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Design Principles for Equity and Excellence at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Executive Summary

Many higher education researchers, policymakers, educational advocates, institutional leaders, and educational practitioners have called for widespread dialogue on what it means to be truly Hispanic-Serving. Due in part to the lack of consensus on what it means to be Hispanic-Serving, HSIs lack guidance on how to assess themselves on how well they serve Latino/a students. HSIs shoulder unique responsibilities, including the education of post-traditional student populations, while facing distinct resource-related challenges. With these facts in mind, in this brief, we offer design principles for equity and excellence at HSIs that can be used to assess the extent to which these institutions are truly serving Latino/a students. Our aim is to help make the "Hispanic-Serving" designation more meaningful to students and their families, higher education practitioners, institutional leaders, and policymakers, and to inform ongoing dialogue on what it means to be authentically Hispanic-Serving.

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Introduction

With increasing levels of college access among a growing and more geographically dispersed Latino/a population, the number of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) continues to rise. The "Hispanic-Serving" designation was established during the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). In the ensuing two decades, the number of HSIs increased from 189 institutions in 1994-95, to 370 institutions in 2012–13 (*Excelencia* in Education, 2014). These 370 HSIs enroll a disproportionately high share of Latino/a college students; though they constitute just 11% of U.S. postsecondary institutions, they educate 59% of all Latino/a undergraduates (Calderón Galdeano & Santiago, 2014). At present, 277 two- and four-year institutions are "emerging" HSIs, approaching the 25% Latino/a full time equivalent undergraduate enrollment threshold necessary to earn HSI status (Calderón Galdeano & Santiago, 2014).

Given the growth in HSIs and the high proportion of Latino/a students they enroll, these institutions are critical to increasing educational opportunity and attainment among the Latino/a diaspora. Though a Hispanic-Serving Institution becomes designated as such based on its enrollment, many have argued that truly *serving* Latino/a students requires that HSIs focus on facilitating academic success — not merely providing educational access (e.g., Santiago, Andrade, & Brown, 2004; Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Malcom, Bensimon, & Davila, 2010; Nuñez, 2014).

Indeed, many higher education researchers, policymakers, educational advocates, institutional leaders, and educational practitioners have called for widespread dialogue on what it means to be truly Hispanic-Serving. Due in part to the lack of consensus on what it means to be Hispanic-Serving, HSIs lack guidance on how to assess themselves on how well they serve Latino/a students. While external accountability schemes (e.g., performance-funding models, college rating systems) provide metrics that HSIs could adopt to assess institutional performance, these traditional measures are inappropriate for HSIs, given the communities that they serve and the lack of resources with which they grapple (Jones, 2014; Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Elizondo, in press). For example, graduation rates may not be an accurate characterization of institutional performance due to disparate levels of academic preparation of HSI student populations and because graduation rates exclude transfer students — who are disproportionately Latino/a (Jones, 2014; Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Elizondo, in press). Further, because these accountability schemes are heavily outcome-driven and lack process benchmarks (Dowd, 2005; Jones, 2014), they neither aid HSIs in understanding how current practices are (or are not) serving Latino/a students nor do they provide direction on how to improve educational practice. The above criticisms of traditional performance metrics underscore the need for a framework to facilitate institutional self-assessment for HSIs.

Purpose

HSIs shoulder unique responsibilities, including the education of post-traditional student populations, while facing distinct resource-related challenges. Any efforts to assess the performance of HSIs must be done with these facts in mind. In this brief, we offer design principles for equity and excellence at HSIs that can be used to assess the extent to which these institutions are truly serving Latino/a students. These design principles, along with the tools we offer to enact them, draw upon the work of the Center for Urban Education (CUE), particularly the Equity Scorecard™ and the STEM Toolkit. Our aim is to help make the "Hispanic-Serving" designation more meaningful to students and their families, higher education practitioners, institutional leaders, and policymakers, and to inform ongoing dialogue on what it means to be authentically Hispanic-Serving.

Design Principles

Principle 1. Hispanic-Serving designation is reflected in the institutional identity, mission, and priorities, as well as in the goals of campus divisions, departments, and units.

Scholars of organizational cultures view mission statements as the embodiment of an institution's values, commitment, and purpose (Contreras, Bensimon, & Malcom, 2008). Mission statements guide strategic planning efforts (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), and campus participants typically spend a great deal of time deliberating on the content. Mission statements and other formal documents guide long-term change efforts, reminding decision makers of institutional values and goals.

Mission statements influence what campus leaders and practitioners

value, prioritize, and focalize. Therefore, the presence or absence of an institution's HSI identity (see Table 1) within the mission statement may influence how much attention leaders pay to it. Speaking of the University of Houston, Professor Michael Olivas observes that reminders of the university's aspirations to be recognized as a Tier One institution are everywhere, but references to its HSI identity are nowhere to be found. He says, "Not a publication comes out that does not highlight the 'Tier One' status claimed by UH … [but] I cannot find a reference to the University of Houston's HSI status in a single online article or website." (Olivas, p. *x*, 2015)

An examination of mission statements of 10 two- and four-year HSIs in California, Colorado, New Mexico, New York, and Texas revealed that none explicitly mentioned their designation as a HSI (Contreras, Bensimon, & Malcom, 2008). More recently, we searched the mission statements, strategic plans, and accreditation self-studies of 103 HSIs in California, and also found that none made specific reference to its HSI status in the mission statement. The mission statements were generic, making it impossible to differentiate between HSIs and non-HSIs.

Recognizing that mission statements may be older than an institution's acquired HSI status, we decided that strategic plans and accreditation self-studies might be more likely to incorporate the HSI identity. We examined these documents to determine whether they: (1) made mention of the HSI designation; (2) openly stated the importance of promoting Latino/a student success; and (3) provided specific data on Latino/a outcomes and/or provided outcomes by departments or fields.

Among the 103 institutions, a small number mentioned their HSI identity. For example, California State University at Fresno in its accreditation self-study indicated, "The University has been designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution." CSU Fullerton openly states the importance of promoting Hispanic student success throughout their main website and includes quick facts such as "Fall 2014 – 36% Hispanic Enrollment" and "Number 1 in California and tenth in the nation among top universities awarding bachelor's degrees to Hispanics." East Los Angeles Community College's strategic plan goes into depth on the many ways the college is Hispanic-Serving, as well as its commitment to serving the Hispanic community given the demographic changes in the service community and in the state of California as a whole.

Overall, being a HSI did not seem to play a prominent role in the core content of the strategic plans or self-studies. We did not find evidence that strategic plans or self-studies were vehicles for critical reflection on the goals and indicators of performance that are important to the mission implied in the label "Hispanic-Serving."

Notably, many of the institutions whose documents were examined are recipients of the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program (Title V) funding, which means they have submitted proposals that required them to elaborate on the needs of Latino/a students and set forth improvement goals. However, the goals articulated in Title V proposals seem to exist in a vacuum, failing to make their way into the institutional documents that will presumably guide decisions about curriculum, programs, resource distribution, and evaluation.

We are aware that acknowledging HSI identity in official institutional documents is not an assurance of conscious and intentional responsiveness to the needs and success of Latino/a students. Needless to say, written documents cannot compensate or substitute for the absence of leadership actions (Schein, 1985). However, mission statements, strategic plans, and accreditation self-studies are cultural artifacts (Schein, 1985) that communicate institutional values, commitment, and purpose (Caruthers & Lott, 1981; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Peeke, 1994) and, if well understood and taken seriously, can be a guide for change, consensus-building, and accountability (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008).

Many factors may contribute to institutions' silence about their HSI identity. Some may choose to not tout it for fear of making students from other groups uncomfortable or discouraging them from enrolling. Understandably, a HSI that barely meets the 25% Latino/a enrollment requirement may not feel its "HSI(ness)" as strongly as one that is predominantly Latino/a. Another factor that may contribute to a weak HSI identity is that institutions often acquire it accidentally as a result of demographic changes within their geographic area over which they have no control.

While the majority of HSIs did not become so by choice that does not mean that they cannot be intentional about enacting their identity. In

fact, as a nation, we need HSIs to be successful. Clearly, the success of HSIs in educating Latinos/as has national consequences. Hence, it is important that the leaders, administrators, faculty, and staff of HSIs be intentional about expressing the HSI identity. This process can be facilitated by a document review protocol (see Table 2) such as one used by CUE's institutional partners.

Principle 2. Latino/a student success is a shared value among institutional leadership, faculty, and staff.

Student learning and success are core values universally shared by the nation's higher education institutions. On any given college campus, institutional leadership, faculty, and student affairs practitioners talk of "student success" as a central — and uncontroversial — goal. HSIs undoubtedly share this general commitment to fostering student learning and success, however "success" might be best defined for their unique population of students (Santiago, Andrade, & Brown, 2004; Núñez, 2014; Núñez & Elizondo, in press). Yet in spite of the well-meaning rhetoric of "student success," national and institutional data illustrate that many institutions continue to fall short in producing positive outcomes for a significant proportion of college students. And, at many HSIs, Latino/a students — the very students that these institutions purport to serve — experience inequities in educational outcomes including persistence, degree completion, and participation in high-demand fields (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Malcom-Piqueux, Suro, Bensimon, & Fischer, 2013)[1].

Table 1. Example of presence and absence of HSI identity

	General Mission Statement	HSI Identity Embedded in Mission Statement
Characteristics	• Includes general language such as "prepare students for a changing multicultural world," "promote access and success for underserved students" • The mission statement is indistinguishable from those of predominantly white institutions	• Institution identifies itself as a Hispanic-Serving Institution • Includes statements such as "Our HSI identity represents the institution's commitment to an excellent educational experience for first-generation Latinos and Latinas."
Example	*We are a comprehensive, regional university with a global outlook located in a technologically rich and culturally vibrant metropolitan area. Our expertise and diversity serve as a distinctive resource and catalyst for partnerships with public and private organizations. We strive to be a center of activity essential to the intellectual, cultural, and economic development of our region.*	*We are a comprehensive, regional Hispanic-Serving university with an educational outlook based on values of equity, excellence, and inclusiveness. More college-educated Latinos and Latinas are imperative for the economic and social well-being of California. Nevertheless, we have a long way to go in order to achieve a Latino/a college-educated population that is proportional to their representation in California. As a Hispanic-Serving university, we hold ourselves accountable for increasing the number of college-educated Latinos and Latinas.*

As HSIs are tasked with "increasing educational opportunity and attainment among Latinos/as" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), our second principle for equity and excellence is that Latino/a student success has to be a shared value among institutional leadership, faculty, and staff. This principle calls for HSIs to move beyond a general commitment to student success to a specific commitment to Latino/a student success. That is, leaders of and practitioners at Hispanic-Serving Institutions ought to directly acknowledge the importance of Latino/a student success, and this value ought to be embedded within the shared understanding of their overarching mission and day-to-day practices.

Why is it important that HSIs value Latino/a student success? According to organizational theorists, values are central to the work of an organization or institution. Values are embedded within institutional communities (Lavé & Wenger, 1991) and provide tacit instruction about an institution's purpose — and, by extension, the areas in which organizational actors (i.e., practitioners) ought to direct their efforts (Tierney, 2008). Spoken or unspoken, the shared values of an institution drive what it does

[1] Non-HSIs also fall short in producing equity in educational outcomes for Latino/a students, and steps ought to be taken to redress these inequities; see Witham, Malcom-Piqueux, Dowd, & Bensimon (2015) for an in-depth discussion of how equity ought to drive higher education reforms at PWIs and MSIs alike.

and where it directs its resources. Institutional values also signal to new faculty and staff that this is "what we are about," and ensures that they, too, align their actions to work toward that goal (Tierney, 2008).

Institutional leaders, faculty, and staff who value Latino/a student success are more likely to think about their own practices in relation to producing positive educational outcomes for Latino/a students (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Openly valuing Latino/a student success does not mean that a HSI is not concerned with facilitating success among *all* students, nor does it suggest that it concentrates on Latino/a students to the detriment of other student populations. It does, however, mean that the institutional community — and practitioners, in particular — recognize their responsibility to Latino/a students and consider whether Latino/a students are benefitting from the educational resources HSIs employ to support persistence, course completion across all disciplines, and degree attainment (Bensimon, 2012).

As discussed earlier, our examination of the websites, strategic plans, and other organizational artifacts of California's 103 HSIs revealed that they refer generally to their commitment to supporting student success and learning without mentioning Latinos/as or any other specific student populations. Table 3 provides the description of the Office of Undergraduate Education listed on the website of a four-year public Hispanic-Serving university. This blurb is what greets Latino/a students and their families upon clicking the "Academics" link on the institutional homepage. While the office's commitment to "student success" is stated, a commitment to Latino/a student success is not. That is not to say that Latino/a student success is not valued at this institution; the HSI does have an Office of Chicano Student Programs dedicated to supporting academic success among Latino/a students. However, the absence of any mention of Latino/a student success elsewhere on the institutional website suggests that this value may not be shared across the entire institutional community. By contrast, at another four-year public HSI in California, there was evidence that the institutional value of Latino/a student success informed the redesign of the academic advising model that would be used throughout the entire campus.

Table 2. Assessing the presence of HSI identity in institutional artifacts

Title of Document: Name of Reviewer:		
Refer to the following indicators of Hispanic-Serving practices and consider whether the documents in your sample could be characterized as communicating:	Based on your review of the sampled documents, would you say that they can be characterized by the indicator in the first column?	How could the document be changed to reflect HSI identity? Who would need to be involved to make the changes?
1. A clearly stated HSI designation	Yes/No/Somewhat If Yes or Somewhat, how do they?	Note possible steps:
2. Goals that are explicitly informed by HSI identity	Yes/No/Somewhat	Note possible steps:
3. The importance of HSI identity in terms of history, language, and the empowerment of the community	Yes/No/Somewhat If Yes or Somewhat, how do they?	Note possible steps:
4. The institution's commitment to equity in student outcomes	Yes/No/Somewhat If Yes or Somewhat, how do they?	Note possible steps:

Principle 3. Examining equity in educational outcomes for Latino/a students is central to institutional assessment processes and practices.

As indicated in the second design principle, one of the most effective ways leaders communicate what is important to internal and external constituencies is by what they pay attention to systematically — what they notice and comment on, what they measure, reward, and control, as well as their casual remarks and the questions they ask (Schein, 1985).

HSI leaders, including presidents, vice presidents, deans, department chairs, and directors of divisions and programs, can demonstrate "paying attention" to student success by engaging in the following practices systematically:

1. Insisting that all data on educational outcomes be disaggregated by race and ethnicity to enable continuous monitoring of students' progress.
2. Adopting specific metrics of equity and applying them to disaggregated student outcomes (see Figures 1 and 2).
3. Engaging in performance benchmarking to set equity goals in specific outcomes to monitor Latino/a student success (see Figures 3 and 4).
4. Modeling the practices of equity-minded data interpretation.

The first three data practices are an essential aspect of paying attention to the success of all students, including Latinos/as. HSI presidents need to know the answers to questions such as: "Is the rate of admission for Latinos/as equal to their representation in the college-age population within the college's service area?" and "Are Latinos/as completing the minimum number of credits required for on-time graduation?" The dean of engineering needs answers to questions such as: "Is the proportion of Latino/a majoring in engineering equal to their share of all undergraduates?" and "What are the high-risk engineering prerequisite courses for Latinos/as?"

At a minimum, HSIs should monitor equity for Latinos/as in basic indicators of access, academic progress, and excellence. In the examples below, we represent equity as proportionality based on overall enrollment. Figure 1 shows that Latinos/as have a 46% share of the undergraduate enrollment pie. Therefore, equity in academic progress for Latinos/as would be met if they represent 46% of all the students who are retained after the first year; complete 24 credits within two years (if they are part-time community college students); and complete a degree or transfer within three years. In our definition, equity means maintaining a consistent share of the pie on key indicators of student success.

Figure 2 provides indicators of excellence that measure equity in the participation of Latinos/as in high-value and high-priority fields such as science and engineering.

The kind of data provided in Figures 1 and 2 are necessary to set performance benchmarks for increasing Latino/a success. As

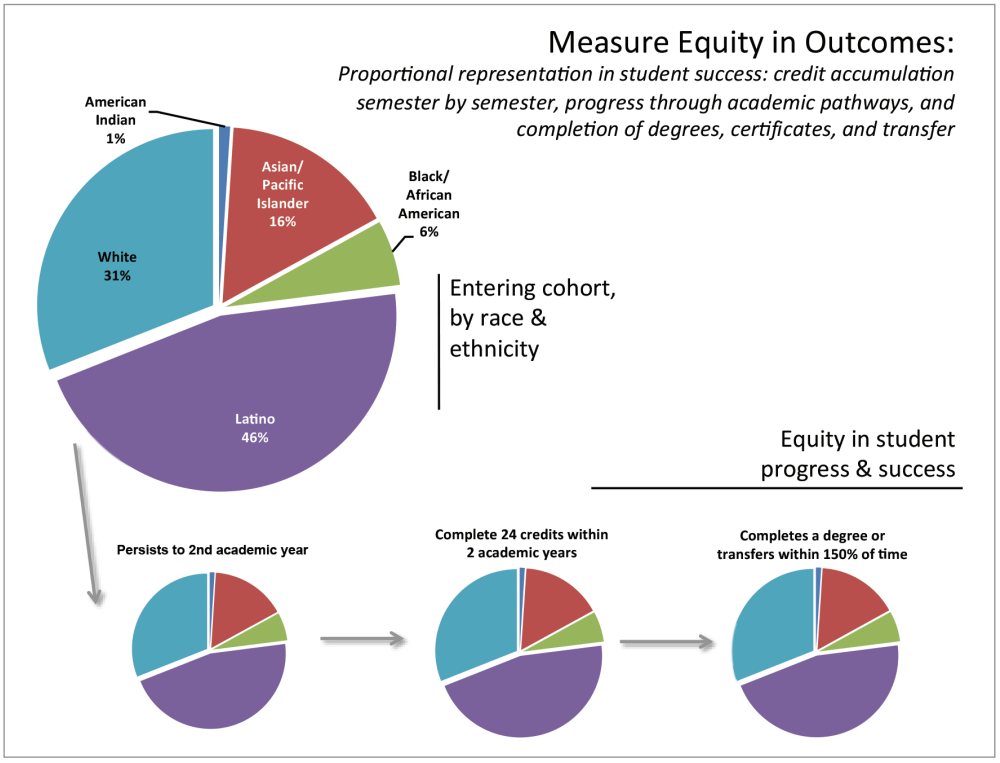
Table 3. Example of presence and absence of Latino/a student success as a shared value

	Generic Commitment to Student Success	Latino/a Student Success as a Shared Value
Characteristics	• Institutional leadership, faculty, and staff speak generally about promoting student success and learning, but rarely explicitly acknowledge their responsibility to serve Latino/a students. • Practitioners who do articulate the importance of promoting Latino/a student success do so in their roles within ad hoc offices tasked with dealing with these issues (e.g., Title V office, Minority Student Affairs, etc.).	• Institutional leadership, faculty, and staff openly state the importance of promoting Latino/a student success and understand Latino/a student success to be a shared responsibility. • Latino/a student success is discussed in a manner that does not pit the duty to serve Latino/a students against promoting success of other student populations. Leadership, faculty, and staff recognize that the efforts undertaken to promote Latino/a student success will benefit all students.
Example	*"The Office of Undergraduate Education is committed to student success and the creation of a supportive educational environment at [public four-year HSI]. The office oversees the development of programs designed to support student learning, research and experiential opportunities. Visit our offices to learn about the support programs that can help you be more competitive in the job market and in the pursuit of graduate and professional education."*	*At a public, four-year comprehensive Hispanic-Serving university in California, the final institutional proposal to revamp the academic advising model to an integrated one incorporates several strategies and practices demonstrated in the higher education literature to promote Latino/a student success. The proposal states the need to employ such strategies to support its Latino/a student population and notes that all students would benefit from these practices.*

Table 4. Example of presence and absence of disaggregated data and goals

	Generic Data Practices	Hispanic-Serving Data Practices
Characteristics	• Data are not disaggregated by race and ethnicity • Goals for student success are not measurable	• Data are disaggregated by race and ethnicity • Equity metrics for Latinos/as (and all other groups) are routinely reported • Performance benchmarks are set for Latinos/as (and all other groups)
Example	*A HSI university creates a new initiative to involve more undergraduates in research activities with faculty. At the end of the first year the program is praised as an exemplary "high impact" practice, but there is no information on how many Latinos/as participated.*	*A HSI community college produces an annual report on the state of equity and excellence and provides data to assess student outcomes by race and ethnicity. The institution has identified high-risk courses for Latinos/as and monitors their performance systematically.*

Figure 1. Sample indicators of equity in student outcomes



simple as these data may appear, most colleges do not follow cohort progress routinely for Latinos/as or any other group. Or if they do, the information conveyed in data reports goes unused because colleges lack a structured process to help practitioners make sense of the data.

Figures 3 and 4 provide an example of how to use the kind of data represented in Figures 1 and 2 to set clear and measurable goals to improve outcomes. Goal setting that is as specific as shown in Figure 4 should be a routine practice of all institutions of higher education for all students, all of the time. Unless higher education institutions focus on outcomes deeply and discretely, equity will remain America's unmet promise (Witham, Malcom-Piqueux, Dowd, & Bensimon, 2015).

Earlier in this brief, we indicated that equity is defined by each group's share of a defined population — e.g., total enrollment, total majors in engineering, total number of students in a particular course. Figure 3 shows that at HSI Community College (pseudonym), even though Latinos/as represent 46% of the full-time student population, they represent only 29.3% of the students who graduated and/or transferred within three years. Latinos/as are 16.7 percentage points below equity.

Figure 4 shows that in order for Latinos/as degree attainment and/or transfer to be proportional to their share of total enrollment, 76 additional Latinos/as will need to be successful.[2]

It is important to set equity goals that are: (1) based on specific indicators (e.g., graduate within four years of enrollment, participate in undergraduate research, complete basic skills courses within the first two semesters); (2) expressed in percentages (e.g., 46%) and numerically (e.g., 76 additional students for a total of 210); (3) represented clearly — both visually

[2] The calculation in this example assumes that the share of Latinos/as would remain constant at 46%. We realize that this is unlikely and are only using it for the sake of simplicity. Institutions can also benchmark to the highest-performing group or to an aspirational goal.

Figure 2. Sample indicators of equity in excellence

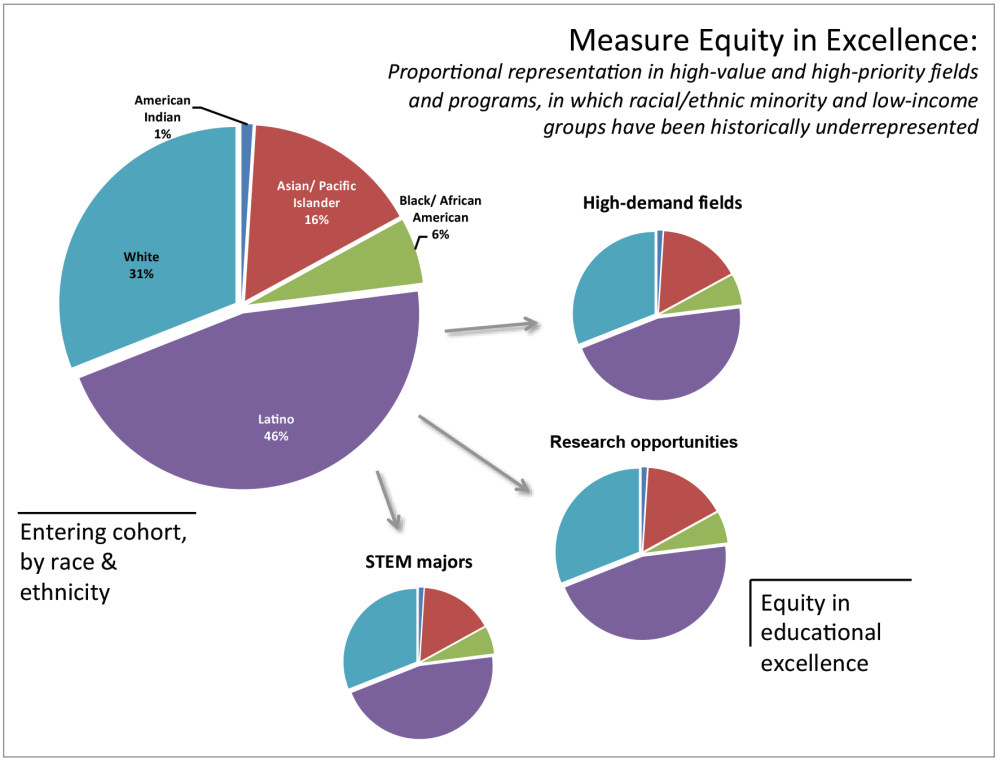
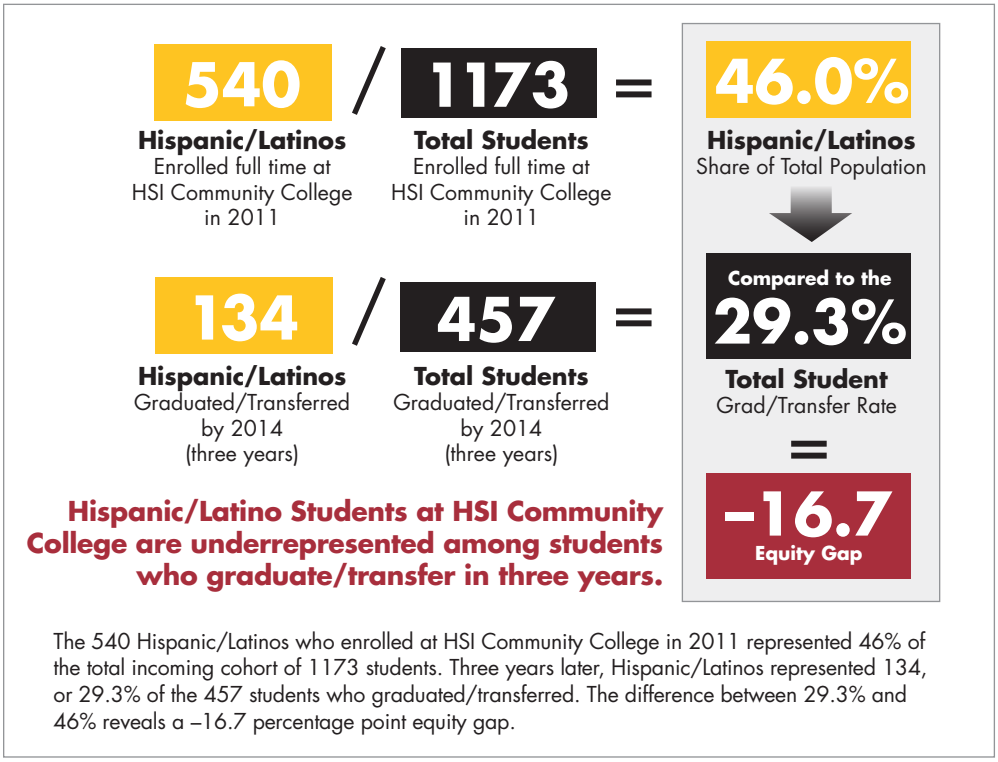


Figure 3. Latino/a share of students who earned an associate degree and/or transferred to a four-year college within three years of enrolling at HSI Community College



The 540 Hispanic/Latinos who enrolled at HSI Community College in 2011 represented 46% of the total incoming cohort of 1173 students. Three years later, Hispanic/Latinos represented 134, or 29.3% of the 457 students who graduated/transferred. The difference between 29.3% and 46% reveals a –16.7 percentage point equity gap.

and in writing — so that the goals are broadly accessible and transparent.

While to the experienced institutional researcher Figures 3 and 4 may seem very elementary, this format is very appealing to leaders, faculty, and staff precisely because its simplicity provides a goal that is clear, measurable, and achievable.

Having clear goals and measurable benchmarks is an essential practice for HSIs. The necessary data are available and can easily be extracted from student records. Yet few institutions, including HSIs, organize their data as shown in Figures 1–4 systematically. Why not? The most probable reason is that leaders have not made it clear that they want these kinds of data and that they want it in a format that is accessible. It may also be that leaders are fearful that the disaggregation of data by race and ethnicity violates anti-affirmative action policies. However, anti-affirmative action regulations apply only to admissions and do not preclude colleges from setting completion goals by race and ethnicity.

Goal setting is the first step toward greater accountability for student outcomes, but by itself is insufficient. Ideally, numeric data, particularly those that show unequal outcomes, should cause feelings of discomfort and distress, so much so that the data have the power to mobilize institutional actors to take action. But the power of numeric data as a catalyst for critical examination of Hispanic-Serving(ness) in outcomes depends on the mindsets of institutional participants. Disaggregating data by race and ethnicity is essential, but embedding a culture of Hispanic-Serving(ness)

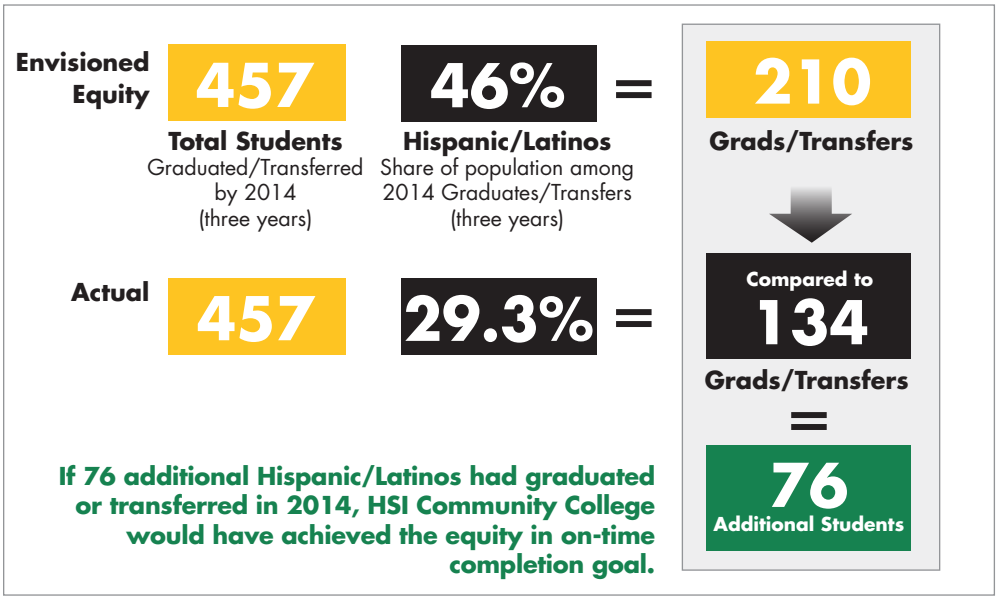
requires that leaders and practitioners shift their interpretation of the data from the student to institutional practices, structures, and policies.

Instead of rationalizing unequal outcomes as inevitable because students suffer a long list of deficiencies — e.g., underprepared, lack study habits, do not seek help, at risk (Rendón, Nora, Kanagala, 2014; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012) — the focus should be on analyzing how practices might be failing Latino/a students. Leaders, from the president to the department chair, need to model for others how to reframe unequal outcomes as a problem of practice rather than a problem of student deficiencies. Practitioners and scholars typically respond to evidence of low rates of college completion by asking questions that focus attention on the student: *Are these students academically integrated? Do these students exhibit such-and-such behavioral patterns? Do these students exert effort? How does the effort of these students compare to the effort of such-and-such group? Do these students have social capital? How do the aspirations of high-performing students compare to low performers? Are they engaged? Are they involved? Are they motivated? Are they prepared?*

Equity-minded interpretations require that questions focus on practices rather than students, and make it imperative that the goodness of practices be doubted rather than the capabilities of students. Examples of equity-minded data interpretations include:

- Not rationalizing evidence of inequality by attributing it to students' characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, predispositions, and motivation.
  - Instead of declaring "We have state-of-the-art resources on this campus, but students do not use them," institutional leaders and practitioners will gain greater traction if they proactively gather evidence to answer questions such as: "Why are our resources not reaching Latinos/as?" "How do Latinos/as experience the resources we offer?" "Are the resources we offer responsive to the actual needs of Latinos/as?"
  - Instead of complaining, "I tell them to see me during office hours, but they just do not come," instructors can improve their practices by reflecting on questions such as: "What might prevent students from taking advantage of office hours?" "How is the purpose of office hours communicated to students?" "How could office hours be integrated into course requirements?"
  - Instructors can improve their practices by understanding that help-seeking is a cultural competency that comes more naturally to those who feel entitled to receive assistance.

Figure 4. The additional number of Latinos/as who must earn an associate degree and/or transfer to a four-year college within three years of enrollment to achieve equity in on-time completion at HSI Community College



Principle 4. Promoting Latino/a student success and ensuring equity in outcomes requires ongoing reflection and action by institutional leadership and individual practitioners.

This principle for equity and excellence at HSIs emphasizes both reflection and action by leaders and practitioners. Faculty, administrators, and staff at HSIs must be willing to examine how their practices and language contribute to the problem of low and inequitable rates of Latino/a student success (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Inquiry using institutional data, as described in the previous principle, not only makes leaders, faculty, and staff aware of inequities that Latino/a students might be experiencing, but also leads them to question

how existing policies and practices might be creating inequitable outcomes. For example, do the admissions criteria for the honors program at a HSI create inequities between working and non-working students? Do faculty who wish to involve undergraduates in research projects inadvertently hinder the participation of commuter students compared to residential students? This type of reflective practice creates new knowledge and motivates practitioners to change their own practices as well as those institutional policies within their control (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Armed with the knowledge and insight gained from reflective practice, practitioners can act as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) to advocate for and provide resources and opportunities for historically underserved students.

Institutional agents are individuals in positions of power within organizations and institutions who use their human, social, and cultural capital to transmit resources, opportunities, and services to historically underserved and marginalized students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Any practitioner at a HSI who occupies a high-status position and knows how to access high-value resources, navigate complex systems, and take effective action has the potential to be a transformative institutional agent (Bensimon & Dowd, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013).

In Table 5, we describe the characteristics of practitioners and leaders at HSIs who act as institutional agents to promote Latino/a student success and those who, however well intentioned, do not. We also draw on CUE's previous research on STEM education at HSIs to provide illustrative examples of two science faculty members — one who acted as an institutional agent to promote the success of Latinos/as in STEM fields, and one who did not.

Table 5. Example of characteristics differentiating transformative institutional agents and well-intentioned practitioners

	Practitioners do not act as Institutional Agents	Practitioners act as Institutional Agents
Characteristics	• Practitioners treat all students as though they are the same, and fail to recognize that students enter college with vastly different aspirations, life experiences, ways of engaging in learning and participating in college, and identities as students. • Practitioners view existing policies and practices as rigid and believe all students should adapt to them. Practitioners are unwilling to examine how their own practices contribute to inequity. • Practitioners view problems of retention and completion as the result of student deficits.	• Institutional agents understand how the administrative policies and organizational cultures of colleges present greater obstacles to minority students than to others. • Institutional agents reflect on how seemingly "neutral" institutional policies and practices create or contribute to inequitable outcomes experienced by Latino/a students. • Institutional agents approach problems of retention and completion as a structural or systemic problem and work to reform policies, "remediate" practice, and change organizational culture.
Example	*Professor Jones is on the science faculty at a four-year HSI. When asked about intra-institutional inequities experienced by Latino/a students, he responded:* "A lot of our kids come here, again, especially if they don't have anybody in the family that's gone to college, not really realizing how much work they have to put in … The way that we've been trying to [help the students] is simply by telling them that what they're doing is not right and telling them you know this is the way you should be doing it. I don't think we really have the time to try to think through what other more effective ways there might be to help them change their habits." *When asked by a CUE researcher what he does to let students know he is available to them, he replied,* "I just make comments … in class about how I'm available and I'd like to talk to them if they want. I've heard of programs where the professors actually call students and try to get them engaged. I just never felt like I had the time to go out hunting through all those different students trying to get them to come through."	*Professor Ramirez is a math professor at a four-year HSI in the Southwest. Alarmed by the small number of Latinos and Latinas in STEM fields at his institution and their persistent underrepresentation in STEM professions and among STEM faculty nationally, he took action to increase Latino/a student participation. He shared:* "When students get into a lab, they don't really have the skills to work in the lab. So the faculty gets frustrated because they have to spend a lot of time teaching those students. So I started Summer Boot Camp — for three weeks, they're going to be in the lab, and they're going to learn how to do cells …" *The interdisciplinary program gives students a head start by providing the opportunity to learn lab skills prior to enrolling in a lab course. He also spoke of the importance of building relationships with his students and helping to connect them with individuals who could act as mentors:* "I think that connecting with the students makes a big difference. I cannot connect with the hundreds of students in my mathematics class that I teach, but I can connect with my students in my STEM support program."

Though the previous example of action by an institutional agent showcases a faculty member, institutional agents do not have to interact directly with students to transmit opportunities, privileges, and services to them. Faculty and administrators who work at the system and campus levels of HSIs to generate increased opportunities for Latino/a students are also institutional agents (Bensimon & Dowd, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Institutional agents go beyond what is typically expected of faculty and staff to actively pursue change at their institutions. At HSIs, institutional agents mobilize the resources to which they have access to promote Latino/a student success.

Finally, we note that institutional agents cannot pursue the goal of Latino/a student success in isolation. In order to have a meaningful and lasting impact on educational outcomes of Latino/a students at their institutions, institutional agents require the support of leaders within their departments, divisions, and institution (Bensimon & Dowd, 2012).

Developing institutional agents

Some practitioners act as institutional agents due to their personal understanding or identification with the challenges that Latino/a students face. However, institutional agents can and must be purposefully developed by HSIs. Below, we offer specific actions that the leaders, faculty, and staff at HSIs can take to become and/or create institutional agents.

CUE's STEM Toolkit includes a self-assessment instrument that helps faculty members identify how their actions fit within the framework of being an institutional agent. A sample item from the self-assessment reads as follows:

Over the past semester...

Statement	Frequency				
	Never		Sometimes		Frequently
... for a significant number of my students, I've actively served as a human "bridge" to key faculty members, college/university personnel, authority figures, and gate-keepers who I know are supportive of students.	1	2	3	4	5
How do you do this?					
What are the challenges?					
To what extent do you do this specifically for Latino/a students?					

Recommendations for administrators at HSIs

- Engage faculty in an examination of departmental culture and interrogate how it supports Latino/a student success.
- Give priority in faculty hiring to individuals whose backgrounds, experiences, values, and aspirations make them identifiable as institutional agents.
- Reward (materially or symbolically) and highlight faculty who act as institutional agents in support of Latino/a students and other students from historically underserved groups outside of the classroom. Provide release time or other kinds of support to write grant applications for special programs; provide programmatic funds to encourage faculty members to offer academic support through social gatherings to Latino/a students.
- Use institutional agent characteristics as criteria for faculty performance assessment and evaluation.
- Use the Center for Urban Education tools to help teams and individuals reflect on how their own actions and behaviors, as well as institutional practices and resources, affect Latino/a student success.

Recommendations for faculty at HSIs

- Reflect on the actions associated with institutional agent roles and intentionally enact them.
- Identify Latino/a students and become familiar with their life histories, and provide them with the resources and experiences to develop their identities as students and learners.
- Become familiar with federally-funded programs to support Latino/a student success and collaborate with other faculty members to write grant applications.
- Participate in faculty search committees and develop methods to identify individuals who are knowledgeable about Latino/a students and possess the characteristics of institutional agents.

(Bensimon & Dowd, 2012, pp. 11–13)

Principle 5. Engaging Latino/a students with culturally sustaining practices is central to promoting and supporting Latino/a student success.

The growing number of HSIs and "emerging" HSIs (*Excelencia* in Education, 2014) reflects overall changes in the college student population. College campuses are increasingly diverse, though we note that long-standing patterns of stratification in college access remain (Witham et al., 2015). The shifting demographics of college students have sparked criticism that higher education practice has failed to evolve with the students that postsecondary institutions serve (e.g., Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Current policies and practices have not abated the inequities in educational experiences and outcomes endured by racial and ethnic minority, first-generation, and low-income students. And, there is increasing recognition that in order to achieve "inclusive excellence" (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005), institutions and their practitioners must alter their approaches to teaching, curriculum, student learning, assessment, etc. We argue that for all higher education institutions, but particularly HSIs, engaging Latino/a students with culturally inclusive practices is a necessary step to making excellence truly inclusive.

Culturally inclusive practice — also referred to as culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive, and more recently, culturally sustaining practice (Paris, 2012) — refers to educational practice that promotes students' academic success while supporting the maintenance of their cultures and communities and raising critical consciousness of social inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Culturally inclusive practices affirm and validate minoritized students by "building on their cultural, linguistic, and community-based knowledge" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 62). It is in this manner that culturally inclusive practice is distinct from dominant "race-neutral" educational approaches, which disconnect practice from students' cultures, communities, and lived experiences (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Though typically discussed in the context of K–12 education (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally inclusive practice is increasingly advocated for in undergraduate (Harper & Hurtado, 2011; Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus & Quaye, 2009) and graduate education (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011) as a means to increasing belonging and learning among college students of color.

Given their Hispanic-Serving mission and their role in advancing educational opportunity and attainment for Latino/a students, HSIs must engage in culturally responsive practices inside and outside of the classroom. Efforts to be "culturally inclusive" cannot be limited to faculty in disciplines that are "the usual suspects" for critical pedagogy (e.g., Chicano studies, sociology). Much has been written about how the full range of disciplines can be more culturally inclusive. Math faculty members at HSIs, for instance, might teach mathematical concepts and their application in ways that enhance Latino/a students' understanding of their own communities (Rubel, 2010; Rubel, Chu, & Shookhoff, 2011).

In the next section, we outline the characteristics of culturally inclusive educational practice in the context of higher education as described in Dowd and Bensimon (2015), and contrast it with more dominant "race-neutral/color-blind" approaches (See Table 6). We also offer illustrative examples.

As the above examples illustrate, being culturally inclusive requires that HSI faculty are aware of and knowledgeable about the students that they teach. They must also be willing to move their practices into alignment with the needs of Latino/a students.

Staff and administrators must also strive to become more culturally inclusive in their own practices. Academic advisers and counselors could achieve this by employing practices that account for and seek to understand disparate patterns of help-seeking by Latinos/as and other students of color. Academic support staff can be more culturally inclusive by supporting the collectivist cultures of many communities of color (Guiffrida, Kiyama, Waterman, & Museus, 2012) and leveraging them to promote Latino/a student success. Practitioners can also design programs that intentionally engage students in experiences that raise consciousness about issues of social justice and inequality.

Enacting culturally inclusive educational practice

To nurture culturally inclusive practitioners, HSIs must take active steps to reflect upon and, if necessary, change their current approach to educational practice. Leaders at HSIs can and must challenge faculty and staff to think about what it means to be Hispanic-Serving, and support and encourage practitioners to be more culturally

Table 6. Examples of color-blind and color-conscious practices

	"Race-Neutral" Educational Practice	Culturally Inclusive Educational Practice
Characteristics	• Instructional strategies presume that Latino/a students are deficient and require "remediation." • Students are solely responsible for their learning and developing relationships with faculty. • Students are solely responsible for identifying and acquiring resources needed to excel academically. • Practitioners view the knowledge and experiences that students bring into the classroom as tangential to academic content and detracting from learning. • Practitioners view the development of students' capacities to act as social change agents as unrelated to the purposes of college.	• All students, regardless of their background, are capable of excelling academically. • Instructors are responsible for students' learning and for maintaining equitable relationships with all students. • Institutions are responsible for providing resources and information needed to meet high expectations. • Practitioners hear, value, and engage the knowledge and experiences that students bring into the classroom in meaningful ways. • Practitioners foster students' capacities to act as social change agents to address racial inequities.
Example	*Asked during an interview with a CUE researcher what it means to teach at a HSI and how it is "different," a philosophy instructor was first surprised. He then responded that he had not thought about it and he did not think it would be right to do anything different for Latino/a students. The question prompted him to share that he recently added to his reading list the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, and he noticed that suddenly Latinas in his class, typically not very actively involved, were suddenly quite lively. The faculty member was clearly dedicated, serious, and creative; however, he had never before considered how he might alter his teaching practices in light of his presence at a HSI — nor had he been invited to consider this question by the leaders, deans, or department chair at this institution.*	*Professor Maria Tuttle at Los Medanos College (LMC) in California designed her syllabus to be culturally inclusive. On the first page of the syllabus, a picture of a group of Latino/a LMC students holding t-shirts displaying the names of four-year institutions to which they transferred is prominently displayed. The syllabus, which is formatted as a newsletter, includes detailed information on a number of academic resources and support (e.g., tutoring center) and explicitly articulates the benefits of utilizing these resources. Clear statements of how to succeed are present. The instructor also includes clear, step-by-step directions for using the course Blackboard site. The instructor purposefully set a welcoming and supportive tone: "Communication with your instructors and your counselor will help you feel supported by the program. You can count on us to help you work it out. No problem is too big or too small." Finally, assigned readings are culturally relevant and include Rudolfo Anaya's* Bless Me, Ultima *and* The Latino Reader.

inclusive. We offer the following specific recommendations:

- Faculty should use tools, such as the ones developed by CUE, to review course syllabi and other instructional documents to determine whether they are culturally inclusive.
- Faculty should use language that is supportive, welcoming, and affirming when interacting with students inside and outside of the classroom.
- Faculty should assess their practices based on standards of culturally responsive teaching.

A self-assessment survey, "How Culturally and Linguistically Responsive is My Teaching?," developed by professors Ana María Villegas and Tamara Lucas of Montclair State University, provides items such as:

____ I use pertinent examples and analogies from students' lives to introduce or clarify new concepts.

____ I use instructional materials that not only promote the learning goals but are also relevant to my students' experiences.

____ I frequently use community resources (both human and otherwise) in my teaching.

____ I often help students examine the curriculum to determine whose voices are heard and whose voices are excluded.

____ I often work with other teachers in my school to make the curriculum, instruction, and testing practices we use more supportive of all students.

____ I consistently advocate for individual students in my class, when such advocacy is needed.

- Leaders and faculty should review search practices and incorporate culturally inclusive competencies into interview questions and hiring criteria. At right are sample interview questions from CUE's STEM Toolkit. The questions are designed to emphasize the unique skills and motivation a candidate should possess (or seek to develop) in order to successfully instruct and mentor Latino/a students in STEM fields.

Conclusion

Making Latino/a student success a shared value will not happen overnight; however, there are specific actions that can aid in its adoption and institutionalization. Institutional leaders embed specific values into their higher education organizations through what they measure, talk about, and reward (Bensimon, 2012). Thus, HSI leadership plays a central role in making Latino/a student success a value shared by the institutional community.

- Talk often to both campus and community audiences about the importance of Latino/a student success to fulfilling the Hispanic-Serving mission.
- Reassure faculty and staff that institutional practices intended to support Latino/a students will benefit the entire student body. Latino/a student success does not come at the detriment of success for all students. If the institution is a recipient of Title V funding, point out that all students benefit from the resources it makes available.
- Measure, disseminate, and discuss Latino/a student outcomes within academic programs, departments, and institution-wide.
- Encourage faculty and staff to examine how Latino/a students are faring on appropriate measures of academic success in their own classrooms and programs.

Developing a HSI identity requires a structure that involves the campus community in a process that leads to change from within. Drawing on the action research methods employed by the Center for Urban Education (CUE) to help institutions develop a culture of equity, we recommend that as a first step campus leaders create a process that engages the campus in a collaborative self-assessment framed by questions such as:

- In what ways do our institutional artifacts (e.g., website, documents, board of trustee meetings, presidents' speeches, strategic plans) reflect our HSI identity?
- In what ways do our data practices help us learn how we are performing as a HSI?
- In what ways is the HSI identity incorporated into the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and evaluation?
- In what ways do we communicate and develop the competencies that are essential to be a successful practitioner at a HSI?

Evidence from CUE's action research projects show that the engagement of practitioners in inquiry is a catalyst to questioning familiar and taken-for-granted practices and reflecting on whether they are appropriate. Inquiry into how artifacts and practices reflect Hispanic-Serving(ness) is a concrete activity toward self-transformation.

Sample Interview Questions to Assess Competencies to Work at HSIs

1. Briefly describe your previous roles or experiences (committee, classroom, etc.) as they relate to Latino/a students in STEM fields.
   - How are you involved with Latino/a students in STEM fields?
   - How did you get involved?
   - What motivates you to be involved with Latino/a students in STEM fields?
2. Given your past experiences, can you talk about three students whom you have helped in particular ways?
   - Are any of these students Latino/a? Transfer students? STEM majors?
   - Describe the steps that you took to help these students.
3. Based on your knowledge of the academic culture of STEM fields, what would a Latino/a transfer student in STEM need to know in order to succeed?
   - How would you help students learn what they need to know?

Resources

http://cue.usc.edu/our_tools/stem_toolkit.html

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[3] Only selected citations are included in this print version of the Policy Brief. A complete list of references may be accessed online at **http://education.utsa.edu/crpe/**.

About *PERSPECTIVAS*

PERSPECTIVAS is produced in partnership with the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE), Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Center for Research and Policy in Education, The University of Texas at San Antonio. Its purpose is to provide a venue for policy formulation, to highlight best practices, and to disseminate cutting-edge research to improve access, retention, and graduation of Latino/a students in higher education. The vision of *PERSPECTIVAS* is to be recognized by the P–20 education community as the premier publication addressing research and policy related to Latino/a student success and solutions to improve access, persistence, retention, and college completion.

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AAHHE is proud of its accomplishments over the past decade, and PERSPECTIVAS *is one of our signature initiatives. In partnership with ETS and UTSA, we are able to showcase Latino/a scholars whose work features policy implications for institutions of higher education across the country.*
— Loui Olivas, President, AAHHE

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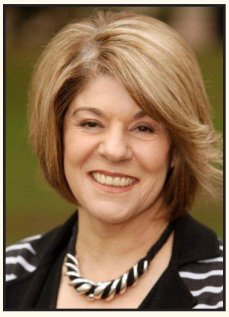

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