

# ED365206 1994-01-00 Chicanos in Higher Education: Issues and Dilemmas for the 21st Century. ERIC Digest.

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## Chicanos in Higher Education: Issues and Dilemmas for the 21st Century. ERIC Digest.

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As we approach the 21st century, U.S. society is renewing its interest in educational opportunity for racial and ethnic minorities. Not since the civil rights movement of the 1960s have we seen stirrings in this area that seemingly promise some change in the relationship between educational institutions and ethnic minority populations. As one of the fastest-growing minority populations in the United States, the Chicano population needs to examine its educational condition in U.S. society.

## HOW DO CHICANOS RELATE TO THE U.S. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM?

An educational crisis exists in the Chicano population, for the Chicano population has fared poorly in its progress through the U.S. educational system. Compared to the educational outcomes of other racial and ethnic populations in the United States, the Chicano population's educational outcomes are deplorably low. In 1990, for example, less than half of the Chicano population 25 years and older had completed at least four years of high school. Compared with other ethnic groups in the Hispanic population, the Chicano population ranks at the bottom.

Chicanos are undereducated, and a contributing factor to that undereducation is the relative social and cultural isolation of Chicanos in U.S. schools. This relative isolation, coupled with segmentation created by educational tracking, has placed the population at risk with regard to its educational outcomes and its economic outcomes. Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the Chicano population's position of risk in U.S. schools is the high dropout rate from high school of its youth.

## HOW DO CHICANOS RELATE TO HIGHER EDUCATION?

While access to higher education has improved slowly for Chicanos, the number of Chicanos in postsecondary institutions is quite low. The limited presence of Chicanos in higher education can be attributed, in part, to the small number of Chicano students who pursue a postsecondary education. The tapering of the educational pipeline results in a trickle of Chicano students entering postsecondary institutions.

The participation of Chicano students in U.S. higher education has a long and obscure history. It began with the early days of los californios at Santa Clara College in the 1850s and reached its zenith in the turbulence of Chicano students at Berkeley in the 1960s. The social and political climate of the 1960s served as the context for the construction of El Plan de Santa Barbara, in which Chicano students and community members defined the aims of higher education for themselves.

## WHAT IS THE CONTEXT FOR CHICANOS' PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

While the civil rights struggles of the 1960s were important in shaping the aims of higher education for Chicanos, the federal government was the source of support programs that facilitated the participation of Chicanos in higher education, for example, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill of Rights, the National Defense and Education Act of 1958, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Higher Education Act of 1965. These programs were the initial bridges that brought the Chicano population into institutions of higher education in relatively substantial numbers.

While they facilitated the entry of Chicanos into higher education, these programs also reinforced the subordinate status of Chicanos in U.S. society. Given their limited financial resources, Chicano students were channeled into two-year colleges, where they became victims of low transfer rates to four-year institutions and high attrition rates. Thus, the number of Chicano students at four-year institutions has been low, even lower at some more prestigious institutions of higher education.

## HOW ARE CHICANOS REPRESENTED IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

Perhaps the best indicator of the tenuous presence of Chicanos in higher education is found in an examination of Chicano faculty. Chicano faculty are often viewed as having embarked on "extraordinary careers" in the U.S. educational system, as having surpassed the expectations U.S. society ascribes to them. But does higher education recognize their extraordinary careers?

Chicano faculty, for the most part, are peripheral members of academe. On the one hand, postsecondary institutions use them to address minority concerns. On the other hand, white faculty do not regard them as legitimate participants in academe. In most cases, they are regarded as impositions brought about by litigation and social legislation. If Chicano faculty have traveled this far to be reminded of their subordinate status in U.S. society, how can they encourage Chicano students to embark on their own extraordinary careers?

## WHAT DOES THE 21ST CENTURY HOLD FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHICANOS?

As the 21st century approaches, Chicanos must use educational attainment as a vehicle for social change, in particular as the means for entering sectors of U.S. society that bestow influence on participants. Through such a process, Chicanos can transform their position in U.S. society from one of relative disadvantage to one of relative influence.

Perhaps the most serious challenge facing Chicanos in the 21st century is their

exclusion from policy-making arenas. Numbers alone will not push Chicanos into those arenas; they must preface their entry into policy-making arenas by altering their socioeconomic status in U.S. society. One prerequisite for altering one's opportunity for advancement is by enhanced educational outcomes. Thus, Chicanos must use educational attainment as a net for gathering forces in the shaping of policy agendas.

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