

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 002

RC 023 023

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TITLE Hopes versus Reality: A Study of Anglo and Hispanic Students' Expectations of the Benefits of College Education.  
PUB DATE 2000-02-00  
NOTE 28p.; In: National Association of African American Studies & National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies 2000 Literature Monograph Series. Proceedings (Education Section) (Houston, TX, February 21-26, 2000).  
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Education Work Relationship; \*Educational Attitudes; Employment Patterns; \*Higher Education; \*Hispanic American Students; Racial Differences; Sex Differences; Social Integration; \*Student Attitudes; Student Surveys; \*Undergraduate Students; Unemployment; White Students  
IDENTIFIERS Texas A and M University

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether Hispanic Americans are more likely than Anglo Americans to view college education as a major component in job attainment. The study reviewed data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and surveyed 86 undergraduate students at Texas A&M University. The college sample was fairly representative of the student population in terms of racial, ethnic, and gender composition. Survey results indicate that Hispanic males and females expressed more faith in college education being a main component of getting a job than did their Anglo counterparts. However, faith in the employment benefits of college education was stronger among Hispanic males than Hispanic females, and was stronger among Anglo American females than Anglo American males. Department of Labor Statistics data indicate that college education reduced unemployment rates for both Hispanic Americans and Anglo Americans; Hispanics benefited more from college education in terms of employment than did Anglo Americans; and college-educated Anglo Americans were systematically more likely to be employed than their Hispanic counterparts. While college education has been a main component in significantly decreasing unemployment rates, particularly for Hispanics, it has not significantly closed the socioeconomic gap created by Anglo Americans being employed more than Hispanic Americans. (Contains 13 references.) (TD)

**HOPES VERSUS REALITY:  
A STUDY OF ANGLO AND HISPANIC  
STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE  
BENEFITS OF COLLEGE  
EDUCATION**

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## **Hopes Versus Reality: A Study of Anglo and Hispanic Students' Expectations of the Benefits of College Education**

*The hypothesis that Hispanic Americans are more likely to view college education as a major component toward job attainment than do Anglo Americans was examined. Data for the present study are based on 100 undergraduate students of an American University. The sample is fairly representative of the student population in terms of racial, ethnic, and gender composition. Using a combination of bivariate analysis and chi-square, the study found similarities as well as significant differences between Anglo and Hispanic Americans in terms of their expectations about the benefits of college education. Hispanic students overall, expressed more "faith" in college education being a main component of getting a job than their Anglo counterparts. Furthermore, college education did reduce unemployment rates for both groups even though whites persistently had lower unemployment rates than Hispanic Americans.*

College Education has often been regarded as one of the most efficient means to employment, and hence the reduction of income disparity among ethnic, racial and gender groups (Vago, 1996). In response to this "promise" of college education, there has been a tremendous upsurge in the demand for college education and consequently, an

increase in the number of new state and private colleges. For example, "in 1994, there were 3,628 institutions of higher education in the United States: 2159 were classified as four-year, including 159 universities and the remaining 1,469 as Junior colleges (*Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1994:5). There was an increase of almost twice the amount of 2 year and 4 year colleges since the last generation. Furthermore, the number of students enrolled in college has increased. For example, there were approximately 14.5 million students enrolled in higher education by fall 1994 (Vago, 1996). There has also been a significant growth in the number and variety of majors: approximately 6,000 and over (Vago, 1996).

Furthermore, there have been significant enrollment gains in college for women. More importantly, women represent more than 55 percent of the college population, leading the way in earning both bachelor's and master's degrees, (54.1 percent). However, women represent only 37.1 percent of Ph.D. recipients (Vago, 1996). Differences do persist in the fields of study of men and women. Men constitute approximately two-thirds of the students with

college majors such as architecture, engineering, physical science and religion. Women constitute approximately two-thirds of the students with college majors such as education, foreign languages, library sciences, and health professions. Women have, however, made significant headway in fields such as mathematics and engineering (Vago, 1996).

There has also been significant increase in the amount of minority enrollment in higher education. By 1994, minority enrollment had increased from “1,691,000 in 1976, (representative of 15.4 percent of all students in 2 and 4 year colleges), to approximately twice that amount, 3,260,000 (22.5 percent of total college enrollment of 14,491,000)” (Vago, 1996: 144). These patterns, however, did vary by race. Black enrollment in colleges, while reflecting a gradual increase (9.6 percent of college population) was still lower than the proportion of blacks within the population (*Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1994:15). Hispanic student college enrollment gradually increased from 3.5 percent in 1976, to 4.8 percent of the 1994 college population (Vago, 1996).

Is this increased faith in the “promise” of college education embraced across ethnic, racial and gender lines? Does this increase in Hispanic enrollment reflect a change in attitude about the promise of college education? More directly, do Hispanics share Anglo Americans faith in the promise of college education for employment? This is the question that will be addressed in this study.

The significance of race/ethnicity has been the subject of much social science research. Some of these studies have examined questions of whether: (1) college students from different ethnic backgrounds and with different family histories of college attendance, differed in their academic and social integration into the same 4-year environment? (2) they differ in their profiles of academic achievement and achievement motivation? and (3) they differ with respect to patterns of relationship between social and academic integration on the one hand and levels of achievement motivation on the other (Strage, 1999, Bong, 1999 ; Laden et. al, 1999; Cabrera et al., 1993)?

Survey data collected identified “five indices of academic and social integration (academic confidence,

social confidence, perception of oneself as a leader among one's peers, a positive rapport with one's teachers and an internal locus of control and mastery orientation in that environment). By indexing these students GPA, measuring their persistence and task-involvement and evaluating their incremental view of intelligence (through survey questions utilizing various scales of measure) there were significant differences between White and Hispanic students for the variables. Correlational analysis revealed strong linkages between academic and social integration and student outcomes across ethnic groups and for first and later-generation college students" (Strage, 1999:1).

More specifically, for "White students, Academic Confidence, Leadership and teacher rapport were positively correlated with Persistence, Task involvement, and Incremental views. Social confidence was predictive of Persistence and Incremental views. An Internal Locus of control was predictive of Persistence and Task involvement. For Hispanics students, Academic Confidence and Internal Locus of Control were significantly correlated with Persistence. Leadership,

Teacher rapport and Internal Locus of Control were predictors of Task involvement; and Social Confidence and leadership were predictors of incremental view” (Strage, 1999:5; Bong,1999).

The findings of the foregoing study raise the need to consider the link between student perceptions of their environment, the way they fit into it and their ability to arise to the challenges of that environment. For instance, “Students’ level of persistence in the face of obstacles was continuously linked with a range of measures of their academic and social integration.” (Strage, 1999:6; Bong, 1999) In other words, students perceptions of elements positively or negatively influencing their college environment matters tremendously, (especially across ethnic/racial lines) because it reflects towards their persistence to continue their college education.

Other studies have examined benefits of college education. From a societal standpoint, college graduates are less likely to commit crimes and far less likely to be unemployed (by approximately 30 percent) in comparison to students possessing a high-school degree. (Hossler et al.,



1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). From an individual perspective, earning a college degree is linked to the production of greater gains in occupational prestige and economic returns (Lin and Vogt, 1996). Despite the erosion of Affirmative Action programs, Hispanic Americans are making significant strides in the attainment of Master's (8.6 percent) Doctoral and first professional degrees. Thus, minority graduate education plays a critical role in the continuing vitality of the U.S. economy and its educational system. The promise of college education does seemingly close the gap of socioeconomic disparity among racial and ethnic lines (Bruner, 1999).

Yet another study, examined the significant under representation of Hispanics on the nation's college campuses. According to a new report by the Educational Testing Service and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, while the number of Hispanics who have college degrees has increased since 1973, Hispanics still continue to be under represented on college campuses (only 10.5 percent of the nation's college undergraduates) (Collison, 1999). The number of Hispanics is

disproportionate with the number of Hispanics attending college. This gap in education comes at a time when the fastest growing segment of the job market requires personnel with a college degree.

Although, “individuals of all ethnic groups suffer lifelong economic consequences if they do not pursue college education and because larger proportions of Hispanics fail to go beyond high school, larger proportions of people in this group are among the poor. These are indeed troubling statistics when a college degree is increasingly necessary for economic advancement in today’s economy” (Benjamin, 1998). In conclusion, the data from this study presents a startling implication: unless the nation makes an effort to raise the level of education of large segments of the population (namely Hispanics)-wage disparities will continue to increase along racial/ethnic lines, threatening “ America’s social stability and its basic democratic values”(Benjamin, 1998).

To the best of the present author’s knowledge, no study has looked at Hispanic/Anglo differences in attitudes towards the “promise” of college education. This study

intends to fill the gap. It is hypothesized here that: Hispanic Americans are more likely to view college education as a major component towards job attainment than Anglo Americans.

### **Method**

Two data collection techniques were employed in this research:

- (1) A forty question survey, used to measure undergraduate students responses to questions about the benefits of college education for job attainment.
- (2) Secondary data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicating the unemployment rates of Anglo and Hispanic American high school and college degreed students from the years 1992 through 1997.

### **Participants**

A total of 100 participants, ranging from a variety of course disciplines (Math, Sociology, Education, Psychology, English, Computer Science, etc.), a variety of religious backgrounds (Catholic, Protestant,

Agnostic...etc.), of various class standing (Senior, Junior, Sophomore and Freshman) and of different gender (twenty-seven Males and fifty-nine Females) participated in this cross sectional study. Due to small sample size in representation of African Americans and other minority groups (with the exception of Hispanics) the sample size was reduced to eighty-six participants (sixteen Anglo American Males, thirty-five Anglo American Females, eleven Hispanic American Males, and twenty-four Hispanic American Females), after recoding to reflect Anglo American and Hispanic American representation only. All respondents were 18 years of age or older. Thus, the sample more accurately reflected the general population of undergraduate students at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi.

### **Design and Procedure**

Appropriate permission was obtained from the Human Subject Research Committee and instructors to administer this study. Students were informed that participation was voluntary. In order to ensure student

confidentiality, students were informed verbally and in the written directions of the survey, not to include their name or social security number on the survey. To ensure representativeness both in gender, sex and age, surveys were administered in different colleges at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, over a two week period in October 1999.

### **Measurement**

The survey instrument, which was designed for a much larger study, consisted of a total of forty (38 closed and 2 open-end) questions. Responses were based on Likert scales to measure degrees of agreement/disagreement to questions: (1) Not at all (2) Sometimes and (3) At All times.

The variables of key interest in this study were the effect respondents felt college education had on being: (1) the main component towards increasing employment opportunities for:

A. Anglo and Hispanic Men

B. Anglo and Hispanic Women and

(2) equalizing the differences between Anglo Americans and Hispanic Americans as far as employment rates.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Responses toward college education as the main component toward getting a job, by ethnicity.**

Ethnicity	Responses toward college education as the main component toward getting a job					
	Not Always	Sometimes	At All Times	Total	Percentage Favorable Sometimes +At All Times	At All Times Percentage
Anglo American	9	27	15	51	82%	29%
Hispanic American	1	19	15	35	97%	43%
Total	10	46	30	86		

Over all, Hispanic Americans expressed more faith in college education as a means for getting a job. Based on the results from Table 1, we see that Hispanic Americans (at forty-three percent) vs. Anglo Americans (at twenty-nine percent), find college education as the main component forgetting a job “At All Times”.

When responses from “Sometimes and At All Times” were added together, the aforementioned difference

still persisted. For example, on Table 1, Hispanic Americans (at ninety-seven percent) vs. Anglo Americans (at eighty-two percent) are more “favorable” in finding that college education is the main component toward getting a job. How does one explain these findings? Regarding Table 1, three explanations are possible:

- 1) Most studies show that achievement of greater socioeconomic independence and socioeconomic mobility in the United States is through educational attainment (McGlynn, 1998).

College graduates earn on average, approximately \$500,000 more during their working lives than do high school graduates (Mellander, 1997). Furthermore, a college degree is increasingly necessary for economic advancement in today’s society (Benjamin, 1998) Historically, many Hispanic Americans fail to go beyond high school, predisposing them to be among the largest group of people of this country who are poor (Benjamin, 1998). Thus, most Hispanic Americans recognize the importance of a college education. They acknowledge that higher education has

historically been the gateway to opportunity in this country, normally assuring a lifetime of higher income and more comfortable social circumstances (Mellander, 1997). With this, what some may view as idealized “promise” of the benefits of college education, it is not however, surprising that Hispanics Americans, overall, are readily embracing a greater degree of faith in college education as the main component for getting a job.

- 2) Hispanic Americans may be less informed about the many “non-college factors” that go into the determination of who gets the job, such as: A) Job search techniques-(placement, want-ads, contacts and networks) and B) Interviewing techniques and Effective resumes; all of which are integral factors toward successful job attainment (Bradley et al., 1999).
- 3) As an extension of the previous explanation, Anglo Americans may have come to realize (or believe) that Social Policies such as Affirmative Action mediate the effect of education on employment. According to this argument: A) Affirmative Action discriminates against



non-minority male college students who have high grades and test scores and B) Affirmative Action discriminates against qualified non-minority male job applicants through the implementation of quotas instead of merit based qualifications; thus, proliferating reverse discrimination (Bryant, 1996). This may explain why for Anglo Americans, there is a lesser degree of faith toward college education as being the main component toward getting a job.

**Table 2. Responses toward college education as the main component toward getting a job for male respondents.**

Males Responses toward college education as the main component toward getting a job

	Not Always	Sometimes	At All Times	Total	Percentage Favorable Sometimes + At All Times	At All Times Percentage
Anglo American	2	10	4	16	88%	25%
Hispanic American		5	6	11	100 %	55%
Total	2	15	10	27		

Further analysis on each of the sexes revealed some interesting results. Results from Table 2 revealed that Hispanic American Males (at fifty-five percent) vs. Anglo

American Males (at twenty-five percent) have more faith in college education as a means for getting a job “At All Times”.

When responses from “Sometimes and At All Times” were added together, the aforementioned difference still persisted. For example, on Table 2, Hispanic American Males (at one-hundred percent) vs. Anglo American Males (at eighty-eight percent) are more “favorable” in finding that college education is the main component towards getting a job.

**Table 3. Responses toward college education as the main component toward getting a job, for female respondents.**

Female Responses toward college education as the main component toward getting a job

	Not Always	Sometimes	At All Times	Total	Percentage Favorable Sometimes + At All Times	At All Times Percentage
Anglo American	7	17	11	35	80%	31%
Hispanic American	1	14	9	24	96%	38%
Total	8	31	20	59		

Results from Table 3 revealed that Hispanic American Females (at thirty-eight percent) vs. Anglo American Females (at thirty-one percent) have more faith in college education as a means for getting a job “At all Times”.

When responses from “Sometimes and at All Times” were added together, the aforementioned difference still persisted. For example, on Table 3, Hispanic American Females(ninety-six percent) vs. Anglo American Females (eighty percent) have more “faith” that college education is the main component toward getting a job.

However, what is truly interesting, is that, in reviewing Tables 2 and 3, Hispanic American Males (at fifty-five percent) vs. Hispanic American Females (at thirty-eight percent) have more faith in college education as a means for getting a job “At all times”. While, Anglo American Females (at thirty one percent) vs. Anglo American Males at (twenty-five percent) have more faith in college education as a means for getting a job “At All Times”. Interaction effect suspected: The effect of race /ethnicity on “faith” in college education varies by gender.

4) While the aforementioned explanations support the overall outcome of both Tables 2 and 3, there is a clear discrepancy between the degree of faith each ethnic group has (by gender) toward college education as the main component towards getting a job (percentages in Tables 2 and 3).

Why is there a difference drawn between Hispanic men and women as far as their degree of faith in college education toward getting a job (Hispanic men appear to have more faith in college education's benefits than Hispanic women). Perhaps because of the following:

- (1) "According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 6.9 percent of Hispanic women have completed college" (McGlynn, 1998). The completion rate of black women is 10.2 percent, and that of white women, 17.6 percent.
- (2) "Given the emphasis on the family in Hispanic culture, and the emphasis on the roles of wife and mother for Hispanic women, the attainment of a college education might be de-emphasized and even devalued" (McGlynn, 1998). "There was a significant relationship between

Hispanic women who adhere to traditional roles (married with children) not attending college or not persisting in college at the same rate as were the more “non traditional women” (McGlynn, 1998). (3) Educational Environment can influence the outcome for Hispanic women. Without reinforcement for their academic achievements, and without Hispanic women role models and mentors to emulate, persistence towards completion of college education is a challenge for the Hispanic American woman (McGlynn, 1998). Thus, it may not be surprising that the Hispanic American Woman, when compared to her male counterpoint, does not have as much faith in college education being the main component toward getting a job.

A final conclusion will require a more rigorous data collection procedure than the present study. Further research is needed to find out which of the foregoing reasons is more valid.

So far we have found that there are ethnic differences among students in terms of the faith they have in college education for employment: Hispanic Americans

more than Anglo Americans believe that college education is the main component for getting a job. To what extent is this difference in “faith” consistent with objective employment data for both groups? This is the question addressed below.

The Department of Labor Statistics (review Table

4) reveal at least three important patterns:

- (1) College education reduced unemployment rates for both Hispanic Americans and Anglo Americans;
- (2) Hispanic Americans benefit more from college education in terms of employment than Anglo Americans;
- (3) College educated Anglo Americans are systematically more likely to be employed than their Hispanic American counterparts.

These patterns are more fully explained below.

For the year 1997, unemployment rates for Anglo Americans were 4.6 percent and 1.8 percent for high school graduates and college graduates respectively. And, for Hispanic Americans for the year 1997, unemployment rates were 7.5 percent and 3.0 percent for high school graduates & college graduates respectively.

Overall, Hispanic Americans benefited more in terms of reduction in unemployment rates, from college education the Anglo Americans (4.5 percent vs. 2.8 percent respectively).

From 1992 to 1997 Anglo American college graduates continued to have lower unemployment rates than Hispanics (as per Table 4). The most current figure (1997) shows an unemployment rate of 1.8 percent and 3.0 percent for Anglo Americans and Hispanic Americans respectively.

## Discussion

**Table 4 US Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, Race, and  
Hispanic Origin: 1992 to 1997**

### Unemployment Rates

#### Race and Year

White	Total	Less than High school Diploma	High school graduate No degree	Less than a bachelor's degree	College graduate	Percent Difference for High school and College Graduates
1992	6.0	12.9	6.8	5.3	2.7	4.1
1993	5.8	12.4	6.5	5.0	3.1	3.4
1995	4.3	9.2	4.6	4.2	2.3	2.3
1996	4.2	10.2	4.6	3.7	2.1	2.5
1997	3.9	9.4	4.6	3.4	1.8	2.8

Hispanic	Total	Less than High school degree	High school graduate no degree	Less than a bachelor's Degree	College graduate	Percent Difference for High school and College Graduates
1992	9.8	13.6	9.6	5.9	4.2	5.4
1995	8.0	10.9	8.1	5.2	3.7	4.4
1996	8.5	12.3	7.3	5.7	4.0	3.3
1997	7.3	9.6	7.5	5.5	3.0	4.5

## Conclusion



The foregoing findings lend themselves to different interpretations. The most pertinent of which, from the point of view of the present author, appears to be Karl Marx's theory of false consciousness. According to Karl Marx, a person or groups of persons, are "false conscious" if their attitudes and behaviors are not consistent with their material existence. In this case, one would agree that the "faith" expressed by Hispanic American Students in the research sample is not consistent with their experience of relatively higher unemployment rates as compared to their Anglo American counter parts. Thus, while college education has been a main component in significantly decreasing unemployment rates (specifically within the Hispanic American race,) it has not however, significantly closed the socioeconomic gap created by unemployment rates between Anglo Americans and Hispanic Americans, with Anglo Americans systematically more likely to be employed than their Hispanic American counterparts.

With the aforementioned findings (unemployment gaps between college educated Hispanics and Anglos) it would seem that college enrollment would be decreasing

for Hispanics as time goes on, yet as indicated previously, Hispanic enrollment continues to increase. Thus, indicating Hispanics are not discouraged from their pursuit of college education despite the aforementioned data from the U.S. Bureau Labor Statistics.

It is this author's recommendation, for a more rigorous data collection procedure (hence, an increase in sample size) than the present study has used for more reliable conclusions. It is my intention to re-examine this topic of interest in the near future.

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