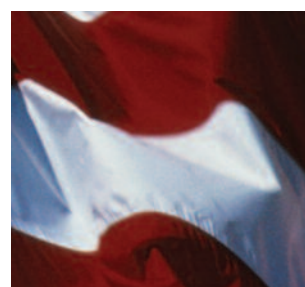


# ENSURING AMERICA'S FUTURE: FEDERAL POLICY AND LATINO COLLEGE COMPLETION



PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**A**chieving the nation's educational attainment goals is impossible without significant improvements in the postsecondary completion rates of Latino students. Taking into account the current population projections, educational attainment levels, and economic reality, this brief aligns a focus on Latino college degree completion with federal policy to address the emerging national agenda to accelerate degree completion.

Three policy areas—academic preparation, institutional capacity, and financial aid—were examined at the federal policy level that can support the achievement of Latino students entering and successfully completing a college degree. Collectively, federal policy in these areas impact higher education for all students, including Latinos; particularly in light of increasing college costs, decreasing financial resources, and articulated national goals of improved degree completion.

**Academic preparation:** Of the multiple federal programs developed to improve academic preparation and college readiness, four programs are considered in this brief—Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund, Race to the Top (RTTT), TRIO, and GEAR UP programs.

- For the i3 fund, the summaries of the highly ranked applications do not overtly mention serving Latinos. However, numerous projects describe their target populations for service as those with “high need,” “minority,” and “underserved” students.
- Combined, the 12 locations receiving RTTT funds enrolled about 14 percent of all Latinos currently in K-12 education in the U.S.
- Currently, 19 percent of TRIO students are Hispanic.
- According to the National Evaluation's baseline data, 36 percent of the GEAR UP population was Hispanic.

**Institutional capacity:** Among the federal programs targeting college access and capacity are the College Access Challenge Grants (CACG), the Community College and Career Training Grant Program (CCCTGP), and the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) program.

- States with the largest Latino student concentration—California, Texas, and Florida—received significant grants under the CACG.
- To date, the funds for the CCCTGP have not been awarded.

- In FY2010, the Developing HSIs program received \$217 million. Given more than half of Latino undergraduates are enrolled at HSIs, this investment has the potential to increase Latinos' and the nation's overall college completion levels.

**Financial aid:** Federal aid programs are important to college access and persistence for Latino students. Among those considered here are loans, Pell grants, and Work-Study.

- In 2008, 39 percent of all undergraduates took out loans to pay for college, compared to 34 percent of Latinos. White House analysis estimates about 143,000 (12 percent) of those who will participate in the new income-based repayment program will be Latino.
- The Department of Education estimates more than 150,000 additional Pell Grant awards would be made to Hispanic students (18 percent) with new changes in Pell grants.
- Latino students are actively participating in the Federal Work-Study program and earn, on average, higher aid awards than all other undergraduates.

Moving forward, it will be worth following the progress of these programs to examine how Latino students are served along with other students. Policymakers can be purposeful in assessing the opportunities and barriers public policy can create for Latino students, and take the necessary steps to ensure that public policy and regulatory actions are supporting postsecondary completion for all students, including Latino students.

- Ensure that Latino student needs are explicitly addressed during the development and implementation of higher education policy.
- Delineate degree completion goals by race and ethnicity to highlight the progress required among Latino students and to illustrate the institutional capacity and fiscal resources needed to attain these goals.
- Leverage the flexibility inherent in U.S. higher education to support student mobility and create innovative policy solutions.

## INTRODUCTION

*“We will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”*

— PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, FEBRUARY 24, 2009

In today’s knowledge driven economy a college degree is critical to the success of a competitive workforce. Yet in 2008, only 19 percent of Latinos, 29 percent of blacks, and 39 percent of whites 25 and over had earned an associate degree or higher.<sup>1</sup> Recent studies have noted the United States’ fall in international rankings of degree attainment. Recognizing this need to increase college degree attainment, the Obama Administration, leading foundations, and other organizations have each articulated ambitious national college completion goals.

At a time when all students will have to accelerate success to meet our national degree completion goals, improving Latino success in postsecondary education is vital. Analysis shows it will be nearly impossible to reach our national goals without significantly increasing Latino college completion.<sup>2</sup> However, too often policy discussions perpetuate traditional approaches and the status quo while neglecting to consider the changing student population to be served in higher education. Given the current educational attainment levels for Latinos, demands for economic competitiveness, and projected demographic growth of the U.S. Latino population, increasing U.S. college degree attainment requires a policy focus on young adults, generally and on Latino students, specifically.

A focus on Latinos provides an opportunity to examine policy issues through the lens of a generally nontraditional population and can therefore provide critical insights to improving college access and completion. Further, a policy focus on Latino young adults that aligns with measures, tactics, and strategies can encourage expansion and replication of effective policies and practices to reach the scale needed to reach national college completion goals.

How can federal public policy investments increase college completion in the U.S.? And, how can we ensure Latinos share in the benefits of these investments to increase their college completion and to help meet the national college completion goals? These questions drive the review in this brief of recent public policy efforts to improve college completion.



Accelerating Latino college degree completion requires: (1) intentionality in serving this group of students; (2) delineation of degree completion goals and measures of progress; (3) commitment to practices that produce positive results; and, (4) clarity about the federal, state and institutional policy environments that affect Latino student success. This issue brief provides an overview of recent federal public policy efforts in academic preparation, institutional capacity, and, financial aid. It also considers how these policy efforts might impact Latino college completion and presents questions beyond the scope of this brief. The brief concludes by offering several points for consideration in federal policy efforts to increase Latino college completion.

## PROFILE OF LATINOS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Latinos in the United States are the youngest and fastest-growing population group, yet lag behind other groups in educational attainment. Among both young adults (18 and 24 years of age) and adults (25 and over) Latinos were less likely than other racial and ethnic groups to have earned at least an associate degree (Table 1).

**TABLE 1: Percentage of young adults (18-24) and adults (25 and over) earning an Associate degree or higher, by racial/ethnic category, 2008**

	Percentage with an associate degree or higher	
	Young adults (18-24)	Adults (25 and over)
Adults		
All	14	38
Asian	25	59
White	15	39
Black	9	29
Hispanic	8	19

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008

Given the increased attention on degree completion in policy discussions, and the recognition that the nation's college completion goals cannot be met without a substantial improvement in Latino college completion, a brief profile of Latino students in higher education can provide context to the role of current federal policy on Latino college completion.

**Representation:** In 2008, Hispanics represented 15 percent of the U.S. population and 12 percent of undergraduate students in higher education.<sup>3</sup>

**Growth:** The college enrollment of Latinos is projected to increase faster than other groups. Between 2007 and 2018, enrollment of Hispanic students is projected to increase 38 percent, compared to 4 percent for whites, 26 percent for blacks, 29 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 32 percent for American Indian/Alaska Natives, and 14 percent for nonresident aliens.<sup>4</sup>

**College-going rate:** Latino young adults are less likely to be enrolled in college than other students. In 2008, the college-going rate for Latino high school completers between 18-24 years of age was 37 percent. In comparison, the rate was 40 percent

for blacks, and 49 percent for whites of the same age cohort. Of all 18-24 year olds, the percent of Latinos enrolled in college was 26 percent, compared to 32 percent for blacks and 44 percent for whites.<sup>5</sup>

**Attendance pattern:** Latino students are more likely than other students to be enrolled part-time. In 2008, 48 percent of Hispanics were enrolled part-time, compared to 37 percent of white, 41 percent of black, 38 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 40 percent of Native American/Alaska Native students.<sup>6</sup>

**Citizenship:** Latinos in postsecondary education are overwhelmingly native-born citizens (88 percent) or legal residents (11 percent).<sup>7</sup> In K-12 education, Latino students were more likely to be native-born (89 percent) than Asian (76 percent) or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (79 percent).<sup>8</sup>

**Income and generation:** Latinos are more likely to be both low-income and first-generation than most other students. Over one-third (34 percent) of Latino undergraduates were both low-income and first-generation college students. In comparison, 17 percent of white students, 39 percent of black students, 23 percent of Asian students, 27 percent of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, and 30 percent of American Indian/Alaska Natives were both low-income and first-generation college students.<sup>9</sup>

With this profile as context, the following sections review three policy areas—academic preparation, institutional capacity, and, financial aid—that play a critical role in increasing the number of students who enter and persist in postsecondary education. These sections also examine how recent public policy efforts are addressing the need to meet the nation's overall college completion goal and where Latinos are being served.

## ACADEMIC PREPARATION

The need to improve both the educational preparation of Latinos for the academic demands of college and their readiness to succeed in college has significant implications for meeting the nation's college completion goals. A few statistics highlight the scope of the challenge and provide context for public policy.

**Concentration:** Latino youth represent 21 percent of students enrolled in K-12 education and are concentrated regionally. In 2007-08, Latino students represented 38 percent of students enrolled in K-12 in the West and 20 percent of students in the South, compared to 15 percent of students in the Northeast and 9 percent in the Midwest.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Latino students are concentrated in the largest public school districts. In 2007-08, 40 percent of students in the 20 largest public school districts were Latino.<sup>11</sup>

**Academic progress:** According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), one-third of Latino students perform below grade level.<sup>12</sup> Further, Latinos are more likely to be placed into lower academic tracks throughout

their secondary schooling, which affects their college preparation.<sup>13</sup> While Latinos have made academic improvements over several years, Latino high school students still graduate at lower rates than students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Further, among those who graduate with a high school diploma, their academic preparation for college generally lags behind other students in their cohort.<sup>14</sup>

**Generational progress:** Latino young adults' high school graduation rates are increasing—in 2008, the rate was 70 percent, which is slightly up from the previous year. However, only 60 percent of the Hispanic population age 25 or older has earned a high school degree compared to 90 percent of whites and 81 percent of blacks age 25 and over.<sup>15</sup>

Given these facts, it is important to consider how federal legislation will impact the Latino school-age population—a population that must be better served in order to meet the Obama Administration's college completion goal.

## FEDERAL POLICY – ACADEMIC PREPARATION

The current federal investment to improve the academic preparation of students raises awareness of the national imperative to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure more young people are prepared to succeed in college. Of the multiple federal programs developed to improve academic preparation and college readiness, four programs are considered here—Investing in Innovation Fund, Race to the Top, TRIO, and GEAR UP programs. The following provides a succinct overview of these programs and considers their potential impact on Latino students' academic preparation for college.

To address persistent gaps in student achievement, the federal government has provided funding for competitive grants to expand innovative practices with a record of boosting student achievement. Two of the newest government programs are the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund, and the Race to the Top (RTTT) Program. Both programs were established under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

### Investing in Innovation (i3) Funds

The i3 Fund provides \$650 million in competitive grants to local education agencies (LEAs), non-profit LEA partnerships and consortiums of schools with a record of student achievement to ex-

pand innovative practices. Recipients of the i3 funds can expand and develop already effective practices, work in partnerships to leverage resources within the private sector and philanthropic communities or scale up and sustain innovative practices that can serve as best practices. The program's absolute priorities for grantees to focus their work—effective teachers and principles, use of data, high standards and high-quality assessments, and persistently low-performing schools—are educational areas essential for improving Latino students' academic preparation.

A quick review of the project summaries from the 49 highest-rated applications showed a broad geographic breadth for work. While the summaries do not overtly mention serving Latinos, numerous projects describe their target populations for service as those with “high need,” “minority,” and “underserved” students. It will be worth following the progress of this program to see how Latinos are served along with other students.

### Race to the Top (RTTT) Program

The RTTT program provides \$4.3 billion in competitive grants to support states' comprehensive reform efforts to improve schools and close the achievement gap.<sup>16</sup> Two states received support in



the first phase of RTTT funding: Delaware and Tennessee. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 10 percent of Delaware's public elementary and secondary students are Hispanic and 5 percent of Tennessee's are Hispanic,<sup>17</sup> both of which are below the national average. In funding recently announced, 10 states and the District of Columbia received RTTT funding. Of these states, only Florida and New York have substantial Latino student enrollments (21 and 17 percent) close to the national average of Latino representation. Combined, the 12 locations receiving RTTT funds enrolled about 14 percent of all Latinos currently in K-12 education in the U.S.<sup>18</sup>

### TRIO

The TRIO programs are a set of competitive grant programs created to ensure low-income, first generation and minority students are prepared for college. Currently authorized under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA), the TRIO programs—Upward Bound, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Centers, Student Support Services, Upward Bound Math/Science, and the McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program—comprise the largest set of federally-funded college access and success programs. The Council for Opportunity in Education, an organization that represents many TRIO programs, has noted that over 850,000 low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities — from sixth grade through college graduation — are served by more than 2,800 programs nationally. Two-thirds of the students served through TRIO programs must come from families earning less than \$33,075, where neither parent graduated from college. Over

one-third of Latino students are both low-income and first-generation potential college-goers. Several national evaluations of TRIO programs have shown a positive impact on Latino students. For example, the Upward Bound Math-Science, has shown a particularly strong effect on GPA and course selection for Hispanic students, increasing enrollment rates in chemistry and physics by 17 and 27 percentage points, respectively.<sup>19</sup> Currently, 19 percent of TRIO students are Hispanic.<sup>20</sup>

### Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)

GEAR UP was authorized in the Higher Education Act amendments of 1998 and provides competitive grants to both states and education and community partnerships, with a particular emphasis on early college preparation and awareness for entire cohorts of students, starting in the seventh grade. There is also a scholarship component. GEAR UP programs are targeted toward underserved students, in this case requiring at least 50 percent of students at participating schools be eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch. The 2008 interim findings from the National Evaluation of GEAR UP indicated that participation in the program improved middle schools students' and parents' knowledge of the college admission process, and increased parental involvement in education — two areas of increasing importance to the Hispanic community.<sup>21</sup> The President's FY2011 budget is expected to level funding at \$323.2 million and reach an estimated 748,000 middle and high school students. According to the National Evaluation's baseline data, 36 percent of the GEAR UP population was Hispanic.



## INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

While national leaders are calling for increased college degree completion, states are facing financial shortfalls and are decreasing higher education budgets. As a result, the capacity of public institutions (including the numbers of seats available to students) is being constrained. For instance, 36 states cut their higher education budgets for fiscal year 2010,<sup>22</sup> and while federal stimulus spending from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) boosted spending in some states for fiscal years 2009-10, these funds have largely been spent.<sup>23</sup> These budget constraints are also occurring at a time when the Latino population is growing as part of the college-age population and the numbers of returning students, of adults retraining for jobs, and of life-long learners is increasing.

Public policy to increase capacity can also improve the access and completion of Latinos in higher education because Latinos are concentrated at public institutions in relatively few states. Consider the following data on the concentration of Latinos in higher education:

- In 2008, 80 percent of Latino undergraduates were enrolled in public colleges and universities.<sup>24</sup>

- In 2008, 93 percent of Latino undergraduates attended institutions in their state of legal residence. This is higher than all undergraduates (87 percent) and every racial/ethnic group.<sup>25</sup>

- Over 60 percent of Latino college students in 2008 were concentrated in three states—California, Texas, Florida—and Puerto Rico.<sup>26</sup>

- Almost half of Latinos (49 percent) were enrolled in community colleges and 31 percent were enrolled at public colleges and universities.<sup>27</sup>

- Just over half of Latino undergraduates were enrolled in less than 10 percent of degree-granting institutions (266 institutions) identified at the federal level as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).<sup>28</sup>

The following section considers how federal policy addresses some of the financial challenges facing public postsecondary education systems and considers the impact these policies may have on the growing Latino student population.

## FEDERAL POLICY - INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Among the federal programs targeting college access and capacity are the College Access Challenge Grants, the Community College and Career Training Grant Program, and the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) program.

### College Access Challenge Grants Program (CACGP)

The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (HCERA) authorized \$750 million to states through CACGP to foster partnerships between federal, state, and local governments with philanthropic organizations. The program provides states with matching challenge grants to improve their capacity to provide access and completion programs as well as financial literacy with the goal of increasing the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

In FY 2008, \$66 million was awarded to partnerships through the CACGP and a similar amount was appropriated for 2009. The states with the largest Latino student concentration received significant grants. California received \$7.6 million to implement efforts, Texas received \$6.2 million, Florida received \$3.1 million, and Puerto Rico re-

ceived \$2.6 million. Further, four states overtly mentioned serving Latino students in their proposals (Connecticut, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Hampshire). One additional state—Minnesota—noted the numbers of Latinos has increased 166 percent over the past decade and proposed including outreach to Latino families to its efforts after its one-year review.<sup>29</sup>

### Community College and Career Training Grant Program

The HCERA also acknowledged the important role community colleges play in the college completion agenda through an investment of \$2 billion over four years for the Community College and Career Training Grant Program (at no less than \$2.5 million for programs per state). The program will be administered by the U.S. Department of Labor with the purpose of developing, offering, or improving educational or career training programs (of not more than two years) for workers eligible for training. As of the printing of this brief, the funds for this program have not been awarded. However, once awarded, it will be worth tracking this federal investment to determine its impact on college completion overall, and on Latino students specifically.

## Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) Program

In both the Higher Education Opportunity Act and the HCERA, there is an articulated role for federal policy and investment in the capacity of minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to provide access to traditionally underrepresented students. One large set of minority-serving institutions is HSIs. These institutions are predominately public and over half are two-year institutions. While Latinos are enrolled in many of these diverse institutions, Latinos are highly concentrated in HSIs. The Developing HSIs program is a competitive program that provides grants to institutions enrolling a significant concentration of Latino students (25 percent or more of total undergraduate full-time-equivalent enrollment) in order to help the institutions expand Latino students' educational opportunities and improve their degree attainment. The grants also enable HSIs to expand and enhance their capacity in academic offerings, program quality, and institutional stability.

## FINANCIAL AID

Student financial aid provides funds to students to offset the cost of attendance at a postsecondary institution and thus to increase participation in postsecondary education. Funding for financial aid comes from an array of sources, including federal, state, and local governments, private lenders and philanthropies, and colleges and universities. Financial aid can be dispersed based on a student's demonstrated financial need or some other factor such as a student's academic abilities and can take the form of loans, which require repayment, and grants, which off-set student educational expenses directly. To increase college completion, Congress recently passed legislation that overhauled the federal student loan program, increased funding for Pell grants, and revised the income-based repayment program.

To consider the impact of financial aid on Latino student college completion, consider the following profile developed from analysis using National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Aid Survey (NPSAS: 2008):

- Latino undergraduates are more likely to apply for financial aid to pay for college than all undergraduates (78 percent vs. 74 percent).
- The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) to pay for college for Latino undergraduates (\$9,966) is lower than the EFC for all under-

Funding for HSIs has increased substantially since the first appropriation of \$10 million in 1995. In FY2010, the appropriation for the Developing HSIs program was \$217 million. Included in this amount is mandatory funding of \$1 billion (awarded over 10 years) to revise and expand programming at HSIs. Investing in HSIs can strengthen the capacity of institutions enrolling large concentrations of Latinos. Previous analysis by Excelencia in Education has shown that some HSIs are very focused on serving their Latino students (not just enrolling). Unfortunately, policy-makers cannot assume that all institutions with a concentrated enrollment of Latinos are identifying and investing in these students' success by default. However, given that HSIs are predominately located in states with large Latino populations, and that more than half of Latino undergraduates are enrolled at HSIs, this increased investment in the institutions with high concentrations of Latinos has the potential to increase Latinos' and the nation's overall college completion levels.

graduates (\$13,524) and all groups, except African Americans.

- The average federal financial aid awarded to Latino undergraduates (\$5,977) was substantially lower than the average award for all undergraduates (\$6,558). However, the average Pell grant awarded to Latino students (\$2,699) was higher than the average Pell grant award to all undergraduates (\$2,558).
- Latino students who participated in work-study programs received, on average, higher awards (\$2,575) than all other undergraduate groups (\$2,403).
- Latino students were as likely as all undergraduates to discuss financial aid decisions with family/friends and to research financial aid on the internet. However, Latinos were more likely to talk with staff about financial aid decisions than all undergraduates (56 percent vs. 48 percent).
- The majority of Latino students were employed while enrolled. In 2008, 42 percent of Hispanic students enrolled full-time and 74 percent of those enrolled part-time were employed. Of those enrolled full-time, 28 percent worked 20 or more hours a week. Of those enrolled part-time, 43 percent worked 35 or more hours a week.<sup>30</sup>

## FEDERAL POLICY – FINANCIAL AID



Traditionally, financial aid at the federal level has been provided to students demonstrating a financial need, calculated through completion of the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FASFA). Federal aid programs, most notably the Pell Grant and subsidized federal loans, provide billions of dollars to students each year and are a critical element of the postsecondary education funding structure. It is generally accepted that these need-based aid programs have supported an expansion of low-to-moderate income student participation in postsecondary education.

Federal aid programs are important to college access and persistence for Latino students. Among those considered here are loans, Pell grants, and Work-study. Recent changes to federal financial aid policy changes in the way students obtain and repay federal loans to pay for college and increases in Pell Grant funding are likely to have significant impacts on the college completion of Latino students.

### Federal Loans

The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act shifts the provision of student loans from private lenders to the federal government through direct loans. Overall, Latino students are less likely than all other undergraduates to use federal loans to pay for college. In 2008, 39 percent of all undergraduates took out loans to pay for college, compared to 34 percent of Latino undergraduates. And, those who did use loans tended to receive lower average awards than all other undergraduates. Although borrowing patterns are in part a function of the institutional enrollment choices students make, Latino students' enrollment decisions appear to be driven by a combination of price sensitivity, loan aversion, and limited knowledge about federal loan programs.

To ensure students can afford to repay the loans they have taken to pay for college, the HCERA expands the income-based student repayment program for new borrowers after the summer of 2014. These borrowers will be allowed to cap their loan repay-

ments at 10 percent of their discretionary income. Further, if the borrowers maintain their payments, their balance can be forgiven after 20 years. Analysis by the White House estimates that 1.2 million borrowers will qualify and participate in the expanded income based repayment program between 2014 and 2020. Of those who participate, they estimate about 143,000 (12 percent) will be Latino.

### Pell Grants

Many Latino undergraduates are recipients of Federal Pell Grants to pay for their college education. The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act invests more than \$40 billion in Pell Grants to ensure that all eligible students receive an award and that these awards are increased in future years to help keep pace with the rising cost of college. The bill increases the Federal Pell Grant maximum award by the Consumer Price Index from 2013 through 2017, which is estimated to raise the award from \$5,550 to \$5,975 (according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office). By the 2020-2021 academic school year, more than 820,000 additional Pell Grant awards are expected to be made. Of these additional awards, the Department of Education estimates more than 150,000 additional Pell Grant awards would be made to Hispanic students (18 percent).

### Federal Work-Study

The Federal Work-Study Program provides funds to assist students in paying for college through part-time employment. Institutional financial aid administrators have flexibility in determining the amount of Work-Study awards to students, but the hourly wages cannot be less than the federal minimum wage. This program is part of the Campus-Based Programs awarded to over 3,000 institutions to provide additional financial aid to students.

The Federal Work-Study Program has received considerably less attention in public policy discussions about financial aid compared to Pell Grants or Direct Loans. However, Latino students are actively participating in this program and earn, on average, higher aid awards than all other undergraduates. There is some evidence that more campuses are augmenting this program with their own resources to engage more Latino students and address their need to work with the opportunity to stay on campus and potentially use more of the institutions' support services, gain work experience in their chosen field, and pay for college. More analysis is needed on this federal program to determine its contributions to Latino college completion.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

This brief reviewed recent federal policy efforts to address college completion and considered how these efforts might impact Latino college completion. However, this overview yielded numerous questions beyond the scope of the brief. For example:

- Are these policy efforts, and allocated resources, sufficient to reach our national college completion goals?
- What can other organizations do to make sure Latinos are included in efforts to increase college completion?
- Are federal programs that award funding through competitive grants serving a representative number of nontraditional populations?
- Are best practices and policies being funded that address the needs of Latino students?
- How will national college- and career- ready standards and assessments impact states and districts serving predominately first-generation and Latino students?
- How can federal and state policymakers ensure adequate funding is directed towards practices that have a proven impact on increasing enrollment and persistence of Latinos in higher education?
- Are federal institutional capacity-building efforts sufficient to increase capacity and success for underserved students across the country?
- What measures of institutional effectiveness for degree completion are useful for institutions that enroll a large concentration of Latino and other nontraditional students?

*Excelencia in Education* will continue efforts to better understand and address these questions in future research.



## CONCLUSION

This brief discussed several critical areas that have primary and secondary impacts on the experiences of Latinos in higher education. Projected population growth, historical educational attainment levels, current attendance patterns, and national goal of college completion require increased attention on Latinos in higher education. As policymakers and other postsecondary stakeholders chart a pathway forward to meet the civic and work-force needs of the nation, it is imperative that policy be developed with a keen awareness of the impacts of action or inaction on the growing population of Latino students.

To understand the experience of Latinos in higher education, three policy areas were examined at the federal policy level that can support the achievement of Latino students entering and successfully completing meaningful postsecondary credentials. Collectively, these areas highlighted the multifaceted challenges facing this student population, particularly in light of increasing college costs and falling fiscal resources that are eroding access and shifting public attention away from a focus on completion. Moving forward, policymakers should be purposeful in assessing the opportunities and barriers policy prescriptions can create for Latino students, and take the necessary steps to ensure that public policy and regulatory actions are supporting postsecondary completion for all students, including Latino students. In support of preparing a plan of action, several key considerations for policymakers and stakeholders are offered:

**Ensure that Latino student needs are explicitly addressed during the development and implementation of higher education policy.** As discussed throughout this brief, the nation's ability to achieve desired levels of educational attainment will rely in large-part on the success and completion of Latino students. All too often policy discussions fail to consider the needs of Latino students in concrete and explicit ways. Moreover, even where public policies are well intended to assist Latinos, a lack of persistent and coordinated outreach efforts produces conditions where Latinos are unaware of the public benefits for higher education that are available to them. As policy is crafted, it is vital that the growing Latino student population is explicitly considered in accurate ways to ensure successful outcomes.

**Delineate degree completion goals by race and ethnicity to highlight the progress required**

**among Latino students and to illustrate the institutional capacity and fiscal resources needed to attain these goals.** The Obama Administration and others have made increasing postsecondary attainment a strategic priority. However, raising educational attainment levels across varying racial and ethnic groups will require more than a one-size-fits-all policy approach; we will simply not be able to reach articulated goals by doing more of the same and treating the experiences of students as uniform. Tracking the progress of varying ethnic groups towards completion goals would support sustained attention, investment, and action on these goals. In order to meet this goal, additional support for the collection and dissemination of data that provides clarity on the Latino student experience in higher education is also needed.

**Leverage the flexibility inherent in U.S. higher education to support student mobility and create innovative policy solutions.** As the population of "traditional" students continues to make up a smaller proportion of the overall postsecondary student population, policy shifts will be required to assist first-generation, working adults, and lower-income students in achieving success in the postsecondary endeavor. The experience of Latino students in postsecondary education, while unique in many aspects, mirrors that of the student population as a whole in necessitating more flexible and responsive public policy. The variance in institutional type, enrollment patterns, and academic programs offers a fertile ground for unique policy ideas to support increased educational achievement for Latino students.

Begin to form a plan of action to ensure Latino students are included and benefitting from programs so can contribute to overall completion goals and the economic strength of the U.S.

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# ENSURING AMERICA'S FUTURE BY INCREASING LATINO COLLEGE COMPLETION

## About The Initiative

A new emphasis on college degree attainment by the Obama Administration, and major foundations including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation for Education, reflects the growing recognition that increasing college completion is key to future prosperity. Given current educational attainment levels for Latinos, demands for economic competitiveness, and projected Latino demographic growth in the United States, increasing American college degree attainment is vital.

According to the U.S. Census, only 19 percent of Hispanics in the United States had earned an associate degree or higher in 2008. In comparison, 39 percent of whites, 28 percent of blacks, and 59 percent of Asians had earned an associate or higher in 2008. Further, demographic predictions show Latinos will represent 22 percent of the U.S. population by 2025. In combination, these facts create a compelling call to action.

To meet this challenge, *Excelencia* in Education, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is shaping a policy strategy with measures, tactics, and strategies focused on young adults generally, and Latino students specifically.

The initiative, Ensuring America's Future by Increasing Latino College Completion brings to the forefront of public attention the role Latinos play in meeting the country's college degree completion goal. The challenge will be met through partnerships

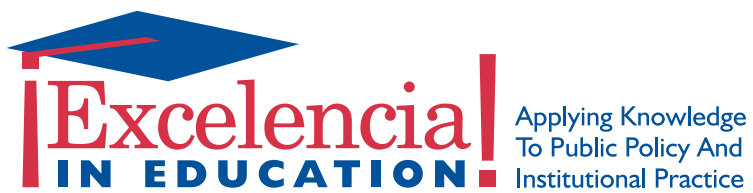
with community-based as well as national organizations in education, business and workforce, Latino advocacy, media and philanthropy high-level engagement with postsecondary and public policy leaders, analysis of public data that benchmarks national and state level Latino college degree completion, and the implementation of an outcomes-driven plan promoting promising practices and policies.

*Excelencia* in Education is uniquely positioned nationally to tackle this challenge in several ways. By using its voice and convening power, *Excelencia* makes the case for the importance of getting Latino students to and through college. It is prepared to expand its information role to track progress towards Latino college degree completion, as well as engage stakeholders at national, state, and institutional levels in purposeful deliberations to develop and deploy a policy roadmap to accelerate Latino college degree completion.

Accelerating Latino college degree completion requires: (1) intentionality in serving this group of students; (2) delineation of degree completion goals and measures of progress; (3) commitment to practices and policies that produce positive results; and, (4) clarity about the federal, state and institutional policy environments that affect Latino student success. There is a role for all stakeholders committed to increasing U.S. college degree completion.

**For more information please visit:**  
[www.edexcelencia.org/initiatives/EAF/full](http://www.edexcelencia.org/initiatives/EAF/full)





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