

Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Contributions and Challenges

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Summary Notes

- Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) contribute greatly to the educational attainment of Latinos, yet these institutions face several challenges as they aim to serve Latino students.
- There are currently 301 two-year and four-year HSIs located in 17 states and Puerto Rico that enroll more than 52 percent of Latino undergraduate students.
- Collectively, HSIs grant 58 percent of subbaccalaureate certificates, 59 percent of associate degrees and 40 percent of bachelor's degrees conferred to Latino students.
- Policymakers and higher education practitioners can increase the positive student outcomes for Latino students at HSIs by strengthening programs, policies and practices, implementing data systems to continually assess the academic outcomes of Latino students, and conducting research that allows institutions to continually improve policies and practices to effectively serve Latino students.

This policy brief presents information about the characteristics of the nation's Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and

their students, as well as their contributions to the educational attainment of the Latino population. The brief concludes by outlining some of the challenges faced by HSIs as they aim to meet their implied mission of serving Latino students.

Defining Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Hispanic-serving institutions are defined as accredited, not-for-profit degree-granting postsecondary institutions whose Latino enrollment exceeds 25 percent of its total full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate enrollment.¹ Having emerged as a result of the nation's shifting demographics and the persuasive appeals of advocates for the Latino community,² HSIs are central to the expansion of educational opportunity for this historically disadvantaged group. While other minority-serving institutions (i.e., historically black colleges and universities [HBCUs] and tribal colleges and universities) were founded for the purpose of educating their target populations, HSIs earn their designation based on enrollment demographics alone.

1. Upon its authorization in 1998, Title V required that at least 50 percent of Latino undergraduates at HSIs be "low income." However, this portion of the eligibility criteria was dropped in the Third Higher Education Extension Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-292).

2. See Laden (2004) and Santiago (2006).

Although there is no single “official” list of HSIs published by the U.S. Department of Education, an analysis of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data reveals that 301 accredited, not-for-profit, two- and four-year postsecondary institutions met the 25 percent Latino undergraduate FTE enrollment threshold required to be designated as an HSI in 2009-10.³ Although 301 institutions meet the enrollment conditions, it is not known precisely how many institutions meet all of the HSI eligibility requirements set by Title V, which stipulates that, in addition to the enrollment requirement, eligible HSIs must also serve needy students and have low general and education expenditures relative to comparable institutions. However, the secretary of education may waive these requirements provided that certain conditions are met. For these reasons, an exact count of HSIs is not available.

In 2009-10, 246 for-profit, two- and four-year institutions also exceeded 25 percent Latino undergraduate FTE enrollment. For-profit institutions collectively enrolled nearly 109,000 Latino undergraduate students (FTE), compared to 773, 226 Latino undergraduate students (FTE) enrolled at two- and four-year not-for-profit institutions. While for-profit institutions play an important role in providing postsecondary access to Latinos, their “for-profit” status prevents them from being classified as HSIs. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that institutions

with high Latino enrollment exist in all sectors of U.S. postsecondary education.

The Origins of the “Hispanic-Serving” Designation

Unlike other special mission colleges and universities, the institutional category “Hispanic-serving institutions” is a relatively recent development, arising from the changing demographics of American society. HSIs were first formally recognized as an institutional type by the federal government in the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Although the changing face of the American population made the emergence of higher educational institutions that serve large numbers of Latino students almost inevitable, much of the credit for the official federal recognition of HSIs belongs to an alliance of the leadership from high Latino enrollment institutions, congressional members from states with large Latino populations, and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU).⁴

In 1992, the aforementioned coalition of advocates, institutional leaders and congressional representatives successfully lobbied Congress to formally recognize HSIs and include these institutions in the funding provisions of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The 1992 HEA amendments added the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program as an authorized program under Title III, Part A of the HEA.⁵ The formal recognition

3. Fall 2008 enrollment data obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) were used to derive the estimated number of HSIs.

4. See Santiago (2006) for further information on the history of how HSIs became officially recognized by the federal government.

5. *Ibid.*

of HSIs was meaningful because these institutions, many of which had been severely underfunded, were now eligible to apply for additional federal support intended to strengthen their institutional infrastructures and instructional capacity. In 1998, Congress reauthorized the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program under Title V of the HEA in large part to “assist HSIs to expand educational opportunities for, and improve the academic attainment of, Latino students.”⁶ As evidenced by the previous and ongoing investments in HSIs through Title V, policymakers have recognized the need to provide currently underfunded HSIs with additional resources, enabling them to carry out their implied mission of serving Latino students.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the Current Educational Landscape

Although all HSIs share the same Hispanic-serving designation, the proportion of Latino enrollment at these institutions ranges from 25 percent to 100 percent. Many HSIs are *historically* Hispanic serving; that is, they had enrolled a majority Latino student population long before the official designation was codified in the HEA in 1992. There are also a small number of HSIs that were founded with a mission to educate Latino students, similar to other minority-serving institutions (i.e., HBCUs

and tribal colleges).⁷ These so-called historically Hispanic-serving institutions have long demonstrated a commitment to facilitating postsecondary access and success for Latino students.

However, other HSIs obtained the Hispanic-serving designation recently by meeting the 25 percent Latino FTE enrollment threshold within the last few years. These more nascent HSIs are indicative of the growing numbers of Latinos participating in postsecondary education. Over time, the number of HSIs will continue to increase. According to IPEDS data, 219 two- and four-year institutions had Latino FTE undergraduate enrollments between 15 percent and 24.9 percent in 2009-10. Institutions in this category are called “emerging HSIs,” and are on the verge of attaining Hispanic-serving status and may meet the 25 percent threshold in the coming years.⁸

Geographical distribution of HSIs

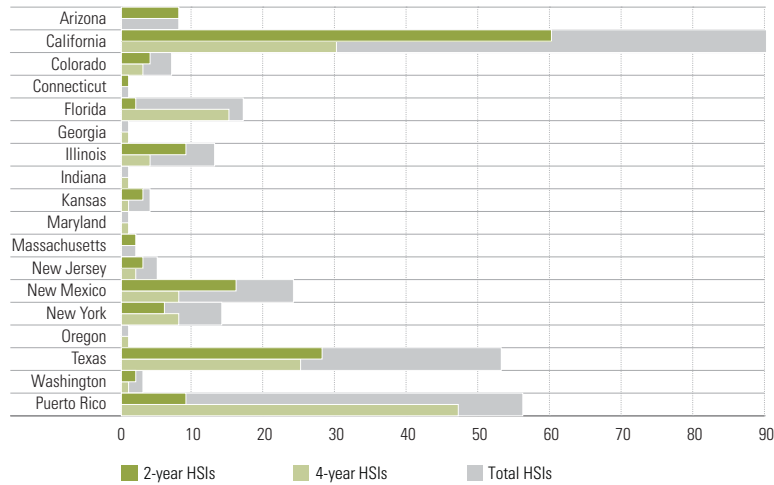
Currently, 301 accredited, not-for-profit two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities located in 17 states and Puerto Rico meet or exceed the Latino enrollment required to be designated as HSIs. Figure 1 below shows the number of two- and four-year HSIs by state. Not surprisingly, HSIs are heavily concentrated in those areas of the United States with

6. Title V of the Higher Education Act, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1100 *et seq.* 2005.

7. At least three institutions were created prior to 1992 for the specific purposes of serving the educational needs of Latinos: Boricua College, an independent liberal arts college in New York; National Hispanic University in San Jose, Calif., an independent four-year B.A.-granting institution; and Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College, a two-year college in the South Bronx that is part of City University of New York (CUNY).

8. See Santiago and Andrado (2010) for more information on emerging HSIs.

Figure 1: Number of 2-year and 4-year Hispanic-Serving Institutions by State, 2009-10



Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Fall 2009 Enrollment Data and Institutional Characteristics.

large Latino populations. Just below half of all HSIs are located in California and Texas, which boast the nation’s largest Latino populations. The presence of HSIs in states such as Georgia, Oregon and Washington are indicative of the growing Latino population in the South and the Northwest.

Nearly one-fifth of HSIs are located in the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (see Figure 1). These HSIs are distinct from those located within the 50 U.S. states due to many factors, including the fact that instruction is provided in Spanish and nearly all faculty and administrators at these institutions are Latino. Policymakers, educational researchers and others ought to be mindful of these factors as well as others that contribute to the intra-group variability among HSIs.

Institutional Characteristics of HSIs

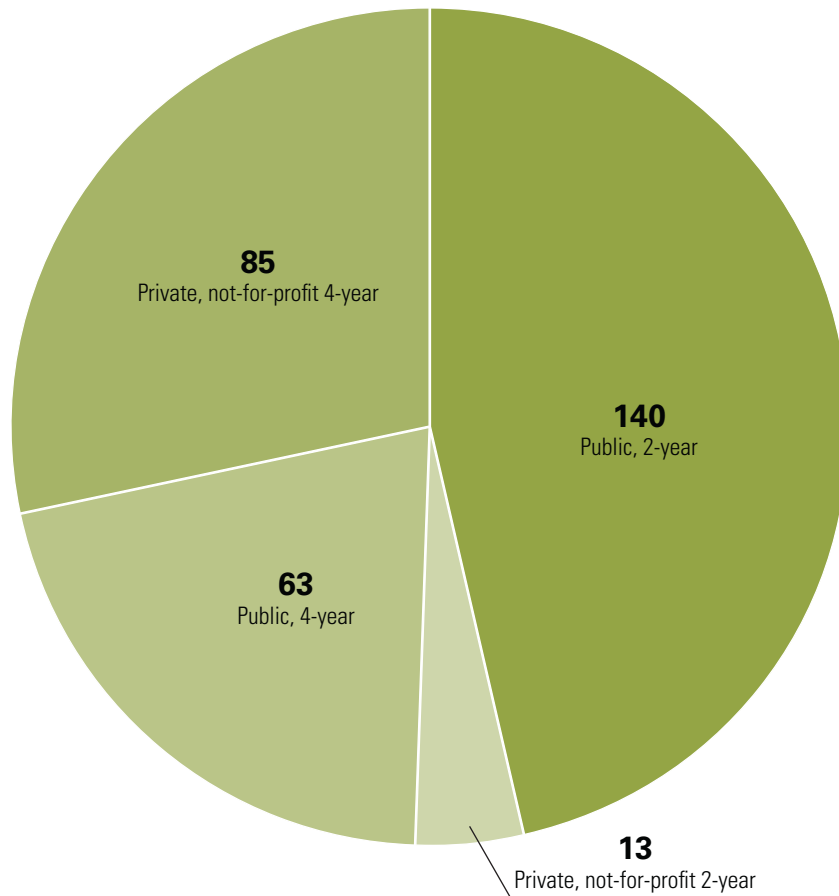
Institutional type. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of HSIs by institutional type. As shown in the figure, a little over half (51 percent) of HSIs are two-year colleges; the vast majority of these non-baccalaureate-granting institutions are public community colleges.⁹ Interestingly, among four-year institutions, private, not-for-profit institutions outnumber public institutions.

Figure 3 indicates the distribution of HSIs across various categories of the Carnegie Basic Classification. While slightly more than 23 percent of HSIs award postbaccalaureate degrees, just 2 percent of HSIs are classified as Research Universities.

Institutional selectivity. On average, HSIs are less selective than non-Hispanic-serving institutions. Although

9. Ibid.

Figure 2: Institutional Level and Control of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, 2009-10



Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Fall 2009 Enrollment Data and Institutional Characteristics.

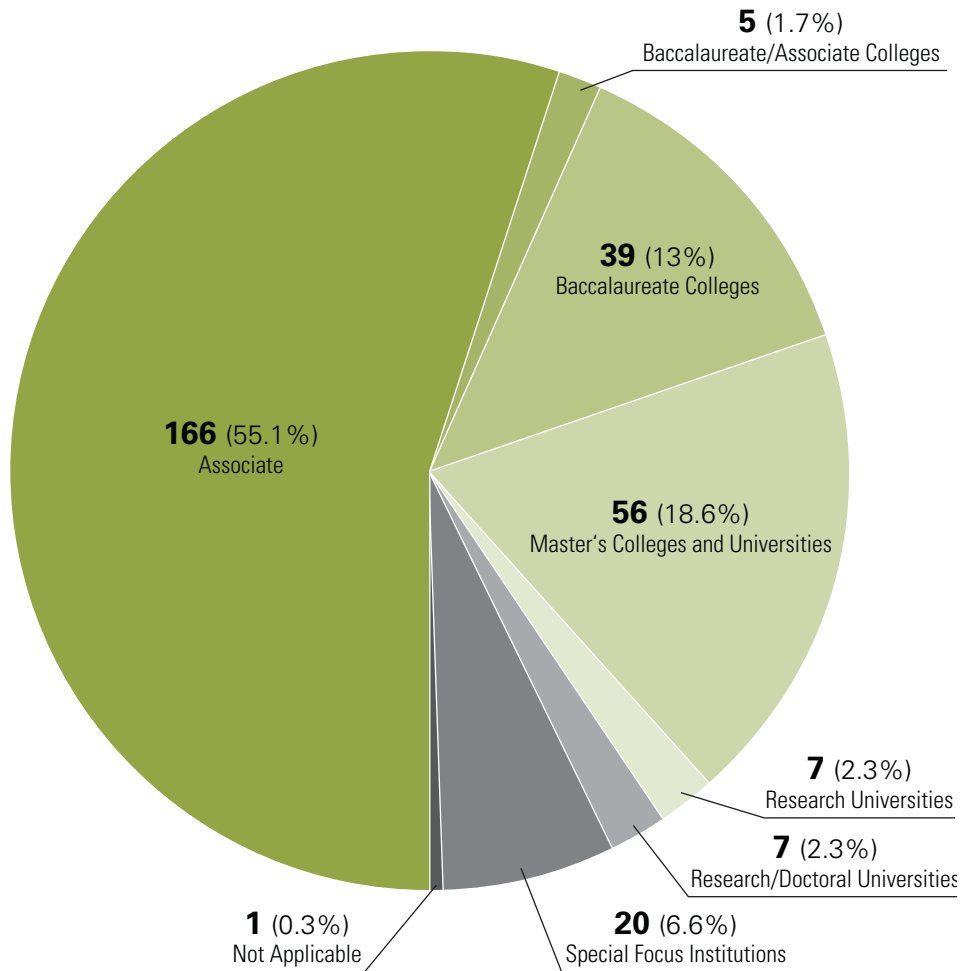
four-year HSIs admit a slightly lower proportion of applicants than non-HSIs, on average (63 percent versus 66 percent, respectively), the SAT[®]/ACT scores of incoming degree-seeking students at non-HSIs are higher than their counterparts at HSIs. In 2008-09, the estimated median SAT score at four-year HSIs was 960, compared to 1,045 at non-HSIs.¹⁰

10. See Education Trust (2011) for more information on SAT scores at four-year HSIs and non-HSIs.

Institutional costs and economic diversity.

Hispanic-serving institutions are, on average, less expensive than their non-HSI counterparts. As shown in Figure 4, in the 2009-10 academic year, the average in-state tuition and fees at public two-year HSIs were 25 percent lower than the national average in 2009-10 (\$1,906 versus \$2,544). Similarly in 2009-10, the average in-state tuition and fees at public four-year HSIs were 40 percent less than that of all public four-year institutions

Figure 3: Carnegie Basic Classification of Hispanic-Serving Institutions, 2009-10



Note: One HSI was not included in the Carnegie universe.

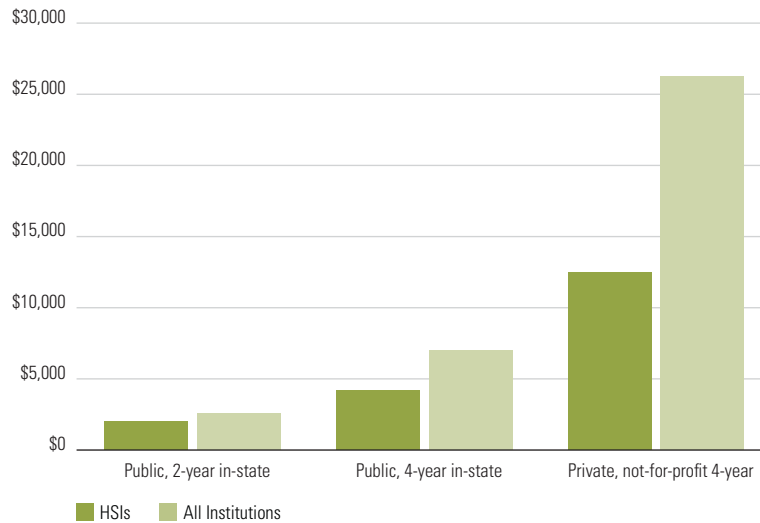
Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Institutional Characteristics, 2009-10; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Carnegie Classification Lookup, 2010.

(\$4,156 versus \$7,020).¹¹ Even private not-for-profit four-year HSIs were significantly less expensive than their non-HSI counterparts (\$11,842 compared to \$26,273).

11. College Board. 2010. *Trends in College Pricing 2010* (Trends in Higher Education Series). New York: The College Board; IPEDS, 2010.

Considering the striking differences in prices between HSIs and non-HSIs, it is not surprising that HSIs enroll greater proportions of low-income students than non-HSIs. Figure 5 illustrates that in 2008-09, 60 percent of undergraduates at public four-year HSIs received some form of federal, state, local or institutional

Figure 4: Average Tuition and Fees at Hispanic-Serving Institutions and All Institutions by Type and Control, 2009-10



Source: College Board *Trends in College Pricing 2010*; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Charges 2009-10.

financial aid, compared to 56 percent at all public four-year institutions. Similarly, the proportion of undergraduates enrolled in public four-year HSIs receiving Pell Grants exceeded the proportion of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants at all public four-year institutions (45 percent and 29 percent, respectively). Similar patterns hold at HSIs across all categories of institutional type and control (see Figure 5).

Federal Support for HSIs. The purpose of the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program under Title V is to make competitive grant funds available to two- and four-year Hispanic-serving institutions to build their instructional capacity, ensure institutional stability, and assist HSIs to expand educational opportunities for, and improve the

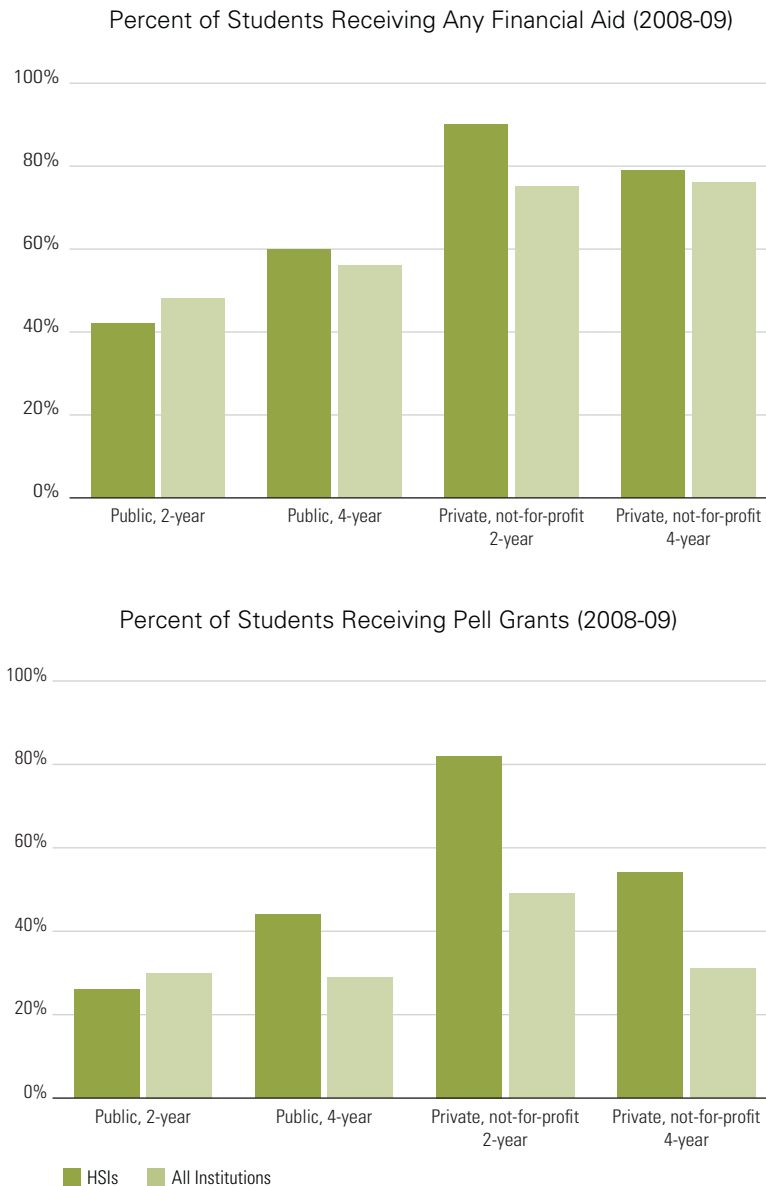
attainment of, Latino students. Federal funding earmarked for HSIs has increased substantially since the creation of the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program in 1992. In FY95, \$12 million was appropriated for distribution to HSIs under the program; by FY11, this figure increased to just below \$105 million.¹² Although institutional aid appropriations under Title V have increased over the past two decades, many education advocates argue that HSIs remain underfunded compared to other degree-granting institutions.¹³

In recent years, policymakers have aimed to provide currently underfunded HSIs with additional resources through

12. See U.S. Department of Education (2011) for a detailed analysis of higher education funding at institutions.

13. See Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (2011) for information on underfunding of HSIs compared to non-HSIs.

Figure 5: Economic Diversity at Hispanic-Serving Institutions and All Institutions by Type and Control, 2008-09



Note: 2008-09 is the most recent year for which Student Financial Aid Data are available in IPEDS.

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid, 2008-09.

new federal programs. For example, a new Title V program, Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA), was established to provide funding to HSIs for facilitating postbaccalaureate educational opportunities and attainment for Latinos. HSIs have also been awarded funds through the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA-HSI), a program that seeks to improve access and degree completion for Latino students. These programs, and others authorized under the America COMPETES Act and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, will likely provide HSIs with the additional resources needed to improve access and outcomes of Latino students.

The Contributions of Hispanic-Serving Institutions to Latino Educational Attainment

Granting access. Undoubtedly, as the demographics of the United States continue to shift, HSIs play an increasingly important role in providing access to higher education for Latinos and other students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Latinos are the fastest-growing minority group in the United States.¹⁴ The growth of the Latino population is even more dramatic in certain geographical areas of the country. For example, in California and Texas, more than one out of every three people is Hispanic or Latino. The overall growth of the Latino population is mirrored in

U.S. postsecondary institutions: Latino enrollment in colleges and universities more than tripled in 19 years — from 782,400 in 1990 to 2,546,700 in 2009.¹⁵ Although only about 9 percent of all postsecondary institutions are HSIs, more than 52 percent of Latino undergraduates enrolled in not-for-profit U.S. postsecondary institutions attend HSIs.¹⁶ The high concentration of Hispanic students in HSIs clearly demonstrates the important role that these institutions play.

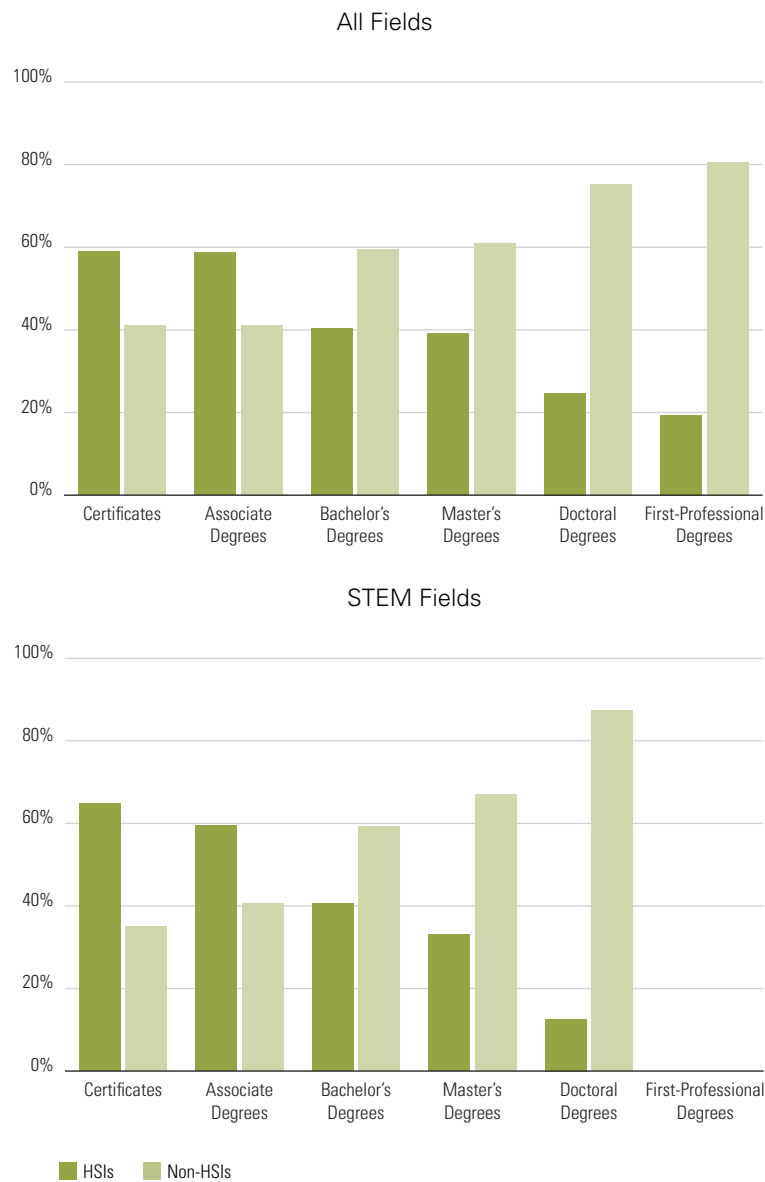
Granting certificates, associate degrees and bachelor's degrees. HSIs are responsible for granting a large share of the degrees earned by Latinos. In 2008-09, the most recent year for which degree completion data are available, 58 percent of subbaccalaureate certificates, 59 percent of associate degrees and 40 percent of bachelor's degrees earned by Latino students were conferred by HSIs (see Figure 6). HSIs also award a significant proportion of degrees in high-demand fields related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to Latinos. Nearly 65 percent of STEM certificates, 61 percent of STEM associate degrees and 40 percent of STEM bachelor's degrees awarded to Latinos in 2008-09 were conferred by HSIs. In addition, Latinos who complete STEM bachelor's degrees at HSIs are more likely to have earned their degrees in a math-intensive science field (e.g., computer science, engineering) than their counterparts who graduate from non-HSIs (Dowd, Malcom and Macias 2010). National postsecondary data also

14. See U.S. Census Bureau (2010) for more information on the current demographics of the U.S. population.

15. See the U.S. Department of Education Statistics (2011) for more information on trends in education.

16. Ibid.

Figure 6: Proportion of Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees Awarded to Latinos by HSIs and non-HSIs by Degree Type and Degree Field, 2008-09



Note: 2008-09 is the most recent year for which Student Financial Aid Data are available in IPEDS.

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Student Financial Aid, 2008-09.

illustrate that Hispanic-serving institutions act as pathways to graduate degrees for Latino students in STEM fields; between 2003 and 2007, nearly 40 percent of Latino STEM doctoral recipients completed their undergraduate degrees at an HSI.¹⁷

Although HSIs do make significant contributions to the degree attainment of Latinos, the graduation rates of Latinos at four-year HSIs lag behind those of their Latino counterparts at four-year non-HSIs (see Figure 7). In 2008-09, the most recent year for which graduation rate data are available, the six-year graduation rate for Latinos at four-year public HSIs was just 35 percent — five percentage points lower than the graduation rate of Latinos at four-year non-HSIs. Similarly, private non-HSIs outperform their HSI counterparts in terms of conferring bachelor's degrees to Latino students within six years (47 percent versus 35 percent). As illustrated in Figure 7, at HSIs and non-HSIs alike, Latinos are less likely to complete their bachelor's degrees than Asians and whites.

While Latinos at two-year public HSIs and non-HSIs completed their degree at the same rate (i.e., 16 percent) in 2008-09, the three-year (150 percent of normal time) graduation rate was far below that of Asians and whites (see Figure 7). Figure 7 also illustrates that at private, not-for-profit two-year HSIs, 66 percent of Latinos completed the degree within three years, compared to 41 percent of Latinos at private, not-for-profit two-year non-HSIs.

17. See National Science Foundation (2009) for a detailed analysis of STEM degree conferrals by higher education institutions in the United States.

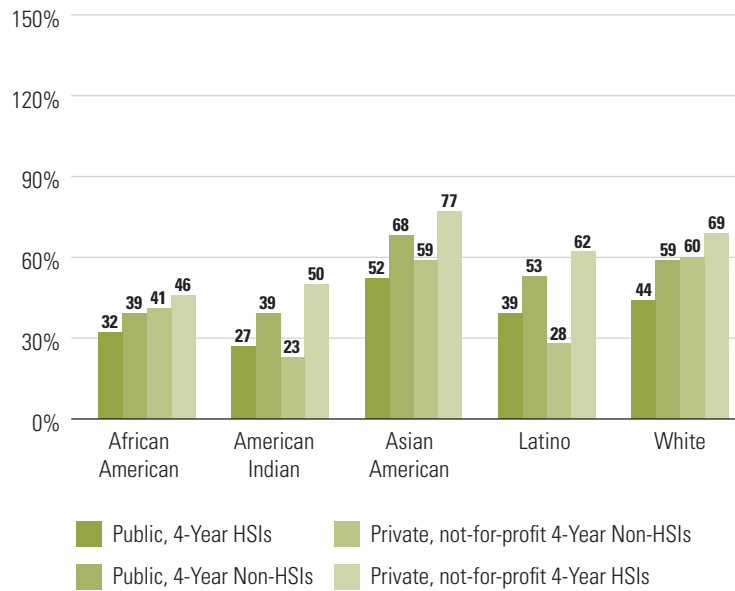
Granting graduate degrees. HSIs award a significant percentage of master's degrees to Hispanic students, conferring 39 percent of all master's degrees earned by these students in 2008-09, the most recent year for which degree completion data are available. Despite the fact that only a small proportion of HSIs grant doctoral and professional degrees, nearly 25 percent of Latino doctoral degree holders and 20 percent of Latino first-professional degree holders earned their graduate degrees from HSIs (see Figure 6). Figure 6 also indicates that HSIs awarded 33 percent of STEM master's degrees and nearly 13 percent of STEM doctorates to Latinos in 2008-09. Considering that the range of STEM graduate programs available at HSIs is relatively small, the fact that these institutions confer such a relatively high proportion of STEM graduate degrees to Latinos is noteworthy.

HSIs make a large contribution to the status of Latinos in the United States and to American society as a whole. Because Latino students are heavily concentrated in HSIs and as the demand for higher education by Latino students continues to increase, it is critical that these institutions examine what it means to be an HSI and to assess how well they are serving their current Latino student populations.

Solving the Challenges Faced by HSIs: Recommendations for the Future

This brief demonstrates that HSIs face many challenges as they move toward the future of educating Latino youth.

Figure 7: Six-Year Graduation Rates at Public and Private Not-for-Profit 4-Year Non-HSIs and HSIs, by Race



Source: IPEDS, 2009 Graduation Rate Data.

Recommendation 1: HSIs must ensure that the programs, policies and practices on their campuses intentionally lead to an increase in positive outcomes for Latino students.

Due to the unique way in which institutions become HSIs, it is important to examine how these colleges and universities conceptualize what it means to be “Hispanic serving,” and the extent to which this status is reflected by an HSI’s institutional identity, policies, practices and performance.¹⁸ While HSIs gain their designation from the proportion of Latinos enrolled in the institutions, it is important that these institutions also develop missions to intentionally serve

Latino students and provide them with positive outcomes. Many have argued for a better understanding of the ways in which HSIs serve Latino students and the areas in which institutional performance could be improved.¹⁹

18. See Contreras, et al. (2008) for more information on the arguments made for a better understanding of HSIs.

19. See Bensimon (2010), Contreras et al. (2008), Dowd et al. (2009), Dowd et al. (2010), and Santiago and Andrade (2010).

Recommendation 2: HSIs must implement data systems that allows institutions to continually assess the academic outcomes of Latino students, especially in STEM fields.

Examining educational outcomes (e.g., graduation rates and access to high-demand STEM degrees) and other indicators of institutional commitment to serving Latino students (e.g., Latino representation on faculty and administrative staff, and among graduate students) is one approach to evaluating HSIs. Emerging HSIs can also benefit from a similar assessment in order to identify those areas that need specific attention and improvement as these institutions move closer toward earning the HSI designation. Further, such an examination of institutional performance would help policymakers make wiser investments by distinguishing HSIs that meet their mission from those that are Hispanic-serving in name only.

Recommendation 3: HSIs must conduct research that allows institutions to continually improve policies and practices to serve Latino students.

To date, limited research has been done to assess how well HSIs are serving their students, particularly their Latino populations. While HSIs do award the majority of certificates and associate degrees, as well as a significant percentage of bachelor's degrees, to Latinos, it is important to determine if these institutions produce equitable educational outcomes for these students. For example,

do Latino students constitute an equitable proportion of students who graduate with honors? Are Latinos equitably represented in fields such as science, technology and engineering? Are Latino students being retained at the same rates as other student populations attending HSIs? These questions, along with other similar lines of inquiry that seek to determine the state of equity in educational outcomes at HSIs, are of the utmost importance if we are to ascertain how well these institutions are serving their Latino student populations.

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