



Continuamos Juntos — Moving Forward Together

Lessons on Advancing Latino Success from California's LATIDO Project

Oscar Cerna

May 2019

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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**Lessons on Advancing Latino Success from
California's LATIDO Project**

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with
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MAY 2019

FUNDERS

Funding for this report was generously provided by the College Futures Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and the Crimsonbridge Foundation. The authors are also grateful for the partnership and contributions from the California Community Colleges Chancellors Office, particularly Theresa Tena and Daisy Gonzalez.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following funders that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Sandler Foundation, and The Starr Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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OVERVIEW

Latinos are the fastest growing college population in California, but less than one-quarter of all Latino adults in the state earn a college degree. To reverse this trend, both the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the California State University (CSU) Office of the Chancellor launched new initiatives in 2017 to raise Latino graduation rates by 2022 and 2025, respectively. Key players in these efforts are the state's Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), which are public, degree-granting institutions that enroll the equivalent of at least 25 percent full-time Latino undergraduates in their overall student population. California has the country's highest concentration of HSIs, with 96 of its 144 community colleges and 21 of its 23 CSU campuses. The state provides a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities of advancing the higher education prospects of this thriving population.

In 2017, MDRC launched the Latino Academic Transfer and Institutional Degree Opportunities (LATIDO) study in collaboration with the community college chancellor's office to investigate how California HSI's are supporting undergraduate Latino students. The work began with a roundtable discussion that included scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. This led to the evaluation of Latino education programs at five HSIs: CSU Dominguez Hills, CSU Fresno, Hartnell College, Mount San Antonio College, and San Bernardino Valley College.

Through interviews with students, faculty, staff, and administrators at each college, MDRC researchers collected feedback and information on campus programs, services, and interventions that served Latino student needs. The following cross-cutting themes emerged across the colleges under study:

- The importance of fostering a sense of belonging to smooth the transition from home to college, especially for first-generation Latino students
- The urgent need to hire and train successful Latino students as peer leaders to help new or struggling students
- The role that increasing connections between Latino students' families, communities, and college circles, plays in student success
- The overarching goal of increasing faculty diversity and cross-cultural competence among all staff
- The imperative to scale successful programs for Latino students by establishing institution-wide strategies

These themes, and the lessons on culturally responsive approaches to Latino student success, can shape future policy and practice. In particular, California colleges should consider expanding access to Dream Centers and other spaces on campus that give students a place to socialize and obtain vital information; promote more collaboration and alignment between two- and four-year colleges to ease the transition for Latino transfer students; hire and train academically successful Latino students as institutional peer leaders; and prioritize diversity in faculty hiring, and cross-cultural competency training for all staff.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the commitment to student success from the administrators, faculty and staff at the five LATIDO colleges that offered their time and insights during this study. In particular, we would like to thank the following college representatives for their coordination of the case study visits: Frank Llamas and Lydia Duarte at California State University, Fresno; Vince Flowers and Matthew Smith at California State University, Dominguez Hills; Natalia Cordoba-Velasquez at Hartnell College; Michelle Sampat and Eric Lara at Mt. San Antonio College and; Carmen Rodriguez and Marco Cota at San Bernardino Valley College

Drafts of the report were reviewed and commented on by Kendall Guthrie, formerly of the College Futures Foundation; April Yee, formerly of the James Irvine Foundation, and Reyna Sharp of the Crimsonbridge Foundation. At MDRC, we thank Alexander Mayer, Robert Ivry, Rashida Welbeck, and John Martinez for their thoughtful review of multiple drafts of this report. Anaga Dalal edited the report and Ann Kottner prepared it for publication.

The Authors

INTRODUCTION

Nationally, the number of Latinos pursuing college is on the rise, but their college completion and attainment rates lag far behind those of their white peers.¹ California provides an important perspective on the challenges and opportunities of advancing higher education for Latinos across the country. The state’s Latino population has become increasingly more likely to attend college, yet remains less likely than other racial or ethnic groups in the state to graduate with an associate or bachelor’s degree within six years.² Only one-third successfully transfer from a community college to a four-year institution within that same period of time.³ As a result, fewer than 25 percent of all Latinos in California earn a college degree — a graduation rate that is well below that of other adults in the state.⁴

To improve college achievement rates in the state, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office outlined a strategic plan called **Vision for Success** to increase graduation and transfer rates for Latino and other community college students by 2022.⁵ A key component of the plan is **Guided Pathways**, which provides a framework for integrating and strengthening support programs for students across the system.⁶ Similarly, the California State University (CSU) Office of the Chancellor updated its **Graduate Initiative 2025** goals to increase the system’s six-year graduation rate for first-year students to 70 percent by 2025.

Recognizing these state-wide initiatives, MDRC and the Chancellor’s Office launched the Latino Academic Transfer and Institutional Degree Opportunities (LATIDO) project to examine ways to increase the transfer and college completion rates of Latino students, particularly those attending two- and four-year Hispanic Serving Institutions, (HSIs).⁷ On December 4, 2017, MDRC facilitated a one-day **LATIDO roundtable discussion** with more than 20 researchers, faculty members, practitioners, policymakers, and system leaders to discuss key factors related to postsecondary success for Latino students, and the role HSIs play in fostering this success.⁸ In the spring of 2018, MDRC built

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1. The United States Census defines Latino (masculine) or Latina (feminine) as any person of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin.” In recent years, research literature and other publications have started using “Latinx” as a broader, gender neutral reference to this population. See Carnevale and Fasules (2017); Nichols (2017).
 2. Valliani (2015).
 3. Cooper et al. (2017).
 4. Santiago and Galdeano (2015). Of Latinos 25 years old or older, 16 percent earned an associate’s degree, or higher.
 5. Fried, Esch, and Supinger (2017).
 6. Dadgar, Fischerall, Collins, and Schaefer (2018).
 7. The Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008) defines Hispanic Serving Institutions as public, degree granting institutions that enroll 25 percent, or more, full-time equivalent Latino undergraduates in their overall student population. California has the highest concentration of HSIs of any state, with 96 of the 144 community colleges, and 21 of the 23 CSUs campuses.
 8. In April 2018, MDRC published a LATIDO policy brief to document the themes and recommendations of the expert scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who attended a December 2017 MDRC roundtable discussion.

upon this roundtable discussion with a study of how five California HSI's approach their Latino student population. This report documents the findings and recommendations from these case studies.

Because the majority of California's community colleges and CSUs are federally designated and funded as HSIs, these institutions play a critical role in supporting Latino college students across the country.⁹ Organizations committed to the educational achievement of Latino students, such as the [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities](#) and [Excelencia in Education](#), have been instrumental in advocating for federal and state policies that increase institutional capacity for research and program development at HSIs. The LATIDO study builds upon these efforts by examining how the institutional approaches of HSIs can inform statewide policies for improving outcomes for Latinos, and other college students in need.

This report begins with an overview of the LATIDO study and the five colleges that were selected as case study sites followed by a brief discussion of the methodology for the study. The report then lays out crosscutting findings that apply to each of the colleges under study. It ends with recommendations for university administrators, lawmakers, and advocates regarding best practices and policies for advancing the college outcomes of Latino students in California, and beyond. A conclusion and list of references follow.

THE LATIDO STUDY IN BRIEF

LATIDO is more than just an acronym. In Spanish, it is a word that means “beat” or “pulse,” and is used here to exemplify the steady progression of both Latino students working toward finishing college, and the HSIs that help to better support them. In this spirit, the LATIDO project, in collaboration with the Community College Chancellor's Office, examined how five HSIs have responded to the cultural attributes, needs, and priorities of their Latino student populations. The project's goal was twofold: to shed light on institutional practices deemed promising or effective for Latino college students, and to offer recommendations to state policymakers and college leaders on how best to advance these practices at other institutions.

Soon after the LATIDO roundtable, 10 California community colleges and 10 CSUs were identified as case study candidate sites following an analysis of the rates of Latino student enrollment, transfer, and degree completion that were collected from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. MDRC worked with the Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and funders to narrow the list of potential colleges for the study. Preference was given to colleges with established or emerging programs that demonstrated an institutional commitment to improving Latino student success.¹⁰ Three regions with high Latino college enrollment rates — Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San

9. A list of eligible Hispanic Serving Institutions from the U.S. Department of Education (as of 2016) can be found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opec/dues/hsi-eligibles-2016.pdf>.

10. The programs, policies and other institutional approaches that are described in this report are not an exhaustive list of strategies that these colleges have used to help Latino students and other students succeed. The approaches described here were the most commonly highlighted and discussed as part of the LATIDO roundtable, and subsequent case study visits.

Joaquin counties — were targeted as possible HSI case study sites. Table 1 outlines the five colleges that were chosen for the LATIDO study and briefly describes their Latino student population and their rate of graduation or transfer. Figure 1 maps the location of the five California HSIs chosen for this study.

TABLE 1
LATIDO Case Study Colleges, 2018

COLLEGE	CITY	COUNTY	TOTAL UNDER-GRADUATE ENROLLMENT ^a	HISPANIC/LATINO ENROLLMENT ^b	HISPANIC/LATINO TRANSFER RATE ^c	HISPANIC/LATINO GRADUATION RATE ^d
California State University, Dominguez Hills	Carson, CA	Los Angeles	16,219	62%	—	44%
California State University, Fresno	Fresno, CA	Fresno	25,325	51%	—	54%
Hartnell College	Salinas, CA	Monterey	12,072	65%	4.7%	31%
Mount San Antonio College	Walnut, CA	Los Angeles	29960	63%	3.9%	25%
San Bernardino Valley College	San Bernardino, CA	San Bernardino	13892	67%	2.6%	21%

SOURCES: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences; California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

NOTES: ^aUndergraduate enrollment in fall 2017.

^bPercent of total fall 2017 undergraduate enrollment.

^cPercentages are the three-year transfer rates for students in cohort year 2010-11; they are calculated using data from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office.

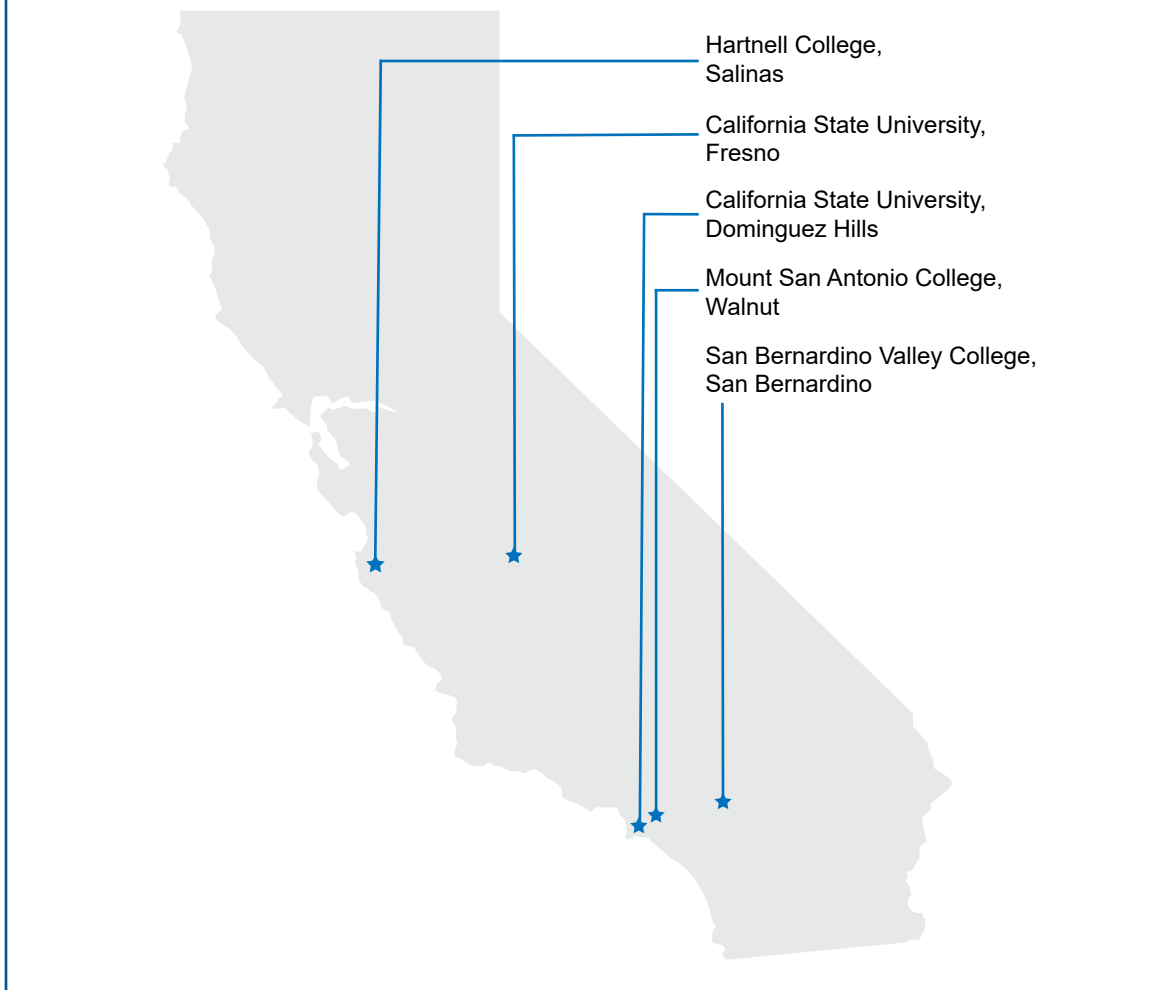
^dPercentages for Dominguez Hills and Fresno are the six-year graduation rates of full-time, first-time students who began in fall 2011. Percentages for Hartnell, Mount San Antonio, and San Barnardino are the three-year graduation rates of full-time, first-time students who began in fall 2014.

METHODOLOGY

The research questions that guided MDRC’s LATIDO study are as follows:

1. What do HSI administrators, faculty members, staff, and students consider to be effective practices that help Latino students transfer or graduate?
2. How do Latino students experience HSI practices that attempt to improve their college achievement rates? What are the factors they consider valuable for their success?
3. How do HSIs partner with other colleges, schools, and local organizations to strengthen transfer pathways for Latinos?

FIGURE 1
A Map of LATIDO Case Study Colleges



4. How do HSIs customize services and resources for specific Latino student groups, such as Latino males or first-generation students¹¹?
5. How do HSIs grow, integrate, and expand successful, or promising, strategies using limited institutional resources?

Researchers collected data for the study during one- to two-day visits to each college, interviewing senior administrators; conducting focus groups with faculty, staff, and students; and observing campus programs or activities that involved high Latino student participation. In some cases, follow-up phone interviews and website reviews were also conducted. The research team worked closely with a point person at each college — often a senior administrator or a research director — to recruit par-

11. In this report, a first-generation student is defined as a student who is the first in their family to attend college.

ticipants for interviews and focus groups. Approximately 40 staff, faculty, and administrators were interviewed or participated in focus groups that highlighted policies and practices they considered essential to Latino student achievement. In addition, approximately 80 Latino students throughout the study participated in small focus groups that examined the challenges and special considerations these students face in college, and how HSI colleges and other Latino students support them.¹²

There are two important caveats to the analysis of programs and strategies in this report:

1. The colleges under study have high overall Latino enrollment numbers so most of the initiatives described in this report have high Latino student participation rates, but they also serve non-Latino students with similar needs and circumstances. College officials made clear during interviews for the LATIDO project that some of the programs helping Latino students are available to all students who demonstrate a high need. This can include students who are low-income, the first in their family to attend college, or those placed in remedial courses.
2. California has well-established program models that have long supported Latino students at public colleges and universities in the state. These programs include the **Puente Program** and **Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS)**. Both of these initiatives offer multi-service supports such as holistic advising, book and transportation vouchers, and mentoring.¹³ These programs provide valuable yet costly services and are required to follow strict funding mandates. As a result, they serve students on a small scale. Some of the programs and strategies described in this report have adopted the multi-service principles of Puente and EOPS but have expanded their reach to a wider set of students.

CASE STUDY FINDINGS

MDRC researchers asked administrators, faculty, and program leaders from each of the LATIDO HSIs to describe campus programs, centers, and other services that they considered to be highly effective in supporting the needs of their Latino students. Although interventions differed by site, some goals and activities were constant across the colleges. Five cross-cutting themes emerged from the LATIDO case study sites:

- The importance of fostering a sense of belonging to smooth the transition from home to college, especially for first-generation Latino students
- The value of hiring and training successful Latino students as peer leaders to help new or struggling students

12. At one case study college, researchers conducted one focus group of eight students that was comprised of former students and Latino Vision for Success program participants.

13. Holistic advising typically refers to an approach to academic advising that considers guidance for the whole student, taking into account their educational, career, and personal pathways, and acknowledging these dimensions as interdependent.

- The significance of connecting Latino students’ college experiences to their family life, communities, and cultural traditions
- The overarching goal of increasing faculty diversity and cross-cultural competence among all staff
- The imperative to scale successful programs for Latino students by establishing institution-wide strategies

Each of these themes is discussed in detail below and introduced with a quote from a student or college administrator who participated in an interview or focus group with LATIDO researchers.

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

“I know I needed support and advice because I don’t have any family that went to college, so it was about finding someone that’s been through [college] to help me.”

–Incoming Latina first-year student, San Bernardino Valley College

Most of the students who attend HSIs and other minority-serving institutions come from underserved or disadvantaged communities, and many are the first in their families to attend college. These students are largely unprepared to navigate the exciting yet unfamiliar world of college. In recognition of this, college leaders and staff at all five case study sites emphasized the importance of making all of their new students — particularly first-generation students — experience a sense of belonging on campus that makes them feel accepted, valued, and important to others.¹⁴

One of the key tenets of San Bernardino Valley College’s (SBVC) Valley Bound Commitment program, which helps first-year students cover the cost of courses, books, and transportation, is to make first-generation Latino students feel welcomed and supported by Commitment staff who have experienced similar journeys. More than 70 percent of the population that the Commitment program serves is Latino – many are the first from their family to attend college. Commitment leaders noted the importance of surrounding the program’s incoming first-year students with current Latino students, advisors, and professors that were once first-generation college students themselves. Latino students in the program said Commitment staff passed along invaluable lessons about the diligence required to succeed in college and the heightened expectations that differ starkly from high school. The Commitment program has become a cornerstone for onboarding Latinos who are the first to attend college from their families. It has also helped undocumented students receive financial support that may otherwise be unavailable to them.

Other programs that HSI staff identified as important to fostering a sense of belonging for Latino students included summer bridge programs, cross-cultural centers on campus, and internship programs. For instance, Mt. San Antonio College’s (Mt. SAC) Bridge program creates opportunities for incoming Latino first-year students to take introductory math and writing summer courses that they can continue taking in the fall term. According to one Bridge faculty member, “In the summer, we try to create the bonding experience, so that they can stay together in class with other students that they already know and trust — that way they have a better experience in class together.”

14. Strayhorn (2012).

Summer activities at HSIs have also helped returning Latino students by reinforcing a stronger connection to their fields of study following their first year. For example, Hartnell’s STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) Internship program enrolls a high proportion of first-generation Latino students in an internship success course during the spring semester of their first year, and then places students in summer internships that reflect their areas of study. The program helps students make connections between the internship experience and academics by identifying potential research projects for the fall semester that evolve from their summer internships. Institutional data collected on the program indicate that nearly nine out of ten students who complete the program successfully, transfer to a four-year institution. According to program leaders, the internship motivates students to complete their coursework because it spotlights the practical application of their academic pursuits.

Across all case study sites, most Latino students reported a sense of connection to campus **Dream Centers**. Over the last decade, these centers have surfaced on many California college campuses, including the five LATIDO HSIs under study. They provide resources and guidance primarily for undocumented and immigrant students. Dream Centers also provide students with access to holistic services for personal, social, and academic support, and to external services that can provide students with financial assistance and referrals to legal services. Dream Centers have become what one center director described as “essential safe havens” for Latinos to receive support amid fears or concerns regarding deportation or incarceration. These centers now also serve as important spaces on campus that many Latino students — undocumented or not — seek for support and social interaction. In addition to offering workshops that provide updates about immigration policies and non-citizen rights, many Dream Centers also stay open on evenings and during the weekend for working students and others with variable campus hours. One student who spoke to MDRC described his experience at the campus Dream Center, “I spend a lot of time in the Dream Center — that’s where I see others like me. We have a lot of safe spaces — a Latinx Center, the Black Resource Center, the LGBTQ Center. The campus is diverse...I feel at home.”

Hiring and Training Successful Latino Students as Peer Leaders

“Students are our best advocates. We don’t have to recruit....[T]hey keep [new] students informed and help develop the skills they need.”

—Director, CSU Fresno

Staff and students at the LATIDO colleges said experienced students are effective peer leaders because they offer unique support for new or struggling Latino students both in and out of the classroom. Peer leaders are typically upper-level students who have successfully completed coursework and are very familiar with the campus and its surroundings. They can serve in a variety of positions, including as peer mentors, supplemental instructors or tutors, and outreach ambassadors.¹⁵

Each of the HSIs in this study hire and train Latino peer leaders to work on support programs and services such as those offered at STEM and Dream Centers, as part of EOPS or Puentes staff, and during summer bridge and orientation programs. Latino students in focus groups also reported that peer leaders are other students they could turn to when their advising centers had long lines,

15. Cerna and Platania (2012).

or when their instructors were hard to reach outside of class. For instance, Hartnell College’s Math, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) program employs several peer leaders as program ambassadors to provide students who major in STEM with drop-in tutoring and advice on taking courses. Latino students in MDRC focus groups said these peer leaders provided useful academic advice and crucial mental health support.

Peer mentors with SBVC’s Commitment program advise and monitor the progress of first-year participants to ensure that they enroll in courses at the beginning of the semester, and that they finish requirements for completing community service hours or attending campus workshops. Similarly, peer advisors in Mt. SAC’s Bridge program — who are themselves former Bridge participants — provide firsthand-accounts about college to first-year students and facilitate icebreakers as part of the program’s learning community sessions. Staff and faculty with the Bridge Program acknowledged that Latino students in the program are more likely to be open about their struggles with peer leaders than with Bridge program staff. As one Mt. SAC counselor said, “I love it [having peers] ...they are my eyes and ears on how the students are doing [in class].” A Bridge peer advisor added, “What really helps [in Bridge] is having peer advisors like us. We have similar struggles, so for me, I can explain my own story.”

During the LATIDO roundtable, scholar and research experts shed light on the positive effects that peer cohorts and mentoring has had on college students of color, particularly when those cohorts share common characteristics or academic pursuits.¹⁶ For instance, the CSU Dominguez Hills’ gender-based support program, known as the Male Success Alliance (MSA), offers the promise of brotherhood among Latino, African-American, and other male students of color. In response to recent research that men of color experience low achievement rates relative to their female peers or other racial/ethnic groups,¹⁷ MSA program leaders make it a priority for seasoned upper-level students to mentor incoming MSA first-year students early on. This includes celebrating their early academic successes, and modeling behaviors that reflect self-respect, respect for women, and regard for the other men in the program. Participating in the MSA program has provided some of the Latino males with an added appreciation for their shared experiences, with one student elaborating, “The respect we have for each other, that’s the most heartfelt thing. The support system is here...it’s a second home in a sense.”

Latino peer leaders are also hired to provide additional academic support during class time. Staff and Latino students at all five colleges highlighted the importance of having supplemental instructors available in courses that are particularly challenging. These instructors can help struggling students understand lectures in real time, and offer weekly study sessions to review content, and field questions. At CSU Fresno, Latino students described supplemental instructors as “very experienced students that helped” in political science courses, which require polished writing and critical thinking, or in various math courses that require extra time for explaining formulas and solving equations. Students pointed out, however, that not enough courses offer supplemental instruction even though recent student services data reveal that Latino students use extra help more than other

16. Cerna and Beal (2018).

17. Gardenhire and Cerna (2016); Sáenz and Ponjuan (2011)

students. The shortage of supplemental instruction prompted a call for more help with courses that have a high rate of failure. In addition, further training on interpersonal communication was offered to supplemental instructors to help them better detect students' nonverbal cues for help.

Valuing and Supporting Latino Students' Family, Culture, and Community

"The idea of serving the family, not just the student, I think is very important with our support programs."

—Program director, Hartnell College

Although most families offer emotional support and encouragement to be successful, many Latino students new to college said they found it hard to receive familial guidance about college-specific tasks, such as preparing the right paperwork for financial aid applications, mapping out their course loads, or setting aside enough time to study for rigorous classes. College leadership staff also noted that many Latino students come from households that speak more Spanish than English, and that operate under different cultural norms than those that apply to other students.

LATIDO colleges encourage the families of Latino students to remain involved throughout a student's college journey by hosting events and activities that familiarize them with their campuses. At some colleges, this has led to more bilingual parent meetings and workshops throughout the year. For example, SBVC hosts monthly workshops to help parents learn about bilingual and cultural services on campus, and even recruits Latino parents of current students to talk about how these services have benefitted their children.

At Hartnell, a bilingual parent organizer was hired to conduct regular community meetings to educate parents about the rigors of college and the importance of parental support. This outreach in high schools and churches is an attempt to reduce the number of Latinos who are "stopping out" — or leaving college with an intention to return and finish — due to family responsibilities. Hartnell's leadership staff has also started reaching out to more parents of Latina STEM majors, whose participation in internships or transfer visit programs is stagnating because of family pressure relating to their perceived domestic obligations. As a result, Hartnell invites both Latina students and parents to campus for presentations about STEM internships and other opportunities, that help parents better understand the benefits of educating females.

In addition to informing Latino parents about college expectations, HSIs often invite other family members, such as younger siblings, to try out the college experience alongside student family members. Fresno State administrators understand that this helps create bridges between home and school for Latino students. "They see us more, trust us more," said one administrator. "That's how the relationships are built." Some faculty members at other colleges even allow parents or siblings to attend classes with their students to see what college feels like.

Several LATIDO colleges offer and even sponsor multiple events that honor Latino culture such as Latino family graduation ceremonies, a *Dia de Los Muertos* altar-making celebration, and parent appreciation nights in Spanish. Administrators at some of the colleges consider cultural family events important for building credibility with parents. "Latino families tend to have more questions about what does going to college mean," said one Mt. SAC counselor. "When [their questions] get answered, they walk away knowing better that their kids will be in good hands and cared for."

A CSU Dominguez Hills senior administrator added, “It’s our university’s obligation to work with parents, especially those of first-generation, so that they know what we do with their kids, and how we help them to reach their goals here.”

Many of the LATIDO HSIs provide Latino students with basic needs and resources such as food, clean clothes, and supplies for infant children, that may not be available to them in college. Several faculty and staff said securing these basic needs for low-income Latino students can affect how well they feel and perform in their classes. SBVC works with its local Community Action Partnership sponsors to provide the Valley 360 Resource Center on campus with daily necessities for homeless or low-income students throughout the day. Similarly, Fresno State works with local retailers to provide an on-campus clothing closet and food pantry for low-income Latino students.

Committing to a Diverse and Culturally Competent Staff

“As an HSI, attracting faculty that care about culturally responsive strategies is not difficult, but instructors here have a sense that there’s always something new or something more to better understand in that regard.”

—Administrator, CSU Dominguez Hills

At the December 2017 LATIDO roundtable discussion, experts strongly agreed on the need to diversify staff and provide them with cultural sensitivity training so that Latinos and students of color feel better supported and capable of succeeding in college. These experts all agreed that these students are more likely to be successful if they have instructors who look like them, come from similar backgrounds, or are trained to better understand the lives of students of color.

Across all LATIDO case study colleges, efforts were underway to recruit more faculty and senior administrators of color. In general, however, these colleges found it easier to diversify student services staff — many of whom include former program participants — than faculty and senior administrative staff. Despite an expressed desire to diversify their faculty, administrators at some of the colleges cited a general lack of determination to change the hiring and selection practices that could expand the pool of qualified faculty of color for job openings. Additionally, administrators reported that most faculty members lacked motivation to participate in programs or initiatives that help reduce achievement gaps in their classes based on race and ethnicity. As one Hartnell dean reflected, “We do get good participation from some faculty, but we want to see other faces. There’s more difficulty to get full buy-in from faculty, and we’re not sure if it’s because they can’t, or if it’s just that they don’t want to.”

Some faculty of color pointed out that this lack of buy-in leaves them to shoulder the responsibility of being student club advisors, formal and informal mentors to students of color, and cultural representatives for campus outreach activities. One Fresno State faculty member describes this as, “the extra burden, the extra load. When Latino students come in, and they look like you, they seek you out, even if they’re in biology and I’m in social science.” Often, these additional responsibilities for faculty of color go unpaid and can adversely affect their ability to fulfill their teaching responsibilities.

While increasing faculty diversity has proven to be challenging, some LATIDO colleges have implemented institution-wide strategies to diversify college leadership and train greater numbers of cur-

rent faculty and staff in cultural competence. According to a senior administrator, CSU Dominguez Hills has added “cultural adjustment” topics to faculty orientations and strategic planning meetings so faculty can more easily identify unconscious bias, understand the subtle “isms” that surface in everyday practices, and demonstrate cultural awareness in their classrooms on a daily basis.

At Fresno State, the president’s five-year diversity plan established the Cultural Competency Certificate, an 18-month program open to all Fresno State faculty, staff, and administrators. The program provides participants with a greater awareness and understanding of the principles of privilege and oppression that are often replicated on college campuses, and in classrooms. It aims to equip participating faculty with the skills to address social inequalities when they arise. As the program director noted, however, participation in the program is voluntary for faculty, but it “needs to be more than just the choir. Everyone here needs to do it.” Although the program now requires all managers in the student affairs department to participate, senior leaders at the college acknowledged that more mandates or incentives are required to ensure that additional faculty are willing to participate.

Other efforts to increase cultural competence and student-centered teaching skills develop in organic ways. For instance, senior administrators at most of the LATIDO colleges encourage their faculty members to use class time to better understand their students’ lives as early in the term as possible. Students may share their expectations for their courses or their motivations for pursuing a certain field. The additional time and flexibility of summer sessions provide a good opportunity for more meaningful interactions between Latino students, faculty, and staff. HSIs and other community colleges in California hire academic advisers at these colleges to also teach summer and fall courses that impart essential skills for college success. In fact, many academic advisers interviewed at Mt. SAC and SBVC were themselves former participants and graduates of the very same classes they taught during their summer programs. Academic counselors also help academic faculty learn how to sustain student attention in class and pass along communication techniques for use in their own classes.

Scaling Successful Programs for Latino Students

“It’s not about the students getting ready for college — it’s about the college strengthening what we do to serve more students — it’s about preparing ourselves for the population we have here...that’s the HSI model.”

—Director of HSI Programs, Hartnell College

Administrators, faculty, and staff at the LATIDO case study colleges described how some of their most successful programs grew over time to recruit, enroll, and retain more Latinos and students from other underserved populations. The majority of the programs mentioned throughout this report began by serving small numbers of students. Eventually, they secured more institutional support and slowly grew in scale, demonstrating success through the collection and dissemination of program participation data. The high rates of course completion and positive feedback from program participants helped institutional leaders make the case that many of these programs worked for Latino students and that these programs should be part of campus services targeting a wider net of students. What follows are specific examples of programs that successfully integrate institutional strategies, departments, and initiatives.

- **Mt. SAC’s Summer Bridge Program** initially served primarily new Latino students who enrolled in developmental math or writing courses. The program has now grown

to include other incoming first-year students and this has garnered cross-departmental buy-in as a result of how well the program retained its initial cohorts of students.

- **SBVC’s Valley Bound Commitment Program** began in 2008 with an assessment of the academic progress of students at three local high schools and a handful of incoming Latino first-year college students relative to their peers with similar backgrounds and characteristics. The program was initially funded almost exclusively by a grant from a local tribal sponsor.¹⁸ Ten years later, the program has expanded to more than 17 high schools and close to 200 students — primarily Latino first-generation students — across the San Bernardino region. From its inception, program leaders worked regularly with the college’s Department of Institutional Research. The program’s positive outcomes and participant feedback compelled SBVC administrators to bring in other institutional funds, such as the Equity and the Student Success and Support Program, both of which provided state funding and led to increased support for peer mentoring, workshops on financial aid, and help preparing applications for assistance through the California Dream Act.
- **Fresno State’s Supplemental Instruction Program** started out with unstable funding that limited its participants to math and science courses. But the program grew in notoriety and scope upon demonstrating that supplemental math and science instruction was helping students of color pass these courses, which otherwise had high rates of failure and withdrawal. In 2011, the program coordinator received a small grant from the CSU Office of the Chancellor. Three years later, additional funding from the chancellor’s office increased the number of supplemental instructional courses at the college to 25, covering a range of academic areas from math to science. Permanent institutional funding followed, and the program expanded to include 160 courses. As of 2019, supplemental instruction is part of six of the college’s eight academic departments. The cost of training and paying supplemental instructors is now split between academic departments and academic support centers.
- **Hartnell’s STEM Internship Program** started out with just 10 first-generation Latino students in its 2007 inaugural year. By 2018, the program grew to over 400 students and boasted a high rate of retention. This internship model is now showcased in a teacher-training program at the college along with other liberal arts pathway programs. The Hartnell Internship program has been supported and expanded through various grants from the California Community Chancellor’s Office, HSI STEM initiatives, and endowment and general institutional department funds. In addition, the local government agencies, university departments, and business partners who often provide internship opportunities for Hartnell students, are now a part of the growing pool of public and private funding support for the program.
- **CSU Dominguez Hills’ Male Success Alliance (MSA) Program** secured the backing of the school administration from its very onset in 2010. Many program leaders were

18. The San Manuel Mission of Indians, see <https://www.sanmanuel-nsn.gov/>.

working as part-time graduate workers who felt that, “keeping senior leadership aware and bringing them into our [MSA] spaces” was essential to showcasing the important role the program played in helping students achieve success. Program staff invited senior administrators to MSA student meetings and asked them to serve as mentors. In response to this outreach, the college president secured institutional baseline funding for the program five years later and was able to hire full-time staff as a result. In addition, the college president assigned the director of development to write grants that would secure scholarships and uniforms for program participants.

Many of the students and staff who were interviewed for this study applauded the tireless advocates who championed interventions on behalf of Latino students at senior levels. Although some programs experienced growth in scope and reach, some college leaders cautioned that this growth sometimes came at the expense of instructional quality and personal attention for student participants, particularly for programs with only one coordinator. In interviews for this study, program leaders highlighted the need for greater delegation of duties and increased program structure to balance growth with quality. This would alleviate some of the burden on program leaders, who are otherwise tasked with handling the bulk of responsibilities. Successful Latino programs are reflected in program data that continues to show promising outcomes, along with glowing student testimonials. In turn, greater support for Latino intervention programs from senior administrators, trustees and local sponsors, make clear that these programs will continue to expand in scale. There are targeted efforts to ensure that the quality and individual attention that these programs offer will remain intact despite their rapid growth.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE

This study provides ample lessons for improving culturally responsive post-secondary opportunities for California’s growing Latino population. The following are key considerations for college administrators and policymakers when advancing this work:

- **Apply California’s Student Success Funding to culturally responsive programming and institutional support for Latino students**

In 2018-2019, the state of California approved a budget that incorporated a new **Student Success Funding Formula** to help low-income community college students secure additional resources. The funding formula also establishes institutional research approaches for collecting data on first-generation college students for future planning purposes. The focus on community college funding is particularly pertinent to Latinos in California because that is where many begin their postsecondary careers. In turn, the funding formula offers colleges the opportunity to increase culturally responsive approaches to their Latino student population by adopting many of the best practices highlighted in this report. These practices include covering the first-year costs of tuition and books, offering hands-on learning through internships and community service opportunities, and sponsoring social events on campus that foster a strong sense of belonging for Latino students.

- **Promote the value of campus Dream Centers**

Dream Success Centers or Dream Resource Centers have become important spaces on campus that provide many Latino students — regardless of their residency status — access to vital information, resources, support, and mentoring. Although the primary focus of Dream Centers is to serve the needs of undocumented students, they can also help reach first- and second- generation Latino students as well as students from other immigrant populations.

- **Promote collaboration and synchronized goals for two- and four-year colleges to make it easier for Latino transfer students to adjust to college**

The majority of Latino students begin their postsecondary careers in community college, so it is vital to strengthen their transfer path between two- and four-year colleges. (See Box 1.) These colleges can help Latino transfer students by aligning their standards for both course selection and credit accumulation, and by ensuring further continuity in the academic, financial, and cultural support that Latino students receive both before and after they transfer. At the state level, chancellors and other state leaders can dedicate state funding to increasing collaboration and support between two-and four-year institutional partners. At the college level, HSIs can utilize Latino alumnae who were once transfer students themselves and involve them in the student orientation and welcome protocol for current transfer students. These alumnae can also orient new transfer students to the

BOX 1

The Transfer Transition

Even when Latino students successfully transfer from a community college to a university, many still encounter challenges associated with moving from familiar to unfamiliar surroundings. In focus groups, some Latino students who transferred to Fresno State said they were not aware of how much larger their classes would be, how expensive courses and books would cost, and how different enrollment procedures would be. In 2017, Fresno State joined four local community colleges and local K-12 districts to help bridge some of the communication gaps in the transfer process. The initiative, known as the Central Valley Promise, was a localized effort to develop streamlined pathways for students to access information, technology, and financial support from one institution to the next.

At Mt. SAC, the coordinator of the Achieving in College, Ensuring Success (ACES) program — which helps first-generation students transfer to a four-year institution — described how moving from a community college into a university setting can be daunting for many Latino first-generation students. She observed, “It’s hard for them to picture themselves at a university... they are juniors when they transfer, but many will feel like freshmen at their new school.” To combat these fears, the program schedules a weeklong transfer boot camp over the summer so that tasks such as filling out financial aid applications and writing personal statements are done well in advance of application deadlines. The program also gives students a chance to exchange views about the transfer experience on a personal level.

campus, its cultural programs, and Latino student organizations, while sharing their own experiences as transfer students.

- **Identify, hire, and train greater numbers of successful Latino students as institutional peer leaders**

Latino students that undertake campus or program leadership roles provide essential guidance and support to new or struggling Latino students. HSIs and other colleges could dedicate institutional resources to recruit and hire academically successful Latino students for on-campus peer leader positions, and train them to effectively work with faculty members and students. Accomplished students can be recruited from campus honors programs, student-led organizations, or alumni from EOPS, Puente, or any of the other campus programs mentioned in this report. Increased communication between academic and student services departments may provide further opportunities to find qualified Latino student mentors. As California community colleges implement their Guided Pathways models, the Chancellor's office and institutional leaders should consider establishing standards for how peer leaders — especially Latino peers — fit into overall strategies for guiding students to a four-year degree.

- **Prioritize the hiring of diverse faculty and cultural competency training**

Participants across the colleges under study stressed the need to diversify their faculty and provide cultural competency training for staff. In order to attract and retain more qualified faculty of color, college leaders should develop explicit recruitment and hiring policies that encourage expansive search strategies to increase the number of qualified Latinos and other faculty applicants from traditionally underrepresented groups. This might include partnering with local and national diversity organizations to enhance the recruitment and selection process. College leaders can also involve their faculty senates, human resources departments, and other faculty hiring stakeholders to establish a strategic plan and measurable outcomes for increasing diversity. For current faculty (as well as for staff and administrators), institutional leaders should consider making common principles of cultural competency, and of teaching and learning in a culturally diverse context, as integral as possible to the general faculty and staff training that they offer.

CONCLUSION

The impact of Hispanic Serving Institutions on Latino student success in California is well-documented. This study takes the added step of clarifying that this success rests upon the commitment of HSIs to advance campus policies and practices that reflect the needs and cultural realities of Latino students. Latinos are the fastest growing college population in California. It is vital that community colleges and universities in the state — the majority of which are HSI-designated — develop institutional approaches that effectively support this student population both academically and culturally. California has a unique opportunity to reverse decades of low graduation rates for Latino students by building upon its now established practice of culturally responsive postsecondary support for this thriving population.

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