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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

# **A Review of the Literature on Internships for Latinx Students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Toward a Latinx-Serving Internship Experience**

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**Matthew T. Hora, Adrian Huerta, Anita Gopal, and Matthew Wolfgram**

Wisconsin Center for Education Research  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
[matthew.hora@wisc.edu](mailto:matthew.hora@wisc.edu)

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# **A Review of the Literature on Internships for Latinx Students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Toward a Latinx-Serving Internship Experience**

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## **Abstract**

Internships are a widely promoted high-impact practice (HIP) across the postsecondary landscape, particularly among minority-serving institutions (MSIs), where internships are seen as potentially transformative vehicles for students' career success and social mobility. However, little research exists on how the design, implementation, and ultimate effects of college internships vary (or should vary) according to the unique institutional contexts of MSIs and students' racial identities and cultural backgrounds. This idea is based on research demonstrating that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to classroom teaching and student advising, and broader approaches to student engagement, ignore historic and structural inequalities while also overlooking the unique needs, circumstances and potentials of a diverse student body. Our main goal in this paper is to review the literature on internships in Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and with Latinx college students to determine if internship program design, implementation, and student experience vary based on the unique institutional contexts of HSIs and/or the racial and cultural attributes of Latinx college students.

We conducted an integrative review of the literature on HIPs in general and internships in particular as they relate to Latinx students and HSIs. Results indicate a small but growing body of empirical research on these topics. Some studies highlight how specific features of HSIs (e.g., institutional missions, "servingness") and Latinx students (e.g., their family capital, cultural perspectives on work) influence how HIPs and internships are designed and experienced. These insights underscore the importance of accounting for cultural, structural, and historic factors when studying and designing internship programs. We conclude the paper with a review of existing theoretical frameworks for studying HSIs and a proposal for a new research agenda that pays close attention to the role of culture at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels. Ultimately, we contend that while certain universal principles of internship design and implementation are likely to be applicable for HSIs and Latinx students, there are critical differences and opportunities for internships in these institutions and for these students that should be acknowledged and incorporated into HIP-related policymaking and practice.

# **A Review of the Literature on Internships for Latinx Students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Toward a Latinx-Serving Internship Experience**

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## **Introduction**

Internships are widely viewed as a “high-impact practice” (HIP) that improves college students’ career outcomes. Indeed, some scholars call for postsecondary institutions to make internships a requirement for graduation (Busteed & Auter, 2017), or at least to strongly encourage students to participate in internships during their college careers (Kuh, 2008). Advocacy for internships is supported by a growing body of interdisciplinary and international research demonstrating that internships can have positive impacts on students’ employment (Moss-Pech, 2021; Nunley et al., 2015), academic achievement (Parker III et al., 2016), and developmental outcomes such as confidence in one’s career trajectory (Ocampo et al., 2020). While insights into the exact mechanisms governing student learning and development during the internship are scarce, the argument that learning should integrate abstract conceptual knowledge with hands-on experiential applications has a long history in education (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Resnick, 1987). Coupled with growing pressure on colleges and universities to cultivate students’ “employability” (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2016), internships are quickly becoming a central feature of institutional strategies for enhancing student success in the early 21st century.

Efforts to enhance student employability and advocate for internships are evident across the postsecondary landscape. There is a special focus on these issues in minority-serving institutions (MSIs), given historical inequalities for students of color in accessing education, jobs, and other opportunities. For example, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) increasingly emphasize the use of HIPs (Covington, 2017) and internships (Perry, 2017; Strayhorn, 2020) to enhance Black student outcomes and post-graduate success. In 2016, the United Negro College Fund launched a multi-institutional, \$50M Career Pathways Initiative (UNCF, 2016) that aimed to increase the capacity of participating institutions so that they could better serve their students’ career-related needs, which included attention to work-based learning (WBL) programs such as internships. Similarly, in Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), there is a growing emphasis on students’ post-graduate career success, fueled by goals ranging from diversifying the workforce (Sansone et al., 2019) to a commitment to enhancing the social mobility of Latinx students (Martinez & Santiago, 2020).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we use the term Latinx, a gender-neutral term increasingly used by higher education scholars to refer to people with Latin American ancestors (e.g., Salinas & Lozano, 2017). While the term Hispanic is also widely used, some view it as an externally derived and imposed category with the primary referent of colonial Spain (Núñez, 2014). In cases where scholars whose papers are cited in this review use terms such as Latino or Hispanic, we will use terms other than Latinx.

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A robust body of literature exists on the unique cultural features of HSIs and Latinx student outcomes in HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019; Núñez, 2014), and the experiences of Latinx students with the world of work (e.g., Núñez & Sansone, 2016) and career development (e.g., Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; Risco & Duffy, 2011). However, the literature on internship programs in HSIs is not as well developed. The lack of strong empirical insights on internships at HSIs and for Latinx students poses a problem for institutions, students, and employers who wish to better understand internships and how they may (or may not) vary from the experiences of non-Latinx students at other types of institutions. This is a critical issue facing the field of WBL, internships, and HIPs, as it is possible that the design, implementation and ultimate effects of college internships may (or should) vary according to the unique institutional contexts of MSIs and students' racial identities and cultural backgrounds.

Research demonstrates that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching and learning, student affairs, and career development ignores both historic and structural inequalities while also overlooking the unique needs, circumstances, and potentials of a diverse student body. For instance, research on culturally relevant pedagogy underscores the need to reject deficit-oriented frames and acknowledge marginalized students' experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Further, research on the racialized (and discriminatory) nature of institutional practices and the allocation of resources (Harper, 2009; Ray, 2019) demonstrates how policies, practices, and thus student experiences in higher education are decidedly not “innocent” or race-neutral. This is especially true for Latinx students, as the evidence indicates that students of color often opt out of internships and related career development opportunities due to preconceived concerns about ethnic and racial discrimination, misalignment with college major and employer expectations, and the suitability of employer culture for Latinx populations (Berríos-Allison, 2005; Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; Poon, 2014; Sweeney & Villarejo, 2013). Moreover, contextual issues and trends in the broader labor market—including diversity pipeline initiatives, the persistence of hiring discrimination (Quillian et al., 2017), and documented inequities in access to internships that may impact Latinx students—highlight the fact that internships (and student outcomes) do not operate in a social, historic, or legal vacuum. As viewed through an intersectional lens, internships are implicated in a wide range of issues and contextual forces (Núñez, 2014).

This state of affairs suggests that internship design should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach, with no accounting for students' racial identities and cultural backgrounds, and how they may influence not only their experiences at the internship but their very conceptions of what is possible and available to them as they pursue a college education. Consequently, with the continued emphasis on HIPs in general and internships in higher education, it is essential that faculty, career services and student affairs professionals, and employers understand the key principles for effective program design and implementation, as indicated by the research literature.

Our main goal in this paper is to review the literature on internships in HSIs and with Latinx college students to determine if internship program design, implementation, and student

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experience vary based on the unique institutional contexts of HSIs and/or the racial identities and cultural backgrounds of Latinx college students. We used the integrative literature review approach, which involves reviewing, critiquing, and then synthesizing a body of research with the aim of generating new frameworks or research agendas for future work (Torraco, 2005). For this study, we conducted searches in Google Scholar and JSTOR. Keywords included “HSI,” “internship,” “Latinx,” and “work-based learning.” Resulting papers were reviewed for applicability to the main question driving this study: Do unique institutional features of HSIs and/or Latinx student culture impact internship programming, and how? We included salient papers that addressed this question.

Our analysis begins with a brief review of the history and context of HSIs. We then describe the results of our review of the literature on HIPs and internships at HSIs and/or with Latinx students, followed by an analysis of existing theoretical frameworks for studying HSIs. We conclude with a proposal for a new research agenda that pays close attention to the role of culture at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels. We contend that while certain universal principles of internship design and implementation are likely to be applicable for HSIs and Latinx students, critical differences and opportunities for internships in these institutions and for these students should be acknowledged and incorporated into HIP-related policymaking and practice.

### **Review of Institutional Context and Culture of HSIs**

This brief overview covers the history and characteristics of HSIs, and the evidence regarding Latinx student outcomes in these unique institutions. A thorough review of the history of HSIs is beyond the scope of this paper; readers interested in the topic are advised to consult professional associations such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) or Excelencia in Education, and the works of Garcia (2019), Laden (2004), Núñez et al. (2015, 2016) and Santiago (2012), to name but a few scholarly works on the topic.

### **History and Characteristics of HSIs**

The formal recognition of HSIs in the United States began as a grassroots effort to have Congress recognize these institutions and subsequently provide federal funding for their growth and support. Congressional recognition came in 1992 when HSIs were added to the Higher Education Act (HEA) and became eligible for funding via Title V, a competitive grant program that provides five years of funding to expand the capacity and quality of HSIs to serve Latinx and low-income students (Garcia & Taylor, 2017). Access to additional sources of funding is particularly important for HSIs, which are typically less well funded via public resources than predominantly White institutions (PWIs) or even other minority serving institutions. For example, Anguiana and Navarro (2020) found that “in 2019, the total funding available for HSIs represented just \$87 per Latinx student enrolled, compared with \$1,642 per Black student enrolled at HBCUs” (p. 1).

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The formal HSI designation requires an institution to be an accredited, degree-granting institution of higher education (public or private not-for-profit) that has 25% or more undergraduate Hispanic full-time enrollees. The number of HSIs has almost tripled in the past 25 years, from 189 to 539 (as of 2018–2019), with 350 more institutions now than in 1994 (Excelencia in Education, 2020). This dramatic increase in the number of HSIs is due to the corresponding increase in the Hispanic population in the United States, which can be seen in the growth of Latinx student enrollment in HSIs from 490,000 to 2.1 million between 1994 and 2018 (Excelencia in Education, 2020). In fact, some estimate that about 12% of postsecondary education institutions meet the definition of an HSI (HACU, 2020). The anticipated continued growth in both the Hispanic population and the number of “emerging HSIs” that have between 15%–24% Hispanic enrollment, suggests additional growth in the number of HSIs in coming years. HSIs also represent a diverse range of institution types, including public community colleges (40% of all HSIs), public 4-year colleges (28%), and private nonprofit institutions (30%) (Anguiana & Navarro, 2020), demonstrating how HSIs have become deeply ingrained in the nation’s postsecondary landscape.

HSIs sometimes started out as PWIs in cities and regions whose demographics changed over time, while others were established in locales with historically large Hispanic/Latinx populations such as New Mexico and Puerto Rico. In 2017, 83% of all HSIs were located in California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, New Mexico and Puerto Rico (Excelencia, 2020; HACU, 2017; St. Amour, 2020). As the Hispanic population grows throughout the country, most observers expect the number of HSIs to increase correspondingly in other regions. The HSI designation enables an institution to apply to Title V grant competitions, and brings with it the potential for institutional leaders, faculty, and staff to recognize that Latinx students are an important core constituency whose unique needs and promise should be centered in conversations about institutional operations. The fact that an institutional mission and designation may alter how a college or university allocates resources, sets policy, and engages with students is one of the key issues underlying this paper. We next turn to evidence on the different ways that features of HSIs (and Latinx students) may influence WBL and internship programs.

### **Unique Aspects of HSIs and Latinx Students That Impact Student Outcomes**

In this section, we address HSIs and Latinx students separately as distinct subjects of analysis and/or venues of cultural activity. Many scholars regard these two potential fields or venues of influence as inextricably connected. However, we are interested in teasing out the unique features of HSIs, and of Latinx students as individuals with distinctive ethnic, racial, cultural, and socio-economic identities, that might potentially impact students’ experiences with college internships.

#### ***Exploring the Intersections of Culture, Individual Experience, and Environments***

An overarching goal of HSIs is to enroll and support Latinx students to persist and complete a college degree. In recent years, the way HSIs serve and support students in this process, and

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their organizational culture(s), have come under scrutiny (Garcia, 2017). Researchers of MSIs in general and HSIs in particular have long argued that one of the most important aspects of these institutions is the welcoming and even nurturing institutional climate and/or culture that they provide to students of color (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Dayton et al., 2004; Gasman et al., 2008). A welcoming culture or climate for students of color can be fostered via empathetic and attentive faculty–student interactions (e.g., Martinez & Gonzalez, 2015), particularly in PWIs that can represent a hostile environment replete with micro-aggressions, limited opportunities, and even outright racist behaviors towards students of color (Harper, 2012; Huerta & Fishman, 2014). Before further discussion on the cultural aspects of MSIs, it is worth briefly reviewing the precise meaning of the terms “climate” and “culture,” which are often used as buzzwords without an in-depth examination of their meaning and intent (Lizardo, 2017).

While the concepts of climate and culture are both contested and variously defined across the disciplines, in general climate is seen as the temporary manifestation of an institutions’ norms, beliefs, and practices that a given student experiences, whereas culture refers to deep-seated and tacit forms of these phenomena, along with ritual, symbolic representations, and so on (Denison, 1996; Martin, 2002; Schneider et al., 2013). Some salient aspects of these long-standing debates about culture theory include the consensus that no single “culture” exists that can adequately describe an entire group, nation, or organization; instead, culture is evident at smaller units of analysis (e.g., sub-cultures) and even at the individual level, where a person can hold multiple and even contradictory cognitive schema (i.e., knowledge structures) from different social groups in which they are members (DiMaggio, 1997; Strauss & Quinn, 1997).

Internalized by individuals through years of exposure to and engagement with various social and institutional worlds, these *cultural models* are deeply held memory structures about a wide range of “normal” tasks (e.g., how to order food in a restaurant), concepts and values (e.g., family comes first), or social institutions (e.g., what constitutes a good marriage) (Shore, 1996). As a result, instead of essentializing a Latinx student by ascribing attributes of “Hispanic culture” to them, it may be more accurate to speak of the different cultural models that they have internalized from their religious training, family history, social class, participation in youth sports, local geography and history, and so on. At the institutional level in higher education, the essentialist tradition of ascribing culture to entire organizations (e.g., University X has a “managerial” or “entrepreneurial culture”) has long been dominant (e.g., Bergquist & Pawlak, 2007), but it is more accurate to speak of smaller sub-units of an organization such as a department or even a work group, and the types of norms, rituals, practices, and policies that are instituted and reified over time within these units, which can be considered a type of organizational sub-culture (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984).

Regardless of different approaches to and debates about culture theory in sociology, anthropology, and other social sciences, in research on HSIs it is widely perceived that when HSIs cultivate a welcoming culture or climate, they can positively impact student success. Theoretically, internship programming is implicated in such efforts, through faculty

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encouragement to pursue internships as well as institutional efforts to make them accessible and available.

### *Institutional Features of HSIs That May Impact Internship Programming*

Scholars argue that a “Latinx-serving” identity—that is, how students are treated and experience college life—is part of the core mission of many HSIs. In a study on this concept, Garcia (2017) observes that while metrics such as graduation rates are often used to define successful “servingness,” another potential indicator is organizational culture and identity. Garcia (2017) reports findings from a case study of “Naranja State University,” highlighting six indicators of an ideal institutional identity for serving Latinx students that included three commonly used metrics for institutional success or efficacy (graduation, enrollment in graduate school, and employment), and three cultural indicators (community engagement opportunities, a positive climate, and support programs). Based on this analysis, HSIs that foster an effective Latinx-serving identity around internships implicate both traditional outcomes (e.g., employment) and cultural features of the institution (e.g., community engagement, positive climate and support programs), underscoring how the provision of internship opportunities alone may not be sufficient to meet the needs of Latinx students attending an HSI.

A literature review conducted by Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone (2019) also focused on the question of what it means to be “Latinx-serving,” elaborating on Garcia’s (2017) study by identifying several non-outcome focused indicators of serving that also include the development of academic self-concept, leadership identity, racial identity, critical consciousness, graduate school aspirations, and civic engagement. Yet, a majority of researchers and practitioners focus primarily on academic outcomes, and rarely consider nonacademic ones (Garcia et al., 2019), despite their great importance to the academic success of Latinx students in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). In many cases, HSIs have been intentional and effective at enhancing the very nonacademic outcomes (Cuellar 2014; Garcia & Cuellar, 2018) that are critical for cultivating servingness within an HSI. In addition, Garcia et al. (2019) found that student and staff experiences such as the presence of Spanish-speaking staff and faculty, and internal organizational structures such as leadership, culturally relevant pedagogy, and programs were also used in the literature to conceptualize the notion of servingness.

Faculty and staff play an important role in creating a supportive culture within HSIs, underscoring how individuals may shape or otherwise influence student experiences. Researchers argue that language proficiency is an important attribute for HSI staff; some researchers argue that HSIs need leaders and faculty who can act as “cultural conduits” to the Latino community, who understand the experiences and cultural backgrounds of Latinx students, and can access established networks to advance student goals and opportunities (Mendez et al., 2015). These administrators, staff, and faculty can then act as “institutional agents” (Bensimon et al., 2019) to advocate for Latinx students, help them transition to college life, and navigate the complex social, academic, and bureaucratic features of academia.



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In our current focus on internship programs, it is critical to explore how an internship program could (or should) be culturally relevant, as well as the ways that a campus could institute what Garcia et al. (2019) call “structures for serving” (p. 28) that reflect both the institutional capacity and intentionality to serve the unique needs of Latinx students. While campus personnel and institutional systems play an important role in shaping students’ experiences, it is also important to consider the unique experiences, perspectives, and cultural norms and models that Latinx students themselves bring to campus, and subsequently to the internship experience.

### *Attributes of Latinx Students That May Impact Internship Programming*

Next, we consider how Latinx students’ unique attributes may impact their academic and post-graduate success in general, and their experiences with internships in particular. Importantly, there is no single, monolithic, or homogenous cultural group called “Latinx.” As Núñez (2014) argues, the social category of “Latino” obscures considerable variation on the basis of national origin, gender, social class, immigrant status, and religion. These multiple identity categories often overlap in ways that impact individuals’ lives and opportunities. The social and institutional contexts in which students operate also intersect to “shape Latino college access and success” (Núñez, 2014, p. 34).

Thus, we should view with suspicion any assertions about how “Latinx” students’ identities and cultural backgrounds shape their college and career experience that rely on broad claims or explanations of this complex identity. That said, research does indicate that some Latinx students do not consider certain careers available to them based on fear (or experience) of discrimination (Berríos-Allison, 2005); may have limited peer, family, and professional support systems and networks (Huerta et al., in press); may bring a familial orientation and goals to enhance social mobility (Núñez & Sansone, 2016); and sometimes have regional family bonds that keep them from considering non-local career options (Fedynich et al., 2012). With respect to the role of family, studies on “familism” have explored the role that Hispanic families play in college students’ pursuits and ambitions (e.g., Rudolph et al., 2005; Desmond & Turley, 2009), with some emphasizing family support systems as a unique form of capital or community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that can motivate and support students to persist and graduate (Sáenz et al., 2018). These are but a few aspects of Latinx culture and experience that are applicable to families, communities, and populations beyond the individual.

Different social categories such as race, gender, immigration status, and age further complicate matters by shaping and constraining an individuals’ opportunities in the world (Núñez, 2014). Different cultural models can also lead an individual to hold diverse and non-stereotypical ideals, goals, and plans (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Such a perspective is not dissimilar to intersectionality theory from legal studies (Crenshaw, 1991), which has been applied to higher education research (e.g., Jones, 2009; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2013), as well as studies of student development (e.g., Hurtado et al., 2012). Núñez (2014) applied the framework to an analysis of how social categories, identities, and subsequent experiences intersect with embodied institutional and individual practices as well as macro-level

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forces of history, politics, and the economy. Because internships implicate at least three actors that reflect distinct yet overlapping spheres of activity—the labor market, higher education, and students’ own lives—the intersectional perspective of Núñez (2014) provides an especially promising analytic lens to capture the complex, multi-level array of individual, organizational, and societal forces that likely impact Latinx students as they seek an internship experience.

### **What Do We Know About High-Impact Practices and Internships at HSIs?**

Considerable research exists on the experiences and outcomes of students who attend an HSI. In this section, we first review research on high-impact practices at HSIs, followed by a discussion of the literature on internships at HSIs and the role that race plays in internship experiences across the entire postsecondary sector.

#### **Research on High-Impact Practices at HSIs**

A primary goal of organizations such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) that advocate for the widespread adoption of HIPs is to make these practices inclusive and available for underrepresented students. In an essay outlining how certain HIPs were instituted at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christie, Moreno and Shope (2014) write about efforts to align their institutional mission as an HSI by having faculty develop programming (via culturally relevant pedagogy) in conjunction with their campus Writing Center. This essay, which built on collaborative work between AAC&U and Excelencia in Education, is one example of the ways that national organizations prioritize HIPs at HSIs as part of their student success initiatives.

Our review also revealed a small but growing body of empirical research on HIPs and HSIs. In a 2015 dissertation, Quintero examined the degree to which HIPs impacted student outcomes for first-year Latinx students at an HSI. Instead of examining the impacts of individual HIPs on students, Quintero (2015) studied “integrated HIPs,” which are intentionally combined programs or experiences (i.e., embedded peer support, active learning, writing-intensive courses, and peer-led learning communities), and found that these experiences led to greater gains on first-term academic outcomes compared to students with better odds of succeeding in their first term (based on pre-college characteristics) who did not participate in integrative HIPs.

In a case study analysis of culturally relevant practices at one HSI, Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) found that the historical presence of culturally relevant pedagogy and programs and the degree to which they were embedded within institutional structures played a key role in dictating whether these practices adequately reached diverse students. In particular, the Chicana/o Studies Department with its long-standing focus on Latinx issues, perspectives, and culturally relevant pedagogy, especially through required courses for first-year students, strongly influenced students’ experiences. While not a study at an HSI, Knouse (2017) investigated students participating in service learning or undergraduate research (two HIPs) in a Hispanic linguistics course (a Spanish course that emphasizes critical and cultural aspects of Latinx culture,

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experience, and language), finding that the HIP approach led students to become more amenable to advocating for linguistic diversity and critical perspectives on language and power dynamics.

Finally, while their analysis focuses on under-served students more generally, Finley and McNair (2013) analyzed data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and documented inequalities in participation in HIPs. For instance, first-generation students participated in fewer HIPs than continuing-generation students, and White students participated in more HIPs than Hispanic students; in both cases, findings were determined to be statistically significant (Finley & McNair, 2013). Focus groups with students then revealed that their busy schedules (especially when working paid jobs) inhibited the students' ability to participate in HIPs; the presence of engaged and supportive faculty proved helpful, while a lack of familial experience in navigating applications and opportunities for HIPs was a negative factor in students' ability to find and pursue an HIP. In an appendix to their report, Finley and McNair (2013) include a toolkit for assessing HIPs based on the Center for Urban Education's Equity Scorecard, which guides practitioners through an equity-focused approach to evaluating HIPs such as internships. Steps include gathering details about representation (disaggregated by race and ethnicity), criteria for reasonable access, and program impact, along with ways to interrogate policies and avoid deficit-minded explanations of student achievement (Bensimon et al., 2019).

### **Research on Internships with Latinx Students and/or at HSIs**

Next, we turn to the internship literature that studies either Latinx college students or the HSI as a unique institutional context that may impact how internships are designed, implemented, and experienced. As with research on internships at other MSIs such as HBCUs (Hora et al., 2020), this line of inquiry is not extensive, but is growing and contains key findings that should be considered by scholars and practitioners alike.

First, it is important to note that many studies of internships do address issues of racial and ethnic identity, often by including these issues as variables in statistical analyses of survey data or large datasets. In these cases, findings such as the lack of significant differences between White and non-White groups in internship participation (Binder et al., 2015) or that Hispanic students are less likely to pursue an HIP (Finley & McNair, 2013) are not uncommon. When working with large datasets such as NSSE or the Baccalaureate and Beyond dataset, it is difficult to delve into subtler aspects of race and ethnicity. Some researchers argue that a more critically minded approach to quantitative research is warranted in higher education research—that we must disaggregate race and ethnicity, seek data from traditionally disadvantaged populations (e.g., students with disabilities), and analyze data to reveal inequalities and related problems (Stage, 2007; Wells & Stage, 2015).

Mixed-methods or qualitative studies contain deeper analyses of the intersections among racial identity, institution type, and internship experiences. In a particularly insightful study, Fedynich et al. (2012) examined experiential learning programs at Texas A&M–Kingsville (TAMUK). The authors note that because many students were dropping out and/or were unfamiliar with employers' skill demands in areas such as geographic information systems, the

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university created a program to better help their students learn about job opportunities in agriculture and natural resources. The program included a 3-week off-campus course where faculty, students, and employer mentors visited natural resources sites and engaged in hands-on learning in the Rocky Mountains, followed by an internship program where students pursued either a research experience or more generalized work experience.

The authors emphasized experiential learning as an important way for students to enhance their academic learning (Kolb, 1984) and transfer knowledge to new settings. They asserted that in general, experiential learning benefits underserved students by supporting students' confidence and identities and helping them to build relationships with peers and mentors. In addition, the authors noted that because retention is a considerable issue at TAMUK and other HSIs, programs such as internships that appear to enhance student outcomes (i.e., persistence, graduation, and immediate employment) may be especially important at these institutions. Finally, recognizing that some Latinx students at TAMUK were unfamiliar with other cultural groups and job opportunities outside of South Texas, the authors found that the internship experience led many students to consider moving to where jobs in their field were, while also fostering new interactions with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Fedynich et al. 2012).

In another study led by Farmer and colleagues (2014) on winter internships (or “winterships” that took place during the school year and over winter break) at the College of the Desert and California State University San Bernardino (both HSIs), researchers examined preparatory training for students pursuing summer internships in STEM fields, with the intent to increase diversity in STEM occupations. This training included undergraduate research, faculty and peer mentoring, and guidance with securing an internship, underscoring the value of pre-internship advising and support services (Farmer et al., 2014).

In a similar study about a National Science Foundation program that aimed to diversify the workforce in the geosciences, Sansone et al. (2019) argue that HSIs—institutions uniquely suited (via support systems) for serving students of color—play a critical role in diversifying the national STEM workforce. In particular, the authors contend that the traditional separation of academic affairs (focus on academic skills) from student affairs (focus on careers) on HSI campuses is deleterious for student skill and career development. For example, the centerpiece of the University of Texas–San Antonio Geoscience Pathways Program (UGP) was a semester-long internship on campus, followed by two semesters in off-campus internships. This program expanded students' knowledge of geosciences careers, exposed them to “soft skills” and career options, and enhanced their confidence. The authors also felt that the program successfully raised the visibility of University of Texas–San Antonio in the employer community and drew upon the skills of both career services and student affairs professionals (Sansone et al., 2019).

Another study focused on the development of professional identity among a cohort of Hispanic student interns in a counseling program at a regional university in south Texas (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). The authors argued that the challenges Hispanic student social workers faced

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in the process of professional socialization were understudied. They called for closer study of issues related to the definition of a “Hispanic helper,” the degree of student identification with Hispanic culture, the non-academic roles that students play in their lives, and the role of family in Hispanic culture. In this phenomenological study of eight student counseling interns, Nelson and Jackson (2003) identified four themes that were “mediated by cultural issues that are specific to Hispanic counseling students” (p. 6). These themes included relationships (especially with supportive or disengaged family members, and the students’ role in their family); a sense of accomplishment; costs of the program (e.g., dealing with poverty, multiple family obligations); and perceptions of the profession—students’ families often held inaccurate perceptions about certain occupations, attributed to the tendency for Hispanic families to not seek assistance outside of the family (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). Interestingly, this study echoed earlier findings of Manoleas and Carrillo (1991) about students in a similar field (i.e., social work). During field experiences, the Hispanic student social workers in the study strongly identified with “Hispanic culture,” and their families had high expectations for them to succeed (as the most intelligent person in the family) and to financially support parents, siblings and relatives.

### **Research on Latinx Students and Work-Based Learning or Work-Related Issues**

Next, we briefly review several studies that did not focus on internships per se, but on WBL programs and career development more generally. This growing body of literature provides important insights into the ways that Latinx students’ identity and lived experience may impact their college and career development experiences, and thus should be included in conversations around internship design and implementation.

First, scholars have examined ways that cultural and ethnic identity shapes students’ thinking about their futures and career opportunities. Low-income Latinx students often are “foreclosed” to exploring certain careers and internship opportunities due to fear of future discrimination tied to gender and ethnicity (Berríos-Allison, 2005; Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005). These self-imposed constraints may be particularly strong for first-generation students of color, who may experience stress and low internal confidence when navigating higher education, which can then be compounded by the pressure to forge new professional networks off-campus to secure an internship (Moss-Pech, 2021). Moreover, what constitutes a good job or internship may be framed by home community context (Hill, 2020) and a limited network of support (Huerta et al., in press).

Consequently, when colleges develop targeted support and intervention programs for first-generation and low-income students of color, these efforts may build students’ career confidence, and aspirations for graduate school and new career opportunities (Sweeney & Villarejo, 2013). These types of interventions can empower students to discuss majors and career exploration with their parents and families, which is particularly relevant for the children of immigrants who may only promote economic mobility and social status (Berríos-Allison, 2005; Poon, 2004).

Another study examined how working at part- or full-time jobs influences how Latinx students experience college. This is an important issue given growing numbers of working

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students across the entire population (Perna, 2010), but especially the high rates of Latinx students who must work during college to pay for tuition, living expenses, and even to support their families (Núñez & Sansone, 2016). Findings from this interview-based study revealed three key themes: (1) a family-oriented focus that led to a strong desire to obtain more prestigious and better-paying jobs, (2) the view that work helps to develop key skills and sense of identity and belonging on campus, and (3) that work itself is a satisfying experience (Núñez & Sansone, 2016). These findings suggest that some of the salient cultural models for Latinx students as they enter college are strongly tied to family obligations and aspirations as well as perceptions of work as meaningful and valuable. In addition, the authors argue that “work offers these students benefits beyond financial capital, including human, cultural, and social capital” (Núñez & Sansone, 2016, p. 91), and that colleges and universities should strive to create or facilitate “meaningful work opportunities” for students so that they can benefit from these positive aspects of work.

Finally, as we consider the experiences of Latinx students as they enter the world of work and the labor market, we should not overlook contextual and structural forces. In our discussion of Latinx student identities, HSIs as unique institutions, and the cultural forces that are implicated in both, we adopt an ethnographic lens that situates the lived experiences of people within specific (and unique) geographies, political spheres, times, and situations. However, the aforementioned theory of cultural models—as cognitively held schema about certain tasks, concepts, or situations that form a critical building block of culture (DiMaggio, 1997; Strauss & Quinn, 1997)—has long been critiqued for paying insufficient attention to extra-individual forces that constitute the texture of daily life (e.g., Geertz, 1973). Fortunately, we have examples of scholarship where cultural forces at the level of the individual are embedded within specific situations and macro-level contexts, such as the apprenticeship of tailors in Liberia (Lave, 1977), the management and operation of aircraft carriers in San Diego (Hutchins, 1995), or domino games played by Black students at a school in California (Nasir, 2005). We argue that this type of contextually situated analysis should be pursued in future research on the intersections of internships, Latinx students, and HSIs.

While there are many issues that affect Latinx graduates (e.g., immigration law, regional labor market conditions, linguistic discrimination), here we highlight two: hiring and workplace discrimination, and the job market for Latinx students.

The first issue to consider is the persistence of hiring discrimination in U.S. society. While little research exists on discriminatory practices in internships, a large body of evidence makes it clear that discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity, gender, age, and other personal attributes persists in the labor market. For instance, a recent meta-analysis of field experiments on hiring discrimination against Black and Latino applicants found that White applicants receive 36% more callbacks than Black applicants and 24% more than Latino applicants, with educational attainment, occupational group, and labor market conditions held constant. The authors conclude that, “contrary to claims of declining discrimination in American society, our estimates suggest

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that levels of discrimination remain largely unchanged, at least at the point of hire” (Quillian et al., 2017, p.5).

A recent resume audit study, where fictitious resumes were sent to employers with all applicant attributes being equal except for “distinctively” Black (e.g., Ebony Booker) or White (Cody Booker) names for male and female applicants, similarly found that White applicants received 14% more callbacks for job interviews (Nunley et al., 2015). While this study did not examine Latinx names and subsequent employer perceptions, results such as these underscore the persistent, widespread nature of hiring discrimination in the United States, with a variety of negative implications for Latinx students. Besides reducing the prospects for gaining employment and a toe-hold in an early career position, discriminatory practices and their widespread acknowledgement (and acceptance) can have substantial negative psychological impacts on students of color. For instance, people of color are more likely to compromise career aspirations due to perceived barriers to access to educational and career opportunities, in effect self-selecting out of certain career pathways (Fassinger, 2008). This situation is exacerbated for women of color, who face both sexism and racism in the labor market (Omi & Winant, 2014).

We argue that those engaged in internship design must consider how racial identity often acts as a lever to activate discriminatory or preferential treatment by institutional actors; in practice, racial identity often operates subtly and intersects with other identities (Omi & Winant, 2014; Crenshaw, 1990). Consequently, the racial discrimination that racially minoritized students may face in securing an internship is often compounded by longstanding social arrangements that privilege students who have access to financial, social, and cultural capital. This is the situation that Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah (2020) explored in a study of unpaid internships in sustainable agriculture farm internships, which tend to be dominated by young, middle-class White people. Additionally, the dominant preferences for the cultural associations connected to normative whiteness and maleness passively work to limit the access points to internships for students of color, hindering their full participation in internships once at the job site (Boulton, 2015; Levkoe & Offeh-Gyimah, 2020; Shade & Jacobson, 2015). As a result, some argue that the field of internships is characterized by inequitable forms of access and opportunity, and that internships are “the first step into a career, but a step structured by inequalities” (Swan, 2015, p. 30). We conclude our paper with a brief discussion of existing theoretical frameworks that foreground these issues, followed by our ideas for a future research agenda on internships, Latinx students, and HSIs.

### **Theoretical Considerations for Studying HSI Students and Internships**

While our review of the literature on HSIs, Latinx students, and internships revealed a limited number of empirical studies, promising lines of inquiry are emerging in both higher education and WBL studies on internships. Together with the more general, robust body of empirical and theoretical work on HSIs and Latinx college students, these studies collectively provide a foundation for a future research agenda.

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In addition, to delve more deeply into the cultural aspects of individual-level student identities and experiences, institution-level cultural forces, and elements of culture in broader social structures and systems, we draw upon cultural models and intersectionality theory to begin unpacking how these forces may interact to shape students' internship experiences. This effort is part of a larger goal to examine if and how racial identity, culture, and systemic forces interact to shape college students' internships at MSIs, with a specific focus on HBCUs and HSIs (see Hora et al., 2020). Any new research agenda necessarily builds on the labor of previous scholars, and in this case we first review and acknowledge the efforts of researchers who articulated frameworks for studying student engagement and success in MSIs.

### **Frameworks for Studying Internships**

It is instructive to acknowledge ways that scholars in management and WBL have conceptualized the internship experience. One widely cited framework was developed by the management scholars Narayanan et al. (2010), who contend that most internship research ignores the interplay among the three actors involved in the experience: students, the college or university, and the company. This notion led to their framework focused on the testing of specific antecedent (e.g., employer and university size and structure, student readiness) and processual factors (e.g., employer and university communications with students) that may contribute to particular outcomes for all three parties. Their framework emphasizes the importance of effective program design that pays attention to faculty/advisor–student communications (McHugh, 2017), the development of meaningful tasks for the intern (Rogers et al., 2021), the coordination between faculty/advisors and employers (Scicluna et al., 2014), and effective supervision and mentoring (Liu et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2014). But while Narayanan et al. (2010) emphasize certain aspects of students (e.g., academic preparedness), colleges (e.g., faculty selection of students) and employers as organizations (e.g., task development), any issues of student racial identity, cultural forces at individual or institution levels, or structural issues in which an internship program is embedded, remain unaddressed. That said, the focus on the subtle processes of learning through the design, implementation, and outcome phases of an internship are a valuable addition to the literature, as they address the “black box” problem of viewing the internship experience as simply one of mere participation that results in positive outcomes (Hora et al., 2020).

Another framework to study internships focuses less on technical matters and more on student development. Sweitzer and King (2013) outlined four stages of an intern's experience, including anticipation, exploration, competence, and culmination. In focusing on these stages, Sweitzer and King (2013) argue that too often, internships are not studied in the same pedagogical space as a college course or lab experience, stating, “A pedagogy of internships calls upon the academy to . . . recognize the internship as a legitimate, collaborative, and deliberately designed academic learning experience” (p. 54) that demands careful attention to design and the processes of student learning and development. Additionally, the authors emphasize how students themselves construct meaning of their experiences within these spaces, and stress the importance of interns being introduced into new (and potentially discordant) socio-cultural and



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professional contexts. This framework is consistent with developmental perspectives in vocational psychology (e.g., Savickas et al., 2009) and student development (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2001) that also emphasize constructivist and processual accounts of development and growth. However, this framework also does not pay close attention to cultural issues that may be implicated in the internship experience, or how a student's racial identity, their institution's MSI status, or structural and socio-economic forces may influence these processes and experiences.

### **Frameworks for Studying the Success and Engagement of Students of Color in Higher Education**

While these internship frameworks do not explicitly account for students' racial identity, institutional cultures, and capacities, several frameworks focus on college student success and development and are explicitly designed to attend to issues of racial identity and socio-cultural forces.

For example, Museus (2014) advanced a multi-dimensional model of the success of students of color in college. The model was processual, accounting for influences at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels, while also deeply exploring the cultural dimensions of the college experience. One of the aims of this model was to critique the problematic assumption that "racial and cultural bias does not shape institutional environments, programs and practices" (Museus, 2014, p. 190). As part of the cultural foundations of the new model, Museus discussed prior work of Tierney (1992, 1999) on the limitations of dominant frameworks of student success. These critiques focus on Tinto's (1993) influential theory of student success and its argument that integration into college life—where college was seen as a unique cultural space, distinct from students' prior home and community lives—was an essential element of students' ultimate success in college. Tierney (1999) notes that culture is "an elusive term that demands definition" (p.83); in rejecting the not uncommon view that culture refers to values, norms, and practices that are uniformly shared among an entire population or organization, he instead defines it as "a set of symbolic processes, ideologies, and sociohistorical contexts that are situated in an arena of struggle, contestation, and multiple interpretations" (p. 83).

Museus and Quaye (2009) built on this more nuanced account of culture, as well as on Kuh and Love's (2000) work on "culturally based propositions" that impact minority student experience, to articulate an *intercultural perspective* focused on the dissonance between "students' cultural knowledge and the new cultural information that they encounter" as being inversely related to their positive experiences and success in college (Museus, 2014). The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model then accounts for the various forces (at individual, institutional and macro levels) that impact minority student success. In accounting for "pre-college inputs" such as a students' familial background and demographics, and how these are engaged (or not) with the campus environment, this model is well aligned with the idea that cultural models travel with students from home to college and beyond. The CECE model also offers key indicators such as cultural familiarity or culturally relevant knowledge that capture how well (or poorly) an institution's practices, personnel, and policies are congruent with the lived cultural realities of a diverse student population. In the case of college internships, this

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could be internship programs run by Latinx staff and faculty, placements with employers and organizations that have inclusive workplace environments, and so on.

Arroyo and Gasman's (2014) non-Eurocentric framework of Black student success in HBCUs represents another model developed to study and diagnose how postsecondary institutions serve students of color. This model is grounded in the notion of HBCUs as uniquely supportive institutional environments for Black students, a perspective very similar to arguments that HSIs reflect a nurturing and welcoming environment for Latinx students. Such a supportive environment can facilitate student achievement, identity formation, and the cultivation of strong values (e.g., conservatism, commitment to social justice), which interact with one another as the student goes through their college experience. As with Museus' (2014) framework, this model is processual: students from a diverse range of experiences enter the institution via an "institutional entry point," which can be seen as a form of filtering or gatekeeping, and then proceed through the environment, which ultimately leads to their graduation, career attainment, and engagement in society (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

Both of these models highlight the role that racial identity and institutional contexts play in shaping student experiences. They contribute important insights that can be applied to the study of internships in HSIs. However, frameworks developed specifically to study HSIs—the subject of the next section of our paper—are uniquely well suited for this problem.

### **Frameworks for Studying Success and Engagement of Latinx Students in HSIs**

We first discuss research on "servingness" in HSIs and what it means to have a core identity or mission as a "Latinx-serving" institution. Garcia (2017) observed that while metrics such as graduation rates are often used to define successful "servingness," another potential indicator for this concept is that of organizational culture and identity. In a case study of "Naranja State University," Garcia (2017) identified six indicators of an ideal institutional identity for serving Latinx students that included three commonly used metrics for institutional success or efficacy (i.e., graduation, enrollment in graduate school, and employment), and three cultural indicators (i.e., community engagement opportunities, a positive climate, and support programs). Based on interviews with faculty and staff, Garcia (2017) also found that study participants constructed their own professional identities from "environmental cues about social practices" (p. 111) such as student support programs, leading to the conclusion that a Latinx-serving institutional identity should adopt a cultural lens that highlights an institution's student-facing practices rather than a sole focus on outcome metrics.

This question of what it means to be "Latinx-serving" was also the focus of a literature review conducted by Garcia et al. (2019), which elaborated on Garcia's (2017) study by identifying several non-outcome focused indicators of serving, including the development of academic self-concept, leadership identity, racial identity, critical consciousness, graduate school aspirations, and civic engagement. Given that these non-academic outcomes are known to be especially important for the academic success of Latinx students in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), it is not surprising that many HSIs intentionally create

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opportunities for students to develop these identities, experiences, and outlooks while in college (Cuellar 2014; Garcia & Cuellar 2018). In addition, Garcia et al. (2019) found that student and staff experiences, such as the presence of Spanish-speaking staff and faculty, and internal organizational structures, such as leadership, culturally relevant pedagogy, and programs, were used in the literature to conceptualize the notion of servingness.

Another important contribution to the study of Latinx students in postsecondary institutions is the framework highlighting the various assets or funds of knowledge that students bring to college (Rendon et al., 2015). Rendon et al. (2015) build on the work of Yosso (2005) and Moll et al. (1992), who argued against deficit-minded approaches to student success and instead emphasized the role that cultural assets or valuable approaches ultimately support student persistence and success. Rendon et al. (2015) introduce four types of cultural assets unique to Latinx students: determination (*ganas*), ethnic consciousness, spirituality, and pluriversal cultural wealth. With these and other forms of cultural wealth (e.g., familial and social assets) Rendon et al. (2015) propose a model where students must navigate multiple worlds (e.g., family, peers, work); with these cultural models and experiences in hand (or mind), they enter a new and unfamiliar college environment, which can result in cultural collision (i.e., *choque*) and potentially dislocating or disruptive experiences (see also Manoleas & Carrillo, 1991).

Finally, we highlight Núñez's (2014) application of intersectionality theory to the study of how power dynamics and interlocking systems of power shape the lives of Latino populations in terms of educational opportunity and equity. Núñez (2014) traces the concept of intersectionality back to its origins in Critical Race Feminist legal scholarship, which was used to address dimensions of Black women's life opportunities and the constraints imposed by "interlocking systems of patriarchy *and* racism" (p. 85). The theory was later advanced to unpack interconnected issues of "marginalized and privileged identities" (Collins, 1990, 2007, as cited in Núñez, 2014, p. 85). It is important to note that some observers critique the use of intersectionality theory in higher education, where scholars sometimes overly de-politicize and ignore a central tenet of the theory (Harris & Patton, 2019)—to identify and challenge oppressive structures of inequality. A robust and growing body of research uses intersectionality theory in higher education (e.g., Museus & Griffin, 2011), and applies intersectionality theory to HSIs. Núñez (2014) offers an approach that is relevant to our interests in internships at HSIs.

Taken together, these frameworks highlight how the experiences and outcomes of college students of color are shaped by a complex dynamic of forces that must account for individual-level experiences, identities, and agency, and how they interact with the institutional environment of a college or university. In some cases, these environments will support the unique experiences, identities, and values that students bring to college as a form of cultural congruence, while also offering opportunities for them to acquire new knowledge, develop new skills and social bonds, and celebrate their cultural identities. In the final section of this paper, we propose a new research agenda on internships for Latinx students at HSIs that builds on these ideas and suggests how cultural models theory offers a new lens for theorizing and studying these complex phenomena.

### **Towards a Cultural and Intersectional Analysis of College Internships at MSIs**

Our results indicate a small but growing body of empirical research on the ways that college internship programs may be shaped by individual-level racial identities and cultural backgrounds (i.e., for Latinx students) as well as institution-level programs, norms, missions, and personnel (i.e., at HSIs). In addition, scholars of both internships for Latinx students and at HSIs (e.g., Nelson & Jackson, 2003; Sansone et al., 2019) as well as those studying the forces influencing the success of students of color (Museus, 2014; Núñez, 2014), emphasize the need to situate students, institutions, and programs such as internships within the broader structures of opportunity and oppression that shape U.S. society. In most of these accounts, culture plays a central role in how students perceive their opportunities and self-worth, how colleges and universities enact their commitment to being Latinx-serving, and how both interact with the broader spheres of the labor market, political economy, and racialized social structures.

In considering next steps for the study of internships with Latinx students and at HSIs, we build on these prior efforts by incorporating advances in culture theory from sociology, anthropology, and organizational studies, which highlight how knowledge structures (i.e., schemata) of socially acceptable behaviors, norms, and worldviews form a key unit of cultural analysis. In the aggregate, these knowledge structures among social groups, such as a career services office or an intern host organization, can be evident in shared values as well as in policies and practices that reflect these norms (DiMaggio, 1997; Lizardo, 2017; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Critically, how this cultural knowledge is internalized and enacted at both individual and organizational levels is not “innocent” or objective, but instead is deeply shaped by racialized discourses of self-worth, value, dignity, and positionality (Núñez, 2014; Ray, 2019).

Before we outline a proposed agenda for the future study of internships at MSIs, we first review five theoretical premises that form the foundation of our approach.

#### **Premise 1: Effective Internship Design Cannot Follow a One-Size-Fits-All Approach**

Universal principles of effective internship design and implementation, such as the development of meaningful tasks for interns (Rogers et al., 2021) and effective supervision and mentoring (McHugh, 2017), may apply to all internship programs regardless of student racial identity or institutional status (i.e., as an MSI or not). However, critical differences and opportunities for internships in these institutions and for these students should be acknowledged and incorporated into HIP-related policymaking and practice. In other words, internship design should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach.

This is not to say that the duration, compensation, type of tasks, or supervision in an internship in the geosciences, nursing, or archeology should vary depending on the race and ethnicity of each intern. Internship programs will necessarily vary according to a wide range of factors, including discipline and major (especially when accreditation requirements are in play), the local and regional labor market, an institution’s relationships with employers, and area competition with other postsecondary institutions and their students for limited positions.

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Instead, we propose that some internship programs can and should target specific student demographics to engage them in fields where workforce diversity is a widely acknowledged problem (e.g., STEM fields), such as an HSI program designed to attract Latinx students to jobs in the geosciences (Fedynich et al., 2012). In addition, given established problems with hiring and workplace discrimination, employers and higher education leaders must consider ways to make an internship experience positive and professionally productive. The degree to which an institution (whether a college or an employer) is explicit and intentional in providing an experience that is “congruent” (Museus, 2014) with the racial identities and cultural backgrounds of their students and interns, should be a primary consideration in internships and WBL.

### **Premise 2: The Study of Culture as an Influential Factor in Internship Operations Needs More Methodological Rigor and Precision**

The concept of culture has a long and contested history in anthropology and sociology, beyond the purview of this paper. In light of the myriad theoretical interpretations of culture (e.g., structuralism, culture and personality, interpretivism) and debates, it is important to note that the common notion that a single “culture” can adequately characterize an entire nation or people (e.g., Japanese culture) has long been discredited. This shift arose not only as a rejection of a largely White, colonial and male “anthropological gaze,” where such claims were often made in large ethnographic tomes, but also with the recognition that phenomena commonly considered cultural (e.g., beliefs, rituals, language, kinship patterns, religious practice, dress) varied considerably across regional, ethnic, political, and socio-economic boundaries within these populations or national boundaries.

A similar caution against stereotyping or essentializing entire populations or organizations has been made throughout this paper with respect to HSIs and Latinx students, who may share certain characteristics with students of a similar ancestry, but whose unique upbringing, socialization and life experiences in a particular geography, social class, religious tradition, immigration status, and family situation may make them fundamentally dissimilar from other students with a similar heritage. Consequently, a person can hold multiple and even contradictory beliefs, values and identities from different social groups that they are members of (DiMaggio, 1997; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). In addition, the social categories that an individual inhabits (e.g., race, gender, age, immigration status) also shape, whether through externally imposed conditions and/or via self-imposed constraints, how people develop their identities and value systems, such that this internalization process is anything but “neutral” or acontextual.

A similar argument against over-simplification can also be made about organizations, where it is not useful to speak about the “culture” of an entire college or university, much less an entire category of institutions such as HSIs, which vary along many dimensions such as size, location, institutional mission, history, and composition of the student body. It is far more useful and accurate to speak of cultural phenomena operating within smaller sub-units of an organization, such as a department or even a work group; the types of norms, rituals, practices, and policies that are instituted and reified over time within these units may be considered a type of organizational sub-culture (Van Maanen & Barley, 1982). Some analysts even consider culture at

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these smaller organizational units to be individual-level cognitions in the form of beliefs, values, and practices in the aggregate, where they are called “cognitive schemas” (Ray, 2019) or “team mental models” (Langan-Fox et al., 2000).

We argue that this cognitivist perspective on culture, which Geertz so famously disparaged in favor of focusing on the symbolic forms of culture made public (1973), is especially well suited for the analysis of how culture, race, identity, and organizations interact in internships for Latinx students at HSIs.

### **Premise 3: Cultural Models Are Socially Distributed Cognitive Schemata for Acceptable Behaviors, Norms, and Worldviews That Operate at Individual, Organizational and Societal Levels**

Definitions of culture invariably include phenomena that are evident at the group level, such as shared beliefs, rituals, language, wardrobe, and so on. However, with the cognitive revolution of the 1960s, as insights into the nature of memory and the brain grew, social scientists began to consider how culture may be operating at the individual level, according to properties of human cognition (e.g., D’Andrade, 1995). Essentially, for some anthropologists (Shore, 1996), discourse analysts (Gee, 2004), and cultural sociologists (Lizardo, 2017), one of the most useful and appropriate units of analysis for cultural studies is the *cultural model* held by an individual, with “culture” itself best described as a “distributed network of models” instead of a “single, all-encompassing unit” (Sapir, 1917; Shore, 2000).

How does the theory of cultural models apply to our current question about internships for Latinx students at HSIs? Instead of thinking of culture as “Hispanic culture” or “HSI culture,” we can talk about how a Latinx student can have different cultural models that they internalized from their family history, social class, participation in community service, local geography, and so on. This approach is not inconsistent with the idea of community cultural wealth or funds of knowledge, which can encompass beliefs and values tied to family, peers, or work (e.g., Rendon et al., 2015). Once ensconced in the world of formal education, Latinx youth are then exposed to various messages, tasks, and beliefs in both K–12 schools and postsecondary institutions, some supportive and others derogatory and dismissive. Of course, culture may manifest in an HSI in many other ways. Besides aggregated cultural models among staff and faculty, which Ray (2019) calls group-level cognitive schemata in his theory of racialized organizations, it is useful to be as specific as possible and to name practices such as empathetic faculty–student interactions (Rendon et al., 1988), the presence of Spanish-speaking staff (Garcia et al., 2019), or community engagement opportunities (Garcia, 2017). The theory of cultural models enables a more precise and theoretically informed way to speak about the ideational forms of culture that avoids oversimplified and reductionist claims about the ways that values, beliefs, and norms function for people and organizations.

Another benefit of cultural models theory over more general approaches to cultural studies is that a rich body of methods accrued over the decades. These methods provide researchers with a variety of qualitative and quantitative tools for cultural analysis. Some techniques are designed to

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capture the content and structure of cultural domains, such as free-list analysis (e.g., Borgatti, 1999; Hora et al., 2020), pile-sorting, and other methods that capture cultural categorization schemes (e.g., Gravlee et al., 2017). Discourse analysts interested in cultural models also developed techniques to analyze subject utterances for evidence of different features of models, such as their material, semiotic, or activity features, as well as aspects of dialogue such as turn-taking, that reveal features of people's social worlds (Gee, 2004). Finally, the traditional method of participant observation and also more structured approaches to observational techniques can yield important information about the cultural life of an individual, group, or institution, and should be a part of the methodological toolkit for the cultural analyst (e.g., Agar, 1980).

### **Premise 4: The Content and Instantiation of Cultural Models Are Deeply Shaped by Racialized Discourses**

One of the key principles of cultural models theory is that as a person goes through childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, they internalize a dizzying array of norms, cues, and behaviors from their social world. The process of acquiring information about matters such as how a society views norms for marriage, or taxonomies for color (D'Andrade, 1995; Strauss & Quinn, 1997) is not solely shaped by properties of cognition alone, but is deeply shaped by the social, material, economic, and political situations in which the internalization process takes place (see Hutchins, 1995; Lave, 1977). However, when it comes to racial identity and considerations of systemic oppression, this point has not traditionally been emphasized in cognitive anthropology—issues that are at the heart of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1990; Núñez, 2014). We argue that the ways that racialized discourses (and oppressive structures) shape people's cultural models should also be part of the conversation. This is especially important for studies of Latinx students and HSIs, where racial identity and overcoming different, overlapping systemic forces are a central part of the literature and experience.

In addition, one of the key premises of our approach is the recognition that organizational life is not race-neutral (Ray, 2019), and that race and ethnicity influence college students' experiences in numerous ways. As previously mentioned, some models of student success or processes of student experiences with internships either overlook issues of student identity and the potential for these identities to clash (or be congruent with) organizational life (e.g., Narayanan et al, 2010), or adopt an assimilationist approach where students' pre-college lives should undergo a form of ritualistic suicide in favor of embracing the new college "culture" (Tinto, 1993). Instead, perspectives that account for the role of race and ethnicity in college student success should acknowledge issues such as the identities and cultural models that students bring to the institution (Museus, 2004), and then institutional practices such as supportive student–faculty interactions, explicit attention to affirming students' cultural identities, and most salient for our current investigation, the provision (or not) of opportunities for career development (Garcia, 2017; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

The implications of these foci on race and ethnicity for our first three premises are that internship design and the role of culture (and cultural models) in students' lives and

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organizational activities must reject a race-neutral and acontextual approach and instead explicitly account for the influence of both race and ethnicity.

### **Premise 5: Internships Can Represent the (In)Congruence of Cultural Models Among Three Distinct Parties—Student, Postsecondary Institution, and Employer—All Operating Within Broader Intersecting Spheres of Influence**

Our final premise is that in college internships, three distinct cultural models interact in contexts that are considered “normal”—the individual student, the college or university, and the employer who hosts the intern. There are considerable opportunities for what Museus (2014) calls cultural incongruence to occur, where the students’ identities and cultural knowledge are not affirmed, supported, or even acknowledged in new settings or situations (see also Rendon et al., 2015). This is because as new people enter an institution or a workplace, they bring with them their own cultural models and identities, which then align with (or not) the institution’s own norms, practices and so forth. A Latinx student entering an HSI may perceive a hostile environment and/or a lack of structured opportunities for them to pursue particular experiences (e.g., an internship), while in other cases their prior cultural models may be in concert with the institutions’ (and academic programs’) mission, policies, and practices, and structures may be available to open new doors for them to pursue.

The same process of congruence or incongruence takes place as the student participates in an internship, which can be a daunting introduction to a new professional world. Beyond the expected challenges that a college student may experience when entering a new workplace (with its own unique set of cultural expectations), additional considerations regarding hiring and workplace discrimination, as well as potential stereotypes around the quality of MSIs and their students, may come into play for students of color and/or those attending an MSI. We conclude that this complex interplay of cultural, organizational, and contextual forces is an integral and inescapable part of how Latinx students at HSIs engage (or not) in internships. Thus, some type of multi-dimensional model that explicitly accounts for these issues (e.g., Museus, 2014; Núñez, 2014) and/or close attention to the five premises outlined above, should guide future research on this important topic.

### **Conclusion**

Our primary goal in this paper was to conduct an integrative review of the literature on internships in HSIs and with Latinx college students to determine if internship design, implementation, and student experience vary based on the unique institutional contexts of HSIs and/or the racial identities and cultural backgrounds of Latinx college students. We conclude that the answer to this motivating question is “yes.”

Empirical research on internships at HSIs and/or with Latinx students represents a small but growing line of inquiry. Research on the unique features of HSIs as cultural institutions, and the unique experiences of Latinx students within the worlds of higher education and work, demonstrates that institutions and academic programs are not race-neutral. The next steps for the



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field of higher education and work-based learning are to operationalize these concepts and employ them in one of the several theoretical frameworks available for studying student success at MSIs. This research program becomes all the more urgent as our society increasingly faces the reality that the playing field of economic opportunities is unfair, and that college internships may serve to reproduce power, privilege, and inequality.

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