



American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, Inc.

**Latino Student Achievement:
A Collaborative Mission of Professional Associations of Higher Education**

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Abstract

Latino student achievement in higher education is a priority for the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE). To date, AAHHE has worked deliberately on this agenda, involving primarily Latina/o scholars, graduate students, and non-Latino allies. Annual conferences have provided for a sharing of research and examples of interventions promoting Latina/o student achievement. At some research universities, there may be biases discouraging faculty from engaging in community-based and K-12 empirical research because it may be categorized as service rather than research. The Boyer model for *scholarship of integration* is described as a methodology that can be applied to put discoveries in a larger context and create connections across disciplines to view the data in different ways. As a strategy to address the Latino educational achievement gap, recommendations are made for multi-professional collaborations among the Association of Public Land Grant Universities (APLU) and the American Association of Universities (AA&U) and AAHHE.

Latino Student Achievement:

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In the United States and around the world, education is seen as an enabler to a myriad of personal life outcomes. From improvements in earning power to decreases in poverty, to improved health because of access to health insurance and to enhanced contributions to the economic well-being of one's home country, education is a catalytic force. For Latinas/os in the U.S., educational attainment continues to lag behind that of other ethnic/racial groups.

Complicating the status quo are several variables: the current and increasing population of Latino-heritage children under 18, the drop-out rate of those under 18, the under-enrollment in higher education, and the educational attainment of individuals age 25 and over. Consider these facts:

- 13.3% of U.S. Hispanics have a bachelor's degree or more; 86.7% do not have a college degree. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a)
- Of the over 46 million persons of Latino heritage in the U.S., 15.7 million or 34.2% are younger than 18; by comparison, 21.4% of White non-Hispanics/non-Latinos are under 18. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a)
- Latino families are more concentrated geographically than Whites. It is reported that 78% of all Latinas/os live in the West and South (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009a) and in the following 20 states, Latinas/os represent the second largest ethnic/racial group: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009b)

- Demographic trends project that by 2020, Latinas/os will represent 17.8% of the U.S. population or 59, 756 million and by 2030, 73,055 million or 20.1% of the U.S. population. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004)

In this paper we posit that this demographic reality, the future of the United States, requires deliberate attention from many entities, including higher education associations. It is these associations that collaborate with federal and state bodies to advance the educational agenda for the country. As such collaboration among higher education professional associations, power brokers in their own right, is essential to address the Latina/o education achievement gap and plans to educational empowerment.

Higher Education Associations

Professional associations for higher education serve a multi-purpose role for colleges and universities throughout the United States. Through their mission and strategic plans, they represent and advocate for higher education priorities. The latter are often sensitive to the country's national agenda as with the need for STEM-related education and research and an increase in financial aid for students. With respect to these two stated priorities, most professional associations have offices in Washington, D.C., on-going affiliations with the federal government, and often provide testimony on Capitol Hill, and publish policy papers specific to a national priority for higher education. Among the more established associations are the following: American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), American Council on Education (ACE), Association of American Colleges and Universities (ACU), Association of American Universities (AAU), Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU formerly NASULGC), National Association for Equal Opportunities in

Higher Education, and National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. As may be evident in the name of the association, each has a particular constituency, primarily colleges and universities and senior administrators in the United States. Their scope of influence is broad and crosscutting, seemingly intended to address issues that are inclusive of their constituencies.

There are also higher education associations with a focus African Americans and Latinas/os. The National Association for Equal Opportunities in Higher Education (NAFEO) is the membership organization for the 120 Historically Black Colleges. The two associations representing Latina/o concerns and goals are the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE).

HACU was established in 1986 and currently has nearly 450 member institutions in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Latin American, Spain and Portugal (HACU, 2009). It is like many of the aforementioned higher education professional associations with its Office of Government Relations in Washington and other activity with federal agencies. However, HACU's focus is higher education success for institutions, professionals and students. It represents the Hispanic-Serving institutions (HSIs) and more recently has added a focus to student development, from pre-college to post-graduation career opportunities. HACU has also hosted international conferences, with objectives for collaboration among Latino nations.

In its vision and mission statement, AAHHE is described as “cross-disciplinary, higher education organization primarily focused on the need to develop Latino/a faculty and senior administrators as well as serving as a leading research and advocacy group for Hispanic higher education issues” (AAHE, 2009, p. 1). To this end, AAHHE, in partnership with the Educational

Testing Service (ETS), hosts annual dissertation competitions and Graduate Student, Graduate Fellows and Faculty Fellows programs.

Rationale for Multi-professional Collaborations

To provide a rationale and specific recommendations for multi-professional collaboration among professional associations for higher education with AAHHE, a review was made of several non-ethnic specific professional associations. Included in this review were the associations' websites with attention to mission and values statements, priorities, research reports, board of directors/trustees, executive leadership, theme of recent annual conference. For example, the American Council on Education (ACE) states: "ACE, the major coordinating body for all of the nation's higher education institutions seeks to provide leadership and a unifying voice on higher education issues and to influence public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives" (ACE, 2010, p. 1). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) issued a report *Top 10 Higher Education State Policy Issues for 2010* (AASCU, 2010). The issues cited are states' fiscal crises, tuition policies, President Obama's graduation initiative, veterans' education, college readiness, and so forth. Reference to Hispanic/Latino students is not made in any one of these Top 10 issues. In fact, none of the higher education associations have priorities inclusive of the Hispanic/Latino student access and achievement.

In this paper, attention is given primarily to two associations: AAU and APLU. The oldest group is the APLU formerly known as the National Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities. Its membership is inclusive of public research universities, land-grant institutions, and state university systems and "is dedicated to excellence in learning, discovery and engagement" (APLU, 2009, p. 1). Among APLU's current major initiatives are the voluntary

system of accountability (VSA), global competitiveness with a focus on the preparation of science and math teachers, internationalization of higher education, online learning, Science and Mathematics Teacher Imperative, Energy and reauthorization of the Farm Bill, reflective of APLU's historic mission representing land-grant institutions, CREATE-21, and other issues. For example, in May 2008, Peter McPherson, President of APLU provided testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Africa and global health. APLU currently includes a priority for an Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative. APLU has a Commission on Access, Diversity and Excellence addressing very broad institutional issues; there is no reference to the potential enrollment of Latina/o students in public and land-grant universities.

AAU membership is limited to public and private universities based on the excellence of its research and education programs (AAU, 2009). Of the 62 AAU member institutions, 12 are in states with a majority-minority population demographic specific to persons of Latino heritage. AAU's mission does not have a priority for ethnic minority students. Recently, AAU made policy recommendations to Obama Administration (AAU, 2008). One recommendation focused on the STEM education initiative to prepare the American workforce to work in science and technology fields. Although AAU provides a recommendation to implement and support the K-16 STEM education programs, it does not address the low number of Latino students in STEM programs. Another AAU recommendation is to expand access to higher education by reducing financial barriers to higher education (e.g., increase student aid programs). A third recommendation, a goal that is similar to that of APLU and other higher education associations, focuses on international education and the internationalization or globalization of U.S. higher education. In fact, recommendations from AAU included appointing a new assistant secretary for international education to oversee international education programs with attention to exchanges

of both students and scholars. There is no mention of domestic diversity, more specifically the achievement gap of students of African and Latina/o heritage.

The Opportunity

The specific review of AAU and APLU illuminates an opportunity for both well-established associations to address the Latina/o higher education situation in collaboration with AAHHE. It is important to recognize the growing gap in the direction that AAU member universities have taken. They must develop strategies that will fill the gap since the need for AAU universities to engage in meeting the educational needs of Latinas/os is dire, particularly if AAU universities want to train future researchers and professionals in the STEM areas. To not focus on a growing Latino student population will have implications on immigration policies, U.S. businesses, the economy, and the type of contribution Latinas/os can make to their country.

In order for well-established associations such as AAU and APLU to work in collaboration as leaders in Latino higher education initiatives, there must be change in the current paradigm of how Latino student outreach is currently in place. For instance, most universities value diversity and often have in their strategic plan to increase the diversity at their respective universities. One manner in which their objective is often fulfilled is by establishing an office whose primary mission is to focus on the recruitment of racially diverse students. Activities in this office may include attending college day fairs at high schools with a high amount of underrepresented or low-income students. However, this type of approach, whether or not it is effective remains to be seen, does little to address the pool of Latino high school students who are dropping out of high school and who do not attend these types of functions since they do not see themselves as having the ability to attend college. A recent brief on Latinos and higher education conducted by *Excelencia* supports this contention (Santiago, 2009). A focus group of

20 Latino leaders that were state legislators, higher education leaders, faculty members, school board members, and community leaders expressed that colleges and universities were more focused on enrolling students from underrepresented groups and that Latino students did not receive sufficient guidance and support in their transition from high school to college and that this contributed to higher dropout rates for Latinos.

What is remiss in this type of strategy of Latino student outreach is that this focuses on Latino students who have survived high school and are more than likely going to some type of postsecondary institution. What are missing are institutional initiatives that address the Latino educational gap at the K-12 level. However, neither higher education associations nor universities have typically taken the lead when it comes to systemic changes in addressing Latino achievement gaps (Collins, Weinbaum, Ramon, & Vaughn, 2009).

Instead, Collins et al. (2009) suggests that it is nonprofit organizations that have taken the lead in facilitating partnerships between 2- and 4-year institutions, school districts, and community organizations that then work together to address achievement gaps for students of color. However, numerous scholars and U.S. corporations call for higher education institutions to take the lead and become more engaged with K-12 in order to bring the kinds of systemic changes needed to address achievement gaps (Bodilly, Chun, Ikemoto, & Stockly, 2004). However, as noted by Nuñez and Oliva (2009), the traditional roles of universities often create a university culture and reward system that emphasizes pure knowledge and deemphasizes applied research. Furthermore, service is perceived and implemented from a top-down approach where constituencies are seen as passive recipients of expert knowledge (Collins et al., 2009; Texas A&M University Educational Roadmap Committee, 2009). Although service can be beneficial to

its recipients, a more engaged approach where institutions work *with* communities is needed to address the Latino education gap.

The shift in universities way of thinking about how to address the Latino education gap must be through a proactive pursuit of scholarly engagement. Using Boyer's (1990, 1996) model, we propose that higher education associations and their members can fulfill their mission of research, teaching, and service while at the same time addressing the Latino educational achievement gap by following Boyer's (1990, 1996) model. Boyer identified four separate but overlapping types of scholarships.

The *scholarship of discovery*, or research, is the heart of most academic life particularly with AAU member intuitions. The second tenant of Boyer's model is *scholarship of integration*, which underscores the need for scholars to give meaning to their research by placing their discoveries in a larger context and create connections across disciplines to view the data in different ways. Boyer distinguishes discovery from integration by stating that those engaged in discovery ask, "What is to be known, what is yet to be found?" (Boyer, 1990, p. 19) whereas those engaged in integration ask, "What do the findings means?" (Boyer, 1990, p. 19).

Boyer (1990) suggests that the *scholarship of teaching*, the third component of his model, is often viewed as a routine function that is tacked on to a faculty/scholars work. However, Boyer contends that teaching as a scholarly enterprise both educates and entices future scholars. Scholarship of teaching involves professors who expert in their fields who not only transmit knowledge but also transform and extend it as well.

The fourth element in Boyer's (1990, 1996) model is the scholarship of application. Boyer proposes that it is the scholarship of application where scholars begin to move towards engagement as they move towards reflecting on their discovery is useful and applied to practice.

However, Boyer (1996) argues that institutions of higher education have an obligation to become engaged in societal issues “just as land-grant colleges helped farmers and technicians a century ago” (p. 147). Thus, it is not enough to have research that can be applied in practice but that is also relevant and applicable to our countries societal needs. This is what Boyer (1996) refers to as the scholarship of engagement.

Scholarly engagement connects the four dimensions of scholarship (discovery, integration, teaching, application) to the understanding of pressing social problems, such as Latino education disparities. The scholarship of engagement goes beyond a development of a program to address Latino education gaps. Instead it means creating a climate in which academic and civic groups communicate and work together. We propose that professional associations for higher education such as AAU and APLU can provide leadership in creating this climate and a cultural norm in their member institutions to work with civic organizations on a local, state, and federal level to address the Latino education gap.

Micro-level Example of Scholarly Engagement

The Bryan ISD GEAR UP project provides an example of how scholarly engagement is applied to meet needs of the Latino education gap on a local level. Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) is a federally funded discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The Bryan ISD GEAR UP serves a school district of predominately Latino students and is designed as a 6-year, school-based intervention consisting of mentoring, tutoring, and academic and career counseling to facilitate graduation and preparation for postsecondary education. As required by the funding agency, the Bryan ISD GEAR UP provides services to a cohort of 7th grade students and follows this same cohort of

students for six years. Further requirements include that partnerships be developed between universities, businesses, and community organizations in order to develop specific programs to meet the needs of cohort students and their parents. The Bryan ISD GEAR UP project allows stakeholders to build programs tailored to the local community needs.

Although in academic realms, GEAR UP is constituted as a “service” grant, using a framework that focuses on scholarly engagement transforms this project whereby service, research, and teaching work synchronously to address a local need.

Service

In the state of Texas, (Texas Education Code Sec. 28.0212), each school district is encouraged to establish for each student entering their freshman year of high school, a personal graduation plan that promotes college and workforce readiness as well as career placement and advancement. As a service to Bryan ISD, the GEAR UP project provided trained staff to assist the schools in providing a career inventory to over 1,000 8th grade students. Using the Bridges career exploration software program, students were able to discover their career interest, research career choices on line, explore information about education, salaries, and work opportunities in their career of interest. In addition, GEAR UP staff along side with school district personnel worked together to meet with each student individually and helped students create a personal four-year high school plan with their career interests in mind.

The impact of this type of one-on-one service was noted in a comment made by teacher at one of the schools who stated,

"a group of teachers that work with the special education department said that the kids were talking about how much they enjoyed meeting with us. They never realized the opportunities that were at the high schools and they are excited about coming to high

school!!!! They said no one had ever taken the time to visit with them about their choices. Also, they said that some of the higher kids (who did not have the parental support as others) did not realize to take advanced classes and now were excited about being able to take some of these classes. So it's working!!!! We may not get to all of the kiddos as quickly as we would like but we sure are making an impact on some of the students!!!!”

Teaching

One component of the Bryan ISD GEAR UP involves removing psychological barriers that may inhibit adolescents in their success in school. One way this is done is by providing psychoeducational group counseling sessions called Lunch Bunch. Lunch Bunch groups teach and improve on communication skills, goal-setting development, and social skills topics that are meant to help students succeed in school and increase their interest and potential in attending college. The group meets once a week for six weeks during the semester. Doctoral counseling psychology students facilitate the Lunch Bunch groups. This type of service learning activity provides the opportunity for doctoral students to apply didactic knowledge on counseling theory, group theory, multicultural theory, and adolescent development to practice in a real-world setting. In addition, doctoral students are provided weekly supervision to assist in developing interventions, educational materials for group work, as well as process their experiences with the group members. At the same time, it provides a service to the middle school students, predominately Latino and African American, who would benefit from counseling and guidance in a non-threatening format.

Research

As service is tied in with teach, so too is the research that is conducted. Research in the GEAR UP project centers around understanding the factors that are associated with middle

school students' career decision self efficacy. For example, one study that was conducted examined the role of culture and personality on the career decision self-efficacy of 345 Latino seventh-grade public middle school students (Ojeda, Watson, Castillo, Khan, Castillo, & Leigh, under review). The findings of the study suggest that predictors of career decision self-efficacy for Latino boys differed for Latino girls. That is, for Latinas, having a bicultural orientation and being a conscientious person was associated with a better sense of career decision self-efficacy. For Latino boys, being conscientious and having a strong identity to Latino culture were the only predictors. As noted by Ojeda et al., the study's findings imply that career development interventions need to take into account gender difference. Interventions with Latino boys should take into account Latino cultural norms and who that may influence how they think about the world of work. On the other hand, interventions for Latinas would also include U.S. cultural norms in addition to Latino norms. Finally, for both Latino boys and girls providing interventions that develop persistent, responsibility, and goal setting skills (i.e., conscientious personality characteristics) are important in order to facilitate career decision self efficacy.

Call to Action

Recognition of the need for public universities to be engaged in the needs and changes in society was recognized by APLU President Peter McPherson in his 2007 speech on engagement (McPherson, 2007). Since then universities, have moved forward assessing their level of engagement (e.g., Texas A&M University, Pennsylvania State University, Iowa State University). However, we call to institutions to specifically focus on scholarly engagement in addressing the Latino educational gap. The Kellogg Commission's (1999) report on the engaged institution provides a seven-part test by which higher education associations can gauge to the extent they and their institutional membership are engaged in addressing the Latino education

gap. What follows is a summary of the seven-part test as applied to Latino educational engagement.

1. Responsiveness – Institutions need to ask themselves if and how they are listening to the Latino community they serve. Are resources in regards to time and space provided for preliminary community-university discussion on the Latino education gap problems that are in their community. Do they really understand that in reaching out they are receiving valuable information in how to respond to the Latino community educational needs.
2. Respect for partners – The purpose of engagement differs from the traditional service role that many institutions play. It is a collaboration of university-community defining the problems that contribute to the Latino educational gap, the solutions, and definitions of success. Institutions need to reflect on whether they recognize that they have much to learn in addressing the Latino education gap in their community and they can learn from their community partners.
3. Academic neutrality – Some Latino educational engagement activities will involve contentious issues such as education of undocumented students. Issues such as these can have profound social and political consequences. Thus, institutions need to ask themselves whether outreach maintains the university in the role of a neutral facilitator and source of information contentious Latino educational policy issues are at stake.
4. Accessibility – How accessible (physically and mentally) is your institution to potential community partners. Institutions need to find ways to help potential community partners who are unfamiliar with university structures. Has there been a concerted effort to increase the awareness of the Latino community, as well as schools working with

Latino students, to the resources and programs available from your institution that may be useful.

5. Integration – Institutions need to find a way to integrate their teaching, research/scholarly work, service missions. Scholarly engagement provides a means by which to integrate the varying missions. However, institutions need to ask themselves whether the institutional climate fosters such scholarly engagement. Scholarly engagement should be a part of the institution's core mission.

6. Coordination – The task of coordinating engagement activities is necessary in order for institutions to have a significant impact on the Latino educational gap problem. This can oftentimes be seen when faculty members within their own college silos tackle a community social issue but are unaware of activities that are already being done.

7. Resource Partnerships – Successful scholarly engagement occurs when there are sufficient resources committed. Institutions should ask themselves if there are sufficient resources in time and effort of staff, faculty, and students. Is there strong leadership in the institution that has dedicated time to establish scholarly engagement activities and partnerships with government, businesses, schools, and non-profit organizations in order to work together to address Latino education gap.

Discussion and Recommendations

Our analysis has been motivated by the crisis in the achievement gap of Latina/o students matriculating and graduating with higher education degrees in the U.S. Our premise is that professional associations of higher education such as APLU and AAU, two of the most representative institutions of colleges and universities, are the best positioned to collaborate with AAHHE to plan for Latina/o student success. Further, because APLU membership institutions

are large and public, they are likely to be a destination for students of a given state. Additionally, the 63 AAU universities are in States with high percentage of Latina/o residents and youth under 18 in particular (AAU, 2009). For example, California with an increasing majority-minority population has 8 AAU institutions; yet, there is a paucity of Latina/o students enrolled currently. The opportunity exists for the AAU universities in Texas and Georgia as well.

Models for faculty research and community engagement were also discussed with an eye to promoting alternative strategies for faculty scholarship that develops new knowledge about Latino communities. Strategies from the GEAR UP program and the Boyer model were reported. As such, these examples show that it is possible for faculty in AAU and APLU institutions to develop research agendas of personal interest and scholarly relevance.

There are certain givens. Latina/o student numbers will continue to increase. There will be more Latinas/os age eligible for higher education enrollment in the foreseeable future and their academic and college readiness is of great concern. Thus, professional higher education institutions cannot overlook this crisis. The time for proactive leadership is now. A few recommendations follow:

- 1) The first priority is for AAHHE to establish an agenda with both APLU and AAU to address Latina/o student achievement with short and long-term strategies. The STEM and teaching areas, both highly needed in the current and foreseeable future, are two foci areas of importance nationally and globally.
- 2) As a result of AAHHE's focus on Latina/o education, valuable reports and position papers have resulted, some are empirical. These papers need to be made readily available to both APLU and AAU for wider dissemination.

- 3) AAHHE can create a clearinghouse of research reports from GEAR UP and other national programs that promote Latina/o student achievement as a strategy to give away knowledge and models for collaborations in scholarship.
- 4) A mini-summit should be hosted by AAHHE senior leadership with APLU and AAU leaders to plan for the future and that the summit take place mid-year, prior to the AAHHE annual conference.

There are no silver bullets to improve Latina/o student achievement. It is sometimes easier to become exasperated and overwhelmed by the crisis situation. However, to not address the crisis will have a devastating effect on the intellectual prowess of the U.S.

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