A primer on Hispanic Serving Institutions, what they are, who they serve and the related federal grant program.

In the early 1980s, a series of congressional hearings on Latino access to higher education focused on two themes: Latino students lacked access to higher education and many who began degree programs did not complete them, and Latinos were concentrated at institutions of higher education that received limited financial support from the federal or state governments.

After continued advocacy and increased awareness regarding the exponential growth in the Latino population (246% increase between 1980 and 2010)[i], a new designation of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) was created in 1992. Recognizing the importance of serving the country’s rapidly growing Hispanic community, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) were created to expand the educational opportunities of Hispanic students while improving their measures of academic attainment.

The first HSI appropriations were distributed in 1995 and in 1998 HSIs were moved from Title III of the Higher Education Act to their own Title, Title V. Title V has two parts; Part A, which contains the HSI program and Part B, which assists in expanding post-baccalaureate educational opportunities for Hispanic students.

Below is a timeline of the evolution of Hispanic Serving Institution designations and grants.
HSI Grants

To become a designated HSI, an institution’s undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment must be at least 25% Hispanic (defined as an individual of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin). The institution must also be accredited, degree-granting and a public or private nonprofit college or university. While some MSIs – Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Colleges and Universities – were explicitly created to serve particular populations, most HSIs were not. Most institutions become HSIs as a result of enrollment shifts over time.[ii]

HSI funds are not distributed by formula as they are for other MSIs. Institutions must compete for HSI funds and, if awarded, may use the money in ways similar to those allowed by other Title III institutions (including using 20% of funds to establish or grow an endowment). HSIs are also allowed to fund the following additional activities:

• Establishing or enhancing student support programs to facilitate the transfer of students from two-year to four-year institutions;

• Establishing or enhancing teacher education programs designed to qualify students to teach in public elementary and secondary schools;

• Establishing community outreach programs that encourage elementary and secondary school students to pursue postsecondary education; and
• Expanding the number of Hispanic and other underrepresented graduate and professional students that can be served by an institution through expanding institutional resources and courses offered.

Before applying for Title V funds, institutions must first apply for an HSI designation. If approved, the institution enters a competitive process for five years of funding during which it becomes ineligible to also receive Title III funds. [iii] This is relevant because enrollment shifts allow several HSIs to qualify for multiple MSI designations (e.g., an institution may qualify to be an HSI and an HBCU or TCU). [iv]

The 2015 appropriation for HSIs was $100,231,000. A total of 109 continuing grants and 96 new grants were awarded.

Types of Institutions

Of the 472 HSIs in 2015-2016, 49.6% were two-year institutions (compared to 38.9% of all undergraduates). All sectors are represented in the HSI program (see below graphic) but the most common HSIs are relatively small, two-year, public institutions that serve fewer than 2,000 Hispanic students.
Hispanic-Serving Institutions [HSIs]

Growth in HSIs by Sector

The largest and fastest growth in HSIs by sector has been 2-year public institutions.

- The number of 2-year public HSIs increased more than other sectors, with a growth of 99 institutions (109%).

- In the past three years, HSIs that were 4-year private not-for-profit increased at a faster rate (26%) than 4-year public institutions (16%).

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While HBCUs represent 3% of all institutions of higher education in the United States, HSIs represent 14%. Mostly concentrated in urban areas in five states (California, Texas, New Mexico, Florida and New York) and Puerto Rico, HSIs exist in 20 states overall.

Click here for a complete list of HSIs and their locations.

**Emerging HSIs**

Though emerging HSIs are not federally designated, many scholars take them into consideration when discussing HSIs. Emerging HSIs have 15-24% Hispanic enrollment and are likely to become HSIs within the next few years. In 2016, there were 323 emerging HSIs located in 36 states. Hispanic higher education advocates use this term to identify institutions whose enrollment is shifting rapidly, help those institutions better serve their Latino students and, when enrollment hits 25%, encourage those institutions to apply for the HSI designation.

Click here for a complete list of Emerging HSIs and their locations.

**Enrollment Patterns and Demographics**

In 2015-2016, nearly 64% of Latino college students attended a Hispanic Serving Institution, and HSIs were responsible for graduating 40% of all Latino graduates in the U.S. The majority of students who attend HSIs are enrolled part time.

Students at HSIs are a very diverse group. Over half of HSI students in 2012-2013 were women (56%); 59% were Latino, 28% were Asian, 16% were African-American, 14% were American Indian and 10% were white, non-Hispanic. In terms of socio-economic status, 48% of HSI students received a Pell Grant, indicating the high degree of financial need experienced at HSI campuses.

**Successes and Challenges of HSIs**

HSIs tend to have retention rates slightly higher than the national Latino retention rates for all institutions of higher education (67% vs 66%). Despite their strong retention rates, six-year graduation rates at HSIs are only 29%, well below the national average of 57%. Similar to other MSIs, the significant populations of low-income students HSIs enroll and a reliance on remedial education may affect retention and graduation rates. Across the country, at predominantly white institutions as well as MSIs, income correlates with retention and graduation—low-income students are less likely to persist year to year and less likely to graduate. Additionally, students enrolled in remedial education face significant barriers to graduation. The challenges these students face often begin in the K-12 system and continue in a higher education system that struggles to meet their needs financially and academically.

Similar to HBCUs, HSIs tend to excel and make a serious impact in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math achievement. MSIs have often been among the top 20 academic institutions that award science and engineering degrees to racial minority graduates. HSIs comprise 10 of these institutions.
Given the sheer number of Latino students HSIs enroll (nearly 1.25 million), they play an important part in granting postsecondary access to Hispanic students. Census data shows that Hispanic enrollment in higher education rose by over 300,000 between 2011 and 2012, a period of low enrollment for other populations. Hispanic students now make up 25% of all public school students and enrollment rates continue to climb.

Figure 1
College Enrollment Rates among 18- to 24-Year-Old High School Completers, by Race and Ethnicity

Notes: "White" includes only non-Hispanic whites. Starting in 2003, respondents could identify more than one race. The figures for 2003 onward refer to the white-, black- and Asian-alone populations. The data shown prior to 2003 consists of those identifying themselves as "Asian or Pacific Islanders."

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the CPS Historical School Enrollment Time Series Table A-5a (http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/historical/index.html)

However, while Hispanic high school dropout rates continue to fall, Latinos still earn far fewer degrees than other populations (15%, compared to 63% of Asians, 22% of blacks and 41% of
whites). They are also less likely than white students to enroll in a four-year college, attend a selective college and enroll full time.

Clearly, the higher education marketplace must become better equipped to serve Latino students. Along these lines, there has been discussion in the literature of the importance of HSIs using funding to prepare for the future—and prepare to truly become Hispanic Serving, not just Hispanic enrolling, Institutions.

Reflections on Reform

There is a clear need for further research and analysis on HSIs, their work, their impact and their students. Given that HSIs are a relatively new construct there is not yet a full body of research or literature on this topic. For instance, we know little of the experience of Latino students at HSIs and what, if any, initiatives HSIs are implementing that help serve this group of students. More documentation would also be welcome regarding the experiences of the significant percentage of Latino faculty members at HSIs (about 21% of faculty members at HSIs identify as Latino).

What we do know is that the Latino population and the number of Latino college-bound students will, in all likelihood, continue to grow. Surely, HSIs will play a critical role in enhancing the educational achievement of Latinos. To further increase the effectiveness of HSIs, advocates have argued for the following considerations with regard to federal policymaking:

- Establish a definition of HSIs at the federal level;
- Develop and maintain an official list of HSI institutions at the federal level;
- Create appropriate metrics to determine the impact and success that HSIs are having given the students that they serve and the challenges inherent with serving those students; and
- Recognize the need for technical assistance to help HSIs serve their Latino students appropriately and effectively.

[j] Minority-Serving Institutions: Serving All Students

[iii] There are a few exceptions. Some institutions were established “with the express purpose of responding to the educational needs of Hispanic/Latino students. These institutions include Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College and Boricua College (both located in New York), St. Augustine (Illinois) which offers bilingual higher education, and National Hispanic University located in California (Hurtado, 2003; Laden, 2004). Colleges and universities in Puerto Rico (56 nonprofit HSIs) were created with the express purpose of educating residents of the island, the majority of whom are Hispanic (Santiago, 2006), indicating distinct historical, political, and cultural foci than mainland institutions.” From: “Realizing the Potential of Hispanic-Serving
Institutions: Multiple Dimensions of Institutional Diversity for Advancing Hispanic Higher Education

[iii] Congressional Record Service: Minority Serving Institutions in the Higher Education Act

[iv] For example, St. Philip’s College in San Antonio Texas meets HBCU and HSI definitions (student population is 20% African American and 50% Latino). D-Q University in Davis, California meets the definition both of a TCU and an HSI (student population is one third Latino and one third American Indian).

[v] Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): Serving Latino Students

[vi] Minority-Serving Institutions: Serving All Students

[vii] Minority-Serving Institutions: Serving All Students

[viii] Among recent high school grads, Hispanic college enrollment rate surpasses that of whites

Updated July 2017