

THE RISE OF HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD

Hispanic-Serving Institutions make up 17% of all U.S. public and nonprofit colleges—yet they enroll 67% of all Hispanic and Latino undergraduates.

That data, published in April, underscores the huge responsibility facing the country’s more than 500 Hispanic-Serving Institutions, so designated because at least a quarter of their students are Hispanic. More colleges will soon join their ranks, as enrollment of Hispanic and Latino students in higher education is expected to exceed 4.4 million students by 2025. Already, more than 300 colleges are classified as “emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions.”

As institutions seek and ultimately gain HSI status, their leaders must fully embrace the responsibility of being Hispanic-serving—not merely Hispanic-dwelling—institutions. Education is the catalyst for change and economic mobility in this country, and colleges must lead the fight to ensure that all students receive a quality education and are provided with an infrastructure from which to propel their lives, and ultimately the lives of their families.

As American civil rights activist Cesar Chavez said, “Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.” Hispanic-Serving Institutions have the power to unlock that social change. To do so, they need strategic commitment to student success, economic equity and mobility, and inclusive excellence.

Stop and Jot your thoughts on the reading so far:



The History of Hispanic-Serving Institutions

The story of HSIs is one of opportunity, triumph and the American dream. The national embrace of these institutions represents a societal change 30-plus years in the making—a shift that should not be taken for granted.

According to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, a person who identifies as Hispanic or Latino is someone of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish-culture heritage, regardless of race. That definition developed over time. Around the time President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed the week beginning September 15, 1968, as National Hispanic Heritage Week, a revolution was underway within the U.S. Census Bureau as to how Hispanics should be accounted for within the U.S.

According to the Population Reference Bureau, prior to the 1970 census, Hispanics were not counted as a single group. In fact, the question on Hispanic origin was added to the survey in spring 1969, late in the planning process. The inaugural Hispanic census question resulted in a total of 9.6 million Hispanics recorded as living in the U.S. as of 1970, according to Pew Research Center. Ten years later in 1980, the Hispanic population was tallied at 14.5 million.

Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions were not created to exclusively educate students of Hispanic or Latino origin. Instead, HSIs first began as a grassroots movement in the 1980s due to the shifts in demography and the increase in Hispanic enrollment in higher education, according to research published by the American Council on Education.

However, it is important to note that at this time, “Hispanic-Serving Institution” was an institutional term that had not breached mainstream. That is, until the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities was founded in 1986 thanks to efforts out of Our Lady of the Lake University. In 1992, the organization led the effort asking Congress to officially recognize campuses with significant Hispanic enrollment as federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institutions and to begin targeting federal appropriations to those campuses. In 1995, HSIs were granted \$12 million from the federal government to champion Hispanic success in higher education. Most recently, HSIs were appropriated more than \$140 million in 2020.

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Looking to the Future

Since 1970, the recorded U.S. Hispanic population has grown to 60.6 million—an increase of more than six times. Hispanic people now make up 18.5% of the entire U.S. population. Along with that growth has come the continued expansion of HSIs, of which community colleges account for the largest share, with 41%. It's also led to the growth of what are now known as emerging HSIs: colleges that do not yet have the critical mass of Hispanic and Latino student enrollment required but that may soon meet the criteria as their enrollment grows and Latino representation increases.



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