

Serving a Rich and Diverse Student Population

Latino American Students

Addressing the Unique Needs of Latino American Students is a multi-author view of the individual, and varied, heritage and hurdles that the rich Hispanic American population currently needs to reconcile in order to successfully navigate Higher Education in the United States. Each of the eight chapters are individually, and collectively, valuable. Despite growing up in a multi-ethnic Hispanic environment, I gained new insight into the multifaceted and sometimes unharmonious lives of our students of Spanish origin. The text title refers to the ‘unique’ needs of the Latino American student, but the content of the book reaffirmed my perspective that Latinos actually encounter treatment similar to Asian American, Black American and Middle Eastern American students, all of whom are disserved by blanket labels that devalue the unique ethnic distinctiveness of their sub-cultures and their own personal individuality. The text is an invaluable resource for Student Affairs practitioners across the nation, for multiple reasons.

Chapter 1 is a detailed summary of the multicultural heritage and immigration patterns of Latino students in the United States. These students have emigrated from their homelands due to economic hardship, political turmoil and/or to pursue opportunities not available to them in the country they are leaving. Student Affairs personnel need to be aware that all Latino students do not share the same history, have the same cultural identity, enjoy similar opportunities or suffer the same prejudices. Landis (2005) concurs in his monograph on Retention by Design that minorities do not always identify with, or share, the same cultural constraints and supports, consequently student services need to address and celebrate student differences, as well as similarities. Understanding the broad diversity of this group serves as an important reminder that educators need to recognize the unique perspectives and experiences of each individual student

and to help each student understand that they can build on their past, to negotiate the present, and to plan for their future.

Chapter 2 – During the last decade, Latinas have emerged as the new Latino majority in higher education. The chapter clearly outlines the constraints Latinas face in trying to reconcile personal identity, cultural expectations, and educational opportunities. Given current and projected higher education demographics, Student Affairs professionals need to conduct much more research on Latina's experiences in higher education, to better serve these pioneers. More immediately, colleges and universities need to develop programs that welcome these student's families on campus, multiple times a year, to provide ongoing reassurance that these young women can indeed take care of themselves, and succeed within the infrastructure of the university. Recruiting activities should be held regionally in the homes of current Latina students, so that the extended families of potential students can see that other Latina parents understand the value of a college education and that college is a wonderful reason to allow their daughters to leave home prior to marriage. Hernandez (2000) reports that the student passion of I want to do it, I can do it, gives many students the courage to pursue college despite family tradition and expectation.

Ch 3 – In general, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) began as Predominately White Institutions that evolved to serving a student population with at least one quarter of their students being of Hispanic origin. These institutions are successful in educating both the target, and greater campus population, due in part to special funding for programs that serve the whole student body, not just Latinos. Student Affairs staff can learn about designing programs that support students across cultural lines by studying learning models employed at HSIs. Additionally, all educators in the United States need to be aware of the impact of 'familismo' on

our Hispanic students. These students are not independent operators, as family responsibility trumps individualism, and all aspects of academia need to respect this core value. Lonerbeam, et al. (2004) concur that campus environments that incorporate, support and revere the Latino culture, increase the likelihood of success for this population.

Chapter 4 – Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory provide mechanisms to review current policies, practices and programs that may have inherent bias for the white majority. WOW. All institutions need tools that assist in systematic evaluation of the status quo. Student Affairs professionals need to constantly review, reflect and redesign the way we do business and need to use tools that allow for outside evaluation to help us see through another's eyes. James Genilucci (2004) states that “what you see depends on where you stand” (p. 133) reminding educators that every issue has multiple perspectives and that schools have little chance at succeeding if we cannot adopt and understand the perspectives of our varied clients.

Chapter 5 – Latino's futures may be inadvertently determined at the community college level by being directed to vocational, rather than, gateway courses. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reported on multiple studies that concur with the text's review of the role played by community college in the lives and educational journey of Latinos. In my role as the transfer student coordinator, the most valuable thing I learned from this chapter is that I need to develop a Transfer Year Experience program. Latinos are the fastest growing and least-well-educated major sub-group in the United States, any and all efforts to recruit and retain Latinos in higher education is worth the effort, time and resources required.

Chapter 6 – The intersections of cultural and career identity need to be addressed to help Latino students successfully transition from college to career. Billett (2005) found that as early as high school, work-study experiences eased the student's transition at graduation from

academics to successful real world work practices. Just learning about work environments in general helped students make better informed decisions about future career choices. Dale (1996) agrees that the affective domain, including issues of belonging, positive feelings about their career goals and knowing that someone on campus cared about them specifically, boosted retention rates and success beyond college. The text reported that experiential learning through internships and part-time major-related work helped graduates use their education to better their home communities and validated the power of higher education. Career counselors need to help Latinos obtain major related internships and summer employment back in the student's home community. Opportunities that help a student's extended family embrace and understand the value of college *within* their own community has positive ramifications about higher education and can provide economic incentives that benefit the student and their family.

Chapter 7 – In their own words, four students shared the importance of how support programs complimented their collegiate experience. Dungy (1996) agrees that educators need to focus on individual learners and that programs need to be developed to make connections between the classroom, the student's home community and a potential career that ideally will bridge the gulf between those often disparate worlds. A campus Latino presence needs to be *felt* by the extended families of Latino students. Bilingual materials are needed to help students explain the power of college to their families. More people of color need to be hired into faculty and administrative positions, student leadership training needs to be designed to attract students from all ethnicities, courses applauding the accomplishments of Latino contributions to society need to be included in the mainstream offerings of all majors, and Latinos need to be encouraged to pursue careers in higher education instruction and administration so that future generations of this incredible population have mentors and role models with whom they can identify.

Chapter 8 – The text editor, Anna Ortiz weaves the different threads of each chapter into a cohesive call to action. This invitation to serve the growing, yet educationally underserved Latino population, reminded me of the enormous potential and untapped resource pool provided to society by the Latino population. The white majority in the United States has much to learn from the family centered Latino culture. Policies, procedures, programs and people need to change to meet the needs of the constantly changing collegiate population. Segura (2002) suggests that the number of challenges encountered by Latinos in higher education can be mitigated by empowering Latino families with information on the community benefit of that education but that changes need to be made in grade school as well as in college. This text and supplemental readings have changed my perspective on how some student services are delivered on my campus and reminded me that educators have as much, or more, to learn than our students.

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