

Do the Math

Increasing Latinos' success in college not only benefits lives, but can also be an economic boon for the entire nation.

BY JULIE DAVIS BELL, BRENDA BAUTSCH AND MICHELLE LIU

By far the biggest story from the recent 2010 Census is the significant and fast-paced growth of the Latino population. The U.S. population increases by four people each minute, with two of the four being Latino.

States have a lot of work to do to deal with this growth and prepare for this new generation of Americans. Right now, Latinos lag significantly behind Anglo students on every indicator of educational achievement—a trend that if allowed to continue will hamper state economic development for the next decade and beyond.

By 2020, about one in four college-age adults will be Latino. Many will be first generation college students who may need special assistance to be successful. Young Latinos often don't consider higher education a real possibility for themselves and don't know that they may qualify for financial aid. Family and work obligations often prevent them from enrolling in or finishing college.

Former Texas state demographer Steve Murdoch puts it best: "The future of America is tied to the minority population. How well they do is how well America will do." Murdoch, now a professor at Rice University, says his experience in Texas prepared him well for understanding the changing American demographics. "The Texas of today is the U.S. of tomorrow. If you think Hispanic growth is a Texas, California or Florida issue, you're wrong. Even in the suburbs and rural areas, most of the population growth is Hispanic."

In short, the Latino population is growing everywhere, making college completion issues important for all states.

Murdoch explains that most of the growth in the United States is because of more births than deaths. This natural phenomenon accounts for 62 percent of the growth, while immigration

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accounts for 38 percent. The United States would actually be declining in population if not for minorities, he says.

“Diversity has been the key to growth in states for the last two decades,” Murdoch says. “If you weren’t diverse, you weren’t growing.”

Because the under-18 Anglo population is decreasing, while the under-18 Latino population is growing rapidly, “the aging Anglo population needs the growing younger minority population to help pay for Social Security and Medicare,” he says. “And the younger minorities need the aging Anglos to help them get the education they need to be competitive.”

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—Texas Senator Joaquín Castro

percentage of adults with a college degree by just 1 percent, the nation would see an increase in per capita income of \$124 billion a year.

Higher incomes, of course, mean higher tax revenues for states. College graduates pay more in income and sales taxes and depend less on social service programs such as food stamps and Medicaid than people without degrees. States save an average of \$1,377 annually in Medicaid costs alone for every person with a college degree, according to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. States also spend less on unemployment benefits for college graduates.

Return on Investment

The challenge for states is to identify what works to ensure these new citizens succeed. The payoff is potentially significant, with more choices, higher incomes and promising futures for these first generation students. College-educated workers reap on average an extra \$1 million in earnings over a 40-year career.

According to CEOs for Cities, a group of urban leaders who promote city development, if the nation’s top 51 metropolitan areas increased the

What Works?

- ◆ Accommodate Latino students, who tend to be more nontraditional—older, with families and jobs.
- ◆ Support community colleges and technical schools, which have high rates of Latino enrollment.
- ◆ Improve the quality of K-12 education by increasing its rigor and teachers’ effectiveness.
- ◆ Offer early testing in high school to assess college readiness.
- ◆ Augment college advising and counseling in high schools.
- ◆ Inform Latino families about college opportunities, the application process and financial aid.

Nothing is more important to future economic success than education. Income is closely tied to education—the richer you are, the more likely you are to have a college degree. But Latinos are more likely to be poorer and less educated than any other population group. Currently, only 19 percent have a college degree, compared with 42 percent of Anglos.

Murdoch predicts that if Texas does nothing to improve the education of Latino students, by 2040, Texas households will make an average of \$6,500 less per year (in 2000 constant dollars), the poverty level will increase by 2 percent, and 30 percent of the state’s labor force will have less than a high school education. But if the gap between Latino and Anglo student achievement is closed, aggregate household income would increase by more than \$300 billion a year, resulting in an increase of \$224 billion in consumer expenditures.

Latino Education Gaps

Latinos lag behind Anglo students at every point along the education pipeline. Raymund Paredes, commissioner of Higher Education in Texas, stresses that “access without preparation is not opportunity. If you’re not well-prepared, your chances of succeeding in college are very, very low.” Of 100 ninth grade Latino students, only 55 will graduate from high school and only 13 will graduate from college within six years.

“We can’t reach national completion goals of having 55 [percent] to 60 percent of our population with a college degree without a plan to improve Latino college completion,” says Deborah Santiago, vice president for policy and research at Excelencia in Education, an advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. “While it might cost a state some extra dollars to support a first generation family’s education success, the returns for future generations are significant.”

Santiago explains that, while the controversy over undocumented students often dominates the political discourse, only 7

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percent of students in K-12 and 2 percent of college students are undocumented. She urges legislators to look carefully at their student data to ensure policy discussions focus on the actual circumstances and experiences of their students.

Models of Success

The University of Texas at El Paso is a national success story of an institution with high enrollment growth of first generation students, especially Latinos. Much of its success can be attributed to its president, Diana

Natalicio. “The key to increasing the total number of degrees is eliminating the gap between whites and minorities,” Natalicio says. “Students have the right to expect the same quality of education as their peers in other institutions. People believe you are either an ‘access’ or an ‘excellence’ university. I don’t believe that. You have to do both. Talent is everywhere, and pathways need to be created to cultivate that talent,” Natalicio says.

The university is committed to serving students in its community, which is largely poor and Latino. In fact, 83 percent of its student body comes from El Paso county, almost 80 percent are Latino, and 30 percent report family income under \$20,000. Over the last 10 years, the school’s enrollment increased by 38 percent, and the number of degrees awarded increased by 79 percent. More than 75 percent of undergraduate degrees in 2009 were awarded to Latino students.

To help students succeed, Natalicio says, you must do the following: Raise aspirations; prepare students for academic success in college; make sure education is affordable; allow students to participate on their own terms—such as on weekends, evenings and online; and ensure everyone can participate, regardless of family and work obligations. The university works closely with high schools and community colleges in the area to coordinate a supportive pathway for success.

Successful State Policies



Representative
Joaquin Castro
Texas

Texas Representative Joaquin Castro represents San Antonio, and when he talks with other legislators and community and education groups, he stresses the importance of making two key changes: improve student counseling in high schools and reduce the need for remedial education in college. “What makes our country unique is the infrastructure of opportunity that makes the American dream



possible—that people can realize their potential. Education and higher education are central to that infrastructure.”

Texas has one counselor for every 420 high school students, while the professional recommendation is one counselor for every 250 students, Castro says. He helped establish Advise TX College Advising Corps, which, through funding from the College Access Challenge Grant, places recent college graduates in high schools to counsel low-income and minority students on the college process, from college applications to the federal financial aid form.

Developmental or remedial education is “the graveyard of higher education, where many dreams die,” Castro says. He believes states need to focus resources on reducing the need for developmental education by identifying students who need extra help before they go to college—at least by their junior year of high school—so they can develop the skills they need their senior year to succeed.

Castro sponsored a bill requiring colleges to offer students who need developmental education a range of options based on their proven effectiveness. For example, colleges could offer online courses, integrate technology into classes, pair developmental courses with credit courses, or offer academic support to students outside the classroom. The bill, which had a zero-dollar fiscal note, passed the Legislature and was signed by the governor in June.

Castro knows there’s no single solution. But, he says, “the problem isn’t that we don’t have solutions. There are best practices.” He believes state legislators are key to promoting these proven practices and continuing the discussion on the link between Latinos’ college completion rates and state economic stability.

“If we can systematically move the needle on these issues, we will greatly improve the outcomes for Latinos and all students.”