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AMAE Special Issue

Latinx Students at Minority-Serving Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

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Ample scholarship has demonstrated that the Latinx population continues to be the fastest growing ethnic-minority group in the U.S. (Calderón Galdeano, Flores, & Moder, 2012; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino population grew by 44% (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014), and is estimated to double in size by 2050 (Krogstad, 2014). As of 2019, there were an estimated 61 million Latinos residing within the United States (U.S. Census, 2020). As such, the number of Latinx students participating in American colleges and universities has also increased (Medina & Posadas, 2012). Between 2000 and 2018, college enrollment rates for Latinx students increased 14 percentage points, the most of all groups, from 22 percent to 36 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

At the same time, there has been a significant growth in the number of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) from 414 in the 1980s (Li, 2007) to approximately 1,000 MSIs (Asian American and Native Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, 2016; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). MSIs are increasingly relevant in higher education for a few distinct reasons (Teranishi, 2014). First, MSIs enroll a high number and proportional representation of low-income minority students. Second, MSIs are pursuing innovative and evidence-based practices, which are effective in promoting persistence, degree attainment, and student satisfaction. Finally, the federal government provides grants to MSIs through a number of federal agencies, with a significant amount of funding authorized through the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA P.L. 89-329). Through HEA alone, annual appropriations total more than $800 million, funding more than

950 institutions. The funding is crucial for MSIs as they typically have fewer resources from tuition revenues or endowments to serve a higher proportion high-need students.

Federal allocations will be heavily influenced by our new president elect, Joe Biden, and vice-president elect, Kamala Harris. For the first time in its history, American citizens elected Kamala Harris, a Black woman of Jamaican and Indian descent, to become the country's Vice President. Furthermore, Kamala Harris is a graduate of a Historically Black College. As such, Biden's administration is projected to bring more aid to MSIs, including investing $10 billion to improve enrollment, retention, degree completion, and employment rates. Biden's proposed plan would spend billions more to improve research at MSIs and require federal agencies to explain and fix any disparities in federal dollars going to MSIs versus other kinds of colleges.

MSIs are of critical importance to the field of higher education, and this special issue builds upon our collective knowledge of Latinx students' being, perceptions, and experiences at them. As our country continues to simultaneously break barriers and struggle with racial equity, our hope is that this scholarship will contribute to highlighting and advancing the efforts of important work being done across MSIs in this country.

This special issue consists of seven articles, one book review, and one poem. As previously mentioned, this issue is being published at the crossroads of social unrest, protests, and leadership changes that reflect a diversifying America. The first article of this series, **"Students' Perceptions of Diversity at Two Hispanic-Serving Institutions Through Pictures: A Focus on Structures for Serving,"** by Gina Garcia and Marialexia Zaragoza explores how students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) perceive diversity at their institutions through art, people, and space. The authors argue that students at HSIs have not been given the opportunity to define "servingness" or to talk about what it means to be at a campus that is compositionally diverse.

One area where much discussion regarding access and equity to higher education has taken place includes the financial costs associated with attending college. As such, the second article by Vincent Carales, Mauricio Molina, and Darrell L. Hooker, **"Without Them I Couldn't Pay for My Education, so Here I Am": Latinx College Graduates' Experiences with and Perceptions of Their Student Loan Debt,"** discusses how sources of information, rationale for borrowing, and the burden of debt influence students' thought processes and decisions when it comes to their loan debt and overall finances.

In the third article, **"I Love How We Developed a Community Already": A Graduate Student Orientation Model for Minority-Serving Programs and Institutions**, Magdalena Barrera's pedagogical reflection contributes to the discussion of Latinx student experiences by exploring an innovative approach to a new graduate student orientation for a master's program in a Chicana/o studies department at a MSI. This article explores student feedback on the orientation and also provides reflection questions for departments and MSIs to bring a more supportive and holistic approach to welcoming and retaining Latinx graduate students.

In **"*Entrando en el juego*: The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions in Fostering Educational and Athletic Outcomes for Latinx Athletes,"** Nikki Grafnetterova, Jocelyn A. Gutierrez, and Rosa M. Banda explore how intercollegiate athletics play a role in fostering educational outcomes for Latinx students at HSIs. Using a critical approach, this qualitative study examined how HSIs operate both the federal designation and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (D1) membership in relation to athletic participation and completion outcomes for Latinx student-athletes. This study is among the first to disaggregate NCAA data by institutional type in regard to the HSI designation and the role HSIs play in fostering athletic and educational outcomes for Latinx student-athletes.

Devan R. Romero, Minerva Gonzalez, Marisol Clark-Ibanez, and Kimberly D'Anna-Hernandez's article entitled "**A Culturally Validated Model of Student Success Services and Academic and Curriculum Enhancements at a Hispanic-Serving Institution"** uses Validation Theory to illustrate an asset-based program that uses a culturally validated model of both student success services and academic and curriculum enhancements at an HSI to increase Latinx student retention and persistence. This model provides a unique approach to how other MSIs can provide culturally validating services in their work.

In the sixth article, **"In a State of Becoming: How Institutions Communicate Latinx- and Asian American and Pacific Islander-Servingness Through Campus Artifacts**," Cynthia M. Alcantar, Blanca Rincón, and Kristine Jan Espinoza utilized a critical ethnographic methodology and found two interconnected themes that emerged from the data: striving to become and undermining progress towards becoming. The study demonstrated the complexities of communicating Latinx- and AAPI-servingness through campus artifacts,

particularly for Historically White Institutions (HWIs) with multiple, competing missions and limited capacities to shift from becoming to being MSIs.

The final article, **"Factors Influencing Latino First-Generation College Students' Optimism for Degree Attainment,"** by Laura F. Romo, Diana Magana, and Gabriela Gutierrez-Serrano, explored factors that contribute to Latino students' positive expectancies for degree attainment. They found that students' beliefs about their competency and determination to overcome challenges significantly influenced students' optimism. Strong connections with institutional agents, such as faculty and student affairs staff, also emerged as significant contributing factors.

For this special issue, Jesse Enriquez reviewed Angele E. Batista, Shirley M. Collado, and David Perez II's book entitled *Latinx/a/os in Higher Education: Exploring Identity, Pathways, and Success.* Enriquez concludes that the book is a compelling culmination of personal narratives and scholarly papers that are supported by research and data. This publication moves beyond deficit-oriented narratives about the plight of Latinx/a/os in higher education.

Our final offering to the issue is Anahi Ibarra's poem entitled **On Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**. In her piece, she offers an in-depth and critical reflection on navigating college as a first-generation Latina student. Through powerful and piercing words, Anahi's poem challenges faculty, staff, and students alike at MSIs to strive for more equitable outcomes for students.

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