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Comprehending Cultural Factors that Impact Success: Emerging Views of The Latina/o Experience at Predominantly White Institutions

Abstract

This session is organized into three sections: an overview of the Latina/o condition in higher education that directly affect recruitment and retention; a synopsis of emergent and cutting-edge research aimed at facilitating success for Latina/o students, staff and faculty at predominantly white institutions; and participant-centered discussion of concepts, issues and practical problems. Personal experiences will be used for illustration purposes and will serve as a catalyst for discussion. The goal of this session is to enhance program participants' understanding of and ability to promote Latina/o socialization, leadership development and educational advancement at predominantly white institutions at all levels.

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Introduction/Purpose and Rationale

Minorities and their increased presence in higher education has resulted in the involvement of more racially and culturally diverse campuses. However, higher education needs to address one of the most urgent challenges in developing future leadership in higher education. Latina/os were found to have a 36-percent college participation rate (Wilds, 2000), comprised 1.6-percent of all student affairs professionals (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991) and held 2A-percent of all faculty positions (Wilds, 2000). Latinas/os are expected to outnumber African American undergraduates for the first time in the year 2006, thus making them the nation's largest college-going ethnic minority group (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). Despite the significant nature of the demographic shifts for Latina/os, educators have yet developed a sense of urgency to deal with the long-term consequences of these changes, especially in higher education (Estrada, 1988). The underrepresentation of Latina/os in higher education is of extreme importance considering that in states such as California and Texas, Latina/os soon will make up more than 51-percent of all K-12 students. This presentation will outline research on the unique cultural aspects shaping Latina/o socialization, involvement and advancement at PWI's that impact the recruitment, retention and eventual success of this group at all levels.

Relevant Conceptual/Theoretical Bases and Review of Literature

Socialization into PWI's:

A key resource towards establishing a welcoming environment at PWI's can be found in the ethnic cultural centers that exist on many college campuses. A cultural perspective (see Kuh & Whitt, 1991) of such entities provides interpretations of norms, practices, rituals and beliefs that influence members' actions and behaviors. Results from a cultural audit (Kuh & Whitt, 1991) done by the presenters suggested that a Latino cultural center played a significant role in creating a "home" or "safe" atmosphere for Latina/o students. Along with providing this atmosphere, gaining admission as a "regular" member at the

center followed an informal yet extremely challenging socialization process. One such conceptual framework that could be used to interpret this socialization process is offered by de Anda (1984). de Anda's bicultural socialization model explains how minority individuals learn "distinct behavioral repertoires for utilization in the minority and majority societies", much like the those found at PWI's (p. 102). The "learned repertoires" presented by de Anda differ from previous cultural deficit-based explanations of biculturalism in that success in dealing with the majority culture is not dependent on the degree of assimilation. This process of bicultural socialization is appropriate for PWI's in that it captures the complexities apparent in an individual's understanding of institutions, behaviors and expectations of minority and majority cultures, as well as how one can adequately develop socialization between them.

Extracurricular Involvement in Student Organizations at PWI's

Colleges contribute to leadership development that benefits our society. Davis (1997) asserts that "leadership development is necessary for the advancement of the Latino communities" (p. 227), a growing need given increasing Latina/o enrollments. Many Latina/os used Latina/o organizations to maintain their already competent leadership skills. Especially for second- and third-year Latina/o college students, participation in organizations providing social-community activities were important towards instilling a feeling of connection to the university environment and creating a "home away from home" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Additionally, colleges are seeing an explosion of Latino fraternities and sororities that are joining the long-standing Black groups as alternatives to the traditional Greek system (Chronicle, January 7, 2000). As the number of Latino Greeks and other Latino-focused student organizations continue to increase, their impact on issues ranging from retention to student development become increasingly important. Scholarly research has for the most part ignored the role or impact of these organizations in higher education. The current complexities and future directions for Latina/o student organizations on PWIs will be discussed. A fruitful understanding of Latina/o student leadership through these organizations can be obtained by examining the cultural elements that shape Latina/o students' worldviews, values, thought and behavior and orientation towards human activity and social relations (Triandis, 1977, 1995).

Educational Persistence, Mobility and Representation at PWI's

Despite an increase of participation rates, the persistence of Latinas/os in higher education continues to lag behind that of White students (Carter & Wilson, 1995; Guzman, 1998). Equally frustrating is a lack of adequate theoretical retention models that are applicable to the singular needs of Latina/o students (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997). The presenters will examine the utility of models based on student success, student expertise (Padilla et al., 1997; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Gandara, 1995) and/ or the concept of academic and social validation (Rendon, 1994) as key elements in understanding student persistence of Latinas/os. According to Sagaria and Johnsrud (1991), "no need is more urgent today than the full participation and achievement of minorities in education" (p.1DS). The doctorate degree is seen as a route towards increasing Latina/o presence in executive positions. However, the presenters will share their own doctoral experience, characterized by courses using dominant perspectives and ethnocentric studies. Additionally, Latina/os in higher education face an "adobe" ceiling where advancement opportunities are unseen and barriers are persevering. The "adobe" ceiling is describe by Burciaga (as cited in Rodriguez, 1994) as being different than the "glass" ceiling in that "you can't see through it (adobe) and it's made to last for centuries"

(p. 23). Latina/os executives in higher education have been described as "missing elements" in college and university leadership (Valverde, 1988).

Method of Program Presentation and Agenda

The program is organized into three sections: an overview of the Latina/o condition in higher education that directly affect recruitment and retention; a synopsis of emergent and cutting-edge research aimed at facilitating success for Latina/o students, staff and faculty at PWI's; and participant-centered discussion of concepts, issues and practical problems. Personal experiences will be used for illustration purposes and .as a catalyst for discussion.

Learning Objectives

The objective of this program is to enhance program participants' understanding of and ability to promote Latina/o socialization, leadership development and educational advancement at PWI's at all levels.

Learning Outcomes

Participants can expect to:

- Enhance their understanding of cultural factors that shape Latina/o experiences and socialization at PWI's;
- Learn about the connections between leadership development and Latina/o student organizations, especially with Latina/o greek organizations;
- Make connections between cultural factors and practical issues and problems.

Presenters

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