



Equitable Graduation Rates for Latino Students is the Minimum; Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) Should Ensure Liberatory Outcomes, Too.

BY GINA ANN GARCIA

University of Pittsburgh

POLICY BRIEF | MAY 2022

Latino students want to graduate from college, get jobs, and be economically mobile. But they also want to learn about their racial-ethnic history, give back to their communities, and work for racial and social justice.

With over 550 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in the United States enrolling over 60% of all Latino college students, these institutions should help students meet their academic and economic goals and provide educational experiences and outcomes that are liberatory.

Determining Institutional Success for Serving Students at HSIs

HSIs are defined only by enrollment (25% Hispanic students). Most do not have a specific history or mission to serve Latino students and have not shifted the organizational structures for serving them. Many lack the curriculum and out-of-class experiences that allow Latino students to see themselves and learn about their racial-ethnic identities and histories. Moreover, the faculty, staff,

What are liberatory experiences?

- Liberatory experiences allow students of color to feel respected and valued as people and thinkers in college, which includes a need to be seen as people of color.
- Liberatory experiences encourage students of color to explore their race, ethnicity, culture, history, and unique contributions to society.
- Liberatory experiences can enhance racial-ethnic identity, desires to give back to marginalized communities, and aspirations to disrupt inequities in social and educational outcomes.

and administration at HSIs are often not reflective of the Latino students they enroll.

This reality has made it difficult to determine institutional success for HSIs. As defined by federal legislation, HSIs are intended to decrease inequities in academic outcomes

for Latino students, with federal agencies offering competitive capacity building grants to do so. [Yet Latino students continue to have inequitable academic outcomes in HSIs](#) with some educators, institutional leaders, policy intermediaries, and legislators wondering how well HSIs are performing as institutions charged with addressing historical educational inequities. Disrupting inequities must be a priority for HSIs, [but scholars have challenged the field to reconsider the ways that HSIs are assessed for institutional effectiveness](#).

Reimagining Measures of Success for Serving Students at HSIs

One consideration is that academic outcomes are not sufficient for measuring institutional success for institutions that have a high enrollment of students of color, even beyond Latino students. Students of color attending HSIs do not have the opportunity to feel seen and valued in unique and cultural ways. Moreover, there is a high occurrence rate of racism and discrimination in HSIs which must be addressed to ensure that students of color feel seen, respected, and valued. HSIs could become a source of educational freedom and justice by providing liberatory experiences and outcomes for students.

Liberatory outcomes can be used to assess how well HSIs allow Latino students to see themselves in empowering and liberatory ways. There are many liberatory outcomes to consider as they often occur in postsecondary settings but are undervalued as measures of serving students at HSIs. These outcomes may also be mediators to more traditional academic outcomes such as persistence and graduation, and therefore should be valued. As HSIs grapple with the best ways to serve students, there should be more attention to liberatory outcomes as important measures for serving.

What are liberatory outcomes?

Liberatory outcomes include racial-ethnic identity development, critical consciousness, social agency, political activism, community engagement, mental health outcomes, and overall freedom and joy.

The Need for Evidence of Liberatory Experiences and Outcomes

Currently, there is a lack of data to show how liberatory outcomes are enacted within HSIs and how these outcomes correlate with more traditional academic outcomes. There is a need for funding to advance the empirical and practical evidence of liberatory outcomes in HSIs. Federal agencies that provide capacity building grants to HSIs should add liberatory outcomes to their respective calls for proposals, encouraging the exploration of practical ways to enact an educational environment that sees students of color and their unique added values such as linguistics abilities and cultural heritage, and evidence of the outcomes associated with these experiences. Private foundations that are invested in greater racial equity for students in postsecondary settings should also support the exploration of liberatory experiences and outcomes. Moreover, there is a need to document and incentivize the use of liberatory outcomes as a measure of institutional success in places such as the [What Works Clearinghouse](#). HSIs should serve students in multiple ways, but they need support, funding, and incentives to provide and assess liberatory outcomes.

For more information about liberatory outcomes, visit these sources:

1. Garcia, G. A. (2020, May 28). Is liberation a viable outcome for students who attend college? *HigherEdJobs*. <https://bit.ly/3qHmAB1>
2. Solano, A. (Host). Student Success & Equity with Dr. Gina Garcia. In *Student Success Podcast*. Continuous Learning Institute. <https://www.continuous-learning-institute.com/blog/student-success-equity-with-dr-gina-garcia>
3. Hibel, A. & Cherwin, K. (Hosts). (2022, May 3). What Does 'Servingness' Mean for Higher Ed? (No. 8) In *HigherEdJobs Podcast*. <https://higheredjobs.transistor.fm/episodes/gina-garcia>