



## Latino Men in Two-Year Public Colleges: State-Level Enrollment Changes and Equity Trends over the Last Decade

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More Latina/os are enrolling in higher education than ever before in the American higher education landscape. At the same time, Latino males continue to lag behind their female peers in rates of enrollment and completion (Sáenz, Ponjuán, & Figueroa, 2016). While there is emerging research exploring the cause and ramifications of such gender disparities (Sáenz et al., 2016), most of what we know comes from studies in single institutions, from a few select states, or from aggregated trends nationally (Hatch, Mardock-Uman, & Garcia, 2016). Yet, Latina/o enrollment trends vary among different states in important ways overlooked by scholars, practitioners, and college planners.

Understanding geographical differences in college-going rates among Latino males is critically important to questions of educational equity broadly and locally. For instance, there is evidence that for many Latino men, decisions of whether and where to attend college are influenced, among other things, by the proximity of higher education institutions (Martinez, 2013); the socio-economic situation of themselves and their families (Crisp & Nora, 2010); familial and community connections to higher education institutions (Pérez & McDonough, 2008); and the proportion of Latina/os enrolled in a given institution (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). At the same time, all of these variables vary in important ways across states and regions (Fry, 2008; Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2015; Hillman, 2016), leading to the hypothesis that changes in college enrollment patterns of Latino men is correspondingly uneven throughout the country. In fact, widely overlooked in the oft-cited statistics of demographic growth nationally is the fact that the most marked differences in fast-growing vs. slow-growing Hispanic areas of the country is the adult gender balance, immigration status, occupational sector, and family structure (Fry, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Parrado & Kandel, 2011).

Some look to the two-year public college sector as a bright spot in the potential to achieve better educational equity. But here too, enrollment and completion disparities persist despite the unique relationship between Latino males and two-year colleges (Harris & Wood, 2013; Núñez et al., 2011; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Indeed, there is clear evidence that the number, type, and proximity of institutions tend to disfavor areas of the country with growing Hispanic populations (Hillman, 2016). All of these factors speak to structural inequities of opportunity that play out in different ways unexplored in the research literature.

A fundamental need largely unaddressed in the research literature is baseline data about community college enrollment patterns for Latino men at a local level that informs the discussion about how to make more colleges more equitable institutions wherever they are located. In response to this knowledge gap, Dr. Deryl Hatch-Tocaimaza, Dr. Crystal Garcia, and Dr. Victor Sáenz recently conducted a study (Hatch, Garcia, Sáenz, 2016) utilizing the most recent available data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and the U.S. Census Bureau's Community Population Survey (CPS) to establish trends over the last decade in overall enrollment numbers and, through the use of equity indices (Bensimon, Hao, & Bustillos, 2006), gains and losses in equitable representation in relation to relative local demographic changes. IPEDS provided enrollment numbers for all U.S.-based and Title IV-participating institutions in the 2-year public sector, while CPS provided yearly estimates of population characteristics at the state level. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) How have enrollment patterns for Latino males developed over time in two-year public colleges in different parts of the country? 2) How do these changes in proportional representation in the study body reflect gains or losses in terms of equity in relation to local demographic changes?

### FINDINGS

#### Enrollment Changes

In terms of enrollment, the number of Latino men that entered community colleges nationwide and state-by-state has increased substantially, from 361,691 in 2005 to 591,450 in 2013, a 63.5% increase. Yet the percent growth varied widely between states with a minimum growth percentage of 24.3% and maximum growth of 283.5%. Differences also existed among states in regard to those eligible to enter college. While the average state growth in Latino males with a high school education increased by 62.4%, some states experienced growth to a greater or lesser degree or even a decline in the case of Minnesota, for instance, which experienced an 8.7% decrease over the same time period.

#### Equity Changes

In regard to enrollment equity, of the 38 states with available data, the average equity index was 0.89 with an average net change of 0.09 index points. Though equity rates increased for most states, in some states rates declined such as in New Mexico and Texas, despite substantial Latino population and presence of many Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). There were few clear patterns as to which states have made gains in enrollment equity. Hillman's (2016) mapping of educational deserts may have some relation. Most education deserts are located in the Midwest and Great Plains states, and indeed 6 out of 12 states that saw equity losses are located here (Illinois, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio), with only 4 Midwestern and Great Plains states (Minnesota, Kansas, Indiana, and Missouri) experiencing gains of any kind. Conversely, Hillman found the fewest educational deserts in Mid-Atlantic and New England states. Similarly, other regions of the country include states with widely divergent trends among them: For instance, Arizona gaining some ground, New Mexico losing ground; Oklahoma gaining, Texas losing; Idaho making gains, while Utah and Colorado fell behind. The full study reports trends for growth vs. equity in all states with available data.

## CONCLUSION

While trends in national enrollment, particularly within public 2-year colleges, shows that participation of Latino males have increased overall, results of this study provide a more nuanced look into the uneven distribution of enrollment and equity trends across geographical areas. Parsing out and examining the variation in Latino college student enrollment and equity by geography matters for a few reasons. Rather than rely on statistics that reflect national trends which may substantially differ by state context, the results of this study provides practitioners and policymakers a clearer picture of the status of Latino equity within their own state and the extent to which public 2-year institutions are effectively recruiting and enrolling Latino students.

Results of this study provide evidence that equity gains and losses that have taken place over time may be gendered, perhaps due to different family and migration patterns in established vs. “new” Latino destinations. This finding entails different policy emphases to better serve Latino males who face different kinds of barriers that are in many ways a function of geography (Hatch, Mardock-Uman, and Garcia, 2016). It is imperative for states to critically examine how educational opportunities are afforded to men throughout the education pipeline. As

shown in these findings, the results that some states have within the same region can be drastically different, begging the question of what some are doing relatively better or worse than their neighbors to serve Latino men in either place.

Because this study is ultimately descriptive in nature, policy and practice implications are limited. Instead, the findings underscore the need for comparative studies between neighboring or similar states to determine the source of divergences in enrollment and equity patterns observed (Núñez & Kim, 2012). Given the role that proximity and type of institutions plays in relation to Latino male enrollment, this may be a promising way to unpack the effects of variations in state policies, tuition, funding, governance models, and the extent of coordination throughout the educational pipeline, among other poorly understood external influences (Flores, Horn, & Crisp, 2006; Hillman, 2016).

Even more fundamentally though, intersectional frameworks for understanding contextual differences of Latino educational equity are critically important to advancing theory and deriving transformative practices and policies. Núñez (2014) makes a detailed and compelling case for why and how to break through the

monolithic treatment of Latina/os in higher education by considering intersecting identities of (a) national origin, (b) immigrant status, (c) class, (d) gender, (e) sexuality, (f) religion, and (g) language fluency, among others. Given that maleness is an intersectional identity that is privileged not oppressed (Cabrera, Rashwan-Soto, & Valencia, 2016), Núñez’s admonition is important to not only consider individual differences, but broader domains of power that can keep families, communities, and civic institutions disjointed through cultural differences, among educational institutions and sectors, including—as shown in this study—as they vary across geographies.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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