

## **LATINOS FACE BARRIERS TO ACCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Latinos\* continue to face structural barriers to meaningful postsecondary educational access. Despite increased rates of college enrollment, Latinos aged 25 years and over are still only half as likely as Whites to have a bachelor's degree (11% compared to 20%, respectively).<sup>1</sup> As more Latinos enroll in postsecondary education, the lack of complete and clear information about its costs and values make it difficult for Latinos to make informed choices about one of the most important financial decisions of their lives. Additionally, inadequate college preparation, academic support, and financial aid guidance often narrow their college choices to those without the same completion outcomes as more selective colleges. Latino students are more likely to graduate at selective colleges, but one-quarter of Latino students scoring in the top SAT quartile attended less selective two-year institutions in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Addressing these issues will be essential for the future of the nation's workforce. By 2050, Latinos are projected to comprise 30% of the nation's workforce, doubled from their share in 2010, and by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some training beyond high school.<sup>3,4</sup> Preserving and expanding postsecondary access for Latinos requires federal investments in college data tools, FAFSA simplification, college-ready programs, and wraparound services.

### **Latinos are making college decisions without adequate college information.**

The majority of Latino undergraduates (70%) are first generation students, meaning they are navigating higher education with less access to information and family knowledge.<sup>5</sup> To access postsecondary education opportunities, many Latinos, especially those who are first generation, complete complex and burdensome college and FAFSA applications largely on their own.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, their main sources of information for making college decisions come from family, friends, and the price tag of college.<sup>7</sup> However, these sources are not always the most reliable. For example, while family is a trusted source, research indicates parents often cannot provide the guidance necessary to help students select a college.<sup>8</sup>

Making a college decision with limited information hinders a student's ability to enroll in selective colleges and can lead to undermatching—a phenomenon where highly qualified low-income students and students of color enroll in less selective colleges. For example, in 2016, 25% of Latino students scoring in the top quartile of the SAT attended public two-year institutions.<sup>9</sup> Further, Latinos who are more likely to have an expected family income of zero, lack sufficient information to secure financial assistance to access postsecondary education.<sup>10</sup> In the 2016 academic year, more than half of Latino undergraduates did not submit a FAFSA because they thought they were ineligible and one in six did not complete a FAFSA because they had no information on how to apply.<sup>11</sup>

### **As more nontraditional Latino students enroll in college, insufficient federal and institutional support hinders educational attainment.**

The demographic makeup of today's Latino undergraduate population—majority women, financially independent, first-generation, and part-time college goers—are nontraditional.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Latino students face unique barriers as they enroll in and attend college, since they are more likely to work and juggle various family responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> In order to ensure that these students are college-ready, the federal government should invest in programs and resources that are comprehensive and culturally relevant. For example, first-

\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

generation Latinos report benefiting from formal supports such as high school counselors and nonprofit college counseling programs.<sup>14</sup> Adequate academic preparation before and while in college is also critical to avoid higher tuition costs and extending time to degree completion due to remedial courses, where Latinos are disproportionately placed.<sup>15</sup>

## Recommendations to Increase Postsecondary Access for Latinos

To increase meaningful access across all institutions, a reauthorized Higher Education Act should include the following recommendations:

- **Streamline and Simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).** By streamlining and simplifying the FAFSA's lengthy and complicated application process, more students, especially first-generation students, will be able to complete the form and receive financial aid.
- **Make Financial Aid Information Available to Limited English Proficient Parents and Students.** Culturally and linguistically appropriate material provides students and families with the information they need to navigate unfamiliar territory, easing a prospective student's onramp to education.
- **Improve and Promote Informational Tools.** Making information regarding college outcomes available and accessible to students and families will impact their ability to make informed college decisions.
- **Maintain and Increase Investment in TRIO, GEAR UP, HEP, and CAMP.** These college preparation programs provide the necessary support and pathways to postsecondary education.
- **Establish Grants to Provide High Quality Evidence-Based College Counseling.** By investing in college counseling, first-generation and low-income students will have access to an individual who will support them in making a college choice that maximizes their potential to complete their degree.

## Endnotes

- 1 UnidosUS calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Educational Attainment for the Population 25 Years and Over," 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Washington, DC, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/programssurveys/acs/technical-documentation/table-and-geographychanges/2016/1-year.html> (accessed January 2019).
- 2 UnidosUS, *Latinos in Higher Education: Enrollment and Completion*, Statistical Brief (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2019).
- 3 Anthony Carnevale and Nicole Smith, "America's Future Workforce," in *All-In Nation: An America that Works for All*, ed. Vanessa Cardenas and Sarah Treuhافت (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress and PolicyLink, 2013), <https://allinnation.org/ms-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/10/Chapter3.pdf> (accessed January 2019).
- 4 Anthony Carnevale, Nicole Smith, Jess Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown Public Policy Institute, 2013), [https://cew-7632.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.FR\\_Web\\_.pdf](https://cew-7632.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.FR_Web_.pdf) (accessed January 2019).
- 5 UnidosUS calculation using U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, NPSAS:16." Washington, DC, 2017.
- 6 UnidosUS, *It Made the Sacrifices Worth It: The Latino Experience in Higher Education*, (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2018).
- 7 UnidosUS, *Getting In, Staying In Community Perspectives on the Barriers to Latino Postsecondary Education*. (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2016)
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 UnidosUS calculation using U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, NPSAS:16." Washington, DC, 2017.
- 10 UnidosUS, *Latinos in Higher Education: Enrollment and Completion*, Statistical Brief (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2019).
- 11 UnidosUS calculation using U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, NPSAS:16." Washington, DC, 2019.
- 12 UnidosUS, *Latinos in Higher Education: Enrollment and Completion*, Statistical Brief (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2019).
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 UnidosUS, *It Made the Sacrifices Worth It: The Latino Experience in Higher Education*. (Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2018).
- 15 Xiangel, Chen & Simone, Sean, *Remedial Coursetaking at U.S. Public 2- and 4-Year Institutions: Scope, Experiences, and Outcomes Statistical Analysis Report*. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC, 2016, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016405.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2019).