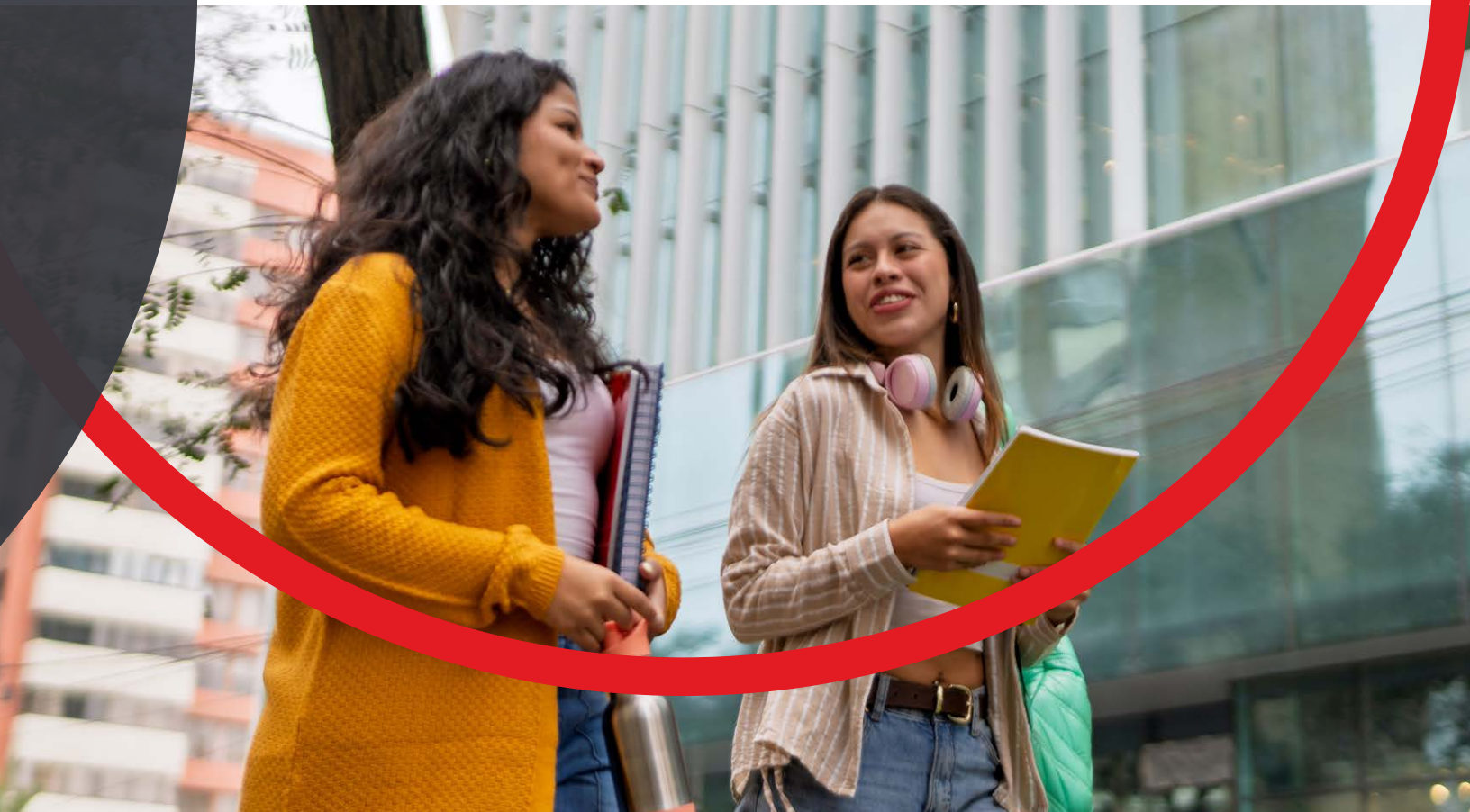




October 2026

Survey of Latinos in Higher Education

Experiences and Attitudes
of Current and Recent
Latino College Students



Overview

To better understand the experiences, challenges and perspectives of Latino college students, UnidosUS commissioned Hart Research to conduct an online survey of 1,566 Latinos ages 18-35 who are currently enrolled in college or attended college within the past four years. The survey was conducted from September 3-17, 2026 and included oversamples in Arizona, California, Florida and Texas. The margin of error is $\pm 2.5\%$.

The Value of a College Degree and Obstacles to Completion

Current and recent Latino college students recognize the value of a college degree and view it as critical to achieving their goals, particularly for the economic benefits and opportunities it provides for themselves and their families.

While Latino students broadly maintain positive perceptions of the potential payoff of higher education, they understand the road to getting a college degree is fraught with many obstacles. Most are

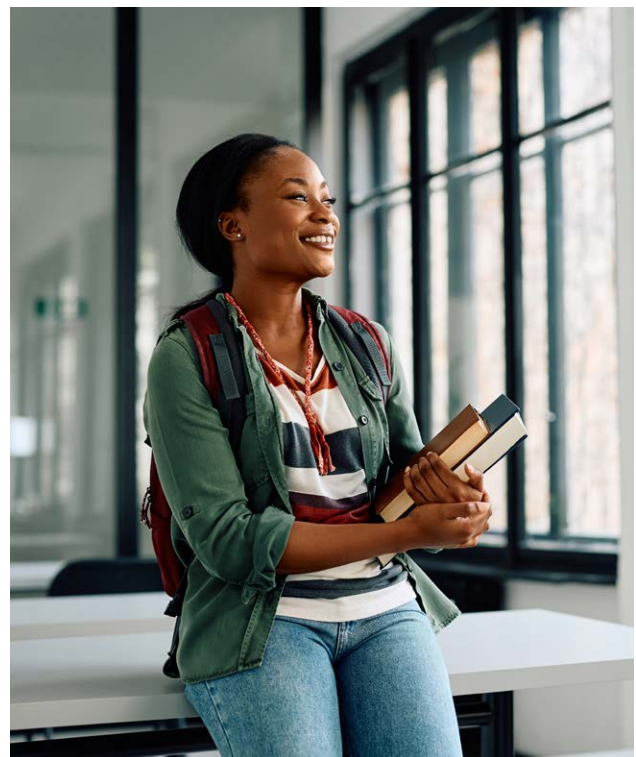
balancing attending college with working and many have responsibilities to their families. Additionally, many are experiencing food insecurity and housing instability. Importantly, Latino students indicate that financial aid, and flexible work and class schedules, could help them stay enrolled and on track to graduate. They also acknowledge the possibility to increase their use of resources that campuses provide to help them afford basic needs.

Trump Administration Higher Education Policies

Most current and recent Latino college students surveyed oppose the Trump administration's higher education policies, with opposition increasing when the policies are explicitly tied to President Trump.

Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

AI is widely used by Latino college students. While they generally view it as having a net positive impact on various aspects of their academic experiences, many students are unsure about AI's impact on education and views are mixed overall.



Key Findings

Finding 1: Current and recent Latino college students overwhelmingly believe a college degree is worth the cost and essential to achieving their life goals.

Three in four Latino students believe that a college degree is “worth the cost because people have a better chance to get a good job and earn more money over their lifetime,” while just 24% think it is “not worth the cost because people often graduate without specific job skills and with a large amount of debt to pay off.” Large majorities of students recognize the value of a college degree regardless of gender, age or whether they are first-generation students. Opinions vary, however, by institution type: More students at four-year colleges (81%) are sold on the value of a degree than students at two-year colleges (67%).

Latino students’ top motivations for getting a college degree are economic: Earning a well-paying job (52%) and providing a better life for their families (42%) were the top two reasons cited for deciding to attend college. Other motivations: gaining new

knowledge and skills (38%), pursuing a more fulfilling career (35%), having greater job security (32%) and preparing for a specific field of study (32%).

A college degree is recognized as important to achieving key life goals — both financial and personal. Large majorities of Latino students think that a college degree is extremely important for providing a better life for themselves and their families (75%), getting a well-paying job in today’s economy (72%), and growing personally and intellectually (66%). While they may see a college degree as less acutely important to contributing to their community (45% extremely, 40% somewhat important) or to the Latino community at large (53% extremely, 35% somewhat important), most view a degree as at least somewhat important in these regards.

Finding 2: The road to getting a college degree is fraught with many obstacles for Latino students. Two in three students surveyed considered leaving college at some point, and one in three students surveyed left school at least temporarily before completing their degree.

Many current and recent Latino college students report that it is hard to pay for college (44%) and basic living expenses (43%), to balance their school responsibilities with their other responsibilities (43%) and to maintain their mental health (42%). One in three say they find it hard to stay on track academically (34%), and fewer say it is hard to make connections (29%) and feel a sense of belonging (23%).

Across each of these areas, women report it is “hard” more than men by at least nine percentage points. Interestingly, all students report similar challenges paying for college or basic living expenses, regardless of family income levels. Latino LGBTQ+ students (58%) are among the subgroups most likely to indicate difficulty maintaining their mental health.

Two-thirds of Latino students (65%) have considered leaving college at some point, and this includes 32% who did leave. Of those surveyed, 1 in 10 students left school and did not return, while 23% returned either full- or part-time to complete their degree.

Large majorities of Latino students across demographics and institutional sector have considered leaving college, including 70% of those at public

two-year colleges, 63% at public four-year colleges and universities and 63% at private nonprofit institutions. Students from households with incomes over \$100,000 are the least likely to have considered leaving (53%), but large majorities of students from all other income groups have considered it, including 65% of those with incomes below \$30,000 and 72% of those with incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

Figure 1. During your time in college, how easy or hard [are/were] each of the following things?

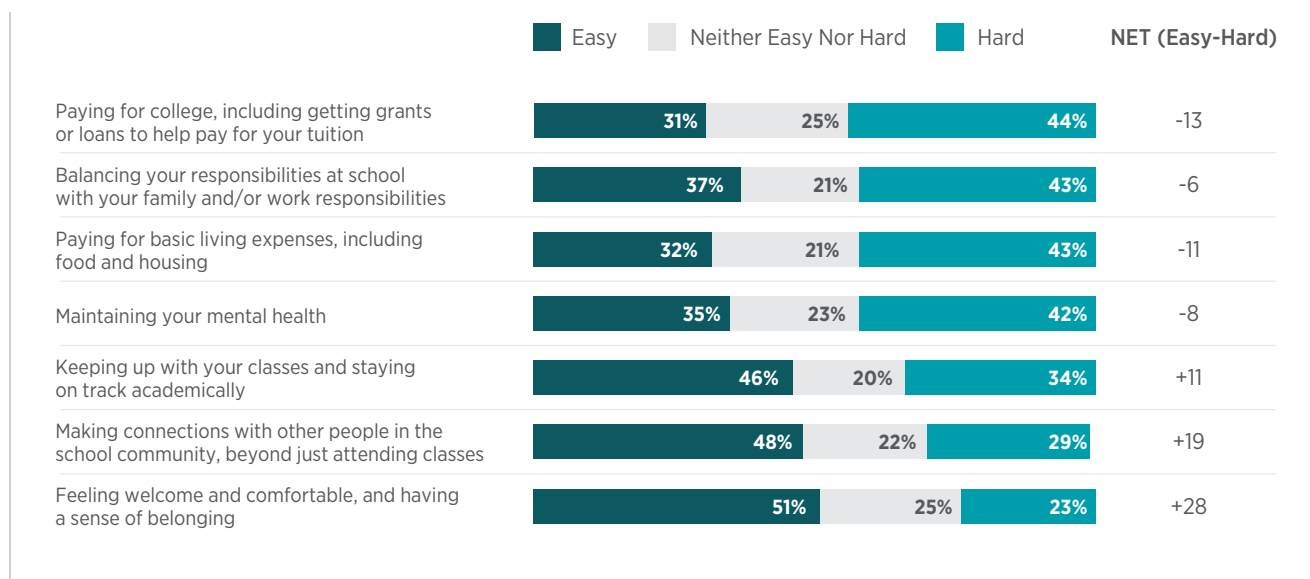
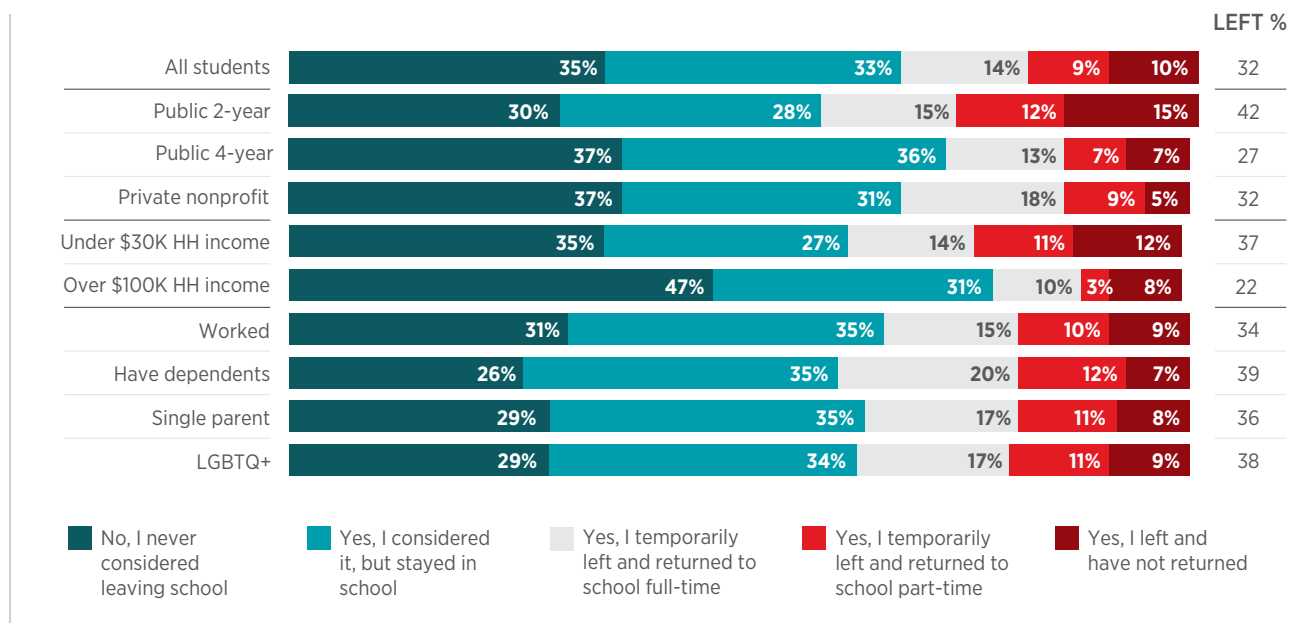


Figure 2. Have you considered or have you ever temporarily or permanently left school before completing your degree?



Students at public two-year colleges (42%) are more likely than those at public four-year (27%) and private nonprofit institutions (32%) to say they actually stopped out. When reviewing by household income levels, understandably, those with lower household incomes are leaving school at greater rates: 37% of students with household incomes under \$30,000 and 39% of those with household incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000, compared to 22% of students

with household incomes over \$100,000. Students with dependents (39%), single parents (36%) and LGBTQ+ students (38%) are also among those more likely to have left college. Students who left and did not return found all dimensions of the college experience harder than those who stayed, and over half said it was hard to pay for college, basic living expenses and maintain their mental health.

Finding 3: Financing college, balancing school and other responsibilities, and managing their mental health and emotional stress are the top reasons Latino students say they considered leaving college; supports that address these challenges were important to them staying or returning.

In an open-ended question, Latino students cite the need to work (25%), stress and mental health concerns (23%), and worries over financing college (21%) as the top reasons they considered leaving or did leave college.

When we presented students with a list of 13 reasons one might leave or consider leaving college, large majorities cited several significant factors that would contribute to the decision. Topping the list as the most important reason Latino students say they left or considered leaving is mental health or emotional stress, with 81% of students saying it was at least a “somewhat important” reason, including nearly half (48%) who say it was a “very important” reason. The other most important factors: work obligations (70%), family obligations (69%), loss of interest or motivation (67%), no longer being able to afford tuition (67%) and lack of flexible course schedules (66%).

Academic flexibility and financial support have the potential to offset other factors that might push students toward leaving school. Students who did not leave school indicate that the most important reasons they stayed or returned after leaving included access to online, asynchronous or flexible class scheduling (41%), additional financial support (38%) and flexible work hours (37%). One in four students who did not leave school say that access to mental health counseling and wellness services (24%) were important to them staying or returning. Given that financial worries and managing competing obligations and responsi-

bilities can cause emotional distress, managing mental health, financial stress and obligations are likely intertwined.

Family considerations — both in terms of support from and a sense of obligation to — play an important role in Latino students’ college experiences. Fundamentally, 84% of Latino students feel a sense of responsibility to succeed academically to honor their parents’ sacrifices. Additionally, more than half (57%) feel a sense of guilt when their schoolwork keeps them from supporting their family. Importantly, most students feel supported by their families: 79% say their family understands what they need to do to succeed academically and 75% say their family’s emotional support has helped them succeed. Only 35% indicate that the needs of their families take away from their ability to prioritize their education. Notably, however, for nearly half of the students who left college and did not return, family needs and a lack of family support took away from their ability to prioritize their education.

Finding 4: Latino college students rely on a diversified portfolio of financial assistance to pay for college, while balancing work, financial stress and basic needs insecurity.

Latino students rely on a variety of types of financial assistance to pay for college. Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) report receiving financial assistance beyond the financial support they got from their family, including 51% who received federal grants, 48% who received scholarships from their college or university, and 47% who received loans (37% public loans, 21% private loans), work study (32%) and other scholarships (28%). Nearly half of Latino students received at least three of these forms of financial assistance.

Other financial lifts come from having to work while in school: 8 in 10 students have or had a full-time (26%) or part-time paying job (50%) while enrolled in college, and another 4% had both. Whether they are full-time students (77%) or part-time students (88%), and regardless of if they are at public two-year colleges (75%), public four-year colleges (81%) or private colleges (84%), most Latino students say they work while attending college. Nearly three in four students (74%) with household incomes above \$100,000 and 72% of those with household incomes

below \$30,000 work while attending college; and students with household incomes between \$30,000 and \$100,000 (86%) have jobs while enrolled in school. Older students ages 26-35 (38%) are more likely than students ages 18-22 (18%) to work full-time; and those with private loans (41%) are more likely than those with public loans (30%) to work and attend school full-time.

Students are facing a paradox when it comes to balancing work and school: Most must work to pay for their education, but work can get in the way of their studies. Four in five Latino students who say they held a paying job while attending college indicate that it had a negative impact on their academic experience, either because they had less time to study (56%), took fewer classes (31%), or because they could not take jobs, internships or other positions related to their field of study or intended career (24%).

Though family is a big motivator for Latino students when it comes to pursuing a college degree, it also comes with responsibilities that compete for their

Figure 3. At any time you were enrolled in college, [has/had] your job [impact/impacted] your college academic experience in any of the following ways? (asked of students who had a paying job while attending college)

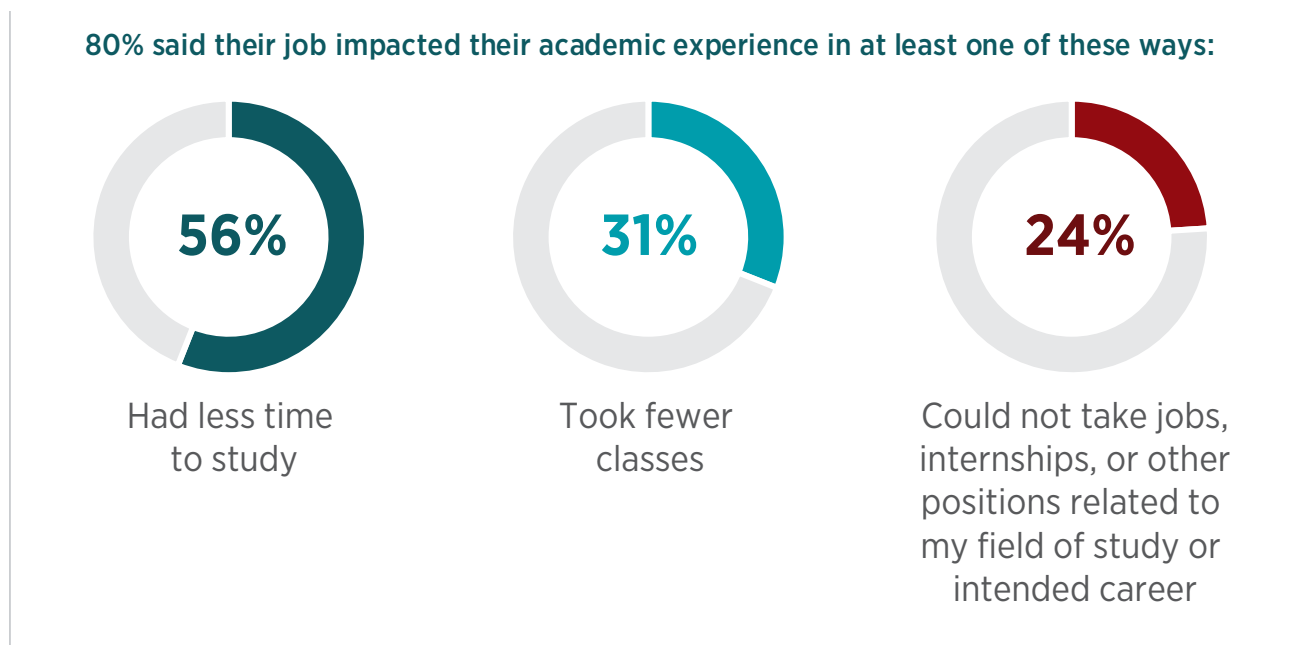


Figure 4. Most students face some degree of food insecurity and/or housing instability.



time. More than half of Latino students (52%) indicate they have had key responsibilities to their family while they were in college, including serving as a primary contributor to their family’s living expenses (22%), a primary caregiver for younger relatives (19%) or parents and older family members (16%), or a primary translator for legal, medical or financial documents (16%).

Many Latino students experience both food and housing insecurities, which can steer some students away from the degree completion track. Those who experience high food insecurity or housing instability are more likely to consider leaving school and find it hard to stay on track academically.

Of the current or recent Latino college students surveyed, 82% indicate that they sometimes experienced food insecurity, meaning they experienced at least one of the following often or sometimes while in college: choosing less nutritious and balanced meals to save money, cutting the size of their meals or skipping meals altogether to save money, or not purchasing more food when they ran low on groceries because of lack of funds. In fact, 43% of students report at least one of these was “often true” during their time in college. Those experiencing the most food insecurity are single parents (52%), older students ages 26-35 (51%), students from families with household incomes of \$30,000 to \$50,000 (51%) and students with dependents (50%).

Additionally, 77% of Latino students face housing instability while in college — either because they have difficulty paying rent, mortgage or utility bills, or

they worry about having stable housing. One in three students (34%) say they “often” experience housing instability; those facing the greatest housing instability are single parents (44%), women ages 26-35 (44%), students with dependents (43%), those with household incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (43%), part-time students (41%) and students with full-time jobs (40%).



Finding 5: Despite numerous challenges many students face paying for college and basic living expenses, many are not taking advantage of financial aid counseling or financial assistance resources that their colleges offer, even when they know such assistance is available. Those who are not taking advantage of these financial assistance resources cite self-reliance as the top reason.

Nearly half (47%) of Latino students say they have used financial aid counseling offered by their colleges, but 39% say they have not used this resource even though their college offers it. Of the students who do utilize assistance for college and living expenses, 40% have used technology assistance, 35% have used food assistance, 24% have accessed emergency financial aid, 20% have used housing assistance and 9% have used child care services. Nearly two-thirds of students have used at least one of these financial assistance resources, but 35% have not taken advantage of any of the resources. When we look at each type of resource individually, approximately two in five students say their school offers such assistance, but they have not used it.

Notably, even among Latino students who indicate high food insecurity, while 41% have accessed food assistance from their colleges, 35% have not, even though they say their college provides it. Among those who indicate high housing instability, only 25% have accessed housing assistance while 32% know their school provides this resource but have not sought help.

When asked why they did not or have not used one of the financial assistance benefits offered by their colleges, 40% of Latino students claim “wanting to handle their own needs” as the top reason. Additionally, one in three students (32%) admit not knowing how to access the resources and more than one in four (27%) say they feel embarrassed or uncomfortable getting assistance.

Finding 6: Most current and recent Latino college students oppose President Trump’s higher education policies, with opposition increasing when the policies are explicitly tied to Trump. Awareness about the impact of these policies is low, however: There is no single policy that students overwhelmingly recognize as impacting their campus.

Large majorities of current and recent Latino college students oppose most of the Trump administration’s policies related to higher education, and opposition is higher when respondents are explicitly informed that President Trump is behind the policies. Latino students express the highest levels of disapproval of Trump’s policies to revoke international student visas (76%), reduce federal funding for colleges and universities with large numbers of Latino students (73%), and restrict diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives (72%). Large majorities also disapprove of

policies to stop states from offering in-state tuition for undocumented students (69%), reduce certain employers’ eligibility for loan forgiveness (67%), close the Department of Education (66%), and dock wages and withhold tax refunds on defaulted student loan borrowers (63%).

Over half (57%) of current and recent Latino college students have heard about at least one of President Trump’s policies (listed below) happening on their campus, but there is not one policy in particular that even one-quarter of students have observed.

Figure 5. Below are some of [FORM A: President Trump's] policies related to higher education. Please indicate if you approve or disapprove of each one.

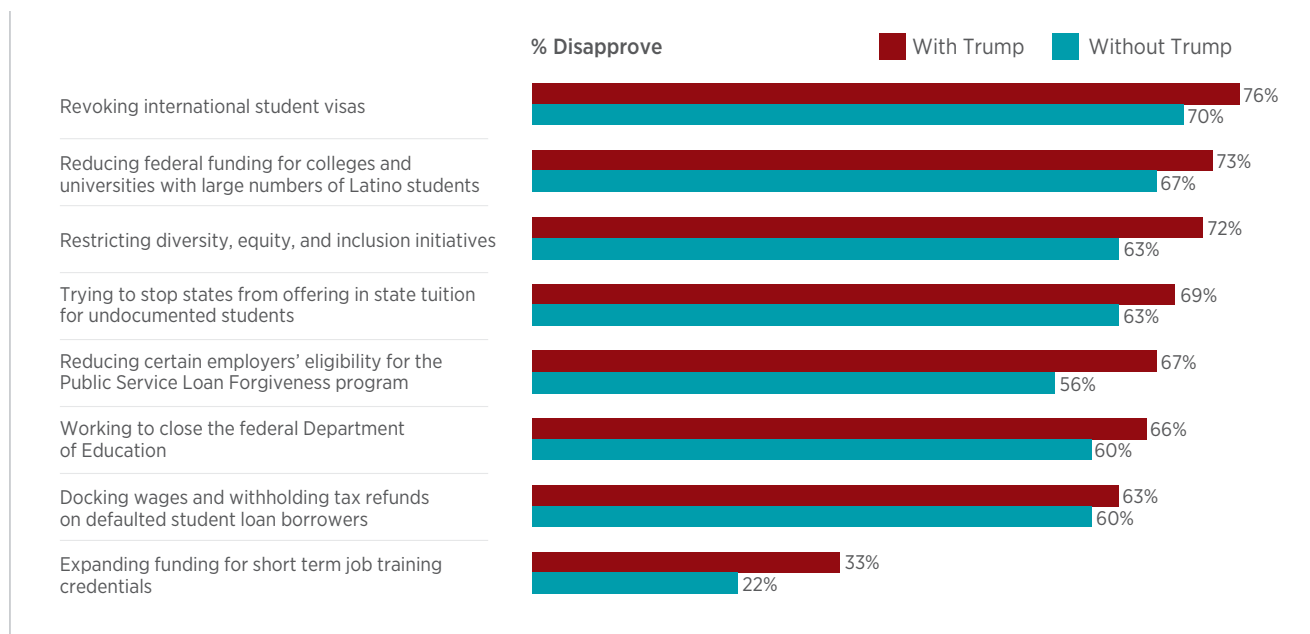
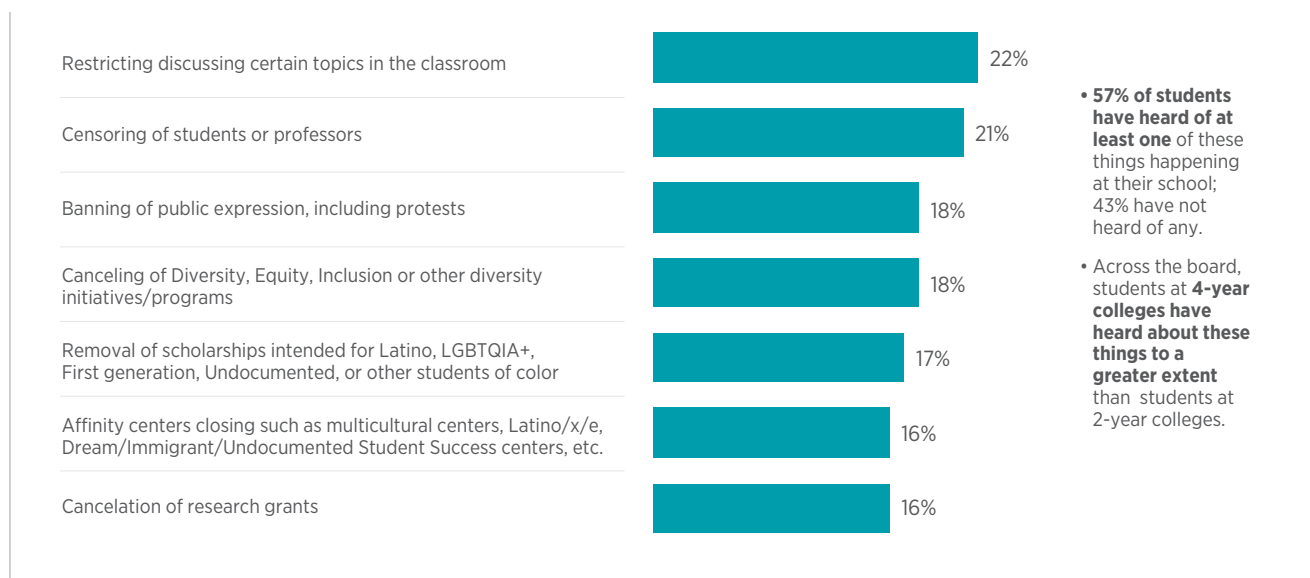


Figure 6. Have you heard about any of the following happening at YOUR college or university?



Finding 7: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is widely used by Latino college students, and they generally view it as having a net positive impact on education-related factors. Yet there are many students who are simply not sure about the impact AI is having on education, and there are mixed views about the impact of AI overall.

More than three in five (61%) current and recent Latino college students use AI at least a few times a month, including 40% who use it at least a few times a week. Men (70%) are heavier users than women (56%), but over half of women use it at least a few times a month.

Latino college students believe that AI is having the most positive impact on their understanding of class material (50% positive, 20% negative), plus a net positive impact on their ability to apply skills

in the real world (43% positive, 25% negative), their enhancement of critical thinking skills (41% positive, 30% negative) and the effort they put into classes (40% positive, 29% negative). They are more divided about the impact on their job prospects after college (36% positive, 33% negative) and think the impact on society overall is more negative (33%) than positive (31%). Latinas, particularly younger Latinas, are the least optimistic about the impact of AI.

Acknowledgements

The *2026 Survey of Latinos in Higher Education* was developed under the leadership of UnidosUS Education Policy Director Jenny Muñiz and UnidosUS Senior Policy Analyst Magin Misael Sanchez. We are grateful to Abigail Davenport, Alicia Simmons, PhD, and Aileen Cardona-Arroyo, PhD, for their invaluable partnership and contributions on behalf of Hart Research.

We thank Amalia Chamorro, Eric Rodriguez, Carmen M. Feliciano and Elizabeth Zamudio for their organizational leadership.

Special thanks to Cassandra Arroyo, PhD, Kim Marshall, Carlos Barahona, David Castro, Sonia Diaz and many UnidosUS staff members and partners whose thoughtful contributions and expertise informed the editorial, communications and dissemination efforts associated with this work.

About UnidosUS

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have built a stronger America by creating opportunities for Latinos and breaking down barriers to expand economic and social progress for all. UnidosUS partners with an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Threads](#) and [X](#).

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