

# THE CHRONICLE

of Higher Education

February 5, 2010

## Number of 'Hispanic Serving' Colleges Is Expected to Grow Significantly, Report Says

By Ashley Marchand

Almost 200 colleges and universities in the United States may soon meet the federal designation of "Hispanic serving," and those institutions should work aggressively now to increase the retention and graduation rates among their Latino students, according to a new report from [Excelencia in Education](#).

The report, "Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): Serving Latino Students," which will be posted on the group's Web site on Monday, aims to provide a greater understanding of "emerging" Hispanic-serving institutions, which generally have an enrollment that is about 15 to 24 percent Latino.. A college's student population must be at least 25 percent Hispanic to obtain the federal government's official designation, which makes institutions eligible for special funds from multiple federal agencies.

Researchers at Excelencia, which advocates for access and support for Hispanic people in higher education, characterize emerging Hispanic-serving institutions as colleges that are at "critical mass" — meaning that their Hispanic-student populations are large enough that they would transform the colleges' cultures.

The report, which was written primarily by Deborah A. Santiago, vice president for policy and research at Excelencia, examines how emerging Hispanic-serving institutions have responded to meet the needs of their growing Hispanic-student populations.

It argues that if such institutions worked to enroll more Latino students, they could win federal designation as Hispanic-serving institutions and gain access to new funds.. Achieving "Hispanic serving" status would also allow some of the institutions to more accurately reflect the populations surrounding them. The reports says there were 176 "emerging" colleges and universities in 20 states in 2006-7, with the highest concentrations in California and Texas.

The report concentrates on four of those institutions: Loyola Marymount University, in California; Palm Beach Community College at Lake Worth, in Florida; Texas State University at San Marcos; and Metropolitan State College of Denver. The last was included because of its progressive approaches to reaching out to and assisting Latino students, even though its Hispanic enrollment is only 13 percent of the student body.

Metropolitan State has committed to pursue full "Hispanic serving" status by 2015 and has created a task force to determine structural changes needed to achieve it. Changes include additional financial-aid awards and outreach to the Hispanic community through bilingual marketing, offering Chicano studies, and academic support.

### **Retention and Degree Completion**

While many colleges focus on enrolling Latino students, little is known about the students' retention rates, according to the report.

"Higher-education leaders and policy makers recognize that our nation's potential for success is tied to reaching degree-completion goals, which require a much greater proportion of degrees among our fastest growing population," wrote Sarita E. Brown, president of Excelencia in Education.

Among the emerging Hispanic-serving institutions studied, more than half of the colleges reported "specific practices related to the recruitment of Latino students," while a little more than one-third said they had "academic programs or support services specifically focused on Latino students."

The retention services include academic tutoring and mentorship through programs focusing on the first-year experience.

"In order to thrive, we must accelerate significantly the degree-completion rate of Latino students," Ms. Brown wrote.

Besides focusing on retention, Ms. Santiago, the report's main author, offered additional suggestions for emerging Hispanic-serving institutions seeking to better serve Latino students. Among other things, she suggested that they:

- Increase the cultural competency of faculty members to work effectively with Latino students.
- Carry out policies that lead to hiring and retaining a more diverse faculty, including more tenured positions.
- Raise awareness within the community, the faculty, and the staff about the potential benefits of becoming a Hispanic-serving institution.
- Provide more need-based financial aid.
- Have a multicultural center with a variety of diverse programs and events available to all students for studying, relaxing, learning, and participating in campus activities.
- Create programs to engage Latino high-school students and their families early.
- Develop strong partnerships between community colleges and Hispanic-serving institutions with formal articulation agreements, transition services, and systems to monitor transfer patterns.