



Post-Completion Success: How Leading HSIs Are Transforming Career Readiness



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Launched in 2004 in the nation's capital, *Excelencia* in Education leads a national network of results-oriented educators and policymakers to tap the talents of the Latino community and address the U.S. economy's needs for a highly educated workforce and engaged civic leaders. With this network,

Excelencia accelerates Latino student success in higher education by promoting Latino student achievement, informing educational policies with a Latino lens, and advancing evidence-based practices. For more information, visit: EdExcelencia.org.

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Introduction

Higher education is a key determinant of upward economic and social mobility—the ability for students to access higher-paying jobs, increase lifetime earnings, and maximize the return on their educational journey. Yet significant gaps remain in ensuring access to quality education and career pathways for all. Latino students are one of the fastest-growing groups of college-goers and the future of our workforce. To support their success, we must be intentional about connecting them to the opportunities they need to reach their full potential and thrive.

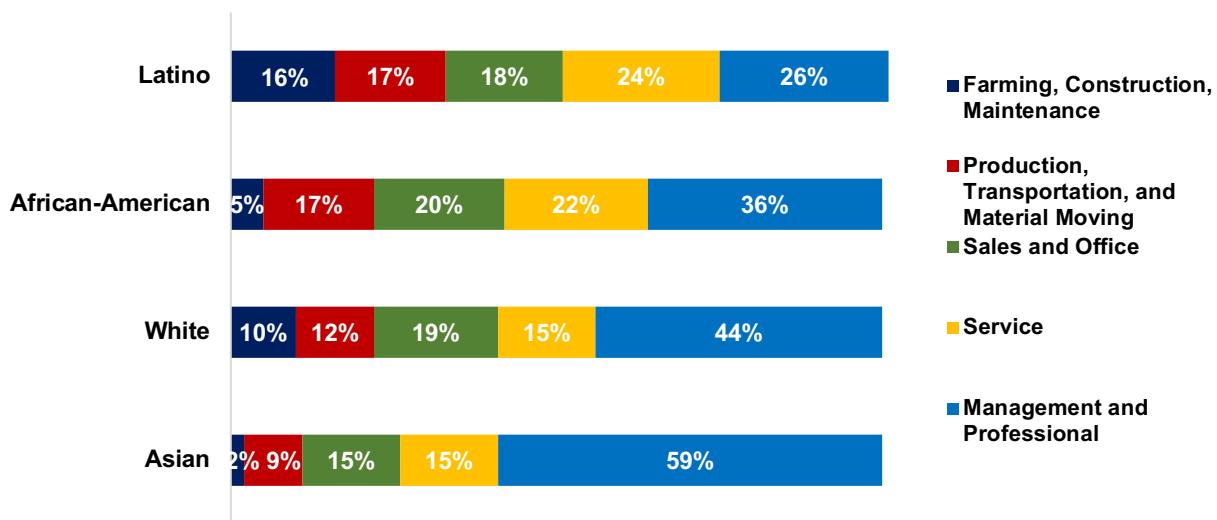
Over the past two decades (2000-2023), Latinos have made significant strides in higher education and the workforce. Latino college enrollment grew from 49 to 58%—the largest increase of any racial or ethnic group.¹ This growth is expected to continue, with Latino college enrollment projected to rise by 21% between 2020 and 2030, reaching 4.5 million students.² During the same time, Latino college completion also grew from 23% to 41%.^{3 4} While these improvements are encouraging, degree completion lags behind enrollment. When comparing between groups, only 29% of Latino adults have earned an associate degree or higher, compared to 49% of White adults.⁵ Closing this gap is critical, as the majority of future jobs will require postsecondary credentials and Latinos are projected to represent a major share of the future workforce. By 2031, 72% of jobs will require at least some postsecondary education.⁶

In addition, Latinos have the highest labor force participation rate of any racial/ethnic group (66%) and are projected to account for 91% of new workers by 2031, making up one in five workers nationwide.⁷ Ensuring post-completion success matters because a college degree increases lifetime earnings, job stability, and long-term well-being. For Latino students, degrees can shift life trajectories—not just for individuals, but for entire families. As the Latino population grows, their success is tied to our country's economic success.

Despite this strong participation in the workforce, Latinos remain overrepresented in low-wage jobs and underrepresented in management and professional occupations that require postsecondary credentials.⁸ In *Excelencia*'s most recent analysis, 34% of employed Latinos were in manual labor jobs such as production, transportation, and material moving occupations, or in farming, construction, and maintenance occupations, compared to 12% of Asians, 22% of Whites, and 24% of African Americans. At the same time, only 25% of Latinos were in management and professional occupations, compared to 58% of Asians, 43% of Whites, and 34% of African Americans (see Figure 1).

Latinos are overrepresented in the workforce, but in jobs that are essential, vulnerable, and lower in pay.

Figure 1: Occupation by Race/Ethnicity, 2023



Source: *Excelencia* in Education analysis of Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2023. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To fully tap Latino talent and meet future U.S. workforce needs, it is essential for higher education to advance economic mobility through career readiness programs, paid internships, and professional networks that connect students to high-quality employment opportunities.

Given the significant role Latinos play in the workforce, addressing educational disparities requires intentional action within higher education. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)⁹ are essential in strengthening academic quality, expanding access, and building institutional capacity to close attainment gaps. Through innovative programs, strategic partnerships, and data-driven practices, HSIs—like those highlighted below are not only preparing Latino students for graduation but for long-term career success. By aligning academic pathways with workforce demands and fostering an inclusive learning environment for all students, HSIs are transforming higher education's role in driving economic mobility and workforce development.

How Leading HSIs Are Advancing Post-Completion Success

To better understand how institutions are supporting Latino, and all, students beyond graduation, *Excelencia* in Education examined the evidence-based practices of seven Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) that participated in *Excelencia*'s 2024 Leadership: Post-Completion Institute. In partnership with JPMorgan Chase, this initiative engaged seven HSIs across California, Florida, Illinois, and Texas—stitutions that have demonstrated strong commitment to workforce preparation, career readiness, and fostering environments where Latino, and all, students can thrive.

In this analysis, we highlight three key post-completion strategies informed by what we've learned from engaging with institutions and leaders in our network. These strategies reflect how campuses are aligning academic pathways with workforce needs, leveraging data and partnerships, and making post-completion success a core part of their institutional priorities. These insights serve as a model for transforming how colleges and universities prepare Latino, and all, students for long-term success after graduation.

Strategies and Practices for Advancing Post-Completion Success

Strategy 1: Preparing Students for Workforce Success by Embedding Career Development into Academics

Institutions that are taking responsibility for post-completion success are reimagining how to align academic preparation with workforce demands. Institutions are investing in career-aligned High-Impact Practices (HIPs) such as undergraduate research, cohort-based support, service learning, and project-based coursework into students' educational pathways. By integrating career development into coursework, advising, and faculty engagement, institutions ensure students graduate not just with a degree but with meaningful, marketable skills and professional experience.

Why it matters

Latino, and all, students benefit from intentional, skills-focused programming that bridges the gap between academic learning and workforce preparation. Embedding career readiness across the curriculum helps students see the relevance of their degree, gain confidence, and build transferable skills for post-graduation success.

Challenge: Ensuring Student Engagement and Meaningful Outcomes

Despite efforts to include career preparation into academic pathways, institutions face persistent challenges in both engaging students early and sustaining these efforts at scale. Many students, particularly those outside of business and engineering majors, often graduate without a clear understanding of how their degree translates into workforce opportunities. Prioritizing and funding HIPs while balancing other demands

remains a challenge for institutions. Scaling HIPs and career-integrated coursework requires institutional support, funding, and staff capacity.

Opportunity: What It Looks Like in Practice

Institutions that integrate HIPs into students' educational pathways show what's possible when academic preparation is intentionally aligned with career success. The following examples illustrate how institutions equip students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to succeed after graduation, integrating career preparation directly into academic pathways.

University of Illinois-Chicago: Crossing Latinidades Humanities Research Initiative Launched in 2021, this initiative aims to strengthen the R1 HSI pipeline to the doctorate and professoriate by supporting Latino doctoral students in Humanities fields. The one-year fellowship includes an intensive 10-day Summer Institute in Latino Studies methodologies and theories, designed to enhance research skills, critical thinking, and productive writing for third- and fourth-year pre-All but Dissertation (ABD) students. Following the Summer Institute, participants enter a nine-month fellowship that provides stipends and academic support. Career development is included through a Writing LAB for dissertation proposals, workshops on publishing research, and faculty mentorship that prepares fellows for academic and professional career pathways. The initiative has produced measurable outcomes: of the 27 Latino fellows in the 2022–2023 cohort, 100% achieved ABD status and advanced to candidacy. The following cohort (2023–2024) saw 24 fellows reach the same milestone. Beyond academic advancement, the program supports career placement by linking students to the workforce: in 2022–2023, of the 27, four fellows received fellowships and three secured postdoctoral positions, while five PhD graduates obtained academic (4) and professional (1) roles. These results show how intentional, career-aligned High-Impact Practices can directly translate into post-completion success for Latino students pursuing advanced degrees.

Dallas College: By integrating career exploration early in the student journey, Dallas College offers a *Career Exploration*¹⁰ online platform designed to help prospective and current students make informed decisions about their educational and career paths. Through this online tool, students can explore a wide range of careers and academic programs, compare areas of study, and see how specific courses align with in-demand industries. The platform also provides information on livable wages and median salaries connected to specific careers within each field of study offered at Dallas College, including access to a living wage calculator, along with career services and advising resources. By connecting labor market data with academic offerings early in the academic process, Dallas College ensures that students can identify clear pathways to careers and understand the value of their education.

Strategy 2: Linking Students to Workforce Opportunities Through Partnerships and Experiential Learning

Institutions are building meaningful connections between students and employers, and community organizations. Many institutions that participated in *Excelencia's* 2024 Leadership: Post-Completion Institute are actively investing in partnerships that are

responsive to the needs of Latino students and the communities they serve. Initiatives like the HSI Career Collaborative¹¹ bring together employers seeking diverse talent with campuses that serve a large Latino student population. Additional efforts, such as programs housed in HSI Initiatives Departments and Hispanic Alumni Chapters, build community by providing mentorship, scholarships, and leadership development. By expanding access to internships, apprenticeships, and other experiential opportunities, these institutions ensure students gain real-world experience, professional networks, and exposure to career opportunities that complement academic preparation.

Why it matters

Community-centered partnerships are an essential part of post-completion success. By working with local employers, healthcare systems, and civic organizations, institutions can create pipelines to connect students to the workforce. These efforts also help elevate the unique strengths of Latino graduates to bring into professional spaces.

Challenge: Sustaining Employer Partnerships

While these efforts are promising, many institutions still face challenges in sustaining relationships with employers. Consistent communication and engagement with employers is needed to align academic preparation with workforce needs. This can create more access to paid internships, co-ops, and career exploration experiences. Building stronger connections with employers remains a key area for growth.

Opportunity: What It Looks Like in Practice

Building strong partnerships with employers, nonprofits, and community organizations can create meaningful opportunities for Latino students to develop career-ready skills while contributing to their communities. The following example shows how institutions create meaningful connections between students and employers, providing real-world experiences that open doors to career opportunities.

University of Texas-Arlington: The Spanish Community Translation and Interpreting Program (T&I) at the University of Texas-Arlington (UTA) connects students with more than 35 local organizations across North Texas—including hospitals, schools, legal aid centers, and nonprofit service providers. These partnerships offer real-world experiences in professional translation and interpreting. The program affirms and maximizes students' bilingual skills in English and Spanish through coursework that responds to current market and professional demands, while also providing leadership and networking opportunities through internships, service-learning, mentoring, and instruction.

Since 2015, 64 students (94% of whom are Latino) completed a total of 3,921 internship hours with community partners. Research shows that students who engage in internships gain workforce skills and are more likely to secure employment after graduation.¹² Since 2008, 282 students (86% of whom are Latino) have earned the Certificate in Translation. These outcomes demonstrate how community and employer-centered partnerships not only expand career opportunities but also ensure that Latino, and all, students are prepared to enter the workforce.

Strategy 3: Measuring and Tracking Outcomes to Drive Data-Informed Workforce Preparation

Institutions are leveraging data to strengthen post-completion efforts. By tracking alumni outcomes, analyzing labor market alignment, and using evidence of effectiveness to inform program design, they continuously improve career readiness and workforce development strategies. Programs that embed data-informed decision-making into student support structures ensure that all students, including Latino and first-generation learners, can thrive after graduation.

Why it matters

For many Latino students, earning a degree is not just about personal advancement, it's about supporting themselves and their families. Workforce preparation should be a core responsibility of higher education. In order to help students succeed beyond graduation, institutions must intentionally include career readiness into the student experience.

Without systematic tracking and evaluation, institutions risk missing gaps in student preparedness, gaps in outcomes, and misalignment with employer needs. Data-driven approaches help identify areas for intervention and ensure all students are positioned for post-completion success. By aligning programming with workforce demands, campuses are preparing Latino, and all, students not just to graduate, but to succeed in meaningful and high-paying careers.

Challenge: Gaps in Tracking, Sharing, and Utilizing Post-Graduation Data

While some institutions are leveraging data to guide workforce development, many still face challenges to collect, share, and use post-completion data in ways that drive internal decision-making. Siloed data systems and limited collaboration across departments make it difficult to understand where graduates are working, in what roles, and how well their skills align with employer needs. Without a student-centered data culture that shows where and how departments share information and use it to inform programming, institutions may miss opportunities to improve post-completion outcomes.

Opportunity: What It Looks Like in Practice

Some institutions are taking intentional steps to better track and share post-graduation outcomes. The following example demonstrates how one institution leverages multiple data sources such as LinkedIn, student surveys, and real-time employment tracking, to increase visibility into where students go after graduation and how this can inform their institutional efforts.

San Francisco State University: As one of the top feeder schools for employers in the Bay Area—including IT and Software, Social and Digital Media, Life Sciences and Biotech, Environmental and Cleantech, and International Business—San Francisco State University (SFSU) leverages LinkedIn data to highlight where alumni are employed and encourage recent graduates to share their employment outcomes. Using real-time employment tracking tools such as LiveAlumni, the institution provides up-to-date information on the sectors and employers where alumni work. By making these outcomes visible, SFSU helps current students understand potential career paths and aligns academic and professional support with evolving labor market needs.

Further, the Office of Career & Leadership Development uses the First Destination Survey (FDS) to collect employment, continuing education, and other post-graduation data from recent graduates. In addition, SFSU's Institutional Research Office administers the Senior Exit Survey, capturing information while students are still enrolled, including responses on soft skills, internships, and employment preparedness. By integrating data from both surveys, SFSU is exploring a more comprehensive view of student outcomes to inform institutional strategies, enhance career support, and better prepare students for the workforce.

Driving Change: Key Institutional Commitments to Advance Post-Completion Success

Following their participation in the 2024 Leadership: Post-Completion Institute, the institutions made three concrete commitments to deepen their post-completion efforts. Their commitments reflect a broader vision: preparing Latino, and all, students for workforce success, connecting them to real-world opportunities, and measuring what works to improve impact. These commitments are not just next steps, they are essential actions that lay the foundation for institutional change that other colleges and universities can learn from.

Three Actionable Commitments:

1. **Preparing Students for Workforce Success:** Institutions are committing to embedding career development into academics by integrating workforce skills into curricula, expanding faculty involvement in career readiness, and using metrics to ensure students graduate with in-demand credentials.
2. **Linking Students to Workforce Opportunities:** To strengthen the bridge between college and career, campuses are committing to expanding partnerships with employers and community-based organizations, aligning academic programs with labor market needs, and increasing access to paid internships, apprenticeships, and real-world work experiences.
3. **Measuring and Tracking Outcomes:** Participating institutions committed to strengthening systems for tracking outcomes of their alumni. This includes enhancing data literacy across departments, using data to better understand and support students after graduation, and using career tracking data to drive data-informed decision-making.

Together, these efforts represent a shared commitment to economic mobility, institutional accountability, and post-completion success for Latino, and all, students.

Policy Priorities: A Call to Action

Higher education institutions and policymakers play a critical role in ensuring graduates transition into high-quality, high-paying careers. The strategies and practices showcased in this brief demonstrate what is possible when career readiness, workforce alignment, and community partnerships are intentionally embedded into the student experience. To scale and sustain these efforts, institutional, state, and federal policies must reinforce and expand practices that connect Latino, and all, students' academic preparation with workforce opportunities.

Institutional Policy

Institutions can lead by integrating career development into the core of the student experience, strengthening partnerships with employers, and using data to drive continuous improvement. Policies at the institutional level should:

- **Embed career readiness across the curriculum:** Require career readiness learning skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem-solving) in general education and major requirements, with competencies reflected in course syllabi.
- **Align programs with workforce needs:** Partner with employers to co-design microcredentials, build transfer/completion pathways in high-demand fields, and use employer advisory boards to review curricula.
- **Use data to strengthen career outcomes:** Track, share, and apply post-graduation results across departments to improve curriculum, advising, and employer partnerships.
- **Leverage alumni networks for career success:** Expand mentorship and professional networking programs through career services to strengthen current student connections with alumni.
- **Prioritize workforce preparation in institutional strategy:** Make career development central in institutional strategic plans and faculty engagement through incentives for career-focused teaching and employer partnerships.

State Policy

State governments can support institutions to better align academic preparation with workforce needs. State policies should:

- **Establish statewide paid internship and apprenticeship programs:** Fund partnerships between institutions serving Latino and all students, and employers to provide paid, credit-bearing internships tied to degree programs.
- **Enhance state data systems for post-graduation outcomes:** Integrate wage and employment data with higher education systems to track outcomes by race/ethnicity and sector.
- **Increase transparency in workforce outcomes:** Require annual public reporting of graduate employment, earnings, and further education by institution and program. State-level reporting would provide locally relevant data to help students, families, and policymakers make informed decisions.
- **Invest in industry-specific training programs at community colleges and universities:** Provide grants for programs aligned to high-demand fields, with a priority for under-resourced institutions, like HSIs.

- **Strengthen transfer pathways between two-year and four-year institutions:** Mandate articulation agreements that include workforce-aligned pathways in high-demand fields.

Federal Policy

At the national level, federal policymakers can advance post-completion outcomes by incentivizing data use, funding career-aligned experiences, and supporting institutional capacity.

- **Leverage existing federal programs**, such as Federal Work-Study, to support experiential learning opportunities for students.
- **Make workforce development an allowable activity for Title V grants** to support institutions' capacity in creating workforce programs.
- **Incentivize engagement between employers and the institutions** serving Latino students.

As the Latino student population continues to grow, HSIs play a critical role in shaping post-completion success. This brief highlights strategies for aligning academic pathways with workforce demands, using data to guide decisions, leveraging partnerships, and expanding career-readiness initiatives—ensuring Latino, and all, students have the support they need to thrive after graduation. By fostering collaboration among institutions, employers, and policymakers, higher education can drive economic mobility and workforce innovation.

To explore *Excelencia*'s recommendations on Workforce: visit the link to [learn more](#)

References

¹ *Excelencia in Education* analysis of U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Digest of Education Statistics, [2022], Table 302.20. Percentage of recent high school completers enrolled in college, by race/ethnicity and level of institution: 1960 through 2022.

² *Excelencia in Education* analysis of U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Digest of Education Statistics, [2022], Table 306.30. Fall enrollment of U.S. residents in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2030

³ *Excelencia in Education* analysis of U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Graduation Rates component, selected years, Spring 2002 through Spring 2014 and Winter 2014-15 through Winter 2022-23 (final data) and Winter 2023-24 (provisional data); and IPEDS, Admissions component, Winter 2017-18 (final data).

⁴ Note: Completion rates shown reflect first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year institutions who graduated within 4 years after entry.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

⁶ Jeff Strohl, Artem Gulish, and Catherine Morris. The Future of Good Jobs: Projections through 2031. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2024. cew.georgetown.edu/goodjobsprojections2031.

⁷ Santiago, D., Labandera, E., Arroyo, C. & Nour, S.R. (February 2024). Finding Your Workforce: Latino Talent for a Global Economy. Washington, D.C.: *Excelencia in Education*.

⁸ Source: Santiago, D., Labandera, E., Arroyo, C., & Nour, S.R. (February 2024). Finding Your Workforce: Latino Talent for a Global Economy. Washington, D.C.: *Excelencia in Education*.

⁹ Note: The classification of HSIs was formally recognized in the Higher Education Act in 1992 for capacity-building support to improve the access and quality of education for Latino and other low-income students. HSIs are defined as accredited, degree-granting public or private not-for-profit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student (FTE) enrollment.

¹⁰ <https://www.dallascollege.edu/future-students/explore-options/>

¹¹ <https://hsicareer.org/>

¹² Gray, Kevin. (2024). *Students Recognize the Importance of Gaining Internship Experience*. National Association of Colleges and Employers. <https://www.naceweb.org/job-market/internships/students-recognize-the-importance-of-gaining-internship-experience>