

Overview

Higher education has a responsibility to prepare students for a competitive and evolving workforce, yet gaps in access to quality education and career pathways persist. Latino students, the fastest-growing group of college-goers, are central to the nation’s workforce and economy. As more jobs require postsecondary credentials, institutions and employers must intentionally prepare, connect, and invest in Latino, and all, college students to ensure they are equipped to meet the nation’s economic and civic needs.

Latinos’ College Enrollment & Completion

Latino college enrollment is increasing, yet degree completion lags.

- Between 2000 and 2023, Latino college enrollment grew more than any other racial/ethnic group (from 49% to 58%).¹
- Over the same period, Latino college completion also rose (from 23% to 41%),^{2,3} yet still lagged behind enrollment.

Latinos’ Labor Force Participation

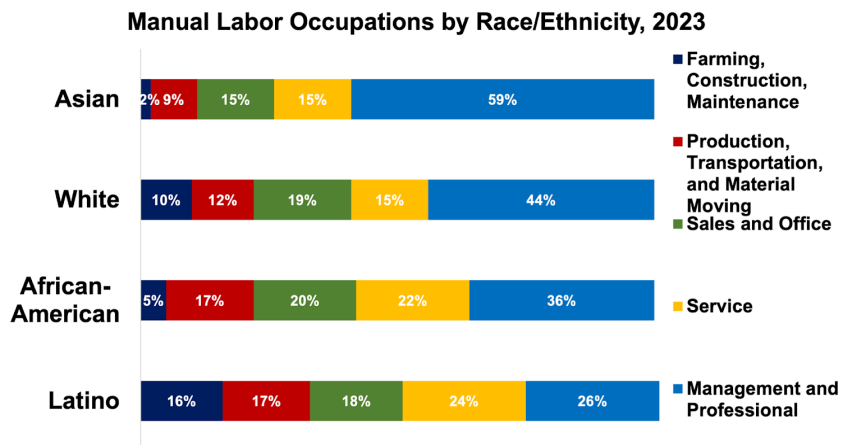
Latinos have the highest labor force participation of any racial/ethnic group nationally.

- In 2023, 67% of Latinos participated in the labor force, compared to 65% of Asians, 62% of Whites, and 63% of African Americans.⁴

Representation and Future Workforce Growth

Latinos are underrepresented in high-paying, professional roles that require postsecondary credentials, and Latinos will significantly drive future workforce growth.

- In 2023, only 26% of Latinos were in management and professional jobs, compared to 59% of Asians, 44% of Whites, and 36% of African Americans.⁵
- By 2031, it is projected that Latinos will represent 91% of new U.S. workers, being one in five workers nationwide.⁶



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, 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).

³ 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.

⁴ Excelencia in Education analysis of Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2023. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 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.

The Institutional Role in Workforce Preparation

Institutions are designing academic pathways, partnerships, and data-informed strategies that advance workforce success and economic mobility. As many Latino students fit a post-traditional profile—often attending college part time, working while enrolled, and balancing family responsibilities, these efforts are essential to translating education into meaningful careers. The following four examples highlight how colleges and universities advance workforce success and economic mobility for Latino, and all, students.

Preparing Students for Workforce Success by Embedding Career Development into Academic Pathways

Institutions are ensuring students graduate with marketable skills and credentials aligned with workforce demand.

- **University of Illinois Chicago – Crossing Latinidades Humanities Research Initiative:** Integrates career preparation into doctoral training for Latino students through research institutes, fellowships, professional writing support, and faculty mentorship.
- **Outcomes:** 100% of the 27 Latino fellows in the 2022–2023 cohort advanced to ABD status; graduates secured postdoctoral, academic, and professional roles.

Linking Students to Workforce Opportunities Through Partnerships and Experiential Learning

Colleges and universities serve as a critical bridge between students, employers, and communities through applied learning and professional networking.

- **University of Texas–Arlington – Spanish Community Translation & Interpreting Program:** Connects students to more than 35 community organizations through internships, service learning, and employer partnerships aligned with workforce demand.
- **Outcomes:** Since 2015, 64 students (94% Latino) completed 3,921 internship hours; since 2008, 282 students (86% Latino) earned a Certificate in Translation.

Measuring and Tracking Outcomes to Drive Data-Informed Workforce Preparation

Institutions advance workforce preparation and economic mobility by tracking post-graduation employment and using data to inform practice.

- **Arizona State University (ASU):** Uses the First Destination Survey and Alumni Survey to track post-completion outcomes and inform program and partnership decisions.
- **Outcomes:** In 2023–24, 70% of Latino/a graduates were employed and 14% pursued further education within six months; 79% of Latino alumni were employed full-time three years after graduation.

Advancing Economic Mobility Through Education-to-Career Pathways

Higher education drives upward economic mobility by connecting students to credentials, careers, and wages that support long-term stability.

- **South Texas College – Center for Advanced Training & Apprenticeships (CATA):** Operates over 17 “earn while you learn” apprenticeship programs in high-demand fields, aligned with stackable credentials and regional workforce needs.
- **Outcomes:** Over 670 students enrolled; partnerships with more than 70 employers; graduates earn nationally recognized credentials and access immediate employment.

For more information about evidence-based programs that advance Latinos in the workforce visit our [Growing What Works](#) page or contact us: contact@edexcelencia.org