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The Latinx Lack of Educational Success

SOC 264: Latinx in the South

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The journey to get to where I am now was a difficult one as a Latinx student with many obstacles along the way. The complex landscape of the college admissions process caused me to be interested in the educational opportunities and success of Latinx students—particularly in the South. Unfortunately, this information is scarce since there isn't much research done in the South about the Latinx community. Even with that obstacle, examining the opportunities offered to Latinx students as they prepare to enter colleges and their representation at various institutions of higher education along with their success is crucial in understanding the Latinx education attainment. Finally, a special case study on the educational access and attainment for undocumented students is also provided as the end to provide some information on a different Latinx demographic.

First off it is important to note that “Southern states like South Carolina receive less attention in scholarly research” because it shows the gaps in the information available.¹ When looking for information relating to education in the South about Latinx students, it is difficult to find what one is looking for. For example, a dissertation by a student at Loyola University in Chicago provides background information on the obstacles towards attaining a higher education faced by undocumented students across the United States with an emphasis on Illinois as well as

¹ Sophia Rodriguez, “Good, Deserving Immigrants’ Join the Tea Party: How South Carolina Policy Excludes Latinx and Undocumented Immigrants from Educational Opportunity and Social Mobility,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 26, no. 103 (August 20, 2018).

the underlying issues in the education system for Latinx students². Her research briefly touches on subjects pertaining to the Southeastern United States discriminatory policies with a small section on North Carolina and their impact on undocumented students. Although her research was recent, other government bodies across the United States started before her looking to promote Latinx academic success. For this reason, the New York City Board of Education created “the Latino Commission on Educational reform to examine issues of concern to Latino children who comprise an increasing segment of students in the public school system”³. The report published includes a wide range of statistics including the representation of Latinx students in each of the cities districts, the problems found with the education systems pertaining to Latinx students and ways to solve those issues. That report was concentrated in the New York City area so for those looking for information in the Southeastern United States, the information is still scarce even if applicable. Similarly, the United States established the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics in 1990 to hopefully “improve the availability of and access to high quality early learning programs for Hispanic children, dramatically increasing the number of Hispanic high school graduates, and [to] ensure more Hispanics students enroll in and more importantly, complete college”⁴. To achieve this, reports are regularly released with statistics on Latinx education but there is little to no focus on the Southeastern United States. The March 2012 issue briefly touched on the same discriminatory policies talked about in the dissertation mentioned above showing how the research on the south

² Aliza J. Gilbert, “Dreamers and the College Dream: A Case Study Analysis Examining the Influences of High Schools and High School Agents” (Ph.D., United States -- Illinois, Loyola University Chicago, 2016), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1833164009/abstract/727E71E4F40D468DPQ/1>.

³ “Toward a Vision for the Education of Latino Students: Community Voices, Student Voices. Interim Report of the Latino Commission on Educational Reform. [Volume I.]” *Undefined*, May 20, 1992, 215.

⁴ “About Us | White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics,” accessed April 20, 2020, <https://sites.ed.gov/hispanic-initiative/752-2/>.

repeats the same issues even 4 years after the incident occurred⁵. It may be difficult to find information pertaining directly to the South. Although there is a lack of research in the South, the above information is still applicable and there have been initiatives to help Latinx students in highschool obtain a higher education.

“The lack of racial balance in ‘the best schools,’” has been an issue around the country for decades⁶. Even with Latinx students making up a large percentage of most school districts, the difference in racial percentages when it comes to the best schools in school districts is massive⁷. This lack of Latinx representation at the best schools has shown to be limiting because Latinx students don't have access to the same preparation during high school to compete with other college applicants nor the resources required to apply to college. In her dissertation, Gilbert notes that students “recognized that the department could do a better job of making sure that all students and parents know what college options exist”⁸. The limited information provided to students hinders their ability to make the best choice because they only have a few options available to them. Fortunately, “students who enroll and succeed in college identify crucial supports in helping them achieve their college dreams”. For this reason, there are various programs established across the United States in hope of providing high school students the required guidance for a successful college career. Colleges in North Carolina have begun to offer mentor partnerships with communities around them in hopes of “empowering Hispanic youth to

⁵ “President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics - ProQuest,” accessed April 20, 2020, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/docview/930278195/368C15B5FA4D41B0PQ/1?accountid=10427>.

⁶ Sophia Rodriguez, “My Eyes Were Opened to the Lack of Diversity in Our Best Schools’: Re-Conceptualizing Competitive School Choice Policy as a Racial Formation,” *The Urban Review; Dordrecht* 49, no. 4 (November 2017): 529–50, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/10.1007/s11256-017-0415-z>.

⁷ “Toward a Vision for the Education of Latino Students.”

⁸ Gilbert, “Dreamers and the College Dream.”

succeed in high school”⁹. Schools such as North Carolina State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have programs that encourage high school students to pursue a college education by providing mentoring services, workshops, and grants meant to diminish the economic barrier between Latinx students and a higher education^{10 11}. The mentorship programs provide Latinx students with “college prep sessions, early college classes, campus visits to diverse universities throughout the state, cultural enrichment activities and public service opportunities” that otherwise would not be available through traditional high school counselors¹². As more programs are created, the gap between higher education and Latinx students is closed but the success of Latinx students in college is still an important statistic to look at.

The “Latinx student enrollment in postsecondary institutions nationwide reached an all time high with Latinx students comprising 16.5% all college enrollments” in 2011¹³. Although this is a promising statistic, it does not show the whole story because their “degree attainment reached only 13% for those in community colleges and 8% for bachelor degree procurement” in the same year¹⁴. The low degree attainment percentages can be attributed to the

⁹ “White House Lauds Juntos Program,” NC State News, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://news.ncsu.edu/2015/10/white-house-lauds-juntos-program/>.

¹⁰ “White House Honors UNC Education Initiative for Investment in Latino Youth | UNC Global,” accessed April 20, 2020, <https://global.unc.edu/news-story/white-house-honors-unc-education-initiative-for-investment-in-latino-youth/>.

¹¹ “About Us,” SLI VA (blog), June 22, 2018, <http://sli-va.org/about-us/>.

¹² “Scholars Latino Initiative (SLI) Program,” accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.ncat.edu/campus-life/student-affairs/departments/multicultural-student-center/sli-mentoring.php>.

¹³ Cristóbal Rodríguez, Melissa A. Martinez, and Fernando Valle, “Latino Educational Leadership Across the Pipeline: For Latino Communities and Latina/o Leaders,” *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 136–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192715612914>.

¹⁴ Joel P. Murphy and Shirley A. Murphy, “Get Ready, Get In, Get Through: Factors That Influence Latino College Student Success,” *Journal of Latinos & Education* 17, no. 1 (January 2018): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2016.1268139>.

previously mentioned lack of resources at a high school level that puts college students at a disadvantage to their peers as well as other drawbacks due to their parents education level. In order to help this, it is crucial that students use “campus services such as tutoring, counseling, and mentors”¹⁵. Another great tool to help the success of underprepared Latinx students is to “promote enrollment of students in summer bridge programs” to help prepare students for the level of education students will face once they enter college. Colleges also need to “increase the number of Latinx faculty that can serve as role models for Latinx and guide” them through their college life¹⁶. By having a faculty member that the student can relate and feel comfortable with, it becomes easier for the student to approach the faculty with any questions and understand the guidance meant to help the student through college. In a similar fashion, undocumented students also need the support to simply feel safe.

The younger undocumented Latinx population across the United States received much needed help when the Obama administration passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals(DACA) but many of them still face issues “such as eligibility for federal aid and in-state tuition”— especially in the Southeastern United States¹⁷. Prior to the enactment of DACA, “the North Carolina Community College Systems Engaged in a years-long debate regarding whether undocumented students should even be admitted to their institutions” showing just one of the many other difficulties that Latinx students faced¹⁸. Even before that

¹⁵ Murphy and Murphy.

¹⁶ Murphy and Murphy.

¹⁷ Alessandra Bazo Vienrich, “In College and Undocumented: An Analysis of the Educational Trajectories of Undocumented Students in North Carolina,” *Masters Abstracts International* (ProQuest, Ann Arbor MI, 2014), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1629333040/D242F1DE58F847B0PQ/1>.

¹⁸ Kristina Isabel Lizardy-Hajbi, “‘Caught in the Crossfire’: Effects of Policy Ambiguities and Inconsistencies on Higher Education Professionals Providing Support to Undocumented Students” (Ph.D., United States -- Colorado, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/863838687/abstract/DF088AAFF95D4DDFPQ/1>.

issue, “the U.S. Supreme Court held that undocumented children could attend public schools” but this only applied to K-12 leaving higher education as an uncertain future for undocumented children¹⁹. Shortly after, the passing of the IIRIA and the PRWORA allowed “Undocumented students [to] attend colleges, private and public, but states that wish to enable these students to be eligible for in-state public college tuition” must pass their own legislation to enable that. This left the door open for each state to pass their own laws which led to states such as “South Carolina [to become] the first state to enact a statute barring these students from attending state institutions, and Alabama’s higher education board acted through regulation to do the same”²⁰. As of 2009, only 10 states had legislation allowing undocumented students to gain resident tuition with none of them being in the Southeastern United States²¹. Many of the private universities “do not advertise formal funding policies, but offer institutional aid and scholarships to eligible undocumented students”²². In North Carolina, “seven private colleges...publicly declared their support of undocumented students by partnering with Golden Goor Scholars to offer scholarships that cover tuition and room and board renewable for four years” in order to remove the financial burden from undocumented students²³. Unfortunately, “dealing with the anxieties surrounding DACA’s future” and the fact that “the threat of deportation becomes real”, undocumented students have many other issues to worry about in life^{24,25}. Without a real

¹⁹ Michael A. Olivas, “Undocumented College Students, Taxation, and Financial Aid: A Technical Note,” *Review of Higher Education* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 407–16.

²⁰ Olivas.

²¹ Olivas.

²² Gilbert, “Dreamers and the College Dream.”

²³ Gilbert.

²⁴ Martin Gonzalez, “Supporting the Undocumented Community in the Era of Trump: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Higher Education” (M.A., United States -- Texas, University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2018), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2202321783/abstract/C23C74EAB39B441CPQ/1>.

²⁵ Bazo Vienrich, “In College and Undocumented.”

fix, many undocumented students “must come to terms with the fact that college may not be a reality for them”²⁶.

Although there isn't wide spread information on Latinx education in the Southeastern United States, much of the information available applies to the South as well. Throughout the US, a trend of underprepared and underrepresented Latinx students hinders the educational success of Latinx students in college. There are possible steps that students, colleges, high schools and governmental bodies can take to help the limited Latinx students. Alongside the restricted Latinx students comes the undocumented Latinx students which have even more difficulties achieving a higher education due to their legal status. It is with this paper that the lack of research, latinx preparation, support and success is showcased to bring awareness to these issues.

²⁶ Bazo Vienrich.

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