Ensuring the Success of Latino College Students

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How can we ensure that the state’s growing Latino population succeeds in college?

Educational Attainment by Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration

Latino students are underrepresented at Rhode Island’s public institutions of higher education.

Latino Enrollment at Rhode Island Colleges

Latino students are underrepresented at Rhode Island’s public institutions of higher education.
Latinos are Rhode Island’s fastest growing ethnic group, but do not graduate from college at the same rate as other students.

**CHALLENGE**

Latinos are Rhode Island’s fastest growing ethnic group, yet Latino students in the state often lag behind their peers. The college graduation rate among Rhode Island Latino students (44%) is significantly lower than for white students (59%), an “equity gap” of 15 percentage points. Only one in five adult Latinos in Rhode Island have an associate degree or higher and more than a third do not have a high school diploma or GED. Ensuring that the state’s growing Latino population succeeds in college is important to cultivating a well-educated workforce for Rhode Island’s future.

**RESEARCH**

To better understand the factors that contribute to or detract from college success among Latinos in Rhode Island, we conducted in-depth interviews with 30 Latino full-time students at the state’s public institutions of higher education: University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and Community College of Rhode Island. Participants were between ages 18 and 23 and had attended high school in Rhode Island. We asked about their college experiences, involvement in college access and preparation programs, college search and choice processes, prior educational experiences, family histories, and plans for the future.

**FINDINGS**

Our research indicates that there are three major sources of stress for Latino college students in Rhode Island:

1. Adjustment to social and academic life on campuses that can be quite different from their high school communities;
2. Family obligations and constraints on the support their families are able to provide; and
3. Financial pressures and difficulties balancing work and school obligations.

These challenges can inhibit students’ academic performance, harm their health and well-being, strain relationships with their families and friends, and even lead them to drop out of school.

**INSIGHTS**

When Latino students do not reach their full educational potential, it hinders the state’s social and economic future. Our research suggests three ways to help Rhode Island’s Latino students succeed in college:

1. Greater institutional support for Latino students including funding for cultural organizations, smaller class sizes, and faculty diversity and cultural competency.
2. Education and outreach to Latino students and their families about the college application, enrollment, and transition process.
3. Increased financial support and opportunities for work and career advancement, such as paid internships or work-study opportunities with professors.

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**Our Interview Sample** | 30 full-time students between the ages of 18 and 23

**GENDER**

- Male: 33%
- Female: 67%

**HIGH SCHOOL**

- Public: 87%
- Private: 13%

**COLLEGE**

- URI: 60%
- RIC: 27%
- CCRI: 13%

**YEAR IN SCHOOL**

- First Year Students: 37%
- Sophomores: 17%
- Juniors: 17%
- Seniors: 30%
The College & University Research Collaborative (The Collaborative) is a statewide public/private partnership of Rhode Island’s 11 colleges and universities, connecting public policy and academic research.

The Collaborative’s mission is to increase the use of non-partisan academic research in policy development and to provide an evidence-based foundation for government decision-making.

The Collaborative turns research into action by sharing research with policymakers, community leaders, partner organizations, and the citizens of Rhode Island.