

Recruiting and Retaining Latino Faculty Members: The Missing Piece to Latino Student Success

by Luis Ponjuan

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Latinos have accounted for most of the nation's population growth over the last decade (56 percent) and currently represent 16.3 percent of the United States population (50.5 million people).¹ Unfortunately, this growth hasn't been mirrored in higher education. Latino students had the lowest percentages (27.5 percent) of college enrollment compared to White and Black students (45 percent and 37.7 percent, respectively).² Nevertheless, Latino enrollment numbers are on the rise: going from 14.8 million in 1999 to more than 20 million in 2009.³ These dramatic demographic changes and the increased presence of Latinos in American higher education highlight new challenges for academe.

While Latino students are enrolling in greater numbers, Latino faculty have not seen similar growth, making up only four percent of faculty nationwide.⁴ These contrasting images between the faculty and student demographics portend an inevitable truth that, while the higher education student population is dramatically changing, the faculty members of color still are not representative of the incoming cohort of students of color, especially the Latino student population.

As a Latino faculty member, these troubling trends resonate with me and remind me that additional work is needed to understand how higher education institutions can improve their commitment to Latino faculty members. In this article, I examine how education leaders can improve the recruitment and reten-

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SPECIAL FOCUS: DEFINING OUR VALUES, AFFIRMING OUR IDEAS

tion of Latino faculty members in higher education institutions. After providing an overview of the current situation *vis à vis* Latinos in higher education, I offer ten specific policy and programmatic recommendations to improve conditions for Latino faculty members.

LATINOS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In response to poor institutional recruitment efforts and low retention rates of faculty members of color, higher education researchers have examined the institutional and educational benefits of having these underrepresented faculty members

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in higher education institutions. For example, researchers have found that Latino faculty members benefit higher education by uniquely engaging students in the classroom, improving Latino students' higher education retention and degree completion rates, enhancing campus pluralism, and conducting academic research on racial/ethnic communities.⁵

One of the more compelling arguments for having Latino faculty members is the direct impact their teaching practices has on student learning outcomes. Faculty members of color are more likely to engage students in classroom dialogue and provide additional readings on issues of race and ethnicity that challenge students' preconceived ideas of racial/ethnic groups.⁶ Urrieta and Chavez argue that most Latino faculty members view their teaching in the classroom as opportunities to "raise students' consciousness and critical thinking skills even when faced with resistance."⁷

Researchers have discovered that students of color in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) are more likely to persist toward degree completion when they have faculty members of color as role models.⁸ Other scholars have found faculty members of color help underrepresented students to have successful undergraduate experiences. These students also viewed faculty members of color as inspiring symbols of professional success and powerful examples of academic excellence.⁹ Hurtado et al. found that the presence of faculty members of color is necessary to create and enhance a diverse educational learning environment. They argued that the racial/ethnic diversity of faculty members demonstrates an institutional commitment to creating a multicultural learning environment.¹⁰ Coupled with Latino student retention, Latino faculty members also make an impact with their academic scholarship, being more likely to produce scholarship that is relevant to the Latino communities and individuals.¹¹

Still, even as much evidence points to the tangible and meaningful contributions made by Latino faculty members to higher education, research also highlights the challenging work environments that too often confront them. These challenges reflect the realities that these faculty members endure when they are one of few people of color in their department and institution.¹²

The literature is surfeit with empirical evidence that shows Latino faculty members are more likely to have additional committee/service duties compared to their White colleagues.¹³ These additional duties represent daunting realities for Latino faculty members who are also trying to navigate the tenure and promotion

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process. That is, many of these “service commitments” are less valued when Latino faculty members are evaluated for tenure and promotion. This inherent tension between service duties and tenure-related activities usually results in “physical and mental exhaustion, emotional drainage” for many Latino faculty members.¹⁴

There are potential challenges when a faculty member of color is in a workplace that reflects dominant racial/ethnic norms and behaviors. For example, researchers argue that Latino faculty members often face barriers within their workplace that lack Latino cultural values such as “*personalismo, simpatia, familismo, and allocentrism.*”¹⁵ These factors may also create a hostile or difficult climate for faculty members of color that inhibits their ability to create meaningful, positive, supportive collegial relationships with their peers.¹⁶ These challenging workplace climates are not universal, but they are more likely to occur when there are few Latino faculty members in the workplace. Finally, there are emotional and psychological costs for enduring challenging workplace climates. For instance, some argue that faculty members of color and Latino faculty members may face isolation and alienation in their workplace.¹⁷

More than 20 years ago, Ernest Boyer published *Scholarship Reconsidered*, the seminal report that changed our discussions about academic scholarship. In this report, Boyer suggests that higher education institutions need to enlarge the definitions of academic scholarly work. Since then, researchers have examined how institutions and senior faculty often have skepticism about the academic work of Latino faculty members and that critics believe that Latino scholarship is less relevant or less valued because it focused on Latino-related issues.¹⁸ Some also argue that the knowledge production community (e.g., academic journals) is “a major problem and obstacle to Latin@ faculty success” and that some social science journals are less likely to publish research focused on marginalized racial/ethnic

SPECIAL FOCUS: DEFINING OUR VALUES, AFFIRMING OUR IDEAS

groups.¹⁹ Despite these challenges toward research focused on Latino issues, many Latino scholars are deeply committed to advancing and enlarging the discussions on Latino social issues, or what has been termed “activist scholarship.”²⁰

The challenges and opportunities Latino faculty members face in their academic careers highlights the urgency to address these difficult realities. For these reasons, it is important to provide recommendations that achieve two interrelated points: increasing the recruitment and retention of Latino faculty members and improving Latino students’ access to and degree completion from postsecondary education. Since Latino faculty members are more likely to be faculty members in

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public four-year institutions (i.e. doctoral degree granting institutions), these recommendations specifically relate to Latino faculty members from these types of institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE LATINO FACULTY REPRESENTATION

The spirit of the *Thought and Action* readership is grounded in the belief that improving higher education is essential for the public good. Our nation and local communities face a new reality in our global economy. The future economic prosperity relies on increasing our postsecondary degree completion rates for an increasingly diverse student population. It stands to reason that, due to the increases in the postsecondary Latino student population, the Latino educational policy is the national education policy. Therefore, we must closely examine and interrogate the reasons for disparities between the representation of Latino faculty and Latino student population in American postsecondary education.

These initial policy and programming recommendations offer a sample of potential efforts to improve recruitment and retention of Latino faculty members in postsecondary institutions. While these recommendations are not comprehensive, they do offer a catalyst for additional discussions.

IMPROVE LATINO DOCTORAL STUDENT SOCIALIZATION

Policies that improve the professional and personal socialization of Latino doctoral students into the academic discipline and graduate programs are important for Latinos because, compared to their peers, they are more likely to drop out.²¹ González states, “...Latinas—a group growing in numbers, influence, and

intellectual sophistication—find higher education institutions to be oppressive and riddled with barriers that prevent or minimize their success.”²² New graduate education policies need to encourage graduate programs to enhance the educational and professional experiences for Latino students. For example, academic socialization policies should specifically identify first-generation Latino graduate students and assign them with advanced doctoral students or a Latino faculty member, ideally in their disciplines, to facilitate their professional socialization as a new Latino scholar. Recent research suggests that department leaders should reexamine how they socialize doctoral students into the faculty profession.²³

Deans and department chairs need to encourage incoming Latino faculty members to connect and engage with the Latino faculty community.

EDUCATE FACULTY SEARCH COMMITTEES

Institutions need to develop institutional policies that adequately prepare faculty search committees to expand the faculty applicant pool to include more Latino doctoral graduates. In the last 20 years, Latino graduate students have received doctoral degrees at faster rates than their White doctoral peers.²⁴ Researchers have found institutions that had these three search committee policy guidelines were more successful in hiring faculty members of color: 1) the faculty position includes an explicit requirement that the position links to a research agenda focused on racial/ethnic issues; 2) the institution creates a “special hire strategy” faculty search to pursue exceptional faculty of color that would directly enhance the department’s research profile; and, 3) the faculty search committee had racially/ethnically diverse representation on the search committee.²⁵ Institutional human resources offices should train faculty search committees to implement similar strategies to increase the applicant pool with qualified doctoral students of color, and specifically Latino applicants.

DEVELOP LATINO FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Institutions can support the recruitment of Latinos by supporting the development of faculty learning communities for incoming Latino faculty members. Recent research highlights that these types of communities enhance and strengthen the communities of Latino scholars. Flores and Garcia note, “Trying to feel that you belong in a PWI is very difficult, and sometimes isolation overwhelms you. However, it all changes when you can sit down in a group of women that understand you and that you feel ‘safe’ around.”²⁶ Institutions should have policies that allow for

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the formation of these supportive communities for Latino scholars. Moreover, academic deans and department chairs need to facilitate and encourage incoming Latino faculty members to connect and engage with the Latino faculty community.

CREATE POST-DOCTORAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Latino faculty members may experience many challenges in their transition as new faculty members at public four-year institutions, especially when developing a research agenda. These challenges highlight that faculty members of color often

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have limited opportunities to develop their research agenda during their doctoral training. In response to these initial challenges, institutions have developed policies to create innovative post-doctoral programs specifically for cultivating the next generation of faculty members of color.²⁷ For almost 30 years, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and University of California system have sponsored a minority postdoctoral program to help potential faculty members of color develop their research agenda and teach at the institution.²⁸ Institutions should develop similar post-doctoral programs to encourage faculty members of color, especially Latino members, to develop as scholars, establish a research agenda, and eventually transition into tenure-track faculty positions.

DEVELOP POLICIES FOR PRE-TENURE FACULTY DOCTORAL SUPERVISION WORK

Even though the workload for all faculty members can be daunting and challenging, this pressure is particularly acute for incoming Latino faculty members at public four-year institutions. As mentioned earlier, faculty members of color often have to balance service, teaching, and research demands, therefore, academic deans need to develop policies to prioritize and manage how Latino faculty members are assigned to these service commitments. In addition to excessive service commitments, doctoral supervision duties are often overlooked as part of the teaching workload. It is important that graduate divisions or colleges develop institutional policies that limit the amount and scope of doctoral committee work (e.g., limited dissertation chair appointments) for Latino faculty members during their pre-tenure years. Pre-tenure faculty members, particularly faculty members of color at public four-year institutions, are at greatest risk in their ability to balance these competing workload demands. Geiger argues that the tension between teaching

and conducting an active and revenue generating research agenda is the greatest threat to the future of the traditional faculty profession at research universities.²⁹

IMPLEMENT PRE-TENURE FACULTY TENURE POLICIES

Develop tenure policies to ensure that the tenure process—especially mid-tenure review—is clearly outlined and the tenure criteria (e.g., research productivity) are explained clearly through formal and informal communication with faculty members of color about their tenure progression and their achievement of

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tenure criteria. The department chair and the associate dean or other college-level administrator should have periodic tenure review meetings with Latino faculty members to explain and clarify the criteria for the three critical faculty work areas: teaching, research, and service. Researchers have found that pre-tenure faculty members, especially faculty members of color, who have a clear understanding of the tenure criteria are more likely to have better professional working relationships with senior faculty colleagues.³⁰

REDEFINE PRE-TENURE FACULTY MEMBERS' MENTORING POLICIES

Institutions need to develop mentoring policies that require the development of personal and professional support networks that encourage increased communication and collegiality between faculty members of color and their counterparts within and across institutional boundaries. Recent research indicates that some faculty members of color have different collegial relationships with senior faculty members and their peers.³¹ Therefore, department chairs should not assume that Latino faculty members will easily transition into the department's work, political, and social life. For example, department chairs should encourage and develop stronger incentives for research collaborations between full professors and pre-tenure faculty members. This may include partnerships with full professors within and between academic areas, and senior White faculty mentor-allies. It is imperative that these mentoring policies support Latino faculty members before, during, and after their probationary tenure period.

IMPROVE PRE-TENURE FACULTY WORK ROLES

Coupled with the recruitment policy recommendations focused on managing

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Latino faculty members' teaching workload, institutions need to clarify the work role conflicts and role ambiguities, and prioritize the multiple work role expectations. New faculty roles are changing the landscape of traditional faculty work. Sorcinelli et al. contend, "Newcomers struggle to prioritize teaching, research, and service responsibilities, as well as tasks they are often less trained for such as student advising, grant-getting, and administrative duties."³² Researchers have found that Latino faculty members are more likely than White faculty members to have additional administrative duties.³³ Researchers have also found faculty members of color often face multiple or conflicting roles, which often leads to occupational

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stress.³⁴ Recent research also highlights that female faculty members of color often face additional burdens related to mentoring students.³⁵ Department chairs should closely consider the work commitments for faculty members of color and provide mechanisms to reduce the excessive workload or delegate these important responsibilities across faculty ranks.

PRIORITIZE THE ALLOCATION OF DEPARTMENT RESOURCES FOR PRE-TENURE FACULTY


Prioritize and adequately distribute financial and human resources to support the teaching and research functions of new faculty members of color. Department chairs who effectively allocate resources can positively influence the work experiences and retention of faculty members of color.³⁶ Initial institutional financial support is inextricably linked to creating and sustaining a research agenda. This type of financial support is not defined as faculty salary compensation, but rather the departmental resources allocated to faculty to conduct their research. For example, financial support for research may include research laboratory and equipment or office space, computers and software, conference and research travel monies, research and teaching assistant graduate students, and course release time. Therefore, department chairs need to consider how allocating these critical resources can assist Latino faculty members develop a successful research agenda and encourage participation in supportive professional development activities (e.g. advanced research methodology training).

IMPROVE FACULTY DEPARTMENT CLIMATE

Create and maintain a department climate that encourages the fair and equitable treatment of pre-tenure faculty members of color. The organizational

research literature offers a perspective on the institutional climate that guides this final recommendation for Latino faculty retention. Researchers have used the term “psychological climate” to describe how an individual describes their work environment and state, “In the literature, psychological climate has been defined as individual descriptions of organizational practices and procedures that relate to organizational influences on individual performance, satisfaction, and motivation.”³⁷ It is critical that the department chair and senior leadership are committed to creating policies that create a positive departmental climate that supports the notion of equitable treatment for all department faculty members. Department chairs should reexamine departmental practices and procedures (e.g. office space and allocation, exclusionary tactics) that may create a passive or active hostile climate for faculty members of color, particularly Latino faculty members.

CHANGE WARRANTS ACTION

Higher education is rapidly changing on many fronts. The challenges facing our nation suggest that our educational system needs to refocus how it assists our diverse student population, particularly Latino students. In this paper, I have argued that there is a dearth of Latino faculty members in American higher education and we need to increase their representation to mirror the growing post-secondary Latino student population. At the same time, there are large numbers of faculty, who are primarily White and male, from the post-World War II era, who are due to retire.³⁸ And, more students of color are attending higher education, pursuing a graduate education, and seeking careers in academics.³⁹ Due to these demographic shifts, impending changes in the higher education landscape will provide a unique opportunity to diversify and retain the faculty ranks with additional faculty members of color, especially Latino faculty members. Ultimately, the onus falls on institutional leaders and senior faculty members to diversify the professoriate so that it adequately reflects our racially and ethnically diverse society. It is my hope that we continue to explore different avenues for helping institutions and organizations invest in recruiting and retaining Latino faculty members. 

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. I use the term Latino to describe Latina/o and/or Hispanic racial/ethnic groups in this paper.
2. Snyder and Dillow, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. See Aguirre; Antonio; Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura; Hurtado; Turner Sotello Viernes and Myers; Umbach; and Urrieta and Chavez.
6. Hurtado, “Linking Diversity and Educational Purpose: How Diversity Affects the Classroom Environment and Student Development.”
7. Urrieta and Chavez, “Latin@ Faculty in Academelandia,” 575.
8. See Nagda et al., and Torres and Hernandez.

SPECIAL FOCUS: DEFINING OUR VALUES, AFFIRMING OUR IDEAS

9. Smith et al., "Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty."
10. Hurtado, "Linking Diversity and Educational Purpose: How Diversity Affects the Classroom Environment and Student Development."
11. See Turner Sotello Viernes et al., and Verdugo.
12. See Aguirre; Castellanos and Jones; Evans and Chun; Moreno et al.; Ponjuan; Ponjuan, Conley, and Trower; Turner Sotello Viernes et al; and Urrieta and Chavez.
13. See Garza; Porter; and Turner Sotello Viernes and Myers.
14. Urrieta and Chavez, op cit, 576.
15. Delgado-Romero, Manlove, Manlove, and Hernandez, "Controversial Issues in the Recruitment and Retention of Latino/a Faculty," 45.
16. See Ponjuan et al., and Whetsel-Ribeau.
17. See Smith and Calasanti; Garza; and Urrieta and Chavez.
18. See Ibarra; Padilla; Padilla and Chavez; and Urrieta and Chavez.
19. Urrieta and Chavez, op cit, 575.
20. Ibid, 577.
21. See Snyder and Dillow
22. See Gardner and Mendoza, 2010.
23. González, "Academic Socialization Experiences of Latina Doctoral Students," 362.
24. National Science Foundation, *Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2009*.
25. Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, and Richards, "Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty."
26. Flores and Garcia, "Latina 'Testimonios': A Reflexive, Critical Analysis of a 'Latina Space' at a Predominantly White Campus," 168.
27. Roach, "A Pipeline to the Tenure Track."
28. Ibid.
29. Geiger, "Optimizing Research and Teaching: The Bifurcation of Faculty Roles at Research Institutions."
30. Ponjuan et al., "Career Stage Differences in Pre-Tenure Track Faculty Perceptions of Professional and Personal Relationships with Colleagues."
31. Ibid.
32. Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach, *Creating the Future of Faculty Development*, 106
33. See Griffin and Reddick, 2011.
34. See Ponjuan; Porter; and Thompson and Dey.
35. See Dey; Olsen, Maple, and Stage; and Thompson and Dey.
36. See Moody; and Williams and Williams.
37. James and James, "Integrating Work Environment Perceptions: Explorations into the Measurement of Meaning," 670. Also see Baltes.
38. See Clark and Ma; and Conley.
39. See Cole and Barber; National Science Foundation; and Snyder and Dillow.

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SPECIAL FOCUS: DEFINING OUR VALUES, AFFIRMING OUR IDEAS

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