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Answering the Call: Hispanic-Serving Institutions as Leaders in the Quest for Access, Excellence, and Equity in American Higher Education

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Assessing Empowerment at HSIs: An Adapted Inputs-Environments-Outcomes Model

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Abstract

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) play a critical role in advancing postsecondary access and success for Latinx students. Scholarship has begun to examine how HSIs influence Latinx student experiences and outcomes, yet much remains to be explored. In an effort to inform future research of Latinx students at HSIs, we argue that student experiences and outcomes should be based on notions of empowerment given the historically marginalized status of this group. We propose a model to guide assessment on Latinx empowerment at HSIs, which builds on the Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) model (Astin & Antonio, 2012) and integrates critical theoretical frameworks, namely critical race theory and community cultural wealth. In proposing an adapted IEO model assessing Latinx empowerment, we encourage scholars and practitioners to expand notions of what constitutes success and excellence at HSIs in terms of how they educate and empower Latinx students.

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Introduction

Despite steady increases in postsecondary enrollment since the 1980s, only 14% of Latinx individuals age 25 or older possess a bachelor's degree or higher (Stepler & Brown, 2016). Persistent lower levels of educational attainment among Latinx students adversely shape the advancement of this historically marginalized group (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). As Latinx students continue to enroll in higher education in greater numbers, many enroll at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), which are broadly described as institutions with at least 25% Latinx students. Between 1994 and 2014, HSIs grew from 189 to 409 and enroll more than 60% of all Latinx undergraduates (Santiago, Taylor, & Calderón Galdeano, 2016). Summarizing the impact of HSIs can be challenging given the varied approaches employed towards serving the Latinx and general student body (Santiago et al., 2016). Nonetheless, HSIs graduate Latinx students at comparable rates to their non-HSI counterparts after institutional and student characteristics are controlled (Flores & Park, 2015). As such, HSIs clearly play a pivotal role in advancing postsecondary access and success for Latinx students.

The spirit of the HSI designation promotes intentional institutional change to better serve Latinx and low-income students (Santiago, 2012). These institutions are thus uniquely positioned to challenge majoritarian views of education, which calls for the creation of an affirming and transformational education (García, 2012). Beyond enrollment and graduation rates, however, there are few indicators to determine the extent to which these colleges and universities serve Latinx students (García, 2016). While important, conventional metrics of performance (e.g. retention and graduation) provide only a glimpse into the education at HSIs that is necessary to ensure the full socioeconomic and political advancement of this racialized group. These measures, for instance, do not capture the experiences of students at these institutions or the quality of education, such as empowerment, which also serve as indicators of success for Latinx students (Cuellar, 2015). Additional metrics are thus necessary to examine how HSIs enhance Latinx empowerment.

In an effort to holistically understand the influence of HSIs on Latinx students, we contend that future examinations of outcomes at these institutions should be grounded in notions of empowerment given the historically marginalized status of this student population. Towards this aim, we propose a conceptual model to guide future research examining empowerment at these colleges and universities. We build on the foundation of the Inputs-

Environments-Outcomes (IEO) model (Astin & Antonio, 2012) and integrate equity-oriented theoretical perspectives, namely critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Given contemporary political, economic, and social attacks to the Latinx community and other marginalized communities, we hope our model can inform the ways that scholars and institutional leaders think about assessing the impact of HSIs to include how Latinx students are holistically empowered for continued socioeconomic and political advancement.

HSIs as Spaces for Marginalized Student Empowerment

The notion of empowerment is central to an educational philosophy that aims to foster personal growth and develop critical learners (Ashcroft, 1987). Ashcroft (1987) broadly defines an empowered person as one who believes in his or her ability/capability to act, which in turn leads to able/capable action. Drawing on Freire's liberatory and social justice frames as well as critical social work theory, Stanton-Salazar (2011) defines empowerment as an active process of gaining resources and competencies that allow for control over one's life and achieving one's goals. At its core, empowerment connects beliefs to actions, a connection that takes on a pronounced role with regard to disenfranchised populations. Building on these perspectives, we view empowerment as the process through which Latinx students draw on their cultural assets and obtain the requisite skills, knowledges, and resources to transform themselves, their communities, and society. We view empowerment as integral to the education of Latinx students given the historical marginalization this community has systemically experienced, and the current sociopolitical context.

Inarguably, the empowerment of Latinx students in any educational context is imperative; however, we contend that this process is extraordinarily significant within HSIs. As institutions enrolling the majority of Latinx undergraduates, HSIs are in a unique position to substantially shape these students' educational and long-term success. Such a position provides an incredible opportunity for HSIs to define what it means to serve Latinx students and promote justice for Latinx communities (García, 2012; Gonzales, 2015). In particular, García (2012) challenges HSIs to courageously stand against systems of education that dismiss and marginalize Latinx students, which we interpret as a call for providing an empowering education. Further, HSIs can cultivate inclusive and empowering environments by drawing on

the cultural knowledge and assets embedded within the communities these institutions serve (Gonzales, 2015). Such views require HSIs to intentionally strive to offer an educational experience that values Latinx students and provides them with the requisite knowledge and skills that position them to transform themselves, their communities, and society.

Yet, how do we assess Latinx empowerment? How do we ensure that institutions provide an empowering education to Latinx students? Assessment is one way colleges and universities self-evaluate to improve and assess what they value and aim to achieve (Astin & Antonio, 2012). What then, is the potential significance of HSIs assessing for empowerment? An assessment model grounded on the empowerment of Latinx students can serve as a useful guide for HSIs to cultivate environments that provide a transformative education and provide useful information to further enhance the empowerment of Latinx students. Though the process of empowerment is difficult to holistically assess, we propose a conceptual model that captures aspects of this transformative process.

An Overview of the IEO Assessment Model

The Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) model provides a simple yet useful framework to assess the empowerment of Latinx students at HSIs. The IEO model promotes the idea that assessment serves a purpose of enhancing student development, which runs counter to traditional notions of institutional excellence (Astin & Antonio, 2012). Traditional metrics of assessment and notions of institutional excellence, such as graduation rates, are heavily based on the accumulation of resources or academic reputation, thereby failing to capture one of the most important purposes of education, which is to educate students (Astin & Antonio, 2012). As an alternative, Astin & Antonio (2012) define excellence as the ability of an institution to holistically develop students' academic and personal talents and make a positive difference in their lives, which they succinctly refer to as talent development. To this end, Astin & Antonio (2012) propose that colleges and universities consider how they "add value" to students and assess how they influence students' development.

Accordingly, the IEO model shown in Figure 1, aims to assess the impact of colleges and universities on students (Astin & Antonio, 2012). The model is comprised of three components: inputs, environments, and outcomes. It illustrates how students change over time (input to outcome) as a result of elements in the college (environment) that may influence student

experiences and development. As such, the model posits that we must consider student inputs before considering how the college environment influences student outcomes.

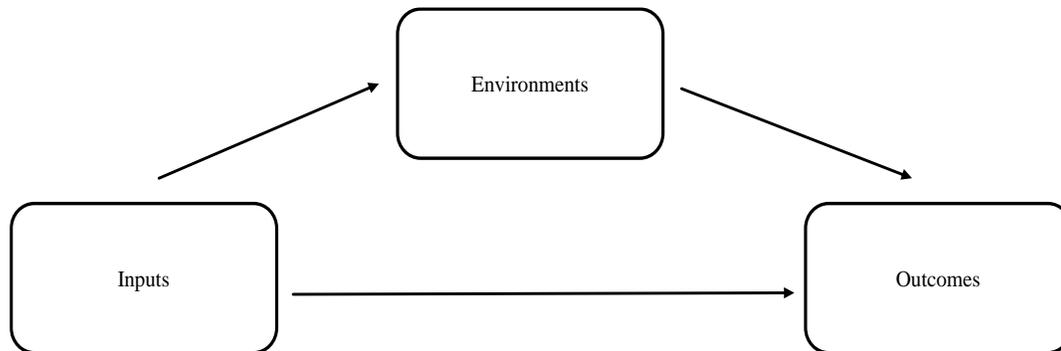


Figure 1. Inputs-Environments-Outcomes (IEO) Model (Astin & Antonio, 2012)

Inputs represent the characteristics students possess before entering college, such as demographic background, values and attitudes, behavioral patterns, and educational background. The environment encompasses structural aspects of the institution, such as size, selectivity, and student body composition, that can affect students' experiences. Sub-environments within an institution, such as particular programs or activities in which students are involved, can affect college experiences as well. After taking inputs and environments into account, we can examine the influence of colleges and universities on student outcomes.

In a holistic typology, Astin and Antonio (2012) categorize outcomes as cognitive or affective. Cognitive outcomes refer to intellectual capacities whereas affective outcomes reflect non-cognitive attributes. Among cognitive outcomes, institutions often evaluate basic and complex academic skills, subject matter competency, and professional competencies. In terms of affective outcomes, institutions consider self-concept, personal values, attitudes, and student satisfaction. To assess these two types of outcomes, psychological (internal characteristics or processes) and behavioral (observable actions) measures can be used. By considering these various elements of the IEO model, we can evaluate how colleges and universities develop the talent of students and add value through the college experience (Astin & Antonio, 2012).

Given its straightforward and holistic design, the IEO framework has guided many studies on how colleges affect students (Mayhew et al., 2016) and will likely remain an influential guide in assessment. The model and its underlying principle of talent development inform how

to examine the empowerment of Latinx students at HSIs by considering how students' backgrounds and college experiences shape outcomes. However, the IEO model was largely developed with "traditional" students in mind, such as full-time students living on campus, which may not reflect many Latinx students at HSIs. Although the model accounts for race as a demographic characteristic, the racialized experiences of marginalized students are not theoretically embedded in its IEO components, which may further limit its applicability to Latinx student populations at HSIs.

Recognizing such possible limitations, Astin & Antonio (2012) encourage the incorporation of theoretical perspectives into the model to ensure alignment between the values and practices that institutions want to assess. Implicitly building on an IEO approach, scholars have developed models that acknowledge how students' racial and cultural identities shape their experiences on college campuses in order to maximize diverse students' opportunities for success (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012; Museus, 2014). However, these models have not centered empowerment as an outcome in itself. As we consider how to build on the IEO model to understand Latinx student empowerment, we infuse perspectives that acknowledge and value these students' racial and cultural backgrounds and their subsequent empowerment.

Critical Perspectives to Adapt the IEO Model

We turn to critical race theory (CRT) to re-imagine how a basic IEO model can better capture the ways in which Latinx students can be served at HSIs. CRT takes head on the claim that higher education is the great equalizer by examining racial inequities in school contexts and challenging dominant ideologies (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CRT acknowledges that higher education institutions in the United States are premised on false claims of "objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). Such dominant frameworks of student success often perpetuate the marginalization of students of color by focusing on knowledges these students do not possess, thereby placing the fault on them and their families for lacking normative cultural knowledge and skills to succeed in higher education (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). A prime example of this deterministic view is well represented in the concept of the achievement gap, a "hegemonic Western science view" (Garcia, 2012), that serves to support the structural inequities inherent in the ways we

expect students to succeed and the tools they need to be successful. Challenging these dominant ideologies, CRT invites us to consider the systemic role of education beyond these conventional metrics.

Moreover, CRT centers the lived experiences of communities of color to advocate for a more socially just society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CRT allows us to name the ways in which race has been an integral factor in the continued marginalization of Latinx students in higher education. Latinx undergraduate students' experiences with microaggressions, racism, and institutional oppression are well documented (Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014; Yosso et al., 2009). Nonetheless, more scholarship on the salience of race and racialization within the schooling experiences of Latinx undergraduates at HSIs is necessary. Perhaps most importantly, through its critical perspectives, CRT extends the invitation for scholarship to work towards the elimination of racism and all other forms of subordination experienced by marginalized communities, while working towards their empowerment (Yosso et al., 2009).

As aforementioned, deficit-based theories place the fault on Latinx students and their families for not possessing normative cultural knowledge and skills to succeed in higher education (Yosso et al., 2009). To counter such epistemological foundations, Yosso (2005) developed community cultural wealth to better capture Latinx students' knowledges, strengths, and success as manifested in education. Yosso (2005) draws from CRT to identify six forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability of a student to remain hopeful amidst obstacles and barriers they face, while setting high expectations about what they can accomplish because they hold education to a high esteem. *Navigational capital* recognizes that students operate in liminal spaces within educational contexts and adapt to these new cultures. *Social capital* speaks to the importance and value of developing relationships, within schools and their communities, to strengthen a student's social network and access to resources and mentorship. *Linguistic capital* emphasizes the skills of students to engage in intentional code-switching between languages, and within formal/informal interactions. *Familial capital* positions family as a central source of motivation and strength for students, who share cultural, ancestral, and situated knowledge. *Resistant capital* is represented by the resilience students exercise to challenge inequality when confronting varying degrees of oppression. Latinx students draw from these cultural assets to

navigate systems and structures that were not historically designed with them in mind as evidenced in their college experience (Yosso, 2005).

Rendón et al. (2014) contributed to the community cultural wealth framework by identifying four additional forms of capital that Latinx students employ to successfully navigate college within an HSI context. *Ganas/perseverance* acknowledges the inner strength students cultivate to develop self-reliance in order to persist in college. *Ethnic consciousness* speaks both to the cultural pride students develop and commitment to uplift the Latinx community, while embracing their membership as part of an HSI. *Spirituality/faith* is the sense that students honor a higher power to make meaning of their experiences and channel strength to overcome barriers. *Pluiversal* represents Latinx students' ability to make sense of and thrive beyond the contradictions they experience in the many systems they navigate. Latinx students possess these cultural assets and ways of knowing that are further developed and nurtured throughout their lifetime (Rendón et al., 2014). To this end, community cultural wealth and its recent additions, recognizes the cultural contexts of Latinx students and values the assets Latinx students possess and employ to succeed in higher education. Above all, community cultural wealth serves as a tool to re-position Latinx students in relation to schooling, and to assess the impact policies and practices have in cultivating or hindering success.

As HSIs educate the majority of Latinx undergraduates, these concepts are especially relevant in considering how HSIs empower these students. Empowerment broadly represents Latinx students' agency to effect change in their life, in their communities, and more broadly within society. Building on earlier work (Cuellar, 2015), we posit that empowerment occurs when Latinx students' backgrounds and cultural assets are affirmed and leveraged when they encounter environments that honor their culture, serving as impetus towards their long-term advancement.

A Model for Assessing Latinx Empowerment at HSIs

To this end, our model's outcomes aim to examine the empowerment of Latinx students that can occur at HSIs. Our model is guided by the following principles, which builds from the IEO model through incorporation of CRT and community cultural wealth: 1) Latinx students are racialized beings who are producers of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002), a disposition that can be further cultivated during college; 2) HSIs have the potential to

intentionally serve Latinx students by providing positive, empowering environments and experiences (García, 2012); and 3) it is paramount to institutional excellence to move beyond traditional notions of success to consider ways in which empowerment can be assessed for Latinx students, particularly at HSIs (Cuellar, 2015). By applying CRT in our model, we respond to Hermán S. García's (2012) question regarding "what role(s) can HSIs play in rethinking colleges and universities' dysfunctional roles in promoting the cognitive justice needs of Latin@ students?" (p. 199). In essence, our model provides a blueprint for HSIs in assessing a transformative educational experience that considers Latinx student assets and their subsequent empowerment.

We developed our model by reviewing current literature on Latinx students at HSIs and weaving in our personal and collective experiences of working at or attending HSIs. Our model, displayed in Table I, addresses core elements within Latinx students' backgrounds and environmental features that affect student experiences. We propose these elements should be assessed at HSIs to capture the empowerment occurring at these institutions. Though we recognize that HSIs are heterogeneous in several institutional characteristics (Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2016), our model focuses on elements that broadly promote empowerment for Latinx students. We detail each component of our model in the following sections and highlight research addressing corresponding elements as well as provide ideas for future research.

Outcomes of Empowerment

Our model calls for outcomes that comprehensively capture the ways in which HSIs influence Latinx students and propel them towards long-term personal, academic, and professional success. While the IEO model classifies outcomes as either cognitive or affective as evaluated through psychological or behavioral measures, our model adopts the view that non-cognitive outcomes also involve higher-order levels of thinking (Conley, 2013). We take the opportunity to both contribute to and move beyond a binary classification. Instead, our outcomes of empowerment focus on three domains that we argue are essential to understanding Latinx students' empowerment: psychosocial, behavioral, and spiritual.

Psychosocial. Within the psychosocial domain, we include outcomes that refer to individual, internal dispositions associated with academic, personal, and professional empowerment. HSIs can assist students in developing their academic skills and self-concepts,

Table I
A Model Assessing Latinx Empowerment at HSIs

Inputs	Environments	Outcomes = Empowerment
Intersection of Social Identities	Campus Climate	Psychosocial
Racial/Ethnic Identity	Perception of Racial Tensions	Positive Academic Self-Concept
Geographic Region of Residence	Microaggressions	Academic Skills
Gender	Interactions with Diverse Peers	Racial/Ethnic Identity
Socioeconomic Status		Critical Consciousness
Generational Status	Curricular Experiences	Social Justice Orientation
Immigration Status	Ethnocentric Curriculum	Graduate School Aspirations
	Validating Pedagogies	Career Aspirations
Academic Skills and Perceptions	Faculty Interaction and Mentorship	
	Bridge/Transition Programs	Behavioral
Community Cultural Wealth	Research/Internship Opportunities	Ability to Navigate Systems
Aspirational		Civic Engagement
Familial	Co-Curricular Experiences	Graduate School Enrollment
Linguistic	Cultural Centers	
Social	Student Organizations	Spiritual
Resistant	On-Campus Work	
Navigational	Staff Interaction and Mentorship	
Ethnic Consciousness		
Ganas/Perseverance		
Pluiversal		
Spirituality/Faith		

which are associated with persistence and retention (Robbins et al., 2004). HSIs have shown a positive influence on first year Latinx students' higher-order learning (Fosnacht & Nailos, 2015) as well as academic self-concepts despite entering college with significantly lower self-concepts than their peers at non-HSIs (Cuellar, 2014). As such, future research should continue to examine how HSIs advance Latinx academic skills and self-perceptions given the strong interrelationship with student success.

Similarly, a holistic approach to engaging students involves a recognition of their personal development. Studies have shown that HSIs enhance Latinx students' personal development as documented in positive academic and social integration and increased student engagement (Abraham, Lujan, López, & Walker, 2002; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2015; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Salinas Holmes, 2007). Some studies also demonstrate how HSIs facilitate Latinx development in other key areas, such as ethnic identity and salience (Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez & Hudson, 2016; Guardia & Evans, 2008). A strong ethnic identity is linked to ethnic consciousness, which manifests in positive self-perceptions of students themselves and pride in attending an HSI (Rendón et al., 2014). Similarly, the development of critical consciousness, as well as a social justice orientation, among students of color is associated with a plethora of positive outcomes, such as academic engagement, career development and attainment, and political participation (Diemer & Li, 2011). Thus, the consideration of how HSIs affect these aspects of Latinx students' personal development seems essential to their empowerment and future success in multiple areas of their lives.

Further, we encourage the evaluation of how HSIs advance Latinx students in their future professional success. For example, Latinx students have indicated that HSIs provide opportunities for professional advancement (Abraham et al., 2002) but with few details in what respect. As such, we propose that HSIs evaluate professional development, such as graduate school and career aspirations as two indicators of how effectively these institutions are preparing Latinx students to navigate educational and employment opportunities for socioeconomic and political advancement beyond their undergraduate education.

Behavioral. Within the behavioral dimension, we highlight actions that result from engaging in environments that foster Latinx student talents and position them to successfully navigate within and beyond the confines of the academy. We propose that institutions examine

to what extent students know how to navigate systems to ensure success in general. We also propose civic engagement as a critical outcome of an empowering education. Civic engagement may further advance Latinx degree attainment; consequently, it is important to consider how Latinx students engage civically on campus and beyond (Alcantar, 2014). Research shows that civic engagement among Latinx students at one HSI has been positively affected by their engagement in student organizations (González, 2008). More research is needed. Moreover, one of the most significant testaments to how well an HSI is serving students, is its ability to motivate and prepare Latinx students to subsequently enroll in a graduate program. Although degree completion at the undergraduate level is a priority for HSIs, the pursuit of a graduate education is also telling of the investment these postsecondary institutions make towards empowering their Latinx student populations.

Spiritual. Furthermore, we propose that HSIs consider assessing spirituality among Latinx students. Spirituality has been considered more recently as a subset of quantifiable affective outcomes (Astin & Antonio, 2012); however, we note this as a key gap that remains to be addressed if we are to serve and empower Latinx students at HSIs and thus advocate for measures of spirituality that are grounded in Latinx students' views. Scholars in the field of higher education (Rendón et al., 2014) and other disciplines (Anzaldúa, 1999) have centered the ways in which spirituality is important in how Latinx students define their sense of purpose, retain faith in seamlessly hopeless situations, and are able to humanize themselves in oppressive environments. Moreover, notions of spirituality are associated with persistence among Latinx students (Nora, 2003). These contributions point to the need to further integrate seminal work across disciplines that have laid the foundation for the salience of spirituality as exercised by Latinx students.

We offer our list of outcomes, not as a comprehensive or deterministic compilation, but rather to stand in solidarity with scholars, practitioners, and administrators who reconcile standard psychometrics with new measures and approaches to holistically assess the ways Latinx students thrive in higher education. Similarly, we provide the following discussion on inputs and environments in our model as a starting point to advance holistic approaches to evaluating how HSIs empower Latinx students. As we move forward in this work, we will expand and further ground elements in our proposed model.

Inputs

Our model acknowledges the entering characteristics of Latinx students. Consistent with Astin and Antonio (2012), some of these entering characteristics are demographic while others represent student values, beliefs, and attitudes. Our model, however, recognizes some of the racial and cultural realities that inform these entering characteristics among Latinx students. For example, our model acknowledges the fluidity and intersectionality of various social identities among Latinx students (Núñez, 2014) as well as the cultural assets possessed by Latinx students and the communities from which they originate (Yosso, 2005; Rendón et al., 2014). Collectively, understanding the inherent diversity among Latinx students and the cultural assets they bring into higher education can help institutions account for the empowerment Latinx students may already possess to assess how college experiences additionally empower students.

Intersection of social identities. Our model centers the racial and ethnic background of Latinx students given the strong representation of these students at HSIs. Latinx students are more likely to enroll at both two- and four-year HSIs than students from other racial groups (Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). Moreover, Latinx students who self-identify as “Other Latino” are more likely to enroll at four-year HSIs and emerging HSIs compared to Mexican Americans, indicating an increasingly diverse Latinx student population at these institutions (Cuellar, 2015). Unfortunately, most studies on Latinx students at HSIs have not considered the racial and ethnic heterogeneity within this racialized group. Although these groups share commonalities in language and aspects of culture, there are also unique experiences that may affect students’ experiences or outcomes. For instance, although Mexican Americans are the most populous Latinx community in the country, this group maintains the lowest level of educational attainment among Latinx students (Zambrana & Hurtado, 2015). Further, it is important to consider how geographic region of residence may also shape Latinx students’ social identities. Thus, HSIs should consider how Latinx students’ racial/ethnic background may affect their experiences within college in an effort to identify and eliminate any possible inequities within this monolithic group.

Several other background characteristics also matter in our model. Despite growing college enrollment gaps between Latinas and Latinos (Saénz & Ponjuan, 2009), Latinos are more likely to enroll at two-year HSIs than their female counterparts (Núñez et al. 2011), whereas

Latinas appear more likely to enroll at four-year HSIs (Cuellar, 2015), indicating the importance of considering how gender subsequently may shape Latinx students' experiences and outcomes at HSIs. Socioeconomic background is also important to consider since Latinx students attending HSIs are more likely to enter with fewer economic resources (Cuellar, 2015; Núñez & Bowers, 2011).

In addition, generational status should be considered, both in terms of college attendance and family origin in the United States. Many Latinx students at HSIs may be the first in their family to go to college and consequently face greater challenges than their non-first-generation counterparts. In addition, generational status in terms of a Latinx students' family origins in this country can affect academic success. According to a longitudinal study, third and fourth generation Mexican Americans show a decline in educational attainment despite initial gains in the second generation (Telles & Ortiz, 2008), suggesting that intergenerational advancement can be impeded by racialized experiences within the United States among some Latinx groups. Many Latinx students at four-year HSIs are not first-generation immigrants (Nunez & Bowers, 2011), which underscores the importance of understanding how this might also affect students' experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, our model accounts for immigration status, both at the student and familial level. We urge scholars and practitioners to recognize that many undocumented Latinx students attend HSIs and experience their college environments in unique ways relative to their peers as do students who are part of mixed status families, where issues of deportation, financial constraints, and negatively impacted well-being are common happenstance. As such, HSIs should consider how these various background characteristics among Latinx students intersect and simultaneously influence their college experiences and outcomes.

Academic skills and perceptions. Additionally, another set of entering characteristics we include in our model reflect a students' initial academic preparation and self-perceptions. Latinx students attending two-year HSIs are more likely to have entered with AP credit in high school and a desire to transfer (Núñez et al., 2011), while those attending four-year HSIs are more likely to have lower standardized high school math scores (Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Further, Latinx students enter four-year HSIs with lower self-perceptions of their academic abilities as compared to their peers attending non-HSIs (Cuellar, 2014). These studies collectively demonstrate the tremendous potential for HSIs to develop the academic

talents of Latinx students (Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Thus, it is essential to understand the entering academic characteristics of Latinx students to fully capture how HSIs cultivate their scholarly potential.

Cultural assets. In order to maximize the impact that HSIs can have on Latinx students' advancement, our model accounts for the cultural assets Latinx students possess that are often overlooked or devalued despite the powerful influence these can have on students' achievements. In other words, it is critical to assess Latinx students' community cultural wealth so that HSIs can account for the influence of these assets on students' experiences and outcomes. HSIs should gather information on the educational hopes students have as they enter college to fully understand the aspirational capital and *ganas* students possess. Institutions should also gauge the familial capital students may possess since family is strongly influential on Latinx enrollment at HSIs (Cejda, Casparis, Rhodes, & Seal-Nyman, 2008; Cuellar, 2015; Núñez et al., 2011). Further, the family unit has been identified as a source of support for Latinx students attending HSIs (Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015), which in turn influences their degree attainment at these institutions (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). Familial capital may be measured according to how much the family influences a students' educational pursuits and knowledge fostered within the home. Knowledge that is gained through family and cultural connections can shape learning although these sources of information are rarely acknowledged in the educational outcomes of Latinx students (Rios-Aguilar, 2010). Moreover, the linguistic capital students possess should also be considered and expanded to account for the multifaceted forms in which Latinx students express themselves (Martinez & Montaña, 2016). For example, Latinx students often speak Spanish to enhance their ethnic identity and feel more connected to their campus community (Garcia et al., 2016; Guardia & Evans, 2008). Several Latinx students may also speak other languages, such as indigenous languages.

In addition, HSIs should consider additional forms of capital that Latinx students draw from to succeed in higher education. Latinx students' social capital is especially important to their success in college. For instance, Latinx students at HSIs receive support from institutional agents, such as teachers and counselors, but also rely on extended family, community leaders, and peers (Cejda et al., 2008). In addition, many Latinx students pursue a postsecondary degree to transform society, which represents resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, it is critical

to also consider spirituality and ethnic consciousness as this can also motivate Latinx student success (Rendón et al., 2014). Thus, it is important for HSIs to consider the various assets Latinx students possess to cultivate environments that value these, which in turn has the potential to yield more empowerment.

Environments

With regard to environments, our model calls for the assessment of elements across an HSI that provide Latinx students with positive and empowering experiences. Though HSIs have been shown to vary in structural aspects, such as two-year/four-year, public/private, small/large (Nunez et al., 2016), we highlight environmental features that support and make Latinx students feel valued and can contribute to an empowering education. Several aspects within the environment at HSIs can help first-generation Latinx students balance their academic and personal obligations (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez & Plum, 2014; Medina & Posadas, 2012). As such, it is important to consider both student perception of and their participation in various environmental aspects of a college that can shape their experiences. We focus on three environmental areas that collectively influence the experiences of students of color and their success in higher education and beyond: campus climate, curricular domain, and co-curricular domain (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Campus climate. Understanding students' views of the campus climate is critical given the adverse influence that student perceptions and interactions with racially diverse students, staff, and faculty can have on the experiences and outcomes of students of color (Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus, 2014). The campus climate is a multifaceted construct that captures how students perceive the environment, e.g. welcoming or hostile, and how students interact with individuals from different social identities on a campus. Students have shared that the atmosphere at HSIs is welcoming when institutions embrace and celebrate Latinx identity through cultural representations in personnel, events, and organizations (Medina & Posadas, 2012; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). Although Latinx students appear to generally view campus climates at HSIs as positive, students have also perceived microaggressions, particularly when linguistic barriers exist for Spanish-speaking students accessing resources (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016). Latinx students have suggested that offering more courses in Spanish and hiring more Spanish-speaking personnel would improve the social atmosphere of an HSI campus

(Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). Additionally, interacting with peers from different racial/ethnic groups can positively impact feelings of belonging for Latinx students at HSIs (Maestas, Vaquera, & Muñoz Zehr, 2007). As such, it is important to assess how Latinx students at HSIs perceive the campus climate, how students interact with diverse peers, and how this influences their success.

Curricular. Considering how Latinx students experience the curriculum and classrooms are also critical in our model. Culturally relevant curricula can offer Latinx students with an affirming and empowering education (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Although many HSIs have not incorporated ethnocentric curricula (Cole, 2011), it is essential to consider how it shapes Latinx students' experiences and outcomes when it is available. In addition, the pedagogies that faculty employ within the classroom can further affirm or marginalize students of color (Hurtado et al., 2012). Latinx student interactions with faculty are especially important given the positive influence of such interactions on a multitude of outcomes (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2014). Studies situated at HSIs document how faculty mentorship enhances the academic success of Latinx students (Dayton et al., 2014), including degree attainment and sense of belonging (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). In turn, sense of belonging has also been shown to promote Latinx student academic achievement at HSIs (Chun, Marin, Schwartz, Pham, & Castro-Olivo, 2016). However, it is essential to note conceptual differences on perceptions of mentoring between Latinx and students from other racial groups in a survey of students at an HSI, which suggests a need for measures designed for different groups of students (Crisp & Cruz, 2010). Furthermore, it is critical to assess if Latinx students are engaging in academic enrichment opportunities, such as bridge or research and internship programs, and how these experiences further empower them.

Co-curricular. To holistically assess the experiences of Latinx students, HSIs should also consider co-curricular aspects of the college environment that can directly or indirectly influence experiences and outcomes. For instance, Latinx students often find community within cultural centers and student organizations, which cultivates students' sense of belonging and resilience (Yosso et al., 2009). HSIs that provide opportunities for Latinx students to interact with one another, such as those that allow students to explore their identities within supportive spaces on campus, have been found to positively affect Latinx ethnic identity (Garcia et al., 2016; Guardia & Evans, 2008). In addition, co-curricular activities with cultural or social

justice approaches are opportune spaces in which critical consciousness and awareness of institutional inequities can be enhanced (Rendón et al., 2014). As such, it is essential for HSIs to assess the extent to which Latinx students are engaging in such spaces or activities and how this engagement shapes their outcomes. Lastly, as more Latinx students work to afford college, institutions must consider how these employment opportunities, particularly those on campus, can be enhanced to foster intellectual and career development (Núñez & Sansone, 2016). Across these various programs and opportunities, HSIs should also explore how Latinx students interact with staff as well as the possible mentorship received from these individuals.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

As the number of HSIs increases, these institutions hold tremendous potential in advancing Latinx students' academic, personal, and professional success. However, more research is necessary to understand how HSIs holistically empower Latinx students. We argue that future institutional assessment and research should examine how HSIs empower Latinx students. In an effort to inform future research, we propose a model to guide assessment on Latinx empowerment at HSIs based on foundational frameworks and critical perspectives. Based on our model, future research should honor Latinx students' multiple social identities and assets, assess the environments students experience, as well as the empowerment Latinx students embody as a result of attending an HSI.

Future scholarship and institutional research on Latinx students at HSIs should examine their experiences and empowerment through comprehensive and novel quantitative approaches. Larger-scale national datasets, such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program and National Survey of Student Engagement, may capture facets of our model (Astin & Antonio, 2012); but, most lack elements for an integrated analysis of Latinx students at HSIs. While we acknowledge such limitations, we encourage scholars to create studies that center empowerment as a process and an outcome in order to further understand student success beyond conventional metrics. Institutional level instruments or smaller-scale studies may already thoroughly assess the influence of HSIs on Latinx empowerment. In these cases, we encourage researchers and scholars to disseminate and share their assessment approaches and findings to inform how others may follow suit.

More holistic evaluations of Latinx student empowerment at HSIs may also require the development of new instruments or measures that capture the concepts we propose are essential. For example, the community cultural wealth of Latinx communities is under-examined through large-scale, quantitative studies despite the fact that some of these cultural assets, such as familial capital, are integral to Latinx student success (Cuellar, 2014, 2015; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2015). Also, most existing surveys are not grounded in the lived experiences of Latinx students. Given that HSIs can cultivate empowering environments by drawing on the cultural knowledge embedded within the communities these institutions serve (Gonzales, 2015), the evaluation of these environments should also be based on the cultural assets and educational views of Latinx students. Accordingly, Latinx student perspectives must be interwoven in the process of creating new measures and surveys for HSIs.

Additionally, we encourage scholars and institutional researchers to explore Latinx empowerment at HSIs through different methodological approaches. Several scholars point to a variety of qualitative and indigenous research methodologies that represent robust and rigorous asset-based approaches, such as interviews, *testimonios*, and focus groups (Rendón et al., 2014; Smith, 1999; Yosso et al., 2009). Of particular importance are the twenty-five indigenous projects Smith (1999) describes, with emphasis on envisioning, democratizing, creating, and sharing as these position students as both experts in their own experiences and as stakeholders in HSIs. We further recommend the employment of participatory action-research that includes students in the reciprocal process of creating and assessing HSIs for continual improvement towards enacting an empowering education.

Conclusion

As Latinx students continue to enroll at HSIs in large numbers, these colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to educate and empower these students. By centering Latinx students at these institutions, HSIs are in a position to restructure around the community cultural wealth inherent among communities of color (Yosso, 2005), which in turn has the potential to self-correct some of the structural inequities inherent in higher education and society. Current approaches to assessing Latinx student success do not holistically tap into the transformative form of education that is necessary to fully advance this historically marginalized group. By employing a model that assesses Latinx empowerment, HSIs can ensure

that students are obtaining the requisite knowledge and skills to transform themselves, their communities, and society. Through the empowerment of Latinx students, HSIs can proactively promote economic, social, and political equity for this racialized group.

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