



RESEARCH

# Briefs

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EDUCATION

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Dr. Piñeres is part of FCE's 2005-2006 Community Scholars Program. The program is designed to serve as a link between academic researchers and the community, where academic scholars are encouraged to focus their research and expertise on real-world issues that have a significant impact on urban communities.

## A University Education: The American Dream or Just a Pipe Dream?

BY

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*College graduates will make \$1.2 million more in salary over their lifetime than non-graduates.*

National Center for Education Statistics (2004)

**A college education is more than just a piece of paper. Higher education provides the means by which to leave behind poverty. Steve Murdock, Chief Demographer for Texas, stated that “if participation and graduation rates remain low, the poverty rate in Texas will increase by 3 percent and the average Texas household income will decline by \$3,000 in constant dollars by 2030.”<sup>1</sup> Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority with the highest high school dropout rate and the lowest college graduation rate.<sup>2</sup> Among 2004 high school graduates in Texas, Hispanics had the lowest college enrollment rate. Only 38.87% of Hispanics who graduated from high school in Texas enrolled in higher education. These numbers are even more telling when the fact that those who dropped out of high school are not considered in the sample. The issue of Hispanic education extends beyond simple high school and college completion goals to a larger social issue.**

Hispanics enter the work force with an educational disadvantage compared to other ethnic groups. In 2000, it was reported that 21%

of Hispanics dropped out of high school, while only 8% of whites and 12% of African Americans dropped out. The Census Bureau reported that in 2002, 43% of Latinos did not earn a high school diploma and 26% dropped out before ninth grade.<sup>3</sup> As the fastest growing minority, it is imperative that Hispanics be integrated into the workforce with higher paying jobs. Robledo Montecel, Cortez, and Cortez pointed out, “Over a 16-year period, inadequate school holding power has cost Texas citizens almost half a trillion dollars in foregone income, tax revenues, increased welfare, job training, unemployment, and criminal justice costs.”<sup>4</sup> As incomes increase, poverty should decline, burden on social services should be reduced, and tax revenue should rise.

While we point out the challenges to high school completion, this paper focuses on and attempts to offer a proposal to address college completion rates. The challenges to Hispanic youth are varied. In a recent study, Swail, Cabrera, and Lee outlined the many challenges Hispanic youth face in high school, in college, and as a result of their socioeconomic characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Hispanic youth encounter problems in high school that leave them less prepared for college. In many cases they:

- are held back in school;
- change high schools more than once;
- earn grades of C or less in high school;
- take lower forms of math;
- leave high school before graduation; and
- earn a GED.

Common socioeconomic characteristics that further hamper Hispanics’ ability to complete

high school and enroll in college are:

- low-income families;
- siblings that dropped out of high school;
- limited English language skills;
- a parent that did not complete high school;
- having children while in high school; and
- a parent without college or university experience.

As a result, Hispanics drop out of high school at a higher rate, enter two-year colleges at a higher rate, and enter four-year colleges at a lower rate. Hispanic college completion rates are lower than all other ethnic groups.

## FINANCIAL AID

*With college tuition and related costs continuing to skyrocket, the financial resources needed to support a college education constitute the most serious challenge for many Hispanic families.*

-Hispanic Scholarship Fund Institute<sup>6</sup>

Financial aid is a key factor in determining accessibility to universities. According to the Hispanic Scholarship Fund Institute, "Hispanics receive the lowest average amount of financial aid awarded - by type and source of aid - of any ethnic group." This limitation can be binding, resulting in students not being able to attend a university.

The nine-month estimated cost of attending a representative four-year public university in Texas for 2005-2006 for an in-state student living on campus taking 15 credit hours is \$18,300. An additional cost of \$1,200 is estimated for books.

## HISPANIC FEMALES

*When you have the critical mass of a population that is undereducated, it really has some very negative implications for an entire community and entire states.*

- Josefina Tinajero<sup>7</sup>

While both Hispanic males and females are affected, females have the highest high school dropout rate of any racial or ethnic group and are least likely to earn a college degree.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that approximately 30% of Hispanic

girls drop out of high school, as opposed to only 8.2% of white and 12.9% of African American girls.<sup>9</sup>

La Raza pointed out that only 10% of Hispanic women completed four or more years of college compared to 22.3% of white and 13.9% of African American women.<sup>10</sup> A United Way impact study reported that in 2000 in Dallas County, one-half of the dropouts would be of Hispanic and African American origin. Additionally, they reported that some estimates suggested, "Fifty-two percent of DISD students will graduate. Sixty percent of African American students will graduate, but only 39% of Hispanic students will finish high school."<sup>11</sup>

Among 2004 high school graduates in Texas, Hispanic females had the lowest college enrollment rate. This coupled with the fact that Hispanic females have the highest high school drop-out rate is revealing and disturbing. This has negative consequences not just for dropouts, who experience much higher unemployment rates, but also for the county as a whole because dropouts are more prone to end up in trouble.

## HIGH SCHOOL ISSUES

Hispanic girls are plagued with many obstacles reducing the probability that they will graduate from high school such as:

- family responsibilities;
- lack of parental support;
- cultural barriers;
- pregnancy;
- lack of school support;
- marriage; and
- stereotypes reinforced by the family, school, and media.<sup>12</sup>

Support and change must come from within and by example. Schwartz wrote, "Latina girls need to know their options, and need the support of family, schools, and peers in taking non-traditional career paths. Events in high school or college campuses that feature successful Latinas in non-traditional fields can inspire Latina girls to think about their future and career options."<sup>13</sup>

Schwartz recommended the following to improve educational outcomes for Hispanics:

- cooperative learning
- study/mentoring groups
- language programs
- sex education programs
- increased parental involvement
- working within the realities of the Hispanic culture.<sup>14,15</sup>

This proposal encouraged Hispanic girls who have beaten the odds to enter college to serve as role models and mentors for younger students.

## COLLEGE ISSUES

The obstacles Hispanics face do not end when they graduate from high school. Research reveals that Hispanic students have a very different college experience from their counterparts. After controlling for level of preparation, Fry found that Hispanics enroll in less selective colleges, graduate at lower rates, and are more likely to enroll in community colleges.<sup>16</sup> As a result, less than 25% of Hispanic college entrants finish bachelor's degrees and almost 66% do not receive post-secondary degrees.

There are a number of other factors affecting their college completion rates. For example, Fry noted that Hispanics tend to:

- enroll in less rigorous high school curriculum;
- enroll first in community colleges;
- enroll in non-selective colleges;
- delay entry into colleges;
- be unfamiliar with the college application process;
- not apply to more selective colleges;
- enroll part-time as opposed to full-time;
- have children and other family obligations; and
- live at home.<sup>17</sup>

These issues must be addressed if Hispanics are to complete college and become active members of the economy. For example, Tarateta wrote, "Research has found that Hispanic female adolescents continue to receive far less positive reinforcement from their teachers than do their

white counterparts. Yet, similar studies show that when Hispanic girls do receive encouragement, there is a significant improvement in their performance."<sup>18</sup> Mentoring is a key component in helping Hispanic girls see the value of a university education and showing them how to achieve it.<sup>19</sup>

Stereotypes and lowered expectations can be countered by programs such as mother-daughter programs and other support systems while students are in high school and college. Reyes, Gillock, and Kabus found that "Latinas with close friends who are school oriented are more likely to graduate and consider attending college."<sup>20</sup> A program to encourage Hispanic girls to attend college must include a buddy system to foster a support system.

## UTD: ALREADY MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) is committed to providing support for students who share the at-risk traits identified earlier. A number of programs exist through the efforts of committed faculty and students. Dr. George Fair, Dean of the School of General Studies, through the Academic Bridge Program (ABP), seeks to attract, support, and retain students who graduate from Dallas-area urban high schools with high class rankings without having completed the full university-track curriculum.

UTD believes strongly in the capabilities of these students and fosters ABP as a supportive introductory environment for those who choose to attend UTD. ABP provides a summer scholarship to give selected entering freshmen the opportunity to begin their university education immediately following high school graduation. Core curriculum courses are offered in small class settings during the months of June and July. Students in the Academic Bridge Program receive:

- free on-campus housing for June and July, including a weekly meal stipend;
- tuition and fees for seven semester hours, including college-level mathematics and rhetoric;
- small class sizes (20 or fewer students);

- tutoring and supplemental instruction;
- campus orientation activities;
- extracurricular activities and field trips; and
- the Bridge Builders Award, a \$1000 scholarship awarded to excellent summer ABP students.

The UTD chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) swept all three awards at the LULAC Young Adult/Collegiate Chapters District III Convention held in May 2005 in Plano. Nine other chapters from local universities competed for the honors. Victoria Neave, president of the UTD chapter, a government and politics major in the School of Social Sciences, and student body vice president, was awarded LULAC District III Young Adult Woman of the Year. Juan Solis, chapter vice president and mathematics/education student, was recognized as the LULAC District III Young Adult Man of the Year, and the entire chapter received the LULAC District III Young Adult Council of the Year award.

The group's accomplishments include raising \$10,000 in scholarships for UTD Hispanic students, establishing a free SAT preparation course at two Dallas Independent School District high schools, lobbying in Austin on higher education issues, registering new voters, mentoring underprivileged Hispanic children, adopting poor Hispanic families during the holidays, and hosting local and national Hispanic officials and leaders visiting UTD. The students are to compete at the Texas LULAC State Convention in San Antonio in June 2005. A win there would place them in the running for the National LULAC Young Adult Awards at the 76th Annual LULAC National Convention in Little Rock in July.<sup>21</sup>

LULAC's mission is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health, and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.

For the last seven years, Dr. Juan Gonzalez, Associate Dean for Graduate Affairs, School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, has offered a series of lectures on basic science to the students and teachers of a predominately Hispanic-serving elementary school. This school, located in South

Dallas, has a student population that is about 85% Hispanic and about 10% African American. The school represents an ideal place to present some of his experiences in science to children normally underrepresented in the sciences.

## **POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO IMPROVE HISPANIC ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

A more comprehensive program, in development, does not propose to address the many underlying issues related to why so few Hispanic girls reach the top 20% of their classes, but rather is a focused program designed to make a difference in the lives of those who have overcome many obstacles. This proposal is designed to address the problem of lower college enrollment and completion rates among Hispanic girls by focusing on the key negative external factors that affect them. The program is multifaceted and aimed at high-achieving Hispanic girls from low-income families. The components are:

- **Financial aid to reduce dependency on already financially impoverished families**
  - o **Scholarships: Linked to community service**
  - o **Loans: Traditional need-based financial aid**
  - o **Work Study: On-campus work study program**
- **Mentoring programs to reach the community and increase future enrollment rates**
  - o **Serve as role model for younger girls in the district**
  - o **Serve as link for increasing parental involvement**
  - o **Serve as mentor for incoming university students**
- **Support system for current students to increase retention and graduation rates**
  - o **Academic Bridge Program**
  - o **UTD LULAC student organization**
  - o **Multicultural center**
- **Reduce external negative pressures**
  - o **Provide support for on-campus housing**



TABLE 1 PERCENTAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN DALLAS BY DALLAS ISD HIGH SCHOOL

<b>DISD HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT</b>			
	Percentage enrolled in higher education in Texas:		
	2002	2003	2004
DISD	33%	33%	35%
High Schools:			
A. Maceo Smith	26%	23%	30%
Booker T. Washington	42%	33%	43%
Byran Adams	35%	35%	34%
David W. Carter	39%	40%	39%
H. Grady Spruce	20%	21%	22%
Hillcrest	30%	24%	32%
James Madison	22%	28%	35%
Justin F Kimball	32%	32%	38%
L. G. Pinkston	11%	11%	21%
Lincoln	37%	31%	42%
Middle College	48%	47%	72%
Moises Molina	31%	26%	27%
North Dallas	22%	21%	25%
Roosevelt	25%	26%	28%
Govt/Law Enforcement	62%	55%	61%
Talented & Gifted	48%	41%	67%
Business & Management	38%	52%	53%
Education	57%	67%	59%
Health Professions	68%	65%	74%
Science & Engineering	67%	67%	75%
Seagoville	28%	32%	32%
Skyline	40%	45%	44%
South Oak Cliff	24%	33%	33%
Sunset	28%	25%	27%
Thomas Jefferson	21%	12%	19%
W. H. Adamson	21%	21%	22%
W. T. White	37%	41%	41%
W. W. Samuell	23%	19%	20%
Woodrow Wilson	32%	32%	32%

Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, May 2005

TABLE 2 TOTAL DISD HIGH SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS FOR 2004-2005 SCHOOL YEAR

<b>DISD HIGH SCHOOL TOTAL DEMOGRAPHICS 2004-2005 School Year</b>			
	9th-12th grades combined:		
	Female	Male	%
White	1404	1388	7.20%
African American	7114	6785	36.00%
Hispanic	10747	10626	55.30%
Asian	220	227	1.20%
Native American	80	64	0.40%
Seniors:	Female	Male	%
White	308	308	8.70%
African American	1501	1208	38.20%
Hispanic	1969	1670	51.30%
Asian	49	55	1.50%
Native American	17	13	0.40%

Source: Texas Education Agency, May 2005

TABLE 3 2004 TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES DEMOGRAPHICS

**TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES  
2004 and Texas Higher Education**

Status	Grad type	Gender	Total	Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White
Enrolled in higher ed	Distinguished achievement	Female	8944	27	583	323	2768	5243
	Minimum HS program	Female	8404	22	189	1471	2140	4582
Total Females	Recommended HS program	Female	45833	120	1753	6075	13457	24428
Total (men and women)	Enrolled in higher ed	Female	63181	169	2525	7689	18365	34253
Not enrolled in higher ed	Enrolled in higher ed	Female and Male	116886	319	5137	14012	33201	64217
	Distinguished achievement	Female	3126	11	259	209	880	1767
Total women	Minimum HS program	Female	24168	79	338	4366	9662	9723
Total (men and women)	Recommended HS program	Female	33533	111	948	5001	14991	12482
Grand total (men and women)	Not enrolled in higher ed	Female	60827	201	1545	9576	25533	23972
Grand total (women)	Not enrolled in higher ed	Female and Male	127279	420	3167	19201	52211	52280
Total women	All high school students	Female and Male	244165	739	8304	33213	85412	116497
Total (men and women)	All high school students	Female	124008	370	4070	17445	43898	58225
Grand total (men and women)	Enrolled in higher ed	Female	50.95%	45.68%	62.04%	45.11%	41.84%	58.83%
Total women	Not enrolled in higher ed	Female	49.05%	54.32%	37.96%	54.89%	58.16%	41.17%
Total (men and women)	Enrolled in higher ed	Female and Male	47.87%	43.17%	61.86%	42.19%	38.87%	55.12%
Total (men and women)	Not enrolled in higher ed	Female and Male	52.13%	56.83%	38.14%	57.81%	61.13%	44.88%

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Closing the gaps: The Texas higher education plan.* (2000). Retrieved from Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board web site at <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/ClosingTheGaps/>

<sup>2</sup> *About the Hispanic scholarship fund.* Retrieved from Hispanic Scholarship Fund Institute web site at [www.hsfi.org](http://www.hsfi.org)

<sup>3</sup> Robledo Montecel, M., Cortez, J., & Cortez, A. (2004). Dropout-prevention programs: Right intent, wrong focus, and some suggestions on where to go from here. *Education and Urban Policy*, 36(2), 169-188.

<sup>4</sup> Data from Intercultural Development Research Association, 2001, Estimated loss of earnings and tax losses to Texas due to school attrition: School years 1985-86 to 2000-01, San Antonio, TX, as cited in Robledo Montecel, M., Cortez, J., & Cortez, A. (2004). Dropout-prevention programs: Right intent, wrong focus, and some suggestions on where to go from here. *Education and Urban Policy*, 36(2), 169-188.

<sup>5</sup> Swail, W., Cabrera, A., & Lee, C. (2004). *Latino youth and the pathway to college.* Retrieved from Pew Hispanic Center web site at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/31.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *About the Hispanic scholarship fund.* Retrieved from Hispanic Scholarship Fund Institute web site at [www.hsfi.org](http://www.hsfi.org)

<sup>7</sup> As cited by Ludden, J. (December 16, 2002). *Educating Latinos: An NPR special report.* Retrieved from NPR web site at [http://www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2002/nov/educating\\_latinos/part4.html](http://www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2002/nov/educating_latinos/part4.html)

<sup>8</sup> *American Association of University Women.* Retrieved from [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org)

<sup>9</sup> *Census Bureau.* Retrieved from [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>10</sup> Associated Press. (January 25, 1991). Fewer caps and gowns for Hispanic girls. *The Daily Texan.* Retrieved from [http://tspweb02.tsp.utexas.edu/webarchive/01-25-01/2001012514\\_s02\\_Young.html](http://tspweb02.tsp.utexas.edu/webarchive/01-25-01/2001012514_s02_Young.html)

<sup>11</sup> *Our impact on Dallas drop outs.* (n.d.) Retrieved from United Way of Metropolitan Dallas web site at [http://www.unitedwaydallas.org/OurImpact/Education\\_ChildEdu3.htm](http://www.unitedwaydallas.org/OurImpact/Education_ChildEdu3.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Romo, H. (1998). Latina high school leaving: Some practical solutions. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.* Retrieved from [ericdigests.org](http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-2/latina.htm) web site at <http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-2/latina.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Vives, O., & McCray, K. (Fall 2001) Latina Girls' high school drop-out rate highest in U.S. *National NOW Times.* Retrieved from <http://www.now.org/nnt/fall-2001/latinas.html>

<sup>14</sup> Schawrtz, W. (October 2001). Strategies for improving the educational outcomes of Latinas. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education.*

<sup>15</sup> Mellander, G. (Spring 2002). Latinas: Their education and future. *Journal of School Improvement*, 3(1).

<sup>16</sup> Fry, R. (2004). *Latino youth finishing college: The role of selective pathways.* Retrieved from Pew Hispanic Center web site at <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=30>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Tarateta, M. (February 2004). *Mentors bring college dreams to Hispanic girls.* Retrieved from Fordham Online web site at [http://www.fordham.edu/Campus\\_Resources/Public\\_Affairs/Archives/2004/archive\\_356.html](http://www.fordham.edu/Campus_Resources/Public_Affairs/Archives/2004/archive_356.html)

<sup>19</sup> Fry, R. (2003). *Hispanic youth dropping out of US schools: Measuring the challenge.* Retrieved from [pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com/pdf/vf_pew_hispanic_dropout.pdf) web site at [http://www.pewtrusts.com/pdf/vf\\_pew\\_hispanic\\_dropout.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.com/pdf/vf_pew_hispanic_dropout.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Reyes, O., Gillock, K., & Kobus, K. (1994). A longitudinal study of school adjustment in urban, minority adolescents: Effects of a high school transition program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(3), 341-369.

<sup>21</sup> Editor's note: At the time this paper was accepted by FCE, the results of the competition were unknown.



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