



## Focus on Latino Student Success in Community Colleges

Sarita E. Brown

### A Survey of Best Practices

*Abriendo Puertas* is a series of abstracts published by NCCHC for the express purpose of surveying best practices for student success and professional development of future leaders.

In this issue, the author explores the effect the choice of community college has on the overall success for Latino students in higher education.

Community colleges have long been on the front lines of the struggles for access to higher education in the United States. A distinctly American invention, these institutions are known for responding promptly to local educational needs by offering affordable and convenient options to students of all ages and backgrounds. Their open door policies help provide the means to remediate under-prepared high school graduates and educate other underserved students.

Latino students are more likely to enroll in community colleges than students from other racial/ethnic groups. Over 55 percent of Latinos in higher education are in community colleges. In contrast, less than 50 percent of students from other ethnic groups are concentrated in community colleges. Additionally, when scanning the national landscape the marked preference of Latino students to enroll at Hispanic Serving Institutions\* (HSIs) is apparent; about half of all Latino students were enrolled at HSIs in 2002-03. And over half of HSIs (126) are community colleges.

For all their appeal to Latino students, the question remains: what effect does the choice of community college have on overall success for Latino students in higher education? A report summarizing a survey of student persistence and attainment by the U.S. Department of Education found that 23 percent of students who begin at a community college with the expressed intent to complete an associate's degree do so within six years. The report also suggests that Latino students are less likely to complete a bachelor's degree in six years if they begin their college studies at a community college. Among students who transfer to a four-year institution, 36 percent attained a bachelor's degree within six years of starting community college. In contrast, 58 percent of students who began at four-year institutions completed a bachelor's degree within six years (National Center on Education Statistics, 2003).

Some react to this data by working to dissuade Latino students from starting their college education at community colleges. Others react by trying to strengthen community colleges and their transfer programs to serve all students better. *Excelencia* in Education (*Excelencia*) chooses the latter and is committing resources through the following project.

**Starting Point: Community College** This applied research project builds on the findings from the earlier demonstration project, Latino Student Success (LSS) at HSIs sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement



Editor  
Dr. Maria C. Sheehan,  
Superintendent/President  
College of the Desert  
(760) 773-2500  
msheehan@collegeofthedesert.edu  
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**Sarita E. Brown** has spent more than two decades at prominent national academic and educational institutions and at the highest levels of government working to develop more effective strategies to raise academic achievement and opportunity for low-income and minority students. From the start of her career at the University of Texas at Austin, where she created a national model promoting minority success in graduate education, to her current post as founding President of *Excelencia* in Education in Washington, DC, Sarita has focused her work on expanding this country's human capital through improving the quality of education.

Serving as Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans in the Clinton administration from 1997-2000, Sarita released the report, "Creating the Will: Hispanics Achieving Educational Excellence," with recommendations to stakeholders from all sectors to close the Latino educational achievement gap from early childhood to graduate and professional education. From 2001-03, Sarita worked to increase federal support for Latinos in higher education, and helped the Hispanic Scholarship Fund establish a public sector affiliate by serving as founding President of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund Institute. In 2003-04, Sarita continued to focus on federal policy and Latino higher educational success as senior fellow at the Pew Hispanic Center while incubating the new nonprofit organization, *Excelencia* in Education. Launched in June 2004, *Excelencia* aims to accelerate Latino success in higher education.

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of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE). Now with support from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education *Excelencia* leads the effort to use the LSS inquiry model to identify community college practices and qualities of institutional leadership that enhance Latino student success.

This new project, Starting Point: Community College, began in April 2005 and works with the following the community colleges listed below with their partner baccalaureate granting HSIs:

#### NEW YORK

##### **La Guardia Community College**

CUNY–New York City College of Technology

##### **Borough of Manhattan Community College**

CUNY–Lehman College

#### TEXAS

##### **El Paso Community College**

University of Texas at El Paso

##### **South Texas College**

University of Texas, Pan American

#### CALIFORNIA

##### **East Los Angeles Community College**

California State University, Los Angeles

##### **El Camino Community College**

California State University, Dominguez Hills

The National Community College Council is an important partner in *Excelencia's* efforts to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. The NCCHC Board is developing a subcommittee to serve as advisors to *Excelencia* and the Starting Point: Community College project principals over the 18-month data gathering and analysis process.

For more information on Starting Point: Community College, and other *Excelencia* initiatives, please visit: [www.edexcelencia.org](http://www.edexcelencia.org)

\*Hispanic Serving Institutions are accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with at least 25 percent or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment, at which not less than 50 percent of these Hispanic students are low-income individuals.

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2003. Descriptive Summary of 1995-96 Beginning Postsecondary Students: 3 Years later. NCES 2003-151, Washington, DC: NCES.