

Seal of *Excelencia*: Recognition and Accountability for Latino Student Success

While Latino students have become the largest and most rapidly growing minority group in U.S. higher education, our higher education system has not gained much traction in helping increase the success of Latino students. Latino college completion is significantly behind other racial and ethnic groups. Of adults, 23 percent of Latinos have earned an associate degree or higher compared to 47 percent of white and 32 percent of African American adults. When looking at graduation rates, about 54 percent of Latinos earn baccalaureate degrees within six years compared to 63 percent for white students, and 59 percent for all students.

The failure to close the attainment gap in graduation rates and other crucial outcomes presents a major challenge to achieve our national goal of increasing the number of college students who attain a college degree or certificate as the number of jobs that require postsecondary education continues to increase.

Policy initiatives to support institutions of higher education based primarily on minority enrollments—as well as institutional efforts that are strong within specific departments but are not implemented at scale—have failed to significantly increase Latino student success. Merely designating institutions as Hispanic Serving Institutions based on Latino enrollment is no guarantee that institutions will serve their students well. These and other strategies will continue to prove inadequate unless there is a systematic, focused, and data-driven effort to support the institutional change necessary to increase Latino student success. Changes in the policy arena will be important to support our colleges and universities in this effort, but the real change must happen at the institutional level.

Introducing the Seal of *Excelencia*

Excelencia in Education, the Nation's leading organization in accelerating Latino student success, is addressing these challenges by initiating a new national effort—the Seal of *Excelencia*. The Seal will facilitate institutional change to close equity gaps and significantly increase Latino student completion and will assist Latino students in making postsecondary education choices. The effort is based on *Excelencia*'s years of work to identify and

grow what works at the institutional level to ensure Latino student success. The Seal signals that an institution has developed a comprehensive and systemic approach to accelerating Latino student success and seeks to raise the bar by which institutions are evaluated with regard to serving Latino students.

The intended outcomes of the Seal are to:

- ▶ Significantly increase the percentage of Latino students who persist and attain degrees by 2030.
- ▶ Increase the number of institutions that achieve the Seal of *Excelencia* by concretely showing improved ability to help Latino students succeed.
- ▶ Raise awareness and action among institutions of higher education to accelerate Latino student success.
- ▶ Influence policy discussions about how to help institutions of higher education better serve Latino students.
- ▶ Build consumer demand within the Latino community to enroll in institutions that demonstrate success in serving Latino students.

How Does the Seal Work?

Rather than seeking to implement change with one-size-fits-all policy mandates, The Seal of *Excelencia* is a voluntary system focused on changing institutional focus and practice. The Seal is designed to create demand in the higher education market for improving Latino student success by leveraging the momentum of a growing Latino population as they evaluate and choose to attend colleges and universities that show evidence of truly serving Latino students. Colleges and Universities will earn the Seal of *Excelencia* once they demonstrate consistent success in helping Latino students graduate. Specifically, to attain the Seal, institutions will demonstrate they have reached benchmarks in the three core areas that *Excelencia* has determined are more likely to lead to Latino student success.

- ▶ **Data:** Institutions will demonstrate that they have accurate data that show the institution's increasing success against five key metrics: **enrollment** of Latino students; **retention** of Latino students; **financial support** for students

through Pell grants, institutional aid, employment, and work study; **representation** of Latinos in administration, faculty, and staff to further model success; and graduation of Latino students.

- ▶ **Practice:** Institutions will demonstrate a consistent and transparent use of evidence-based practices and policies to support Latino student success. Evidence-based practices are those with quantitative and qualitative data showing positive impact over multiple years aligned with a program implemented in areas where research generally shows greater effectiveness in Latino student success. The Seal will identify institutions that intentionally implement and advance evidence-based practices, programs and policies to achieve desired results for Latino students.
- ▶ **Leadership:** Institutions will not only show that their data and practice are aligned, but will also highlight the many ways that campus leaders have explicitly and publicly committed to improving Latino student success. Institutions that earn the Seal will demonstrate the impact of effective leadership, by tracking: the quality and execution of the strategic plan and number of occurrences and transparency in public messages from the campus president and/or the board of directors regarding the campus' commitment to improve Latino student success.

Excelencia will provide expertise and technical assistance through a network of peer-to-peer learning sessions, workshops and institutes where institutional teams of faculty, staff and administrators will help institutions build the capacity needed to achieve the Seal.

Excelencia will also continue its commitment to increase awareness about the current condition of Latino higher educational achievement and the impact of evidence-based practices. This research, combined with the implementation of data-driven

policies and practices, will further accelerate success for post-traditional students.

A key aspect of the work will be a national marketing campaign to encourage colleges to volunteer to take on the challenge to achieve national recognition. We will also work with advocates, educators and counselors to encourage prospective college students to look for the Seal in making decisions about where to attend.

Why *Excelencia* in Education?

Excelencia is uniquely positioned to drive change in higher education to better serve Latino students. We have a deep knowledge of higher education data trends nationally as well as experience helping institutions use data to inform and improve institutional policies and practices to help more students succeed.

Excelencia's Growing What Works database has cataloged successful evidenced-based practices used by institutions and communities across the country to accelerate student success.

Excelencia in Action, our national network of action-oriented professionals in higher education and community-based organizations—effectively blends their collective expertise with *Excelencia's* to expand successful strategies and support policies to accelerate Latino student success. To jumpstart acceptance in the field, we launched Presidents for Latino Student Success, currently a group of 57 college and university presidents committed to serving Latino students. These leaders will be among the first to strive to earn the Seal of *Excelencia* for their institutions.

These programmatic efforts—along with our extensive research on the most pressing issues facing Latino students in higher education—make *Excelencia* the only organization with the knowledge, experience and credibility in the field to launch an effort of this magnitude and importance.