



Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Task Force Report

Charge of the HSI Task Force:

1. define and describe what an HSI should look like at SSU
2. assess how SSU is meeting that definition
3. develop goals and objectives that will ensure we can make claim to being an HSI
4. provide other recommendations that will enrich the campus climate for Latinx students, staff, and faculty at SSU
5. develop a list of "promising practices" from model institutions across the nation and California

Report Date:

December 23, 2020

Executive Summary

In the Fall of 2020, Dr. Jerlena Griffin-Desta, Chief of Staff to the President and Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Diversity, charged the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Task Force to develop a report with recommendations on five core charges: 1) What SSU should look like as a model HSI; 2) our current status as an HSI; 3) our key goals and objectives to be a model HSI; 4) our recommendations to enrich the campus climate for all SSU Latinx community members; and, 5) promising practices from other HSIs.

The whole HSI Task Force met seven times between October 6 and December 22, 2020, in addition to weekly meetings of three subgroups. The Task Force was composed of SSU Latinx community members including students, staff, faculty, and administrators. HSI Task Force members formed three teams to explore the charges and make the recommendations included in this report. Given the extreme institutional diversity in HSIs, there is no single model for defining an HSI. However, becoming an effective HSI requires learning from other institutions and from the body of research in this field to make informed decisions about best practices to serve Latinx students at SSU. Given that an HSI designation is based on enrollment and comes with no explicit mission, it is up to us at Sonoma State to create that mission and implement it to effectively serve our Latinx students so they may thrive and flourish academically, socially, and emotionally. It is our responsibility to do the work to move our HSI from enrolling “Hispanics” to serving our diverse Latinx constituencies before, during, and after they are at Sonoma State.

We cannot assume that Sonoma State, like most other public universities and HSIs, has addressed our ongoing historical legacy as a de facto White-serving institution. The fact that SSU is one of the last of the CSUs to achieve HSI status points to the immediacy of this legacy and the urgency of undertaking in earnest our commitment to dismantling the long-standing barriers to serving our Latinx students. The Fall 2019 data, from the SSU Office of Institutional Effectiveness, portrays the current staggering disparities between Latinx and White staff and faculty:

SSU Staff: White 69% (n = 510) and Latinx 18.3% (n = 135);

SSU Faculty: White 63.3% (n = 393) and Latinx 7.6% (n = 47)

These disparities call for an in-depth examination of the structures, practices, and policies established by academic and student affairs and the office of human resources. We need a different approach to strategically increase the hiring, retention, and promotion of Latinx staff and faculty. Hiring committee members must be held accountable to yield a diverse pool of qualified applicants, including Latinx applicants.

The stark disparities between the number and percentage of White and Latinx faculty and staff demands further attention in the light of enrollment data for Fall 2020 showing the composition of Sonoma State’s student body:

SSU Students: White 43.4% (n = 3,378) and Latinx 38% (n = 2,959).

The data points to the reality that most of our Latinx students will mostly be educated by White faculty and will access services provided most often by White staff. Therefore, we must focus on providing effective training and support to all faculty to promote an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment, offer a de-colonized syllabus and curriculum, and be effective in preventing and intervening when instances of racism and microaggressions happen in their classrooms. An important outcome of such training must be the acceptance, understanding, and acknowledgement of White privilege and the responsibility associated with that, to become partners in institutional change to serve our Latinx students. All staff should be encouraged to participate during regular work hours (not solely lunch time) in diversity training with a focus on facilitating positive intergroup interactions between all staff and Latinx students, faculty, and staff.

This HSI Task Force Report articulates the duty and responsibility for SSU to intentionally engage in critical practices and changes that demonstrate we are closing the graduation rate gap between White and Latinx students, thus contributing to the economic, social, and civic engagement and the well-being of all our communities in the North Bay and greater California. In 2018, NBC news succinctly reported the economic contribution of Latinx college students.

Nearly 40 percent of all 38.6 million people living in California are Latino, including over half of the state's K-12 student population and four in 10 college undergraduates. "You can't ignore such a significant number and not care about their educational success," Michele Siqueiros, president of The Campaign for College Opportunity and co-author of the report, told NBC News..... For California to maintain its standing as the fifth-largest economy in the world, the state has to produce at least 1.65 million college graduates by 2030. But it won't reach this goal without Latino educational success, and many of the state's schools are not preparing young Hispanics for higher education.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/increasing-latino-college-completion-key-california-s-economy-report-states-n938936>

HSIs are the present and future of SSU and of higher education in California. The success of SSU and California is tied to the success of our Latinx students.

Eligibility of SSU as a Hispanic Serving Institution requires a regular renewal application process. To maintain constant eligibility as an HSI, as well as to coordinate implementation of institutional plans and actions to achieve the set goals for our Latinx community and become a model HSI, it is essential we create an HSI office and hire a **permanent, full time HSI Director**. We can no longer afford the committee model approach, where we expect Latinx faculty and staff to add such an important responsibility on top of the regular duties and work (and without assigned time and/or compensation). Our pursuit of becoming a model HSI requires explicit articulation of the goals pertaining to our Latinx community within the SSU Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity model and strategic plan. Cultural taxation is a reality, which should be recognized as a major contributor to work related burn out and a threat to the well-being of Latinx faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

The opportunity for Sonoma State University to become a model HSI must include a crystal-clear public mission articulated and communicated by top SSU leaders as to our university's commitment and readiness to transformatively educate, serve, and support our diverse Latinx community. As a group of SSU student-researchers asked: "How can we strategically continue moving from intent to action in pursuit of social and educational justice for racial/ethnic minority students?" (Sami, Sukkar, & Velasquez, 2017). The current SSU Strategic Plan must become transformative in its intentionality in identifying how the institution will equitably meet the following needs necessary for Latinx students, staff, and faculty to thrive both at and beyond Sonoma State:

- *Basic human needs* (food and housing security);
- *Safety needs* (financial, health, emotional security, safe learning environment);
- *Social belonging* (a campus climate of connecting, being included and welcomed);
- *Self-esteem and dignity* (feeling respected, valued, recognized, visible);
- *Cognitive and academic needs* (learning, knowledge, understanding, need for meaning),
- *Aesthetic needs* (Latinx specific cultural programming, cultural representation through the arts, murals, music, dance);
- *Full participation and engagement* (access to the complete range of educational capabilities, opportunities, technologies, and experiences leading to a college degree and preparedness to move beyond college life to further academic and professional success and civic participation).

Through our words and actions, we must truly speak to and truly serve our Latinx students, their families, and their diverse communities as full participants in our mutual commitment to their well-being and success in all aspects of life. Our Latinx students are our future at SSU and California, a future we all share.

The HSI Task Force has identified six core goals with recommendations that are designed to lay the foundation upon which future changes may be implemented by Sonoma State University to better embody its HSI identity and better serve our diverse Latinx constituencies:

- A. Establish an HSI Office with a full-time Director to lead a University-wide initiative for SSU to achieve the [Seal of Excelencia](#) standards;
- B. Develop a University-wide Communication Plan for our HSI Identity;
- C. Improve Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Latinx Students, Faculty, and Staff;
- D. Promote Student Success and Holistic Well-Being for our diverse Latinx community;
- E. Ensure that the Office of Institutional Effectiveness collects and provides annual reports on enrollment, retention, persistence, academic achievement, degree completion, and dropout rates by academic year for Latinx students;
- F. Develop and implement culturally-relevant and inclusive curricula, programs, and training to equitably serve Latinx students.

The Task Force further recommends using the Seal of Excelencia Framework and Criteria, a national certification confirming that an institution goes beyond enrollment to

intentionally serve Latino students and includes a framework with three components: data, practices, and leadership.

1. **Data:** Institutions have accurate data and positive momentum among six key data areas.
2. **Practice:** Institutions that intentionally implement and advance evidence-based programs and policies in six key practice areas to achieve desired results for Latino students include.
3. **Leadership:** Institutions demonstrate leadership impact and how the institution aligns data and practice to improve Latino student success according to the following five leadership areas.

In conclusion, this Report is a call to urgently and intentionally (1) engage in the necessary institutional work of articulating a vision of what and who we are at Sonoma State University (SSU) as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), dedicated to truly serving diverse Latinx students, families and communities, and (2) commit resources necessary to making the vision a reality for our diverse constituencies of present and future SSU students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni. Although deeply informed by research and models from other institutions, the vision and objectives articulated in this report are home-grown, grounded in the specific and contingent realities of SSU. There is no paint-by-the-numbers picture of Sonoma State as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Instead, what we propose requires a sustained and sustainable commitment to the ongoing work of learning to serve diverse Latinx individuals, families, and communities as full members of our SSU constituencies now and in the future. As an HSI, we must place serving our Latinx students, staff and faculty front and center as we build a pluralistic “we” that is inclusive of all the lives lived by members of the communities we serve. Our failure to begin this urgent work in the short term and sustain it in the long-term risks jeopardizing the future of SSU and the economic growth for the region and the greater State of California.