A Culturally Specific Perspective: The Hispanic Serving Institution Story
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Esperanza United is the federally designated national resource center that mobilizes Latinas and Latin@ communities to end gender-based violence. Esperanza United has chosen to use “@” in place of the masculine “o” when referring to people or groups that are gender neutral or both masculine and feminine. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that women, men, and gender-nonconforming people make to our communities. Formerly Casa de Esperanza, the National Latin@ Network, Esperanza United was founded in 1982 by a small group of persevering Latinas as an emergency shelter in St. Paul, Minnesota to offer culturally responsive support to Latin@ survivors. We continue to ground our work in community strengths and wisdom, as we serve Latin@s locally and nationwide.

In this document you will see the use of multiple terms to describe the specific student population. Although Esperanza United has chosen to use Latin@ to define our communities, we will use the term Hispanic in this report as it is widely used and recognized in educational institutions, research, and adopted by the US government.

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to share highlights from listening sessions conducted by Esperanza United (the federally designated Latin@ resource center on gender-based violence and a technical assistance provider for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Campus Program) around how Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) address and respond to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking on campus. This report also serves as an overview of the definition, designation, Impact, and history of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). While content in this report refers to feedback and the identity of HSIs, all campuses with a Hispanic student population would benefit from understanding and reviewing best practices gathered by the OVW Campus Grant program.

Background

Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs) are defined in Title V of the Higher Education Act as a not-for-profit institution of higher learning with a full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student enrollment that is at least 25% Hispanic. According to the US Census Bureau, there are 62 million Hispanics/Latinos in the US, this number has increased by 93% over the last decade. Additionally, data from the 2019 - 2020 school year shows an estimated 3.6 million Hispanics enrolled in high education institutions.

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) founded in 1986, is a member association that represents more than 500 colleges and universities committed to Hispanic higher education success. As part of (HACU's) mission and commitment towards promoting the development of member colleges and universities, the association advocated for the formal recognition of campuses with high enrollment of Hispanic students in 1992. Since then, the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics has designated 411 HSIs as of Fall 2018.

Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking (DVSAS) impact individuals across all races, ethnicities, socio-economic levels, genders, sexual orientation, and levels of

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education. The Association of American Universities conducted a Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct in 2019 in which 14.9% of Hispanic or Latino students (22.6% women and 6.2% men) reported that they had experienced nonconsensual (which is defined as an act or behavior that was not freely agreed to by both partners) sexual contact by physical force and/or inability to consent which was slightly higher than the rate of non-Hispanic (12.8%) students. HSIs have greater access to Hispanic students and are positioned to bridge Hispanic students to DVSAS services.

**HSI Highlights**

A total of 24 HSI key staff representing 17 institutions and the White House Initiative on Hispanic Serving Institutions participated in a virtual listening session.

- HSI campus' full-time undergraduate student enrollment must be at least 25% Hispanic to be considered a Hispanic Serving Institution.
- In 2017, 523 institutions met the federal HSI enrollment criterion, enrolling 66% of all Hispanics undergraduates across the country.
- HSIs comprise over 15% of nonprofit colleges and universities, and their number has increased on average of 20 institutions per year since 2009.
- The following were the top five core values of HSIs identified in our review of HSIs
  - Diversity
  - Integrity
  - Community service
  - Respect
  - Learning
- From the same national HSI review, the majority of HSIs were founded through a growing community need, land grants from private entities, or on the grounds of local high schools.

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6 Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Website About Section. [https://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU_101.asp](https://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU_101.asp)

• Hispanics conferred degrees rose from 6.5% in 2001 to 14.9% in 2019. In 2018 Hispanics earned nearly 1 out of 4 associate degrees.9

• Help service resources within HSIs are generally provided in both Spanish and English to help improve understanding for students and community members whose first language may be Spanish.

• 17% of HSIs were composed of nonprofit colleges and universities.10

While more information is gathered to support identifying specific cultural aspects of HSIs the following can be highlighted to identify cultural realities of the Latin@/Hispanic student body at HSIs:

• Across the United States, Hispanics are not a homogenous group. Likewise, the HSI student body is not monolithic, and institutions note that their Hispanic student body differs across campuses.

• HSI campus culture varies from campus to campus and is largely influenced by religion, traditional values, and cultural attitudes of Latin@/Hispanic identities, and for immigrant Latin@s/Hispanics, their country of origin, immigration and acculturation experience.

A representative from a HSI shared the following description on their student’s identity:

“Hispanic, especially in the New Mexico region, can mean a lot of things as far as how students identify...thinking about the complexities of serving students who may or may not identify as students of color, may or may not speak second languages, etc.”

- 2020 HSI listening session participant

Impact of DVSAS in Hispanic Communities

Domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking impact individuals across all races, ethnicities, socio-economic levels, genders, sexual orientation, and levels of education. However, data does reflect that there is a difference in how communities are impacted by certain acts of violence.

- Hispanic students experience a slightly higher rate of nonconsensual sexual contact than non-Hispanic students.\(^{11}\)
  - The Association of American Universities conducted the ‘Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct’ in 2019 in which 14.9% of Hispanic or Latino students (22.6% women and 6.2% men) reported that they had experienced nonconsensual sexual contact by physical force or inability to consent.
  - Approximately 1 in 3 Latinas will experience intimate partner violence during their lifetime.\(^{12}\)
  - In a recent study, immigrant Latina survivors reported a decrease in the likelihood of calling the police due to heightened immigration enforcement policies and increased fear of deportation.\(^{13}\)
  - Latina women aged 18 to 24 years have a 29.7% lifetime prevalence of physical violence, a 6.2% lifetime prevalence of rape, and a 6.8% lifetime prevalence of stalking.\(^{14}\)

Strategies to Address DVSAS Services on Hispanic Serving Institutions

There are various strategies being used with the intention to better serve the growing Hispanic student population succeed in their higher education journey.

Below are a few initiatives and/or strategies shared during listening sessions with HSI faculty and advocates, which are currently being used to work on DVSAS prevention and response efforts amongst the Hispanic student population:

- Counselors and advocates who share identities with Hispanic students are often able to create a sense of comradery and trust. Programs have increased transparency, awareness, and the trust of students by proactively informing the campus

\(^{14}\) https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6308a1.htm
community about DV/SA resources and legal protections, processes, and remedies.

• HSI staff have embraced diversity and strength-based approaches with their students, which has led to the creation of supportive environments that incorporate students’ strengths to improve students’ campus experience and student retention.

• Continued efforts of innovative programming via social media, online events, watch parties etc. have boosted campus advocacy and use of on-campus resources to create more safe spaces.

• Identifying students to become leaders in creating content on DVSAS on social media platforms has increased visibility and representation on campus.

• Continuous education and outreach on social media platforms and timely content creation has increased access to information. For example, recording a 3-minute video on filing a police report, can be helpful for students to refer to the information at a more convenient time for them.

• Cross department and university collaborations on future virtual events and programs have created a closer-knit community on and off campus.

Additional Promising Practices for Hispanic Serving Institutions:

• Adopt culturally responsive bystander intervention strategies that equip students with skills to respond to DVSAS and promote accountability, but also addresses the intersections of inequality and justice when working with historically marginalized communities.

• Ensure programming is culturally sensitive and addresses environmental factors, where students learn about DVSAS occurring both on and off campus, the reporting processes, alternative responses and how to seek out community-based services.

• Develop a student advocacy or ambassador program where students are trained in identifying and sharing helpful resources to their peers on and off campus.

• Use a holistic view to trauma-informed care of students in which the community is integrated with the DVSAS training. (i.e. collaborating with local DV/SA service organizations that represent marginalized communities and creates opportunities for students to receive services on campus or in the community)

• Adopt an intersectional framework to address DVSAS on campus where the experience, backgrounds and identities of students are considered and prioritized.
• Engage students from academic and social cohorts, to inform program development and enhance access and inclusion.

• Have clear and accessible protocols to address DVSAS and distribute widely.

Challenges identified on Hispanic serving institutions

Due to the unique experiences of Hispanic students, there have been barriers in providing the equitable support Hispanic students deserve such as:

• Lack of language access with limited direct services in Spanish. It is essential for supportive programming to have language access so that survivors can begin their journey of healing in the language they feel is the most powerful. According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, recipients of federal assistance must take reasonable steps to make programs more accessible for individuals with limited English proficiency.\(15\)

• Students who attend campus in the evening or commute daily (non-traditional students) are often left out of advocacy programs. Attempting to reach out to accommodate students who attend evening classes can be particularly challenging.

• Students are hesitant to report abuse or use campus services to keep police and other authority agents out of the equation due to fear of discrimination and/or distrust of formal processes.

• Lack of data on DVSAS among Hispanic students.

• Students' legal status can influence their decision to seek DVSAS services due to fear of not being able to complete their studies and/or lose scholarship or federal aid.

“We’ve had issues around students who wouldn’t disclose or report because they’re afraid that someone would retaliate by calling ICE.”

– 2020 HSI listening session participant

The COVID-19 pandemic has also added challenges in serving the Hispanic student population. Experiences include:

• Students are accessing psychological services much less than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

• Increased disclosures of digital sexual violence and unwanted sexting.

\(15\) https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/limited-english-proficiency/index.html
• Difficulty in building trust with students in a virtual setting as opposed to in person. This is particularly difficult when a student discloses remotely as opposed to supporting a student in person.

It is important to note that there are varying experiences of students’ response in seeking online services.

• Some institutions have shared that they have had more success in reaching a larger number of students via the usage of technology. This is due to omitting the barrier of transportation and accessibility to DVSAS services with a click of a button.

On the other hand, leaders working with the Hispanic Student population have also noted that it has become difficult for students to trust information and services provided online, and additional safety and privacy concerns exist. Especially when the student is living with an individual who is causing them harm.

**Available funding for the prevention and intervention of (DVSAS) on Campus**

Congress created the Grants to Reduce Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking on Campus Program (hereinafter referred to as the Campus Program) in recognition of the unique issues and challenges that colleges and universities face in preventing and responding to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

• This grant is administered by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) at the U.S. Department of Justice. To learn more, access the OVW Campus Technical Assistance Website ChangingOurCampus.org

• The Campus Program encourages a comprehensive coordinated community approach that enhances victim safety, provides services for victims, and supports efforts to hold offenders accountable.

• The funding supports activities on campuses to create or strengthen large-scale efforts that treat domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking as serious offenses by adopting effective, trauma-informed, culturally relevant policies and protocols, developing victim services and advocacy programs, and implementing effective prevention approaches.

• The Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women Campus Grant Programs has consistently made awards to campuses across the nation and U.S. Territories.

For more information about the program, please contact the OVW Campus Program Unit at OVW.Campus@usdoj.gov
Additional Resources

Website details for service provides and organizations working to expand services on campus and within Hispanic communities can be found below.

- Alteristic
- Esperanza United
- Clery Center for Security on Campus
- East Central University’s Safety Training and Technical Assistance for Administrator’s, Boards, and Law Enforcement (STTAABLE)
- Futures Without Violence
- Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- National Organization for Victim Assistance
- Soteria Solutions
- The National Center on Violence Against Woman in the Black Community - Ujima
- Victim Rights Law Center