

DiMaria, F. (2005). Under the threshold: Dreaming of becoming an HSI. *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 15(21), 15-X.

Copyright The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education Jul 18, 2005

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) reports that it has 191 member Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) in 14 of the United States and in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Department of Education defines an HSI as a nonprofit, accredited college, university or system where total full-time equivalent Hispanic enrollment requirement (unless waived) stands at 25 percent and, of those students, at least 50 percent are low-income as defined by the Bureau of the Census.

Under the Title V Program, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) awards grants to HSIs to help them expand their capacity to serve Hispanic and low-income students. The awards come in two forms -- five-year development grants or one-year planning grants. Schools are free to use these funds for everything from renovation of instructional facilities to faculty development to the development and improvement of academic programs.

In 2004 the department awarded nearly \$94 million to HSIs with an average grant being just over a half-million dollars and a cooperative agreement averaging about \$600,000. During the 2005 school year, the ED will dole out more than \$95 million.

With so much funding available, one could see why qualifying as an HSI is beneficial to any institution. No schools illustrate this point better than Morton College in Chicago, Ill., and the Community College of Denver (Colo.).

Morton and CC Denver

Since becoming an HSI in 2001 and being awarded \$2 million of Title V money to be spent over five years, Morton has been able to offer its students a range of valuable programs and to construct state-of-the-art facilities it otherwise could not afford. Morton also created a "one-stop" student center that centralizes student services. To narrow the digital divide, Morton upgraded its technological capacity, including 11 technology-enhanced classrooms and 50 laptops, and has made its library wireless.

Dr. Alejandro Padilla, director, Title V, Morton College, said the funds are contributing to the "academic success, persistence, retention, completion, and transfer rates" of its Latino students.

The Community College of Denver (CCD) has received two grants since becoming an HSI in 1995. With its Title III grant money, the school was able to establish the La Familia Scholars program to improve student services, instruction and the cultural climate. At the end of the grant period, CCD institutionalized the La Familia Scholars program as the First Generation Student Success program.

CCD is currently in the final year of a five-year Title V HSI grant called El Acceso y El Exito, or Access and Success, which provides Hispanic, low-income and first-generation students holistic support to plan for academic and career success, complete high-attrition courses and programs that lead to in-demand professional careers, graduates with associate degrees, and transfers into baccalaureate institutions.

The Title V funding also allowed CCD to develop Educational Case Management Teams which include case managers, program coordinators, faculty and student ambassadors within academic centers who advocate for students and provide holistic advising and career planning and academic retention strategies,

including advanced computer training, bilingual support groups, laboratory study groups, one-to-one tutoring, and supplemental instruction.

"The funding that is available to CCD because we are an HSI absolutely provides the resources we need to create services that otherwise would not be possible," said Christine Johnson, president, Community College of Denver.

But what of those schools that are currently serving a large percentage of Hispanics, but fall just below the eligibility threshold that would qualify them for Title V funding as HSIs?

Johnson & Wales University

One school that falls under this description is Johnson & Wales University in Florida. In 1994-95 its full-time Hispanic enrollment was 21 percent of its total population. During AY2004-05, its Hispanic enrollment increased to approximately 24 percent, just shy of the number needed to allow the school to write a proposal for Title V money. But David Freitas, director of recruiter training at Johnson & Wales, says that with strong growth in the nation's Hispanic population he anticipates that his school's population will reflect this change. He stopped just short of offering a specific projection of when the institution will become an HSI. He is, however, confident that with the school's location in South Florida and its consistent success in recruiting students from this growing segment of the population, "It is not unrealistic to anticipate," said Freitas, that the school's full-time Hispanic enrollment "could exceed 25 percent in the near future."

Johnson & Wales, says Freitas, has no plans of altering its current marketing to reach the 25 percent number. Currently its marketing plan does not specifically target the Hispanic community. Rather, it provides a strong, diverse student body, according to Freitas. The school simply aligns its resources as necessary. For instance, Spanish-speaking recruiters seek out high schools with large Latino populations, and often international and overseas markets, such as South America and Puerto Rico. "We also employ Spanish-language advertising and marketing to promote the university and its events when we are trying to reach a large audience. Ultimately, the benefits of our unique approach to education are universal to all cultures," said Freitas.

Housatonic

Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, Conn., is in a similar situation. Although Housatonic has seen its Hispanic population rise 76 percent in the past 10 years, it still falls shy of the 25 percent full-time Hispanic enrollment needed to qualify as an HSI and receive Title V money. The reason? Housatonic's enormous growth in Hispanic enrollment occurred at a time when the school's overall enrollment skyrocketed as well, as a result of moving to a new campus. In just 10 years, the number of students at Housatonic jumped from 2,855 to 4,701, a 65 percent increase.

But when Anson C. Smith, public relations coordinator at Housatonic, talks about whether or not Housatonic will one day become an HSI, he says it's not a question of will Housatonic ever become an HSI, "it's a question of when will the school meet the magic 25 percent." To help answer this question, Smith turns to the school's strategic planner, which draws upon 24 state and national databases that attempt to project population changes between 2002 and 2015. According to the planner, said Smith, the Hispanic population of the two counties that encompass Housatonic's service area is projected to increase by 13 percent by 2015. "With this type of Hispanic population growth, reaching the 25 percent seems well within the realm of possibility," said Smith.

To push Housatonic along toward the magic 25 percent Hispanic enrollment and enable it to more effectively meet the educational needs of the Hispanic population of its service area, said Smith, Housatonic markets a bit differently within the Hispanic community than in other segments. Housatonic buys advertising on Spanish-language radio stations and places Spanish ads in the Hispanic Commercial Guide, also known as the Spanish Yellow Pages. Smith also targets Connecticut's six Spanish-language newspapers with its press releases.

Housatonic has attempted to build ties with Hispanic community groups in the region to help them achieve their objectives and to strengthen ties with Hispanic legislators and others who represent districts with large Hispanic populations. Academically, the school encourages Hispanic faculty and staff to participate in planning of diversity-related activities to ensure that the Hispanic perspective and experience are well represented.

Los Medanos

Los Medanos College in East Contra Costa County, Calif., the state's fastest growing area, recently reached 25 percent Hispanic enrollment, 50 percent of it low-income. The college has written and submitted its proposal for Title V funds and is now waiting to hear if it's selected for funding. "It's a very competitive process," said Ruth Goodin, principal administration analyst for grants and economic development at Los Medanos.

This is true. Nearly 700 schools were eligible to apply for Title III and Title V grants this year, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Los Medanos applied for \$2.7 million that, if approved, would come in yearly allocations, starting in October and running through 2010.

Los Medanos President Peter García, at the school since 1986, as a faculty member, dean and vice president, has always emphasized planning, inclusive governance, increasing college capacity to meet local needs, and addressing the ethnic diversity needs, according to Goodin.

To García, it is very important to bring resources to the fastest growing sector of the schools community, but until Los Medanos is awarded its Title V grant money, that is exceedingly difficult. "The plans in our grant cannot be implemented without the resources that come from being an HSI. Focused recruitment, attention to neglected neighborhoods of East County, augmented tutoring, and support-rich learning communities will result in higher educational achievement among Latinos in our community," said García.

In its Title V proposal letter to the ED, Los Medanos described activities that comprise three integrated components, all critical to improving the success of Hispanic and other students as they move through the schools pipeline, said Goodin. First, it hopes to strengthen and coordinate its ESL program. Second, Los Medanos would like to establish a "critical pathways" learning community program to strengthen its gateway courses. And finally, it would use its Title V money to create an academic support "learning leadership center" to provide tutoring and other support services to students. "At the end of the five years, compared with current baselines, we project that our ESL student enrollment will double and the number of Hispanic students who get a degree, certificate, or transfer will increase. These funds would allow us to establish programs and services to maximize our effectiveness as a Hispanic-serving institution," Goodin said.

Wharton

The full-time Hispanic enrollment at Wharton County Junior College in Wharton, Texas, falls a half-percentage point below the 25 percent needed to obtain Title V money. A mere 40 students, according to Zina Carter, director of marketing and communications at Wharton, are preventing this junior college from receiving Title V money.

Wharton's Hispanic population grew dramatically when, three years ago, it opened its Richmond Campus near Houston, an area higher in Hispanics than the small town of Wharton itself. The increase pushed Wharton very close to the 25 percent Hispanic enrollment required for Title V.

It is increasingly difficult for Wharton to offer its Hispanic students the services they require and deserve. According to Betty McCrohan, Wharton president, state funding has been slashed by as much as 60 percent in the past four or five years in Texas. "Title V money would offer a wonderful opportunity for us to increase the school's recruitment and retention in the Hispanic community.... It is important for the citizens to have an educated population."

McCrohan says that Wharton would use Title V money to provide programs for recruitment and retention of Hispanics, to hire a Spanish-speaking recruiter and to offer dual credits in the areas vocational technical high schools to entice Hispanics to enroll earlier in wharton.

McCrohan projects that Wharton's full-time Hispanic enrollment will reach 25 percent in about two years. Carter says the school already spends quite a bit of its marketing budget within the Hispanic community, especially targeting parents of high school juniors and seniors who do not speak English or feel more comfortable reading or hearing Spanish. And, says Carter, Wharton purchases time on local Spanish-language TV stations and radio stations, and advertises in daily Spanish-language publications.

The importance of attaining HSI status and receiving Title V money from the ED cannot be overstated. According to HACU, HSIs make up less than 7 percent of all colleges and universities, but they educate more than half of all Hispanic higher education students, as well as serving the larger, diverse communities beyond their campuses with pre-collegiate mentoring, tutoring and college preparation initiatives, crucial work force development partnerships, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Without Title V funding, many schools already serving large numbers of Hispanics would simply not be able to offer the services these students need. With many states slashing their educational funding, it is more important than ever that universities and colleges attain HSI status and apply for Title V money.