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Assessing Institutional Change toward Servingness in Hispanic-Serving Institutions

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In Short

- Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) is a federal designation for institutions of higher education that meet a threshold of enrolling 25 percent or more of Hispanic/Latinx undergraduate students as well as thresholds for Pell-eligible students and per capita expenditures.
- Using a conceptual “servingness” framework (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 771), the research group mapped out new metrics to assess the extent to which HSIs change educational and administrative practices, processes, and policies in the interest of serving.
- The research group focused on five areas for change: institutional success, faculty success, student success, community engagement, and research.

Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) have experienced significant changes over the past 28 years; among them are the number and types of institutions with this designation from the U.S. Department of Education (Excelencia in Education, 2023). Sixty-two percent of Latino college students enroll in just 19 percent of all institutions of higher education (IHEs). HSIs are dominated by public and private 4-year institutions, with the remaining being mostly public 2-year colleges. Many institutions became HSIs because of regional demographic patterns rather

than as a strategically identified goal. HSIs have diverse missions and characteristics, yet we typically measure the success of the institutions and diverse student populations using the same metrics. Typical student outcome metrics like first-year persistence rates and 4- and 6-year graduation rates reflect relatively little information about the HSIs' characteristics or the processes by which they serve Hispanic students, as the HSI designation suggests.

We report on the work of a research group whose purpose was to develop a set of metrics that would be specific to the HSI context with funding from the National Science Foundation. These new metrics could comprise the foundation of any institutional self-study related to becoming an HSI or assessing servingness. Servingness emphasizes the institutional role in creating a sense of belonging for students and impacting their academic and nonacademic outcomes. The majority of designated and emerging HSIs were founded and function as predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In other words, their practices, cultures, and metrics were developed to serve the needs and interests of the traditionally aged, middle class, White, non-Hispanic student. In contrast, students at HSIs and Latinx students, in general, are more likely to enroll part time, work during college, come from first-generation and low-income families, and be caregivers to family members.

According to research like the Equity Scorecard (e.g., Bensimon, 2004; Bensimon et al., 2016), typical student success metrics focus on student enrollment and performance indicators such as first-year persistence rates, average grade point average, 4- and 6-year graduation rates, percent Latinx enrollment, and racial disparities. These time frames and rates may be less relevant for Latinx students who may also be

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juggling additional responsibilities as described above. In addition, the typical Latinx student is more likely to incorporate a family or community orientation, suggesting a potential for expansion of success metrics to include these groups. Further, traditional metrics do not account for assets brought by Latinx students or an enhanced focus on community-based, translational, and use-inspired research and discovery associated with Latinx students and faculty.

The designation to serve Latinx students necessitates a reorientation of the institutional culture and a new set of institutional outcomes. In order to increase the alignment of metrics with that reorientation, HSIs need to track practices, processes, and policies that contribute to shaping the Latinx student experiences that lead to success outcomes such as learning, graduation, and employment opportunities. While the development of servingness metrics is specific to the HSI context, we believe that PWIs and other minority-serving institutions can also benefit from using new servingness metrics to assess how an institution improves its capacity to serve both minoritized students and faculty.

To guide our work developing these metrics, our research group explored the servingness framework (Garcia et al., 2019) and theories of institutional transformation (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). The group reexamined what it means to serve diverse students at HSIs and decided that new metrics were needed that provided options for assessing and realizing Latinx student success at HSIs. Additionally, the new metrics would provide options for different types of metrics according to self-defined institutional identities and goals with the HSI community instead of relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. While the servingness framework guided our selection of assessment categories, an institutional transformation framework focused the metrics on institutional practices, processes, and policies that would need to change to achieve equity for Latinx students and to draw attention to cross-institutional practices.

WHAT IS SERVINGNESS?

The concept of “servingness” is derived from a comprehensive review of educational research studies examining HSIs' organizational activities (Garcia et al., 2019; Núñez, 2015). The framework characterizes how HSIs promote Latinx student success while affirming students' cultural backgrounds. Servingness emphasizes the importance of creating organizational

The research group addressed the following question:

In what ways might institutions of higher education change pedagogical, educational, research, and business practices to improve student success at designated HSIs?

structures that foster a sense of belonging and a range of academic and nonacademic outcomes for diverse Latinx and other minoritized students who constitute a large share of the students at HSIs. We note that we use the term Latinx as a compromise across project participants, and we acknowledge that members of the Latinx community use different identification labels (Mora et al., 2022).

Servingness is multidimensional and centered on institutional structures that shape the institutional context (Figure 1). For example, mission and values statements, institutional advancement activities, compositional diversity of the workforce, and leadership and decision-making practices are some of the institutional structures that the framework identifies as parts of the IHE that could be activated to move from enrolling Latinx students to intentionally serving the students' diverse needs for success (Garcia, 2019). These structures also influence the academic and nonacademic experiences that shape students' outcomes, including outcomes like identity development, civic-mindedness, and social agency, in addition to time to graduation. The framework identifies validating experiences (e.g., cultural validation on campus, mentoring and support groups) and racialized experiences (i.e., discrimination, harassment, microaggressions) that contribute to creating a culture of servingness. Garcia et al. (2019) also included external influences that shape servingness, including federal, state, and local legislation; alumni; and state governing boards, among others.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCH GROUP DO?

The research group addressed the following question: In what ways might institutions of higher

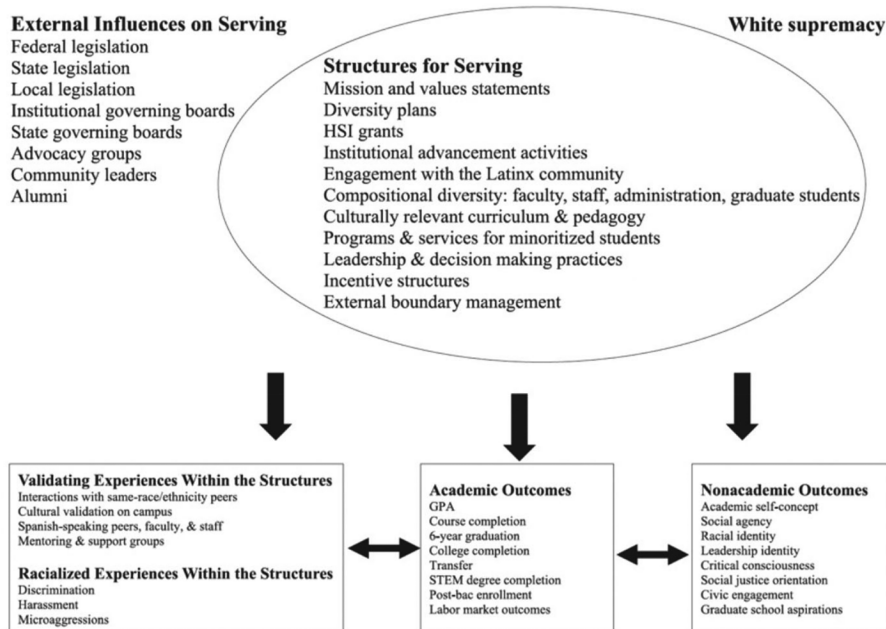
education change pedagogical, educational, research, and business practices to improve student success at designated HSIs? We reimagined student success as dynamically interacting institutional transformation and servingness at HSIs and then redefined measuring student and institutional success at HSIs. Returning to servingness (Garcia et al., 2019), our new guiding question became this: What will support diverse Latinx students' success in higher education from their own perspectives and those of their communities? This reorientation opened the possibility to think about new ways of measuring success, not only as a function of whether the students reach goals that are typically measured in arenas like performance-based funding, but also as a function of how students reach a goal, what forces underlie their experiences, and how institutional practices, processes, and policies support their success.

The group met virtually for structured workshop discussions about the distinctiveness of the HSI as an educational and cultural context and about the development of metrics aimed at assessing changing institutional cultures. The group, composed of scholars studying HSIs, as well as STEM faculty and administrators at HSIs, imagined first what IHEs might become as they serve the needs of a diverse Latinx student population and then how to measure changes toward servingness. Information about the project, including participants and our final report (conference proceedings), may be found at the University of Arizona HSI Initiatives website: <https://hsi.arizona.edu/hsi-initiatives/nsf-project-measuring-institutional-change-across-diverse-hsis>.

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES: TRADITIONAL METRICS TO SERVINGNESS METRICS

The research group summarized five main categories of metrics and then collaboratively wrote short papers that laid out typical success metrics at IHEs and highlighted new servingness metrics aimed at achieving equity for Latinx students at HSIs. The papers include literature reviews and recommendations about selecting metrics for self-studies, action plans, strategic plans, and accreditation self-studies. We recognized that successful institutional transformation was essential to achieve servingness; throughout our conversations, we threaded Kezar and Eckel's (2002) components for successful change efforts, including

FIGURE 1. MULTIMENSIONAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SERVINGNESS IN HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS (GARCIA ET AL., 2019)



senior administration support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development (professional development), visible action, and institutions’ interactions with external systems, such as state legislation, the federal government, and funders.

The remainder of this report is divided into the following five sections in which we give examples of typical metrics and then introduce servingness metrics:

- Institutional Success for Equity
- Faculty Success
- Student Success
- Community Engagement
- Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities

Institutional Success for Equity

Typical success metrics for undergraduate institutions include average grade point average (GPA); first-year persistence rates; 4- and 6-year graduation rates; percentage Latinx enrollment; disparities across racial–ethnic groups in GPA, persistence, and graduation rates; and students’ future earning power. In contrast, servingness metrics explicitly examine practices and processes that likely affect a student’s everyday experience. New servingness metrics assess institutional practices, processes, and policies that indicate servingness. We look in detail at five leverage points (or servingness structures): mission and value statements, campus workforce diversity, institutional incentives, institutional advancement activities, and

institutional racism and change efforts. [Figure 2](#) gives examples of new servingness metrics.

As [Figure 2](#) highlights, servingness metrics reorient the lens to assess the degree to which HSIs communicate their mission and values and then track how their workforce and performance incentives connect to and promote servingness. Underlying our focus on institutional transformation is that administrative and academic parts of institutions are highly interconnected (or should be); these connections constitute pathways throughout an institution that also need to change to make an effective transition to being Hispanic-serving. Using the case of senior administrator support as a characteristic of successful change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002), servingness metrics focus on identifying evidence of tangible support for the HSI identity in the documentary record. For example, evidence of attention to servingness can be found through specific mention of creating and sustaining the HSI identity in mission and value statements, as well as the articulation of goals related to being an HSI in key policy documents. Likewise, ensuring that all faculty who work with diverse students are equitably hired, paid, and advanced is another metric for assessing servingness, as these practices demonstrate that compositional diversity is a priority, especially to ensure the representation of diverse faculty to serve as role models for students. These metrics should be inclusive of all faculty, including those in contingent positions, because tenure-eligible faculty teach only a small

proportion of overall students at many institutions and HSIs. Last, these metrics would reveal demonstrated support for diverse students as an institutional priority along the path to servingness.

Faculty Success

Typical metrics for assessing faculty success are focused on the three areas of faculty work: teaching, research, and service. Those metrics include student evaluation of teaching ratings; research productivity in terms of grant money secured, numbers of publications, and citations; and number and types of committees served on.

Servingness metrics for faculty success would assess the degree to which faculty are engaging with Hispanic students and their communities as well as being recognized for doing so. Research has shown a positive linkage between student success and faculty use of course-related examples that speak to diverse students, such as reading lists that draw from scholars with diverse backgrounds (e.g., Chamany et al., 2008; Johnson & Elliott, 2020). Further, the use of pedagogical practices that focus on cooperative learning and asset-based approaches (e.g., Gay, 2018; Mack & Winter, 2015) also support success for diverse Hispanic students. Metrics assessing professional development and use of this evidence-based research would indicate increasing servingness capacity.

Faculty come into their positions with a variety of skills to support students and often benefit from professional development about new pedagogies. Figure 3 tracks the increase in faculty capacity for servingness in instruction and engaging with the Latinx community and diverse students.

Student Success

As noted above, traditional student success metrics are not likely to pertain directly to the diverse student populations at HSIs. The research group recommends moving from success measures centered on performance outcomes to assessing ways that the institution serves Latinx students in support of educational achievement.

Our reorientation from student-focused to servingness metrics highlights the roles that institutions play in meeting students' basic needs for learning, like creating a sense of belonging throughout the educational experience and meeting diverse educational goals (Figure 4). Rather than assessing student academic performance, new metrics focus on leverage points for servingness that underlie the potential for student success. For example, Duran and Núñez (2021) found that Latinx students are more likely than non-Latinx students to experience basic needs insecurities that impact learning. Hurtado and Ruiz Alvarado (2015) suggested that HSIs can leverage cultural attributes of Latinx students to create a sense of belonging found to positively impact Latinx student success (see Hurtado & Carter 1997). Our research team noted that the locus of the sense of belonging might need to be spread throughout the institutional context, so metrics should assess the multiple contexts and situations where a sense of belonging is beneficial. Following Espinosa et al. (2017), we argue that because traditional metrics are constructed to be race neutral, they do not consider the actual context of the student population being measured. Our research group suggests rethinking the ways that we measure student success to better reflect the diverse goals of diverse students.

FIGURE 2. SAMPLE SERVINGNESS METRICS: INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS

Mission & Value Statements	Compositional Diversity in Campus Workforce Data	Institutional Incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission & value statements define specific ways institution enacts servingness • Institutional documents (e.g., strategic plan, marketing brochures) name HSI status • Key policy documents demonstrate integration of servingness as an institutional value and central mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of compositional diversity is evidenced in hiring across student, faculty, & staff positions • Leadership roles demonstrate gender & racial equity in hiring and advancement • Equitable support to promote retention & advancement for all positions and titles • Racial & gender equity in pay is evident within titles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees are incentivized to act in alignment with servingness • Criteria for annual & promotion review includes demonstrated commitment to diverse student success • Institution rewards & recognizes engagement in professional development supporting servingness • Activities related to servingness (e.g., community engagement & mentoring) are recognized through awards & communications

FIGURE 3. SAMPLE SERVINGNESS METRICS: FACULTY SUCCESS

Use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Faculty Engagement with Hispanic & Diverse Students	Faculty Incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators for faculty participation in professional development & use of pedagogies • Assessment of student outcomes changes in courses that use culturally relevant curriculum & pedagogy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of direct faculty involvement with student research mentorship, inclusion of students in service work, participation in student organizations • Faculty mentoring & advising of diverse students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion in faculty performance reviews - engagement with Hispanic & diverse students • Inclusion in unit level leadership performance reviews supporting, seeding, & maintaining faculty use of culturally relevant pedagogy & engagement with Hispanic & diverse students

FIGURE 4. SAMPLE SERVINGNESS METRICS: STUDENT SUCCESS

Basic Needs Are Met	A Sense of Belonging	Multidimensional Revisioning of Degree Completion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution documents and addresses student basic needs insecurities related to • Food • Housing • Mental & physical health • Transportation • Employment • Textbooks & technology • Covid-19 recovery support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey and institutional analysis assesses students' sense of belonging • In every social context (e.g., classroom, research settings, residence halls, sporting events) • In the context of interacting with other students, faculty, & staff • By using current NSSE, SENSE, & HERI questions that assess sense of belonging in detailed way • Use findings to target locus of improvements to sense of belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of metrics to incorporate influences over degree completion such as • goals upon entry (e.g., family-sustaining wages) • number of institutions attended • inclusion of certificates & other academic programs • specific academic programs that may take longer to complete like some STEM degrees or co-curricular activities

Community Engagement

Community engagement by institutions of higher education has shifted substantially over the past several decades from a model of universities providing research and other services to communities toward a model of reciprocal and collaborative partnerships (Boyer, 1990; Roper & Hirth, 2005). Typical metrics for assessing what universities call community outreach and public service include measures of K–12 outreach programs, number of people reached, and the participation of faculty, staff, and students on local boards or in giving lectures to the public. Servingness metrics could align university activities with the Carnegie Community Engagement classifications (<https://carnegieelectiveclassifications.org>) that are premised on relationships based on cocreation and mutual participation and benefit.

Achieving servingness at HSIs depends on living the ideals of community engagement in support of Latinx students and communities. We link servingness to a Latinx-informed framework for assessing community engagement (Franco et al., 2020). The servingness metrics (Figure 5) assess how students become more engaged with their communities through study at the university and the ways that the IHEs engage in reciprocal relationships with local and regional Latinx communities. Servingness metrics add detail to link servingness to nonacademic outcomes.

Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities

Typical metrics for research success include research expenditures, the number and value of grants and contracts, patents, industry alliances, publications (in peer-reviewed journals), the Carnegie Classification,

FIGURE 5. SAMPLE SERVINGNESS METRICS: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Students	Institution	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in civic and political engagement (e.g., volunteer activity within community, participation in service learning, voter registration, participation with democratic processes) is measured and recognized • Opportunities exist for racial identity development (e.g., engagement with Latinx organizations, cultural centers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The composition of the board of trustees and foundation board reflects direct engagement with Latinx communities • Fundraising activities focus on the Latinx community • Institutional activities support the Carnegie Classification of Engaged Institution • Publicly-engaged scholarship and community-based research is recognized and incentivized • Institutional support exists for service-learning in the interests of the HSI mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members are sustainably positioned as co-creators of community-based programs and activities • University activities reflect the needs of the Latinx community on campus and off-campus • The Latinx community feels that there is a reciprocal relationship with the university structures

and number of Nobel Prize winners on the faculty. Because many HSIs are not research-intensive, one might argue that research metrics are not necessary for gauging servingness. However, we concluded that measuring research, scholarship, and creative activities at HSIs is increasingly salient for three primary reasons. First, participating in undergraduate research is known to be a “high impact practice,” especially for minoritized students (Peters et al., 2019, p. 185); second, HSIs have expanding opportunities to apply for federal funding specifically for HSIs; and third, since 2015, there are 21 Carnegie “R1s” that have become HSIs, with more institutions expected to follow.

New servingness metrics assess and seek evidence of the multiple roles that research, scholarship, and creative activity could play in institutional transformation (Figure 6). They evaluate the research infrastructures that enable faculty and practitioners to apply for external funding, the extent to which Latinx undergraduates have opportunities to engage in authentic scientific discovery and other scholarly and creative activities, the types of theoretical and methodological approaches that are considered meritorious in tenure and promotion review processes, the diversity and inclusiveness of research teams and environments, and the ways that institutions recognize and reward community-based, action research, and public scholarship that engages and addresses inequalities in Latinx communities.

ACHIEVING SERVINGNESS: BUILDING CAPACITY

Because most IHEs in the United States produce performance metrics that are required for

accreditation or state and federal reporting (e.g., the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System or accrediting agencies like the Higher Learning Commission), they are unlikely to have the capacity to pivot, calculate, and analyze servingness metrics too. Yet new metrics are necessary to assess the shift in institutional identity and culture from being a PWI toward Hispanic servingness. Servingness metrics place responsibility for student success on collective and integrated efforts across multiple institutional domains and redefine success from an individual to a community concept.

Institutional capacity to develop and continually produce and analyze servingness metrics is a major concern. Many HSIs, especially community colleges, do not have the robust institutional assessment capacity necessary to collect and analyze the proposed servingness metrics. Institutions that do have capacity can lead the efforts and potentially codevelop ways for all institutions to follow suit. For example, two multiinstitutional networks of HSIs that are funded in part by the National Science Foundation are each building capacity among their members to identify and measure metrics of servingness and success in STEM for Latinx students: the Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (CAHSI; comprising more than 80 four-year institutions and community college HSIs; cahsi.org) and the Accelerate Latinx Representation in STEM Education (ALRISE Alliance; comprising about 20 four-year institutions and community college HSIs; alrise.org). In the case of CAHSI, regularly reviewing data on the success of Latinx students in computer science at member HSIs has led to efforts to expand servingness efforts to support graduate students (see

FIGURE 6. SAMPLE SERVINGNESS METRICS: RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Grants & Contracts Infrastructure	RSCA Serve the Latinx Community	Engagement with Funding Agencies	Institutional Fundraising
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development available for faculty, staff, and students related to proposal development & writing & inclusive collaboration • Staff & resources for grant submission and management are available at every institutional level • Support is provided equitably to all faculty across disciplines, regardless of funding amounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects (e.g., proposals, funded project, and collaborations) utilize federal HSI grant funding opportunities • Institutional data informs development of evidence-based RSCA activities in support of the HSI mission & values • Student success programs are linked with RSCA programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse faculty, staff, & students serve as grant proposal reviewers • Government relations offices engage with funding agencies & elected officials around HSI funding • The institution participates in advocacy for HSIs through organizations like HACU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraisers engage with private industry & other donors to support RSCA • RSCA is directly linked to workforce development programs & industry partners • Philanthropy is used to support RSCA endowments & matching opportunities that support the HSI mission

Villa et al., 2022). Review of data also led to efforts among HSI computer science departments toward institutional transformation through developing practices to better support Latinas in the discipline, including opportunities for departments to learn from others that were further along in their transformation process (Núñez, 2022, 2023).

For those institutions seeking capacity to identify and enact continuous improvement toward servingness, we recommend designing a self-study that considers leverage points for promoting the institutional change and organizational identity necessary to serve diverse Latinx students. An example of a multiinstitutional network of HSIs that is embarking on such a process is the Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Research Universities (hsru.org), which is currently developing procedures to share data to measure progress and associated institutional transformation among its 21 members that are both HSIs and highly active research institutions, toward the two goals of increasing the number of Hispanic doctoral-degree earners and the number of Latinx faculty.

Federal HSI grant programs serve the important purpose of investing resources into the IHEs that are on the front lines of achieving servingness. Collaborative projects and alliances such as those discussed above are also an important mechanism for capacity building at HSIs. Servingness metrics themselves also provide a way of reexamining institutional, student, and community goals that expand capacity to achieve institutional missions and societal goals of educational equity.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.


DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. □

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