

# Con Ganas y Más: A Cross-Cohort Analysis of Factors Contributing to the Increase in Undergraduate Enrollment of Latinas

Clarissa Reneé Ozuna  
*The University of Texas at San Antonio*

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In 1980, Latinas made up 2.2% of undergraduate students in the United States. By 2010, the percentage of Latina students had risen to 8.3% (Aud, 2012). This was the largest proportional increase by any male or female racial or ethnic group. The purpose of this study is to identify if changes occurred in social and educational experiences of young Latinas during this time that influenced their increased post-secondary enrollment. A series of National Center for Education Statistics longitudinal studies (HS&B, NELS:88, and ELS:02) are used to examine cross-cohort changes in the relationships between individual, social, and secondary education factors and Latina educational aspirations and enrollment in higher education. Data from nationally representative sophomore cohorts represent the beginning, middle, and end of this period. Data collected from students, their social networks, and schools during their sophomore year along with educational status collected four years later is analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling.

The demographics on college campuses are currently undergoing a shift toward the inclusion of more Latino/a students. Historically, Latino/a students were a marginalized population at institutions of higher education. In 1976, Latino/a students made-up 3.8% of undergraduate students while non-Hispanic Blacks made-up 10.2% (Aud, et al, 2012). However, the Pew Research Center (Fry & Lopez, 2012) recently reported that as of 2011 Latino or Hispanic students have become the largest minority group of 18- to 24- year olds at four-year colleges and universities (13.1%). Latinos attending two-year colleges received this same distinction in 2010 and have continued to grow to more than 25% of students at their institutions. Although 74% college enrollment increases can be attributed to increases in Latino/participation we find that young Latinas are participating at much higher rates than young Latinos.

As Latino/a college enrollment increased so did the gender gap (Cammarota, 2004; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Latinas have consistently been increasing their participation in higher education over the past three decades. In 1980, Latinas made up 2.2% of undergraduate students in the United States. By 2010, the percentage of Latina students rose to 8.3% (NCES, 2011). The changes experienced by young Latinas spurring their increased participation in higher education between 1980 and 2010 are unknown. The purpose of this study is to identify if changes occurred in social and educational experiences of young Latinas during this

time that influenced their increased post-secondary enrollment. It is not only important to identify what factors increase the likelihood of a Latina to have educational success but also to identify what changes in the Latina population and experiences can lead to better educational outcomes among Latinas nationwide. The current body of educational research addressing Latinas in higher education does not address the latter. This study will explore the differences in the characteristics and experiences of Latinas coming of age at different periods of time. The information gained will enhance the existing body of educational research by identifying factors that have motivated positive change in the educational outcomes of Latinas. This information can then be used to shape policy to support the continuation of this positive trend.

Three primary research questions will be addressed by this study. (1) What individual, social, educational, and community factors influence positive educational aspirations in 10<sup>th</sup> grade Latinas in 1980? In 1990? In 2002? (2) What individual, social, educational, and community factors influence Latina higher education enrollment 4 years after completing 10<sup>th</sup> grade in 1980? In 1990? In 2002? (3) What significant changes occurred in the identified influencing factors of Latina aspirations and enrollment from 1980 to 2002? It is hypothesized that changes in educational aspirations will precede changes in enrollment patterns and that familial characteristics and social support systems of Latinas were significant influencing factors to the increased enrollment between 1980 and 2002.

The existing body of research examining post-secondary educational attainment of Latinas lacks studies that aim to identify the individual-level changes that are transforming Latina attainment outcomes. The bulk of the literature uses different approaches to identify relationships that exist between Latina individual, familial, or institutional characteristics through cross-sectional or qualitative approaches. The characteristics found to have a significant influence in Latina college enrollment and Bachelor's degree attainment in the existing literature, although not in the context of change, will be incorporated in this study.

Latinas are highly influenced both to enroll in post-secondary education and to persist to Bachelor's degree attainment by their family. Parents and siblings can serve as social support and information sources (Ceja, 2004, 2006; Ojeda & Flores, 2008; Rosas & Hamrick, 2002; Wycoff, 1996) as well as detractors and sources of competing responsibilities (Espinoza, 2010; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Although parents of Latinas (and Latinos) value education (Arzubiaga, Ceja, & Artilles, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995; Roksa & Potter, 2011) there are often other barriers that hinder the advancement of these young people. Inadequate educational preparation due to poor school funding (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Santiago & Brown, 2004) can lead to low educational aspirations despite cognitive abilities (Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Latinas often experience a lack of financial resources and knowledge about available funding (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Another major influential factor in educational outcomes among Latinas is perceived and

experienced racism and discrimination that exists within institutions that they and communities in which they live (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). As a double minority, Latinas are also influenced by perceived and experienced sexism (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Bernal, 1998) as their ethnic identity intersects (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011; McCall, 2005; Simien, 2007) with their sexual identity (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Cammarota, 2004).

Data collected on sophomore cohorts from the High School & Beyond (HS&B) longitudinal study of 1980, the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), and the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002) are used to examine how student characteristics, social interactions, relationships, early educational experiences, and schooling environment influence educational aspirations beyond high school and subsequent progress made towards these goals in four years' time. (It should be noted that the sophomore class of the NELS:88 was captured during the first survey follow-up in 1990.) Using data from longitudinally designed surveys increases the quality of this research by allowing past experiences to be linked to current outcomes without having to rely on retrospective data collection. Further, the surveys were designed to produce comparable results across cohorts creating more accurate estimates than would be produced with unrelated instruments.

The educational outcomes being assessed are 10<sup>th</sup> grade educational aspirations and enrollment in higher education two years after the cohort's expected high school graduation. Educational aspirations are measured as how far the student thinks they will get in school and enrollment in higher education is defined as having attended post-secondary school. Independent variables of interest include student's perceived safety at school, parent's aspirations for the 10<sup>th</sup> grader, quality of relationships with teachers, and engagement in the school and outlying community.

Though a causal relationship cannot be established between Latina characteristics, educational aspirations, and higher education enrollment, appropriate statistical procedures to control for spurious relationships this study can produce unbiased estimates of the influence that each characteristic contributes to the likelihood that they will have positive educational aspirations or enroll in college. Stratified hierarchical linear models are used to examine how these factors influence student aspirations and outcomes across race and ethnicity and sex. Comparison of Latinas with their Latino counterparts, as well as non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic Asian male and female students, will allow for the identification of significant positive and negative pressures experienced by this group within each cohort. Parameter estimates will be compared across cohorts of Latinas, and other groups, to determine whether significant changes can be observed across this time period.

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