

A Snapshot of the Communities That Hispanic-Serving Institutions Serve

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December 2023

Highlights

Communities with at least one Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) are more likely to have large shares of Latinos compared to communities without HSIs.

There is potential for collaboration between Latino museums and HSIs because of their close geographic proximity to each other.

This is one of a series of products from Urban’s research to inform development of the new American Latino History and Culture program to be administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. This grantmaking program aims to strengthen the capacity of American Latino museums at promoting and preserving the study of Latino life, art, history, and culture. For more, see: <https://www.urban.org/projects/planning-american-latino-history-and-culture-program>.

Note: We use the term “Hispanic” and “Latino” throughout to refer to people of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” This term remains consistent with legislation authorizing this new program (Public Law 116-260), and we intend for it to reference all diverse people of Spanish and/or Latin American origin in the US.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) play a critical role in the landscape of higher education, having enrolled 62 percent of American Hispanic college students in the 2021–2022 academic year (Excelencia in Education 2023c). HSIs are degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment of 25 percent or more (Excelencia in Education 2023c; for more on the term “FTE,” see <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/public/glossary>). Institutions that have not met the enrollment threshold of 25 percent but have undergraduate Hispanic FTE student enrollment between 15 and 24.99 percent are defined as Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (eHSIs).

HSIs serve Latino students in multiple ways, including by increasing graduation rates (Stormes and Rojas 2023); promoting Latino cultural identity and a sense of belonging (Garcia and Okhidoi 2015; Guardia and Evans 2008); offering programs and services that have been adapted to serve Latino students, including immigrant students coming from Latin America (Excelencia in Education 2020a); and engaging students in community-based activities and service-learning projects that foster leadership development (Garcia 2019b).

Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone (2019) explain that “servingness is multidimensional,” meaning that experiences of students, academic outcomes, and structures (e.g., policies; diversity of faculty, administration staff, and graduate students; and engagement with the community) define the level of servingness of HSIs and eHSIs. An understudied dimension of servingness is the role of factors external to HSIs, such as social and political context (Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone 2019). In particular, there is limited research to our knowledge on the communities that are home to HSIs and eHSIs. Rosenbaum, Li, and Jeanetta (2020) compared levels of social and economic development in communities with and without HSIs, but their analysis was limited to the state of Illinois and did not include eHSIs; national-level information about the communities that are home to HSIs and eHSIs can provide additional context for understanding these institutions’ impacts on Latino students. Indeed, prior research shows that people attending HSIs prefer to live closer to home (Nuñez and Bowers 2011), suggesting that the

communities that house HSIs and eHSIs are especially important to the success of these institutions and their students. One external factor that may influence HSIs' and eHSIs' degree of servingness is the presence of American Latino museums in their community. American Latino museums are institutions that conduct various activities with the objective of preserving and promoting American Latino life, art, history, and culture (Treskon et al. 2023). Such activities include documenting American Latino history, expanding knowledge of American Latino historical events and figures and their influence on US society, and serving as communal spaces for activism. Collaborations between HSIs/eHSIs and American Latino museums, such as internship programs, have been successful at increasing students' feelings of self-worth and familiarity with museums, and participating museums have benefited from students' skills (Addario and Langer 2016). Therefore, in order for HSIs and eHSIs to better serve Latino students in a multidimensional way, it is important to understand the social context of HSIs/eHSIs and their potential to forge collaborations with American Latino museums in their respective communities.

In this summary, we provide a snapshot of the communities that are home to HSIs and eHSIs, paying particular attention to communities' demographic makeup, the characteristics of their Latino population, and the presence of American Latino museums within communities. Herein, we use the term "community," referring to counties as "communities." We find that communities with HSIs and eHSIs differ from communities without them in many ways. Communities with HSIs and eHSIs have a higher percentage of Latinos, and Latinos in these communities are more likely to be foreign-born, to speak Spanish at home, and to have lived in the same county for more than one year. Communities with HSIs and eHSIs are also more likely to have an American Latino museum, which points to the potential for increased collaboration between HSIs/eHSIs and American Latino museums.

Below, we discuss our data and methodological approach before highlighting the key takeaways from our research.

DATA AND METHODS

Using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) enrollment and degree data from 2018 to 2022, compiled by Excelencia in Education (2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b), we identified HSIs ($n=571$ during the 2021–2022 academic year, the most recent year for which data are available) and eHSIs ($n=401$ during the 2021–2022 academic year) across the US states and Puerto Rico. Of the 972 institutions designated as HSIs or eHSIs during the 2021–2022 academic year, 748 (77.0 percent) have been designated as an HSI or eHSI for all four academic years in our data. During the 2021–2022 academic year, 40 institutions (7.0 percent of all HSIs that year) received the HSI designation for the first time. HSIs and eHSIs also vary based on their statuses as two- versus four-year and public versus private institutions. Among HSIs and eHSIs during the 2021–2022 academic year, 341 (35.1 percent) are two-year public schools, 12 (1.2 percent) are two-year private schools, 350 (36.0 percent) are four-year private schools, and 269 (27.7 percent) are four-year public schools.

We geocoded HSIs and eHSIs in 2021–2022 at the county level, so that we could merge this information with select sociodemographic information on the Latino population in all counties from the 2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

In addition to HSIs and eHSIs, we conducted a thorough review of museum association memberships and mission statements to identify 106 active American Latino museums, which promote the study and appreciation of American Latino life, art, history, and culture, and their impact on US society. We conducted two analyses. First, we conducted a descriptive analysis of HSIs and eHSIs, calculating institutions' mean percentage of Latino students, mean percentage of the community population that is Latino, and the mean number of American Latino museums in communities with HSIs and eHSIs. For this analysis, we divided the institutions into the following categories:

- **HSI in the 2021–2022 academic year:** Institutions that were designated as HSIs during the 2021–2022 academic year (please note that some institutions were HSIs before 2021–2022).

- » **New HSI:** Institutions that received the HSI designation for the first time in the 2021–2022 academic year.
- **eHSI in the 2021–2022 academic year:** Institutions that were designated as eHSIs during the 2021–2022 academic year (please note that some institutions were eHSIs before 2021–2022).
- **HSI/eHSI since 2018:** Institutions that have been designated as HSIs and/or eHSIs continuously since the 2018–2019 academic year (the earliest year in our data). We include this category in order to highlight institutions that have a track record of enrolling a relatively large proportion of Latino students. Since the HSI and eHSI designations are determined by enrollment figures, some institutions receive the designations without actively seeking them, and upon initial receipt of the HSI or eHSI label, they may lack established methods of serving Latino students (Brown and Mangan 2021) or deep connections with their respective community’s Latino population. Institutions that have held the HSI or eHSI designation for several years may have a more established presence within their local Latino community and may therefore be particularly well positioned to form partnerships with American Latino museums in their community.
- **Overall:** All HSIs and eHSIs in the 2021–2022 academic year.

For the descriptive analysis of the communities with HSIs/eHSIs and without HSIs/eHSIs, which includes all counties in the United States and Puerto Rico, we calculated the percentage of Latino residents and analyzed select demographic characteristics of the counties’ Latino populations: percentage of Latinos who are foreign-born, who speak Spanish at home, who have household incomes below the poverty level (i.e., income below 100 percent of their poverty threshold; please see <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/> for more information on the poverty level), and who have lived in the same county for the past year. We chose these characteristics for the analysis because prior literature shows that 44.8 percent of Latinos in the US are foreign-born (Funk and Lopez 2022), over half speak Spanish at home (Funk and Lopez 2022), 16.8 percent of Latinos lived in poverty in 2022 (Contreras and Feng 2023), and many Latinos tend to pursue higher education in places close to home and family, so many may choose to stay in the same county where their family lives (Excelencia in Education 2007). To identify statistically significant differences, we conducted two-tailed *t*-tests between counties that have HSIs/eHSIs and counties without these institutions. We also mapped the locations of all HSIs and eHSIs across the United States and Puerto Rico.

TAKEAWAYS

Below we highlight the findings from our descriptive analyses.

Counties that are home to HSIs and eHSIs resemble the composition of those institutions. Table 1 provides summary statistics for the institutions in our dataset and the communities in which they are located. On average, the percentage of Latino undergraduate students at HSIs and eHSIs is slightly higher than the percentage of Latino population in these institutions’ respective communities. Similar trends are seen for institutions that have a longer history of serving Latino populations. In fact, 40.8 percent of undergraduates are Latino at institutions that have been HSIs or eHSIs since 2018, while in the counties where these institutions are located, 36.9 percent of people are Latino.

TABLE 1

Composition of Different Types of HSIs and eHSIs and the Communities They Are in during the 2021–2022 Academic Year

Type of HSI	N	Mean % Latino students	Mean % Latino population in community	Mean number of American Latino museums in community
HSIs in the 2021–2022 academic year	571	49.2%	43.6%	1.0
New HSI	40	36.3%	30.3%	0.8
eHSIs in the 2021–2022 academic year	401	19.4%	18.7%	0.5
HSI/eHSI since 2018	748	40.8%	36.9%	0.8
Overall	972	36.9%	33.3%	0.7

Source: Excelencia in Education analysis using US Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2018 Fall to 2021 Fall Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics (Excelencia in Education 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b); 2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Notes: Community = county. HSI = Hispanic-Serving Institution. eHSI = Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution.

HSIs and eHSIs are located in counties with high shares of Latinos. Table 2 shows that counties with at least one HSI or eHSI have an average Latino population share of 28.6 percent, which is larger than counties without HSIs and eHSIs (on average, 9.5 percent Latino population). Additionally, figure 1 shows that HSIs and eHSIs are located in counties across the western and southern regions of the United States, which also have high shares of Latinos. Some HSIs and eHSIs are also located in the northeast region of the United States, where some counties had an increase in the Latino population from 2010 to 2020 (Passel, Lopez, and Cohn 2022).

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Latino Population in Counties with and without HSIs and eHSIs during the 2021–2022 Academic Year

Metric	HSI/eHSI is present (N; %)	HSI/eHSI is not present (N; %)	t-test
Share of Latino population at the county level	403; 28.6%	2,830; 9.5%	***
Select characteristics of the Latino population			
Speak Spanish at home	403; 64.5%	2,801; 49.5%	***
Speak non-English language at home	403; 65.0%	2,801; 50.2%	***
Immigrant (foreign-born)	403; 26.2%	2,801; 23.3%	***
Household income below the poverty level	403; 17.5%	2,691; 18.8%	*
Stayed in the same county in the past year	381; 92.7%	2,745; 88.4%	***
Counties with at least one Latino museum	403; 11.9%	2,830; 0.0%	***

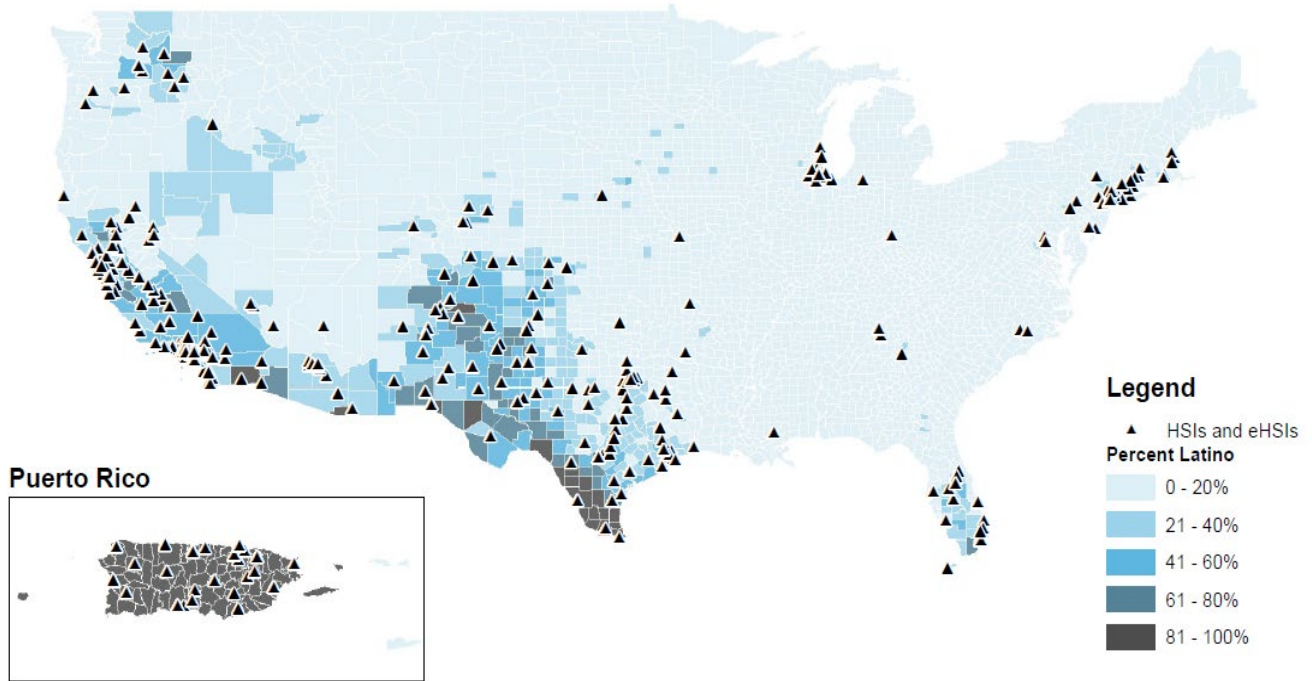
Source: Excelencia in Education analysis using US Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2018 Fall to 2021 Fall Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics (Excelencia in Education 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b); 2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates; 2023 Urban Institute Latino Museum database.

Notes: Community = county. HSI = Hispanic-Serving Institution. eHSI = Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution. Two-tailed *p*-value computed using the *t* distribution. */**/**: *p* < .05/.01/.001; difference in means is statistically different from zero. NS = not significant.

Spanish is spoken by about two-thirds of the Latino population and a quarter of Latinos are immigrants in counties with HSIs and eHSIs. Counties with HSIs and eHSIs have a larger share of Latinos who speak Spanish than counties without HSIs and eHSIs (64.5 percent versus 49.5 percent) (see table 2). Counties with HSIs and eHSIs also

have a larger share of Latinos who were born outside of the United States than counties without HSIs and eHSIs (26.2 percent versus 23.3 percent) (see table 2).

FIGURE 1
Locations of HSIs and eHSIs during the 2021–2022 Academic Year across the United States and by Percentage Latino Concentration



Source: Excelencia in Education analysis using US Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2018 Fall to 2021 Fall Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics; 2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates; 2023 Urban Institute Latino Museum database.
Notes: HSI = Hispanic-Serving Institution. eHSI = Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution.

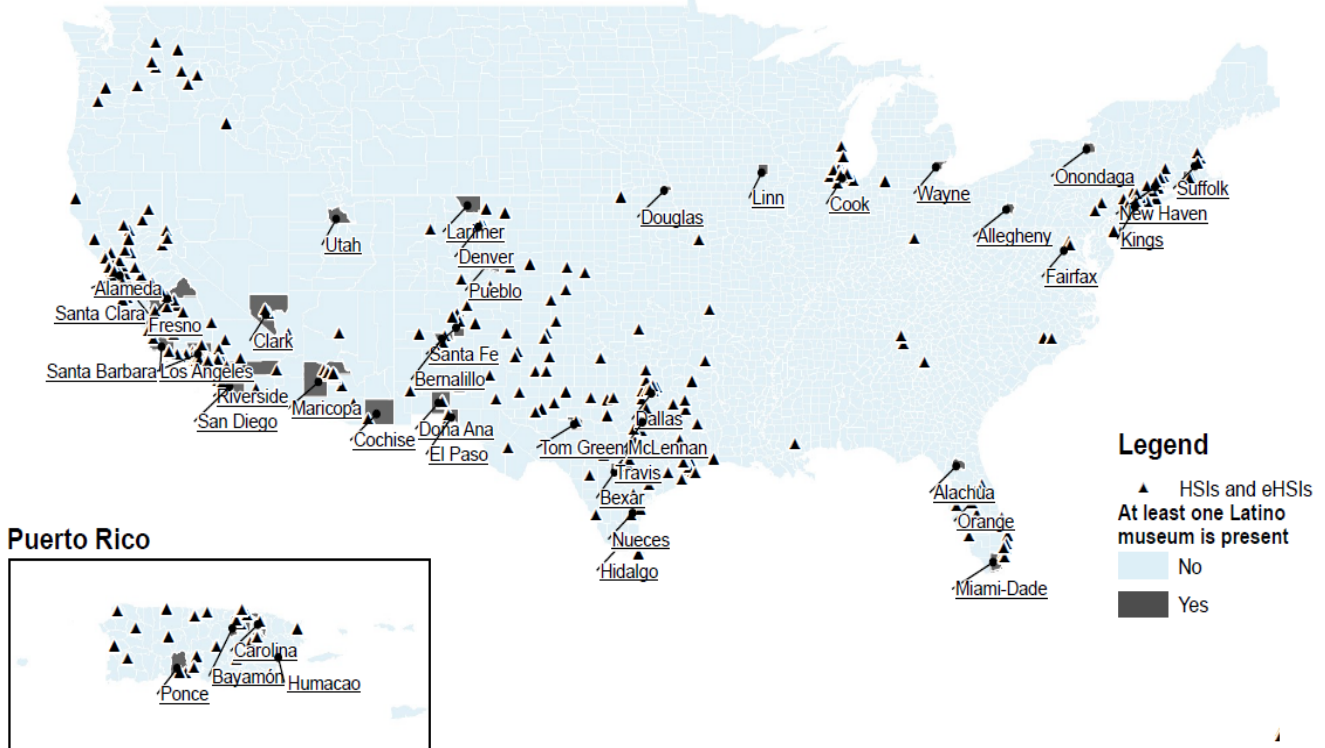
Counties with HSIs and eHSIs have lower shares of Latino households with incomes below the poverty level, but the difference is less than 1 percentage point. While 17.5 percent of Latino households in counties with HSIs and eHSIs have incomes below the poverty level, 18.8 percent of Latino households in counties without HSIs and eHSIs have incomes below the poverty level (see table 2).

Latinos in counties with HSIs and eHSIs are more likely to have lived in their county for more than one year compared to Latinos in counties without HSIs and eHSIs. While 88.4 percent of Latinos in counties without HSIs and eHSIs have lived in the same county in the past year, a larger share of Latinos (92.7 percent) in counties with HSIs and eHSIs have lived in the same county in the past year (see table 2).

Counties with HSIs and eHSIs are much more likely to have American Latino museums. Figure 2 shows that counties with at least one American Latino museum often have HSIs and/or eHSIs. During the 2021–2022 academic year, 26.5 percent of HSIs/eHSIs were located in a community with at least one American Latino museum (results not shown).

FIGURE 2

Locations of HSIs and eHSIs during the 2021–2022 Academic Year, and Latino Museums across the United States



Source: Excelencia in Education analysis using US Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2018 Fall to 2021 Fall Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics (Excelencia in Education 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b); 2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates; 2023 Urban Institute Latino Museum database.

Notes: HSI = Hispanic-Serving Institution. eHSI = Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution.

CONCLUSION

Our research highlights important characteristics of communities that house HSIs and eHSIs and provides context needed to support services for Latino students as well as collaborations between HSIs/eHSIs, Latino museums, and their communities. Because communities with HSIs and/or eHSIs are more likely than others to be home to at least one American Latino museum and to have a larger share of Latino population and Latino immigrants, HSIs and eHSIs are especially poised to create meaningful and sustainable collaborations with American Latino museums and communities. The Latino population in the United States is highly diverse; 27.6 million Latinos identified as more than one race and 32 percent of all Latinos were immigrants in 2021 (Lopez, Krogstad, and Passel 2023; Moslimani, Lopez, and Noe-Bustamante 2023). In terms of language, 68 percent of all Latinos spoke Spanish at home in 2022. The Latino population not only contributes to the diversity of the United States, but it promotes economic advancement and community engagement (Crowley and Knepper 2019). Latinos are also more likely to live close to home, and the share of Latinos who stay close to home continues to increase (Garcia 2019b; Flores and Schermele 2022). The prevalence and demographic characteristics of Latinos in the United States highlights the importance and influence of this population. Educational institutions and museums can take advantage of this and work on building relationships that would strengthen their communities.

HSIs and eHSIs with strong community engagement programs help their students not only to give back to their communities, but also to develop their cultural identities (Garcia 2016, 2019a). However, it is important that community engagement not become a burden for students. HSIs and eHSIs educate large numbers of students from underrepresented populations, first-generation students (i.e., those whose parent or parents did not earn a

bachelor's degree), students with low incomes, and students from communities with limited access to higher-education opportunities (Núñez, Hurtado, and Calderón Galdeano 2015). Recognizing this, Smith (2023) recommends that community engagement and service-learning programs at HSIs require students to complete a relatively low number of service hours so as not to overburden students who are likely to be working a job in addition to completing their studies. He also recommends a "critical" approach to service-learning and community engagement in which students are encouraged to reflect on the root causes of the social issues they encounter through their service.

Future research should continue to assess the impact of partnerships between HSIs/eHSIs and museums on outcomes for students and museums alike. Researchers may also investigate why communities with HSIs and/or eHSIs have a larger average share of Latinos than communities without HSIs or eHSIs: Does the presence of HSIs and eHSIs cause communities' Latino populations to grow, or do HSIs and eHSIs exist in communities that already have relatively large shares of Latino residents? Finally, given our findings that Latinos living in communities with HSIs/eHSIs are more likely to be immigrants and to have lived in the same community for more than one year, future research should further examine the ways in which HSIs/eHSIs and American Latino museums shape the experiences of Latino immigrants in the United States.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This summary was funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission. We also thank Mark Treskon, Jennifer Yahner, Hamutal Bernstein, and Bryan J. Cook for their input on this piece. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples. Copyright © December 2023. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.