

---

## **A Descriptive Study into Hispanic Youth and Educational Impacts**

---

**Richard Johnson**, Louisiana State University, USA

**Abstract:** *Hispanic (including all Latinos and people born in, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central, and South America) populations have risen through the United States. This study explores the educational challenges that face the United States and the future of educating this continually growing population. Programs in place to assist the Hispanic youth are discussed in this study with comments related to high impact learning strategies. The percentage of educational attainment compared among the multiple ethnic backgrounds shows a lower portion of higher educational attainment in the Hispanic population. Focusing on education, many challenges are labeled throughout the educational mainstream of society that relate to needed educational training and less discriminatory practices in order to address the problems faced with the growing population of Hispanics that must be served. This study focuses on those specific challenges and provides potential solutions that have been mentioned and suggested for public educational consideration. These educational solutions may also be applied to adult education as well as extension education in the United States with regards and utilization of high impact learning models*

### **1. Introduction**

Although most Hispanic (including all Latinos and people born in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central, and South America) population growths tend to be observed in California and Texas, the overall growth trend can be seen in Louisiana as well. According to Hernandez (2001), it has only been recent that many Hispanic populations have begun to identify themselves within that ethnic group. Prior to being labeled Hispanic, many labeled themselves by country of origin (Mexican, Columbian, Puerto Rican, etc). Many observations can be made post-Hurricanes, as Hispanics come into the area seeking employment opportunities in

***Richard Johnson, Louisiana State University, USA***

areas where many others will not work for low wages. Hispanics play an important role in our current society and, as educators we must address the needs and wants of this population (Hernandez, 2001).

This descriptive study explores the trends in education for young Hispanics through secondary education Hispanic populations and the needs of these students to be served. Personally, I have observed many crawfish farm employees as well as Mexican citizens come to the United States for better employment opportunities. However, the underlying desire for the Hispanic population is to provide a better life, not only for themselves, but for their families. Many Hispanic men leave their families in Mexico or other country of origin to come work in the crawfish fields for a season. This income provides a better way of life for their family, but with sacrifice of time away from the family. The Hispanic families that do come to the United States on visas hope to have jobs that can provide a better life, and with the hopes that their children will have a chance to live the American dream. The Hispanic parents want to see their children have opportunities to get an education and to have a fair chance at a successful career that will make them satisfied with their lives. The extension service can successfully assist these adults with assimilating their children into mainstream school settings as well as providing education for the adults themselves.

The Hispanic population continues to grow in the United States (Chapa, 2006). In response to this growing population trend, education as well as extension should react with programs that can be focused on the growing population trend as well as the needs of the Hispanic population that has now become a permanent part of America. As the population continues to grow, many reports of discrimination have been observed, which can lead to the widening of the socioeconomic gap (Cardarelli, 2007). The Hispanic population is the most underrepresented population in terms of providing students with opportunities to flow through the education system into a higher education or degree attainment system (Chara, 2006). According to Garcia, at early ages, even before kindergarten, Hispanic students seem to be achieving at lower levels than other students (2006).

According to Chapa, the current graduate status is not diversely related to the population that is observed in the nation (2006). The term “pipeline” has been set in place to describe the current circumstances and problems that education faces as they streamline students through an educational system that may not be best suiting the needs of the population (Chapa, 2006). The overall demographic trends are making a shift, with more Hispanics numbering the population, toward the need to reach out to communities with many more challenges. According to Chapa, the Census Bureau reported that Hispanic population growth from 2000 and 2002 accounted for half of the total population growth (2006). With these statistics in place, there is evidence that education and extension must shift the primary objectives to suit the new population trends that are developing. The noted numbers of Hispanics through education shows a trending shift of lowering numbers as students are tracked from High School through Higher education.

Cardarelli (2007) indicates that many Hispanic individuals have experienced discrimination in regard to employment and society. Caderelli also states that these discriminatory practices lead to lowering the socioeconomic status of discriminated victims as well as can negatively affect health (2007).

## **2. Hispanic Youth**

The largest growth in high school attending ethnic populations in the future will be in the Hispanic group (Chara, 2006). According to Chara, the high school population of Hispanic students will rise from 17 % in 2001-2002 to 21 % in 2007-2008 (2006). Many students with Hispanic backgrounds may be starting with a greater challenge. A study by Garcia has shown that many Hispanic students are entering elementary school lacking the skills that many students entering at the same age already have mastered (2006). Weiher (2000) states that employing minority educators and having them play a role in student’s lives into an educational setting tends to increase achievement within the school setting. This is known as passive representation and allows minority students to have role models that are ethnically similar (Weiher, 2000).

*Richard Johnson, Louisiana State University, USA*

Weiher states that educational systems should adjust pedagogy and curriculums to address the student population (2000). One of the challenges at achieving this goal is that many educational systems are gaining Hispanic students much more rapidly than curriculums can change. Also, Weiher indicates that many minority educators are not available at the rate that is required to properly diversify the educational settings to passively influence student success (2000). Weiher's study concluded: "minority students perform better in schools that have more minority teachers and minority students perform better in schools that adopt models of curriculum and instruction more suited to their educational needs" (2000).

Bennet (2007) studies work-based support for Hispanic and youth in schools that assists with teaching students to be career and socially oriented. These programs are in place in schools in order to prevent dropout and school failure due to misorientation for their own futures. These programs were created in response to the rapidly evolving global economy and the inner city youth that must respond to these changes (Bennet, 2007).

Hernandez (2001) recognizes the many challenges faced by Hispanic youth and discusses the importance of Hispanic diversity in the current youth living in the United States. When studying Hispanic youth, we must also look at the driving forces that play a role in the growing population. According to Hernandez (2001), immigration and high fertility rates within the population has contributed to this growing number of Hispanics within the population. Also, there is recognition of natural Hispanic settlement in America over time (Hernandez, 2001).

One of the unfortunately recognized challenges facing the Hispanic youth is the aging of the non-Hispanic population (Hernandez, 2001). The Hispanic youth are credited with being the group that will carry the aging burden, providing most of the care to the aging population in America (Hernandez, 2001). With the unification of Hispanics as a specifically large group of citizens (including all Latinos and people born in, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central, and South America), Hispanics have recently begun to be noticed as an ethnicity that is contributing to the American workforce.

When educating Hispanic Youth, it is commonly noted that Hispanics feel that learning English is the primary way to earn a better life in the United States (Hernandez, 2001). Bennet (2007) states that many schools have begun offering programs to help reach out to the Hispanic youth in order to bring learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The goals for these school programs, according to Bennet, are to stimulate educational roles that provide opportunities to learn skills that would promote socially and economically productive adults (2007). Students in urban areas are now required to become adults much more rapidly and be able to adapt to rapidly fluctuating labor markets (Bennet, 2007). Even within the markets available to students, it is often observed that many Hispanic youth will have more problems obtaining an education due to the increased requirement for a formal education (Bennet, 2007).

Education must respond to these needs by offering programs that can suit the growing economical needs and rapidly changing business opportunities. Bennet (2007) states that American education has often been criticized for neglecting the needs of students today, stating that the traditional classroom is no longer producing students that are able to meet the demands of today's corporate America. Bennet states in his study that education needs to become more open and reach beyond the four walls of a traditional classroom (2007). Educators often see the needs of diversified classrooms, but can sometimes be overwhelmed by the vast amounts of backgrounds, both ethnic as well as traditional home-life or religions. Many educational leaders and policy makers are now encouraging career-exploration, preparation, and development programs for not only Hispanic youth, but urban youth (Bennet, 2007). These programs are titled work-based learning, and are now found throughout the United States in forms of various internships. These work-based programs often team up with students and allow them to learn a skill on the job that can be used in the future for practical purposes. This practical learning not only can bring an interest to the students, but can also help bring classroom lessons become true to life. However, Bennet (2007) notes many problems that have occurred with these programs. Bennet notes that many of these internships offered a shadowing of an employee to

*Richard Johnson, Louisiana State University, USA*

learn a task, but there was a lack of learning structure in place to help guide the student (2007). When the program only offers a single task for the student, is there a real benefit in place? Bennet's study explores this program and discusses the effectiveness and possible problem areas found within these programs (2007). The purpose of these outreach programs, although providing educational opportunities for students, was also to give occupational engagement opportunities and provide students with experiences in general employment that will allow the students to make decisions based on experience rather than in classroom educational lessons (Bennet, 2007). Programs were also in place to provide social support for these students. The "social support" service guidance is a program created to provide encouraging relationships between students and society (Bennet, 2007). Mentors in these programs can be in place to offer guidance and advice students who want to pursue specific careers or to provide generalized experiences in order to enhance overall students learning (Bennet, 2007). Bennet concludes that these high school programs have "lead to higher self esteem, coping skills, and great personal competencies" (2007). Programs in place like these can also be helpful to students entering adulthood through the extension program.

Wentling (2000) also explores school and workplace programs in place to help minority youth. Wentling also observed that the rapidly growing and diverse workforce should be noted and a response should be made to recognize these changes. The primary purpose of Wentling's study is to explore school and workplace programs and evaluate how effective the programs are at assisting the youth's in future decision making. Many of the programs available provided guidance and information for minority youth and also provided the work-based learning programs that are now more readily available across the nation (Wentling, 2000). Many mentoring opportunities are the most popular programs available to minority youth. These programs offer guidance and advise students in relation to educational attainment and experience necessary to be successful in certain career areas as well as guidance to career exploration in many various fields (Wentling, 2000).

Another common theme noted for Hispanic families and education of youth is the common family bond that is in place (Hernandez, 2001). Many families rely on siblings to take care of each other so that the parents can both work and provide for the family. Hernandez notes that it is important for Hispanics to understand immigration rights, although 75 % of the Hispanics living in the United States were born here (2001). However, Hernandez also states that these Hispanics born in the United States also have ties to Latin American countries with regard to family (2001).

Not only does family ties and immigration status play an important role in Hispanic families, but also does socioeconomic status. Bennet (2007) states that current economic conditions faced by Hispanic families seem to diminish the household's ability to provide more than just basic survival opportunities for the family. Hernandez notes that the poverty rate among Hispanics is very high, at almost 50 % for single parent households and 19 % for married households (2001). Living at or below the poverty line for Hispanic youth can take a toll on a student's education. According to Hernandez (2001), the number of Hispanic families with children under the age of 18 is 57 % for single parent households and 25% for married. For white counterparts, the percentage for married families with children under the age of 18 is 9.

Hispanic youth also play an important role in the labor force. Hernandez notes that Hispanic males ages 16 to 19 have an employment rate of 46 % as compared to their white counterparts at 1.6 %. With this labor force and work ethic in place, Hernandez compares the Hispanic youth juvenile correctional facility inmate numbers. Hernandez noted that in juvenile correctional facilities in the United States, 56 % were white, 32 % were black, and 8 % were of Hispanic origin (2001), but in regard to educational enrollment, Hispanics were in the lowest category of attending students.

Other challenges that face Hispanic Youth, according to Hernandez, is the increasing number of high school dropout rates, gang involvement, teen pregnancy, and HIV health problems (2001). With all of the problems facing Hispanic youth, we as a society should reach out to educate these students in order to help prevent many of these problems that Hispanic households face. Education is the

*Richard Johnson, Louisiana State University, USA*

key to providing Hispanics with the knowledge to be successful in society.

In order to incorporate many programs that are available to Hispanic populations, it is important to design program plans that can reach the Hispanic population and be successfully implemented. When considering high impact learning objectives, it is important to have the impact from the community. In the extension programs in place, many programs are created from the input of advisory councils. These advisory councils could consist of many members and educators of society with minority youth in mind. The programs that were studied, such as school to work and work based learning, could be greatly enhanced by the implementation of direct objectives with participant input and agreement. With a higher learning based objective system, many students would have opportunities for reflection as well as input from many mentors that will help guide them throughout these programs. The programs in place can be much more effective following a higher educational objective model.

### **3. Community College and Higher Education**

Educational achievement has a direct impact to the fiscal ability of a company or organization to be able to succeed as well as the adaptability of a company's employees to the changing society (Malданado, 2006). With this idea set, educators and parents should strive for their children to have educational attainment in order to be successful in a career and financially stable for their families.

The number of Hispanics enrolling in a community college program is relatively higher than other ethnic populations; however, the completion rate tends to be the lowest of any other ethnicity (Chapa, 2006). According to Maldanado (2006), in 2000, Hispanics accounted for 14 % of all students entering community colleges, but only 7 % of the population enrolling in a four year university. Community colleges tend to be used more by Hispanics than any other ethnic group as a stepping stone into four year universities. Only approximately 7 % of the bachelor's and 4 % of master's degree recipients were Hispanic in 2001 (Chapa,



2006). Hernandez (2001) states that in college enrollment, Hispanics make up 14 %, while whites are 20 %, blacks are 15 %, and Asians are 30%. O'Connor (2009) explores the overrepresentation of Hispanics in community colleges and discusses the socioeconomic relation to educational decision making among Hispanic youth. O'Connor states that community college attendance does not necessarily offer increased educational opportunities, and may in fact hinder education attainment when compared to populations who enroll in four year universities directly (2009). O'Connor (2009) also notes that degree program achievement is at a different level than a decade ago; whereas an associate degree today is the equivalent to a high school diploma a decade ago. Therefore, many students who attend community college for associate degrees, but fall to a disadvantage when enrolling into a four year university because enrollment from community colleges to universities are much less than direct high school to four year universities (O'Connor, 2009). College qualified Hispanic students have much lower completion rates when compared to their White counterparts (O'Connor, 2007).

Arbona (2007) also indicates that Hispanics enrolling in four year universities is growing, but not at the rate of their white counterparts. The relative number of Hispanics obtaining a bachelor's degree is 10 %, African American at 18 %, Whites at 34 %, and others in 2000 (Arbona, 2007). Students who succeeded in high school and had appropriate study habits and achieved successfully in those younger years are likely to continue and be successful in college (Arbona, 2007). Arbona also cited that success in high school can be used as a predictor of success for students enrolling in community colleges and universities (2007). Therefore, many students can be reached while in middle and high school in order to counsel and make more aware of the benefits of educational success and career potential availability. Educators have the ability to guide students to make the right decisions in order to get on a successful track for community college or at a university setting. Arbona (2007) also indicates that community colleges that enroll higher proportions of minority students will also have lower transfer rates, which indicates that administration should create policies and practices that best serve Hispanic

*Richard Johnson, Louisiana State University, USA*

students at the academic level in order to assist in successful completion of programs. Also, Arbora (2007) states that four year universities should be reaching out to the community colleges in order to make any and all transitions smoother for the students who may need the assistance and guidance to complete a successful transfer.

With a prerequisite to transfer from community colleges to four year universities to obtain a bachelor's degree, many Hispanics often fail to make the transfer and will settle for an associates (Arbona, 2007). Arbona's study indicated that students who did make the transfer from a community college to a four year university were just as likely to obtain a bachelor's degree as their counterparts who initially enrolled in the same university (2007).

O'Connor explains that some explanation to the community college enrollment is the fact that community colleges offer open enrollment, mainly as a result of Hispanic high school students doing poorly throughout high school, resulting in lower grade point averages, and the inability to be enrolled in many four year universities (2009). Also, of all ethnic groups, Hispanic students have the lowest socio-economic status, and may also have problems with information access that is usually readily available for white counterparts (O'Connor, 2007). This lack of information or misinformation may lead to making educational decisions that are not in the best interest for the student. Maldonado (2006) also indicates socioeconomic status as well as family history, English proficiency, and educational achievement as factors that influence the Hispanics in decision making processes in regards to educational achievement and enrollment. Maldonado's study (2006) indicates that both parents have high aspirations for their children to succeed. There is no indication that parent's hold back students from striving to meet their highest potential in education.

Also, many Hispanic students do not have the ability to get student loans because of their status in the country. It is much easier and cost effective to take courses in a community college than a university, especially for those students who have not completed getting appropriate visas or documentation that will allow for student loans.

Success in higher education is the ultimate goal for any student, but for a minority, it can be a goal much more

difficult to achieve than for the mainstream student. Fry (2002)

#### **4. Educational Outreach**

Chara (2006) indicates that improved counseling and communications for the Hispanic population overall can improve the standards of education for these students as well as improve the opportunities for these students to succeed in the current educational system. Hernandez (2001) notes that the work ethic found within the Hispanic population is a great American resource, stating that Latinos are the most active participants in the labor force. Hernandez concludes in his studies that Latinos are the hardest working group, but also the most underpaid (2001). Maldonado (2006) examines the involvement of Hispanics in post secondary education.

Maldonado states that Hispanics are one of the most important ethnic groups in the future of American workforce (2006). The reason for the higher workforce labor, according to Maldonado (2006), is the low educational attainment by the Hispanic population. The low educational attainment can be linked to the language barriers that are faced by many Hispanic individuals seeking employment within the United States (Maldonado, 2006). Educators and Extension agents should create programs that help break these barriers in language and culture through guidance and being available for student conversation and day to day interaction. High impact learning centers around the theory that communication is key to creating an impact to a group that is need of guidance and a positive change for successful attainment of knowledge and a career base planning or exploration program.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Preparation and educational responses seem to be the best answers to solve the Hispanic educational challenges facing the United States. Garcia (2006) indicates that

*Richard Johnson, Louisiana State University, USA*

recognition of the problem and properly training educators to serve these students will contribute to the more successful educating of the Hispanic population. Overall, Hispanics work hard, they do not earn enough financially to get themselves out of poverty (Hernandez, 2001). According to Maldonado (2006), the largest factors affecting Hispanic students is socioeconomic status and the misinformation provided to the Hispanic students when making educational decisions or career decisions. As educators and extension responds to the needs of society, we must pay special attention to specific groups that seem to be falling behind in terms of achievement. The high impact learning models would benefit this group if used in workshops, classrooms, and field presentations. When creating these impact models, it is important to keep the primary stakeholders in mind. When planning programs, educators and extension agents should have the input of advisory councils as well as the community involved. In terms of Hispanic populations, it is important for all education related employees to provide information and make it readily available for these students and stakeholders.

Programs created to support Hispanic youth should be created with specific high learning objectives in place to support a learner based and informative setting. The primary goals and objectives for all programs, according to high impact learning, should be well planned out with specific outcomes labeled and a specific plan to guide the desired outcomes desired for the population to be served.

As the Hispanic population continues to grow, it is our responsibility as educators, whether high school or extension, to recognize this population and provide all of the resources necessary to inform this overall ethnic group of all opportunities (educational and career) that is available to them. A recognition must be made that this hard working ethnic group needs to have the opportunities available for increasing education and every attempt should be made to being the realization that higher educational attainment will lead to higher income based careers. Once these careers are held by the Hispanic population, the poverty rate for the group will subside and the achievement gap among the diverse groups will be lessened. Once a generation can make this realization and become successful, then the future

generations will follow in the path for equality in educational attainment and career opportunity.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have had the opportunity and privilege to meet and speak with many Hispanic students that are 20-30 years old. This research is a stepping stone for me to gain a better understanding in educational ideals for Hispanic populations. I have heard stories of many individuals who can remember crossing the river with their parents at 9 years old. Once crossing the river, they would hide among trucks and be brought to a destination point to be brought into the United States. At 9 years old, a child is allowed into school through high school graduation in the United States. However, although the student was brought across illegally and not allowed any opportunities as their counterparts such as driver's license, obtaining a high school job, or applying for financial aid, these students want to achieve an education. I would consider many individuals as my close friends, but I can't help but feel upset that these individuals are not offered the opportunity to become citizens because of a parent's choice to attempt to provide a better life for their child. Community colleges are efficient because they are cheaper and can be paid each month, whereas universities require student loans or payment in large amounts every two months.

The purpose of this study is to look into educational opportunities for Hispanics as well as to get an understanding of public opinion in terms of Hispanic labor and educational attainment. Hopefully an outreach can be made to change many policies in place that hinder Hispanic individuals from achieving due to governmental policy. The statue of liberty was created as a welcoming, but now seems to be revoked. As an extension agent and educator, I hope to be one person that can help make a difference.

## **References**

Arbona, C. and A. Nora. (2007). "The Influence of Academic and Environmental Factors on Hispanic College Degree Attainment", *The Review of Higher Education*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 247-269.

Alon, Sigal and M. Tienda. (2007). "Diversity, Opportunity, and the Shifting Meritocracy in Higher Education", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 72 pp. 487-511.

Bennet, J. (2007). "Work-Based Learning and Social Support: Relative Influences on High School Seniors' Occupational Engagement Orientations", *Career and Technical Education Research*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 187-214.

Cardarelli, R. K Cardarelli, and A Chiapa. (2007). "The Modifying Effects of Education and Income on Hispanics Reporting Perceived Discrimination", *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, vol 29, no. 3. pp. 401-407.

Chapa, J. and B Rosa. (2006). "The Problematic Pipeline: Demographic Trends and Latino Participation in Graduate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Programs", *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, vol. 5, p. 203.

Fry, Richard. (2002). *Latinos in Higher Education: Many Enroll, Too Few Graduate*. Pew Hispanic Center. Senior Research Associates.

Garcia, E. Jensen, B. and D. Cuellar. (2006). "Early Academic Achievements of Hispanics in the United States: Implications for Teacher Preparation", *The New Educator*. vol. 2, issue 2, pp. 123-147.

Hernandez R., M. Siles, R. Rochin. (2001). "Latino Youth: Converting Challenges to Opportunities", *JSRI Working Paper # 50*, The Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University.

Maldonado, C. and E. Farmer. (2006). "Examining Latinos Involvement in the Workforce and Postsecondary Technical Education in the United States", *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, vol. 22, no. 2.

O'Connor, N. (2009). "Hispanic Origin, Socio-Economic Status, and Community College Enrollment", *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 80, no. 2.

Weiher, G. (2000). "Minority Student Achievement: Passive Representation and Social Context in Schools", vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 886-895.

Wentling, R. and C Waight. (2000). "School and Workplace Initiatives and Other Factors That Assist and Support The Successful School-to-Work Transition of Minority Youth" *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, vol. 37, no. 2.

Zalaquett, C. (2006). "Study of Successful Latina/o Students", *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, vol. 5, no. 35.