

# *University Diversity: A Study of Hispanic Women in Higher Education*

By Valeria Estrada

It is no surprise to hear that Hispanic women as a population have struggled to obtain degrees in higher education. They fit into two well-known disadvantaged groups: they are women, and they are an ethnic minority. Each of these two groups come with their own set of barriers, and Hispanic women are expected overcome those barriers if they want to achieve an education and be successful. Some of these barriers are due to Hispanic culture and the way that women have historically fit into it, and others are due to the economic disadvantages that commonly plague Hispanic Americans. The first portion of this paper will explore the nature of these barriers and why they can be difficult to overcome, and the rest of the paper will be dedicated to showing how the situation for Hispanic women in higher education is improving. Texas Woman's University, located in Denton, Texas, will be used throughout the paper as an example to show how the barriers and improvements apply to an actual institution of higher education.

It is claimed that Hispanic women have not had an equal opportunity to education, but without evidence, this claim bears no weight. Evidence for this claim comes in many forms, one of which is discrimination. It is not widely known that Hispanic Americans suffered from segregation at the same time that African Americans were subject to it. The degree to which they suffered may have varied, but the point is that the prejudice did exist. It bled into the quality of their education just as it did for African Americans. According to a paper written by Richard R. Valencia, a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, the separation of Mexican American and White American children in public schools began "in the decades following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought an end to the Mexican American War of 1849-1848."<sup>1</sup> This segregation persisted well into the 1900s.

Valencia has identified at least 28 cases of lawsuits filed against the segregation of Mexican Americans from 1925 to 1985.<sup>2</sup> The existence of these cases shows that segregation was undoubtedly a serious problem for many Mexican Americans in the United States. Among those 28 cases is one called *Mendez v. Westminster*, which surfaced in Orange County, California. In 1944, the children of Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard R. Valencia, "The Mexican American Struggle for Equal Educational Opportunity in *Mendez v. Westminster*: Helping to Pave the Way for *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 3(2005): 394, <http://ezproxy.twu.edu:2668/library>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

were denied entry into a school because they were Hispanic, and this happened to many other Hispanic children, too. As a result, “five Mexican American fathers -- Gonzalo Mendez, William Guzman, Frank Palomino, Thomas Estrada, and Lorenzo Ramirez -- filed suit on behalf of their 15 collective children and 5,000 other minor children of ‘Mexican and Latin descent’.”<sup>3</sup> In this case, the plaintiffs made the argument that “separate was *not* equal in K-12 public schools because such segregation violated their rights under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.”<sup>4</sup> The plaintiffs also strongly argued that the segregation was mentally damaging to the affected Hispanic children. Segregation “engender[ed] feelings of inferiority” constantly and created an environment in which Hispanic children were not able to thrive like their white counterparts.<sup>5</sup> The judge ultimately ruled “that discrimination against the Mexican-origin students existed and that their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment were being denied.”<sup>6</sup>

This monumental case proves that Hispanic children were segregated in California, and the existence of similar cases throughout the country shows that it was an undeniable problem in various regions of the United States. The mental effects segregation had on Hispanic children is one possible reason why Hispanic women were hardly present in colleges around the nation. Segregation can cause feelings of being inferior and inadequate, and having these feelings throughout childhood until the age of seventeen or eighteen can mean that they are left deeply embedded in those children. These feelings of not being good enough may have left many Hispanics, especially women, lacking the belief that they were deserving of a secondary education. This could have very well led many Hispanic women to abandon the idea of attending a college. This likely had a significant impact on Hispanic female enrollment numbers in the 1900s, at least until *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled against segregation at the national level.

Another possible reason for low enrollment numbers is the role sex plays in the lives of most Hispanic women, and it is intertwined with their culture. It is well known that, for a long time, women as a general population have been expected to bear children and take care of household duties. It is still a stereotype many women of all backgrounds feel pressured to fill. Hispanics are no exception to this. In fact, this pressure can be amplified for Hispanic women because of the importance given to family in Hispanic culture.<sup>7</sup> That is why it is important to note how feeling the pressure to fill the roles of wife and mother can affect a Hispanic woman seeking a higher

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 403-404.

<sup>7</sup> Desmonda Cardoza, "College Attendance and Persistence Among Hispanic Women: An Examination of Some Contributing Factors," *Sex Roles* 24, no. 3/4 (February 1991): 135.

education. Desmonda Cardoza, a professor of psychology at California State University in Los Angeles, conducted a study concerning the behavior patterns of Hispanic women in college. The study found that, like most women, Hispanic “women who delayed marriage and having a family were found to pursue a college career more often and tended to persist in college longer than those women who followed traditional sex role patterns.”<sup>8</sup> Women who choose to get married and have children before pursuing an education spend more time completing domestic labor, which usually means there is less time to wholeheartedly invest in an education.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that a woman with children cannot go to and graduate from facilities of higher education, yet it does show that having children and being wed can be a difficult barrier to deal with when pursuing said education. It may explain, at least partially, why some Hispanic women do not attend college or finish.

Family encouragement can also be listed as a factor that affects the success of Hispanics in college. This is due to the notion that the Mexican American culture is characterized by intimate familial ties.<sup>10</sup> Because there is an emphasis on familial bonds, it is easy to see why, in many cases, “the role of both parents may be particularly important in the career development of Mexican American women.”<sup>11</sup> A group of women at Texas Tech University conducted a study in 2003 which accessed some of the factors that affect Hispanic and non-Hispanic women in their commitment to a career choice while attending institutions of higher education; in other words, they wanted to find out what influenced those women to carry forward and complete their education or to abandon their education in pursuit of a career. The study suggests that, although parent socialization is not the only determining factor in a Hispanic woman’s commitment to career choice, it still plays a significant role. The researchers concluded that “for Mexican American women, it was parental encouragement and support that resulted in commitment to a career choice.”<sup>12</sup> This supports the aforementioned claim that the closeness of Hispanic families does have a notable effect on Hispanic women in their quest for obtaining a higher education.

Another factor contributing to or negatively affecting the success of many Hispanic women in institutions of higher education is the issue that Hispanic women often belong to the lowest socioeconomic class.<sup>13</sup> It is common knowledge that a low

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>10</sup> Yvonne M. Caldera, Christine Robitschek, Mary Frame, and Martha Pannell, "Intrapersonal, familial, and cultural factors in the commitment to a career choice of Mexican American and non-Hispanic White college women," *Journal Of Counseling Psychology* 50, no. 3 (July 2003): 311.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>13</sup> Desmonda Cardoza, "College Attendance and Persistence Among Hispanic Women: An Examination of Some Contributing Factors," *Sex Roles* 24, no. 3/4 (February 1991): 134.

income is correlated with low college completion rates; this would mean that “because Hispanics, especially women, tend to be in the lower socioeconomic levels, this presumably presents an even greater problem for this group.”<sup>14</sup> The first thought that may come to mind is that having a low socioeconomic status makes it difficult to pay for a higher education, and that can be a major reason that Hispanic women drop out of college or do not attend at all. Low socioeconomic status can also have a negative effect on a student’s performance. There is much research that suggests a parent’s education, job, and income are related the academic performance of their child; this means students belonging to a higher socioeconomic class usually receive better grades and stay in college longer.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to obtain lower grades and are not persistence in attending college. Because Hispanic women typically have low socioeconomic backgrounds, they are subject to these negative trends. Therefore, low socioeconomic status is clearly “one of the primary barriers to higher education for” these women.<sup>16</sup>

It is mainly due to the aforementioned barriers that Hispanic women have had difficulties obtaining an education in the past, and some of those barriers continue to affect these women, although maybe not to the same extent. It is extremely difficult to say how many Hispanic women were in living in the United States in a little over the first half of the twentieth century because, until 1976, the U.S. government did not take the Hispanic ethnicity into account when conducting a national census. Because of this, the government also does not appear to have records of Hispanic female college enrollment numbers. Some schools may have data, but it is not likely; if the government was not inquiring about Hispanics, colleges probably did not either. In the event that some colleges have those numbers, it would not help in determining the data for the nation because, as it does today, the number of Hispanics probably greatly differed by region. Nevertheless, it is important to use the data that is available.

The National Center for Education Statistics has enrollment numbers starting in the year 1976. In 1976, there were 10,985,600 students enrolled in colleges across the United States.<sup>17</sup> Of those, 174,100 students were Hispanic students were females.<sup>18</sup> That year, these females made up 1.5 percent of college students nationwide. If these were the numbers for the year of 1976, it is easy to imagine that the numbers in earlier years were very low, perhaps below one percent; it is difficult to infer any different. Since the 1970s, the number of Hispanic women in college across the country has risen. In 2014,

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Digest of Education Statistics: Table 306.10,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, accessed July 22, 2016, [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15\\_306.10.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_306.10.asp).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

out of 20,207,400 students in the United States, 1,843,800 were Hispanic women.<sup>19</sup> They made up 9.1 percent of college students enrolled in the country. That rose by 8 percent from the enrollment percentage in 1976, and although that may not seem like much over a span of 48 years, it is a significant improvement that should not be ignored.

Texas Woman's University (TWU) in Denton, TX has enrollment numbers that somewhat resemble national numbers. The number of Hispanic women at TWU in the early 1900s was likely very low, just as it was at the national level. Enrollment data was requested from various departments on the TWU campus, but the answer given to the author by each department was that the numbers simply did not exist. Ethnicity was not taken into account by the university just as it was not taken into account by the U.S. government. It was not until decades after the university opened that ethnicity was documented, and there is no way to have specific numbers for the early period of the university's history.

Although specific numbers could not be acquired, the university's yearbooks provide some insight that allowed for a few educated guesses to be made. It was clear, after searching through several of the university's early yearbooks, that there were few or no Hispanic women present. This was determined by looking at the names listed and noting if any of them sounded remotely Hispanic. In the 1928 yearbook, for example, there were about three women with Spanish last names, and in several books after that there were even fewer or none.<sup>20</sup> These small numbers may reflect what was normal around the country, but again, there is not enough evidence to show exact numbers. There may have also been women with Hispanic ancestry that could not have been determined by just their last names.

It was not until surveying the 1940 yearbook that more than a few Hispanic female students were found.<sup>21</sup> The numbers began improving significantly when Dr. John A. Guinn, the sixth president of Texas Woman's University, made an effort to diversify the campus population. The university was known as the Texas State College for Women (TSCW) during Dr. Guinn's presidency. Dr. Guinn made it a top priority to increase enrollment numbers for the college. He was so determined that he delivered 30 speeches to various counties throughout Texas during his first year as president.<sup>22</sup> He also developed the TSCW Foundation that focused on bettering the school; one of the priorities was to use funding for "support for promotional activities directed primarily toward recruiting students."<sup>23</sup> There is no doubt that Dr. Guinn's efforts expanded the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> College of Industrial Arts, *The Daedalian*, (Denton, TX: The Senior Class of 1928, 1928).

<sup>21</sup> Texas State College for Women, *The Daedalian*, (Denton, TX: The Senior Class of 1940, 1940).

<sup>22</sup> Phyllis Bridges, *Marking New Trails: An Informal History of the Texas Woman's University*, (Denton: Texas Woman's University Press, 2014), 30.

<sup>23</sup> Joyce Thompson, *Marking a Trail: A History of the Texas Woman's University* (Denton: Texas Woman's University Press, 1982), 135.

population at what would eventually be called Texas Woman's University, and although the specific enrollment numbers by ethnicity are nonexistent, there is much evidence to suggest the population did diversify. Overall, the history of Dr. Guinn's efforts show that an administration intent on including a diversified student population will accomplish that as long as there is an effort. Therefore, there is a higher chance Hispanic women will find themselves in colleges if those colleges actively seek to include them.

At Texas Woman's University, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Guinn and other presidents who followed his lead, the number of Hispanic women has grown significantly from the numbers depicted in TWU yearbooks of the early 1900s. There were 11,344 students enrolled in the fall semester of 2005; of those, 1,210 were Hispanic females.<sup>24</sup> This means that Hispanic women made up about ten percent of the school student population. In the fall of 2014, TWU had a total of 15,070 students with 2,708 being Hispanic women.<sup>25</sup> Hispanic women made up nearly 18 percent of the student population in that semester. This growth reflects the growth occurring throughout the state of Texas. In 2013, *The Huffington Post* published an article reporting that Hispanics made up 50.2 percent of students in Texas public schools, a 15 percent increase from fifteen years prior.<sup>26</sup> This number is expected to continue growing, and that will likely be reflected at Texas Woman's University.

The percentage of Hispanic women enrolled at TWU is higher than the national percentage, but one thing is clear from viewing both: the percentages are increasing. This is significantly important because it shows that things are positively changing. The shift in numbers could mean that more Hispanic women are finding that overcoming gender, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers is more possible than it was in years past, and higher education is becoming more accessible. The question then becomes: what has caused the shift across the nation?

The positive shift can be attributed, at least in part, to the many different resources that have surfaced over the last few decades. Organizations and scholarships that are catered to educating and helping the Hispanic population in the country play a major role. One such resource is the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (HACU). This association was founded in 1986 by a group of eighteen colleges and universities.<sup>27</sup> It does many things for the academic Hispanic community. HACU works hard to convince Congress to pay more attention to Hispanics. For example, the

---

<sup>24</sup> "Fact Book," *Texas Woman's University*, last modified June 7, 2016, <http://www.twu.edu/institutional-research/fact-book/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Tony Castro, "Hispanics Now Majority In Texas Public Schools, Districts Assess If They Are Ready For Change," *The Huffington Post*, June 12, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> "About HACU/ HACU History 1986-2011," *Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities*, accessed August 4, 2016, [http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU\\_History\\_1986-2011.asp](http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU_History_1986-2011.asp).

association “and its allies were instrumental in convincing Congress to appropriate money specifically for [Hispanic-Serving Institutions].”<sup>28</sup> The funding increases the quality of education those institutions provide, which benefits Hispanics and other students attending those institutions. The association also works to provide Hispanics with opportunities to gain access to “internships, scholarships, college retention and advancement programs, pre-collegiate support, and career development opportunities and programs.”<sup>29</sup> All of these things can be extremely beneficial to Hispanic women all over the country because it provides them with ways to pay for a postsecondary education and with knowledge about how to be a successful student. There is no doubt that the creation of the HACU has positively impacted the Hispanic community.

The National Hispanic Institute (NHI) is another important organization. This institute works to create “experiences that engage achieving high school and college age youth in community leadership roles that advance our quality of life.”<sup>30</sup> NHI accomplishes this with several different leadership programs. Each program is designed for a specific age group and builds onto each other so that a student has years of continuous training.<sup>31</sup> The institute also holds leadership conferences and has volunteers available to help students in their development of those much emphasized leadership skills.<sup>32</sup> The students who go through these programs benefit by building skills they will need in college and in their careers. In addition to a student’s participation benefiting themselves, each student is expected to take what they learn back to his or her community so their communities benefit. The student leaders set examples for and teach other students how to be successful as well. This organization works hard to help out the Hispanic population, and it provides that population with useful resources that can help them get into and stay in college.

Hispanic women taking advantage of this resource and others like it probably have a better chance of going to college, and the good thing is that organizations, grants, and scholarships are now more numerous. People often say that there is so much money out there for students, and all one needs to do is search for it. In a way, this is true because there is a lot of money available to students every year. In fact, about \$46 billion is awarded by the U.S. Department of education and the nation’s colleges and universities to students in the form of scholarships and grants.<sup>33</sup> That amount does not include the estimated “\$3.3 billion...awarded by private sources” like

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “About the National Hispanic Institute,” *National Hispanic Institute*, accessed August 4, 2016, <https://www.nationalhispanicinstitute.org/aboutnhi/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Cecillia Barr, “Scholarships & Grants for College Students,” *Debt.org*, 2013, <https://www.debt.org/students/scholarships-and-grants/>.

foundations, nonprofit groups, and organizations like those previously mentioned.<sup>34</sup> The availability of this financial aid may be part of the reason enrollment numbers have increased. It is likely that Hispanic women all over the United States are taking advantage of monetary opportunities and using the money to get a college degree. Now, Hispanic women have access to more help, and these scholarships and organizations help ensure that they are given the right tools to succeed in obtaining a postsecondary education.

All this mention of the number of Hispanic women in college rising is useful, but it is mainly statistics. It helps to get some personal insight from the women themselves to see how they actually went about conquering the barriers mentioned in the studies and succeeding despite them. Eliza Alvarado was part of that rising number of women; she is a useful example of a Hispanic woman who succeeded in getting a postsecondary education.

Eliza Alvarado is from Pharr, Texas, and she was born a first generation Mexican-American.<sup>35</sup> As such, her first language was Spanish, and her English was learned in school. She and her family moved around much during her childhood because her “entire family did a variety of migrant farm work.”<sup>36</sup> The family moved back to Texas when Alvarado was 13 years of age, and she enrolled at a magnet school for health professions because, at the time, her dream was to be a physician. She worked hard in school, and it paid off because she graduated as class president at the top of her class in 1999.<sup>37</sup>

After “turn[ing] down several ‘fancy’ colleges because the cost was unreasonable,” she settled on attending Texas Woman’s University.<sup>38</sup> Her family had a combined yearly income of less than \$25,000, and she chose TWU because it was the most financially beneficial. She overcame her economic barrier by acquiring government aid, scholarships, and employment. With all of those, she was able to pay for nearly everything she needed.

While at TWU, Alvarado believes that she was one of few Hispanic students. She claims that “there was not a Hispanic presence” when she attended, but this did not phase her.<sup>39</sup> She received encouragement from her parents and professors, and most importantly, she possessed a strong personal drive.

After four years at TWU, Eliza Alvarado graduated in 2003 with a bachelor’s degree in political science and was the first Hispanic woman to graduate from the

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Eliza Alvarado, interviewed via email by Valeria M. Estrada, September 21-23, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



Honors Scholar Program.<sup>40</sup> She went on to get a master's degree from George Washington University in 2006 and a doctoral degree from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2014.<sup>41</sup>

It is quite clear that Eliza Alvarado succeeded in overcoming the barriers that many Hispanic women face when pursuing a college degree. Like the women discussed from the studies, she faced many barriers. She was not well-off financially, and she could have abandoned the idea of going to college like many others do in the same situation. College is a great expense, and it is understandable that the cost discourages many. Again, despite this, Eliza went. She took advantage of the help different organizations were willing to offer, and she graduated. Although she cannot be representative of all Hispanic women, her case is a good example of what many go through in their pursuit for a better education. The barriers vary, but nonetheless, the struggle is there.

The discussion of barriers seems to never end, but this is because they are still so present. According to a publication from U.S. Department of Education written by Patricia Gándara, "despite significant barriers, Latinas have made significant progress over the last decade."<sup>42</sup> The publication also shows improving graduation rates at the high school level with over a 14% increase and at the college level with a %0.5 increase.<sup>43</sup> These numbers show positive progress, and that is a significant change throughout the nation. While this is a victory for Hispanic women, the remaining issue is that, although there are resources for overcoming those barriers, it does not appear that anything is being done to get rid of them. If something was being done, the barriers would no longer be an issue. Even the Department of Education publication states that, despite the obvious progress, Hispanic women are still not doing as well as they could be.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, there needs to be a shift from providing ways over those barriers to eliminating, or at least reducing the size of, those barriers. This would require targeting disadvantaged groups at earlier ages.

One problem with reaching out to seniors in high school is that they are nearly adults, and they already have certain attitudes toward college. These attitudes are, many times, characterized by the belief that going to college is not possible; as a result, those students do not really attempt to go. They finish high school and begin searching for jobs that require only a high school degree. This mentality can be present for a mixture of reasons, but it can be prevented from forming if students are monitored at a younger age.

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Gándara, "Fulfilling America's Future: Latinas in the U.S., 2015" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

One book suggests that “for Hispanics, initial disadvantages often stem parents’ immigrant and socioeconomic status and their lack of knowledge about the U.S. education system.”<sup>45</sup> This results in students not being properly prepared when they enter school as kindergarteners. Although the status of Hispanic parents cannot be magically changed, there are ways to minimize the effect this has on Hispanic children. These children are generally not exposed to reading at early ages. One survey showed “that Hispanic children age 3 to 5 are less likely to be read to [by their parents] compared with non-Hispanic children.”<sup>46</sup> This means that before Hispanic children even enter schools, they are already “at a disadvantage because of a lack of exposure to literacy activities.”<sup>47</sup> The writers of the chapter stress that the parents of Hispanic children should read to them more. It is understandable that some parents do not know English so they may not be able to read English books to their children. The authors also claim that this disadvantage can be done away with at a state level. They claim putting children in preschool programs can help overcome this problem, and many states have taken the first step by starting state-funded universal preschool programs.<sup>48</sup> Bilingual educators would be a beneficial addition to these programs because many students, like Eliza Alvarado, do not begin learning English until they attend public school. Texas had done well by implementing these programs across the state, but the Huffington Post article mentioned earlier noted that, in recent years, funding for these programs has decreased drastically causing some to completely shut down.<sup>49</sup> It is imperative that the state take the necessary steps to restore this funding as soon as possible. If preschool programs with bilingual educators are restored in Texas and implemented across the nation it may mean that a barrier is minimized for the Hispanic population.

Promoting stronger bonds between teachers and students in grades K-12 is another way to improve chances for Hispanics. Hispanic girls may receive support from home, but they often lack the support needed from role models in academics. They claim that “weak relational ties between Hispanic students and their teachers may diminish motivation or engagement in academic work, which in turn can undermine academic achievement.”<sup>50</sup> This is an issue because “it appears that teacher interactions and the less than optimal school contexts that Hispanic students encounter in middle

---

<sup>45</sup> Barbara Schneider, Sylvia Martinez, and Ann Owens, “Barriers to educational opportunities for Hispanics in the United States,” *Hispanics and the future of America* (2006): 179.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>49</sup> Tony Castro, “Hispanics Now Majority In Texas Public Schools, Districts Assess If They Are Ready For Change,” *The Huffington Post*, June 12, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Schneider, Sylvia Martinez, and Ann Owens, “Barriers to educational opportunities for Hispanics in the United States,” *Hispanics and the future of America* (2006): 199.

school contribute to their academic and social difficulties in later year.”<sup>51</sup> In short, poor relationships between teachers and young Hispanic girls can affect their academic life to the extent that their desire to attend college after graduating from high school is diminished. Therefore, positive and encouraging relationships should be greatly promoted between teachers and their students, and this should be promoted at all grade levels. An added benefit of this is that, by having teachers show girls that they are suited for college, they would minimize the barrier that some Hispanic girls face at home.

One final thing to consider is implementing more programs that help students in applying to colleges in high school. Hispanic girls are usually first generation students; their parents never attended college. This means that when it is time for those girls to apply to colleges, they may not know how, and their parents are not able to help them. Programs teaching those students how to apply for college would be immensely helpful and may mean the difference between those students going to college or not. The great thing is that such programs exist.

At TWU, there is an organization called G-Force, and it is that organization’s job to send student workers to high schools to teach students how to enroll in institutions of higher education and how to apply for scholarships and financial aid.<sup>52</sup> This organization also tries to “raise awareness about the value of higher education” and attempts to show students that it is possible for them to obtain such an education.<sup>53</sup> Although this organization does not focus only on the Hispanic population, it should be mentioned that the organization tries to hire workers that speak Spanish because a significant portion of the high school students they reach out to are Hispanic. This program is extremely valuable, and it would likely have a great impact in schools across the nation if it were implemented everywhere. The goal is to expand organizations such as this one and those mentioned earlier because they can have a lasting positive effect on students and specifically on Hispanic women.

Once those women get to Texas Woman’s University, there are several organizations and events that promote the inclusion and culture of Hispanics. TWU is working to keep the student body diversified and rich in culture. There is an entire department at the university that is dedicated to this. The TWU Diversity, Inclusion, and Outreach Department has stated that the main goal of the department is to “support the needs of cultural based, traditionally underrepresented and first-generation student populations.”<sup>54</sup> Although this is not specific to Hispanic women,

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>52</sup> “About the G-Force Mentor Program,” *Texas Woman’s University*, last modified November 30, 2016, <http://www.twu.edu/diversity-inclusion-outreach/g-force.asp>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Home,” *Texas Woman’s University*, 2017, <http://www.twu.edu/diversity-inclusion-outreach/default.asp>.

these students are still supported by this department. It is clear through the events held by the department in celebration of Hispanic culture, such as the cultural awareness events held yearly during Hispanic Heritage Month, that the Hispanic population is important to the university. The department is also the home of the G-Force organization mentioned earlier and a few other organizations promoting the well-being of these women on campus.

The LULAC chapter on the TWU campus also promotes the well-being of Hispanic women. The organization page states that the mission of the organization “is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, housing, health and civil rights of the Hispanic population of the United States.”<sup>55</sup> The organization regularly holds events in an effort to empower Hispanic women on campus. The organization also holds events with speakers and other events that teach Hispanic women, and other interested students, about professionalism in the workplace. Another important organization on the TWU campus is a sorority called Sigma Lambda Alpha. This sorority’s mission is “to educate and excel the stance of Latin Cultures in this diversely enriched society.”<sup>56</sup> The sorority, like the LULAC chapter holds events promoting Hispanic culture and shows that there is a space for Hispanics to embrace and celebrate their culture.

Clearly, Texas Woman’s University is a great example of a university that seeks to diversify its student population and include Hispanic women. Through the Diversity, Inclusion, and Outreach Department and the various organizations within the department, TWU has shown its commitment to seeking out and empowering the female Hispanic community. This university is so focused on ensuring there is diversity on campus that 2012 “[marked] the fifth consecutive year [*U.S. News and World Report*]...placed TWU on its list of most diverse universities.”<sup>57</sup> TWU clearly serves as a valuable example of how a university can promote the success of minority groups like the group of Hispanic women, and it is an example for other universities across the nation to follow.

Hispanic women attending college is a fairly new thing; we can look back to the last century and see that it was not a common occurrence. In fact, there are still Hispanic women who can probably discuss living in a time period when Hispanic women were still a rarity in institutions of higher education. Recently, Hispanic women have achieved a notable presence in many institutions, one that will hopefully continue to grow. In the past, disadvantages to these women were segregation, cultural pressure, familial pressure, and low socioeconomic status. Despite these many barriers, a steadily

---

<sup>55</sup> "Lulac 4205 at TWU," *Facebook.com*, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/LULAC4205/>.

<sup>56</sup> "Sigma Lambda Alpha." *Texas Woman’s University*. <http://www.twu.edu/greek-life/governing-councils/sigma-lambda-alpha/>.

<sup>57</sup> Karen Garcia, "TWU Times," *Texas Woman’s University* 2, no.2 (Fall 2011): 7.

growing number of Hispanic women are managing to gain a presence in higher education; this shows that they have found ways to overcome those barriers, which is a good sign. An example of this conquering and persevering is seen through the experiences of Eliza Alvarado, a Hispanic woman who encountered some of those barriers. More resources are now available that help that population attend college, such as financial help in the form of scholarships. Lastly, some ways in which the enrollment numbers of Hispanic women may be helped further were discussed. The main idea is to target Hispanic females at younger ages and assist them in different ways so that the impact lasts and allows them to succeed later when it is time for them to attend college.

Overall, it is clear the odds of Hispanic women attending college are increasing, but it is an issue that is still important because, despite all the progress and increased enrollment numbers, this is still a concern. Hispanics students are overwhelmingly present in Texas public school districts making up over half of the entire population, but not many are making the transition from public high schools to colleges and universities. Hispanic women still make up only a small percentage of college-goers at Texas Woman's University and throughout the United States, and that needs to change. Half of students in Texas are not being properly prepared to pursue higher education, and this is something the state should not be overlooking because that means half of the state's student population is getting left behind; this includes Hispanic girls. These students are the future of the state, and if they are not successful, Texas will begin to decline in various ways. It would be in the best interest of the state and the nation to provide these students with the resources they need to excel in academics so that they may contribute to the growth and success of the state and the nation. Hopefully, Texas and the United States citizens will continue to create new ways to combat this issue such that the number of barriers will decrease and enrollment numbers will rise to the point where they will no longer be considered a problem.