Educational Inequities and Latina/o Undergraduate Students in the United States: A Critical Race Analysis of Their Educational Progress

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Abstract: Using critical race theory (CRT) as a framework, the authors analyze the educational inequities and racialized barriers faced by Latina/o college students when navigating the educational pipeline leading to a college degree. The impact of racialized structures, policies, and practices is examined in the context of how they influence the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os. The article concludes by offering CRT-based policy and practical approaches to enhancing the success of Latina/o college students.

Resumen: Usando la Teoría de Raza Crítica (CRT) como marco de referencia los autores analizan las desigualdades educacionales y las barreras raciales que estudiantes universitarios Latinos encaran al navegar la tubería educacional que los lleva a obtener el grado universitario. El impacto de estructuras racializadas, políticas, y prácticas se examinan en el contexto de cómo éstas influencian el logro educacional y el avance académico para los estudiantes universitarios Latinos. El manuscrito concluye ofreciendo políticas y prácticas basadas en CRT para enriquecer el éxito de los estudiantes universitarios Latinos.

Keywords: access; equity; diversity; Latinos; race; racism

In June 2003, the Supreme Court ruled in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) case and reaffirmed the 1978 *Bakke v. Regents* case that race-based affirmative action could continue to be used as one factor in college and university admissions. However, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, writ-

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Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, Vol. 4, No. 3, July 2005, 272-294
DOI: 10.1177/1538192705276550

ing the majority opinion in *Grutter*, argued that race and ethnicity would become irrelevant characteristics for college admissions in 25 years. Clearly, one of the major outcomes of the Supreme Court's opinion in *Grutter* was to forewarn higher education institutions that race should become an irrelevant measure of the educational achievement or academic potential for students of color. The opinion further reinscribed the myth of race neutrality in higher education but, more important, set a legal alarm clock that will go off in 25 years when, presumably, race will no longer play a factor in the educational experiences and conditions of students of color.

In this article, we provide an analysis of how race may indeed continue to be an important characteristic in determining students' of color educational attainment and achievement in higher education. We focus our analysis specifically on Latina/o college students, one of the largest racial/ethnic groups in American higher education yet one of the least studied populations in the field. The question guiding our analysis is: What are the educational conditions and related outcomes that exist as Latinas/os navigate the undergraduate pipeline, and why do these conditions continue to exist? We begin by reviewing educational pipeline data we have compiled on Latina/o students, focusing on the key transition points. Next, we analyze these data through a critical race theory (CRT) lens. Finally, our CRT analysis concludes with a discussion of policy and practical implications that stem from our research and analysis.

Background

According to the 2000 Census, approximately 13% of the total U.S. population, or 35.3 million, people self-identify as Latinas/os and now represent the largest underrepresented racial/ethnic group in the United States—a category formerly ascribed to African Americans. Chicanas and Chicanos represent approximately 64% of the total Latina/o population, with Puerto Ricans (11%), Cubans (5%), Central or South Americans (14%), and other Latinas/os (7%) making up the remainder of the Latina/o population. Within the Latina/o population, there are significant subgroup differences. For instance, of the three most prominent Latina/o subgroups, Cuban Americans are the smallest, the oldest, and do much better educationally and occupationally than either Chicanas/os or Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans and Chicanas/os are more likely to be concentrated in urban centers, live in poverty, and experience poor educational conditions.

Chicanas/os are the youngest, the largest, and the fastest growing of the three population groups and are moving in large numbers to major metropolitan areas in the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, and the South and on the East Coast. When one examines ethnic groups west of the Mississippi River, Chicanas/os represent the largest single group of color in almost every major metropolitan area.

Specific to education, nationally only 46% of Chicanas/os have attended at least 4 years of high school, in contrast to 84% of non-Latina/o Whites. Similarly, just 8% of Chicanas/os have acquired at least a baccalaureate degree, compared to 26% of Whites (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Critical Race Theory in Higher Education

To help us understand the structures, practices, and policies that led to these dismal educational attainment levels for Latina/o students, we use the interpretive framework of CRT (see Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Crossland 1998; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Tate, 1997; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Within the field of higher education, CRT is becoming an increasingly important tool to broaden and deepen the analysis of the racialized barriers erected for people of color (see Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Taylor, 1999; Villalpando, 2003; Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2000). CRT in education explores the ways in which "race-neutral" laws and institutional structures, practices, and policies perpetuate racial/ethnic educational inequality. This framework emphasizes the importance of viewing policies and policy making within a proper historical and cultural context to deconstruct their racialized content (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995). It challenges dominant liberal ideas of color blindness and meritocracy and shows how these ideas operate to disadvantage people of color while further advantaging Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

There are at least five defining elements that form the basic assumptions, perspectives, research methods, and pedagogies of CRT (Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tate, 1997; Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002). These elements help to frame this examination of Latina/o college students.

The centrality of race and racism. CRT acknowledges as its most basic premise that race and racism are defining characteristics of American society. In American higher education, race and racism are imbedded in the structures, practices, and discourses that guide the daily practices of universities (Taylor, 1999). Race and racism are central constructs but also intersect with other components of one's identity, such as language, generation status, gender, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw, 1989; Valdes, 1996). For people of color, each of these elements of one's identity can relate to other forms of subordination (Crenshaw, 1993), yet each dimension cannot fully

explain the other. For example, language oppression by itself cannot account for racial oppression nor can racial oppression alone account for class oppression.

The challenge to dominant ideology. CRT in higher education challenges the traditional claims of universities to objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. These theoretical frameworks reveal how the dominant ideology of color blindness and race neutrality act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in American society (Calmore, 1992; Delgado, 1989).

A commitment to social justice and praxis. CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination (Matsuda, 1996). In higher education, these theoretical frameworks are conceived as a social justice project that attempt to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

A centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racial subordination. The application of a CRT framework in the field of higher education requires that the experiential knowledge of people of color be centered and viewed as a resource stemming directly from their lived experiences. The experiential knowledge can come from storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1995; Olivas, 1990).

An historical context and interdisciplinary perspective. CRT challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses in educational research. In the field of higher education, this framework analyzes race and racism in both a historical and a contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990).

These defining elements of CRT form a framework that can be applied to real-life problems in higher education and in broader society. It is especially applicable to the realm of higher education given how the American legal system has historically used race/ethnicity, national origin, language, class, and an ever-changing conception of justice in the construction and implementation of laws that influence higher education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a; Taylor, 1999). CRT provides a set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that can identify, analyze, and transform those structural and policy dimensions of higher education that maintain the racial, ethnic, gen-

der, language, and class subordination of people of color in universities (Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002). A CRT framework is useful in theorizing and examining the ways in which race and racism affect the structures, practices, and discourses within higher education by, for example, pointing to the contradictory ways in which universities operate with their potential to oppress and marginalize while also emancipating and empowering (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998).

The Latina and Latino Educational Pipeline

In the following section, we examine the educational pipeline for Latina/o undergraduates through a CRT framework. We begin by highlighting the educational pipeline (from elementary school to the doctorate) for the five major racial/ethnic groups and then for each of the largest Latina/o subgroups (e.g., Chicanas/os, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, and Salvadorans) in the United States. Then, for purposes of this article, we illustrate the aggregated Latina/o pipeline. This particular illustration includes a piece of the pipeline (i.e., community college transfer) often understudied for Latinas/os but constituting an entry point to college for the majority of Latina/o students.

The Latina/o college-age population has increased by 14% since 1994 (Carter & Wilson, 2001), contributing to a steady increase in their college enrollment during the past two decades. These gains, however, are partly driven by enrollment increases at 2-year institutions, where the numbers of Latina/o students have tripled in the past 20 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In the past year alone, there was an absolute increase in college enrollment of Latina/o students of 143,000, yet 75% (108,000) of this growth occurred at 2-year colleges. This does not underscore the fact that Latina/o student enrollment in baccalaureate-granting institutions is also on the rise. Presently, Latinas/os account for 24% of undergraduates enrolled in California 4-year institutions.[1] For these reasons, an examination of students at this juncture of the pipeline is warranted.

To better understand the underrepresentation of Latinas and Latinos in postsecondary education, it is important to begin with an examination of their experiences in elementary and secondary school (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). Malcom (1990) has stated that "to understand the reasons for the mere trickle at the end of the . . . pipeline, . . . we must go all the way back to the headwater" (p. 249). Therefore, the underachievement and underrepresentation of Latinas and Latinos at each point in the educational pipeline might be better explained by investigating the educational conditions at the elementary and secondary "headwater."

We contend that educational researchers and policy makers need to theoretically understand the cumulative effects of inadequate educational prep-

aration and schooling conditions of Latinas/os at the elementary and secondary levels and how that affects their educational attainment in college and beyond. This lack of achievement and attainment at each point in the educational pipeline has resulted in both a loss of talent to U.S. society and a loss of important role models for the next generation of Latina/o students who aspire to educational and professional careers.

To graphically show the leakage points in the educational pipeline, we have taken data from various sources (see Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000; Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solórzano, in press). At any given point in the educational pipeline—no matter how one measures educational outcomes—Latinas/os do not perform as well as most other students (see Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000; Watford et al., in press).

Figure 1 compares the five major racial/ethnic groups in the United States along the educational pipeline from elementary school to the doctorate. The data make clear that Latinas/os do least well at each point in the educational pipeline. For example, among 100 Latinas/os who begin elementary school, a little more than one half will graduate from high school and only about 10 will complete a college degree. Eventually, less than 1 of the original 100 Latinas/os who enrolled in elementary school will complete a doctoral degree. What makes these data especially noteworthy is the fact that Latinas/os represent the largest ethnic/racial group in the United States but have the poorest educational transition rates among all groups. In fact, in Figure 2, when we disaggregate the Latina/o subgroups, we find even greater differences in educational outcomes between Latina/o groups. These low educational attainment rates are cause for concern given the youthfulness of the Latina/o population and the continued growth projections of this group in the near future (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). It is critical that we begin to understand why these groups historically (as well as presently) do not attain more equal outcomes as their counterparts in the United States.

To expand and further illustrate the educational pipeline, we use Figure 3 to focus specifically on the Latina/o population. Of the 100 Latina/o students at the elementary level, 48 drop out of high school and 52 continue on to graduate. Of those 52 who graduate from high school, about 31, or 60%, continue on to some form of postsecondary education. Of those 31, about 20, or 65%, move on to community colleges and 11, or 35%, will go to a 4-year institution. Of those 20 in community colleges, only 2 will transfer to a 4-year college. Of the 11 students who went to a 4-year college and 2 who transferred, 10 will graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree. Finally, 4 students will continue on and graduate from graduate or professional school and less than 1 will receive a doctorate.

Clearly, investigation into the educational and social conditions at every point in the pipeline is critical to the success of one of the fastest-growing

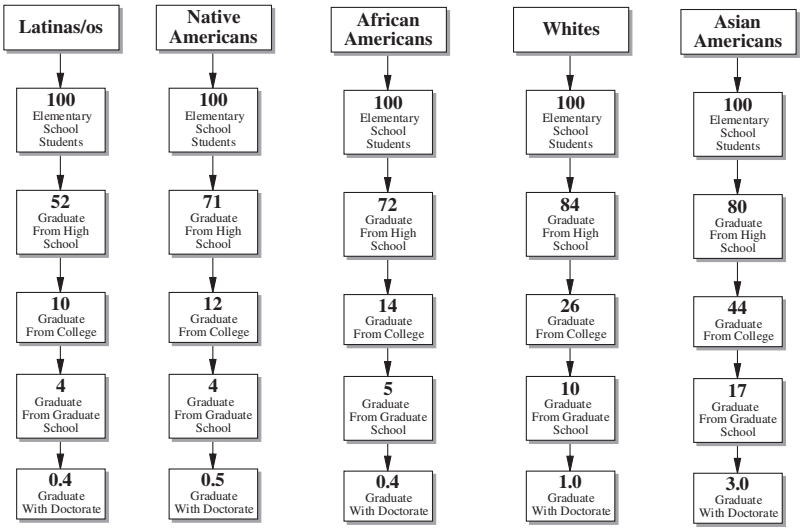

Figure 1
The U.S. Educational Pipeline

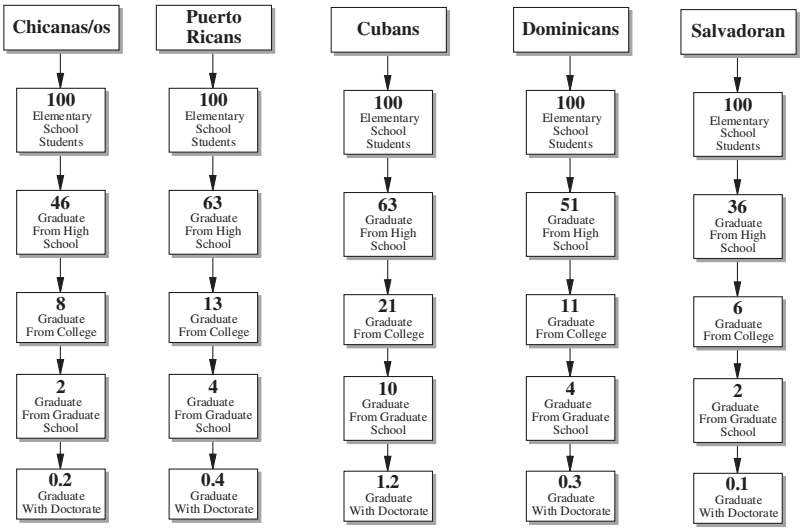

Figure 2
The U.S. Latina/o Educational Pipeline

populations in the country. For this article, however, we focus primarily on the transition to college and through college, toward the attainment of a bac-

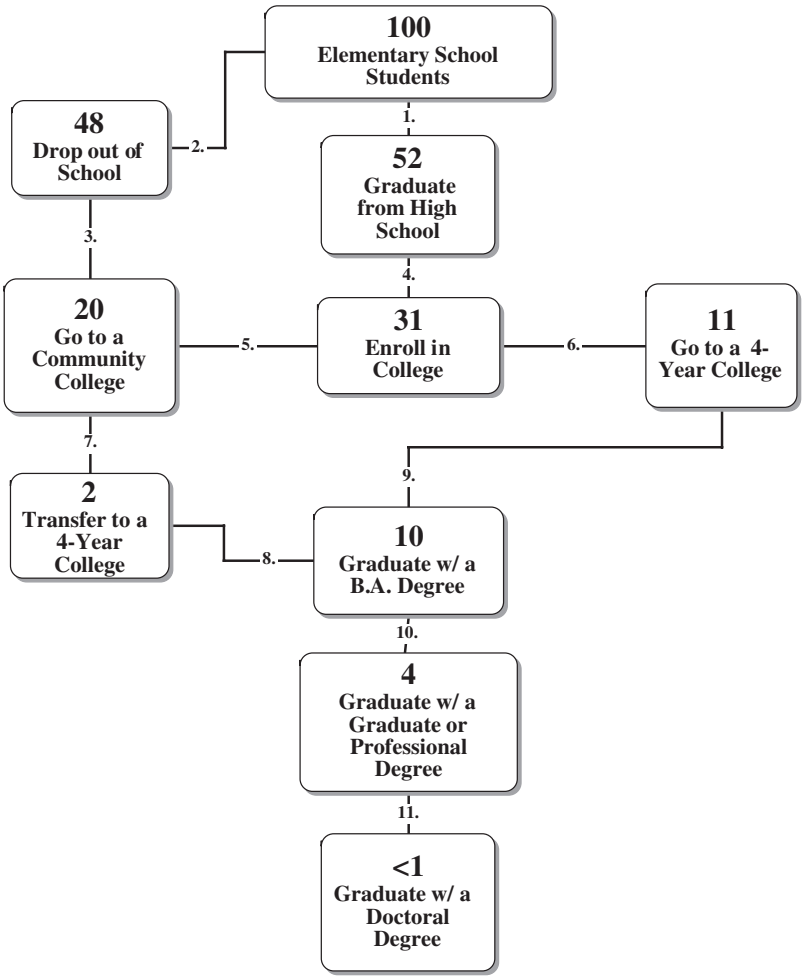

Figure 3
The Latina/o Educational Pipeline

calaureate degree because entry and successful completion of a baccalaureate can dramatically improve the overall economic and social conditions of Latina/o groups (Dougherty, 1994). In particular, we are trying to address what we do know about the educational experiences of the few Latina and Latino students who enter postsecondary institutions, how these students survive and succeed in higher education, and what happens to students at each of the stages in the postsecondary pipeline.

Latinas and Latinos in the Postsecondary Education Sector

As we move through the pipeline, it is important to discuss the conditions that influence the completion of a baccalaureate degree among Latinas/os. To better understand the educational conditions and related outcomes that exist as Latinas/os navigate the undergraduate pipeline and why these conditions continue to exist, we present four outcomes to which higher education must attend to ensure the continued education of Latina/o college students. For each outcome, we evaluate the conditions at the leakage points that contribute to the underachievement of Latina/o undergraduate students. The three main outcomes and conditions we present include (a) the disparity between 2- and 4-year enrollments of Latina/o students, (b) the low transfer rates of Latinas/os to 4-year institutions, and (c) retention and graduation at both the 2- and 4-year level.

Latinas/os and the Community College

In its 2003 decision on affirmative action, the U.S. Supreme Court asserted that the opportunity to attend and graduate from college has become more equitable for all students (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003). As evidence, it pointed to projected increases in enrollments of low-income students and students of color and concluded that access will continue to be an attainable goal for all underrepresented students. At first glance, the Supreme Court opinion seemed to echo Clark Kerr's 1960 Master Plan for California Higher Education, which envisioned access for all students but primarily through the open admissions policies of 2-year colleges to anyone at least 18 years of age or holding a high school diploma. However, 42 years later, Kerr expressed concern about the direction and future of California higher education in the May 16, 2002, *UCLA Daily Bruin* interview (Falcone, 2002). When discussing the unequal opportunities for transfer to 4-year colleges from California's community colleges, Kerr declared,

> The good community colleges will have college preparatory courses there that you can then transfer your credits (to the UC), and the poor community colleges will have no transfer courses whatsoever. So if you want to transfer and you haven't taken any transfer courses, you can't. (p. A1)

Today, nearly half a century after the inception of the California Master Plan, we, like Clark Kerr, question whether open access to under-resourced and lower-status institutions, like community colleges, truly represents genuine access for all students. As large institutions with many part-time faculty and few resources for academic expenditures and student services, community colleges tend to serve part-time, commuting students and to offer less financial aid than 4-year institutions of any type. Their ability to develop stu-

dents' cognitive and affective skills is often questioned, especially in light of their low transfer rates to 4-year institutions (Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). Yet why is it that nearly two thirds of all Latinas/os begin their postsecondary education at the community college level, and to what extent does this account for their low numbers of 4-year degree attainment?

Admittedly, community colleges serve multiple and often-conflicting roles for their students. They have three primary functions that some argue have little relation to one another. Community colleges provide (a) vocational education/certificate programs, (b) terminal associate of art/science degrees, and (c) transfer opportunities to 4-year institutions. Having three separate roles often results in different outcomes for the enrolled students. For example, on one hand, community colleges are seen as spaces that are inefficient and harmful for student aspirations when their transfer and retention rates are low, yet on the other hand, they are successful at providing job training and credentialing through 2-year degrees or certificates. But it is precisely these multiple and competing functions that may serve to exacerbate the pipeline dilemma for Latina/o students who find themselves in 2-year colleges, especially because some community colleges place a stronger emphasis on one or more of these functions (see Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). It is important to examine why these conditions exist at this level and what types of career and educational aspirations are being fostered in community colleges that admittedly serve a multitude of functions.

Despite these conflicting multiple functions, the largest growth in higher education has been at the community college level. First, students are unable to enroll directly into 4-year colleges because they have not met admissions requirements. This is often because of poor college preparatory counseling and the cumulative effects of having been tracked into non-college-preparatory curricula in elementary, middle, and high school (Oakes, 1985; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004).

Second, community colleges are less expensive than 4-year colleges. Latinas/os are disproportionately found at the lowest socioeconomic sectors of U.S. society and appear to also be overrepresented in community colleges. Community colleges appear to offer the opportunity to working-class, first-generation Latinas/os to pay the low tuition while working full-time. These conditions combine to inhibit their likelihood of transferring to a 4-year institution and contribute to their inability to complete a degree.

Third, 2-year colleges are places where there is an increasing need for remediation. Faculty and institutional personnel are often confronted with the fact that most of their efforts need to be in the form of remediation for its students. The 2000 NCES-PEQIS survey indicates that 42% of public 2-year students enrolled in at least one remedial reading, writing, or math course (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Perhaps the most central policy concern is the enrollment of underprepared students and the attendant effects of remedial programs on student achievement and matriculation

through the higher education pipeline as this extends coursework and increases the likelihood that students will not persist through to a degree. In the past few years, no less than 41 state legislatures, governing boards, and higher education systems have considered or have enacted policy initiatives directed at limiting or reforming remedial education[2] in 2- and 4-year institutions (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002; Mazzeo, 2002). Even among supporters of remedial education efforts, there are worries that requirements for remediation are not equitably enforced. In fact, the research suggests that the varying standards and definitions for remedial education from institution to institution and even within the same state or higher education system, exacerbates the dilemma of course completion and successful transfer (Grubb, 1999; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Perin, 2002).

Clearly, when Latinas/os begin their postsecondary education at a 2-year community college, in contrast to beginning at a 4-year institution, they face a greater possibility of not completing a baccalaureate degree. The reasons for their inability to transfer often result from institutional structures that fail to support their academic needs and professional goals and aspirations.

Low Transfer Rates to 4-Year Institutions

One of the major ways that 2-year community colleges fail Latina/o college students is by not providing a clear and explicit method of transferring to 4-year institutions. Even though 71% of Latina/o students who enter a community college desire to transfer to a 4-year institution, only 7% to 20% end up eventually transferring (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The absence of a "transfer culture" at 2-year community colleges leaves students without the structures, practices, and discourses that promote or facilitate transferring to a 4-year institution (Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). Community colleges often lack academic guidance or clearly defined transfer procedures. Despite the growing trend of developing articulation agreements between 2- and 4-year colleges, which identify specific classes and other requirements that, once-fulfilled, guarantee students' ability to transfer, they still do not have a significant impact on Latina/o students transfer rates (Ornelas, 2002).

One example of the poor academic guidance and counseling often provided by community colleges is their inability to dispel the myth that completing the requirements of an associate of arts degree will also fulfill transfer requirements to a 4-year institution (Ornelas, 2002; Rangel, 2001; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). The misinformation obtained by Latina/o community college students often leads them to additional coursework that both fulfills associate of arts degree and transfer requirements to a 4-year institution.

The poor academic guidance and counseling provided to Latinas/os in community colleges is often based on low expectations that instructors and counselors hold for Latinas/os (Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). Deficit-based expectations about Latina/o students' culture, language, values,

and ability to learn often impose structural barriers that inhibit their college-level preparation and academic success (Ornelas, 2002; Valencia, 1997). Indeed, these deficit-based stereotypes often guide the students' schooling experience prior to getting to postsecondary institutions. Jeannie Oakes (1985) has documented the effects of academic tracking and ability grouping in K-12 education, which often parallels tracking practices by community college instructors and counselors that steer Latinas/os toward vocational skills and job training programs rather than a college transfer track.

Using 2000-2001 California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) data, it is no wonder that of every 100 Latina/o California high school graduates, 40 continue on to postsecondary institutions. Of these 40 students, 30 begin at one of the California Community Colleges (CCC), 3 at the University of California (UC) and 7 at the California State University (CSU) campuses. Of those 30 community college students, 3 will transfer to a CSU campus and 0.4 to a UC campus.

Clearly, data from Figure 4 confirm that practices adopted by 2-year community colleges in the state of California to increase the transfer opportunities for Latinas/os have been insufficient and ineffective. Indeed, we are losing a tremendous resource in the community college student who fails to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Baccalaureate Degree Retention and Attainment

This section examines the intended outcomes for Latina/o students when they do enter into higher education institutions and will highlight the programs and services that are in place to help assist in degree completion when they do enter higher education. This section will argue that even good faith efforts may often perpetuate unequal outcomes for students through the underlying messages being sent. We also speak to the factors that mitigate for and against baccalaureate degree completion.

There are a number of institutionalized systems in place to aid students in their degree completion. Examples include student-initiated retention programs versus university-based retention programs. Students have developed their own response to retaining fellow undergraduates through student-initiated retention efforts (Solórzano, 1999). Apparently, these students feel that the institution's programs are not serving its intended purposes. Students already have a great deal of responsibility, so agreeing to take on other students may add to their stress and workload. In addition, because these programs are student initiated and student run, there is little institutional memory, and if there is no one that can fill these roles when a student graduates, the programs cease to exist. Although it is admirable that students want to play a role in this process, the message that student-initiated and student-run programs send is that students who are serviced by these programs are really not a priority of the college and indeed should not be enrolled in those institutions.

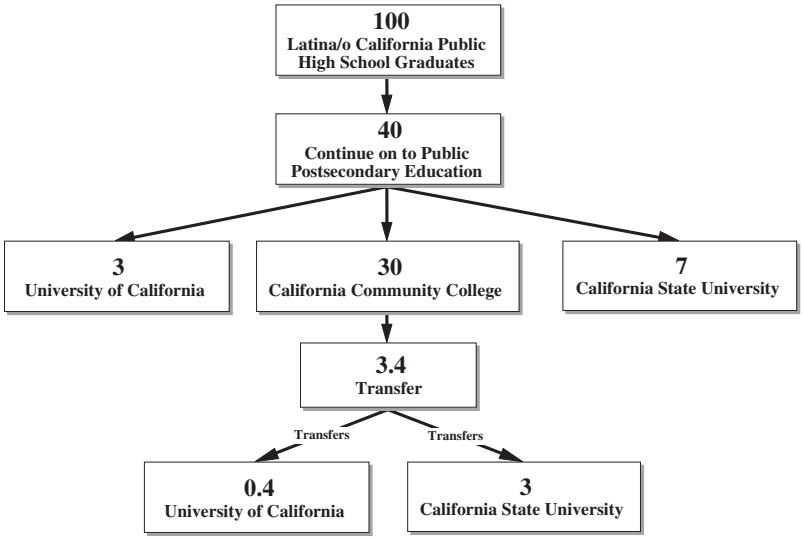

Figure 4
The Latina/o California Postsecondary Educational Pipeline: 2000-2001

A second condition that would advance student retention includes community college partnerships. Community college partnerships are important avenues for students to acquire knowledge of the college transfer process and other important information about the college-going experience. Community college partnerships can go a long way in developing and strengthening academic partnerships between universities and the community colleges within their area by offering such services as curricular diversity and academic advising to make students academically competitive for admission and by creating more collaborative relationships between various offices on both the community college campus and the 4-year institution, such as admission offices, academic guidance offices, transfer centers, financial aid centers, and housing offices.

A third condition that would facilitate college completion includes the financing of college for Latina/o students. Numerous studies have demonstrated that aid is a positive predictor of degree completion (Astin, 1993; Oseguera, 2004; St. John, 1991, 2003). Having the ability to finance college frees an individual from having to work and the student can spend more time devoted to college and studying. As we mentioned earlier, Latina/o students are disproportionately from low-income families. Unfortunately, low-income

students are precisely the group of students most responsive to college price changes (Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988). This is cause for concern given the steep rise in tuition in the past two decades coupled with the increasing shift from grant aid to loans (Price, 2003; St. John, 2003). A recent study by St. John (2003) demonstrated this phenomenon as his research identified the negative effect of reduced grant funding and overreliance on loan funding on college enrollment. In addition, Hu and St. John (2001) and Oseguera (2004) have demonstrated how financial aid that need not be repaid is also a significant positive predictor of persistence in college.

A fourth condition that can assist undergraduates in the pursuit of their degree is students receiving mentoring and/or validation (Rendon, 1994; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). The popular conception is that students need to break away from the family and community to be successful (Tinto, 1993), but research on students of color challenges that notion and shows that maintaining strong family and community ties enhances student success (Solórzano, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

A fifth condition that affects baccalaureate completion is the campus racial climate. A large body of research has explored the ways in which an institution's climate affects the lives of students and faculty. This information, when utilized, has aided campus leaders and policy makers in moving toward sustaining diversity and improving the quality of life for diverse populations. Assessing climate is important because of the implications it has on all individuals within an organization. A harsh racial climate has a direct negative effect on the recruitment and retention of minority students (Allen & Solórzano, 2001; Blackwell, 1981; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002). Improving the climate for diversity, as outlined by Hurtado et al. (1999) requires (a) thoughtful reflection by campus leaders with regard to their history of inclusion and how this has carried over into the present, (b) improving the present recruitment and retention of people of color on college campuses, (c) attending to perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and (d) enhancing inter- and intra-group relations among groups in college. Changes on all four of these dimensions are necessary and should be addressed simultaneously if we are to achieve any success in improving the racial climate and thereby the experiences of minorities within the academy (Hurtado et al., 1999).

In conclusion, a number of researchers continually demonstrate how colleges and universities can accommodate Latina/o students with services such as culturally sensitive academic advising, increased financial aid opportunities, the provision of summer and fall orientation programs for social and academic enrichment, access to learning centers, availability of school-year and summer research programs, and the alignment of diversity programs with the university's mission (Garcia, 2004; Ornelas, 2002; Solórzano, 1999).

Discussion/Conclusion

The data we present in this article clearly show that there are persistent educational inequities for all Latina/o college students. Despite increases in their enrollment rates, our data show that Latinas/os still remain underrepresented at almost every level of the educational pipeline. In fact, as Latinas/os continue to increase their representation in the general U.S. population, it appears unlikely that higher education will achieve any measurable degree of parity either in their enrollment or educational attainment rates at any time in the near future. Despite the recent Supreme Court decision declaring that in 25 years race will no longer be a significant factor in determining access to and graduation from college for students of color, our data and analysis indicate that, for Latinas/os, their race and ethnicity will continue to be strongly related to the quality of, and equality in, their educational conditions and outcomes throughout the educational pipeline.

What Are the Educational Conditions and Outcomes for Latina/o Undergraduates?

Our data reveal that approximately two thirds of all Latinas/os enrolling in postgraduate study begin at 2-year community colleges, and only one third enroll directly in 4-year institutions. Although the majority of Latinas/os (i.e., 70%) who enroll in 2-year community colleges aspire to transfer to 4-year campuses, the systems and support structures in place are inadequate and are often under girded by deficit-based assumptions about students' academic ability and potential.

Moreover, both 2- and 4-year institutions lack academically and culturally appropriate support systems to meet the holistic needs of Latina/o students (see Gándara & Maxwell-Jolley, 1999). Most formal, institutionally sponsored retention practices, programs, and policies continue to be centered on outdated notions of alleged race-neutral institutional integration, which insist on viewing students as academically and culturally deficient and mismatched with their campus. Rather than recognizing and nourishing the cultural wealth (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005) that Latinas/os draw from in their pursuit of a college education, university-initiated retention efforts refuse to acknowledge the significance of these assets that have historically supported students' success in higher education (Villalpando, 2002).

Without appropriate retention efforts, our data show that graduation rates among Latinas/os at 2- and 4-year institutions will remain the weakest among all major racial/ethnic groups in the United States. In fact, when compared with their increases in the U.S. population, there actually appears to be a decline in their graduation rates given that these rates have not kept pace with their population increase. The most important point with respect to their baccalaureate degree attainment is that although their absolute numbers may have increased slightly in the past decade, this increase is entirely

attributable to the increase in the college-age population and enrollment of Latina/o college students. In other words, the increase in their attainment of a bachelor's degree is not proportional to the increase in their college-aged population.

Why Do These Conditions Continue to Exist?

To answer this question, we draw on the explanatory framework offered by CRT. One of the principal contributions of CRT is its focus on how race and racism are woven into the structures, practices, and policies of colleges and universities. Although on one hand claiming to be objective, meritocratic, and color blind in its pursuit of equal educational opportunities for all students, CRT points to how in practice, higher education adopts practices, norms, and policies that clearly inhibit the success of Latinas/os and other students of color. CRT argues that higher education in the United States cannot separate itself from the historical fact that its current identity and practices have been largely shaped by legal and sociopolitical forces that have continuously redefined concepts of race, ethnicity, national origin, language, class, and justice.

CRT provides a way of seeing and naming the contradictory ways in which higher education institutions operate. Although colleges clearly provide economic, social, political, and other benefits to the small trickle of Latina/o college graduates who can navigate them successfully, these postsecondary institutions also exercise a significant degree of oppression by sustaining a campus culture and climate that marginalizes, devalues, and silences these students.

The disparity in Latina/o student enrollments between 2- and 4-year institutions, their low transfer rates to 4-year universities, and their equally dismal retention and graduation rates at 4-year campuses illustrate the chronically persistent racial stratification of higher education in the United States. The "overrepresentation" of Latina/o students in the 2-year colleges, and their continuing underrepresentation in 4-year colleges, when viewed through a CRT framework, clearly represent the effects of the continuing manipulation of self-serving notions of racial neutrality and meritocracy by higher education institutions. A CRT analysis suggests that colleges and universities adopt concepts of alleged racial blindness in their daily norms and practices along with alleged meritocratic measures of academic potential and success to purposely maintain a racially segregated educational environment. In fact, one can argue that one of the major reasons for the disproportionate representation of Latinas/os in 2-year versus 4-year institutions, besides academic tracking and ineffective counseling, is because of the insistence of using standardized admissions exams. Despite decades of research by prominent scholars (see also Astin, 1982, 1993; Duran, 1983; Oseguera, 2004) that clearly show the lack of predictive value of standardized admissions exams for students of color, most 4-year institutions

continue to insist on using these measures as admissions screening devices, in contrast to 2-year institutions that seldom, if ever, require these exams. In fact, 4-year campuses insist on using standardized admissions exams even though the testing services that create and administer these exams have consistently warned them about the limited use of these measures.

In our analysis of retention efforts designed to increase the graduation of Latina/o college students, we discovered that students have been implementing their own successful retention programs since the late 1960s—many without the official sanction or support from campus administrations. Yet we are hard-pressed to find examples of institutions that even bothered to inquire about, let alone replicate, the components of these successful retention efforts that students have been adopting. However, when viewed through a CRT framework, it should not strike us as counterintuitive that centering students' experiential knowledge within their educational experience should lead to their academic success. The challenge is in trying to persuade higher education institutions that this is an example of the types of race-conscious practices that are necessary for the success of Latina/o college students. In fact, within the current sociopolitical climate of anti-affirmative action, anti-immigration, and xenophobia, we have seen college administrators pursue a policy of retrenchment when it comes to recognizing the salience of race/ethnicity in education and the impact of racism on their campus.

Our analysis of the data through a CRT framework allows us to identify some of the racialized barriers that impede the success of Latina/o college students. Our review of these data suggest that despite an official end to de jure racial segregation, higher education continues to reflect a state of de facto racial segregation for Latina/o college students. Latina/o college students are not only concentrated in institutions considered to be of lesser prestige and with fewer resources but can expect to achieve lower levels of academic achievement—and social mobility—as a result of attending these types of institutions.

CRT suggests that if 4-year institutions were truly committed to creating equitable educational outcomes for students of color, they would not insist on adopting these practices that they claim to be racially neutral, unbiased, and represent genuine academic achievement and potential. A CRT analysis suggests that perhaps one of the reasons why 4-year institutions insist on adopting these types of tools may be related to their disinterest in seeing a greater representation of Latina/os on their campuses out of fear that they will enroll students perceived as academically unprepared and unmotivated—students who they feel would be better served by the "lesser" community college. The claims by higher education that in serving the needs of Latina/o college students, it adopts so-called "objective," "meritocratic," and "race-neutral" practices clearly do not hold up when analyzing the educational inequities that we have reviewed in our data.

We argue that rather than accept the notion that race will become irrelevant as a means of achieving greater equity, higher education needs to adopt more explicit race-conscious practices to truly enhance the success and achievement of Latina/o college students. The data suggest that although there are many factors that may have influenced the lack of educational attainment and academic progress for Latina/o college students, most of the responsibility lies on the racialized structures, policies, and practices that guide higher education.

Unfortunately, higher education has embraced the meritocratic illusion that it has been, is, and will remain objective and color blind, but we believe that its assertions of neutrality serve to maintain existing race, class, sexual, and gender privileges while clearly devaluing and marginalizing Latina/o college students.

Critical race theory proposes a contextual analysis of educational policies and practices. Our contextual analysis of the educational inequities faced by Latina/o college students points to a continuing lack of attention to how race and racism in higher education influences their educational success and achievement.

Notes

1. These data were gathered from the Higher Education Research Institute's extensive trends file available at UCLA.

2. Remedial or developmental education at 2-and 4-year institutions focuses on the training of those students who enter college underprepared to handle college-level work. For purposes of this article, we will refer to these practices as remedial, recognizing that the dominant discourses and bodies of research are increasingly using the term *developmental education* to refer to such practices and programs.

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