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Caring or Capitalizing?

How HSIs Leverage Title V Funds

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Responding to growing awareness of racial-ethnic injustices and social inequities, this study investigates how Hispanic Serving Institutions' (HSIs) Title V grant activities prioritize Latinx students, guided by two questions:

1. How do Title V grant abstracts vary relative to their Latinx-focused language and program activities?

2. How do HSIs engage with servingness in their Title V abstracts?

Findings:

- Many grant recipients were opportunistic, referencing the Latinx population, while failing to dedicate any program activities to serving them effectively.

- Some grant recipients dedicated at least one of their program activities to Latinx students and at least one program activity to generic purposes.

- About a quarter of institutions referenced servingness literature in their abstracts, but, among them, few included Latinx-centered program activities.

Policy Recommendations:

- Narrow Title V criteria to mandate Latinx-centered program activities and outcome measures.

- Impose these criteria as minimum requirements for Title V consideration.

- Collaborate with HSI experts to create a servingness rubric to score Title V applications.

- Modify Title V Competitive Preference Priorities to encourage Latinx-focused program activities.

- Provide HSI practitioners with tools, resources, and professional development for greater Latinx student support.

- Encourage HSI practitioners to implement Latinx-focused practices in equity-focused funding applications including Title V and beyond.

This study underscores the need for HSIs to prioritize Latinx students in their Title V grant programs, recognizing their unique strengths and needs. By refining Title V criteria and raising institutional awareness of servingness principles, policymakers and HSI practitioners can contribute to a more equitable higher education landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

The Latinx population in the U.S. has a long and nuanced history, one that experienced large waves of immigration in the 1980s and 1990s, accounting for over half of the nation's overall population growth between 2000 and 2014 (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). Advocates celebrated an important victory for this community when the federal government introduced Hispanic Serving Institutions[1] (HSIs) into legislation in 1992 (Mendez et al., 2015), falling under the umbrella of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), which houses Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), among others.

MSIs play an important role in higher education, educating a large majority of historically marginalized students. Yet, MSIs are distinct from one another in that HSIs are defined by their student enrollments, while HBCUs and TCUs are instead defined by their historical mission to serve a given student group (NASEM, 2018; Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón-Galdeano, 2015). HSIs are those institutions whose Latinx enrollment reaches at least 25%. Thus, while HBCUs and TCUs remain considerably small and fixed in number[2] (105 and 35, respectively), HSIs make up the largest of all MSI categories, nearly tripling in size "from 189 institutions in 1994-95 to 571 in 2021–22" (Arroyo & Santiago, 2023).

> According to the **HIGHER EDUCATION ACT (HEA)**, HSIs are degree-granting, public or private not-for-profit institutions of higher education enrolling 25% or more Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Institutions must also enroll at least 50% Pell-eligible students and demonstrate lower student expenditures than like institutions.

A distinct body of literature has since emerged, focusing on understanding HSIs within U.S. higher education. Scholars note that HSIs are not obligated to demonstrate support for their Latinx students beyond enrollment (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Núñez et al., 2015; Santiago, 2006). In fact, most HSIs reach their status simply because they are situated in states with growing Latinx populations, rather than because of concerted efforts by the institutions themselves (Garcia et al., 2019). Researchers therefore take issue with the notion that HSIs are referred to as Hispanic serving when the majority would be more appropriately referred to as Hispanic *enrolling* institutions (Núñez, et al., 2015). Out of this body of research came the concept of "servingness," going beyond the enrolling versus serving debate and asking what it means to serve Latinx students, noting that there is no singular way to enact servingness (Garcia et al., 2019).

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[1] In line with prior research (e.g. Garcia, Nunez, & Sansone, 2019), we use Latinx to refer to students identifying as Latina/e/o/x/@ or Hispanic, per the limited categories made available via data collection sources such as the Census and IPEDS.

[2] The number of HBCUs and TCUs typically stays the same but is subject to change when things like institutional closures or mergers occur.

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Servingness literature occupies an important space in higher education equity literature, drawing attention to the historical marginalization of Latinx students (Aguilar-Smith, 2021, 2022; Contreras et al., 2008; Laden, 2004; Santiago, 2006; Santiago, 2007; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). One mechanism by which HSIs can enact servingness is through the Department of Education's Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions Program (Title V). Title V under the Higher Education Act (HEA) is a competitive HSI-only grant competition, intended to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Latinx students (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Title V funds have the potential to benefit Latinx students. Such program activities have included expanded cultural competency development opportunities, additional course formats to improve access, internship opportunities to advance job placement after graduation, and mechanisms to decrease time-to-degree, to name a few (Arroyo & Santiago, 2023). Yet, many Title V programs capitalize solely on institutional demographics of Latinx students to qualify for the funds, rather than striving to address inequities and serve Latinx students in targeted and intentional ways (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). We see this reflected at numerous HSIs. For example, one HSI president, whose identity remained private, stated that Latinx students receive residual impacts of Title V grants, underscoring how HSIs use racialized grant funding to further institutional needs above those of its Latinx students (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Santiago, 2007).

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CURRENT STUDY

Since 2016, there has been a major uptick in conversations addressing race and equity within higher education and beyond. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) populations, drawing public attention to the systemic disparities that manifest within and between virtually all sectors (Braimah et al., 2022). Around the same time, the murder of George Floyd, which built on countless other instances of racialized police brutality,[3] ignited global protests, spurring further conversations about race and racism in the U.S. (Toraif et al., 2023). At colleges and universities, these conversations sparked student action and inspired conversations on campus nationwide.

Considering these events, relevant shifts in conversation, and the increase in attention towards HSIs, we assess if and how HSIs targeted their use of 2022 Title V grant funds towards their Latinx students – 6 years beyond the most recent Title V competition included in Vargas & Villa-Palomino's 2019 analysis. We therefore investigate the ways in which HSIs use targeted language throughout their Title V abstracts relative to the stated uses of grant funds. We sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do Title V grant abstracts vary relative to their Latinx-focused language and program activities?

2. How do HSIs engage with servingness in their Title V abstracts?

WHAT IS TITLE V?

Title V is a competitive grant program that dedicates its funds towards supporting HSIs. The program aims to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for Latinx students by offering support for academic programs, services, and infrastructure at HSIs.

WHAT IS SERVINGNESS?

Servingness is a multidimensional concept addressing what it means to serve Latinx students. It refers to an institution's commitment and capacity to meet the unique needs and support the academic and personal success of Latinx students, often through mechanisms such as tailored programs, resources, and services.

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[3] Use the Know Their Names interactive to learn the stories of some of the many victims of racialized police violence in the U.S.

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RESEARCH APPROACH

Institutions seeking out Title V funding must first apply for designation as an HSI, recognizing their HSI status. Using the Department of Education's Eligibility Matrix,[4] institutions can see if they are pre-determined as "eligible institutions."[5] If eligible,they can download a Letter of Eligibility to include with their application. Otherwise, institutions that meet the enrollment criterion can apply for a waiver.[6] Once an institution has received their Letter of Eligibility, they can apply for the Title V grant.

Title V applicants submit one-page abstracts describing intended funding usage. The Department of Education makes the winning abstracts publicly available. Although prior years included cooperative development grants partnering HSIs and non-HSIs, there were no cooperative development grants included in 2022, excluding these grants from our sample. Additionally, while Puerto Rican HSIs are an important piece of the HSI conversation, their geographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts are unique to the island, varying significantly from those HSIs on the continental U.S. (Nuñez et al., 2015; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). Thus, the authors excluded HSIs in Puerto Rico from the analysis.

Our final sample included 70 HSI Title V 2022 grantee abstracts. Using Taguette, a qualitative analysis software, we analyzed the language used in each abstract relating to Latinx students and Title V program activities. We also used the 2022 Eligibility Matrix and data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to gather information about the institutional characteristics of the HSIs in our study.

Initially, we coded keywords relating to HSI status (Hispanic, Latinx, Hispanic Serving Institution, low-income, equity, underrepresented, underserved, minority/ies/ized) within the abstracts. We then assessed the abstracts in more detail, looking for context around these terms to better understand the various ways that they were being used and whether and how the funds were being targeted. Using Excel, we then coded and categorized each abstract based on how the language used pertained to serving Latinx students, creating indicators for various areas of interest. These included: Hispanic/Latinx language, equity language, program beneficiaries, outcomes measures, and servingness language. The second author reviewed and commented on the first author's initial analysis. We discussed the findings and the best ways to conceptualize terms and categorize institutions throughout the analysis.

Hispanic or Latinx language referred to abstracts explicitly mentioning the Latinx population. Equity language included those abstracts openly addressing or acknowledging equity and relevant issues or topics. The program beneficiaries and outcomes measure indicators both identified the relevant populations benefitting from the stated program activities and the populations whose outcomes were being measured, respectively. Populations included 1) all students or the institution as a

[4] The Department of Education's Eligibility Matrix identifies those institutions eligible for Title III and Title V Minority Serving Institutions funding programs under the HEA.

[5] Eligible institutions are 1) 25% Hispanic FTE undergraduate student enrollment, 2) 50% Pell-eligible student enrollment, and 3) low institutional expenditures relative to peer institutions (20 U.S. Code § 1101).

[6] Waivers allow institutions that meet the Hispanic enrollment criterion but not the other HSI criteria (e.g., Pell students, low expenditures) to be considered for HSI status.

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whole, 2) bundled students, which refers to language where Latinx and another targeted student group were identified (e.g., "Hispanic and low-income/minoritized/underserved students"), and 3) Latinx students, where only Latinx students were included. We also included an indicator called "servingness," identifying those abstracts that explicitly use any of the following three terms 1) servingness, 2) Gina Ann Garcia (a prominent HSI scholar leading servingness scholarship), or 3) Excelencia in Education (an HSI advocacy and research organization promoting servingness at HSIs) (Arroyo & Santigo, 2023; Garcia et al., 2019).

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FINDINGS

Program Activities

Nearly all the HSIs in our study used "Hispanic" or "Latinx" at least once, although we were surprised to find that one winning grant abstract omitted these terms entirely. Among those who did use Hispanic or Latinx, many only did so when referring to themselves as an HSI or in reference to their student body alone. Others went further, stating the proportion of Latinx students in the surrounding community. Some referred to Latinx students when identifying a target population or when describing the outcomes and measures they would use to assess their program's effectiveness. Most institutions did at least one or some of the above. Because Title V funds HSIs alone, these findings were expected, however, we needed to dig deeper.

Despite the many ways HSIs referred to Latinx students, fewer grantees used such language when describing their intended use of funds (e.g., program activities). The tension therein lies in the contrast between the volume of institutions recognizing Latinx students and/or their needs relative to the proportion of institutions with Latinx-focused program activities. We created four categories of grantees to describe funds usage:

MISSING: No mention of Hispanic or Latinx.

OPPORTUNISTIC: Mentions Hispanic or Latinx, dedicating all funds to general purposes.

COMBINED: Mentions Hispanic or Latinx, dedicating funds to both general purposes and Latinx (or bundled) students.

TARGETED: Mentions Hispanic or Latinx, dedicating all funds for specific student groups, focused on Latinx (or bundled) students.

Table 1. Characteristics of 2022 Grant Recipients by Program Activity Language

	Missing (n=1) Percent	n	Opportunistic (n=28) Percent	n	Combined (n=38) Percent	n	Targeted (n=3) Percent	n
Four Year	-	-	53.6	15	68.4	26	33.3	1
Two Year	100	1	46.4	13	31.6	12	66.7	2
Public	100	1	82.1	23	76.3	29	66.7	2
Private	-	-	17.9	5	23.7	9	33.3	1
Mean Latinx %	27.1	-	52.5	-	44.3	-	53.9	-
Servingness Language	0	0	14.3	4	21.1	8	33.3	1
TOTALS	0	1	40.0	28	54.3	38	4.3	3

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FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the institutional characteristics across our 4 program activity categories. We found that the largest category included Combined abstracts (54.3%) indicating that over half of our sample included at least one targeted program activity in their Title V abstracts. This was followed by Opportunistic abstracts, which made up 40% of our sample. Overall, a larger proportion of both Opportunistic and Combined abstracts were four-year as compared to two-year HSIs, and public as opposed to private institutions. Interestingly, Opportunistic HSIs demonstrated higher mean Latinx enrollments than did HSIs with Combined abstracts, although Targeted HSIs had the highest mean among all four groups. Nine (9) of the 13 HSIs that used servingness language had either combined or targeted abstracts. This makes sense given that HSIs addressing servingness would logically be those most aware of the importance of meeting Latinx student needs.

Missing

It was surprising that any of the abstracts would be void of any Hispanic or Latinx references altogether, but one grant winner fell under this category: HSI45. HSI45 is a public, 2-year institution with a Latinx enrollment of 27.1%.

> [Our program] is comprised of four interrelated components: 1) Greater efficiency and coordination around ... student support services 2) Model the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in order to increase the number of students who complete their degree in 150% (3 years) 3) Strengthen Data Infrastructure and Utilization in order to become a more data-informed institution, particularly around student engagement, retention, persistence, and completion, and 4) Provide Faculty and Staff professional development and training opportunities around holistic student advising, technology-enabled advising tools, and greater data literacy.

Latinx students attending HSIs with lower Latinx enrollments, such as HSI45, could benefit most from Latinx-specific program activities, since Latinx students may be less visible at these HSIs. It was therefore concerning to see that HSI45's program activities and the abstract at large omit references to those students on whose its Title V-eligibility depends. Much like some of the institutions described in prior Title V studies (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019), HSI45 capitalizes on funding mechanisms implemented to help Latinx students while overlooking them altogether, contributing to inequities Title V aims to correct.

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Opportunistic

Those institutions that employed targeted language, sometimes drawing attention to disparities Latinx students face, while failing to dedicate any funds to Latinx students are opportunistic in their pursuit of Title V. HSI70, a public 2-year HSI enrolling 42.3% Latinx students, for example, recognized that it exists in a "district comprised of a highly socioeconomically disadvantaged and underserved community…[where] 34.1% of residents are Hispanic, … 19.9% Hispanic residents are below the poverty line, … and a mere 4.9% of Hispanic adults have attained a bachelor's degree." Yet, none of its program activities are specific to Latinx students:

Onboarding to Degree Completion: Over the course of five years, [HSI70] will develop a Guided Pathways Center and implement a Guided Pathways Coaching process to guide student from first enrollment, persistence to degree completion, and baccalaureate transfer or career field entry. To accomplish this, [HSI70] will develop a set of onboarding activities for first time students (self-assessment tool, guided pathways resource toolkit, and individualized guided pathways plans). Industry professionals will collaborate with [HSI70] to engage students in focused career exploration within the fields of STEM, Health/Social Sciences, and Business/Technical Programming.

Customized Data Analytics for Improved Student Success: [HSI70] will implement a new Student Information System, correcting its current deficiencies in student data access and reliability. Capabilities for student planning, degree audit, customized data dashboards, and student ePortfolios will be developed, pilot tested, and implemented. Faculty, staff, and students will be provided training on use of the new SIS and its capabilities.

> *Those institutions that employed targeted language, sometimes drawing attention to disparities Latinx students face, while failing to dedicate any funds to Latinx students are opportunistic in their pursuit of Title V.*

While these may be worthwhile pursuits in non-racialized competitions, they do little to promote the interests of Latinx students. Those institutions that employed targeted language while failing to dedicate any funds to Latinx students are opportunistic in their pursuit of Title V. For example, HSI36's abstract states that the "project will serve Hispanic and other low-income students in all majors (with the exception of STEM majors) from their first year to graduation." Yet, it follows with entirely generic program activities:

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[HSI36] will establish a peer-to-peer support program, professional development for faculty and staff, an industry advisory committee, an internship program, student centered career development with two pathways (credit bearing and non-credit bearing), coordinated career support, a career readiness framework, a formalized system of high-quality data collection, and the technology infrastructure to deliver flexible (hybrid) learning.

Moreover, HSI36 includes many outcomes measures (e.g., "100 students will have earned a career readiness certificate, and 5% of all students will participate in credit-bearing courses each year") relative to the rest of our sample, but none measure Latinx student outcomes.

In line with prior research (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Contreras et al., 2008; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019), many HSIs use their status as MSIs to capitalize on racialized funding mechanisms (e.g., Title V) while disregarding the students they need to enroll to be Title V-eligible. These institutions use racialized language, making equity and servingness salient in a performative manner to win the funds, but do not use the funds for Latinx student support. Given the historical marginalization of Latinx students in higher education, using the funds in this way can exacerbate the inequities Title V seeks to address (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019).

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Combined

Combined abstracts include at least one program activity specified for Latinx or bundled students and at least one generic program activity. These abstracts were mixed in terms of the extent to which they could benefit Latinx students. While Latinx students were far from the focal point of some Combined abstracts, others demonstrated more promise.

Latinx students at HSI12, a private 4-year HSI enrolling 34% Latinx students, would benefit from just one of its program activities:

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[HSI12] will create support modules for 15 gateway and advanced STEM courses, and it will establish two new positions to provide real-time assistance to students: a quantitative and analytical skills specialist, housed in the existing academic resource center, to provide personalized and group tutoring to students in any major; and an academic success coach-advisor providing holistic student support including career guidance and preparation to low-income students in any major.

[HSI12] proposes to expand opportunities for high-impact undergraduate research by creating a vibrant new faculty research fellowship program involving students and peer mentors. This faculty research program will be accelerated with new laboratory equipment and supplies, and it will be sustained with a new research/internship endowment targeting Hispanic and low-income participation... [HSI12] also proposes to secure new degree auditing and document management systems, which will save staff time, streamline the transfer of students from the many HSI community colleges in the area, and reduce administrative costs, thereby increasing financial sustainability.

The only component of HSI12's abstract benefitting Latinx students reflects a common practice that emerged among Title V grant winners: the use of bundled language (e.g., "Hispanic and low-income participation"). While the activities are not exclusive to Latinx students, bundled program activities still highlight Latinx students, contributing to more equitable higher education institutions. Thus, they are a step above Opportunistic Title V programs. Still, abstracts using bundled language were not as strong as those Combined abstracts with at least one Latinx-*exclusive* program activity, like HSI14, a public 2-year HSI with 34.6% Latinx students:

The following proven and promising strategies will yield project goals:
- Create Center for Hispanic Culture,
- Create community outreach programs,
- Provide real-world learning equipment,
- Develop articulation agreements,
- Increase proactive advising techniques,
- Increase work-based learning supports,
- Provide additional mental health services,
- Develop virtual New Student Orientation.

Funding for these strategies is needed to improve engagement, belonging, and outcomes for students.

Latinx students would benefit from a Center for Hispanic Culture, but all the remaining activities at HSI14 were generic. HSI14 framed all its outcomes measures around improving Latinx enrollment, retention, and graduation, despite its largely generic program activities. The above are two of the many examples of HSIs using targeted language while simultaneously overlooking Latinx students in program implementation.

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Although they may offer some benefits to Latinx students, these abstracts do not reach their full servingness potential.

On the other hand, we also found Combined institutions that used funds more effectively. Take HSI19 (private 4-year; 63.2% Latinx), for example:

> **Strategy #1:** *Connection & Purpose.* [HSI19] will equip students to make informed decisions about their educational and career pathways from entry through to completion and career launch. Career-relevant learning, exploration and discovery through courses and work-based experiences will benefit Hispanic students.
> **Strategy #2:** *Support & Belonging.* [HSI19] will improve *"servingness"* to Hispanic and low-income students through improved wrap-around, asset-based supports that foster belonging. Proven-effective case management strategies attuned to Hispanic students' strengths and needs will ensure that students persist and complete. **Strategy #3:** *Community & Ecosystem.* [HSI19] will catalyze an institutional culture shift to advance its identity as a Hispanic-*Serving* Institution. Professional development will increase faculty and staff cultural-competence, community relations, and data-driven decision-making capacity.

Strategy 1 states that it benefits Latinx students but does not make clear how it would benefit them or specifically meet their needs, reflecting a recurring ambiguity evident during the coding process. In fact, we argue that the specific components of Strategy 1 ("career-relevant learning, exploration and discovery through courses and work-based experiences") would benefit all students about equally. That said, Strategies 2 and 3 were stronger and Latinx-focused. Strategy 2 underscores an asset-based approach and indicates strategies "attuned to Hispanic students' strengths and needs." Similarly, Strategy 3 states the intent to center institutional culture around HSI identity, using some funds to establish "an Office of Hispanic-Serving Initiatives." These types of program activities can contribute towards a servingness-focused environment, making HSI identity more salient within the institution.

Three institutions within the same category varied significantly in how likely they were to fulfill Title V's intended purpose, "to expand educational opportunities for and improve the attainment of Hispanic students," underscoring the complexities and challenges of assessing Title V grants." (U.S. Department of Education, 2023; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019).

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Targeted

Out of the 70 abstracts in our study, just three directed all their program activities towards specific student groups, and two were Latinx-*centered*. Two Targeted abstracts were submitted by public 2-year HSIs and the third was by a public 4-year HSI. HSI41 (public 2-year) enrolled 33% Latinx students:

> The activities ... include the construction of Pathway Centers at all three campuses, the addition of success/career coaches and expansion of tutoring programs to assist underserved students. [HSI41] will enhance its new student "6 x 6" initiative by revamping orientation and the bridge program to include more families and Spanish language sessions. Underserved students will be presented with a full array of academic, wraparound and career services through the programs of this Title V project. Further, [HSI41] will institute a series of faculty and staff development aimed at improving the campus culture of belonging through asset-based mindset training.

HSI41 targeted all its Title V program activities around meeting the needs of its underserved students. Although it does not draw attention to Latinx students, they would be the most likely to benefit from the enhancements aimed at Spanish-language sessions. The attention to greater inclusion of families additionally stands out given the important role that *familismo*, referring to family belonging, loyalty, and engagement as a central value (Arroyo & Santiago, 2023; Santiago-Rivera, 2003), plays in shaping the lives of the Latinx community. A total of 10 other abstracts in our sample included at least one family-centered program activity.

We expect that the additional services and asset-based faculty and staff training for underserved students would also benefit Latinx students. Although HSI41 offers one of the only Targeted abstracts in our sample, the program activities would be stronger with additional detail explaining how the services would address underserved students. Still, the way HSI41 centers its program activities around underserved students stands out among our sample and, we believe, would make important contributions towards servingness and creating a more equitable HSI, as evidenced in prior Title V research (Arroyo & Santiago, 2023).

HSI27's Latinx enrollment was considerably higher than that of HSI41, at 59.8%.

> [HSI27's] program will provide low-income Hispanic participants with direct aid, service referrals, and critical job placements to address their housing and food insecurities... It will connect them with integral support that include mental health, career, completion, and transfer services. Additionally, the Program will create an inclusive, compassionate, and welcoming environment for participants by providing several ways for faculty, staff, and administrators to participate in professional development that will foster approaches to services that are trauma-informed, culturally-responsive, and asset-based.

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HSI27's was one of two entirely Latinx-centered abstracts in our sample, addressing student needs through job placement, mental health, and transfer services. Aspects such as the "trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and asset-based" professional development also elevate Latinx students, preparing faculty and administrators to approach diverse students effectively (Garcia et al., 2019).

Interestingly, the program activity language focused on providing for "low-income Hispanic" students, although the surrounding language was bundled, referring to "Latinx and low-income students" throughout. Each of HSI27's program goals were well-framed and centered on supporting the institution's Latinx *and* low-income students in the short- and long-term. This calls into question whether the program would focus on Latinx students *who are also low-income* or both low-income *and* Latinx students.

HSI53 was a private 4-year HSI comprised of 68.8% Latinx students. This HSI was unique in that, although two of its three program activities were Latinx-focused, all activities would be "guided by educators and administrators of Latinx heritage to strengthen students' database of role models." Thus, we argue that all activities for this grant would likely show the strongest benefits for Latinx students since working with educators from matched backgrounds can improve student outcomes (Llamas et al., 2021).
HSI53 was also one of the 13 HSIs in our study that referenced servingness literature, stating, "As Gina Ann Garcia (2019) has noted, HSIs ought to be evaluated on their performance across two dimensions: (1) the academic outcomes accrued by students as they relate to subsequent academic and occupational opportunities; and (2) the extent to which Hispanic students experience a stronger connection to their cultures." This servingness-informed abstract was one of the strongest in the sample.

We were not surprised to see that two of the three strongest abstracts came from HSIs enrolling over 50% Latinx students (HSI27 & HSI53).

HSI41, HSI27, and HSI53 make use of their Title V funds in ways that would contribute to each institution's ability to effectively serve Latinx students. In each instance, all program activities demonstrate a capacity to benefit Latinx students and promote servingness at HSIs. We were not surprised to see that two of the three strongest abstracts came from HSIs enrolling over 50% Latinx students (HSI27 & HSI53).

Servingness

At the forefront of HSI research are prominent HSI scholars, advocacy groups, and practitioners. To better understand if and how HSIs were engaging with that literature, we coded as "servingness" those abstracts that referenced servingness, Gina Ann Garcia, or Excelencia in Education. Mentioning these would indicate an institutional awareness of the prominent work in the area. Although it was a minority of institutions, a noteworthy 13 (23%) of the 70 Title V abstracts in our analysis referenced servingness. Despite the ways in which servingness literature underscores the need for HSIs to serve Latinx students, however, four of the abstracts that referenced it did not include any targeted uses of funds in their listed program activities (See Table 1).

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DISCUSSION & RECOMENDATIONS

Discussion

The Latinx college student population grew by 33% from 2010 (2.7 mil) to 2021 (3.7 mil) (NCES, 2022). Considering recent history, the growth in attention to race and ethnicity, the varied needs of Latinx students, and the role of Title V grants in positioning HSIs to serve Latinx students, we assessed the winning abstracts of the 2022 Title V Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions grant competition. Our findings parallel prior studies, indicating that a significant portion of Title V winners do not center Latinx students, and instead use a race-evasive approach in their pursuit of funding (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). We did find that more than half (41) of our sample included at least one targeted program activity, but many (29) institutions remained that benefitted from Latinx-focused funding without dedicating any of those funds to Latinx students.

Recent Title V literature demonstrates that Title V funds can benefit Latinx students when acknowledging their unique and varied needs, interests, and assets. Many examples in this analysis, while not always Latinx-focused, demonstrate practices beneficial to Latinx students, such as new internship opportunities, bilingual tutoring and advising programs, and expanded dual credit options (Arroyo & Santiago, 2023). Similarly, our sample institutions commonly included program activities centering on career development, Spanish-language programs, and wider access to various course options. While we echo prior calls for Latinx-centered Title V grant activities, we recognize that program activities may still benefit Latinx students without explicitly referencing them.

Still, we contend that institutions should go a step further, centering Title V activities around Latinx students, acknowledging their unique needs and contributions to their campuses and communities. Using language to shape intentional, Latinx-focused grant activities will enhance visibility, underscoring the value of Latinx students and contributing to servingness at HSIs.

> *Our findings parallel prior studies, indicating that a significant portion of Title V winners do not center Latinx students, and instead use a race-evasive approach in their pursuit of funding (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019).*

Title V Applicants should use intentional language and ensure funds contribute to a more equitable higher education landscape by maximizing the benefit of this racialized funding for the Latinx students it was created to support. Thus, our recommendations for policymakers are as follows:

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Recommendations

If the Department of Education leads by requiring HSIs to prioritize Latinx students in their Title V program activities, institutions will need to invest in understanding and supporting them.

Policy Recommendations:
The Department of Education should...

RECOMMENDATION 1: Narrow Title V criteria, mandating HSIs to include:
- Latinx-centered program activities that consider the varied strengths and needs of Latinx students.
- Latinx-centered outcomes measures illustrating program impact on Latinx students.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Create a servingness rubric in collaboration with HSI experts by which to evaluate all Title V applications.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Modify Title V Competitive Preference Priorities, tailoring them to encourage Latinx-focused program activities and servingness at HSIs.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Expand Title V funding, incentivizing institutions to serve Latinx students with well-supported program activities.

Institutional Recommendations
HSI practitioners can have an impact on their campuses; their institution-level decisions shape the experiences of Latinx students' lived experiences. To empower these professionals:

RECOMMENDATION 5: Ensure their institution's Title V application aligns with the above criteria.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Learn how to effectively serve Latinx students using available to tools and resources (e.g., best practices literature, relevant webinars, professional development opportunities)

RECOMMENDATION 7: Implement Latinx-focused practices when applying for HSI- and other equity-focused funding opportunities to encourage HSI servingness within the scope of Title V and beyond.

FUTURE RESEARCH

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Despite important findings, our study faces several limitations, prompting further inquiry. Because our access was limited to publicly available abstracts, we could only assess Title V grant winners. Future research should compare Latinx-centeredness between Title V recipients and non-recipients. This may offer insight into whether the selection process favors race-evasive applications as prior research suggests (Aguilar-Smith, 2021). Additional study is necessary uncover how Puerto Rican HSIs engage in servingness given the island's distinct geographic, linguistic, and demographic contexts (Nuñez et al., 2015; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). This work would be further enriched by expanding the dataset to include more years, revealing trends in HSI grant applications over time.

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CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the 2022 Title V Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions grant competition highlights the potentially pivotal role of Title V grants in reshaping U.S. higher education to better serve Latinx students. Despite focusing on grant applications from the 2022 grant competition—several years after the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the George Floyd protests—our results paralleled previous research indicating that Title V grant winners tend not to focus their grant activities towards benefitting Latinx students. That said, there remain glimpses of promise in some of the innovative program activities introduced by a few grant winners. To enhance the impact of Title V grants, we urge policymakers to mandate Latinx-centered program activities and outcome measures, promoting collaboration between policymakers and HSI experts, modifying Title V priorities, and expanding funding incentives. Empowering HSI practitioners with resources and tools is crucial to expanding HSI servingness. Overall, our institutions will never truly change until we become intentional and targeted about the language we use to visualize transformation and servingness for Latinx students in general and at HSIs specifically.

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