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By

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**More than “Just an Advisor:” Experiences and Perceptions of Student Support Staff at  
Hispanic-Serving Institutions of Higher Education**

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**More than “Just an Advisor:” Experiences and Perceptions of Student Support Staff at  
Hispanic-Serving Institutions of Higher Education**

**By**

**Margaret Grace Garry**

**Treatise**

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## **Dedication**

To the students who trusted me enough to tell me they didn't feel served at their HSIs, and to the HSI educators who are working hard every day to make sure that changes. Thank you for trusting me with your truth.

## Acknowledgements

I'm grateful for my amazing spouse Stephen Hawkins. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for making me take breaks. Thank you for making me laugh. Thank you for loving me unconditionally.

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And finally, thanks to you, if you're reading this. I wrote it so hopefully someone would read it and learn something, find something to cite in the process of building a new idea, or start to think about things they could do at their own campus to serve students. I'm glad you're here!

## **Abstract**

### **More Than “Just an Advisor:” Experiences and Perceptions of Student Support Staff at Hispanic-Serving Institutions of Higher Education**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2023

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Hispanic-serving institutions of higher education (HSIs) were created by the United States government in 1992 to offer special grant funding to colleges and universities that met certain demographic thresholds (S.1150 - 102nd Congress (1991-1992), 1992). Today, a diverse group of over 500 colleges and universities carry this designation, including public and private institutions, institutions with a range of religious affiliations, and institutions ranging from community colleges, to small liberal arts colleges, to Carnegie-classified R1 research universities. Many of these institutions originated as predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and took on the HSI designation as demographics changed at the institutions and in the communities they serve (Garcia, 2017).

Significant research exists describing the experiences of students and faculty at these institutions (Crisp et al., 2015; Ek et al., 2010; Garcia, 2017; Gonzales, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2013; Hurtado et al., 2011; Musoba et al., 2013; Preuss et al., 2020; Venegas, 2015). This research demonstrates how students and faculty alike must operate in HSIs as white-dominated spaces. This leads to challenges with student identity and belongingness (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2011; Musoba et al., 2013; Yosso et al., 2009) and with faculty being able to

pursue research and pedagogical strategies outside of white-normative practice (B.A.L., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales et al., 2013; Gusa, 2010). Less is known about the experiences and perceptions of the staff who work directly with students, and much of what we do know focuses on how white, middle class staff members can support students whose backgrounds are different from their own (Preuss et al., 2020; Tevis & Britton, 2020; Zenner & Squire, 2020).

This treatise seeks to contribute to existing knowledge of these institutions and the people who learn and work there by examining the experiences and perceptions of academic advisors, student affairs professionals, and related staff members who directly support students. Through document review and interviews, it shows how a case institution communicates its HSI identity to staff, how staff perceive their work, and how participants with different demographic backgrounds describe servingness (Garcia et al., 2019) at the case institution. This treatise paints a picture of a diverse group of staff with strong ideas about both student service and their own roles within the institution. They discuss challenges related to complex organizational systems, struggles to do meaningful work while earning low salaries, excitement about recent changes in institutional leadership, and the ways that the institution succeeds and strives as an HSI. By learning more about the contributions and voices of these colleagues, researchers and practitioners gain new knowledge about how HSI systems operate, how they can grow, and the role that staff play in ensuring that students experience opportunities to grow academically and find belonging at institutions that are federally designated to serve them.

*Keywords: Hispanic-serving institutions, HSIs, student affairs, academic advisors, HSI grants, college and university staff, servingness, case study, organizational systems, structures for serving*



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) were first established by the Higher Education Act of 1992. This federal designation describes two- and four-year nonprofit institutions of higher education whose student bodies include at least 25% Hispanic undergraduate full-time enrollment. They must also enroll a significant number of students with financial need to receive the HSI designation. Institutions are granted the HSI designation by the United States Department of Education; as a result, they qualify for special grant-funding from a range of federal entities. Because institutions apply for this designation based on the demographics of their student body, many HSIs began as predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and take on the HSI designation following changes to student demographics. This differentiates these institutions from other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which were founded to serve specific communities of learners and originated with a mission dedicated to supporting those students. As a result, HSIs may experience shifts in their organizational needs and goals as student demographics evolve (Garcia, 2017; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).

In my own experience working closely with students at these institutions, I often heard from students expressing concerns that they didn't feel served at their HSI. Here is an example of how those concerns sound: "[This university] needs to be able to codify what it means to be a Hispanic and Latinx- serving institution, and enrollment is not the core definition of serving" (Castillo, 2018, para. 5). The sentiment in this student news editorial evokes a consistent concern facing a range of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs): Latinx or Hispanic students at these institutions report they do not feel served by institutions that carry federal designations



associated with serving them (Garcia, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2011; Musoba et al., 2013; Preuss et al., 2020; Venegas, 2015). The goal of this treatise is to explore this concern from the point of view of student affairs and related professional staff, including academic advisors. These colleagues are charged with serving students; however, there is a need for more research into their experiences (Llurda et al., 2014). I hope to explore their experiences as people who are both affected by institutional organizational structures and people who have a profound impact on the experiences and outcomes of their students.

This treatise will be divided into five chapters. This introduction will introduce the issue and provide some initial context and background. It will introduce a problem statement and describe the purpose of the study. It will provide some introductory background, introduce research questions, and briefly introduce the proposed methods, theoretical framework, and provide context for the scope and limitations of the treatise.

A second chapter will review literature on the subject. It will first examine a brief history of HSIs and their organizational structures. From there, it will review three theoretical frameworks and one epistemological outlook that have been used to help researchers evaluate HSIs within the last decade. The literature review moves on to explore how researchers can use these frameworks to further understand these institutions. It covers how external federal funding influences HSIs' operational choices. It then moves to explore how students, faculty, and staff experience their work and scholarship in these institutions.

A third chapter will address methods for a study exploring the experiences and perceptions of student support professionals at an HSI. It will reintroduce the problem statement, research questions, paradigm, and orientation. From there, it will connect each research question to data sources, describe the population and sample, and explore the instruments and protocols

that were used to collect data. The chapter will continue by providing information about how data was analyzed. It will describe limitations of the proposed study and how to account for them, and it will detail the proposed Institutional Review Board (IRB) process.

The fourth chapter will detail findings based on five themes addressing the three research questions. It will introduce the participants in the study and review how the document review and interviews contributed to the findings. A fifth chapter addresses limitations of the study, potential avenues for future research, and recommendations for leaders at HSIs, as well as state and federal policy makers. This treatise will also include appendices including information on proposed questions for participants and proposed start codes.

### **Background on the Issue**

Hispanic-serving institutions were first established as part of the 1992 Higher Education Act Amendments with the specific goal of distributing federal grant funds to nonprofit institutions of higher education with at least 25% undergraduate full-time enrollment of Hispanic students, plus a significant population of financially needy students (Higher Education Amendments, 1992). Because these institutions are defined by student demographics rather than an institutional mission focused on serving a specific group of learners, many of these institutions originated as predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and took on the designation as more Hispanic and Latinx students enrolled at those institutions. As a result, the phrase “Hispanic-enrolling institution” has been used to describe these institutions, especially in the contexts where students do not feel served (Garcia, 2017; Gasman, 2008). These institutions are affected by both internal and external structures, where internal structures might include things like institutional mission, student programming and services, and institutional efforts toward faculty, staff, and student diversity. External structures might include the community where the

institution is located, federal, state, and local legislation, or calls for grant proposals (Garcia et al., 2019; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015).

Hispanic and Latinx students and faculty at HSIs report that attending an institution federally designated to serve them does not guarantee that they will feel served. On the student side, students often report outcomes similar to their peers at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Hurtado et al., 2011). PWIs are described as a space where Hispanic or Latinx students may often experience microaggressions or worse (Yosso et al., 2009). A range of researchers looking at the HSI context specifically as well as at other kinds of institutions that experience changes in student demographics establish that students must be able to maintain their social identity as a member of their culture of origin while they take on the identity of a student at their institution of higher education (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Crisp et al., 2015; Musoba et al., 2013; Tevis & Britton, 2020).

This experience of having to navigate both a white-centric institutional culture and maintain a sense of cultural identity is also something that faculty must deal with at these institutions. Researchers describe the extra effort that Latinx faculty go through at these institutions to see their work recognized as they publish research and earn tenure (B.A.L., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales et al., 2013). Researchers describe this struggle as strongly influenced by white normative structures on campus, and encourage institutions to consider perspectives, ways of knowing, and scholarship outside of a white-normative paradigm when considering what it means to be a successful student or scholar (Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2015; Gusa, 2010).

Though staff are described in some of this research, relatively little research centers the experience of student affairs and related professional staff members at HSIs and how those experiences connect to student service. Most of the research I was able to find regarding staff,

both at HSIs and in general, focuses on how they either succeed or fail at serving students, rather than their lived experiences as institutional community members (Preuss et al., 2020; Tevis & Britton, 2020; Zenner & Squire, 2020). My study will look specifically at staff who support students directly, and while there is research covering these colleagues (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2015; Kuhn & Padak, 2008; Swecker et al., 2013; Zenner & Squire, 2020), there is not a great deal of research focused on their experience at HSIs. Research tells us a compelling story about the experiences of HSI students and faculty members. I am interested in how those themes carry over to staff, specifically staff who work closely with students to help them achieve their academic goals at these institutions.

## **Overview of Methods**

### **Problem Statement**

As the literature briefly described above and thoroughly explored later in this treatise shows, students and faculty alike often report that their Hispanic-serving institution experience does not serve them. Less is known about the experience of the staff who support students at these institutions. We know that staff members at HSIs work in a complex system. They may have some power to shape institutional policies or procedures. They are influenced by both internal institutional structures and external structures such as legislation or calls for grant proposals. They act as part of a system that can create both validating and racialized experiences for students. However, as a group, there is limited research into their experiences and how they work to foster student outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

To address the problem statement described above, I plan to conduct a case study of an HSI. To evaluate the case institution, I plan to address the following research questions:

1. How does the institution communicate its HSI identity to staff members?
2. How do staff perceive their experience working at this institution?
3. How do staff perceive HSI Servingness across different demographic backgrounds?

### **Exploration of Research Questions**

I explored these questions using qualitative methods and focus on a single institution to analyze these issues. Within the context of this institution, I identified a group of professionals who engage in regular work activities that directly support students. Data was collected using four methods:

- a review of documents, such as institutional mission statement, institutional statements on diversity, and information about HSI programming at the institution.
- a preliminary questionnaire designed to collect data about participant demographics, experience at the institution, and related topics.
- a semi-structured interview including both pre-determined questions and opportunities for each participant to elaborate on aspects of their own experience that might not be anticipated by the researcher.
- participant checks that allow participants to review transcripts of their interviews and provide clarification or corrections if needed.

Once data was collected, I coded transcripts using a mix of pre-determined codes and codes that were established as I reviewed the materials. Themes were identified from coded documents, and these themes were used to frame discussion of the research.

### **Research Paradigm and Conceptual Framework**

This study relies on a constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm. The constructivist and interpretivist paradigms incorporate qualitative or mixed methods to identify multiple values

and perspectives. They do not treat reality as singular or objective; rather, they focus on the subjective experiences of both the researcher and the research participants (Dean, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Mertens & Wilson, 2019). The methods section of this treatise will provide more in-depth information about these paradigms and respond to concerns about them that have been posed by critical theorists.

This treatise also relies on a multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding servingness developed by Garcia et al. (2019). This framework proposes that internal and external influences on institutions lead to the development of structures for serving. These structures for serving can lead to positive or negative outcomes for students. In Garcia et al.'s (2019) framework, staff members can be influenced by these structures, but they may also have some power to determine how those structures are developed and implemented. This treatise examines how the relationship between staff members and these structures for service affects their capacity to thrive in their institutional environment and in turn support students.

### **Definitions and Language**

In the process of developing this treatise, I use several specific terms which might require further clarification for the reader. The purpose of this section is to provide context for those terms and elaborate on their meaning to ensure clarity in later sections of this treatise.

- *Academic advisor*: a representative of an institution of higher education who assists college students with developing insight or making decisions about academic, social, or personal matters (Kuhn & Padak, 2008). These colleagues may be faculty or professional staff. They may be housed in Student Affairs or Academic Affairs units within an institution. Academic advisors interviewed for this treatise are professional staff, and

while some hold adjunct faculty roles, those are supplemental to their primary full time staff employment.

- *Enrollment-defined minority-serving institution (alternatively, demographically defined minority-serving institution)*: an institution of higher education that takes on a federal designation as minority-serving when undergraduate enrollment meets a certain demographic threshold. HSIs are one type of enrollment-defined/demographically defined MSI. These institutions differ from historically and culturally-defined MSIs such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) that were founded to serve specific communities of learners (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).
- *Hispanic*: a demographic term describing a broad range of people living in the United States with heritage or ethnic origins in the Spanish-speaking world. This term was first used widely in the 1980 United States census. Many people who are demographically included as Hispanic do not use the word to describe themselves. (Mora, 2014). The term Hispanic is used here when authors use it to describe their research and within the context of Hispanic-serving institutions. It is also used when participants use it to describe themselves.
- *Hispanic-serving institution (HSI)*: a term established by the Higher Education Act of 1992 that describes two- and four-year nonprofit institutions with at least 25% Hispanic undergraduate full-time enrollment and a significant number of students with financial need (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).
- *Latinx or Latine*: gender-neutral umbrella terms for people who self-identify as having ethnic, cultural, or historical connections to Spanish colonization and the indigenous

people of present-day Mexico, Central America, South America, and parts of the Caribbean. Gendered versions include Latino and Latina. (Garcia et al., 2019). Many people prefer a more individualized descriptor based in their own heritage or place of origin (Pontón & León-Carrión, 2009). These terms are used here when authors use them to describe their research. Latino and Latina are also used when participants use those terms to describe themselves.

- *Predominantly White Institution (PWI)*: an institution of higher education with a significant population of white faculty, staff, and students that is not designated as a minority serving institution. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Enrollment/demographically defined MSIs such as HSIs often originate as PWIs and maintain many of the same organizational and institutional characteristics after taking on their new designations (Ek et al., 2010; Hurtado et al., 2011).
- *Servingness*: an institution of higher education's capacity for service to Hispanic or Latino/a/x students. This understanding of service could be rooted in student outcomes, student experience on campus, the internal dimensions of the organization, and external influences on the institution (Garcia et al., 2019).
- *Structures for serving*: organizational structures, processes, priorities, and decisions that HSI leaders create or develop to serve Hispanic or Latinx students. These might include things like an institutional mission or values focused on serving these students, strategic plans, implementation of HSI grants, or engagement with the broader community. These structures can be harder to measure than outcomes or experiences, but they are observable (Garcia et al., 2019). Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) describe a Chicana/o Studies Department and an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) that provides financial



assistance and student services to low income and first-generation students as specific examples of structures that were put in place with the express purpose of supporting Latinx students at an HSI institution at the center of their research.

- *Student affairs professionals*: colleagues within an institution of higher education focused on enhancing student learning and personal development (American College Personnel Association, 2008). Because professionals focused on these goals may or may not be part of an organized Division of Student Affairs, a more general term such as student support professionals is often used in this treatise.
- *Whiteness*: a sociological and political power construct which allows white people to assert power over those who are not white. Whiteness ties American-ness to English and European cultural practices (including the English language) and racializes those who engage in those practices as white and minoritizes others as nonwhite (Gusa, 2010).

### **Positionality Statement**

Some literature detailed in this treatise involves the need for researchers studying HSIs to avoid what Hurtado (2015) and Núñez (2018) describe as “drive-by” research where researchers with limited experience in HSIs arrive at these campuses, conduct research, and leave without sharing potentially useful findings with the campus community. As a white person studying at the University of Texas, an institution which has recently become an HSI at the time of this writing, I recognize the need to contextualize my experience as a student and practitioner in these institutions. I was employed full time as a staff member at one of three HSIs from 2010 to 2022, including a private, Catholic liberal arts institution, a public emerging research university, and a community college. I also completed a master’s degree at an HSI prior to beginning this work experience. My observations and concern that led to this course of study are the direct result of

over a decade of both professional and educational experiences at multiple HSIs with a diverse range of institutional characteristics. While I did not grow up in any of the many communities that fall under the umbrellas of Latinx or Hispanic culture, I am a proud product of HSIs, and I would not be prepared for the research I undertake today without my experiences studying, teaching, and working as a student affairs and academic advising professional at these institutions. I look forward to applying my findings to continued work as a practitioner in these institutions and apply my learning to better supporting my HSI students and colleagues.

### **Summary**

As we see in this chapter, Hispanic-serving institutions have the power to have a profound impact on the lives of scholars and workers. Our understanding of these institutions is shaped by a body of literature that explores both the nature of these institutions and the experiences of the people who study and work there. There is also a strong body of research exploring the experiences of students and faculty at these institutions. While research exists describing the general experience of professional staff tasked with supporting students, less is known about how their perceptions of their work contribute to the student experience. This treatise addresses a study designed to learn more about these colleagues. I will next explore the existing literature surrounding these topics.

## Chapter 2: Background and Context

To better understand the current HSI landscape and the recent history surrounding these institutions, I reviewed literature on the subject with the goal of establishing background and context for this study. This chapter will examine three significant strands of literature relating to HSIs.

1. It will begin by providing a brief history of HSIs. It will examine their origins and growth since the designation was first established as part of the Higher Education Amendments of 1992.
2. From there, it will explore guidance for studying HSIs, including three recent, significant frameworks and one epistemological outlook that scholars have used to study these institutions.
3. With knowledge of the tools that researchers might use to better understand HSIs, we will then look at specific research at these institutions.

The third section covering research at these institutions covers a lot of ground, and so it is broken up into sub-sections. It begins by looking at how external funding affects these institutions and the choices that HSI leaders make when they allocate resources. Then, it reviews significant studies concerning three groups of people who study and work at these institutions: students, faculty, and staff. As we will see, there is a strong body of literature describing the experiences of students and faculty, but we have much to learn regarding the experiences of staff at these institutions. This section includes information regarding staff in general, but it also drills down a bit to explore literature focused specifically on academic advising, as these colleagues will be central to the proposed study. The review concludes by describing this need for further research and laying the foundation for the methodology section to be described in Chapter 3.

## **Methodology of Review**

Most articles in this review were found by searching four databases: ERIC, Educational Administration Abstracts, Education Source, and APA PsycInfo. Initial searches focused on articles including both the phrase “Hispanic-serving institution,” and a range of other topics, including faculty, staff, students, perceptions, environment, culture, governance, strategic planning, policy, and grants. I also reviewed the sources of several literature reviews found through these searches; some of the references from those reviews are also included in this paper. Much of the scholarship covering HSIs began with work in practitioner-focused journals and scholarly books. Hence, this treatise includes both the kinds of scholarly articles that are most often seen in this sort of literature review as well as those other sources. As a result of these searches, I noticed a lack of articles dealing specifically with the perceptions and experiences of staff at these institutions, so further searches were conducted for staff perceptions, beliefs, experiences, opinions, and related topics without the term “Hispanic-serving institution.” I also searched for specific types of university staff, such as “student affairs professionals,” “academic advisors,” and “counselors.”

## **History and Background of HSIs**

HSIs were established in the Higher Education Act of 1992, when the United States Congress directed the Secretary of Education to award grant funding to institutions that (1) are nonprofit institutions of higher education (2) have a full-time enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic Students, and (3) have a significant population of needy students. This designation was created to distribute US Department of Education grant funding to these institutions (Higher Education Amendments, 1992). HSIs must regularly submit documentation that they meet these qualifications and can lose their designation, as well as grant eligibility, as Hispanic and/or needy

student populations decrease below the required thresholds (Contreras et al., 2008). Laden (2001) describes four factors that shaped the early growth of these institutions, including (1) the Civil Rights Movement leading to greater diversity in higher education, (2) increased Hispanic immigration to the United States in the last three decades of the twentieth century, (3) Hispanic demographic shifts, both in urban centers and in rural areas, and (4) the location of HSIs in communities with significant Hispanic populations.

This diverse and growing group of over 500 institutions of higher education across the United States (inclusive of territories such as Puerto Rico) ranges in size and scope from community colleges to small private liberal arts institutions to large public research universities (Núñez, 2018). A 2015 study showed about one third of four-year HSIs were located in Puerto Rico, another third were located in the American South (including Texas), about 20% were located in the American West, and fewer than 10% of HSIs were located in the Eastern US, the Midwest, or the Rocky Mountains (Núñez & Elizondo, 2015).

As an example of the diversity of HSIs, one case study of institutions seeking to become HSIs in the Chicago metro area described five institutions: four were private and one was public, three held the master's-granting Carnegie classification, one was a bachelor's/associate's college, and one was a doctoral granting institution. Of these institutions, one was founded to serve Chicago's English-Spanish bilingual community, and one was affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (Garcia, 2019).

Because HSIs are defined by the demographics of their students rather than a founding mission to serve a community, institutions may describe themselves differently than other types of minority-serving institutions. Contreras et al. (2008) reviewed the mission statements of ten HSIs and did not find the phrase "Hispanic-serving institution," in any of the mission statements.

The authors discuss how these institutions often express a commitment to more general topics of diversity or multiculturalism in their mission statements. Contreras et al. (2008) compare mission statements at a Historically Black University, a women's college, and a Tribal College, all of which speak to the institutions' commitment to cultivating Black students, women, and students from the Tribal community respectively. Of the institutions that Contreras et al. reviewed, most included a statement about being an HSI somewhere on the institutional web site, usually connected to a page describing HSI grant initiatives. Rather than putting their HSI status at the forefront of their identity, the HSIs in the study connect their HSI identity to their grant portfolio. The authors conclude that HSIs are less likely to publicize their HSI status than some other types of minority-serving institutions. In a more recent study, researchers interviewed HSI students about how their institution serves Hispanic or Latinx at two institutions in the Midwest and found that students minimized conversations about race and instead talked about how their HSI accepts and serves all students. Students discussed general resources such as financial aid or athletic programming as indicators of service to Latinx or Hispanic students and downplayed topics such as diverse ways of knowing (Cristobal & Garcia, 2022).

Though there are HSIs founded to serve Hispanic or Latinx students, many HSIs originate as predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and become HSIs following demographic changes in their communities. This places HSIs in a different position from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), both of which consist of institutions founded to support specific communities of learners (Laden, 2001; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). As a result, HSIs can range from those founded with the intention of serving Hispanic or Latinx students to majority white institutions that enroll a plurality of Hispanic or Latinx students. These environments can range

from “congenial” to “intimidating” for Latinx students (Gasman, 2008, p. 24). Some of the ways in which students might experience these conditions are described in a later section of this chapter.

Garcia (2019) describes an institution founded to serve the Spanish-speaking population of Chicago as part of a case study of institutions seeking HSI designations:

Its historical mission of being a bilingual institution and serving the Latinx community in Chicago exemplify it as Latinx-serving, regardless of federal designation. In other words, [this institution] will continue to enroll and educate Latinx students, with or without the designation, as these values are engrained in its mission (Garcia, 2019, p. 41).

The institution Garcia (2019) describes, which sought the HSI designation for the first time in 2019, stands in contrast to those reviewed a decade earlier by Contreras et al. (2008), who only described their HSI status in connection to their grant activity. Many institutions are designated as HSIs and struggle to serve Hispanic or Latinx students, but there are institutions like the one Garcia (2019) describes in her case study which lack the federal designation but are purposefully created to serve Hispanic or Latinx communities. The next step in exploring these institutions is to examine research used to describe and define them, including attempts to quantify the extent to which HSIs can serve Hispanic or Latinx students.

### **Guidance for Studying HSIs**

Frameworks, models, and epistemological outlooks exist to describe research at HSIs. These models can give scholars direction and structure as they design research. This section provides a brief overview of some of the most significant and noteworthy models of the last decade, presented in approximate chronological order. This section of the paper explores four approaches that provide guidance to HSI researchers:

- A Multi-contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments as it applies to HSIs (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015)
- A transformative epistemological paradigm for conducting research at HSIs (Hurtado, 2015; Núñez, 2018)
- A typology that measures outcomes and institutional culture to evaluate the degree to which institutions serve Latinx students (Garcia, 2017)
- A Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Service at HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019).

These frameworks illustrate HSIs as ecosystems where internal and external influences shape outcomes for community members, and they give researchers tools to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for supporting HSI students.

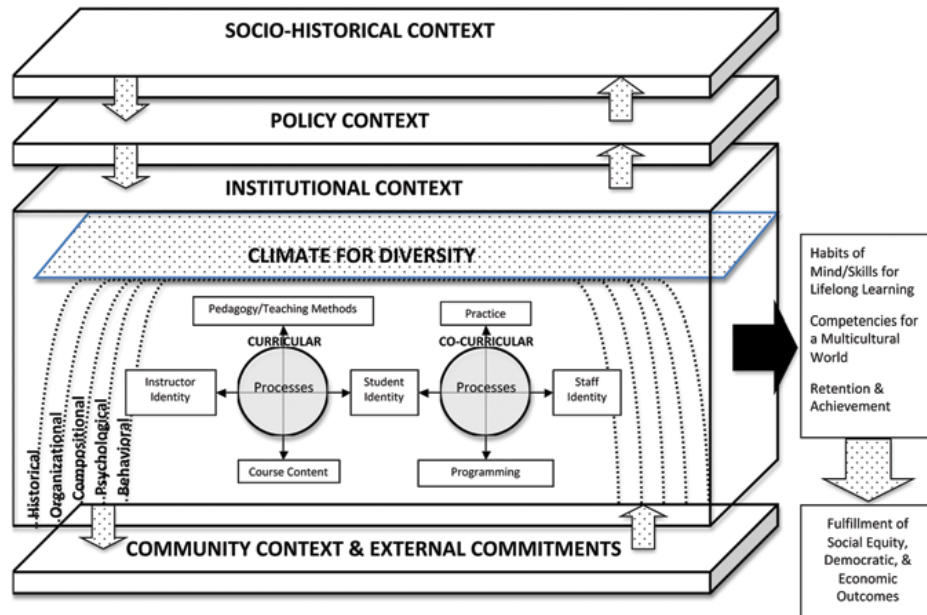
### **Multi-contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments**

The Multi-contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments was developed by Hurtado et. al (2012) and expanded by Hurtado and Ruiz-Alvarado (2015) to apply to HSIs (see Figure 1 for the Hurtado et al.'s diagram). In the model, sociohistorical, policy, and institutional contexts contribute to institutional climate. Within the institution, curricular and cocurricular processes foster habits of mind, skills for lifelong learning, competencies for a multicultural world, and fulfilment of outcomes connected to social equity, democracy, and economics. Hurtado and Ruiz-Alvarado (2015) use the model to describe HSI faculty, staff, and students as people who shape and are shaped by curricular and co-curricular processes within the broader contexts described above.



**Figure 1**

*Hurtado et al.'s (2012) Multi-contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments*



Note: Reproduced from Hurtado, S., Alvarez, C. L., Guillermo-Wann, C., Cuellar, M., & Arellano, L. (2012). A Model for Diverse Learning Environments: The Scholarship on Creating and Assessing Conditions for Student Success. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Vol. 27, pp. 41–122). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2950-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2950-6_2). Copyright © Smart, J.C. and Paulson, M.B.

The multi-contextual model describes how demographic changes affect both the HSI and the community where it is located. Institutions of higher education are one variable within a broader sociocultural story. The model also describes institutional and student links to the community. In later sections of this review, the ability to connect to the community will continue to emerge as an important theme for HSIs. Hurtado and Ruiz Alvarado note that many Latinx

students choose to attend college closer to their homes; for these students proximity to their home community is an important part of their college-choosing process (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). In Hurtado and Ruiz-Alvarado's depiction, institutions of higher education exist as part of their communities, and the experiences of students, faculty, and staff are shaped by the localized institutional environment and the broader community around the institution.

### **Transformative Epistemological Paradigm**

In two separate papers, Hurtado (2015) and Núñez (2018) describe a transformative epistemological paradigm for HSI researchers to employ. The paradigm allows researchers to approach their work in ways that incorporate the needs of the communities where research takes place and produces results that may be implemented by the participants and their communities. Hurtado's 2015 paper describes the evolution of an earlier emancipatory paradigm to its more recent transformative form. Núñez's 2018 paper examines Hurtado's work to define the paradigm and apply it to an HSI context. The paradigm consists of a plan for an ontology, epistemology, and axiology that are focused on epistemic justice. Núñez (2018) defines epistemic justice as an inclusion of historically marginalized people in knowledge creation.

This paradigm is grounded in an understanding of the history of HSIs, a knowledge of asset-based practices and analysis, and necessary immersion and contextualization at these institutions. This transformative paradigm encourages researchers to avoid "drive-by research," where researchers with limited connection to a community arrive, study it as distant observers, and publish findings without sharing that new knowledge with the community. Núñez (2018) describes a climate where researchers begin from a transformative ontological, epistemological, and axiological mindset to employ an appropriate methodology. She encourages HSI researchers to consider how these paradigmatic factors can shape a methodologically appropriate study with

findings that can both explore scholarly questions and provide HSI practitioners with useful information as they work to serve students.

**Typology for Determining Latinx-serving Institutional Identity**

Garcia (2017) establishes a four-quadrant typology (as seen in Figure 2) for determining an institution’s Latinx-serving identity grounded in two dimensions:

- outcomes for Latinx students, such as equitable graduation rates, equitable rates of post-graduation employment, and equitable rates of graduate school attendance
- cultural factors, such as a positive campus climate that affirms Latinx students and engagement with the community where the institution is located.

**Figure 2**

*Garcia’s (2017) Typology of HSI Organizational Identities.*

		Organizational Culture Reflects Latinx Students	
		Low	High
Organizational Outcomes for Latinx Students	High	Latinx-Producing	Latinx-Serving
	Low	Latinx-Enrolling	Latinx-Enhancing

Note: Reproduced from Garcia, G. A. (2017). Defined by outcomes or culture? Constructing an organizational identity for Hispanic-serving institutions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(1\_suppl), 111S-134S. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216669779>. Copyright © 2017 AERA.

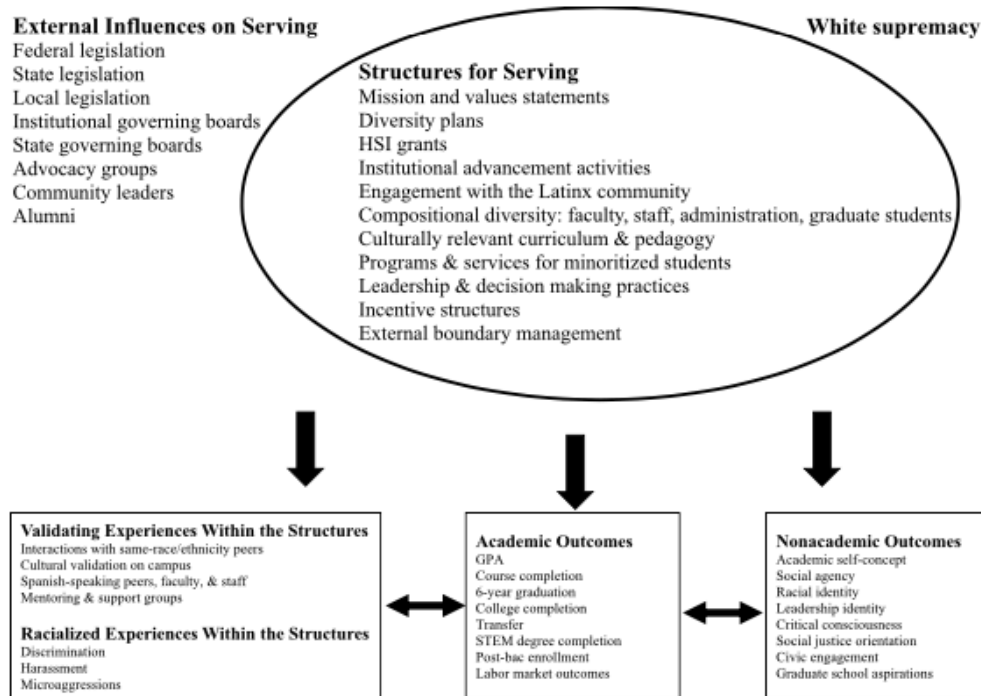
These dimensions were identified in the author's previous research that described the importance of serving diverse groups of students at HSIs (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). In a finding that brings scholarly validation to the concerns that led me to this line of inquiry, Garcia's typology includes both "Latinx-enrolling institutions," which foster neither equitable outcomes nor a Latinx-serving culture, and "Latinx-serving institutions," which do both. The typology is rounded out by "Latinx-producing institutions," which foster equitable outcomes, but do not provide students with a culturally responsive environment, and "Latinx-enhancing institutions," which foster a supportive culture while failing to produce equitable outcomes. As Garcia explores this typology, she reviews organizational outcomes of a case study institution, including graduation rates, graduate school enrollment rates, and employment rates for Latinx students and graduates. She also examines campus climate, community engagement, and the presence of support programs to place a case study institution within the typology. Researchers and practitioners can replicate these steps at their own institution to determine its place in the typology, and therefore explore potential structural or organizational changes designed to foster improved outcomes, a more welcoming campus culture, or both.

### **Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Servingness at HSIs**

The Multidimensional Conceptual Framework was developed by Garcia et al. (2019) following the authors' systematic review of literature regarding HSIs. The framework (see Figure 3 for a diagram) demonstrates how factors internal and external to institutions create structures for serving students that can lead to either positive, validating experiences for Hispanic and Latinx students or negative, racialized experiences. These structures can also lead to both beneficial or negative outcomes in both academic and non-academic contexts.

**Figure 3**

*Garcia et al.'s (2019) Multidimensional conceptual framework of servingness in HSIs*



Note: Reproduced from Garcia, G. A., Núñez, A.-M., & Sansone, V. A. (2019). Toward a multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding “servingness” in Hispanic-serving institutions: A synthesis of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(5), 745–784.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319864591>. Copyright © 2019 AERA.

In this model, external structures might include federal, state, or local lawmaking bodies, governing boards, community organizations, and alumni of the institutions. Internal structures for serving include mission statements; HSI grants; compositional diversity of faculty, staff, administration, and graduate students; culturally relevant pedagogy; programs for minoritized

students; and external boundary management. In this model, white supremacy can affect both internal and external structures. This model recalls Hurtado et al.'s (2012) model that depicts institutions of higher education as entities both influenced by and capable of interacting with external forces and communities.

Validating experiences might include things like cultural validation on campus or access to mentoring and support groups, while racialized experiences might include discrimination, harassment, or microaggressions. Academic outcomes include things like GPA, graduation rates, or labor market outcomes. Nonacademic outcomes might include academic self-concept, social agency, or civic engagement. Garcia et al.'s 2019 model can be used by researchers in a variety of contexts, as it shows relationships between a diverse range of actors who both shape and are affected by institutional organization and structures.

Garcia et al. (2019) give us several ways to look at HSIs, united by strong themes. One key theme is the institutions' connection to outside forces. These outside forces might include more benevolent forces such as entities that offer grant funding to HSIs and their calls for proposals. They might include lawmakers who might be supportive or antagonistic toward these institutions. They might include the community surrounding the institution. White supremacy, a systemic problem, is specifically included in the model. Garcia et al. (2019) point out that when scholars examine these institutions, they must examine the political and community contexts in which they operate. They also point out that the people who study and work in these institutions may be affected by structural or cultural factors at the institution, but they also have the power to shape the institution. Additionally, researchers who choose to focus on these institutions are guided to engage in research that centers the institutional community, involves that community in the research process, and shares findings that the community can choose to use moving

forward. Garcia et al.'s (2019) framework will be used to guide this treatise's inquiry into how staff are both influenced by and capable of influencing the institutional structures that lead to either positive or negative student outcomes.

Taken together, these frameworks, models, and epistemological outlooks give researchers context to consider when they develop methodologies and research questions. Researchers who rely on these frameworks have opportunities to consider the interplay between forces both internal and external to the institution. They have information describing the importance of the broader community where the institution operates, and they can observe the importance of conducting research that faculty and staff can choose to apply following the conclusion of their work. These researchers give colleagues tools that they can use to evaluate both HSIs and research focusing on HSIs. With these principles in mind, this paper transitions to discussing lessons from research on HSIs and how that research connects to these principles.

### **Significant Research at HSIs**

This section of the review begins by considering how federal funding (a key external influence as identified by Garcia et al. (2019)) affects HSIs and the choices they make about student service. Then it examines how three major institutional constituent groups (students, faculty, and staff) experience these institutions. Much more is known about the student and faculty experience at HSIs than about staff, so this chapter will conclude by describing how further research into the experiences of these colleagues may help readers to further understand HSIs.

### **Effects of Federal Funding and Other External Actors on HSIs**

An earlier section of this chapter discussed the ways that HSI identity is entwined with institutional ability to receive HSI grants (Contreras et al., 2008; Garcia, 2017; Higher Education

Amendments, 1992). These frameworks for understanding HSIs also describe how socio-historical and policy contexts as well as external influences affect how HSIs deliver services to students (Garcia et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Federal funding and the methods by which it is distributed provide researchers with much to explore, particularly considering how calls for proposals shape the distribution of funds and how those funds affect student services.

Venegas (2015) found student support interventions were often driven by federal legislation and calls for proposals. Because these proposals often call for student support programming (such as additional tutoring or peer mentoring resources), HSIs in Venegas's findings often implemented additional student support programming rather than increasing direct payments to students, even though students reported making college-going decisions based on affordability (Venegas, 2015). This is an example of how external funders can influence how institutions set priorities and how parameters are established for research to be conducted at these institutions. Venegas's findings also relate to the model developed by Garcia et al. (2019) that describes how both internal structures (such as grants that are written to implement specific programming) and external ones (such as the legislation and federal calls for proposals) can influence these institutions and therefore the support these institutions provide to students.

Brown et al. (2021) also examine this connection between outside structures and institutional approaches to student success when they review a series of three first-year cohorts at a large public HSI and examine factors that lead to retention. In their findings, Brown et al. stress the importance of focusing on the needs of the specific institution's student population, rather than generalizing. (Brown et al., 2021). A valid approach for a large public HSI with a significant plurality of Hispanic or Latinx students might not be applicable at a small private HSI



with a majority Hispanic/Latinx student body. It is noteworthy that Brown et al.'s study was shaped by the institution's Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on College Quality Enhancement Plan (SACSCOC QEP) and a US Department of Education Title V grant. These external structures (like those described by Garcia et al. (2019)) shape how researchers design interventions and describe student outcomes. Interventions, and by extension the research describing them, should be in alignment with both the goals of an accrediting body and with calls for proposals such as those offered by Department of Education grants. This serves as an example of the model described by Garcia et al. (2019) where both internal and external structures shape the student experience. Research also demonstrates that it is important for legislators, decision-makers at entities that fund HSI grants, and other external actors work to develop a deep understanding of these institutions and the community contexts where they operate (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). In order to create calls for proposals that allow campus-based researchers and practitioners to serve these students, these external groups need to develop a strong understanding of these communities and their needs, rather than engaging in the drive-by research that does not consider the long-term effects on the community (Hurtado, 2015; Núñez, 2018). Taken together, the researchers described above demonstrate how federal funding can shape the ways that practitioners at HSIs support their students. The next step is to examine the experiences of HSI students.

### **Student Experiences at HSIs**

I was drawn to study HSIs after hearing from students that they did not feel served at institutions designated as serving them. In reading literature that specifically deals with the student experience, a key theme arises: Latinx students at HSIs experience similar concerns to their Latinx peers at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). In this section, I explore that

theme. In her typology of HSI organizational identities described earlier in this paper, Garcia (2017) describes a “Latinx-enrolling institution,” as one where Latinx students enjoy neither positive outcomes (such as equitable graduation rates or rates of post-graduation employment) nor a campus climate that affirms their cultural background and fosters belonging on campus. In describing these institutions, Garcia establishes not all institutions receiving a federal HSI designation successfully cultivate a community which serves their Latinx or Hispanic students. These findings are supported by Crisp et al. (2015), whose systematic review of literature found a correlation between positive perceptions of campus climate and positive outcomes related to degree completion. Crisp et al. note correlations between Latinx students’ satisfaction with campus racial climate and degree completion as well as studies demonstrating that discriminatory experiences served as barriers to success for students (Crisp et al., 2015).

Hurtado et al. (2011) explore the experiences of a diverse group of STEM majors at multiple institutions of higher education and find a discrepancy between the experiences of Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and those of Latinx students at HSIs. While Black students at HBCUs experienced better connections with their faculty than their counterparts at PWIs, the same was not true for the Latinx students at HSIs. For Hurtado et al. (2011), Latinx students at HSIs reported similar experiences approaching faculty to their counterparts at PWIs. This illustrates a key difference between culturally defined MSIs and enrollment or demographically defined MSIs. Demographically-defined MSIs which began as PWIs may still resemble PWIs in structures and access to resources. Yosso et al. (2009) describe a culture of microaggressions at highly selective PWIs. In Yosso et al.’s research, PWI institutional climates leave students open to microaggressions from strangers and community members alike. Both groups of authors present evidence suggesting Latinx students report

feeling minoritized and othered as they pursue higher education, and they link the experiences of Latinx students at HSIs, those at PWIs, and a culture where students may feel as though they are an outsider on campus.

These articles work together to show how HSIs must be intentional in service to Latinx students. The authors describe a concern that newly designated HSIs can easily fail to serve their Latinx community members if they fail to evaluate and adapt the organizational patterns that worked for them as PWIs. This literature reveals it is possible for HSIs to merely enroll rather than serve these students, as Garcia (2017) describes. Without supportive organizational structures, a student experience at an HSI might be comparable to that of a student at a PWI, and these scholars demonstrate that PWIs often deliver racialized experiences where Latinx students feel othered and experience microaggressions. From here, this review explores the importance of a sense of belonging and social identity for students from historically marginalized backgrounds in higher education, and how those concepts can be applied at HSIs.

Two separate studies from Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) and Musoba et al. (2013) both conclude it is crucial for students who come from historically marginalized backgrounds to establish a sense of belonging and develop a social identity as valued community members at the institutions of higher education where they study. While Bazana and Mogotsi's (2017) research focuses on the experience of Black South African students at historically white universities, their findings regarding social identity are in alignment with literature describing historically marginalized American students at PWIs and MSIs which originated as PWIs. Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) discuss how culture, heritage, language, and traditions contribute to a social identity that is altered when a student enters an institution of higher education that expects them to assimilate into a culture other than their own. They find historically white institutions whose

demographics have become more diverse in recent decades must change their own culture to be more welcoming to historically marginalized students. When institutions make changes, students can continue to cultivate a positive social identity as both a member of their own culture and as a student at the university, rather than having to assimilate into existing white-dominant structures.

Though Bazana and Mogotsi's (2017) research covers a different community of students in a different part of the world, they explore similar phenomena to what Garcia et al. (2019) describe when they point out how institutional structures can contribute to racialized experiences for students and what Hurtado et al. (2011) and Yosso et al. (2009) point out regarding the experiences of Black and Latinx students at PWIs in the United States. Their findings also correspond with findings from Crisp et al. (2015), who note that academic success for undergraduate Latinx students is correlated to factors such as sociocultural characteristics and positive perceptions of campus climate and environment. This literature demonstrates students must be able to engage in their culture of origin to truly thrive in the culture of higher education. They must do both, rather than being asked to choose between the two.

Musoba et al. (2013) interviewed Latinx and Black first-year students at an HSI and found a similar need to belong. They identified first-year experience (FYE) courses as key means to establish this connection between student and institution. They discuss the importance for students to have a person (such as the instructor for an FYE course) they can use as a resource for understanding institutional culture as well as learning about more practical concerns such as deadlines to register or pay tuition. They also discuss the importance of "transition friends" (Musoba, et al., 2013, p. 361) in the form of classmates in an FYE course who can serve as a social network as new students connect to the broader campus climate and find ways to get involved in their academic field or campus organizations.

Musoba et al. (2013) describe these positive factors in contrast with academic policies which can often feel punitive or like a means to trick students into paying additional money in late fees. The researchers describe these incidents as poor impressions of the institution that may last for years (Musoba et al., 2013). In these findings, we see examples of how institutional structures (whether they be a supportive FYE course or a harmful lack of clarity in the publication of deadlines or policies) contribute to both positive and negative outcomes for students (Garcia et al., 2019; Musoba et al., 2013). Findings discussed by Musoba et al. (2013) are in alignment with Bazana and Mogotsi (2017) in describing the need for environments where students can build community and develop a social identity inclusive of both their cultural identity and their identity as a student at their institution of higher education. Musoba, et al.'s research also dovetails with more recent research on the gap between student and faculty/staff expectations (Tevis & Britton, 2020).

Tevis and Britton interviewed students, faculty, student affairs staff, and admissions staff and determined an "integration information gap" (Tevis & Britton, 2020, p. 334) persists, particularly for first-generation students. Tevis and Britton also credit first-year experience courses in helping students make connections to the institution, but they note faculty and staff seem to expect students to engage in self-reflection and practice help-seeking behaviors, something middle-class and continuing-generation students were more likely to do. This finding is reminiscent of Musoba, et al.'s (2013) findings regarding students feeling like the institution was out to trick them by publishing deadlines and fees on web sites but not directly communicating them to the students. It confirms the idea that there are often institutional expectations that students do specific things (like seek help or information) which are not always communicated to students. The assumption that students will know these things is grounded in

expectations that someone will tell them, but if the institution does not enlist faculty and staff with ensuring this communication happens, students may miss out on opportunities designed to lead to increased persistence and retention.

Together, this research demonstrates how developing a sense of belonging for students and building a community where they feel welcome are prerequisites to creating a space where students achieve the intended outcomes of curriculum, programming, and other faculty and staff efforts. We see in multiple models how HSIs are influenced by external forces, and while forces like legislation and calls for grant proposals are among those external influences, the communities that shape students and their identities are also a major factor to consider when we think about how to create an environment where students succeed (Garcia et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). HSIs that fail to cultivate a positive campus climate and do not explicitly work to improve outcomes for Latinx students (as described by Garcia, 2017) run the risk of faring no better than those who lack the HSI designation when it comes to serving this community. As this paper transitions toward examining the experiences of faculty at these institutions, the idea that home communities shape institutional communities and demographic changes necessitate institutional changes persists as a theme.

### **Faculty Experience at HSIs**

The experience of feeling like an outsider at HSIs is not limited to students. The experiences of Latinx faculty (especially Latina faculty) at these institutions are well-documented. While discussion in the previous section addressed Latinx students' concerns about connecting to faculty, Latina faculty at HSIs report their own struggles with connecting to their institutions and taking requisite steps toward the professional and academic success that would allow them to become strong allies and advocates for their students. Ek et al. (2010) describe the

experiences of Latina tenure-track faculty at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) and the Research for the Educational Advancement of Latin@s (REAL) mentoring group they created. Though UTSA is classified as an HSI and has a majority Hispanic student population (The University of Texas at San Antonio, n.d.), Ek et al. (2010) describe the university as dominated by white men. The authors organize a mentoring group specifically for Latina faculty in order to support them as they pursue goals such as earning tenure, developing manuscripts for publication, and negotiating situations where they feel like they have to speak for their entire culture (Ek et al., 2010). Another scholar at another institution points out that:

by negating the unique cultural knowledge, social experiences, and academic needs of Latino students, a HSI without a clear commitment to the Hispanic heritage of its students can reinforce the dominant status of men more generally, and white men in particular (B.A.L., 2017, p. 177-178).

Researchers offer evidence to explain why faculty at HSIs may still feel as though institutions remain white-dominant even though they are designated as HSIs. Ek et al. (2010) describe a setting where there are fewer Latina faculty members compared to white faculty, including at HSIs. Gonzales et al. (2013) share statistics noting there are fewer Latina faculty compared to other groups and go on to note that Latinas are historically more likely to begin their studies at two-year institutions and less selective four-year institutions, which can pose a barrier to their entry into the research-based doctoral programs most likely to lead to tenure track faculty appointments. Gonzales et al. (2013) describe how there are more Latina faculty at pre-tenure than post-tenure levels, and as such, Latina faculty members may have to prioritize efforts toward earning tenure above mentoring students or new colleagues. They describe this as a failure of the institutions to retain Latina faculty members (Gonzales et al., 2013).

At HSIs that originated as PWIs, white-normative culture affects faculty as well as students. Gusa (2010) describes a White Institutional Presence (WIP) where “white normative messages and practices are exchanged within the academic milieu” (Gusa, 2010, p. 471). Gusa examines a setting where white monoculturalism leads to an expectation that Eurocentric scholarly methods are central to the institution. Greene and Oesterreich (2012) concur when they analyze HSIs as institutions where whiteness is perpetuated when institutions receive an HSI designation based on demographics alone rather than by making structural changes required to support Hispanic or Latinx students. They argue that white faculty at these institutions must be active participants in antiracist work to properly support students and colleagues (Greene & Oesterreich, 2012). Garcia (2019) reviewed the history of higher education and noted many seminal texts on the history of the field, its future, and its successes were written by white authors whose experience was drawn primarily from predominantly white institutions (Garcia, 2019). This lack of diversity in these seminal texts ensures that whiteness continues to be centered in our analysis of higher education, and faculty from historically minoritized communities enter a white dominant academic culture. For institutions which began as PWIs and became HSIs, in addition to thinking about how researchers and practitioners can better incorporate the cultures of Hispanic or Latinx community members at the institutional level, stakeholders consider this cultural centering of whiteness in higher education institutions that privileges some community members’ ideas, teaching, or scholarship above others.

In synthesis, the research into the experiences of Latinx faculty at HSIs parallels the conversation about student experiences in many ways. Because research demonstrates Latina faculty perceive HSIs as institutions where they must navigate potentially hostile administrative structures (Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales et al., 2013), potential researchers can see how the HSI



students described by Hurtado et al. (2011) might struggle to connect to faculty who are also experiencing challenges connecting to the institution (B.A.L., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales et al., 2013). This perception of university administration as hostile towards Latina faculty also evokes the concerns raised by students who were interviewed by Musoba et al. (2013) about feeling as though the administration was out to trick them. Conditions similar to those at Hispanic-enrolling institutions which fail to produce positive outcomes and cultivate positive culture for students (Garcia, 2017) also exist for faculty (B.A.L., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales et al., 2013). Both groups report feeling as though their institution does not serve their needs or nurture their academic or scholarly growth.

Students perceive HSIs as similar to PWIs because the faculty to whom they would normally connect also struggle to navigate potentially hostile academic and professional terrain. Gonzales (2015) proposes using funds of knowledge to ensure that HSI faculty have opportunities to advance in their roles and support students. Funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992; Moll et al., 1992) are areas of knowledge derived from a learner's cultural practices. These areas of knowledge are often ignored by Eurocentric educational systems as outside the mainstream for learning (Gonzales, 2015). Gonzales proposes that funds of knowledge can be converted into cultural capital in ways similar to those described by Yosso (2005) when she lays out her model of Community Cultural Wealth. In Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth, people of Color draw on strengths such as the cultural knowledge passed down by family, the depth of experience gained from using two languages, or the experience people draw from their social networks to build cultural capital. Within a faculty context, this might involve ensuring that the curriculum includes opportunities for students to engage with both their home community and the local community near the university (as has been encouraged by both Hurtado et al. (2012)

and Garcia et al.'s (2019) frameworks). It might also involve intentionally pursuing publications in journals which incorporate social justice into their mission or becoming involved with professional organizations that support their growth as both faculty members and as people from their home culture (Gonzales, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Gonzales (2015) is clear that this strategy will only work with support at the institutional level; institutions must avoid situations where scholars feel deterred from trying a less majoritarian strategy in research, teaching, and publication.

When considered together, these studies show that faculty at HSIs have much in common with students when they seek to navigate potentially hostile white-dominant environments. While opportunities for faculty to work together to support one another exist (Ek et al., 2010), they must exist within supportive institutional structures to allow faculty to thrive and contribute to positive student outcomes (Garcia, 2017; Garcia et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012). When researchers consider the effect of community and identity on HSI students and faculty, they are reminded of how institutional structures, ranging from internal structures implemented by university leadership, to external structures such as the communities where students and faculty live, to systemic issues such as white supremacy shape these institutions (Garcia et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Faculty exist in the same systems as their students, and taken together, the studies demonstrate how institutional, community, and societal factors affect faculty in similar ways to students. Staff members constitute a third significant constituency at HSIs, and this review now transitions to examine their experiences.

### **Staff Experience at HSIs**

In the case of the experiences of students and faculty at HSIs, I was able to create a narrative connecting texts describing similar phenomena. I found my experience looking for information focused on staff to be much more challenging. This comparable lack of information

drove me to explore associated and parallel studies. As a result, I have a few sources focused specifically on HSIs and some more general material on the experiences of staff at a broad range of higher education institutions. The literature also casts a broad net regarding the nature of the staff, with studies focused on administrative assistants, student affairs staff, and upper-level administrators. Hence, this section draws upon a more diverse range of literature. It is also worth noting that much of the literature on staff covers their ability (or lack thereof) to support students rather than describing their experience in the organizations, as can be seen with research describing faculty. Though I examine literature covering both HSIs and other institutions, the literature points in a direction that suggests staff have a role to play in ensuring students succeed at HSIs and their perceptions of their efforts may not align with student needs. In the methods chapter, I will narrow my focus to look at staff members who directly support students and their relationship with a case study institution.

Zenner and Squire (2020) used an intercultural competence model to investigate how academic advisors perceive internationalization in US student affairs graduate programs. These graduate programs serve as a foundation for professionals in a diverse range of student service roles, and many participants in this study are either current students in or graduates of student affairs master's programs. Though Zenner and Squire (2020) focus on how advisors support international students, their study relies on an intercultural competence model as its theoretical framework, where intercultural competence involves attitudes, knowledge, and skills which contribute to the professional's ability to communicate effectively in intercultural situations (Zenner & Squire, 2020). Zenner and Squire conclude graduate programs in higher education and student affairs (HESA) emphasize intercultural competence at varying levels, ranging from no emphasis at all to a strong effort to engage white, middle-class graduate students with

intercultural competence regarding students of Color and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They do not describe the experiences of nonwhite students or students from different socioeconomic backgrounds in this context. The authors call for HESA graduate programs to invest further in requiring intercultural competence of their graduate students (Zenner & Squire, 2020). Another study (Llurda et al., 2014), which focused on administrative staff, finds even though the administrative staff do not generally have opportunities to set institutional policy, they are frequently charged with carrying out policies, and therefore need a strong understanding of those policies and how to use them to support students. In addition, these colleagues often provide the student's first impression of the institution. Llurda et al. (2014) identify a lack of study of administrative professionals as a gap in current research regarding higher education in general and call for further research into how these colleagues perceive their environments. Both studies show support for ensuring professionals in roles which interact closely with students should be able to think critically about the best ways to support those students (Llurda et al., 2014; Zenner & Squire, 2020).

This idea that staff have a role to play in ensuring positive student outcomes plays out in further studies. In two separate studies, Brown et al. (2021) and Swecker et al. (2013) both look at students' relationships with their academic advisors and find that when academic advisors and related professionals regularly meet with students, students see improved outcomes. In the study conducted by Brown et al. (2021), HSI students were retained at a higher rate if they met with an academic advisor, peer mentor, or success coach multiple times during the academic year. Swecker et al. (2013) examined first-generation students outside of the HSI context and found that students were more likely to be retained by the institution when they met with their academic advisor on a regular basis. These colleagues can have positive influences on student

outcomes, but their ability to do so may be impaired by factors such as a lack of cultural competency, as described by Preuss et al. (2020).

Preuss et al. (2020) review the level of cultural competence of faculty, staff, and administrators at HSIs. As part of a National Science Foundation funded investigation focused on characteristics and programming at HSIs, Preuss et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study of students, faculty, staff, and administrators at HSIs in Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, and Texas. They found strong, consistent differences in perspective between Hispanic faculty, staff, and administrators and their non-Hispanic peers regarding culturally competent resources at HSIs. Specifically, Hispanic faculty, staff, and administrators were less likely than their non-Hispanic colleagues to believe applicable information about Hispanic culture was available to higher education professionals. They describe a setting where these conditions lead to greater potential for “acculturative stress for minority students” (Preuss et al., 2020, p. 225). A separate qualitative study focused on both students and upper level administrators at HSIs found that participants desired an institutional staff that better reflected the demographics of the student body in order to better support students (Dayton et al., 2004). This notion that faculty and staff who do not share the cultural background of their students may miss out on opportunities to help their students succeed aligns with research focusing on social identity, student outcomes in first-year experience courses, and microaggressions (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2011; Musoba et al., 2013; Yosso et al., 2009). Taken together, these studies describe a gap between what students need to succeed in higher education and the cultural competencies of professionals charged with serving students. It is also evident that while there are studies on how white staff support Latinx students (Preuss et al., 2020; Zenner & Squire, 2020), less is known about the experience of staff whose identities have been minoritized.

Tevis and Britton (2020) examine the expectations of faculty and student service staff regarding first-year students in the form of a case study. The authors describe an “integration information gap” (Tevis & Britton, 2020, p. 334) primarily experienced by first-generation students. Faculty and staff expect students to engage in self-reflection and help-seeking behaviors. They find students whose parents attended college and students with higher family incomes are more likely to seek out resources than first-generation students or those from families with lower incomes. They recommend first-year experience courses help close this gap, as these courses provide students with opportunities to learn about how to seek resources and normalize making use of them. Peer mentoring can also be a beneficial means of closing this gap, but it isn’t always a guarantee, as mentors also need appropriate training on cultural competency and incentives should exist for students and their mentors to continue to build a relationship throughout the academic year, rather than meeting once and not continuing to connect (Tevis & Britton, 2020).

Tevis and Britton (2020) strongly suggest that administrators should purposefully identify resources for students and connect them to specific people related to those resources. They also recommend colleagues who make recommendations to students follow up with the student to ensure they made the connection and re-emphasize the importance of seeking help when needed. These recommendations, geared toward administrators, faculty, and staff who work with first-year student programming mirror those provided by researchers focusing on the student experience. Musoba et al. (2013), whose research takes place at an HSI, concur that first-year experience courses can be beneficial to students, but people who work with students should be aware that they will see things like inflexible deadlines or late fees as a means to trick them unless faculty and staff members make sure they know about those topics in advance. General

research into the experience of staff such as academic advisors and student affairs professionals relates to existing knowledge about the student perspective of the services they receive at HSIs (Musoba et al., 2013; Preuss et al., 2020; Tevis & Britton, 2020; Zenner & Squire, 2020).

Garcia (2016) takes a deeper dive into the experiences of student affairs professionals at HSIs. She interviews professionals in microclimates which she describes as positive or negative, and she notes that professionals can experience mismatched institutional micro and macroclimates, where one experience is positive, and one is negative. Microclimates, as described by Garcia (2016), involve the racial climate that colleagues experience at the departmental level. In Garcia's (2016) findings, a positive microclimate often develops due to the presence of a racially diverse team of colleagues. Being the only person from one's cultural background was associated with a negative microclimate. In a microclimate described as positive by Garcia's (2016) interviewees, colleagues work to expand diversity, and changes are implemented because of the institution becoming an HSI. A colleague who described her microclimate as negative reported racialized experiences with white colleagues, even though she did not believe her white colleagues were intentionally discriminatory. This finding is in alignment with Preuss et al. (2020) who found a need for increased cultural competence among non-Hispanic faculty and staff at HSIs, and with Garcia et al. (2019) whose systematic review of the literature found both internal organizational dimensions such as faculty and staff and external structures such as funding entities can lead to either positive, inclusive experiences or negative, racialized experiences depending on the cultural competency of those working at the institution. Colleagues can also experience an intersection of different micro- and macro-climates, such as a research participant who reported being the only Latino man in his department and experiencing

off-hand negative remarks in his office, but enjoying being able to engage in conversations in both Spanish and English in other campus spaces (Garcia, 2016).

Taken together, these scholars demonstrate how staff members can have positive impacts on students. Most, but not all, of this research explores the ability of white, middle-class professionals to connect to historically marginalized students. However, some staff come from historically marginalized backgrounds and experience the same struggles to thrive in HSIs as their student and faculty counterparts. Based on the available research, I am interested in learning more about the staff experience at HSIs. Current research shows how faculty and students struggle or succeed in these institutions. When examining guiding frameworks, readers see how both curricular and co-curricular practice, including a specific mention of staff identity, can shape student environments for better or for worse (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). A deeper study of the experiences of staff provides researchers and practitioners with an opportunity to better understand the factors that contribute to student success. Further research may explore how these professionals are influenced by the institutional structures where they work. From there scholars and practitioners can learn more about how their work influences the experiences of their students.

### **Summary of Background and Context**

The background and context chapter of this treatise explored the history of HSIs, strategies that researchers might use to approach them, and the experiences of students, faculty, and staff at these institutions. As a result of reviewing these three strands of literature, I have developed an interest in the experience of student-support staff at these institutions. The concerns of students and faculty at these institutions are well-documented, and it is evident that further exploration of staff is imperative as we work toward improving outcomes for students. While research tells a



compelling story about the experiences of Latinx faculty members and how their ability to support students is shaped by the white-centric culture where they work (B.A.L., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Gonzales, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2013), most research into the experience of staff focuses on how white, middle-class staff colleagues support (or fail to support) students whose cultural background may differ from their own (Preuss et al., 2020; Swecker et al., 2013; Tevis & Britton, 2020; Zenner & Squire, 2020). Further research is needed to explore how staff experiences compare to those of students and faculty. Research should address factors that influence the ability of student support professionals to provide services that lead to positive student outcomes. It should examine how staff members' communities and social identities influence their work supporting students. Because this community of professionals is diverse in and of itself, and works with students in many capacities, this gap is unlikely to be bridged in a single study. Multiple researchers, with a diverse range of perspectives and epistemological outlooks can explore this gap and produce findings that investigate these questions. In Chapter 3, I will describe methods for this exploration. I propose a study that will contribute to a growing body of literature describing how these professionals fit into the HSI story.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The literature described in the previous chapter establishes a need for more scholarly knowledge regarding the experiences and perceptions of student-facing staff at HSIs. This chapter will describe the methods for a study I conducted to learn more about this topic. The methods chapter reexamines the problem statement and research questions, provides further information regarding the research paradigm and conceptual framework that will guide this inquiry, and elaborates on the research design. The research design section involves more information about data sources, the research site, information about the population and subjects. It provides details regarding the plan to code and analyze data, discusses limitations of the study, and describes the internal review board (IRB) process.

#### **Problem Statement and Research Questions**

In the previous chapter, I expressed a need to learn more about the experiences of staff members at Hispanic-serving institutions. To begin this description of the problem I would like to crystalize what is known about these institutions. Since they were first established by the Higher Education Act Amendments of 1992, HSIs have evolved into a heterogenous group of institutions held together by their populations of Hispanic students, financially needy students, and their eligibility for federal grant funding. Though HSIs that were established to serve Hispanic communities exist, many HSIs are predominantly white institutions that took on the HSI designation following shifts in student demographics during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Rich literature exists to describe the experiences and perceptions of students and faculty at these institutions, but less is known about the experiences of staff at these institutions. In fact, much literature about staff at HSIs centers on white, middle-class staff members and their ability to support students whose cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds are

different from their own. Further study of how a diverse group of staff members experience their work at HSI is needed.

### **Research Questions**

To address the problem statement described above, I propose a case study focused on a specific institution as the unit of analysis. I plan to address the following research questions:

1. How does the institution communicate its HSI identity to staff members?
2. How do staff perceive their experience working at this institution?
3. How do staff perceive HSI Servingness across different demographic backgrounds?

### **Epistemological Outlook**

#### **Constructivist/Interpretivist Paradigm**

My study relies on a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm to shape inquiry. Mertens & Wilson (2019) describe a constructivist paradigm that uses qualitative or mixed methods to identify multiple values or perspectives. In constructivism, reality should not be labeled as singular or objective. As such, it accounts for the subjective experience of both the researcher and the research participants. This paradigm stands in contrast to positivist or postpositivist methods of inquiry which seek to understand a single, objective reality (Hays & Singh, 2012).

I also rely on concepts connected to interpretivism, which also describes a worldview based on multiple constructions of reality and a rejection of a single objective reality (Dean, 2018). This outlook will be critical for my study, as it examines the experiences, perceptions, and world views of a diverse group of staff at an HSI. I am interested in how they evaluate their experiences and the institutional structures in which they operate. I am also interested how these professionals view the way they shape the student experience and student outcomes. Because I interviewed a diverse group of colleagues, including colleagues from a range of racial and ethnic

backgrounds, gender identities, and years of experience working at HSIs, it is paramount that I account for their differing experiences and perspectives. For these reasons, a constructivist and interpretivist study with a focus on qualitative inquiry is the best technique to explore this issue.

Though I believe that a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm is a useful means to explore my questions, I am aware that this means to inquiry is not free from criticism. Critical theorists comment that a focus on the experiences and meaning-making of participants can lead the researcher to ignore structures of privilege, power, and oppression that affect individuals' choices and perspectives (Dean, 2018). Though I am interested in the experiences and perceptions of staff members, the literature that shapes my inquiry is steeped in critical scholarship. The literature reviewed in chapter two of this proposal specifically addresses topics such as how white supremacy originally shaped and continues to affect higher education structures (Garcia, 2018; Gusa, 2010). It also documents both student and faculty experiences at HSIs that are impacted by structures that assume whiteness as a default (B.A.L., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Garcia et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2013; Greene & Oesterreich, 2012; Hurtado et al., 2011; Musoba et al., 2013; Preuss et al., 2020). As a researcher, I undertook the process of data collection and analysis with awareness of these conditions. Within this context I sought to learn more about the experiences of student-service staff as a group that is both influenced by institutional structures and a group that shapes student outcomes (Garcia et al., 2019). My goal is to understand how participants construct their own reality. From there I seek learn more about how each participant's reality aligns with the knowledge derived from existing critical scholarship. Developing an understanding of this alignment (or misalignment) between what we know about the student experience at HSIs and the experience of the staff who serve those

students should serve as a preliminary step toward future research into how to help staff continue developing skills needed to support students.

### **Conceptual Framework**

My conceptual framework follows Garcia, Núñez, and Sansone's multidimensional framework for understanding servingness. This framework was developed after the authors conducted a systematic review of literature regarding HSIs (see Figure 3 in the second chapter of this treatise for a diagram constructed by the authors). The framework proposes that factors internal and external to institutions create structures for serving students that can lead to either positive, validating experiences for Hispanic and Latinx students or negative, racialized experiences. These structures can also lead to both beneficial or negative outcomes in both academic and non-academic contexts. In this framework, staff are both actors who contribute to student outcomes, and members of an institutional community that are in turn affected by external forces such as grant calls for proposals, legislation, and even white supremacy itself (Garcia et al., 2019). This framework draws on Garcia's earlier work that attempts to classify servingness at HSIs based on both student outcomes such as graduation and retention rates and institutional culture that welcomes and validates Latinx students (Garcia, 2017).

Within the parameters created by this framework, I am interested in isolating staff as a variable within the broader structures that Garcia et al. (2019) describe. How do their experiences and choices influence student outcomes and institutional culture? How are those experiences and choices affected by the other structures that contribute to the broader organizational culture? Grounded in critical scholarship, and from my own position within that grounding, invite participants to describe how they experience their own individually constructed realities. This will allow me to learn more about the perceptions and experiences of these

colleagues while also considering the need for a critical analysis of the issues that led this proposed study.

### **Research Design**

I conducted a case study focused on a single institution of higher education. The study explored the experiences and perceptions of student support professionals who work at this institution. This section of the methods chapter will explore sources of data; the population, subjects, and unit of analysis to be studied; the apparatus, instrument and protocol used to conduct the study; data coding and analysis; information about potential limitations of the study, and a plan for IRB approval.

### **Sources of Data**

This project relies on data from multiple sources, including document review, a preliminary questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and participant checks of interview transcripts.

First, I reviewed key institutional documents. Hayes and Singh (2012) describe document review as an effective method for supplemental data collection. In light of research regarding how HSIs describe (or omit description of) their HSI status in their mission statements and web sites (Contreras et al., 2008), this document review will help determine the extent to which the case institution conforms to existing knowledge about HSIs.

I began by reviewing the institution's home page, then opened and reviewed pages that the institution used to describe itself that were immediately available to readers hoping to learn more about this institution, its values, and its future plans. I also searched for the term "HSI" in the institution's search bar and reviewed several pages that were retrieved by that search. Table 1 shows the pages that were included in the review.

**Table 1***List of Documents Reviewed*

Document	Found
Institutional Home Page	Via Home Page
Institutional “About” Page	Via Home Page
Mission, Values, and Goals	Via Home Page
Strategic Plan, Parts I-V	Via Home Page
Hispanic-Serving Institution About Page	Via “HSI” Search
Hispanic-Serving Institution Page	Via “HSI” Search
HSI Advancement Committee Page	Via “HSI” Search
HSI Week Celebration 2022 Page	Via “HSI” Search
Sponsored Programs Page	Via “HSI” Search
Los Gatos University Celebrates a Decade as a Hispanic-Serving Institution Press Release	Via “HSI” Search

Transcripts of interviews with a group of student service staff at the institution provides another significant source of data. Prior to their interviews, participants completed a short introductory questionnaire administered using Qualtrics. This questionnaire collected demographic information, information about the length of time the participant has worked at the institution, and information about whether the participant has been involved in working on an HSI grant-related project at the institution. Once that data was collected, each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview, based on a protocol developed by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement at Stanford University (2003). This interview consisted of a mix of pre-determined items tied to the research questions as well as opportunities for the participant to elaborate further on their experiences. Though participants were not required to answer all questions, everyone did, and many provided insights that led me to ask follow-up questions or prompted conversations about topics that were not originally included in the interview protocol. Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom and were recorded and transcribed. Following their interview, participants received a copy of the transcript of their interview and made

corrections or clarifications as needed or desired. After participant checks were completed, transcripts were coded and analyzed for themes. Table 2 shows how each source of data relates to each question.

**Table 2**

*Research Questions Data Table*

Data Source	Document Review	Initial Questionnaire	Interview Transcripts
How does the institution communicate its HSI identity to staff members?	X		X
How do staff perceive their experience working at this institution?		X	X
How do staff perceive HSI servingness across different demographic backgrounds?		X	X

**Site**

The study takes place at the pseudonymous Los Gatos University (LGU), a Hispanic-serving institution in the southwestern United States. Los Gatos University is a public institution with approximately 40,000 bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral-level students. Approximately 40% of undergraduate students identify as Hispanic for demographic reporting purposes, with smaller percentages at the master’s and doctoral level. Most of the university’s faculty and staff are white.



The case institution was founded in the nineteenth century with the goal of training teachers in the region where it is located. It admitted its first nonwhite students in the 1960s. For the past few decades, LGU has been known as a teaching-focused regional public institution. A significant majority of students originate from the state where LGU is located, with many students coming from the metropolitan areas closest to the institution. In recent years, LGU has taken steps to increase its research activity with the ultimate goal of being designated as a Carnegie classified Research 1 institution. As research activity has increased, there has been an increase in out-of-state and international students, particularly at the graduate level. LGU became an HSI approximately 10 years prior to data collection for this study, so while some participants have the perspective of being present on campus prior to the institution taking on HSI status, others only know LGU as an HSI.

### **Unit of Analysis, Subjects, and Population**

The institution will serve as the unit of analysis. This will allow this research to take the form of a case study. A case study describes a bounded system and the “individuals, events, activities, or processes/elements” within it (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 44). Case studies are well suited to answering questions in environments where researchers have limited amounts of control over events. Case studies can explore the daily activities within the case; they can also uncover things that had been hidden regarding the case (Mertens & Wilson, 2019).

The population within the case institution includes student service staff at Los Gatos University. This includes student affairs staff and staff outside of student affairs who have regular contact with students, such as staff who manage academic programs, HSI grant staff who deal directly with students, and academic advisors. These staff members all hold bachelor’s degrees, and many have earned or are pursuing master’s or doctoral degrees.

To develop a sample, I worked with key stakeholders, such as administrative leaders, supervisors, and directors of departments where these staff members work to identify potential candidates. My original plan was to interview approximately ten individuals; thirteen completed the questionnaire, interview, and participant checks. I had hoped to collect a diverse sample with different racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds, and this was achieved. Participants have varying levels of experience working with HSI grants, diverse levels of experience in the field of higher education, including team members who worked at the institution prior to when it became an HSI. Participants are described in much more detail in the findings chapter of this treatise.

### **Apparatus, Instruments, and Protocol**

For the document review, I examined several key institutional documents that are readily available to the public on the institution's web site to learn more about how the institution describes itself as an HSI and how its HSI status effects its organizational structures, including the institution's mission statement, the language that the institution uses to describe diversity, both in general and in its capacity as an HSI, and the language surrounding grant funded HSI programs on campus.

For the staff interviews, two apparatuses were used to collect data. The first apparatus is a preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix A) designed primarily to collect demographic information and data about how participants describe their roles at the institution. This questionnaire serves primarily as a supplement to a recorded and transcribed interview where participants were invited to discuss topics connected to the research questions in more detail. Upon transcription of the interview recording, each participant was invited to review and make updates and corrections to the transcript of their interview, and recordings were deleted once transcripts are completed and saved. A sample interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

These multiple opportunities for participants to share, confirm, and correct the data they provide led to a credible study from which I drew conclusions and identified themes. These themes are addressed in detail in Chapter 4 of this treatise.

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

A timeline for my efforts to complete the research can be found in Table 3. I commenced work on this study in Spring 2022 and defended the treatise in Fall 2023.

**Table 3**

*Timeline for data collection and analysis*

Milestone	Semester or Month
Defend proposal and move to candidacy;	August 2022
Submit Institutional Review Board paperwork for approval at both the University of Texas and the case institution	Fall 2022
Identify participants and begin questionnaires and interviews	January 2023
Complete questionnaires and interviews; begin coding and analyzing data	January and February 2023
Complete coding and analyzing data and write findings chapter	March and April 2023
Write chapter covering discussion and implications, make appropriate updates to introduction, literature review, methods, and findings chapters, and prepare final treatise for committee review	Summer 2023
Defend final treatise	Fall 2023

For the initial outreach to interested participants, I constructed a survey in Qualtrics to collect data and generate reports. I used this survey to better understand the demographic makeup of the sample as well as collect data on the participants' years of experience working at

the institution and in higher education. I included a question to determine whether a given participant has been a student at the institution in the past. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, and Rev's artificial intelligence transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews within minutes of their completion. Once transcripts were reviewed and returned by participants, I used Dedoose for data analysis. A list of start codes and codes that were introduced during the review of data can be found in Appendices C and D. Though I developed several codes for initial analysis of transcripts and participant checks, I relied on both descriptive and interpretive codes derived from the language in my conceptual framework and incorporating language that participants used to describe their experiences. This allows for both emic and etic codes that account for both the background information used to develop the study and the participants' own experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). As data was collected, I organized coded text excerpts to look for themes in participant experiences as well as significant outlying experiences. Chapter 4 of this treatise will evaluate these themes, describe their significance, and evaluate them considering the research questions.

### **Coding Procedures**

Documents and interviews were coded using the same set of start codes. As documents and interviews were reviewed, codes were added to the set to describe findings not included in the original start codes. A final code list for documents and interviews can be found in Appendix D.

When participants said something that tied closely to a theme that emerged during data analysis, their statement was coded as a "potential quote for reporting." These codes were added to a spreadsheet where they could be sorted by speaker, research question, and theme. Additionally, reports that counted the number of times each speaker or document received a code

were generated. These reports also linked to excerpts of interviews and documents featuring the codes. Some further direct quotes from participants not originally included in the “potential quote for reporting” list came from this process.

### **Limitation to Methods**

As a qualitative case study, results from this research may not be immediately generalizable to a range of contexts. As noted earlier in this paper, HSIs are a highly diverse group of institutions. Findings that are applicable to student-facing staff at a large public university such as the case institution might not be applicable a smaller institution, a community college, a religiously affiliated institution, or an institution in a different geographic location within the United States. Additionally, HSIs have the added dimension of the diverse ways in which institutions adopt their HSI identities. Some institutions embrace their HSI identity to a greater degree than others. We have seen in the review of literature how HSIs can range from institutions specifically founded to serve Hispanic or Latinx students (Garcia, 2019) to institutions that do not describe themselves as HSIs at all (Contreras et al., 2008). It would be a mistake to presume that a full understanding of nationwide HSI staff perceptions and experiences could be derived from a single study at a single institution. However, this research will cover some important preliminary ground in understanding the experiences of these colleagues, and its methods could potentially be replicated for further studies covering the experiences of staff members in a variety of HSI contexts.

### **Institutional Review Board Approval Process**

Because I am a student at the University of Texas and collected data at a different institution, I consulted with and received approval from the institutional review boards (IRB) of both institutions. The institution where I plan to collect data requires that I identify a faculty

member to oversee my research. A faculty member at the case institution was identified and assisted with preparing and submitting that institution's IRB application. I applied for IRB approval at the University of Texas in Early Fall 2022, received approval later that semester, and completed IRB approval for the case institution during December 2022.

I applied and was approved for exempt research status under IRB regulations. This approval was attainable because I collected information through conversational and written responses from participants whose identities remain confidential. I use pseudonyms for the institution, for each participant, and for specific individuals (such as the institution's president) and other institutions of higher education that participants named directly in their interviews. If a participant worked in a specific role where their anonymity might not be preserved if the institution was known, I kept their job title and description appropriately vague. Participants selected their own pseudonyms. I do not believe that participating in my study poses a threat to any participant's financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation. Participants did not run risk of criminal or civil liability and no deceit was involved in the research conducted. Participants do not include members of vulnerable populations such as children or incarcerated people. This research has no connections to the Food and Drug Administration or Health and Human Services. The study was designed to pose minimal risks to research participants, and I envision participants will benefit by having an opportunity to review my research once it is published and learn more about how their perspectives and experiences contribute to the student experience at their campus. Hurtado (2015) and Núñez (2018) caution against researchers at HSIs engaging in "drive-by" research where researchers conduct research and evaluate findings without sharing what they learned with the community where they conduct

research. I am excited for participants to have an opportunity to access and use my findings if they so choose and use any knowledge they gain from my research as they see fit.

### **Summary**

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology for my treatise covering the experiences of academic advising staff at Hispanic-serving institutions and their perceptions of how their work benefits students. It reviews the problem statement and research questions, and it provides context regarding the epistemological outlook that guides the inquiry. It describes sources of data, information about the site for the case study, provides information about participants and how they were identified, and gives context as to how data was coded and evaluated. Limitations to methods and context regarding the study's institutional review board approval was also provided.

My study will contribute to the literature surrounding HSIs and their service to students, and I hope that it will help shed light on the ways that staff can lead either positive or negative student outcomes. I further hope that it will be a springboard from which I can engage in future research on the topic of how to ensure that higher education environments are designed to be accessible to all students.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter shares information about the document review, the interview participants, and the themes that were developed based on their interview transcripts. It examines five themes that arise in response to the three research questions:

1. How does the institution communicate its HSI identity to staff members?
2. How do staff perceive their experience working at this institution?
3. How do staff perceive HSI Servingness across different backgrounds?

It continues to discuss results connected to each theme and provides the required context to discuss potential avenues for future research and practice and policy recommendations in the treatise's final chapter.

### Document Review

The document review covered generally available information on the institution's web site as well as pages that popped up when the reviewer typed "HSI" into the search bar located on the institution's home page. Documents were downloaded and coded in December 2022 and January 2023. Documents reviewed include:

**Table 4**

*List of Documents Reviewed*

Document	Found
Institutional Home Page	Via Home Page
Institutional "About" Page	Via Home Page
Mission, Values, and Goals	Via Home Page
Strategic Plan, Parts I-V	Via Home Page
Hispanic-Serving Institution About Page	Via "HSI" Search
Hispanic-Serving Institution Page	Via "HSI" Search
HSI Advancement Committee	Via "HSI" Search
HSI Week Celebration 2022 Page	Via "HSI" Search
Sponsored Programs Page	Via "HSI" Search
Los Gatos University Celebrates a Decade as a Hispanic-Serving Institution Press Release	Via "HSI" Search



These documents largely addressed the first research question, which involves how the institution communicates HSI identity to staff members. More information regarding how the documents address HSI identity will be discussed in the portion of the chapter addressing that research question.

### **Interview Participants**

Initial outreach emails were sent to approximately 80 staff members at the institution (see Appendix E for email outreach text), housed in academic advising, student affairs, HSI grant programs, and in student-facing academic affairs offices. Participants were encouraged to forward the initial email to colleagues working at the institution who might be interested in participating. A total of 15 participants completed the demographic questionnaire. All participants completing the questionnaire were eligible to participate in the study. Of the 15 original responses, 14 scheduled an interview, and 13 participants successfully completed the interview and participant checks. One participant completed the demographic questionnaire and did not respond to follow-up emails regarding interview scheduling. Another scheduled an interview that was postponed due to a power outage caused by severe inclement weather and was not able to reschedule. Interviews and participant checks were conducted in January and early February 2023 and coded during February, March, and April 2023.

Interviews were scheduled for up to an hour in length. The shortest interview lasted half an hour, and the longest was about an hour and twenty minutes in length. For the two interviews that lasted longer than an hour, I informed participants that we were at the time limit they had committed to, and they were comfortable with extending the conversation. Most interviews lasted between forty and sixty minutes.

## Demographic information

The demographic questionnaire included several open-ended questions which allowed participants to describe themselves and their identities in the most accurate way. As a result, some variation in terms (for instance woman and female) are included in participant demographic information. Terms used here reflect the ways that participants described themselves. Participants included five men/male people, eight women/female people, and no people who described their gender other than one of those options. The racial/ethnic breakdown included people who described themselves as either Hispanic, Latino/Latina or both, white people, one African American person, and one Biracial person. Two participants disclosed that they were veterans of the US armed forces during their interviews. The group held a diverse range of roles on campus, including academic advisors (some of whom served in leadership roles on their teams), people who worked on HSI grants and programs, people who worked on institutionally funded campus programs, and one assistant dean whose role requires frequent direct student contact.

**Table 5**

### *Participant Background and Demographics*

Name:	Race/ Ethnicity:	Gender:	Role:
Althea	Hispanic	Woman	Academic Advisor
Antonio	Hispanic	Male	Assistant Dean
Anya	African American	Female	Academic Advisor
Emma	White	Female	HSI Grant Leader
Felix	Hispanic/ Latino	Male	HSI Grant Coordinator, Transfer Support
Jebidiah	White	Cis Male	Academic Advisor, Senior
John	White	Male	Academic Advisor, Senior
Karoline	White	Woman	Academic Program Administrator
Lalo	Latino	Male	Academic Advisor, Developmental Education Program Liaison

Marie	Hispanic	Female	HSI Grant Coordinator
Mary	Biracial	Cis Woman	Academic Program Administrator
Mason	White	Cis Woman	Academic Advisor
Shannon	White	Female	Academic Advisor

Participants also had a diverse range of experience in the field, with six participants with current or previous experience working with an HSI grant, and levels of experience in the field ranging from relatively new professionals to staff members with multiple decades of experience. All participants were either alumni of or current master’s or doctoral students at the case institution.

**Table 3**

*Participant Experience in Higher Education*

Name:	Experience in current role	Experience at the case institution	Experience in higher education	Degrees at the Case Institution	Experience with an HSI Grant
Althea	10 years, 11 months	10 years, 11 months	14 years, 6 months	Bachelor’s	Yes
Antonio	13 years	20 years, 4 months	20 years, 4 months	Master’s	No
Anya	9 months	4 years	4 years	Bachelor’s	No
Emma	4 months	5 years, 4 months	5 years, 4 months	Bachelor’s Master’s	Yes
Felix	6 months	7 years, 3 months	7 years, 3 months	Doctoral	Yes
Jebidiah	3 years, 7 months	11 years, 3 months	11 years, 3 months	Master’s	No
John	4 years, 6 months	8 years, 2 months	9 years	Doctoral	No
Karoline	1 year, 5 months	9 years, 5 months	11 years, 5 months	Doctoral	No
Lalo	8 months	3 years	3 years	Master’s	Yes
Marie	4 months	6 years, 5 months	6 years, 5 months	Bachelor’s Master’s	Yes
Mary	1 year	15 years	16 years	Bachelor’s Master’s Doctoral	No
Mason	1 year	6 years	6 years	Bachelor’s Master’s	Yes
Shannon	9 months	9 months	7 years	Bachelor’s Master’s Doctoral	Yes

Note: Reported experience is correct as of the time of data collection.

### **Participant Profiles**

This section gives some context about each participant that was provided by their initial questionnaires and their interviews. Each profile includes information about the participant's current role at the university, their background, long term career plans, and other related information. This information is accurate at the time of the participant's interview and may have changed since the time of data collection. Participants are listed in alphabetical order.

#### **Althea**

Althea is a Hispanic woman who works as an Academic Advisor. She also teaches a college transition course to first-year students, and she is a current or past advisor to different student organizations on campus. She has been in her current role for over ten years. She earned a bachelor's degree at the case institution, earned a master's degree at another institution, and worked in residence life at an HSI in another part of the country prior to returning to this institution in an advising role. When asked about the future, she mentions that she once considered returning to graduate school for a PhD to pursue faculty roles, but she is not interested in moving into administrative roles with a strong supervisory component. She enjoys her current role and does not have specific plans to change. "Why fix what's not broken?" she asks.

#### **Antonio**

Antonio, a Hispanic man, is an Assistant Dean whose role involves a significant amount of student-facing work. He has been in his current role for over a decade. He came to college thinking he might pursue a career in medicine, but he found an interest in student services and student affairs during his time as a student, with a particular interest in "what was called

multicultural student affairs at the time.” He credits key early mentors with connecting him to the field of student affairs and helping him grow as a professional. He is currently a doctoral student, and he describes his future goals as involving “being more mobile.” While he doesn’t intend to leave his current role soon, he describes himself as at a point in his life where his children are preparing for college and his parents, who live in another region, may need more attention in the coming years. He looks forward to having the flexibility to make a geographic move considering his changing family priorities if needed.

### **Anya**

Anya, an African American woman, works as an academic advisor at the case institution. She has been in her current role for about 9 months. She worked in an academic advising center at the case institution as a student employee during her time as an undergraduate, and credits that experience as helping her establish higher education as career path of interest. After completing her bachelor’s degree, she worked for a nonprofit implementing a college transition program for high school students in a nearby city, and she realized she wanted to return to higher education. She is interested in the larger idea of making the college transition as smooth as possible for new students, and notes that while she will likely continue to focus on higher education, she is contemplating a graduate program in instructional design, learning technologies, or a similar field that would help her broaden her horizons both in and outside of higher ed.

### **Emma**

Emma, a white woman, leads an HSI grant funded program. She has been in her leadership role for four months, but she has worked at the institution in different roles for over five years. Emma earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees at the case institution. She describes how she needed a full-time job while pursuing her master’s degree, and she found a role in

academic advising. She mentioned that she anticipated doing that work during graduate school and moving on, “but I actually loved it.” Since then, Emma has worked in both academic and student affairs, and has held progressively responsible roles on HSI grants. Her current grant is in its final year, and while they are pursuing an opportunity to use any remaining funds over an additional year, she is considering future roles accordingly. She is excited for some new proposed teams that are launching soon at the university, and she looks forward to continued service to students at this institution.

### **Felix**

Felix, a Hispanic/Latino male, works on an HSI grant in a role where he supports transfer students. He has been in his current role for about six months and has worked at the institution for about seven years. During that time, he has worked in academic advising and in HSI grant roles. He earned a master’s degree at another institution and is currently pursuing his PhD at the case institution. Once Felix completes his doctoral studies, he hopes to transition to either a tenure track faculty role, or to a higher education administrative role at the director level or higher. Because of his experience working with transfer student populations, he notes community colleges as a potential future area of interest.

### **Jebidiah**

Jebidiah, a white male, is an academic advisor in a senior role. In addition to managing a caseload of student advisees, he is also responsible for work connected to advising administration and advising center operations. Jebidiah describes himself as a non-traditional veteran student who started college “six months out of a war.” He credits an academic advisor with changing his life by asking the right questions, helping him navigate both academic and non-academic challenges, and helping him clarify what he wanted to do. As a result of his own

college transition and his strong relationship with his own academic advisor, he chose a path where he could help other students, including non-traditional students, veterans, and first-generation students. While he is interested in topics like systems thinking, curriculum development, and ways to impact how advising is done on a broader scale, Jebidiah describes himself as enjoying his current role when asked about the future.

### **John**

John, a white male, serves in a similar role to Jebidiah's. He holds a senior academic advising role where he advises students but also has leadership responsibilities in his advising center. He also serves as an adjunct instructor at the university. He has served in his current role for four of his nine years in the higher education field. He describes himself as a person who likes to help others and who likes to solve problems, so he says academic advising "really sort of came for me." After completing a bachelor's degree at the case institution, he worked in financial aid and admissions and realized he liked roles where he could have interpersonal communication with students. From there, advising seemed like the next logical step. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at the university and hopes to move to a faculty role or a more advanced administrative role in the long term. He also mentions that he wouldn't be opposed to a role outside of higher ed if the right opportunity came along.

### **Karoline**

Karoline, a white woman, leads an academic program focused on first-year students. Karoline's program is not connected to HSI grants. She has been in her current role for about 18 months and has worked in higher education for over a decade. Her team uses an annual theme to plan a range of campus events, including high profile events with nationally and internationally known speakers. In addition to her role leading this program, she is a faculty member. Her role

also involves a great deal of committee support, including work on new student convocation, staff development, and support for first generation students. “I’ve always been teaching,” Karoline says when asked to describe what drew her to higher education. She began her teaching career as a swimming, yoga, and fitness instructor, and later became certified to teach primary and secondary students in a range of capacities including English and fine arts. She realized that teaching younger students wasn’t a good fit, and so she earned a PhD at the case institution and began teaching undergraduates, eventually stepping into her current role with this program as she continues to teach. When asked about the future, she describes herself as content in her current role, especially since her children are considering attending the university soon.

### **Lalo**

Lalo, a Latino male, is an academic advisor with additional responsibilities connected to a state developmental coursework program. He describes himself as a liaison between that program and the first year advising center with a responsibility to make sure that students get placed in the most appropriate developmental courses based on their test scores and academic plans. He has worked in his current role for 8 months and has 3 years of experience in the higher education field. Lalo, a veteran of the US armed forces, attended the university as a graduate student planning for a career in physical therapy or chiropractic care, but he found graduate student employment as an academic success coach and transitioned to his current role after graduation because he wanted to continue to help students and sees a great deal of value in the LGU community. Lalo’s parents and siblings are all alumni of this institution, and he sees the university as “a family thing.” When asked about the future, he mentions that he is considering a second master’s degree with an emphasis on education. “The sky’s the limit,” he says.



## **Marie**

Marie, a Hispanic female, works as a Program Coordinator on an HSI grant-funded program. She has been in her current role for about four months, but she has worked at the institution for over six years. Prior to working in higher education, she was a kindergarten teacher. Marie left elementary education when she moved to the metro area where the case institution is located. In her new city, Marie found herself drawn to roles outside of teaching where she still had an opportunity to help students. She also wanted to try working with a different age group. Marie began her higher education career in academic advising but felt concerned that there wasn't a career ladder in that field. That brought her to work with HSI grants, and to complete a master's degree in a data analytics at the case institution. Once the grant that funds her current position ends, she hopes to find a role using her data analytics background in a higher ed context, perhaps in an institutional research capacity.

## **Mary**

Mary is a biracial first-generation woman of Color. She works as an administrator for an academic program. Her program emphasizes its service to first-year students, but also welcomes all students, faculty, staff, and community members. She has been in her current role for about a year, and she has worked in higher education for the last 16 years. Mary describes a lifelong interest in education, with early childhood experiences where she would arrange her toys as a class, and she would be the professor. She says that her first experiences with higher education happened at the case institution, including watching an uncle graduate from the institution and having a parent who was employed there. Mary is a doctoral student at the case institution, and she says, "I'd be a lifer [at this university] if the salary paid more." She plans to stay in education and expresses a desire to help first-generation students throughout her career.

## **Mason**

Mason, a white woman, is an academic advisor. She has worked in her current role for a year, and she has been employed in the field of higher education for six years. After graduating from a bachelor's program at the case institution, Mason felt a desire to stay close to familiar people and a familiar campus. She took a job as an academic advisor shortly after graduation as a result. She worked as an advisor for a while and then took a job working with a non-HSI grant program that brought her to several high schools to assist those students with their college transitions. In that role, she describes difficulty navigating complex administrative processes that varied between different high schools she supported, and she missed having proximity to the case institution, and so she returned to academic advising when an opportunity arose. Her advising role was funded by an HSI grant for some, but not all her time as an academic advisor. Mason appreciates the structure and purpose she finds in advising, and she plans to stick with academic advising for her long-term career plan.

## **Shannon**

Shannon, a white woman, works as an academic advisor at the case institution. She has been in her current role for about nine months and has worked in the field of higher education for seven years. She completed her bachelor's degree at the case institution and shared a story of a faculty member who helped her connect to the university and learn how to navigate its resources. That professor helped her find a job on campus, and "when I found my job, I found my purpose." After taking on new responsibilities connected to her campus job, and she realized she "wanted to be that person for other students ... be that support or connection that helps them get through." Shannon recently completed a doctoral program and wants to stay in higher ed, but she isn't sure

about specific plans. She has considered teaching, but she describes herself as “open to opportunities in higher ed ... as they present themselves.”

### **Research Questions and Themes**

Next, this chapter will explore the findings connected to the three research questions identified earlier in this treatise. Five themes are established that respond to the three research questions as follows. The remainder of this chapter will cover the findings connected to these themes and the way that those findings relate back to the three research questions.

**Table 4**

*Research Questions and Themes*

Research Question	Themes
RQ1: How does the institution communicate its HSI identity to staff members?	Theme 1: Institutional leadership must incorporate HSI identity into its communication strategy.
RQ2: How do staff perceive their experience working at this institution?	Theme 2: Participants seek to both provide consistent communication to students and receive consistent communication from the institution. Theme 3: The inauguration of a new institutional president has left participants feeling both hopeful and skeptical about HSI identity development.
RQ3: How do staff perceive HSI Servingness across different demographic backgrounds?	Theme 4: Hispanic and Latino/Latina participants were more likely to point out that to effectively serve students, the institution should also be serving their families. Theme 5: Participants from a range of demographic backgrounds compare the institution to other HSIs to make meaning of HSI identity and assess Servingness.

**RQ1: How does the institution communicate its HSI identity to staff members?**

One significant theme arose in response to this research question. In reviewing documents and interview transcripts, it became evident that specific offices and organizations do

a great deal of work to communicate HSI identity across the institution. Because the work of communicating HSI identity takes place in specific corners (or “pockets” as one participant described them) of the institutional community, the case institution may miss opportunities to communicate HSI identity to the entire institutional community. While these “pockets” have strong communication of HSI identity, that communication does not always rise to the institutional level. Inclusion of HSI identity in spaces that command a broad audience, such as the institutional web site home page, the strategic plan, and communications from senior institutional leaders would amplify the excellent communication taking place in different spaces around the institution.

**Theme 1: Institutional leadership must incorporate HSI identity into its communication strategy.**

A common theme in both the document review and in the interviews involved the idea of who leads HSI initiatives and who communicates HSI identity on campus. While HSI identity is not centered in widely read institutional documents, three groups were identified as important to this leadership, HSI grant staff, committees such as the HSI Advancement Committee, and affinity groups like the Hispanic Faculty and Staff Coalition. Organizations described here are given pseudonyms to preserve institutional and participant anonymity. These groups work together to communicate HSI identity and develop programming that supports the organization’s development as an HSI, including planning for events like HSI week and Hispanic Heritage Month and developing an application for the Seal of Excelencia, an award given by an organization called Excelencia in Education to colleges and universities across the United States that excel at serving Latino students. This section of the chapter will elaborate on how these groups work to lead and communicate HSI identity.

Current and past HSI grants listed on the Sponsored Programs web site include multiple Title III and Title V programs, both past and present. These grants are examples of the kinds of grant funding that HSIs can attain via applying with federal government entities, in this case the US Department of Education. They are created in response to calls for proposals from the funding entity, and focus on specific goals, such as supporting future teachers, facilitating transfer student success, enhancing career and financial education, or developing a pipeline for STEM students to move into graduate school and careers. While these grants are sometimes available for what one participant described as “no-cost extension,” where they are allowed to spend any remaining money over the course of the year following the grant award period, they are generally not renewable. As a result, grant leaders generally must seek new jobs as the grants end, resulting in frequent turnover for key advocates who communicate HSI identity. Emma, the current leader of an HSI grant program, describes a situation where she was promoted twice over the course of a six-month period as colleagues left for other roles at the institution when a grant was coming to an end. The impact of these non-renewable grants as a focal point for HSI identity communication ties in with conversations about staff turnover to be discussed further in a later theme. HSI grants are a key part of how HSI identity is communicated, but because they are not permanent; their ability to maintain consistent communication over many years is limited.

The HSI Advancement Committee is a relatively recent development that brings some permanence to HSI identity communication. According to the committee’s web page reviewed as part of the document review, it was formed in 2021 after a working group tasked with preparing an application for the Seal of Excelencia award determined there was a need for a permanent HSI advisory group. It is designed to “elevate, promote, and reinforce the efforts of the work group,” and communicate “the importance of LGU’s ongoing commitment to Latino student success.”

The group has four key goals connected to gathering data, enhancing HSI visibility, facilitating programs, and pursuing the Seal of Excelencia designation.

The Hispanic Faculty and Staff Coalition, an affinity organization for Hispanic and/or Latino/a/x faculty and staff, did not come up in the document review but was mentioned by several participants, including Emma, Antonio, Marie, and Althea. Antonio described the coalition as a “pocket” of space inside the institution where it feels like an HSI. He mentioned that if a student connects to a coalition member, they will be well-served. Althea also brought up the coalition when describing spaces within the institution where it felt like an HSI, even though she personally described the organization as “just not my thing.” Emma also described the organization’s work to develop programs for students and how it sometimes varied from year to year. Marie described a relatively complex relationship with the organization:

I've been here six years and like I've finally joined. I was always scared to join. I don't know why, but I just was, and now I'm happy that I did. But the few meetings I went to, there wasn't many, like many people. Also, I don't think there's anybody big from ... [the most senior] administration level.

The organization represents a space that creates community for faculty and staff, supports students and communicates identity, but per Marie, it is limited because of its overall size, and it lacks membership from some of the highest levels of institutional administration.

Because staff working on non-renewable grants, committee leaders, and affinity group members lead in communicating HSI identity, there are limits on how it is communicated and to whom. Four participants reported students and other offices on campus not being aware that the institution was an HSI, including Lalo, Emma, Karoline, and Mary.

Lalo, a relatively recent alumnus of a graduate program at the case institution, mentioned that prior to graduation, he didn't hear about the institution being an HSI much compared to his time as a full-time staff member, but he also mentions that as a student, he may have been focusing his attention elsewhere. Emma similarly reported that sometimes students she interacted with didn't realize that the institution was an HSI. Karoline reported that "for social media, our student employee had gone out and she was asking people 'what is an HSI?' And most of the students didn't know what it was and what it meant." Where Emma, Lalo, and Karoline described students not being aware of the institution's role of an HSI, Mary shared a story about an issue she ran into as part of the planning committee for an HSI-related event:

[I reached out to Marketing and said we were] "going to have this huge HSI celebration; we need to make sure that we get photos of this." And I was having to let marketing know, "Hey, you need to be there. We need photos because the Seal of Excelencia is probably coming in a couple days." They didn't know what that was; they didn't know what HSI was. And so, it's having to explain to people who are even in charge of marketing certain events, what that means and how we frame it to serve this demographic.

The idea that HSI identity is communicated, but in "pockets," stood out as staff described their experiences. The document review told a similar story, but by omission. No codes for HSI or related topics were found in "Mission, Vision, and Values," page, the "About," page, the reviewed strategic plan pages, or the institution's home page at the time of review. In fact, HSI related codes, such as HSI, Hispanic-serving institution, HSI designation, and HSI certification were clustered in pages found by searching the web site for the term "HSI." This aligns with the findings of Contreras et al. (2008), whose research described in the literature review of this

treatise found that few Hispanic-serving institutions referenced their status in primary documents connected to their mission, vision, or strategic plan, but generally limited discussion of HSI identity to parts of their web site dedicated to grants or to diversity statements. Antonio also describes this phenomenon in his interview:

Unless you're funded by some type of HSI grant, or you are in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office, ... then it's not going to be talked about. It's not baked into your day to day unless you look for it and commit to it.

Because communication about HSI identity is clustered in these pockets, rather than being on the institutional web site's home page, in its mission statement, and in other widely available spaces, someone seeking to learn more about this institution as an HSI must know what an HSI is, and how to find HSI-related information. This ties back to findings in the literature review where researchers found that institutions of higher education may presume that students will understand key concepts and know how to seek out information about them. In that research, gaps in both student understanding and in student service arise when students are not told about key concepts or how to access pertinent information (Musoba et al., 2013; Tevis & Britton, 2020). In this case, the concern is not unique to students. Mary's point about how even a staff member in the marketing office wasn't aware of the concept of an HSI drives home a need for a permanent, centralized means of communication with a platform that reaches all members of the institutional community. Althea shares that "It takes more than one dedicated office to make a university an HSI." Integration of HSI identity into all aspects of institutional identity is needed for the entire community to get the message, and permanent HSI leadership is needed to spearhead this integration.



## **RQ2: How do staff perceive their experience working at this institution?**

Two primary themes came up in response to this question. One was a broad theme of a need for strong consistency and communication at the institution. This theme touched on both how staff provide consistency and communication to students, and how they receive it from the institution itself. Staff describe barriers to communication and consistency rooted in turnover, and turnover rooted in concerns about compensation. The second theme tied to this question covers the institution's recent presidential transition. While this interview protocol was not designed to ask about the institution's presidential transition, participants were eager to discuss it. The recent change in leadership affected participants' views of their work and the institution in both positive and negative ways.

### **Theme 2: Participants seek to both provide consistent communication to students and receive consistent communication from the institution.**

Two ideas, consistency and communication, summed up many of the conversations that came up in interviews. As such, this theme will cover several topics that can tie back to these two more general ideas. Staff expressed their desire to provide consistent, accurate communication to students, their desire to support students to consistently navigate complex institutional resources, and their need for consistency and communication from the institution and its leaders to succeed in their roles and grow as professionals.

From the student perspective, consistency and communication look like strong interdepartmental communication and strong knowledge bases for staff who support students. For themselves, staff desired professional development to maintain awareness of changes in policy, as well as a consistent way to stay in contact with their colleagues across departments and offices. They described barriers to communication and consistency that were created by turnover,

as staff shuffled between roles in the institution and left the institution altogether. This turnover, driven by concerns about compensation and a need for career advancement, served as a barrier to providing students with the kind of continuous support that would allow them to be successful.

Jebidiah, an academic advisor with leadership responsibilities, described student service as helping students make “the connection between what I’m doing, and who I am, and who I want to be.” To make these connections, students rely on a broad variety of campus resources to help them navigate choosing a major, finding community and belongingness, paying for college, and determining and implementing successful career and graduate school plans. In responding to questions about times when they helped students succeed and challenges that students faced, participants described a complex network of resources that students must navigate and policies that sometimes change in ways that challenge even staff members’ ability to navigate resources.

Two advisors with leadership responsibilities, John and Jebidiah, laid out strong ideas regarding ways to streamline consistency and communication for students. Jebidiah described issues where students might miss a connection. For instance, a student might understand what they had to do to receive financial aid, but they didn’t make the connection that those steps were related to their ability to register. He spoke about the need for a “one-stop-shop” for student services, where:

there’s one person ... who has access to the finance records, ... to the academic records, ... who has the time to do follow-up meetings on time management skills. I would have people who can do all of it, right? So that when you go to your academic “insert title,” they can look over your financial aid package, ... and they can show you why this particular academic advice matters because it relates to that thing.

This stands in some contrast to John's experience, where he talked about training a new colleague who had previously worked as an advisor at another institution. John's colleague was surprised at the amount of time the team spent processing major changes and overrides for students. At their previous institution, John's colleague spent most of their time working directly with students to discuss their major, their coursework, and developing expertise in the academic area they advised so they could provide thorough guidance to students. He discussed the idea that advisors were often bogged down with administrative and process tasks, and he advocated for a stronger communication network for advising, financial aid, recruiting, academic coaching, and other offices to better support one another. "Unfortunately," he said:

some of it is a self-inflicted issue there. I think that there are a lot of things that we as an institution could do better in terms of being a little more universal in some processes. I think that there could be a better job of keeping other offices informed. Being in higher ed for as long as some of us have been, ... processes change frequently, so even people who are on top of things normally ... may be uninformed if something has recently changed.

Though both John and Jebidiah pose different strategies for a solution, they both describe a similar problem and a similar goal. Both participants express a desire for students to understand their experience at both an existential and administrative level and flow seamlessly from discussing financial aid to academic planning to developing skills they will need to be successful in their coursework and beyond. Two potential barriers to this kind of robust network of support, whether it takes the form Jebidiah's one-stop-shop or John's closely connected network of specialists, involve a need for information sharing and a need to minimize turnover to build and

maintain strong relationships between students and staff, as well as between staff across teams or departments.

Karoline, who manages an academic program, had some ideas about how this kind of relationship might be achieved. Harkening back to Jebidiah's concerns that students go to too many places and talk to too many people to make sense of their academic and financial aid concerns, she described a situation where redundancy made it challenging to know where to send a student. She gave an example tied to the HSI grants:

Grants are great, right? You can offer more things, but for a while we had [an institutionally funded office focused on resume development, interview preparation, career fairs, and related topics] and [an HSI grant focused on helping students prepare for careers and learn about money management] ... and the students were like ... "Who do I talk to? What's going on?" ... Let's work together. Work smarter, not harder, and pull that together.

She described these multiple places to go as an impediment to a smooth referral process between offices. While she was excited about and supportive of HSI grants and the institution embracing its HSI identity, she advocated for making sure that the institution approached its work to increase funding in ways that strengthen existing services rather than potentially duplicating efforts. She also described something that John alluded to, a need for further cross-departmental communication and professional development. She described her work with a new leader at the institution who oversees staff development. This leader had asked her to work on a staff development event to be scheduled at the conclusion of the academic year. She shares that:

We're reflecting on the needs of staff ... and bringing them this just in time, like education and opportunities, also including the social part of it as well ... trying to be more open ... supporting staff as they are at LGU holistically.

Karoline's work with institutional leaders to provide just-in-time updates, opportunities for social interaction, and holistic support to staff speaks both to John's desire for greater communication between departments and Jebidiah's call for staff to have deeper knowledge of all the facets of the institution that students interact with. The training she describes could assist with deepening both relationships between departments and the depth of individual staff members' knowledge. However, keeping staff in place from semester to semester and year to year is a challenge in and of itself. The other important consideration in this theme is staff turnover and the barrier it poses to student support.

Staff turnover at LGU happens when staff leave their roles for new departments within the institution as well as for new employers. Interview participants reported that staff members had to switch jobs for both financial reasons and career advancement. Emma, who worked in her first Program Coordinator role for some time prior to the events described here, gives a particularly striking example of how turnover affected her own career advancement:

I was a Program Coordinator in June, became a Senior Program Coordinator in July and a started acting as the leader of the grant in September. And so, I had all these changes in positions, [but] each time I had to wait a couple of weeks to post the job, then the job's posted for a couple of weeks and then we ... interview and then that takes a while. And so that's just more time where things are not getting done, and then you have to train those people, right? And so even if the people you're bringing in are from LGU, it just

takes a pause in planning anything or getting things done because there's [no one] there to do it.

While Emma's experience is an outlier caused by the upcoming end of the grant that she works on, she illustrates two problems caused by regular turnover in front-line student support roles. First, roles are vacant for weeks or months as supervisors seek to fill those positions, leaving no one to do important student-service work. Additionally, it illustrates an example of a situation where staff feel a need to change to more senior roles, often in other departments or even away from the institution, to advance their careers.

Mason, an academic advisor, provided an example of what this career advancement movement might look like. She describes a situation where she moved from an advising role to a more senior role (still at the case institution) overseeing a college preparation and transition program at several area high schools. After spending some time in that more senior role, she came back to a less senior academic advising role because she prefers the nature of academic advising work. In her current academic advising role, she reports feeling like her knowledge and expertise are not always valued. She described working closely with a student to ensure their credits transferred successfully from their community college and feeling like she was "just a little advisor without a PhD," when describing her experience explaining transfer policies, course equivalencies, and advocating on behalf of students, especially to colleagues who are faculty or hold departmental leadership roles:

It's very frustrating working in higher education as I feel like my opinion's only reached so far ... We administer degree programs, so we know a lot more about sequencing and how these things are going to affect students ... I understand curriculum needs to be

looked at on a philosophical level, but the administration part I think has to come into play.

Overall, Mason reports enjoying her work as an advisor, but the low pay and the lack of respect she described above led her to seek other options. Mason reports that if she had to live on her income alone without her partner's, she could not survive on her salary. She describes a need for "some sort of senior advisor position" where more experienced advisors who don't want to supervise staff can stay with their current departments, keep advising students, be eligible for a higher salary, and do more and different work on projects that would benefit the institution and its students. She draws a distinction between this hypothetical role and roles like those held by John and Jebidiah, who are responsible for hiring, training, and providing feedback to fellow team members. The idea of being able to grow professionally without growing into a supervisor was important to her, as well as to Althea, who mentioned a similar desire not to supervise staff in her staff profile in this chapter.

Mason was not the only participant to note that compensation made it challenging for them to stay in their role. Eight participants mentioned staff compensation as a concern at some point in their interviews. In academic advising, the institution has worked to improve compensation. Mason describes her original salary as close to \$30,000, but now a little above \$40,000. Marie, a former academic advisor who now works as a Program Coordinator on an HSI grant, also described recent efforts to raise pay for advisors. While Mason expressed being glad to earn more, Marie had some skepticism regarding how recent efforts to improve advisor compensation had been carried out:

Our advisors weren't getting paid, and they finally got a little raise, but only the [the most entry level advisors] got a raise ... For advisors who had been here, their pay wasn't adjusted ... and that was very bad for morale.

Marie goes on to describe how many advisors with a few years of experience in their roles were already making the new, higher base pay level due to raises granted over several years of work. Effectively, they did not receive a raise, while their less experienced colleagues did. When they saw that their newer colleagues were making the same salary as they were, they jumped to new roles for higher salaries, Marie says.

Multiple participants described struggling to reconcile their love of the work with the compensation offered by their employer. Mary said, "I would be a lifer if the salary paid more." Jebidiah described how "you don't do this emotionally draining work for the pay we get unless you care about something, right?" John pointed out how the institution's efforts to raise compensation at the macro level often aren't felt in individual paychecks:

A lot of times we'll be provided updates on like, "well we've awarded \$X this year in raises," and other things like that, and ... that's over ... a population of 4,000 staff members and 2,000 faculty.

"When it's all said and done, we're all working and need a paycheck to live our lives and be part of the way society is built," John said elsewhere in his interview. Karoline, who manages an academic program, had a similar perspective. She describes how:

Education has always been a rough road unless maybe you're in upper administration ... I've heard a lot of people leaving for corporate jobs because they can get paid more, which is like, yeah, "now I can pay my rent ... I can pay for my food."



While participants make it clear that they are passionate about the work that they do, they struggle to reconcile that with their compensation. These participants have deep connections with the institution. They are all either alumni or current graduate students. Many of them have family members who also studied or worked at this institution. Some described being proud to send their children to study at the institution someday. Even with this sense of deep pride in their work and in their employer, participants still describe needing a high-earning partner to be able to afford to work there or describe colleagues leaving jobs there to afford necessities like food and housing. When asked a question about challenges at the institution, one participant facetiously said, “More money!” laughed, and went on to describe a more thorough answer.

Staff are being asked to choose between doing work where they find value, and doing work that compensates them appropriately for their labor. They are leaving direct student support roles to advance their careers and increase their salaries. Whether they do this by switching to a job with supervisory responsibilities in another department, or by leaving the institution or the higher education field, their absence creates gaps that prevent students from receiving the kind of consistent communication that would allow them to have a knowledgeable one-stop-shop support person or a closely connected network of experienced specialists in place to support them. Compensation in line with the cost of living and comparable to what is provided by other employers or industries that require similar levels of education and experience would not only serve to retain trained, qualified, committed staff, but it would prevent the gaps in service Emma describes above when she talks about the significant time commitment required to post a position, review applications, interview candidates, make decisions, wait for institutional hiring processes, and train new team members. When staff leave their roles, there is no one doing that role to serve students, but there is also a loss of institutional knowledge. We know from the

literature review that HSI students express concerns about whether their college or university is truly serving them. The interruption of service caused by turnover in these key roles may be a contributing factor to this problem.

**Theme 3: The inauguration of a new institutional president has left participants feeling both hopeful and skeptical about HSI identity development.**

The case institution recently experienced a presidential turnover when its past president retired after a lengthy tenure in her role. A total of eight participants mentioned the new president or the recent presidential turnover in their interviews, even though no questions were structured in ways that were intended to bring up the topic. In general, participants are excited about presidential turnover, while there was also some skepticism. To help preserve participant and institutional anonymity, the outgoing president will be referred to as Dr. Fisher, and the new president will be referred to as Dr. Maisonneuve in this treatise, and any participant references to their names will be replaced with these pseudonyms.

Antonio, an assistant dean, was quick to draw contrasts between the two leaders. He stresses that while he believes that both presidents care deeply for the institution and want the best for it, they have different styles and present in different ways.

I'm not a very sports-oriented person, but as I'm talking through this, I think of both leaders as a sort of head coach who gives direction. When sending messages beyond the team to the field, Dr. Fisher seemed to take on the role of ... an announcer who calls out what is happening because it is happening or has happened. Dr. Maisonneuve seems more of a head cheerleader ... rather than an announcer who is calling out what they see, [he is] trying to rally everyone behind the team and offer a sense of a shared goal.

Felix, a Program Coordinator on an HSI Grant, drew similar comparisons between the two presidents:

I think that under Dr. Fisher's leadership, it felt, at times, sterile ... the way she responded to certain things was from being genuine in general and being authentic, but I don't think she did enough to really put herself in the community ... In our new administration, he does a good job of being connected to students, and he's in tune with student populations.

Mason, an academic advisor, offered a similar perspective when she says that:

we have a new president who started this past summer and I feel more optimistic than I ever have about working at LGU for that reason. [Before, it felt like] things wouldn't change unless there's an urgent reason to. But now we're looking at things proactively instead of ... in a reactionary way.

Anya, an academic advisor, described the new president as a supporting factor in her general optimism toward her role when asked about her future plans:

I feel very comfortable in college settings, working with people to advance the school, how things are changing.

Anya goes on to describe goals, including going on to pursue a master's degree at the case institution and learning more about a related professional field where she can see herself growing. Even if the new president isn't direct cause for excitement among participants, the transition contributes to their overall excitement about their work and the institution.

Several participants specifically mentioned their hopes that the new president would be a champion of the institution's HSI identity. "I do know Dr. Maisonneuve takes a lot of pride in our HSI status and wants to continue to grow our reputation as an HSI," said Mason. Antonio

drew a comparison between the two leaders and expressed some optimism about Dr.

Maisonneuve's ability to embrace the institution's HSI identity:

I think our previous leader was very reserved and measured. That may include whether they highlighted the university's identity as an HSI, and ... that might have been more measured depending on the audience. I think the new president seems much more comfortable with highlighting our HSI identity.

Emma, who leads an HSI grant, described how a new leader might affect future HSI grant applications. She describes how the transition makes her feel "hopeful," and she believes that her team's services are valued, but also reevaluated. She mentions that Dr. Maisonneuve was excited about the institution's recent recognition from Excelencia in Education, an organization that recognizes higher education institutions that work to advance Hispanic and Latino students. "He's keeping the committees [that were formed around the institution's goal of receiving the Seal of Excelencia award] going," she says. "I think that change in leadership is just really going to influence the institution all around as far as making HSI [initiatives] more prevalent and more effective on campus."

Marie, a Program Coordinator working on an HSI grant, had both optimistic and skeptical thoughts on the new president. She specifically describes how Dr. Maisonneuve was selected following a rigorous process with extensive involvement from a diverse group of voices on campus.

There were a lot of people involved in the interview process. Like, from [the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion] office, from across campus, the deans ... it was not just big people in [upper administration], but people who were actually doing ... student support services ... I feel like they were really listening to staff when making the decision.

While the new president was selected in a way that gave her reason to feel optimistic, she describes change to fully embrace the institution's HSI identity as "slower than I would, and I'm sure students would, like." She also drew a distinction between receiving awards like the Seal of Excelencia and actual service to Hispanic and Latino/a/x students:

I was kind of struggling with ... helping with the Seal of Excelencia application ... like, this is all great stuff and we're doing it, but as a staff member ... there were times when I felt like, are we really serving our students? Are they really doing anything for our staff? Our faculty? ... I identify as Hispanic, Latina, all of it ... I'm seeing all these things, but I don't feel like I have a whole place at the table ... [Compare that to now,] we have a different president, and we have a lot of things going on, and ... I'm feeling more like staff does have a seat at the table.

Marie's mixed feelings draw a line between some participants' optimism and others skepticism about the change in leadership. Mary, an administrator working on an academic program, describes how new presidential priorities focusing on becoming an R1 Research institution and on recruiting and retaining students don't necessarily include HSI identity or prioritize historically marginalized students.

When it comes to being an HSI in the South, you don't hear that in these initiatives ... Currently we have 28 males in a hotel because we over-committed our on-campus housing. We are on track to do that again for fall ... I don't understand why as an HSI we continue to push for enrollment levels when we should be going for excellence.

Mary describes two new presidential priorities connected to academic research and enrollment growth and contrasts them with priorities connected to serving students who already attend the institution:

A lot of the students who do get pushed into hotels are high financial aid or first gen, and this is a demographic that has been identified through literature that should live on campus and have live-in supports. And that's not happening ... We are seeing record enrollments in our classes, but at the same time, we're seeing record levels of faculty leaving, because if you don't increase their salary, you don't increase their tools and you just increase class size, you're seeing that disconnect. And as an HSI, I think we should be focusing more on our current demographics that we have rather than trying to scale up at a time when that might not be feasible.

While Felix, who works with transfer students on an HSI grant, drew a positive comparison to the new president compared to his predecessor earlier in this chapter, his outlook was not without skepticism. Earlier in this section, discussed concerns that Dr. Fisher was reactive rather than proactive, but he describes Dr. Maisonneuve as not having shown active support for communities of Color on campus.

I don't remember seeing anything on social media in support of [Hispanic Heritage] Month ... I haven't really seen anything in support of Black History Month. And so, I'm worried that ... the new administration is going to be in some way having this lack of cultural connectivity and social awareness that is needed. Especially in the most recent line of events that has happened politically. I don't think our ... administration has done anything to say "I'm in favor or I'm supportive, or I can recognize the social events that have been happening," unlike other universities. Like, I know for a fact that at [another university I attended, the president] had already been speaking on social events that have happened since he's taken office ... so that's where I'm concerned about the current administration.

This tempered hopefulness regarding new institutional leadership illustrates an institution at a time of transition. Participants are optimistic, skeptical, and even both at the same time when they consider how the institution might change under new stewardship. Whether, and to what extent, the institution's HSI identity takes a place at the forefront of the new president's agenda is a concern for participants. From here, this chapter will go on to examine how participants from diverse backgrounds consider the subject of HSI Servingness.

### **RQ3: How do staff perceive HSI Servingness across different demographic backgrounds?**

In reviewing and coding interview transcripts and reviewing documents, two themes emerged that related to this question. The first theme involved the ways that participants from Hispanic or Latino/Latina backgrounds described the importance of serving the families of students as a component of student service. The second theme involves the idea that participants across demographic backgrounds compared their experience at this HSI to other HSIs, and they compared the way that the institution talks about being an HSI to the way it talks about its other priorities. Some of those comparisons were more favorable than others.

#### **Theme 4: Hispanic and Latino/Latina participants were more likely to point out that to effectively serve students, the institution should also be serving their families.**

Four participants who were Hispanic or Latino discussed the importance of serving students' families as well as the students themselves: Antonio, Althea, Felix, and Lalo. Mary, a biracial woman, and Jebidiah, a white man, also shared stories that echoed their perspectives. Emma, a white woman, shared a story about helping a student make the case to their family that they should attend the university even though it is relatively far from home.

When Lalo, an academic advisor and an alumnus of the university, described his own family's experience with the institution, he became emotional:

I am Hispanic and Mexican American. Just thinking of like, sorry, I get tears. I wanna talk about this. Just thinking of like my parents, my sisters, me coming to school here. And you know, the willingness to come to school here because LGU has served Hispanic students ... for such a long time. Now when I was in school, I didn't really hear about HSI that much ... And [it was] even harder for my parents cuz they came there in, you know, the seventies ... I'm not sure what the population was then, but ... just thinking about how many students that come here that are Hispanic, that want to have that LGU degree. It brings a sense of pride.

He goes on to describe graduating from the institution, leaving to work elsewhere, coming back as a graduate student and then as a staff member, and seeing how representation on campus has grown over time, including events featuring the campus Mariachi group and with student organizations. He contrasts this feeling of pride and the recent increase in representation with an issue that several participants discussed, language barriers experienced by both students and families.

When we have a student that comes in and they're not ... as fluent in, in English or they bring their parents and their parents ... do not speak English, it's a lot harder to communicate what the demands are of college, what to expect ... when you get here, and things like that.

Althea, who is also an academic advisor, reported feeling concerns about having to find interpreters for students and their families, and a scarcity of resources to serve them:

I feel terrible saying this. I have to have another advisor come help me translate ... He's the only person that speaks Spanish in this office ... We are trying to get more people that speak Spanish. That's something we want, and we need.



She described times prior to when that person began working in her department when she would have to go to another department to find a colleague who could interpret for her. The idea that students should not have to interpret for their parents was important to multiple participants. Jebidiah also brought up efforts to secure interpreters for family members as part of student support. “We don't want the student to be in the interpreter role,” he said. “We want the family to know that we care enough to have people available to do that so that they're part of everything.”

Antonio, an assistant dean, expanded upon the idea of language barriers and linked them to barriers connected to proximity to the campus, and to technology access. He described how traveling to the university would be a challenge for people with immigration status concerns, and how an English-only web site would pose a barrier both for families with limited technology proficiency and for tech savvy family members with limited English proficiency.

Depending on where they are, if they come from a border area, traveling from that border area to this campus may have its own challenges because of family members' immigration status ... In addition to language barriers, there may also be technology literacy barriers ... We're at a point where we assume that everybody is on a computer, on email, on certain social media platforms, and that may not necessarily be true.

“We are quick to ... refer people to websites,” says Antonio, but the institutional web site is in English, and therefore inaccessible to people for whom English is not a primary language.

They may be well educated and computer literate, but the family's primary language may not be English. So, you know, as a Hispanic Serving Institution, are websites available in Spanish? I think that's one thing that we've struggled with, or at least something we don't seem to have fully embraced yet. Do families simply not contact us because they are not confident that they'll connect with someone who they can communicate with?

Felix expressed similar concerns regarding how language barriers might affect students themselves in addition to their families. In contrast to the idea that a family member might not reach out with questions if they didn't feel confident that they would connect with someone who could communicate with them, he also raised the idea that a stronger culture of speaking Spanish on campus and using Spanish in the web site and in marketing would be beneficial to recruiting as well as to serving students.

Even though we say we're HSI, we are a monolingual institution. And there are very few spaces that on campus that are truly bilingual or Spanish only. And for whatever reason, you know, the, there's a pushback of providing resources, disseminating that information, publicizing marketing, advertising, recruiting in Spanish ... having actual native, or at least highly proficient Spanish speakers would pay huge dividends to our recognition as an HSI.

Two participants advocated for more programming specifically for families. In discussing the idea of transparency in how HSI funds are spent, Mary, an administrator on an academic program, suggested providing programming specifically for families:

If you're in HSI and you get HSI funds, I wanna see transparently that X amount is dedicated to events for workshops. X amount is dedicated towards inviting *familias* to campus and ensuring that they have the cultural competencies, not just for student success but family success.

Antonio also advocated for programming for families of students. He mentioned above that some students' families have issues traveling to visit campus due to concerns connected to immigration status. Rather than expect those family members to travel to learn the university and the ways it can support students, he took the idea of meeting families where they are literally:

To me that means that if students' families are not able to engage with the institution, then we go to where their families literally live ... I would take the institution to the families where they are. It's hard for us to say, oh, we're gonna go talk to the parents and explain them and meet them where they are to help them, and their students navigate college and everything that needs to be done ... So I think that's where I would ... somehow expand support for the students and their families. Not just here on the campus, but wherever they are ... That would mean taking the people from housing, financial aid, student services, academic advising, etc., to the families to explain services and procedures from recruitment to employment.

Antonio saw bringing the institution to families as a way of demonstrating the institution's connection to Hispanic culture. "I keep saying, '...and their families' because Hispanic culture is very family oriented," says Antonio. "And higher ed, for a long time, has fostered an individualistic, competitive culture. We emphasize ... students' independence from their families when they come to college, at least until it's ... time to pay." While most participants talked about connecting families to the institution, one participant had a different experience describing the interactions between students, families, and the university.

While other participants spent time talking about ways to support families of students, Emma, who has held several progressively responsible roles in academic advising and on HSI grants, told a story about helping a student advocate for something different than her family's expectations. She worked with a prospective transfer student who had earned dual credit through a university closer to her home. The student wanted to attend LGU after speaking to teachers and mentors and reviewing the institution's web site.

And she talked to her parents about it, and they were like, “well, you already have all this credit that you're already getting at [your dual credit university]. It's closer to home, like that's an eight-hour drive” ... But they were open to looking at it.

Emma goes on to describe how the student:

reached out, advocated for herself, got that information, and shared it back with her parents. This led to me meeting with the parents as well ... And mom was able to get the questions that she wanted answered as well and I encouraged them to visit campus ... and they came and then her parents understood why she was finding that value in [LGU].

Emma shares a happy ending to this story where the student and parents agree that the case institution is the best place for the student despite her parents' initial misgivings about distance and their familiarity with a university closer to home. Some of the other ideas proposed by participants, such as a robust group of Spanish-speaking staff members in key roles like academic advising and financial aid, or events where students' families can come learn about the institution without going too far from their home communities would make it possible for more students and families to have their own success stories at the case institution.

**Theme 5: Participants from a range of demographic backgrounds compare the institution to other HSIs to make meaning of HSI identity and assess Servingness.**

Participants from a range of demographic backgrounds used other institutions as a basis for comparison to describe servingness at their own institution. Some of those comparisons were favorable. Others were less so. Earlier in this chapter, Felix, a who supports transfer students as part of an HSI grant, described his past experience as a student at another HSI in another region. He compared the outgoing and incoming presidents of the case institution to the president of his

past institution. “I know for a fact,” said Felix, that the other HSI’s president “has already been speaking on social events that have happened, since he’s taken office [a few years ago]. So that’s where I’m concerned about the current administration.” Felix goes on to describe acknowledgement of cultural celebrations such as Hispanic Heritage Month in September and Black History Month in February as the kind of acknowledgement that is absent from the institution’s past and current presidents.

Shannon, an academic advisor, describes her experience working at a different HSI in a different city near the case institution: “I did work for another [HSI] and I feel like it was a little bit different because the place that I worked ... has a more rich Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American cultural background.” She goes on to describe how that other institution is based in a city that is noted for its strong connections to Mexican American culture and for a significant Mexican American cultural festival. She thinks that the other institution’s proximity to the broader community’s Mexican American cultural institutions and celebrations helps it “incorporate more cultural celebration[s] into the university.”

Althea, an academic advisor who has worked at other HSIs and non-HSIs prior to working at the case institution, compared the institution to two other HSIs, one in a nearby city and another in a different region. She describes LGU as not recognizably an HSI based on the campus and the representation she sees, while the other institutions are. The other institutions described here are given pseudonyms.

If I’m walking through [the LGU] campus, ... personally I don’t see a difference to any other campus. If I were going to ... Chapparral University, I would feel right at home. I know that’s a Hispanic serving institution, absolutely a hundred percent. Even when I

visited my sister at Desert Mountain University, I would automatically feel right at home ... that I'm in a Hispanic serving institution just by the population.

“Here at LGU,” she says, “I don't necessarily feel that way.” When asked what made the difference, she talked specifically about the feeling she experienced on those campuses.

I feel it. I know it's Hispanic-serving. I can tell. I hear people speaking Spanish. I don't hear that here when I walk down the hall ... But my sister went to Chapparal and worked at DMU, so I spent time at both universities. And yeah, [I would say those] were [HSIs]. I think [LGU is] getting ... to be Hispanic serving, but not quite like the other two yet.

While Althea felt that the case institution didn't feel like an HSI compared to the other campuses, Shannon describes a setting where she felt the case institution was doing better than another HSI. She describes a colleague who attended an HSI in another region with a significant Hispanic and Latino population, “but they didn't tap into celebrating that,” she says. When asked to describe an example of how that institution didn't celebrate Hispanic or Latino students, Shannon describes how her friend studied in the other institution's English department, and that:

They didn't highlight a lot of Hispanic and Latino authors ... which they easily could have done ... but they didn't focus in on any of those resources ... You would think, oh, well if you've got folks that are interested in those majors, you want to have Hispanic and Latino [authors] to ... show them ... “I became a writer, and this is what I write about, and this is my process,” but ... they just didn't tap into that kind of stuff.

She compared the institution her friend attended to the case institution. She describes how the institution does a lot of programming around Hispanic Heritage Month and showcases a range of Hispanic or Latino authors and photographers in different contexts. “Could we do more?” she asks. “Probably ... there's always room for improvement.”

In describing improvement and the process of taking on HSI identity, Althea, who earlier described the difference between LGU and two other HSIs, notes that the institution has progressed over the years. She compared her current experience as a staff member to her time as an undergraduate at the institution prior to when it became an HSI. As an undergraduate at the institution, she says that:

I actually very much went into, not went into the closet. I didn't disown my identity, but I joined a sorority and I was one of the only Hispanics ... Being Hispanic wasn't a major part of my identity that I embraced at the time.

She compares her time as an undergraduate to a recent experience she recently had at a park on the LGU campus. "I was at the river the other day," she says,

And some guys jumped in ... blasting their music. It was Reggaetón ... I was like "yeah!" That's like a sense of pride, you know, and you feel comfortable ... feeling at home, being at home.

Althea describes the institution as being on its way to being an HSI in practice, specifically using the word striving. "How long have we been striving to be an HSI?" she asks. "I know we are an HSI. What does that mean?" she draws a contrast between the federal designation of an HSI and the feeling she gets when she is on a campus that genuinely celebrates Hispanic culture. LGU has the former, but is still working on the later, she suggests.

### **Summary**

In consideration of the three research questions posed for this treatise, the documents reviewed on the case institution's web site, and the results of a series of interviews of participants, five significant themes emerged. This chapter discussed the ways that specific offices, committees, and organizations on campus take responsibility for communicating HSI

identity on campus. It also explored a multifaceted need for communication and consistency as the university works to define itself as an HSI and create spaces where both students and staff can thrive. It explores how presidential turnover affects how staff perceive their work. It showcased how Hispanic and Latino/a participants describe family supports as crucial to the institution's HSI identity, and it showed how participants compare the institution to other HSIs when determining whether the institution serves its Hispanic and/or Latina/o/x students. This treatise's final chapter will offer further discussion, describe potential limitations to this study, make recommendations for policy and practice, and propose opportunities for further research.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications**

This chapter will cover limitations of this study, potential avenues for future research, recommendations for HSI leaders, state policy leaders, and federal policy leaders, and final concluding comments. Limitations include a limitation posed by the study's methodology, a limitation posed by significant organizational changes at the institution, and limitations posed by both recent Supreme Court opinions and legislation in states such as Florida and Texas. Institutional organizational changes and policy changes at both the federal and state level may affect the ability of this and other institutions to implement the policy and practice recommendations described here. However, the need to serve all students despite these limitations may also provide researchers and practitioners with opportunities for both further research and the development of new, high impact practices at HSIs and elsewhere.

Opportunities for future research include opportunities to replicate this study at HSIs with different institutional characteristics, opportunities to study how the identities and personality traits of institutional presidents affect the presidential transition and community perceptions of institutional leaders, and opportunities for longitudinal research as the HSIs that took on the designation in recent years maintain and develop their HSI identity over the coming decades.

Policy and practice recommendations are broken up into recommendations for leaders at HSIs, policy makers at the state level, and policy makers at the federal level. Recommendations for HSI leaders include a recommendation that institutions center HSI identity development as part of institutional identity development, a recommendation to enhance services to families as part of student service, the creation of an institutionally funded HSI office, and competitive compensation for HSI staff. Recommendations for state policy leaders involve a recommendation to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and programming (in

contrast to recent legislation limiting these offices), and a recommendation to prioritize funding for competitive salaries for state workers such as university staff. Federal policy recommendations involve structuring calls for grant proposals to incorporate potential programs in support of student families, and to structure calls for grant proposals so that institutions in states with limited ability to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion programming can pursue federal grants to help meet needs established by recent state legislation. My concluding thoughts incorporate a recommendation for all readers involving the interconnected relationships between HSIs, governmental entities, and voters, and their own power to affect those relationships.

### **Limitations**

#### **Qualitative Case Study**

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. Mertens and Wilson (2019) cite Merriam (2001) in describing a case study as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. As such, this method is designed to develop insights into a specific phenomenon in a bounded system. While a qualitative case study is an excellent choice to answer the research questions posed in this treatise, this design limits generalizability to prioritize the development of a deeper understanding of the case.

In this case, the bounded system is the institution where participants were employed at the time of data collection. Because HSIs are formally defined by the demographics of the student body, they are a heterogenous group of institutions. While this study illustrates the experiences and perceptions of colleagues who are working at a specific, large, public, doctoral-granting HSI in the southwestern United States, those experiences may not be generalizable to institutions of different sizes, community colleges, private institutions, religiously affiliated institutions, or institutions in different parts of the United States. Though this study may not be

generalizable, it may be replicable at HSIs with different characteristics, and comparisons may be drawn between institutions with diverse characteristics if the study is replicated at multiple institutions. Further discussion of this opportunity will be provided in the section of this chapter that describes opportunities for future research.

### **Significant Organizational Changes at the Institution**

During my final participant interview, I asked a question from the protocol about what the institution can do to help students overcome challenges, and the participant shared the following information:

... so this morning, Margaret, I'll keep this short. [My academic unit] is disbanding. So there is no more. ... We'll be going under the provost's office. A bunch of things are breaking up and few weeks ago we heard that they're creating [a new department/unit called] student success. There's a new vice president [in the student affairs area coming in as well]. So we [are] creating all these things.

This announcement regarding organizational changes was shared with staff members in the participant's academic unit the day of the interview, so the participant was still processing this news, and we discussed other topics for most of their interview. During the months I spent coding transcripts and identifying themes, further information emerged regarding this reorganization. An academic unit that housed many resources for first-year students and several HSI grants was reorganized from an academic college model with its own dean to a more direct reporting line to the provost. As part of this reorganization, at least one office where participants worked at the time of data collection was disbanded at the conclusion of the Spring 2023 semester. In addition to the document review described in this treatise, a further review of the institution's web site conducted during June 2023 showed that "Student Affairs" redirected a

new, different term. In addition to organizational changes in the academic unit where this participant worked, broader changes within student support offices across campus took place during and after the Spring 2023 term.

Because so much changed at the institution after data was collected, the findings shared here depict a snapshot of an institution at a specific moment in time prior to and during the earliest stages of the implementation of these changes. While this treatise proposes avenues for further research as well as policy and practice recommendations based on the findings described in Chapter 4, the nature of many participants' work has changed since data was collected. Because of these changes, participants' perception of their work and of their employer may also have changed, so their answers to the questions in the protocol may look quite different as I write this chapter in Summer 2023 than they did in January or February 2023 when interviews were conducted. A delay of weeks or perhaps even days in data collection might have yielded a dramatically different findings chapter, which in turn may have shaped recommendations described here in unknowable ways. This is one reason that I encourage further research into how HSIs grow and evolve in a later section of this chapter.

### **Significant Federal and State Policy Changes**

In addition to the localized organizational changes that took place at the case institution during Spring 2023, the policy landscape for higher education diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioners changed dramatically across the United States. In June 2023, the US Supreme Court ruled that colleges and universities can no longer consider race in admissions (Totenberg, 2023). During their 2023 sessions, state legislatures in Florida (HB 999/SB 266) and Texas (HB1, HB 5127/SB 17) have banned the use of state funding for offices dedicated to student diversity and inclusion or mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion-related trainings at public institutions of

higher education (Lu et al., 2023). These policy moves in legislative and judicial circles will affect how universities across the country recruit, serve, and retain students, particularly students from historically marginalized backgrounds. The case institution is no exception.

In interviews, at least one participant specifically described the institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion office as a "pocket" where HSI identity is communicated and where students are most likely to experience servingness. If, as discussed in chapter 4, HSI identity is communicated in small pockets of the institution, rather than as an institution-wide endeavor, one of those pockets has been sewn shut by this legislation. If we consider these changes in terms of Garcia et al.'s (2019) Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs, the loss of state funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion offices represents a significant blow to an institutional structure for serving designed to cultivate institutional environments where students have validating (as opposed to racialized) experiences in HSIs. In Garcia et al.'s (2019) model, this diminished opportunity for validating experiences will in turn have an adverse effect on academic and nonacademic outcomes, as the model links positive experience with positive outcomes and racialized experiences with negative outcomes. The loss of this funding will have an adverse effect on students in these states and on the faculty and staff who support them.

The case institution is one of many institutions that were directly impacted by state legislation limiting their ability to offer diversity, equity, and inclusion programming or operate diversity, equity, and inclusion offices. As a result, recommendations to be described later in this chapter involving topics like an institutionally funded HSI office or increased communication of HSI identity may be limited while these laws are in place. Because HSIs are a diverse group of institutions, HSI identity will look different across institutions. In addition to having to explore what it means to be an HSI and a public institution, an HSI and a research institution, or an HSI

in its geographic region, this institution's HSI development will be shaped by what it means to be an HSI that is compliant with legislation that limits its ability to do DEI work, at least until there are changes to the legislation. Even if legislation changes or is ruled unconstitutional, it will take time, money, and effort to get institutional DEI offices and programming back up and running. In the meantime, institutions must grapple with ideas of how to support their institutional community without these key resources. Impacts may be felt throughout both student and academic affairs as institutions determine what must be done to be in compliance with legislation, and what faculty, staff, and students can do as they work to maintain HSI identity.

If its ability to conduct diversity, equity, and inclusion programming is limited by legislative action, the case institution will also be limited in its ability to successfully communicate HSI identity. This hole in the network of offices, departments, and organizations that provide support to students raises questions about the role of federal grant-funded staff and federal grant dollars. Federally funded HSI grant programs will not be affected by the loss of state funding, so they may become more instrumental in communicating HSI identity and the scope of their role in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belongingness on campus may become much broader in scope.

In the findings chapter of this treatise, I discussed how the time-limited nature of HSI grants adversely affects their ability to consistently communicate HSI identity over the course of many years. These concerns may also come to affect the broader diversity, equity, and inclusion landscape, as DEI may become increasingly tied to less permanent funds such as federal HSI grants with fixed expiration dates, rather than being housed in institutionally funded Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices.

Additionally, if federally funded programs step in to fill in the gaps left by the loss of state funding, these programs may come under increased scrutiny. This potential level of increased scrutiny on HSI grant programs may in turn affect things like how federal departments and agencies develop calls for proposals and how funding for HSI and related grants are allocated. Federal departments offering HSI grants may consider the needs of institutions in states such as Florida or Texas while drafting calls for proposals. It might even prove to be a good time to look at how these grants are structured, and if a fixed end date for grants such as Title III and Title V programs could be replaced with a renewable model for institutions to provide continuity of services given the potentially enhanced scope of these grant programs.

Conversely, if legislatures passed bills such as those in Florida and Texas to stop institutions of higher education from offering diversity, equity, and inclusion programming, they (and their colleagues in the US Senate and House of Representatives) will likely take notice of federal funds continuing these efforts in the absence of state funding for these offices.

Public institutions of higher education are limited in their ability to weigh in on these policies, and state employees are not able to use working hours to advocate for political causes. With those limitations in mind, I would like to make the strongest recommendation I can make in this treatise, not for hypothetical policy makers or institutions, but for the reader. The legislation that we see in Florida and Texas and the appointment of Supreme Court Justices who wrote opinions like *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* (2023) are all the direct result of elections at the federal and state level. Those who are employed at public institutions of higher education may not be able to take political stances at work, but their personal time is their own. If we want to be able to do our jobs and serve our students, it is incumbent upon us to work to elect candidates who will, at a minimum, not actively work to

hinder the ability of institutions like HSIs to create spaces where all students have opportunities to grow academically, find belongingness at their college or university, and work towards achieving their goals.

### **Implications for Future Research**

#### **Replicable Study**

In the limitations section of this chapter, I discuss the limited generalizability of a qualitative case study. While the findings in this treatise may not be immediately generalizable to other institutions, the protocol and methods used for this treatise may be implemented across a range of institutions. The findings expressed in this treatise may not be immediately generalizable to the experiences of staff at private HSIs, or community college HSIs, or at HSIs in different regions of the country, but the process provides researchers with a framework that they can use to determine how staff experience and perceive their work environments in those spaces.

Further comparison of how different institutional characteristics shape these experiences and perceptions would also be possible as additional studies are completed. If this study were replicated at a range of HSIs, it would be possible to compare what HSIs with different characteristics do well, and what these institutions can learn from one another. A large public HSI might not be able to adopt all practices that work at a small, religiously affiliated HSI (or vice versa), but developing an understanding of what works for different institutions combined with idea-sharing between these institutions may lead to enhanced practices across institutions.

This recommendation also connects to the section of the findings chapter that discusses how participants compare their own HSI to others where they or people they know have worked or studied. In addition to replicating this study across regions and institutional characteristics,



this method could be used to further explore those comparisons, especially if researchers looked at several HSIs in a similar geographic area, or HSIs that compete to attract similar groups of students and employees. Staff at other institutions mentioned in this treatise may be making similar comparisons, either with the case institution or with other peer institutions in their respective regions, and the way that people at different HSIs draw comparisons between institutions may shed new light on what Servingness looks like in different HSI contexts and how different institutions can incorporate Servingness into their evolution as HSIs.

### **Further Research on Institutional Presidential Transitions**

Participants described the new institutional president with a great deal of excitement, much of which tied into some key differences between the outgoing and incoming presidents. The incoming president is described as more outgoing and more willing to engage with the institutional community, while the outgoing president was described as more reserved and less engaged. Additionally, the outgoing institutional president is a woman, and the new president is a man. Existing research describes how women in academic leadership roles must often “pass” as male leaders to gain legitimacy. Leadership performance is often associated with traits historically linked to masculinity, and women in leadership roles are often placed in a situation where they are perceived negatively if they don’t lean into more masculine behavior patterns, but they also are perceived negatively if they take on characteristics more often associated with masculinity, such as assertiveness (Read & Kehm, 2016). These conflicting expectations may make it challenging for women leaders to engage audiences, and they may shape the way that constituents describe women in leadership roles.

For the case institution’s recent presidential transition, much of the participant excitement was tied to a change in presidential behavior. The outgoing president was described by

participants as “sterile,” “reserved,” and “measured,” in contrast with the new president who is described as “the head cheerleader,” “proactive,” and “connected.” As I was analyzing the transcripts of interviews dealing with this topic, I couldn’t help but wonder how these two individuals might score for the Extraversion dimension of the Big Five Personality Dimensions. The Big Five is an assessment tool used to measure a range of dimensions of personality in psychological and business settings (Costa & McCrae, 2008). One of the Big Five dimensions, extraversion, is related to traits such as assertiveness, sociability, and interactivity. People who score highly on extraversion are often seen in a positive light compared to introverts, who are described as reserved, independent, and even-paced. Research has shown a positive link between social interaction (as measured by extraversion) and job performance for managers (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). It is possible that the outgoing president may have dealt with both gendered expectations of how leadership is performed and with expectations of how leadership connects to extraversion. The new president is a man who was immediately described by colleagues at the case institution in ways that are more closely tied to extraversion compared to his predecessor. Because of this, he may experience fewer barriers to being perceived as a leader by the institutional community.

Multiple aspects of the outgoing and incoming presidents’ identities may have shaped how the institutional community viewed both the transition of power and the presidents themselves. Further research on presidential transition at institutions of higher education where there is a significant difference between the identities of the outgoing and incoming president might lead to greater understanding of how new presidents might approach their roles and how they can work to engage the institutional community. This difference might be an easily recognizable demographic difference, such as a president of a different gender or racial/ethnic

background than their predecessor, or a change in a factor such as personality that might be measured by an assessment such as the Big Five. An enhanced understanding of how these differences affect the way institutional communities view their leaders might help leaders make choices about how to engage their communities during their first days, weeks, and months in their roles. It may also prove useful to those charged with recruiting and hiring leaders in higher education as they work to ensure that equitable consideration is given to candidates with historically marginalized identities. Better understanding these transitions will be useful both to college and university presidents and the institutional communities they serve.

### **Longitudinal Research on HSIs**

Two participants described changes at the institution over a period of decades. One mentioned his parents' experience at the institution during the 1970s as well as his own experience as a student more recently. Another compared her experience as an undergraduate at the institution in a previous decade with a more recent experience where she interacted with current students. Multiple participants described support for families as an important part of wraparound student services. These conversations lead me to wonder what this HSI will look like in several decades, after students who only know the institution as an HSI become parents and their children begin to make college-going choices. Will students whose parents attended this institution be more likely to choose it instead of peer institutions? What does/will servingness look like at an institution that has been an HSI for 20, 30, 40, or 50 years? In addition to replicating this study at a diverse range of HSIs, this study (or a similar one interviewing a wider group of institutional community members) could be replicated at this institution at regular intervals to measure how HSI identity and service to students develops over decades.

Independent of its HSI status, the case institution proudly describes its service to a significant community of first-generation students whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree. Many of today's first-generation students will someday become parents to continuing generation students, and while those students will be able to learn from their parents' college experiences in a way that current first-generation students may not, their perceptions of what to expect from college will likely be shaped by their parents' first-gen experience, including experiences with services designed for first-gen students. As the children of first-gen students who may have sought out and benefited from robust first-generation outreach and programming attend college, what kind of opportunities and resources will they seek compared to both first- and continuing-generation peers whose families did not engage in such programming?

In addition to replicating HSI-specific research as time passes, there are also opportunities to learn about the experiences of continuing-generation students whose first-generation parents may have attended the institution in the past. As described in the findings chapter of this treatise, the case institution is working both to grow its enrollment numbers and increase its research activity. There is strong potential for qualitative data collection that will help uncover new information about both how the institution develops through these changes and how its students and their families grow alongside it.

### **Recommendations for Higher Education Leaders at HSIs**

#### **Ensure that HSI Identity Development is Part of Institutional Identity Development**

The incoming president of the case institution has set two primary goals for the institution: to grow enrollment and to increase the university's research activity. While these are both admirable goals that will help the institution thrive in the long term, they fail to account for

the fact that staff describe servingness as something that happens “in pockets,” or describe the institution as “striving to be an HSI,” after a decade with the designation.

Institutions may reach certain demographic thresholds, become federally designated as HSIs, and receive HSI-related funding, but institutions provide meaning to complement that funding and ensure that the institution is living out its HSI designation. This makes sense, because (as described earlier in this treatise) HSIs are a highly diverse group of institutions serving diverse constituencies in different ways in different regions throughout the United States. There is no one way to be an HSI. This means that institutions have leeway to define what being an HSI means to them. Demographics make an institution eligible to become an HSI, and receiving a federal HSI designation makes them eligible for funding. When we make the funding the meaning, we miss the point of serving (Garcia et al., 2023), so it is crucial for HSIs, including the case institution, to embrace their HSI development as they work toward their strategic goals. For the case institution, those goals include enrollment and research. Other institutions might have very different goals, but whatever an institution’s goals may be, HSI identity should be infused into how it defines itself and works to evolve.

Because institutions have some leeway to describe what being an HSI means to them, it is also crucial to point out that some HSIs that may not necessarily embrace their identity at all. As Contreras et al. (2008) point out in their examination of the mission statements of multiple HSIs, none of the institutions they examine mention being an HSI as part of their mission, while many HSIs discuss their HSI identity in response to their grant portfolios or in a separate section of the web site devoted to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. If institutions are not communicating what it means to them to be an HSI, it is also feasible that institutions may seek this designation for reasons connected entirely to the designation’s financial benefits. These leaders might operate in

political climates where topics connected to justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion draw ire from powerful elected officials and their constituents, or these institutional leaders may simply be considering ways to increase funding without considering the people who are impacted by those funds. Either way, this approach is concerning, as other studies detailed at length in the literature review section of this treatise describe adverse outcomes for students and faculty alike who report conflicts between their individual identities and their identities as members of their higher education institutional communities. While this approach of simply pursuing the HSI designation and associated grant funding may seem tempting to some institutional leaders, institutional identity must also develop to facilitate the positive student experiences and outcomes that lead to things like increased retention, increased graduation rates, increased acceptances to graduate programs, increased research activity, and increased interest from other funding agencies. A successful HSI is an HSI that embraces servingness and ensures that it fosters a community where students, faculty, and staff can work together towards positive outcomes at both the individual and institutional level.

While the case institution has taken strides to develop and communicate its HSI identity, it might continue this important work by including HSI identity in documents such as the strategic plan or the president's goals. It might also center its HSI identity by creating a centralized, institutionally funded HSI office or department that can work with grant programs, committees, and organizations to further their existing work and communicate HSI identity more broadly across the institution.

If, as noted above, demographics, funding, and identity can be considered as three pillars of doing the work of being an HSI, this recommendation becomes particularly important for emerging HSIs, institutions that are nearing the necessary demographic numbers to attain federal

HSI status. While emerging HSIs may be working on recruitment goals to meet demographic thresholds with the goal of becoming eligible for grant funding, they can also begin to work on identity development. This might involve beginning to develop infrastructure such as the committees and organizations that the case institution has developed if they are not present already, ensuring that there are plenty of multi-lingual staff members who can assist students and their families in languages other than English, seeking opportunities to partner with local communities, and encouraging faculty to pursue research that aligns with their own funds of knowledge and ways of knowing. When “striving to be an HSI” starts early and considers HSI identity as in addition to demographics and funding, institutions can make significant headway towards being places where people like the participants and their students feel at home.

### **Focus on Family Services as Part of HSI Identity Development**

Participants told several stories about situations where enhanced service to families was a way to serve students. Emma, who shared a story about helping a student persuade their parents that a transfer to the case institution was a smart move, showed how supporting the students’ parents through conversation and a campus visit helped the family make a decision together. That conversation and that campus visit was made possible by shared language and the ability for the family to make a significant journey to campus. Not all families have that opportunity, due to both language factors described by many participants, and due to the inability of many families to travel long distances to the university.

Multiple participants describe a language barrier experienced by both students and families for whom English may not be a primary language. This barrier existed both in conversation with university staff and in interactions with institutional web sites. Participants shared a desire for more colleagues to be able to communicate in both English and Spanish, and

for the institutional web site to have information more easily available in both English and Spanish. These are both achievable goals that could be attained by including a preference for English and Spanish language proficiency in job descriptions for roles with direct student contact, partnering with faculty who teach Spanish language courses to provide opportunities for current staff enhance their Spanish language skills, and by having existing staff with Spanish language skills work with institutional marketing and web design professionals to provide Spanish versions of key web pages connected to academic advising, financial aid, student involvement, housing, and related pages that students and their families might review together while making decisions and planning for the future.

One participant, Antonio, went a step further by discussing how family members may not contact the institution because they lack confidence that they could connect with someone they could communicate with. Part of making Spanish-language pages available is making them accessible. Rather than hunting for a resource in Spanish (as I hunted for HSI-related resources during my document review), links to that resources should be shared in Spanish when they are shared in English. This ensures that the relevant information is readily available to families, regardless of their primary language.

Antonio also described how travel to the university may not be possible for family members with immigration status concerns. While colleges and universities may offer robust campus visit programs designed to help students and families connect to the institutional community, this kind of travel is not possible for all families. Rather than depend on families to come to the university, Antonio discussed the potential for the university to come to families. He suggests a day where a range of key campus offices, such as housing, advising, financial aid, and the dean of students' office travel together to different regions where students have historically



applied to the university. These events would allow family members with travel barriers connected to immigration, income, or disability to connect with institutional resources and receive answers to their questions. If the parents Emma described had not been able to travel to visit campus, such an event might have provided an alternative way for them to connect to the institution and understand why their student might choose to attend it rather than another university closer to home.

Overall, participants had excellent ideas for making the university accessible to families. Ensuring that families have access to university resources, without barriers connected to language and travel, ensures that families have the information they need to support their students and have conversations with them about the things they are doing to be successful at the university. This stands in contrast to what Antonio described as the “individualistic, competitive culture” of higher education. For many students, providing support to their family is a way of providing support to the student. Ensuring that families have the knowledge they need to help their students make good decisions during their college experience is one way to ensure positive student outcomes.

### **Create an Institutionally Funded HSI Office**

The findings chapter of this treatise demonstrated that at the case institution, HSI identity is most often communicated by people in temporary roles, including grant leadership whose jobs will end with their grants, as well as committee and campus organization leaders who may circle in and out of their roles as their “other duties as assigned” vary. Many people are doing significant work in their capacities as grant leaders or organization/committee members to advance the institution as an HSI, but those grants will end, or those people will not have time to commit to a committee or faculty and staff organization outside of their primary jobs. This lack

of centralized leadership demonstrates need for a permanent, institutionally funded office that can lead in communication and programming connected to institutional HSI identity. Such offices exist at other institutions, including the University of Arizona and Colorado State University – Pueblo.

A permanent HSI office would meet multiple institutional needs. It would have leadership responsibilities and budget for organizing both HSI week events and cultural events throughout the academic year. It would be an ideal base to organize efforts to enhance Spanish-language offerings on the web site or coordinate coursework or training for staff who want to enhance their Spanish language skills to better serve students and families. This office would also act as a hub for HSI grants and facilitate coordination between grant investigators and existing administrators and campus offices. For example, in the findings chapter of this treatise, Karoline described a situation where students experienced confusion about whether they should reach out to an HSI grant focused on career planning or the institutionally funded career office. A permanent HSI office could have facilitated conversations between investigators working on the proposal for that grant and the institutionally funded career office to ensure that those two entities worked together and developed a process for ensuring students could make one inquiry and be routed to the colleague or team that would best assist with their needs. Because calls for grants often require efforts to institutionalize programs, this would also increase the odds of successfully integrating these services so that parts of the new things the grant created would be carried forward by an institutionally funded office that was already doing relevant work. It is a much greater lift to create a program from scratch and find ways to sustain it when its funding ends than it is to integrate new and enhanced services into an existing office and then determine what can be done to maintain that enhanced level of service as the initial grant funding ends.

Participants also expressed concerns about senior institutional leadership not prioritizing HSI identity, as well as about students and colleagues not being aware of the institution's status as an HSI. A permanent HSI office would take responsibility for communicating HSI identity to senior institutional leadership, and it would increase visibility of the institution's HSI status. A committee member contacting the marketing office about an upcoming HSI week event reported that a marketing staffer was unaware of the institution's status as an HSI. A central HSI office would be able to establish and maintain partnerships to ensure that students learn about HSI resources at orientation and that faculty and staff receive information about what it means to be an HSI as part of new employee onboarding.

Rather than having HSI identity primarily communicated by colleagues whose jobs are limited by the end dates of their grants or by committee or organization members who are engaging in this work as part of a voluntary collateral assignment or an "other duty as assigned," a permanent, institutionally funded HSI office would be able to bring all those groups together and support them as they carry out their missions and enhance the university's HSI work. It would be able to both support existing efforts and lead the charge as new efforts are developed. It would ensure that both students and colleagues are aware that the institution is an HSI and it would support senior administrators in communicating the institution's HSI identity as an important component of its institutional identity. HSI grant proposals often describe about how the proposed program strengthens and enhances existing campus resources. An investment in an institutionally-funded HSI office would make it easier for grants to carry out their mission, ease the burden on team members who are working on HSI identity through committees or organizations in addition to their primary staff or faculty roles, ensure that senior leaders at the institution have the vocabulary and information they need to communicate HSI identity to the

entire institutional community, and make sure that students are aware of the wealth of resources available to them because they chose to attend an HSI. This office would strengthen and enhance the entire institution.

### **Competitive Compensation for Staff**

Inescapable in any discussion of ways that higher education can improve its service to students is the idea that capable, qualified, hard-working staff are leaving student-facing roles to advance their careers and earn salaries that keep up with inflation and the cost of living. Participants throughout this treatise described situations where they loved their work, but they were not sure if they could afford to keep doing it. This aligns with what we know about research considering the attitudes of staff, where there is a focus on the ability of privileged staff to support students whose experiences might be different from their own. At least one participant specifically mentioned not being able to afford to do a job they loved without the benefit of a higher-earning partner, while others mentioned a desire to stay at the institution forever if it weren't for the salary, or they described colleagues leaving the institution to better afford rent and groceries. This brain drain leads to vacant positions and interruptions in student service. One of the reasons students that students say they don't feel served at their HSI may involve the fact that there are too few employees there to serve them due to vacancies caused by turnover.

If institutions of higher education are not able to offer competitive compensation to employees, in addition to driving existing colleagues to higher paying peer institutions or to other industries, they are excluding voices who lack that higher earning partner, generational wealth, or other factors that might allow them to accept a lower salary to do work they find meaningful. A wealth of research addresses the importance of having voices at the table that accurately reflect our students' identities (B.A.L., 2017; Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Ek et al.,

2010; Gonzales et al., 2013; Musoba et al., 2013; Preuss et al., 2020), and for institutions where a majority of students' identities have been marginalized throughout history, a staff may not reflect those identities when a majority of them have the economic freedom to choose a role with a lower salary because it brings them fulfillment. Candidates who might be instrumental in advancing a range of institutional goals (including enrollment goals, research goals, and HSI goals) may not be applying to student service positions because they do not have the luxury of earning \$40,000 annually as an academic advisor when they could be earning tens of thousands of dollars more in other industries. The vacancies caused by existing staff leaving their roles for other departments, other institutions, and other industries result in measurable interruptions in student service, but the absence of the voices that are missing from student support and the impact of that absence will prove more challenging to measure. Competitive compensation for staff, much like the creation of an HSI office, is an investment that will pay dividends in ensuring that students have every opportunity to pursue their academic goals.

### **Recommendation for State Policy Makers**

#### **Prioritize Funding for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education**

At least one participant, interviewed prior to when recent legislation was enacted, described the office of Student Diversity and Inclusion as an important “pocket” where students could connect with HSI resources and experience Servingness at the case institution. These teams are an important voice in advocating for students from historically marginalized backgrounds as well as for students with disabilities, veteran students, and any student who brings their whole self to college. We see from research how students benefit from belongingness at their institution (Bazana & Mogotsi, 2017; Garcia, 2017; Garcia et al., 2019; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Hurtado et al., 2011; Venegas, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009), and limitations placed

on diversity, equity, and inclusion programming adversely influences a significant institutional scaffold that helps all students find community and connect to their institution so that they can work toward academic and career goals.

Rather than enacting legislation designed to limit these offices, both existing research and participants in this study show that offices and programs devoted to supporting all students on their academic journeys are crucial for ensuring that students go to college, are retained as students, and graduate. Beneficial outcomes for all students are good for the state in general, as an educated populace drives the sort of innovation that businesses, governments, and societies need to be successful (Tomcikova & Coculova, 2020). Limitations to programming designed to support all students result in systems where not all students have an equitable chance at success in college and beyond. Legislators in states like Florida and Texas should work to undo recent legislation limiting these offices, and states across the United States should prioritize ensuring that institutions of higher education have both the leeway and the budget to provide equitable supports and ensure that all students experience belongingness at their college or university.

### **Prioritize Funding for Competitive Compensation for State Employees, including in Higher Education**

For many institutions, including the case institution, funding comes from a range of sources, including student tuition and fees, state funding, and federal appropriations through grants like those described in this treatise. However, after reaching a peak in the early 2000s, state funding for institutions of higher education has dropped an average of 11% (McKeown-Moak & Mullin, 2014). This decrease in state funding for higher education has limited the ability of institutions to keep pace with several financial priorities, including keeping wages for faculty and staff in line with other industries that require similar levels of education.

Participants across this study report that they or someone they knew had left a role to earn a salary that was more in line with the cost of living and inflation costs in the region where the university is located. They describe situations where they could only stay in a role because of a higher earning partner, or where people were leaving the field of higher education to better afford rent and food. In addition to limiting the number of potential candidates who would be willing to work for a lower salary, these institutions are missing out on voices who might not be able to accept a lower salary and might not even apply to a posting as a result.

Prioritizing competitive compensation for these roles would allow more people to apply to work in higher education, and it would ensure that more of the people who undertake the important work of supporting students choose to stay in those roles. Consistent student support from professionals with the appropriate level of education and a depth of experience with both the field of higher education and with the institution and its systems will help professionals help students. This will lead to the kind of positive student outcomes such as retention and graduation that will ensure that states will remain competitive for attracting businesses seeking an educated workforce, and it will lead to the kind of educated, involved populace that will lead to beneficial outcomes in communities across the state.

### **Recommendations for Federal Policy Makers**

#### **Incorporate Family Support into HSI Grant Calls for Proposals**

While existing research demonstrates that HSI initiatives will often align with calls for grant proposals provided by federal entities (Garcia et al., 2019; Venegas, 2015), participants in this study share that support for families is an important aspect of HSI student support. An easy way for federal policy makers in agencies such as the US Department of Education, US Department of Agriculture, National Science Foundation, and other agencies that frequently

award HSI grants to support their colleagues at colleges and universities is to include programming designed to support families in their calls for proposals.

If calls for HSI grant proposals include language that involves a need for family initiatives, especially regarding language and travel barriers, HSIs could write and be awarded grants designed to pilot programs to help meet these needs. Grant awardees would then use annual performance reporting and academic research derived from grant activities to document the impact of adding Spanish/English bilingual staff to key student support offices or implementing programs where campus representatives visited different regions to bring the campus visit day experience to families. This information could then be used to institutionalize these efforts and ensure that best practices related to them are shared across institutions.

### **Consider Renewable Awards for HSI Grantees**

Throughout this treatise, I have discussed how the limited nature of HSI grants limits the ability of those who work on those grants to lead HSI identity communication and impact institutional identity development. This concern is compounded by the fact that a loss of these programs may have disparate impacts in states where limitations have been placed on institutional DEI initiatives. The limited nature of HSI grants stands in contrast to programs such as TRIO, where institutions can reapply to continue grant funds in support of programs designed to ensure postsecondary opportunities for specific populations of students. Renewable HSI grants would help these institutions provide continuity of service to students who may not have other options to receive HSI programming, and it will help mitigate some of the need for a centralized institutional HSI office discussed earlier in this treatise. Grants could step into spaces that centralized HSI offices legally might not be able to in Florida or Texas, for example.



There may be some concerns regarding such a move. For example, the number of HSIs may grow at a faster rate than the growth of available funds for awards. Grantees may already be seeing this in the form of smaller awards than during previous application cycles. This might make it challenging for new HSIs to receive their first awards as the pool of HSIs grows. With these concerns in mind, careful cost-benefit analysis would be warranted in this consideration, but there is potential that a shift in how funds are awarded would make a great deal of difference not only to the continuity of HSI identity communication, but to the continuity of DEI services in general at institutions in Texas, Florida, and other states that work to limit access to these crucial educational opportunities.

### **Provide Federal Supports for Educators in States Adversely Affected by State Policy**

A significant limitation to this treatise involves state level legislation in states like Florida and Texas that limits the ability of public institutions of higher education to house diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and programs. As a result of this legislation, offices have closed, and staff have been reassigned to roles where they have limited opportunities to support equity and justice for students from historically marginalized backgrounds. Federally funded HSI grant programs are not affected by this legislation, as they rely on federal funding to provide services in alignment with grant goals. This puts these grants in a unique situation to serve a diverse group of students outside of the limitations placed by state legislatures.

Policy makers working within the federal government to design future calls for proposals connected to HSIs (as well as to other MSIs, including both enrollment-defined and historically-defined MSIs) can address this gap in services by crafting calls for proposals that give leeway to institutions affected by this legislation to request federal grant funding that can help them implement programming that can support students from a diverse range of historically

marginalized communities as they work to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities for both academic success and belonging. Recent state legislation will result in significant adverse outcomes for large communities of students. Until that legislation can be replaced in future legislative sessions, federal policy makers have both an opportunity and an obligation to step up for institutions whose states have legislatively limited their ability to serve students.

### **Concluding Remarks: A Recommendation for All Readers**

In this chapter, I recommend things that I describe as “investments” the institution or federal or state government should make. An institutionally funded HSI office would cost money, it would cost a significant amount of money to reimagine staff compensation to put it in line with other industries that hire professionals with master’s or doctoral degrees to do work that requires a high degree of critical thinking. It would be easy to respond to these calls by stating that universities have budgets and that they must operate within their means. For this reason, I would like to conclude this treatise by returning once more to Garcia et al.’s (2019) multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding servingness. In that framework, HSIs’ capacity to serve students is shaped by both internal and external factors. Some of those external factors, such as governmental entities, have a great deal of power to aid or limit HSIs in their work to serve students. While those systems can influence HSIs, they are systems that are subject to their own internal and external influences.

People who fail to see the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education have organized to elect candidates who have actively worked to limit funding to diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, or to nominate judges who would rule that institutions of higher education cannot consider race or ethnicity during the admissions process. As a result, at least in places like Texas or Florida, higher education professionals have become accustomed to working

to serve students in adverse conditions set forth by governmental entities that do not value their work. I ask the reader to consider what might change if those conditions were not adverse. What if higher education leaders in any state could approach governors and legislators, present recommendations like the ones suggested here, and hear words of affirmation and see commitments of funding to support these priorities? What if elected officials in every state filed bills to increase funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion work in higher education, rather than curtail it? These adverse external factors can be influenced through lobbying, organizing, and voting.

Lobbying, organizing, and voting might take the form organizing a community around a significant goal, like ensuring that everyone gets counted for the census or that high school students in a local community learn about college options. It might mean advising a student organization dedicated to advancing policies that will help diverse groups of students thrive on their campus. It might look like running for local office. School boards, elected community college boards, state boards of education, and other government entities need candidates with the lived experience and professional expertise that HSI professionals possess. At a minimum, those of us who can register to vote can help our students and our communities by continually working to be educated voters and communicating with our elected officials on issues that affect our ability to do our work and serve our students. In the state of Texas, where I sit as I write this chapter, Hispanics hold the greatest share of the state population (Ura, 2023). HSIs may be called minority-serving institutions in literature, but they serve a large and growing proportion of the population. Issues related to allowing diverse groups of students, faculty, and staff to thrive in their institutional communities are not fringe issues, and we can work to center them in policy moving forward.

HSI professionals are experts at understanding complex systems and making them work for students. Those skills are applicable to other systems as well as to the ones HSI students navigate. In Spring and Summer 2023, governmental systems functioned in ways that make it challenging for a range of diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioners to do their work. HSIs may not work in a vacuum, but neither do elected officials. I hope that I have made the case that an investment in HSIs and the people who work to support HSI students is crucial to higher education. To move towards making those outcomes a reality, people who care about HSIs will need to work together to shape the external influences that affect our work.

## Appendix A: Preliminary Questionnaire Questions

1. Name:
2. Pseudonym: Please choose a pseudonym for yourself for purposes of anonymity.
3. Email address: Participants will receive a copy of their transcript at the email provided.
4. Position Title:
5. Do you currently work or have you previously worked in a position funded by an HSI-related grant program?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Unsure
6. Please list all the job titles you have held at this institution starting with the earliest and working up to your current title:
7. How long have you worked in the current position (years and months)?
8. How long have you worked at this institution (years and months)?
9. How long have you worked in higher education (years and months)?
10. Please check any degrees that you have earned or are currently working towards at this institution:
  - a. Bachelor's
  - b. Master's
  - c. Doctoral
11. How would you describe your racial/ethnic background?
12. How would you describe your gender identity?

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol**

Aspects of this protocol were adapted from a sample interview protocol distributed by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, Stanford University (2003).

Interviewee (Title and Name):

Interviewer:

Introductory Protocol:

To facilitate notetaking, I would like to record our conversation today. You will have access to a transcript of our conversation. You will have an opportunity to amend and correct the transcript as you see fit. Only researchers on this project will have access to the recording, and recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed. You will also need to sign a form consenting to the interview pursuant to institutional review board protocols. All information will be held as confidential. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop if at any time you feel uncomfortable. We do not intend to inflict harm on you or any participant. This interview should take no longer than one hour. We have several questions we would like to cover during this time.

Introduction:

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as a staff member at Los Gatos University. This research project focuses on the experiences of staff at LGU, specifically as it pertains to the experiences of staff working to support LGU students within the context of LGU's status as a Hispanic-serving institution or HSI. This study does not seek to evaluate the performance of participants but rather seeks to learn more about their experiences and perceptions.

Interviewee background:

1. Please describe your role on campus.

2. Please describe what drew you to work in a higher education role, and at this institution specifically.
3. Please describe your future career plans.
  - a. Probe: you might ask if the participant wants to keep working in their current role, if they want to pursue promotions or more advanced roles in this institution, if they are planning to stay in higher education but switch to another institution, or if they are considering leaving the field in the future.

#### Student Service Context

4. What does student service look like to you?
5. Can you describe an example of a time when you were able to help a student reach a positive outcome? What factors led to that outcome?
6. In your opinion, what are some challenges that students face at this institution?
7. What are some things that you would change to help students overcome these challenges?

#### HSI Context

8. What does the phrase Hispanic-serving institution (or HSI) mean to you?
9. This institution is classified as a Hispanic-serving institution by the federal government. What does this mean to you? How does this designation affect your work?
10. Do you perceive HSIs as different from other types of higher education institutions? What thoughts, factors, or considerations contribute to your answer?

11. Without thinking too much about the federal definition of an HSI, do you think that this institution serves its Hispanic/Latinx students? What considerations lead you to come to that answer?
  - a. Probe: If the participant states that the institution isn't doing much to serve these students, ask what kind of steps they would take to improve the situation.
12. Have you worked for another institution that was an HSI? How did that experience compare to your experience here?
13. What can academic advisors do to ensure that this institution lives up to its designation as an HSI?



## Appendix C: Initial Codes

In development of the conceptual framework that I plan to use to guide my inquiry, Garcia et al. (2019) use a series of themes and codes to analyze existing literature pertaining to HSIs. I plan to adopt many of their themes and start codes in my review of material collected directly from HSI staff. Other codes come from my personal experience as an employee and student at a total of four different HSIs and emerging HSIs. Codes were added based on the contents of the document review and the participant statements during the process of collecting and analyzing data. That information can be found in other appendices.

Parent code	Preliminary Child Codes	Definition
Outcomes	Academic outcomes, nonacademic outcomes, graduation, retention, persistence, employment, graduate school, DFW rates, course completion	Outcome related codes relate to what happens to students because of their experiences at the institution.
Experiences	Student experiences, staff experiences, faculty experiences, positive experiences, negative experiences	Experience related codes connect to things that happen to individuals (either the participant or someone else).
Internal organizational dimensions	Leadership, decision-making, culturally relevant curriculum, pedagogy, or programming, culturally relevant practices on campus, grants,	Internal organizational codes relate to individuals, conditions, or actions that are internal to the organization.
External forces	Policy, federal government, state government, local government, government agencies, legislation, community organizations, calls for grant proposals	External forces related codes might relate to outside stakeholders or groups that may affect students but aren't part of the institution
Students	Undergraduate students, graduate students, student workers, transfer students, prospective students, new student orientation participants, first time in college (FTIC), first-year students, first-generation students	Students are enrolled at the university unless otherwise noted.

Faculty	Professor, associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer, adjunct faculty, instructor	Faculty are employed the institution in a teaching capacity. Faculty may also engage in research activities on campus.
Staff	Academic advisor, counselor, student affairs staff, residence hall director, director, associate director, assistant director, administrative assistant, custodian	Staff are employed at the institution in a non-teaching capacity. Staff may also engage in research activities on campus.
Administration	Dean, Associate Dean, Provost, Vice-President, Associate Vice-President, President	Administrators are campus leaders whose roles may encompass aspects of staff and faculty work. They are often key decision-makers for the institution.
Grants	Grants, calls for proposals, program officer, annual performance reporting, US Department of Education, Title III, Title V, TRIO, USDA, NASA	Grants are generally offered by federal and state government entities. There are several grants specifically designed for HSIs.
White supremacy	Racism, bias, discrimination, systemic racism, "Make America Great Again"	White supremacy describes a system where whiteness is privileged and people who are not white experience oppression.
HSI	Hispanic-serving institution, emerging HSI, HSI certification/recertification, Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Seal of Exelencia,	HSIs are institutions of higher education that are federally designated as serving Hispanic students and communities.
Race/Ethnicity	Ethnicity, Hispanic, Latina, Latino, Latine, Latinx, Raza, Chicano, Chicana, Chicanx, Mexican, Mexican-American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Black, African American, indigenous, people of Color, white people, Asian, European	These terms are used to describe people's racial or ethnic identities and heritage.

### Appendix D: Final Codes

Parent Code:	Original or Added?	Final Child Codes
Major Organizational Change	Added	
Academic Concepts Not in Literature Review	Added	Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, In Loco Parentis
Other Institutions	Added	PWIs, HBCUs, Other HSIs, Other non-HSIs, AANAPISIs, Community Colleges, private, public, Tribal Colleges
Collaboration between faculty and staff	Added	
Concepts from Literature Review	Added	Funds of Knowledge, Community Cultural Wealth, Critical Race Theory, Belongingness, “Hispanic-Enrolling,” Representation, Servingness
“Just A ...”	Added	n/a
Potential Quote for Reporting	Added	n/a
Selena	Added	n/a
Siloing	Added	n/a
Optimism	Added	n/a
Physical Spaces on Campus	Added	Central Administration Building, Library, Student Center
Activities	Added	Duplicating Efforts, “Meeting them where they are,” helping, conferences, advising, building relationships, coaching, collecting/gathering data, committee formation, communicating, registering for courses, tutoring, hiring, hosting events, listening, mentoring, reading or reviewing data, recruiting, research, teaching

Administration	Original	Department Chair, New VP for Student Success, Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, Associate Vice President, Dean, President, Provost, Vice President
DEI	Added	DEI office, Dia de los Muertos, Black History Month, JEDI Program, Hispanic Heritage Month, marginalization, intersectionality, MSI, demographic changes, generational diversity, diversity, equity, historically underrepresented/underutilized, inclusion, justice
Experiences	Original	Faculty experiences, negative experiences, barrier, language barrier, technology barrier, unintentional barrier, course repeat, sexual assault, positive experiences, staff experiences, student experiences
External Forces	Original	Families, other places (subcodes exist for several regions in the state and country that are not local to the case institution), local community, Covid 19 Pandemic, NACADA (Professional Organization), AVID (high school program), calls for grant proposals, community organizations, federal government, Title IX, government agencies, legislation, local government, state government, governor, state developmental course standards, state core curriculum, US Department of Defense
Faculty	Original	Faculty compensation, adjunct faculty, assistant professor, associate professor, instructor, lecturer, professor
Grants	Original	Title III, Title V, annual performance reporting, calls for proposals, NASA, National Science Foundation, program officer, National Endowment for Humanities, TRIO, US Department of Education, USDA
HSI	Original	People not knowing the case institution is an HSI, need for a full time HSI office, HSI Week, HSI trainings, Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions (DHSI), emerging HSI, Seal of Excelencia, Hispanic-Serving Institution, HSI Advisory Group, HSI certification, HSI designation, HSI recertification, Spanish phrase in an English language web site

Internal Organizational Dimensions	Original	Latina/o Studies Minor, African American Studies Minor, referrals, supervisors, strategic plan, size of first-year class, redundancy, dining, institutional accountability, course descriptions, web site, assessment, committees, community, cultural competencies, culturally relevant curriculum, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally relevant programming, decision-making, fundraising, institutional policy, institutional finance, student fees, tuition, budget endowment,
Outcomes	Original	Appeal institutional decisions, major change, conflict resolution, withdrawal, academic probation, academic reinstatement, academic suspension, course completion, DFW rates, employment, graduate school, graduation, nonacademic outcomes, persistence, retention
Race/Ethnicity	Original	Afro-Latino, Intersecting Identities, African American, Asian, Black, Chicana, Chicano, Chicanx, Cuban, Ethnicity, European, Guatemalan, Hispanic, Indigenous, Latina, Latine, Latino, Latinx, “majority-minority,” Mexican, Mexican-American, People of Color, Puerto Rican, Raza, white people
Staff	Original	Emotional drain/emotional toll, Burnout, Financial Aid Staff, Instructional Design Staff, Purpose, Spanish Speaking Staff, staff knowledge discounted, professional development, admissions staff, registrar, remote work, career office, cost of living, librarians, student conduct staff, staff organizations, turnover, staff compensation, transactional interactions with students, staff engagement in HSI initiatives, staff retention, academic advisor, administrative assistant, assistant director, associate director, counselor, custodian, director, housing staff, student affairs professionals
Students	Original	Student organizations, commuters students, STEM students, rural students, nontraditional students, male students, LGBTQIA+ students, Mariachi students, hybrid courses, homesickness, dual credit students, high school students, student mental health, student housing, student cost of living, students who are parents, female students, veteran students, alumni diverse groups of students, student financial aid (including sub codes for institutional programs,

White Supremacy

Original

tuition rebates, student grants, federal aid, college affordability, loans, and scholarships), first-generation students, first time in college (FTIC), graduate students, new student orientation participants, prospective students, student success, student employees/workers, transfer students, undergraduate students

“go back where you came from,” hegemony, “Make America Great Again,” bias, discrimination, racism, systemic racism,

## **Appendix E: Email Outreach**

Note: The information below includes names that have been changed or omitted to preserve institutional and participant anonymity.

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved by the Los Gatos Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Greetings:

My name is Margaret Garry, and I am conducting research on the experiences and perceptions of academic advisors and student affairs professionals at HSIs. While literature exists describing the experiences of students and faculty members at these institutions, less is known about the experiences of the staff members who work directly with students and contribute to student outcomes. This study seeks to explore how these professionals experience their work and how their experience at an HSI shapes their experience working with students.

Participation in this study includes the following activities. You may opt out at any time:

- Completion of a brief questionnaire including some demographic information and information about your experience working at your institution.
- Completion of a one-on-one interview about your experiences and perceptions of your work.
- An opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and make clarifications, amendments, or corrections if needed.

You will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card as a token of thanks for your participation in this study.

To participate, you must work as an academic advisor, student affairs professional, or in a related role where you work closely with students at Texas State University.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please begin by completing the initial questionnaire: [https://utexas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_ewGWkLfxhSHxxVY](https://utexas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ewGWkLfxhSHxxVY)

For more information, please view the attached consent form. You may also respond to this email with questions or to request more information.

Thank you for your interest!

Margaret Garry

Doctoral Candidate, Executive EdD in Higher Education Leadership

The University of Texas at Austin

To participate in this research or ask questions about this research please contact (Ms. Margaret Garry, [Margaret.garry@utexas.edu](mailto:Margaret.garry@utexas.edu), 512.773.5460 or Dr. Victor Saenz, [VSaenz@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:VSaenz@austin.utexas.edu))

This project [Protocol 8698] was approved by the IRB on January 8, 2023. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, [name and contact information redacted to preserve anonymity] or to IRB Specialist [name and contact information redacted to preserve anonymity].

Attachment: Consent Form.



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