

# Hispanic-Serving Institution Host Communities and Latinx Community Development

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*Despite their considerable impact on Latino students and the communities they serve, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are largely unrecognized in the academic literature for their role in Latinx higher education, much less for their role in Latinx community development. This study uses quantitative analysis to compare outcomes in selected indicators of Latinx community development between HSI host communities and non-HSI host communities. The results suggest an association between HSIs and the development of their host communities in terms of higher Latinx population shares and higher mean outcomes in selected measures of Latinx educational and economic wellbeing.*

*Keywords: Hispanic Serving Institution, anchored institution, Hispanic higher education, Latinx community development*

## INTRODUCTION

Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are accredited, public or private nonprofit, and degree granting institutions of higher education in the U.S. and Puerto Rico who's Hispanic (also Latinx, Latino/a) undergraduate full-time equivalent student enrollment is at least 25 percent of the total. Nationally, HSIs enroll more than their share of undergraduate college students and award more than their share of associate's and bachelor's degrees. They also account for a major share of the Hispanic students enrolled in college and of the degrees they earn each year. In 2018, for example, HSIs enrolled over a quarter (27%) of the nation's college students even though they account for only 14 percent of the accredited and degree grants colleges and universities in the country. They also account for 34% of the associate's degrees and 17% percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded that year (Rosenbaum & Jeanetta, 2020). In terms of Hispanic student enrollment, HSIs account for 64% of all Hispanic students enrolled in the U.S. They also accounted for nearly three quarters (73%) of the associate's degrees and for about half (48%) of the bachelor's degrees awarded to Hispanic students that year.

Several factors help explain the large proportions of Latinx students attending and earning degrees at HSIs. The high share of Latinx students already enrolled in HSIs and the chain effect this causes is certainly a draw to Latinx students. So is their location within Latinx communities because of the preference of Hispanic students to attend schools near their home (Cuellar, 2012; Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). The fact that HSIs are generally less expensive and more accessible when compared to other institutions is another factor for choosing HSIs (Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Torres & Zerquera, 2012). The relatively high portion (47%) of community colleges in the population of HSIs is also a factor because they provide several advantages compared to traditional four-year colleges. Among these advantages are having open admission policies, lower tuition and fees, savings on room and board, and more flexible curriculum and class schedules (Kolesnikova, 2010).

Researchers and practitioners examining HSIs have tended to focus on one central question: “How do HSIs serve Latinx students?” (Nunez, 2017, p. 136s). Understanding how HSIs service Hispanic students is now the established concern of HSI researchers and practitioners working to close the Hispanic educational achievement gap (Cardenas, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008; Cuellar, 2019; Garcia 2018; Garcia, Ramirez, Patron, and Cristobal, 2018; Laden, 2004; Marin 2019). Focusing on the central question of how HSIs serve Latinx students has been key in better understanding the roles these institutions play and the actions they take to advance Latinx student educational outcomes (Rosenbaum & Jeanetta, 2020). Because of the high concentration of Latino college students at these institutions, HSIs are deemed central to closing the Hispanic degree attainment equity gap, which when measured in terms of the disparity between Latinx and White students age 25 and older, stood at a 19 percent difference in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

This article deviates from this dominant academic discourse on HSIs to advance Latinx student educational outcomes. Instead, it examines the role of HSIs as anchor institutions and as Latinx community development actors in the communities where they are geographically located. The article investigates whether ‘HSI host communities’ as compared to ‘non-HSI host communities’ are associated with higher mean outcomes in selected measures of Latinx community development. To begin the discussion, we provide a brief overview of institutions of higher education as anchor institutions and their potential for community development. Next, we describe the HSIs in Illinois, which served to identify the HSI host communities in our study. This is followed by a description of the study: the hypotheses tested, the methods used, and the results of the analysis. The study’s findings and limitations and how the latter can be remedied in the future are then discussed. The manuscript concludes with a commentary on the role of HSIs as anchor institutions and the anchoring effect they exhibit on members of the Latino population who reside in HSI host communities.

## **COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AS ANCHORED INSTITUTIONS**

Colleges and universities in the U.S., including HSIs, generally have a culture of separation when it comes to the way they behave toward communities as they go about acting on their academic missions (Del Rio & Loggins, 2019). However, these educational institutions have begun to rethink this culture of separation. While local economic and community development is not the primary role of colleges and universities, in the past quarter century, institutions of higher education have increasingly committed themselves to community engagement, making them indispensable members of their host communities (Friedman, Perry, and Menendez, 2014; Grogan, 2008). Particularly in the context of the knowledge economy, colleges and universities hold tremendous potential for community and economic development outcomes in the places where they are located (Harris and Holley, 2016).

Increasingly, researchers use the concept ‘anchor institution’ to describe the potential benefits of colleges and universities for their host communities. In addition to universities, anchor institutions include hospitals and other health agencies, civic organizations, foundations, churches, governments, utilities and other entities that can play key roles in a community’s development (Friedman, Perry and Menendez, 2014). While some literature on anchor institutions points to institutional immobility and regional economic ties as drivers of investments in host communities, other literature points to a “social purpose credo” that introduces community-focused values into institutional missions (Taylor & Luter, 2013). There is also

growing recognition that community engagement, much like service learning, is an important pedagogical tool that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Bandy, 2012a, 2012 b). Beyond the university, local governments and communities hold an expectation that universities will support their communities (Ehlentz, 2018).

The anchored institutions movement that emerged in the 1990s, in particular, delivers a direct challenge to the culture of separation from community that has traditionally dominated university thinking and behavior. The rise of university-community partnerships has forced colleges and universities to reconsider their commitment to separation from community (Del Rio & Loggins, 2019). In urban development circles, specifically, strategies that leverage the staying power and scale of anchor institutions such as universities, hospitals, and other place-based organizations are on the rise. The feature that makes anchor institutions special is that they are tied to the community; they cannot easily move. This is unlike with corporate for-profit capital, which is mobile and puts cities at greater risk of abandonment. According to proponents, anchor institutions are a good place to start with community rebuilding efforts because they stay in the community irrespective of economic conditions (Bartley, 2014).

Although useful as an analytical and descriptive tool, the concept of anchor institution remains imprecise (Taylor & Luter, 2013). Nevertheless, it has evolved in the U.S. into a growing movement and a way of thinking about the role institutions of higher education and other entities can play in the development of local-level communities. An emerging body of practitioners, among them university administrators and faculty, hospital purchasing officers and HR chiefs, as well as economic development consultants, are actively trying to make it happen in communities across the country (Rutheiser, 2019).

The Coalition of Urban Service Universities is a network of institutions committed to anchoring their cities and regions (Friedman, Perry, and Mendez, 2014). Commitment to the anchor institute mission is the ideal normative stance by which anchor institutions advance the long-term social, economic, and physical health of their host communities. Hodges and Dubb (2012) define the anchor mission, particularly for urban universities, as “the conscious and strategic application of the long-term, place-based economic power of the institution, in combination with its human and intellectual resources, to better the long-term welfare of the communities in which they reside” (p. xix-xx). The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities is another network of colleges and universities committed to the anchor mission and bettering the long-term welfare of their host communities. The Coalition has more than 100 member institutions of which twenty are HSIs (Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, 2019).

While colleges and university have the potential to serve as anchor institutions, the majority fail to embrace the anchor mission. Indeed, not one of the 24 HSIs in Illinois used in our study recognizes itself as an anchor institution. However, not adhering to the anchor mission, does not mean that they do not generate an ‘anchor institution effect’ that benefits the residents of the host communities. Indeed, one reason for this study is to search for evidence of an anchor institution effect in HSI-host communities. Specifically, we are searching for evidence of higher mean outcomes for selective measures of Latinx community development, recognizing that the targeted HSIs are not embracing the anchor mission.

Whereas responding to the Latinx student educational achievement gap challenge is central to the role of HSIs as an academic project, the interpretation of HSIs as anchor institutions gives priority to their role as community and economic development actors (Rosenbaum & Jeanetta, 2020). Similar to other institutions of higher education, HSIs have the capacity to engage with community in an anchor role to affect community development outcomes in ways that benefit them, and their students, faculty and community. However, there is a shortfall in the higher education literature on HSIs as anchor institutions and community development actors. This exploratory study to gain a better understanding of HSIs as anchor institutions and their Latinx community development impact aims to further advance this line of inquiry.

## **HSIs IN ILLINOIS**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 3,390 public and not-for profit accredited and degree-granting institutions of higher education in the US in the 2016, the base year for this

study. These institutions enrolled nearly 16 million students and awarded over 858,000 associate's degrees and over 1.8 million bachelor's degrees that year. By comparison, the state of Illinois accounts for 147 or 4% of the nation's public and not-for-profit accredited and degree granting institutions of higher education. These institutions enrolled over half a million or 4% of all undergraduate students in the nation. They also accounted for 4% of all associate's degrees and for 3.5% of all bachelor's degrees awarded in the nation that year.

The share of Hispanic students enrolled in college grew significantly during the 1990s and today Hispanics account for a significant share of the nation's college student population. In 2016, close to three million (2.9) of all undergraduate students (18.1 percent of the total) enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities were of Hispanic origin. In the state of Illinois, the share of Hispanic students was even higher. Of the nearly 580,000 undergraduate students enrolled in the state in 2016, 20 percent were of Hispanic origin. Hispanic students accounted for 19.2% of the associate's degrees and 12.5% of the bachelor's degrees awarded by Illinois's colleges and universities that year, percentages comparable to the degree shares awarded nationally.

Of the 167 public or private not-for-profits institutions of higher education in Illinois in 2016, 24 qualified for HSI status by meeting the full-time Hispanic student enrollment equivalent of 25%. Eleven of the 24 HSIs in the state were 4-year institutions and thirteen were 2-year institutions. Ten HSIs were private institutions and 14 were public. Half (50%) of all HSIs in the state were two-year community colleges.

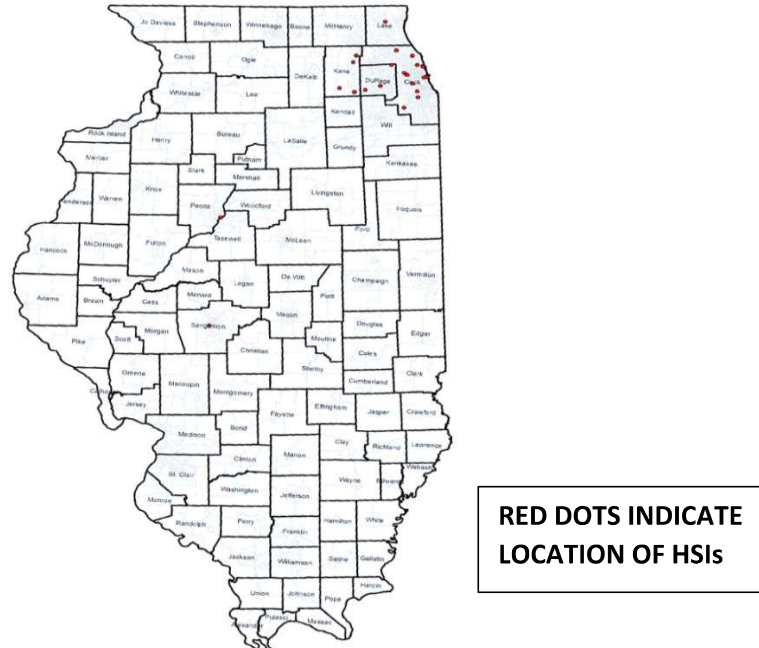
As is the case nationally, in Illinois, HSIs enrolled more than their share of college students and awarded more than their share of degrees. HSIs in Illinois enrolled over a quarter (28.3%) of the state's college students even though they account for only 14 percent of the accredited and degree granting colleges and universities in the state. They also account for 38.6% of the associate's degrees and 14% percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded by institutions of higher education in Illinois that year.

The relatively high share of the students enrolled in Illinois HSIs and the high share of state's degrees these institutions award is linked to the high number of Hispanic college students that attend HSIs. Over half (57.5%) of the state's Hispanic undergraduate students was enrolled in one of the 24 HSIs in 2016. HSIs in Illinois also accounted for nearly 7 in 10 (69.8 %) of the associate's degrees and nearly a third (30.5%) of bachelor degrees earned by Hispanics in the state in 2016.

As is the case nationally, community college HSIs in Illinois figure prominently in the education of the state's students, but especially its Hispanic students. In 2016, these institutions accounted for 74 percent of all students and 78 percent of all Hispanic students enrolled in HSIs respectively. Illinois' HSIs also accounted for 95% of all associate's degrees awarded in the state and for 92% of all associate's degrees awarded to Hispanics in the state that year.

## METHODS

**FIGURE 1**  
**CENSUS TRACTS WITH HSI AND NON-HSI**



For this study we limited the scope of our analysis to the state of Illinois, which has by far the most HSIs of any state in the Midwest region of the country. We began by locating the universities and colleges in the state in 2016 based on the address of each institution. We then identified all the census tracts in the state that had an institution of higher education and created two categories of census tract communities: ‘HSI host communities’ and ‘non-HSI host communities’ (see FIGURE 1 above). We used census tracts because

they were the most suitable geographic units for our analysis. The city scale covered too many universities, preventing us from isolating HSI impacts. The same was true for the counties. Cook County, particularly, contained many HSIs. Based on these classifications, we determined there were 24 HSI host communities and 126 non-HSI host communities in the state of Illinois in 2016.

Our analysis used SPSS software to conduct independent samples T-tests to investigate at an alpha of 0.05 level of significance whether or not HSI host communities have higher mean scores than non-HSI host communities in selected demographic, economic, and educational variables. We then used these variables to measure the community development conditions of Hispanic residents and to examine their association to the presence of a HSI in their census tract community. Consistent with anchor institution theory, we reasoned that HSIs, irrespective of their commitment to the anchor mission, likely exhibited an anchor institution effect on their host communities that could translate into stronger economic ties with the community and higher education and income for its residents. However, we were specifically interested in examining the HSI anchored institution effect on the Latino residents in the host community.

Five-year (2013-2017) of data from the American Community Survey were used to enumerate seven indicators of Latinx community development and to create two sets of data—one for Latinos in HSI host communities and another for Latinos in non-HSI host communities—that we then used to test for mean differences in these variables between HSI host communities and non-HSI host communities. Two demographic variables were used as indicators of Latinx community development in the HSI host and non HSI host communities: the Hispanic share of the population and the Hispanic share of youth 18 to 24-year

old. The economic indicators of Latinx community development used in the tests were the poverty rate, the employment rate, and medium household income. Hispanic educational outcomes were measured in terms of both associate's and bachelor's degree attainment. The following hypotheses were tested:

1. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in the Hispanic share of the population in HSI host communities and that in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in the Hispanic share in the population in HSI host communities is higher than that in non-HSI host communities.
2. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in the Hispanic poverty rate in HSI host communities and that in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in the Hispanic poverty rate in HSI host community is lower than that in non-HSI host communities.
3. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in the Hispanic employment rate in HSI host communities and that in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in the Hispanic employment rate in HSI host communities is higher than that in non-HSI host communities.
4. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in the Hispanic associate's degree attainment rate in HSI host communities than in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in the Hispanic associate's degree attainment rate in HSI host communities is higher than that in non-HSI host communities.
5. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in the Hispanic bachelor's degree attainment rate in HSI host communities and that in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in the Hispanic bachelor's degree attainment rate in HSI host communities is higher than that in non-HSI host communities.
6. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in Hispanic medium household income in HSI host communities and that in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in Hispanic medium household income in HSI host communities is higher than that in non-HSI host communities.
7. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  claims that there is no difference between the mean score in the Hispanic share of the population ages 18-24 in HSI host communities and that in non-HSI host communities. The alternative hypothesis  $H_a$  claims that the mean score in t/he Hispanic share in the population ages 18-24 in the HSI host communities is higher than that in non-HSI host communities.

## RESULTS

TABLE 1 provides a summary of descriptive statistics, t statistic, and p value associated with each hypothesis. Regarding hypothesis 1, there is a significant difference in the share of Hispanics in HSI host communities compared to communities with non-HSIs. Specifically, we reject the null hypothesis because our results indicate that the Hispanic share of the population in HSI host communities is higher than is the case in non-HSI host communities. Test 2 results related to Hispanic poverty rates do not show a statistically significant mean difference between the two communities, so we cannot reject the null hypothesis. We reject the null hypothesis in test 3 because a significant positive difference in Latinx employment rates is observed between HSI host communities and non-HSI host communities. We also observed a significant positive difference in Latinx associate's degree attainment between HSI host communities and non-HSI host communities, so we rejected the null hypothesis associated with test 4. Similarly, Latinx bachelor's degree attainment was higher in HSI host communities compared to non-HSI host communities, so we reject the null hypothesis in test 5. In the case of Hispanic medium household income, we observed a statistically significant higher mean difference in HSI host communities compared to non-HSI host communities, causing us to reject the null hypothesis in test 6. Finally, in the case of test 7, we cannot reject

the null hypothesis because we did not observe a statistically significant difference in the share of Hispanics ages 18-24 in HSI and non-HSI host communities.

## DISCUSSION

According to the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities membership roster, not one of the 24 HSIs in Illinois are members of the Coalition, suggesting they don't embrace the anchor mission. However, not explicitly embracing the anchor mission does not necessarily mean that such institutions do not exude an anchor institution effect or play an anchor role in the development of the communities where they are geographically located. This may be even more the case for minority serving institutions located in minority neighborhoods. One piece of evidence supporting this claim is the recent e-mail to the authors from President and CEO of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Dr. Antonio Flores (2019), who writes, "To a large extent, HSIs are evolving organically as "anchor institutions". HACU has successfully promoted for more than 15 years this evolution by compelling HSIs to collaborate substantively with Hispanic-Serving School Districts (HSSDs)-HACU's definition mirroring the one for HSIs. As HSIs' most significant community partners, HSSDs engage families in their collaborative work."

Because HSIs have a large share of Hispanic students who reside in the communities where HSI are geographically located, we were interested in knowing whether Latinx community development outcomes were different for Latino residents in HSI host communities compared to Latino residents in non-HSI host communities, irrespective of an HSI's commitment to the anchor mission. This approach enabled us to examine community development anchor institution benefits accruing to the Latino population as a whole, rather than at the individual or institutional level, thus permitting capture of community level Hispanic amalgamation and associated multiplier effects.

The results from the T-tests provide strong evidence in favor of five of the seven the alternative hypotheses suggesting a relationship exists between the presence of a HSI in a community and the socioeconomic wellbeing of its Latino residents, as measured by indicators of Latinx community development. The mean differences found in key indicators of Latinx community development between HSI and non-HSI host communities suggest HSIs may play an anchor role in the development of their host communities through an association between their presence in the community and Latinx population growth and increased community development benefits for Latino residents.

**TABLE 1**  
**SUMMARY OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, T STATISTIC, AND P VALUES**

Variables	N	Descriptive Statistics		Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
		M	SD			
Percentage of Hispanic						
Non-HSI	126	0.089	0.089/	-0.119	-2.679	0.013*
HSI	24	0.208	0.208			
Poverty rate						
Non-HSI	126	0.016	0.028	-0.014	-1.419	0.168**
HSI	24	0.030	0.049			
Employment Rate						
Non-HSI	126	0.042	0.042	-0.052	-2.922	0.007**
HSI	24	0.094	0.086			
Education Attainment, associate's degree						
Non-HSI	126	0.011	0.012	-0.017	-2.495	0.020*

HSI	24	0.028	0.033			
<hr/>						
Education Attainment, Bachelor's degree						
Non-HSI	126	0.011	0.014	-0.015	-4.533	0.000***
HSI	24	0.026	0.015			
<hr/>						
Median Household Income						
Non-HSI	126	41744.62	54196.67	-50352	-3.095	0.004**
HSI	24	92096.62	76109.89			
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Share of Hispanics aged 18-24						
Non-HSI	126	0.021	0.023	-0.011	-1.919	0.065+
HSI	24	0.032	0.028			

+ p < .1, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

The finding that the share of the Hispanic population is higher in HSI host communities compared to non-Hispanic host communities makes sense given HSIs are defined in terms of a Hispanic student enrollment threshold, given HSIs are often located in Hispanic neighborhoods, and given the preference of Hispanic students to attend local schools. We also observed a positive difference in the employment rate of Hispanic residents in HSI host communities compared to Latino residents in non-HSI host communities. This outcome likely reflects the larger share of Hispanic residents in the HSI host community and more abundant employment and entrepreneurial opportunities and higher levels of social capital for Latino residents. The positive differences observed in the share of the Hispanic population with associate's and bachelor's degrees may reflect the attraction of low-income Hispanic students in the community to HSIs. This Latino community development outcome, however, also reflects the federal funding garnered by HACU to support Latinx associate's and bachelor's degree attainment at HSIs. To quote Dr. Flores (2019), 'HACU has advocated successfully for community colleges and 4-year degree institutions to collaborate in moving greater numbers of STEM students up to bachelor's degrees and beyond; this program provides about \$100 million annually to HSIs (Title III, Part F) and accounts for most of the doubling of the STEM graduation rate among Latinx over the past 12 years or so'.

According to Dr. Flores (2019), 'the economic development side that HSIs represent is best illustrated by the higher incomes that college graduates earn and their contributions to the strengthening of the U.S. workforce'. The higher concentration of Hispanics with associate's and bachelor's degrees in HSI communities helps to explain the higher Hispanic median household income observed in HSI host communities compared to non-HSI communities. Higher Hispanic medium household incomes are also likely a reflection of the higher concentration of Hispanic residents in HSIs anchored communities and the different market conditions and the opportunities for social networks these communities provide.

That the HSIs under study are mostly in urban locations is also be a contributing factor to the better economic conditions of the Latinos who reside there. Higher Latino medium household incomes as well as lower poverty rates appear associated with the location of HSIs in urban areas. Data from the 2015 American Community Survey show that nationally, rural Americans have lower median household incomes than urban households do, but people living in rural areas have lower poverty rates than their urban counterparts (Bishaw and Posey, 2016).

Although the results of his exploratory study demonstrate an association between the educational and economic wellbeing of Hispanics and their residence in HSI hosted communities, several limitations related to the design of the study warrant caution in interpreting the results. One important limitation is the fact that HSIs in Illinois are mainly found in the urban counties of Cook, Kane, and DePage counties while non-HSIs are distributed across the state, including rural areas. This is an important consideration because, as was stated earlier, rural Americans have lower median household incomes and lower poverty rates than their urban counterparts (Bishaw and Posey, 2016).



Another limitation in the design of the study was the use of census tracts to identify HSI communities. This approach limited the data on indicators of Latinx community development to the census tracts used to define HSI host communities. This approach failed to capture the impact of HSIs on Hispanic residents in the surrounding census tracts living in closer proximity to HSIs than did some of residents in the census tracts that defined the HSI host community.

A third limitation is the number and type of indicators selected to measure Hispanic wellbeing. Tests using other indicators of Latinx community development and wellbeing could produce alternative results. Alternative indicators of Latinx community economic development may not result in higher mean outcomes in indicators of Latinx community development for Latino residents in HSI host community.

All the above-mentioned limitations could be remedied in future experiments. The first limitation related to the urban concentration of HSIs is addressable by making comparisons of HSIs to non-HSIs that consider only comparable urban and rural areas. The second limitation is addressable by defining the HSI communities to include all the census tracts that surround each HSIs. Creating a 1.5- or 2-mile influence buffer and using indicator data that is limited to those spheres of influence could address this limitation. Increasing the number of indicators of Hispanic wellbeing could mediate the third limitation.

In conclusion, this study addresses the lacuna in the HSI literature on HSIs as anchor institutions, with a role to play in the development of the Latino residents in the host communities where they are geographically located. The exploratory study considered HSIs in Illinois to examine the relationship between HSI host communities and Latinx community development. Mean differences in Latinx community development indicators in HSI host communities and non-HSI host communities were observed. Even though the HSIs did not explicitly adhere to the anchor mission, they nevertheless exhibited an anchoring effect on the host community as reflected in increased Latino population growth and improved educational and economic outcomes for its Latino residents.

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