The Role of Chicana/o Studies in Advancing Hispanic Serving Institutions: A pragmatic approach combining pedagogy y la práctica

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by

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&
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I. Introduction

This research paper will examine sustainability factors pertaining to the Chicana/o Studies (CHS) Department, utilizing qualitative strategies including participant observation, secondary analysis, and interviews with key informants that contribute to the success of Chicana/o Studies at the Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD). Researchers hope to establish the role the Chicana/o Studies, as an institutional collaborator, can play in the development of a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), demonstrating effective academic programming efforts and strategies in recruitment, retention, matriculation and eventual graduation, specifically towards Latina/o students in an urban land grant institution. Simultaneously, it is anticipated that in the process of obtaining HSI status and with the involvement of the CHS personnel, the department will grow, flourish and become sustainable, melding into a viable part of the organizational structure, for the next quarter of a century.

This paper posits that Chicana/o Studies (CHS) can sustain itself at Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD) by becoming a functional part of the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Initiative. For the department to become further institutionalized within the structure of the college, it needs to respond to market demands in the workplace by developing programs that are academic in nature, without losing the discipline’s initial dream of liberating La Raza.

Recently MSCD’s Board of Trustees launched a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Initiative “aimed at strengthening the institution’s capacity to serve the Hispanic population in its service area.” It is significant to note that the Denver Public Schools student population of 72,000 with 55% Latino underscores the need for the Chicana/o Studies Department to assist Metro State College in meeting its objective. This is augmented by a growth in the Hispanic population within the 7-counties that are served by this institution. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education’s (WICHE) publication entitled, “Knocking at the College Door Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022,” “The racial/ethnic composition of Colorado’s public high school graduating classes will continue to show substantial diversification over the coming decade and beyond” (WICHE, 2008). The study further argues that there will be a decline in White non-Hispanics, dropping from 78.9% in 1994-95 to 63.8% by 2014-15 (Ibid, 2008). Lastly, the study states that “Hispanic graduates from public schools in Colorado 7,362 in 2004-05, but within a decade they are projected to number 11.941, an increase of 62.2 percent,” (Ibid, 2008). These numbers do not include the
exorbitant drop out rates in many of the large urban schools in Denver, Colorado, which ostensibly could increase Latina/o enrollment in colleges and universities if district dynamics were to change and drop out rates were to decrease. Currently, MSCD Latina/o enrollment is approximately 13%. In order to qualify for HSI status, the institution has to have 25% Latino student enrollment.

**Brief History of National Chicana/o Studies Programs**

“Educación es Liberación” (Education is Liberation.) was one of the battle cries of the Chicano Movement. Communities realized education was a great equalizer that would improve the plight of La Raza. The development of a discipline was an overarching goal of El Movimiento as educated Chicanas/os trekked through a process that would define La Raza’s existence in all facets of the education system. Historically, Chicana/o Studies (CHS) as a discipline has struggled for survival within the academy because of its controversial nature, its continued search for a paradigm and what many believe to be educational hegemony (Muñoz, 1996). Hegemony is defined as, “preponderant influence or authority,” generally in cases of one nation over another. In this case, it is preponderant influence of higher education state commissions and other governing bodies that develop policies perceived as insensitive to CHS continued existence.

Thomas Kuhn regarding paradigm shifts argues that, “Scientific revolutions entail the supplanting of older paradigms with new compatible ones” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 90). Mirandé (1988) states, “New paradigms have not been readily established because their acceptance might mean rejection of older, more established perspectives.” Acceptance in the academy many times translates into abandoning truth for politics. The question that CHS departments face nationally is one of academic relevancy in a contemporary society. What should Chicana/o Studies Programs look like in the 21st century as demographic growth of persons of color, economics and politics interact in polemical battles about discovering truth and justice in higher education?

The construction of knowledge in the social science field to explain the world that we live in is of paramount importance to any burgeoning academic discipline offered in America’s universities. The establishment and continuance of an intellectual tradition following the rules and methods of scientific inquiry, constructed by any group in society allows for that group to become part of history. Conversely, the failure to include the stories of historical groups is
equally detrimental to the future existence of that group. They are metaphorically erased from history. During the developmental phase of Chicano Studies as scholars began the construction of a paradigm, Gomez-Quiñones (1971) stated, “The paradigm should reveal, historically, the inter-relations between culture and economic roles, group personality configurations, mechanisms of social control and the accumulating weight of historical experiences—all of which form the historical context.” Chicanas offered other themes that needed to be included in a paradigm, including sexism in higher education that caused consternation and a form of double oppression for Latinas (Blea, 1992). Until recently, female stories have, for the most part, been omitted from the curriculum in the discipline adding to the struggle that Chicana/o Studies has in finding its place in the academy. Issues of control over resources and power within the institution are not always included in analyses of statewide education whose mission is to respond to the curriculum needs of the populace.

Carlos Muñoz (1996) states, “The young radical intellectuals produced by the Chicano Movement were searching for a ‘new’ activist-oriented scholarship that would identify and initiate the kind of research demanded by the current phase of struggle for Chicano liberation.” One of the defining concepts that are included in this definition is “activist,” and generally is questioned in higher education, especially as it relates to the imparting of knowledge. A value free approach has generally been adhered to in institutions of higher learning, colleges and universities. From the point of view of Chicana/o academicians, alternative paradigms were needed to offset the historical stereotypes that had been developed. As Alfredo Mirandé (1988) stated, “Well constructed theories that meet the rigor of scientific exploration can be used to dispel the myths and “the many misconceptions, [and the] erroneous characterizations which have been perpetrated by the sociology of Mexican Americans,” (Mirandé, 1988, p. 4). Praxis or the combination of theory, action and reflection characterized the Chicana/o Studies discipline, with a commensurate need to develop a paradigm that could be used in transforming the communities suffering from poverty and alienation. (Freire, 1970) had termed the concept “conscientizacao” referring to “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality,” a concept that was transformed into a reality in Chicana/o Studies. Because of its relative newness, approximately 40 years in the academy, Chicana/o Studies Programs are in the process of forming and sustaining a permanent identity.
The challenge that Chicana/o Departments and programs in American society face is how to establish this intellectual tradition within higher education without compromising the continued search for veracity in the process. Since its inception and forty years ago, the multi-disciplinary nature of Chicana/o Studies has been researched by Ph.D’s and social scientists who meet the most rigorousness of methodologies. This is the essence of Chicana/o Studies Programs across the country. Should this essence be truncated prematurely, it would be for political reasons versus other issues related to its ability to construct sound and methodological scientific research.

For the discipline’s continued survival, its principle objective is to establish and maintain an identity and critical pedagogical practices, coupled with la practica, as an Academic Program within an institution of higher learning. One of the fundamental struggles is to establish an analytical framework designed to meet the needs of a modern society, without compromising the discipline’s initial intent, which was to develop an intellectual tradition that would liberate the people. In many campuses where CHS programs had been established, “the programs fell into control of people who did not support the development of Chicana/o Studies as a radical alternative or with community focus” (Muñoz, 1996, p. 188). Programs also experienced the political struggles that are part of the cultures of institutions of higher learning. Inner organizationally, Chicanas “grappled to get [their voices] heard in both women’s studies and Chicano studies” (Baca-Zinn, Et. al., 1986).

II. Definition of Hispanic Serving Institutions

Hispanic Serving Institutions are America’s response to serving groups who have historically and traditionally been excluded from education. Dr. Luis Torres (2009), Deputy Provost in a concept paper, stated, “The HSI designation originated with President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society movement…which applies to all Latin American, Caribbean, and other Hispanic heritage.” Excelencia in Education (2009) states “a fundamental premise for creating the Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) category is the assumption that a critical mass of students triggers an institution to change how it operates to serve these students. This premise stems from critical mass theory, derived loosely from nuclear physics. When applied to social science, this theory suggests that once a group reaches a certain size, there will be a qualitative change in the nature of group interactions as the minority group starts to assert itself and thereby transform the
institutional culture, norms, and values.” Essentially, it is a response for providing equity into America’s colleges and universities. There are 221 member Hispanic-Serving Institutions or (HSI) Hispanic Serving Institution Initiatives. According to Torres (2009) the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) is “the largest and most successful association advocating for Hispanic higher education.” HACU can be a very influential force in deciding which institutions should be considered for funding. HSI is defined as, 

colleges, universities, or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment. “Total Enrollment” includes full-time and part-time students at the undergraduate or graduate level (including professional schools) of the institution, or both (i.e., headcount of for-credit students). Member enrollment statistics are self-reported by the institution for the fall semester of the year prior to the membership year. For example, year 2009 members provide Fall 2008 enrollment statistics. Listing as an HSI by HACU does not “certify” an institution as an HSI for Title V or other Federal grant purposes. Title V eligibility (i.e., meeting the Federal definition of an HSI) is determined by the U.S. Department of Education as the first step in the application process for a Title V grant. Specifically, if your college or university has (1) a full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of undergraduate students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students and (2) not less than 50 percent of all students are eligible for need-based Title IV aid, it should be an “eligible institution” for Title V. Eligibility designation qualifies an institution of higher education to receive grants under the Title V and Title III, Part A, Programs, provided certain other program-specific eligibility requirements are met. Title V authorizes the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program. Title III, Part A, authorizes the Strengthening Institutions, American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions Programs. 


CHS can be a major component at Metro College as it works towards its goal of becoming an HSI. Metro College’s challenge is to develop culturally competent inner-institutional programs and policies, coupled with outreach, public relations, recruitment, and retention programs that are attractive to the burgeoning Latina/o populations while simultaneously working with local school districts to increase high school graduation rates. Metro College should also provide strategies to incorporate multiculturalism into the root and branch of its organization. These authors argue that there are enough students, particularly in the Denver Public School District that can be recruited into Metro College to meet HSI
requirements; however, the high failure rates in high schools have not been adequately addressed. The college administration will have to commit resources, staff and services as well as develop supportive policies to achieve this preeminent goal. CHS will have to develop creative and innovative programs that offer 1) academic rigor, augmented with critical and relevant curriculum development; 2) promising employment opportunities in a changing world; 3) inner-institutional collaboration; 4) culturally competent programs that provide security for the children of families guided by strong familial traditions; and 5) advising services that promote success.

III. Hispanic Serving Institutions as Vehicles for Change: Metropolitan State College of Denver

Legislation regarding Hispanic Serving Institutions were written to (1) expand educational opportunities for, and improve the academic attainment of Hispanic students, and; to (2) expand and enhance the academic offerings, program quality, and institutional stability of colleges and universities that are educating the majority of Hispanic college students and helping large number of Hispanic students and other low-income individuals complete postsecondary degrees” [1](http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSI_Definition_EN.asp?SnID=853389077).

Metropolitan State College’s interest in Hispanic Serving Institutions developed as a result of data compiled by Dr. Juan Dempere, a Finance Professor, who had researched the concept and presented data to top level administrators who advised the President to keep this initiative on his radar screen. Dr. Dempere’s research spawned continued interest from the Metro’s administration. It eventually led to the formation of a 65 member Task Force who “engaged in large-scale, directed planning to develop as a Hispanic Serving Institution, with special emphasis on what the word ‘Serving’ means in this context” (Torres, 2009). Planners developed a structure with several subcommittees that worked arduously in defining and developing planning processes with an ultimate goal of developing a series of recommendations regarding this initiative. This resulted in Metro personnel attending National Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) conferences and becoming part of a statewide coalition whose mission is to develop statewide interest in Hispanic Serving Institutions and provide technical assistance to institutions interested in pursing or enhancing current strategies to realize their institutional goals related to HSIs. To date, the statewide coalition continues to meet
and develop statewide plans to increase Latina/o presence on Colorado campuses via HSI initiatives.

As part of the development of the HSI Task Force, Dr. Luis Torres submitted a concept paper to the United States Department of Education, entitled, “Planning and Development Assistance for Emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions,” aimed at “providing funding specifically for emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions, or emerging HSIs, to develop plans by which to sooner become HSIs than they would without such funding.” He further states that a belief exists that “funding for those institutions seeking HSI status would greatly accelerate the enrollment of Hispanic students and their increased retention (Ibid, 2009). Data was provided to the U.S. Department of Education demonstrating the strong impact that HSIs have on institutions interested in graduating Hispanics from colleges and universities.

Dr. Ramon Del Castillo, Chair and Associate Professor in the Chicana/o Studies Department, has been intimately involved in the HSI planning process since its inception. He was the co-chair of the Public Relations Department and has continued to do to public relations announcements for the college in general since the committee began its work. He attended meetings and assisted in developing public relations strategies that would support the initiative including visitations to HSI designated institutions. Del Castillo was also instrumental in dialoguing several of the final recommendations that included but were not limited to:

1) Development of Metro’s Café Cultura, an effort to recruit and retain Latinas/os and African American students; 2) Support for Journey Through Our Heritage by hosting this historical and cultural knowledge base competition, high school students and parents will increase their awareness of Metro State as a college to attend after high school; 3) In-state Tuition for Undocumented students who have graduated from Colorado high schools; 4) Schedule town hall meetings, open forums, and educational opportunities for 1st amendment education for students to discuss HSI and related topics; 5) Create a multicultural environment on campus that will showcase and integrate the history, art and influence of historically underrepresented minorities on the Auraria campus, specifically on Metro State properties; 6) Identify departments that currently adhere to best HSI practices in relation to student expectations, inclusion and student success. Sub-classifications of HSI departments, and offer incentives for non-HSI departments to achieve HSI status; 7) Identify new programs that will attract and retain Latina/o students based on national research and current/future trends; and 8) Review and evaluate faculty diversity and culturally responsive teaching in relation to achieving institutional multi-culturalism in the content and delivery of the curriculum (HSI Report and Recommendations, Metropolitan State College of Denver, 25 January, 2008).
Metro is now positioned to play a leadership role in increasing Latina/o post-secondary graduation within the State of Colorado. With the changing demographics previously mentioned, Metro’s HSI can develop an HSI model for replication. With assistance from the CHS Department, Latina/o students can enter this institution and walk out with a degree. This would entail specific strategies that include the CHS Department building a strong relationship with local and national HSI personnel.

IV. **Chicana/o Studies Department: Metropolitan State College of Denver**

Metropolitan State College of Denver’s Chicana/o Studies Department has had its share of the ebbs and flows of austere economics and organizational restructuring. In 1985, during a financial crisis, and augmented by decreased student interest in Chicana/o Studies resulting in low enrollments, the department was consolidated with the African American Studies (AAS) Department into the Institute for Intercultural Studies and Services (Thobhani, 2009). During this intense time period, the college was also on a trajectory to revise its General Studies Courses, which ultimately included courses in both AAS and CHS disciplines respectively. As the 90’s approached and the tanning of America was occurring, there was an incessant national interest in Multicultural Studies. Data demonstrated that America was on the path to multiculturalism and needed to align its major educational institutions with the changing demographics. Metro State created a policy supporting a multicultural requirement that would encompass “U.S. Ethnic Minorities,” (Ibid, 2009). In 1995, with the increased enrollments, a revised General Studies curriculum, coupled with recognition that America’s complexion was changing, the Chicana/o Studies and African American Studies Departments were revived.

Policy makers don’t often see the relevancy of including alternative paradigms to its educational model as valuable. Often times, there are policies in place at the state level without commensurate supportive policies at the institutional level. For example, The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) “has established a graduation benchmark for baccalaureate degree programs as ten (10) graduates in the most recently reported year or 20 graduates in the last three years” (January, 2003). CCHE expects governing bodies to monitor this policy but also allows flexibility relative to the implementation of this policy. For example, there are three options that governing bodies can decide when a department has been relegated to a low demand status, “to discontinue the program, exempt it from discontinuance, or appeal for
an extension of the decision (Ibid, 2003). Dr. Akabarli Thobhani, the past Director of the Institute for Intercultural Studies and Services stated, “When a department has not graduated a certain amount of students within a specified time; thus, being placed in a low demand status, it essentially places the program in jeopardy” (Thobani, 2009). Hence, the perception that CHS is always under attack has merit.

The CHS Department at Metro State College has been relegated to low demand status several times. At times, this situation acts as a disincentive to attract qualified faculty seeking out a professional teaching career in higher education. The contradiction is that there are not necessarily institutional policies in place that can assist the CHS Department in keeping off this status. Currently, there is ambiguity about the policy. The current advantage that Metro’s CHS Department has is support for its program from the upper echelons of the organization; however, the political current could easily change, placing it in potential risk. At this point, Metro’s Board of Trustees is aware that the department works arduously at achieving this policy goal and that CHS offers program, classes and plays adjunctive roles that are consistent in achieving the college’s mission. This is an important consideration as Chicana/o Studies Departments in general struggle for sustainability within higher education.

There are policies that are created that have serendipitously contributed to the benefit of CHS and other departments. This occurred at Metropolitan State College of Denver. According to Metro’s current catalog, graduates have to take at least one multicultural requirement in order to graduate from the institution. The CHS department has become more stabilized following this policy initiative. More specifically, the policy states that, “…a student must complete a three-hour Multicultural course…to be awarded a bachelor’s degree from Metro State” (2008/09). The catalog further states, “Multicultural course required content and course materials are designed to increase student’s awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity in the United States” (Ibid, 2008/09). An analysis of this institution’s policy states,

This institutional policy created an avenue for increased enrollment. As in any societal change, organizations are challenged to find a positive path of modifying attitudes about the complexities of a changing society. Eventually, the policy was institutionalized and student enrollments increased. Universities across the country had matured, following the 1960’s social revolution and had developed increased acceptance (Metro State Catalog, 08/09. www.mscd.edu).
On a national level, the CHS Department had aligned itself with the Association of Chicana/o Studies (NACCS), which had been formed with the following mission statement,

The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies is the academic organization that serves academic programs, departments and research centers that focus on issues pertaining to Mexican Americans, Chicana/os, and Latina/os. The Association was formed in 1972, during the height of the Chicana/o movement, calling for the development of a space where scholarship and Chicana/o students could develop their talents in higher education. For more than 30 years, students, faculty, staff, and community members have attended the NACCS annual conference to present their scholarly papers—many of which have spun into important intellectual pillars (NACCS website, 2009).

NACCS developed into a sophisticated advocacy group supporting research and the construction of knowledge utilizing sound methodological and research principles, able to withstand the scrutiny of any research methodologist. However, it is also faced inner-organizational challenges with respect to its initial mission. In an analysis of the organization (Muñoz, 1996) stated, “NACCS as an organization has not been able to accomplish many of its original objectives…It has not been able to provide radical direction for Chicano Studies envisioned by its founders…They had anticipated the development of alternative modes of analysis that could be applied to the resolution of problems in the Chicano community.” These are issues and challenges that will plague CHS departments until the discipline earns respect and/or is granted full-fledged participation in the academy.

**MSCD: Chicano Studies, Mission and Vision**

The CHS department’s vision is, “To create an international competitive Chicana/o Studies Department that will attract students globally and prepare them to address national and worldwide issues and concerns (Del Castillo, ET. al, 2007). It’s mission is to “prepare culturally responsive and competent students with skills to work in multicultural and global contexts to deal with the changing demographics in American society and articulate public policy issues such as human rights and immigration through the incorporation of concepts such as Chicanismo, Mexicanismo and Latinidad through approaches of inclusive pedagogy and praxis” (10 year CHS plan, 2007).
The role of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at MSCD has been to fulfill our vision and mission in providing academic content to our students and the metropolitan area about the Chicana/o and Latina/o cultures. As stated in the 2007 ten-year strategic plan.

The department explores new and innovative initiatives that will bring value to the discipline. In teaching, we offer curricula that are multi-disciplinary in nature—including the social sciences and humanities—and which reflects the historical and contemporary complexities of our nation and world. In research, we foster studies to promote scholarly and theoretical understanding of the various expanding issues about the past, present and future of our communities. In service, we offer research-based assistance to the college and the metropolitan area to address the needs of our society, especially, but not limited to the status of the Chicana/o and Latino communities. By providing the “academic content to our students and the metropolitan area about the Chicana/o and Latina/o cultures” we fulfill a serious, significant multicultural requirement that the graduates of MSCD—most of whom stay in Denver and throughout Colorado—are required to take within the curriculum guidelines of Metropolitan State College of Denver. This provides students with rigorous academic instruction about the increasing population that is the subject of CHS. The department is in the process of developing service learning opportunities to its repertoire of academic programs. In advising, we offer students counsel and advice regarding classes, availability of graduate school opportunities and professional development. The department writes letters of recommendation and supports student activities that are both on campus and in the community (CHS program report, 2007).

The department continues to enhance the quality of its teaching, service, and professional development; preparing students for their academic, intellectual, and professional futures. We constantly strive to engage students in critical thinking from various perspectives for studying multi-disciplinary subject matter relative to the Chicano/Mexicano/Latino experience.

Departmental faculty works to meet the needs of curricula regarding the Chicana/o community in partnership with Denver Public Schools (DPS) through El Alma de la Raza Project, a multicultural curriculum that addresses the contributions of Latinos to this nation. To date, over 75 curriculum units have been written, edited, authenticated by MSCD professors, and published; thirty-eight of them are on the Colorado Department of Education Website and fifty-five on the Denver Public School’s Website (Ibid, 2007).

The department prepares students to teach in K-12 classrooms, with opportunities in obtaining teaching licensures, granted through the department. In May of 2001, CHS received Secondary Education Certification in Social Studies from the Colorado on Higher Education Commission (CCHE). This was a historical milestone and the first time that any department in an Ethnic Studies type program received such licensure in higher education in the State of
Colorado. In the “Grow Your Own” Program, CHS faculty collaborates with the Teacher Education Department in preparing students to obtain majors in Chicana/o Studies, minors in ESL and elementary school licensures (Ibid, 2007).

The department assists the college in meeting its diversity goal, offering its students culturally relevant curriculum, augmented with creative programming efforts. For many Latina/o students, for the first time in their educational journeys, they are offered alternative explanations about histories and cultures of People of Color that have been purposely been left out of curricula in public education. This adds to the building of cultural self-esteem, especially as they observe role models teaching classes. The importance of these fundamental, structural changes cannot be underemphasized. It is widely recognized throughout Colorado that systemic change must occur if today’s young children are to be tomorrow’s successful college students. According to a recent front-page article in the *Sunday Denver Post*, “If nothing changes, children getting ready for preschool today will start—and finish—college at an even lower rate than now. Already, the six-year-graduation rate is well below 50 percent at more than half of the public four-year colleges and universities in the state” (2008).

Pursuant to the goal of transforming higher education, the department has offered the following programs in the last 3 years, many of which are becoming institutionalized: 1) Café Cultura, a spoken word program implemented in collaboration with community poets and spoken word artists; 2) Journey to our Heritage; 3) Rudolpho “Corky” Gonzales Symposium,” honoring one of country’s historical heroes who coincidentally is a Denver native; 4) Cesar E. Chavez Leadership Days, honoring the co-founder of the United Farm Workers Organization; 5) Lalo Delgado Annual Poetry Festival, considered the father of Chicano poetry; 6) Richard T. Castro Distinguished Visiting Professorship; 7) Annual La Raza Youth Conferences; 8) *Su Teatro*: St. Cajetan’s Reunification Project: *Colorado en una Noche de Navidad*, a local teatro group that has been in existence for 40 years in the State of Colorado; 9) Return of the Corn Mothers, a Navajo/Hopi/Zuni Native American tradition that paid recognition to the many contributions of women in the community; 10) The Dance of the Flower Medicine: Danza Xochitl Pahtli – Mexican/Chicano Health Symposium, wherein curanderas/os from New Mexico and Mexico provided training modules on holistic and alternative healing practices; and 11) Salsa, Soul and Students, an introduction to Latin American struggles for independence and liberation. These programs allow student participation in the development and implementation phases and provide
cross cultural educational experiences. Other programs include “Beyond Chicanismo” and “Herederos of Change and Esperanza,” two programs coordinated specifically by students and supervised by an affiliate faculty member.

In its last program evaluation, conducted in 2008 by an outside evaluator, Dr. Raymond Padilla stated, “As a strategy for consolidation, the last program review (2002) recommended that the [CHS Department] curriculum be reviewed to reflect a ‘second generation’ CHS program. The revised curriculum would result in program offerings that are market driven, bi-disciplinary in nature, and add value to other programs on campus.” In an effort to respond to the feedback from the 2008 program evaluation, the department has embarked upon a series of strategic approaches to transform itself and prepare the department for the increased number of Latina/o students while simultaneously developing strategies to assist the institution in meeting its objective. This includes the following: development of bi-disciplinary valued added certificates in Integrated Health Care and Marketing and a Service Learning Class to Mexico. Additionally, the department has developed a Community Advisory Council, designed to provide institutional and community support.

Inner-organizationally, CHS’s personnel track record regarding diversity “subsidizes other departments,” that lack diversified staffs…described as an asset model, the department can act as a specialist in outreach and public relations for the HSI initiative” (Diaz-Bonacquisti, 2009). As further stated by Diaz-Bonacquisti with respect to how Latinas/os might be feeling, “You invite me to your party; but you don’t play my music, you don’t serve my food, or speak my language. Then, you wonder, why I leave the party” (Ibid, 2009). Pragmatically speaking, Chicana/o Studies Programs must offer support services for students, many of whom come from working class backgrounds and from public high schools that historically have had alarming push-out rates, leaving students vulnerable to the rigors of academic discipline. Chicana/o Studies Programs must also offer creative and innovative curricula that translate into student employability in the marketplace. In order to meet its objectives, CHS programs must also offer hope for the future, hope for the construction of a just society and the true liberation of its people.

Campus climates provide the backdrop for safe and gracious space. Students need to feel that they can relate to others on campus. CHS participates with other departments and programs to offer a welcome mat for those seeking out role models that can assist them in their educational
journeys. CHS collaborates with other departments and groups on campus to provide a
culturally competent organizational climate that is inviting and respectful of other cultures. CHS
staff has provided workshops on diversity and cultural competency on campus.

There has to be a balancing act between academic and service oriented CHS
programming efforts in higher institutions. Strategically, this must be done without “watering
down” the concept of an academic department, supplanting it with the image of a service
delivery program. Programs should share the most relevant research that meets academic rigor.
To compromise this goal would be an injustice to the discipline. This research project will focus
on several key programmatic areas and strategic approaches that offer a balanced approach
between the academic rigor of a department and a service delivery system wherein both elements
provide a recipe for success. This paper seeks to address the history both nationally and locally
with the current status of the Chicana/o Studies Department, the College Assistance Migrant
Program (CAMP); Journey Through Our Heritage Program; and the “Grow Your Program” as
they coalesce to assist this institution in meeting its goal of being transformed into an HSI, while
simultaneously sustaining and institutionalizing CHS within the walls of this higher education
institution. As well, the department has worked with the following programs that are
academically based but also have recruitment and retention strategies incorporated into their
program descriptions.

V. College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) has been in existence nationally since
1972 when it was developed under the auspices of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO),
created as a part of the Johnson administration’s War on Poverty. Initially there were four
CAMP sites serving students from migrant and seasonal farmworker backgrounds in the U.S.:

- Adams State College in Alamos, Colorado;
- California State College in San Diego, California
- Pan American University (now University of Texas Pan American) in Edinburg, Texas;
- Saint Edward's University in Austin, Texas.

A tragic and frequently overlooked fact is that migrant students are among the most
underrepresented groups on college campuses in the nation. The reasons for their lack of
participation in post-secondary education may be traced directly to the demands of the farmworker lifestyle:

As of July 2002, there were 819,000 migrant children nationwide . . . These children are among the most disadvantaged in the United States due to the combined effects of poverty, poor nutrition and health care, and high absenteeism from school related to work responsibilities and family mobility . . .

Many migrant children fall behind academically as they progress through school. The best and most recent national studies of school completion rates (now more than a decade old) estimated that only about half received a high school diploma (State University of New York [SUNY] Oneonta Migrant Programs, 1987; Vamos, 1992); (Gibson, 2003).

A CAMP student, Yajaira Castillo, offers graphic details on the farmworker lifestyle and the effect it had on her family and their hopes for an education:

Living in the U.S. was very hard for our family because we did not know how to speak English, and school was very difficult. It was almost as if school was not an option. We thought we would not be attending school and spend our time working in agriculture . . . During school, my older brother and sister worked after school. I worked during the school breaks in the azadón (digging the weeds in the fields with a hoe). We worked in the hot morning to late at night. Our backs would ache from bending, and our shoulders, from using the strength of cutting the weeds (Castillo, 2008).

Despite the documented need for services for marginalized groups, the Program’s history has been plagued by challenges from all sides. In the very early days, many programs serving underrepresented student populations were cut when the Nixon administration dismantled the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1973. CAMP was able to survive however; and later, in 1980, it was transferred to the newly created U.S. Department of Education. By 1981, there were six CAMPs in existence across the United States. Then, in 1995, the Clinton administration zero-funded both CAMP and its sister program, the High School Equivalency Program (HEP). This move outraged advocates for migrant students and prompted the “CAMPaign” to save the programs. The CAMPaign was successful, and Congress agreed that the programs were a “necessary and vital investment in the future.” Today, CAMP programs are funded by the Office of Migrant Education of the U.S. Department of Education on a competitive grant basis based on a five-year cycle.

CAMP addresses the academic, financial, and social needs of migratory and seasonal farm workers and/or their immediate family members, in pursuing higher education. CAMP specifically addresses the problem of how best to accommodate first generation students to the
world of higher education as they grapple with the challenges of a new environment, urban life, a diverse campus population as well as the need to learn study habits. Frequently CAMP students are faced with second language issues as they face the need to map learning strategies, begin to network with various campus constituencies and to work collaboratively with faculty and their peers.

The College Assistance Migrant Program has been in operation at Metro State since Fall Semester of 1999. The idea that it is possible to use anthropological methods to solve pressing human needs informs MSCD-CAMP’s Tri-Part Mission: 1) To provide Personal Support Services to MSCD-CAMP Students; 2) To provide Academic Support Services to MSCD-CAMP Students; and 3) To provide Financial Support Services to MSCD-CAMP Students. These overarching goals provide the framework for first generation Latina/o students (and others from farm worker backgrounds) not only to survive, but to thrive in college.

The interconnectedness with the goals of the CHS Department at Metro State is clear. Chicana/o Studies is, at base, a multi-disciplinary field. The combining of pedagogy and praxis, which is at the heart of Chicana and Chicano Studies, is also contained in the philosophy articulated by anthropologist Ward H. Goodenough that humans tend to be “reformers” and so we should be concerned with how changes are to be made, not if they should be made (1963). In the case of the educational needs of migrant and seasonal farmworker students, researchers have found that by employing an applied anthropological approach to those issues, it is possible to achieve excellent results.

For example, during the 1999 – 2004 grant cycle, the MSCD-CAMP served a total of 171 students, 114% of the 150 required. Furthermore, the student retention rate in higher education was 83.5%, significantly higher than that of the general population at MSCD.

The chart below indicates the type of success possible when culturally appropriate strategies are implemented in a rigorous academic environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number Served</th>
<th>Completed 1st Year in Good Academic Standing</th>
<th>Number of Students Who Continued to Sophomore Year</th>
<th>Percent of Total Continuing in College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year</td>
<td>Number Served</td>
<td>Completed 1st Year in Good Academic Standing</td>
<td>Number of Students Who Continued to Sophomore Year</td>
<td>Percent of Total Continuing in College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(no federal funding awarded to MSCD-CAMP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>*31</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One student went to the military and two students left to get married

**VI. Journey Through Our Heritage**

The mission of Journey Through Our Heritage/Jornada de Nuestra Herenica is to increase the historical and cultural knowledge bases of high schools students who participate in the program (Giron-Mushfig, 2009). The program works directly with Colorado State high schools, both rural and urban, in achieving its goals. Program personnel outreach to high schools beginning in the Metro Denver area and expand to include rural, suburban and urban schools in other counties, building relationships and a concomitant network of access to students in order to sustain the program. Encounters with principals or designated school officials are established in order to: 1) describe the program and its benefits for high school students; 2) recruit students interested in participating in this initiative; 3) engage in dialogue regarding resource development and logistical setup; 4) provide workshops regarding the program material; and 5) implement the program once the preliminary benchmarks have been met. Outreach includes interaction with those schools that have participated in the past as well as many other public high schools and newly established charter schools that seem to be growing exponentially in the Denver Metro area.

**History of Journey Through Our Heritage**
Journey Through Our Heritage/Jornada de Nuestra Herencia,” was initially created by the Chicana/o Studies Department to bring local high school students together to engage in an academic competition in the areas of Native American, Chicana/o, and Latina/o studies. Its initial goal was to increase the student’s knowledge bases and cultural understanding of their histories and cultures. As with other academic competitions, the program was referred to as an Odyssey, or Jornada, in that it was a virtual travel through time, space and history. It also addressed the disciplines relative to Chicano and Native American histories, cultures, and their respective contributions to American society.

The Program was able to raise enough funds, although miniscule, from 1999-2004 at which point resources became extremely difficult to raise and the program was terminated. During its lifespan hundred of students from throughout the State of Colorado participated. The creativity and enthusiasm demonstrated in this program culminated in well-informed students who had learned how to empower themselves with the history, culture and contributions of Chicanos and Native Americans. Although no data is available, anecdotal evidence exists tracing the movement of students from the program into higher education institutions, including Metro College (Giron-Mushfig, 2009).

The CHS Department was recently funded a two year internal HSI grant via stimulus funds in the amount of $90,000. Funds will be used to hire a coordinator for the program in order to build a stronger infrastructure, enhance program operations and develop and implement a sustainability plan. The program administrators have also been encouraged to seek funding out from Metro’s Diversity Initiative in order to cover some of the overhead expenses.

Journey Through Our Heritage is implemented twice during the 2007-2008 academic year. Helen Giron-Mushfiq, an adjunct faculty member in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at Metropolitan State College of Denver is the contact person for this program. Ms. Giron-Mushfiq works with the Chicana/o Studies Department and the Mexicano Estudiantl Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) organization located on the Metropolitan State College of Denver campus to recruit mentors and boundary spanners for the program. College students become the role models for their high school counterparts. In spring 2009, a proposal to expand the program was written to the WalMart Foundation tying this initiative to meet the goals and objectives of the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Initiative. In particular the proposal addresses two of President Stephan Jordan’s college goals: 1) Engage, collaborate, and work with the community;
and 2) Embrace and promote diversity. The program will continue collaboration with many of Colorado’s high schools whose student populations have high concentrations of Latino/Hispanic students.

VII. **Grow Our Own Program**

This project involves a partnership between Metropolitan State College of Denver (Teacher Education and Chicana/o Studies Departments), Denver Public Schools, the second largest school district in Colorado which serves the greatest numbers of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, and the Colorado Department of Education’s Office of Teacher Education. Paraprofessionals selected for the program are working towards 143 hours of coursework over a five year period, earning a degree in Chicana/o Studies, a K-6 elementary teaching license with a state-approved endorsement in English as a Second Language. The model proposed allows paraprofessionals to continue in their paraprofessional teaching assignment providing them opportunities to practice learned skills in real classroom settings, ultimately having a positive effect on the education of LEP students (Lucero-Sandoval, 2007).

The data relative to the need for the “Grow Your Own” Paraprofessional Teacher Preparation Program demonstrates the growth of the ELL population in Denver Public Schools, which has increased two-fold over the past ten years supported by the decline of ESL teachers. Data estimates from the National Center for Education (NCES) further demonstrated the need for this program. There are three million English Language Learners (ELLs) in the U.S.; approximately 1.5 million of these students reside in Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California and Arizona.

Since 1990, Colorado has experienced a tremendous growth in its ELL population. In 1995, approximately 43,000 students were identified as limited English proficient. In academic school year 2005-06, the Colorado Department of Education reported a LEP count of 83,659. Interestingly, 14,450 English Language Learners, or 17% of the State’s ELL student population are enrolled in Denver Public Schools (the district targeted for services). Given the growing numbers of ELLs in DPS and a lack of ESL endorsed teachers in the district, a need exists to develop a teacher education program designed to prepare paraprofessionals for roles as elementary teachers who are skilled in meeting the academic and linguistic needs of the District’s growing ELL student population (Sandoval-Lucero, 2006).
The program design consists of the development of a teacher education program that prepares teachers to provide effective instruction to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Throughout the five years of this project, Metropolitan State College’s teacher education faculty, Denver Public School administrators and the Colorado Department of Education is committed to the development of an elementary teacher education program that is aligned with State content standards. The partners will assure that ESL endorsement courses are aligned with ESL standards. A unique feature of the project is that supervised practicum will be embedded in all teacher education and ESL endorsement courses. Through supervised practicum, faculty will observe, first hand, the degree to which trainees are prepared to serve students of limited English language proficiency. Upon completion of the five year program, a study will be conducted to determine the overall impact of the project on preparing trainees to provide high quality instruction to all students, with a focus on equipping paraprofessionals with skills in teaching the growing ELL student population in Denver Public Schools (Ibid, 2007).

Trainees are enrolled in courses on a part-time basis during the fall and spring semesters and on a full time basis during the summer months. The model proposed herein not only allows paraprofessionals to continue in their paraprofessional teaching assignment, but more importantly, provides them opportunities to practice learned skills in real classroom settings, ultimately having a positive effect on the education of LEP students. Capacity for this program will be demonstrated in that a “Grow Your Own” teacher education, specifically targeting paraprofessionals, will be developed at Metropolitan State College of Denver and will be made available to other paraprofessionals long after funding ends. Equally important is the fact that 25 highly qualified paraprofessionals will earn a teaching license and will be assigned to high need schools in the Denver Public Schools.

**Effectiveness of “Grow Our Own” Programs**

Career Ladder Programs have demonstrated success with para-professionals because of their commitments to their jobs and communities. Upon termination of their degrees, they can continue to educate all children in their respective communities. Too often, suburban teachers interested in pursuing teaching careers, come into urban school districts unfamiliar with the shibboleths and cultures of urban school children and families and spend time learning how to teach, a sort of “on the job training,” approach. They often spend 2-3 years in these types of
school districts with aspirations to eventually climb the educational workforce ladder provided by school districts.

The “Grow Our Own” program ensures that there will be a supply of teachers that are direly needed in schools like Denver Public Schools. The investment of the dollars to train them is money worthwhile spent (Sandoval-Lucero, 2009). Sandoval Lucero (2009) states that similar programs have utilized Spanish as a major but have not been as effective as Chicana/o Studies Programs. The CHS Department offers both the language component of what teachers need as well as the cultural component direly lacking in public school systems. Currently the students in the program maintain an average of 3-3.2 GPA. Equally important is that students are able “to immediately use the information that they are obtaining in the classroom to enhance his or her teaching capabilities” (Ibid, 2009). The value added components to the CHS Department include the following. 1) The program is based on the concept of educational and social justice for Latina/o communities. 2) The program strengthens the cultural identities of both paraprofessional and students as they interact in classrooms; 3) the program solidifies and enhances partnerships between the department and the school district. 4) The program can be used in assisting the Hispanic Serving Institution Initiative by increasing student enrollment numbers. 5) The program can be replicated to further increase the demand for teachers in the classrooms. Although the data is scant regarding the effectiveness of Metro’s program, preliminary results indicate that the 25 students are still currently enrolled, with an average GPA of 3.2.

Conclusion

There are several qualitative and quantitative reasons why the Chicana/o Studies (CHS) Department at Metropolitan State College of Denver should coalesce, utilizing a pragmatic approach combining pedagogy y la practica, as the college pursues Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) status,. Qualitatively, there is a moral issue regarding equality in education, specifically with an underserved population that is growing in leaps and bounds and will eventually take its place in history. If is it true that “education is the great equalizer,” what could be substantially more of a moral imperative that should be used as a driving force to assist this group in reaching parity than education? During austere economic times, small departments such as the CHS that struggle for survival; but that offer curricula and services that assist a college or university meets
its mission, can become an instrumental force in assisting higher education organizations meet their moral and statutory commitment to the nation, state and more importantly to a group that has traditionally been absent on a per capita basis in institutions of higher learning. The Chicana/o Studies Department at Metro has demonstrated resilience for the last 30 years within the college campus. It has weathered the many re-organizational attempts as well as fiat by authoritative bodies to dissolve the department through arbitrary policies that act as deterrents to success. Paradoxically, it has been institutional policies that have rescued it from complete annihilation as the changing demographics demand innovative approaches to recruiting and retaining Latina/a students. Additionally, because of foresight and perseverance from the college, CHS has demonstrated that through effective policy initiatives, it can reach equal footing with other disciplines that have been in existence for decades.

Quantitatively, the CHS Department has graduated its share of majors that are now in prominent positions in the community, struggling for equity and social justice. The department’s credit hour production is at par with other departments; therefore, able to sustain itself economically. The department has demonstrated that with supportive policies such as the multicultural requirement policy, it can sustain itself through increased enrollments; thus adding funds to the coffers while simultaneously sustaining itself economically. Additionally, with the demographic changes that are inevitable, CHS will continue to grow and attract students of all colors interested in providing culturally competent curricula to its majors and minors with subsequent classes based on serving communities within a culturally respectful manner. The success at transforming Metropolitan State College of Denver into a Hispanic Serving Institution will serve all students and strengthen the college’s commitment to the Latina/o community, the City of Denver and the State of Colorado.

**Recommendations: Hispanic Serving Institution initiative and CHS sustainability**

1. Metro College needs to keep the HSI Initiative on its priority list with concomitant support through the allocation of resources.
2. Metro College must initiate and develop policies that are consistent and promote its goal to establish a Hispanic Serving Institution that include but are not limited to outreach, recruitment and retention policies.
3. Student ambassadors should be recruited, trained and developed for the program that become boundary spanners for the organization as it outreaches to various departments.
with specific objectives of increasing interest from high school and community college students.

4. Pre-collegiate programs with culturally competent staff should be further developed and enhanced for the betterment of all Metro students.

5. Outreach programs to bilingual families whose children are preparing for entrance into college should be developed and implemented.

6. Through institutional collaboration, the Chicana/o Studies Department (CHS) must be involved in every aspect of the HSI process including but not limited to outreach, recruitment, and retention strategies in order to influence and/or develop program policies that can benefit Latina/o students while simultaneously supporting the Chicana/o Studies Program.

7. CHS needs to revise its curriculum that include “value added and bi-disciplinary” programming efforts that are attractive to employers without losing the initial intent of CHS philosophical intentions to liberate La Raza, offering academic rigor and a degree that is marketable in an information society.

8. CHS has to develop funding mechanisms for recruitment and retention programs that will support student’s educational journeys.

9. CHS staff should provide cultural competency workshops for the college in order to increase cultural sensitivity and competency within the college climate.

10. CHS should work with high schools in GEAR Up and other Advanced Placement programs offered by high schools and encourage the teaching of Chicana/o Studies classes.

11. The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) should be utilized as a model program to recruit and retain Latina/o students.

12. The CAMP Program should continue and be moved under the auspices of the CHS Department, with a goal of enhancing and replicating the program.

13. Journey Through Our Heritage should be fully utilized as a community bridge building tools that can add visibility to both Metropolitan State College of Denver in general and the CHS Department in particular.

14. Journey Through Our Heritage should be utilized as a recruitment tool in collaboration with the public school districts in the metropolitan area.

15. Journey Through Our Heritage should be utilized as a retention strategy for both Latino college students as well as high school students.

16. The “Grow Your Own” Program should be utilized as a model program for retaining college students, the future role models in public schools.

17. The “Grow Your Own” Program can be used as a CHS strategy to address the low enrollment policy utilized by Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

18. The: Grow Your Own Program” should be replicated.
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