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## **BOOK REVIEW**

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*Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Practice: Defining “Servingness” at HSIs*

Ed. Gina Ann Garcia

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### **AUTHOR NOTE**

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In her 2019 solo-authored work, *Becoming Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities*, Gina Garcia contested the race-neutral face of education policy and demonstrated how the embodied race of Latinx students becomes the institutional race of the colleges and universities they attend. Using rich data she gathered at a range of HSIs, Garcia provided six considerations for reframing HSI practice to better serve Latinx students, evaluating “systemic, political, and historic forces... [alongside] individual and organizational forces” to advance an understanding of servingness as multidimensional (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 770). In the present edited volume, *Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Practice: Defining “Servingness” at HSIs*, Garcia connects her previously developed framework (outlined with Koren in Chapter 1) with the experiential knowledge of practitioners at Hispanic Serving Institutions. *HSIs in Practice* highlights exemplars of HSIs that allocate federal funds to effectively serve Latinx students, providing resources and experiences aimed at reducing inequity and improving student outcomes.

Garcia recognizes the difficulty of defining “servingness” because HSI status is enrollment-driven, HSI student populations are extremely diverse, HSIs comprise different types of institutions, and HSIs span different regions of the country (pp. xii-xiii). Consequently, her co-authored Chapter 1 with Emily Koren draws on a Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Understanding Servingness in HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019), which defines servingness according to a range of factors. Within this framework, student outcomes and experiences, both academic and non-academic, are “indicators of serving” (p. 3). Outcomes include GPA, course completion, persistence, transfer and graduation rates, academic self-concept, racial identity, and graduate school aspirations. Experiences include positive indicators of serving, such as cultural validation and mentoring, as well as negative indicators such as racial microaggressions, discrimination, and harassment. The framework also considers institutional “structures for serving” (p. 6), including curriculum, mission statements, decision-making practices, and community engagement. Garcia and Koren make clear that the way HSI practitioners “conceptualize and operationalize servingness” (p. 11) within these structures is a vastly understudied but crucial avenue to understand what it means to be or become an effective Hispanic Serving Institution.

The remaining chapters share practitioners’ experiences and strategies for carrying out servingness. Chapters 2-10 answer the question of how practitioners are better serving Latinx students by transforming the organizational structures of their institutions. Chapters 11-17 address academic and non-academic indicators of serving and how these indicators shape student outcomes. Through strategies ranging from curriculum transformation to speaker series to strengthening community and family connections, the practitioner authors demonstrate many forms of “servingness” by which they fulfill their responsibilities to the Latinx students who, more than simply bringing in funding, shape the character and structure of these institutions.

This review highlights three cases to demonstrate the range of both institutional models and approaches to servingness within HSIs included in this edited book. California Lutheran University (Ch. 2, 8, 11, & 13) is a private, faith-based institution around which the Latinx community grew significantly in the past two decades. University of California Santa Cruz (Ch. 3, 5, 6, 10, & 17) is a public land-grant R1 university. Springfield Technical Community College (Ch. 4) is located in a historical Massachusetts manufacturing hub that has experienced a steady population decline and increasing poverty since 1960 (p. 63). Like institutions covered in other chapters, these cases illustrate concrete ways that HSIs are advancing servingness.

Cal Lutheran diversified the student body through financial aid programs, recruitment, and student support services to become an HSI. Authors reveal how Cal Lutheran established an HSI task force and incorporated Latinx servingness into its vision and mission, focusing on programs, identity, and practices. They highlight the key role of marketing—from brochures to website branding to plans for social media outreach—in establishing and publicizing an authentic HSI identity, offering lessons for similar institutions (Chapter 2). Moreover, Cal Lutheran reveals the essential nature of community engagement and partnership to servingness, demonstrating how private and public community organizations support the university’s efforts at building trust and opening communication between the institution, community partners, and Latinx students

interested in STEM (Chapter 8). Finally, Cal Lutheran indicates the value of incorporating an Academic Mindset Development Framework, which aims to help Latinx students feel capable, connected, and inspired (pp. 234-239). This has increased both positive academic behaviors and non-academic outcomes, such as self-efficacy and a sense of belonging (Chapters 11, 13).

The University of California, Santa Cruz came to center race in serving students by utilizing research rooted in racial justice to address unequal experiences and outcomes for Latinx students. The authors emphasize the importance of a long-term commitment to racial justice and race-consciousness in becoming an HSI (Chapters 3, 10). UCSC highlights the usefulness of both non-academic and academic strategies to serve Latinx students. A professional development workshop through interactive theater aimed to equip academic advisors to identify and mitigate microaggressions and provide students with a sense of belonging on campus through microaffirmations (Chapter 5). Transforming the College Algebra curriculum to better serve students resulted in raising Latinx students' final grades and increasing their confidence and sense of belonging. UCSC achieved this by redesigning the course through 1) strengths-based pedagogy, 2) student-professional teaching teams, 3) feedback loops to connect students and lecturers, and 4) course-embedded holistic advising. The success of this initiative increased institutional support for HSI initiatives more broadly at UCSC and encouraged more STEM faculty to redesign their courses to better serve Latinx students (Chapter 6). Compellingly, the UCSC case also underscores the value of engaging with families and culture in order to serve Latinx and low-income students well. UCSC's Regional Family Conference aims to include family in the college transition, eliminate barriers to access, and increase the availability of culturally-relevant programs. Based on reports of helpfulness from students and families, the authors recommend that other HSIs also center culture-, language-, and family-affirming practices in their efforts at servingness (Chapter 17).

Springfield Technical Community College frames its servingness through training faculty and staff to serve minoritized students. The authors highlight the need for faculty and staff at a technical community college like Springfield to consider their Latinx students' cultural wealth, background, and needs, especially to mediate equity disparities in persistence and degree completion. Springfield has utilized HSI grant funding to provide professional development that fills in the gaps in faculty and staff's knowledge and skills for serving Latinx students, completing the training through nationally recognized programs. It is worth considering why Springfield did not dedicate some portion of the grant funding to hiring Latinx faculty and staff who already possess the necessary cultural awareness to serve Latinx students. That said, all faculty and staff should, ideally, be equipped to serve students equitably (Chapter 4).

This book offers rich lessons for HSI leadership. Where prior literature on HSIs has explored history, policies, funding, and racialization, *HSIs in Practice* illuminates the authors' experiences of how they define servingness through federally funded practices at their respective institutions. These are the people leading efforts on college and university campuses to become and grow as institutions that serve Latinx students well, and their practices offer ample, actionable insights for serving-in-practice. Both researchers and practitioners interested in understanding

what it looks like to effectively serve Latinx students at HSIs can learn from the challenges and successes of these authors.

Moreover, this book could serve as a resource for leaders at the federal level to reform the standards used to determine the ongoing allocation of funds to eligible Hispanic Serving Institutions. Currently, eligibility requirements include enrolling a student body that is at least 25% Latinx, of whom at least 50% are low-income (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018, p. 405). Not all eligible institutions seek or receive federal funding, but those that do have limited accountability for how they allocate funds. Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2018) found that only 10% of HSIs took a Latinx-centered approach to serving in their grant abstracts, while 85% took a colorblind approach, and 4% usurped funds for initiatives that would not benefit most Latinx students. For example, one university allocated all of its multimillion dollars in HSI funding to a STEM program that enrolled only 3.6% of the Latinx students at the institution, and then called that “serving” with the aim of increasing Latinx STEM enrollment (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2018). These findings demonstrate that without a clear definition of servingness, allocations ultimately may not serve Latinx students at all.

By contrast, each institution detailed in *HSIs in Practice* demonstrates well-evidenced strategies to center Latinx students in the allocation of federal HSI funds. In combination with Garcia et al.’s (2019) multidimensional framework, these cases can serve as a guideline for verifying servingness in practice, according to the benefits afforded to Latinx students. These insights could assist federal educational leaders in developing accountability measures to ensure the stated aim of “serving” Latinx students is authentically implemented at funded HSIs.

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