

Latinos Lag in Earning College Degrees

Census: They are more likely to attend part time and less likely than those in other population groups to get four-year or graduate diplomas.

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Latino high school graduates attend college in large numbers but lag far behind other Americans in earning four-year and graduate degrees, limiting the economic payoff of their educations, a new analysis says.

The children of immigrant parents appear to be the most likely to continue their educations beyond high school, according to the report by the Pew Hispanic Center, a Washington, D.C.-based research group operated by USC. More than

42% of Latino high school graduates born in this country of such parents attended college. That rate almost matches the college-going rate for whites in similar circumstances.

In California, the researchers found, Latino high school graduates overall are more likely to be in college than Latinos elsewhere. That's partly a reflection of the size and strength of California's community college system.

But the report also depicts Latino college students in California as far less likely than other groups in the state—or than Latinos in other states—to attend four-year colleges and universities.

Only 46.4% of Latino college students who were enrolled in higher education attended four-year bachelor's or graduate programs, compared with 58.2% for blacks, 63.3% for whites and 72.4% for Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Louis Caldera, vice chancellor of

the 23-campus California State University system, said the report "really underscores something we've known: that the matriculation rate for students from community colleges to four-year universities is abysmally low in California."

The vast majority of community colleges, he said, "do a very, very poor job of moving students who want bachelor's degrees on to the four-year universities."

He also said educators and other community leaders need to do a better job of explaining the long-term economic value of going to college full time, even if it means taking out big loans.

"When you grow up in a family where you sometimes have to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table, it is not at all evident that it makes good economic sense to borrow tens of thousands of dollars to go to school full time for four years and walk away with a bachelor's degree," Caldera said.

Nationwide, Latinos are more likely than other groups to study part time, begin at two-year colleges and enroll at older ages. All of those factors dovetail with lower prospects for earning bachelor's or graduate degrees.

Pew's sampling of Latino high school graduates 25 to 29 years old found that only 16.4% held bachelor's or graduate degrees, compared with 36.5% for whites.

All told, the report shows that even Latinos who make it through high school often fail to go far in college.

"There are a very substantial number of Latino kids who get as far as enrolling in some form of higher education and then fail to get a degree," said Robert Suro, director of the Pew Center. "Providing them with some help could bring very substantial results."

Suro suggested expanding work-study programs, simplifying the fi-

nancial aid application process and urging colleges to place more emphasis on student retention.

In California, Latinos enrolled in college are almost as likely to study full time as other groups. The percentage of Latino college students studying full time is 54%. That's just slightly behind blacks, at 54.6%, and whites, at 56.4%, although well behind Asians and Pacific Islanders at 73.9%.

The Pew report said that although college attendance rates among children of Latino immigrants nationally is relatively high, the figure drops off among Latinos whose families have deeper roots in this country.

The analysis found that among Latinos who are at least the third generation in their families to live in the United States, the college-going rate is 35.9%, compared with the 42.4% rate of college attendance among second-generation Latinos.

Richard Fry, author of the report and an economist for the Pew Center, said shortcomings in the available statistics may explain part of the reversal. But he added that part of the stronger performance by second-generation Latinos might be that "there's something about the drive and expectations of immigrant parents that shows up in the behavior of their children."

If all Latinos are taken into account—not just high school graduates, the group that Pew studied—the picture is far worse.

According to a U.S. Department of Education report that studied residents from 16 to 24 years old, the high school dropout rate for Latinos, including the foreign-born, is 27.8%, versus 6.9% for non-Hispanic whites and 10.9% for the overall population.

The Pew study was based on U.S. census data on nearly 500,000 people, collected from 1997 through 2000.