

To: UNIDOS US
From: BSP Research
Date: October 1, 2024
Re: Survey of Latinos in Higher Education

On behalf of Unidos US, BSP Research conducted a survey of n=3,000 Latinos ages 18-35 who are current or recent college graduates. The study included oversamples in four states: California, Florida, Texas, and Arizona. The survey was conducted between August 16th and September 25, 2024. All respondents completed the survey online and it was available in English or Spanish, according to respondents' preference. The margin of error for this study was (+/- 1.8%).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Latino students see college education as an aspirational pathway to big life goals: getting well-paying jobs and providing a better life for their families.** 50% of Latinos cite well-paying jobs as a top reason behind why they pursue higher education; this number is highest among Arizona Latinos at 54%. Providing a better life for their families follows as a close second nationwide.
- **Latinos face various barriers across the collegiate school system, which occur at even higher rates among lower income students, LGBTQ+ students, and single parents.** Lacking affordable and nutritious food (85%), having to work (80%), and the efforts to target diversity or speech at their schools create significant roadblocks for many Latino college students, and can have negative impacts on their ability to achieve.
- **Many Latino college students experienced technical problems trying to file the 2023-2024 FAFSA application.** There appear to have been significant issues for students when filling out the 2023-2024 FAFSA application. 43% of students reported experiencing technical issues with the application, an impact felt harder by students in California and those with family incomes under \$29,000.
- **Two-thirds of Latino students considered leaving school at some point during their time in college; one-third of them actually took a leave at some point.** In total, 66% of students considered leaving at some point, with 11% of those not yet having returned. These rates are high across recorded demographics, but notably high among low-income (74%), LGBTQ+ students (71%), and single parents (77%).

KEY FINDINGS

Latino students see college education as an aspirational pathway to big life goals: getting well-paying jobs and providing a better life for their families.

It is no surprise that many students seek college degrees to get ahead in life, and Latino students are no exception to this. In asking about their motivations in pursuing higher education, the top three reasons

that the majority of Latinos cited as important reasons they decided to go to college all revolve around an aspirational idea of having a better life in the future. Getting well-paying jobs was cited by half of all respondents as a top reason to attain a college degree; with 1 in 5 respondents also citing it as their top reason to pursue higher education. This response was also higher by a 10-point margin to the other reasons, displaying the connection that Latino students make between the two.

The fact that Latino students are looking ahead at their futures is clear in their top reasons. Rounding out the top three were providing a better life for their family (40%) and pursuing a more fulfilling career (37%). This was consistent across oversample states with the expectation of Florida where “gaining new knowledge and skills” came in at number two (ranked 4th on the national scale).

Latinos face various barriers across the collegiate school system, and these barriers occur at rates even higher among lower income students, LGBTQ+ students and single parents

- *Lack of access to affordable and healthy food:* At the most basic level, 85% of Latino college students cannot consistently access affordable and healthy food. This finding is consistent across the national and oversample states. Among all respondents, 50% reported that this happened either “a few times a week” or “daily.” For single parents, this number rose to 63%. High across demographics, lower-income students experience the biggest impact of food insecurity: 54% of respondents with household incomes under \$29,000 and 55% of respondents with household incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000. Among these groups, 21% and 20% reported lacking affordable and healthy food daily. It is important to note that while this impacted those at the lowest income levels the hardest, more than 40% of those from higher income households also face this problem.
- *Low information about SNAP resources:* Despite the shockingly high amount of Latino college students that report some level of food insecurity while in college, less than half (45%) of them have applied for SNAP benefits. Florida and Arizona report the lowest number of applicants, with 42% and 43% respectively, while California nears the halfway point at 47%. When asked about why they have not applied for SNAP benefits, 45% of Latino college students said that they believe they are not eligible for the program. It should be noted that this includes 44% of those from household incomes less than \$29,000, and 47% of those with household incomes \$30,000 to \$49,000. Also notable is the difference between California and the other states on this option. Only 35% of California respondents cited that they believed they were ineligible for the program, compared to 50% in Florida, 52% in Arizona, and 52% in Texas.
- *Maintaining full- and part-time jobs while in school:* The vast majority (80%) of Latino students report having held a full- or part-time job while attending college. While the number is slightly higher (+5) for part-time students, working while pursuing a higher education degree is a reality for most Latino college students. Overall, nearly half (49%) say they have held a part-time job at some point during their college studies while 26% say they have held full-time jobs; this includes 78% of currently enrolled and 80% of recently graduated undergraduate students. The reality of holding a job while studying is consistent regardless of income level or type of school.

- *Targeting diversity and censoring students on campus:* The majority of Latino college students (53%) say that they have not heard about efforts targeting diversity or speech on their own campuses, however a sizable minority (47%) report having heard of at least one action happening. 18% of students say they have heard of “restricting discussing certain topics in class,” 15% have heard of the “censoring of students or professors,” and 15% say they have heard of the closure of affinity centers on campus. The restricting of certain topics in class was notably highest in Texas at 20%. Also notable is the impact on LGBTQ+ students; 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ students report having heard of the closure of affinity centers on their campuses.

Many Latino college students experienced technical problems trying to file the 2023-2024 FAFSA application.

The 2023-2024 FAFSA posed significant and alarming challenges to Latino students looking to apply for aid. Overall, 43% of respondents who filed the 2023-2024 FAFSA report experiencing technical problems with the application, including 46% of students already enrolled in college and 52% of students who took a leave of absence at some point. The technical issues encountered with last year’s FAFSA application created significant barriers to accessing financial aid across states, income levels, and school types. 43% of college students with incomes under \$29,000 and 41% of students with incomes between \$30,000 to \$49,000 report issues with the application. Notably, 47% of respondents from California students reported experiencing these issues, higher than Arizona, Florida, or Texas.

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Despite aspirations to attend and graduate from higher education programs, the large number of students who at some point consider taking leaves of absence from school demonstrates the impact of various barriers. Our study found that 66% Latino college students considered leaving school at some point, and that 34% actually did leave. This is similar across the national and state samples. Additionally, over 1 in 10 respondents said that they have taken a leave and still have not returned.

Unfortunately, this finding is high and fairly consistent across demographics. Single parents appear to be impacted the most by this, with 77% having considered leaving and 44% having done it. Low-income students are also highly impacted, with 74% of Latino college students with household incomes under \$29,000 say they have considered leaving school, and 42% going through with it. Finally, also a unique impact on the LGBTQ+ community. 71% of students who identify as LGBTQ+ say they have at some point considered taking a leave, with 39% having done so and 15% not yet having returned.