Latinas/os are the fastest-growing racial minority group in the U.S., with much of this growth occurring among the school-aged population (Lui, 2011). With this demographic shift in mind, and in light of lower-than-average college completion rates, increasing higher education access and participation among Latinas/os is an important policy concern. By 2018, nearly two-thirds of jobs are expected to require a postsecondary degree (Carnevale, 2010), increasing the urgency to strengthen the pipeline to college. Although more Latinas/os are entering higher education than ever before, they continue to be less likely to attend selective colleges, enroll full-time, and complete degrees (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2013). Community colleges remain the primary destination for Latinas/os entering higher education. It is in this sector where the greatest likelihood of interruption to educational attainment and completion occurs (Santiago & Galdeano, 2014).

As a response, it is important to understand educational aspirations (which often change throughout K-12 schooling), in order to learn how Latina/o students’ access to knowledge, familial support, and school resources culminate in the decision to apply or not apply to college (Alvarez, 2010; Ceja, 2006). Moreover, an examination of the educational conditions of Latina/o students makes it possible to highlight issues of access to college information, placing the negotiation of such resources at the center of discourse surrounding postsecondary opportunity.

The college choice process for Latina/o students is best understood as a dynamic and complex process where educational conditions, organizational structures, and state and national policies merge to produce a system of opportunities that continue to be less than optimal (Perez & Ceja, 2015). Taken together, the negotiation of these factors, usually in the context of the family unit, often results in decisions to stay close to home. Perceptions of fit and affordability are central reasons for these decisions, in some cases resulting in students forgoing attendance at more distant and/or selective institutions. Higher education access efforts must focus on ensuring that college choices are made under the most informed circumstances, regardless of destination.

Latina/o educational opportunity and attainment must be addressed from multiple fronts. At a macro level, state and national policy needs to intentionally advance and support Latina/o student success, including addressing persisting inequitable K-12 experiences, supporting undocumented students, and appropriately using race in higher education admissions. At the institutional level, K-12 structures are desperately needed that support a college-going culture for Latina/o students and help disrupt existing normative expectations of “who” goes to college. A strong college-going culture must include an effective partnership and communication plan between schools and home that provides Latina/o families with the necessary information to effectively negotiate the college choice process. Finally, higher education institutions, particularly those enrolling high percentages of Latina/o students, must reaffirm their commitment to support the success of Latina/o students from enrollment to completion and examine their strategic priorities to ensure that completion outcomes for these students are unequivocally supported (Santiago & Galdeano, 2014).

---

**Dr. Miguel Ceja** is Professor and Director of Doctoral Programs in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policies Studies at the Michael D. College of Education at California State University, Northridge. His research focuses on college choice and issues of access and equity in higher education for students of color. He recently published a co-authored edited volume entitled: *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (Routledge, 2015).
REFERENCES


ONLINE RESOURCES

- Excelencia in Education
  http://www.edexcelsencia.org

- Pew Hispanic Research Center Hispanic Trends
  http://www.pewhispanic.org

- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
  http://www.hacu.net/hacu/default.asp

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

The mission of the California State University, Northridge Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership is to create a network of school and college administrators prepared to effect profound change in teaching and learning that leads to improved student achievement.

Interested in an Ed.D. in K–12 or Community College Administration?
To learn more please visit:

http://www.csun.edu/eisner-education/doctoral-program