This article considers the role Chicano/a student organizations have played in the recruitment and retention of minority students on college campuses. The author examines the historical development of the Chicano/a Student Movement, and the current accomplishments and struggles that effect the educational attainment of Chicano/a students. Finally, recommendations are included for student affairs professionals to consider.

According to United States census figures, Latinos are the country's fastest growing racial/ethnic minority population. In fact, current population projections show Latinos becoming the largest U.S. racial/ethnic minority group by the year 2010, and by 2050, they will account for almost one-quarter of the total U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1996). However, the rising educational attainment of Latinos does not coincide with the growing population, as the proportion of Latinos/as graduating from four-year post-secondary institutions is disproportionately lower than their U.S. population total. Even more discouraging is census data indicating that approximately 50% of Chicanos/as leave high school before graduation (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1994). Within that context, this article will evaluate the role of Chicano/a student organizations in the recruitment and retention of Chicano/a students in post-secondary academic settings. A brief discussion of Latino ethnicity and labels is necessary to better understand this article. This, in turn, will be followed by discussions on (1) the historical development of Chicano/a student organizations; (2) the accomplishments of Chicano/a student organizations; and (3) the contemporary struggles facing Chicano/a student organizations, with recommendations for the continued improvement of Chicano/a
LATINO ETHNICITY AND LABELS

The historical mixture of Spaniards with the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas gave rise to La Raza, or "the people." These mestizos, or mixed blood people, have come to be labeled "Hispanic" (Guerrero, 1993). As Gimenez (1997) noted, this label is a generic umbrella term coined by U.S. census officials in the wake of 1960s civil protest in order to categorize individuals who could trace their ancestry from Spanish speaking countries. Although the term Hispanic became necessary in order to determine how affirmative action policies and programs could best be implemented, this term ignores the varied historical, social, economic, and political experiences of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Central and South American peoples in the United States.

Hayes-Baustista and Chapa (1987) argued that the term incorrectly characterizes the "Hispanic" experience as a European experience with minimal difficulty in acculturation and integration into U.S. society. They argue for the use of the term "Latino" which gives more emphasis to the indigenous roots of "Hispanics," and correctly characterizes their U.S. experience as one deeply rooted in U.S. policies with the overall effect of social, economic, and political exploitation of Latin American peoples and resources. They also argued that the use of "Latino" instead of "Hispanic" allows for the development of a more relevant collective memory and history for members of this group, which in turn leads to a strong sense of self and group pride. More importantly, Padilla (1985) emphasized that Latino ethnic consciousness is situational and specific to individuals who share common ideologies, demographics, cultural interests, and experiences. With Mexican-American/Chicanos (individuals who can trace their ancestry to Mexican origins), class differences, cultural differences, music, and border regional differences
have played a role in the subculture realities embedded in Mexican-Americans. In fact, Chicano ideologies and political identities vary from state to state. For example, individuals living in California and Texas have evolved with different Mexican-American ideologies and even consider themselves "Californios" or "Tejanos." In the northern part of New Mexico, the majority of the Mexican-Americans pride themselves on their Spanish legacy over Mexican traditions (Munoz, 1989). The different opinions and perspectives on Chicano/Latino/Hispanic terminology and identity are an implicit debate concerning assimilation and pluralism more readily understood by exploring the historical development of Chicano student organizations.

**HISTORY OF CHICANO STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS**

Chicanos mark the beginning of their struggle with the arrival of Spanish explorers on Mexican soil and continued the miscegenation of La Raza through either marriage or rape of indigenous women (Guerrero, 1993). Most agree that Chicano student activism began on college campuses in the 1920s when Ernesto Galaraza, a Stanford University graduate student in history, spoke in support of oppressed Mexican immigrant workers in California during a National Conference on Social Work. Without the support of any social, academic, or cultural organization, Galaraza rebuked racist notions and perceptions of Chicanos as lazy and unable to assimilate. Contrary to public opinion, Galaraza stated that, "the very economic structure of the United States rests on the blood and sweat of the [Mexican] immigrant without any true commitment for the well being of the people" (Munoz, 1989, p. 23). Galaraza wanted society to recognize that Chicanos had contributed to the building and growth of the United States through hard labor.

Chicanos were treated like second-class citizens, and the majority Eurocentric culture tried to systematically transform them into a product of mainstream society through acculturation (Munoz, 1989). The public and private school systems gave Mexican
American children a large dose of White-American traditional values, which contributed to the erosion of indigenous cultural pride. Mexican American youth were confused about their self-identity because the schools promoted one set of traditional values, while individual families remained loyal to Mexican virtues and values. These issues with Chicano youth became an important stepping stone for creating community support systems. Thus, during the 1940s and 1950s, Chicanos directed their energies to trying to gain power by creating community and political organizations that would address Chicano issues. These organizations included the Mexican American Movement (MAM), the Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE), the Political Association of Spanish Speaking Peoples (PASSO), and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (Munoz, 1989).

During the late 1960s, the quest to diversify college campuses began with Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, who led and hosted the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado (Munoz, 1989). This conference set the stage for the dissemination of information about civil rights, nationalist ideology, and Chicano self-identity to the youth not only on college campuses, but also throughout Chicano communities. Students began to understand the purpose of taking a revolutionary stance by making their college education beneficial to the overall Chicano community, rather than using education as a stepping stone to increased individual socioeconomic mobility--an accepted core value of American society. This motivated Chicanos to enter their colleges with a nationalist and revolutionary attitude towards attaining their degrees. Chicano student activism was born. Also during this conference, an important document titled *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan*, or the Spiritual Plan of Aztlan, was written to give Chicanos not only a vision, but also a framework to build a Chicanismo presence in higher education (Munoz, 1989). Approximately one month after the National Chicano Youth Liberation, a group called the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (CCHE) held a conference at the University of California at Santa Barbara to discuss how the community and the students could work together to increase educational access. In attendance were hundreds of student leaders, community activists, and
graduate students. They published *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (Munoz, 1989) that sent a strong message to universities:

Chicanismo draws its faith and strength from two main sources: from the struggle of our people and from our community's strategic needs. We recognize that without a strategic use of education, an education that places value on what we value, we will not realize our destiny. In order to develop our communities, Chicanos recognize the importance of participating institutions of higher learning. We go further by stating: we believe that higher education must contribute to the development of the holistic student containing freedom and values. The destiny of our people will be fulfilled. To that end, we pledge our efforts and take as our credo what Jose Vasconcellos once said at time of crisis and hope: 'At this moment we do not come to work for the university, but to demand that the university work for our people.' (p. 192)

This conference is known in Chicano history as the "founding" of the Chicano Student Organizations, and it also became a critical time for Chicano students to take an active role in addressing the needs of Mexican Americans at institutions of higher education. In addition, *El Movimento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan*, or the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan (MEChA) formed as an organization at many campuses and advocated educational civil rights and equal access (Munoz, 1989).

**CHICANO STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

MEChA was a fairly radical group with many established chapters across the nation (Estrada, Flores-Macias, Garcia, & Maldonado, 1991, p. 162). This organization started the movement towards increasing resources for student support services in order to meet the needs of Chicanos. As Chicanos, these students were tired of changing themselves to fit in the "American" college environment (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). One direct result of the Chicano Student Movement struggle was the establishment of Chicano Studies programs. The Chicano Studies curricula revolved around history, current issues, and trends, thus, giving students a sense of belonging and self-identification that also produced a number of Chicano scholars such as Rodolfo Acuna,
Ana Castillo, and Carlos Munoz (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). The Chicano model for educational access (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993) evolved from *El Plan de Santa Barbara*. The following are three principles that guided the relationship Chicanos have with higher education institutions:

1. Funding for recruitment activities should be determined by the qualified Chicano students who are interested in enrolling instead of letting the amount of funding available determine the number of students that should be enrolled.

2. Proportional representation of certain geographic areas should mirror the representation of Chicanos on that particular college or university.

3. Proactive initiatives for Chicano students and faculty recruitment and retention will be administrated by Chicano students, faculty, student affairs officials, or community activists (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993, p. 22).

The general attitude reflected by many MEChA members was that if the institution was not going to take responsibility for the Chicano student population on campus, then MEChA was ready and willing to be accountable for its people. Over the years, MEChA has evolved and changed to meet the needs of today's generation. Not only does MEChA symbolize the historical progress of Chicanos (Munoz, 1989), it also plays an important role in establishing Chicano cultural centers, Chicano Studies programs, and strategic recruiting plans targeting Chicanos (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Today, MEChA continues to be a strong voice for Chicano students on many campuses. Yet, it is learning to deal with the contemporary struggle for Latino panethnicity (Munoz, 1989).

**CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**
Like the 1960s, Chicanos still are experiencing struggles of equity and racism on college campuses. Bigotry on college campuses has become a force that creates competition for valued resources between minority and white students. Research refers to racial and ethnic bigotry as an attack against minority students in order to deprive them of valued resources; in this case, education (Aguirre & Messineo, 1997). Examples of areas where there is competition for resources includes race-based financial aid, minority support services, ethnic studies, and cultural houses. Instead of viewing these services as support, the mainstream culture would argue that they create separatism, and thus are exclusive (Rodriguez, April, 1994). Even though minority students experience a "chilly" climate on college campuses, it also is important to acknowledge that this is not a universal experience for all students of color on all college campuses (Smith, 1989). Regardless, many MEChA members, as well as members of other Latino organizations, experience harassment. The following are examples of racial incidents targeted at Latinos/Chicanos off and on college or university campuses:

At St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, MEChA members received a memo from the Student Publications Board that instructed them to cease the MEChA newsletter from further publication because members did not receive "approval," even though they had been publishing on campus for three years and had a letter from the Dean recognizing the publication. Also, students at the same institution succeeded in gaining a new Chicano cultural room, but only had room capacity for 20 people. This was viewed as a major defeat because Latinos at St. Mary's University make up 50% of the total enrollment (Rodriguez, December, 1996b).

While Chicanos were participating in a spiritual ceremony on the University of California-Los Angeles campus, members of traditionally white fraternities and sororities threw tortillas at the crowd from the back of a truck (Rodriguez, 1995).
At Baylor University in Waco, Texas, the Phi Beta Phi sorority hosted a "Head for the Border" theme dance. In an attempt to stereotype Latinos, sorority sisters dressed in black mini-skirts and appeared pregnant, and white fraternity brothers dressed as cholos [Latino gangsters], in baggy pants and with bandanas on their heads (Estrada, 1998).

Two teachers were fired in Vaughn, New Mexico for teaching about Cesar Chavez's labor movement accomplishments, showing the documentary "Chicano, History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement". This documentary teaches students about the men and women who helped lead the Chicano movement. The teachers were also fired for allowing some students to form a MEChA group that provided a forum where they could express their pride for their culture (Aguilar, 1997).

Although students still endure racial tensions on many college campuses, issues such as these have awakened student activism on many college campuses. MEChA, along with other Latino and multicultural student organizations, have worked cooperatively to protest racial harassment and demand a more inclusive campus environment.

Even though Chicanos have encountered many issues on campuses, there have been many accomplishments that Latino communities can cherish. For example, on October 12, 1996, a Latino march in Washington, D.C. demonstrated unity and national recognition of the many issues Latinos face. Maria Jimenez, a long-time human rights activist and Director of the Immigration and Law Enforcement Monitoring Project with the American Friends Service Committee in Houston said, "The October 12th Latino march on Washington, D.C. was the culmination of 25-30 years of struggle of the Chicano movement" (Rodriguez, 1996, p. 7). Jimenez viewed the Latino march on Washington D.C. as Chicanos/Latinos
coming together from all parts of the United States to support a common cause in order to gain a national presence and to send the message that, "We're here, we've always been here and we're not going away" (Rodriguez, 1996a, p. 7).

Other accomplishments include: the establishment of nationally recognized Chicano Studies Programs and Scholars, National Association for Chicano/a Studies conferences are held that discuss research on Chicanos in many aspects of our society, the formation of predominately Latino/a sororities and fraternities, such as Sigma Lambda Gamma National Sorority, Inc., renowned research institutes such as the Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University, and higher education entities, such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). These are just a few strides Chicanos have made in higher education.

**DISCUSSION**

This article has discussed the history of the Chicano student movement and the positive impact the movement has made for Chicano/a college students. While Chicano/a students, as well as other minority students, struggle with unwelcoming campus climates, institutions are faced with the challenge of creating a more diverse environment in order to promote racial and ethnic understanding (Smith, 1989).

One way institutions can increase recruitment and retention among students of color is through support services and an institutional commitment to diversity (Smith, 1989). Instead of questioning what is wrong with students of color, institution should evaluate their own campus environments. This will allow student affairs administrators to propose a strategic plan to meet the challenges
of retention on college campuses (Jeria & Roth, 1992). How can institutions create a welcoming environment for Chicanos? By revisiting the three principles of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* and by utilizing existing Chicano/Latino student organizations, college and universities can work cooperatively to better meet the needs of Chicano/Latino students. With Aguirre and Martinez's (1993) Chicano model for educational access in mind, this author offers four recommendations for colleges and universities to enhance Chicano recruitment and retention:

4. **Utilizing Chicano/Latino student organizations in the recruitment and retention of other Chicano/Latino students.** By empowering Chicano/Latino student leaders to become ambassadors of their communities or liaisons to the administration, student affairs professionals will proactively develop recruiting and retention initiatives that serve the needs of the students.

5. **Latino retention is tied to the presence and involvement of Chicano/Latino faculty.** Implementing a Chicano Studies program enables students to take pride in learning about themselves and their heritage. In essence, students who participate in Latino/Chicano studies classes can be the "teachers" of their history to their peers.

6. **Universities must make connections with Latino communities.** Outreach to the high school population may allow universities to influence enrollment and build relationships with the public schools in that area. Once the communities are familiar with the admission counselor or minority affairs representative, they will feel more at ease sending their children to that particular institution.

7. **Provide adequate funding for minority student support offices and cultural theme houses.** This is basically a "home away from home" tactic of retention. If students see part of themselves on campus through multicultural centers or minority affairs
offices, they feel like they are a priority on campus. It also can provide services and support that will help minority students with their transition into college life.

Chicanos/Latinos student organizations play a vital role in recruitment and retention of students of color on many college and university campuses. Although, Chicanos have come far in higher education, student affairs administrators must develop proactive initiatives for the educational attainment of not only Chicanos/as but for all students of color. The quality of higher education depends on the incorporation of minority perspectives into the mainstream university frameworks. Yet, the students stand strong and the struggle for educational equality will continue.

REFERENCES


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