

Guest Editorial: Inspire emerging Latino leaders through higher education

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Achieving higher education continues to be a significant challenge for Hispanics. Only about 12 percent of first-generation Hispanic immigrants in the United States have [completed a bachelor's degree](#). The statistic is not much better among U.S.-born Latinos; only 20 percent have completed a bachelor's degree.

It is projected [by the year 2050](#), Latinos will be close to 100 million people in the United States, becoming 29 percent of the total U.S. population.

From my experience, although significant challenges exist for Latinos to complete college studies—even for those born in this country—achieving that goal is not impossible. And with the projected growth in their share of the U.S. population, we need to prepare Hispanic and Latino leaders for the future.

The challenges faced in the classroom are similar to those we face in our congregations in terms of language and culture. But as in congregations, we see examples around us that inspire and encourage us to overcome those obstacles.

Where I found inspiration

When I came to Texas about 12 years ago as an international student at the Baptist University of the Americas, my goal was to respond to God's call by being prepared better in Bible studies and ministry. At that time, I did not

imagine I would complete graduate studies in the future.

When I met people who had been through this journey before me, I was inspired greatly, and I believed I could do it, too. Latino professors, such as Dr. Nora Lozano and Dr. Mario Ramos, taught me more than Bible and theology classes. Their example and dedication fostered my desire to complete a college degree and continue my master's and doctorate degrees.

I remember countless courses in which I was the only Latino in the classroom surrounded by competent students from different contexts than mine. At first, that was an enormous challenge. Still, I realized although I was the only Latino, and my accent and worldview were different, I had the support of my classmates and professors. I was encouraged to know they were interested in my perspective on certain topics, and they wanted me to succeed.

Through my experience, I pray I can inspire my students as my professors inspired me.

Inspiring emerging generations

The example we see in others—both students and teachers, clergy and laity—is one of the best ways to foster a culture of education among Latinos in the United States. In this way, we also can be an inspiration to the new generations of Hispanics who desire to prepare and face the same challenges we faced.

The generations of Latinos emerging through education can make a difference, not only in our congregations, but also in our communities and our country.

It is a joy to see more and more Hispanic pastors who desire to be trained

in seminaries and universities to serve their congregations better. Theological higher education makes a difference in how we run our churches, in our services and preaching, in how we conduct worship, and other activities.

Interestingly, as a result of the pandemic, many educational institutions have adapted their academic programs and offer more diverse formats of instruction, including online and virtual courses from which our leaders can benefit. Many of these courses are in Spanish.

I applaud the work of universities that offer scholarships exclusively for Latinos, such as Dallas Baptist University, East Texas Baptist University, Truett Theological Seminary, Howard Payne University, Wayland Baptist University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and others.

As the Latino population grows in the United States, these efforts and other initiatives to support education for Latinos will have a significant impact. The higher level of education being made available will play a crucial role for Latino leadership in our churches and communities.

When I look at my daughters completing kindergarten and first grade assignments, I hope their education will enable them to achieve their professional and vocational dreams. It is not an easy path, but the inspiration of others continues to play an essential role in this journey.

When he saw me walking in the hallways of BUA, Teo Cisneros frequently encouraged me by saying, “¡Si se puede!”—Yes, we can.

We can inspire Latinos to overcome the challenges of completing college education. We can support them and their efforts. And for the good of our churches and communities, we should.

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