Book Reviews

Olivas (Michael A.) ed.: *Latino College Students*. New York, London, Teachers College Press, 1986, 360 p. £22.50
ISBN 0-8077-2798-9

The rapid growth of the Hispanic population in the United States during the past decade and the economically disadvantaged position of this population have led both policymakers and researchers to realize that there is much to be learned about the country's second largest minority group. Hispanic education issues have not been sufficiently examined because disadvantages facing Hispanic students are so great at all levels of education, and so intertwined with the politically powerless status of Hispanics that neither the nature nor the severity of the disadvantage is fully understood. Hispanic youth are not only likely to have acquired fewer years of schooling but are also considerably more likely to attend two-year colleges and not to complete their college education. The fact that they generally come from disadvantaged backgrounds and tend to be recent immigrants also has implications for their educational attainment.

The various essays which make up this volume are based on the 1983 Conference on Latino College Students. The research categories that have emerged include the characteristics of Hispanic students themselves, the financing of education and organizations responsible for governing education systems. Hispanic students are far less likely than majority or even most minority students to complete high school or graduate within their age group. Moreover, bilingual education programmes remain inadequate in most states. The failures of the school systems to meet the needs of the Hispanic communities are mirrored in postsecondary institutions. Here, issues of limited access, discriminatory employment practices and high attrition disproportionately affect Hispanic students. Although there is a public perception that Hispanic enrolments have increased in recent years, the reality is quite different. They are concentrated in the less prestigious and less well funded institutions and in very few four-year institutions. This uneven distribution within the system indicates that a large proportion of Hispanic students seeking a full-time, traditional learning experience are doing so in institutions established for part-time commuter students. While two-year institutions have increased Hispanic access, they suffer from the inherent problems of student transfers, part-time faculty, commuter programmes and funding patterns. Moreover, such students do not even enjoy full access to open-door institutions. Additionally, they do not have access to a network of traditionally Hispanic colleges. They are therefore concentrated in fewer than two per cent of the more than 3,100 colleges and universities in the country and in institutions that lack historical missions to serve Hispanic students.

The papers dealing with Hispanic achievement in education critically examine the assumptions of widely accepted educational practices — admissions testing, counselling, measuring achievement — and find them totally inadequate for Hispanic populations. Each suggests ways in which the merit of these students can be better measured and developed. The allocation of three chapters to tests and their uses in selective admissions underscores the importance of these issues. Given the unevenness in the quality of high schools, selective universities find that grades alone are inadequate for choosing their incoming freshmen. Predicting which Hispanic students are potentially most successful presents special problems. Not only are tests less predictive for Hispanics, but high school grades are also significantly less related to college grades for this group than for others. It is therefore very important to improve testing procedures and investigate the situational aspects of the college experience that best promote the realization of Hispanic students' potential.

The third section of the book analyses the major barriers to Hispanic access. Research on financial aid practices provides

evidence that government financial aid programmes, particularly need-based programmes, are offering major resources to Hispanic students. Several troubling trends, however, do appear, such as the practice of nearly exclusively employing federal aid for Hispanics, while employing a more diversified portfolio of resources for non-Hispanic students. Federal cutbacks in financial aid programmes will disproportionately affect Hispanic students. The barriers encountered by women of Mexican origin are substantially different from those encountered by men of Mexican origin or Anglo women. Anglo and Black women enrol at rates that are higher than those for Anglo and Black men, whereas Latin American women enrol in substantially lower proportions. They tend to be older students with major domestic obligations. They are also the poorest group and have the lowest levels of educational attainment. The final essay reviews stratification literature and the role played by racial ideology and colonialism in the condition of Hispanic education. It is commonly believed that Hispanics have a language problem. There are three components to such a perspective: first, that they are alingual, second that their vernacular is an inferior Spanish, and, third, that bilingualism is detrimental to cognition. It was not uncommon for educators to segregate students on the basis of language. Racism can also enter the school curriculum through written texts which depict minorities negatively or ignore them altogether. The result of racism in the educational system is continued segregation of Hispanics and their concentration in two-year colleges, as opposed to four-year colleges. Differentiation is also reflected in the types of majors students choose. Two of the more plausible reasons why they seem to be overrepresented in fields that pay less and have lower prestige are their inadequate preparation for the professions, and counselling that guide them away from technical fields and towards the less lucrative fields.

Although much research has documented the common obstacles that minority students encounter in obtaining a quality education, few have focused specifically on students of Hispanic descent. This focus is necessary because the educational consequences of characteristics unique to them — such as language background and the immigration histories of the various groups — deserve close attention. This book provides an overview of key stages and turning points in the educational process for Hispanics, therefore helping to fill an important gap.

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