

Building Bridges: DePaul's HSI Endeavor

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Senior Capstone Project



Figure 1, DePaul University, Loop Campus

DePaul University is in the process of applying to receive HSI designation, which requires at least 25% of the student population to be Hispanic. For the academic year 2023-2024, Hispanic students made up 19.6% of the total population, with 4,107 out of 20,917 students.

Hispanic students comprise 23% of total enrollment this academic year. In recent years, DePaul has seen an increasing number of Hispanic students attending the university, which is

now attempting to become a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). Yet, the question remains: Can DePaul transform this promise into a meaningful commitment that truly benefits its diverse student body?

DePaul University's quest is for Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) status. It highlights some of the systematic barriers within the higher education system. Some of the recurrent issues include limited media coverage, uncertainty in funding, and a metrics-driven gauge of success instead of genuine engagement with the students. This highlights the need for intervention in a genuine way that supports the empowerment of the Latinx community.

HSIs were formed to serve two fundamental purposes: access and retention to higher education and funding at the federal and state levels. In 1995, HSIs were assigned as a federal designation in higher education after continuous advocacy efforts by members of Congress. This triumph recognizes institutions committed to serving the academic and financial needs of Latinx students. In 1998, HSIs transitioned to Title V after the initial classification under Title III in the

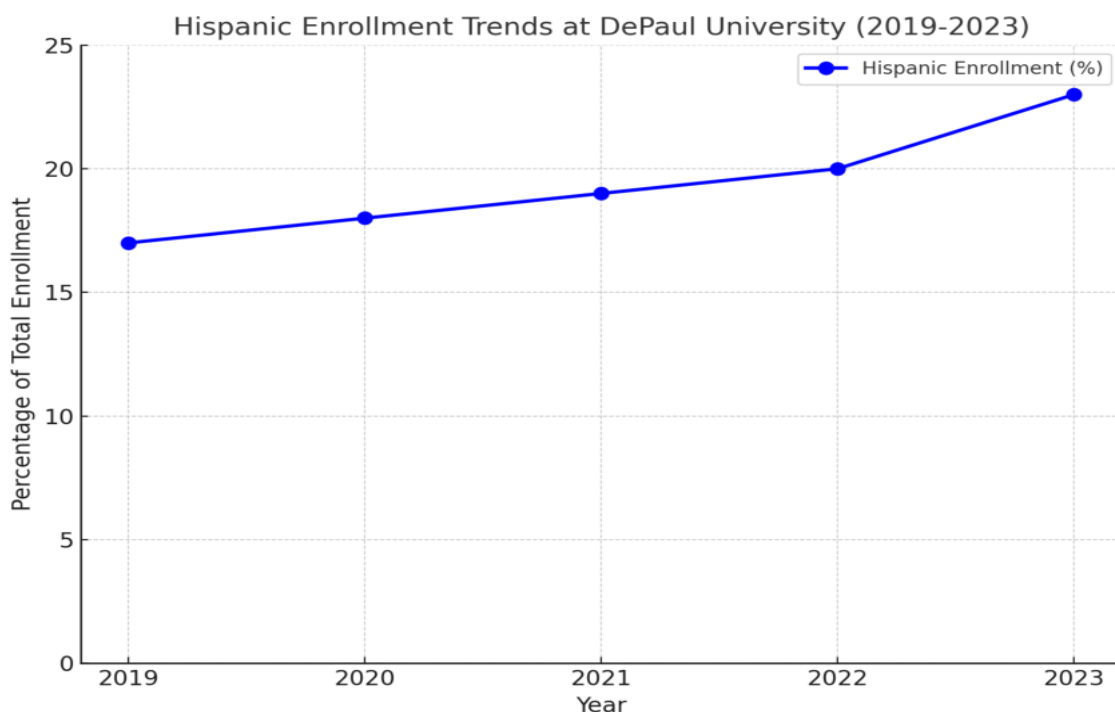


Figure 2, Hispanic Enrollment Trends at DePaul

Higher Education Act. This achievement came from the mass immigration of Latinos who were looking to enroll in higher education. Without HSIs, Latinx students are left barren of education, lacking guidance, support, financial aid, mentorship, and promise. Without HSIs, Latinx students miss out on valuable features that would include, among others, targeted financial aid, culturally aware mentoring, and bilingual academic assistance. Unlike traditional institutions, HSIs are specifically intended for these unique demands of increasing retention and graduation rates of Latinx students.

DePaul University is a university that serves a minority composition and is located in the mixed diversity of the city of Chicago, which is 29% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This capstone will evaluate the efforts made by the university in achieving HSI designation, with a view toward its initiatives to address the educational, cultural, and socio-economic needs of its Hispanic students. Among these are required 25% Hispanic enrollment; institutions that receive HSI designation earn federal funding to further support their students in their quest for success.

This analysis will focus on accountability for targeted recruitment activities, cultural programming, and academic support services in an effort to ascertain whether such efforts correspond to HSI goals or take on a symbolic nature. In doing so, this capstone will analyze the successes and opportunities for growth within the programs at DePaul in light of its HSI status.

Amongst all my interviews with the internal networks at DePaul University, all stated that having Latinx students at the center of these discussions is of utmost importance. Latinx students are the living milestone of the metrics that have yet to make a distinction.

The Potential of HSI Designation

Achieving HSI status is a significant milestone for any institution, as it reflects a commitment to serving the Hispanic community. HSIs provide access to Hispanic students who

have faced systemic barriers to higher education and success in postsecondary education, according to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). These systemic barriers often include poverty, immigration status, language barriers, limited access to college preparatory resources, underfunded K-12 schools, lack of college counseling, challenges for first-generation college students, and greater culture isolation on college campuses.

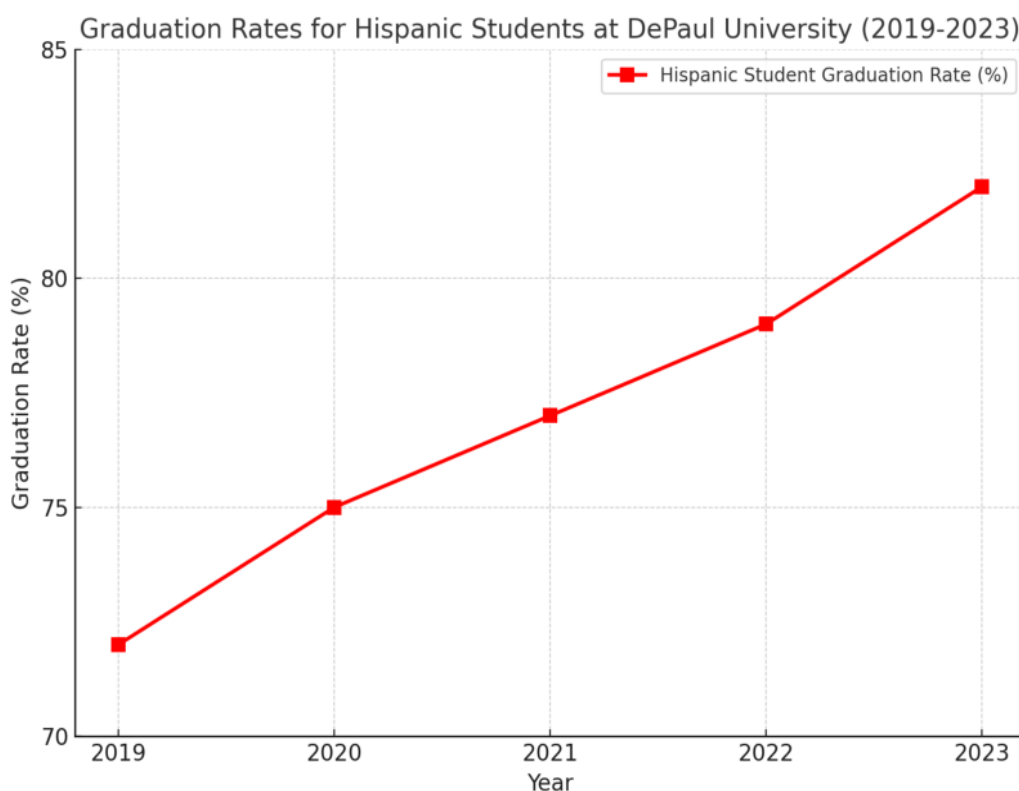


Figure 3, Graduation Rates for Hispanic Students at DePaul

The designation of HSI should not be merely seen as a label; it carries significant implications for funding and grant opportunities for improved student support services and enhancement of retention and graduation rates, specifically for Hispanic students. Funding like this is necessary for schools such as DePaul, whose student population is represented by many first-generation college students who may require boosted support services.

Aside from funding, achieving and retaining HSI status offers academic support services, cultural celebrations, career and internship opportunities, research opportunities, and community

and peer support. “The idea of becoming an HSI is receiving fair funds. Funds are gonna help everybody, improve teaching methodologies at the university, library resources, that will help faculty and students,” says Dr. José Sotero, Professor at the Department of Sociology, DePaul University. For example, the Hispanic Serving Institution Office of the University of Arizona has significantly furthered research and student success by garnering \$173 million within 2023 for 130 HSI-based research projects whilst awarding \$625,000 in faculty seed grants for 31 projects since 2021. These achievements reaffirm the university's commitment to increasing educational prospects and support for the Hispanic student population.

“In achieving HSI status, it is not only announced to the public that DePaul has a growing Latinx population, but it also opens the doors for the University to apply for grants that will



Figure 4, Latinx Student Led Organization, (SHPE), at DePaul

directly help fund the necessary resources needed to support maintaining that HSI status.”

Magoli Garcia, Political Science Alumni, Class of 2024, stated.

DePaul’s Efforts and Challenges

DePaul University empowers Hispanic students through initiatives such as the Latinx Cultural Center, bringing Latinx student organizations and academic departments together in the spirit of community and collaboration, especially among the Latin American and Latinx Studies program, which offers interdisciplinary courses intended to raise cultural awareness and examine the contributions of Latin Americans around the globe. Moreover, the university also offers internship opportunities, scholarships, and special programs to provide academic and professional development to students from diverse backgrounds.

On Thursday, November 11, 2021, DePaul launched its HSI Task Force under the ambit of the "Designing DePaul" initiative, of which there is surprisingly no information regarding its activities before 2023. Only recent milestones are posted on its website, along with outdated PDFs, which seem to be the only resource on the Task Force’s activities. This lack of data casts doubt upon the transparency of the Task Force’s early progress and raises the question of why initiatives seem to have only recently gained momentum in 2023.

Magoli Garcia was a member of the task force in the 2023-2024 academic year, but she expressed limited awareness of current and ongoing initiatives, especially those planned to span multiple years. There are, however, no specific recruitment pathways for students wishing to become involved in these kinds of initiatives and processes. Such involvement could either mean a lack of details about how to join, when meetings take place, or other information often considered a prerequisite. The task force comprises students and administrators committed to serving DePaul's increasing Hispanic constituency; however, actionable solutions and improved

communication to foster student involvement are well emphasized. Events and forums offered sporadically by the DEI office have, on occasion, failed to inspire interactive dialogue about the HSI missions of the university.

Concerning our elected president, Republicans controlling the U.S. House, and the hateful rhetoric by those who favor these results, HSI status is a priority. Dr. Sotero has overheard faculty, staff, and overall opinions stating that “DePaul becoming an HSI decreases the status of the university, it’s not a real university.” HSI status is not a “diminution” of the university but a recognition of its value and commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity.

HSI distinction, merit, recognition, and retention are all in honor of Latinx students, faculty, and staff who improve the narrative of necessary conversations, unique perspectives, awards, insights, and philosophy. This is not a measure of metrics but rather a foundational element honoring our attributes that have yet to be credited.

Recognitions range from Magoli Garcia, recognized as DePaul’s Class of 2024 Student Lincoln Laureate, to Giana Aguilar-Valencia, nominated to the White House for a briefing with the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers in 2023.

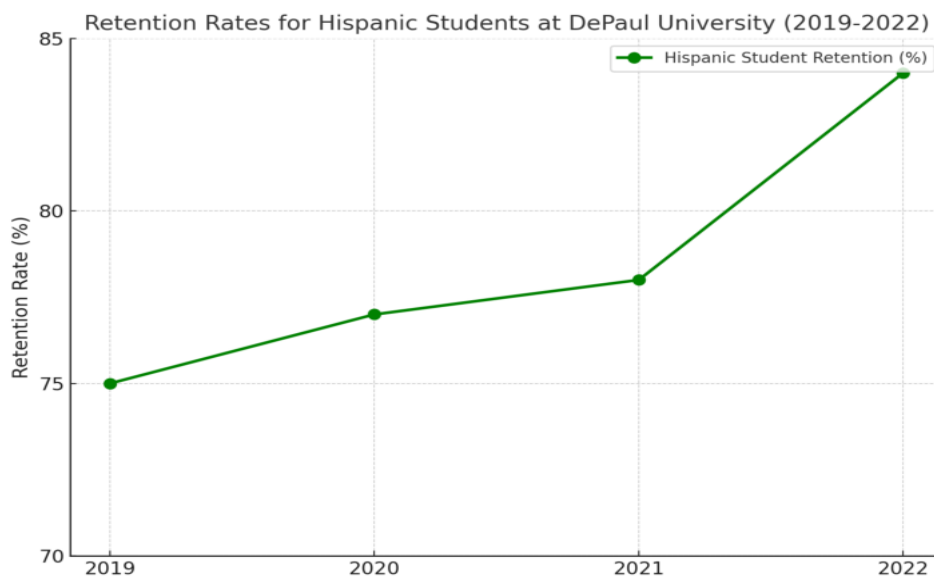


Figure 5, Retention Rates for Hispanic Students at DePaul

These views are essential to diversify institutional stories and, in any way, negate the omission of Latinx communities' rich experiences and specific and unique assets. In seeking equity while naming the disparity, HSI could, at a minimum, address past institutional and societal neglect and the resulting resource constraints.

Hispanic Student Perspectives

“Having more Latinx professors and staff members would help the student population, specifically having them in powerful, leading spaces,” asserts Natalie Solis, a Senior studying Communications and Media.



Figure 6, Photographer: Giana Aguilar-Valencia, Samantha Ortiz (left), Magoli Garcia (middle), Arielle Kallan (right)

According to Institutional Research & Market Analytics (IRMA), only 7.5% of DePaul’s faculty is Latinx, out of 864 total full-time faculty. The imbalance between Latinx faculty and

students is astonishing. Through the push of an agenda by the Task Force or the DEI's nudge, the ratio between students and professors is concerning. While these efforts are geared towards decreasing the disparity, Latinx representation in faculty remains unnoticeably dismissive and has not materialized into other things. This lack of actualization makes students wonder whether the programs cater to their needs.

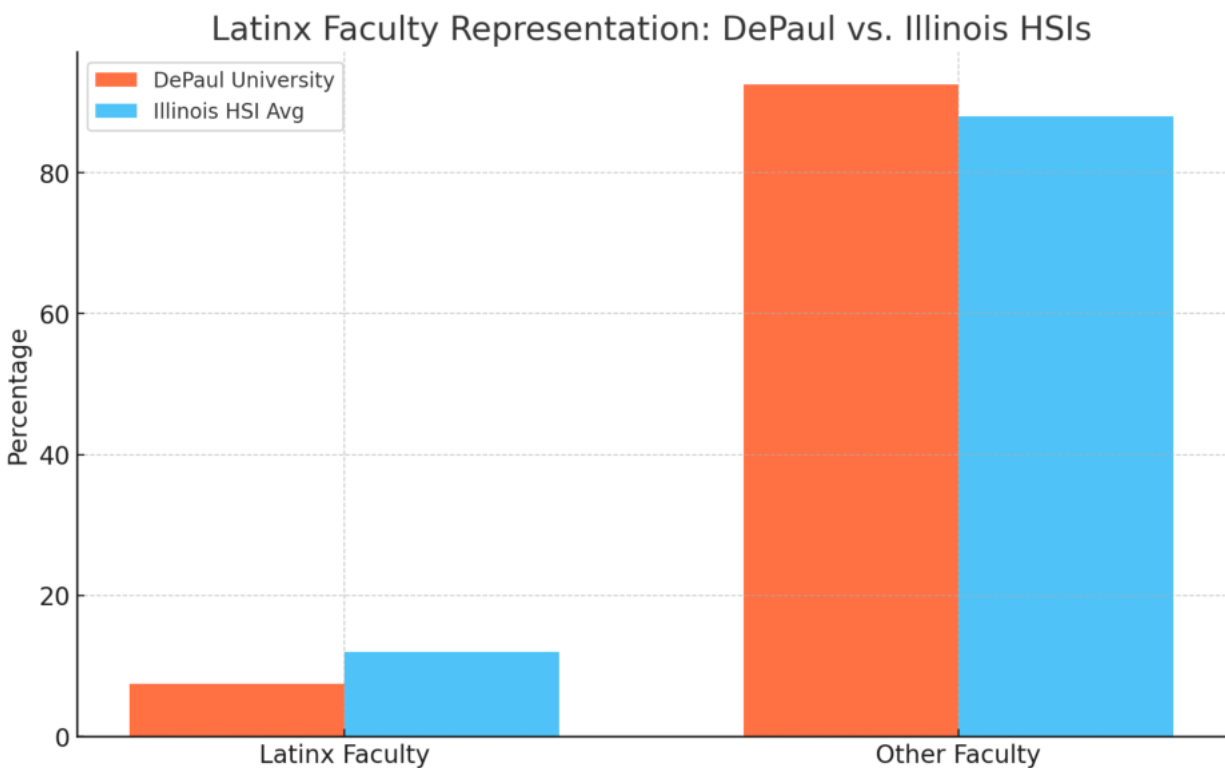


Figure 7, Latinx Faculty Representation: DePaul vs Illinois HSIs

Samantha Ortiz, a sophomore studying Political Science, expressed the need for more tailored support:

“We should have more specific groups and faculty to help undocumented students, students with visas, and international students.”

Ortiz’s stance and worry are commendable upon the election and the lack of reassurance from DePaul. “Students need reassurance, especially the amount of money they are paying is a

lot for the minimal resources they have.” Ortiz highlighted. Concerningly, she asked, “Where does DePaul stand post-election?”

U.S. citizens can apply for federal financial aid, state aid, and institutional scholarships. DACA recipients are only eligible for state aid and institutional scholarships, as they are unable to receive federal aid. International students cannot receive federal or state aid but can apply for institutional scholarships and seek private scholarships and assistance.

All students will need to budget for additional living expenses such as housing, food, and transportation, which will vary according to individual needs and choices.

Dr. Sotero relays this same narrative, “This republican party could remove HSI status for everyone, along with all other policies that underserved groups rely on.”

Amongst faculty and student anguish, DePaul needs to speak out about the many groups they serve at this institution. Minority students across the board are worried about the future of their education.

“Intentionality, in anything we do. Creating spaces for cultural celebrations, not just during Hispanic Heritage Month, but all year-round celebrations. Access to peer-to-peer support, navigating their own stories and journeys similar to yours.” Luis Sanchez, Student Success Manager at HACU.

Comparative Analysis

“In Chicago, UIC and several community colleges are HSIs. It would be great if DePaul could become an HSI, attracting more students to enroll for the curriculum.” Dr. Sotero conveyed.

Across 248 institutions in Illinois, 33 are HSIs, and in the Chicago metropolitan area, universities like the University of Illinois-Chicago, Roosevelt University, and Northeastern Illinois University, amongst many more, are HSIs.



Figure 8, DePaul University, Loop Campus

HACU representative Luis Sanchez went on to define success as an HSI: “It’s a commitment to the needs of this demographic. Institutions can focus on equity and access specifically tailored to this community. Ultimately, it is not measured by enrollment but by

retention and graduation rates. The engagement in leadership, representation, and ability to embrace HSI status goes above and beyond benchmarks. It's where students are seen and heard."

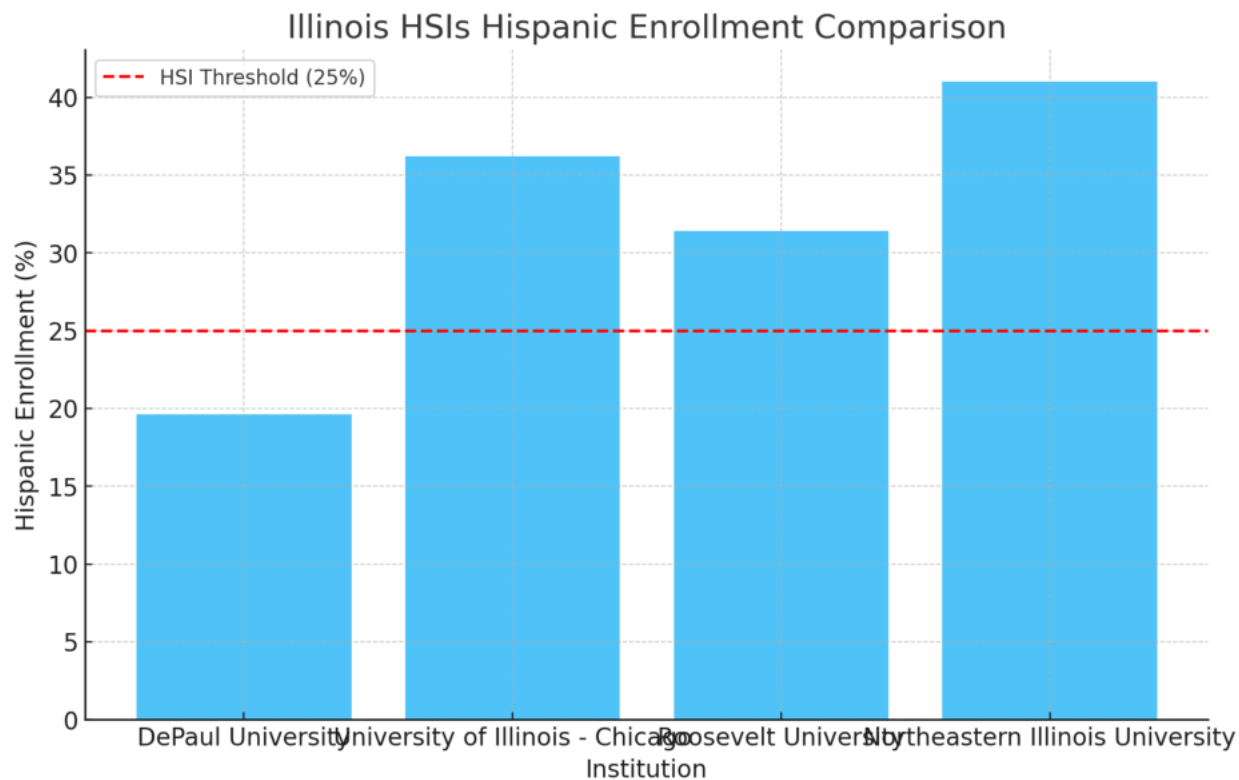


Figure 9, Illinois HSIs Hispanic Enrollment Comparison

"Being part of an HSI showcases that my presence on campus is valuable. It positions us as a significant part of our college culture, campus, and environment and allows for us to be a part of the university's initiatives towards success." Solis expressed.

Conclusion

During his previous term, Trump proposed a substantial cut in funding for various existing programs to support Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including HSIs, amounting to just under \$95 million. These budget cuts may certainly hamper efforts at DePaul to boost resources and support for Hispanic students and may even impede the attainability of HSI status.

The emphasis on institutional goals, devoid of tangible results, the absence of comparative studies with other HSIs, and the insufficient representation of student perspectives contribute to an incomplete story at DePaul. Additionally, the limited attention from major local media outlets raises concerns about the prominence of this vital issue.

Failure to attain that HSI status would deny DePaul the opportunity to access vital funding and resources benefiting, among others, the Hispanic community, in addition to other minorities. In turn, this lack of resource availability would stifle the development of an inclusive environment and access opportunities for all underrepresented students.

Christine Jacinto, a senior studying information systems, portrayed her opinion:

“This is mostly due to on-campus organizations where students and staff work diligently to run inclusive programming and events. That being said, I don’t feel that DePaul does enough to partner with external organizations, including those at the national level, that are concerned with Hispanic issues or educational attainment for the community.”

Without HSI designation, DePaul faces losing important federal resources and contending with an increasingly hostile political environment under the Trump administration that imperils years of action toward equity and diversity for Hispanic students.

The University has rolled out several measures that support Hispanic students, such as targeted recruitment efforts, culturally relevant programming, and academic support services. These measures led to an increase in Hispanic student enrollment and retention rates. For example, the freshman retention rate for Hispanic students in 2022 was 6% higher.

Despite these advancements, DePaul still has work to do in outreach and support systems to meet and sustain that 25% figure necessary for HSI designation. With it, constant work in improving retention and graduation rates among Hispanic students will be significant.

Potential Federal Funding Allocation for DePaul HSI Status

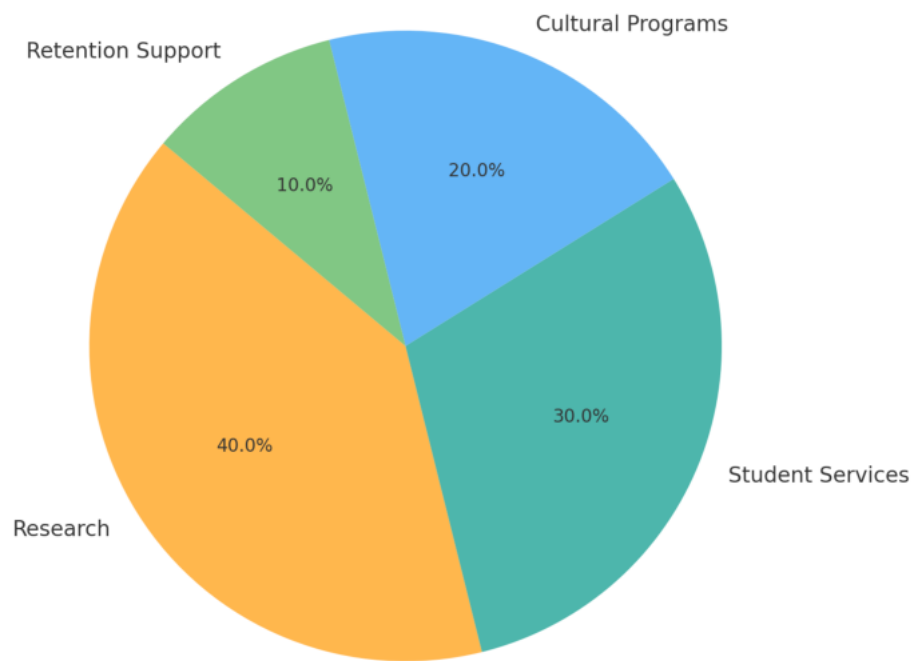


Figure 10, Potential Federal Funding for DePaul HSI Status

DePaul is nearing HSI status with growing Hispanic enrollment and supportive equity programs. Their ongoing commitment to continued initiatives will be of utmost importance in gaining and retaining HSI status.

Citations

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DePaul University's Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Task Force works to bolster resources and educational support for Hispanic students at the university.

2. University of Arizona. "Hispanic Serving Institution Office Achievements," University of Arizona, 2023.

The Hispanic Serving Institution Office at the University of Arizona garnered \$173 million for 130 research projects in 2023 and provided \$625,000 in faculty seed grants for 31 projects since 2021.

3. AP News. "Trump's Proposed Budget Cuts Impact MSIs and HSIs," Associated Press, 2020. Former President Trump proposed a \$95 million cut to funding for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including HSIs, which may hinder efforts to expand resources for Hispanic students.

4. SHPE. "SHPE Advocates for Hispanic STEM Students at White House Briefing," Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, 2023.

The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) participated in a White House briefing advocating for increased federal support for Hispanic students in STEM fields.

5. Magoli Garcia. "DePaul's Class of 2024 Student Lincoln Laureate," DePaul University, 2024.

Magoli Garcia, a DePaul University student, was recognized as a Lincoln Laureate for her leadership and contributions to advancing Hispanic student representation.

6. DePaul University. "Targeted Recruitment Efforts at DePaul Lead to Increased Enrollment and Retention," DePaul University, 2022.

DePaul University's recruitment efforts, including culturally relevant programming, helped improve Hispanic student retention by 6% in 2022.

7. Collegewise. "DEI: The History and Importance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions," Collegewise, 2023.

This article explores the historical significance and the increasing importance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in addressing educational inequities for Hispanic students.

8. AP News. "Republicans and House Elections: Impact on HSI Funding," Associated Press, 2024.

In the context of the 2024 House elections, Republicans have discussed potential changes to the funding mechanisms for institutions such as HSIs, with implications for their operations and outreach.

9. DePaul University. "DePaul's HSI Strategy: Enrollment and Academic Initiatives," DePaul University, 2023.

DePaul University has undertaken various initiatives to support Hispanic students, including recruitment and academic services that have contributed to a significant increase in Hispanic student enrollment.

10. The Chronicle of Higher Education. "Trump's Budget Cuts and Their Impact on HSIs," The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020.

The proposed budget cuts under the Trump administration included significant reductions to funding for HSIs, impacting programs aimed at helping Hispanic students.

11. National Center for Education Statistics. "The Role of Hispanic-Serving Institutions in U.S. Higher Education," NCES, 2021.

This report highlights the essential role that Hispanic-serving institutions play in improving educational outcomes for Hispanic students.

12. DePaul University. "DePaul's Progress on Achieving HSI Status," DePaul University, 2023.

DePaul University has made substantial progress toward achieving full HSI status, with targeted programs and partnerships to increase support for Hispanic students.

13. University of Arizona HSI Office. "Research and Funding for HSI Projects," University of Arizona, 2023.

The University of Arizona's Hispanic Serving Institution Office achieved \$173 million in funding for HSI-related research in 2023.

14. **U.S. Department of Education.** "Federal Grants to Hispanic Serving Institutions," U.S. Department of Education, 2020.

The U.S. Department of Education provides significant grants to Hispanic-serving institutions, which are critical in advancing educational opportunities for Hispanic students.

15. **DePaul University.** "DePaul's Hispanic Enrollment and Retention," DePaul University, 2022.

DePaul University saw a 6% improvement in the freshman retention rate of Hispanic students in 2022 due to enhanced academic support services.

16. **SHPE.** "SHPE Advocacy and HSI Funding at White House Briefing," Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, 2023.

The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) presented its advocacy for Hispanic-serving initiatives during a White House briefing on STEM and education policy.

17. **Collegewise.** "The Importance of HSI Status for Universities," Collegewise, 2023.

The importance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) is emphasized in this article, focusing on their role in expanding opportunities for Hispanic students in higher education.

18. **National Education Association.** "Impact of HSI Funding Cuts on Education," National Education Association, 2020.

The proposed cuts to HSI funding were discussed in the context of national education policy, highlighting the potential negative effects on the support and resources available to Hispanic students.

19. **AP News.** "Funding for Minority Serving Institutions Under Review," Associated Press, 2024.

The ongoing review of funding allocations for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) could have significant effects on Hispanic-serving institutions and their ability to serve Hispanic students.

Sources

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