

An Investigation of Critical Mass: The Role of Latino Representation in the Success of
Urban Community College Students

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The purpose of the study was to discover if the level of Latino representation (or critical mass) had an effect on academic success. The Los Angeles Community College District was selected for the study because of its large percentage of Latino students. The study was done through an analysis of the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students project. The researchers wanted to find the affect of the level of Latino representation in students, the level of Latino representation in faculty, and the student's aspiration, academic integration, age, attitude and English ability on the student's success in community college.

Student success was measured by cumulative GPA, course completion, course success ratio (number of courses with an A, B, or C grade divided by all courses taken), and level of Math and English courses (remedial, basic, intermediate, and transfer level). These elements were combined into a "meta-success" variable. The researchers operationalized the level of Latino representation by dividing the LACCD into three categories: high representational value (50% Latino students and above), moderate representational value (30%-50%), and low representational value (20%-30%). The relationship between the meta-success variable and the level of representational value were analyzed using an ordinal regression model.

Initial analysis showed that there was a positive correlation between representational value and GPA (coefficient .675 $p < 0.01$) and between representational value and the course success ratio (coefficient .694 $p < 0.01$). Student attitude and aspiration were significant predictors of student success. Age, English ability and academic integration were not significant predictors of success. The ordinal regression analysis showed a moderate relationship between representational value in the community college and the meta-success variable. According to the researchers, the relationship between faculty representational value (the amount of Latino faculty) and student success was significant.

The researchers suggest that the critical mass of Latino students in community college is important to their success. It leads to a feeling of comfort that will increase likelihood of success. The researchers suggest that if the community college is located in an area with a high Latino population, that community outreach will help increase Latino success by increasing the critical mass of the Latino student population and increasing the number of Latino faculty.

Citation:

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Summary by Caitlin Tiffany