

OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION:  
A BEST PRACTICES REVIEW OF HISPANIC HIGHER  
EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT IN TENNESSEE

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HISPANIC HIGHER EDUCATION OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

Outreach and Communication: A Best Practices Review  
of Hispanic Higher Education Engagement in Tennessee

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Thesis for a master's degree in communication

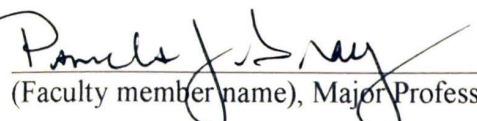
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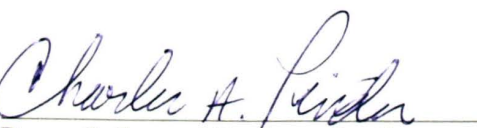
  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines current practices in Hispanic higher education outreach in the state of Tennessee, through the context of communication. Hispanic outreach models include those based on student success and family involvement (Swail, Cabrera, Lee & Williams, 2005) and models that incorporate opportunity, and institutional climate throughout the educational career (Padilla, 2005). Research for the study consisted of interviews with college employees involved in Hispanic outreach at seven colleges and universities across Tennessee. Results show that all schools in the study have active Hispanic outreach efforts; however the offices and departments carrying out the efforts vary. Community group involvement and multi-office participation were cited as important aspects of outreach efforts. Obstacles included budget cuts, higher institutional priorities elsewhere, and lack of funding.

## Outreach and Communication: A Best Practices Review of Hispanic Higher Education Engagement in Tennessee

Outreach to students is an essential part of the college and university mission. It can be as simple as handing out a welcome brochure, or as complicated as mentoring programs and preparatory academies. One technique is to pay attention to the cultural and racial background of the student, appealing to identities which are often deeply ingrained, and quite important to the student. This cultural outreach approach has been used for many years in the African American community, and is becoming increasingly used with the Hispanic community (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Hispanic higher education outreach is defined for this paper as activities that can help educate the Hispanic population about the process and benefits of higher education and that serve to bring that information to potential students and their families. Outreach can be a broad range of actions, from Hispanic specific recruitment to community festivals. In the end, no matter what the activity, the unifying factors are education and communication. The goal for this type of outreach is to provide better access to higher education opportunities for Hispanics, through targeted communication.

The question is how to do this effectively. Colleges and universities need to institutionalize Hispanic outreach efforts. The schools should utilize a cross-functional approach that combines the expertise of many offices across campus. The programs need to move beyond the basic event driven models, currently in favor, to more substantial student based models. Partnerships need to expand to include more secondary school participation. Outreach needs to be viewed as a communication issue and better involve Public Relations offices. The existing

programs need to be grown into long term efforts that can survive, despite budget cuts and other pressing considerations.

The importance of this research is directly tied to the surge in the Tennessee Hispanic population in recent years. U.S. Census population estimates show Tennessee with a 56 percent Hispanic population growth rate between 2000 and 2006. That is the fourth highest growth rate in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). This trend may not hold in coming years, as recent reports point to a large decline in the illegal immigrant population in the United States due to economic conditions (Iliff, 2009). However, even with less illegal immigrants entering the country, the number of Hispanics in the United State is projected to grow at substantial rates, in part because of the relatively young nature of the population, and the number of children in Hispanic families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Hispanic higher education outreach is a unique challenge in Tennessee. The Hispanic population is relatively new to the state, and a majority of those Hispanics are relatively new to the United States. Census data reports 54 percent of Hispanics in Tennessee were born outside the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Educational systems in most Latin American countries are quite different from the higher education system in the United States. This makes it challenging for Hispanics to navigate the educational system, and the opportunities available to them (Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2004).

The need for these opportunities is clear. Hispanics have one of the lowest college enrollment rates for any of the major ethnic groups in the United States. Twenty-eight percent of Hispanics ages 18-24 years were enrolled in college or university in 2004. That compares with 37 percent of blacks, 58 percent of Asians and 45 percent of whites. The only ethnic group with a

lower enrollment rate is American Indians, with just under 28 percent (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox & Provasnik, 2007).

Educational issues follow Hispanics later in life. Nearly 24 percent of Hispanics aged 16 and older work in service occupations, compared with 14 percent of non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The 2004 median income for Hispanic households was \$35,929, compared to \$48,784 for non-Hispanic white households. For Hispanics 25 years and older there is a seven percent unemployment rate, for those who have less than high school completion. That compares with five percent for those who finish high school, and two percent for those who obtain a bachelor's degree or higher (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

Census data estimates 197,696 Hispanic were living in Tennessee in 2007. The Hispanic community in the state is still a small percentage of the overall population, just 3.3 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). However, it is a fast growing population, which is especially acute in certain areas of the state. Sumner County showed a 100 percent Hispanic population increase from 2000 to 2007. Robertson County posted a 161 percent increase during the same period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

The rapid growth, combined with the foreign born nature of the people moving to Tennessee, has created strain in some public resources. Secondary school systems have been grappling with bilingual education and providing resources in Spanish (O'Neal, 2007). One problem for higher education is the need to reach Hispanics in their native tongue. Seventy-eight percent of Hispanics in America are non-English speaking at home, either in conjunction with some English or with limited or no English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). College outreach is not

just a matter of communicating with high school students, but also their parents and other relatives. This is often a significant challenge given the language barrier.

The primary research questions for this thesis are: How are Tennessee colleges and universities reaching out to the Hispanic population? Are there ways for schools to improve those efforts? From these basic questions several quantifiable research questions were developed and tested.

The answers to the research questions are important not just for higher education institutions in Tennessee, but for the many states with fast growing, and relatively new, Hispanic populations.

## Literature Review

The theory behind Hispanic higher education outreach is directly tied to student success strategies. Swail, Cabrera, Lee and Williams (2005) offer an integrated model of student success, based on the Geometric Model of Persistence and Achievement. This model posits that student experience is determined by the interaction of three factors: cognitive, social and institutional. This is placed into a triangle with institutional factors, such as established outreach programs and K-16 coordination, at the base. Rising up on the cognitive side is college knowledge and postsecondary planning. On the social side there is family encouragement and aspirations. There are also a number of academic factors for all of these foundations (Swail et al., 2005).

Family encouragement is a critical part of the outreach effort. Boosting family encouragement is often a function of building college knowledge. Universities and colleges do this through educational efforts. Outreach programs seek to show parents why higher education

is important and how it can be accessed (Auerbach, 2001). For students the family encouragement is critical, which is why it sits on the top level of the student outcome triangle in Swail's Student Success Model (Swail et al., 2005).

Padilla (2007) offers a conceptual model based on 100 studies of Hispanic students and higher education. It defines success for Hispanic students as occurring in three contexts: Macro, Meso and Micro. Macro issues include family, opportunity, and institutional climate throughout the educational career. Meso contexts include the educational institutions themselves, access to educational opportunities, and regulators such as tests, resources and interventions. The Micro context includes family enabling or hindering success, and the psychosocial aspects of the higher education institution, which include campus climate. Padilla shows how an individual navigates these contexts as they move through their educational career. Macro challenges of demographics, community and immigration are faced on the front end, moving through the family contexts, and then opportunity structure and finally to the college institutional climate. It appears, in essence, as a series of hurdles for the Hispanic student. The path ends either in the success of a college degree or the failure of drop-out. This is ultimately the challenge for outreach: how to provide a helping hand to the student so they can clear the hurdles and cross the graduation stage with diploma in hand.

To accomplish this goal, Padilla says there needs to be targeted communication throughout the student's educational career. Families need to be informed of the education process and particularly the higher education process. The opportunity structure needs to be approached through partnerships in the community, including those between colleges and

secondary schools. Colleges need to be welcoming in recruitment and provide social and academic support on campus (Padilla, 2007).

This process can also be evaluated through social theory and many researchers have used this context to tackle the issues facing Hispanic students. Nora (2002) argues that college persistence depends on social integration and is applicable across ethnic groups. This approach takes on class dimensions and defines culture as impacting social capital. Putnam (1995) describes social capital as the networks, norms and social trust of society that builds cooperative action for the mutual benefit of individuals. While social capital originally took in elements of class, as first defined by Bourdieu (1986), it has since been expanded to include cultural characteristics. Jun and Colyar (2002) use the cultural perspective of social capital to examine techniques for helping lower income families navigate the many barriers to education, including college outreach programs. The authors argue that cultural, and even specific local identities, need to be a part of the college outreach process. This can be done by linking culture to academics and showing success from a cultural perspective. The authors also propose that more attention be paid to alternative programs using culture based techniques, ones that are outside the normal college preparatory process.

In the context of this paper social capital can be defined as the tools and knowledge that help Hispanics navigate the educational system. It can be affected by everything from cultural misunderstandings to the lack of participation in school activities. It is a matter of acculturation and assimilation, which is a big part of the immigrant experience and a complicated one according to Portes and Rumbaut (2006). They write that the action of taking up American culture, and becoming more like the majority population, is not all positive. Americanization can

lead to its own set of problems. The authors say that at its best acculturation is a balance of progress in navigating and integrating with the majority culture, while retaining select elements of the immigrant culture.

The ultimate goal of Hispanic higher education outreach is enrollment and success in college. Both of these goals have many steps for achievement. There is no doubt that academic preparation is among the biggest hurdles. If students are not academically prepared all the outreach in the world cannot help. U.S. Department of Education statistics show that 82 percent of white students complete high school on time, compared to 67 percent of Hispanic students. Forty-six percent of Hispanic high school graduates have not completed Algebra 2 as compared to 28 percent of white high school graduates (Fry, 2005).

In fact, many outreach programs work specifically on the issue of academic achievement. Tutoring programs in junior high and high school, combined with preparation for entrance exams and college essays are just a few of the techniques being used (Gandara, Larson, Mehan & Rumberger, 1998). Studies have shown that linking cultural outreach to academic preparation is important. Cultural enrichment techniques can help make academic programs more successful and ultimately lead to greater college enrollment (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Academic preparation is an entire subject in itself. While it will be mentioned in this paper, it will not be the primary concern of the paper. The outreach examined here is related to communication and community engagement.

College outreach programs can be broken into two general groups, student-centered and school-centered. School-centered strategies involve reorganizing the secondary school as a whole, to better prepare the general student population for college. The student-centered

approach uses academic tutoring, college counseling, college visits, and parental education programs to get students ready for college. These are quite often targeted at specific groups (Gandara, 2002). Using culture as a focus for programs may help in many respects. However, targeting by culture may not answer bigger issues, such as socio-economic status and educational level. Loza (2003) raises alarms over exactly who is being reached by Hispanic college outreach and whether lower income and lower achieving students are left out of the picture. Loza evaluates three programs as examples and concludes that many underachieving, and at risk, Hispanic students are not being served by college outreach programs. Stringent acceptance criteria are one hurdle. Loza points to the importance of college outreach in building social and cultural capital, but argues students who need it the most may not be getting the attention they need.

### *Students*

Two of the biggest hurdles facing Hispanic high school students are a lack of financial resources and a lack of knowledge about the college admissions process. Immerwahr (2003) found this during interviews he conducted with high school seniors in Texas, California, Arizona, Illinois and New York. It was a relatively small group, just 50 students, but the study was designed to go beyond the standard surveys and provide a starting place for further research. The interviewers remarked on several findings, including a lack of adult supervision over the educational process, student misinformation about the college process, and competition from current jobs. Immerwahr divided the respondents into two groups: college-maybes and college-prep. Not surprisingly the college-maybes were more likely to be making their own decisions about college, without much help from parents. For both groups misinformation can include

things like not knowing application deadlines and not understanding what tests are required before one can apply to college. The interviewers found that many students rely on information they received from other high school students, and college students, without going to a direct source to make sure. Students in the study also seem to have a tough time navigating the particulars of financial aid options and restrictions. One of the biggest distractions for students, keeping them from college preparation, was work outside of school. Many Hispanic teenagers are expected to be part of the family earning group (Immerwahr, 2003).

Monahan (1993) found a disturbing lack of information about college in high school students he studied. He interviewed 120 African American and Hispanic students in the ninth grade. Ninety-six percent of the students were not familiar with the college admissions process. Ninety-two percent did not know of any potential financial aid sources, or how one would go about getting assistance. Granted, ninth graders are not an age group that is typically heavily involved in the college selection process. However, Monahan also found that 87 percent of the students did not know where or from whom they could get information about college and careers. The author interviewed teachers and administrators who said that the parents of African American and Hispanic students were generally unaware of the courses needed to prepare for college, financial aid sources or resources available at the high school.

The study results led to collaboration between Monahan and the high school administrators at the study school. Together they designed a pre-collegiate outreach program for at-risk students. The program included biweekly meetings between the author and students. These career education conferences combined talk of career aspirations with specifics about the academic program needed to achieve that goal. Workshops were also held for parents, focusing

on many of the same themes. The goal was to put students and parents on the same track, and give them the tools to start a discussion about life after high school. Monahan reports that achieving parental involvement was not an easy task. Poor attendance was a problem at first, but eventually, through phone calls and a change in meeting time, an average of 63 parents attended the four meetings. Monahan also held one-on-one counseling sessions for students and even arranged tutors for students who needed academic help. College visits were reported to be a popular part of the program. The results were dramatic. The study author and school administrators set a goal of success as 42 of the 82 students in the study applying to college or university. The actual number was 56, which was an increase of 300 percent over the number of students applying to college in the previous year (Monahan, 1993).

While successful in all appearances, the Monahan study also shows the immense amount of work needed to make a difference. Hundreds of hours were devoted to the workshops and counseling. It may not be realistic to assume that high schools, even in partnerships with dedicated colleges, could ever expend such a degree of resources on a small group of students. The question raises the issue of whether outreach preparation efforts can be sustained in the long-term.

Vargas (2004) points to several reasons why students are not getting enough information about the college process in high school. First and foremost is the lack of time students spend in school guidance counseling, which may be related to the staffing levels in those programs. Vargas says this is especially problematic in schools with lower income populations. Colleges may not be visiting the lower income schools as they would higher income institutions. The dearth of information can hurt students in many ways, including confusion over financial aid

possibilities. Quite often parents do not have an accurate idea of college costs and the range of more cost effective options for students, including public schools, scholarships and student loans (Vargas, 2004).

### *Parents*

The role of parents in the process of higher education is important for issues of college outreach, as shown in several previously mentioned studies (Auerbach, 2001; Monahan, 1993; Padilla, 2005; Swail et al., 2005). There are several obstacles facing parental involvement. Swail, Cabrera and Lee (2004) evaluated data collected in the 2000 edition of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to better understand Hispanic obstacles in higher education attainment. Cultural capital, as provided by parental knowledge of the higher education system, was one issue. While 72 percent of all the NELS youth had at least one parent with postsecondary experience, only 49 percent of Hispanic youth had a parent with that level of education. The analysis also showed that Hispanic students value education. Seventy-three percent of Hispanic NELS students aspired to higher education, but only 55 percent had the ultimate goal of a bachelor's degree or higher.

Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) conducted an extensive telephone survey of Hispanic parents in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles for the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI). 1,054 parents were interviewed. The questions included a short test of college knowledge. Sixty-five percent of parents answered incorrectly for at least half of the college knowledge test questions. This was especially dramatic in families who were recent immigrants, or of a lower socio-economic status. The authors say the results show that first-generation immigrant Hispanic parents are limited in many aspects of social capital, including connections to the established

power and information sources, such as government and institutions. The lack of knowledge of the higher education process didn't match up with parental expectations. Ninety-six percent of the parents interviewed expected their children to attend college. The hopes don't appear to match the reality. A breakdown of the data from Hispanic parents with higher socio-economic levels shows that they have a higher college knowledge level. The authors found three factors affecting that knowledge: parental English proficiency, attendance of a school college process event and interaction with high school counselors about college. This presents some important points for college outreach. Socio-economic considerations are important. Hispanic students and parents have a wide spectrum of educational attainment, income levels and cultural interaction. Immigrant families, especially those with English language problems, are among those most in need of outreach help.

The TRPI study (2002) has positive implications for the outreach effort. Interviews showed that parents, especially those in lower and middle socio-economic groups, best acquired college knowledge from individual contact with school counselors and college representatives. Parents who took part in college nights and similar activities reported a high degree of satisfaction. Interestingly, the parents appreciated it when colleges treated them as "valued potential customers" which contrasted with the attitudes towards high school counselors. The biggest obstacle found in the study for parents getting this direct college contact was language. A lack of English proficiency came up in everything from teachers meetings, to correspondence and meetings with college representatives. It was the most common obstacle listed by parents in the lower socio-economic group (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002).

Tornatzky et al., (2002) make recommendations that include increasing the number and scope of college nights and open houses. They suggest making campus more accessible to Hispanic parents through bilingual tours and guides. The authors recommend increasing the number of Spanish language materials and web pages, and providing more bilingual staff at college nights and open houses.

Sosa (1997) reviewed the literature of successful parental engagement activities at the secondary school level focusing on immigrant and migrant Hispanic families. She found that parents face several barriers when it comes to engaging in the educational process of their children. Time is a problem because often both parents are employed and may work long hours. Struggling parents who work long hours are less likely to have the time or energy to engage in school and college outreach activities. Safety issues at inner city schools can be a problem when it comes to attending activities at night. Child care arrangements are another issue. Sosa also points to the segmentation of the educational system in the United States. Because secondary school systems are separate from colleges, and the array of public and private colleges is so great in number, it is tougher for parents to access all the needed information at one time. Attitude barriers as identified by Sosa include parental uncertainty over their roles in the education system and frustration over not being able to help children with school work.

One important consideration for college outreach is the type of population the outreach hopes to serve. As previously mentioned Tennessee has a high percentage of recent immigrants in the Hispanic population. Wainer (2004), in a study for the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, took a closer look at this challenge in case studies of secondary school systems in three states: Georgia, North Carolina and Arkansas. The selection was based on the list of the top ten counties

in the United States with the fastest growing Hispanic population. One hundred and nineteen interviews were conducted with parents, students and educators. The schools in these fast growing counties have plenty of challenges, including contact with immigrant parents. The administrators interviewed pointed to the difference in the Mexican educational system, as compared to the United States. Another issue is parents not feeling welcome at schools. Both can have a major impact on relationships. Extra burdens on already busy school staff may be part of the problem. Fast growing populations bring an influx of new students, often straining secondary school resources. Wainer (2004) says that schools want to do business as usual and immigrant parents feel left out of the process.

While this study focused on secondary school issues it offers many lessons for the college outreach dilemma, in regards to immigrant parents. Colleges, like secondary schools, need to develop a welcoming atmosphere where immigrant families can feel comfortable. Flexible scheduling is important to reach immigrant parents, especially when it comes to getting them to the school and engaged in school activities. The study points to programs where colleges and secondary schools work together for complete family education. Immigrant parents are often in need of English classes and basic education services. Outreach programs that combine secondary, college and adult education programs prove especially successful. In Arkansas the author points to a program that not only incorporates schools, but also library services (Wainer, 2004).

### *Outreach Programs*

In another study for the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, Torres and Marquez (2005) took a broad look at ten college outreach programs and came up with five characteristics that they had

in common: committed program champions, cultural considerations, program evaluation, successful partnerships and stable funding sources. These five areas provide a good method for helping to evaluate the Tennessee college programs, and are areas highlighted at the Tennessee schools in the research section of this thesis. The only areas that are not directly communication related are program evaluation and stable funding sources. They do relate to the organization inside colleges and universities, and have a direct impact on the performance of the communication.

Torres and Marquez (2005) say that program champions are often high level administrators who have the resources to secure funding and allow staff the time to grow and develop the outreach programs. The cultural considerations include grassroots organizing as a way to build trust in the community, an issue that comes up over and over again in college outreach. The TRPI report points to flexibility in programs that allow colleges to reach out to families in Spanish, plan events in non-traditional hours, and even provide transportation to those events. Evaluation is defined as how the programs studied adjusted to successes and failures after the initial start-up of the program. The researchers found that the programs usually developed from a broad outreach to a general population, into a more defined outreach to a smaller target audience. Successful partnerships are defined as those done in conjunction with area secondary schools and school districts. There is a level of multiple partnership programs that the authors call "intersegmental." These include several agencies and community groups working together in college outreach programs. The final characteristic, stable funding, does not necessarily mean funding from one, exclusive source. It can include money from federal grants, foundations and even local business and industry (Torres & Marquez, 2005).

These TRPI characteristics show up in programs across Tennessee, but with varying degrees of success. Ultimately hard data needs to be used to decide the success of a college outreach program. Increases in enrollment for the target population, and assessment tests given to parents and students about college knowledge, are ways for college outreach to be judged independently. The TRPI report explains that many college outreach programs do not use these techniques, due in large part to the increased staffing needed to do such research, and issues with having some in the Hispanic community, especially immigrant populations, take part in standardized testing for assessment.

### *College and University Programs*

To evaluate the performance of Hispanic outreach at Tennessee colleges and universities it would help to have some models of outreach programs elsewhere, and the communication techniques used in those programs. There are Hispanic outreach initiatives happening on campuses across the country. Many are created from within the particular institution and designed to reach out. Others are formed as collaboration between higher education and secondary schools. Another model is grant driven, and often tied to federal and state programs. It's tough to asses which are the most successful programs, due to the massive number, and the lack of common criteria. However, it is possible to use specific programs to highlight the techniques used. From there individual criteria can be used to judge whether the programs have proved successful, based on the goals and measures of that particular program.

There are four general categories for college outreach programs: federal government supported, state government supported, not-for-profit supported and programs particular to a college or university (Torres & Marquez, 2005).

The bigger of these include the federal programs tied together under the TRIO banner: Student Support Services, Talent Search and Upward Bound. All three have elements of college outreach and academic preparation, and in some states the programs have significant Hispanic student enrollment. The Talent Search program is most closely related to increasing knowledge of the college admission process, financial aid, and scholarships (Perna & Swail, 2001).

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) is another wide reaching federal program with a 2008 fiscal year budget of just over \$303 million. It provides grants to state-wide college outreach initiatives and smaller, institution based partnerships at the local level. The object of GEAR-UP is to help disadvantaged students and parents prepare for college ([www.ed.gov/programs/gearup](http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup)). Researchers say the elements of a successful program include early intervention, often in middle school. They have a clear focus, and linkages with secondary school classes and community groups. The students are motivated, and the program itself adapts to the particular needs of the community and the target population (Perna & Swail, 2001). An example is the GEAR-UP program at the University of North Texas. Two full-time university employees work directly with high schools and middle schools. While the federal programs reach many cultural groups, the target at North Texas is the Hispanic population. Program organizers say that one-on-one communication is important for Hispanic families. Much of their attention is focused on making parents feel more comfortable in the secondary school and on the college campus ([www.unt.edu/gearup/](http://www.unt.edu/gearup/)). Clark and Dorris (2007) point to a general lack of understanding among Hispanic parents when it comes to the basics of school life, such as report cards and advanced placement classes. The GEAR-UP liaisons at North Texas actually became the contact when parents had concerns about student report cards. This illustrates a back to basics communication approach. Communication returns to the most

basic level of education: educators, parents and students. These are roles more commonly ascribed to secondary school counselors and administrators.

The University of North Texas experience shows that trust is a major factor in reaching parents and students. It also raises the question of why secondary schools need such university and college partnerships to reach at risk students and parents. Funding and staffing certainly seem to have something to do with the problem. However, the college outreach model also takes communication out of the schools and brings it to the home. Clark and Dorris (2007) used an outreach study as part of their Postsecondary Access to Latino Middle-Grades Students (PALMS) project. They identified five strategies that may be effective: home visits, parent and student activities, home-school liaisons and skill development. This all supports the idea that parents should take ownership of the educational career of their child. Combined, these efforts create a new model of the educational pipeline for Hispanic students, one that has many partners and reaches students and parents in many different ways. The most important aspect, though, appears to be the one-on-one communication. Personal contact can help overcome a number of potential problems including: language barriers, cultural differences, lack of understanding of how the system works, and fear of government. Personal contact takes time, dedicated workers and a tight focus. It is an activity that goes beyond what most secondary school or college could handle with normal staffing and approaches. It is the commitment of resources and careful planning that make the difference (Clark & Dorris, 2007).

Another model for outreach is the small localized program that grows to be embraced statewide. The Puente Project is one of the most established and long-running such outreach efforts in the nation. It was established in 1981 at Chabot Community College in Hayward,

California. In the last 28 years it has grown to encompass 33 high schools and 59 community college sites across California. There are two versions of the program: one for high school students and another for community college students. There are currently 14,000 students in the programs (<http://puente.ucop.edu/about>).

Puente means bridge in Spanish. The idea is to provide a bridge for students, from high school to college, or from community college to a four-year institution. The model has three major components: counseling, mentoring and writing instruction. These areas can be more generally described as college process, community and cultural contacts, and academic preparation. The ultimate goals of the interdisciplinary approach are to make sure students graduate from high school, or community college depending on the version, and enroll in a four-year college or university. It is open to all students. However, the original impetus for Puente was to address the low transfer rate of Hispanic students from community college to four-year schools. The conceptual framework was based on the needs of the Hispanic student population. One need specific to the Hispanic community is writing help for students raised in bilingual households. The program is based on an English class with writing at the heart of the academic work. Another need is for active high school and college counseling. The lack of counseling, or access to counseling, has been cited as a potential barrier for students. There must be a mechanism for communication to occur and extra efforts made to ensure that communication is received by populations with increased need. Finally, the mentoring program gives students someone to turn to for advice and a connection to the larger community (Gandara et al., 1998).

The staffing for Puente is formed in a team at each school, including a counselor and an English instructor. They receive specialized instruction in the program methodologies.

Community partners make up the backbone of the mentoring component of Puente. Organizers report that 75 percent of the Puente students have parents with no college education. The mentors come from various professional backgrounds, designed to connect students with the larger community and show them career possibilities. Students themselves are encouraged to be community leaders after they graduate and are often recruited as ambassadors for the program. Puente is open to all students, but that doesn't mean that culture isn't a part of the process. Counselors are trained to integrate the culture and social background of students into the program (<http://puente.ucop.edu/about>).

Puente has been extensively tested for effectiveness. Gandara (2002) studied students in the Puente program and compared the data to students not in the program. The study showed that 43 percent of Puente students from the class of 1998 attended four-year colleges. Only 24 percent of students in the non-Puente group attended a four-year school. When the original sample was followed for two more years, the study found 75 percent of the Puente students who enrolled in college were still in college, as compared to 55 percent of the non-Puente students. The author also did a survey of Puente and non-Puente students. One-on-one counseling is a big part of the Puente program, and not just through normal counseling offices, but with specific and specially trained Puente staff. The study showed that the one-on-one relationship with the Puente counselors had an impact on the student college decision. When asked if a counselor influenced their decision to go to college 58 percent of the Puente students agreed as compared to 22 percent of the non-Puente students. Puente is also unique because it builds a cohort of students who take many of the same classes over several years. By creating a Puente group of students with similar goals, the students themselves became part of the support system (Gandara, 2004).

Puente is an example of how a program can grow over 28 years, when supported by government and higher education institutions. It also shows how states such as California have embraced cultural outreach in ways not seen yet in Tennessee. California has a significantly larger Hispanic population and a longer established Hispanic community. In the 2006 census 36 percent of Californians identified as being of Hispanic descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). If Tennessee continues to experience explosive growth in the Hispanic population, the lessons learned by states such as California may prove valuable. It seems unlikely that the Hispanic population percentages in Tennessee will ever reach those seen in California. However, programs such as Puente could provide models for smaller outreach efforts in Tennessee. It isn't a matter of scope, but of the model employed and the methods used.

College outreach often starts at the college and university level, springing from a perceived need in the community and a plan to address that need. A successful program can then grow in scope and sometimes spread to other institutions. Such is the case with the Arizona State University Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program (HMDP). It was created in the late 1970's by a former dean of students at the university. The idea was to reach students and parents early in the educational pipeline. The program works with seventh grade girls and their mothers and stays with them for five years, until they graduate from high school ([www.asu.edu/enroll/hmdp/](http://www.asu.edu/enroll/hmdp/)).

The primary goals are to increase Latina representation in higher education and to enlist mothers to support that effort. The communication components of the program come through direct one-on-one visits in the secondary schools, workshops for mothers and daughters, and special topic workshops specifically for mothers. The parental emphasis is designed to help mothers with financial issues and keep them apprised of how their child is doing in school, from

a college preparation perspective. The program also reaches out to parents to show them that college isn't just for the teens, but also open to them (Torres & Marquez, 2005).

The cultural aspects of the Mother-Daughter Program include an emphasis on Latina history and an exploration of the family history of the student. The focus on women is in effect a strengthening of the personal approach of such culture specific programs. Not only does the program speak to the students as Hispanics, but also as Latinas. The message becomes stronger, because it can reach each student at a much more personal level (Torres & Marquez, 2005). The ASU program has shown success, measured by persistence in the program by both mothers and daughters. The 2006-2007 school year showed an 84 percent persistence rate for high school students and their mothers ([www.asu.edu/enroll/hmdp/](http://www.asu.edu/enroll/hmdp/)).

The ASU Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program was the model for the Mother-Daughter Program at the University of Texas, El Paso. It was started in 1986 as a way to address the poor performance of Latina students in high school and for enrollment in college. This smaller version of the ASU model reaches out to students in the sixth grade and has more limited connections in the following years (<http://academics.utep.edu/motherdaughter>).

Both of these programs show the importance of the five factors defined by TRPI, and previously mentioned, as elements of a successful program. Committed program champions developed the ideas with community partners and grew them into an institutionalized part of the founding college or university. Cultural considerations are used to strengthen the messages. Assessment is a regular part of the process, allowing the organizers to refine techniques and provide better services. All of this then allows the programs to seek funding. Both of the Mother-Daughter Programs are funded by a number of sources, including foundations, businesses and

school districts. Grants are a key part of the funding model and the assessment aspects of each program are important for grant evaluation.

The programs discussed thus far are located in areas with a large Hispanic population. However, Hispanic outreach efforts are developing in areas where the Hispanic community is still relatively small, but fast growing. Kentucky is in a situation similar to Tennessee when it comes to a growing Hispanic population. There are only 86,769 Hispanics in Kentucky according to 2005-2007 state estimates. This is just over 2 percent of the state population (U.S. Census Bureau, FactFinder, 2007).

Bluegrass Community and Technical College serves a multi-county area around Lexington with seven campuses. Of 11,000 students enrolled at the college just 253 are identified as Hispanic (Bluegrass Factbook, 2007). Despite the small numbers, the Department of Multicultural Affairs at Bluegrass runs a Hispanic Outreach initiative, led by a full-time Hispanic Outreach Coordinator. One reason cited by organizers is not only the fast growing state population, but the size of the Hispanic population in Lexington, which one organizer estimates at six percent of the overall population, and eight percent of the secondary school student body ([www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/multiculturalaffairs/hispanic outreach](http://www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/multiculturalaffairs/hispanic%20outreach)).

To go beyond the website information listed for the program the program organizer, Erin Howard, was contacted by telephone. The program began in 2004 as part of a larger diversity initiative started by a former President of the college. Thus from the very beginning the program was institutionalized inside a specific office. A Hispanic Task Force, with a cross-functional make-up of people across the campus and in the community, helped to launch the program and

hire a full-time staff member. Erin Howard became the first Hispanic Outreach Coordinator in 2005.

Hispanic Heritage Month films and speakers are some of the smaller events held at Bluegrass. The Latino Student College Fair is large outreach activity that brings in high school students to meet with colleges and universities from across Kentucky, in conjunction with Kentucky State University. Four-hundred and twenty-seven students attended the last college fair.

The outreach coordinator visits high schools in Hispanic specific recruitment trips. Organizers say they often work directly with high school English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instructors, rather than always using the traditional method of collaborating with high school counselors. This helps the organizers target Hispanic students.

A “College Experience Camp” is designed to help Hispanic students and ESOL students feel more at home on a college campus. They participate in a week of college, career and academic skills classes during the day, and stay overnight in college dorms. The classes are organized in college fashion, with actual registration and faculty teaching. Leadership and self-esteem building workshops help prepare students socially for college life. A Hispanic history fashion show is designed as a fun way to teach students about Hispanic culture and integrate the need to go to college with a Hispanic perspective. An emphasis is placed on familiarizing students with famous Hispanics in history and the importance of education in meeting goals and dreams. Thirty-six high school students participated in the last session with 15 college students helping as counselors during the week ([www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/multiculturalaffairs/hispanicoutreach](http://www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/multiculturalaffairs/hispanicoutreach)).

“Promesa” is the name of the mentoring aspect of the Bluegrass Hispanic outreach.

Currently 14 community members have been trained as mentors. The participants are requested to be bilingual, motivated to help students, and able to participate in the college outreach events. The mentors work directly with high school students in encouraging them to stay in school and enroll in college ([www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/multiculturalaffairs/hispanic outreach](http://www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/multiculturalaffairs/hispanic%20outreach)).

While the Bluegrass Hispanic Initiative is institutionalized, it still faces many challenges. Howard says the biggest challenge is funding. She reports facing a possible budget cut in the coming year. Grants have become a big part of the effort. Bluegrass has several grants which are primarily state and local. There are Federal funds that may be sought for a migrant farm worker program in the future.

Organizers say Bluegrass Community and Technical College has doubled the Hispanic student enrollment since the program began, a rate much higher than the increase in Hispanic population for the area.

The Bluegrass model shows that Hispanic outreach for higher education can be proactive and provide a foundation of support for prospective students, well before the population becomes a large part of the overall student body. Bluegrass employs a cross-functional organizational model that operates with clear objectives. The programs are well established and institutionalized at Bluegrass with stable funding and a commitment to long term growth. One full-time dedicated employee can make a difference when combined with a large campus-wide effort that brings together many offices and resources.

## Working with New Populations: Volunteer State Community College

Tennessee colleges and universities are reaching out to the growing Hispanic community. There are many challenges in that outreach. A significant issue is how best to organize an outreach effort in an area where the Hispanic population is relatively new. Many rural areas in Tennessee have Hispanic populations that are growing quickly, but still do not have the infrastructure of community groups, leadership and representation in government. Volunteer State Community College is located in Gallatin, Tennessee. It is a two-year commuter college with an enrollment of 7,241 students in fall semester 2008. One hundred and forty-one students identified as Hispanic for that fall enrollment, just 1.9 percent of the population. Another 132 students, or 1.8 percent, did not identify race ([www.volstate.edu/Research/research/datatables/2008-2009/Fall 2008/](http://www.volstate.edu/Research/research/datatables/2008-2009/Fall%202008/)).

The college is located in Sumner County. As mentioned previously, Sumner County experienced a 100 percent Hispanic population increase from 2000 to 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Hispanic businesses and churches have begun to form. However the links that bind a community together have not yet been forged. This includes areas of community representation and leadership.

Volunteer State Community College started a formal Hispanic outreach program in the fall of 2005. The former Assistant Vice President for Advising, Dr. Tom Miller, noticed the growing Hispanic community and decided it was time for the college to respond. He hired the first bilingual employee at the college, Terry Bubb, assigned as an Advisor/Counselor in the Advising Center.

Bubb began to assess the status of college resources for Hispanics, and especially Spanish speakers. Determining that those resources were meager at best, he worked to establish a Spanish language web page and a Spanish language telephone answering system.

Bubb approached the Public Relations Office in the fall of 2005 and inquired about the possibility of Spanish language advertising for the college. That was the point at which this author first became involved in the Hispanic outreach effort. The author began a best practices review of Hispanic outreach at other colleges and universities across the country. It was quickly determined that Volunteer State Community College was not ready for Spanish language advertising, and more so that such advertising might not be the best way to reach Hispanics in Tennessee. The review of research did reveal many methods that have shown success. A research paper was put together with recommendations. In January of 2006 the Public Relations Office called a meeting to discuss Hispanic outreach. Public relations, retention, advising and admissions were all represented at the meeting.

The initial gathering brought forth many ideas. The brainstorming included suggestions for a community-wide Hispanic festival, college nights, an expanded Spanish language website, and Spanish language printed materials. The main focus, though, was on whether the college was ready to reach out to the Hispanic population. There was a realization that outreach wouldn't do much good if people became frustrated when trying to interact with college offices. It was also realized that big events might be too much for the college to tackle right away. One important consideration was making community contacts with local Hispanic groups and organizations.

Thus the college moved forward on two fronts: the internal preparation of the college to welcome the Hispanic community, and the search for external partners. Internal preparation

included expanding the Spanish language web page and making the Spanish language telephone line easier to use. The college also created the first Spanish language printed document, which was a general flyer about college programs and opportunities.

The Hispanic Outreach Group, as it became known, expanded rapidly to include other departments. Continuing education, academic affairs, and ESOL were all represented. ESOL was particularly interested, primarily because so many students seeking ESOL classes were Spanish speakers.

The Hispanic Outreach Group held meetings monthly and those came to include faculty and students. The students were the first direct link to the community. Only one or two students, at most, would show up to the meetings, but their insight was important. They helped college staff and faculty better determine needs in the community, and the best ways to reach the community. This proved important. It quickly became apparent that Sumner County, even with 3,884 Hispanic residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008) did not have any organized community groups or established leaders. Even the churches were relatively new to the Hispanic community, and often shared pastors between several congregations.

The college held its first Hispanic Family Night in February of 2007. Tables were set up in the library and eight college offices were represented. Spanish speaking translators volunteered to help the faculty and staff. Twenty-five people from the community attended. The number was a disappointment given the hundreds of flyers distributed, as well as the news releases and newspaper advertisements placed in area media. It was determined that the lack of a community partner was making Hispanic outreach tough. Conversations with students and attendees of the Family Night revealed that Hispanics didn't know much about the college at all

and that the effort to reach out was very much appreciated. It underscored a major challenge: many Hispanics in the county didn't even know the college existed. Those that did know about the college recognized it as a state institution, which made them wary of contact.

Nashville has a more established Hispanic community. Organizations and leadership developed there in the 1990's and now includes groups like the Nashville Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Tennessee Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Conexion Americas, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, and the YMCA Hispanic Achievers. Through these groups several recognizable leaders have developed. These are people sought out by the news media when covering Hispanic issues, and by politicians when seeking to integrate Hispanic planning into governmental decisions ([www.hispanicnashville.com](http://www.hispanicnashville.com)). While some of these organizations had contact with people in Sumner County, none of them had a presence in the county or any active efforts.

It became apparent that the college needed to look for alternative methods to connect with the community. Outreach to the churches was a problem due to the language barrier for some congregations, and the shared nature of Priest responsibilities at Catholic churches. There were basic trust issues as college representatives attempted to make contact. Volunteer State Community College was seen as a state institution with little available to help the Hispanic community.

A community group solves many of these problems. It is an opportunity to interact with the Hispanic community directly and build ambassadors who can help carry the college message to the rest of the population. Research has shown this to be important for colleges in other states (Torres & Marquez, 2005; Wainer, 2004). The Volunteer State Community College group

determined the only way to accomplish this type of activity was to start a community organization for Sumner County.

The idea from the beginning was to start an organization, help get the organization on its feet, and then turn the group over to the community. A meeting was held to discuss the idea in the summer of 2007. It was agreed that the college needed to take extra measures to build community support. The Sumner County Hispanic Alliance was formed, using the Hispanic Outreach Group as the first members.

The first meeting was less than dramatic. The event was publicized with a direct letter mailing to Hispanic business owners, and Spanish language posters distributed to local Hispanic stores, restaurants, and the Sumner County Health Department clinic. No one from the community attended. The second meeting was also a disappointment, with only college employees in attendance. At the third meeting the first community members showed up, 15 in total. The people attending were a cross section of the professional community: doctors, bankers, business owners, students and government workers. Moisés Caballero was a bank vice-president from Gallatin who found out about the meeting from a Spanish language message on the electronic sign in front of the college. He couldn't stay for the meeting, but promised to return. The next meeting brought in 20 people and Caballero did return. A former Floridian of Cuban descent, Caballero relayed experiences he had while working with some of the Nashville Hispanic organizations. He said he was excited about having a local group.

Caballero soon agreed to be the first Chairperson for the Sumner County Hispanic Alliance. He viewed the group as a way for Hispanic businesses to connect with each other and

the larger community. He also saw an opportunity for the organization to become a bridge between the Hispanic population and government.

The Alliance was developed as an open membership organization with no dues, fees or even formal application process. Anyone who showed up was considered a member and engaged to whatever degree they felt comfortable.

The connections in the community proved to be important in the college planning process. The next step for the college was to hold a major outdoor event. The festival idea had come up on several occasions, and was quickly pushed back because of the lack of community connections. With the new relationships formed, thanks to the Sumner Hispanic Alliance, the college set a date for the first Fall Fiesta.

College events up until this point had been purely educational in focus. The Fiesta was viewed as a celebration of Hispanic culture, designed to give the Hispanic population somewhere to gather and share food, music and fun. The Fiesta was seen as an opportunity to help educate the wider Sumner County population about Hispanic culture. Holding the event on college grounds was thought to be a way to show the college as a welcoming location.

The importance of the Sumner Hispanic Alliance to the college efforts could be seen in advertising the Fiesta. The college used the Alliance meetings as sounding boards to establish what the Fiesta should entail. This included ideas about food and entertainment. Alliance members, in a sense, became ambassadors for the Fiesta. This could be seen in the actions of Alliance members who worked as interpreters at the Sumner County Health Department. There are public health clinics in Gallatin and Hendersonville, and both locations bring in a substantial

number of Hispanic families. The interpreters took the charge to personally distribute flyers about the event to interested clients at the clinic. Most importantly, they communicated support. They told people that they could trust the college and that the college was interested in helping them. In an emerging immigrant population this type of message is critical (Sosa, 1997). It does not have nearly the same impact coming from college representatives. The interpreters were joined by physicians, court officers, social service workers and real estate agents who carried the same message to their Hispanic clients.

The formation of the Alliance interested some of the Nashville Hispanic organizations. Members of the Nashville Area Hispanic Chamber and YMCA Hispanic Achievers attended meetings. This helped to pull the Alliance into a larger network of Hispanic organizations.

Having a large community event gave Alliance members something they could participate in directly with the college. It provided a focal point for the Alliance, and for the college outreach efforts. College staff determined that such an event should have only minimal college recruiting activities. The real benefit was bringing Hispanics to campus and making them feel comfortable.

The Fiesta de otoño was held in September of 2007. It included a soccer tournament, live band, cultural dance, food, and kid's games. The need for Hispanics to better understand social services kept coming up. Thus many service agencies were contacted, both in Sumner County and Nashville. About a dozen staffed tables for the first Fiesta. They included the Sumner County Health Department, Boy Scouts, Hispanic organizations from Nashville, state health care representatives, domestic violence shelters, and adult education services.

The six hour Fiesta brought in an estimated 450 people, which was considered a success. All of the promotion highlighted the family nature of the event, and indeed entire families came and many stayed most of the day. There was a positive, and to a certain extent surprised, reaction from the attendees. They were surprised that the college cared enough to welcome them and positive about the chance to celebrate their culture in a large public event. The Fiesta became a focal point for the Hispanic community in Sumner County.

Moises Caballero and other members of the Alliance began meeting with civic leaders, including the mayor of Gallatin. The idea was to show government and business people that they now had a connection to the Hispanic community. There was a recognition that the Hispanic community was growing fast, but leaders seemed perplexed about how to reach the population.

In the meantime, the college outreach effort continued with an informational campaign to better educate the campus faculty and staff about needs of the Hispanic community. Sessions were held during professional development days held at the college. The college Spanish language printed materials grew to include specialty areas like ESOL and financial aid. Much of the campus effort, though, shifted to the Alliance during this time, as the group needed much help staying organized.

The Alliance continued to hold monthly meetings and attendance went back and forth from a few people one month to 20 or more the next. In February of 2008 the college held the second annual Hispanic Family Night and more than 100 people were estimated to be in attendance. The crowd overwhelmed the college staff to a certain extent, and while the mood stayed positive there was a realization that the college needed more Spanish language translators to meet the need. The attendance was viewed as an indication that word of mouth campaigns

were starting to pay off. A news release was issued about the event and radio and newspaper advertising secured. Yet, most people, when asked what brought them out, pointed to word of mouth. Much of this was accomplished by Alliance members giving Spanish language flyers to friends, family and colleagues. It was becoming clear that the Alliance was providing what the college outreach organizers had hoped: a direct connection to the Hispanic community. More so the Alliance was helping to build trust and relationships.

The Alliance formalized its organization during this time. A board of directors was set up, with specific positions and written job descriptions. The Alliance adopted a mission and value statement and started a web page. Meeting minutes were recorded and a bank account established. The initial funding for the Alliance was a voluntary donation of \$30 by each board member. The board felt that asking membership fees of regular members was not a good idea if the group still wished to attract people from all income levels.

A major setback faced the Alliance in the summer of 2008. Caballero made a sudden decision to return to Florida for family reasons. Luckily, reserve leadership had been developed. Cristina Frasier arrived in Tennessee just a year earlier. Also from Florida, she moved to Tennessee during the real estate boom to take advantage of the strong housing market and cheaper home prices. She became interested in the Alliance as a way to help her fledgling real estate business in the area. She says she soon found herself excited about the possibilities to help the Hispanic community. Caballero appointed Frasier as a vice-chairperson, and the two worked together on projects for several months. When his departure was announced Frasier quickly stepped into the leadership role. Frasier communicated that the Alliance would continue to move forward and subsequent meetings showed the membership supportive.

Frasier continued the visits with civic leaders, making personal calls and also inviting them to speak at Alliance meetings. The core group of the membership was still professionals in various fields and trades. It was recognized that more recent immigrants, people in lower income levels, and those with less education were still wary about attending. Frasier began to engage more community members in direct dialog. One idea was to hold the monthly board meetings at a different Hispanic restaurant in Sumner County each month. It would help to show the business community that the group cared about them, and make it easier for business owners to attend a meeting. This brought in new members, among them a woman who ran a small restaurant and did not speak any English. Up until this point the Alliance membership was primarily English speaking. The addition of Spanish only speakers brought translation to the meetings, which soon became a regular occurrence. The meetings were held in both Spanish and English.

The Alliance was very involved in the planning and carrying out of the 2008 Fall Fiesta at the college. Expanded activities included people cooking and sharing their favorite recipes from their home countries, and Hispanic themed story telling for kids. The event brought in 600 people.

The ESOL program began to see benefits from the outreach work. New Hispanic students came to the school as a direct result of outreach initiatives. This was especially noticeable at the Madison teaching location: a 21 percent increase in ESOL students in one year, with the bulk of the increase due to Hispanic enrollment. A Madison Hispanic Family Night created better contacts in the Madison area, primarily due to a partnership with the Madison Church of Christ Hispanic congregation, who helped to sponsor the event. The main campus in Gallatin experienced an increase as well. One of the decisions made regarding ESOL classes was that

there needed to be a better bridge between basic adult education and the college ESOL program. Adult education is provided in all Tennessee counties, and English literacy classes are a big part of those programs. The Statewide Tennessee Adult Education Office administers the federal funding and each county has a separate agency that runs adult education for that area. The free classes can bring foreign speakers from an educational level of no English proficiency to a level at which they could take GED high school classes ([www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/AE/](http://www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/AE/)). The jump from those classes to the college level ESOL classes was not only a leap in education, but also cost. While in-state residents would pay \$366 for a standard three credit ESOL class in spring of 2009, out of state students would have to pay \$1,338 for the same class ([www.volstate.edu/BusinessOffice/Fees/](http://www.volstate.edu/BusinessOffice/Fees/)). It was decided there needed to be a system for people to move into college level ESOL without experiencing the immediate cost increase. This could not be changed on the credit side, but it was determined that it could be accomplished through continuing education. This is one of the benefits of the cross-functional support team for Hispanic outreach at the college. Continuing education and ESOL were both represented at meetings and had regular discussions about issues facing Hispanic students. Dual listing is a college practice where students can take an academic course through the Division of Continuing Education. They essentially take a credit course, but without the credit. This allows new students to take ESOL classes for about the same cost as in-state tuition, as long as they are okay with not getting credit for the classes. It is hoped the students will be able to engage the college and then continue college courses, at whatever tuition rate they qualify for, without the initial sticker shock ([www.volstate.edu/ContinuingEd/](http://www.volstate.edu/ContinuingEd/)).

Cristina Frasier was hired as the first Hispanic Outreach Specialist at the college, on a part-time basis, in the summer of 2008. She worked as a bilingual bridge to help Spanish

speaking ESOL students go through the admissions and testing process. She also kept a contact list of Hispanics interested in the college, taken from calls to the Spanish language phone line and combined with contacts from the Family Nights and other events. The follow-up calls to these interested parties have become a critical part of the Volunteer State Community College outreach process. It allows parents to ask questions about their son or daughter attending college. It helps Spanish speakers get information they need to start the college process. Most importantly it gives Spanish speakers, and other Hispanics, a person to advocate for them and walk them through the often confusing college admissions, testing, advising, and registration process.

The Sumner County Hispanic Alliance has grown into more of a grass roots organization. One recent development is meetings held primarily in Spanish, with translation available for English only speakers. The result is that there is much more discussion at the meetings and that discussion tends to be less college focused and more community focused. The group continues to move forward as an independent organization, with help from the college Hispanic Outreach Group.

Budget cuts have become a reality at higher education institutions and these seem likely to have an impact on Hispanic outreach. This became a reality for the third annual Hispanic Family Night held at Volunteer State Community College in February of 2009. In the midst of a state budget shortfall and projected college funding cuts, the event was planned and held. The budget for the 2008 event was \$450. The budget for the 2009 event was scaled back to \$72. While this required more work on the part of college staff, and help from Hispanic Alliance volunteers, the 2009 Family Night brought in 75 people and was judged a success. This shows that outreach efforts can continue, even with a tight budget.

The college was just awarded a \$125,000 grant by the Tennessee Board of Regents to expand the Hispanic outreach effort. This will allow Volunteer State to hire a full time worker for three years and further institutionalize Hispanic outreach. Additional grants are being sought to expand the initiative into academic college preparation for Hispanic high school students.

From 2004-2008 the Hispanic enrollment at the college increased by 24.8 percent, still just 1.9 percent of the total student enrollment for fall semesters. It can be argued that the entire Hispanic population in the area increased greatly during the same time period, however anecdotal reports from those working directly with Hispanic students show that the outreach effort is bringing new students to the school. Perhaps more importantly the outreach effort is building a relationship with the Hispanic community that can grow in the coming years.

### Research Questions

The literature review and examination of outreach practices at colleges and universities across the country, combined with the experience at Volunteer State Community College, helped to provide a framework for developing research questions. The primary research questions for this thesis are: How are Tennessee colleges and universities reaching out to the Hispanic population? Are there ways for schools to improve those efforts? From these basic questions several specific, testable research questions were developed.

RQ1: What offices and departments are involved in the Hispanic outreach effort? Are those offices and the methods used different school to school?

RQ2: Do schools utilize an organized cross-functional approach?

RQ3: What is the role of public relations offices in Hispanic outreach efforts?

RQ4: Do Hispanic outreach efforts run into obstacles, and if so, which ones?

RQ5: Is there resistance on-campus or off-campus due to negative views of illegal immigration?

RQ6: Does the newly emerging status of Hispanic leadership in Tennessee present a major obstacle?

RQ7: Would Hispanic outreach coordinators like to see a more cohesive effort involving more offices on campus?

## Methods

Many ideas were considered to make decisions on how to collect the data to test these research questions. A computer based survey was considered. While it would have provided an easier method to collect data, it was feared that some of the most interesting information may not come up as part of regimented questions. College outreach can be accomplished in many different ways and with differing levels of success. To capture what is truly occurring at Tennessee colleges and universities it was determined an interview format would be best. The interview questions were developed from the primary research questions. Twenty-nine interview questions were formatted into a standardized interview protocol.

The schools were selected to provide a cross section of higher education institutions in the state including: public, private, large, small, and community college. Because of the nature of the study for-profit schools were not considered. Colleges and universities were chosen on the basis of size, type of school and location. An effort was made to choose schools from across the state, and of many different types and sizes. Four schools were contacted and declined to participate. A final group of seven colleges and universities was selected.

Interview subjects were chosen after a search of college websites and phone calls to college public relations (PR) staff. Public relations staff members have a wide range of knowledge about activities occurring on campus- in different departments, divisions and colleges. The names provided by the web search and the PR staff provided a starting place for research. The goal was to find the people most actively involved in Hispanic outreach at the college. Each interview subject was asked to list others involved in Hispanic outreach at the institution. In this way an effort was made to interview at least two or three of the main people involved in Hispanic outreach at each school. The research did not attempt to engage everyone involved in Hispanic outreach at each college. In all 21 interviews were conducted with college personnel. These interview subjects included faculty and staff. They were from several general college groupings including admissions, student services, diversity, adult education and public relations.

To gain a perspective outside the institution, efforts were made to contact Hispanic community groups that have been working with the colleges and universities in outreach. Five interviews were conducted with community group leaders. These interviews were conducted with a different protocol, although using questions related to the main protocol. The interviews were not scored with the college personnel data.

Because of the interview nature of contact, standard consent forms were collected from all interview subjects. While the questions asked are not of a personal nature, some of the answers could be construed as being critical of the college administration. For this reason the interview subject names were kept confidential. However, it was decided to use college and

university names in the college program section of the results. This was designed to help other researchers, and interested parties, contact the schools about a particular program.

The telephone interviews were conducted from June of 2008 to February of 2009. Three interviews were conducted in person, at the beginning of the research, until it was determined that in person interviews would not be feasible on a statewide basis. All used the same standard interview form.

A scoring sheet was developed based on the interview questions. The answers were tabulated, and the number of respondents to each question also tabulated. This is important because not all interview subjects answered every question. Some questions were beyond their area of knowledge. The final data is presented as a percentage of total respondents to each question.

## Results

All of the schools in the study reported having active Hispanic outreach efforts. Fifteen percent of the respondents said their school had been conducting Hispanic outreach for less than a year. Twenty-three percent reported one or two years, and 23 percent three to five years. The largest group, 38 percent, reported outreach for more than five years.

The reasons cited for starting Hispanic outreach ran from internal decisions to external factors. Respondents were allowed to pick multiple responses. Sixty-three percent stated the growth in population was the impetus for outreach, the largest response. Forty-four percent cited recruiting a diverse student body. Twenty-five percent said the impetus was faculty or staff led.

Thirteen percent answered that the effort was administration led; another 13 percent said it was part of a grant program. Thirteen percent said to assist the community, and 13 percent said it was the right thing to do.

Table 1

*What was the impetus for the Hispanic outreach effort?*

Answer	Percentage
Growth in population	63%
To recruit a diverse student body	44%
Faculty/staff lead	25%
Administration lead	13%
Grant program initiated	13%
The right thing to do	13%
To assist the community	13%
To deal with needs of Spanish speakers	6%
Part of strategic plan	6%

Note: Multiple-answer question

Some of the interview respondents expressed frustration at the lack of action in Hispanic outreach and said the impetus for college involvement was partially a personal effort.

One respondent said: "It's part of my culture. It bothers me (that not more is being done)...we noticed an increase in the population."

Another said: “Just tired of waiting for other people to do it. People don’t see the urgency. I felt that even though the population is small, it is growing and we should be doing better.”

Some subjects pointed to business realities: “The population is still a relatively small percentage...graduation rates for Hispanics are low and the expression of interest in going to college is low. They look at a cost versus return benefit. There is lots of lost potential. Trying to solve these issues is what we are exploring now.”

For some, the population trends have been a topic of conversation, but without college action until recently. “Let’s get a comprehensive plan” said an interview subject. “...to get everyone involved, after three years of it going nowhere.”

A few schools said that Hispanic outreach helped to fulfill university goals. “We want to recruit diversity,” said a subject. “It’s part of our strategic plan. We have a theme of preparing students for the world. That’s what we want to do with our student body. We’re committed to recruiting a diverse freshman class.” The diversity theme came up at all of the larger schools in the study.

Only six percent of interview subjects said the Hispanic outreach effort was necessary to respond to the needs of Spanish language speakers, perhaps reflecting the fact that the majority of schools in this study were four year institutions, which are less likely to have active ESOL programs.

Subjects were questioned about which offices and departments are involved in the Hispanic outreach efforts. Admissions/enrollment management was the top group, with 58

percent. The next largest groups in the multiple choice answer were academic programs and student groups with 53 percent each. Faculty came in at 47 percent, tied with student services. Diversity and multi-cultural affairs garnered 26 percent. Adult education was cited by 16 percent of respondents and development by 11 percent.

Table 2

*Who on campus is involved in the Hispanic outreach effort?*

Answer	Percentage
Admissions/Enrollment management	58%
Academic programs/colleges	53%
Student groups	53%
Student Services	47%
Faculty	47%
Diversity/Multi-Cultural Affairs	26%
Adult Education	16%
Foundation	11%
Public Relations	5%
Continuing Education	5%
Human Resources	5%
Neighborhood Relations	5%
Upper Administration	5%

Note: Multiple-answer question

The question of which offices or departments are involved in Hispanic outreach was asked separately from questions about public relations involvement, and it may be a more telling result. The question appeared near the top of the interview and asked: "Who else is involved in Hispanic outreach at the school?" Public relations was cited by only five percent of interview subjects. Compared to the public relations specific questions, which will be discussed later, this seems to show that public relations involvement is secondary and not usually considered direct involvement. Neighborhood relations, upper administration, human resources, and continuing education also received just five percent in the affirmative for the question.

Fifty-eight percent of the interview subjects stated that the college administration had been very supportive of the outreach efforts. Forty-two percent registered somewhat supportive and zero answered not supportive.

"They are very active and very aware," said a respondent. "The president of the college comes to open houses..." another replied: "(They are) 100 percent behind it. Absolutely. The faculty are even more powerful demanders of it (a diverse student body)."

Only one subject expressed concern over the level of administration involvement: "It's hard to say. Supportive to an extent. Not antagonistic. Momentum will start to pick-up. I don't think people will be non-supportive. People just don't know what to do."

While confidentiality was brought up at the beginning of each interview it seems possible that the answers to administration involvement could be primarily positive due to concern that administration officials could see such responses.

Financial support rankings face the same issue of confidentiality. Sixty-four percent of respondents report modest financial support for Hispanic outreach, while 21 percent say the efforts are well supported financially, and 14 percent say there is no financial support. Money issues are hard to define because of the number of ways that Hispanic outreach can be funded. At some institutions it is part of the diversity budget, and at others part of the admissions recruiting program. Several schools, though, have funded the efforts through academic departments, such as foreign languages. Fifty-four percent said that there was no specialized budget specifically for Hispanic outreach while 46 percent said there were earmarked funds.

Sixty-five percent of respondents say there is no organized group or meetings for those involved in the Hispanic outreach effort. Thirty-five percent said there was an organized effort. For those who answered in the affirmative, 71 percent said the type of group meeting was Hispanic specific, 43 percent said it was part of a diversity or multi-cultural committee, and 14 percent said part of student group meetings. Multiple answers were allowed. In terms of how often those groups would meet, 50 percent said monthly, 33 percent said occasionally and 17 percent weekly.

“Our main way of meeting is with the diversity committee that meets once a month,” said one subject. “...involves many offices on campus, including academic affairs and student services.”

“There was a regular group that met every two to three months,” one woman said. “That group is not meeting on a regular basis. More sporadic now. Many have retired.”

Others expressed a different approach: “Everyone works in their own little world.”

The issue of regular meetings seemed more important for schools just starting efforts and less important for those with established activities. Those starting efforts were also more likely to report that active efforts were made to bring other offices and departments into the discussion. The schools with ongoing activities reported meeting less frequently and primarily to plan a specific event. In a breakdown of communications techniques, 58 percent reported meetings as the primary method of communication between people on campus involved in Hispanic outreach. Twenty-six percent said e-mail was the primary method and 16 percent stated that there was no regular communication between people involved in Hispanic outreach.

Public relations involvement in the outreach effort points to the view of outreach as a communication issue, versus just an organizational function of admissions or student services. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents said PR was involved in Hispanic outreach while 22 percent said PR was not involved. Seventy-nine percent of the yes group said that PR was somewhat involved, while 21 percent said very involved.

“(They are) very involved. They promote our events, do news releases for events, print posters for events and design brochures...” said one faculty member.

Several schools answered that public relations staff responded when needed, but were not part of the active planning process: “They stay pretty much on top of what we do,” said a subject. “We inform them and they take action for press releases. They don’t initiate.”

One faculty member said: “I handle my own publicity.”

Others didn’t have much contact with public relations: “I can’t say for sure,” answered a subject from a larger institution.

“Very little. We are not asked to do anything specific to the Hispanic population,” said one public relations respondent.

One question focused on obstacles faced by the school and organizers in Hispanic outreach efforts. Language barriers were cited by 27 percent of respondents as an obstacle, the highest ranking for answers in this multiple answer question.

“Very few English speakers at (attending) events, so not enough Spanish speakers,” one woman said. “Some bilingual people are on the staff at the college, but very few at our festival.”

“We need Spanish language (printed) materials and a Spanish language phone answering system...” said one respondent.

“It’s hard to reach the Hispanic community...it takes a lot of work to get the community engaged,” said another.

Twenty percent said higher institutional priorities for other issues were an obstacle for Hispanic outreach. One subject responded by noting how the effort is not known on campus: “Not being on the radar.”

Thirteen percent cited lack of funding as an obstacle, and 27 percent said budget cuts or economic issues were a problem. This obstacle may not be fairly represented in this research, due to the unique nature of the current economic downturn facing the world economy. Interviews for this project began in summer of 2008, at a time when economic issues were not perceived as a crisis, and higher education budgets were not generally in turmoil. By the fall of 2008 budget

issues and funding problems came up more often. By the final set of interviews, in the winter of 2009, budget issues were mentioned often.

“With the budget cuts we’ve seen we’re even having trouble paying the lease (on an outreach site),” said one staff member.

Table 3  
*What obstacles have you run into?*

Answer	Percentage
Language barriers	27%
Budget cuts/economic conditions	27%
Higher priorities	20%
Lack of funding	13%
Campus resistance	7%
Off-campus resistance	7%
Low high school graduation rates	7%
Families not ready for college	7%
Not much Spanish language printed material	7%
Tough to get outside people onto campus	7%
Hispanics afraid to go out	7%
Concern about immigration raids	7%
Tough to get Hispanic students to want to move to Nashville	

Note: Multiple-answer question

One research question for the study focused on the immigration debate as it relates to public and college perception of the Hispanic outreach effort. Only seven percent of respondents

reported campus resistance to such efforts and only seven percent off campus resistance. All of the answers in the affirmative stress the minor nature of such resistance.

“There are some people in the state with a conservative view and not happy with programs that target one group,” said one respondent. “There are critics out there...but way more support than critics.”

“Participation by the Hispanic community gets hampered because of worries about immigration,” said a faculty member. “At a recent conference attendance was down, that may be because illegal immigration is getting attention, afraid to go out and do things where it can be a risk.”

The final set of questions in the interview related to cross-functional support. This term was described for the interview subjects. They were asked whether they would like to see more offices and departments involved in the Hispanic outreach initiative at their school. Eighty-five percent said yes and 15 percent no.

“I think it would bring some formality to the process and help engage new folks,” one man said. “We may attract more attention. Right now we just each do our own little thing.”

“Yes, I think to be more successful you have to get more folks involved,” one subject answered. “Some don’t see the need.”

One respondent replied: “Yes, I think we are getting there.”

“We already do it well. Everyone responds. They come through and help,” said a faculty member. “If we need to do something specific I call a meeting and everyone responds.”

Within the yes group there was a sub-question as to whether they thought such a cross-functional approach to Hispanic outreach would ever happen at their school. Sixty-three percent said it was unlikely and 38 percent said it was likely. In terms of the reason why it was not likely, 38 percent responded that people on campus were too busy, and 25 percent said it was not a high priority for other offices and departments.

### *Community Group Involvement*

The importance of community groups to Hispanic outreach initiatives is cited in many studies (Clark & Dorris, 2007; Gandara, 2004; Torres & Marquez, 2005; Vargas, 2004). Sixty-nine percent of interview subjects described their connections with Hispanic community groups as very good. Twenty-three percent said they experienced moderate success and just eight percent said contact was not so good.

“They have been wonderful and they are very excited about the university getting more involved,” one university staff member said in reference to a local community group.

Hispanic community organizations in the study are primarily lead by churches or closely connected to churches. “We’ve been working with the churches well,” said one college staff member. Other subjects had issues reaching community leaders: “It is difficult getting in touch with some of them...they may have an office, but not answer the phone.”

Six Hispanic community groups were contacted as part of the research and five agreed to do interviews. The groups were all located in larger metropolitan areas and have been in

existence for at least several years. They offer a unique perspective into how colleges and universities are perceived in their outreach efforts by the community.

One community group reaches out to colleges, saying that: "They are very timid. They want to make sure they have complete information before they act. We have had some schools that have balked." The same group remarks that a couple of colleges had personnel who made reference to illegal immigrants, in a way that made the community member feel that the college employee considered most Hispanic people to be illegal immigrants. However, those were the only negative contacts reported by the community group respondents.

Many of the groups stressed the importance of making Hispanics feel welcome on campus. The relationship between Hispanic community groups and colleges and universities in the study was characterized mainly as positive, but with hopes for future growth.

"They are doing what they have to do. I think they are doing all they can do," said one community organizer. "I'd like to see more scholarships."

"It's been steady and increased," one subject replied, in regards to a question about whether Hispanic outreach was increasing.

"When the number of (Hispanic) high school students started to grow, the colleges started to ask 'what are we going to do here'," a respondent said.

At one university Hispanic community members are part of a committee that works directly with the admissions office on Hispanic outreach projects. Regular meetings include discussion of everything from recruiting events to publications.

Often community group participation on campus is event oriented. A number of the community groups work with colleges on Hispanic festivals, awards dinners, speakers, and musical events. One group works directly with students on campus in a regularly scheduled and well-promoted discussion of Hispanic issues. These open forums attract up to 30 students, including many who are not Hispanic. "It's a tremendous dialogue," said an organizer. "We have great discussions."

Two of the community organizations said colleges and universities were trying to build a more diverse student population.

"It's amazing to see that colleges have an interest in these communities, they want to know why they don't have more Hispanic students," one man said.

"The process is harder for Hispanic students who work with schools directly," said one community group member. "They have to jump through hoops on their end...students get burned out and disillusioned."

One leader mentioned that in his city the colleges and universities had only begun an effort to reach out to the Hispanic community. Several groups stressed that the best way to reach the Hispanic community was by educating parents on the importance of college and how students could access college. All of the groups said that the colleges and universities could be doing more in Hispanic outreach. "Definitely they could be doing more...more with the 15 Hispanic churches in the area," a community leader said.

"The most important thing right now is scholarships," a respondent said. "Sometime they (students) don't get enough assistance to successfully finish four years."

Leaders of the groups say they are trying to get the word out to the Hispanic community about the importance of education. They would like the colleges to create a more welcome atmosphere on campus for Hispanic students. "It's already hard enough for students," said one respondent. "They will do better at a school with a Hispanic focus...students are coming from high schools where they are not the focus. All it takes is one college person to be rude and the student is not interested in going there. They are choosing the colleges that are the warmest."

The relationships between community groups and colleges range from new and tentative, to long established. The most robust relationships include some form of regular meeting. In one city this comes in the form of a community wide monthly meeting of many different social service and educational groups who serve the Hispanic community. It is, in a sense, the cross-functional team for an entire city. The meeting gives college Hispanic outreach staff regular access to community groups and civic leaders. One community group mentioned that they used to have regular meetings, which had faded recently. Another community group was excited that the university was beginning to make an organized Hispanic outreach effort.

### *College Events and Programs*

The programs and events that Tennessee colleges and universities use for Hispanic outreach run from festivals to civics education. Research results show that 88 percent of respondents hold events on campus, and 41 percent events off campus, in this multiple choice answer. Education events were cited by 53 percent of subjects, and recruitment specific events by 47 percent.

Table 4

*What do you do for Hispanic outreach at your school?*

Answer	Percentage
Events on campus	88%
Partner with community groups	70%
Hispanic student groups	59%
Educational events	53%
Hispanic specific recruiting	47%
Events off campus	41%
Recruitment events	41%
Fairs and festivals	41%
Spanish language advertising	35%
Spanish language printed materials	29%
Spanish language news releases	29%
Hispanic community civics education	24%
ESOL	18%
Awards or dinners	18%
Mentor students	6%

Note: Multiple-answer question

Fairs and festivals are a traditional way to reach out to the community. Forty-one percent of the interview subjects cited these activities. The way those events are held, though, is different school to school. At Belmont University the Latin Street Fair is in its fourth year. The free festival has been held next to campus. It is seen as a cultural and fun event rather than a recruiting or educational event. The goal is to show the Belmont commitment to the Hispanic community in a broad sense, without an emphasis on direct engagement. In contrast Roane State

Community College held a series of festivals on four of the college campuses. While fun cultural events were part of the mix, the focus was on providing college information for Hispanics. College staff also collected a data base of contact information, so they could follow up with interested parties. The Roane State example is very much funding dependent. The festivals came about due to a Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Access and Diversity grant. Funding for future festivals may be in question, as organizers seek out new possibilities. The Belmont Street Fair is funded almost entirely by corporate and community support, as solicited by the faculty organizer. The University operates primarily in a support role for public relations and advertising of the event.

Seventy percent of respondents say they partner with local Hispanic community groups. This can be seen even in the newest of Hispanic outreach efforts. Organizers at the University of Memphis have been breathing new life into a Hispanic outreach effort that began eight years ago, and part of that effort is engaging the group Latino Memphis. A Hispanic Heritage Month dinner brought 200 people to campus and the college covered much of the expense. Activities with community groups can define outreach efforts, which can then provide better stimulus for a cross- functional approach on campus. The University of Memphis recently started an enrollment management group specifically tasked with Hispanic recruiting. The relationship with Latino Memphis is seen as a strong way to promote the campus effort in the community.

Fifty-nine percent of interview subjects cited college Hispanic student groups as being part of the overall Hispanic outreach effort. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville is a good example of this approach. The Office of Undergraduate Admissions works closely on events with the Lambda Theta Alpha sorority and Lambda Theta Phi fraternity. Those activities include

an overnight program on campus for Hispanic high school students. Spring Fling, as it is called, is designed to not only introduce Hispanic high school students to the U-T campus, but also have them interact with Hispanic college students, as a form of information and mentorship. Hispanic role models for high school students are important and role models of a similar age may be some of the best examples (Zalaquett & Feliciano, 2004).

At Vanderbilt University the Vanderbilt Association of Hispanic Students helps to define Hispanic outreach, which operates in a different way from the state universities and community colleges. The students hold an event called Café Con Leche featuring dance and spoken word poetry. They bring in special speakers, including a speech by CNN anchor Soledad O'Brien. Vanderbilt works to build a strong student community, but when it comes to recruitment the focus is on building a diverse student body, not necessarily trying to educate the Hispanic community about college possibilities. This reflects the highly selective nature of Vanderbilt admissions. The mission is to reach the top performing students of all types, with an effort to make sure many different minority and cultural groups are represented. Vanderbilt partners with a group called the Posse Foundation to identify and recruit high achieving minority students. The students who decide to attend the university do so as a group, thus the meaning of the name Posse. Vanderbilt staff members say many Hispanic students at Vanderbilt participate in the program.

Austin Peay State University gets a significant influx of Hispanic students due in part to its close proximity to Fort Campbell, according to student services staff. This has made Hispanic student engagement on campus a priority. The Hispanic Cultural Center is the centerpiece for this effort. It was established three years ago as a response to retention issues at the college. The

center has a room in the campus center, featuring computers, TV and Spanish language magazines. Faculty members report that about 20 students a day use the facility, and that it provides a gathering place for Hispanic cultural efforts. The center sponsors national speakers, such as Jaime Escalante. The Sigma Delta Pi national Hispanic honors society partners in many of the Cultural Center events and programs. Another program sponsored by the group provides mentoring for Hispanic students.

The Austin Peay Hispanic Cultural Center connects the university to HOPE of Clarksville, a long running Hispanic community group. The events on campus are open to the public, thus providing a way to engage the larger community while responding to the needs of current students.

The universities in this study had an emphasis on current student engagement, and Hispanic recruiting, while the community colleges were involved in grass roots educational efforts. This tends to put the community colleges in more contact with people outside of the usual college spectrum. Nowhere is this more apparent than at Chattanooga State Technical Community College. In 2001 the college hired a Hispanic Outreach Coordinator to help serve the business community. Spanish classes were provided for clients such as hospitals, banks and the local builders association. In 2003 the Outreach Coordinator became aware of a program called Plaza Comunitaria. It's funded in part by the Mexican consulate in the United States as a way to provide basic educational opportunities to the Spanish speaking population. It addresses a concern that goes well beyond college issues, and even beyond issues of English language learning. The program seeks to serve people who are illiterate and untrained, or have very low educational levels, in Spanish and math. The idea is that helping people acquire basic skill levels

in reading and writing Spanish will prepare them for English learning. The entire Mexican educational system is accessible online and the Plaza model provides access and support for anyone who wants to take the programs. Chattanooga State runs its Plaza program out of a local community resources building located in a Hispanic neighborhood. A computer room provides access to the Plaza online curriculum. Mentors and tutors provide extra support. Plaza is a partnership between the Humanities Department at Chattanooga State and the county Adult Education program, which is also run by the college. It is hoped that the Plaza students can move through Plaza, into adult education English and GED classes, and eventually into the college ESOL program. The ultimate goal would be to have Plaza students enter into the academic programs at the college. This is still a work in progress, and it underscores the long term commitment of such an intensive effort. Plaza Comunitaria answers a need critical to the new immigrant population in Tennessee. College outreach for secondary school students is one thing. It is quite another to take on the challenge of helping people who are illiterate even in Spanish. It shows the wide range of issues in Hispanic outreach. Recent immigrants can have an educational level ranging from a first grade education to graduate degrees.

Using the Plaza as a starting point Chattanooga State faculty and staff have undertaken a number of events, including Hispanic themed medical fairs and visits by the Guatemalan Consulate for document support. The Plaza has strong roots in the community thanks to close work with La Paz de Dios. Monthly meetings organized by La Paz bring together college staff and social services groups from across the county. These long-running lunch meetings are a level of community connection not seen in any other city or county evaluated in this study.

Hispanic civics education was cited by 24 percent of college respondents in the study as an activity in which they participate. It can be seen in several innovative programs at Belmont University. The school offers business classes for Hispanic entrepreneurs. Students are involved in many of the projects. A notable enterprise was conducted by the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) program. They did research, planning and execution of a business plan for a fair trade organic coffee brand, in partnership with the community group Conexion Americas. The new business was then handed over to Hispanic entrepreneurs from the community. The Belmont campus is the site for a yearly workshop for immigrants that teach life skills including how to integrate better into the community and be successful as part of the larger Nashville community.

While many Tennessee Hispanic outreach efforts start with college or university actions, there is one different approach occurring in Nashville. The YMCA Hispanic Achievers program actively reaches out to higher education institutions to establish scholarships, college fairs and mentoring programs specifically for Hispanic high school students. Hispanic Achievers currently works with six Nashville area colleges and universities, and the group is developing new relationships with two others. The Hispanic Achievers model brings in area businesses as active partners in the college outreach process. Career programs, business tours and leadership development help to give students a wider approach to high education, where the potential outcomes of career can be part of the college planning process.

Only six percent of interview subjects who answered the question cited student based mentoring as a Hispanic outreach activity. The low response may simply be a product of such activities occurring on campus, but unknown to the interview subject. However, it does also point to the possibility that Hispanic outreach in Tennessee is very much recruitment and

community oriented, and not as focused on college academic preparation programs. That is not to say that such programs do not exist in Tennessee, but it does appear that they are far fewer in number than in states with a larger and more established Hispanic population.

## Discussion

All of the Tennessee colleges and universities contacted, even if they did not end up participating in this study, have some active form of Hispanic outreach. The results show that the methods and techniques vary from school to school, as does the reason for the outreach. This makes sense given the different missions of each institution. The large selective university has a different mission than the community college. Five of the seven schools had outreach efforts directed by program “champions” in a style similar to those referred to by Torres and Marquez (2005). Two of the schools had more institutional approaches tied to several departments.

RQ1: What offices and departments are involved in the Hispanic outreach effort? Are those offices and the methods used different school to school? Thirteen different offices or departments were cited as participating in Hispanic outreach in the study. This shows that Hispanic outreach does not begin in any one type of department or office from school to school, and it comes about for a variety of reasons and needs.

RQ2: Do schools utilize an organized cross-functional approach? The results show that most schools do not utilize a cross-functional approach. The number of different offices or departments participating in outreach were tabulated by school and then compared to the reported degree of communication between those units. From these results schools were ranked from low cross-functional to strong cross-functional. Three schools rated low and two schools

rated in the medium category. Only two schools showed a strong cross-functional approach in terms of regular communication and structure.

RQ3: What is the role of public relations offices in Hispanic outreach efforts? Seventy-nine percent of respondents said that PR offices were “somewhat involved” in Hispanic outreach efforts, and 21 percent said “very involved.” This would seem to show a high level of involvement by PR offices. However, a closer examination of the interview responses show that most schools view PR as a group to be brought in for specific needs, usually related to news releases, advertising and design work. Only one of the schools in the study reported that PR staff were included as part of the planning process.

RQ4: Do Hispanic outreach efforts run into obstacles, and if so, which ones? It was not surprising that respondents reported that they do run into obstacles. What is interesting is the wide array of obstacles. While language barriers topped the list, obstacles cited included Hispanics afraid to go out to public events, families not prepared for college, low high school graduation rates, and concern about immigration raids. These answers reflect many of the larger challenges in the Hispanic community today. They also show how tough Hispanic outreach can be for colleges and universities. It isn’t simply a matter of marketing and public relations; there are an array of needs and problems to be addressed by schools, and for some institutions this can seem overwhelming.

Budget cuts were also at the top of the list for obstacles. This reflects the impact of the economic crisis on state colleges and universities and to a lesser, but still significant, extent to private schools. It seems likely that if all respondents were interviewed during the spring of 2009 the percentage reporting budget issues as an obstacle would be higher. Budget issues present

some real challenges for Hispanic outreach in Tennessee. If outreach is considered to be outside of the scope of necessary college functions, entire outreach efforts may be subject to budget cuts or even elimination. Follow-up research in this area could be important in the coming months and years. This goes to the method of Hispanic outreach and how much money the effort requires. It is also a question of personnel and the time they have to work on such efforts. Not all activities and events require a great deal of money.

RQ5: Is there resistance on-campus or off-campus due to negative views of illegal immigration? None of the schools reported any significant opposition to Hispanic outreach efforts on campus. Opposition from the outside community was also shown to be minimal to the point of being not significant. Immigration has become a hot topic at times in the news media and political areas. Often this comes out as generalized hostility to the Hispanic community (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006). A few of the college employees interviewed did expect some sort of backlash from the community for supporting Hispanic outreach activities and found none. Whether the educational nature of the outreach ameliorates any hostile reaction, either on campus or off, cannot be known from this study. However, it would provide an interesting topic for future research.

RQ6: Does the newly emerging status of Hispanic leadership in Tennessee present a major obstacle? This was not found to be a problem for the study schools. In each community studied there are active community groups and working partnerships. However, the study did focus on schools in the major urban areas of Tennessee. A study of rural schools could show this to be bigger issue. The one rural based school in the study reported significant issues in finding community partners. The value of community group relationships is clear. They can help provide

support to get grants and funding. They can connect the college to other Hispanic organizations. They can provide translation of printed materials and interpreting at Hispanic events. Most importantly, the members and leaders of the organization can become ambassadors for the college, reaching out to the Hispanic community to let them know what the college or university can offer. This helps to build trust. Surveys have shown that word of mouth is quite important for Hispanic purchasing decisions (Wentz, 2008). People need to hear from their family and friends about college opportunities. This will build a bridge and perhaps encourage them to visit campus and start a dialog with college faculty and staff.

RQ7: Would Hispanic outreach coordinators like to see a more cohesive effort involving more offices on campus? Eighty-five percent responded yes to this question, but as mentioned by several respondents, it's an easy question to answer yes. The hard work of establishing such a cross-functional effort is the real challenge. Only eight respondents answered the question about how likely it is for a more cohesive effort to happen and 63 percent of those said it is unlikely. The reasons cited for cross-functional efforts not occurring included people being too busy, Hispanic outreach not being a high priority, and funding issues.

The danger of a silo mentality in Hispanic outreach is clear: if the efforts are coordinated by only a couple of people on the campus, career changes or work responsibilities have the distinct possibility of ending those Hispanic outreach efforts. Cross-functional support means buy-in from a larger group of people, and a cross section of the campus. It is a means by which Hispanic outreach can be institutionalized and have a lasting impact.

The issue of public relations involvement seems worthy of more discussion from a communications perspective. The results show that public relations staff members are involved

in Hispanic outreach, but usually not in the planning process of outreach, or part of an organized long-term effort. The interviews reveal that public relations is viewed as a tool based office, to be used to help achieve publicity through the use of advertising, media relations and graphic design.

Perhaps the larger question is how outreach should be viewed. Is it a matter primarily for admissions and student services, or is it a wider reaching process that includes the fundamentals of communication? I argue that outreach is a communications issue and public relations needs to be better integrated into the planning of outreach, of any type and to reach any group. Most would agree that the essence of public relations is communication. However, some of the same people would not view outreach as a communication activity. Perhaps it would help to take a look at the fundamental elements of communication and see how they apply to outreach.

I argue that community outreach for an organization is a form of communication carried out with a multitude of strategies and techniques. It involves the classic elements of communication theory. The Lasswell (1948) model is a foundation for early verbal communication theory. The basic approach is broken into five segments: (1) who, (2) says what, (3) in which channel, (4) to whom, and (5) with what effect. This simple construction allows the model to be used in many circumstances. It applies to the fundamentals of higher education outreach in that colleges and universities are trying to communicate, a specific message, using various media and methods, to Hispanic students and families, hopefully with the effect of encouraging Hispanic students to attend college. Critics of Lasswell argue that the simple model needs a specific communicator and a specific message (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 49). In terms of college outreach these conditions would be met, and are in fact quite important for the process. Outreach is entirely about specific messages from a specific group. The goal is to

influence a change in perception, and a change in action. Outreach is goal oriented and narrow in scope, fitting well into the Lasswell model.

The Shannon Mathematical Model was established in 1948 for engineering purposes, but had wide-reaching implications for communication theory, thanks to colleague Warren Weaver, who described it in wider communication terms as being general, fundamental and of classic simplicity and power in results (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 25).

Shannon and Weaver (1949) worked together to provide both extrapolations of the model and a context for use in a wide array of communication methods. They presented a schematic diagram to show the functions of source, transmitter, signal, receiver and destination. This basic model grew to include three other important subjects of discussion: noise, the encoder and the decoder.

The encoder and decoder concepts were based on engineering needs. For any signal there needs to be a mechanism to turn the signal into a message that humans can comprehend. Weaver enlarged the context by adding the “semantic characteristics of a message” (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 4). Semantic characteristics provide for an interpretation of meaning as compared to intended meaning. The encoder has to make sure the message is designed properly to overcome semantic noise, the differences that can take place between sources and receivers.

In the Hispanic outreach context, the concept of noise could describe everything from the deluge of media reaching teenagers today, to the confusion caused by cultural differences. The idea of encoder and decoder from a communication consideration helps to describe not only who

is putting together messages, but how they do so. On the other end, it helps to describe how that message will be received, and most importantly perceived.

Berlo (1960) took elements of the Shannon and Weaver model and expanded them for a new communication approach. He provided a model that is quite applicable to the Hispanic outreach process today. The six steps include: source, encoder, message, channel, decoder and receiver. Expansion of the encoder and decoder concept is important for this discussion because it fleshes out the Shannon and Weaver formulation of the message, and the process that takes place when the receiver goes to interpret that message. The encoder stage could be conducted by anyone involved in the Hispanic outreach effort, including admissions advisors, diversity coordinators and public relations staff. Berlo calls this “expressing the source’s purpose” and explains that it can include everything from human ambassadors bringing the message from the source to receivers, to printed documents and advertising (Berlo, 1960, p. 30). This is quite important for the Hispanic outreach context. Encoding the message properly is critical for the message to be decoded in the way intended. Perhaps the message should be in Spanish? Or it could require cultural cues, such as references to family. Encoding the message properly takes careful consideration and refined technique.

The decoding takes place when the receiver takes in the message. Here the work of the college encoder is brought to bear. If the language is not understood, or the message is perceived to be for an Anglo audience, and not a Hispanic audience, the message could be misunderstood or ignored. Berlo (1960, p. 32) mentions sensory skills as the most basic decoder, but in his wide ranging approach cultural cues and the immigration status of the receiver could be considered important decoders for a Hispanic outreach message.

The Berlo model also takes into account the nature of the sources and receivers as an integral part of the communication methods. Colleges have a message for students and their families. That message comes about as a result of the attitudes, culture and social system of the campus and the college employees. The content of the message is critical to engage the students and families. Choosing the right channel is important to make sure the message is presented in a way the receiver wants to approach it. The receiver relies on, quite possibly, a very different set of attitudes, culture and communication skills to decode the message. The end result, the decoding of the message, is impacted by the culture, social system, attitudes and knowledge of the student or family member. It isn't just a matter of colleges and universities wanting to reach students and families. They have to carefully craft an appropriate message, and take into account the culture and background of the intended receiver. These are essential parts of the higher education outreach process.

Outreach is more than just communication. It is also the process of attempting to get a person to do something, or persuasion. Many outreach techniques are based on the work of Ajzen & Fishbein (1970). The Theory of Reasoned Action model says that behavior is a function of attitude towards performing that behavior, and the perception of the norms of that behavior, and the individual motivation to accept those norms. While this model is used in social psychology, it is the foundation of many marketing approaches. It also applies to the higher education outreach process. Outreach is an effort to change behavior and persuade someone to do something. Colleges and universities are trying to get high school students to enroll in college. They must change not only the behavior of the student, but work in the context of subjective norms, especially concerning interaction with friends and family. Many of the same elements apply in outreach to parents and relatives.

The communication function of outreach makes it possible to view outreach from an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) perspective. This can, in turn, help with organizational issues inside higher education institutions. Some may question whether a marketing based approach can be used for community outreach. Shimp (2003) defines IMC as a communications process, with the goal of influencing, or directly affecting the behavior of the audience. The delivery channels are an important part of IMC decision making, according to Shimp, who says that communicators need to make “use of all communications methods that are relevant customers/prospects and to which they might be receptive.” Shimp argues that relationship building is the “key” to modern marketing and IMC is the way relationships are built (Shimp, 2003, pp. 8-11).

Once again, the terminology might concern some people. They may question if Hispanic students and families should be considered customers or prospects. However, it seems any concern is based more on questioned motives than terminology. If college outreach efforts are only concerned with selling the college, and meeting recruitment goals, then critics may have legitimate grievances with such an approach. If the techniques and fundamental principles of IMC are used to promote education about college, enrollment in college, and ultimately success in college, then those critics may be quieted.

The most important aspects of IMC would seem to apply to any community outreach effort, no matter what the motives or intentions. IMC is listening based, focusing first on the customer, figuring out needs, and then designing messages to reach those customers. IMC is a customer-centric process (Duncan, 2005, p. 33).

In an outreach model this includes one-on-one counseling, workshops, meetings and events. This is often supported through a variety of media, including news releases, flyers, advertising, and word of mouth. One big change in the IMC view of marketing is the action to reduce dependence on traditional mass media advertising. Outreach is based on a new model that incorporates personal relationships and contact into the communications model. Word of mouth is important in Hispanic decision making. A survey of Hispanics in 2008 found that word of mouth was cited as the primary influencer in product purchase decisions by 24 percent of those polled. TV followed with 23 percent, the internet with 14 percent and print media came in at less than four percent (Wentz, 2008). This may present even more of an issue in Tennessee where the Spanish language media is less established. Highly targeted methods such as flyers, direct mail, e-mail and direct contact provide more coverage with less cost. Most importantly they can support word of mouth efforts and promote trust through relationship building. Colleges attempt to create a message so relevant and interesting that others take it forward and pass it on to friends and family.

Trust is an important part of the Hispanic outreach effort and trust comes out of relationships. It can be as general as the relationship between the Hispanic community and the college, or as specific as the relationship between a college outreach counselor and a high school student. Building brand loyalty is one of the favorable outcomes for a successful IMC plan (Shimp, 2003, p. 10). Building loyalty with the Hispanic community is important for colleges and universities.

In the end IMC seeks to affect behavior. That same goal is basic to the college outreach effort. College personnel work to make parents and students more aware of the importance of

higher education and the college process. The ultimate goal is to have Hispanic students enroll in college and have success. Success may seem like an afterthought in a marketing approach, but Shimp stresses that brand loyalty depends, in large part, on experience and how that experience is then communicated to others by the customer (Shimp, 2003, p. 10). If Hispanic students enroll in a college and do not have the support they need to succeed, word of that poor experience will quickly travel back to the Hispanic community.

IMC techniques make sense when public relations is viewed as interpersonal and part of community building. Proponents of this approach cite the growing diversity of the population and the need to respond in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment (Neff, 1994). Monitoring is the act of listening to the community to evaluate needs and responses to those needs. Neff (1994) shows this in one context as trying to understand other cultures and using diversity based approaches to engage those cultures.

In the world of higher education IMC style techniques are most commonly known as “responsive university” or “engaged campus”. In these terms colleges are expected to be “interactive institutions” that develop community partnerships in response to specific needs (Kezar, 2000). One challenge is how to organize college outreach inside the institution. This comes back to IMC techniques, focusing on the integrated part of Integrated Marketing Communications. Integration happens internally when many college offices and departments are involved in the outreach effort. This utilizes the concept of cross-functional planning, which Duncan (2005, p.58) describes as “a process for planning and monitoring brand relationships that involves all departments that directly or indirectly touch the customer.” For colleges this may include admissions, advising, student services, academic affairs, public relations, and diversity.

Individual members of the team can come from administration, faculty, staff and students. The phrase brand relationship may cause some question about how applicable cross-functional organizing is from an outreach perspective. It simply describes the relationship the institution has with outside constituencies. In the case of Hispanic outreach that constituency is the Hispanic community and the brand relationship is how the Hispanic population views the higher education institution. The value of cross-functional planning from a Hispanic outreach context is the ability to respond to the many needs of potential students and their families. Each office “touches” the Hispanic community in some aspect of the higher education process. By bringing many of the offices and individuals involved in that effort to the table, the entire institution gains a new perspective on outreach activities. Needs can be ascertained and addressed. Offices can share knowledge and learn from each other. Cross-functional planning is designed to help broaden the understanding of those trying to solve a problem. (Duncan, 2005, p. 59) Administration gains new perspective from the people on the front lines of student support and engagement. Public relations staff can help advise outreach workers on communications issues. Faculty provide a viewpoint from the classroom. Students, and especially Hispanic students, can provide insight about the community. Cross-functional planning can be as simple as regular college meetings on Hispanic outreach. The key is who is invited to those meetings and who attends.

### *Conclusion*

Hispanic outreach for colleges and universities has been well studied in areas with a significant Hispanic population (Clark & Dorris, 2007; Gandara, 2004; Perna & Swail, 2001; Tornatzky, et al., 2002; Torres & Marquez, 2005). As the Hispanic population grows rapidly in other parts of the country, the need for study in the emerging population areas will be

increasingly important. The dynamics of college outreach is different in communities with a large Hispanic population versus those with a small, but rapidly expanding, population. Future studies could include how newly emerging immigrant communities are best reached by colleges and universities.

This study certainly could have been more comprehensive, in scope and assessment. It could have started with a wide reaching web based survey and then followed up with the interviews of selected schools. The small number of interview participants means that the statistical data is weaker than it could have been with a larger group. Interviews with Hispanic college students, high school students and families would have helped round out the study to give perhaps the most important perspective of all: that of the student. It shows that there is still much to be done in this area in terms of research.

The population of Tennessee is changing demographically and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. It is an important issue for the nation, as well as the state. Recent national statistics show that 23 percent of kindergartners in public and private schools in the United States are of Hispanic descent. Minority children are projected to become the majority in the United States by 2023 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

There needs to be a better accounting of the educational needs of the new immigrant communities in Tennessee. The Chattanooga State example, featuring the Plaza Comunitaria adult education program, seems to show that there is a significant need for basic education in Spanish and math, before many new immigrants can even consider English education or GED preparation. College is a distant goal for people who have literacy problems even in their native language. Creating an organized educational pipeline for immigrants may be important. In each

city and county different groups handle different parts of that educational process. It is critical that they communicate and work together to move people through a system of education. Higher education institutions in Tennessee need to institutionalize a response to emerging immigrant communities. These groups have many challenges and needs. Without an organized approach it will be difficult to help the immigrant population access higher education and become better skilled members of the workforce (Wainer, 2004).

Outreach is a communications issue and needs to better involve those who are most skilled at communications. PR professionals need to be part of the planning process. That process would be best served by an organized group representing offices and departments from across campus; those most able to help in the effort, and those with a passion for involvement in the effort.

Faculty members provide the front line work for several of the Hispanic programs in the study. The interviews found that many faculty members operate programs quite independently from other college activities, and often without much connection to larger campus Hispanic outreach efforts. This does raise concern for the longevity of such programs. When a Hispanic outreach program is dependent on one person it is at risk. A simple career change, or change in teaching duties, could potentially shut down such a program, because it has no system of larger institutional support. This issue can be seen in nearly every school in the study. The passion and energy of program organizers are driving Hispanic outreach efforts. Those organizers need help and support from other offices and individuals to grow the efforts and achieve long-term success. This can be seen at well-established programs in other states.

Budget cuts present a clear danger to Hispanic outreach efforts in Tennessee. Colleges and universities need to institutionalize Hispanic outreach efforts. It is not merely a matter of funding. It is a matter of institutional commitment. Even with severe budget cutbacks Hispanic outreach can be achieved by many offices and departments working together. The greatest expense is in human resources. If many people work together on outreach the work load is lighter for all. Most importantly the insight and skills of many different people provide for a more robust outreach effort and one that can better succeed in the long term.

Partnerships with community groups and secondary schools are essential to growth. The Tennessee colleges and universities in this study have started a dialogue and are attempting to use communication to reach the Hispanic community. That is perhaps just the first step in a multi-pronged approach favored by more well established programs in other states, which combine college outreach, college process education, mentorship, support and academic preparation. The Puente Project in California, and GEAR-UP programs in Texas and other states show the possibilities, and more importantly the positive outcomes, when college outreach combines academic preparation, college process education and community and secondary school system partnerships (Torres & Márquez, 2005). Outreach in Tennessee needs to move beyond event driven models and expand into wider reaching programs, to better serve students and better achieve goals.

There will be political and philosophical battles along the way. Tight resources inevitably lead to a debate over who can be helped. There are many groups that could benefit from increased college outreach attention, including African Americans, Native Americans, first generation college adults, other immigrant groups and those from lower socio-economic

backgrounds. The great need in college outreach and preparation should not be a matter of pitting one group against another. The models and programs cited in this research show that outreach is an action that can be used to reach many groups. The same general techniques used in Hispanic outreach can be used to reach other minority and immigrant populations. Hispanic outreach should not be viewed as the final step in the process, but part of a wider continuum of support that can help many different populations participate in higher education and ultimately achieve the American dream through learning.

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