

INTRODUCTION

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Students, and their professors, are going ahead and developing new ways of writing in the academy that make use of “their own” languages as well as the still-valuable resources of traditional academics. (Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell 2002, ix)

Rather than merely transplant theories into this space, we need to alter both our practice and theories using our students’ particular cultural space as our mediator. In this new space we can try to avoid choosing either to teach academic discourse or value individual difference. (Ramírez-Dhoore and Jones 2007, 2)

Times of demographic shift in our nation have created cultural challenges connected to identity and language. As sites of “cultural positioning,” writing classrooms and, by extension, the programs and institutions that house those classrooms are microcosms that make visible these challenges. As Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell (2002) and Ramírez-Dhoore and Jones (2007) point out, students and teachers, the inhabitants of these microcosms, must find ways to transform that space to adjust for difference, to change the culture more broadly. If these changes are not made, if these new languages, literacies, rhetorics, and ways of knowing and being are not embraced, then the writing classroom, as Horner (2006) has so astutely pointed out, remains complicit in the “tacit policy of monolingualism” that has scarred its history (569); more broadly, the writing classroom will remain ideologically, socially, culturally, and rhetorically “Standard American Edited English-Only”—no additions allowed.

A Brief History

By definition, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) occupy a site of difference and educational activism. Deborah A. Santiago, Vice President for

Policy and Research at *Excelencia* in Education, presents a history of HSIs that reflects this claim. At a congressional hearing in 1983, Latino/a institutional leaders testified that Latino/a students faced the following challenges: (1) access to higher education, (2) completion of their degrees, and (3) attendance at institutions with limited funds (Santiago 2006, 6). After gathering evidence from these hearings, “Congressman Paul Simon introduced legislation” that advocated measures to recognize these challenges and address them (*ibid.*). The bill failed in 1984. However, institutional leaders from Texas and New Mexico decided that an academic organization was necessary to represent Latinos/as in higher education. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) formed in 1986, and “the term ‘Hispanic-Serving Institution’ was coined at the first HACU conference” (*ibid.*). In response to Texas community leaders who recognized these inequities in South Texas and border areas, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) sued the state of Texas in 1987, and the Mexican-American Legal Defense Education Fund (MALDEF) argued the case. Although it lost the lawsuit, it called attention to the state’s neglect of its Latino/a residents by failing to furnish a first-class college system in South Texas. In 1989, Texas legislators created the South Texas Border Initiative, providing over \$880 million to predominantly Latino/a institutions in Texas (2006, 7). Some of the contributors to this collection, including the editors, work or have worked at these predominantly Latino/a student-based Texas community colleges and universities. We are part of the history of HSIs, and our brief telling of this history pays homage to those who made it possible for us to effectively teach at HSIs in our region. Concerns regarding Latino/a students reached a national audience in 1989 when Representative Albert Bustamante (D-TX) introduced a bill to financially benefit HSIs across the nation. In 1994, President Clinton signed the executive order, Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, under the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This act officially recognized the government designation of HSIs. HSIs are “accredited, degree granting, public or private, non-profit colleges or universities with 25% or more total undergraduate full-time equivalent (FTE) Hispanic enrollment” (Laden 2004, 186).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions Today

In the United States and Puerto Rico there are 236 HSIs (Santiago 2006).¹ This number represents an increase since the period 1995–1996, when there were 131 institutions (Santiago 2006, 10). Over half of all Latinos/as are enrolled in California and Texas institutions alone, and almost 75 percent of Latinos/as are enrolled in five states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. Fifty percent of Latino/a students in higher educa-

tion attend HSIs. Enrollment increased at HSIs by 14 percent from 1990 to 1999, and graduate student enrollment grew by 24 percent. Estimates of population growth reveal that the Latino/a population in this country will reach 25 percent of the population by 2050 (U.S. Census 2004), and increasing numbers of Latinos/as will attend two- or four-year colleges and universities in the future. Numbers show that in the fall of 2002, 1.7 million Latino/a students enrolled in degree-granting college programs. Furthermore, the Hispanic high school dropout rate in the period 1973–2003 declined from 34.3 percent to 23.5 percent among young Hispanic adults ages sixteen to twenty-four (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). Although this figure is still the highest among minorities, this decline points to the possibility of increased college enrollment of Latinos/as.

In the twelve years since President Clinton signed the order designating HSIs, social and political movements involving issues of immigration and a national language have resurfaced in the national consciousness and federal government policies. Educators at HSIs must address these issues that are inextricably linked to identity, access, opportunity, and social equity. According to Diana Natalicio, president of the University of Texas at El Paso, “To be an HSI is to be at the forefront of change in higher education because of the shift of demographics” (Brown and Santiago 2004, 21). Recently, HACU called for scholarship that will bring these institutions together to foster needed dialogues regarding these issues.

A Grassroots Movement

In her article Santiago states that the “defining characteristic of HSIs is their Hispanic enrollment, not their institutional mission” (2006, 3). Unlike historically black colleges (HBCs), which developed from the civil rights movement and whose primary mission revolved around serving African American students, HSIs are defined only through their Latino/a enrollment. In spite of this definition, however, readers will discover among our HSI composition scholars a deep commitment toward their students, evident in reflections on their philosophies and perspectives, examination of their practices, study of their engagements with students, and attention to their students’ voices. This commitment helps shape HSIs to be much more than just places with 25 percent Latino/a enrollment. Instead, we can see that the personal mission of teachers at HSIs to promote meaningful learning experiences for Latino/a students constitutes what an HSI is, or ought to be. We hope that this collection can contribute to the growing conversation among compositionists and, more broadly, within institutions of higher education to achieve the dream represented by MALDEF, HACU, LULAC and others by helping to define an HSI mission—to educate all students, particularly Latino/a students.

Monolingual English Tradition

The first book to bring together HSI scholars from a particular discipline, this collection furthers the efforts to teach writing with Latino/a students. It follows in the footsteps of scholars who worked to counter the history of our discipline's role in English-only literacy instruction. Thanks to the detailed account by Bruce Horner and John Trimbur, "English Only and U.S. College Composition," we are well aware of the indictment against the English discipline as being complicit in creating "a sense of nationhood" at the exclusion of foreign languages in the quest for U.S. identity (2002, 607). We are certainly aware of the response to a monolingual pedagogy by scholars through the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (CCCC 1974) and the National Language Policy (CCCC 1988) and decades of scholarship—by researchers and teachers such as Smitherman, Villanueva, Rose, Gilyard, Guerra, Kells, and Bizzell—devoted to the creation of a multilingual, transcultural pedagogy that addresses the needs of diverse populations.

However, we realize that much work is ahead. Smitherman and Richardson report that two thirds of the memberships of CCCC and NCTE, surveyed for their knowledge of the organizations' language policies, are not familiar with them (Smitherman 2003; Richardson 2003). Also, the renewed quest for national identity, cultural cohesion, and linguistic hegemony represents a challenge. Roseann Dueñas González notes that the official language movement and its ideologies and policies "are counterproductive to our work as educators and nation builders because [they devalue] the language and presence of minority persons in our society and in our most important societal institutions . . . [some being the schools and our classrooms]" (2003, xli). González's description mirrors what some of our authors, such as Isabel Baca and Dora Ramírez-Dhoore, personally experienced in their childhoods and adolescent years in school: The movement has reinforced a climate in which "accents and other forms of variety in linguistic expression, including syntactic, lexical, or rhetorical varieties, are discriminated against or overtly ostracized" (González 2000, xxxii).

The movement has prompted a special issue of *College English* (July 2006) designated to encourage a countermovement of teaching and research that addresses the negative effects of "English Only" efforts (Horner 2006, 569). Paul K. Matsuda states that the "myth of linguistic homogeneity—the assumption that college students are by default native speakers of a privileged variety of English—is seriously out of sync with the sociolinguistic reality of today's U.S. higher education as well as of U.S. society at large" (Matsuda 2006, 641). Bruce Horner articulates a contemporary concept of the composition classroom, promoted by Hawisher,

Selfe, Guo, and Liu: “[I]deologies, technologies, languages, and literacies form a complex, interdependent, cultural ecology of literacy both shaping and shaped by writers’ literacy practices at the macro, medial, and micro levels” (Horner 2006, 570). This view of the composition classroom as a complex ecology invites those who teach growing numbers of multi-cultural and multilingual students to take a hard look at their work.

The Editors

As composition teachers working at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, we represent a diversity at various levels: geographic origins, cultural backgrounds, teaching experiences, and academic emphases. While our personal narratives represent our differences, we have found common ground in our commitment to provide opportunities for Latino/a and other underrepresented students.

Diana Cárdenas

In my seventeen years of teaching first-year writing at Del Mar College, our local community college, which enrolls a 51 percent Hispanic student population, I adopted and adapted many approaches to composition instruction to engage students—who demonstrated varying degrees of writing proficiency—in meaningful and empowering experiences. My desire to find connections to them academically and personally stems from my own background—born in northern Mexico and transplanted to Corpus Christi, Texas, as an eight-year-old girl—and the poignant middle school, high school, and college writing classroom experiences, which I record in my autobiographical essay.² My journey to develop English language literacies, with its insecurities and joys, influenced my search for an appropriate pedagogy; it continues to influence me today. In my upper-level composition courses at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, I engage students in service learning efforts that address local needs related to poverty and lack of access and opportunity in the most underserved areas of the community. These efforts help them place a human face on writing, and many of them invest personally, beyond a grade, in the effectiveness of their documents to improve the lives of others.

National figures (Canagarajah, Smitherman, Villanueva, Gilyard, Guerra) who promote a multilingual, transcultural democracy urge us to use linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical strategies to resist attitudes and practices that bind any individual or group. Like them, I am distressed about the language used to define who is, and who is not, entitled to access to education and opportunity. Reflecting on their work has helped me revision what I do in class. I am redefining learning, achievement,

and citizenship by building on what students bring and engaging them in a critical examination of their individual and national identities. My aim is that they will help mold an America that allows all its people to develop their essence regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and age.

Cristina Kirklighter

When I arrived at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, I was excited to begin working at an HSI given my interest in Latino/a issues in composition and literature. I thought that my familiarity with these issues as a result of my mother's Honduran background and my experience teaching students of Latino/a backgrounds in Florida would be enough to make for a smooth transition. I was wrong. South Texas is not Florida, and Mexican Americans are not Hondurans. Like many new faculty at HSIs, I did not know what an HSI stood for beyond the Latino/a enrollment of 25 percent definition, much less how the teaching of writing fits into this definition. I remember one day almost two years ago speaking to some of my colleagues about this issue. What prepares us in our composition area specifically to work and thrive at an HSI? Who are our HSI compositionists who work day in and day out with these populations of students, and what do they do to promote student success? In order to navigate the composition waters at an HSI, we needed answers to these pressing questions. We searched for HSI colleagues and developed this anthology project to bring their voices together. Fortunately, we found contributors dedicated to serving this diverse population of students and the innovative ways they use to promote student success.

Susan Wolff Murphy

As a white (non-Hispanic), first-generation college student, born and raised in the shadow of Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, I had little exposure to or knowledge of the issues facing Latino/a students in higher education until I became a graduate student.³ As a master's student, I worked side by side with a young Chicana named Migdalia from California's central valley. Her family did not approve of her seeking a degree. She did not eat some days because she lived on her student worker wages and loans. At the same time she would confront her teachers in their offices when she felt she was not learning in their classes. Migdalia reminds me that I cannot patronize or stereotype students; I must respect their diversity, their challenges, and their passion for learning. When I accepted a position teaching basic writing at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, I encountered first-year nursing students from the Texas Rio Grande Valley and small rural towns who had not passed the standardized, high-stakes admission test (TASP). Some were in graduating classes

of less than 100; some were seventeen-year-old students who were caring for dying grandparents or taking children to the emergency room in the middle of the night; many were students whose lives were filled with the demands of family, work, and school. I was unprepared in my graduate work or life history for these contexts, histories, and challenges. My co-editors and I see this volume as bringing together the voices of two-year and four-year HSI teachers who already have experience teaching this population to energize the conversation in composition about these regionally, culturally, and linguistically diverse and multifaceted students.

Our Collection

Our collection, made up of narratives, qualitative studies, and conversations that represent many years of teaching Latino/a students at HSIs, provides a variety of approaches to meet individual student needs as they connect to identity and heritage, language, and geographic region. It presents the experiences of teachers at two-year and four-year HSIs and validates their theoretical and pedagogical practices. Our eclectic voices and approaches signify the diverse complexities of our Latino/a students from many geographic areas. We are different, and we celebrate this difference out of respect for our students. We also are aware that this collection can capture only a small part of the good work being done at other HSIs and at all schools that enroll Latino/a and other non-white, nontraditional students.

Given that 53 percent of HSIs are two-year institutions (Reed 2003), a generous representation of scholars from community colleges is achieved in this collection. According to *Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics*, "In 2000, Hispanic students accounted for 14 percent of the students enrolled in 2-year colleges and 7 percent of these in 4-year institutions" (NCES 2003, 1). These disproportionate percentages point to the strong need for collaborations between two-year and four-year HSI institutions in mentoring Latinos/as to pursue their education. Indeed, many Latino/a students who attend four-year institutions started out at community colleges. In fact, some of our most respected Latino/a scholars, such as Victor Villanueva and Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés, among others, have written about being mentored by community college teachers who encouraged them to pursue four-year degrees and beyond. According to D. G. Solorzón, "The origins of Hispanic doctoral recipients occur largely through the pipeline from two- to four-year HSIs into doctoral granting institutions" (Laden 2004). These particular students coming from the HSI pipelines and entering non-HSI doctoral institutions would benefit from our collection, finding validation and continuity to thrive in their programs.

Research regarding HSIs often presents Latino/a students as an at-risk population. Although some are indeed at risk, we also attempt to counter the stereotypes that are prevalent regarding HSIs: student underpreparedness, ESL difficulties, and resistance to education. Since experienced HSI teachers realize that they do not work with a homogenous group of students through their daily interactions, “a single teaching strategy is not appropriate for all Latino students, just as one instructional strategy cannot reach all white students” (Rolón 2003, 41). In these chapters, we do not seek consistency of one message; rather, we see the strength of this work in the diversity of approaches and theories used by our authors to address the issues central to those who teach Latino/a and other minority students. As a whole, this volume is a positive portrayal of Latino/a students and the generative teaching and learning outcomes that stem from an appreciation of difference, respect for diversity, honor for students’ identities, promotion of students’ right to their own language, and value for home literacies and languages.

Most HSIs are not Research I institutions; therefore, teachers at these institutions work in colleges and universities where the scholarship of teaching is prevalent. Because we serve an underrepresented population in this country, HSI writing teachers follow an imperative to understand our students through informed research and reflection. Publishing and valuing the scholarship of teaching at and from these institutions is necessary to the creation and implementation of a critical pedagogy. We hope this collection will help inspire further HSI research in many areas of teaching and learning, even outside the discipline of English.

We would have liked submissions from Midwestern and Puerto Rican HSI teachers. Additionally, we are aware of specializations in composition studies and the broader field of the teaching of English that are not represented in this volume.

Part 1: Introductory Chapters

The chapters in Part 1 provide a complex introduction to the questions and issues within this conversation; the first examines writing pedagogy, while the second is a conversation focused on resources, politics, and cultures connected to two-year colleges. We begin the collection with these chapters so our readers will enter the conversation with a context for thinking about and discussing the teaching of writing at HSIs.

We open the collection with “Teaching Writing at Hispanic-Serving Institutions,” by Beatrice Méndez Newman, a twenty-year professional of a four-year HSI in Texas. Méndez Newman claims that it is not the HSI student who needs specialized attention but the teaching practices, attitudes, and expectations that compositionists bring to the HSI classroom. Because writing reveals so much about the writer’s ethnolinguistic, cul-

tural, and academic identity, teaching writing at HSIs calls for a cultural and linguistic perceptiveness that allows the instructor to resist merging into what Michelle Hall Kells describes as “the linguistic hegemony that implicitly and explicitly shapes classroom practices” (2002, 7). Méndez Newman calls for new understandings, new pedagogies, and specialized training that can be learned from those who teach at HSIs.

Similarly, in their controversial conversation, “Teaching English in a California Two-Year Hispanic-Serving Institution: Complexities, Challenges, Programs, and Practices,” Jody Millward, Sandra Starkey, and David Starkey, at two-year HSIs in California, critique the political, cultural, and budgetary issues that impact what occurs in the writing classroom and the resources committed to writing and access programs: “Two-year college students succeed *despite* the current system and not because of it.” These community college teachers describe approaches that help students understand the multiple factors that affect their learning experiences and their performances. Bringing these contexts to light works against the stereotypical and preconceived notions of what faculty need to focus on at HSIs.

Part 2: We Are Not All the Same: Understanding Geographic and Cultural Differences at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Part 2 focuses on differences of geography, culture and language. The authors here discuss the different practices of writing teachers at HSIs located in particular geographic areas who teach Latino/a populations with differing linguistic realities. By contrasting these four contributions, readers will begin to understand the linguistically, and thus educationally, diverse nature and needs of U.S. Latino/a students. Dora Ramírez-Dhoore and Rebecca Jones, in “Discovering a ‘Proper Pedagogy’: The Geography of Writing at the University of Texas-Pan American,” and “Literate Practices/Language Practices: What Do We Really Know about Our Students?,” by Isabel Araiza, Humberto Cárdenas, and Susan Loudermilk Garza, demonstrate how border universities, such as the University of Texas-Pan American, and more inland universities, such as Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, located just a few hours from each other, are remarkably different in terms of student assimilation and matters of language diversity.

In contrast to many South Texas schools, “*Más allá del inglés: A Bilingual Approach to College Composition*,” by Isis Artze-Vega, Elizabeth I. Doud, and Belkys Torres, demonstrates how faculty in Miami, with its Cuban American cultural and economic influences, are empowered to teach bilingual composition courses where Spanish can thrive alongside English. “*Un pie adentro y otro afuera: Composition Instruction for Transnational Dominicans in Higher Education*,” by Sharon Utakis and Marianne Pita, teachers in the Northeast, illuminates how issues of

transnationalism with the Dominican population create geographic disruptions of language, culture, and national loyalties that teachers of writing must address as they navigate these classrooms.

Part 3: Considerations for Creating Effective Writing Programs at Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Part 3 presents several contributions that describe how writing programs—featuring service learning, focused professional development activities, and bilingual, student-centered pedagogies—can work to meet the needs and missions of HSIs and their students. In “Building on the Richness of a South Texas Community: Revisioning a Technical and Professional Writing Program through Service Learning,” Diana Cárdenas and Susan Loudermilk Garza examine how their technical writing program, dedicated to service learning, aligns with their university’s commitment to community engagement. Technical writing students learn to invest in their predominantly Hispanic area by helping institutions fulfill their missions and making a difference.

In “It Is All in the Attitude—The Language Attitude,” Isabel Baca describes how, in her ethnographic study of El Paso Community College’s basic writing program, she discovers that valuing students’ cultures and languages creates a safe learning environment for writing. Baca, who identifies with these students because of her similar geographic, cultural, and language background, describes the struggles she faced as a student. Her personal insights of identification add a dimension of autoethnography that enhances her study.

Barbara Jaffe’s “Changing Perceptions, and Ultimately Practices, of Basic Writing Instructors through the *Familia* Approach” describes her role as an instructor in the *Puente* Project, a bridge program that has met with great success in California community colleges. Jaffe describes the training she conducts for community college teachers who want to improve composition instruction at HSIs by creating a positive environment that promotes collaborative responsibility and learning in the classroom and teacher training sessions. She depicts the impact the *familia* approach has upon community college teachers as they move through their training. She addresses what successful HSI programs can do to create a positive learning and teaching environment by valuing “*la familia*.”

Part 4: The Personal Narrative: Exploring Our Cultures as Hispanic-Serving Institution Students and Teachers

We end this collection with a more specific focus that addresses the importance of using the genre of personal narrative in classrooms.

In his chapter about using personal narratives at the University of New Mexico, “The Politics of Space and Narrative in the Multicultural Classroom,” Robert J. Affeldt demonstrates that narrative can empower students to explore their cultural heritages. At HSIs, this approach is particularly important not just for students but for those who teach them as they gain insights into their diverse population of students.

Cathy Freeze, Dundee Lackey, Jennifer Anderson, Peter Cavazos, Rachel Eatmon-Hall, Misty Lynn García, Jennifer Nelson Reynolds, Sandra Valerio, Billy D. Watson, Elizabeth Worden, and Stacy Wyatt, members of a graduate Capstone course, with Cristina Kirklighter, wrote “Collaboratively Mentoring Our Identities As Readers, Writers, and Teachers: A Black Cuban, Black American’s Impact on a South Texas Community.” These authors demonstrate how Evelio Grillo, a black Cuban, black American memoirist, mentored South Texas graduate students to critique and reinforce their identities. They in turn mentored others within their communities. This collaboration between Grillo, a professor, high school teachers, graduate students, and high school students reveals how a well-coordinated literacy event can validate student experiences, provide real audiences for writing, generate opportunities for interinstitutional communication and partnership, and improve students’ attitudes toward writing and reading.

Conclusion

We see this gathering of ideas as a celebration of the diversity of HSIs that makes us proud to serve our students. We hope that this collection will invite many other conversations, conferences, articles, and books to fulfill the promise created by the history of activism behind the label “Hispanic-Serving Institution” and thus to meet the needs of Latino/a students across the nation in all institutions of higher education. One day we hope to reflect and say, “We cannot imagine a time when this wealth of knowledge did not exist.”

Notes

1. According to Santiago, the number of HSIs may fluctuate based on different criteria that serve specific purposes (2006, 8).

2. Diana Cárdenas, “Creating an Identity: Personal, Academic and Civic Literacies,” in *Latino/a Discourses: On Language, Identity, and Literacy Education*, ed. Michelle Hall Kells, Valerie Balester, and Victor Villanueva (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2004), 114–25.

3. We are aware of the different capitalization patterns of the designations “Black” and “White” in style manuals. To conform to the Chicago style in our book, we used lowercase.

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