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A Love Letter to HSI Grant Seekers/Implementers and the Federal Agencies that Fund Them: Defining Servingness in Research, Practice, & Policy

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As a scholar who centers my research on Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), working with and for HSIs as they try to figure out how to best “serve” students, I spend a lot of time with my head in books and scholarly journals, freedom dreaming about utopian HSIs. HSIs are my jam, my bread and butter, my passion, so I pride myself on knowing as much as I can about the latest empirical and non-empirical work centering HSIs. I regularly check my Google Scholar alerts, scroll through “online first” articles in higher education research journals (especially *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*), and follow HSI scholars on social media, hoping to access the latest HSI research. I also stay tuned into HSI policy advocacy groups (especially *Excelencia* in Education and Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities), doing my best to stay knowledgeable on the latest HSI policies.

I realize, however, that the people who need the HSI research the most, the people on the ground trying to transform HSIs—Department of Education Title V and III, and NSF HSI Program grant seekers and implementers, and HSI college administrators, faculty, and staff—do not spend most of their time with their heads in the books or journals. And rightfully so, because it is hard to transform an organization into one that truly centers and uplifts the racially and economically minoritized students who enroll in HSIs including Latinxs, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), low income students, first generation students, and undocumented students or students from mixed status families. I know because I was a grant coordinator, charged with implementing a Department of Education Title V grant at California State University, Fullerton. It was hard work. And like other practitioners at HSIs, I was not reading the latest books or journal articles, because I was actively trying to implement the HSI grant activities. Even so, I am struck by the disconnect between HSI research, practice, and policy.

This revelation was unearthed as I was completing my second book, *Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Practice: Defining “Servingness” at HSIs* (Information Age Publishing), which is an edited book with contributions from practitioners at HSIs implementing HSI federal grants. The call for book chapters was specific to HSI federal grant directors and coordinators, asking them to write about their efforts to implement HSI federal grants and to provide evidence of their effectiveness and usefulness. The impetus of this edited book came after another epiphany of mine, which was that very few HSI articles are written by HSI federal grants directors and coordinators. In fact, most HSI articles are written by people like me—scholars whose primary job is to research and write about social

phenomena, not necessarily to do the things we are writing about (oh the irony of academia). So yes, we sit in our ivory tower and write about innovative educational things, and make recommendations to practitioners about what they should do, while not doing it ourselves. Ok, I'm being facetious, and exaggerating, and downplaying the fact that some of us are scholar practitioners doing the exact things we are writing about...but not all of us. For me, the edited book was a way to learn with and from HSI federal grant directors and coordinators; a way to amplify their voices while decentering the voices of educational researchers (like myself).

What I found in reviewing the 20 chapter submissions I received for the book is that most of the practitioners on the ground, seeking and implementing federal HSI grants, are not citing the latest HSI research and/or implementing their grant efforts as informed by the latest HSI research. I was actually surprised by the number of chapters I received that did not cite any HSI research (don't worry, all the authors added HSI literature before the book was published). I also found that many are not centering Latinxs or BIPOC in their grant proposals or initiatives. I call this "practicing through a race neutral lens," which is when HSIs fail to recognize or center the history, voices, experiences, and needs of Latinxs and BIPOC in HSIs. In the process of editing the book, I was also asked to review the pre-submission grant proposals for one HSI that was planning to submit a campus proposal to NSF's HSI Program. Again, I was blown away by the number of proposals that were not only uninformed by the latest HSI research, but were also proposing race (and identity) neutral initiatives to serve Latinxs.

These anecdotal experiences of mine were empirically confirmed by Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2018) who, after systematically reviewing 220 successful Title V grant applications awarded between 2009 and 2016, found that 85% (n = 188) proposed race neutral programs and initiatives "tailored to a much broader student body such that all students could benefit" while only 10% (n = 22) proposed a Latinx centered approach to serving students (p. 9). My own experiences and this emerging body of research have left me wondering, "How can federal HSI grant seekers and implementers conceptualize servingness and ultimately implement Latinx-centered initiatives completely uninformed by the latest HSI research?" Moreover, "How can HSIs continue to operate through a race neutral lens while trying to serve a racial-ethnic group that is subjected to racialization and racism within the educational system?" (Garcia, 2018; Garcia, 2019).

My goal in writing this love letter to HSI federal grant seekers and implementers and the federal agencies that fund them is to ask y'all to *please* actively define and redefine servingness guided by the latest HSI research and to center Latinxs, BIPOC, and other minoritized students in your HSI initiatives, practices, and policies. Here I offer suggestions for connecting research to practice, with the goal of ultimately transforming HSIs and the Latinx and BIPOC students they seek to serve. Let me remind you that despite the fact that I am seemingly "out group" as a faculty member at a non-HSI (and probably one of the whitest institutions in the United States), I consider myself "in group" and do this work with love, concern, and gratitude for HSIs. I am a proud alumna of an HSI (California State University, Northridge), was a practitioner at an HSI (California State University, Fullerton), and received my doctorate from an emerging HSI (University of California, Los Angeles). Essentially, I am a product of HSIs working to empower HSIs. I believe in HSIs. I love HSIs. I want y'all to be the best practitioners possible, and I write this love letter (in the form of a journal article) with the utmost respect.

In this article I review the *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness at HSIs* (Garcia, Núñez, & Sansone, 2019a) to explain how servingness has been defined in research. I then offer suggestions for using HSI research, books, and articles to guide HSI grant getting and implementation and to elevate the focus on Latinxs, BIPOC and other minoritized groups within HSIs. Finally, I call on the federal agencies themselves to consider HSI research and to center Latinxs and BIPOC in all

HSI programs. My hope is that this love letter will open an important dialogue about the disconnect between HSI research, practice, and policy, and move us towards a conversation about the importance of using research in practice and policy.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SERVINGNESS IN HSIs:

Scholars have spent more than 20 years trying to define servingness through research, although often in implicit and unintentional ways. By this I mean that researchers have been writing about HSIs since the federal designation legitimized them, yet the goal of the research has not always been to define servingness. Instead, researchers have looked at a variety of phenomena within HSIs, ranging from student outcomes and experiences within HSIs (e.g. Cuellar, 2014; Rodríguez & Calderón Galdeano, 2015), to unique organizational structures within HSIs (e.g., Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Natividad, 2015; Núñez, Murakami-Ramalho, & Cuero, 2010). Drawing on the extensive HSI literature, my colleagues and I propose that servingness is multidimensional and should be understood as such (Garcia et al., 2019a). With the *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness at HSIs* we suggest that servingness can be primarily conceptualized in two ways: (1) indicators of serving; and (2) structures for serving. Moreover, servingness is perpetually influenced by the external environment. I urge grant seekers and implementers to think about servingness as multidimensional. Let me explain.

INDICATORS OF SERVING (MEASURABLE VARIABLES):

Indicators of serving are best understood as measurable variables. Grant seekers and implementers can propose these variables as grant outcomes, and they can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Indicators of serving can also be reported to the federal government at the end of each grant cycle, and they can be measured by external evaluators. Most importantly, grant seekers can determine which indicators to pursue with their grant activities, and which indicators are best for their diverse population of students within their unique institutional environment.

Indicators of serving include *academic outcomes*, such as retention, persistence, graduation, transferring, course completion, STEM degree completion, post-baccalaureate enrollment, and labor market outcomes (Garcia et al., 2019a). They also include *non-academic outcomes*, such as the development of academic self-concept, social agency, leadership identity, racial identity, critical consciousness, grad school aspirations, civic engagement, and social justice orientations (Garcia et al., 2019a). Yet as noted by Boland (2018), most HSI grant applications focus solely on academic outcomes, and give little consideration to non-academic outcomes. Garcia (2018) argued that non-academic outcomes are essential to an anti-racist, anti-oppressive approach to organizing HSIs, and should be considered viable outcomes for HSIs. Since proposing the framework, I have started calling non-academic outcomes *“liberatory outcomes”* suggesting that if HSIs are truly committed to racial justice, equity, and liberation, they must focus on the development of liberatory outcomes such as racial identity development, critical consciousness, self-determination, community uplift, and an antiracist orientation (Garcia, 2020, May). Scholars have found that HSIs can be effective at enhancing concepts such as academic self-concept, critical consciousness, and civic engagement (Cuellar, 2014; Garcia & Cuellar, 2018), yet HSI grant seekers and implementers have not fully embraced these important outcomes. With this letter, I urge grant seekers and implementers to elevate the use of liberatory outcomes as important indicators of serving within HSIs and I encourage the federal agencies funding HSI grants to consider the importance of legitimizing liberatory outcomes.

Indicators of serving also include *experiences* of students (and faculty, staff, and administrators) on campus, and are also measurable (Garcia et al., 2019a). Experiences comprise those that are validating to students’ racial-ethnic identities, such as interactions with same racial-ethnic peers and Spanish

speaking peers, faculty, and staff. Experiences also include participation in mentoring and support programs, as well as cultural signs on campus that enhance a welcoming, affirming environment. Garcia (2016a), for example, talked about the importance of cultural indicators such as mariachi bands and *dia de los muertos* celebrations for students at an HSI. Experiences, however, also encompass negative, racialized situations that do not validate students' racial-ethnic identities. This includes experiences with discrimination, harassment, and racial microaggressions. There is a growing body of research showing that negative experiences with the campus racial climate is a regular occurrence at HSIs (e.g., Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016, 2020; Sanchez, 2017, Serrano, 2020). With this letter, I urge grant seekers and implementers to understand that positive, affirming, cultural experiences will ultimately lead to greater academic outcomes (e.g., Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Rhee, 2008), and to incorporate these experiences into your grants as indicators of serving. Moreover, grant seekers and implementers must take responsibility for decreasing negative racialized experiences, as these experiences hinder the institution's ability to serve students.

STRUCTURES FOR SERVING (TANGIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS):

Structures for serving are best understood as tangible organizational elements, that are not necessarily measured, but can be observed. Grant seekers and implementers can transform structures with their grants, with the goal of achieving equitable outcomes and experiences for students (the measurable indicators of servingness). The 16 allowable grant activities under the Title V program fall into this dimension of servingness. Yet as written by the federal government, these activities are race neutral, and lack an underlying call for transformation. As noted by Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2018), grant seekers often propose racial neutral activities, with little effort to ground these activities in the ways of knowing and being of Latinxs within the institution. Garcia (2018) calls on HSIs to decolonize their entire organizational structure, which requires them to first recognize the historical, insidious educational experiences that Latinxs in the United States have experienced as a result of Spanish conquest across the Americas and the Caribbean as well as U.S. imperialism, which ultimately led to harmful policies that have policed, silenced, and stripped Latinxs of their core languages, knowledges, and overall ways of beings. In order to effectively serve Latinxs and BIPOCS, the organizational structures that have excluded and oppressed them must be completely disrupted and transformed.

As noted by Garcia et al. (2019a), *structures for serving* include mission and purpose statements, HSI grant activities, decision-making, leadership, policies, curricular and co-curricular structures, institutional advancement activities, compositional diversity of faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate students, community engagement, and external boundary management. Torres and Zerquera (2012) argued that as institutions prepare to become HSIs, they must consider how their mission statements, diversity plans, and marketing strategies are centering Latinxs. Numerous studies, however, have found that HSIs tend to focus less on Latinxs, and more on broad concepts such as access, diversity, inclusion, and culture in their mission statements (e.g., Andrade & Lundberg, 2018; Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008), with an increased need to center HSIs in their mission statement (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015). Leadership and decision making practices are also important, as leaders have the positional power to transfer social capital to minoritized students within the institution (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018).

Structural changes must also be considered at the curricular and co-curricular level. In other words, the curriculum and all student support services must be transformed with an intentional effort to center Latinxs and BIPOC in all courses and programming efforts. Some HSIs, for example, are incorporating Spanish language into their curriculum as a way to better prepare students to serve local Spanish-speaking communities (Garcia, 2019; Summers, Mueller, Pechak, & Sias, 2018). Numerous studies have also called on HSIs to increase the number of Latinx faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate

students as a form of servingness (e.g. Contreras, 2017; Garcia & Guzman-Alvarez, 2019; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013; Vargas, Villa-Palomino, & Davis, 2019). With this letter, I call on HSI grant seekers and implementers to utilize HSI grants to transform the institutional structures for serving. Transformation, however, must be *transformative* and grounded in the goals of equity, justice, and liberation for Latinxs and BIPOC within HSIs (Garcia, 2018).

FOR GRANT SEEKERS/IMPLEMENTERS: CONNECTING HSI RESEARCH TO PRACTICE:

In this section I urge grant seekers and implementers to access and use the latest HSI research when writing and implementing HSI grants. Here I provide an overview of books and articles to consider and encourage the reader to go to the reference list to access the full citations (the reference list in this article is a gold mine, please use it). There are currently six books and over 200 journal articles published about HSIs, with this number growing substantially every year. There are two education journals that I highly encourage grant seekers and implementers to access and review regularly. Scholars who are writing about HSIs, and Latinx students in general, tend to publish in these two journals. The first is the *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, published by Sage (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jhh>). The second is the *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal*, which is an open access online journal available through The University of Texas at San Antonio (<http://amaejournal.utsa.edu/index.php/amae/index>). The journal has published two special issues about HSIs (Volume 11, Number 3, 2017) and Latinxs at Minority Serving Institutions (Volume 14, Number 3, 2020), and has published special issues on other topics of interest for HSI grant seekers and implementers, including community colleges and undocumented students. Be sure to also check the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) database (<https://eric.ed.gov/>), as articles are often made available in the database.

Since 2020, there have been six published books that are entirely centered on HSIs. Kirklighter, Cárdenas, and Wolff Murphy (2007) published an edited book with chapters authored by faculty who wrote about the challenges and joys of teaching literacy, composition, and writing at HSIs, many of whom were (and still are) faculty at “border HSIs.” In the book they talk about language and how to center multilingual practices at HSIs. Twelve years later Baca, Hinojosa, and Wolff Murphy (2019) carried on this legacy and published a second edition of the book called “*Bordered Writers: Latinx Identities and Literacy Practices at Hispanic-Serving Institutions*” elevating the critical focus on Latinx identities and translanguaging practices at HSIs and focusing on concepts such as familismo and testimonios. If you are writing or implementing a grant that includes aspects of writing, literacy, composition, multilingualism, translanguaging, and/or pedagogy in general, I encourage you to access these books.

The year 2015 provided us with two edited volumes about HSIs. Núñez, Hurtado and Calderón-Galdeano (2015) filled a critical gap in knowledge about HSIs as broad access institutions, with higher education researchers providing critical conversations about the practices and experiences that are unique to HSIs and the students within them. In many ways they sought to flip the narrative about HSIs, arguing that they serve as engines of social mobility for Latinxs. Perez Mendez, Bonner II, Méndez-Negrete, and Palmer (2015) similarly called on researchers to write chapters about the unique ways in which HSIs serve Latinx students, with some authors providing critical narratives about how HSIs are not effectively serving students, which is an important contribution. These two edited volumes provide a wealth of foundational knowledge about servingness at HSIs that should be used in developing and implementing HSI grants.

In 2019, I published the first solo-authored empirical book about HSIs, *Becoming Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities* (Johns Hopkins University Press) based on two years of research with three distinctly different HSIs in Chicago. I set out to write counternarratives, highlighting the ways that these three institutions are uniquely and effectively serving their students, despite the racialized context they are operating in; yet I found it difficult to do, as each were facing numerous challenges on their path to becoming HSIs. The book offers educators and leaders at HSIs multiple ideas for serving students, including ideas about centering Spanish in the curriculum and reframing cultural relevance towards racial and social justice. I also critique the use of race-neutral practices. In 2020, I published an edited book inclusive of 16 chapters written by and for HSI Title III and Title V directors, coordinators, and implementors (Garcia, 2020). Some of the stories are new and never been told in book chapters or journal articles, including how institutions such as UC Santa Cruz and Cal Lutheran University leveraged their HSI Task Forces on their path towards becoming racially just HSIs.

The number of journal articles about HSIs has also been burgeoning. There are many themes within the literature, many of which align with the *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness at HSI*. Here I offer a few topics for consideration as you go on your journey to write and implement HSI grants that center Latinxs, BIPOC, and other minoritized students. Several authors have written **anti-deficit narratives about the types of students** who enroll in HSIs (e.g., Cuellar, 2019; Malcom-Piqueux, & Lee Jr., 2011; Núñez & Bowers, 2011). Cuellar (2019) makes an important contribution, elevating the idea that the students who enroll in HSIs arrive with what Yosso (2005) termed, “community cultural wealth” inclusive of six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial social, navigational, and resistant. Cuellar displays how to utilize anti-deficit narratives about students, rather than reifying a false narrative that they are deficient when they arrive on campus. Scholars have also written about the **HSI designation as a racialized identity** that must be embraced and enacted (Garcia, 2017a, 2017b, 2019; Garcia & Dwyer, 2018; Garcia, Ramirez, Patrón, & Cristobal, 2019b). Thinking about the HSI designation as an identity allows practitioners to envision HSI as a process, rather than an end point. I urge grant seekers and implementors to first determine which type of HSI they are (Latinx-enrolling, Latinx-producing, Latinx-enhancing, Latinx-serving) before determining which type they want to become as they implement their grants (Garcia, 2017a, 2017b). There are also innovative arguments about **HSIs as spaces of liberation and justice** (Cuellar, Segundo, & Muñoz, 2017; Garcia, 2018, Núñez, 2017). In these articles, me and my colleagues have been freedom dreaming, proposing equity, justice, liberation, empowerment, and community uplift as viable outcomes for HSIs. I encourage grant writers and implementors to freedom dream with us.

Many articles have been written about how **HSIs enhance academic outcomes** for students (e.g., Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard & Aguilar, 2011; Flores & Park, 2015; Garcia, 2013; Rodríguez & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Rodríguez and Calderón Galdeano (2015) in particular challenge the deficit that narrative that HSIs underperform when it comes to graduating students in equitable ways. I encourage others to reframe the way they think about HSIs as effective institutions. There are also articles about how **HSIs elevate liberatory outcomes** (e.g. Cuellar, 2014; Garcia & Cuellar, 2018; Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez, & Hudson, 2018; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Onorato & Musoba, 2015). Garcia and Cuellar (2018) talk about the importance of redefining how outcomes such as civic engagement are operationalized in research and practice, as they are often conceptualized along white normative definitions that exclude Latinx and BIPOC students, reifying a deficit narrative that students are unengaged in democratic and civic activities, despite the fact that are engaged in ways that lie outside of the normative measures. In order for outcomes such as civic engagement to become liberatory, HSIs must critically redefine them with and for Latinxs and BIPOC.

One of the most trending topics in HSI research is the level to which **Latinx and BIPOC people at HSIs experience racism and microaggressions** (Abrica, García-Louis, & Gallaway, 2019; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2016, 2020; B. A. L., 2017; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Garcia, 2016b; Sanchez, 2017, Serrano, 2020). Abrica et al. (2019) and Serrano (2020) call particular attention to the anti-Blackness prevalent in HSIs, which must be addressed if HSIs are to become spaces of liberation and justice for all students, not just Latinxs. Despite the fact that Black students may be the smallest racially minoritized population on campus, HSIs grounded in equity, justice, and antiracism cannot do this work without disrupting anti-Blackness. Moreover, there must be a concerted effort to elevate Afro-Latinx voices and experiences on campus, as research shows Afro-Latinxs often experience violence and exclusion on college campuses (Haywood, 2017a, 2017b). I call on HSI grant writers and implementers to write into their grants the ways that they will not only assess experiences with racism and microaggressions, but how they will disrupt them.

There is a growing body of research about structures for serving at HSIs, with the most attention given to **culturally relevant practices** (e.g., Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Garcia, 2016a; Garcia & Zaragoza, 2020; Natividad, 2015) and the ways that **faculty enact these practices** (e.g., Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018; Bensimon, Dowd, Stanton-Salazar & Dávila, 2019; Castro Samayoa, Gasman, Gonzalez & Milian, 2020; Ek, Quijada Cerecer, Alanis, & Rodriguez, 2010; Garcia, Koren, & Cuellar, 2020; Núñez et al., 2010). There is also growing attention given to **leadership and decision making practices at HSIs** that are grounded in institutional agency and Latinx-centered leadership (e.g., Doran, 2019; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2011; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Jones & Sáenz, 2020). Garcia and Natividad (2018) lay out six leadership processes for HSI leaders to enact as they move towards transforming their HSIs. I urge HSI grant writers and implementors to connect Latinx and BIPOC-centered structures for serving to their desired academic and liberatory outcomes and validating experiences.

Although I recognize that HSI research is often about four-year HSIs, there are numerous articles for Hispanic-Serving community colleges to consider as they pursue HSI grants (Andrade & Lundberb, 2018; Jones & Sáenz, 2020; Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2015; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011; Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010; Rodriguez, Garbee, Miller & Saenz, 2018). There is also an abundance of HSI STEM focused resources worth considering (Bensimon et al., 2019; Crisp, Nora & Taggart, 2009; Dowd, Malcom & Bensimon, 2009; Dowd, Malcom & Macias, 2010; Malcom, Dowd & Yu, 2010; NASEM, 2018).

FOR FEDERAL AGENCIES: CONNECTING RESEARCH TO POLICY:

In this final section, I want to talk to the federal agencies offering competitive grant programs for HSIs, including the Department of Education, USDA, NSF, and other agencies that have provided HSI grants in the past. First of all, THANK YOU! Thank you for your symbolic and economic commitment to HSIs and Latinx (and low income) students in general. The data show that the federal government's commitment to HSIs (by way of appropriations) has grown tremendously since 1999 (Ortega et al., 2015). Appropriations, however, have been steady in recent years, despite the continued increase in the number of institutions eligible for HSI status and therefore eligible to apply for competitive HSI funds (Ortega et al., 2015). Data also show that HSIs continue to be underfunded, and need more resources to do the important work that they have been tasked with (HACU, 2018). HSIs have the ability to train and prepare the future workforce, which will be more Latinx and more diverse due to the changing demographics of the United States, but need federal appropriations to do so (HACU, 2018).

Federal agencies must remain committed to not only funding HSIs through competitive grant processes, but also increasing appropriations each year, as the most recent research and reports show that HSIs are doing their job. Recent studies show that for four-year colleges and universities, Title V funds significantly predict bachelor's degrees awarded to Latinxs (Perez, 2018). Title V funds, however, have not been shown to significantly predict graduation rates, yet this is likely a function of the inaccuracy of the 150% graduation rate (Perez, 2018). In fact, Espinosa, Turk, and Taylor (2017) found that when using data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), which more accurately captures student enrollment and outcomes beyond the federal graduation rates, the completion rates at both two-year and four-year HSIs are much higher than those reported by the federal government. Arguably, HSIs are graduating students at equitable rates when compared to non-HSIs, after controlling for selectivity and resources (Flores & Park, 2015; Rodríguez & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Moreover, HSIs are contributing to the economic mobility of students, with students from lower income quartiles moving into higher income quartiles upon graduation from HSIs (Espinosa, Kelchen, & Taylor, 2018). Students that graduate from HSIs are also earning equitable post-graduation wages as those at non-HSIs, after controlling for selectivity and resources (Park, Flores, & Ryan, 2018).

Yet these measures, including graduation rates and post-graduation employment, are what I call white normative measures (Garcia, 2019). These are the measures that have been determined to be the most desirable and most worthy outcomes for colleges and universities situated within a racialized system that values whiteness (Garcia, 2019). Although these measures are important, are they the most appropriate for institutions that are racially minoritized (HSIs) and that enroll racially minoritized students (Latinxs)? I urge you to consider the importance of infusing racially conscious and liberatory measures for HSIs.

Not only did Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2018) find that a majority of Title V grants were written using race-neutral language, Vargas (2018) also found that HSIs that enroll a larger white population and smaller Black population were more likely to receive Title V funding. This suggests that the federal agencies funding racially minoritized institutions (HSIs) do in fact value whiteness and white normativity, thus further stratifying an already racially stratified postsecondary system, which will ultimately maintain inequitable educational outcomes for the exact students HSIs seek to serve (Garcia, 2019; Vargas, 2018). The federal agencies that offer competitive grant programs must grapple with servingness, paying particular attention to the need to ground curricular and co-curricular options in Latinx and BIPOC ways of knowing, the need to disrupt racism and microaggressions within HSIs, the need to better serve the local Latinx and BIPOC community, and the need to graduate students that are committed to equity, justice, liberation, and antiracism (Garcia, 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019). There is also a desperate need to help HSIs change the composition of their faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate student population (Contreras, 2017; Garcia & Guzman-Alvarez, 2019; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013; Vargas et al., 2019) and the leadership and decision making practices within HSIs (Garcia, 2018). The federal agencies funding HSIs should consider these as important elements of servingness. I ask federal agencies to consider the most recent research that centers HSIs as you develop future RFPS and accountability measures.

CONCLUSION:

As I sign off on this love letter, I want to remind y'all that I am 100% committed to the development and uplift of HSIs. I hope you will take my comments seriously, and rethink your approach to the important work that you do every day in HSIs. I challenge y'all to access and use the latest HSI research as you develop and implement your HSI grants. I encourage you to think outside the box, and freedom dream a little, about what HSIs can and should be, beyond the white normative standards and

practices of all postsecondary institutions. I absolutely want Latinx and BIPOC students to graduate and get jobs, but I also want them to graduate as socially conscious people who understand their historical, social, linguistic, and racial-ethnic backgrounds. I also want them to be committed to serving, empowering, and transforming their own Latinx and BIPOC communities upon graduation. This will require a devaluing of white normative standards, and a reinvention of measures of success for HSIs and Latinx and BIPOC students. I encourage you to transform your organizational structures so that they are not only grounded in the ways of knowing and being of Latinxs and BIPOC, but are also humanizing and empowering for them. Stop being race neutral, and understand that becoming an HSI presents an opportunity to disrupt whiteness while being unapologetically committed to racially minoritized students. Adelante!

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