

COVER STORY: We Are All Latino

Monday, September 16, 2013 - By Paul Bradley



Photo courtesy Miami Dade College
Single Stop USA student mentors gather at Miami Dade College.

COVER STORY

We Are All Latino

Single Stop USA Aids 'Post-Traditional' Students

By Paul Bradley

Meet the post-traditional college student. He or she bears little resemblance to the traditional image of the college student found in the popular media. There are few leafy campuses or toga parties here.

The post-traditional student doesn't typically enroll in college full-time or live in a dorm. His parents don't have college degrees.

Instead, the post-traditional student is likely to enroll in a community college, attend school part-time and juggle class assignments with work obligations. The post-traditional student likely lives at home with a family or parents and is the first in their family to go to college.

Increasingly, that student is likely to be of Hispanic origin, a member of the country's fastest-growing minority group. The profile of Latinos pursuing higher education, in fact, is becoming representative of a growing majority of all college students. A recent study from the Pew Hispanic Center showed that, for the first time, Latinos have surpassed whites in college enrollment rate.

"Latino students are reflected in what has become a broader profile of college students," said Deborah Santiago, vice-

A New Kind of Student	
A growing number of college students could be described as "post-traditional," and many of them are heading to community colleges. Many policymakers believe the higher education financial aid system must be reshaped to meet the needs of these new students. Here is a look at the differences between traditional and post-traditional students.	
TRADITIONAL STUDENT PROFILE	POST-TRADITIONAL STUDENT PROFILE
College-ready	May need academic prep or remediation
Enroll in a college or university full-time	Enroll at a community college and attend part-time
Enroll the fall after High school graduation	Delay postsecondary enrollment while entering workforce
Live on-campus	Live off-campus with parents or dependents
Complete a bachelor's	Take more than four years

president for policy and research for Excelencia in Education, the Washington think tank which coined the “post-traditional” term in a policy paper released earlier this year. “So much of public policy is aimed at that traditional student. Yet the post-traditional student, that profile, represents the majority of students today.”

degree in four years	to complete a degree
Parents have college degree	First in family to enroll in college
White, non-Hispanic	Latino or African-American
Do not work while enrolled	Work 30 hours or more per week
Make college choices based on academic programs offered and institutional prestige	Make college choices based on cost, location and accessibility

SOURCE: EXCELENCIA IN EDUCATION

As lawmakers in Washington prepare to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, groups like Excelencia are urging congress to view a rewrite of financial aid rules through a Latino lens, boosting student support capabilities to help all post-traditional students achieve academic success.

Advocates are asking Congress to take a close look at Single Stop USA, a non-profit group which strives to link needy Americans — including community college students — to some of the more than \$65 billion in government services and benefits that go unclaimed every year. The idea is to get students the kind of financial support that will allow them to finish their studies without worrying about being evicted or not having food on the table — real concerns for those living at or below the poverty line.

A study prepared for Single Stop and the American Association of Community College Trustees, a strong supporter of the program, took a close look at Single Stop’s Community College Initiative.

“For students, having financial security may allow them to register for and attend classes, devote more time studying, reduce stress, purchase books and supplies needed for class, or afford the lunch required to thrive during the day,” the study said. “Many community college students have financial needs not covered by their financial aid packages, such as contributing to their households. Unfortunately, such needs interfere with college completion. Supplementing financial aid to include provisions for such currently excluded needs may increase the overall efficacy of the financial-aid dollars, enabling students to fulfill requirements to complete their educations.”

The study report added: “Single Stop helps colleges too. First, the organization assists in managing the daunting challenge of serving students living in poverty. It is common for administrators to feel overwhelmed at the sheer magnitude of that task, causing them to feel frustrated and torn between their access mission and their financial bottom line. When they have help in thinking about ways to triage that need and successfully meet it, it can affirm their sense that serving these students is possible, worthwhile, and achievable.”

Single Stop recently won a second grant from the White House Social Innovation Fund to expand its work to more community college campuses.

Who Does Single Stop USA Serve?

The Single Stop USA Community College Initiative operates on 17 campuses, linking eligible students to public benefits so the path to a degree will be free of financial concerns. Here is a breakdown of the students who are served.

DEMOGRAPHICS BREAKDOWN

► Community College Students

Average annual income	\$7,184
Average age	28
Marital status	85% are single
Gender (male/female)	36%/64%
Households with children	45%
Average household size	2.7
Work status	50% work at least part-time

► Ethnic Breakdown

Hispanic or Latino	41%
Black	35%
White (Non-Hispanic)	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%
Other	4%
More than one race	2%

SOURCE: ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES, SINGLE STOP USA

“This is something that has caught on like wildfire,” said Elisabeth Mason, chief executive officer and co-founder of Single Stop USA. “There is a lot of funding that students don’t access. A lot of students can’t afford to stay in school. We are looking at shoring up that safety net. It’s a proxy for student success.”

Many policymakers believe that the need to increase Hispanic student success is urgent if the country is to reach its college completion goals. Latinos represent over 20 percent of students in K-12 education and are projected to increase their representation more than other demographic group. But their academic achievement is lagging. In 2012, 21.3 percent of Latino adults had earned an associate degree or higher, compared to 40.1 percent of all adults.

Limited degree attainment among Latinos is the result of numerous challenges, including college cost, limited college knowledge, increased family responsibilities, and the need to work while enrolled. Many Latino students are the first in their family to attend college and make choices to contain costs by enrolling in community colleges, attending part-time, and working more than 20 hours per week while enrolled. Data show all these practical choices by students hinder their college completion.

According to Excelencia, too few Latino students know there are resources available to assist with college costs. They are also less likely to access financial resources like tax credits, food assistance, and public health insurance that can enable them to maintain a stable family budget while enrolled. Single Stop and its community college partners connect thousands of students to millions of dollars in existing benefits and services that immediately reduce the financial strain faced by Latino students.

Single Stop is both high-tech and high-touch. Its Benefits Enrollment Network proprietary software is a powerful benefits enrollment and case management tool that can link students to an array of potential benefits within 15 to 20 minutes. The organization also connects the students to legal professionals for issues such as immigration, to financial counselors for help in consolidating debt, and to free tax preparers who are able to get hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars returned to them.

Single Stop was launched by the New York-based Robin Hood Foundation in 2001 to help the poor at food pantries and homeless shelters. In 2007, Single Stop took steps to take its initiative national through its Community College Initiative. In 2009, it had opened its first site on a community college campus, at Kingsborough Community College in New York.

In 2011, it won a \$1.1 million grant from the White House Social Innovation Fund to support expanded operations. Today, Single Stop sites are located on 17 community college campuses in seven states, including eight Hispanic Serving Institutions. During 2012, Single Stop served more than 32,000 students on these campuses, drawing down over \$60 million in existing benefits and services, according to a study of the initiative; more than 40 percent of beneficiaries were Hispanic. This year, Single Stop plans additional sites in Louisiana and Philadelphia.

Mason said community colleges provide an ideal bridge between higher education and social services.

“They are the most obvious place,” she said. “We are looking at places where people have a chance to move up and out into the middle class. This is something community colleges around the country should have.”

ACCT President and Chief Executive Officer J. Noah Brown agrees. He sees Single Stop as a critical part of the college completion agenda.

“What Single Stop does makes great sense,” he said. “It’s a model that works and ought to be replicated at all of our colleges.”

“Single Stop and ACCT are committed to doing the longitudinal studies and look at the completion rates. We want to build a system where we can look at the data and understand the effectiveness of the model. I think the data will show that Single Stop will move students through to institutions to where they want to go.”

CUNY Hostos Community College, in the Bronx, N.Y., was one of the first colleges to forge a partnership with Single Stop. It opened in 2008, and seemed like a natural fit. Located in one of the country’s poorest congressional districts, the college has a Latino enrollment of almost 60 percent. More than 90 percent of its students receive Pell Grants. Many of its students are single mothers; 67 percent of enrollment is female.

“There was a lot of buy-in right away,” said Johanna Gomez, dean of student life. “It was helping not only our students, but also their families.”

Nathaniel Cruz, vice president for student development and enrollment management, said Single Stop meets numerous needs of Hostos students.

“It’s not financial aid, it’s financial assistance,” he said. “It’s issues at home, like child care. Students may need to leave home to attend class or go to work.”

Single Stop at Hostos has helped more than 1,500 students, and the college is beginning to see some encouraging academic results, Cruz said. Between 2008 and 2011, the semester-to-semester retention rate has climbed from 57 percent to 64 percent.

“It’s the first time in our college’s history that we were able to increase retention rates for four straight years,” he said.

At Miami Dade College, Single Stop has delivered more than \$16.5 million in benefits to nearly 12,500 students on two of MDC’s eight campuses since 2010.

“We have a lot of students in need,” said Theodore Levitt, MDC’s director of college communications. “Our students need a lot of help to stay in school.” Some 76 percent of Miami Dade students receive Pell Grants; 70 percent of students are Hispanic.

The program has grown rapidly at MDC. From the first year to the second, the number of students enrolled grew by 70 percent and the value of benefits received by students grew by 35 percent.

More growth is in the offing. Next year, the college plans to screen all incoming freshmen to identify who could benefit from Single Stop. The expansion reflects the college’s support of the program, Levitt said.

“We are trying to scale it up,” he said.

Bringing the initiative to scale is exactly what Mason wants to see.

“Our goal is to bring systemic change,” she said. “We think the answer is at our fingertips.”

IT'S YOUR TURN: CCW wants to hear from you!

Q: Would Single Stop USA benefit students at your college

Comments: [ccweekblog](#) | www.twitter.com/ccweek

Community College Week

<http://www.ccweek.com/>