

Project Description

Chicanos/Latinos(as) are among the most educationally subordinate racial-ethnic group in our society. Research reveals, for instance, that Latinos(as) have the highest high school drop out rates and are less likely to earn bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees than any other racial-ethnic group (except American Indians) in the United States. Given their progressively smaller numbers in the educational pipeline, the marginality of Latinos(as) in higher—particularly *doctoral*—education is especially pronounced. In 2001, for example, Latinos earned just 4.4% of all doctorates, while whites, Blacks, and Asian Americans received 78.6%, 6%, and 7.5%, respectively (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac 2003). When disaggregated by gender and nationality, the statistics reveals that Chicanos/as in general, and Chicano men in particular, are acutely underrepresented among recipients of doctoral degrees (Gándara 1995; Hoffer et al. 2003; Solórzano 1993).

Because doctorate education is the gateway to research careers and the professorate, the dramatic underrepresentation of Chicanos/as at this level of the educational hierarchy has detrimental implications, particularly for knowledge production. Thus, it is imperative that researchers examine the factors contributing to the low representation of Chicanos/as at the doctoral level, particularly in the University of California system. As the premier public research institution in California, the state with the lion’s share of Chicanos/Latinos (García and Figueroa 2002), the University of California has traditionally produced the largest number of Chicano/a doctorates (Solórzano 1993). Recent policies enacted by the University of California system, including budget cuts, narrowing of admissions criteria, and increases in student fees, however, threaten the academic presence and viability of Chicano/a students (especially working-class students) at this institution. Though scholars and policy-makers have articulated concerns about the deleterious impacts these policies portend to have at the undergraduate level, less concern

and research has focused on how these policies also threaten the presence of Chicanos/as at the doctoral level.

My dissertation research examines how current policies enacted by the University of California regents, as well as inequalities embedded within the graduate schooling process itself, contribute to the educational underrepresentation of Chicanos and Chicanas in doctoral degree programs in the University of California (U.C.) system. The central research questions of this study are the following: 1) What impact have past and present policies had on Chicanos/as’ access to doctoral degree programs in the University of California system? In particular, I am interested in examining how Affirmative Action policies (e.g. SP1 and SP2) and current fiscal and admissions policies impinge on Chicanos/as’ access to doctoral degree programs in the U.C. system; and 2) How does the graduate schooling process itself contribute to the educational underrepresentation of Chicanos/as? Specifically, I am interested in examining how Chicanas/os are impacted by race, class, and gender inequalities embedded in various aspects of the graduate schooling process, including the graduate school curriculum, classroom dynamics, peer and faculty interactions, mentorship and faculty expectations, financial support, and teaching and research opportunities and experiences. I am also interested in examining how Chicana and Chicano graduate students manage and balance their familial and educational responsibilities within an institutional context and academic culture that assumes the experiences of White, middle-class, heterosexual males as normative (Segura 2003), and rewards “family-free” academic men with housewives that assume the responsibilities for reproductive labor (Hochschild 2003). In short, my dissertation study will examine Chicanos/as’ access to, and experiences in, doctoral degree programs in the University of California system within a theoretical and empirical context recognizing the mutually constitutive relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

My dissertation research builds on, yet also moves beyond, the theoretical and empirical focus of the extant literature on Chicanos and Chicanas in graduate education. Scholars have made invaluable contributions to our knowledge about the correlates of academic success among high-achieving Chicanos/Latinos(as) (e.g. Aragón 1998; Gándara 1995; Lango 1995; Louque and Garcia 2000; Simoniello 1981), while others have documented the various barriers and types of discrimination that Chicanos/Latinos(as) experience while in graduate school (e.g. Achor and Morales 1990; Cúadraz 1993, 1996; Ibarra 2001; Margolis and Romero 1998; Solórzano 1993, 1998; Solórzano and Yosso 2001). Notwithstanding their insightful observations, the existing literature on Chicanos/as in graduate school is rather limited. Most of these studies, for example, were conducted with Chicanos/as that completed their studies during the 1970s-1980s; thus, there is a lack of more recent data on Chicanos/as, as well as on those *in the process* of attaining a graduate degree (Gonzalez et al. 2002). Perhaps most importantly, these studies do not systematically explore how race, class, gender, and sexuality simultaneously structure the experiences of *both* Chicanos and Chicanas in graduate school. Most, if not all, of these studies, for example, assume that gender is relevant only for women; no empirical research to date, for instance, explores how Chicano males mediate their familial and educational demands and responsibilities, or examine how the ideals of masculinity impinge on Chicanos pursuing higher education. The majority of these studies also fail to examine the experiences of Chicanos/as in graduate school in a rigorous intersectional manner (some even denounce intersectionality frameworks, e.g. Ibarra 2001). By conceptualizing race, class, gender, and sexuality as intersectional *and* relational constructs, my dissertation research will thus fill significant theoretical and empirical gaps in the existing literature, as well as add to our knowledge about the dilemmas Chicanos/as continue to face in the University of California system.

Methods

This project focuses on the experiences of Chicana and Chicano doctoral students at one campus of the University of California: UC Riverside. Research reveals that current University of California (U.C.) policies have resulted in a “redistribution” and increasing segregation of students within the U.C. system, insofar as Chicano/Latino students are increasingly denied admission at the most selective and elite campuses (such as Berkeley, Los Angeles and San Diego), and are being channeled into the “less selective campuses,” namely Riverside and Santa Cruz (García and Figueroa 2002). Despite increases in Chicano/Latino enrollments vis-à-vis other U.C. campuses, U.C. Riverside has also had to deny admission to undergraduate students due to budget cuts. How doctoral degree admissions at UC Riverside in general, and the experiences of UCR Chicano/a graduate students in particular, have also been impacted by these and other policies, however, has not been sufficiently examined or explored.

My dissertation research will employ qualitative research methods to examine Chicanos/as’ access to, and experiences in, graduate degree programs at UC Riverside. Specifically, the data for my study stems from in-depth qualitative interviews, participant observation, and analysis of institutional data. Specifically, I will interview three types of students at UCR: 1) Chicanas/os that are in the process of attaining a doctoral degree; 2) Chicanas/os that have successfully completed a doctoral degree program; and 3) Chicanas/os that have dropped out from their doctoral degree programs. By juxtaposing the experiences of “successful” versus “non-successful” students, I can glean important insights about the nature of graduate education and the type of student that thrives or fails in academia. Moreover, by including both students that are in the process of attaining their degrees, as well as those who have already completed their degrees, I can compare the experiences of Chicano/a graduate students that have labored under different historical, social, and political contexts. Respondents

will be provided complete confidentiality and anonymity. The qualitative interviews will be supplemented by participant observation. As Burawoy (1991: 2) explains, “the advantages of participant observation are assumed to lie not just in direct observation of how people act but also how they understand and experience those acts. It enables us to juxtapose what people say they are up to against what they actually do.” Thus, by observing and interacting with Chicano/a graduate students in a “natural” setting (e.g. in classrooms, campus activities, in their peer and faculty interactions, etc.), I can bring more reliability to the data gathered through interviews. Finally, institutional data documenting admission and retention rates at U.C. Riverside (which are available through UCR’s Graduate Division and the U.C. Office of the President) will also be examined.

Respondents for this study will be recruited mainly through snowball sampling techniques, though efforts will be made to include a sample with diverse background characteristics. I will first identify Chicana/o students by contacting the Chicana/Latina(o) graduate student organization on campus, as well as the Graduate Division, to help me locate students that are in the process of attaining their graduate degrees. I will also ask faculty, student organizations on campus, and graduate students to help me locate Chicanas/os who completed or dropped out of their graduate degree programs. Once I recruit respondents, I will tap into their networks and identify other potential interviewees. Chicano and Chicana graduate students from the fields of natural sciences, social sciences, education, and humanities, will be recruited, with a projected sample size of 40-50. Because my aim is to build and improve theory in the sociology of education, rather than on producing generalizable results, I will employ the extended case method (Burawoy 1991). One of the primary objectives of my study is to gather rich, qualitative data that are conducive to building a theoretical framework that is grounded in Chicana feminist theorizing, Chicano social science scholarship, and critical theory in education.

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