

Oklahoma City's Emerging Hispanic Community: New Partnerships, New Successes

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Abstract

The University of Central Oklahoma's new strategic plan sought to increase its connection to the emerging Hispanic community in Oklahoma City. Simultaneously, the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce was seeking a higher education partner. This case study describes resulting new programs for Hispanic students and businesses. The relationship inspired the newly formed UCO Latino Faculty & Staff Association to connect UCO to the Hispanic community while providing greater opportunities for Hispanic student success.

Keywords:

University of Central Oklahoma; Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Latino Faculty Staff Association; Latino Community Development Association; College-going Hispanic Students.

Introduction

If Oklahoma City is anything, it is a mirror of the trends in the past 15 years that has seen a near doubling of the Hispanic population in America's metropolitan areas. The context for the partnership described in this article may best be set in the context of the demographics of the Sooner State's capital city and the nation (Barker, 2012; Borgerding, 2012). A U.S. Census Bureau report (2014; see also, Barker, 2009) indicates that of 620,602 Oklahoma City residents, some 17.2%, or 106,743 Hispanics, call the state's largest city their home. Of those, about 80% are of Mexican heritage. From 2000-2010, the community's population increased by 88.4%. That proportionate concentration slightly trails the U.S. average of 17.4%, but nearly doubles the Oklahoma percentage of 9.8% Hispanics among its 3.87 million residents. One-third of Oklahoma Hispanics are immigrants (Brown & Lopez, 2013; see also, Llopis, 2012).

In addition, Hispanic owned metro businesses exceed 7,660 enterprises, or about 4.1% of all city businesses (Greater OKC Hispanic Chamber 2015a; Lopis 2012). That percentage nearly doubles the state rate of 2.3%, but lags behind the U.S. average of 8.3% by more than half. In 2007, the last year reported by the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), OKC Hispanic-owned business generated \$1.7 billion in sales receipts and employed 8,940 paid employees. According to the Hispanic Chamber, statewide Latino purchasing power tallies \$6.2 billion, with 763% growth in the past decade.

Nearly one in five children under the age of 18 in the OKC metro are Hispanic. This is reflected in Oklahoma City Public Schools, which since 2000 has experienced a doubling in the enrollment of Hispanic children. Hispanic students comprise 49.6% of the 40,400 young people in the state's largest school district as shown in Figure 1 (Neu, 2014; see also Institute for Child Advocacy 2013; Postsecondary Education Opportunities, 2012).

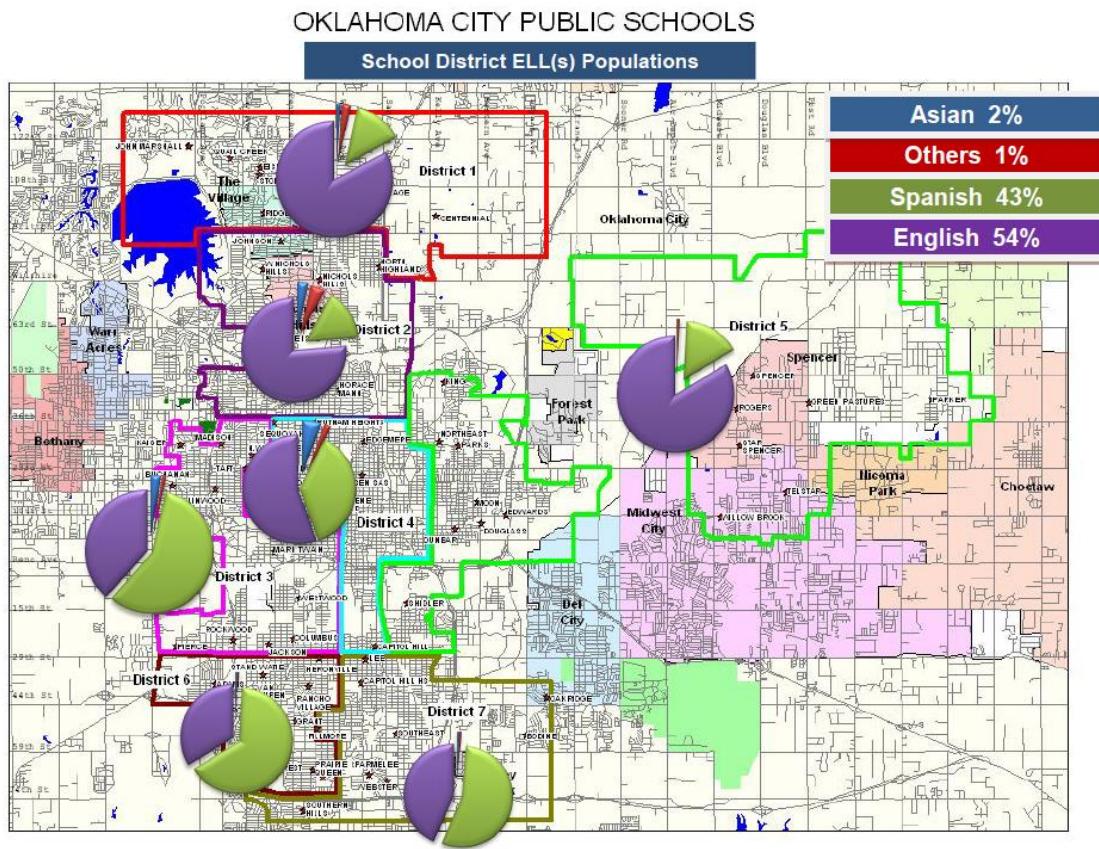


Figure 1. Distribution of Oklahoma City Public Schools Students by Language

What also exists is a clash between multiple cultures. Hispanics are now the largest minority population in Oklahoma, exceeding the enrollment of the 39 federally recognized Native American nations and tribes in what was once “Indian Territory.” Hispanic community leaders explain the growth surge by citing Oklahoma City’s family-friendly atmosphere, neighborhoods free from gangs unlike major metro areas in adjoining Texas, and business opportunities in one of the nation’s healthiest state economies. The Oklahoma Legislature, however, has passed some of the most restrictive immigration laws in the nation, with some legislators contending that Hispanics are not acculturating into mainstream society quickly enough (Lavandara & Sabo, 2011). Even with restrictive laws, an estimated 68% of immigrant youngsters in Oklahoma are Hispanic, with Oklahoma City Public Schools indicating that 43% of its households speak Spanish as the primary language. This latter statistic suggests the relative newness and importance of immigrants to the OKC community. Language challenges in part have affected the success of Oklahoma City Public Schools, as shown in Table 1. Further, the Metropolitan Policy

Program at the Brookings Institution (Wilson, 2014), reported an increase from half to three-quarters in the number of 16-64 year old Hispanics in OKC who had limited English proficiency. Wilson (2014) reports that 79.7% of OKC metro Hispanic households speak Spanish as the primary language, ranking OKC No. 17 among the largest 89 metro areas.

Table 1. Oklahoma City Public Schools Hispanic Trends, 2014

Characteristic	OKCPS	Failed state student performance tests: Hispanic Majority	Passed state student performance tests: Hispanic Majority	Total Schools
Enrollment	40,383			
Hispanic Students	49.6%			
Bilingual Students	19,465			
Percent of Households with primary language other than English	43%			
Native American Tribes and Clans in student body	67			
Percent of students eligible for reduced lunch	26,186			
ACT average score	OKCPS: 18.4 OK: 20.7 U.S.: 21			
Elementary Schools		14	12	56
Middle Schools		4	3	16
High Schools		0	5	16

Notes:

Oklahoma elementary students are assessed in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Oklahoma middle schools students are assessed in reading, mathematics/Algebra 1, science, Social Studies/Geography/U.S. History, writing.

Oklahoma high school students are assessed in English II and III, Algebra I and II, Geometry, Biology I, U.S. History.

This paper describes the emergence of a shared-space partnership between the University of Central Oklahoma and the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Its purpose is to provide acculturation, college-going, and business development opportunities to the Hispanic community. This convergence was the coincidental simultaneous strategic planning initiative of UCO to expand its reach as a metropolitan-serving institution and the Hispanic Chamber's planned physical plant expansion in which it sought a higher education partner to advance its educational and business services to its member and larger community. This partnership resulted in new services directly provided within the Chamber by UCO and the energizing of the university's Latino Faculty Staff Association to play a significant role in fulfilling the idealized partnership to the benefit of both organizations.

Partnerships like these between universities and their communities have grown significantly over the past couple of decades (Vidal, Nye, Walker, Manjarrez, Romanik, Corvington, Ferryman, Freibert, & Kim, 2003). There are numerous influences. These reasons include the need for communities and campuses to collaborate because of limited resources available to address complex community and social issues, an increased effort by higher education to develop a civic purpose in alignment with the community, and because many funding entities require multi-agency collaboration as a condition for fiscal support (Harkavy, 1999; Holland, 1999; Holland & Gelmon, 1998; Walskok, 1995); Zlotkowski, 1999).

Scholarly literature is consistent in highlighting that Hispanic students face additional challenges when it comes to being successful in college. Torres (2006) notes that there are challenges to these students in terms of navigating two cultures – their native culture and the culture of the university. Others have carried this finding further and noted that issues of culture shock and cultural incongruity are major inhibitors to Hispanic student success (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gloria & Kurpius, 1996). Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) found that those Hispanic students who have adequate financial resources to afford college have reduced stress and consequently are able to focus more on being successful. Further, Rivera and Monzon (2013) used the concepts of cultural, economic, and human capital as a framework for assessing those factors that contribute most to Hispanic college student success, and they discovered that these factors could be enhanced through more engaging programs and services. The programs that have been developed by UCO use this lens also to ensure that Hispanic students are successful.

UCO Metro “Equity Mindset” Strategic Plan

The University of Central Oklahoma has long been engaged with the metro’s Hispanic community through partnerships with numerous educational and social agencies. These efforts were intentionally increased during the institution’s strategic planning process in 2013 that resulted in the seven-year plan, Vision 2020 (UCO, 2013). In its previous planning process in 2008, UCO initiated a deliberate course to set itself apart from Oklahoma’s other 24 public higher education institutions by pursuing designation by its governing boards as the state’s only metro-serving institution.

The impetus for the designation was UCO's dramatic growth to 17,200 students, with a history dating back 125 years as Oklahoma's first state public higher education institution as a state normal school. In 1894, the school was located in the undeveloped community of Edmond, which has since blossomed into a northeastern suburb of Oklahoma City. In 2013 CNBC ranked Edmond, with a population of 100,000 and of whom 55 percent of its residents hold a bachelor's degree, as the most livable suburb in the United States. UCO is the only four-year public higher education institution located within an Oklahoma-designated metropolitan area.

During the strategic planning process, UCO President Don Betz reinforced UCO's commitment to the concept of an inclusive "equity mindset" (Ramaley, 2015; see also, Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002). In serving the ten-county metropolitan area. "We will accomplish this objective through building intentional partnerships with business, industry, government, non-profits, and educational institutions. These partnerships will enable us to draw upon the exceptional talent of our faculty, staff, and students to collectively address critical issues and opportunities" (UCO, 2013).

As more than 100 faculty, staff, and students engaged in a metropolitan area "deep dive" as part of the strategic planning operationalizing process, they reversed the typical Strength/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) process to TOWS. The former is the traditional planning process that can emphasize assessing the internal organizational structure to provide direction for an expansion of existing programs. By focusing on the external environment to evaluate its needs and opportunities TOWS adds the additional dimension of identifying new programmatic development and implementation. UCO teams conducted secondary research in an extensive environmental scan of all metro social, educational, and business issues, and then engaged over 80 external leaders in individual or panel interviews to mine their insights and gain their advice.

Three general observations emerged from the 2013 environmental scan:

1. UCO should "be bold" in extending its service presence throughout the ten-county metropolitan area. This comment acknowledged recent expansions by UCO into the heart of the Oklahoma City's downtown area with focused academic and service programs in music, performing arts, and business assistance. UCO's expansion is inspired by the "Stewards of Place" movement by its primary higher education association partner, the American Association of State Colleges & Universities to align its programs in response to the needs of its service area.
2. The growth momentum of the Hispanic community was palpable with extraordinary impact on the Oklahoma City Public Schools system. In the previous 10 years Hispanic student enrollment grew from a small percentage to comprise half the enrollment in the state's largest school district. This trend foretold dramatic changes in the composition of future college-bound students and workforce graduates.

3. No public four-year institution maintained a footprint south of Interstate 40, which served as the boundary—both geographically and psychologically—to the downtown area of Oklahoma City and its south side. UCO was encouraged to provide greater educational and outreach services to residents in the southern half of the city, which is increasingly being dominated by the Hispanic community.

Growth of the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

The nexus for UCO’s expanded footprint in south Oklahoma City occurred in 2014 with a proposal from the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. President and Chief Executive Director David Castillo approached UCO to serve as the underwriter to develop a conference center and classroom in the chamber’s new facility.

Founded in 2000, the Chamber expanded to include more than 400 members and had twice outgrown space provided to it by non-profits and a technical school (Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2015b). In 2013 the Chamber purchased and began redevelopment of an office building located in the heart of the Hispanic community in southeastern Oklahoma City, located some 19 miles from UCO’s suburban northeastern Edmond campus.

Castillo, a former technical school educator and former OKCPS school board member, approached UCO in 2014 to sponsor the complete rebuilding of the conference room. Over the subsequent months, UCO staff consulted broadly with the Chamber, advising overall on information technology, color schemes, and finishing materials for the entire facility. The University funded the remodeling and outfitting of the conference/class room as shared space. UCO agreed to provide \$25,000 per year as a sponsorship for a renewable, two-year contract. Funding was provided through the Office of Academic Affairs. UCO’s Customized Education department anticipated that as its service expanded into traditional academic programs, tuition revenue would offset the sponsorship fee. UCO provides the additional service to the Chamber of providing access to the classroom’s state-of-the-art technology for the Chamber’s operational activities. Through this arrangement, UCO has access for classes, seminars, and workshops in a classroom/conference room that was branded to UCO’s bronze and blue color scheme and logo.

“It’s been a great relationship since then and we see a bright future ahead of us,” said Castillo (personal communication, November 23, 2015). Based in part on Castillo’s and the Chamber’s leadership insights into the Hispanic community’s family-oriented culture, business, and education needs, UCO has responded through numerous programs and consulting services. For example, Castillo noted that Hispanic entrepreneurs seek to start businesses but required assistance in such small business fundamentals of choosing an economically viable enterprise with training in business planning, finances, and marketing. As the Hispanic community continues to mature in its business development, Castillo predicted greater diversification and growth of its business community. UCO has

historically offered free small business development seminars to the Hispanic community taught by bilingual Hispanic staff, such as Carlos Amaya, an Hispanic small business development specialist and member of the UCO Latino Faculty & Staff Association, with 15 years of experience at UCO. With Castillo's advice, UCO is assisting the Chamber in surveying its membership to determine the scope of workshops its entrepreneurs require.

There clearly are needs and demands for those services, as reported both by the Hispanic Chamber and the Brookings Institution (Wilson, 2014). The Chamber shows the Hispanic OKC workforce is split into five sectors: services (27%); natural resources, construction and maintenance (24%); sales and office occupations (18%); management, business, science and arts, (17%); and production, transportation, and material moving (14%).

Language and education challenges are also impeding the workforce development for a significant portion of OKC Hispanics, according to Brookings (Wilson, 2014). More than 58,000 Hispanics who have limited English proficiency (LEP), making OKC the No. 11 metro of the 89 largest in the U.S. in that category. Among those, over 55% have less than a high school education. Nearly three-quarters of LEPs are employed, with 25% primarily working in construction. Their median annual earnings of \$22,000 substantially trails the estimated 2014 mean wage of \$40,850 for Oklahoma, reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014). The Hispanic Chamber found that overall Hispanic median family income in Oklahoma City to be \$34,774, while the statewide average is \$45,339. (The U.S. average in 2013 was \$53,046).

In the sponsorship contractual agreement between UCO and the Chamber, the university has access to the shared space on evenings and weekends to offer classes, business seminars and college preparatory workshops. These programs are heavily promoted by the Chamber to its membership and community. College-going and scholarship sessions are attended by students and their parents, often overflowing the room's capacity, as shown in Figure 2.

The Chamber uses the conference room during the daytime and occasional evenings for its membership meetings and Chamber subcommittee planning meetings. Because UCO is continuing to develop its class and workshop programs to fill out its access schedule, the agreement between the two organizations enables the Chamber to use the conference room for its own purposes if the room is idle.

Figure 2. Hispanic students and their parents attended a Gates Millennium Scholarship Application Workshop in November. Conducted by the University of Central Oklahoma, the workshop was held in the UCO conference/classroom located in the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The workshop was one of many addressing college opportunities as well as business development offered through the facility. Programs often are delivered bilingually. Photo provided by UCO.



Student Engagement

The new presence of UCO at the Hispanic Chamber over the past two years has also provided numerous opportunities for engagement with Hispanic K-12 students, with more programs to be launched in 2016 based on the best practices reported by other institutions (Excelencia in Higher Education, 2015d). The impact has been significant, according to Barry Lofton, UCO executive director of admissions. This includes in 2015 a 21% increase in the number of UCO's Hispanic first-time freshmen and transfer students, from 388 to 409, and a 13% increase in all underrepresented groups from 1,328 to 1,499 students. This follows on 10-year growth from 2000-2010 with an 82% increase in Hispanic students as UCO's overall student population grew by 26%. The increase in Hispanic enrollment also reflects national trends, according to the Pew Research Center. In a 2013 report, it noted that Hispanic high school graduates for the first time enrolled in greater proportion than did majority students. That analysis also reported the third straight year of Hispanic enrollment growth nationwide (Lopez & Fry, 2013).

There clearly is room for substantial growth in the number of college-degree holders in OKC. The Hispanic Chamber (2015) notes slightly more than 14% of OKC Hispanic community members hold a two- or four-year or graduate degree. That new population also represents some challenges, with 39% of first-time Hispanic students not declaring a major, which places them at greater risk because of reduced connection to campus. Further, with a majority being the first in their family to attend college, these students also are lacking the safety net of family members who can draw on their own college experience to offer advice.

The magnitude of this challenge will only increase without a direct, compelling response by higher education institutions. The U. S. Census Bureau projects that the number of school age Hispanics will grow by 166% by 2050 compared to other populations. This growth will cause a significant increase in the number of students from Hispanic backgrounds who are college or workforce ready by 2020 (Jenkins, 2009).

Research predicts that second generation Hispanics, who are typically children of immigrant families, will represent 23% of the labor force growth between 2000 and 2020. Considering this reality, workforce training and career opportunities are essential to ensure Hispanics are able to acquire positions beyond low-skill, low-paying jobs. Additionally, ACT, Inc. (2009) and Blankenship (2010) have indicated that although the number of students has increased by 60 percent since 2005, the number of Hispanic students who have demonstrated college readiness in all four subject areas of the ACT test is only 10%. Most Hispanic students who make it to higher education either choose to enroll at community colleges (Crisp & Nora 2010) and urban public universities (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Working to establish structures to support these students is critical for colleges and universities. The work of UCO contributes significantly to this effort to increase Hispanic student enrollment and success.

Currently, no Oklahoma institution is included among the more than 600 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) whose student bodies include more than 25% Hispanic population (Excelencia in Education, 2015a, 2015b; Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities, 2012). Three Oklahoma institutions are considered "emerging" with more than 15% of its

students of Hispanic origin, but none is a public four-year institution. UCO projects it will reach emerging status by 2018.

The impetus for enrollment growth and strategies at UCO is through the division of Student Affairs, with many programs offered at the Hispanic Chamber facility. For example, UCO Office of Undergraduate Admissions regularly collaborates with the Aspiring Americans, Inc., to provide helpful information to undocumented students and families. UCO is now linked to that organization, which seeks to assist undocumented students to attend college.

The programming at the Hispanic Chamber is varied and focused on assisting students to become college ready. General workshops focus on strategies to complete college admissions and financial aid applications, as well as mock interviews to assist them with scholarship interviews. Additionally, special Gates Millennium Scholarship Application workshops are conducted by UCO staff for parents and students. Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, each year 5,000 of these scholarships are awarded to student from under-represented populations to attend any accredited college or university. Grant awards are based on the cost of attendance at the selected institution and financial need after accounting for other grants and scholarships assistance the students receive. Finally, a Steps to Becoming a Broncho Workshop is offered which provides general assistance to help admitted students to UCO feel more comfortable with enrollment steps.

Other Hispanic student recruitment activities and initiatives to strengthen and build partnerships are substantial. New partnerships have been developed with Aspiring Americans, Inc., the League of United Latin American Citizens, and INTEGRIS Southwest Medical Center. Existing partnerships that have been expanded include those with the Hispanic Chamber, OKC Public Schools, and the Latino Community Development Agency (LCDA). These efforts have focused on many best practices, including Stanford University's Bridge Project, which was a six-year national study focused on analyzing gaps in high school exit-level policies and college entrance policies. This research demonstrated that there are significant gaps that exist for parents and students regarding this transition, and consequently indicated that these gaps could be overcome through three primary actions. First, students, parents, and educators must receive accurate, high quality information about becoming college ready as early as possible in middle and high school. Second, students should be provided with access to institutions that serve the majority of students as they provide the greatest benefit. Finally, articulating to students that getting to college is not the hardest part, but it is only the start. The ultimate and most important goal is to be successful in college (Venezia Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). These strategies have been the guiding force for developing programs at the Hispanic Chamber.

Through its efforts, UCO has experienced a significant increase in the number of Hispanic student applications as part of the outreach at the Hispanic Chamber. During the Spring 2016 semester, the institution witnessed a 32.6% increase in Hispanic enrollment compared to just five years before (UCO Institutional Research, 2016).

Impact on other UCO Hispanic Community Outreach Efforts

Engaging with partners who represent the communities of minority students can provide a vital linkage in mentoring opportunities for students. It also provides an opportunity for the institution to learn more about these communities and create conversations to assist in the development of strategies to enhance student success (Walshok, 1995).

UCO has worked diligently to develop these collaborative efforts which have accelerated significantly from face-to-face relationships by the UCO/Hispanic Chamber partnership. Since the partnership was formed, UCO hired three additional bilingual admissions recruiters. Since their arrival, UCO has expanded its outreach on campus and at locations across the metro in existing programs and has added many more.

Its community outreach, working with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, has been to participate in Super Saturdays at Oklahoma City Public Schools to talk about college opportunities, Latino Community Development Association scholarship nights, community celebrations such as “Fiestas de las Americas,” the Hispanic Chamber Expo and Career Fair, providing weekly Spanish language campus tours for Hispanic families of prospective students, and providing Spanish translations for recruitment publications and marketing in Spanish language media.

With UCO participation in more than a dozen programs across the metropolitan 10-county area, the university increased its engagement in numerous settings. To familiarize parents with UCO and the process of admissions and enrollment is critical in the decision making for Hispanic parents who may not possess English as their primary language. A monthly Spanish Language Campus Tours for prospective students and families has resulted from the partnership because of the recognition of this need. This need was identified through the presentations at the Hispanic Chamber where many parents had challenges in comprehending the English only workshops for their children. In 2014, 45 students and five families participated in these main campus tours in Edmond.

Through this collaboration, UCO also expanded its prior relationship with the OKC Latino Community Development Agency (LCDA). Our representatives visited AP Spanish classes in local High Schools to provide admissions and scholarship information. Also, UCO participated in the LCDA Scholarship Night and Mentoring Program, where our team provided information in Spanish to the Hispanic community regarding financial aid and scholarships. These opportunities did not exist prior to the collaboration with the Hispanic Chamber facility programming, so the visibility of UCO was significant in enhancing this relationship.

UCO has been active in the Hispanic community during several major events. 2015 was the second year that UCO participated in the Fiestas de las Americas held in the Historic Capitol Hill Business District. This annual Hispanic event attracts thousands and boasts some of Southwest Oklahoma City’s best flavors, educational and social services, and shopping experiences to its participants. UCO received a special invitation to participate due to our Hispanic Chamber collaboration. Also, UCO representatives were asked to participate in the Dia de los Niños (Day of the Children) at the Hispanic Chamber. Recruitment office personnel and a UCO Latino Faculty & Staff Association (LFSA) volunteer served on the planning committee for the festival and volunteered as stage managers for the entertainment portion. UCO Office of Undergraduate

Admissions also staffed a recruitment booth per a request from Hispanic Chamber staff members who felt that the attendees would benefit from UCO's presence.

Latino Faculty & Staff Association Acts as Advocate and Liaison

A major asset in ensuring cultural transitions, student success, and a bridge between UCO and the metro Hispanic community is the UCO Latino Faculty & Staff Association that includes 35 members. Formed in 2013, it has especially ramped up its activities following the objectives arising from Vision 2020 to expand UCO's relationship to the OKC Hispanic Community, and that has certainly been evident in programming at the Hispanic Chamber. Formally recognized by the President's Cabinet in 2014, its mission, in collaboration with the UCO community, is to support the success of Hispanic faculty, staff, and students at UCO by advocating for efforts, programs, and policies that promote an understanding of Hispanic issues within the University. They have embraced the notion of outreach to the Hispanic community in the metro. Following a 21% increase in Hispanic student enrollment at UCO, other institutions are now using UCO's LFSA activities as a model for their own programs.

UCO LFSA also has expanded its outreach activities in the metro to strengthen its relationship with the Hispanic Chamber by active participation in networking events, with Tango Public Relations, the primary Hispanic marketing firm in the metro to grow its business community, the Latino Community Development Agency, and Aspiring Americans, Inc. The extensive presence of LSFA members and other UCO employees at these events has drawn the continuing comment from Hispanic community members that "UCO is everywhere," Renteria Mendoza reports (personal communication, November 15, 2105).

The LFSA members have been engaged in other outreach activities on and off campus. Members partnered with the UCO Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching & Learning and the Office of Diversity & Inclusion to sponsor a student panel that addressed issues and concerns faced by Hispanic students. They also have assisted in hiring three bilingual staff members for community outreach and student recruitment positions for UCO. Finally, to ensure that their voice in conversations about diversity on campus, UCO LFSA is represented on the University Diversity Committee.

The Alliance's members have encouraged the institution's leadership to initiate a formal institutional membership in the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) to ensure that UCO is linked to this national network. Presently, it is the only OKC metro institutional member to this organization. LFSA members have attended the HACU annual conference to harvest best practices to strengthen UCO's plan to hire diverse faculty and staff, and to expand upon services provided to students on campus. Many of the best practices promoted through HACU focus on collaborations between institutions of higher education and the community, so this membership will be beneficial in enhancing our strategies with the Hispanic Chamber.

The organization has also collaborated with the Division of Student Affairs to host a workshop by Aspiring Americans in Spring 2015, and has been actively working with this organization to assist current and incoming Hispanic students to be retained and graduate. There is special

attention provided to the estimated 60 undocumented students attending UCO. Undocumented students do not qualify for federal or state financial aid, including student loans, and pay their tuition out of pocket. In conjunction with the UCO Foundation and Aspiring Americans, has awarded matching scholarships to current students, and is raising funds for an endowed scholarship. As many students who are participating in Hispanic Chamber of Commerce workshops sponsored by UCO are undocumented, the collaboration has provided these students with the additional support needed to better understand the matriculation process and access resources to be able to afford college.

LFSA Hispanic Success Initiative

Among the most intensive projects engaged in by the LFSA is a new, ongoing team of three faculty and three staff who are members of LFSA, working with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, to pilot a program to foster an environment that promotes the success of Hispanic students. The program targets increasing retention and graduation rates, fostering greater appreciation for Hispanic cultural heritage, and connecting Hispanic students to the community through mentorships and service-learning experiences.

This Hispanic Success Initiative results from UCO experiencing a 36.8% increase in its Hispanic population over the past five years, to an enrollment of 1,434 Hispanic students in fall 2015. Students have expressed the need to connect with each other, with UCO faculty and staff, and the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan community. Hispanic students have also stressed the importance of exploring and developing Hispanic cultural identity.

At UCO, the average Hispanic GPA in Fall 2014 was 2.83 (2.63 for Hispanic men; 2.95 for Hispanic women). Through the UCO Student Right To Know cohort, 70% of Hispanic students in 2013 were retained from first to second year, which was about 5% higher than the average for all incoming SRTK students. However, the difference in the retention rate does not translate to higher graduation rates; 37.9% of Hispanic students in the 2008 SRTK cohort graduated within six years compared to 37.5% of the total 2008 SRTK cohort. Even within the Hispanic transfer student population, only 57% of the 2008 transfer cohort graduated in six years compared to 54% for the overall population. This lag in performance in retention and graduation rates by Hispanic students still significantly exceeds that finding of Hispanic college students nationwide, with a 15% graduation rate (Krogstad, 2015a). As a percentage of the population, Hispanics still represent just nine percent of all U.S. college degree holders (Krogstad, 2015b; see also, Excelencia in Education, 2015d).

The Hispanic Success Initiative seeks to increase the retention and completion rates of UCO's Hispanic students, along with increased confidence and a sense of belonging. This will be accomplished through several initiatives. First is a combination of learning opportunities associated with UCO's Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR), both curricular and non-curricular experiences that infuse the ACE VALUE rubrics throughout the curriculum and all student activities. Second, it provides experiences that foster development and exploration of identity through activities that foster connections between students, faculty and staff, and the OKC community, including community leaders. Third, a mentoring component is provided in which each participant is paired with two other peers as well as one faculty or staff mentor.

The HSI Initiative uses the Integrated Knowledge Portfolio Process created by Dr. Melissa (2015; see also, Peet, Lonn, Gurin, Boyer, Matney, Marra, Taylor, & Daley, 2011) from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The UCO research team, comprised of faculty and staff, will examine the impact and benefits of the curriculum on the participants' sense of belonging in postsecondary education and their identity. The research team will also examine the effectiveness of the program overall and will share the outcomes with other institutions of higher education.

Fifty-one students were selected for HSI from 64 applications that were received and a total of thirty-nine students decided to participate (76% participation rate). Of the thirty-nine students, 63% are from low-income backgrounds and 75% are first-generation students. Other participant characteristics are: 55% first-time, full-time freshmen; 30% are transfer students; 67% are females; 33% are males; average high school GPA for freshmen students is 3.54; average cumulative GPA for non-freshmen students is 2.84.

The HSI has the support of various entities across campus including the Division of Student Affairs, Division of Academic Affairs, Division of Public Affairs, Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching and Learning, College of Education and Professional Studies, and the Hispanic American Student Association.

The HSI program is directly tied to UCO's partnership with the OKC Hispanic Chamber. The HSI team has built a component where students are connected to leaders in the community by bringing community leaders as role model speakers to students, as well as through a service-learning project. LFSAs connections that have been made through the partnership with the Hispanic Chamber will be capitalized on through this program.

Additional Considerations and Conclusion

Like many metropolitan areas across the nation, Oklahoma City is experiencing an unprecedented and unpredicted growth in the size of its Hispanic community. Through its strategic planning process, Vision 2020, the University of Central Oklahoma conducted a "deep dive" environmental scan of the ten-county metro employing a TOWS (Threats/Opportunities/Weaknesses/Strengths) format that focused on unmet metro needs and opportunities. The exercise synthesized university community thinking to place greater emphasis on serving the Hispanic community, whose children now represent almost half of the enrollments in the state's largest public school system (Perry & Menendez, 2011). By coincidence, the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce was seeking a partner as it sought to renovate a new headquarters facility to provide a classroom for business classes and college-going information to the Hispanic community. The new partnership cemented the relationship between the two organizations in ways previously unexpected. Some of the significant outcomes were a substantial increase in Hispanic students enrolling at UCO, increased business services outreach and college-preparatory workshops delivered on site at the Hispanic Chamber, expanded networking with continuous interactions through other scheduled social events affected by the recruitment of UCO Provost John Barthell to the Chamber Board of Directors. This was further cemented by the emergence of the UCO Latino Faculty & Staff Association as a critical

linkage to the Chamber, Hispanic Community, and on campus for the recruitment, retention, and personal and professional growth of UCO students of Hispanic heritage.

As the collaboration continues to grow, there will be many other opportunities to strengthen this partnership. The addition of academic classes and potentially academic programs at the location by UCO will allow affordable and accessible options for many who live in the community. Also, as an institution committed to the notion of being stewards of place, UCO plans to create service learning opportunities for its students through the Hispanic Chamber. The opportunity to conduct programming to enhance cultural competencies for these students, as well as faculty and staff, is another opportunity. The burgeoning relationship exemplifies the innovation that occurs when two distinct organizations unite to enhance their communities through shared spaces. The future opportunities seem limitless considering the capacities of the two current partners and potential additional partners who can work together to create solutions for the metro citizens of Hispanic backgrounds. Hispanic Chamber Executive Director David Castillo summed up the strength of the relationship by saying “the best is yet to come” (personal communication, November 23, 2015).

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