DEVELOPING SERVINGNESS AND UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP
DECISION-MAKING FOR HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION GRANT PROGRAMS

Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
In
Education Leadership
By Everardo Barraza
SIGNATURE PAGE

DISSE YATION: DEVELOPING SERVINGNESS AND UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP DECISION-MAKING FOR HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION GRANT PROGRAMS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Being the first in my family to obtain a doctorate, I dedicate this accomplishment to my ancestors before me, who have worked hard from the mines of Durango, Mexico, to the farm fields of Watsonville, California. Their hard work to support our family has been instilled in my being. This hard work and understanding of their sacrifices allowed me to continue on my educational journey. To my mother, I thank you, gracias por tu apoyo. I hope to continue to pass on that motivation to those who will come after me. Si se puede y adelante! I recognize that this could not have been done alone but with a support system around me, and I feel privileged to have that unwavering encouragement from my loved ones, family, wife, cohort, and colleagues at work. You have all helped me get through the hard times, and when I wanted to quit, you kept letting me know that I could do it. To my cohort, while we are all very different, and come from different walks of life, careers, and cultures, I thank you for letting me learn from you. I am a much better person today because of your humility, honesty, and openness to share your experiences and stories.

A message to my mother, Martha–Recuerdo cuando me obligabas a levantarme y prepararme para la escuela, me dabas mi cereal y me decías que me esforzara. Me dijiste la importancia de la educación y que me ayudaría a prosperar. Aunque no siempre escuchaba, tus palabras estaban dentro de mis pensamientos. Hago esto por ti y nuestra familia, gracias mama.

To my wife–I am thankful for your patience, care, and support. There were days that I would be stressed and doubtful, and you would encourage me, give me words of wisdom, and provided your time to help whenever I needed it. You believed in me and
that I had the capacity and knowledge to succeed in the doctoral program. You are the best partner anyone could ask for and I send you my love.

Dr. Eligio Martinez Jr.–Please know that I am very grateful for having you and the rest of the committee to guide me. You gave me the opportunity to conduct research outside of the classroom, hone my skills, and gain confidence as a scholar-practitioner. You made the experience so much more meaningful and your positive and reaffirming attitude helped me stay calm throughout the dissertation process. While it was not easy at times, I felt that you expected me to provide quality work and pushed me to do better. Those affirming words helped me believe in myself and in the process. Thank you for spending countless hours reviewing my work, track change after track change. I could not have done this without your support and thank you for challenging my thinking.

Dr. Cynthia D. Villarreal–When I first met you over a cup of coffee to discuss my research interests before I started the dissertation, you were so excited that we shared a common emphasis. We shared our thoughts on issues related to HSIs. You then shared with me your knowledge, books, and articles that I should read. You inspired me with your own research work and your words of encouragement. You helped me engage with the academe. I was very nervous to ask you to be part of my committee but I knew you would be a great member to add value to my learning. Thank you for taking the time to work with me, guiding my thinking, and providing critical feedback. I see you as a role model on how we should be as scholar-practitioners.

Dr. José Aguilar-Hernández – Profe, it has been an honor to work with you. When I asked you to be part of my committee and then met you to discuss my research, you made me feel welcomed in a safe space. I felt like I could be open with you and my
thoughts about my work. I know that you expect the best out of all of the students you mentor, so thank you for providing not just the critique, but also pointing us to authors, and scholars we should read. You made my work so much better and my thinking of concepts better, so thank you. It really takes a village to make a successful dissertation.
ABSTRACT

Higher education leaders have been competing for federally designated Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs) grant funding to improve the educational attainment of Latinx and low-income students. However, while the number of HSIs has continued to grow since the passage of the Higher Education Act (HEA), the availability of the funds has remained stagnant. Utilizing critical race theory, theory of racialized organizations, critical race praxis, and multidimensional servingness framework, this study aimed to understand eight HSI grant implementation leaders’ decision-making practices, motivations to serve and explore their racial and cultural identities as they created programmatic interventions to support Latinx students. Employing a qualitative multiple case study approach, leaders from one research university, one state university, and one non-profit 4-year institution were interviewed. Three themes were identified in the findings: 1. participants highlighted their roles as being servingness conscious agents, 2. shared insights into transforming their HSI university identity, and 3. participants shared their knowledge and experiences on their decision-making practices for equity. Overall, leaders created collaborative cultures and leveraged grants for organizational change. In response to findings of colorblind and race-neutrality in HSI grant programs, I provide a leadership framework for grants for equity and policy recommendations.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Hispanics/Latinxs are the fastest-growing college-going population in the United States, leading to more historically marginalized students matriculating to college (U.S. Census, 2019). With many traditionally White institutions now becoming Hispanic-serving, researchers have raised questions about what it means to serve (Garcia, 2017, 2018, 2020; Gasman et al., 2008; Núñez et al., 2011, 2015). The government defines Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) only by the metrics of student population characteristics of 25% or more full-time enrolled Hispanic/Latinx, and 50% must qualify as low-income or Pell-eligible (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Due to the definition of HSIs being only by the population demographics, HSIs have been found to lack a particular mission to help support Latinx students (Garcia, 2021; Gasman et al., 2008). Furthermore, scholars have also problematized the word “serving” in HSIs and pointed to the intricacies that exist within the Hispanic ethnic and racial identity through its many intersections, including gender, race, socio-economic status, language, culture, first-generation, student parents, and undocumented (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Lara & Nava, 2018).

To build more equitable institutions, leaders should continue to desegregate their data by ethnicity and consider qualitative measures in their decision-making (Garcia et al., 2018). When researching HSIs, leaders have yet to recognize the various demographic characteristics of the Hispanic/Latinx and student population where Mexican American/Chicanx are the largest group at HSIs, subpopulation of Cuban,

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1I use Latinx as a gender-inclusive term of Latino/a/x intersections.
Dominicans, Salvadoreans, Central Americans, South Americans, and other minoritized populations including African Americans and Native Americans (Núñez et al., 2011, 2016). In terms of socio-economic status and college preparation, there are higher numbers of Latinx students at HSIs who qualify as low-income compared to non-HSIs, and students may not have the same level of college preparation, making it difficult for leaders to understand the best approaches needed to serve (Garcia, 2020). Thus, it is difficult to know how to best support Latinx students at HSIs because of the diversity among and within the Latinx community, which is often not considered. Nevertheless, it is essential to point to the importance of Hispanic-serving institutions. HSIs are leading the nation in providing the most baccalaureate degrees and increasing the social mobility of Latinx (Arciniega, 2012). However, HSIs have more work to do in retention and graduation, where the 4-year graduation rate is seven percentage points lower than white students nationwide (Excelencia in Education, 2020).

Leaders at Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), and those who seek to implement HSI grants, have a significant role in developing an institutional identity that builds a capacity to serve Latinxs and strives to intentionally distributes the funding to impact Latinx students directly. While there have been significant gains in Latinx student achievement over the years, the college success data shows that Latinx students still lag behind white students (Palmer et al., 2013). For example, in the West Coast, the California State University system (CSU), Latinx students graduate at 14 percentage points lower than non-minoritized students at the 4-year graduation level (Chancellor's Office, 2020). At the University of California, gaps exist in the 4-year graduation rate for minoritized students that have persisted and slightly declined for Hispanic/Latinx in
particular (UC Board of Regents, 2020). In the universities’ pursuit to secure funding, researchers suggest that HSI grant funds are racialized, where many proposed activities take away the focus from Latinx students, and institutions utilize the population of Latinx students and commodify them only to redistribute the funding to serve all (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Garcia, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). Thus, to create program interventions that support minoritized students, strategies should include not only capacity-building efforts but also efforts on non-academic outcomes that consist of identity development opportunities, positive campus climates, and ethnic studies curriculum, among others (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

Still, most program proposals have mainly academic priorities and only produce indirect impacts (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Within proposal abstract submissions, scholars have found programmatic elements to include practices of the redistribution of funding to serve all students, develop current faculty, purchase equipment, and invest in technology, which some say takes away the focus from centering minoritized students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Garcia, 2017, 2019, 2020; Núñez et al., 2015). Garcia (2020) describes that accountability and assessment of the impact of federal grants have been fundamentally colorblind and race-neutral, meaning that race-neutrality continues to mask how race and racism play a role in the federal appropriations of grants. The current literature on the grant accountability (Hyunjung Shin, 2006; Jeffrey Mervis, 2003; Marin, 2019; Murphy, 2013; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019) predominantly focuses on analyzing the language of grant proposals, abstracts, and overall spending and its relationship with graduation and retention. What is missing in the current body of work is to look beyond the abstracts to understand how leaders’ own narratives contribute to their
decision-making processes. The purpose of this study was to learn about how leaders carry out equitable or inequitable decision-making practices that enhance or diminish equity for Latinx students. Furthermore, it is also vital to understand how leaders' lived experiences and positional authority inform how they perceive their role in equity issues related to Hispanic-serving grants.

**Background of the Problem**

It is crucial to know when HSIs were first recognized and what it means to have the designation to understand the evolution of the Hispanic-serving institution designation and their role in serving students. Due to achievement gap disparities and inequities in higher education between Latinxs and their counterparts, the Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) designation was federally recognized in 1992 with the passage of the Higher Education Act (HEA) with advocacy from groups like the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) (Arciniega, 2012).

**Figure 1**

*Timeline of HSI Grants and Present Study*

The act, included in the Title III Strengthening Institutions Program, allowed institutions with 25% or more Latinx students and 50% of the enrollment population as low-income
to qualify for access to federal funds (Nuñez et al., 2015; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). When the HEA was reauthorized in 1998, HSIs were placed under Title V Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program and allowed universities and colleges to apply for developmental and planning grants to improve and expand the capacity to serve (Nuñez et al., 2015). However, since the definition of federal student characteristics did not imply that HSIs needed specific missions to serve Latinx students, the definition and serving purpose was left to the institution to interpret. As HSIs are considered a relatively new construct, the allowable activities believed most impactful to improve the academic attainment of Latinx, and other minoritized students are still being debated and criticized. Many of the proposed activities have been deemed to “indirectly” impact Latinx and other minoritized student success (Carter & Patterson, 2019; Garcia, 2018b; Nuñez et al., 2011; Santiago et al., 2018). Examples of indirect impacts include course redesigns and purchasing equipment (Perez, 2020). However, the Department of Education’s (2021) HSI mission states:

The Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Division provides grant funding to higher education institutions to assist with strengthening the institutional programs, facilities, and services to expand the educational opportunities for Hispanic Americans and other underrepresented populations.

While the HEA expansion allowed HSIs to apply for much-needed funding, grants were not guaranteed. Institutional leaders, including faculty and administrators, need to submit a request for proposals (RFPs) to competitive government agency applications. In these competitive applications, less than half of all HSIs have successfully received a Title V Developing Institution HSI grant from the Department of
Education (Perez, 2020; Santiago et al., 2018). Due to the grant funding process’s competitive nature, some scholars have argued that applications are made to satisfy the government’s definition of serving and assert that as more institutions grow to become HSIs, the funding opportunities have remained stagnant (Garcia, 2019; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Nuñez et al., 2015). Thus, this leads to questions about accountability and how leaders intend to use federal appropriations. When trying to make sense of and understand the decision-making practices of HSI grant leaders, it is significant to recognize how the organizational structures, norms, and culture may also be causing pressures both internally and externally (Harris, 1989; Stowell, 2004).

**Purpose of Study**

This qualitative multiple case study aims to understand HSI implementation leaders’ grant funding decision-making processes that contribute toward equitable or inequitable practices to serve Latinx students. The absence of race and the use of color-evasive language in HSI program proposals is a way that racism is currently being played out, which may be failing to accomplish the goal of closing equity gaps and developing an institutional identity with students at the center (Annamma et al., 2017; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). While we are starting to see an initial response in addressing issues around HSIs, racism still persists in the allocation of color-evasive and colorblind funding associated with HSI grants. Program implementation leaders play a critical role in developing support programs for students of color that address existing barriers and structural inequities in higher education. The existence of HSIs and grants indicate a counter-narrative that universities create equal opportunity for all students. Further, HSI
grants reveal the potential for leadership and organizational identity transformation that embraces a framework around equity that is reflective and evolving.

**Research Questions**

Given the information stated above, this study is guided by the following research questions.

1. How do HSI grant implementation (GI) leaders perceive their role in advancing Latinx student success?
   a. In what ways do HSI GI leaders’ own lived experiences and intersectional identities inform their decision-making?

2. To what extent, and in what ways, do HSI GI leaders use their roles to challenge existing structures to form an organizational identity that serves minoritized students?
   a. How are GI leaders contributing to social justice efforts in their practice?

**Significance of Study**

Answering questions around grant accountability and leadership practices will add to the existing literature on HSIs, specifically revealing how higher education agents employ leadership and decision-making towards equitable or inequitable strategies for an HSI servingness\(^2\) framework. Unfortunately, HSI grants have yet to be thoroughly examined in the higher education scholarship from more critical lenses, which may add to operationalizing "servingness" at Hispanic-serving institutions (Apple, 2016; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Masters, Beltran, & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2020).

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\(^2\) Drawing from Garcia's (2017, 2018, 2019) work, servingness is a Latinx-serving organizational identity that provides equitable graduation and retention and culturally relevant enhancement that centers Latinx students' ways of knowing.
To better understand how leaders use cultural responsivity in leadership to create structures for serving, this study will focus on the education leaders who implement and make funding decisions for Latinx students. I want to point out that other historically marginalized groups, African American, Native American, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander, are also part of the discourse on minority-serving grant issues. The reason for bringing attention to Latinx students is because HSIs nationwide recruit and enroll over 60% of all Hispanic college-going students, and there seems to be an avoidance of intentionality from universities on embracing the Latinx population (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Garcia, 2019; Núñez et al., 2016). The significance of the study should offer current and future practitioners’ implications for policy, assessment, and an equity leadership framework for HSIs grant decision-making practices.

**Assumptions**

As the facilitator and researcher of this study, my identities as a scholar-practitioner, Latino, male, first-generation student, faculty member, and Assistant Director of HSI grant initiatives at a public higher education university were considered. I observed a lack of clarity from the federal and institutional levels on how resources should be distributed in an equitable and socially just manner. The lack of transparency in best-implementing grants may be due to the lack of leadership development and understanding of what it means to support Latinx student success at Hispanic-serving institutions. My goal in stating my positionality is to show my investment in understanding Hispanic-serving institutions as minority-serving institutions and understanding narratives of leadership that can help create organizational transformation. My life experiences and the way I view reality influenced the interpretations in this study.
Still, it is essential to note that I made sure not to lead participants in any positive or negative direction in the interviews based on my own opinions and experience.

The assumptions for this study consist of the following:

- The study was conducted at two public 4-year Hispanic-serving institutions and one private non-profit college.
- This study focused on higher education leaders who implement HSI grants, including administrators, chairs, directors, faculty, and coordinators.
- Participation in the study was voluntary.
- Participants were identified in a purposeful sampling method to fit the criteria of HSI grant leaders.
- It was assumed that leaders will understand HSIs and funding distribution practices.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Terms that will appear throughout the study related to Hispanic-serving institutions, decision-making, and leadership are as follows:

- **Latinx:** The term Latinx is used as a gender-neutral term that makes space for inclusivity, activism, and openness to non-binary individuals (Milian, 2019; Santos, 2017). When referring to national or institutional data, I use the government census description of Latinx as being part of the Hispanic group.
- **Hispanic:** U.S. Census (2020) states, “Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before arriving in the United States. People who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race.”
• **Servingness:** Drawing from Garcia’s (2019) work, this paper defines servingness as a Latinx-serving organizational identity that provides equitable academic outcomes and culturally relevant enhancements, such as ethnic studies curriculum, building a sense of community, specialized support programs for minoritized students, and intentional efforts to increase diversity in faculty at HSIs (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Casados, 2014; Garcia, 2017, 2020; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

• **Culturally Responsive Leadership:** Culturally responsive leadership deliberately disrupts the status quo through critical conversations where leaders apply a critical race theory framework in the decision-making process (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015).

• **Capacity Building:** The institution's ability to provide adequate support for student success by understanding student issues and creating support services and specialized interventions.

• **HSI Typologies:** Four categories of emerging or existing Hispanic-Serving Institutions that enroll 25% or more Latinx students but may enhance or diminish student achievement and cultural identity development (Garcia, 2019).

• **Theory of Racialized Organizations:** This theory centers on race theories and concerns of critical race theory by examining the macro – racial state and institutional racism, meso – schools, and micro – individual prejudice, racial attitudes, and implicit bias (Ray, 2019).

• **Critical Race Theory:** Emerging from the law and civil rights scholarship (Bell, 1976, 1980), Critical Race Theory in education is applied to understand the issues
of racism where minoritized students are still segregated, colorblindness exists, and aspects of society and education are treated as property for Whites or the right to exclude minoritized students at all levels of the educational pipeline (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).


- Leadership: Is defined as having two core functions: providing direction and exercising influence (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011).

- Equity in Education: Understanding how policies serve or fail to serve students' interests shaped by gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, and other intersections (Grogan, 1999).

**Delimitations**

This study is bound to a time period and particular school sites. Therefore, this study may not be transferrable or reflective of practices found at other HSIs. It is difficult to make a definitive claim on the idea of “servingness” due to existing factors that HSIs are not homogenous, and student success may be defined differently. Developing a culture that serves minoritized students is a complex phenomenon and has a continuous growth process. HSIs are complex, ranging from emerging to existing, and are subject to changing demographics and leadership. The grant implementation leader interviews for this study will be used to understand insights into current practices that may inform future practitioners. The aim is to move the paradigm towards equity for emerging and existing
HSIs. Grant seekers should inform themselves of the current literature around HSIs, and agencies that fund HSI initiatives also have the opportunity to create programming grounded in the recent research (Garcia, 2021).

As mentioned above, answering questions around grant accountability and leadership will add to the existing literature on HSIs, specifically illuminating how higher education HSI grant implementation leaders employ equitable or inequitable strategies for a servingness framework for Latinx students. Drawing from Garcia’s (2019) work, this paper defines servingness identity as a Latinx-serving organizational identity that provides equitable academic outcomes in graduation and retention. Servingness also has an existence of culturally relevant enhancements, such as ethnic studies curriculum, a sense of community, specialized support programs for minoritized students, and intentional efforts to increase diversity in faculty at HSIs (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Casados, 2014; Garcia, 2017, 2020; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). A limitation of this study is that 2-year community colleges, both public and private, are not represented.

Excluding 2-year community colleges is due to the time and scope of the project and trying to give attention to institutions with similar practices but differences in resources and hierarchical structures. The comparative analysis will allow for triangulation, validity, and reliability of findings and saturation (Meadows & Morse, 2001). In the following literature review, I selected theoretical and empirical research related to HSI grants and leadership servingness, including 1) Hispanic Serving Institutions, 2) HSI grants, 3) servingness, and 4) culturally responsive leadership and decision-making.
Organization of the Study

This dissertation is a qualitative multiple case study of Hispanic-serving institution grant implementation (GI) leaders in western U.S. universities comprising two 4-year public universities and one 4-year private non-profit college. Patton (2015) asserts that the narrative approach focuses on stories from the beginning, middle, and end, honoring the participant’s lived experiences – the core idea of the analysis offers “translucent windows into cultural and social meaning when understood and analyzed as narratives” (p. 210). Furthermore, the multiple cases in this study allow for a comparison analysis creating more information-richness (Patton, 2015). Each one of the public universities is part of a university system, one with more access to monetary and institutional resources as an R1 research institution. The other is a public state university with less access to resources, and research is not their primary activity—the third university is a private college non-profit. In addition, the private college is unique in that it is not bound to follow some state regulations imposed at the public universities, such as anti-affirmative action laws.

The study chapters are as follows: Chapter 1, the introduction gives the background and problem of Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and HSI grants; Chapter 2, the literature review, will present the theoretical frameworks guiding this study and an overview of the empirical and conceptual scholarship on HSIs, grants, the concept of servingness, faculty development, culturally responsive leadership, and decision-making; Chapter 3 methodology will provide an overview of the multiple case study, why it was employed, and the justification for selecting the three school sites. Chapter 4 research findings includes direct quotes from participants, themes of servingness conscious agents,
HSI campus climate, and equity-driven decision-making. Chapter 5 discussion, conclusion, and implications describes how the research questions were answered by the findings, policy recommendations for HSI administrators, and recommendations for future work.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents an overview of the theoretical frameworks and literature review associated with this study in addressing issues around HSI grants and leadership practice. While there are limitations to fully understanding the impact of leadership on student success in higher education, empirical data from multiple sources have found a link between leadership practices and student learning which may be a way to help move the paradigm toward equity (Apple, 2016; Casados, 2014; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015; Shields, 2010, 2011). School leaders help shape practices that can alter the school conditions, goals, culture, and organizational structure with the right tools that can help develop people, redesign the organization, and improve the instructional curriculum (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011). Thus, HSI grant implementation (GI) leaders are part of expanding existing educational resources, interventions, and policies by utilizing grants to be innovative and transformative in their practice.

Since HSI GI leaders function within the university organization and system, the literature review will focus on Hispanic-serving institutions, grants, servingness, and culturally responsive leadership research. This research is guided by the theoretical frameworks of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019), Critical Race Theory (Solórzano, 1998), Critical Race Praxis (Stovall, 2005; Stovall et al., 2009; Yamamoto, 1997), and the multidimensional framework for serving (Garcia, 2020). The theories and literature were selected to help future practitioners understand the organizations they serve, understand what works for leadership practices, and build HSI grant program efforts that center students while creating a new institutional identity and a new type of university.
With HSI grants focusing on increasing the institutional capacity to serve Latinx students, what is missing in the current body of literature is how to operationalize what works for leadership and decision-making practices. Figure 2 conceptual framework of HSI grants for equity provides elements that can be measured for accountability, including traditional quantifiable measures of student success and non-academic outcomes, such as practices that lead to the implementation of culturally relevant activities. The proposed HSI grants for equity framework is guided by the theory of racialized organizations (Ray, 2019), critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding servingness (Garcia, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019). To better understand how existing racialized structures shape the decision-making practices of HSI grant implementers, a new guiding framework is needed to grasp how leaders’ positional authority, experiential knowledge, and intersections interact with existing power structures, hierarchies, institutional culture, norms, and practices that shape how grants are carried out in higher education (Capper, 2019; Marin, 2019).

**Hispanic-Serving Institutions**

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are essential in helping students from racial and ethnic minorities graduate and receive degrees. As HSIs enroll 64% of all Hispanic students, empirical studies have found that HSIs were only defined by characteristics of the student population (Arciniega, 2012; Casados, 2014; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Garcia, 2019; Núñez et al., 2015, 2016; Perdomo, 2018). Despite the contradictory findings of HSIs effectiveness to serve Latinx students, most scholars agree that a Hispanic-serving identity could be defined primarily by outcomes in persistence and
graduation (Crisp et al., 2015; Garcia, 2017; Seifert et al., 2014). Therefore, if an institution produces positive academic outcomes, they effectively serve Latinx students (Garcia, 2017; 2018). Still, this narrow definition of servingness at HSIs has been criticized and challenged to not account for experiential knowledge, colonization, and merit-based practices that have marginalized communities of color in education.

In challenging institutions on what it means to serve, Contreras and Contreras (2015) found that while Latinx students persisted in equitable rates compared to white students, Latinx students transferred and graduated at lower rates than whites. These findings paralleled earlier work by Contreras et al. (2008) that provided evidence that graduation rates for Latinxs at four-year HSIs were not equitable to non-HSIs. However, Núñez and colleagues (2015) found that while HSIs were frequently criticized for lower persistence and graduation rates at the 4-year rate for Latinx students, their findings opposed the notion that Latinx students were unsuccessful. They suggested that a commonly examined six-year graduation rate did not significantly differ for Latinx students and non-minorities compared to all U.S. four-year universities (Núñez et al., 2015). Some suggest that students take longer to graduate due to college preparation, having to work and attend college, students with dependents obligations, and being the first in their family to attend college (Harper et al., 2012; Ishimaru, 2020; Kiyama, 2018). These factors make it more difficult for students who do not have the same support or less preparation in navigating college (Cordova & Knecht, 2019; Gómez, 2018; Kiyama, 2018). Still, the consensus is that HSIs provide an excellent opportunity for social mobility and better-paid careers for historically marginalized students. As more universities gain the HSI designation as emerging institutions, they may find themselves
unable to provide the support needed to serve Latinx students. Therefore, it is vital to continue to understand the overall compositions and complexities of HSIs as leaders move towards applying for HSI grants and HSI designations.

**HSI Typologies**

There are six distinctive types of HSIs, including 1) urban community colleges, 2) rural community colleges, 3) big system 4-year universities, 4) small communities 4-year institutions, 5) Puerto Rican, and 6) health science schools (Núñez et al., 2015). However, research has found inconsistency among findings of the most impactful factors associated with the graduation, retention, and sense of belonging of Latinx students due, in part, to the amount of variation between schools and size (Crisp et al., 2015). In addition, there is minimal research on grant funds' impacts and their correlation with graduation and persistence. However, Perez (2018) conducted multiple regression analyses on HSI grant activities predicting graduation and found that expenditures for classroom instruction did not predict graduation but supported institutional action of support programs to promote and enhance student attainment.

Contrary to prior research, the persistence of Latinx students at the 6-year remains relatively equitable compared to non-HSIs (Garcia, 2021). In the California State University System (CSU), of which holds 21 out of 23 campuses are HSIs, institutional data illuminates that Latinx students graduate 14% lower than non-minorities at the 4-year graduation rate (Chancellor’s Office, 2020). Thus, there is a call to close the achievement gap at the 4-year graduation rate, which is now a goal in the CSU system with the Graduation Initiative 2025 (Chancellor’s Office, 2020). Understanding the HSI typologies may inform the CSU leadership that what works for one institution may not
work for the next. While the CSU is under one system, the universities need to reflect on their student populations' specific needs.

**Servingness Typologies**

In addition to the organizational structures of HSIs, Garcia (2017) expanded on understanding HSI composition through multiple case studies that helped develop institution serving types. Garcia (2017) had the overarching question of what it means to “serve” Latinx students at emerging and existing HSIs using a combination of both quantitative, such as academic outcomes of graduation and persistence, and qualitative measures, from organizational membership narratives from students, staff, faculty, and administrators. A framework of HSI typologies was the direct result of this research. Four types of institutions emerged: 1) enrolling institutions, which enroll 25% or more Latinx students but do not produce equal rates in graduation and retention compared to non-minorities, 2) enhancing institutions, which provide culturally relevant activities but do not produce equal rate of graduation and retention, 3) producing institutions, which graduate and retain at equal rates but do not provide a sense of belonging and culturally relevancy, and 4) serving institutions, which provide cultural enhancement and equal rates in achievement compared to non-minorities. To understand how HSIs enact a servingness organizational identity, leaders should realize how spending and accountability play out in higher education. Spending and servingness have a close link that has not been explored. Colleges and universities that had higher than the national average in persistence and graduation rates had the existence of federal grant support (Kuh et al., 2010), which indicates that grant support may be essential when supporting student success.
In defining servingness from a practitioner’s perspective, Vargas and Ward (2020) worked on building an HSI brand that the university adopted by creating an intentional logo and marketing strategies that made students feel welcomed. Furthermore, Vargas and Ward (2020) imbedded the HSI brand in the university strategic plan through Hispanic-serving initiatives in identifying programs, building identity, and university-wide practices to build cultural proficiency. Cooper et al. (2020) described how HSI servingness at a public university was integrated through research, practice, and policies that “advance students’ academic pathways and promote institutional changes in ways that reflect servingness” (p. 174). Servingness was accomplished by having university buy-in and developing a university HSI team drawing on quantitative data on equity gaps and qualitative evidence through testimonios (Cooper et al., 2020). In comparing how institutions enacted servingness, the range of possibilities derives from university buy-in, leadership investment into a cause, and the availability of grants to enact such changes. Drawing from practitioner inquiry from all levels of staff, faculty, and students, data was disaggregated to devise a plan and understand where the university stood in serving minoritized students (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon et al., 2019).

**HSI Spending**

Núñez and Elizondo (2015) revealed that HSIs, overall, spend less per student in academic support and faculty instruction than non-HSIs because of limited budgets. HSIs also enroll more students from historically marginalized communities than non-HSIs. Students may come into the institution with specific lived experiences and intersections of race, socio-economic status, first-generation, gender, and undocumented. Thus, HSIs, as historically white institutions, may not always be equipped with the support structures
needed for students of color (Núñez et al., 2015). From all the minority-serving institutions, HSIs received some of the lowest federal funding support students at $87 per student compared to $1,642 per student at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Anguiano & Navarro, 2020). Understanding the budget constraints informs education leaders on the significance of seeking additional federal or private grants to help create the needed interventions, programs, and support systems for Latinx and other minoritized students' success.

Even though the HSI label comes with opportunities to gain federal appropriations and recognition, HSIs face insufficient overall student budgets (Arciniega, 2012). They are left to compete for federal grants to support and address issues of inequity. Competitive grants are not a sustainable solution. Thus, the government requires all awarded programs to create sustainability plans for institutionalization, but many fail to do so (Castagno, 2012; Perdomo, 2018; Santiago et al., 2018). Due to the growing trend in the number of new emerging HSIs, the likelihood of receiving specific HSI grants is much more challenging to attain. In 2019, out of 223 applications to the Department of Education for HSI grants, only 43 applications were funded (Anguiano & Navarro, 2020). There is not enough funding to support student success both from the federal or state government, creating a set of challenges for leadership and policy. Perez (2018) states, "HSIs leaders need to exert pressure on local, state, and federal leaders to continue to commit funds for HSIs and their role in the educational attainment of Latinxs” (p. 332). Therefore, more targeted and consistent funding is needed as many HSIs lack the endowments some of the more prestigious universities have.
The above section described HSIs organizational structures as contextually different in terms of Latinx student compositions, including racial and ethnic intersections that are not taken into consideration when speaking about HSIs. Furthermore, I then pointed to the typologies of HSIs ranging from 2-year schools to 4-year public and private universities. Overall, HSIs are doing better at graduating students at the 6-year graduation rates but still have achievement gaps at the 4-year rate. Lastly, Garcia (2019, 2020, 2021) has provided education leaders the framework of servingness which takes into account academic and non-academic outcomes that enhance the experiences of students of color.

**Hispanic-Serving Institution Grants**

In terms of the relationship between grant funding and student achievement, Perez (2018) suggests that HSI Title V funding priority areas of academic support and retention were significant and positive predictors of graduation rates for Latinx students. In an earlier study, Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2006) conducted an analysis on the amount of money spent per student for instruction, academic support, student services, institutional support, and institutional grants and the relation to achievement. Their findings agree with Perez (2018), indicating that expenditure categories of institutional grants significantly affected students’ retention rates and graduation. Further, Perez (2018) found that expenditures per FTE (full-time equivalent) in instruction were not a significant factor associated with bachelor’s degrees conferred by Latinx students.

As a government's focus area of allowable activities, this lack of instruction for Latinx student success should be explored and possibly changed at the classroom level. The empirical findings agree with Garcia's (2020) notion that the government sets the
standards on what it is serving. Further, Perez's (2018) results also support Garcia and Okhidoi's (2015) recommendations where they argue that some of the most impactful activities for Latinx students are implementing academic support programs and student services from the first year to post-graduation as an evidence-based intervention, rather than stand-alone programs or classroom instruction. Examples of evidence-based interventions include advising, mentoring, and research. In general, the study found that there is a relationship between how federal grants, leadership behavior in expenditures, and resource allocation impact student retention and graduation rates.

**HSI Race-Neutrality in Grant Funding**

As the institutions carry racialized practices, it is crucial to understand how far racialization occurs in higher education, including the HSI grant distribution and decision-making that directly impacts students' success. From 1995 to 2014, the majority of funded HSI Title V grant activities included: faculty and curriculum (33%), student support services (26%), general fund and administrative management (11%), internet or distance education technology (9%), construction/improvement of facilities (7%), and other allowable activities (14%) (Santiago et al., 2018). Race-neutrality in grants is not necessarily a direct result of faculty and administrators' intentions to not serve minoritized students. However, it may be due to the limited number of allowable grant activities, which stands at 16 (Santiago et al., 2018). Garcia (2020) asserts that race-neutral activities only indirectly impact Latinx students and are not intentionally addressing inequities. The absence of race in the application of grants is to take away the focus from explicitly identifying the needs of Latinx and other minoritized students. Garcia's (2020) findings suggest that the current grant award system has the federal
agencies dictating what it means to address inequality and social justice and fails to create an approach guided by a framework derived from HSI scholarship recommendations. For example, from Santiago et al. (2018) lists of allowable HSI grant activities, the following are debated as indirect impacts to Latinx students in the literature:

1. Purchase, rental, or lease scientific or laboratory equipment
2. Construction, maintenance, renovation, and improvement in classrooms, libraries, and laboratories
3. Support faculty exchanges, faculty development, curriculum development, and academic instruction

The above examples are contested activities as race-neutral in the equity and social justice research and are said to only indirectly impact Latinx student success. Of the allowable activities, 26% of the overall budgets are being utilized to impact student success directly, and the other categories are described as indirect (Garcia, 2020).

While there is a debate over which activities should continue to be funded, Santiago et al. (2018) identified that there is a broad link between HSI grants and improving Latinx students’ academic achievement through support services, instructional quality through faculty and curriculum development, and stability through funding administrative management. With contradictory findings, more research is needed in understanding the impact of all 16 allowable activities. Speaking to this point, Vargas and Villa-Palomino (2019) analyzed multiple years of grant proposal abstracts. They concluded that race-neutrality was a system that preserved the status quo and racialization. Overwhelmingly, race-neutral grants are awarded; therefore, it is vital to
continue challenging and understanding how federal funds are used to hold institutions accountable for their spending.

**Colorblind Allocation of Funding**

Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) alluded that HSIs spend proportionally less than non-HSIs on instruction, student support programs, and student services. Currently, many of the allowable grant activities are said to take away the focus from directly serving minoritized, colorblind allocation of resources and serving the institution as a whole, such as emphasizing serving all students, creating classroom instruction to serve all students, and purchasing equipment that services all (Garcia, 2013, 2020; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Within the colorblindness argument, the researchers analyzed submissions of requests for proposals (RFPs); 85% of abstracts awarded in the last decade employed racialization of funding (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). In other words, allocations of funds had levels of interest-convergence (Milner, 2008) where the distribution of resources from the minoritized groups were moved to service all students or had an absence of naming efforts to impact Latinx and minoritized students directly. In a second study, Garcia (2020) also found many cases of colorblind language in the National Science Foundation HSI funding activities and distribution. Of the colorblind abstracts, none specified how they would directly impact Latinx students and lacked a structural focus on leadership decision-making and how accountability would be carried out. These findings show a continuation of colorblindness and a form of institutionalized racism veiled as supporting minoritized students.

This section described HSI grants, race neutrality, and colorblind allocation of funding from the extant literature. Since the inception of the grants, the government
created a set of allowable activities which some say they have taken away the focus from directly impacting students over color. Further, many of the grant abstract submissions employed race-neutral or colorblind language. In the following, I will provide an overview of servingness as it is described in the literature with its many dimensions, emphasizing on culturally relevant practices and understanding the role of faculty in the servingness scheme.

**Servingness**

As education leaders continue to make sense of what it means to be Hispanic-serving, scholars have attempted to create a roadmap for policy and cultural change. However, with 559 HSIs across the nation, there is no single best practice example. Many HSIs are still developing an organizational identity and capacity to serve (Casados, 2014). In understanding the most impactful activities for students of color, HSI research starts with identifying the Latinx population, aligns quantitative metrics for student success to find gaps, and allows student and leader voices to understand inequities that persist by exploring intersectionality fully. Student and leader lived experiences, which are all aspects that quantitative measures alone could not answer.

Servingness could be best explained by a study evaluating a grant-funded Diversity Scholars Program comprising two ethnic studies courses for incoming students of color. Scholars found that the construction of identity and understanding of intersections of race and gender led students to recognize the struggles of internalizing an oppressive hierarchy; in addition, students learned to think critically about societal inequities and how people of color navigate the world to find a voice (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016). The presence of ethnic studies curriculum led to students learning about a
deeper understanding of their roots and breaking down stereotypes. Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) and Kuh et al. (2010) echoed Delgado Bernal’s findings where faculty, administrators, staff, and students revealed that servingness was linked to the presence of culturally relevant curricula and programs like the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). However, while ethnic studies were an opportunity for students to develop their own cultural identities (Yosso et al., 2009), Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) warned that institutions placed a lot of the equity work in one department.

In terms of how leaders, including administrators and staff, perceived and practiced servingness, Vargas and Ward (2020) experienced a shift in becoming an HSIs at their predominantly White institution, with the Latinx population reaching 25%. The university investigated the feasibility of becoming an effectively serving HSI and created an approach that stemmed from an HSI strategic planning team that developed a mission and vision embedded with the university's strategic planning. Similarly, Reguerín et al. (2020), in becoming a racially just HSI at the University of California, Santa Cruz, centered race to disrupt university structures, created a university-wide HSI team, applied and received three federal grants, and used evidence-based research models with racial justice at the center for decision-making.

In addition to creating HSI teams, Griffin-Fennel and Lerner (2020) suggest that there needs to be a long-term commitment that is necessary to become a serving institution. Their approach to servingness focused on training faculty and staff, claiming that faculty and staff did not have the knowledge or skills to engage minoritized students adequately. Then, using funding from two federal grants, Griffin-Fennel and Lerner (2020) created programs and resources for faculty and staff's long-term development.
One critique for the faculty and staff development programs is the extensive amount of work and time commitment it takes for faculty and staff to gain the skills and knowledge needed to serve students of color better. Therefore, universities need to be willing to invest time and money in the faculty and staff’s professional development. The common thread in creating a servingness identity at HSIs was the presence of federal grant support and the willingness for leaders to reflect and understand the gaps that are unique to the institution. In addition, the intentionality of including culturally relevant enhancement experiences.

**Culturally Relevant Practices**

Culturally relevant practices vary from pedagogy in the classroom, as stated before, to student support services and undergraduate research opportunities. A 3-year study of successful teachers of minoritized students, culturally relevant practices recenter marginalized communities' knowledge through positive campus climates, valued students' ways of knowing, and provided opportunities for students to share cultural heritage (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Further, cultural enhancement through ethnic studies courses was found to recenter around the communities that the university served, embed race and ethnicity as essential discussions throughout the curricula, and allowed for safe spaces for Pláticas (talks) for students’ cultural identity development (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016).

In a case study conducted by Garcia and Okhidoi (2015), of 88 participants at an HSI, culturally relevant practices were found in grant-funded support services. Programs such as the summer bridge allowed for students’ cultural identity development, fostered a sense of community with peers and the institution and provided high-impact practices like faculty mentoring. These experiences helped change the organizational identity
towards a servingness framework (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Culturally relevant practices provided students a transformative experience that challenged colonization and deficit discourse (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Expanding on culturally relevant research on centering Black students’ experiences, Williams et al. (2021) employed a grounded theory approach and highlighted culturally-affirming strategies including them in the research an curriculum “affording students opportunities to learn about their communities of origin as well as the larger African diaspora… understand their personal backgrounds, and particularly their cultural identities” (pg. 744). At the quantitative level, in an analysis of institutions with higher than predicted outcomes from the National Survey of Student Engagement, Kuh et al. (2010) suggest that schools with more equitable outcomes in graduation and retention exhibited students to diverse perspectives in the curriculum and encouraged faculty to feature topics around race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Overall, students should be able to encounter activities where they learn about their own histories and those who have been marginalized (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016; Garcia, 2017). It is crucial for the inclusion of HSI grant proposals to look beyond traditional outcomes of graduation and retention when designing program activities since qualitative studies of minoritized students continue to point to culturally relevant enhancement as equally crucial to their success. Then, merging traditional evidence-based practices with positive holistic activities may be one of the answers that education leaders need to understand to better serve diverse students in designing and implementing grant activities and faculty development.
Faculty Development

Faculty development may lead to a “great source of innovation, creating high-quality teaching, experimental curriculum, cutting-edge research, intellectual enrichment, student engagement, improve student outcomes, and respond more to the campus and community needs” (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p.736). Given the current and historical demographics of higher education and the existing inequities, it is incumbent for education leaders to interrogate how faculty development is a priority for HSI grants. As one of the primary sources of expenditures for HSI grants (33%), faculty development is challenged by some to indirectly impact Latinx student success (Garcia, 2019; Perez, 2018). When analyzing the classroom impact on Latinx student success, there was no significant correlation between classroom pedagogy expenditures and Latinx students' graduation and retention (Perez, 2020). While faculty preparation to serve minoritized students may be contested, some HSIs reside in states in which legislation prohibits the targeted recruitment and hiring of faculty of color, such as proposition 209 California (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 1996). Due to the restrictions of institutionalized racism, and even with the presence of Chief Diversity Officers, universities continue to lag in diversifying the faculty representation (Bertrand et al., 2015; Bradley et al., 2018; Contreras, 2017). Therefore, institutions are left to develop their current faculty to become more culturally aware and trained to serve students of color better.

The lack of training on topics surrounding minoritized issues is best documented in response to improving Latinx STEM education through an employee preparation study. Using a sequential mixed-methods investigation gathering answers from 494 faculty, staff, and administrators from HSIs across four states, Preuss et al. (2020) found
that all three (faculty, staff, and administrators) cumulatively reported that 10% or less had received any information about concerns of first-generation students, low-income, and Hispanic students. Further, less than 6% of 4-year HSIs employees reported having any professional development type addressing the HSI issues (Preuss et al., 2020). In terms of Hispanic versus non-Hispanic faculty, staff, and administrators’ responses, Hispanic respondents were more likely to agree with elements of Hispanic cultural values, meaning that minoritized faculty, staff, and administrators had more knowledge and understanding of minoritized cultural wealth and assets (Preuss et al., 2018). These findings bring to light the need to continue supporting the development of current faculty, staff, and administrators, which may go against some of Garcia's (2020) recommendations.

The argument of why it is essential to continue developing current faculty can be best shown through a study with a survey sample of 2,500 college students conducted by Chang (2005). Latinx students were found to have some of the lowest interaction levels with faculty. Chang (2005) stated that the low faculty-to-student interactions might directly result from teaching and mentorship preparation for higher education instructors. For HSIs in Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, and Texas, Preuss et al. (2020) stated that one reason for the lack of student interaction was the faculty to student ratios. However, Preuss et al. (2020) continued that those findings also illuminated faculty responses to less frequently support Hispanic students, minoritized students in STEM, first-generation students, and students of low-socioeconomic backgrounds. As education leaders continue to develop proposals for HSI grants with components of faculty development, it is vital to understand how faculty diversity should also be considered and develop current faculty as
they both play a significant role in enhancing the overall learning for Latinx students. Faculty development will give minoritized students access to mentors, role models, and diverse perspectives to challenge and develop students' cultural and professional identities (Contreras, 2017; Crisp et al., 2015).

**HSI Faculty Diversity**

Freeman (2015) identified an education pipeline issue in the P-20 for Latinx students and asserts it is reflected in the slow progress faculty of color and higher education leaders of color have made in gaining tenure-track positions and leadership positions. Around 24% of all students in the national K-12 system are Latinx, but only 11% of them are represented at 4-year institutions, only 5% hold leadership positions in education and 4% are represented as faculty (Freeman, 2015). In California, Contreras and Contreras (2015) identified that Latinx faculty only represented 8.8% at the CSU, while White faculty represented 68% of positions. This data brings to light a pipeline issue where minoritized students are not represented in higher education. As a result, there is a call from the scholarship to increase the diversity pools for faculty and administrative leadership positions (Abdul-Raheem, 2016). Garcia and colleagues (2020) state that faculty diversity, development, and training are essential in the context of HSIs and grants.

Literature related to the impact of faculty diversity on minoritized student graduation and persistence is not extensive. However, for the few studies that exist in exploring the implications of faculty diversity, Umbach (2006) investigated two questions: 1) how do faculty of color engage students compared to White counterparts? And 2) how do structural factors, such as diversity in faculty, relate to how faculty
members engage students both curricular and co-curricular? Umbach (2006) surveyed 137 colleges and universities, both full-time and part-time faculty members, and revealed that faculty of color interacted with students overall more than White faculty. Further, faculty of color employed more collaborative learning pedagogy and more frequently engaged students in diversity-related activities (Umbach, 2006).

While Umbach’s study reflects on the educational landscape over a decade ago, today, an analysis of the California State University system by Contreras (2017) expands on Umbach’s findings, suggesting that the Latinx demographic trend has led to a more significant number of college-going students. Still, there remains a considerable gap in tenure track Latinx faculty. Specifically, the percentage of Latinx faculty is three times less than the critical mass of Latinx students system-wide. Thus, efforts to increase faculty diversity continue to be an area of concern for a servingness framework for HSI grants and are highlighted as a need for equity and social justice for Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2020). Contreras and Contreras (2015) expand on the faculty diversity issue by asserting that leaders need to rethink traditional models of success for Latinx students, suggesting that faculty of color play a critical role in students' positive school experience are more likely to mentor Latinx students. The empirical evidence regarding the awarded colorblind grant proposals contradicts some of the recommendations from HSI research. That is, federal HSIs granting agencies did not have a requirement to improve faculty diversity in higher education (Contreras, 2017). While ethnicity is not the sole factor for faculty serving minoritized students, race and racism continue to play a role at the faculty level, how institutions utilize grant funds for faculty development, and the colorblind allocation of funding (Bell, 1980; Ray, 2019). Garcia (2019, 2020) argues
that part of a servingness identity is for schools to create intentional efforts to train current faculty in embedding culturally relevancy to their curriculum and hire more faculty of color.

**Faculty Training**

Hispanic Serving institutions have an obligation to address various aspects of the organization where students interact and are engaged, including faculty in the classroom and co-curricular spaces (Garcia et al., 2019). Latinx students can face barriers that limit their ability to engage with the campus due to their circumstances. Many are first in their family to attend college, some may come from low-socioeconomic households, or some did not have access to the best preparation possible (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018). However, the importance of student engagement on campus goes without question, which leads to more remarkable persistence and retention (Astin, 1984; Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Estepp et al., 2017). HSI grant program designs should consider all the factors associated with teaching and serving students of color. However, there have been few studies that address HSI-related training for faculty to develop practices of cultural enhancement and equity-minded co-curricular opportunities (Contreras, 2017). Using a web-based quantitative linear regression survey of faculty at ten HSIs between 2018-2019, Garcia et al. (2020) found that faculty indicated low levels of color-neutral racial attitudes which means that they have knowledge of institutional discrimination and understanding of racial issues; however, in STEM, faculty reported lower awareness than faculty in the humanities and social sciences. There were no significant differences between White faculty and faculty of color.
Griffen-Fennel and Lerner (2020) described that when their institution became an HSI and received a Title V grant, they had to first disaggregate student-level data by race, ethnicity, and Pell eligibility (low-income) to understand the achievement gaps and found that persistence and graduation for minoritized students had lower rates than Whites. Using a conceptual multicultural framework in changing the attitudes in serving minoritized students, faculty were then trained about conscious and unconscious biases, included minoritized narratives in the curriculum so that students could learn about their own cultural legacy, and encouraged faculty to participate in summer institutes for training (Griffen-Fennel & Lerner, 2020). The idea that faculty should already know how to serve minoritized students is not evident. Therefore, university leadership should make an effort to inform and train faculty in long-term interventions to change the culture and organizational identity (Liera, 2019). One way to educate leaders is through culturally responsive leadership.

**Culturally Responsive Leadership**

Education leaders play a vital role in shaping the environments to increase college success for minoritized students (Bensimon et al., 2019). However, more current research has outlined the obstacles leaders face between responsive leaders’ need to focus on retaining students while still maintaining demands from the university for its institutional prestige (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012). Santamaría and Santamaría (2020), in a multiple case study design, interviewed leaders of color and indigenous leaders, whom both share a history of colonization, racism, brutality, and oppression, and found that leaders agreed that race and ethnic identity played a critical role in how leadership is practiced in promoting equity in education. Research findings suggest that leaders' lived experiences
played a role in countering educational injustice by practicing culturally responsive leadership to deliberately disrupt the status quo through critical conversations where leaders apply a critical race theory framework in the decision-making process.

Using critical race theory led to building trust and honoring all institution members (Santamaría, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015). Scholarship surrounding culturally responsive leadership is built upon the notions of culturally responsive pedagogy, which refers to creating an environment where minoritized people do not learn to be "White" at the expense of their cultural and psychosocial well-being; therefore, minoritized leaders can explore their histories and gain a voice in critical discourse (Castagno, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Deeb-Sossa et al. (2021) described how in challenging deep-rooted White supremacy and colonialism, institutional agents used culturally responsive recruitment efforts at Hispanic-serving institutions by utilizing a partnership between the Chicana/o Studies department and the diversity recruitment initiatives and transfer program creating a strong reputation with high school counselors, superintendents, and other school stakeholders to expand traditional events to include Latinx/Chicanx parents and caretakers, and increase the social capital of Latinx/Chicanx students by hosting visits at the UC campus.

When studying examples of culturally responsive non-minority leaders, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) interviewed White urban school leaders that supported the cultural development of students, staff, and administrators through the use of analytical tools like critical race theory and understanding whiteness. Leaders addressed their own emotional and intellectual work around race, institutional racism, and building a culturally supportive community by infusing race into data-informed leadership. Practitioners of
culturally responsive leadership were found to challenge dominant discourse and policies that disenfranchise students based on class, race, sexual orientation, language, and immigrant status (Lopez, 2016). Santamaría and Santamaría (2015) show examples of how culturally responsive leaders, including non-minority leaders, can use critical race frameworks to set privilege aside and respond to inequities by intentionally learning about the socio-political, cultural, and linguistic context that surrounds learning of students.

**Decision-making at HSIs**

As education researchers tried to make sense of school organizations and accountability for students' success, in the early 1980s and preceding decades, researchers turned a focal point on education leadership as the explanatory option for understanding school performance and decision-making (Chitpin & Evers, 2019). Over several decades, decision-making has been extensively researched in economics, organizational theory, and sociological studies, and many distinctive decision-making leadership frameworks have been proposed. Today, decision-making in the context of educational leadership of HSI grants and HSIs, in general, have been given more growing attention (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Palmer et al., 2019). The most frequently noted decision-making framework in the literature is the classical individualistic dynamics of rationality or rational choice models, which are based on leaders using context, information, cognitive understanding (Connolly et al., 2019; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Zey, 1992).

The choices rely on individuals who have their own biases, experiences, and pressures from the organization, state, and federal policies. Therefore, decisions are selected based on individualistic factors or organizational pressure factors of value,
culture, or to satisfy the individual’s preference, understanding, and predictability to the goal (Robinson & Donald, 2015). Rational choice decision-making, as described by Posselt et al. (2020), “does not offer direct ways of understanding how and why inequities so frequently arise from the decisions that individuals and organizations make” (p. 20). The limitation to classical decision-making research is that the value of the goal and the strength of the individual's preference to it, through implicit or explicit bias, influences how specific important goals are carried out through the material, social, and cultural resources (Zey, 1992). Constrained by the rational choice problem, scholars propose that leaders mainly consider the preferred goal, means for achieving the plan, and issues in epistemic resources relevant to the decisions (Chitpin & Evers, 2015, 2019; Zey, 1992). As such, in understanding concepts of decision-making and schools as organizations that serve Latinx and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), leaders must define and redefine what it means to serve guided by HSI research and center the student populations supported through initiatives, practices, and policies (Garcia, 2021).

Education scholars have proposed other models of decision-making to include equity-mindedness in the evaluation criteria, decision makers’ understanding of their own positionality and biases, and the role of power on values, preferences, and priorities (Posselt et al., 2020). Therefore, because schools as organizations are complex for understanding how decisions are made, studies point to decision-makers as having to go through a process that enhances their understanding of social causation and cognitive processes by embedding a methodological approach with data-driven decisions and equity analysis (Capper, 2019; Chitpin et al., 2015; Stowell, 2004). Felix et al. (2015) assert that it is not possible to achieve equity at most college campuses without the
engagement of actors, including faculty and administrators. Faculty and administrators need to unlearn normative and deficit perspectives that are used to explain academic success as an outcome that derives solely from the students’ motivation, self-efficacy, and goals, instead of looking within and reflecting on how to reform institutional dysfunctions and inequities by utilizing their power to take action (Bensimon, 2007).

**Equity-minded Decision-making**

Decision-makers are part of an organizational chart reflecting hierarchical structures that function dynamically to fulfill institutional goals (Chitpin & Evers, 2019). For the decisions to employ equity-mindedness, information is important because to be effective, institution leaders need to be responsive to the place, promote cultural knowledge, and understand the social, cultural, and economic disparities of the communities they serve (Crazy Bull, 2019). In leading from the center with indigenous knowledge as the basis for effective leadership, Crazy Bull (2019) asserts that effective leadership is based on relationships and kinship derived from the expectations from the people served and informed by ancestral knowledge and contemporary experiences. HSI leaders can learn from tribal college leaders as they have distinctive cultural missions which reflect a student population of native communities. Crazy Bull (2019) illuminates that tribal college leaders “directly engage with the acquisition of tribal knowledge with the integration and use of knowledge to build curriculum, courses, and degree programs” (p. 20). Even though HSIs as public institutions have broad missions to serve their communities, the decision-making practices should follow a design principle for equity and access.
Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon (2015) laid five principles to bring meaning to "serving" in HSIs, with first, Hispanic-serving designation should be reflected in the identity, mission, priorities, as well as the goals of the campus divisions, departments, and units. Second, valuing Latinx student success among institutional leadership, faculty, and staff. Third, examining equity in educational outcomes disaggregated by race and ethnicity, adopt metrics of equity and apply them to student outcomes. Fourth, promoting Latinx student success and equity in outcomes is an ongoing process emphasizing on reflection and action by leaders. And fifth, engage students in culturally sustaining practices, such that current policies and procedures must be altered to promote students' academic success while supporting and maintaining their cultures and communities, raising critical consciousness.

Felix et al. (2015), in working with colleges and systems from several states, including the University of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania State, and individual campuses in California, Colorado, Nevada, Indiana, and New York, administered and implemented an "equity scorecard" which consists of tools, activities, and processes to assist leaders in embedding equity into institutionalized structures. When decision-makers used the data, they sometimes were found not to make an effort to look into the data in more profound ways to have meaningful conversations about existing racialized patterns of inequality to intervene strategically. Felix et al. (2015) indicated that “under the right conditions, institutional actors will strive to learn how to change themselves and their own institutions to produce equity in educational outcomes” (p. 25).
Traditional Study of Organizations

Organizational theorists argue that utilizing the organizational analysis to better understand higher education's structural challenges with critical perspectives can lead to culture change and raise the consciousness to better serve students of color (Capper, 2019; Bolman & Deal, 2017). Some scholars argue that organizational structural analysis alone carries many limitations. It ignores the ideas of privilege, power, identity, oppression, equity, and social justice (Connolly et al., 2019; Garcia, 2013, 2018b). While organization institutional theories may inform leaders in the structural and functional epistemologies, organizations mainly strive to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and traditional structures of goals, culture, and context (Bush, 2015). The main priorities of an organization can be said to focus on legitimized quantitative measures of success, such as graduation and retention, while leaving out other intersectional elements of the individual student situation, such as having to work part-time or full-time jobs, having dependents, access to support services, and college navigational support.

More contemporary institutional theorists provide new organizational theoretical ideas that merge organizational theory and critical race theories. Capper (2019) further expands on this idea of using organizational theory and critical race frameworks by embedding it into the study of organizations. Both provide tenets on understanding how race and racism play a role in traditional efficiency and effectiveness measures in higher education. Capper (2019) found that leaders who are trained to understand the tenants of critical race theory and organizational theory could make strides for cultural change. To understand Critical Race Theory, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define CRT as 1) race and racism are endemic and permanent, 2) challenges dominant ideology, 3) commitment to
social justice, 4) centrality of experiential knowledge of people of color, 5) CRT extends beyond any discipline and can be analyzed within a historical or contemporary context. Capper (2019) stated that leaders with CRT training could develop the tools and become empowering agents needed to address their own racism and how not to become complicit to racialized structures.

**Institutional Agents**

Institutional agents are “individuals who, having experienced or developed an understanding of institutionalized oppressiveness, use their knowledge to support minoritized student success” (Bensimon et al., 2019, p. 1691). Studies have established the role in which institutional agents, which include faculty, staff, and administrators, play a significant role in the success of minoritized students through formal mentorship, faculty interactions, undergraduate research, counseling, and traditional peer support programs (Bensimon et al., 2019; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2010). In a qualitative study at one HSI, Garcia and Ramirez (2018) interviewed 47 administrators, faculty, and staff participants and narrated their stories. Garcia and Ramirez's (2018) study revealed that some agents carry deficit thinking of students of color. However, others empowered and contributed to the institution's transition to serving Latinx students. Institutional agents were found to be a resource and political advocates, creating programs that encourage minoritized students to engage in research and support academic achievement by transferring agents' resources to build students' social capital (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). In a similar study, Bensimon et al. (2019) found that faculty helped students develop self-efficacy and feel a sense of belonging in their respective disciplinary communities.
While faculty, administrators, and staff can serve as empowering agents, Hurtado (2011), using quantitative survey hierarchical linear modeling and focus groups, stated that 28% of faculty to student interactions were based on student characteristics, 61% on institutional characteristics, and 33% interactions of student's first year in college. The findings indicate that students of color may be less likely to interact with faculty in impactful activities like mentorship and research, depending on where students of color attend college. Overall, on average, minoritized students had fewer interactions with faculty than White students (Hurtado, 2011). To further expand on the problem of student and faculty interactions, Blake-Beard et al. (2011) suggests that minoritized students more frequently sought to be matched to faculty of the same gender and the same race than their Whites student counterparts. Further, women and minoritized students were more likely to say that it was important for the faculty mentor to know about their background and understand how it affects their experiences as a student (Blake-Beard et al., 2011).

To further expand on this importance, Roksa and Whitley (2017) assert that high levels of academic motivation of minoritized students were tied to faculty members being student-centered, welcoming discussion, going “above and beyond,” and showing cultural sensitivity. There is a clear need to increase faculty interactions and interactions with faculty of similar backgrounds in discussing institutional agents. Institutional agents, including faculty, staff, and administrators, hold immense potential in their positions and can provide critical support, forms of social capital, and institutional support to students (Bensimon et al., 2019; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). The literature points to how
gatekeepers of individuals with power can transfer capital. Still, the question remains about the extent of the practice and opportunities for students to gain capital.

**Social Capital**

It is evident that institutional agents play a crucial role in using their own authority and positional resources to transfer social capital to Latinx and BIPOC students, leading to more remarkable persistence and positive campus experience (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). Through the review of the literature and theoretical frameworks from the sociological field, Stanton-Salazar (2011) expanded on the social capital framework grounded on institutional support, institutional agents, social capital, and empowerment. Some institutions were held back because of the lack of understanding of minoritized students' experiences and deficit-based beliefs that prevent administrators and faculty from empowering students of color (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018).

Social capital in higher education was emphasized as an integrative process through bonding between students and school personnel, allowing the student to gain a sense of belonging and collective identity (Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Empowering agents on behalf of the student is dependent on three factors: 1) resources that agents possess and institutional support they can leverage, 2) resources that are tied to their position to serve students, and 3) the ability to mobilize other actors to support students. Education leaders can then use their authority to empower minoritized students through active recruitment, bridging, brokering agreements, such as grants to add value, and coordinating efforts based on the assessment of needs and services tailored for students (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Accordingly, faculty and administrators alike who have a sense of cultural responsibility in their leadership practices can leverage their HSI
grant initiatives to empower their staff as agents and build the social capital for students through academic and non-academic designs.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

In this dissertation, I present a new conceptual framework designed for HSI leaders seeking to apply and implement grants (see Figure 2). The framework aims to pose reflection from the leaders, bring accountability, and change organizational structures. Grant implementation (GI) leaders are institutional change agents that can implement HSI grants for equity. As agents, leaders have the power to move the institutions that they serve towards equity through leadership reflexivity and action (Stovall, 2016). Leaders can also challenge oppression and transfer material, social, and cultural capital to students of color (Bensimon et al., 2019).

Building from Garcia (2019, 2020), Ray (2019), and Stovall’s (2016) work, the conceptual framework for grant leadership for equity seeks to realize equity-minded leadership practices around grant implementation by identifying actions, evidence of success, and organizational climates in a continuum. This continuum allows leaders to reflect on current indicators for serving, resource distribution practices, decision-making practices, and contributions to HSI-positive school climates. The HSI grants for equity framework highlights the individual leaders’ decision-making and servingness with hopes of building on current contexts for positive growth over time. This framework recognizes that HSIs and grant practices are imperfect and can always move in a more equitable or positive direction, as demonstrated with the arrows.
In addition to the framework, Bensimon et al. (2016) asserts that in enacting equity, leaders should have mechanisms to understand goals and measures and equity-mindedness should be the guiding paradigm.

Equity-minded individuals are aware of the sociohistorical context of exclusionary practices and racism in higher education and the impact of power asymmetries on opportunities and outcomes, particularly for African Americans and Latinas/os… Equity-minded individuals are color-conscious in a critical sense… aware of beliefs, expectations, and practices assumed to be neutral… Willing to assume responsibility for the elimination of inequality, (p. 3).

Leaders can critically assess, validate, and provide accountability with the hope to center Latinx and other minoritized students.
This research sheds light on HSIs grant practices and add a level of accountability on how leaders decide how to allocate grant funds and prioritize program activities. In addition, the framework creates an opportunity to bring practitioner knowledge and theory together to add to the indicators of serving that may be used as tools to assess effective measures of leadership practice at HSIs (Garcia, 2020). In the following, I present four theoretical frameworks that guide this study: the theory of racialized organizations, critical race theory, critical race praxis, and multidimensional servingness framework. These frameworks come from the critical scholarship and research of Hispanic-serving institutions, which all identify the challenges to structures of serving and racial disparities from historical and contemporary issues that affect students' success in higher education.

**Theory of Racialized Organizations**

Using racial analysis, higher education researchers have argued that universities and colleges’ patterns of racial inequality are embedded in the country’s history of colonialism and that students of color are colonized people (Garcia, 2018a; Wilder, 2013). The ideals of postsecondary institutional prestige and competitiveness are grounded in White hegemonic traditions of power and hierarchy. In understanding power and hierarchy, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe organizations as isomorphic where practices become more similar to one another carrying out the same practices. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) state, "isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same environmental conditions" (p. 149). For this reason, inequities in higher education appear across all universities and colleges in the U.S., as can be seen in the merit-based application process, standardized testing,
selectivity of high achieving students, focus on graduation rates, retention, and deficit notions of students of color (Garcia, 2019; Núñez et al., 2015). Due to the conversion of HSIs from once predominantly White institutions, they carry certain aspects of racial inequities that characterize the institution as a racialized organization (Dayton et al., 2004).

Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations asserts that educational institutions can 1) enhance or diminish the agency of minoritized groups, 2) make legitimate claims to the unequal distribution of resources, 3) enhance White supremacy – the notion of colorblindness and racial inferiority in which African Americans, Latinxs, and others have not taken advantage of the opportunities given to them, and 4) enact policies that benefit the majority veiled as benefitting minoritized groups. While Ray’s theory extends structural theories around race and racism at the institutional level and some critical race theory concerns, the theory does not include crucial intersectional identity developments, such as a minoritized student's lived experiences, intersectionality of Latino/a/x, language, socio-economic status, and undocumented status (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Crenshaw, 1996; Solórzano, 1998).

While more recent theories of institutions do point to racism as systemic and endemic, race has been historically under-theorized as part of organizational and institutional theories (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Capper, 2019; Ray, 2019). Squire (2015) asserts that organizational theory can allow practitioners to analyze higher education from a macro level in investigating the system's process, norms, values, power structures, and interactions. Squire (2015) affirms that "a singular framed approach is not sufficient to understanding the intricacies of such complicated systems" (p. 106). Thus, in
understanding the organizational identity formation of Hispanic-serving institutions, there needs to be an institutional and individual level analysis to account for education leaders’ actions at the individual membership level that looks at both positional authority and experiential knowledge. Much of the organizational theory lacks critical race and intersectional examinations; therefore, in addition to the theory of racialized organizations, I also employed critical race theory (CRT) to shed light on forms of resistance to oppressive aspects of higher education grant programs. Individual action and lived experiences can explain how leaders perceive their roles to impact and understand the multidimensional identities of Latinx students (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

**Critical Race Theory**

Coming from the legal academy in critical legal studies in an effort to articulate the struggle of the collective social reality and experiences of the oppressed, Critical Race Theory (CRT) assessed how societal racism continued to persist post desegregation law and how promises from the civil rights movement were unrealized (Bell, 1976, 1980; Matsuda, 1993). African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Chicanx/Latinx continued to fight and resist racism and oppression in education (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009, 2009). Even after the election of the first Black president Barack Obama, the national media had proclaimed that the nation had entered a new “post-racial” era which many scholars critiqued as a current form of colorblind ideology that attempted to rationalize and sustain current inequities in U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). However, critical race theory tenets allow researchers to show how racism remains in the
higher education systems, policies, and cultures. Further, CRT provides a way to disrupt, understand, and inform higher education research.

It is crucial to understand how critical race theory evolved into the field of education. After legal advances through the Civil Rights Era, students of color continued to endure hostility, segregation practices, and policies that benefitted white students (Ishimaru, 2020; Lewis, 2015). Legal scholars sought to challenge racial injustice by pointing out existing laws as arbitrarily categorized to reflect whiteness relationships masked as legitimate and equal (Bell, 1980; Matsuda, 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Therefore, U.S. legal scholarship indicated how the legal system was not neutral and was undeniably affected by social, economic, political, or cultural forces (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). As such, race and racism were protected by the law, where whites ultimately maintained power. Policies around education, economics, and politics were shaped to continue to marginalize students of color. In offering the ideal school system, Bell (1980) asserts that desegregation should mean the removal of all barriers based on race, but it should not mean the dismantling of the Black institution. Instead, it should allow for the increase of critical consciousness to value diversity and should mean that Blacks and other minoritized communities participate at every level of our political and economic structures with educational attainment as a means to achieving that goal (Bell, 1980).

Moving towards critical race theory in education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), expanding on the legal studies, including propositions that exemplified how race continued to be significant in the educational systems, including whiteness alone as the ultimate property rights comprising of the right of disposition, rights to practice and satisfaction, hold status and power, and right to exclude others. Taking into account legal
scholarship and social science body of work on CRT, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) proposed that race and property intersects and can be analyzed to understand injustices in schooling, from unequal punishment of African American and Latinx students to the right to exclude students from advance placement courses based on race, socio-economic background, and language. CRT scholars challenged historical majoritarian narratives using experiential knowledge and counter-stories to show how reality is socially constructed by individual situations (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Using voice as a component of critical race theory, stories were a way for researchers to give minoritized groups the power to rewrite history by countering many deficit notions and pointing blame at students and their families; the use of voice is “required” for analysis of the educational landscape (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT has several tenets, and some other developed forms of CRT have additional elements, such as LatCrit, QueerCrit, DisCrit, and Tribal Crit, which all add significant intersections not found in the CRT alone. For the purpose of this study, CRT will be discussed. Solórzano (1998) defines CRT as 1) race and racism are endemic and permanent, 2) challenges dominant ideology, 3) commitment to social justice, 4) centrality of experiential knowledge of people of color, 5) CRT extends beyond any discipline and can be analyzed within a historical or contemporary context. CRT can serve in several ways for the understanding of Hispanic-serving institution grant functions by providing context to understand and transform established belief systems; CRT can teach others about how combining story and elements of reality can create new constructs for direct impacts; CRT allows leaders to challenge majoritarian views and
center the wisdom of those who are at the margins, showing new possibilities for equity and social justice (Solórzano, 1998).

**Critical Race Praxis**

Critical race praxis takes CRT a step further from theory to practice and includes interpretive, experiential, and reflective elements. Critical race praxis allows us to answer the question: How are we moving the paradigm towards equity? With the use of critical reflexivity as an integral part, critical race praxis allows for collaborative leadership that is based on values of co-development, holistic learning, and social justice as essential to the critical intentionality that brings pro-active change (Stovall, 2005; Stovall et al., 2009; Yamamoto, 1997). In understanding the status of desegregation for Chinese Americans in San Francisco's public schools, Yamamoto (1997) observed how a desegregation order discriminated against Chinese Americans through meritocracy and colorblindness. In response, Yamamoto (1997) proposed a critical race praxis framework, describing the central idea that racial justice required action, anti-subordination practices where injustice needs to be understood, critiqued and healed to make intergroup alliances. The framework proposes four points of inquiry: conceptual, performative, material, and reflexive.

Building from Yamamoto’s (1997) work, Stovall (2005) explains the four main points from critical race praxis as the conceptual encompasses interconnecting influences of power, status, hierarchy, sexism, and race; performative questions what practical steps should the practitioner be taking and who should act; the material inquiries into the changes in the material, social, and cultural conditions on racial oppression; and the reflexive reintegrates the experiences into theoretical practice which is a continuous
rebuilding of theory in light of the practical experiences of racialized groups. Critical race praxis inquiry provides an opportunity for practitioners and scholars to record the actionable steps taken toward equity by findings indicators of serving and taking risks.

**Figure 3**

*Theoretical Frameworks in Conversation to Move Paradigm Towards Equity*

Note. Adapted from Ray (2019), Yamamoto (1997), and Garcia (2020).

**Multidimensional Conceptual Framework for Understanding Servingness**

Due to the heterogeneous nature of HSI institutions ranging from small community colleges to large 4-year research institutions, researchers have argued that there is no one way to best serve Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2019; Garcia, 2020;
Marin, 2019). Therefore, findings in one study of campus administrators at HSIs suggest that it is more critical to understand the extent to which institutions currently serve Latinx students and build from there, which acknowledges a developing institutional identity formation needed to support the needs of minoritized students (Marin, 2019). Within this line of thinking, Garcia (2020) expands on her previous definition of servingness to include the multidimensional aspects of HSIs and identifies indicators of serving rather than it being one size fits all. Indicators of serving are described at the institutional and leadership levels to include both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, including student outcomes and lived experiences, as well as faculty, staff, and administrators' inputs (Garcia, 2020). Structures for servingness institutions included mission and values statements, diversity plans, HSI grants, institutional advancement activities, engagement with the Latinx community, compositional diversity in faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate students, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, programs and services specialized in supporting minoritized students, leadership and decision-making practices, incentive structures, and external boundary management (Garcia, 2020).

**Summary of the Literature**

This literature review shows the need to understand further accountability in HSI grant spending and leadership’s role in creating and enacting equity-minded decision-making practices that lead to a servingness organizational identity for Hispanic Serving Institutions. Almost 25 years after the federal government recognized institutions with 25% or more Hispanic students and 50% low-income enrollment populations, we continue to see a slow progression towards Latinx equity goals. Scholars point to the importance of federal and state funding support for student interventions. HSIs have
some of the lowest funding compared to other institutions, around 67 cents to the dollar (HACU, 2019). While HSIs welcome the support from the federal government, there has been a boom in emerging HSIs at 523 (Garcia, 2019). Therefore, funding has been based on competitive applications, not guaranteeing the much-needed support. As such, HSIs receive some of the lowest funding per student compared to all the minority-serving institutions bringing to light much-needed policy changes.

The academic achievement data shows there are still gaps between Latinx students and non-minorities, and faculty are critical as empowering agents, principle investigators for grant proposals, and have the positional status to pass on social capital to students (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Museus & Neville, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Accordingly, it is crucial to understand how faculty development and faculty diversity play in the HSI racialized structures and grant context. Thus, it is also imperative for leaders to understand the typologies of HSIs to build the needed agency and capacity to serve Latinx students (Núñez et al., 2015). To do so, Garcia (2017) asserts that leaders need to understand the servingness continuum and where their respective universities fall into that continuum. Once reflective work is completed, using traditional academic and climate metrics, administrators, staff, and faculty can create strategic planning teams to create program designs that are evidence-based and equity-focused, allowing them to apply to HSI grants with intentionality to serve Latinx students.

What has been found as critical from current HSI practitioners is to gain the university's support by embedding their HSI interventions within the university's strategic planning (Reguerín et al., 2020). In terms of grant accountability, from the 16 allowable activities, only 22% of funds are used to impact students directly and have
shown evidence of correlation with retention and graduation (Perez, 2020). It can be said that a significant portion of the funds are indirectly impacting Latinx student success and continues to be debated (Garcia, 2020). Education leaders need to rethink the most impactful activities for minoritized students, including both culturally relevant activities to build a sense of community and specialized academic support programs, such as the Educational Opportunity Program (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Today, there is little research on understanding HSI grant program leadership, including faculty and administrators' roles, decision-making, and spending, which has generated calls from HSI research (Garcia, 2020; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the method employed as a qualitative multiple case study, the role and positionality of the researcher, and the motivation of the study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand HSI grant implementation (GI) leaders’ experiences and decision-making processes that contribute toward equitable or inequitable practices that serve Latinx students. The absence of intentional language around race leads to the use of colorblind and color-evasive language in the HSI program proposals submissions (Annamma et al., 2017; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). While we are starting to see an initial response in addressing issues around HSIs, racism still persists in the allocation of colorblind funding. Recognizing that individuals construct their own realities based on their culture, lived experience, location, and understanding of the world, I used a constructivist lens (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) asserts that through a constructivist lens, the researcher “seeks to capture diverse understandings and multiple realities about people’s definitions and experiences of the situation” (p. 201). Therefore, this study shed light on and described the leadership identity development of a selected group of HSI grant program leaders at one large public 4-year, one research-intensive (R1) public 4-year, and one private non-profit 4-year Hispanic-serving institutions in the western united states.

Rationale

This research filled an important gap in the HSI leadership organizational identity development discourse by problematizing HSI grants and focusing on federal dollars spent, leadership decision-making, leadership identity exploration, and understanding of organizational structures. In addition, this study sought to understand how leaders play an
important role in understanding how they may be able to disrupt or challenge racialized structures and act as grassroots institutional agents who may hold power to actively work on creating more equitable spaces for minoritized students (Petrov & Garcia, 2021). With HSI grant programs as a resource to increase the institutional capacity to serve, educational leaders must answer the question, "what does it mean to be Hispanic-serving?" Garcia (2019) states,

Theorists have spent extensive time and energy talking about change at the organizational level and less time thinking about field-level change. Arguably, there has not been a significant structural change at the field level that has led to the evolution of HSIs as a new organizational form. The most distinct feature about federally eligible HSIs is that they enroll a large percentage of Latinx undergraduate students. Yet, some federally eligible HSIs do not even pursue the designation, let alone move into an identity construction phase. As such, the criticism is that beyond the 25% enrollment criteria, federally eligible HSIs continue to operate as other post-secondary institutions, legitimizing themselves based on standard (white) measures of institutional effectiveness (e.g., access, persistence/graduation rates, loan default.) (pp. 125-126).

Thus, by studying three different school sites, I was able to gain an understanding of the university climate at the “field-level” related grant programs and “grassroots” leadership practice. Additionally, by conducting a comparative analysis, I was able to triangulate to understand better the institutional climates and overall organizational similarities and differences that support or diminish servingness of Latinx students. The literature on HSI grants has underreported accountability in allocating grant funds and prioritizing funded
activities. HSI grants played an essential part in the advocacy for recognizing the Hispanic-serving institution designation (HACU, 2019). However, there is a gap in the literature on how federal funding support has impacted Latinx student success and how leaders make sense of their roles in advancing equity and social justice efforts for students of color.

**Sites Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the West**

HSIs enroll over 65% of all Hispanic/Latinx students in the university system and play an essential role in providing access, social mobility, and awarding a large number of baccalaureates to minoritized students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Garcia, 2019, HACU, 2019). Rather than focusing on a single institution site, I focused on three 4-year universities in the western states, including California, which holds 175 HSIs (HACU, 2019). As such, this study focused on leaders from a public research institution, a state university, and a private non-profit institution located in a western state which holds a large number of HSI-designated institutions. Hispanic-serving institutions are defined as 2-year and 4-year, degree-accredited, not-for-profit colleges with a population of Hispanic students of at least 25% and 50% of the student population qualify as low-income (Núñez et al., 2016). As 4-year public institutions, they have more similarities in structure, application, recruitment, and student demographics. Organizational theorists describe the parallels in history through isomorphism, meaning many universities tend to copy one another in practices including legitimized and traditional outcomes, prioritizing merit, test scores, and graduation metrics (Bush, 2015; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Many western HSIs are shaped by how similar postsecondary institutions, university system policies, and legislation at the state and federal levels apply pressures
in prioritizing outcomes. The unique features of each site provided rich data for comparative analysis, such as power and hierarchical structures influence decision-making, how private 4-year colleges have their own set of rules, and some state regulations do not apply to them. Furthermore, some institutions had more access to financial support from the university as a research-intensive institution than a primary baccalaureate granting institution.

Figure 4

*Hispanic-serving institutions 2018-2019*

Qualitative Multiple Case Study

A case study is about phenomena within a real-world context where data can be collected from the people, institutions, and documents to help the researcher identify the linkage between university efforts and program outcomes (Yin, 2014). The qualitative case study looks at a noun, something like a manager, a program, event, or school site (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006). My goal in this study was to understand how three different HSI grant-funded programs function to increase the capacity to serve Latinx students and understand the three school sites' leaders and their role in the identity development formation for their institutions. Stake (2006) describes that when selecting multiple cases, the researcher should answer three critical criteria questions that bind the main idea: 1.) Is the case relevant? 2.) Do the cases provide diversity? 3.) Do the cases offer good opportunities to learn about complexity in their own context? The case study method allowed me to investigate three specific sites and "a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 86). The case study helped me analyze from multiple sources of information, including first-hand accounts, documents, and interviews on how certain decisions are made regarding HSI grant funding and leadership.

Data Sources

HSI GI leaders can be defined as the principal investigators, directors, assistant directors, faculty advisors, faculty directors, and coordinators essential in the decision-making, recruitment strategies, mission, and goals of programs that serve Latinx students. I used purposeful sampling to identify and recruit leaders for this study. The participants were identified by their current and past experience working on HSI grant programs.
through public records of National Science Foundation, Department of Education, and Department of Agriculture grant-funded awards, including the institution awarded and the email addresses of the principal investigator and co-principal investigators. Creswell and Creswell (2013) state, “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p.558).

Grant implementation leaders are members of the university’s organizational structures who directly oversee and implement program components, such as student engagement activities, faculty development, collect student success data, and provide support services, which were all good sources that provided rich data. To grasp the depth of the case, first, I reviewed and coded awarded abstracts from 2017-2020 for intentional language to serve Latinx students. The date range was to interview active grant program leaders who would have been entering the end of year 2 of the grant to entering year 4 of their grants. Typically, year one of the grants is for recruitment, planning, and some activity implementation. From this initial review, I then selected three school sites. Next, following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and school site permission, I contacted the grant leadership through public emails, and interviews were conducted. Participants were invited through email consent and I asked for permission to record the interviews to be later transcribed and coded.

Furthermore, the recordings were stored on a secure password-protected computer, and a research journal was kept to write down my thoughts and initial themes. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended. In addition to the interviews, a content analysis was conducted of publicly accessible documents and
websites. The content analysis was used to try to see if what participants were saying matched the university’s priorities and agenda. The interviewees helped inform this study on how the university’s culture may translate to everyday practices at the department and programmatic level.

**Positionality**

I have many intersecting identities as a scholar-practitioner, Latinx, male, first-generation student, faculty member, and assistant director of an office with many minority-serving grant initiatives at a public higher education university. As someone who administered federal institution grants to serve minoritized students, I observed a lack of clarity from the federal to the institutional level in how resources should be distributed in an equitable and socially just manner. HSIs are a new phenomenon, and I believe that institutions are not providing the much-needed leadership development and understanding of what it means to support Latinx student success at Hispanic-serving institutions. My goal in stating my positionality is to show my investment in understanding Hispanic-serving institutions’ educational organizations and understanding narratives of leadership that can help create organizational change. Para seguir adelante – educational systems need to recognize and adapt to the current context to support students of color and utilize grants not as a means of legitimacy but as a tool to develop intentional programs centering students. My life experiences and the way I view reality influenced the interpretations in this study.
Category Identification and Coding for Data Analysis

To begin analyzing the data using the NVivo software, the institutions and the participants were divided into three separate cases by institution type and given pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and maintain confidentiality:

- Case 1: R1 Public University – Pseudonym Luna University
- Case 2: Public 4-Year – Pseudonym Sol University
- Case 3: Private Non-profit – Pseudonym Roma University

I first developed a set of priori codes found in Table 1 below, which focused on themes related to the theoretical frameworks. After collecting data from semi-structured open-ended questions, I read the passages several times to immerse myself in the details of the data to get a sense of the depth of the picture before I started coding. Then, after transcribing the interviews, I employed the first round of coding using the techniques of in vivo, narrative, and causation codes to highlight meaningful quotes that related to the research questions, including notes taken during the interview and journaling following every interview (Saldaña, 2013). In vivo codes examine the direct words from participants; narrative coding allows for the exploration of intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of participants such as “how does your lived experience help with your decision-making?”; causation codes relate to the interview protocol questions extracting causal beliefs not just on how but why, such as “why is there a need for HSI grants and support Latinx students?” (Saldaña, 2013).

The first-cycle coding process was looking at data points from interview transcripts and content analysis and connecting them back to the priori codes categories; in second-cycle coding was used for cross-case data analysis, portions of the same coded
Continuing with the second-cycle coding, I also used classification, conceptualizing, and theory building to identify patterns from the cases and entered the codes into “bigger picture codes,” such as equity-minded decision-making, institutional change, leadership functions, and grant accountability.

Table 1

*Theoretical Framework and Priori Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Priori Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>Challenge Status Quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Counter-storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversity and Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systems Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-dimensional Servingness Framework</td>
<td>Academic Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Academic Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentionality to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embrace Latinx and minoritized students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Racialized Organizations</td>
<td>Redistribute Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest Convergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Hegemonic Structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serve All Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Praxis</td>
<td>Equity minded-decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflexivity in best practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training and professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity expertise or knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leverage grants to change organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creswell and Creswell (2018) specify that qualitative researchers work inductively, building patterns, categories, and themes, focusing on participants' meanings. Participants serve as informants for their respective programs and campus practices, which will help identify and link how their efforts are moving the paradigm towards equity or maintaining the status quo.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), expanding on Guba and Lincoln's (1985) four criteria of trustworthiness describe them as 1.) credibility or the prolonged engagement, observations, triangulation of sources, 2.) transferability or peer debriefing, 3.) dependability or an audit trail, and 4.) confirmability or to confirm the audit trail by other researchers. Several data sources were used to establish trustworthiness, including member checking, triangulation, and document analysis was applied in this study. In employing triangulation, I used different methods, interviews, census data, institutional success data, and documents to validate the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In developing qualitative rigor, Tracy (2010) describes eight criteria for "excellent" qualitative research: "worthy topic, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, and ethical and meaningful coherence" (p. 840). These foundations guided me in understanding the particular strengths and the "webs of relationships," focusing on the process, interconnections, and relationships among the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).
Site Context

This qualitative multiple-case study spanned three universities in the western United States: Luna University, Sol University, and Roma University (pseudonyms). All three universities had the Hispanic-serving designation comprising at least 25% or more Latinx students and 50% of the population qualifying as Pell Eligible – a substitute used to describe low-income qualification. At the time of this study, the three universities had active HSI grant initiatives mainly comprising of Department of Education Title V HSI grants and National Science Foundation HSI-STEM grants3.

The universities in this study were purposely selected as universities with existing servingness qualities and Hispanic-serving identity adoption at an institutional level. All three universities had dedicated Hispanic-serving positions at the administrator or director management level, meaning that the institution had made explicit steps in embedding HSI development in their leadership structures. These individuals have power and access to institutional funding, which was later confirmed from the interviews. All three sites had the intentionality to serve minoritized students found in their websites and abstract submissions for grants. However, to confirm this, questions about servingness structures were asked of the participants.

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3 HSI STEM grant’s goal is to enhance the quality of undergraduate STEM education and increase participation in STEM disciplines and retain and graduate. There are three tracks, implementation and evaluation, institutional transformation, and planning/pilot projects (NSF, 2022).
Luna University (Public-R1)

Luna University\(^4\) is one of 17 HSIs with R1 status, a research-intensive university as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions and (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education Center for Postsecondary Research, 2021; UC Office of the President, 2021). Luna University enrolls roughly 19,000 students with 26% of Hispanic/Latinx background, 22% are Hispanic/Latinx staff, 10% Hispanic/Latinx represented in the faculty, and 65% are White faculty (Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Policy Studies, 2018). At the time of this study, Luna University had five active Department of Education Title V grants focusing on undergraduate curriculum redesign, graduate school programming, retention and graduation, industry career development, and pathways advising. A unique feature of Luna University is that it holds a non-grant permanent HSI director position under a student success division.

Sol University (Public 4-year)

Sol University is part of a state school system and is one of twenty-three HSIs comprising 30,000 students with 32% from Hispanic/Latinx, 15% Hispanic/Latinx faculty, and 60% White faculty (Analytic Studies & Institutional Research, 2021). Sol University has a dedicated HSI office and has a chair-level position. Sol University’s HSI office has an institutional mandate to explore the HSI identity to leverage the designation to apply to HSI grants. Sol created a task force to assess its current status equity gaps and assess existing grants to provide the leadership the necessary steps to leverage its identity.

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\(^4\) Not all racial or ethnicity categories are represented in the description of each HSI institution (Asian, Black/African American, Native American, Native Hawaiian, mixed-race, and other). I focused on comparing Hispanic/Latinx students, faculty, and staff to White student peers, faculty, and staff dependent on data availability because extant literature typically focuses on comparing student success measures.
and transform the culture to support faculty training and development. Table 3 below illustrates the organizational formal to informal structures that exist as HSIs and the way the campuses branded themselves as servingness institutions.

Table 2

University Servingness Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Institutionalized HSI Staff Position</th>
<th>HSI Grant Structure</th>
<th>Type of Grants Reviewed</th>
<th>Campus Intentionality (modified for confidentiality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luna University</td>
<td>Yes/ HSI Initiatives Director</td>
<td>Formal office structure with directors, support staff, faculty leads, Advisory committee</td>
<td>HSI Title V</td>
<td>Luna University will work to graduate Latinx and low-income students supporting equity goals and create pathways through holistic student success, student-centered practices, Conduct accountability through inquiry and policies that advance education equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol University</td>
<td>Yes/ HSI Affairs Chair</td>
<td>No office structure, informal, faculty leads, department chair supported</td>
<td>NSF HSI STEM</td>
<td>An internal report from Sol indicated plans to work on becoming a leader in Meso-American studies, transborder studies, and Chicano/a-Latinx studies. Should recruit and retain more Latina/o/x faculty and staff and better serve Hispanic and low-income students. Enhance Latinx education and diversity to innovate what it means to be HSI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma University</td>
<td>Yes/ HSI Initiatives Director</td>
<td>Semi-formal structure under university college division, faculty leads, support staff</td>
<td>HSI Title V</td>
<td>Roma University uses the HSI identity to empower and develop programs with a commitment to historically marginalized students, Latinx students, and low-income students. The goal is inclusion making sure individuals feel valued, cultivate practices dedicated to the needs of Latinx students inside and outside the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Content analysis of websites, training videos for faculty, task force reports, and grant abstracts.

**Roma University (Private non-profit)**

Roma University is a private nonprofit university with 4,300 full-time students.
Comprising of 36% Hispanic/Latinx, 40% White students, 71% White faculty, and 29% non-White faculty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Roma University had a dedicated staff position overseeing HSI initiatives, including four active U.S. Department of Education funded projects. The department has an HSI vision and mission, campus strategic plan and defines what it means to be a Hispanic-serving institution. Roma University had a big emphasis on branding having multiple sites for university members and the public to learn more about what it meant to be an HSI.

Table 3

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>Chair/Faculty</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Latinx/Hispanic</td>
<td>First-Gen</td>
<td>Luna University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Latinx/Hispanic</td>
<td>First-Gen</td>
<td>Luna University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Latinx/Hispanic</td>
<td>First-Gen</td>
<td>Luna University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Latinx/Hispanic</td>
<td>First-Gen</td>
<td>Roma University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Latinx/Hispanic</td>
<td>First-Gen</td>
<td>Roma University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Latinx/Hispanic</td>
<td>First-Gen</td>
<td>Roma University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>Director/Faculty</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-first-gen</td>
<td>Sol University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Director/Faculty</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-first-gen</td>
<td>Sol University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

After an initial content analysis of Latinx serving intentionality, fifteen potential active GI leaders were identified and contacted for interviews, with eight leaders responding, accepting invitations, and signing consent forms. Three leaders were from Luna University (R1), two from Sol University (public 4-year), and three from Roma University (private non-profit). The names of the universities are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the individuals in this study. The purpose for using the initial content analysis was to begin from the ground up and be objective, systematic, and observational of institutions’ HSI branding and intent to serve Latinx students. I examined thematic structures and overarching constructs from the codes for inductive analysis of servingness type universities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015). The case studies included proposal abstracts, websites, and publicly available documents.

Latinx Intentionality Cases Selection

After the content analysis, I received permission from each university to contact the grant implementation (GI) leaders through publicly accessible emails. I also used the snowball sampling method of the initial participants to identify other potential participants for the study. Table 2 summarizes the participant breakdown and intersectional identities of each participant who self-identified as women (n=6), two as men (n=2), six as Latinx/Hispanic (n=6), two as White, and six out of eight (n=6) were first-generation college students. Furthermore, five were directors of HSI grant programs (n=5), one chair (n=1) of HSI grant initiatives, and two were coordinators (n=2). Table 3
illustrates the breakdown of the cases, the grant programs represented in this study, initial content analysis coding for Latinx student focus efforts, and intentionality statements.

The first step to creating interventions that serve students of color is to understand the context of the university and reflect on where it stands in terms of servingness. Garcia (2021) asserts, “I urge grant seekers and implementers to access and use the latest HSI research when writing and implementing HSI grants… I urge grant seekers and implementors first to determine which type of HSI they are (Latinx-enrolling, Latinx-producing, Latinx-enhancing, Latinx-serving)” (p. 6). Both public universities graduate Latinx students at higher rates than the national average than their white peer counterparts. Still, equity gaps exist. Roma as a private non-profit university is graduating Latinx students 3.55% higher than their white peers.

Table 4
Latinx vs. White student 6-year graduation rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Latinx 6-year Graduation</th>
<th>White 6-year Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luna University</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sol University</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma University</td>
<td>73.55%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Average</td>
<td><strong>54%</strong></td>
<td><strong>64%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from three institutional data sources (IRAPS, 2022; ASIR, 2022; Univstats, 2022).

Based on initial content analysis and graduation rates, the universities fall in Latinx-producing based on Garcia’s (2018) definition, which alludes to graduating more
significant numbers of Latinx students than the national average falls under the producing classification. Still, elements of enhancing and servingness exist, although they are not widely adopted to the core structures of the university but instead function within the programmatic efforts under HSI initiatives.

**Summary of Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology and rationale behind selecting the multiple case study approach and its relation to the implementation leadership of HSI grants. Three different HSI institution sites were selected and compared by interviewing eight leaders who hold decision-making positions for grant funding activities and priorities. The theoretical frameworks of the theory of racialized organizations, critical race theory, critical race praxis, and multidimensional conceptual framework of serving institutions guided this study and framed the research questions. The research questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. How do HSI grant implementation (GI) leaders perceive their role in advancing Latinx student success?
   a. In what ways do HSI GI leaders' own lived experiences and intersectional identities inform their decision-making?

2. To what extent, and in what ways do HSI GI leaders use their role to challenge existing structures to form an organizational identity that serves minoritized students?
   a. How are GI leaders contributing to social justice efforts in their practice?
Limitations

This study had several limitations due to factors associated with the particular school sites, the scope of the project focusing on 4-year institutions, and the type of HSI grants awarded which have different expected outcomes. First, this study does not include students’ voices concerning Hispanic-serving institutions grants. While some of the programs do include students’ reflections and voices in their decision-making practices, this study did not include interviews from student participants related to the grant programs, so I could not confirm the depth of student involvement in program decisions. Additionally, this study does not include 2-year public community colleges or 2-year private colleges. This study is not a representative sample of all HSIs or HSI institutions in the western United States. Instead, this study serves as a theoretical and equity leadership framework foundation for future and current leaders. Furthermore, due to the complex and relatively new structures of HSIs, each school site’s grant leaders and staff had a variety of titles, roles, and leadership functions. For example, while coordinators were interviewed from one site, other sites did not have coordinators as part of their grant structures and teams. Some had staff director positions strictly, while others used faculty directors who taught courses and used course release time to work on the grants. The variation is still vital in understanding the role of grant implementation leaders as comparative analysis and learning from best practices.

There are also limitations of the participants in this study in their level of expertise and understanding of the role of HSI grants, identity, and servingness. The leaders ranged in preparation, including education, background, and years of service. However, since HSIs are relatively a new phenomenon, it is essential to understand the
variations among the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and how they are developing as leaders, their implementation practices, and their decision-making. This study includes the interviews of eight leaders, with six identifying from a minoritized background of Latinx and first-generation. Two participants identified as white and non-first generation. This study attempted to explore intersectional identities of race, class, gender, and generation status to understand leadership motivations, attention to equity and diversity, lived experiences, and how they relate to decision-making.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study aimed to investigate the role of grant implementation (GI) leaders’ decision-making practices at three Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs). The study also aimed to understand how HSI GI leaders, as servingness conscious agents, navigate their leadership roles, make grant programming decisions, and center students of color, leveraging their roles and grants to transform institutional identities and organizational structures for equity.

The research questions that guided this study was as follows:

1. How do HSI grant implementation (GI) leaders perceive their role in advancing Latinx student success?
   a. In what ways do HSI GI leaders’ own lived experiences and intersectional identities inform their decision-making?

2. To what extent, and in what ways do HSI GI leaders use their role to challenge existing structures to form an organizational identity that serves minoritized students?
   a. How are GI leaders contributing to social justice efforts in their practice?

RQ1 investigates how leaders make meaning of the HSI designation and HSI grants, servingness scheme, and critical leadership functions. SQ1 focuses on resistance to white hegemonic structures and the challenges leaders make to move the paradigm at their

5 I provide the term servingness conscious agents crediting research from Villarreal (2022) on HSI consciousness and Latinx-serving consciousness which describes a path to conocimiento or understanding of intersectional experiences of students, commitments, priorities, and awareness of the HSI identity.

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institutions towards equity. RQ2 explores how GI leaders, as HSI institutional agents, may have access to power, networks, and expertise to prioritize resources in a servingness context. SQ2 investigates leadership positionality and intersectional identities and how lived experiences may contribute or not to their decision-making.

The three significant themes found in this study are as follows: 1.) HSI servingness conscious agents, 2.) HSI institutional climate, and 3.) Equity-driven decision-making. Stake (2010) asserts that findings and stories can shed light on those seeking to understand history or desire to change policy. However, findings are assertions of the researcher as personal interpretations of the data. In the following, I provide information on the breakdown of participant university cases, followed by the findings. In the following section, I present the study's data findings starting with the theme of HSI institutional agents, then HSI organizational climate, and concluding with equity-driven decision-making.

**Servingness Conscious Agents**

There is great potential and barriers that exist for Latinx entering college. Many of which have been laid out in the beginning chapters, such as college preparation, navigational knowledge, and a sense of belonging, to say a few. Academic and social outcomes of Latinx students can be nurtured by institutional agents that promote social mobility. As Yosso (2005) alludes, students can develop aspirations with consejos (advice) from faculty and staff that offer tools to resist the oppressive conditions of the university. I identified subthemes concerning servingness-conscious agents as HSI champions and culturally responsive leaders. In describing their roles as institutional agents and being servingness-conscious, participants enacted themselves as HSI
champions and culturally responsive leaders. Thus, I define servingness-conscious agents as members of the university organization who advocate for structural changes to support minoritized students, who are aware of the HSI identity, servingness scheme, and make decisions that take into account the race, cultural, and intersectional identities of their students and continue to build an understanding of equity issues in their practice.

**HSI Champions**

In all cases, Hispanic-serving institution-type efforts were led by a few members of the university, who, through their observations of students’ needs, pursued to advance Latinx and minoritized student equity and apply for federal grants. As institutional agents and champions of HSI work, many participants were motivated to raise awareness, advocate, and transform institutions. I coin the term HSI champion because beyond being an institutional agent, participants take on the form of activism, advocacy, resisting and challenging existing structures, as well as using the cultural and social capital to support students and leverage grant outcomes. They are also champions of HSI work as many work in small teams with little monetary support, relying on their grants, and personal motivations.

Many of the champions in this study share common backgrounds in terms of racial background and similar educational experiences as Latinx and first-generation students themselves. Studies point out that institutional agents can provide more holistic support and humanize the educational experience of minoritized students (Bensimon et al., 2019; Museus & Neville, 2012). Considering the educational and lived experiences of the participants, I sought to understand participant motivations to engage in HSI work.

By either lived experience or career trajectory in graduate education research focusing on
minoritized students, all participants had centered students in their decision-making but were also thinking about “big picture” systems change. Julio from Luna stated,

    By my own specialization in literature, I was in very close contact with this population of first-generation Latinx students, who were coming in significant numbers for the first time to the [university] and in particular to [LU]. We are quickly diversifying the campus demographically, so I could see what they needed. I could see their assets because it's not just a deficit thing. I could see that we were wasting their assets.

    Coming from a Latin American country that was under a dictatorship, Julio could now find a voice and political meaning to create change for those marginalized at Luna University and impact students beyond the classroom. He observed how students’ assets of being bi-lingual and coming in as first in their families were being neglected.

    Julio continued,

        I told you all this story because I wanted to answer the question, “Why are you doing this work?” When I arrived at [the western U.S.], my licenciatura in [my Latin American country] had been in a public university. But that was under the dictatorship, so it wasn't ideal conditions. I couldn't do a good Ph.D. there, so that's why I left. For me, it was a return to the public university setting when I got to [Luna University]. It was also the recuperation of a political space in which what I did, as a professor in the institution could have a political meaning that was bigger or broader than simply fulfilling my function as an educator, which is not a small function, but it's sort of a narrow one.
Julio found a space where he could provide new resources to address some of the equity issues faced at his institution. He participated in multiple spaces to create change from committees at the university level to committees at the systems level and bring new ideas to create policy change to help support underrepresented students.

A colleague of Julio, Sophia who identifies as Latinx and is a director of HSI grant initiatives at Luna University, expressed her inspiration comes from her interactions as a first-generation student with student affairs and finding herself working for a college access program, being a participant, and contributing to the program by expanding services to include presentations in Spanish. As Sophia discussed,

Regarding my lived experience in discovering the world of Student Affairs, that was really because I was a first-generation college student. I worked almost all of the semesters I was in college, and eventually, I had a job with a college access program. I was a participant in that program. We worked a lot with financial aid literacy and really college admissions literacy and ultimately getting students to apply to college and to apply for financial aid. I gravitated towards that because of my own experiences as a first-generation college student as a student person whose parents’ first language is primary is Spanish and who would have benefited as a family of receiving services in Spanish. I did presentations for the program to families in Spanish.

Even before becoming a director at Luna, Sophia started to make changes in the communication of first-generation Latinx students. She provided programming presentations to their families and supporters’ in Spanish using her assets and being culturally responsive to the student demographic population they served.
Another example of how students were centered from relating to the Latinx and first-generation student experience was Jessica, a program coordinator for Department of Education grant at the Roma campus which was traditionally a predominantly white non-profit private institution in a predominately high-income and white neighborhood. Reflecting on her experiences as a college student participant in a minority-serving program that did not fulfill a sense of belonging, Jessica made presence and care a cornerstone to center students by being accessible. Jessica stated,

I was an EOP student… I was part of the program, but I didn’t feel part of the program. So, you know, being part of these grants really kind of offered me the opportunity to make the students that were involved feel a little bit more welcome. I tried to be more of a face to [students].

Jessica reflected on her own lived experience participating in a minority-serving program like EOP. She implemented more intentionality by making students feel more connected to the program staff, explicitly trying to change the culture and climate at Roma to be Latinx welcoming.

Director Linda from Luna University utilizes her own experiences to make decisions for her work and respond to students’ needs. Linda emphasized,

I'm Chicana and I grew up in a small agricultural farming town, so my own experience has helped me navigate how I do my work. I think I'm primed to give sort of share my expertise as far as like, what is it that students need, and what does that the institution needs to do differently when we're serving our students.

In sum, the motivations of all institutional agents and champions have been inspired by their interactions with the education system and the barriers they observed. By being
closely linked to the students they supported with HSI grants, they were able to connect and understand some of the needs that could impact and reinforce their cultures as assets. These individuals championed efforts to support students that share similar cultural and historical backgrounds, observed how structures were not meeting the needs of minoritized students and decided to make changes through grant program interventions.

**Culturally Responsive Leaders**

At Roma University, Maria came into the director position in the third year of a five-year HSI grant. One of her first culturally responsive decisions related to Maria’s evaluation team. She decided to hire new evaluation consultants because the original consultants did not have the students’ cultural and racial identities centered in their evaluation strategy. In other words, she thought that the consultants did not have the understanding needed to recognize Latinx students’ experiences and evaluate them within an equity framework. Santamaria et al. (2016) alludes to culturally responsive leaders taking into consideration race, ethnicity, language, culture, gender, and inclusion of students’ history, raising the critical consciousness among all stakeholders. Maria stated,

> For the consultants, my first idea was to have someone local, right, from [the state]. Someone who knows our environment. [The consultants] were both Latinx. By not having Latinx representation, I felt that from that start, there was something missing in the message and principles of the project. I need to think bigger, more significant, about the reality of who are the students that we serve.
Maria works in a private non-profit that does not have to abide by state policies, such as Prop 209\(^6\). She could be selective and intentional with who should run the consultation of the program. This provided Maria with the flexibility to hire someone that understood the student populations she was trying to serve.

Contrasting universities, Julio illuminated on the limitations to prop 209 in relation to student policies. Yet, he found ways to continue to move the equity agenda forward.

I have been working at both the institutional and the system level for a long while and becoming more and more familiar with how we choose our students and what can be done about that. I've seen significant progress in how we make admissions in the context of 209, which severely limits what we can do, but does not make it impossible.

Despite challenges as a result of state law, Julio believed that he had figured out how to maneuver around the policy for admissions.

Furthermore, in practicing cultural responsiveness, Sol University is located close to the Mexican border, bringing its own set of challenges and student experiences. As a director at Sol and overseeing a National Science Foundation-HSI grant, Josh focuses his efforts on changing classroom pedagogy and understanding the intersectionality of the students they serve. Josh states,

\(^6\) Prop 209, known to end affirmative action in California that passed in 1998, affected the number of underrepresented minority students applying to higher education at UC and CSU campuses (Antonovics & Backes, 2013).
When we think about being in the borderlands, there is this interesting dilemma that the students who live in Mexico and come to school at [Sol] have a unique educational experience. Some of the most obvious things are that when students come across the border every day, depending on their family's status, they may or may not qualify for a Sentri pass. And if someone doesn't qualify for a Sentri pass, like their day involves a three and a half hour wait first thing in the morning. So, kind of understanding the student experience is, I think, really critical, right for interpreting what's happening in the classroom. So, when we're watching these moments, understanding how the students are experiencing this environment is essential.

Josh explains how centering students is context-specific and should be considered when developing his HSI programs that can link what is going on in the classroom with what the student may be experiencing outside of the classroom in students’ personal lives.

Likewise, building on findings from previous grant programs, Linda at Luna University, with her team, was working on department “selfies” that allow department staff, faculty, and deans to access disaggregated data on their students in a database. Departments can then reflect and learn how to best support students who fall through the cracks with interventions and faculty development.

We have these dashboards that are available to different people on campus. They are public dashboards so that departments, department chairs, faculty can look at disaggregated data. What we're doing with the department selfie is we're working with two departments per year to work on what their student plans would be.
Overall, of the three institutions, we could see how students’ cultures and racial identities were centered in decision-making practices in different ways and with varying intervention strategies. At the same time, all three have in mind to reflect on their student populations and unique aspects of their surrounding environments and circumstances.

**Leading from the Bottom**

Many of the institutions in this study were newly formed HSIs with less than a ten years from when they received their HSI status and first grants. Time has played a factor in their evolution as HSIs – in terms of knowledge and number of organizational impacts. Nonetheless, all three sites have made considerable progress in a short period due to having teams of change-makers who cared about the impacts HSI work could have on student outcomes. When speaking about their HSI work in the analysis, participants’ comments outlined insights into grassroots efforts, networking, relationship-building, and seeking recognition for their work. Within the leading from the bottom approach, Doran and Medina (2017), researching two HSIs and the historical growth of the Latinx-serving institutional identity, described the process of becoming as “intentional” and “grassroots” in how education leaders should aim for HSI work to be absorbed into the institutional mission and identity with the presence of Latinx students, faculty, and staff. At the beginning of their program, Jessica from Roma commented,

It was only a few of us on the kind of hitting the ground at [Roma University]. It was me, that was our director on the [RU] side and then a few faculty members that were a little bit kind of had their toes in the water for some of the projects that were going on.
Luna University, an associate vice president mandated that a group of faculty assess their current climate in becoming an HSI. However, after the task force's initial report was completed, a smaller group of faculty decided to continue the mission and implementation of HSI initiatives. Julio said,

We were created by this administrated fiat, but then we took it on and run with it and have run with it ever since. So, if you will, there is no real appointment. It's more of a de facto initiative that is honored by the institution because it grew both by a mandate of the [administration], but then organically as part of the faculty who were interested in this issue.

The participants of this study were some of the first individuals at their respective universities to start HSI work. Both Julio and Jessica’s teams were sense making of the role their teams would play and how they should develop the HSI organizational identity. In both cases, they gained funding support through grants but their interpretations of what was needed varied by their institutional context. They were both similar in that the starting point was a primary focus on academic measures which were measures that legitimized their work and would be supported by administrators at the university.

The institutional agents at all three universities mentioned that there were creations of a task force to assess their state of affairs and climate of Latinx students in becoming an HSI. The common findings focused on Latinx student retention and graduation, devising a plan to apply for HSI grants, and providing the institution administration with recommendations for improvement. While some were created through administrative fiat, the success of HSI work was left to the hands of a few who, at the time, were not being recognized for their service nor being paid for their work.
Administrative Support to Serve or Serve

In understanding the HSI GI leaders’ perceptions of their role to serve, all of the participants related that to truly transform the systems of inequality in higher education for Latinx students and other minoritized students that they would need collaboration from multiple stakeholders, specifically in gaining support from people in power, such as presidents, chancellors, provosts, and department chairs. Many of the efforts were grassroots, with relationship-building being part of the institutionalization goals. Many programs collaborated between existing grant program directors, faculty, and staff to maximize their reach. They also attempted to gain access to administrators to inform them of their program objectives, institutionalization needs, and evidence-based findings. Maria explained,

I think that [Roma University] is embracing the designation. I think they are embracing and bringing change at the pace that they can. We have a new president at the university, and she has been in this position for one year. She has brought many other changes as well to the university. I want to make another point about HSI support. There was an HSI director at the university. The university plans to use its funds to hire someone to be only the director for HSI because the HSI grants are bringing much money to the university.

Even though Maria was the new director of the grant at Roma, it was Maria’s perception that the previous leadership had done an excellent job at making relationships and gaining the support of university leaders. Maria explained, “Like, in terms of administration, the project is very well respected at the university.” Based on the response from Maria, the university is willing to support a position for the reason of the
access to new funding sources. Still, the new president was vital in helping HSI’s efforts to access funding.

This unique access to the financing with HSI status is attractive to the administration may not necessarily be having students centered in their decisions to pursue grants. Thus, grants are used to leverage support by HSI institutional agents. In the same vein Julio explained,

I would say that the answer to that is complex. We have legitimized the work, politically speaking within [the system]. This is work that is now on everybody's agenda. So, you have the grant that is not simply that there is a money sign at the end of the tunnel, but this is educational work that the system, from the top down, has begun to embrace much more powerful and institutional ways as a result of the grassroots pushing of the groups that I was mentioning to you. It’s not just a sign of the dollar at the end of the tunnel, but the sign is what you have to show to your administrators if you want to get something off the ground. There has to be an economic potential for this. Then you can say we can also be more successful with our institutional mandate of graduating whatever our targets are.

A prominent driving force on why institutions are interested in HSI issues is the new access to funding. While the motivation may not have equity at the center, Julio described how due to the grassroots efforts, there is now momentum at the systems level, and HSI initiatives have reached multiple institutions at the system level. While grant seeking is in the form of interest convergence, the administration’s support allows the movement to continue forward. Therefore, grants are then used as leveraging power to continue to
move the momentum forward, and with the right leadership, then they resist the status quo and can drive the equity-minded intervention strategies.

In all cases, the people involved in implementing the grants pointed to a lack of recognition of service and institutional support from the administration as concerns. The grant implementors as grassroots leaders often took on multiple roles, including lecturing, coordination, evaluation, recruiting students, training faculty, advising students, and providing volunteer hours to accomplish goals. The amount of work would put a toll on leaders, including a cultural tax. Jessica from Roma University mentioned,

People come and go because they just don't feel welcome. Our overall HSI director just left. There was just a lot of stuff going on and a lot of our Latinx and Hispanic faculty and staff have left, because there's just this constant battle. The HSI director was trying so hard to help change the narrative and keep our students here, retain them, get them through, and make them feel included. We're reaching out to our community, which is great but the work also needs to be done inside our campus and I think that's what we are lacking.

As minoritized leaders, many carried were proud to do equity work. Still, they felt unappreciated and left in a silo where they were the only ones the university placed the responsibility for the HSI-work agenda. Faculty members at all institutions were sometimes discouraged from participating in the work because it was not recognized for tenure or pay for time worked.

When conducting a member check with Julio, he expanded on how HSI work was not recognized at first as service for tenure for the founding team of faculty who dedicated seven and more years of service. After years of advocacy, working on HSI
grants became recognized at Luna University, and faculty are directly being paid a stipend or given a course release time. As Julio discussed,

Because service to HSI, at least in our institution falls between the cracks. It's not properly administrative work, because you are a faculty. So, you're not an administrator that has a salary to do that job. But it's not what most faculty recognize as faculty service, because it's not senate related. You see that HSI initiatives is neither 100% administrative, nor is it 100% faculty. Still, it’s a hybrid, that hybridity is difficult to read is less legible for faculty than service in the standard senate committees. HSI is not a senate committee.

The lack of recognition as service for faculty highlights the lack of priority from academic affairs to value the work of becoming an HSI. Since HSIs are a new phenomenon, grassroots efforts are being made by faculty and staff to have HSI work recognized and supported by the institution. Julio’s example also exemplifies how institutions are not properly recognizing HSI work as important creating barriers for institutional members to be able to participate but also receive credit and not work in a voluntary basis. Newer faculty who are still working towards tenure will be deterred to take on additional task that are HSI related even though they may be interested in participating or want to make a difference.

Sol University had a different situation where any grant work, regardless of HSI, is recognized as “professional growth” relating to research but not as service. Maria stated that faculty involvement in HSI work at her university was evaluated by diversity, equity, and inclusion service. Maria from Roma University explained,
Until recently, the grant project was the only program for faculty development available to full-time faculty at [Roma]. So, it was recognized campus-wide as very valuable to the university’s mission. The idea to include HSI service, as well as DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] service, as part of service credit in the tenure and career advancement is currently being evaluated by the university board revision. However, it has not been finalized and approved by the university yet. Right now, HSI service relies on the work of a few people on campus, and even though the university promotes it, it’s not seen as part of the whole university.

To integrate the HSI mission into the structure of the university, it needs to be recognized as an essential service. Some of the ways the university can recognize service as described by the participants were hiring dedicated and diverse staff, paying faculty stipends or course release, and embedding core missions to the university’s strategic planning. Still, participants had an absolute sincere commitment to helping and supporting students and even though they were understaffed, they believed in the mission and the value of the interventions they were implementing.

**Navigating Among Leadership Functions**

An observation from the data underreported in the literature is the importance of HSI leadership functions. There were three themed subelements to leadership functions from participant interviews: 1.) access to a budget, 2.) decision-making power, and 3.) direct contact with administrators. Hence, the ideal institutional appointment for a HSI team includes members with social and cultural capital at the institutional level, access to existing support structures, access to funding, and agents with direct contact with
administrators. If the grant implementation leader was doing HSI work ad hoc through their interest to support and serve students, they had to build relationships and gain support from stakeholders, often using legitimized (graduation and retention) evidence-based findings to convince leaders to sustain and institutionalize. Still, for the more established HSI initiatives teams, such as Luna’s team, access to the administration was critical to them for transforming the organizational culture. For the other institutions, they were in the process of participating in grassroots work, trying to gain visibility, recognition, and institutional support. Julio explained,

That meant a restructuring of our structure because [our original leader] was the only person in the group who had access to a budget and decision-making at the institutional level and contact with regular contact with the chancellor and the campus vice-chancellor. So, when [our original leader] left, we were left with replacing him, something very difficult because of his technical knowledge and his capacity to work with the administration.

The lack of support and institutionalization left Julio and his colleagues in a difficult situation when the original grant implementor left and took all of the knowledge about the grant with them. That left Julio and his peers to figure out how to move efforts forward on their own.

Comparably, Maria from Roma University also experienced high-level leaders leaving the position. Maria, in a similar experience,

I came into [the project] at the beginning of the 3rd year of this five-year project. So, the previous director stayed with the project for maybe one year and a half. She was a very dynamic person. The previous director was able to get a lot done
during that period, and she had experience working in the Title V project before, and I didn't…we also lost three of the key people who are working with the project. That added to the challenge because a lot of the programming decisions that I now have to work with were made by somebody else, right.

All the case participants understood that their initiatives would fall to deaf ears without administrator-level support and fail to be sustained beyond the grant. In one case, Sol participants were working on their own with only department support and no institutional knowledge of their project. They worked with their resources and existing support structures in collaboration with a local community college. Two school sites, Luna and Roma, had high-level HSI administrator leaders leave their positions, leaving them to create their connections to the administration. Thus, this indicates how specific individuals are essential for the success of projects and shows how institutional change can quickly fail once an individual leaves the HSI role.

**Transforming to a Hispanic-serving Identity**

Generally, to better grasp what it means to be an HSI, many of the participants had exposed themselves to professional development spaces, specifically professional conferences, such as American Educational Research Association and Alliance for Hispanic Serving Institution Educators. They created collaborative cultures with other HSI programs, used student voice in their decision-making, and partnered with college departments, administrative leaders, and faculty were involved in many aspects of the implementation of programs from curriculum redesign, equity training and development, and mentoring students.
In addition to positive servingness qualities, none of the institutions were perfect. They still had a ways to go in terms of systemic characteristics of racialized practices and a lack of institutional missions to institutionalize what participants found to be essential services for students of color. The reliance on applying for more and more grants, sometimes one building on top of the other, was evidence of the need for financial resources and the lack thereof at HSIs. Notably, the notion of institutionalization, while a goal for many of the programs, realized that they could only hope for some of the activities to be carried out beyond the grant. The three cases had three sub-themes as priorities that fell under transforming to a HSI identity aligning grant activity to university priorities, unique servingness dimensions, and institutionalization.

**Aligning Grant Activity to University Priorities**

As expected, all three cases emphasized academic metrics of graduation and retention as one of the most important themes of their grant programming goals. The extant literature on HSI’s institutional identity suggests that graduation and retention rates – closing the equity gaps are one piece to the Latinx-serving organizational identity and a measure legitimized and accepted by the institution on how well they are producing Latinx students to graduate (Garcia et al., 2019; Martinez, 1998; T. Murphy et al., 2010; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). This was evident throughout the data as a priority for the campuses. Jessica from Roma University stated,

> We definitely wanted to focus on bridging that pipe with having like a pipeline right from the community college to a university, whether it be, you know, private or public or whatever that may be. They were having really low retention rates
and really low transfer rates. So, part of the program’s goals was to increase those numbers into transferring into any sort of school.

Jessica made a point here that they are still trying to address issues of pipeline to graduation from community college to 4-year. As such, their efforts focused on creating a pipeline from community college to any four year university.

Similarly at Sol University, the team’s focus was on tackling the completion rates of Latinx students through curriculum redesign and updating articulation agreements of math requirements. To begin, the team focused on pedagogy. It was met with resistance from staff, feeling they need to adhere to the norm of the syllabi and accomplish all the objectives from the old system, which gives little room for innovative equity pedagogy that engages students’ voices. Elaine as the director of a collaborative HSI grant with a local community college explained,

The most significant tension has not been around norms in the classes or, you know, what the culture is around the teaching. The bigger tension has been around well, we have these transfer agreements with these four-year institutions, and we cover all of this content. I've never seen so much content, a college algebra course, where I'm like this. “Is that even possible?” Trying to figure out how to do that has been the hardest thing because there's so much content and trying to bring in active learning and student voices and these different things with the classroom while getting through all this stuff has been a big challenge.

While institutions should also look beyond graduation and retention to non-academic outcomes, the theme of completion and student mobility was prominent in the data
collection. All of the HSI leaders in this study focused on the pipeline issues from community college to graduate school completion.

Curriculum redesign, equity-driven, and culturally centering pedagogy were prominent themes from all three school sites. Julio as a faculty member from Luna University centered students by redeveloping the curriculum to include Chicano/a studies,

I believe I work with my colleagues in social sciences on this [initial] grant. There was rethinking it was an initiative of the [grant] called rethinking area studies. In our case, it meant thinking how is it that you would connect Latin American Studies with Chicano Chicana studies. That is to say, ethnic studies in the US with area studies in Latin America. I developed the model that I'm using, again, for these [HSI] graduate grants. I develop the first graduate class of [Latin American and Latinos (LALs) studies]. I participated in the very, very long process of creating that Ph.D. program. It's about a year and a half of work to get the Ph.D. going. Approved, that's what I mean by going.

Julio recognized the changing demographics at his institution. He made it an objective to expand area studies to be more inclusive and centering of the students transforming the school. Julio’s area of expertise was also critical to developing area studies. The expertise of staff and cultural connection was significant.

**Unique Servingness Dimensions**

A primary goal of HSIs is to provide equitable graduation rates for Latinx students, but should also include non-academic outcomes (Garcia, 2018a; Garcia, Núñez, et al., 2019; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). Julio, who was a founding member of the
HSI initiatives task force and chair of the committee at Luna University, described how before the university became officially recognized as an HSI, the university was proactive in forming a team of faculty and staff to understand what it would mean to become a Hispanic-serving institution by analyzing its current state of affairs around Latinx student success. With the task force report, they were able to identify areas that needed support and submitted a grant proposal focusing on the issue of student mobility.

Julio states,

The purpose of that task force was to prepare the campus for what at the time seemed imminent, which was our achieving 25% in the Hispanic undergrad population, and that’s becoming eligible for HSI grants from the Department of Education. Eventually, we did become HSI. That got us thinking and working more seriously inside [Luna University], trying to think what serving will mean for [LU]? I want to emphasize that we, internally collectively in this core group, expanded our mission and decided that we needed to give meaning and teeth to this HSI serving role. After that, we have had several grants that the Department of Education funded. We mainly were an issue of admission and retention in the first year kind of effort. “How can we help them transition from high school to the second year of college more successfully than so far?” We interpreted our mission to be precisely that. That is still work that needs to be done; there is still a significant level of underrepresentation of Latinos.

Julio’s team had evolved over time from being an effort of direct impact to students, to an effort on changing the institutions and system. Julio mentioned that their mission to help students through their mobility from high school to college was still important. Julio’s
colleague Sophia also from LU, is a director who was recruited to implement a newer graduate-level HSI grant. Sophia alluded to building from their success, and evidence from the first grants continued to provide more pipeline or pathway support to graduate school. While the first grant was from high school to the second year of undergraduate education, this new grant focused on undergraduate to grad school. Sophia’s programs included academic and non-academic outcomes, which enrolled more Latinx students beyond the bachelor’s to post-graduate education and ensured that students had a sense of belonging. As Sophia discussed,

We want to see increases in Latinx students enrolled in graduate programs on our campus, so enrollment as a metric, sense of belonging, degree completion, and graduate degrees received by Latinx students are another metric, and the last metric is writing proficiency do Latinx students.

Luna’s initial HSI efforts allowed for subsequent grants to push equity throughout the pipeline. As Sophia mentioned, their initial grant paved the way for a second grant to focus on graduate school enrollment.

Director Elaine from Sol University leads an HSI grant under the math department with little communication with the HSI initiatives office and leadership. Elaine, who had experience working in K-12, community college, and higher education, used her expertise to develop an equity-driven curriculum and faculty professional development. When making meaning on how to best support minoritized students, Elaine devoted the grants to solving issues around student retention in the math gateway courses. While Director Elaine’s HSI grant is making developments in changing articulation
agreements between community colleges and the 4-year, their project is somewhat not recognized by the institution and removed from the campus discourse. Elaine explained,

This project that we've got here looks specifically at community college instructors’ instruction and gives them the support they need to bring inquiry and equity into the [math] classroom. And so my research background and my different teaching roles have given me the expertise I need to lead this project.

One of the strengths of many of the GI leaders is utilizing their teams’ or their own specializations to help support the objectives of the grants. Elaine’s team included three math faculty professors, one post-doctoral student, and community college math faculty to come together to strategize on how to best move forward with math policy at the community college and 4-year level while also implementing equity centered teaching methodologies to engage Latinx students in the classroom.

Respectively, Josh, another director from Sol, is also supporting the project added that their efforts are tied to a policy mandate called AB 705, which was signed in 2017 requiring community college district that allows students to fulfill requirements of entry-level English and math within a one-year timeframe (California Community Colleges, 2018). Josh followed by stating that remedial math at the university level had been changed to where students start in college-level math, which has brought a new set of challenges to math instruction. Because of this, they are trying to make changes to pedagogy using equity frameworks to guide their recommendations.

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Julio recognized the changing demographics at his institution. He made it an objective to expand area studies to be more inclusive and centering of the students transforming the school. Julio’s area of expertise was also critical to developing area studies. The expertise of staff and cultural connection was significant.

Comparably, through university mandate, the private institution created an implementation team of faculty, administrators, and staff, making a strategic plan, mission, and vision for HSI initiatives. At Roma, Director Maria, who has an extensive background working in higher education for 30 years, explained how she intentionally focused on a more specific Latinx student population focusing on Latino men. Their approach in making meaning of the servingness role was able to identify that Latino men compared to Latina women were falling more through the cracks in terms of degree completion. Thus, Maria made sure that their team members were from similar ethnic and
cultural backgrounds as the students they served and centered the lived experiences of Latinx students. The team also would remind the leadership to stay true to the grant objective. Their HSI grant focused on transitioning men of color into higher education, providing early career support services, mentorship, and cohort experiences. Maria stated,

I think that the main guiding principles are from the grant proposal, the initial idea of the grant. We don't deviate from that initial plan. I hired a consultant to help me design and envision what to do with the program. He is a [Latino] professor, and he directs a program for men of color in higher education. I felt that he has been excellent for us, in terms of reminding us again and again and again on what we need to do, right, because we read about it, but then we forget that we need to be in constant contact with the students.

Maria shows that while she has an extensive background in higher education, she understands that she still needs the right team to ensure that the student’s needs are met. In this example, the consultant helped her understand the importance of community for men of color and constant support. All three cases exemplify the vastness in the servingness role, from supporting individual students to supporting faculty in a classroom.

**Institutionalizing Servingness**

While some of the efforts are on their way to being institutionalized, many programs were seeking new grants to create the next version or continuation of the existing grant. Maria explains, “In terms of institutionalization, we have two more years of the grant. I think that maybe part of the initiatives may be institutionalized. But I think that the main effort is going to be on writing a new grant like [Grant Project 2.0].” What
was evident was that some of the current faculty, staff, and leadership wanted to maintain the norm, which perpetuated white hegemonic structures to preserve legitimacy that stakeholders did not want to disrupt.

The push to maintain the status quo was felt by others who often felt they had to pursue grants in order to support the growing population of Latinx college students. Jennifer from Roma stated,

[Roma] will definitely rely on more HSI grants to provide these services to our students, which is unfortunate. Because how are we supposed to change the narrative if we're not looking at changing our budgets and changing our focus on what we can provide to our underrepresented Hispanic Latinx students. I can tell you that just looking at this program or having conversations with some of the other directors of the other grants that are on campus, they're constantly trying to implement all the goals of their grant but also trying to figure out a way to get some of these things institutionalized.

Despite the success in gaining grants to support Latinx students, Jennifer felt that there was little effort, or interest, from the administration to get some of these efforts institutionalized long-term. The trends discussed with the participants point to grant program interventions being effective. Yet, institutions are falling behind in their commitments to scale or institutionalize the practices to support Latinx students in the long-term. To combat funding issues, Elain at Sol University mentioned,

That kind of investment and restructuring for institutionalization would have to move on up the chain. And when you move on up the chain, you usually have to have a clear succinct plan or model to propose and a way of, you know, this is
how much it'll cost. This is what it's going to take and this is for how long.

Sometimes there are internal calls for funding because we're in the state system. There are potentially funding mechanisms within the institution or system that one could go for. But it can't just be on you, you know, it has to be university wide.

Elaine explained that while there are internal funding mechanisms to sustain some of the practices, there needs to be buy in from multiple stakeholders. Elaine expanded that when changes are small, they can occur at the department level with curriculum committees, but to implement institutional wide changes and need for professional development of faculty, requests need to be presented to administrators as a proposal similar to a HSI grant application. To help institutionalize Elaine asserted that the university can also invest in people,

Thinking deeply about also wanting [administrators] to be invested in [Sol University]. Could the university help us in a way to help faculty continue to teach and change practices. Can we invest in them? That may be a conversation I need to have with my chair and then with my dean and thinking about a bigger grant. We can take what we're learning on this project, which is still a big grant in a big project, to look at something bigger to try to really invest in people because universities are not good at valuing people.

Again, while Elain’s project is making meaningful changes in the math curriculum, she mentions that the university needs to value people who are doing the work. However, because of the likelihood of the university investing in a project like Elaine’s may be an
uphill battle, Elaine may have to rely again on external funds to continue to invest some of those funds in people.

**Lack of Commitment**

Comparing the three institutions in their accountability on grant spending, leaders from all three sites maintained fidelity to their project proposals. At the same time, the literature would argue that some of the spending practices do not have Latinx students in mind because of the approach to serving all students. It was evident in the data that all three campuses wanted to better the prospects for graduation and success after college for their Latinx students. However, Luna’s approach was the institutional and systems-level change, Sol’s approach was course-based, faculty-level, policy changes, and Roma’s was individual student-level impact. Regardless of the servingness approach, all three universities illuminated that they needed more institutional support, resources and university investment, to make structural changes for long-term and broader effects. Josh from Sol University,

There’s a huge interest in the Hispanic servingness of the institution. Before the current president, [they were] actually not supportive of the university's HSI identity as an important feature, if you will. I don't know that for certain, but that was the impression I got. Our current president is very interested in emphasizing and leaning into the HSI identity of [Sol University]. There’s a huge level of support for pursuing and getting grants, like the ones that we have. Thinking about how to make our services for Latinx students more robust and effective, and engaging, if you will.
Further, Elaine from Sol University, for example, is working slowly with two departments at a time to do equity audits. Sol focuses on the pipeline from community college math and reevaluating articulation agreements, counselor training, and faculty training to ensure they all know students’ expectations before the transfer to Sol. Roma university has the most directly targeted intentionality to serve Latino men with targeted interventions. Nevertheless, for these grants to make the change, they need institutional support.

**Challenges to Equity-driven Decisions**

In this next section, I describe samples of equity-driven decisions as a form of resistance to white hegemonic structures made by the participants in their servingness roles. As the incoming director for Roma University’s existing HSI grant, the strategic evaluation team did not encompass the mission to serve Latinx students, deciding that the team had to be replaced. Maria replaced the evaluation team with experts that centered equity in their evaluation, intentionally recruiting evaluators with Latinx backgrounds. A common element in critical race theory is the commitment to deconstruct and transform the educational realities of Latinx students and other minoritized students, which makes examining secondary data vital and integral to qualitative methods to analyze race and ethnicity (Garcia et al., 2021). Maria stated,

One of the first decisions was related to personnel because I had to hire new people. I had to make changes with the consultants that were working with. This is not the way I want the program to go. [Then], I received a proposal from two professors, and they are from Texas. They are both Latinx professors, which was also important for me. The previous consultants, they were not Latinx. The
original consultants were not connected with the needs of Hispanic Latinx students.

It was important to Maria to include members of the racial and cultural community that the program was serving which was focused on Latino males. Maria felt that the Latinx professors could serve an important role in guiding her decision-making for the program.

Each case in this study presented ideas and practices that could help improve social justice efforts. This study occurred during a global pandemic, making it difficult for some programs to continue on track with their program objectives. Nevertheless, as the director of an NSF HSI grant at Sol University, Josh made it a point first to understand the learning, listen, and observe the educational environment of students and the faculty who teach.

The first thing we did was he spent the first year listening and understanding the system. Of course, you know, COVID happened in the middle. But we spent the first year listening, interviewing the instructors, the students observing classes, interviewing administrators, trying in a sense to kind of develop a case study or an understanding of what's happening in this department or in this college around gateway math courses. I should say that we're using two main frameworks. So, one is around the kind of inquiry-oriented pedagogy. The second piece looks at the patterns of verbal participation in class. Gandara and Contreras wrote this book in 2009, the Latino education crisis, I think it's called. It's kind of describing like the state of affairs, and it has not changed. I can say that firsthand from all the observations I've done.
Josh alludes to the changing sociopolitical and social realities of running a grant during a pandemic while continuing to advance with the grant activities. The pandemic may have exacerbated some of the inequities found pre-pandemic and now observed in the virtual classroom for Latinx students.

In addition, in integrating culturally-centered decisions, all of the leaders utilized evidence-based data for reinforcing decisions as well as a leveraging tool to gain the support of upper administration. Elain from Sol University stated that their first year was a data collection year “a lot of baseline data collection… we’re doing professional development and we are collecting even more data but are also simultaneously doing data analysis.” Similarly, at Luna University, the teams are disaggregating data by race and other identities through their departmental selfie integrated data base which reveals evidence of institutional strengths and weaknesses.

While decision-making is something every leaders will need to do, a good leader will need to take in information from many different sources and come to a conclusion as to which is the best decision based on their current project goals. All the leaders from this study pointed to collaboration and working intentionally with their teams, allowing staff and faculty input and help with the direction of the programming. Elaine from Sol University, “We make the decisions together, but then ultimately, I then make sure that the loop closes.” Elaine as the director with the most experience from her team has the ultimate task to make sure their project is successful. Josh who is also part of Elaine’s team expanded,

We don’t have a formal hierarchy. I would say we are fairly collaborative group which works to our benefit and sometimes to our detriment in terms of efficiency.
We have meetings every other week, that’s meeting with 12 or 15 people and then we have subgroups who are working on particular parts of the research agenda, professional development, design and delivery, and so on.

Ultimately, decision-making takes on two forms, one is the equity-minded one which consists of understanding the role of the program in centering minoritized students’ racial and cultural identities; the second, which is focused on making sure all the moving pieces work synergistically and with accountability measures by imbedding robust mechanisms of data collection.

**Legitimacy**

As part of GI leadership decision-making, leaders had to work to legitimizing HSI work as important and organizational cultures and norms had to adapt to an HSI agenda. The findings of this project revealed that the organization of HSI grants varied from faculty leaders to professional staff directors. However, what was clear is that faculty are involved in many of the missions and project goals of the HSI grants. In seeking support from faculty and other stakeholders in creating more equitable practices, legitimacy was an underlying theme. When trying to transform the way faculty design their classroom pedagogy, resistance to change was met by some. Josh from Sol University states,

There's a powerful perception that the college doesn't want to screw things up in some ways. And what I mean by that is that they're worried that if they don't teach, you know, the full list of topics that are on their curriculum, then [a public 4-year] or other state universities will not accept their courses for transfer. There's this sense that they need to do what's on their syllabus because their syllabus has
been approved by these other colleges. So that's a pretty big institutional constraint.

The resistance encountered by Josh was masked in a race-neutral approach by opponents who stated that they were worried about not having courses articulate with other colleges. As such, opponents hid behind this veil of racism by blaming larger system challenges.

Similarly, Julio indicated to making HSIs legitimate as part of the new university that works with the realities of the students that are enrolled and in the pipeline. Julio from Luna University explained,

We are honoring the idea that we must institutionalize HSI in a way that makes it sustainable. It has been a work of legitimizing. But I would say because legitimizing seems to imply that there is a reluctance to acknowledge that legitimacy. In some quarters at [Luna], there is more legitimized in the sense of making understandable both what is entailed in the effort and the potential the transformational potential of the effort for the institution. So that is seen less as an identity or ethnic-specific effort, and more of a chance for the university to honor what it means to be a public university that can be conceived as what my colleagues at [another university] have recently called a New University.

Contrasting both Josh and Julio’s positions in legitimizing HSI work. Josh and Julio are met with institutional opposition where faculty and leaders try to maintaining existing structures that they are contented with and do not see the transformation potential of HSIs. Gonzales (2013) describes, “as faculty members left their elite research universities for jobs at less prestigious and more-teaching intensive universities, their membership in the professoriate compelled them to seek legitimacy from peers in the field rather than
from the college of university-based peers” (p. 183). Thus, instead of adapting structures to the demographic, faculty seek to make sense of and apply definitions to missions aligned with more prestigious universities (Gonzales, 2013).

**Deficit Mindset**

When making decisions by the GI leaders, many faced resistance from faculty and staff who had deficit mindsets or who wanted to maintain the status quo because they believed that was the best approach in supporting students. Even though significant progress is happening at all three sites, existing white structures and racialized practices are barriers for all which make decision-making difficult for some leaders. Julio from Luna University explains that by his expertise in literature and observations of Latinx students who have been underserved, he identified how the university was not embracing Latinx students’ assets.

Similarly, Josh from Sol University observed how some faculty had deficit mindsets and stereotypes of students’ abilities to succeed in the classroom. Josh from Sol stated, “I think there's among some of the faculty. It's hard for me to say, I don't like to say that people have deficit mindsets, but I think some of them have ideas about what the students are capable of.” While much progress has been made at Roma University, creating an HSI permanent staff position and an HSI strategic plan, Jessica, a coordinator who works directly with students to develop program activities, pointed out how Roma has diversity issues. Jessica explained,

[Roma] really does have a long way to go still. There’s some, you know, faculty, some staff, and some people that just don’t buy into being an HSI. There’s a high
turnover of BIPOC people, staff, students, faculty, administration, everyone that
don’t feel welcome.

The lack of buy-in to the HSI institutional identity often caused many staff and faculty to leave the campus, which further complicated the situation.

Many HSI scholars point to diversifying the staff and faculty of HSI campuses (Abdul-Raheem, 2016; Bertschinger, 2012; Capper, 2019; Contreras, 2017), but at Roma they are having trouble with turnover which may point to unwelcoming or toxic environments for people of color or minoritized staff and faculty. Maria, who works at the Roma as a director, shared Jessica's view described losing faculty and staff of color.

Their main challenge is still in the lack of representation in the staff and faculty.
Instead of growing, the percentage and the actual numbers are getting lower, like it's all going down.

This section focused on challenges that leaders had in navigating their roles as HSI GI leaders and attempting to transform the institutional identities of their organizations.

There were resistance in the form of institutional norms and traditions of maintaining decades old articulation agreements. There were deficit laden approaches to teaching in math curriculum. There was also issues of turnover of minority faculty and staff.

**Summary of Findings**

HSI GI leaders’ experiences across the three cases varied in institutional level support, formal or informal structures, servingness qualities, and programming emphasis.

There were three primary themes presented in the chapter servingness conscious agents (i.e., champions of HSI work, motivations, and advocacy work), transforming the HSI identity (i.e., described the current conditions and servingness interpretations), and
equity-driven decisions (i.e., culturally responsive leadership, leadership resistance, legitimizing HSI work, and gaining institutional support). In understanding GI leaders’ role, HSI grants play a significant role in providing the ability and leveraging power to gain the administration’s support. GI leaders’ experiences also play a factor in decision-making; however, all leaders in this study centered students through specialization and knowledge about equity and social justice issues Latinx students face. Still, GI leaders are still making sense of their role and active learning on the job, attending professional conferences, and trying to surround themselves with intentional teams. HSI grants allow for the experimentation of what works best for the students at their respective campuses, and with that, I will turn to the next chapter of the findings and discussion.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

In the beginning chapter, I presented the background and literature describing Hispanic-serving Institutions’ grant research gaps in grasping the role of the grant implementation leaders have as institutional agents, the framework for servingness, and culturally responsive leadership. Today, the extant literature on HSI grants has primarily focused on the effects of allowable activities on graduation and retention of minoritized students – many programs employing color-blind and color-evasive programming (Perez, 2020). Other scholars have shed light on the need for external funding support, describing HSIs as receiving less overall funding compared to other minority-serving institutions and predominantly white institutions (HACU, 2021; Marin, 2019). Despite the racialized organizational practices of capitalizing on Latinx students to seek funding for legitimacy (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Ray, 2019; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019), institutions are slowly adapting the HSI initiatives to their strategic plans and agendas.

Now more than ever, institutional agents, as champions of HSI work, are critical to the successful implementation of centering students in the HSI agenda and creating organizational cultural shifts to address Latinx with structural changes to the organization by supporting full-time staff incentivizing faculty to engage in HSI work. Museus and Neville (2012) allude, “key institutional agents who have a positive impact on participants humanized the educational experience… Key institutional agents could be seen as authentic human beings, rather than just another instructor or administrator” (p. 445). In the following sections, I start by having a discussion on answering the research questions, bringing together the analysis of the data, then move to close the chapter with the conclusion and implications for policy and practice.
Discussion

To answer the research questions in this study, I proposed the qualitative multiple case study approach, conducted a content analysis of institutional intentionality to serve Latinx students, and interviewed eight leaders at three HSI 4-year schools in the west. Bearing in mind the limitations of participant HSI knowledge, higher education expertise, and equity work knowledge, I found three main themes: 1.) HSI institutional agents, 2.) HSI institutional climate, and 3.) Equity-driven decision-making. Ultimately, the eight participants shed light on utilizing intentionality in serving, gaining the support of faculty, staff, and administrators to make meaningful changes at the institutional level, providing evidence-based findings for grant management accountability and plans for long-term sustainability. However, the realities of each institution were that GI leaders and their programs continued to rely on external funding, with some facing finality and reverting to “business as usual.”

In answering RQ1, How do HSI grant implementation leaders perceive their role in advancing Latinx student success? The theme of HSI institutional agents as champions of HSI work was left to apply endlessly to more and more grants as leveraging power to gain administrative support, which points to the lack of institutional commitment to changing structures. However, the data pointed to the significance of grants helping the HSI agents build projects by providing much-needed funding. Furthermore, grants allowed HSI initiatives to continue to assist leaders in short-term sustainability. In advancing student success, institutions needed to be committed which was not the case. The participants were working on ongoing advocacy and meeting with administrators to gain their support – financially.
Gaining administrators’ support was required to advance the HSI servingness agenda for the chance to institutionalize some, but not all, of the objectives. Grants allowed the leaders to develop their respective university’s potential for servingness by experimenting with context-specific intervention strategies. Therefore, the role of the GI leader was of an advocate, activist, change-maker, and leader of care. The findings in this study are in agreement with previous studies that servingness is multi-faceted depending on the institution’s needs, including centering students, developing faculty, curriculum redesign, peer and faculty mentoring, and focusing on graduation and retention – closing the equity gaps (Carter & Patterson, 2019; Cataño & Gonzalez, 2021; Garcia et al., 2020; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Santiago et al., 2018) were observed from research question one.

In answering SQ1, In what ways do HSI grant leaders’ own lived experiences and intersectional identities inform their decision-making? Themes of grassroots efforts working from the bottom up and HSI champions emerged. Six out of eight participants asserted that their intersections of Latinx and first-generation guided their decision-making practices. The participants observed organizational cultures that continued to perpetuate whiteness and deficit notions of students of color. All leaders continued to challenge and resist white hegemonic structures by reflecting on their own experiences navigating college as first-generation and Latinx students.

Further, leaders also focused on creating collaborative cultures. While not first-generation, the two white participants championed Latinx student equity through their specializations in education as faculty. They aimed to change policy that affects student mobility from community college to 4-year institutions. Therefore, there was no
difference in servingness by leaders’ racial and cultural identity. However, those who identified as first-generation and Latinx did have a sense of pride, motivation for political action and advocacy, and had a level of knowledge unique to students of color educational experiences. Having diverse teams as part of the HSI initiatives teams can be beneficial to leaders, such as recruiting student assistants that represent the demographic population served, graduate assistants, or other faculty HSI champions.

In answering RQ2, “To what extent, and in what ways, do HSI GI leaders use their roles to challenge existing structures to form an organizational identity that serves minoritized students?” Being culturally responsive, leaders were intentionally hiring team members centered on students’ cultural and racial identities either through them being closely interconnected to the lived experience of Latinx and first-generation students, expertise in the equity and social justice issues in education, or a combination of both. Moreover, leaders understood that the geographic location of their campuses, either being in a high-income white community or being near the Mexican border, brought a set of specific challenges and experiences of their Latinx students whom they supported. Some students had to spend many hours on the road to cross the Mexican border which meant that Sol needed to address issues not only in the classroom but what happens outside of the classroom. At Roma, some students would not feel a sense of belonging due to being a minority in a predominantly white and high-income location. Leaders made efforts to make students feel part of a community. An example of institutional culture change came from the department selfie at Luna University, which allowed departments to see disaggregated data to assess student success. The selfie approach enables the department to self-reflect rather than an “outsider” trying to convince them that they need to change
how they support minoritized students. By collaborating with the departments and using culturally responsive and evidence-based findings, the GI leaders practiced equity decision-making at their institutions.

In answering SQ2, “How are leaders contributing to social justice efforts?”, themes of institutionalizing HSI positions and understanding the leadership functions allowed for sustainability beyond one individual leaving the HSI role. Many of the programs faced transformative leaders leaving, and the new directors had to rethink the most critical functions of the leadership role for purposeful long-term structural embeddedness. Moreover, participants reported that relationship-building was essential to gain institutional support, including from departments and faculty. Still, the reality is that many interventions were short-term and ended without being institutionalized, even though they effectively supported students. Then, the university reverted to business as usual. Furthermore, to create meaningful systems change, some of the leaders would participate in committees where institutional and systems-level decisions were made to inform people in power of their findings, HSI agenda, and create structural change. GI leaders also made efforts to disseminate campus-wide to develop conversations with faculty and staff who may not know about their HSI designation or programs that exist to support minoritized and low-income students.

The study’s theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the theory of racialized organizations, critical race theory, critical race praxis, and multi-dimensional servingness qualities were connected to the insights found in the data and allowed me to understand better the relationship between HSI champions working within racialized institutions that hold a history of racism and marginalized practices. HSI GI leaders showcased how they
intentionally and unintentionally utilized critical perspectives in their practices, such as centering students’ experiences, hiring minority staff with expertise in equity-driven assessments, and doing advocacy work to resist and change existing structures. It was evident that all cases still had room for growth to embed new support services, curriculum changes, and professional development for faculty and staff within the structures. In the following sections, I offer contributions and recommendations for practice for HSI grant implementation leaders and administrators, policy change, and future study direction.

**Servingness Role**

As GI leaders try to make sense of HSIs, grants, and the servingness role, universities still lacked the commitment to change the organizational cultures to embed HSI initiatives system-wide. As more universities create task forces and committees to develop an HSI grant agenda, because of the access to funding, leadership needs to be selective in who takes part in the teams, assuring there is a diverse representation and HSI work champions who have an understanding of Latinx intersections and educational issues. Still, realizing that by focusing on the seeking the dollar sign at the end of the tunnel, universities will continue to perpetuate racialized practices that indirectly impact students of color. In a similar study, Aguilar-Smith (2021), using a critical qualitative inquiry of 17 HSIs Title V grant seekers, also found that institutions were dependent on external revenue streams as a financial precarity was an endemic issue across many of the minority-serving institutions. Other studies suggest that the reasons to seek funding were not centered around social justice or equity of colorblind and color-evasive language in grants (Annamma et al., 2017; Petrov & Garcia, 2021; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019).
Therefore, administrators need to listen to equity-minded GI leaders and create university-wide HSI strategic plans. Because the opposite is currently valid, where the GI leaders are in positions where decision-making has to balance institutional pressures to maintain the status quo, while also trying to disrupt and resist by centering students, GI leaders are left to satisfy not only the government’s definition of servingness but also the administrators’ definitions of servingness. In the following figure 5 below, I outline the HSI institutional agent’s role based on the findings of this study.

**Equity-centered Leadership**

In describing HSI institutional agents, GI leaders’ role in the below Figure 5 equity-centered leadership is critical in legitimizing the work they do for it to become the work of every university member. Findings reveal that GI leaders pull from their experiences as Latinx and first-generation students. In addition, white leaders and minority leaders alike showed how they centered critical and culturally responsive frameworks by learning about the complexities of the students at their campus and environmental contexts as part of their decision-making that addresses Latinxs’ institutional needs.

Figure 5 describes as grassroots institutional agents, GI leaders advocated for legitimizing new ways of serving students of color, legitimizing HSIs as a new university, not one that maintains white hegemonic structures, while also resisting the institution’s race-evasive and race-neutral practices. Participants also pointed out that some members of organizations as resistant to change and perceive Latinx students through a deficit lens.
Note. Equity-minded decision-making and servingness roles.

Therefore, it should not only be the responsibility of one team, but all the departments, colleges, and leaders to change the culture around Latinx students by providing training, access to information, such as the departmental selfie for desegregated data, and funding to attend professional conferences that center equity issues.

Conclusion

A Message to HSI Administrators

HSI GI leaders as institutional servingness agents play a fundamental role in transforming HSI institutions through innovation and experimentation with intervention strategies that lead to better some of the outcomes that universities want to see in more remarkable persistence and a positive sense of belonging (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). However, faculty and staff are not recognized for their service in many cases, either as qualifications for tenure or paid support. In that pattern of HSIs not being recognize by
faculty senate committees, the few members involved in this type of service are typically taxed, sometimes culturally, for their insights as first-generation and part of a minority group. Due to this taxing, efforts may be lost if any of the HSI leaders choose to leave their positions which occurred in two of the cases with Roma and Luna.

In chapter two, connecting back to the review of the literature, participants in this study also used their own lived experiences as social and cultural capital, which was passed on to their decision-making to focus on the issues beyond academic outcomes, which were grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy with Sol University changing the curriculum in gateway math courses to engage students in the classroom or like Roma University providing spaces for men of color to connect and feel welcome. Institutional agents provide students with access to social capital by connecting them with resources (Museus & Neville, 2012).

An issue raised by participants similar to the higher education scholarship was that Roma faced a decrease in diversity in staff and faculty. Yet, faculty of color contribute to students’ positive educational experiences, including pedagogy and mentorship (Abdul-Raheem, 2016; Contreras, 2017). Therefore, universities need to continue diversifying their professoriate and staff to find individuals who champion equity. Furthermore, current staff and faculty need to be trained and incentivized to change the curriculum. Having a lack of understanding of minoritized students’ experiences and deficit-based beliefs prevented administrators and faculty from empowering students of color (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018), which was also an issue some participants pointed to with some professors leaning toward maintaining the norm in their courses because of existing articulation agreements and confusion on what students
needed to accomplish in the course. Because the extent of the role of an HSI GI leader may be grassroots, administrators need to be involved as empowering agents on behalf of the HSI teams to provide the structures and resources that administrators possess and institutional support they can leverage.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Secured Student-Centered Investment

Altogether, participants suggested that a few of them conduct, administer, and lead HSI work at their respective universities. While some of them mentioned that they felt somewhat supported by their leadership, university leaders' actions in terms of institutional commitments to institutionalize were lacking. The grant agencies layout mission statement objectives of building institutional capacity to serve students of minoritized backgrounds, but universities cannot rely on external competitive funding to build institutional capacity. HSIs need federal and state-secured funding investments to develop and sustain the ability to carry forward the grant interventions. Despite the great efforts by GI leaders being implemented, which many have shown positive student legitimized outcomes, are not enough. HSIs as some of the least funded universities that do not have access to billions of dollars of endowment funds compared to “prestigious” schools. Some participants, four out of eight, agreed that their programs would not be sustained beyond the grants because of the lack of federal, state, and institutional commitments to invest.

I emphasize that administrators, government officials, and federal agency decision-makers read the current research, be reflexive, and employ strategic plans for permanent secured funding. One way is to commit to investing in people making positive
changes and changing policy around faculty and staff hiring to make sure individuals understand what it means to be a Hispanic-serving Institution. We cannot simply continue to only capitalize on student demographics for short-term gains without changing the organizational cultures and structures. Still, HSIs are currently underfunded, so changes need to be made to the competitive nature of grants. Securing investments that have students at the center will help with the institutionalization, sustainability, and adaptability of practices to be reflexive as described in the critical race praxis framework to continue to build on the theory and assess how resources are being distributed (Stovall et al., 2009; Yamamoto, 1997). Leaders need to demand systems to reflect on their institutions’ population and implement adaptable mandates.

**Dedicated HSI Staffing**

Besides supporting HSI work through strategic and actionable institutional commitments, only Luna had a formal HSI staffing structure. In comparison, Roma and Sol HSI GI leaders functioned within university college departments. The two schools have infrastructurally less support, which was highlighted in the data. Roma and Sol’s GI leaders had to take on different staffing roles to carry forward the grant program activities. All schools relied on faculty volunteers. Some of the faculty were not paid or given recognitions toward tenure. Even with the limitations, the GI leaders continued to move their agenda forward. Many of the participants credited their success to the support of director mentors or previous leaders who laid the foundational work.

Participants implied that they needed more help in all cases regardless of formal or informal structure; some required additional support in understanding accounting or expectations towards the funding agencies. Others needed more support as they came into
leadership positions with no real transitional help. Therefore, the 4-year public and non-profit institutions need to establish grant support offices with experts in reporting accounting and promote strategic equity initiatives for those seeking grants. Since the GI leaders started as grassroots efforts, they functioned independently from any formalized structure when they were awarded the grants. Once a grant is awarded, the teams should be merged into a consortium or formalize the existing support structure, with visibility and direct contact with administrators and leaders who can help mentor new GI grants leaders through advisory councils. Still, I ask that the institutional leaders listen to the GI leaders in their innovative and culturally responsive intervention strategies rather than instructing them and pressuring them to maintain the status quo. It would be fitting for the university to show its commitment by offering support funding for part-time or full-time staff and then investing in permanent positions to help institutionalize.

**HSI Branding to Serve or Serve**

A growing body of literature and many participants in this study have shed light on how HSIs are branding themselves as serving institutions but are capitalizing on the Latinx student population (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Garcia, 2021; Perez, 2020; Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019). Since grants serve as leveraging power for GI leaders to increase the productivity of servingness activities, branding must match what is going on the ground. This study had a disconnect between Sol University’s HSI grant team and the formalized HSI institutional Sol leadership. While both teams are moving the agenda forward on HSI initiatives at the institution, there was no communication or sharing of ideas from the parties. All three cases had shown superficially intentional language in
terms of content. Still, after interviewing the participants, it was clear they were on their own carrying the weight of equity work for the entire institution.

Vargas and Ward (2020) provide insight into their institution becoming an HSI. They utilized a task force to develop an HSI strategic plan to launch authentic branding that included central themes of identity, programs, and practices. The figure 6 below shows HSI branding with action and intentionality. The first, identity, called for the campus culture shifts so that all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and staff to foster and embrace the HSI designation, involving internal communities, providing professional development for a more culturally responsive university.

**Figure 6**

*HSI Branding to Serve*

Note: Adapted from Vargas and Ward (2020) of HSI branding strategies.

The second, intervention, programs highlighted the work that was already beginning with grants, such as the development of culturally relevant curriculum,
strategies to address barriers for students of color, and allowing conversation beyond the grants; third, dissemination, which shows a commitment by the university as a whole to become culturally proficient and measure progress to the HSI strategic plan embodying equity and diversity (Vargas & Ward, 2020). Vargas and Ward (2020) tell us that institutions cannot stop at the branding stage to “sound intentional.” Still, without actionable steps, universities need to create the next steps for institutional transformation with measurable outcomes that are embedded in the strategic agenda.

**Student-Centered Responsive Action**

As HSIs continue on their isomorphic trends to be closely aligned to research-intensive, prestige, and predominantly white institutions, it will take mechanisms to change the organization by creating coercive action – placing pressure on the system to shift priorities to focus on their contextual needs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). One way is to embed Latinx-serving and minoritized-serving responsive strategies with collaborations with inside and outside partners. For example, in unifying equity practice and policies for a systemic servingness at a research institution, Cooper et al. (2020) build alliances, helping with shared responsibility, with students and educators who are advancing systemic servingness with Latinx and low-income students across the pipeline not just at their institution but with community college transfers, incoming students, and their families. This will help shift practice and policy at the state and national systems levels. In other words, it takes a community to build the institutions into something that truly serves the needs of students. HSIs need to bridge the pipeline of student mobility from local high schools to local community colleges which tend to be the feeder schools. Furthermore, the schools that belong in a system need to understand that context is
important and schools that are at the border will need a different set of resources than those who are located other parts of the state.

**Faculty and Leadership Development**

Serving Latinx students based on intentionality is demonstrated by broad campus awareness. It requires attention and investment of institutional resources, grant resources, support services, and faculty and staff development to better serve students (Santiago, 2012). The participants in this study exemplified an increased representation of Latinx leaders and critical leaders who understood the complexities of the students they serve. However, the effort must be disbursed across the campus. That means that department chairs, deans, and staff supervisors must encourage and allow their teams to learn and develop their HSI knowledge and role by providing resources, training, and opportunities to engage in discourse related to HSI initiatives. Some policies can be implemented at the recruitment stages, ensuring faculty highlight their equity and diversity statements and evidence of working with students from minoritized backgrounds. Management-level staff should also be asked questions about the HSI designation and what it means to serve a diverse body of students, and how to address inequities. Leaders should not assume that grant funds are enough. Institutions should invest and commit additional resources to faculty and leadership development.

**Updating Articulation Agreements**

The California Intersegmental Articulation Council (CIAC) (2013) describes the articulation agreement as course articulation in developing a written agreement that identifies courses (or sequence of courses) that are acceptable for transfer. Articulation assures that both faculty and student have taken the steps needed to give the proper
preparation and instruction. Two of the three site GI leaders were working on developing, changing, and improving the curriculum. However, Sol’s director, Elaine, expressed how there was a disconnect between course expectations, student engagement, and faculty and counselor knowledge about what is needed for the student to transfer. Therefore, faculty and articulation officers may need to revisit some of these courses and articulation policies at 4-year, 2-year, and local high schools. This study did not focus on the policy concerning courses and how they affect transfer prospects for Latinx and underrepresented students. Still, course redesign is a prominent feature of many grants with the knowledge that college preparation, culturally relevant pedagogy, and student experiences should all be considered in the design of the curriculum.

Future Work

This study, like all studies, had its limitations in the recruitment of a limited number of leaders involved in HSI work, with some having more experience and knowledge of HSI issues than others. However, this study sheds light on a diverse group of grant implementation leaders’ critical and culturally responsive leadership and decision-making practices. While scholars and advocates of servingness frame grants as a necessity (Perez, 2020), the funding amounts have remained stagnant, and new designated HSIs have to compete for much-needed funding. Yet, recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, HSIs dropped from a peak of 569 to 559 in 2021 (Excelencia in Education, 2022). This should be explored why there is a drop in Latinx enrollment.

This study took place during a global pandemic, and the effects of the pandemic are still being studied. The pandemic effects on grant programs and leadership may be an area of future study, specifically looking at inequities that have been exacerbated where
grants may not be enough to solve some of the deep-rooted issues facing students. While the participants in the study emphasized the importance of institutional support and commitment, I would recommend future research to focus on administrators, presidents, and chancellors to learn about their HSI agenda and strategies, or lack thereof. Finally, there is much focus on curriculum redesign and innovative strategies for faculty and pedagogy.

Future research should focus on why the curriculum focuses on intervention strategies. Is it because of the history of education policy and laws that favored maintaining white practices post-Brown v. Board of Education, or is faculty teaching preparation insufficient to support a diverse body of students? The curriculum is a big emphasis as in California, there are two assembly bills AB 1111 (California Legislative Information, 2021b), where community colleges will adopt a standard course numbering system for general education that may provide an opportunity to change pedagogy and AB 928 (California Legislative Information, 2021a) where the University of California and California State University system will establish lower-division general education pathways that meet academic requirements by 2023. Again, understanding curriculum inequities may provide an opportunity to change student success trajectories by understanding courses that affect transfer prospects for students of color.
Concluding Statement

As HSIs continue to grow and new emerging institutions become Hispanic-serving, leaders that have a role in creating innovative solutions with grants need to assure that they are working with intentions of long-term solutions. HSI GI leaders cannot sustain their programs alone and need the support of administrators to assist them in embedding proven impact programs into the university structures. Therefore, collaboration with all levels of stakeholders should be instigated from the beginning of a grant program that aims to change organizational identity to a servingness identity. I urge federal, state, and university policymakers to change the policy strategy around grant funding distribution and move away from competitive grant awards to also provide institutionalization funding beyond the grant, which would allow to pay for staffing needs, continue to provide some competitive grants to promote new ideas and solutions. What this study provided is the dimensions of servingness from the sites moved beyond the classroom to the university’s location environmental contexts. Therefore, leaders need to build an awareness of who their students are outside of the classroom and grow a servingness mentality raising their consciousness to better support minoritized students.
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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Consent form

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
Informed Consent Form for Participation in Class Project
DEVELOPING SERVINGNESS AND UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP DECISION-MAKING FOR HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION GRANT PROGRAMS

You are invited to participate in a dissertation study conducted by Everardo Barraza, a doctoral student at Cal Poly Pomona. This study is designed to understand leadership practices at Hispanic-serving institutions. Please read through this form and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not you want to participate. Take as much time as you need to read the form. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign. You will also be offered a copy of this form.

Purpose of the Project
This project aims to understand the role that administrators, directors, and staff leaders play in administering minority-serving grant programs, such as Department of Education Trio and HSI grants, National Science Foundation HSI-STEM, and Department of Agriculture HSI that help support student success for minoritized students. The interview will allow us to learn first-hand from you about you and your organization's decision-making processes, how resources are distributed, learn about program structures, support services, faculty involvement, improving the educational attainment of minoritized students, and document your thoughts on how to enhance the educational system for equity and social justice.

Participant Involvement
If you consent to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take approximately 45-60 minutes over a videoconference call Zoom. The interview questions will address topics of your role and how you address issues of equity through program activities, student achievement, discussion on what it means to be a Hispanic Serving Institution, and your own lived experiences and background. There will also be a brief follow-up interview of 30 minutes or less where we will review what was discussed and give you an opportunity to add or clarify any points made.
Voluntary Participation
You are being asked to participate in a dissertation study. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Please read the information below. Agreeing to participate indicates your consent.

Possible Risks
There is minimal risk in participating in this project, which means that there will be minimal discomfort as to normally answering questions for your normal daily life. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, please let the researcher know at any time, questions that may be skipped, and you may also choose to withdraw. Any answers may be omitted entirely from the study.

Possible Benefits
Your participation is intended to add knowledge to the student support and equity discourse that focus on Hispanic-serving institutions. Furthermore, you may also reflect on your current practices as a practitioner that may inform the current status or areas that may need improvement.

Confidentiality
No personal information about you will be revealed. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this project will remain private and confidential. The researcher will remove your name and all identifiers. Once the project is completed, the recorded data will be deleted. Only transcripts will be kept with no identifiable information. The purpose of maintaining transcripts is to help improve interviewing skills for future work.

Contact Information
For any questions or concerns, please contact: Ever Barraza at edbarraza@cpp.edu.

Signature of Participant
I have read the information provided above regarding the project: DEVELOPING SERVINGNESS AND UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP DECISION-MAKING FOR HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION GRANT PROGRAMS. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

☐ I agree to be audio-recorded

☐ I do not want to be audio-recorded

________________________________________
Name of Participant
<table>
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<th>Signature of Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Appendix B

Interview Protocol

You are invited to participate in a project that I am conducting as part of my dissertation study at Cal Poly Pomona Education Leadership EDD program. You were invited to participate because you have been identified as being affiliated as a staff member working with Hispanic-serving institution grants at your respective university.

Study’s Purpose: The purpose of this project is to learn about minority-serving programs leaderships’ role in their roles to develop equity programs that advance student success for underrepresented students. This study aims to learn about the decision-making process, insights, positionality, funding decisions, student support services, including academic, professional development, post-graduation placement, and culturally relevant practices, and your thoughts on how we can better serve students and change our organizations to meet that mission.

Participation is Voluntary: You are being asked to participate in a class project. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Please read the information below. Agreeing to participate indicates your consent.

Ask to please sign the informed consent and for the participant to give permission to start recording.

Research Questions

1. How do HSI grant implementation (GI) leaders perceive their role in advancing Latinx student success?
   a. In what ways do HSI grant leaders' own lived experiences and intersectional identities inform their decision-making?

2. To what extent, and in what ways do HSI GI leaders use their role to challenge existing structures to form an organizational identity that serves minoritized students?
   a. How are GI leaders contributing to social justice efforts in their practice?

Background

1. Please tell me about yourself, your current title, background, and your own story going through the education pipeline.
   a. If you can, please describe your current role and how it relates to HSI grants.

2. How has your own lived experienced help you navigate your leadership role?
   How has it impacted the way you lead HSI grants?

3. Please describe your motivations to pursue grants to help support Latinx students?

4. Please tell me about the program you are involved in, its goals, mission, and how it fits within the institution?
5. Since the inception of your HSIs grant, can you reflect on any achievements so far? What do you wish you could do differently?
“I want to transition to asking questions about how decisions are made among the HSI grant leadership.”

Decision-making
6. Can you tell me how decisions are made in the HSI program when implementing grant activities?
   a. What does the process look like?
   b. Who are the people involved?
   c. What type of data is brought in and by whom?
7. Can you tell me how you come to a decision concerning students?
   a. What are some essential things you consider when making decisions that may impact students?

HSI Designation, Organizational Identity, and HSI Campus Climate
8. Please describe your institution and how you perceive it to be addressing HSIs related issues?
9. Does your organization embrace the population it serves? Can you give some examples?
10. What does it mean to you to work at a Hispanic Serving Institution?
11. How is the HSI designation considered in the decision-making process in your program? For example, recruitment efforts, distribution of funding resources, when applying for additional funding, or program focus areas? Why do you think it is or is not considered?
12. Do you think the HSI designation should be approached differently by the university? How so? Why?
13. In what ways, if any, have you used your positional authority/power to change the organizational culture? [If they need a probe: For example, have you modified or changed program structures to be more equitable?]

HSI Typology
14. How do you assess achievement and student success? What metrics are most important to you?
15. What elements of academic and culturally relevant practices does your program offer students?
16. What group of students does your program mainly serve?
17. How are faculty involved with the program?
18. How would you describe the faculty’s role in supporting Latinx student success?
19. As an HSI organization, how do you feel the campus is doing to serve the diverse student body?
Appendix C

Table

Participants Aggregate

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<th>Occupation</th>
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