

The Participation of Hispanics in US Schools of Public Health, 1975–79

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Abstract. Hispanic student and faculty representation at US Schools of Public Health from 1975–1979 was investigated. Findings indicate a substantial underrepresentation of Hispanic students and faculty members at these schools. Hispanic public health graduates were found to be less likely than other graduates to receive an MPH degree or a doctorate. It appears that the University of Puerto Rico graduates one-half of all Hispanic graduates and employs two-thirds of all Hispanic public health faculty. (*Am J Public Health* 1984; 74:251–252.)

Introduction

Hispanics constitute the second largest and fastest growing minority population in the United States with a population (exclusive of Puerto Rico) in excess of 14 million. It has been estimated that if it sustains its present rate of growth, the Hispanic population in this country will double in size every 25 years.¹ Previous studies have indicated a severe underrepresentation of Hispanic enrollments in professional schools, particularly medicine.^{2–7} To date, the responsiveness of the nation's schools of public health to educate future Hispanic public health professionals has not been investigated.

Methodology

This study is based on the data collected and aggregated by the Educational Data Project of the Association of Schools of Public Health for academic years 1975–76 through 1978–79.* Data were collected principally through an annual survey conducted by each school of public health. The combined student response rate for all schools in 1975–1979 was 92 per cent or higher depending on the year. The yearly response rate for faculty ranged from 91.3–98.2 per cent.

Analysis of Hispanic faculty and student characteristics (e.g., source of financial aid) was not possible due to the manner in which the data had been aggregated. Unfortunately, data from the University of Puerto Rico (which has a large Hispanic enrollment) had been aggregated with data from all other US schools, which precluded the analysis of Hispanic enrollments in traditionally non-Hispanic schools. However lack of data from the University of Puerto Rico on

graduates in the 1977–78 academic year and on new enrollments and faculty members in 1978–79 permitted the use of the aggregate data for the analysis of Hispanic participation in the other schools of public health for these years.

Results

Students

From 1975–76 to 1978–79 there occurred almost a 40 per cent increase in the number of new enrollments at US Schools of Public Health. The absolute number of Hispanic enrollments, however, remained constant thus the overall proportion of Hispanic new enrollments declined (Table 1). The 139 Hispanic students who enrolled in a school of public health during 1978–79 represent the total new Hispanic enrollments in the schools of public health which are located in the 50 states. Of these, 37 were foreign students, thus only 102 new Hispanic students of US citizenship were enrolled during 1978–79 in all US Schools of Public Health other than Puerto Rico.

Total Hispanic enrollments (new and continuing students) varied considerably from school to school during 1978–79 (Table 2). Loma Linda had the highest proportion of Hispanic enrollments (7.1 per cent). While Texas and the University of California at Los Angeles had the highest Hispanic enrollments of all state institutions, their Hispanic enrollments were considerably below the level that would reflect the ethnic distribution of their state populations.

As seen in Table 3, the number of Hispanic US citizen graduates from US Schools of Public Health does not adequately reflect the Hispanic proportion of the total US population (5.2 per cent in 1970 and 6.4 per cent in 1980, not including Puerto Rico). Puerto Rico did not report data on graduates for the 1977–78 academic year. The 47 Hispanics who graduated (1.9 per cent of all graduates) during that year constituted the total number of Hispanics graduating from schools of public health in the 50 states.

Data on Hispanic graduates by type of degree earned are available only for academic year 1978–79. Of the 110 Hispanics who graduated during that year, 38 were male and 72 were female. Hispanics received 54 of the 1,629 master of public health (MPH) degrees (3.3 per cent), 55 of the 669 "other master's degrees" (8.2 per cent), none of the 71 doctor of public health (DrPH) degrees, and only one of the 187 "other doctorates."

Faculty

The number of Hispanic faculty members in US Schools of Public Health has been on the decline. In 1975–76 there were 89 Hispanic faculty members (3.9 per cent); in 1976–77, 67 (3.8 per cent); in 1977–78, 69 (3.9 per cent); and in 1978–79, 23 (1.3 per cent). The University of Puerto Rico did not report faculty data for 1978–79, thus there were only 23 Hispanic faculty members reported at all other schools of public health. Presumably, the University of Puerto Rico employs two-thirds of all Hispanic public health faculty members. Data on characteristics (e.g., tenure, rank, type of degrees, etc.) of Hispanic faculty members were unavailable.

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TABLE 1—New Enrollments in US Schools of Public Health, 1975–1979

Academic Year	US Citizens			All New Enrollments		
	Hispanic	Total	% of Total	Hispanic	Total	% of Total
1975–76	159	2406	6.6	192	2708	7.1
1976–77	151	2956	5.1	199	3317	6.0
1977–78	158	3047	5.2	190	3427	5.5
1978–79*	102	3329	3.1	139	3735	3.7

SOURCE: Association of Schools of Public Health, Education Data Project.
*Does not include data for the University of Puerto Rico.

Discussion

It would appear from the available data that the University of Puerto Rico is graduating one-half of the students in public health and employing two-thirds of all Hispanic public health faculty. If this is the case, the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the field of public health is perhaps more severe among Mexican Americans (60 per cent of the US Hispanic population) and other Hispanics who may be less likely to attend the Puerto Rico school.

The fact that only one Hispanic received a doctorate from a US School of Public Health during 1978–79 would signify that the US Schools of Public Health have not contributed significantly to the development of doctorally

TABLE 2—Total Enrollments* in U.S. Schools of Public Health Located in the Conterminous US and Hawaii, ‡1978–79

School of Public Health	Hispanic	Total Students	% Hispanic
Alabama	0	90	0.0
Berkeley	15	415	3.6
U Cal, LA	28	528	5.3
Columbia	17	399	4.3
Harvard	18	473	3.8
Hawaii	10	335	3.0
Illinois	1	154	0.6
Johns Hopkins	18	653	2.8
Loma Linda	23	323	7.1
Massachusetts	1	65	1.5
Michigan	13	602	2.2
Minnesota	8	363	2.2
U N. Carolina	6	625	1.0
Oklahoma	1	193	0.5
Pittsburgh	7	451	1.6
South Carolina	0	96	0.0
Texas	30	522	5.7
Tulane	10	366	2.7
Washington	8	281	2.8
Yale	6	172	3.5
TOTAL	220	7106	3.1

Source: Association of Schools of Public Health, Education Data Project.
*Includes new and continuing enrollments of US citizens and foreign students.
‡University of Puerto Rico did not report student data in 1978–79.

TABLE 3—Graduates (US Citizens Only) of US Schools of Public Health, 1975–1979

Academic Year	Hispanic		Total Number
	Number	% of Total	
1975–76	176	6.9	2568
1976–77	81	3.3	2480
1977–78*	47	1.9	2459
1978–79	110	4.2	2609

Source: Association of Schools of Public Health, Education Data Project.
*Does not include data for the University of Puerto Rico School of Public Health.

prepared Hispanics to rectify the severe underrepresentation of Hispanics on their faculties.

The findings of this report suggest that affirmative action programs have not been effectively implemented at American Schools of Public Health with respect to Hispanics. Indeed, when the University of Puerto Rico is excluded from the analysis, the nation's schools of public health display a lower level of Hispanic representation than other health professions schools.

Additional data are needed comparing student applications, admissions, attrition, financial aid, etc., across ethnic and racial groups so as to identify specific factors related to the underrepresentation of minorities in US Schools of Public Health. Unfortunately, the Educational Data Project was terminated in 1979 so that even the minimal summary data set presented here will no longer be available.

Many Hispanic health professionals are particularly well-suited to deal with the public health needs of the US Hispanic community because of their bilingualism and their knowledge of the Hispanic cultures. They represent a health resource largely untapped to date by the US Schools of Public Health. Hispanic faculty could serve as role models for prospective Hispanic students and could provide non-Hispanic students with better insights into the Hispanic cultures so as to maximize their effectiveness in dealing with the public health needs of our Hispanic citizens.

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