

Racialicious – the intersection of race and pop culture

EDUCATION, LATINO, LATINO/A

LATINA/OS IN ACADEMIA: A LOOK AT NUMBERS

MAY 23, 2012 | GUEST CONTRIBUTOR | 9 COMMENTS

14 Reactions

by Guest Contributor Daily Chicana, originally published at [The Daily Chicana](#)



METRO: Patricia Portales, Margaret Cantu-Sanchez, and Candace de Leon -Zepeda are receiving their doctorate degrees in English from UTSA this weekend. While Latinos make up 15 percent of the U.S. population, they account for only 3.6 percent of the doctoral degrees awarded in the United States and can be counted in the low thousands. Helen L. Montoya/San Antonio Express-News Photo: HELEN L. MONTOYA, SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS / ©2012 HELEN MONTOYA PHOTOGRAPHY

From the San Antonio Express News

This past weekend, I came across “[Latinas blaze path to doctoral degrees](#)” (12 May 2012), an article that tells the story of the three gorgeous Latinas pictured above, who are newly minted Ph.D.s in English from the University of Texas at San Antonio. First and foremost, I want to send out my con-

gratulations to them and to wish them all the best as they continue their academic careers! I hope I will have the chance to meet these new colleagues in person one day. For now, I'll just look forward to sharing their story with my students, who I know will be tremendously inspired by the challenges these women have overcome.

The nature of the challenges—and particularly the numbers and statistics behind them—are ones that I lose sight of all too easily, even though I myself was a first-generation doctoral graduate. The caption of the image above begins to hint at the rarity of what Drs Portales, Cantu-Sanchez and de Leon-Zepeda have achieved. Latina/os (note: the term “Latina/o” includes people whose origins extend to any Latin American country, not just Mexico) comprise 15% of the US population, yet according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), we received only the following in 2009:

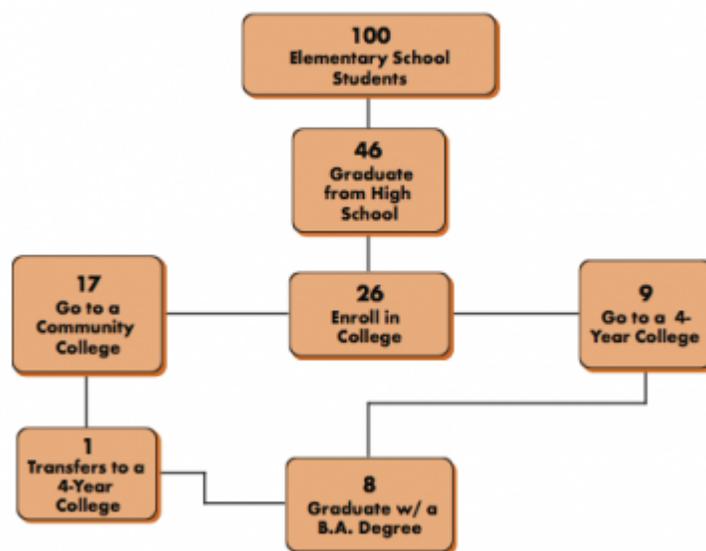
- › 8% of bachelors degrees
- › 6% of Master’s degrees
- › 3% of Ph.D.s.

Moreover, Latina/os **comprise just 4%** of college faculty. (By way of comparison, whites received 71.% of bachelors degrees, 64% of Master’s and 63% of Ph.D.s. and make up 75% of faculty.)

These numbers are made even smaller if we keep in mind how many Americans (25 years or older and of any race) earn a doctoral degree in the first place: **1.5% of the US population as a whole in 2011**. Therefore, these three women and I represent a select group only .045%. ***We don’t even make up one half of one percentage point.***

Now, to focus specifically on Mexican Americans, here is a handy flowchart and more numbers that astound me (and as a Humanities scholar, numbers usually don’t move me all that much):

Figure 1. Chicanas and Chicanos attained low academic outcomes at each point along the educational pipeline in 2000. (Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Educational Statistics, and the National Survey on Earned Doctorates.)





From “[Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline](#),” by Tara Yosso and David Solorzano, Latino Policy and Issues Brief No. 13 (March 2006).

Again, we see that Chicana/os do not make up a full percentage point of doctoral earners. Seeing this figure always shocks me, particularly when I discuss it in class with my students. (The part that always gets to me: of the seventeen students who attend a community college, only one will successfully transfer to a four-year institution... such a tremendous gap!) As I explain to students, I live in a strange world where most of my close friends are people of color with Ph.D.s and who are either tenured or on the tenure-track at top universities (as well as, of course, my colleagues and the people with whom I interact on a day-to-day basis at work). On some days, it seems to me, “Everybody gets a Ph.D. Big deal.” And yet it truly IS a big deal. You just have to conduct the most cursory examination of these facts and figures to appreciate it.

Looking at that flowchart again, I don’t have the time/space/energy to start get into all the reasons why Chicana/os graduate at such low rates. One thing I do want to do, though, is to caution against engaging in any theories of cultural deficiency, which basically means blaming some monolithic notion of Mexican American or Latino “culture” for whatever is “wrong” in Latino communities. For example, there is a terrible stereotype that Latino students don’t perform as well as whites as Asians simply because “Latinos just don’t care about education,” a pernicious idea that gets bandied about not just in popular media, but also from the mouths of administrators at my own university campus, who should know much better than to think this way. Instead, I will point you to the excellent work of Critical Race Theory and education scholars such as [Tara Yosso](#), [Daniel Solorzano](#) and [Marcos Pizarro](#), who are helping to transform our understanding of the Latina/o educational crisis by analyzing the impact issues such as educational inequities, lack of funding, historical trauma, racial battle fatigue and microaggressions.

Okay, so there are the numbers in my head for today; it’s a lot to wrap one’s brain around. However, this is the numerical groundwork I have to lay for an angsty post about my own education experience and class status that I have planned for tomorrow. Now doesn’t that sound like a fun read? See you tomorrow...

Comments for this thread are now closed.



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Mr. Oyola • 3 years ago

Where is this world where most of your friends are PoC with PhDs? As a Puerto Rican PhD candidate in an English department the numbers you are talking about here are as not surprising as they are depressing.



Daily Chicana

Hi Mr Oyola--I'll admit I was in a unique situation: My interdisciplinary Ph.D. program was one that had a high majority of students of color. The faculty with whom we typically worked and who heartily supported our program (from across departments) also included many