

# Puerto Ricans and Other Latinos in the City University of New York (CUNY)



**A NiLP iReport**  
By Angelo Falcón

**CONTENTS**

Student Enrollment -1  
Faculty and Staff -5  
Discussion -9

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# Puerto Ricans and Other Latinos in the City University of New York (CUNY)

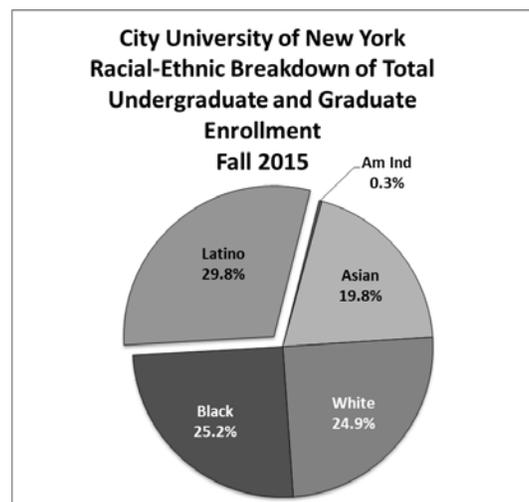
By Angelo Falcón (September 2016)

**T**his NiLP iReport examines patterns of Latino student enrollment and staffing of the City University of New York. Utilizing data provided by CUNY on their website, this report provides a broad synthesis of these data in ways that it is hoped will generate general questions that will require further research and analysis that will yield solutions to the problems outlined here. While it examines the general status of Latinos in CUNY, special attention is given to a number of issues specific to the Puerto Rican community, which appears to be experiencing unique barriers to access to CUNY enrollment and employment. This report includes a discussion at the end that explores various opportunities for addressing these issues both within CUNY and the Latino community.

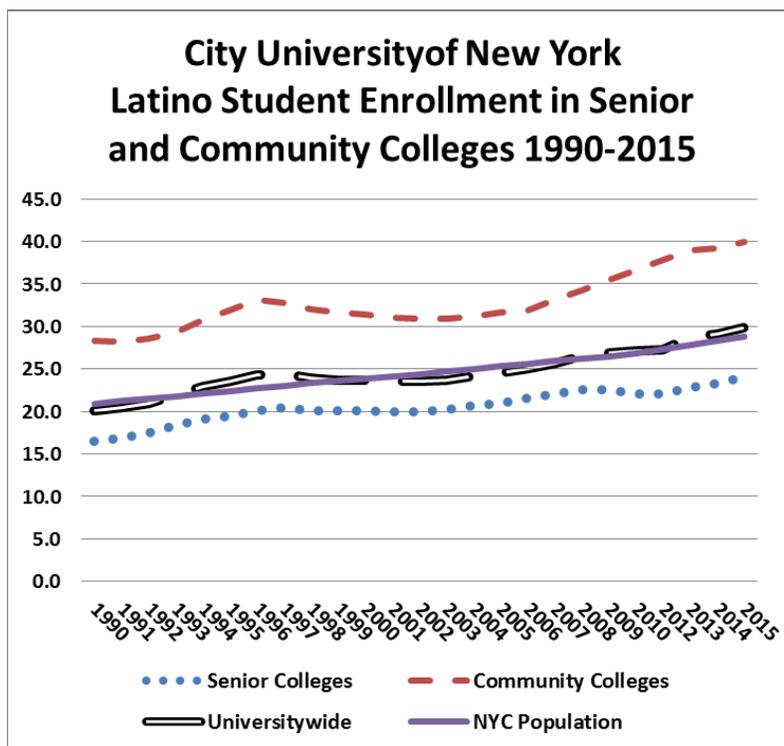
Despite the critical role that the City University of New York (CUNY) plays in the higher education of New York City's Latino community, there has been relatively little research into the status of Latinos in this institution. Established in 1847 as the Free Academy, it was created as CUNY in 1961 by the NYS Legislature and today is the third-largest university system in the United States in enrollment, following the State University of New York and the California State University system. Currently, CUNY brings together 24 campus institutions, educating 516,000 students.

## Student Enrollment

**N**ew York City's Latino population numbers over 2.3 million, making up 28.8 percent of the total population. In CUNY, Latino student enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs makes up 29.8 percent of the total, making it currently the largest group of students enrolled in CUNY.

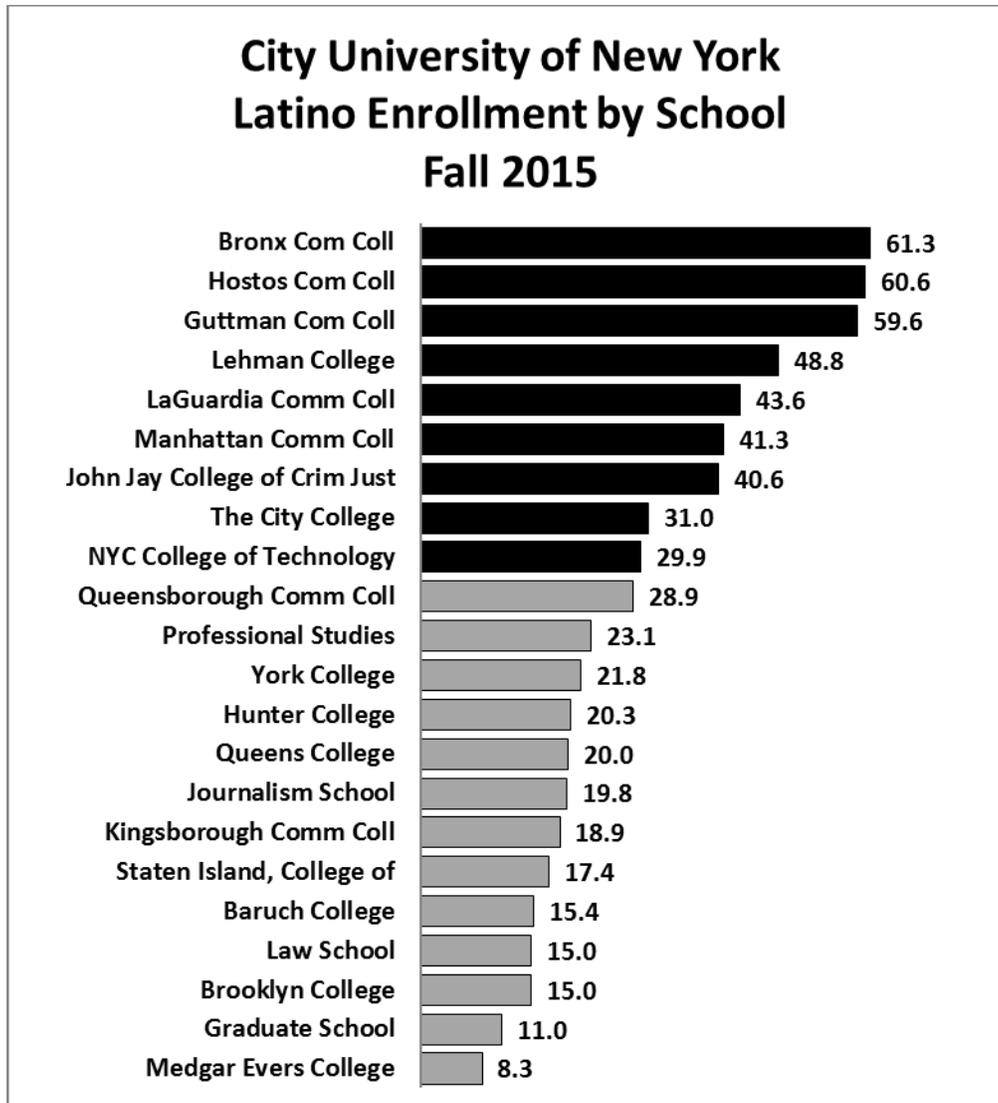


At least since 1990, the Latino share of CUNY enrollment at both the senior and community colleges has increased at about the same rate and level of Latino population growth in the city. However, there is a big difference in enrollment levels between those attending the senior colleges (24.1 percent in 2015) and the community colleges (39.9 percent). This raises the issue of why Latino students are concentrated in the system's lower tier schools. The existing data appears to indicate that the gap between the two has been growing since 2008.

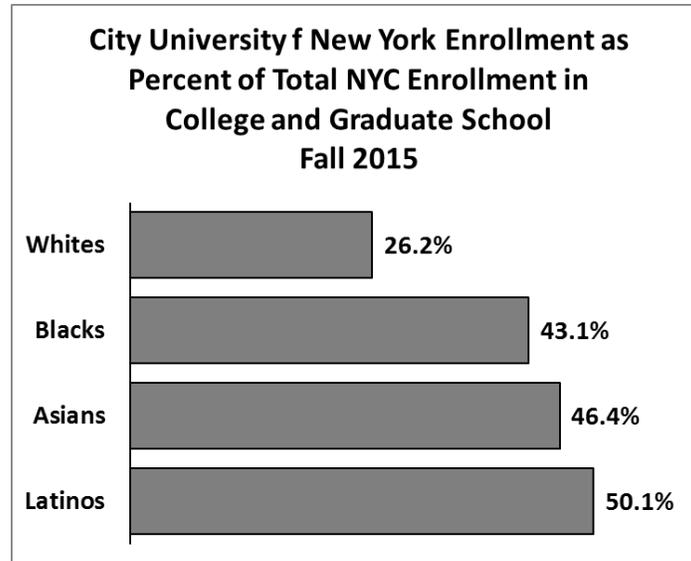


[Latino enrollment in CUNY schools](#) ranges from a low of 8.3 percent in Medgar Evers College to a high of 61.3 percent in Bronx Community College. Among the senior colleges, Lehman College has the highest Latino enrollment percentage, 48.8 percent. This wide variation in Latino enrollments within the same university system raises questions about potential tracking and related problems. There is [a growing concern](#) that CUNY is developing a racial-ethnic hierarchy related to its system of low to upper tier schools within the system. In [a 2015 study](#), the Community Service Society found these troubling trends:

- Significant decreases in black and Latino freshman at top CUNY schools
- A greater reliance on transfer students at top schools;
- That the vast majority of transfer students do not come from CUNY community colleges; . . .
- These trends are occurring while the pool of college-ready black and Latino graduates from NYC public high schools has increased dramatically.



CUNY has historically been the most important institution of higher education for Puerto Ricans and now other Latinos in New York City. When one looks, for example, at the city's population of those attending college and graduate school, Latinos make up the largest share of those in this category attending CUNY. Latinos attending CUNY make up fully 50.1 percent of all Latinos attending college and graduate school in New York City, compared to 23.6 percent of Whites, 43.1 percent of Blacks and 46.4 percent of Asians. The importance of CUNY to the higher education of Latinos is critical.

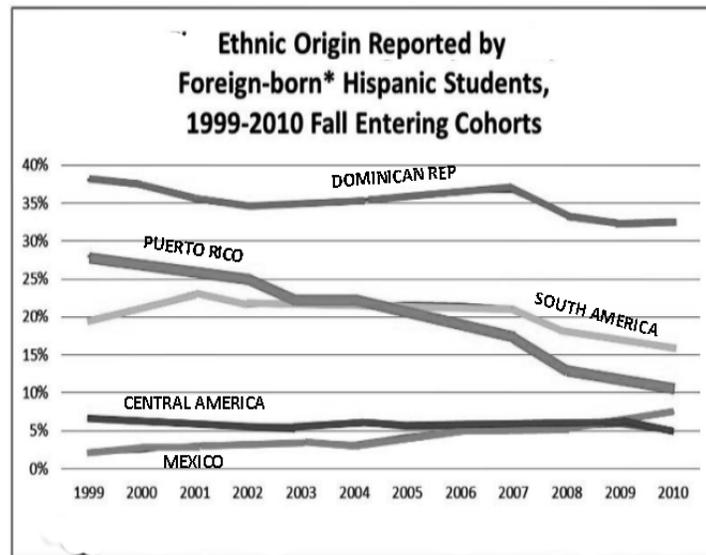


This overreliance on CUNY by Latinos, Blacks and Asians raises the question of the much smaller role being played by the city's private colleges and the state university system in their higher education. In Fall 2014, for example, Latino enrollment in the [State University of New York](#) system was only 10.8 percent despite Latinos making up over 18 percent of the state's population. At [Long Island University](#), Latino enrollment is 15.5 percent, at [Fordham University](#) 13.6 percent, at [New York University](#) 8.1 percent, at [Columbia University](#) 7.8 percent and so on. (These are all, including CUNY, only exceeded by [Boricua College](#), which has an 82.3 percent Latino enrollment of its total 1,168 students, 74.7 percent of which are women.) This general enrollment disparity could be seen as a CUNY success or a failure by SUNY and the city's private colleges to be more fully inclusive of the Latino community.

Despite CUNY's importance to Latinos as a whole, the National Institute for Latino Policy has documented a problem with the declining enrollment of Puerto Ricans specifically. In [a 2012 report](#), NiLP found that:

... of total Latinos. Puerto Rican student enrollment at CUNY "declined steadily from 28% in 1999 to 11% in 2010.

This precipitous decline in Puerto Rican student enrollment in CUNY in a decade is alarming. At first blush, this would appear to be the result of the continuing decline of the overall Puerto Rican population in the city and perhaps the aging of this community. According to the 2010 Census, however, the median age of Puerto Ricans was 33 years, compared to 31 for all Latinos, 43 for non-Hispanic Whites and 38 for non-Hispanic Blacks. Puerto Ricans made up 26.4 percent of the city's Latino youth, ages 16-24, that year.



\* includes Puerto Rico. Students born in the U.S. or other non-Hispanic majority countries are excluded.

Source: [CUNY Office of Policy Research \(2011\)](#)

Despite numerous inquiries with the CUNY administration and faculty at the time, the reasons for this sharp decline in Puerto Rican enrollment were never addressed by the university. There was general agreement [that this was a problem](#), but action was never taken to address it specifically, including publically updating the Puerto Rican enrollment data.

One reason given tied this decline in enrollment to the decline in the city's Puerto Rican population. However, to date, [Puerto Ricans remain the largest segment of the city's Latino population](#) (about 30 percent). Among those Latinos ages 18-24, Puerto Ricans make up 29.4 percent of the total, second to Dominicans who make up 31.3 percent of total Latinos in that age group. The Puerto Rican decline in enrollment, therefore, appears due to factors other than demographic change. In addition, the massive debt crisis facing Puerto Rico has spurred [a major migration to the United States](#) to the point where there are now more Puerto Ricans stateside than in Puerto Rico, a factor that is at least stabilizing the Puerto Rican population in New York City.

## Faculty and Staff

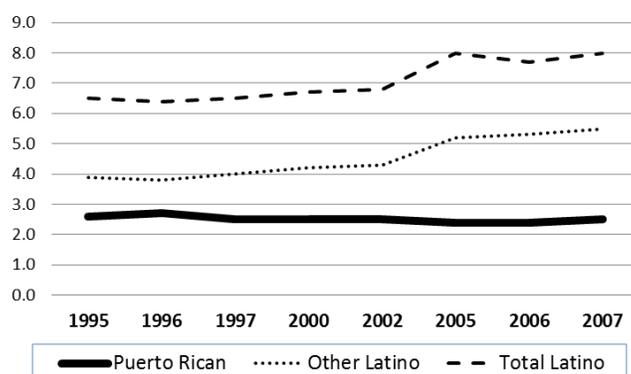
In response to [a 2005 study](#) documenting the decline of Puerto Rican faculty in 1991-2001, CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein established the Puerto Rican Faculty Initiative in Fall 2006. According to this report:

Historically, the situation of Puerto Rican faculty at CUNY has been marked by controversy and unfulfilled expectations. In 2002 this protected group had the lowest percentage of representation among fulltime faculty university-wide and was practically nonexistent in several senior colleges.

According to this report, Puerto Ricans made up only 2.5 percent of CUNY's faculty in Fall 2003, down from 2.6 percent in 1981. This situation was so extreme that it moved Chancellor Goldstein to create a CUNY initiative to address the problem after meeting with a group of concerned

stakeholders from the Latino community. However, within its first year, the university inexplicably changed the focus of this initiative from one targeted specifically at Puerto Ricans to a broader Latino effort. During 2005, CUNY also proposed eliminating the Puerto Rican category in its data collection in favor of an umbrella “Hispanic” category. This proposed change was dropped after Puerto Rican community leaders objected.

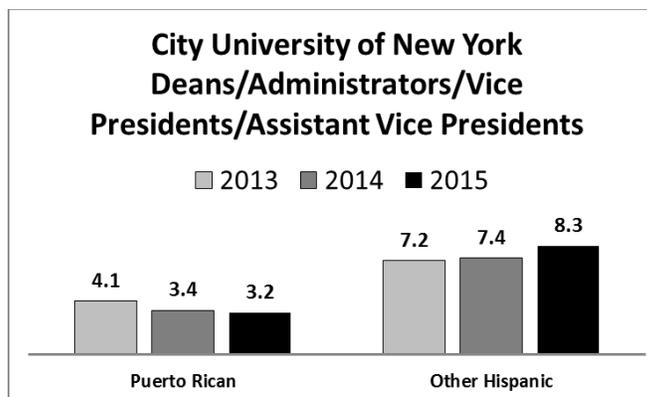
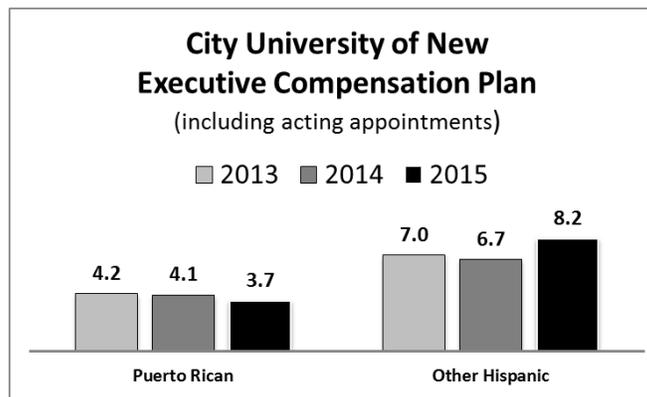
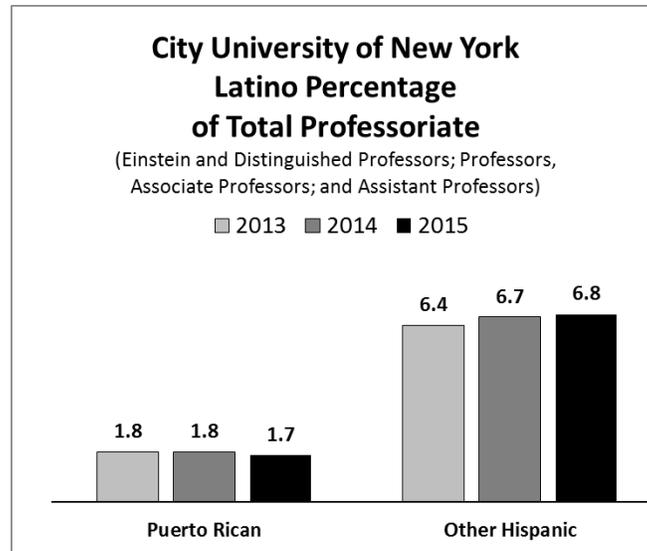
**City University of New York (CUNY)  
Percent Latino  
Full-time Faculty 1995-2007**



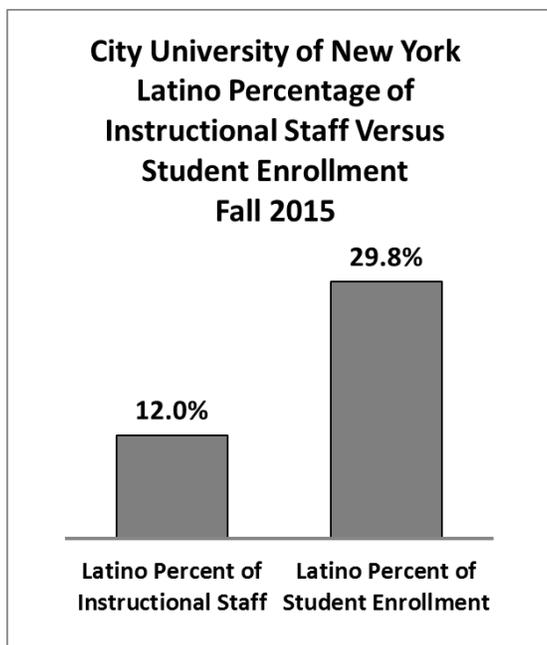
What is the current representation of Puerto Ricans on the CUNY faculty? Besides a website describing the Latino Faculty Initiative, no analysis of the impact of this project for Puerto Ricans or other Latinos has been produced.

[Since 1981](#), Puerto Rican representation on the CUNY full-time faculty has grown slightly from 2.6 to 2.9 percent in 2015. Other Latinos make up an additional 9.1 percent of CUNY faculty.

However, [recent trends for 2013-15](#) raise troubling questions about continuing declines in the representation of Puerto Rican faculty and staff at CUNY. Between 2013 and 2015, Puerto Rican representation among the professoriate dropped from 1.8 to 1.7 percent, of CUNY executives from 4.2 to 3.7 percent, and from deans and administrators from 4.1 to 3.2 percent. Therefore, not only do Puerto Ricans continue to be underrepresented, but their presence on the CUNY faculty and staff is declining.



More generally for Latinos, there is a large gap in the ratio of Latino students to instructional staff in CUNY. While Latinos make up 29.8 percent of CUNY's enrollment, Latinos are only 12.0 percent of its instructional staff.



When focusing on the Latino faculty to Latino student enrollment ratios, we find the lowest and most problematic to be at the following CUNY units:

Community Colleges

1. Queensborough Community College
2. Guttman Community College
3. The Bronx Community College
4. Manhattan Community

Senior Colleges

1. College of Staten Island
2. John Jay College of Criminal Justice
3. Queens College
4. The City College

Graduate Programs

1. Graduate School of Journalism
2. School of Professional Studies

The table on the following page brings together data on the racial-ethnic breakdown of instructional staff, other staff and student enrollment in each CUNY campus. The last two columns present ratios that can assist in comparing the performance of the different CUNY units on these indicators.

City University of New York (CUNY)									
Latino Staff and Student Enrollments for Spring 2015									
compiled by the National Institute for Latino Policy									
	Instructional Staff			Other Staff			Students	Latino Faculty-Student Ratio	Latino School Enrollment to Universitywide Latino Enrollment Ratio
	Puerto Rican	Other Hispanic	Total Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Other Hispanic	Total Hispanic	% Latino Enrollment		
Baruch	2.5	7.1	9.6	4.3	16.8	21.1	15.4	62.3%	51.7%
Brooklyn	2.1	5.9	8.0	3.6	9.8	13.4	15.0	53.3%	50.3%
City	1.7	9.8	11.5	1.2	24.6	25.8	31.0	37.1%	104.0%
Hunter	3.2	8.7	11.9	7.9	21.1	7.9	20.3	58.6%	68.1%
John Jay	4.4	9.8	14.2	6.4	24.8	31.2	40.6	35.0%	136.2%
Lehman	5.8	13.6	19.4	9.9	37.1	47.0	48.8	39.8%	163.8%
Medgar Evers	1.1	5.0	6.1	4.5	4.8	9.3	8.3	73.5%	27.9%
NYCCT	2.9	8.6	11.5	9.3	14.0	23.3	29.9	38.5%	100.3%
Queens	0.5	6.5	7.0	4.9	17.3	22.2	20.0	35.0%	67.1%
Staten Island	1.3	3.9	5.2	6.2	4.4	10.6	17.4	29.9%	58.4%
York	2.1	8.4	10.5	3.0	13.3	16.3	21.8	48.2%	73.2%
Graduate School	1.5	8.8	10.3	11.0	12.8	23.8	11.0	93.6%	36.9%
Journalism School	2.5	6.6	9.1	3.3	13.3	16.6	19.8	46.0%	66.4%
Professional Studies	3.9	7.2	11.1	8.2	18.4	26.6	23.1	48.1%	77.5%
Law School	2.7	8.0	10.7	5.6	12.5	18.1	15.0	71.3%	50.3%
Total Senior Colleges	2.6	8.2	10.8	5.6	17.1	22.7	24.1	44.8%	80.9%
BMCC	3.1	9.6	12.7	5.6	21.8	27.4	41.3	30.8%	138.6%
Bronx	6.2	12.5	18.7	11.0	41.1	52.1	61.3	30.5%	205.7%
Guttman	4.3	11.8	16.1	7.6	28.6	36.2	59.6	27.0%	200.0%
Hostos	12.6	23.4	36.0	14.7	42.0	56.7	60.6	59.4%	203.4%
Kingsborough	1.6	7.7	9.3	1.2	12.0	13.2	18.9	49.2%	63.4%
LaGuardia	2.8	14.0	16.8	4.8	32.8	37.6	43.6	38.5%	146.3%
Queensborough	0.4	7.2	7.6	1.0	18.6	19.6	28.9	26.3%	97.0%
Total Community Colleges	3.7	11.4	15.1	5.6	26.3	31.9	39.9	37.8%	133.9%
TOTAL UNIVERSITY	2.9	9.1	12.0	5.6	20.2	25.8	29.8	40.3%	100.0%

## Discussion

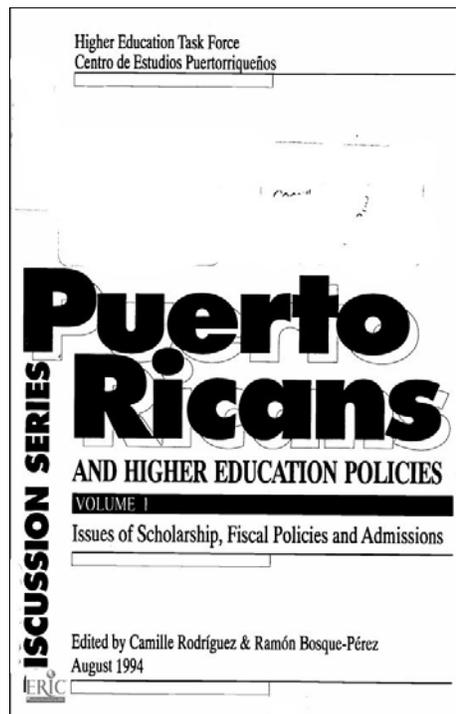
The continuing problem facing Puerto Ricans in accessing CUNY both as students and staff remains unaddressed by the University and the Puerto Rican community leadership. [At over 700,000](#), the Puerto Rican community remains the largest segment (31.0 percent) of the city's Latino population and is the Latino groups with the longest history in the city and the only one to arrive already as U.S. citizens from their homeland. Despite this history and legal status, Puerto Ricans have one of the highest poverty rates in the city (31.2 percent), exceeded among Latinos by Dominicans (32.2 percent) and Mexicans (33.9 percent). The need for greater educational attainment by these communities is critical to their positive economic development.

In the Puerto Rican case, there is a need to focus on its specific problem of declining access to CUNY. One important institution that should be systematically addressing this problem is the CUNY Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños), which is based at Hunter College.

### **Reinstating Centro's Higher Education Task Force.**

Established in 1973, the Centro sponsored a Higher Education Task Force until the 1990s that conducted research on and advocated for Puerto Ricans within the CUNY system. In one of [their last reports](#), published in 1994, the Centro's Director at the time, Dr. Frank Bonilla, explained that "the Task Force has undertaken data collection, production of analysis on the condition of Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in CUNY, dissemination, and support of other related initiatives."

With increasing evidence of the decreasing access to CUNY by Puerto Ricans as students and staff, it is not clear why the Center for Puerto Rican Studies has abandoned its higher education research agenda for the last two decades or so. In so doing it has eliminated an important tool for the broader Puerto Rican community to promote its interests within CUNY. Consideration should be given by Centro to re-establishing its Higher Education Task Force to seriously address this important problem once again in a systematic manner.



**Role of CUNY Latino Trustees.** The other opportunity to address this that has recently come into being is that this year the [CUNY Board of Trustees](#) has the largest number of Puerto Rican and Latino members. Besides the carryover appointment of Rita DiMartino, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo made four appointments of Latinos to the 17-member Board. These are Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, Fernando Ferrer, Mayra Linares-Garcia, and Robert F. Mujica. There is a need for Puerto Rican community stakeholders to meet with these and other interested Trustees to discuss with the CUNY Chancellor, James B. Milliken, the situation of Puerto Ricans within the CUNY system.

**Chancellor's Latino Faculty Initiative.** As mentioned earlier in this report, in 2006 CUNY established a Latino Faculty Initiative (originally called the Puerto Rican Faculty Initiative). It has been headed by anthropologist Arlene Torres since 2009, which describes its functions as follows:

**Faculty Recruitment.** Actively seek out potential candidates for faculty positions within CUNY as well as establish cooperative relationships with university systems in Latin America

**Strengthen The CUNY Pipeline.** Increase the pool of Latina(o) undergraduates at CUNY preparing for careers in teaching and strengthen and enhance the opportunities for them to pursue their goal

**Faculty Mentoring.** Enhance opportunities for mentoring and create an environment that promotes growth and support for faculty *en route* to tenure

**Support for Leadership Development.** Recognize and support Latino(a) faculty in CUNY who play a mentorship and leadership role that foster a welcoming environment for junior Latina(o) scholars

**Recruitment of Outstanding Scholars.** Recruit outstanding Latino(a) scholars to not only serve as mentors, but who also assist in attracting other top quality faculty to CUNY

**Support for Puerto Rican, Latina/o, Caribbean, and Latin American Studies.** Support CUNY's programs and departments in Puerto Rican, Latina(o), Caribbean, and Latin American studies to promote an environment that is welcoming and attractive to prospective faculty

Based on discussions with various Latino faculty members at CUNY, it appears that this initiative is largely inactive, reduced to being just a website entry and a promotional vehicle for its director. Despite the serious issues it was established to address and the complexities and size of the CUNY system, this initiative only has one part-time staff member, Dr. Torres, who also functions as an associate professor in the Department of Africana and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies at Hunter College from where she also she coordinates and directs the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program at Hunter College, is conducting a study of the experiences of migrant and immigrant ethnic communities located in Paterson, New Jersey dating from the mid-twentieth century to the present with a major grant from the National Park Service, and is the current President of the Puerto Rican Studies Association.

And as the description of the initiative above indicates, the functions of the initiative have been greatly expanded beyond its original focus on increasing the hiring of Puerto Rican faculty despite a lack of staff. The CUNY Chancellor's Latino Faculty Initiative appears to be little more than a symbolic gesture by the university. To date, no Latino faculty we have consulted with at CUNY has seen a formal report on the initiative's accomplishments in increasing the number of Puerto Rican and other Latino faculty at CUNY or their promotion. It would be useful if the CUNY Chancellor commissioned such an evaluation of its work to share with Latino stakeholders. The findings of our report indicate that there has been little to no progress in the hiring of Puerto Rican faculty, and that other Latinos continue to be underrepresented. It appears in need of a thorough reassessment of the value of the Initiative, probably requiring its major reorganization.

**Hispanic Federation's CREAR Program.** Another effort potentially addressing the access of Puerto Rican and other Latino students to CUNY is the Hispanic Federation's CREAR (College Readiness, Achievement, and Retention) program. [As described in the media](#), in 2015 the:

Hispanic Federation has received a historic \$1,000,000 grant from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation to fund the CREAR Futuros 2.0 and National Expansion Initiative. This is the largest private philanthropic contribution ever awarded to the Hispanic Federation. The grant expands and enhances CREAR (College Readiness, Access and Retention) Futuros, a nationally-recognized initiative that significantly improves retention, graduation rates, course completion, and GPA of Latino students.

The three-year grant will expand CREAR 2.0 to three additional City University of New York (CUNY) colleges and will include technology enhancements such as portable tablets and a

virtual curriculum tied to independent study, incentives such as MetroCards, credit-bearing independent study programs, and a long-term evaluation of program outcomes. It will also fund a national expansion which will extend CREAR 2.0 initiatives into Connecticut, New Jersey, and Florida. The national expansion will replicate best practices and lessons learned from CREAR 2.0.

Although this program has provided a wide array of useful student services, and held conferences, focus groups, and other activities with students and other stakeholders and has [outlined some initiatives it supports](#), it has yet to publish a report on its bottom-line accomplishments. It would be useful to have the program circulate any available independent study or studies of its accomplishments regarding its actual impact on the retention, graduation rates, course completion, and GPA of Latino students. The program, which began in 2011 with a grant from the [Lumina Foundation](#) and had greatly expanded since then, should have important insights on approaches that CUNY needs to pursue to strengthen the Latino higher education experience. This should also include a discussion of the role of such community-based programs' interventions in CUNY such as Aspira of New York and other Latino youth programs.

**PSC's CUNY & Race Project**. Finally, an opportunity to address the issues on the lack of faculty diversity was missed by the CUNY faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC). In 2011 they launched a CUNY & Race Project that was to develop a report on the state of faculty diversity at the university. However, despite a number of public events on the subject and the hiring of [a research team](#) to produce the report, its release was abruptly killed by the union with no explanation. Some members of the faculty involved with the project point to the union's wish to avoid the controversy involved in exposing the extreme underrepresentation of Puerto Ricans and African-Americans on the CUNY faculty as the reason for the dropping of this report. Now that the PSC has negotiated a new contract, will they again take up the issue of the racial-ethnic disparities in their ranks or continue to ignore the problem?

**T**he focus in this NiLP iReport on the Puerto Rican community is an acknowledgement of the limitation of the usefulness of broad terms like "Hispanic" or "Latino" in addressing the needs of as large and diverse as is New York City's Latino population. Puerto Ricans, for example, arrive in New York already as U.S. citizens in contrast to other Latinos, and have had the longest history in the city. Mexicans have by far, the lowest education attainment and the highest poverty rate among Latinos, and they and other Latinos have the challenges of their undocumented legal status to their full participation in American society. CUNY, therefore, needs to consider further disaggregating its data on students, faculty and other staff to take into account this diversity and its policy implications.

The City University of New York is an amazing institution that has played an important role in the development of the city's Latino community. However, it is also a complex organization with an ambitious mission whose paths to accountability are complex. While created by the New York State Legislature, its senior colleges and graduate schools are largely funded by the state, while its community colleges are funded jointly by the city and state. Left to its own devices, the levels and types of access that Latinos have to its campuses appear increasingly problematic. It, therefore, becomes incumbent upon Latino community leaders within and outside of CUNY aggressively engage the CUNY leadership in discussions about the future of Latinos within the university. ■