

## About the Researchers

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in Chicago and a comprehensive study of religious congregations in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Hernández is coauthor of *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics among American Seventh-day Adventists*, *AVANCE: A Vision for a New Mañana*, and *Reconstructing the Sacred Tower: Challenge and Promise of Latino/a Theological Education*. Recent publications include the edited book *Emerging Voices, Urgent Choices: Essays on Latino/a Religious Leadership* and the reports "Equipped to Serve: Latino/a Seminarians and the Future of Religious Leadership in the Latino/a Community" and "Strengthening Hispanic Ministry across Denominations."

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## An Educational and Ministerial Profile of Latino/a Seminarians

### Introduction

The transition to seminary is rarely easy. Would-be ministers leave behind jobs and communities in the hope that the sacrifice they are making will pay off in acquired wisdom, knowledge, and pastoral skills. For others, family and financial obligations necessitate attending seminary on a part-time basis and thus fitting time to study into already busy schedules.

This adjustment can be particularly hard for students who are a minority in the academy, including Latinos/as. Though Hispanic Americans constitute the fastest growing segment of the US populace, they remain the most under-represented minority group in US seminaries and schools of theology.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing this gap, religious communities have stepped up their efforts to recruit Latinos/as for leadership positions. But as most denominations have come to realize, successfully diversifying the cadre of religious leaders requires both concerted efforts to get more Latinos/as into the seminary's doors and an equal effort to incorporate Latinos/as and their diverse experiences and perspectives into the community's core.

### About the Series

**This is the second of a series of Latino Research@ND reports focusing on Latinos/as and theological education. The other reports examine particular aspects of Latino/a seminarians' experiences and identify areas of commendation and concern for the institutions that serve them.**

<sup>1</sup> Hispanics represent just 3.6 percent of the US seminary population compared to roughly 14 percent of the US population. See the first report in this series for more detailed analysis: "A Demographic Profile of Latino/a Seminarians," Latino Research @ ND Volume 4, Number 2, March 2007, Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

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## Data Sources and Methodology

This report is based upon the 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey. The bilingual survey was created by the Center for the Study of Latino Religion at the University of Notre Dame and sent to the 67 seminaries and schools of theology in the United States and Puerto Rico that together accounted for 82 percent of Latinos/as enrolled in master's-level theological education in the academic year 2001–2002 (the year immediately prior to our study's commencement). Parts of the questionnaire were designed so that the responses could be compared with a survey that the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education conducted in 1999 with students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds at Association of Theological Schools (ATS)-affiliated institutions. The Auburn data set reflects the responses of 2,512 respondents, which represents 25 percent of the total to whom Auburn surveys were mailed (go to [www.auburnsem.org/study](http://www.auburnsem.org/study) for more information about the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education).

To ensure the highest response rate possible for our survey, we sent letters to the appropriate deans at each institution and asked them to recruit someone to distribute surveys and encourage student participation. These on-site coordinators were instructed to distribute the survey questionnaires among US-based Hispanic students—that is, Latino/a seminarians and students of theology who could or were planning to minister in the United States or Puerto Rico, the names of whom were supplied by the institution's registrar. Data were collected in two waves—the first from spring to early fall of 2003 and the second during winter to spring of 2004. In all, 523 completed surveys were collected, which represents a 23.4 percent response rate.

To help in this effort, this report analyzes what a quantitative survey of Latino/a theological students reveals about the educational and ministerial backgrounds of Latino/a seminarians.<sup>2</sup> We find that Latinos/as arrive at seminary with considerable community and religious leadership experience. They also come from comparatively less formally educated families than their white non-Hispanic peers—a reality that might complicate their social and academic acclimation to graduate school. We conclude that seminaries need both to recognize the challenges that their Latino/a students face and to welcome the experiences and perspectives that they bring to the seminary community.

## Educational Backgrounds of Latino/a Seminarians' Parents

By the time most Latinos/as begin seminary, they have vastly surpassed their parents' educational achievements. While everyone in our sample was enrolled in a master's-level or higher program,<sup>3</sup> more than four of every ten Latino/a seminarians have fathers (42 percent) and mothers (44 percent) who did not graduate from high school (Figure 1). This gap in educational capital is notably wider than the one between white non-Hispanic seminarians and their parents, as Figure 1 shows. Specifically, 12 percent of white seminarians' fathers and 9 percent of white seminarians' mothers have less than a high school education. Though parental education levels do not necessarily determine academic success or failure,<sup>4</sup> coming from households in which higher education

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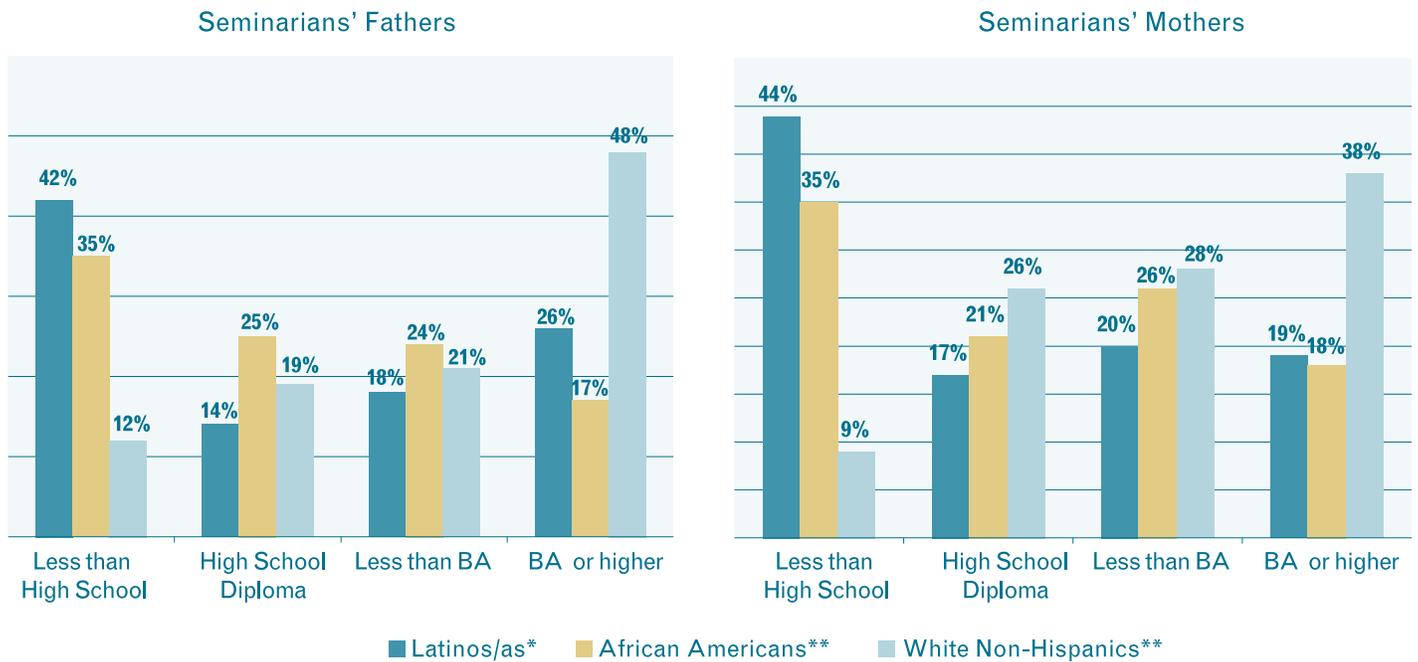
2 For the sake of simplification, we use the term “seminarian” in this paper to refer to students enrolled in master's-level programs at a seminary or school of theology, regardless of whether they intend to become ordained priests or ministers. Nearly all of students in our sample were at institutions affiliated with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), a membership organization of more than 250 graduate schools that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs designed to prepare persons for a wide variety of positions of ministerial leadership and teaching and research in the theological disciplines. Most Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox graduate schools of theology in North America are affiliated with ATS, including those run by particular denominations, dioceses, or religious orders whose primary but not necessarily exclusive focus is to prepare people for ordained ministry within that denomination. ATS does not include undergraduate colleges or other non-master's conferring institutions. For more information on ATS and its member institutions, go to [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu).

3 Most (93 percent) of our survey respondents indicated that they were enrolled in a master's-level program, 2 percent checked post-master's theological programs, and 5 percent marked “other.”

4 See Ann L. Mullen, Kimberly A. Goyette, and Joseph A. Soares, “Who Goes to Graduate School? Social and Academic Correlates of Educational Continuation after College,” *Sociology of Education* 76: 2 (April 2003), 143–69.



Figure 1  
**Parental Educational Levels, by Student's Race/Ethnicity**



\*Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey      \*\*Source: 1999 Auburn Survey

was not the norm could impact how Latinos/as socially and academically adjust to graduate school.

The men in our sample have substantially less educated parents than do the women. Roughly half of the Latinos reported that their mothers (48 percent) and fathers (51 percent) have less than a high school education compared to just one quarter (25 percent) of the Latinas' fathers and one third (33 percent) of Latinas' mothers. This gender effect remained strong even after we controlled for denomination and nativity.

Not surprisingly, we also found that the more recent immigrants and the less acculturated<sup>5</sup> in our sample have less educated parents than those who are more highly acculturated and those whose

families have lived in the mainland United States for one or more generations.<sup>6</sup>

## Latino/a Seminarians' Educational Backgrounds

Most Latinos/as in seminary did not spend their high school or college years studying in church-based educational institutions. Only one-third of our sample attended a religious or parochial grade or high school, and the same percentage (33 percent) attended a denominational college or university. Catholics were the most likely to have attended a religious grade or high school (46 percent compared to 39 percent of Evangelicals, 25 percent of Mainline Protestants, and 24

5 Acculturation in this paper was determined using a scale developed by Gerardo Marin et al. in "Development of a Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 9: 2 (June 1987), 183–205. This composite of English-language usage scales was based on four questions: "In general, what language do you: (1) read, (2) think, (3) speak at home, and (4) speak with your friends?" Our Cronbach's alpha was .93. Those who scored a mean of 2.99 or above are considered highly acculturated and those who scored below 2.99 are considered less acculturated. We excluded from our acculturation analysis the responses of Latino/a seminarians studying in Puerto Rico since they live and study in a Spanish-dominant context and thus adapting to an English-dominant environment is not an issue for them.

6 Specifically, more of the less acculturated have mothers and fathers with less than a high school diploma (49 percent of each) compared to the highly acculturated (39 percent have mothers and 37 percent fathers with less than a high school education). Also, 36 percent of third-generation Americans (i.e., US born of US-born parents) have mothers without a high school diploma compared to 46 percent of first-generation immigrants (i.e., foreign- or Puerto Rican-born) and 45 percent of second-generation (US born of foreign- or Puerto Rican-born parents). And 35 percent of third-generation Hispanic Americans report having fathers with less than a high school education compared to 45 percent of first-generation and 43 percent of second-generation Americans.

Institute for Latino Studies



The Center for the Study of Latino Religion was founded in 2002 within Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies to serve as a national center and clearinghouse for ecumenically focused research on the US Latino church, its leadership, and the interaction between religion and community. For more information, please go to [www.nd.edu/~cslr](http://www.nd.edu/~cslr).



The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

percent of Pentecostals), while Evangelicals were the most likely to have attended a denominational college (56 percent compared to 34 percent of Pentecostals, 30 percent of Catholics, and 20 percent of Mainline Protestants).<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, one third (33 percent) of our sample majored in theology or religion in college, the disciplines traditionally associated with pre-seminary formation. Not surprisingly, those who attended denominational colleges or universities were more likely to have studied theology or religion (50 percent) than those who attended other kinds of colleges or universities (20 percent).

As Table 1 shows, Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestant Latino/a seminarians were much more likely to have studied theology or religion in college than either Mainline Protestants or Catholics. Evangelicals and Pentecostals were also more likely to begin seminary one to five years after graduating from college than were Mainline Protestants (Table 1), the latter being the Protestant subgroup with the lowest percentage of people who majored in religion or theology (16 percent). This suggests that among Protestants, studying religion or theology as an undergraduate may be associated with going to seminary soon after graduating from college, whereas mid- and second-career Latino/a Protestants are more likely to have studied something else in college. This pattern does not hold for Latino/a Catholic seminarians. Although a majority (52 percent) entered seminary within one to five years of completing college, only 19 percent majored in religion or theology as undergraduates (Table 1).

One response to the training needs of Latino/a religious leaders has been to establish Bible Institutes and Diocesan training programs, which typically do not require a college degree and are much less time-intensive than a master's-level theology program.<sup>8</sup> Among our sample, 28 percent reported that they had attended a Bible Institute or Diocesan training program. As Figure 2 shows, Catholics and Pentecostals were more likely to have done so than Evangelicals or Mainline Protestants. Further, less acculturated and foreign-born Latino/a seminarians were significantly more likely to have gone through a Bible Institute or Diocesan training program (Figure 2), which suggests that these programs have greater appeal to those who are less integrated into the dominant American society.

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of analysis, Protestant denominations were categorized as follows: Southern Baptist Convention, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Baptist General Conference are considered "Evangelical"; Assemblies of God, Iglesia Evangélica Unida, The Foursquare Church, Pentecostal and "nondenominational" are considered "Pentecostal"; American Baptist Churches USA, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church of America, and Metropolitan Community Church are considered "Mainline."

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 3 of *Reconstructing the Sacred Tower: Challenge and Promise of Latino/a Theological Education*. Edwin I. Hernández and Kenneth Davis (Scranton, PA: The University of Scranton Press, 2003), 43ff.



Table 1  
**Relationship between Undergraduate Major and Starting Seminary 1-5 Years after College, by Student's Denomination**

	College Major in Religion or Theology	Started Seminary within 1-5 years of Graduating
Catholic (N=142)	19%	52%
Mainline (N=158)	16%	37%
Evangelical (N=109)	50%	61%
Pentecostal (N=106)	42%	62%

Figure 2  
**Bible Institute/Diocesan Training Program Attendance, by Demographic Variables**

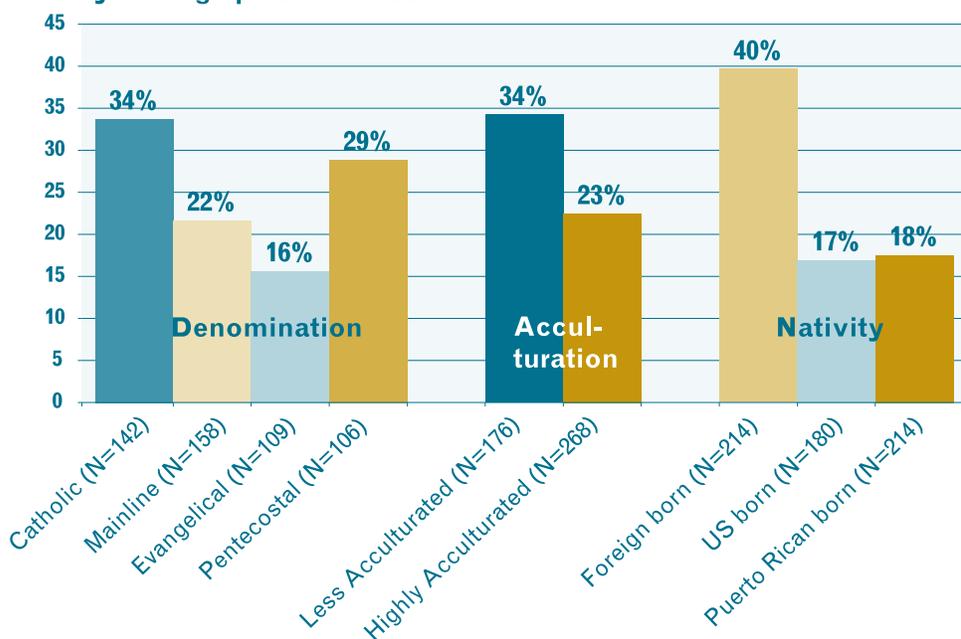


Table 2  
**Religious Leadership Experience of Seminarians, by Race/Ethnicity**

	Latinos/as*	African Americans**	White Non-Hispanics**
Teaching in a local church	83%	73%	72%
Congregational youth ministry	75%	69%	64%
Small group ministry	70%	59%	62%
Worship/liturg	70%	74%	67%
Social action ministry	50%	27%	26%
Youth organizations outside a congregation	47%	46%	40%
Religiously related camping	45%	15%	33%
Campus related organization	34%	20%	31%
Teaching in a religious school	33%	16%	16%

\* Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey \*\* Source: 1999 Auburn Survey

## Religious and Community Service Experience

Latinos/as arrive at seminary with considerable service and leadership experience as religious instructors and worship, youth group, and small group ministry leaders (Table 2). As Table 2 shows, Latinos/as report higher rates of religious leadership experience in several areas than do their non-Latino counterparts—religious camps, teaching, and small group ministry. Most notably, half of our respondents have led social action ministries, which is nearly twice the rate of white non-Latino/a and African American seminarians.

Levels of religious leadership experience differ among Latino/a seminarians along denominational lines (Table 3). As Table 3 shows, these rates most vary in the areas of congregational youth ministry, worship/liturg, and social action ministry, with Mainline Protestants reporting the highest levels of experience in all three areas. These denominational tendencies remain strong even after considering respondents' age, gender, and place of birth.

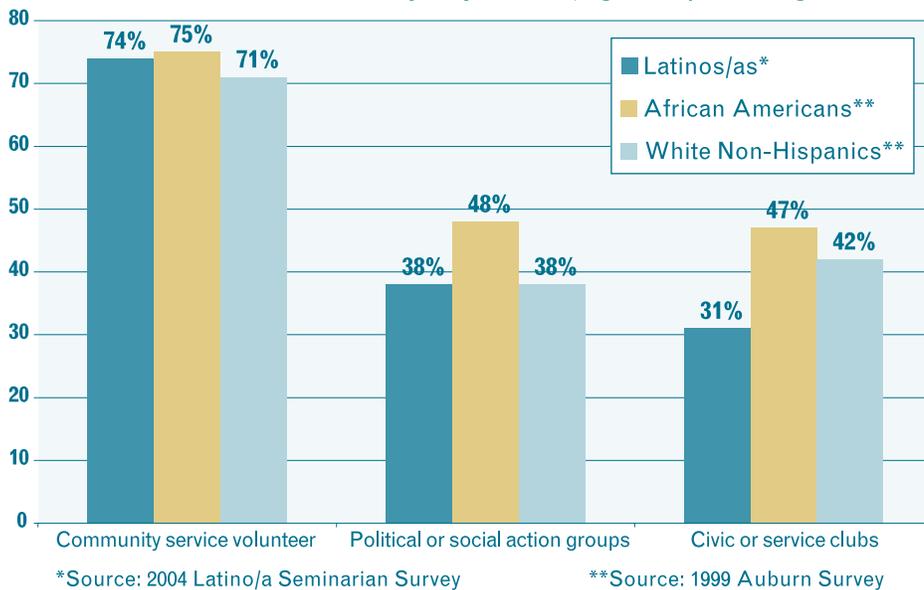
In terms of service outside of a religious setting, nearly three-quarters of Latino/a seminarians have served as community service volunteers, a very similar rate to that of their white and African American counterparts (Figure 3). But while the participation rate of Latinos/as in political or social action groups is similar to those of non-Latino whites, it is lower than that of African Americans. Further,

Table 3  
**Percentage of Seminarians Who Have Led These Religious Activities, by Denomination**

	Catholic	Mainline	Evangelical	Pentecostal
Youth ministry in a congregation **	66%	86%	73%	70%
Worship/liturgy **	70%	81%	69%	54%
Social action ministry **	49%	60%	34%	54%
Teaching in a local church *	72%	89%	90%	79%
Small group ministry *	66%	68%	76%	70%
Religiously related camping *	24%	65%	41%	43%
Campus related organization *	31%	30%	43%	37%
Youth organizations outside a congregation (NS)	45%	52%	41%	49%
Teaching in a religious school (NS)	39%	27%	27%	41%

\*\* Significant at .01; \* Significant at .05 or less; NS indicates no statistically significant difference. Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey

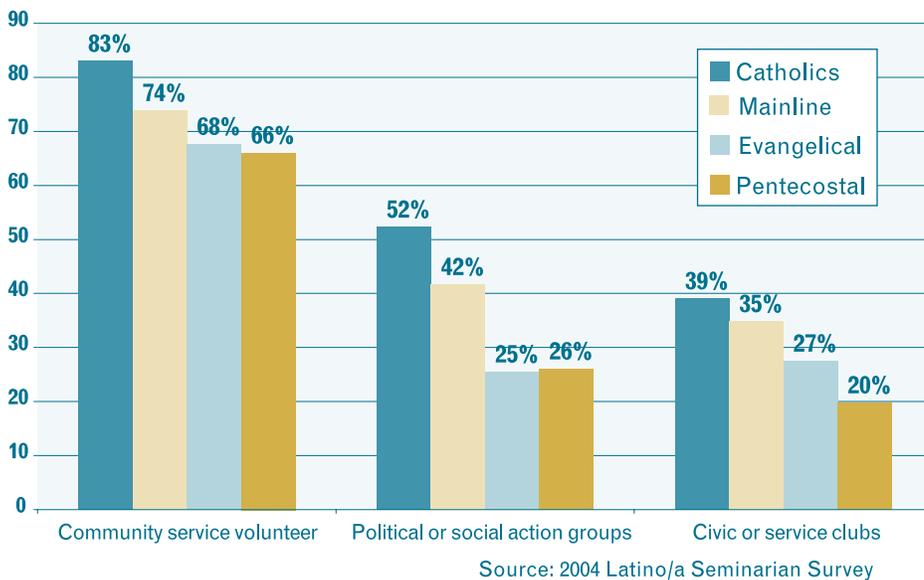
Figure 3  
**Seminarians' Civic Leadership Experience, by Race/Ethnicity**



Latino/a seminarians report lower levels of civic or service club involvement than do non-Latino seminarians.

We also found that civic leadership involvement varies among Latino/a seminarians along denominational lines (Figure 4), with Catholics reporting considerably higher levels of such engagement, particularly as compared to Evangelicals and Pentecostals. As we saw above, these denominational tendencies persist even after taking age, gender, and place of birth into consideration.

Figure 4  
**Civic Leadership Experience of Latino/a Seminarians, by Denomination**



## Discussion and Conclusion

Latinos/as arrive at seminary with considerable leadership experience in both their congregations and broader communities. A substantial majority have led religious instruction classes, worship, youth groups, and small group ministries. Moreover, half have led social action ministries—nearly twice the rate of white non-Hispanic and African American seminarians. But though most have also served as community service volunteers,

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Latino/a seminarians report lower levels of involvement in both political or social action groups, and civic or service clubs.

Differences in seminarians' religious and civic leadership experiences appear to be more a function of denominational affiliation than of age, gender, or place of birth. Mainline Protestants report the highest levels of congregational youth ministry, worship/liturgy, and social action ministry leadership, and Catholics report the highest rates of involvement as community service volunteers and with political or social action groups and civic or service clubs. Whether these reflect denominational differences in ministry priorities, leadership

opportunities, or pathways to ministry is a matter to be taken up by further research.

The wealth of hands-on experience that Latinos/as bring with them to seminary is not matched by their educational capital. Latino/a seminarians come from families with much less formal education than their white non-Hispanic classmates. Roughly four out of ten grew up in households in which neither parent had completed high school, and fewer than two out of ten have college-educated parents. These rates are even lower for foreign-born and less acculturated Latinos/as. Though this gap does not consign Latinos/as to academic failure, it might complicate their efforts to adapt to the vocabulary,

methodology, and expectations of graduate-level theological training.

We found that over a quarter of Latino/a seminarians have attended a Bible Institute or Diocesan training program, both of which were created to specifically address the training needs of Hispanic religious leaders. These programs appear to be most attractive to Catholics and Pentecostals and to Latinos/as who are less acculturated, newer immigrants, and foreign born.

Most Latinos/as in seminary do not come out of religious high schools or colleges, and only one-third studied theology or religion in college. Latinos/as who go back to school many years after getting their BAs are even less likely to have majored in religion or theology

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## About the Researchers *continued from cover*

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**Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner** is a professor of educational leadership and policy studies and Lincoln Professor of Ethics and Education at Arizona State University. Her research interests include access and equity in higher education, faculty racial/ethnic/gender diversity, and

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**Jeffrey Smith**, a research assistant at the Center for the Study of Latino Religion, is pursuing a PhD in sociology at the University of Notre Dame with research focused on religious pluralism, congregational dynamics, and ethnicity. An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, he holds a Master's of Divinity from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and has served several congregations in Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas.

**Kari Jo Verhulst** is a writer/editor with the Center for the Study of Latino Religion. She holds a Master's of Divinity from Weston Jesuit School of Theology and has studied at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. A contributing writer to *Sojourners* magazine, she is preparing for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

## Discussion and Conclusion *continued from page 7*

as undergraduates. This might compound the potential for mid- and second-career Latino/a seminarians to experience a degree of dissonance upon entering seminary. Though they are among the highest educated in their families and have held leadership positions in their congregations and communities, the demands and expectations of master's-level theology might be difficult to adjust to after being out of school for so long.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following steps for seminaries and schools of theology:

- Professors, administrators, and student life staff need to be aware of the educational capital gap that many of their Latino/a students might experience and not take for granted that the language, procedures, and assumptions of the academic world are universally understood.
- Extend this sensitivity to mid- and second-career seminarians, who have been out of college for many years and who are less likely to have previously studied religion or theology than their classmates who began seminary soon after graduating from college.
- Find ways to draw upon the tremendous wealth of experience in the church and broader community that Latinos/as bring with them to seminary, especially older students who bring years of practical experience with them to the academic environment.
- Reach out to Bible Institutes and Diocesan training programs. Our finding that over a quarter of Latino/a seminarians have attended such programs suggests that these are potential venues in which to recruit Latinos/as into higher theological education, particularly given the prevalence of such programs throughout the United States and Latin America. Seminaries should recognize these organizations as partners in the effort to train Latino/a religious leaders and explore ways to share resources with them, possibly through seminars, college-level classes, or other special education offerings.

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