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A series of policy and research briefs from the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame

About the Researchers

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A Demographic Profile of Latino/a Seminarians

Introduction

While the rapid growth of the Latino population in the United States has led to a concomitant rise in the Latino presence in both Catholic and Protestant congregations, Latinos/as remain vastly underrepresented among the religious leadership of most Christian denominations.[1] Cultivating a vibrant and well-trained cadre of Latino/a religious leaders is critical for the vitality of the US Latino community. Indeed, research has shown that a congregation's leaders have the single biggest impact on the scope and quality of a church's outreach and community service.[2] Increasing the number of Latino/a religious leaders is also important for the broader US community. With religious leaders playing an increasingly public role in shaping our political and civic discourse and determining what social and moral issues are considered critical, it is essential that Latino/a concerns and perspectives have a voice in the discussion.

To get a sense of who comprises the future pool of Latino/a religious leaders, this report presents the basic demographic findings of a survey

About the Series

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

1 Edwin I. Hernández, "Strengthening Hispanic Ministry across Denominations" (Duke Divinity School, 2005); Adair Lummis, "Hispanic Ministry in Fourteen Protestant Denominations," in Hernández et al., eds., *Emerging Voices, Urgent Choices* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

2 Ram A. Cnaan and Stephanie C. Boddie, *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare* (New York: New York University Press, 2002). See also: Ram A. Cnaan, Edwin I. Hernández, and Charlene C. McGrew, "Latino Congregations and Social Service: The Philadelphia Story," Research Report Vol. 2006.1 (Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2006); Edwin I. Hernández, Rebecca Burwell, Marciana Popescu, Milagros Peña, and Juan Carlos Rivera, "If the Pastor Says, 'Let's Do It,' It Gets Done: Success Stories in Latino/a Social Ministry," and Amy Sherman, "The Community-Serving Activities of Hispanic Protestant Congregations," both in *Emerging Voices,* op. cit. n.1.

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INSTITUTE for Latino Studies

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 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.

conducted among Latinos/as enrolled in master's-level theological programs in preparation for leadership positions in their congregations and communities. Though people prepare to serve their religious communities in a variety of ways, seminaries and schools of theology represent a primary training ground for lay and ordained congregational leaders. The Roman Catholic Church and most Protestant denominations strongly encourage, if not outright require, master's-level theological education for their ordained leaders, and a significant subset of lay people who are not heading toward ordination also attend seminary in anticipation of serving as pastoral associates, teachers, chaplains, and so on.

The experiences of Latino/a seminarians[3] highlighted in this report provide an important window into the future of Latino religious leadership. They also help set the stage for the other reports in this series.

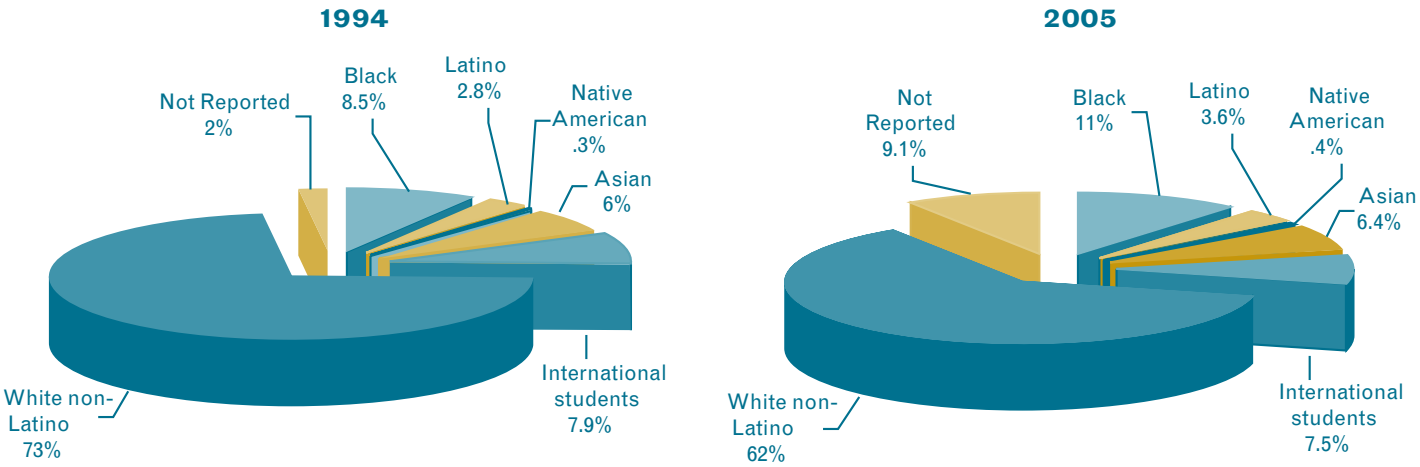
Latino Representation in the US Seminary Population

Though the number of Latino/a students enrolled in seminary or theological school has risen slightly over the past decade, Latinos/as are still the most under-represented minority community within the US seminary population. According to statistics provided by the Association for Theological Schools

3 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 the 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 http://www.ats.edu.

Figure 1

Racial and Ethnic Composition of the ATS-Student Body in Percentages, 1994 and 2005



(ATS), Hispanics comprise just 3.6 percent of the ATS-student body (Figure 1), although they represent 14.5 percent of the US population.[4]

Denominational Affiliation and Identity

The denominational profile of the Latino seminary student population is strikingly different from that of the overall US Latino population. Based upon our survey findings, just 28 percent of Latino/a seminarians are Catholic while the remaining 72 percent are Protestant—an inverse ratio to the denominational affiliations of US Latinos/as in general, 70 percent of whom are estimated to be Catholic.[5] In contrast, Mainline Protestants are particularly over-represented in the Latino seminarian community, comprising 31 percent of Latino/a seminarians compared to just 4 percent of the overall US Latino population.[6] Pentecostal and Evangelical Protestant Latinos/as each account for 21 percent of Latinos/as in seminary (42 percent combined), compared to 16 percent of the general Latino community.[7]

These numbers suggest that Latino/a Protestants are more likely to attend seminary than Latino/a Catholics—a finding that corresponds with the reality that there are simply more Protestant seminarians and seminaries in the United States than Catholic. ATS data show that 89 percent of ATS students identify as Protestant and just 11 percent as Catholic.[8] Correspondingly, 57 percent of master's-level seminaries and schools of theology are affiliated with Protestant denominations and 19 percent are inter- or nondenominational (most of which have majority Protestant faculty and student bodies). In comparison, 23 percent of ATS institutions are Roman Catholic.

4 In comparison, black or African American people comprise 11 percent of the US seminary population vs. 12.1 percent of the US population; Asians comprise 6.4 percent of the US seminary population vs. 4.3 percent of the US population; and Native Americans comprise 0.4 percent of the US seminary population vs. 0.1 percent of the US population.

5 Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda. "Hispanic Churches in American Public Life: Summary of Findings," Interim Report, 2003 Vol. 2 (January 2003), Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

6 Ibid.

7 Discrepancies in the percent totals are due to rounding. Protestant denominations were categorized as follows: 'Evangelical' includes respondents who belong to churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Baptist General Conference. 'Pentecostal' includes respondents who belong to churches affiliated with the Assemblies of God, Pentecostal, Iglesia Evangélica Unida, The Foursquare Church, and those who identified as 'nondenominational.' 'Mainline Protestant' includes respondents who belong to churches affiliated with The American Baptist Churches USA, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church of America, and Metropolitan Community Church.

8 ATS, *Fact Book on Theological Education* (Pittsburgh, 2004). ATS does not report what percentage of ATS students are Orthodox but does report that one percent of ATS institutions in the United States are Orthodox. Throughout this paper we use ATS data for academic year 2003–2004 since that is the timeframe during which the majority of our data was collected.

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.

Gender

The Latino seminarian population contains nearly twice as many men as women. We found that 69 percent of the 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey respondents are male and 31 percent female—a gender breakdown that closely mirrors the one reported in ATS head count statistics for AY 2003–2004 (see Table 1). As Table 1 shows, the white non-Latino seminarian population for that year had a similar male to female ratio (66 percent and 34 percent, respectively).[9] In contrast, the gender balance among African American seminarians was nearer to equal—52 percent male and 48 percent female (see Table 1).[10]

Our finding that master's-level theological education is a predominantly male field for Latinos/as stands in striking contrast with the gender breakdown of Hispanic master's-level students in all areas of study (Table 1). Based on the most recent statistics available from the US Department of Education, 63 percent of Hispanic master's degree recipients in 2003 were female and 37 percent male—a nearly inverse ratio to that found among master's-level theology students.

Table 1
Gender Representation of Seminarians and Master's Degree Recipients in All Fields of Study, by Race/Ethnicity

	Head Count Enrollment in US ATS-Affiliated Schools, Fall 2003*	Master's Degree Recipients in All Fields of Study 2002–2003**
Latino male	71%	37%
Latino female	29%	63%
Black, non-Latino male	52%	29%
Black, non-Latino female	48%	71%
White, non-Latino male	66%	39%
White, non-Latino female	34%	61%

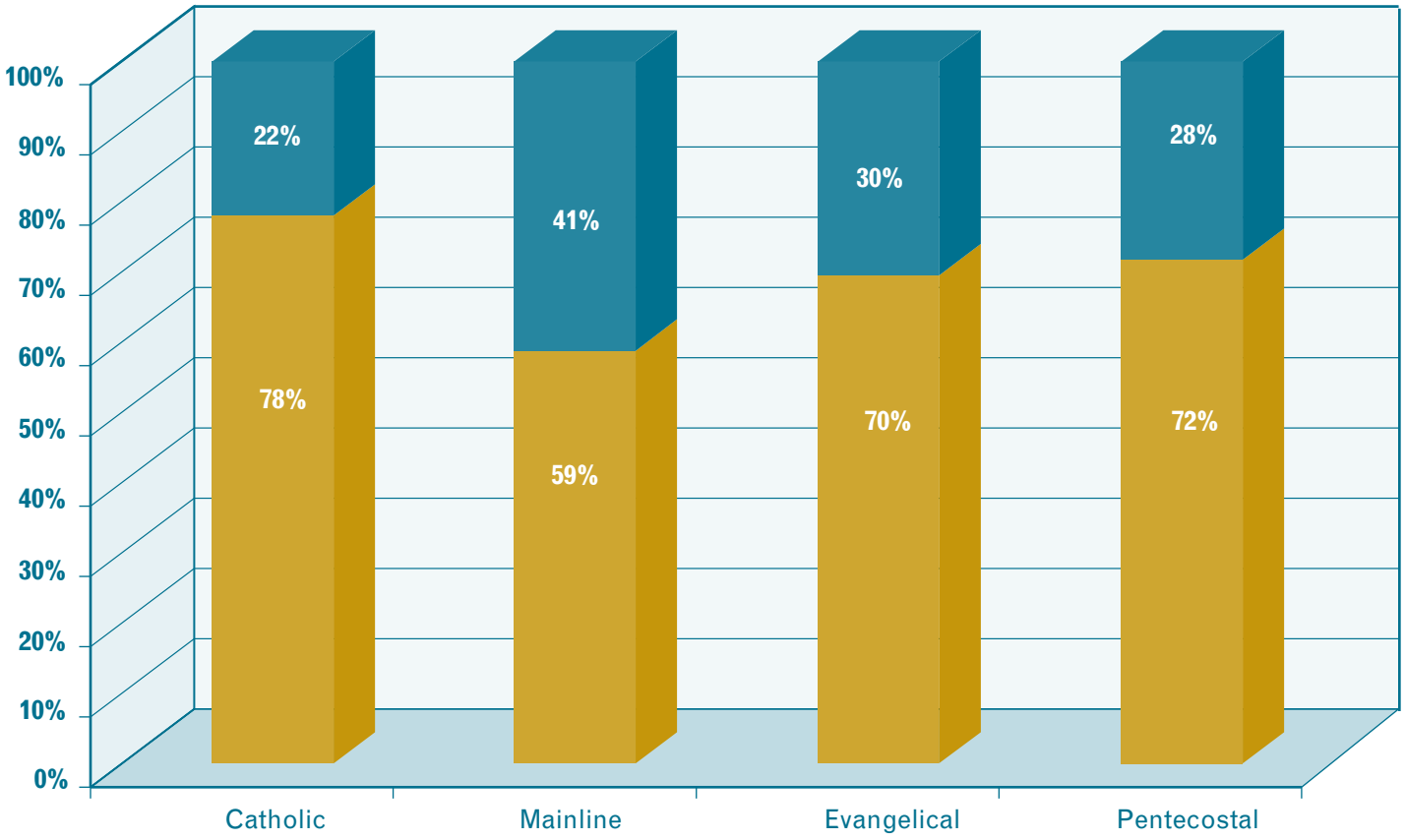
* Source: ATS, 2004.
** These figures reflect all subject areas and fields of study and come from the National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Educational Statistics 2004; downloaded on September 18, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/tables/dt04_266.asp.

9 ATS *Fact Book*, op. cit. n. 8.
10 Ibid.

Figure 2

Gender Representation of Latino/a Seminarians' Denominational Subgroups

(based on student's denominational affiliation)



Source:
2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey

A closer look at our sample reveals that the gender representation within each denominational subgroup strongly corresponds with the ordination options for women in those communities. The Mainline Protestant Latino seminary population, which is comprised of members of denominations that ordain women, has a closer gender balance than the other three denominational subgroups (Figure 2),[11] while the Catholic student population in our sample contains the lowest representation of women.[12]

Correspondingly, a significantly higher portion of the women in our sample (41 percent) belong to Mainline churches than found in any of the other three denominational subgroups (see Figure 3). This correlation suggests that the gender disparity that exists among Latino/a, white, and African American seminarians alike (Table 1) is strongly related to the role of women within the Christian community and the theological and historical

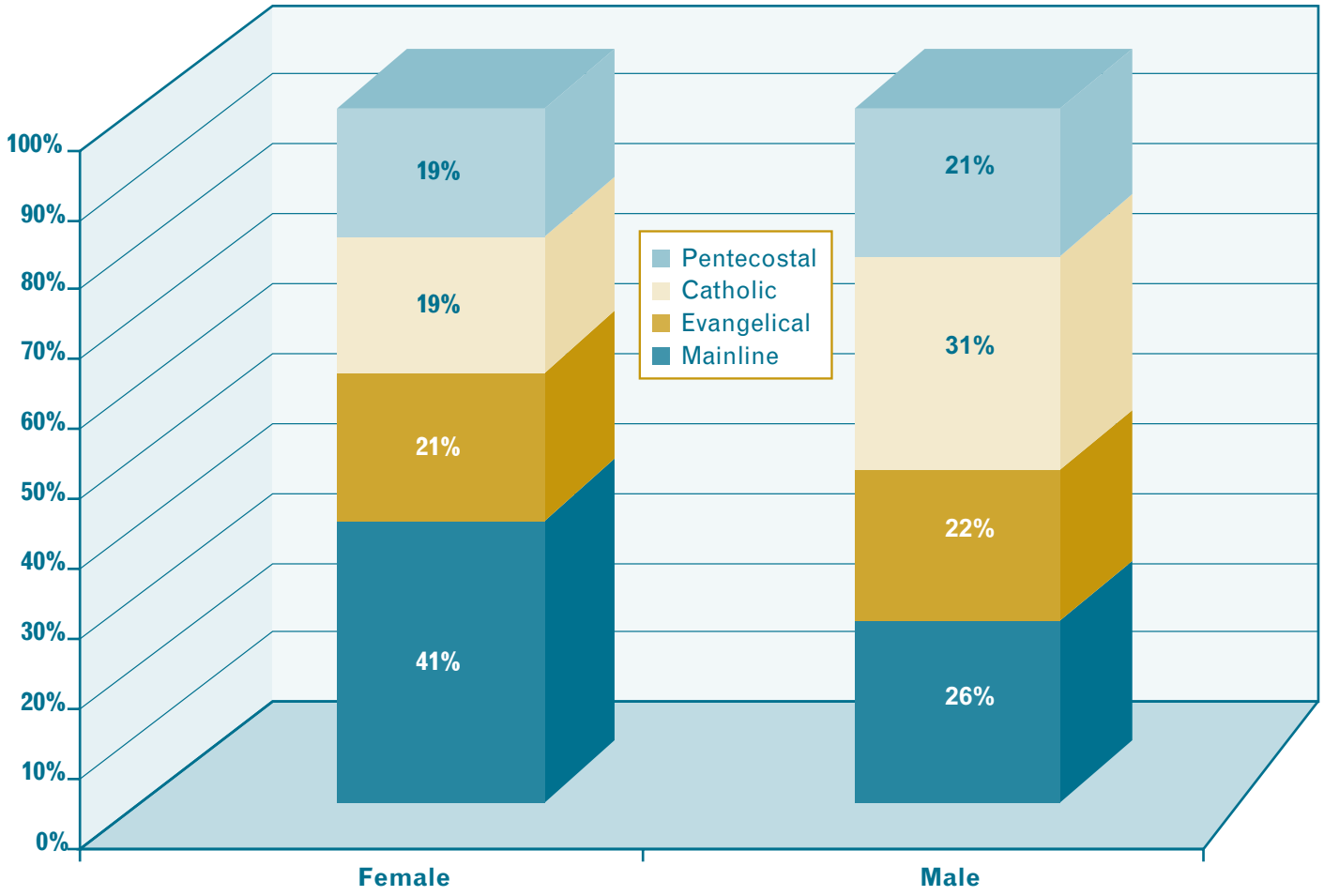
The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs,* collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

11 All of the denominations in the Mainline Protestant subgroup ordain women, while the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Baptist General Conference do not. Though some denominations in the Pentecostal and Evangelical subgroups (Assemblies of God, Foursquare, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance) do not formally prohibit women's ordination, the practice varies from congregation to congregation.

12 Since our survey was conducted among Latinos/as pursuing master's-level theological degrees, Catholic women in formation with a religious order would only have been captured if they were studying at this level, which is not a requirement for all orders nor for all members of a given community. Only 3 of the 29 female Catholics in our sample indicated that they are members of a religious order, and no respondent indicated that she planned to join one.

Figure 3

Comparison of Male and Female Latino/a Seminarians' Denominational Affiliations



Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey

understanding held in many of these communities that limits ordained ministry to men.

Age

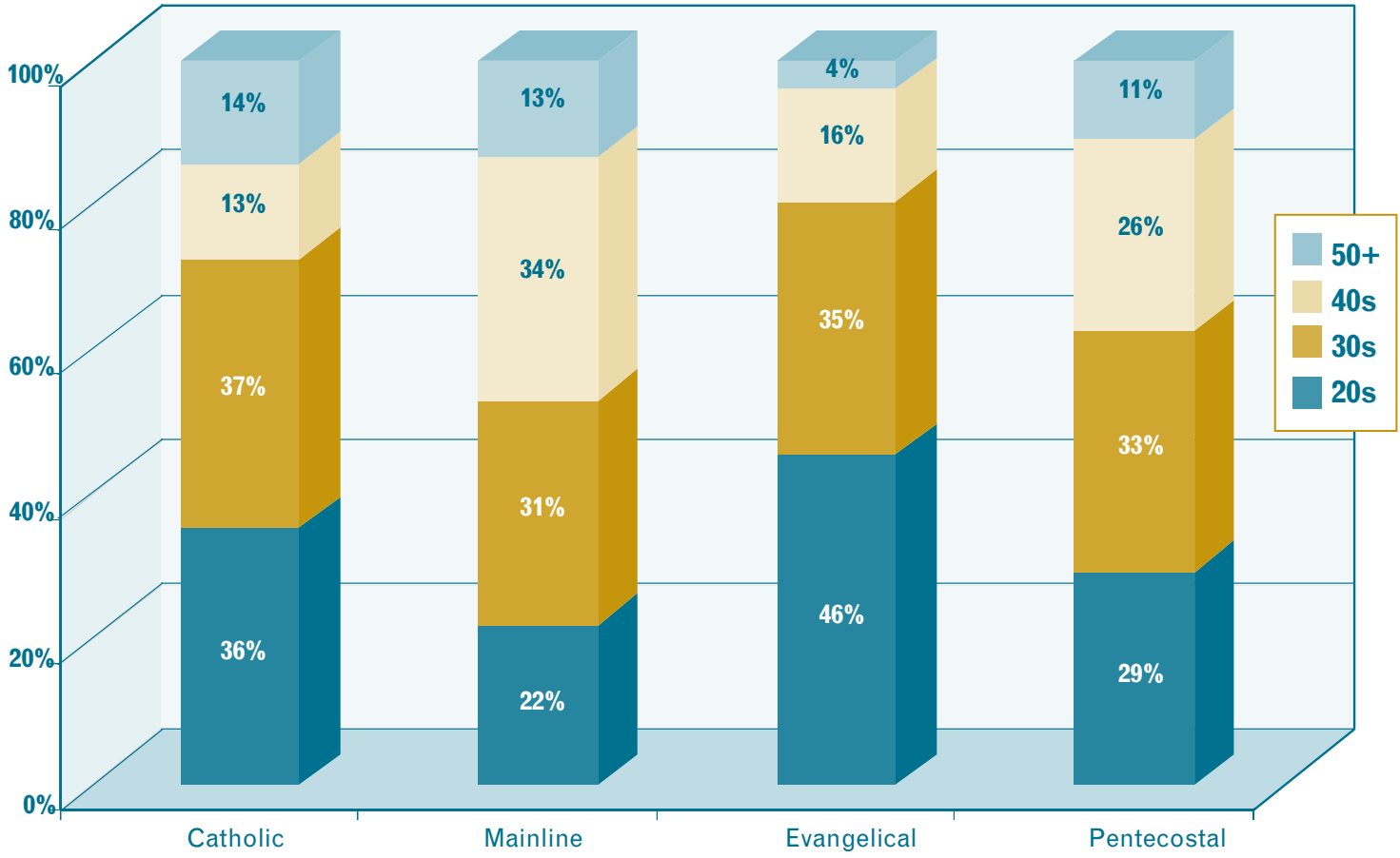
Latino/a seminarians are similar in age to their white non-Hispanic equivalents. The mean age of both our respondents and the white non-Hispanic Auburn respondents was 36 years old, making both the average Latino/a and the average white seminarian nearly five years younger than their African-American counterpart, who the Auburn survey shows is approximately 41 years old.

Among our four denominational subgroups, the Evangelical Latino/a seminarians are the youngest (average age of 33) and the Mainline Protestants the oldest (average age of 39), while the average age of the Catholic and Pentecostal Latino/a subgroups (36 years old) falls directly in between.

Figure 4 shows the age representation within each denominational grouping and illustrates that the Evangelicals and Catholics in our sample fall mostly under the age of 40, whereas the Mainline and Pentecostal Protestants have larger representations of older students in their midst.

Figure 4

Age Composition of Denominational Subgroups



Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey

Marital Status

As with their age, the marital status of Latino/a seminarians is similar to that of their white non-Latino/a equivalents. Slightly more than half (52 percent) of our sample and of the white Auburn survey respondents (53 percent) are married. By comparison, 44 percent of African Americans in seminary are married. As would be expected, Latino/a Protestant seminarians have much higher marital rates than Catholics—70 percent of both Mainline and Pentecostal Protestants and 63 percent of Evangelical Protestants are married, compared to just 13 percent of Catholics—a finding that directly relates to celibacy being a requirement for priesthood in the Catholic Church.

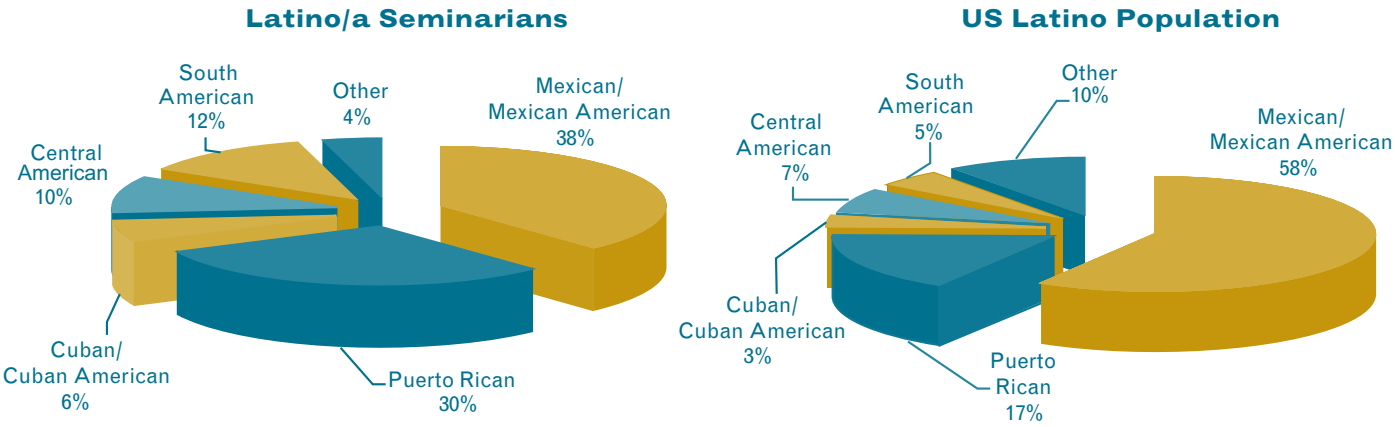
National Background, Citizenship, Generation in the United States, and Acculturation

The largest segment of our sample (38 percent) is of Mexican descent—21 percent identified as Mexican American and 17 percent as Mexican (Figure 5). By comparison, 59 percent of the US Latino population is of Mexican ancestry.[13] As Figure 5 shows, the Latino seminarian population contains considerably larger representations of both Puerto Ricans (30 percent)[14]

13 General US Latino population statistics are based on the US Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey and the Bureau's 2005 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

14 The high percentage of Puerto Ricans is due in part to our inclusion of seminarians enrolled at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, who account for 13 percent of our total sample. The remaining 17 percent of Puerto Ricans in our sample are studying in the mainland United States.

Figure 5
National Origins of Latino/a Seminarians and General US Latino Population



Sources: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey; 2005 American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey

and South Americans (12 percent) than found in the general US Latino population.

Our Catholic cohort most closely resembles the national background of the general US Latino population, with 58 percent indicating that they are Mexican or Mexican American (Figure 6). Though our findings suggest that the national backgrounds of the Mainline Protestant Latino seminary student body is the most at odds with the US Latino community at large, these numbers are affected by our inclusion of students at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, 79 percent of whom are Mainline Protestant.

The nativity of Latino/a seminarians is similar to that of the general US Latino population. The 2005 American Community Survey indicates that 40 percent (16.8 million) of the Latino population in the United States are foreign born, 57 percent are US born, and 3 percent were born in Puerto Rico. In comparison, 43 percent of our total sample are foreign born, 36 percent were born in the continental United States, and 21 percent were born in Puerto Rico.

A higher portion of Latino/a seminarians can be considered first-generation immigrants than the 43 percent who are foreign born, however. If we count island-born Puerto Ricans studying at mainland US institutions,[15] we see that a considerable majority (60 percent) of Latino/a seminarians are first-generation immigrants, while 13 percent are second generation (i.e., US-born of foreign- or Puerto Rican–born parents) and slightly more than a quarter (27 percent) are third generation (i.e., US born of US-born parents).

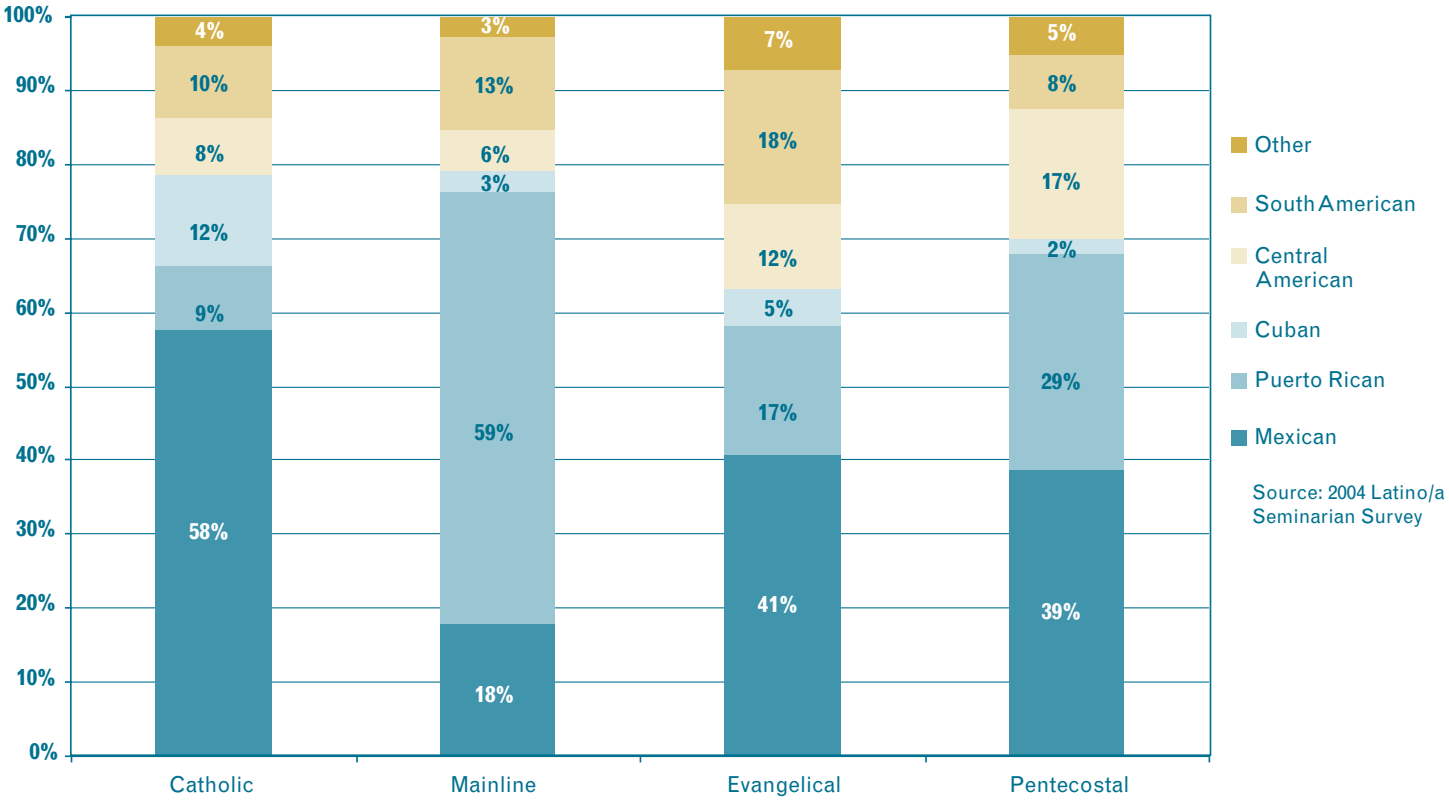
Some interesting differences exist between foreign-born, US-born, and Puerto Rican–born Latino/a seminarians studying on the mainland United States. As Table 2 shows, the foreign-born Latino seminarian student body is older and has a larger representation of men, Catholics, and people of Central and South American origin than found among the US born.

Our finding that only 20 percent of the foreign born are women might be due in part to our finding that Catholics are the most represented denominational subgroup among the foreign born (38 percent). Catholics are least represented among the Puerto Rican born (18 percent), the largest share of whom are Mainline Protestant (34 percent). The US born are nearly equally Evangelical (29 percent) and Catholic (28 percent), with slightly smaller representations of both Pentecostals (22 percent) and Mainline Protestants (21 percent).

15 Because of the significant cultural differences between the island of Puerto Rico and the mainland United States, native-born Puerto Ricans who live on the mainland are considered first-generation Americans.

Figure 6

National Origins of Latino/a Seminarians, shown by Students' Denomination



About the Researchers *continued from cover*

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Table 2 Demographic Comparison of Latino/a Seminarians, by Nativity Status

	Foreign Born	Puerto Rico Born	US Born
Age			
Median Age	36	35	30
20s	23%	31%	46%
30s	41%	39%	31%
40 or over	37%	31%	23%
Gender			
Female	20%	30%	34%
Male	80%	70%	66%
National Heritage			
Mexican	42%	2%	63%
Central American	21%	2%	2%
South American	25%	2%	4%
Puerto Rican	3%	90%	16%
Other	11%	4%	15%
Denomination			
Catholic	38%	18%	28%
Mainline	21%	34%	21%
Evangelical	23%	22%	29%
Pentecostal	18%	22%	22%
Acculturation			
Highly Acculturated	39%	50%	91%
Less Acculturated	61%	50%	9%

Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey

Though people of Mexican descent comprise the largest national heritage subgroup among the foreign born (42 percent), Central (21 percent) and South Americans (25 percent) are also considerably represented, particularly when compared to the US born (Table 2).

Not surprisingly, the greatest variance along nativity lines arose in the area of acculturation. This measure, based on language usage, was enlisted to get a sense of the manner in which our survey participants relate to the dominant, non-Latino American culture.[16]

Our findings show that 60 percent of Latino/a seminarians overall are highly acculturated, suggesting that they are comfortable negotiating English-dominant learning and social environments. In contrast, the less acculturated might encounter difficulty negotiating majority non-Spanish-speaking American society, including in the classroom and broader seminary life.

16 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), pp. 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.

Table 3 Percentage of Each Denominational Subgroup Who Are Foreign Born, Less Acculturated, and Non-US Citizens

	Catholic	Mainline	Evangelical	Pentecostal
Foreign Born	58%	31%	43%	39%
Less Acculturated	46%	27%	30%	42%
Not a US Citizen	37%	15%	27%	19%

Source: 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey

As might be expected, 91 percent of the US born are highly acculturated, compared to 50 percent of the Puerto Rican born and 39 percent of the foreign born. This is the one measure in which Puerto Rican–born seminarians studying on the mainland are closer to their foreign-born counterparts—a chief indication of why they can be considered first-generation immigrants.

Looking at denominational differences in the cultural indicators in our study (nativity, acculturation, and generation in the United States), we find that a higher portion of the Latino/a Catholic seminarian student body consists of foreign-born immigrants who identify with Spanish-dominant culture than is found in any of the three Protestant subgroups. As Table 3 shows, 58 percent of the Catholics in our sample are foreign born, 46 percent are less acculturated, and 37 percent are non-US citizens.

Summary and Conclusion

As the Latino population in the United States continues to increase, the need for trained and competent religious leaders is going to become even more important. Though the Latino portion of the US seminary population has risen over the past decades, at less than 4 percent of the entire ATS student body Latinos/as remain the most under-represented minority group in US seminaries and schools of theology.

Our findings point to some interesting cultural differences between Latino/a seminarians and the general US Latino population. Similar in age (average of 36 years old), marital status (just over half are married), and gender breakdown to white non-Hispanics, there are more than twice as many men as women in their ranks—a marked contrast to the gender trends found among Latino/a master's-level students in general.

Latino/a seminarians also mirror the broader seminary community in being primarily Protestant. Whereas 70 percent of US Latinos/as are estimated to be Catholic, only 28 percent of Latinos/as in seminary are Catholic. Mainline Protestants are particularly over-represented compared to the percentage of Latinos/as in general who identify as such. The under-representation of Latino/a Catholics in seminary is not surprising in light of the demands placed upon Catholic priests—including that they be both male and celibate—but does highlight a need to more vigorously cultivate Latinos/as considering ministerial vocations (both lay and ordained), which will only intensify as the Latino population continues to grow.[17]

The foreign-born Latino seminarian student body is older and has a larger representation of men, Catholics, and people of Central and South American origin than found among the US born. Further, six out of every ten foreign-born Latino/a seminarians and five out of every

17 Though estimates of what percentage of the US Catholic population is Latino vary, it is generally agreed that Latinos/as constitute the fastest growing segment of the Catholic Church. For example, a 2003 national survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that 28 percent of the adult Catholic population identifies as Hispanic/Latino or Spaniard (Mark M. Gray and Mary L. Gautier, "Latino/a Catholic Leaders in the United States," in *Emerging Voices,* op. cit. n.1). A study by *Fe y Vida, La Red* and the Southeast Pastoral Institute (SEPI) concluded that 41 percent of Catholics under the age of 30 are Hispanic (Kenneth G. Davis, Andrew Hernandez, and Philip E. Lampe, "Hispanic Catholic Leadership: Key to the Future," also in *Emerging Voices,* op. cit. n.1).

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ten Puerto Rican–born seminarians studying on the mainland United States are less acculturated, indicating that they are likely to experience difficulty negotiating majority non-Spanish-speaking American society, including in the classroom.

Like their denominational profile, Latino/a seminarians also vary from the general US Latino population in their national backgrounds. Though Mexicans comprise the largest single heritage in both populations, only 38 percent of Latino/a seminarians are of Mexican descent compared to 59 percent of the US Latino population. This warrants particular attention since all indicators suggest that Mexican Americans will continue to be the fastest growing segment of the Latino community.

Ensuring that the diversity of the Latino community is reflected in the leadership of American Christian congregations is critical for the health of both our religious communities and our broader public discourse. As debates over the shifting composition of the American population continue, the voices of Latino/a religious leaders need to be heard in the public square. Moreover, the church needs the diverse experiences and insights of all of its members to be reflected in its leadership. Having laid the groundwork for efforts to address the shortage of Latino/a seminarians in this report, the subsequent reports in this series will detail the attitudes and aspirations of Latino/a seminarians and the challenges that they face and identify ways to recruit and retain higher numbers of Latino/a seminarians.

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