

## About the Researchers

**Edwin I. Hernández**, a research fellow with the Center for the Study of Latino Religion, is foundations



research director at the DeVos Family Foundations. His current research includes an extensive survey of Latino congregations

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 "Answering the Call: How Latino Churches Can Respond to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic" and "Equipped to Serve: Latino/a Seminarians and the Future of Religious Leadership in the Latino/a Community."

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# Latino/a Seminarians' Evaluations of Their Institutions' Quality and Commitment to Diversity

## Introduction

The number of Latinos/as preparing for ministry in both Catholic and Protestant churches in the United States is vastly outpaced by the number of Latinos/as in the pews. Recognizing this gap, this series of *Latino Research @ ND* reports has investigated the backgrounds, vocational motivations, and institutional expectations of Latino/a seminarians<sup>1</sup> in order to identify ways in which schools of theology can adapt their institutional and academic cultures to better serve the upcoming generation of Latino/a religious leaders. In this fifth installment we investigate how Latino/a seminarians assess their schools on a variety of social, cultural, and academic factors and what this reveals about how effectively seminaries and graduate schools of theology are meeting the needs of their Latino/a students.

## About the Series

This is the fifth in a series of *Latino Research @ ND* reports focusing on Latinos/as and theological education. For information about the other reports in the series, go to [latinostudies.nd.edu/cs/r](http://latinostudies.nd.edu/cs/r).

<sup>1</sup> 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 the students in our sample study at institutions affiliated with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), an 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 those denominations. 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).

## 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.

## Evaluating Student and Academic Support Services for Latino/a Seminarians

Latino/a seminarians offer mixed reviews of their institutions' general student and academic services. On the positive side, more than three-quarters (78 percent) of our sample said both that “supportive services (counseling, career counseling) are adequately available to students” and that “there is a strong sense of community, a feeling of shared interests and purpose on campus.” More ambivalently, 56 percent agreed with the statement “there is an adequate job placement program at my institution” and 51 percent that “there is adequate financial assistance for Hispanic/Latino/a students.”

On many measures of academic and student life our respondents rated their institutions in similar ways to their non-Latino/a counterparts (Table 1).<sup>2</sup> As Table 1 shows, faculty and academic standards received considerably higher ratings from all three racial/ethnic groups than did community life, worship, and administrative services. Latinos/as differed from both non-Hispanic whites and African Americans only in their assessment of “opportunities for community service beyond the school” by being statistically less positive (21 percent rated their school as excellent in this area vs. 31 percent of whites and 30 percent of African Americans).

<sup>2</sup> All data on non-Hispanic white and African American seminarians throughout this report come from the Auburn survey whereas all data on Latinos/as come from the 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey. We do not compare our sample with the Latinos/as in the Auburn data set because of the low number of Latino/a respondents in the latter (see Data Sources and Methodology for more details).

Table 1  
Percentage of Seminarians Who Rated Their Institution “Excellent,” by Race/Ethnicity

	Latinos/as	African Americans	Non-Hispanic Whites
Faculty	61%	65%	63%
Academic standards	60%	70%	58%
Practical preparation for ministry	46%	53%	42%
Role models for religious leadership	38%	34%	42%
Spiritual formation/development	37%	38%	36%
Students	34%	34%	40%
Administrative services	30%	32%	28%
Worship	30%	33%	33%
Community life	23%	21%	24%
Opportunities for community service beyond the school	21%	30%	31%

Shaded areas indicate statistically significant differences between Latinos/as and other highlighted group(s).



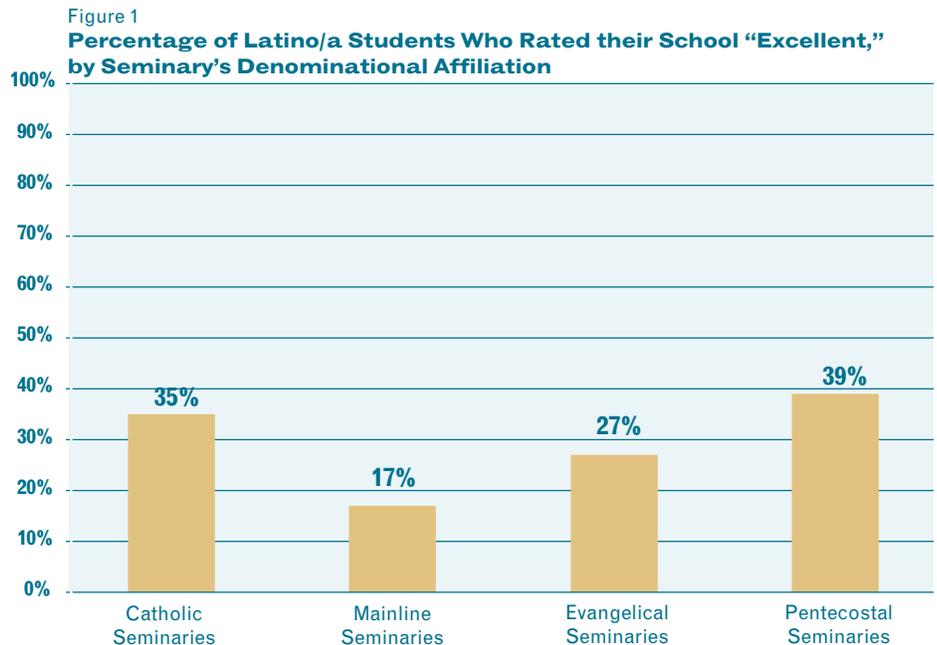
To further investigate how Latino/a seminarians evaluate their institutions, we created a scale of seminary quality that combined the variables in Table 1 with other related questions.<sup>3</sup> We found that 29 percent overall gave their school an excellent rating, and that doing so varied by the respondent's age.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the older a Latino/a seminarian, the more likely that he or she rated his or her seminary as excellent, with 52 percent of respondents aged 50 or older, 40 percent of those in their 40s, 26 percent of those in their 30s, and 19 percent of those in their 20s doing so.<sup>5</sup>

Students' assessments of their school's quality also varied by the denominational affiliation of the school, with students at Pentecostal (39 percent) and Catholic (35 percent) seminaries rating their institutions more

3 The seminary quality assessment score was based on ten measures of institutional life: 1) academic standards, 2) practical preparation for ministry, 3) faculty, 4) students, 5) administrative services, 6) worship, 7) community life, 8) opportunities for community service beyond the school, 9) role models for religious leadership, and 10) spiritual formation/development. Students ranked these measures on a four-point scale of poor, fair, good, and excellent. These measures had a standardized Cronbach alpha of .877. We consider students to have given an overall "excellent" rating of their seminary if the average of their responses was 3.5 or better (i.e., between "good" and "excellent").

4 Unless otherwise indicated, all findings reported as significant are so at  $p \leq .05$ . Ancillary analyses confirm that these differences persist when controlling for relevant individual variables (age, gender, marital status, acculturation, enrollment status) and institutional variables (their seminary's size, geographic location, and denominational affiliation).

5 The case numbers (Ns) for each age subgroup are: 163 persons in their 20s, 171 in their 30s, 117 in their 40s, and 55 persons aged 50 or older. For more detailed demographic information about our sample, see the first report in this series: "A Demographic Profile of Latino/a Seminarians," *Latino Research @ ND* Volume 4, Number 2, March 2007, Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.



highly than those at Evangelical (27 percent) and especially Mainline Protestant seminaries (17 percent; see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup>

## Role of Faculty in Latino/a Seminarians' Institutional Evaluations

Our findings reveal that the presence of available, responsive professors is one of the key indicators of institutional satisfaction among Latino/a seminarians. As Figure 2 shows, our survey respondents were generally quite positive about their seminary's faculty but less so about their awareness of Latino theology and culture (55 percent vs. over 80 percent on every other measure of faculty quality).<sup>7</sup>

As Figure 3 shows, Latino/a seminarians who positively assess their school's faculty on the above measures are more likely to rate their school as excellent than those who do not.<sup>8</sup>

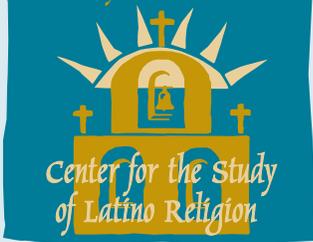
In addition to faculty availability, we also found that faculty investment in the lives of students directly relates to the latter's assessment of the seminary experience. Nearly a third of respondents with a faculty mentor (31 percent) rated their school as excellent compared to only 17 percent of those without one. Interestingly, the ethnicity of the faculty mentor made no difference in this measure in that the 129 respondents who reported having a Latino/a faculty mentor were no more likely to rate their school as excellent than the 163 with a non-Latino/a mentor.

6 In all, 21 of the institutions included in this analysis have formal or historic ties to Mainline Protestant denominations (from which there were 94 respondents), 17 to Evangelical communities (170 respondents), 5 to Pentecostal communities (51 respondents), and 19 to Roman Catholic dioceses or religious orders (131 respondents).

7 Throughout this paper, in situations where minority context is taken into consideration we omit students at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico (ESPR) from the analysis. Their large response rate and Latino majority environment could potentially skew results.

8 In the following analysis of how Latino/a seminarians' school ratings vary according to their evaluations of various measures of faculty, we have excluded "faculty" from our composite institutional excellence rating.

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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 [latinostudies.nd.edu/cslr](http://latinostudies.nd.edu/cslr).

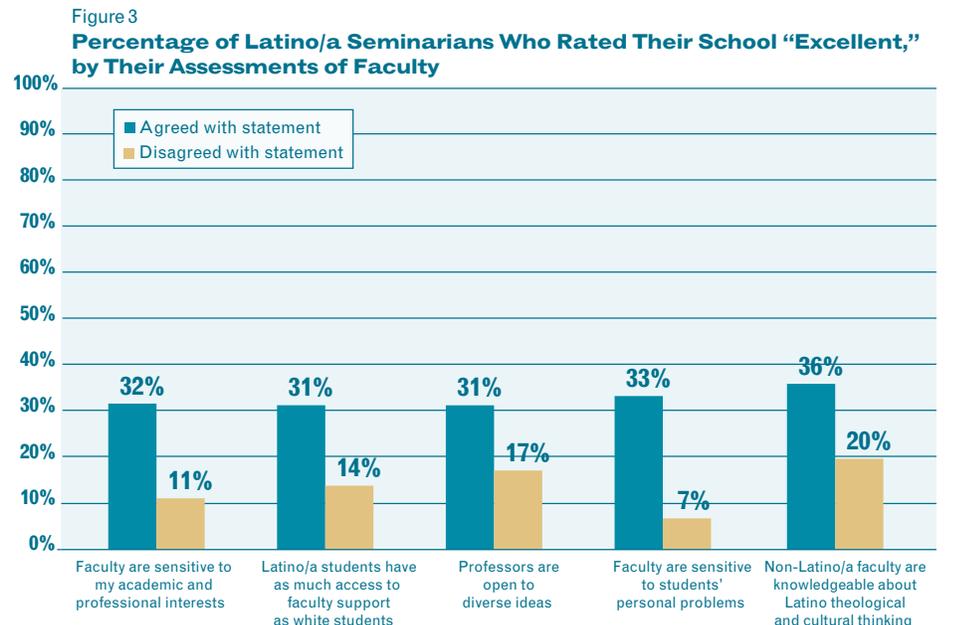
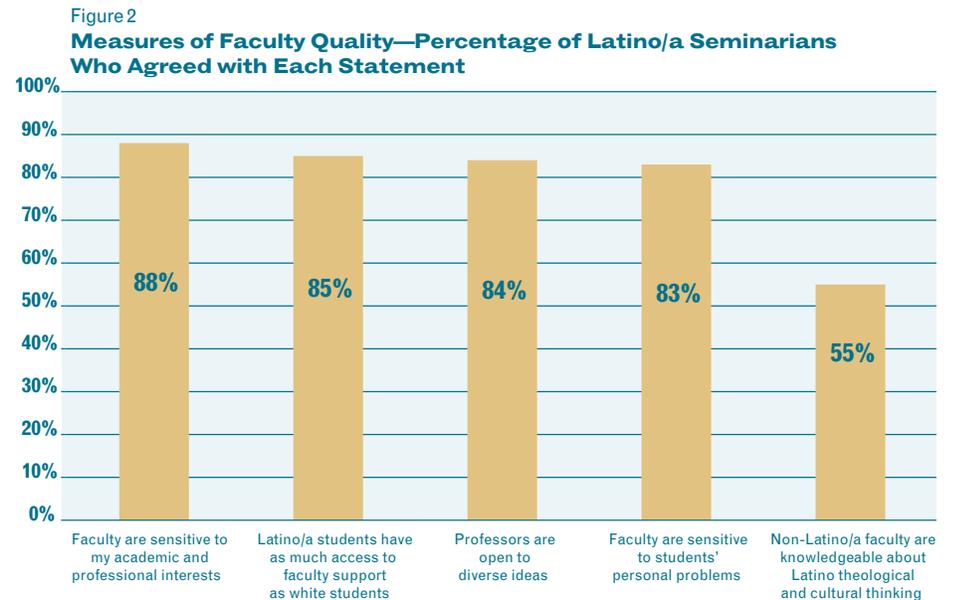


The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

## Do Seminaries Provide a Culture of Academic and Social Support for Latino/a Students?

Latino/a seminarians' assessments of their theological education also differ by how receptive and committed their institutions are toward diversity in general and Latino perspectives and culture in particular. Figure 4 shows how our respondents compare with non-Latino/a seminarians on some of these measures and illustrates that a relatively small minority (19 percent) of our sample reported having encountered overt racial discrimination at their schools<sup>9</sup> compared to nearly a third (32 percent) of African American

<sup>9</sup> Both our survey and the Auburn survey asked respondents to "indicate to what extent you agree or disagree" with the statements shown in Figure 4, using a four-point scale of strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree. To the statement "I have been discriminated against on the basis of race," 4 percent of our respondents strongly agreed and 15 percent somewhat agreed.



seminarians. Not surprisingly, on the other questions about receptivity to minority students and perspectives, Latino/a and African American seminarians' views match one another's more closely than those of their non-Hispanic white counterparts (Figure 4). Specifically, though large shares of both the African Americans and Latinos/as surveyed (79 percent and 78 percent respectively) said there is a supportive environment for minorities at their schools, fully 92 percent of white seminarians believed that their schools were supportive environments for non-whites. Non-Hispanic whites were also less likely to think that insufficient attention was paid to multicultural perspectives in the curriculum (27 percent) than both the Latinos/as (40 percent) and African Americans surveyed (43 percent).

In addition to the questions for which we have comparative data from the Auburn survey (see Figure 4), the 2004 Latino/a Seminarian Survey asked a series of more pointed questions about the climate in regard to diversity at their institutions. Our respondents in general were more positive about the general institutional culture at their schools (see Figure 5) than they were about the concrete presence of Latino perspectives and voices in the curriculum and academic environment (see Figure 6). Specifically, 80 percent agreed that "there is a welcoming environment for Latinos/as" and 90 percent that students of different racial/ethnic origins relate well to one another while only 39 percent indicated that "many Latino/a students feel like they do not 'fit in' on campus." The exception to these otherwise favorable reports is our finding that two-thirds (66 percent) of our

Figure 4  
Percentage of Seminarians Who Agreed with Each Measure of Institutional Exclusion, by Race/Ethnicity

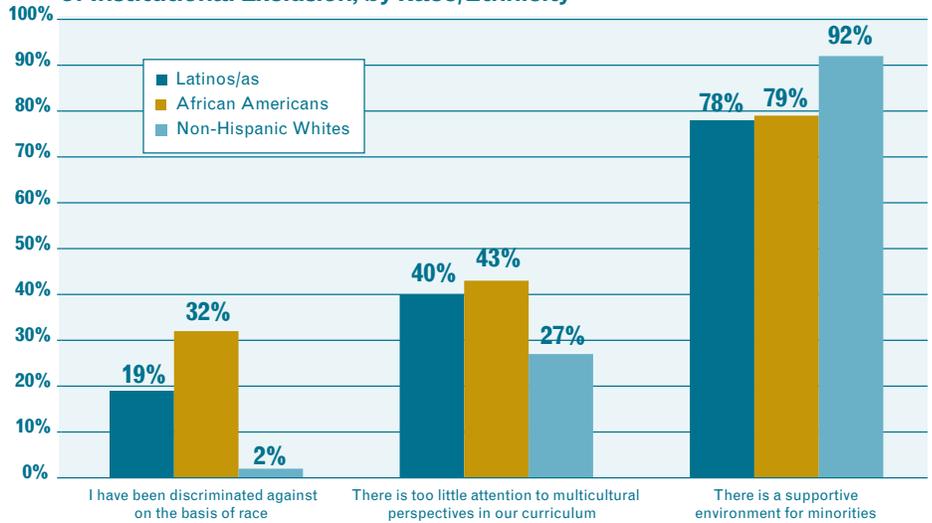


Figure 5  
Measures of Institutional Culture of Diversity—Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Agreed with Each Statement

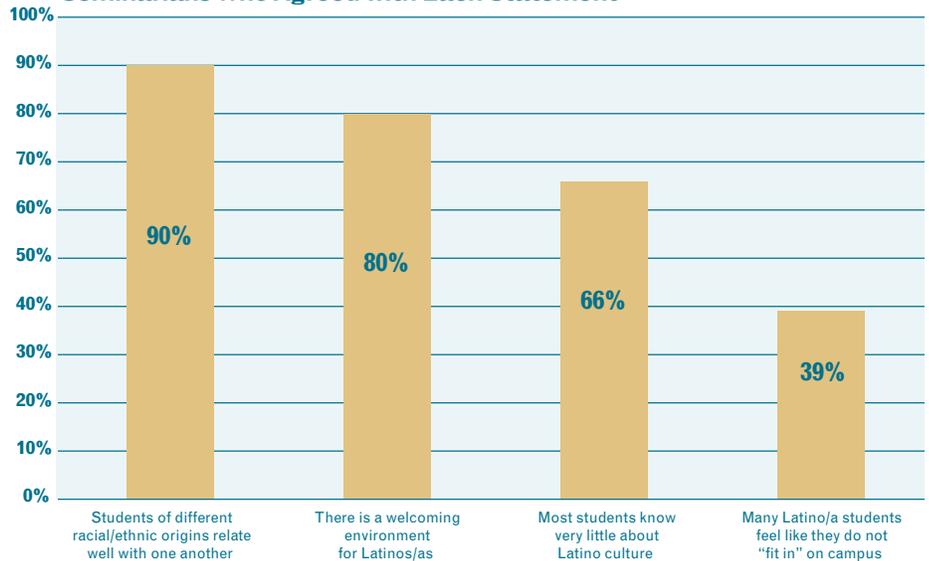


Figure 6  
Measures of Commitment to Diversity—Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Agreed with Each Statement

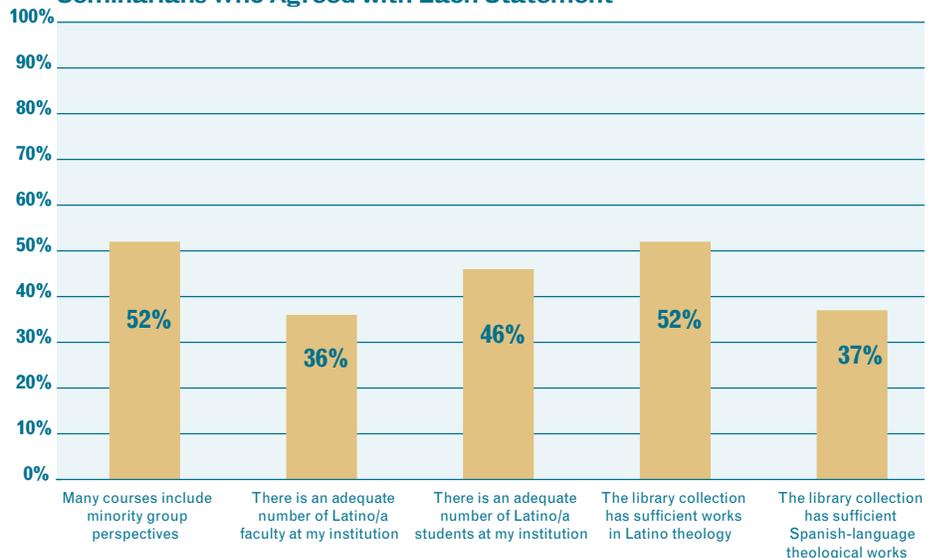


Figure 7  
**Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Rated Their School “Excellent,” by Measures of Institutional Culture of Diversity**

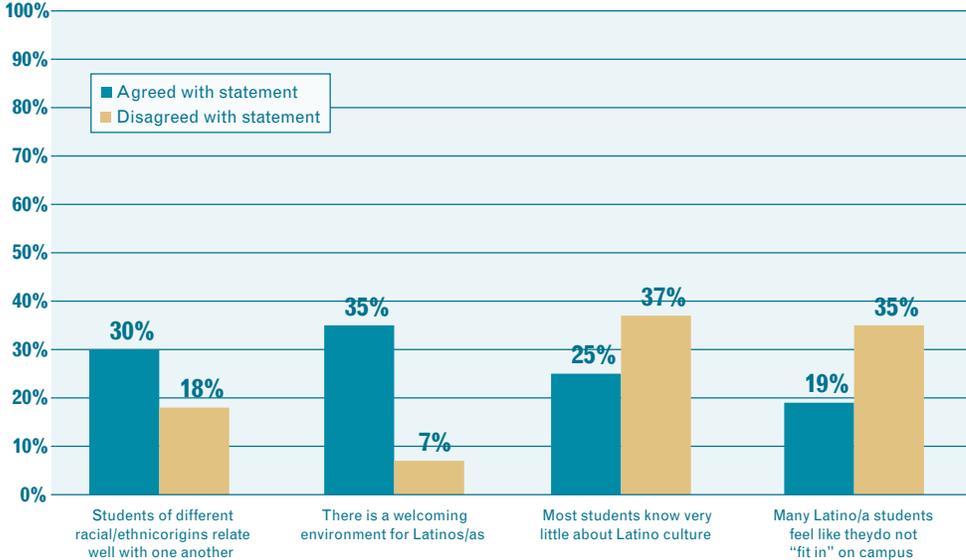
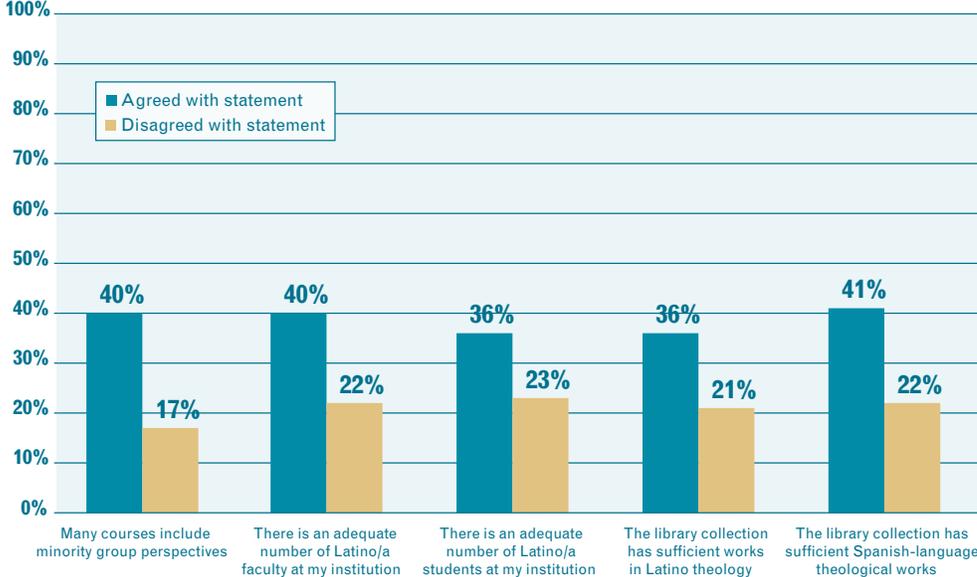


Figure 8  
**Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Rated Their School “Excellent,” by Measures of Commitment to Diversity**



sample said that most of their fellow students know very little about Latino culture.

In comparison to these generally positive reports of inclusive institutional cultures, our respondents were more negative about the representation of Latino voices and perspectives within the academic environment at their seminary. As Figure 6 shows, just over half (52 percent) said that the

curriculum is sufficiently inclusive of minority group perspectives and that there were enough Latino theology books in the library, and just 37 percent that there were enough Spanish-language theological works on campus. Moreover, only 46 percent said there are enough Latino/a students and only 36 percent enough Latino/a faculty at their school, neither of which is surprising given that fewer than

4 percent of both the student and faculty bodies among ATS schools in the United States are Latino/a.<sup>10</sup>

As with faculty investment in students, we found a close association between these assessments of the general culture and commitment to diversity and Latino/a seminarians’ assessment of their school’s quality. As Figures 7 and 8 illustrate, students who perceive their campus as difficult for Latino/a students to fit into are much less likely to give their school an excellent rating than those who have experienced the opposite.

So, too, lower percentages of students who reported having an inadequate representation of Latino/a faculty and theology at their school rated their school as excellent than those studying somewhere with a more evident presence of Latino perspectives and voices (Figure 8).

## Denominational Trends

In several places throughout this analysis of academic and social support, our respondents’ answers varied according to the denominational affiliation of the seminary they attended (see Figure 9). Latinos/as enrolled at Mainline Protestant seminaries reported having experienced racial discrimination at their schools and that “many Latino/a students feel like they do not ‘fit in’ on campus” at much higher rates than Latinos/as studying elsewhere. Conversely, Latinos/as attending Catholic seminaries were far less likely to report that most students at their school know very little

<sup>10</sup> The ATS Annual Data Tables for AY 2007 show that 123 of the 3,423 (or 3.59%) full-time faculty members in all of their US member schools that year were Hispanic. In AY 2003 (the year of our study) there were 104 full-time Hispanic faculty members who comprised 2.98% of full-time faculty at ATS schools in the United States. See [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu) for more details.



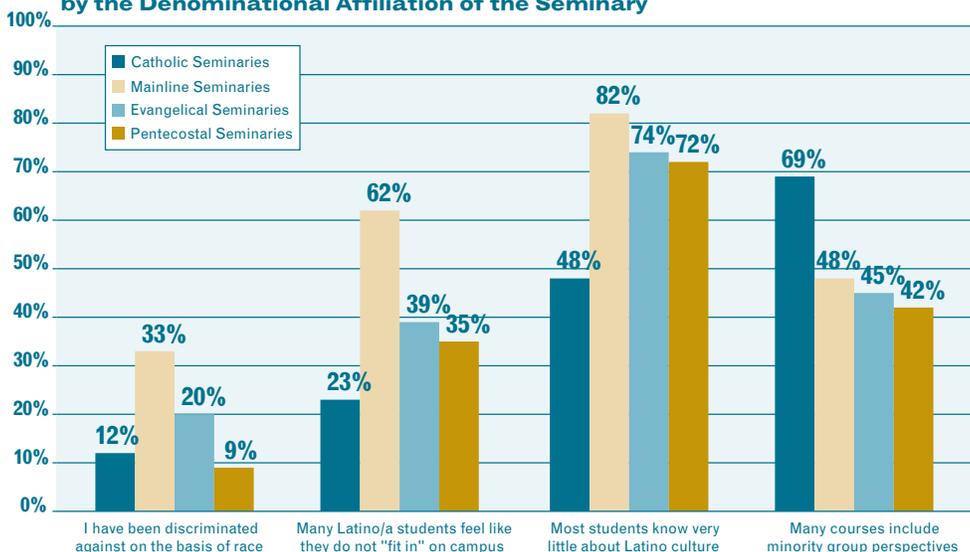
about Latino culture than students at Protestant seminaries of any kind and much more likely to say that minority perspectives were incorporated into many courses.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Latino/a seminarians offer mixed reviews of their institutions. While they are positive about the general climate in regard to diversity at their schools they are less so about how adeptly their schools have integrated and incorporated Latino perspectives into the curriculum and academic environment. The presence of attentive, available faculty members who are sensitive and receptive to Latino theology, culture, and perspectives makes a substantial difference in Latinos/as' experience of seminary, as does the inclusion of minority perspectives into the curriculum. Notably, though our respondents rate their professors quite highly overall, only just over a third think there are enough Latino/a faculty members at their school.

Latinos/as who attend Mainline Protestant institutions are considerably less satisfied with their schools than Latinos/as who attend Catholic or Pentecostal schools. They report higher rates of racial discrimination and of Latino/a students feeling like they do not "fit in" on campus and are more likely to say that most of their fellow students know very little about Latino culture. While our data do not illuminate why this is so, we suspect it reflects a gap between institutional intent and the cultural reality found at many Mainline seminaries. Many Mainline Protestant denominations

Figure 9  
Percentage of Students Who Agreed with Each Statement, by the Denominational Affiliation of the Seminary



have prioritized diversity and inclusion and have made considerable efforts to recruit minority students and faculty to their seminaries, but the institutional and academic cultures at such schools can be slower to transform.

Conversely, on many of these measures Latinos/as enrolled at Catholic seminaries are more positive than Latinos/as attending Protestant—particularly Mainline—institutions about their classmates' knowledge of Latino culture, Latino/a students feeling like they belong on campus, and the presence of minority perspectives in the classroom. This suggests that Catholic seminaries are doing a better job of serving their Latino/a students than Mainline Protestant schools in particular, and that non-Latino/a Catholic seminarians are more attuned and thus receptive to the cultural and religious experiences of their Latino/a classmates.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following:

- Teachers in all disciplines need to be encouraged to incorporate Latino and other minority perspectives into their classrooms as part of a concerted effort to change the institutions' assumption about who is in their churches and what experiences and values matter.
- Administrators and personnel who work with student life need to seek ways to incorporate Latino religious and cultural expressions into the spiritual and social life of the school, not only for the sake of the Latino/a students in their midst but also to educate non-Latino/a seminarians about the experiences and culture of the Latinos/as they will serve.
- Mainline institutions in particular need to examine how their academic, spiritual, and social cultures welcome or isolate Latinos/as and other minority students so that the reality within their schools matches their intended commitment to diversity.
- Schools need to recruit more Latino/a faculty, and faculty of all backgrounds need encouragement to take an active interest in Latino theology and culture and in their Latino/a students.

## About the Researchers *continued from cover*

**Milagros Peña** is the director of the Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research and associate professor of sociology and women's studies at the University of Florida. She is author of *Latina Activists across Borders: Women's Grassroots Organizing in Mexico and Texas*, *Theologies and Liberation in Peru: The Role of Ideas in Social Movements*, and *Punk Rockers' Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender*. Recent publications also include "Latinas, Border Realities, Empowerment, and Faith-based Organizations," published in 2003 in the *Handbook for the Sociology of Religion*, and "Encountering Latina Mobilization: Lessons from Field Research on the US-Mexico Border," published in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*.

**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

leadership. Her publications include *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success* and *Diversifying the Faculty: A Guidebook for Search Committees*. Turner received her doctorate in administration and policy analysis from the Stanford University School of Education.

**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.

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Institute for Latino Studies

230 McKenna Hall  
Notre Dame, IN 46556-5685

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