

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."

continued on page 7

The authors wish to thank The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation for funding the research and writing of this report.

Finding the Right Seminary: Influences on Institutional Choice, Expectations, and Satisfaction among Latino/a Seminarians

Introduction

Latino/a seminarians' pursuit of graduate theological education is a complex negotiation of commitments to vocational call, denominational expectations, and family and community relationships.¹ With over 250 accredited graduate institutions and numerous unaccredited options to choose from, prospective seminarians must adjudicate how well individual institutions will address their particular concerns and life situations.

This report identifies key factors that influence Latino/a seminarians' choice of educational institution and whether students feel that their

¹ 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 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.

About the Series

This is the fourth 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 <http://latinostudies.nd.edu/cslr>.

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.

institutional expectations are being met. We find that Latino/a seminarians share many of the same concerns as their white and especially African American counterparts for a theologically compatible, quality education without undue financial burden. Though they are generally satisfied with the institutions they choose to attend, there is a pronounced gap between the importance ascribed to finances in choosing one's seminary and the adequacy of the financial aid one's institution offers.

Factors in Seminary Choice

To ascertain what Latinos/as look for in a seminary, we asked survey participants to rate the level of importance that a variety of factors played in choosing to attend their institution (Table 1).² Like their non-Latino/a counterparts, Latinos/as in our sample rated a school's reputation for educational quality most highly among the variables.³ However, at 51 percent and 52 percent, respectively, Latino/a and African American seminarians were statistically more likely to say their school's educational reputation had played a very important role in deciding to attend there compared to white non-Hispanic seminarians, 41 percent of whom said this was very important to their seminary choice (Table 1). As Table 1 shows, this factor was closely followed by the theological position of the school, which 46 percent of Latino/a seminarians deemed very important to their choice—a significantly higher percentage than found among African American seminarians (36 percent). Latino/a and white non-Hispanic seminarians prioritized their school's denominational affiliation at similar rates (42 percent

² Respondents rated the level of importance for each characteristic on a four-point scale of not important, somewhat important, important, and very important.

³ All data on white non-Hispanic and African American seminarians in this report come from the Auburn survey.

Table 1
Factors Rated as "Very Important" to Seminary Choice, by Race/Ethnicity

	Latinos/as	White non-Hispanics	African Americans
School's Reputation for Educational Quality	51%	41%	52%
School's Theological Position	46%	37%	36%
School's Denominational Affiliation	42%	41%	27%
Financial Considerations	37%	24%	43%
Availability of Specialized Programs	30%	17%	24%
Faculty Member(s)	30%	19%	31%
Direction from Religious Authorities	29%	13%	19%
Convenience of Location	21%	28%	19%
Information Provided by Seminary Recruitment Officer	17%	9%	26%

Shaded boxes within each row indicate statistical significant ($p \leq .05$) differences between Latinos/as and the other shaded group(s).



Table 2

**“How important were the following factors in your decision to attend this institution?”
Percentage Indicating “Very Important,” by Denomination**

	Catholic	Mainline	Evangelical	Pentecostal
School’s Reputation for Educational Quality**	41%	55%	49%	61%
School’s Theological Position**	41%	43%	55%	49%
School’s Denominational Affiliation***	54%	36%	54%	21%
Financial Considerations***	29%	40%	36%	45%
Availability of Specialized Programs	27%	29%	35%	33%
Faculty Member(s)**	24%	30%	26%	40%
Direction from Religious Authorities***	46%	22%	29%	15%
Convenience of Location***	14%	31%	17%	22%
Recruitment Information/Officer*	20%	16%	11%	22%

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

and 41 percent, respectively) compared to only 27 percent of African American seminarians.

Other studies have demonstrated the rising concern over the cost of theological education.⁴ According to our data and those provided by the Auburn survey, financial considerations play a more dominant role in seminary choice for non-white seminarians than it does for white non-Hispanics. Roughly two out of five respondents in both our sample (37 percent) and among the African Americans surveyed by Auburn (43 percent) indicated that financial considerations were very important in their decision to attend their seminary, compared to just under a quarter (24 percent) of white non-Hispanic seminarians (Table 1).

The presence of specialized programs was an important

4 The Center for the Study of Theological Education has published three such relevant studies: “Lean Years Fat Years,” by Anthony Ruger (December 1994), “Manna from Heaven,” by Anthony Ruger and Barbara G. Wheeler (April 1995), and “The Gathering Storm,” by Anthony Ruger, Sharon L. Miller, and Kim Maphis (September 2005). All three are available at www.auburnsem.org/study.

selection criterion for significantly higher percentages of Latinos/as (30 percent) than of white non-Hispanics (17 percent). Latino/a seminarians also rated direction from religious authorities more highly (29 percent) than African American (19 percent) or white non-Hispanic (13 percent) seminarians, quite possibly because a higher percentage of Latinos/as in seminary are Catholic than among either whites or African Americans (28 percent compared to 13 percent of white non-Hispanics and 7 percent of African Americans), and religious superiors play a considerably greater role in determining where Catholics preparing for ordained ministry attend than religious leaders in most Protestant communities.

Latino/a seminarians varied according to their denominational affiliation in the level of importance they ascribed to some of these factors of institutional choice (Table 2). Significantly higher percentages of Catholics and Evangelicals (54 percent

of each) said that a school’s denominational affiliation was very important in their choice of school compared to 36 percent of Mainline Protestants and just 21 percent of Pentecostals.⁵ Financial considerations weighed most heavily on Pentecostal Latino/a seminarians (45 percent said these had played a very important role in their choice of institution) especially in comparison to Latino/a Catholics, 29 percent of whom rated them as “very important.” Though the institution’s educational reputation was rated by relatively high percentages of all

5 The case numbers (Ns) for each denominational subgroup are: 106 Pentecostals, 109 Evangelicals, 158 Mainline Protestants, and 142 Catholics. 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’; and the American Baptist Churches USA, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America, and Metropolitan Community Church are considered ‘Mainline.’

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 <http://latinostudies.nd.edu/csrl>.



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).

four denominational subgroups, Pentecostals rated its importance at the highest rate (61 percent) and Catholics the lowest (41 percent). In contrast, Catholics were overwhelmingly more likely to flag the role of religious authorities in their decision of seminary (46 percent) compared to just 29 percent of Evangelicals, 22 percent of Mainline Protestants, and 15 percent of Pentecostals.

Some of the differences between our Catholic and Protestant respondents on these variables of school choice also apparently relate to the comparatively greater role that religious authorities play in determining where Catholics preparing for ordination go to seminary and the correspondingly smaller amount of choice they have over such matters in comparison with Protestants. Indeed, when comparing the 67 percent of Latino/a Catholics in our sample who are on an ordination track with the 33 percent who are not,⁶ we found that lay Latino/a Catholics in seminary align more closely with their Protestant counterparts in many of these factors. Specifically, among Latino/a Catholics, lay respondents were much less likely to say that direction from religious authorities had been very important in their decision of school than those preparing for the priesthood (26 percent vs. 58 percent, respectively), or that their school's denominational affiliation was very important (37 percent vs. 63 percent). Latino/a Catholics preparing for the priesthood were also less likely to say that financial considerations had played a critical role in their deliberations (21 percent vs. 43 percent of the lay Catholics in our sample), reflecting the reality that Catholic clergy in training often have their education paid for.

Regarding the importance of "convenience of location," we found that older Latino/a seminarians were considerably more likely than their younger counterparts to rate this as important, even when controlling for denominational affiliation. The rate of saying this was "very important" to one's choice of institution increases with every decade, with only 16 percent each of seminarians in their 20s and 30s rating it such, compared to 24 percent of those in their 40s and 36 percent of those aged 50 or older.⁷ This is possibly related to older students requiring more social and geographical stability for their families. Age is thus a likely contributing factor in our finding that Mainline Protestants were the most likely of the four denominational subgroups to rate the location of their seminary as having been highly important in their school selection (see Table 2), given that they are an older student body than the other three denominational subgroups (47 percent are 40 or older vs. 37 percent of Pentecostals, 27 percent of Catholics, and 20 percent of Evangelicals).

⁶ In comparison, 82 percent of Mainline, 69 percent of Evangelical, and 64 percent of Pentecostal Protestants are or plan to be ordained. For more about how Latino/a seminarians vary in their vocational goals, see the third report in this series: "Latino/a Seminarians' Vocational Motivations and Views about the Church's Role in Society," *Latino Research@ND* Volume 4, Number 7, September 2007, Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

⁷ The 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.



Are Institutional Expectations Being Met?

Our findings indicate that Latino/a seminarians' expectations of their institutions of choice are generally being met. In several places we found a correspondence between students reporting that a certain factor was "very important" in their decision to attend their seminary and the likelihood that they rated their school highly in that area. For example among those who indicated that a school's academic reputation was "very important," 75 percent rated their institution's academic quality "excellent."⁸ Conversely, among students for whom educational reputation was less important, far fewer (47 percent) rated their school's academic quality as "excellent."

This positive correlation between expectation and reality is also evident among those who reported that a school's theological position was a factor in their choice, but chiefly among students who identified themselves as conservative. To begin with, a higher percentage of students who described themselves as conservative (51 percent) than of those who identified themselves as liberal (39 percent) indicated that the theological position of their school was "very important" in their decision to attend there. Correspondingly, among students for whom a school's theological position was critical, 45 percent chose seminaries they consider conservative compared to 25 percent who said their school was "middle-of-the-road," 13 percent "diverse," and 17 percent "liberal." In fact, 79 percent of conservatives who indicated that the theological position of their school was important ended up at institutions they perceived as conservative, compared to only 47 percent of liberals in a similar position. These relationships suggest that theological conformity is particularly consequential for conservatives.

Latino/a seminarians who prioritized denominational affiliation in their school choice also tended to enroll at seminaries within their denominational subgroup. As Table 3 shows, of the 42 percent of our overall sample for whom denominational affiliation factored highly in their decision, 89 percent attend schools that align with their denominational identities. Nearly all of the Catholic and Evangelical students for whom a school's denominational

⁸ Respondents rated their institution's academic quality on a four-point scale of poor, fair, good, and excellent.

Table 4
Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Enrolled at a Seminary of Their Denominational Subgroup

	Catholic Seminaries (N=19)	Mainline Seminaries (N=21)	Evangelical Seminaries (N=18)	Pentecostal Seminaries (N=5)
Catholic Students	84%	11%	0%	6%
Mainline Students	1%	61%	35%	3%
Evangelical Students	2%	10%	86%	2%
Pentecostal Students	8%	9%	45%	39%
TOTAL SAMPLE	29%	21%	38%	11%

affiliation was very important—the same two subgroups with the highest rates of students indicating such (see Table 2)—enrolled in schools of their denominational ilk (92 percent of Catholics and 95 percent of Evangelicals, respectively; see Table 3). Our finding that a comparatively smaller percentage of Pentecostals for whom a school's denominational affiliation was very important are enrolled in Pentecostal schools (70 percent) is likely related to the reality that there are comparatively few formally accredited Pentecostal seminaries or schools of theology in the United States.⁹ We found that

Table 3
Percentage of Students for Whom a School's Denominational Affiliation Was "Very Important" Enrolled at a Seminary of Their Denominational Subgroup

Catholic Students	92%
Mainline Students	83%
Evangelical Students	95%
Pentecostal Students	70%
TOTAL SAMPLE	89%

nearly all of the Pentecostal students who really cared about their school's denominational ties but are not attending Pentecostal seminaries are enrolled in Evangelical institutions (95 percent, or all but 5 percent of these respondents, see Table 3), which suggests that for these students Evangelical institutions are

⁹ Our sample includes students from five different Pentecostal seminaries, and according to ATS member school statistics there are only six in the whole country.

theologically and culturally compatible.

Looking at how individual and institutional denominational identity line up for our entire sample, we find that higher rates of Mainline and Pentecostal students overall are enrolled in seminaries outside of their direct denominational subgroup (Table 4). Over a third (35 percent) of Mainline Latino/a seminarians and 45 percent of Pentecostal seminarians are studying at Evangelical seminaries. These findings correspond with the relatively low import that Mainline and Pentecostal Latino/a seminarians ascribe to a school's denominational ties (see Table 2) and a degree of theological flexibility toward Evangelical institutions among both groups.

The connection between a student's institutional expectations and their evaluation of their school of choice is also evident among Latino/a seminarians for whom faculty really matter. Specifically, among the 64 percent of Latino/a seminarians who said that the faculty was a very important factor in choosing their institution, 79 percent indicated that their school's faculty was "excellent."¹⁰ Comparatively, among students for whom faculty quality was not as important only 46 percent deemed their faculty excellent (Figure 1). Moreover, these faculty-

Figure 1
Relationship between Saying Faculty Were Very Important to Seminary Choice and Relevant Evaluations of Current Institution

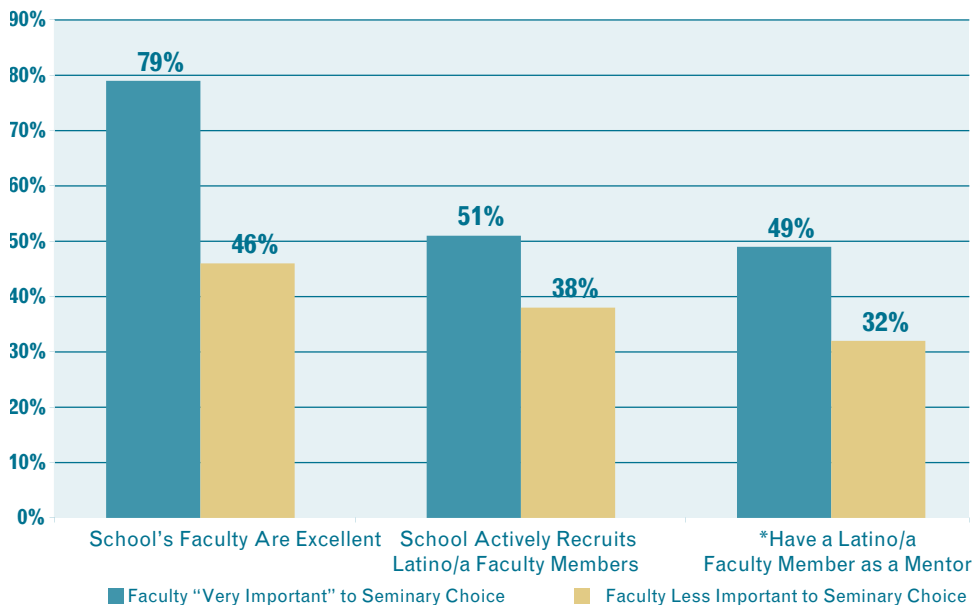
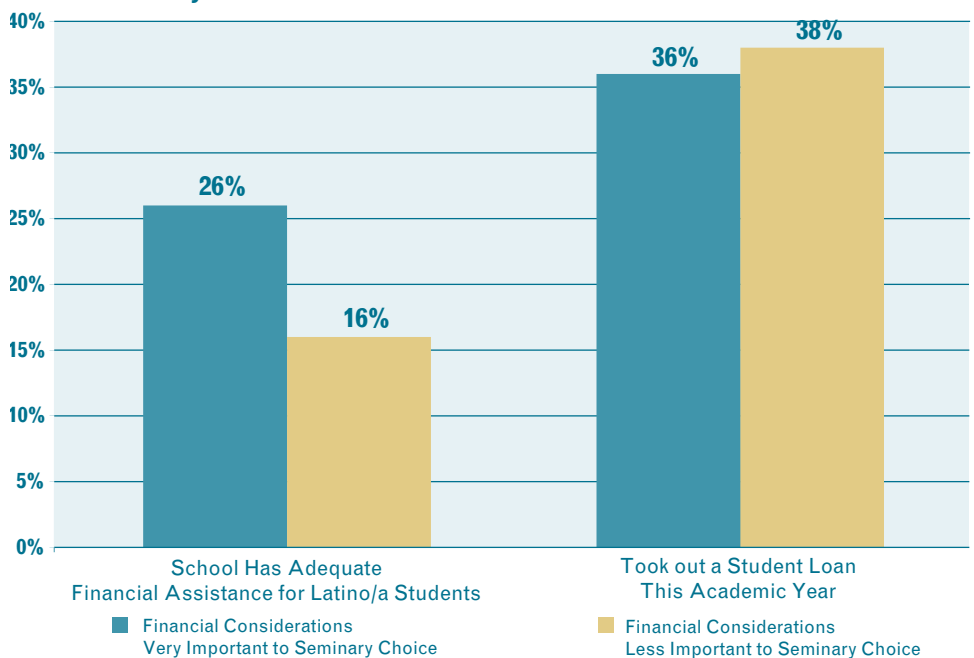


Figure 2
Relationship between Saying Financial Considerations Were Very Important to Seminary Choice and Relevant Education-Related Financial Variables



concerned students were more likely to attend schools they felt actively recruit Latino/a faculty members (51 percent vs. 38 percent of students who rated faculty as being of less import to their decision). We also found a positive correlation between the importance of faculty in school choice and whether a student reported having a Latino/a faculty member as a mentor. Specifically, a higher percentage of students for whom a school's faculty was a very important factor in their choice of school (49 percent) indicated that they had a Latino mentor than did those for whom faculty were less

¹⁰ For analysis of the importance of Latino/a faculty members, specifically, to Latino/a seminarians see: "Equipped to Serve: Latino/a Seminarians and the Future of Religious Leadership in the Latino Community." Research Report, Vol. 2006.3 (October), Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.



important to their decision (32 percent).

Thus overall, it appears that Latino/a seminarians' expectations for their institutions of choice are largely being met in that they consistently give a favorable assessment of institutional performance in the areas they indicate were important in their choice of school prior to enrollment.

However, contrary to the positive associations between student priorities and their assessments of their institutions' academic excellence, theological orientation, and faculty quality, students who considered financial issues very important to their institutional choice were statistically no more likely to have found a school with adequate

financial aid. Specifically, of the 37 percent of our sample who said that financial considerations were very important to their choice of seminary, 26 percent said their seminary offered adequate financial assistance for Latino/a students vs. 16 percent of those for whom finances played a less significant role in their decision (Figure 2). Moreover, they were no less likely to have taken out a student loan than students for whom finances were less important (36 percent vs. 38 percent of students who ranked financial considerations as less important to their choice), indicating that though money was a critical matter in their institutional discernment they still could not pursue theological training without accruing loan debt.

Conclusion and Discussion

In selecting a school Latino/a seminarians care most about its reputation for academic excellence, and are more likely to say this was a very important factor in their choice than are white non-Hispanic seminarians. They also highly rank its theological position and denominational affiliation in their decision process. Conservative students are particularly concerned with a seminary's theological position, and Catholics and Evangelicals with a school's denominational affiliation. In contrast, substantial percentages of Latino/a Pentecostal and Mainline students enroll in Evangelical seminaries, which suggests a degree of theological

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.

Conclusion and Discussion *continued from page 7*

and cultural ease between these communities. Finances, specialized programs, and faculty also figure highly in their deliberations and Latino/a seminarians rank these as important at higher rates than their white non-Hispanic equivalents.

In general, Latinos/as in seminary are satisfied with their seminaries' performances in the key categories that drew them to their particular school.

This is especially true for those who prize academic excellence, those who value a conservative theological stance, and those who care about the quality of the faculty. The exception in this trend of met expectations surrounds the availability of financial aid. Students who reported that financial issues were a critical factor in their institutional choice were not significantly more likely to say that their school provided adequate financial aid and were

as likely to accrue student loan debt as students who did not rank financial considerations as highly. This finding highlights the importance for denominations and congregations to prioritize financial assistance for Latino/a seminarians in order to ensure that seminary is a financially viable option that does not overburden its graduates with student loan debt.

Latino Research @ ND is produced by the Communications Group of the Institute for Latino Studies. To view this document electronically, with live links to further information and topics of related interest, go to <http://latinostudies.nd.edu/pubs>. For more information call the Institute at (574) 631-4440 or toll free at (866) 460-5586 or email latino@nd.edu.

INSTITUTE for

Latino Studies



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

Institute for Latino Studies

230 McKenna Hall

Notre Dame, IN 46556-5685

Return Service Requested