

What Can Seminaries Do to Prepare Their Students for Ministry in the Latino Community?

Introduction

As custodians of the next generation of pastors and lay religious leaders, seminaries and graduate schools of theology must constantly adapt their programming to keep up with the changing needs of the churches and communities their students will go on to serve. The ongoing growth of the Hispanic population in both Catholic and Protestant congregations has spurred such institutions to evaluate their curricula and general academic cultures to identify how to best prepare ministers for service to and with Latinos/as. This final report in a series investigating the experiences of Latino/a seminarians explores which institutional practices and programs help ensure that these future ministers are prepared to be effective leaders in the church.

How Well Are Seminaries Preparing Latino/a Students for Ministry in the Latino Community?

In general, Latino/a seminarians¹ have a positive view of the education they are receiving. When asked to rate their school's quality in terms of "practical

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 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.

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About the Series

This is the sixth 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/cslr.

About the Researchers

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in Chicago and a comprehensive study of religious congregations in Grand Rapids, Michigan. 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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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.

preparation for ministry,” 45 percent of our sample selected “excellent” and 40 percent “good,” while just 12 percent said “fair” and 3 percent “poor.” The majority of our survey respondents also indicated that their seminaries are effectively preparing them for service in the Latino community. Eight in ten (80 percent) agreed that “theological education gives me tools to understand and better serve the Latino community,” while only three in ten (31 percent) indicated that “the more time I spend in graduate education the more distant I become from the Hispanic/Latino community.”²

On this latter question, Latinos/as enrolled at Catholic seminaries were much less likely to say that seminary was creating a wedge between them and the Latino community than those studying at Protestant seminaries, especially Mainline Protestant-affiliated ones³ (see Figure 1). These differences persisted even after controlling for relevant demographic and institutional variables,⁴ which suggests that Catholic seminaries are doing a better job than Mainline Protestant institutions in establishing connections to the Latino community, possibly because of the comparatively low number of Latinos/as in Mainline communities.⁵

2 To these and all other statements analyzed in this report (unless otherwise described) respondents were asked: “Thinking about your current seminary program, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement” using a four-point scale of strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree. Unless otherwise noted, we combined ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’ into a single ‘Agree’ category for analytical purposes.

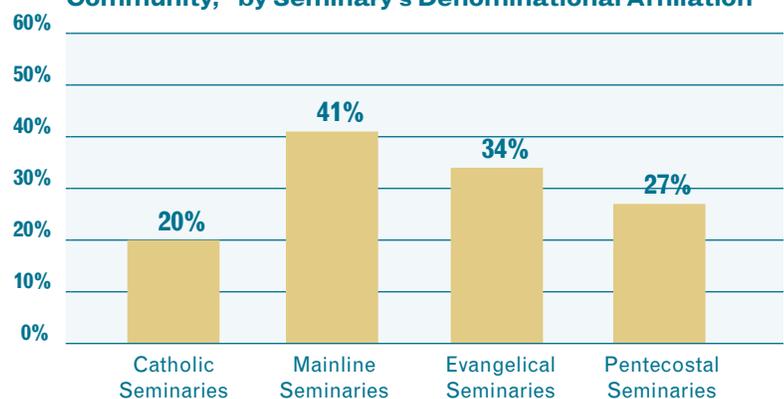
3 Our sample includes 19 Roman Catholic seminaries (from which there were 131 respondent), 21 Mainline Protestant seminaries (with 94 respondents), 17 Evangelical seminaries (with 170 respondents), and 5 Pentecostal seminaries (with 51 respondents).

4 Throughout this section 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 (age, gender, acculturation, generation, marital status, enrollment status, and degree track) and institutional variables (a seminary's denominational affiliation, geographic location, percent of the student body that is Latino/a, overall student body size, and whether or not they have an MA track in Hispanic ministry).

5 The Hispanic Churches in American Public Life survey found that just 4

Figure 1

Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Said “The More Time I Spend in Graduate Education, the More Distant I Become from the Hispanic/Latino Community,” by Seminary’s Denominational Affiliation



Latinos/as studying at Mainline seminaries were comparatively positive about how well their seminary is training them for Hispanic ministry. As Figure 2 shows, 82 percent of respondents at Mainline institutions agreed with the statement “theological education gives me tools to understand and better serve the Latino community”—a similar rate as those at Catholic (85 percent) and Pentecostal (86 percent) schools. On this question, students at Evangelical seminaries were significantly less likely to agree (74 percent) than those at Catholic and Pentecostal schools (Figure 2), indicating a somewhat decreased level of confidence in the efficacy of Evangelical seminaries’ education for Hispanic ministry.

We found some other interesting tendencies among the experiences of Latino/a seminarians who reported that “theological education gives me tools to understand and better serve the Latino community.”⁶ To begin with, the presence of Latino/a faculty members who serve as mentors to Latino/a seminarians seems critical. As Figure 3 shows, Latino/a seminarians who have a faculty mentor, regardless of that mentor’s ethnicity,⁷ are more likely

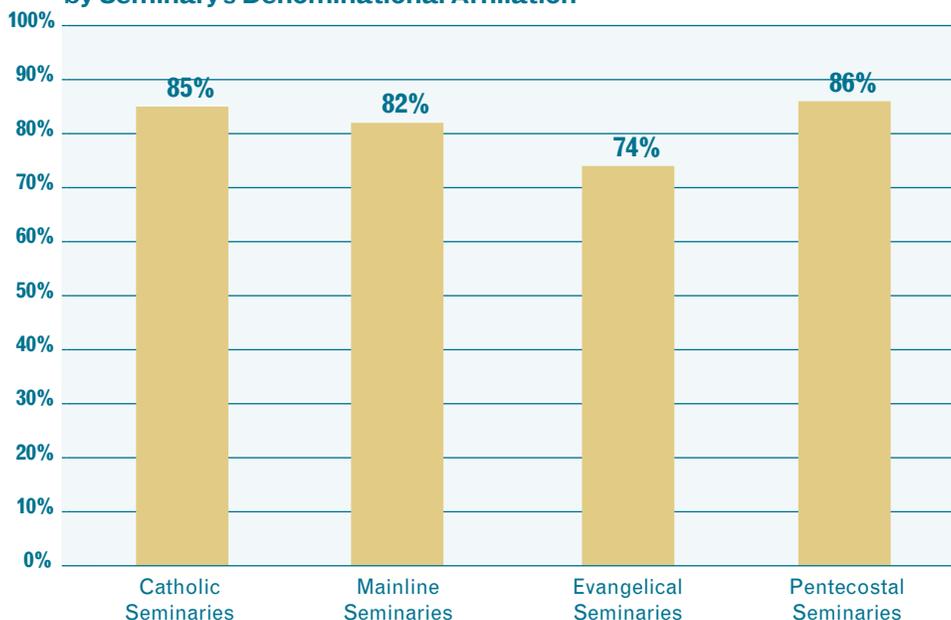
percent of Latinos/as in the United States belong to Mainline Protestant churches while 70 percent identify as Catholic and 16 percent as Evangelical or Pentecostal Protestant. Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda. “Hispanic Churches in American Public Life: Summary of Findings,” Interim Report, 2003 Vol. 2 (January 2003), Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

⁶ The remainder of this paper focuses on this outcome since it measures students’ preparedness for ministry and points to what institutional characteristics contribute to effectively equipping seminarians for Hispanic ministry.

⁷ Our findings about faculty mentors are

Figure 2

Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Said “Theological Education Gives Me Tools To Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community,” by Seminary’s Denominational Affiliation



to report that seminary is giving them tools to understand and better serve the Latino community than are students with no faculty mentor (85 percent vs. 72 percent, respectively). But students with a Latino/a faculty mentor were even more likely to say their education was preparing them for ministry to and with the Hispanic community (91 percent) than students with a non-Latino/a faculty mentor (80 percent).

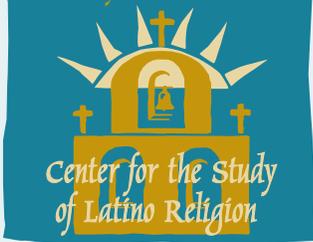
The presence of other Latinos/as in the student and faculty bodies and of Latino theological works in a school’s library also enhances Latino/a seminarians’ sense of preparedness for ministry to the Latino community. As Figure 4 illustrates, respondents who reported that their institutions actively recruit Latino/a faculty (84 percent vs. 73 percent whose schools do not) and students⁸ (85 percent vs. 70 percent of those whose schools do not) were more likely to say they are getting what they need to serve the Latino community. Similarly, higher percentages of respondents who felt there were enough Latinos/as on faculty (90 percent vs. 75 percent of those who did not) and enough Latino/a students at their school⁹ (87 percent vs. 75 percent of those who did not) said seminary was equipping them to serve the Latino community. So, too, Latino/a seminarians who reported that their school’s libraries stock sufficient collections of Latino theology (88 percent vs. 76 percent of those who reported the contrary) and Spanish-language theological works (88 percent vs. 76 percent of those who reported

based on the questions: “Do you have a faculty mentor or guide in your program?” and “If your seminary has a Latino/a faculty member(s), does this person/people serve you as a mentor and advisor?”

⁸ In all, 40 percent of our sample said their school is active in recruiting Latino/a faculty and 62 percent said that their school is active in recruiting Latino/a students.

⁹ In all, 36 percent of our sample said there was an adequate number of Latino/a faculty and 46 percent said there was an adequate number of Latino/a students at their institution. Overall response rates for the remaining two statements, “The library collection has sufficient works in Latino theology” and “The library collection has sufficient Spanish-language theological works,” were 52 percent and 37 percent, respectively.

Institute for Latino Studies



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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/csrlr.



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).

the contrary) were more likely to say that their theological education was preparing them for Hispanic ministry.

Along with the physical presence of Latino/a students, faculty, and theological works, we found that hearing and seeing Latino perspectives reflected in the classroom and feeling understood by one's professors and welcomed in the general environment strongly correspond with reporting that one is being well prepared for service to the Latino community (Figure 5). Respondents who agreed that their professors are open to diverse ideas were much more likely to say their education is so preparing them compared to those who disagreed with the statement (84 percent vs. 62 percent,

Figure 3
Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Said "Theological Education Gives Me Tools To Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community," by Whether They Have a Faculty Mentor

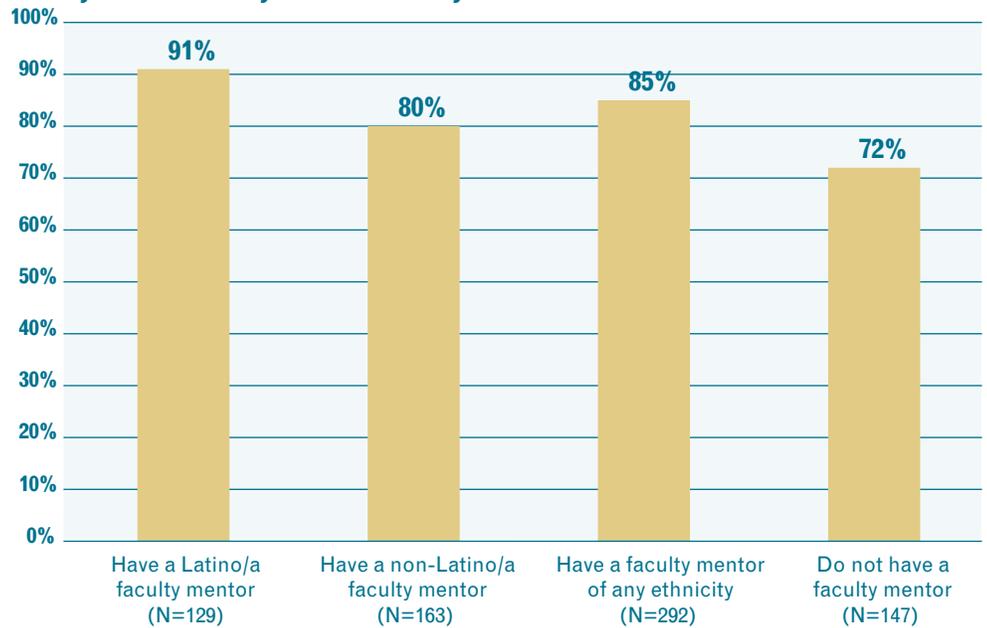


Figure 4
Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Said "Theological Education Gives Me Tools To Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community," by Measures of Their School's Commitment to Latino Presence on Campus

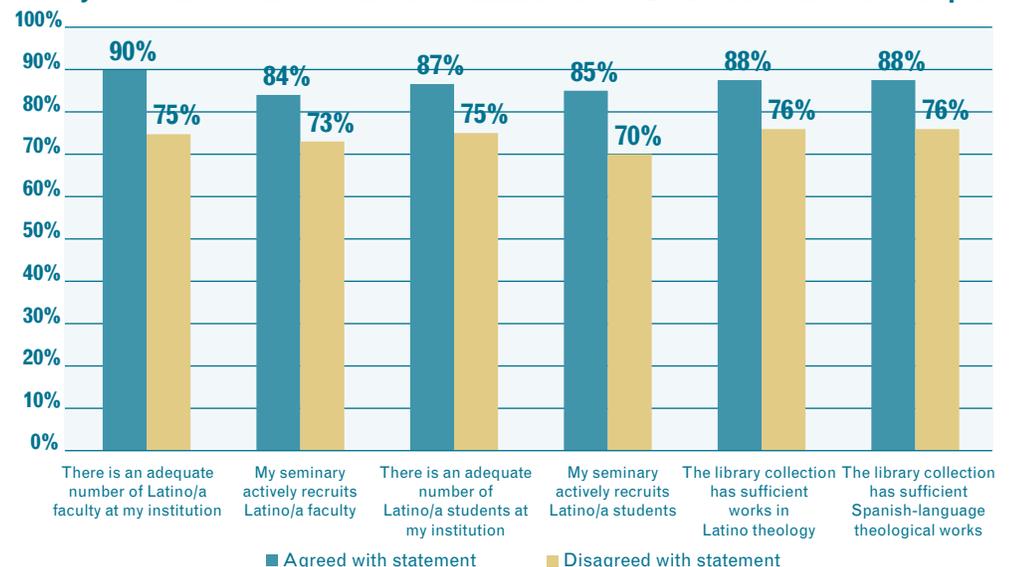
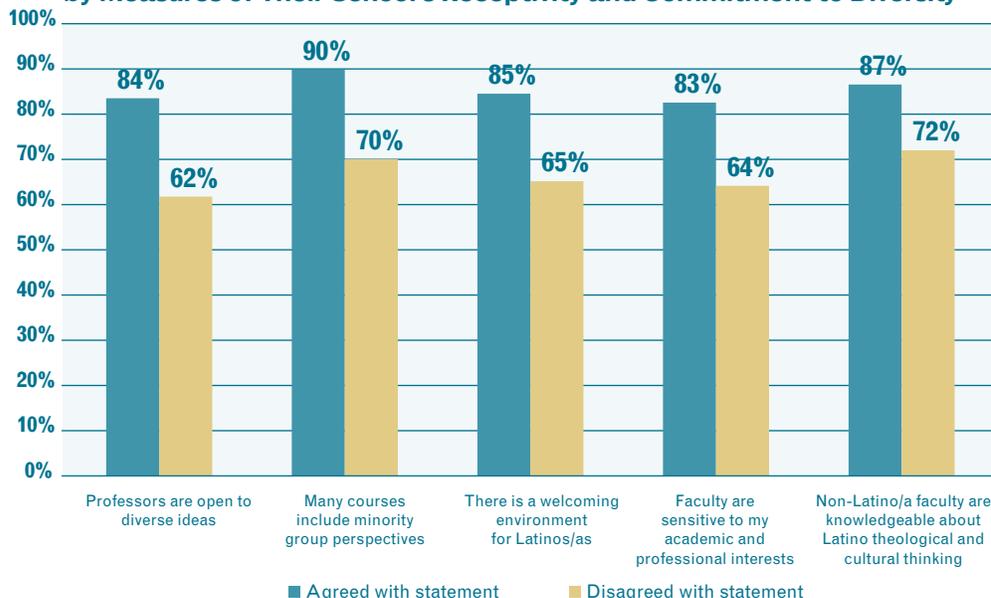


Figure 5

Percentage of Latino/a Seminarians Who Said “Theological Education Gives Me Tools To Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community,” by Measures of Their School’s Receptivity and Commitment to Diversity



respectively) as were those who said many courses include minority group perspectives (90 percent vs. 70 percent) and those who reported that non-Latino/a faculty understand Latino theological and cultural thinking (87 percent vs. 72 percent).¹⁰ These findings indicate how crucial it is for seminaries to include the diverse experiences and worldviews of its students in the classroom.

¹⁰ The overall response rates for the statements in Figure 4 were: “Professors are open to diverse ideas”—84 percent; “Many courses include minority group perspectives”—52 percent; “There is a welcoming environment for Latinos/as”—80 percent; “Faculty are sensitive to my academic and professional interests”—88 percent; and “Non-Latino/a faculty are knowledgeable about Latino theological and cultural thinking”—55 percent.

What Programmatic and Institutional Characteristics Are Most Crucial to Latino/a Seminarians’ Preparation for Service?

Thus far we have observed that Latino/a seminarians are more likely to feel well equipped for ministry in the Latino community if they have found their culture and perspectives reflected and appreciated in the classroom and general academic culture at their schools. In this section we shift our analysis from the individual student to the institutional level (i.e., our unit of analysis is the seminary, not the students) to see how the schools in our sample differ from each other on these variables and what kinds of programs and characteristics correspond with better performance reviews from their Latino/a students on this question of preparation for Hispanic ministry.

We found that schools that have institutionalized their commitment to Latino concerns are much

more likely to produce Latino/a ministers who feel that their seminary education is preparing them to serve the Latino community than are schools that have not. The first measure of such an institution-wide commitment we examined was whether Latino/a faculty mentors were available at a given school. Confirming our findings above, we found that at nearly all (96 percent) of the seminaries where most of the Latino/a students have a Latino/a faculty mentor the majority of respondents said their education was providing tools for ministry in the Latino community (Figure 6).¹¹ In comparison, at only 64 percent of the schools that have Latinos/as on faculty but where most of the Latino/a students do not have a Latino/a faculty mentor did most of our respondents say their education was preparing them for ministry in the Latino community (Figure 6)—a slightly higher rate than at the schools with no Latinos/as on faculty (56 percent). These differences persisted even after taking into consideration the representation of Latino/a students in a school’s student body, its denominational affiliation, geographic location, student body size, and the number of Latinos/as on faculty. This suggests that while having Latino/a faculty is associated with Latino/a seminarians indicating that their school is doing a good job of training them for Hispanic ministry, having Latino/a faculty members who take the time to directly mentor Latino/a students has an even greater impact in this area.

The importance of having a Latino/a faculty mentor is confirmed by our finding that schools where the majority of students have a Latino/a mentor have a better reputation for preparing their students for Hispanic ministry than institutions at which most Latino/a students have a non-Latino/a faculty mentor. As Figure 7 shows, though having a non-Latino/a faculty

¹¹ In this section unless otherwise indicated, all findings reported as significant are so at $p \leq .05$. Ancillary analyses confirm that these differences persist when controlling for institutional variables including a seminary’s denominational affiliation, geographic location, percentage of the student body that is Latino, and overall student body size.

Figure 6

Percentage of Seminaries Where Most of the Latino/a Students Said “Theological Education Gives Me Tools to Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community,” by Presence of Latino/a Faculty and Latino/a Faculty Mentors

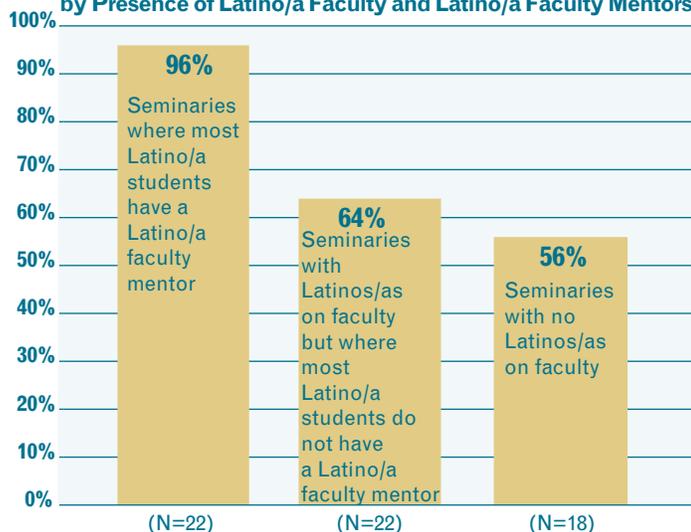


Figure 7

Percentage of Seminaries Where Most of the Latino/a Students Said “Theological Education Gives Me Tools to Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community,” by Availability of Faculty Mentors

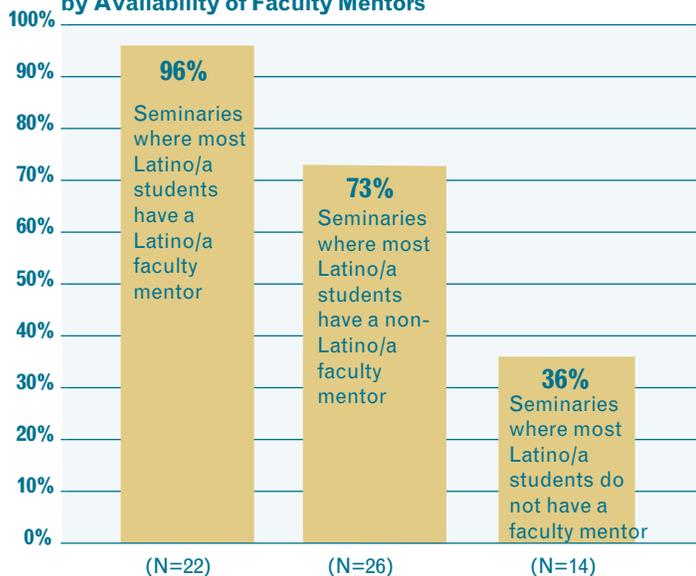
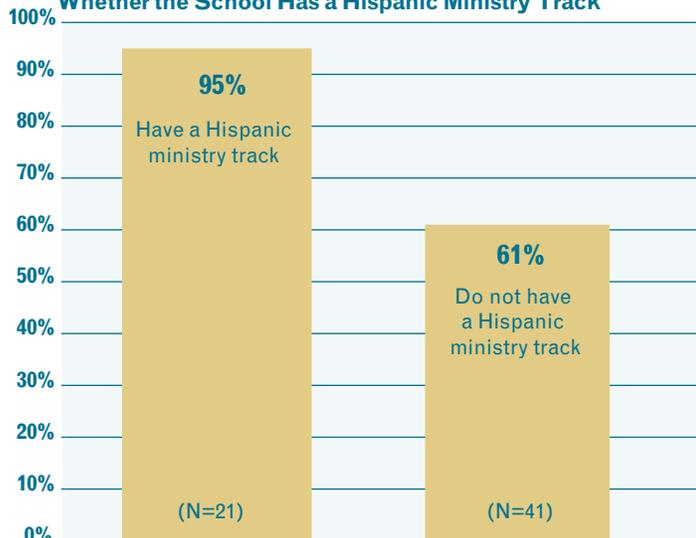


Figure 8

Percentage of Seminaries Where Most of the Latino/a Students Said “Theological Education Gives Me Tools to Understand and Better Serve the Latino Community,” by Whether the School Has a Hispanic Ministry Track



mentor corresponds with much higher reports of feeling prepared for Hispanic ministry than having no mentor at all (specifically, respondents at 73 percent of schools where most Latino/a students have a non-Latino mentor agreed with the statement in question vs. those at only 36 percent of schools where most Latino/a students do not have a faculty mentor),¹² schools that provide Latino/a faculty mentors have the highest rates of such responses (96 percent). This Latino/a mentor effect persists regardless of a school’s geographic location, student body size, percent of student body that is Latino, and denominational identity.

The other programmatic indicator of an institutional commitment to preparing seminarians for ministry to the Latino community we considered was whether a school offers a master’s track in Hispanic ministry. Drawing on research that the Center for the Study of Latino Religion conducted among ATS-affiliated schools,¹³ we learned that 21 of the 62 schools represented in our sample offer a specific track in Hispanic ministry in their master’s-level programs. As Figure 8 shows, at nearly all of the schools with such a program (95 percent) most of the students in our sample reported that their theological education was preparing them for ministry in the Latino community. In comparison, at only 61 percent of schools without such a track did most of the students agree with this statement.

The presence or absence of an MA track in Hispanic ministry remains significant for this question of ministerial preparation even after controlling for institutional characteristics including a school’s denominational affiliation. This is interesting given that, in parallel with the individual level analysis above, Evangelical seminaries represented in our sample have a weaker reputation for preparing their Latino/a students for ministry in the Hispanic community

¹² It is striking that 72 percent of students who do not have a faculty mentor of any kind nonetheless indicated that their seminaries were preparing them for ministry in the Latino community (see Figure 3), but that at only 36 percent (or 5) of the schools where most Latino/a students lack a faculty mentor did the majority of our respondents indicate such (see Figure 7). This suggests that there is an institutional effect at play at schools where the faculty are not mentoring Latino/a students that is stronger than the effect on the individual level. In other words, it seems that being at a school where most of one’s Latino/a classmates do not have a mentor of any kind has a more chilling effect on one’s sense of preparedness than simply not having a mentor of one’s own.

¹³ Data about which schools in our sample offer a master’s track in Latino/Hispanic ministry come from a different and as yet unpublished survey that CSLR conducted in AY 2004-2005 among ATS-affiliated schools. To measure how well an institution is preparing Latino/a seminarians for ministry in the Latino community we averaged the responses of the students from each seminary. We consider an institution to be effectively equipping its students for ministry in the Latino community if the mean of all of the students at a school agreed with the statement “Theological education gives me tools to understand and better serve the Latino community.”

than the non-Evangelical seminaries. Specifically, at only 47 percent of our Evangelical institutions did the majority of respondents say their theological education was giving them tools to understand and better serve the Latino community. In comparison, most Latino/a seminarians at 76 percent of the Mainline seminaries and 90 percent of the Catholic seminaries in our sample said their theological education was training them well on this measure. (Because we are investigating denominational effects at an institutional level, we dropped the Pentecostal seminaries from this analysis since the N is too small (5) to allow for statistically meaningful findings.)

To determine what might account for these apparent denominational differences we did further analysis and found that geographic location, representation of Latinos/as in the student body, and the presence of Latino/a faculty did not alter their significance; however, when we factored in the presence of an MA track in Hispanic ministry the denominational effect was eliminated. Indeed, at nearly every seminary in our sample that offers an MA-level Hispanic ministry program—regardless of its denominational affiliation—most respondents said they were being well equipped for ministry to the Latino community. But at only 39 percent of Evangelical seminaries that do not have Hispanic ministry tracks did most Latino/a students say they were being well prepared on this measure. In comparison, most respondents at 82 percent of Catholic and 67 percent of Mainline schools without such tracks nonetheless said their schools were giving them tools to understand and serve the Latino community. This suggests that the absence of

a master's-level Hispanic ministry track has a more negative impact on Evangelical seminaries' educational appraisals on this measure than it does for Catholic or Mainline schools. Our data do not directly explain why this is so, but we theorize that either students at Catholic and Mainline schools without such tracks have less of a need for these programs than those at Evangelical schools without them, or that these programs provide something to Latino/a seminarians at Evangelical schools that Mainline and Catholic schools without such programs provide by other means.

Discussion and Conclusion

In general, Latino/a seminarians report that their education is preparing them well for ministry in the Latino community and only a minority said that being in seminary is distancing them from the Latino community.

We found that certain institutional commitments and programs strongly correspond with Latino/a seminarians feeling that their education is giving them tools to better understand and serve the Latino community, including:

- Hearing and seeing Latino perspectives reflected in the classroom and feeling understood by professors and welcome in the general environment
- The presence of other Latinos/as in the student and faculty bodies and of Latino theological works in a school's library
- The presence of faculty mentors—especially Latino/a faculty members who serve as mentors to Latino/a seminarians.
- Offering a master's-level Hispanic ministry track.

Denominationally, we found that Latinos/as enrolled at Catholic seminaries were much less likely to say that seminary was creating a wedge between them and the Latino community than those studying at Protestant seminaries, especially those at Mainline Protestant-affiliated ones. This suggests that Latinos/as find their culture and experience more fully understood and embraced at Catholic seminaries than at Mainline Protestant institutions in particular. Though our data do not directly account for this difference, we suspect it is related to the fact that there are not very many Latinos/as in Mainline communities and thus the social and academic culture at these seminaries reflects a limited exposure to Latino-American experiences and culture.

Despite the relative isolation that many Latinos/as studying at Mainline institutions experience, our findings suggest that these schools are nonetheless offering a quality and effective theological education given that over three-quarters of our respondents enrolled at Mainline schools reported that their education is giving them tools to understand and better serve the Latino community. Here, again, Catholic seminaries received the highest reviews, while Evangelical seminaries fared the poorest. Specifically, Evangelical seminaries without an MA track in Hispanic ministry were less likely to receive a vote of confidence on this measure than those at Mainline or Catholic schools. This suggests that even if Latino/a students encounter cultural and communal barriers at a seminary, the commitment to investing in specialized ministry programs yields Latino/a ministers who feel that their theological education was worth the time and effort.

About the Researchers *continued from cover*

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