



Policy Brief:  
**Increasing Federal  
Funding for TRIO Student  
Support Services (SSS)**

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## Who We Are

### **Henry Rosas Ibarra, Yale University**

- Henry Rosas Ibarra is a graduating senior from Yale University with a Bachelor of Arts in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration. Born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona as the son of Mexican immigrants, his policy and direct service work centers on ensuring equitable policy outcomes and increased political representation for Latino communities. As a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and a Director's Fellow for Yale's Institution for Social and Policy Studies, he conducted independent research projects focusing on histories of Latino community organizing and Arizona immigration policy. At Yale, he has created and led programming that provided social and academic mentorship for fellow First-Generation, Low-Income (FGLI) students. He also worked to strengthen Yale's vibrant Latino community as Social Chair for Ballet Folklorico Mexicano de Yale and as Co-President of De Colores, the Latino LGBTQ affinity group.

### **Citlaly Gomez Ibarra, Arizona State University**

- Citlaly Gomez Ibarra is a first generation Mexican-American born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona. She is currently an incoming Senior at Arizona State University pursuing a concurrent degree in Political Science and History with a Minor in Transborder Studies. On campus, Citlaly is a part of the Association of Chicanos Por La Causa Scholars, a participating member of the Hispanic Business Student Association and a sister of Pi Lambda Chi Latina Sorority, Incorporated. Citlaly's roles in constituent services, and community outreach has strengthened her desire to gain more insight into public policy. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree, Citlaly plans to get her masters in Public Administration.

## Luz F Velazquez, Binghamton University

- Luz Velazquez is a first-generation, low-income college student from Queens, NY and a proud daughter of Paraguayan immigrant parents. She is currently a graduating senior at Binghamton University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with minors in Latin American and Caribbean area studies and Immigration Studies. At her institution, Luz serves as the Student Director of Programming and Diversity Initiatives for the career center, is a Resident Assistant, and an active member of TRIO Student Support Services. Her additional roles as an immigration researcher, JFEW SUNY Global Affairs Scholar, NASPA Undergraduate Fellow, and *Líderes Avanzando* Fellow inform her desire to work in the field of public policy advocating for the immigrant and Latinx community through education equity and migrant justice.

## SUMMARY

American colleges and universities are facing a crisis of college retention and completion rates for working-class Latino students. Nationwide, 70% of Latino college students identify as either first-generation or low-income (FGLI).<sup>1</sup> Among FGLI undergraduates, more than 4 in 10 fail to complete a four-year degree program on-time—the completion rate drops drastically to just 6% among FGLI community college students. For undocumented college students, about half of whom identify as Latinx, the figure rises to just 6.6%.<sup>2</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic further aggravates these figures for FGLI Latino students. According to a survey done by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 40% of Latinos currently at four-year universities and 44% of current Latino community college students surveyed said the pandemic was likely or very likely to impact their ability to complete their respective degrees.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, decades-long gains made in college enrollment for Latinos evaporated when nationwide fall 2020 college enrollment figures dropped by nearly 5.5%.<sup>4</sup>

These alarming figures are a call for policymakers to address a crisis of degree completion among Latino FGLI students—especially among undocumented undergraduates that fall into this category. The federal TRIO program's Student Support Services (SSS) is one step in inspiring scholars to complete their respective degrees. SSS provides comprehensive support to FGLI students through dedicated professional mentorship, counseling services, and grant assistance to improve college retention rates. In this memo, we call for a budget increase of \$1.2 billion allocated for TRIO programs and amending the Higher Education Act (HEA) to allow undocumented students access to federal education funds.

## BACKGROUND

TRIO SSS consists of eight federal programs assisting low-income or underrepresented minorities to finish high school, enroll in post-secondary education, and attain a degree. Established by the Higher Education Act in 1965, the host of programs was allocated nearly \$1 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2018, and in FY 2019, SSS received more than \$500 million.<sup>5</sup> Also in FY 2019, the average cost per participant in the program was approximately \$1,667, and the average award granted to applicants was approximately \$316,000.<sup>6</sup> Further, SSS has consistently serviced over 200,000 students since FY 2010.<sup>7</sup>

**The principal mission of the TRIO SSS program is to provide:**

- opportunities for academic development through regular programming
- assistance on college requirements and motivate students toward the successful completion of their post-secondary education
- grant aid to current SSS participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants

Combined, these services work to construct a more inclusive college campus for FGLI college students and “help students make the transition from one level of higher education to the next.”<sup>8</sup>

## THE ASK

- Congress should increase investment in federal TRIO programs by \$1.2 billion to increase college retention rates amongst FGLI students.
- Congress should also amend Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to allow Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and other undocumented students to be eligible for federal TRIO funds and services.

## THE NEED

- Attaining a post-secondary degree has long been the golden ticket for social and economic mobility in the United States. However, there is an urgency to address the socioeconomic and racial disparities in retention rates. For cohorts entering 4-year public institutions in 2011, only about 54% of Latino students finished their degrees within six years, compared to 63% of White students.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, FGLI college students complete their degrees at half the rate of their non-FGLI peers.<sup>10</sup> With its core mission being to correct these disparities, SSS is an essential path forward to bolster student achievement.
- TRIO SSS has demonstrated a significant positive effect on FGLI student retention and success. Students enrolled in TRIO SSS programs are more likely to remain enrolled in higher education, obtain more college credits, and earn higher GPAs compared to similarly qualified students who were not enrolled in the program.<sup>11</sup> The Pell Institute (2009) found that SSS students were 12% more likely to be retained in the second year and 23% more likely to be retained in the third year<sup>12</sup>—again demonstrating the effectiveness of SSS programs.

## THE IMPACT

Expanding the reach of Student Support Services to more students at community colleges and universities is key to fostering a new generation of Americans equipped to meet our nation’s growing challenges. Inspiring and supporting students who are the first in their families to step foot on a college campus fulfills the promise of economic and social mobility for millions of working-class students. The hundreds of thousands of students already benefiting from SSS have provided their stories and data, revealing a renewed confidence in their academic potential and feelings of belonging.<sup>13</sup> We call for a dramatic increase in SSS funding to meet the striking racial and economic inequities associated with degree attainment. Additionally, the inclusion of undocumented students further unlocks the academic and economic potential necessary for our communities to thrive.

A lack of action on the issue of degree attainment has severe ramifications for our post-COVID economic rebuilding efforts. Students from Latinx working families have put their

education on hold to serve our community as essential workers. Many more feel the social and economic factors induced by the pandemic make them unlikely to finish their degree. Without active mentorship and financial support, we face an entire class of FGLI Latinx students failing to be adequately equipped to attain well-paying jobs. Student Support Services and their accompanying resources can catch these students before they are completely out of reach. As Congress considers economic relief plans, we ask that they allot additional funding for SSS programs to ensure that low-income students are receiving the support they need, including expanding the TRIO program funding, to complete their higher education.

## Endnotes

- 1 UnidosUS, "A Path Forward for Latinos: Laying the Groundwork for Equity in Higher Education," February 18, 2020 , <http://publications.nclr.org/handle/123456789/2110>.
- 2 Esther Yu Hsi Lee, "Why So Few Undocumented Immigrants Make It Through College," ThinkProgress, March 31, 2015, <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/why-so-few-undocumented-immigrants-make-it-through-college-d07d30136e5/>.
- 3 Abigail Johnson, "Roughly Half of College Students Say Covid Will Likely Impact Their Ability to Graduate," CNBC.com, December 31, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/31/half-of-college-students-say-covid-may-impact-ability-to-graduate-.html>.
- 4 Michael T. Neitzel, "College Enrollment Update: Undergraduate Numbers Now Down 4% Nationwide," Forbes.com, October 15, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltneitzel/2020/10/15/college-enrollment-update-undergraduate-numbers-now-down-4-nationwide/?sh=2b2d68b9389d>.
- 5 Council for Opportunity in Education, "Resources: TRIO," (accessed February 12, 2021, <https://coenet.org/trio.shtml>).
- 6 "Student Support Services Program: Funding Status," U.S. Department of Education, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triostudsupp/funding.html>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 U.S. Department of Education, "Federal TRIO Programs 50th Anniversary Fact Sheet," 2014, page 5, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/trio50anniv-factsheet.pdf>.
- 9 National Center for Education Statistics, "Digest of Education Statistics," U.S. Department of Education, 2019, Table 326.10, accessed February 12, 2021 [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_326.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_326.10.asp).
- 10 Margaret W. Cahalan, Laura W. Perna, Marisha Addison, Chelsea Murray, Pooja R. Patel, and Nathan Jiang, "Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2020 Historical Trend Report," The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education, and Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy of the University of Pennsylvania, 2020, <http://pellinstitute.org/indicators/>.
- 11 Bradford W. Chaney, "National Evaluation of Student Support Services: Examination of Student Outcomes After Six Years," U.S. Department of Education, 2010, <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/student-support/final-report.pdf>.
- 12 The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, "National Studies Find TRIO Programs Effective at Increasing College Enrollment and Graduation," ERIC Institute of Education Sciences, May 2009), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED508928>.
- 13 TRIO Student Support Services/Center for Learning and Student Success, "Testimonials from TRIO SSS Graduates," Rutgers University, 2016, accessed February 12, 2021, <https://trio.camden.rutgers.edu/testimonials-trio-sss-graduates>.