

As a first-generation Hispanic student from El Paso, Texas, I have lived the struggles many Hispanic students face when pursuing higher education. Raised by a single mother with two siblings, financial instability was a constant challenge. Opportunities were scarce in my majority-Hispanic community, and I had to fight for every chance to succeed. Without guidance, I navigated the college application process alone, searching for scholarships, resources, and mentors. Through determination, I made it to Texas Tech University, but my journey was filled with obstacles that many Hispanic students continue to face. Texas Tech has an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that students like me receive the support we need to thrive.

As an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), Texas Tech must go beyond increasing Hispanic enrollment and take active steps to support its students. A truly Hispanic-Serving institution provides financial aid resources, academic mentorship, and cultural representation in the faculty and curriculum. However, today's political climate makes this work more difficult. DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives have faced increasing opposition in several states, with some arguing they create division. While Texas has not fully banned these programs, political pressure can create hesitation in advocating for Hispanic students. Despite these challenges, Texas Tech must remain committed to fostering an inclusive environment. Supporting Hispanic students is not about politics—it is about ensuring equitable access to education. When Hispanic students succeed, the entire university benefits through higher retention rates, stronger alumni networks, and a more competitive workforce.

One of the most critical steps in becoming a truly Hispanic-Serving Institution is increasing cultural competency among faculty and staff. Many professors may not fully understand the unique challenges Hispanic students face, such as balancing financial burdens, supporting family members, or overcoming imposter syndrome. There have been moments in my college experience when professors assumed all students had the same access to resources, unaware that some of us were working full-time jobs or struggling to afford textbooks. Providing faculty and staff with professional development on cultural competency would help create a more supportive academic environment. Training on how to engage with first-generation students, recognize financial barriers, and incorporate inclusive teaching practices can make a significant difference.

Another important step is increasing Hispanic representation among faculty and staff. One of the most discouraging aspects of my college experience has been the lack of Hispanic professors and mentors who understand my background. Seeing faculty members who reflect our experiences fosters a sense of belonging and motivation for Hispanic students. Texas Tech should prioritize hiring and retaining Hispanic faculty by offering mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and leadership positions. When Hispanic students see themselves represented in academia, it validates their place in higher education and encourages them to pursue their goals.

Beyond faculty representation, Texas Tech must expand student support programs. Many Hispanic students, including myself, have had to figure out college on our own. First-generation

students lack the generational knowledge that many of our peers take for granted. Expanding mentorship programs that connect first-gen students with faculty or upperclassmen who have navigated similar experiences can provide crucial guidance. Financial insecurity is also a significant barrier for Hispanic students, and Texas Tech should increase scholarship opportunities while ensuring that financial aid resources are accessible. I remember struggling to understand financial aid forms with no one to guide me—having bilingual financial aid counselors available to assist students and their families would be a valuable resource.

In addition to financial and academic support, Texas Tech should integrate Hispanic perspectives into the curriculum. It is disheartening to go through college without seeing your own history and culture represented in your coursework. The university should expand Latinx studies programs and encourage faculty to include Hispanic voices across disciplines. Whether in literature, history, business, or STEM fields, representation in the curriculum matters. Offering research opportunities focused on Hispanic communities and study-abroad programs in Latin America can further enhance the academic experience for Hispanic students.

Career development is another critical area where Texas Tech can better serve Hispanic students. Many of us come from working-class backgrounds and need strong career pipelines to achieve upward mobility. The university should strengthen partnerships with Hispanic-owned businesses and organizations to create internship and job opportunities. Hosting networking events that connect Hispanic students with professionals who share their backgrounds can help bridge the gap between education and career opportunities. Growing up, I didn't have professional connections or mentors to guide me, and I know that structured career support can make all the difference for students like me.

Finally, Texas Tech must continue advocating for policies that support Hispanic student success. Faculty and administrators can work together to push for expanded financial aid options, bilingual student services, and state policies that increase educational access for first-generation and low-income students. Institutional support at the policy level can create lasting change and ensure that future generations of Hispanic students do not face the same struggles that I and many others have endured.

As Texas Tech moves toward officially becoming a Hispanic-Serving Institution, it must take intentional steps to fulfill the responsibility that comes with that designation. For students like me, college is not just about education—it is about breaking cycles of poverty, achieving dreams that once seemed impossible, and creating a better future for our families. The challenges we face are real, but they are not insurmountable. By investing in cultural competency, faculty diversity, student support programs, curriculum inclusivity, career development, and policy advocacy, Texas Tech can create a campus where Hispanic students do not just survive but thrive.

Being Hispanic-Serving is not just a title it is a commitment to action. Texas Tech has the power to transform the lives of its Hispanic students, and by embracing this mission wholeheartedly, the

university can set an example for institutions across the country. For students like me, that commitment means everything.