

Serving Hispanic students better enriches Texas

UT System joins alliance to boost diverse pool of doctoral candidates and faculty

By JAMES B. MILLIKEN

Texas is often defined by its entrepreneurial spirit and determination to push new frontiers. Businesses are establishing roots here in droves. People are moving here, working here and staying here. As our state continues to rapidly grow and diversify, Texas higher education has the responsibility, and the privilege, of ensuring an educated and trained workforce.

Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau released updated national and state population and demographic estimates. Not surprisingly, the growth of Hispanic populations in Texas and the U.S. confirms what we already knew. Today, Texas is the proud home to 12 million Hispanics, a population that has increased roughly 24% since 2010 and is predicted to increase an additional 71% by 2050.

The new census data provides a clearer vision of what Texas will look like in the coming decades. It gives state officeholders, businesses and civic leaders — including higher education leadership — the opportunity to better understand who we will serve,

and the ways in which Texans can be served most effectively.

Texas institutions of higher education have worked diligently toward the advancement of Hispanic populations for decades — recruiting, enrolling and graduating Latino students, while embracing the influence of Hispanic culture, expanding avenues of success for Hispanic scholars and students, and promoting the art, culture and ideas of the Americas. Today, six University of Texas institutions are federally designated Hispanic Serving Institutions in our state, and four have been recognized with the prestigious Excelencia in Education seal, the only national data-driven initiative to recog-

nize programs that accelerate Hispanic student success in universities.

Our efforts are making a difference, with Hispanic Texans already making up the state's highest labor force participation rate at 66%. But there is much work to be done. In higher education, just 5% of full-time professors in the U.S. are Hispanic, compared with nearly 20% of the general population. In addition, higher education degree attainment rates among Hispanics still lag non-Hispanic whites by 22%. As leaders in helping shape the future of the workforce in Texas and the nation, institutions of higher education must do better, and the UT System is taking impor-

tant new steps.

Just last month, four UT institutions — in Arlington, Austin, El Paso and San Antonio — joined 16 other institutions nationwide to launch the new Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Research Universities. The alliance announced a commitment to two goals by 2030: double the number of Hispanic doctoral students to diversify and enrich the pipeline of talent into academia; and increase the amount of Hispanic university faculty by 20%. These two steps are key to ensuring that all talented Texans — and Americans — have the opportunity to earn a college degree and reap the benefits so clearly associated with that achieve-

ment.

UTEP President Heather Wilson, a former secretary of the U.S. Air Force, will serve as the inaugural chair of the Alliance of Hispanic Serving Research Universities.

As we look ahead to the future of Texas and the nation, we embrace our rich diversity and continue to create more opportunities for more people. In doing so, we will make our state more creative, more competitive and better prepared for the opportunities and challenges to come.

James B. Milliken is the chancellor of the University of Texas System. He wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News.