Desiree Danielle Zerquera

Title: The Consequences of Prestige-Seeking for Fulfilling an Access-Centered Mission: An Analysis of Changes in Access over Time at Urban-Serving Research Universities (USRUs)

Urban-serving research universities (USRUs) make a large contribution to ensuring the diversity of the higher education landscape, and are identified as having a distinct mission that is connected to serving their surrounding regions through service and research, with a key part of the USRU mission to provide access to higher education for its city’s residents. Researchers have noted a susceptibility among USRUs to the value systems of research-intensive, agrarian, and more highly selective universities, posing a risk to the function these institutions serve in providing education to local and under-served students.

The fulfillment of the USRU access mission may be threatened by forces within the higher education environment that encourage a singular model of excellence. Little work has examined the extent of engagement in prestige-seeking behavior or its consequences, nor given substantial attention to this diverse group of institutions at all. This study fills in gaps in the understanding of consequences of prestige-seeking on access outcomes, relating these understandings to systemic influences. In so doing, this work responds to calls for research that critically interrogates assumptions and tacitly-held knowledge among academics about how higher education frames concepts of prestige and excellence.

The purpose of this examination is to underscore the access-serving mission of USRUs and prestige-seeking within these institutions while considering both through a lens of equity. Developing a panel dataset, I employ descriptive and longitudinal data analysis techniques to examine change over the past two decades and the relationship between engagement and prestige seeking and changes in enrollments by Black and Latino students at USRUs.