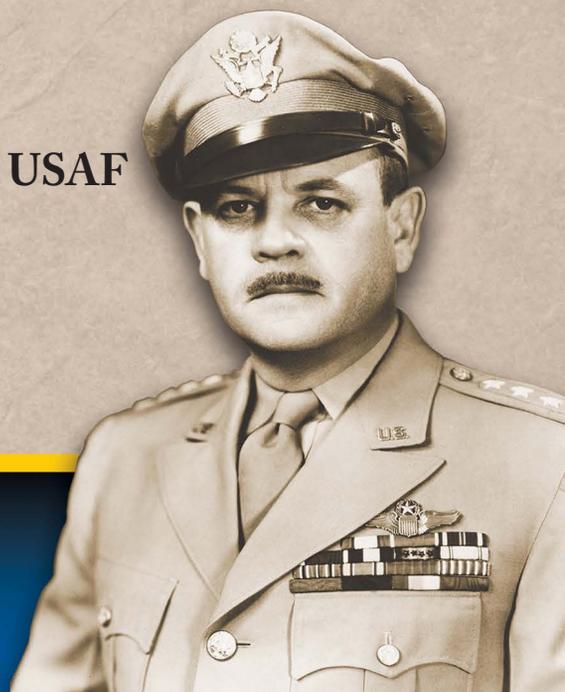
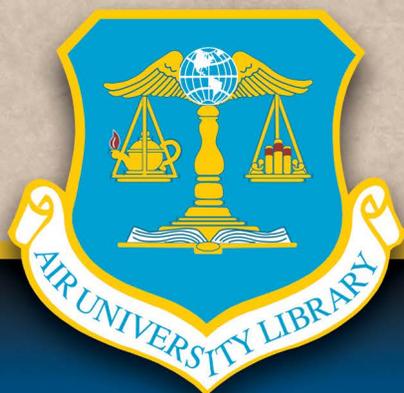


# Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Table Talks (HART)

**Recommended Actions to Increase the  
Pool of Qualified Hispanic Officer  
Candidates**

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Hispanic Officer Candidates*

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<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress/>

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Accepted by Air University Press September 2022 and published October 2022.

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*Dedicated to*

*Muir S. Fairchild (1894–1950), the first commander of Air University and the university’s conceptual father. General Fairchild was part visionary, part keen taskmaster, and “Air Force to the core.” His legacy is one of confidence about the future of the Air Force and the central role of Air University in that future.*

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## **Preface**

1. To avoid phrases that suggest victimhood or deficit, this paper utilizes the term “minoritized” versus minority, when referring to the Hispanic/Latino community.<sup>1</sup> While the term minoritized has not yet been widely accepted in the national lexicon, there has been a push in academic circles to use terms that empower groups traditionally labeled as minorities. While the term “minority” addresses the literal definition of a numerically smaller group, it fails to address the inequities forced onto individuals from these groups through institutionalized policies and practices. Additionally, the use of the term “minoritized” versus “minority” highlights the distinction between actions taken as a verb, versus the noun, which presupposes a “less than” status. The utilization of minoritized as a more inclusive term was suggested by the university educators present at the national symposium and is also described in various academic resources. The authors of this paper chose to use this term to further the dialogue and use of more inclusive language.
2. “Hispanic/Latino” is a collective term chosen by the authors to describe the family of ethnicities from Europe, South, Central, and North America.<sup>2</sup> The authors understand that some people who identify with this community prefer terms like Latina, Latinx, Latine, and many others. This report will use Hispanic/Latino throughout as it is the current terminology used by the US Census Bureau for gathering and analyzing demographic data. It is understood by this report’s authors that this narrow terminology may offend some individuals who have been labeled as such and the authors recognize there is a need to develop more inclusive terms that are recognized and utilized by state and federal institutions.
3. AFROTC data presented in this report is from 2017 to 2021, seeking to show current trends. It is understood that the COVID-19 pandemic could have skewed the trends. However, where that is known to be the case, a note will follow.

## **Author Acknowledgements**

The authors of this report would like to thank all the Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), university educators and staff, AFROTC instructors and cadre, Hispanic/Latino community group leaders and volunteers, Department of the Air Force Barrier Analysis Working Group (DAFBAWG) Hispanic Empowerment and Advancement Team (HEAT) members, Air University staff, and the Airmen, cadets, and families that invested their time into the Hispanic–Serving Institutions and Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps TableTalks (HART) initiatives and allowed themselves to be vulnerable to enable the candid discussions needed for this paper. Additionally, the HART team would also like to thank the board members of the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Hispanic Veterans Leadership Alliance, and the Air Force Cadet Officer Mentor Association for their participation, insight, and support. A special thanks must also be given to the HSI advisors that guided our dialogue and analysis. They include: Dr. Carol Sumner, Texas Tech University; Dr. Heather Shipley, The University of Texas at San Antonio; Dr. Cyndia Muñiz, University of Central Florida; Dr. Emilio Ulloa, San Diego State University; Dr. Betsy Morales Caro, University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez; and Professor Rosa Cervantes, University of New Mexico. Finally, the HART team would like to thank Brig Gen Leslie Maher, Commander, Holm Center, for her incredible vision, wisdom, and unwavering commitment and support to improve diversity, inclusion, and equity for all in our United States Air and Space forces. Her leadership will continue to impact future Airmen and Guardians for decades. Thank you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

by

Lieutenant General Marc H. Sasseville

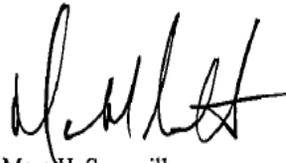
Hispanic Advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force D&I Council

The inspiration to serve the nation varies by individual and is often influenced by that individuals' background and past experience. I, myself, was inspired by someone who had found success in actively serving their nation. Like many of my colleagues, I worked hard, persevered through tough training, long deployments, and challenging missions. This career is not easy, but it has been like no other and has taken me well beyond anything I could've dreamed.

However, hard work and perseverance are only part of the equation. Many of our Hispanic/Latino youth are attending classes while balancing a multitude of personal and professional priorities that exemplify the brand of tenacity and leadership our nation needs, but the traditional college route in many cases inhibits their ability to capitalize on the incredible opportunities afforded by pursuing a commission in United States Armed Forces.

The partnership between the Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accession and Citizen Development and the Department of the Air Force's Hispanic Empowerment and Advancement Team (HEAT) is a big step in the right direction. The alignment of goals combined with the strategic use of specific outreach tools that support the Hispanic/Latino community can revolutionize how our nation raises a more diverse, highly technical and mentally agile military.

A big thanks to the HEAT team for their ongoing efforts. The collaboration with our universities and community partners continues to break new ground and galvanize our nation's top talent to tear down the barriers to success. This is only the beginning...



Marc H. Sasseville  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Air Force  
Vice Chief, National Guard Bureau

## **Abstract**

The uniformed services have been charged with reducing racial disparities in the armed forces. The Department of the Air Force (DAF) recently published three reports highlighting racial disparities across officer promotion, retention, and administration of military justice. “Minoritized”<sup>1</sup> groups are underrepresented in the Department of the Air Force’s (DAF) officer ranks. In an effort to change these statistics, the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and the Secretary of Defense charged each of the respective military services to study the barriers to entry into the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) for members of minoritized groups. In response, the Jeanne M. Holm Center (referred to as Holm Center), as the parent headquarters unit for the Air and Space Forces’ Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, desired to better understand the challenges facing the Hispanic/Latino community, as it is projected to be the fastest growing group in the United States for the next 40 years. To better its understanding, the Holm Center partnered with the Hispanic Empowerment and Advancement Team (HEAT), 16 Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), and non-federal Hispanic/Latino affinity groups in a series of regional and national engagements aimed at addressing barriers and working toward solutions to negate or minimize their impact.

This collaborative effort, titled the Hispanic-Serving Institution—Air Force ROTC Table Talks (a.k.a. “HART”), brought university Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) leaders, educators, community leaders, AFROTC cadre, and cadets together via virtual means to forge a common understanding of each entity’s role and responsibility in increasing opportunities for the Hispanic/Latino community. The DAF has identified the need to diversify its force to maintain a competitive edge. In line with that objective, this paper demonstrates that building an elite, diverse, all-volunteer force requires intentional outreach, holistic individual development, and resources with impact, all of which are critical to increase the enrollment and retention of qualified Hispanic/Latino students within the Department of the Air Force.

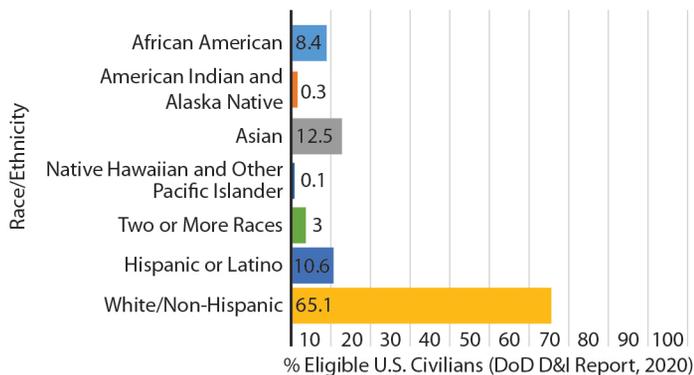
## **Introduction**

“There shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the Armed Services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.”<sup>3</sup> This quote is from Executive Order 9981, which directed the military to end segregation in 1948. It was expected that service members from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and races would come together to protect and pursue the ideals that this country was founded upon: individual liberty, respect and dignity for every human life, and the pursuit of happiness. Despite this executive order and decades of military policies aimed at increasing diversity and inclusion in the military, the data continues to tell another story—the armed forces, especially the officer corps, do not yet represent the nation they have sworn to protect.

Although racial and ethnic representation of some minority groups within the enlisted ranks is similar to the US population, officers of color across all minorities are underrepresented.<sup>4</sup> In 2020, then-Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper established the Board on Diversity and Inclusion. In its first report, the board stated that the eligible US Hispanic/Latino population who qualify for consideration to be an officer (bachelor’s degree, age group 19–44) is 10.6 percent, very close to the 10 percent accessions applicant pool goal established in 2014 by the Secretary of the Air Force and continues to be monitored annually. However, this eligibility pool being produced by the nation’s universities and from which the services seek talent serves as the nexus of this study. How can AFROTC assist in supporting production to increase the size of the eligibility pool? How can universities aid in building interest within this pool to lead and serve in the armed forces? The relationship is symbiotic and requires nurturing to yield the results desired.

As a result of the board’s report, Esper tasked the military services to identify actions related to improving Diversity and Inclusion policies and processes. This effort resulted in 25 actionable recommendations, including recommendation 1.3, which is “Increase the Pool of Qualified Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) Enrollment, Scholarship, and Commission applicants from Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI).”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act charged all the services’ ROTCs to study how effectively their programs produce officers of diverse backgrounds.

**Eligible U.S. Civilians (Officers) 19-44 y.o. with at least a Bachelor's degree (5-yr estimate 2014-2018, U.S. Census)**



**Graph 1. Qualified and eligible US civilians (Officers)<sup>6</sup>**

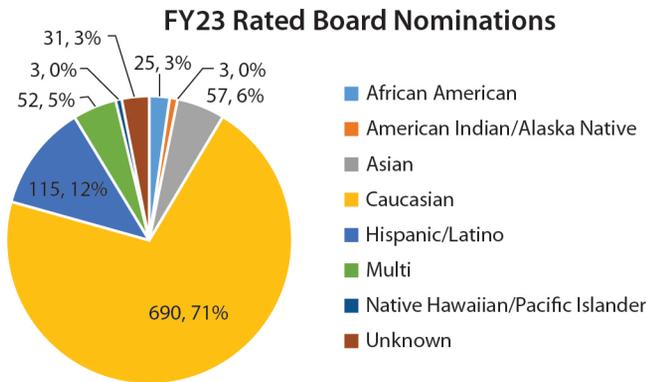
With regard to AFROTC, the applicant pool is students (cadets) enrolled in the General Military Course (GMC), usually during the freshman and sophomore years of an individual's university career. The GMC is an unconstrained period during which any university student can enroll as a cadet and learn the basics of military culture, leadership, aviation, and space operations. This period is critical to the cadets' decision to pursue a military career. During the Aerospace Studies 200 (AS200) course (usually taken in the spring of sophomore year), the services award enlistment allocations on the basis of merit, without regard to race or ethnicity. The enrollment allocation is, in essence, a contract between the cadet and the Department of the Air Force, signifying the decision by both parties that the cadet is to become an officer.

During the measured time-period of 2017–2021, 15 percent (6,485 of 43,435) of the AFROTC GMC population (applicant pool) identified as Hispanic/Latino—easily surpassing the SecAF's goal of 10 percent. During this same period 1,099 Hispanic/Latino cadets were commissioned, at a rate of success of 19.8 percent, lower than the overall of 25.1 percent (all cadets) and those of their non-Hispanic counterparts at 26 percent. Only 33 percent (360 of 1,099) of those commissioned from this community were selected for a career as an aviator (pilots, combat systems officers, air battle managers, and remotely piloted aircraft pilots). Overall, cadets from the Hispanic/Latino community selected to the total rated positions equated to 9 percent (360 of the 3,868 rated positions offered).<sup>7</sup> This becomes even more important considering that most of the Air Force's general officers and senior leaders

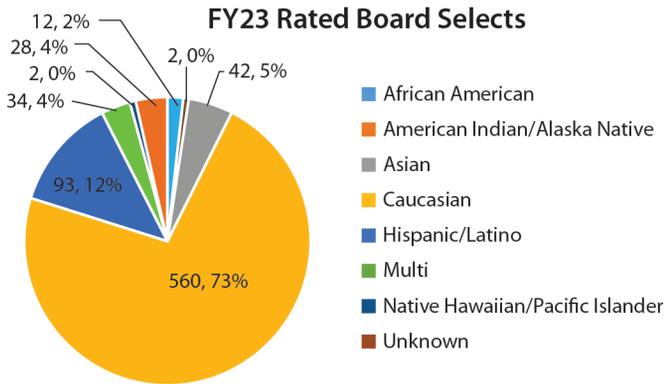
have predominantly been aviators and, overall, only 3 percent of the Air Force’s aviators are Hispanic/Latino.<sup>8</sup>

In analyzing the intersection of gender and ethnicity, the data illustrates that it is even less likely for a Hispanic female to be an officer in the flying community. To continue the discussion from above, only 51 Latinas were selected during the time-period for rated positions, whereas 337 of the total 456 females selected were Caucasian. That equates to 1.3 percent (51 of the 3,868) of the total chosen during the data period.

One last point must be considered—inspiration to pursue certain careers, be they technical, rated, medical, or any other. To continue the rated discussion, there is a true lack of aspiration to pursue a rated career in the Hispanic/Latino community. AFROTC cadre are limited in availability of rated members. Cadets are directly influenced by the instructors that mold them. If the instructor is from the Intelligence community, many cadets become interested in becoming Intelligence officers. When a rated instructor is on the detachment staff, it increases interest in rated positions. For example, the FY2023 rated selection process demonstrated that rated interest directly correlates to rated selection (See figures 1 and 2). The data suggests that the US military still has work to do to attract minority service members to not only the Department of the Air Force, but also to the career fields where diversity is sorely lacking.



**Figure 1. Fiscal Year 2023 ROTC rated board nominations by race and ethnicity**



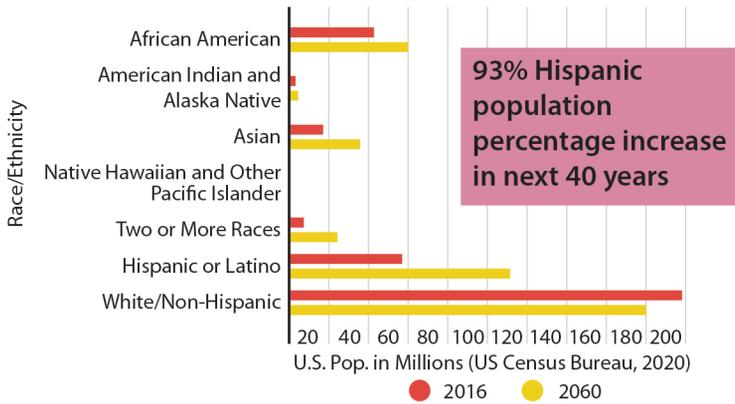
**Figure 2. Fiscal Year 2023 ROTC rated board selections by race and ethnicity**

These disparities in data suggest that the US military in general and the Air and Space forces in particular still have work to do to combat the biases and prejudices that affect minority service members.

As an all-volunteer force, the US armed forces must represent the nation they serve and defend. Research indicates that the military, as an inclusive organization, is more innovative, better anticipates change, is more agile, and is effective in its response.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, inclusivity contributes to members feeling valued, leading to greater engagement at work and increased retention.<sup>10</sup> If the Air and Space forces seek to be leading employers in this diverse labor market, their efforts need to be in line with leading American corporations that are recognized for their diversity. For example, Forbes’s annual “Best Employers for Diversity” is a comprehensive survey that ranks organizations on diversity and equality, and top candidates span an equally diverse set of industries that includes companies such as Progressive, Booz Allen Hamilton, Adobe, and TD Bank.<sup>11</sup> The Air and Space forces would benefit from analyzing what successful and diverse organizations do to ensure they recruit top (and diverse) talent across the United States.

In response to the SecDef’s charge, the Holm Center and AFROTC are partnering with key organizations to study the issue of increasing the pool of qualified ROTC candidates from universities across the nation, with an emphasis on MSIs. From the outset, the Holm Center sought the DAF’s endorsement to study HSIs first because of this demographic’s forecasted growth of 93 percent in the next 40 years, the fastest of all groups.<sup>12</sup>

## US POPULATION PROJECTIONS



**Graph 2: US population projections<sup>13</sup>**

AFROTC partnered with the DAF’s HEAT to establish the DAF’s first-ever HSI-Air Force ROTC Table Talks, better known as HART. HART began by initiating several individual conversations between university leadership, the Holm Center and AFROTC leadership, seeking a way to bring these groups together for actionable engagement. This led to four regional table talks (CA-WA, NV-NM-CO-AZ, TX, and PA-FL-Puerto Rico, hereafter referred to as Regionals) to share data and gather ideas for increased partnership. The collaboration then culminated with a national symposium focused on joining cadets, instructors, university leadership, citizen advocates, and officer accessions professionals in a collaborative way. This group addressed the barriers to enrollment and subsequent retention that Hispanic/Latino students face when considering and pursuing a career as a military officer through the AFROTC program. The national symposium garnered input from 185 participants from the military, 23 universities (16 HSI, seven high Hispanic/Latino officer-producing), and three community service groups, all addressing the barriers Hispanic/Latino students face.

The group determined that AFROTC, in partnership with the universities, must develop meaningful outreach for Hispanic/Latino communities to expose youth to Air and Space force careers, address and seek to remove barriers to enrollment, provide holistic individual development of cadets to be successful in the ROTC program and overall college setting, and provide resources of true impact to increase retention of those who demonstrate the

leadership and talent required to sustain and extend the nation's defensive and, if needed, offensive capabilities.

This paper intends to build upon the work of the HART Regionals and national symposium by presenting a plan of action for AFROTC and the DAF in addressing the barriers that deter Hispanic/Latino youth from considering a career in the Air or Space forces. Further, this paper addresses the factors that degrade this competitive employment process from being as equal and inclusive as possible. Military service is the unique opportunity for all, regardless of ethnicity, race, or gender, for those who strive to serve in defense of their nation. The DAF can fulfill our country's promise to all who wish to serve by shaping actionable recommendations into policy.

### **Literature Review**

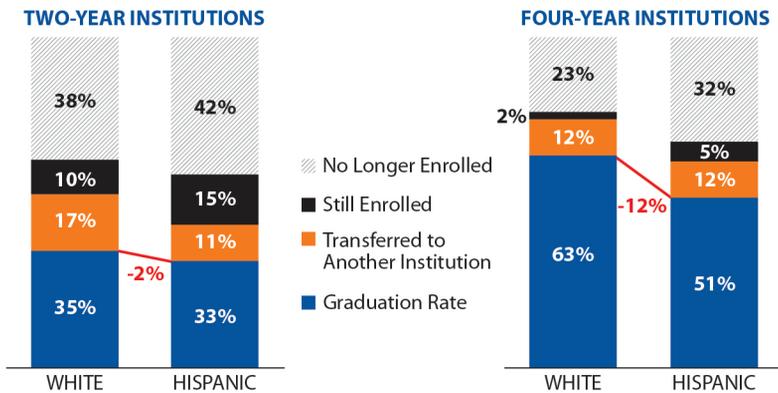
The designation of "Hispanic-Serving Institution" is earned. This Title V federal designation is awarded to colleges and universities whose declared Hispanic/Latino student population is at least 25 percent of the full-time equivalent undergraduate enrollment. Universities apply for this designation, and maintenance of this status is governed by the US Department of Education.<sup>14</sup> Despite a significant increase in HSI eligibility and enrollment, the four-year institution graduation rate for Hispanic/Latino students is 51 percent, 12 percentage points lower than white non-Hispanic/Latino peers in the United States (see graph 3).<sup>15</sup> Research suggests that universities and organizations have recognized the increase in the Hispanic/Latino population and have been working toward understanding how to increase enrollment and retention of this student demographic. These efforts are relatively recent and are awaiting measured results. Hispanic/Latino student enrollment at HSIs has more than quadrupled in the last 27 years.<sup>16</sup>

While this research is interesting, how have the institutions reacted to this increase?

### **The Holistic Approach**

A 2020 study from Humboldt University in California, titled "Holistic Student Development in Higher Education: Perspectives and Practices of Holistic Student Development at a Public California University," recognized that higher education institutions place a keen emphasis on "academic student success within the structures and values of educational programs."<sup>17</sup> The concept of a more holistic approach to education is not novel. A 2004 study titled, "Latino Student Success at Hispanic-Serving Institutions" analyzed six HSIs

DEGREE OUTCOMES	
At two-year institutions, Hispanics' graduation rate was <b>2%-points lower</b> than that of their White non-Hispanic peers in the United States.	At four-year institutions, Hispanics' graduation rate was <b>12%-points lower</b> than that of their White non-Hispanic peers in the United States.



\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**Graph 3: United States equity gap in degree completion.**<sup>18</sup>

in California, New York, and Texas to “develop a better understanding about institutional leadership and practices that promote Latino student success.”<sup>19</sup>

The results highlighted three key policy issues that centered on the need to focus “on other elements of success (beyond grades) such as student engagement in campus activities, continuous enrollment, and employment beyond graduation.”<sup>20</sup> This study highlighted what some HSIs were doing to contribute to Latino student success. These examples included

- the use of disaggregated data of students to identify areas of need and target areas of limited resources;
- partnering with nearby high schools and community organizations to increase access to universities;
- developing proactive institutional leaders;
- incorporating leadership, institutional research, academic programs, support services, and student life programs; and

- identifying and implementing practices to facilitate access to resources and facilities.

More recent research corroborates that successful programs employed “a variety of approaches that can support students holistically, including building community, nourishing cultural values, connecting students with nature, advising through the narrative approach, and advocating for student voices.”<sup>21</sup>

Georgetown University defines the holistic student experience as focusing on enrolling diverse candidates and on “their success academically and personally, in college and beyond.”<sup>22</sup> This means considering their “health, families, financial circumstances, housing, food, safety, relationships, and mental health.”<sup>23</sup> This holistic approach is directly in line with AFROTC objectives.

To identify and address these issues, universities are using data to identify problem areas and taking a proactive approach to develop solutions. Tiffany Beth McFune is the Assistant Vice President for Student Success and Retention at Morgan State University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). She asserts that addressing the holistic needs of students is expensive and requires work.<sup>24</sup> The touch point here is that a holistic approach to education is not cheap, neither in funding nor time and effort. The benefits of making this investment include improved academic achievement, enhanced mental and emotional well-being, increased problem-solving abilities, and reduced impact on inequities.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, many of the results captured thus far have been anecdotal, making this research even more essential.

There is much to learn from this research on a holistic approach to education. This approach can mean creative class, lab, and physical fitness scheduling, garnering enterprise-wide access to military-resourced helping agencies, increased recruiting strategies and resources, and analyzing the qualifying requirements that currently present barriers to commissioning for some groups. If these issues are not addressed they are likely to “negatively impact student development and well-being,” incurring feelings of isolation and absence of community within the academic institution, in a student’s AFROTC Detachment, and, ultimately, the DAF.<sup>26</sup> In guiding the curriculum of the four year ROTC student, there is little doubt that detachment commanders and AFROTC senior leaders are motivated to help, but the majority of efforts are individualized, not institutionalized, nor are they backed by DAF resources or support. As it stands, there are numerous ways the Department can develop more inclusive policies and resource programs that will aid AFROTC leadership in incorporating a more holistic approach.

Work in this area extends beyond the universities and AFROTC. Non-federal, community-based organizations have had great success in addressing

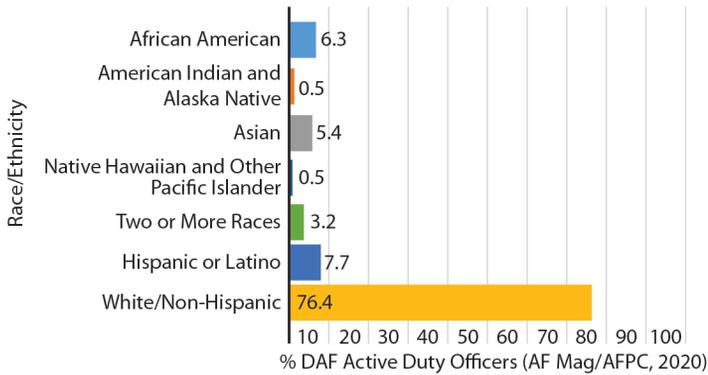
the unique needs of Hispanic/Latino students. Examples of these needs include studying trends concerning Hispanic/Latino youth and their enrollment, retention, and successful completion of college. This work has led to proposals to steer change, like the creation of, and active lobbying for, the Educator Diversity Act; consequently, this act would increase the number of diverse educators from the current 8 percent to 25 percent and bring the concept that “in order for students of color to thrive in the classroom, they need to see themselves represented in their teachers and role models” closer to actualization.<sup>27</sup> Impactful organizations such as Excelencia in Education, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and Latinos for Education have contributed significantly to greater knowledge of where the nation is failing Hispanic/Latino youth, especially as it relates to higher education. However, current research, and thus current data, is limited in that it is specific to the general population, not how it applies to industries or institutions like the DOD. Further study is needed to determine how current university enrollment and retention rates affect the Hispanic/Latino demographic of those seeking employment with the DOD and, more specifically, the Department of the Air Force.

### **DAF’s Recent Research**

The DAF’s 2020 Racial Disparity Review and the second Inspector General Review on Racial Disparity in September 2021 focused on assessing disparities by race, gender, and ethnicity in several areas, one of which studied career opportunities.<sup>28</sup> As it relates to officer recruitment to military service by the Hispanic/Latino community, these reports revealed that its members were underrepresented in officer accessions over the past five years, and although 7.7 percent of the active duty Air Force officer corps is Hispanic/Latino, only 3 percent of DAF pilots are Hispanic/Latino.<sup>29</sup>

While nascent, over the last decade, both Congress and the DOD have taken steps to slowly identify and, to a limited extent, address disparity issues within the DOD. Though at first glance this might seem like a slightly different topic, disparity issues within the DOD (including the DAF) affect retention of minoritized service members who are currently serving (including Hispanic/Latino service members) and that, in turn, influences who promotes (or demotes) the military as a viable career option, which also negatively impacts ROTC enrollment.

### AF Active Duty Officer Population (CAO June 2021)



**Graph 4: AF Active Duty Officer population<sup>30</sup>**

A precursor to today, the DAF Barrier Analysis Working Group (BAWG) was established in January 2008 in accordance with guidelines of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission “to address active or potential barriers to equal employment opportunities across the Total Force [to] maximize the team’s diverse talents and create an inclusive culture regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, orientation, religion, or disability.”<sup>31</sup>

In 2009, Congress established the Military Leadership Diversity Commission to study the persistent underrepresentation of minority demographics and released a 2011 report, which concluded that “the Armed Forces have not yet succeeded in developing a continuing stream of leaders who are as demographically diverse as the Nation they serve.”<sup>32</sup> This report led to the development of the DOD Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2012–2017, which outlined objectives of compliance, communication, and coordination that focused on the military’s internal development of training.<sup>33</sup> The study and subsequent strategic plan led to restructuring D&I oversight, developing new policies focused on inclusion of minority service members, and clarifying metrics that assess the effectiveness of D&I policies and programs.<sup>34</sup> While ensuring internal D&I training and development was an essential step in the right direction, these efforts did little to address external root causes, like the enrollment and retention of minoritized youth and their limited opportunities to serve as Air Force leaders. Failing to consider the root causes of the persistent underrepresentation of minority demographics has contributed to the issues the Air Force is seeing today.

One of the lessons learned was that a single solution cannot be applied to all groups, which has led to seven DAF BAWGs to represent various minoritized groups. These BAWGs, to include the HEAT, have been essential in addressing inequities particularly considering the social events of 2020 that have affected Americans. The HEAT's mission is to "analyze anomalies found in government civilian and military workplace policies, procedures, and practices, paying particular attention to identifying the root causes of the anomalies. Once identified, the team seeks to determine if these root causes are, in fact, potential barriers to equal opportunity, then devising a plan to eliminate them."<sup>35</sup> The HEAT is tasked with three distinct lines of effort: overcoming language barriers; education, awareness, and recruitment; and mentorship, professional development, and retention.<sup>36</sup> The team's accomplishments include updating Air Force policy to increase inclusivity and ensure Hispanic/Latino service members are able to use the Spanish asterisks, accents, and hyphens in their legal names on uniform nametags and nametapes and increasing equity in standardized Air Force Officer Qualifying Test (AFOQT) practices for cadets and Airmen who learned English as a Second Language (ESL) by allowing officer candidates to utilize the highest verbal score earned among all tests taken, instead of only using the most recent score received.

While the scope of this paper is focused on student and cadet enrollment and retention, previous research, such as that conducted by Air Force Col Lisa C. Firmin, can be critical in understanding the complex and enduring nature of many of the issues highlighted. Colonel Firmin's 2002 report, titled "Hispanics: An Untapped Leadership Resource," provides clear evidence of the lack of representation of Hispanics in the DAF's most senior leadership positions. In this report she demonstrates that Hispanic officers are routinely underrepresented in the selection for programs that are critical for career progression, such as "below the zone promotions, service school attendance, pilot career fields, and senior level command positions." Furthermore, Colonel Firmin's 2002 recommendations on recruiting, accessions, and mentoring and development still ring true today and support the findings and holistic approach utilized in this report.<sup>37</sup>

## Methodology

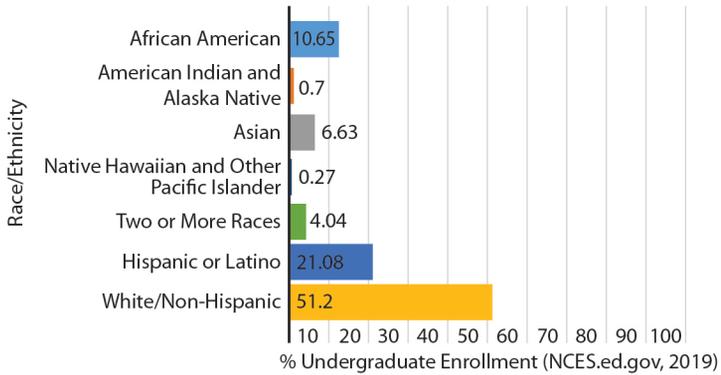
The purpose of this research was to identify actionable items the DAF can take to effectively address the issues highlighted by the DOD Board on D&I and the 2020 NDAA regarding AFROTC's ability to produce elite and exceptionally qualified officers from diverse backgrounds. In the pursuit of addressing the goals above, a strong partnership with the HEAT was essential to

establishing operational DAF participation as well as effective qualitative and quantitative data collection. The HART partnership provided a platform to engage internal and external stakeholders at every level, allowing the authors of this paper to use effective qualitative and quantitative research methods.

AFROTC and HEAT determined that research also required quantitative and qualitative data from university D&I leaders to reflect the importance of relating numbers and statistics to lived experience and personal anecdotes. Qualitative examples included anecdotes received through virtual table talks with D&I leaders and key stakeholders, like educators and students. Quantitative examples included US Census Bureau data, Air Force and AFROTC demographic data, program analytics, and enrollment data from each of the participating universities. After gathering the quantitative data displayed in the graphs below, two rounds of virtual table talks brought together university educators, D&I leaders, AFROTC cadre and cadets, HEAT, and staff from various leadership levels within the Holm Center.

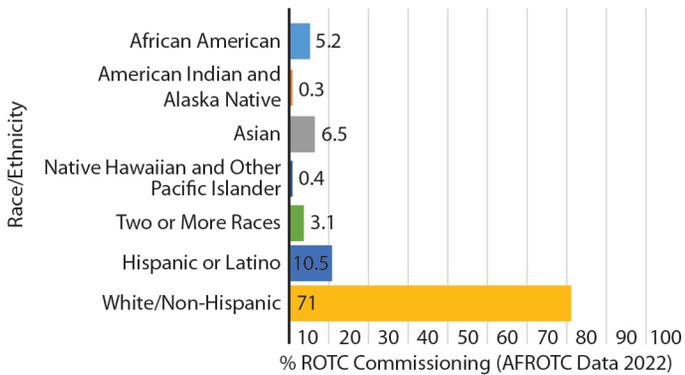
The utilization of both regional- and national-level moderated discussions provided invaluable qualitative and quantitative data. The first round, or Regionals, of moderated discussions were held January 10–14, 2022, and dedicated each day to each of the state groupings as described above. It is important to note that other non-HSI university leaders (like Penn State, University of Washington, and others) cadets and cadre were invited to participate in the Regionals to ensure nontraditional perspectives were included. This initial approach allowed discussions to focus on regional topics and address issues unique to each. During the Regionals, researchers collected anecdotal evidence and categorized inputs into recurring concepts. They then compared this evidence to the existing literature to develop three recurring themes used to focus the moderated discussions at the culminating national symposium. The symposium brought all regional participants together to discuss central topics and build upon the data discovered during the Regionals. During both events, participants discussed the barriers and limited access to resources that students, instructors, and institution officials faced, as well as different options on how to overcome them. After the national symposium, researchers used online surveys to collect additional qualitative data from Hispanic/Latino students, university educators, and AFROTC cadre and staff.

### Total U.S. Undergraduate Enrollment (Fall 2019)



**Graph 5: Total US undergraduate enrollment<sup>38</sup>**

### AFROTC Commissioning (2015-2020)



**Graph 6: AFROTC commissioning (2015-2020)<sup>39</sup>**

### **HSI Air Force ROTC Table Talks Participants**

- Angelo State University
- University of North Texas
- The University of Texas at San Antonio
- Texas A&M University
- University of Nevada–Las Vegas
- University of Washington
- California State University–Sacramento
- California State University–Fresno
- Virginia Tech
- Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Rio Piedras
- California State University–San Bernardino
- The University of Texas at El Paso
- Texas State–San Marcos
- Texas Tech University
- The University of Arizona
- The University of New Mexico
- University of Colorado–Boulder
- San Diego State University
- University of Central Florida
- Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto Universitario de Mayaguez
- Pennsylvania State University
- University of Miami
- New Mexico State University

The HART Regionals capitalized on having D&I university leadership, AF-ROTC cadre, and AFROTC cadets provide voice to fruitful and failed efforts and their impacts on the recruitment and retention of Hispanic/Latino students. Through these rich discussions, three key themes emerged: meaningful outreach, holistic individual development, and resources with impact. During the National Symposium, panel discussions added to the depth of understanding in these three central concepts. The findings are summarized below.

### **Meaningful Outreach**

HSIs and their ROTC detachments benefit from fostering persistent and consistent outreach programs that are dynamic to student needs. Purposeful outreach engagements should lead to meaningful increases in Hispanic/Latino student completion and commissioning rates.<sup>40</sup>

Anecdotal evidence shows that just because a college or university has been awarded an HSI designation by way of their 25 percent Hispanic/Latino student rate within its population, it does not necessarily mean that the institution, or its ROTC detachment, understands how to best serve its Hispanic/Latino students, their families, or their communities. Within this construct, AFROTC leadership seeks opportunities to negotiate with universities

to provide individualized academic resources and programs for these students, serving each cadet's needs to promote success, to develop a sense of individual value and realize the feeling of being valued. These discussions led to the discovery of a critical relationship in this process. True meaningful outreach cannot happen unless there is a concerted effort to engage not only students but their families, and communities as well.

How should success in these areas be measured? AFROTC can add interviews, surveys, and cadre input to its detachment assessment process to gauge cadet growth and feeling of inclusiveness, including focused questions to root out factors most important to the ethnic and racially diverse cadets they serve. To promote partnership between AFROTC and the HSI leadership, AFROTC can modify its annual viability letters to include this evaluated success of the university's programs, resources, and support functions in promoting the best environment for student progression, especially for those it is designated to serve. Including additional holistic information to these letters will create productive conversation space to highlight how AFROTC's services and programs, such as scholarships, recruiting plans, and diversity initiatives, can help student recruitment and retention for both AFROTC and the university.

<b>Implied Tasks to Support Increased Collaboration to Serve</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AFROTC develop survey mechanisms to gauge effectiveness of outreach and modified programs outcomes</li> <li>• AFROTC to reform annual viability letters to include observed university effectiveness in attracting and enabling success for the Hispanic/Latino and other diverse cadets</li> </ul> |
|--|

The AFROTC enterprise consists of 145 host detachments, with over 900 crosstown universities. This arrangement allows students from within the local area to have access to the AFROTC program while making the best use of manpower and resources. Crosstown arrangements are complicated for any ROTC cadet as it requires traveling to the host detachment for classes, physical fitness, and leadership labs. For the Hispanic/Latino cadet, this can be even more challenging if they are working to provide for their family or are limited by not having ready access to transportation. Negotiations between the host university leaders, its crosstown leaders, and the detachment commander should attempt to find meaningful resources to lessen the burdens of these valued cadets. Suggestions include increasing the alternative class schedules to enable fewer trips to the host university or at times that don't conflict with family and work commitments. Many universities have access to transportation

stipends or reduced fares, they just need to be negotiated into the formal university-DAF contract. None of these suggestions are easily attained, but equipping AFROTC's detachment commanders with negotiation tools and skills can open creative doors to reach this most precious talent pool.

<b>Implied Tasks to Support Crosstown Cadets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holm Center JAG to provide a Detachment Commander Negotiations Toolbox to empower detachment commanders to negotiate Memorandums of Agreement (MOA)</li><li>• AFROTC to seek ways to expand class and lab offerings during nontraditional hours</li><li>• AFROTC to work with universities to find creative transportation access to aid crosstown cadets</li></ul>

Air Force Recruiting Service's Gold Bar Recruiter (GBR) program is crucial to meaningful outreach. GBRs are recently commissioned Air Force officers who are competitively chosen to serve as a recruiter for their first year on active duty. They are charged with visiting high schools and community and junior colleges and attending key gatherings to inform and inspire youth about careers in the Air Force, with an emphasis on the AFROTC program. The 40 GBRs chosen each year are from diverse backgrounds and placed in areas of high racial and ethnic diversity. A portion of the total GBRs, especially those who are Spanish speakers, are leveraged to inspire and engage Hispanic/Latino youth. However, these GBRs would better serve the DAF if they were further employed to generate meaningful outreach and establish enduring relationships with the prospective cadets' families and communities. If employed in this way, they can utilize their own unique cultural competencies, extending the reach of the AFROTC detachment staff who may not have the same competencies or experiences.

"If you can't see it, you can't be it" is a statement that rings true for many as deterrence against trying something unfamiliar. Therefore, relatability and representation among detachment cadre are vital to the prospective cadet. Students are attracted to successful role models and to those that demonstrate the ability to overcome similar cultural and economic struggles. While all the services are striving to become more diverse, AFROTC units, the US Air Force Academy (USAFA), and the Air Force Recruiting Service would benefit from prioritized placement of diverse Airmen in targeted instructor and recruiter roles. AFROTC can also capitalize on cadre testimonials of overcoming adversity and unique experiences in its marketing materials.

The Regional and national symposium underscored the importance of familial and community ties and their influence on student decision-making. One study cites the important, yet often overlooked, impact that positive parent involvement has on the achievement level of Hispanic/Latino students.<sup>41</sup> The Regionals revealed that HSIs and ROTC Detachments do not just recruit students, but their entire families, including their parents, siblings, *abuelos* (grandfathers), *abuelas* (grandmothers), and *primos* (cousins). Families have great influence on the student's choice of school and program, to include AFROTC. Detachment Commanders and university professors shared personal stories about dealing with parents or grandparents seeking reassurances about how their child would be treated as an AFROTC cadet and commissioned officer.

For many in the Hispanic/Latino community, military intervention in their respective countries of origin has negative connotations of abusive control, political strife, and violence against the public. This background impression of the military in general may cause consternation, fear, and rejection of their child considering the military as a career choice. Simple efforts to promote the participation of parents have been shown to not only benefit the student, but the parents as well. GBRs and AFROTC recruiters can be leveraged to communicate directly with family members and provide their own testimonies of service and opportunities. If families are engaged throughout the entire process, it reduces resistance to students enrolling in the program and increases their chances of successfully completing the program. Further, simply providing families access to media resources in languages other than English can have an immense positive impact by removing language and cultural barriers. Again, scheduling of outreach events will most likely need to take place outside of the traditional nine to five, Monday through Friday work week to enable maximum participation and demonstrate a willingness to meet the students and families where they are.

A current dynamic will require all recruiters and detachment cadre to approach this community with care. Students of all demographics endured isolation from other students throughout the pandemic, with socialization limited to members of their household. Layer this with marginalization of these families if they have not yet learned English. Symposium panelists further noted a perceived loss of identity since students were not attending classes in person. For the Hispanic/Latino student, all these forces combined completely upset a normally tight-knit sense of family, friendship groups, and community networks that traditionally helped them overcome adversity. Institutions and detachments could also consider how they are promoting and recruiting at cultural events as students reemerge into daily life.

One drawback to the program is that GBR assignments are one year long and each GBR covers a wide geographical area. This can make it difficult to establish enduring ties in local Hispanic/Latino communities.<sup>42</sup> These drawbacks can be mitigated by expanding the GBR program to include more recruiters and developing strong, enduring relationships with local community groups that are already serving the Hispanic/Latino community. Groups like LULAC, which is one of the oldest Latino civil rights groups in the US, have already developed the trust needed with these target populations through decades of service to Hispanic/Latino families and can enhance Air Force outreach efforts.

To increase a sense of belonging and community, detachment personnel and current cadets should partner with the Civil Air Patrol and Junior ROTC units. This engagement with the next generation would positively increase each community’s awareness of Air and Space Force careers, while extending the network of peer-aged youth.

<b>Implied Tasks for Recruiting Efforts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air Force Recruiting Services (AFRS) trains and resources Gold Bar Recruiters to engage families and key community members in the areas surrounding HSIs</li> <li>• Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) provide priority to AFROTC, US-AFA, and AFRS in instructor and recruiter assignments to leverage diverse members in strategic placements</li> <li>• AFRS provides recruitment materials and media in Spanish</li> <li>• AFROTC and AFPC consider extending GBR tours to enable 30-day turnover between GBRs to achieve sufficient handover that will build trust and accessibility in the Hispanic/Latino communities they serve</li> <li>• AFROTC to partner with Hispanic affinity groups to further support GBRs with access and resources</li> <li>• AFROTC cadre and cadets formalize engagement with high school youth programs</li> </ul>

The AFOQT is used to determine if a prospective recruit has the knowledge and skills necessary to be an officer in the Air and Space forces and is a requirement for entry. The test measures verbal, quantitative, academic aptitude, navigation-technical aptitude, and piloting skills. This standardized test, like the SAT and ACT, has been scrutinized for covert and overt barriers to minoritized groups. Dr. Marla Francisco, from the University of Arizona, stated

that standardized testing is problematic, as many ESL students are directly struggling. Typically, women and underrepresented groups perform lower on standardized tests that assess performance, which in turn affects their admissions into college or programs.

Is the AFOQT an accurate predictor of success? Many universities say no. Dr. Heather Shipley, from The University of Texas at San Antonio, noted that the GPA is usually a better predictor of success than a standardized test and recommends that to increase diversity other metrics and a holistic review should be considered when admitting/placing students.

Since 2020, the DAF has instituted policies to accommodate students who struggle with this test. One policy now allows for group study among students taking the test for the first time. One other accommodation is the ability to “super score” measured areas between test attempts, counting the higher score as the final assessment.

The AFOQT is regularly refined by a panel of testing specialists within the DAF, AFROTC approves several waivers to the AFOQT scores each year after a cadet has proven leadership, character, and demonstrated academic prowess through observation and overall GPA. So, is the AFOQT truly required to aid in evaluating fitness for becoming an officer? Further study is required.

<b>Implied Tasks to Address the AFOQT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DAF commission RAND to review and readdress previous study to determine if the AFOQT is still in alignment with current admission practices and identification of career path</li></ul>

Active mentorship is one way of aiding Hispanic/Latino students with these institutional boundaries. Brig Gen Leslie Maher, Holm Center Commander, suggested having a bank of Hispanic/Latino mentors for cadre to contact so cadets can link up with them. Cadre can network with other detachments or their peers to seek mentors for their cadets, as needed. AFROTC can leverage the mentorship groups that utilize online-based platforms such as Facebook and MyVector to create a network of online mentors available to guide cadets and their families that are separate from AFROTC detachment cadre. This network of mentors can include a database that identifies the member’s Air Force career field, languages spoken, and other demographics as well. This way cadre can also connect students with mentors in the career fields of interest. Additionally, the DAF should foster partnerships with organizations like the Hispanic Veterans Leadership Alliance (HVLA). The HVLA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that is made up of veteran military and civilian senior leaders committed to “overcoming the profound lack of

Hispanic diversity and inclusion through the senior ranks of the DoD.<sup>29,43</sup> HVLA can provide invaluable insight into the issues affecting Hispanic/Latino cadets and Airmen and can serve as a pivotal resource to advance opportunities and remove barriers to increased representation.

<b>Implied Tasks for Cadet Mentorship</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holm Center to partner with HEAT and AFPC to build cadet-centered mentorship programs</li><li>• Holm Center to partner with key community organizations such as HVLA to develop mentorship opportunities and remove barriers to cadet accessions</li></ul>

### **Holistic Individual Development**

The Regionals discussed misperceptions about how Hispanic/Latino youth are evaluated, either from their language ability or by how they approach education. These discussions identified a need to reevaluate and transform these views to instead set an environment that fosters success. Rather than viewing Hispanic/Latino youth as desperately looking for a lifeline out of their environment, the DAF should see these possible cadets as competent, highly capable individuals, with unique talents, skills, and experiences. The DAF can unlock this potential through an approach that develops Hispanic/Latino students in ways that coincide with individual goals and talents. Currently, the DAF uses traditional enrollment and recruitment standards and strategies, which were developed years ago for a very specific and narrow demographic. To recruit and retain this diverse group of individuals, today's strategies are best served if they adapt to the demographic, location, and culture of the individuals they are trying to engage. Failure to consider a holistic approach to enrollment and recruitment will result in constraints to enroll and retain a diverse pool of candidates.

The national symposium discussions supported the research supporting a holistic approach to student success as outlined earlier in this paper. Conversations centered on how current standards and requirements measure academic and physical performance but fail to address other, nontangible factors like nutrition and mental health. A holistic approach to enrollment and retention includes not only measuring the body the person occupies, but the person within that body. This requires that the DAF shift away from measuring the potential of possible candidates in the explicit and exclusive way it has developed in the past. It should instead seek to make candidates feel welcomed and have

a sense of belonging in the organization. This means employing current DAF members who come from similar backgrounds and experiences as those it is trying to recruit. There is power in building peer-to-peer relationships to drive change.

<b>Implied Tasks to Drive Holistic Individual Development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AFROTC identify key partners and influencers at the university, through Hispanic affinity groups, and within the DAF to engage on events that address common areas of improvement and celebrate areas of success</li></ul>

Holistic individual development requires addressing the entire host of issues that prevent potential cadets from attempting a career path of choice. Financial, medical, societal, and spiritual stability are basic requirements for success and must be addressed at the time of recruitment. Success in this development has included areas identified below by university staff, detachment commanders, and cadets:

- Challenging the notion that having “just enough” (the basics) is not enough
- Ensuring students are offered financial literacy education such as the USAA financial literacy class that is available for detachments<sup>44</sup>
- Partnering with universities for running clinics and nutritional courses
- Working with universities to identify common gaps and working with local organizations to address those gaps
- Recommending students for the AFROTC Cadet Language Immersion Program
- Increasing scholarship coverage to include room stipends
- Identifying challenges encountered by community college transfer students

There are both short- and long-term actions that AFROTC can take to address this issue. In the short term, AFROTC can build partnerships with local university professional groups that serve STEM-related degree-seeking students. The DAF can also tap into existing university resources that already provide health and mental wellness support. Flexibility for commuter students can also be increased to ensure they also have an equal opportunity of fulfilling ROTC participation requirements.

In addition to the options mentioned above, AFROTC should take a long-view approach to persistent, continuous success. AFROTC should seek DAF

support to employ a full-time civilian representative to shepherd recruitment and student success actions at each detachment. This civilian's role would include university engagement to address and reduce barriers for all cadets. Further, they would identify events and opportunities for organic and external recruiters, alleviating the research required for the GBRs, senior officer visits, and other efforts geared toward inspiration for a career in service. If funding is not available, negotiations with the university to use employees of the Veteran's Affairs and Services offices for this function would also be extremely helpful. Training that is already offered through the Air Force Culture and Language Center can also be cross utilized to provide detachment commanders and instructors with the cultural competencies needed to better serve the diverse students at their host university.

<b>Implied Tasks to Promote Cadet Success</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holm Center to advocate to DAF for full-time civilian employees at each detachment</li> <li>• AFROTC detachments work with host universities and crosstowns to identify school-provided physical and mental health resources</li> <li>• AFROTC identify STEM related professional groups to partner with and co-host events</li> <li>• AFROTC to provide a Detachment Commander Cultural Competency Toolbox to include resources that can better serve a diverse student bod</li> <li>• Major Commands (MAJCOM) to partner with universities to provide professional development training opportunities that connect cadets with tech/STEM- related careers for exposure and mentorship</li> </ul>

**Resources with Impact**

To successfully implement the recommendations for holistic individual development and meaningful outreach, resources need to be supplied that will have a meaningful impact to Hispanic/Latino student and cadet success. AFROTC awards well over 1,000 scholarships each year, varying from two to four years of financial support. One ROTC program is testing the effectiveness of supporting 100 cadets each year with up to \$5,000 for room costs. AFROTC data states that Hispanic/Latino students awarded scholarships have a 78 percent success rate in completing their degree program and commission.

Unfortunately, for many of our students this is not enough. We have seen that for many under financial strain, the difference between having an additional \$300–\$500 can mean the difference between remaining in school or not. Studies show that the fear of financial burdens such as loans can be a strong barrier to attending postsecondary institutions, especially for low-income and minority families.<sup>45</sup>

DAF scholarships should only be a part of an overarching system that matches students to scholarships with little to no restriction. Students who are able to combine and utilize multiple scholarships from various sources have a greater chance of funding a complete degree program and hence commissioning from AFROTC. Research shows that scholarships can help increase postsecondary enrollment and retention to completion by reducing students' debt burden, enabling students to attend higher-quality institutions, and allowing students to enroll full-time or work fewer hours while pursuing a certificate or degree.<sup>46</sup>

Students would be even more likely to complete a degree and commission if the time frames for ROTC programs and their scholarships were not predicated on a four-year consecutive model. The ROTC program and its scholarships are built on the assumption that a degree program will take four consecutive years to complete. However, colleges and universities report degree completion rates in terms of six years. For almost all of the HSI universities sampled for HART, the six-year completion rate was significantly higher than the four-year completion rate. One idea here is for the AFROTC to adopt the Navy's ROTC prep model. In this model, the university agrees to pay the cadet-candidate's first year scholarship. If the cadet is successful and achieves a level of qualification in their academic classes and the first year of ROTC, ROTC then puts the cadet on a four-year scholarship to enable the successful completion of a five-year college program. If modified to allow for an additional year of scholarship support, this program can better accommodate this current trend.

<b>Implied Tasks to Maximize Scholarship Resources</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DAF maintains current AFROTC scholarship resources agnostic to production levels to provide decisive financial support to meet the DAF's technical degree requirements</li><li>• DAF supports employment of the Navy University Prep Program within AFROTC to support the potential cadet's unique educational needs to meet DAF degree requirements</li><li>• AFROTC redesigns scholarship program to meet changing trends in education, focusing on in-college scholarships to garner observed talent and leadership</li></ul>

Many Hispanic/Latino students use junior and community colleges to gain college credit for basic degree requirements. However, the transition to the four-year university is not automatic, nor is it streamlined to ensure students will not have to take certain classes again. The DAF tasks AFROTC to produce well over 70 percent of the DAF's technical degrees. Students transitioning from junior and community colleges do not typically transfer technical course credits and are therefore already disadvantaged from qualifying for the officer positions AFROTC is tasked to produce.

Another trend in education is dual enrollment between high schools and state universities. This trend results in high school graduates already possessing an associate degree and an expectation that a four-year scholarship could equate to two years to complete the bachelor's degree and using the money left over to attain a master's degree. Again, this system does not support degrees in technical fields. This model is not conducive with the traditional ROTC path to commissioning either.

To meet these and other changing trends in higher education, AFROTC and the DAF will need to contract an outside agency to study how to capitalize on these trends yet attain the technical degrees to meet our nation's future defense needs.

<b>Implied Tasks to Capitalize on Changing Trends in Education</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DAF contracts RAND to study how the changing trends in education can be harnessed to attract cadets into desired degree plans that yield the most capable officers</li></ul>



Qualifying for resources like scholarships can mean filling out demographic information on applications, which itself can be a barrier. Race and ethnicity are often narrowly defined with Hispanic/Latino as an ethnicity, leaving the student to ponder what race they belong to. Many demographic survey forms usually limit the choices for race to White, Black, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Native American/Alaskan, thus many will select "other" or "mixed" for race since no other US Census bureau categories are offered. This confusion leads to a misrepresentation of the total Hispanic/Latino student population and consequently can reduce the number of resources that should have been intended for them. It would behoove the universities and the DAF to identify alternatives to the standard demographic boxes. One recommendation is to ask students to identify themselves with a blank line to fill in versus the check in the box. If we ask for items like cultural heritage, it gives students more room to describe which communities they come from. This more comprehensive information will enable the DAF to

have a better understanding of where to allocate its resources. It would also enable a stronger analysis of HSI schools and the demographics at AFROTC host universities.

<b>Implied Task to Collect More Accurate Demographic Data</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DAF and universities devise and standardize demographic collection techniques that promote inclusivity vice exclusivity to ensure scarce resources are made available with accuracy</li></ul>

Accurate demographic reporting of communities will allow better use of recruiting functions and resources. Discussions with university diversity leaders highlighted the critical need to engage students on the idea of attending college and joining ROTC years before they reach their junior or senior year in high school. To accomplish this, it is recommended that more resources, like dedicated long-term liaisons, be designated specifically to engage with Hispanic/Latino communities. Additionally, incorporating more civilian specialists with higher positions will improve continuity and relationship-building between ROTC detachments, middle and junior high schools, and the local communities. These personnel will have the credibility and trust to advocate for the ROTC program and the college opportunities it provides in ways that will be understood in those communities. JROTC can also play a pivotal role in this partnership as most units are typically located in junior and senior high schools with diverse student populations.

AFROTC will also need to collaborate with organizations like the Alliance of Hispanic Serving Research Universities (HSRU). The HSRU is a national network of universities that are both HSIs and in the top 5 percent of universities in the US for research as determined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This network is focused on doubling the number of enrolled Hispanic/Latino doctoral students and increasing the Hispanic professoriate by 20 percent within their higher education institutions by 2030.<sup>47</sup> Partnerships with organizations such as HSRU can provide unique opportunities to tap into the Hispanic/Latino graduate and doctoral candidate population as well as provide additional insight into increasing representation in professional institutions. Many of these recommendations outlined here will help AFROTC become more relevant in Hispanic/Latino communities and develop the trust needed to decrease barriers to enrollment into DAF accessions programs and entry into military service.

## Conclusion

The objective of the HART Regionals and national symposium was to discuss the barriers Hispanic/Latino youth face in trying to enroll in a college or university and successfully complete an undergraduate program to secure a future as an Air or Space Force officer through the AFROTC program. These barriers not only affect their journey as AFROTC cadets but have repercussions for their professional military careers as well. Identifying then negating these systemic forms of marginalization will reshape our Air Force to promote growth and development of future Hispanic/Latino leaders in our military organization. The HART National Symposium was the first of this magnitude, and because of its success, there is a desire to reach other communities through this same collaboration.

As AFROTC teams with universities to design and execute meaningful outreach, the importance of ensuring students feel a sense of community and support will be paramount, ensuring all focused recruitment efforts intentionally include families and community partners. Outreach through and supported by our military leaders requires genuine presence, offering recruiting resources and engagements to be in both Spanish and English to connect with family and community influencers. These influencers, as demonstrated in this paper, play a significant cultural role in the student decision-making process, especially when it involves major life decisions such as education and career.

The holistic approach to student development is critical to future success. The various engagements identified that the Air Force as an organization needs to move past previous biases and concepts of how to measure and support future development and growth. Holistic means are not just limited to performance output but also extended to circumstances outside of one individual's success. This includes incorporating the family in the support network, capitalizing on cultural values like loyalty and service to communities, ensuring representation in instructors and staff, and removing institutionalized barriers meant to keep minoritized communities from advancement. This includes addressing the use and impacts of standardized tests such as the AFOQT and taking positive action. Many ESL students struggle with these types of standardized tests, not because they are not capable, but because they lack the resources and support needed to empower them to fully succeed. Ultimately, action is needed now to ensure our Air Force has the right people in service to maintain its strategic competitive edge.

Lastly, none of the meaningful outreach and holistic approach to learning is feasible without impactful resources. Even if AFROTC were to do everything

correctly to attract this community, it will take resources to retain them through their college career and beyond. More than just resources are required, but also enduring partnerships between AFROTC and its university partners to provide students and cadets with resources that are effective and timely. This includes expanding current scholarship programs that are changing outcomes and seeking creative partnerships to expand the resourcing period to match the “new normal” of longer college careers (for this community, six-year college careers are prevalent). If the DAF desires to attract this community’s best talent, impactful resources are critical to galvanize the technical revolution the nation requires in its next generation of national defense.

Many minorities and low-income students leave university or higher education, not because they chose to but because they are forced out by barriers created to leave them behind. Additionally, the lack of demographic representation within application forms and demographic surveys leaves many Hispanic/Latino students feeling obligated to check a box that does not fit their identity or marking “decline to respond” without understanding how this may reduce resources that could have been allocated to serve their community.

The results of these HART panels generated difficult discussions that drove the hard issues; the DAF must consider addressing the disparity in officer recruitment. Is the Department of the Air Force creating or continuing to support counterproductive barriers, therefore excluding talented, diverse future leaders? The implied tasks within this report are time-consuming and resource-inducing. However, they are also considerably inexpensive when contrasted with the outcomes should the DAF not act. To maintain the world’s greatest Air Force, the organization, through AFROTC and its partner universities, must enlarge the applicant pool to ensure it does select the very best this nation has to offer. Ultimately, the DAF must seek out those with the best possible talent and push for innovation and advancement, ensuring that every capable individual with the drive to serve is not overlooked.

### **Areas for Further Research and Analysis**

Although the research and dialog with various experts, affinity groups, and students conducted to develop this report uncovered many topics that fell outside the scope of this paper, many of these concepts merit additional research and analysis to further the overall initiative to increase minoritized representation in the DAF. The authors would like to highlight that the GBR program was a common theme mentioned when discussing ways to improve recruitment and accessions. Many felt that expanding this Air Force Recruiting Services (AFRS) program and others such as the Admissions Liaison Officer

program could provide additional opportunities to tap into the Hispanic/Latino community. This paper recommends that the AFRS conduct additional analysis into how the GBR program can be enhanced to better serve not only the Hispanic/Latino community but all minoritized communities.

Additionally, the authors of this report recognize that the population trends, demographic data, and DAF milestones and targets for D&I need to be constantly assessed and updated. The current SecAF accessions target for a Hispanic/Latino applicant pool of 10 percent was established in 2014 and based on the eligible population data current at that time. US census data today indicates that the percentage of the Hispanic/Latino population with a bachelor's degree or higher is at 16.9 percent and that the DAF's target should reflect current population data. As of the publication of this report, the DAF is working to address this issue and how it can best incorporate current trend data. This paper recommends that the DAF and DOD at large include higher education institutions, community groups, and BAWGs into this process to ensure our military services are not chasing outdated targets.

Finally, HART-generated discussions led to looking at new ways to expand formal partnerships with HSIs and other minoritized serving educational institutions. While outside the scope of this paper, one such initiative discussed looked at establishing a formal relationship between an Air Force Major Command (MAJCOM), such as Air Combat Command, Air Mobility Command, or Air Force Material Command and a network of HSIs across the country. This type of partnership could provide promising Hispanic/Latino cadets at HSIs with consistent access to DAF installations and senior leaders, with paid internships to develop the leadership skills critical to academic and accession program success. While HSIs would serve as an initial starting point or proof of concept, this type of initiative could then be expanded to include other MSIs. This paper recommends key stakeholders such as AFROTC, DAF D&I staff, MAJCOM headquarters, community affinity groups, and DAF-BAWGs take a closer look at how this concept can be put into practice.

## Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

1. The term “minoritized” “reflects an understanding of ‘minority’ status as that which is socially constructed in specific societal contexts (Stewart, 2013).” That is to say, the term “minority” implies that the recipients of that term accept their status whereas the term “minoritized” shows how the title is one that society has given to a set group of individuals.

2. The Census Bureau states, “The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requires federal agencies to use a minimum of two ethnicities in collecting and reporting data. . . . US federal government agencies must adhere to standards issued by OMB, which specify that race and the Hispanic origin (also known as ethnicity) are two separate and distinct concepts. These standards generally reflect a social definition of race and ethnicity recognized in this country, and they do not conform to any biological, anthropological, or genetic criteria.”

3. NARA, “Executive Order 9981.”

4. Department of Defense, “Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report,” 8.

5. Department of Defense, “Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report,” 22.

6. Department of the Air Force, “Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review,” 13.

7. Department of the Air Force, Holm Center, Commander’s Action Group.

8. Department of the Air Force, “Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review,” 6.

9. Johnson, *Inclusify: The Power of Uniqueness*, 61.

10. Johnson, 13.

11. Council, “America’s Best Employers for Diversity 2022.”

12. “About the Hispanic Population and Its Origin.”

13. “About the Hispanic Population and Its Origin.”

14. White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics.

15. Excelencia, “A Florida Briefing.”

16. Despres, “Report: Huge Growth in Hispanic-Serving Institutions.”

17. Crutchfield, “Holistic Student Development.”

18. Closing the equity gap in college completion can be tracked by the measures shown in the graphic. Alone, none of these measures capture the entire story of equity, but in combination, they provide a useful picture of the equity gap in degree attainment between Hispanic and White non-Hispanic cohorts in a single year. Analysis performed by Excelencia in Education using the DOE, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Education Data System 2018 Graduation Rates Survey and the Institutional Characteristics Survey.

19. Santiago, Andrade, and Brown, “Latino Student Success.”

20. Santiago, Andrade, and Brown.

21. Crutchfield, “Holistic Student Development.”

22. THE FEED, “What Does It Mean to Create.”

23. THE FEED.

24. THE FEED.

25. American University, “What Is Holistic Education?”

26. Crutchfield, “Holistic Student Development.”

27. Latinos for Education, “About Us.”

28. Department of the Air Force, “Racial Disparity Review Update.”

29. Department of the Air Force, “Report of Inquiry (S8918P).”

30. Air Force Magazine, “2021 USAF & USSF Almanac.”

31. Perez, “DAF Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.”

32. Military Leadership Diversity Commission, "From Representation to Inclusion."
33. Department of Defense, "Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan."
34. Department of Defense, "Evaluation of Department of Defense Compliance," viii.
35. Hispanic Empowerment & Advancement Team, "HEAT Fact Sheet."
36. Hispanic Empowerment & Advancement Team, "HEAT Fact Sheet."
37. Firmin, "Hispanics: An Untapped Leadership Resource."
38. Department of Education, "Digest, 1976–2014"; and Department of Education, "Digest, 1976–2019."
39. Department of the Air Force, "Reports on Racial Disparity," 75.
40. Discussion with AFROTC, February 17, 2022.
41. Araque, Wietstick, Cova, and Zeppeda, "Impact of Latino Parent Engagement."
42. Discussion with AFROTC, February 17, 2022.
43. HVLA, "Our Mission and Vision."
44. USAA Educational Foundation, "Command Your Cash."
45. Complete College America, *Time Is the Enemy*.
46. Oregon Community Foundation, "Student Success Through Scholarships."
47. Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Research Universities, "Who We Are."

## Appendix

### Sources:

- *Reasons Why Hispanics Remain Underrepresented in Military, Despite Interest* | RAND
- *Hispanic Representation in the Department of Defense Civilian Workforce: Trend and Barrier Analysis* | RAND
- *Military Enlistment of Hispanic Youth: Obstacles and Opportunities* | RAND
- *Force Drawdowns and Demographic Diversity: Investigating the Impact of Force Reductions on the Demographic Diversity of the U.S. Military* | RAND
- *Proving Patriotismo: Latino Military Recruitment, Service, and Belonging in the US* by Adam McGlynn and Jessica Lavariega Monforti

## **Table of Abbreviations**

AFOQT	Air Force Officer Qualifying Test
AFRS	Air Force Recruiting Services
BAWG	Barrier Analysis Working Group
CAP	Civil Air Patrol
D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
ESL	English as a Second Language
GBR	Gold Bar Recruiter
GMC	General Military Course
HART	HSI-Air Force ROTC Table Talks
HBCU	Historically Black College and University
HEAT	Hispanic Empowerment and Advancement Team
HSI	Hispanic-Serving Institution
HSRU	Hispanic-Serving Research Universities
HVLA	Hispanic Veterans Leadership Alliance
IG	Inspector General
LULAC	League of United Latin American Citizens
MAJCOM	Major Command
MSI	Minority-Serving Institutions
RDR	Racial Disparity Review
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
RPA	Remotely-piloted aircraft

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