

# POLICY RESEARCH BRIEF

## ***Hispanic Student Enrollment at CUNY: A Decade of Growth and Change***

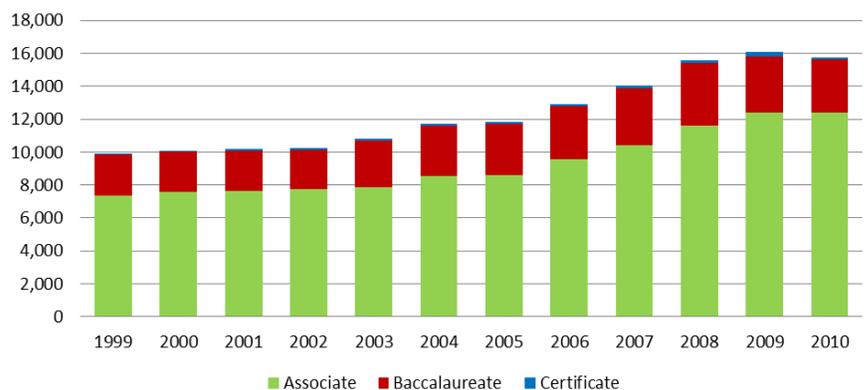


*Over the last decade, the growth of Hispanic enrollment at CUNY has outpaced both the increase in the Hispanic population in New York City and the increase in CUNY's overall undergraduate enrollment. Today, Hispanics are the largest ethnic group among CUNY's undergraduates, comprising 29% of the total. During this period, the Hispanic student population transitioned from first- to second-generation. This shift can be charted in terms of the nativity of CUNY's Hispanic students as well as the percentage who report English as their native language and their proficiency in English.*

### **Growth of Hispanic Enrollment at CUNY**

Hispanics are one of the fastest growing racial and ethnic groups in New York City: Over the period 2000-2010, the City's Hispanic population increased by 175,000, or about 8.1%. It now accounts for 28.6% of the city's population compared to 27.0% ten years earlier. Hispanic representation among undergraduate students at CUNY has grown even more rapidly. Between 2000 and 2010 Hispanic enrollment at CUNY rose from 25.6% of undergraduates to 29 percent. This increase, from 43,000 students to just over 66,000, represents a growth rate of 54 percent, compared to a 36 percent increase for CUNY's total undergraduate population. The greatest increase in Hispanic enrollment occurred in associate programs; the number of Hispanic students was 68 percent higher in 2010 than in 1999. This compares to a 31 percent increase for Hispanic students in baccalaureate programs.

**Figure 1: Number of Hispanic Students Enrolled at CUNY by Degree Level, 1999-2010 Fall Entering Cohorts**

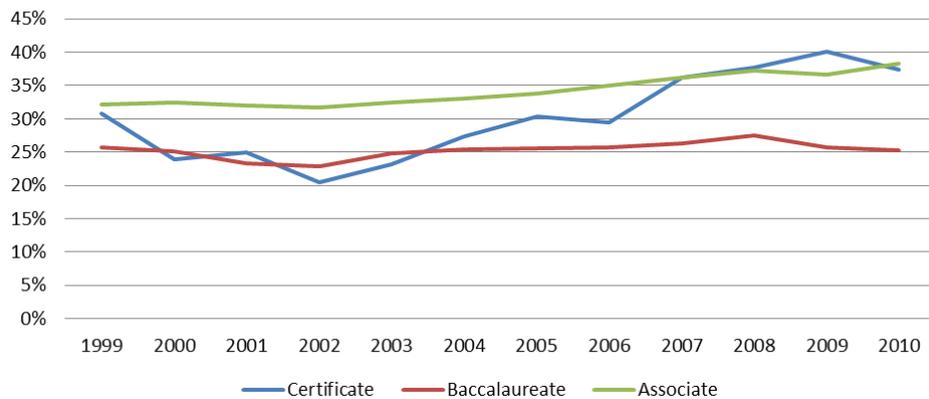


### **Transition from first to second generation**

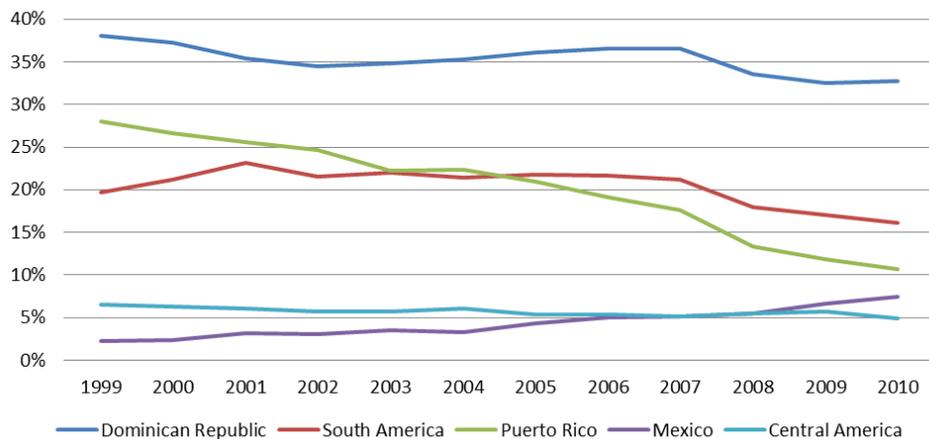
Over the past decade, CUNY's Hispanic student population has undergone a transition from predominantly first- to majority second-generation. That is, a greater proportion of Hispanic students in recent years were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents rather than being immigrants themselves. The transition can be

<sup>1</sup> [www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/census2010/pgrhc.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/census2010/pgrhc.pdf)

**Figure 2: Hispanic Students as a Percentage of First-Time Freshmen at CUNY by Degree Level, 1999-2010 Fall Entering Cohorts**



**Figure 3: Ethnic Origin Reported by Foreign-born\* Hispanic Students, 1999-2010 Fall Entering Cohorts**



\*Includes Puerto Rico. Students born in the U.S. or other non-Hispanic majority countries are excluded.

Note: Ethnic origin is defined as country of birth, unless student was born in the U.S. or had missing information for country of birth. In this case, information was taken from country of identity when available, or country of citizenship if country of identity was missing. Unknowns estimated on students for whom information is complete.

charted in terms of percentage of Hispanic undergraduates who are foreign born (Figure 3).

**Countries of Origin**

The ethnic makeup of Hispanic students at CUNY who were foreign-born has remained relatively stable over time with some notable excep-

tions (Figure 4). Dominicans make up the majority of Hispanic students at CUNY; indeed, Dominicans are the largest ethnic group of any at CUNY. South Americans and Puerto Ricans are the second and third largest groups, respectively. Puerto Rican representation, however, declined steadily from 28% in 1999 to 11% in 2010. As a result, the number of South Americans at CUNY exceeded the number of Puerto Ricans in 2005. Smaller numbers of Hispanic students are from Mexico and Central America, although Mexican enrollment has been increasing steadily over time, out-pacing Central American representation in 2008 and after.

The shift from first to second generation among Hispanics at CUNY was similar across all Hispanic countries and regions of origin. There has been a decrease the proportion of students who are

foreign-born in all groups (Figure 5). For example, 62% of Dominican students were foreign born in 1999 but only 42% were foreign-born in 2010.

<sup>2</sup> “A Profile of Undergraduates at CUNY Senior and Community Colleges: Fall 2010”, <[www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/ira/ir/data-book/current/student/ugStudentProfileF10.pdf](http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/ira/ir/data-book/current/student/ugStudentProfileF10.pdf)>

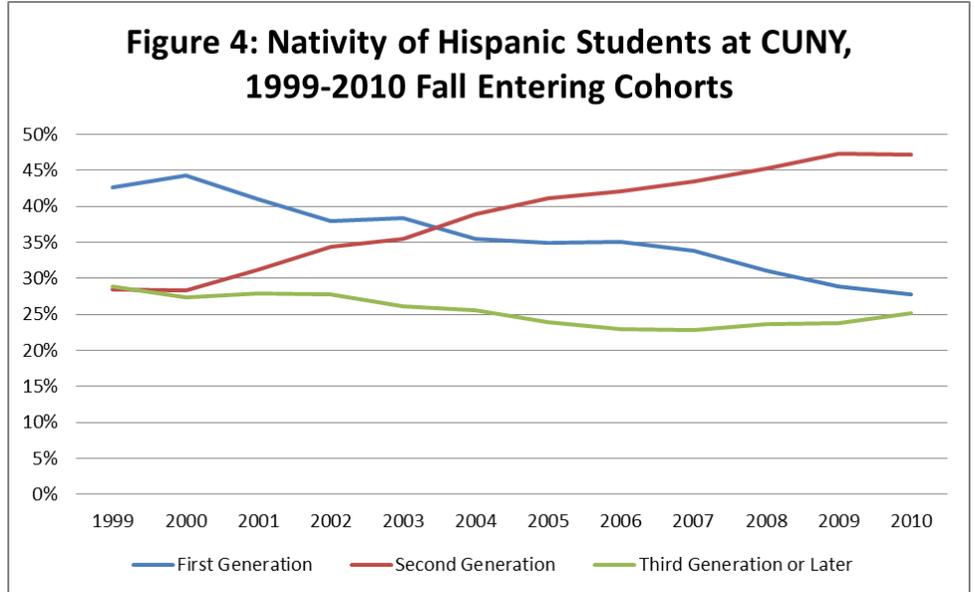
The proportion of South American students who were foreign born decreased from 65% in 1999 to 44% in 2010. The same pattern is evident for Mexicans and Central Americans.

**Native Language**

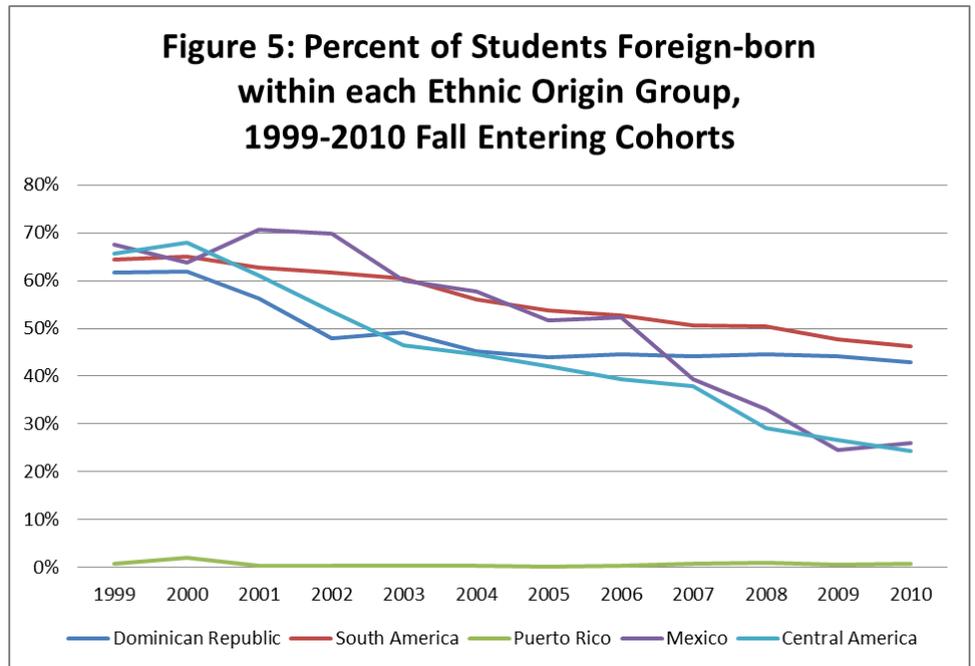
The demographic shift in CUNY’s Hispanic population from first- to second-generation has implications for the language proficiency of CUNY students. The majority of Hispanic students now report that English is their native language rather than Spanish (Figure 6). Following this trend, the proportion of Hispanic students who require remediation for writing has decreased from a high of 58% in 2000 to a low of 38% in 2010 (Figure 7).

**Conclusion**

The growth in Hispanic enrollment at CUNY has not just kept pace with Hispanic population growth in New York City, but far exceeded it. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic share of New York City’s population grew by 8.1 percent, while Hispanic undergraduate enrollment at CUNY increased by 54 percent. Meanwhile, CUNY’s Hispanic population has transitioned from first to second generation, posting strong gains

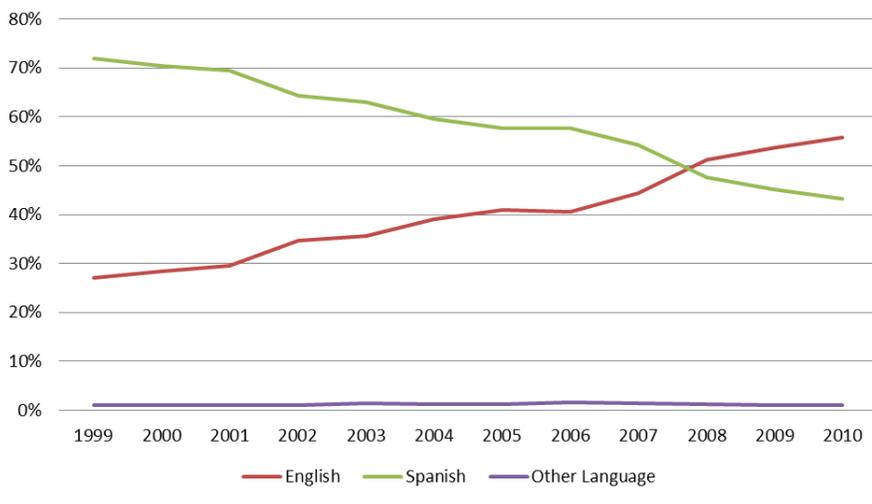


Note: First generation students are defined as those who immigrated to the U.S. after being born in a foreign country. Second generation students were born in the United States or a U.S. territory but have at least one foreign-born parent. Third generation and later are those students who were born in the U.S. or a U.S. territory to two parents also born in the U.S. or a U.S. territory. Unknowns estimated on students for whom information is complete.



Note: Ethnic origin is defined as country of birth, unless student was born in the U.S. or had missing information for country of birth. In this case, information was taken from country of identity when available, or country of citizenship if country of identity was missing. Unknowns estimated on students for whom information is complete.

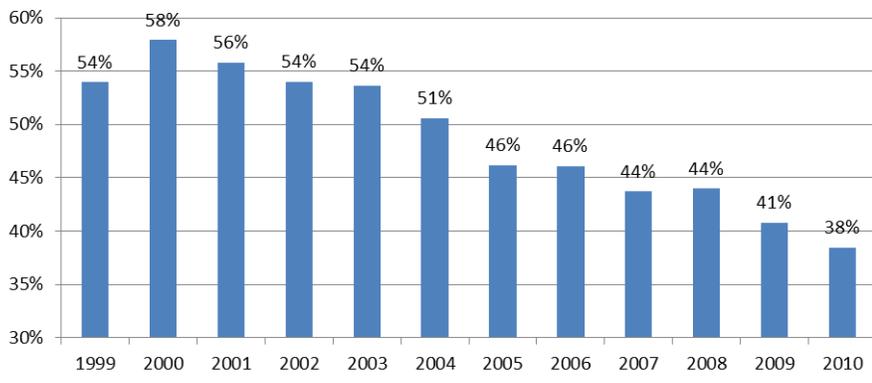
**Figure 6: Native Language Reported by Hispanic Students, 1999-2010 Fall Entering Cohorts**



in English language proficiency at the start of their college careers. These trends bode well for continuing upward trends in the academic success rates of CUNY’s Hispanic students.

Note: Unknowns estimated on students for whom information is complete.

**Figure 7: Percent of Hispanic Students Requiring Remediation in Writing, 1999-2010 Fall Entering Cohorts**



Note: Unknowns estimated on students for whom information is complete. Remedial need in writing based on a student’s best score on basic skills exams.

Visit us at OPR’s new website:  
[www.cuny.edu/opr](http://www.cuny.edu/opr)

The Office of Policy Research (OPR) aims to improve retention and graduation rates at CUNY through research, evaluation, and decision support. To this end, OPR pursues issues of relevance across the CUNY system, including postsecondary racial, income, and gender gaps in access and performance; the role of college in economic development and workforce training; the educational experiences and choices of immigrant students; college readiness and the high school to college “pipeline”; and the inter-relationships of housing and education. And with Gates Foundation support, OPR is working with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to build a shared, student-level, longitudinal, tracking data system that both institutions use to improve their understanding of college readiness and the high school to college transitions. [read more >>](#)