



## Higher Education as a Human Right: Comparing Early College Approaches to University Access for Racial Minority Students in Costa Rica and the United States

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Despite the United Nations emphasis on Education as a human right for all world citizens, access to higher education by students representing traditionally marginalized racial minority groups, particularly those of African descent, continue to be a challenge in many nations. In Costa Rica and the United States, early college high schools represent one approach to facilitating college going and retention rates of racial minority students by enhancing college readiness skills and dispositions. Demographic profiles of African Americans and Afro-Costaricans, as well as an overview of the educational systems in both countries, provide an important backdrop to the comparative description of early college high schools. Strengths and challenges of each approach are presented. Emerging concerns also are outlined for further research on the demographic reporting of Afro-Costaricans as well as the need for further studies on the role of early college high schools in enhancing university access and college success in various nations.

*Keywords:* early college high schools; colegios universitarios; college access, racial minorities, Afro-Costaricans; African Americans; educational systems; United States; Costa Rica

Countries differ in the extent to which both basic and higher education are viewed as a human right for all citizens. However, the importance of education as a human right is reflected clearly in the policy statements of international organizations like the United Nations. For example, human rights proclamations are outlined in the many charters of the United Nations and Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013) which state, “the right of every individual to education is recognized as inalienable.” Furthermore, UNESCO stresses that pathways to college and post-secondary educational attainment must be prioritized by governments and their societies, who, in turn, will benefit from an educated citizenry. According to this point of view, a basic or K-12 education can be considered a necessary, but insufficient, condition for the educated citizenry of a nation. Furthermore, college-educated people tend to have higher incomes which allow for

greater spending power and an ability to spread wealth among family and community members (Kochlar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011; Lloyd, Tienda, & Zajacova, 2001). This is particularly true for students representing traditionally marginalized groups (Kochlar et al., 2011).

Although U.S. education policy does not explicitly state that access to education is a right of its citizens, this notion is implied in the U.S. Department of Education’s (USDOE) 2007-2012 Strategic Plan as, “all students [should] have the opportunity to fulfill their full academic potential (USDOE, 2009). Similarly, educational policies in the Central American country of Costa Rica have focused on improving educational attainment, literacy, equity, and access. Moreover, Costa Rican educators, policy makers, and scholars have stressed that education is goes beyond a citizen entitlement in that education is expressed as “a human right” (Costa Rica Minister of Education [MEP], 2011;

National University Humanistic School, 2011). Much of this language is outlined and delineated throughout the aims, objectives, and strategic plan of the Office of the Costa Rican Ministry of Education [Ministerio de Educacion Principal de Costa Rica-MEP] (Costa Rica MEP, 2011), which has goals of expanding and sustaining educational attainment that is equitable and accessible to all students. Ministry of Education efforts include increasing access to college and post-secondary educational opportunities (Costa Rica MEP, 2011). Additionally, Costa Rican educational values of humanism are commonly expressed along with the call for public universities to prepare citizens to be humanistic-oriented professionals who embody a sense of service to country and community through both research and public service (Twombly, 1997).

Therefore, in viewing higher education as a human right, it would seem imperative to improve educational access for students from traditionally marginalized racial groups, such as African Americans and Afro-Costaricans, who continue to attend and complete college at drastically lower rates than Whites and other groups both countries (Castro, 2005; U.S. National center for Educational Statistics-NCES, 2012). As a result of social movements in the United States during the 1960's and the enactment of political policies in Costa Rica during the 1940s and 1950s, access to higher education has improved slightly for traditionally marginalized racial groups; however, significant problems persist for Afro-descendants in both countries (Castro, 2005; Harpelle, 2002; Lloyd, Tienda, & Zajacova, 2001). Throughout the history of Costa Rica and the United States, Afro-descendants have tended to: (a) be overrepresented among those in the poorest socioeconomic strata; (b) experienced systemic exclusion and discrimination; (c) be marginalized from full societal participation in government and economic policy making; and (d) have limited access to higher education (Castro, 2005; Cresnoe, 2009; Orfield & Lee, 2007).

One educational strategy for addressing these inequities and discrimination while enhancing college access and student success has been what has been called, *early college high schools* (ECHS) in the United States or *colegios universitarios* [university-based secondary schools] in Costa Rica and other Latin American countries. In the United States, early college programs are designed to focus on college preparation and have been identified as a viable and sustainable means of improving higher education access for minority groups (Edmunds et al., 2010). Moreover, U.S. researchers indicate that programs designed to provide early college experiences to minority high school students (e.g., *Upward Bound*, early college high schools) have been successful in increasing student college readiness, access, retention, and completion (American Institute of Research, 2013).

In this article, we provide a comparative description of early college high school (ECHS) approaches in the United States and Costa Rica to explore how these programs might improve college preparation and educational access to higher education for traditionally marginalized racial groups, namely those of African descent (e.g., African Americans and Afro-Costaricans). In the United States, ECHSs have been touted as a sustainable approach to expanding higher education access for minority students, namely because partnerships between high schools and colleges/universities have been shown to cultivate cultures of college persistence among ECHS students (Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000; Early College High School Initiative, 2013). As mentioned above, in Costa Rica, these high school-college partnerships are commonly referred to in Spanish as, *colegios universitarios*, or university-based high schools.

This comparison of early college approaches in the United States and Costa Rica initially emerged from site visits made in Costa Rica by U.S. higher education leaders who participated in an international internship. Because early college programs are being implemented in both countries, visiting U.S. higher education leaders took an interest in exploring the similarities and differences in ECHS approaches, particularly as these approaches might lead to the college access and success of traditionally marginalized racial groups. Like the United States, Costa Rica is racially and ethnically diverse, and has a population of people who are of African descent and mixed race.

In this comparison, we describe two early college high school approaches most widely used in the United States and Costa Rica. In the United States, early college high schools tend to partner with community colleges and universities, whereas in Costa Rica, *colegios universitarios* typically are based on 4-year university campuses. In comparing early college high school approaches taken in Costa Rica and the United States, we hoped to reveal potential opportunities and challenges for educational leaders and policy makers to consider in implementing early college models as a means to increase the college access and academic success for students who identify as African Americans and Afro-Costaricans in their respective countries.

In a globalized world, higher education leaders might benefit from comparisons of national systems to explore educational strategies and approaches implemented in countries outside their own. In examining pertinent issues in higher education, Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) stressed a need for scholars to move beyond bordered perspectives of what they termed, *methodological nationalism* (MN), which keeps researchers and educational leaders encapsulated in a nation-state lens that defines and limits their views of society. In particular, Shahjahan and Kezar (2013) stress

the importance of adopting more global perspectives in examining issues comprising college student experiences, diversity, and governance. By comparing early college approaches in the United States and Costa Rica and exploring how these programs might facilitate college access and success of students who are afro-descendants, we hoped to move beyond a bordered perspective.

#### **Higher Education Access for Afro-Descendants**

Costa Rica has a population of *Ticos* (nickname for Costaricans) that are of Afro-Caribbean heritage and are often identified as *Limonese*s because the largest concentration of the Afro-Costarican population lives in the province (state) of *Limon*. Although data from the 2000 Costa Rica census (Costa Rica National Institute of Census Statistics, 2001) specify Costa Rica's Afro-descendant population to constitute less than 2% of the overall racial and ethnic demographic make-up of the country, a study by researchers Morera, Barrantes, and Marin-Rojas (2003) indicated that approximately 9% of the Costa Rican population is of African origin, but that Afro-Costaricans tend to be under-reported. In attempting to research demographic data on Afro-Costaricans, a number of inconsistencies were found across census-related data sources in Costa Rica. For example, in the census data prior to 2000, Costa Rica reported the population of Afro-descendants in Costa Rica to be 7.5%. Conversely, 2010 census data for Costa Rica reported the population of Afro-descendants to be 1.91% (INEC, 2010). This drastic decrease in the number of Afro-Costaricans reported amounted to a 74% decrease in the population as reported by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos [INEC] (2001), the Costa Rican government entity that oversees administration of the country's census. No explanation was offered regarding this reported population decrease.

However, Sanchez and Bryan (2003) offer a potential explanation for inconsistencies in reporting the demographics of Afro-Costaricans by emphasizing how Afro-Costaricans consistently are undercounted or wholly unrecognized as a race. This under-reporting of Afro-Costaricans also might reflect an under-recognition of the existence of race and its social ramifications as disguised by what many Latin American scholars have referred to as *the myth of racial harmony or democracy* that has been noted to be prevalent in several countries throughout Latin America, particularly those with larger populations of Afro descendants and indigenous populations (see Lasso, 2007; McGowan, 2007; Oliven, 2008; Rodriguez-Caravito, Sierra, & Adarve, 2008). The myth of racial harmony essentially purports nationalism over identification with any particular race or ethnic group and reinforces a notion that race is unimportant and has no bearing on privileges that afford economic success, educational access, or access to resources that afford a greater quality of life. For example, in Brazil, scholars contend that racial inequalities traditionally have been

masked by this myth of racial harmony and democracy (McGowan, 2007; Oliven, 2008; Siss, 2002). However, Oliven (2008) argued that the myth could best be described as "together, but unequal" (p. 143). Since Freyre's (1933) influential book, the myth of racial democracy has dominated cultural rhetoric, both within and outside Latin America, and has limited serious public discourse on race and education) in many countries, including Costa Rica (Alves, 2012).

In the United States, the 2010 U.S. Census Report indicated that 12.6% of the U.S. population reported being African American with another nearly 1% describing themselves as mixed race (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011). Results from a recent Pew Research Center study indicated that Whites possess 20 times more wealth than that of African Americans (Kochlar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). A cited factor contributing to this wealth gap in the United States was the low rate at which African Americans enter into college (Kochlar et al, 2011; Lloyd et al., 2001). African American and Hispanic students together comprised less than 25% of overall college enrollment as compared to that of White students, which accounted for approximately 68% of the total undergraduate college enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities (USDOE, 2009). Retention and graduation rates of these students are poor. Only 20% of African American students who started college in 2002 completed their undergraduate coursework. With regard to college graduation, African American students represented less than 10% of the degrees conferred for the year 2008-2009 (USDOE, 2009).

Additionally, in the United States, minority college students are largely concentrated in community colleges (Jeria & Roth, 1992), rather than 4-year universities. According to NCES (USDOE, 2009), over 40% of the African Americans and 53% of the Hispanics categorized as college-going are enrolled in community colleges. These institutions serve a more functional role offering basic college curriculum as well as career/technical training (Gardner, 2008). Many researchers note that the prevalence of these competing efforts drastically reduces the effectiveness of preparing students, particularly minority students for a successful transition to a 4-year college (Gardner, 2008). Nora and Crisp (2007) and Dougherty and Kienzl (2006) posited that community colleges lack retention programs that focus sufficiently on the matriculation of minority students into 4-year institutions. Instead, they tend to promote baseline standards that lack the true rigor needed to succeed beyond the 2-yr college setting (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Nora & Crisp, 2007). Therefore, few of these students, if any, go on to complete their coursework at a community college or graduate from a four-year institution.

### **A General Comparison of the Two Countries' Educational Systems**

A general overview of structural differences in the educational systems of the United States and Costa Rica are important to understanding the impetus for the existence of early college high schools as an approach to improving the post-secondary educational opportunities for Afro-descendants. Brief comparisons of the primary and secondary systems in each country are given, followed by descriptions of each country's post-secondary education systems, as well as trends in educational equity, policies, investments, and the accessibility of traditionally marginalized racial and ethnic groups to higher education.

#### **Primary and Secondary Education**

Education in the United States is compulsory up to age 16 with the majority of students spending 13 years in school including, Elementary (Kindergarten-5th grade), Middle School/Junior High School (Grades 6-8), and High School (Grades 9-12). According to the Alliance for Excellence in Education, among developed nations the United States ranks 18<sup>th</sup> in high school graduations and 15<sup>th</sup> in college graduations (Langley, 2009). Depending on the higher education route selected, students typically complete a battery of tests ranging from state assessments to national college entrance exams also known as the SAT and ACT. Students can opt to pursue an associate's degree, also known as a 2-year college degree, or a bachelor's degree (a 4-5 year college degree). College institutions can be either public (state supported) or private. Often a student's decision is based on an area of specialty related to the bachelor degree area sought. Many options are available to high school students preparing for post-secondary education. Of these options include advanced placement (AP), and dual credit (DC) courses as well as the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Students seeking the Advanced Placement (AP) course option take college level courses while in high school. Students receive college credit for these courses through their successful performance on the AP Exam. In addition a test/registration fee is assessed for each subject area (i.e., exam) (College Board, 2013). Similar to that of the AP course option, students involved in Dual Credit Programs enroll in college courses, which are taught by college faculty while in high school to earn both high school and college credit (Fisher & Abbott, 2010). Offering a more traditional approach, International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs typically consist of a rigorous two-year liberal arts curriculum in which students take courses from a range of subject areas and must successfully complete exit exams in each subject area in order to receive their IB diploma (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013; Tab, 2002). Although completion of the IB Program is viewed as a prestigious accomplishment college credit for the completion of the program curriculum is not a guarantee (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013; Tab, 2002). Through

these programs, some students enter into college with college credits acquired from taking dual credit and advanced placement courses while in high school, while others acquire college credits through high schools that offer a hybrid experience such as early college. Students who complete a bachelor's degree then might elect to complete an advanced degree ranging from a master's degree to a doctorate.

In comparison, education in Costa Rica, also known as General Basic Education is compulsory through the 9th grade, and is separated into IV (i.e., four) cycles. The I (i.e., first) cycle or primary school, consists of kindergarten through Grade 4. Cycle II comprise grades 5 and 6, and is followed by Cycle III which includes grades 7 through 9. High school or grades 10 through 12 are denoted as the IV (i.e., fourth) Cycle. Upon completion of the IV cycle students receive what is called a bachillerato, or the Costa Rican equivalent of a U.S. high school diploma. Additionally, students are required to pass a Bachillerato Exam in order to receive their diploma. Score results on the Bachillerato Exam are also used by Costa Rican Colleges and Universities to assess student entry into college. Tertiary education options in Costa Rica consist of a bachelor's degree (4-5 years) followed by a licenciatura (license-1 year), master's degree (2 years) and then lastly the doctorate (3-4 years).

#### **Educational Equity, Policies, and Investments**

In recent years, the values of equity and social justice have received considerable policy attention and have driven research and discussion in the area of higher education (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). However, as Brennan and Naidoo (2008) posit, these concepts have a distracting appeal that conceals the decreased advocacy efforts and funding in education. For example, in the United States, over 24 billion dollars in K-12 education funding have been cut under the new Debt Ceiling Legislation (Staff Reports, 2011). Specific areas proposed for cuts are full day kindergarten, advanced placement programs, and adult education programs like high school diploma and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) attainment services (Bryant, 2011). Furthermore, schools continue to remain substantially underfunded at the state level while being expected to meet all provisions as outlined by No Child Left Behind (Sunderman & Orfield, 2008). Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the United States that emphasize the assessment of students' knowledge in key content areas such as Reading, Writing, and Math without alignment to national college readiness standards. Some scholars (Brown & Conley, 2007) claim that this lack of alignment reduces the preparation necessary for U.S. youth to be college-ready. For example, in illustrating this inconsistency in the preparation and rigor among the various states, 44 states have adopted college and career readiness benchmarked standards, yet there is tremendous variation in the degree to which state assessments

determine the college readiness of students (Achieve, 2011; Brown & Conley, 2007). Additionally, community colleges are not providing the preparation needed for minority and low income students to matriculate successfully at 4-year institutions, as indicated by the number of students enrolled in developmental or remedial courses who do not persist on to 4-year institutions and complete bachelor's degrees (Nora & Crisp, 2007).

This college readiness gap also is evidenced by the low rates of academic success of these students (Sandy, Gonzalez, & Hilmer, 2006). As indicated by the results of previous educational-attainment surveys, only 8% of students that start at a community college go on to complete a 4-year college degree (Sandy et al., 2006). Moreover, where most post industrialized nations are making massive investments in education, the U.S. is not. Consequently, for-profit education corporations are capitalizing on the issues of accessibility and equity not currently being addressed by U.S. education policy. From 1989 to 2003 proprietary colleges grew by 844% from 316 to 2983 schools (Lee & Topper, 2006). Many of these private, for profit higher education institutions target their educational products at those groups whose access has been traditionally marginalized. Overall, U.S. economic instability appears to underscore the importance of remaining globally competitive by having an educated and skilled citizenry (Baily & Slaughter, 2008). Only a U.S. citizenry with lower high school dropout rates and heightened rates of educational attainment can continue to effectively compete and produce within the global economy (Langley, 2009).

Comparatively, Costa Rica has committed to greater investment into its public school system, dedicating 16% of its Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the education of its citizens as compared to a U.S. GDP allotment of 4.8%. There are a few characteristics that make Costa Rica such an interesting and contrasting example to that of the United States, the most profound being literacy. UNESCO reports that the literacy rate in Costa Rica is 96%, which is amongst the highest rates in the world. This is especially notable with a large proportion of Costa Rica's citizens living in rural areas where limited infrastructure in makes access to schools and colleges especially challenging. Nevertheless, Costa Rica has educational policies that promote educational access to all of its citizens; the results of which have furthered the country's economic development and increased its role in the global economy. Central to this effort is Costa Rica's focus on sustaining a public education system focused on heightened innovation and greater access. This access is accomplished through public education that is free and compulsory, and subsidized enrollment in the nation's public universities. Although problems with post-secondary access still exist, Costa Rica is working to improve educational access in Costa Rica, through an

inclusive and humanistic approach. Additionally, educational initiatives such as, *Avancemos* have attempted to ameliorate the institutionalized racism prevalent in the Costa Rican educational system. Such policies and policies reflect an attempt to provide Afro-Costaricans, who are predominately Limoneses (from the state of Limon), with equitable primary and secondary education, as well as greater access to Costa Rican higher educational opportunities (Ministerio de Educacion Principal [MEP] de Costa Rica, 2011).

An unexpected consequence of Costa Rican's promotion of secondary education as a human right has been a rise in the expectation that all Costa Ricans should seek postsecondary educational opportunities. As a result, a large number of private universities have surged in growth and popularity. Although some of these private universities might meet the immediate educational needs of *Ticos*, some educators believe the growth of private universities has threatened the rank and posture of Costa Rican public universities (Monge-Naranjo, 2007). These Costa Rican educators perceive a threat to the esteem of Costa Rica's public universities as well as a growing disparity between richer and poorer *Ticos* in the process of admission to the country's public universities (Monge-Naranjo, 2007). As Costa Rican educators and policy makers recognize the country's current struggles to meet growing educational demands, educational initiatives like the Humanistic School aim to heighten admissions access and learning outcomes conducive for the development of a globally competitive workforce.

Although Costa Rica has faced similar challenges to that of the United States in the development of higher education policy, other challenges have surfaced as a result of free post-secondary education. For many Costa Ricans, intense competition for admission into these institutions has dampened the free access to college sought by many citizens (Ganimian, 2006). To better prepare students for the challenge of entering these highly selective institutions, many upper-middle class Costa Ricans send their children to private college preparatory schools in lieu of public school (Ganimian 2006; Long, 2010). Although Costa Ricans view the cost of attendance and the admissions process into these private schools as complicated, they also see private school attendance as a necessary pre-condition for successful admission into public colleges and universities (Ganimian, 2006; Long, 2010).

#### **Early College High Schools**

Interestingly, both the United States and Costa Rica have implemented early college high school programs as viable means of providing greater access to higher education and to preparing students for college-level work. Approaches taken in both countries reflect similarities and differences. However, educational leaders' knowledge of these early college approaches taken in the two countries might inform practice as well

as provide clues as to how to facilitate postsecondary access, success, and completion of students who are Afro-Descendants.

### **U.S. Approach to ECHS**

In a study conducted by Fleischman and Heppen (2009) over 5000 ECHS were identified in the United States. Early inception of the community college model, the most widely employed of all ECHS, dates back to the 1920s (Langley, 2009). The successful re-emergence of the program in the late 1970s brought with it a modified version of ECHS where students take classes on community college campuses rather than solely at the high school site (Langley, 2009). The growth in the prevalence of the ECHS model has been helped along by various supporters, namely the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Collectively the consortium created by the Gates Foundation has generated over 130 million dollars to the creation and sustainability of such postsecondary models (Early College High School Initiative, 2013).

Often, ECHS programs have limited course and program availability and opportunities to participate in ECHS programs are highly selective (regularly dictated by socioeconomic status-SES ) (Brewer, Stern, & Ahn, 2007; Fisher & Abbott, 2010). These access limitations make it difficult for students interested in attending early college high schools, to fully benefit from participating in such programs (Brewer, Stern, & Ahn, 2007; Fisher & Abbott, 2010). Moreover these scholars have discussed how the traditional U.S. high school model lacks the innovation and rigor needed to meet the impending domestic and global pressure to maintain the United States' standing as a global power. Therefore, early college high schools (ECHS) have been touted as a viable means to increasing and sustaining access to higher educational opportunities that cultivate a competitively skilled workforce. Central to the ECHS model is a progressive approach to teaching that promotes college retention and matriculation. Supporting this approach is a mission that drives to bridge the college-going gap, allowing *at-risk* and students of low SES to meet their full academic potential.

Students who might be considered *college ready* experience fear and trepidation about the transition and acclimation to college. Early college high schools not only offer a sustained pipeline to postsecondary education, but also have been found to be instrumental in reducing students' psychological barriers to college by providing environments that stimulate growth in emotional intelligence and self-efficacy (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Fleischman and Heppen (2009) have been identified several reasons for the dissolution of these barriers. Namely, their research has shown that postsecondary success is largely influenced by rigorous academic preparation and a clear understanding of the college expectations. Early college high schools impart a more rigorous curriculum, heightened demands, and an

opportunity for students to learn in community with college students (Langley, 2009). Through sound college preparation and access to effective educational resources, the chances for enrollment in remediation courses are significantly reduced (Langley, 2009). By embedding a college culture in the minds of high schools students, not only do they become motivated to achieve, but they are well prepared to attain academically (Vargas & Miller, 2001).

Although the early-college model serves as a vehicle for providing traditionally underserved students with opportunities to transcend educational obstacles and gain access to a college education, many deficiencies exist. At the center of the adopted approach is the focus on acquiring college credits rather than developing true scholarly engagement. With regard to 4-year college accessibility, researchers point out that extensive problems exist with the transition from community college to a traditional 4-year college or university setting (Langley, 2009).

### **A Costa Rican Approach to ECHS: *Colegios Universitarios* and the Humanistic High School**

In Costa Rica, development and implementation of the ECHS model might best understood by exploring a *colegio universitario* model, the *Universidad Nacional-UNA* (National University) of Costa Rica's *Colegio Humanista* [Humanistic School], which is located in the capital of San Jose and is the country's first ECHS type model. The Humanistic School follows a 4-yr university affiliation approach. This design, according to some researchers, is considered superior to the prevailing 2-year early college model most common in the United States (Botstein, 2003). The ECHS of the *Universidad Nacional de America-UNA* (also known as the National University Humanistic School) has existed since 2002, and offers a student-centered, constructivist curriculum. Students at the Humanistic School take courses from faculty with doctorates in their respective fields of study, providing them with heightened exposure to the scholarly demands and expectations of a 4-year college setting. Moreover, employing the use of university faculty and university resources the Humanistic School offers an effective pedagogical methodology where curricula are designed to engage students in challenging academic pursuits (Botstein, 2003). Humanistic Constructivism pedagogy directs curriculum development at UNA. Among the specific goals of the Humanistic curriculum is to foster a learning environment that encourages the development of students as global citizens (National University Humanistic School, 2011). Global citizens that are aware of value and worth of human beings as the center of any effort of knowledge (National University Humanistic School, 2011). Another aim of the Humanistic constructivist curriculum is to promote research as an extension of learning and building new knowledge. An example of this is the common practice

of teaching each other what they have learned through the creation and instruction of lessons steeped in critical thinking and depth of knowledge. Additionally, the Humanistic School hosts an annual research symposium planned and organized by the students. Students present research projects and are judged by their colleagues. This encourages heavy involvement in the development and presentation of research, an aspect lacking in the common U.S. ECHS model.

Eighty percent of the students enrolled at the Humanistic School are of low SES, and originate from rural areas of Costa Rica. Students can fully utilize university common areas like the library and dining facilities. This utilization of college services and resources helps to better acclimate students to their new role and lessens the stress commonly associated with the transition to college. Working and interacting alongside UNA college students has helped Humanistic School students to build relationships with their university colleagues providing positive opportunities for academic and social mentoring.

Additionally, an existing strength of the Humanistic School, which is unique to the university setting, is a commonly established identity. Contrastly, the community college affiliated early high schools lack the intrinsic connection to the institution due to high rates of transience and attrition. Although the Humanistic School is one of two ECHS in Costa Rica, it is evident that Costa Rica is establishing an educational tradition centered on 4- year college matriculation and success. Costa Rica's robust approach to sustained and heightened educational funding has successfully resulted in a growingly competitive and literate citizenry.

#### **Strengths and Challenges of ECHS Approaches**

Countries like Costa Rica have chosen to promote ECHS experiences that best expose students to a university environment and the educational demands of a 4-year college setting. As expressed by Langley (2009), the best early college high school models provide symbolic messages to students of their academic potential; whereas, traditional U.S. high schools, as well as 2-year affiliated ECHS, do not maximize students' educational potential or preparation beyond a baseline standard. Thus, as suggested by representatives of the U.S. ECHS Initiative, there is more work that needs to be done in order to successfully accomplish and exceed the five core ECHS design principles: (a) purposeful design, (b) professionalism, (c) personalization, (d) college readiness, and (e) powerful teaching and learning. With regard to future ECHS implementation, researchers from the 2009 AIR and SRI suggested that placing early colleges on a college campus as opposed to a traditional high school campus led to greater academic outcomes for students. In addition, for those students attending ECHS located on college campuses, engagement in both on campus and academic activities were increased as

compared to those students attending ECHS located in traditional high school settings (AIR & SRI, 2009). Placing students on college campuses resulted in increased institutional engagement, which according to AIR and SRI (2009) allowed for better transition from high school to college. Placing emphasis on 4-yr college matriculation promotes higher rates of retention and increased opportunities for the upward mobility of racial and ethnic minority groups.

The UNA Humanistic School in Costa Rica stands as a great example of how a well-designed early college program can exceed the expectations of these principals and provide continuing access to higher education for all (Botstein, 2003). More common in Costa Rica, is partnership of Early College High Schools like that of the UNA Humanistic School to 4-yr institutions. The *colegios universitarios* (ECHS) and 4-yr. university partnership, which is common in Costa Rica, is in contrast to the "typical" 2-yr. affiliated Early College High School model most often employed in the United States. As earlier described, examples of ECHSs such as the UNA Humanistic School, allow for greater college exposure, heightened student engagement, and opportunities for students to take courses from faculty with doctorates in their respective fields of study- creating an expectation for scholarly achievement that meet the expectations of a 4-year college setting.

#### **An Emergent Observation**

The purpose of the present paper was to examine comparatively early college high school approaches within the educational contexts of Costa Rica and the United States to illustrate how ECHS programs potentially enhance higher education accessibility for students representing traditionally marginalized racial groups, namely students who are considered Afro-descendants (African Americans and Afro-Costaricans). However, as we carried out this comparison, an issue emerged that merits additional scholarly consideration in furthering conversations of race and access to higher education; namely, the general dearth of information regarding Afro-Costaricans, in general, and their enrollment in higher education and ECHSs, in particular. Overall, we discovered a general lack of scholarly publications about academic Afro-Latinos in both Spanish and English journals, and even less in English language journals. Moreover, limited information on Afro-Costa Ricans was available in data bases and reports of multinational organizations such as the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This lack of information was especially problematic in gathering data on the educational experiences for students of Afro-Caribbean descent in Costa Rica.



We found substantially more information regarding the experiences of Afro-descendants in other Latin American countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, and Nicaragua, but fewer publications in English, Spanish, and Portuguese focused on Afro-Costaricans. Most attainable academic literature was written in Spanish. In these academic publications, scholars highlighted an ever growing disparity in educational access, inequity in wealth and income distribution, and the marginalization of Afro-Costaricans in the Costa Rican political system (Caamano-Morua, 2007; Delgado Montoya, 2007). Interestingly, we observed that English language journals tended to highlight the academic successes of Afro-Costaricans. This contrasted with Costa Rican societal characterizations of Afro-Costa Ricans as dangerous, infantile, and lazy when contrasted to White Costa Ricans and whiteness which endears positive connotations of culture, class and civility. This dichotomist view of race as suggested by Townsend-Bell (2009) deeply underscores the denial and contradictions surrounding educational access and inclusion of Afro-Costaricans.

In Costa Rican journals, we found a few articles by Costa Rican authors who used their writing to dispel the claims of racial homogeneity and racial democracy implicit in many of the English-language journals. Although some Costa Rican scholars have brought forth discussions that challenge the myth of racial harmony and democracy in Costa Rica, including Herrera's (2007) article, *Between Hate and Laughter*, which describes Costa Ricans' often *racialized* humor when referring to Nicaraguan immigrants, an overall dearth of contemporary academic articles addressing racial inequities in Costa Rica remains. Further examination and comparison of the amount of coverage and content of articles and reports on Afro-Costa Ricans published in both English-and Spanish-language journals is needed in order for educational leaders and scholars to obtain a better understanding of how to approach issues of race, access and retention in higher education in Costa Rica.

### Conclusion

Although UNESCO firmly states that education and educational access for all children is a basic human right, the disparity in educational attainment and lack of sustainable paths for college success for racial minority students continue to exist in Costa Rica and the United States. Moreover, UNESCO emphasizes that education should involve values that promote and secure social justice, equality, respect and human dignity for all (UNESCO, 2013). To this end, expanding access to higher education is integral to expanding the rights of all world citizens.

In Costa Rica and the United States, educational initiatives like ECHS and *colegios universitarios* have the potential to make some significant inroads in increasing access to higher education for students representing racial

minority groups. Programs such as these motivate students who lie on the periphery of college access to be involved in a high school environment that promotes college matriculation. However, even with approaches such as ECHSs, underlying myths and institutionalized racism continue to threaten the upward mobility of racial minority groups by perpetuating systemic racism and negatively impacting the educational access of these groups in both the United States and Costa Rica (Caamano-Morua, 2007; Campbell, 2012; Delgado Montoya, 2007; Harper, 2012).

Furthermore, in order to better recognize opportunities for increased access to higher education, educational researchers have to be willing to look outside their national lenses when making critical comparisons of higher education issues (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013), including issues relevant to educational access and retention programs, such as comparative early college high school (ECHS) programs for racial minority students. Becoming comfortable with adapting more inclusive and global perspectives is imperative to the examination and comparison of effective practice and scholarship in higher education. More importantly, when analyzing issues of higher education, integration of global perspectives and comparisons contribute to rigorous examinations of higher educational issues important to the future of all global citizens. Similarly, as indicated by the contrasting characterization of Afro-Costa Ricans by English and Spanish journals, it was evident that a shortage of depth and perspective concerning Afro-Costaricans in higher education existed. Clearly, there is a need for more research on this population and, in general, more studies on early college high school models in countries around the world and how these approaches might enhance access for students who represent traditionally marginalized racial groups. Ideally, a global knowledge base, centered on notions of humanism and social inclusion, would enhance the ability of higher education leaders to better assess issues relevant to higher education, and to promote the human rights of higher education for traditionally marginalized students and, consequently, to the larger global communities in which we serve.

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