

NATIONAL HISPANIC INSTITUTE: A 32-YEAR LEGACY

ABOUT US

For over 32 years, the work of the National Hispanic Institute (NHI) has made leadership training its chief means of engaging high school Latino youth with strong potential. NHI taps into this largely untapped and underused source of emerging intellectual wealth and intelligence with the intent of supplying the Latino community with its most capable future leaders.

Much of the Institute's work revolves around the study and analysis of different concepts and philosophies of learning in its efforts to provide these students with "best practices" through its summer training programs. Understanding and documenting the social messages that are constantly transmitted to these young people from their families, schools, and communities as beliefs, truths, and assumptions that help guide their cultural identities, form perceptions of their social roles, and understanding of success also consumes large amounts of the Institute's time.

NHI training programs provides these youth with a deliberate means of identifying beliefs, truths, and assumptions that they individually come to realize as no longer being functional, valid, or even appropriate to their desired life aims, and, as a result, need to be "unlearned." The impact of NHI training experiences guide these youth to initiate a process of extricating themselves from the social narratives and definitions of self that have been imposed on them, so that in time and through a process of constant "relearning" they may lead themselves to not only become contented with their identities as Latinos, but also driven by the intent of evolving into creative and enlightened humans who lead self-directed, purposeful lives as well educated professionals and engaged community leaders.

The process of extrication or unlearning from the conventions of the established truths, beliefs, and assumptions that often youth tend to adopt and use as guides in their development is often referred to by the Institute as the "third reality" experience. Third reality is the framework for social analysis that young people learn to construct in their efforts to conduct critical reviews of beliefs that they acquire through their interactions with family, popular culture, school, and other influencing, perception-shaping institutions. The capacity to "let go" beyond the self is, in the view of NHI, the basis that make the construction of a new self possible -- free of the biases and burdens of externally induced beliefs that for all too many Latino youth represent more barriers of race, ethnicity, gender, and class than opportunities.

In NHI's view, the experience of self-definition provides young Latinos with the means to authenticate their identities in the context of a modern-day era as valuable assets rather than deficits needing constant remediation. It de-clutters their minds and thinking. It makes them more astute, self-directed learners, who assume control of their personal development and success without blaming others or external conditions for their shortcomings and failures.

THE NHI MODEL AND STRATEGY

NHI employs a multi-tiered progressive model approach as its primary strategy in leadership training and development. Three core programs constitute the organization's high school programs. These include the Great Debate (GD) for ninth grade students, the Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session (LDZ) for 10th graders, and the Collegiate World Series (CWS) for 11th graders. Experiential learning, as a training concept, drives NHI curriculum in all three of these learning experiences.

Within each program, however, particular principles are applied. For instance, action learning is the primary strategy for learning of the Great Debate, while social constructivism is widely used in the LDZ. Once youth complete their junior year of studies and begin the transition to college, inquiry-based learning is used as the means through which students conduct critical self-examinations of the life pathways they intend to follow while in college and beyond. All three programs, however, are guided by NHI's unique game technology approach in which the participants and slightly older peers become a community of self-learners through various deliberately applied collaborative strategies and activities.

Beyond direct participation in its youth programs, NHI also provides its participants with different opportunities to remain involved through volunteer high school and college internships. As John F. Lopez Fellows, they continue their leadership development through different project management roles that are administrative, programmatic, and even policy making in nature. First, however, each Fellow is required to undergo a minimum of 16 contract hours of certification training to ensure uniformity of practice in NHI training program approaches and methods and understanding of the Institute's philosophy and practice of collaborative learning.

While in some organizational structures a clear and distinct separation exists between students and policy makers, this distinction is not present at NHI. The Institute's educational and leadership training staff are exclusively comprised of former participants who since high school have become working professionals in a number of fields. Each year, a select number of volunteers take time off from their respective professional endeavors to oversee, manage, and direct the organization's high school and college programs. Many of these individuals also serve on the Institute's board of trustees where they are expected to not only share their knowledge and expertise, but also financially commit through their annual contributions. This novel approach of "participant-policy maker" fosters a porous means through which a freshman in high school may eventually transition to being a training volunteer, an summer intern, a supporting alumnus, a researcher, a college representative on the board, a professional staff person, and eventually a policy maker at the board level, and eventually a board chair.

The impact of NHI's approach to leadership and community development can already be seen at different levels. The culture of success and community engagement that NHI training programs has on high school students can be seen in their academic performance and engagement in school extracurricular affairs. Student body presidents, valedictorians, and active engagement in school life are commonplace for NHI high schools students. Similar levels of engagement are seen in well-known colleges and universities nationwide that include institutions like the University of Texas at Austin, University of Rochester in New York, and Villanova University in Pennsylvania. No small wonder that NHI youth enroll and complete college in record numbers.

This past fall semester, 2011, of the 1,100+ entering college freshmen who also attended at least two of NHI's high school leadership programs, 99% successfully enrolled in college. In keeping with its current trends, over 90% will complete their undergraduate requirements in 4 to 5 years, with 65% continuing into advanced studies afterwards. In other words, it comes at no surprise to the National Hispanic Institute to see its former high school participants emerge as professionals and in different businesses in such high rates of success. The more important outcome is their involvement in Latino community life and the success they appear to be having in shaping public policy as they increasingly serve on school board members, city councils, state boards, and state and national legislative bodies. More is expected to come as the organization expands its footprint internationally as it already has

with students increasingly attending from Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Guatemala.

The organization's founder and current president, Ernesto Nieto best describes what distinguishes the work of the National Hispanic Institute from other community initiatives thusly "Changing the mindsets of young Latinos," he states, "away from the conventional truths that have historically guided us to a new understanding of our potential and value is our most important task and purpose as an organization that underwrites its own work. We need to see Latino youth worldwide in a similar way that we react when uncovering a vast reservoir of untapped oil reserves. The more we invest in their development, the higher the dividends that all sectors of society will enjoy. It's in our own best interest to lay aside all of the confining barriers that we have used before and replace them with new invigorating truths and beliefs that free the mind to unimaginable possibilities."

Examples of NHI's Developmental Goals

The Great Debate

Skill Development

- a) critical analysis
- b) thought development and articulation
- c) tactical skill development in argument formation and defense
- d) research development
- e) voice and expression
- f) listening and evaluating

Competency Development

- a) ease in communications and selective use of words
- b) comfort with competition
- c) effectiveness with communications style
- d) capacity to note counter-argument deficiencies
- e) effectiveness in crafting an opening and closing argument

Knowledge Development

- a) Increased understanding of communications concepts
- b) Understanding of subject matter and its application to community leadership
- c) Increased awareness for competing and advance preparation
- d) Increased appreciation for preparation readiness
- e) Advanced understanding for personal attributes and deficiencies needing further work

The Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session

Skill Development

- a) organizational process and procedure
- b) the use of organizational protocols
- c) presentation styles and methods
- d) time management
- e) mobilizing constituent support for and against

Competency Development

- a) ease with public speaking
- b) effectiveness in the use of protocol and procedure

- c) ability to deflect opposition
- d) effectiveness in applying skills under different situations

Knowledge Development

- a) Understanding and observation of organizational processes and protocols
- b) Acquaintance with group dynamics
- c) mastery of subject matter and its application
- d) knowing how to apply different organizational strategies and tactics under different situations

CONTACT US

For more information visit the NHI website at www.nhi-net.org. Our main office in Maxwell, Texas is open daily from 8:30 AM – 6:00 PM Central Standard Time. We may be reached at (512) 357-6137 or via e-mail at info@nhimail.com. You can also learn about NHI via mini-documentaries and short videos at www.youtube.com/NHITV or follow NHI on Facebook or Twitter.