

# **THE NHI LEARNING EXPERIENCE: ITS FEATURES, BENEFITS, AND POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON LATINO YOUTH MINDSETS**

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The National Hispanic Institute (NHI) was founded in 1979 to have an active and involved role in shaping, influencing, and guiding Latino high school youth towards the highest possible standards in their educational attainment, personal development, and appreciation for civic engagement. To achieve these aims, NHI concentrates its resources on high potential youth as a population sector that demonstrates greatest leadership promise in making community change possible. The information that follows provides prospective and currently enrolled students, parents, school leaders, alumni, and members of the community at-large with a statement of benefits that best describes NHI's work and the impact that its programs are designed to have on the outlooks, thinking, and views of its student participants.

## **NHI STUDENTS SIGNIFICANTLY ENRICH THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Having access to an extensive network of NHIers at different ages and points in their lives is critical to the success of NHI youth. Our learning experiences create opportunities for building strong relationships with over 80,000 alumni worldwide, university admissions representatives, and making lifelong friendships with peers who share similar educational values and cultural references. It is common to the post-college NHI experience for alumni to remain in contact as personal friends, launch businesses together, and participate in joint community ventures or other creative projects as a result of the relationships they established while in high school and college.

## **NHI STUDENTS CONTINUOUSLY STRENGTHEN THEIR INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIES**

Students who attend NHI programs increase their understanding of a changing work place and a growing Latino community that demand individuals who are thoughtful, intellectually prepared and culturally competent to engage in the world of thought innovation. These learning goals are achieved through social constructivist models, action-learning principles, and inquiry based learning methods that are integrated into NHI's own unique game technology approach. The use of these teaching theories and pedagogies, however, are not accidental. Instead they come from extensive research and consultation conducted over years in conjunction with nationally known education experts in the United States and Latin America whose work concentrates on learning styles and approaches that take place outside regular classroom environments. As a result, youth participate in highly engaging discussions, conversations, and projects that significantly strengthen their capacities to think critically, aid them in inferring meaning through engagement with others, and experience the importance of having their views, beliefs, and values scrutinized and evaluated by NHI peers as part of their individual growth and maturity.

## **NHI STRENGTHENS STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

NHI strongly supports the work of public schooling and its efforts on building a strong knowledge and skill base for adolescents. However, we also recognize the need to guide young men and women towards a strong appreciation for engagement in one's local community. NHI programs foster this thinking through its emphasis on volunteerism and John F. Lopez, Jr. Research and Management Fellowships (summer internships). As a result, nearly 1,200 youth volunteers a year participate in NHI programs that challenge their executive skills and competencies in project management, counseling, leadership coaching, program planning, and program evaluation.

## **NHI YOUTH BECOME AGGRESSIVE SELF-LEARNERS**

NHI training curriculum emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge as the result of aggressive, self-directed learning. Students often express surprise when they find out that NHI does not use motivational speakers, classroom lectures and other forms of didactic methods to conduct its work. Instead, the organization relies on competitive game-based learning opportunities that allow students to gain meaning and insight from participating in various knowledge development scenarios that take place as games. Whether the focus is on communications enhancement, navigating social systems, or becoming more adept in personal life planning or community vision building, NHI learning processes achieve high levels of interaction and drive participants to peak psychological readiness levels for learning.

## **NHI YOUTH LEARN TO APPRECIATE AND EMBRACE STRONG FAMILY VALUES**

NHI guides and nurtures its students to appreciate, value, and practice strong family values. Parent involvement is highly encouraged in all programs of the National Hispanic Institute as project administrators, heads of NHI community leadership councils, educational directors, and during awards recognition ceremonies. Discussion groups guide students to focus on their individual families and the examples they must set for younger brothers and sisters. Oftentimes our youth debates dedicate entire themes to family. The combination of these discussions and activities are designed to strengthen appreciation for family and reinforce the values that parents wish for their children to adopt into their thinking and daily practice.

## **NHI YOUTH STRENGTHEN THEIR SELF ESTEEM AND SELF WORTH**

Having a strong personal identity is key to a young person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Through NHI training programs, students are able to make individual adjustments in their perceptions about themselves as Latinos and as members of a dynamic and growing global culture. Through research, discussions, and projects, NHI alumni not only gain a deeper understanding of Latino community life, but also explore and gain exposure to different social perspectives, beliefs, and outlooks that replace old ideas and perceptions about this community that are no longer useful and potentially harmful to personal development. This particular realization is especially important as the globalization prompts the workplace to become more multilingual and multinational in areas of commerce, education, innovation, and policy making. In other words, to navigate this new social landscape, strong leaders need the cultural background, social acumen, and meaningful experience to help foster engagement and change in the Latino community.

## **NHI YOUTH BECOME PART OF AN ACTIVE AND CONTINUING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

NHI leadership programs are purposely designed to disrupt conventional thinking and engage youth in crafting new possibilities that extend beyond conventional references. A topic of discussion, for example, that is first heard during a ninth grade debate activity often lingers into discussions into college. NHI is fortunate to have one of the most active alumni volunteer corps of any nonprofit in the United States. Hundreds of high school upperclassmen, undergraduates, and alumni professionals annually give time to volunteer as training staff during NHI field leadership programs. Personal friendships between students and alumni foster a healthy exchange that make intellectual sharing an important outcome of their interactions. The NHI Progressive Leadership Model also bolsters the concept of learning as a continuing life experience that is firmly embedded in NHI culture.

## **NHI STUDENTS TRAVEL ABROAD IN HIGH SCHOOL AND DURING COLLEGE**

NHI views the expansion of social and cultural comfort zone as vital to learning readiness and the willingness to explore the unfamiliar. NHI programs in New York, Illinois, Colorado, Texas, and

Pennsylvania encourage youth from Latin America to enjoy working with U.S. Latino communities nationwide. Conversely, programs in Latin America make it possible for U.S. born students to visit abroad and expand their social ties with students abroad. These diverse environments expand the social landscape to include students from Mexico, Panama, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The opportunity for Latin American youth to improve their English and conversely U.S. youth to advance their Spanish does much to strengthen their social awareness and risk-taking capacities to navigate unfamiliar environments.

### **NHI YOUTH INCREASE THEIR SKILL CAPACITIES AND READINESS TO PARTICIPATE IN DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP ROLES**

Attaining the skills and capacities to participate, as an effective leader is not easy. High school youth who attend leadership-training programs of the National Hispanic Institute become involved in different leadership roles from the ninth grade through their senior year of high school. They also undergo considerable training in NHI leadership philosophy and are provided numerous opportunities to practice their readiness to lead. These learned skills have a considerable impact on them when they return to school and when they become undergraduate college students. The experience and comfort levels that they develop from repeated leadership opportunities through NHI help form a foundation of experience and confidence that is often seen in the success of their businesses and through their involvement in the communities where they reside as members of civic, social, cultural and church organizations, as well as elected public office.

### **NHI YOUTH ATTEND COLLEGE IN CONSIDERABLY HIGHER RATIOS THAN SIMILAR AGE PEERS**

Historically 98% of the students who attend NHI leadership programs enroll in college after high school. Approximately 90% graduate in 4-5 years, and over 65% pursue advanced studies and degrees. Former NHI members have the largest number of Ph.D and Masters Degree recipients than any other Latino youth membership group in the nation. The NHI record of unprecedented, uninterrupted service to Latino youth, the continued expansion of NHI programs to different regions of the United States and different Latin American countries, and the growing global stage that students are able to enjoy are all the result of 32 years of continued progress and expansion, critical study and analysis, and imaginative design.