



Hispanic Serving Institution Initiatives

Dr. Marla A. Franco
Assistant Vice Provost, HSI Initiatives
University of Arizona



Dr. Marla Franco serves as the Assistant Vice Provost for Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Initiatives at the University of Arizona (UA). She has worked in higher education for nearly 20 years at public universities in California and Arizona, having served in various roles within academic and student affairs to champion greater college access and degree attainment among underserved and minoritized students, which strongly informs her work today.

Dr. Franco led efforts that resulted in the UA becoming the first four-year public university in the state of Arizona to be federally recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education in April 2018. She is now working across the university to develop a centralized vision for maximizing this designation in a way that truly benefits students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members from diverse backgrounds. This federal distinction has widespread implications for the UA, the greater Tucson community, and the state of Arizona.

In 2017, Dr. Franco co-led efforts with faculty that resulted in UA becoming the first recipient of the National Science Foundation's HSI conference grant, which supported the convening of over 100 thought leaders from five states within the southwest region of the United States aimed at transforming STEM education at HSIs. As a result, she became co-founder of the STEM in HSI Working Group, co-authored *Transforming STEM Education at Hispanic Serving Institutions in the United States: A Consensus Report*, engaged in a broader impacts road trip to present key insights and recommendations nationally, and co-facilitated an adaptive case study competition to incite transformation in STEM education at HSIs across the nation.

As a scholar-practitioner, she has co-authored publications to inform improved practice at HSIs, including *Assessing the Readiness of Hispanic Serving Institutions to Serve Latinx Students: Moving Beyond Compositional Diversity* and *Engaging Community Partners to Improve STEM Education at HSIs*. Dr. Franco's contributions to the field of higher education and the community are well recognized. She has received the John Hernandez Leadership Award from the American College Personnel Association, the Edith Auslander Outstanding Support of Hispanic Issues in Higher Education Award from the Pete C. Garcia Victoria Foundation, the Exemplary Leadership Award from Valle Del Sol, and Hispanic Business Woman of the Year from the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. In June 2019, Dr. Franco's leadership also resulted in the UA receiving the inaugural Seal of Excelencia, aimed at recognizing institutions that demonstrate intentional impact and success in the three core areas of work that Excelencia has determined lead to Latino student success: data, practice, and leadership.

Dr. Franco is a first-generation college graduate, having earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, a master's degree in counseling from California State University, Long Beach, and a doctoral degree in higher education leadership from Azusa Pacific University. Dr. Franco leads strategically, courageously, and with a fierce passion for what she does.