

Texas Education Research Consortium
Spring Research Institute
Reframing Educational Pathways for Young Males
February 27, 2026

Panelist Biographies

Adrian H. Huerta is an Associate Professor (tenured) in the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the Rossier School of Education and the Department of Population & Public Health Sciences at the Keck School of Medicine (by courtesy), both at the University of Southern California. Dr. Huerta is a leading expert on the social and academic experiences of active and former/inactive gang-involved people across the educational pipeline. Through sociocultural perspectives and qualitative methods, he examines individual and structural factors that impact college access and success, boys and men of color, student parents, and gang-involved populations.

Dr. Huerta has secured more than \$2.8 million in local, state, federal, and philanthropic dollars for research, evaluation, fellowships, and contractual projects tied to his research agenda. Some funders include the U.S. Department of Education, the ECMC Foundation, the W. T. Grant Foundation, the College Futures Foundation, the California Community Foundation, and others. His more than 28 peer-reviewed research papers appear in leading education journals, including *The Review of Higher Education*, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student Development*, *Community College Review*, *The Urban Review*, *Urban Education*, and many other outlets. He is a past co-winner of the American Sociological Association Julia Anna Cooper Early Career Award from the Sociology of Education section, a recipient of the Postdoctoral Fellowship from the National Academy of Education and Spencer Foundation, and an Early Career Award from the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). He earned his PhD and M.A. in education from UCLA, an M.A. in educational policy & leadership from The Ohio State University, and a B.S. in human services counseling from UNLV, and he attended both the College of Southern Nevada and Santa Barbara City College as a part-time student.

Sarah L. Rodriguez is an Associate Professor of Engineering Education and an affiliate faculty member with the Higher Education Program at Virginia Tech. Dr. Rodriguez is also affiliated with the Center for Educational Networks and Impacts (CENI) and has served as a VT Center for Rural Education Scholar in Residence. Her work is featured in scholarly outlets such as *The Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, *Computer Science Education*, and *The Review of Higher Education* as well as in policy-based media outlets like Education Commission of the States' Strong Start to Finish Series. Dr. Rodriguez is co-editor of the award-winning book, *Latin* Students in Engineering: An Intentional Focus on a Growing Population* and new book, *Supporting Latinas in Engineering and Computing: A Chicana Feminist Approach*.

She received her PhD in Higher Education Leadership and a certificate in Mexican American Studies from The University of Texas at Austin and holds a master's degree with a focus in College Student Personnel from The University of Tennessee. She holds a bachelor's degree in

English and Spanish from Texas A&M University-Commerce and was a transfer student from Trinity Valley Community College. She is also a proud Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS) Program Alum, born and raised in rural East Texas with family roots in the Rio Grande Valley.

Moderator Biography

Victor B. Sáenz serves as the associate dean for Student Success, Community Engagement, and Administration in the College of Education and as the L. D. Haskew Centennial Professor in Public School Administration in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at The University of Texas at Austin. He also holds courtesy appointments with the LBJ School of Public Affairs, the Center for Mexican American Studies, the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, the Irma Rangel Public Policy Institute, the Institute for Urban Policy Research & Analysis, and the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute.

Sáenz's current work advances research-informed best practices and policy solutions that improve educational outcomes for underserved students in education, with a special emphasis on boys and young men of color. In 2010 Sáenz co-founded an award-winning initiative at UT Austin, a multi-pronged effort focused on advancing educational outcomes for male students of color. Under Project MALES he launched a nationally recognized Student Mentoring Program that partners with local schools to connect undergraduate peer mentors with middle school and high school male students. He also co-created a network of K-12 and higher education institutions called the Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color that focuses on advancing educational outcomes for this critical student population. Supported by grants from the Greater Texas Foundation (GTF), the Trellis Foundation and the Kresge Foundation, this statewide collaborative focuses on improving educational outcomes for male students of color across the state of Texas. The Consortium is made up of over 30 institutional partners in K-12 and higher education and it seeks to align and coordinate existing programs and services across the education continuum.