

North Carolina Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

May 5, 2023

- Good afternoon, everyone. It's an honor to address you.
- Y'know, I really like that we can use our culture, our values and our life experiences to create new levels of excellence in whatever we do.
- Doing that creates unique contributions in ways that would otherwise never be possible. Your unique insights and ideas produce success.
- Actually, it's something that I'm trying to do at the U.S. Census Bureau as director. I'm bringing my whole self to the table as the leader of the largest federal statistical agency. That includes my statistical expertise, my life experiences, my values, and also my Latino culture.
- I've found that over a 40-year career it allows me to offer unique perspectives that can add value to research, to scientific investigations, and especially to interpretations of results.
- It's in this spirit that I offer a little story for you to think about.
- Back in the late 1990s, I was already a seasoned statistician at a university-based research center. I was overseeing survey operations divisions, working on National Academies panels, and serving on grant-giving review panels called study sections.
- One day I happened to peruse a newsletter from NIH on the findings of some recently completed research on health care delivery. It involved Latinos! A scientific study had been conducted with Spanish-speaking patients who visited clinics.
- Turns out that the statistical evidence clearly showed that when these patients were able to interact with clinical staff who spoke even just a little Spanish, then their health outcomes were better compared to Spanish-speaking patients who only experienced English-speaking health care staff.
- OK, don't laugh. Some of you might be thinking why anyone needs a research project to examine such a predictable, obvious result.
- Well, honestly, that was my first reaction, but then an insight hit me like a ton of bricks. I saw something that maybe others hadn't realized. Perhaps there's another way to look at this...NIH had funded and was reporting on a bona fide research project to explore non-English health care delivery.
- And as such, it signaled to me something rather profound: the nation's health care industry was acculturating to our increasingly diverse society. People of color and their communities were being recognized as part of our diverse nation and formal research efforts were emerging to provide more meaningful health care delivery.
- Going a step further, it made me realize that as our nation becomes more diverse, society will necessarily acculturate to us because—after all, we are part of society and becoming a larger part with time.
- It also made me realize the potential missed opportunity coming from a behavioral research focus. Sure, patient outcomes flow from their behaviors—they are responsible for accessing health care and adhering to prescribed therapies, for instance.

- But health outcomes can also be seen as the net result of the interaction between two parties: the health care provider—indeed the health care enterprise—and the person seeking health care.
- If the medical provider doesn't adequately acculturate to its diverse, growing clientele, it will negatively affect health outcomes of the country's population.
- And in a sense, the same lessons apply in academia, to understand how our population is evolving in the future. Not just in language, race, and ethnicity...but also in gender, age, family and household compositions, technology use, travel patterns, and more.
- Well, guess what? The Census Bureau has stats for all that!
- And the data show that our country is increasingly becoming more beautifully diverse.
- There are not only more Latinos, Blacks, Asians, American Indians, and other persons of color in our nation, there are multirace, multiethnic, and mixed race-ethnic people being born every day in our great nation.
- Academics like you can leverage our data products to adapt to our societal renaissance in population, culture, and technology. In fact, you can use your "whole selves"—your culture, your life experiences, and, thus, your unique perspectives—to meet our broader acculturation challenge.
- We at the Census Bureau will keep providing you the data you need. And the rest will be up to you.
- Lately, I have been reflecting on my journey of self-identity and have something to say about this.
- All of us—Latinx or otherwise—have stories that need telling so that we can better understand one another.
- As I said earlier, bringing one's whole self to your career helps you become better at whatever you do. In my case, it makes me a better statistician, mentor, and leader.
- My search for identity has spanned more than half a century, and it continues to this day.
- My journey commenced before I was born, with my abuelos. Like many families in their generation, my grandparents fled Northern Mexico to avoid the violence of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.
- They came to San Antonio by simply crossing the Texas/Mexico border sin papeles. They were refugees. Both of my parents were second-generation immigrants, born in San Antonio, which makes me a third-generation immigrant.
- Why talk about immigrant generations? They represent the starting point of an immigrant family's acculturation after arriving in a new country.
- Results from Pew Research Center's Survey of Latinos research indicate what you may already suspect, and this has relevance in the hospitality industry, "The percentage of households speaking Spanish at home declines with successive generations."
- Their survey suggests that virtually all first-generation Latino households speak Spanish at home, but the numbers drop to about one-half by the third generation.
- Similarly, American Community Survey data between 2009 and 2019 suggest that native-born Hispanics—myself included—increasingly speak only English at home now, at about 42 percent in 2019.
- True to form, there was a bit of Spanish spoken in my second-generation home when I was growing up. But my third-generation family—my wife, kids, and I—exclusively spoke English at home.
- This language loss that led to personal conflict in my journey of identity. How could I call myself a Latinx or Mexican American if I am a monolingual English speaker?
- Interestingly, my thinking on self-identity has evolved over the course of my life and career. I believe that if we are to be a society that embraces human dignity and human rights, we should celebrate people in the entirety of their varied cultural makeup.

- Moreover, we should recognize and value diversity within groups...including within Latino groups. We are not monolithic in our identity.
- Sure, Latinos can be Mexican, Cuban, Puerto-Rican, Afro-Caribbean, and so on. But, Hispanics can also be Catholic or Evangelical or Muslim; male, female, or some other gender; impoverished, middle income, even wealthy; and, yes, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual.
- I love that about us.
- Everywhere I look, there are many other Latino voices to be heard and appreciated.
- I believe our collective diversity—Latino or otherwise—makes our nation stronger and more special.
- Let's all take our own journeys of identity and grow from the paths we have chosen. We'll all be better professionals and better human beings for it.
- Next, let me tell you a little about how I am leading the Census Bureau. First, I think my roots as a statistician, a policy researcher, a fellow stakeholder, and a Latino offer me a unique perspective in leading the Census Bureau.
- I'm a leader who champions diversity, equity, and inclusion. I call these principles DEI. I've lived them over a 40-year career and have seen firsthand that innovation and excellence are advanced by embracing DEI principles.
- An important part of our DEI effort includes seeking out and listening to diverse voices. That certainly includes listening to our partners and stakeholders, which of course includes you.
- Now, I believe that we promote excellence by embracing DEI in our workforce, in our policies and practices, as well as in how we engage stakeholders. We're committed to producing data that reflects an accurate portrait of America.
- The Census Bureau is the leading provider of quality data about the nation's people and economy. We provide a wealth of population data by age, disability, race, ethnicity, sex, income, veteran status, and other key demographic variables to help measure equity.
- We also provide a treasure trove of economic data on our businesses, capturing production, sales and services, industry, number of employees, and so on.
- We have so much data that can be useful to you.
- Thank you again for having me. We at the Census Bureau stand ready to help you access our wealth of data in any way we can.