



**AAHHE**

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF HISPANICS  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION, INC.

MARCH 27-29 - 2026



**OUTSTANDING  
DISSERTATION  
COMPETITION 2026**

**DEADLINE: AUGUST 1, 2025**

[www.aahhe.org](http://www.aahhe.org)

# OUTSTANDING DISSERTATION COMPETITION 2026

## INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) proudly announces the 2026 Outstanding Dissertation Award. Although Hispanics are the fastest-growing population in the country, they are underrepresented in all areas of higher education: undergraduate, graduate, faculty, and administration. Despite the increasing enrollment of Hispanic students in graduate programs, they only represent a small percentage of full-time academic faculty members. AAHHE recognizes the need to greatly increase the number of Hispanics receiving doctoral degrees, entering higher education on the tenure track, and serving in faculty, administrative, and other leadership roles. AAHHE seeks to recognize and honor doctoral dissertations that exemplify exceptional scholarly research, reflect high academic excellence, and contribute significantly to academic advancement.

## ELIGIBILITY

1. The award is open to any Hispanic graduate student who has completed a sole-authored dissertation as part of a doctoral degree program from an accredited postsecondary institution between December 2023 and August 1, 2025.
2. AAHHE accepts award applications from all academic disciplines.
3. Previous AAHHE dissertation award applicants are ineligible to reapply.

## APPLICATION GUIDELINES & TIMELINE

The first phase of the application process requires award nominees to submit a complete nomination packet by August 1, 2025. The award submission must include a title page, the dissertation abstract, a dissertation summary that explains the research, and a nomination letter from the dissertation committee chair. Please review the detailed award submission guidelines at [www.aahhe.org](http://www.aahhe.org).

In the second phase, the AAHHE dissertation awards committee will select the top seven to ten award semifinalists. If selected, the semifinalists will be asked to submit their unabridged dissertations. Three finalists will be selected.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

The award committee will evaluate the award finalist's dissertation based on the following criteria:

1. The overall quality of the research purpose and aims of the scholarship.
2. The creative and innovative approach to investigate or explore the research topic.
3. The strength of the research methodology or design to conduct the research study.
4. The quality of the discussion of the research dissertation findings
5. The overall significance of the impact of the research on Hispanic communities.
6. The importance of the dissertation research contributions to advancing knowledge in their respective field.

## SELECTION & RECOGNITION

The awards committee will formally recognize the top three finalists at the 21st Annual AAHHE National Conference scheduled for March 27 - 29, 2026. The three finalists will also receive a monetary award (to be determined), an AAHHE Outstanding Dissertation Award Certificate, and financial support to attend the 2026 AAHHE Conference to present their dissertation in an individual concurrent session. Complete details about the 2026 Outstanding Dissertations Award are available at [www.aahhe.org](http://www.aahhe.org).

# 2025 COMPETITION WINNERS

## FIRST PLACE



### **Maria Javiera De los Rios Escobar, PhD**

Degree Granting Institution: The Pennsylvania State University

*Understanding Persistence through University Climate Assessment: First-year Students' Experiences at Chilean Universities and their Plans of Re-enrolling For The Next Academic Term*

María Javiera De los Rios Escobar, a Fullbright scholar and higher education researcher committed to fostering equity and inclusion in academic environments, researches the intersection of institutional climate, student persistence, and educational equity. An advisor to the Cabinet of the Superintendencia de Educación Superior de Chile, she contributes to policy development and oversight to ensure quality in higher education institutions. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals and presented at international academic conferences. She's contributed to projects funded by the NSF and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, advancing efforts to create more inclusive STEM environments.

## SECOND PLACE



### **Edwin Jose Perez, PhD**

Degree Granting Institution: University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

*The Life Cycle of STEMM Intervention Programs: From Adoption to Institutionalization*

Edwin Perez, a postdoctoral scholar at The Diana Natalicio Institute for Hispanic Student Success at the University of Texas, El Paso, is the son of immigrants from Oaxaca, Mexico and comes from a first-generation and low-income background, both identities serving as challenges and motivators that have shaped his experiences through higher education and his work in transforming institutions into environments where students, who have been historically excluded from higher education, can thrive. His research interests focus on examining and developing the organizational dynamics and conditions that allow the creation of equitable higher education institutions.

## THIRD PLACE



### **Yvette Regalado, PhD**

Degree Granting Institution: Texas State University

*Pedagogy del Corazón: Investigating Cultural and Community Practices Embedded in IRW Courses Using the Methodology of Counterstory.*

Yvette M. Regalado is an assistant professor of Literacy Instruction at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is deeply committed to advancing cultural and language pedagogy in literacy instruction and her research uses counterstorytelling to advocate for student success, restorative literacies, and Indigenous pedagogy. She has 14 years of experience teaching in the K-12 classroom; seven of those years were as a reading specialist and dyslexic coordinator. She facilitates Coahuiltecan language and Ways of Knowing classes and is an educator in the Tānko Summer Institute: Xinachtli Pedagogy. Her work creates counterspaces that promote a sense of belonging and unity.



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**c/o AAHHE  
2455 East Sunrise Boulevard, Suite 816  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304**

**AAHHE is proud to announce the Outstanding  
Dissertations Competition 2026.**

**The first deadline is August 1, 2025.  
Visit [www.aahhe.org](http://www.aahhe.org) for details.**

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