

La Voz

The NASPA Latino Knowledge Community Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 2



Taking the Next Step

THIS ISSUE:

The Book Corner
Hot Topic: Pursuing the Ph.D
A New Start in Arizona



Letter from the Editors

Now that the school year is underway, we wanted to turn our attention to mentoring and personal development; two themes that underscore most every higher education professional's goals but that are often overlooked amid the frenzy of everyday life.

In the spirit of highlighting our peers' achievements and reminding ourselves about our own goals, both for ourselves and our community, we talked with a few professionals about their quests to earn their doctoral degrees. In speaking with them, we found not only a tireless work ethic, but a singular goal to elevate themselves as individuals and touch the lives of their community members despite the precarious balancing act before them.

This month, we also bring you a story about the New Start Program at the University of Arizona, which has made college access and success a reality for hundreds of students and is based on a holistic sense of mentoring and outreach. We applaud their strides in a successful mentoring program and challenge our readers to define how you view the role of mentoring in your own lives.

And we are pleased to welcome two new contributors to *La Voz* and the blog; Marla Franco, a doctoral candidate, California State Polytechnic employee and passionate proponent of mentoring for Latino professionals and Amalia Gerbino, a doctoral candidate at the University of Rochester who took an unconventional path to the PhD and who shares her story in this issue. Both will write periodically about their experience balancing class work with the demands on their personal and professional lives and their research, which is driven by their own experience, past and present.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *La Voz*. Y como siempre, adelante!

Christa Wessels and Cecilia V. Lalama



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weeting La Voz

When's the last time you checked out La Voz's Online Media??

<http://latinoakc.blogspot.com/>
<http://www.twitter.com/tweetinglavoz>

**Need a reminder about who is on the LKC Leadership Team?
Check out Page 4!**



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Coming Up:

Do you have something you wish to be featured in La Voz?
Do you have a book you've recently picked up that could be a part of our Book Corner?
What's the next Hot Topic?

Let us know at lavozlkc@gmail.com

Message from the LKC Co-Chairs

As we completed the spring semester and prepared for summer, we never anticipated the challenges that we, the LKC, and NASPA would face. As Arizona State Bill 1070 became a reality, your LKC co-chairs were fielding emails from the membership and calls from the national board. The feedback we received ranged from boycotting the 2012 NASPA conference in Phoenix to organizing educational programs during the 2011 NASPA conference in Philadelphia. We distributed a survey to gather additional feedback and by mid-May, we had submitted a statement to the NASPA board, requesting that we move the 2012 conference to a more hospitable location. As the NASPA board considered various options, we were involved in many conversations with current president Elizabeth Griego, as well as members of the NASPA office. Although the decision was to remain in Phoenix, we believe that our voices were heard and our perspectives were valued.

As we enter a new academic year, let us focus on taking action and advocating for nuestra comunidad. There will be several formal opportunities during the Philadelphia conference to discuss immigration issues and the DREAM Act. Now is the time for you to help. Here are just a few ideas:

- Facilitate discussions on your campuses regarding the implications of Arizona State Bill 1070 in your state and region.
- Volunteer at the regional level to address issues specific to the Latina/o community.
- Organize a program proposal for the NASPA conference that addresses our concerns as a community.
- Register for the upcoming webinar on the DREAM Act (Sept. 22nd from 3-4:30pm EST).
- Represent the LKC on the 2011 NASPA Multicultural Institute planning committee.

We look forward to working with you and for you this coming year. Please feel free to contact us with questions, feedback, or to get involved with the LKC. Adelante!

A NEW START AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cecilia V. Lalama

Most entering freshmen begin their college career by being dropped off in a strange place, knowing no one and feeling more ill at ease than at home. For a lucky few, summer bridge programs offer an early and safe introduction to college. For some University of Arizona students, the New Start program has provided just such a beginning.

“Originally, I dreaded the idea of going to school during the summer but I actually think it might have been one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” says Luis Raul Rivera III. Rivera is now a freshman majoring in computer science. He adds, “the program helped me adjust to the college lifestyle. It got me ready for something that I had no idea I had to be ready for.” Rivera recently won the Rudy B. McCormick Award for

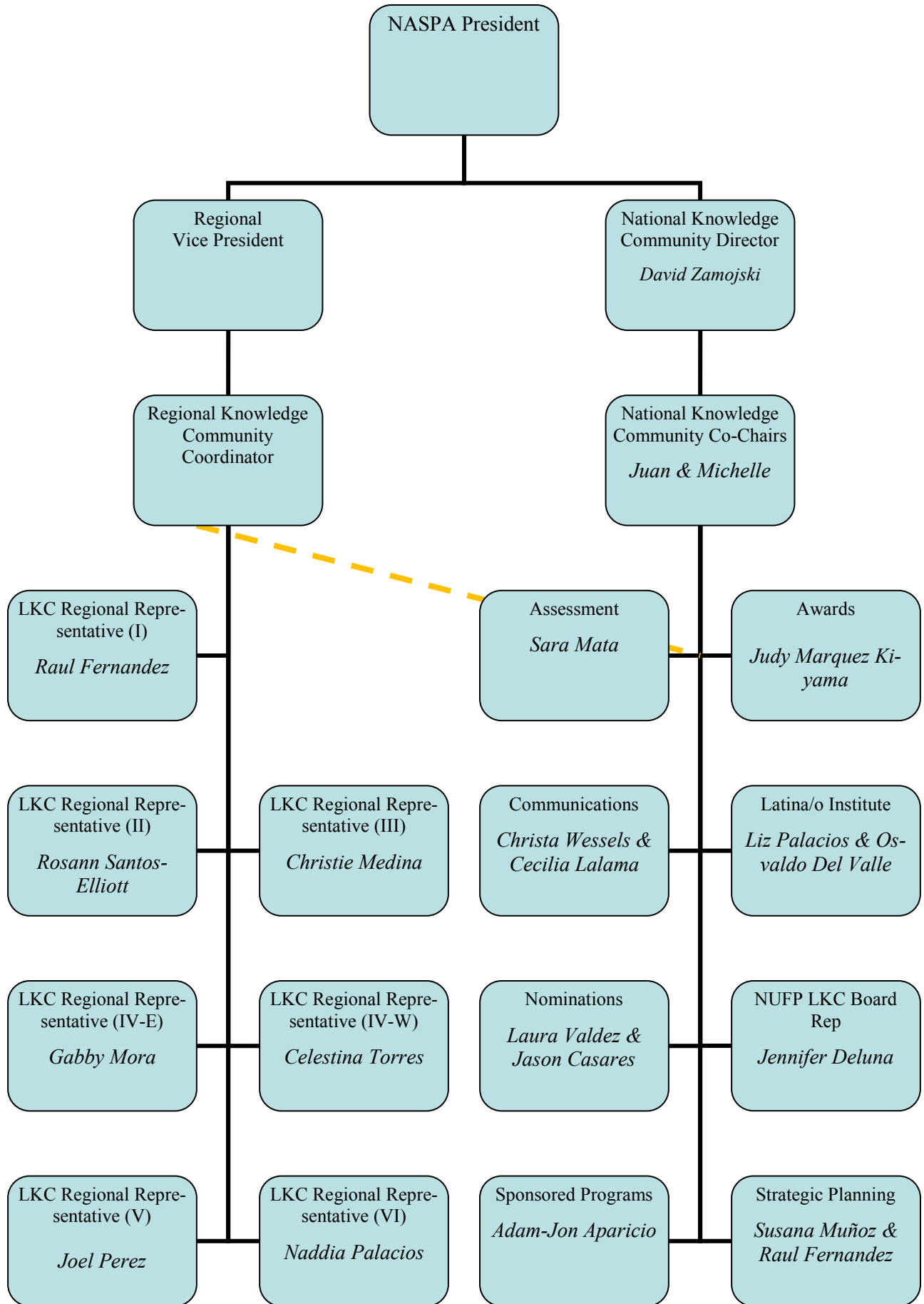
Excellence, a scholarship given to the New Start student who shows exceptional leadership and best exemplifies the program, according to Mary Frances Kuper, who runs the program.

New Start is a six-week transitional program that helps prepare students for the college experience in terms of course work and socialization. The program offers a rigorous curriculum that includes writing composition, algebra and calculus prep as well as tutoring and a peer advising component. This year, tuition for the program is just under \$1000 but Pell Grants generally cover at least 75% of the cost. The University provides additional tuition waivers to cover the difference, according to Kuper.

Kuper says the program originally recruited first-generation and minority students but has expanded to include any incoming student from the area. The program recently welcomed 338 students for the fall 2010 semester and offers college prep work along with general education courses with a team of peer advisers as part of the summer curriculum. New Start is housed within the University’s Student Transitions division, which designs programs to promote academic success and retention for new and returning students.

“Without New Start on my first day of classes this Fall I would have been so lost and confused,” says Rivera, who plans to apply to be a peer advisor for the program. Program Peer Advisers teach incoming students about the nuances of college life. “I felt that the





NEACUHO Social Issues Committee Proudly Presents: The January Retreat Series: January 5-7th, 2011 at The College of New Rochelle



Social Issues Committee
Turning Conversation into Action

Professionals of Color & Allies: January 5, 2011

GLBT & Friends: January 6, 2011

Women's Winter Renewal: January 7, 2011

Dear Colleagues!

The Social Issues Committee (SIC) of the Northeast Association of College and University Housing Officers (NEACUHO) is charged to plan and implement the Social Issues January Retreat Series. Each Retreat has a specific focus but the desired result for the Retreat Series is to:

- address needs of historically under-represented populations
- provide a safe space for professionals to discuss issues, challenges and share success stories
- provide an opportunity for professionals to develop and deliver presentations on topics of interest
- network and build relationships with professionals in the field

Having a deep and rich history, the Retreat Series is comprised of three individual retreats which each have their own, distinctive focus area. Below are brief retreat descriptions and a list of topics discussed in recent years.

The Professionals of Color & Allies Retreat focuses on the needs and challenges of professionals of color in higher education as well as ways to identify Allies for support in addressing these issues.

- Working at Predominately White Campuses
- What it Means to be an Ally: Supporting Colleagues of Color
- Power, Privilege & Perspective: Understanding the World We Live in & How it Affects You
- Being Political vs. Being Politically Competent
- Strategic Planning and Navigation for Professionals of Color

GLBT & Friends Retreat focuses on the multiple identities within the GLBT and Ally community. They work to identify ways to create, support and maintain safe campuses for students, faculty and staff.

- Ally Development: Building Networks of Support on Your Campus
- Best Practices for Working with the GLBT Community
- GLBT families in higher education
- Gender Identity and Expression
- Wrestling with Multiple Identities
- Bisexuality and Pansexuality

Women's Winter Renewal Retreat has the longest history of all the Retreats and focuses on the needs and challenges of Women as well as ways to empower oneself and navigate your career in higher education.

- Success – Taking stock of your successes this year! Goal setting
- Celebrations! - Celebrating the people who have impacted us. Gratitude journals
- Strength – Mental, Physical and Spiritual
- Professionals with Partners and Families
- Panel Discussion with Women in Student Affairs

Registration for the Retreat Series can be found at www.neacuho.org. Register early to guarantee your space! More information will become available as the date draws near. You may also contact Rosann Santos-Elliott, Director of Student Development at The College of New Rochelle at rsantos@cnr.edu.

NEW START UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA (Cont. from page 2)

course that the P.A.'s taught [was] extremely helpful and I want to pass that on to other people who will be in my shoes now", Rivera said in an e-mail interview. Rivera says he plans to become an English professor at the community college or four-year college level.

Chris Cruz, a Brooklyn native who grew up in Tucson was an unwitting New Start student. "My mother...learned about the program from the former program director and immediately signed me up, without my knowledge." Parents don't go unsupported either. The program staff offers parents help with financial aid and program applications, hosts a parent welcome event and talks to them candidly about their role in their student's education.

Cruz seems to have come a long way since his freshman year; "Had I not gone through New Start, I would not have known how to navigate campus and I surely would have been lost on the first day," he says. Cruz is now a senior and has served as a peer advisor and coordinator for the program. He plans to attend law school and help underrepresented communities advocate for themselves.

Students who live outside of Tucson are able to live in a residence hall and all students share a double room with someone from a different school, city or state, according to the program website. The program staffs 14 instructors, 15 tutors, 21 peer advisers and seven resident advisers.

Derek Adams is a new addition to the New Start staff and teaches English. Adams, who is pursuing his PhD in English, says his students were enthusiastic and highly motivated but could also be timid. "I also have to make sure that I give them the tools to conquer these challenges after they have left my class, so that they are not dependent on a single individual (other than themselves)" he writes in an e-mail of his responsibility to give them the tools they need to succeed.

Cruz says working at New Start helped him see the value of preparing students for college. "I love watching former New Start students take leadership roles on campus, join clubs, encourage friends and family to attend New Start and return to work for New Start too." He adds, "I want to combine my experiences in college and my unique speaking ability (which I describe as radical honesty) with my desire to fight injustice."

New Start also partners with the university's career services division, which lends the program space in which to conduct peer interviews, for example. The career office offers students presentations on resources and job searches and offers New Start students work-

shops on preparing for graduate school.

Adams adds that all of his students initially "felt that the [university] was a space that did not necessarily belong to them; that they were merely visitors... By the end of the program, there was a shared sense among them that the university belonged to them, that it was their personal possession to be used to achieve their own goals."

"The thing that I really love about it is that it's really comprehensive," says Mary Frances Kuper about the program. Kuper says the university has made a significant investment in the program and adds that New Start is the object of a presidential directive. She says the program shows students "how to have that college experience that we're always telling them they should have."



Photo Courtesy of the Arizona Daily Star:
http://azstarnet.com/news/local/education/college/article_e3e54e5d-f652-5ac6-8f7a-4a09d2f10e38.html



La Voz Book Corner

We hope to provide book reviews each issue that directly pertain to our work as student affairs professionals . This month's book review comes from

GENERATION ME

Twenge, J.M. (2006). *Generation me: why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled-and more miserable than ever before* . New York, NY: Free Press.

As the fall semester begins and the Class of 2014 find their way to the first scheduled class and participate in campus events created to engage them in their collegiate experience, I begin to ponder- who are our students? Having a working knowledge of who our students are can be the first step in developing best practices to supervising, mentoring and challenging students we interact with on a day-to-day basis in our positions.

Recently, Beloit College released their mindset list for this incoming class that provides insight on the cultural touchstones that have shaped the lives of these first year students. This reminds me Dr. Jean M. Twenge's book titled, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled- and more miserable than ever before*, showcasing the generation that we call Millennials, and currently work with. I'm thinking that it may be a good idea to read up on this generation since we will possibly be working with this generation for at least 10 more years.

In this book Dr. Twenge shares with her readers the results of twelve studies on generational difference found in data from 1.3 million adolescent Americans. She divides the book into eight chapters that provide a historical look at the stemming factors that have influenced the way the current generation see, feel and live their lives. In one chapter she dissects how this generation has been taught from a young age to place a high emphasis on a high self-esteem but low tolerance to criticism. One example is that of programs created to help students increase their self-esteem during the young years implying that having a high self-esteem will result in higher grades. Yet, the truth is that high self-esteem can be a result of high grades; therefore these programs have put the cart before the horse.

With so much emphasis on having high self-esteems you would think this generation would be walking around as the happiest generation to ever exist, and yet the opposite is true. Twenge states, "The number of people being treated with depression more than tripled to the ten-year period from 1987 to 1997, jumping from 1.8 million to 6.3 million." These statistics are a scary notion when thinking about the increase in mental health issues that institutions of higher education are facing nowadays. In this world that continues to be more and more competitive, our students are coming in with high levels of pressure to succeed and become flustered when things do not go as anticipated. Using the last chapter as a resource of best practices, we can begin to think of new ways to challenge and mentor our students to be comfortable in the uncertainty that is life.

While there is no section in the last chapter specifically for those working with this generation in a college or university setting, one piece covers what employers can do in order to best work with this generation. This can be useful as Twenge provides some methods that can be used in order to best connect with this generation, such as providing praise and showing appreciation for the work being done. As I think about the staff I work with and the issues that are arising in my own interactions with students, I find these insights to be helpful when having developmental conversations with students of this generation. I recommend this book to those who are starting to think our students are aliens from another planet, it's a great detailed explanation as to how this is far from the truth. Especially since I myself am part of this generation, and I promise- I was born on this planet.

- Yauleimy "Jamie" L. Rodriguez

Jamie is a new Residence Director at Syracuse University. She contributes monthly to our blog, *Blogging La Voz*.

Pursuing the Ph.D

Our very own Cecilia V. Lalama interviewed three members of the Latino/a Knowledge Community to find out more about their experiences in pursuing their Ph.Ds and how this affected their family and their current and future careers.

Marla A. Franco

Senior Coordinator
Office of Student Life & Rose Float
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona



Tell us a little bit more about your decision to pursue your PhD. What is your area of focus? Why did you choose to pursue this particular area and what do you hope to gain from this degree in terms of your professional path?

I am pursuing an Ed.D in Higher Education Leadership. It took me about five years to make the decision to return to school to pursue a doctorate degree. After much consideration, I decided to go back to school because I hate hearing the word “NO”. The thought of being excluded from opportunities and advancement in the field because I do not have a doctorate degree was enough for me to take the plunge and commit. Most people in middle and senior management at my institution have doctorates. I knew that at some point my master’s degree would only take me so far.

My main hesitation was my commitment to my two young children, ages 4 and 1. Not only was I feeling a bit burned out from my master’s program, but I also had two very important priorities at home; my children, who depend on me for everything at this stage in their lives. It is important for me to be there from them and not be absent from their lives. This led me to research and select a non-traditional program. I am part of a cohort and we attend class 4 weeks out of the year. We have a two-week residency (class time) in January and another two-week residency in July. Outside of the residency, we have our syllabus and for the most part work independently, yet still connect with each other via technology. The format of this program still provides me with a very enriching and challenging curriculum but it also provides me with the flexibility I need to remain employed full-time and be an involved mother to my two children.

What was your experience like when you began your degree? Did you know others in the program? How did you make connections with your cohort or classmates?

Initially, when I began my program, obtaining this terminal degree was more of a means to an end. I basically saw it as a means to climbing the hierarchical ladder of higher education, but, soon after I started, I realized that this experience was going to be much more than that. It is an exhilarating feeling to be immersed in literature again, challenged by assignments and connected to a group of scholars. Due to the format of the program, it allows for practitioners to work and live in other states. They simply fly in twice a year, two weeks at a time, to attend school. This enriches the program by bringing together a group of people who are geographically diverse and well connected in other parts of the country.

I must say that it was a bit jarring during the first weekend of my residency this past July. I had not felt like a minority in a long time, perhaps since my undergrad days. I live in a diverse community and work at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), so I am not used to feeling like I am one of very few Latinos. In many ways, this was a reality check. It reminded me how fortunate I am to work at such a diverse campus and that many Latinos across the nation working in higher education institutions do not have the same experience. There are 18 people in my cohort, which includes three Latinos and one Asian. The rest are White. I am one of three Latinos and have known these people before beginning school. Since that first weekend, I have really come to know my cohort and appreciate the diversity of experience they bring to the program, regardless of their ethnic background. Our cohort has its own Facebook page and this seems to be the best way for most of us to stay connected. We check in with each other, share resources and discuss assignments. It is very convenient!

We've heard that creating a strong support network is critical in finishing your PhD. As a Latino pursuing your PhD, what does your support network look like? Have you made connections with others who are pursuing their degrees? Are their other Latino/a peers in your program or elsewhere that you've made connections with?

Yes, having a strong support network is very important. My support network includes my family (husband, kids, parents, tias, tios, grandma, etc.), co-workers, classmates and close friends. Yes, I am connected with others that are pursuing their degrees as well. This helps because you can share stories with them and they completely understand. I actually used to supervise the one Latino in my cohort. We used to work together but now he works at a local community college. He and I are well connected and are good about checking in with one another. Having him in the program with me has been a great source of support. One of my close Latina friends/colleagues is currently in a doctoral program, but at another institution. She is also a great source of support. I know that I can always call her and she will understand.

(Continued on Page 9)

(Marla continued from page 8)

Finding mentorship is important in any degree seeking program or professional position. Does your school offer a mentoring program? Are there Latinos/as at you institution who you consider to be a mentor? How important is mentoring to you?

This is my biggest hang up right now and an area that I am so passionate about. Latinos are the largest minority group in the country right now. Data for the 2000-2001 U.S. Latina/o population show that 0.26% enrolled in graduate school, 0.06% attained master's degrees and 0.003% attained doctorates (Harvey, 2001). What could it possibly feel like to be one of the 0.003%? What a dismal number! It's lonely, yet encouraging all at the same time. Being one of so few makes completing this doctoral program even that more important. My program does not have a formal mentoring program, but they do encourage you to connect with students from the other cohorts, as well as the faculty.

Mentorship is very important to me. I feel like I have yet to come across some really good mentors. I would love to be connected with Latino/a professionals in the field who are leading by example and share some of my characteristics/identities (scholar, parent, ambitious practitioner). In my dissertation, I plan on studying mentorship as one of the many components of ethnic-based leadership programs that provide support, resources and the social/cultural capital necessary to prepare Latinos/as for top administrator positions.

How do you continue to balance school, work and family in order to ensure your success?

It is NOT easy! In fact, in my perspective, this is the most difficult part of being in school. I work full-time as a lead supervisor in my department, in addition to being very involved in life at home. I go to my day job and do 100% there, leave at 5 p.m. (if I'm lucky) and start my second shift (picking up the kids, getting them home, bathed, fed and ready for the next day) and then my third shift starts between 9-10 p.m. once my kids are in bed and that's when I begin my school work.

What would you consider the most challenging aspect of pursuing your PhD and what advice would you give to other Latinos/as who are considering the process?

The biggest challenge for me is juggling my competing priorities of family, work and school. My advice to other Latinos would be:

- Do it, but do it because you want to do it!
- Find a mentor and more importantly BE A MENTOR! Help guide someone else through their pursuit of an advanced degree.
- Research various doctoral programs

Terry Mena

Associate Dean of Students
Florida Atlantic University



Special Note: Terry responded to these questions on the eve of the birth of his baby girl. Thank you Terry!

Tell us a little bit more about your decision to pursue your PhD. What is your area of focus? Why did you choose to pursue this particular area and what do you hope to gain from this degree in terms of your professional path?

My ultimate goal is become a University or College President. I believe obtaining a PhD is critical for me to reach this goal.

My degree will be in Higher Education Leadership. My dissertation will be a qualitative study examining the pathways of Latino Senior Student Affairs Officers at Public two-year and four-year colleges and universities. I am also interested in leadership and student development theory.

In researching my interest area, I found there are few studies that include Latinos who aspire to the senior post in Student Affairs.

I hope to obtain a position of Associate or Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students and continue on the college president pathway. I also want to serve my Latino community; raise awareness of Latino unity and foster opportunities to obtain a higher education.

(Continued on Page 10)

(Terry continued from page 8)

What was your experience like when you began your degree? Did you know others in the program? How did you make connections with your cohort or classmates?

It was not easy. I have my master's degree from Teacher's College at Columbia. I made the assumption that most schools would accept me. I was surprised when I was declined admissions to Florida Atlantic University on two separate occasions. But I decided not to allow others to define my success. I came pretty close to leaving FAU to pursue my doctorate degree at another school (Iowa State), I was admitted the Higher Education Leadership program and promoted to Associate Dean of Students in a two-week period!

At first, I was completely lost. We had no intentional method for mentors to guide us through our experience and our program is not structured like a traditional Student Affairs program. It focuses on Higher Education and is housed within the larger program of Educational Leadership (Secondary Education). Most of my classmates are principals or individuals want to become principals. The conversations about learning were very different from those I encountered during my master's program. I learned quickly that I had to devise my own system for learning. So, along with a few other students, I created an unofficial cohort. My group even coordinated supplemental coverage of areas that weren't covered in our classes and have started mentor groups for PhD and master's students.

We also starting to focus on the unique experiences of people of color since there are very few in our program and across the country, which is surprising to me given South Florida's population.

When I started taking classes in 2003, my former boss and others were working towards their degrees. When I did not get into the program and they did, I stopped to focus on my professional development, job advancement, and family. They completed their degrees and I am close to finishing mine. As mentioned, we did it, but our advisor also tries to get us together. The program coordinator does not work with the second Ph.D. advisor and so there is no intentional method for the cohort.

We've heard that creating a strong support network is critical in finishing your PhD. As a Latino pursuing your PhD, what does your support network look like? Have you made connections with others who are pursuing their degrees? Are their other Latino/a peers in your program or elsewhere that you've made connections with?

Yes...creating a strong support network is very important within your program as well as in the profession. I depend heavily on Juan, Michelle and many others, especially Sal, my step brother. We are both completing our degrees, so we push each other and mentor others behind us to get into a program.

My wife is my strongest support. I could not do this PhD stuff without her support. I cannot say in words how much my wife Kathy has support me. I work full-time, attend school part-time. We have two boys, a baby on the way and I recently pledged for Phiota. That is all due to my wife's support.

My co-workers and boss are also a strong support, especially my Sr. VP. He drives me everyday to finish my degree. In fact, he is on my dissertation committee. While he does not like to mentor his direct reports, he is my mentor and has guided me in recent years. I also have to recognize my other two mentors: one of whom mentored me into the field. They have both encouraged me to continue to reach for my goals.

Every time I get a chance to connect and network with other scholars, I take the opportunity. I recently joined ASHE and consider this a way to move forward in becoming a scholar in the field. There are only two of us in the program. The other person just started and I have been mentoring him.

Finding mentorship is important in any degree seeking program or professional position. Does your school offer a mentoring program? Are there Latinos/as at you institution who you consider to be a mentor? How important is mentoring to you?

No. We created it unofficially. I mentor others since I am a senior officer at the University. Mentoring is a very important role and is a responsibility as a successful Latino.

How do you continue to balance school, work and family in order to ensure your success?

Again, my family is my base and support group which allows me to accomplish all of my goals and responsibilities.

What would you consider the most challenging aspect of pursuing your PhD and what advice would you give to other Latinos/as who are considering the process?

Time....I know I can do this work. It is having the time to be as good as I want to be.

If you got into college, you can do this work. Do not allow others to define your destiny and passion. You are the only person who can make your path in life.

Amalia Dache-Gerbino

Second year Ph.D. student
 Educational Leadership-Higher Education
 Graduate Assistant, University of Rochester

Tell us a little bit more about your decision to pursue your PhD. What is your area of focus? Why did you choose to pursue this particular area and what do you hope to gain from this degree in terms of your professional path?

While I was doing my undergraduate work at the State University of New York's College at Brockport, the Ronald E. McNair program recruited me and introduced me to the possibility of earning a PhD. I am humbled to say that before this, I did not know that one could be a doctor in a non-medical field! My area of focus at University of Rochester is Higher Education. Although my PhD is in Educational Leadership, I chose higher education as a concentration because of my personal struggles navigating through the higher educational pipeline after dropping out of high school and becoming a teen mother. It took me approximately four years to complete community college. As one can imagine, I had a myriad of social obstacles.

My goals are to be a tenure-track professor at university that aggressively challenges racism, sexism, and monolingualism in higher education. My research interests are tied to Cultural Studies, Postcolonialism, Organizational Leadership and Governance in higher education.

What was your experience like when you began your degree? Did you know others in the program? How did you make connections with your cohort or classmates?

The support I had from professors and colleagues during my first year was great. I had a caring and brilliant advisor (Dr. Judy Marquez-Kiyama) and had great colleagues that worked with me on a Latina/o community study research team. I did not know others in my classes or on the team. However, since there were other Latinas on our research team, there was an instant connection. We always greeted cheek-to-cheek and the cultural affection created a quick bond between us. Classes were a completely different world. In most classes I was one of two Latina/os, which was great because we formed an alliance usually during controversial discussions. The bond with the Latina/os was again, instant. Yet, there was always a sense, especially in classes on race and gender, that we would speak for the entire community. Since I am Afro-Cuban, it seemed I carried the white of both African-American and Latina/o communities on my back. I remember reading Tara Yosso's *Critical Race Counterstories Along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline*, specifically a chapter called "It is Exhausting Being Mexican American" and thought similarly, "It is Exhausting Being an Afro-Cuban American!" Speaking up in class on theoretical and practical issues facing our population in college or in K-12, was a battle because many white students believe that social -isms are self-constructed and inflicted: Truly not the case, so I am always arguing in class, which is not always the ideal situation.

We've heard that creating a strong support network is critical in finishing your PhD. As a Latino pursuing your PhD, what does your support network look like? Have you made connections with others who are pursuing their degrees? Are there other Latino/a peers in your program or elsewhere that you've made connections with?

This might be an odd response to a question of support networks, but here it is. My support network is my family, here and in Cuba, and the legacy my father left behind when he passed away eight months ago. My nuclear family and I were refugees on the Mariel Boatlift in 1980, so needless to say we were poor, Black, and my father was a political prisoner in a country where a non-English speaking mechanic spiritual healer (*Santero*) was not in demand. My family legacy, our past and present is really the support network that fuels my passion to not only finish the PhD. but to do exceptionally well in research and teaching.

I have met a few Latina/o students that are pursuing PhDs and have a connection with one or two. On campus, my support network is my advisor Dr. Kiyama, and the Latina/o community study research team. I have another professor/mentor who has been instrumental in my development as a PhD student, Dr. Signithia Fordham, who is an African-American Cultural Anthropologist.

Finding mentorship is important in any degree seeking program or professional position. Does your school offer a mentoring program? Are there Latinos/as at your institution who you consider to be a mentor? How important is mentoring to you?

Mentorship during the PhD process is critical and my school does not offer a mentoring program. Dr. Kiyama is my primary mentor, the person that guides and nurtures my voracious appetite to learn and grow. Dr. Kiyama is Latina (Mexican-American) and because she understands my cultural background, she "gets" many of my "issues." I can be myself and not have to act like an "academic" or talk about academic stuff. We talk a lot about our families and how we are in this privileged and paradoxical position of coming from modest beginnings but pursuing (or are) PhDs.

(Amalia continued from page 11)

How do you continue to balance school, work and family in order to ensure your success?

Balance, there is no balance! Well at least during the semesters I am taking courses. That said, I try to manage my time to the best of my ability. I schedule dinner dates with my husband, movie nights with my mother, and just “chillin” time with my three children. However, most of my time during the Fall and Spring semesters is centered on classes, research, proposal writing, planning for conferences, etc. I have a gym schedule that is also critical to my attempt at achieving balance. I go to the YMCA three mornings a week at 5 am, which gives me the energy I need throughout the week.

What would you consider the most challenging aspect of pursuing your PhD and what advice would you give to other Latinos/as who are considering the process?

The most difficult aspect of pursuing a PhD is figuring out how you will “represent” yourself, your family and your community in your research. Even if we do not want to “represent”, we do. As Latina/o PhDs we are a minority in academia and by default carry our communities on our backs. In America, Latina/os who are in positions of prestige, power, wealth, “represent” all aspects of the socially constructed lives depicted on television, film, and in the mass media. *Entonces*, we have to have tough skin, and “represent” *con orgullo* our journeys here and know that it will be, like Yosso says, “Exhausting Being Latina/o” in the pursuit for a PhD in America.




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