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La Voz

The NASPA Latino Knowledge Community Quarterly EZine

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LATIN@S

Our Intersecting Identities

THIS ISSUE:

MENTORING LATINO STUDENTS

THE ONLY ONE IN THE ROOM: REGION VI DRIVE-IN

LATIN@ POLITICS

BEING BLACK, BEING LATINA



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Letter from the Editors

When we took on the idea of accumulating articles about our intersecting identities as Latino/as, we knew that we would be opening a large can of worms: race, sexual identity, relationships with peers, how to navigate the campus climate and community, and more. We've received a wide array of articles from our large community, with contributors who identify as NUPF fellows, graduate students, and new professionals. We also have a few notes from our seasoned professionals that you all know very well.

We are very excited about the opportunity to begin discussion in OUR community about what it means to be a Latino or Latina. As our community continues to grow, and as our students contemplate taking on roles similar to our own, we must ask the question, "What are we doing to blaze the path for our future colleagues?" We must also ask ourselves, "How can we continue to unite as a community and support one another, while being conscious of our very complex and intersecting identities?" As a community, we are united by language and culture—but our faces vary and our places of origin cross the globe.

We hope that this issue will help you to begin the conversation at home and in the office, but also spark some internal thought when it comes to, "Who am I and what does it mean to be Latinoa... and [fill in the blank]?"

All the best for the remainder of your summer and we welcome your thoughts and comments!

Adalante!
Christa and Cecilia

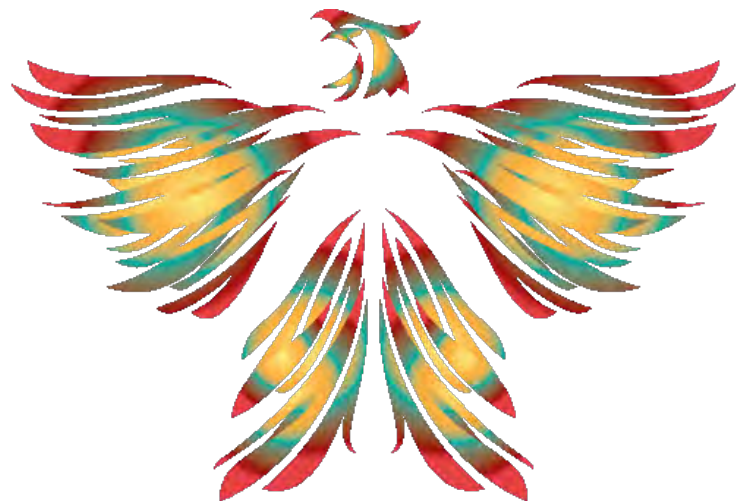
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IGNITE LEADERSHIP

Influence Change

2012 NASPA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
MARCH 10 – 14, 2012 PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Saludos from your Co-Chairs

Saludos from the Southeast!

Summer is a time for relaxation, rejuvenation, and recreation! As such, we hope that you are taking time to take care of yourselves before the start of a new semester/quarter is upon us.

As your LKC Co-Chairs, we have been busy planning for our last year in our respective Co-Chair positions, and we'd like to share with you some of our goals for 2011-2012:

- Offer at least one webinar pertaining to Latina/o issues in higher education in the fall
- Incorporate a diversity of experiences, geographic locations, and ethnic subpopulations into our volunteer/membership base
- Develop a talent pool within the LKC who are able to serve as potential candidates for NASPA leadership positions at regional and national levels
- Establish a mentorship program within the LKC
- Work with the membership to craft research about Latinas/os in higher education
- Develop tools to bridge Latina/o practitioners with Latina/o faculty and faculty in general
- Begin the strategic planning process for the LKC.
- Provide a smooth transition for the LKC Co-Chair Elects.

As a reminder, the 2012 annual convention will be held in Phoenix, Arizona. Based on the 2012 conference theme, "Igniting Leadership," we will dedicate this year to fostering the growth and development of Latina/o leaders in higher education as well as in NASPA at both regional and national levels. There are countless opportunities for you to offer your ideas, feedback, and time to the LKC as we prepare for the 2012 conference and within your respective regions as many focus on regional conferences and drive-ins. In addition, we encourage you to submit a program, either a pre-conference or general program for the convention, which are due **September 2nd** and/or volunteer to serve as a reviewer. **Don't forget that the LKC can sponsor up to 3 program sessions, so that increases your chances of presenting at the national conference!**

We look forward to continuing to serve the LKC for our final year. Please feel free to contact us via email or Facebook with your ideas and feedback. Enjoy the rest of the summer!

Juan & Michelle



How to Submit a Program FREE Webinar!

August 10, 2011
2:00 - 3:00 p.m. EDT

Join your colleagues for an interactive webinar on how to submit a program proposal for the 2012 NASPA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona! Discuss the theme of Ignite Leadership Influence Change and walk through the submission process online so that you can easily navigate the 2012 NASPA Program Submission and Reviewer Process!

Register here: <https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/303173155>

Deadline for Submissions: September 2, 2011

Mentoring Latina/o Students

“In reading articles on mentoring, I realized my mentor was doing the recommendations that the authors suggested. From introducing me to faculty and reminding me of the importance of building relationships with them, to demystifying graduate school, working to make it a little more easy for me. He also supported me in bridging the personal and professional self and understanding how to be my full-self as a person of color in academia.”

- Alejandro Mendiaz Rivera

Mentoring Latina/o students isn't much different from mentoring other students but our experiences in mentoring Latina/o students at the University of New Mexico do tell a story that supports some of the academic theories on mentoring and also highlight the specificity of the Latina/o experience within higher education in New Mexico. We blend several mentoring theories with Critical Race Theory (CRT), specifically racially conscious storytelling, to illustrate our own experiences.

Alejandro and Christopher have participated in the NASPA Undergraduate Fellowship Program (NUFP) since fall 2009, and have also collaborated on several mentoring projects including the re-launch of the UNM El Centro de la Raza's Amistades Peer Mentoring Program as well as participating in the UNM Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI) Fellowship and Project for New Mexico Graduates of Color (PNMGC) Peer Mentoring Program.

Moran et al (2009) discusses 'social cultural theory' or promoting the idea that we learn more from mentors who are “just a step ahead of them, such as college-age tutors, than with older experts.” In our experiences this is true for Latina/o mentoring.

This past year, Alejandro mentored a student from Albuquerque's South Valley Academy who was working on a project about New Mexico Senate Bill 582, legislation from 2005 that allows undocumented immigrants access to in-state tuition and state funding. “It's about relativity; she felt she could see me more 'eye-to-eye' with me than other mentors because we were closer in age and experience. She felt more comfortable to ask me questions, and I can relate to that because I feel the same about my mentor and asking him questions about graduate school.”

Moran et al (2008), using Rogoff and Vygotsky, further explain that these interactions between peers are about working **“together on culturally relevant tasks, with novices gradually entering expert communities through growing levels of participation in family, school, and community settings.”** In both of our experiences, peers mentors have also made spaces more accessible especially in academic settings.

Christopher's participation with the Project for New Mexico Graduates of Color (PNMGC) was first as a peer mentor and then as student staff of PNMGC. “It was the web of mentoring with my peers that I realized was most effective. I found experiences of other people of color, who while I could not relate to exactly one other person but did I find pieces of other's stories to connect with and learn from to help make graduate school as a first-generation student more successful.”

We both find that reaching out to peers, ahead and behind us, is part of both a 'stereotypical' but (for us) true value of the Latina/o community that encourages supporting our 'familia' of origin or choice. With our involvement with El Centro de la Raza and other Latina/o-serving programs and student clubs, creating a sense of 'comunidad' and 'familia' where we take care of one another is an important part of us feeling a connection to our academic experience and feeling that we belong to the larger university community.

Luna and Prieto (2009) use the self-efficacy and cultural wealth models to talk about Latina/o mentoring and graduate school. Their three basic findings were that mentors can help develop networks of students and faculty, familiarize students with the ins and outs of graduate school in order to lessen anxiety for first-generation graduate students and encourage students to believe in themselves and transform their visions of themselves as academics.

Similar to these findings, Alejandro's participation in NUFP has changed his mind about a graduate degree. “Before having a NUFP mentor, I leaned towards not going to graduate school. I have developed relationships with my mentor and others, and it's now like 'why would I not get a Masters?’” He has been reassured by having another Latino mentor because while there are many Latinas, he has met few Latinos, specifically male graduate students. Seeing that someone like him could do it gives him extra comfort because than there's no reason he cannot do it too.

Christopher can also relate to the idea that he has been successful in graduate school because he has drawn strength from **being one of the few Latinos in academia. “I realize it's often more difficult to be the only or one of a few Latinas/os in higher education, but it's also a source of pride for my family and community. I definitely realize I am doing this for more than myself and I pass that same idea along to other students that I mentor.**

Mentoring Latino/a Students (Continued from Page 4)

Other Latina/o graduate students, and graduate students of color, motivate me to want to be and do better because I see the valuable contributions they are making to not only their academic disciplines but also their communities.” Similar to Luna and Prieto, Christopher sees his cultural and racial identities as assets that have helped him persist in his academic career and give back with mentoring and other service activities.

Alvarez et al (2009) and others use the Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory to explain how “many students of color may have attended schools within their cultural communities, entering graduate school or college may be their first experience to being in the minority in the school environment.” The challenge, also according to Alvarez et al (2009), for Latinas/os and other students of color is learning how to navigate the two worlds of their communities of “familial and cultural ties” and their “commitment to academia.”



Alejandro and Christopher with El Centro Staff.

Alejandro understands that you have to be comfortable in sharing worlds that may not fully understand each other. He has learned that you can be both at the same time, rather than keep them separate. “I see that my mentor is proud of his cultural heritage and not afraid to throw in his cultural heritage in academic situations.” This has helped Alejandro to see how important it is for him to learn how to be comfortable in academia and to be all of who he is.

As the first in his family to graduate from college, let alone attend graduate school, Christopher has had to learn that graduate school is a lot about ‘faking it, until making it.’ “I remember my first semester having people talk about literature reviews and annotated bibliographies. They also talked about post-structural versus neo-liberal frameworks and theories. Even though I had a Bachelor’s degree and ten years of organizing experience I felt lost.” In conversations with other graduate students of color, participating in skills building workshops and developing mentoring relationships with faculty of color, he learned not just the academic lingo but how much graduate school is about learning and using tools that first-generation Latina/o students may not yet have in their tool kit.

Alejandro and Christopher agree that cultural programs that involve Latina/o mentors are also important. Christopher has helped to coordinate annual events to recognize the birthday of Chicano activist César Chávez. Both have been involved with the Mexican Student Association (MexSA) which has sponsored Las Posadas at El Centro de la Raza for the past four years. These events are important because they don’t only celebrate our community’s cultural traditions but also involve our parents, siblings and extended family in campus events.

Thus, in light of what we have collectively learned, we would also like to make the following recommendations:

1. Provide more mentoring programs for Latina/o students, especially young Latino men, that allow them to connect with Latino peers in undergraduate and graduate school.
2. Provide more opportunities for Latina/o students to developing mentoring relationships with Latina/o faculty and staff.
3. Encourage and support informal peer mentoring between Latina/o students and with other students of color. This can be done in student clubs, academic departments and student support programs.
4. Start early with mentoring programs for our Latina/o students, including connecting to NUPF, that explore graduate and professional school as a possible path.
5. Support culturally relevant programming that includes Latina/o parents and families and especially that brings our familia onto campus.

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Christopher Ramirez is currently working toward his PhD in American Studies while serving as a Graduate Assistant with El Centro de la Raza and the Dean of Students-Student Government offices at the University of New Mexico. Alejandro Mendíaz Rivera studied at the University of New Mexico and was a member of NUPF program.

Region VI Update



Members of the NASPA Region VI Latino Knowledge Community hosted our first-ever drive-in conference at the Claremont University Consortium on Saturday, June 25.

It was a day of professional development workshops and a panel discussion on the roles our multiple identities play as professionals in Student Affairs. We were able to engage in dialogues on the struggles and advantages of being a Latino/a in higher education.

Our day started off with a warm welcome from Denise Hayes, Vice President of Student Affairs for the Claremont University Consortium and was followed by five sessions: Career Mapping-The Five Year Plan; Navigating the Field as People of Color; Mentoring, Networking and Engagement in the Field and a Panel of **Veteranos** in the Field. Overall, the drive-in conference was a success. We had great evaluations; the vibe in the room was collegial and participants walked out with **many practical “tools in their bag” as well as new professional contacts. We had a total of 37 registered participants, many of whom were non-NASPA members, first-time NASPA event attendees and graduate students.**

Of course, this would not have been possible without those who contributed to the success of this drive-in conference. I'd like to thank all who attended: participants (from graduate students to SSAO's,) workshop presenters (Osvaldo Del Valle and Emily Sandoval from Cal Poly University SLO) and panelist (Dr. Kristan Venegas from the University of Southern California; Dr. Jacob Diaz from Seattle University; Emily Sandoval from Cal Poly University SLO and Dr. John Hernandez from Santiago Canyon College. Muchas gracias!

I would also like to give a special shout-out to Osvaldo Del Valle, who was the drive-in conference Co-Chair and who is also the Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community National Chair. If it were not for his drive and enthusiasm, this conference may not have come into fruition. Thank you Osvaldo! Your professionalism is contagious and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Naddia Palacios is the LKC Incoming Co-Chair and past Region VI Regional Director. She is an Assistant Director in Chicano/Latino Student Affairs for the Claremont University Consortium.

A Graduate Student Reflection

I recently attended the Region 6 LKC Drive-in at the Claremont University Consortium. The drive-in, which was mostly facilitated by Osvaldo del Valle, was structured around career mapping, navigating the field as Latinas/os, mentoring and networking and engaging in the field and concluded with a panel of more experienced Latino/a professionals.

The **professional career mapping** session was a definite highlight for me. As I enter my second year of graduate school, I need to be strategic about my fieldwork internship placements and how I plan to conduct my job search. This session allowed me to reflect on my immediate and long-term professional goals, obstacles and challenges. I had the chance to evaluate my strengths and the sources of support that can help me successfully navigate my professional journey. Beyond the personal reflection, we had small group discussions **regarding our goals and concerns and were able to share some tips and strategies we've used along the way. There was** definitely a sense of support and encouragement both within my within my small group and the larger group of attendees.

While I am no stranger to micro-aggressions, I've never experienced them in the workplace. Granted, I'm only just begun my professional journey. However, I did find the **navigating the field as people of color** session helpful because it went beyond sharing personal stories of bias-incidents and racism and focused on how to appropriately respond to these incidents. Some of our colleagues shared their experiences and some talked about what they would do differently.

One of the best takeaways from the **mentoring, networking and engagement** session was about **being intentional and finding the right fit when job searching. It's important to know what you are looking for, be open to** challenges and find the right mentors and organizations to help get you where you want to go. Emily did a fantastic job discussing different types of networking and sharing personal examples with us. I think some of the themes from this session also came up during the panel as more seasoned professionals shared their journeys with us. I find great value and power in storytelling and sharing, so I always enjoy these type of panels.

This was my first LKC drive-in, and it was a great experience. Being an introvert, I sometimes feel overwhelmed when I go to national or regional conferences, but this setting felt more intimate and it was a lot easier to meet and connect with people. Thank you to the drive-in conference co-chairs Osvaldo and Naddia, the presenters and panelists, the LKC and Region VI!

Carlos Lopez Garcia is a first-year graduate student in the California State University—Fullerton Masters of Science in Higher Education program. He also serves as a graduate assistant in the Dean of Students Office.





La Voy Book Corner

The Racial middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide

According to the 2010 United States Census, Latinos account for approximately 16.3 % of the total U.S. population (that's about 308 million citizens) and Asian Pacific Islanders for approximately 5.0%. These figures are significant due to the increase since the 2000 census (Latinos saw an increase of 43.0 % and Asian Pacific Islanders by 43.3 %).

By the middle of the 21st century both groups combined are projected to make up 35 % (Latinos will account for 25 % and Asian Pacific Islanders for 8.9 % respectively) of the U.S. population. I wonder how these figures will change the social, economic and political impact of the changing racial demographics in the U.S. How will I, as student affair professional, educate my students about the social construction of race and the relationship it has with privilege and oppression?

In *"The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide"* (New York University Press, 2008), Eileen O'Brien sheds lights on that question. She

uses in-depth interviews to illustrate how race impacts the lives of Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders and in seven chapters, explores the history and significance of Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders in the U.S. O'Brien asks throughout the book: **How does the growing number of Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders in this country change the conversation about race in America when the topic is generally grounded in a white and black narrative?**

O'Brien and her team interviewed 23 Latinos and 27 Asian participants (individuals varied in gender, age, generation and region) to examine whether Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders ideologies align more with the white or black perspective. The interview questions ranged from interracial marriage, the importance of affirmative action, feelings towards Whites, African Americans, other Latino and Asian ethnicities, maintaining cultural tradition and dealing with racism/discrimination. The whitening and browning thesis was one of the models used to compare the participants' answers.

O'Brien explains the whitening thesis thus, "when blacks will experience the chronic alienation and powerlessness in the social order... Latinos and Asian will initiate a process of "thinning" declining in salience for them as they increasingly access privilege of whiteness." She describes the browning thesis; "as minorities increase, more demands will be placed on the dominant white majority to share power in a more democratic and egalitarian fashion."

The insights of the interviewees were rich and complex and do not provide a one size fits all answer in supporting or not supporting the whitening and browning thesis. Rather, O'Brien believes Latinos and Asian Pacific Islanders should be seen as their own separate groups. And rightfully so: too many nationalities and experiences exist within the terms Latino and Asian Pacific. Someone who identifies as a mainland Puerto Rican will differ from someone who identifies as White, African American or Mexican. In the same vein, a person who identifies as Cambodian may have a different interpretation of racism in the U.S. than someone who identifies as Korean.

O'Brien's research serves multiple purposes. It can be used as assigned reading for a higher education and student affairs graduate course, help a student understand why an Asian Pacific Islander student may feel offended with the question, "Where are you from?" and can shed light on family dynamics for people in interracial relationships.

Joshua Gonzalez is a Residence Education Coordinator at the University Center of Chicago.



Latin@ Politics:

Current events and its impact on one Latina's identity

This year, there has been much in the political arena that impacts the Latino community which extends to how some identify as Latino. As a student affairs professional who wears many hats including being an advocate of the Dream Act and being a member of a culturally based organization, national politics continues to hit close to home, especially in the area of ethnic identity development. Aside from my various roles, I am passionate about immigration reform and social justice. This article is a commentary on current politics and its impact on my view as a Latina.



In May 2010, a group of college students, which included two students who are part of a Latino-based fraternal organization, participated in a sit-in at Governor Mitch Daniel's office in Indiana.

These students became arrested and known as the Indiana 5. As organizations mobilized to support the students, on in particular, Youth for Western Civilization, published an online article, *What Ethnocentrism Looks Like* (Morrett, 2011). Morrett, a self-identified conservative and Latina, shared her perspective on what it means to be American and a member of a culturally based fraternal organization.

I'd like to provide another, non-conservative viewpoint. The author of this article equates culturally based greek organizations as a "hotbed for far left activism and anti-American rhetoric." As a college student, my involvement in a culturally based fraternal organization became a way to explore what it means to be Latina. Through my involvement as an undergraduate member and later as an advisor, I saw students use culturally based organizations as a way to give back and engage various communities and to actively address inequalities. I saw undergraduates and alumni of these organizations organize their campus and communities to send care packages to their brothers and sisters in combat, coordinate voting drives, and arrange other activities that promoted civic engagement.

Instead of viewing these cultural organizations as far left activism, I have known these organization to devote countless hours to mentoring young Latinos to believe that college is possible, to raise funds to give scholarships to teen mothers wanting to pursue higher education, to increase cultural awareness among their college peers and to organize educational programs that take a critical look at issues impacting Latino communities such as the situation of the Dreamers. While not every Latino participates in culturally based organizations and not every Latino has the same fraternal experience, these organizations have been found to be critical in retaining students and engaging the entire campus with diversity (Banerji, 2006).

My political viewpoint on the DREAM Act also intersects with my Latino identity. As a bilingual, first generation Latina, I can recall many peers who dream of achieving a college education. Their identity as an undocumented Latino presents them with many challenges. I have also seen many not let their identity stand in their way of being vocal about their challenges. Since coming across the DREAM Act ten years ago, I have understood how different factors shape Latino identity and I have also understood the importance of solidarity and the belief in an identity beyond borders or categories.

These current political issues have been critical in forming my own Latino identity and have resulted in choices that strive to make the invisible more visible, including a profession in multicultural affairs. I am very passionate about the success of all college students and I am equally interested in the retention of first-generation students and Latinos. It has become clear to me in following these political issues that identity and politics impacts Latinos differently. The newest edition of *Student Development in College* provides models that address the development of Latino ethnic identity (Evans, et al., 2010). These political topics have also shaped my identity as an informed American. As a Latina leaning towards a left wing perspective, I choose to be a believer of possibilities, community and culturally based organizations.

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Daisy Torres is the Coordinator of the Hispanic Cultural Center at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee.

Amigo Leadership

I have been reflecting much on the term “amigo leadership.” I first heard the term from Noel Castellanos, CEO of the [Christian Community Development Association](#), in the context of what we as Latinos bring to the table with regard to our leadership styles. The main reason I have been reflecting on this term is that it directly relates to my work as the Chief Diversity Officer on my campus. I believe that the cultural value of friendship goes a long way in helping me bring people along in the institutional change process. I believe that as change agents we need to move away from beating people over the head with a 2x4 when it comes to doing diversity, or any work, for that matter. I have found it much more effective to walk alongside people in this process. I also believe that this approach encourages immediate rapport with institutional leaders.

There is a balance between coming alongside and pushing for change. There is a healthy tension that exists and one should continually ask questions about how hard to push for change and when to nurture people along in the process. My opinion is that when you nurture change it becomes much more sustainable. We all know that acquiring social capital can go a long way in helping us in change efforts as well as how we progress in our careers. I believe this approach to leadership is a way that we can demonstrate the benefits of diversity on our campuses. **Amistad means valuing someone’s friendship. How many times have we been in a room where we are able to get a lot more done when we have a friendship with a colleague sitting across the table?**

How does one develop these types of friendships? I’ve provided a few examples below.

1. Take people to coffee
2. Have lunch together
3. Ask about hobbies
4. Ask about their passions and values
5. Allow them to hear your story
6. If they have been at the institution for a long time, ask them why they have been there so long.
7. If they are resistant to the type of change you are promoting, ask them why



Will this approach always work? Most likely not, but it is better than the alternative and it will save you from burning out and feeling like you need to leave your position sooner than you should. Reflect with me on what other aspects of our culture add to the **concept of “amigo leadership.”**

Dr. Joel Perez is the Dean of Transitions and Inclusion at George Fox University.



Shades of Brown:

Exploration of my student affairs journey as seen through my multiracial identity

As student affairs professionals we spend time studying and discussing identity development. Our identities are multi-dimensional and shift as we move through life. **One of the dimensions of my own identity that I’ve explored throughout my collegiate and professional career is that of a bi-racial Latino.**

I don’t think I knew what it meant to be multiracial/biracial until I went to college. Coming from a small town in California with a white mother and Mexican father, I never thought of myself as anything other than Mexican. My Identity was challenged as soon as I set foot on the University of California Santa Cruz campus. Other Mexican and Latino Students quickly labeled me as white, since I was only half Mexican and did not speak Spanish. I didn’t feel validated until I joined my fraternity. I vividly remember one of my brothers explaining to me that I was 100% percent of both racial and ethnic groups and that the only one who needs to validate my identity is me.

The reception I received when I started my graduate work in Student Affairs at Iowa State University, was the opposite of what I’d received from my undergraduate peers. Many people at Iowa State labeled me a Latino because I was easily distinguishable from the predominantly Caucasian population. My graduate experience gave me a new lens to explore my identity as I was introduced to multiracial student development literature. Now, I could reflect on my own experience and become more comfortable with my own identity.

In 2008, when I attended my first NASPA conference in Boston, my roommate told me that we were going to attend the Latino Knowledge Community meeting. While I had a better understanding of my identity, I was not sure if I would be accepted into the LKC or if my identity would be challenged. Needless to say that was not the case. In fact my experiences in Boston with the LKC only solidified my confidence.

I hope this article will help inspire you to reflect on your own identities. I feel fortunate that my profession has given me a lens through which to explore my identity and that now, though the LKC, have a group of friends and colleagues; all of who share my questions (and maybe some of the same answers) about identity.

Trace Camacho is an Assistant Director of Student Life at Michigan State University.

Being Black, Being Latina

A Hybridity Leading to Post-Modern Progress

I am not one for boxes or for check marks, so having to check my race as ethnicity or ethnicity as my race (literally or figuratively) has always been problematic on applications, in employment and in my research interests. Holding constant the argument of dissolving races, which is another topic for another column, I will argue that there is such a thing as race and ethnicity.



I cannot be either or, but am simultaneously and unapologetically a Black Latina, an Afro- *Cubana* or as Marta Cruz Janzen coined it, a *Latinegra*. The Black Latin movement is alive and kicking in our music. *Reggaeton* is a representation of urban music that transformed Blackness and Latinness. Some researchers believe that there is a divide between Black and Latina/o communities, **yet, it is impossible that my body, mind and spirit are in opposition. Let's explore my background** a bit to see if I can illustrate this much more as a hybridity and a force and not so much as a division.

Being a Cuban refugee that was part of the *Mariel* Boatlift, the present migratory condition of many Latina/os is at the core of my own immigrant experience. Although I was only three years old when my parents escaped to the Peruvian Embassy in Havana, (where the boat lift began) Cuba remains etched in my soul, deeply and profoundly. I live a very exiled life at times because of a longing for my native island. I am completely bilingual and most of my family still lives in Cuba. I am 100% Cuban and 100% Latina.

Growing up in the ghettos (barrios) of Rochester, New York, I can't say that being Latina or rather Cuban were the parts of me that I identified with the most.

Why? Well, I realized in Kindergarten at The Martin Luther King Jr. #9 School, when my classmates asked me if I spoke Spanish and why my hair was not straight or my skin not white, or lighter, that I was different than other Latina/os, mainly Puerto Ricans, in Rochester at the time. As I grew up, I realized that even though I had a unique immigrant and cultural experience much different than many of my African-American peers, my classmates seem to embrace me as a Black girl who happened to speak Spanish and whose mother cooked black beans, white rice and *Yuca con Mojo*. Although my mother continues to deny that there is such a thing as Afro-Cubans (to her she is just Cuban), I have been trying to convince her that being of African descent makes a difference in our experiences in America, no matter your immigrant status, language or income. I am a 100% Black.

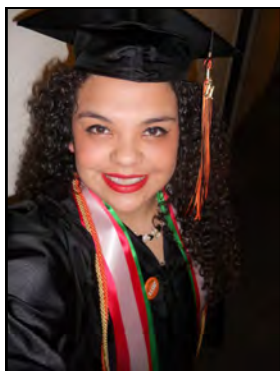
There are a million Black Latina/os in America. A study on the categorizations of Latina/os revealed that Black Latina/os had higher educational attainment (11.7 years compared to 9.9 years of education, respectively) but made less in annual income than their White Latina/o counterparts (\$35,000 compared to \$37,500 median annual income, respectively). The research suggests that there are racial inequities among Latina/o groups correlating with having African ancestry. If we acknowledge our African ancestors and African identity, does that make us less Latina/o or in my **mother's case, less Cuban? Absolutely not, but this is a sour topic in many Latina/o families represented by a vernacular phrase, "Y tu abuela donde esta" (translated to: "and your grandmother, where is she?") Hence, encapsulating how as Latina/os we try to deny our Blackness and in this example, our Black grandmothers, at times.**

As a researcher and an aspiring Ph.D., it is my role to explore racial/ethnic nuances such as this one because of its implications on education and economic opportunities for both Black and Latina/o communities. In the words of Edward Said, I believe in order for continued progress as Americans we must "bond in our differences" and in my case, being a hybrid of both these racial and ethnic groups is an advantage in our post-modern world. The most recent U.S. Census got it right finally: Please Check Race – **"Black"** - and/or Please Check Ethnicity - **"Latina/o."**

Amalia Dache-Gerbino is a second year Ph.D. student in the Educational Leadership-Higher Education program at the University of Rochester. She also serves as a Graduate Research Assistant.

A NUPF Feature

Claudia Ramirez Islas



We are featuring this recently graduated NUPF fellow because of her outstanding and trendsetting work with student affairs. Claudia was a NUPF fellow at Lewis & Clark College and recently hopped on a plane to begin graduate school at San Diego State University. Here, she talks about her senior project, *Immigration: A vision of Hope*, a series of paintings she hopes will raise awareness about the plight of the immigrant and undocumented community.

You can see Claudia's work at the NASPA 2012 Conference in Arizona where her work will be featured. Congratulations Claudia!

What's your next step after college?

I will be attending graduate school at San Diego State University to get my Master of Arts in the Postsecondary Educational Leadership with a Specialization in Student Affairs program. I have chosen to pursue a career in Student Affairs and Higher Education because I want my degree to be a

catalyst for developing stronger professional networking skills and help advocate for underrepresented groups like the Latino community. Ultimately, I want to pursue an advanced degree in Student Affairs/Higher Education to continue to serve students at the college level.

Why did you choose to move forward with this project?

I have chosen to move forward with my project titled *Immigration: A Vision of Hope* because it is part of my identity and part of a mission that I established long ago.

I was born in Mexico City but immigrated to the United States at the age of seven. Growing up, I never considered myself as being different from my peers. I identify as Claudia Ramirez Islas, a person who belonged to various cultures and identity groups. When I began applying for college, I realized (or more specifically was told) that I was different and apparently, did not deserve the same type of education. Many colleges rejected me because of my legal status here in the United States. Many schools overlooked my accomplishments and desire to persevere a higher education; however I was blessed enough that Lewis & Clark College was willing to give me a chance to obtain a higher education despite not having a Social Security number, a student visa, or a green card.

That's when I knew I wanted to make a difference and do something with my degree—commemorate the lives of the many people who have been silenced by society, treated unequally and been denied the right to pursue a higher education because of their legal status in the United States. I felt it was necessary for me to give back to my community and educate myself as much as possible so that someday I could help my people through education and my own "privileged" position as a college-educated woman.

I believe in that art is a form of education and a way of communicating and learning from each other. Art has always been there for me, making the unknown known by helping me build bridges. Art was there for me in second grade when I could



not communicate with my peers except through art because I was the only little girl in the class who did not speak English. Art was also there for my ancestors. I decided to use it as a way to educate, empower, and create a message of humanity by sharing the untold stories of my people through a series of paintings; *Immigration: A Vision of Hope*.

I knew that dedicating my senior project to the theme of immigration and having it displayed in the Senior Art show was not going to be enough for me to create the change I wished to see, so I decided to organize an event on campus called *Issues on Immigration A Public Forum and Discussion* where I used my senior project as a way to open up discussion and dialogue regarding one of our nation's most controversial topics, the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act). My guest speakers included Dr. Joel Perez, Dean of Transition and Inclusion at George Fox University; Melina La Morticella, an immigration attorney, Rebecca Shine, producer of *Papers the Movie* and Jaime, a DREAMer or undocumented student who advocates for the passing of DREAM Act legislation.

After this event, I realized I wanted a larger audience to see my work and hopefully become inspired to create change in the lives of the many undocumented students in the United States. I contacted a couple of my mentors and people I had met at NASPA Conferences

during as a NUPF Fellow. With their help, I got permission to exhibit the project at the 2012 NASPA National Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. (Continued on Page 12)



(Cont. from page 12)

As a Latina woman and student looking to start a career in student affairs and higher education, I knew that this would be a great way to come together and see what we can do for undocumented students who do not have the same rights that US citizens have. I knew my story and my project *Immigration: A Vision of Hope* was worth sharing with others.

How does this topic align with our theme for this newsletter: Latino/as: Our Intersecting Identities?

My project *Immigration: A Vision of Hope*, aligns with the theme of Latino/as: Our Intersecting Identities because it reflects the many identities that I possess: immigrant, Latina, student, artist, leader, resident advisor, NUFJ Fellow and NASPA member. By embracing each of my identities, I was able to create a project that has inspired many and that has opened doors such as exhibiting my work at the 2012 NASPA National Conference. My goal is that *Immigration: A Vision of Hope* not only reflects some of our current issues that our society currently faces but that it also motivates us to create change and inspires others to reach for their goals and dreams just as I have in advocating for change through art and education.

Artwork featured on this closing page and page 11 was painted by Claudia. Thank you Claudia for sharing your story!



La Voz Communications