

## Facing the Challenges: Latina/o Faculty in Higher Education

By Shannon Burns

*This paper covers the more significant challenges that Latina/o faculty face as minorities in academe. Some of these challenges include the lack of representation of Latina/os in higher education, minority social and psychological barriers, tokenism, barrioization, racism, isolation, separatism, unfair expectations of service to the university community, and difficulty in obtaining tenure. Several individual stories of Latina/o faculty members are given in order to better illustrate the personal struggles they have encountered in higher education.*

Latina/o faculty have been criticized by other Latina/os for not committing to Latina/o students or to their responsibilities as Latina/o people (Padilla, 1997). They have been criticized by Anglo academicians as being separatists (Boice, 1993) and too outspoken (Cockcroft, 1995). These criticisms offer only a glimpse into the controversies surrounding Latina/o faculty. The purpose of this article is to present some of the more significant issues that Latina/o faculty face as minority educators in higher education in the United States. First, statistics regarding Latina/o representation are shared and barriers they face in beginning careers in education are discussed. Next, specific challenges that Latina/o educators encounter are given and followed by some of the reasons they persevere. Finally, this article concludes with recommendations for improving the conditions and experiences of Latina/o faculty and reasons why change is necessary.

### *Lack of Representation and Barriers to Education*

The paucity of Latina/o faculty in higher education is quite revealing. In 1985, Chicanos represented less than one percent of all United States professoriate (Aguirre, Jr. & Martinez, 1993). By 1990, this number increased to 3.3% (Cockcroft, 1995). According to Aguirre, Jr. and Martinez (1993), the majority of Chicano faculty are concentrated in two-year schools (1.8% in 1989) and are grossly underrepresented in four-year institutions (0.6% in 1989). In addition, Latina/os are more concentrated in the lower-levels of academe such as junior faculty and lecturers (Garza, 1993). This imbalance persists in the academic departments as most Latina/o professors tend to be employed in the social sciences, education, humanities, language, and

ethnic studies departments, as compared to science, engineering, computer, and math departments (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Overall, the evidence shows the definite lack of Latina/o faculty representation in United States higher education.

It is even more difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the number of Latina/o professors because of the differences in terminology when referring to their race or ethnicity. Latina/os are referred to and choose to identify themselves in various ways, as Hispanic, Chicana/o, Latina/o, Puerto Rican, Cuban/a, Mexican American, or Dominican American. For the purposes of this paper, and for consistency, the term Latina/o will be used to encompass all of these identifiers unless a direct quotation from another source uses one of these terms.

The under-representation and imbalance in numbers when it comes to Latina/o faculty can be mostly explained by the institutional, social, and psychological barriers that they face in starting careers in academe. Such barriers include, but are not limited to, early educational experiences, entrance and scholarship exam biases, socioeconomic status, others' and self-perceptions of incompetence, and fear of failure. The messages that minority children receive about education and their levels of intelligence are often negative and can carry over into a minority student's college career. In addition, the majority of college professors are White, leaving few people with whom a minority student can identify (Bronstein, Rothblum, & Solomon, 1993). Scholarship tests and college entrance exams are also barriers in that they favor middle- and upper-class White males, making it difficult for many students of color to meet testing standards (Bronstein et al., 1993). Minority students are also more likely to be financially limited in their options for school. This discourages them from paying for application fees, travelling to different schools to visit, and often limits them to the more affordable state and community colleges that are less likely to pave the way toward graduate school.

Psychological barriers to education are created from the negative messages that Latina/o students receive from the world around them (Bronstein et al., 1993). By being treated as though they are incompetent, or that their achievements are due to affirmative action policies, Latina/os may internalize this oppression and begin to limit and denigrate themselves. The fear of failure that results creates yet another barrier for Latina/os wishing to join the ranks of academe.

### *Challenges Faced By Latina/o Faculty*

Many of the problems that Latina/o faculty encounter are

similar to those faced by minority students and other minority faculty in predominantly White institutions of higher education. These include struggles with identity, tokenism, isolation, barrioization (channeling Latinas/os only into areas assumed to be related to their culture), expectations of service, difficulties in reaching tenure, and perceptions of separatism. Within these experiences, prejudice and racism are often present which contribute to the unfair treatment that minority faculty receive. In order to better illustrate the issues that Latina/o faculty members face in higher education, several personal excerpts written by Latina/o faculty in R. V. Padilla and R. Chávez Chávez's book, *The Leaning Ivory Tower* (1995) are presented throughout this paper.

Issues of cultural identity frequently confront many Latina/o faculty. The contradiction of being a minority in a White world pervades higher education and the Latina/o professor is not exempt from this contradiction. A study examining the experiences of Black, Latina/o, and Asian faculty found that almost half reported having to give up some or all major aspects of their culture in order to succeed in their departments (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). On the other hand, they are criticized by others for assimilating, which is seen as devaluing the Latina/o people and culture and detaching oneself from Latina/o students (Padilla, 1997). Many want to be regarded simply as professors and not "Latina/o" professors and to be respected for their work, not judged by their ethnicity. Ana M. Martínez Alemán (1995), a Cubana professor, shares her personal struggle with her identity as a Latina professor in a Eurocentric academic world:

Though I speak their languages and know their secret handshakes, sing their ceremonial hymns, and worship their academic gods, I cannot fully be one of them. I am a convert, baptized by academic missionaries who have shown me the way into the promised professional land. Dressed in academic regalia and fluent in its discourse, I can only masquerade as one of them, never truly *be* one of them. I am born outside the boundaries of the pedigree, born into another neighborhood. Moving into my faculty office, taking my seat at the faculty meeting or at commencement, sampling the hors d'oeuvres at the president's holiday bash, I am struck by my lived contradiction: to be a professor is to be an *anglo*; to be a *latina* is not to be an *anglo*. So how can I be both a Latina and a professor?...As Latina/o pro-

fessors, we are newcomers to a world defined and controlled by discourses that do not address our realities, that do not affirm our intellectual contributions, that do not seriously examine our worlds. Can I be both Latina and professor without compromise? (p. 74-75)

In addition to trying to succeed at predominately White institutions with predominately White faculty, Latina/o professors often feel as though they are perceived by their White colleagues and sometimes students as being the "token minority," and are only there through the results of affirmative action policies (Johnsrud, 1993). Richard R. Verduga (1995) relates his experience along these lines:

In the fall of 1980, as I neared completion of my doctoral dissertation, the prospect of accepting a teaching position at a reputable research-oriented university was not only personally satisfying but would have been the culmination of seven years of grinding graduate study. Since my first love was research, early on I had decided not to apply for academic positions at teaching institutions. My goal was to develop into a first-rate scholar. My prospects, so I thought, looked good. In fact, a number of other graduate students continually reinforced this belief by informing me that I would "have no problem" landing a position at a first-rate research university. Interestingly, I later realized that such comments were made simply because I was a Chicano and had little to do with my academic accomplishments. (p. 101)

Latina/os who do make it in academe are frequently concentrated in academic departments such as Chicano studies, ethnic studies, Spanish language and literature, or bilingual education. They are also more likely to participate in committees related to cultural events and issues, international or study abroad programs, and minority affairs and recruitment. These areas have been referred to as affirmative action "dumping grounds" where institutional policies and discrimination keep Latina/o and other minority faculty members grouped together with little connection to the rest of university life (Garza, 1993). This practice known as "barrioization," "contributes to the formation of 'separate but equal' racial/ethnic divisions that fuel the misperception of Chicano/Latino scholarship as political partisanship and advocacy

rather than true, legitimate research and scholarship in its own right" (Garza, 1993, p. 36). The opinion that minorities should study or teach only those subjects that relate to their culture or ethnicity (or are only capable of doing so) can be seen in the following example of a Dominican American faculty member:

Usually faculty and other graduate students were stunned when I said I was pursuing nineteenth-century British literature. "Aren't you interested in the literature of your people," a few asked. My people! When did knowledge and literature become the property of a specific group, I often thought but rarely had the nerve to say. (Cruz, 1995, p. 92)

Later, when she did change her field of study to literature on Dominican Americans, she continued to experience assumptions about her interests based on her race. Here she relates an incident with an important university official:

When I explained that I had done research on highly literate Dominican Americans, his immediate response was, "Oh, so you must be a Dominican American yourself." "Yes, I am," I answered, and by the end of the conversation I was angry: It is a no-win situation. Had I done research on a typical mainstream subject, my right and ability would have been questioned. When I do research on my own community, I am considered suspect, narrow, ethnocentric, and incapable of being objective. (Cruz, 1995, p. 92)

Related to the issue of barrioization is not only the assumption that Latina/os in academe wish to, or should take on Latina/o related subjects and roles, but that they are *expected* to do so. In addition to the roles of teaching, research, and service that all faculty members are required to perform to obtain tenure, Latina/o faculty are generally expected to take on additional duties and have extra demands placed on them. They are asked to be on committees to offer a multicultural perspective, Latina/o students seek them out as role models and for advisory positions, and they are asked to represent their minority population for other services in which they feel obliged to participate (Johnsrud, 1993). One Puerto Rican faculty member recounts an experience where she was consulted on behalf of the minority population:

Whether at the college or in professional organizations, I found that an implicit expectation was that, as a minority, I would serve as the connection to minority networks. When it was time to think about minorities who would be good for this or that, or about a minority candidate for a position, the minorities in the room (sometimes I was the only one there) were assigned the task. This was reasonable at one level, but unreasonable and unfair at another. While minority faculty members tend to know other minorities, it is unreasonable to expect them to know minorities in all fields...I also realized that the burden of affirmative action was not on my shoulders, but on the institution's. (Torres-Guzmán, 1995, p. 61)

Attitudes and treatment that channel Latina/o faculty into certain academic areas and minority service-oriented positions can lead to feelings of isolation and marginalization (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). The small number of minority faculty at an institution adds to isolation and separation from the mainstream academic culture as the ability to create networks that involve Latina/os in non-minority affairs is limited. Being kept on the margins of academe also prevents White faculty from altering their perceptions of Latina/os. As a result, White faculty persist in ignoring them and perpetuate institutional discrimination (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Trying to break into the majority circle can be very difficult and traumatic for many minority professors, especially in the early years of their profession. Oftentimes, Latina/o faculty members leave an institution after a few years, because they do not feel as though they fit well within the institution's culture. A Mexican-American faculty member tells of his feelings of isolation at one university during the 1980's:

As a result of attrition, I became a senior member of the department's faculty. However, the exclusiveness of the academy persisted. I was still seen as a minority faculty. I never became part of the informal leadership network in the School of Education, nor was I allowed opportunity to provide formal leadership at the departmental or school levels. (Contreras, 1995, p. 127)

Barrioization, isolation, and exclusion from mainstream academia result in keeping minority faculty members removed from their White colleagues who sometimes misperceive this division as minority separatism (Boice, 1993). Because Latina/os tend to circulate within Latina/o and minority populations and to be involved in Latina/o related issues and departments, many White faculty view this as being a choice that Latina/os have made, rather than a result of institutional discrimination. They do not realize that the atmosphere is not always welcoming for Latina/os and many attempts to interact among White faculty and within the majority-dominated culture have failed.

Many examples of failed attempts to fit in to the culture, or at least to gain respect from their White colleagues, are abundant among Latina/os as they go through the process of obtaining tenure. This is probably one of the biggest difficulties facing Latina/o professors in their academic careers. Going up for tenure can be nerve-racking and complex in its own right, but it can be even more so for minority faculty. Instances of subtle and out-right racism have been noted by Latina/os as they have been considered for tenure. Latina/os are frequently told their research subjects are not noteworthy or scientific enough, the journals they publish in are not scholarly, or that they have concentrated more on service than research (Bronstein, 1993). Furthermore, because many Latina/o faculty are not tenured, they are perceived as not being able to meet the rigorous standards associated with tenure, rather than being confronted with a discriminatory process (Torres-Guzmán, 1995). Two Latinas/os share their experiences as they went through the process:

Everyone had given me the institutional history. Only one Latina had obtained tenure, and she had not entered at a junior status as I had. I had replaced a Latina who had not been given tenure. Furthermore, within my first two years at the college, another Latina was denied tenure. The message was written on the wall: Latinas rarely make tenure; you have got a struggle on your hands. (Torres-Guzmán, 1995, p. 56)

At the first institution where I was employed, I went up for promotion and tenure a year early with the unanimous support of my department head, dean, associate deans, and the college faculty. But at the level of the graduate college my promotion and tenure were delayed one year because they felt that I had not pub-

lished in "major journals." Here was a graduate dean, not in the field of education, telling me, and in fact the whole college of education, what he considered to be major journals in education. Yet there had been White faculty members who went up early, and who had fewer publications and service than I, who were tenured and promoted. (García, 1995, p. 160)

Other instances of racism are legendary throughout the Latina/o community. Inside and outside of the classroom, Latina/os and other minorities face the overt and covert racist attitudes and behaviors that they also regularly encounter off the college and university campus. Ethnic jokes and slurs, glaring looks, and degrading remarks are just some examples. For instance, professor Tatcho Mindiola, Jr. (1995) who was continually referred to as "Taco" by his White supervisor at an important and public meeting among state legislators and Chicano coalition members. The story of Dominican American Dulce M. Cruz (1995) suggests that a student dropped her class because he wanted to be taught by a "real" American, even though she was raised in the States and her primary language is English.

Not all Latina/o faculty experiences are negative, as there are also several rewards of the professoriate. Many Latina/os feel as though their contributions to academe and to their students in general are well worth the costs of working in a predominately White atmosphere. The study mentioned earlier of Black, Latina/o and Asian faculty reported many members having a positive view of their impact on their institutions (Bronstein, 1993). For example, some mentioned being able to restructure or add to the ethnic studies curriculum. Others spoke of creating multicultural programs, of encouraging minority students to be activists, and of changing minority hiring policies. Still others commented about the relationships they developed with their colleagues for whom they acted as models or resources. Finally, the impact they have on their Latina/o students is often mentioned as being the most rewarding as illustrated in the experience of Felix M. Padilla (1997) (emphasis is Padilla's):

For me to witness Latina/o students pursue and enjoy education for freedom was (and will always be) the most exciting and stimulating personal and intellectual moment. I was truly touched by the experience. I watched as students came to express a sincere eagerness toward critical learning, a sincere desire and com-

mitment to continue, beyond our class, to be engaged in critical dialogues we had developed together in our classroom. The idea of education as a practice of freedom was being reconfirmed. I have come to believe more and more in the transformative power of teaching, pedagogy. (p. 18)

Not only are there benefits for Latina/o faculty, but there is a great need for more of them to add to the lives of other faculty and students, and of higher education in general. Latina/o faculty members are often the ones pushing for social change and providing mentors for Latina/o and students. Without people from similar backgrounds and with similar experiences, Latino/a students lack successful examples of those within their race who have overcome the challenges facing minorities in higher education. In addition, Latina/o faculty are those conducting important research regarding the Latina/o other minority populations. In general, it is their presence that helps create a more diverse and supportive culture which makes higher education more relevant to an increasingly minority campus community (Garza, 1993).

### *Recommendations and Conclusion*

This article has highlighted the lack of representation and the imbalance in the numbers of Latina/o faculty and has presented the significant challenges that face this minority population of educators in the United States. These challenges include identity issues, tokenism, isolation, "barrioization," unrealistic expectations of service, struggles in reaching tenure, and perceptions of separatism. This article also touched on some of the reasons Latina/o academicians persist in a field where they continue to encounter instances of racism and discrimination. If the current experiences of Latina/o faculty are to change, it is up to the educators of all races to work to increase their numbers, to obtain fair representation, and to provide them with equal treatment throughout their academic careers.

Focusing on the recruitment and retention of Latina/o faculty, monitoring promotion and tenure practices, attending to issues of inclusion and barrioization, and providing mentors and a supportive environment for Latina/o faculty are all immediate and important steps that can be taken. Continuing to educate White students, faculty, and administration as to the issues facing Latina/o and other minority faculty is also an essential move toward improving the experiences of minorities in academe (Bronstein et al., 1993). With this in mind, it

seems appropriate to restate the words of Chicano professor, Roberto Haro (1995):

A firm commitment and a national resolve is needed to identify and help qualified Latinos achieve leadership roles in higher education. This valuable human resource should not be ignored. Latinos need to be better utilized in American higher education. They will bring new and valuable ideas, insights, and solutions to many of the pressing challenges that exist on our campuses. In these times of declining resources and mounting pressure to enhance diversity on our campuses, their contributions may be invaluable. (p. 205)

Without adequate representation and fair treatment of Latina/os faculty, the messages are then that Latina/os are not welcome in higher education, that they cannot succeed, and that working for the goal of an academic career is not worth the effort. This continues to build the barriers to education for Latina/os that desperately need to be broken if there is to be change. Hopefully, with greater awareness and acknowledgement of the issues Latina/o faculty face in higher education, we can strengthen our work toward eliminating those challenges that are due to racism and discrimination.

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## Where Do Students Study? An Analysis of Preferred Study Environments

By Sarah Beck, Jen Berson, Allison Hagan, Jason Pontius,  
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*This paper examines where and why students choose various study environments. The focus is less on study habits and more on the conditions that student prefer when studying. The purpose of this paper is to determine if environment affects studying outcomes and what environmental conditions are most conducive to study.*

Colleges and universities must strive to design and create environments congruent with student preferences and needs in order to foster optimal development among students. One of the most important environments to investigate is the space in which students study. Studying is found to be associated with numerous positive outcomes including retention, graduating with honors, enrollment in graduate school, and all self-reported increases in cognitive and affective skills (Astin, 1993).

To better address how environments may have an effect on behavior, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) define physical theories and models as those that focus on the external, physical environment. They state that an environment may allow or foster certain activities, such as studying, or may limit or hinder other activities in those spaces. Environments may even select or shape the behavior of individuals in the common setting in a similar way, regardless of their individual differences (Barker, 1978). Banning (1978) offered the phrase "campus ecology" to describe the relationship of college students to their campus environment. The ultimate goal of an institution should be to design a campus environment that meets the needs of students, rather than the students needing to adapt to an incompatible environment (Banning, 1978). Toward this end, several studies (Christ, 1966; Condon, 1964; Stoke, Grose, Lewit, Olmstead, & Smith, Jr., 1960) were conducted in the 1960s regarding study spaces and conditions in post-secondary institutions to determine how the changing college campuses should adapt in their ever-expanding construction. Nearly 40 years later, the authors of this paper could uncover little additional research on the subject of preferred study locations.

In order to improve study environments, how are campus