APSA Fund Successfully Mentoring Latino Scholars

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Recent census estimates place the percentage of Americans who are of Latino/Hispanic origin at more than 14%, up from 12.5% in the 2000 census. Despite comprising this large and increasing proportion of the population, Latinos continue to be severely underrepresented in the discipline. Today Latinos comprise fewer than 2% of all political scientists in the United States. This significant underrepresentation reflects the many barriers that continue to exist in terms of educational attainment among Latinos. In turn, our discipline is impacted by this trend as our ability to adequately assess the political incorporation and impact of this increasingly important minority population is seriously limited.

A recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center measured the quality of college outcomes for equally prepared high school youths of different racial and ethnic groups (Fry 2004). While Anglos (Whites) and Latinos are equally likely to enroll in postsecondary education, young Latinos are half as likely to finish a bachelor's degree. Three primary reasons were given to explain this disparity: family pressures, a lack of resources because parents are either incapable or unwilling to assist students, and a lack of preparedness they received from their high schools. While the challenge of graduating college is not unique to Latinos, this study points out that the issues are more severe among Latino students. Knowledge about financial aid (or lack thereof) also seems to be a crucial factor. A recent study by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) found that 43% of all Latino young adults and 51% of Latino parents were not aware of even a single source of college financial aid (TRPI 2004).

While graduation rates need to improve, it is notable that more and more Latinos are enrolling in postsecondary educational institutions. According to Rodriguez (2006), "Not only is the number of Hispanics attending college on the rise, but Latinos are also enrolling in higher numbers in the country's best schools, changing the faces of the most selective academic institutions." As more and more of our students are Latino, it becomes more crucial to provide role models and mentors who are themselves Latino. This is where the Fund for Latino Scholarship can make a difference: by offering financial support to young Latino scholars and scholars of Latino politics, the fund aims not only to improve the representativeness of our profession but also to better serve our students.

In October 1999, in response to earlier reports on Latino student achievement and needs, the APSA's Sector Latino de Ciencia Politica (Latino Political Science Caucus) and the APSA Committee on the Status of Latinas/os in the Profession established the Fund for Latino Scholarship. The primary aim of the fund is to encourage and support the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Latina/o political scientists. A secondary goal is to support research on Latina/o politics. Several years after launching the capital campaign, the fund was successfully endowed at the $50,000 level, allowing for an initial grant disbursement in 2003. A list of the generous donors to the fund is listed below. The Latino Fund has now distributed grants to Latino scholars and scholars of Latino politics for three years.

Applications for funds are accepted for a variety of initiatives, including proposals

Contributors to the APSA Fund for Latino Scholarship (as of 8/15/2006)

$5,000 +
Tony Affigne
Valerie Martinez-Ebers
Robert Putnam
Ronald J. Schmidt, Sr.

$2,000–$4,999
John G. Bretting
Luis Fraga
Robert O. Keohane
David R. Mares
Gary M. Segura
Christine Marie Sierra

$1,000–$1,999
Anonymous
Manuel Ávalos
Nancy Brune
Louis DeSipio
F. Chris García
John A. García
Lisa García Bedolla
Rodney Hero
Michael Jones-Correa
David Leal
Linda López
Benjamin Márquez
Lisa Montoya
Arturo Vega

$500–$999
Carol Hardy-Fanta
Robert Jervis
Paula D. McClain
Melissa Michelson
Catherine E. Rudder
Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell

$250–$499
Edwina Barvosa-Carter
James Jennings
Rita Mae Kelly
Gary Klass

$100–$249
Cristina Beltrán
Amy Bridges
Michael A. Brintnall
Christine Di Stefano
Ángelo Falcón
James L. Gibson
Helen M. Ingram
Elizabeth F. Moulds
Joseph M. Tages, II

$1–$99
Anonymous
Anonymous
Anonymous
Gloria Anglón
Peter Burns
Renee Noelle Day
Eric González Juenke
Jessica Lavariega-Monforti
Pie-te Lien
Julie L. Novkov
Stephen Andrew Nuño
Anna Sampaio
Mark Q. Sawyer
Harold W. Stanley
Joseph Stewart, Jr.
Henry Suhr
Ángel L. Viera-Tirado
S. Laurel Weldon

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506241180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to: 1) identify promising Latino/a undergraduates and encourage them to enter the profession of political science; 2) provide professional opportunities and financial assistance to Latino/a graduate students in political science programs; 3) support the teaching, research, and publishing activities of junior-level, tenure track Latino/a political science faculty; and 4) support activities that advance our knowledge of Latino/a politics. In practice, the selection committee has favored travel grants to young Latino scholars and scholars of Latino politics hoping to attend the APSA Annual Meeting due to the educational and professional opportunities such attendance offers. However, several grants for other purposes have also been made, all with the same goal of advancing proportionality in the profession or research by young scholars on Latino politics.

In 2003, the first year grants were awarded, three young Latino political scientists received travel grants of $500 each: Assistant Professor Jessica Lavariega Monforti (née Perez Monforti) and graduate students Brandon Valeriano and Marisa Abrajano. Lavariega Monforti and Valeriano received funds to travel to APSA's Annual Meeting, while Marisa Abrajano was awarded funds to purchase needed data for her dissertation and to travel to the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA). All three scholars have continued to thrive in the profession. Lavariega Monforti notes:

> I was able to travel to the annual conference of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia because I received this grant. I received limited institutional support for conference travel and needed to supplement this funding to cover the expenses of travel and lodging. I had three main goals for the conference: 1) to attend the short course focused on preparing junior faculty of color for the tenure process and professional development; 2) to meet with various academic press representatives that I could work with to publish my dissertation manuscript; and 3) to participate in panels focused on Latino politics.

Lavariega Monforti has since moved on from Mercer University, where she was teaching at the time she received the grant. She is now in a tenure-track position at Texas Christian University and recently completed a post-doctoral Ford Fellowship at Florida International University. She has also successfully published a book, co-edited with William E. Nelson, Jr., entitled *Black and Latino/a Politics: Issues in Political Development in the United States* (Barnhardt and Ashe, 2005).

Valeriano used his award to travel to the APSA Annual Meeting in 2003, where he not only presented a paper but also participated in the on-site job market, leading him to take a position at Texas State University. Last year he moved to a tenure-track position at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Valeriano has co-authored a book, *The Bush Doctrine and the War on Terrorism: Global Responses, Global Consequences* (Routledge Press, 2006) as well as a 2003 article in *International Studies Perspectives.*

Finally, Abrajano completed her Ph.D. at New York University and went on to a teaching position at Texas A&M University. This fall she started a new tenure-track position at the University of California, San Diego.

In 2004, the Fund for Latino Scholarship was able to provide for five grant awards. Assistant Professors Maria Chavez and Ricardo Ramírez, and graduate students Christina Elizabeth Bejarano, Gustavo Cano, and Eduardo J. Gómez each received funding. Chavez, now teaching at Pacific Lutheran University, used the grant to conduct interviews with Latina lawyers in Yakima, Washington, leading to a published book chapter, "Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender: The Experiences of Latina Lawyers," in Lavariega and Nelson's co-edited volume. Chavez notes that the award meant more to her than money:

> I was at a point where I didn't want to work on the data anymore, much less expand upon it by collecting more. Because a respected and esteemed group of my colleagues believed in my idea enough to fund me it made me believe in my work again too. Sometimes a person really needs that.

Ramírez is in his fourth year of a tenure-track position at the University of Southern California. Cano is teaching at the University of Nebraska at Omaha while he finishes his Ph.D. at Columbia University. He has published an article in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and a chapter in Dick Simpson's edited volume, *Inside Urban Politics,* entitled "Political Mobilization of Mexican Immigrants in American Cities" (Longman, 2004). Gómez used his grant to travel to the APSA Annual Meeting, where he reports that he received "some great suggestions for [his] dissertation." He is currently finishing his Ph.D. at Brown University while teaching in the politics and governance group of the Harvard School of Public Health. Gómez also recently served as an APSA Centennial Fellow in Washington, D.C.

In 2005, four graduate students received funding for travel to the APSA Annual Meeting: Jennifer Lynn Miller from the University of Michigan, Stephen Andrew Nuño from the University of California, Irvine, Lorrie Ann Frasure from the University of Maryland at College Park, and Bejerano.

Frasure used her award toward travel assistance to help defray the cost of attending the 2005 APSA Annual Meeting, where she presented both a paper and a poster. She notes that the funding was helpful in allowing her to receive comments and encouragement from colleagues:

> The award provided an outstanding professional development opportunity to present scholarly work relevant to minority communities, specifically Latino communities. This award was provided during a critical juncture in the dissertation writing process. Presenting this work at the APSA Annual Meeting was a very rewarding experience. The paper presentation was also well received and I was very fortunate to obtain excellent feedback and comments from my discussant Jason Casellas as well as from fellow panel and audience members. During my poster session, I received important feedback and encouragement from scholars whom I chatted extensively with during the session. And, of course, the award provided the necessary funds (in advance) to pay for conference travel, lodging, and food.

Frasure has since completed her Ph.D. and is serving as a postdoctoral associate in the department of government at Cornell University. She has also published a co-authored chapter in Wilbur Rich's *The State of the Political Science Discipline: An African American Perspective* (Temple University Press, forthcoming), entitled "Still at the Margins: The Persistence of Neglect of African American Issues in Political Science, 1986–2003," with Ernest J. Wilson, III.

Bejerano is in her fifth year of graduate work at the University of Iowa and is on the 2006 job market. She used her 2004 award to present her first conference paper, at the 2005 Southern Political Science Association annual meeting. In 2005, she used her award to travel to the APSA Annual Meeting, where she both presented a paper and served as a panel chair and discussant. Bejerano notes: "The APSA Latino Fund provided opportunities to enhance my professional skills and exposure within the academic community and also provided valuable experience at presenting research in a professional setting."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506241180 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Fund for Latino Scholarship awards are competitive, with winners chosen by a five-member panel that includes Tony Affigne, professor and chair of the political science department at Providence College, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, associate professor of political science at Texas Christian University, James Jennings, professor of urban and environmental policy and planning at Tufts University, Louis DeSipio, professor of political science at the University of California, Irvine, and Gary Segura, professor of political science at the University of Washington.

The Fund for Latino Scholarship is proud of the support it has been able to offer these emerging scholars, and looks forward to watching past and future winners help change the face of the discipline, with more Latino/a faces and voices, and more attention to issues of Latino/a politics. While scholarships made from the fund cannot completely erase the disparities in educational attainment noted above, they can help narrow the gap, and make political science more inclusive and diverse. It was only a few decades ago that the first Latino and Latina scholars received Ph.D.s in political science. Adaljisa Sosa-Riddell, now emeritus at the University of California, San Diego, received her doctorate in 1974, the first Latina in the United States to do so. The question of who was the first Latino political scientist is more contentious, but in 1970 the Committee on the Status of Latinos/as counted only six in the entire United States: Rudolph Gomez, Ralph C. Guzman, Leonard Cardenas, Thomas V. Garcia, Herman Lujan, and Alexander Garcia. Today, Latinos are a visible and valued presence in the discipline. With the help of the Latino Fund, the progress and representational proportionality of Latinos in political science will continue to improve.

Notes

1. Personal interview, March 31, 2006.
2. Personal interview, April 3, 2006.
3. Personal interview, March 30, 2006.
4. Personal interview, April 16, 2006.
5. Personal interview, April 17, 2006.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506241180 Published online by Cambridge University Press