

In Pursuit of Puerto Rican Studies

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Agenda

- The Current Environment
- Where is the Puerto Rican Studies Field Now?
- Towards a Collective Response to a Collective Problem
- A Vision for El Centro
 - Role in the Current Context
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- A Point of Departure
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Current Environment: Changing Demographics

- Changing composition and destination of migratory flows between Puerto Rico and the U. S.*
- Population dynamics: in 2003, population in the U.S. diaspora exceeded that on the Island.
- Geographic dispersion of population within the U.S., and concentration within central cities of metropolitan areas.*
- Linguistic isolation: 39% of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. speak English poorly.

*See Centro policy report on this topic at <http://www.centropr.org>.

Current Environment: Growing Presence of Latinos in U.S.

- When El Centro was founded in 1973, Latinos constituted about 5 percent of the total population, and Puerto Ricans and Cubans were the second and third largest national groups among Latinos.
- Today, Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the country.
- Immigration of Latinos is a contentious political issue that shapes social stratification and discrimination.
- Relations with other racial and ethnic groups are embedded in this context.

Current Environment: A Social Reality Paradox

- Have dense network of community organizations and leaders and large number of elected officials; yet, in 2000, the 38.6% voter registration and 79.8% turnout rates were the lowest.
- Have made significant gains in household and individual income; yet, have highest poverty rates of all groups (with the exception of Dominicans).
- Recent research suggests that second generations are doing worse in socio-economic terms than first generations.

Current Environment: A Leaky Pipeline

Though Puerto Ricans have high school graduation rates comparable to other New Yorkers or Latinos in the State (25.7 % compared to 27.8% and 23.6% respectively), in 2000:

- Puerto Ricans had a college graduation rate 0.3 percentage points lower than other Latinos (6.3% v. 6.9%), and 9.3 lower than other New Yorkers (6.3% v. 15.6%).
- Puerto Ricans (3.5%) tracked both New Yorkers (11.8%) and other Latinos (4.5%) in graduate or professional degrees.

* See Centro policy report on this topic at <http://www.centropo.org>.

Current Environment: Is a Puerto Rican Studies Education Valuable, Relevant?

- Many administrators question the value of Puerto Rican Studies.
- Need to answer questions of “why” and “how” is Puerto Rican Studies relevant.
- Need to foster new pedagogies that celebrate and value our cultural and historical heritage.
- Need to demonstrate how knowledge generated by Puerto Rican Studies, and ethnic identity more generally, affect social change and public policy.

Where is Puerto Rican Studies as a Field Now?

- Who is well represented in the audience tonight?
- Look around ... let’s ask ourselves “who is not here?”
- Who we would like to be here?
- Why not everyone who we would like to be here is not?
- What are the issues and concerns that those who are not here may have?
- Which issues and concerns do we (those who are here) agree are important priorities for the Puerto Rican community?
- How can we engage in a collective effort to address important priorities for the Puerto Rican community?

How Have We Responded to the Challenges?

Scholarly production devoted to the understanding of the socio-economic conditions of stateside Puerto Ricans has declined when compared to prior decades, including:

- A decline in support mechanisms for scholars who decide to undertake such topics;
- Minimal mentorship of young scholars with interests in pursuing these topics; and,
- Fewer opportunities for the discussion and dissemination of this research.

How Have We Responded to Opportunities?

- CUNY Faculty Initiative: The appointment of a significant number of faculty offers the infusion of new scholars into the field and the opportunity to renew a research agenda.
- The next PRSA conference shows a marked growth of membership and interest on the field.
- Recent interviews with community leaders and policy makers indicate a great desire to collaborate with academics in the solution to our community problems.

Greatest Challenge: Affirming the Value of Puerto Rican Studies

- **Education:** Cultural identity and ethnic solidarity are important elements in students' intellectual curiosity and social and political motivation;
- **Scholarship:** Ethnic-centered interdisciplinary approach is important for understanding the individual and its community; and,
- **Social Change:** Ethnic networks, build on norms of trust and solidarity, are important form of social organization that affect social stability, economic achievement, and political processes that shape access to power and resources.

Towards a Collective Response

- Puerto Rican Studies as a Social Movement: Origin of the field and Centro rooted on the civil rights and open admissions movement of the 1960's;
- Beginning tonight, establish a sense of urgency among scholars to rediscover:
 - The purpose of a Puerto Rican Studies education;
 - Linkages to the aspirations of our community; and,
 - Relevancy to academics, community and policy makers.

What is the Role of Centro in the Current Context?

The Center for Puerto Rican Studies "Mission" currently is:

- To collect, preserve, and provide access to archival and library resources documenting the history and culture of Puerto Ricans.
- To produce, facilitate, and disseminate interdisciplinary research about the diasporic experiences of Puerto Ricans and to link this scholarly inquiry to social action and policy debates.

Re-discovering the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Mission

Centro was created by community and university activists to create a "graduate" support mechanism to:

- Assist newly created departments to experiment with "new approaches that will transcend failed pedagogies;"
- Promote "community access to the university;"
- Create "new knowledge and quickly and comprehensibly transfer it to a long denied community;" and,
- Generate "supportive activities on a University-wide basis."

Re-discovering the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Mission

What need to be strengthened:

- Connections to the educational mission of the university;
- Relevancy to the solutions of critical social problems; and
- Community engagement.

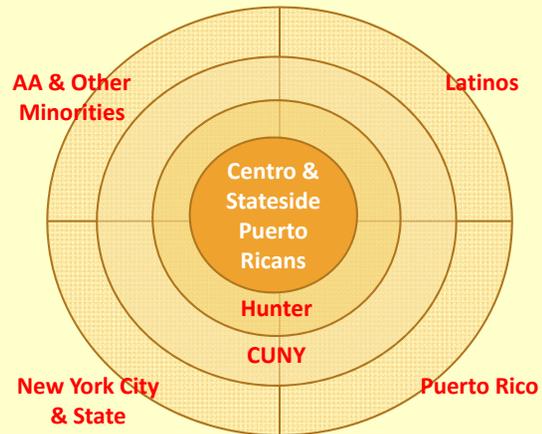
The questions are "How is this relevant to:"

- Current challenges to the field?
- The university?
- The community?

A Point of Departure: Realignment of Centro's Vision Statement

- A "vision" constitutes a collective declaration of intent about a strategy to achieve organizational goals as stated in the mission.
- Developing a shared vision is a collective process.
- The critical role of the Centro Staff is to:
 - Guard that any discussion and planning process protect the values and mission of the organization, and
 - Insure that any plan reflects El Centro and Hunter College's mission and goals.

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach



Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach: Towards a Relevant Research Agenda

- Establish effective dialogue with multiple stakeholders to prioritize research agenda.
- Identify scholars who can contribute and have interest in such a research agenda.
- Align Centro's resources to priorities established by Hunter College, CUNY Puerto Rican Studies, and the community.
- Serve as a catalyst for public policy and community development.

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach: Towards a Relevant Research Agenda

Establish Advisory Board for the Centro Library and Archives to develop and implement plan to:

- **Rescue:** Broadly and comprehensively collect archives from relevant individuals and organizations;
- **Digitalize:** Process in digital form current and future archive collections; and,
- **Engage:** Engage the Puerto Rican community in the appreciation and dissemination of their cultural heritage.

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach: CUNY Puerto Rican Studies Partnerships

- Establish effective partnerships to support the development of a common intellectual agenda.
- Identify curriculum gaps and support scholarship that can close those gaps.
- Explore and document the unfulfilled potential of contextual, service-learning pedagogies that allow Puerto Rican Studies to be more connected and responsive to the needs of our communities.

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach : Hunter College Partnerships

- Seek partnerships with other Hunter programs to establish research, service, and project-based programs that provide a direct link to community development, social action, and policy debates.
- Examples of potential partners:
 - School of Education: Curriculum & Teaching
 - School of Social Work: Education Center for Community Organizing
 - Center for Community Planning and Development
 - Center for Community and Urban Health

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach: Expanding the Research Pipeline

Strengthening the intellectual and scholarly pipeline of Puerto Rican scholars and researchers by:

- Expanding research programs for the benefit of undergraduate students at Hunter (e.g., the Latino Leadership Opportunity Program).
- Sponsoring an ongoing graduate research seminar on Puerto Rican Studies.
- Promoting the formal and informal matching with mentors that will nurture the next generation of Puerto Rican scholars.

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach: Partnerships with Puerto Rican Leaders

El Centro would establish a community Advisory Board that articulates external support for El Centro, including but not limited to:

- Serving as community Trustee of El Centro;
- Becoming ambassadors to external stakeholders;
- Promoting archival donations to the library;
- Structuring voluntary work in El Centro activities and programs;
- Encouraging financial contributions; and,
- Promoting other forms of community participation.

Adopting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach: Latino and African American Research Centers

- Strengthening and establishing partnerships with other Latino and African-American research centers to examine issues of broad relevance to the status and well-being of minorities.
- Specifically, El Centro needs to be part of a broader dialogue and research effort about:
 - Immigration;
 - Racial discrimination and growing economic disparity; and,
 - Asset building in our communities.

What's Next for Centro?

- Meetings with the Puerto Rican Studies faculty throughout CUNY.
- Meetings with Puerto Rican students at Hunter and graduate students at CUNY.
- Creation of an Advisory Board for Centro.
- Creation of an Advisory Board for the Library and Archives.
- Sponsoring of a "Search Conference" where scholars, policy makers, and community leaders find common ground for a research agenda.

Final Thoughts

This is an occasion in which I would like to be wrong in my assessments, but right in my idealism, hopes and aspirations.