

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dr. Tatcho Mindiola

for Mexican American Studies has selected students to participate in the LLI. Both LLI and AAP students are examples of the outstanding Latino students who are enrolled at the University of Houston. We focus on the AAP students in this issue because we are culminating our yearlong effort to raise funds to support them with scholarships and academic services.

The final event will be the Noche Cultural Banquet held on November 3, 2011 at the University of Houston's Hilton Hotel. Our dynamic keynote speaker will be Gilbert A. Garcia, the chairman of Houston's Metropolitan Transit Authority and the managing partner of Garcia, Hamilton and Associates, an asset management firm.

You, the reader of this newsletter, know well that our community in the U.S. is poorly educated,

In this issue of *Noticias* we present essays by the students who participated in the Latino Leadership Initiative (LLI) at Harvard University and students in our Academic Achievers Program (AAP). This is the second year that the Center

but the statistics bear repeating. Mexican-origin people are the least educated of the Hispanic groups. Cubans and Puerto Ricans, for example, have a relatively large number of college graduates with the respective percentages being 30% for Cubans, 17% for Puerto Ricans, and 10% for Mexicans. We also have the highest dropout rate and the lowest number of high school graduates.

We all know that focused, long term efforts are needed to ameliorate this situation. The Center for Mexican American Studies is doing its part. We sponsor the Academic Achievers Program that offers students an array of academic services, as well as scholarships. In return, we require the students to be full time students, maintain a minimum 2.7 grade point average, and attend tutoring sessions and skills workshops, plus participate in leadership retreats and engage in community service.

Approximately 90% of the AAP students are the first in their families to attend college. They come from inner city schools and less than modest circumstances. Consider, for example, that the median family income is \$25,000. Many students

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**Gersson Rosas:
UH-AAP Success at the Houston Rockets**

Gersson Rosas came to Houston at the tender age of three and completely adopted his new home. In fact, today he says with pride, "Houston is my city."

Rosas became aware of the CMAS programs to help college students attain their dream of a degree when he was beginning his senior year in high school. His family had been stressing the importance of a good education for years. However, as an immigrant family (from Bogota, Colombia), they had to search for resources to assist in affording a college education for Rosas.

Through a series of connections that began with Rosas' inquiries about scholarships and funding, he was put in touch with Dr. Tatcho Mindiola at CMAS. Rosas followed up by completing his AAP application and was then accepted as a freshman in UH-AAP in 1996.

Coupled with Rosas' desire to obtain a good education was his ardent love of sports. He says, "My dad's passion for sports, principally soccer,



Gersson Rosas

was bred in me early on. But I realized that to have a sports career, if you aren't athletic, you have to find your niche. Luckily, Houston has a strong base for sports with many sports agents, several strong college sports programs, and, of course, the professional teams."

After completing his Marketing degree *cum laude* in 2000 and after a senior-year internship at a Hispanic communications company, Rosas decided that his love of basketball and sports trumped his love of marketing. Through a generous mentoring relationship with Dennis Lindsey at the Rockets organiza-

tion, Rosas began working on the business side of that same organization. Two years later Lindsey advised Rosas to get more experience in either the coaching or scouting side of the game. Rosas then left the Rockets in order to get this experience and was an assistant coach for Westbury Christian High School's state championship team in 2002-03. He

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at the University of Houston was established in 1972 as an interdisciplinary academic program encompassing the liberal arts, education, and social sciences focusing on the Mexican American and broader Latino experience in the U.S. Its mission is to advance knowledge, promote critical thinking, and foster the value of service to the community. This involves designing a broad spectrum of public and scholarly programs. Located within the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, CMAS has evolved into an academic unit with several major components: teaching, research and publications, recruitment and retention, leadership training, academic advising, and community service.

Yael Lara: AAP Graduate in Graphic Communications

Ms. Yael Lara still remembers her mother's often repeated words, "You have to go to college. I don't know how I'm going to pay for it. But you have to go forward in life." These words were buoyed by the undaunted spirit of Yael's mother and father who both gave up good jobs in Guadalajara, Mexico and sold all their possessions to bring their children to the U.S. for the opportunities afforded to those with a college education—opportunities that no longer exist in Mexico. Yael says, "My mother had to give up going to college because she had to work to support her mom since her father was deceased."



Yael Lara

Fueled by her parents' faith in education, Yael maintained good grades in high school and considered attending other prominent Texas universities. In fact, she was eager to begin her exploration of the world by moving out of town for college. But a Career Day at UH changed her plans. "Mrs. Treviño was at a table promoting the Academic Achievers Program at UH. She said that I didn't have to leave Houston to get a scholarship."

Yael completed an application to AAP-UH but wasn't accepted into the program for her first semester. Despite the discouraging news, she decided to try her hardest to maintain good grades during that first semester so that she could reapply to AAP for her second semester. She gratefully accepted assistance from Mrs. Treviño for that first semester's registration process and financial aid applications even though she wasn't in the AAP.

To Yael's delight, her second semester at UH brought the news that she had been accepted into AAP-UH. She says, "As soon as I walked into the CMAS lounge, I made friends in the AAP, and that feeling of friendship comes from all of the CMAS staff."

Yael had been interested in graphic design since middle school. At that time in Mexico she had a professor whose famous career in graphic design made him an exciting teacher as he shared his experience and passion. Yael says that at that time she was "shy and quiet," but that she gained incredible inspiration from this professor just by hearing the way he talked about design principles and their application in ads. She says, "I thought that I would like to come up with my own ideas for designs." Once she began high school in the U.S., she continued to study art to acquire further skills, although at that time she worked mostly in painting.

At UH, Yael chose to minor in Graphic Communications Technology to increase her knowledge of production and printing. She was chosen to attend an annual conference of

the International Graphic Arts Education Association in Chicago. There she found inspiration in the many exhibits and presentations from companies such as Kodak and Canon.

While at UH Lara feels that she profited from the many components of the AAP program. First of all, the tutoring reinforced her study habits from high school. Then, the social networking and intellectual stimulus among other AAP students placed her with others who had similar goals of achieving success in life and careers. Importantly, the financial assistance enabled her parents to concentrate on helping her siblings in high school with their schooling.

Yael feels that it is important for a student to concentrate on schooling. Fortunately, the financial assistance from CMAS enabled her to go to school full-time for six years. She says, "Work would have kept me from being focused 100% on school. I knew I needed good grades to continue with AAP, so I studied hard."

Since Yael was the only "art major" in AAP-UH, she began doing designs for various CMAS events. She has been thrilled to design postcards, banners, and posters for a wide array of CMAS-related campaigns, some of which are featured on page 10. Lara says that she is "happy" that CMAS can benefit from her designs through the auction of posters and other items for scholarship funds.

Yael's current responsibilities keep her working day and night both as a freelance designer, with her own clientele, and as a graphic designer for EcomLeads. As a routine and daily part of her job, she has to create new designs continuously. To do this she draws upon her reservoir of design education. She also relies on her knowledge of contemporary culture and daily news events to create fresh ideas for the art work and web design.

Yael is also adamant that being in AAP-UH helped her to grow professionally. The problem-solving, networking, and site visits at various companies exposed all AAP students to the workings of the business world while also inspiring them to become a part of that world. Yael also tried to increase her exposure within the design world by becoming a student member of the Graphic Communications Student Association, the American Institute of Graphic Arts, and the International Graphic Arts Education Association. Yael encourages everyone to help by donating money to CMAS for scholarships to help students like her, who while motivated and hard-working may not have the funds to attend college. 



Luis Daniel Gonzalez: AAP-UH Freshman

Life is a gift to those who have had much adversity in their lives, and I would like to tell you about my life—both before and after entering UH as a freshman in the Academic Achievers Program of CMAS.

I was born in San Antonio, Texas, where I lived for a couple of months until my mother sent my sister and I to live with my grandparents. A year later, we were reunited with our mother who had moved to Houston, TX. My mother was barely present in my childhood because she worked two jobs to support us. All my sisters and I had was each other.

My mother never had the time to get involved in any of my school activities and I had to repeat the first grade. All my relatives made fun of me, rubbing my failure in my face. I now realize that the thing that hurt me the most was that they had infected me with so much sorrow and pain that I was forced to give up my childhood and become a man at an early age.

As time passed, I had acquired many of my sister's virtues, such as perseverance, commitment, and an independent attitude. I planned to use them throughout my high school years. Then, I was chosen for enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) and Pre-AP classes. I was also active in sports, such as football and swimming, while maintaining a part-time job at Jack in the Box. In my junior year I kept the job at Jack in the Box and was ranked a top student. I remember that sometimes I didn't have enough time to complete my school work due to my work hours. Every time I had the day off or a sports practice was canceled, I spent time doing make-up work, extra credit work, or even preparing for future lessons. My test results reflected that hard work does pay off.

My family's income was not enough to buy decent meals from time to time. To help out, my sister was working more than studying and her grades suffered. She was suspended from the University of Houston. It killed me inside knowing that my older sister sacrificed herself.

To make matters worse, my mother was breaking down mentally from the stress. She ended up quitting her job and leaving us so that she could live with my grandmother in Mexico. To take up the slack, I asked for more hours at work. Life is strange to me. Things don't always turn out the way one feels they should. Instead, they can become far from what is expected.

In my senior year, I was nominated to participate in the Career Preparation Program in order to be interviewed for a job at Shell



Luis Daniel Gonzalez

Oil Company. I landed the job by the middle of summer of my junior year while still working at Jack in the Box. I worked full time at Shell, from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., and then I headed to Jack where I would work from 5:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, I would work all night from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. in the morning of Saturday. On Sunday, I had to work from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. I did this every week.

My mom went to Mexico, and I didn't know if she was ever coming back. We were alone again, just as we had been previously, but things were different now. I had grown up and could now provide financially for my sisters. My mother came back one day and a crisis occurred between her and I. Then, I ran away from home...

I was taken in by my best friend's family where I helped with everything I could. I became calm, seeing that there was still a chance for me to change the course of my life. Before, I had doubted myself all the time, wondering why I always ended up having more questions than answers in my life. I knew the answer for me was in doing my best in academics.

My sister suggested a program that had helped her when she was at UH, the Academic Achievers Program. She said not only do they pay part of your tuition, but they offer many resources. They mentor you in which classes to take or what is appropriate for you to take based on your major. They have personal tutors who are willing to help you, and they offer the opportunity to meet and interact with other students with the same goals as yours. Fortunately, when I applied to AAP, I was accepted.

My first week at the University, I noticed that everything my sister had said about college was true. You have the opportunity to live again, live a new life, have new dreams, and develop a new character for yourself.

A good friend of mine would always tell me that the saddest thing to see in life is wasted talent, but as Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." I believe in my dreams. I believe that adversity has a tendency to bring out the best of our human nature, but we must learn to see beyond that. We must see more than the blue sky, more than our skin color, more than the eye can see. I am grateful for the opportunity to become the person I always knew rested inside of me, the person I now see when I look in my mirror. ❌



Bryan Salazar: AAP-UH Sophomore

I entered Austin High School in the fall of 2006, not knowing anything about scholarships or college, but with the thought that I had to get an education, as my parents had always stated saying I mustn't give up my dreams for accomplishment. At that time, I was more concerned with making new friends and adapting to the high school atmosphere. But I stumbled across a student who gave me a quick lecture on the Academic Achievers Program that helps students go to college. I became very interested, and interviewed with the program coordinator at the time, Ms. Maria Cobio. I explained my goal of becoming a university professor and how much I loved writing short stories as my hobby. Fortunately, I gained one of the coveted spots in the program.

I quickly learned that the program would walk us through scholarship and college applications in the future, and that as long as I remained in the program throughout my high school years, and then went to the University of Houston, I would receive a \$12,500 scholarship. Before that time, the program would provide tutors to help me with my homework and a summer session of tutoring and workshops. In the summer sessions, I found out that there were math and English tutors, and fascinating workshops on how to be a leader. We were introduced to networking with many businessmen and women in several interesting careers, including Bank of America. The program not only furthered my academic success in high school but also offered the opportunity to socialize with many of my peers and make lifelong friends who were all pointed in the direction of success.

With my high school years passing by, I quickly had to choose if I was going to stay home and go to the University of Houston or attend college elsewhere. Although I applied and was accepted at The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M, it was obvious that no other university gave me a larger scholarship than the Academic Achievers Program at UH. Once I had chosen UH, I realized that the end of high school was approaching, and now I had to slowly transition from the high school mind to the university mind. This transition is always difficult for incoming freshmen right out of high school, but for me, having been in the Academic Achievers program, the conversion was not as tough. The program had already helped



Bryan Salazar

me to figure out good study habits, including how to manage my time and when to seek help.

At the completion of high school, I was ready to pursue my career goal of becoming a history teacher by beginning the Academic Achievers Program at the university level. Just before I was going to enter UH in the fall, I was given the chance to be a part of the JUMP Program in the summer of 2010. The JUMP Program is an intensive six-week program for freshmen who must take six hours that are normally part of the required freshman curriculum. I took a U.S. History course and an English course.

The English course required us to write several essays, and, I turned to the Academic Achievers program's outstanding English tutor for help; therefore, I did fairly well in the course. After the JUMP Start courses, I entered college that fall ready to rumble with more classes. I am thankful to the Academic Achievers Program for exposing me to college-level work before the fall freshman semester. With six credit hours I had an advantage over others who did not have any college credits or any experience dealing with college-level expectations in the classroom.

That freshman year I studied especially hard in the area of mathematics. With the help of the AAP tutors and Mrs. Rebeca Treviño's, the program manager, immeasurable support, I passed the class with an A. I can't tell you how proud I felt because this was the first "A" I had ever earned in math, and it was in a college-level course. During my entire freshman year I worked hard, and I excelled in all my classes and made the Dean's List. Again, the pride I felt was fantastic. This past semester, my second freshman semester, I enrolled in pre-calculus. This course was much more difficult than college algebra, but I managed to pass it with a B. Unfortunately, at the end of the semester I missed the Dean's List by one point.

As I start my sophomore year at the university, I look back at my freshman year and sincerely appreciate all the wonderful support from both the Academic Achievers Program and the Center for Mexican American Studies. I want to continue to feel proud of my academic accomplishments, but I also want the program administrators to feel proud of me as well, and that is why I study hard and seek to excel. 



Maria Fernanda Alfaro: AAP-UH Junior

In December 1997 my parents decided that Orlando, Florida would become our new place of permanent residence. Upon arriving in the United States, I recall that this new place brought a sense of hope and opportunity to live and fulfill the “El Sueno Americano!” Our belongings consisted of what the airlines allowed us—two bags—and within those two bags we carried both our past and our future. Even though Heredia, Costa Rica is my birthplace, the United States became the adopted mother who raised me.

My father, the main reason why we decided to stay in the U.S., suffered from a brain tumor that would soon leave him paralyzed. But to our surprise, it was not enough for him to stay with us, rather it was a motivation to abandon us and go back home to Costa Rica. It wasn’t that we were a bad family or that we didn’t care about him, it was that my father left us because he wanted to continue his relationship with another woman, and he felt that we were a waste of time and money. The fact that his medical treatments were expensive here compared to the prices back home was, doubtlessly, another factor. The fact was that he no longer had to support us if we were here. The moment we left for America, we relinquished our home in Costa Rica, to go back now to nothing was out of the question. My mother made the choice to stay in the United States and try to give us a life that we would not have been able to have back home.

No one in my family in the U.S. had gone to college, and it was because our legal status prevented us from getting any Federal financial aid, and, importantly, we didn’t have decent jobs to earn a good salary to finance a higher education. How could I dream of achieving a college education when an American family found it difficult or almost impossible to provide the monetary support for their child to attend college? My mother, as a single parent, could not provide the money to assist me with college tuition or expenses because she was the sole source of support for my sister, my brother and I. I did not have a future and I thought that I would end up like the rest, living paycheck to paycheck and paying the bills on time, if I was lucky. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of my high



Maria Fernanda Alfaro

school years, I was on the verge of dropping out. I no longer saw hope or light for my future and felt that if I were to work I would be able, at least, to help my family.

My introduction to the Academic Achievers Program at UH was a very unusual one. After being successful in Cross Examination (CX) debate in high school, I was sought out by the director of the Forensic Society, Dr. Michael Fain, along with professor of law, Dr. Lonny Hoffman. Together they worked to get me financial aid, to change my legal status, and to introduce me to Mrs. Rebeca Treviño, the Manager of the Academic Achievers Program at

the Center for Mexican American Studies at UH.

I filled out the application, interviewed, and was admitted. Suddenly, my life changed. Several years later, I am a junior here at UH, pursuing dual degrees in Spanish and Political Science with the goal of becoming an immigration lawyer. I have been on the Dean’s List every semester and because of my grade point average I have been admitted to the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Pi Kappa Delta, the honorary debate society, Phi Alpha Delta-Pre law, and Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society. I also have been named the senior captain of the University of Houston’s Forensic Society.

I have to admit that my success up to now is because God has granted me the blessing of being part of such an amazing academic family. The resources provided to me by AAP-UH, and the guidance that they have given me has helped me to survive in college. Not only does the CMAS program provide me with financial support, but AAP has been consistently involved in my educational choices and the development of my academic schedule. They have made sure that I stay on track towards my degree. I have also been on jobsite visits and learned about other opportunities. All of this has allowed me to grow and become the person I have always dreamed of being.

I am the first person in my family to pursue a college education and will be first to graduate with a college degree from such a prestigious university. This would not have been possible without the “intervention” of Academic Achievers Program in my life. ❌



Fatima De Leon: AAP-UH Senior

My family came to the United States when I was eleven years old. Frankly, I didn't even think about the impact that my parents' decision to immigrate would have on my life. I just knew that I preferred to stay with my friends and family in my old school and hometown in Mexico. Like many other immigrants, I did not know English, so I began middle school in ESL classes and struggled with learning the language. My school was not within walking distance of my house, so I rode the bus, abhorring going to school because I was teased by classmates and threatened if I mentioned anything to the teachers about the pranks, thefts, or fights between other students. I was not used to the kind of environment where teachers had so little trust in the students and had to monitor our every single move.

As I transitioned into high school, it was as if I had a clean slate for showing my capabilities and my drive. I attended Eastwood Academy where I met incredible teachers that later became my mentors and with whom I still keep in touch. I pushed myself and joined as many organizations and clubs as I could, and I vowed that wherever I went to college I would figure out how to pay the expense.

During my senior year in high school, my family experienced extreme changes. My mother had to return to Mexico for a serious surgery. We were unable to see her and had to keep in touch through phone calls and even Facebook, which was a real challenge for my mother. Since then, I have lived with my dad and sister five years without seeing my mother. However, as hard as it still is, our family has become stronger. Though I realized too late the things that my mother used to do for us and which I always took for granted, it allowed me to be more thoughtful about my actions, and most importantly, it drove me to have better communication with my dad and sister.

Now that I am a student at the University of Houston, I see the pain and struggles it took to get here, but I am happy to be where I am. As a transfer student from a community college the change from my previous school was significant. But the most stressful was the cost of tuition. In trying to solve that problem I came across the Center for Mexican American Studies and its program, the Academic Achievers, which offers me a scholarship to help me pay for school. I must fulfill the requirements of completing study hours, maintaining a certain GPA, and attending a monthly meeting.



Fatima De Leon

I thank AAP for my accomplishments and advancement. As a result, I am a senior now and about to graduate from the Bauer College of Business with a double major in Supply Chain Management and Marketing. When I transferred to UH, I did not know a soul. I took classes alone, ate lunch by myself, figured out my homework on my own, and felt horrible for a whole semester. Fortunately for me, I had CMAS, where I could turn in every free moment I would have. Slowly, I made friends and became more comfortable at school. I used every tool available for me from CMAS: the mentors, the workshops, the networking opportunities available at the retreat and banquet. I utilized these chances to meet people in the business world and become involved in other activities around campus.

Through the program I have met remarkable people that have empowered and guided me throughout the years. Because of that, I have had the opportunity to intern with *Familias Latinas Magazine* and *Latin Breaking News*. At those two places, I was able to perform a myriad of activities. Some included contacting businesses in the Houston area for interview material, piecing together articles for publication, translating articles to use in the magazine and newsletter, etc. I also enjoyed the community service projects, e.g. college career days, volunteering with Junior Achievement, and partaking in the first Leadership Initiative started by students in our program.

As I get closer to graduating, my goal as a professional is to further my education by acquiring an MBA, then working in the Supply Chain field of Sourcing. I hope to gain in-depth knowledge of the processes needed to buy, make, and ship a product or service, to gain purchasing power within a company, and eventually become a buyer.

Nevertheless, my current goal as a leader is to publicize the AAP program and the remarkable impact it has on kids that are like me, first-generation college students who despite barriers like language or background, need help from people in our community to further our education.

But I also wish to give back to others and this year I am glad to be a part of the Academic Achievers Austin High School Program as a mentor. I hope that through me more students are able to let go of the anxiety of making that four-year commitment to college. 



Arts & Activism by Reyes Ramirez



Reyes Ramirez

The first time I read Junot Díaz, his first sentence ended: "...a big Dominican [posterior] that seems to exist in a fourth dimension beyond jeans." The startling, yet honest, language of Díaz's writing sent shockwaves through my aspiring-writer's literary consciousness, like the first time I cracked open a Charles Bukowski book, or like the sudden solace I felt after finishing the last sentence in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Such an unapologetic voice inspired a peacefulness in my existence by the fact that its author lived in my world, and it made me only appreciate my writing more.

So, the moment I saw that Junot Díaz was going to speak at the Latino Leadership Initiative (LLI), I thought what more can this guy say that hasn't already been accompanied with a resounding up-and-down movement of my skull. The title of his lecture, "Arts and Activism," proved promising because I generally thought that the often didactic nature of the latter stunted the creative growth of the former. Junot Díaz would prove otherwise. From his lecture, a few points stand out.

First, the idea that art gives pigment to what would be the fleshy vessel we call our human bodies. As Díaz put it, without the arts, we would be monsters looking into a mirror and only seeing the blinding veneer of nothingness. Of course, I couldn't disagree with that. To write a book, to paint a painting, to sing a song is to create something from nothing; without the creator, it would continue to not exist, and no one could breathe in its particles and know what it is to create. This is the essence of activism, according to Díaz.

To pass along the gift of knowledge, to inspire the willingness to act, to feed the hunger one has for change, that is an art within itself because otherwise, nothing would happen.

When I write, when I help others, I feel most at peace, most like the world is perfect at the angle it currently rests. Everyone deserves this feeling, and I want to aid each person in achieving it. Just as the LLI taught me to enable others to lead, I will enable as many as I can to be artists, to change their communities.

After Junot Díaz's lecture, I am more convinced than ever that my love to change communities for the better and my love to improve my craft are one in the same and spreading this passion is more important than ever. With everything that I learned at LLI, this couldn't seem more possible to me now. ❏

The Art of Negotiation by Myrna Katalina Serna



Myrna Katalina Serna

Our one-week Latino Leadership Initiative trip began the same way that other academic trips usually do. But very soon, we departed from the ordinary. We learned to articulate and value our personal story, to acquire skills for public speaking, and to learn the art of negotiation.

Dr. Andy Zelleke, a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, taught us the art of negotiation. I had reasoned that this was going to be a straightforward lecture, but I was soon thrown a curve ball. The day of our lecture, we were put into groups of three. Each member of the group represented a fictional, nonprofit, healthcare service provider. While each company provided the same types of resources for the community, the companies varied in size of their facilities and staff.

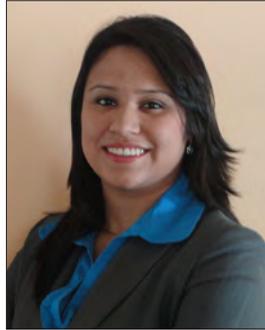
The object of our mock negotiation was to come to an agreement regarding how government funds would be allocated between the three companies. Although only two companies were required to work together in order to receive funds, if none of the companies came to an agreement, no money would be received. Representing the smallest of the healthcare providers in my group, I expected my other two group members to form a consortium and leave me out. I was surprised when they both agreed to include me and give me a larger percentage of the funds than I had anticipated. Although I was relieved that my two teammates were being inclusive, I was perplexed by the fact that they wouldn't take a larger share of the funds for themselves.

Throughout our negotiation, I was challenged by my teammates to fight for more funds from their larger companies. After a rollercoaster, thirty-minute negotiation, my team and I agreed to share the funds between the three of us. Soon, we found out that most of the other teams had done the same.

Through this mock negotiation I learned that there are many definitions of "fair." While my team divided the funds based on the size of each company, other teams decided to split the money evenly. Although the two larger companies could have teamed up and left the smallest out or the largest company could have bullied the others into giving it the largest share of funds, it was much more beneficial to team up and work together. In this way the companies could not only receive the maximum amount of federal funds, but also have the greatest impact on the community. I learned that an individual, regardless of status, can foster change in our community. ❏



Personal Stories from Latina Leaders by Melissa Hernandez



Melissa Hernandez

Being a woman in a man's world is a challenge, but being a Latina poses an even greater challenge. Latinas such as Nina Vaca, Noelia Rodriguez, Mayda Prego, Amanda Fernandez and Alexandra Martinez are prime examples of successful Latina women and each of them had a different story, background, and moral to share with the LLI students this past summer.

Their roles have varied from working in the White House, to leading diversity and inclusiveness efforts, to serving as President of the Hispanic National Bar Foundation, to serving as Chairman of the Board for the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, to establishing leading technology companies. Their positions, titles, and accomplishments are impressive and inspiring, but their personal stories are what made the most lasting impression on me.

While they all had different career paths and upbringings, they shared many things in common. Throughout their lives, they had encountered obstacles because of their gender and Latino heritage. Prego shared an anecdote of her high school years. During her college application process, she expressed interest in applying to Ivy League schools, but was discouraged from doing so by her high school counselor. Prego clearly remembered the counselor encouraging some more privileged Anglo students with lower qualifications than her, while telling her that she could not apply. Prego received her letter of acceptance and went on to attend Yale University. Her story resonated with many of us, who at one point had been told that we couldn't do something.

Her story, and those shared by the others, presented life to us as it really is: anything but picture-perfect. Hearing their life experiences taught us to believe in ourselves, in our goals, and in our generation to make a difference.

By sharing their personal stories, these women were able to step down from the pedestals where people have placed them, to join the audience and connect with us, as students. As proud Latinas these women have embraced their heritage and humble backgrounds. Even though each has a very busy schedule, they find the time to give back to their communities and mentor students. As a Latina myself, these women are an inspiration and living proof that anything is possible. More importantly, they have demonstrated that our heritage is not a setback but our strength, the strength to make our hopes and dreams into a reality. 

Am I a Leader? by Liz Rubio



Liz Rubio

For years, I questioned why people had always considered me a leader. Even after having two children while working a full-time job and pursuing my degree, I realized that I still do not know.

Recently, I was given the opportunity to participate in the Latino Leadership Initiative Program at Harvard which brought an entirely new understanding of the word leadership. I felt reluctant about attending the program because I didn't think I had anything in common with the students and their academic achievement.

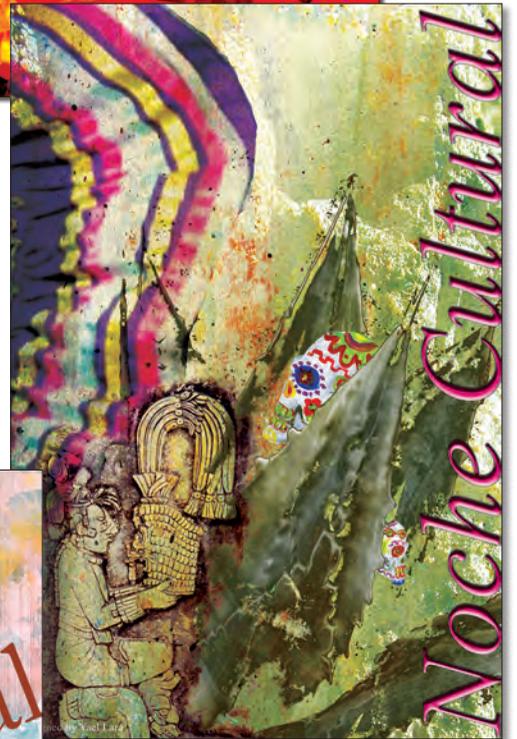
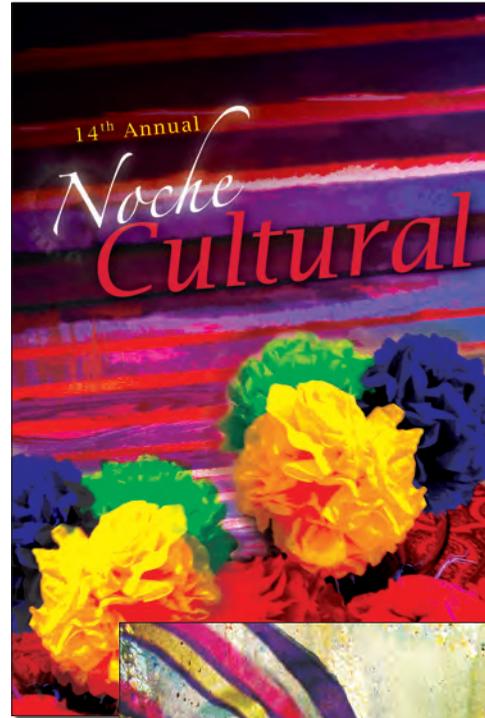
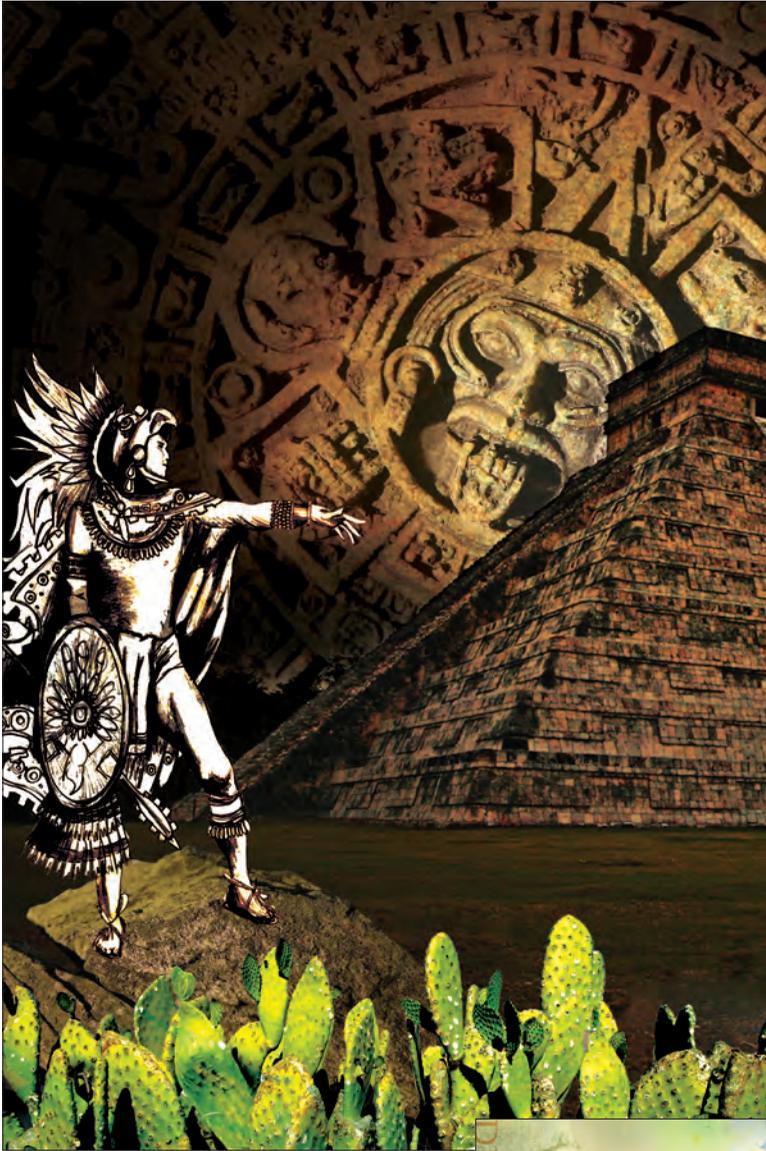
The LLI had several workshops to develop our leadership skills and, thereby, assist us to progress in life and help enable others to lead. However, one workshop in particular had a profound impact on my life. It was Marshall Ganz's class on how to create a "story of self." According to Ganz, leadership is "taking responsibility for enabling others to achieve purpose under conditions of uncertainty." He taught that each of us has a story that can enable others to lead.

During this workshop we were separated into our university groups. We then thought back to a specific moment in our lives which had made us want to create change in the world. Developing and expressing my story of self was much more difficult of a task than I had thought, but as I sat and listened to each story, it became more evident to me that we were more alike than different. It truly touched me to see how all our academic achievements didn't matter at that moment; the only thing that mattered was that we were all placed in that room for one extraordinary reason—because we were all leaders.

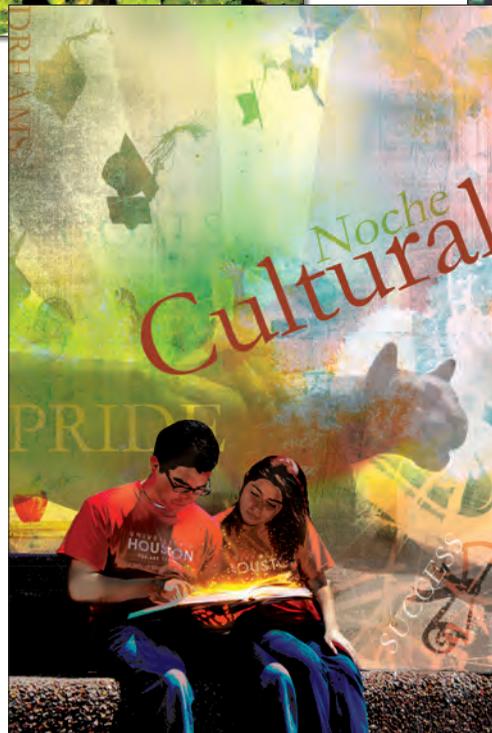
I learned that leaders weren't necessarily those in high positions. I learned that many of this country's greatest leaders had one thing in common, and that was passion for what they truly believed in. Interestingly, I also found that although we participants came from different backgrounds, religions, and cultures, we all experience emotions such as fear, sadness, joy and happiness. It is with these same emotions that we are all connected despite our differences.

I can say that the LLI changed my outlook on life. It turns out I had been using the same techniques of leadership without even knowing it. It was an honor and a privilege to participate in the Latino Leadership Initiative Program at Harvard because I met amazing people that will one day help create change in the world we live in today. 





Yael
Lara's
Artwork



From The Director continued from page 1

are immigrants, live in single parent homes, and have brothers and sisters who must be taken care of. Approximately 76% are working part time to help pay for their education and make a contribution at home. These students are not expected to succeed academically, but succeed they do.

We invite you to read their stories of doubt, struggle, and overcoming odds through ambition and determination. One student and her family were abandoned by their father shortly after they arrived in the U.S. Another student has dealt with living in poverty and being ridiculed by prosperous relatives. And, still another student didn't know anything about college until arriving in high school and discovering alternatives in life. Also, read the lead article about Mr. Gersson Rosas, a graduate of AAP, who is now the Vice President of Player Personnel of the Houston Rockets. Each of these success stories would not be possible without the financial support of people like you. Clearly your support makes a difference.

The evaluations of the program have shown that although our students enter the university with lower SAT scores than other students, they move towards graduation at a faster rate, have higher grade point averages and graduate at a higher rate; 235 students have come through AAP-UH, and 179, or 76%, have graduated with their degrees. This graduation rate is higher than the national average of 70%. The average grade point of AAP students at graduation is 3.0, and they are found in a variety of majors, including engineering, communications, technology, education, marketing, accounting, and computer science. They

are smart and hardworking, and are proving that with adequate academic support and financial assistance, they will succeed in earning their college degrees.

We need your help. All of the funds that we use to support the students comes from people like you. We need to raise approximately \$300,000 a year to provide the students with a \$12,500 annual scholarship and defray the expense of the tutors, skills workshops, and leadership retreats. All of the donated funds go directly to the students in the form of services. Not a penny goes for administrative costs which are borne by the Center for Mexican American Studies.

Our strength lies in our numbers and if everyone contributes in accordance with his/her financial ability we can raise the funds we need not only to sustain our efforts but also to increase them. But everyone must contribute if gains are to be made. We need to embrace the idea embedded in the Mutual Aid societies of old when our people pooled their resources for the benefit of the entire community. We must take the leadership role in order to improve. Research has shown that more college-educated people translates into a healthier community and that as the level of education increases, social pathologies such as crime, drug use, and violence decrease. More college-educated people also mean better jobs, more civic engagement, and civic leadership. Supporting our students is a win-win situation, for not only do the students benefit but so does the Mexican American and the larger community. I look forward to seeing you at the Noche Cultural Banquet in November.

Tatcho Mindiola, Ph.D.

Director

Gersson Rosas continued from page 1

also worked as a graduate assistant for the men's basketball team at UH the following year.

Next, Rosas was contacted by the Rockets for a scouting position. He began as a video coordinator and personnel scout for a few seasons but soon rose through the ranks to become the Director of Scouting and Director of Player Personnel. At present, he is in charge of all scouting with an official title of Vice President of Player Personnel.

In talking about his phenomenal success in his field, Rosas credits CMAS for helping him with obtaining an excellent education and with putting him in touch with the right people within the Rockets' organization who decided to mentor him. He says, "The scholarships really helped me; the internships really helped me. My entire time at UH, I worked full-time and also carried a full load of semester hours. I wanted as much experience as I could gain before I graduated. Being able to get relevant career experience is so important for students. I was blessed to be able to intern with both sports organizations and with a marketing firm. I focused on getting as much experience as I could get."

Remembering the day that brought the good news of his acceptance into the UH-AAP, he said, "My family's and my reaction was one of total joy because the program offers so much. Every avenue of my education was covered: finances, mentoring, an education in leadership and community service."

As his time within the AAP framework continued, he saw the

amazing value in its "family approach" of encouragement and assistance in all the various aspects of a student's life. He says, "It's a community working together to help each student get the most out of his/her education. Living out this dream is living out a gift that, at first, you feel you don't deserve. I know that a lot of what I've been able to do in my career is a direct result of AAP."

Now, Rosas assists General Manager and Managing Director of Basketball Operations, Daryl Morey, in all basketball operations of the franchise and is responsible for the team's player personnel matters, including the evaluation of draft prospects, free agents and potential trade targets. He also oversees the domestic and international scouting departments, while assisting in the coordination of the team's Player Development program.

Rosas's final message to CMAS supporters is about education. He says, "I believe that our community is a sleeping giant that will only be awakened when it is educated. The CMAS programs give students a way to have their dreams fulfilled through the support systems, the education structure, and the example of how much they are valued as unique individuals. Now that I am a professional in my industry, I am committed to being an active contributor to CMAS so that others can experience what I experienced. It's so easily said by everyone that education is important. But in the professional world, it means so much. I try to tell others not to just get a degree, but to strive to get a degree doing something that will also allow you to work in a field that you are passionate about working in. I believe so much in the CMAS program because it is a great conduit for allowing others to follow their dreams." 

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