

May 27, 2008

Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.  
President  
Princeton University  
One Nassau Hall  
Princeton NJ 08544-2006

RE: Latino Studies at Princeton

---

Dear Doctor Tilghman:

One quarter of the United States population will be Latina/o within a generation according to current projections. Harvard, Brown, Cornell and UCLA, among other universities, are building up their Latina/o Studies programs, recognizing that education and research in this field are essential. Can any major university afford to find itself without a program that focuses on the origins, cultures and experiences of one quarter of the country's population?

We, members of a rapidly growing group of concerned Latina/o alumni, believe that Princeton University can no longer fulfill its mission of academic excellence and public service without fully committing to a state of the art Latina/o Studies Program. We are saddened that in 2008, the University could possibly question the need for such a program. Princeton shaped us, set us out on our career paths and became an integral part of our identities. The imprint of its demand for rigor and the production of quality scholarship will be with us always. How can our University, perhaps the world's foremost university, fail its own standard of academic excellence and deny essential scholarship to its students and the nation by turning a blind eye to this critical policy, research and pedagogic agenda?

The University needs an exemplary Latina/o Studies Program:

- To attract the brightest Latina/o scholars
- To remain at the forefront of academic excellence in the examination of ethnicity, race, migration, and identity
- To promote intellectual contributions of Latina/os within the disciplines
- To explore the rich interdisciplinarity of the field and engage with its booming scholarly literatures
- To contribute to the resolution of the country's most important social issues in the 21st century

Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.  
May 27, 2008  
Page 2

Developing a Latina/o Studies program is complicated by Princeton's history of scant attention to scholarship about the various communities that constitute the United States's Latina/o population: Mexican-Americans/Chicano/as, Puerto Ricans, Cuban-Americans, Dominican-Americans, Central Americans and other people of Latin American descent. The diversity of these communities and the complexity of the relations among them are fertile ground for scholarly research. The study of Latin America itself is incomplete without the study of transnational processes, including migration and the racialized experiences of Latin Americans in the United States. The University cannot responsibly educate future public servants and professionals without taking into account the particular experiences of Latina/o communities. Moreover, Princeton's silence does injustice to the undergraduates it is charged to educate and sends the wrong message that Latina/o Studies is not a legitimate area of scholarship, unwisely dismissing well-documented links between the presence of a Latina/o Studies program and the success of Latina/o students.

Princeton's future standing in this field depends on its prompt and unambiguous commitment to providing significant research opportunities to talented academics who are breaking ground in Latina/o studies in their various disciplines and "inter-disciplines," developing a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches. Beyond an exciting undergraduate curriculum, an excellent Latina/o Studies Program must engage the most promising post-graduate scholars as well. Princeton must, by offering housing, post-doctoral fellowships, visiting professorships, international conferences and graduate student support, actively participate in shaping the field.

A successful Latina/o Studies Program at Princeton must build upon the University's success with distinguished interdisciplinary programs like the Woodrow Wilson School, but the University's academic community must prepare to draw on histories and approaches with which it is less familiar, strongly rooted in Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies, where the contributions of Latina/o scholars and the influence of culture and critiques of mainstream society have catalyzed into new styles of scholarship. The demands of such a transition will require your sensitive leadership.

Many Latina and Latina/o alumni have worked directly on and are familiar with these issues and approaches. We are able, perhaps for the first time, to offer you the benefit of the Princeton Latina/o experience from perspectives representing a broad spectrum of generations, disciplines and academic settings. For a many of us, the importance of this effort to our communities has inspired us to reconnect with the University after a long period of absence in which we felt our experiences and views were underappreciated. We would be pleased to do what is necessary to facilitate tangible progress in this endeavor so important to

Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.  
May 27, 2008  
Page 3

the University's future.

We have recently learned that a group of Latina/o students proposes an initiative to encourage this very same agenda. This is the latest effort in almost four decades of student initiative to establish a Latina/o Studies Program. We support their effort and ask that you give the student proposal your full consideration. Beyond this, we ask that you help make Latina/o Studies one of your top priorities for the intellectual betterment of the University. We stand ready to help you move forward.

Sincerely,

/s/  
Aldo Lauria Santiago '81  
Associate Professor and Chair  
Department of Latino and Hispanic  
Caribbean Studies  
Rutgers University

/s/  
Nellie Gorbea '88  
Housing Works RI

/s/  
Jorge Sánchez del Valle '68, M.B.A.  
Retired

Robert LeRoux Hernandez '69 S77  
Boston University School of Law  
Visiting Lecturer  
Legal Writing Program  
College of the Holy Cross  
Visiting Professor  
Latin American and Latino Studies  
Center for Interdisciplinary and Special  
Studies

Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.  
May 27, 2008  
Page 4

/s/  
Teofilo F. Ruiz \*74  
Professor of History  
University of California- Los Angeles

/s/  
Sylvia Hurtado '80 Ph.D.  
Professor and Director of the Higher  
Education Research Institute  
Graduate School of Education and  
Information Sciences  
University of California- Los Angeles

/s/  
Luz Calvo '82  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Ethnic Studies  
California State University, East Bay

/s/  
Myrna Santiago '82  
Associate Professor of History  
Director of the Women's Studies  
Program  
St. Mary's College

/s/  
John M. González '88  
Assistant Professor of English  
University of Texas, Austin

Shirley M. Tilghman, Ph.D.  
May 27, 2008  
Page 5

/s/  
Raúl A. Ramos '89  
Assistant Professor of History  
University of Houston

/s/  
Patricia A. Garcia '92 S93  
Association of Latino Princeton Alumni

**TRANSMITTED BY FAX AND OVERNIGHT MAIL FROM 02459**

cc: The Daily Princetonian  
Princeton Alumni Weekly  
Tigernet discussion groups:  
Pueblo Latino  
Princeton Educators  
Whig-Clio Alumni  
Class of 1969  
Boston Region