Director’s Report

The 2011-2012 academic year was an exciting beginning for the new Latina/Latino Studies (LLS) Program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. As the founding director my primary goals were to create an identity for the program and then discuss with various constituencies, both on- and off-campus, how the mission, vision, and goals of Latina/Latino Studies are integral to the overall mission of the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

LLS is based in the College of Arts and Sciences and in the first semester I met with the majority of A&S Chairs and Directors to talk about our LLS goals and objectives and how these goals and objectives can be, and are, complementary to their own departmental and programmatic needs. In addition to creating LLS-specific courses, it is clear there also exist good opportunities for collaboration through cross-listed courses and cluster courses with departments and programs (e.g., Urban Studies, Institute for Labor Studies, and Black Studies), especially if LLS participates in the BLA and MALS academic programs.

I also met with other entities on campus that will be part of an excellent support network for our new program. I met with Vice Chancellor Tyler and Assistant Vice Chancellor DeHaemers in Student Affairs; Multicultural Student Affairs; Institutional Research & Planning; the Institute for Human Development; University College Initiative; and the Office of Diversity, Access and Equity. In addition, I talked with students from the Association of Latin American Students (ALAS), and students attempting to revive MEChA, the Chicano student organization on campus. Avanzando, the Latino student mentoring program in DAE, shows good promise and collaboration with LLS could be mutually beneficial.

One essential characteristic of Latina/Latino Studies is the significant goal of creating and strengthening connections with the Latino community in the greater Kansas City region. Given the under-enrollment of Latinas/os at UMKC, the LLS program defines outreach into the Latino community as a necessary first step in establishing trust between UMKC and the Latino community before we can expect Latino families to entrust their daughters and sons to us to receive a quality education. To begin building this trust, my outreach efforts have focused on meeting with as many centers, organizations and individuals as possible during this first year. The organizations have included Latina/o organizations (Guadalupe Center, El Centro, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Coalition of Hispanic Organizations, Mexican Consulate, Latinos of Tomorrow, Mattie Rhodes, Inc., Dos Mundos, KC Hispanic News, and Univision), as well as non-Latino organizations (KC Public Library, KC Museum, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the Mid-America Regional Council).

I have been fortunate to present at several activities during the past academic year - Latino Youth Day, African American Read-In, Agapito Mendoza Scholarship Breakfast, First ALAS Leadership Conference, Cesar Chavez Celebration, and the COHO Cinco de Mayo event. I also served on the Chancellor’s Hispanic Advisory Board, the Chancellor’s Diversity Council, and participated at the Access2Success National Conference. My personal professional development during this year included a co-authored manuscript accepted for publication in Latino Studies, chairing a session at the Inter-University Program for Latino Research’s (IUPLR) bi-annual SIGLO XXI Conference in New York, organizing and presenting on
a panel on “Chicano/Latino Studies Programs in the Midwest” at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies 40th Annual Conference in Chicago, and being an invited panelist of former Presidents for a session on “Reflections on 40 Years of Ethnic Studies” at the annual conference of the National Association for Ethnic Studies in New Orleans.

Throughout the academic year, Latina/Latino Studies was able to collaborate with other organizations to offer: 1. Two showings of the Webinar “Increasing Access and Success for Underrepresented Populations: The Importance of Family Engagement” (w/ College of Arts and Sciences and Office of Diversity, Access and Equity), 2. Three showings of the film Abused and visit with the director Luis Argueta (w/Institute for Labor Studies, Guadalupe Center and Kansas City Northeast Public Library), and 3. A visit and readings by Salvadoran poet and activist Carlos Parada Ayala (w/ Foreign Languages and Literatures and Bernardin-Haskell Funds).

With all of the above providing a beginning context for this first year, Latina/Latino Studies has started to build a solid foundation for the future. We have developed a website – http://cas.umkc.edu/latino-studies/ - that will be informative and will also create an ongoing and bi-directional communication within UMKC as well as between UMKC and the greater Kansas City community. We have also developed the “gateway” course for our curriculum, LLS 201: Introduction to Latina/Latino Studies, to be taught for the first time this fall 2012 semester. This past spring semester I taught a special topics course, Sociology 300LYA: The World of Latino Youth and Adolescents, and I anticipate transforming the course into an LLS regular course offering. Other LLS courses are in the process of being prepared for submission to the A&S Curriculum Committee.

Finally, LLS conducted a search for a senior faculty member spring 2012, and Dr. Norma Cantú, Professor of English from the University of Texas at San Antonio, has been offered the position and will join us in January 2013! The addition of Professor Cantú will greatly expand our course offerings in the area of the Humanities as Latina/Latino Studies continues to move forward this next academic year. Her teaching interests include Chicana/o and Latina/o literature and film, cultural studies, contemporary literary theory, border studies, and folklore and women’s studies. Her expertise and experience in these areas will provide tremendous leadership in the humanities for UMKC’s Latina/Latino Studies Program.

Respectfully submitted,

Miguel A. Carranza, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology & Latina/Latino Studies
Director, Latina/Latino Studies Program