

Chicano Studies: From the Seventies to the Twenty First Century

Arnoldo Carlos Vento
University of Texas-Austin

I. *CHICANO STUDIES MODELS*

In addressing the question of structure in Chicano Studies, it is important to consider the size of the University, the ethnic population and the long-range objectives of higher administration with respect to minority programs. Moreover, if one is to consider the future of existing programs that were developed in the seventies, the political climate of the state legislature and the country become critical, particularly when economics is the driving force of the University. Universities, like most institutions in this country operate as big businesses, from the student head count (FTE) at the Departmental level to the College wide budgets. Additionally, the social and political climate changes cyclically. When the Reagan-Bush conservative era began, minority programs nationwide suffered great cutbacks dissolving many minority programs overnight. By 1973, administrators in Universities were boasting that it was no longer fashionable to support minorities, despite local student protests.ⁱ In order to placate student demands, administrators would seek candidates that would preferably have no Chicano Studies experience, one that would minimize the creation of curricular offerings in Chicano Studies. The budget for a start-up program was often paltry since it was designed to merely cover office expenditures obviating faculty recruitment.ⁱⁱ Any concern for program expansion via federal proposals was seen as threatening to the existing curricular status quo. The above model represents the humble beginnings of the first Chicano Studies program in the State of Michigan. It begins as a curricular program, which is supported by the challenge program, a minority Student Services support program for the education of disadvantaged students³. Due to a cohesive Chicano community and student group, pressure was applied to administration for additional Chicano faculty. After three years, Me-Chicano Studies was represented by five Chicano faculty courses in Language, Literature, Political Science and Sociology, a Student Services support program, ten Chicano Conferences and a Summer Study Abroad program in Mexico. In examining this program it becomes clear that certain factors must be present for success. They are (1) leadership and total commitment from its director (2) Student organization and cohesiveness (3) Chicano adult community participation and link to the University. (4) Leadership provided by faculty and support program director.⁴ (5) Creativity in funding conferences and summer study abroad programs⁵ (6) Homogeneity in nationality and/or cultural background. With respect to the Departmental structure, in California during 1969-70, the demands for Chicano Studies were crucial from Oakland to Los Angeles. Often arrests and violence were commonplace as students and professors risked education and professions. Cal-State University at Northridge is an example of the tenacity of determination by students and

the leadership of Rudy Acuña among others. CSU-Northridge along with Berkeley are some of the few programs that received Departmental status as a consequence of student-faculty protest. The Departmental structure without question is the ideal structure albeit it is seen as a threat by the traditionalist administration in view that (in their view) it takes money away from traditional Departments. To speak of Departmental structure was verboten in higher educational circles. The advantage of a Department is the availability to its own curricular and faculty budget. Additionally, once established it cannot be dismantled.

The model at the University of Texas-Austin represented by the Center of Mexican-American Studies began as a curricular model that added in its growth an independent publications unit and a research component. The Center model, while it has a student connection and directed program flexibility, is subordinate to the existing Departments. The largest problem for growth lies on faculty recruitment. The needs of the Center may not be the same as the Department. Nonetheless, if there are recruitment monies available, a Department may save half of a position through a dual appointment. However, if the philosophy of the Department runs contrary to the school of thought of the minority candidate, it can eliminate a top prospect for the Center. The dual appointment can only be positive if the base Department is flexible and progressive. If there is ideological or philosophical conflict, it could spell disaster for the Chicano candidate when he comes up for promotion. As the first permanent director for the Center for Mexican American Studies in 1978, several observations became clear: (1) There was no real support by a very conservative Dean. (2) There was subtle dissent or division among some of the Chicano faculty, the students wanted more involvement in Center activities. (3) There were very few full-time faculty on a tenure track. During this time the UT-Austin President was Peter Flawn, a mexicanist by profession who could carry a conversation in Spanish. His primary objective was to make UT-Austin a first rate University. After several conferences with him it was agreed that in order to make UT-Austin a first rate University, the University must be willing to pay first rate salaries to the best faculty nationally. Thus, I became his personal liaison and that is how several of our senior faculty became associated with the University of Texas-Austin. These candidates were essentially lured from out of state positions through the President's guarantee of meeting the competitive California salaries. In the first two years, the Center for Mexican American Studies doubled its curricular offering as well as its Chicano faculty in addition to creating its own independent publications unit.⁶ Moreover it established a close student link much to the chagrin of the Dean. The next phase by a new Director moved from the previous student oriented curricular unit with faculty recruitment via the Director as a personal liaison to the President to a non-student oriented, curricular and research program. After several Directors, the Center for Mexican-American Studies enjoyed having a student connection with heavy faculty recruitment adding to the expansion of its curriculum. The recruitment was aided by a \$300,000 a year program entitled the Target of Opportunity Program. Its aim was to recruit minority faculty. Unfortunately, it is being dismantled currently due to a 1996 federal court decision known as the Hopwood decision which forbade the use of quotas, racial and ethnic preferences in admissions.⁷ Since Hopwood, TA's, RA's and recruitment have declined and many Departments have taken conservative stands not only with respect to minority faculty recruitment but also to interdisciplinary research.⁸

As such it is possible that a Chicano/a faculty member on a tenure track may be denied tenure and/or promotion due to the invalidation of his/her interdisciplinary research. Herein enters the conservative political climate. Because of Hopwood, the Center has raised several protests regarding the future of ethnic studies on campus. Suggestions from the Dean include the incorporation of several Ethnic Studies Centers into one Department; on the other hand, American Studies has suggested the incorporation of Ethnic Studies into American Studies. According to the current Director, David Montejano, the Center could maintain the status quo as a teaching and research unit giving the program flexibility; however, the disadvantage of being subordinate to other Departments remains. If the Center merges with other Centers as an Ethnic Studies Department it gains a Departmental status and a comparative ethnic emphasis but loses its identity and perhaps some internal resource allocation. One such model is seen in Washington State University where Asian Studies, Chicano Studies and Native-American Studies must share resources. On the other hand, if it is absorbed by American Studies, it can enjoy Departmental status but may not be suited for Policy Studies and may lose its student connection. It becomes obvious that the choices do not offer expansion but rather absorption. This means that the economic pie must now be divided additionally and that recruitment will take on a slower pace than before. This conservative political climate on Texas is not shared by other states that have not responded negatively to the interpretation of the Hopwood decision. It is however, propitious to the conservative nature of Texas and its power players.

II *ACADEMIC POLITICS AND PROBLEMS*

Some of the advantages and disadvantages have been previously pointed regarding the distinct models for Chicano Studies. There remains, however, a plethora of academic problems many of which are caused either internally or externally. Perhaps one of the greatest considerations concerns the validity of interdisciplinary teaching and research. In the past decades there has been a trend to move away from minority programs. The English Only movement, along with overt prejudice against Mexican immigrants continually calls for fear tactics by the conservative political forces. In a

ⁱ Exemplary of this was at the University of Michigan-Flint where Chicano students, sons and daughters of migrant worker from Texas led María Elena Castellanos began to protest, calling for Chicano Studies in spite of the changing political climate. Other students included Phyllis Valdez-Wood, María Guzmán, Rick Castellanos, Clemente Tovar, David Quintanilla and Sue Burnash, Jesusa Zamarripa and Pat McDougal, Tina Morton, Oscar Rodríguez, Lorenzo Alfaro, Ismael and Anita Vargas, Jean Lorraine Lord, Majella Marion, Linda Caballero, Mimi Trujillo. Papo and Erasmo.

ⁱⁱ The budget for Me-Chicano Studies at the University of Michigan-Flint did not surpass \$2,000.

³ María de Leary was the Director of the Challenge Program. It was her efforts in organizing her students that enhanced the curriculum and FTE 's in Mechicano Studies.

⁴ In addition to the recruiting efforts of María de Leary, the faculty was represented by David Berlanga, Andy Montez, Maxine Baca-Zinn, Norma Salinas. Arnold Gonzalez, a Ph.D candidate at UM -Ann Arbor, contributed greatly, particularly in embarrassing Dean Yankovich in front of the Board of Regents.

⁵ Funding for the Study Abroad Program was acquired by the Director from local foundations, including the Mott Foundation. The Conferences were supported by a Utah Chicano based program designed to promote Chicano Studies and Culture on campuses.

⁶ Previously, a few book publications had been printed but at a high cost for production. This was due to the price tag for production by UT Press, leaving little resources to work with. During the second year, a typesetter was leased and the Center became independent in publications.

⁷ Information on Hopwood was sent through the Internet by the Director; it also appears in the January 8, 1999 issue of *The Chronicle for Higher Education*.

⁸ This is a problem that is seen currently with the infamous Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UT-Austin.. This Department has never accepted Chicano literature as valid. While it has only one token class in Chicano Literature cross-listed with Chicano Studies, it does not accept Chicano Studies research as part of the evaluation for promotion.

FOR A COMPLETE COPY OF THIS UNPUBLISHED ARTICLE (13 pages), SEE ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES OR CLICK TO BOOKSTORE.