Dr. Carolyn De La Peña  
Director, Davis Humanities Institute  
227 Voorhies Hall  
One Shields Avenue  
University of California, Davis  
Davis, CA 95615  

Dear Carolyn:

We are writing to request $1000 in funding to inaugurate a Davis Humanities Institute research cluster on the state of “Chicana/Latina Studies in California.” We wish to explore, interrogate and re-imagine from a multi-disciplinary perspective a sustainable vision for this academic endeavor in this time of budget crisis. In fact, faculty members long associated with the UC Davis Chicana/Latina Research Center (the C/LRC) have gathered together to submit this proposal in direct response to funding cuts.

As you might know, on June 30, 2009, the University of California’s Office of the President suspended 100% of its funding for the C/LRC and other similar centers across the UC-system. These research centers emerged in response to a 1987 California Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR #43) that urged the University of California to coordinate funding and research regarding California Latinos. Unique among similar centers on other UC campuses, however, only the C/LRC at Davis has had a gender focus. Today it is still the only research center in the country that focuses specifically on Chicanas, Latinas, and indigenous women in the United States, the latter a group that the C/LRC has always included. From its start in 1991, its dual mission has been to cultivate both Chicana/Latina research and, through pipeline mentoring work, Chicana/Latina researchers. Although the center has secured some campus support for the 2009-2010 academic year, we have no guarantee of future funding.

Nevertheless, the argument can be made that the C/LRC’s research agenda is more important than ever. At a time when Latinos comprise 36.6% of California’s population, research, much of it funded through the C/LRC, has shown that that the circumstances confronting men and women within this population are often different. Overall, Latinas are more inclined than their male counterparts to head single-parent families, suffer domestic abuse, and experience political exclusion. They also tend to be poorer and less educated than Latinos. While the picture is bleak, the C/LRC has also been at the forefront at funding research that investigates Chicana/Latina strategies of survival, of creative resistance, of cultural celebration, and of political protest. This emphasis on female agency is one of the benefits of placing Chicanas, Latinas, and indigenous women at the heart of our research.

With limited funding even in the best of times, the Chicana/Latina Research Center has operated through the dedication of a small collective of interested professors, graduate students, and undergraduates who share an understanding of the importance of the center’s dual mission. Dedicated members of this collective make up the core members of the proposed research cluster. We represent fields as diverse as education and ecology, history and public health, and indigenous studies and immigration politics. Together, we share a conception of Chicana/Latina Studies that sees academic research as a partner to social change.
Part of that social change is mentorship. Despite real progress, Chicana, Latina, and Native women scholars remain severely underrepresented in the UC system; the proposed research cluster’s intent is to continue the C/LRC’s commitment to mentoring which, given the lack of representation, is itself another critical issue for California. Faculty participants in this research cluster will include senior and junior faculty as well as graduate students. As a group, we look forward to using cluster events as opportunities to strengthen the pipeline.

The main purpose of the research cluster, however, is to engage directly with the future of Chicana/Latina studies within California and within the UC-system. On the one hand, the neo-liberal, corporate, hybrid model advocated by UC administrators is one that divorces itself from any obligation to provide institutional support for Chicana/Latina research. On the other hand, the breadth of scholarship at UC Davis that falls under the rubric “Chicana/Latina Studies,” as well as the dispersal across the disciplines of UCD scholars supportive of the C/LRC’s research agenda, speaks to the vitality of this academic enterprise. So too does the recent invited DHI talk, “Unpacking the Latino Threat Narrative,” by anthropologist Leo Chavez. The centerpiece of that perceived threat, he argued in November, was Latina fertility. But that crucial piece of his analysis would have been missing except for a generation of scholars insisting upon the primary of examining politics and sexuality through a Chicana/Latina lens.

Given these competing tendencies, a lack of funding, yet recognition of scholarship on the part of some individuals, does Chicana/Latina scholarship still need a space of its own within the academy? If so, given budget constraints, how can it secure such a place? Earlier this year, 52 scholars across the UC-system expressed an interest in forming a system-wide Chicana/Latina research group. Our challenge is to distill this broad-based support into a well-formulated coherent multi-campus research unit proposal. A DHI research cluster would provide the necessary intellectual space for cluster members to address this challenge and others.

We have already begun planning. In January, we will hold a double-feature brown bag about Latina health and sexuality, one of our campus strengths. In the spring, we are planning, in conjunction with our allies at Woodland Community College, to explore the prevalence and praxis of testimonios in Chicana/Latina Studies. An oral history methodology borrowed from Latin America, testimonios have proven useful to Chicana/Latina scholars from fields as diverse as psychology and cultural studies. Specifically, we hope to use DHI funds to stage a one-day workshop in the spring featuring a nationally known expert on this topic (most likely Rina Benmayor of Cal State Monterey Bay). Finally, we have already secured funding from the Consortium on Women and Research toward holding a two-day UC-wide conference in fall 2010 entitled, “Collective Engagement: The State of Chicana/Latina Studies in the 21st century.” On this campus alone, more than 20 scholars have voiced their desire to participate. Building from our strengths as well as working across disciplines, we envision a series of thematic panels on such topics as health and sexuality, social activism past and present, and educational inequality and language difference.

We welcome the support of the Davis Humanities Center in these endeavors.

Sincerely,

Lorena Oropeza, Inés Hernández Avila,
Associate Professor, History Professor, Native American Studies
Co-Directors, The Chicana/Latina Research Center
Cluster members with brief bios:

1. Yvette Flores Ortiz, Professor, Chicana/o Studies, is a psychologist whose research focuses on Latinas and violence.

2. Gloria Rodriguez, Assistant Professor, School of Education, is interested in issues of educational equity and minority students especially in terms of language and socio-economic difference.

3. Natalia Deeb Sossa, Assistant Professor, Sociology, has put Latina reproductive rights at the center of her research and social justice agenda.

4. Raquel Scherr Delgado, Ph.D., a member of the University Writing Program, has been involved in Chicana/Latina feminist matters ever since she translated into Spanish the original edition of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*.

5. Isabel Porras, Graduate Student, Cultural Studies, is researching notions of blackness across the Americas. The C/LRC’s GSR, she is also a member of the DHI super-cluster *estudios culturales* and thus serves as a coordinating link between the two entities.

6. Carmen Cortez, Graduate Student, Ecology, is a first-year graduate student primarily interested in issues of land-use and conservation, including how they impact Chicanas and Latinas.

7. Lisceth Cruz, Graduate Student, Education, is gathering data on the circumstances of undocumented students in higher education for her dissertation.

8. Inés Hernández Avila, a poet as well as a scholar, has published on Native American women, and indigenous literature and performance.

9. Lorena Oropeza has explored the role of women within the Chicano movement in two books.