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A community-building vision for the Chicano Studies Research Center as campus comes back together

Director Veronica Terriquez shares how the center will help steward UCLA's efforts to become a Hispanic Serving Institution

Jessica Wolf | October 12, 2021

As the director of UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center, Veronica Terriquez draws on her background as a community organizer to enhance Latino community networks and presence on campus, and further support university-community partnerships.

On Sept. 24, UCLA announced steps it was taking as it seeks to [achieve Hispanic Serving Institution status](#) , and Terriquez and the center's staff and faculty will become partial stewards of that process. The center will administer the hiring of 15 new faculty positions over the next seven years, and will bring 20 postdoctoral fellows into the UCLA community during the next five. In collaboration with the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research & Creative Activities the center will manage \$250,000 in seed research grants. All of that will focus on those whose teaching, scholarship or mentoring experience has ties to Latino experiences.

"We're really looking to recruit scholars who are going to be able to connect to our students as we become an HSI," Terriquez said. "Research shows that underrepresented students



Ernesto Chavez

Veronica Terriquez

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fare better when they have a faculty mentor who can relate to their experiences. They don't have to come from the exact same background, but they have to understand the learning conditions and communities that students are coming from."

In the 2020–2021 school year, faculty and staff affiliated with UCLA's Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies oversaw four of UCLA's Rising to The Challenge initiatives, all focused on recruiting and supporting scholars and research related to Black life. Bunche staff built an infrastructure that the CSRC can model in support these of ambitious goals related to Latino scholars and research.

The first thing the center will ramp up is the selection of postdoctoral fellows, Terriquez said.

"It is a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the pipeline of future professors," she said. "And there's a hiring incentive that hopefully our departments will take advantage of. The CSRC's role will be to encourage the integration of postdocs into their host departments and ensure that campus leaders in both north and south campus understand the hiring opportunities associated with the chancellor's postdoctoral program."

Terriquez said she's eager to see UCLA students and faculty come back together safely, knowing that experiences with remote learning have varied widely — many Latino and first-generation students struggled to comfortably learn, and are still coping with losses wrought by the pandemic.

Meanwhile, faculty had their own struggles with remote teaching. Many professors have not had opportunities to connect with each other in far too long, in particular younger faculty with their more senior colleagues.

"I see a lot of opportunity to rebuild and make new connections among the faculty," Terriquez said. "I think there are opportunities to build relationships, even though people might be studying vastly different topics. I think building those professional networks are vital to their longer-term success."

Terriquez has expanded the Chicano Studies Research Center's faculty advisory committee, which now includes a greater breadth of disciplinary backgrounds.

The center is planning a special virtual Dia De Los Muertos event on Nov. 1, in close

Veronica Terriquez named
director of UCLA's Chicano
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collaboration with Karina Alma, assistant professor of Chicana and Chicano and Central American studies, and Arturo Bustamante, professor in the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, among other faculty. Everyone in the UCLA community is invited to attend. There will be faculty and student presentations spanning a range of topics that honor the Latino community, Dia de los Muertos traditions and that acknowledge losses suffered during the pandemic.

“The program will feature Dia de Los Muertos-related arts and performances, but it will also feature the hard data that remind us of the devastation Latinx communities have experienced during the current pandemic,” Terriquez said. “It will be a celebration and a call to action because we can’t let this happen again.”

Looking farther ahead, one of Terriquez’s major forthcoming projects is what she calls California Freedom Summer. She’ll be working to train and place college students as interns in summer 2022 nonprofit organizations to mentor other young leaders, conduct non-partisan voter education and support grassroots campaigns that will especially seek to uplift communities hit hard by the pandemic and inspire voter action around the 2022 midterm elections.

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