

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

CENTER FOR MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

PLEASE! HELP US SAVE THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS PROGRAM

Dear Friend/Supporter,

I hope you and your loved ones are doing well and staying healthy during these challenging times as the pandemic has impacted all of us in a variety of ways. This past academic year CMAS continued to provide courses and programming for our Academic Achievers. We collaborated with Clear Channel to commemorate the Latino Art Now! Anniversary with another billboard display of visual art. We even continue our research with our Gibson colleagues to complete Houston's first mobile museum. Nevertheless, like everyone we too have had to adapt.

No doubt you are aware of the necessity of moving our courses and programming to an online format. In addition to the more obvious challenges, social distancing changed our ability to serve our students in a number of ways that can often be overlooked. This year our graduates missed the opportunity to gather with their peers and families at one of the seminal moments in their lives, graduation. The pandemic brought into bold relief the central aspect of what it means to be human -- our need to see, interact with and touch other people.

In April, Latino Decisions presented some of its findings from the country's first national poll on the impact of COVID-19 on Latinos. The nationally representative survey offers a picture of how this pandemic has impacted our communities (<https://latinodecisions.com/polls-and-research/somos-covid-19-crisis-national-latino-survey-april-2020/>).

Just a few of the findings include:

- 66% of those surveyed had difficulty finding basic necessities such as medicine, food and household supplies
- 22% knew someone who has contracted the virus
- 35% reported having lost a job
- 20% lost employer-provided healthcare

I mention this survey because it captures the very issues so many of our students and their families are now facing.

The **Academic Achievers Program** has received three national recognitions/honors and has won the Texas; STAR award. We have graduated 301 students in 26 years and while these numbers may seem small, the challenges and obstacles faced by our students who have persevered have been significant. This number also obscures the many lives impacted by our program as our students positively impact the community. The success of this program is the result of Dr. Mindiola's life work, and the commitment of Lorenzo Cano, Rebecca Trevino, Fely Aguilar, Jeronimo Cortina, Jessica Thiam and all of our staff members. It is also the work, determination and sacrifice of our students, their parents and families. AND it is the work and generosity of our community – our volunteers, our role models, our sponsors and benefactors, our supporters -- YOU.

If you recall in my last update, I mentioned the financial reality of our program. I conveyed that I had suspended the Austin High School program because we cannot currently assure a new cohort of students financial support unless we increase our funds. This year we have had to restrict the number of UH AAP students for the same reason.

CMAS raises approximately 63% of the needed funds to run the Academic Achievers Program each year (staff salaries not withstanding)

100% of the Austin program is enabled by the CMAS fundraising

Quite literally, the life of the Austin program and the number of students we are able to serve in the UH program is dependent on your contributions. Because of the financial exigencies created by the pandemic, the program is in even greater need of your support than when last I wrote to you.

The Center must navigate the “new normal”, and even though we don't yet know what that will mean, it is already clear that the gains made by Latinos in the past decades are in jeopardy of being lost without educating our youth. It is not enough to be the largest ethnic group at the university or in the country. Unless we educate our young people, they will not have a seat at the table where decisions and policies are made. Instead they will continue to serve those who are at the table. Please please help us.



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