

Editor's Note

The baseball diamond on the cover of this issue of *La Fuerza* represents the different possible Latino experiences at Yale and at other institutions of higher learning. No matter where we come from or wherever we end up, our 'home base' will always be our Latin American heritage. From there, we each define the bases that follow based on personal experiences and interests, and how strong of a tie we have to our 'home base.'

The first base on the cover, represented by Yale's mascot, is our education. This education can come from becoming culturally and/or politically aware, learning about our histories and struggles, and/or from the standard education we receive inside of the classroom.

In this issue, Derek Morales TC '05 touches on how his education will affect his future 'success.' He questions how a Yale education could detach him from his 'home base' and his historical "humble beginnings."

The second base represented by two shaking hands, symbolize the relationships we forge while at Yale. These relationships can be a result of memberships to organizations (see La Casa Briefs pg. 6), classes we take, professors who have become friends and mentors, etc. Such relationships can very well be influenced by our 'home base.' The friends we make and hang out with, the classes we take or learn the most from, etc., can potentially teach us more about our pasts and/or foster our knowledge and appreciation of our heritage.

Moreover, social networks we establish can bring us closer to our 'home bases' and allow us to give back to where we come from. Eleonora Sharef DC '07, in "POR COLOMBIA," writes about more than a hundred students

coming together at Yale from all over the East Coast, to discuss ways in which they can help Colombia from abroad, and upon their return to their country.

Finally, the third base, represented by a briefcase, suggests our post-graduation plans. Our education and the relationships and social networks we've formed at Yale, will unquestionably affect where we will go. This base can be the closest or farthest away from our 'home base,' depending on how we look at the baseball diamond. How close we feel to this starting point is entirely dependent upon how we define our journey through the bases.

What defines someone as Latino, and what defines someone's 'Latino' experience at Yale and beyond, are essentially two very personal questions that can produce countless answers. Priscila Martins SY '06, for example, writes in "Yo Soy...Latina?" about her identifying herself as Latina after arriving at Yale; she never had before because she had lived in Brazil all of her life and never self-identified as such. Morales discusses how being a biracial Latino has affected how members of the community have judged him in the past.

Thus, who can say who is more "Latino" or whose journey is most "Latino?" when so many different 'Latino' experiences exist. Nonetheless, the extent to which a 'Latino's' experience at Yale is affected by this self-identification, really depends on how they decide to cultivate their relationship with their 'home base;' and how they keep it in mind as they journey through the different bases.



La Fuerza welcomes readers and writers of all nationalities, ethnicities and backgrounds; it invites outside submissions, as well as letters to the editor. Please feel free to send submissions, questions, and/or comments to marisol.leon@yale.edu.

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Mi Yale

Derek Morales wrestles with defining culture and success after graduation

by Derek Morales

Photo illustration by Liara Silva

I am Latino. My mother has beautiful Russian blue eyes and blonde hair. My father has dark Puerto Rican eyes and strong olive skin. Experiencing Yale through biracial eyes has been difficult and I think that I have burned as many bridges as I have forged. But looking out upon two years of certainty and a questionable six-year plan requires that I reflect on my four years at Yale.

My mother probably instilled in me the necessity of education in a society that demands the best educated. She took upon her own shoulders the financial burden that would weigh on our family by letting me come to Yale; I owe her everything and thankful is only a word for what I feel towards her. On the other side, my grandmother is the strongest woman I know; she is the link that ties my family to everything. She taught me humility and to love what I am.

One thing occurred to me when I arrived at Yale my freshman year: I do not fit in. To start, it was incredibly difficult being biracial when Yale drew definitive lines on race. It was hard having Latinos explain to you that you look white and whites turned off by the fact that you act black. In actuality, the African American community welcomed me, as a student first, but race was the least of what separated me from Yale.

In reality, I felt more out of place because my family was lower middle class. It was hard becoming friends with students that could take the summer off vacationing in Europe while I had to work to make money.

However, it was one of the ethnic counselors who showed me that I was not alone with these feelings of isolation and jealousy. He introduced me to an ethnic fraternity, and in some way I feel like that is where my story at Yale begins. In the fraternity, there is a unity that I did not see at Yale, Latinos from similar beginnings that were loyal to each other. Pledging an ethnic fraternity was one of the best and the hardest things I have done at Yale, particularly for two reasons. It has given me best friends where I did not think best friendships could be formed. My reasoning in this is that I believe the preoccupation with grades and activities among Yale students is not conducive to the cliché that you meet your best friends in college. Moreover, it gave me a concrete way to stay grounded to the Latino community while at college and for years to come.

In many ways, the fraternity has been the lens through which I view the Latino community at Yale. That said, the Latino community became my home from sophomore year

onward, but I think it was just as divided along the definition of Latinismo as many other ethnic communities. What made someone Latino?

The truth is that this question is a personal one that, regrettably, we have a tendency of holding others to. For me, being Latino meant that you descended from Latin America and both understood and lived the minority experience in America. There are divides sometimes between Latino and international students from Latin America because of just this point. It is hard to understand what it is to be a minority coming from a country where everyone is what you are. Similarly, this causes the divide between “box-checkers” and Latino

“It was hard becoming friends with students that could take the summer off vacationing in Europe while I had to work to make money....”

students in that the understanding of what it is to be a minority runs parallel to the understanding of socioeconomic inequality in America. Latino does not mean being poor, but rather that you understand poverty as a part of the Latino experience and you are proud of your heritage’s humble beginnings. Unfortunately, privilege is something very foreign to the majority of Latinos in America.

This brings me to the last point, which is something I struggled and will struggle with from the day I set foot at Yale until the day I die: How does one balance privilege and cultural humility? Intrinsic in each of our decisions to become students of higher learning, we are putting ourselves in a position to one-day come face to face with this question. I do not have an answer beyond trying to give back the community that you are a part of. Looking out into my future, I hope that what I have done will allow me to remain grounded, and never forget the loving humility of my grandmother.



Yo Soy...Latina?

Priscila Martins becomes “Latina” at Yale

by Priscila Martins



I was recently interviewed for an Ethnic Counselorship at La Casa. I was amazed to discover I was the first international student to apply to the position. The matter got me thinking about the Latino community at Yale: Latin Americans are more outsiders than we would have imagined, but precisely for that reason, we can be one of the strongest assets of the community.

I did not know I was a “Latina” until I came to Yale. Born and raised in the interior of Brazil, I was not, surprisingly, surrounded by Brazilians who only felt the need to identify me by the state I lived in. Brazilian society does not have a strong ethnic awareness – the many immigrant groups and ethnicities in the country have had an easier integration than their counterparts in the United States – which by no means precludes discrimination. However, the social structure of Brazil is determined more by classifications of color, and sociological surveys register over 140 popular classifications of tones between black and white.

When I applied to Yale, I proceeded to always check the box “Other”, and sometimes write something down, like “South American”, a concept as vague and encompassing as “Latino”, but more significant to me. Suzanne Oboler, in “The Politics of Labeling: Latino/a Cultural Identities of Self and Others,” affirms that according to her research with various Latino communities in New York, Latin Americans tend to classify themselves more by geographical and national concepts: Peruvians, Colombians, Brazilians, Central Americans – a fact with which I can identify. My awareness of the diversity of the surrounding Latin American cultures in the continent made it unreasonable to me to mark down “Latino/a”. I did not speak Spanish, I had never had a nacho, and I could not dance salsa.

However, upon arriving at the university, I started to understand that despite the fact that the creation of a “Latino” concept promotes a homogenization that does not acknowledge the diversity of national, linguistic, social, cultural, historical, political and religious realities of Latin America and the hybrid cultures created by immigrant communities in the United States, there were underlying foundations that linked these groups in a rich ethnic experience. I do speak a romance language whose development is closely linked to Spanish, much of my cuisine is based on corn and beans, and samba has the same African rhythmic influences as many other Latin American music styles.

Clearly, the parameters of comparison go beyond the food, music and language stereotypes that established my “Latina” identity with my American peers. I have roomed with a Mexican-American for three years, and have many Latino friends at Yale: our understandings of family structure, morality, notions of time, leisure and work values highly overlap, despite our different religious affiliations and nationalities. But what kept me, a Latin American, as an outsider of the Latino community at Yale was the fact that I had not grown up under a system of discrimination. Most of the Latino population at the university is composed of Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, groups that have been part of the American system, but that have been historically marginalized. The barrier for our integration rests on the supposed premise that I cannot understand that reality; that I do not know how it feels to not belong.

I beg to differ.

Being a Latin American student I might not be seen by the Latino community as a member of their group, but I am certainly labeled as such by the rest of American society. My experience of being a minority in the U.S. might not be as extensive as that of the Latino students, but it is a reality.

I do not believe that the focus on the development of an ethnic identity should be based on its experiences of discrimination, but instead on the resources and cultural riches that each group can use to draw strength for its further development. It is important to acknowledge, assess and deal with discrimination, but the binding principles of the group should not be the by-product of hate or misunderstanding.

The integration of Latin American students within the Latino community at Yale brings an exchange of perspectives that is productive for both groups. Latin Americans can benefit from the experiences of those who have been partial outsiders in the US for longer – being both a national and an ethnic minority can be a difficult process. For their part, they can bring to Latino students an appreciation of Latin cultures that many times has been marred by experiences of exclusion.

Then the groups will be capable of focusing not on their differences, but on their similarities—starting a process that can transform classifications of minorities in the university. The lesson might be one of the most valuable ones that we learn at Yale: diversity is meaningful in dialogue, not simply in coexistence.

*Please note opinions pieces reflect the opinions of their individual authors, and not those of the *La Fuerza* staff, La Casa Cultural, or Yale University.

POR COLOMBIA

Students from across the East Coast gather at Yale for Colombian Conference

by Eleonora Sharef

U.S. COLOMBIA POLICY AT A CROSSROADS, a conference on U.S.-Colombia relations, took place at the Yale Law School on the 25th and 26th of February. The conference sought to provide a forum for politicians, academics and journalists to debate the United States' policy toward Colombia and to suggest a course for the next five years.

Cesar Gaviria, the former President of Colombia, Antanas Mockus, the former mayor of Bogotá, Maria Teresa Ronderos, the editor of *Semana Magazine*, Adam Isaacson of the Center for International Policy and Sanho Tree of the Institute of Policy Studies were among the conference panelists.

At the conference, a consensus emerged around two points: First, no amount of U.S. support for the resolution of Colombia's internal crisis will ever be enough unless the political, social, and economic elite in Colombia assume a greater degree of responsibility for its resolution. Second, U.S. policy should be guided by the hypocritic oath: Whatever you do, do no harm.

In addition to attending the conference, Colombian students from across the East Coast gathered at Yale for the first Colombian Student Congress. They were invited to Yale to join POR COLOMBIA, a new initiative with the purpose of creating a network of Colombians studying in the United

"They will be informed as to how they can help Colombia from abroad..."

States. POR COLOMBIA seeks to communicate Colombian students with one another so that they may share relevant information, and thus, make both their stay in the United States and their eventual return to Colombia less difficult. Students will be able to inform themselves about upcoming events related to Colombia; they will be able to access information on internship and job opportunities in Colombia; and they will be informed as to how they can help Colombia from abroad. Although all communication will occur through a website, students will come together for an annual congress and get to know each other on a personal level.

The first Colombian Student Congress was a great success. More than 100 Colombian students from more than 15 universities on the East Coast came to Yale to join POR COLOMBIA. Although the students were first presented with

the central concepts that make up the organization, they were subsequently divided into small discussion sections so that they would be able to bring their own ideas to the fore. By the end of the weekend, regional directors had been elected and initial tasks had been assigned.

In addition to attending discussions and debates on POR COLOMBIA, students were also invited to go to a Colombian party, held at Image Nightclub on Friday, the 25th. One Colombian student argued that "[he] felt as though [he] were

"No amount of U.S. support for the resolution of Colombia's internal crisis will ever be enough unless the political, social, and economic elite in Colombia assume a greater degree of responsibility..."

in a nightclub in Bogotá." When the manager asked everyone to leave at approximately 2am, the Colombian students left the nightclub singing the national anthem and embracing each other as they walked down New Haven's streets.

Within the next months, the POR COLOMBIA board of directors will take the necessary steps to launch this organization and thereby get it well underway. Eventually, POR COLOMBIA hopes to include not only universities on the East Coast, but also in all other parts of the country.

The organizers (Ricardo Cortes '06, Valeria Lopez-Fadul '08, Maria Claudia Prieto '07, Eleonora Sharef '07 and Santiago Suarez '07) would like to thank Ryan Calkins, Dean Garcia, Jim Silk, Sarah Morrill, Stuart Schwartz, Frank Keil, Richard Schottenfeld, Bruce Harris and all those who hosted Colombian students in their rooms and who gave up one of their dining hall meals. This congress would not have been possible without your help and support.



Photo Courtesy of Eleonora Sharef

Students gather at Yale from all over the East Coast to attend Colombian Conference and the first Colombian Student Congress.

LASO

The Latin American Student Organization (LASO) has had a busy semester. We started off by co-sponsoring a talk on Argentine Jews with the Slifka Center for Jewish Life. We then had a Master's Tea at Ezra Stiles College with the former mayor of Bogotá and helped organize the first Colombian Student Congress. Last, but not least, we sponsored a Carnival Fiesta and an Aguardiente Party at Image Nightclub. LASO would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who came to our events, because without you, LASO could not be the energetic and active organization it is today. Special thanks to Dean Garcia and to Jean Silk at the Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies for their generous support.

Sigma Lambda Upsilon

The Pi Chapter of Sigma Lambda Upsilon/ Señoritas Latinas Unidas Sorority, Inc., has been busy this semester re-establishing their sorority's presence on campus. Currently, the four Hermanas have been working with JUNTA for Progressive Action, the oldest Latino Social Service Agency in New Haven. **The Hermanas work as ESL tutors** for Latino adults in the area, twice a week.

Additionally, the Chapter honored Women's History Month with **"Una Celebración de la Mujer Latina,"** on March 30th. Visual Artist Sandra María Esteves presented her poetry and art, and her presentation was followed by a question and answer session. Ms. Esteves is one of the founders of the Nuyorican poetry movement, and one of the first Nuyorican females to publish a volume of poetry in the US.

The Chapter also co-hosted a party with La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc., called **"Calentura,"** on Saturday, April 9th. It also plans to co-host an event with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., on the topic of Black/Latina relations, before the semester's end.

Despierta Boricua

This spring, Despierta Boricua moved its meetings to a half-hour later. We now meet Mondays at 8:30 PM, rather than 8:00, as always, in the TV room on *La Casa's* second floor. Our grandest ambition this semester is to have a small conference. We would like to invite a speaker to give a talk on **Puerto Rican assimilation into US culture.** We have contacted our ideal candidates, ranging from Carlos Torre to Luis Fortuño. **The conference** would take place in late April, and would include a small happy hour, with the speaker presenting on the next day. We shall send invitations to the Puerto Rican cultural organizations in schools throughout the northeast US.

Other smaller projects we've planned for the semester include designing some PR-themed hooded sweatshirts, a Latin party, and a couple of cultural awareness presentations, to be conducted at New Haven public schools.

Yale Mexican Student Organization

The Yale Mexican Student Organization (YMSO) is an organization that strives to strengthen the relationship between Mexico and Yale. It is composed of undergraduate and graduate students from Mexico or interested in Mexico.

YMSO has over fifty members, half of which are undergraduates and the other half who are from the graduate and professional schools. We meet on a weekly basis usually on Wednesdays at 7 pm at the Law School common room to plan our events and to socialize. If you are interested in joining our organization, if you would like to participate in our events, or if you would like to be placed on our mailing list, please send an email to Ricardo.Cruz@yale.edu. You may also visit our website: www.yale.edu/ymso

Alianza

Alianza has reorganized and revamped itself this semester with a new board, new mission statement and even a new name.

Alianza: The Alliance Celebrating Latino Culture, meets every Sunday night at 8:30 in La Casa. It is an organization that welcomes all students interested in Latino culture, regardless of ethnic origin, and provides them a venue to interact with each other and the general Latino community.

Alianza is branching out with new activities to foster a sense of support, community, and dedication to its members and the rest of the Yale public. Some include: staffing and reviving **La Casa Café**, which offers freshly-baked cookies and home-made Mexican hot chocolate every Thursday from 7-9pm; organizing a **Family Reunion** for organizations associated with La Casa; and planning alternative activities for prospective students during Bulldog Days. Alianza is further looking into coordinating various volunteer activities for its members with Dwight Hall and Junta, among other organizations.

La Unidad Latina

This semester the **Kappa Chapter of La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc.,** has been focused a lot on road tripping, hitting approximately 10 campuses in the Northeast for various events.

Kappa Chapter of LUL started off the semester by hosting an interest conclave for the New England region to kick off the Spring 2005 pledge class, and the most important news we have to report is the induction of brand new **Hermano Ryan Murguía** BK'05 also known as Hermano Relámpago. There are now five brothers currently on campus: Carlos Gaviria, Derek Morales, Jamil Abreu, Gabriel Hernández, and Ryan Murguía. We just threw a party with the hermanas of SLU called "Calentura" and there will be another one to come shortly. We are looking forward to programming more on campus next semester and hopefully expanding our chapter by perhaps reaching out to the University of New Haven.

El Amigo Es Tu Amigo

Try good Mexican food at El Amigo Felix

By Sara Cardoza and Rebeca González

We're from deep South Texas. You can't get more Tex-Mex than that. When we arrived at Yale freshman year, coming from a place where rice and beans are a staple for almost every meal, it was a little hard to accept that our Mexican food options were so limited in New Haven. The next four years looked sad and dreary. Luckily, our Ethnic Counselor introduced us to El Amigo Felix early in our first semester. After three and a half years of searching and sampling, we can honestly say that El Amigo Felix comes closest to an authentic Mexican food restaurant in New Haven.

El Amigo Felix, or just El Amigo for short, is a small, family-owned restaurant located on the corner of Whalley and Howe. Named for its owner, Felix Raya, El Amigo combines good, quality, homemade food with a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. And the service is extremely friendly. As soon as you walk in the doors, you're greeted by Felix or one of his waiters and are lead to a table, with endless chips and salsa quickly following. Music adds to the fun, with anything from rock to 80's to Mexican Rancheras to reggaeton playing over the loudspeakers. Or just choose what you want to hear from the jukebox by the bar.

As you look over the menu, you might be distracted by the decorations around the restaurant, from traditional Mexican *zarapes* that have been converted into curtains to posters advertising weekly drink specials. Speaking of drinks, aside from the food, El Amigo has a fully stocked bar. Margaritas are El Amigo's specialty, but there are a number of traditional and exotic drinks to choose from. And if all the choices are



Rebeca González

The walls of El Amigo Felix are decorated with zarapes, sombreros, papel picado, and mexican flags.

overwhelming, the waiters are more than happy to help you out with a suggestion.

El Amigo's meal prices are affordable, with the entrees ranging from about \$10 to \$20, including, of course, rice and beans. If you're of age, add a nice drink to your meal for about \$6 to \$8, and you'll be pleased. If you can stay late, El Amigo turns into quite a party scene, and you can take advantage of those weekly specials we mentioned earlier. If you'd like to rent out El Amigo for your own small party, just talk to Felix. He's almost always around and willing to talk to his patrons.

El Amigo isn't exactly our grandma's kitchen or anything like the Tex-Mex restaurants back home, but you have to work with what you've got. New Haven's got El Amigo Felix, and it's probably the best Mexican food in the immediate area. Try it out. Have some south-of-the-border fun.

Hours:

Tue.-Thu. 3:30-10:30 p.m.,

Fri.-Sat. noon-11:30 p.m.,

Sun. 12:30-10:30 p.m.

8 Whalley Ave.

New Haven, CT

(203) 785-8200

MEChA

Stop by one of our MEChA meetings, every Monday at 6pm at La Casa Cultural. Worried we're too political? Too community oriented? Or too social? Actually, we're all three. There's something for everyone in our organization: political activism, community service, and social activities.

Here's a sample of events this semester: a joint trip with ANAAY to see "The Aztec Empire" exhibit at New York's Guggenheim Museum; participation in the East Coast Chicano Student Forums and the National MEChA Conference; active support for the Financial Aid Reform Campaign at Yale; and a celebration of Cesar Chavez Day. The week of April 11, we held our annual Semana Chicana conference, honoring

"Chicanos and the Arts" with a series of events, including film screenings and a guest lecture by celebrated Chicana filmmaker, Lourdes Portillo. We'll also be celebrating our 35th anniversary with a dinner for students and alumni on April 22nd.

On the political front, we'll continue our support for the women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, who are persecuted by ongoing feminicides; we'll continue to fight against HR418, "The Real ID Act," an unjust, racist bill targeted at hardworking immigrants; and we'll campaign for the DREAM Act, which will make college an attainable goal for many deserving *estudiantes* in our communities.