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HISPANIC LEADERS FOR THE LARGER COMMUNITY: THE SURGE IN THE HISPANIC POPULATION CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

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As the first Hispanic dean of Barry University Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law and the first female Cuban American dean of any ABA accredited law school in the country, I face the non-unique challenge of attracting minority students and maintaining diversity in the law school community. Fortunately, the law school's location in Central Florida has facilitated my success. In the last decade, Central Florida has experienced a surge in its Hispanic population. The law school community reflects this regional growth. Indeed, in the years immediately preceding my deanship (2003-2006), the percentage of minority students in our entering classes ranged between twenty and twenty-eight percent.¹ Since that time, during my tenure as dean, the percentage of minority students in our entering class increased by eleven percent.² In many ways, Barry Law School mirrors the community that surrounds it, and the school has made efforts to serve its diverse region and leverage its location.

Like Central Florida, there has been a seismic shift in demographics throughout the country. Hispanics are the largest growing segment of the population, and now one in every six residents is Hispanic.³ In fact, more Hispanics live in the United States than any

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1. BARRY UNIV. DWAYNE O. ANDREAS SCH. OF LAW, ANNUAL ADMISSIONS REPORT: ENTERING CLASS 2002-2011 COMPARISON (2011) [hereinafter ANNUAL ADMISSIONS REPORT].

2. *Id.*

3. Corey Dade, *Interactive: How Latinos Are Reshaping Communities*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (Oct. 10, 2011), <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/10/141130042/interactive-how-latinos-are-reshaping-communities>.

other country except Mexico.⁴ With this rising minority population, institutions of higher learning throughout the country are welcoming students who are the first generation to attend college. To ensure this minority population succeeds at law school and is able to become leaders in the legal and Hispanic community, Barry University strives to provide assistance to this under-served population. I believe that it is crucial to proactively promote and encourage inclusivity. Providing these opportunities is consistent with the University and Law School's overall mission of achieving diversity.

As dean, I've implemented several ways of achieving this goal. For example, the law school provides scholarships to many students, including those of Hispanic descent.⁵ This allows Hispanic students who may have been unable to afford law school the opportunity to attend and pursue their career goals. In addition, the law school has hosted special events on campus, most recently a White House Hispanic Community Action Summit in September, where several top-level administration officials came to speak about issues impacting Hispanics.⁶ The school also works with the Hispanic Bar Association of Central Florida, which serves "as the local voice for the concerns and opinions of Hispanics in the community generally, and in the legal profession in particular."⁷ Like many law schools, Barry has several minority student organizations, including the Black Law Student Association and the Hispanic American Law Student Association.⁸ Several student leadership positions are held by Hispanic students, including the current president of the Student Bar

4. *Facts for Features: Hispanic Heritage Month 2011 (Sept. 15 – Oct. 15)*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Aug. 26, 2011), http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb11ff-18_hispanic.pdf.

5. In 2011, ninety-six percent of our entering class received scholarships. ANNUAL ADMISSIONS REPORT, *supra* note 1.

6. Jeanette Rivera-Lyles, *White House Staffers Open Hispanic Summit in Orlando to Gather Ideas*, ORLANDO SENTINEL (Sept. 11, 2011), http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2011-09-11/news/os-white-house-hispanic-summit-20110909_1_commerce-of-metro-orlando-hispanic-chamber-hispanic-community.

7. *Our Mission*, HISPANIC BAR ASS'N OF CENT. FLA., <http://www.hbacf.com/> (last visited Dec. 21, 2011).

8. *Student Organizations*, BARRY UNIV. DWAYNE O. ANDREAS SCH. OF LAW, <http://barry.edu/law/future/studentlife/studentorganizations.htm> (last visited Dec. 21, 2011).

Association.⁹

I believe it is important for the law school to prepare this new generation of Hispanic lawyers to be leaders in the larger community. Across the nation, the demographic shift is not just in states that have traditionally had a large concentration of Hispanics, like California, Texas, and Florida. From 2000 to 2010, the fastest growing states in Hispanic population were all in the South: South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas, in that order.¹⁰ For example, South Carolina experienced an explosion in its Hispanic population, growing by 148%, while its overall population increased by 15.2%. Alabama's Hispanic population grew by 145%.¹¹

This growth and shift are not confined to urban areas. Small, rural towns in the Midwest, like West Liberty, Iowa, have seen an influx of Hispanics. West Liberty became the first town in Iowa to have a majority Hispanic population.¹² While Hispanics make up only five percent of Iowa's total population, they increased by nearly 84% from 2000 to 2010.¹³

These rapidly growing communities are facing challenges that come with increasing minority populations, including the blending of cultural differences and overcoming language barriers. While these are challenges facing many communities for the first time, Central Florida can serve as a model of successful adaptation to growing Hispanic populations. In my twelve years as a member of the faculty at the Barry University Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law, I have witnessed an already substantial Hispanic population make a great impact on a local level. In the tri-county area (Orange, Osceola, and Seminole), Hispanics made up 18% of the population in 2000.¹⁴ In

9. Eva Gonzalez, 2011-2012 President. *SBA Presidents and ABA Representatives Directory*, AM. BAR ASS'N, http://www.americanbar.org/dam/aba/publications/law_student_enevs/rep-sba-directory.html (last visited Feb. 1, 2012).

10. See Dade, *supra* note 3.

11. *Id.*

12. David Schaper, *A Look At Iowa's First Majority Hispanic Town*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (Oct. 10, 2011), <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/10/141150607/west-liberty-is-iowas-first-majority-hispanic-town>.

13. See Dade, *supra* note 3.

14. *Hispanic Population Census Figures: 2010 vs. 2000 Comparison*, HISPANIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF METRO ORLANDO (Mar. 2011), <http://www.hispanicchamber.net/new/other/images/2010censusDATAREVApril42011.pdf>.

the next ten years, the Hispanic population would grow by 94%, and now more than a quarter of residents in these counties are Hispanic (27%).¹⁵

With Hispanics making up a larger percentage of the population in Central Florida, there has been a slow but steady increase in Hispanic influence in business and politics. Statistics released in 2006 by the U.S. Department of Commerce showed that the number of Hispanic-owned businesses in Central Florida nearly doubled over a five-year period from 1997 to 2002.¹⁶ Even more important to note is that the revenues of these businesses over the same five-year period increased by 191%,¹⁷ exemplifying the success of these Hispanic entrepreneurs.

Hispanics are growing in political influence as well. Central Florida and its location on the politically important I-4 corridor has influence state-wide and nationally.¹⁸ The area has been crucial in the elections of Mel Martinez and Marco Rubio to U.S. Senate seats, and the region and its large Hispanic population will be heavily courted in the 2012 elections—by both Hispanic and non-Hispanic candidates.¹⁹ Currently, the Florida Legislature is proposing redistricting maps, and it's likely that this redistricting will create new seats, offering more opportunities for Hispanic leaders.²⁰

Across the country, as the Hispanic population has exploded, progress still must be made to ensure that Hispanics are represented

15. *Id.*

16. *Hispanic Business Stats and Facts*, HISPANIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF METRO ORLANDO 2 (2008), <http://hispanicchamber.net/new/other/images/HispanicOwnedFirms.pdf>.

17. *Id.*

18. The I-4 corridor runs across the State from Tampa to Daytona Beach and divides the conservative-leaning north part of Florida from the more liberal south.

19. Javier Ortiz, *Hispanics, I-4 Corridor Key to Success in 2012*, ORLANDO SENTINEL (May 5, 2011), http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2011-05-05/news/os-ed-hispanic-vote-050511-20110504_1_hispanic-voters-latino-vote-puerto-rican-voters.

20. Aaron Deslatte & Kathleen Haughney, *Proposed Senate Redistricting Maps Boost Hispanics*, ORLANDO SENTINEL (Nov. 28, 2011), <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/os-senate-redistricting-maps-20111128,0,5685712.story>; *see also* Aaron Deslatte, *House Redistricting Maps Would Add Hispanic Seats*, ORLANDO SENTINEL (Dec. 6, 2011), <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/os-house-redistricting-maps-20111206,0,130095.story>.

proportionally in politics, business, and the legal profession. As dean, I place a high priority in ensuring that Barry Law School produces leaders equipped with the skills to meet these challenges. As stated, one of my goals as dean is to encourage our diverse student population to be inclusive, resulting in a community rich in cultural differences. We hope to serve as an example to other law schools blessed with the opportunity to prepare Hispanics to succeed in the larger legal community.

