Fall 2011

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By Aaron Sanchez, Ruben Arellano, and Nyddia Hannah

Published by
The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs
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Cover image: “Senor y Senorita Rodriguez, y Senor Gomez. These are representatives in Southern Methodist University, from Mexico.” Courtesy of SMU’s 1917 Rotunda yearbook.
Introduction

As Southern Methodist University embarks on its second century of existence, much has changed in the city, state, country, and even the world. In 1911, when the Methodist Church chartered the university, Dallas was a city of just over 92,000. Today, Dallas is an important metropolitan city of 1.2 million people. The first president, Robert S. Hyer, had recruited thirty-five faculty to teach the young minds at SMU. Today, there are over 650 faculty members still committed to engaging young, open minds.1 When classes began in 1915, SMU was housed entirely in Dallas Hall, including offices, classrooms, and dormitories. There was one other building, a dormitory for women. SMU opened its doors with 706 students, almost all from Texas. It was the largest opening of any university in the United States, with the exception of the University of Chicago.2

The campus was an isolated building on a hill on the outskirts of town and it was the last stop on the trolley line. After getting off of the rickety streetcar that hobbled over rusty rails—it affectionately came to be called “The Dinky”—students still had to walk from the corners of Hillcrest and University on a boarded path to Dallas Hall.3 Today, SMU is no longer a peripheral building on a hilltop on the outskirts of town. SMU is now at the center of the city, geographically and academically. The campus extends over 290 acres, contains 90 buildings, and is home to 11,000 students, not including the Plano, Texas and Taos, New Mexico campuses.4

The university has established a national reputation and is home to some of the most preeminent scholars in the country. SMU has come a long way since 1915 indeed. As the second century of SMU is celebrated, much will be written about the history of SMU, but what of the history of Latina and Latino students at SMU? What is their story here? As students, faculty, administrators, and alumni look back at the 100 year history of this institution, will they see that this place has many stories, many voices, and many faces?

The 1910s and 1920s

The history of Latinas/os at SMU is tied to the developments of regional and national history, as well as the history of the institution itself. When SMU opened its doors in the fall of 1915, the world was on the brink of great changes. The Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth century impacted urban centers all over the world. The United States, as a relatively young nation, had become the industrial heart of the world. By 1913, the U.S. produced a third of industrial output across the globe. In addition, the railroad had connected the nation just decades before, creating a truly national market and culture. For many cities in Texas, the railroad provided the economic opportunities for growth. It brought people and goods in and transported material out to be sold. It was the railroads that brought the first large groups of Mexicans to North Texas. Before the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the ethnic Mexican population of Dallas consisted of fewer than 1,000.5 But the Revolution would bring over a million Mexican nationals to the United States, and many of them chose to move to Texas. In 1910 the population of ethnic Mexicans in Texas was 226,466, and by 1920 the population had increased to 388,675.6 It would nearly double again to 683,681 in 1930.7

The ethnic Mexican population of Dallas grew, too. In 1910, the population comprised only 583 people.8 By 1920, that number had grown to 2,838 people who spread across four barrios: Little Mexico, East Dallas, and small neighborhoods in South and North Dallas.9 Little Mexico was by far the largest barrio in the city and it was the oldest. The barrio’s history dated to the beginning of the century with the introduction of the railroad to Dallas. Ethnic Mexicans working for the railroad made their homes near the tracks of the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railway (which would later be the foundation for the KATY trail in Uptown).10 By the late 1920s, Little Mexico was home to seventy-nine percent of the ethnic Mexican community in Dallas.11 It was a well-established and diverse
community that began to make impacts within the city. By 1930, Little Mexico’s population had soared to over 15,000 people.13

The growth of the ethnic Mexican community in Texas and the growth of SMU were not isolated from one another. These two tandem developments could be seen in SMU student rolls. When the university opened its doors in the fall of 1915, the first Spanish-surnamed individuals enrolled: one male ministerial student, A. R. Rodriguez, and one female, Anastasia R. Rodriguez, who is only listed as an “Adult Special.”14 A year later, in the fall of 1916, another male ministerial student named Santiago Gomez enrolled, though none of these first Latino students would graduate from the university. By 1920, an additional fifteen Spanish-surnamed students were registered at SMU.15 Most of these students were from Texas, although a few were international students. The majority of those from Texas were from Dallas, San Antonio, and Laredo.16

The appearance of Spanish-surnamed students, initially students of ethnic Mexican descent, before the official racial integration of SMU (the university was integrated in 1954) had to do with the ambivalent racial position of ethnic Mexicans in the United States. In South Texas there existed a form of Jim Crow segregation in which Anglos and ethnic Mexicans were separated from one another. In the southern parts of the state, class factors and the transformation of the Mexican ranch—an institution which had a long history in Texas—to the Anglo farm upset race relations.17 In areas where Mexicans occupied the lowest of working positions, ethnic Mexicans experienced the worst racism. And while there was a long history of racial antagonism stretching from the early nineteenth century, changes in the economic system exacerbated these feelings.18 Across the state, ethnic Mexicans attended separate schools and could not live in the same neighborhoods as Anglos.19

However, race relations in the United States were built upon the history of slavery in this nation. In a world of black and white, ethnic Mexicans were some shade of grey. For that reason, class became an important factor. Many wealthy ethnic Mexicans could “pass” the various social tests of acceptance.20 In addition, the Methodist mission for conversion, at times, superseded the call for white supremacy. As a result, some ethnic Mexicans found themselves in socially-elevated places across the country—like SMU in Dallas, or in other cities such as Kansas City and St. Louis. Students like Santiago Gomez, A.R. Rodriguez, and Anastasia Rodriguez were the vanguard of a changing America that many people could not begin to imagine.

The 1930s

With the enrollment of fifteen additional Spanish-surnamed students at SMU in the 1920s, the decade saw the first Latinos to graduate from the university. In 1927, the first Latino graduated from the School of Theology—Oscar Machado da Silva, a citizen of Brazil.21 In 1928, Victor Manuel Cano, an international student from Lima, Peru, graduated from SMU with a degree in Spanish.22 These first Latino graduates came on the eve of the Great Depression. The nation found itself trying to save every dime it could and SMU was no different.
The president of the university at the time, Charles Selecman, would walk around to classrooms and buildings and turn off lights in an effort to save money. SMU faced several difficulties during the Great Depression: enrollment fell by roughly 1,000 students, all salaries were reduced by twenty percent, the president’s salary was cut by a third, and faculty salaries were cut again by fifty percent in the summer of 1933. But the university also embarked on new pursuits. John McGinnis brought the Texas Review, a struggling literary review from the University of Texas at Austin, to SMU and renamed it the Southwest Review in 1924. By the 1930s, under McGinnis’ strong direction, the Southwest Review gained critical praise, becoming one of the leading literary reviews in the Southwest. McGinnis also started Southern Methodist University Press during the Depression, in 1937. Even in the midst of economic collapse, SMU continued with its mission.

Latina/o students continued with their mission of acquiring an education as well. In 1931, the first Mexican-American students graduated from SMU. Francisco Cruz Aedo from San Antonio graduated with a degree in chemistry and Maria Gonzalez from Laredo, Texas graduated with a degree in Spanish. The first Mexican citizen to graduate from SMU graduated the same year; Felix Hilario Garcia from Salvatierra, Guanajuato, Mexico graduated with a Bachelor of Law. In 1936, Aurora Rodriguez graduated with a degree in education, becoming the second Mexican-American woman graduate of SMU. By 1939, over twenty Spanish-surnamed students had attended SMU.

Aurora Rodriguez was the “daughter of the first Spanish-speaking Presbyterian minister in Dallas.” She was also “the first Hispanic personality to work for PBS’s Dallas Channel, KERA,” and “taught at W.E. Greiner Junior High before transferring to... Justin F. Kimball High School, where she was named the first department head of the school’s foreign language department” when it first opened. Rodriguez’s daughter, Belita Moreno, also attended SMU, where she “earned a BFA in theater arts and appeared in the first production to open the Bob Hope Theater on the SMU campus.” Her professional career took her to Hollywood, where she starred in numerous films, like Mommie Dearest, and television shows such as “Perfect Strangers.” She is best known for her role as “Benny,” George’s mother, in the “George Lopez Show.”

The 1940s

While Aurora Rodriguez completed her classes, the U.S. was preparing for war. Events in Europe drew the U.S. into a global fight. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the U.S. formally entered World War II. The war changed many aspects of student life at the University. When the new president Umphrey Lee began in the fall of 1939, SMU was just recovering from the worst of the Depression. The Mustangs defeated the Texas Longhorns during homecoming 10 to 0. Twenty-three thousand fans cheered the Mustangs on. By the next fall, 406 faculty and students volunteered for the draft. By the end of WWII,
enrollment had dropped to only 1,500 students. But as the War ended, the future of the United States was looking bright.

After the GIs began to return from the field of battle, the American GI Bill provided them with the benefits needed to go to college. The GI Bill created the modern middle class in the United States. This was true for Dallas and the state of Texas. SMU's enrollment grew exponentially. While enrollment was only 1,500 students at the end of the war, by September 1945 it had grown to 6,500. Sixty percent of these new students were veterans. With the explosion of new students, the "country-club" image of SMU took a hit. In order to accommodate the new students, the University built a trailer park with 108 trailers for veterans and their families. One of the better changes of the war years was the addition of the first air-conditioned building in 1940, the Fondren Library (currently the DeGolyer Library). For many racial minorities in the U.S., victory abroad meant something more. Many Mexican-Americans, Asian-Americans, and African-Americans fought for a double victory at home and abroad—ensuring democracy in Europe and equality in the U.S. Racial minorities began making major headway during this time. Some managed to gain entry into racially-exclusive neighborhoods and others managed to gain entry into racially-exclusive universities. For Mexican-Americans in Texas, the fight for equality took many forms. In 1948, three years after the war ended, Mexican-American veterans formed the American GI Forum. Led by a doctor named Hector P. Garcia, the group fought for equal rights for Mexican-American citizens and veterans. The GI Forum often teamed up with another Mexican-American civil rights organization, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Both of these organizations were founded in Texas and were important in influencing politics and policy on a national scale. Most of their membership rolls were filled with returning veterans who chafed at the unfair and unjust treatment they were given in their own hometowns. They had marched off to war, believing they were fighting for the American dream. Many returned to a rude awakening.

The 1940s saw an explosion of Latina/o students at SMU. This was due to the economic affluence that World War II afforded the U.S. and the gains made by Mexican-Americans during the post-War era. In 1948 there were forty-two Latina/o students at SMU. They were undergraduate, graduate, theology, and law students. Eighteen of those students were from the Dallas area. There were two seniors: Mercedes Herrera, a piano major from Dallas, and Mrs. J. Neal Naranjo, an economics and geography major from Lufkin, Texas. Josue Gonzalez, a Fort Worth, Texas native who had recently graduated from SMU, was the first Latina/o professor at the university, serving as assistant professor of Spanish during the 1944-45 school year. In 1948, he enrolled in his first year at the Divinity School. Gonzalez was replaced by Sabas David Casas, who lectured in Spanish up into the 1950s. There had been other Spanish-surnamed teachers at SMU, such as Eduardo Carrera in the early 1920s and Felix Garcia in the early 1940s, but they did not hold the distinction of professor; instead, they were listed simply as instructors of Spanish.

Another instructor worth mentioning is Octavio Medellin who was a lecturer of art in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, he studied at the San Antonio School of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago and is known for his "vigorous interpretations of subjects reflecting the human struggle." After leaving SMU, Medellin
showed his work throughout the country and around the world, and he taught at the Dallas Museum School for twenty-one years before it closed in 1966. Soon thereafter, Medellin founded the Medellin School of Art at its original location in the Oak Cliff neighborhood of Dallas, which later became the Creative Arts Center of Dallas (CAC). He had many faithful students who stayed by his side and went on to become instructors at the CAC. Tomas Bustos, Dallas sculptor and artist, met Medellin in 1973 and recalls him dotingly stating: "I showed him my portfolio, and he liked my work. I became his apprentice for seven years, worked on his commissions, and taught children's classes [at the center]." Medellin received many awards and recognitions, and examples of his sculptures can be seen at the Dallas Museum of Art. Before he passed, he gave some of his catalogs, clipping files, correspondence, small examples of fused-glass experiments, photographs, and slides to SMU's Hamon Arts Library and to the Syracuse University Library.

The 1950s

During the 1950s the long US Civil Rights Movement began to grow in many directions. In Texas, many Mexican-American organizations and politicians made major inroads. Henry B. González became the first Mexican-American city council member in San Antonio, Texas in 1953. In 1956, he became the first Mexican-American Texas state senator. Raymond L. Telles was elected mayor of El Paso in 1957. He was the first Mexican-American mayor of a major US city in the twentieth century. Politicians like González and Telles believed in the slow and gradual change of liberal, and largely Democratic, electoral politics. They tried to make coalitions and platforms that combined the complaints of Mexican-Americans with the interests of Anglo-Americans. At times they were successful, but more often they were not. Inroads were made at SMU too. In 1951, the first African-American students were admitted into SMU through the Perkins School of Theology. Again, the Christian call for conversion overcame the need to maintain racial segregation. But, it would take another eleven years before the first African-American undergraduate would enroll at SMU in 1962.

John Nieto, an internationally-recognized contemporary painter and SMU alum, was born in New Mexico but raised in Texas. Nieto warmly remembers his time at SMU, from 1957 to 1959. Even though he felt detached from the already established sorority and fraternity culture on campus, he recollects his involvement with SMU's International Club, where he met many of his Iraqi friends. He explained of his college experience, "I was not Latino, I was just me." Still, Nieto acknowledges that there were not many Latinas and Latinos on campus. When he attempted to socialize with other Latinos off campus, Nieto found himself in the heart of Little Mexico, where he attended parties and dances. But, besides their ethnic roots, Nieto recalls that he had little in common with the girls from Little Mexico, who showed little interest in him.

This ability to straddle two worlds had its pros and cons. Paying his own way through college, Nieto experienced the relatively flexible racial position that some Latinas/os faced in the university setting. While African-Americans felt the harsh effects of a concrete color line, Nieto was able to escape it. While trying to navigate the social world of 1950s SMU, Nieto attained many traits that stayed with him later in life. He explains that SMU helped strengthen his moral character and his commitment to academic standards. John's brother, Leo, would follow him to SMU and become a preacher later in life. The Nietos' connection to the campus has
only strengthened with time. Recently, two of Nieto’s nephews graduated from SMU.

Despite the headway made by the post-War Mexican-American generation, the marks of inequality were easily visible. Mexican-Americans still suffered from discrimination, poor housing, poor education, and police harassment. On the SMU campus, they still comprised just a small fraction of the student body. A new generation of Mexican-American youth was tiring of the accommodationist and gradualist approach of their elders. These youth did not want to wait for the universities and the institutions to change. Instead, they wanted to change the universities and institutions. They began to call themselves Chicana and Chicano, which had previously been an insult used decades earlier but with the new adoption it became a term of affirmation and resistance. Across the nation, Chicana and Chicano youth began to force change on a national scale—the Chicano Movement was born.

The 1960s and 1970s

In Texas, the Chicano Movement had its critical mass in the rural areas of South Texas and in the urban areas of San Antonio, Austin, Houston, and Dallas. The Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), started in 1967, sent out organizers to help organize school walkouts all over the state. Chicanas/os walked out of public schools in Crystal City, Robstown, San Antonio, Abilene, Carrizo Springs, and many other Texas cities. While some organized a third party called La Raza Unida Party in the Winter Valley region of Texas, others created literary journals, community centers, and neighborhood associations.

On July 24, 1973, Dallas became the focus of the Chicano Movement in Texas. On that day, Roy Arnold, a local policeman, killed Santos Rodriguez in the back of his cruiser. Arnold forced Rodriguez, a child of only thirteen years old, to play a deadly game of Russian roulette. The police officer demanded that Rodriguez inform him of a robbery that he had been called to investigate. When Rodriguez could not answer, Arnold pulled the trigger, spun the cylinder, and shot again. The gun went off and killed Rodriguez.60

In the aftermath of Rodriguez’s murder, many Chicanas/o activists descended on Dallas. The Brown Berets attended the trial, but absent was LULAC. While this was the first nationally-publicized incident of the Chicano Movement in Dallas, the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano Movement had started to impact the city and SMU years earlier. In 1961, Adelfa B. Callejo became the first Mexican-American female to graduate from SMU’s Law School.61 She was the only Latino student enrolled in the law school at the time, and only one of three women.62 Callejo wanted to become a lawyer to help fight injustices in the world around her, recounting later in life that “a law degree with money is a powerful weapon” for change.63 She quickly learned important lessons in leadership by serving on many boards and commissions, such as those for the Dallas Housing Authority, DART, DFW Airport, and Dallas’ Library Board, that she was able to make a great difference within the community.64

Unfortunately, the early years of the Civil Rights Movement were relatively exclusive towards women. While some gains were made, women learned from their experiences in both the Chicano Movement and the Civil Rights Movement that gender inequality was as obstructive and unjust as
racism. When Callejo graduated SMU with her law degree, no firms offered her a job. After forming the Callejo and Callejo law firm with her husband William F. Callejo, also an SMU Law School alum, in 1966, she became the first Latina lawyer in Dallas, the second in the state of Texas, and the third Latino lawyer in Dallas. To this day, Callejo continues to fight for racial injustices in Dallas as a civil rights lawyer and a well-recognized and beloved community leader.

Change, while slow, continued at SMU. In 1965, the university had hired the first African-American professor, Dr. William S. Willis, in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. In March of 1966, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to an audience of SMU students at McFarlin Auditorium. That same year, African-American students were slowly integrated in North Dallas High School, but full integration would not occur in Dallas public schools until 1971. Chicano students, like René Martínez, were enrolled as early as 1965, but much change for Mexican-American students did not occur at SMU until the 1970s.

In 1971, Chicana and Chicano students formed a new group that broke from previous accommodationist groups; they called themselves the Chicano Association. Through the Minority Action Committee (MAC), they submitted a proposed budget for a Chicano Symposium to be held at the end of the 1971 fall semester, and for a Chicano Conference in the spring of 1972. The MAC was composed of Chicanos, African-Americans, and other minorities “working together to inform all students as well as faculty members...of their different cultures and heritages.” The budget proposal shows that they wanted to bring El Teatro Campesino (a Mexican-American theater company that was affiliated with the United Farm Workers Union and the Chicano Movement) and native Texan and Chicano activist, Jose Angel Gutierrez, for these events. Gutierrez had been instrumental in founding La Raza Unida Party (a Mexican-American third party), MAYO, and leading the Crystal City, Texas student walk-outs of 1969.

By 1972, the Chicano Association simplified its name to “Los Chicanos,” and the organization resumed its work in the fall of 1973, achieving campus recognition and $550 from the Student Senate for a leadership retreat. Members’ early requests mirror the demands that many students still make today: hire more Chicana/o faculty, appoint a full-time Chicana/o advisor, appoint a Chicana/o admissions counselor in the Office of Admissions, establish a Chicano Studies program, and provide comprehensive financial aid award packets for Chicana/o students. Los Chicanos, as an organization, wanted the university to be more sensitive to the issues surrounding their community, and they wanted the university to actively recruit more Chicana/o students to SMU.

The demands made by Los Chicanos were not completely met by SMU’s administration. In 1973, there were sixty-nine Chicana/o students on campus, up from five in 1970. Attempting to respond to their demands, the chancellor at the time, Willis Tate, said that “SMU needs to make the Chicano student and his needs attractive to the community so that
we can attract money to help these students come to SMU. In November of 1973, the administration released $10,000 to be distributed among graduating minority students to help pay student loans. However, the funds were woefully insufficient, and only five Chicana/o students were awarded some aid from the fund.

Not only interested in university policy and politics, Los Chicanos also brought to campus the acclaimed Chicano poet Nephtali de Leon in the fall of 1973. In the spring of 1974, Irma Cantu was appointed the full-time Advisor to Chicano Students. She served only one year before becoming the Assistant Director of Admissions. Felix Saucedo replaced Cantu in the position of Advisor to Chicano Students in the fall of 1974. During the 1974-75 school year, Los Chicanos continued their ambitious calendar of events and list of demands.

Los Chicanos brought many interesting groups and speakers to campus, as well. La Raza Unida Party’s gubernatorial candidate, Ramsey Muñiz came to campus and spoke to students. His wife, Addy Muñiz, spoke at a later event on “the feminist arm of the third party.” El Teatro Campesino performed “Los Vendidos” at SMU in November of 1974. The group was nationally and internationally recognized. Luis Valdez, the founder to the theater group, would go on to produce Broadway productions and blockbuster movies.

Even with the successes of Los Chicanos, in the spring of 1975 there was only one Chicano professor on campus, and he was in the School of Theology. In order to address these shortcomings, the university established the Chicano Studies Council. Through the efforts of the council and the students, new faculty members and administrators were brought to SMU. Dr. Josue Gonzalez was appointed to help establish Chicano Studies at the university. He was the first Chicano professor in the school of liberal arts.

Between 1973 and 1976, SMU alum René Martínez taught the course “Chicano Studies and the Nature of Man” as an adjunct professor. Martínez would also chair the Chicano Studies Council between 1977 and 1981.

The 1980s

In many cases, the 1980s were years of retrenchment. There was a conservative backlash against the progressive gains made during the Civil Rights Movement. The election of Ronald Reagan, the stagnation of the American industrial economy, and a reheated Cold War ushered in a new era of conservatism. Texas and SMU were able to take a national stage during the 1980s. While the Midwest acquired its “rust-belt” status, the Southwest economy grew. Texas’ economy thrived on cheap labor, oil, and new technologies. Many of the heads of these burgeoning industries were located in Dallas.

SMU gained notoriety in the 1980s with their winning football teams. The “Pony Express” could not be stopped in the Southwest Conference. With a primetime television series named after the city that captured the nation’s attention and imagination, it seemed that Dallas was doing well. While many things changed nationally and locally, Latinas/os at SMU managed to weather the storms of the New Right and the more conservative atmosphere. Many traded the forceful rhetoric of the Chicano Movement for the more acceptable language and pleasantries of the middle-
class. The Decade of the Hispanic was well under way across the nation and at SMU.

While the mass mobilization and militant rhetoric of the early Chicano Movement began to die down, the goals of the Chicano Movement continued to grow in many ways. For those who came in the wake of the Chicano Movement, the world was a much different place. For the students who came after the Chicano Movement, many mainstream avenues for participation were already opened to them. Los Chicanos changed their name to Mexican-American Student Association in 1981, representing a more mainstream ideological shift. The following year, in 1982, the group changed its name to CHAS, or the College Hispanic American Students. The group discussed the name change over several meetings. In the group’s minutes, they wrote that the group would “prefer to change [the name] to something that says ‘Hispanic’ as opposed to Mex[ican] Am[erican].” Other possible names were considered: Hispanic Student Association, Hispanic American Student Association, and College Hispanic American Students. In the end, CHAS won the election with five votes, while the other names only received a combined five votes.

The university moved in measured, although progressive, steps. SMU started a bilingual education program in the 1980s aimed at helping various students, but with Latinas/os in mind. In addition, a new position, the Hispanic Student Coordinator, was created in the mid 1980s. Irma Herrera was the first to fill this position (eventually, this position would become Coordinator for Hispanic Student Services, Coordinator of Latino Student Services, and, today, Coordinator of Multicultural Student Services). The University also established the Department of Intercultural Education and Minority Student Affairs in 1987 (in 2001, it became the Department of Multicultural Student Affairs).

This decade also witnessed the rising backlash against many gains made during the Chicano Movement and the Civil Rights era. Affirmative action programs became a target prompting legal cases and a strong reaction from the white community across the country. In 1982, SMU student James T. Robinson organized the Association of White Students and petitioned the Student Senate for approval; it won in a 32-4 vote. SMU President, L. Donald Shields, stated his opposition to the goals of the group but was “reluctant to reverse a decision made by the Student Senate.” SMU did not have a minority recruitment program then, nor did it offer race-based scholarships, but Robinson stated that he wanted “to ensure that the university does not begin adopting policies that benefit only minorities.”

In early 1988, SMU announced that it would begin offering the Dallas/Fort Worth community college transfer scholarship which guaranteed full tuition to ten selected students, “and half-tuition scholarships to all … students with at least a 3.5 grade point average in all transferable courses.” Minority enrollment at SMU began to steadily rise, and in 1989, they comprised fourteen percent of the entering freshman class, a ten percent increase from the year before. In 1987, there were only thirty-two “Hispanic” students at SMU, and by 1989, there were double that many entering as first-year students.

The 1990s and the 2000s

The 1990s saw the end of a half-century Cold War and the 2000s saw the beginning of a new war on terror that would define politics at home and abroad. On the SMU campus, Latina/o students continued to participate in the life of the university. They ventured into the strong Greek-life culture at SMU, but on their own terms. In 1995, Edna Aguilar formed a group called Women in Action with the help of nine other women, and began to form what would become the Sigma Lambda Gamma sorority. After meeting all the requirements for national and campus recognition, Sigma Lambda Gamma was an established chapter on the SMU
Two years later, in 1997, Omega Delta Phi fraternity started a chapter, as well.

During the 2000s, Latina/o students continued to participate in campus life. The students increased the number of Latina/o organizations on the SMU campus. This was a combination of the efforts of the students themselves and the new Coordinator for Hispanic Student Services, Fernando Salazar, who arrived in 2001 (the name of the position changed in 2009 to Coordinator of Latino Student Services, and again in 2011 to Coordinator of Multicultural Student Services). Salazar helped organize the SMU students' energies and worked to encourage their efforts. In 2001, eleven women, who called themselves the "Phenomenal Eleven," decided that SMU needed a new group. Karla Bucio, the founding president, and the other women worked hard and brought a chapter of the Kappa Delta Chi sorority to the university. Similarly in 2008, a group of young Latino men felt the need for another group on campus. Erik Burgos, Alan Perez, and Ruben Garcia sought an organization that represented Latinos in the Greek system. With the help of Salazar, these young men brought Sigma Lambda Beta to the campus in 2009.

Greek life was not the only way that Latinas/os participated in campus life. Latina/o students organized themselves in areas of professional and social interest, as well. In 2005, the combined efforts of Salazar and other students brought the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers to SMU. The same year, another Latino professional organization came to the university, the Association of Latino Professional Finance & Accounting. Prior to the establishment of these organizations on campus—and, as is evidenced in the Rotunda yearbooks—Latina/o students had been welcome to join existing Greek and professional societies since the early years of the university.

The most recent Latino student organizations at SMU were founded in 2008. The Destino Movement, a religious organization with a Latino focus, seemed fit for a university with a Methodist background. Lastly, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) established a student chapter on campus. However, this was not without controversy. Conservative SMU students reacted harshly to the possibility of LULAC on campus. Some hinted that LULAC was a domestic terrorist organization, while claiming that LULAC and MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) were separatist, racist organizations. This seemed laughable considering the long, moderate history that LULAC had in Texas, and the ardent views aimed at social justice of MEChA. Mechistas and LULACers hardly saw eye-to-eye in previous years. Despite arguments against the venerable organization, LULAC established a chapter on campus to serve and promote equality and justice for all citizens in 2008.

Today, in 2011, the SMU student population has reached 10,982. Latinas/os now comprise 9.4 percent of the student body, or a total of 1,032 students. This is a far cry from 1915, when there were only two Latina/o students enrolled. Indeed, SMU has come a long way from even a just few decades ago, when Los Chicanos demanded more recruiting. Today, the university is making a
greater effort at recruiting Latina/o students, but is still falling short. Many of the battles that previous Latina/o students fought, whether it was Los Chicanos, CHAS, or LULAC, today's students are still fighting. With that being said, many Latina/o SMU graduates are succeeding. The skills and knowledge they have acquired here, as well as the mentorship they have received, has prepared them to compete in the economy and make a difference. SMU has come a long way, but still has a long way to go.

The Second Century of Latinas and Latinos at SMU

In the one hundred years since SMU opened its doors the university has witnessed dramatic changes and changed lives. A university is a unique institution. It can be a hindrance to change, as many lifeless establishments are, or it can help make change, as a community of diverse people brought together is apt to do. The campus on a hilltop has watched the city, state, and nation grow and transform, just as it watched the students who passed through its doors grow and transform. Indeed, many of those students were the force behind the changes in our world. Looking back at one hundred years of SMU history, we must ask ourselves what SMU has stood for and what it will stand for in the future. The Latina and Latino history of SMU speaks to the future but only so much as we are willing to listen. In an era of transitioning demographics and linguistic shifts, of transnational Diasporas and disconnected citizens, our history offers answers. The face of America is changing; will SMU reflect this? If we continue to be under-represented at SMU, SMU will no longer be able to represent its bigger goals. We are the second century of SMU.
Notes

1 About SMU, "Campus Profile," Southern Methodist University (http://www.smu.edu/AboutSMU/Facts/Campus%20Profile.aspx), accessed October 12, 2011.


3 Terry, High on the Hilltop, 18.


5 The phrase “ethnic Mexican” is used by scholars to refer to Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants residing in the U.S when talking about them together as one group.


8 Fifteenth Census, 35.


12 Villasana, Dallas’s Little Mexico, 7.

13 SMU Rotunda (1917), 122; SMU Course Catalogs (1916-1919), unpaginated.

14 SMU Course Catalogs.

15 SMU Course Catalogs.


22 Terry, High on the Hilltop, 31.

23 Ibid, 33.


26 SMU Course Catalog 1932-33, 227.

27 SMU Course Catalog 1932-33, 229.

28 SMU Course Catalog 1937-38, 245, 251.

29 SMU Course Catalogs.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Terry, High on the Hilltop, 37.


36 Ibid, 37.

37 Ibid, 37.

38 Ibid, 37.

39 Ibid, 38.


41 Rotunda (1948).

42 Rotunda (1948).

43 Rotunda (1948).

44 SMU Course Catalog 1947-48, Pt VII, 44.

45 SMU Course Catalogs.

46 SMU Course Catalogs.


49 Tomas Bustos, interview by Ruben Arellano, Dallas, TX, October 2, 2011.

50 Bustos, interview.


52 Martin Donell Kohout, "GONZALEZ, HENRY BARBOSA," Handbook of Texas Online
“Henry B. Gonzalez.”
Gosnell, “University Milestones,” 143.
Ibid, 144.
Nieto, interview.
John Nieto, interview by Ruben Arellano and Nyddia Hannah, Dallas, TX, July 18, 2011.
Adelfa B. Callejo, interview by Nyddia Hannah, Dallas, TX, October 12, 2011.
Callejo, interview.
Ibid.
Ibid.
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Casswell, “40 Years,” 106.
Rene Martinez, interview by Nyddia Hannah, Dallas, TX, September 20, 2011.
Martinez, interview.
Chicano Association, Proposed Program Budget 1971.
Carroll, “Los Chicanos.”
List of Images

1. SMU Rotunda yearbook 1917. Caption reads: “Senor y Senorita Rodriguez, y Senor Santiago Gomez. These are the representatives in Southern Methodist University, from Mexico.”
2. SMU Rotunda yearbook 1927, Oscar Machado da Silva, 40.
3. SMU Rotunda yearbook 1931, Francisco Aedo Cruz, 63.
4. SMU Rotunda yearbook 1931, Felix Hilario Garcia, 63.
5. SMU Rotunda yearbook 1936, Aurora Rodriguez, 80.
10. “Los Chicanos” records, The Daily Campus, Office of Multicultural Affairs, SMU, 1975. Caption reads: “Los Chicanos discuss university priorities at the first Big Birds meeting of the semester. At these meetings held in the Student Center, students can talk informally with administrators and student leaders.”