

(H)OLAA

OBERLIN LATINO

Alumni Association Newsletter



Spring 2013 • Volume 5, Issue 1

SALUDOS FROM THE CHAIR

By José W. Meléndez '01

SALUDOS A TODOS. I hope this fifth edition of the (H)OLAA newsletter finds you well. The college has had an eventful year, with the public kickoff of the Oberlin Illuminate Campaign and the bias events that occurred on campus early in the spring semester. In this newsletter, we will try and provide you with a micro-view of how our work this past year has been meaningful in light of the greater attention-grabbing events on campus.

One of the pieces you will read was written by Oberlin alumnae sisters Jeannette and Miriam Velez. The Velez sisters were instilled with the values of *familia* building by their mami. Jeanette, an OLAA board member, approached her oldest sister, Doña Olguita, to ask if they could share their Thanksgiving dinner with current Latino students. As you will read, this event emerged from multiple histories, from the Velez sisters' upbringing, to the siblings' shared experience at Oberlin in the 1970s, to our OLAA board meeting in September 2012. During some community-building events on campus, we made it a point to offer students who could not go home for the holidays a place to be with friends and *familia*. I am grateful to the Velez sisters for sharing the spirit that guides them and for opening their home to students.

I was fortunate enough to again open my own home to students during this past winter term. My partner and I provided a safe, free room to a student who was interning at United States Gypsum in Chicago, and I offered another student a research assistant internship to help me with my dissertation work. In addition, Cindy Camacho '11, to whom we provided housing for three months after her graduation while she found a job and a place to live in Chicago, orchestrated a tamales-making party at our home during winter term. We hosted nine Obies—three students and six alumni—with other friends and family as we communally made “masa” (corn dough) and then enjoyed a great meal together.

The call for our extended *familia* of Latino alumni to stay connected is ever so important. As OLAA board member Francisco Dominguez reminds us, it is important to stay up-to-date with events on campus. This connectivity prevents us



Friends and family members at the 2012 Latino/a graduate and family reception and dinner.

from being left in the dark when intimidating and other events happen on campus. Whether it is receiving updates from the administration or connecting with current students to get their perspective, staying linked to fellow Latino alumni and students keeps our community relevant. For me, it highlights the need to open our homes to current students for a meal, free housing, a job, an internship, or a place to crash when they are attending a conference or concert in our area. It also makes it that much more critical for alumni to return to campus to share their expertise and their vision of what's possible with an Oberlin degree.

The transformative experience of an Oberlin College education is on full display when I read about our *Beca* scholarship recipients. We can see the continued growth and maturity of Brenda Alvarez and Robert Cornell, both of the Class of 2015, as they take advantage of an Oberlin education; both were selected for the scholarship for two consecutive years. This, of course, would not have been possible without the generosity of OLAA alumni who give to *La Beca*.

Alumni generosity also makes possible our many community-building events on campus. OLAA co-sponsors various such events with our vital partners at the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC). In this issue, our newest board member, Maria Victoria Albina, profiles Jesus Gomez, the Latino community

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR, cont.

coordinator and our liaison at the MRC. Among the events we co-sponsor is the Latino Student Commencement Ceremony/ Dinner, which is captured well in the picture included in this issue. This special event provides OLAA an opportunity to celebrate the next generation of graduates, providing them with certificates welcoming them to our alumni *familia*. Those of you who give to the operating budget make this possible. Our greater work would not be achievable without a sustainable budget that allows us to stay active while working to improve the relationships between alumni and Latino students, the faculty, staff, and administration.

Finally, OLAA has worked to move our board members into key Alumni Association committees, as it is vital for our voices as Latino alumni to be at the table where decisions are made. We celebrate OLAA board member Elio Trabal's assignment to the Nominations Committee; we all hope that distinguished, accomplished, and humble Latino alumni will be recognized not only by us, but by the Alumni Association as well. It is in this vein that we profile Lorri Olan '87 in this newsletter. Lorri has been a critical voice on the Alumni Association and she was with me at the very beginning, when we were resuscitating OLAA. Lorri was always willing to help and to advocate for the development of a stable and formidable OLAA to be an essential part of the greater alumni *familia*. Lorri stepped down from



José W. Melendez '01, Esmeralda Martinez, Raquel Olivo '99, and Elio Trabal '04 in front of the Feve during Alumni Council Weekend 2012.

the board this past year, so we wish her the best in her future endeavors and simply say *gracias!*

As I start my final year as OLAA Chair, I know that the coming year will be filled with strategic planning to ensure that OLAA continues forward, strengthening while broadening our reach. Our continued growth will only be possible by those of you who give, participate, stay active, or remind an alum who has been out of touch for a while that it is time for them to re-engage. To you I simply say *gracias!*

LA ESENCIA DE LA FAMILIA

by *las hermanas* Miriam Velez '77 and Jeanette Velez '80

FAMILY IS IMPORTANT—not only the one you were born into—but also the one you make along the way. Our parents, who were community leaders in the Lorain, Ohio, area in the 1950s, frequently opened our home to



Back row, L to R: José W. Melendez '01, Cindy Camacho '11, Anne Wildman '11. Middle Row: Christopher Chu '11, Epiphany Acevedo '11. Bottom Row: Max Haight '15, Karlyn Gehring '15, Leann Dameron '10, Zin Linn Hiet '13.

relatives, newcomers, and strangers. In those days we trusted and offered assistance to anyone, without judgment. Oftentimes we hosted individuals or families who were in need of a hot meal, a bath, or a place to stay for the night. It was not unusual for us to come home from school to find strangers eating in the dining room, sleeping on the couch, or temporarily living with us—for whatever reason. We were not wealthy, but we always had enough food to share, clothing to donate, and a place for someone in need to rest. This was the norm at our house. Our Latino community was important, and welcoming strangers into our home was merely our opportunity to make new *familia*.

We brought this community connection to Oberlin with us, but first,

a quick flashback. *Las hermanas* Velez had exceptionally unique academic opportunities. We were each awarded a scholarship to Oberlin College in the 1970s and, at one point, lived on campus together, giving us the distinction of being one of the first latina siblings to attend Oberlin. (Other siblings of our era were the Romeros, the Araizas, the Oregos, and the Delgados.) We supported each other and were fortunate to cultivate the same sense of community among our mutual friends, who rapidly became our extended Oberlin *familia*. At that time, the Latino/a population of Obies numbered about 20, so we fast became a close-knit group. We spent a lot of time together, and, like many *familias*, we ate together, stayed up all

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LA ESENCIA DE LA FAMILIA, cont.

night studying, travelled together, and even argued every now and then. We cared about each other, so it was only natural to make sure our friends had a place to go during the holidays if they could not make it home. Thanksgiving was always the first holiday of the year, so we would often call our Mami to ask if we could bring our friends; she always said, "Yes!" So we would load the car and take the 20-minute drive down Oberlin Road to Lorain. Our guests were always hungry and eager to get treated to a Thanksgiving meal, a la *Puertorriqueña*. After that, we often called Mami, who would cook up some *arroz con gandules* and *empanadas* or *arroz con pollo*. She loved to cook, and we were always welcome. In subsequent years, she expected us to show up with a carload of hungry Obies for Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner.

Thirty-five years have passed and, unfortunately, Mami is no longer with

us, but she would be beaming with pride to know that the Velez family continues to welcome students and friends for the holidays. This year, Jeannette contacted Robert Palacios and Stephanie Mora, co-chairs of La Alianza, to inquire about any Latino/a students who could not make it home for Thanksgiving. The now matriarch of the family, our oldest sister, Doña Olguita, was more than happy to host our new Obie friends. Five students joined our 30 family members and enjoyed a traditional Puerto Rican Thanksgiving feast. The students were also able to connect and share stories with another Obie, Milena Evtimova Velez '07 (married to our nephew, Joel), who loved her student life experience. As a result, we engaged in lively conversations about the conservatory of music, campus life, interesting professors, challenging courses, and the general essence of Oberlin's culture. It was truly a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Hosting the students reminded us of the importance of our responsibility to continue building community and how imperative it is to support and encourage our Latino/a Obies. By sharing our stories and opening our homes to them, we can encourage them to persevere, stay strong, and focus on their educational endeavors. With Lorain, Cleveland, Toledo, and Youngstown being a short distance from Oberlin, there are many Latino/a alumni who can sponsor, mentor, or advise current students. OLAA would like to invite our Latino/a alumni to extend a hand and re-engage with current students. OLAA also encourages alumni to visit the Oberlin campus to spend time with Latino/a students whom you might then want to invite to your homes to share your *Día de Gracias* or *Navidad* in 2013.

AWARDS COMMITTEE 2013

by Elio Trabal '04, Treasurer

BEING SELECTED TO serve on the Oberlin Alumni Association's Awards Committee is exciting for me, because I'm learning a lot about the inner workings of the college. This committee is the entity behind the selection of award recipients handed by the college to notable alumni, awards such as the Distinguished Achievement Award, Distinguished Service Award, Outstanding Young Alumni Award, among others.

We are always interested to hear about our fellow alumni and their dedication to Oberlin and their accomplishments, and I'm personally interested in raising the profile of Latino/a alumni by bringing more recognition to our constituents. To help us with this mission, please fill out the nomination form attached to this newsletter or submit your nomination online by going to the following page and click on "Alumni Awards" on the left frame of the page: <http://new.oberlin.edu/office/alumni>. You don't have to be close friends with alumni you'd like to nominate! If you've heard of alumni who are doing great things, please let us know.



Third World House Mural 2012, 30th Year Anniversary, designed by Maria del Pilar O'Cadiz '80 and her father, Sergio O'Cadiz.

Recent recipients of alumni awards include:

- Alumni Medal: Daniel J. Gardner '89
- Distinguished Achievement Award: Nan Aron '70 and Moses G. Hogan '79 (posthumous)
- Distinguished Service Award: Laura E. Stachel '80
- Outstanding Young Alumni Award: Matthew A. Kaplan '07
- Alumni Appreciation Award: Gideon Y. Schein '68
- Volunteer of the Year Awards: Elana Gartner Golden '98, class representative of the year; Mel Maisel '93 and Patty Stubel '09, admissions coordinators; Asheley Smith '03, class agent, Rebecca Witheridge '10, regional coordinator.

Thank you for your support. We look forward to your award nomination submissions!

JESUS GOMEZ JOINS THE OBERLIN LATINO COMMUNITY

by María Victoria Albina '01

JESUS GOMEZ, a 2012 graduate of Denison University, is the new Latino/a community coordinator at the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) at Oberlin. We sat down with Jesus to learn about where he's from and the work he's doing.

Born and raised in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood, Jesus's *familia* hails from El Salvador and Mexico. A scholar of the nonprofit student-support organization HighSight, Jesus received a scholarship to a private high school, where he was part of the Student Organization of Latinos and the National Honor Society and was a varsity athlete in soccer and volleyball. As part of his work with HighSight, he traveled to Paraguay for a summer, connecting with his Latino roots and learning to be independent.

Jesus was awarded a four-year full scholarship to Denison, majoring in history with a concentration in Latin American and Caribbean studies. From his first week in college, he worked in the Multi-Cultural Student Affairs Office (MCSA) in the Center for Cross Cultural Engagement, home also to International Student Services. He worked his way from sorting mail to becoming an important part of student services for students of color. In addition to his work at MCSA, Jesus has worked as a community organizer in Chicago with the Alliance of the Southeast, organizing Latina/o communities on the south side.

In speaking of his transition to Oberlin College, Jesus speaks with gratitude about this "great opportunity...working with the Latina/o community." As a member of the MRC staff, Jesus is a liaison between the associate dean/director, students, the MRC, and other campus and local communities, including other communities of color and LGBTQ students. He has supported students as they coordinate activities such the Latina/o Heritage

Month and Immigration Action Now Week, and he is currently planning a retreat and a Latino/a film festival. He also plays a vital role in organizing two important programming series, the *Indigenous Women Series* and *My Name is My Own*. His office recently brought poet Yalini Dream and MC Jendog Lonewolf to campus as part of these series. "I was glad that we had a successful Latina/o Heritage Month in September/October. It was hard work but the students rose up to the challenge," says Jesus.

Discussing the role that Latina/o alumni can play on campus and with students today, Jesus says, "We are always looking for alumni support and appreciate the alumni who come and talk with our students. It means a lot to students and gives them a sense of pride that other Latino/as have made it outside of Oberlin College. We always want to know more about what alumni are doing outside of Oberlin. Please recommend literature/speakers/artists/musicians/scholars whom we can bring to Oberlin College."

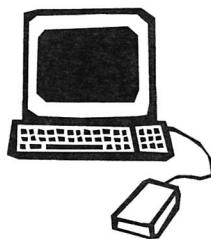
Gracias, Jesus, for your hard work on behalf of our *comunidad!*



Jesus Gomez '12

DON'T MISS OUT!

In an effort to curb print, postage, and environmental costs college-wide, Oberlin is moving several of its print publications online. Please make sure that the college has your email address, so that you don't miss out on newsletters, invitations to alumni regional events, and more. You can update your e-mail address (and other information) via OBIEWeb at new.oberlin.edu/office/alumni. Go to the MyOBIEweb box and click on "register to access the community" (it's free). Please direct questions to alumni@oberlin.edu or call the Alumni Association at (440) 775-8692.



Jesus Gomez, MRC Latino/a community coordinator, with Latina/o students and others.

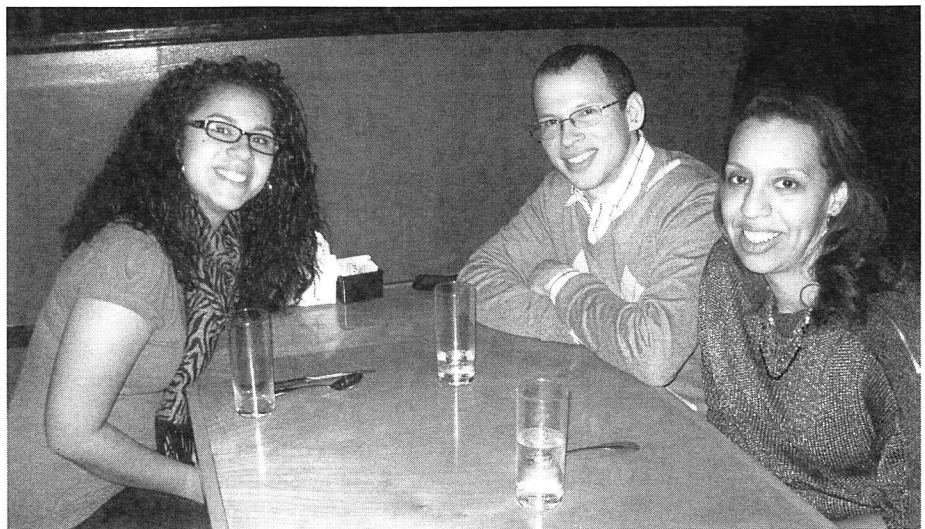
LA BECA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS REVISITED

by Raquel Olivo '99 and Elio Trabal '04

HELLO EVERYONE! Oberlin sophomores Brenda Alvarez and Robert Cornell were awarded our La Beca scholarships again this year, so we decided to get their perspectives on how much or little has changed in the past year. We are happy to report that both Obies are well adjusted, are into a myriad of activities, and have accomplished more in a year and-a-half at Oberlin than many of us care to admit.

Over this past winter term, Brenda participated in Accion Callejera, a nonprofit in Santiago, Dominican Republic, dedicated to addressing the needs of low-income citizens. The organization's law department helps Haitians and Dominicans get citizenship. Other sections help with emotional therapy and run a free clinic. Brenda worked in the education department, which offers formal and informal classes. She assisted the main teacher by tutoring students and helping students who needed homework assistance.

When not attending classes or studying, Brenda is a tutor to three young girls. She applied for a summer



Brenda Alvarez '15, Elio Trabal '04, and Raquel Olivo '99.

fellowship at YP4, a strategic long-term leadership development program that identifies, engages, and empowers a new generation of progressive leaders to create lasting change in their communities. Brenda is still considering majors but is considering anthropology. Whichever she chooses, we can tell she is a trailblazer in the making.

Robert Cornell is our other scholarship recipient, and it was a pleasure to witness his growth and maturity during our recent visit. Robert not only impressed us with his academic successes but with his extracurricular activities. He told us that he has nearly completed his religion major and is considering adding on a history major! To round off his studies, he took a Stand-Up Comedy Exco because he was interested in developing his presentation skills. This makes sense: Robert has a movie soundtrack radio show on WOBC radio. Tune in on Wednesday mornings at 9 a.m. to listen! Also, if you know of any radio stations in El Paso or Houston, Texas, that are looking for summer interns, please shoot him an e-mail!

If you don't find Robert in the radio station or at his co-op making pizzas on Fridays, then you might find him outside Mudd Library, where he sets up a chess table for fellow students to come and play him. He might even join the newly chartered chess club, if the club's president's ego isn't too bruised from Robert beating him in a recent match.

Hasta la proxima-abrazos!



Raquel Olivo '99 and Robert Cornell '15

TREASURER'S REPORT 2013

AFTER THREE YEARS of fundraising for our beloved scholarship, affectionately known as “La Beca,” we are now in the last few months of our annual fundraising campaign to fund La Beca for the next school year. This scholarship helps fund the education of two Latino/a students and has been distributed for two consecutive years.

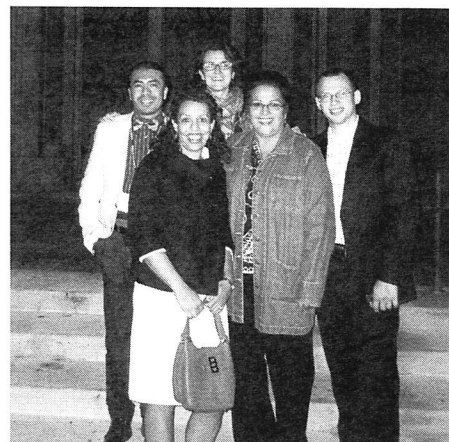
When La Beca was first created, OLAA agreed to fundraise for three years, setting a modest goal of \$5,000 each year. We are now in the final months of our last fundraising campaign for La Beca’s final year of distribution. We are currently halfway to our goal and need your help to finish its three-year run in great cheer.

At this point, you might be wondering where you can continue your philanthropic efforts to help Latino/a students at Oberlin, and we are glad you asked! We have been in talks with the college to begin planning an endowed

scholarship to establish the legacy of Latino/a alumni at the college. Most other minority groups already have this, and we have enough alumni graduates to help achieve this next goal.

Please join our Facebook page to stay updated on developments in this effort! Simply search for Oberlin Latino/a Alumni Association and add us to your page!

La Beca is a matter of pride for all Oberlin Latino/a alumni, and so it is very important that you help us establish our legacy as an active Latino/a community at Oberlin. We are a community that is proud to show our unity, our collective success, and our support to current students who face the same financial challenges we all faced as students in Oberlin. Our learning experiences were invaluable, but we want to make it a little easier for Latinos/as who are fortunate enough to extend their intellectual



José W. Melendez '01, María Victoria Albina '01, Elio Trabal '04, Raquel Olivo '99, and Jeanette Velez '80 on the steps of Finney Chapel during Alumni Council Weekend 2012.

and regional reach beyond their local communities to attend Oberlin.

Sincerely,
Elio Trabal '04
Treasurer

STAY CONNECTED

by Francisco X. Dominguez, '89

AS PART OF OUR efforts to grow OLAA and to make it easier for Latina/o Alumni to reconnect with alumni, students, faculty, and the institution itself, we created an OLAA Facebook group in 2008. The group is open to Latina/o alumni, students, faculty, and staff. We currently have 141 members.

If you have a Facebook account just search for “Oberlin Latino/a Alumni Association (OLAA).” If you have trouble finding us, you can always contact me at brownbuffalo@world.oberlin.edu (my permanent forwarding e-mail address, courtesy of Oberlin).

Our Facebook Group page provides an easy, fast and inexpensive way for OLAA to provide you with information, and for you to update the Oberlin Latino diaspora on news, events, issues of interest, and opportunities. It is also a fantastic way to re-connect with beloved friends from the past and to become a resource and mentor for younger alumni and students.

As you might be aware, recent bias attacks on campus received national attention, including coverage in *The New York Times*, *CBS News*, *Slate*, *Huffingtonpost.com*, and a variety of

other media and online sites. Through our OLAA Facebook group page, many of us were able to monitor the response from the administration and the students. This also allowed us an opportunity to hear directly from students on campus.

Finally, remember to go to www.oberlin.edu and follow the “Alumni” link to register and provide your updated information. Even if you are not ready to re-engage with the Oberlin community at this moment, it is important that you provide this information so that we do not lose track of you.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Ishmael Beah '04 and Francisco X. Dominguez '89

ALUMNI PROFILE: Lorriann Olan '87

by Francisco X. Dominguez '89

ONE OF THE GREAT joys of working with OLAA is having the opportunity to get to know alumni from different generations and getting to reconnect and catch up with dear friends. The latter is why I am particularly excited to offer this alumni profile of Lorriann Olan.

As one of my “big siblings” at Oberlin, Lorri provided guidance through example. I was a wide-eyed, overwhelmed, out-of-place kid from the U.S.-Mexico border who was reassured by Lorri’s example that I might just make it at Oberlin. Whatever struggles this confident Puerto Rican sister from New York may have had as a student, all I ever saw was someone who worked hard, had a plan, and, as we used to say back in the day, had it going on.

Lorri graduated from the High School of the Performing Arts in New York in 1983. (Yes, the high school on which the movie and television show *Fame* were based.) At Oberlin, she was active in a variety of activities involving her artistic and athletic talents (volleyball and track), as well as her commitment to social justice issues; she was a member of La Union de Estudiantes Latinos and Third World Coalition Council. She also held jobs at Oberlin, serving as a peer mentor, an RC, an intern in career services, and a lunchtime salad prep worker at South Hall.

After Oberlin, Lorri worked as a litigation legal assistant at a big firm in New York City before heading to Boston to attend Northeastern University School of Law. She graduated from law school in 1992 and worked as an executive director of Project Horizon, which focused on domestic violence and sexual abuse prevention in rural Virginia. Lorri then served as a law clerk for more than eight years at the Court of Appeals of Virginia.

In August 2007, after a year’s sabbatical in Florence, Italy (a perk of life with an academic), Lorri



Lorri Olan '87 and Liz Covarrubias at the 2012 Latino/a graduate and family reception and dinner.

began working at Washington and Lee University School of Law and is currently the director of law career planning and professional development.

Lorri is married to George Bent '85, and together they are raising three remarkable “children”—Miles, Catalena and Liam—in Lexington, Virginia.

In addition to the rigors and demands of her professional and personal life, Lorri has remained engaged with Oberlin College through her involvement as class trustee (1987-1990), class president, serving on the executive board of the Oberlin Alumni Association, chair of the Career Services Advisory Committee, and, until recently, on the executive board of OLAA. Her commitment to OLAA includes her financial support of *La Beca*, for which the OLAA executive board is deeply grateful.

Lorri was instrumental in our efforts to get OLAA up and running in 2008. Through her prior work with the Alumni Association, she was able

to provide invaluable guidance and networking opportunities that greatly contributed to OLAA becoming a vibrant and stable organization and having a seat on the Alumni Association’s executive board.

Lorri, we miss you, but we know that you are always an e-mail or phone call away from providing assistance!

DON'T MISS OUT!

You can find OLAA
on Facebook and
join our group to
stay connected.



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