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Preparing Hispanic Media Professionals

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Preparing Students to Work in Hispanic Media

By Marilyn Gilroy

Many colleges try to find ways to help their students stand out in a crowded job market. But communications majors at California State University Fullerton (CSUF) are getting an edge that is leading them to new career paths, especially in Hispanic media. Last fall, the university launched the Latino Communications Initiative (LCI) to develop and maintain an industry-ready, qualified workforce by offering courses and certificate programs in Latino-oriented communication studies.

When college officials looked for a leader for the program, they recruited a heavy-hitter, **Inez González**, who for many years was executive vice president for the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC), a nonpartisan, nonprofit, media advocacy and civil rights organization. She jumped at the chance to direct the initiative.

"I realized that this is a calling for me," said González.

At NHMC, she developed an expertise in media policy and established national alliances within the media and entertainment industries. For the past year, she has been using her talents and contacts to build the initiative into a first-rate training and networking program for students.

"My job is bringing together the talent that we have at Cal State Fullerton with the industry that is looking for them," she said. "Cal State Fullerton is already a leader in graduating the most Latinos in communications. And it's not just the numbers, but it's the quality of the education."

CSUF has an impressive track record in Latino higher education. In addition to its number one rank-



Inez González, Latino Communications Initiative, California State University Fullerton

ing in Latino communications graduates, the Fullerton campus is the largest in the California State University system with 38,000 students. It is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, with a 35 percent Latino population and 54 percent first-generation college student population. CSUF has ranked first in California and fourth in the nation among top colleges and universities awarding bachelor's degrees to Hispanics.

Connecting with the Latino Media Market

Students in the LCI program are able to build their skills and resumes by taking courses that train them as Spanish-bilingual communications majors. As González points out, it is the right program at the right time. "It is as if the "stars have aligned," she says. "Media and entertainment industry leaders are trying to connect with a Latino market that represents \$1.3 trillion in purchasing power. They are looking for communications professionals who are bilingual or who understand the Latino market."

Many of the CSUF students have learned Spanish at home, says González, and they now need to improve their language skills so they have strong bilingual capabilities.

To this end, students can take advantage of a curriculum that is multi-faced and cross disciplinary. Thanks to a partnership between CSUF's College of Communications and the department of modern languages and literatures, students can enroll in "Spanish for International Business," which emphasizes writing for Hispanic media. Last year the class was taught by Elias Weinstock, executive vice president and chief creative officer at the advertising firm, Casanova Pendrill. Weinstock said the industry needs talent to help marketers communicate with this expanding market.

"The immediate need now is to communicate the way students do, which is a blend of Spanish and

English," Weinstock explained. "It's about understanding the culture rather than about speaking perfect Spanish. I want to give them [students] a real-life perspective of our market."

As a principal of one of the nation's leading Hispanic ad agencies, Weinstock says the course gives students the full perspective of the Hispanic media industry and exposes them to opportunities they may not have considered.

"I aim to teach students how to think differently within the Hispanic culture – how to come up with new ideas, new ways of writing and communicating with the consumers through different media."

Tammy Tripp, a '14 graduate who was a double major in communications-advertising and radio-TV-film took the course, although she had concerns that she would not fit in. But she enjoyed the class and found a career.

"The class showed me that I can excel as a copywriter, and it made me aware of the potential career opportunities in advertising and media for the Hispanic market," said Tripp. "I felt like I was born for this."

When Casanova Pendrill offered Tripp an internship during her studies, she grabbed the opportunity – and landed right in the thick of things.

"I was thrown into the water so fast, but that's the best way to learn," she said. "I've learned how to conduct myself within an agency setting. I understand the process more clearly because I've been involved in so many aspects of the creative process



– from brainstorming to client presentations.”

The passion and the quality of her work so impressed Weinstock that Tripp landed a full-time position as a copywriter at Casanova Pendrill which she started this fall.

Expanding Curriculum and Partnerships

Because the interdepartmental course collaborations at CSUF have been so successful, González has been exploring other possibilities to expand offerings. She has been developing plans for two certificate programs that will emphasize cultural competency in Latino communications issues. A Spanish-language certificate program will offer four communications courses for students who want to improve their fluency. A second certificate program, offered in English, will be launched at a later date. Both certificate programs will include internships with Univision, Telemundo and others area media providers.

Input from Latino leaders in the media, entertainment and marketing industry has been a key to developing the initiative's certificate programs and overall direction. González has worked to recommend experienced professionals to teach along with the full-time communications faculty. For example, the vice president of Telemundo is teaching a course this fall.

“Here is a person who is an experienced practitioner and has worked in different parts of the world,” said González. “He is a great professional contact for our students who are often first-generation and do not come from homes where families are connected to these types of individuals.”

One of the pillars of the LCI program is the internship. González is constantly mining her contacts in the industry for paid, meaningful internships.

“Most of our students are low-income and paying for college while they work,” she said. “They really cannot afford to take unpaid internships.”

González has been very successful in developing partnerships within the Hispanic media community. Her students recently worked at Hispanicize, one of the largest Latino communications conferences in the nation.

“Hispanicize selected Cal State Fullerton as their West Coast campus partner,” says González, noting that five CSUF students were chosen to intern with Hispanicize and were involved with organizing and planning the 2014 Hispanicize conference. “This was an incredible opportunity for the students, not only for the experience they gained, but for their

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Inez González, director, CSUF Latino

Communications Initiative

exposure to industry professionals who attended the event.”

At the conference, results of the initiative's first research project, another partnership that included Hispanicize Wire as well as the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and Florida International University, were released. The research involved a national survey to explore Hispanic journalists' beliefs about their profession and the use of social media and technology.

The study revealed that 59 percent of Latino journalists believed social media was having a positive impact on careers despite the challenges media organizations were facing to adapt technologically. Many Latino journalists are entrepreneurial and have their own blogs.

González says she is constantly aware of the need to train a new generation of journalists.

“The Latino population is the top user of mobile phones so we know that social media is a very important part of Latino journalism's future,” she said. “This survey clearly identified opportunities for additional training that will help Latino journalists speed the adaptation to multiplatform newsrooms.”[Ⓜ]