

To: Texas Public University Presidents and Chancellor

March 9, 2015

Re: Funding for Mexican American Studies in higher education

Dear University Presidents and Chancellors of Texas' public universities:

The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco is the Texas Regional Organization of NACCS. Established in 1972, NACCS is the professional organization of the academic field of Chicana/o, Mexican American Studies throughout the United States. The membership is comprised of ladder rank faculty in academic programs, departments and research centers whose scholarship and academic focus embody issues pertaining to Mexican Americans, Chicana/os, and Latina/os.

At our annual conference in Houston, Texas on February 26-28, 2015, our members unanimously passed a resolution in support of the Senate Hispanic Caucus and Mexican American Legislative Caucus Latina/o Education Task Force's "Latina/o K-12 and Higher Education Policy Agenda in Texas." As an organization deeply committed to the education and academic success of Latina/os, we applaud the Senate Hispanic Caucus and Mexican American Legislative Caucus and Task Force Co-chairs for their thorough report that has identified major issues and needs of Latina/o students in public schools and institutions of higher education.

Among the many important recommendations made by the Task Force we signal and concur with the need for culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy; curriculum that inspires a positive self-identity, and curriculum and textbooks that acknowledge underrepresented groups (p. 16). In other words, there is the need to implement Mexican American and Latina/o Studies from K-16, which, according to numerous studies, has a positive impact on the academic success of Mexican American/Chicana/o/Latina/o students.

Accordingly, NACCS Tejas highlights one particular recommendation in the Task Force Policy Agenda that is of great urgency and long overdue specifically, the funding and expansion of Mexican American/Latina/o Studies programs in Texas universities and colleges. The Task Force recommends the following:

- Funding support for Mexican American Studies Centers, Programs, and Departments must be a priority. (p. 27)
- The State must invest in Mexican American/Latino Studies programs and departments at Institutions of higher education across the state. (p. 30)

Mexican American Studies programs continue to be marginalized in higher education and the academic discipline is treated as an auxiliary intellectual exercise. To date, only one department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies exists in Texas. A department was recently formed at UT Austin while other campuses, especially those with majority Mexican American and Latina/o student populations, continue to fight for department status or even to have programs established. For example, UT Pan American established its Mexican American Studies program in 1971 and has a Latina/o student population of 91%, yet it still remains a program without permanent funding. As leadership seeks to establish UT Rio Grande Valley as a bilingual, bicultural Institution, Mexican American Studies is crucial for this goal, thus the lack of Department status and institutional support for its inherited MAS program warrants immediate funding. Moreover, other Institutions such as UNT Denton have only a Mexican American Studies Minor with a budget allocation of a mere \$1000/year, yet serves a metropolitan area of over 2 million Latina/o residents. These are but two examples of marginalized, underfunded academic

programs or curricular offerings, while the norm statewide at existing Institutions is that of no programs at all. In general, Mexican American Studies programs in Texas are at best surviving and need to thrive in order to meet the educational needs of Latina/o students across the state.

It is of the greatest urgency that we heed the Policy Task Force Directives to make funding and investments in Mexican American Studies Centers, Programs, and Departments a priority across the state. This is particularly true of those universities in South Texas that were involved in the *LULAC vs. Richards* case of 1989 that led to the South Texas Border Initiative. These institutions serve predominant Mexican American/Latina/o student populations yet still have no Departments of Mexican American Studies on their campuses and no Ph.D. programs in Mexican American Studies. In this current legislative session we urge you to scrutinize and amend your Legislative Appropriation Request (LAR) to prioritize funds and invest in Mexican American/Latina/o Studies departments, centers and programs on your respective campuses.