



Department of Chicano/Latino Studies
3151 Social Science Plaza
Irvine, CA 92697-5100

November 26, 2019

Dear members of the UCI Community, Central Americans for Empowerment, the Central American Graduate Student Collective, and other concerned community members:

The faculty in the Department of Chicano/Latino Studies is writing this letter in response to the “Open Letter: A Call to Support Central American Students at UCI,” authored by Central Americans for Empowerment and the Central American Graduate Student Collective. In the open letter, undergraduate and graduate student members of the UCI community articulate concerns with the organization of the 1st Annual Central American Studies Conference, set to take place at UCI on April 16th-17th, 2020.

First and foremost, we appreciate all students for their time, critical thinking, and emotional labor that so many are engaged in to help make UCI, and higher education institutions, a more inclusive and equitable space for Central American scholars and scholarship. As a department, we support efforts by students from all departments and all backgrounds to create and disseminate new knowledge of Latina/o/x/é communities, and commend student engagement in a wide range of scholarly activities, including hosting and participating in conferences like this one. Our department co-sponsored the event by providing some modest funding for the conference that is entirely organized by graduate students. We nonetheless recognize that politically and emotionally fraught issues of identity, representation, and collaboration are deeply implicated in the production and dissemination of scholarship about underrepresented communities. We have been, and will continue to be, in dialogue with faculty colleagues in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese about how to support the success of this important conference.

The Open Letter also raises the important issue of underrepresentation of Central American scholars and scholarship at UCI. This is a concern that we share and have been working to address for the past several years. As a department, we have advocated for the hiring of Central American faculty, and we recognize the importance of including Central American experiences in our curriculum. Many of our faculty work hard to ensure Central American content and topics are covered in our classes and programmatic activities. We know this is not enough. We take seriously the concerns listed in the letter, and will continue to welcome thoughtful feedback and collaboration about how to increase the visibility of Central American communities in our department, at UCI, and beyond. As an HSI, we are also committed to working with administrators and our colleagues across UCI to promote equity and inclusion for Central American members of the UCI community.

Finally, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting the academic success and wellbeing of students who wish to learn about and advance Latina/o/x/é communities, particularly undergraduates currently taking classes or completing a major, minor, or certificate in Chicano/Latino Studies, as well as graduate students enrolled and/or participating in our Graduate Emphasis. We encourage our students who have questions or concerns about these issues to reach out directly to faculty and departments for further information.

Sincerely,
The Department of Chicano/Latino Studies