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Major Bi-national Conference to Address Education Crisis Across the U.S.-Mexico Border

"The Students We Share" To Be Held January 15-16 In Mexico City

Scholars from across Mexico and the U.S. will meet in Mexico City on January 15-16, 2010 for an unprecedented bi-national conference to share research, information, and ideas on issues relating to immigration and educating children whose lives are shaped by both countries. The conference, "The Students We Share," will be held at the Casa de la Universidad de California in Mexico City, and will seek to address the issue of the lack of formal education policies between Mexico and the U.S., who share millions of students yet have two markedly different educational systems.

Conference organizer and UCLA Professor Patricia Gándara, who is co-director of the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, a co-host of the event, commented: "It is very exciting to see how eager those studying these students on both sides of the border are to share information and to seek more informed answers. The scale of this collaboration between scholars of both countries is a first, and is one we're hoping will yield some effective solutions."

Mexico estimates that one in five Mexican citizens will live in the United States at some time during their lives; many will be children. Today, a tenth of U.S. students – more than 5 million – are children of Mexican immigrants. At the same time, researchers estimate that half a million U.S.-educated students are currently attending schools in Mexico.

Latino students in the U.S. are typically several years behind their European-American peers on indicators of academic achievement: At least one out of 5 Latino students do not finish high school -- in urban centers, one out of every two Latino students drops out. Latinos have the lowest college degree rate of any racial or ethnic group in the U.S. – about 12% of Latinos complete a college degree, compared to almost 60% of Asian students. Students who reenter Mexican schools after been educated in the U.S. face many problems, as do those who come to the U.S. in the midst of their formal education.

A major social policy challenge facing Mexico is expanding lower and upper secondary enrollments while, at the same time, improving quality in under-resourced schools, principally in rural and indigenous communities with stagnant economic productivity. Across Mexico, about 2 in 5 of 15 year-old children are not enrolled in formal schooling.

Sponsoring the bi-national conference is the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA, in collaboration with the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in the U.S., and El Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa (COMIE) in Mexico, the Foundation for Child Development, Arizona State University, and the Secretary of Education of Mexico.

Michael Fix, Director of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington D.C. noted, “Despite much hard, thoughtful work at many levels, serious issues remain in educating the "children we share" in US schools.”

Victor Zuñiga, a sociologist at the University of Monterrey, concludes, “Mexican teachers are unprepared to receive the students who return to Mexican schools with weak Spanish skills, and little knowledge of the Mexican curriculum. These students are routinely held back—we must do better!”

Felipe Martinez Rizo, founding director of Mexico’s National Institute for Educational Evaluation, added that bi-national cooperation can be a powerful way to address “very serious 21st century problems,” within the Mexican educational system. “These are problems whose resolution will determine, without exaggeration, whether Mexico is to be counted among developed nations.”

For details about the conference, please visit: www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

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