

Memo

To: University Faculty Senate

From: Jose E. Cruz, Associate Professor of Political Science & Senator for Rockefeller College

Re: Senate Bill 1415-04 To deactivate and discontinue the Puerto Rican Studies Major in the Department of Latin American, Caribbean and U.S. Latino Studies.

Date: 5-11-15

I would like to make a comment and a motion:

1. A proposal such as this requires an explanation of discussions with departmental faculty and assurance that everyone is in agreement with the request. If a departmental vote takes place, that needs to be referenced as well. I do not believe this process was followed and from the documents that I have been able to review, there is no evidence that it was properly followed. I have been an active and very involved member of the Department of Latin American, Caribbean and U.S. Latino Studies and I know for sure that I was never consulted on this, was never invited to a departmental meeting to discuss what to do with the major, and never participated in a vote because I don't believe a vote ever took place. I only found out about the proposal on May 5 when Elisa Lopez sent out the agenda for today's meeting. I am not the only one in this position.

2. What I have been able to establish since I became aware that this was going to be decided here today, is that there has been a chronic enrollment problem in the major and that some faculty suggested in the past that while deactivation might be a possible course of action, a focus on Puerto Rican studies was nevertheless considered critical and that the scholarly and intellectual importance of the field warranted preservation of some kind of a formal option of study such as a Puerto Rican studies minor. But this has never been part of a considered departmental deliberation and what seems to have been the main driver of the deactivation and discontinuation proposal has been enrollment.

3. Enrollment is of course an important consideration but it cannot be used lightly or out of context to do away with academic programs of scholarly and intellectual importance that may not happen to be popular at a certain point in time or even over a period of time. The way this proposal has been justified does not do justice to the field of Puerto Rican studies. It is one thing for the major not to have enrolled students, it is completely another to claim that it should be deactivated and discontinued because it has been superseded by the broader field of Latino studies and it is therefore anachronistic.

At best, this is an interpretive position. I find it ironic that this claim is made barely three years after the University at Albany was the site for the 20th anniversary conference of the Puerto Rican Studies Association (PRSA) and at a time in which the field shows continued signs of vitality and growth. The Puerto Rican Studies Association was founded in 1992 and it has held a biennial conference without

interruption since. Our last meeting took place in October 2014 in Denver, Colorado. Over the years, the Association has brought together scholars, educators, public policy experts, artists, community activists and students from diverse fields of knowledge whose work focuses on Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans in the United States, or both. Its members work in a variety of institutions, including colleges and universities, research and public policy centers and non-profit organizations located in the United States, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean region, Canada and Europe.

PRSA members, numbering several hundred, represent virtually all fields of research and teaching in the Humanities, Social Sciences and the Arts, including Anthropology, Architecture, Art History, Demography, Economics, Educational Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Administration, Social Work, Sociology, Studio Arts, Theater and Dance, and Urban Planning, among others.

Some of the members of the Association work within specific disciplines but a large number are also engaged in interdisciplinary research and teaching in fields such as Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Studies, Environmental Studies, Film Studies, Gender and Sexuality, Public Health, Public Policy, Queer Studies, and Women Studies, among others.

Another major institution devoted solely to Puerto Rican Studies is the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College in New York City, which was established in 1973. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies operates a library, an archival collection and employs five full-time researchers, publishes an award winning academic journal, an online newsletter, and is an active member of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research. The Center recently established an academic press and has published two books about Puerto Ricans in the United States in quick succession.

Finally, just last year, the University of Illinois Press, the University of North Carolina Press, and Columbia University Press published three very important books that look at the Puerto Rican political and cultural experience in New York City. This is just a very tiny sample of an ample bibliography.

In other words, the major at UAlbany may have an enrollment problem but the field of Puerto Rican studies is neither anachronistic, has not been superseded by Latino studies, and it is certainly not defunct.

In light of this, I respectfully move that this bill be tabled until a more sensible and appropriate discussion of the problem is carried out by the Department of Latin American, Caribbean and U.S. Latino Studies. Puerto Rican studies is a field of critical importance to American politics and SUNY-Albany should do all it can to promote this critical scholarly and intellectual field of study.