

**Title**  
**Cristobal Valencia Ramirez**

**EVOKE**

**About the Ethnographer**

I am a PhD student in Socio-cultural Anthropology. I completed a Master's degree at the University of Texas in Latin American Studies. I currently do research in Caracas, Venezuela. My interests and analyses are informed by my participation in autonomous knowledge production collectives of Chicano, Latino and other students of color.

**EXPLORE**

**Question**

**What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?**

Are campus units aware of, have a copy and using the Chancellor's Committee on Latina/o Issues Report (2003)?

How effective was the act/process of making the Chancellor's report? Was it an empty gesture?

How is the Chancellor's Committee on Latina/o Issues Report (2003) University intended to be used by campus units? This question pretends to concentrate only on the document at hand but hopes to interrogate whether or not the document is being consulted or has been shelved.

IS THE CHANCELLOR'S REPORT BEING USED?

*Files:*

[Chancellor's committee report.pdf](#) (Mon 10/02/2006 12:33)

**Plan**

**How will you go about answering your inquiry?**

Review the document for information regarding the release strategy planned by the committee, the stated intentions of the committee in developing the strategy and the actual publication release date of the document.

Interview one or two members of the committee for more information about the units identified as most problematic and the actual release events.

Interview the head/faculty of some of the problematic units about whether they are aware of the report or not and how they are/are not using it.

Continue interviewing students to find out if they are aware of the report and analyze patterns of knowledge or use.

Find out if the University Archives contains a copy of the report.

## **OBSERVE**

### **What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**

An important and effective method for gathering research on whether or not there is knowledge about the chancellor's report might be better served by a simple survey. This survey might include forced-answer (Fink 1985) questions about knowledge of the existence of the report amongst students, and dept. chairs. Second, a forced-answer question might be asked regarding whether or not the particular campus unit had a copy. And a last question might be open-ended and ask how is it being used or where is it located. Fink (1985) does not discuss combining closed and open-ended questions. However, this sort of survey could not be scored easily. Parts of it could be, but the qualitative question would have to be separated and take in to account the effect the first two questions might have on its responses.

My main concern is testing the effectiveness of the project of doing the Chancellor's report. However, if I were to tweak the question as Prof. Moodie has suggested to ask "what role has it taken, what does it represent, what are the repercussions of its release? Has it had an impact?" then I might think of using a focus group. My concern with using a focus group is that the interactions of the participants might influence the opinions allowed to be expressed. Since the data in this method comes from group interaction (Morgan 1988) it seems that the focus group would tell me more about interactions on a certain topic (Morgan 1988:10) rather than the effectiveness of doing the report and its distribution.

I think that a survey to unit chairs/heads might be a better strategy for answering my question, which will have to be rewritten to specify this particular concern.

Finally, I think it is important to use documents at your disposal (in the media, from organizations and other people in your research network) to assist in your own project. One often doesn't have the time to be a videographer and record events in multiple places. Time constraints are a reality. Many documents have surfaced in the last few weeks in video, photo, and print form that add context to my project and I include them as links here. At the moment, I do not provide any context for them, but rather let them be interpreted by the viewer. I have not decided myself how I should represent them and tie them to my project. Pink (2001) informs us that video, photo's are "subjective representations." Therefore, I think it is important at this point to merely point out and credit from where and by whom these representations are being made. This is very different than Pink's urging to maintain an understanding of the specific cultural practices of picture taking at the research site. On reflection it seems that Pink does not discuss the importance of framing the subject position of the ethnographer. Rather, she chooses to focus on the viewer.

The report is lengthy (53 pages) and well organized. It includes sections on Campus Climate, Undergraduate, Graduate, Faculty, Academic Professionals, Administrative Employees, Cultural Programs, Academic Units and Recommendations. Interestingly, there is no inclusion of the local Latina/o Community. The compartmentalized nature of

the report seems to indicate sharp divisions or perhaps a hierarchy between the different citizens and units of the University community.

For example the section on Cultural Programs raises the issue of a lack of University support for connecting La Casa Cultural with academic units such as Latina/o Studies.

Start Citation pg. 30:

Lack of formal links to academic units. La Casa has no links to academic units to support its efforts in retention and mentoring. La Casa's links to other programs within the University are based on the informal networks of its staff. For example, efforts to increase Latina/o student recruitment are often informally organized between Latina/o students and alumni or through volunteer efforts as individual students participate in the Peer Recruitment Program housed in Admissions and Records. This is a challenge for many cultural programs nation-wide; mission statements often emphasize recruitment and retention of Latina/o but focus primarily on cultural programming

Focus of La Casa as site of cultural performances, often of traditional Latin American cultural expressions, rather than the lived, everyday cultures of Latina/o students.

End Citation.

This text pulled from the document seems to imply a few things. First, it implies that formal links to academic units are preferable over informal links. Second, that culture or cultural programming is somehow not or is less legitimate than academic programming. Fairclough(2003:58) points out that assumptions about what is necessary may represent ideological relations of power. This raises questions about whether the committee perceives the difference between culture and academia or if it is a common assumption in the University setting.

Next, the report uses language to make a clear distinction between the "recommendations" it makes and the "demands" that were made by students during the 1992 "student protests." This indicates that the committee is softening its approach in order to remain within institutional procedure while simultaneously recognizing the "demands" as somehow outside of institutional procedure. Perhaps the language is used to mark a different time. "Demands" and "recommendations" may represent "keywords" or a "cultural model" of how change is to be accomplished within the university structure, they have "expressive importance" in that they are being used to mark two seemingly very different points in historical time (see Strauss 2005:205). Does this necessarily imply progress?

Other language in the introduction seems to contradict any notion of progress. The committee chose to entitle a forum in 2002 used to present the report and preliminary findings "Delivering Empty Promises" (4). This might be understood as an example of the "modalization" of a controversial opinion (Strauss 2005:233).

Finally, the introduction outlines a strategy for the “targeted” distribution of the report. This strategy includes presenting a report card in 2003-2004 regarding the climate for Latina/o citizens on the UIUC campus and sharing findings with units who have done little to address the problems cited in the report. The report gives no indication of which departments these might be, what authority the committee has, the procedure for following up on whether or not the report is being consulted, read or made available. One indication that there might be a problem with distribution is that the report was not uploaded to the University library until March 2006, three years after it was published in limited hard copy numbers. The dean who initiated the committee has left the University and there is no clear indication of how the current dean must engage with the report. It appears that the committee may have little control over how it’s findings are used.

It seems that here the committee's document may be suffering from a compartmentalization of the protest period and the report period. This compartmentalization of two different social discourses (protest and committee) and their implied actions and assumed legitimacy (see Strauss 222-232) creates a sort of ambivalence on behalf of the report to delineate any specific line of future action.

#### Interview 1. 10-12-06

Joint interview w/ two undergraduate women students. Both women started courses at UIUC in 2003. Interviewees were selected spontaneously with regard to location of interview. I wanted to interview Latino students who had been at the University for some time (preferably since 2003 the day the year following the report release). So I spent some time at La Casa taking care of other business and took advantage of the opportunity to interview two students with whom I was acquainted, but we knew very little about each other other than our names. We had been introduced a matter of weeks ago. The two women were having a casual conversation in an adjoining room from the hallway. They were alone in the room and they included me in conversation when we ran into each other. I asked if they would consent to an interview. The interview lasted about 35minutes.

I had one central concern I wanted to get to at this point in my project . Were these two women aware of the Chancellor’s report and that it contained recommendations and was strategically distributed to those campus units who had major problems. This was essential information the larger inquiry needed, at least [see Weiss 66].

First, I planned to ask a series of questions to get to know the interviewees better and situate them in the context of the University. I thought this might help me analyze whether or not they should know about the report and how might the report be used by them.

Questions:

Where is your hometown?  
What year did you start UIUC?  
What is your major and minor?  
Why did you choose UIUC?  
What are your plans after graduation?  
What organizations do you participate in on/off campus?  
Are you employed?  
Are you aware of the Chancellor's report?  
How would you describe the climate at UIUC for Latinas?

I will not reproduce all the answers here. They are in my handwritten notes. However, a few responses are worth noting in relationship to each other. Neither student was aware of the report. One student was an employee of La Casa mentoring other students, the other student worked soliciting donations from alumni for a prominent organization. One student said she had become aware of a "hostile" environment on campus for Latinos in general a couple of years ago as she started to become accustomed to the workload here and had time to think of these issues. The other student remarked that she was extremely versatile and flexible when it came to dealing with other people and their racisms. However, she recounted an experience that she said will always remain in her mind.

During a party she had been invited to, she heard a white student tell her friend a Latino student who she had invited to "know your place." She indicated that many of her friends had internalized this statement and contemplated it often, knowing that there was a significant amount of helplessness in confronting this attitude. This was an important specific incidence she shared with me, and I let her talk at length without asking more questions only acknowledging that I was understanding her recount (see Anderson and Jack 1991)

So was it important that these women know about the Chancellor's report? YES. Should they have known? YES. Why didn't they know?

#### Findings:

The chancellor's report itself includes a section titled "Campus Climate" (2003:5-8). This section is becoming more important given recent events on campus that have drawn protest against racist practices. Several links to documents included in the links section of my page tell the story of these events from varied perspectives and institutional responses. The existence of the report and its use are becoming more important than the actual process of writing the report or the information it contains. This is due in part to the changing nature of my question (see latest revision above) and little doubt as to the nature of the climate on campus. One interviewee reported that at a party her Latino friends were told to "know their place" by an Anglo student. The report departs from the position that nothing has changed since 1992, entitling a 2002 forum to discuss changes "Delivering Empty Promises" (2003:4).

The report emphasizes that Latino students feel nothing will change "unless they organize" (2003:5). It also criticizes the institution administration response to activist approaches to addressing problems of a hostile climate. The report states that "Such

action often collides not only with [] administration and faculty prerogatives but also with the perception the perception that students should participate in these decision-making processes through established bureaucratic channels, not activism” (2003:5). Finally, the report emphasizes the effectiveness of activist approaches in the past, their ability to draw attention to issues, and the often negative and consequential reactions to these approaches. However, the report makes recommendations in place of demands. Seemingly this is akin to the University’s preferred and established method for effecting change.

The introduction of the report mentions a targeted distribution of the report. However, it does not explain this strategy further. There seems to have been limited distribution of the report, few copies are available and it was only recently 2006 uploaded to the library as an electronic document.

Many Latino/a students involved in campus social and political organizations are unaware that the report exists. However, they are aware about the protests leading up to the report and the establishment of La Casa and Latino/a Studies.

The chancellor who facilitated the report is no longer at the University.

Possible arguments:

UIUC is a hostile environment for Latino/as – if not other non-white students.

The report exemplifies a tension between institutional participation and activism to produce change. It does not resolve this tension and falls short of making demands and apparently of instituting guidelines to assess the use of the report.

The report had limited rather than targeted distribution.

Clear mechanisms for following up on the use of the report are not delineated. It is possible that there has not been follow-up after the report was written.

Many departments are not using the report, have no plan on addressing these issues and may not be aware that it exists.

The University has made no University wide formal demands for departments to utilize the report.

Revised Research plans:

Less time can be spent on determining if the situation has improved, how the report is perceived or if UIUC is a hostile climate for Latino/a students. The question has shifted and selected interviews with, the chancellor’s office, and those involved in creating the report are necessary. Again, a survey of campus unit heads/chairs/directors would also be informative.

Validity:

While there might be some discrepancies between how “use” of the report is determined they should not be substantial. Are you aware of the report? Do you have a copy? Do you know where it is? Where is it? These are questions that help define use in a general sense. During interviews what one means by “use” will be a factor. For example it could be used to inform but not to take action. This might satisfy the informant but not the general inquiry of the research.

## **REFLECT**

### **Link**

**Connect with other resources and materials.**

Daily Illini coverage of protests against institutional racism and institutionally supported racism

<http://www.dailyillini.com/home/index.cfm?q=tacos+and+tequila&event=displaySearchResults&buttonPushed=1&client=testing-testing&forid=1&ie=ISO-8859-1&oe=ISO-8859-1&cof=GALT%3A%23008000%3BGL%3A1%3BDIV%3A%23666666%3BVLC%3A663399%3BAH%3Acenter%3BBGC%3AFFFFFF%3BLBGC%3AFFFFFF%3BALC%3A0000FF%3BLC%3A0000FF%3BT%3A000000%3BGFNT%3A0000FF%3BGIMP%3A0000FF%3BLH%3A37%3BLW%3A310%3BFORID%3A1%3B&hl=en&cp1=paper&frombar=1>

Video and photos of protesting racist private, public and institutional practices against Latinos provided by I Resist Collective participants are available at:

<http://www.iresist.org/protest>

Protest participants and observers reactions to protests on UIUC campus:

<http://www.iresist.org/liberacion>

Chancellor's letter regarding racist practices by fraternity and sorority on UIUC campus:

<http://www.oc.uiuc.edu/announcements/respect.html>

### **Implications**

**Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?**

The findings can tell us about the differences between attempts at change through established insitutional channels and direct action activism.

## **OTHER**

**A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.**

*Files:*

[proposal draft2.doc](#) (Fri 12/01/2006 11:32)