



ALAS NEWSLETTER

Association of Latina Alumnae of Smith College

Spring/Summer 2005

Message from the President

ALAS Moving Forward

Dear Friends,

I am happy to report that the activities that ALAS sponsored during *Discovery Weekend* 2005 (April 16-17) were a success. The private tour of the Smith College Museum of Art organized on Saturday, April 16, was a great opportunity for prospective and current Latina students and alumnae to see the college's Latin American collections.

The museum tour was followed by a reception with President Carol Christ who welcomed us back to campus. I am delighted to report that over 40 students and alumnae attended this event. Please check our website (www.ALAS.us) to see photographs of the tour and reception.

On Sunday, April 17th, the ALAS Executive Board met at the Alumnae House. Former and current Board members as well as other Latina alumnae participated in this meeting, where we reviewed our recent accomplishments and discussed our future goals.

Recent accomplishments include: establishing a website, hosting send-off parties for first year students, raising money for the Alumnae Fund and the Women of Color Emergency Fund; recruiting prospective students; publishing two newsletters; and hosting events in New York City, Los Angeles, Miami, and Washington, D.C.

Future goals include: offering a one year complimentary membership to graduating seniors; increasing networking opportunities for ALAS members; strengthening connections between alumnae and the current student body; planning meaningful and interesting events in cities with a strong Smith Latina presence; and establishing a forum for ALAS members to exchange ideas and share their experiences.

In conjunction with the Alumnae Association, ALAS has created a membership survey to learn more about your opinion on the direction that ALAS should take in the future. An invitation to complete the electronic version of the survey was sent by email to all Latina alumnae on June 21, 2005 and a hard copy was mailed to alumnae for whom we do not have an email address.

Your voice is important to us, and we hope that you will be interested in giving us your feedback as we work towards building a stronger alumnae network.

I want to thank the ALAS Executive Board of 2004 and the Alumnae Association for all their hard work and efforts this past year to make this association a success. I am proud to announce our new 2005 Board members:

Gladys Pulido '08, Student Liaison; Kelly Aguilar '04, Secretary; Elisa Del Valle '04, Program Co-Chair; Lizette Pabón '03, Alumnae Admissions Chair; and Diana Xochitl Munn '95, Communications Director.

The ALAS Board includes women from different backgrounds, generations, interests, perspectives, and beliefs who have come together to create a space where Latina alumnae can convene to network and build community.

Meet the ALAS Executive Board

In this issue, we feature the profiles of four of our Board members. In the fall newsletter, we will introduce our other five Board members. It is a chance for you to learn more about the Board and an opportunity for us to share our vision for ALAS.

Become A Member

I encourage all alumnae to support ALAS and help promote the organization's mission by becoming a member. Being a member is a great opportunity to give back to Smith and help build the future of our alma mater. As an alumna, I am extremely grateful for the opportunities a Smith education gave me, and I hope that the next generation will be as fortunate as I was. ALAS membership is open to all Smith alumnae. The annual membership fee is \$40. For your convenience, an ALAS Membership Form is included with this newsletter. Thank you in advance for your support.

Build Community

ALAS looks forward to working with you to build a strong, proactive and dynamic association that will work to support past, present, and future students of the Latin American Diaspora.

If you would like to volunteer to organize and/or host an event, serve as an admissions volunteer, be featured in our ALAS newsletter, or speak to current students about your career and life choices, please email us at: alasalumnae@yahoo.com.

We would like to get as many of you involved as possible.

Con cariño,

Sylvia Bolivar '88

Student Spotlight

Isabel Porras '06 ***2004 Mellon Mays*** ***Undergraduate Fellow***

Isabel Porras '06 is a 2004 recipient of the prestigious Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. The fellowship, funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation, is designed to increase the number of minorities entering doctoral programs, in order to broaden the pool of faculty members at the nation's educational institutions. Each fellow works with a faculty member on a research project of her design. As a Mellon Fellow, Isabel receives faculty mentorship from Professor Ginetta Candelario '91 and a yearly stipend to pursue her academic research.

Isabel Porras' interest in Latin American studies led her to apply for the fellowship. Her research initially focused on studying Latin American domestic workers in the United States, as well as the effects of feminism and women's roles on both the employer and employee.

After attending a six-week summer program for Mellon Fellows at Brown University, however, Isabel shifted her focus to studying Che Guevara's commodification as an anti-capitalist icon for the Latin-American left after realizing that a number of young people wearing Che Guevara t-shirts believed he was the lead singer of *Rage Against The Machine*. Isabel came to the conclusion that the image of Che Guevara was transformed by business into one of profit.

This summer, expanding on her research, Isabel will spend two months in Buenos Aires, Argentina studying the autonomist movement (www.autonomista.org) and specifically, how assembly workers have organized themselves from the ground up to promote economic innovation.

In October 2004, Isabel had the opportunity to attend the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada where she saw over 900 scholars, including her mentor, Professor Candelario '91, present their research. During her senior year, Isabel will continue her Mellon research and hopes to present her senior thesis at the 2006 LASA conference.



Beyond academics, Isabel has been involved with Smith's school-wide Diversity Committee, that works to promote diversity and the development of a welcoming and inclusive campus climate. She is also involved with Students for Social Justice and Institutional Change (SSJIC), a campus organization whose mission is to provide students with an opportunity to work for social justice in local venues and connect these issues to the broader set of global concerns. Isabel hopes her involvement in these activities will encourage other Smith Latinas to become involved with both campus activities and community activism.

Isabel Porras, along with fellow students, Leyna Lightman '07J, Megan McRobert '06, and Christina Souza '06, created *Popped Collar*, a cultural critique magazine. The first issue of *Popped Collar* was published in February.

Isabel Porras is a 2002 recipient of the Smith Book Awards, awarded to promising high school students. Born in Queens, New York, Isabel lives in Miami, Florida and is of Colombian descent. She loves to travel and enjoys analyzing media and society.

By Jomarie Cruz '03 and Sylvia Bolivar '88

Kelly Aguilar '04

ALAS Secretary

I grew up in an immigrant, working class home. In the early 1980's, my parents fled the civil war in El Salvador literally with the clothes on their backs and found many of their ideas, hopes, and dreams shattered.

Despite the setbacks, my parents encouraged and inspired me and my siblings to succeed in life, and their hopes and dreams have fueled much of my academic career. I spent many of my childhood summers and part of my high school years in El Salvador, and these experiences helped me to better understand my place in the greater global community.

When I began searching for colleges I looked for a school where I could prepare academically and grow as a person. Smith proved to be a great choice. It provided a rigorous academic experience and it helped me develop other skills through creative outlets, such as working with the local community as a YMCA mentor and working with on-campus groups to promote greater diversity awareness.

I sometimes thought that I would never graduate from Smith because of the overwhelming amount of reading, but I was able to manage these moments of anxiety. I graduated with a degree in Biology, and I left Smith knowing that I had received an excellent education. I also knew that my undergraduate experience had made me a stronger and more confident individual, one who believed in her capacity to face whatever challenge came her way.

While my academic achievements since pre-school paved the road to attend Smith, my Latino culture set the path I would take once I left the college. When I graduated, I knew that my greatest interest lay in improving the lives of underprivileged and often voiceless communities. I am now particularly interested in helping these communities gain access to proper health care but I am not certain about whether I will work with them directly as a care-giver or work to change policies that inhibit their access to these services.

I currently work in a radiation hematology lab at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. My research is focused on finding the means to protect healthy tissue from damage due to radiation exposure. This research has implications for bioterrorism—as it could help minimize or eradicate serious health effects on the population if exposed to biological weapons—as well as for improving current cancer therapies by reducing their length and side effects.



Outside of work, I am very involved in three volunteer activities. As a youth group leader for the Seventh Day Adventist Church, I help young children understand the Bible and I teach them how to apply biblical principles to their daily lives.

I also volunteer at the Holy Cross Hospital and at Habitat for Humanity in Montgomery County, Maryland. At the hospital I work in the emergency room where I help staff comfort patients, and also serve as a Spanish to English translator.

At Habitat for Humanity I work with the selection and partnership committees that identify families who qualify for, and ultimately receive low-cost homes within the county, one of the most expensive in the United States.

My interest in ALAS comes from the desire to help others within our larger global community. I want to empower women of color beyond the confines of Smith and I believe that ALAS has the potential to do so.

As Secretary, I am glad to be part of the development of this new organization. In the upcoming year, I expect to hone my leadership skills through ALAS, and inspire many recent graduates and older alumnae to help us get this organization on its feet.

Sylvia Zamora '04

ALAS Treasurer

As Treasurer of ALAS, I will work to ensure that we raise funds to plan and realize activities that will help fulfill the organization's mission and goals. I am particularly committed to helping with the recruitment of Latina and Latin American students, not only to diversify campus life, but also to provide such women the same opportunities for learning and personal growth that I was afforded in college.

My parents immigrated to this country from Mexico in the early 70's, and I was born and raised in a predominantly Latino/Mexican community in Los Angeles, California.

I decided to attend Smith because I knew it would provide a challenging intellectual environment that would help me reach my full academic potential, and also because I thought it would be an ideal place to develop into a strong and independent woman.

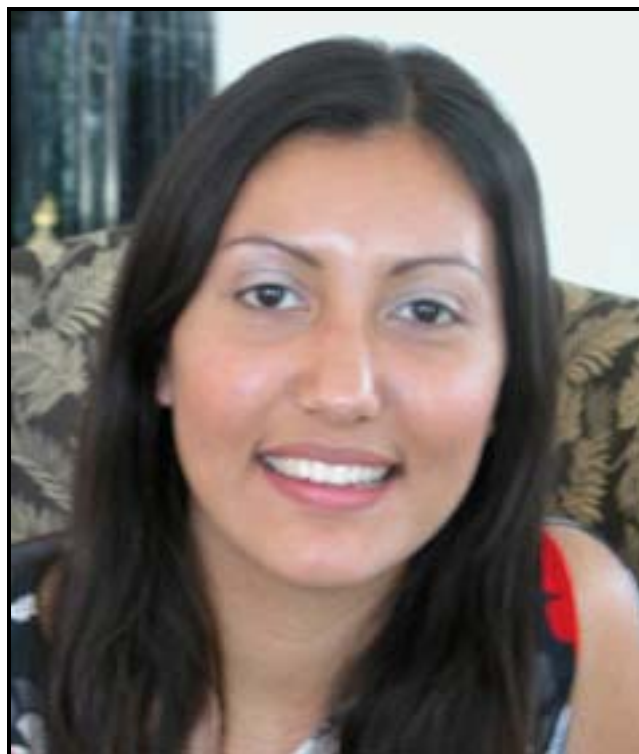
In my sophomore year I was awarded a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, which provides financial support, faculty mentorship, and research opportunities to minority students who plan to pursue a Ph.D. in the arts and sciences and also an academic career in an American university.

As a Mellon Mays fellow, I explored the growing environmental justice movement in the predominantly low-income, immigrant Latino community of South Gate, California. My research there focused on the disparities in environmental discourse between mainstream environmental organizations and grassroots environmental groups led by people of color.

Then, through Smith's Praxis program, I was able to intern at Communities for a Better Environment, an environmental health and justice non-profit organization that promotes clean air, clean water and the development of toxic-free communities. I incorporated this experience into my research and I presented my findings at a student symposium at Mt. Holyoke College.

During my senior year, I spent a semester abroad in Havana, Cuba, where I studied at the University of Havana. To date, my experience in Cuba has been the most intriguing, mind-opening and satisfying experience of my life.

At Smith, I was involved with NOSOTRAS and served on its Board for three years as five-college representative and treasurer. I was also a DJ for WOZQ, Smith's radio station, where I was part of "Urban Revolutions," one of the few all female hip-hop college radio groups in the country.



As an undergraduate I also participated in various political marches and protests for social justice, including the "Free Vieques" march in Washington, D.C.; a "Free Trade Area Agreement" protest in Quebec, Canada; and a march in New York City against the World Economic Forum.

After graduating with a B.A. in Sociology and Latin American Studies, I was a summer intern at the Phillips Academy Institute for Recruitment of Teachers (IRT) in Andover, MA. This is an intensive academic summer program that helps college students and graduates from diverse backgrounds to refine their writing, analytical and oral skills in preparation for graduate study.

When I completed the IRT program, I returned to Los Angeles and began working as a research assistant for the L.A. Unified School District, an organization that is committed to diversifying academic institutions.

This summer I will be a faculty member of the IRT, and in September I will begin my graduate studies in Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

I am excited to be helping ALAS become a well-known and respected alumnae organization. I hope to build solidarity among all alumnae of color and to be involved in the establishment of a Latina alumnae reunion at Smith. I believe that everybody has something to contribute, so I urge you to look into how you can make a difference for the Latina and Latin American women at Smith and beyond.

Liliana Hernández '02

ALAS Program Co-Chair

I am delighted to serve on the Executive Board of ALAS for a second term. ALAS is an organization where Latina alumnae can voice their many views and opinions and is also a forum to find personal and professional support, encouragement and inspiration.

I was born and raised in the diverse, multilingual community of Fairview, New Jersey, to a Cuban-Colombian immigrant family. I first learned about Smith through my older sister, who heard wonders about the school while she was an intern at *Ms.* magazine. When I applied, I doubted that attending Smith could ever become a reality, but it did, and I loved the school from the moment I arrived on campus. I majored in Government and Sociology, but took many courses in Latin American Studies, especially during my semester abroad in Chile. One of my favorite things about Smith was the diversity of housing options, so much so that I ended up living in three different houses: Talbot, Scales and Washburn!

After graduating from Smith I worked for Alianza Dominicana Inc., a community development agency in New York. Through their "Project Liberty," I provided grief counseling and education about post-traumatic stress reactions to Latino families affected by the 9/11 attacks and the Flight 587 crash in Queens, NY. This experience allowed me to better understand how culture, religion and community can provide resilience during difficult times. It also made me more aware of the economic and social challenges that some Latinos face in the United States, such as limited knowledge about government aid programs related to immigration, health, housing, and education.

In 2003, I joined the Chandler for Governor campaign in Kentucky as Latino coordinator, and was later a campaign organizer with Moveon.org in South Florida for the 2004 presidential campaign.

I now work as a paralegal in the Juvenile Rights Division of the Legal Aid Society, in the Bronx Family Courthouse. Smith alumna, Ruth Mantilla '02, was instrumental in helping me secure this position. The head of our division, Nanette Schrandt, is also a Smith alumna ('73). My current job involves interviewing foster children, advocating on behalf of clients, coordinating the arrival of new cases and performing legal research. At times this work can be very difficult, but I enjoy it because it is always challenging and rewarding.

I also play softball and am a writer/spoken word artist. My first essay, *Dinner Talk*, was published in April of 2004 in the book *Without a Net: the Female Experience of Growing up Working Class*, by Michelle Tea.



I am currently working on a book of poetry and plan to pursue a degree in public administration.

I am strongly committed to ALAS' goal of promoting higher education for Latinas and of sharing our experiences with future generations.

As Programming Co-Chair, I look forward to creating programs and events around the country that foster unity and embrace our diversity. Through the ALAS newsletter, website and "meet & greet" events, we can all share our experiences and advice.

No topic or tip is too small, from how to make a casserole to finding the perfect job. From my previous experiences working with ALAS, I know first hand how nice and useful it is to meet alumnae from other classes. Something refreshing and reassuring that I have learned from them is that my post-college angst and hopes were not unique, but rather a marker on the road to self-discovery.

I look forward to working with all of you to make ALAS a positive addition to our lives over the next year. Please feel free to contact me with your suggestions on fun, creative, insightful ways to build community or to plan an event in your local area at lilitalks@yahoo.com.

Diana Xochitl Munn '95

Communications Director

I learned about the existence of ALAS last spring, when I received my first newsletter. I was very glad to see that this organization had been established, as the idea of creating a Latina alumnae network was something that was being talked about even when I was an undergraduate more than ten years ago! At Smith, I had been an active member of NOSOTRAS, and I, as well as other Latinas on campus, always felt a desire to learn more about the academic and career experiences of Latina alumnae.

I was born in Mexico City, to an Irish-Australian-American father from Maine and a Mazatec Indian mother from Oaxaca, Mexico. I grew up in Mexico, California and Maryland, speaking English and Spanish, and listening to Mazatec, my mother's native language.

As Communications Director I will be responsible for helping create and edit the ALAS newsletter. The objectives of this publication are to keep you informed about the organization's activities and projects; to highlight the academic, professional and personal achievements of our members; and to bring to your attention interesting employment and internship opportunities.

I am a botanist who specializes in the biodiversity of Mexican cloud forests. When I arrived at Smith I didn't know what I would major in, but I decided to study plant biology during the second semester of my first year, after taking a class in Plant Systematics. As an undergraduate I was very focused on my botanical studies, but I also took a variety of courses in art history, Latin American literature, French and anthropology. I also enhanced my academic experience through summer internships at Phyton Catalytic, a pharmaceutical company in Ithaca, NY, at Kew Gardens in London, and at the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St. Louis. For three of my college years I worked at the Lyman Plant House. Robert Nicholson, the conservatory manager, was my most important mentor at Smith and it was he who encouraged me to pursue my interests in botany and in field research.

After graduating in 1995, I worked for the Missouri Botanical Gardens as coordinator of their floristic research projects in Costa Rica and Bolivia. After a year in this position I moved to Oaxaca, Mexico, where I worked as a field assistant and taxonomist for Mexico's National Polytechnical Institute. In 1998 I began my graduate studies in botany at the University of Texas-Austin. As part of my Master's thesis, I carried out an inventory of the vegetation found in the forests of the Sierra Mazateca of Oaxaca, my mother's native region in Mexico.



This project, sponsored by the Mexican government, involved the collection of more than 8,000 plant specimens in a mostly indigenous region where women do not generally go into the forests. It was a great challenge to carry out fieldwork in this environment, but as an independent and focused Smithie, I was able to manage! So far I have compiled a list of 630 species that grow in the area and I plan to produce a field guide that teachers in the region can use to teach botany.

In the summer of 2003 I moved to Washington, D.C., where I am now exploring a new career path in management as coordinator of the Latino Program of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. This program was established as an initiative to increase the presence and participation of Latinos in the research and educational activities of the museum, and to broaden the museum's collaborations with scientists and institutions in Latin America.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading this installment of the ALAS newsletter. We want this publication to be a forum for us to learn from one another, and through our diverse stories, we hope to inspire and motivate current Smith students. If you would like to be featured in this newsletter or know of someone who you think should be, do let me know. Artwork and short fiction contributions are also welcome. We need your support to build a strong organization, so please consider becoming an active member of ALAS!

ALAS Membership Form and Survey

(Membership year is July 1-June 30)

Please update your information:

Name		Class Year
Address		
Home #:	Work: #:	Cell #:
Profession:		
Email:		

ALAS was founded to create a stronger network for Latina alumnae and current students. ALAS relies on membership dues to sustain the organization's yearly events. Last year, ALAS used membership dues to:

- Publish and distribute the ALAS newsletters highlighting alumnae and students;
- Host welcome teas for new and current students and alumnae during Orientation and Discovery Weekend;
- Sponsor regional ALAS events in New York, Los Angeles, New England, Miami and Washington, D.C.

This year ALAS will use membership dues to host networking opportunities, regional events and workshops. Funds will also be used to continue publishing the ALAS newsletter. Your membership contribution will help ALAS create a stronger network and resource for Latina alumnae and students.

Membership Dues:

2005 graduate	Free
Recent graduate (2000-2004)	\$15.00
Basic membership	\$40.00
Sustaining membership	\$60.00
General Support	\$100.00
President's Circle	\$250.00

Checks should be made payable to:

Alumnae Association of Smith College
33 Elm Street
Northampton, MA 01063

Attention: Robin Feldman, ALAS Dues

Total Enclosed for Membership Dues: \$_____.

The Emergency Fund for Women of Color was established March 2001 to provide assistance to students of color for emergencies, which may include travel for family illness or death, emergency medical or dental care, as well as required textbooks and supplies that are not covered by financial aid awards. During the past year the fund provided 14 students with assistance. **If you would like to contribute towards the Emergency Fund, please send a check made payable to *Smith College* and indicate that it is for the Emergency Fund.** Your gift will make a world of difference to a student in need. Total Enclosed for Emergency Fund: \$_____.

What kind of programs and events would be most appealing and/or helpful to you?

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Picnic with President Carol Christ – Cape Cod

Place: At the home of Joan Dillion '47
North Chatham, MA

Date: Wednesday, August 10, 2005

Time: 12:00-2:00pm

For additional information please contact the Alumnae Association at 800-526-2023 x4.

Welcome To Smith Tea

Place: Smith College Alumnae House

Date: Thursday, September 8, 2005

Time: 4:00-6:00pm

Come give a warm welcome to the first year students. This is an opportunity to meet the next generation of Latina leaders. All Latina students and alumnae are invited to attend the reception. Please RSVP via email to: alasalumnae@yahoo.com

Beyond the Performance, Ana Mendieta in the 1970s

Place: Smith College Museum of Art

Date: August 27-October 23, 2005

This exhibition (part of the Museum's Art of Latin America project) features images from Ana Mendieta's performance work, *Siluetas* created in Mexico and Iowa from 1973 to 1980. On view will be photographs from the collection of the Smith College Museum of Art and generous loans of photographs, films, and drawings from the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York.

The Lowriders, Portraits of New Mexico

Place: Smith College Museum of Art

Date: September 2-December 4, 2005

Photographed and assembled in 1980, the portfolio depicts members of a vital subculture in the Hispanic communities of New Mexico, the "Lowriders." The twelve vibrantly colored etktachrome prints housed in a velvet box pays homage to the Lowriders and to the pride of those who created them.

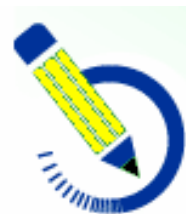
Ada Comstock Reunion

Place: Smith College

Date: Saturday, October 8, 2005

Thirty years ago, former President Jill Ker Conway started the Ada Comstock Scholars Program. To commemorate this milestone, the Alumnae Association of Smith College is inviting all Ada alumnae and current Ada Comstock Scholars to campus on October 8, for a daylong celebration. Jill Ker Conway and President Christ will be on hand to greet alumnae and to discuss the program. For information, contact the Alumnae Association at 800-526-2023 x4.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!



Visit
www.ALAS.us
To Complete Our
Online Membership Survey

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