ALAS

Association of Latina Alumnae of Smith

WINTER 2010

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President’s Report

It’s been an exciting year for ALAS! For this issue, we wanted to highlight influential Latina women. Inspired by the appointment of Judge Sonia Sotomayor we hope to motivate you to fulfill your dreams.

I am extremely fortunate to work with a dedicated and talented board representing diverse geographical regions and Smith generations. Our board members have helped create this issue and our successful events. In 2009, ALAS traveled to cities across the United States and established new partnerships with existing Smith clubs. As I reflect on our events, your stories and voices serve as inspiration for the upcoming year.

Washington, DC
We started the year in Washington, DC with a retreat hosted by Alta Rodriguez ‘90 during the Presidential inauguration. It was the first time that the board met as a group. We used the time to chart our 3-year plan and visit delicious eateries. We tapped into the energy of the inaugural weekend by hosting a tea at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. ALAS established important connections with the D.C. Club leadership and we found our current secretary, Maria Naranjo ‘91.

Los Angeles, CA
On the next leg of our journey, we were drawn to sunny Los Angeles for an event organized by Monique Chavoya ‘02, Program Co-Chair. Monique coordinated a beautiful lunch at Masa Café with the Los Angeles Smith Club that yielded over 35 participants! I was touched by the warmth and enthusiasm from alumnae. In fact, over 20 alumnae paid their membership dues and volunteered to partner with Smith on admission/recruitment efforts. At this event, I met Xiomara Iraheta ’07 who joined the board as an “advisory” member. ALAS nominated her to the planning committee for the 2010 Woman of Color Conference at Smith. We also met Brenda Ramirez-Parra ‘06 who recently joined the board as our second advisory member. ALAS is planning to return to Los Angeles in the summer of 2010 for another contemporary event! I hope you will make plans to attend the Woman of Color Conference at Smith this spring.

Boston, MA
One of the challenges for ALAS is the geographic distance between board members (yet, it serves as a strength as we represent diverse experiences). For example, in Boston, I finally connected with Ashley Zurc Pereira ‘07. She joined the board in September 2009 as Program Co-Chair. It was wonderful linking the voice to the person. Ashley is a children’s book writer who resides in Springfield, MA. You can find her book on Amazon.com, Lilly and Milly: Amigas 4 Life! Please pick up a copy for your daughters, nieces, and friends. I also met Erika D. Rodriguez ’06 who was part of the first Engineering Class at Smith. It was inspiring hearing her Smith journey. Erika is currently working on her PhD in Mechanical/Aerospace Engineering at Syracuse University. She traveled many miles to connect with ALAS. She is a trail blazer for women in the field of engineering. Keep your eyes open for her as she has great promise!

New York, NY
In August, we met with alumnae in NYC at an event organized by Arlene Ellis ’06, Communications Chair, at Havana, Alma de Cuba Café. Please note that Arlene planned the event while reformatting the website and Facebook! I reconnected with Leticia Medina Richmond ’91, Lisa A. del Puerto ’92, and Virginia Ramos-Rios ’94 after over a decade! I also met a number of new graduates and a new student ready to start in the fall. Elisa del Valle ’04 was unable to join us, but thanks to her generous donation, our future Smithie, attended the event for free.
Dallas, TX
ALAS co-sponsored a holiday tea with Dallas area alumnae on December 10th. Our former secretary, Aurora Becerra ’06, helped organize the tea. It was a beautiful event at the at the Mansion at Turtle Creek with over 30 diverse alumnae from the Dallas-Fort Worth Texas area. ALAS would like to send a special "Thank You" to Mr. Becerra for helping secure space at the hotel. Gracias Aurora and Mr. Becerra for your generosity! Alumnae who wish to connect with the Dallas area group, please feel free to send an e-mail to dfwsmithclub@gmail.com.

Succession Planning
The success of an organization is greatly dependent upon the ability to identify and develop future leaders. The current board will turn-over in 2011. Please contact me if you are interested in joining the board. You may also nominate friends to the board.

I hope that this summary inspires you to get involved with ALAS. Your membership dues of $25 helps support our efforts throughout the year. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me at ALASAlumnae@Live.com if you have ideas for future events.

Enjoy the newsletter!

Welcome to our New ALAS Officers!

Secretary
2010 - 2011
Maria Naranjo graduated from Smith College in 1991 with a Bachelors Degree in Government and Latin American Studies. Since graduation, Maria has spent the most of her career directing grassroots social justice organizing campaigns in the Washington DC Area. As the Deputy Director of the Service Employees International Union -Local 32BJ, Maria has helped immigrant and janitors of color fight for higher wages and benefits in the workplace. Maria also spends much of her time on staff development work as well as, union member leadership building in her union. Maria is a mother of two lovely children (ages 4 and 7) and lives with them in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Networking Chair
2010 - 2011
Ashley Zurc Pereira, graduated from Smith College in 2007, where she majored in American Studies, concentrating on Latino literature in the U.S., and minored in English. Her love of literature and working with children led her to write her recently published book, *Lilly & Milly: Amigas 4 Life! and she is currently working on the sequel. She also owns and operates a Family Child Care program called Mom’s Little Hearts. The program gives her the opportunity to work with toddlers who she credits as inspiring her everyday. She is currently living in Springfield, MA with her husband, Paul.

Meet the Board

President - Norma A. Melgoza ’92
Vice President - Catherine Castillo AC ’91
Treasurer - Alta Rodriguez ’91
Secretary - Maria Naranjo ’91
Fundraising Director - Sarah Zenaida Gould ’99
Recruitment Chair of NAAC - Rebeca Ames ’01
Communications Director - Arlene Ellis ’06
Co-Networking Chair - Monique Chavoya ’02
Co-Networking Chair - Ashley Zurc Pereira ’07
ALAS Alumnae Liaisons – Raquel N. Lopez ’10
ALAS Alumnae Liaisons - Tatiana Acevedo ’10

Read more about why Ashley joined ALAS on page 5.
Upcoming Events

Miami, FL

We plan to kick off the year with an important topic. ALAS and the Smith College Club of Miami will co-sponsor a discussion on the topic of women and financial independence on **February 18th, 2010** in Miami, Florida.

Our guest of honor is Mahnaz Mahdavi, Ph.D, the Director of the “Women & Financial Independence: The Smith College Center for Financial Education.” The Center for Women and Financial Independence was established for Smith students to increase their awareness on issues pertaining to finances. For many of us, speaking about finances was a “taboo” and considered an impolite topic of conversation. We learned about finances through trial and error - *many times via error*. The reality is financial matters are important and require our active participation.

As women, we live longer than men and spend twice as many years in retirement compared to men, yet we are less likely to have an adequate retirement plan. Beginning to save at a young age is essential to securing a sound financial future. Furthermore, learning about debt at a young age can contribute to a stable adult life by avoiding painful economic situations. While practical knowledge of financial matters is important for everyone, it is particularly important for women, and especially young women.

**The goals of the Smith program are threefold:**

- **Increase awareness of the importance of financial literacy among undergraduate women at Smith.**

- **Give Smith students the knowledge and skills to tackle life's financial decisions**

- **Provide hands-on opportunities for Smith students to synthesize financial lessons learned through our courses.**

After reading about the program, many of us wish we could return to campus. Although the center focuses on students, all alumnae are encouraged to use the Resource Center, enroll in classes and participate in alumnae sessions around the country, such as the discussion in Miami. Mahnaz Mahdavi, PhD is committed to bringing valuable information to alumnae and establishing a link to the center. I hope that you will participate in the upcoming Miami seminar.
Why I Joined ALAS  
Ashley Zurc Pereira ’07

Not so long ago I realized that I wanted to connect with other Latina professionals. So many times have my Latina friends and I talked about being the only Latina in the room or feeling frustrated that there weren’t more of us in our respective fields. It only made sense that I seek ALAS.

I looked up their new website and blog and decided to try to attend their NYC networking event. This was my chance to meet and interact with other Latina Smithies who have gone through the same rigorous studying while trying to maintain our identity ...and sanity. These were women that I could possibly connect with because of our shared heritage.

Unfortunately, I was unable to make it. I had already rsvp’d, so I felt the need to contact Norma, the president of ALAS, to explain my absence. The emails exchanged between myself and Norma only cemented the idea that I wanted to be a part of ALAS. I only thought about becoming a member, but Norma had me convinced that I could be one of the Networking Chairs. This became my opportunity to organize the events that bring together women from all different fields.

I am looking forward to creating opportunities for us to come together to not only network and connect, but to celebrate our successes. What I find fulfilling about networking events is that they always leave me feeling inspired. As I shake the hand of an executive of a large organization or meet a Smithie going through an intense graduate program, I can’t help but feel proud to be Latina and a graduate of Smith College.

Recruitment Chair and NAAC Update  
Rebeca Ames ’03

As we all know, Smith College is back in session and the class of 2013 is settling in. Smith has an extremely diverse and talented class this year. The college experienced a record number of applicants with a full class despite the uncertainty stemming from the economic turndown.

In response to the economic pressures, Smith reprioritized expenses across the institution; however, financial aid and outreach efforts to underrepresented groups such as Latinas were not impacted.

This fall, a new affinity group, the Smith Asian Alumniae Connection (SAAC), has joined the admissions circle. I am excited about the potential of collaborative recruitment efforts between ALAS and SAAC.

As you read this update, the admissions office representatives are traveling around the country and abroad reaching out to high schools and meeting with talented young women. Please note that alumnae can participate in the recruitment efforts by conducting interviews, speaking with potential Smithies about your experience and/or attending college fairs. The volunteer opportunities are limitless.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet with Deanna Dixon the new Assistant Director of Admissions assigned to New York City. She informed me that over the summer, the college conducted market research focusing on how to better market Smith. Three marketing buzz words were derived from the focus groups: individual, global and exceptional. The office will creatively tailor these words to the curriculum, students and overall Smith experience.

More good news -- Ford Hall just opened with a dedication dinner on October 16th. Plus, Smith is launching the new BA in Engineering. The Admissions Office plans to begin marketing to prospective students interested in science and engineering with these new enhancements.

2010 promises to be another exciting year in the field of admissions and recruitment. I hope that you’ll join these worthwhile efforts by reaching out to me at rebeca.ames@gmail.com
Reflections on Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor

Alta Rodriguez '90

Orgullo (Pride). Un Gran Orgullo (Great Pride). This is the feeling that washes over me when I think about our country's first Latino Supreme Court Justice, Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Having followed the grueling confirmation hearings, newspaper accounts of her swearing-in, and now being able to read her Wikipedia page (how many Latinos/Latinas get their own Wikipedia page?), I get emotional just thinking about what she represents for this country, for us as Latinas, for our Latino community, and for future generations.

As a 10-year old growing up in Anaheim, California, I remember hearing from my Catechism school teacher, Mrs. Ramos, about how, as a child growing up in Southern California, she had been sent to the "White school", but the boy who later became her husband, Mr. Ramos, was sent to the vastly inferior "Mexican school". You see, what distinguished Mr. and Mrs. Ramos and their educational opportunities was the color of their skin. Mrs. Ramos was light-completed -- and thus "passed" as Anglo or European -- while her husband, who was dark-completed could never be anything but “Mexican”. And, in those days (during and after the Great Depression), being a Mexican in California was not necessarily a positive attribute.

Even in the late 1970's, as a new immigrant and a monolingual Spanish-speaking student being bussed to integrate a "White" school, I felt that historical bias against Latinos.

We have come a l-o-n-g way.

Today, we not only have a Latina sitting in the highest court of this country, but we also have an African American man as Commander-in-Chief. My 3-year old daughter, Madeleine Alegria, will never know what it is not to have a Latina role model on the Supreme Court. And, her 6-year old cousin, Kenneth Ezenwa Nwobi, will never doubt that, he too, an African American, can dream about someday living in the White House. Madeleine and Kenny are indeed fortunate to have Justice Sotomayor and President Obama as outstanding role models!

An Influential Latina Woman

Norma A. Melgoza '92

I first heard Mercedes Sosa’s voice at Smith in Tyler house as I walked from the kitchenette to my room. At that moment in time, I knew very little about her history, political activism, exile from Argentina and commitment to human rights. I was touched by her voice. She was an Argentine singer who brought to life the songs written by many Latin American artists. Mercedes Sosa was considered the “voice for the voiceless” and traveled around the world to raise awareness for the victims of oppression.

Her voice brings lyrics to life. For example, the tension and emotions are palpable in the song, “Yo Vengo a Ofrecer mi Corazón”, as she speaks about sacrifice and hope despite the loss. In addition, when I listen to the song “Razón de Vivir”, her powerful voice sends goose bumps up my back and stirs deep emotions within me. Once in a while, I will play her CD when I need to feel grounded.

I was saddened to hear of her death on October 4, 2009 as we lost a beautiful person; however, I am comforted by her songs as these are eternal. Her convictions, independence, dignity and courage serve as an example for future generations. She was an influential Latina woman making her way through the world.
Our Very Own Influential Latina Smith Alumnae

Maya Ramos ‘03

Originally from the Bay Area, Maya Ramos graduated from Smith College in 2003, where she majored in Comparative Religion and Biblical Studies & African Studies. While a student at Smith, Maya studied abroad in Botswana, Africa and Lamas, Peru.

It was in Botswana where Maya developed and implemented outreach plans for men as part of a greater effort to combat violence against women. Maya’s training and outreach abilities would soon come in handy in an entirely different arena. Upon graduation, she earned a position at The Posse Foundation, Inc., a leading college access and youth leadership development program. As a Trainer for The Posse Foundation’s Boston office, Maya would help identify, recruit and train Posse Scholars to attend such partner institutions as Bryn Mawr and Hamilton College.

Maya’s success did not go unnoticed and she was soon offered, not just a promotion to Program Director, but the opportunity to return to the west cost and become the very first program director in Posse’s LA office.

Since her tenure as Program Director, Posse Los Angeles has grown from a small site to a full-capacity site serving over eight different partner institutions, including premier institutions such as UC Berkeley, UCLA and Tulane University. Under Maya’s leadership, the high school nomination network has expanded significantly, resulting in a 60% increase in 2008, and a nearly 100% increase in 2009. 90% of the Posse Scholars in Los Angeles graduated from college. Since joining Posse in 2003, Maya has led efforts to identify over 300 outstanding high school students and, on behalf of the partner institutions, award them over $30 million in college scholarships.

She is a former member of the Smith College Alumni Association Board of Directors, a Common Ground Committee member and most recently, an invited panelist at the Smith College Alumni Women of Color Conference. Maya’s hard work is certainly an inspiration for us all.

Norma García Guillén ‘97

Norma García Guillén was born and raised in Santa Ana, California to immigrant parents from the southern state of Guerrero, México. She is the third of five children born to Saúl and Gloria García. She attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she earned her B.S. in 1997 in Government and Latin American Studies. In 2002, Norma earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Southern California Law School. Today, Norma is an associate at the international law firm, Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton, LLP where she specializes in general business litigation in various industries, including financial institutions, pharmaceuticals, insurance and information technology. Her litigation experience centers around complex breach of contract and business tort claims, as well as intellectual property, unfair competition, securities and products liability claims.

Norma is active in her community and was elected President of the Orange County Hispanic Bar Association in 2008. Norma was awarded the 2009 Inspirational Alumnus award by USC Law School’s La Raza Law Students Association, the 2008 Emerging Leader award by the American Jewish Committee in Orange County, and was also named one of OC Metro Business’ 2008 20 Women to Watch (March 2008). She was also profiled the Orange County Register, Latina magazine Secciones, La Opinión, Excelsior for her accomplishments and humble beginnings.

Norma credits her accomplishments to the strong work ethic her parents exemplified throughout her life, their willingness to leave all they knew behind in their native México for a chance at a brighter future, and their constant reminder that education is the key to any unopened door. Norma, who is bilingual and bicultural, also thanks her parents who stressed the importance of dominating both English and Spanish and not losing her Mexican roots.

Norma lives in her native Santa Ana with her husband José Guillén, 5 year-old daughter, Eliana Fe, and 4 month-old son, Santiago Saúl.
Poems
Lissy Gutierrez ‘87

Lissy Gutierrez was born and raised in Puerto Rico in a literary family. Her great grandfather and uncle were known poet laureates in Puerto Rico. She was educated in the Catholic school system run by Dominican sisters through high school. While at Smith, Lissy majored in Child Psychology and Latin American Literature. She continued her educational career at Boston College where she obtained an M.B.A. in 1992. She worked for the government of Puerto Rico until her first daughter was born. Lissy returned to work 10 years later and obtained a teaching certificate as a language teacher. She currently teaches Spanish to grades K-5 at the International School in Greenwich, CT. A loving husband and two magnificent princesses, ages 10 and 12, complete the picture.

In the words of the poet, her works are “about my daughters Catalina and Valentina, one celebrating my friend’s adoption of her baby girl, Cecilia, and other thoughts and feelings, throughout my life cruise.”

We are grateful to Lissy for sharing her beautiful poems with ALAS.

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CECILIA (Para Margarita Figueroa)

Cuentas de perlas parecen tus dedos
Entrelazado de azul, tu pelo
Cuando protestas me encanta tu empeño,
Ilimitado al cansancio y a cualquier tristeza eres
Ilusión hecha vida
Arullo rosa, Alas y Día
CECILIA

CEMENCIA
(Otoño 2003)

I
Engáñame, por favor
Dime que tú sí me quieres,
Que me piensas, que me extrañas,
Que sin mi aliento te mueres
¡Por Piedad, haz un esfuerzo!
Te doy permiso. ¡Miente!
Di que entre nuestras vidas
Aun hay matices alegres
Miénteme con la Mirada
Piensa en otra y ponle amor
Que es que el sueño no me llega
Porque lo espanta el dolor

II
No me digas la verdad
Silencio. No me la cuentas.
No me digas que este amor
Que todavía no crece, Ve muerte
No me regales cordura
No me ilusiona el Honor
Eso es para otros mortales
Cuyo amor consagró Dios

III
Di que te agrada mi vista
Que te enternecen mis gestos
No me digas que mi nombre
Lo que llenaba, ahora es hueco,
Que el pensamiento hace Eco
En lo vacío del cuerpo

IV
¿Qué quieres? ¿Que te lo pida?
¿Qué quieres? ¿Que te lo ruegue?
Pues si es mejor, Te Lo Suplico
Dame un abrazo… Si puedes…

V
Tal vez un día, pensando,
Mirando desde otra orilla
Con el cabello sin brillo
Y el cuerpo sin lozanía
Me arrepienta de adorarte,
De regalarte mi vida,
De velarme el sentimiento
Y de humillar mi pasión

Sé que cuando al fin te vayas
Y también se ponga el sol
Soledad, siempre en mi nido
Me habrá dado la razón

Más mientras sea primavera,
Ayúdame a creer, mintiendo
Ayúdame a volar creyendo
Que fui Julieta en tus sueños

Que no hay mentira más linda
Que un sueño puro de amor
Pues cuando despunte el alba
Me habrá roto el corazón

CECILIA
SONETO A CATALINA

Suena a taza de plata al rodar por el suelo: Tu Risa
Huele a flores silvestres y a viento y a miel: Tu Estela
Acaricia los sentidos con un fresco vaivén: Tu Aliento
Eres Ternura, Alegría, Pasión e Independencia: CATALINA

SONETO A VALENTINA

Imaginación que vuela aún estando despierta
Inocentes rizos que retan al sol
Eres dulzura y sentimiento puro
Intensidad y Fantasía y Valor y Corazón: VALENTINA

MIS NENAS

Amores he tenido y amor he regalado
Por amor he rezado y por amor he llorado
Pero amor sin fronteras y sin condición
Lo conocí ahora, con las DOS

Share Your Nosotras Memories!

A founding member of Nosotras is interested in compiling a historical overview about Nosotras for the Smith archives from its birth to current times. Please send your favorite memories to ALASAlumnae@Live.com.

Message from our Fundraising Director
Sarah Zenaida Gould ‘99

Now that fall has turned into winter, the season of cold yet beautiful snow, really hot café, warm sweaters, and our membership drive. As you peruse the pages of our latest newsletter, I hope you will consider joining ALAS. As a self-supporting affinity group all of our funding comes from our members. This means that without due paying members there is no ALAS.

As we are sensitive to the current economic climate, we have recently lowered our annual membership dues to just $25. Currently these dues help pay for event costs, postage and printing fees. However, as our membership grows we hope to build a large enough fund to establish a scholarship in named in memory of Smith’s first Latina Alumna, Salome Machado, class of 1883.

ALAS aims to create a network connecting Latina alumnae across the country. In the past year we have hosted events in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, New York, Boston and Dallas. Additional events are planned for Miami and New York City.

If an ALAS event comes to your town, please join us to experience ALAS for yourself. If no event has been planned for your area, please let us know if you would like to help us plan something. Please join ALAS today and help build nuestra comunidad!
Please update your information:

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Checks should be made payable to the:

Alumnae Association of Smith College
c/o Norma A. Melgoza
1007 W. Armitage, 2F
Chicago, IL 60614

I would like to make this contribution to the Smith College Women of Color Emergency Fund. Please make your check payable to Smith College and indicate that it is for the Women of Color Emergency Fund.

Total Enclosed: $ __________.

Please indicate your interest in attending or helping to organize either locally or regionally, the following group functions or events:

- [ ] ALAS Big Sister Program/Mentoring Program
- [ ] Career Panel
- [ ] Admissions Interviews/Recruiting
- [ ] Book Club
- [ ] Women and Financial Independence Seminar
- [ ] Hosting an Event

Would you be interested in Career Networking breakfasts/roundtables? ___Y ___N

Would you be interested in a Working Mothers/Balancing Family and Career Support Group? ___Y ___N

Would you be willing to be contacted for informational interviews? ___Y ___N

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

Suggestions:

Email: ALASAlumnae@Live.com