

Statement from Pedro Caban, Director, Latino Studies Program

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I will note that Latina/o student perceptions of the Cornell and their position here vary significantly across class, race, gender, national origin and regional lines. It is difficult to hypothesize a common experiential framework for all Latino/a students.

There is however, one concern that seems to run across virtually all Latina/o constituencies. A common source of frustration for these students is that they know that invariably they will be called upon in class or another forum to act as the representative voice for the Latino experience. Students have shared with me their very real annoyance at having to legitimize stereotypical constructions of who they are by acting out the role that they speak for "their people." This lament has been consistent over the twenty years of teaching in different institutions (CUNY, Fordham, Columbia, Rutgers and now Cornell).

I have much more that can be said, but the key point is that a gap does exist between the self perceptions that Latino/a student have and their sense of the constructed images the dominant society has created to classify and categorize them.

These students are proud of their achievements, and one of the most notable is being a student at Cornell. Although many do consider the university to be an alienating and somewhat intimidating world, they also are sufficiently sophisticated to accept that their experiences here are invaluable if they are to succeed once they have left the relatively safe haven of the university.