



BROWN

Dean of the College

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October 4, 2013

Dear supporters of Brown's Minority Peer Counselor program:

I write as an academic dean, as a former Minority Peer Counselor, and as someone whose personal and professional goals have been profoundly shaped by the MPC program. The MPC program – its mission and its student leadership – represent the absolute best of Brown. It gives me great joy to join others in celebrating the 40th anniversary of this seminal program.

As a student, I felt awakened and inspired by the Third World Transition Program. Although I was no stranger to activism and to questions of power, privilege, and identity, during TWTP, I grew in three important ways: first, I developed a critical language for talking about often uncomfortable issues about which I cared deeply; second, I learned that Brown was a place where I could integrate my commitment to anti-racist practice into my education in a way that was both meaningful and rigorous; finally, I left TWTP with a community that would challenge and sustain me intellectually, socially, and spiritually far beyond my undergraduate years. Later, as an MPC, I would learn the leadership, communication, and advising skills that have become central to the work I do as an academic dean. I returned to TWTP every year until I graduated – even during the year I spent away from campus – as an MPC and an MPC Friend.

As a scholar, my single most formative experience was the time I spent as an MPC. MPCs and MPC Friends played a leadership role in the Third World Coalition, which fought to create Brown's Ethnic Studies concentration. On a personal note, the community of color that sprang from the TWC and the MPC program connected me to faculty of color who would become my mentors and to research experiences that introduced me to the idea of doctoral study, like the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. My PhD dissertation, which explored the development of a third world consciousness among U.S.-based activists of color between the 1930-1970s, was inspired and informed by the vision and work of the Third World Center and the MPC program.

As an administrator and academic advisor, I have come to see the MPC program as providing an invaluable service to the University. Numerous studies and anecdotal evidence point to the challenges faced by students of color – across class backgrounds – in navigating elite institutions. MPCs certainly do the important work of connecting students of color with critical resources, but they also create spaces for the honest, painful, and productive conversations about privilege, difference, and inequality that are often ignored in other settings. True community cannot emerge without this type of dialogue. This program has touched the lives of all Brown students – not just those who felt affirmed and supported by their MPC, or those who grew because of the work they did as MPCs. It bears repeating that all Brown students have benefited from the climate – one which nurtures as it challenges – created and protected by the MPC Program and from the day-today work done in support of Brown's most vulnerable population – its first-year students.

I close by urging everyone with a stake in this University – now celebrating its two hundred fiftieth year – to watch the video, *Third World History at Brown*, archived in the Third World Center (and I urge the TWC staff to make this film available digitally). As an undergraduate, this evocative film provided me with a powerful sense of the legacy of struggle that made it possible for me to call Brown home and to

thrive here. MPCs are one important chapter in this history. I hope that in spite of whatever changes lie ahead for the TWC and its programs, the spirit of mentorship, community, and justice will endure.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Besenia Rodriguez". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the phrase "In solidarity,".

Besenia Rodriguez '00, Ph.D.
Associate Dean of the College
Minority Peer Counselor, 1998-99