

**A Program Evaluation  
Of the 2009 Latino Museum Studies Program  
Of the Smithsonian Latino Center**

November 2009

 Smithsonian Institution

Office of Policy and Analysis  
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## Foreword

In one form or another, the Latino Museum Studies Program (LMSP) has been around for over 15 years. It was one of the first initiatives specifically designed to connect the Smithsonian to the growing U.S. Latino community, predating the establishment of the Smithsonian Latino Center (formerly the Smithsonian Center for Latino Initiatives) in 1997. To this day, the LMSP remains a core program of the Latino Center.

The Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) was pleased to be asked by the Smithsonian Latino Center to conduct a program evaluation the 2009 running of the LMSP. The following report, while critical at times, maintains that the LMSP remains a program with enormous potential benefits both for its participants and for the Smithsonian itself—albeit one that, at this point in its development, may be in need of some changes.

I would like to thank the members of the Smithsonian Latino Center staff who worked with the OP&A study team on this project, particularly Core Program Director Joanne Flores and Andrew Rebatta, a former LMSP participant who managed the 2009 program. I would also like to thank Center Director Eduardo Diaz for his continuing support for the Center's longstanding interest in evaluating its programs to determine their success with their intended audiences and how they might be improved.

As always, I thank the OP&A personnel who worked on this project, particularly intern Sarah Block, who undertook much of the most time-consuming work for this project—administering surveys, conducting interviews, observing sessions of the LMSP, analyzing survey data, and writing the initial draft of this report. Thanks also go to OP&A staff members Lance Costello (who helped to develop survey instruments, conducted post-program interviews, and assisted with the survey data analysis) and James Smith (who helped to develop the surveys, conducted pre- and post-program interviews, assembled the final version of the report, and served as project manager).

Above all, I wish to thank the talented participants in the LMSP who thoughtfully filled out lengthy surveys at the beginning and end of the program, consented to in-depth interviews before and after coming to Washington D.C., and took the initiative to write up their own collective views on the program—which are presented as appendices at the end of this report. Their cooperation will help to make future sessions of the LMSP even more rewarding for participants.

Carole M.P. Neves  
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## Acronym List

AAA	Archives of American Art
GTS	Graduate Training Seminar (precursor to LMSP)
LMSP	Latino Museum Studies Program
MCI	Museum Conservation Institute
NMAfA	National Museum of African Art
NMAH	National Museum of American History
NMAI	National Museum of the American Indian
OEC	Office of Exhibits Central
OP&A	Office of Policy and Analysis
SAAM	Smithsonian American Art Museum
SITES	Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service
SLC	Smithsonian Latino Center

## **Introduction and Methodology**

The Latino Museum Studies Program (LMSP) and its predecessor, the Graduate Training Seminar (GTS), have been in existence since 1993. Over the years, these programs have hosted approximately 200 participants.

In its current form, the LMSP runs for four weeks, divided into two segments:

- A two-week instructional segment, consisting of panel sessions, lectures, workshops, and behind-the-scenes tours of Smithsonian collections and facilities; and
- A two-week experiential segment, during which fellows participate in a practicum project within the Smithsonian Institution.

The former segment is conducted at the beginning of the program as a group, while in the latter fellows work alone or in pairs. Practicums for the 2009 LMSP were hosted by the National Museum of American History, National Museum of the American Indian, Anacostia Community Museum, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibitions Service, Smithsonian Early Education Center, and Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC). The program is administered by the SLC.

In September 2002, the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) completed an evaluation of the GTS. This study explored the experiences of former GTS participants and faculty members, concluding that the program met fellows' expectations and was considered by them to be successful. Suggestions for improvements included extending the seminar beyond its original two-week duration; involving fellows in actual research on relevant exhibitions and projects; developing a formal mentoring relationship between fellows and Smithsonian scholars; creating mechanisms for post-program follow-up; organizing an active alumni group; and focusing greater attention on actual museum operations. Program faculty contacted for the study suggested that faculty should be given an orientation on the program's mission and goals, and should receive fellows' feedback on their efforts. A number of the report's recommendations—most notably, the extension of the program's length from two to four weeks—were subsequently implemented.

In the spring of 2009, the SLC approached OP&A to request an evaluation of the LMSP. Unlike the previous study of the GTS, which solicited the views of past participants, this study was to focus specifically on the experiences of participants in the 2009 program (held from July 12–August 7), particularly with regard to the following questions:

- What benefits do participants prospectively expect from the program, and what benefits do they actually gain from it? How well does the program fulfill their expectations?
- What are some of the fellows' favorite activities in the program, and why?
- What did fellows think about the organization and administration of the program?
- How might the program be improved?

To answer these questions, the OP&A study team used the following research methods:

- In-depth telephone interviews with 5 out of the 13 participants prior to their arrival in Washington, D.C. to explore their expectations for the program;
- Informal observation of several sessions of the program (including fellows' introductory and final presentations, and the group's meeting with SLC Director Eduardo Diaz);
- Written surveys of the fellows upon their arrival in Washington (July 13) and before their departure (August 7);<sup>1</sup>
- Daily written summary evaluations of program activities, administered at the end of each day of the instructional segment;
- In-depth in-person and telephone interviews with 9 out of the 13 participants at the end of the program, to discuss their views on both the instructional and experiential segments; and
- In-depth interviews with three of the practicum supervisors to discuss the program from their perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> The number of respondents was 14 for the pre-program survey and 13 for the post-program survey.



## Findings: Participant Experience

### General

In response to questions in the pre-program interviews and survey about why they applied to the program and what they hoped to gain from it, participants offered a wide variety of responses, ranging from resume-building to gaining better understanding of Latino representation in museums.

Because many of the fellows had years of experience working in museums, the opportunity to spend time at the Smithsonian and see the inner workings of one of the world's great museum complexes was a particular draw. More generally, an important goal for some participants was to explore how other practitioners in the museum field are approaching common challenges and issues. For example, one participant noted:

*[I wanted] to expose myself to how different museums work. ... My goal was basically to come here and look at things differently, learn about a different way of working, and see how I could make connections here.*

Unsurprisingly, the opportunity to gain professional contacts was a draw. Participants stressed their interest in the program as a channel for forming connections with Smithsonian personnel and other program faculty, as well as other fellows:

*I hope to make professional contacts that may lead to partnerships. I want to hear from others who are interested in the field. We are rather isolated here at [my home organization], and I welcome the opportunity to broaden my horizons and hear from others.*

Overall pre-program expectations were high, in some cases mainly because of the program's association with the Smithsonian:

*Because it's the Smithsonian, I expect it to be a high-quality program—quality teaching, learning best practices, etc.*

Fellows also expected the program to help them to develop specific professional or research skills/knowledge. Indeed, all of them listed this as an expected benefit on the pre-program survey. One interviewee expressed this sentiment in the following words:

*The main benefit I hope to get from the program is to learn concrete exhibition development skills. I have been curating for a while, but often for organizations with limited budgets that are not working at the highest levels. By contrast, the Smithsonian is committed to the highest standards of practice. I hope what I learn in*

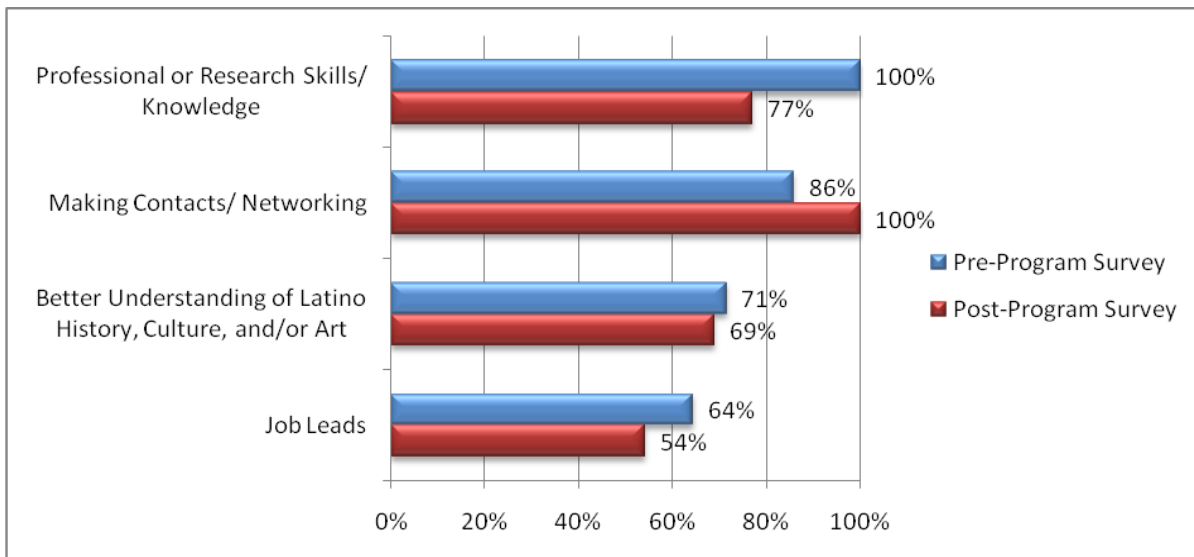
*the program will move my skills up a couple notches and make me more proficient in my professional curation activities.*

Figure 1 compares what fellows prospectively hoped to gain from the LMSP (according to the pre-program survey) with what they retrospectively said they gained (on the post-program survey), from among four choices:

- *Professional or research skills/knowledge;*
- *Making contacts/networking;*
- *Better understanding of Latino history, culture, and/or art; and*
- *Job leads.*

Comparing results from the pre- and post-program surveys suggests the LMSP was slightly more successful than fellows anticipated in the area of *making contacts and networking*; slightly less successful in the areas of conferring *professional or research skills/knowledge* and providing *job leads*; and about as successful as expected in providing a *better understanding of Latino history, culture, and/or art*.

**Figure 1: Anticipated and Actual Benefits from the LMSP**  
(Percentage of Fellows Expecting/Receiving Benefit)



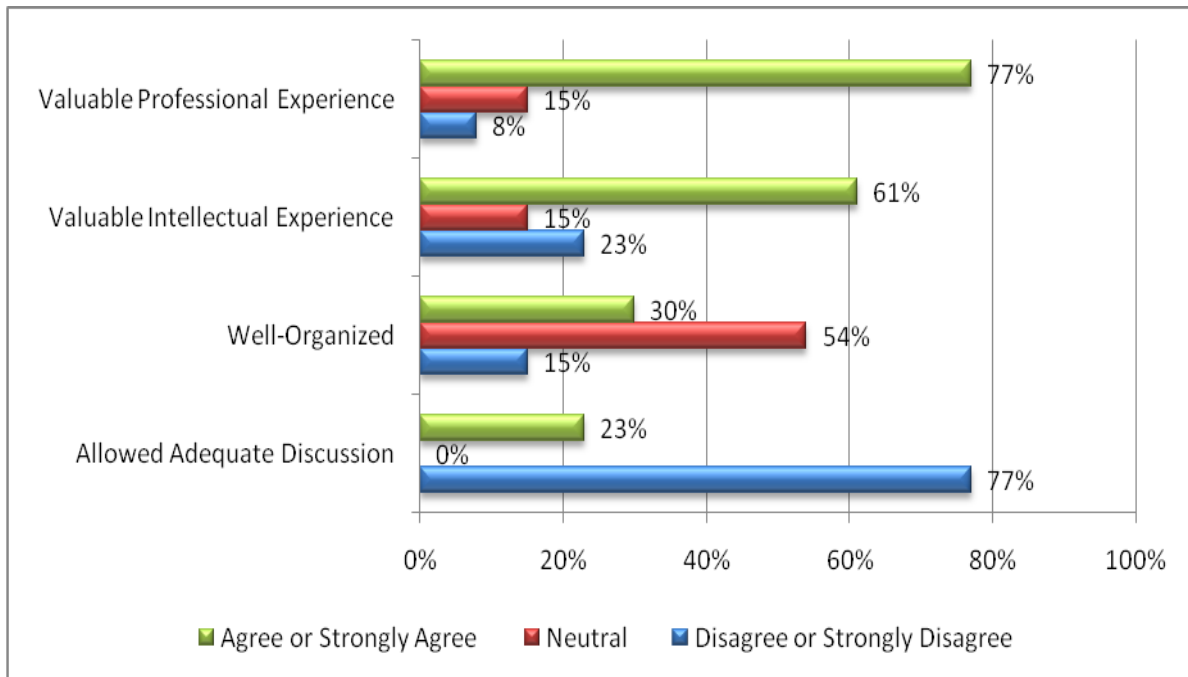
## Instructional Segment

To assess overall satisfaction with the two-week instructional segment of the LMSP, the study team asked fellows to indicate their agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5):

- “The instructional segment was a valuable professional experience.”
- “The instructional segment was a valuable intellectual experience.”
- “The format of the instructional segment allowed for adequate discussion and interaction among participants.”
- “The instructional segment was well-organized.”

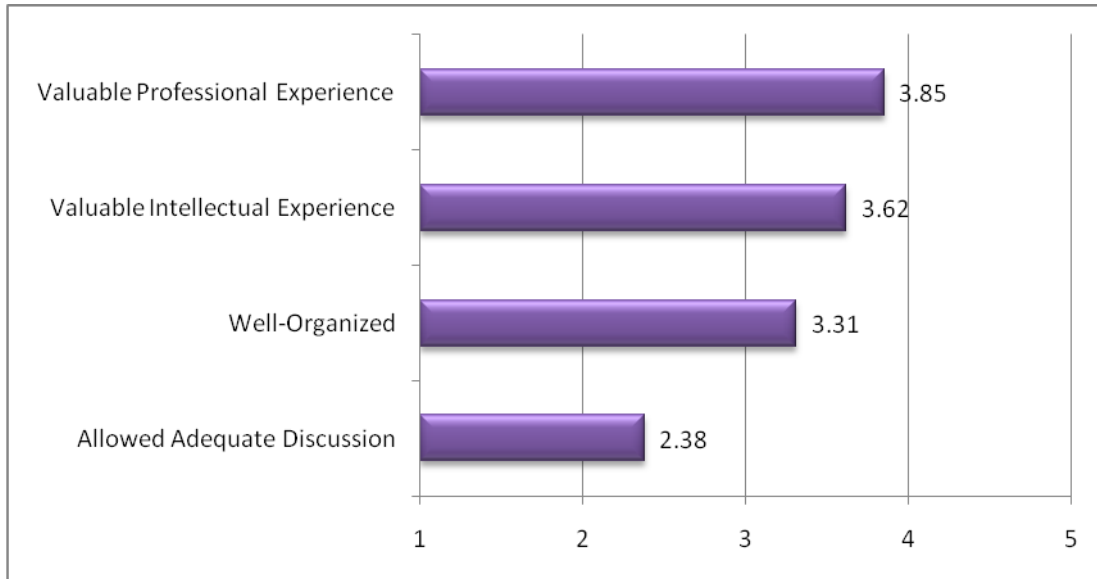
Figure 2 summarizes the results, in terms of the split between general agreement and disagreement. The Figure demonstrates general agreement that the instructional segment was a valuable professional and intellectual experience; general disagreement that the format allowed sufficient time for discussion; and a range of views (with neutrality predominating) on the issue of whether it was well-organized.

**Figure 2: Agreement with Statements About Instructional Segment**



Averaging the responses for each question (see Figure 3) provides a similar message.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3: Average Response to Statements About Instructional Segment**  
On Scale of 1 (= *Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (= *Strongly Agree*)



The most striking result from this set of questions is the very low level of agreement with the proposition that the instructional segment was structured to allow adequate discussion. This finding was backed up by participants' responses to a write-in question on the exit survey that asked what parts of the program they found most and least interesting/relevant. A number of fellows indicated that the least interesting/relevant parts of the program were those that allowed little or no time for discussion. (Fellows also indicated that they found activities less interesting/relevant when they were presented at an excessively elementary level or lacked intellectual stimulation.)

Complaints about instructional segment activities that did not allow adequate intellectual discussion came up frequently during post-program interviews. This issue was also highlighted in "Evaluating the Latino Museum Studies Program," a document written by the 2009 cohort on their own initiative to articulate their views of the strengths and

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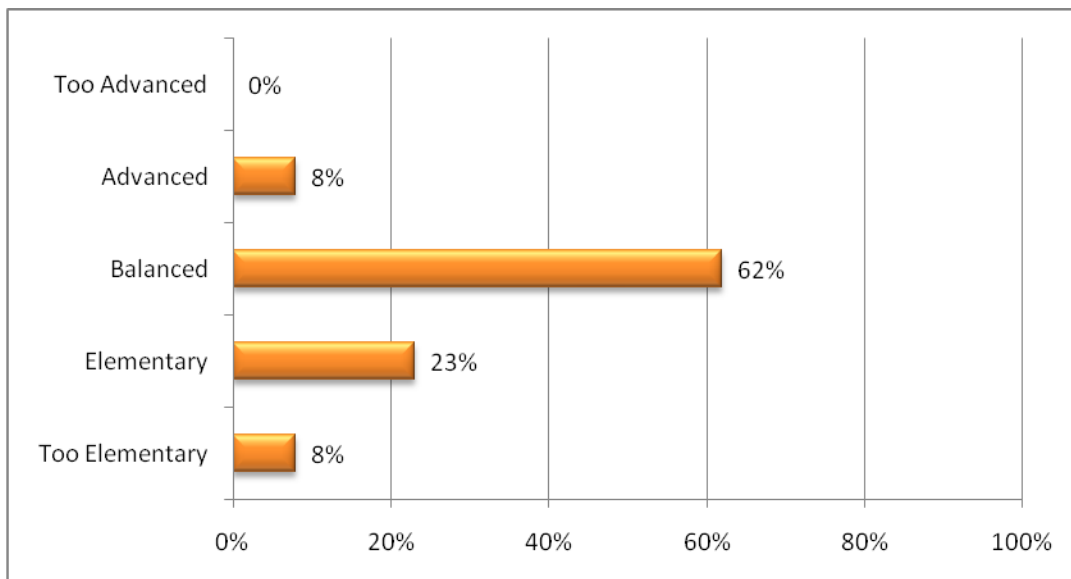
<sup>2</sup> Recall that on the scale used for this question, an average of 1 would indicate all participants *strongly disagree* with the statement, and an average of 5 would indicate all participants *strongly agree*.

weaknesses of the program, and to offer recommendations for improvements (see Appendix C).<sup>3</sup> The document states:

*Each workshop theme was presented in largely discipline-oriented format and without the opportunity to engage either the presenters or LMSP fellows in theoretical or philosophical discussions that relate to these individual practices, and that represent issues that are important in our own work as well as relevant to the Smithsonian.*

When asked about the general level of presentations in the instructional segment, the majority indicated it was pitched at the right intellectual level, although about a third of participants found it either *elementary* or *too elementary* (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Level of Instruction in Instructional Segment**



### *Specific Programs*

At the conclusion of each day of the instructional segment, fellows were asked to rate the day's activities, assessing both the session itself and the presenter. They were also given a

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewees indicated that most members of the LMSP group met nightly after the end of the structured part of the program for their own discussion of each day's events. These sessions resulted in the idea of writing a document to provide constructive feedback to the SLC on their experiences. In addition to the "Evaluating the Latino Museum Studies Program" document, the group composed a document called "Reigniting the Vision," which offers a more broad and forward-looking view of the role of the Smithsonian, the SLC, and the LMSP in promoting the representation of Latino culture and heritage across the nation, including thoughts on a prospective Smithsonian museum focusing on the Latino experience. See Appendix D.

chance to write in any additional thoughts about the day's sessions. Figure 5 presents the average ratings for each activity.

**Figure 5: Average Activity Rating**  
On Scale of 1 (= *Poor*) to 5 (= *Superior*)<sup>4</sup>

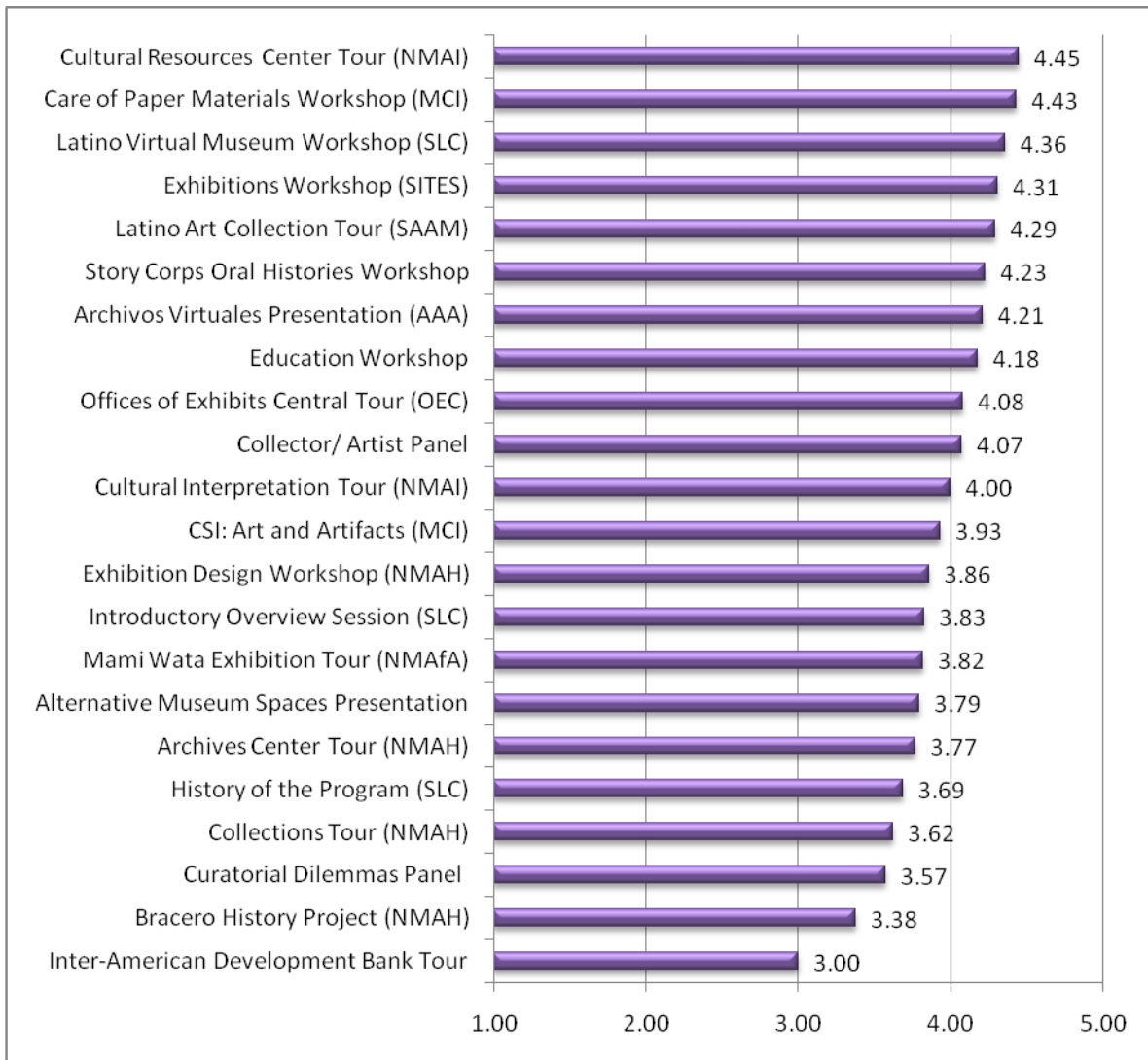
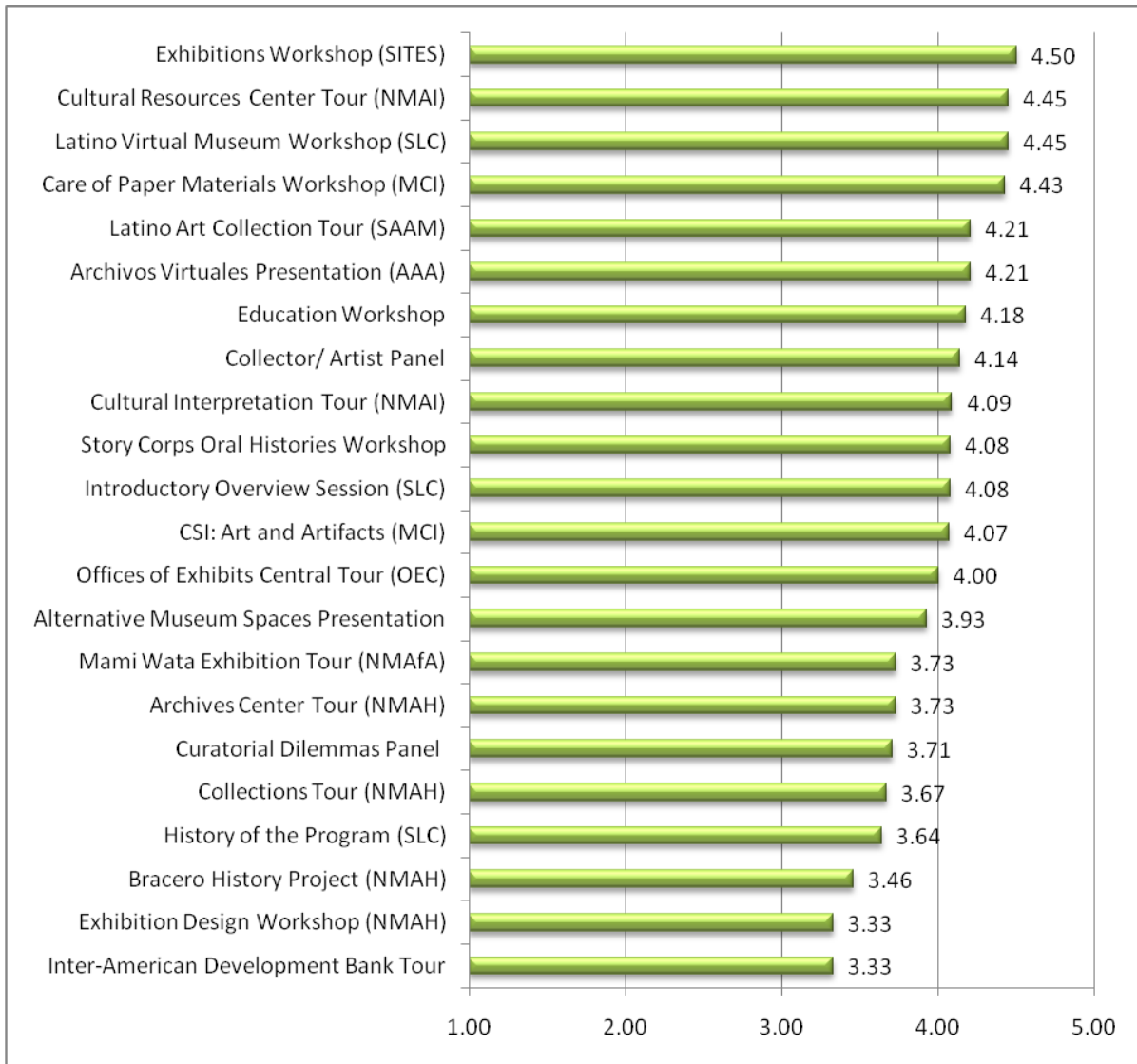


Figure 6 presents the ratings for session presenters. Generally, there was a close correlation between activity and presenter ratings. The only notable exception appeared to be the exhibition design workshop at NMAH on July 15, which tied for the lowest presenter score, but fell in the middle of the rankings for the activity itself.

<sup>4</sup> Acronyms in parenthesis following activity name/description refer to the main Smithsonian unit associated with the activity, where this applies. For acronym list, see page iii.

**Figure 6: Average Presenter Rating**  
 On Scale of 1 (= *Poor*) to 5 (= *Superior*)



Looking at both activity and presenter ratings, the highest-rated sessions included:

- The tour of the National Museum of the American Indian's Culture Resources Center on July 21;
- The Museum Conservation Institute's paper care workshop on July 20;
- The workshop on the SLC's Latino Virtual Museum on July 22;
- The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibitions Service's exhibitions workshop on July 17; and
- The tour of the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Latino collections on July 16.

The sessions that ranked highest were accompanied by comments noting participants' appreciation for hands-on elements, rich interaction between the presenter and participants, and/or a presentation level that was appropriate for an audience with prior knowledge of the museum field.

At the other end of the scale, the lowest-rated sessions included:

- The Inter-American Development Bank tour on July 22;
- The *Bracero History Project* presentation of the National Museum of the American History and George Mason University on July 14;
- The curatorial dilemmas panel on July 23;
- The tour of the National Museum of American History's collections on July 17; and
- The presentation on the history of the LMSP on July 13.

Participants indicated the offerings that received less favorable ratings usually did not include enough time for discussion, dealt with the topic at a superficial level, and/or were presented by individuals who did not appear aware that the group had prior knowledge of the museum field.

### **Practicum Segment**

Included in the application for the LMSP was a list of practicum descriptions, from among which participants were asked to choose three options. SLC staff then assigned each fellow to a practicum, based on his or her preferences to the extent possible.



To assess satisfaction with the practicum, the study team asked fellows on the exit survey to indicate their agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5):

- “The practicum segment was a valuable professional experience.”
- “The practicum segment was a valuable intellectual experience.”
- “My practicum was well-organized.”
- “My practicum supervisor was helpful and supportive.”

Figure 7 summarizes the results in terms of general agreement and disagreement.

**Figure 7: Agreement with Statements About Practicum**

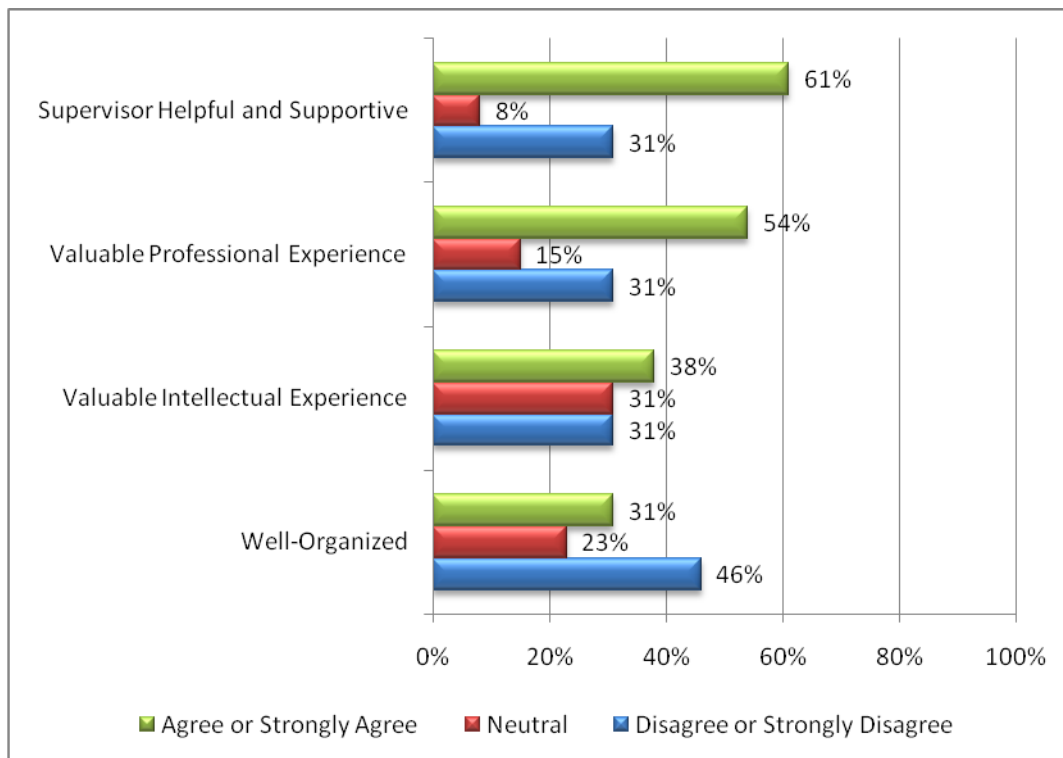


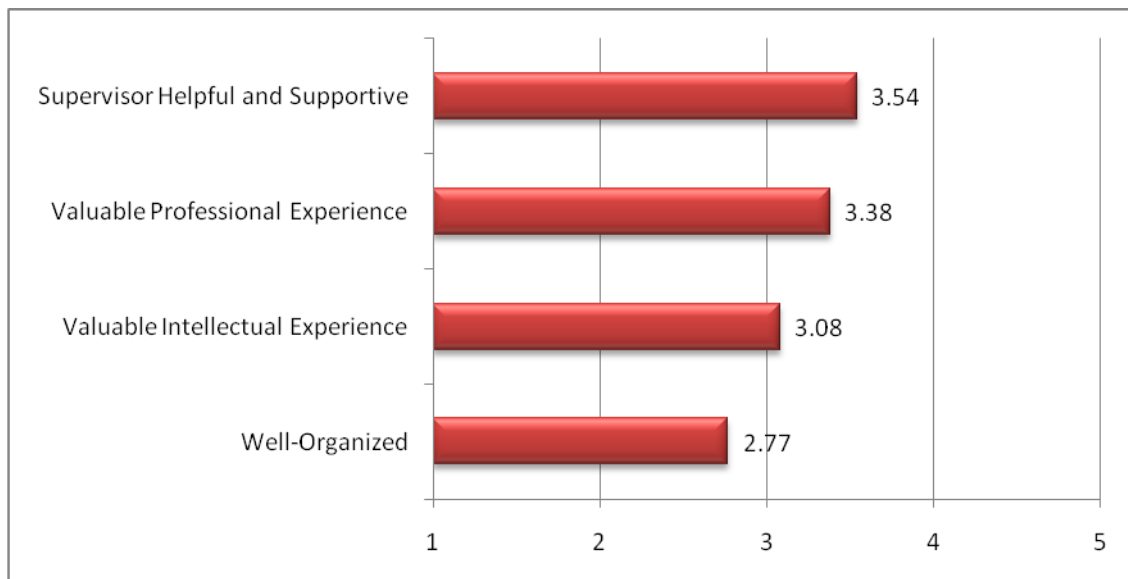
Figure 7 demonstrates relatively high levels of agreement with the statements that practicum supervisors were helpful and supportive, and that the practicum was a valuable professional experience. However, opinions on both statements covered a wide range, with nearly a third of fellows *disagreeing* or *strongly disagreeing* with the statement in both cases.

There was less agreement on whether the practicum was a valuable intellectual experience, with opinions almost evenly distributed across general agreement, neutrality, and general disagreement.

The organization of their practicum was clearly perceived to be a weakness by many fellows, with about a third expressing *strong disagreement* with the proposition that their practicum was well-organized, and nearly half expressing either *strong disagreement* or *disagreement*.

Figure 8 provides a different perspective on fellows' opinions about their practicum, derived from averaging the responses for each question. The Figure supports the finding that organization was perceived to be a relative weakness of the practicum experience.

**Figure 8: Average Response to Statements About Practicum**  
On Scale of 1 (= *Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (= *Strongly Agree*)



In interviews and written comments, all fellows indicated that they derived something positive from their practicum experience. However, many also mentioned negative aspects; and for some, the experience was clearly a disappointment on balance. Among the problematic issues were the following:

- Most fellows were notified of their placement only at the beginning of the program. Most were contacted by their advisors only on the Friday before the Monday when practicums were scheduled to begin, and some did not have any contact with their

advisors at all until the first day of the practicum. This made pre-practicum planning, preparation, and discussion with advisors difficult or impossible.

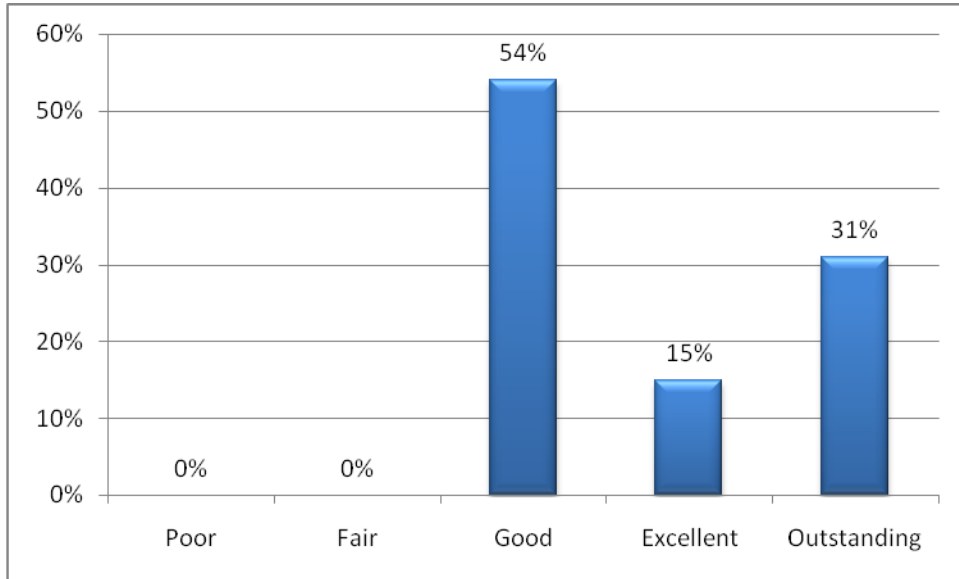
- Some projects were tightly directed and scheduled by supervisors, while others allowed fellows to work in a highly independent way. Some fellows complained that their advisors did not appear to have adequately prepared for the practicum. Discussions with supervisors suggested that the problem in some cases was a lack of communication among the SLC, the practicum supervisors, and the fellows, which resulted in advisors without a clear sense of what the program was about and what they were expected to do with fellows. However, there was one case in which a supervisor was described by fellows as simply indifferent.
- A number of fellows did not feel they were given the opportunity to utilize their skills and knowledge, or to contribute to their projects in a substantive way. Some complained about too much “busy work” and not enough intellectual stimulation. Participants generally expressed the desire for the practicum to be of mutual benefit to both them and the host unit, and some did not feel that this was happening in their case.

### **Overall Satisfaction**

On the whole, on the five-point scale of *poor, fair, good, excellent, and outstanding*, four fellows (31 percent) rated the value of the program to them as *outstanding*, two as *excellent* (15 percent), and seven (54 percent) as *good*. (See Figure 9, next page.)

Fellows who were working in the museum field were asked how relevant they expected their experience in the LMSP to be to their careers. In response, 27 percent indicated that they saw the program as *transformative*, 55 percent indicated *very relevant*, 18 percent indicated *some relevance*, and no one opted for *mostly irrelevant* or *completely irrelevant*.

**Figure 9: Overall Value of LMSP to Participants**



Just under half of the fellows (46 percent) indicated on the exit survey that the balance between the instructional and practicum segments of the LMSP was *about right*. A roughly similar proportion (38 percent) would have preferred *more practicum, less instruction*, while very small proportions (8 percent in each case) would have preferred *all practicum* and *all instruction*.

## Findings: Program Goals

On the program website, the goals of the LMSP are given as follows:

- To strengthen academic and professional excellence in the representation of Latino art, culture, and history;
- To provide a network among the participants, Smithsonian staff, and guest faculty;
- To advance research in the areas of Latino art, culture, and history at the Smithsonian; and
- To share and promote Smithsonian Latino collections and resources.

Comments from fellows suggest that they did not necessarily see this list as an entirely accurate description of the purposes actually served by the program. Each of the goals given above deserves individual comment.

**“Strengthen academic and professional excellence in the representation of Latino art, culture, and history.”**

Academic and professional excellence are, of course, quite different objectives, and a program that is successful in promoting one might not necessarily be successful in promoting the other. In the exit survey, both the instructional and practicum segments were judged by fellows to be more successful as professional than as academic (intellectual) experiences (see Figures 3 and 8 above).

Fellows also addressed the balance between professional and academic/intellectual aspects of the program in interviews, generally indicating that they considered the program more successful in the former. For example, one interviewee noted:

*The instructional segment felt like a surfacey survey of the parts of the Institution—which seemed odd to me, based on the type of written material that was presented and that we were reading each night before the presenters came in.*

In sum, participants appeared to see the program as geared more toward professional development than intellectual growth or academic excellence per se.

**“Provide a network among participants, Smithsonian staff, and guest faculty.”**

As indicated above, there was universal agreement among fellows that networking opportunities were a major part of the program’s appeal. As one interviewee put it:

*It was a very successful way to get a lot of people with roughly similar interests interacting with each other in a very short period of time.*

On the exit survey, 62 percent of respondents *strongly agreed* with the statement, “I made contacts with professionals that can help me with my studies or career,” while another 31 percent *agreed*. However, it also appears that some of the successful networking that took place required a good deal of initiative on the part of participants, and that the program was not necessarily structured to facilitate the formation and maintenance of such ties.

In terms of networking among the participants themselves, the program clearly resulted in the development of tight personal and professional relationships among a core group of fellows. But this outcome appeared to be largely the result of participants’ own initiative in forming an evening discussion group to address the absence of opportunities for discussion and exchange within the formal structure of the program. Moreover, efforts to keep this network alive after the end of the program will probably have to be initiated by the fellows themselves, even though fully 85 percent of exit survey respondents *strongly agreed* with the statement “I would be interested in a formal (online) mechanism/forum for maintaining connections among program participants and the Smithsonian Latino Center.”<sup>5</sup>

With respect to SLC staff, several participants indicated that they would have liked greater and more structured contact with these personnel, to whom they were introduced only informally over the course of the instructional segment. Indeed, participants had to request a meeting with Eduardo Diaz, the Director of the Smithsonian Latino Center. One interviewee noted:

*It wasn’t until the third week that we got more into speaking with the Director about what it is to be Latino and Latino representation in museums. I think that should have been the first topic to get into from the beginning. Since there is a Latino Museum being planned, I really wish we could have had a discussion with the Director early on because we were all trying to investigate it behind the scenes.*

It is not clear to the study team the extent of successful networking between fellows and other LMSP presenters, faculty, and practicum supervisors, although the program no doubt

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<sup>5</sup> The SLC indicated it does not have adequate staff resources to maintain its own active online forum for program alumni, or to facilitate the maintenance of an alumni network in other substantial ways.

provided ample opportunities for making such contacts if fellows chose to take advantage of them. It is, however, clear that the bonds formed between fellows and their practicum supervisors were much tighter in some cases than in others.

**“Advance research in the areas of Latino art, culture, and history at the Smithsonian.”**

This goal seemed to be almost completely absent in the 2009 LMSP. The program in its current form is not structured to support work on fellows’ own research projects or to apply fellows’ academic skills in a sustained way to the furtherance of existing research programs at the Smithsonian.

**“Share and promote Smithsonian Latino collections and resources.”**

By contrast, pursuit of this goal was prominently on display in the 2009 LMSP, particularly during the instructional segment. Participants were exposed to a wide range of Smithsonian collections and resources, and hopefully will in turn share their new knowledge of these resources with colleagues at their home institutions and elsewhere.

However, while fellows were generally impressed by the variety and depth of resources and collections presented to them, some indicated that they would have appreciated less “show and tell” and greater interaction with presenters. Also, at least one interviewee felt that the desire to showcase Smithsonian resources in some ways overshadowed the larger purposes of the LMSP:

*Overall the thrust was to get us to know the Smithsonian in two weeks. I did not feel like it was a museum studies program. ... I think it was more about the Smithsonian than museum studies per se.*

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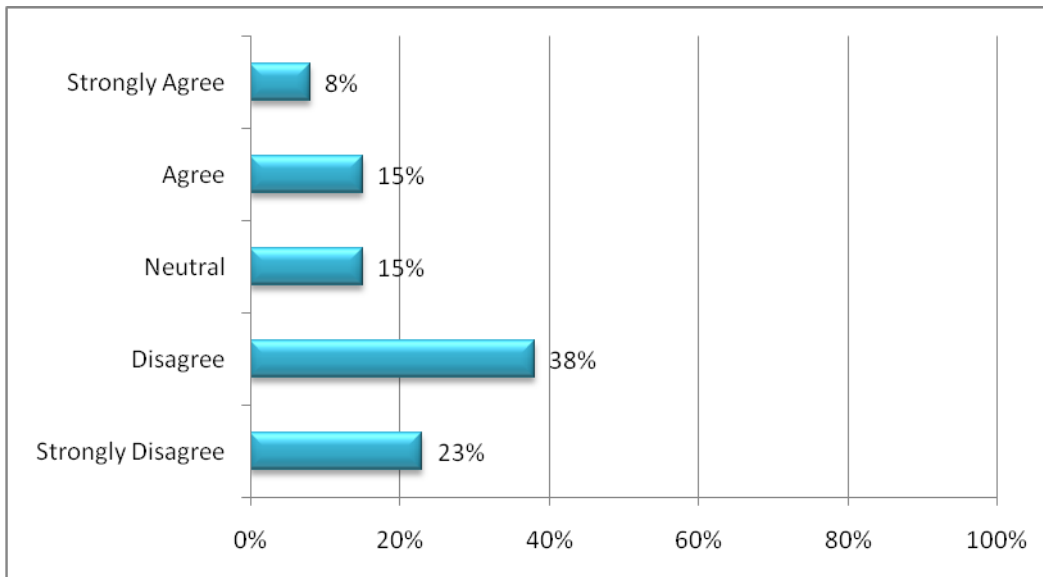
In sum, fellows generally indicated that the LMSP functioned mainly as a professional opportunity and an introduction to the resources and workings of the Smithsonian, and that it came up short of its stated goals in the academic, intellectual, and research areas. One interviewee succinctly noted:

*There were two goals—acquainting people who work in the Latino field with the Smithsonian and creating networking opportunities.*

## Findings: Organizational and Administrative

As noted above, the organization of both the instructional and practicum segments received mediocre ratings on balance (see Figures 2 and 7). The exit survey also queried fellows about the overall organization of the program, asking them their level of agreement with the statement “the program was well-organized and smoothly run” on the five-point scale of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. The results are displayed in Figure 9. A majority (over 60 percent) either *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement, and only 23 percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed*.

**Figure 10: Level of Agreement with the Statement  
“The LMSP Was Well-Organized and Smoothly Run”**



From interviews, the study team gathered that participants sensed organizational weaknesses in two different areas: logistical organization and conceptual organization.

### Logistical Organization

Several fellows indicated that they would have liked more pre-program information, particularly with regard to practicum assignments and advisors, but also with regard to the content of the instructional segment and housing logistics (such as contact information on roommates). For example, one interviewee stated:

*I would like more information on the program website. It is basically general information on the program, and then a link to the actual mechanics of applying for it. It would help if the website was more of a place to go for information on not only the programmatic side of the program, but the logistics—where we will be going, when*



*will we be doing it, where will we be living, etc. We have to wait for e-mail communications for whatever information we get.*

Some fellows were perplexed about how practicum assignments had been made, or were frustrated about their inability to discuss the practicum project in advance with relevant program faculty or to prepare in other ways. A few fellows sensed—and some faculty confirmed—that their practicum supervisors had only a tenuous grasp of the purpose of the program and advisors' role in it. A number of participants indicated that they would have derived greater benefits from the program if they had more information about it in advance:

*I would have liked to do a little background reading relevant to my project before I [went] there.*

*It would be nice if I had some background on the speakers, or contact information on the other participants so we could have a chance to touch base before the program. I think more information would allow me to be better prepared to take advantage of the program.*

Several participants also suggested that the dates for the announcement of the program, deadline for application, notification of acceptance, and receipt of detailed information about the program by accepted participants (such as the practicum to which they have been assigned) need to be significantly moved up relative to the program's starting date. This would allow participants more time to arrange for extended absence from their home institutions and families, and to make contact with practicum supervisors, roommates, and other relevant personnel.

### **Conceptual Organization**

While fellows had some criticisms about logistical organization, the more fundamental issue for many seemed to be the conceptual organization of the program.

As discussed in the section on Program Goals above, the larger purpose of the LMSP was not clear to many participants. While they appreciated the professional opportunity that the program represented and acknowledged its potential to be an intellectually meaningful experience, they had great difficulty identifying the concrete goals and objectives of the LMSP—whether for the fellows, for the Smithsonian, or for other organizations with an interest in the representation of Latino culture. This sentiment was reflected eloquently in the “Evaluating the Latino Museum Studies Program” document collectively drafted by 2009 LMSP fellows:

*We sensed no clear vision, overall goals, or specific purpose of the LMSP before arriving, nor during the length of the program. Although we understand that this might be in part due to the constant and current changes within the Latino Center, we feel more institutionalized leadership and direction would certainly provide for a clearer agenda, more relevant priorities, and better defined goals for the program, which would ultimately be beneficial to all.*

On the whole, interviewed fellows asserted that the concept of a program to cultivate young museum professionals with an interest in Latino culture was a worthy endeavor. However, for many, the program fell well short of its potential, and many seemed to believe that the root cause for this was a lack of clarity about the purposes of the program—in terms of goals, objectives, and desired long-term outcomes.

## Conclusions

### Participant Satisfaction

All participants noted gaining something positive from the program, such as learning new skills, meeting future collaborators, or obtaining insight into how a leading cultural organization approaches the issues and professional challenges with which fellows are concerned. However, many fellows also expressed some measure of disappointment with the program in its current form. Some interviewees demurred when asked if they would recommend the program to a friend, or questioned whether the benefits they gained outweighed the considerable commitment of time that the LMSP entails.

Interviews and responses to daily and exit surveys indicate that there were several specific areas in which the program fell short of many participants' expectations. Prominent among these were:

- The lack of structured opportunities for discussion and interaction among fellows, LMSP faculty, and SLC staff;
- The tendency for instructional segment activities to focus on passive absorption of material, rather than active exchange;
- For some, a lackluster practicum experience; and
- A lack of clarity about the precise goals and objectives of the program.

### Program Goals

Generally, the LMSP in its current form does not closely adhere to the goals outlined on the program's website. In practice, it succeeds in sharing the collections, resources, and internal workings of the Smithsonian with fellows, and in presenting them with valuable professional networking opportunities. But its success in promoting intellectual exchange and academic excellence is more problematic.

The program does not systematically foster the exchange of ideas and experiences among participants, presenters, and Smithsonian staff. Many participants were looking forward to challenging discussions on theoretical, topical, and practical issues related to Latino culture and its representation, and were disappointed that the program was not well structured to facilitate such interaction. As noted above, participants created their own evening forum for discussion to fill this gap.

Moreover, the stated goal of advancing research in the areas of Latino art, culture, and history at the Smithsonian seemed to be almost completely absent in the 2009 LMSP. Indeed, it is not clear to the study team how a program of this description and duration might be structured to effectively support such a goal—it would probably have to involve expanded opportunities for fellows to conduct their own research during the practicum segment, or at least to present their work to Smithsonian specialists for in-depth feedback, discussion, and possible incorporation into Smithsonian exhibitions, programs, or research projects.

It is by no means necessary for the program's success that it continue to adhere to the goals currently laid out on the website. But it is necessary that the character and purposes of the program are clear in the minds of program managers, and accurately represented in the materials upon which fellows rely in deciding to apply and attend. Thus, the study team would suggest that a clearer vision for the program needs to be decided upon, reflected in program promotional materials, and embodied in modifications in the LMSP.

### **Administrative and Organizational**

The basic logistics of the program appear sound, and participants appreciated the work that went into planning and scheduling the wide variety of activities in the program. There was some dissatisfaction with front-end logistics, in that the time between acceptance into the program and the beginning of the program seemed much too short to some fellows. Further, the information provided to fellows prior to the start of the program—particularly on practicum assignments, but also on the general purpose and nature of the program—struck some participants as inadequate to allow the kind of preparation they would have preferred to undertake. There was also some question about how well some of the practicum supervisors had prepared for their role.

### **Post-Program Contact**

The 2009 fellows were interested in extending their relationship with the Smithsonian beyond their four-week stay in Washington. They also wanted to contribute their voices to the discussions underway at the Institution about Latino culture and its representation, particularly on high-profile issues such as the possibility of a new Smithsonian museum devoted to the Latino experience in the United States. The study team believes that investments in maintaining such relationships are likely to pay off in the long run for both the Institution and the national communities of practice that the LMSP targets.

## Recommendations

The study team believes that the fundamental concept of the LMSP is sound, and that the SLC should continue to bring museum professionals and graduate students to the Smithsonian to expose them to what the Institution has to offer and to larger conceptual issues related to the representation of Latino issues and culture. However, the study team also believes that modifications in the program could improve the experience for participants, and might increase benefits for the Smithsonian itself.

The 2009 LMSP participants comprised a thoughtful, intelligent, motivated, and knowledgeable cohort with a deep interest in many of the same issues that the SLC and the Smithsonian confront. Yet there appeared to be little effort to take advantage of the group's unique skills and knowledge. The emphasis appeared to be upon the "passive" presentation of the Smithsonian, rather than "active" engagement and exchange of ideas and experiences. A program that is structured to promote greater engagement and information sharing would create greater benefits on all sides.

### Program Goals

It is not clear whether the program in its current form effectively supports all of the current stated goals for the program, or even whether these goals are the "right" ones. In particular, the study team would raise the question of whether the language about promoting research and academic excellence per se are appropriate for a program of this description. Certainly, the program in its current form does little to explicitly support such goals.

#### *Recommendation:*

The first step toward strengthening the LMSP must be to take a step back from the day-to-day management of the program, consider its larger goals, and clarify exactly what it seeks to achieve in terms of benefits for participants, their home institutions, the Smithsonian, and the larger national communities of museum and cultural professionals with an interest in Latino issues. A clearer articulation of goals is a critical first step toward bringing greater cohesion to the program and providing greater benefits to all stakeholders. The process of articulating these goals should explicitly address questions such as the following:

- What are the long-term outcomes that the SLC hopes to see from the LMSP? For example,
  - Does it literally wish to attract participants to positions at the Smithsonian?

- Does it hope to form programmatic or research connections to fellows' home institutions?
- Does it wish to cultivate a nationwide cadre of Latino-culture professionals with ties to the Smithsonian? If so, what mechanisms would allow such a network to flourish over time? (Newsletters? A collaborative website? An online alumni network? Regional alumni events? An online job bank?)
- What are the objectives of the LMSP in terms of *professional* benefits to fellows? For example, to what extent does it seek to
  - Provide an overview of how the Smithsonian functions, and the challenges it faces, in key areas of interest such as collections management, educational outreach, and exhibition development?
  - Convey knowledge of professional best practices in key areas of interest?
  - Create structured opportunities for interpersonal and organizational networking?
- What are the objectives of the LMSP in terms of *intellectual/academic* benefits to fellows? For example, to what extent does it seek to
  - Create forums for in-depth discussion among fellows, program faculty, and SLC staff on issues relating to Latino culture in the United States and its representation?
  - Find and build upon areas where Smithsonian research and programs overlap with or complement fellows' research interests?
  - Provide access to Smithsonian resources for fellows' research?
- What is the proper balance between the *professional* and *intellectual/academic* objectives of the LMSP? Should the program have a research dimension at all, per se? Or should it be seen more as an opportunity to expand professional horizons, engage in intellectual exchange with other professionals, and establish ongoing connections between fellows, their home institutions, and the Smithsonian?
- What does the SLC wish participants to bring back from the LMSP to their home institutions?
  - Ideas and inspiration only?

- Collaborative institutional ties with the Smithsonian?
- Knowledge of, and perhaps enhanced access to, Smithsonian resources?
- Ongoing professional ties to Smithsonian professionals?

### **Instructional Segment**

The most pervasive criticism of the instructional segment of the LMSP was that it was insufficiently interactive—or, more precisely, that the level of interaction was extremely variable, and on average lower than fellows would have preferred. Thus, the SLC should take steps to ensure that the activities in the instructional segment are more consistently interactive and intellectually engaging.

#### *Recommendations:*

- All presenters should be made aware that LMSP fellows have experience in the museum field or are otherwise professionally engaged in issues pertaining to the representation of Latino culture, so they are both capable of and interested in engaging in dialogue at a relatively sophisticated level. Presenters should be encouraged to set aside time in all sessions for dialogue and information sharing, and to have issues for discussion in mind.
- At the conclusion of each day, a brief session (no more than one hour) should be introduced that allows participants to discuss among themselves the issues that were raised during the day's presentations, and how these pertain to challenges that they face at their home institutions. These sessions should be informal, but facilitated by SLC staff—both to maintain a modicum of order and to add the unique perspective of the SLC to the dialogue. Most or all SLC personnel should be required to moderate at least one session, preferably on issues related to their own interests and work.

### **Practicum Segment**

The quality of participants' practicum experience was variable, and fellows' assessment of it ranged from lavish praise to strong criticism. To some extent, the quality of the practicum will always depend upon individual supervisors, and this introduces a measure of unpredictability that can never be fully removed. However, steps can be taken to minimize the risk of a poor practicum experience arising from supervisors who do not fully understand their role, or do not know how to adequately prepare for it.

*Recommendations:*

- The SLC should recruit advisors as early as possible and ensure that they are fully briefed about the program, its purposes, their roles as practicum advisors, and expectations for their participation in the program. The study team believes it is more important to have a few deeply committed, well-prepared practicum supervisors than to have a large number of practicums—even if this means fellows might have to participate in their practicums in small groups (rather than individually or in pairs).
- Practicum assignments should be made earlier, and both supervisors and fellows should be informed of them well before the beginning of the program. Fellows should be encouraged to contact their advisors to discuss and plan how the experience can be made mutually beneficial, and how to prepare for it so as to make optimal use of the short time in the practicum.
- To the extent possible, practicums should be tailored to what individual participants want (e.g., research experience with Smithsonian resources; hands-on experience with collections or exhibition development; an educational orientation; an overview of a unit or function rather than a focus on a specific project; etc.) and what they can contribute (e.g. specific expertise or research skills; other specific professional skills in areas such as IT or curriculum development; etc.).
- The SLC should explore the possibility of offering fellows a chance to conduct their own self-designed, semi-structured research or professional enrichment project—using Smithsonian resources and in consultation with one or more Smithsonian specialists—as an alternative a practicum designed by an advisor.

**Administrative and Organizational**

*Recommendation:*

- The pre-program timeline for publicizing the program, accepting applications, and providing accepted fellows with program information needs to be moved up, to allow fellows more time to prepare logistically and intellectually for an extended period away from their home institutions.



## **Post-Program Contact**

### *Recommendation:*

- To the extent possible, the SLC should create avenues for sustained post-program contact, both electronically and in person. For example, it might create a listserv or Facebook or Ning site; bring alumni together for webinars; maintain an active alumni professional network; coordinate with alumni to host Smithsonian-themed programs or exhibitions at their home institutions; and so on.



## Appendix A: Frequencies of Responses to Pre-Program Survey

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

<b>Undergraduate Degree</b>	57%
<b>Master's Degree</b>	36%
<b>Other post-doctorate professional degree</b>	0%
<b>Doctoral Degree</b>	7%

Which of the following describes your current status?

<b>Participating in/recently completed master's studies</b>	36%
<b>Participating in/recently completed doctoral studies</b>	29%
<b>Currently working in museum or related profession</b>	64%
<b>Other</b>	0%

Do you intend to pursue a career in a museum or related field?

<b>Definitely</b>	67%
<b>Probably</b>	11%
<b>Possibly</b>	22%
<b>Probably Not</b>	0%
<b>Definitely Not</b>	0%
<b>I am currently working in a museum or related field</b>	64%
<b>Don't Know</b>	0%

If you are currently working in a museum or related field: What do your responsibilities include? [Mark all that apply]

<b>Research</b>	43%
<b>Management</b>	21%
<b>Exhibition Design/development</b>	36%
<b>Collections management</b>	14%
<b>Educational programming</b>	64%
<b>Information Technology</b>	0%
<b>Public/community affairs</b>	50%
<b>Marketing</b>	14%
<b>Development/fundraising</b>	21%
<b>Other (specify)</b>	<i>Curatorial</i>

How did you hear about the Latino Museum Studies Program? [Mark all that apply]

<b>Smithsonian website</b>	14%
<b>University faculty</b>	29%
<b>Other university information source</b>	0%
<b>Professional colleague</b>	64%
<b>Professional organization/network/publication</b>	21%
<b>Friends or family</b>	14%
<b>Previous participant</b>	14%
<b>Other (specify)</b>	0%

What do you expect to gain from attending the Latino Museum Studies Program [Mark all that apply]

<b>Making contacts/network</b>	86%
<b>Job Leads</b>	64%
<b>Better understanding of Latino history, culture and/or art</b>	71%
<b>Professional or research skills/knowledge</b>	100%
<b>Other (Specify)</b>	<i>Understand the current situation in Latino museum work, Access to research opportunities at the Smithsonian, Learn about the Smithsonian</i>

In which part of the Latino Museum Studies Program are you more interested?

<b>Instructional segment (lectures, panel sessions, workshops, behind-the-scenes tours, etc.)</b>	21%
<b>Experiential segment (working with Smithsonian staff on specific project)</b>	7%
<b>Both segments equally</b>	71%

Which of the following best describes your feelings about the information you received prior to arriving at the Latino Museum Studies Program?

<b>Information was excellent- I knew exactly what to expect from the program</b>	7%
<b>Information was adequate- I had a general sense of what to expect</b>	14%
<b>Information was minimally adequate- I had a vague sense of what to expect</b>	71%
<b>Information was inadequate- I had little or no sense of what to expect</b>	7%

What additional information (if any) would you have liked to have received prior to your arrival?

*Would like to have received contact info for roommates. Housing info much sooner. Packing list much sooner.*

*I would have liked to receive the information on the program more in advance. Most details on the schedule and itinerary were to us only two days before arrival.*

*Contacts to all participants and staff so we could better prepare ourselves and divide up what to bring for housing, etc.*

*Roommate assignment name, contact info.*

*Who my roommate was, contact info*

*Information on my specific project, i.e. who I'm working with, location, and project description.*

*Internship project assignment. Roommates. More housing (internet, mailing, etc.) and transportation (cab fares, metro info) info*

*May have been useful to know our placements for the experiential segment prior to arriving*

*I would have liked to have the agenda and some readings. Would have liked to know the limits of monetary support more clearly.*

*More housing information, packing list earlier, a little more info on presentation.*

*Schedule, placement, clear statement goals of program (more than what was on the website), info on housing*

*Would like to have received flight information earlier*

## Appendix B: Frequencies of Responses to Post-Program Survey

Which of the following describes your current status? **(Mark all that apply)**

<b>Participating in/recently completed master's studies</b>	54%
<b>Participating in/recently completed doctoral studies</b>	31%
<b>Currently working in museum or related profession</b>	62%
<b>Other</b>	15%

Do you intend to pursue a career in a museum or related field?

<b>Definitely</b>	63%
<b>Probably</b>	25%
<b>Possibly</b>	13%
<b>Probably not</b>	0%
<b>Definitely not</b>	0%

**If you are currently working in a museum or related field:** Which of the following best describes the practical implications of your Latino Museum Studies Program experience for your career?

<b>It was transformative</b>	27%
<b>It was very relevant</b>	55%
<b>It had some relevance</b>	18%
<b>It was mostly irrelevant</b>	0%
<b>It was completely irrelevant</b>	0%

Where and with whom did you do your practicum?

*National Museum of American History*

*National Museum of the American Indian*

*Anacostia Community Museum*

*Smithsonian Institution Archives*

*Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibitions Service*

*Smithsonian Early Education Center*

*Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC)*

What did you gain from attending the Latino Museum Studies Program? (**Mark all that apply**)

<b>Making contacts/networking</b>	100%
<b>Job leads</b>	54%
<b>Better understanding of Latino history, culture, and/or art</b>	69%
<b>Professional skills/knowledge</b>	77%
<b>Other</b>	0%

Which part of the Latino Museum Studies Program did you find more interesting?

<b>Instructional segment (first two weeks—lectures, panel sessions, workshops, behind-the-scenes tours, etc.)</b>	31%
<b>Practicum segment (last two weeks—working with Smithsonian staff on specific project)</b>	31%
<b>Both segments equally</b>	38%

How do you feel about the **balance of time** spent on the instructional segment versus the practicum segment?

I would have preferred <b>all practicum</b> , no instruction	8%
I would have preferred <b>more practicum</b> , less instruction	38%
The balance was about right	46%
I would have preferred <b>more instruction</b> , less practicum	0%
I would have preferred <b>all instruction</b> , no practicum	8%



To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Latino Museum Studies Program overall? **(Please circle response)**

- 1 = Strongly disagree**
- 2 = Disagree**
- 3 = Neither disagree nor agree**
- 4 = Agree**
- 5 = Strongly agree**

	<b>Strongly Disagree 1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Neutral 3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Strongly Agree 5</b>
<b>I gained experience with or learned specific professional skills of value</b>	8%	8%	15%	38%	31%
<b>I made contacts with professionals that can help me with my studies or career</b>	0%	8%	0%	31%	62%
<b>The program was well-organized and smoothly run</b>	23%	38%	15%	15%	8%
<b>Latino Center staff were helpful and supportive</b>	0%	23%	38%	23%	15%
<b>I would be interested in a formal (online) mechanism/forum for maintaining connections among participants and the Smithsonian Latino Center</b>	8%	0%	0%	8%	85%

Overall, how would you rate the value of Latino Museum Studies Program to you?

<b>Outstanding</b>	31%
<b>Excellent</b>	15%
<b>Good</b>	54%
<b>Fair</b>	0%
<b>Poor</b>	0%

How might the program be improved to make it more valuable/relevant to people like you?

*More time for practicum, prior contact. More time for engagement with Smithsonian staff and other presenters.*

*There needs to be more time for dialogue. Instructional segment needs to be tailored to fit the sophistication and experience of the group. More thought needs to be given to making practicums mutually beneficial for participants and host institutions. Program needs to engage theory and current issues and controversies in the representation of Latinos in museum settings*

*Be more organized. Prepare speakers for the instructional portion for more theoretical dialogue with the participants. Organize practicums in anticipation so fellows are satisfied with their project and can do something that is relevant for the site of the practicum*

*More organization of practicum and coordinator for program should be more outgoing.*

*More information provided on the website to applicants and more communication from staff before and during the program. More info re: Practicum before program. Choice between practicum and research to make experience relevant to all participants.*

*I think more dialogue about the current state of Latino as visitors and professionals in the museums would be more helpful. A clear explanation about the Latino center would also be a good introduction on the first day. Discussing the feasibility of an American Latino Museum could have been a topic which could have been spoken about on a larger scale. More communication before arrival would also be helpful on a logistical side.*

**Instructional Segment (First Two Weeks)**

To what extent do you agree with the following statement about the instructional segment of Latino Museum Studies Program? **(Please circle response)**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b> 1	2	<b>Neutral</b> 3	4	<b>Strongly Agree</b> 5
<b>The instructional segment was a valuable professional experience</b>	0%	8%	15%	62%	15%
<b>The instructional segment was a valuable intellectual experience</b>	0%	23%	15%	38%	23%
<b>The format of the instructional part of the program allowed for adequate discussion and interaction among participants</b>	23%	54%	0%	8%	15%
<b>The instructional segment was well organized</b>	0%	15%	54%	15%	15%

What are your thoughts about the general level of presentations in the instructional component of the program?

<b>Too elementary—I learned little or nothing new</b>	8%
<b>Elementary—I learned a few new things</b>	23%
<b>Balanced between elementary and advanced material</b>	62%
<b>Advanced—I was challenged</b>	8%
<b>Too advanced—I was overwhelmed</b>	0%

What aspect(s) of the instructional segment did you find most interesting/**valuable/relevant**?

*Networking with some of the presenters*

*That practitioners, collectors and faculty provided a good mix*

*Getting to know SI esp. MSC, CRC hands on skills- paper conservator, Jai Sun, Painting conservation*

*Hands-on and interactive activities*

*The care and preservation of works on paper. The concept of NMAI. Storage of cultural artifacts of NMAI.*

*The segments that involved discussions on theories and methodologies of other institutions and museums representing Latino art, history and culture*

*The discussion time with presenters.*

*Braceros History. Evelyn Figueora (engaging professional issues).*

*When the speakers were engaging I knew they could also hear us as professionals in the field (for advice).*

*Presentations that sparked discussions*

*Speaking directly with SI staff, especially when were given the opportunity to dialogue. Hands-on experiences/participatory activities were very valuable.*

*The most valuable were those segments directly linked to Latino museum education, collection care, presentation, exhibition and accessibility. It's good to learn about the Smithsonian in general but professionally I liked seeing how the Smithsonian worked best with Latinos.*

**What aspect(s) of the instructional segment did you find **least interesting/valuable/relevant?****

*Some presentations were not that informative*

*Exhibition design workshop/received no education on how to use the tools we were to work with.*

*When we received tours and they werent put into context on how they applied to the program. There was no discussion time dedicated to the readings we were provided.*

*Presenters that gave intros to "what they did." There was little time for broader, philosophical exchanges*

*Too much low level touring of museum spaces without engaging in theory.*

*The visit to the OEC- I believe we wouldn't have access to those facilities and I don't think I particularly learning anything form it. The NMAI and CRC visit were most relevant and valuable to see how a new museum could work within the Smithsonian institution.*

*The visit to the prep warehouse. Interesting but not really applicable.*

*"Backstage" tours, especially those involving offices and machines*

*Presentations that verged on lectures—with no opportunity to dialogue.  
Presentations/tours that became repetitive—i.e. visiting two archives. Time would have been better spent exploring SI institutions on our own, following our own agendas*

*Some of the technical areas such as printing machines, cutting, etc. It’s nice to know these things but were not as applicable like Latino issues.*

**Practicum Segment (Last Two Weeks)**

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the practicum segment of Latino Museum Studies Program? **(Please circle response)**

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>My practicum was a valuable professional experience</b>	15%	15%	15%	23%	31%
<b>My practicum was a valuable intellectual experience</b>	23%	8%	31%	15%	23%
<b>My practicum was well-organized</b>	31%	15%	23%	8%	23%
<b>My practicum supervisor was helpful and supportive</b>	23%	8%	8%	15%	46%

What aspect(s) of your practicum/project (in the final two weeks of the program) did you find **most interesting/valuable/relevant**?

*The onsite visits and discussions, the application of the of the theoretical and methodological knowledge we acquired through a creative and critical exercise in exhibition development*

*The hands-on experience was valuable; the onsite intellectual quizzing (museum visits) was relevant. It was all interesting. I wish other participants has this experience as part of the program*

*I was pleased to support Anacostia and enjoyed working with a variety of interesting, skilled people there*

*Being able to assist another community*

*All of the projects, except for one, were not new or stimulating experiences. There was no real engagement with practicum leaders.*

*I was introduced to new concepts and practices that are created to support exhibits (i.e. websites, etc).*

*I enjoyed working with Archives staff and Deborra. I think the practicum design (2 weeks without prior prep) makes it difficult to really engage and create a product. I was happy with what developed and hope it will be useful to the museum.*

*No discussion (example curatorial panel)*

*The most valuable was working with my partner and potentially working together in the future with a project we started developing due to the lack of organization and interest of our supervisor.*

*Networking with Smithsonian employees, learning, learning more about Smithsonian Latino/Latino American Art*

*Bringing a Panamanian perspective and knowledge to the team's work*

*My supervisor was focused on me being successful, without being overbearing. The materials and resources given to me were also very valuable and helped me understand the institution and my task*

*I liked seeing/learning about the early stages of a blockbuster exhibition addressing Latino audiences. As an educator I enjoyed seeing the technical aspect of making the first contacts. My supervisor was also a great mentor!*

What aspect(s) of your practicum/project (in the final two weeks of the program) did you find **least interesting/valuable/relevant?**

*The practicum was truly engaging and transformative for me. I have nothing to say that isn't positive and only wish other members of my cohort had had as important and engaging an experience as I had. I do wish I'd had the opportunity of working directly with one of the museums developing programs like other members of my cohort. All I did was "hypothetical"—nothing was grounded in the reality of the Smithsonian and with all my experience I wish I'd been able to contribute to SI*

*Not an educational experience for me. No intro to the organization/community. No preplanning, they went back on their agreement re my project*

*I could have interacted with staff at my site more*

*The practicum leader didn't spend too much time learning what I wanted to learn from the practicum and from the exhibit. The leaders were too busy to devote time to us because of other exhibit deadlines.*

*Creating an evaluation, while most helpful to the center- was quick and did not contribute to my learning*

*Most of what was interesting and relevant happened because we took the project into our own hands.*

*Our supervisor was very kind and friendly, but generally unprepared for engaging us in a valuable practicum experience. Our skills, experience and time were very under used.*

*I was disappointed to find that the practicum supervisor was disorganized and lacking in delegation skills. I worked with a partner with whom we turned the situation around and practically planned our own practicum. We hope the work that we do will help the center, even though the supervisor did not seem to think so.*

*Lack leadership on part of practicum mentor and very disorganized.*

*Frustrating: not being able to influence the development of the exhibition (especially the script!) beyond the educational materials and not ever being asked my opinion about it by the project coordinator*

*I would have appreciated more interaction with my supervisor. I could have also been more prepared had I been given more info beforehand.*

## **Evaluating the Latino Museums Studies Program**

We are both honored and grateful to have been included in this year's LMSP cohort. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to spend time at the Smithsonian, and to be included in the work and vision of the Smithsonian Latino Center. This opportunity has introduced us to invaluable contacts both within our own cohort and among the various institutions at the Smithsonian. Participating in the program has provided us with much food for thought as we return to continue our work with Latinos and Latino cultures across the United States. That said, as a group we have found that we have some concerns and suggestions that we hope the Smithsonian Latino Center will consider when planning for future LMSP groups.

We believe LMSP is an important link between the Smithsonian and practitioners around the country, and has the potential to deepen dialogue about the representation of Latinos and Latino culture at the local and national level. It is also a unique opportunity for all parties to make connections that will inform research and improve networks and communication vital to creating a strong and productive national framework for our shared work.

LMSP brings a rich and varied group of scholars and practitioners from around the country for an entire month. The format of the initial two-week workshop provides an overview of the Smithsonian, but in a manner that does not allow for sincere dialogue either among the participants of LMSP or between LMSP fellows and the Smithsonian staff. This format for workshops is better suited for an undergraduate survey about museum careers, and does not fully engage the experience, scholarship and questions of LMSP participants.

LMSP provided us with an interesting and contemporary set of readings that touch on important debates in the fields of Latin American and museum studies. But these topics were not engaged in the content of the presentations and workshops. Each workshop theme was presented in largely discipline-oriented format (American History, Art, Exhibition Design, etc) and without the opportunity to engage either the presenters or LMSP fellows in theoretical or philosophical discussions that relate to these individual practices, and that represent issues that are important in our own work as well as relevant to the work of the Smithsonian.

We sensed no clear vision, overall goals, or specific purpose of LMSP before arriving, nor during the length of the program. Although we understand that this might be in part due to the constant and current changes within the Latino Center, we feel a more institutionalized program leadership and direction would certainly provide for a clearer agenda, more relevant priorities, and better defined goals for the program, which would ultimately be beneficial to all.

Some other logistic issues involved: not enough early information regarding housing, roommate arrangements, and travel; the cancellation of several speakers; and the lack of an overview of the Latino Center, its staff, initiatives, and role within the Smithsonian



Institution. Additionally, the reading materials could have all been provided by email ahead of time, which would have allowed for more in-depth reading and reflection for better discussions, as well as being a substantially greener form of dissemination.

We represent Latinos and Latino communities from around the country. Many of us are in close contact with these communities on a daily basis, have developed programs and exhibitions that engage individuals and ideas from these communities and are saddened to see that so many years after the Willful Neglect document that the Smithsonian is still struggling to incorporate Latinos and Latino culture in many of the museums. While we recognize that this is largely related to the immense and bureaucratic nature of the institution, LMSP provides an opportunity to really infuse the Smithsonian Institution with a fresh and diverse perspective. Allowing time for serious dialogue and discussion about these issues within the context of the program, would offer the opportunity for a mutually beneficial exchange between both LMSP cohort and the Smithsonian.

The nature of some of the practica did not allow for either critique or real engagement with the issues in which we are experts, nor were all of the practica supervisors prepared to receive us or concerned about our learning experience. While we recognize that much of this program is designed to make connections between practitioners, we believe a more thoughtful design would allow for more meaningful dialogue between LMSP cohort and the Smithsonian itself. This would include pre-program contact with our individual supervisors and the mutual drafting of a project that would be beneficial to both parties. It might even include pre and post program work by LMSP participants, making for a more meaningful engagement that would ultimately better serve the goals of both the individuals and the Smithsonian itself.

Here is a list of suggestions to make LMSP a richer experience for all concerned:

- The cohort should be chosen with a much greater lead time both to allow a smoother exit from our host institutions, and additionally to allow for preparation and contact with our practicum supervisors before arrival. LMSP cohort should be informed about both the site and nature of the placement before arrival in DC, and have the opportunity to dialogue with direct supervisors about their areas of interest and expertise, as well as the supervisors' needs and expectations.
- The schedule of the initial two-week sessions should allow time for more meaningful dialogue about the topics being presented, as well as engagement with the readings and other information provided. This might mean scheduling fewer presenters, and allowing for more of a discussion or roundtable format with the presenters. It also might mean scheduling presenters around themes that are important to Latino representation in museums, rather than around a more strictly discipline-based schedule. The daily wrap-up should provide for an actual exchange among fellows and with the Center's staff.
- Successful practica occurred when participants were placed in their areas of interest or expertise or challenged in new areas they were eager to explore, and

where there was advance planning and communication on the part of the practicum supervisor. Because the practicum are for both mid-level professionals and graduate students, thought should be given as to the best way to utilize the skills and expertise these participants bring with them to the Smithsonian. Again, this would be much easier to do if the cohort was selected earlier in the year and had the opportunity to be in communication with their supervisors before arriving in DC.

- Thought should be given as to a mechanism for keeping in touch with past LMSP alumni, and harnessing their energy and enthusiasm after LMSP sessions end. LMSP alums would be useful in recruiting future participants; in creating public voices for Latino Center projects; in communicating with local congress people; as well as in creating a network for identifying future partners, researchers, and staff for Smithsonian initiatives. Additionally, they would strengthen the presence of Latino voices in cultural institutions across the country. Ideas for continued communication include social networking sites, quarterly updates, LMSP affinity groups at major conferences like NALAC or AAM's LNPIC, and an annually updated contact list of LMSP alumni.

## Reigniting the Vision

*"Because of the politics of representation and the lack of Latino curators and museum administrators, our mainstream museums continue, in large part, to neglect Latino experiences. Attempting to fit a national Latino institution into European museum constructs needs to be rethought. To truly succeed, we **may** need to create a different museum model. That model will need to use community or first-person curatorial practice and balance this approach with national politics, regional nuances, community activism and cultural awareness."*

Tey Marianna Nunn, Un Museo Nacional, published in Museum News May/June 2007

As the Latino Museum Studies Program 2009 cohort visiting the Smithsonian Institution at a critical time on the verge of the feasibility study on the establishment of a National Latino Museum, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to “the increase and diffusion of knowledge” by sharing our experiences and insights, and joining the dialogue in Washington and nationally in regards to Latino representation at the Smithsonian and at cultural institutions across the nation. Through a plethora of scholar and professional engagements, each of us is committed to advancing the awareness, knowledge, and visibility of Latino cultural heritage, as well as adding to the discourse on Latino identity. Along with our personal dedication and experiences, we bring the hopes and aspirations of our constituencies into this dialogue and strive to bring about a shared understanding of the foundations of American cultural heritage that fairly includes representation of Latino experiences through the humanities, arts, and sciences, as well as people.

In reviewing *Towards A Shared Vision: U.S Latinos and the Smithsonian Institution*, we were proud that the leaders and visionaries who participated on the Latino Oversight Committee and crafted this thorough document addressed all aspects of the shortcomings of the Smithsonian Institution with regards to Latinos. We feel their vision and roadmap were comprehensive. What is now evident to us is that, despite the work of the Smithsonian Latino Center and other committed individuals, not much has changed. More than a decade later, we have observed that there is still no “permanent and sustained initiative” or “distinctive physical presence” “on the Mall.” We, then, wonder about the institutional, community, and financial support for said efforts. We must question whether the vision was truly shared. And if so, shared by whom? As the latest cohort of LMSP, we are eager to offer what we can to the discussion in order to re-enliven this discussion and effort.

We applaud the recent legislation initiated by Congressman Javier Becerra to study the feasibility of the establishment of a Latino Museum on the Mall or elsewhere. We recognize that the fruitfulness of this study must ensure the participation of those with expertise and knowledge of museum practices that resist the Eurocentric museum construct. It must also include the voices of the national Latino cultural sector both directly in first-person participation as well as through strategic and sustained outreach to the elected officials both nationally and locally who can help us realize this vision.

With all this in mind, we offer the following recommendations for creating a broad constituency around and beyond our communities, as well as effective political strategy to bring greater awareness and action to the cause of reigniting a shared vision for Latino representation.

1. We encourage the Smithsonian Latino Center to look outward from Washington and come to visit the institutions and museums (or other affiliated constituencies) we represent. We propose to extend invitations to the members of the board and staff of the Smithsonian Latino Center to come share their successes and program plans and address the next steps for its mission as a hub for implementation of the Shared Vision for the Smithsonian.
2. We encourage the Smithsonian Latino Center and its collaborators, both inside and outside the Smithsonian staff and the LMSP, to reintroduce a dialogue on the issues presented in *Towards a Shared Vision* with an update on the recent legislation, research and initiatives through existing advocacy networks, (NALAC, Latino Interest Network of the American Association of Museums, National Council of Latino Museum Directors, Inter-University Program for Latino Research, among others). We aspire to continuing the dialogues informed by our experience at the Smithsonian during LMSP through future panel presentations and other possible modalities at Latino Art Now! and other such conferences, for which we request the Latino Center's support.
3. We request the assistance of the Latino Center to reach out to the past participants in LMSP in order to review our experiences, consolidate a professional and research network, and create a clearinghouse of potential consultants for the various committees that may be convened during the two-year feasibility study for the National Latino Museum, as well as the many institutions we work with around the country. Additionally, the network would provide a forum to continue engaging in fruitful discussions about the current practices regarding Latino representation, scholarship, curatorial practice, and programming. A basic, very low maintenance format for this could include an email list serve, a Facebook or Yahoo! group, and a blog.
4. We propose that a research team also comprised of past participants in LMSP could be developed in order to devise and implement a current assessment of the field with regards to resources and expertise in the curatorial, education and programming, policy, and academic areas of alternative museum practices that can be offered as examples. As a start, perhaps the Latino Center, its colleagues, and the LMSP participants themselves could share with our group some articles addressing these alternative models as well as reports on current initiatives in order to continue informing and sparking the group's discussions.
5. Talking points to be distributed in our constituencies could be developed for outreach to local elected officials about the work of the committee and the relevant issues that we hope the committee can address both in the feasibility of establishing a national Latino Museum and also with regards to the kind of community devised museum model we hope to come out of the Committee's recommendations.