



Open Letter to the Board of the Hispanic Society of America

1 message

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To: Board of the Hispanic Society <hsaunion@2110uaw.org>

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We, the undersigned staff of The Hispanic Society of America, are writing to bring deep-seated and urgent concerns to your attention. In expressing these, we draw upon decades of collective professional experience dedicated to the institution which we and you love so greatly.

Lack of Vision and Risk to the Collection

- We are deeply concerned about the safeguarding of the collection from its daily handling to longer term planning. In the absence of clearly thought-out goals, we often follow questionable priorities that lead us to waste financial and human resources. This leads to further problems since the absence of a finalized exhibition calendar seriously hinders long-term fundraising.
- The current master plan for construction calls for relocating hundreds of thousands of objects but does not account for the space to store them or for the cost of professional handling, nor is there a fundraising plan in place for the removal and storage of objects in a professionally maintained long-term storage facility.
- There has been no clarity about goals, both shorter and longer term. Often, there are commitments to projects or events without consulting the responsible staff about their feasibility. Such actions force deadlines that ultimately put the collection at risk.

Unclear Roadmap

- No realistic date exists for the reopening of the museum with its permanent collection fully installed, and even the dates for the partial opening planned for this year have shifted. As a result, the Education Department has had to cancel programmed partnerships. Even worse, this uncertainty has significantly curtailed our ability to carry out our mission as an educational institution.
- The administration has similarly failed to meet deadlines for the reopening of the library. Consequently, we are still unable to serve the broad base of scholars and patrons who consult our matchless collection of manuscripts and printed books.

Staffing and Work Environment

- Our conservators and curators have worked for years without adequate resources. There is not enough staff for proper cataloguing and registration. These problems become more severe with the increased exhibitions and programming currently planned.
- Although the Society has posted openings for highly-paid positions in Finance and Administration, it has failed to replace curators, conservators, collection care staff, and educators. Thus, our already high workloads have increased to unbearable stress levels.
- Compounding the stress levels, the administration has created a working environment that is hostile, toxic, and adversarial.

Administration

- The administration is not transparent about finances and has not answered basic questions about either short or long-term financial planning. Departments are not told their approved budgets which seriously compromises their ability to carry out their work. A recent concerning issue was the CFO's refusal to account for a \$1.2 million restricted acquisition fund. As the Board is assuredly aware, acquisition funds are subject to oversight by the Attorney General and cannot be used to cover other expenses with only rare exceptions.
- We are concerned that recent appointments in key decision-making positions have no museum or management experience. Consequently, they are unaware of the priorities of a museum and particularly the correct procedures regarding collections. All of this jeopardizes the credibility of the institution in the eyes of the outside world.

Fair Contract

- The administration fails to recognize our qualifications and demeans our contributions as staff.
- This disrespect for staff has crystallized at the union bargaining table, where after more than a year, the Society has yet to offer a fair contract and continues to insist upon health care cutbacks.
- As staff, we were able to stay on because of an affordable health benefit plan and a collegial working environment. Without commensurate wage increases, the cuts in our basic benefits combined with the poor treatment make our sustained employment untenable.

The museum closed on January 1, 2017, and now, six years later, it is still unclear when we will fully reopen. The institution's staff has demonstrated their commitment to the Hispanic Society and urges the Board of Trustees to take immediate action regarding the alarming situations we have outlined. In the spirit of finding fair solutions that work for everyone, we hope to correct these issues while there is still time. We know there are many challenges ahead, but we love our work and look forward to and hope for a flourishing institution. We strongly urge the Board and the Hispanic Society administration to treat us with the respect and dignity we deserve both by bargaining a fair contract and by working collaboratively with us as professionals.

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