

Department of State
New Jersey's Governor's Hispanic Fellows Program



CENTER FOR HISPANIC POLICY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

2021 Alumni Spotlight: Hablando with Dr. Darius V. Echeverría



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DR. DARIUS V. ECHEVERRIA
Internship Fellow, Class of 1999

1. Tell us about yourself.

I am a historian, college professor, and university dean at Columbia University committed to developing a deeper understanding and more accessible narrative of the American experience. Through my teaching and writing, I hope to build on my first book, *Aztlán Arizona: Mexican American Educational Empowerment, 1968-1978* (University of Arizona Press, 2014). I am currently carrying out research for my second book project while collaborating with other scholars on different works. I also have a background in the political arena having served as a political aide to New Jersey and federal government-appointed and elected officials, including the New Jersey Governor's Office and presidential and senatorial administrations. Furthermore, I served as a guest curator and visiting historian at the Newark Public Library in New Jersey. I hold several leadership positions in national, statewide, regional, and university organizations, advisory councils, government task forces, community bodies, research institutes, and editorial boards as well.

2. How did you find out about CHPRD's Internship Program?

While participating in community service for the LEAP Academy University Charter school in Camden, New Jersey, I thankfully noticed a pamphlet promoting this highly selective program that brings together exceptional emerging young leaders from around the state. The chance to connect with like-minded peers in a supportive space was extremely appealing to me as well as the chance to help usher in more positions of power for Latinxs bearing in mind our statewide influence is not reflected in our ongoing growing numbers. Equally important, the chance to participate in a professional development program consisting of roundtable discussions with leaders from all walks of life, to taking trips to better understand state government, and to work along side others on behalf of the public good, was so exciting. Finally, the opportunity to encourage others to follow their central interests, while championing determination, diligence, and imagination is a privilege I value to this day.

3. What is one of the most valuable lessons that you learned from the Program?

This internship helped me to move forward in life trying to remain focused on improving myself; rather than trying to prove myself to others. And with this, I prioritized reflecting not what I have accomplished, but rather what I overcame to do it. In doing so, I learned that everyone basks in their successes yet, the program reinforced to me that you have to shine through challenges too. Indeed, falling short of a goal hurts a great deal, but it also builds character and helps define who you are and where you want to go.

4. Looking back in time, how did the Internship Program impact you?

CHPRD reinforced life-long lessons of civic responsibility and to draw strength from both our experience and the relationships we forged therein. Nurturing a more intimate awareness, moreover, of my peer's collective stories of perseverance and accomplishment have continued to inform and guide me, as each memory is a reflection of American greatness and success. Also, the privilege to be a part of a program that for more than three decades has been helping to decrease underrepresentation of Latinxs in various New Jersey government, community, and corporate agencies is an absolute honor. Put together with supporting hundreds of diverse people through regular sessions with executives, lunches with societal leadership factions, and career coach insights, I emerged from the program better equipped to understand how the interworking of government work and acumen on how to wield public policy that makes an indelible difference. We represent the very best of the Latinx and New Jersey community, which is a reminder to always try to help those less fortunate while taking responsibility for our roles to fulfill the promise of a better tomorrow for all.

5. Where are you now in your professional journey?

As a faculty member in both Columbia University's Department of History and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER), I teach classes mostly in Latinx Studies and Mexican American History. I also have the pleasure of leading the Senior Project Seminar for CSER, which is designed to develop and hone the skills necessary to complete an advanced undergraduate senior research project. In addition to my teaching responsibilities, I serve as an academic dean for Columbia College and the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science. I am also a Lecturer II faculty member for the Department of History and the Department of Latino and Caribbean Studies at Rutgers University—New Brunswick. As a dean I provide guidance and mentorship to hundreds of undergraduates while support approximately 1,000 students through the university's First-in-Family program.

6. What would you like to say to current interns?

Remember you are part of a distinguished internship program that is one of the fastest growing networks of Latinx professionals in the state of New Jersey. In fact, since its inception, nearly 1,000 students of promise have participated and gone on to become even greater leaders in the public, private, and nonprofit spheres. Continue to use this opportunity to cultivate the best of your abilities while always being accountable for your time and talent. Be persistently present in your moment, always value your time as it is the greatest gift of all, and do not let setbacks deter you, or worse yet, make you a cynic in the power of the human spirit. And above all, do not get hung up on where you would rather be that you lose sight of how to make the most of where you are. I often find both solace and support in our community's rich history because there is so much to be proud of but also so much to continue to learn from and work toward improving. CHPRD is part of this circle of public trust, and we are part of its outsizing legacy. I look forward to your measured perspective, continued achievement, and for others to build on the principles you set forth.

Our most sincere gratitude to Dr. Echeverría for sharing some time with us.

Best wishes & ¡Éxitos!