April 5, 2011

Dear MHIRT Applicant:

I want to thank you very much for applying to the second year of the Latino Mental Health Research Training Program. We had 74 total applications of which 47 were completed by undergraduate students and 21 were completed by graduate students.

We did not have room for all the wonderful, bright young scholars and professionals who want to address mental health disparities among Spanish-speaking communities. Unfortunately, you were not among those selected for final consideration. However, I did want to share with you some of the general reasons that contributed to our decision making.

Most importantly, our funders will judge us in our ability to contribute to the pipeline of researchers. Therefore, we looked carefully at your research background, prior research activities, and letters of recommendations from your research mentors. Those who have a strong research background (e.g., have taken courses in research methods and statistics), are actively involved in research (e.g., conducted an honor’s thesis, presented papers at conferences, and even published a paper), and have letters from professors who discuss the applicant’s research interests and progress were most likely selected for further consideration. Those in more applied programs or positions with a limited research background and who wanted to enroll in our program to obtain research experience were given less consideration.

Given that research background was so important, those undergraduates in their senior year had a decided advantage over those in their junior year. For the most part, outstanding juniors were discussing what they wanted to do for their senior thesis whereas seniors were presenting what they were doing. There were however some outstanding juniors who were selected to be among the finalists (6 of 17). Those of you who are juniors and are in a position to strengthen your research background, please consider reapplying next year.

Some of you may wonder if we only selected Latinas or Latinos. Given that students had to demonstrate an interest in Latino mental health issues and had to speak Spanish, Latinos clearly comprise most of the finalists for the
program. However, two non-Latino applicants who had considerable interest in Latino mental health issues, provided significant evidence of their Spanish language skills, and had a strong research background were selected for the final pool. I would like to encourage members of all groups that encounter significant health disparities (a requirement established by the funders) to apply in the future.

Most of the finalists are psychology majors or enrolled in graduate programs in psychology. However the final pool is not comprised exclusively of young psychologists. Among the undergraduate students, other majors included Microbiology, Spanish, Chicano Studies, Social Welfare, Anthropology and Biology. Among the graduate students, the doctoral programs included Clinical Psychology, Counseling Psychology, and Sociology. Although psychology will probably always be the dominant program of study, my hope is that in the future years we have more students from other areas like sociology, anthropology, and social work.

I finally want to inform you all that I was touched by the considerable interest in our program and by many of the personal essays. Some of you have succeeded in overcoming considerable barriers to accomplish all that you have. Others have been affected by mental health issues personally or within your family and know the importance of addressing these issues. Although this program, with its considerable research emphasis and small number of positions, will not be able to help you further your career interests, I encourage you to continue bringing your passion to your work. We need so much help to reduce disparities in mental health care for Latinos.

Again thank you for applying to our program and I wish you the very best in your future endeavors in the mental health field.

Warm regards,

Steven R. Lopez
Professor of Psychology and
Director Latino Mental Health Research Training Program