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## TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF CHICANOS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (TACHE)

*A Conversation with Dr. Magdalena H. de la Teja, TACHE President-Elect  
and Dean of Student Services, Austin Community College*

*By Robert H. Leos*



**F**or the past year, **Dr. Magdalena H. de la Teja**, Dean of Student Services, South Austin Campus, at Austin Community College, has been serving as President-Elect of the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE). In this capacity, she chairs the planning committee for TACHE's 33<sup>rd</sup> annual conference, scheduled for February 13-16, 2008, at the Doubletree Hotel in Austin, Texas. The conference, with the theme, "Colaborando Para Un Cambio—Latino College Student Success," promises to be as informative as any that the organization has held in its 34-year history.

**A**s Student Services Dean and as President-Elect of TACHE, Dr. de la Teja devotes a great deal of time to issues of student success. Her dedication to helping students succeed began with her interest in learning more about the educational challenges that deaf students face, particularly those who grow up in a bilingual home, like her sister, Dora. To that end, she earned her bachelor's and master's degree in Speech

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*Communication from The University of Texas at Austin. Her initial career goal included teaching deaf students and eventually conducting research into deaf education and communications as a university faculty member. The career goal changed, however, when she was invited to apply for a student development specialist position at The University of Texas at Austin, which led to her enrollment in a Ph.D. program in higher education administration and positions as administrative intern in the office of the President of The University of Texas at Austin and assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs, also at The University of Texas at Austin.*

**A**s Dr. de la Teja's career in higher education evolved, another career move grew out of her intrigue with a school law course and its great relevance to public education. Her interest in law led to her obtaining a law degree from The University of Texas Law School and serving as an attorney with the Texas Legislative Council for three years.

**I**n 1989, the opportunity to continue a career in higher education became available at Austin Community College. Dr. de la Teja was offered the position of Student Services Director and has been an integral part of this dynamic community college system as it has witnessed major growth and challenges through the years. In addition to the responsibilities she has now as Dean, Dr. de la Teja devotes a great deal of time to issues related to Latino student success, with her role as President-Elect and soon-to-be President of TACHE, and as a Board of Directors member of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).

*Dr. Magdalena de la Teja took time to discuss issues of Latino student success, TACHE's role in tackling these issues, and some of the highlights of the upcoming TACHE conference on February 13-16, 2008, in Austin, Texas. [rhl](#).*

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**ROBERT LEOS:** *What are some of your primary responsibilities as Student Services Dean at Austin Community College?*

**DR. DE LA TEJA:** One of the areas that is traditionally under Student Services is Student Life or the Student Union. Although our office does not directly supervise Student Life, Admissions, and Financial Aid, we work collaboratively with each of those areas to help students apply for admission, enroll in college, and seek financial aid. Directly under the Deans of Student Services are academic advisors, counselors, student assessment testing, and staff who support students with disabilities. In addition, I am responsible for student discipline (Judicial Affairs) and have college-wide responsibilities for helping to develop policies, procedures, and training related to academic advising and other Student Services areas.

**ROBERT LEOS:** *In addition to your responsibilities as Student Services Dean and as President-Elect of TACHE, you are also active in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). How did your involvement in NASPA come about?*

**DR. DE LA TEJA:** When I was in the Vice President's office at The University of Texas at Austin, I became involved in NASPA by volunteering to do sessions and by serving on

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various committees and boards within the association. Most recently, I was named chair of a national advisory board for community colleges. I have been actively advocating for two under-represented groups of my association: the first is for community college professionals, like me, and the other is for Latinos. NASPA has now recognized that almost 50% of all undergraduate students across the country are enrolled in community colleges, and a growing number of those students are Latino. Because NASPA has recognized community colleges as a very important constituency, it moved from having a national advisory board of which I was chair, to creating a division within NASPA. They also created a position for chair of the new national division and named me as chair. In that capacity, I am also on the NASPA Board of Directors.

My involvement with TACHE, however, is also very important to me because throughout my career I have worked on Latino student recruitment and success. Now that “Closing the Gaps” is a priority for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, TACHE is in a prominent place to make a difference.

**ROBERT LEOS:** *What role do you envision TACHE playing to help the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board achieve its “Closing the Gaps” priorities and goals?*

**DR. DE LA TEJA:** TACHE began communicating with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Commissioner, Dr. Raymund Paredes, to express our interest in collaborating with the THECB on “Closing the Gaps” and other

issues related to Latino student success. He informed us that he was going to form a Latinos in Higher Education Task Force. We met in July and will continue to meet with him to discuss college readiness curriculum, how TACHE can work with high schools to help students prepare for college, and how we can work with school faculty and counselors to make this happen. Dr. Paredes recognizes that many of TACHE’s members are dealing with issues related to Latino student success. TACHE can make a difference, *colaborando para un cambio*.

**ROBERT LEOS:** *What are some of the highlights of the February 13-16, 2008, TACHE conference?*

**DR. DE LA TEJA:** The work that was done by a coalition of Latino advocacy groups including LULAC, MALDEF, TACHE, etc., will be presented at the February conference. We are very excited to have Mr. Adam Chavarria, Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, as our Opening Plenary Speaker.

We will also have a powerful panel called *Creating Change Through the Word*, with Mr. Ernesto Nieto, Founder and President of the National Hispanic Institute, Dr. Amaury Nora of the University of Houston, Dr. Raymond Padilla of The University of Texas at San Antonio and Dr. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez from The University of Texas at Austin. Mr. Arnold García, Editorial Page Editor of the *Austin American Statesman*, will serve as moderator of the panel.

Another featured panel will include Mr.

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John Hernandez, Chair of the Austin Community College Board of Trustees; Dr. Steve Kinslow, President of Austin Community College; Dr. Ricardo Romo, President of The University of Texas at San Antonio; and Dr. Alda Benavides, Superintendent of La Joya Independent School District. We are working very hard to promote the conference and get as many people as possible to register before the holidays in December. We will continue to promote the conference throughout December and January, right up until the actual conference dates.

**ROBERT LEOS:** *You will become President of TACHE in February. What do you hope to accomplish through your presidency with TACHE?*

**DR. DE LA TEJA:** I want TACHE to be inclusive of all Latinos, not just Chicanos, but Puertorriqueños, Cubanos, Venezolanos, and all Latinos. Even though we are from different Latin American countries, we all have commonalities and there is still so much work to be done to get to where we need to be, particularly in Texas and California. What I would like to do in my term as TACHE President is to reach out and be inclusive.

**For More Information on TACHE and the February 13-16, 2008 Annual Conference in Austin, Texas, Visit:**

<http://www.tache.org>



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*“What I would like to do in my term as TACHE President is to reach out and be inclusive.”*

*-Dr. Magdalena de la Teja-*

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**Note:** *“Closing the Gaps,” a plan adopted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, is directed at closing educational gaps within Texas as well as between Texas and other states. The four goals of the program include closing gaps in student participation, student success, excellence, and research (from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website). For more information on “Closing the Gaps,” visit: <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us>.*

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