



The Smithsonian Institution and East Los Angeles College Sign Memorandum of Understanding to Create Partnership for Latino-focused Museum Studies Program

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The Smithsonian Institution and East Los Angeles College (ELAC) recently signed a memorandum of understanding that formalizes a new relationship between the two entities. This partnership, shepherded by Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) Director Eduardo Díaz, ELAC President Marvin Martinez, and Vincent Price Art Museum (VPAM) Director Pilar Tompkins Rivas, facilitates an unprecedented opportunity for undergraduate students to engage in museum studies in their hometown of Los Angeles and with the nation's premier museum complex in Washington D.C.

The inaugural program will immerse a cohort of four ELAC students in professional workshops led by ELAC's Vincent Price Art Museum, followed by a month-long internship coordinated by the Smithsonian's Office of Fellowships and Internships (OFI). Drawing upon local and national museum networks, students will be given the opportunity to learn under the mentorship of experts across a range of fields and among the Smithsonian's unparalleled collection of over 156 million objects.

Smithsonian OFI Director Eric Woodard said, "We here at the Smithsonian are so excited to work with colleagues at ELAC and VPAM to build this bridge to help bring more students all the way from East Los Angeles College to the Smithsonian. As much as ELAC students can expect a great learning experience while they're here at the Smithsonian, I know the Smithsonian will too be greatly enriched by their presence."

"The program is designed to create a pipeline for Latina and Latino students interested in the museum field by providing them with work opportunities that both mirror and expand upon their experience at the Vincent Price Art Museum," said SLC Director Eduardo Díaz. "Our aspiration is that upon their return to East Los Angeles College, or to a four-year institution, that they visualize a path for themselves as future museum professionals."

"At East Los Angeles College, we are in the business of transforming lives," said ELAC President Marvin Martinez. "This new program has the potential to have a transformative impact on our students, as many of them come directly from this part of town and belong to demographics that are underrepresented in the museum field."

"We know that one of the biggest challenges facing the museum field is the need to diversify, from the top tiers of administration and curatorial ranks, to careers in museum conservation, education, and registration. We hope this program will make an impact by fostering new avenues of access within museums," said VPAM Director Pilar Tompkins Rivas.

The inaugural cohort includes four students, Hope Flores, Melissa Marinero, Gabriela Padilla and Vanessa Quintero who will be placed with mentors across the Smithsonian Institution, including the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Office of Smithsonian Exhibits.

Through this agreement, the Smithsonian and ELAC seek to prepare future generations of museum professionals and develop new and innovative strategies for engaging students early in their studies. Both organizations believe this early engagement will ensure a diverse and continuous pipeline of students into a multitude of museum studies professions while also connecting communities across the country.

For press inquiries, contact Joseph Daniel Valencia: joedvalencia@gmail.com