Charles Ramírez Berg: Let's talk about the origins of the Latino Caucus.

Mary Beltrán: Great. Great.

Well, why don't we start. It would be really helpful to know what circumstances in SCMS led to perhaps discussions about forming a caucus and what functions it wanted to serve.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Okay. So, this is going back… I had attended my first SCS in 1987, which was at Montreal. And I was just graduating with a PhD and all of that. And I had done a PHD dissertation on Mexican cinema. And there was one panel at Montreal that was looking at Latin American cinema. And so that was my first introduction to SCS. And what had occurred to me, which was later validated by others like Chon Noriega, that there wasn't a whole lot of diversity in the membership. And so, those were the kind of conversations that he and I would have. And I think his first SCS was maybe '89, in there somewhere, '88-89, and he was also finishing up his dissertation around the same time.

So, I guess maybe from those conversations, that's maybe how it started. But it was initially about diversity in the membership, which meant we were trying to think of ideas to increase Latino membership of graduate students and faculty, to draw them to SCS in those days. So increased Latino membership was the initial goal.

We added another one later once we got started, but I'll tell you that in just a second.

Mary Beltrán: Okay. And were there other caucuses forming around that time?

Charles Ramírez Berg: I think... gosh, I'm trying to think. There was, and I can't remember what it was. I think there was one before us.

Mary Beltrán: There's an African American Caucus.

Charles Ramírez Berg: It might've been an African American one, maybe.

Mary Beltrán: Or a Women's Caucus; that's still-

Charles Ramírez Berg: Maybe the Women's Caucus. But there was one, I think, before us. And so what happened was, Chon. Chon and I were the first co-chairs and co-founders, I guess. But I have to take my hat off to Chon because it was all Chon; I was his assistant. He's the one that had the idea.

And one thing to think about, since we're doing history, is just recall that in those days ... So this is 1990 when we're having this conversation, that's 25 years ago. In those days, the way we used to communicate was landline telephone calls, long distance calls, long ones that we would have and think

about things and talk about things and strategize, and mail, snail mail with envelopes and stamps and all of that. And that's how we did stuff.

And he had the idea, you know, "We need to have a Latino Caucus. Yeah, yeah, we need to have one." And I think he sent out maybe a letter to a couple people and said, "You know, I think we should do this, let me know if you're interested. We really need to do this." And Chon is very good at things like that. He just has this knack for understanding how organizations work and how to get organizations to work for you, and who to ask, and what to ask, and when to ask and all that. So it was his idea.

And I responded, and I said, "Yeah, yeah. You're right," And I must've said something like, "Let me know what I can do or if you need some help or whatever." And the next thing I know is he said, "Okay, you and I are going to found the Latino Caucus."

Later on, just to tell you how whimsical history can be, later on I asked him, "How did I get to be co founder?" And he said, "Oh, you're the only one that answered my mail. I put out this call, you're the only one that answered." Oh, okay. So, you know, I just happened to say, "Okay."

So he says, "Okay, so what we need to do is we need to request $200 for the Latino Caucus from the board, the executive board." And I don't think I was a member of the board yet. I was elected to the board I think in ‘91. So this was probably right before that. And we're going to ask for $200 for the next one, which is going to be in Washington DC, that was the 1990 one. So this must've been in ‘89 when we were concocting all of this.

And just to show you how smart Chon is—I really admire his savvy, just in terms of, like I say, organizations and how they work and all of that. And I remember telling him, "Chon, what can we do with $200? That's nothing." And his answer was, "The amount doesn't matter, what matters is that we become a line item in the budget." And he's absolutely right. He said, "Once you’re a line item, and it's $200 or whatever, then next year, you're on the budget and you exist and you have a validity and you have an identity and everybody knows that you're there.” You know? It's like, you exist.

And so we did, and they gave us $200. And I think that was one of the first SCS conferences that was at a hotel. Up until that point, it had been at universities. And we would go to universities when their classes weren't being held, so during the summer, spring break or whatever, and just take over classrooms and buildings and stuff. And that's where we would have the stuff. And I was on the executive committee when we made that change. And I remember that was one of the big changes at the time.

And by the way, let me just tell you how I got to be on the executive, is it the executive committee? Is that the-

Mary Beltrán: Board of directors.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Board of directors; okay. Let me tell you how I got elected to the board of directors. So, 1987 was my first conference. And I kept attending and presented papers and all that stuff. And I think I was appointed to the task force on race, which was started in 1989, which was another initiative by the organization for diversity and things like that. And you know, they have elections. So they had an election and it was coming up. And this must've been in '89 or '90, in there somewhere. And right before they were going to send out the ballots, so this was when you sent out ballots and all of that, somebody dropped out.

And so I got this phone call that somebody dropped out. "We need somebody on the ballot, can we put your name?" I said, "Yeah, I guess. Sure. Are you sure?" "Yeah, yeah, we're sure." So they put me on the ballot last minute; I end up winning. So that's how I got… another fluke, just 'cause somebody dropped out and they asked me.

And as I think back, I don't know, maybe I was the first Latino on the board of directors.

Mary Beltrán: Very likely.

Charles Ramírez Berg: I don't know. But I know there weren't, I can't think of any others.

So anyway, so I'm on the board kind of at the same time as this is going down with Chon. And they give us $200, and I remember at that 1990 conference ... so what we did with the $200, you know, "What are we going to do with the $200? Oh, we're going to have a meet and greet, we're going to have wine and cheese." And, "Oh, okay."

And so we had to rent the room; we had to pay for it. And we used that money to pay for it, and I think we had wine and cheese or something. You know, it was at five o' clock some evening, Chon and I get there at 4:30, and we're setting things up and all that stuff and wondering if anybody's going to show up.

And lots of people showed up; it was immediately successful. And right after that, we got a lot of assistance from Ana Lopez, who's at Tulane, still, and was then, and Margarita De la Vega Hurtado, who was at Michigan. And they chipped in and they really helped a lot, just in terms of helping out, just assisting us to put it together. Should I keep going?

Mary Beltrán: Sure.

Charles Ramírez Berg: So then what happened, what we realized, and I think partially from who turned up at the wine and cheese meet and greet, we realized... So initially, it was a diversity kind of initiative, you know, "Let's try to get some diversity, let's try to get some Latino graduate students and faculty members." But then we realized,

we should also be open to people who are doing research on Latinos in media, film, television, whatever, in the States and in Latin America. Because there's a lot of people.

And then we realized, "Just because you're Latino doesn't mean you're going to be researching Latinos, you can be researching horror films or whatever you want, but we still want you. And just because you're not Latino, you could be looking at Latino stereotypes or Mexican cinema or something, and we want you too." So then we realized the research focus was also part of it. So, "If you're interested in Latinos and media here or abroad in Latin America, we're interested, and come and join us." And that kind of solidified what we were about at the time.

And then it was a lot of people and then it was a lot of fun. And we were exchanging ideas, and it was very open and it was an exciting time. And some of the things that happened, once again, it was Chon. "We need to get some Chicano film makers and put them on panels and have them show their work." And sure enough, we had some Chicano workshops and Chicano filmmakers, and it was great.

And I remember the Dallas SCS, which was ’96, I hosted Lourdes Portillo.

Mary Beltrán: Oh, great.

Charles Ramírez Berg: We had her, and she showed some of her films. And we had a little workshop, which was basically kind of a masterclass. And she and I talked and we did a Q and A. So that kind of stuff, we started doing that, you know, "Let's bring in film makers, let's open the conversation. Let's get the actual film makers included in the dialogue." And so that was another thing I think we were doing that no one really had explored the way that we did. Because we were bringing all sorts of filmmakers in and having them show their films.

And Dallas was one. We did another one I think the next year maybe or so, in San Diego, and we had some California filmmakers there. And so I think we were very successful very early on, and it was a lot of energy. And we really felt, and I think we did, we were doing something that needed to be done and something worthwhile, and attendance was good and all of that good stuff.

So we ended up being co-chairs; I think ‘90 to ‘93 was when were co-chairs. But like I say, a lot of it is Chon and just having that kind of mind to figure it out.

Mary Beltrán: You're too modest.

Charles Ramírez Berg: No, no, no. I was like his helper, like, "Okay, what do you think we need to do?" And I would ask him these questions and he would have the answer.

And what's interesting is, a couple years back, we were asked to put together something and writing about it. And I called him, and we talked on the phone. And I told him that story about, you know, "What can we do with $200?" And he said, "Did I really say that?" And I said, "Yes. You said, 'We just need to be a line item.'." And he said, "Boy, I was smart back then."

So, I mean, I don't think he even remembered it. So that's kind of how I remember it happening. But I also remember at the Dallas SCS which was, maybe we were SCMS then, I can't remember when that change happened. But… we also had a workshop with teaching national cinemas. And a couple of us were on that workshop. So it was national cinemas in general, but I think Ana Lopez and I were on the How to Teach Cuban Cinema, How to Teach Mexican Cinema, things like that. So we're doing things like that as well, you know, "If you're interested in this, how would you go about doing it?" Or, "How could you include Mexican film and what Mexican film should it be?" And those kinds of things.

So it wasn't just papers and panels. It was workshops and kind of trying to spread the word and getting people interested in the work, the films, and then the research as well. So, anyway, long answer to your question.

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. Well I think that it was a really important time and that the caucus made inroads in teaching scholars of film about the fact that films starring Latinos, by Latinos, about Latin America and Latinos in the US, that they had a place at the table.

Charles Ramírez Berg: No, no, exactly. And we didn't quite feel that way in the late ‘80s when we were attending. And I must say, SCS was very welcoming, and they're very supportive, and once we got the caucus going, they were really 100 percent supportive. It wasn't mean spirited at all. It hadn't occurred to them. And I think if it had occurred to them, they would've said, "Yeah, but how exactly do we do it?" And then you know, along came Chon. And Ana and Margarita. And we kind of showed them.

And then after that, a lot of other caucuses followed. There was one on, I think class was one, and then there was another. There was a gay caucus, I think that was what it was originally called. It's not called that anymore.

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. I think it's now [the] LGBTQ Caucus. And there is still a Women's Caucus and an Asian American Caucus now. So, the caucuses are now…

Charles Ramírez Berg: A thing!

Mary Beltrán: A major part of the conferences and so on.

Charles Ramírez Berg: It was also a great way for us to kind of get this group together. Because there's so many members, and then, "Oh, we have this and this and this in common."

And then it's wonderful; then it's what a conference should be. It's like, "Have you read this? What are you working on? Have you seen this?" You know, all of those kinds of conversation, which were hard to have, I think, before all that.

Mary Beltrán: Right. Were there any obstacles you had to overcome as a group at that point? Or do you feel like once it became a line item of the budget, did it feel like the enthusiasm of members kind of just kept it moving along?

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah, the member enthusiasm kept it going. There was some… because we were doing things that hadn't been done before. So when we were asking to have ... So they would have screenings of directors, but they had never had Latino directors and independent and, you know, small documentary film makers, things like that. I think that was, it's not that there was resistance, it was just like, this was all new and we had to convince them, "Yeah, but we can do it, and it'll work and it'll be good," and all of that.

And there was a lot of good will, I must say, in the membership. They were ready for it. I think they were ready for it and they were looking for a way to do it, and they were thankful that someone was going to help them do it. And they were looking at all these places, so, gay, class, African American, Asian American, Latinos. I think they were looking and they were aware of the diversity problem.

And so the resistance was mostly, "Gosh, we've never done that before," or, "That's different," or, "Are you sure?" And you know, we had to, "Yeah, yeah, we're sure. We can do it. It'll be good. And you should have Lourdes Portillo. And you should be showing her films." "Oh, okay." So I don't remember a whole lot of pushback. It was just kind of, "Gosh, we've never done that one before."

And there would be times when you'd be on a panel, I was on a panel one time, and the moderator was Isaac Artenstein. Do you know Isaac Artenstein?

Mary Beltrán: Did he do *Break of Dawn*?

Charles Ramírez Berg: He did *Break of Dawn,* and he was the moderator. And you know, and because he wasn't an academic and not a conference guy, he came in and he said, "Oh, look at this line up, let's move it around." So he started moving things around. "I think Charles, you should go second and somebody and go first and someone should," moving the whole thing around which you're not supposed to do at a conference because everybody is visiting different panels because they were at the same time. So you figure, "I can go to this one for the first talk and I'll go to that one." And ours was all scrambled, but it was because he was, "Yeah, makes sense to me."

And you know, we just went with it. And you could tell there were people that would come in and they would say, "Oh, I missed that one." But at the same time, it was that kind of energy, just having a filmmaker come in and be part of

the panel and be the moderator and ask the questions. You know, it was a lot of different kind of energy there. So it was fun.

That's the other thing, let's not forget it was fun.

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. It's always been a great group.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah, it has.

Mary Beltrán: Very friendly, yeah.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah, very much so.

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. I have only one other question. I'm not sure if you've already answered it. Do you feel like there are any other issues or events that took place in the past that would be useful for the current members of the Latino/a Caucus to know about? Are there any other functions you feel the caucus has served that you haven't had a chance to address yet?

Charles Ramírez Berg: So, let me just mention some of the filmmakers we've brought in. Besides Lourdes Portillo, we've brought in Paul Espinosa, we've brought in Frances Salomé España, we've brought in Mario Beretta, who was at Berkeley. Isaac Artenstein.

Going back to that line item, the amount doesn't matter, being a line item matters. That one stroke created a space for all this to happen, the work that you do, the work that I do. A space where it would be understood and appreciated and all of that, and validated, and all of those kinds of things. Which I think was just as important as the interpersonal stuff and all of that, just that it kind of validated this area and this focus of research and study. It made it all equal.

And so I'm talking about film studies back in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and a lot of it was the great films and great filmmakers and a lot of that. And as we know, a lot of those were Hollywood and male. And just creating a space where, "You know what, this is also a part of film studies and media studies. There's Latinos and how they're represented. And Latino stars and Latino filmmakers and the movement that they joined and all of that history." It just kind of validated all that within film studies. So that little line item kind of had repercussions that I think were really good for people like you and me who did this kind of work. Now it's an area and it's recognized and it's understood as, "Yeah, Latino representation in film and media, yeah." But it wasn't always like that.

Mary Beltrán: And in the first years, were there a larger percentage of members that were graduate students?

Charles Ramírez Berg: There was, because the faculty were, the ones who were involved were the ones who were doing Latin American cinema. So Ana Lopez was doing Cuban cinema, things like that. So they were involved. So one of the things we were trying [to do], is to give the graduate students a place to go to and kind of a goal. "Oh, here is a body of work and here are some people who are doing that kind of research and that kind of work and you can join in on that," and kind of showing them that is exists and it's okay to do; and it's important and we needed to do it.

So I think we understood. And, gosh, we used to have these conversations too. I can remember having these conversations with Chon, just, "How are we going to get more graduate students here?" And it was almost a question of generations. I finally realized, "Gosh, I think we need one more generation, one more generation of Latinos, Latino families sending their kids to college who then go to graduate school and end up with us and get their MFAs or get their PHDs or get their Masters or whatever." And I think it's happening. But it was so heartening.

But one of the things Chon would do is he would give this group a place to show their stuff. So he would have special editions of *Jump Cut*, and he would say he convinced the editors at *Jump Cut*… And they were happy to do it. You know: "We're going to have a special Latino edition of 'Jump Cut', so you need to send them your essays." So it gave us a place to go that we hadn't been before, particularly as a group. And so, "We're going to have a special cinema journal." And he would do that; he would just get those, and that would create a place for young researchers to publish, for young graduate students and undergraduate students to see it published, and give them a sense of, "Oh, look, maybe I can write one of these," Or, "Somebody's doing Latinos in film."

So that was the other [thing], that came out of it. You start figuring out where you're going to publish things. And he had a conference at UCLA one time. And it was all of us; basically it was just all of us doing that kind of stuff. And we did a Mexican film and we did a Latin American film out of the UCLA archives. And once again, he gave us and he created this conference; he called it a Working Conference. And I think it was '95 or '96, in there somewhere, for us.

And he was very conscious of, "And we need to get more graduate students involved." And that became kind of the, "Let's attract them, let's nurture them, let's support them," all of that. Because we realized that was the future and there was not going to be a future unless we did that.

Mary Beltrán: That's great, remarkable, to think of you at the time you were, graduate students not having faculty members who could say, "Oh, just do what I'm doing, and this is the way."

Charles Ramírez Berg: You know what I did? When I did my dissertation, which was on Mexican cinema, I don't know if there was another dissertation ever on Mexican cinema. You know? Ever. In the United States. It went on to be published as a book, but

it was the first book of criticism in English of Mexican film, the first ever. Okay? How can that be? There are all these books on Japanese cinema, Swedish cinema, Italian cinema. So that just goes to show you, that's not the case anymore. Now if you go and you look at Latinos in film, Latinos in media, both here in the States and Latin America, there's shelves of those. But once upon a time, it wasn't like that.

And when I did my dissertation, I remember I was by myself. I was doing it by myself. Tom Schatz here was fine and open to it, and he helped me get it published as a book, but I knew more than he did. And he was fine with that. I remember him telling me, "I'm going to learn a lot." And so, those were the days where we were just trying to get those out there. And then it would give kind of a signal to others that, "Oh," an idea, a goal, maybe, or an area that was okay, that existed in film studies and media studies. It's hard to imagine, but yeah, once upon a time a lot of that wasn't there.

Mary Beltrán: It was important work.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah. Thank you. So do you want to talk about your-

Mary Beltrán: Sure.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Tell us a little bit about how you got involved with SCS, and was it SCS or SCMS?

Mary Beltrán: I think it was SCMS, maybe had just become SCMS around the early 2000s when I first went to a conference. And I was encouraged by you and perhaps also by Federico [Subervi] when Federico was still here, to attend the caucus, and I didn't know what to expect. And it was a very supportive group of faculty and graduate students that were working on Latinos in film and media and Latin American cinema, and it was immediately just a supportive group to be a part of. And in some ways, it was a bit of an oasis in the middle of the conference, which, you know, is still a mostly white, perhaps even upper-middle class group of scholars, although a nice group of people. And so it was very easy to get involved.

And you know, I think the caucus has changed somewhat as the need has become less dire.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Oh, okay. Talk a little bit about that.

Mary Beltrán: As those of you that started the caucus became established faculty, you've mentored a number of different scholars along the way and have made such inroads that I think it's a little easier to be a Latino scholar or a scholar looking at Latinos in media. So it's still a very social, supportive group. I think in some ways, it's becoming a bit more of a SIG, a Scholarly Interest Group, which they also have at SCMS. It's a bit more focused now probably on the work than on surviving. But it's still very supportive and friendly.

One of the things that they do, and I don't know if you were a part of starting it, is a Spanish-language table in the book exhibit.

Charles Ramírez Berg: No, no. I remember we were… that was one of the things, I mean, "We need to have a presence in the book exhibit," right? And then I remember it was like, "Yeah, some of them need to be in Spanish, right?" And there's all this work being done in Latin American and Spain and whatever. And so I don't remember ever seeing that happen, but I do remember the conversation that it was important for us to have a presence there.

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. And I think actually that that may get phased out or it may be happening to a lesser degree, but for about 10 years, Catherine Benamou and some other faculty involved began to bring books with them, fill a suitcase full of extra books and journals and work that had been, some of it may have been translated into English already, and some was in Spanish, and it was a way in which Latino/a Caucus members would also man the table. And people would come up and say, "What's this?" And it was sort of a way to reach out outside of the caucus as well. And so I think that that's been helpful.

But also, we've just tried to maintain some of the really helpful things that the early folks started, like bringing in filmmakers and trying to tie into Latino filmmaking in the cities where the conference has been held. And so sometimes it's involved site visits away from the conference.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Oh really?

Mary Beltrán: I believe. And so, it's still very active, I actually think right now there are fewer people focused on Latinos in the US, which I find too bad, but it may just be the case that there was a boom of new people coming in and maybe there have been fewer lately. Maybe your and Chon's presence is missed. I don't know.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah; that's really interesting.

Mary Beltrán: But it's still very active. And it still often involves scholars that are not Latino that are interested in Latin American cinema or Latinos in media. And I think-

Charles Ramírez Berg: When we made that switch, when we realized it also needs to be research focused, it made all the difference in the world. And the thing is, they were there already. They were at the mixer. It's like, "Oh, yeah. All of us go have a meeting," and it really made a difference. And I think them knowing that they were welcome was key. But that's still the case, huh?

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. And nowadays, the caucus has more than, they actually have too many panels that they could possibly sponsor, and they can only choose to sponsor, it might be eight. And they easily do that, and there easily may be another six more or 10 more that can't be officially sponsored and are unofficially sponsored.

Charles Ramírez Berg: That's good, that's a good thing. That means the numbers and the work is, the numbers are there and the work is there. 'Cause I remember once we got it going and then Ana Lopez and Margarita got started, and that was immediately what they went to, you know, "We need to have our own panels, we need to have our own topics, we need all of that." And they were right. And you know, initially it's just, "Let's do this one, let's do these two," or, "Let's do a workshop." But that's another way to kind of establish yourself and validate who you are and what you're doing.

Mary Beltrán: So now the second generation of scholars, we're teaching around the country. And I think all of this really was fed by the early caucus and what they accomplished.

Charles Ramírez Berg: And do you see, so you were co-chair once upon a time too, about 10 years ago?

Mary Beltrán: It might've been that long ago, I think so. Yeah, that's right.

Charles Ramírez Berg: And what kind of challenges did you have? Or can you identify anything that you had to work at that was difficult or was difficult to achieve?

Mary Beltrán: It was a really good experience. But I'd say that now we probably have the same challenges, or at the time there probably were the same challenges that any scholarly group might have today, that, because it's so established, it can be easy for people to get listserv emails and feel like, "Oh, other people are going to be able to take care of it." I think it's almost easier sometimes to get people motivated when there's a real lack. Although, you said Chon was sending letters to a number of people and not everyone responded. So, maybe it's a long-term issue.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Well it was probably a short list. But you know, when you mentioned the word, "oasis," that the caucus is kind of an oasis, I felt the same way. And because, you know, you would go to the conferences in the late ‘80s and gosh, so, I'm from El Paso, and it's just like, "Gosh, I love all the films that they're talking about, but right now I'm doing Mexican film and I'm doing Latino images in American film and where do I go to talk to somebody else who's interested and get some ideas and exchange ideas and thoughts and whatever."

And, if you don't see anybody like that, then you start thinking, "Gosh, I don't know. Maybe I'm doing the wrong stuff," or whatever. And thankfully, there was Chon and there was Ana and there was Margarita, and then there were others. And we did, gosh, thank goodness! Yeah. And I remember knowing Margarita in the first, in ‘87 in Montreal. She was wonderful. And she was very excited, "Somebody doing work on Mexican cinema, wow." So, just finding some people like that.

And I would guess, just hearing you talk, I mean it's almost like… now that there is a body of work and there's an organization and there's members and all of that, complacency almost becomes kind of a danger, right? Because for the newer members, it was like, "This has always been here, it's going to run itself, it's going to roll right along." So I guess that's a second generation problem.

Mary Beltrán: I think so. I think becoming overly professionalized could, if we're not careful, take away from a feeling of community that the caucus has offered. And I don't think that things are going poorly, necessarily, and I've been less involved, but I think there could be more outreach to graduate students right now, and also more outreach to senior faculty who don't always get to come to the conference. And we need to come up with some more excuses to bring you back.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah, yeah, no, no, I'd love to go back. And it's not for lack of desire, but there always seems to be something else going on. But I do remember, I mean. So some of the things we would talk about, and this is with Chon and Margarita and Ana and others, is just professional development, just, "How are you getting a tenure? How are you getting published?"

And one of the things Chon was doing is, by establishing, "Oh, we're going to have a special edition of this journal." Or, you know, he was basically getting us published so that when my time for tenure was coming up, I had a body of work that he helped get published just because he said... And he would say, "Oh, I'm going to edit a book, and you're going to write the chapter on “El Automovil Gris”, this 1919 silent Mexican film. "Really?" "Yeah." And I would write it. And I would say, "You know, but it needs to be peer reviewed." He said, "Don't you worry, we're going to get it peer ... " You know, all of that. And so in a way, he was helping me get tenure by giving me publications and getting it peer reviewed, all the stuff you needed to do.

I can remember he encouraged me. So, more on Chon, he encouraged me to apply for the National Endowment for the Humanities. So I'd apply to do the Latino Images book, and got turned down, apply again, got turned down. And talking to him on the phone, back in the phone days, and I said, "Gosh, I struck out twice, what should I do?" He said, "Oh, I think you should apply again." "Okay, I'll apply again." And I got it; the third time, I got it. And he said, "So what are you going to do?" This is, once again, just how good a player he is, how he just understands. And I said, "Well, I guess it'll allow me to take a semester off or something and do some work." He said, "No, you're going to have a year off." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, how do you ... " And he said, "Look. Go see your dean, tell the dean that you just got a NEH, and she's going to get you a year off." "Really?" "Yeah." "Are you sure?" "Yeah, yeah, go tell ... "

So I did, and I didn't even finish the sentence and the dean said, "Oh, you need a year off." But he's the one that said, "This is what you need to do. They're going to give you a year off." I didn't know, I had no idea. I mean, how was I going to know? I'd never won an NEH before. And so he was the one that just said, "No,

you need to have a year off, and it's so prestigious, they're going to give it to you."

But I mean, so, professional development, just knowing-

Mary Beltrán: All of this is really, the caucus has been really helpful. I think now they're working to set up a mentorship system. So they've done a lot.

Charles Ramírez Berg: All of that kind of stuff. Because academia… and we would talk about it, and we would say, "That's crazy. That doesn't make any sense. Yeah. So here's how we're going to work it. Here's what you need to do."

Mary Beltrán: Yeah. Informally, a lot of mentorship goes on in the caucus, right? You know, I think that's continued. And so it's still a really vital group within SCMS.

Charles Ramírez Berg: Yeah, so it helped me a lot and he helped me a lot.