

## *A Conversation With . . .*

# CSU Dominguez Hills President Mildred García



Mildred García, Ed.D., was named president of California State University, Dominguez Hills in 2007. This year marked the 50th Anniversary of the campus located in the City of Carson. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

**M**ildred García, Ed.D., who joined California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) as its seventh president in August 2007, is the first Latina to be appointed president in the CSU system. Known for her commitment to multicultural alliances for the benefit of students and communities and listed among Hispanic Business magazine's 100 Most Influential Hispanics for 2007, Dr. García was a natural fit for CSUDH, regarded as the most ethnically and culturally diverse university west of the Mississippi. García is a noted scholar in the field of higher education, having published several books and speaking extensively at national and international conferences about the subject.

Before coming to CSUDH, García served six years as president of Berkeley College in New York and New Jersey. Before that, she was at Arizona State University (1997-2001), Montclair State University in New Jersey (1986-1996), and Hostos Community College of City University of New York (1979-1986).

García received doctor of education and master of arts degrees

in higher education administration from Teachers College, Columbia University; a master of arts in business education/higher education from New York University; a bachelor of science in business education from Bernard Baruch College of City University of New York (CUNY); and an associate of arts degree in legal secretarial sciences in business from New York City Community College of CUNY.

As the university continues with its 50th Anniversary celebration, Long Beach Business Journal Staff Writer Amy Dempsey sat down with García, to discuss her experiences at CSUDH thus far, as well as her future aspirations for the institution.

**LBBJ:** How do you see the role of the university in the community?

**García:** Very, very important. We are part of the community. That is why it is so important that every community in the South Bay sees us as their university. We are the only public university between the Port of Los Angeles and the Port of Long Beach and

so, instead of driving by to go to other sister institutions, we need to let them know we are part of the community and they can come here for degrees, classes or continuing education.

**LBBJ:** What are you doing to engage the community?

Well, for one, we have great sports teams, and I'm proud to say that our soccer team won, our baseball team is I think number 10 in the nation. We opened up our sports events so people can come and have a wonderful, inexpensive afternoon to be part of the Toro pride. Or see our concerts, or see our plays. One of our plays won a wonderful award. . . . a wonderful play. We've got to let the community know we're here. And we want to work with the community; that is the other part of it.

One of the goals that I strongly believe in, regardless of what major you have, is internships. So how do we work with our community and our business partners to ensure that we work together so they give students internships in the areas in which they are studying?

And also have businesses and the community talk with us about the programs they think are cutting edge. What should we be paying attention to in order to help the South Bay be strong in the state? So whether it's water resources, green technology, or whatever, have CEOs and others give us input and work in partnership. And finally of course is K-12, or P-12. How do we have better graduation rates within our community so that these children will have the opportunity to get a university degree at CSU Dominguez Hills? So it's critical, it's indispensable, that we be an integral part of the community.

**LBBJ:** What is the expected enrollment and retention rates for the 2010-11 school year?

**García:** We are going to try to keep enrollment under 14,000 FTE – that's full-time equivalent. We're over 14,000 headcount right now. And we are going to have to keep it under that headcount. As you know, we're in a fiscal crisis and the CSU has worked very diligently to take the money we have, and educate our students. If we over-enroll, then we don't have the money and we don't have the classes. And so, all of us, all 23 campuses are keeping our enrollments down, which is unfortunate at this point in time.

**LBBJ:** Is the university allowing spring transfer students?

**García:** We don't know that yet. We are looking at the outlook of what the budget will bring to us. Right now, we have people on waiting lists to be admitted into the institution, but again we go back to: What will the budget be? And right now, as many administrators say, we don't have money in the bank. We don't know if we will have to cut more. We are expecting that, if we get the governor's budget, especially since the legislature is also saying that CSU is as important a priority as UC, that we may be able to maintain the status quo, but we don't know that yet.

**LBBJ:** How many students are expected to graduate in May 2011, and how does that compare to previous years?

## University Presidents

During its 50-year history, the six men pictured here preceded Mildred García, Ed.D., as president of California State University, Dominguez Hills, although one held the "interim" title. Two other men served as "acting" president: Dr. Herbert Carter, 1998-1999; and Dr. Boice Bowman, Spring 2007.



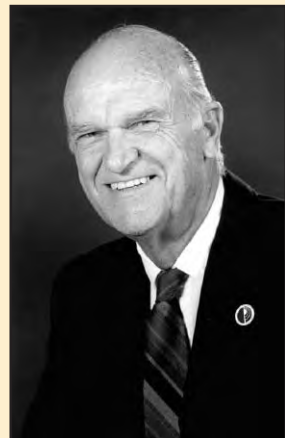
Dr. Leo F. Cain  
1962-1976



Dr. Donald R. Gerth  
1976-1984



Dr. Richard Butwell  
1984-1987



Dr. John Brownell  
(Interim) 1987-1989



Dr. Robert Detweiler  
1989-1998



Dr. James E. Lyons, Sr.  
1999-2007

**García:** I don't have those numbers off hand, but May 2011 is next year. Wow, next year. I would expect that we would graduate more students than we did this year, which I want to say, was about 3,500 eligible to graduate. So I would expect either that number, or slightly higher because our students are moving along and we are working very diligently in spite of the budget crisis to ensure that classes are priorities and students can graduate.

**LBBJ:** How much has CSUDH cut enrollment?

**García:** We have not. Before I got here, Cal State Dominguez Hills had not met its enrollment target. We met our enrollment target a year and a half ago and we had over-enrolled this year, and now we have to bring it back down. We definitely will shoot to cut for the fall because we have to come under 14,000 now. It's ironic, it's unfortunate, that the situation in the state is what it is. At a time when we're now turning a corner, and people are understanding the quality programs we have and the environment we have, we have to cap enrollment. It's a really tough situation right now for us.

**LBBJ:** Because of the budget crisis, the CSUs are cutting classes and implementing furlough days. At CSUDH, which classes are being cut, and how are the cuts decided?

**García:** Very few classes have been cut. The reason has been that



Professor L. Mark Carrier teaches a cultural pluralism class at California State University, Dominguez Hills. The university consists of six Colleges: College of Arts and Humanities; College of Extended and International Education; College of Professional Studies (School of Health and Human Services, School of Nursing, School of Education); College of Natural and Behavioral Sciences; and the College of Business Administration and Public Policy. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

we are placing the priority on classes. So, we got one-time money from the stimulus dollars. And all of that money at this campus I directed to the provost to make sure that classes were not cut. Of course, even during regular times, classes are cut if enrollment goes under a certain number of students. Those kinds of classes were cut, but the classes that students needed to be enrolled in, all of our stimulus money went to that. The way the provost decides that, is he looks at enrollment. He looks at what students need, he uses the normal factors and he makes sure that students are enrolled in classes that they need to graduate.

**LBBJ:** So then, is it safe to say that decreased classes have not impeded students' ability to graduate?

**García:** Decreased classes have not. What we've cut back on, unfortunately, are services that are necessary. We just put together a university advising center. We need to increase that, but we can't. That is very, very important for our students. We have a freeze on hiring. At this institution we need more people in financial aid, for example. We need more advisors, so it's the services that our students need so desperately that are being affected. And we do have larger class sizes. Our faculty has been wonderful. Our FTE to faculty has increased. It used to be 20 to 1, and now I'm sure it's 25 to 1. So we have had to do that as well.

**LBBJ:** Would you say that the budget is your number one challenge, or is it something else?

**García:** I think it's the number one challenge for us right now because we are on a trajectory of growth. We are in the middle of a fabulous strategic plan. We've had everybody involved in planning. To move a strategic plan forward, we need to have resources. And so it's redirecting resources in order to reach our goals. It's been very difficult at an institution like Dominguez Hills that is now turning the corner that we don't have the resources we need to reach the next level of excellence.

**LBBJ:** You were recently appointed to be a member of the U.S. Committee on Measures of Student Success. What are the goals of the committee?

**García:** The goal of the committee is to look at community colleges and figure out how to measure ultimate levels of success, which can look different for different student scenarios. It's not only graduation. I'll give you a couple of examples. I started out as a community college student. So you become a community college student with

a particular goal. Some students go in and want to get a career immediately because they need to work because they're poor. So they don't finish. Does that mean that student is a failure? But we do count them as "dropouts." Or, for example, a student does go for that career, leaves, and comes back. How do you count that student as part of your success story? Or you have students who go to a community college and decide to transfer. Is that a failure for the community college? No. But how do you track the students who did not finish their associate's degree and moved on to another four-year institution or another community college somewhere in the country? And so, we have very traditional ways of measuring success. You know, the formula for success that has been used, which is very traditional, is you come in fulltime, you take your classes, and a year later are you still there? How many students go to school fulltime these days? How many students come and go because of the many things they have on their plates? So, as a committee, how do you look at the measures of success at community colleges? And I'm really excited to be on it. It's quite an honor to be appointed.

**LBBJ:** What changes have you implemented at the university, and what other changes have been planned?

**García:** You know, I came in with four themes, four goals, that we are still working on. The first one was recognizing who we are and our points of pride, ensuring that the entire South Bay and Los Angeles know Dominguez Hills and the excellent work that we do. And so, we talk about points of pride and who we are, and being proud of the work that we do here. Part of that is also customer service, and we work very hard to ensure that we understand that the student is coming in to learn. And so, how do we treat them with respect and dignity? It doesn't matter who is paying for their education. Respect and dignity to ensure that we help them reach the high standards that we want them to have. That was goal number one.

Goal number two was enrollment management. That meant reaching our enrollment potential, which we have. Now we need to look at, within enrollment management, how many students we're bringing in and the retention rate. In the whole CSU system, every president now is going to be accountable to ensure that our retention and graduation rates go up, and how we do it. I started that in 2007, so I wasn't afraid of it. How do we work with community colleges to help them transfer to Dominguez Hills? And also, how

do we work with the high schools to ensure that the high schools are doing the curriculum, that students have what is needed to be qualified to come to a CSU, especially Dominguez Hills? All of that is part of enrollment management. So that's number two, enrollment management.

The third goal was financial stability, and we still continue to work on that. When I first got here, we had a \$1.8 million structural deficit, before the crisis. We got rid of that. However, now we have something worse. We have a national and global crisis. So now we need to think about defining who we are – we can't be everything to everybody. Who is Dominguez Hills? Thus came the strategic plan. And the strategic plan will help us focus our resources on who we will be as part of the CSU system.

The fourth goal is building community, internally and externally. Building community internally, even though we're not as big as some of our sister institutions. I was surprised how many people don't know each other here. We have great faculty members who are here because they want to work at the most diverse public university west of the Mississippi. And so, how do we ensure that the faculty, the staff and the administrators all know each other and are working together toward a common goal, and be proud of who we are? How do we work together to ensure that we all understand in a transparent way that we're all here for one purpose: To educate and graduate students? And then also externally, we had some work, and still need to do some work, as I said before in helping people understand 'Who is Dominguez Hills?' Some people didn't even know we were here. We've worked hard to get the word out through our media relations department and the vice president's office, telling people what our points of pride are and who we are. People now know who we are.

So those are the four areas that we've put in place that we will continue to work on through next year. The unveiling of the strategic plan will be critical in the fall.

**LBBJ:** Are there any long-term plans to expand the campus or its facilities?

**García:** We have just had the master plan approved by the board of trustees. And, of course, that's in the long term. That master plan has us going to 20,000 FTE to our potential – which won't happen overnight obviously because of the fiscal crisis. But we are looking at our number one priority, which will be a science and math building. Extremely important today is STEM – science, technology, engineering and math. STEM is critical to this country and critical to the state. Educating students in that area is important and we need to have facilities in order to ensure that we fulfill that need, to help the students move forward. So, yes, we are excited. Our new library, I think, is the centerpiece of our institution and it is absolutely wonderful. We've had two buildings – the



Students wait in line at Taco Bell Express, which is located at the food court inside the Loker Student Union at the California State University, Dominguez Hills. The Loker facility is the second newest building on campus. It houses a multicultural center, the university bookstore, the office of student life, the Associated Students, Inc. and a Schools Federal Credit Union. (Photographs by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

expansion of our student union in 2007 right before I got here, and now we have the library – as centerpieces for our institution.

It's a beautiful campus, and the environment is as important to the teaching and learning process as everything else.

**LBBJ:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

**García:** I just think that it's so important that we start to focus and think about education in the State of California. I really do believe that there is a crisis in education, in that we are losing so many students in our schools. And we need to work in partnerships to ensure that people understand their choices, and about how to get into the university. The need to educate underrepresented students and students who come from poor families is critical to the salvation of California. We all must work in partnership to ensure that they have the opportunity to have a college degree. ■