

Harvard-MIT Puerto Rican Caucus set for this month

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A group of Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology students organized a conference to discuss Puerto Rico's economic situation and encourage youth to return to the island and contribute to its economic growth.

The conference, titled "Restoring economic growth in Puerto Rico: Proposing solutions," will be held on April 20 and 21 in Cambridge, Mass.

The conference emerged as "a reaction to last year's government shutdown and to the economic difficulties that the country started to face as a result of the shutdown," Antonio Sosa-Pascual said in phone interview Wednesday from Cambridge.

Sosa-Pascual is one of the conference's four main organizers, an MBA candidate at the MIT Sloan School of Management and a former director of the Puerto Rico Trade under Sila Calderón's administration.

The conference's other main organizers are: Harvard Ph.D. candidate in Romance Languages Carmen Oquendo, Association of Puerto Rican Students at MIT President Katia Acosta and La Organización de Puertorriqueños en Harvard President Luis Martínez. The latter two are undergraduate students.

However, Sosa-Pascual said the event has been a collaborative effort between undergraduate and graduate students. About 25 Puerto Rican students have been working day to day on organizing the event, and about 100 students from Harvard and MIT have gotten involved in the event in one way or another.

Together, they form the Harvard-MIT Puerto Rican Caucus, which Sosa-Pascual said is "an ad hoc entity whose purpose is to organize the annual conference of the caucus."

Sosa-Pascual said that the idea for a caucus arose after he bumped into Oquendo in a Cambridge cafe during the May 2006 government shutdown. Oquendo invited him to participate in a Harvard event on the shutdown and in a caucus on Puerto Rico.

"I said yes, no problem, but with one condition — it has to be Harvard-MIT," Sosa-Pascual said.

The duo then approached Martínez and Acosta, who joined the effort.

"We've been working on this since December," Sosa-Pascual said.

"The main objective of this event isn't really the speakers or the pan-

elists; it's involving youth in the solution to Puerto Rico's problems and that they later assume roles of leaders and of private and social entrepreneurs," Sosa-Pascual said.

"When they decide whether or not to return to Puerto Rico, it's not about who's going to give me a job, it's about what company I'm going to start or what non-profit I'm going to start so that I can make an impact on Puerto Rico and help improve quality of life."

Problem solving

Another of the event's goals is to propose solutions "in conjunction with the decision-makers in Puerto Rico," he said.

"We don't have to wait to be in a position of power to propose solutions," Sosa-Pascual added. "Puerto Rican youth and students have the right to participate in the proposals and solutions of the country."

The first day a recruiting event called the VIP Networking Reception will be held to help Puerto Rican youth get access to high-caliber job opportunities and to give companies on the island access to Puerto Rican talent in the Boston area.

MIT Entrepreneurship Center Director Ken Morse and Puerto Rico Supreme Court Chief Justice Federico Hernández Denton will be keynote speakers at the networking reception.

The second day of the conference will be divided into eight discussion panels, one with each of the following topics: Puerto Rico's economy, public and private financings, entrepreneurial projects, education,

biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, health enterprise and policy, sustainable development and Puerto Rico's image.

Over 35 speakers have confirmed their participation in the conference, including former Government Development Bank President William Lockwood-Benet, Puerto Rico Bankers Association Executive Director Arturo Carrión, Abaco Mobile President Fernando Alvarez and Puerto Rico Medical School Dean Dr. Walter Frontera.

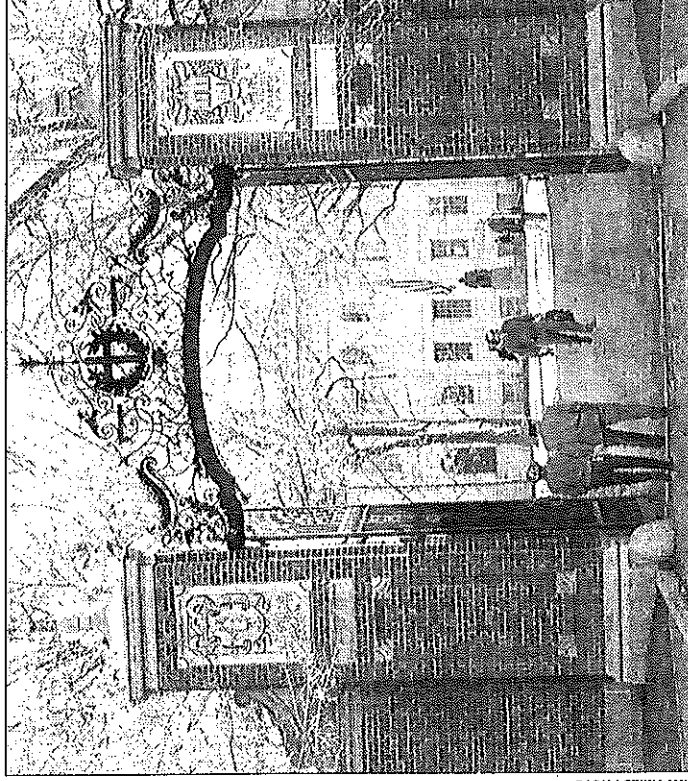
Also confirmed are: Sapiientis President and co-founder Kristin Ehrgood, Institute for Environmental Studies Director Neftalí García, Convention Bureau of Puerto Rico Executive Director Ana María Viscacillas, Center for the New Economy Executive Director Miguel Soto Class, and Brookings Institution's Barry P. Bosworth and Susan M. Collins.

Keynote speakers at the conference's activities on April 22 will also include University of Puerto Rico President Antonio García Padilla and Popular, Inc. Chairman Richard Carrión.

Students from universities in Puerto Rico and universities close to Boston have also been invited to participate.

To register for the conference, for more information about the panels or to contact organizers and get involved, visit the following Web site: <http://harvardmitcaucus.com/index.html>.

Sosa-Pascual encouraged students to register quickly. As of Wednesday there were about 90 people registered, and space is limited.



N.Y. TIMES PHOTO

Part of the conference "Restoring economic growth in Puerto Rico: Proposing solutions" will be held on campus at Harvard in Cambridge, Mass.