

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



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Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

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Alejandro Portes



Alejandro Portes, the Howard Harrison and Gabrielle Snyder Beck Professor of Sociology, is retiring after 17 years of teaching and research at Princeton. His work spans the areas of social stratification and status attainment in Latin America; migration and immigrant communities related to the United States, Cuba, Mexico, and Spain; economic sociology; and design of government institutions.

Alex began his long pilgrimage to Princeton in Havana, Cuba. Beginning his studies at the University of Havana, he left the island (in body if not in spirit) in 1960. He continued his undergraduate studies in Buenos Aires and then graduated from Creighton University in 1965. From the beginning, Alex was drawn to sociology as a way of understanding the changes and challenges he faced as an exile and continued work toward a doctoral degree at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, from which he received his Ph.D. in 1970. Wisconsin later welcomed him back with an honorary doctorate in 1998.

After Madison, Alex taught at the University of Illinois, the University of Texas, Duke University, and Johns Hopkins University before coming to Princeton in 1997. Along the way, he was a visiting professor in Brasília, Quito, Oxford, and Utrecht as well as being a regular visitor to universities in Florida, where he continues to serve as research professor at the University of Miami. Over the years, he has earned just about every award available to a social scientist including various honorary degrees and disciplinary prizes, and membership in the American Academy of Political and Social Science, the American Philosophical Society, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2010, he was awarded the W.E.B. DuBois Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award from the American Sociological Association.

Having published his first article in 1968 and continuing through his nine newest publications in the past two years, Alex has written dozens of books and several hundred chapters and articles. His first work focused on social stratification and status attainment with a parallel interest in the specific challenges facing Latin America. He soon combined these interests by doing pioneering work on migration in the United States. His book *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (written with Robert Bach and published in 1985) remains a classic in the field and helped define how work on this issue would be done over the next decades. During these same years, he continued to study a lifelong interest in the dynamics of urban life in the Americas. Combining these set of interests, he studied ethnic enclaves and how they produced particular dynamics of successful migration and integration. *His City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (coauthored with Alex Stepick and published in 1993) remains a classic interpretation of this phenomenon.

Never satisfied with just a few subdisciplinary specializations, Alex also pursued work on the informal economy, where his contributions once again helped define standards in the field. This interest expanded into the relatively new area of economic sociology. Several of Alex's many articles on this issue have been cited hundreds of times, and his *Economic Sociology: A Systematic Inquiry* (2010) yet again helped establish the theoretical and methodological parameters of a major area of study. A related field of study has been the design and development of government institutions, culminating in the pathbreaking *Institutions Count*, edited with Lori Smith and published in 2012.

Moving to Princeton, Alex founded the Center for Migration and Development, a unique institution focused on two closely connected areas often studied in isolation. For several decades, Alex has been one the leading experts on migration though his many publications, including studies of the economic lives, health care, and political organization of immigrant communities. In the 1980s,

he began working on the second generation of migrants and how they developed in their new societies. This produced many articles and *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (co-authored with Rubén Rumbaut and published in 2001). Alex has expanded this research from its initial site in several North American cities to now include the first major study of second-generation immigrants in Spain.

A gifted teacher, Alex has a long legacy of students at leading American institutions. At Princeton, his methods course has long been a rite of passage for incoming graduate students. He has been an outstanding departmental citizen throughout his career and served as department chair at Princeton from 2003 to 2006. Not satisfied with a purely academic life, Alex has also been a major public voice on inequality and migration, and he has played a pre-eminent role in supporting democratic politics in Cuba. He has also served on many institutional boards and disciplinary bodies.

Alex likes to emphasize that this is merely a new stage in his career. We hope that his affiliation with the department and the University will continue for years to come.

