

UNIT I

Title: Overview of ASPIRA

Course Description:

Participants will learn about ASPIRA, its mission, vision and history. They will learn about ASPIRA's goals, philosophy and the ASPIRA Process. They will examine its symbols. Participants will also learn about expectations of Aspirantes and they will participate in an Areyto Ceremony.

Goal:



Participants will develop knowledge of ASPIRA's mission, vision and history and the ASPIRA Process. Participants will also understand the importance of ASPIRA in the development of the Puerto Rican and Latino community. The overall aim is that they will use ASPIRA's principles as a guide for their future actions and development.

Resources needed:

- Sheet of paper – one for each participant
- Handouts
- Newsprint for blackboard
- Candles – one for each participant (For Activity 3)
- White carnations – one for each participant (For Activity 3)
- Cemi – (For Activity 3)
- One glass of water at main table - (For Activity 3)

Objectives:

- Participants will learn about ASPIRA's history, mission, vision, goals and philosophy.
- Participants will learn about ASPIRA's Accomplishments.
- Participants will learn about ASPIRA's symbol, the Pitirre.
- Participants will learn about Dr. Pantoja and her efforts to build ASPIRA and other institutions.

Context



When youth are involved with positive adults and youth service organizations (like ASPIRA), they are more likely to increase self-esteem, have higher career aspirations and reduce delinquency (Lawson 2002). Moreover, when youth feel positive about their history and culture, they are more likely to feel positive about their future.

Activity #1: (55 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Ask participants in a brainstorming session to share what they know about ASPIRA. Write down the responses on newsprint or blackboard. Review the list with them and check off the correct answers.
- Ask participants to form small groups and review and discuss the following handouts (Found at: <http://www.aspira.org/about.html>)
- Participants should be able to answer the following questions:
 1. *Why was ASPIRA started?*
 2. *What is the mission of ASPIRA?*
 3. *In what year was it started?*
 4. *Where was it started?*
 5. *How many offices does it have today and in what locations?*
 6. *Who was the primary founder of ASPIRA?*
- Now that participants know about ASPIRA as a National Organization ask them to conduct some research on their own local ASPIRA Office. As part of this research they should interview individuals that have been involved with ASPIRA following Handout 1.5.
- Debriefing

Handouts:

- *1.1 What is ASPIRA? ASPIRA's Mission and Goals*
- *1.2 ASPIRA's Philosophy*
- *1.3 History of ASPIRA and Its Symbol- The Pitirre*
- *1.4 A Few Facts About ASPIRA*
- *1.5 My Research on my Local ASPIRA Office*
- *1.6 ASPIRA's Symbol*

Activity #2: (55 min)

Procedure:

- In small groups, participants will review and discuss Handout 2.1 on Dr. Antonia Pantoja (found in <http://www.aspira.org/about.html>).
- Then ask participants to complete ASPIRA Trivia Form on ASPIRA and ASPIRA Crossword puzzle (Handouts 2.2A 2.2.b and 2.3A 2.2.B).
- Discuss answers with participants

Handouts:

- *2.1 Dr. Antonia Pantoja*
- *2.2 A ASPIRA Trivia Form*
- *2.2B Trivia Answer Key*
- *2.3 A ASPIRA Crossword*
- *2.2.B ASPIRA Crossword Answer Key*

Activity #3: Induction Ceremony (90 min)

Procedure:

- Facilitator will review and discuss Handout 3.1 on the Areyto induction Ceremony (Visit <http://www.aspira.org/manuals/areyto-ceremony> for more information).
- Participants will take part in an Areyto Ceremony.
- Each ASPIRA Club will present an offering in the form of music, dance, poetry, or history all relating to Puerto Rico.
- Should music be selected as an offering, it should be Bomba or Plena, historical of Puerto Rico.
- Debriefing

Handout:

3.1 The Areyto Induction Ceremony

Activity #4: Evaluation (20 min)

Students should be asked to complete the evaluation for this unit.

Handouts:

4.1 Evaluation Form-Student

4.2 Evaluation Form-Facilitator

Handout 1.1

What is ASPIRA?

The ASPIRA Association, Inc. is the only national nonprofit organization devoted to the education and leadership development of Puerto Rican and other Latino youth. ASPIRA takes its name from the Spanish verb *aspirar*, "aspire."

Since 1961 ASPIRA has pursued its mission of empowering the Latino community through the development of its youth. All of ASPIRA's goals and activities spring from one basic belief: Puerto Ricans and Latinos have the collective potential to move their community forward.

ASPIRA looks at Latino youth and sees this potential: leaders waiting to emerge. With community-based offices in large cities of six states and Puerto Rico, ASPIRA's 1,000 staff members work with over 50,000 youth and their families each year to develop that potential. These are our *Aspirantes*---those youth who will become educated, committed leaders for the community's future benefit.

Since its founding, ASPIRA has provided a quarter of a million youth with the personal resources they need to remain in school and contribute to their community. Most mainland Puerto Rican leaders today were encouraged by ASPIRA during their adolescence.

ASPIRA's Mission

The ASPIRA Association promotes the empowerment of the Puerto Rican and Latino community by developing and nurturing the leadership, intellectual and cultural potential of its youth so that they may contribute their skills and dedication to the fullest development of the Puerto Rican and Latino community everywhere. ASPIRA has defined its mission as follows:

To empower the Puerto Rican and Latino community through advocacy and the education and leadership development of its youth.

ASPIRA's Goals

To ensure the success of that mission, ASPIRA's goals focus on developing the education and leadership potential of Hispanic youth by encouraging them to be aware of the socioeconomic conditions, needs, and potential of their community; by fostering a commitment to use their skills to further the development of their community; by promoting community-based research and advocacy; and by supporting the Puerto Rican culture and preserving the native Spanish language.

Handout 1.2

ASPIRA's Philosophy

ASPIRA believes that our youth are key to the socio-economic development of the Puerto Rican community. Our primary aim is to prepare them to become future leaders by focusing on positive youth development. We call our youth Aspirantes. We work to instill in them the desire to achieve their goals, further their education, and use their skills and knowledge to make positive and lasting contributions to our community. We want our youth to return to their communities as leaders and fulfill our motto: *Once an Aspirante, always an Aspirante.*

The family and community are valued at ASPIRA. They are seen as assets and key to the development of the Puerto Rican community. Youth are encouraged to engage in their communities through civic participation. Parents and families are an integral part of ASPIRA programs.

Our youth development programs aim to provide experiential opportunities that build self-determination, build character, and instill pride in self and heritage. ASPIRA sees the preservation of the Spanish language and the Puerto Rican and Latino culture as central to the development of the community. We encourage youth to maintain their culture and native language: the building blocks of their identity. Our students and staff are trained to treat all individuals with dignity and respect.

Handout 1.3:

History of ASPIRA and Its Symbol

In 1961, [Dr. Antonia Pantoja](#) and a group of Puerto Rican educators and professionals created ASPIRA (which means “aspire” in Spanish), to address the exceedingly high dropout rate and low educational attainment of Puerto Rican youth. They were convinced that the only way to free the Puerto Rican community from poverty and to promote its full development was by focusing on the education of young people, and developing their leadership potential, self-esteem and pride in their cultural heritage. This was the best way—they believed—to ensure that youth would become not only productive members of society, but leaders in the development of their own community. ASPIRA conveyed in its name the expectation that Puerto Rican youth could succeed if they dared to aspire.

After extensive research on youth, ASPIRA founders developed a process for leadership development that remains the core of all ASPIRA activities: [The ASPIRA Process](#).

Since its formation over 47 years ago, ASPIRA has grown from a small nonprofit agency in New York City to a national association with statewide Associate organizations in Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Puerto Rico, with its National Office in Washington, D.C.

With community-based offices across the country, ASPIRA has over 1,200 staff members that work with over 50,000 youth per year. ASPIRA’s local offices also work with over 5,000 parents each year in parental engagement. Since its founding, ASPIRA has provided over half a million youth with the personal resources they need to remain in school, enter college and contribute to their community.

In the last four decades, students from diverse cultural backgrounds have been involved with ASPIRA. While still mainly a Puerto Rican organization, ASPIRA now reaches out to all youth, across cultural and ethnic groups.

ASPIRA’s Symbol

The *Pitirre* is the symbol of ASPIRA. A small tropical bird found in Puerto Rico, the *Pitirre* is known for its agility, rapid flight and its ability to outsmart, exhaust and defeat much larger birds. ASPIRA believes that the *Pitirre* is a fitting symbol for young Latinos. Aspirantes gain the confidence of the *Pitirre* by acquiring knowledge and developing their leadership skills. They can face and overcome seemingly overwhelming odds to become productive adults, returning to their communities the benefits of their skills and leadership abilities. The symbol of the *Pitirre* reinforces ASPIRA’s belief that even the smallest and seemingly powerless can take control of their lives and create change.

Handout 1.4

A FEW FACTS ABOUT ASPIRA

- ASPIRA is the largest Hispanic youth-serving organization in the country and a leader in youth leadership development.
- Since its founding, ASPIRA has positively impacted more than 750,000 youth, of which over 60% are female.
- In an era when Hispanics have a high school dropout rate of 35%, ASPIRA participants have a graduation rate of 95%.
- Approximately 84% of the graduating high school seniors that participate in ASPIRA programs go on to college.
- Approximately 90% of the students served by ASPIRA live in urban areas.
- ASPIRA was responsible for the Court decision mandating Bilingual education in the New York City Public Schools.
- In 2000 ASPIRA was rated by Money Magazine and the American Institute of Philanthropy as "One of the 10 Best Charities in the Nation," and given an A+ based upon its compliance with program standards, program spending, and Fundraising efficiency.
- The ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence (APEX) Program received national recognition for family involvement in education, including Working Mother Magazine's Golden Apple Award in 1996 and the National Latino Children's Agenda *La Promesa Award* in 2000.
- In 2001, the Hispanic Business Magazine ranked ASPIRA as the largest Hispanic nonprofit organization in the U.S.
- In 2002, Independent Sector honored ASPIRA with its *Non-Profit Leadership Award* for demonstrated, sustained leadership in investing in people.
- In 2007 & 2008, the Hispanic Business Magazine ranked ASPIRA as the third largest Hispanic nonprofit organization in the U.S.

Handout 1.5

My Research on the Local ASPIRA Office

Handout - 1.6

ASPIRA's Symbol

The *Pitirre* is the symbol of ASPIRA. A small tropical bird found in Puerto Rico, the *Pitirre* is known for its agility, rapid flight and for its ability to outsmart, exhaust and defeat much larger birds. ASPIRA believes that the *Pitirre* is a fitting symbol for young Latinos. Aspirantes gain the confidence of the *Pitirre* by acquiring knowledge and developing their leadership skills. They can face and overcome seemingly overwhelming odds to become productive adults, returning to their communities the benefits of their skills and leadership abilities. The symbol of the *Pitirre* reinforces ASPIRA's belief that even the smallest and seemingly powerless can take control of their lives and cause change.



Handout 2.1

Dr. Antonia Pantoja - ASPIRA's Leading Founder

Biography

Dr. Antonia Pantoja was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1922 and studied at the University of Puerto Rico where she obtained a Normal School Diploma in 1942. Upon graduating from the University of Puerto Rico, she worked as a schoolteacher for two years in Puerto Rico where she cultivated a profound interest in education and addressing the needs of disadvantaged children. She arrived in New York City in November 1944 where she got a job as a welder in a factory making lamps for children.

During these years which involved long hours of hard work, Dr. Pantoja was awakened to the harsh experience of racism and discrimination against Puerto Ricans and how this community lacked the knowledge and political power to overcome these and other challenges in the United States. She became an activist in the factory, providing information to other workers about their rights and how to organize a union. These were the most formative years of her life. But within a few years, the women who welded pieces of filament for submarine radios would rise to weld together a fragmented community, a community much in need of leadership and vision.



After great personal initiative that included the extensive research of academic scholarships, Dr. Pantoja received a scholarship from Hunter College, City University of New York, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1952. She went on to acquire a Master of Social Work in 1954 and was bestowed a Ph.D. from the Union Graduate School, Union on Experimenting Colleges and Universities in Yellow Springs, Ohio in 1973.

Her most profound contribution to the Puerto Rican community in the United States began in 1958 when she joined a group of young professionals in creating the Puerto Rican Forum, Inc., which paved the way for the establishment of ASPIRA in 1961. ASPIRA was Dr. Pantoja's dream, but it was not the only organization she helped build for the Puerto Rican community. In fact, as early as 1953, Dr. Pantoja—then a graduate student at Columbia University—joined a group of students and created the Hispanic Youth Adult Association, which later became the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA). In 1970 she wrote a proposal and secured funds to establish the Universidad Boricua and the Puerto Rican Research and Resource Center in Washington, DC and in 1973 became its Chancellor. For health reasons, Dr. Pantoja moved to California in 1978 to become an Associate Professor at the School of Social Work at San Diego State University. There, in collaboration with another successful educator, she founded the Graduate School for Community Development in San Diego, an institution that served communities and neighborhoods throughout the nation. She became the President of this organization, devoted to imparting people with knowledge and skills necessary for problem solving and restoring their communities. She was involved in a variety of community and professional organizations, all working toward the goal of building stronger Puerto Rican and minority communities, including the Ford Foundation, the National

Urban Coalition, the Museo del Barrio, the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education and several other groups and organizations.

Her most notable contribution—the creation of ASPIRA in 1961—was the result of considerable hard work and collaboration with educators and social work professionals who shared her concern with the high dropout rate of Puerto Rican youth in New York City during the '50s and '60s. The organization flourished into a major national organization dedicated to empowering communities and especially Puerto Rican youth to have a say in and control of their future.

Dr. Pantoja's work has not gone unnoticed. Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, Professor of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies at Brooklyn College and Co-Editor of the forthcoming *Latinas in the United States: An Historical Encyclopedia* has called her "one of the foremost figures in community activism from the 1950's to the present." In 1996, Dr. Pantoja received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor bestowed upon civilians by the United States government. She became one of only four Puerto Rican recipients of the award, which has also been presented to Governors Luis Muñoz Marín and Luis Ferré, as well as Sr. Isolina Ferré.

"One cannot live a lukewarm life," Dr. Pantoja has said. "You have to live life with passion." After nearly sixty years as an educator and activist, she continues to display that passion and vigor. In 1999, she interrupted work on her memoirs to return to New York City and lend her assistance to a new initiative. Alarmed by reports of threats to the city's bilingual education system—a system she was instrumental in initiating—she is working to raise awareness about the value of nurturing students to be proficient in multiple languages.

She appeared earlier this month as part of a panel discussion on "Latinas Making History" at a hotel in midtown Manhattan. A small woman with a powerful voice and no-nonsense attitude, she wears a poker face that breaks periodically into a beaming smile.

"I am for the fact that our children must learn English for their livelihood, and because they should know that other language of the place where they live," she explained. However, she described the "total immersion" of Spanish-speaking students in an English-only environment, as "a stupid, stupid thing,"

"If we are already bilingual," she asked, "why should our children lose their language and only speak one language, English?"

Unapologetic for her forceful opinion, she added, "Sometimes people think that you shouldn't express yourself directly and say what you're thinking, but you have to. You have to be open and direct and say what you mean. Call things by their name."

***A Well-Deserved Honor:
ASPIRA Founder Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom***

In 1997, Dr. Antonia Pantoja, founder of ASPIRA and legendary for her role in the education and leadership development of Puerto Rican Youth in the United States and Puerto Rico, she received the highest honor the nation bestows on a civilian, the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#).

Dr. Pantoja joined five other Americans of exceptional merit in receiving this award: the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, James Brady, Morris Udall, David Hamburg, and Rosa Parks. President Bill Clinton awarded the medal at a ceremony at The White House. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and other distinguished members of the Administration were in attendance. Dr. Pantoja was also given recognition from the United States Congress.



The ASPIRA Association and the Puerto Rican Presidential appointees at the White House sponsored a special reception in Dr. Pantoja's honor. Among friends and honored guests in attendance were many Aspirantes and ASPIRA National Board Members. Attendees included The Honorable Donna Shalala, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services; Nelson Diaz, General Counsel, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Antonia Novello; Josephine Nieves, National Executive

Director of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW); Suzanna Valdez from the White House; Raul Yzaguirre, President of the National Council of La Raza; and Norma Cantu, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. A video about Dr. Pantoja's life was presented as part of the celebration.

Organizations founded by Dr. Antonia Pantoja

Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA) - 1953

Social service institution that dedicated most of its resources to work with children in adoption, foster care and bilingual nursery. Also offers services for leadership development and works on women's issues.

National Puerto Rican Forum - 1958

Community development programs, including securing funds and loans to start small business in the community.

ASPIRA - 1961

Community organization devoted to the education and leadership development of youth in the city of New York.

Universidad Boricua - 1970

Bilingual University

Puerto Rican Research Center - 1970

Organization devoted to the collection of data and to create policy based on research.

Escuela Graduada para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad en San Diego, California - 1975

PRODUCIR - 1985

Community organization in Puerto Rico that helped a rural community create its own cottage industries that generated employment and other services.

Latino Educational Media Center - 2001

Dr. Antonia Pantoja, Dr. Wilhelmina Perry, and Ms. Jiménez founded the Latino Educational Media Center to create media on the diverse and rich Latino experience in the United States. The Center has embarked on an ambitious Historical Recuperation Project that focuses on the impact of Puerto Ricans on the City of New York.

Aspirante Alumni Fellowship, Inc. 2002

Promotes and enhances the work of ASPIRA by providing a means for ASPIRA Alumni (Aspirantes) to "give back" to Aspira by developing a platform from which they can network, collaborate and serve as mentors to the upcoming generation of Aspira Students

Awards and Recognitions

1980 - Hunter College Hall of Fame

1991 - John W. Gardner Leadership Award presented by Independent Sector

1991 - Recognition by the City of New York Board of Education for outstanding educational leadership

1992 - Hispanic Heritage Award - Leadership

1993 - National Mujer Award - awarded by National Hispana Leadership Institute

1996 - Julia de Burgos Award presented by La Casa Cultural, Yale's Puerto Rican community

1997 - Presidential Medal of Freedom

1997 - Doctor of Letters, Honorary Degree, University of Connecticut

1998 - University of Massachusetts, Doctor Honoris Causa,

1999 - Lenore and George W. Romney Citizen Volunteer Award presented by the Points of Light

Foundation

2000 - University of Puerto Rico, Doctor Honoris Causa

2001 - Hunter College Professional Achievement Award

Handout 2.2 A

ASPIRA TRIVIA

1. What is the symbol of ASPIRA?
2. Where was ASPIRA founded?
3. Who was the primary founder of ASPIRA?
4. In what year was ASPIRA founded?
5. What are two major things that ASPIRA promotes for youth by bringing together students, school, and community members?
6. What are the three factors of the ASPIRA Process?
7. How many ASPIRA Offices are there across the country?
8. In what city is the national office located?
9. ASPIRA was formed to help solve what high school problem?
10. Hispanic youth who have gone through the ASPIRA programs are called what?
11. Most ASPIRA programs are designed to help youth obtain what specific skill?
12. ASPIRA helps parents to get more involved in their children's _____?
13. Originally, ASPIRA was formed to help _____ youth.
14. All of the ASPIRA offices together make up a _____.
15. ASPIRA takes its name from what Spanish verb?

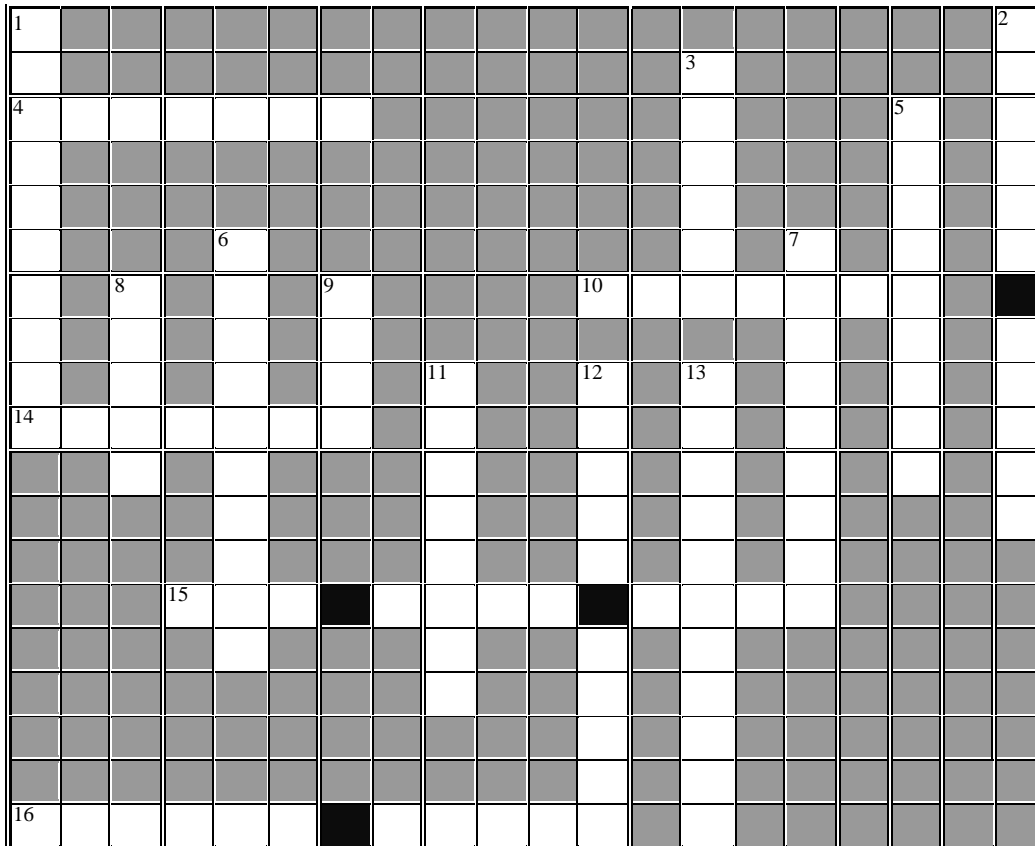
Handout 2.2B

ASPIRA Trivia Answer Key:

1. Pitirre
2. New York City
3. Dr. Antonia Pantoja
4. 1961
5. Educational Success and Community Involvement
6. Awareness, Analysis, and Action
7. 9
8. Washington, DC
9. High Drop Out Rate
10. Aspirantes
11. Leadership
12. Education
13. Puerto Rico
14. Association
15. Aspirar – to aspire

Handout –2.3 A ASPIRA Crossword

ASPIRA Crossword



ACROSS

DOWN

- 4. Origin of the organizations name ---- Spanish for “to aspire.”
- 10. Last name of the primary founder of ASPIRA.
- 14. The symbol of ASPIRA.
- 15. Location where ASPIRA began.
- 16. ASPIRA was originally created to help youth from the _____ community.

- 1. Most important skill for youth to develop.
- 2. School based _____ where students learn the ASPIRA process.
- 3. ASPIRA process of awareness, analysis, and _____.
- 5. ASPIRA helps youth gain access to better _____.
- 6. Youth who have participated in ASPIRA programs.
- 7. ASPIRA works toward helping youth get involved in the _____.
- 8. ASPIRA works toward empowering Hispanic _____.
- 9. Number of ASPIRA offices across the country
- 11. One of the reasons ASPIRA was created to stop the high school _____ rate.
- 12. Number of years that ASPIRA has existed.
- 13. All of the ASPIRA offices make up an _____.

Handout 2.3B

ASPIRA Crossword Answer Key:

Across:

4. Aspirar
10. Pantoja
14. Pitirre
15. New York City
16. Puerto Rican

Down:

1. Leadership
2. ASPIRA Clubs
3. Action
5. Education
6. Aspirantes
7. Community
8. Youth
9. Nine
11. Drop out
12. Forty Seven
13. Association

Handout 3.1

Areyto Induction Ceremony

Participants will take part in an Areyto Ceremony. Each ASPIRA Club will present an offering in the form of music, dance, poetry, history all relating to Puerto Rico. Should music be selected as an offering, it should be Bomba or Plena, historical of Puerto Rico.

Through this ceremony, the leaders of the Aspira movement take an oath of commitment to work for the achievement of Aspira's goals no matter what hard work and sacrifices it will require of them.

The idea of incorporating the Areyto ceremony is taken from the Taino Indian ceremony where the leaders sang of the great deeds of their people. The Areytos were religious ceremonies that involved the entire Taino community and neighboring communities as well. Areytos were held in the main plazas at important times. Areytos were long celebrations that included ritual feasting, singing, and dancing. At Aspira, the Areyto ceremony has been developed by each generation of Aspirante leaders into today and it is already one of our traditions.

The Aspira Clubs Federation (A.C.F.) membership committee and Aspira Board of Directors are responsible for planning and conducting it. The ideology behind the use of Taino symbols, language and rituals is to provide our youth with a sense of belonging to something ancestral, to understand our cultural and historic roots from which they will develop their own direction. These are the symbols and ideology of a brotherhood of service.

The Areyto is a private ceremony in which the leaders of the Aspira movement are initiated every year. The participants are reminded that the oath is the oath of a lifelong brotherhood. They take an oath of commitment to work for the achievement of the objectives of the movement no matter what hard work and sacrifices it will require of them. The oath is taken by candlelight or torches, with drums and maracas sounds in the background. The Oath spoken first in Spanish followed by English (in the US mainland) to give the added importance and cultural connectedness to both the oath and the culture.

This ceremony is festive, rather than solemn. A prominent political official or community leader is usually invited as a speaker challenges.

At the end of the ceremony all initiated clubs members stand and receive the acceptance from the president and are accepted into the brotherhood.

Handout 4.1: EVALUATION

Evaluation Form for Student

Indicate three new things you learned about ASPIRA.

How will you use this new knowledge in the future?

Were the handouts useful?

How could this workshop have been improved?

Handout 4.2 Evaluation Form for Facilitator

1. Did the workshops run smoothly? Why
2. What aspects of the workshops did not work? What would you change?
3. Was it easy to understand?
4. How would you make it more culturally relevant?
5. What visuals would you add?
6. How would you make it more hands-on for youth?

Bibliography

ASPIRA Association Web Page (2008) <http://www.aspira.org/about.html>)

ASPIRA of Connecticut (2008)

ASPIRA of Florida (1991) Leadership Development Curriculum

ASPIRA of Illinois (2008)

ASPIRA of New York (2008)

ASPIRA de Puerto Rico (2008) Programa de Clubes de Liderato de ASPIRA de Puerto Rico

Lawson, Reed W. (2002) Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

<http://www.schooelectionslogans.com/>