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Introduction

The Chicana/o Studies Department at California State University, Northridge was born out of struggle. This struggle sought to build an academic space in which social justice was a guiding principle, and our communities heard. This volume commemorates and reflects on that vision fifty years later, now as the largest department of Chicana/o Studies in the nation. The struggles continue, but the heart and core of our mission remain as powerful as ever.

The 1960s served as an impetus for incredible social upheaval around the world. In the U.S., the grassroots movements to demand social justice for historically subjugated peoples and causes challenged the status quo in ways that our nation had never seen before. The chief aim of many of these movements was to address the systemic racism that permeated social and political institutions around our country, including within higher education. The efforts of the Chicano/a Movement’s early founders, including many of our department’s first faculty members and contributors to this volume, helped to re-envision what academia ought to look like. Starting from scratch, our department’s founders worked tirelessly to design a curriculum that reframed academic conversations from the bottom up, paying close attention to the contributions of everyday peoples in our communities as well as the unstudied rich cultural traditions of our ancestors.

As many of our contributors note, the biggest challenge that we have faced as a department was, and continues to be, exploring uncharted territory. Being one of the first departments to address social, political, and economic inequalities meant that more struggles needed to be fought to see substantive structural change. Funding has always been a huge concern, especially when building a department from the ground, and obtaining the necessary resources to create and promote critical
scholarship remains a central mission of our faculty and department as a whole. Our department’s relationship with the administration has been tenuous, but what matters most is our unified understanding that fighting for social justice must involve solidarity. The transformations that we have seen take place out of these day-to-day struggles have impacted the lives of thousands upon thousands of students, many of whom have used the knowledge gained from our department to directly impact change within and outside their communities.

The most rewarding result of these historic struggles has been the ability to witness the birth of something incredibly unique—an interdisciplinary space where faculty and students can explore their passions and be empowered by the spaces that our classrooms provide. Our department is home to scholars from a range of traditional disciplines—history, sociology, political science, literature, just to name a few—yet our department nurtures us to devote our energies into causes that challenge the systemic issues that those disciplines often ignore or endorse. This has resulted in one of the nation’s most comprehensive Chicana/o Studies curricula, one which gives equal importance to Indigenous peoples as well as acknowledging our own relations with and within these communities. As our contributors look back to what we have accomplished as a department over the last fifty years, the impact of our willingness to embrace interdisciplinary inquiry has been one of the most remarkable legacies of the early struggles. This mission remains a strong focus of our department into the present and it is further reinforced through the establishment of the Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Américas (CESPA) in 1998.

The Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Américas (CESPA) serves as a space for the production and exchange of knowledges by and of peoples descendent of Latin American communities, whether of Indigenous origins, African, Latino/a, Asian, or European within the U.S. and south of the U.S./Mexican border through service learning and student and faculty research. CESPA also promotes faculty and public intellectual workshops, symposia, conferences, and lectures as a way of fostering interdisciplinary and hemispheric dialogues. As a result, CESPA has invited a number of distinguished scholars, community activists, political representatives, writers and artists over the years, including Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, U.S. Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva, Justice Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, Relatives of the 43 Ayotzinapa forcefully disappeared Ayotzinapa students, Susan
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Additionally, CESPA is committed to a deeper understanding of the creation of and movements across borders, and the development of border cultures, identities, and economies. For this reason, several student-centered events and artistic exhibits have taken place in recent years. These events and exhibits centered on displaying our students' art and writings to underscore the ways in which creative productions highlight our community’s lived experiences. These works have been displayed in the hallways of the CSUN building home to the Chicana/o Studies department and its offices (Jerome Richfield). Empowered by their accomplishments, students often bring parents, grandparents, and other relatives to view their work on display. Considering that the California State University system has one of the largest concentrations of students of Mexican and Central American descent of any four-year university system in the country, CESPA aims to create a space of belonging for our students, their families, and communities. CESPA has also produced other works of critical scholarship, including another anthology that engages with hemispheric dialogues about Latinidad.

As noted, student input and activism have been central since the foundation of the department and in the work that CESPA promotes. El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (MEChA) was formed after the adoption of “El Plan de Santa Barbara” in 1969, which urged for the unification of Mexican-American and Chicana student organizations. The creation of MEChA served to unify student voices
and political power to collectively struggle and achieve significant
to collectively struggle and achieve significant
tochanges for students of color across the nation in various university
campuses and high schools. As noted on the CSUN Department of
Chicana/o Studies’ website, the existence of the department as well
as its continued expansion and contributions has been a result of
the combined efforts of students and faculty since the 1960s. This is
why for the Chicana/o Studies Department, student organizations, and
in particular MEChA, have always shared an important working
and collaborative relationship. Today, MEChA continues to serve
as an umbrella organization for various groups, subcommittees, and a
number of special ad-hoc committees. The work of these students has
been fundamental in the recruitment, retention, and success of many
generations of Chicanx and Latinx students at CSUN. To date, MEChA
continues to serve as an advisory organization to the department given
that student input and advocacy are central components to the planning
and implementation of a wide range of departmental activities.

Our department’s foundation in community empowerment through
critical education grounds our pedagogy. As the various contributions
in this collection demonstrate, since our origins, Chicana/o Studies
at CSUN has engaged in what are now recognized by mainstream
educators to be high-impact pedagogical practices. Our students are
encouraged to identify as producers of knowledge and become agents
of social change. Some of the pedagogical strategies we have employed
since early on have been community-based learning, centering applica-
tible knowledges that students use to address diverse problems and
situations at the personal, professional, and community levels, valuing
experiential knowledge, collaboration outside of the classroom,
and providing research opportunities. In our classrooms we teach our
students to critically understand systems of power, including racism,
classism, and heteropatriarchy, and encourage them to join efforts to
positively impact their communities. While the value of these peda-
gogical practices gained recognition in higher education not that long
ago, our department has always understood their worth.

Her collection provides a reflection of the work that has been
carried out for over five decades, assess our current state, and
engage in the imaginative labor necessary to determine our roles
and obligations to create a better world. “Part 1. Reflections on the
Founding of the Department” provides insiders’ perspectives of
the early making of the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN. Rudy
Acuña’s piece serves as a reflection on the early history of its founding. His contribution shares some of the strategies used by early leaders, as well as the collective work done by students and faculty to build welcoming and activist spaces on campus. Mary Pardo’s contribution provides an important history of the varied ways in which Chicanas were active participants in the Chicana/o movement during the 1960s and 70s, including in our department. In particular, the piece discusses the multifaceted ways in which Chicana students at CSUN have continued to address gender inequality both on and off campus. It concludes by recognizing the important place that solidarity continues to have within the department and the field of Chicana/o Studies.

“Part 2: Faculty Perspectives” consists of three individual interviews with faculty. The interviews with Everto “Veto” Ruiz and Yreina D. Cervántez provide a rich history of the significant contributions that the arts have made in the department since its foundation. For Ruiz, a San Fernando Valley native, the Chicana/o movement inspired him to want to study music, but resources were scarce. Ruiz emphasizes that it was the support of the newly formed Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN that gave him the space and encouragement to study Mexican regional styles of music, and later pay this knowledge forward by teaching music courses in our department for decades. Cervántez, an acclaimed community muralist, was also significantly impacted by the Chicana/o movement, and her interview speaks about her important work both inside and outside the department. The interview also highlights the ways that Cervántez’s artistic productions recognize the central role that women and immigrants have played in the empowerment of our communities.

The interview with Christina Ayala-Alcantar, Graduate Program Coordinator since 2017, emphasizes several core aspects of our graduate program’s mission, as well as some of its challenges and strengths. She provides examples of recent memorable thesis projects, including works that have focused on biracial identity, fat studies, feminist interventions, immigration (DREAMers, mixed-status families) and the textual analysis of Chicanx narratives. Importantly, Ayala-Alcantar concludes by noting that the MA program provides “graduate students an opportunity to grow individually and intellectually” as well as “create a strong foundation for their careers and work in the community.”

As noted, Chicana/o Studies is interdisciplinary and places value in myriad forms of knowledge production. Through a compilation of
photographs taken over the years, “Part 3: Snapshots of Community Engagement” provides a visual opportunity to engage various moments of our department’s efforts. The photographs document protests and demonstrations against racism and other forms of injustice, visual and performance arts by faculty, students and community members, scholarly presentations, and community-building events. This visual representation embodies what our department has been over the past fifty years, as well as our efforts to continue building a more just world.

Finally, “Part 4: The Importance of Critical Pedagogy and Curriculum” is composed of pieces by current faculty that reflect on how the department’s interdisciplinary mission in social justice informs their pedagogy. David Rodríguez’s contribution reflects on his role in pushing the department’s curriculum to address issues of political economy. The piece sheds light on the ways in which our department has and continues to fight against capitalist hegemonies vis-à-vis critical thinking, scholarship, and activism. CESPA Advisory Board member (2017-) Melisa Galván’s contribution expands the boundaries of our department and the field. The piece argues that Chicana/o Studies courses should expose students to the histories of our communities on both sides of the border. By infusing more Mexican perspectives, a much more cooperative and shared history is revealed to students with little to no knowledge of these connections. Both Rodríguez and Galván’s pieces underscore the ways in which our department’s curriculum serves as a means to adapt to the needs of our communities.

Similarly, Ana Sánchez-Muñoz’s contribution provides potential new directions for our department as she explores the impact that teaching heritage language within our department has on our students. It further reflects on future directions to build an even greater heritage language program in our department, and the ways in which this can impact identity development and language equality in educational institutions. Related to the significance of language for our department, Fermín Herrera’s contribution discusses his efforts to learn and teach Náhuatl, one of over sixty-three Indigenous languages spoken in Mexico. The piece also explores his experience teaching traditional Mexican music. The pedagogical incorporation of Indigenous languages and music signals to students and the larger community that there is inherent worth in Mexican culture, something which has been historically devalued by mainstream society.
The central role that learning and teaching Indigenous knowledges and worldviews holds in the department is documented by Alicia Ivonne Estrada, current CESPA director (2016-). Her contribution considers the various ways in which the department has actively sustained hemispheric dialogues with Indigenous scholars, artists, writers, activists, and community members. Her piece specifically notes the role that CESPA has played in facilitating these varied engagements with Indigenous communities, the impact they have had for students at the university, and the challenges that arise under a neo-liberal university model.

CESPA Advisory Board member (2016-) Martha D. Escobar’s contribution unpacks the ways in which the university serves as a site of contestation. Her piece discusses how Chicana/o Studies enables engagement in abolitionist pedagogy, which maintains that the U.S. is founded in anti-Black racism and that slavery did not end but was embedded into our contemporary criminal legal system. Escobar’s contribution highlights some of the solidarity work that has been carried out, especially in relation to the death of Black CSU students Quinten Thomas and David Josiah Lawson, and marks this work as part of an abolitionist pedagogy driven by a sense of urgency given our communities’ life conditions and opportunities.

Stevie Ruiz and Long Bui’s contribution provides a broad contextualization of the struggles of Chicana/o Studies and Ethnic Studies as fields within academia. The piece emphasizes that resistance derives from the fact that the purpose of Ethnic Studies is to create knowledge that brings about justice for vulnerable communities. The fields are inherently defiant of structures of power that create precarity for some and increase life opportunities for others. Using CSUN’s recent struggles with the implementation of oppressive system-wide Executive Orders, Ruiz and Bui examine some of the battles against institutional racism that Chicana/o Studies has historically engaged in as they underscore the significance of student voices and actions to these efforts.

Turning the critical lens back onto the department, Omar González’s contribution sheds light on an important gap within our department’s curriculum and argues for an urgent need to address LGBTQ voices. Through poignant ethnographic case studies, González’s piece exemplifies the ways in which our discipline must open itself to queer experiences, and his work demonstrates the constant self-reflection
necessary in work grounded in social justice. The constant necessity to shift is also noted in Peter J. García’s contribution as he reflects on his role as academic faculty advisor for Mexican folk and Latina/o music ensembles and student clubs at CSUN. His work examines the groups’ shifting identities, especially in relation to race and gender, and some of the challenges they have faced. The piece emphasizes that these shifts have meant continual learning and adaptation over time. His work speaks to the ways in which the personal and collective transformations of our department represent struggles and political activism of Latina/o/x communities to resist marginalization.

The collection concludes with María Elena Fernández’s piece, which also engages a discussion of personal and collective transformation. Her contribution provides a recount of Fernández’s personal transition and empowerment through the teaching of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN. The piece highlights that while Fernández expected teaching in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN to be her “day job” as she dedicated her life to creative pursuits, the classroom empowered, invigorated, and transformed her. Her piece serves as a wonderful example of the ways in which our work within the classroom is revolutionary not just for the students we are privileged to teach, but also the faculty who are given the opportunity to learn from them.

As the diversity of perspectives and contributions demonstrate, Chicana/o Studies was established on an ethos of social justice. This necessitated an interdisciplinary approach that places value on various forms of knowledge, centers on the experiences of marginalized communities, understands the ways in which our pedagogy can be used as a tool for community empowerment, and engages in constant self-reflection and transformation. With this anthology, contributors consider the origins of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN, our current state, and provide glimpses of where we hope to go as a department, field, and community. As co-editors we hope that this anthology serves as an important space for reflection, dialogue and historical memory as our struggles and resistance continue.

*Martha D. Escobar, Alicia Ivonne Estrada and Melisa C. Galván*
PART 1

REFLECTIONS ON THE FOUNDING
OF THE DEPARTMENT
History is never the product of a single event, and certainly change is no different. The establishment of the San Fernando Valley Chicana/o Studies department was a product of the social movements of the 1960s, especially the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Witnessing the struggles of students around the world served as a turning point to further mobilize students in the greater Los Angeles area. Students of color at San Fernando Valley State College (SFVSC) were quick to take up this call. SFVSC was unique because unlike many colleges, it possessed the ability to offer a strong connection to the communities that surrounded it, although this did not always include students of color. The “Valley,” as many still call it, was unique in its demographics. Estimates suggest that by “1950, Anglos accounted for at least ninety percent of the total population” (Kotkin and Ozuna 8), and racism was rampant in the communities that SFVSC served.

Yet, by the 1960s the Valley was undergoing dramatic demographic change. While historically Valley Mexican communities functioned as small “donut” communities throughout the area (San Fernando, Pacoima, Van Nuys, and Canoga Park), people of color were no longer relegated to the fringes of larger boroughs. Stark changes have occurred over the years, and in 2012, the so-called non-Hispanic whites comprised 41.0%, Latinos 41.8%, African Americans 4.6% and Asians 12.7% of these regions.  

1 Dr. Ernesto Galarza called these areas “donut” communities because they were the hole in the middle surrounded by the dough (money).
Born in Boyle Heights and raised in the Los Angeles Basin, I moved to the Valley in 1955 and began teaching at SFVSC two years later. As a young veteran with little financial means, the area attracted me since houses were more affordable. My early teaching experiences and community involvement in the Latin American Civic Association (LACA), the Mexican Political Association and also teaching at San Fernando Junior High formed my academic identity. Given my work in the area, I made the conscious decision to choose the San Fernando Valley as my new primary community. Concurrently, LACA was attempting to force reforms at SFVSC in the mid-1960s, and as a result, the campus was in turmoil.

Despite the student demographic inequalities, campus enrollment figures remained strong (12,690 students in 1965). Although primarily white, progressive groups on campus protested the Vietnam War Movement, culminating in the occupation of campus by police and the detention of students for handing out “unauthorized” antiwar fliers. Of the 15,600 enrolled students in 1967, only 23 identified as Black and 11 Latina/o. Noting these stark contrasts, the school decided to find ways to boost minority enrollment. 3

As minority enrollment began to increase, so too did student activism on campus. In fact, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) considered SFVSC one of the most radical campuses in the United States. One such example is when, on November 4, 1968, Black Student Union members held 34 staff and administrators hostage in the Administration Building. The student demands centered around increased minority enrollment and more minority staff. Further, they demanded that SFVSC investigate complaints of racism on campus. Twenty-four students were charged with conspiracy, assault, burglary, kidnapping and false imprisonment. In November 1969, 19 were convicted and sentenced to terms of one-to-25 years. This was just one of many assaults on students of color on the SFVSC campus.

Looking back, Chicana/o Studies at SFVSC was an outgrowth of the educational reform movement that wanted to stem the horrendous dropout rate among Mexican American and Black children in primary schools. Activists pushed for a culturally relevant course of study that gave value to student’s ethnic backgrounds. As this message spread

into our communities, so too did grassroots activism. Famously, in March of 1968, students from East Los Angeles high schools walked out of classes. This action set the stage for the further actions at SFVSC because a small number of Mexican Americans had been admitted under the Education Opportunities Program (EOP). The walkouts forced university and college administrators to consider the “forgotten” Mexican Americans as a legitimate group worthy of concern. Even more important, it brought together a core of Mexican American students who were politically conscious.

Although Chicana/o student numbers were still small, alliances with other student groups led to a much larger base on campus. The vanguard of the Chicana/o Students was the organization United Mexican American Students (UMAS)\(^4\) founded in 1968 under the leadership of Mike Verdugo and Hank López.\(^5\) SFVSC Biology professor Warren Furu-moto served as the first UMAS faculty adviser. Under UMAS, students set up experimental college studies classes and had speakers such as myself give lectures. This culminated in the storm that brought about the formation of both the Afro-American Studies and Chicana/o Studies departments in January 1969. Students marched on the Administration Building demanding to meet with President Delmar Oviatt, where they were met by the LAPD Riot Squad. Fighting erupted, students were injured, and many arrested. Recognizing the need for permanent curricular and structural changes, students and community members organized a committee that would later hire me to establish the first Department of Chicana/o Studies at SFVSC.

Other than addressing the widespread racism on campus, there were two other pressing problems. The first was establishing a radical new curriculum and the second was hiring faculty who could teach these new (but vital) courses. I vividly recall that as founder of the program, the administration only requested that I submit twelve new classes. Instead, I drew up forty-five course proposals within two weeks of

\(^4\) UMAS later changed its name to the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlán* (MEChA) in 1969 in response to the Plan de Santa Barbara and several Chicana/o student conferences elsewhere.

\(^5\) Also prominent in UMAS were Dian Borrego, Raúl Aragón, Evertto Ruiz, Evie Alarcón, who later became regional head of the Communist Party (USA), Becky Villegas, Frank Del Olmo, Frank Lechuga, José Luis Vargas, Peter Barbosa, and Ismael Campuzano, who upon graduation enlisted in the Sandinista Army in Nicaragua.
their initial request. The administration noticeably did not help in this effort, allocating me only one work study student to help compile all the necessary bureaucratic paperwork. In the end, it was no small feat that I was able to get everything through the various bureaucratic channels within two weeks, after which it was approved by the president in April 1969 and later approved by the Chancellor in June of that same year.

The hiring of new faculty presented more complex problems. While I advertised the positions nationally, I simply could not attract applicants. I will never forget that one professor told me that he had not attended twenty years of higher education to work the hours of a high school teacher (I required that all faculty teach five classes and be available in their offices five days a week for office hours). Simply put, it was hard to attract and retain faculty.

We were pressed for time and students were mobilized so we decided to build the department like a baseball farm team. We would initially hire high school teachers with bachelor’s degrees, under the condition that within three years they were expected to earn their Master of Arts. They would then advance to assistant professor and would be on the tenure track, although it was always believed that they would ultimately get their doctorates. The only exception was music and art teachers where performance was accepted in lieu of the terminal degree.

Initially we were allocated six positions. Three of the six faculty had terminal doctoral degrees. Our first cohort of faculty included José Hernandez (who held an M.A. in Political Science and later went on to earn his Ph.D.), Rafael Pérez Sandoval (Ph.D. in Mexican Literature and Spanish), Joe De Anda (Ph.D. in Spanish Literature), Carlos Arce (M.A. candidate in Anthropology), Alicia Sandoval (History teacher at Roosevelt High School in East Los Angeles), Gerald Resendez (M.A. in Spanish Literature), and myself (with a Ph.D. in History). Due to strong fall enrollments, we were granted an extra position. All the faculty we hired were seasoned teachers. While many white professors ridiculed our lack of Ph.D.’s, we knew that to have legitimacy we had to develop an area of study that could impact academia.

The survival of our department would not have been possible without alliances made with other progressive white faculty on campus. They

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6 The following year we were fortunate to attract Jorge García (Ph.D. in Political Science). He had a strong interest in studying structural inequalities, and he was committed to studying the rules that governed the university.
often cleared the path for us. Committees ran the university; decisions such as promotions, tenure, and sabbaticals all required support across campus. I had a meeting with some of the MEChA leadership and explained the situation. It was our “ahora o nunca (now or never)” moment. MEChA had to be a vanguard organization and for the next ten years it was at the forefront of every demonstration on campus. I explained that we had to be willing to go to the edge of the cliff and over it if necessary. I stressed that it was not good enough to be a small department without power. With the decision to make MEChA the vanguard organization we gave students an increased voice in the governance of our department. They had veto power and participated in personnel and curricular decisions. The progressive movement on our campus survived because of the presence of MEChA.

By the end of our first year as a department, we had successfully retained the core of the students that the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) recruited and counseled. Chicana/o Studies would not have survived without the support of EOP.

Although our department has never been free of attack from within the university administration, a catalyzing event that brought us all together was the anonymous burning of the Chicano House on May 5, 1970. Students felt under siege and almost all of them supported demonstrations where we voluntarily shut down the department and the university. Two Chicanas were arrested for their activism, and I will never forget that as the house was burning Yvonne Aguirre and Monica Medina tried to enter to see if there was anyone in there sleeping. In fighting back, we all felt as one. This cowardly act of injustice solidified the students even further.

As I reflect on the history of our department at the celebration of its 50th year, I cannot help but be proud of all the work that has been done to get us here. This is and has always been a collective effort. As we move forward, now as the largest department of Chicana/o Studies in the nation, our battles are no less challenging. The historic demographic shifts of SFVSC are something that the nation has much to learn from as they are now reflective of American society at large. It should come as no surprise then that our curriculum and activism resonate with the students that we serve more than ever.
Work Cited

The Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN’s 50th anniversary provides an opportune moment to reflect on where we have been and how far we have come. We remain committed to reimagining a just society and creating curriculum that recognizes the intersectional power relations of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identity. The original Chicana/o Studies curriculum that established Chicano Studies as a department did not include courses on Chicanas or address gender inequality. The omission reflected the shortcomings of the political thought and scholarship at that historical moment (Acuña 2011). Although women were active participants in the Chicana/o movement during the 1960s and 70s, the meaning, origins, consequences, and solutions to gender inequality were contested issues. Some thought it was a peripheral issue; many spoke out against it.

At CSUN in the 1970s, Chicanas shared ways to navigate the university while balancing independence and family commitments. For example, in the 1970s, a Chicana collective set up an autonomous “Third World Child Care Co-op” in the Chicano House to provide free child care on campus (Acuña 153). A decade later, in 1980, when I began teaching in the Chicana/o Studies Department, several women faculty had been hired and courses focused on women had been integrated into the curriculum, largely resulting from a process of dialogue and negotiation between students and faculty. No doubt, in 1975, when Chicana students attended the first World Conference on Women, sponsored by the United Nations in Mexico City, they gained invaluable insights regarding international links with other women of color.¹

¹ World Conference on Women, 1975 was held between 19 June and 2 July 1975 in Mexico City, Mexico. It was the first international conference held by the United Nations to focus solely on women’s issues and marked a turning point in policy...
For Chicana students, gender inequality has always meant more than a topic of scholarly inquiry distanced from everyday life. Chicana students recognized the tremendous journey they had embarked on as they moved from working class, ethnic racial communities to what were at that time the largely middle-class, white suburban communities surrounding CSUN. University counseling services were limited in scope and ill prepared to serve Chicana students, as they still are today. Chicana students and faculty formed ways to create a “safe space” in an often-hostile university environment as well as to share intimacies about family trauma and challenge sexism in their personal relationships on campus and in their homes. Oppression based on gender was no longer understood or accepted as a peripheral concern.

Shortly after I began teaching in 1980, EOP Advisor Avie Guerra, students, and Chicana faculty, created an informal social network to focus on Chicana concerns. On a regular basis we organized conferences and forums on “La Mujer,” that addressed Chicanas and labor organizing, reproductive rights, community-based resources for poor women, self-defense workshops, violence against women, and at one, a keynote lecture on the role of women in the Mexican Revolution of 1910.² Chicana students established a support group that they named the Chicana Information Center (CIC) and I served as the Faculty Advisor. Chicana students volunteered their time to provide peer support and create referrals for counseling regarding family and personal relationships, birth control information, and domestic violence. They also provided peer support. Most were undergraduates and a few were graduate students completing a degree in Marriage and Family Counseling. The CIC served students for a few years.

Our student population grew to include a significant number of students who had fled the U.S.-backed military dictatorships and brutal civil wars occurring in Central America. We hosted speakers and forums and faculty and students joined mass demonstrations and campus teach-ins calling for anti-intervention in Central America.³ By the late 1980s,

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² Dr. Shirlene Soto, one of the first Chicanas to earn a PhD in History, gave the keynote speech; she later joined our faculty.

³ In 1986, I joined a Chicana/o delegation to Nicaragua to learn about the Sandinista government and the literacy campaign; Dr. David Rodriguez joined a delegation to observe politics in El Salvador in 1986 as did Dr. Rudy Acuña in 1991.
students created another woman centered group, *Mujeres de Aztlán*. The name change was strategically selected to respect the increasing number of Central American women students who did not identify as “Chicana.” Again, the intent was to provide a peer support group, raise consciousness about women’s issues, and challenge sexism. At times, provocative statements spurred heated debates among students and between faculty and students.\(^4\)

Our curriculum reflected the growing attention to the significance of gender. Few university courses outside of Chicana/o Studies included curriculum that critically addressed ethnicity and race and gender and few faculty of color with a history of discrimination in the U.S. were hired outside of our department. Chicana students commented that the Chicana/o Studies Department allowed them a place to “define themselves within Chicanismo,” that is, to challenge traditional norms without abandoning their families or condemning Mexican culture. Theories guide policies that may help or hurt our communities and the university curriculum plays a central role in either confirming or challenging harmful theories.

Chicana/o Studies emerged in opposition to Eurocentric perspectives and dominant power relations. Well into the 1980s, sociological studies perceived Latinas/os in the U.S. as a social problem: studies typically concluded that high fertility rates, pathologically rigid gender roles characterized by abusive male dominance, and adolescent gang affiliation characterized Mexican families. The assumption was that cultural assimilation would solve social problems. The prevalent “ethnic succession model” assumed each wave of immigrants to the U.S. would move up the socio-economic ladder as they worked diligently and became “Americanized” and forsake “backward” cultural traditions; however, a racial logic was embedded in the image of the ideal citizen. The racial logic also had gender and sexual dimensions of what is acceptable. The logic of “modernity” embedded in the cultural deficiency model equated assimilation with progress and gender relations signified an ethnic group’s achievement of modernity. If Latina/os are not advancing as the “ethnic succession” model predicts, it is attributed to inferior cultural traditions from their country of origin and

\(^4\) Sexist images and language were used on a flyer for a Latino Graduation Committee fundraiser generating angry confrontations and memos for dissolution of the group.
their failure to assimilate.\(^5\) From my standpoint, Chicanas were not passive and pathetic as depicted in the scholarly literature. Sociological studies on Chicana/os in the U.S. were demoralizing, dehumanizing, an offensive affront to the complexity of the Chicana/o experience.

Since I began teaching “Contemporary Issues of the Chicana” and “Third World Women and the Chicana,” I have used an intersectional analysis and searched for women of color narratives that challenge cultural deficiency perspectives and provide insights about systemic oppression and women’s resistance to inequality. The readings have, of course, changed over time. I have used testimonies of Latin American women to explore the underlying themes of oppression and resistance. Students have found the personal narratives compelling. At other times, I have organized the course readings around issues, including international labor migration, family, sexuality, body politics, and political activism. Themes of oppression and women’s resistance have also guided my research on Mexican origin women’s grassroots activism.

For example, I documented the activism of *Mothers of East Los Angeles* (MELA), a women’s group whose activism helped to defeat several environmentally dangerous projects, including an above-ground oil pipeline and the first in a proposed series of thirty-four toxic waste incinerators planned for California. In Los Angeles, Latinos and Latinas and African Americans bear the highest burden of estimated cancer and other health risks associated with ambient air toxin exposure while they are in school (Pardo 1998). Environmentalism, initially perceived as the protection of flora and fauna, was initiated by White middle-class activists. The way people thought about environmentalism ignored the relationship between environmental problems and poor people in the inner cities. By the 1980s, people of color fused environmentalism and civil rights, transforming the concept of environmentalism into “environmental justice.” Communities of color broadened the understanding of environmental justice beyond flora and fauna to include poor people.

The successful organizing efforts of MELA gained national as well as international attention. It also provided implications about who creates knowledge. Women are often the caretakers, in the family and in the

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\(^5\) In social science accounts, Mexican origin as well as other Latino families have been depicted as culturally deficient and particularly “traditional” and marked by pathologically rigid gender roles compared to “Anglo” families. Women were described as “fatalistic but cheerful victims of their own backward traditional culture” (Achor 1978: 159-86).
community, and the first to note, analyze, and arrive at conclusions about unhealthy or unsafe conditions. Those who hold official positions of power dismiss women’s claims as “unscientific” conclusions. Only after protracted political protests have scientists revisited their conclusions and capitulated. The political conflicts have illustrated that knowledge about the environment is produced not only by scientists but also by laywomen and laymen. Government protection agencies privilege the knowledge that scientists produce, but Latina activists at the grassroots have successfully challenged that privilege. The case of MELA dramatically contests images of the “pathologically backward” Mexican family and exemplifies the themes central to the courses that I teach.

Conclusion

Continuity and change marks our last 50 years. Critical Chicana feminist scholarship has inspired new ways of thinking—Anzaldúa’s borderlands metaphor generates critical scholarship across the disciplines. Environmental justice curriculum has been developed as an area of emphasis in our major. Gender is no longer considered a peripheral concern although integrating it into our teaching and addressing the gender inequality our students face is an ongoing process as faculty review and update curriculum. Today, most of our faculty are women and in 1994, the department was renamed from Chicano Studies to Chicana/o Studies, affirming the presence of women.

Students and faculty continue to dialogue about gender-based oppression and widen the discourse to include sexuality. Students broke the silence about sexuality in the early 1990s when a queer Chicano was elected Chair of the Chicana/o Student Group, MEChA; through critical dialogue and humor, several self-identified gay Mechistas challenged homophobia and the absence of its analysis in our curriculum. In 2019, student activists started a call for the inclusion of queer studies and the elimination of binary gender designations. They argue that the

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6 Dr. Rosa RiVera Furumoto and Dr. Stevie Ruiz have worked diligently on developing pioneering new curriculum addressing environmental justice.
7 Dr. Juana Mora, the first woman Chair of Chicana/o Studies initiated the name change in 1994.
8 According to Mechista Soñía Lopez, Queer Latinos Unidos held a “kiss in” for men.
Chicana/o Studies Department replace the a/o with “x,” using Chicanx and Latinx. Again, language reflects as well as shapes critical thought about gender and sexuality and power relations in the academy. Deaf students have also called for an understanding of “audism,” and how to better address their circumstances. At CSUN, faculty and student dialogue about the curriculum compels constant assessment, reflection, and negotiation within the context of limited institutional support. In 2017, the California State University’s Chancellor, Timothy White, issued a mandatory order purporting to further equitable opportunity for students to succeed, but in effect decimating funding and curriculum crucial for the academic success of first-generation college students. Chicana/o studies faculty formed a coalition with other faculty and students who continue to oppose the Chancellor’s mandates.

Today, as well as fifty years ago, international liberation struggles provide inspiration for us and for our scholarship. I vividly recall the Cuban classic film “Lucía” as an important resource for teaching that stimulated our thinking about the “woman question” within the context of liberation movements. The film dramatically illustrates what it meant to be a “woman” living under different material and ideological circumstances during tumultuous political change in Cuban history from colonialism to socialism. In the final scene of “Lucía,” a young girl gazes at a couple, a man and a woman, quarreling on the beach—the young girl’s eyes seem to hold hope for the future as her face breaks into laughter, she turns away, and then walks off into the horizon. So it goes with confronting inequality in our communities and integrating gender into our teaching and research in Chicana/o Studies—we continue to struggle against inequality along class, citizenship status, ethnicity/race, and gender and sexuality as well as hold hope for a “decolonial imaginary.”

Works Cited


9 White, Timothy E. “Executive Order 1110” California State University System, Memo to CSU Presidents.

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PART 2
FACULTY PERSPECTIVES
An Interview with **Evertto “Veto” Ruiz**

*Veto Ruiz started at California State University, Northridge as a student and joined the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department in 1970 as an instructor. He was one of the students involved in demanding the creation of what became the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the Chicana/o Studies Department. For approximately 50 years Veto has taught courses in music and greatly contributed to the distinction of the department as a leader in championing Mexican and Latina/o music.*

**Question.** *When did your interest in music begin?*

**Answer.** As a child, music was very much present in my life. At home, my parents had a deep appreciation for music in general. My parents were born in Mexico and particularly preferred Mexican music. I was born and raised in the San Fernando Valley. I grew up in the Mexican barrio of the city of San Fernando. It was there that I often heard various types of Mexican music. In elementary school, I played the violin for two years, but left it behind once I was on my way to San Fernando Jr. High School. At the age of 14, I began to sing in the choir at El Mesias United Methodist Church, a Spanish-speaking congregation, and thus began my exposure to four-part singing. I received my first guitar as a gift from my parents when I was 16 years old. My intention then was to begin on acoustic guitar and eventually acquire an electric guitar so I could join a local rock ‘n roll band. For the most part, my initial learning was without a teacher. I learned some basic chords and began to accompany my mother’s singing of Mexican songs. She had grown up with her father, Ramón Lizarraga, who was a musician on various Spanish-speaking radio stations including KFOX during the 1930’s and 40’s in Los Angeles. Eventually I began to sing with my younger sister for family gatherings, church, and friends. While I initially performed in English and Spanish, my focus began to narrow on the performance of Mexican music. My developing interest in Mexican music traditions was very much influenced by the Chicana/o Movement, which encouraged many Chicana/o youth to have a greater appreciation of Mexican culture.
Q. What are some of the musical styles you play and teach?

A. I play various types of Mexican regional music, but my concentration in the last forty years has been on mariachi music. Within the varied music of the mariachi, I play and sing Mexican rancheras, corridos, boleros, huapangos, sones and other song forms traditionally found within the repertoire of the mariachi. At CSUN I have primarily taught basic skills and fundamentals for the beginning guitar student. Some students have continued to study with me and I have introduced them to other string instruments used in the performance of Mexican music. Some of these instruments include the guitarrón, vihuela, violin and requinto.

Q. What have been some of the challenges you have faced as a Chicano musician?

A. One of my earliest challenges was learning how to play guitar without the help of a teacher. While I was fortunate to have some formal music instruction in public school, particularly learning to play the violin, I did not pursue further study or private instruction as a teenager. At that time my interest in music was not that serious and my family had limited economic resources. As I remember, the social and political atmosphere of the late fifties and early sixties did little to give Chicano youth an appreciation for Mexican music. The rise of the Chicana/o Movement began to change this situation. Increasingly, the Movement encouraged and motivated me to study Mexican regional styles of music. While I pursued the study of Mexican music, I received significant support from our newly-formed Chicana/o Studies Department on our campus. During our department’s early stages, it was rather difficult to find publications that provided information about Mexican music. It was difficult to find written music, which I needed for the courses I taught. There was also a challenge in locating the particular instruments and written arrangements that were necessary for the performance of mariachi music. In the early years of developing a student mariachi ensemble, I spent much time and effort transcribing musical arrangements from recordings to use with my students.

Q. When did you start working in CHS at CSUN?

A. I began to teach in our department in the fall of 1970. Prior to taking a position in our department as an instructor, I worked for three semesters
in the CSUN University Counseling Center, and as an undergraduate student I worked in the university cafeteria.

Q. Tell us a little bit about what it has been like working in this department.

A. Working in the Department of Chicana/o Studies has been the most stimulating and rewarding experience for me. I began working in the department when this field of study was in its infancy. The birth of our department was a result of struggle and turmoil; however, we were fortunate to have the leadership and direction of Dr. Rudy Acuña. I cannot stress enough the importance of his vision and guidance in the development of the department. Since our beginnings I have witnessed the growth of a dedicated faculty and the consistent presence of strong student support and participation. Another strength of our particular department that has significantly contributed to its growth and my own personal development has been the presence of fellow professors who are talented artists in their own right. Their skills and talents in the fields of music, drama, dance, graphic and visual arts certainly led to the development of an atmosphere of creativity and performance. The growth of this department included making adjustments and improvements over time to further develop the relatively new academic field of Chicana/o Studies.

Q. How do you see the role of music in higher education?

A. Music is an important aspect of our cultural life experience, not only in our immediate community, but also in our country and the wider world. As such, the study of musical traditions of various ethnic groups that make up American society is essential for the development of cultural understanding and leads to an appreciation of the creative capacity of various groups. In the late 1960’s, the Music Department as well as many of the other departments on this campus, gave little attention to the study of the Chicana/o experience.

Our department began to provide the opportunity to study and perform musical forms found in the Chicana/o community with limited resources and space. This study took place in formal courses as well as in informal performance groups that developed around different regional styles. By the early 1970’s, there were faculty-student groups that focused on the study of jarocho, mariachi and South American-Andean music. These groups performed in our classes as well as in
classes of other CSUN departments, and in various events on our campus. Off campus, these music and drama (Teatro Aztlán) groups made numerous presentations all over Southern California, including in universities, public schools, correctional institutions, and community-organized festivals. During the mid-1970’s we had three music groups: Los Sencillos, Conjunto Hueyapan, and Los Huicholos. These groups were invited to perform at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. These opportunities gave our students from various majors a wealth of knowledge and experience that would benefit them in any number of professional careers they pursued.

Q. What are some of the challenges of teaching music at CSUN?

A. In addition to some of the challenges I mentioned before, there has been the challenge of teaching an instrumental class in some of our assigned classrooms. Spaces for the storage of instruments and practice rooms for students were very limited and at times non-existent. Another challenge was that some of our students came from families and schools with limited socio-economic resources and had little or no experience in the study of music. However, their enthusiasm and positive attitude encouraged our department to seek out resources that would help us make instruments available to them. In spite of these challenges we saw some of our students go on to make significant contributions in their professional careers. An example of this would be Rudy Vásquez. As a Chicana/o Studies and Music major, he became an active participant in our department’s Mariachi Workshop. In the early 90’s, as a new San Fernando Middle School music teacher, and with the support of our department, he started the first public school mariachi class in the San Fernando Valley. This resulted in the development of many mariachi youth groups in the San Fernando Valley. Eventually, the city of San Fernando, under the direction of Virginia Diediker (also a CSUN graduate with a Chicana/o Studies Major) created the Mariachi Master Apprentice Program (MMAP). On November 19, 2012, this pioneering instructional program received national recognition and an award from First Lady Michelle Obama in a ceremony that included a performance in the East Room of the White House.

Q. As the department celebrates its 50th anniversary, can you share with us what you see is the role of music for CHS and the department?
A. The study and practice of music in this department has historically enriched our curriculum. The long history of creativity in our community continues to be revealed in various courses offered in our department. It would be my hope that this department continues to support courses, faculty, and students that keep our music traditions alive. This is especially important at a time when the arts too often do not receive needed support at all levels of education.
An Interview with Yreina D. Cervántez

Yreina D. Cervántez is a Chicana visual artist who is known for her multimedia painting, murals, and printmaking. She is considered a leader in the Chicana muralist movement. She has exhibited nationally and internationally and her work is housed in collections at the Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, The Mexican Museum, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Cervántez joined the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge in the fall of 1999 and retired at the end of fall 2019.

QUESTION. When did your interest in art begin?

ANSWER. I have been drawing since I was a child, I always had a love of color. My mother used to embroider, and one of my first memories as a baby was seeing the embroidery threads she used and being very attracted to the brilliant colors. My mother was very creative and also loved to draw. When she was young, she wanted to attend art school but unfortunately, she was not encouraged by her family. They did not see it as a viable way to make a living, especially for a young woman during her time (1930’s-40’s). Instead, my mom went to cosmetology school. When I was little, I was very curious and always looking through my mother’s photo album, admiring the drawings she had made that were kept there. I would look at these drawings often, they were special to me and definitely made an impression.

Art was/is my sanctuary. Like most children I wanted to find something that I could be good at, and art making came more naturally to me than most things. In elementary school and all throughout my education I made sure to take art classes. Because of the overt institutional racism in school when I was growing up in Kansas, and then later in California, education was always a conflicting experience for me, as it was for my parents’ generation. Even so, my parents valued education and supported me. My opportunity to study art in the university came to me through my awareness and involvement in the Chicana/o movement.
Q. What are some of the themes at the center of your work?

A. I have been creating art most of my life. Much of the artwork I have produced in my adult life has been motivated by the events of my own lived experience and the desire from an early age to address issues of social justice. You could say that I was born into the circumstances that would create an awareness and resistance to discrimination and racism. My parents also instilled in me a deep sense of fairness, as they had lived through very harsh times and racial prejudice. I was born in Kansas in 1952, two years later Brown vs. the Board of Education, a case started in Kansas, was taken to the Supreme Court, setting in motion the desegregation of schools across the United States. As it turned out, years later I would attend my last years of high school in Westminster, California, where the 1947 case Mendez vs. Westminster had desegregated schools in Orange County, California. In the 1960’s my family moved from Kansas and we lived in a very rural and isolated area in the mountains of Southern California, on a turkey ranch where my father worked. At that time television became a window to the world in terms of watching the tumultuous events that were taking place in the U.S. and globally. Many of my Chicana/o artist peers and I came of age in the 60’s and 70’s during the eras of the African American Civil Rights Movement, the Farmworkers’ Movement, the Chicana/o Movement, the Women’s Movement, the massive protests against the Vietnam War, and the wars being waged throughout Latin América. These historical events impacted us profoundly - and we were inspired to become cultural workers/activists, or as known today, “Artivists.”

My body of work reflects over forty years of exploration. Through my art, teaching and community activism, I have contributed to the discourse of an ever-evolving Chicana/o aesthetic. My work relates to themes of Sacred Space, specifically in regard to Xicana/Latina agency and the decolonized feminine body as a contested space and site of transformation. Autobiographical elements, and personal/collective memory and history or “auto-história” (as defined by writer Gloria Anzaldúa), are integrated in my imagery to communicate a contemporary Xicana feminist thought and perspective.

A complex layering of symbolism and text from many sources characterize the compositions in my artwork; inscribed testimonies imbued with spiritual and political meanings. I am inspired by Mesoamerican/Indigenous religion, mythology and cosmology, past and present, and
the Pre-Colonial pictorial manuscripts/codices or amoxtli of the Aztec, Mixtec and Maya. I combine ancient concepts and metaphors with current issues and reality, creating a hybrid language of contemporary glyphs in a rich visual narrative. Through my artwork, I attempt to reconcile two vastly different worldviews, applying ancient concepts and metaphors to present day reality and issues of social justice.

Q. What have been the challenges you have faced as a Chicana artist?

A. I have experienced (especially in my early career), the economic challenges faced by most artists in this country. This society does not value art, and therefore does not provide the adequate and equitable funding for artists, arts programs and the arts in general. In comparison to other interests or budget items, very little money is allocated for the arts on a national or local level. Communities of color are especially impacted by the lack of resources available for the arts.

One of the greatest personal challenges was my graduate school experience. After many years of working in the community, I applied to graduate school in my early thirties. I was excited when I was accepted, and enthusiastic to work and learn from my professors. As a Chicana artist in pursuit of an education/degree in art, one of the most difficult challenges was confronting the racist and narrow definitions of aesthetics and categories of so called “high art,” and the dismissive attitudes/labels of “Ethnic art” within the mainstream arts institutions and academia. It was especially disappointing in graduate school at UCLA. I had to constantly and consistently correct racist and misguided assumptions about myself and my artwork. These assumptions were made by many of my predominately white male instructors (some of whom were my age). This was also frustrating given that I was more experienced than the younger graduate students, having already worked at many community arts organizations and exhibited my artwork. Though some of my professors had international reputations as artists, they unfortunately still did not have the humility to admit that they were either not interested, prepared or informed enough to intelligently address or have meaningful discourse on the content/symbolism in my work.

I believe that it is important to seek allies and learn as much as you can in any given situation. Graduate school proved to be an education on many different levels. Complicating the situation was the lack of
faculty of color in my art department. Ultimately, I was able to find some willing professors to work with and form a committee. I had proposed doing a mural for my art project/thesis, but still needed to convince my art professors/committee members on the relevance of creating a mural and painting it in my community of Echo Park. My third committee member was a Chicana from the UCLA theater department. Her presence and participation on my committee made all the difference, as she understood the importance and history of muralism in the Chicana/o community as an act of self-determination, raised pertinent questions, and acknowledged the significance of this particular mural I was painting. She affirmed the work in a way that positively shifted the energy and attitude of my committee members and their interest towards my mural/thesis. Thank you, Professor Edit Villareal!

My mural/thesis project, La Ofrenda was painted in 1989. This mural is meant as an offering to the community and its people, and is dedicated to immigrants and to mujeres, depicting the powerful role that women play in creating positive transformation. It is also an homage to co-founder, and former vice-president of the UFW, Dolores Huerta. La Ofrenda has lasted for thirty years and remains a site of memory in a community presently undergoing extreme gentrification.

Lastly, support systems are crucial for the success of any artist and to successfully overcome the many challenges/obstacles. I have been fortunate to have family, friends, colleagues and others that believed in me and my vision as an artist. I am especially grateful to the artists, particularly women artists who have been willing to exchange resources, information and their expertise, which has been invaluable to me. Among my peers I have found inspiration, solidarity, and a strong sense of community with other Chicana/Latina artists, a sense of community that extends over many generations and diverse cultures as well.

Q. When did you start working at CHS at CSUN and what were some of the challenges?

A. I began working in the Chicana/o Studies department at CSUN in the fall of 1999.

Early on one of the challenges of teaching art practice in particular in the Chicana/o Studies department was the need for a studio space/classroom, and an adequate gallery space to exhibit student artwork. Our gallery space is modest, and over several years we have made improvements in the Chicana/o House to create a space to teach the art
The Chicana/o House is an important location and cultural space on the CSUN campus for our students: a comfortable and welcoming space within an academic environment.

My hope (dream) for the future would be to see more space expanded at or around the Chicana/o House to accommodate not only art studio/gallery space, but functioning studio spaces for music and dance, all the arts that are offered in our department, even an amphitheater for performance/theatre, etc.

Q. What has it been like working in this department?

A. It is very important to teach art courses in our department, as art and art making provide another way of knowing for our students, offering unique pathways of thought, communication, and as a valuable aspect of their education: experiencing art as a full expression of the human being. I consider my experience as a professor teaching art in our department to have been a privilege. This has been a rare opportunity to develop curriculum in art practice and lecture courses on Chicana/o art, to create opportunities for graduate students to develop creative projects with their thesis in Chicana/o Studies, and to collaborate with my esteemed and learned colleagues that have been an inspiration to me. This work was accomplished with the support of my department chairs and colleagues. The Chicana/o Studies department at CSUN is one of the only Chicana/o Studies departments anywhere to actually create a full time tenured position in the visual arts.

Chicana/o art reflects many forms of activism. Chicana/o artists respond to and address the issues of social justice in our community in various ways, through working with community, providing workshops and providing awareness and relevant art education. The concerns of our people are also reflected in the artwork, communicated in various forms, styles and media. I consider Chicana/o artists’ act of creating art as a form of activism. In most struggles for liberation the role of the artist/art is crucial and at the forefront of creating profound changes. In these instances, the artist is also a visionary. The reclamation of culture, memory, language, valuable traditions, and reconnecting to one’s “roots” are also necessary elements in the processes of de-colonization and the forging of self-determination.

One of my earliest examples in regards to art activism and cultural resistance: “National Liberation and Culture,” (1970) Amilcar Cabral, leader of the liberation movement in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde,
described the role of Indigenous culture in national liberation movements: “The study of the history of national liberation struggles show that generally these struggles are preceded by an increase in expressions of culture, consolidated progressively into a successful attempt to affirm the cultural personality of the dominated people, as a means of negating the oppressor culture. Whatever may be the conditions of a people’s subjection to foreign domination, and whatever may be the influence of economic, political and social factors in practicing this domination, it is generally within the culture that we find the seed of opposition, which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement.”

Q. As the department celebrates its 50th anniversary, can you share with us what you see is the role of art for CHS and the department.

A. As stated previously, the Chicana/o Studies department at CSUN is one of the only Chicana/o Studies departments anywhere to actually create a full time tenured positon in the visual arts. We must continue to maintain a tenured position(s) for the arts within our department and support our Chicana/o artists/arts professionals. The fact remains that all of the arts have made a formidable contribution to our community and to Chicana/o Studies, yet regrettably in most college and university Chicana/o Studies departments, the positions for artists teaching Chicana/o art and art practice are still adjunct or temporary part-time, in contrast to other areas of study that are tenured positions.

This is problematic for obvious reasons, but especially because Chicana/o Latina/o artists are not being hired in traditional art departments. Thirty years after I graduated with an MFA, the presence of artists/professors of color still remains notoriously low in university art departments. This is also true at CSUN. We need positions for Chicana/o, Latina/o artists in both Chicana/o Studies and the art departments. These spaces/positions in Chicana/o Studies are crucial. If the art departments are not accountable, where else than Chicana/o Studies are our students going to have the opportunity to learn about community-based art from a Chicana/o perspective, and especially from the position of artivism?
The Chicana/o Studies Master’s Program: An Interview with Christina Ayala-Alcantar

Christina Ayala-Alcantar has been the Graduate Program Coordinator for the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at California State University, Northridge from 2017-Present (Fall 2021). She obtained her doctoral degree in Psychology in 1998 from Michigan State University. Her areas of scholarly interest include Latinas and education, K-12 teacher preparation, teacher educators, critical pedagogy, and Latina sexuality.

**Question.** What is the mission of the MA program?

**Answer.** The Master’s of Arts in Chicana/o Studies is designed to develop advanced studies in the Social Sciences, the Arts, Education, Community Studies, the Humanities, and other areas related to the Chicana/o experience in the United States. Thus, students who graduate from the MA program are qualified to work in their communities in an array of jobs such as teaching, non-profit administration, local government, and college outreach.

**Q. Can you describe some of the strengths of the program?**

A. One of the strengths of the MA program is the array of options students have to complete the culminating experience. They can write a traditional thesis, a creative project, or take the comprehensive exams. Given the array of skill sets and strengths students bring to the program, these options provide them an opportunity to choose a culminating experience that best suits them.

Another strength is the opportunity for graduate students to work with a diverse group of faculty. Faculty have their doctorates in a range of disciplines and research areas.

Finally, while not all graduate students are interested in pursuing a Ph.D., those that graduate from our program leave with academic skills that transfer well to a Ph.D. program, including critical thinking and research skills.
Q. What are some of the current challenges that the CHS MA program faces at CSUN?

A. A challenge that the program currently faces is the large number of retirements that are occurring in our department. Several key faculty members that teach in the MA program such as Yreina Cervántez, Mary Pardo, and Marta López Garza will no longer be available; thus, limiting the number of faculty available to teach and chair theses and creative projects. In addition, we currently struggle graduating students in a timely manner. An array of factors contributes to this issue such as student’s full-time employment, writing skills, personal life circumstances, and finances to name a few.

Q. What are some of the challenges that our graduate students typically confront?

A. There is an assortment of challenges faced by our graduate students. The primary challenge is that many of our students work full time, which can limit the number of courses they take per semester, and it influences the time and energy they have to complete their culminating project. In addition, some students do not have a strong skill set in writing and critical thinking. Students come from an array of educational contexts which influence this set of skills such as relatively recent immigration and attendance at poor performing schools (K-12), to name a few. This affects their work on the culminating experience. Lastly, some students struggle financially and emotionally. In the last five years, the department has noticed that students are struggling with having monies for housing and food. Some are also experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Q. Can you share some examples of some of the most memorable thesis projects?

A. We have a collection of theses and creative projects that are memorable. These works are found electronically through the CSUN library. A few that come to mind are the works of Jessica Arana (Biracial identity), Monica Hernandez (Fat Studies), Raymond Hernandez (DREAMers), and Raul Melgoza (Textual analysis of Cherrie Moraga’s work). These culminating projects are memorable because they each address a unique topic and expand the subject matter of the discipline of Chicana/o Studies. For example, Monica Hernandez explored the marginalization of Chicanas within our own communities and homes due to fatness.
Q. As the department celebrates its 50th anniversary, can you share with us what you see is the role of the MA in CHS and the department.

A. The MA plays a critical role in providing graduate students an opportunity to grow individually and intellectually as a Chicana/o. This helps create a strong foundation for their careers and work in the community. The MA also serves as a stepping stone for students interested in pursuing a Ph.D. and other fields such as Education and Gender & Women’s Studies.
PART 3
SNAPSHOTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Student protests after the burning of the Chicano House on the SFVSC campus, May 6, 1970. Photo courtesy of Ismael Campuzano

Veto Ruiz, Richard Vaca, and Margaret Garcia, Grape Strike Picket Line at Safeway Supermarket, 1970. Photo courtesy of Veto Ruiz
Professors Fermín Herrera, Tony Ortiz, and Rafael Pérez-Sándoval circa 1972. Photo courtesy of Rudy Acuña

Teatro Aztlán, Directed by Veto Ruiz, 1972. Photo courtesy of Veto Ruiz
Abel Pacheco, José Luis Vargas, Cruz Leija, Veto Ruiz, Tony Leija, Conjunto Aztlán, 1973. Photo courtesy of Veto Ruiz

Solo musical performance at the Chicana/o House by Professor David Rodríguez that was dedicated to the Sandinista Revolution, 1979. Photo courtesy of David Rodríguez
Fermín Herrera (far left) with jarocho master musicians Rafael Rosas, Lino Chávez, Mario Barradas in the Chicana/o Studies Resource Center in 1979. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera

Chicana/o Studies Guitar Class, circa 1980s. Photo courtesy of Veto Ruiz
Conjunto Hueyapan participating in the Tournament of Roses Parade, 1980. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera

Fermín Herrera rehearsing with Los Lobos, 1987. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera
CSUN Faculty Member Fermín Herrera as guest harpist on the set of the movie "La Bamba" with Los Lobos, 1987. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera

Mariachi Aztlán, San Fernando Valley Hall, CSUN campus, 1988. Photo Courtesy of Veto Ruiz
La Ofrenda Mural (1989), by CSUN Faculty Member Yreina D. Cervántez. Sponsored by SPARC - Neighborhood Pride Program and the LA Cultural Affairs Department and located under the bridge on Toluca and Second Street in Echo Park, Downtown Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of Yreina D. Cervántez

Big Baby Balam (c. 1991/2017) by CSUN Faculty Member Yreina D. Cervántez. Photo courtesy of Yreina D. Cervántez
Symphony Orchestra Conjunto Hueyapan performing José Pablo Moncayo's symphony, "Huapango," (Conductor: Maestro Fernando Lozano, Founder and Musical Director of the Mexico City Philharmonic), 1994. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera

Nepantla Triptych: Nepantla/Mi Nepantla/Beyond Nepantla, by CSUN Faculty Member Yreina D. Cervántez, 1995-96. Photo courtesy of Yreina D. Cervántez
People demonstrating against racism during the 35th anniversary of the Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium. August 1995. Photo courtesy of Jesus Flores

Students marching in August 1995 during the 35th anniversary of the Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium. Photo courtesy of Jesus Flores
People marching and carrying United Farm Worker flags in August 1995 during the 35th anniversary of the Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium. Photo courtesy of Jesus Flores

People speaking at a demonstration at CSUN on November 8, 1995 in support of affirmative action. Photo courtesy of Jesus Flores
Students and faculty at CSUN demonstrating on November 8, 1995 against attacks on affirmative action. Photo courtesy of Jesus Flores

Mujer de Mucha Enagua, Pa’ Ti Xicana, by CSUN Faculty Member Yreina D. Cervántez, 1999. Photo courtesy of Yreina D. Cervántez
Conjunto Hueyapan performing at an event for Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Rigoberta Menchú, 2000. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera

Heart of the Mountain/Canto Ocelotl, by Yreina D. Cervántez, 2005. Photo courtesy of Yreina D. Cervántez
B’itzma: Sobrevivencia Maya Rock Music Event at CSUN, 2006. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
Do You Know Where ITZ’ At? (Searching For My Mojo), by CSUN Faculty Member Yreina D. Cervántez, 2014. Photo courtesy of Yreina D. Cervántez

CSUN Trip to Casa de las Américas. (From left) Dr. Francisco Tamayo, Ana Niria Albo, Dr. José Prado, Dr. Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Dr. Martha Escobar, Jaime Gómez Triana, and Dr. Gabriel Gutiérrez, July 2014”
Benefit Concert Poster for the 45th Anniversary of the CSUN Chicana/o Studies Department, October 25, 2014. Photo courtesy of Fermín Herrera
Event Flyer for Ayotzinapa Families, March 19, 2015. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar
Ayotzinapa Families Event, March 19, 2015. Photo courtesy of Manuel Felipe Pérez

Event Flyer for CUBA Roundtable Discussion, October 14, 2015. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
Event Flyer for Mario Carranza’s Visit to CSUN, November 17, 2015. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada

Mario Carranza Exhibit, November 17, 2015. Photo courtesy of Manuel Felipe Pérez
The Center for the Study of Peoples in the Americas (CESPA)

Presents

Our América:
A Collection of Photo Essays by Chicana/o Studies Students on Migration and Community Formation in Los Angeles

On Tuesday, November 17th Mario Carranza will speak to the CSUN community about his experiences as a Guatemalan living in pre- and post-revolution Cuba. Following Tuesday’s event, on Wednesday, November 18th, several students in Chicana/o Studies courses and student organizations will present to Mr. Carranza photo essays on their communities and migration histories to Los Angeles. This form of collaboration will help create productive dialogues and exchanges between and within diverse communities in Southern California and Cuba.

Wednesday, November 18, 2015
12:30-1:45PM
Sequoia Hall 104

Sponsored by: CESPA, Chicana/o Studies Department, History Department, College of Humanities Programming Fund, Department of Communications and Social Justice GE Path.

Painting by CSUN student Omar Cruz, titled *Entra por un Oído y Sale por el Otro*. It was part of an art exhibit installed at CSUN in April 2016 to memorialize the 43 forcefully disappeared students from the rural teachers school in Ayotzinapa in the Mexican state of Guerrero. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar.
On September 26, 2014, three students and three bystanders were killed by police and 43 student teachers were disappeared in the city of Iguala, Guerrero. Parents of the disappeared and some of the student teachers are engaging in a second caravan across the U.S. to create awareness about the current situation and put additional pressure to locate the disappeared. During the event the speakers will provide an update on the situation in Ayotzinapa and continuing struggles.

Thursday, April 21, 2016
Reception and Art Exhibit
CSUN Gallery 2-3:30
Caravan Lecture
Noski Auditorium 4:6:30

The event is presented by the Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Americas and cosponsored by the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department, Civil Disobedience & Social Change, the College of Humanities, the Dream Project, the CE Social Justice Path, and the History Department.

Event flyer for Ayotzinapa 43 Caravan Lecture, April 21, 2016. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar

Speaker and Scholar Activist Oriel María Sui (center) with Chicana/o Studies faculty. From left to right, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Gabriel Gutiérrez, Rudy Acuña, Oriel María Sui, Elías Serna, Melisa Galván, and Denise Sandoval, April 27, 2016. Photo courtesy of Melisa Galván.
Event Flyer for Ayotzinapa: Struggle for Justice, October 13, 2016. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar

Event Flyer for Borrando La Frontera, October 26, 2016. Photo courtesy of Melisa Galván
Event Flyer for Caravan Against Repression in Mexico, November 15, 2016. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar.
Event Flyer for MemoryArte: Visual Art on Guatemala and the Peace Accords, Exhibit from November 30, 2016. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
Painting by Cache for MemoryArte Exhibit, 2016. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
Ana Niria Albo’s Visit and Lecture at CSUN, March 7, 2017. From left to right, Francisco N. Tamayo, Martha D. Escobar, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Ana Niria Albo, Gabriel Gutiérrez, Jorge García. Photo courtesy of Manuel Felipe Pérez

CSUN students demonstrating against Executive Orders 1100R and 1110 on October 25, 2017. Photo courtesy of Kelly Fong
As part of their demonstrations against Executive Orders 1100R and 1110, CSUN students gathered and waived Indigenous flags as a sign of resistance to white supremacy, October 25, 2017. Photo courtesy of Kelly Fong.

Hundreds of CSUN students engaged in a weeklong demonstration against Executive Orders 1100R and 1110, which, among other things, would have eliminated CSUN’s Section F, a cross-cultural studies requirement, October 25, 2017. Photo courtesy of Kelly Fong.
Maya hip hop artist Tzutu Baktun Kan Speaking to the CSUN Community, February 2, 2018. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada

Casa de la Américas’ Jaime Gómez Triana’s Visit and Lecture to the CSUN community, April 15, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manuel Felipe Pérez
Casa de las Américas’ Jaime Gómez Triana Visit to CSUN, April 15, 2018. Photo courtesy of Manuel Felipe Pérez

Event Featuring Mexican Student Activists Recounting the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City, April 23, 2018. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
CSUN staff, faculty, students, and community organizers demonstrating at Los Angeles County Jail against CSUN student Quinten Thomas’ death, June 9, 2018. Photo courtesy of Saharra White

Memorial assembled by members of CSUN’s MEChA in front of the campus library to commemorate the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa’s rural teachers’ college, September 26, 2018. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar
Students demonstrations at CSUN against EO 1100R, September 27, 2018. Photo courtesy of Clem Lai

Event flyer for Remembering Quinten and Resisting Violence, November 5, 2018. Photo courtesy of Martha D. Escobar
Event Photo from Rigoberto Quemé Chay’s (Maya-K’iche’) talk at CSUN, March 25, 2019 at CSUN. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada

Event Photo from Maya-K’iche’ Poet Manuel Tzoc Bucup’s talk at CSUN, April 17, 2019. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
Human Rights Attorney Héctor Reyes Chiquín Lecturing on the Historical Maya Genocide Trial in Guatemala, September 4, 2019. Photo courtesy of Alicia Ivonne Estrada
PART 4
THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM
The Chicana/o Studies Department at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is the largest Chicana/o Studies department in the United States. Established in 1969, the department continues to grow, develop, and evolve into a dynamic educational entity. CSUN Chicana/o Studies stands out as a department committed to the needs of the Chicana/o community, students, and progressive change in society. Over the years, political and economic challenges have confronted the department, students, and the community. In this piece, I will address the challenges raised by political economy and its significance to Chicana/o Studies at CSUN.

The department emerged during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s when social, political, and cultural movements in the United States protested and demonstrated against war, racism, sexism, homophobia, class exploitation, environmental degradation, and many other issues. During this period, a Chicana/o movement demanded equality, justice, transformation, and reflected various perspectives such as nationalism, feminism, Marxism, and Third World politics. Chicana/o movement leaders, organizations, and activists struggled for socio-political and economic change, but differences related to ideology, leadership, organizations, and the impact of agent provocateurs presented challenges. CSUN Chicana/o Studies persevered while other departments were greatly impacted and some eventually faded. Part of this department’s success is the centering of critical thinking and the need for societal change.

However, political economy was underdeveloped in CSUN Chicana/o Studies, as well as in the general discipline of Chicana/o Studies. Political economy offers significant insights into the dynamics of capitalism, its effects on the U.S. and Chicana/o community,
and a pathway towards transformation. I was a student activist and member of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) in the early 1970s at CSUN and I majored in political science and minored in Chicana/o Studies. I graduated and obtained my doctoral degree in political science and returned to CSUN as a professor and later served as chair of the department. Teaching presented the opportunity to incorporate political economy with a critical Marxian perspective into my politics and theory courses.

Since I started teaching at CSUN Chicana/o Studies in 1978, I found that students had little understanding of political economy and often lacked a critical perspective of capitalism and its impact on the Chicana/o community. In general, students were familiar with problems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and environmental injustice. But capitalism is a complex and challenging system where profit, plunder, and exploitation are fundamental, and a small portion of the population dominates the means of production. Capitalism evolved from Western Europe and spread throughout the rest of the world by conquest, colonization, and accumulation of great wealth, and Chicanas//os were part of this process.

Generally, political economy combines political science with economics and studies the interrelationships between them. The term came from the Greek words polis (city-state) and oikonomos (one who manages a household). Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx were major contributors to the development of political economy in Western Europe during the 1700s and 1800s. Smith viewed the political economy as free market capitalism, whereas Ricardo incorporated labor theory value to political economy, and Marx countered with anti-capitalist views that included areas such as labor exploitation, surplus value, class struggle, and revolutionary transformation.

Marx’s insights provided a critical context for understanding government and the role economics plays in the decision-making process. This is significant in the Chicana/o community, since we are products of sixteenth century Spanish and nineteenth century Anglo conquest and colonization. Unfortunately, the separation of political economy into political science and economics became the norm in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This led to a categorization and oversimplification of the political and economic process, which obscured Marx’s radical view of political economy and the critical role of capitalism in politics and government. However, some contemporary studies that I
have used in my Chicana/o politics and theory courses challenge this problem.

For example, in his work “The Age of Monopoly-Finance Capital,” John Bellamy Foster argues that capitalism has developed from industrial monopolization to financial monopolization. Bellamy Foster points out that since the 1970s, large financial-monopoly corporations with greater control and influence over government and society dominate the capitalist economy. But when economic growth declines it results in stagnation that weakens the economy and paradoxically enhances the pockets of financial capitalists through increases in finance (Bellamy Foster). According to Bellamy Foster, the U.S. as well as the world economy experienced a slowdown from 1970-2010 not only in the “rate of growth” but in the decline of “real hourly wages,” “non-residential investment,” and “wage and salary disbursements.” The “housing bubble of 2002,” the “household debt bubble of 2006,” and the 2007 recession were significant examples of financial crisis and instability in this new development of capitalism (Bellamy Foster 2019).

However, Bellamy Foster argues in “The New Imperialism of Globalized Monopoly-Finance Capital: An Introduction” that monopoly-finance capitalism has imperialist consequences. Bellamy Foster believes “what is widely referred to as neoliberal globalization in the twenty-first century is in fact a historical product of the shift to global monopoly-finance capital or what Samir Amin calls the imperialism of ‘generalized-monopoly capitalism’” (1). Contemporary imperialism is “taking on a new, more developed phase related to the globalization of production and finance” (1). It is occurring in the context of a “New Thirty Years’ War” by the U.S. government for strategic control (especially oil) of the Middle East (15) as well as problems with China, Russia, Chile, Cuba, and Venezuela (19). All this demonstrates “the potentially deadliest phase of imperialism,” which would be a “full-scale nuclear war” (19).

Richard Wolff offers another significant analysis of capitalism in his book Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism. Wolff argues that capitalists not only make profits and distribute surplus for their own needs, but capitalist economies have changed over time into what he characterizes as “private capitalism” and “state capitalism” (80). Wolff explains that in private capitalism “employers are private citizens who hold no position within the state apparatus and operate with relatively minimal interventions by the state” (80) such as in the U. S. and other
advance capitalist nations. Whereas in state capitalism, Wolff points out that “employers are state officials who have replaced the former private capitalists” such as in the new Soviet Union (81-82) and China (83-84). Since the 2007 capitalist crisis, “demands for a transition to a more regulated private capitalism and also for a transition to state capitalism” have occurred (83). However, Wolff posits “workers’ self-directed enterprises” as a cure for capitalist exploitation of workers and a pathway to a truly democratic socialistic system. This is very significant because workers can take control of the production process and allocate products based on the needs of the community and not on profit. In the Chicana/o community, most students come from blue-collar working families where many have a great sense of familism and community.

What are some of the effects of these changes in capitalism on the Chicana/o community? In “The Great Recession and Its Impact on the Chicana/o Community,” I argue that the 2007 recession was the “worst economic crisis in the United States since the Great Depression” (253). The recession significantly impacted “income, wealth, poverty, employment, immigrants, workers, and stress” in the Chicana/o community (253). Median wealth fell by 66%; nearly 33% had zero or negative net worth; median levels of debt rose to 42%; median level of home equity declined by half; homeownership rates declined from 51% to 47%, and mortgage rates were higher than conventional mortgages (259-260). Other issues arose such as immigrants sent fewer remittances to their country of origin, poverty increased, especially among children, unemployment rates increased, and stress affected health, financial security, retirement, sleep, food, medications, utilities, and caring for family and relatives (260-262). I concluded:

Our political economy is unable to make any progress in improving economic conditions and circumstances in the United States… The Great Recession and its aftermath of continued economic crisis on a local and global level, necessitate a fundamental reexamination of capitalism and its ability to meet the needs of the majority population… A resurgence of contemporary socialist thinking and alternative egalitarian solutions to our capitalist system is manifesting hope for a better future (262).
Another aspect of capitalism’s impact on the Chicana/o community is wages and stagnation. Drew Desilver recently pointed out that although “U.S. unemployment is as low as it’s been in nearly two decades” and “private-sector employers have been adding jobs for 101 straight months,” wage growth has lagged (1). He notes, “today’s real average wage (after accounting for inflation) has about the same purchasing power it did 40 years ago” (1). In addition, what little wage gains that have occurred have gone largely to the highest earners (1). Chicana/o workers are low wage earners and continue to make significantly less than white workers. This in turn impacts Chicana/o student higher education opportunities.

A study by Mora and Davila found that in 2017, Latino men made 14.9% less in hourly wages than white men (2) and Latina women made 33.1% less than white men (3). When examining Latina/o immigrants, the “wage gaps between second-generation [Latina/o] immigrants …and second-generation white immigrants… do not reveal a significant narrowing of the wage gap between the second and third generation or beyond” (3). Sarah A. Donovan and David H. Bradley buttress this in their Congressional Research Service study of real wages between 1979 to 2017, where they note that wage growth was much higher for white men and women and lower for Latino men, while gender “gaps expanded between the median wages for [Latina] workers over the same period.”

A January 2019 report by the United States Department of Labor Statistics on fourth quarter 2018 median weekly earnings found that the median weekly earnings of Latinas/os working at full-time jobs was $684 and were lower than those of Whites and Asians whose earnings were $931 and $1,095 respectively (1). In regard to gender, the median earnings for Latino men were $736, or 71.9% of the median for White men (1). But the difference was less for Latina women whose earnings were $610, or 74.8% of those for White women (1). The study reflects continued wage inequality trends in the Chicana/o community and the U.S. political economy’s inability to remedy the problem. Exacerbating this problem is inflation and the inability for wage increases to offset it (e.g. prices rose 2.9% from July 2017 to July 2018, but the average hourly pay increased 2.7%).

All the above studies point to problems of capitalism, its negative economic impact on the Chicana/o community, and the need for
political-economic change. Our students carry this burden into our classrooms and will continue after they graduate. Our community is under siege by global capitalism and imperialism. Indeed, the “local is global” and the “global is local.” CSUN Chicana/o Studies opened the doors to political economy and critical thinking of capitalism. The department contributes to the fight against capitalism through critical thinking, scholarship, and activism. Capitalism has evolved in a complex manner, but again the capitalist class represents only a small percentage of the population over the vast majority of the population. The struggle for liberation is difficult, but to not struggle is unconscionable!

Works Cited


Teaching Chicana/o History from Both Sides of the Border

Melisa C. Galván

An enduring subject of media attention worldwide, the U.S.-Mexico border holds a remarkable ability to both divide and unite. Originally established to demarcate national boundaries, its meanings and uses have evolved over time (St. John; Truett and Young; Adelman and Aron; Jackson; Weber; Usner; Hämäläinen and Truett). The border has long been used as a capitalist political tool by U.S. politicians, but as is well established within the literature, people, goods, and ideas will never be easily constrained by it. In turn, a full understanding of the history of the United States or Mexico is difficult to achieve without a deeper examination of the politics of how the border came into existence in the first place. The effects of these policies resonate with our communities today.

But the impacts of the border go even further. It has in a very real sense impacted the ways that entire fields of study are organized and taught. The scholarly discipline of History, for example, has evolved along imagined boundaries, by geography, by national divisions, or by time period, so historians specialize in Latin American history, US history, and so on. This makes for manageable scopes of study for students but raises other challenges as it limits one’s ability to draw worldwide connections across time and space. It also leaves out of the conversation regions that have had numerous changes in national affiliations, as these regions become relegated to the “borderlands” of historical focus. As a result, scholars of American history interested in topics that transcend the two sides of the U.S.-Mexico border – such as Chicana/o history – are steered towards a focus on just the U.S. side of the border.

One must question this inherent bias. Pedagogically, it may make sense for historians to focus on the geographic area that their subjects
inhabit, which for Chicana/o Studies often happens to lie within communities that inhabit the boundaries of the modern-day United States. What this paradigm fails to recognize is that this approach assumes that immigrants abandon their connections to other nations once they arrive here or that their children who are born in the United States do so as well. However, families and communities do not necessarily forget their origins—transnational connections endure—if even only through oral history and memory.

My own research has demonstrated that this happens because the U.S.-Mexico border is far-too-often read and applied backwards in time. It is almost as if the border “always” existed and that people living in “borderlands” regions always considered them to be something of significance (Galván, DeLay, 3). Historical examples demonstrate that this simply is not so—regional players, communities, and peoples have strategically used their agency in these regions to both ignore the border altogether or to play it from both sides. As a result, I believe that we must also teach and structure the study of this history from a transnational perspective (Gutiérrez and Young; Wood; Bayly et al.). Chicana/o history cannot and should not ignore the pre-1848 period, nor should it stop drawing connections to Mexico afterwards. Mexican-American communities in the United States who were absorbed by changes in national boundaries did not necessarily abandon their ties to Mexico. A lot is left out of our courses when we fail to actively draw comparative and transnational connections between processes taking place within communities in the United States and Mexico.

This realization was cemented for me when I began crafting syllabi for my position in the Chicana/o Studies department at CSUN. Having previously taught in history departments where these national fields and boundaries were so engrained into the curriculum and mindset, my transition to teaching in an interdisciplinary Chicana/o Studies department presented new opportunities to challenge traditional paradigms. Upon consulting course descriptions and syllabi past and present, I immediately realized the department’s strengths in Chicana/o issues, while I also saw the need to infuse more Mexican history into the curriculum so that students can better contextualize transnational social movements of the present (i.e. the 43 missing Ayotzinapa students in Mexico).1

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1 On September 26, 2014 a group of 43 male students attending the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers’ College were abducted and disappeared while on their way to commemorate the 1968 student massacre in Mexico City. Their school was known for
This exercise and realization resulted in my making three important observations. First, I found that most courses had a strong leaning towards topics relating to the twentieth century. Pre-1848 topics and peoples were noticeably under-emphasized, as was the nineteenth century. Course content jumps from indigenous societies and languages to colonization to the Mexican-American War in almost one fell swoop. My second observation, and perhaps most impactful to me personally, was the realization that the majority of Chicana/o history courses did little with communities south of the border. I believe this has less to do with a lack of interest or concern for these topics, but again, more with the geographical boundaries that the academy has structured into graduate programs. Academics simply feel more comfortable approaching big topics from one side of the border or the other (many for language reasons). And lastly, I realized that to make my courses address these concerns, I was going to need to figure out new ways of constructing my pedagogy. In other words, my third observation was that I would need to expose my students to the Chicana/o history from both sides of the border.

This introspective exercise revealed for me the need for a much more cooperative and shared history than most students expect to receive. Yet, this new approach offers a space for students to get exposed to a well-rounded picture of how what has transpired al otro lado has impacted their communities, families, and selves here in the United States. Mexican peoples’ struggle and agency come into focus. The comment that most often comes up amongst my lower division undergraduates is that they had heard stories of past events from their abuelos/as, but never understood the context. For example, they knew that their great-grandfather fled Mexico during the 1910 revolution but never understood the push and pull factors that led him to make that decision in the first place. U.S. textbooks cover the revolution as a grassroots community activism, and while there is much debate amongst political officials and activists regarding who was responsible for their disappearance, it is clear that the Mexican State was involved. I combat this by spending a good chunk of time unpacking Mexican Independence and the turbulent politics of the long nineteenth century that followed. I assign students a number of primary sources written by Mexicans and foreigners to help paint this picture. I also have them read official documents (such as the Constitution of 1917) so that
minor blip on the radar screen of American history (if at all), because the border limits their focus.

Students’ exposure to California mission history is even more telling. Because the majority of CSUN students are from the greater metropolitan LA area, and they were educated as part of the Los Angeles Unified School District, most were asked to complete a capstone California mission history project in fourth grade. Their teachers took them on field trips to a mission, and they followed lesson plans provided by the state to cover what most historians consider to be an extremely harsh, brutal, and controversial topic. Yet, the vast majority of my students admit that they have only been exposed to watered down “Disney” versions of this history. Coming into my courses they have absolutely no idea that from an indigenous perspective, this history is not a happy story of interaction and assimilation. They also have relatively no context with which to understand how mission history is part of a larger narrative of Spanish colonial and Mexican history. A series of lectures that unpack the interplay of experiences of natives and colonial Mexican officials, colonists, and missionaries, supplemented with readings from scholars and periodicals about the removal of monuments to Mission “heroes,” expose students to the need to examine all sides and perspectives in order to arrive at a more satisfying narrative of what this period actually looked like (Menchaca; Restall). I am also deliberate in exposing them to the colonial history of the place where they live today – reinforcing for them that we are occupying native land, and if history had played out differently, we may very well not be standing on American ground today.

The course in which I have been most able to apply this technique is “History of the Americas,” which is taught exclusively in the CSUN Chicana/o Studies department. This is a campus General Education they can understand how revolutionary concerns were being addressed at a policy level.

4 One example is the controversial figure of Junipero Serra. The namesake of many historical landmarks and schools throughout the state, it is now mainstream knowledge that his role in the massacre of countless indigenous populations is abhorrent. Still praised within the mainstream state curriculum, students are appalled to hear the “true” history of this historical figure. Through a hands-on activity for the course I ask students to visit a California mission and reflect on the ways that natives are portrayed. Almost always they point out how the statues and museum visits have purposely silenced the “true” history of the California missions that they learn in my course.
course, and our department offers over fifteen completely full sections per semester. The course title implies a sensitivity to a transnational/transcontinental perspective, but state requirements dictate a strong emphasis on the “American” perspective. As a Title 5 requirement the state requires that the course must cover a minimum of one hundred years, cover an entire area now included within the United States of America, explore the relationships between regions and external regions and powers, address major ethnic and social groups, and address the “continuity of the American experience.” Our department gives its instructors the autonomy to structure their pedagogical approach through their own unique academic lens, which is what I have done.

Because my graduate training was in Latin American history, more specifically Mexican borderlands history, I immediately saw the ways that my expertise could provide a unique opportunity to push students outside of the post-1848 narratives that are all too often emphasized. First and foremost, I decided that limiting the content by adhering to national boundaries and structuring the course only around the United States’ present-day boundaries was insufficient. Instead, I chose to structure the class chronologically and hemispherically. I begin with the longstanding presence, development and growth of native societies, their encounters with the Spanish colonial world and that long and complicated process of layered conquests. I then follow with at least two weeks on what life was like for those living in these regions and what might have pushed religious and political leaders to support Mexican independence. I follow this with a focus on the complicated terrain of nineteenth century politics, both within the United States and in Latin America, and follow that with a week on the Mexican-American War. One of the most important points I try to impart on students is that the Mexican-American War was uniquely important for both sides. Not only did it result in the beginning of the delineation of national boundaries that we know today, but, importantly, it also provided U.S. soldiers with the training they would need to participate in the American Civil War only a few years later (Greenberg; Henderson). Because of the U.S. Civil War’s important place within American history and memory, the Mexican-American War is often pushed off to the sidelines. It is

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after that point that I begin to shift to mainstream “American” history, but with constant attention to how Mexico, people of color, and other nations viewed and experienced these same events. In other words, neither side is ever silenced.

One lesson that exemplifies this approach and resonates with students is when I lecture transnationally on Mexican Independence. So often only covered from a Mexican perspective, it is very telling to understand what was transpiring in the U.S. at the same time. I provide a vignette of the life story of Afro-Mexican independence leader Vicente Guerrero, who was the first native and black president of Mexico. Students are shocked to realize that they had never learned of his background before. But things get really interesting once I start framing Guerrero’s reforms side by side with contemporary laws in the United States. At the same time that Guerrero outlawed slavery once and for all in Mexico and the country was experimenting with universal male suffrage, only 6% of males in the United States could vote. And this is fifty years after American independence. It helps to think about how discussions of freedom and equality are framed within American history curriculum. By inserting Mexican history into these conversations, students are exposed to a rich example of how the laws set into motion south of the border can influence changes on this side, and vice versa. Our histories have never been mutually exclusive.

Student responses to this approach have been extremely positive. I almost always receive comments that point to a redemptive outcome of learning about their cultural background, but have had little exposure to within mainstream curricula. One student wrote, “During this course I have learned important history about my own country. It has been worthwhile really understanding the history of Mexico from our own point of view instead of hearing only about the side of the United States, who makes it seem like they did nothing wrong when taking land from Mexico.” The struggle to see this curricular reorientation has been ongoing for the 50 years that our department has been in existence. To see the impact on student’s learning to be given the context with which to understand how historical narratives are framed and silenced is my way of contributing to our mission.

By the end of the semester students speak of biases and silencing. One student notes, “So far one of the most important things I have learned

6 Quoted students took and evaluated my course in fall of 2015.
from this class is that when we were in high school there was a lot of information that was not taught to us because it wasn’t ‘American.’ But it is still very important. Because of this I have realized that I had wrong perceptions about some parts of Mexican history that I thought I knew about.” Students’ reactions reveal the ways in which presenting this history from both sides can serve a redemptive purpose in the classroom. There is at first a realization that what they had previously been taught left a lot out, but also a sense of pride in understanding history from an alternative perspective. Putting these two sides and perspectives in conversation with one another leaves students with a greater appreciation for transnational approaches and other cultures’ roles in influencing historical events and processes.

Transnational and comparative lesson plans reframe historical narratives so that one side is not portrayed as privileged over the other. I feel fortunate to teach in a department that values this dialogue and was built to ensure that these conversations could and should be had. Infusing more Mexican perspectives into our Chicana/o Studies courses reveals a much more cooperative and shared history. Not only does this reinforce the need to transcend the national boundaries that separate us, it does so in a way that helps students better understand larger historical processes. They take pride in knowing that their cultural heritage is significant, and that it should not be relegated to the sidelines of their history textbooks. Debates over abandoning nation-states are not new to the field of Chicana/o Studies, but these examples reiterate the need to apply these pedagogies and approaches to the teaching of our history. I am grateful that Chicana/o Studies at CSUN provides the space for me to do this every day.

**Works Cited**


The Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at CSUN, like other Ethnic Studies Departments across the nation, was born from a struggle, guided by a clear vision, and sustained by a strong mission: To educate and mentor thousands of ethnic and minority students who traditionally have been denied access to knowledge about their own histories, cultures, and languages by mainstream education avenues. Despite having to frequently prove its legitimacy and academic rigor in educational settings, it is undeniable that Ethnic Studies curricula benefit all students; this has been substantiated by an ample body of research in the last few decades. Some of the benefits include a boost in attendance and academic performance among students at risk of dropping out (Dee and Penner 129), an increase in critical thinking abilities, which helps students in all their academic endeavors (Sleeter 9-10), and a culturally relevant curriculum which provides students with an applicable and meaningful education and their identities (Vásquez 13).

At the time of its foundation, Chicana/o Studies mostly evolved out of sociology and race theory. Thus, most of the core courses in Chicana/o Studies consist of history, sociology, race theory, and political science. While most Chicana/o Studies majors also include courses in psychology, literature, education, and some language courses, linguistics has not been viewed as part of the core of ethnic studies. Yet, the study of language and, in particular, the language spoken by most of the Latina/o community as their first or heritage language is crucial. The knowledge of the community language also plays a central role in affirming students’ identities and it also contributes to a better understanding of the experience of Chicanas/os.
in the United States. In fact, many Chicana/o students consider Spanish to be an important part of their ethnic identity and an access to ancestral familial connections, knowledge, and community practices (Sánchez-Muñoz, “Identidad y confianza” 226). U.S. Latinas/os and Chicanas/os exhibit a broad range of competencies in Spanish, from fluent and literate to passive knowledge (capable of some basic understanding, but unable to speak the language). Spanish is nevertheless the second most spoken language in the U.S. with more than 41 million speakers (DADS) and it is the second most spoken language in the world (Ethnologue). Therefore, incorporating the study of language, specifically Spanish as a Heritage Language in Chicana/o Studies should be considered a fundamental piece of the curriculum. The Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN is one of the few to have taken a step in that direction.

**Spanish as a Heritage Language (HL) in U.S. Latina/o and Chicana/o Communities**

Although the linguistic history and ability of each Latina/o and Chicana/o Spanish speaker is different, I will use the term Heritage Language (henceforth HL) speaker to refer to this group, a growing demographic within the Spanish speaking population with different levels of proficiency. A HL speaker is someone who was born or raised and educated in the U.S. and who is exposed to a non-English language at home (Valdés, “Heritage Language Students” 37-38). HL speakers of Spanish acquire the language through natural interactions and exposure to the language through their family and community; in fact, very few Latinas/os who are 1.5 generation and beyond learn the HL in academic settings; indeed, most do not ever acquire academic skills. If they do take Spanish classes in high school or college, they are rarely taught with an adequate HL pedagogy, which is crucial for addressing their linguistic needs. Moreover, many educators mistakenly consider these students as proficient native speakers since they may have conversational fluency; and yet, they lack literacy and academic skills in Spanish. HL speakers cannot be treated as though they are academically prepared to perform as native speakers of Spanish, even though Spanish may have been their first language.
Breaking away from the mold: The need for a specifically designed HL Curriculum

Despite years of research that proves that a foreign language learning pedagogy is not effective with heritage learners, very few schools do offer a linguistically-sound heritage curriculum. If a Latina/o student takes a language class in high school or college, they usually end up in Spanish courses designed for non-Latino students who are learning Spanish as a foreign language. In those classes, the abilities that HL speakers bring from their lived experiences with Spanish are not taken into consideration; instead, HL learners lose valuable academic class time because they are not given the opportunity to develop grammar awareness, reading comprehension, and academic discourse skills. Since the 1980s, linguists have been calling for the implementation of language classes with a unique HL pedagogy through which Chicanas/os may be given the tools to develop literacy skills in Spanish, such as academic writing and reading, and an awareness of social and linguistic factors that affect their everyday lives. Valdés argues that educators must use a HL approach in their pedagogy in order to address the needs of HL speakers whose life experiences contribute to their language skills in Spanish, unlike those of second language learners ("The Teaching" 320). Second or foreign language learners are usually familiar with a standard/monolingual variety of Spanish since their exposure to the language occurs mainly in formal academic settings. On the other hand, most HL speakers learn Spanish as their first, home, and/or community language within an already bilingual/multilingual setting. Thus, HL experiences contribute to the development of a colloquial and conversational proficiency, which is different from the formal Spanish variety used and required in academic settings.

HL courses are designed to allow students to acquire formal and academic oral and written registers, so they can express themselves confidently in and out of their speech communities. Most importantly, well-designed HL classes incorporate information about the students’ cultural identity and about Spanish in the U.S. and its history, which is essential for Chicana/o learners to value the variety of Spanish that they bring from home. HL classes help students overcome the potential insecurities and shame they have about their Spanish as a result of the stigmatization of the variety they speak (Sánchez-Muñoz, “Identidad y
confianza” 227). Again, HL pedagogy aligns with the vision of Ethnic Studies and should be part of the core subjects of Chicana/o Studies. The Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN is one of the few that incorporates HL courses as part of its curriculum.

**Are we there yet? Linguistics gaps in Chicana/o Studies**

One of our Chicana/o Studies graduates, Angélica Amezcua, researched the impact of HL courses in Ethnic Studies for her M.A. thesis. Amezcua found that of the 23 California State Universities, 21 offer minors, majors and master’s degrees in Chicana/o Studies, Mexican Studies, and/or Latino Studies. Ten of these 21 institutions require their students to show proof of Spanish language proficiency (11). In order to meet this prerequisite, students have to either take a Spanish test to be exempt or take one or two Spanish classes, which often do not count toward the Chicana/o Studies major. Even in programs with a language requirement, students must take Spanish in traditional language departments which often lack the ethnic perspective or the training to teach HL pedagogy (such as Language and Literature Departments).

**The road less traveled. Teaching Spanish for Chicanas/os**

Since I started teaching Spanish for Chicanas/os from a HL perspective at CSUN in 2009 (CHS 101 and 102), I have engaged in continued research to understand the students’ motivation for taking this class, their expectations, and the impact of the course on their linguistic confidence. I have found that students enroll in this class in order to improve their Spanish skills as it is the vehicle to learn more about the history and the culture of their community, as well as a way to strengthen their ethnic identity. The following quotes from CHS 101 students interviewed between 2010-2012 exemplify these sentiments (Sánchez-Muñoz, “Heritage Language Healing?” 213):

1. Spanish helps identify who you are, it is part of your culture, even if you are mixed, like that is my case, my mom is half Ameri-
can […]. I identify as Latina and when you know how to speak [Spanish] or you want to know how to speak it, you feel part of the community.

(2) Spanish is part of my culture. It is the language that my grandparents passed on to my parents and, like, I want to be able to pass that on to my children too.

Through years of observation and research in the HL classroom, I have consistently found that Latina/o students (not just Chicana/o) take CHS 101/102 driven by a desire to develop skills and proficiency in Spanish because they consider this language to be part of their ethnic identity. Students often share that CHS 101/102 helps them stay connected with their community (Sánchez-Muñoz, “Identidad y confianza”, “Heritage Language Healing?”). It is impossible to look at education or society without acknowledging that language is at the core of everything as the essential vehicle that allows everyone to communicate, to produce and have dialogues, and to acquire knowledge (Darder 105). It is for this reason that I strongly believe in the importance of teaching heritage and community languages within the framework of ethnic studies, rather than leaving that task to language and literature departments who might not have the tools or interest to connect to students’ backgrounds and linguistic experiences.

As Anzaldúa asserts, “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity: I am my language” (81). Our language is part of who we are, it is part of what represents our ethnic identity. Language is the umbilical cord between the culture and traditions and the personal and social identity of the speaker. Therefore, it is fundamental to recognize the importance language has on the development of a person’s identity as this understanding can lead to language equality in educational institutions with the implementation of more HL classes and the deconstruction of social language ideologies. Chicana/o Studies at CSUN is well-positioned to take on this task as we have taken the first steps toward HL classes with CHS 101/102. Nevertheless, there is much work ahead as we continue to grow and change as a discipline. It is my hope that future generations of Chicana/o Studies professors and students at CSUN will realize the potential that our department has to develop a Spanish Heritage Language Program and to inspire other Ethnic Studies Departments across the nation.
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Náhuatl Studies, Mexican Music, and Vocabulary Building in Our Department

Fermín Herrera

I began teaching in this remarkable department in the fall of 1971, a semester that marked the start of a wonderfully fulfilling venture that remains exciting. The courage of students, who in 1969 pressed to establish the Department of Chicano Studies, and the insightfulness of Rodolfo Acuña, who conceived the balanced curriculum that remains a hallmark of our department should be applauded as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary. I still thank Rudy for having first invited me to apply for a position to teach courses related to Mesoamerican civilization.

A natural complement to our offerings in ancient Mexican civilization was a course I developed on the Náhuatl language. The driving force behind my decision to teach a Náhuatl course in the department was the conviction that there is intrinsic worth in the legacy of the indigenous peoples of the Américas and that the only way to arrive at that legacy is through knowledge of native tongues such as Náhuatl. It is axiomatic that a thorough comprehension of a people’s values and worldview is not possible without knowledge of the language through which they express those values and worldview.

An immediate obstacle was the lack of instructional materials in English. Even in Spanish, other than the rather abstruse grammatical descriptions written by the first Spanish missionaries in Mexico, didactic books were scarce, the text of choice being Angel María Garibay Kintana’s Llave del Náhuatl, which would have proven impractical for our students. The lack of pedagogical resources prompted me to write a workbook for the class because, although there were some articles in English that described the linguistic structures of Náhuatl, there was no practical guide to the language. My solution was to prepare a series of lessons with exercises, Introduction to Classical Náhuatl, a text that has gone through several revisions over the years. In the
early 1970’s, it was the only book of its kind. The work’s content represents my distillation (with non-technical explanations and added exercises) of material gleaned from the many artes (language manuals) written by 16th century Spanish friars in Mexico, from the corpus of Classical Náhuatl literature, from early and recent dictionaries of the language, from contemporary Náhuatl, mostly from the Milpa Alta sector of Mexico City, and from contemporary grammatical treatises. The objective was to make the language as accessible as possible, which meant the elimination of much of the esoteric terminology found in all previous publications. The goal of this workbook was to present the rudiments of the language to our students in a clear and understandable manner to make the learning of Náhuatl a realistic, reachable goal for them. Happily, the result has been that many general students with little or no background in linguistics have acquired, in varying degrees, the ability to unravel the intricacies of classical Náhuatl, to analyze a primary source in the original language, and to produce a functional translation into English or Spanish. It has been rewarding to see, over the years, so many of our students having an encounter with passages from primary sources and, on their own, dissecting terms into their constituent elements and then extracting meaning from them. It is in this manner that students have arrived at a genuine understanding of the indigenous notion of human, of student, of teacher, of education, and of so many other concepts imbedded in the language. It is an understanding derived, not from reading a secondary source, but from analyzing a primary text in the original tongue.

A fundamental contribution of the Náhuatl course has been to make our students conscious of the reality that reading about ancient Mexican ideas is no substitute for engaging them through the actual language in which they were formulated. If a native concept is not fully grasped in its own context, simply rendering it into a Spanish or English counterpart does nothing but submerge its meaning into further oblivion, strip it of its distinctiveness, and present it as if it were a mere extension of Spanish or English. After studying Náhuatl, students could see firsthand that ixtli yollotl is not “human being” but “human agent,” that momachtiani is not student but “one who causes himself or herself to know,” that nemachtiloyan is not “school” but “place where people cause themselves to know,” that neyolmelahualitztli is not “education” but “the act of giving direction to people’s potential.”
A further benefit derived from the study of Náhuatl is the insight into the ubiquitous toponyms of Mexico: Acapulco, Chiapas, Colima, Jalisco, Mazatlán, México, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Tlaxcala, Zacatecas, Xochimilco, to name a few. Even Central America exhibits Náhuatl impact in its placenames: Guatemala, Tegucigalpa, Sensuntepeque, Ometepe. Moreover, our students see more clearly the influences from the Náhuatl language that permeate the everyday, casual, conversational Spanish of Mexicans: borrowings (atole, guacamole, chapulín, mocajete, escuincle); literal renditions (Día de los Muertos, niño de la tierra, aventar una flor, ahora); and the pervasive, sometimes seemingly illogical use of the diminutive suffix (tantito, sabrosito, agüita).

I should emphasize that CSUN is one of the few universities in the United States that offers a course on Náhuatl and that does so, not on an occasional basis or by special arrangement, but, for the last forty years, during every semester and as part of its regular curriculum.

The impact of my work on Náhuatl has transcended the classroom and has received recognition by agencies outside of the university, the state, and the nation, as evidenced by the many invited lectures that I have delivered and the projects to which I have contributed, among them: “La lengua Náhuatl: sus características e impacto sobre el español coloquial México-estadounidense” (Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y Las Artes, Mexico City); “Náhuatlahtolli: La Lengua Náhuatl” (Convention of Native Speakers of Náhuatl, Delegación Milpa Alta, Mexico City); “Grupos Orquestales en la Antigüedad Mexicana” (Encuentro Nacional de Directores de Orquestas, Mexico City); “Náhuatl Educational Concepts” (Commission for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education, University of Missouri, Kansas City); narrator (Náhuatl) and translator of text (Spanish to Náhuatl): “Echoes,” a film by CSUN student Moisés Pérez, 1st Place Winner at California Shorts Festival, 2014; translator (Náhuatl to English and English to Náhuatl: The Magic Dogs of San Vicente, a novel by novelist Mark Fishman; consultant: “In Search of Ancient Aztlan,” a PBS project directed by Directors Guild of America Lifetime Achievement Award winner Jesús Salvador Treviño.

As part of my work I accepted Hippocrene Books’ invitation to prepare a Náhuatl dictionary, which they published as English-Náhuatl/ Náhuatl-English Concise Dictionary, the only dictionary of its kind. I also composed and narrated a passage in Náhuatl for the CD Jaguares Acústico by the famous Mexican rock band Jaguares. Additionally,
I served as translator, commentator, and consultant for noted Chicano composer Joseph Julian González’s “Misa Azteca,” a symphonic oratorio based on Náhuatl poems that has been performed at the Sydney Opera House, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Carnegie Hall, and the Festival of the Aegean (Syros, Greece).

Our department has always sought to celebrate the special character of Mexican music and all of its wonderful idiosyncrasies and to offer its students mentorship and instruction in this area. I have played a role within our music component and have made contributions as curriculum developer and teacher, mentor, performer, composer, and producer. I developed a course on regional Mexican music, which is distinguished not only by its focus on various types of Mexican song but also by the special attention directed at various co-traditions of the son, the most deeply rooted yet least understood genre of Mexican music. This course was, perhaps, the first in the nation, or possibly anywhere, to formally distinguish song genres (compositions for vocal performance) from son genres (compositions for vocal, instrumental, and dance performance). It classified the defining features of traditional, nationalistic, corrido, ranchera, huapango, and bolero song genres as well as the idiosyncratic vocal, instrumental, and dance features of the son huasteco, son jarocho, and son de mariachi. Identifying the formal distinctions among these genres is critical because of the tendency prevalent among Latinos and Latinas in general to describe traditional Mexican music as simply música ranchera or, worse, to reduce it to the vague category of canción ranchera. Through this course, our students examine the Mexican musical heritage following a clear, systematic approach that highlights the characteristics distinctive to each genre studied and that is free of ambiguous and often misleading classifications such as mariachi and rancheras.

In addition, I also organized several concert series that took place at CSUN and in various off-campus communities: “Sones y Cantares Mexicanos,” “Cuerdas y Voces de México,” “Festival del Son Mexicano.” Performers such as Linda Ronstadt, María de Lourdes, Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, Zeferino Nadayapa, Alberto de la Rosa, Rolando Hernández, Lino Chávez, Mario Barradas, and Octeto Vocal Juan D. III participated in these events. We added pre-concert workshops conducted by the artists to complement these programs and to make their content more meaningful to both CSUN students and to community members. There is no other institution on record, in the
United States or in Mexico, that has hosted so many legendary practitioners of Mexican music both as performers and as lecturers. Our students were able to interact with and learn directly from celebrated traditional masters such Zeferino Nandayapa (marimba), Lino Chávez (requinto jarocho), Mario Barradas (arpa jarocha), and Rolando Hernández (violín huasteco). To these activities can be added my eight-part lecture series “Celebrando el Son,” sponsored by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, and which took place at CSUN and at Plaza de la Raza in East Los Angeles. Furthermore, for six years, I coordinated the instructional component of the Tucson International Mariachi Conference, for which I prepared a set of instructional videotapes and a seminal mariachi curriculum.

I founded, and continue to direct, a professional performance ensemble, Conjunto Hueyapan, that has provided lecture-demonstrations in many schools and universities across the nation and has brought international recognition to CSUN and to our department through its performances in venues and events such as Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (New York City), The Kennedy Center (Washington DC), Wolf Trap Farm Park for the Performing Arts (Vienna, Virginia), the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (Los Angeles), the Hollywood Bowl (Hollywood, CA), Ronald Reagan’s Presidential Inaugural (Washington, DC), the World Harp Congress Concert (Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico), the 1980 Tournament of Roses Parade (Pasadena, CA), and the Encuentro de Jaraneros (Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, Mexico). Mentoring CSUN students in the study of son jarocho performance technique resulted in the formation of another professional son jarocho ensemble, Conjunto Tenocelomeh, which has performed for over two decades.

Other activities that have brought distinction to CSUN and to our department are the various invited guest performances and recordings with distinguished artists such as Grammy Award Winners Linda Ronstadt, Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano, and Los Lobos. I had the pleasure of appearing with Los Lobos in the film La Bamba and of performing with them at the Greek Theater in Hollywood, at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, and at Capitol Records for a special National Public Radio broadcast. I also recorded with them in two of their CDS: Good Morning, Aztlan and Kiko. I was guest harpist in the first CD recording by Mariachi Los Camperos de Nati Cano and in Linda Ronstadt’s “Más Canciones” tour. I also recorded with the Mexican rock band Jaguares in their CD Jaguares Acústico.
and with British vocalist Thea Gilmore in her song “Mexico.” The legendary requinto jarocho performer Lino Chávez honored me with an invitation to perform harp as part of one of his tours. My contribution as producer includes several CD’s, one of which was nominated for a Grammy (Ixya Herrera: Voz y Guitarra) in 2015.

The mission statement of the department has historically emphasized skills development in critical thinking, public speaking, and writing. In my opinion, proficiency in these three areas is greatly advanced by a solid command of formal English vocabulary. As a result, I developed a course to augment our students’ academic vocabulary through a study of Greek and Latin roots. My objectives have been to improve precision in written and oral expression by teaching students how to identify the components from which English words are formed, to heighten comprehension of terminology used in academic disciplines, and to promote a keener insight into the meaning of commonly occurring words of Greek and Latin origin. Since most of our students have at least incipient native familiarity with the Spanish language, their experience with Spanish (a Latin language) serves as a bridge to Latin, which helps to increase their formal Spanish lexical inventory. Pretests and posttests have revealed a dramatic increase in the vocabulary growth of students who have enrolled in this class. Likewise, former students who took the GRE or LSAT have reported, without exception, immense satisfaction with the impact of their knowledge on their test scores.

As the department celebrates its 50th Anniversary, it is important to note that it has supported and sustained exceptional service in the areas of indigenous studies and Mexican music. The Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies is the only one in the nation that regularly offers (every semester) a course in Classical Náhuatl, which it has been doing since the early 1970’s. It also offers a course every semester on Mesoamerican civilization. Furthermore, the recent addition of courses that touch on Zapotec language and culture has strengthened the department’s indigenous studies component. The department has continued to excel in course teaching, professional performance, and recording production of traditional Mexican music. It is the only department in the nation that every semester offers multiple section lecture courses in traditional Mexican music and actual instruction in traditional Mexican instruments. In addition, it has sponsored a mariachi orchestra (Mariachi Aztlán), a folkloric dance troupe (Ballet Aztlán), and a Veracruz ensemble (Conjunto Hueyapan) that have brought international recog-
nition in this field to the university. Given that southern California is one of two important centers of traditional Mexican music (Mexico City is the other), the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at CSUN has fittingly provided academic focus to a vital aspect of the region’s Latino cultural reality.
In the midst of multiple forms of systemic exclusion and erasure since the 1960s, burgeoning Indigenous diasporic peoples in the United States continue to survive and (re) create a sense of community.¹ Their presence and struggles are often made invisible by government and media sources either through the continued imposition of national identities (e.g., Mexican/Guatemalan), or by incorporating them into a homogeneous Latinidad that creates further marginalization.² These exclusions and erasures are also reproduced in the U.S. education system, where the particular needs of Indigenous students are at best problematically addressed. Zapotec scholar Lourdes Alberto notes that “as a young indigenous girl whose family originated from Yalalag, Oaxaca (a Zapotec pueblo in southern Mexico)” (247), she often “sought out public representations of [her] ‘Indianness,’ a hunger that was insatiable” (248). Yet, this hunger for her community’s public representation was often confronted by colonial constructions and racialized slurs, like “Oaxac,” spouted by non-Indigenous Latina/o immigrants in her Pico-Union neighborhood (Ibid).

¹ Some of these growing diasporic communities include Mayas from Guatemala, Chiapas and Yucatan as well as Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Hñañus, Quechuas, Aymaras, Garifunas, among many others.

² Even though the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that Indigenous migrants from Mexico and Guatemala make up 17% of farm workers, their work is often erased from national discussions on labor rights. In California, Indigenous migrants make up 30 percent of the farmworker population (http://indigenousfarmworkers.org/demographics.shtml). For information on the contributions to the labor movement by Maya farmworkers in the U.S. see Elizabeth Oglesby’s “How Central American Migrants Helped Revive the US Labor Movement,” (https://www.latinorebels.com/2019/02/01/centralamericanmigrants/).
Lourdes Alberto’s experiences, and particularly the need for public representations of her Indigenous identity, are echoed by Yuneisy Hernández, a sophomore in Spring 2018 who enrolled in my “CHS 100—Introduction to Chicana/o Culture.” In an email sent the day after the 10 April 2018 lecture given by Maya-Poqomchi Professor Máximo Ba Tiul on the genocide in Guatemala and the search for justice, Hernández shares:

I was born in Santa Rosa, Jumaytepeque, Guatemala… I am part of the Indigenous Xinca group in Guatemala and have always wanted to know more about my heritage but throughout my school career, nobody has ever lectured about any type of Indigenous group so I kind of gave up on wanting to know more…Throughout the middle of his lecture, it made me think and get that emotion and thrill of wanting to know about my Xinca side again.

Discussing her conversation with Ba Tiul, whose talk I organized as part of the Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Américas’ series on “Indigenous Survival and Resistance,” Hernández recalls:

I was able to talk to him [after the lecture] and as soon as I said, ‘I am from Jumaytepeque’ he said, ‘yeah, you are Xinca.’ I felt this emotion of happiness and full of mixed emotions go through my veins because this is the moment I have been waiting for, for someone to be able to teach me about my heritage and culture. Thank you so much for this life changing experience!

As Lourdes Alberto stresses, for Indigenous students to publicly position themselves as Indigenous, they often have to explain and frame their Indigenous identity, culture, and community to non-Indigenous students and faculty (250). This is because identifying as Indigenous (Maya, Xinca, Mixtec, Zapotec), “runs counter to the nation-based identity formation of the US” (Ibid). Thus, for Yuneisy Hernández, being able to name her birth place without having to frame it, and being recognized as Xinca by Ba Tiul, who she also acknowledges as

3 Organizing lectures by international speakers requires collective work. Yanira Pineda, Griselda Corona-Torres and Yanina Flores provide the essential logistical support to make these events happen. For this particular series, collaborations with faculty, students, other departments and the USU have been instrumental.
part of her extended Indigenous community, produces an empowering transformation. This is why for Hernández the experience is “life changing,” because, as she poignantly notes, her formal education in the United States has systemically eradicated the presence of Indigenous peoples from the histories and cultures taught in classrooms. Thus, the public recognition of her community at the University, which often produces those violent erasures, gave her the opportunity to imagine a space she could also claim as her own. In my role, as a professor in the Chicana/o Studies department and a scholar on the Maya diaspora, ensuring that these spaces are open to students requires that our curriculum also incorporates Indigenous theoretical frameworks and cultural productions.

Bridging Chicana/o Studies Curriculum & Critical Indigeneities

Since being hired as a tenure-track professor at CSUN, I have made it a priority to include works by Indigenous scholars, writers, artists and/or activists in all my courses.\(^4\) I complement the curriculum with guest lectures, like the one Hernández attended, poetry readings, film screenings and/or art exhibits that are open to the public.\(^5\) In courses such as, “CHS 100—Introduction to Chicana/o Studies,” we also critically examine the violent ways in which racialized representations of Indigenous peoples continue to circulate. These dialogues are coupled with examples of the contributions Indigenous migrants have made to U.S. labor movements, the arts, as well as national economies. Additionally, in the two literature courses I teach, “CHS 380: Chicana/o

\(^4\) My scholarly and pedagogical contributions in the department form part of multifaceted efforts that several colleagues are also actively engaged in. For instance, the Náhuatl language courses created and taught, since the foundation of the department, by Fermín Herrera. Similarly, the various library and museum collaborations with Zapotec artists and scholars organized by Dr. Xóchitl M. Flores-Marcial (Zapotec) as well as her ongoing work with the Ticha Project, a digital text explorer for colonial Zapotec (https://ticha.haverford.edu/en/).

\(^5\) Between 2006-2019, I have organized over twenty public lectures, talks and art exhibits by Indigenous scholars, artists and activists including a musical performance by the Maya-Rock group “B’itzma: Sobrevivencia”; Poetry readings by Calixta Gabriel Xiquín (K’aqchikel) and Gaspar Pedro González (Q’anjob’al); A lecture by Francisco Cali Tzay(K’aqchikel), UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, among many others.
Literature” and “CHS 381: Chicana Literature,” we discuss the politics of translation as it relates to Indigenous textualities. Moreover, we employ the works of leading Indigenous and Chicana scholars to critically examine the ways that indigeneity has often been problematically appropriated by non-Indigenous Chicana/os and Latina/os.

In spring 2018, I designed and offered a graduate course that focuses on “Contemporary Indigenous Migrations and Diasporas.” The course aims at providing an interdisciplinary approach to critically understand indigeneity as well as contemporary Indigenous migration movements and diasporas. The scope of the course is particularly important, because national discourses on (im)migration tend to be homogenous and in doing so, erase the specific conditions that displace Indigenous peoples from their territories. The problematic ways in which these migratory movements are (de) contextualized was evident at the end of spring 2018 after the death of Claudia Patricia Gómez González (Maya-Mam), who was shot and killed by a Border Patrol agent in Laredo, Texas on 23 May. While the migration of Mayas has been referred to by Guatemalan journalists as the “Invisible Caravan,” the video recording of the murder, taped by local resident Marta Martínez on her cell-phone, brought international attention to the violence faced by Maya migrants.

Yet, the context of Indigenous migrations to the United States continues to be explained as the “search for the American Dream.” In fact, four months after Gómez González’s murder, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency, U.N. and USAID reported that Mayas migrate to the U.S. in high numbers, because of “hunger and not violence.” Thus, this course further aims at critically reframing these public discussions on Indigenous migrations by thinking about the ways coloniality, genocide, race/ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality inform the experiences and displacements of Indigenous peoples in

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the Américas.⁸ Reframing these public discussions also requires that we engage with them outside of the classroom, an effort that has been pivotal for the department’s Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Américas (CESPA).

The Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Américas (CESPA)

Founded in 1998, the Center for the Study of the Peoples of the Américas (CESPA) aims “at promoting the interest in and knowledge of peoples descendant of Latin American communities” (https://www.csun.edu/center-study-peoples-americas). Since its foundation, university funding for the center has been minimal at best. Through Dr. Jorge García’s unwavering support as well as various collaborations on and off campus, CESPA advisory board members continue to maintain its mission in producing knowledge that centers on the peoples of the Américas.⁹ This anthology forms part of those efforts by critically framing the respective commemorations of the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN (1969) and Casa de las Américas (1959) as continued forms of hemispheric struggles and resistance.¹⁰

Facilitating direct dialogues between members of Indigenous communities, CSUN students, faculty and staff are equally essential in the (re)production of knowledge. For this reason, every year CESPA organizes several lectures, events and art exhibits, the majority of which are centered on the various social justice struggles and movements led by Indigenous communities in the hemisphere. For instance, on 13 October 2016 survivors and family members of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa that were forcefully disappeared spoke to hundreds

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⁹ Jorge García is professor emeritus of Chicana/o Studies and former Dean of the College of Humanities.

¹⁰ Also, (De)construyendo latinidades y movidas de descolonización (forthcoming 2021), which Dr. Martha D. Escobar and I co-edited will be published by Casa de las Américas, La Habana, Cuba.
of CSUN students, faculty and community members. At the event, survivors shared their ongoing struggles against state violence as well as their continued efforts to find “los 43.”

A number of CESPA’s events have focused on the role of memory and the ways it is (re)constructed by Indigenous diasporic communities. To think critically about the commemoration of the 1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords, which officially ended one of the bloodiest civil wars in the hemisphere, the two-part series “MemoryArte” was held on campus. The event featured 16 poets who read pieces created for the occasion in English, Spanish, Maya-K’iche and Q’anjoba’l. The second part included an art exhibit that used the display cases outside of the Chicana/o Studies department’s main office on the first floor of Jerome Richfield. The exhibit was curated by Fabrizio Flores and held from November-February 2017. It featured 20 pieces by acclaimed artists including graffiti artist Cache, muralist Ana Ruth Yela Castillo and photographer James Rodríguez. Submissions were also sent from Guatemala by Prensa Comunitaria and from New York by landscape artist Thomas Germano.

Moreover, these events have explored the ways Indigenous peoples strategically use established systems to assert their agency. Rigoberto Quemé Chay, a scholar on Indigenous rights and political engagement who was the first Maya-K’iche’ mayor of Quetzaltenango (the second-largest city in Guatemala), was invited to lecture on the historical role that Mayas have played in the country’s political processes. During the 2019 spring semester, Manuel Tzoc Bucup (Maya-K’iche’), whose work focuses on re-signifying literature by exploring the limits of the letter while also engaging with the intersections of racial/ethnic, gender and sexual identities, gave a lecture and a poetry workshop that

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11 On 26 September 2014, forty-three students from the Escuela Normal Raúl Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero were forcefully disappeared in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. Between 2015-2016, relatives of the 43 students toured the United States and Canada as a way of raising awareness and solidarity. The speakers at CSUN were part of the “Ayotzinapa Caravan” that travelled throughout the United States in 2016.

12 At the end of the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996), it is estimated that over 200,000 people were killed and most of them Maya. There were approximately 50,000 forcefully disappeared.

13 The event was held on 30 November 2017.

14 Quemé Chay’s lecture was held on 25 March 2019.
encouraged students to think about their identities as intersectional and fluid.\textsuperscript{15} Kelly de León (a junior majoring in Chicana/o Studies) and I co-organized the event with essential support from the Queer Collective as well as the chair of the Queer Studies Program, Dr. Breny Mendoza. In addition to the lecture and poetry workshop, Tzoc Bucup’s visual work and books were exhibited in the display cases outside of the Chicana/o Studies’ department office. The collective poem that students who attended the workshop created formed part of the exhibit that Manuel Tzoc Bucup mounted.\textsuperscript{16} These presentations reaffirm the agency of Indigenous peoples and help to (re)frame our own understandings of race/ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality.

In these varied hemispheric dialogues, Casa de las Américas continues to have a central role both through the publications produced and ongoing collaborations with CESPA. For example, Jaime Gómez Triana, director of the Program on Indigenous Cultures at Casa de las Américas, was invited to give a lecture that centered on the objectives of the aforementioned program.\textsuperscript{17} Gómez Triana provided a genealogy of the multiple projects that Casa de las Américas has created on Indigenous cultures and noted the varied ways that students, faculty and community members can access some of these resources. That same year the lecture “Invisible Latinidades: Afro-Latinos and Indigenous Communities in the U.S. Public Sphere” by Ana Niria Díaz Albo, researcher for the Program on Latina/o Studies at Casa de las Américas, was also held.\textsuperscript{18} Her lecture focused on the ways Afro-Latinos and Indigenous diasporic communities in the U.S. are made invisible through the imposition of national identities. She argued that capitalism plays a central role in processes of homogenization since Latinas/os are constructed as a solidified cultural group in efforts to produce a consumer base. Thus, the hemispheric lens employed in their lectures to discuss identities, like Latinidad and indigeneity, have further expanded our own frameworks. Additionally, as scholars at Casa de las Américas the lectures and work by Díaz Albo and Gómez Triana have engaged our campus community in rethinking the ways knowledge is produced and circulated.

\textsuperscript{15} Manuel Tzoc Bucup’s lecture and poetry workshop were held on 17 April 2019.
\textsuperscript{16} The exhibit was held from 17 April-7 June 2019.
\textsuperscript{17} Gómez Triana’s lecture was held on 15 April 2017.
\textsuperscript{18} Díaz Albo’s lecture took place on 8 March 2017.
Conclusion: The Neo-Liberal University, Chicana/o Studies and Indigenous Diasporas

In his essay “Decolonizing the University: New Directions” Achille Joseph Mbembe argues that higher education has been restructured to systemically reproduce the dynamics of global capitalism. He explains that this is evident in the business models of contemporary university reforms that “tends to turn students into customers and consumers” (31, 39). According to Mbembe, under this model everything and everyone is economized. Higher education becomes “a marketable product, rated, bought and sold by standard units” (30). At CSUN, this has meant among other pressing issues, the reduction of Ethnic Studies courses, as noted by other contributors in this anthology. It has also meant the reduction of resources for students and faculty. Additionally, the administration has created deeper cuts to already limited funding available for the types of collaborations, publications, lectures, exhibits and events discussed in this chapter. Along with the financial cuts, a series of regulations that range from the denial of visas for Indigenous speakers coming from Latin America to the required paperwork to process honorariums, lodging and airfare have also severely hindered these exchanges. In this way, the neo-liberal university model systematically attempts to limit the possibility of transformative and empowering dialogues, like the one depicted by Yuneisy Hernández, for our students. This is because under the neo-liberal university model Indigenous knowledges are either commodified, made invisible, devalued or cast as dangerous.

Thus, our continued resistance as a department must also include ensuring that these hemispheric dialogues with Indigenous scholars, artists, writers, activists and community members are sustained. Equally important is an active engagement with members of the growing Indigenous diasporic communities across the United States, who are further criminalized and marginalized under neo-liberalism. As a department rooted in social justice, we must continue to create pedagogical spaces that actively engage and collaborate with Indigenous rights activists, scholars, writers, and artists across borders. These dialogues and collaborations are critical in our efforts to not only uphold the department’s mission but also stand in solidarity with Indigenous hemispheric movements as they continue to fight against the ongoing legacies of colonialism.
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HERNÁNDEZ, YUNEISY. “Re: Thank you for Professor Maximo Ba Tiul Lecture.” Received by Alicia Ivonne Estrada, 11 April 2018.


When I started my doctoral program, a practice in my department was to collectively conduct end of the year evaluations of graduate students’ performance, which we received in the form of a letter. Throughout my graduate studies I faced imposter syndrome. I had internalized that I did not belong and was constantly afraid that my department would figure this out. My first evaluation letter did not help. It basically stated that I was too narrow in my focus on Chicanas/os. However, as I reflected on the work that I produced that first year in my six courses, I had only written one piece on Latinxs, and it was in a course on bilingual education. I perceived the evaluation letters as a way to document graduate students’ performance in the event that they asked us to leave, which happened occasionally. I felt that the faculty perceived me as not intellectual enough and they were preparing in case they needed to dispose of me. I responded by noting the work I produced that first year and asked for evidence of my narrow focus. There was no response to my letter.

Despite the constant desire to leave the program, I grounded my work in my original purpose, which was to use education as a tool of empowerment, and I graduated in 2010. I was on the job market fall 2009-spring 2011. I applied to dozens of positions in Sociology, Ethnic Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, and Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies. Ideally, I wanted to be in an Ethnic Studies or Gender and Women’s Studies department because I misguidedly thought that being in Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies would not allow me to carry out relational and comparative work. In the spring of 2011, I had three on-campus interviews, one at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) in Chicana/o Studies, one at another California State University campus in Sociology, and another one at a University of California campus in Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies.
My first interview was at CSUN. While I had reservations about being in Chicana/o Studies, I decided to present myself and my work as genuinely possible and hope that it was a good fit. During a teaching demonstration, I presented on the historical context of my dissertation research, which focused on Latina (im)migrants’ criminalization experiences. I offered a relational analysis of how the history of slavery and criminalization lived in the United States by Black people in general, and Black women specifically, shapes incarceration, detention, deportation, and family separation for Latina (im)migrants. I had previous teaching experience, but teaching at CSUN was different. The students, primarily Latinx, were more open to the material and engaged. There was a Black male student in the front of the class whose body language and participation during discussion informed me that the material I was presenting resonated with him.

During a session with faculty, the issue of prison abolition arose. I spoke candidly about my position that carcerality is rooted in slavery and that prisons do not accomplish their stated purpose of making communities safer. I maintained that we need to move away from incarceration and focus on building institutions that truly serve our communities. I informed them that abolition is central to my pedagogy. As often occurs with discussions on abolition, some people are skeptical of the concept and a male lecturer questioned my views as not pragmatic. I responded that if Chicana/o Studies is truly concerned about social justice and liberation for our communities, we need to engage in radical thinking that gets to the root causes of the social problems, and prisons do not achieve this objective. I observed a positive reaction from other faculty present, especially women.

Some of the features of the department that struck me that day were the composition of the faculty. The majority of faculty I met were women and they evidently had strong leadership roles. It surprised me to see that there were faculty members from Spain, Puerto Rico, and Guatemala. This signaled to me the openness of the department for comparative and relational work. I had also never been at an institution with murals in classrooms and hallways. They depict community experiences and I looked forward to teaching in such a space. More than anything, the focus of the faculty on justice and their questions about my efforts to create positive social change for our communities made an impression on me.
During the meeting with the dean of the College, she asked why I wanted to teach at CSUN. While not explicitly stated, I understood her question inferring that there is a high teaching load at CSUN and many students come from backgrounds that under-prepare them for college-level work. Racial and class dynamics are central to CSUN students’ realities. The majority of students are impoverished or working class and 75% are students of color, in contrast to faculty, which are 63% white (CSUN Counts). Additionally, CSUN has the second largest undocumented student population in the nation; it is part of a system where one out of every ten students faces homelessness (Crutchfield); Black students are steadily decreasing (CSUN Counts); and it is located in Los Angeles County, which has the largest number of people in jail and sends the most people to state prison. These realities structure the lives of CSUN students and their educational experiences. Although I was not as familiar at the time, I knew that the dean’s question related to this context—why did I want to teach at an institution whose students face so many structural barriers to obtain their education? The thought that came to me almost immediately was “I am one of these students.” I am a first-generation college student and I come from a working-class immigrant family. Reflecting on that day’s experiences, I realized that teaching at CSUN would allow me to work with underserved students of color to transform our communities’ realities. I responded to the dean’s question by stating “I am one of these students” and elaborated on my background.

That day’s experience changed my perspective about Chicana/o Studies. While in my graduate program I was perceived as too Chicana, I thought that in Chicana/o Studies my work was going to be perceived as too broad. While I wanted a position, I did not want to compromise my work nor my convictions. I wanted to be in a place where I could engage in relational and comparative analysis and in pedagogy grounded in abolition. I left that day knowing that I wanted to be in

1 Personal communication (November, 2016) with Dario Fernandez, Director of the EOP DREAM Center at CSUN.
2 Of the 131,260 people incarcerated in prisons in California in 2017, 43,142 (32.9%) were sentenced in Los Angeles County (Office of Research). In comparison, the next county with the largest number of people in prison is Riverside, with 9,992 (7.6%).
3 Many CSUN students take classes in Chicana/o Studies because we have a significant offering of General Education courses.
Chicana/o Studies at CSUN and hoping they wanted me. A couple of days later I received an offer from the dean, and immediately cancelled my other interviews.

I became a professor because I wanted to contribute to transforming the world. I grew up witnessing violence all around me: in my home, in school, in the streets, in the media, at the border—it was everywhere. My Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies undergraduate professors equipped me with an understanding of social inequality as a production and to recognize that if something is made, it can be unmade. This life-changing and life-affirming education altered the way I engage the world around me and empowered me to believe that I could do the same for others. The words of scholar-activist and abolitionist Angela Y. Davis offer me guidance, “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time” (2014). I teach with a sense of urgency, and since I joined the department in 2011, Chicana/o Studies at CSUN has afforded me the support necessary to keep fighting and engaging in abolition pedagogy, which is grounded in an understanding that the role of teachers should be to fight the logic of carcerality and genocide that permeates every aspect of society, including the classroom.4

My goal for all my students is that they be radical critical thinkers—for them to question existing relationships of power and to understand the root causes of social problems so that they can develop meaningful and long-term solutions. A central focus of my teaching is understanding the racial state5 and its violence from an intersectional perspective, meaning that we must examine how race intersects with other axes of power, including class, gender, and sexuality. I integrate this throughout my teaching and Chicana/o Studies has consistently encouraged my efforts to offer courses on the topic. These include graduate level courses, “CHS 595C: Critical (Im)migration Studies” and “CHS 595A: Race and State Violence,” as well as undergraduate level classes, such as “CHS 495RR Resisting Racialized Gender State Violence.” Common threads throughout these courses are that the state is a contested site where people seek recourse and where racial-

4 The concept of abolition pedagogy is taken from the work of Dylan Rodriguez (2010).
5 I draw from the theory of racial formation from Omi and Winant and understand the racial state as composed by the various institutions and their representatives responsible for racially organizing society.
ized violence is enabled and enacted; the fact that rights are racially distributed and that processes of racialized criminalization—associating ideas of criminality to particular racialized bodies and communities’ life conditions—function to mark these bodies and communities as rightless; that state violence interrelates with interpersonal violence; how people of color are often implicated in sustaining relationships of power; and that communities have and continue to resist the violence they experience.

In addition to supporting my teaching, Chicana/o Studies has consistently encouraged my efforts to resist the violence discussed in my courses. Quinten Thomas, a young black Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) student at CSUN, died in 2018 while incarcerated at the Los Angeles Twin Towers Correctional Facility under the supervision of the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department. He apparently died from neglect during a medical emergency. He was arrested on 2 March and found dead on 9 March. Quinten was in the foster care system since he was sixteen years old, he faced chronic houselessness, and was epileptic. He left behind his daughter Ashanti, who was a year old when he died, and Saharra White, Ashanti’s mother. My immediate response to the knowledge of his death was pain and anger. I did not know Quinten, but I understand that his life conditions structured his death. It occurred in a context where police, security guards, and vigilantes kill a black person every twenty-eight hours (Eisen 12-13); where the United States has less than 5% of the world’s population but almost 20% of the world’s incarcerated people; where Blacks make up 12.6% of the population of the U.S. (United States Census Bureau “Profile of General Population”) but 38% of people incarcerated (Federal Bureau of Prisons) and 23% of children in foster care (Children’s Bureau).

I engaged efforts to organize on campus around Quinten’s death. Other than EOP, which fundraised for his services and funeral and attempted to obtain answers about his death, answers that were denied because they were not his biological family, the response to his death

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6 EOP was created in 1969 by a student-led movement at CSUN (then San Fernando Valley State College) to outreach and retain students of color. Today it provides access and support services to underrepresented students (CSUN Division of Academic Affairs).

7 The United States makes up approximately 4.4% of the world’s population (United States Census Bureau “U.S. and World Population Clock”) but almost 20% of the world’s prison population (World Prison Brief).
was limited. A group of students and faculty members from Chicana/o Studies and an EOP professor attended a vigil held for Quinten in front of Twin Towers in June 2018. The students that participated were part of the Revolutionary Scholars Project, a space students and faculty helped establish in 2017 to support formerly incarcerated students and students affected by the incarceration of loved ones. Chicana/o Studies faculty, students from Revolutionary Scholars, and I organized a memorial for Quinten held on 5 November 2018. It afforded the campus community an opportunity to remember Quinten, mourn, and discuss the conditions that led to his premature death. People remembered him as generous, loving, and intellectually curious. He was majoring in Public Health and wanted to become a nurse to care for his family and to help others. On 12 March 2019 Revolutionary Scholars organized an event to commemorate Quinten’s life and death, “Quinten’s Life Matters: Refusing to Forget and Celebrating Life,” which was another opportunity for the campus community to reflect on the meaning of Quinten’s death. Most recently, on 17 February 2021, we held a virtual remembrance, “Remembering Quinten Thomas: The Fight for Justice Continues,” that provided the community a space to remember Quinten so that his memory grounds the work that we do.

Throughout my efforts to remember Quinten, students, staff, and faculty in Chicana/o Studies (and other departments) collaborated with and supported me. We developed a memorial exhibition for Quinten along our department’s hallway, which functioned as a tool to educate the community about Quinten’s death and the death of David Josiah Lawson, a Humboldt State University student who was called the n-word as he was stabbed to death on 15 April 2017. The memorial is a form of solidarity. On Tuesday, 12 February 2019, as I stepped out of class for a few minutes, I came across Saharra, the mother of Quinten’s one year-old daughter. This was the first time she visited the memorial and as I called her name, she turned and we hugged and cried. She shared how depressed she was because fighting for justice for Quinten is so overwhelming, and how appreciative she was of our efforts at CSUN. On 21 February 2019 I was part of an event, Black History Month: #justice@CSU, which engaged the question of what safety and justice mean for Black students in the CSU. Charmaine Lawson, David Josiah Lawson’s mother, and Anthony, his younger brother, were participants. After the event they walked over to the memorial exhibition; seeing David Josiah included had a tremendous impact on both.
As a Chicana/o Studies professor, I refuse to forget Quinten and David Josiah and I engage in knowledge production around their deaths inside and beyond the classroom. The abolitionist dialogues that I attempt to generate center on envisioning a world where people of color are not made vulnerable to such violence and premature death. I ask what would a world where someone’s freedom and life are not contingent on others’ unfreedom and death look like? What transformative change is necessary, and how do we create such change? I believe that the most important role of higher education is to provide the imagination for a better world and the skills to create it. I became a professor because I wanted to offer my students the life-changing and life-affirming vision that my Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies professors gave me. Chicana/o Studies at CSUN created a space where I can engage in abolitionist praxis that urges us to create the relationships and institutions that make violent spaces such as prisons obsolete.

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Reflections on the Political Attacks against Chicanx and Ethnic Studies

Stevie Ruiz and Long Bui

Fifty years ago, the longest student led strike in U.S. history took place, forever changing the color of the ivory tower in higher education. In 1968, the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State College fought with school administrators, taking over and occupying their offices for months to challenge what they saw as the Eurocentric bias in higher education (Acuña 2011). The result of this hard-won fight was the first College of Ethnic Studies with a social justice-oriented curriculum that emphasized the struggles and experiences of oppressed people of color.

While academic disciplines from anthropology to sociology were founded by white male academics, ethnic studies remains the first to be founded exclusively on student voices and activism with emphasis on historically underrepresented communities and “collective knowledge” about race, colonialism, indigenous displacement, women’s exploitation, homophobia, and immigrant exclusion. These are issues that are still alive with us in the present day. Despite the end of formal segregation in education under the case Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, the appeal of ethnic studies continues to ring across the halls of academia as sign that there is intellectual and social segregation at work, and why there needs to be a greater push for an inclusive learning environment that reflects the changing demographics of the country and the population of college students. The University of California predominantly serves middle-class whites and Asians, reflecting entrenched hierarchies, while the California State University system serves overwhelmingly brown and black working-class

1 Stevie Ruiz is assistant professor in Chicana and Chicano Studies at the California State University, Northridge. Long T. Bui is assistant professor in Global & International Studies at University of California, Irvine.
students. At California State University, Northridge (CSUN), half the student population is Hispanic/Latino but they make up only a fifth of the faculty, which remains overwhelmingly white (more than double the percentage of white students).²

In this context of inequality, ethnic studies practitioners face cutbacks as well as blowbacks by administrators unwilling to both teach race and confront institutional racism. Despite powerful calls for a more democratic learning system and greater emphasis on diversity on college campuses today, ethnic studies programs in existence endure constant political pressure and budget cuts by university administrators. This despite a growing spread of popular subdisciplines like Asian American Studies, Chicano/a Studies, African American Studies, and Indigenous Studies. Here, a focus on recent events affecting Chicana and Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge—the largest department of its kind in the country—brings attention to the close relationship between the tenuousness of ethnic studies and the precarity of U.S. higher education.

In 2017, Chancellor Timothy White of the California State University system issued executive orders 1100R and 1110 (hereafter referred to as EO 1100R and EO 1110) as efforts to streamline general education code. Under the banner of student success to allegedly increase graduation rates, Chancellor White issued these two mandates which would have severe consequences for cultural studies departments such as Ethnic Studies, Women’s Studies, and Queer Studies (Watanabe 2018). After weeks of walkouts, boycott and divestment led by CSUN students against its administration and the Chancellor’s Office, in October of 2017 CSUN’s faculty senate voted in favor that the students not comply with EO 1100R and EO 1110 because of their detrimental impact upon their education. The Department of Chicana/o Studies responded swiftly and forcibly, inspired by the groundwork of student organizers (all of this happened during a time when California’s Governor Brown rejected the mandatory implementation of ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum).

The controversy at CSUN resonates with previous activities in Arizona years past. Most recently, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Arizona’s 2010 Ethnic Studies Law SB-1070 violated the constitutional rights of Mexican-American students. In Arizona, conservative legislators claimed Tucson School District’s Ethnic Studies curriculum
promoted ethnic chauvinism, ruining the image of the founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Attacks made against Mexican-American Studies in Arizona are connected to the colorblind policies promoted by CSU Chancellor Timothy White. Comparable in their impact, each policy is intent on diluting the mission and integrity of Chicana/o Studies. Content management by decreasing demand of Chicana/o Studies courses means Chicanx students have less access to information that relates to their racialized experiences. When high school students are denied access to this content, it makes it easier to further deny them once they reach college age because they have not been exposed to ethnic studies material. Most students that take classes in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN express their disappointment in being denied a critical education early on and now even in college. Such life affirming responses that students share in Chicana/o Studies classrooms speaks to the mission we hold dear as a department.

Courses on the nonwhite experience are rarely offered as a mandatory or even elective part of the General Education curriculum, while ethnic studies professors are often censored for speaking directly to the issues of the times. Brown and Black students are ghettoized and maligned, despite the use of their bodies for boosting school statistics. What happened in Arizona is happening all over, and racist and nativist voices claim that youth of color fighting racism are the race-baiters, effectively shutting down any form of critique. When Chicanx and African American students at UC San Diego in 2010-2011 fought hard to make reforms after witnessing intense racism on the campus, they were labelled “uncivil” rabble-rousers by faculty and administrators but not the fraternity members who had sparked protest by having “Compton Cookout” blackface parties.

In the end, the cascade of student voices will not stop. In 2015, student protests rolled across forty campuses, including top tier private schools like Wesleyan University and Pomona College, demanding more ethnic studies courses to the chagrin of university heads (New York Times 2015). These were the precursors to later student protests demanding removal of offensive names, statues, and monuments of racist leaders of yesteryear. In these institutions of privatized higher learning, where there is an open curriculum and encouragement of non-traditional learning, students still fight for more anti-racist seminars and hiring of faculty of color. In all these places, students have been met with open resistance or passive indifference by administrators and
faculty who might not see the value of such programs. In an age of neo-Nazi revivalism and white nationalism, it is not an understatement to say that when students simply demand classes about race and racism that help teach them about their attacked identities or how to confront white supremacy, resistance to this effort makes opponents complicit enablers in the violent terrorist organizations and xenophobic ideologies currently besieging this country and other territories. Despite the liberal pretense of college as a pure place of learning, where highly educated professors are mostly liberal and open-minded, ethnic studies remains the most maligned discipline, as it poses a real political threat to those (half-hearted) advocating for mere diversity and numbers rather than widespread change and perhaps revolution.

At CSUN, Chicana/o Studies stood in solidarity against EO 1100R and EO 1110 policies that eroded the health and survival of Ethnic Studies departments on campus and contribute to the under-education of students of color. Chicana/o Studies intentionally built coalitions with departments that include Communication Studies, History, Deaf Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, Central American Studies, Asian American Studies, Africana Studies, American Indian Studies, and Queer Studies because we felt strongly that racial justice requires that Chicana/o students and faculty understand race and racialization between communities. Built upon the intersections between race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation, faculty like Gabriel Gutiérrez, Martha D. Escobar, Marta López-Garza, Rosa RiVera Furumoto, Vilma Villela, and ourselves embrace models of Chicana/o Studies that align itself with other communities of color, queer communities, and those seeking gender equality because we see our struggles in relationship to one another. When in solidarity, students and faculty built a stronger sense of community on campus with one another that allowed them to network in ways that undermined false antagonisms that are perpetuated by those who seek to divide coalition among historically disenfranchised communities. Built by a history of coalition between students of color, the Chicana/o Studies department has historically placed the experiences of Chicanx communities in conversation with indigenous peoples, African diasporic communities, and Asian American experiences. In this way, Chicana/o Studies is a stomping ground for comparative and relational work that seeks to embrace a comparative model of ethnic studies.
Detractors think ethnic studies displaces the contributions of Western civilization and, by default, replaces white people. This is not true, but it is in fact a call for a better, more accurate and truly global education. In his book *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation*, Gary Okihiro traces the birth of ethnic studies to the decolonizing movements of the mid-twentieth century, and discusses its cooption or dissipation by institutional forces, even though ethnic studies strike at the core of humanistic learning:

To clear the deck, Third World studies is not identity politics, multiculturalism, or intellectual affirmative action. Third World studies is not a gift of white liberals to benighted colored folk to right past wrongs; Third World studies is not a minor note in a grand symphony of U.S. history…Third World studies is about society and the human condition broadly; Third World studies is about the United States in its entirety and its place in the world (Okihiro 1).

From recent calls in South Africa to make the curriculum less Eurocentric to implementation of Black Studies in Ireland, ethnic studies constitutes a part of an international movement to decolonize a Western educational model that has still locked out historically disadvantaged groups. Canadian ethnic studies, for example, has become a leader in the field to tackle some of the most pressing issues about post-colonial and settler colonial contexts. Among them include indigenous sovereignty movements over land, color blind racism (amid claims of post-racism), and Black Lives Matter. Yet, such “unorthodox” education does not only mean picking up chants from the *United Farm Workers Movement* (Sí Se Puede or “yes we can”), but also learning some real difficult facts about America, such as the fact that a million Mexicans in the U.S. were deported in the 1930s due to the racial fallout of the Great Depression, and the fact that the U.S. has been central to initiating migration from Mexico, for example, through the federal Bracero Program that lasted from 1942-1964 and the North American Free Trade Agreement signed in 1994. Ethnic studies bring such matters into the foreground, re-envisioning traditional disciplines like literature, history, and even science, while showing students a pathway into academia beyond regular vocational careers.
The proven success of such programs cannot be denied in increasing test scores and graduation rates and motivating low-income students to love learning in an education system that ignores or even silences them. Enlightenment may be a hallmark of a liberal arts education, but empowerment is the basis of ethnic studies and Chicano studies. To suggest that black, brown, and red people have the same right to self-determination as white people is as radical—or even more so—now as it was back during the foundation of ethnic studies during the 1960s. This links intimately to the mission of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN to “provide students with an awareness of the social, political, economic, historical and cultural realities in our society…in order to offer a Chicana/o critique and perspective within the traditional disciplines…and to provide a multicultural and enriching experience to all students in the university.”

Despite all its challenges, the movement to establish ethnic studies endures. Oregon became the first state in the country to implement an ethnic studies curriculum for K-12, while California passed a law requiring it as an optional elective. These state-instituted efforts should be celebrated, because they give a voice to those traditionally silenced. Actor Danny Glover, a staunch supporter of ethnic studies, and former activist in the Black Student Union at San Francisco State in the 60’s says ethnic studies is not about dividing people but that it is “committed to creating a larger sense of democratic possibility in which everybody’s voice, culture, and history was honored and valued equally.” He goes on to say that “in attempting to do that we kept running into these institutionally constructed divides—that privilege some realities and marginalized others” (ibid).

One of the biggest criticisms is the lack of utility of a degree in ethnic studies for postgraduates in a tight job market and a time of skyrocketing student debt and tuition—things that disproportionately affect working-class students of color. But Glover and others believe ethnic studies allows for a revolutionary educational model that allows greater access for formerly colonized communities to education, because of its founding mission to teach them to understand their social position in an unequal segregated world, how their actual histories of success (i.e. the Haitian Revolution) have been erased, and how to address the structural inequality that impedes their life progress. In its 50th anniversary, the
Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN remains committed to providing access to low income historically marginalized communities. In this way, the faculty envision their research and teaching in practices to allow for equitable access for local communities who otherwise would not have the affordability, mentorship, or opportunities to obtain an undergraduate degree in higher education.

One cannot be something if one does not know who one is or where they came from. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, just 16% of professors at post-secondary institutions are historically underrepresented minorities, while close to 90% of full-time professorships are white (and male), even though white people are less than 70% of the population (National Center for Education Statistics). At CSUN, the argument is that students should be funneled into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Yet, the false divide and assumed wedge between ethnic studies and STEM is one that fails to address how STEM fields are (de)racialized and how ethnic studies is the bogeyman to blame for the failures of STEM fields to both attract black/brown students and help them achieve in the first place in contrast to ethnic studies’ long-time successes in helping students integrate/coordinate familial struggles with academic ones. The lack of mentorship and role models in STEM fields are a serious problem that undermines the professional pipeline and student retention, but ethnic studies is not the problem or the impediment. It is the solution. It is often the first window where students see themselves in the lesson plan as the main subjects rather than the objects of study by others; the first time they see a world where they fit in and where they can do something and be heard.

In an era of social crisis where white supremacy and nativism are on the rise, it seems we have turned back the clock to half a century ago when racism was more direct and overt and less coded. We need ethnic studies, and especially Chicana and Chicano Studies, which emerged from that time, more than ever to teach us why race still matters today and how we might unravel its grip on society. It will teach us how race is not just a black and white issue, how students and youth are the true teachers, and how community activism is the basis of true education. On the 50th anniversary of the field (and Chicana and Chicano Studies at CSUN), a time where activists are still asking and fighting the same things they have always faced—we ask everyone to reflect on where we have been, where we are stuck, and where we should all be heading.
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Gabriel Fernandez and Anthony Avalos lived in Antelope Valley communities—potential first-year CSUN students in the coming decade. They could have enrolled in my Chicana/o Studies 115 course, a first-year composition class, where I assign Chicano LGBTQ-themed material, like Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s noir page-turner, Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders (2006). However, I will never see either of their names on my rosters, as they are victims of familial violence motivated by homophobic hate.

Gabriel played with dolls. Anthony said he liked boys. They each suffered tortuous deaths as punishment for these transgressions. According to Garrett Therolf’s reporting on both cases in the 3 March 2019 edition of The Los Angeles Times, Gabriel’s parents cut and burned his genitals and made him eat cat feces and his own vomit; Anthony’s parents starved him and bludgeoned him to death. These murders represent a critical, if understudied, area of research. Jotería Studies, an LGBT-focused area of study born out of the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies’ (NACCS) Joto Caucus, recognizes the queerness of a working-class, Chicana/o reality and challenges its heteronormativity, especially the messages emanating from organized religion. Furthermore, Jotería Studies challenges the racism and classism of the White LGBT community, the misogyny that some gay

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1 The most (in)famous biblical injunctions condemning same-sex desire are the verses, Leviticus 18:22, stating “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination,” and Leviticus 20:13, declaring “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.” However, as Daniel A. Helminiak elucidates in his text, What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality (2000), contemporary Christians continue to decontextualize these verses to suit a reactionary political agenda.
men direct towards lesbians, and engages in solidarity with causes of social justice, particularly queer people living under repressive governmental regimes. Therefore, the Chicana/o Studies Department at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), must develop curriculum and programming including Jotería Studies as a means to center queer Chicanx experiences, narratives, and scholarship. The deaths of Gabriel and Anthony and countless other Chicanx LGBTQ+ persons and the work being conducted in Jotería Studies motivates me to produce scholarship bridging the chasm between the Chicanx and the queer. The murders of Gabriel and Anthony demand the interrogation of racialized non-normative gender roles and echo Gloria Anzaldúa’s assertion that gender roles constrict men more than women (84). Thus, I inquire: (1) What are the educational experiences of queer Chicano male undergraduates? (2) Why is Latinx LGBTQ-specific curriculum necessary for the further expansion of the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN?

Theoretical Framework/Methodology

Queer Critical Race Theory (Queer Crit), a branch of Critical Race Theory, centers the lives of queer people of color, including the fluidity of sexuality. Mistunori Misawa uses Queer Crit to ask similar questions in the article, “Musings on Controversial Intersection on Positionality: A Queer Crit Perspective in Adult and Continuing Education” (2010). They write, “When both these elements are combined [race and sexual orientation], can we still have dialogues about both without discounting the other?” (187-188). A Jotería epistemological standpoint demands that neither, nor the other factors of identity, be ignored. Misawa argues ’I find that I personally identify with queer crit theory and not queer theory because the former does not discount my racial identity and the latter does” (191). Misawa’s critique of queer theory is valid because of the field’s lack of analysis regarding race, class, and other components of identity that usually pertain to people of color, particularly Latinas/os, including language, accent, and immigration status. Queer Crit opens the door to begin an analysis on the educational experiences of queer people of color, and a Jotería epistemology focuses on the educational experiences of queer Chicanos. The lack of LGBTQ-specific courses in the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN continues to be motivation for my inclusion of queer Latinx content within my curriculum.
as a method of expanding the horizons of Chicanx and Latinx identities and experiences. Furthermore, exposing my students to LGBTQ content creates an inclusive space for LGBTQ students and educates heterosexual students to become allies.

I model this work after Dolores Delgado Bernal’s classic study on the participation of women in the East L.A. Blowouts, “Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research” (1998) and its follow-up, which she co-authored with Dolores Calderón, Lindsay Pérez Huber, María Malagón, and Verónica Nelly Vélez, “A Chicana Feminist Epistemology Revisited: Cultivating Ideas a Generation Later” (2012). In the former, Delgado Bernal argues for a Chicana feminist methodology that “encompasses both the position from which distinctively Chicana research questions might be asked and the political and ethical issues involved in the research process” (558-559). I apply Delgado Bernal’s Chicana feminist epistemology in my work to analyze the educational experiences of queer Chicano men; this research further provides for mentorship possibilities. The majority of my own mentors have been cisgender queer and non-queer women, both here at CSUN and in my doctoral program at a public research institution. Queer mentorship is something I am still searching for as a middle-aged queer Xicano, yet I am committed to providing queer mentorship to my current and future students.

I utilize the methodology of testimonio as described by Lindsay Pérez Huber. Through her research, Pérez Huber defines testimonio as, “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (644). Although Pérez Huber elides any mention of injustices based on sexuality or perceived sexuality, testimonio is the appropriate methodology to utilize in this research as it furthers the goals of an intersectional analysis. Other testimonios often occur in informal settings within office hours, class discussion, and after class. Several times, Chicano male students have disclosed their sexuality, or “come out,” to me and sought my emotional and academic support and guidance.

Findings

For this article, I conducted testimonios on three undergraduate queer Chicano men. Instead of using initials or some sort of random alias,
the participants and I co-created drag names. This is a rather easy but campy way to ease any tensions that may exist. Usually, the participant and I laugh at the names constructed by the following method: What is the name of your first pet? What is the name of the first street you lived on? The results are usually comical. As I expected, all three participants and I laughed when we came up with each of their drag names—Coco Laurel, Princess Solano, and Muñeca Alvoca. This method further established a rapport with my research participants. While the Chicana/o Studies faculty at CSUN who served on my thesis committee supported the content of my Master’s thesis, Constructing an Ofrenda of My Memory: An Autoethnography of a Queer Chicano (2006), the first thesis in our department to incorporate queer Chicano male identity, history, and literature—the department still neglects to provide institutional support for queer Chicanx and Latinx students. In my thesis, I applied the method of autoethnography to contextualize my experiences as a gay Chicano man within queer history and queer Chicano literature. In the years since my committee approved my thesis, several other Chicana/o Studies graduate students have written about the intersection of queer and Chicanx subjectivity.

Similar to my own background, the three participants—Coco Laurel, Princess Solano, and Muñeca Alvoca—are transfer students and come from working-class backgrounds, very similar to the student population of CSUN. These testimonios could apply to many students who have walked the halls of the first floor of Jerome Richfield Hall, which houses the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN, yet does not provide a home to its LGBTQ Chicanx and Latinx students by not offering any Latinx LGBTQ-focused courses. Although individual professors may assign LGBTQ material, this is insufficient when one instructor’s curriculum includes queer content and another’s syllabus may be devoid of LGBTQ material.

Like Gabriel, Anthony, and many students in our department over the years, Coco Laurel dealt with familial homophobia. Coco, thirty-five years old, grew up in the San Fernando Valley and attended public schools. Coco was sick as a baby, and did not enter kindergarten until he was seven years old. He received a lot of extra attention because of his medical condition, which, according to Coco, shaped future experiences, “I was already kind of like ‘other-ized’ [chuckle] in that sense where, like, I, I, you know, I wasn’t allowed to participate in, like… physical activities. Um, but I, I excelled in, um, like, read—I loved
reading.” He has three older sisters, who all experienced institutional racism during their education. They taught Coco to speak English fluently. An opportunity arose for Coco when he entered the sixth grade. He attended a Theater Fine Arts magnet school in Pacoima. According to Coco, the school was very diverse, as many urban children were bused in. “It was basically… this little valley school, which was still a barrio and, like, but there was, like, white kids. That was the first time I ever socialized with white kids. On the weekends, everyone in my neighborhood treated me differently. I was able to take all these advanced classes and classes like dancing and singing. They [the neighborhood kids] had probably pretty boring curriculums, so I got treated differently around home. That’s when I started feeling homophobia. I had a junior high teacher [tell] my mom I was gay. But [it] changed my entire educational experience. And my entire experience at home. The most homophobic experience was at home.” Gabriel and Anthony would commiserate with Coco.

Coco experienced a racist incident in elementary school. He was asking his teacher about college and becoming a doctor or a teacher. His teachers respond, “Oh. You want to be a doctor? That’s like twenty years of college. You don’t… you can’t afford that… Oh, you want to be a teacher? That’s like ten years of college.” The teacher suggested he go to a trade or vocational school. During high school, however, Coco had a Chicana friend who lived in San Fernando and whose parents and siblings were college-educated. This friend and her family encouraged Coco to apply for college.

Later in high school, a queer friendly counselor worked at Coco’s high school and formed an unofficial queer support group. Coco was exposed to queer publications, like Out and The Advocate, and to queer films, such as Paris is Burning. This was instrumental for Coco. At this time, he also started to read gay tween literature, such as Hey Joe. However, even though Coco had these resources at school, there was a lot of bullying at his high school, “I mean, there was bullying. I had a friend who was effeminate and he really took it more than I did. I was really good at defending myself. He got beat up, but I didn’t really have to deal with too much of that. And I was ditching all the time.” What complicated this matter was an incident when a white gay faculty member engaged in racial micro-aggressions towards Coco. Ultimately, Coco dropped out of high school, attempted community college, but did not return to school until his early thirties. However, with his
partner’s support, Coco is graduating and planning to apply to graduate school.

The next participant is Princess Solano, a twenty-seven-year-old from the Bay Area. He is a third-generation Chicano. His grandmother attended secretarial school in Mexico, and his mother was several units short of earning a Bachelor’s from San Francisco State University. His mother moved him to another high school because he had always been the “fat, awkward, chubby kid who got picked on a lot.” Princess then went to a high school that was majority white and much more affluent.

“I was always the Mexican. Even though I was the really light skinned, and my Spanish was always choppy… You know I was always the Mexican—I remember one time in class… our professor—it was a psychology course, too… I remember the professor called me out and tried to get me to translate something. I didn’t have a problem, but it was just because I’m the only Spanish surname in here that obviously I’m assumed that I know it?”

Princess was somewhat out in high school. He identified as bisexual because he believed that was better than being gay, “My mom will still love me. But once I turned eighteen I had really looked back, I go, ‘Oh, shit… I’m lying to myself. Let’s be honest.’ I was really gay [laughter]… And even though the Bay Area’s a lot more liberal… the homophobia still exists.” Achieving a higher education was an important goal in Princess’ family. However, unlike his siblings, he did not enter directly into a four-year university. He attended a community college until circumstances forced him out, “And, so my brother and the other two…and the one youngest behind me—because I’m technically the middle of all five—they all went to four years [colleges].” I’m the only one that went to community college and, ‘lived’ there for like, six years [chuckles]. Before they actually—they kicked me out! Community college kicked me out! [chuckles] They said I had too many units and my financial aid was running out. So, I was, like, oh, so I guess I have to leave… I’m actually glad I didn’t go to a four-year right away. I think it would’ve been a waste of time because… I don’t think… you know, eighteen-year-old Princess Solano is different than where I’m right now. And I’m glad I took my time because I didn’t know what I wanted to do.”

Even though Princess did not attend a university right out of high school, he had attained a high level of literacy. Princess developed a love of reading because of a disdain for sports, “Why I also think it also
had to do with, I don’t know if this makes sense, be me being, queer. I always felt like that had a lot to do with me reading, because I never wanted to participate in sports. Never wanted it… do all those, kind of, extracurricular activities. I was just more content being at home and reading. And my mother really forced reading on me. During the summer, my mother used to give me a list—’you have to read this.’ So, I would read a lot during the summer, and… I just enjoyed it.” Clearly, Princess transgresses traditional gender roles for young Chicano men; therefore, the college campus should be a respite for him and other queer men, not another space where they must fracture their identities. The Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN, unfortunately, is not such a space where queer Xicanx students can feel whole. Just as the first Chicana feminists created space within the discipline to address the intersection of gender issues with white supremacy and capitalism, queer Xicanx instructors must queer heteronormative spaces to construct a more inclusive department.

Princess credits his now ex-partner for matriculating to a four-year university. I mentioned to him that he could easily have been one of those students who never transfer, and he agreed. I asked him what gave him the impetus to transfer to a four-year university. What is interesting is that he did not ask for any assistance regarding the transfer process, “My mother, even though she’s always been supportive of me, educationally, she even told me when I was in community college, she gave up on me. Because she said I have been there too long. And she’s like, ‘Yeah, I gave up. I didn’t think you weren’t gonna go anywhere.’ I was, like, oh, that was great. They even called me the professional student. Ass. They’re jerks. And then, you know, I don’t, it was just kind of this innate feeling that was just, like, just do something. Just try. And so, I remember I looked into the application [process] myself. I didn’t visit the career center, college center. I did it myself. I think it just has to do with my upbringing that I’ve always been… you can do it yourself. I’m not afraid to go find an answer myself. So, I really did it and… and, you know, I filled out my applications all by myself. I wrote my personal statement all myself. I did a lot of it all on my own.” Princess will be graduating with a double major and plans to apply to several graduate programs.

The final participant, Muñeca Alvoca, had a different trajectory than Coco or Princess. Muñeca is twenty-four years old, from the San Diego county area, and lives with dyslexia. His mother is from Mexico, and
his father is fourth generation Chicano. His schools placed Muñeca in special education courses. His father demanded the school teach him how to read when he was in elementary school. Muñeca did not develop the same love for reading that Coco and Princess did, understandably. However, one of his high school teachers advised Muñeca to attend college. Muñeca responded that he was not college material. He believed his disability prevented any chance of attending college. “But it wasn’t until my twelfth grade teacher who made me go to college and, her name was Señora Yaden. She was the first Mexican woman I ever had as teacher. She told me, ‘Mi’jo, necesitas ir al escuela.’ ‘¿Porque? Va a ser muy difícil para mí.’ ‘No, debes aprender en el community college.’ At first, I didn’t know community college existed. And, my GPA, when I graduated from high school was a 2.7… the education that I did not gain from K-12, I got it, basically, in community college.”

Now, Muñeca is an avid reader and dedicated student.

Muñeca did not recognize his homoerotic desires until he attended college. “I felt like once I [was able to manage] my disability, until I got to [a four-year university], that’s when I started to discover my sexuality. I overcame one challenge in my life. But, there was another challenge that I didn’t really focus on that was dormant, but I knew it was there… Now being at a [four-year university] and coming from a very conservative family, from San Diego, a red county and coming here to Los Angeles, it’s very liberating. You can be who you are. I felt my sexuality was my next chapter of the struggle of my identity.” Muñeca, unfortunately, is a victim of racism and body shaming. When he visited a West Hollywood gay bar, he was told, “Get the fuck out of here, fat ass. You don’t belong here. We don’t want no brown pigs here. You need to get the fuck out of here.” These comments demonstrated to Muñeca the importance of intersectionality for queers of color, “Looks. Appearance. It’s, Americanization; I call it Queerization. You have to be the Anglo queer to be recognized. We [brown queers] desire to be the Anglo queer.” Muñeca is entering his senior year and is planning to apply to graduate school.

Conclusion

For Coco, Princess, and Muñeca, their jotería allowed them to better navigate the academy given their traits that usually impede success—
first generation college-student, non-traditional transfer student, living with a learning disability, and Latinx. Because their particular Chicana/o Studies Department supported their openness regarding their jotería, all three learned to express their queer identities healthily and proudly. Although the genesis of the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN is rooted in the revolutionary ethos of the late 1960s, I am hesitant to declare if Coco, Princess, or Muñeca would feel as liberated at CSUN within Chicana/o Studies without any signs of substantive or institutional support. This support is key, especially if their biological families harbor or display blatant homophobic and transphobic attitudes. In the second chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, one of Anzaldúa’s students believed homophobia meant the “fear of going home” (20). For Gabriel Fernandez and Anthony Avalos, they lived in constant fear of their own families. Their non-normative developing masculinities transformed their homes to houses of horrors. To create a semblance of “home” for its LGBTQ students and to expand its radical spirit by honoring the memories of Gabriel and Anthony, our department must develop LGBTQ-specific programming and curriculum. I was fortunate to encounter supportive cisgender, non-queer women in our department, yet representation matters. Xicanx LGBTQ students must see themselves reflected in their mentors, in their faculty, and in the departmental course offerings, in the chance that faculty in our department find queer Xicanx students like Gabriel and Anthony on future rosters.

**Works Cited**


Pedagogical Meditations on Directing Mexican Folk, Latin/o/a/x Pop, and Mariachi El Matador Music Ensemble Clubs

Peter J. García

Looking back on the past decade of teaching music students at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), one of the most rewarding duties for me has been working closely with Chicanx, Mexicanx and Latinx student musicians. As part of my service to the university and departments of Chicana/o Studies and Music, I have served as academic faculty advisor for the Mexican folk and Latin/o music ensembles and the most recent Mariachi El Matador student club. This chapter highlights some of the shifting identities and musical and gender politics I have witnessed and pedagogical challenges that I have experienced in my role as faculty advisor. The shifting name changes and diverse musical styles performed by the groups reflect much of the changing demographics and student diversity among Chicanx, Latinx, Mexican and mixed brown students of color on campus.

Much promotion, recruitment, rehearsal and time management is required, especially in helping students develop a culturally relevant and musically meaningful experience that allows them to learn, perform, and re-discover Mexican, Latin American, Caribbean and/or U.S. Latinx folk and popular music and culture. The Mariachi El Matador club offers an extra-curricular performing ensemble, which attracts diverse students, especially Latinx talented student musicians. The club meets weekly and typically rehearses twice a week for approximately three to four hours throughout the semester. Sometimes practice lasts up to five or six hours depending on the type of show, concert or gig. Although it is a volunteer organization, I am amazed that it comes together each year with minimal effort on my part. While student membership fluctuates in numbers from one year to the next, students have committed in keeping the various Mexican, Latin/o and Mariachi clubs going for over ten years. Students do not receive academic credit
and the commitment in time, energy, and dedication required is indeed demanding, but the ensembles offer opportunities to perform in several annual campus cultural events, world music concerts, and community festivals and farmers’ markets. The diverse musical leadership and unique visions for the groups have transformed the CSUN Mexican, Latin/x and mariachi clubs over the years as a response to students’ musical diversity, collective creativity, and identity/gender politics. Today, Mariachi El Matador club offers CSUN students creative opportunities for musical expression while serving the surrounding San Fernando Valley communities and greater CSUN campus.

Begun in spring 2010, the CSUN Mexican Music club was founded by Abraham Herrera and Efrain Arellano. Several music majors were determined to play their own original arrangements of Mexican folk music tunes and vocal harmonic covers of popular Mexican Trío groups on campus and the club needed a faculty adviser. These students asked me to serve as musical co-director, performing musician and club manager. I accepted the opportunity as it allowed me to continue rehearsing and playing guitar, guitarrón, clarinet and saxophone. The CSUN Mexican Music club’s debut performance was for the opening of an art exhibit at the Oviatt Library and soon after, we were asked to play for a solemn memorial service for Karin Duran, librarian and instructor in Chicana/o Studies, who passed away on 11 June 11 2010. The next year, Elizabeth Gutiérrez and Luis Rodriguez invited us to perform at their wedding ceremony on 16 April 2011 at Our Lady of Lourdes in Northridge. The following year, Nicholas “Nick” M. Medina stepped up to direct the club. Nick was a Ronald E. McNair and Sally Casanova Pre-doctoral scholar and was completing a double major in Chicana/o Studies and Music Breadth Studies. Nick renamed the club and the CSUN Latin/o Music Ensemble made a huge splash performing at the College of Humanities Commencement on Wednesday, 23 May 2012 playing popular cumbias and pasodobles. Under Nick’s leadership, the ensemble/club grew to fifteen musicians and we performed at the annual Día de Los Muertos and for President Diane F. Harrison’s welcome tardeada at Los Angeles Mission College. The club’s diversity reflected the multi-ethnic mixing and browning musical consciousness among diverse students of color with a serious interest in Latin/x popular, Mexican folk, and Chicano soul music on campus.

Jessica Suarez stepped up as musical director in 2013. She began recruiting mostly mujeres (female singers) and mariacheras shifting the
club’s identity and gender focus again back to Mexican mariachi music with emphasis on womxn performance. “Jessi” performed arrangements of boleros, huapangos, and rancheras and covers of Lola Beltran, Aida Cuevas, Linda Ronstadt, Selena Quintanilla, Paquita la del Barrio and Jenni Rivera. The next year, Jessica auditioned and was hired by Cindy Shea playing violin and singing with Mariachi Divas at Disney California Adventure Park. Jessica completed her M.A. in Chicana/o Studies (2015) and as part of her culminating experience, she performed a solo mariachi recital at the Chicano House, a community space on campus, in addition to completing an entire written thesis chronicling her professional fame, educational path and remarkable musical journey. At the time of this writing, Jessica is busy touring, recording with Mariachi Divas and using her M.A. in Chicana/o Studies to further develop her musical leadership and outstanding mariachi talent.

The club shifted musical styles, identity and gender politics yet again under the leadership and direction of our next student leader, Lucas Carneiro (B.M. Guitar Performance 2016). Luke is a talented and creative Brazilian-American guitarist and music major who introduced the group to several of his own original arrangements including Cuban sones from the Buena Vista Social Club, Brazilian pop artists and styles like bossa nova, rock en Español, salsa, merengue, and bachata. That year, the club produced an outstanding studio recording and performed on campus at the annual Farmers’ Market, Día de los Muertos, and several Cinco de Mayo celebrations at local high schools.

In 2016, Alonso Rodríguez (B.M. Guitar Performance 2017) recruited mariachi musicians and renamed the ensemble once again. Mariachi El Matador continues playing traditional Mexican sones, jarabes, paso-dobles, boleros, rancheras, polcas, and huapangos. Pedro Bautista Ramirez (Guitar Performance major and Sally Casanova scholar B.M. 2017) stepped up as music director the following year and he now co-directs the mariachi while working towards his M.A. studies in Music. Carlos Carrasco completed his B.A. in History and Chicana/o Studies in 2018 and is also working on his M.A. in History. As the current maestro, Carlos has recruited several outstanding musicians from across campus, digitized the musical library, reorganized the Canvas archive and is taking the mariachi to another level of professionalism. Carlos’ musical involvement reflects his pride in his Mexican heritage. He grew up in Boyle Heights and has performed with Mariachi Sol de Mexico de José Hernandez. Most recently, Mariachi
El Matador performed at the annual Miccailhuitl or Día de los Muertos 2019 at CSUN and at the time of this writing, they are preparing for the Fiesta of Guadalupe and Las Posadas.

It is important to contextualize our Chicano and Chicana students as influenced simultaneously by postmodern mestizaje, ongoing decolonial turns to Latinidad, and resurgent radical Mexicanidad in the United States. Latinx, Mexicanx and Chicanx now represent the largest growing ethnic communities after non-Hispanic Whites. Latinos/as/xs comprise close to 18 percent of the U.S. population, approximately 50 million people. CSUN has close to 40 thousand students and 44% of the campus identified as non-White Hispanic and/or Latino/a/x in 2016. The majority of our students are of Mexican and Central American descent, first generation Mexican-American and many more are emergent mixed brown and fusing their identities, hybrid racial and ethnic identities with several clever labels including: Blaxican, Blatinx, and Mexipinx. Proud of their bicultural heritages, students often identify as Mexican-Peruvian, Salvadoreña/o-Guatemalteca/o, Chicanx-Cuban, or Chicana-Boriqua, refusing to emphasize or choose one parent’s race, ethnicity, or nation over another. As part of the Title V legislation, CSUN was designated a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) intent to “expand educational opportunities for and improve the academic attainment of Hispanic students: and expand and enhance the academic offerings, programs, quality, and institutional stability of colleges and universities that are educating most Hispanic college students and helping large numbers of Hispanic students and other low-income individuals complete postsecondary education” (Dabbour 2008). While interest in and support for the CSUN Mexican folk and Latin/o Music clubs and Mariachi El Matador exists, there remains obvious need for additional support and development of further Mexican, Chicanx, Latinx folk, popular and mixed brown fusion music making opportunities for students of color.

The CSUN Mexican and Latin/x music clubs are negotiating cultural hybridity and postmodern mestizaje through diverse musical performance of original folk and covers of popular repertoires. However, the students do not always follow strict ensemble protocols, inflexible gender and cultural codes, political orthodoxy or over-determined identity politics. Moving from paso-dobles to popular cumbias is itself an empowering form of musical “code switching,” expressing inter-cultural and transnational identities shifting across Mexican
elite, Chicanx folk, and U.S. Latinx popular musical geographies and aesthetic borders. The audible browning sonic mixtures are similar to what Chicana borderlands writer Gloria Anzaldúa described as “haciendo caras” (making faces) (1989). The Mexican folk, Latin/x music clubs and Mariachi El Matador allow brown and mixed students of color to re-imagine themselves through transnational musical performance and culturally relevant, meaningful experiences. Students are creatively exploring postmodern mestizaje, re-discovering sonic geographies, and re-arranging decolonial aesthetics through their musical voices and instruments and expressing diverse brown and mixed consciousness through their creative voices and musical bodies. Seen, or rather, heard in this way, music is experienced as an empowering way of expressing soul and brown feeling that empowers students in the process of co-creation through relevant musical expression on campus. Postmodern mestizaje certainly challenges the European (colonial), patriarchal and “classical tradition” with its tired western canons and dead, white “great composers.”

Mixed brown popular fusion music often heralds heated debates because it is not always certain what we are dealing with when listening to Mexican, Chicanx or Latinx folk and popular music and cultural expression. Musicians joining the music clubs need not identify exclusively as Mexican, Latin/x, or Chicano/a. Membership and participation requires open minds, artistic ears, creative hearts and brown souls allowing us to move musically within the diverse and browning third world beats, Latin and Mexican rhythms and mixed intercultural Chicanx fusions heard across the CSUN campus borderlands. Our diverse musical sounds readily share, mix, exchange, co-create, re-arrange and express transnational melodies and diverse harmonies, shifting musical affect most familiar with our students. This in turn helps build much needed inter-ethnic coalitions and encourages political solidarity across color, class, and intersecting gender and sexual orientations, especially among mixed brown students of color.

Chicana/os are themselves collages—an amalgam of Indian, African, Spanish, Mexican, Latin/o and Anglo elements. According to Curtis Marez, “their cultural products are also mixtures and fragments from diverse traditions” … “collage is thus the stylistic corollary of mestizaje, the ‘impure’ status of racial and decentered national mixtures” (122). Over the past fifty years, the CSUN department of Chicana and Chicano Studies has offered courses in and promoted and encouraged Mexican
musical expression on campus. Founded in 1973 by Professor Fermín Herrera, Conjunto Hueyapan emerged and continues representing the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies in community events, conferences and concerts covering many facets of Mexican musical heritage: sones jarochos, sones huastecos, sones de mariachi, sones abajeños, banda, norteño, marimba, salterio, rondalla, huapangos, pirecuas, boleros, corridos, canciones clásicas and canciones rancheras” (CHS Benefit Concert). Professor Evertto Ruíz also leads Mariachi Aztlán, a professional ensemble founded in the late 1960s through the sponsorship of the Chicano Studies Department, and it now includes alumni. Seeking fresh and open-ended tags that portray us in our brown complexities and non-binary potentialities, “certain musics,” cautions Rafael Pérez-Torres, “may go as far as invoking a simulacrum of Latino music,” however, “with the growing success of Rock en Español, the increased exchange of musical commodities across national and cultural borders, the proliferation and diversification of music and music video programming in all countries and continents, the term ‘Chicano music’ itself seems somewhat antiquated” (332).

On 15 July 2018, NBC News journalist Dennis Romero announced an emergent “Chicano Renaissance” occurring in Southern California as Mexican-American millennial youth appear to embrace the term. Romero reports how “on streets and college campuses, in fashion and in art, there’s renewed energy around a term associated with 1960s civil rights and farm worker activism” (2018). According to Romero, “the recharged movement is a metaphorical safe space for young Mexican Americans and Latinos who feel battered not only by President Donald Trump’s politics and rhetoric regarding south-of-the-border immigrants but also by a far right emboldened by his rhetoric” (2018). Romero’s article points to Los Angeles indie band Chicano Batman and argues that it is “exposing masses to the movement through a current national tour. It reached the heights of the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival in 2015.” For Romero, “Chicano Batman has put the word out there [sic] is something that’s not only political but something that’s hip and edgy” (2018). Chicano Batman released their debut album on 28 May 2010 and the band expresses their strong attachment and sense of belonging to East Los Angeles through music regarded as “el oro del barrio”- the collective wisdom of the people.

Enrique Lamadrid explains la querencia as a “deep-rooted attachment to place” (xiii). The term combines the words “querer” (to love) with
“herencia” (heritage), which literally translates to “love of heritage.” Querencia helps us reveal hidden transcripts and hear brown urban soul in Chicano Batman’s “hip and edgy” sound, political message and cosmopolitan beat. The band offers musical re-discovery by confirm(ing) our student’s own experiences and mixed musical heritages and multiculturalism while “being acknowledged as people of consequence” (see Davis-Undiano. 6). I am proud to be a part of Chicana and Chicano Studies and its solid record of social justice scholarship, greater Mexican music pedagogies and commitment to community struggle and political activism. The CSUN Mexican folk and Latin/x music clubs and Mariachi El Matador reflect the “impure” status of racial, gendered and decentered transnational beats and shifting brown rhythms among diverse mixed people of color. Our cultural renaissance, identity politics and simultaneous decolonial turns to Latinidad (see Milian 2013), MeXicanidad (see Fregoso 2003), and resurgent Xicansima (see Velasco 2006) are symptomatic of Anzaldúa’s prophetic “new” mestiza consciousness articulated through the Greater Mexican musical borderlands. For Ramón Rivera-Servera, “the announcement of a second Latina/o arrival during the 1990s, made more spectacular by the frenzied coverage of the Latin music explosion and its spread into all aspects of corporate media, further consolidated the enduring and growing presence of the Latina/o population in the United States” (11). Meanwhile, a radical generation of Chicana feminists began replacing the “Ch” in the word “Chicana” with a capitalized “X,” challenging and expanding stereotypic, distorted, monolithic and tired notions of Mexican nationalism, toxic forms of Chicanismo, and inflexible mestizaje. Ana Castillo’s influential 2002 contention is that the word “Xicanisma” is one vehicle for allowing us to reclaim, she writes, “our indigenismo.” Engaging Stuart Hall’s notion of “imagined re-discovery” (see 1998, 1989), Russel Rodríguez reminds us that “it is important to understand that just as mexicanidad can be maintained, searched for, and desired by non-mexicanos, chicanidad is enhanced by the participation of many people, Chicanos and non-Chicanos alike” (349). While ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña further reminds us that “while the cultural economy of late capitalism was transforming the post-Chicano generation into a fragmented, heterogenous mass with a ‘decentered’ sense of ideological purpose,” (189), sociologist George Lipstiz argues that the Chicano Movement “was an effort to convince people to draw their identity from their politics rather than drawing
their politics from their identity” (79). These are the political stakes and academic challenges that lie ahead as we move forward within greater Mexican, Chicana/o and Latin/x Music Studies over the next half century.

**Works Cited**


From the Page, to the Classroom, to the Stage

MARÍA ELENA FERNÁNDEZ

This was supposed to just be my day job. I started teaching in the CSUN Chicana/o Studies Department in the late 1990s, thinking that it would be temporary, but it has turned out to be the centerpiece of my life. In the early 90s I left a grueling Ph.D. program that almost destroyed my spirit with only a Master’s degree in U.S. History and foreswore academia in favor of the artist’s life. I had discovered I was a writer.

I transitioned to working a job for only 30 hours a week and the rest of the time devoted to freelance writing, mainly for the LA Weekly, an alternative publication covering local politics and entertainment. I wrote about Latina/o culture, mostly music reviews and features on the burgeoning rock en español scene. As I ventured into writing poetry and monologues and performing them around the city, I thought that if I taught at the college level I could have flexibility with my free time on weekdays. When I learned there was an opportunity to teach in CSUN’s Chicana/o Studies department, I thought, “Perfect, here’s my meaningful day job with a flexible schedule, until I become a famous writer.”

Instead, much to my surprise, I fell in love with the work, elated to pass on the ancestral knowledge that had profoundly changed my life as an undergraduate. Like my students, it was the first time I learned about the grandeur of the Maya, which was the antidote to having grown up pounded by anti-immigrant rhetoric in the media. I also learned about the stark race, class and gender disparities in income and wages in the U.S. and received insight on their origins when I learned about racist policies like the Mexican repatriation movement in the 1930’s and scientific racism that reigned in the U.S. until the 1940s. This crucial information forever extracted the internalized doubts about whether we were to blame for our marginalization. Perhaps most empowering was gaining the language of feminist theory by women of color that for the
first time allowed me to analyze and understand the gender discrimination I fought against since I was a little girl. I can still remember the thrilling internal revolution I experienced when I first read Sandra Cisneros’ *House on Mango Street* (1983). The young protagonist, Esperanza, a Latina girl trounced by sexism just like me, pushed back her plate at the end of her meal refusing to remove it and wash it, just like a man. It was a revolution I had only fantasized about, and there it was on the page before my very eyes, and I gasped, inspired and in awe. To be able to pass all of this on to the young people in front of me every day, had me dancing out the classroom door at the end of each class period.

Since discovering my love for teaching, there have been many other lessons learned in the two decades I have worked in the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN. I learned that much to my dismay, the social and economic conditions for my students were very different than my experience at Yale University. At Yale our battle was surviving as just a handful of Latinx students, largely first generation from working-class backgrounds in an overwhelmingly white, upper middle-class and upper-class culture that made us invisible and alienated. We typically only worked 10 hours per week to supplement our financial aid. It was rare that a Latino student worked 20 hours per week, so we had the time to explore interests outside of classes and take advantage of the resources the university offered, or simply socialize with each other and process the unique and challenging experiences we were having.

In my classroom there are two thirds to three fourths Latina/os and the rest from the vast array of cultures and ethnicities represented in Los Angeles. When I began teaching, I was shocked and dismayed to discover that a significant percentage of students work 30 hours a week, sometimes 40 hours, as full-time students. And there were always a few who lived in South Los Angeles and commuted to CSUN on public transportation, a daily four to six-hour round-trip commute. Then there are those who live in South Los Angeles, work on the Westside and come to CSUN, easily an 80-mile triangle. I call them road warriors. I was dismayed and angry that my students could not enjoy the stage in life college offers, of having time to explore their interests, friendships and make self-discoveries outside of the classroom in their young adulthoods, like my classmates and I had.

There are burdens for faculty too, teaching at a state college. The institution’s lack of respect for our labor means that we teach 120-160
students every semester without any teaching assistants. Quickly, I learned that giving my lower division History of the Americas class two choices for research topics made for dreadfully boring grading, the hardest part of the job. I decided to create an assignment that asked students to write three generations of their family history. They are told to focus on one person each generation, including themselves and at least one family member who was responsible for their migration to the United States. Those who wanted to focus on their African American or Native American heritage wrote about an internal migration. After completing their family history, they had to research the immigration history from their family’s country of origin during the time their family migrated, integrate it into the family story and compare or contrast their family’s story with the larger immigration trends from that country.

Because the students are now adults, most family members are willing to tell them the truth about the hardships they experienced. Thus, students learn about their parents’ dangerous border crossings, such as hiding in trunks of cars, sometimes even on top of a motor of a truck, and children crossed by coyotes and delivered safely on the other side.

It has been a profound honor to bear witness to how my students transform as they learn about their parents’ and grandparents’ brave acts of survival and resistance: One of my Salvadoran students learned that his mother witnessed her activist mother killed by the army during the civil war (1980-1992). Another student told the story of his father facing his brother in a gun battle as they stood on opposite sides of the battlefield in the US-sponsored Salvadoran civil war. Both walked away.

Another student found out that her mother migrated to the U.S. from Mexico because a man in her community had kidnapped her to force her to be his wife. She escaped, but was so ashamed, that she migrated to the United States. Another student found out that the uncle she had never met because he died before her birth had been disappeared by Argentina’s military junta in the 1970s. By the end of their research, students always respond with admiration and gratitude.

“I didn’t used to get along with my mother, now I understand her.”
“I can’t believe my father crossed the border alone, he was younger than me! I have so much respect for him.”
“My mom only went to school until 4th grade. I feel so lucky to be in college now.”
Thanks to this assignment, I have learned about migrations not only from Mexico and other Latin American countries, but also from Armenia, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Iran, Ethiopia and so many other nations.

And I have learned so much from my international students. I ask them to choose a historical event that one of the generation’s in their family experienced. From them I discovered where Oman and the island of Mauritius are located. I learned about civil war in Sri Lanka, the experience of the Kuwaiti people of the Iraq invasion, and the one I cherish the most: learning about the 1990 Saudi Arabian women’s protest that banned women from driving. My student’s mother organized the protest and gathered over 40 women to drive around the capital of Riyadh.

Another profound moment of learning was in 2006. It was the 37th anniversary of the founding of the Chicana/o Studies department and my colleague Gerard Meraz and I met with students to discuss how best to commemorate. He suggested that a documentary be made and recommended Miguel Duran, a senior who was a film maker, to head the project. Gerry and I identified the founders and first cohorts of students and conducted interviews with them. This is how I learned that in 1968 Black and progressive white students at CSUN occupied the president’s office and succeeded in obtaining the agreement to establish Africana Studies and Chicana/o Studies. The administration later reneged and at a subsequent protest, had police ambush and target black students, beating and arresting them.

I learned about the massive student protest on 9 January 1969, defying the state of emergency declared by the university president that banned any such gatherings. It resulted in 286 arrests and a level of conflict that the faculty senate found unacceptable. This is how I learned the Chicana/o House was set on fire and while the first reaction was violent retaliation, cooler heads prevailed and a solemn and silent march was the response. This is how I learned that women’s voices were not at the leadership, with a rare exception, such as María Terán who served as co-chair of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan) in the early years of the department.

Every semester, the array of reactions to the documentary when I show it to my classes is filled with disbelief and inspiration:

“Professor, it’s amazing that they were our age and they did so much.”
“I can’t believe CSUN was so white back then!”
“I can’t believe it wasn’t safe to drive across Balboa because you would get racially profiled by police.”
“Professor, I can’t believe how they could get 100 people together for a protest in one hour and they didn’t have cell phones.”

Now I assign the documentary at the beginning of each semester so that students feel empowered when political challenges from the university or local or national politics arise.

Another very recent and deep change has been in my pedagogy in my upper division course Chicana/o History. Terribly alarmed by the shocking and blatant attacks since the 2016 general election against Latina/o immigrants and all other non-European groups that had direct effects on our students and their families, I knew that I had to change my teaching.

I realized it did not make sense to give my Chicana/o History students the same ten research topics that I had previously considered central to Chicana/o History. I realized I needed to focus on historical topics that paralleled or explained the antecedents of our current political crisis. I also felt it was imperative for students to research a contemporary issue and create a campus awareness project to educate their CSUN peers.

I changed about five of the research topics. For example, instead of a comparison of the construction of gender between the Aztecs and the Spanish, I asked students to research the rape culture during the Spanish conquest of Alta California, as well as contemporary rape culture and the rights and resources for survivors. One semester students created an installation, laying on a blanket on the lawn in front of the library, items that conjure up sexual assault on a college campus: a back pack, a bottle of alcohol, empty cups, a bra, etc and gave hand-outs with statistics explaining that 80% of sexual assault survivors know their assailant, that California law now sets the standard of consent as an affirmative “yes” from both parties, and gave resources for survivors both on and off campus.

One of the other topics students now research is the origin of mass incarceration with the 1855 California Vagrancy Act, originally called the Greaser Act that targeted Mexicans. They align this topic with research on contemporary mass incarceration. One group hung handcuffs on classroom doors in the hallway where the Chicana/o Studies Department is housed and above each one posted a sign giving a stark
statistic such as: The U.S. houses 4.4% of the world’s population yet has 22% of the world’s incarcerated population.

U.S. immigration laws have always been integral to the research topics, but now it is focused on the 1965 Immigration Act that attempted to end discrimination against non-European immigrants and is under attack by the Trump administration. During the spring 2019 semester the group who had this topic created a live installation, one of them dressed as Lady Justice with scales in hand, defending an immigrant from an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer. They stood frozen in dramatic positions standing on a bench in front of the library entrance, while the fourth member of their group handed out information on the importance of the 1965 Immigration Act and the constitutional rights of all who reside in the United States. It has been extremely gratifying to witness my students feel empowered by becoming experts on crucial topics they care about and then offer their expertise to their peers on campus.

While teaching was meant to be my means of support as a writer, it has now become the inspiration for my writing. My current project is the solo performance The Latinx Survival Guide in the Age of Trump, and centers on my experience teaching Chicana/o Studies during this age of attacks. It narrates my own and students’ responses to the anti-immigrant hostility and policies and the search for strength and inspiration from our culture and ancestors. The Chicana/o Studies Department has always offered me a political home, a place of refuge in an antagonistic dominant society, a place to exercise my deepest beliefs and contribute my most important ancestral knowledge to the next generation. And now my work in the classroom has merged with my work on the page and on the stage.
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