

College of Humanities Newsletter

Message from Humanities Dean Elizabeth A. Say



Elizabeth A. Say, Ph.D.
CSUN Alum 1981

At this season of the year, we are often encouraged to remember all the many blessings we enjoy and to also remember those who may not be as fortunate. As I look over this issue of the College of Humanities Newsletter, I recognize that here at CSUN we have both great riches and great need. Our riches come in the form of our outstanding academic programs, excellent faculty and staff, enthusiastic and motivated students, and dedicated volunteers and donors. This issue highlights the 15th anniversary of the Central American Studies program, the only such program in the country. Attending this celebration I was impressed by the commitment of faculty and students alike. That twin commitment was again in evidence at Lit Crawl LA: NoHo, where faculty and students from our Creative Writing program found voice. We also interview our illustrious Humanities alumnus William Covino, now president of sister campus Cal State Los Angeles, whose commitments to diversity and equal access reflect his own experiences as a first generation college student. And we recognize this year's Humanities Volunteer Service Awards recipients, devoted CSUN supporter Earl Greinetz and Chicana/o Studies grad Griselda Corona; their continued contributions most certainly enrich us.

Finally, Religious Studies and Philosophy grad Orlando Avila's story reminds us that great riches and great need may go hand-in-hand. Avila struggled to complete two degrees while fulfilling his responsibilities to his family. A generous donor made his dreams possible. As you reflect back on 2014, I encourage you to find ways to invest your time, talents, or treasures in the College of Humanities.

The Central American Studies Program Turns 15

Submitted by Professor Beatriz Cortez

In 1999 enthusiastic faculty and students launched the nation's first Central American Studies Program. Professors Douglas Carranza Mena and Beatriz Cortez would soon join this program. Housed in the College of Humanities, it remains the only North American program devoted to the interdisciplinary study of Central American cultures, ethnicities, experiences, and worldviews. On September 19 the program inaugurated a year of events commemorating its 15th anniversary. Professors Carranza Mena and Cortez reflect on this important milestone.



Central American Studies students at the 15th Anniversary event. From left to right: David Valenzuela, Karen Bonilla, Karen González, Carol Paniagua, Luzita Pineda, Benjamin Bivian, Brenda Moreno, Jessica Duran, Hayle Rudas

Dr. Beatriz Cortez: I got here when the program was about to be inaugurated. I was 29 years old and had recently graduated with a doctorate in Latin American literature from Arizona State University, and had just spent a year as an assistant professor in my first teaching job at Wayne State University in Detroit. I met Professor Douglas Carranza about a month before; he was then finishing his doctorate at the University of California in Santa Barbara, and we happened to participate in the same congress in El Salvador. CAS Turns 15 continues

Central American Studies Program Turns 15 - continued

Dr. Douglas Carranza Mena: I was hired a few months after that at California State University, Northridge, and soon we became colleagues and we realized that we had several things in common. The most important perspectives that we shared were our interests in interdisciplinary exploration of Central America, in the rights of Indigenous peoples, and our transnational experiences as immigrants. But what we did not share then was the most important thing that we share now: our program, and with it, the history of work, commitment, and friendships that allowed us to build it.

BC: The road to design the first B.A. in Central American Studies was a road that had not been traveled. But it was a road that cannot be traveled by two people alone, and our program would not be what it is without the participation of all the colleagues that are now part of it.

DCM: Yes, professors Celia Simonds and Freya Rojo — who have been here the longest — Linda Alvarez, Joe Wiltberger, and Gisela Lanzas, who have more recently joined us as full-time tenure-track faculty members, and all the lecturers who make numerous contributions to our program: Axel Montepeque, Jonathan Martínez, Maritza Fonseca, Leslie Rodríguez, Gretel Vera-Rosas, Jenny Donaire, Susana Marcelo, as well as Ronald Nibbe, who worked with us until the end of his life. Our program also has the support of a dedicated and talented Administrative Support Coordinator, Maria Castillo. In addition, we have the support of the members of our Interdisciplinary Program Committee: professors Teresa Williams-León (Asian American Studies), Rick Talbott (Religious Studies), Michael Love (Anthropology), and Gloria Melara (Computer Science).

BC: For us it is not only a job, but also a way to open up spaces and opportunities for our students, and our community. This makes a difference in the way each one impacts our program, our collective experiences, and that of our students. Each one of us has traveled a different path, crossed many borders, learned about different cultures, and excelled at a discipline in order to be here. I am proud to be part of this wonderful, diverse, interdisciplinary team of outstanding scholars and professionals.

DCM: Central American Studies is an emerging discipline. It is an interdisciplinary academic space that emphasizes the transnational character of Central American communities in the diaspora. The courses that fall under the category of Central American Studies offer a variety of perspectives and approaches, including the study of politics, gender, art, culture, identity, and literature with the diverse issues and worldviews relevant to Central American peoples, our communities, and their transnational reality.

BC: Also, our vision of Central American Studies questions the portrayal of the Central American identity as Hispanic. We seek to open spaces for the knowledge and understanding of Central America's diverse cultural and ethnic identities. Of course, one must also make a distinction between the nationalistic construction of identity with a foundation on an Indigenous distant past, and the Central American identity that our community's reality demands: one that is constructed by diverse cultural and ethnic Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean identities coexisting with the Latino and European consciousness not only in our distant past but also in our present, a present that is marked by its transnational context. It is in this transnational space that Central

American peoples battle for legalization and immigrant rights.

DCM: To further add to the problematic erasure of ethnic and cultural diversity in Central America, within the isthmus, there is a marked presence of nationalistic cultures. These follow the traditional modern construction of national identity based on territoriality, on the eradication of difference, on the formulation of a uniform national subject, and on the construction of the idea of national unity. The Central American identity functions best outside of the Central American territory. In spite of the nostalgia that the experience of immigration produces, and the tendency to present the nation and nationalism as the foundations of identity, for our discipline, it is fundamental to deconstruct nationalism



Group photo of the Central American Studies Program faculty and students at the 15th Anniversary event. Photo courtesy of Central American Studies

BC: Yes, it is a postcolonial positioning that is no longer affiliated to the colonial dimensions of a nation or a region, but to a more permeable and malleable understanding of this region and of the movements of its displaced peoples.

DCM: We are proud of our achievements and we look forward to 15 more years of growth, of success, and of imagining together the future of our transnational communities.

Humanities Alum and CSULA President William Covino Prioritizes Diversity in Education and Leadership

Submitted by President William A. Covino

In 2013 first-generation College of Humanities alumnus William Covino was appointed president of Cal State University, Los Angeles. Despite his packed schedule as he facilitates his institution's transformation from a quarter to semester system, President Covino kindly made time to answer several questions about what it means to be in a position to impact so many students whose challenges resonate with his own.

How does it feel returning to Los Angeles after all these years to helm a university that's so vital to its residents?

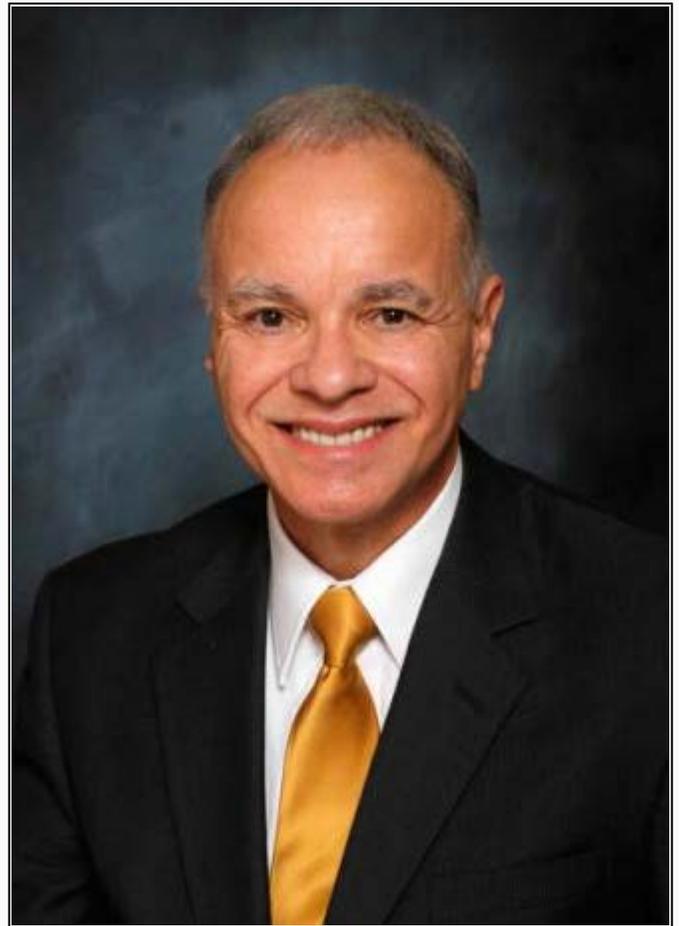
It's been a terrific homecoming, and a great opportunity to strengthen the ties between the university and the region we serve. And it's been a stroke of luck to be leading Cal State L.A. as we convert from a quarter calendar to a semester calendar, literally reinventing the university—its courses, programs, partnerships—with great energy and dedication from the faculty and staff.

So many of our students can relate to your roots as a first-generation college student who grew up in the San Fernando Valley and graduated Reseda High. What would you say to today's students who aspire to senior leadership roles?

I hope that all of our graduates will see themselves as leaders.

I have said repeatedly that great leaders are less interested in themselves than in the welfare of others. To emphasize this point, we have established the Center for Engagement, Service, and the Public Good at Cal State L.A., through which our students, faculty, and staff will have increased opportunities to serve the communities in which we live and work. Students who experience the value of public service and community service, and become involved in positive change, will become our future leaders. So my advice to aspiring leaders is, "Get involved."

I see that one of your stated central missions is to raise the profile of CSULA among area universities. Having attended UCLA and USC as well as CSUN—M.A. '75 English)—do you feel that you particularly resonate with



William A. Covino. Photo courtesy of Cal State L.A.

the CSU mission as a first generation student?

Absolutely. I remember juggling school and work, driving from classes at UCLA to teach accordion lessons in Granada Hills all evening, and working as a musician all weekend—bringing my books along to get some reading done on breaks. I was often exhausted, but also exhilarated. And I especially remember family dinners at which I'd talk excitedly about what I was reading and learning about. Some of my family nodded appreciatively, and others wanted to debate me about the value or truthfulness of this "college stuff."

You've progressed toward leadership roles at increasingly diverse campuses. Has diversity been a major driver in your career?

Without diversity, learning does not take place. I first discovered this as a graduate student, reading through the works of American rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke, who reminds us that we are each "one voice in a dialogue," and that it is only through both cooperation and competition with other voices—representing opposing ideas, different backgrounds and experiences, and new ways of seeing and understanding—that we can transcend our own limits and the limits of others. With this in mind, I have sought leadership opportunities that afford me the chance to embrace and enrich the value of diversity.

What do you believe are some of the advantages of attending CSULA or CSUN over more high-profile institutions in the area?

Southern California is notable for a number of fine universities. The CSUs are especially notable for the dedication of the faculty to excellence in both teaching and scholarship; the determination of diverse, largely first-generation students to transform their lives; and the tendency of our graduates to give back to their communities and neighborhoods. Eighty percent of our Cal State L.A. alumni live within 50 miles of campus, working to improve the quality of life for us all.

How did you choose English as your field of study?

One of my English professors, Douglas Canfield, persuaded me. He explained that a deep understanding of English, American, and World literature involves familiarity with all of the subjects that deal with the representation of human action: aesthetics, philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, and so forth. Therefore English is, he proposed, the richest and most all-inclusive major. To all these dimensions of literary study, I later added my interest in rhetoric and the teaching of writing, which entails the study of the history of rhetoric and literacy, linguistics, cognitive processes, persuasion, and pedagogy. All in all, the English major has been for me a gateway to a very broadly based and exciting education.

How would you respond to students who are interested in English but think it might be an impractical degree choice?

In general, employers value communication skills, the capacity to work through complex problems, an appreciation of diversity and multiple perspectives, and the intellectual flexibility to find creative solutions. These are all elements of the English major. That said, there are many majors that also prize these capabilities, and open up a world of opportunities for students.

Can you describe any standout memories from your CSUN days?

My CSUN master's degree included my first opportunity to teach composition, an experience that was very

rewarding and charted my course toward a Ph.D. in rhetoric. I especially treasure the great mentors who took an interest in my potential and helped me to fulfill it, in particular Bob Chianese, who retired recently, and remains a great friend. And some of my most vivid memories involve bumping into stars filming TV shows on campus—Rock Hudson filming *Macmillan and Wife*, and Lindsay Wagner filming *The Bionic Woman*, among others—I've always been a little star-struck.

And just for fun, since you've spoken about making extra money in your college days playing accordion at weddings and bar mitzvahs, is there any chance you'll reprise your talents for a university function?

I've been working up to this, playing "Happy Birthday" on the accordion for staff celebrations in my office, and doing a tune or two at gatherings at our house. But nothing more than that just yet. One of these days, though, I may just pop up at the Cal State L.A. Golden Eagle ballroom with the accordion on my shoulders....

CSUN Writers Make Their Voices Heard at Lit Crawl LA: NoHo

Submitted by Justin La Torre

"All you voices of the valley, let's hear you roar!"

With those words, English professor Martin Pousson kicked off one of the opening events of Lit Crawl LA: NoHo to the clamorous chorus congregated in Gallery 800 at the historic Lankershim Arts Center. Though the Los Angeles-based word-centric extravaganza was only in its second year of celebration, support and attendance for Lit Crawl LA was already proving to be formidable, as a crowded house filled up to standing room only to lend an ear to a selection of California State University, Northridge's elite writers in a reading session titled "Voices from the Valley."

Focusing exclusively on established and emerging creative writers from CSUN's undergraduate and graduate programs, Voices from the Valley boasted an impressive cast of wordsmiths. As a graduate of CSUN and emcee for the night, I was certainly no slouch myself, having been recently published in Westwind at UCLA and the last two issues of The Northridge Review. That being said, the presenters have had their work featured in publications such as Cargoes literary journal, Glimmer Train, and Los Angeles Review, and their crafts spanned the gamut from poetry to short story and even semi-biographical long fiction. In short, Voices from the Valley wasn't just going to commence the night; it was going to rock- et right out of the gate.

Presenters from the night included:

Brandon Krause, CSUN graduate whose poem "Seven Grand" was a winning piece in Hollins University's 2014 National Undergraduate Poetry Competition and has been featured in the Spring 2014 issue of Cargoes literary journal. His short story "Coldline" was published in the Fall 2014 issue of The Northridge Review.

Karlee Johnson, CSUN alumna and co-author of the 'zine series Doggone Sentiment, and whose work has been featured in The Northridge Review and Uno Kudo magazine. Johnson and Krause each received honorable mentions from Glimmer Train Press, and they are both currently pursuing MAs in Creative Writing at San Francisco State University.



Photo courtesy of Richard Chambers

Cody Dietz, master's candidate at CSUN who has been published in Ellipsis, Chaparral, and The Northridge Review. His chapbook placed in the finals of Split Lip's Uppercut Chapbook Awards, and he is currently working on a full-length collection of poetry.

Gina Srmabekian, graduate student and teaching associate at CSUN who was a recent finalist of the Glimmer Train New Voices Awards. She has work published in several literary journals including Chaparral, and is described by her students as "young and pretty...and kind of mean."

Kim Young, creative writing professor at CSUN, author of the 2011 Agha Shahid Ali Poetry Prize-winning piece "Night Radio," and founding editor of the Southern California-based online poetry journal Chaparral. Her work has appeared in Los Angeles Review, Los Angeles Review of Books, No Tell Motel, and POOL poetry journal.

[Lit Crawl LA:NoHo continues](#)



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CSUN Writers Make Their Voices Heard at Lit Crawl LA: NoHo - continued

Joseph Mattson, author of story collection *Eat Hell* and SCIBA Fiction Award finalist novel *Empty the Sun*, and editor of *The Speed Chronicles* and *Two Letters: Collection of Art and Writing Vol. 2*. His work has appeared in *Slake: Los Angeles-A City and Its Stories*, *The Rattling Wall*, *Ambit*, *Pearl*, and *The Fix*.

From the moment the first presenter took the mic, it was clear that a vibrant spark had ignited the air. The colors and richness that mark the writing culture of Los Angeles seemed to congeal and condense within the small swanky mecca of Gallery 800 as the eyes and ears of nearly a hundred captivated audience members drank in the words of CSUN's literary best. From the quiet yet cutting honesty of Krause's "Seven Grand" to Mattson's sardonic and scorning sketch of his story's antihero "Lenny Kablinski," there was no slowing down the rhythm or the poignancy of the night's tone, which rang with a satisfying mixture of profoundness and profanity. My personal favorites were Dietz's beautifully tragic family-inspired pieces "Treehouses" and "Ritual," as well as Johnson's rendition of "Truth Ingest," which had me silently mouthing "whoa" to myself every few lines.



From left to right: Joseph Mattson, Cody Dietz, Gina Srmabekian, Karlee Johnson, Brandon Krause, Kim Young, Justin LaTorre, Martin Pousson. Photo courtesy of Richard Chambers

When all was said and done, Voices from the Valley proved to be a re-sounding victory not just for CSUN and its writers, but for the whole of the L.A. writing scene. With such a warm and receptive response to fresh and upcoming literary talent, there is no question that the future of stories as art burns as bright and as hot as the spirits and sparks of these young voices.

"Voices from the Valley was a true testament to the potency and variety of the work coming out of CSUN's creative writing program," Dietz proudly proclaims. "I am honored to have read with such a talented bunch of writers and poets, and we really couldn't ask for a more supportive community."

"It was an honor to be a part of Lit Crawl. I loved seeing the city open up to words, and hope that it continues to grow each year," Johnson adds.

Professor Martin Pousson, former instructor of and adviser to many of these talented individuals, says he couldn't be more proud. "The CSUN Voices from the Valley team generated loud buzz by flashing bold colors," Pousson says. "Their range, their poise, and the infinite variety in their creative writing form the hallmark of our students' success. They dare to defy convention, to cross boundaries, to blur borders. We should all expect to hear a great deal more from these writers."

Justin La Torre '13 (Creative Writing) has been published in CSUN's Northridge Review and UCLA's Westwind. He has received an Honorable Mention from Glimmer Train Press and was a finalist in Cargoes' Fiction Competition for New Writers. He regularly contributes to HalfAChicken.com and The Wordsmith's Foundry.

Laufer Scholarship Helps Student Appreciate the Gift of Life

Submitted by Chelsea Turner

The old adage “hard work pays off” proved true for Matador alumnus Orlando Avila '10 (Religious Studies/ Philosophy). As a recipient of the Joseph and Anna Laufer Religious Studies Student Endowment in fall 2009, Avila found that his work on campus and off campus in the real world paid off in a true gift of life to his daughter, now 4 years old.

Avila, who had never applied for a scholarship during his academic career, was nominated for the award by a professor after volunteering as a teaching assistant in three lower-division religious studies courses.

He's no stranger to hard work. A first-generation college student, Avila had a distinctively split schedule by his sophomore year at CSUN: Two days a week, he worked as a security guard from 5 a.m. to noon and attended class from 1:30 to 7 p.m. On two other days, he worked a second job as a technician from 7 p.m. to midnight and went to class from 8 a.m. through the afternoon. He also worked Friday to Sunday, making his workweek a full seven days.

In his junior year, Avila added to that load by becoming a volunteer teaching assistant in the Religious Studies department, helping freshmen with basic college materials and explaining the major.

“The cycle was horrible,” he recalled. “I was always tired and always burnt out, but I had to do it to stay in school.”

Passionately driven to earn two bachelor's degrees, Avila kept at it, rarely taking breaks and studying every possible moment. He admits that studying was never his strong suit, so working through school helped him gain practical experience. “Working is what we're going for after college,” he said. “Not having side distractions [with this schedule] enhanced my focus.”

As graduation neared, his load grew heavier. Avila and his longtime girlfriend, Dulcira Zuniga, found themselves expecting a baby. As the due date neared, Avila continued to work hard, save money, and study for his degrees.

Excited to become a father, the nearly \$1,000 Laufer Endowment seemed like a good way to start a savings account for his new daughter's future education. However, upon her birth, Avila and Zuniga found themselves facing a \$500 copayment to the hospital.



Orlando Avila pictured with his family. Photo courtesy of Orlando Avila.

"I had thought good insurance, which my girlfriend had, meant good coverage," Avila said. "I couldn't believe we were sitting in the hospital about to be admitted, and I didn't have the funds. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks: I can use the award money!"

With help from his scholarship, Rheina Marie Avila was born on January 27, 2010. Though originally awarded for career pursuit and academic success—Avila made the Dean's List in the Religious Studies and Philosophy departments—the Laufer Endowment proved helpful beyond its institutional bounds.

"I want to support students who demonstrate a commitment to overcome difficulties and have the education so that they can improve themselves and support their families and become role models for others to follow in their footsteps," said David Laufer '68 (English), the sponsor of the endowment.

"To the Laufer family, I would like to say 'thank you' for giving me that amazing feeling in the fall of 2009," Avila said. "I felt a distant family was telling me I was on the right track in life. You helped this young man with one of the most important moments he'll have in life."

Avila and his girlfriend continue to raise Rheina together. They plan to encourage her to attend college and work toward scholarships. Avila also said he hopes to give back to higher education through a gift to CSUN, the institution that provided him with two gifts of his own—one monetary and one, a new family.

Volunteer Service Awards Honor Humanities' Own

Submitted by Suren Seropian

This semester we saw two members of the College of Humanities volunteer community honored with the annual Volunteer Service Award for their commitment and dedication to the mission of the College and the students we serve: CSUN graduate Griselda Corona '09 (Chicana/o Studies) and Earl Greinetz, a CSUN parent and devoted community member.



Griselda Corona '09. Photo courtesy Suren Seropian

Griselda was honored by the La Raza Alumni Association, the oldest and largest Latino alumni organization at CSUN. As an active member and chapter treasurer in La Raza, Griselda is a major asset to the association. She also gives her time fundraising for scholarships that benefit Chicana/o Studies students. In October, La Raza presented a Benefit Concert honoring the 45th anniversary of CSUN's Department of Chicana/o Studies. The concert raised money for scholarships while shining a light on all of the community-building work that the association is doing today. Griselda now serves as an administrative support coordinator for the Chicana/o Studies department.

Earl was nominated by the College of Humanities Dean's office.

Loyal supporters of the university, and parents of alumna Marcee Weiss '78 (Child Development), Earl and his wife, Toba, were conscientious donors across the campus for over a decade prior to Toba's death in 2011, and Earl's tireless support for the university continues today. A classroom is named in the Greinetzes' honor in the Michael D. Eisner College of Education. Earl is also a member of the Heritage Society. In 2004, Earl became a member of the Steering Committee for the Jewish Studies Program and remains a generous benefactor. The College of Humanities is grateful for Earl's generous philanthropy, precious time, and boundless energy.



Earl Greinetz pictured with daughter Marcee Weiss '78. Photo courtesy Suren Seropian

Griselda and Earl are only two examples of the dedication we are honored to witness here at CSUN. Each make a daily difference in the lives of our students and through them we see the impact selfless service and philanthropy can have on our collective future.

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Mission Statement

The Mission of the College of Humanities is to create a community of learners who...

Explore and value the diversities of cultures, thought, perspectives, literatures and languages of humanity;

Critically reflect on and analyze multiple dimensions of human identity and experience;

Contribute to scholarship and creative production and innovation, and

Act as responsible global citizens committed to principles of freedom, equality, justice and participatory democracy

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