MAS 135 is a Special Topics course that changes depending on the instructor and/or semester. In the Fall of 2012, the objective of this course is to help students develop an understanding of the forces that contribute to the disenfranchisement of certain segments of the raza community as part of a larger process to develop the skills to work with communities toward social justice. The unique approach of this course is to allow students to see specific models of working for social justice in action. This will provide students the opportunity to clearly understand your own strengths and weaknesses in participating in Social Justice work, to develop your skills in these areas, and to consider the ways in which you can continue this work after the class ends.

Two special opportunities are available to MAS 135 students this semester: 1) Mario Ozuna-Sanchez of the Compadres Network will be co-teaching the class, focusing on aspects of the Joven Noble intervention model he uses with youth in disenfranchised communities, and, 2) Students will be able to work with youth as they learn these skills. Marcos will also be using the intervention model developed with MAESTR@$ (a social justice group of teachers and community workers that he coordinates). Our work in class, therefore, will focus on youth and their experiences in these communities (with a special emphasis on schools and potentially “high-risk” behaviors). Still, each student can choose your own area of emphasis for your work in the class. Students will also have the opportunity to continue this work through and Independent Study/Internship in the Spring semester.

The focus of this class and the communities we will be working with require our unbending dedication this semester. If you remain enrolled in this class on 9/5, we will expect you to be with us for every class session and to work hard to achieve our collective goals. Mario and Marcos commit to supporting you through this process to help you do exactly that. If you are a student who does the bare minimum to get by, if you are a student who has a hard time making it to class on-time every day, if you are a student who likes to be anonymous in class, if you are a student who is afraid to ask questions or ask for help, if you are a student who is afraid to take risks, this is not the class for you. We are going to work! We will also be a community of support, building on our individual strengths to address our weaknesses and become an even stronger collective.

Background on Chicana/o Studies
Excerpts from:
COLUMN OF THE AMERICAS by Roberto Rodriguez and Patrisia Gonzales
A STRIKE FOR HUMANITY
FOR RELEASE: WEEK OF MAY 23, 2003

“…Chicana/Chicano studies is a place where knowledge is produced or recovered. It can be found in a milpa (cornfield) just assuredly as it can be found at a university. So too it can be found in an old rocking chair -- in the memories of elders who remember a time when they were not supposed to remember. …Perhaps one finds it in the movement of Aztec danzantes or in hip-hop moves aligned to the constellations. Or in a community garden, a mural, an AIDS or women's health clinic, a union hall, a legal aid clinic, a human rights office or in a modern ball court ... or in the dignity of the workplace, where parents toil mercilessly to give their children a dream.

…Today, Chicana/Chicano studies isn't just about "doing," either. It is spirit. It is what one is. What one becomes. It has always been an energy bigger than the university. It exists outside its walls and definition. It can be found in East L.A. as well as San Salvador. In a sense, it begins upon
graduation. It is what one does with one’s education. Its definition: To place oneself at the service of humanity. It is to build community. And to do that requires but cara y corazon, a good character and a good heart.

[Our] dynamic energy guarantees that Chicana/Chicano studies will remain a place of creation, and, we hope, a place where one goes to become a good human being."

1st Assignment: Due 8/27, 12pm

As you know from our first class, the goal of this course is to train students to be able to work for and walk social justice in disenfranchised communities. Each of you can have your own personal area of interest for the work you do, but we have to agree to focus on this general theme. Before we finalize the syllabus, we want to know what your areas of interest are to make sure our process will work for each of you.

Building on the Freewrite today in class, please write a short essay that covers the following:
- Who you represent and what your purpose is,
- An issue in a community, preferably whatever community you consider “home” (which could be where you live now, where you grew up, where your family lives now or…), that you want to understand. Use examples, stories and data to explain the issue and why it is important to you. [The data can be from the census, news stories, school districts, research organizations like pew.org, and can be whatever data you find interesting. You will not be evaluated on the data you bring in.]
- An issue that you have struggled with personally and/or in your family and/or community that you want to understand. Use examples and stories to help you explain this issue and why it is important to you. [This can be the same issue but it does not have to be. If it is, areas 2 and 3 will be explained together and you just need to explain that the issue covers both areas.]

There is NO wrong answer to this. The key is that you push yourself to provide thoughtful and honest answers. Take your time with this. We want to suggest one specific way of doing this assignment: Start it tonight and then let it sit for a couple of days and come back to it on Friday. Then let it sit again and finalize it on Sunday. Read it just before class [and if you need to edit it then, just do it in pen]. Everyone gets full credit for this assignment if they put their hearts into it.

Bring this to class on Monday and we will use it to finalize the syllabus, which will be available on 8/29. Most of the readings for the class will be available to you on-line once we finalize the syllabus. We also will be relying on movies, tv, the internet, and people as reference materials.

We are asking you to read two books for the class: Victor Rios’, Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys, and Gregory Boyle’s, Tattoos on the Heart, which will be on reserve in the library soon and can be bought at Amazon for less than $25. Rios will be our first reading and we will probably need to have Part I read by 9/12. We will probably have another writing assignment due before then that will build on what you write for this assignment.