

Mexican American Studies 135
Contemporary Chicana/o Issues:
Working for Social Justice in Disenfranchised Communities
Monday & Wednesday 12-1:15pm, Location: SH 444
Course Website: <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/courses/135/>
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Office: Uchida Hall (YUH) 34 Office Hours: M 3-5pm, T 9:30-11:30am, and by appointment

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@S* (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 an 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.

What follows is our plan for the class based on the work we did with students in 2010 and 2011, your interests and experiences shared in the first two classes, and our experience working with communities. We know that this plan will evolve over the semester, so we expect to update it at the end of September and the end of October based on our work together. As we discussed in class, these updates will not lead to earlier deadlines or additional assignments, but should reflect our growing understanding of where we are and what we need to do to reach our collective goals.

Assignments

Our first assignment will be the **Autobiography**. This is an opportunity to explore and deepen our understandings of who we are and how we came to be who we are, with a focus on how that is connected to social justice work. This assignment was handed out on the 2nd day of class.

Throughout the semester we will also complete a **Weekly Journal**. On Wednesdays (beginning 9/5 and ending 11/14), we will make time at the end of class to write a journal entry on the class, what we are learning, what we are struggling with, what we are still needing, etc. Students have the option to turn those in at the end of class or to go home and submit them by e-mail some time that day.

We have selected a few readings that will help us understand disenfranchisement and social justice work as we have learned to do this work in our communities. For each reading, students will write a short **Reading Reflection**. This should include a short quote from the reading and an explanation of how it helped you understand: your own experiences, family, or community; injustice today; your project interests; and/or the pursuit of social justice in our communities. Please focus on the most interesting aspect of the reading for you. *This is not busy-work*, so your goal should be to write something that really matters to you. These can be done in 1 page but if you need to write more, that is fine. **[All of the readings except Rios and Boyle {which will be on reserve in the library} will be available on the course website by the 3rd week of classes.]**

Much of our work in class will reflect the models we use in working with communities, but students will also get to see examples of this by sitting in on sessions with youth that Mario will be coordinating. Everyone will attend one of these sessions and then submit the **Circulo Insights Essay** that explains the lessons you learned from participating in the group. These lessons can cover any of a number of different areas: connections you see to our work in class, the teachings shared with youth, the work that youth themselves did, the impact the content had on you, the impact the community had on you, applications to your own project interests, etc.

After we have completed and discussed the Autobiographies, started the reading, and visited the Circulos, we will begin to apply all that work as we do a **Biography/“Family” Story**. The goal of this assignment is to get deeper into knowing our own stories by better understanding those of our families. You will need to select someone who you consider “Family” and ask questions about her/his own life and how s/he got to where s/he is now, focusing on one or more key lessons from her/his experiences. You can let the family member guide you or you can use themes that come from your Autobiography and the class work we have done up to this point. Your goal is to better understand this person and yourself through her/his story. You can work with more than one person, but need to recognize the amount of work that goes into doing this with even one person before deciding to do that. *Check in with both of us on who you are focusing on before starting this assignment.*

For the rest of the semester, we will each focus on completing a major **Class Project**. The project will center on a specific issue in a community/neighborhood that you want to understand better (we use a broad definition of community to allow you to focus on something meaningful to you). Each student will choose the community/neighborhood, or even part of a neighborhood, that you want to work in (students can do this project in groups or alone). Our assignment in the first class was intended to get you thinking about this. We think it makes the most sense to focus on a community that you are very familiar with, like the one where you grew up. This allows you to make connections between the Autobiography, Biography, and the

project. If you decide to work in a group, each of you in the group may focus on different aspects of the same community and make the work stronger by connecting the insights you obtain from the process. In the project, we will be focusing on an issue that we and our communities want to address with the goal of finding ways to work with the community to actually address it. Our approach will be grounded in the *Community Cultural Wealth Model* as a way of building on the strengths and resources already in the community. This project is not the conventional class paper. We are actually thinking about it as a multi-layered map. We will explain that as we go, but you can already begin to imagine some of the layers of the map: 1-the challenges and needs of the community, 2-the resources and strengths of the community, and, 3-a vision of how the resources and strength can be applied in new ways to address the challenges and needs. *Check in with both of us on which neighborhood and issue you are focusing on before starting this assignment.*

The project will require that you work hard to understand the community in all of its complexities and from all the different perspectives of the community members that are there. This can involve connecting with and listening intently to the people in the neighborhood. Your goal is to see them as the historians and knowledge-keepers of the community. They can tell you about the challenges of the community, but also about the resources and strengths. You each will have a specific issue that you want to understand as you do this work and you can use the conversations with community members to focus on that issue, although you should be open to having the project go in a different direction based on the insights of the community members. You will submit the **Community Engagement Paper** about 2/3 of the way through the semester, which will provide background on who you worked with and why, and then details the stories and insights that you learned from them. The conclusion of the paper will be an analysis of the overall lessons from this process in which you identify all of the different forms of *Community Cultural Wealth* that are resources that can help the community respond to or counter disenfranchisement and your ideas on how this can be done. You should also submit a draft of the map layers you will submit.

The last step of this process will be to put together all of your work into your **Social Justice Portfolio**. This will bring together everything we have done during the semester. The Map may be the heart of this project. This should be accompanied by your revised Community Engagement Paper that explains your process and the lessons you learned along the way. You also need a section that explains all of the insights from the work we did in class (assignments, readings, discussions, group work, teachings, etc.) and how they played into this process as well as the possible ways you may be able to apply those lessons in the future. You can end this with a final section that describes a process for addressing the needs of the community by using the resources in that community and integrating the lessons from the class. The ultimate goal is that this process be something that is truly do-able, and even something that you yourself could do in the spring (if you choose to do that). Plan to spend time sharing it with people in the community and getting their feedback and input.

Class participation is a critical component of this course. We will integrate a number of different exercises and approaches to meeting our goals through class activities. Obviously, being in class will be critical because these lessons are learned only through participation. The key to effective participation is simply engaging. There are not right and wrong answers. We are looking for deep commitment, which involves different things for different students. We will be discussing this throughout the semester.

Grading Distribution

- Autobiography – 10%
- Weekly Journal – 10%
- Reading Reflections – 10%
- Circulo Insights Essay – 10%
- Biography/“Family” Story – 10%
- Community Engagement Paper – 15%
- Social Justice Portfolio – 15%
- Class Participation – 20%

Please ***save all of your work throughout the semester***, including your class notes, freewrites and all of your assignments (especially the versions that have our feedback on them). You will be submitting all of this work again in the Portfolio at the end of the semester. For each of these assignments, we will develop a rubric or guideline in class together so that we know exactly what the goals and requirements of the assignment are. This will be the measure used to evaluate/grade the assignment. In addition, students will provide in-depth, self-evaluations of each assignment using the rubric. ***After you have completed the assignment, add a note that explains your goals for the assignment and how well you achieved them!*** Whenever possible, we will also have peers evaluate the assignments to provide another level of feedback. Peer feedback will never affect your grade negatively, although it might help us see something that we might not have otherwise. The self-, peer-, and instructor evaluations will include honest perceptions of the amount of effort that was put into an assignment. Students should always come talk to us whenever your self-assessment and our assessment of your work do not match. Again, you may help us see something that we missed and we may also help you better understand something that you missed.

University Policy on Academic Integrity

“Academic integrity is essential to the mission of San José State University. As such, students are expected to perform their own work (except when collaboration is expressly permitted by the course instructor) without the use of any outside resources. Students are not permitted to use old tests, quizzes when preparing for exams, nor may they consult with students who have already taken the exam. When practiced, academic integrity ensures that all students are fairly graded. Violations to the Academic Integrity Policy undermine the educational process and will not be tolerated. It also demonstrates a lack of respect for oneself, fellow students and the course instructor and can ruin the university’s reputation and the value of the degrees it offers. We all share the obligation to maintain an environment, which practices academic integrity. Violators of the Academic Integrity Policy will be subject to failing this course and being reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action, which could result in suspension or expulsion from San José State University. The policy on academic integrity can be found at: http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct.”

University Policy on Students with Disabilities Act

“If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with DRC to establish a record of their disability.” See <http://www2sjsu.edu/senate/s97-10.htm>

Weekly Schedule

We have developed this plan for our work based on our understanding of how best to meet the course goals, combined with a careful look at who you are as students and the interests you have. Our understanding of you and your needs will evolve as we go through this process, as will your own interests. Because of that, we will make

changes to the course as needed. As we told you, we will not be adding assignments, but we may change the readings we assign, develop and clarify assignments, and alter the plan for how we pursue our goals, including bringing in guests, going on “field trips,” and seeing films. Any significant changes in the syllabus will be made in writing and due dates will not be added or moved up. Expect Syllabus updates at the end of September and the end of October.

Weeks 1-3: Goal Setting & Community Building

August 22, 27, 29, September 5 [No Class 9/3 – Labor Day]

We will explore our individual interests as well as the goals for the course and the means by which we will pursue those goals and evaluate our effectiveness in reaching them.

Assignment Due: Autobiography [9/5]

Week 4-5: Understanding the Roots of Raza Disenfranchisement in Local Communities

September 10, 12, 17, 19

We will consider the earliest roots of Raza Disenfranchisement and their link to current issues. The readings will introduce the concept of Historical Trauma and its role in these processes, which we will also link to a LifeMap process we will integrate throughout the class. Rios will introduce the insights from research on disenfranchised communities today.

Readings & Reflections Due:

By 9/12: 3 short essays from Patrisia Gonzales (2005-2006) on Decolonization

By 9/19: Part I of Victor Rios (2011), *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*

Week 6: Joven Noble and Innovative Approaches for Working in Disenfranchised Communities

September 24, 26 October 1, 3

Mario will introduce the first phase of the *Joven Noble* approach to working with youth. We will also look at innovative research into the relationship between historical trauma and daily life in disenfranchised communities with a focus on the lesson for our own projects.

Readings & Reflections Due:

By 9/26: Gregory Boyle (2010), *Tattoos on the Heart*

Assignment Due: Circulo Insights Essay [10/3]

Week 7: Historical Trauma and its Impact on Raza Communities Today

October 8, 10

We will look at innovative research into the relationship between historical trauma and daily life in disenfranchised communities with a focus on the lesson for our own projects.

Readings & Reflections Due: [this week's reflections can cover the three readings separately of together by highlighting connections and distinctions]

By 10/8: Edén Torres (2003), *Chicana Without Apology*, Chapter 1: “Anguished Past, Troubled Present.”

By 10/8: Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2003), From Intergenerational Trauma to Intergenerational Healing, *Wellbriety Magazine*.

By 10/8: Jerry Tello (2008), El Hombre Noble Buscando Balance: The Noble Man Searching for Balance, in *Family Violence and Men of Color: Healing the Wounded Male Spirit*.

Week 8: Cara y Corazon: Building Respectful Relationships with Youth / Connecting Our Stories to Our Histories

October 15, 17

Mario will continue covering the *Joven Noble* approach with a focus on specific strategies for effectively engaging youth. We will then make connections between the analysis of historical trauma and our own lives and those of our families by focusing on our Biography

papers.

Assignment Due: Biography/“Family” Story [10/17]

Week 9: Tools for Racial Justice Work in Disenfranchised Communities

October 22, 24

We will consider the power of the *Community Cultural Wealth Model* for our projects, along with an analysis of the processes by which Historical Trauma has evolved into Internalized Racism.

Week 10: Cultural Rites of Passage and Racial Justice Work

October 29, 31

Mario will introduce the ways *Joven Noble* integrates Rites of Passage into working with youth and we will connect this to our LifeMap work as we develop that work.

Week 11: Project Development Work & Becoming Warriors for Peace

November 5, 7

We will share the lessons from our work in communities and develop our plans for completing the projects. Mario will continue covering the *Joven Noble* approach with a focus on moving toward healing strategies in our work with youth.

Assignment Due: Community Engagement Paper [11/5]

Week 12-13: Personal Applications of the 135 Model

November 14, 19, 21 [No Class 11/12 – Veteran’s Day]

We will return to the LifeMap and move toward the Visioning and Planning phase. We will also dedicate a class session to a Healing Circle that will be of campus, and then integrate all of this work into our Projects.

Class Activity: Off Campus Healing Circle [11/19]

Week 14: Walking Social Justice

November, 26, 28

We will use our class time to work on our projects, integrate the lessons from the course, connect different projects, and develop ideas from the final phase of the project. These are essential classes where we will be elaborating on key aspects of the model.

Week 15: Teaching Social Justice

December 3, 5

Students will share the lessons and skills they have developed over the course of the semester. On Monday we will focus on the lessons from inside the classroom and on Wednesday we will emphasize the lessons from our work in communities. This will help with finalizing the Portfolios.

Assignment Due: Presentations [12/3, 5]

Week 16: Closing Circle

December 10

We will close our circle focusing on the next steps each of us will take with this work.

Assignment Due: Social Justice Portfolio [12/10]

