

together

EXPLORING WHAT CAN BE

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

FALL 2018 NO. 12



MENTOR

[men tōr, men tər] noun

1. *capitalized*, the loyal friend and advisor of Odysseus, and teacher of his son, Telemachus
2. a wise, loyal advisor
3. a teacher or coach



in this issue

3 Focus on Ethnic Studies

Magdalena Barrera of Chicana and Chicano Studies heads new collaborative

4 New Faculty

Ten new assistant professors bring range of research topics

9 New Chair

Theodora Berry explores new degree in Department of African American Studies

11 Staying on Track

Ramped up ACCESS Center is focused on student success

COMMUNITY

from the dean

Thank you for reading the Fall 2018 edition of the College of Social Sciences' Together newsletter! As was the case in the three previous years I have been dean, the main section of Together profiles faculty who are new to the college. This year 10 new assistant professors joined us: Estevan Azcona (Chicana and Chicano Studies), Danijela Dudley (Political Science), Alberto García (History), Jonathan Gómez (Chicana and Chicano Studies), Aidin Hajikhameneh (Economics), Paul Lombardi (Economics), Carolina Prado (Environmental Studies), Costanza Rampini (Environmental Studies), Joanne Rondilla (Sociology & Interdisciplinary Social Sciences) and Wendy Thompson Taiwo (African American Studies). Theodora Berry also joined us as professor and chair of African American Studies. This year 11 of the 65 new faculty across SJSU are in the College of Social Sciences!

Of the 11 new faculty in the College

of Social Sciences, four (Azcona, Berry, Gomez, and Thompson Taiwo) are in our two Ethnic Studies departments (African American Studies and Chicana and Chicano Studies), and assistant professor Rondilla primarily works with the Asian American Studies program in the Department of Sociology & Interdisciplinary Social Sciences. Additionally, assistant professors García and Prado have strong interests in Chicana and Chicano Studies. Associate professor Magdalena Barrera is a member of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, and the inaugural director of the Ethnic Studies Collaborative, a new College of Social Sciences structure to foster increased multi- and interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies opportunities for students and faculty. In this issue of Together, Associate Professor Barrera discusses plans to bring new and continuing faculty together to build on our Ethnic Studies strengths.

Improving student retention and graduation rates across the university is a key SJSU objective. The primary mechanism the College of Social Sciences will use to meet our goals is through new

initiatives in our Academic Counseling Center for Excellence in the Social Sciences (ACCESS). Amy Leisenring is a professor in the Department of Sociology & Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, and the faculty director of ACCESS. She outlines the new and improved processes the college is rolling out to optimize student success.

The new and continuing faculty profiled in this issue are all dedicated mentors, to our students, to each other, and to members of external SJSU communities. I am very excited about the important work the faculty are conducting in multiple areas of the social sciences to teach us about the nuances and complexities of our social worlds. Please see the back cover for information about how you can help us with this important work. We very much appreciate those of you who have helped us in the past, and look forward to both continued partnerships and new collaborations. Thank you!

Walt Jacobs

Walt Jacobs
Dean

Strength in Numbers

New collaborative builds on ethnic studies programs

San José State has long been known for its commitment to serving the unique educational needs of its first-generation students. Now, with its Ethnic Studies Collaborative in the College of Social Sciences, it will have a powerful tool for ensuring their success.

“It’s a new initiative that we’re launching this year,” says founding director Magdalena Barrera, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. “It’s exciting, because we want to bring together all the different faculty, staff and students that are interested in pursuing ethnic studies research, with our college really being at the forefront of that work.”

The collaborative will draw together scholars from different disciplines, Barrera says, including faculty from the departments of Chicana and Chicano Studies (formerly Mexican American Studies) and African American Studies, as well as the Asian American and Native American studies programs. She credits Dean Walt Jacobs, Ph.D., with throwing his support behind the effort.

“I think the impetus was born in wanting to see these different ethnic studies departments and programs strengthened,” Barrera says. “How can we come together to amplify those visions and projects, and make the College of Social Sciences a showcase for work in ethnic studies?”

Theodora Berry, chair of African American Studies, is enthusiastic about the collaborative. “I think it’s a wonderful idea to see all the ways in which these programs can support one another,” she says. Given that many of the aims of social justice movements overlap, “it makes a lot of sense to put together something official and formal that says, ‘Here’s how we speak to each other in relationship to our research and teaching.’”

Student success has been the driver in the move to develop the ethnic studies initiative, Barrera says. “One of our points of pride is we have so many first-generation students,” she says. “These students have really played a critical role in voicing their interests and what their needs are.”

Student success centers for Chicanx and Latinx and African American students are already operating on campus, and Asian American/Pacific Islander students are advocating for a similar center, she says.

It’s all about helping students navigate the distance from their home communities to the university, she says. “How can we really help those students develop an academic identity that meshes with their home identity?”



Barrera has set two goals for the coming year. The first is to seek approval of a formal undergraduate minor in race and ethnic studies. “It will help students think critically about how different ethnic groups relate to each other,” she says.

She will also work to create a core faculty to help articulate the collaborative’s vision. This could lead to a speakers’ series and a venue for faculty to showcase their work, as well as providing new research opportunities for students, Barrera says. “How can we bring students into research and get them excited about pursuing degrees in different ethnic studies areas?”

It’s not about reinventing the wheel, she says, but building on great efforts and ideas that are already underway. “In the spring, I’d really love to have a retreat with all the interested faculty and staff – to come together and envision where do we go from here? What do we want to do? What’s our collective vision for this?”

Barrera, who joined the SJSU faculty in 2008 after completing her Ph.D. in Modern Thought and Literature at Stanford University, says assuming directorship of the initiative is in line with her desire to assume broader administrative duties in the college.

“I love this mix of responsibilities,” she says. “Because on the one hand teaching is truly my passion, but it’s really exciting to get to grow professionally into these administrative kinds of roles. This work I find so meaningful, because SJSU has continued to shape me as a scholar in a way I could never have anticipated.” 🌸

Ten New Faces, Lots of New Ideas

Ethnomusicologist **Estevan Azcona** explores the ways in which traditional Mexican American music has been put to use — especially its function as a form of cultural expression and as a potent medium for political protest.

Joining the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, he's eager to enable students "to see cultural studies in a larger frame and have opportunities to explore tradition and the interrelatedness between tradition and change."

Azcona was the first graduate in ethnomusicology at University of California, Santa Barbara, when it first became a major. Like all music majors he had to study music theory and performance, but his interest in popular music and culture led him in a different direction.

He played double bass with a Middle Eastern music ensemble, but his real interest lay in the Mexican American idiom. "It was during those years that I started studying Mexican traditional instruments, and I still play them today," Azcona says.

He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin, which had a robust ethnomusicology program, then won a fellowship at the University of Houston. He later directed performing arts public programming for a Latino arts organization and taught Mexican American studies as an adjunct.

Returning full-time to academia, he hopes to continue his study of traditional music during the Chicano movement in the 1960s and 1970s. "Folk and traditional sources were being politicized in a particular context and being remade into what was then an emerging identity," he says. "It was really interesting to look at it and see shades of the previous generation of social movements."

Students should be ready to explore this with a sense of participation. "They're not just studying it," Azcona says. "They're bearers of culture and tradition, and they'll pass it on to the generations that follow them." 🌍

A world map is tacked to the wall of **Danijela Bubanja**



Dudley's office that locates North America off to the left and Australia on the far right. Montenegro, her tiny Balkan homeland, is just about in the center.

Dudley, an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, uses the map to help educate her American students about the world. But it also highlights her research into the developing democracies of Eastern Europe — particularly the reframed relationship between military and civilian leadership.

Many former Eastern Bloc countries have joined the peacetime military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, on the way to applying for admission to the European Union, Dudley says. "It's not an official requirement," she says, "but they have been evaluated by their progress toward satisfying NATO conditions."

Montenegro, formerly a part of Yugoslavia, is a good example. "Nobody says this out loud, but I believe the only reason they joined NATO was because that was a requirement for joining the EU," she says. "It's a tiny country, with armed forces of about 2,500 people, but for some reason they need to join NATO."

She studied political science in Serbia before coming to the U.S. to study English. She completed a bachelor's degree in political science at San José State, followed by a master's and Ph.D. from University of California, Riverside.

Dudley started teaching as an adjunct at San José State in 2012 while working on her doctoral dissertation. Her first-generation undergraduates are fascinated by political science because it helps them better understand the circumstances that they and others face, Dudley says.

"I know it's cliché," she says, "but it's the best part of this job, going into a classroom and having a conversation with 30 students and hearing all the different perspectives and points of view." 🌍

In the Mexican immigrant community of farmworkers in the Sacramento Valley, where



Economic inequality, Southern black migration, climate change in India, traditional Mexican American music and notions of Asian beauty are some of the research interests of the newest members of the College of Social Sciences faculty. Other new hires bring academic inquiry into developing democracies in Eastern Europe, Mexican guest workers, cross-border environmental justice, art-based community making and economic individualism.

his father worked in the fields and his mother labored in fruit and nut processing plants, young **Alberto García** was a historian in the making.

"I always was curious and always had my head in a book. I loved reading," García says. And he loved listening to his older relatives' stories of the Mexican Revolution and about their time as braceros, participants in the guest worker program between Mexico and the United States that brought millions of Mexican workers to the U.S. temporarily to fill labor shortages after World War II.

"Listening to their stories is what really got me interested in history," says García, a newly appointed assistant professor in the Department of History.

García majored in history at the University of California, Davis, and earned two master's degrees in history and Latin American studies before completing his Ph.D. in history at the University of California, Berkeley.

For his research, he dug deeper into those family stories and focused on the Bracero Program, which ended in 1964.

García's curiosity led him to examine why nearly half the braceros came from only four Mexican states. He found it led back to the Mexican Revolution and staunch opposition to subsequent land redistribution among traditional Catholics. "It had pushed people off the land and contributed to them being interested in migrating."

García, an enthusiastic cheerleader for public education in California, is excited to be teaching at a public university.

"The system is one of the best things California has done for its people," he says. "I see what it's done for me and my family and a lot of students here have similar backgrounds to mine. It's very easy to see myself in them. I'm motivated to pay it back, to return the favor." 🌻



For his sociology Ph.D. dissertation, **Jonathan Gómez** wrote about "El Barrio Lindo," a 1970s-era movement by muralists and activists to beautify and reclaim the East Los Angeles neighborhood in which he was raised.

Now, Gómez is channeling that spirit as an assistant professor in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. "I think in some way I'm carrying on El Barrio Lindo," he says. "I recognize the knowledge in the community and bridge it with what I bring from my training in the academy."

Gómez could scarcely have imagined a career in academia when he was young. In high school he was consigned to metal and auto shop (he flunked both.) But at graduation, reflecting on how much his mother and grandparents had sacrificed on his behalf, "I said to myself, 'The opportunities I had here don't reflect everything I can accomplish.'"

Mentors in community college and at the University of California, Santa Cruz, convinced him that he belonged in higher education — and ought to aspire to graduate work. "It was a very empowering time," he says. "I developed into a poet, into a student. I felt like I was definitely living up to those sacrifices, to that work that people had put in before me."

Doing his doctoral work at the University of California, Santa Barbara, "I learned how to become an effective teacher, to be a critical writer, a creative researcher and someone who's present on both the campus and the community that surrounds our campus," he says.

San José State is a perfect fit for his interests. "There's so many students with so much knowledge from lived experience," he says. "My job is to blend the knowledge they bring from their community with the formal knowledge of the academy. This is social wealth from the bottom up." 🌻



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Carolina Prado majored in women's studies at San Diego State University and thought her career path was set.

"I thought I would be working at a domestic violence shelter," Prado says. "That was the goal of my life at that point."

Then Prado joined a Chicana organization in her junior year and went on a tour of toxic sites in Tijuana, the Mexican border city just south of San Diego, and learned about a women's cross-border network formed to address toxic contamination.

"That changed the trajectory of what I wanted to do," says Prado, a newly appointed assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Studies. "To me it was a perfect blend of environmental justice and feminist organizing."

Prado earned her Ph.D. in environmental science, policy and management from the University of California, Berkeley, and brings to San José State a focus on environmental justice, social movements and feminist organizing spanning both sides of the U.S.- Mexico border.

"My parents are both migrants, so I spent most of my life going back and forth between Mexico and southern California," Prado says. "I had a vision that I would focus on the border and try to effect some kind of change."

Women's issues and environmental issues often intersect at reproductive health, and in her dissertation Prado explored the toxic effects of a battery recycling plant in a Tijuana neighborhood where there was a cluster of miscarriages. Her research has also looked at how women's involvement in care work allows them to identify environmental problems and organize around them.

Prado is excited to be at San José State.

"I wanted to be able to work with first-generation students and students who maybe wouldn't have the resources to go to a UC," she says. "I relate a lot to my students." 🌻



Paul Lombardi combines an abiding love of economics with his avid exploration of the roots of economic inequality in his new role as assistant professor in the Department of Economics.

The San Diego native completed his bachelor's degree in management science at the University of California, San Diego. After working in the insurance industry, he elected to pursue his Ph.D. in economics at the University of California, Irvine.

As an economic historian, he focuses on the "cotton South" — the period in the late 19th and early 20th century in which subsistence-level farming dominated the 10 agrarian Southern states that at one time produced 96 percent of the world's cotton.

African American households lacked ready access to credit — or were forced to pay higher rates of interest when times were lean, Lombardi says. To survive, parents pulled children from school and put them to work to increase the cotton yield. Or, they took jobs and the children assumed some of their household duties.

"I was curious whether the approaches they used to deal with short-term fluctuations led to worse long-term outcomes," he says. Census records from 1900 through 1940 suggested that was indeed the case. Children who hadn't completed their educations were trapped in lower-wage occupations and the cycle repeated itself through time.

"Some of these approaches they used to deal with changes in their income led to permanent differences between whites and blacks," Lombardi says.

Lombardi is studying whether families in modern-day developing economies might find themselves in a similar bind. Answering that question could potentially provide developing economies with evidence-based policy recommendations, Lombardi says.

Meanwhile, he is looking forward to sharing his enthusiasm for economics with his students. "Fifty people might care about my research," he says, "but a lot more people are affected by my teaching." 🌻



Joanne Rondilla's

introduction to sociology came when her Filipino family moved from Guam to Union City, Calif., and she began a very personal examination of social relationships and culture.

"It was hard," says Rondilla, who joined the Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences this fall as an assistant professor. "I always felt out of place."

On Guam, nerds like her were popular and everything she knew about the continental United States she had learned from watching "Laverne & Shirley" and "Happy Days." In the Bay Area, material things determined social status and the Filipinos in her new home didn't act like those in the sitcoms, or like the people she grew up with.

"In Union City, everybody looks like you, but you still feel like an outsider," Rondilla says. "I always felt out of place."

With an M.A. and a Ph.D. in ethnic studies from the University of California, Berkeley, Rondilla now focuses her research on notions of beauty among Asians.

Her book project, "Colonial Faces: Beauty and Skin Color Hierarchy in the Philippines and the U.S.," explores how lighter skin color conveys status to Filipinas in the Philippines and in Filipina communities outside of the Philippines.

Her past work also includes an examination of the popular practice of double eyelid surgery in much of Asia.

This research shows that it is too simple to say Asian women are surgically altering their eyes because they want to look white. In many Asian countries, mixed-race people define beauty. Plus, the expensive surgery conveys a higher social status.

"Most won't say, 'I want to look white,'" Rondilla says. "They will say, 'I want to look like a better version of me.' It is important to interrogate the depth of what that means." ❀



Wendy Thompson Taiwo

studies the second great migration — Southern blacks who moved out of the South westward to California, particularly the Bay Area, for jobs in the shipbuilding, manufacturing and weapons and ammunitions industries that formed in the World War II era.

"I'm really, really interested in looking at the way that black Southerners transformed public spaces — entire cities — and created new culture in these urbanizing cities of the West," says

Taiwo, who joined the Department of African American Studies as an assistant professor.

She's also interested in dispossession and displacement. Where did black families go as wealth flowed in and gentrification took hold? And as they dispersed, did their cultures remain intact?

"I'm very excited to be looking at these stories because I'm really interested in why people move, where they go and how that movement changes people," Taiwo says.

And these are no longer academic questions for Taiwo, who grew up in Oakland, the child of a black father and Chinese immigrant mother, and who left two decades ago to attend college.

After her Ph.D. in American studies from the University of Maryland, College Park, and stints teaching at Bowdoin College and Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minn., Taiwo returned to the Bay Area. She settled with her family back in Fremont and barely recognized Oakland, with its artisan bread shops and new-money boutiques.

"I'm still trying to figure out this new Bay Area, California," she says.

Taiwo has also focused her research on mixed-race identity and what it means to be both black and Asian American in a nation where Asian Americans are cast as social successes and blacks are cast as social failures.

"Asian American represents this model minority and blackness represents a certain kind of abjectness," she says. "It's this irreconcilable identity." ❀



Raising the Profile

New Chair Theodorea Berry wants African American Studies to lead in social justice



Her sunny Washington Square office is still stacked with unpacked boxes of files, but Theodorea Berry has already settled in to her new post as professor and chair of African American Studies in the College of Social Sciences.

“I started on August 1st and hit the ground running,” says Berry, who most recently was associate dean for academic affairs in graduate studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

She brings a clearly defined vision for the program and the students it serves. “There are lots of things I’d like to see happen,” she says. A primary objective is to build on the department’s reputation and inaugurate a master of arts degree program in African American studies.

“I want this to be the place where people, when they hear about African American studies at San José State, they know this is where social justice leaders are made,” she says.

Berry’s path to academic prominence was a circuitous one. A Philadelphia native, she graduated from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania with a double major in mass communications and music arts (a lyric soprano, she also played orchestral timpani).

“My initial plan was to become a sound engineer doing music for movies,” she says. “But the entire time I was in college I worked in student affairs. Somebody suggested to me that that might be something that I do.”

Her first job took her to Southeastern Massachusetts University (now University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth), where she served as an assistant to a dean for student affairs, worked at a local radio station and sang with a local choral group.

Berry’s next job was at Marymount University in Arlington, Va., where she was assistant director of multicultural student affairs and played timpani with the local symphony orchestra. But, tiring of university life, she won admission to a federal government internship program that had her rotate through the Departments of Defense, Labor, Education, State and Health and Human Services over the course of three years.

That led to a job living in Germany while working as a civilian employee of the U.S. Army. There, Berry completed her master of education degree in interdisciplinary studies in curriculum from National-Louis University, which had a European campus in Heidelberg. A year later she added an educational specialist degree.

“I was trying to find my way back into university life by getting into what I thought was more of a philosophical approach to education,” she says. “Both of these programs allowed me to look at education from a social and cultural standpoint. I was interested in the social and cultural aspects of black women’s experiences with education.”

Soon after her father died Berry decided to return stateside to be closer to family and decided to pursue her doctorate in education at the main National-Louis campus in Evanston, Ill.

During her graduate studies in curriculum and social inquiry, she encountered critical race feminism, which gave her a lens through which to explore her research topic. “It talks about race in relationship to power,” Berry says. “I was really intrigued by it, simply because it really encapsulates a lot of the experiences of black women — a lot of the ways black women have endured issues of power at the intersections of race and gender.”

After a post-doctoral fellowship and teaching jobs at North Carolina Central University, Lewis University and Mercer University, she moved to San Antonio, where she assumed directorship of the African American studies program.

“I completely revamped that program and got it to where it needed to be,” she says. With her administrative experiences, she had a realization. “I didn’t like the idea of being just faculty anymore,” she says.

That led her to answer the national search for a new department chair at San José State. “The strengths of this program have to do with its longevity and its genesis,” she says. “It’s been around a very long time, and it’s on a campus that has a social justice mission and history.” She particularly appreciates that SJSU’s program has strong connections with the community.

She is gauging the interest of students in pursuing the major in African American studies (and two related minors). “They really want to see things develop further,” she says. “They’re very happy to see new black faculty members on campus who are interested and engaged.”

For now, she says, “I’m waiting to see how all the dust settles.” 🌀

Mission: Graduate

ACCESS Center keeps students on track to academic success



Being accepted to San José State and finding the resources to attend are the first building blocks toward a college degree.

Then comes the hard part. Rising to the level of college work, finding a major, juggling class schedules with work, keeping track of graduation requirements and making sure credits line up to satisfy a major.

Any misstep along the way, says Amy Leisenring, may negatively affect the progress of an aspiring SJSU graduate.

Leisenring is director of the Academic Counseling Center for Excellence in the Social Sciences, an airy suite on the second floor of Clark Hall that aims to keep students in the College of Social Sciences on track to graduate and succeed.

While individual departments within the college assign faculty advisors to each student in the major, ACCESS, as the advising center is known, offers students help in keeping track of their credits toward general education requirements as well as

help in choosing majors, changing majors and getting back on track from academic probation.

“This is a big place and it’s a big bureaucracy to navigate,” says Leisenring. ACCESS, she says, “is a way for the college to make sure the process is more user-friendly and supports success in students graduating and graduating faster.”

Many students come to college without a focus and unsure of what classes to take.

“They’re coming from a smaller high school or community college and they’re confused about what to take, sometimes directionless,” Leisenring says. “They need help.”

While it’s not always possible for students to follow a four-year degree plan, a student who earns a degree in four years spends less on college and gets into the workforce faster, so taking classes that fulfill degree requirements, passing classes and keeping track of credits needed to graduate are keys to success for the 5,000 or so students in the college.

The advising center opened in 2013 and is now in full swing, with six full-time advisors and tutors available for help with writing and statistics, the two most common areas in which students struggle, Leisenring says.

ACCESS offers appointments as well as drop-in opportunities. And students also take advantage of a quiet and comfortable space to study.

Leisenring joined SJSU as a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences in 2005. Her

research has been on the sociology of higher education with a focus on how race, gender and class inequalities shape students' experiences, a perfect fit for her position.

"We prioritize serving students," she says. While the college doesn't require general education advising and tutoring, students are often referred by faculty members and some respond to flyers and other outreach on campus and come in on their own.

"And we strongly recommend students check in with us," she says. 🌟

Amy Leisenring, left, director of ACCESS.



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On the Cover

Students make use of drop-in hours at ACCESS (the Academic Counseling Center for Excellence in the Social Sciences) where advisors and tutors help students in the college stay on track to graduate.

together

Fall 2018

Walt Jacobs, Ph.D., Dean

Editorial

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We're in this together

The College of Social Sciences is a place where inquisitive freshmen grow into scholars. It happens with the advice and mentorship of faculty, through collaboration of departments to serve all students' needs and through outreach and personalized support to smooth out bumps in the road to graduation.

We support all of the students who come into the College of Social Sciences because we believe they are the leaders, thinkers and mentors of tomorrow.

You can help support the college in its mission by making an annual gift. Whether you designate your gift to the dean to invest in our most pressing needs or to a particular department that inspires you, your donation will help us achieve our goal of providing a high-quality education to students who need it most.

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