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Spring 2010 Newsletter

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XGC NEWSLETTER **Spring 2010**

Xicana/o Graduate Council

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

Standing:
Ricardo, Prof. Mora Torres, Robert, Jessica, Kathryn, Ana, Alicia & Victor
Seated:
Juan Pablo, Rosa, Prof. Curry Rodríguez, Jessica, Elisa & Noralee

Letras y Macanas

By Ana Angel y Juan Pablo Mercado

¿Que onda compañeras y compañeros? The Xicana/o Graduate Council (XGC) evolved out of the Mexican American Studies Graduate Associated Students. In the Fall of 2009 students in the Mexican American Studies Graduate program felt it was essential to foster comunidad within the department and to build on what the previous graduate group had done.

As part of this new direction the graduate group established a set of core values that were of importance to Chicana/o students at the university and in the community. These values include: student success, academic retention and community outreach. With these values in mind the Mission of the Xicana/o Graduate Council is to create a community based on social justice, engaged in critical thinking, and raising conciencia to promote a safe space were action and dialog can be explored. The XGC newsletter was formed as part of that space where we can engage in this action and dialog.

Our first issue highlights the experience of XGC members at the 37th Annual National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies conference. The theme of the conference was Environmental Justice Struggles For a Post Neo-Liberal Age.

We would like to thank all of the San José State University organizations that helped to support our students who participated and attended this years conference, in particular:

Office of Equal Opportunity
Office of The Dean of Social Science
Office of The Provost
Associated Students

With a special thanks to Kathryn Blackmer Reyes and Professor Julia E. Curry Rodríguez for their guidance and support. ¡Muchisimas gracias!

How I Almost Quit My Masters Program...

By Victor Vasquez

I started the MAS grad program feeling disconnect with the student academic community. I felt out of place, not knowing too many people out in San Jose and commuting from Oakland after work made it even more difficult. At times, I've felt frustrated because I was so far away from campus and I wish I could be closer to the university and all the resources. In addition, working in Oakland this year has been extremely difficult. I've been working in the same place for three years dealing with all the different types of problems youth face such as homicides, drugs and all the different "ism" we face in society. At work, I am dealing with getting "truant" students to stay in our after school program and connecting them with the resources they need in order to graduate. I was also difficult keeping up with organizing, my family and well my own personal life. During the Fall 09 finals, I felt like quitting the Mexican American Studies Masters program and I honestly felt depressed thinking about quitting because I cannot remember the last time I actually gave up on something. I realized that if I was going to be successful academically, I needed to do everything in my power to invest my self academically and socially at San Jose State.

I came to the Mexican American Masters program because I wanted a place that could support me and understand my needs as a community worker who aspires to "just learn more". I found all the support and understanding I needed in my professors and peers. Prof. Curry challenged me to keep writing and not to give up. She told me, "I want to help you bring out the victorious writer in you" Prof. Barrera encouraged me to pursue my writing, but most importantly she created a safe space for me and other students to connect personally and academically. Prof. Pizarro critically encouraged me to dig deeper and reminded me to write with a purpose and to choose my words intentionally. My peers in MAS and in Xican@ Graduate Council (XGC) helped me stay focused and supported me throughout the semester. Two of my XGC peers even drove out to Oakland to study with me. I feel fortunate to be part of this great program and to be part of the Xican@ Graduate Council.

Alicia, Victor & Robert

This semester I feel more confident about my academics. I decided to attend the National Association of Chicana/Chicano Studies (NACCS) to further develop my academic interest. Prof. Curry asked us to become panel moderators and to step up and take on leadership positions at the NACCS conference. Being involved throughout the conference by helping out at registration table, attending great panels, seeing old friends at the conference and meeting other Xican@ studiest, was exactly what I needed to do to become more invested academically. I am now a member of NACCS and I am confident that I made the right decision in attending NACCS. Next year I am looking forward to presenting my own research and to represent my Oakland community to the fullest at NACCS. It has been a long year with many ups and downs but I feel good about my commitment to finish my Masters program. After this program, I am thinking about pursuing a PhD. P'alante siempre, don't give up!

For more information about the Xicana/o Graduate Council at José State University please email:
sjsu_xgc@googlegroups.com

Raising Awareness of Environmental Injustices

By Berta Jimenez

The NACCS conference was a doorway into a lot of positive experiences. It gave me the chance to engage with other individuals interested in my focus of environmental justice. I was able to meet and talk to others one on one about issues of sustainability and groundwater, soil and air contaminations and their prevalence in minority communities. I was able to form contacts that continue to lead to future internship possibilities. It also gave me the chance to take a look at topics central to NACCS attendants, issues of importance to our community. With the large diversity of topics I was able to get a sense of the complexity and wide range of foci occurring across this nation in Chicana/o studies. That was exciting. The variety of panels fed the intellectual palette and stimulated a thirst for further knowledge and exploration. And then there were the range of books from venders. I did not walk away from that without at least one.

As a first time presenter at the conference I appreciated the opportunity to speak on a panel with presenters concerned about similar environmental injustices. Having an audience interested in our presentations not only gave us a platform for our cause, it was an affirmation that we can make a difference in delivering our messages and in following through with action.

Jessica, Prof. Curry Rodríguez, Berta, Noralee, Maria, Rosa, Ana & Ricardo

Comunidad at NACCS

By Ricardo Agredano

The recently passed National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) conference had a lot of "firsts" for me. It was the first of these conferences I have attended, first time I have ever been up to Seattle, and the first time I had met people I consider my colleagues from other parts of the country. Something that seemed common to everyone, however, was a sense of comunidad, at least temporarily, and it was something that kept building through the duration of the conference.
We began building comunidad even before the conference road trip. Xicana/o Graduate Council members had already been in conversation about funding, logistics, plotting fun, and all while having fun, which brought us closer together. A colleague from Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State, Elisa, was also a part of the conversations and, because there was enough room, she was able to join us and share into the comunidad.

Once we arrived in Seattle, checked into our rooms, took some rest, and registered, we ran into other folks from San José. One guy, Frank, was there to present. The other, Ruben, was there to learn what he could about the conference theme of Environmental Justice. Again, comunidad was catching steam and would keep building.

The next few days of panel presentations, plenaries, caucus meetings, and informal chatter in the Exhibit Hall also brought people into comunidad. We quickly found ourselves going to panel presentations together, seeing local sites, going out for evening meals, and hanging out late. In all cases it seemed that we did not have enough time to talk about what it is we have been learning, what sort of work we had been doing, and where we plan to take it all. We were excited to encounter each other with all that we know academically, as well as jokes and things that bring laughter and joy into our lives.

Though most people seemed to have come from the West Coast, we were also able to meet folks from other states. From the Pacific, folks came from Seattle, Eugene, Bay Area, Central Coast, Los Angeles Area, and San Diego. We met folks from down in Texas, New Mexico, and back up to Utah. Each brought in their regions' happenings, introducing their people to us, and us to them.
Towards the end of the conference, it seemed as though many of the people in attendance knew each other, at least enough to greet each other. There also seemed to be bigger mobs of people roaming around together, chatting, sharing, and creating comunidad. I am stressing comunidad as an important part of the conference because it allows people to engage each other on things related to Chicana/o studies, as well as creating a climate of trust and collaboration. If we are to continue our work alongside our beautiful communities, we will need to learn to live in comunidad.

A quick story of this, while in Seattle, took place one night during an outing. Victor and I had gone outside to get some air and saw a group of about 5 or 6 Brown folks walking on the other side of the street. We decided to call out to them, "Hey! Are you all here for NACCS?!" They stopped and yelled back over to us, "Yeah! How is it over there?!" We told them that it was cool and they should join us, and although they did not end up coming, it illustrated to me how we were able to call on our temporary comunidad, even if we had not yet met them.

Making Connections at NACCS

By Juan Pablo Mercado

My experience at NACCS this year was tremendous. I was able to attend the screening of the film *As Long As I Remember: American Veteranos* (to be aired on PBS in May 2010). The film examines three Vietnam veterans from South Texas who use art as a mode of processing their experiences during the war and during the Chicano Movement. Film maker Laura Varela was there to discuss the film and what got her involved in the project. She said that the war had a significant impact on her as a young person; and that she had an uncle who was in Vietnam. She also stated that she wanted to examine the role that art plays in sorting through memories. Currently I am taking a an ethnic studies graduate course that specifically addresses the themes of traumatic memory and memory reconstruction. The film was an excellent way to bridge some of the theory that I have been reading along with how communities are actually (re)constructing memories.

The highlight of this event was the panel discussion of the film the next day. At the panel discussion Norma Cantú discussed the film briefly and recited a portion of her book Canícula. The portion of the book that Cantú read dealt with her bother Tino who was killed in Vietnam. It was a very emotional moment for Cantú and the audience members as well. Earlier in the semester in my ethnic studies course we had read Canícula and I had written a short response on the portion about Tino. The interconnectedness of the conference with my course work was unimaginable. I felt as if I had deeper level of understanding due to the work that I have been doing at San José State. I am very appreciative for the opportunity to have attended the NACCS conference this year. I am also very fortunate to be involved with such a great graduate program and great group of folks at San José State University.

A Community of Social Activists

By Robert Unzueta

The National Associations for Chicana and Chicano Studies annual conference was a transformative experience for me. I've never been in such a positive space where so many of my brothers and sisters where all working in very different capacities, with the same end goal in mind; to create social justice in their own communities. During my time at NACCS I felt what it meant to be a part of a larger community of social activists whom all have dedicated their life to creating a spaces in which they can make their contribution to the larger struggle of Chicana and Chicano rights. The most important lesson that I take away from NACCS is that no matter the age, generation, gender, level of education, geographical location, political association, etc. we all have a part to play in the larger struggle of human equality and it is up to each of to take on that responsibility every day. It is not enough to struggle within the walls of academia but how do we take those struggles of high theory and turn them into practical forms of resistance challenging all forms of oppression in our homes, in our relationships, in our communities and within ourselves.

Food Justice at NACCS

By Elisa Ocegueda

Attending the 37th Annual NACCS conference was an incredibly reassuring experience. As a person who identifies as a scholar-activist, I was truly inspired by this year's theme, presenters and overall program. The theme: "Environmental Justice Struggles in a Post-Neoliberal Age" struck a chord with many of us who are pushing academia to not only theorize the circumstances of marginalized communities but also to see ourselves as scholars who are part of larger struggles and movements for social justice. Many people who attended the conference were really excited to learn about the intersectional work happening across the Chicana/o academic network, for example a reoccurring subject was that of food justice (FJ) in communities of color.

Teresa Mares, a graduate student at the University of Washington-Seattle, presented her research work on FJ in Seattle. As part of the conference program, Ms. Mares organized a trip to a local community farm- the Marra Farm. During our visit to the Marra Farm we learned of the food injustice struggles of the local predominantly Latino and Laos community. With the exception of the farm, the neighborhood would be classified as a "food desert" considering the lack of affordable healthy food outlets in the area. The 4.5 acre farm serves multiple communities not only as a food source but as an educational tool, organizing space, and as a community resource. Overall I learned that the Marra farm and efforts like the South Central Farm create spaces for communities to gather, engage and share with one another, in other words, generate a commons. I left Seattle feeling imaginative and excited to know that there are many people inside and outside of academia who are dedicated to addressing social, environmental and food justice issues.

For more information about the Mexican American Studies Department at José State University please visit:
http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/catalog/departments/MAS.html

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY *powering* Silicon Valley

Mexican American Studies

40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Saturday, May 1 | 1–6 pm
MLK Library Cultural Heritage Center
(4th and San Fernando)

Please join current faculty, staff and students in marking forty years of Chicana/o scholarship and community at SJSU!

For more info or to RSVP, contact MAS at MASsjsu@gmail.com

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

- Reflections from Dr. Jorge Klor de Alva, Dr. Héctor Córdova and other former faculty and students
- Creative performances
- Poster session featuring documents and images of the department's history
- Opportunities to network and reconnect with friends
- Find out how to contribute to our department endowment
- Live music, food and libations

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY | COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Creating Spaces Outside The Classroom

By Ana Angel

NACCS provided a space for community building outside of the classroom. For me it was exciting to be with my classmates and professors and sharing this amazing opportunity. I felt this conference brought our department closer and it has motivated us to continue bonding and creating community outside the classroom environment. XGC has created the Circulo de Estudio's where MAS students get together for study sessions, homework sessions and simply doing work together. After our experience at NACCS, the attendance for the Circulo de Estudio's has been getting stronger. Our department has a strong family atmosphere. We inspire and motivate each other. I am glad I decided to pursue my graduate education at San José State and very proud to be a part of MAS. I enjoy being surrounded by amazing people who challenge you and push you in the right directions. We guide each other for success in this program and beyond.

Upcoming Circulo de Estudio:

May 5	YUH #30	9-11PM
May 15	TBD	10-3PM
May 18	YUH #30	9-11PM

Upcoming XGC Meetings:

May 3	YUH#30	9:00PM
May 17	YUH#30	9:00PM

XICANA/O GRADUATE COUNCIL
San José State University
San José, Califas

Future and current XGC members pose for a picture before the awards luncheon at the 37th Annual NACCS conference in Seattle Washington.