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### **Authors**

Vásquez, Irene  
González Cárdenas, Elizabeth  
García, Christine

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# AN ‘EPIC JOURNEY’<sup>1</sup> IN COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING:

## Teaching and Learning in a Chicana and Chicano Studies Classroom

IRENE VÁSQUEZ, ELIZABETH GONZÁLEZ  
CÁRDENAS AND CHRISTINE GARCÍA

**ABSTRACT:** *This article examines the positive educational and social outcomes of a community based learning class in a Chicana and Chicano Studies program at the University of New Mexico. The study examines the experiences of a small cohort of students and utilizes qualitative data, including a survey, interviews, and a focus group. The authors argue that the experience students shared working in the community, studying Chicana and Chicano materials and approaches, and dialoguing within collective community-oriented spaces empowered them to identify themselves as agents of social change. Students communicated that members of community organizations can serve as important teachers and mentors because they possess cultural capital that allows them to address complex community issues. In addition, students also described a new sense of appreciation for culturally relevant materials in the Chicana and Chicano Studies course. At the completion of the course, students reported a higher degree of self-confidence that they could and should work to promote positive social change in their own identified communities. Overall, students’ sense of self efficacy multiplied within a community based learning environment and, as a result, students reported a feeling more confident about their academic achievement and potential than before taking the Community Based Learning (CBL) course.*

### INTRODUCTION

Influenced by currently existing models of community based learning and emergent notions of community based research found in the 1969

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© 2014 Irene Vásquez, Elizabeth González Cárdenas, and Christine García. All Rights Reserved. The Chicana and Chicano Studies Program received funding for a Graduate Assistantship from the Center for Regional Studies at the University of New Mexico to provide research support for the development of this summary analysis on the Community Based Learning course in Chicana and Chicano Studies.

*El Plan de Santa Bárbara*, the Chicana and Chicano Studies Program at the University of New Mexico implemented a Community Based Learning course that requires students to engage in thoughtful community engaged learning. This study examines the effects of community based learning on student success at a flagship institution in the Southwest and contributes to a small but growing literature in this area of higher education. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a pilot Community Based Learning course on the academic, educational, and career aspirations of students enrolled in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Program at the University of New Mexico. The primary data set includes a survey questionnaire as well as oral interviews and a focus group involving eight classroom participants.<sup>2</sup> Personal opinions and reflections were captured throughout the study and then analyzed for content and meaning. The findings were situated within existing literature on the impact of community based learning to understand the significance of this type of experiential learning for students at a campus that serves a large percentage of underrepresented students in the United States.

The preliminary findings of the study indicate that community based learning experiences nurture academic skills, critical awareness, cultural competency, and a strong sense of social responsibility. Although the study set is small, the conclusions drawn support current scholarship that affirms the success of Chicana and Chicano Studies and community based learning approaches that support student educational aspirations and academic success. Furthermore, students who spend time at community sites, whether they are non-profits, community based organizations or businesses, demonstrate a greater understanding of social economic disparities and indicate they are more likely to envision themselves as giving back to their communities. The Chicana and Chicano Studies (CCS) Program faculty believe that community based learning (CBL) is a critical pedagogy and praxis. They believe student success increases because students are more likely to see their education as providing them with essential skills that contribute to their academic preparation, their lifelong personal success, and their commitment to a better society.

Research demonstrates that forms of experiential learning foster active learning and support student retention and graduation (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001). In colleges and universities throughout the U.S., a variety of names, definitions, and approaches are used to represent community engagement or community based learning practices. The Community Based Learning course in Chicana and Chicano Studies draws upon a variety of academic, service, and community engagement activities that inform approaches to community

based learning. The definition of community based learning in this paper is a structured academic classroom linking community based learning activities, including personal observation and direct involvement at community sites, to academic research that is focused on meeting the needs and challenges of a particular community.

## CONTEXT FOR THE COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING STUDY

CBL is rooted in a design and implementation of community-centered and culturally relevant education. The foundation for these types of educational models is works by Paulo Freire (1974). Freire discusses issues of race and oppression by examining the ways in which education systems maintain the subordination of economically marginalized populations. His educational approach challenged the prevalent “banking” concept within education that had its roots in western-based educational approaches. Freire proposed an educational approach that honored the cultural knowledge of oppressed individuals. Through a reorganization of teaching and learning that utilized problem-based learning and honored the social and cultural realities of individuals and communities, educators could engage and support community based learning.

Freire also challenged the hierarchical basis of education as one where oppressive relations characterize student –teacher relationships. The inherent structures inhibit students’ abilities to be active participants in their own social development. Instead, Freire posited a pedagogy of the oppressed, which seeks to transform the student-teacher relationship and learning outcomes in educational and community settings. Freire’s works circulated at the time that curricular programs in Ethnic Studies were being developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The monumental English language translations of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Cultural Action for Freedom* were both published in 1970 and have since influenced Chicano education activists. Implementing a Freirean approach in CBL and CCS is imperative in demonstrating that community building can occur and is transformational for both the students and community.

Freire’s work and the community led struggles by People of Color<sup>3</sup> for educational reform provided a critical context for reexamining public education in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Early works that sought to address social language and literacy models for ethnic minorities in the U.S. include Cazden and Leggett (1976), Smitherman (1977), and Heath (1983). These influential works informed and inspired critical work on culturally and community relevant education in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Ladson-Billings (1994) and Moll and González (1994). These latter works linked

linguistic and cultural difference to different approaches to teaching and learning. The 1990s and 2000s proved to be fruitful decades as scholars examined maternal and ancestral cultural influences alongside social and linguistic practices that fostered student educational successes (Paris, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2010; Paris, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2008; Alim, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Yasso, 2006, Howard 2001a and b; and Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejada, 1999). The model utilized by the CBL in CCS courses draws on the critical theories of aforementioned scholars in the areas of community based education and cultural relevancy.

This article applies notions of cultural relevance and cultural capital to explain the positive outcomes of CBL in a CCS course. The authors define cultural relevance as a framework for interactions where the teacher and the students possess purposeful knowledge and respect of communities' heterogeneous social and cultural values especially in regards to educational endeavors. Cultural relevance entails communication, symbols, local historical orientation, and cultural representations that are part and parcel of the society at large. Cultural capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and praxis by which individuals and communities deal with and respond to adversities and challenges based on their own lived and cultural experiences. Moreover, the authors refer to CBL as a "transformative practice" because the participants define the knowledge and the experiences they gain as life changing. Furthermore, they acknowledge their individual growth is linked to or measured by a socially impactful community experience. In this study, multidirectional teaching and dialogue involving community, instructors, and students produced identifiable community outcomes. Transformative education may also occur within a culturally or community related context.

Chicana and Chicano Studies offered the Community Based Learning course for students for the first time in fall 2012. CCS faculty members developed the CBL course in order to ground student learning in a praxis that connects academic learning and critical awareness to social responsibility and cultural competency. The particular community based praxis found in the CBL course at UNM is influenced by currently existing models of CBL, by emergent notions of community based learning, and by proposed community-oriented research found in the 1969 *Plan de Santa Bárbara*. Chicana and Chicano educational activists and professionals developed the 1969 model for the establishment of CCS in higher education within the context of the Chicana and Chicano Movement, a period of remarkable nation-wide struggles for civil rights by Mexican Americans. The *Plan de Santa Bárbara* highlighted the need for higher educational models to work to address Mexican American civil, human,

and cultural rights. Through the establishment of culturally relevant and community centered curriculum and pedagogy, Chicana/o Studies was outlined in the *Plan de Santa Bárbara* as integral to attaining civil rights for Chicanas and Chicanos. These goals mirrored the call of community members in the larger Mexican American society to acknowledge the ancestral cultures of Mexican Americans and work towards positive civic and community goals. These included improving the quality of life and increase access to cultural expression and forms of representation through supporting the work of community based organizations.

During the Chicana and Chicano Movement, calls for quality and culturally relevant education and higher education access went hand in hand with notions of community empowerment. Over 100 college and university students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community delegates met in Santa Bárbara, California in 1969 to discuss and formulate *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*, a Chicano plan for higher education (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969) that addressed the educational needs for Chicanas and Chicanos at the university level and stated:

[T]he state of California must act in 1) admissions and recruitment of Chicano students, faculty, administration and staff; 2) a curriculum program and add an academic major<sup>77</sup> relevant to the Chicano cultural and historical experience; 3) support and tutorial programs; 4) research programs; 5) publication programs and 6) community cultural and social action centers. (p. 10)

Although *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* has been revisited and reinterpreted over the past 40 years to reposition CCS within diverse higher educational and social political contexts, its call for culturally relevant education and community based learning has influenced higher education reforms regarding Ethnic Studies curriculum in the 21st century. The development and use of materials about the ancestry and heritage of People of Color in the United States and the concomitant application of critical theories regarding race, class, gender and sexuality power dynamics were initially proposed by scholars, writers and activists working from within or alongside Ethnic and Women's Studies curriculums.

*El Plan de Santa Bárbara* proposed a culturally relevant higher education model that underscored knowledge production about the CCS community by informed educators responsive to the social realities of modern society. The authors imagined a relevant interdisciplinary curriculum that reflected the needs of Mexican communities in the United States. Although *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* in many ways reflected a California thrust with California educators at the helm, it was in line with

other community-initiated efforts that promoted educational alternatives. Alternative educational institutions also developed in New Mexico in the late 1960s and early 1970s, simultaneous with calls for the establishment of CCS Programs at UNM and other four-year institutions.

Researchers in the last decade have begun to evaluate the positive impacts of Ethnic Studies on Students of Color in ways that validate its institutionalization in university curricula. For example, in “The Academic and Social Values of Ethnic Studies” (2011), Christine E. Sleeter discusses the important influences Ethnic Studies Programs have on student educational aspirations and success rates. Sleeter writes that Ethnic Studies counters traditional mainstream curriculum (p. 1) that has not served student aspirations or educational needs and interests. Instead of invalidating or denigrating the social and cultural experiences of students, Ethnic Studies Programs draw on student phenomenological understandings to strengthen their academic competencies and critical engagement. Other studies underscore the notion that students and their communities’ culturally-lived experiences are critical in shaping their academic and personal success. Jessica M. Vasquez (2005) examines how eighteen Chicano college students become engaged in a classroom environment because the topics of their course underscore their lived experience, such as immigration, labor, poverty, and Catholicism. The students in Vasquez’s study described developing a feeling of community based on their understanding of common experiences and hardship. Furthermore, the students reported that in reading texts by Chicanos, they:

discovered that Latinos do in fact have an abundance of cultural capital, just not the cultural capital reified by the United States educational system or the society at large. The Latino students referred to this overflow of cultural capital as ‘ownership of the text’, meaning that they were finally the ones with the inside knowledge, and this flowed into a new-found sense of ethnic validation (p. 909).

Other research demonstrates the ways a culturally relevant education counters hierarchical forms of knowledge and approaches that lead to high push outs rates and low college attainment rates for Latino students and other Students of Color. Cammarota and Romero (2009), for example, examine how a social justice approach within a culturally relevant education provides Latina/o students with the ability to change the narrative of their educational experiences. Consequently, the students in Cammarota and Romero’s study examined existing social and educational disparities within their communities, collected data, and presented it to various groups such as school administrators in hopes of remedying problems

like high push-out rates. One student stated that having a social justice approach towards education helped him see that a college education was a necessity in improving his life and community, and challenging social and educational disparities (p. 92-93). Hence, Cammarota and Romero demonstrate the positive outcomes a culturally relevant education can have on Latina/o students and their educational attainment and future aspirations.

## COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING PEDAGOGY AT UNM

At UNM, the development of the Community Based Learning course resulted from faculty, student, and community interest in community based engagement and research. The academic purpose of the CCS Program is “to promote a critical understanding of Chicano/Hispano/Mexicano communities through teaching, research, and advocacy” (UNM Chicana and Chicano Studies Website, 2013). Through a strategic planning process, CCS faculty identified CBL as an academic planning priority. Moreover, students enrolled in the CCS Program had previously engaged in community organizing, service learning, and volunteering through specific program initiatives or individualized opportunities. Many of these experiences were not structurally tied to a curricular program rooted in Chicana and Chicano Studies approaches. Community members also played a role in stimulating structured community based learning opportunities for students in the program through their participation in the CCS Advisory Board. The outcome of these dialogues was the creation of the CBL course with the intention to strengthen student research, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. The program staff expects that strengthening these skills will best prepare students for post-baccalaureate programs, professional opportunities, and career pathways.

In the CCS CBL course, each student completed 4 to 6 hours of weekly service at a community-based site or non-profit organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The students met weekly with an instructor and completed a common set of readings and written assignments. Guided readings and reflective discussion activities were designed to integrate student learning within the academic field of CCS as well as other fields of study that emphasize experiential learning. In addition, student participants regularly provided short progress reports on their community based learning project and received feedback from their peers. At the end of the semester, each student gave a final presentation that summarized the findings of their community based learning project. Three of the students enrolled in the class presented their projects at the 2013 National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies conference in San

Antonio, Texas, and three presented at the 2013 National Impact Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. These students had opportunities to share their CBL work with a broader audience, which reaffirmed their understanding that knowledge is interactional and informed through collective spaces of inquiry and dialogue.

In fall 2012, CCS enrolled the first cohort of 16 students in the CBL course. One cohort of eight students was enrolled through the CCS Program and adhered to the model of CBL herein described. The course incorporated structured academic learning and weekly service hours at a local non-profit, business or community based organization. Another set of eight students was placed within El Centro de la Raza, where they completed their service learning hours on campus and engaged in research projects focusing on social and economic disparities in the South Valley. These students were supervised directly by the staff at El Centro. The researchers felt it was critical to focus on students who voluntarily chose to experience community based learning in a community setting. The El Centro cohort was mandated to enroll in the course as part of an internship requirement. The CCS cohort that was situated at community based learning sites is thus the focus of this particular study. The CCS cohort of eight students was selected for the study because they followed the model presented in the CCS 384 (Community Based Learning in Chicana and Chicano Studies) course, which is informed by the conceptual thrust of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*. Students had direct connections with community-based organizations and were involved in activities that served communities outside of the university.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study examines the impact of community based learning in three areas: student educational enrichment, student clarification in regard to career or professional aspirations, and student commitment to civic involvement and community service. The researchers developed three instruments intended to draw out information pertinent to the three major themes. These included a survey instrument, individual interviews, and a focus group. All three instruments served to collect data on student perceptions of the efficacy of community based learning. The research questions guiding the study were:

- How does community based learning impact Chicana and Chicano Studies students and their learning?
- How does community based learning impact the educational and career goals of Chicana and Chicano Studies students?

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Student Placement</b>
Agricultural Cooperative	1
Arts	1
Family Services	1
Health Services	1
Historic Preservation	1
Immigrant Rights	2
Business	1

TABLE 1: Community Site Place Placements

The data collection and analysis process occurred in two phases. The first phase took place in the fall 2012 semester. Students completed a survey questionnaire and the majority of the participants participated in an interview and the focus group. During the second phase, completed in the spring 2013 semester, the primary investigator analyzed the data. The investigator analyzed the responses to the surveys and looked for patterns in the responses regarding student perceptions of the efficacy of community based learning.

### PLACING STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

The CBL course offered students a variety of options in regards to initiating and implementing community based learning projects. Students had the option to start a new community based learning project or build upon current CBL experiences and expand the scope of their involvement at community sites. Based on their career or research preferences, students selected a site from a list of pre-approved community based organizations. In this study community based organization refers to a site located off campus and intended to serve stakeholders through the specific provision of services aimed to improve the life of the community. The sites selected included an agricultural cooperative, an arts-based center, a historic preservation site, health and family services organizations, and an immigrants rights organizations. One business site was selected because the organization was a female-owned start up business that sought to deliver quality food to an area of the South Valley that lacked food provision services. Six students chose their site placement and two students were placed at their site. Table 1 lists the student placements by the type of organization.

At the end of the semester, all eight students reported high levels of satisfaction with their site selection. One student did shift from their original placement to another site based on that student's choice. Below

are eight short profiles of the students and their community based learning project.

Julie worked as a salesperson for the Agricultura Network, an agricultural co-op in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In this position, she compiled a database of orders and sales from local restaurants and schools. She placed the orders among participating growers based on their available produce for the week. Julie said that because of the work of the collective, growers are “able to market and sell more than by themselves.

Esra developed a blog for an immigrant’s rights center, El Centro Igualdad y Derechos, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Undocumented youth were encouraged to submit stories about their experiences for posting on the blog. Esra said, she wanted to create a site where youth could “share their stories; share their experiences either through literary works or art of any kind, visual art.

Julian conducted community based learning activities at El Centro Igualdad y Derechos. He facilitated weekly art sessions for middle and high school youth at El Centro. He said, “I worked with El Centro Igualdad y Derechos. I had organized with them for about a year and there was a need for art, so that is why I chose to do that project because when there is any type of event we do. . .we usually need some type of art.”

Serena planned and organized events for an independent micro cinema, Basement Films, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The organization promotes the use of underrepresented forms of moving art. As Executive Director, Serena is responsible for putting events together that promote the organization. She said “Throughout the course I found myself involving more people that weren’t originally a part of Basement Films.”

Ivan worked with a music therapist at Casa Angelica, a home for severely disabled children, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In addition, shadowing the music therapist, he also assisted the Activities Coordinator to implement new activities for the children. He said, “I went in there and shadowed a music therapist and learned from her and assisted her and the music therapy program.”

Oralia worked with Peanut Butter and Jelly Therapeutic Services in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She assisted the staff in the day care and in facilitating parent-training workshops. In addition, Oralia worked with a videographer to develop a promotional video that garnered \$100,000 in support from the Kellogg Foundation. She said, “We would have meals together and do songs and read together. . .it is a program to help bring the parents and the kids together.”

Aron worked with Gutierrez-Hubbell House, a history and cultural center located in the South Valley in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He worked on publicity and marketing initiatives for the center. At the end of the semester, Aron reported, “I feel like I actually got in there and improved it immensely.”

Overall, in the survey instrument, students demonstrated high levels of satisfaction in regards to their community based learning experience. The course syllabus outlined opportunities for students to learn about community based learning as a pedagogical and methodological approach to learning. Students, in conjunction with their community site supervisor, developed a project that benefitted the community-based organization. The results of the survey questionnaire demonstrate the following findings:

- At the completion of the course, an increase occurred in the number of students who agreed that they feel prepared to formulate an original [research] question.
- 100% of the students agreed that they are comfortable understanding the role of critical literacy in their education.
- 6 of 7 students had previously volunteered or engaged in service learning activities prior to taking the course.
- At the end of the course, more students agreed that community work can help students understand the class lectures and reading materials.
- 100% of the students agreed with the statement, “the idea of combining work in the community with university coursework should be practiced in more classes.”
- There was an increase in the number of students who marked “strongly agree” to the statement “I feel comfortable proposing action items to solve problems, issues, or challenges in my community.”
- 100% of the students at the end of the course agreed that they feel a sense of responsibility to serve their communities.
- More respondents than in the beginning of the course stated that the work they accomplished in the course will make them more marketable in their chosen profession.
- At the completion of the course, 100% of the students agreed that they can make a difference in their community.

## BRIDGING ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The data collected for this study demonstrates that students perceived that the CBL course in CCS supported their academic and professional development. Students felt more comfortable at the end of the course in developing a research question and project and in utilizing critical literacy skills. Ivan defined his success in terms of the academic skills and knowledge that he gained but also the contribution he made at the community site, Casa Angelica:

My experience I would definitely say was a success, because of the knowledge I was able to gain and the service I was able to give back to the community.

Ivan further describes his academic and social development as a result of the CBL course:

I enrolled in the course merely to fulfill a major requirement. However, I gained more from this course than any other course that I took during my undergraduate career. I learned how to properly conduct research within the scope of community activism, as well as gaining a better understanding of how to more effectively prepare for involvement in the community. The experiences, life lessons, and life long relations that were acquired throughout the semester long course were invaluable to me as a person, student, future professional, and community activist.

In this quote, Ivan underscores the academic development that he obtained from his community based learning project. He emphasizes research skills development but also links it to the life lessons he experienced and lifelong relationships he established through the course. His statement suggests that these lessons were missing from other parts of his undergraduate training. Like Ivan, Oralia, who worked at Peanut Butter and Jelly Therapeutic Services, drew a connection between her academic and community learning experiences. She said:

Fortunately, my experience definitely related to the Chicano Mexican Studies Program because I went into a program, I worked with PB&J that was involved with undocumented families and children, so working on those levels, I felt like I was informed academically through our readings and like I said before through *El Plan [de Santa Bárbara]* and through a lot of the community members that came in and spoke about the South Valley or the city of Albuquerque in general.

In this statement Oralia shared that her background in Chicana and Chicano Studies oriented her to be more familiar with the experiences of undocumented communities. This contributed to her sense of ease in working with underserved populations.

Another student reported gaining new skills in communication and networking. As the primary volunteer for the AgriCultura Network, Julie grew the number of buyers and sales for the agricultural collective during her CBL placement. She said:

I am able to multitask better than what I thought I was able to and working with people I have never met, before, ever. I have always gained new jobs from networking or sometimes experience, but having to introduce myself to people that they've only heard my voice or seen my name in an email and just going up to them and introducing myself. Presenting my thoughts and ideas on how to change something in front of a group of all men is intimidating, and, I was able to do that and I was encouraged to do that, so. I was able to do that.

Julie noted that she gained a sense of ease and confidence in working with diverse populations. In particular, she noted gender dynamics that she initially felt challenged by, but was able to overcome. She expressed that overcoming a fear of speaking before an all male audience gave her a sense of accomplishment. She remarks, "I was able to do that."

Students tied their sense of empowerment to their own skills development and the way this benefitted the community organization. For example, Aron sharpened his skills as a Communications student developing a database and newsletter for Gutierrez Hubbell House, a Historic Preservation site in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He stated:

In my case they needed, they desperately needed a better system of communicating and I feel like I actually got in there and improved it immensely, so now that she has the database, now that she has the templates and formats to send out these newsletters, anyone can come in behind me and if they mention they like communications and public relations, 'Oh good, we have a site for you.'

As evident in the quote, Aron felt that his contribution made a positive impact on his community site. This sense of self-efficacy was notable among other students in the course because the students believed that their work positively impacted the operations and practices of the community based organization. Oralia, for instance, was involved in the development of a video project that resulted in a \$100,000 Kellogg Grant going to PB&J. She described gaining new technical skills and

strengthening her academic skills through her applied community based learning experience. She reported:

I learned how to edit, cut, write, hold the camera, and how to work with the sound especially for interviews. I was hiding the mic and he was like, “NO, no, no.” I felt that the filmmaker was going outside his cultural boundaries and safe zone going into these undocumented workers’ homes, which were tight spaces. And, they trusted me and trusted him to go into their homes. So, I learned the technical part, the emotional part, the academic part. It was an epic journey through the community, on the streets, and through books.

Here, Oralia enthusiastically expressed her experience in the CBL course as an “epic journey through the community, on the streets, and through books.” Prior to saying this, she explained how families trusted her to go into their homes, interview them, and record their experiences on camera. Her role in making the families feel comfortable was critical to the success of the documentary project because she, unlike the cameraman, was bilingual and bicultural. Her skills and sensitivity resulted in more effective video that ultimately brought the organization a sizeable grant.

As reported by the above-mentioned statements, students identified gaining new academic, technical, and social skills in specific areas such as marketing, communication, and writing. All of the students connected their learning to their specific site and understood that the benefits to the community organization were valuable and empowering. Students identified themselves as being capable of solving problems that had real benefits via a specific need demonstrated at the community based organization. The fact that students developed specific informational products and demonstrated culturally relevant skills ultimately empowered the community based organization. This in turn allowed the community based organization to better serve the community and fulfilled the students’ aspirations to create change. This notion of affecting and creating positive change was a driving motivation in the establishment of Chicana and Chicano Studies Programs. The data collected from the CBL students underscored that knowledge acquisition and dissemination in the silo of the university is incomplete if students and the communities they live or work in do not realize the benefits of teaching and learning.

## EXPANDING NOTIONS OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING

The CBL course in Chicana and Chicano Studies provided students with a larger network of teachers, mentors, and guides. This collaborative

learning setting was identified by student participants as a benefit and as a source for meaningful academic experiences. In the interview and in the focus groups, students described their peers and the community partners as mentors and guides throughout the course. In addition to identifying the course instructor as being influential in their learning process, student participants attributed their learning to site supervisors, site stakeholders, and their classroom peers. Students reported learning from individuals and interactions in their community based learning, which underscored the social benefit of CBL.

Students came to validate the knowledge and cultural capital of the communities that they served because community members provided students with tools and knowledge that were significant in their success. This positive exchange occurred even when students experienced frustrations while learning the job. Julie remarked that one of the farmers provided her instrumental support, guidance, and information that were critical to her success at the agricultural collective. She said:

One of, a few of our farmers, but one of them kind of took me under his wing and coached me. During my first week Henry [Director] was out of town, my very first week of placing the orders and I almost quit at that point. It was a complete mess and Justin put me under his wing and was like, just come over. I went to the farm, he figured out all the orders, because I did them completely wrong, and he took out everything and then from then on it was very smooth.

Julie points out that while she expected to receive support and training from her Director, in the end, it was a farmer who guided her through the process of developing computer orders of the agricultural cooperative's produce. As she notes, she almost quit her position but instead took pride in being able to overcome her challenges with the assistance of a community member.

Some of the students faced social trials for which they felt unprepared or overwhelmed to deal with until they witnessed first hand how community members overcame these limitations. Oralia discussed that while being challenged to support family workshops that strengthened parenting skills and family bonds, she found the staff and parents of the PB&J organization to be important sources of influence and inspiration. She said:

I learned a lot from the parents. They talked a lot about how it is living on the streets of Albuquerque. I learned from the supervisors about how the programs evolved. I learned about how it was when there wasn't this program and what drove people to get together.

It was kind of like a neighborhood decision. Two women, one was like, 'my sister has to work all day with four kids and no husband so I'll take care of her kids and then take the night shift.' It was people working together; it was the community.

Oralia noted how the women of this community bonded to develop critical services for working women and how this led to the development of the Albuquerque community organization known as PB&J. This reinforced for her how underserved communities utilize cultural capital to address pressing social needs. Students learned to be appreciative of supportive persons at the community site. Ivan also identified staff members of the community placement sites as being formative in the CBL course. He said, "I felt like [the staff and clientele I was working with] informed me and instructed me. As well as the instructors in the class [who] were very informative and kind of kept me on track and in progressing me, in a sense." Ivan described the learning and skills that he gained in health services center as helping him progress academically and socially. The above examples illustrate that students believed that their own learning occurred in relation to the challenges that they faced in their CBL sites and the ways they overcame their trials with the assistance of community members. They defined their success in relation to the knowledge and experience they gained from community members and their abilities to create positive changes in the community. This dynamic demonstrates that when utilized in the Chicana and Chicano Studies programs, CBL can be used simultaneously to support communities and students in addressing problems of the 21st century.

Students also highlighted the impactful relationship that their classroom peers had on each other and the implementation of their CBL projects. When asked about whom she learned from in the course, Esra stated:

Yeah, I think from Julian [a student peer] especially because he was in the same organization and I really admire how constant he was, like I saw how hard it was for him to be there every single Monday, but he was there and he stuck with it, and eventually he started getting a really good base of students, so maybe that was maybe where I failed, I lacked having workshops, where I should have done that instead having it purely online, that was something that he—just having people engaged physically like really helped him because he was able to gather much more.

Esra's statement reveals a classroom environment where students found learning from their peers to be important and rewarding. She demonstrates that students learned how to improve their methods of enacting

change from observing other students' successes and challenges. Overall, the environment of community based learning had a significant impact on the academic and social learning of the students involved in CBL. This demonstrates that community based organizations or public or private service organizations situated in underserved communities are resources for engaging in learning. These sites bring together professionals, working staff, community members, and their families into an environment that seeks to address community needs and interests. Placing students in these community sites offered students a dynamic learning environment where they were exposed to individuals possessing the skills and abilities needed to navigate complex social and economic conditions. Students assessed the skills of the community stakeholders and learned from their successes as well as relating their successes to community members. Students also described being motivated and influenced by their classroom peers. Multi-directional and interactional learning enhanced the experience of students inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, when students examined the learning praxis as being identified with the methods and approaches of the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies, they affirmed the importance of both CBL and CCS.

By the end of the course, students attributed the pedagogy and learning practices of the CBL course as lending to their personal satisfaction with the course. Their individual sense of accomplishment stimulated their academic aspirations. Ivan underscored the impact of the course, the instructor, course materials, and course presenters as critical to his successful CBL project. He shared:

Each of us had a very different project in very different fields and in film and others were talking about nutrition and community based gardens. And Frank<sup>5</sup> was really on us about presenting our progress every week so we were all very knowledgeable about what each other was doing, we could probably present on each other's work if we had to. And, that was really a beautiful thing because we were being educated on a weekly basis by our peers on all the things and just the friendships I was able to create in that class were incredible and those are friendships that will last far beyond the scope of this class. Definitely from Frank I can see why he, in particular was chosen to teach that course because he is very intricate in his methods and very passionate about working in Chicano communities. And, I really felt that his work helped us to make really powerful, really strong presentations. He helped us to stay on track and made sure no one was falling behind. So, I really learned a lot from him.

Serena also corroborated other students' perceptions that the course materials were helpful to her and that the staff at the community site played a significant role in the success of her project. She said:

Oh, yes, definitely. Just because, there was, the lecturers came in and learned so much about community based learning and planning and things like that I can now take those ideas and implement into Basement Films. And, I think I have a little bit already, but it's still growing, it's still something that you gotta, you gotta do things to learn.

Serena highlights the usefulness of both the supplementary instructional materials and practical elements of community based learning to students in the CBL class. In addition, she expressed that learning by doing is equally important. Serena also stated:

Well. . .the lecturers that came in that I learned a lot from, they brought concepts that I had never heard before. I still look back in my notebook and I'm like, "Duh, of course that's the way people think!" But, like I was saying before, I learned a lot from Michelle and I just learned a lot from constantly being [at Basement Films]. I mean this is probably the most time I've put into Basement Films since I've been a member there. I mean, I do put in a lot of time, but being in this class and also having a set amount of hours that I had to work and also all the events we had to attend and I was there everyday and it just didn't stop. Everyone I interacted with when I was there I learned from. I learned in such a positive way that made me love the work that I am doing even more. So it all kind of like just combined into a giant love ball.

While the requirements of attending a course, completing course work, engaging in community based learning, and completing a final project presented students with personal and academic challenges, their sense of achievement multiplied because they had the support of their instructor, peers, and community allies. Serena used the word "love" several times in her interview, which negates the typically hierarchical and competitive learning environment once held in esteem at institutions of higher education.

In the CBL course, students learned in multi-directional and cyclical fashions through peers, community based staff and clientele, and through the course instructor. The learning approach then went beyond a linear binary of learning from professor to student. Implementing projects and applied learning at community based learning sites also opened up the learning spaces for students and enhanced their capacity for learning and their confidence to overcome challenges. Overcoming obstacles

boosted the students' confidence and this in turn made them feel more satisfied with the learning process. Ultimately the students took abstract knowledge, concepts, and theories in the CCS class and put them into practice. As one student puts it, "you gotta do things to learn."

## CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEARNING IN A CHICANO STUDIES CBL CLASSROOM

The previous sections explored the connections between community based site learning and student academic and social development and multi-directional forms of teaching and learning. Another line of inquiry in this study was the relevance and impact of community-based learning within a CCS classroom and specifically the relationship between learning and the tenets of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*. Students were asked about the impact of their educational experience within the context of the field of the CCS. Several students remarked that the course made them think about getting their education and then going back to their communities and making a difference in the quality of life. The majority of the students contextualized their learning experiences within the framework of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*.

Oralia spoke to the impact that *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* had in shaping her understanding about university and community interaction. She expressed feelings that the University has a responsibility in making education accessible and relevant to pressing social needs. She commented:

I would like to add as an ethnic studies group and studies students a goal of ours was following *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* and talking about how to make the university work for the community and for the students and for us and how to stick together as a *gente* and a *raza* and how to give back to our community and circulating this knowledge that is happening at the university and continuing our *movimiento* as the younger generation and making sure that everybody has the equal right to an education and to food and to all that good stuff that keeps us going.

Oralia's comment demonstrates her understanding of the relevance of Chicana and Chicano Studies in addressing community needs. She underscores making "the university work for the community," which to her means making education and basic materials accessible to those who do not have that access currently. In this case, the CBL course in CCS encouraged Oralia to see the university as a resource for the community in ways similar to the proponents of CCS.

Julian and Esra also agreed that *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* offered a meaningful commentary on the purpose of the educational and community based learning experiences at the university. Julian stated:

The readings I was doing gave me a different thought about how the community should be functioning, not should be functioning but just a different way than I learned. Like right now I am thinking about *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* . . . it really made me feel responsible to do something. So, by showing up every day over there I felt that connection. . .

In this statement, Julian suggests that students themselves should play a more active role in their communities. In his case, Julian worked at an immigrant's rights center where he has previously been involved as an organizer. His experience of teaching art to the youth at the center gave him a different vantage point to understand the community. Overall, his experience motivated him to be responsible to do something beyond what he already did as youth organizer at the organization.

Esra's involvement in the course encouraged her to want to seek out more information about *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* and CCS. She said:

And the readings were good too. Reading *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* and I really think that *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* should be focused on more because it is the basis of class because we went through it, but I kind of wanted to go through it more because it is perfect for this you know, it's the essence of it.

Students in the course, like Esra, who read and reflected on *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*, linked teaching and learning in the CBL course to calls for community and culturally relevant education by Chicana and Chicano educators in the 1970s. Specifically, they identified the relevance and applicability of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* in 21st century society.

Even students who were less familiar with the tenets of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* and CCS reported educational gains that were transformative. As an Anthropology major, Julie was less familiar with CCS and the founding documents associated with the discipline. However, she corroborated the notion that CCS courses offer students a learning environment that is illuminating. She commented:

This whole class. . . this is my first Chicano Studies class. . . and the class views in general were enlightening and educating me on a whole different level that I have ever experienced before.

Like Julie, Ivan was less familiar with the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies but he also reported gaining new insights that related to the

emphasis on community based and culturally relevant learning. Ivan's CBL experience helped him understand that cultural competency, as prioritized in the CCS course, provided him with a critical approach to being successful in his community site placement. He stated:

So, what I got into with music therapy is that music is very dynamic and people of different communities relate to different kinds of music and are affected by different kinds of music depending on their background. So, in my particular experience I noticed that the majority of the songs I was singing in English maybe only half of the kids in the room were responding to that music whereas the other half of the children seemed unresponsive or unaffected. So, when I talked to the nursing staff there they told me some kids were Spanish speaking only. And they were raised with traditional Spanish music, so I would sing *Feliz Navidad* or *La Bamba* and it was amazing to see how those kids were turned on by that type of music that really resonated with them. I guess what I'm really trying to say is that certain communities require a specialized approach and a culturally sensitive approach. And how you are dealing with them whether it be in the political realm, artistically, or in any realm. Cultural sensitivity and cultural engagement is really at the basis of it.

Ivan is an accomplished singer and musician who chose to be placed at a site that provided musical therapy to its clients. Initially, he didn't identify his Spanish speaking abilities as a resource that could enhance the experience of his clients. He learned at the site that youth respond to culturally relevant forms of art. He understood his ability to sing in Spanish as a form of cultural capital. Ivan expressed this by saying the kids were really "turned on" and, in consequently, he attributed this to "cultural sensitivity and cultural engagement."

In regards to the community engaged and culturally responsive tenets of the CBL course, students drew their own significant connections to the field of CCS and, more importantly, emphasized tenets of the field that underscore social praxis and social justice. Oralía remarked:

"There is nothing in Taos." I don't know how I survived, how I got out. If it wasn't for this program [Chicano Studies] I would have gone back. But then I think, "No, no, no, I do need to go back, but I need to give to the community that is struggling, that doesn't have programs. And, back to what is important to us. Apparently the people who are working from these non-profits are from here. They already have a place. I need to go back to where I am from and fix things there. And I know it is a huge goal that will take 20-30 years to do, but that needs to be done as an individual goal. What goals do we set as students and what do we take away from working with

our communities. We need to build up from what we know and our education and go into communities where there isn't any, where you can do your art and become the teacher and organizer.

Oralia emphasizes the importance of self-action for community empowerment. Like Julian, Oralia links her own personal goals with community learning and community empowerment. She values the education she gained at the university when she states "if it wasn't for this program, I would have gone back," while also making the point of building on her education and going back to her community.

Serena volunteered at Basement Films, a diverse community based arts organization that cuts across, race, class, gender, and sexuality groups, prior to the start of the course, yet she learned to value her work in new ways. She, like Esra and Julian, understood the needs and challenges of the organization because of her previous experience. Although her community placement did not target communities of color, her experience at Basement Films led her to value the importance of educating all public communities about forms of underrepresented art. She attributed her successful outcome to the development of a new film initiative to mentor women in the area of underrepresented cinema. This outcome, like others achieved by students in the CBL course, highlights personal satisfaction with a community oriented outcome. Serena states:

I think it was definitely a success because I was working with people who wanted to learn more about an underrepresented form of art. And I think that I can relate with Ivan when he says that the population I was working with was mostly Anglo, there were only about 2 or 3 of us that were Chicana and Chicanos, but it was more so working with a group of people that were interested in working with something underrepresented and bringing that to life completely.

Serena identified her project as being identified with an underrepresented community, women of color in cinema. Her works demonstrates the application of CBL and CCS educational tenets for a broader audience or constituency beyond Ethnic Studies programs. Serena applied principles of community based learning to her educational and professional work environment; working to resolve issues of underrepresentedness, be it in film, education, or a farm collective requires a commitment to understanding a community and valuing diverse participants.

Oralia also learned to appreciate the notion of working to improve communities regardless of their racial and ethnic composition. Through her CBL placement, she learned about the social and economic needs

of the International District located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She attributed her success to her acceptance of different social groups and her desire to work to build healthier communities. She stated:

That they build these non profit programs to help our community, so either if that is for food or if that is for children or if that is for healthcare there is all these different issues addressed with in different non-profits. Some served the *raza*, others don't and in my opinion the bigger picture of it all is what can these non-profits and what can we do as students to help the community in general. As Chicano students, most of us come from rural communities and have struggled to be here at the university and this program finally allowed us to give back. Finally struggling to be here, we gave back. My experience was very successful and helped me grow as a Chicana woman.

Notably, Olivia expressed finally being allowed the opportunity as a student to give back. While emphasizing her rural background and her experience struggling in college, her sense of accomplishment resulted in a personal and social outcome. The course strengthened her sense of identity as a Chicana woman.

By the end of the semester, students felt that the curricular approach and the content in the CBL class served to reinforce the importance of CCS in institutions of higher education. Several of the students underscored one of the original tenets of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* that public institutions must serve their surrounding communities and making higher education accessible to underrepresented communities. One student appreciated learning through a more holistic community based site approach. These experiences nurtured students' sense of responsibility to the community and society and demonstrated that higher education should be about community enrichment more than it is about individualistic career or educational goals. The field of CCS and specifically learning about *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* offered students a philosophical approach to community based learning that included interdisciplinary learning, cultural sensitivity, and cultural engagement. They emphasized a praxis of teaching and learning that draws on student and community knowledge and experience to create innovative teaching and learning spaces. Students enhanced their own cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005) by drawing on the cultural capital of the stakeholders at community-based learning sites and by creating transformative experiences that generated social change within their communities.

## THE CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING

While all of the students reported high levels of student satisfaction with their community based learning experience, their learning environments provided them with a range of challenges. Since the course was a one-semester course, students had to set realistic goals and objectives. Yet, finding time outside of their academic and work schedules challenged several of the students. Several students described feeling challenged to meet their academic, employment, leadership and CBL obligations. For instance, Julie reported that making time for the service hours was a challenge. She also said:

[. . .] But once I was able to handle that and focus and realize it could lead to more than just school I definitely made time for it. But those first few weeks of making sure my managers didn't schedule me for work and making sure I managed my homework during the times I wasn't there was the most challenging part.

The course required four to six hours of community work. The requirement is intended to ground student learning in the daily activities of community based organizations as they work to address the needs of communities. However, the combination of weekly meetings, assignments, and service hours made juggling their lives and schedules a problem for some students. Although some students already volunteered at their community sites, other experienced the tension of adding on new responsibilities.

Several students also suggested that more time be spent in the classroom studying and understanding the community. For instance, Esra stated:

Maybe instead of going out there and coming up with a project and right away put it out there and make people do something, maybe it should be first you go and learn. First, you learn, you write, you learn about the community. So, you learn about the community before you go out and teach it. Because that is what Juan and I learned. We learned by doing it. Like, "We have these awesome plans and we are going to go out and change the community and change the world" and it is not that easy. And it slaps you in the face and drives you back and says, "Nope, we are going to teach you." So maybe that is what you guys as instructors have to do is maybe almost make the class a two part, a two semester thing where you go into the community first, you learn first, you observe, you participate, you get involved first and then you go back and you give something. Even for me, I have been with this organization for two-three years, even that, I went and I actually had to go back. But

actually, you guys telling us, “You have to go and learn and observe and then from there you see the needs, you’ve learned, so now go and provide something the organization needs.

Esra’s commentary demonstrates new potential for the CBL courses to better prepare students for community work through course work. She highlights the need for students to understand communities’ historical and social background as a requisite for community service. Although adding coursework would be burdensome on both student tuition costs and CCS program faculty teaching loads, perhaps in the future CCS curriculum can be changed to make more explicit connections between social science coursework and community service projects.

Esra also reveals the need to make the relationship between a student fulfilling her/his course requirements and a community service organization more reciprocal. Esra’s suggestion for local and specified participant-observation research projects illuminates potential research curriculum for other social science courses in the CCS program that roots all courses in community based learning. In the future, the CCS program could thus provide research curriculum to all of its instructors that both helps students make sense of broader social trends while at the same time grounding student research in locally specific projects that prepare them for community service either as a course requirement or as a life long goal.

Although some students may not have any knowledge of localized history that shapes the political, social, and economic needs of communities, other students may already possess experiential knowledge that better prepares them to accomplish the goals of CBL. For instance, students like Esra and Julian who had previously worked at their community placement site were more comfortable entering the community and initiating experiential learning projects. The challenge for instructors with students like Esra and Julian is to modify coursework to apply to a student with a more advanced understanding of local community needs. Perhaps supervised independent research that helps Julian make use of the research resources at UNM to develop his understanding of community needs would work better than additional coursework. Julian also highlights the challenges of not only the CCS program, but for instruction at all universities to institutionalize a curriculum that can be adapted to on an assessment of students’ experiential knowledge. Although Julian’s experience with CBL courses reveal much larger and broader debates in necessary educational reform, for the CCS program, Julian’s experience

serves as a way to better adapt course assignments in ways that takes into account the diverse experiences represented among students.

Although the students in the CBL courses had to overcome time constraints and lack of knowledge of community needs, the majority of the students agreed that knowing about the social, economic, cultural dynamics of communities is critical to working effectively within community based organizations. Critical awareness of community needs in academic settings leads to more successful outcomes for student academic learning and a positive working relationship with the organization and the community.

## SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING

The CBL course had an insightful personal impact on several of the students enrolled in the course. Several students defined their experiences as being transformative. Students found that in working side by side with community partners and community members, they could better respond to community needs. When describing her transformative experience, Oralia stated:

I'm privileged; I'm sitting in a class of college students. I have food, I am doing for me." So I had a spiritual change because I was like, "Wow, I am pretty selfish. I took a lot of things for granted. I took my education for granted." I was proud to say I am a student from the university and I am going to read you a book in Spanish and I read it to you in English. And to me that was beautiful because the kids wanted to do that to. They look up to people like me and the parents do too. They want to pursue an education. These parents, how can they inspire their children to go to school if they have never gone? Yet we don't take into consideration that these parents have many skills that a lot of us at the university can never obtain or have because they do the jobs we would never do. So, the learning I experienced was talking to these people and their experiences and learning about the things they know how to do and it is our job to go in there and help them. So, I did. And I was scared at first, but I went in there with my heart and it was a great learning experience for me. It changed me. And I think it changed them because they realize we are not the elite, that students are from the community and we need to work together and keep reminding each other there is hope.

Oralia's experience demonstrates the power of the CBL experience to move students to view themselves and their communities as

transformative agents of change. Oralia contextualized her development and learning as a student and human being as occurring within the context of community based learning. She learned that individuals in the most dire of circumstances have the power and skills to remedy their situations like the women who formed PB&J to be able to provide services to working mothers and their children. She realized that working class women create their own resources from their organizational skills. Her interactions with community members at the community based learning site propelled her to realize that change can occur when people work together and remind each other that there is hope.

Like Oralia, Ivan also defined his CBL experience as transformative, which he expresses in the following statement:

I think this experience has honestly been life changing for me. In my personal experience with music therapy it has really opened me up to an entire new field of therapy and the power of that therapy and the power of music. I planned on becoming a physical therapist and part of my community based service, I would say half of it was me going on site and the other half was the research I did online, peer reviewed journals and really going through the literature that is out there on musical therapy and how it's being incorporated with physical therapy. So, definitely just seeing that scientific backing to how effective musical therapy is definitely causes me to want to incorporate musical therapy into my physical therapy practices. And that is something that isn't necessarily being done on a wide scale. It's being done in small pockets with certain therapists doing it. But, it's definitely something I want to incorporate into my own practice. And, additional to that, I already had desire to work in my community that I was raised in Northern New Mexico, in Peñasco, which is an underserved community, and there is not many physical therapists in that community, so serving a small Chicano community, my work in this course reinforced my desire to do that.

For these CBL students, transformational learning involved identifying themselves and the communities they worked with as agents of change and proponents of hope. They understood that if change is to occur in communities, then the residents and youth of these communities must be integrally involved in that change. Those who commit to the work for change must also respect and honor the cultural capital of all of the community's stakeholders. Through interactions with members of a community, students realized the socially transformational praxis of community based learning.

Students' experience in the CBL courses also reveal the transformative potential of undergraduate influence on community members.

In his work with El Centro Igualdad y Derechos, Julian learned that he had to inspire youth to get involved in art production when he reported:

Well, I had to walk in there with a lesson plan every Monday because they were waiting there for me like, “What are we going to do today” so I had to write some stuff down. But then that, just like, having felt like I needed to have a high energy going in there sometimes especially at the beginning I didn’t expect so many young kids to go through, I just thought we were going to be working on some art what the kids already knew, but these young kids came in and some of them, at the beginning were really shy. So, those first weeks I would think, “How can I change that and like, um, really try to go in there with high energy and go in there positive and act like I knew what I was doing because they were looking up to me and that I knew what to do.

Julian understood that his own academic preparation and social interaction was key to working to encourage youth to be civically engaged art. His experience demonstrates the transformative mentorship role undergraduate students can have on youth in the community. Julian, who both worked at becoming a role model and was expected to be role model, demonstrates that CBL courses can help undergraduates be a transformative force for community youth. At the same time, Julian’s role at El Centro Igualdad y Derechos helped him realize a much stronger influence on youth than he thought he could have by assuming a leadership role. In this way, Julian’s experience at El Centro also transformed him by developing his leadership skills.

CBL courses also helped students develop meaningful relationships throughout the semester with their peers and community members that helped student reflect on their potential transformative role in their communities. Many reported that their experiences influenced them to look beyond the constraints and challenges in their own lives and to work toward a more equitable and inclusive society. For example, Oralia stated:

There is this humongous world with billions of people on it and it is like, what can we do to stick together and survive. Make sure babies have food and everyone has a house. And, without community there is no coherent society. And, as Chicanos we get that because that is what we come from. We understand that everyone does a little bit of something and then we come together. And, as a country, as a nation there is none of that anymore. So, I feel like the University or this department took a really big step towards something, pretty scary. And as students to be involved in that in our personal lives, like I said I want to go back to Taos to build something.

While Oralia highlights transformative perspectives developed as a result of the CBL courses, Julie emphasized how being able to pick a site that correlated with her interests and facilitated her learning experience. She states:

...when I signed up for my first service learning class last semester in the Spring, I was very intimidated having two jobs, going to school, and having to put so many hours into it, but the fact that you have so many options and you're able to pick a site based on interest and go somewhere that you enjoy and be with people you enjoy working with really makes a big difference. I mean, you make the time for it, you make the time for it, and it was effortless to make the time and go, I mean definitely, there was no an issue with that.

By picking a site that fit her interests, Julie was able to form lasting relationships with peers and community members that shared her goals. She also learned to prioritize her time to enable her to become successful. Her problem-solving techniques helped her overcome time constraints and partake in community activities, which in the end allowed her to become more civically engaged. Overall, Oralia and Julie demonstrate the ways in which CBL course can teach students both the broader significance of the curriculum they encounter in their courses and provide them the means to apply their knowledge in spaces specific to their interests and long term goals. The CBL courses thus facilitated the ways in which students can use their university educations to enhance their professional and career training as a way to better serve their communities after graduation.

Students identified cultural relevancy and community knowledge as being critical to their ability to serve communities in the future. Knowing a community resulted in better relationships and more effective services. Several students brought a strong sense of what community meant to them into the course. Others developed their own understanding of how they defined community and experienced community through their CBL experience. Some students identified community as the residential neighborhood they served, while others described the community-based organization and the stakeholders it serves as a community. Overall, many of the students throughout the semester expanded their notion of what community meant to them. Although Serena described community in more ambiguous terms, she perceived community to be an integral part of her life as a student. She said:

Community to me, community is my life. I don't even know what I would do without it. When I was younger I didn't even know what

community was. I was a solo kind of person and went on by myself. And, when I got to college, I found community in the simplest way and it just grew from there. And, I don't think I could live without it. I think community is a very big part of my life. And, that is my relationship to it.

Serena explains here her own transformation from being a “solo kind of person,” to being more social and interactive with different types of community. Her involvement in Basement Films provided her access to a social and artistic community. She gave back to the community by establishing a women's centered initiative to promote women in under-represented forms of art. Students found the relationships they formed within the community based organization as a form of inspiration and self fulfillment. They valued this self-development in themselves and in other students around them.

Students linked individual achievement to collective sources of support, which strengthened their commitment to social responsibility. In this way, student learning in the CBL course came full circle because student participation in community resulted in more student engagement. Ivan appreciated the relationships in class and how the class nurtured a sense of social responsibility in him and in others.

I think we, as a class, are a community. We better each other on a weekly basis. We teach each other. We help progress each other. We as a university are a community of academics, of scholars. Furthermore, as citizens of Albuquerque, of New Mexico, of the United States wherever we were raised, that community we may associate with or identify with we are nurtured by that community. So, whatever we may do in our professional careers we have to give back in some sense. It may not be to the community, but maybe you give back to the university. Give back to Chicano Studies as a whole, to your city, to your state. Give back to your community that made you who you are.

Ivan's statement demonstrates that students established relationships in the class that inspired and motivated them to progress academically and give back socially to their communities, whether this is a class, the university, or a residential community. Students viewed their learning as dynamic, relational, and meaningful. Students learned outside of the class, in the community, through a network of relations, and in a specific or designated locale. Consequently, the potential impact of CBL is not contained or enclosed within a classroom space but rather is fluid and cyclical and intimately connected to community development.

Julie identified that community based learning has the potential of reverberating and spilling over into a larger living community, in this case Albuquerque as a whole.

I characterize community through my project, I guess, just networking and the social aspect of it. Meeting the farmers and . . . seeing the products and sell[ing] their crops at farmers markets. Listening to their frustration when their crops freeze. Community is . . . even though I don't live in the South Valley and they might not live in the South Valley, it is us working together as a team for better agriculture, for healthier food for Albuquerque as a whole.

Julie described the benefits created by the CBL course as promoting the expansion of sustainable agriculture in Albuquerque. Aside from improving the operations of Agricultura Network, Julie sees the value of her CBL project as promoting healthier lifestyles through supporting the work of agricultural cooperatives. Her statement corroborates other students' opinions of the value of working with community based organizations.

For Esra and Julian, community based organizations offer hope to undocumented immigrants who often are ostracized in society. Esra reported:

I think for Julian and me because we are undocumented that community gave us what we were looking for. Ok, so we are part of a group, we have an identity. And maybe some people look at being undocumented as a bad thing, but we embraced it, said, "Ok, this is a challenge, but we are going to take it and prove we can get over it.

Being a part of a non-profit organization that directly addressed the social issue affecting two of the students, served to inspire them and make their journey through higher education less stressful. Esra stated:

So then when I got to the university and I figured out there was a nonprofit that could help me in a way it hit me that I was not the only one facing these struggles. And that is something I always emphasize to people because that is the first step. That is when you become aware that there are so many people struggling with the same thing that it empowers you. Being undocumented is hard, it is challenging. People tell you, "you don't belong here, you can't do this, you can't do that." You are so limited, but just that community and finding those people who are willing to help you, that is so empowering. So, that really helped me.

Esra received a sense of affirmation through her association with Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, an immigrant rights organization. Her placement at this organization helped to support an organization that

undocumented students associated as being critical to them in their education. Thus, she was giving back to an organization that provided her with unconditional support. Esra identified Centro de Igualdad y Derechos as a significant resource and support network. Similar to Esra, other students gained new opportunities that otherwise would have been unavailable to them if the CBL placement did not occur.

For some students, CBL opened up a new opportunity for employment and professional development. One CBL site offered the student a job. Julie is now the primary employee of the Agricultura Network. She said:

[The CBL course] did encourage a career. I got hired on, a part time position, if they found funding it would be full time, but it was part time so, that alone was very encouraging and exciting when I found that out. I wasn't sure what I was going to do when I graduated because I have a degree in Anthropology, so, not the most employable always, so I was very excited with that. . . I am going to sign a 6-month contract and then we are going to go from there. And, it's a salary based.

Julie's new career opportunity exemplifies how a CBL learning experience can help students develop a strong sense of how to apply the knowledge they learn in the classroom to post-graduation career aspirations that promote civic engagement. Julie, thus, was able to transform her belief that the skills she learned within her major, skills that she framed as "not the most employable," were further built upon by her community based service. Her community based organization work prepared her to utilize her knowledge within the community advocacy platform of the Agricultura Network.

In all, students in these CBL courses described the transformative aspects of their learning through the quality of the relationships they developed with community stakeholders. Furthermore, they identified the impact they made in meeting the needs of underserved communities as relating to their satisfaction with their educational training and experience. This finding correlates to the growing academic interest in drawing on community based learning to meet the educational priorities of the future and of students themselves, who are central to the learning process.

## CONCLUSION

This preliminary analysis of CBL course in CCS found that students perceived that they improved their academic, leadership, and cultural competency skills over the course of the class. Student responses in the

survey, interview, and focus group demonstrate a high level of student satisfaction with the outcomes of the course. This small pilot project will inform the implementation of a model for community based learning course that will be a core requirement in the CCS major. The following are recommendations, based on student input during the interview and focus group, to improve the experience in CBL:

- Allow students to play a role in the selection of a community-based site.
- Ensure adequate time is spent at the community-based site.
- Engage students in basic research about the demographics and needs of the community that they will serve.
- Determine the specific needs and priorities of the organization prior to the course.
- Provide workshops that are specific to research design.

As this study shows, the CBL course in CCS offered students a meaningful learning environment that profoundly impacted their academic, social and personal development in ways that traditional classroom instruction does not. Students described gaining new academic knowledge and skills, which enhanced their education at the university. CBL participants described their experience as being transformative because they had the opportunity to create new projects or provide services to community based organizations. In effect, they applied the knowledge and skills they gained to improve the workings of a community based organization. Furthermore, the interactions with stakeholders and clientele at the community based organizations provided students with new mentors and teachers that they normally would not have in a traditional classroom setting. The result was a collaborative learning experience where students felt empowered through the struggles and achievements they experienced learning side by side with other students, the course instructor, and community members.

Overall, this study demonstrates that in order for a culturally relevant CBL curriculum to be successful, it must include student and community-centered pedagogical practices and include community teachers or mentors. Academic and community teachers who are sensitive to the learning environment of students and who affirm lived experiences through culturally relevant curriculum, pedagogy, and community based learning experience academic success with their students. Having teachers that care and a culturally and community-centered curriculum that Students of Color can relate to, is one that leads students towards educational and life transformation because it reaffirms who

they are and the types of community cultural wealth they bring to the university. In addition, students give back to their identified communities by contributing to collective efforts to address social and economic needs. Students enter college classrooms with language capacities (bilingualism), non-traditional ways of learning like the use of cultural, family, community lessons, consejos, and oral histories that assist students in navigating university spaces successfully (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso 2005). In this study, students identified that drawing on the knowledge and experiences of community members in particular community based settings. The knowledge gained ranged from specific technical knowledge about a variety of processes including farming, media production, historical preservation services, and civil rights advocacy. Students identified that individuals from community based sites have knowledge about addressing social and civic needs and thus they are resources for social change. Academic knowledge gained in the classroom was important, and the opportunity to implement the skills and knowledge students gained in the CCS courses propelled students to a transformative educational experience, one that was personally gratifying. An academic environment that encourages students to feel that their individual and collective learning experiences matter in the classroom means students are more likely to feel empowered by and more engaged in the learning process.

CCS provided curricular and content focus that nurtured students understanding of their cultural capital and the importance of using CBL and culturally relevant approaches in educational, community, and professional settings. All of the students reported that the CBL class was life changing because not only did CBL strengthen their student skills, knowledge, and social responsibility, it inspired them to give back to their communities. Forty years after the introduction of CCS, students in higher education identify the significance and relevance of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*. Although much has changed over the past forty years, there remains a critical need for culturally relevant education rooted in the praxis of community based learning to foster student academic development while emphasizing community development.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘epic journey’ refers to a specific quote provided by a student enrolled in the Community Based Learning course. The student was also part of the study discussed in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Survey questions were based on questions published in Gelmon, S. B., Holland, B. A., Driscoll, A., Spring, A., & Kerrigan, S. (2001). *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact, and

influenced by the learning outcomes identified in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Community Based Learning course.

<sup>3</sup> People/Students/Communities/Women of Color are deliberately capitalized as an attempt to reverse social hierarchies that privilege whiteness.

<sup>4</sup> For a review of literature related to culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogies, see Django Paris, (2012) “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 41, 3: 93-97.

<sup>5</sup> A pseudonym for the course instructor.

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