

# UC Santa Cruz

## Institutional History of UCSC

### Title

With Conocimiento, Love, Spirit, and Community: Rosie Cabrera's Leadership at UC Santa Cruz, 1984-2013

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*With Conocimiento, Love, Spirit, and Community:  
Rosie Cabrera's Leadership at UC Santa Cruz,  
1984-2013*

Interviewed by Susy Zepeda  
Edited by Susy Zepeda and Irene Reti

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## **Interview History**

Longtime director of El Centro, UC Santa Cruz's Chicano/Latino Resource Center, and counselor and academic coordinator at UCSC's Educational Opportunity Program, Rosie [Rosalee] Cabrera, mentored, advised, counseled, and inspired UCSC students for nearly three decades. "I can think of no one on campus more committed to helping our students reach their full potential as young scholars, leaders, and human beings," wrote Larry Trujillo, Executive Director of Student and Academic Support Services, when he nominated Cabrera for the Outstanding Staff Award she received in 2009. In this oral history conducted by Susy Zepeda shortly before Cabrera's retirement in 2013, Cabrera reconstructs the political and cultural climate at UCSC over three decades, sharing her memories of key Chicano/a and Latino/a campus figures, organizations, events, and student activism.

Rosie Cabrera was born in Fresno, California, on October 28, 1952, the eldest of four children, and grew up in Dinuba, California. Her parents worked in the fields and then in the packing houses near Fresno. Cabrera worked in the fields and packing houses as a teenager. She attended Saint La Salle Catholic School in Reedley, California from first grade to fourth grade and then public school in Dinuba. Growing up, she was profoundly affected by the Vietnam War, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and inspired by the antiwar movement, the women's movement, the American Indian movement, and the Black Panthers.

After graduation, Cabrera attended Reedley College for a year, where in 1970 she joined the first cohort of students to benefit from the new Extended Opportunity Program and Services program (now known as EOP). While at Reedley, Cabrera was active in the Mexican American Student Association [MASA], which later grew into MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán].

After a year, Cabrera transferred to San Jose State University, where she majored in sociology with an emphasis in criminology. She found a home in the Mexican American Graduate Studies Program [MAGS], which offered undergraduate as well as graduate-level courses. At San Jose State she was mentored by the professor and pioneering Chicana feminist and lesbian activist Sylvia Gonzales.

Cabrera advocated for justice for incarcerated youth in the San Jose area and worked with San Jose State as an academic counselor with their Educational Opportunity Programs from 1982 until 1984. This section of the oral history paints a vivid and textured picture of the emerging and vibrant Chicano/a movement of the 1970s and early 1980s in San Jose: the teatro, the music, and the political activism.

After graduating in sociology, Cabrera worked in several positions advocating for adults in the criminal justice system, including the University Alternative Program that recruited former prison inmates to attend college at San Jose State. She also pursued graduate studies in clinical community psychology at San Jose State.

In 1984 UC Santa Cruz hired Rosie Cabrera as an academic counselor in the Student Affirmative Action/Educational Opportunity Program (SAA/EOP).

At SAA/EOP she coordinated the five-week Summer BRIDGE Program from 1984 to 2000 and the Pre-graduate Programs (Faculty Mentor Program and the Graduate Information Program). BRIDGE provides mentoring and skill building to first generation college students who may come from low income backgrounds and under-resourced California high schools. Her oral history describes the BRIDGE program and EOP at that time.

In 2003 Cabrera became the director of El Centro, the Chicano Latino Resource Center at UCSC, where she served until her retirement in July of 2013. Cabrera said that she learned as much from the students as they learned from her. Cabrera ensured that the programming of El Centro reflected the diversity of the students, including issues of race, sexuality, and undocumented status. One of her major accomplishments was to launch the Cesar Chavez Convocation with the co-founder of the United Farm Workers, Dolores Huerta, as the inaugural speaker.

In 2013 the Chancellor's Office and the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion recognized Cabrera for her twenty-nine years of service with a Chancellor's Special Recognition Award for Achievements in Diversity in Inclusion. She was also honored at the Chicano/Latino Commencement Ceremony in 2013. Her words about that graduation ceremony in the oral history perhaps best sum up her approach to her work at UCSC: "I always love that moment when people go up and are able to say to the world, really to their parents, but to say to the world, 'I did it.' That's what it's all about."

Upon Cabrera's retirement, many people expressed their gratitude for her service on her Facebook page, describing how important she was to the UC Santa Cruz community, students, staff, faculty, and community members. We are



pleased to share some of these comments here (with permission from the commenters). Marissa Camacho wrote, "Thank you for your dedication and commitment to the advancement of our community. It's people like you [Rosie] that help our communities' progress. You're an inspiration. You were the first person that I met at UCSC that welcomed and introduced me to such wonderful peers and fellow activists. Again, thank you for dedicating your life to something bigger than you and for giving us hope." Similarly, Tannia Esparza expressed her sincere appreciation; "Gracias for all the love and spirit you put into your work and for all you've done to lift student voices at UCSC. I feel blessed to have been able to cross paths with you!"

Alma Guadalupe López's comments reflect how many saw Cabrera as, not only an inspiration, but as an example of how to be of service to diverse communities. She notes, "Rosie, thank you for helping me along my path. Thank you for all the consejos, easy and tough, you gave me. You helped me grow. You gave me an example of how I want to be with my students. Deliberate. Purposeful. I keep you in my mind and in my heart." Finally, Jesus Diaz expressed what many felt about Cabrera's presence on campus, "UCSC would not have been the same without Rosie, a surrogate mother and mentor to many of us." In Olga Nájera-Ramírez's words, "An extraordinary woman that we love and admire!"

This oral history is part of the Regional History Project's series of interviews with Chicano/a and Latino/a leaders at UC Santa Cruz. Susy Zepeda interviewed Rosie Cabrera in McHenry Library at UC Santa Cruz; most interviews took place in the Gloria Anzaldúa Study Room in McHenry. The six interviews took place on November 2, 2012, November 7, 2012, November 28,

2012, December 14, 2012, January 22, 2013, and March 14, 2013. Susy Zepeda graduated with a PhD in sociology from UC Santa Cruz in 2012. She also earned a designated emphasis in feminist studies and Latin American and Latino studies. Zepeda codirected the Women of Color Film Festival at UC Santa Cruz, and got to know Cabrera as a graduate student. This relationship is referred to several times in the interview.

Irene Reti transcribed the interviews. The transcript was returned both to Zepeda, who audited it for accuracy of transcription, and Cabrera, who edited it for flow and accuracy, in collaboration with Irene Reti. Copies of this volume are on deposit in Special Collections and in the circulating stacks at the UCSC Library, as well as on the library's website. The Regional History Project is supported administratively by Elisabeth Remak-Honnef, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and University Librarian, Elizabeth Cowell.

*—Irene Reti, Director, Regional History Project, University Library*

*—Susy Zepeda, Interviewer, Regional History Project*

*University of California, Santa Cruz, January 15, 2015*

## **Early Life**

**Zepeda:** This is Susy Zepeda, and I'm with the Regional History Project at UC Santa Cruz. It's November 2, 2012, and we're with Rosie Cabrera to begin our oral history. So let's go ahead and begin with when and where you were born.

**Cabrera:** I was born in Fresno, California, on October 28, 1952. I just learned from my father that when my mother went into labor—because we're from Dinuba, well, actually, Reedley at the time—he didn't own a car, and my mom had complications, so he actually had to rent a hearse, one for the dead, to take her to Fresno to the hospital.

I didn't realize that she had had all these complications and he never told me, but I overheard him telling my husband, "Can you imagine being told that your wife and your child may die?" Never had I heard that. That was just this year, so it was kind of interesting about what he was confronting, because I'm the firstborn.

**Zepeda:** What was the complication?

**Cabrera:** I don't really know. I need to ask my *tia* more about it, because I never knew that. I knew my mom had quite a few complicated births, so I'm not sure what it was. But can you imagine, going in a hearse?

**Zepeda:** Wow. So what did your parents do for a living?

**Cabrera:** They were farm workers. They were farm workers, and then they did a bump up and worked in the packinghouses; so my father was a forklift driver and he drove truck, and my mom was a packer. When I was young, that's what I

did too. From the age of fifteen until about eighteen, I packed fruit in the summertimes.

**Zepeda:** How many siblings did you have?

**Cabrera:** There were four of us altogether. I had two brothers. One passed away. My youngest brother, Tommy, passed away. I have a brother, Gerardo; he's still living. My sister, Maryann, she lives in Arizona. So there were four of us altogether.

**Zepeda:** And you were the eldest?

**Cabrera:** I was the eldest. Jerry, Gerardo, was two years younger than me; Maryann was probably six or seven years younger than me; and then Tommy was probably ten years younger than me.

**Zepeda:** Was your family immigrants to the U.S.?

**Cabrera:** No, I consider them on my mom's side second generation because her mother came when she was about nine years old. My grandma on my mom's side, Vincenta Campos, came when they were building the railroads. It was at the turn of the century, the 1900s. They lived in the Calexico, El Centro area.

My grandfather on the Campos side, he immigrated to the U.S., and he went to the Central Valley and did farming. And I don't know how true it is, but my uncle, he was going through a marriage with a Persian woman, and they did this investigation on him, and he said that they found out that my grandfather actually taught a lot of the farmers in the area that we're from how to prune and

how to take care of both the grapes and tree fruits, like peaches and plums. Where we're from, it's mostly peaches and plums. Oranges are further up. Now it's all transforming, but it was mostly peaches and plums and grapes.

I say I'm third generation because my Grandma Campos, she was fully bilingual when she came. I don't know how far in school she went but she tried teaching her children that you need to be fluent in both languages.

My grandma and my grandfather housed a lot of *braceros*, so before there were contractors like there are now, they would lease land. I don't know if you know where Parlier is, but that's where my mother was raised. They would lease land and they would also hire workers, but the workers lived in the house with my grandparents. So my grandmother would make food and wash their clothes, and then my grandfather was kind of like what a [labor] contractor would be. Unlike contractors now, they were good. I don't know what they called them. I don't think they called them contractors then.

I remember learning more about my grandparents. When my grandmother died—two teachers actually came to me. One [said] that her husband lived with my grandmother and grandfather, and then a teacher that knew somebody that had lived with them said my grandmother was an angel, that she took care of people.

But they also had a huge family. My mother came from a family of sixteen. She was the middle kid, so she often, because they housed *braceros*, she would go and live with her sister in Palo Alto, who was twice her age, old enough to be her mother. My mom would come during the time that people were staying at the

house and she would help my *tia* with cleaning houses in the Palo Alto area. My uncle, my Tia Susanna's husband, was a gardener. He was a gardener and she would keep houses.

Then on my dad's side, my grandmother came with my grandfather. She was about fifteen; he was about thirty-something. They went to the Los Angeles area. So my father was born in L.A., and they did farming in Los Angeles. It was a long time ago, so it was all an agricultural area. From Los Angeles, they moved to the Central Valley. So my mom was in Parlier and then they moved to Dinuba after World War II; my father was raised in Reedley, although he had been born in L.A., and did farmworker work. His family was huge, too. There were ten of them.

Even though my Grandmother Victoria Cabrera was here for a long time, she refused to speak English. I didn't even know she could. I grew up with her speaking Spanish and me speaking English back, because I understood it. We went out one time; she got really pissed off at this person and started cussing them out in English, and I was looking at her like, "What the hell? You made me go through all these changes?" (laughs) I think she always felt she was *Mexicana*. Her story's interesting because she was so young when she started a family. She was fifteen when she got married. Her husband died when she was thirty years old and she had ten children. Imagine being that young with that many kids.

**Zepeda:** Yes, that's hard.

**Cabrera:** Really, really hard, so that explains a lot of her. She was very strict and she had an attitude. I guess if I had been left with that many kids, trying to figure

out what the hell I'm going to do, I would sure be—I mean, it takes a lot of strength to do that.

So I say I'm third generation. It's kind of complex because of that. My parents never went to Mexico, if you can imagine that, except for one time going to Rosarito and TJ. They've never been to Mexico, yet are very Mexican.

My mother used to kind of apologize for her Spanish. It was like she was caught in these two worlds. I never felt she had an accent, but she felt she had an accent. My mother had a real bad experience in schools. She quit school in eighth grade. My father quit school, I think, in tenth grade, and then he finished high school in the service, [while] my mom didn't continue.

I think for my mom there was always this kind of schism around the schooling system and around her language use. She got to the point in her older age of feeling embarrassed about her Spanish, because, you know, if you don't use it, you lose it. But we live in a very Mexican community, so they're constantly going in and out of English/Spanish, constantly. But I think for my mom there were just some things that she felt unequipped to express, where my father, he's very fluent. But, again, of my family, myself and my brother are the only ones that have the ear for Spanish, and we speak a little. My brother actually picked up more because he became a gardener and because of the workers, right? I struggle, you know, *pocha* to the max.

**Zepeda:** What service was your dad in, in the military?

**Cabrera:** He was in the air force.

**Zepeda:** So did you all have to move around because of that?

**Cabrera:** No, but he was in the service for just one stint. That's how he learned to drive truck, and he got certified. When he came home, he went to work in the packinghouses. That was a skill. That was a skill to be able to handle machinery and all of that.

He got the G.I. Bill, and he went to barber school. It would have been interesting to see how our lives would have been. But he didn't pass the test the first time he took it and he never took it again. A lot of his cohort, they had been in the service. He grew up in Reedley from the age of two, and he's going to be eighty-six this year, so all of his cohort, they have always lived there. A lot of them were in the service together or they went to the service at the same time, came back. A lot of them became barbers. A few of them went on to college. My Tio Robert went to community college. He went to Reedley College and learned aeronautical mechanics, and in those days he got a job at Lockheed with—I don't know if it was NASA, but he worked on some of the first Gemini missions. He was a mechanic on those missiles.

I had one uncle that went to school after he had been out of the service for a long time, and he became a CPA, but on the Campos side there's no one that's in my mother's cohort that went to college. Then my cohort, there's a few of us that have.

**Zepeda:** So that leads to the next question about your schooling. Did you go to school in Dinuba?



**Cabrera:** Yes. I went to parochial school, Catholic school, from first grade to fourth grade, [at] Saint La Salle in Reedley. That was when I was a really good Catholic. I *loved* being a Catholic. I didn't like the nuns that were the teachers, but I loved the ritual of the church. I don't know how to explain it. It wasn't until I was in high school that I started questioning it. I loved going to church. My mother would go every day, so we were there every day for evening Mass. When you grow up in a parochial school, once a week you go to Mass and during different seasons you're going a lot.

Reedley to Dinuba is a seven-mile distance, it's very close together. But we moved to Dinuba, my parents couldn't afford to send us on the bus. So that's when I started public school, in fifth grade in Dinuba. I went through public schools there.

**Zepeda:** How was that for you, the public school?

**Cabrera:** It was interesting.

**Zepeda:** A big change?

**Cabrera:** Yes. I think my experience in school was colored by my father's drinking. His drinking did not interfere with his work per se. But it interfered with home life and it interfered with our public image within the community. I grew up in a really small community. There were probably only about seven thousand people in Dinuba at the time. It's tiny. So, at that time everybody *knew* each other. Relationships in communities like that, they're not different even in urban environments. You have your immediate family, but then you have people

that are kind of an extended family. They're not related to you by blood, but they've known you. They're the *compadres* and *comadres* that people have known, and people that know your family, or know somebody in your family. I came from that kind of community.

When my father would drink, people would see him. My peers would see him. So I often was teased about my father. That colored how I participated [in school] because I always felt like everybody knew our business.<sup>1</sup> So I grew up with—how do I say this? My family has the whole range of *color*: really, really dark to very, very light. I'm the in-between. I'm considered light-complected, so I think I didn't get as much disruption because of my skin color, as opposed my cousins who were much, much darker. I'm one of the very few of my immediate cohort of cousins that survived, literally. I was thinking about that last night because I was going to evoke my cousin Lenny's name. And thinking about my *tia* in Dinuba, why I'm going back [after retirement], not only is it my father, but my *tia* having seven children, five being dead, and one being locked up for life, he's a three-strikes inmate. She's getting older and surviving that many deaths [that happened in her family because] of drugs and gang shit, you know.

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<sup>1</sup> Having a parent that drinks or is an alcoholic can impact our growing years. It certainly impacted mine. But an even more profound impact was when my father decided not to drink anymore. He was in his late fifties or early sixties. I am very proud of my father. His decision and action made it possible for me to heal and to work on a relationship with my father. It has taken time, and the result is that I want and draw strength from our relationship today. The why's of his alcohol abuse are numerous. I still do not know the real reason he made this choice. What is important for me to share is that he no longer drinks and he has a longevity of well over twenty-seven years of sobriety. I am very proud of my father and cherish the doors that opened to re-establish a relationship with him. I am honored to be the daughter of Raul Cabrera—Rosie Cabrera.

You want to do good, but you know who you are, you know where you come from. I remember in high school, some of my friends used to hang out with the white girls, but they were very Mexican, and they wanted me to hang out with them. I didn't understand this notion of passing till later. I could have, if I had wanted to, pass, but it disgusted me so much. There were white people that were just as poor as *raza*, but there were also a lot of white people that had more of a middle-class existence. There were people who were rich, not a lot of them, but [had] a middle-class existence, whereas we came from a poor existence. I never knew we were poor till I went to college. I had no consciousness of it. We always had food to eat. We always seemed to make it. But we were not—we were not middle class. We didn't grow up middle class.

In high school, I was like a nerd. I didn't want to get too involved in certain things. My mother wouldn't let me get involved with sports. I wanted to. That seemed to be the outlet— okay, let me get on the volleyball team. Let me get on the basketball team. But I couldn't. I had to come home immediately after school and then go to catechism. Remember, Catholic. Ay!

So school was kind of like a cloud. I don't go to my reunions. My cousin, Irene, kind of laughs at me. She says, "We go. We just take it over." But I just don't have good feelings about my experience in high school and I don't want to socialize with the people that go. It's not my reality, although it was my reality.

So, *que mas*—what else can I tell you? I came from a generation [when] all the outreach programs were just starting when I was in high school. My junior year, there was a group called Mobile Guidance. They were kind of the forerunners of

EAOP [Early Academic Outreach Program]. They were college students that would go out to the high schools.

The woman that I met, her name was Mitch. I don't even remember her last name. She would come in her little Volkswagen, and I just will never forget, she called me to the office and asked, "Are you thinking of going to college?" I'm looking at her like, "Are you crazy?" She started telling me about Fresno State, because that's where she was going to school. Had she not said that to me, I don't know if I ever would have really thought about going to college. All it took was two meetings with her, and then that was it. I think I saw it as my ticket out, my way to get out of Dinuba. I always had this thing about I never wanted to be dependent on a man like my mom is dependent on my father. If it's not working out, I want to be able to jam and get out. So how do you do that? If you don't have an education or you don't have a skill, then you're kind of stuck in what's there. My life would have been packing fruit.

**Zepeda:** So before you met this counselor, what were your aspirations? What did you see yourself doing? Or maybe that aspiration came after meeting her.

**Cabrera:** It came after. I don't know that I constructed something I was going to do. I was in high school and in middle school, in junior high, during the sixties, so all of that colored—my father's drinking and Dinuba is a very economically depressed location. So that feeling of *pesada*, right? Being heavy and always knowing who you are in that town.

### **The Movements of the 1960s**

Then [there] was the backdrop of the Vietnam War, César Chávez's movement—all the different movements, the women's movement, the American Indian movement, the Black Panthers. All of that was happening. Because I was always stuck at home, I was a news nerd; I always watched the news. Now we just take it for granted, having CNN and the news like it is. That's not how it was before. You had all of these really corny shows, but then there were news programs, and those were the ones that I really would glue onto.

In '68, I was in high school when Robert Kennedy was assassinated. I was in middle school when Martin Luther King was assassinated. I do not remember Malcolm X, but Martin Luther King's death and Robert Kennedy's death had a profound effect on me. They seemed the hope. When you think of coming from a location like where we came from, they were the hope. But it was also very confusing, because whenever there's organizing, there's pros and cons. [In] my area, there's a lot of conservativeness. It's out of fear. If you get involved you're going to lose your job.

It was very Mexican. There were no Blacks in our community. I never experienced an African American person until I went to college. So all I knew was from what I'd watched. So those [movements] made me feel a sense of purposefulness, of there is more. There's a different way of experiencing my life, other than accepting that this is how I have to move. So I think my decision [to go to college] was a culmination of those things.

I liked biology. I never pursued it, but during that time there was a lot of environmental stuff happening. I can't even remember where it was where all these cows died because of these gases that were emitted. It was horrible. So when *60 Minutes* first started, that's when I was a kid. So [there was] my consciousness of what was happening in the world, the antiwar movement. And then sometimes the dialogue when my father was not drinking. My father actually is a very political person, a politically conscious person, but had his own shit he was working through. He never talked to me. We would be in the same room and he would talk to the television, or if his *compadres* were over, I would hear the conversations. I think he always wanted to get involved, but the union he was represented under was the Teamsters Union [which was] anti-UFW.

There was all this conflict of them thinking I was crazy, because they would hear me on the phone talking to my peers, or I would respond, "Oh, I can't believe this is happening." My parents, I think, were really thinking, "Oh, my gosh, she's crazy. Something's going to happen." So all of that added up to: there's got to be more. I have to understand this deeper. I cannot just buy into that this is how life is.

Then the other side, being a *mujer*, and feeling like I cannot be dependent on a person. I have to be able to do something in my life that allows me to be independent, allows me to make my own decisions. So when Mitch told me [about Fresno State], I was like, "Oh, man," I was like, "Sign me up."

Because of the takeover at San Francisco State, the experience of it on a daily basis for months and months and months, that's where I wanted to go. I said, "I

want to go there. I want to be there. That's where the movement is happening." But the movement was also happening at San Jose State. Right before I graduated was all the stuff that happened at the Olympics and the San Jose State group that protested, so there were all these things, right?<sup>2</sup> I didn't know about UCs at all, wasn't even conscious of it, but I did apply to San Jose State, Fresno State, and San Francisco State, and Humboldt, because Humboldt was the other environmental [college], because of my science leanings. I got accepted to Humboldt, San Jose State, and Fresno State. And my parents said no.

**Zepeda:** About going to college?

**Cabrera:** About going to college and about leaving the area.

**Zepeda:** They didn't like it.

**Cabrera:** No. And I was young. I was only about seventeen when I graduated. I had a *tia*, my Aunt Mary—she was the independent person that taught me, okay, this is possible, without even saying it. She would always rescue me. I remember I told her, "I just want to run away. I just want to do this."

We grew up in a family where, "*Mija*, until you're eighteen, you have to do what your parents say. And after eighteen, whatever you decide, it is up to you." It was about respect. I think my mom was really terrified about what was going to

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<sup>2</sup> On October 16, 1968, San Jose State students Tommie Smith and John Carlos finished first and third, respectively, in the 200 meters at the Olympic Games in Mexico City, with Smith smashing the world record in 19.83 seconds. In support of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, they stood on the victory stand for the medal ceremony, raising a black-gloved fists during the playing of the National Anthem in silent protest over the treatment and conditions of Black Americans. They were both shoeless, symbolizing poverty—Editors.  
<http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/OLYMPIC-PROTEST-Smith-and-Carlos-Statue-2601229.php>

happen to me. When you see those things happening—*now* I understand it. I think for her it was, “What’s going to happen to you? You’re either going to get pregnant, you’re going to get shot, or you’re going to end up in jail. No, you can’t go, because it’s too far. You can’t go.”

So I went ahead and agreed to [go to the local community college], with the anticipation that I was going to transfer. I started planning for that and also talked to my uncle and my aunt that lived in San Jose. They supported me. They were like my other parents in some respects.

### **College and the Mexican American/Chicano Movements**

I went to Reedley College, and I was in the first EOPS cohort, I think, in the state of California. That was the year 1970, when the EOPS program started. So I was in something like a BRIDGE EOPS Summer Readiness Program.

**Zepeda:** What does EOPS stand for?

**Cabrera:** Extended Opportunity Program and Services.<sup>3</sup> I was in that first cohort and that was when the world blew up big time for me. I remember my cousin, Irene, and I were in that program. It was the first time being away from home. Even though it was the next city over, it was like, “Oh, god, we could be out.” [laughs] It was my first exposure to literature that was written by people of color and learning a way to articulate about identity. It was very painful, very painful. My cohort in Dinuba included Miguel Contreras, who was the first Chicano

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<sup>3</sup> In 1969, Senate Bill 164 was enacted into law, establishing Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) within the California Community Colleges system. This action came about as a direct result of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Today, EOPS are available at all 112 community colleges in California—Editors.



labor leader for the L.A. Federation of Labor. So I grew up with some people knowing early on what they wanted to do. We were friends, but when you're friends and you grow up as kids, sometimes you talk about stuff and sometimes you don't. So Miguel was in that program, too.

Then I got involved with a group called MASA, the Mexican American Student Association. It was before M.E.Ch.A. [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán]. My first year at Reedley was the whole confrontation of changing from MASA to M.E.Ch.A. It was turbulent because it was the question of: are you going to be a nice, clean group that just goes about their business? Yes, of course, you have your identity, but it wasn't about political action, where M.E.Ch.A. was about claiming that location of being Chicano and what that meant to be a Chicano. Not a Chicana, a Chicano. I was *pocha* [and] in those days the markers for being Chicano were you spoke Spanish, you were brown, a lot of stereotypical kinds of things. *Mujeres* were supporting the men. It was pretty bad.

I mean, there were fistfights with the students. (laughs) It really wasn't that funny. I laugh about it only out of anxiety, to be quite honest, because it seemed like, how can we be in fights about an organization? There were those shifts happening. We changed to M.E.Ch.A. and then I got involved with the group and became an officer. I was the treasurer, but I was the only *mujer*, so the guys would always leave me out of decisions.

*Mujeres* were helping with fundraisers. I was the treasurer, but they would run circles around me, or try to run circles around me, and then not understand

when I would get pissed off about, “Okay, well, you never said this in a meeting that you were going to spend \$100 on—blah, blah, blah.” It was that initial struggle around feminism in the group, and I don’t even think as *mujeres* we completely understood what we were fighting for. That was my introduction to political organizations. There were things I really detested about the way I was being treated.

So when I finally transferred [to San Jose State]—again, I went through these gyrations with my mom, “You think you’re going? You’re not going.”

**Zepeda:** She didn’t want you to go?

**Cabrera:** No. But by then, because I was in the EOPS program, they were promoting these jobs with the Park Service. So I got a job in the summer with the National Park Service, cleaning toilets. But you know what? It paid me twice as much as per hour than what I earned packing. It was consistent hours, and I didn’t have to live at home. It was in a national park near my house because we’re at the base of the foothills of the Sierras. So I was up at Kings Canyon, and so I did that for three summers.

The first summer empowered me enough to make the decision: no matter what, I’m going away to college. I knew I had to do some compromising. So the compromise was go to San Jose State because my *tia* and *tio* would be given the charge of taking care of me, so that made it palatable that I could go.

The day before I was leaving, my mother and I got into a horrible, horrible fight. She said, “You leave this house, you leave everything that we have spent even a

penny on, and you leave and never come back." So I made my decision. By then I was fairly self-sufficient, and so that was fine. So when I went to San Jose State, I didn't talk to my mother for almost two months.

**Zepeda:** Wow, Rosie.

**Cabrera:** It was horrible. It was horrible.

**Zepeda:** That must have been hard.

**Cabrera:** It was hard because I moved in with Chicanas that were very close to their families. So my relationship was not that kind of traditional family. In fact, Leticia, my best friend from San Jose State, her parents actually kind of adopted me. They taught me how to hug, if you can even imagine. It makes me want to cry. [pauses] We were not a touchy-feely family. Her family was so *cariñosos*. Her mother and father, they just always showered me with love and affection. It was unconditional.

It was my *tia* that said, "*Ay miija*, you've got to reach out to your mama. You can't live your life like this." I would see my aunt and uncle all the time. I would go and visit them. They'd come and take me out. My cousins, who I grew up with, they moved to San Jose. When we moved to Dinuba, they moved to San Jose, so we grew up as youngsters together. So they would come over and hang out, try and pick up on my roommates and stuff. (laughs)

Then my brother moved up and lived with me for a couple of months and then lived with them, with my aunt and uncle. I always had that safeguard. But I lived

on my own, experienced life on my own, did a lot of crazy-ass shit and met a lot of really incredible people.

San Jose State was where life started to open up. I tried to figure things out. I think that's why I feel so passionate about the undergraduate experience here around being silent in classes and not being able to really express.

Then also sometimes getting sloppy with my stuff. I remember one time this Chicana called my ass out. I wish I could remember her name because I would like, to this day, to thank her for doing that. It was on affirmative action, and I got real sloppy with this report. If you can imagine, I came out anti-affirmative action. She didn't say a word in the class, and then afterwards she just said, "I'm going to talk to you." It wasn't like she was involved, but she told me about her brother who was really involved, and she said, "You just ruined it."

Then I realized because I was sloppy and did not really understand how to research, I just mimicked what I read. I wasn't really thinking through it. And how could that be? Knowing my existence, how could I think that way? That was an eye-opener. But I was in classes where there were mostly white students. I started out in environmental studies and that was horrific.

**Zepeda:** At San Jose State, that's what you entered with as your major?

**Cabrera:** Yes, but I changed after my first year. I changed to sociology. That was better, but not all that much better. But I took—there it's called Mexican American Graduate Studies, MAGS. I think they've changed the name since. I would take courses out of MAGS. That would have of lots of *raza*. So I would

have this split of what would happen in what would be a more traditional ethnic studies department as opposed to a traditional sociology department. So sociology: silent. The other classes were warmer, but a lot of times the classes were big, and I'm trying to find my voice.

**Zepeda:** Did you say that the Mexican American [classes] were graduate classes?

**Cabrera:** That was just what the department was called. It was a graduate studies master's program, but they had a core of undergraduate courses. Their structure is different there. I don't even know what it is now, but that's when they had African American studies, Asian American studies. MAGS was called Mexican American Graduate Studies back then. I think it's still MAGS, but I also think their undergraduate program is something different now.<sup>4</sup>

[When] I went through college, Vietnam was still happening. We were getting out of Vietnam. It was the movement and lots of things happening. I think it was my last year, my roommate and I met Sylvia Gonzales. She was the first lesbian Chicana feminist that we had ever met, and even to acknowledge that there were feminists was like, (gasps), you know. (laughs)

**Zepeda:** A big deal.

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<sup>4</sup> The Mexican American Studies Department at San José State University was created in 1968 and is the oldest graduate program in Chicana/o Studies in the country. Today, MAS at San José State is still one of only five graduate programs in Chicana/o Studies in California and the only one north of Santa Barbara. The mission of the Mexican American studies department is to serve SJSU students and diverse communities through an interdisciplinary Chicana/o Studies program that is based on principles of social justice. The program prepares students to critically examine and address intellectual traditions and contemporary issues resulting from race, class, and gender intersections in Chicana/o-Latina/o and other communities—Editors.

**Cabrera:** It was a big deal. She was really incredible, and we got to know her really well. Letty took her classes. I couldn't fit them in. But we had a personal relationship with her. She would take off in the summers and we stayed in her house during the summers.

MAGS was different. They treated Sylvia like shit. It was that playing out of the gender stuff. And being lesbian then, oh, my god, forget it.

**Zepeda:** Wow.

**Cabrera:** So there was M.E.Ch.A. I went to the meetings, but it was just too, too big. My roommate would go occasionally. And a lot of her friends were *Mechistas* and I got introduced to some of the women's groups. Then I got introduced to a group called the All African People's Party and got connected with some people that were looking at [the] movement in a bigger way. I don't know why that intrigued me. That seemed to be okay. There were more women involved in that, even though it was still a gender-biased environment. There were more women that were very vocal and would be involved in political things. So that kind of intrigued me.

San Jose State was a trip. I think I learned more outside of the classroom, to be quite honest. The classroom helped me raise questions and then the community was like the incubator, because I knew I wanted to do something in the community. So I got more involved in the criminal justice route. But that was satisfying only to a certain extent, until I understood these are all institutions, and institutions have limits of what you could do.

## **Becoming Chicana**

**Zepeda:** When was the first time you realized you were a Chicana, or took that in as your own [identity] that you gravitated towards?

**Cabrera:** I think it was in the sixties when I first heard it. It really was through the United Farm Workers that I comprehended being part of the Chicano movement. But I didn't totally claim it till I went to college and understood. It was that conflict between MASA and M.E.Ch.A. and understanding, yes, you can gravitate to an organization. We gravitate to organizations that reflect us, but there is a distinction [between] an organization that chooses to do cultural work or get people together, versus an organization that's purposeful and their goal is a political consciousness, political action.

That was when it was clear: I'm Chicana. I'm Chicana, and it was more than an ethnic marker. It was, am I making a commitment in my life to do the things that better my community, whatever that community is? Then I identified [with] my local community. But that was the distinction. Chicana to me is more than just being Mexican. Now I do define it as when people say, "What do you mean, Chicano?" I initially say, "People of Mexican background," because most of us are, and that's kind of how people use it now. But it's far deeper than that. It is a consciousness of where we've come from, and to know that when I think about my mom and even my father's experience, we have nothing to apologize for. We are who we are, and to be able to claim it on our terms.

So that's what it means for me. It's not this term that somehow people gave to us. We claimed it. My mom had lots of problems with it. She felt like it was the

filthiest word in the universe: "Chicanos are those that do bad things." I never could really quite understand that. My father actually will say he's Chicano. For me it had that more political context of at least a consciousness to continue to strive to use your life for the good of the people.

**Zepeda:** So when you entered into that African American organization that you mentioned, do you feel like you entered in as a Chicana in solidarity with them?

**Cabrera:** Yes. Yes. They sought me out. It was because I had met another student and we would have these conversations after class. She'd always say, "You're in the wrong organization." I felt like she was trying to recruit me, to be quite honest, because I was involved but I never was in the forefront. I would be invited to things. I'd go. I'd show up. I'd be a part of efforts, but I was never in leadership, none of that.

But it was interesting. I think she saw something else in me that was hard for me to recognize and claim at that time: that I'm a thinking person, that I'm interested in what happens, I'm willing to participate, and that I was questioning my location. I was not quite satisfied with organizationally participating in M.E.Ch.A. I was still struggling with, what kind of Chicana am I? Am I really *authentic*? This notion of real Chicanas. They were so powerful, people like Dolores Huerta, or people that just seemed to exude *Chicanismo*, right?

**Zepeda:** Interesting.

**Cabrera:** I just felt like I couldn't live up to that. Well, you know, most of us can't. Most of us can't. But did I know that then? No.



## **Working in Coalition**

I think Octavia, this other student, realized, “You’ve got your head screwed on backwards. That’s not what it’s all about,” and she would talk to me about the All African People’s Movement.

Then I met Zizwe, who actually I worked with later on, and he would always talk to me about, “We’ve got to be in coalition with one another.” It was the first time I really heard about coalitions. I mean, we would talk about coalitions, but a lot of times it was *raza* coalitions with different groups. But this was across ethnicities. That was both frightening and positive. It was probably the thing that gave me the most energy, but it was frightening, in the sense that it was serious political activism.

Then a lot of those folks were also communist. So then it was a dogmatic kind of location. I could never quite cross that. I didn’t know much about communism other than stereotypical—I had never done more political science courses and hadn’t done my own kind of [study]. But there were those alignments of those organizations that had a deeper kind of political agenda. (sighs) I don’t know. It’s the thing, I think, in my life that’s always caused me intrigue and tension. I don’t necessarily feel the way we organize is the best, and then the people that are outside the box are always demonized. So it seems like if you’re communist, you’re not part of legitimate movements.

**Zepeda:** Do you think that you felt a lot of fear because you were doing work outside of the box? Or maybe the other way to phrase the question is: how would

the Chicano or Chicanas react to you doing another kind of coalition work that took it beyond what they were used to?

**Cabrera:** We didn't talk about it. At least in San Jose at the time, it was a very *raza*-based organizing. Yes, it was very *raza*-based. I think you're hitting on something I hadn't looked at in that way, because as much as I was struggling with what it meant to be Chicana, I wasn't willing to take some risks to be identified as not being Chicana because I was going outside that box. Remember, I talked about Sylvia Gonzales?

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** I think she was tagged as going so far outside of the box because of the emergence of the feminist movement at the time. That was profound. But they were considered—that's outside. Although there were lots of *raza*, *mujeres* were actively involved.

**Zepeda:** But it was considered outside of the Chicano movement?

**Cabrera:** Yes. Yes, I think for me it was like: okay, where am I going to expend my energy and how am I going to do my practice? I ended up, like I said, in more criminal justice kinds of areas. But it's interesting to me now. Our political identities are another identity that's really important. There's our personal identity with our families; there's our sexual identity; there's our ethnic identity, and eventually you are in this location that I don't know how to describe [as] any other than a political identity. That took a long time, to sort out where do I stand on the political front. I see it as part of how we are as human beings, because the

political is the collective. It's the place of coming together to really take a stand to do something. We could do that in terms of political parties, but there're other ways of making that kind of movement. So I struggled through that. I continue to struggle through it, of where do I expend my time politically?

**Zepeda:** So I wanted to ask you, going back to Sylvia and then—I believe her name was Mitch.

**Cabrera:** Mitch.

**Zepeda:** So who would you say were some of your mentors, in high school and then college?

**Cabrera:** I want to say my *nina*, my Tia Mary. She was divorced very young, kind of ostracized by her family. I thought she was the most beautiful creature on Earth. She just would do things. She worked real hard. She was self-sustaining. But she also partied. (laughs) She was the one that would rescue me. So she's clearly one person that [said], you don't have to fit this place. You can be who you want to be and, yes, you may get crap for it, but as long as you're enjoying and you're doing what's important to you, it's fine. And she was single for the longest time, longest, longest time.

My other Tia Mary, she was married to my Uncle Robert that's a Cabrera, and she offered me happiness. She's a very joyful person, a serious person, and her relationship with my *tio*; they were partners. They taught me love is possible, mutual respect is possible, having family was possible. My *nina* taught me even if you don't have somebody, you can be happy. You can do it.

Mitch was like a savior. She was the one that threw the life raft out, a tangible one that said, "This is a pathway. What you decide to do with it is your choice." But she actually came out like with gangbusters, like "You have no fucking choice." You know what I mean? (laughs) It was like somebody was in my face, "You have no choice. You have to make this choice." Nobody had ever confronted me like that before. To have someone say, "You're smart, you're talented. Why would you just hang out here?"

Then her arranging a field trip—it was the first time I had gone to a university. It was Fresno State, but I went there and met other Chicanos. Compared to where I was from, they were radical. That taught me, oh, my god, the world has so much more to offer. Mitch was this kick-ass *mujer*. She wasn't owned by anybody. I think those are the women, initially.

Then Sylvia opened up sexuality, the stuff that we would talk about but we never *really* talked about. Then it was at San Jose State that I started meeting other *lesbianas*, and [seeing] the relationship between heterosexual Chicanas and *lesbianas*. The *lesbianas* were, that was a political front. It was a location.

**Zepeda:** Was there conflict there? Was there a lot of conflict, [between] the *lesbianas* and the heterosexual Chicanas?

**Cabrera:** I think there was suspicion unless you really established relationships. I feel the *lesbianas* were so much more conscious than we were, but it was trying to learn, like, okay, where's our common ground? Those were more creative *collectivas*. When I think about the Women of Color Research Cluster [at UC Santa Cruz today], [it was] kind of similar to that, but on a baby scale. There

were poetry collectives. People could share through more artistic routes their identity, and you could express. I don't know that we accepted or we were like, "Holy shit. Like, whoa!" and understanding there's more to who we are and just because you love another woman, does that mean that's bad, and really grappling with that. What does it mean to love another *mujer*?

I'll never forget, Leticia, my roommate, we were roommates for, like, four years. In the summers we would be separated. She did her thing. She was involved in a program, and then I would go up to the mountains. I'll never forget this one time, I came back to San Jose, and I was in the shower, and she came in, she was so excited, she said, "I'm going to take a shower with you." There were friends there and when we came out, they were like, "What the hell is wrong with you all?" We talked about that, like why is it that as *mujeres* we cannot love each other, and that it's always perceived in those sexual terms? That was probably my first conversation with another person about, okay, who *are* we? Because we loved each other. We were best friends. "What's wrong with you guys?"

But it was because they were all men. It just so happens they were all at our place. You could be tagged as lesbian whether you were or not. Women could not be in strong relationships with one another. I don't know, it was kind of weird. It was a very young time in the consciousness of sexuality. We were coming out of this whole era of sexual expression. I mean, everybody was fucking everybody, to be quite honest. Yet there were still those barriers and it wasn't really talked about. It was in smaller circles.

Sylvia was involved with the big conference that happened in San Jose, the feminist, the Chicana conference that happened there.<sup>5</sup> So that just busted all kinds of stuff out. That was probably the first conference where women came out.

**Zepeda:** Wow. They literally came out with their sexuality in front of everyone?

**Cabrera:** Yes. And not wanting men there. I remember this guy I was dating, he went to the caucus like an idiot, and they asked him to leave. Then he was pissed off, "Why'd they ask me to leave?" People's consciousness was just like, "Get a grip. They asked you to leave because you're a guy. Come on. They're not going to talk about shit with you there."

**Zepeda:** So I wanted to ask you also sort of a fun question, hopefully. Similar to mentors—what were the books or music, or films, that influenced you?

**Cabrera:** I'm very typical, El Chicano Malo, Santana, but I loved old-school, you know, Marvin Gaye. When you think about the music of the seventies, there was music coming out. Donny Hathaway. I loved Donny Hathaway. Stevie Wonder. It was the music of the times. So there was Chicano-esque, but there was also music coming out of the Black community that was speaking more to what was happening at the time.

**Zepeda:** Marvin Gaye's music was questioning even environmental stuff, the war.

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<sup>5</sup> A thousand Hispanic and non-Hispanic feminists gathered for the First National Hispanic Feminist Conference in March 1980. The conference of Hispanic feminists was the brain child of Sylvia Gonzales, project director of the conference and co-chair of NOW's Minority Women's Committee. <http://www.feminist.org/research/chronicles/fc1980.html>

**Cabrera:** Yes. So then I started getting later turned on to jazz, which was like a whole new thing. Anna Marcoida, who lives over the hill, she's a person that I got really, really close to. She turned me on to jazz and that was a whole new world of Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, real traditional stuff. I didn't have a lot of money so I wasn't out there. And then movies, I'm not really that much of a film buff. I love documentaries. I'm such a nerd. I'm going to have to think about that, like go back in Memory Lane, *chihuahua*.

I don't even think Sylvia [had] published her [1974] book, *La Chicana Piensa*. That was probably the first time I read anything by a Chicana, somebody who claimed being Chicana, and it was a collection of poetry/stories. That grounded me, again, in claiming that location [of being Chicana]. She was so ridiculed.<sup>6</sup>

**Zepeda:** By the department?

**Cabrera:** By the department. To be quite honest, I feel that it's because she was feminist and because she was *lesbiana*. I think they could not handle it. *Ay dios mio*.

**Zepeda:** Was she permanent faculty?

**Cabrera:** No. She didn't get tenure. I'm not sure where she went after leaving San Jose State.

**Zepeda:** So that went along with—

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<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Alicia Gonzales, *La Chicana Piensa: Social Cultural Consciousness of a Mexican-American Woman*. 1974. San Jose, California.

**Cabrera:** Yes, yes. God, what movies did I go see?

**Zepeda:** Well, I like your story about how you would go watch *60 Minutes*.

**Cabrera:** I loved all of that. I was a nerd around stuff like that. I think because I wasn't making a decision to join a political party, that it was like—how do I experience and how do I make sense of what's important to me, and what do I talk about to other people? I would go to things in the community. I would go to open lectures or meetings and discussions. [I] was kind of a nerdy person.

But in San Jose, I would hang out. Again, Letty and I were best friends. She knew a lot of people from Teatro [Campesino] and Teatro De La Gente. In fact, Adrian Vargas over the hill,<sup>7</sup> he was very involved with a *collectiva* of people that took over this old bakery in downtown San Jose when it was really was deteriorating. So there was this whole movement of people in the arts. Flor Del Pueblo was starting; young Chicano folks would form bands. They have their recording at the Smithsonian, if I'm not mistaken. But it was Eduardo Robledo and folks that are now involved with Teatro Campesino. Those things had more of an influence on me.<sup>8</sup>

I don't remember going to the movies, to be quite honest. That's why I'm like, did I go to the movies? (laughs) I did see things like *The Exorcist* and *Johnny Got*

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<sup>7</sup> Adrian Vargas has been active in the Latino artistic and cultural movement for more than thirty years as a theater and film director, playwright, actor, musician, and producer. For a decade he directed San José's former Teatro de la Gente and was co-founder of El Centro Cultural De La Gente, the South Bay's first Chicano/Latino cultural center during the 1970s—Rosie Cabrera.

<sup>8</sup> Members included Deborah Rodriguez, Felipe Rodriguez, Francisco Rodriguez, Eduardo Robledo, Yolanda Perez, Enrique Castillo, and Ramiro Perez. Smithsonian Folkways recorded *Soy Del Pueblo*. [http://www.folkways.si.edu/rolas-de-aztlan-songs-of-the-chicano-movement/american-folk-latin/music/album/smithsonian—Rosie Cabrera](http://www.folkways.si.edu/rolas-de-aztlan-songs-of-the-chicano-movement/american-folk-latin/music/album/smithsonian—Rosie%20Cabrera).



*His Gun*, an antiwar film that had a high impact on my perception of war, but I was not a movie buff. I could not afford it. But we would go to Teatro a lot. We went to see Los Mascarones, a Teatro from Mexico City that often collaborated with Teatro Campesino when they came into town. Teatro Campesino was doing a lot of stuff. There was lots of different *teatro* happening, a lot of music, that kind of thing that I thirsted for.

**Zepeda:** Did you see your reflection in Teatro?

**Cabrera:** Oh, yes, yes. Again, that was the location of an expression of a reality. I wasn't of farm worker background. I was just a baby step up. The packinghouses are not that great a place. Now they don't even have them. A lot of that's automated now. The industry has changed drastically. But I used to be able to go to the store and see boxes of fruit packed by family members. I knew all my *tias'* numbers and I knew the boxes. The global economy has changed that industry. So whether [teatro] was talking about farm worker labor, or the packinghouses, the garment industry—we didn't have a big garment industry, but Levi Strauss—they were sort of the lower-wage places. Teatro explained the relationship of workers to *patrons*. You could relate to that. When you think of the [Central] Valley, the kind of socioeconomic structure, you could relate to it no matter what. They were just so audacious to be able to put it out in a place that made you think. It was provocative, made you laugh. You felt a sense of community. I think that's why I like those formats more, because I was also a shy person. In those formats you could make friends. It was okay, you know? You could be amongst people who were thinking, people trying to make sense of the world and trying to understand it, and trying to articulate it.

**Zepeda:** And probably getting a lot of knowledge that maybe you weren't getting in the classroom.

**Cabrera:** No, no, no, unless you were taking an ethnic studies [course]. And, again, I took MAGS courses. At least two classes every year I would take in what would be the equivalent of Chicano studies or African American studies. I took classes in African American studies, too, and I took courses in Asian American studies. I took African American studies because I wanted to understand—because, remember, I told you I didn't grow up in a community where there were African Americans—so that opened up understanding who African Americans are historically and to take responsibility for my own sense of understanding of people that I had not been exposed to.

Then Asian American studies. I took courses that were related to Filipinos because I grew up with Filipinos. So I was able to see struggles beyond my own. And feminist studies, women's studies. I was trying to remember, was there women's studies then? Bettina [Aptheker] was on our campus [San Jose State] in the seventies, [and] she taught at New College, but I don't remember there being a women's studies program then. The environmental studies program, it was just white. I just couldn't stand it.

**Zepeda:** That's amazing that you had that interest but didn't find it within the—

**Cabrera:** Oh, no. It was like, "Get me out of here." I can see it even here [at UCSC]. I am really glad Rose [Cohen] is where she is [in environmental studies]

because those are our movements.<sup>9</sup> The issue of environmental degradation, what's happening, is our issue, but it's not spoken to us in those ways, at least within academia. I think the community is a whole different thing.

You asked me the question about movies. I don't remember us going to movies. It was more stuff in the community. It was either free, or if we paid for it it was fine, because it was incredible stuff. Like, Chicano-esque. Chicano-esque was doing Teatro and then after-hours partying. I mean, it's so funny because Bob Dylan was such a profound influence. So here you'd have all these Chicano singers, right, in town when they were doing their performances. They would be singing all these Chicano songs or Mexican songs, reappropriating *corridos* and creating different *corridos*, and then at home singing Bob Dylan. But that was the music of the times.

**Zepeda:** Yes, I love that.

**Cabrera:** That kind of folk music that was political music and the bridge between that and having a Chicano voice.

**Zepeda:** So shifting gears just a little bit, I wanted to ask how you first started to work on a college campus. The first college that you worked at was at San Jose, right?

**Cabrera:** Yes.

**Zepeda:** How did that first come about?

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<sup>9</sup> Rose Cohen, PhD Environmental Studies, UCSC, 2010. Dissertation: *Nurturing New Ground: Displaced Farmers and the Politics of Resource Control in the City of Cartagena, Colombia*.

## **Working in the Criminal Justice System**

**Cabrera:** I started with criminal justice. I worked with adult probation as a community worker in San Jose. That was my very first job. I worked in a family support unit. It was working with deadbeat dads that weren't paying child support. So it was a lot of response to calls and a lot of follow-up and referrals to the courts on people that were not paying their child support.

Well, that didn't take me too long to get really bored. Again, no matter where you are, *raza* organized. So what was the group called? The Mexican American Correctional Association or something like that, I got involved with them. Again, that's very institutional. It's still working with the structure, and I was not really satisfied.

Out of the blue, I ran into an old friend, and a job that came open at San Jose State with an ex-offender program called the University Alternative Program. That was a program that worked with ex-offenders that were coming out of prison or local county facilities to go to college. So my first job at San Jose State was working with ex-cons. I was a counselor and would help mostly men. We had women, but there were not that many. People [came] from almost any institution in the state of California, they were smaller in number then. I worked with guys that had done lots of time at Folsom, at Soledad, at San Quentin, lots of different facilities, and people that also that had gone to county facilities, sometimes YA, so Youth Authority, former inmates that were going to college. During that time there was actual recruitment that was happening in institutions. You don't find that. You would never find that anymore.

**Zepeda:** Recruitment to get them in—

**Cabrera:** In the institutions to go to college, because at the time the philosophy was rehabilitation. Education was seen as an avenue for creating change in a human being's life. I loved that job until it got really dicey.

I worked with that program for about two and a half years. [I watched] those that were able to complete a degree and then those that would go back to prison. That was the option. I never had anybody just drop out and not continue. It was either finishing their degrees and moving on, or they would get locked up again. So I really became very conflicted with—I used to say intrigued, but it's conflicted—with this notion of change and what is it that makes a person make the decision to make a change in their lives?

One of my former students, he actually was a student colleague, Michael Van Cubie, was one of the most brilliant persons I have ever really truly met. He was a philosophy major. Every day we'd always have these philosophical encounters around issues and around change, because he'd come in and he'd find out, "Oh, I heard so-and-so's—what happened?" We'd have this engagement. And then I started to get conflicted with: am I doing good or am I a do-gooder? Do-gooders don't really create change. You're kind of there, but you're not really having a tremendous influence. So in my own skill sets of being a counselor, I started to feel a level of incompetency, hitting the wall of my own ability to encourage or facilitate some transformation. I didn't think about it in that way then, but now I have the words for it.

How does someone begin to transform their lives? You can be a counselor, but if the person's consciousness about themselves and their location doesn't change, then what is the impetus for them to change? Going to college is hard. You're still poor. You know what I mean? You're still poor. You're free, but you're still poor.

**Zepeda:** (laughs) Yes.

**Cabrera:** There were a few situations I confronted while a counselor in this program. They challenged my personal and professional values of right and wrong, and challenged my notion of being prepared to do a good job in my work that was productive and ethical. It was clear to me that I needed more training, more skill sets that I could bring to my work.

I ended up making the decision to go to graduate school then. That was when I started applying for the clinical community psych program. I didn't know what I was doing. That is another reason why I'm so passionate about the pre-grad stuff [now]. It just was easy. Well, it wasn't easy, but people actually were recruiting me, so it was easy in that regard. "Get your stuff in." I took it serious. I didn't have to take the GREs, which I was so thankful for, but I had to state a good case.

I ended up getting into the program, and then my choice was to leave my job. Before I left my job, the dean of social sciences opened up a program at Soledad Prison. That was an educational program, like FMP [Faculty Mentorship Program at UC Santa Cruz], in some regards. I was working with recruiting faculty from San Jose State to go into Soledad to teach courses. I always felt like education was the ray of hope.

So that was my second job, working at Soledad. I was the liaison between San Jose State and the prison, but it was a Bachelor of Arts degree program. Inmates. There already existed AA programs in most of the state prisons, very few BA programs. San Francisco State had one; Sacramento State had one. I didn't learn until I was here there was some work that was happening [with] UC Santa Cruz, but it wasn't like a formalized [program] where you could actually get your bachelor of arts degree.

So that was my next job. I was an advisor to those students, but I was also the liaison and got books from the library for them, got them the supplies they needed, facilitated the faculty getting their clearances to go in. It was probably my second year doing that job that a horrific issue came up with one of the University Alternative Program students. There were two murders. The program shut down. Within two weeks, all of the programs within the state of California were shut down.

**Zepeda:** Oh, wow.

**Cabrera:** It happened fast, fast, fast. And because of all the shift politically of moving from rehabilitation to throw away the key, that philosophy was changing.

Today I got called by *City on a Hill* because we had this event on the death penalty and Juan Melendez, who was exonerated, was the speaker. I hadn't talked about how I had personally been involved in a death penalty case. This former student of mine, it was a big case. It was one of those trials. That freaked me out, Susy, because I learned horrifying things. I learned horrifying things that

changed my life forever. As much as I still feel inmates are human beings, they're human beings that deserve all respect, there're some pretty horrific people. But life is not as linear that you could say monsters just exist, right?

But this case unfolded, a scenario that was unreal for me. I'm not going to say on tape what he did, but it was horrific. They started to prepare me for the sentencing part of whether or not he was going to get the death penalty or life in prison. [I was] working with his lawyer and being confronted with how do I feel about the death penalty and them showing me pictures, and explaining this is how they're going to cross-examine you. And then being told what his life had been like from age of two years old. This person who committed this crime himself had been sexually abused. He came from a family of seven children. Every last one of the children had been sexually abused. Social workers had been involved with them from forever. They had been abandoned at different times. One time when the social worker came, the parents were gone, and the kids were eating their own feces. So what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Yes, this person did horrific, unimaginable crimes, but he had been perpetrated on. That just fucking blew my mind. That was, again, do-gooders versus really *skillful* ways of working with people. That's when I decided, I cannot do this work anymore.

Part of it was the prisons were changing. We had moved from a program that was having face-to-face contact, to the overcrowding starting to happen. This was in the early eighties [when] the overcrowding started to happen. It was not unusual; every other week there was a lockdown, so there was a disruption of



classes. I just got set up by the guards one time. I'm just like, I can't deal with this anymore. I decided, this is not my life's work.

I'm very proud of the work. I have former students that were inmates that are teaching at community colleges in the state. They transformed their lives. I still absolutely believe that education is the light that is a point of transformation, and I have nothing but admiration for the people [who feel] this is their calling in life. Nane Alejándrez with Barrios [Unidos] comes to mind, even though he's not in each of the institutions every day. Programs and education offer the rays of hope, because those places are horrific.

I had worked in the summers with Upward Bound, because my job with the social science division was just during the academic year. I worked with Upward Bound in their summer programs. EOP found out that I was making this switch. I had worked with them because the guys and the *mujeres* that were part of the University Alternative Program, most of them were also EOP students—so we knew of one another. So the next time they had a job opening, I applied and I got the job.

**Zepeda:** That was at San Jose?

**Cabrera:** At San Jose State, yes. I worked there for a couple of years.

### **Coming to UC Santa Cruz's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)**

This just opened up a totally different world view, a totally different professional and personal practice. Remember, I didn't know about the UC's. I had just been exposed to Cal States. When I came here I was just like, "*This* is happening

here?" I mean, I couldn't imagine. I think Bettina [Aptheker], Bettina's class was the first one that a colleague of mine, Michael James, said, "You're not educated through the UC system. You need to go and check out some of the classes. You've got to see who's teaching here." I went to Bettina's *Intro to Fem* class, and there were people hanging out of the rafters, right, over at the Classroom Unit Building. It was packed. Then that was when I felt like, oh, my god, these are the kind of people that teach here. It's pretty incredible. I was starting to be introduced to this community.

There was lots of activism that was happening. Aida Hurtado—I think she had started maybe two years before me. She was a young scholar here. Pedro Castillo was here, of course. But my mentor, Katia Panas, she was a counselor who had been here for a long time. The question arose again, "What kind of Chicana are you?" We started this relationship with each other around: what's our role? To her, every single person that was a person of color or Chicano that was coming to work in this place had better be checked out deeply because of the impact. So she became my mentor. She became a close friend, and she became the woman who would give me the friggin' *patadas* if things weren't happening. But she also was a person who believed in me and believed in partnership.

So it was her, Elba Sánchez, who was working with Spanish for Spanish speakers—I mean, some of these names you probably know. Alvina Quintana, who was in literature here. No, was she in histcon? Was Alvina a histconny?

**Zepeda:** I think she might have been histcon.

**Cabrera:** I think so. Okay. And her husband was in literature. Ed Guerrero. There were all these people. It was a much smaller campus. They were my introductions. Francisco Alarcon was teaching with Spanish for Spanish Speakers and trying to work with the community. I mean, where we are now is just like, oh, my god, leaps and bounds, enormous changes and transformations, and numbers are the biggest. And some not-so-good transformations.

**Zepeda:** Okay. So we're here for part two of our oral history with Rosie Cabrera, and it's November 7, 2012. We're in the Gloria Anzaldúa Study Room in McHenry Library.

So, hi, Rosie.

**Cabrera:** Hi, Susy.

**Zepeda:** Oh, yes, and I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project.

So I wanted to start today by asking you if there was anything from our last interview that you wanted to share with us that came to your mind over the course of the days.

**Cabrera:** I realized I'm such a storyteller, that I have to go through these stories, right, and they may not be important to anybody else other than me.

**Zepeda:** Of course they are.

**Cabrera:** When you asked about the books that I've read and the things that made an impression on me, at the time I just couldn't even respond. And movies,

I don't think I've ever really been into movies. So it's not one of those things that I remember, you know, key things.

### **Chicano Literature**

But I know when I started reading Chicano literature, it had a profound effect on me. And then, it's not Chicano literature, but *One Hundred Years of Solitude* really had a profound effect on me. I think it was the style of the writing. I felt like it took me on a journey and it was very much an affirming journey of my reality. It was more complex than the book that I [also] remember very profoundly, *Bless Me, Ultima* by [Rudolfo] Anaya. Those [books] introduced me to a way of thinking about my life experience, and even though it wasn't completely on target, it helped me understand or to name an intergenerational relationship to my family.

I wanted to say that. I don't recall Anzaldúa's work, I mean, we're in this study room [named after Anzaldúa] and I'm thinking about it, although I have a feeling she was at some of the very locations [I was part of]. But Sylvia Gonzales's manuscript really had a profound effect on me, because it was the first time I had read from a Chicana perspective looking at our experiences.

Then really it was mostly there were *collectivas*. Josie Méndez-Negrete was part of that in San Jose. There was a very vibrant arts community, what we consider spoken word now, there were poets, and Josie was part of that. It was ironic that we had this faraway love for one another, and it wasn't until we both ended up here that we really got to know each other and we worked with one another. So that was just some closure to last time.

**Zepeda:** Nice. Thank you. Thank you for that. That *does* bring it full circle.

**Cabrera:** Yes.

**Zepeda:** And so now to go into Santa Cruz, what made you decide to come to [UC] Santa Cruz, or how did that happen for you, and then how was the cultural climate when you arrived at Santa Cruz?

**Cabrera:** Well, sometimes you end up in a place, not because you've planned it, but because things happen in your life. I had been in this really long-term relationship and we worked closely together at EOP.

**Zepeda:** In San Jose?

**Cabrera:** Yes, in San Jose, and we split up. And then it became very difficult. Because when you're in a relationship where you respect each other it just became very difficult and painful [to keep working together].

So for me it was about making a choice. This job opened up here. I had been active with the Third World Counselors Association, so I had a cadre of Chicano professionals and other people of color. I think, thematically I've always [lived in the] intersections of lots of ethnicities and people of color. Even though I was grounded in being Chicana, I was always in relationship to other people. So when this position opened, it spoke my name, and I felt like, "Let's go for this." I did.

I think didn't really comprehend until I started work what it meant to work at a UC campus. EOP was really small at the time. There were—I think I remember

the number—785 students in the whole program. It was the Student Affirmative Action/Educational Opportunity Programs. So at that time you could be an SAA student; you could be a middle-class or upper-class student of color and be a part of the program, as well as be an EOP student. So it was about race and class. It was about making sure that diversity mattered.

### **The Climate at EOP When Cabrera Arrived in 1984**

**Zepeda:** That was in—

**Cabrera:** 1984. May of 1984 is when I started. I felt like I had dropped in heaven. I can't explain it any other way. The consciousness, I mean, it was a rough time in EOP. It was a turbulent time. The office was healing from having a gap in leadership. For a while, the office had been run by a coordinated body of multiple staff members. By the time I arrived, they had finished that. The person that was the associate director had been on a fellowship. She came back and then she was the acting director. Nobody liked her, so it was a contentious time period for the staff. The staff at the time was huge. We had outreach that was part of the effort. There were at least four people that worked in outreach. There was early academic outreach. That was all part of SAA/EOP, and there were at least three staff members there and student staff. Then there were the academic counselors. I was one of the academic counselors. There were four of us at the time. When we would get together, there were twenty-one staff members, including administrative staff. I mean, it was huge. It was a big staff.

**Zepeda:** Sorry, what is SAA?

**Cabrera:** Student Affirmative Action. Pre-Proposition 209 the program was called Student Affirmative Action/Educational Opportunity Programs.

**Zepeda:** Okay. Thank you.

**Cabrera:** I was hired in May, and then they were in a search for a new director. So I got to participate in that process and was introduced to the internal struggle of clarifying what kind of leadership was needed. There was a very tumultuous time with EOP and then SAA/EOP.

Extremely passionate staff. I loved that. People were really passionate. Students were very connected. There was no SOAR [Student Organization Advising & Resources] on campus, so student orgs used to meet at SAA/EOP, and they were very invested in who the next director was going to be. Arturo Pacheco got the job. Arturo was a faculty member at Stanford who actually quit his job at Stanford because Stanford had denied tenure to an African American scholar faculty member. Then Arturo just, out of protest, left Stanford. Arturo had been involved with creating theme housing at Stanford, all the structures that were support structures there. So when he came, there was this new introduction of structures that could be helpful here in Santa Cruz.

I was hired in May and then by the end of June, I coordinated the BRIDGE Program. So it was like being flung into a process. Cheri Araki, who was real involved in organizing BRIDGE, was going back to get her PhD. She left SAA/EOP when I got hired. It was sort of like, "Here you go." My introduction to SAA/EOP programming was that summer, with a cohort of about forty-three, forty-two students and teaching staff. I lived in the dorms with students. Short of

having the Upward Bound experience, I hadn't had that level of intimacy with the students, and it was really exciting. It was very exciting. In those days, SAA/EOP used to have an orientation program that was a week long. So there were structures that were really helpful to students and that really tried to help students understand, not only the transition of coming to a UC system, but the whys. Why does a Student Affirmative Action Office exist? Why does an EOP Office exist? What does this have to do with you being here at UC Santa Cruz, and where are you in the numbers of things?

So there was a level of consciousness around trying to ensure that students understood they were walking into a campus that for all practical purposes was a predominantly white campus. Chicanos and Latinos at the time probably were only about 7 percent of the population. African Americans' [percentage by population] has been steady all this time. It hasn't gone over about 3 percent. [The percent of the population that are] Asian Americans has changed; it's transformed, and those numbers have increased. [The] American Indian [population] has continued to kind of stay steady. It's improved, but not drastically.

In the old days, there was a consciousness of trying to develop counseling strategies, programmatic strategies. EOP was responsible for not only BRIDGE, but the Orientation Program and then a few years later, starting the Faculty Mentor Program. So there was this focus on trying to develop curriculum that would be responsive to students of color, with this acknowledgement that the exposure to the material may not have been there.



I talked about my experience [at the beginning of my oral history]. That was kind of what I saw happen with the students. [I was] taking into consideration my own experience in developing my identity—how do you respond to the works of people of color, the anger, in particular, to some of the writings that were coming out of the seventies? How do you take that in when you have no consciousness? You know who you are, but do you really know who you are?

It was a very beautiful time. We would struggle. It was not easy. Sometimes the students would think we were trying to teach them to be racist. For BRIDGE that was a developmental process. We knew by the second week we would be accused of being racist, and it wouldn't be till the end of BRIDGE that they would understand or be able to put in perspective the exposure that they were being afforded in the program.

Arturo came from a very Freirean pedagogy. So we constructed these different forms of: how do we take the language of the institution and then how do we construct curricula that exposes them to those structures but is on our terms and exposes them to the literature that's critical? We were really very blessed, because we had really incredible grad students that worked with us, that taught the courses and helped to develop the curriculum. People like—well, Greg was actually a staff member and a lecturer, but Greg Sarris worked with us.<sup>10</sup> He left, finished his PhD and then became a faculty member at UCLA and is a noted Native scholar. And Alvina Quintana, Ed Guerrero, Liddy Detar, all of these

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<sup>10</sup> Greg Sarris was the SAA/EOP Writing Coordinator. He implemented courses for SAA/EOP students during the academic year, trained and supervised the tutorial staff, and had oversight of the SAA/EOP tutorial support. He coordinated the writing segment of Bridge until he left to complete his PhD—Rosie Cabrera.

people. Maylei [Blackwell], Josie Mendez Negrete, and so many more graduate students were part of those initial cohorts. So it was those type of people that were engaging the literature.

I think EOP was the one place on campus that race, class, gender, sexuality mattered and the one place that there was excitement about collegially working with each other to figure out how do we best serve these students? And in those days, they were truly Special Action students. Special Action does not exist like it did then.

**Zepeda:** What is Special Action?

**Cabrera:** Meaning that for whatever reasons in a person's academic record, they did not meet the criteria to be admitted to the university. SAA/EOP could admit—I can't remember the number, but it was over 100 students—and then the bulk of those students would come through BRIDGE as sort of a pre-prep and then would be followed up [on] during the academic year.

Ironically, those students, I feel, performed better than the regular admits. I think that it speaks to the resiliency of students of color that really have to fight to be part of a system, and the kind of community that was constructed with the students, that it mattered, even though at the beginning, like in any community, you're checking each other out.

Again, class [background] was [diverse]—we would have students that were middle class; we would have students that were super low income. Engagement and tension sometimes would arise as a result of that class difference. How do

you create common ground, so that those markers were not part of something that differentiated you, but could be utilized to bring the community together if they understood who they were and that their histories mattered?

**Zepeda:** So was that the common ground?

**Cabrera:** Yes. Yes, that was the common ground—trying to educate students that the opportunity they were afforded came at a cost and that there were people that paid that cost.

The nice thing is that Arturo was part of the strike that happened at San Francisco State.<sup>11</sup> So he would raise that—the fight for ethnic studies, as well as the fight for continuing to have access within the institution, and the coalitions that were developed at that time and that crossed racial boundaries. We were really blessed in those early years to have someone like that, that was excited about that kind of development of curriculum.

So you can imagine, with cohorts of students coming through the program like that, those students coming out of BRIDGE were the ones that were in leadership positions within student organizations at their colleges. They were, I would say, the most active. I personally regret that we have never done a longitudinal study of those cohorts. I've talked to some alumni since Eugene Cota-Robles has passed, and they actually would like to employ that kind of study because they feel like where the UC system is right now, that there's this huge cohort who

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<sup>11</sup> The 1968 student-led strike at San Francisco State was the longest campus strike in United States history. The five-month event defined core values of equity and social justice, laid the groundwork for establishment of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State, and sparked the establishment of ethnic studies classes and programs at universities throughout the country. <http://www.sfsu.edu/news/2008/fall/8.html>

could be highly, highly successful here that is being eliminated. But we don't have the factual material that proves that there are other factors that need to be considered around access to higher ed. If you looked at those cohorts, we probably could. I mean, if you talked to people that have worked with Special Action admits—yes, there's lots that has to be dealt with, but they are the most resilient. They're the ones that can get to the point that they don't take it for granted and will do what is necessary and find their way. We have so many that they have their PhD's; they're doctors, they're leaders.

So when we got to the point where that notion of offering access in that way was questioned that was pretty traumatizing.

**Zepeda:** Who was it questioned by, by the funding?

**Cabrera:** There're sometimes dynamics on this campus around fairness. It's always been there. The tension between how do you increase diversity and be fair, is a contentious location. Then the system started to tighten up because there were more students eligible [and] there weren't more UC's being built. Merced is the last of them. There really need to be more UC campuses built or expanded. But even when you expand, that becomes contentious. When you think about Santa Cruz and what it means to expand a campus like this, it changes the nature of what Santa Cruz is. But for lack of a better way to put it, there is not enough bed space, there're not enough chairs at the table to account for that. So it's troubling in the sense that there are so many more students who could really do this.

### **The Summer BRIDGE Program**

I always felt like BRIDGE was almost like an incubator. Not only was it a location for the students to engage, but because we hired so many graduate students and lecturers, it became a location of learning what it meant to teach a diverse student population. It was the only place.

**Zepeda:** That's amazing.

**Cabrera:** You would only find it in a BRIDGE Program. During the academic year, there were more white students in courses, and so students of color would be an anomaly unless it was the very few courses where there were more students of color. American studies was one of those locations, but it was not predominant. Spanish for Spanish Speakers was another one of those locations. It was all *raza*.

The graduate students became these partners that were very cherished around thinking through how do we do this work. We had a cadre of people. We would have these meetings and they would be so intense and so deep because everybody was invested. Sometimes we'd run into tensions because there was difference of opinion about how to work with the students. But I felt like for the grad students it gave them a practice of grappling with what the needs truly were, truly are, and they would have to integrate those new strategies and reach the students.

Those were the people who became these incredible teachers. When I think of the people that have come through, they're outstanding teachers because they had to come up with: how do we deal with the issues that emerge when we come to this

series of readings? What do we do when, because of that class distinction, people start to say things that are horrific? Do you immediately react that they're saying racist things? Or, how do you engage students so they're responsible for their language and responsible for their thinking? How do they write about that experience, and how do we not make them feel—yes, call them on it, but don't humiliate them, because it's a developmental process.

So it was a really beautiful time of being able to come up with some solid ways of working with the students. And they pulled each other. BRIDGEies were hardcore and they had their cohorts. They always invited other people into the cohort because they knew their way around. They understood how the system worked.

**Zepeda:** Amazing.

**Cabrera:** They were very, very strong.

**Zepeda:** How long did that program last?

**Cabrera:** Well. I'm trying to remember the year we had to decide not to have BRIDGE. It was horrible. It was during one of these times when there was a budget cut. There had been two budget cuts. I'm sorry I don't recall the exact year, but it was after Proposition 209, because we had already moved over to the ARCenter. Proposition 209 was 1996.<sup>12</sup> SP 1 and 2 were actually on the books pre-

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<sup>12</sup> In 1995, the Regents of the University of California passed two landmark resolutions, Standing Policy 1 (SP1) and Standing Policy 2 (SP2), prohibiting "preferential treatment" on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, and national origin in admissions, employment, and contracting. These resolutions were followed by the passage of the 1996 voter initiative Proposition 209, which incorporated similar prohibitions into the California State Constitution, effective August 1998—Editors.

209, but had not been implemented. So it was probably the year 2000. I was still at EOP, but we had gone through a series of cuts and they were pretty horrific. Everybody was invested in BRIDGE. We were confronted with the decision of did we have to lay off people? How were we going to manage? Over \$200,000 had to be absorbed. Well, BRIDGE alone cost that much. So it was pretty horrific. None of us wanted to let it go. But the cohort of EOP students had grown so much that the decision almost had to be—do you save a program for 85 to 100 students, or do you serve 1,500? You know what I mean?

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** And how fair is it to the staff that you furlough academic advisors? Not only were we doing BRIDGE, but we still had our Orientation Program that went from a weeklong program to three days. Then we also had the pre-graduate programs that started—I think it was 1988 is when Eugene had left. Eugene Cota-Robles had left UC and had gone to the Office of President by then. So Eugene was instrumental. I'm going to have to backtrack the story so you understand it.

**Zepeda:** Thank you.

**Cabrera:** Eugene was very instrumental in getting monies pumped into the entire UC system for what were called faculty mentor pre-graduate programs. So not only was it BRIDGE and Orientation, but then we had the restarting of FMP, that actually was a Herman Blake program from when Oakes [College] started.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Cameron Vanderscoff, Interviewer and Editor (with a supplemental interview by Leslie Lopez) *Look'n M' Face and Hear M' Story": An Oral History with Professor J. Herman Blake* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2014). Available in full text and audio at <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/4m01p3bz>

That was a sociology undergraduate research program, because that was Herman's area of expertise, and then waned when Herman left, and it went to the grad division, and then the university stopped supporting it.

So we were confronted with big challenges. Not only did we have an academic year Faculty Mentor Program, but then we would apply for money. So I applied for grants [to this program with] this long-ass name—Grants to Institutions to Encourage Women and Minorities in Higher Education. McNair and that program existed through the feds at the same time. So in the early nineties, we started getting that money. That allowed us to have an undergraduate research program up on campus. 1995, I think was the last year, because then that particular federal program got eliminated, and it was just McNair that existed.

We were never successful. We tried three times for McNair and were never successful in getting the funds. I do feel that it's because EOP was where the activity was happening. I'm not going to say it was EOP's fault, but the campus had not figured out how Student Affairs and the academic end of the house was going to work collaboratively on academic programming for students of color.

URAP [Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program] emerged, but that was just for research within Latin American and Latino studies. We had some students in chemistry, a few students in the sciences. There were other programs that existed for them, but [not for] students in the arts, in humanities, and social sciences. There was a lot of demand on the staff to support all of those programs.

The choice of letting go of BRIDGE was horrific. By then I had changed my job. I started out as an academic counselor, then continued to be an academic



counselor, but coordinating the pre-graduate programs.<sup>14</sup> Then when there was restructuring within EOP, then there was a position created as coordinator of academic support services, which was managing the counselors, managing the pre-grad programs, and the Summer BRIDGE Program, and orientation programs. I was promoted to take on this new role as Coordinator of Academic Support Services.

I loved it. I loved it. It was very demanding, but it allowed me to work the pipeline. The graduate students were part of BRIDGE, but they were also part of the pre-grad programs. We were fortunate to have former graduate students like Maylei Blackwell, Maurice Stevens, Maria Ochoa, Deborah Vargas, Alyssa Huerta, Gloria Chacon and others. They all helped in organizing, teaching and supervising student researchers. It was almost like a lab of learning how to work with our students around the issues, with the objective of getting them, not only through the institution, but excelling, graduating and going on to graduate school.

I always felt like in some respects the health and well-being of EOP<sup>15</sup>, although it was said to be supported by the faculty, it wasn't tangibly. So there was always a lot of critique. It's what happens within educational institutions when there aren't strong relationships. I always felt like [things might have been different] if Eugene Cota-Robles had stayed longer, but he had a bigger job to do. When he

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<sup>14</sup> Pre-graduate programs included the Faculty Mentor Program (FMP), the Graduate Information Program (GIP), and for well over five years the Summer Opportunities for Academic Research Program (SOAR)—Rosie Cabrera.

<sup>15</sup> After Proposition 209, SPI and SPII, Student Affirmative Action was eliminated and SAA/EOP changed to EOP only—Rosie Cabrera.

left, we didn't have a strong leader on the campus that was Chicano or Latino who assumed the kind of relationship that Eugene had taken on, and Rafael Guzman, who was before my time. Those were both very strong, strong people that had the ear, constant ear, of the chancellor and could maneuver things or at least understood how to work the institution.

So Katia Panas became a really key person. Here's this woman—I didn't even know her, but from the moment I got hired, she was ringing my phone, wanting to connect. I made this mistake. Oh, my god, I will never forget it. We had an appointment and I missed the appointment. And she called me out. She called me and said, "I want to know what kind of Chicana are you? I want to know who you are and what you're all about and which side are you on?" I was in shock that someone would do that, but she became my strongest ally and mentor.

She understood the history of the campus. She knew all the characters. In some respects, her and Eugene Cota-Robles were real unique. They understood how to work in white worlds. I don't know how else to explain it. I carried this baggage of anger with me, of just always feeling sort of an oppositional location, right? She felt that, but she could always socialize with them. She was very much into the arts, and so it was not unique for her to be in social settings with the chancellor or the vice chancellor, deans.

I remember one time asking her, "How do you do it? How is it that you can be in the same room or eat across a table from someone that you know has made a decision to cut a program?" Then she reminded me that it's not about her; it's

about what she embodies for the constituency. If that meant that social capital and that political capital would be able to translate into something for students later, she was going to do that. She made it work. She reminded me that there was a time she had to utilize it. It was when the students in early, early days took over the chancellor's office. They were calling in the National Guard. The National Guard was outside the university; the students had been inside for days, and the institution was going to use violence against the students. So her, Pedro [Castillo]—young faculty at the time negotiated. They negotiated with both the students and the administration.

So this was negotiated positively and students were not hurt. She reminded me constantly: do not burn your bridges. If you have things to say, it doesn't mean don't call people on it, but always be respectful and know that over time your personal power matters. It matters. It does matter that some of us understand and can talk to people.

Eugene was like that. Eugene understood how the institution worked, and because he was an academic vice chancellor and moved his way through, he knew how to negotiate with these people. So when you think about *raza* or people of color moving in administration and higher ed, I feel like that's the location that's the most difficult, because a lot of us consider when people do that that they're selling out, right? So how do you maintain your integrity? How do you move in ways that it's clear what your intentions are, but that you're not making people feel so uncomfortable that they can't work with you? I always felt like Katia had that very unique ability. She was a strategist that you would not believe. It *was* always about the students.

Josie King, who was African American and the counselor that was at Oakes College, she's one of the unsung heroes. She was at Berkeley during the time that there were lots of protests. Her lungs got totally fucked up because she took in a lot of teargas. So she had a disease that affected her lungs and it affected her ability to do her work as she got older.

All of the people before, [in] the 1980s—they were trying to construct mechanisms for students to be able to claim this location and not be an anomaly, [to know] that they're the very core of what needs to be here. Yet this was *such* a white institution. So they kept trying to make inroads in constructing courses.

So Katia, when things would happen in the community, you could always count on her. She was never a clock watcher. If you needed her after hours, she was there. If shit came down in the community and mediation was needed, she was there. She dragged me into these things that Herman Blake had started, which were multicultural retreats, and so we did that. Oh, my god, I probably did those retreats for at least five years. It was pulling students from across campus to engage over a period of three days on race, class, gender, sexuality issues in trying to impact [the] campus climate. There would be some meaningful engagement away from campus. So Katia is one of those persons that really is an arch here.

**Zepeda:** It seems like she really paved a road towards creating something different at UC Santa Cruz, because if we feel it, or if it was thought of as a white institution, which now it's different in some respects—

**Cabrera:** Yes, fairly different, yes.

**Zepeda:** But especially if there's an emphasis around curriculum, or on students becoming in tune with who they are and really tapping into that, that's powerful work.

**Cabrera:** Yes. So there were these pockets of people. Elba Sánchez is another one, with Spanish for Spanish Speakers. So in dealing with *mujeres* feeling isolated and disconnected, it was really the faculty, the graduate students, and the staff, mostly the staff. The faculty would come every once in a while, but it was mostly the staff and graduate students that would host *mujeres* meetings. Like once a quarter, at least, there were all these ad hoc—

There was a publication [which is archived] here at the library, *Revista Mujeres*. Faculty, staff, and students would have their material published. They were very hard to get done, as you can imagine, in those days, old-school ways before computers.<sup>16</sup>

**Zepeda:** So what years are we talking like here?

**Cabrera:** Oh, my gosh. It existed before I started here, so it was my first year.

**Zepeda:** “Come join this project.”

**Cabrera:** Yes. “Come and join this project.” So it had to have been in the eighties that they started. *Revistas Mujeres* was a labor of love for all involved. Elba Sánchez and Katia Panas took on the leadership and coordination of this publication. Most of the work of editing, preparing for press was all done pre-

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<sup>16</sup> For much more on *Revista* see Susy Zepeda, Interviewer and Editor, *A Lifetime Commitment to Giving Voice: An Oral History with Elba Rosario Sánchez* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2014). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/sanchez>

computer processing of this kind of publication. We used typewriters and light tables for producing the layouts. It was a huge process. Before Katia left, we collectively decided we couldn't sustain it anymore. It was too taxing.

**Zepeda:** Oh, my goodness.

**Cabrera:** They were beautiful publications.

**Zepeda:** That's powerful.

**Cabrera:** Yes. It was a beautiful publication, and it was affirming for the students. The publication emerged from Elba and Katia, with support from many of us. Faculty were always invited to be a part of this process, but it was difficult to get commitments. Aida Hurtado and Pat Zavella<sup>17</sup> helped out through support of the publication and lending us their credibility as faculty. But it was difficult to have faculty involved because they were working through the processes of tenure. *Revista Mujeres* was also a location of affirming the students that submitted work. People submitted artwork, kind of like *TWANAS* but with a Latina focus.

Sometimes we would find white faculty had inflated a grade because they were scared. I'll never forget this one student that submitted this one paper, and we had to talk with her about it. She had gotten an A in, in sociology. We read the paper and it was so flawed. Then we were confronted with, we can't publish it the way it is. How do we talk with the student about this and yet not make the

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<sup>17</sup> See Susy Zepeda, Interviewer and Editor, *Patricia Zavella: Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies*, UC Santa Cruz (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2014). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/zavella>

student feel less than? She was furious, furious. It made her question the viability of what she had learned so far. She rewrote the paper. She rewrote it and it was beautiful, but she ended up confronting the faculty member about the paper and about her feelings about not being told what was wrong with the paper. So how do we talk about how faculty are engaging our students? People were engaging diversity in weird ways. They were either really polarized against it, or feeling like the students shouldn't be here if they couldn't do the work. Or they were like, "Well, they can't help it," and then inflating their grade, versus engaging with the student on what they needed to do.

**Zepeda:** Right, to actually help them.

**Cabrera:** Yes, yes. So sometimes trying to deal with how the institution was dealing with diversity happened in these outside locations because that would be where we saw what was happening. Then as a result of that one student, the next quarter when we had a *mujeres* meeting, that student actually came out to the other students to discuss that. Then we discovered she wasn't alone and that there were other students that had experienced that, but didn't know who to talk with, or if they should even talk [about] it, because how they discovered it was maybe the professor graded high, and then when they wanted to submit it, not for publication, but even to student locations that were professional orgs, they would be rejected. Or if they would submit it to *TWANAS*, it would have to be tweaked a lot. They didn't know how to engage the faculty that were doing it and never really discussed it because they didn't know how to talk about it.

Sometimes EOP would take that charge on because you would see it with the tutoring; you would see it manifested in the ways I've described. Then it would be: what is our role as EOP in being advocates for the students? Because is that not an act of racism? Our students are tough. They're resilient. They can handle it. But if you don't believe they can handle it, you don't give the feedback and the critique that's needed.

There were partnerships amongst some of the faculty and staff. We always did things together, socialized with each other and stuff like that. But [we didn't really] come together to really try to figure out how we were going to press an agenda. The faculty did their thing and then those of us in Student Affairs did our thing. A wasted opportunity at the time.

**Zepeda:** Were the faculty supportive of the Faculty Mentor Program? Because for that, a student needs a faculty member to work with, right?

**Cabrera:** Yes and no. I have to say in a self-critical way that that relationship with faculty was very difficult, very difficult. So the management of those discussions with the faculty became hard. We always had faculty that worked with students, but it started to be the same faculty that had a commitment to students of color. [Some people felt] that EOP had no business working in this realm; it's really the faculty who should be organizing these programs, and that the money for FMP should be given to faculty who were working in this area.

**Zepeda:** Oh, wow.



**Cabrera:** I had to really deal with: how do we negotiate our mutuality? How do we partner? Because the faculty obviously had a major role. They're the centerpiece of it. But it was difficult to discuss the importance of the developmental steps that were important to supporting a student. Some of these issues faculty were not willing to take on. This was one of those areas of how do we work together to successfully impact the numbers of students who are making the choice to pursue graduate work and are prepared for this level of academic work.

So it became difficult. I think at some point with FMP there was a culture that emerged where the students started to believe—no matter what we did to try to counter it—they believed that the way to learn how to do research was to develop their own projects. That's fine for an advanced student that has already taken a research methods class, has a question that they're working with. But it's hard to tell a student, "It's okay to start on somebody's project because you're learning the techniques. You're learning how it's done." If the student is young enough, like a junior, they could actually have two years of experience. They start out on [a faculty member's] project and then could ultimately do a spinoff because they're so informed about the work, they have their own questions that emerge out of that research.

And all the budget cuts had whittled down the money. Who pays for the program? So, for example, Aida said, "You know what? I can do this, but I need one of my course equivalencies bought out in order to do this." I don't know what's happening this year with it. FMP, to me, represents that inability of Student Affairs and faculty to really find common ground.

Now, as I moved to El Centro, I found another location to support students in considering and preparing for graduate school, but it's not as charged as within FMP. It's in organizing events and activity that are academic in nature. Collaborations with faculty seem more mutual. I feel like now there's a respect for Campus Life professionals [who] have their expertise and the faculty have their expertise and we can work together to make it happen for the student. But that's taken twenty-five years to get to that point.

So, again, in a self-critical way, because I feel like I was such a pivotal part of that, I found it difficult to deal with the faculty on the issue. The very last time that I applied for McNair, I did have the discussion with a few key faculty on campus. They told me upfront, "We will work with you on this. We will write you the strongest letter possible, but we have to move to the faculty being responsible for the program." I do feel had we received the money, there would have been a good chance of making that collaboration work, because these faculty were *very* invested and had worked with the program for a long time. They saw the potentiality. But we didn't get the money.

**Zepeda:** Who's the granting institution? Is it the federal government?

**Cabrera:** It's the feds. It's big money, *big* money.

**Zepeda:** I didn't realize that universities had to apply for it.

**Cabrera:** Oh, yes.

**Zepeda:** For some reason I thought it was just part of what happened.

**Cabrera:** No, you apply for it. It's highly, highly competitive. I mean, I don't even know now, because I'm so removed from that, but it's a shame, because Santa Cruz, to me, has one of the best potentialities around that mentorship. There're committed faculty. It wasn't like we didn't have them. The faculty always liked the end results, but it was the process of getting there. And, really, when it worked well was when we did FMP during the academic year, and hosted a summer research program. Remember, Grants to Institutions, blah, blah, blah, that big long name? Because then we had the students in the summer. So they actually had almost a year of grooming. So by the time they ended the summer program, oh, my god, they were sophisticated. Many of these students continued work following their summer experience or participated in other programs on other campuses. Nicole Guidotti-Hernández came out of that cohort. Belinda Lum, Robert Lint Sagarena, Gerardo Licon came out of that cohort. Lots of PhD's came out of those cohorts.

It's an investment and an effort to be able to provide the structure. Graduate students were essential to a type of mentoring, in terms of the psychological development of a student truly believing they are scholars and working through the issues that they have and claiming that space. When you claim it, you also take responsibility for doing the work.

**Zepeda:** That seems key.

**Cabrera:** Oh, essential.

**Zepeda:** Yes. I do hope that that study gets tracked in some way, because it feels really important.

**Cabrera:** This year I heard they're on hiatus and FMP may not exist. I talked to Angelica Lopez the other day, and she said, "I really don't know what's going to happen," and so it's tragic. I don't know where URAP is, if it's really happening this year. The monies are drying up. When the monies dry up, then how do you change the character of the institution so that those processes become commonplace? Right now I feel like we're in crisis.<sup>18</sup>

**Zepeda:** So I want to ask you a question. What advice would you give an administrator? Would this be some of the insight that you would offer administrators, to know that it's part of this sort of pipeline?

**Cabrera:** The institution has to make decisions about how it changes its culture, so that the mentoring Santa Cruz says it's all about truly happens and structures are in place to make [the mentoring] happen. There should be courses, and some departments actually have them, but very few. It's almost like, how do you introduce students to the culture of an academic discipline?

I'll never forget Deb Vargas. These are the [kind of] people that used to work within FMP and within the summer program. I loved the workshops because [of] the way people would pay attention. We knew the students had issues with reading. You could have a workshop on reading, but it would go in one ear, out the other. But Deb came up with gutting a book, and she literally went through like it's like gutting a fish. How do you gut a book so that you have command

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<sup>18</sup> It's important to recognize that the Faculty Mentor Program works with students in the social sciences, humanities, and arts. There are programs on campus in the STEMS [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics] area that do have support, and some have federal or state funding—Rosie Cabrera.

over it? And the students would grab onto that. *Tú eres mi otro yo* [You are my other self]. When you have students that are in graduate-level work sharing—in the Women of Color Research Cluster, people were sharing all these strategies with one another, and then some of that would filter into FMP.

**Zepeda:** Wow, that's really powerful. I like that. So the mentoring is within the structure.

**Cabrera:** It's within the structure, within a cultural context, and there's a relationship all the way through. I think right now everybody's worried about time and what they're being paid to do and how much. When you look at the volume of students, what's viable. I understand that, but we can't get stuck. The pendulum is where it is. But how do we deal with this? [Now we have a] Hispanic Serving Institution Committee [which I am serving on]. We know that Latinos are going to be a solid majority here in California, but we're still expecting our students to accommodate how the university wants them to be. So, how does the institution change its culture so that what the students want and need is acknowledged and worked through?

Remember how I talked about FMP? I always felt like it was a think tank. We all would struggle through: okay, this is the issue. People would raise it. They would share strategies, talk about, well, that doesn't quite work, and people would get into a pedagogical dialogue around what is most effective. I don't know that that's happening [now]. How do we teach our students? I don't know how it's going to be. Within Latino populations, there's the whole range. I have a lot of faith in our students. I feel like our students are very resilient. If you have

good people around you and mentoring you, people can develop. Or it can shortchange them. They don't get what they want and they're constantly doubting their ability and they're not engaging.

**Zepeda:** Exactly.

**Cabrera:** So I don't know.

### **Political Backlash**

**Zepeda:** Yes, that makes complete sense. I just want to take us back a little bit to the time of these propositions, of 187 and 209 and SP1 and SP2 and ask about the effects on campus. And also was there activism by the students, staff, faculty?<sup>19</sup>

**Cabrera:** Oh, yes, yes. Yes. It started with 187. And what was the other one, Proposition 227—

**Zepeda:** Bilingual education?

**Cabrera:** Yes. So those were all the starts of attacks on bilingual education and attacks on who was legal, who was not. The students were very, very vocal. M.E.Ch.A. had coalitions with other orgs. At one point with 227 and 187, they went off campus and where you turn to get on [Highway] 1 to go over the hill [to San Jose], they all were arm-in-arm and stopped traffic right under the bridge

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<sup>19</sup> California Proposition 187 (also known as the Save Our State (SOS) initiative) was a 1994 ballot initiative to establish a state-run citizenship screening system and prohibit undocumented immigrants from using health care, public education, and other social services in the state of California. Proposition 227, also called the English Language in Public Schools Statute, was approved in 1998. The proposition claimed bilingual education was the culprit for the low academic achievement and high drop out rates of immigrant children in California and proposed that English Language Learners (ELLs) be "taught English as rapidly and effectively as possible" This undermined most bilingual education in the state of California—Editors.

that goes by the church. It was dangerous, in the sense that somebody could have really gotten hurt, but I think they really felt like there was a necessity to express. That was happening everywhere. That was happening everywhere. Santa Cruz clearly had the students that were doing that. And a lot of them were BRIDGE students that were part of that organizing effort.

We moved from that to Proposition 209 and Ward Connerly raising the affirmative action attacks. It was difficult because then it was key that our students understood—because, again, they were SAA/EOP—it didn't matter, the class difference, right? So it became even more critical that the students understood what this was going to mean to the total population.

So the students were real involved in this. But I have to give Bettina Aptheker and Judy Yung total props. The two of them assumed leadership and really did a lot to raise the question on the campus to the broader front. They organized with graduate students. They organized with undergrads. And they organized with staff; they made every effort to include all segments of the campus community. They organized lots of teach-ins. All of us were involved, and it became the question of the day.

We did have a chancellor, Chancellor [Karl] Pister, who was really profound. He was chancellor when 227, 187 passed; he was here when César Chávez passed away. He grew up in the Central Valley, I want to say the Stockton area, more up north. He understood these issues. I'm really sorry I didn't evoke him earlier [on] the question about the faculty. He personally asked us to host a meeting with the faculty. He came to the meeting and he told the faculty at the time, "If you work

with this [Faculty Mentorship] program, when your paperwork for tenure or promotion comes before my desk, I will not forget that you contributed.” And that has never happened since, in terms of a personal commitment.

During this time of turmoil, a new dean of undergraduate instruction was appointed, Clifton Poodry.<sup>20</sup> He was American Indian. Cliff had been one of the first-timers that Eugene [Cota-Robles] had [brought to UCSC]. He was one of the first of that cohort of people of color in biological sciences. We had the highest number of people of color [in biology] in the entire system. When Cliff took on that job, he had a personal vendetta with EOP—he was very concerned about the recruitment, retention and graduation of American Indian students.

But in our experience with Cliff we had to wrestle with—how do we make sure that our personal interests or community commitments happen, or concerns are raised without condemning the whole group? I think the campus, [and] I see it even within sometimes the resource centers, this happens. It can't be a zero sum,

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to clarify how I am discussing Dr. Cliff Poodry and the political issues related to SAA/EOP. He was, and is, a very proud and committed American Indian scholar and administrator. Cliff was part of a critical mass of science faculty that built a strong location for students of color to pursue science majors and careers. Cliff was one of the founding members of SACNAS, the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science, a nationally renowned STEM organization whose major commitment is to recruit, train, and support the next generation of STEM researchers. A member of the Seneca nation, Cliff makes no apologies for his expectation of excellence, and his passionate goal of increasing the numbers of American Indian and people of color in the academy. Cliff left UC Santa Cruz to become the director of the NIGMS ([National Institute of General Medical Sciences](https://www.nih.gov/nigms)) Division of Training, Workforce Development, and Diversity; he retired in January of 2014 after twenty years in this role. Although he has left federal service, Cliff is continuing to pursue his long-held interest in improving science education as a senior fellow at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. See and hear Cliff talk about his career: <http://thebenshi.com/?p=5159>. I have tremendous respect for Dr. Clifton Poodry. The issues that came up during his tenure at UCSC and within the office are not unusual. I think as a person of color within the academy we come with our personal and professional sensibilities and commitments. Cliff was non-apologetic and I understand this and respect this important quality that is Cliff. We, as a campus and within the nation, are indebted to Cliff for all his work throughout his prolific career that spanned well over forty years.— Rosie Cabrera



that some get at the expense of everybody else. Cliff was very angry that the numbers of American Indian students had not been improving. He felt strongly EOP wasn't doing enough. I remember in those days we had outreach and early outreach were part of our program. It wasn't until 2009 that that was no longer part of our effort.

So Cliff really messed with our director at the time. Arturo had left, and Allen Fields became the director. He was also was really demanding of the entire staff, to the point that he was requiring report after report after report and not approving expenditures and it felt like he was just trying to interfere. I know Cliff, so I know in his heart it came from a good place because of how passionate he is about wanting to improve the conditions of American Indian students. So it's hard to be critical, but he was difficult. The staff demanded to meet with the chancellor. The chancellor arranged for the staff to meet with him and the academic vice chancellor, who was [Michael] Tanner at the time, and they all heard from the staff of EOP.

Remember Katia said, "Never burn your bridges." But we were really brutal. It was hard for Pister to handle such anger coming from the staff. But he took that and decided he was going to make sure that his people were not interfering. He was not afraid of students. He would go to their rallies. He wore their T-shirts that were used for student actions. He would speak to them. When César passed away, he was the first one to say, "Organize the memorial. Organize the celebration. We will pay for it."

I always felt like the students didn't really appreciate him, what it took for a person in leadership like that to take those steps to be on the front lines. When it came to affirmative action, he understood this was a big issue. He left to go to the Office of the President, so it was before Prop 209. This was a loss for the campus, from my perspective.

Then there was a new chancellor, [M.R.C Greenwood]. So it became a mess when Prop 209 was on the ballot during an election period like now. The students had been organizing all over the state, and Santa Cruz had done their fair share of shutting down the campus and pressing the issue of affirmative action. The night of the elections, the chancellor came to an event hosted by SAA/EOP; the academic vice chancellor was there. Students were there in large numbers, we were rasquache with our set up, but we were doing it for the students. The chancellor, MRC Greenwood, and other administrators just came.<sup>21</sup>

Faculty were invited, Angela [Davis] came out, John Brown Childs came out, Herman Gray came out, just to let the students know it's going to be a long night no matter how the selection comes out. We were trying to give the students a sense of, let's work on this together. So the chancellor stayed, and when it was evident that Prop 209 had passed, the students asked the chancellor, "Where do you stand?" And [Chancellor] MRC Greenwood, her stand was, "I am 100 percent behind you. I will be there at the base of campus with you. I just don't want you shutting the campus down." So it was with a condition. The students

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<sup>21</sup> For Chancellor Greenwood's account of this protest see Irene Reti and Randall Jarrell, Interviewers, *From Complex Organisms to a Complex Organization: An Oral History with UCSC Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood, 1996-2004* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2014). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/greenwood>

were pissed off at that, that there was a condition set to it. I don't think she understood that she had set a condition that challenged them.

Personally, I wouldn't have decided [in favor of] the action the students decided to take. There was more strength on the campus to really make things move, but it went beyond 209. It was ethnic studies. It was around the resource centers and expanding. Because we only had the African American Resource Center and El Centro had just started. It was only a few years old when all of this came down, if even that. It was one year old, I think. Asian students, American Indian students were like, "More's got to happen." So it wasn't just about 209; it was about ethnic studies and how there had not been movement.

So the chancellor was at the base of campus. She came through with what she said she was going to do and the students retreated. A few of us got calls about three in the morning, four in the morning, letting us know. They wanted to know if things came down, if they could just count on us to be there if they needed us. I'm not going to identify the other people but there were other people on campus that they called.

I didn't know exactly what they were going to do. *Mija* was little. I couldn't come up to campus immediately. But they called probably around 7:30 in the morning. A student called and said, "We're inside Student Affairs." I could hear the police in the background asking the students to leave. I could hear Gail Heit, who was the associate vice chancellor of student affairs, asking the students to vacate the premises. And the students were saying, "We're not leaving. We're not leaving."

**Zepeda:** Wow.

**Cabrera:** Yes. [I] was talking to one of the students around, "What are you doing?" and she said, "The only way we'll leave this location is if there's agreement that we can go into EOP." Well, EOP was right next door. Where the other half of Student Affairs is now, that was EOP. So it was me calling the associate director of EOP at that point and letting her know this is what's happening. "You guys need to let them go into EOP. Can you get to Allen [Fields]?" Because I was afraid they were all going to be arrested.

Allen Fields, who was our director, did agree to have the students go over to EOP. They moved. They were ready to stay in there for the long haul. They had food, they had water, they were ready.

I didn't get there till later, after I dropped off my daughter at school, and by then there were negotiations. The associate vice chancellor would not allow them to stay in the building unless there was a staff member that was in there. So they asked for Sayo Fujioka from SOAR to be there, and the administration wouldn't agree to it. Then they called me, and Gail Heit said, "They want you in the building." She didn't want me to say yes.

I'm looking at them, and I said, "As long as you're done by six o'clock. I have to pick up my daughter at six, or something has to happen." That was nonnegotiable for me. I said, "I'm fine with going in as long as I am out and there's other agreements about what takes place, because I have to pick up my daughter before six."

So even though Gail was not really down with that, I was the one that went in. I was in there the whole time that they were doing their negotiations. I was not

part of that. That was their *cosa*, and they were very clear about that. Even though they trusted me a lot, that was *their* thing. They had lots of support. People were buying them food, sending it up.

There was progress. Good things came out of that. But this is my personal opinion—that there was a transgression that occurred with a few people that complicated what we now see as the discussion for ethnic studies. Herman Gray, Dana Takagi, and John Brown Childs wanted to come in to talk with the students, because the faculty were already in their discussion around so-called ethnic studies, and the students refused to meet with them. I could not understand. “It’s John Brown Childs.” But they were very sensitive around the people that they were willing to trust. The chancellor at the time had a good reputation. John just happened to be with the chancellor when the press came, and then the students just thought, “He’s on her side.” Just complications. But I was able to see that because I was inside.

There was another faculty member who really wanted to work with the students following this action. He was supportive of the students making a formal presentation before the Academic Senate and he was willing to train them and prep them on the procedures and what to expect. He had personal agreements with the students. Unfortunately, the students did not follow through.

It was an opportunistic moment and the students took that moment. I have no right to say it was wrong. They did what was right [for] them. But I feel like activists have a responsibility, and that responsibility is: if you believe in something, you have the responsibility to follow it through when you make

agreements with individuals. I personally was disappointed that it didn't go to the next rung, and I feel like that has tainted the views of some key faculty, and some faculty lost credibility with administration due to their faith in the students. Some things happened that cause questions around responsibility of the action.

So, yes, there were positive results that came out of it. They were done before six. Marriott's, who was dining services at the time, brought all kinds of food out to the Hahn parking lot. There was a big *cosa*. The students were feeling really good about it. And for the most part, yes, they got something. And here we are once again [fighting for] ethnic studies. It's just that irony.

I'm going to backtrack, because that was the moment of affirmative action's demise. But it wasn't until a year and a half later that the campus truly understood the ramifications of Proposition 209, SP1, and SP2. The hit was to the graduate and to the law and medical programs. SP1 was implemented immediately. We saw that first cycle: numbers of African Americans, Chicano and Latino graduate students plummeted. We saw that reaction. We didn't experience it till the second phase was implemented for the undergraduates, and then people were in denial. That was when all of the outreach programs were gutted out of EOP, EPC was created, there was an external force and—

**Zepeda:** What's EPC?

**Cabrera:** Educational Partnership Center. All of the outreach effort was consolidated, and it was done under the guise of trying to protect outreach. It transformed the relationship of outreach to an on-campus effort. We're still

trying to recoup that. It's not what it used to be. Our relationships are different. We don't see each other, so we can't talk about students. They were able to recruit more students. I cannot remember the exact year, but there was a huge influx of funds that UC put into outreach and because of this outreach was able to hire more staff with the goals of recruiting more students to UC. But outreach is always vulnerable. Both graduate outreach and undergraduate outreach—those are the first locations of the cuts that happen, always. So it's a hard pill to swallow because you need the whole pipeline to work effectively.

The campus has tried to grapple with the ramifications of the affirmative action measures. These are the things I cannot keep quiet about. When the opportunity arose to voice strategically, I took it. So we were doing a phone-a-thon, and it was after the affirmative action, after 209 passed, and after UC was clear about what we couldn't do. Well, they were actually very confused, and everybody was scared because Connerly had convinced the entire UC system that if we even made any effort to discuss race, or to discuss ethnic-specific strategies, or we tried to call people that were not EOP, that, in fact, we were breaching the law and we could be arrested.

There was a time on this campus that we were told: do not put anything in writing. Do not speak this. Whatever you do, you do it at your own risk. There wasn't institutional support for it. We didn't know who to trust, who said they supported diversity, but were actually waiting to whistleblow if we did anything that seemed contrary to the law. Proposition 209 was like that crack in the cosmic egg. All of the diversity effort that had all this tremendous impact and had come out of the sixties was gone. Race or ethnicity was not to be discussed or

accounted for. And here we were, making these calls. I'm like, "Have you looked at the numbers?" The associate vice chancellor was there, and I said, "Have you looked at the numbers? What are you telling the people that are making these calls? If they get asked a question about EOP, who is responding to those questions? Who is responding to questions about affirmative action?" And we had a knock-down, drag-out— Nancy Cox-Konopelski was there from the ACE Program. It was at that moment that [the associate vice chancellor] realized, "Whoa. We've got to talk about this."<sup>22</sup>

So then it was about another month and he pulled all of the diversity efforts in the sciences, in the grad division, and with us, with EOP and the resource centers together to talk about what do we do, first steps. Then we realized he ain't gonna do nothing. So we decided to create an ad hoc group called SSTOC, Services to Students of Color. Then that involved EOP, ACE, the resource centers, and the Multicultural Engineering Program. For years we did programming that involved students of color. And then, Ward Connerly showed his ugly head again and was trying to push efforts. There were people coming on campus, people waiting for us to make mistakes.

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<sup>22</sup> From my perspective, during this time, there seemed to be a lack of relationship between the students and faculty and staff of color. I since have felt that there were a few issues that impacted this lack of tangible connection. There was a lack of intergenerational organizing that was occurring; students were articulating their needs and visioning structures of support that they would initiate and maintain. We started to see the impact of faculty not being affirmed in working with students outside of the academic structures. More demands were being placed on the faculty and there was a deterioration of affirming public service in the tenure process. Lastly, as faculty and staff of color, we started to lose our own connection to one another. We were not organizing around issues. We lost the opportunity to galvanize a front—so to speak—a political front that engaged students, faculty and staff. It is an issue we continue to struggle with—Rosie Cabrera.



Student Affairs was concerned that we used the term “student of color.” You couldn’t even do that. You could not identify students of color as students of color. So we had to change our name from Services to Students of Color, SSTOC. How do we change our name without changing the acronym? So we became Success Strategies and Opportunities Collaborative, to keep SSTOC. Then this year we had to change it again, because the associate vice chancellor did not like our name, at least that’s what it felt like. So now we’re the Student Leadership Institute [SLI].

It was us coming together to try to deal with the fact that the people that used to be part of SAA/EOP and all the support they would get from SAA/EOP were no longer being served by the program, because now we were EOP only, and you had to meet an income criteria (poverty guidelines). It took us years to work through: how do we come up with criteria that’s broad enough that could still capture the affirmative action pipeline? Because now we knew they still needed us. So the criteria changed over a period of two to three years. And we borrowed from other institutions: UCLA had done a good job of figuring it out; Irvine was the other. So we all borrowed from each other to create a new criteria.

Then the resource centers really expanded. There was the Asian American-Pacific Islander Resource Center. That resource center involved graduate students and faculty that wrote that proposal. Then the American Indian Resource Center—Andy [Smith], who was in histcon, was part of that effort, and Alfreda Mitre, who was at EOP, she was the first director, they wrote that proposal. But they all came online at different times.

So what the resource centers do now, actually EOP used to do a lot of programming like that, not as much. Now it's pretty much the resource centers that do more sociocultural, cultural programming, and academic programming. EOP is transformed. I mean, it's still very, very important, but the budget issues—I just felt like all of our programs are just—we're teetering, and we're teetering at a point when the population is exploding and they need us more than ever. And so it makes no sense, other than in a very paranoid way (and I feel like my paranoia is justified), that the plan was there: "Once you all get too big for your britches, we're going to make sure that you cannot do the good work."

So it's making the work harder. All of the questions about FMP, all of what the Hispanic Serving Institution Committee is dealing with right now about how to reassess the needs, how do we change the culture, how do we get the academic end of the house to see what needs to be garnered without—how do they operate without overtaxing them? How do we engage them in a process that's going to be exciting and transformative? "Transformative," that's the university's word. When we used the word "transformative" it was viewed as radical. Now it is embraced.

We've come through a pretty tumultuous [time]. I'm really hoping with the interview of Pedro [Castillo]<sup>23</sup> more of this history will be articulated. It's really too bad that some staff and faculty activists could not be interviewed because

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<sup>23</sup> See Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Professor Pedro Castillo: Historian, Chicano Leader, Mentor* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library 2013). Available in full text and audio at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/castillo>

they are no longer living. Because it's pretty deep. There's this dream that Santa Cruz has attempted and I feel like it's a legitimate location that we do not claim. It is the relationship of the institution to undergraduate mentoring and it *is* about social justice. But as the shifts have happened and more have gone into the sciences, which is fine, I don't ascribe to that that shouldn't happen, but it's not balanced by equal amounts in the other [divisions]. We're partners in the intellectual venture. Right now there's an imbalance. It's not working. It's not what it could be.

But I still feel how I felt when I first arrived here. There are tremendous people here. This is a place that has really incredible intellectual capital, and the people that emerge from here, those of you that are getting your PhD's, oh, my god—you're going out in the world, and the way you're doing your craft is changing disciplines. But we've got to be careful that we don't stop those pipelines.

**Zepeda:** Exactly.

**Cabrera:** They're still really, really needed.

**Zepeda:** Exactly, yes. With this conversation and with this history that you just laid out, I can see how that we can really go off track and everybody can go into their own career or their own road, but forget that the way that we even got here was Katia Panas.

**Cabrera:** Yes.

**Zepeda:** Like that kind of like inroad work to even start to build a space for the possibility of people to go through a pipeline. It's intense.

**Cabrera:** Yes. I got reminded, and I have to evoke this, because at Eugene's memorial there were some old-timers, elders.<sup>24</sup> Arturo attended, the former director of EOP, who was there when I first got hired, and some of the elders from campus, and they reminded me that there was a civil rights lawsuit that was filed by Chicanos on this campus against the university sometime in the 1970s. I didn't realize a fact that you may find interesting—Leon Panetta was the attorney that handled the case.<sup>25</sup> Do you believe that?

**Zepeda:** Who's Leon Panetta?

**Cabrera:** He's the top dog in the Obama administration. He's secretary of defense. (laughs)

**Zepeda:** That's amazing.

**Cabrera:** What Rudy told me—and I don't remember Rudy's last name—he said that the case went forward but that the university ended up settling, so it didn't turn into a public fiasco. But, yes, he said Leon Panetta was the person that was the lawyer for the Chicanos that put it forward.

**Zepeda:** Wow. When was that case?

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<sup>24</sup> A memorial service for former Crown College provost Eugene Cota-Robles took place on October 7, 2012 at UC Santa Cruz.

<sup>25</sup> April 26, 1972 "Letter from Leon Panetta of Thomas, Panetta & Thompson to Chancellor Dean McHenry," which reads in part: "As you know, representatives of the Chicano Community of the nine counties being served by the University of California, Santa Cruz made a formal complaint to the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in the latter part of February, 1972. The complaint alleges violations of both Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 11246 in that the University failed to provide equal educational and employment opportunities to ethnic and racial minorities. We believe the facts clearly establish a pattern of discrimination by the University against all minorities but particularly against the predominant minority in this area—minority students." See University / Archives Ephemera Collection (UA70) in UCSC Library Special Collections, Folder 10 "The Chicano Complaint."

**Cabrera:** It was in the seventies. It was in the seventies, so I have no doubts probably Cota-Robles was part of that. Another person shared with me that Cota was very prophetic. It was just before I got hired. There were some of the older guard. He was actually young, but he was part of what was considered old-school EOP. Francisco Serna, he quit his job. He worked in outreach, and he was like, "*Chale*, I'm leaving this place." He was really happy and thrilled he was going on to another position off campus. [But] Eugene's secretary called him and said, "Well, you know, Dr. Cota-Robles wants to meet with you before you leave."

So Francisco went over to meet him then. You have to understand, Eugene is very proper. He is not a cusser. Francisco said that Eugene said, "What the fuck are you doing? You have to understand the doors are closing, and it's going to take all of us to make change happen." So I feel like Eugene understood where the window was. I think he understood what was coming down way back then. (laughs) Herman Blake gets lots of credit, and he should. He was the founding provost of Oakes College, and he did a lot. But there were lots of people that did a lot, and they actually all worked together and Eugene Cota Robles was one of these persons.

I do want to say something about the undocumented student issue, because that seems like that's a more recent thing, but we've always had undocumented students. There was a time that we had fewer numbers, but Esperanza Nee, who was the director of Financial Aid, she singlehandedly would do the fundraising for those students. It was when the laws changed and you could no longer give state monies to students that were so-called "undocumented." Then that closed

the door for the longest time, and it wasn't until Metztonalli came and Texcalli<sup>26</sup> came that that window started to open again. Actually, [first] it was Adrian Flores. I used to deal with those students when I was at EOP because no one knew how to deal with the cases of talking with the parents and the students, because they were coming through BRIDGE. So because I coordinated BRIDGE, I was the one that would talk with them.

### **Undocumented Students**

When I left EOP, there was no one at EOP that was having the discussions. The students were often referred over to El Centro and to me, since the majority were Chicano/Latino students. So it just so happened one day that a student came in asking about what resources are available. Well, there were none at the time. There was no money. Nobody wanted to deal with it. So I had to deal with it, and Adrian was there. We were organizing the Chicano/Latino New Student Welcome with the Chicano/Latino student organizations, and Adrian was appalled and wanted to raise the issue with the organizations' leadership. He was like, "How can we not know? How can I not know that this is happening and these are my own people?" So Adrian raised it with all the orgs. None of them understood what the issue was.

Then we happened to have Texcalli, who came through Summer BRIDGE, and was a founding member of SIN [Sin Vergünza]. So Texcalli stayed with Adrian because he was looking for a place to stay, and then Metztonalli came and they met each other. It was through the process of organizing the New Student

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<sup>26</sup> Metztonalli and Texcalli are pseudonyms for students. I have appropriated the names used in an article about these undocumented students—Rosie Cabrera.

Welcome that they got in contact with one another and started to talk about what were they going to do, how were they going to deal with the issues of being undocumented?

Then, Arturo, a student that had been in FMP turned twenty-one. All the laws differ, depending on where you're coming from and what the immigration law says. He was one of those that when you reach twenty-one, poof, too bad. Arturo found himself, overnight, undocumented. He had been in FMP, and we all knew him really well. So he started organizing with Texcalli and Metztonalli. Alex Delgadillo and myself would meet with the students and we organized a group of ad hoc people who could plan educational events about the issues of AB540 students as a tool to identify others. Our first plan was a forum, and it was clear that the vice chancellor did not want this to happen. SIN emerged out of that because there were other students there that came up to Metztonalli and Texcalli and said, "I think I'm AB540, because what you described is who I am." That's how they started. These students became a critical mass and then there was no turning back.

Metztonalli grew up in an organizing family directly involved with IDEPSCA,<sup>27</sup> so she's a profound organizer. That's why SIN took on a very Freirean kind of approach and had a lot of strength, because those students had a location of how they were processing, who they were and what they were— like their name, Sin Vergüenza, Never With Shame.

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<sup>27</sup> Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California | The Institute of Popular Education of Southern California <http://idepsca.org>

**Zepeda:** So just to backtrack a little bit, when you were in EOP and encountered these students, what were the resources? They got funding?

**Cabrera:** There was nothing.

**Zepeda:** There was nothing?

**Cabrera:** There was nothing.

**Zepeda:** Oh, my god.

**Cabrera:** It was when all of the doors were closing so it made it illegal to provide support to students that were undocumented. This is why Prop 209 was so profound. You could not have money come to the institution. If somebody said, "I want to give \$10,000 and I want that money to go to an undocumented student," we could not do it. The money could not come through university sources because once it became part of the university, then it was considered state of California monies. All of that has changed.

**Zepeda:** Thank goodness.

**Cabrera:** That was a Regental decision that monies could not be used in that way. So SUA, the Student Union Assemblies from throughout the system worked hard to push that agenda. That got transformed. That's recent, very, very recent. Now we can actually fundraise and the monies could be considered University of California monies and given to undocumented students. But that's within the last year and a half.

**Zepeda:** Oh, my goodness.



**Cabrera:** That's very, very recent. And that's all a result of trying to close every door possible.

**Zepeda:** That's such a good way to put it. Should we take a pause?

**Cabrera:** Yes.

**Zepeda:** So we're here with Rosie Cabrera. It's November 28, 2012, and I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project. We're in the Gloria Anzaldúa Room in McHenry Library. So, welcome, Rosie. Thank you.

**Cabrera:** Thank you, Susy.

**Zepeda:** This is our third interview.

**Cabrera:** Wow. [laughter] Who would have thought?

**Zepeda:** So I know that as a staff member, a dedicated staff member, that you've participated in a wide variety of diversity committee work here at UC Santa Cruz. I wanted to ask you about that committee work, maybe starting with what was your first experience with that committee work and how it evolved from there.

**Cabrera:** My trajectory here [began] at a particular time when Herman Blake had been gone for a year or two. A lot of the work, the so-called diversity work, had been done by Herman, [by] people at Oakes [College], Eugene Cota-Robles. There were these traditions that had been set and had been started, in particular by Oakes College, Herman's vision—and not just Herman's vision. Again, Herman was sort of the leader at the helm, but there were lots of people involved

in trying to make that vision of a college within the university that spoke to diversity in very clear ways.

When leadership leaves, then there's a readjusting, a reconfiguring. So some of those projects got farmed out to different people. My introduction was through Katia Panas, and the multicultural retreats. These were efforts to take students at large from different colleges, or colleges would take responsibility for them. Maybe one year Stevenson College would take responsibility. Maybe the next year Merrill College would. There was a pot of money that was set aside, and then there were staff that facilitated a three-day retreat with students. That was because it was a very white institution. How do you start to transform or work with students so that they have a buy-in in terms of diversity? I was invited to participate in helping to plan those retreats and to help facilitate. So I worked with a cadre of people, and Katia Panas was one of those. Max Camarillo, Jerry Lee—all of those people are no longer here at the university—Michael James, who was a former staff member; Michael Grigsby, who was the associate director of EOP, got involved at certain times.

I did that for probably about four or five years. It was a once-a-year effort, very taxing because it was working with a lot of white students. See, students of color were not buying into it. One of my colleges was Merrill College, and Bob Taylor, who at the time was the student activities coordinator—he's now a lead academic preceptor over at College Ten—he helped to organize the Merrill group. It was probably the one location of contention.

There was a cadre of Black students that were organizing at the time. Interestingly enough, I, as a Chicana, was very involved in that group because Merrill was one of my colleges. There was a good critical mass of Latino students at Merrill, and so that became sort of a location of, why are students of color not participating in the multicultural diversity retreats? It was this contention around: Why would I as a person of color go and spill my guts out to a white person if I didn't even know who they are and I don't know what they're going to do with my business afterwards, and I don't know that I want to hear their business? So it was always a real dilemma to try to get students of color, because how can you even talk about diversity if there was no diversity?

The people facilitating the retreats were people of color. So it was emotionally taxing, very personally challenging to try to stay in the facilitator role. At that time, the white student contingent, depending on what college, they were very affluent students. I think the income level here at Santa Cruz is no longer what it was. We had the highest income level of [UC] students here, so that economic spread, as well as racial spread, was drastic.

So the retreats were often people who wanted to be involved, didn't know how to get involved with diversity. For example, Stevenson College or Cowell College students of good will, but [who had] never done any personal work around race, class, gender, sexuality. I had to use a lot of personal social capital with my students, because I also was an advisor to students at Merrill, to try to get them to participate in these retreats. So it was out of trust at times. Then we had actually organized a Black student retreat, and I was one of the facilitators of that

session. So there was a *confianza* with me as an individual, and so, *poco a poco*, students started to apply to participate.

Just like I'm talking about white students, there's also the other side of it. I remember, I think it was the third retreat I participated in, because students had to apply to participate, and Katia called me and she said, "You have got to see this application." It was from a Black student, and one of the questions was, "What is your ethnicity or your racial background?" She put down "Negro." Katia was like, "Whoa. Whoa. This is where we're at."

So when you think about the consciousness of students, it was white students, but it was also our own students: where are they at with their own ethnic identity? I think we've always had this stress around African American students and Native students, because there hasn't been a critical mass of either faculty or staff that have been able to sustain it. Doesn't mean we haven't had the faculty, but there hasn't been a critical mass that can make a commitment, a personal commitment in the community. At times we've had it, and then when people leave, then there's crisis, and there's nobody. Right? So when you think about one's identity, it's a developmental process over time, right, and programming over time.

So it was interesting work. It was hardcore—get in there, call it what it is, help the students call it what it is, support them, and then try, from that rawness, come back to a location of how do we continue to do this work. As much as those retreats were really invaluable, there wasn't really a recognition of what it took from the staff to plan those retreats, to sustain it over time, to deal with crises

that would happen when you're doing that kind of intense emotional work. And the budget is always something that kind of undercuts those kinds of progressions. So over the years, less and less money was going to it. I can't remember the year that was our last retreat, but it was one of those things of, can we continue to do this and do our work? Most of us that worked on it were working with students of color and the intensity of that work in our own lives, right, in our own professional lives.

So it got to the point where we were really spent. My experience with some diversity things on this campus is people say they want things to happen, and if there's strong leadership that pushes it—and I don't mean staff, I mean faculty—that are saying, "This is important to the movement of diversity on this campus," it goes away. Because ultimately then it's up to the staff to sustain it, and we had gotten to the point where we were literally burnt out because, you know, you hold all that stuff.

**Zepeda:** Yes. And like you said, so much of it is emotional. The labor is on so many different levels.

**Cabrera:** Right, and the intensity of the anger that, in particular, students of color have when they're engaging whiteness. And, again, in those early years the level of privilege was outrageous, just outrageous. So the schism was big. We had admit-by-exception then. Affirmative action was in question and so our students, often by virtue of their color, were tagged as affirmative action, "less than," by their peers. So all of that dialogue was really heavy in the mix.

I think about it because it's similar to what happens now, but it's much more subtle than the in-your-face reality that seemed to be in those late eighties and early nineties. I'm thinking about some of the everyday occurrences. SAA/EOP was a hub, so people would come and they would let us know, "This stuff is happening. This shit's happening to *me*." Or, "I'm watching this happen to people I care about." So that's an everyday occurrence within EOP.

**Zepeda:** Like racist stuff?

**Cabrera:** Racial stuff. Then [I came to] work one day. If you really look over at Hahn [Student Services Building], you can still see on the pillars there—and I don't even know what year it was, I want to say it was in the early nineties, where we went to work at the Hahn Building. Financial Aid used to be way on the opposite side. Now you can't even get to it, but where Financial Aid is now there's two pillars, because there's a place you can actually sit in the little cubby there. One day those two pillars [said], "Whites go this way," with an arrow. I don't know. I can't remember exactly if it said, "Blacks and Mexicans go this way." Then downstairs on the wood as you go up the stairs, there were epithets on there. But in less than four hours of the first sighting of it, that shit was gone.

**Zepeda:** Oh, wow.

**Cabrera:** They came in; they blasted it off. You wouldn't know it's there, if you didn't actually know it's there, because they didn't get rid of it completely. I know it's there, so every time I go by that location, it brings up that memory of what that was like coming to work and not knowing, "Who the hell did this? What was their intention? What is going on campus that's causing this?" Kind of

the same thing that goes on in different locations, but EOP or the location of services like that were really targeted in those days.

Again, there were no ethnic resource centers, except for the African American Resource and Cultural Center, and that was actually developed by an EOP staff member, Zizwe. Zizwe was someone I knew from San Jose State. Remember, I talked about the All African People's Party?

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** I knew Zizwe from that. And he got the job in outreach. Zizwe was—when you think about the campus, he was very radical. He was very Afrocentric, African-centric. He lived his life that way. You knew it when you saw him. He engaged with students a lot. But he was in outreach. He was on campus, but he did a lot of recruitment.

Zizwe was sort of next generation with the African American students. When I started, there were not really key people. A lot of people had left. So it was that rebuilding process. Then Zizwe came and shit started. He just was out there saying it, saying it in EOP, letting EOP, letting those of us within our own office know we're not serving Black students. We're not serving African American students. See, the notion of "African American" wasn't even part of the language, really. That was a very bodacious way that he cemented a more Afrocentric perspective. Because before then, it was always "Black." So Zi got pretty fed up. It wasn't him personally. He engaged a lot with students, so it was the students that were tired of the environment. Also, it's sort of like when you have a love-hate relationship with an environment. They hated the reality of it

being a predominantly white institution, and yet they loved the fact that they were in school and participating in a University of California campus, and they understood what that meant. Because remember, I said earlier a lot of the leadership emerged out of Summer BRIDGE?

**Zepeda:** Right.

**Cabrera:** Those were admit-by-exceptions (not all, but a critical mass); they worked their asses off to do really well. So they were very conscious of their location and what it meant for them to be on the campus. So they worked with Zi to put the proposal together for the African American Resource and Cultural Center. The students hoped that Zi would be the first director, but that never happened. Personally, I feel it's because Zi was too radical in his perspective. Nowadays it would be commonplace, right, but at the time he said what he saw and said what he felt and said what he heard. So it didn't happen for him.<sup>28</sup>

Paula Powell, the first director, was in graduate school at the time. Paula was in the history program and was very dissatisfied with her experience as an African American graduate student in the history department. Lots of controversy, and to make a long story short, it ended up that Paula was the director, and Zi ended up seeing the writing on the wall, and he left. But he got his PhD, and he teaches history at Lincoln University in the South.

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<sup>28</sup> Zizwe was critical to the formation of the African American Resource Center. Had it not been for his push, his vision and his tenacity to make movement on what is right and just, who knows how long it would have taken for the development of the center. I appreciate his major contribution in collaborating with students on the advancement of this effort—Rosie Cabrera.



**Zepeda:** So that level of diversity work that you did, for example, on the retreat, with students saying their truth and expressing their anger, did you ever participate in diversity committees [like that] with staff and faculty?

**Cabrera:** Yes and no. So, yes, with Julia Armstrong, Special Assistant to the Chancellor. We met with her, and often. She heard us. She had the direct ear of the chancellor. I was younger then, and Julia was probably fifteen, maybe even not quite twenty years older than me, but she was older. I think when you're young, working in an institutional framework, sometimes you have your own assessment. I think even those people of color working within the system sometimes were viewed—I want to say short of a sellout, because that's too extreme. But they were definitely people that worked in the big house and had their *modos* based on those locations.<sup>29</sup>

I have to hand it to her for taking information in very raw states and from very angered locations, because I think for those of us that worked on, whether it's the retreats or with EOP, with groups—I haven't even talked about the *Revista Mujeres* and the *Mujeres* group—there's these other locations, right, of work. These are all add-ons. These were not a part of our jobs, per se. There was EOP work and then there was the diversity work, all the added-on sort of things.

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<sup>29</sup> Julia Armstrong was a strong advocate for the issues we shared with her around affirmative action and diversity efforts on the campus. She was exceptionally astute and diplomatic, she challenged my notion of leadership, responsibility and ethics. I am thankful for her support on issues and her willingness to take our message and concerns directly to the chancellor—Rosie Cabrera. See also Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Adding a Plank to the Bridge: Julia Armstrong-Zwart's Leadership at UC Santa Cruz* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2014). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/juliaarmstrong-zwart>

So the committees, some of them were ad hoc. Again, I have to hand it to Katia. Katia never accepted, “No, we can’t meet with these people.” It was always, “How do we get individuals that can make a difference to speak with us, meet with us, so we can discuss what’s going on?” There weren’t these huge diversity committees. The ones that were—it was mostly the director of EOP was part of that. Top-level faculty were part of that. But staff were not part of that. Now there’s a mixture. Now there’s not as much of a top-level sort of analysis only.

**Zepeda:** Oh, good.

**Cabrera:** So we got it as we could, and a lot of times we just said, “We’re meeting. Let’s give ourselves a name, and let’s say we’re a group.” I think what happened indirectly was when shit would come down, some of us were the first people that were asked, “What’s going on? What’s happening? This is what we’ve heard. Is there credence in this activity?” So part of it was being able to honor the trust in our own students and never giving information that identified people, but also being able to articulate the level of dissatisfaction that students had and honoring that we had the privilege of being able to give some voice to the concerns.

I feel like we had the ear of people, but, again, constantly dealing with transitions of the power players that literally could go through the back door. Frank Talamantes<sup>30</sup> was one of those, before he did a transformation and became the dean of graduate studies, and then got marginalized. Frank literally could see the

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Frank Talamantes was a faculty member at UC Santa Cruz and was highly respected for his service to the scientific community and his long-standing commitment to issues of minority and graduate education—Rosie Cabrera.

chancellor anytime he wanted to. So there were people like that that were what I would call the fear factor. Frank had that because he was highly successful in getting research grant funds. So I think sometimes the power was met in that way. Dr. Talamantes was one of very few faculty of color who had this relationship with the administration and who shared that power in helping to articulate issues and needs.

The notion of diversity committees keeps evolving over time, with probably the better work being after 2000, in the aftermath of Proposition 209 passing. Then it's: how do we deal with the notion of hate crimes? How do we deal with constituency groups that have concerns?

The African American Resource Center was started, I want to say, in the late eighties. And then there were no other ethnic centers until 1995, with the Chicano/Latino Resource Center, with El Centro. Then after that was the Asian American Pacific Islander Resource Center that emerged out of the Prop 209 takeover of Hahn [Student Services]. Then it was years after that that the American Indian Resource Center became a reality. The Women's Center existed back in the—I want to say '85, '86. The GLBTI Resource Center, that was a whole student-initiated effort out of Merrill College with queer students demanding programming and space.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the UCSC Student Resource Centers, see Irene Reti, Interviewer and Editor, *Crossing Borders: The UCSC Women's Center, 1985-2005* (Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2005). Available in full text at <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/womencenter> and an oral history with Deborah Abbott, current director of the Lionel Cantú Queer Center, which is part of the Out in the Redwoods GLBT oral history series [http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/deb\\_abbott](http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/deb_abbott).—Editors.

So that goes into when myself and my family were residential preceptors. We started precepting at Merrill back in 1988 and we lived in the apartments for about three years. There was theme housing. So the diversity effort included trying to create housing on campus that was responsive to ethnic concerns. Arturo Pacheco, who was the director of EOP, came out of Stanford that had ethnic-theme housing. He had lived in the theme housing there and was well known for his work. So theme housing started to get a grip during the eighties. Merrill and Oakes College launched programs that included Chicano/Latino theme housing. African American [theme housing] was harder because of the numbers of students. They had an Asian American theme. There were attempts with American Indians, but I don't think any of the colleges have ever really been able to make American Indian theme housing work. [I worked] with the Indian students way, way back when the students had started SANAI, Student Alliance of North American Indians. They were a group of students that met during Summer BRIDGE. And there was a distinction of making sure that it was not so global. These students had their own nationalist kind of location. They did not want what they called Chicanos that thought they were Indian. But those are early, again, developmental, right?

**Zepeda:** Right. It makes sense for the time and the effort.

**Cabrera:** Vizenor was here, Gerald Vizenor. The students raked him over the frickin' coals. But I think that sometimes there's a mismatch. Faculty shouldn't have to provide that direct service to the student. If you're not in that major, what's your relationship? The students didn't even recognize who the hell

Gerald Vizenor was. He was in literature, but then he got into administration and was working on efforts in administration.

I'll never forget one of those diversity efforts. The students called a meeting of all the top administrators, and all the different ethnic groups gave presentations on the condition of students of color on campus. Well, SANAI had just come into being and they were flexing their muscles, and they basically ridiculed Vizenor publicly in front of all of these people. They had asked Clifton Poodry, who is American Indian, but in the sciences, to be there. I remember talking to Cliff, and he said, "I do not ascribe to their tactics, but if that's how they feel, they're entitled to the expression of those feelings."

But I think it's one of the reasons Vizenor left. What do you do when you're trying to work on behalf of your own people and you're trying to create academic programs, which he was doing? At that point, he had started—kind of like how we have the Living Writers Series now, there was an American Indian writer annual award that Vizenor started. People like N. Scott Momaday would come. There were all these different well-known scholars. But the students were disconnected. I think that's where now the bridging of the resource centers helps. It's a developmental process of: the students matter, who they are matters, but [the resource centers take on] the kind of time that it takes developmentally with them. The faculty don't have that time. It's not part of what they do. But there was no distinction around the role of faculty of color. They were just supposed to be all things to all people.

I'm kind of diverting, but I do feel like there's a whole history, very unique histories of the students that are here: African American students feeling like they were not being serviced by EOP; EOP being very Chicano-centric, having a very strong presence, and doing tremendous outreach work in the Central Valley in locations students weren't normally coming from; and then American Indian students emerging. Asian American students were really small in number in the early days. They started to grow more in the nineties. As different populations started not getting into other universities. Santa Cruz was sort of the default—I think it's because we're more rural—for lots of reasons. But now we have a really vibrant, thriving Asian American community.

Everybody has had their way of emerging here. But it also means that there're bones of contention that have some history. And some of that is with Black and Brown communities. It matters whether or not the staff and faculty work together and are respectful to one another, because we model that to our own students. I do feel, for the most part, we have that. There is that mutuality.

With the American Indian community: when do you have a critical mass and what is the presence of that community? And is that presence validated and affirmed, in terms of the scholarship they're doing? We've had people leave. James Treat, who came after Vizenor, even before Louis Owens. They came because they were trying to build programs. They were trying to build graduate programs. So when people leave, there's a disruption. People leave because they also don't feel a critical location of people to support the scholarship. So then the impact is on the students. Now Renya Ramirez and Amy Lonetree are here [whew!]. I am particularly glad that Amy Lonetree is here. Her work in museum

studies is unique on campus. Carolyn [Dunn] being who Carolyn is, and her relationship, it feels now like we're starting to stabilize and there's more potential for growth. At some point you hit a place where there's a pipeline [and] people say, "Because I've had a good experience there, I'm going to tell my cousins and people in my communities to come to that campus." That hasn't quite happened with American Indian students. Part of it is the history and urbanization and where the community's at to send those pipelines. Now with the Amah Mutsun, we've had two students just in that short time span. One's already graduated and she's a tribal member. Another is going to be graduating, and both of them were transfer students. So I feel like in many respects they're going to be able to have that positive impact because they've known a resource center that has supported them. They've known the faculty.

It's a threading of resources. Nobody, no one individual can hold it. It's the threading of the people. In that diversity web, [you need] a complement of people at the top level; people who are the day-to-day engagement with students and advocates; and the faculty providing that way to look at yourself. You could be in the sciences and be American Indian, but it's going to matter to you that Amy Lonetree is here.

I don't know how else to put it. It's through the socials and informal ways that people come together, like [at the] resource centers. EOP used to do that, but in the scheme of things, the growth was so exponential, EOP couldn't be all things. SOAR [Student Organization Advising and Resources] has emerged as an entity providing support to student organizations. Santa Cruz is growing up. We're growing up, and we still have issues around the diversity effort.

**Zepeda:** I wonder if this question is even answerable. You said that there was like a wave of faculty of color that left, and then a rebuilding. So do you feel like the numbers have grown steadily?

**Cabrera:** I think sometimes we've celebrated that we have a critical mass, and then something happens and then we lose people.

**Zepeda:** So more like waves, maybe?

**Cabrera:** Waves. Waves. I think the only steady presence has been Chicano/Latino.

**Zepeda:** Interesting.

**Cabrera:** And that is a different kind of wave. It's old school or first wave and new people. I feel like that's what we're going through right now. We're going through this wave of people who are leaving or will be leaving soon, and there's a new generation of scholars that are coming through, that are transforming the way we look at the work.

Who called me the other day? A mentor was needed for a graduate student in the sciences, a male, and he was getting ready to leave because it wasn't happening, and it was clear he hadn't been mentored. So someone contacted me wanting to know who's out in the sciences, and, I mean, there's very few. Males, forget it. But I let her know, "Well, Enrico Ramirez-Ruiz is here." He's in astrophysics. It's not the area of this person. And this person wrote me back and said, "But he's Spanish." I wrote her back and I said, "No, he's Mexican. He's from Mexico. He's not Spanish."



So we have this other dilemma, which is the way the Latino community used to socialize and come together doesn't happen in the same way. People used to hang out and have happy hours and celebrate. Aida Hurtado and Sophia Garcia-Robles used to have a *tardeada* for graduating seniors at their homes. But, again, that diversity work is added on. So some of that stopped because populations got bigger.

The danger right now is losing our voice because we're not solid, because we don't talk enough to figure out what is our agenda, how are we seeing this? When you think about the American Indian community, there're very few people, but they can have a strong voice if there's a solid location. Same with the African American community. I think sometimes we do weird things with leadership. People that decide they're going to take a risk to do more—we burn them out, and then the community blames them if things don't go right. So it's a precarious location.

Remember, I shared with you that Eugene [Cota-Robles], when we were young whippersnappers and having the SAA conferences and everybody was a hot mess, very political, and he got called out and said, "You do your activism your way, I do it my way, but I expect you to respect me the same way I respect you." I think that we don't do that enough, and so it doesn't help us be really solid and clear about our agendas. That creates havoc with diversity, because what happens when administration wants to know: "Well, who are the voices? Who are the real voices, and how much do we pay attention to those voices? Where's the constituency that can back that up?"

That wave of transformation is happening now, and it could be viewed as positive or negative: glass is half full or half empty. I feel like it's half full. There is no question that the number of people of color at this place is going to change. It's changing. It has changed. So the next [question] is: how does the institution transform to meet that? That's where I feel the fight is. There's resistance, but it's a wave that cannot be turned back.

**Zepeda:** What recommendations would you make based on your experience in seeing this? Because it's amazing you could see that. So what recommendations would you offer?

**Cabrera:** The threads need to be strengthened. This financial crisis, I think, is made by white supremacists. I know that sounds very, very paranoid, but it's a consolidation of finances, a consolidation of power. So there's an undercutting of that thread of people throughout the system [who] work with each other. I'm able to call Liz Martin-Garcia at Financial Aid. I used to be able to call Sophia. It's a relational, a relationship-driven mechanism of trying to provide support and wholeness for our students, with the objective of them seeing who they are, them being able to call what their interests are and to make a movement there. If you don't have that, then you have casualties. So it's the strength of those threads. So I feel like in the African American community, now that Marla Wyche-Hall is here, that's emerging, once again another wave.

It takes time. The next steps are going to require something I can't give or something I'm not prepared to give. But there are people that can do that. So it's not like me leaving [retiring] and the community is in a lurch. I don't feel that's

going to happen. But I think some of us have to be thinking about that and how, when we make our decisions, how does it impact that web, and how do we honor that the transformation is here.

**Zepeda:** Exactly.

**Cabrera:** We have to engage it and work through it, because we've got one hot mess on our hands.

**Zepeda:** It's interesting to me, just to reflect back a little bit of how you said, that so much of that work happens outside, or it's after the work. We're doing this diversity work. It's the unpaid, unrecognized labor that is even allowing these students to succeed, to graduate, to come to class, and then to be able to do the work to become their whole selves. What you're saying is the institution doesn't even recognize that, but yet that's how it's able to sustain itself.

**Cabrera:** Oh, yes. Yes. And it is my fear for the next generation. The next generation should not work the way I work. It's a burnout. You know what I mean?

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** I made those choices. They were conscious choices, decisions, sometimes good, sometimes bad, but I made those choices. But when I think of new people coming in, they're entitled to a life. They're entitled to a social network that sustains them. You shouldn't have to leave the institution to do that.

I think Santa Cruz is weird in that way. It's a high-cost area to live. We don't get recognized. We're in this quandary. We don't get recognized as a high-cost area, so you don't get the added differential that a San Francisco, or places that are designated as high-cost areas get. So when you think of young professionals, unless you're a faculty member that can get into faculty housing and can get those low-interest rates, the days of young people starting here and staying as long as I have and being able to see an evolution of their career, I think, are passé. It just ain't gonna happen. It's not going to happen in that way.

I had the benefit of being able to precept, so I actually had two jobs. I had my day job, but then my husband and my daughter and I lived in the dorms, and we did programming at night and were available and worked with our students in the evenings. But it's how we were able to save enough money for a down payment for a condo in Santa Cruz. Otherwise, I don't think we would have been able to do that. So that's the part that's very difficult, of being able to have enough people here with an institutional memory to not get stuck in it, not get stuck in that memory, but to honor it and know how we're moving.

Faculty have a union, so when it comes to issues around workload, pay, etc., there's a union that protects you, so to speak, and that works to articulate issues. Some staff have that. The staff that are this rubber band, is a band of professional staff, we're not unionized. We're called PPS, or Professional Personnel Staff. And then there's organized unions, right, that are codified by the system, and then there's unions. I don't know how else to articulate it. People of color that work on this campus need to be contended with, and we have not always been successful in [organizing]. I mentioned the group of Chicanos that filed a civil

rights suit against the university. That was back in the seventies, late seventies. There hasn't been that kind of organizing, where that voice comes across clearly. It's one of the regrets I have. Some of us did talk about that, but you have to make time for it. You have to make the time and the space. You have to know each other and know that you've got each other's back. I think that's one of the sacrifices when people don't socialize with each other. You know one another, but it's from a veneer, the public persona. But there's more to who we are than just that public presence and how we bring our total self to the workplace and our own notions of who we are and how the institution works or doesn't work for people of color.

I think that it's something that in this day and age is looked down upon. Somehow we're just supposed to get it together and it's through personal power. But it isn't through personal power. It really is through organizing. I feel like there's a certain level of power I have. That power is only amassed as a result of the number of years that I've been here and the work I've done with students. So there's a level of organizing that I never manipulate because I know the strength of it, and it's wrong to manipulate that.

There's a different level of those of us that can say what our truths are, but we just don't talk to one another long enough to. You run into people. Everybody's looking like hell warmed over right now because of all the budget stuff, and everybody has concerns. But there's another level, where we don't go the next steps of what are we going to do about it because it's not right.

**Zepeda:** I took a look at that case after you talked about it, and I couldn't see the signatures. Do you know if the folks were all UC Santa Cruz-based?

**Cabrera:** I'm pretty sure. I'm pretty sure.

**Zepeda:** Wow. That's pretty amazing. Then following up on that question—it feels like what you're suggesting is the collective. It's almost like the collective is looked down upon in the institution. A lot of what I saw in that report was—oh, you said this one thing, but then this other thing was done. And it feels like only through conversations and trust can you have exchanges, let the truth rise and be said.

**Cabrera:** Right. I feel we have a lot of power. We have a lot of power. When you said, well, what were the diversity efforts? There's the university calling committees together, right? And then there's *us* calling the university to the table, which is a different dynamic. I think at different times we've amassed that. Remember I said Frank [Talamantes] could always go. He just could knock on the door and go in. But then he lost that. I think it really hurt him and humiliated him and made him feel like, "What are you talking about?" Like he was [not] a valued member.

**Zepeda:** Did that happen because of a change in chancellors?

**Cabrera:** Yes. It was a change of chancellors. It's the support that's given to people as they get into administration. When faculty move from the faculty ranks and start to move up, that's treacherous.

**Zepeda:** For them, because they're seen very differently.

**Cabrera:** And, plus, it's a learning curve. I don't know that you learn any of that getting a PhD. You have to be mentored. You have to understand the political terrain, the histories, and not just think, "Oh, I can change this." But how do you finesse it and how do you work it so you get what you need? Because it's a collegial relationship.

**Zepeda:** That must have been really tough for Eugene Cota-Robles and Herman Blake, being in those positions, I imagine.

**Cabrera:** When there was the memorial for Eugene, Arturo Pacheco, the former director of EOP, who had left Stanford out of protest for a tenure process that went awry for an African American professor, and moved out of the academics and came into Student Affairs [came]. Now he's an academic *otra vez*. But he said what we did not say in the public space, is that Eugene—and I feel Herman has this talent, too—how do you remain who you are and know the white man's way and maneuver in those circles and not feel like you're losing who you are? As a human being and as a person of color, you have to be pretty intact, you know?

**Zepeda:** Yes. Yes.

**Cabrera:** It's like me asking Katia, "How can you socialize with these people, knowing what you know about them?" And her saying, "I'll never compromise my ability and my social capital to get for my community what I need to get. If that means I have to be civil in certain spaces, I'm civil in certain spaces. That doesn't mean I'm any less a Chicana."

**Zepeda:** That's powerful.

**Cabrera:** How we navigate that is really important, and our ability to support one another. Some of us have that and some of us can't do that. We just don't have it in our psyche. It's like what I said about Zizwe. Zizwe was important. There would not be an African American Resource Center; there would not be other resource centers, to be quite honest, had he not worked with the students to make a very bold statement and hold the university accountable and hostage to make this space happen. But he didn't get the job, and he's no longer here. So sometimes you have people that can maneuver, right? And sometimes it's down and dirty. So everybody has their role and place. There was a Chicano/Latino themed area in B dorm [at Merrill College] that was constructed by Irene and Maria Mata, and later by Diana and Rico Martinez. There was also an Asian American themed area in A dorm that was nurtured by Susan Kimoto and an African American themed area in A dorm.

**Zepeda:** That's really powerful. I wanted to ask you to continue with the diversity theme a little bit [and talk about] the campus climate study on diversity. I know that that was more recent, and I wanted to see if you felt that the result, [if] it was taken seriously, the result and recommendations based on that.

**Cabrera:** You're talking about Gina Dent's work?

**Zepeda:** Yes.



**Cabrera:** I really respected what Gina was doing.<sup>32</sup> I think she was in treacherous water, trying to get lots of feedback and input. Her and others were the bearers of this. It had its merit at one point, but, again, that stuff gets abandoned. I think that that's one of the reasons why we lose people. I know that when Gina came to interview some of us, it was heavy. There were times she said, "Sometimes I feel like I need to gasp for air, because I can't believe that these things happen, whether or it's from the students or what we've heard from students." So when you hold that, then what do you do? Again, there's the university's response, and I don't want to do a blame-the-victim. That's not what I'm saying. But I feel like we as people of color also don't see credence in it, so we're not bringing that back. You have to contend with this.

So now we're in crisis; we're in a financial crisis. So then how do they deal with that? I am not sure how I feel about it. I was optimistic at one point, because I felt like Allison [Galloway] was hearing and was listening and was not scared. She's not scared of students. She can be in their presence and not have other people [with her] and she doesn't [need to be] in an entourage. She comes, and when she knows something has touched a unit, she will come. I don't know it for sure, but I would suspect she probably is like that with faculty. I have felt a sense of positive movement with Allison. It's the crisis around the budget that stops things. But the positive right now is the ethnic studies commitment, because supposedly the money's reserved. They're still waiting for a proposal that comes from us, that comes from people of color.

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<sup>32</sup> See <http://currents.ucsc.edu/05-06/05-29/diversity.asp>

But I hear more positive—I was actually surprised. The Sikh students had an event that was a response to the gunning of people in the Sikh temple in Wisconsin, and Nirvikar Singh, who's an economist, he was one of the facilitators. I happen to know him from FMP [Faculty Mentor Program] stuff. I hadn't seen him in a long time, and really that's why I went. He is so optimistic about the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies [program]. He said it's going to happen. So I don't know. That's been like, you know—

**Zepeda:** A lot of years.

**Cabrera:** A lot of years in the works. So I'm hoping. That would be the glimmer of hope. But it still has to be supported, because we've lost American studies—even though it's still there, for the most part it's gone. Community studies—those locations of identity formation, of practice in different ways. So this would be the other location.

**Zepeda:** Exactly. I wanted to ask you this. This came up in looking at that court case and then watching a little bit of the video of the *Bakke* case, affirmative action. There was a lot of reference to how the financial determines so much. I wanted to get your take on that. A little bit ago you said this is like a thread of white supremacy, how it works. So if you wouldn't mind elaborating on that.

**Cabrera:** Diversity is not front and center, so when the finances wane, then that's the first thing that goes. I think that it's going to require of everybody a recognition that race matters, that we have a charge. We have a charge, and we're responsible for future generations, and those future generations will only experience difference if we make choices about where the money goes. Some

people are going to be unhappy. You're making people unhappy now. But when I think about those multicultural retreats, nobody works with faculty and staff on those levels. I mean, they do with staff, through staff HR, but it's out of choice. But who's going to make those decisions? It's the faculty that make them and put pressure on the university to make those choices.

**Zepeda:** So it has to be literally a shift, a recognition, a shift in the funds that are invested.

**Cabrera:** Absolutely, absolutely. So getting back to the latest of the diversity reports that Gina had worked on and others, I think they refer back to it. I don't know that we as a collective—even people of color agreed with that. So we have multiple levels of problems, but part of it is the old guard, and the old guard is leaving. I'm much more hopeful with some of the newer folks.

### **Merrill College Preceptorship**

**Zepeda:** So it's December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and we're here with Rosie Cabrera for our fourth interview, and I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project, and we're in McHenry Library in a conference room. So could we begin today with asking you about your role as a Merrill preceptor?

**Cabrera:** Time frame?

**Zepeda:** Time frame and then what impressions you had of Merrill, what was the student life like, students of color.

**Cabrera:** Let's see. My husband and I became preceptors. *Mija* was about one year old, so she was born in '87, so '88 was when we started. My role with EOP at

the time was as an academic counselor, and so Merrill was one of my assignments, and I absolutely loved the college. There was always this back and forth between Merrill and Oakes, like where was the hub of people of color? Both colleges embody a lot of history around diversity, with Merrill having a longer legacy and Oakes coming online at a later point and being very purposeful with what they were doing, with the planning and the mission.

But Merrill, to me, always had that community spirit. There were lots of students of color, lots of Chicano students, Latino students. African American students—there was a cluster that was really strong at the time, a critical mass. There were students that I had been working with because of my role as a counselor. So when the position came open, it was an opportunity, because those jobs were volunteer positions. I was starting out here on campus as a counselor and living in an area that costs a lot of money, and so it was a way for my husband and I to save some cash, because we didn't have to pay for rent. So we lived on campus, but you pay your dues (nothing is for free).

**Zepeda:** Yes, because you're always around the students.

**Cabrera:** You're always around the students. I lived in Building 13 back at the apartments. Richard, and myself, and Ani lived there in a two-bedroom apartment. We lived back there for three years, and then we moved to A-Dorm and lived in A-Dorm for four years, if you can imagine that. So we were at Merrill for seven years, a long time, a long time.

When you think about Oakes and Merrill, there were some regional differences. There were more Black students at Oakes, fewer at Merrill, but still a small

critical mass, more Chicano/Latino at Merrill, but a critical mass over at Oakes. But there was a regional thing. There were more L.A. people at Oakes, where Merrill kind of had a diversity of northern Cal, southern Cal, more traditional, I guess, in some respects. Oakes always seemed to be where the hipsters were. (laughs) I don't know how else to—like, more folks that really liked doing a lot of things with one another.

At Merrill the talk was, go to Oakes to party, but you come home to study. So Merrill was viewed as a location of support, and it had a lot of traditions of where the students could express themselves. Community meetings in the old days were big, big. So when you think about students having voice, that was direct contact with the provost who lived there and engaged with students all the time.

I was there when John Isbister was provost, and he was—well, he was interesting. [laughs] He was interesting because he's Quaker, economist, Canadian, so in his own kind of cultural mix I think he really wanted to be sensitive. He was always the person who you knew kind of would understand, but on a visceral level when things would happen, it was hard for him to comprehend how difficult some of the racial situations were.

But the moat, which now, yes, it's a big thing, but not like it used to be. I mean, the moat, people were really deliberate about the imagery they wanted to—

**Zepeda:** What is the moat? I'm sorry.

**Cabrera:** The moat, if you're at Merrill, is where all of the murals are on the wall there. That's going to get destroyed with the building that's going to happen over there. The moat's not going to exist the way it has. But during that time, there was a thriving of expressing how people viewed life, how they viewed the university, how they viewed themselves as people of color, and sometimes the faculty would get involved in that as well.

So in a lot of respects, I think Richard and I lost track of that we were precepting to save money. It really was about the relationship with the students and us trying to create a family experience back there. Because especially for students of color, it's all relational. It's about, okay, do you know who I am? Yes, you work for the university. And we know how this place works, and you know things, but can you see me? Do you know who I am?

So it was a real special location of a lot of students of color just feeling like they could just come over. *Mija* was little, and when they were stressed out, they would come over and read her books, because it would take them back to a different place. They knew they could get coffee.

When I worked at EOP and *Mija* was little, I needed to be able to work at home. So remember the little box Macintoshes, the cubes? I was one of the first ones to have one back there. So the students would come over all the time wanting to finish their papers. We had a relationship after a while with people that we really did trust. It was like, "Okay, we're going to bed. We cannot stay up with you." We'd go to bed and we'd just tell them, "Will you please lock the door when you leave?"

**Zepeda:** That's amazing. So it really benefitted them.

**Cabrera:** Yes. I think it really helped. Because as a counselor I saw a lot of people. I saw a lot of students continuously. But when you're in a home space, it's different. You're counseling, but not. You're a community member that's trying to help problem-solve. So we were privy to a lot of very personal things—deaths happening in families, illness, rapes—and I'm going to come back to that because during that time some really not so great stuff happened. But it was very intimate.

Theme housing was just launching. So even though Building 13 wasn't a theme area, Building 11 back there—I don't even know that they call it the Vito Russo House anymore—but Building 11 was the theme area for queer students. And there was a Chicano/Latino [themed housing], but that was in Building 5. Liz Dominguez and Enrique Sahagun, they were another couple. They lived there and that was their area.

So we had the privilege of being able to organize a lot of activity. My *estilo* is more when you think about community-building, a lot of it is over *comida*. A lot of it is, okay, how can we do some cultural education and bring people together? Because we were back in the apartment, we shared that space with Crown College, and Crown was not on that wavelength. So there was a lot of tension between the preceptors at Crown and us. Even though we were at Merrill, we still had to have meetings with them. I don't want to get into all of that, the nuances of how people enact diversity or how they believe in it, and at that point there were still a lot of white people who really could not contend with what it

means to engage diversity. They weren't even recognizing how in everyday life they were being really offensive to people. So a lot of times as professionals and working in an intimate way with students, we would confront a lot of that.

But I have a lot of respect for the college system. I think that the people, the architects [of] Santa Cruz really saw that as the beginning location. When you think about student development and what it means to be a university student and educated person, it's not a commuter campus, which I was used to, where you go to school but you didn't have a whole lot of activity on campus; it was mostly off campus that the activity happened, and by knowing people and stuff happening. Up here, there's a life where people are in the practice of engaging the personal to the academic and developing relationships. And because of the themes at Merrill and at Oakes in particular, the core course embodied that. There were more people of color that were even in the staffing area than at other places. They just were not there. But we could do the *Dia de los Muertos* and be supported in that.

In some respects, I was able to blend both my work at EOP with the work at Merrill. They both helped one another. Because I lived there, students got to know me and they would come in and felt very comfortable about coming in for academic advising. Because I found out things in the counseling, I could do things as a preceptor that were more informal that weren't counseling, but they helped to inform and helped to engage students. So I loved it.

I can't even imagine how we lasted seven years because it's a high burnout. I think I have to hand it to my husband. He was really a good support, and he



liked it. He worked in Monterey. Richard is a veteran. He was in the army, in Special Forces-Airborne. He had a very unique experience in doing three tours of Vietnam. He was a sergeant, so he had to engage. He participated a lot in the desegregation of the military. He was a noncommissioned officer, so he engaged a lot with the troops. His job was to keep his people out of harm's way and alive.

So the diversity issue was not unique to him. He was like a resident philosopher. When shit would come down, he would listen to what people would say. Or when things got really, really tense—because in those days you could just call it out, I mean, people would just say, “What you said is fucking racist.” Now there's a political correctness that I think really silences the ability to just get it out. So Richard would be the one who would talk about cause and talk about purpose and how we have to rely on each other, and how you work through difference. Because the bottom line is they needed to graduate and get out of here and not let stuff bog them down or the hurtful things around race and class, because there was a distinct class difference. It's still here, but not like then. It was very sharp.

White students had a lot of money. Now we're starting to have almost in some respects what you see at Cal State, a [white] working class [student body]. You can have white students [who] come from a working-class background. So you work on common ground with them and how to articulate similarity and how whiteness privileges, but the bottom line is people of color and whites in that class strata both experience similar pain. Here it was not like that. It was our students sharing rooms with people that had no worry in the world about money, no worry in the world. I mean, again, we still hear that now, but not as

sharp. It was not unusual for the white students to talk about going to the snow [at the end of the quarter], going back east, flying, where our students were busing it back and forth. There was a very distinct class difference and regional difference in the sense of the manifestation of populations living in segregated areas, so whites didn't mix with people of color. So a lot of times coming to the university was the first time they experienced that. And then students of color mostly coming from segregated environments. Even within the African American community and *raza* students and Asian students, it took effort to bring them together.

But Merrill, to me the preceptor role, if you were a committed staff member— You could cruise it you wanted. There were people that had these jobs where they did the minimum, did two events and weren't around. But that wasn't how a lot of us did our work. At Merrill and Oakes, we engaged ourselves in a way that we tried to raise the hard questions. How do we do this? These roles are kind of weird sometimes. You could get people that are very politically dogmatic and only see it one way. I never saw my role as that. Our roles as preceptors were to create safe spaces, comfortable spaces, challenging spaces. But it was important that the students figured it out and that it wasn't about getting them to do something. It was about, what is it that's important to you? How are you going to work with that?

So within the Chicano/Latino community, it was a smaller Latino population then, at least up until about '95, '96. We would have Nicaraguan students. I don't remember Salvadorian students till later, *Nicaraguenses*, *Guatemaltecos*, rarely South American students, which is still the case now. I mean, there's more. But it

wasn't until really later in the nineties—it's all a product of war, right? And immigration. So as the migration of refugees coming from different locations, then we started seeing them at the university after a while.

But when we were preceptors, I think things were safe enough both in the Chicano/Latino—it was really the Chicano House area over in B-Dorm—when people are safe they can claim. So then we would start to hear more of, "I'm not Chicano. I'm *Guatemalteco*." Or that they're not seeing themselves in MEChA, which was one of the few [organizations]. There were fewer Latino student organizations at the time. So now we have like twenty-six [organizations] that are formal, and there's, like, another five that are informal. So there's a plethora of orgs that did not exist back then. There was CHE (Chicanos in Health Education); MEChA; ESP, (Estudiantes Para la Salud de Pueblo); and Pablo Reguerin was one of those students. Pablo is Boliviano, so here's where I think you started to see this emergence of students starting to create their own orgs.

There was a lot of gender. Things were very engendered. *Mujeres* groups were really needed. A lot of times the *mujeres* were in leadership of MEChA but just got lots of shit. So some of the staff—so I'm going to kind of move out of the preceptor [discussion] because, again, there's the weaving of all these locations. So at the time Elba Sánchez was here and Francisco Alarcon, but Elba really was sort of the arch of Spanish for Spanish Speakers.

When you think about how to engage *raza*, Elba had it down. SSP had it down. Spanish for Spanish Speakers was a very Freirean model, a popular education model. She never really talked about it like that, where now it's commonplace to

talk about popular education. It was a very Freirean model of: have high expectations of the students, demand from them, but it's about learning about who they are and contextualizing their identity with the political, social, economic conditions of who we are.

And then Katia Panas was here, who was a counselor, a kick-ass counselor, who politically was extremely conscious and a really talented therapist. There were lots of bridges that could be built, and it also meant that when things hit the fan, there was somewhat of a support base. Now, graduate students also were part of that network, because of *Revista Mujeres*. Elba and Katia were really the arches for that for graduate students. It was the one location [where] graduate students could feel like they could engage.

So there was *Revista* and then there was the activity outside of that. Once or twice a quarter we would try to get the *mujeres* together. It was always really emotional. We never quite knew what was going to happen. There was not money like now. There were no ethnic resource centers, so it was all potluck. We would just bring what we could, and inevitably there was magic that happened. The students would talk about how they felt being *mujeres* and being students on campus, so highly emotional, highly charged.

There were some of us that were privy to those articulations, and then we would wrestle with: what do we do with this, what is our role in our respective areas, and who do we need to talk to as things got funky? I think we were really utilized as safe people when there were problems in the community.

During that time a major incident erupted. It was, I want to say, about 1990. The men in one of the Chicano/Latino organizations lived back in the apartments; they would set up the younger women. They would have parties and have drinking games. One student who was involved with ESP and was part of Spanish for Spanish Speakers, shared that she had been raped, and she had been raped in the apartments. And that's when we found out the guys would get the younger students really drunk and then tell them, "Oh, go and rest in the bedroom." Some of them—it even hurts to even articulate it this way—they were really taken advantage of.

So there were years that were really tense, because, as staff, we took a stand. Imagine, these were students we knew—they were activists on campus, the men—and then having to work with the student. Alma Sifuentes was a preceptor as well, and her husband, Daniel. We all came together and decided, "Okay, we've got to do something about this," and then trying to figure out what to do, because the campus couldn't really deal with this. Student Affairs didn't exist like it does now. So my life in EOP and precepting really converged.

But the staff and faculty that were here, we were constantly updating each other around students. We would call each other. I would get calls because of being a counselor, "Do you know such-and-such student? They're kind of running into trouble. Can you reach out?" It was a safety net because the numbers were smaller then.

## **The Office of Civil Rights**

But it was a difficult time. One student came forward. There were other students who had experienced what this one student had experienced, but they weren't ready to come forward. Then other students actually escaped it. They were aware. The student that had been raped, she didn't really come forward till months after this had happened, and it was in crisis that it came out.

We didn't have a Title IX office. There was Rape Prevention and a sexual harassment prevention effort, but there were nuances of conflict that had to do with cultural issues, even [tensions] with Rape Prevention. That office did what it needed to do, but there was more that needed to happen. The bottom line is the university wasn't dealing with the fact of the reality of what was happening. So a group of us filed the civil rights action claim against the university around sexual assault.<sup>33</sup>

The Office of Civil Rights came and did an investigation. There are Title IX offices across the country. Rita Walker was in the position as a sexual harassment advisor. [But we didn't have] a Title IX office. It was sexual harassment education that the University of California was doing. Rita was part of that. So that's how she became the first director. She's been the only director of the Title IX office since then.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Letter to Karl Pister, Chancellor, University of California, Santa Cruz, from John E. Palomino, Regional Civil Rights Director, Region IX, San Francisco, Office for Civil Rights, United States Department of Education, concerning sexual discrimination at the University of California, Santa Cruz]. Available in the Special Collections Department at the UCSC Library.

<sup>34</sup> Rita has been an exceptional support in her years with Title IX. She is exceptionally knowledgeable, supportive, and is a truth seeker. She understands the issues, and is highly

So it was a difficult time because I lived there. It was also during a time that there was an action and the students had occupied McHenry [Library] and were demanding certain things. So that fractured the community for the longest time and sharpened the divide around, how is the campus dealing with issues around people of color. [There were so] few people of color, we often found ourselves dealing with the internal issues of our own communities. Problems would emerge that were Black/Brown issues. They would get complicated and needed intervention. We often had to come up with creative ways to intervene.

Queerness existed, but it was not spoken a lot [about]. At both Merrill and Oakes there were safe zones for people to come out. Then it was dealing with the community. So we had to do a lot within the community around sexuality. Queer people are always part of the fabric, but whether it's spoken is a whole 'nother thing. So like other identities, as students emerge from an educational system, then they can start to name and call themselves. They understand who they are and they understand, "I'm okay. I'm okay."

You mentioned earlier Francisco Alarcon. Having faculty who were queer and were okay with being publicly queer—very few, very few. Francisco was one of the few. That's why it was so important that Lionel [Cantú] was here. He was opening in such tremendously good ways and codifying queerness intellectually.

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sensitive to the cultural nuances that sometimes occur with people of color. When Rita retires soon, she will be missed—Rosie Cabrera.

**Zepeda:** I do want to ask you a few follow-up questions. Who were your allies as preceptors? You mentioned also the tension between Crown and Merrill. I heard about a food fight that happened.<sup>35</sup>

**Cabrera:** Thank you for asking that. Sophia had been a preceptor before us, so she was the *veterana*. Sophia Garcia-Robles was at Merrill for a long time as a preceptor, and was a very strong preceptor, and she was a partner. Diana Martinez and Rico Martinez were also preceptors. Rico was a graduate student in biology, biochemistry. He and his wife were from Texas, and they came so he could get his PhD. They lived in B-Dorm.

And a few other people. Doug Easterly, who was really young at the time, and now he's at UC San Diego and he's got a big *chingón* position there, he was there. Susan Kimoto, who taught on our campus for a long time. She worked with EOP in what's now Learning Support Services, but she was the writing program coordinator for EOP. So they were on that local front.

Then the extended folks, Elba Sánchez, I can't even tell you how profound Elba's role was on this campus. Elba was kind of marginalized. I don't think the

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<sup>35</sup> I did not answer the question about what Zepeda called the food fight at Crown and Merrill. What she was referring to is what is known as the Asian Food Affair at Crown College in the late 1980s, a watershed event in the diversity effort on campus. The college was hosting a College Night on Pearl Harbor Day that consisted of Asian Food. Victor Kimura, a staff member at the college was offended by this action, or the lack of cultural sensitivity in how this event was conceived and constructed. He wrote an open letter of concern and a libel lawsuit was filed against Victor Kimura that focused on defamation of character. A state court of appeals ruled to dismiss the libel suit against Kimura and held that such speech was constitutional. See more [http://articles.latimes.com/1991-06-01/news/mn-2459\\_1\\_open-letter](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-06-01/news/mn-2459_1_open-letter). This was a significant moment at UCSC. Victor Kimura spoke out and was reprimanded for speaking out. For many staff and faculty of color, this represented a significant confrontation with the lack of cultural competency on the campus. Personally, I am indebted to Victor for his courage to take a stand and to raise this as a community issue. These events highly impacted students of color, and the overall campus community—Rosie Cabrera



Chicano faculty would admit it, but she was not always treated or viewed as faculty. She was a lecturer, [with] that kind of status distinction. Spanish for Spanish Speakers was not viewed as a legitimate location. It was not seen as an academic department. But Elba was a kick-ass. Elba wouldn't stand for that shit, so she constantly engaged the faculty and constantly legitimized my role with students.

And Katia Panas. So there were all these partnerships, and the partnerships also included Carolyn Martin-Shaw, who was a faculty member in anthropology. She's emeritus now, an African American woman who was a preceptor at Kresge [College] for the longest time, so when it came to the diversity issues, she was strong.<sup>36</sup> Katia, in particular, had a strong relationship with her, so she was always included.

Then with *Revista Mujeres* there were always these attempts to get more of the Chicana faculty involved, but they were a younger faculty then and were making their way also. Aida [Hurtado] and Pat [Zavella] allowed us to use their name for *Revista Mujeres*, and really engaged one or two issues. I have to attribute that to that they were younger faculty at the time and going through the tenure process. The demands on them were very, very high. But when the shit would hit the fan politically, Elba would usually try to pull people together to try to strategize on, "Okay, let's update each other. Let's figure out what we need to do. Can we count on each other?" She would always call for the question, "Can we count on one another?" and in a good way almost demand that of all of us to articulate it,

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<sup>36</sup> An oral history with Carolyn Martin-Shaw is forthcoming from the Regional History Project in 2015—Editors.

not just walk away and then we don't know for sure. When we lost [Elba], I think we lost a jewel.

These are my impressions based on what I saw happening during this time. There were lots of changes happening with Spanish for Spanish Speakers. Elba left when they really cut the program a lot, and then it was, "Do I stay here at all costs?" Elba was a committed educator and a strong activist. She had always written poetry, but she decided to take a big risk and to focus on her writing. So we lost her.

Carolina Martinez, who taught with SSSP, had been mentored by Elba. She coordinated the program for a while following Elba's departure, and a few other people worked on it. There was nobody that could replace Elba. Carolina did a good job, Francisco—but Francisco left. I can't even remember the year, but it was during one of the cuts.<sup>37</sup>

The work that was being done by Spanish for Spanish Speakers was a profound retention effort. A lot of *raza* went through those programs. They had tons of courses. Those courses got our students through. Spanish for Spanish Speakers was coming from the perspective that if you know your own language and you can articulate in your own language and read in your own language, you're going to do better in acquiring English, and you're going to do better in English. We had talented students, but they were contending with privilege, so it was a difficult dance. Spanish for Spanish Speakers was a community space. It was an

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<sup>37</sup> Both Francisco Alarcon and Carolina Martinez were very important to SSSP. Their departure, along with Elba's departure was a clear signal that all was not well with the program—Rosie Cabrera.

academic space, but it was a community space, high expectation, but it fortified students. The students came out of that program clearly knowing who they were and had the language to articulate it and were stronger in their ability to negotiate the campus. So it's all of us working together that helped make the space on the campus a good space.

**Zepeda:** I wanted to ask you more about what happened with the Office of Civil Rights and the rape case?

**Cabrera:** So the university ended up coming to agreement with the Office of Civil Rights, and they had to have things in place to remedy the situation, which was to develop procedures for documenting not only rape cases, but documenting the sexual harassment. Because not only was that student raped, but she was sexually harassed because she came forward.

So that was over a period of years, and resulted in the Title IX office being initiated on this campus. I have to say, I have so much respect for Rita [Walker]. Rita is fearless, *fearless*, and is thorough with her investigations. I don't know what we're going to do when she retires, because she knows all the history and she knows all the dirt and is willing to put herself out there.

So now there's an office that believes you when you come forward, and has options and strategies and still leaves it up to the individual, but you're not on your own, and something will happen. She knows the law. She understands it. So there was a good thing that emerged from that. [Other people who were involved in the case included] Katia Panas and Marta Morello-Frosch. Morello-Frosch was in literature. She was a faculty member, and found the place to

support this. Elba was incredible, and Alma Sifuentes was key. She was the person that dealt with the university communication with the Student Affairs administration. The students from Estudiantes Para la Salud de Pueblo were incredible, because they were the ones that supported the students. That was an Oakes emergent group and a group that understood *mujeres* voices are important, even though it was a mixed group. What was being contended was notions of feminist thinking, of how power [is] negotiated across genders, and students being able to claim a space to say within their own community, "This is wrong."

**Zepeda:** Exactly, and be able to name it. So is there anything else you want to share about Merrill before we move on?

**Cabrera:** Well, I just want to continue to affirm that it really saddens me to see where the colleges are at now. There's been a real divestment in that kind of community. Merrill could handle strong voices. Even if it meant that they were called on doing something wrong, they could handle it and try to come up with ways to continually develop the space for all of its students. *Día de los Muertos*, the event you talked about earlier at McHenry,<sup>38</sup> that was a big deal to all of us because that was putting a cultural tradition in a public space that everybody came to. Vivian Sykes was the first multicultural librarian here, so she had a lot to do with helping that. And there were other librarians, but she's the one that I

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<sup>38</sup> *Día de los Muertos* 1991 [videorecording].videocassette (13 min.) Camera: Diana Martínez. Featuring: Silas Snyder, Deborah Murphy, Carolina Martínez, Elba Sánchez, Jackie Martínez, Francisco Alarcón, Alma Sifuentes, Arturo Flores, Sofía García-Robles. Summary: A videotape of both the reception for the *Día de los Muertos* exhibit held in McHenry Library, University of California, Santa Cruz in the fall of 1991, and the exhibit itself.

remember the most, because they were all freaked out about how we were dealing with the cases (enclosures for books). Francisco did something. I think he brought frosting and was doing something to the cases with frosting. And they were just like, "Oh, my god!" But that it was an exciting time.

The *ceremonia* that we had started at Merrill started to develop a community identity. Maybe it had happened before, but nobody talked about it. Merrill was cutting-edge in that way. And Oakes was like that. The programming engaged everybody and tried their best to affirm and to go into places that were difficult to talk about.

Now it's hard for students to talk. You've got to go through all gyrations to have a community meeting that's a facilitated dialogue. People are scared to have those kinds of dialogues, but if shit would happen, the students would demand it. And if the provost said, "Well, this happened. Let's discuss it at my house." I remember the one time at Merrill, the provost invited people to go to his house, and there were so many people they had to move it to the dining hall. He just didn't realize what he was engaging, and it was a fierce dialogue. We don't have those anymore, and I feel like we've lost something as a result of that. The role of the residential people is totally different. They're more disciplinarians and they're not programmers like we were.

**Zepeda:** So probably the way before benefitted the students way more because there were programs to support them, but then also having the space to speak their mind, having access to the preceptors, being able to engage them on a relational level.

**Cabrera:** Yes. You have to have people that are preceptors that really want to do the job. So there was a mix. I think that was why they made the switch. Ultimately we got to the point where the university had to question the legality of having volunteers in high-risk locations versus hired staff.

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** Then how do you manage that in a budget? It's all about budget. It's all about how things cost, and what you get for that money. I think the switch to the current model— they're burnout jobs for the people that are in them, and the quality of programming isn't quite the same. College Nine and Ten to me is probably the one space [with programming]—because Oakes doesn't even have the programming like it had before. Merrill doesn't have it. They're kind of dependent now on others to do the programming. Because the resource centers didn't exist before. Now the resource centers exist. There're other locations of the diversity effort. So if you're not getting it out of your own base, where does it come from? It comes from other places. I think the old model had a lot of benefits.

**Zepeda:** Especially around creating that community.

**Cabrera:** Oh, yes, yes. And it matters when you think about retention, that community space. Again—the Merrill students would say, "Okay, I go to Oakes to party, but I come home to study." There was this whole thing about Merrill, "Sterile Merrill." "Merrill, like, nothing happens there." Well, a lot happened there, but it was more grassroots and not in a more public way. But there was a real distinction. Like I said, I don't know how to explain it other than Oakes had

a lot of urban students. Merrill had more traditional, northern Cal, yes, southern Cal, but I don't know how else to articulate it other than an urban vibe versus a more traditional vibe. So that's why I say the hipsters lived in Oakes. It was just, I think, an urban engagement.

**Zepeda:** You had mentioned that the mural was very important.

**Cabrera:** The moat, oh, yes, because what goes on the moat was a political thing. It was a vetted process. So you'd have to turn in sketches and explain your vision of the art you plan to place on the moat, what was it, etcetera. For students of color, that was a place to articulate. I need to go through there before they get rid of a lot of them, because they still have some of the old ones, like one that Sophia Garcia-Robles worked on, Native students worked on. Cliff Poodry, who was faculty, came down and worked on one of them with the students. African American students did this really controversial one of the American flag, but instead of the stars, African American men with the noose around the neck were representing the stars. So they were political statements that helped fuel dialogue. There were deaths of students, and some of the murals were the manifestation of the grief that people felt. I haven't heard the same kind of enthusiasm about the moat that was there before.

**Zepeda:** That sounds powerful, the way it existed.

**Cabrera:** Yes. Oh, god. People would be out there all night, and it was a party. You had the engagement around artistic expression, but it was political expression.

**Zepeda:** Exactly. So is that where your programming began, as a Merrill preceptor—

**Cabrera:** Yes, and at EOP. Again, the resource centers didn't exist. EOP would have events, not a whole lot. But precepting is where I could do more cultural programming; a lot of us could do more cultural programming.

So *Dia de los Muertos*—it wasn't like we just decided, "Oh, let's do *Dia de los Muertos*. It was the Chicano staff there, us meeting, saying we really want to do something. When we started to talk about *Dia de los Muertos*, because it was celebrated a lot in Northern California up in San Francisco, and wanting to engage in it, we had to contend with: we don't know what we're doing, what right do we have to do this, how can we do this in authentic ways and not replicate what sometimes happens around cultural traditions?<sup>39</sup>

Josie Méndez-Negrete was a graduate student at the time, and Elba, Josie, Katia were in some of the discussions. They weren't part of the staff, but we asked their advice. I think Josie was the most profound. [She said] "How can you even say that you have to do it in traditional ways when we're all reclaiming?" So she really helped us understand why is it that we want to do this; where are we coming from; and then take the risk. Try it. Do it. And the students absolutely loved it, so they would claim a lot of it. We worked with each other to create a

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<sup>39</sup> It was important to us to work on cultural events in ways that were not tokenized. We explored purpose and the relationship of this purpose in advancing community spaces for students of color. As we engaged cultural issues, we also wanted to support spaces of inclusion and diversity, spaces that affirmed people and include majority (white) students in productive and authentic ways. We charged ourselves with supporting safe spaces for learning and engagement—Rosie Cabrera.



space. We kept trying to do the best we could and to educate ourselves and other people. So it was a way to explore Chicano identity, even for us.<sup>40</sup>

**Zepeda:** That's powerful. And to take the risk at doing that is really profound.

**Cabrera:** Yes.

### **El Centro: The Chicano/Latino Resource Center**

**Zepeda:** So, let's pick up with your transition from EOP to El Centro and how that happened and your beginning steps of building the Chicano/Latino Resource Center.

**Cabrera:** So in 1995 was when the program, El Centro, started. Larry Trujillo was the founding director, and we engaged immediately. Larry's a very collaborative person. El Centro is different than how the other centers started. I shared with you the story of Zizwe working with the African American students on campus for the African American Resource Center. There were more Latino staff, even though we still were small in number, but there were more. And because we were in strategic places, I don't know that the students felt the same angst, because they were utilizing us. There was more academic programming.

Larry was brought by the vice chancellor of Student Affairs. There was a particular vision that I think Francisco [Hernandez] saw and that Larry saw that involved CLRC [Chicano Latino Research Center], the research center. I think

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<sup>40</sup> As many of us left these precepting positions, many of the cultural events that were initiated were abandoned. There were new locations like at College Eight that included staff such as Gabriela Alaniz, Tere Alaniz, Liz Martin Garcia, Virginia Carrillo-Urrutia, and Sophia Garcia-Robles, who opened new spaces for Dia De Los Muertos. Porter College, under the provostship of Kathy Foley, initiated and maintained an annual fall course on Dia De Los Muertos. This was an exceptional bridge to the existing college activity—Rosie Cabrera.

their vision was that the research center would have an undergraduate component to it and that Larry would be working that portion. But the Chicano faculty and the Latino faculty did not want that to happen in that way. It was a prophetic vision that in some respects, I'm able to do now in my relationship with LALS [Latin American and Latino studies] and started to do with CLRC, but because the finances of CLRC are waning, we are challenged. But I clearly feel that partnership with LALS.<sup>41</sup>

So let me go back to the start. Larry would engage with EOP [when I was still working at EOP], but because we were not used to resource centers, I didn't know what a resource center was supposed to do. A lot of the things that he articulated were things EOP was doing. Unfortunately, I am very upfront, so Larry and I sometimes had a contentious relationship at the beginning, but we hung in with each other. I didn't understand what he was trying to do and why he seemed to be replicating the EOP model. It took me a while to grasp: EOP doesn't have to do everything, nor should it be doing everything. It's okay to let other people do the work. It took a while, but we really respected one another, [and had] a truthful relationship. There was a gender dynamic. He was seen as the savior. But we engaged around affirmative action. We were clear with each other around the demise of the undermining of the support mechanisms and what potentially was going to be a result. So that brought us together.

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<sup>41</sup> I am VERY thankful to all of the LALS faculty, but particularly to Sylvanna Falcon, Shannon Gleeson, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Hector Perla, Patricia Zavella and Jonathan Fox, who always reached out to collaborate on efforts. I appreciated that they thought of El Centro as a partner in bridging academic activity with campus life. They were always there when there were events that students wanted to see initiated, and supported their efforts—Rosie Cabrera.

So I had a relationship with the center for a long time and with Larry, because we worked on projects and he was also a mentor through the Faculty Mentor Program and worked with students. When he was asked to take on the executive director of what now is Retention Services, that meant he was going to vacate his position. So I got the call to meet with the associate vice chancellor of student affairs, who oversaw the resource centers, to ask if I wanted to do this temporarily, do a two-year gig [directing the Chicano/Latino Resource Center]. I felt like, "What? Me?" I guess the identity stuff emerged for me. I think of someone that works for a resource center or multicultural center, you know, they're like super Chicanas or super Latinos. They're really strong in their identity. I guess it raised those questions for me, "Are you sure? Are you sure you want me?" Because I'm not that type. Then I had my own issues around, when people are offered things, that it's a setup.<sup>42</sup> So I had my political view of it, and was I going to participate in that? So before I even entertained it, I had conversation with Sayo Fujioka, who I respect tremendously, and other folks that I knew and my husband. Richard really wanted me to try it because he rarely saw me. So he thought, "Hey, this is perfect, because maybe we'll have a good life. I'll see you occasionally." So he thought, oh, this is a way to get sanity in my job.

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<sup>42</sup> Our original agreement was that I would take on the role of the director of El Centro and within a two-year period of time, the position of Executive Director of Retention Services would be opened for a competitive hire. If at the time, Larry was offered the permanent position, then I would need to decide if I wanted to stay at El Centro or return to EOP. My position at EOP was on hold during this time. I was in the same classification as Larry at the time, and Student Affairs could move me over without having a competitive search. Larry was selected for the full time position and by then I was completely immersed in and loved my work with students at El Centro—Rosie Cabrera.

When I talked to Sayo and I said, "I don't understand why they would have asked me," it was really affirming at the time to hear, "Why wouldn't they ask you?" Then what would I get from it? Would it be a good move? I needed to consult with the directors that were at the [other resource] centers, because I'd been here a long time. I know what it's like when somebody just gets moved in and politically the alignments that occur.

So I talked to Nancy [Kim]. Paula wasn't there (she was on vacation), and Dennis Tibbits, who was the director at the time of the American Indian Resource Center. I came over and talked to them and said, "This is what the offer is. I am hesitating because I don't want to come into this space unless you all feel it's value added to the space." And it was interesting. They were like, "It would be an honor to have you come over." So it was a very affirming process. But what was awkward was that the associate vice chancellor of student affairs, she's the same person that sort of indirectly blamed me for the takeover of Hahn, and Sayo, both of us. So I didn't understand what her motive was. So it was years later that I understood what happened. I thought Larry had said something, but Larry didn't recommend me. I found out later that Alfreda Mitre had suggested that Gail Heit talk to me about taking on this position. I ultimately decided to take the chance and to do it on a temporary basis.

EOP actually lost a staff member. I was a coordinator over there. The words are different, but I would be the equivalent of an associate director at EOP. But we didn't have those names. We had an associate director, but then we had coordinators because of the complexity of the unit at the time.

Alfreda Mitre, who was the first director of the American Indian Resource Center, she had worked for me as a counselor at EOP. Alfreda was unique in that she had been the tribal chairperson of the Northern Paiute and she had moved here because she was tired of living away from her husband, and her husband had a gig in northern California, so she decided sanity, right? We were lucky we had her. She was really profound. Alfreda says that she was asked and that she said, "You know, you need to bring Rosie over." I attribute it to her, because I don't understand it otherwise. The EOP director at the time was surprised that they weren't consulted.

So I still worked with FMP when I came over, but it was a pretty incredible shift, because Larry taught courses through LALS and through community studies. He had a following based on large lecture classes, and I didn't have that. I had to figure out, what does an ethnic resource center do? Who are the students that are the recipients of this service? What do they need and what do they want? And do I have what it takes to manifest those things?

**Zepeda:** Great questions.

**Cabrera:** It was quite exciting [at first] but taxing, because I was still working with EOP. I had two gigs at the same time, because FMP was like teaching a class. The way that I entered El Centro was, in retrospect, positive, because people would just come in. I remember Rafael Frausto coming in and saying, "What do you do? What do you and what is El Centro?" I had that a lot. In the early days I said, "You know, I'm not sure what I do. I know what Larry did, and

I'm trying to continue some of those things, but I'm actually interested in what you think a center should do."

**Zepeda:** To the students, you would say that?

**Cabrera:** Yes. So they started telling me. They just started telling me. It was very *rasquache*, real *rasquache*. I mean, we did really ridiculous shit sometimes (small events that required very little money) because the budget was really small. I remember the constant financial challenges. After my first year, we had a big budget cut. We went from \$25,000 in programming monies to \$8,000 for the year, which was a nightmare.

**Zepeda:** That's huge.

**Cabrera:** Huge, huge, huge. So that's how Pan Dulce Fridays started. Eddie Cervantes<sup>43</sup> was my first program coordinator, and it was something we borrowed from Stanford. It was like, "Well, what's low cost that could bring people in?" At Stanford they had what they called Pan Dulce Fridays, but that was much more informal. The staff and faculty and students would know you could show up at their Centro and they would have pan and coffee and stuff.

But we started to do evening things, like on a Friday night, a Pan Dulce Friday, and students would come. And we'd do low-cost things, play games. That's how I found out we had this whole contingent that was really into Scrabble, but in Spanish. They were just very small community spaces.

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<sup>43</sup> Eduardo Cervantes was a UCSC alum who participated actively in both EOP and El Centro—Rosie Cabrera.

I did continue a lot of the traditions that Larry had. And then over time, the students would come with ideas. Or my EOP sensibilities would come in, because then it would be, why are so many of the students in academic difficulty? What can we do? So then I would start workshops.

I had students working on a newsletter that was a little more sophisticated, and on our old website that we're trying to revamp. The students called the newsletter *Chisme* and it started to offer a location for the students to put in articles, updates and introductions of people in our community that included students, organization, faculty or alumni. We had a smaller number of interns, so it was a challenge to get CHISME completed quarterly.

**Zepeda:** What was the number of them?

**Cabrera:** I would say around twelve, ten or twelve. This quarter I had thirty-one, thirty-one with four student staff.<sup>44</sup>

Anyway, so what's transpired over time is that [students] claimed the space at the resource centers, and they would be there all the time. They'd go to class; they'd come back. I would go home; they would still be there. During midterms, they would hang out and asked if they could be in the space. It was out of those relationships that students worked on the CARE Initiative trying to get money for the resource centers, because they saw much they were struggling. I had

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<sup>44</sup> From the inception of El Centro (Chicano Latino Resource Center) interns played a major role in the day-to-day operation of the center and in the formation and implementation of activity. What changed over time was the numbers of interns wanting to be involved with El Centro. They represented the diversity within the community, were inclusive of the cultural and national experiences of the community, and fairly represented the diversity of academic disciplines. There were less students in STEMS and many more students from Southern California—Rosie Cabrera.

some real issues with students paying for us. But had they not done that, we would have \$8,000 per year. And another pot goes over to engaging education, and then we have to submit proposals for that money.<sup>45</sup>

The students helped to brand Centro. I had to work through being *pocha*, being in a space that is hyperethnic, coming from my own personal family being mixed, coming from a space where I engaged with diversity a lot, to focusing, focusing. So it was almost like coming home. I don't even know how to explain it. It's like locations that I didn't have permission to go before. I felt like I could go there.

**Zepeda:** That's profound.

**Cabrera:** So it was a lot of experimentation. Yet I was very sensitive that, okay, Larry had his formula. How do I honor that? If I'm not ready to make a switch and have a good reason for it, how do I honor that, and then as I move through it, understand is it working or is it not? Or how do I retool it?

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** *Que mas?* So I really love it. I've come to love it.

Then Aida [Hurtado] became director of CLRC. I always went to her events, socialized with her. In *comadres*, Sophia was really a very close friend of Aida's. And I'll never forget, Aida called me and said, "I want to meet with you," and we had this meeting. She said, "I have a proposal for you. I want to see if you will partner with CLRC." She had this vision. She was really sweet, to be quite

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<sup>45</sup> The Care Council is an Engaging Education effort that has representatives from each of the resource centers. These students vote on the allocation of funds for individual projects submitted by the centers—Rosie Cabrera.



honest. She was like, "I have this vision. Will you at least hear me out?" And it was her concern that CLRC didn't have enough money and that if I would assist her, because there was enough that they knew about the programming that I think there was a sense that we could assist with making it happen. CLRC didn't have enough people to do the programming.

So Aida's the one that said, "I want to do three events. I want them to be fundraisers. I'm hoping we can institutionalize these annually. The first year I need the monies coming to CLRC to demonstrate that it's viable, but after the first year, then we will share the money with El Centro that's coming through." We did great work, but she got slam-dunked, just slam-dunked, but the faculty were not supportive of these efforts. It was when we did the Frida Kahlo Ball. Do you remember that?

**Zepeda:** I do remember that.

**Cabrera:** We did the Frida Kahlo Ball; we did the Scholar of the Year event at the museum; and then we did the Anzaldúa event. Although these events were outstanding, the faculty affiliated with the CLRC did not view them as viable to the mission of the CLRC. So our collaboration became problematic.

**Zepeda:** Oh, no.

**Cabrera:** Part of it was her own thinking, her notion as a director [that a] director has the ability to vision. But that's not how the faculty saw the role of the director. So it's unfortunate, because I do think had we continued those, we would have money coming in.

I think that the unfortunate part is Aida had a vision that could be moved. She couldn't do it alone. She needed us. I think the faculty couldn't understand, why she was asking Centro to assist? It was funky. It was not the best, but it was the start of trying to create a relationship. So that took us to another realm, because then the faculty started to see the publicity, and the publicity was exceptionally beautiful. Rafael Frausto prepared the publicity for each of these three events. So everything that was being developed was student-based, and I just refined.<sup>46</sup>

So there was a quid pro quo—we had to work through it, because I think we were also the workhorses for the longest time. Remember that vision of the undergraduate and the graduate and the faculty? That could happen, but then political winds shifted again. Who would have thought? Again, we are where we are now, at a point where we should be flying and doing really, really well. This movement of synergy could have happened, but it's always about money.

**Zepeda:** Money becomes a limitation.

**Cabrera:** It becomes a limitation, and it's what we contend with all the time. Being at the resource centers is incredible because there's this synergy that can happen between all the different resource centers, but we all have to be open to it. So kind of like youngsters, I think it's taken a while for that to happen and for all of us not to perceive ourselves in sort of—it's probably too extreme to say it's nationalistic, but we all scramble for our little pot, versus how do we make things happen?

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<sup>46</sup> A large part of student development is inclusion, planning, feedback, and completion of projects. In Rafael's case, his talent was in publicizing and promoting events. This experience was key to developing experience and his resume—Rosie Cabrera.

I think it's one of those places in people of color organizing: how do we organize with each other and not see each other as threats? And it's even deeper. How do we look at the talent of each of the people and know when to come together and when we need to leave each other to have the autonomous space for the programming that's unique to that group?

So we're still negotiating that. I think it's a little bit easier, but I think the campus really didn't understand what it wanted with having resource centers. So there isn't uniformity, and nor should we have uniformity, but there're some common denominators that need to be there, and then the uniqueness of the constituency groups and the needs can play out in the programming. But there's a lot that are common denominators. So it's a challenging place. I often wonder what would happen if money was not an object, or if we had enough money to do significant programming and not worry about the money, what kind of programming we would do?

**Zepeda:** That's a great question.

**Cabrera:** As opposed to, am I going to spend money on a collaborative [project] with you when this means I'm going to have to not do something else that's important? Some of us are organizers and some of us are not. Even though I don't consider myself an organizer, I'm an organizer.

**Zepeda:** Oh, yes. [laughs]

**Cabrera:** I'm an organizer. Rafa, Adrian, and all the early interns, all the ones that were my very first cohorts, they were there saying, "The problem is we're

not sure about what the center is and what you do.” Even though there’s still that [feeling], it’s not to the degree that it was before. I have them to thank for this notion of branding and having high-quality, not sacrificing on certain things, not being afraid of engaging. And always, always you’ve got to hear them out. You may not agree, but you always have to hear them out. So it’s kind of a hard place sometimes. This is my tenth year. And the first six were contentious relationships with one of the student orgs, and now we’re at the point that that is no longer there. This beautiful space has opened up.

**Zepeda:** Amazing.

**Cabrera:** I’ll never forget, when Cherrie [Moraga] came, and we ran into this problem with a student organization having an event at the same time, and can we collaborate? I remember Alyssa [Diana Huerta] coming back and saying, “This shit’s deep,” and her volunteering to—she says, “You all need a facilitated dialogue.” And at the time I could see it, but I was really scared, because I had experienced difficulties with these particular organizations.

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Cabrera:** Well, there were some people that had no problem coming and telling me, “You do nothing, absolutely nothing for me.” They were powerful student organizers. So it’s a kind of fear, but it’s like, I’m not going to allow you to disintegrate my self-confidence and my ability to do this job.<sup>47</sup> You’re not going

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<sup>47</sup> I feel a need to explain this further as honestly as I can. My fear came from old wounds and being questioned. I felt this came from both old notions that stemmed from the civil rights case years ago and the fact that I was a woman and the students were used to seeing Larry in this position. I also feel that it stemmed from the organization feeling that El Centro was treading in areas that belonged to the student organizations. Some of this was carried over from Larry

to scare me away. I went years with my performance evaluation having that on there I had to work on, and I did continue to work on it, but I also didn't shy away from it. With students, cohorts leave and then you have another opportunity. But there's a certain level of history that keeps coming.

About two years ago there was this new opening that happened. All of a sudden the students started questioning. They'd come to an El Centro activity. They would be like, "How can she be the devil, but I went to this, and it was fine?" You know? I didn't have to do anything, other than just be myself and be truthful when they asked questions. It just happened, to where now I think the orgs are even doing that with themselves. Like, this past year working on the New Student Welcome, it was what does it mean to collaborate? What does it mean to collaborate and who does it benefit? Do we have to lose our identity if we collaborate? How do we work with each other? How do we work with our stereotypes around one another?<sup>48</sup>

**Zepeda:** Yes, that's a big dream.

**Zepeda:** So it's January 22<sup>nd</sup>, and we're here with Rosie Cabrera. This is interview number five, and I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project. We're

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Trujillo's tenure in the position, and some was conflict that arose when we tried to continue a coalition called Concilio. At the time I had experienced my mother's passing and emotionally I was not personally prepared to handle more conflict. This was a mistake I would regret for some time. We are human beings in these roles, and there are times when we are more or less able to resolve conflict—Rosie Cabrera.

<sup>48</sup> I am very thankful to Brittaney Barba and Jose Flores, our summer interns, who opened a space with student organizations. This space was in the planning of the New Student Welcome-Carnaval. We collectively worked through enhancing El Centro's relationship with Chicano/Latino student organizations. This summer preparation helped to refine our roles and relationships in working collectively on a key event that would impact new Chicano/Latino students—Rosie Cabrera.

going to continue our conversation today about your work at the Chicano/Latino Resource Center, El Centro. I'll start with the question: what is your approach to mentoring student interns and creating this next generation of activists?

**Cabrera:** Okay. So let me start with some wrap-up from last time, because it kind of feeds into this. This has been an interesting process because as you start to unravel what your experience is, you have to remind yourself it's what you see, and that the issues and the time and space that you're working in is shared with other people, and they have their perspective on it. I wanted to remind myself in what I'm saying that it is from my perspective and that there are other views, and I'm trying to honor and respect that. But it's hard.

Last time I talked a little bit about how Larry and I worked together but we also had this little bit of tension. Part of that, I think, really did have to do with the nature of how we worked with students. He had his style and it worked for him. He had an excellent cadre of students that were very loyal to the center. They were the building blocks of El Centro.

When he left, I came in. I was coming from EOP, which had a more structured kind of approach. I had been supervising student staff for a long time, but I hadn't had a volunteer internship type of effort. People were getting paid, so the way you work with them is different than we have volunteers. They were getting academic credit, but there wasn't a check involved. I think intrinsically you think a little bit differently about it, although we probably shouldn't.

So those first two years of working at the center, I really was trying to get a handle on, what is the role of an ethnic resource center. All of those notions that I had about being grounded in being Chicana start to get ruffled again, like, okay, here I am taking on this responsibility, right? Am I the kind of Chicana that should be doing this? And engaging with different students, who, it was clear, were the constituencies that used El Centro, but there were so many more that weren't what I would call frequent flyers. They weren't coming through a lot. They weren't sure what is an ethnic resource center or what do you do. What is the Chicano/Latino Resource Center? What is El Centro? Those students existed in the same zone as students who, I would say, had tinges of what I saw as nationalistic, who had their notions about what a center should be like, as Chicano-centered, Chicano-focused, and politically focused.

So I did a lot of listening. I tried to do a lot of listening and tried to absorb what students were saying and what it meant. Those first two years were really hard because there were lots of people that wanted to be a part of it, but they were also critical, because they wanted to see themselves in the center. So then there was this negotiation. I'll give you an example. I had a student that was *puertorriqueño*, and he was furious, "Everybody here is Chicano. I don't see myself." So he became part of the center. He interned; he was one of the first interns to move us from what I would call an old-school mimeographic *Chisme* newsletter that was mailed, to a really beautiful piece that tried to give a slice of life of what was Latino life like at UCSC.

So there were all these different groups of people. So I think, for me, it was understanding I was on this learning curve. Even though I felt like I was really

good at organizing programs, I had done big programs, this was different because it was around identity; it was around community-based work and trying to do more political work. I had done that at EOP when the affirmative action debate was happening. We brought speakers. But it wasn't like that was our total purpose. So coming to Centro there was more of that. The questions were always there: what is it that will draw students in?

Centro has helped me reexamine what is mentoring and how do I make use in very tangible ways the voices and what people are saying? Even if they're not saying the same things, how do I translate that, and where are the potential bridges that could be sort of garnered, with an underlying philosophy, and my own personal philosophy? What I heard from the students was clearly, "We need a community. We exist here. But we exist at Oakes, we exist at Porter, we exist at Merrill. We don't have a collective community." So I feel like in some respects I'm a contradictory mentor.

**Zepeda:** I love that.

**Cabrera:** I give people lots of space, but then it's, be careful what you ask for, because I'm going to hold you accountable for it. I did have expectation of our activity and really had to work to counter what was a student org method, which was, "Well, if we decide this week what we're going to do, that's fine. We'll get the word out, people will know, and they'll come or they don't come." That didn't work for us. We had to get the word out. The numbers when I first started were smaller, so we did a lot that was tangible. People had to go out and actually deliver things and make contact with the undergrads, mostly. Then I was trying



very hard to honor what Larry had started. I had a different strategy, a different way that I looked at the issue, but I wanted to respect that Larry knew what he was doing. So, again, from his perspective, certain things made sense.

So programs like the Chicana/Latina Pipeline that he started, or the *Compas* group for the men. Chicano/Latino Grad was another one that was a mainstay, even though we weren't responsible for it but working on it. CL grad was there always. I tried to respect what he had, but tried to understand what students were saying that they needed, and then tried to programatize.

When I first started, the internship was small, maybe ten people, seven to ten people. A lot of them had been in student orgs, so they had their organizing. They thought they knew how to organize, and they did know how to organize, but there was a level of sophistication that needed to get beefed up, and those are the things they didn't quite know how to do.

When I prescribed what needed to be done, there was resistance. So then what I started to do was go back to my old ways of just *conocimiento*<sup>49</sup> so then using that as a way to identify needs: okay, if we're going to do this, what needs to happen? What doesn't happen in existing activity that needs to happen? That allowed for

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<sup>49</sup> CONOCIMIENTO is a process I learned from Roberto Vargas and from Josie Mendez-Negrete in the 1980's. It came from a process called Razalogia, a Chicano/Latino perspective on ways to work within the community utilizing the community. Its basic principle is that in order to work collectively we must develop a consciousness of each other that can lead to our personal and group power. Conocimiento is a group process that enhances group trust and bonding. These are essential ingredients to working on our unity. It asserts that community is a conscious effort and is a process that needs nurturing and assertive or purposeful engagement. It focuses on sharing, insights and a commitment to action that can inspire our work beyond being one person—we are part of a community. El Centro would start most of our training and work with organizations with *conocimiento*—KEY to interorganizational relationship building. Both Larry and I had background in this process, and had our unique ways of implementing it, but shared common goals—Rosie Cabrera.

some training to happen. It allowed us to assess the social capital<sup>50</sup> of the students. If somebody was really good at one thing, then they became a person that could help us understand what needed to happen.

I had to really trust the students. I had to trust them even when they pissed me off and when I disagreed. I think this is where I'm not the easiest person. But I also will hear what *they* have to say. I think the students understood that, because they kept coming back. I mean, there were a few—you know, you always have some people that you have some regrets with. But there were not as many of those as the ones that kept coming back and kept pushing, kept pushing.

I think my style of mentoring [was]: we're responsible for identifying what this program is all about and the services that it can provide. We're responsible to not make each other go crazy, because it's got to be coherent, and there was some mutuality. I learned as much from the students, if not more, than I think they learned. I think what they got from me was this notion of a steadfast person, consistency. Even in my chaos, I know how to make shit happen.

The community's important, and my commitment to how to respect the community. And sometimes they are in ways that are not talking at them. It's in agreeing that our role is to create spaces for community. Those spaces may

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<sup>50</sup> I am defining social capital as the value placed on all "social networks" that students are involved in. It is who people know and the networks they engage. These networks have benefits that flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks. Social capital creates value for a program like El Centro, as it reaches out to a very diverse student community. They help with forming collective action and to broaden our identity and responsiveness to these identities. Within any intern cohort, the social capital is expansive—Rosie Cabrera.

change, but it's our job to hear what those needs are, try to make sense of it, get creative. Don't get dogmatic about it. Try to think creatively about it, and then do everything we can to give things enough time that the community knew what we were doing and could decide if they wanted to participate or not, or if it was beneficial to them or not.

When you allow students to be a part of something, they can see where their ideas actually translate into real activity, you give them props for it. You affirm it. And sooner or later everybody gets the props. It's like how do we be truthful, how do we help affirm; how do we be critical but without beating up each other, being critical for the sake of trying to improve.

My earliest students were the ones that carved the framework of what you see now. Rafa, he came in. He was one that was like, "What do you do?" I think Rafa was a sophomore when he came in. "What do you do?" He saw that I was working on flyers, and he said, "What are you trying to accomplish?" He was really questioning. At first I thought, what the hell, you know? (laughs) But he was trying to figure out how he could help. He had gone to other people. He had gone to the American Indian Resource Center, because he'd felt a commitment there. He'd gone to MEChA to volunteer to do publicity. Nobody really took him serious, and for me it was like, "Oh, my god, you *can* do all this? Well, let's see what you can do."

He said, "If we're wanting the community to be a part of it, we have to brand this. In the physical way it looks and the kinds of things that go out there, it has to be clear, oh, it's Centro. It's that mark of, if it has Centro on it, that you know

it's going to be good." That came from Rafa, that came from, okay, we need a logo. We had a logo, but it was a slug with a *sarape*. I'm like, "Oh, hell no." So then how do we get more sophisticated in our presentations of things?

So Rafael is a good example of how do you include more students. Again, we all come from our sensibilities. He was an art student and a business management [major]. So he came from, okay, there're a lot of art students out there that are students of color that never get their work seen. What if we started to do a process, like for Chávez [Convocation at UCSC] we asked for artwork, and it would be a real honor that someone does the art.

In the early days, that's what happened. We had everything from woodcuts to paintings to drawings. And then Rafa would do the poster, and the poster was branded. He's probably going to do the poster for the tenth anniversary. Because he told me, "I have to redeem myself from the first one, because it was Dolores [Huerta]. If you look at the posters, they all have Rafa's brand, whether he did the poster or not. Because it's the font, the look. Then we moved to more digital artists. Those posters served not only as our publicity, but they served as an exercise for the students working on them to add to their portfolio, the professional portfolios of work they can do. So if you go to Rafael's website<sup>51</sup> —I haven't seen it lately, but about a year ago, there're about three or four things he did with Centro that are on his professional website, along with a lot of other things, but they are a sample.

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<sup>51</sup> See: <http://www.rafaelfrausto.com/> under University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) for examples.

Then for the students that worked with us, it's like how do we market? So this was Rafa's other [contribution], how do we market, but with a location on the cultural sensibility? How do we get *raza* to look at it and pay attention to it? It had to have that cultural spin to it. So I don't know if it was him, but it was during that time that we came up with this term called *razafication*. So it was a way of, how do we use the marketing strategies that we know need to happen? But they can't be the same, because if they are, we're not going to yield. Otherwise *raza* would be participating left and right in everything. But they don't work.

So that came from him and his notion of how to make a program like Centro work. He helped anchor it and anchor what we've done to this day. You see it with *Chisme*. I have students working with me right now. They're the *Chismoleros*. I train them on the platform, and they're so excited. They are learning what it means to put a newsletter like *Chisme* together. I think people probably think it's easy, but it's lots and lots of hours.

So knowing that I'm leaving, it's like, oh, my god, the next director can't have this as a noose around their neck. So I've trained the students, but what I've told them they cannot do is change the way the newsletter looks, because that's *Chisme*, unless we agree to it. And when we agree to it, we do a big hoopla over it. It's like changing a logo, the imagery. Everybody knows you're making the shift, there's a reason for the shift, and that you move with that shift. Because our newsletter, the artwork at the top is from one of our alumni, Victor Cervantes, who was an Oakes student, a muralist. And the piece on there is the draft of the mural. I think the mural actually exists in Lindsay. It's on one of the high schools.

But to me that stuff matters, that engages them. With the *Chismoleros* now they're moving from the routine of how to do this. I've told them, "We've got to start to train your third eye. You've got to have this other way of looking at the community. It's okay to be a little selfish and to think about what are the things that are interesting to you. What do you see as gaps in the understanding of our students? How do we bridge?" Sometimes you can do that just by information. But other times, like before we started today we talked about the [presidential] inauguration and history that a lot of our students don't understand. So there's little sneak-ups. I'm teaching them about sneak-ups. What are sneak-ups? It's okay if people don't understand certain things, I'm very aware as a person employed by the university, I do not have the right to make people think a certain way. But we're in an educational institution, so you can challenge people. I prefer to do that by looking at what are other people writing? What are other people saying about this? I don't have to say it. I can just put "In the news" and put linkages. Now, maybe people won't read it. Sometimes I'm surprised at what they *do* read.

Or if I start to get a little bit too political—like one Cinco de Mayo I was feeling so strongly about immigration reform, I just was beside myself. I don't like Cinco because it always represents to me drinking and stuff, but I've been trying to reframe that, okay, what can we do with it? So I waited to the very end of *Chisme*. I was like what can I do? [pounds the table] I'd been reading about what exactly Zack de la Rocha [lead singer of Rage Against the Machine] was doing. I ended up coming across this little video of him with Los Tigres del Norte, singing, "Somos Más Americanos." So I stuck that in right at the very end. All I said was

something like, "In honor of Cinco de Mayo." You had to click it to open the video, and a lot of people did, actually. We were talking about it in the office, and I said, "I'll bet you people didn't even open it up." And then two people that said, "Oh, no, we opened it up, and we were like, 'What is she thinking?' I like to do those kind of surprises. That's why I say they're sneak-ups. Because sometimes it's about, how can we be a catalyst? We may not be there when the discussions happen. We may not be privy to how people talked about it, but it has its purpose.

So for me, it was all that [anti-immigrant] stuff that was happening in Arizona, what was not happening with immigration reform, the rhetoric that was out in the public space around undocumented people. It's enraging. But De la Rocha and Los Tigres del Norte said it all. It's this historical location of *raza* and how can we be denied.

I guess in some respects, like, with the *Chismoleros*, I'm trying to get them to trust, to pay attention to what people are saying, to think about what's important and what moves their hearts, and to find something that can speak to that, and that that's okay to share with the community. It's one of those little privileges. We're not really a newspaper, but we do have an opportunity to get information out. People can choose to read it or not, but we have a small fighting chance.

Over time, *Chisme*, we've become a household name. I don't trip on who gets it. There're about five thousand people that get it. Some of them are staff and faculty; some are students that ask to be placed on it, and then the rest are students that identified themselves as Latino. So again it's about, who are we,

and getting that out and teaching. It's a skill. I hope people really want to do this work. It's hard work. You have to be thoughtful and try your best not to cause wedges, and you have to pay attention. The people that work with you, you also have to get them trusting their experience enough that they can hear other people and can try to make sense of it.

I have had some challenges in responding to the needs of some communities. I am very aware of the mixed heritage students. I am aware that sometimes they are not participating in El Centro, but are in other resource centers activities. I am also very aware of the intersection of our histories that cross over various resource centers. Students do come and express concern, or wishes for activities, and I have worked concertedly on my efforts to incorporate these needs and issues. But it is an area I feel less accomplished in. I have some regret, but mostly feel overwhelmed with the variety of activity that the center must engage.

This is also the case in our with queer students, understanding from hearing for years from students that the community was not okay with queerness, and hearing horrific stories of everything from being [harassed] at a bus stop, to being in programs, and when people shared, being told, "Stay on that side." I mean, just horrific things, right. So then what's our job at Centro? Again, we're an educational institution. I don't feel like Centro has to do it all, but who are the partners out there? Some of those partners were the Women of Color Research Cluster and the work that you all were doing a while back with the film festivals and different events. Those were organically coming from the community. So why would I not do what we could to support? Because the benefits to the



community were strong voices and experiences of the students being able to go and come back feeling whole.

The last two years I've done this one *conocimiento* issues around sexuality haven't been discussed, even with queer students in the group. It's an exercise where you put up *placas*, and people choose, they have to make choices about what issue they most relate to, and there're some guided questions with it. The sexuality one, maybe one person [participated]. I'm like, "What's going on?" I could look at that as, is the space so safe you don't even have to think about it? Wrong. Is it that it's not safe when the space is new to come out and be open because you still don't know how the rest of the group is going to feel? So when I see gaps like that, I try to speak it and let the students know, I find this interesting, I don't understand why this wasn't a visitation, and I let them know I'm going to challenge.

It's a challenge to us, because if we can't go there in our space, how are we going to go there in our programming? And how are you going to feel about going into those spaces, and my expectation is that you are. So then, the more you include and fortify the students who are queer—because they don't have a problem coming and telling me, "I think we need to have this. I think we should invite—" but is it more in the public space. Then also really challenging the other students, because sometimes in that group there are queer students but they haven't even realized it and named their sexuality. That happened this last quarter. A student interned with me, and never said anything about their sexuality, but it was because of the programming that they felt they could articulate it in writing in

their final paper. As a result of the events, she was able to grapple with her sexuality, to say, "I can talk about this."

**Zepeda:** That's huge.

**Cabrera:** That's huge. It's huge. So I think it could be around queerness; it could be other issues, right? But some of them are loaded because I think they all affect how we construct who we are.

It's one of the tensions with the Cantú Queer Center. When I say tension, I don't mean [makes stressed out sound]. I mean, it's if you have a center that isn't always thinking about the multiple dimensions of identity, but yet they're constantly talking about the intersections of identity. But race or ethnicity isn't quite that. Then you have it in its opposite form, right? So it's safe to be queer, but is it safe to be Chicano and queer? Is it safe to be Latina and queer?

I think that that's one of the challenges for all of us that are at the resource centers, is that the identity politics in the U.S. is not old-school. It's these transformations by virtue of location, regional, of mixed heritage, of our acknowledging sexuality and even religiously. You begin to understand how little things that don't seem big become big. One of those is I love the Virgen de Guadalupe, but I'm not religious around the *virgin*. I see the *virgin* as the embodiment of indigena, the reminder of who we are as indigenous people. So I

have lots of *cosas* in my office with her image, and even when we do *tiendita* we're using imagery.<sup>52</sup>

I had a student that was Mormon, and she came in one evening and we were there by ourselves, and she said, "You know, you never asked me this, but I don't know that you know this, but do you have to be Catholic in order to be part of Centro?" It was something I didn't even think about, but now we have to. I'm not apologetic about it, and it's like, "Oh, my god, put all my *virgin* things away." No. That's also me, right? But understanding the way any of us articulates impacts others. So being clear about why and how we manifest that in the way we look, our clothing, our things.

With Centro it's that next generation of the activists. That's powerful. What I try to do is acknowledge we're at a UC campus; this is where the best and the brightest come. This is where the best and the brightest engage with powerful, powerful scholars. How do they make sense of this, and how do we support them in coming out at the end whole, coming out at the end with something. And affirming, constantly affirming—you're not responsible for the community, but probably for 95 percent of those students that I engage with—and I engage with a lot of people—their community and their families are everything to them. So then how do you affirm what you're learning here has a relationship to that? It's our job; it's our collective job to affirm that. So you're not walking out of here feeling like you don't know what you're doing or how it's going to impact.

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<sup>52</sup> Tiendita is a fundraising effort of El Centro and our interns. They make items that have a cultural connection or have cultural imagery—Rosie Cabrera.

How I'm defining that activist role is what we've talked about. It's about being civic-minded. It's about understanding we have a role to voice what is important to us. We have a responsibility to use this education to benefit others and to understand we're part of the privileged.

You don't have to go to a UC to be educated, but for those that do, there's just a special place. I feel like Santa Cruz is even more so, and it's the thing that drives me nuts about this place. I don't think we should be apologetic that one of the underlying values of most of the faculty here is social responsibility. We don't play it up like we should. It's where the creativity and the new thinking, the new problem-solving comes from. And it's from the relationships that students form with one another, their sense of being part of community, being part of a community that's not afraid to agree or disagree and can work through it. They know something's still going to be there that they can count on, and that they can have every right to ask for what they want. It doesn't mean we can always do it, but that's part of dreaming. I haven't given up that one. I haven't given up. It is okay for us to dream in the scheme of horror. Otherwise you get very jaded. You get very jaded and it extinguishes hope.

**Zepeda:** Yes. Thank you for that. That was amazing. I wonder, was the César Chávez Convocation part of that dreaming for you?

**Cabrera:** Yes. So you have to understand how this came about. José used to be one of my students, José Olivas, who's the College Ten programs coordinator. He was a GIP assistant when I was at EOP. He was in the Faculty Mentor Program and the Summer Opportunities for Academic Research. He was one of my

students at the time when César died, and so he was one of those that was like, "We have to do something." He went on a single-person campaign to try to get College Eight to change their name. He was a College Eight student, so it was to get College Eight to change their name to the César Chávez College.

He met with brick walls. Chicano faculty thought this was a good idea, but that was all. They thought he was crazy, which is ironic when you think about it. It seems like it should be simple but logical, right? Especially if you think about the history of Oakes, and Oakes, the push was to make it Malcolm X College. So it was part and parcel of that activism that people had then.

Well, the idea went nowhere because it became evident you had to have millions of dollars, to invest lots of money in a location before anything was named after you. He went to Larry. When I made the transition, I'll never forget, Larry told me, he says, "You know, José's going to come to you with this idea. I don't know what he thinks that we could do, but just know that he's going to come and talk to you." And so he did. I think I had been at Centro maybe for about a month, and José came over. And because we knew each other, it was good. He told me, "I have this idea," and he shared with me the idea. Part of it was because of the MLK [Martin Luther King] Convocation, he said, "I don't understand why there isn't something that affirms Chicanos." So we talked about it, and he said, "I have this idea. Why don't we start a convocation?" I think he was shocked because I said, "I'm down, if we don't have expectations that it's going to be like MLK." I knew the politics with the Martin Luther King Memorial Lecture, and part of that had to do with the relationship of the resource center with sort of the big house here, right, with the chancellor's office. The resource center had their

notions, the chancellor's office had theirs; the community was at odds, they could never agree, and then they would pick people and spend all this money. Most of them were great speakers, but the choices didn't always come organically from the community.

So when José raised it, it's like what do I have to lose in supporting this idea of the Chávez Convocation? So we agreed to do it. Dolores [Huerta] was the logical person to be the keynote speaker, and that's how we started it. It was packed, and it was one of those magical moments of starting something new. It was the same day as Take Back the Night. We could hear the group coming, and Dolores said, "What's that? What's that?" People told her, and she went out there, and she addressed Take Back the Night. It was one of those magical moments. So that became the start of a relationship with College Nine/Ten on the convocation.

Then we kept trying to tweak. Okay, what are we trying to accomplish? We've veered away a little bit from the original goals, which were trying to bring speakers that were Chicano or Latino, because the gap was, do our own people know the leaders within our own community? So we went through the first three years with people that were—and then we had to work through how you give honor to César. We were looking at César as UFW (United Farm Workers), but he also represented so much more beyond just UFW and being a social justice leader. So how could we stay true to that?

Originally wanted to keep the union as part of this. The first three: Dolores; Luis Valdez was our second, and then the president of UFW, Arturo Rodriguez, was the third speaker. Then we decided it was okay to branch out, and what were the

voices we were hearing in the community? What was happening? We had to be very deliberate, like taking a risk. Were we going to get critiqued by the UFW? How can we do this and have it be consistent with the labor issues?

Ever since then we've just decided, what do we have to lose? Now, where my concern is with retiring, José and I have talked about—I worry. We work well together because I know him. I respect him. I don't know who's going to be in my job and how that's going to be. So we've talked about is it time to collaborate with campus administration, like [they do for] the Martin Luther King event? Part of it is the cost. It always costs about ten-grand to do. He's the magic with facilities and all of the things that it takes to make a really good event on the day of, and he's really, really good at that marketing strategy. I'm really good with the fundraising, and getting the money to make it work, and getting the student power, and getting the hype kicked up around it, and engaging the campus. Our goal was to get the convocation to be in the public space, like MLK. It's a tradition. It's going to happen every year, and it will always happen in May.

So we decided to go and talk to university administration. I thought, you know, we're at the point of becoming a Hispanic-serving institution, or the rhetoric is there. How can they say no? The goal was—can you make a commitment of a baseline dollar amount that we can always be guaranteed? That baseline was \$5,000, knowing we were still going to have to come up with more. We knew we wanted Dolores Huerta for this one. So to get Dolores, it's the highest-paid person, but you know what? It's less than any of the big speakers, way, half, if not less than half, of what a Cornell West would get or big speakers like that.

I was disappointed because (sighs) I felt like have we not proven that we can make this happen and that it's something that people look forward to? I know they know that. But still, still there was no line-item budget agreement.—It's the question around diversity, and what are you really going to do to make this university transform? Five-grand is a drop in the bucket. It's nothing. We're just asking, meet us part way so we cannot feel the pressure so much in sustaining this event. So we've just decided we're going for it. We're saying yes to Dolores [Huerta]. We will come up with the money. We will figure it out.

You have to build programs. You have to build things. When you look at the MLK Convocation, that's twenty-six or twenty-seven years. Chávez is ten. It's not an issue of you give  $x$  to African Americans and  $x$  to Latinos. It's an issue of, what are you doing with your diversity programming, period. Because right behind us, or right next to us, is the American Indian community, is the Asian Pacific Islander community. The Sikh community now is organizing. Everybody wants to be seen. So it is a question of, how are you going to use your resources to affirm the people that are coming to school in this place?

So I feel like that's where we're at. I'm very proud of Centro. I can't take credit for it. The credit is with the students, and I think the graduate students are included in that. Probably we've done less with graduate students, how you account for all the multiple dimensions. Yet people trust us. I've got a graduate student—in fact, I need to get back to him, because nobody decodes things or nobody explains when you don't get a fellowship or you don't get  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ , and you have graduate students who are trying to make it through. So then who holds the university accountable?



So it is about making that push. If you're saying you're going to be a Hispanic-serving institution, what does it really mean, and do you comprehend it? We know what it means. But do you comprehend it and what are you willing to put in it? Otherwise, shut up.

**Zepeda:** Right, because is it just in name? Is it just to serve, to get funding from the federal government? Or is it to support Chicano/Latino culture, for the continued existence of language, of identity, of politics? What you're saying makes so much sense to me, that for students that come here their direct connection is community and family. That is the heart. If you feel like what you're doing is not connected to that, then it doesn't really matter. It doesn't really matter to wake up in the morning and to go to class and to make it happen. I think that's where El Centro comes in. This is where you can find that community connection.

**Cabrera:** And it's the synergy of the other locations with Centro. We all have this relationship to it. LALS is part of that. Spanish for Spanish Speakers is part of that. There're all these multiple locations. The Women of Color Research Cluster is part of that, even though I feel more removed from it. Oh, my god, that is one of the most powerful locations for graduate students of color, women of color. And it's a constant fight. I know you worked a lot on all of those efforts with the grad division to make things happen, for the writing support to be there. We shouldn't have to struggle so much to get this stuff. It really should be—how are you thinking about us?

I feel like it's not just us coming here to the university; it's our population, period. What are the competencies that people are going to be expected to have: language competency, writing, critical thinking, problem-solving. But those cultural competencies are big. And that's just not Latino; that's with all the populations that have not gotten. We're no longer the minority. We're there! It's really mindboggling. So the university is not quite there.

**Zepeda:** Yes. It can't see that, what you're saying. Because I think that almost becomes a threat if it was to acknowledge that who used to be the minority is now majority in population. And in envisioning, then it becomes, well, how will the institution itself have to shift in order to reflect who is here and who the students are and also who the professors are, and, like you're saying—

**Cabrera:** The multiple dimensions.

**Zepeda:** Yes, and the social responsibility that is really put forward and how that gets hidden. But the truth is that does feel like why so many people are drawn to this space, to do this important work.

**Cabrera:** Right. So I don't know. So, anyway, that's how Chávez—and it's endemic of the whole process and our relationship—I'm optimistic. I feel like with me making the choice to leave, I leave knowing the students know what they want. They really do. The faculty know the support they need. CLRC has lost their funding. It's not where it was before, and yet the demand is still there. So we are going to negotiate these spaces through our constant collaboration with each other, how we share the resources we have. How are we going to collectively really have the expectation? It can't be business as usual.

It's going to happen organically, because people are not satisfied. But we're at a scary moment, and that scary moment is people are afraid of losing their jobs. But sometimes you can scare people so much that it doesn't matter anymore. "You can't scare me anymore. I have nothing else to lose." I feel like that's where we're at. We have nothing else to lose.

So I'm hopeful, and there're so many talented people out there. How do we re-look at El Centro? How do we look at how the university can become even more responsive? Because I'll tell you, I've been feeling it the last couple of years. And this year, oh, my god, this year— Last year I was feeling it, but this year every single day there's at least five or six new students that come in and they're just looking. They always come in, but not a steady stream like we have right now. The successes that we have, people feel good, so people are hearing about us. I think they're reading *Chisme* more. Even if they don't read through it all, they just know, oh, something's over there. And once they connect, once the students connect in the office, oh, my god, they start coming in. They're volunteering. We've got thirty-one interns right now.

**Zepeda:** Wow.

**Cabrera:** Yes. Wow is right. It's fatiguing. But that's not an accident. I think it's that they're all looking for a place to be that's affirming and where their voices matter. And they're not all the same; they're all different. The common denominator is we've got a lot more people from Southern Cal that come through. I think it's not an accident. I think it's because they are so far away from their families that their need for that sense of *familia* is even stronger than

someone who's closer that can go home more often. That's kind of stereotypical, but we're at that place [where we need to not] accept just the status quo from the campuses.

Then how do we negotiate that? How do we negotiate that without it seeming like it's just a Latino thing? Because there are other people of color, and it can't be, oh, we get because we're bigger. How can we negotiate the spaces with brothers and sisters, colleagues, that are equally invested in their communities and have other issues that they're contending [with]? How do we respect those things and that everybody gets as a process of this? Because the reality is we exist in the real world collectively. And a lot of students of color, you're either in somewhat monolithic communities, or you're in communities of color where there's lots of synergy amongst groups.

**Zepeda:** Here we are with Rosie Cabrera, continuing. So I want to ask you, as you're in this transition and getting ready to exit out of El Centro, what advice do you have for people coming into the ethnic resource centers? From your experience, what suggestions would you make to people to work with one another, especially with the challenges of the resources that are available and how things get divided and thought about?

**Cabrera:** When I first got hired, I felt this sense of needing *permiso* to talk to colleagues. And in some respects when you enter a new space, that's the place to start, to find out who the colleagues are and what the space is. In some respects, I feel like we're still trying to figure that out. What is the space? And it's a very powerful space collectively.

So [for] the next person coming in, there's going to be no issue with students coming in. The first day on, they're going to be on the doorstep wanting to meet the person. The challenge is the coexistence with colleagues and understanding, how do we vision the space, be strong in our locations, but work through our notions of being good colleagues to one another because we're very vulnerable. You never would have heard me say, before coming over, that a multicultural center is not the way to go. I mean, if that's all you have, then, of course. I think running centers like that require certain types of people that are strong in their identity but are also strong in other people's identities and willing to move there and learn and go there. If you're not, it gets complicated.<sup>53</sup>

I think for the centers, because of the reorganization, it can be a really taxing place. So I'm really hoping and would recommend to the person coming in—it's what I'm going to say them—is don't look at the work and think you have to do it my way or think you have to replicate everything. There're some things that shouldn't be. And, in fact, if a person's going to stay sane, they shouldn't do it some of the ways that I have done it.

Establishing some real strong collegial relationships with people is going to be important. The next person's going to know that. The students are going to

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<sup>53</sup> For many years the campus resource centers have been experiencing a reorganization. This was initiated by campus life and has been a result of the budget issues and cuts that the campus has experienced and continues to grapple with. Unfortunately, this has meant that in order to deal with the budget demand on increased costs for infrastructures, benefits and retirement costs for staff, there has been no back fill of funds to cover these increases. It has meant that the resource centers have lost their individual program coordinators who were essential to programming and assisting with the supervision of interns, and these funds were pooled to consolidate two new positions that were provide support to all six centers. A managing director position was created and student positions for each of the centers were covered. This reorganization continues—Rosie Cabrera.

expect that. They're going to have an expectation of a certain kind of leadership. The person coming in is probably going to be at least exposed initially just from applying for the job with understanding there's a politic and there's choices of how to engage that politic.

I think for Centro to remain strong, there's this negotiation. It's that teeter-tottering of, do our programming really well, and there shouldn't be any problem. I think there's going to be a lot of investment from the community to support this person in being successful. But understand, not all communities have that support.

The community is going to embrace this person. That's where we are. But they've got to be conscious of, at this moment, how do we not be apologetic for who we are and where we are and how we exist, and at the same time, be sensitive to the fact that the numbers aren't the same in other populations or that the dynamics are different in other locations. And how to work together. It can be a challenge when you know your community needs certain things and you're trying to make your way. So in a physical way, it's being ambidextrous. You can move in and out, but in a psychological way you have to do that at the center. Yes, you have to do that.

If the person pays attention, the students will tell you everything you want to know. They will tell you everything. Graduate students will tell you everything you want to know. Faculty will, because there isn't a location right now for the faculty. The younger faculty are not being mentored. It depends what academic

department you're in how you get mentored, but as a collective group, they're seeking it out too.

So I think the person, I would recommend they take a year, a year to just breathe in. What I'm trying to do is get students who are really good at understanding what we do to return in the fall because I want that person to get the support for the New Student Welcome. The two big events that are huge—New Student Welcome, this year we stopped counting at 800—I think there were over 1,000 people there. It was friggin' crazy. And Chicano/Latino Grad—over 2,000, 2,500 people there. Those are the two big ones. I'm hoping the person will be on board, whether they've started or not, they've been selected, and they could come to Chicano/Latino grad to be able to—it's hard to explain some of these things. You have to feel it and know it.

I feel like we've got a formula that works. So as long as we leave everything intact, I think the person will feel comfortable. As long as there's enough support for them. I think the hardest thing right now is what I went through last year. I felt like, "Oh, my god, we're at the point now where I'm the only one at the big events." Then last year we had an accident at the New Student Welcome. Over time accidents are inevitable, but this one really jarred me. So I had to work through my fear of the size of the groups. I know what I'm doing. We know what we're doing. We have to problem-solve this better, and trust the students. I was coming out of Sophia Garcia-Robles' death, and it felt like I was a little disoriented in having to come back out of that and being clear and being on it. This person has to really know how to work with students.

**Zepeda:** That's the key.

**Cabrera:** They have to know how to work with students. One of the things I've never really been able to do is I feel like it would be incredible if this person could teach a Chicano/Latino identity class, or something where it's just the basics. I think LALS is starting to do some of that. Not necessarily a five-unit class, but a place where you could talk about community-building, work on that, introduce them to lots of things, but that it becomes a location of helping to ignite leadership and that students don't feel like Centro is the only place that they have. Centro is one of the places they can intern, but there's other places. Because the challenge is how do you deal with the volume of students. I'm exhausted, so I know someone new is going to be like, "How the hell did this get done?" So my recommendation is, "Don't go there. Figure out how you can make it work for you, because the more coherent you are, the more you're going to be able to do good programming."

The thing I fear is that there's a mystique, I think, around what I've been able to do, and it's really not that mystical. It's just a lot of hours, and it can't be an expectation that the next person does that, because it's got to be sustainable. So I'm making an assumption it's probably going to be someone younger. I'm hoping it is someone younger, not rookie. But I had years of growth, so I'm hoping that it's someone that understands Santa Cruz is a gem, and whether they're from Santa Cruz or not, or alumna or whatever, that they understand the unique characteristics and the potential.



The things that I hope stay are the New Student Welcome and *Día de los Muertos*, because that has evolved to a very cemented location of, again, annual traditions, right, and *Pachanga*, and the Chávez Convocation, and Chicano/Latino graduation. Besides that, you just have to pay attention to the students, because they will bring whatever needs to happen. But you have to be open.

### **More on Undocumented Students**

**Zepeda:** I forgot that I didn't get to ask you about the AB-540 organizing.

**Cabrera:** Yes, it's a biggie. So let's backtrack, to conceptualize this issue. As long as I can remember we have had undocumented students. They have been called different names. AB 540 did not exist until 2011. So we have had students who, as a result of the immigration laws and their own histories of how they have arrived to the U.S., either had started the process of becoming a resident or did not have "papers." The legal battle around diversity, bilingual education in California and within the national front has been difficult, and that is a whole history lesson, including Propositions 187, 227, and 209. Mingle this with the ramifications of immigration issues and an increasing population that was undocumented, the University of California and universities across the nation became a mess in dealing with the financial needs of our undocumented students.

Santa Cruz did well with the students that we now call undocumented students. The money had been there, because the state of California didn't prohibit the funds from being used and UC didn't prohibit the solicitation of scholarship monies for this constituency group. When I first arrived on campus, I was made

aware of a student, Maria Gutierrez, who was from the Central Valley. She lived at the Cowell Provost house, kind of informally adopted by Provost John Lynch's family. Her housing was covered this way, and she received several scholarships and what state funds that could be allocated to her at the time. She graduated from UCSC and continued her education at Stanford University. She represented for the university what could happen with a student who received solid support. I always felt that she was used as the poster child for UCSC, as it fundraised with donors. There were others, but they did not get the support that Maria did. Maria had a short film made of her experience, *Mi Vida: The Three Worlds of Maria Gutierrez* (Capitola, CA: Gold Mountain Productions).

But when the laws shifted and the doors started closing, when California said you could no longer use California funds, then it was strictly through independent contributions to scholarships. Maybe we had, I'd say, between eighteen to twenty [undocumented students], not too many more than that. So Esperanza Nee, who was the director of Financial Aid (at the time), did all the fundraising for that group to cover their total cost of tuition.

**Zepeda:** Oh, my.

**Cabrera:** So we didn't hear like how you hear now, about the difficulties. Those students, yes, they had difficulties, but not to the same degree that undocumented students up until this quarter have had. Then the door closed. Then the Regents said, "Nothing. No monies can be given to students that are undocumented." It was the political climate. So you couldn't fundraise.

Working with EOP, I had had students in Bridge. So when the shift occurred, a lot of the students that came to Bridge were students that were in the pipeline. Very rarely did I have a student that wasn't even started in the pipeline (meaning that they were in the process of applying for residency), that was coming here. So I was used to the engagement of: you have choices; EOP didn't have the resources to cover them, but to let them know, "You either get the scholarship money, or stop out, or go to a community college and come back. We'll continue to support you."

I had always had the conversations with the students. It wasn't until coming over to Centro that [I realized] other people weren't having the conversations. Adrian Flores worked with me one summer and I always included him when people would come through the door. Summer was always a little bit more relaxed. I always included him on the conversations with students with the hope of that peer feedback. One student came in with a teacher, and it was the first time Adrian heard about undocumented students. He had no clue. So we had a long talk, because it was a difficult conversation, with a teacher who thought, "Of course you're going to fund this student." Well, we didn't have the funds. There weren't other locations. UC couldn't give funds.

Adrian was appalled. We were in the process of organizing the New Student Welcome, and so Adrian is negotiating in his mind, "How can I not know this political reality? How can I be Chicano and not know this? How come we're not talking about it?" I was trying to let him know, "You're just hearing about it. It's not new. I don't feel great about this, but this is the reality."

When we started organizing for the New Student Welcome, I had invited the students to come over for a barbecue at my place, because we were trying to bridge relationships with student organizations, and he brought it up. He asked the students, “Do you know? Do you know this issue? Do you all understand what this is about?” None of them did, none of the students. There were about twenty-two, twenty-four students that were at the house. None of them knew the issues, and then I had to explain.<sup>54</sup>

Then Adrian worked with Summer Bridge and he met Texcalli. Then it became tangible, because then Adrian understood what it was. Texcalli needed to find a place to live and was trying to figure out how to make this happen. He invited Texcalli to stay with him, and then it was tangible. “I have a real person and I have a relationship to this person, so I can’t just turn my back.”

So after that meeting at my house and Texcalli started coming up, Texcalli joined the group on planning the New Student Welcome. At that point, Alex Delgadillo, was working at the Cook House. His *compadre* in L.A. had a student. His—what do you call it? His *ahijada* was coming to school here, and she was undocumented. So then all of a sudden, the collision of the New Student Welcome and the issues of undocumented students were commingled, and there was no turning back after that because Metztonalli was an activist and sought out others to organize. She and Texcalli met each other and that was a synergy

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<sup>54</sup> Undocumented students were often in the shadows. It was not uncommon for Chicano/Latino students to be unaware of the existence of undocumented students at UCSC. As Students Informing Now (S.I.N.) emerged, the issue came into the public space. [S.I.N. stood for] Students Informing Now (SIN) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...SIN Verguenza! The students themselves came out, and would not be shamed by the notion that was prevalent then of being “illegal.”—Rosie Cabrera

around the issues. Metztonalli understood AB-540. At that time I knew of it, but I wasn't working enough with the issue to totally understand it.

Then it was all over. All of a sudden I started meeting other students. And then one of my students who had been in FMP came and saw me. He was in the process of getting his green card. He turned twenty-one. You know, all the laws are different. The law he was under, once you turn twenty-one, you go back to square one. So here's a student who was a strong academic, saw all this in his future, and then sat with me and said, "I don't know how to deal with this. I'm undocumented now. I don't know how what to do."

So there was a kind of synergy. It just happened. Again, I was paying attention but not in the way that Adrian was, like, "Oh, my god, what do you mean? I need to know about this." Adrian had a lot to do with making the space to talk and to have this issue bubble high up. We worked collectively with Metztonalli and Texcalli and the other student, Arturo. At that point the vice chancellor of student affairs didn't even want us to say the words out loud. We couldn't put anything in an email. It was like this—aura of, if anybody finds out that you're even talking to someone, you can end up in jail. I mean, it was really bad.

So when we started organizing, the students wanted to have a forum, an educational forum. So I was like, oh, my god. I was censoring their flyer. "Oh, my god, we've got to be careful." Without even realizing, I was censoring. So I worked with the students and then invited our alumni. One was undocumented while she was here. She got her green card, or permission to get it the last day of her last quarter on campus. It was one of those magical moments, the last hour

she came in with her paperwork. Liz [Martin-Garcia] and Sophia greeted her and in two minutes they were able to give her \$12,000. They were able to fund her from the beginning of the year. So that student, who was in law school, we invited her to come. Another former student, Paz Olivarez, who was a graduate student—her research was on AB-540 students, and then the students participated. That was the first time that all of a sudden people started to self-disclose, who didn't have the words for it.

It's when Nora—I don't know if you know who Nora is. She's another one of those early SINistas. She was at the forum, and she came up to Metztonalli and said, "You know, I think I'm one of those students." Metztonalli's like, "What are you talking about?" "I think I'm one of those students, you know." Then they met some other people that night, and there was an Asian student who left. I had left because we needed something. On my way back, she was leaving the forum and she was real disturbed. I'll never forget. I asked her, "Are you okay?" I knew her. And she said, "No, I'm not okay. That's my story."

So all of a sudden things started emerging. SIN started, and the students started meeting. They met, and the relationship was always there with Centro. And Alex Delgadillo, who worked in the Cook House, he and I did a lot of co-partnering on trying to support the students that we knew and bringing the issue to Student Affairs. The students did a lot of work, so there was a relationship with El Centro. But there was just no way I could fill the need. I didn't have the budget for it. That's how *Tiendita* started. It was an AB-540 fundraiser. That was just organic.

When Alex left, I had a little bit of a breakdown, because then I was the only one dealing with the students, and the population was increasing. You can't talk to undocumented students and not—I mean, you're holding their stories. You're holding all of the things that have happened to them. When Alex left, I didn't have anybody to talk to. And it was by accident one time Alma [Sifuentes] came in, and I just broke down. I had seen a student, and it just was too much. I just was like, "Ay, I don't know what to do, and the reality is I don't know what this campus expects any of us to do." So that's how Alma got very intimately involved. I think she realized, "Okay, this is too much." Then she started working on it and started to push. So now we're at the point where students get lots of support from EOP.

**Zepeda:** Oh, good.

**Cabrera:** And it's a double-edged sword, because there's the SINistas who have a consciousness, right, and then there's the students who come in that haven't had to struggle to get the support, that don't see a connection to being an activist. So now with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), what's going to happen with the next generations of undocumented that used to feel that passion? Are they going to feel the same? Are they going to even have a consciousness of it? Because most of these students don't even realize they're undocumented until they apply to college. They have no idea. The families don't even talk about it.

There have been some tensions and part of the tension has been before the advent of the California Dream Act, a lot of the SINistas<sup>55</sup> were very politically active. They were very involved with lots of different things. So when EOP started to provide the support, I don't know that they intended this, but implied in it was you'll get support as long as you're not an activist. So the SINistas always kind of felt this tension of being kicked to the curb after Metztonalli had left. So now a lot of the students don't have a relationship with El Centro. They have a relationship with EOP. I'm not always clear. I don't know how much of their total self is being dealt with.

I'll give you an example. There's an older student who's a new student. He actually deferred coming in the fall because he didn't have enough money. He's started now. He came through. I met him during training of the interns. He's in his forties. He doesn't qualify for DACA, so he's not qualified for the California Dream Act and being able to get monies. So he's where the students have always been. He struggles and works and tries to get the money. And because of the private funding now of—remember Esperanza, who was the director? Well, now she's retired, but she's part of the Dreamers Group that was named in honor of Sophia Garcia-Robles, kind of using the metaphor of Dreamer from the Dream Act, but also like a dream catcher because of Sophia Garcia-Robles being Navajo and Chicana, and Sophia's sensibilities of the world.

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<sup>55</sup> Students Informing Now—S.I.N. Verguenza (Without Shame) emerged in the winter of 2006. Many were students who met the night of the forum that was held in the fall of 2005. Their history is well documented in an article co-authored by students with professor Kysa Nygren titled: Students Informing Now (SIN) Challenge the Racial State in California without Shame...SIN Verguenza! <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ821605> and Constructing a Counternarrative: Students Informing Now (SIN) Reframes Immigration and Education in the United States <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ826842>



**Zepeda:** That's beautiful.

**Cabrera:** Yes. So a student like the one that's this older transfer student is getting financial support from the scholarship monies. Because last year, finally, UC agreed to rescind their—I don't know what you call it, not a law, but their decision. Because of the California Dream Act, now fundraising can happen.

So when you talk about AB-540, there was this synergy and then there's some weird stuff. So the synergy is between the Chávez Convocation and the Dream Weavers, where last year when we brought our keynote (Jose Antonio Vargas), because he's a Dreamer himself—there was a hosting of a fundraiser. That fundraiser yielded donations. This made the relationship to fundraising an important intersection.

So now there's a relationship between the Dream Weavers and the Chávez Convocation. We just met because they're like, okay, we're going to keep doing this, right? The speakers that we bring make it possible to host a fundraiser prior to the larger event. It's an opportunity to invite people and ask them to contribute funds. And through our programming, because we've had a few of the keynote speakers address the issue. So, again, because it was salient for us, it's what the students were grappling with, we could pick a speaker to address the issue.

So back to the issue of who is being served now. Sometimes I'm not always sure. I trust EOP. Let me say that. But if you don't pay close attention, you don't always hear it. So this older student just happened to come through. He wanted to meet me because we didn't get a chance to talk the other time. He said, "I saw

your light on, so, okay, I'm here." So we had this long conversation. And then he had to go to class, so he said, "Is it okay if I microwave some soup that I could take with me?" I told him fine. So when I went to the kitchen, he started to talk about that he didn't have that much food. I said, "What do you mean, you don't have that much food?" The students [can] go to the on-campus Food Bank that's over at family student housing, and they're eligible to get their food commodity there. It isn't a lot, a dozen eggs and some protein. A lot of it's canned goods and rice and beans. He said, "Well, I missed mine. I couldn't go because I have class." So I said, "No, no, no, no. You never miss this. You can get somebody else to pick up the food."

So in the process, I learned that he didn't have food. So then I just went home sick, because I'm like, "Okay, that's it. Let me get—" So I went through my stuff, and I prepped some stuff for him. I was going to give him some cash to just get the vegetables and the protein. But I had a chance to talk to one of the counselors that's responsible for the group, and I told him, "There's this problem. The student doesn't have food." He laughed at me. He said, "That's not true." I said, "You know, he told me he didn't have food. I can't imagine that he would be making that up." I don't know too many people that would say that to somebody. I said, "I would really appreciate it if you could follow up with him, because he doesn't know that somebody else could get his food for him." The students' issue was reduced to a money management issue.

Then I realized, "Well, maybe I misinterpreted. Maybe I'm mis-assessing," right? The student called me to thank me for the food and I said, "You know, I guess I'm confused. I don't want you thinking that *pobrecito* you don't have anything

and I'm bringing you these things if you actually have food." He said, "I don't have food. I don't have food. You don't understand how important what you dropped off for me was."

So here's where sometimes you can solve a problem or you think you've solved a problem, but have we? And who falls through the cracks? So the bottom line is, even with the California Dream Act, there are people that are not going to qualify for the California Dream Act. There are people, with the way immigration reform, the Dream Act even at the national level, there are people that aren't going to qualify. I think we're always going to have some people. The [Federal] Dream Act will just like, oh, my god, it will make miracles happen. It's what happened with the California Dream Act. This is the first quarter that the students were eligible for California financial aid. So even though it's not solved, it is a hell of a lot better. They still have financial gaps, but nowhere near what they had before.

So the Dream Weavers are still going to work on fundraising. Let's pray that in the span of things that the Dream Act passes. I think there will always be, to be quite honest—I don't know what kind of immigration reform is going to have to happen that we don't have the issue.

I think sometimes when we try to fix a problem, versus problem-solve it and engage the students in the process, is it's an adultist attitude. The adults fix it, and then you should be very thankful because they fixed it for you, right? But when you participate in the resolution, you have a relationship and a commitment. It's a little bit different. So that's where I feel like that it gets back to

the original question of the mentoring and what is our relationship to this generation of student in all its dimensions? With Centro, I don't have a budget that can account for thousands of dollars for students directly, but what is our obligation to educating our own community? Remember Adrian being surprised and shocked? Well, that still exists, so we have an obligation. Even though it's discussed in classes, we still have people that have really crazy notions about immigration and especially undocumented immigrants. These can even be raza students.

Then the other [issue] is, how do we work with the other [resource] centers where it's not just a Latino thing. Earlier today one of our students, told me that the Asian students are helping with the Undocu-Love event. So all of a sudden, these little miracles. So maybe the organizing isn't exactly the way I want it, and I push them. But sometimes the way they do it creates relationships that are longer lasting. So in some respects, I'm hoping this is going to enhance another event that happened, whether the Asian American/Pacific Islander Resource Center is involved or not. I think the students are starting to claim it now, the Asian American student community, and now it's like other communities, right, because there's no one color. You know?

**Zepeda:** Wow. Yes, exactly.

**Cabrera:** So anyway. But I suspect until there is comprehensive immigration reform, we're going to be in it. José and I were talking. I said one of the nice things about Dolores [Huerta] coming—because I was sharing with him some of the things that I heard in the news—I said, you know, at this point we're a civic

engagement, our involvement. Obama's starting to model: you can't have just one leader doing all this; we all have to participate. What is our responsibility to one another? We have this moment where, how do we help our students see they have to get involved? They don't have a choice. And to not take it for granted. So it feeds into, whether it's the issues around AB-540 students, around queer students, so many intersections. AB-540, there's so many challenges with it and yet the students themselves embody such hope that it's really pretty incredible. I can't imagine them not being conscious, but it can happen.

**Zepeda:** Yes.

**Zepeda:** It's March 14, 2013 and we're here with Rosie Cabrera. Hi, Rosie.

**Cabrera:** Hello, Susy.

**Zepeda:** And I'm Susy Zepeda with the Regional History Project. So this is our sixth interview in the oral history. I wanted to start by thinking about significant people who have been part of your path here at UC Santa Cruz in doing your work. I wanted to start, if it's okay with you, with thinking about Sophia Garcia-Robles, and ask you to share with me about her and her presence on campus and her support of you.

### **Sophia Garcia-Robles**

**Cabrera:** What's interesting is, Sophia and I applied for the same job. When I first got here I didn't realize it. She worked at Stevenson College. She was at the front desk but she had worked at San Jose State. Our paths didn't cross there, but she

had worked at San Jose State and had worked at a resource center there that had just started up. She left there to come here.

I remember the first time I met her. I had gone over to Stevenson College because Arturo Pacheco, the director of EOP, had taken me over—he was the director of EOP—we had gone over to meet some Stevenson folks. Sophia was at the front desk. (laughs) So it was the first time I met a Chicana with that twang that she had. She wasn't all-embracing the first time. It was sort of like, "Oh, I know who you are," and I didn't realize until afterwards when I talked to someone else and they said, "Well, that's probably because she applied for the same job you applied for."

I saw her again at a couple of social events because Katia Panas had invited me to some get-togethers and Sophia was there. It wasn't too long after that that she applied for a job at Financial Aid and got the job at Financial Aid. So because I was at EOP, we did a lot of work together. I was always over at Financial Aid trying to figure out what was happening with a student I was working with. And both her and Liz [Martin-Garcia] were really good at always being responsive and supportive—with, okay, let's look this person up. It is important to note that Sophia and Liz were central to providing Financial Aid advice and intervening on issues that were impacting students' finances and retention at the university. Financial Aid Advisors as a whole were not very responsive to the SAA/EOP needs, as I remember from 1984 through the mid-1990s. SAA/EOP academic counselors knew that Sophia and Liz possessed the cultural competencies to deal with our students respectfully and to were responsive to their needs in a timely fashion. They were essential to the retention of students of color. This changed

over time, but for many years they were our [main] advocates within the Financial Aid office.

I think I had been here about a year and a half. I remember going over and talking to Liz about a student and she said, "Oh, so you've been out. You've been sick." So she just asked me, "So what was up?" I said, "Well, interestingly enough, I'm pregnant." She said, "What! Are you kidding?" She immediately got up. Sophia's office was right next door and she went next door and told Sophia.

Both of them just kind of embraced me. We were close collegially but probably up until that time I don't know that I would say that we were friends. We knew each other but we didn't go out or anything like that. But once they knew I was pregnant, then I became their project. They had different ways of being with me. I had come to this in a nontraditional way. I mean, I was with Richard but we didn't have a commitment to get married. I felt such a relief of having people I could count on. "Well, you know, if it doesn't work out with him it will be okay because we can take care of you." (laughs)

They were the ones I could talk to. I just always remember *Comadre*, Sophia, always telling me, Sophia always telling me, "You know, if it doesn't work out with him, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. We're here." They made a commitment to me that they were going to be there. Sophia asked if she could help with *mija's* birthing. From then on, we became really good friends. Sophia and Liz are probably the two people that I would trust with anything. They were there when *mija* was born. So it's almost like *mija* was a community baby, in a lot of respects.

When I came home I ended up getting sick. I had a really bad infection and so I really couldn't take care of *mija*. What was funny is that they jumped at the opportunity—I mean, Sophia, you just would not believe—I always remember the look on her face when I told them, “You know, I need to ask a favor.” Ani was just one week old at the time. I was really sick. I said, “I need you to help me with Anastasia.” Sophia was like, “That's fine. Let's get her stuff.” She was ready to take her. I think that's why she has such a strong relationship to *mija* because the reality is that *mija* was with Sophia and Liz for about three days. They'd bring her but they'd take her home and they took care of her. They took care of her until I got better and I could handle holding her again and feeding her and just—

I think that never stopped with Sophia. You can see it when we look through pictures, Sophia was always there with Ani. I left my phone in the car or I would show you on my phone. There's a little picture of Ani. She must have been two years old or two and a half. Ani drank a bottle until she was five years old. So she's there like this and *Comadre* is on ground-level talking to her. And I'm almost certain, because she kept trying for years to get her to get rid of the bottle. It finally happened but it was Sophia that helped to coach her. She always was the second mom. When *mija* would give me problems, you know, she's a mixed [race] kid so her hair was real kinky when she was little and when I tried to brush it out she always was *escandalosa*, all upset. I would get frustrated. *Comadre* would just say, “Oh, stop it! Give her to me.” So she would take her home once a week. She would take her home, throw her in the bathtub, and that was their



quality time. She would take out *every* tangle that was in her hair. She would do tons of conditioner and *mija* would come back looking gorgeous. (laughs)

*Mija* would allow Sophia to do things she wouldn't allow me to do. So they had these rituals that were lifelong lasting. All the way through *mija's* growing years, Sophia was always there. I can't even tell you how many times—I was constantly late for picking up *mija*. I'd be rushing over. If we had an evening activity, I could call her and just ask her, "Can you take *mija* for about an hour until Richard comes home?" "Oh, I don't care if Richard comes or not. Just bring her over." They just had their *cosas*.

Sophia was like that with kids. She had that relationship with Ani, but it wasn't just Ani. She was like that with Tere Alaniz's son. She just unconditionally loved kids. I got reminded of this because a mutual friend of ours—well, we lived at Merrill together, right. Sophia was a preceptor; Diana Martinez and Rico Martinez were preceptors; and Richard and I. So Ani was young when we were there. Diana had her daughter when she was a preceptor up there. So she just took the kids. There are so many children that Sophia had important nurturing relationships with. She was Tia or Auntee to friends' children, colleagues' children. She made them all feel so very special. She was supportive of parents and what it meant to parent, and she had kid radar in a good way. She affirmed them and always knew what they needed and could support them. Ani was one of these children, but there were many. And she continued these relationships through the kids growing up and some as they emerged as adults. I think in some regards we had mutual [experiences as] Chicanas, in that she grew up in a really small community in Texas, Borger; me growing up in Dinuba. So we had

these affinities based on our growing up years and how our families were.—I think even as we started to deconstruct—what does it mean to be Chicana? What does it mean? How are we in the world here?

So she was one of the partners in starting *Día de los Muertos* over at Merrill College. I think we started that in 1990, or the late eighties. It was Sophia and Diana and Rico and Richard and I. And then Josie worked with us. Sophia and I, in particular, [said] “We want to do this because it interests us and beyond just interests us, it’s something we’d like to engage. But we don’t want to be disrespectful either.” I think both of us had had some experiences where we had gone to some events, separate from each other, and they had a more spiritual connotation. We did not want to be inauthentic, or to do a cultural production and do what we sometimes saw white people do, which is you do it and you think about it, but when you’re done, you’re done. It is just an event. That wasn’t what it was for us. So it was actually really good because Josie Méndez-Negrete helped us and she just said, “You know, you all don’t need to be concerned because it’s not like most people know how to do this. You’re not going to do it in traditional practice because you’re not a traditional person. And the reality is most of us don’t do it in traditional ways. We appropriate it as best we can into a Chicano aesthetic.”

So I think for us it was that. We were learning as we went. Sophia was an artist, even though she didn’t paint or draw—actually she did some things. She was a weaver. She was a bookmaker. She had had a job at the Chicago Art Museum and she learned how to make books. She made these beautiful books by hand. So I think in some respects she was a frustrated, almost closeted artist. I feel like that

was the thing that brought us together. She was more sophisticated in her knowledge of art than me. And yet, we both were trying to figure it out with other partners.

We were these co-conspirators. We could take off and go to San Francisco, "Let's go see what's there? Maybe we could get something and explore." With Sophia there was that cultural reclaiming—when you know you're Chicana, you know it, you feel it, but you don't know everything. You can take classes. But there's an identity location of claiming space that I feel is very personal. I think for me, because I'm *pocha*, I'm third generation, I grew up hearing Spanish, responding in English. Sophia was bilingual but she had her own issues, being raised in Borger. So we both had these ways we were exploring what does it mean to be Chicana? How is it that we express who we are in everyday life?

The opportunity that we had at the time was to do some work over at Merrill that was more cultural and to engage the students in it. It was beautiful. It was very powerful. Diana Martinez and Rico were part of that. Elba Sánchez, who was with Spanish for Spanish Speakers, was part of that. We all played it out in different ways. Francisco Alarcon.

I think we talked about this before, when there was an exhibit for *Dia de los Muertos* here at the [McHenry] library, the old library. Those kinds of things weren't happening then. I mean, I think in old school times, like in the early eighties, there were things that happened up campus. But it seemed like this time of dormancy. So when we started to do these things it almost gave *permiso*, people really got into it. Elba's leadership and Francisco Alarcon and Katia—they

saw what we were doing. They were on it, ten steps ahead. "Let's claim the library! Let's go." It was the social network of some new people being here at the library. Vivian Sykes, who was African American, was the first Multicultural Librarian that was here, opened the space. *Dia de los Muertos* became a space for us to start to work as a community.

**Zepeda:** Wow, that's huge.

**Cabrera:** It's huge. It's huge. And then it was outside of the simply student-initiated. *Dia* was a collaborative between students, staff, and faculty (Spanish for Spanish Speakers). But *Dia* was not that. A lot of students got really into it. I think it was this past year or the year before, Gustavo Vasquez-Guerra, he's an alum and he lives in LA, and I had put on Facebook the *Dia de los Muertos* celebration. He wrote a note on it and said, "I never knew what *Dia* was (he's Guatemalteco) I never knew what *Dia* was until I was a student up there," and he'll never forget the *ceremonias* that we had at Merrill. And it's because of that he now actually celebrates *Dia* with his son." Those are the very special parts of Santa Cruz. It's individuals that just decide, "Let's try this. Let's see." Then it just kind of emerged. And as a result of that everybody started doing *Dia* at the colleges. But they weren't all the same. Colleges worked on incorporating this event to their programming, but not all were thoughtful. Many hosted events that did not explain what this cultural tradition was and just had arts and crafts. They were not considered important cultural affirmations. There were some exceptions and this was because there were staff of color who were invested, not only in *Dia De Los Muertos*, but cultural programming that improved the

engagement of students in the College experience and with one another as a community.

Sophia moved from Merrill and went over to College Eight. And that's when Gaby [Gabriel] Aliniz moved there and Tere [Teresa] Alaniz. Liz Martin [Garcia] became a preceptor there. Then they started a *Dia* there that was different from what we did at Merrill, but was equally as beautiful. A lot of time and effort was put into making this event an important one, that invited not only College Eight students, but the overall campus community as well.

After we stopped being preceptors, maybe it wasn't too much longer after that they started to poop out. They weren't as—how do I explain what would happen? It was just working with the community and building an altar. Katia would always say she was always amazed at how intimate the *ceremonia* would be because all we would do is give the space for people to talk. And they gave *ofrendas* and they talked about deep hurts of people they had lost. Or they'd talk about political things. They'd do poetry. We would be there for hours. There's no other place—I'd say, this is like therapy ten times over. Where else—the safety just got created.

So I miss that with her. When I started working at Centro, it was that synergy *otra vez*, right? I think I mentioned to you that when they asked me to go over, I was like, "Are you kidding? Me?" [Sophia] was one of the first persons I spoke to. And she was about to kick my ass. She was like, "Why would you even question it?" I think again, it's that authenticity: Am I a real Chicana, right? And she really became a partner in thinking through how do I work some cultural

production here? She had great ideas. She would always be there. If it was an evening activity, she'd come over.

As a lesbian *mujer* Sophia felt so strongly that the Chicana community was so homophobic, the Latino community was so homophobic. She thought that if someone knew that she was lesbian they wouldn't come to her. In those days you would actually be able to see your financial aid counselor and talk to them. I had to respect that. She did not want to be separated from a community that meant everything to her.

So it took a long time, *years and years*, and really it was when I came over to Centro, that as issues started to come up that she felt— I think she was on the list at Cantú [the GLBTI Queer Resource Center at UCSC] and people knew she was a safe person, but unless you were in the community you didn't know that. So at Centro she would come to some events and then she started to see—I'll never forget, she said, "Shit, these kids need people to talk to." At one of the events, where we screened the Film *De Colores* and had a discussion on coming out and what it meant to be an ally, she came out. I mean, she didn't say, "I'm coming out." It was the first time I heard her publicly within a Chicano/Latino event say, "If you ever need to talk to someone, I need you to know I'm lesbian. I'm willing to do that. I'm available." We had a long talk about it. And she said, "You know, I think it's okay now. I think it's okay."

Her identity had multiple intersections. So I think it allowed her to be her whole self. I really can't even tell you how much I valued her. She was a colleague and she was a friend and a sister. It's easier to talk about it now. (voice emotional,

pauses) Quoting Aida [Hurtado], we were supposed to all grow old together. Aida Hurtado and Sophia were very close friends and over the span of almost three decades, they were like family to one another. Sophia was a strong colleague of Aida's and was a friend. Like with many others, Aida was highly impacted by Sophia's passing.

I felt very privileged to know some of her dreams. She was always really clear about, "You know, you guys need to save [money]." She saved. She understood—I used to think she taught Liz but actually Liz taught her how to save. And once she learned that, there was no turning back. It was her intention.

She actually talked about leaving, retiring about a year before the car accident happened. She really wanted to move to New Mexico, because that was her heart location. It was home to her. She'd go really twice a year, because she would go for herself and then she would go for Indian Market. I didn't even realize, I mean, here we were friends and I didn't even know, until one day we were talking and she was telling me, "You and Richard need to come because I can show you what this is." And she pulled out the catalog, because she'd always get the catalog for Indian Market and the artists that were going to be there. And then all of a sudden she said, "Oh, so-and-so is going to be there! Oh, God. He always has blah-blah-blah-blah—"I realized she was volunteering. She *never* told us that she would volunteer for different opening night events. So she would meet all of these artists. They knew her by her first name. She wasn't buddies with them but she was privy to that. She would go by herself. Sometimes I'm sure she would go with people but most of the time she wasn't waiting for anybody. She lived her life.

So she always imagined living there. A friend of hers had an apartment and she said, "You know, I think I'm going to try it. I'm going to try it for one year and if it works then I'll sell my place and I'll move." I think she stayed because of her commitment to the students and for whatever reason, I don't know, it just wasn't feeling right to her.

I think that's why it's bittersweet. It's just bittersweet because someone like Sophia, who gave so much—she would come in [to work], do all her files, whatever it took, right? I can't even tell you how many weekends. She did her job beyond what it needed to be. But when she left, she could do her other *cosa*. And she always made sure that she did those other things, whether it was her Scrabble group and the *mujeres* (close friends) that would meet I think once every couple of weeks. Then she had people she went out to the movies with. And there were groups she was a part of like the Santa Cruz Indian Council, the Missionary Baptist Church, or when she was a board member of the Women's Health Center, just to name a few of her commitments. Then there was us; there was Ani. She was so generous with her time and with the people that she loved. She would invite us over, two or three times a year, a whole collective group, and either make breakfast or dinner for us. We were treated to her wonderful cooking. And the Thanksgivings we would spend. My father—after my mother died she invited us over and she was so good with my father. And my father, he would always say, "Are we going over to Sophia's this time?" She understood his loss and wanted him to feel at home.

It's real difficult with someone like that who's kind of—they have their professional life. But it's beyond that. They're part of the community fabric. So



many people knew her. It wasn't until she passed that I realized: we all think we're her best friend because that's how she made us feel. We all meant so much to her. She was very *corta* with her time. She'd always say, "Okay, when am I going to see you next? Let me pull out my calendar." Because she would calendar us all in. I used to tease her and say, "Can you do anything just friggin' spontaneous." And she looked at me and she said, "Why would I do that?" I didn't understand it until she passed. Then I realized, how could she fit us all in if she didn't do that. She couldn't.

At the same time, she always made private time for herself. I think how I feel—I don't know, sometimes you don't realize it and I don't know if it's just my rationalization, but for whatever reason it seemed like she was preparing a long time ago for—" She participated in three churches. She would go to Holy Cross. She would go to Inner Light. She loved to sing, *loved to sing*. And she was part of the Missionary Baptist Church, a predominantly Black church. And outside of a formal church, Native American spiritual traditions were important to her. So spiritually, she was on this journey that was hard to explain. I think, going back to *Dia*, in retrospect you think about that human journey, right? Her spirituality was always front and center. As she got older, she enjoyed spending time by herself. She wouldn't compromise it. Sometimes I'd call her and say, "Hey, what are you doing? Let's go down to Davenport, go and eat." She'd just say, "Hey, you caught me the wrong day. This is my time and I just need—" You know, she just had her down time.

She's the only person I know who was really comfortable with just being. I feel like that's what gave her that grounding spiritually. So even though it seemed

like—lots going on, lots of people—she knew how to do it. She was reflective and was always there for people when stuff would happen.

In many respects Sophia was fearless. She was very fearless in how she would engage political issues. At one point, when there was a movement to bring people together to figure out fundraising for undocumented students, she was the first to sign up to come to the dinner. There was a dinner at the chancellor's house. It was one of those dinners of explaining what the situation is and then the students were asked to tell their stories. I always have mixed feelings when people are asked—sometimes it's in a contrived way and you're not sure how it's going to be heard. But Sophia was so taken aback because a few of them had incredible stories. I think she sensed: it's not right for us to hear this and not do something about this.

The chancellor started to wind things up. And she just got up. She just got up and she said, "I don't know about the rest of you but I'm telling you, "I'm willing to put three hundred dollars down right now. What are you willing to do?" And so that was the catalyst that started—you couldn't be there and not give money. It's how she held us accountable. Don't come and bring us together and don't make these students spill their guts out and us not do something about it. She kept her agreement. There were people that contributed money but it was a one-time thing. It didn't go beyond that. She hung on to her student. She talked to me about it and she said, "I don't know what the hell is going on but I'm willing to make my commitment to Texcalli. As long as he's making good academic progress, he's getting money from me. I don't care if I just have to do it directly." She maintained a relationship like that with him for two years.

**Zepeda:** Wow.

**Cabrera:** So she walked the talk.

**Zepeda:** She practiced it.

**Cabrera:** She practiced it. She did what she could do. That's her legacy: she cared. She was clear about what she could do. And she was clear about how she felt about things. So what an honor, what an honor.

**Zepeda:** Amazing.

**Cabrera:** An amazing *mujer*. We were very lucky to have her here, very lucky.

**Zepeda:** Thank you so much for sharing what you shared about Sophia. I feel like this is good for us to put on the record for folks to be able to tap into.

**Cabrera:** Yes. I want to share that when Gloria [Anzaldúa] passed away, I don't know if you know, she [Sophia] sang at Gloria's memorial. She was so sweet. She really wanted to. She idolized Gloria Anzaldúa. Sophia would walk West Cliff and Gloria would walk West Cliff. And so Sophia came to me one day and she said, "You know what? Gloria Anzaldúa talked to me!" She was all *bolada*. She said, "We passed each other but Gloria talked to me." They had a conversation and Gloria invited her to walk with her and told her when she would be walking." Sophia was like, "Oh, my God. I don't know what to do. Do I walk with Gloria Anzaldúa?" So I feel like Gloria is there holding her hand. It was meant to be.

**Zepeda:** How beautiful. *How beautiful.* Amazing, remarkable women here at UC Santa Cruz. Wow.

### **Final Thoughts about UC Santa Cruz**

So I just want to be aware of energy and time. Just closing off, I want to ask you if there are any other really significant people who were allies to the work?

**Cabrera:** Oh, yeah. You were part of that. I think that one of the really wonderful things about Santa Cruz is the people. Even when we don't always get along, there are pretty remarkable folks here. You've constantly heard me talk about Katia Panas. She's an anchor for me. Elba Sánchez was one of those anchors. Eugene Cota-Robles, who passed away; Arturo Pacheco, who came for Eugene's memorial. Frank Talamantes, he was like the *tio* that always checked in, had a good political sense, and unfortunately, I think, the university towards the end of his tenure here just didn't really treat him very well. Aida Hurtado—Aida, Sophia, myself—at one point we became this trio, trying to create some Chicana magic for a little bit.

It is important that I mention that there were special people that became my comadres, like Sophia Garcia Robles and Liz Martin Garcia. Their friendships mattered so much to both my personal and professional growth on this campus. Our relationships were cemented with a respect for one another's professional expertise and personal connections over the years. I am forever grateful to both of them.

The Women of Color Research Cluster is one of the most powerful organizing entities. So many of you [graduate students] were affiliated with it. There were

generations of really incredibly sensitive and powerful women. They were very challenging around issues and I felt like Santa Cruz needs that. Kick it up. Stir it up. I really feel like that was Angela's [Davis] gift to her own activism, of initiating the space. You all created it but to kind of breathe some life into it and then turn it over to you all to make it. You have honored that. And even to see Jasmine [Syedullah]; she's carrying the torch, even when it feels like it wanes a little bit, there's still a vibrancy of purposefulness there.

The students here, they're incredible. I can go through name after name after name after name. It's why I get upset at Santa Cruz. There are so many powerful people that have gone through this institution and are doing incredible things. And is it recognized, in terms of the community contribution, the contributions to California, the contributions to scholarship? It's really profound. I know that history will be written because there's no stopping it now. There's no turning back. The color of this place is permanently going to be changed. Now how the university decides, in the short term, that it's going to work with that. It's not going to have a choice after a while. It's not going to have a choice.

Santa Cruz is this incredible location of people. Even to see the newer people coming through—Sylvanna Falcon, Shannon Glesson, Hector Perla—they're trying to make their way. Steve McCay. The graduate students—I think that's what I miss the most, is that connection to the graduate students because there're cohorts I felt close with and now that you all are gone it's harder to make that connection. With Xochitl [Chavez] starting to make her way out, Esthela [Banuelos]—Sandra [Alvarez]—it's a close of another era. It's a close of this

[time] of beautiful struggle. You all did do it incredibly well. I know it was painful but the support you offered to each other, it really mattered.

Of course, when I made the move to El Centro, my colleagues at the resource centers created new openings. I am forever thankful for their support, critique and inclusion on new ventures. All of the program coordinators at El Centro over the years—Eddie Cervantes, Lilly Pinedo, Adrian Flores, Sandra Valle and too many student staff members to mention (but they were the heart I depended on). Nancy Cox Konopelski from the ACE program, and of course Sayo Fujioka from the SOAR office were essential. The partnerships and collegial support mattered!

**Zepeda:** Thank you.

**Zepeda:** I wonder if there's one memory or moment that sticks out in your mind, a favorite or one of your favorites.

**Cabrera:** Oh, my gosh. (breathes out) There're so many. Ironically, one of my favorites was when *Chicana Feminisms* came out and Aida asked if we would help with the book unveiling. So it was all *las mera meras*, right? And being at the Women's Center, and the craving—that room at the Women's Center, I don't know if you were there—

**Zepeda:** I was there.

**Cabrera:** There were like friggin' ninety people in the room! And do you remember the windows on the other side? People were on the outside. That was a moment for me of recognizing we all had a relationship to each other. We all had a relationship to each other and it was such a moment of celebration. There

were graduate students, undergraduates, community members, guys were there trying to get in. (laughs) And the pride I saw in the faculty who were there.

I hadn't seen Elba in such a long time and to hear her speak her poetry—oh! It brought back the risk-takers, Elba leaving, leaving Spanish for Spanish Speakers that she loved but couldn't stand how it was being torn apart, and taking the risk to do her poetry, to do her writing. It was one of those moments of how we take back our power. Wow, we're all here together.

**Zepeda:** Despite everything.

**Cabrera:** Yeah, despite everything. Those kinds of things give me hope. Educational institutions can be toxic and they can create weird dynamics and we get into it with each other. And yet, we're human beings, right? We're human beings who I hope are trying our best, really trying our best to not hurt each other. But that's my favorite moment.

Other than that, it's Chicano/Latino graduation. I always love that moment when people go up and are able to say to the world, really to their parents, but to say to the world, "I did it." That's what it's all about.

**Zepeda:** Right. Oh! Thank you.

**About the Interviewer and Editor:** Born and raised in Los Angeles, California to Mexican immigrant parents, Susy Zepeda earned her PhD in sociology from UC Santa Cruz in 2012, with a designated emphasis in feminist studies and Latin American and Latino studies. She has been a Visiting Assistant Professor, Women and Gender Studies at the University of California, Davis and a Social Justice Initiative, Mellon Fellow. Zepeda is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UC Davis.