

UCLA Ronald E. McNair Research Scholars Program



2020 Senior Presentations

May 21, 2020

UCLA Undergraduate Education

Academic Advancement Program

McNair Senior Presentations
May 21, 2020

9:00 – 9:10am – Welcome

Alice Ho, PhD – McNair Director

(<https://ucla.zoom.us/j/97511847505>; Zoom meeting ID: 975 1184 7505)

9:10 – 10:40am – Racialized Histories and the Changing Landscapes of the Present

Spatial Analysis: The Initial Attempt of *Alisal* to East Salinas
Breanna Aguilar

An Educational Historiography of East Palo Alto, California
Jackelyn Avendano

God Save the Queen: An Analysis of Race, Gender, and Welfare Stigma on
CalFresh Program Participation
Alexandria Davis

Displacement through the Eyes of the Community: How Sense of Belonging and
Home Changes for the Northeast Los Angeles community
Stephanie Martinez

10:40 – 11:00am – Break

11:00 – 12:00pm – Gendered Biodiversity and Critical Modes of Resistance

(<https://ucla.zoom.us/j/91344482080>; Zoom meeting ID: 913 4448 2080)

Characterizing the Role of MYO7A in Usher Syndrome Type 1B: Expanding
Frontiers in Gene Therapy
Sonia Bustos Barocio

Prolonged Drought and Its Impact on El Celaque National Park: Understanding
Climate Change within Indigenous Lenca Territory
Wesley Carrasco

Guatemala Mujeres en Resistencia: Racialized Struggle in the Aftermath of the
War
Edna Sandoval

12:00 – 1:00pm – Lunch

1:00 – 2:30pm – We Are Here Too!: Student of Color Belonging and Development
(<https://ucla.zoom.us/j/96781234814>; Zoom meeting ID: 967 8123 4814)

Do I Belong Here?: The Role of Psychological Interventions on Incoming
Community College Students
Jose Cervantez

Song Cry: Black Men, Masculinity, and Media
Miguel Claros Jr.

Substance Use among Adolescents: The Role of Socioeconomic Status, Risk-
taking Behavior, and Perceptions of Peers' Substance Use
Jasmine Hernandez

Making Cents?: Financial Literacy among First-Generation Students of Color
and Their Peers
Janet Rivera

2:30 – 2:45pm – Break

2:45 – 3:45pm – Critical Inquiries of Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexual Orientation
(<https://ucla.zoom.us/j/94884092469>; Zoom meeting ID: 948 8409 2469)

Ethnographic Analyses: Interplay of Culture, Music and Community in a
Brazilian Evangelical Church in Los Angeles
Pedro Borges

Mentoring and Belonging: An Analysis of Peer Mentorship and Sense of
Belonging in UCLA's Queer Peer Counseling Program
Aunica Cesena

The Counterpublic Burden: Essentialism, Discourse, and Re-Signified
Machismo in The Revolt of the Cockroach People and We the Animals
Miriam Santana

3:45 – 4:00pm – Closing

Liliana Islas, PhD – McNair Assistant Director

McNair Senior Cohort 2019-2020



Scholar:

Breanna Aguilar

Advisor:

Janice L. Reiff, Ph.D. | Department of History

Thesis Title:

Spatial Analysis: The Initial Attempt of *Alisal* to East Salinas

Abstract:

Geographical spaces are influenced by the social events that take place due to policies and practices. An often-overlooked circumstance in which both policy and practice are working together is annexation. Analyzing the process of Salinas, California's attempt to annex Alisal in 1949 furthers the literature on how space, place, and race are interconnected. Although the city of Salinas annexed the community formerly known as Alisal in 1963, there were three previous attempts to annex Alisal in 1949, 1950, and 1955 that were unsuccessful. During the 1940's, Salinas was predominantly made up of a white, wealthy population while Alisal was a diverse working-class community. Nonetheless, much research on Salinas neglects these demographic differences and is based solely on the dynamic agricultural industry. This project lays out the events of the 1949 annexation as well as examines how socioeconomic demographic factors impact the decision to annex Alisal and how annexation expands the understanding of community identities. In examining the Salinas city council minutes and the *Salinas Californian* and *Santa Cruz Sentinel* local newspapers, it is evident that white privilege and institutional racism was utilized to take advantage of a vulnerable working-class community. This not only adds to the history of rural areas within California but provides insight of the spatial relationship between communities.



Scholar:

Jackelyn Avendano

Advisor:

Pedro Noguera, Ph.D. | Department of Education

Thesis Title:

An Educational Historiography of East Palo Alto, California

Abstract:

In the 1950s and 1960s gentlemen agreements, white flight, and unethical blockbusting in the San Francisco Peninsula facilitated the construction of the majority Black city of Ravenswood, today known as East Palo Alto (E.P.A). For the Sequoia Unified School District, housing discrimination paved the way for segregation in schools. Even with the passing of *Brown v. Board* (1954), the Board of Trustees' did not prioritize E.P.A parents' educational concerns and demands. My work addresses the gaps in educational historical literature regarding de facto segregation of E.P.A students after *Brown v. Board*. I draw from educational and historical literature, newspapers from the *Times*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Californian*, as well as government documents. My research answers the following questions: (1) What is the history of school de facto segregation in E.P.A? (2) How was de facto segregation of students justified by administrators? (3) What organized opposition was there to de facto segregation? (4) How did E.P.A families articulate their educational needs between 1950 to the present day? In this research, we learn about the agency and power of family and community members in E.P.A. From protest to the creation of the Nairobi Day School, their power is transformative in fighting beyond just equality in schools, but also for the self-determination of their youth and community. Lastly, this research serves to contextualize the schooling experiences of current Black, Latina/o/x, and Pacific Islander students from E.P.A.



Scholar:

Pedro Borges

Advisor:

Ruben Hernandez-Leon, Ph.D. | Department of Sociology

Thesis Title:

Ethnographic Analyses: Interplay of Culture, Music and Community in a Brazilian Evangelical Church in Los Angeles

Abstract:

Immigrant based churches in the United States have long been studied as a major social hub for immigrants, often highlighting its crucial role for socioeconomic integration that reaches far beyond theological teachings. My research question is broken into three pieces. First, how does the social creation of Brazilian-led religious effervesce created and utilized as a tool for member integration beyond theological means? Second, what is the role of Brazilian music and culture in the creation of effervesce abroad? Third, what are the roles of internal socioeconomic networks in its relation to immigrant integration? My questions address gaps in existing sociological literature regarding immigrant churches by emphasizing the maintenance and creation of Brazilian-ness in Los Angeles through an immigrant Brazilian led church. For my methods, I did one year of weekly field visits to a local Brazilian church in Los Angeles. Visits lasted for five hours and a half at a time. My primary data collection methods were field notes, memos, informal interviews and video recordings. In my research, I found that the social creation of Brazilian-ness in the space of the church is flexible enough to be expanded, demonstrating that micro level manifestations of identity can be expanded or contracted depending on the community at hand. I also found that music and culture play an essential role in creating a micro Brazilian-led community in the church, where immigrant-based support is emphasized as the doings of a good Brazilian-Christian.



Scholar:

Sonia Bustos Barocio

Advisor:

David Williams, Ph.D. | Department of Neurobiology

Thesis Title:

Characterizing The Role of MYO7A in Usher Syndrome Type 1B: Expanding Frontiers in Gene Therapy

Abstract:

Usher syndrome is an autosomal recessive disease characterized by congenital deafness, progressive retinal degeneration and in some cases, vestibular dysfunction. Usher syndrome type 1B (USH1B), the leading form of Usher syndrome type 1, is characterized by loss-of-function mutations in the MYO7A gene which encodes an unconventional myosin protein expressed in the retinal pigment epithelium. Early-stage clinical trials are using gene therapy to deliver a healthy MYO7A gene to USH1B patients, thereby providing a curative treatment. The therapy consists of a lentivirus containing cDNA from one of the two major MYO7A isoforms, isoform 2 (IF2). It is necessary to determine whether the other major isoform, IF1, is required for disease resistance. The focus of this study is to determine how the presence or absence of each isoform relates to RPE cell health and function. We will generate iPSC lines from USH1B patient samples and assess the capacity of each MYO7A isoform to rescue USH1B phenotypes. This work will provide valuable insight into the viability of USH1B gene replacement therapies, as well as improve our understanding of retinal cell biology and Usher Syndrome disease pathology.



Scholar:

Wesley Carrasco

Advisor:

Abel Valenzuela & Thomas Gillespie, Ph.D. | Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies & Department of Geography

Thesis Title:

Prolonged Drought and Its Impact on El Celaque National Park: Understanding Climate Change within Indigenous Lenca Territory

Abstract:

As a result of climate change and drought, Honduras is severely affected by the fluctuation of the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) and the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which creates systems of high pressure over the Caribbean Sea and suppresses the development of tropical storms. It results in prolonged periods of drought, limiting rainfall and stressing photosynthetic activity and water availability. This research focuses on understanding how prolonged periods of drought from 2009-2019 impact the tropical cloud forest within the Celaque National Park in Honduras. The tropical cloud forest is a natural hotspot for biodiversity and endemism, which are extremely vulnerable to environmental changes. The region is also home to a native Lenca population an Indigenous community which heavily relies on the water supply provided by the cloud forest streams. To better understand drought in the region we focus on three specific methods: First we use remote satellite sensing to track the Normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) of green vegetation. Secondly, we analyze the statistical data of the daily temperature and precipitation from the Santa Rosa de Copan weather station, to find whether high temperature and low precipitation periods overlap within significant vegetation loss. Third, we create a Supervised Classification using LANDSAT images to measure land use change over the ten-year period. As climate change continues to exacerbate drought conditions, vulnerable Indigenous communities face the growing threat of displacement due to environmental stresses. Climate change is not only an environmental catastrophe, but it has socio-economic implications which disproportionately affects Indigenous communities.



Scholar:

Jose Cervantez

Advisor:

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Ph.D. | Department of Education

Thesis Title:

'Do I Belong Here?': The Role of Psychological Interventions on Incoming Community College Students

Abstract:

Recent public and private policy initiatives have emerged to further expand community college enrollment and increase transfer rates to 4-year universities. These initiatives signal institutional support in favor for community college transfer students. However, multiple measures must be taken into consideration to accommodate the increasing community college student population. For instance, community college students are more likely to come from historically underrepresented backgrounds and lower socioeconomic status; these students may encounter cultural mismatch or stereotype threat at their post-transfer university. A potential moderator for these negative outcomes would be creating a stronger sense of belonging or signaling interdependent cues to students. To combat these negative outcomes and improve sense of belonging, an intervention was developed for incoming community college transfer students during their first academic term post-transfer. 59 students were recruited and self-selected to either an intervention or comparison (control) condition. Quantitative analysis was used to measure within-group differences from the start to the end of the term. In addition, between-group differences were analyzed comparing experimental conditions at the conclusion of the term. Results indicated that participants in the intervention condition reported higher collective self-esteem. In addition, participants in the intervention condition reported a reduction in independence and an increase of interdependence over the course of the term. These psychological outcomes are consistent with the cultural norms of racial and ethnic minority students. The results suggest policy initiatives favoring increased enrollment must be supplemented with psychological interventions to support and enhance community college students during the transfer process.



Scholar:

Aunica Cesena

Advisor:

Latoya Small, Ph.D. | Department of Social Welfare

Thesis Title:

Mentoring and Belonging: An Analysis of Peer Mentorship and Sense of Belonging in UCLA's Queer Peer Counseling Program

Abstract:

Current literature showcases that LGBTQ college students are more likely to experience anxiety and depression. Such experiences of mental health can be exacerbated by encounters with heterosexism and genderism. Heterosexism and genderism refer to social norms reinforced by institutions that privilege straight sexual identity and govern organization of gender presentation and performance. I use Minority Stress Theory as a framework to understand the additive stressors which account for the increased rates of anxiety and depression that LGBTQ people face. Throughout the literature, increasing sense of belonging and providing peer mentorship have been shown to lower levels of anxiety and depression and help underrepresented groups foster a sense of community on campus. However, studies have yet to show the effectiveness of peer mentorship on LGBTQ students of color, specifically. This study investigates that gap in that literature by exploring how interaction with UCLA's Queer Peer Counseling Program can support LGBTQ students of color in navigating the challenges associated with heterosexism and genderism. This study includes four qualitative, semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students who have accessed UCLA's Queer Peer Counseling program. Findings suggest that interview participants benefited from peer counseling services that catered to their intersectional racial identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The findings of this study will inform the development of next year's Queer Peer Counseling Program training curriculum in order for peer mentors to best serve UCLA's LGBTQ students of color.



Scholar:

Miguel Claros Jr.

Advisor:

Pedro Noguera, Ph.D. | Department of Education

Thesis Title:

Song Cry: Black Men, Masculinity, and Media

Abstract:

Black men have historically been stereotyped as aggressive, hypersexual, unintelligent, and criminal through American music videos, television, and film. In Barlow (2011), Dean Larry Davis from the University of Pittsburgh stated that “Overwhelmingly, White Americans learn about African Americans not through personal relationships, but through images shown by media. Unfortunately, Blacks too consume these same images.” These stereotypes inform society, giving a warped perception of Black men, behavior, physical characteristics, and intelligence. Scholarship on Black male media representation has not often centered Black male youth and how they internalize negative depictions. However this project specifically centers Black male youth by examining the impact of media on the intersectional development of racialized and gendered identities, asking: to what extent are media portrayals of Black men internalized by Black male youth? How does this internalization shape their interactions with one another? This research consisted of semi-structured interviews with Black males within the freshman class of UCLA. Findings demonstrate that portrayals in media affects the way Black men view themselves imposed by their communities, in turn perpetuating stereotypical masculine performances. Participants expressed a decline in mental health and academic success as a result of them trying to adhere to these caricatures; only combating internalization through love. This project contributes a new lens to an existing body of work by analyzing these intersectional topics through young Black males and how they navigate the world, while challenging existing narratives in society.



Scholar:

Alexandria Davis

Advisor:

Mark Peterson, Ph.D. | Department of Public Policy

Thesis Title:

God Save the Queen: An Analysis of Race, Gender, and Welfare Stigma on CalFresh Program Participation

Abstract:

Food insecurity is a prominent issue that is negatively impacting thousands of Americans, but more specifically college students, who are simultaneously dealing with academic stress, rising tuition costs, expensive housing options, and more. Despite the severity of the issue, some students are refusing to engage in the welfare benefits even though they qualify for them and this is even further amplified because racist and sexist notions about welfare recipients. This lack of engagement is exemplified in the gap between those that are eligible and those that participate in the CalFresh program where in 2016 about 2.4 million qualified but did not apply for the benefits. Due to this problem within the CalFresh program, my study seeks to address this gap utilizing the Welfare Queen analytic framework to understand why these gaps exist and if race and gender work together to worsen these gaps. Using semi-structured interviews with about eight respondents, I found that the reasoning for the gaps in eligibility and participation are based on cultural values that condemn receiving welfare benefits, beliefs that receiving benefits need to be hidden, and the bureaucracy of the CalFresh system. This research offers insights into the usage of the CalFresh program by college students and helps understand how welfare stigma is negatively impacting participation in the CalFresh program. Also, my findings provide an exploratory understanding of how racism and sexism work in conjunction with food insecurity.



Scholar:

Jasmine Hernandez

Advisor:

Adriana Galván, Ph.D. | Department of Psychology

Thesis Title:

Substance Use among Adolescents: The Role of Socioeconomic Status, Risk-taking Behavior, and Perceptions of Peers' Substance Use

Abstract:

It is unknown whether socioeconomic status, and risk taking behavior predict risk for later substance use among adolescents. The normative developmental changes in adolescence that entail substantial increases in risk taking behavior include experimentation with alcohol and drugs. There is heightened sensitivity for risk taking during adolescence, thus identifying which behavioral and familial factors may predict which adolescents may be at greater risk for substance use. In this study we examined the role of socioeconomic status on substance use by assessing parental education, financial burden on the adolescent, and other indicators of socioeconomic distress, among youth who vary in substance use. This sample included adolescents ages 14-20 (50% female), drawing from the second wave from the Family and Sleep Study, a three-wave longitudinal study which examined functional brain development in adolescents. In contrast to most predictions, results indicated a negative association between youth who report high socioeconomic adversity and greater likelihood of engaging in substance use. The second analyses indicated that adolescents' perception of peers' substance use and likelihood of engaging in substance use is negatively associated with parental financial strain. Furthermore, peers' perception of marijuana use specifically was also associated with actual marijuana use. Also, parental expectations for their children's future social status is negatively associated with not only their child's own perception of their social status but likelihood of substance use as well. These findings may help address health-endangering behaviors that propel some adolescents more easily towards risky behavior with possible negative health outcomes (e.g. drug addiction).



Scholar:

Stephanie Martinez

Advisor:

Daniel G. Solórzano, Ph.D. | Department of Education

Thesis Title:

Displacement through the Eyes of the Community: How Sense of Belonging and Home Changes for the Northeast Los Angeles Community

Abstract:

Since 2008, Northeast Los Angeles has changed socially and economically due to gentrification. Specifically, for low-income residents, there is emotionality with living and seeing gentrification take place in their community that goes beyond just physical displacement. The interpretation of space is powerful because we can attribute feelings and sentiments towards it. Oftentimes, scholars focus on the economic and physical consequences of gentrification, but there exists a gap in research relating to how displacement can have an emotional impact on community members. The purpose of this study is to explore how the community of Northeast LA attributes feelings of emotional displacement to spaces in their community that are heavily gentrified. The research is interested in highlighting the everyday experiences of the community of Northeast Los Angeles and how they deal with the changes happening around them. Questions aimed to be answered with this research are: How is the feeling of home and belonging changing as a result of gentrification? Data collection methods for this research are based on qualitative methods that include a mental map done with participants during the first meeting and an interview to discuss photographic images during the final meeting. A common theme found among participants is the detachment participants feel with their community decreasing their sense of belonging because of the physical changes being brought to their community. My research serves as a vessel that brings to light the emotions of the community because gentrification can be a traumatic experience when you see your community being lost.



Scholar:

Janet Rivera

Advisor:

Efrén Pérez, Ph.D. | Department of Political Science

Thesis Title:

Making Cents?: Financial Literacy among First-Generation Students of Color and Their Peers

Abstract:

Understanding the financial aid process is crucial to college student success, yet so many students are unaware of how this process works. A lack of education regarding financial aid, including how to apply for and where to appropriately use the money when aid is received, can impede retention rates (Dulabaum, 2016). Scholarship produced about financial aid does not center the experience of low-income first-generation students of color, but centers white middle-class men; even as opportunity gaps persist (Banks and Dohy, 2018). This project aims to uncover the financial literacy gap that exists in higher education for first-generation college students of color in contrast to white counterparts at the University of California, Los Angeles. The project is studied through sixteen semi-structured interviews, statement word analysis, a social media interpretation instrument, and analyzed through a lens of critical race theory. Findings for first-generation college students of color illustrate an increase in financial hardships and academic achievement as the financial aid office remained uncooperative and failed to intercede, with downstream impacts on mental health, academic performance, and word-study-life balance.



Scholar:

Edna Sandoval

Advisor:

Cecilia Méjivar, Ph.D. | Department of Sociology

Thesis Title:

Guatemala Mujeres en Resistencia: Racialized Struggle in the Aftermath of the War

Abstract:

Because of racialized and classist dynamics of power rooted in Guatemala during colonialism and established through the creation of the new Republic after independence, indigenous women have become the most vulnerable and subjugated people in the country. Today, movements for gender equality and resistance against patriarchy exist in different spaces are often deeply divided between women who identify within different racial and ethnic categories.

Ladino feminist movements are centered on resisting the extreme patriarchal violence experienced mostly in urban life settings. Indigenous gender resistance movements have worked toward the abolition of systemic racism, violence, and lately, the incredible violence against them during the Civil War in Guatemala (1960-1996) in which the racialized violence ended with an indigenous genocide.

In this study, I examine how the Nation-State and the implementation of Neoliberal policies impacted the movements of resistance among Guatemalan women depending on their ethnic and racial background.

Ladino feminists open a path to gendered resistance on institutions through the tradition of the European feminism theory. Their necessities rooted in the extreme need for resistance against domestic violence and lack of economic access. On the other hand, Maya leaders rejected the wave of feminism because, they argue, ladino feminism still perpetuates racial oppression between ladino and Maya women in domestic spaces because Indigenous women had been perceiving under the domestic servant image at a National level.

However, the common factor in their gendered discourse is the main critique of the Nation-State as the main factor of oppression. Racial and gendered.



Scholar:

Miriam Santana

Advisor:

Rafael Perez-Torres, Ph.D. | Department of English

Thesis Title:

The Counterpublic Burden: Essentialism, Discourse, and Re-Signified Machismo in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and *We the Animals*

Abstract:

This thesis analyses two temporally and ethnically distinct, yet interrelated novels, through an engagement with the concept and performance of machismo in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta and *We the Animals* by Justin Torres. I situate both novels as similarly understanding machismo, not as something solely embodied and performed by the heterosexual brown male body, but as an interwoven system in which every person within that system is implicated in diverse and complicated ways. As such, this thesis asks the following question: In what ways does literature reject the notion of a stable and fully readable machismo and instead encourages an engagement with it, only to further complicate it? By focusing on characters in the novel that are conventionally thought of as victims, at the margins and the periphery, I show how a close reading of the novel's use of syntax, imagery, and form, de-center the macho and highlight the various ways such characters re-claim such oppressive system only to navigate, challenge it through what I call "Indifference to the Machismo System". Lastly, moving away from conventional readings of the novel as solely representative of the problematics of the Machismo System, I interpret the novels as asking for a direct and fierce "head-on" engagement with machismo, in all its abjection.



Acknowledgements



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