Message from the Chair

¡Bienvenidos! Many people here in the United States wonder why we celebrate “cinco de mayo”? After all, it’s only a battle that took place in Mexico and has nothing to do with the country’s war for independence. To add to the confusion, Mexico for many years did not celebrate this historic event. So why all the commotion? Here is a situation where folklore knows no borders and influences both Mexico and the United States.

When the French first invaded Mexico in 1862, their militia was soundly defeated at Puebla on May 5th, via the command of General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguín (1829-1862). Zaragoza was born in Texas before it became a republic and annexed later to the United States. Unfortunately, Zaragoza died the same year of the Battle of Puebla from typhoid fever, but the small towns along the Lower Rio Grande Border in south Texas did not forget his heroics and accomplishments. He was our first Mexican American hero, in many respects, and the village people celebrated cinco de mayo in his honor. Soon other predominantly Mexican American communities throughout the American Southwest began to celebrate it, and even though the event for the most part lost much of its historical significance in the U.S., for Mexican Americans it evolved into a form of cultural identity and affirmation. Around the 1980s businesses learned that there was profit to be made from a growing Hispanic consumer market and tapped into the celebration via television, making it quite popular in the U.S. and forcing Mexico to take notice as well. What we discover is that culture is not static and that there is a continuous mutual influence moving in both directions in and out from the United States and Mexico. Once again, folklore knows no borders.

With this bit of history from a Mexican American perspective, the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department wishes all of you a happy cinco de mayo and invites all of you to learn about some of the issues that are of interest to our community. Enjoy!
A Tribute to Dr. Abel C. Amaya: Over 40 Years in Higher Education

By Cecilia Ybarra

Perhaps many of you have seen on campus an older gentleman walking slowly to Loker Student Union for his daily cup of coffee with a crutch or cane in his hand. He’s usually accompanied by students, talking and laughing along the way. And although his health is fragile and body a bit weak, his mind is still extremely sharp, sharing with his students of another generation the stories and experiences of his life in higher education and the Chicano/Latino community.

Abel C. Amaya received his Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in 1963 from the University of Arizona in Latin American Studies and History and later his Master of Arts degree in 1968 from Southern Methodist University in Texas in Southwest and Mexican History. He was accepted into the International Studies doctoral program at Denver University in 1968, but after the death of his wife (Ms. Martha Ruiz-Amaya) in an automobile accident, Abel had to leave the program to care for his three children.

Dr. Abel C. Amaya has been teaching university courses for over 40 years, and he has taught and developed Chicana/o studies curriculum at different universities which include Colorado State University, University of Southern California, Pitzer and Pomona College, CSU, Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, and Los Angeles. While at Colorado State University (1974-1978) he taught classes in Chicano Cultural History, Latin American History, History of Bi-Lingual Education in America, Historical Perspectives, History of Mexico, Revolutions in Latin America, Oral Communication for Chicanos and Chicanas, and The Chicano Family. All his life, Dr. Abel C. Amaya has insisted that a distinctive culture evolved when the North American and Mexican cultures mingled and clashed and that there are reasons why Mexican Americans remain bilingual and bicultural in U.S. society.

When Dr. Amaya moved to California, he was appointed as Director of El Centro Chicano at the University of Southern California (USC), a position he held for 20 years (1979-1999). Aside from his teaching responsibilities, he developed extra-curricular activities for these gifted Mexican and Latino students. He made it a priority to integrate these barrio students into university life by having them understand and appreciate the philosophy and psychology of USC. These student activities included attending USC football games, rallies, and musical concerts. In addition, Dr. Amaya founded the first Latino Parent Association in 1979 to give a voice to this community at USC, and in 1982 he organized the first Unity Banquet to raise scholarships for minority students. At this annual banquet, Dr. Amaya founded the Cuauhtémoc Award and one of the first recipients was Mr. Bert Corona, an individual who dedicated his life to fighting economic and social injustice in southern California. Two years later in 1984, Dr. Abel C. Amaya founded and directed the Mexican Exchange Program between USC and la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (U.N.A.M.), where a diverse USC student body participated annually. In fact, during his time at USC, Dr. Amaya laid the groundwork for many of El Centro Chicano’s signature programming.

Unfortunately, he was forced to retire from USC when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, an illness which almost took his life. * continue on the next page*
While recovering at his home in Claremont, Dr. Abel C. Amaya was encouraged to stay active and continue his teaching at California State University, Dominguez Hills in 1999. At CSUDH, he has taught various courses in Chicana/o studies that include The Chicano Family, Introduction to Chicano Studies, Chicanos in Contemporary Society, Senior Seminar on Cultural Diversity, Latino Politics, Mexican Revolution in Art and Literature, Latino Politics, and U.S. Immigration Policy. In addition, Dr. Abel Amaya collaborated with the first-ever, annual campus-wide Dolores Huerta Chicana/o y Latina/o Graduation Celebration (2005) at CSUDH, an event which is now in its 9th year and still extremely popular.

In 2006, the Board of Trustees from California State University awarded him an honorary doctorate for his contributions in the discipline of Chicana and Chicano Studies, which include teaching and curriculum development at different universities like Colorado State University, University of Southern California, Pitzer and Pomona College, and CSU Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, and Los Angeles. Today, at the age of 79, Dr. Abel C. Amaya is still going strong as a part-time lecturer in the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSU, Dominguez Hills. This will be his last year, and the students would like to pay tribute to his educational legacy. Muchísimas gracias, Profesor Amaya!

Tell us about your early life and what it was like growing up?

I was born in Sonora, México. My dad brought my family over when I was seven, and we stayed for a year in a town called Agua Prieta to wait for our legal documents. I attended school in an adjacent town in Douglas, Arizona. I really enjoyed learning in school, but had a difficult time learning English. During 1942, when I came to this town… it was segregated. I noticed that Anglos lived on one side of town and Mexicans on the other. They never really interacted much. I was involved in athletics, and I attended an all Mexican school in the eighth grade. When I started high school, which wasn’t segregated, I became involved in athletics and that was when I began to interact with other students regardless of their ethnicity. It was enjoyable and I eventually graduated and received many scholarships and decided to attend the University of Arizona. At the time, there was a draft for the Korean War, but I had a deferment because I was in college. However, I could not continue going to college because it was difficult to be away from my family… considering that I had to take care of my ailing mother and aunt. Eventually, I thought it was better to get a job and return back home. And as soon as I arrived home, I received a military notice for the draft. I talked to them about the options that I had and decided to join the Air Force.

What were your plans after high school?

Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to make my own plans after high school; the government made the decision for me. If I didn’t attend school, I would be drafted into the service. Therefore, I volunteered for the United States Air Force Service since it was the best option for me. I was sent to Canada and lived there for a while… about a year and a half. *continue on the next page*
Was an education an option for you?

Education was not necessarily an option, but it had always been a goal of mine. I always wanted to return after my service in the U.S. Air Force. At the end of my four year service in the Air Force, I had already two years of university training and credit and was accepted when I applied to the University of Arizona.

Which colleges did you attend?

I attended several colleges throughout my career including Seattle Community College when I was stationed there, Maricopa Community College, Glendale Community College, University of Arizona, and Southern Methodist University. I received my B.A. from the University of Arizona and my M.A. from Southern Methodist University.

Which topics did you study in college?

In college, I studied Latin America Studies, History, and U.S. and Latin American Relations. I studied Latin American countries such as Perú, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, etc., including social movements.

What was graduate school like? Did you face any obstacles along the way?

Graduate school was very competitive. When I went to Southern Methodist University as a full time student, it was almost frightening. Most of the courses consisted of the writing of critical essays. I had to argue points and needed a strong thesis in which research was crucial to prove my points. So, anything I turned in had to be research-oriented, and I must say that it was difficult. It was something that I wasn’t used to doing. Most of the time there were several papers one had to write, not to mention a final examination as well. And oh yes… usually the obstacles I faced were concerning the health of my family, pertaining to my mother and kids.

Which positions did you hold after graduate school?

After graduate school, I landed my first job at Colorado State University as Director of the Chicana and Chicano Studies program. I was responsible for establishing an office, recruiting instructors, managing a budget, and overseeing department activities. I was hired also as Program Office for the Ford Foundation. After four years, I was hired as Director of USC’s El Centro Chico and asked to do much of the same of what I had accomplished in Colorado State University. I was there for about 20 years and then retired because of my health. At both universities, I always worked with students whether for academics or organizations. It seems as if time flew by, but it has been enjoyable to say the least. The question is… if I hadn’t done what I have done, I wouldn’t know what my life would be like today. I have taught at other schools as well such as Cal State Fullerton and Cal State Dominguez Hills. I must say it has been a nice adventure and that students are very bright. Unfortunately, this will be my last year here at Dominguez Hills.

Is there any advice you would like to offer students today?

Well, I think that students have to find a purpose for their education. The purpose just can’t be to get a job. It has to be purpose driven. You’re not going to get rich by obtaining an education. Well, perhaps. Maybe for a professional job but even that is not a guarantee. You have to be excited about learning and discovering new things. History is made for that type of inquiry. In other words, you have to enjoy what you are doing. Many students today are not sure what they want to study and that is the case with many first-year students. You don’t know what jobs are out there: Your path to a good job is the degree that you’ve earned from a university. It’s your education that matters most.
A Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill: What’s Really at Stake?
By Yasmín Flores

In an effort to resolve the issue of the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, President Barack Obama set up a bipartisan group who collectively developed a new immigration reform bill. This group consists of eight Senators, also known as “The Gang of Eight” : Chuck Schumer (D-NY), John McCain (R-AZ), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Michael F. Bennett (D-CO) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ). They composed “The Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013”. The bill outlines a border security plan that first has to take place before people can apply for a green card. The first step would be to fund the border security plan which includes the creation of a political fence and methods to carry out its surveillance. Hopefully within 10 years of the bills enactment, the border would be almost ninety percent secure. During the first ten years of the bills enactment there will also be a tighter supervision on visa overstays and an implementation of employment verification. Until all these steps are successfully enacted and completed, prospective residents will only have a temporary status and will need to wait to apply for a green card.

Once the security measures are completed, immigrants will be given the opportunity to apply for U.S. residency. To be eligible for residency prospective residents must prove they have been in the United States before 2012. They need to pass background checks, pay current and past taxes, pay a 2,000 dollar fines, and they have to show proof that they are employed. Any person with a criminal history will be deported. After immigrants have proven eligibility for residency they can begin to apply. After the application process, immigrants have to present evidence continuously that they are working and that they are not and will not become a burden for the United States Government. It is stated in the bill that prospective residents must be twenty-five percent above poverty level and that children who were brought here by their parents would be eligible to apply for U.S. residency within five years. Immediately afterwards, they can apply for U.S. citizenship. The caveat is that although residency can be granted it can also be revoked.

For the millions of people waiting to learn what will happen next, there are a few recommendations. One of the main principles of the reform is to integrate undocumented immigrants into U.S. society. Prospective residents should begin to learn English as soon as possible. They should begin to gather proof of the years which they have been in the United States and should start to do their taxes and/or any previous taxes not completed. It is recommended also that any outstanding violations and/or debts should be paid off. Finally, it is highly recommended that people who wish to begin a path toward U.S. citizenship save their money because it will be costly, especially for multiple family members.

A mixture of emotions is felt by many throughout the United States as the long awaited comprehensive immigration reform bill begins its course through the House and Senate. After such a long wait it is a slight relief that finally the United States Government is attempting to solve the social problem of its 11 million immigrants living in the shadows of society. But even though the bill will bring a sigh of relief for many, it will create as many doubts as well. Why is it that immigrants will have to wait ten or more years to apply for a residency? This seems like a ridiculous amount of time. The whole point of the reform is to integrate these immigrants into U.S. society, not to have them as second class citizens. Moreover, it is problematic to expect these new residents to be twenty-five percent above poverty level. It sounds more like a “take it, or leave it” attitude when there are not even enough jobs and the cost of living is high. One hopes that when these immigrants apply for U.S. residency, the government will take into serious consideration the economic recession and the many contributions that these people have made to society.
En el año 2006, se reportó por el estado de California que de cada mil latinas adolescentes, 65 de ellas resultaron embarazadas. A comparación de 6.8 por cada mil de adolescentes afroamericanos, que son los que tienen el segundo número más alto en California. Las latinas tienen el número más alto de embarazos a temprana edad. Por estos números altos se comenzaron varias organizaciones para bajar el número de embarazos. Estas organizaciones, incluyendo al distrito unificado escolar de Los Ángeles (L.A.U.S.D.), hicieron varios estudios para tratar de entender por qué los números están tan altos. En estos estudios encontraron que la razón más grande de embarazos de temprana edad de latinas es que sus padres nunca les hablan de relaciones íntimas. Estas adolescentes latinas les informaron a estas organizaciones que ellas sí sabían que existían diferentes tipos de protecciones, pero que sus madres nunca les hablaban de eso. Como sus madres nunca les hablaron de eso, estas adolescentes nunca les preguntaron por miedo a una respuesta negativa.

En el año 2010, se reportó que el número de embarazos a temprana edad para latinas bajo a 45 por cada mil adolescentes. El año anterior se había reportado 50.8 embarazos por cada mil adolescentes latinas. En un año, los números bajaron drásticamente. Aunque los números sí están bajando, latinas todavía tienen el número más alto de embarazos. El estado de California dice que los números bajaron porque los padres de las adolescentes están tratando de ser más abiertos con sus hijas. Se ha reportado que los padres les están informando a sus hijas de los problemas que pueden resultar a causa de tener relaciones íntimas en una edad juvenil. También se ha reportado que las escuelas se han unido al programa de Planificación de la Familia (Planned Parenthood) para informarles a los estudiantes del sexo. Estos solamente son dos de tantos ejemplos que se han iniciado para ayudar a las latinas adolescentes (y a todos los adolescentes) para prevenir embarazos a temprana edad.

El condado de Los Ángeles tiene uno de los números más altos de latinas embarazadas a temprana edad. En el año 2000, de cada 1000 latinas (de edades 15 a 19 años) 87 resultaron embarazadas en el condado de Los Ángeles. Estos números vienen directamente del Centro para el Control y la Prevención de Enfermedades (CDC). Con la ayuda de la comunidad el número de embarazos a temprana edad de latinas ha bajado drásticamente, de 87 por cada mil en el año 2000 a 49 por cada mil en el año 2011. Si la comunidad sigue influyendo las decisiones que hacen las latinas adolescentes, estos números pueden seguir bajando. El estado de California reportó que ahora más latinas se están casando después de que sus carreras ya están terminadas. Más latinas están cuidándose y prefieren el estudio en vez de comenzar una familia a temprana edad. Esto ha resultado en el número de latinas en posiciones profesionales y de alto estudio en California que crezca a casi el triple desde el año 1998. Todavía las latinas tienen el número más alto de embarazos a temprana edad, pero con la ayuda y conciencia de relaciones íntimas el número puede seguir bajando. Ya se ha visto que ha estado bajando, y esto les da esperanza a los adolescentes latinos para tener una vida exitosa.
Last year, I was given the chance to serve a group of people, a group made of people like my parents and so many others, who have endured the same journey and difficulties to attain a better life for themselves and for their children by coming to the United States. I volunteered for two semesters at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), located in McArthur Park. It is a center founded by Salvadoran refugees from the civil war in the early eighties. It was founded to serve Central Americans mainly in attaining their citizenship. CARECEN now serves immigrants of any Latin American origin by providing legal services, education, civic participation, and economic development. I served in their Education department, namely tutoring their students (mostly elderly Central Americans) with U.S. citizenship questions, a task that all have to endure at some point if they want to become citizens.

The majority of student put tremendous effort into memorizing the citizenship questions and their answers and to speak English. Some of the students would take the time to study and would surely pass their exam, which is an interview based on being able to read, write, and answer personal and civic questions appropriately in English. Others, however, wouldn’t bother to study or practice their English. Thus, they would inevitably fail their exams. It may seem easy for English speakers, but imagine taking an exam that tested your knowledge on the history and political system of Canada and being asked personal and civic questions in French and then being expected to answer, read, and write in French, even if they were small sentences. We’d need so much time to study another country’s history and politics, and its language too! I’m sure the students’ situation was similar.

There is so much to share about my experience with a community that I thought I knew, only to realize I do not know enough about my cultural background. I would tutor the students individually. Upon listening to their stories about how they came here to find better employment, better pay, better living conditions, and an education for their children, I realized that I took my parents’ and grandparents’ experiences for granted. I was amazed at some of the students’ stories. My parents had very similar stories, and I didn’t think twice about them. It really helped me to reflect on my own family, and how their sacrifices led me to come to college and receive this priceless higher education. Because of that, I was more than happy to give back to the community by helping those who were in my family’s shoes and required help to achieve their goals in this journey that may have started long ago, but was not yet finished.

Something else that I will take with me from this experience is admiration for some of the students. I can think of a handful of them whose characteristics really stood out. For example, there was one man from México who knew the answer to every single question and spoke English fluently, although he did have an accent. Despite being prepared enough, he would still attend every class (classes were twice a week) without fail and continued practicing at everyone else’s pace. In him, I saw so much humility for staying in class with his peers even though he didn’t have to, and I also saw so much diligence because of his studying despite the fact that he already knew everything. Also, there was one woman from El Salvador who initially knew none of the answers, understood very little English, and spoke what little she knew with a very thick accent. Nonetheless, she was determined to attain her citizenship. She and I set aside time to study the questions, translate them, and practice her English. We invested so much time and energy, and she certainly put in all the effort she could muster. Within weeks, she managed to answer most of the questions on the exam. I felt triumphant when she came back from her interview having passed! She is now a U.S. citizen because she fought for it. She, and so many others, got to share that victory.

In short, my experiences at CARECEN helped me to reflect on my own family’s experiences and I came to know and admire people who I otherwise never would have met. I feel that coming to a new country is a formidable trek, in this case, for those from Latin America. Those who take that great leap deserve so much honor and respect. The path to U.S. citizenship is tough, but many have overcome many obstacles and beat the odds. I’m just glad that I took this opportunity to grow in knowledge. I strongly encourage anyone whose ancestors are Latin American to take this internship. It is an awesome reminder of how blessed we are to receive a higher education, all thanks to that great leap our parents, grandparents, and other family members took at some point in our past.
This year's Chicana and Chicano Guest Lecture Series began with Sylvia Méndez, the daughter of Felicitas and Gonzalo Méndez. Sylvia's parents initiated the Méndez v. Westminster case (1947), the landmark court case that desegregated schools in California seven years prior to Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which desegregated schools on a national level. Sylvia has devoted her life to sharing her family's story. As a retired nurse, she has become an advocate for social justice. In 2010 Sylvia received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama for her work as an education activist.

Méndez began her lecture by showing a twenty-five minute documentary about her parents and the Westminster case. She then spoke to a packed room of students about educating ourselves and empowering our communities. She placed an emphasis on how people of color need to become educated and prove that as “minorities” we care about issues directly relating to our communities. She opened the presentation for questions from the audience. One student asked how Méndez had become an activist in the first place and how others can make an impact as well. Méndez answered by saying, “First get an education, and then get involved with your community.”

The second lecturer was renowned author Reyna Grande. She spoke about her latest book entitled “The Distance Between Us” (2013) which is her memoir and describes her experiences as an immigrant in the United States. Grande immigrated from México and her works are a reflection of the experiences she went through as undocumented in crossing the border and dealing with a very changed family dynamic. Her parents had come to the United States before her and her siblings and the family never quite recovered, an experience that has deeply impacted her writing style in an artistic sense.

Her previous work “Across A Hundred Mountains” (2007) slightly echoes her memoir, and she was asked if that was done intentionally. Grande explained that when she had begun writing “Across A Hundred Mountains,” she had intended that to be her memoir. However, reliving those painful memories had been too much for her to live through it all over again, and she created characters to suppress those painful emotions. She shared a story also about her first “book” when she was in grade school, and how her teacher didn’t bother reading it because it was in Spanish.

The last topic of the last presentation was “Latinas and Reproductive Justice: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives”, a panel discussion for International Women's History Month. The speakers were Dr. Virginia Rose Espino and Ena Suseth Valladares.

The presentation began with Dr. Espino’s "Motherhood Interrupted: Choice and Coercion at the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center." She began with a preview of her upcoming documentary “No Más Bebes” (“No More Babies), which spoke of sterilizations being done on Chicana/Latina women without their consent in the 1970s.

An interesting theme in the second presentation was "Latinas and the 'A' Word" by Ena Suseth Valladares, which dealt with the notion of “choice” and perhaps the fact that women are just not being informed adequately. Valladares is currently the Director of Research at the California Latinas for Reproductive Justice where she and her staff provide Latinas the necessary resources and education regarding reproductive health.

The campus community at California State University, Dominguez Hills was able to learn a great deal about various issues within the Chicana/Latino community. We, the students, would like to thank Dr. Marisela R. Chávez for her vision, and we hope that next year we will continue to have these educational opportunities via the Chicana and Chicano Studies Lecture Series.
Growing up, Guillermo Moreno could not see the importance of school or a future in higher education. Despite his negative feelings toward school, he pursued college with his parent’s encouragement. As a first generation college student, with parents from El Salvador, his path to college had its challenges. Since he could not turn to his parents for guidance, he relied on friends and counselors to help guide him through the process.

He discovered his appreciation and passion learning in college, “In psych, what really caught my interest was behaviorism, which demonstrates that humans and animals can become conditioned to respond to certain stimuli without being aware that each are making automatic associations between different factors. That theory made perfect sense to me, and when I learned about it, a light bulb just flashed in my brain. I was pretty amazed,” commented Moreno. And in Chicana and Chicano Studies, I just realized that my culture’s side of the story wasn’t being told in my history classes….So, I’m super glad for learning about that as well. Basically, as I progressed in college, I was just falling in love with so many of the things which I was learning and realized that there is so much to learn.”

In college, he devoted time to his church activities along with school. In his community at St. Francis Xavier’s Catholic Church, he was involved with a youth group where he led many of their activities, which included retreats, field trips, and ceremonies. Additionally, his years at Domínguez Hills were busy too because of his involvement with the campus club, Espíritu de Nuestro Futuro, a non-profit organization established to support Assembly Bill 540 students at California State University, Domínguez Hills.

Moreno’s journey took a new turn in college when he discovered a booklet entitled Pure Manhood (2007) by Jason Evert. He became so inspired by the words of Evert that he made a decision to further his education after graduation. Moreno explains, “Pure Manhood inspired me to become more informed about Catholic teaching and history and since Evert had graduated from Franciscan University of Steubenville, I decided to go there as well. I am happy to state that I have been accepted to that university, and I plan to study theology like Jason Evert.” Franciscan University of Steubenville is perhaps most famous for its theology education and considered to be one of the best in America. Moreno hopes to continue his community service efforts and to be a guest speaker at events that pertain to his degree and religious beliefs. He hopes to become an educator, but for now, Guillermo Moreno believes his direction will eventually fall into place. “My current focus is to learn all that I can about Catholicism and Theology because in this way, I will be better able to serve my community.” We wish Guillermo all the best with his academic and spiritual endeavors.