

NACCS Familia, Knowledge & Activismo: Contemplations from a Past Chair

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Have you ever tried to describe NACCS to other academics?

“Well, it’s an academic conference, but like with emotions with drama, with a march, with dancing, with 30-year-old relationships that feel like the pleasure and pain of family – the hate and love of family, and the weight of the responsibility of a civil rights movement.”

They wrinkle their eyebrows at me. “What?”

“Never mind”

This year I was a participant in a study on butch experiences in the workplace. One of the questions they asked of us was “did you ever have any butch role models in the workplace?” Apart from the former navy captain who used to run our campus security, whom I adored standing next to during convocation, I can’t think of anybody. The researcher nodded. Then she told me, it’s a big finding in her study –that we lack mentors.

But then I had to stop and ask, “Wait, do you consider conferences part of a professor’s workplace?” When she responded, “Yes” I had to try to explain NACCS to her.

“Well then, I go once or twice a year to these conferences where we find each other, a whole group of us, and we hug and present papers and Rusty (Barceló) plays the guitar and El (Heidenreich) and I buy sports shorts together and Maria (Gonzalez) gets stuff done on the board and Rita (Urquijo-Ruiz) performs theatre and Yvette (Saavedra) watches and records for the history books and there’re always more young and old ones pulling out crumpled pieces of paper and

reading aloud poems of desire for the first time. But that's just the butches. NACCS and MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social) have been a 30-year lifeline to queer Chicana/o/x relationships, theory, methodologies, epistemologies, survival, sex, and dreaming; they are ground zero for the creation of Chicana/x queer knowledge.¹

But that's just the queers.

The NACCS Chicana caucus, together with MALCS, are also the home of Chicana feminisms. The rooms where we find each other to learn and talk and heal.

But that's just the feminists.

I've also been hanging out with COMPAS (Rene Nuñez Political Action Caucus) on Friday afternoons of late because at one time Rene Nuñez and I taught together at San Diego State. He was a very tall, big haired man of the Movement. And I was a baby-faced dyke hoping my swagger would be enough to launch me into a postsecondary teaching career. He confessed to me that he didn't know much about queer stuff but he wanted to learn, especially if I was into it. In any case, he liked me, and I liked him, both of us activists, traviesxs, enjoying each other's company. He died way too early, but before he did, he handed me off to his best buddy Raoul Contreras.² And signed me up for COMPAS.³

COMPAS is like a Master Class in Chicano Studies/NACCS foundations. In addition to the goodhearted joking and all-around good faith in Chicana/x revolutionary endeavours, I learned the clarity of la perspectiva Chicana from

¹ For a brief history of how these spaces were built see *Aztlán* 39 no. 1 (Spring 2014), articles by Rita Urquijo-Ruiz, Anita Tijerina Revilla, Emma Pérez, and Michael Hames-García, among others.

² Rene Nuñez was a founder of the field of Chicana/x Studies. After serving four years in the army, he earned his Bachelor's degree in 1967, and became increasingly involved in Chicana/x activism, participating in the 1968 East LA Blowouts and in the educational demonstration at the Biltmore Hotel. He was one of the "Biltmore 10," and was central to the success of the 1969 UC Santa Barbara conference that produced El Plan de Santa Bárbara. That same year he became Director of the Centro de Estudios Chicanos at SDSU. For the next three decades he dedicated his life to promoting Chicana/x studies and making education accessible to all in our communities. See Rene Nuñez Memorial Collection, "Biographical Note," San Diego State University Library, <https://archives.sdsu.edu/repositories/2/resources/326>.

³ Note: He also told me to get my PhD at once—not a second too soon.

Reynaldo Macías, the stories of transformational learning of the Chicano Moratorium from Raoul Contreras, and the significance of Chicana activism on the world stage from Manuel de Jesus Hernandez.⁴

What I did as chair (and chair elect) (2019-2021):

- As Chair-Elect I chose, and helped to plan, the first ever Indigenous themed NACCS conference based on the request of the Indigenous Caucus, a long overdue painful and complicated conversation. It is only the beginning of what is needed.
- I also chaired meetings through a pandemic, when we didn't yet have the imaginations for it. Like so many of us, I worked scrambling to care for isolated elders, hiding out from a virus, balancing a hotel threatening to bankrupt us with members urgently needing information.
- A year into covid, I presided as Chair over the first virtual conference.
- I edited two newsletters, bringing together early tales of a faith in Chicana knowledge that helped our members survive sickness while scientists fumbled, together with eulogies to Chicana icons dying.
- I helped write, edit, and/or rope others into the writing of public statements on environmental action and rage against the systemic and literal murder of George Floyd.
- I listened and responded to a lot of members' concerns, ideas, dreams. I had the fortune to receive members' thanks for keeping NACCS available for us to simply find each other, and to know about the generosity of donations of funding to keep the organization standing.
- I also just did a lot of overall nudging to help make sure we kept moving along. The number one best thing though for me personally, selfishly, have been the beautiful friendships with other NACCS board members that I got to be a part of.

⁴The following links offer information about the life and work of these veterano Chicano Studies scholars and activists: for Reynaldo Macías, co-founder of *Aztlán* and of the National Caucus of Chicano Social Scientists, see <https://chavez.ucla.edu/person/reynaldo-macias/>; for Manuel de Jesús Hernández-G., a founder of the field, who, as a youth attended the 1969 Denver Youth Conference see <https://search.asu.edu/profile/884>; and for insight into the pedagogy and politics of Raoul Contreras see <https://www.iun.edu/news/2017/participatory-democracy.htm?fbclid=IwAR0ImQhUqP6MF3-TWYY7-cznhibXLP7EWUxpDgJAzlrr-VusgRSKh4jhsag>

What I wished I could do internally:

I wished I could offer more vision. I confess though, that if I could have just one thing, I would want something very practical. I want to figure out a way to help NACCS become stronger financially, for long-term sustainability. I want NACCS members to understand that financial health for our organization requires continuing commitment of ideas, work, and funds. Perhaps we could hold some type of summit with everyone (who is able) can pitch in ideas and/or money to keep us afloat for another fifty years. I also want a clear plan for a leadership pipeline (as Aureliano DeSoto mentioned). I was on the nomination committee this year, and it was difficult to find someone to run as chair. How can we make the chair position a role that is valued and sought after?

What I wish I could do externally, via our public voice:

- Environmental and food justice with Devon Peña, Luz Calvo, and Catriona Esquibel.⁵
- Concrete interventions to love and save the land.
- I would also be happy if NACCS could put a stop to Putin. Get him ousted, he's making me super nervous, but let's not stop there, let's go for nuclear disarmament.
- More at home, and with education in mind, I want NACCS to take a leadership role in combatting the mass banning of queer children's books, challenging the laws that ban so called CRT in institutions of learning, and finally making sure that the "Chicano Studies" included as part of new Ethnic Studies mandatory curricula requirements in some states is intersectional.⁶ We have worked over these past 50 years to ensure

⁵ These incredible scholar-activists continue to lead us forward in print and action. See, for example Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2015); Devon Peña, Luz Calvo, Pancho McFarland, and Gabriel R Valle, *Mexican-Origin Foods, Foodways, and Social Movements: Decolonial Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Arkansas Press, 2017); Devon Gerardo Peña, *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas, 2014).

⁶ See Ivory A. Toldson, "New Study Reveals the Anti-CRT Agenda Is Really about Denying Racism and Revising History," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* 39, no. 16

Chicana/o/x Studies includes a diversity of voices, and we don't want this rich knowledge lost as our work becomes institutionalized for K-12 students.

(November 24, 2022): 12–13; Mary Lindsay Krebs, “Can’t Really Teach: CRT Bans Impose Upon Teachers’ First Amendment Pedagogical Rights,” *Vanderbilt Law Review* 75, no. 6 (November 2022): 1925–55.

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