

Giving Back to the Community

By Alejandro Lopez

There are an abundant number of ways in which I as a UCLA student can share my knowledge with immigrant workers. I will begin by discussing ways in which I have been successful in giving back to the community through my involvement with campus organizations as well as community and national organizations.

When I attended Cerritos Community College in the city of Norwalk I was Internal Chair of MEChA. Through MEChA the other members and I coordinated events such as a forum on Proposition 187, which was a policy that denied immigrants the right to obtain an education and healthcare. We spread the word on the forum very well I must add. We publicized the event at the adult education center on campus where many immigrants gathered. At this site, there were frequently immigrants who were interested in obtaining a trade and/or perhaps learning English. The other thing MEChA did was meet with community organizations and community leaders who opposed Proposition 187. Along with their help we were able to flyer and create spaces especially where immigrants tended to be located for example near particular work sites, in certain shopping centers and flea markets, in religious centers, at adult schools, and in particular restaurants. Many immigrants also tend to ride buses and the metro hence they can be found near bus stops, and metro stations. Our collaborative efforts proved to be successful because we were very satisfied with the turnout at the forum.

Another way that we can bridge the gap with the immigrant community is by joining community organizations such as KIWA, CHIRLA and other community organizations that advocate for immigrant rights and that also are active in political demonstrations, rallies and protests. These organizations provide a strong foundation of support and valuable resources pertaining to immigrant communities. There are many ways in which one can share their knowledge with the immigrant workers at sites like these. Activities such as silk screening (making shirts), making posters, designing flyers, and networking with other communities and organizations take place here. Additionally one has access to telephones, computers and other resources that can be of great benefit. By being active through community organizations and in such activities the immigrant workers and UCLA students are able to work together, learn from each other and establish bonds that can last a lifetime. In the process, race relations becomes an important concept because we learn from each others culture and realize that we are part of a movement that is more significant than we are. We strive not for material gain but for similar goals, to combat unfair inequalities that we are faced with.

I am an artist and I have taken courses on muralism with Chicana artist Judy Baca here at UCLA. The process involving the creation of public art can be a powerful way of bringing people of diverse backgrounds together. I would suggest finding a public space where immigrant workers, students and other community members could contribute to the formation of a mural that would address a message to the people. The process of researching the history of the theme(s), making the agreement on what we will include, how and why, and especially the process of using the medium to make the mural would

require us to engage in conversation, analysis, and critique in order to complete the mural. Ultimately, this would be a fulfilling experience because we would learn more of each other, we would be conveying an important visual message/political statement and we would also build strong bonds amongst our respective communities.

As I have mentioned before I volunteer at a local worker center on the weekends. While there I along with other members of Conciencia Libre share our knowledge by reading about current issues that affect our communities. The workers tell us of their experiences in the workforce and we share knowledge that we have learned at the university. Moreover, learning in this case is reciprocal, we learn from them and they learn from us. Much like we have done in this course we would be challenging dominant ideologies of how teaching and learning should occur.