

A word from The Puente Project's Executive Director, Julia Vergara



Dear Puente Family,

As we approach the end of the year, I am reflecting with great appreciation. It is a time for remembering, with gratitude, those who have helped make Puente a responsive, thoughtful, and impactful organization.

The fall semester was also marked by many important events that support Puente's focus on equity and belonging. We reconnected with many of you in-person, and met with thousands of our new and continuing students. Many of us are also looking forward to holiday celebrations with loved ones during this season. It would be remiss of me not to recognize that this festive time contrasts greatly with horrific things continuing to happen around the world.

The stories, images, and audio being broadcasted in the news are difficult to view. We know that behind those images are deeper stories of innocent people losing a parent, child, partner, or even their entire family. For many of us, viewing these situations might trigger memories of our own war-torn countries of origin. We, along with so many others, will continue to demand a cease fire and that the violence in the Gaza and the West Bank come to an end. We stand in solidarity with all communities fighting oppressive, inhumane living conditions and state-sanctioned violence.

The Puente Project has always been committed to community empowerment and dismantling systems of oppression. We also know that our individual capacity to take on such important work, from the heart, varies day to day. When you have capacity, please take action in the ways that you can, continue to learn about what is happening, and be intentional about the corporations you are supporting as you make purchases. When you find yourself exhausted and weighed down by it all, please rest and recharge to the best of your ability. We know that we must all do our part to seek justice and liberation collectively. Within Puente, through education in action, we will continue to create a greater sense of understanding and empathy amongst our communities.

These are indeed difficult times, and I hope that connecting with our Puente Community has brought you some comfort, like it has for me. Our time together this last semester has been cherished. You make a meaningful difference in our world and I appreciate your support and commitment to bettering our communities.

With gratitude,

Julia

MOMENTS TO CELEBRATE

With each new academic year comes The Puente Project's tradition of welcoming the incoming cohorts of Puentistas at our students conferences!

October · NorCal Transfer Motivational Conference · 1400 Puentistas Hosted by UC Davis



November · NorCal HS Student Leadership Conference · 500 Puentistas Hosted by UC Berkeley



November · SoCal Transfer Motivational Conference · 1200 Puentistas Hosted by CSUSB



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*Coming
soon*

Puente Secondary Programs will have their SoCal Student Leadership Conference at the start of next semester. It will be hosted at CSU San Marcos.

LEADERSHIP IN MOTION



Dr. Frances Contreras has been an integral member of our Advisory Board for ___ years. We are happy to announce that she will now serve as Advisory Board Chair moving forward. Dr. Contreras is dean and professor of the UC Irvine School of Education. She began her tenure on Jan. 1, 2022, and is the first Chicana/Latina dean to lead a school of education in the UC system.

As a scholar, Dean Contreras' research focuses on issues of equity and access for underrepresented students in the education pipeline and the role of public policy in ensuring student equity across the P-20 continuum.

She is a first-generation college student – earning her bachelor's degree from UC Berkeley, master's degree from Harvard University and Ph.D. from Stanford University.

Prior to her arrival at the School of Education, Dean Contreras served more than 15 years of academic leadership at UC San Diego and the University of Washington, including as associate vice chancellor of equity, diversity and inclusion at UCSD and directing the higher education program at UW's College of Education.



We are excited to announce the promotion of Cathy Martinez from Mentor Coordinator to External Affairs and Strategic Planning Director. Cathy has held several roles and has contributed greatly to our organization since joining our office staff in 2001. Cathy's ongoing dedication and contributions made to further the mission and vision of The Puente Project have been invaluable!

In her most recent role as Mentor Coordinator, she supported Puente community college faculty with program implementation and mentoring. During the pandemic, she continued to ensure students experienced mentoring and looked for new ways for our volunteer mentors to remain connected to the program during a challenging time. Additionally, in her role as a Puente Regional Project Coordinator, she supported both Community College and Secondary programs with program implementation and professional development. For the last 10 years, Cathy also has also served as the representative for the UC Transfer Preparation Committee. Cathy has led many of Puente's major educational conferences, created summer residential programs, participated on grant writing teams, and presented at several state and national professional conferences.

The External Affairs and Strategic Planning position will manage external partners, support fund development, and assist the Executive Director with strategic planning. In this new role, Cathy will help operationalize and align program policies and streamline administrative processes.



We are also excited to announce the promotion of Larissa Gómez Vázquez from Community College Counselor Training Coordinator to Associate Director of Communications. Larissa has been an integral member of the Puente statewide team since 2017 and was previously a Puente counselor at College of the Sequoias in Visalia, CA. Prior to attending grad school at the University of Redlands, Larissa worked in a variety of Marketing & Public Relations offices as well as in the corporate sector.

Larissa views this change in her role at Puente as the perfect intersection of all her professional skill sets and looks forward to elevating and amplifying Puente's visibility in the community. She also seeks to bring to life Puente's qualitative data in a way that has never been done before!

NEW HIRES

Counselor Training Coordinator

Community College
Programs

Nohemy Chavez comes to Puente from Mission College in Santa Clara where she was a tenured counseling faculty for 8 years, including some during which she served as the Puente Project Co-Coordinator.

Nohemy was born and raised in the Salinas Valley in California's central coast. Her parents immigrated from Mexico and raised her in a bilingual household in the city of Soledad.

Nohemy is a product of the University of California Early Academic Opportunity Program (EAOP), which led her to UC Davis where she graduated with a B.S. in Community and Regional Development before continuing to earn a Master's degree in Counseling from Sacramento State. Nohemy is committed to social justice reform in higher education and has worked in K-20 in various capacities and volunteered for non-profit organizations such as the Chicana/o Latina/o Youth Leadership Project.



Program Assistants



Monica Velazquez is the new Program Assistant for Secondary Programs.

BRIGHAM YOUNG

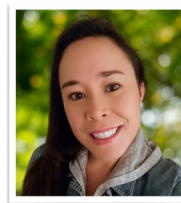
Monica comes to Puente directly from community organizing and advocacy work as a Day Laborer Worker Rights Organizer with the Street Level Health Project in Oakland.

Monica holds a Bachelors in Arts in Chicanx Studies with a minor in Political Science from UC Davis and she has been part of the McNair Scholars Program. Monica has also been a Graduate Teaching Assistant at UC Davis, an Occupational Health Intern at UC Berkeley's Labor Occupational Health Program and a Union Researcher with UC Berkeley's Labor Center.



Lenika Rivas Sanchez will serve Puente as Program Assistant in Puente's new Southern California office.

As a first-generation student, Lenika attended Brown University and earned a B.S. in Environmental Science and a B.A. in Latin American & Caribbean Studies. She also spent time in Washington D.C. as an intern for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. Before joining Puente, Lenika was with the Office of Student Affairs at Columbia University. Outside of work, Lenika enjoys engaging with mindfulness practices, hiking and exploring gardens, and learning about radical theory frameworks. Lenika's general interests lie at the intersection of multidisciplinary art, environmental justice, and urban policy.



Miranda Triay was born and raised in Southern California. They received their BA in Cultural Anthropology & Philosophy at Seattle University

and their MA in Philosophy with a graduate certificate in Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State. They have worked in education administration since 2015 and have worked at multiple universities, including San Francisco State, Cal Poly Pomona, and the University of San Francisco. At Keck Graduate Institute, they helped establish programs and policies for KGI's DEI Committee, including the successful implementation of KGI's first Campus Read program. They believe that honesty and kindness are two of the greatest assets anyone can possess and that thoughtful, compassionate communication is key to building long-lasting relationships.

Celebrating Retirement!



Leo Zamora, Program Assistant extraordinaire, will be retiring after 20+ years dedicated to higher education between his time with UCOP and The Puente Project Statewide Office.

Leo has been instrumental in coordinating all things logistical and technological, he kept us organized, and made magic happen by pulling things together when the team thought we were out of options - always with a positive, optimistic attitude. Leo has been an invaluable member of the statewide team and we will miss him tremendously!

PoderOso

BY STEVE GONZALES, HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRAINING COORDINATOR

The Puente Project is celebrating our third year in partnering with UC Berkeley's PoderOso program. It supports high school senior Puentistas statewide with their online applications, financial aid workshops, and other resources. In addition, the students are supported with individual PIQ sessions where Berkeley staff meet with senior students to provide feedback on their writing. Upon receiving an offer for admission, PoderOso seeks to connect with students and their families offering informational sessions in both English and Spanish. Puentistas who choose to attend UC Berkeley, are also invited to apply to the NAVCAL Fellowship Program which is a semester-long near-peer/mentorship support class that helps make their transition to university life smoother.



Here is a student voice that describes their experience in PoderOso:

"I entered UC Berkeley completely unprepared as a first-generation college student. I had a lot of anxiety about going from high school to college. I discovered the importance of my identity in this program, as well as how to carry my background with me wherever I go. As an incoming freshman at UC Berkeley, I was immediately overcome by feelings of change and a lack of knowledge about what to anticipate from a place like Berkeley. PoderOso and NAVCAL made clear that while all of my feelings are completely valid, there are established solutions for coping to help me deal with my circumstances. I was able to feel comfortable on my campus thanks to NAVCAL and PoderOso, and I now feel confident in my credibility and in my own abilities."

PUENTE MaS (Math and Science)

BY MELVA ALVAREZ, COMMUNITY COLLEGE STEM COORDINATOR

As Puente Project celebrates over 40 years of service to community college students, we also welcome the opportunity to enhance services by embracing Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as a necessary social justice initiative for our learning community. Executive Director Julia Vergara has seen STEM programming as a much needed area of interest but building capacity and momentum to integrate it has taken time, advocacy and resources on behalf of the Puente Statewide team and its partners. Current Puente STEM initiative highlights include:

- Puente Community College and Professional Development units expanded their team by adding math faculty contractors Melissa Aguilar (De Anza CC), Hal Huntsman (Antelope Valley CC), Dr. Rob Rubelcaba (San Diego CC), Karla Rojas (Sacramento CC) and STEM coordinator Melva Alvarez in the summer of 2022.
- Puente Community College collaborated with UCR to develop a STEM Summer Academy residential program in the summer of 2022.
- The Puente Professional Development unit, led by Director Paula Silva, and Elsie Rivas Gomez began creating and facilitating a math equity community of practice in collaboration with the CCCC in the summer of 2022. The series culmination speaker was Dr. Kyndall Brown.
- The Puente Community College unit led by Grace Ebron rolled out their Puente Math and Science (MaS) initiative as a Puente math cohort at Las Positas College, Porterville College, Sacramento College, and San Diego MESA College in the academic year of 22/23.
- Puente Community College rebranded their summer experience as Puente MaS Summer Academy and served 45 students from 33 community colleges at UC Berkeley in the summer of 2023.
- Puente MaS hosts Professional Learning Community series for MaS Faculty led by Hal Huntsman and Karla Rojas for the 23/24 academic year
- Puente 2023 Student Transfer Motivational Conferences (NorCal and SoCal) included our guest keynote science and equity education expert Dr. Chris Emdin.

In the spring of 2023, due to the various STEM Equity professional development workshops and efforts, the STEM initiative became a source of renewed energy amongst the Puente community college campuses. At the request of the administrative team we gathered our math team and convened a retreat in the spring of 2023 to learn from our math cohort pilot, address any obstacles, codify best practices and envision the Puente STEM initiative programming for community colleges now identified as Puente Math and Science (MaS). In 2023/2024 we launched 12 Puente MaS sites across the state of California.



2nd Annual Puente Equity Summit

BY PAULA SILVA, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Puente community reunited at UCLA's Lake Arrowhead Lodge from October 26 - 29, 2023 for our 2nd annual Equity Summit, a gathering of 150 community college educators from across the state. Unlike Puente's famous statewide conferences and summer institutes, the Equity Summit is open to a broader audience of faculty, regardless of their affiliation with a traditional Puente cohort program. This year's theme: Collective Healing and Freedom in Higher Education encouraged participants to expand their idea of what it means to be an equity worker with an eye toward disability, climate, and LGBTQIA+ justice. In addition to awe-inspiring, thought-provoking sessions with faculty trainers, artists, and scholars like Denice Frohman, April Baker-Bell, Lydia X.Z. Brown, Rochelle Gutierrez, and Favianna Rodriguez, Equity Summit participants could be found engaging in a variety of grounding practices and healing modalities including, massage, sound baths, meditation, ayurveda, nature walks, dance, poetry, and much more.



WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE AT THE PUENTE EQUITY SUMMIT, HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE SAID:

“Just being amongst amazing, intelligent, inspiring professionals who live and breath equity. People who really get it and do the work day to day. I felt belonging and understanding. Oftentimes at my campus I feel like I have to explain and justify everything and fight for everything and it's exhausting. This was a breath of fresh air when I felt welcomed, understood, supported and valued. I could be me without any reservation. Summit is a place to learn, be inspired, and truly be in unity.”

“THE BALANCE OF TAKING GOOD CARE OF OURSELVES AND WORKING TOWARD EQUITY MAKES SENSE TO ME. I KNOW WE GET REALLY BURNOUT WHEN WE ISOLATE, BUT WHEN WE COME TOGETHER AND SUPPORT OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER THAN “LOOK OUT WORLD” WE ARE A POWERFUL FORCE.”

“I love the theme of Healing. It is something I don't give myself the freedom to practice. We are not encouraged to take care of ourselves in order to do the hard work we do. We are told we should practice self-care but we are never actually given the time. The content and pacing of the summit workshops, and rest and recreation activities made it so we could take time to heal and rebuild our souls. I brought that back to my classroom and gave students time to be contemplative.”

Reflections on the journey of a Puentista...

BY WILLIAM MOISES DIAZ · B.A POLITICAL SCIENCE CLASS OF 2024 · UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY

When I sit back and think of “lo lejos que a llegado” (how far I've come) I can't forget where I started and how I got here. I started not knowing if school was even a option for me. I decided to give it a shot and enrolled in school. My first semester at Golden West Community College was a blur because I felt lost and didn't know what I was doing. I was taking classes just to take them. Luckily a school counselor talked to me about The Puente Project and how it could help me get a degree and take me on college field trips. When I heard field trips I said, “let's go!”. We went on many field trips to different colleges and we were told that we too could attend these different schools.



William Diaz, Proud Community College Puentista

Today Im a first-generation Chicano finishing up my last year at UC Berkeley. I will be receiving my bachelors degree in Political Science (Class of 2024) and getting ready for the next chapter of my academic journey - applying to law schools.

Puente helped me get here because through its culturally inclusive curriculum I was able to see myself in my studies and in history. Puente helped me realize that school is a choice, and a good one too!
“Ahora me despido” (I am out) “Once a PUEENTISTA, always a PUEENTISTA”



William Diaz, Presenting his reasearch to his honors seminar | UC Berkeley

Upcoming: Annual Scholarship Drive



Our statewide office is extremely moved and inspired by the community support we continue to receive each year. Thanks to many generous spirits, we raised over \$57,000 during the annual Big Give fundraising event, in March 2023. Puente students benefit directly from these meaningful investments which increase access to basic needs and support their degree completion. 100% of gifts fund student scholarships for both secondary and community college scholars.

We look forward to your financial support, and help getting the word out, for our next 24-hour BigGive scholarship drive to be held on March 14, 2024.

Stay tuned for more details!



Do you have a Puente Community story that needs to be shared?

Contact Larissa.Gomez@berkeley.edu



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