

# ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

INNOVATIVE COURSES LINK LAS STUDENTS TO THE WIDER WORLD

WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS FOR A SIGNATURE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN LAS? DEAN GUILLERMO VÁSQUEZ DE VELASCO TICKS THEM OFF ON HIS FINGERS:

MISSION-BASED.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY.

EXPERIENTIAL.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM.

CREATING LEADERS FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

HERE'S  
HOW THEY  
LOOK IN  
PRACTICE.

## LATINO COMMUNITY SERIES

Learning goes both ways when students in her classes spend time providing homework help to children in low-income neighborhoods, says Lourdes Torres, professor and chair of the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies. She developed Growing Up Latino/a in the U.S., one of three service-learning courses that enable students to explore Latino culture while learning about it from young mothers, children and middle-school students. Her students always gain more than a different perspective.

"They develop leadership ability. They learn how to conduct small-group activities or focus groups. They learn how to engage with, or how to reach out to, someone who might be reluctant to engage. They learn how to problem-solve when things don't turn out as they expected," she says. "Working in the

community encourages students to be more flexible and to know that there's not just one solution to a problem."

Dominic Carranza (Arabic '17) took Growing Up Latino/a so he could explore neighborhoods he'd never seen before and work with children from his own ethnic background. He and fellow student Michelle Dominguez (English Literature and Community Psychology '17), both of whom were raised in non-Latino communities, also enrolled so they could explore their heritage. The experience was both insightful and surprising, Dominguez says.

"Sometimes the kids wouldn't know as much as I thought they would, so being able to share things that I've learned—that not everyone who is Latino speaks Spanish and that we're from a lot of different countries—was really cool. We were teaching each other," says Dominguez.



Centro Romero is one of many service-learning sites for Latino community courses.



Kim Wasserman-Nieto, executive director for the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, was one of several speakers for Despair and Hope. Photo courtesy of Goldman Environmental Prize.

## DESPAIR AND HOPE

"If we professors have trouble reading the newspaper and coping with what's going on in the world, it's even harder for students," says Frida Kerner Furman, professor in the departments of Religious Studies and Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies. "I decided to provide them with some models through a course called Despair and Hope."

By necessity, those models reflect many disciplines, including religious studies, philosophy, psychology and literature. "There are no definitive answers to the issue of despair, but there are various ways that individuals respond to it," Furman says.

Peter Kurzawski, a junior majoring in developmental psychology, was amazed that readings as dissimilar as the "Epic of Gilgamesh" and the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. all point at a universal

message: finding wisdom within the suffering.

"Professor Furman's class really forces you to discover how you relate to the material, which lets you decide how to apply it to your life," he says.

Students do exactly that during the final portion of the class, which brings in one more discipline: science. Working in teams, they choose an environmental issue to investigate. After examining how religious and scientific organizations are trying to address the problem, they formulate their own ethically grounded approach.

"You can't simply study these issues from one point of view. Students need to be aware of the complexities of these issues and learn from that. Then they can plug in [take action] where they feel most comfortable," Furman says. "My role as an educator is to help students become better, more responsible citizens."

## REFUGEE AND FORCED MIGRATION INTERNSHIPS

The Master of Science in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies "is a very self-consciously interdisciplinary program," says Shailja Sharma, program director. It also develops students' leadership skills, particularly in service delivery and development of public policy.

"It's geared to students who have skills in different areas like law, public service and nonprofit management, along with academic subjects like history and international relations," she says. Students draw on all those disciplines when they work directly with refugees through internships either in Chicago or abroad.

"[Chicago-based students] do everything—help refugees with their paperwork, teach them English, help them adjust to high school. They also are working in advocacy positions for refugees," she says. "Our overseas students are working on journals that help set policy or raise public opinion around refugee issues."

Through her internships, Tessa Lavdiotis (Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies '14, MS Refugee and Forced Migration



Tessa Lavdiotis (Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies '14, MS Refugee and Forced Migration Studies '17) interned and now works for Field Ready, which builds and deploys humanitarian supplies such as airbags used to rescue people trapped under debris. Photo courtesy of Field Ready.

Studies '17) worked with Syrian refugees in Greece, with the American Red Cross in Chicago and with Field Ready, an NGO that meets humanitarian need by transforming logistics through technology, design and new ways of engaging people.

"Working on the ground gave me insights that I would not have had through simply studying this subject," she says. "Working

with Field Ready helped me learn many aspects of nonprofit management, such as grant and report writing, communications, budgeting and various other elements. I've become not only more confident in my skills, but also have been able to learn what a leader looks like through many of the extremely experienced and talented individuals I have worked with."