History Matters: Our Alumni in the Professional World

On 18 February 2014, the History Department at California State University Los Angeles (CSULA) honored Dr. Rodolfo Acuña, a distinguished alumnus who graduated with his B.A. in 1957 and M.A. in 1962. The department recognized his contributions in academia and his efforts on behalf of the Mexican-American community. The first such honoree, Dr. Acuña was a founding member and now a Professor Emeritus of the Chicano Studies Department at CSU Northridge. In addition to the History Department's Community Outreach and Engagement efforts, the Special Features team of *Perspectives* Volume 41 sought to learn more about the department's alumni. We hope to inspire and encourage current students to leave a legacy as rich and meaningful as Dr. Acuña's.

Lacking a formal database of the department's alumni, we relied on professors who graciously provided us with the contact information of students with whom they have stayed in touch. The list included graduates spanning four decades. We contacted over thirty alumni, most of whom are employed in the field of education as instructors at high schools, community colleges, or universities. What follows is not a complete picture of the experiences of our department's graduates but anecdotes rich in content that highlight the personal and professional experiences our alumni gained at CSULA.

In our correspondence, we sought to learn more about their experiences both as students and as professionals in the field of history. Why did they choose CSULA? How has a degree in history prepared them for their careers? What opportunities and challenges might lie ahead for those pursuing a degree in history now? Answers to these and other related questions prove both interesting and insightful. We wish to thank the faculty and alumni for their participation.

Dr. Afshin Matin-Asgari, Professor in Middle East History and Religious Studies at CSULA, is also a department alumnus. He received his B.A. in 1979 and his M.A. in 1980. He recalls his time as a

student at CSULA as exceptionally positive and he was drawn to the wide range of readings assigned in his history classes. After completing his degrees at CSULA, Matin was invited to teach a course here. He attributes his success in obtaining a Ph.D. in History from University of California, Los Angeles, to the skills he developed at CSULA. He encourages current students to pursue their degree with purpose because research and writing are important in any career. Failing to do so, Matin adds, would be cheating oneself of the "opportunity that most people have only once in a lifetime."

Alejandro Jose Valadez is a history teacher and an instructor in both Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Pathways for the engineering program at Schurr High School in Montebello, California. Valadez graduated in 2006 with his B.A. and two years later with an M.A. in History. He describes his time at CSULA as a fantastic experience with wonderful and caring professors who encouraged him to continue pursuing history after graduation. The faculty taught him how to interpret historical documents and to read and write as a historian. He believes CSULA has one of the best history departments in the state. Upon his admission to CSULA, he received a letter from the Department Chair welcoming him to the program, while other offers of acceptance came from the university's admissions office and were signed by autopen. Valadez still remembers Professor Burnstein's personalized letter that made all the difference to him.

Carrie Glenn graduated in 2013 with an M.A. and is currently a first-year doctoral student at the University of Delaware. She compliments the History department faculty for training their graduate students in advanced research, analysis, and writing. Glenn believes that her time here not only prepared her for the rigors of graduate study, but also gave her confidence to pursue and attain employment as a graduate assistant at Delaware. At CSULA she learned how to balance coursework with grading, family life, and other responsibilities. Today, she thinks it is important that students consider how they plan to use their degree. Knowing what she wanted to do helped to shape her own graduate student experience. She also suggests that meeting with faculty is instrumental in forming a clear plan as well as understanding the different options.

The students who have matriculated from the CSULA History Department have pursued careers in a variety of fields. In our search for respondents, we contacted lawyers, museum directors, authors, business owners, librarians, LAPD officers, and screenwriters. The skills and experiences gained at CSULA have contributed to the success of our alumni in their respective fields. Their accomplishments demonstrate to current students that anything is possible with a degree

in History. The profession of choice for our alumni, however, remains in the field of education. Whether as K-12 teachers, or as instructors at two- or four-year colleges or universities, our alumni have been well prepared for the transition from the desk to the lectern. As we reflect upon the department's first Annual Celebration of Alumni, Professor Acuña's honoring bridges past and present generations of CSULA students as he echoes responses of the other alumni's fond memories about feeling valued as student. Professor Acuña's work and success emulate the rich tradition that faculty try to instill in their students each and every day. We know we will continue this tradition of excellence, and we hope you will help us and future editors of this journal to record our successes by keeping in touch with your professors and/or through our Facebook page: facebook.com/csula.perspectives

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