

Stanford Center for Latin American Studies
Library Access Grant
Final Report,
Randall Vail, Pescadero High School

As mentioned in our application, Pescadero High School is in a rural, agricultural community with a majority of Latino students. We have a high number of low-SES, at-risk, ELD students. Yet, our students are aware of what is happening in the world and they want to know more, especially about the immigration crisis that dominated the headlines from the 2016 election through 2019. Not only did we, the teachers, want to have our students explore these important issues, we wanted to get them out of town, to give them a glimpse of collegiate academics, to take them to Stanford University.

With one Library Access grant from the Center for Latin American Studies, we were able to take two field trips and service two groups of students over two different school years. In addition to doing library research, we were able to see some of the campus, learn about the history of Stanford, and get a first hand feeling for the life of a university student.

During the 2018-19 school year, focusing on Mr. Allen's Social Studies classes (Civics and US History), we took a group of about twenty five, mostly 11th and 12th grade students. In addition to Mr. Allen and myself (then a TOSA), we also brought along English teacher Jose Perez and Counselor Margaret Sedillo. During the 2019-20 school year, focusing on my 'Big History Project' World History class (Mr. Allen is now our Principal and I am a Social Studies/English teacher), we took a group of twenty two 10th grade students.

For both field trips, our tour guide and mentor was Adan Griego, who went beyond the call of duty and expanded the scope of our studies to include a hands-on experience of Mexican history. He shared resources in the Latin American collection of the Green Library about the Spanish conquest, Aztec codices, historical images from the Mexican Revolution, actual letters from people involved in the Bracero program, and artifacts of contemporary Mexican-American art. In addition to his presentation, the students were able to spend time in the stacks (my personal goal) looking for and finding books on their research topics. Mr. Griego's gracious stewardship of our students, his bilingual presentation, his knowledge and gift of elucidation, made our field trips to the library at Stanford particularly meaningful.

The results of both sets of research projects were particularly rewarding. Under the general umbrella of "The Historical Antecedents of the Current Immigration Crisis," students selected a variety of topics including, the Mexican-American War, American imperialism as depicted in "War is a Racket by Smedley Butler," the history of United Fruit, various C.I.A. Operations in Central America, consequences of the School of the Americas, the rise of Mexican Drug Cartels, Narcoculture, the Bracero Program, the Farm Workers Movement, Fake v. Real News, the History

of US Immigration Policy, actions of the Trump administration, the particulars of the plight of migrants, etc. Using both books from the library and access to databases, in 2018-19, the students wrote and submitted research papers; and in 2019-20, the students created and delivered slideshow presentations.

Perhaps the most profound result of our field trips for library research was the opportunity for our students to find out who they are, where they are from, and to learn some of the rich history of Latin America. Rather than just being the children of farm workers, or vaguely related to poor people in the news, they were able to see themselves in a larger context. That Stanford University would have an entire section of their enormous library dedicated to the story of their people was validating for our students. That these rich stories, thousands of them found in the vast stacks, were about their ancestors and their history, this was an affirmation of their culture. The experience brought gravitas to their sense of self.

One student had heard a relative of his had been in the Mexican Revolution, but didn't know what that meant. One student knew that her grandfather had been part of the Bracero program, but now saw what that involved. More than one student made astute observations about the Spanish conquest, the Mexican Cession, the exploitation of labor, the proliferation of drug cartels, and the fact that their family's story is part of the grand sweep of history.

While the Library Access grant might have been primarily designed for individual scholars to learn at Stanford, I think you have maximized your return on investment. By giving two groups of deserving local high school students a chance to understand something about academic research, you have empowered them beyond the gift of knowledge. You have planted seeds. You have touched the future. You have spread some light. And we are most grateful!

Sincerely,

Randall Vail,
Kevin Allen,
Jose Perez,
Margaret Sedillo,
and the students at Pescadero High School