

THE LATINO LITERARY CULTURES PROJECT/ PROYECTO CULTURAS LITERARIAS LATINAS

University of California, Santa Cruz

MISSION STATEMENT

The *Latino Literary Cultures Project/ Proyecto culturas literarias latinas* is an interdisciplinary initiative at UC Santa Cruz dedicated to studying and promoting creative writing by and about U.S. Latinas and Latinos, past and present. It stages a high-profile biennial conference that is innovatively structured to bring together writers with scholars and students, translators and reviewers, librarians and archivists, booksellers and publishers, along with a wide range of readerships.

By specifying “literary cultures” as its object, the Project recognizes the dynamic nature of twenty-first century literary experience. While many Latinos/as continue to read and write in the genres of short story, novel, and poetry, many others are focused on emergent forms such as blogs, performance work, graphic novels, memoir and *testimonio*. As our bilingual name indicates, Latino/a literature can be and has been written in Spanish, in English, or in multiple hybrid forms of English-Spanish. This linguistic fluidity underscores the global nature of contemporary Latino/a writing, and its translation and transmission into different national contexts. We actively try to recruit writers and scholars living outside the U.S.

There are precious few public spaces in the U.S. for publicizing, disseminating, and thinking critically about writing by Latinos. Although there are many thriving programs and departments in Latino Studies across the U.S., creative work is less visible in these institutional contexts than policy-oriented and quantitative research projects, in part because of greater funding opportunities in these areas. There is no single, regular conference or research center focusing on U.S. Latino literature from its historical origins to the present day, and the LLC/CLL aims to step into that void.

The LLC/CLL aims to make Santa Cruz the international center of new thought and creative work in this area. Our region—broadly encompassing the Monterey Bay, San José/Silicon Valley, and the Salinas Valley—is the past, current and future home of a significant population of Latinos and Latinas, including a number of significant writers (Gloria Anzaldúa, Luis Valdez, Ernesto Galarza, Cherríe Moraga, to name a few). As a research unit of the Chicano/Latino Research Center—one of the pioneering university research centers of this type—we are able to draw from a rich range of local expertise both on and off campus. Finally, by joining forces with UCSC’s Educational Partnerships Office, we will build new pathways between the university and local secondary school teachers and students.

Our first bilingual conference in November 2006, “Latino Literature/La Literatura Latina,” was rated a tremendous success by both our participants and our many attendees from the university and surrounding communities. Our featured speakers included the writers Francisco Goldman, Alfredo Véa, Reyna Grande, Tino Villanueva, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Susana Chávez-Silverman, Alicia Alarcón, and Nina Martínez; bookstore owners and small publishers Nicolás Kanellos, Brent Beltrán, Rueben Martínez; and scholars Manuel Martín-Rodríguez, Marisa Belasteguigoitia, Rosaura Sánchez, and Lucia Suárez. Our second conference in November 2008 promises to surpass this, and our new website (currently in the design phase) will both document and publicize the event.