

The Central Michigan University Experience

A Case Study in Migratory Farm Worker Affirmative Action

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- Hello! I'm Isidore Flores from Edinburg, Texas. I'm just a dour administrator involved in a historical event that needed to be written down, so I wouldn't get your hopes up that I will be starting off this presentation with a joke.

- You know, over time, the term Affirmative Action has come to mean different things to different people. You hear the term now and it is usually followed by an angry voice railing against quotas for unqualified people, and the unfairness of it all to everybody else. Here, today, I am using it as it was used circa 1970, in mostly academic circles, to mean the things that could be done to increase the numbers of students from American's sub-populations that weren't enjoying the same opportunities for success in higher education that the rest were.

- Central Michigan University is located 70 miles north of here in Mt. Pleasant. It pretty much sits in the middle of the lower peninsula of Michigan. In the years that the events that I am about to relate took place, the school had a student enrollment of about 12,000; now it is roughly double that. Mt. Pleasant itself was mostly just a college town, otherwise known for oil and gas exploration support businesses, agriculture, and the Chippewa Indian Reservation; the casino movement had yet to evolve. The Latino student population was practically zero. Most Latinos in the states colleges and universities attended urban campuses closer to their homes.

Case Study Main Stakeholders

- ◉ Migrant farm worker students
- ◉ United Migrants for Opportunity Incorporated (UMOI)
- ◉ Central Michigan University (CMU)
- ◉ Urban upperclassmen

- There are various aspects to this story, but the most important ones surround a group of young migrant farm workers, and what they chose to do for themselves and their families. They were brave pioneers, who had the motivation and energy to actualize their dream of a college education and having no idea what the process was going to be like. They agreed to go to an institution that was 2000 miles away from the Rio Grande Valley; very far away from home and family for most of them, and with no money; a place where the temperatures were cold, and where college life promised to be full of unknowns. They took a big chance and put their trust in United Migrants for Opportunity, Inc. and Central Michigan University; thereby challenging those organizations to do everything they could to help them negotiate educational obstacles that few if any other groups of Latino students had ever faced. The response to that challenge paved the way for all migrant farm worker students who would come after them, and made possible rich opportunities for non-migrant Hispanics like Dr. Paul Ruiz who went to work at CMU, and myself, who arrived as an upperclassman transfer from San Antonio College.

Stakeholder Interviews

- ◉ Migrant farm worker students: Marissa Miranda (now Zamudio)
- ◉ United Migrants for Opportunity Incorporated (UMOI): George Johnson
- ◉ Central Michigan University (CMU): Paul Ruiz
- ◉ Urban upperclassmen: Isidore Flores

United Migrants for Opportunity Incorporated (UMOI): George Johnson, Deputy Director

- ◉ Impetus to admit migratory farm workers to CMU sparked by a migrant wanting to go to college
- ◉ Close ties at the academic and administrative levels between UMOI & CMU allowed for a high level of trust and fast program development
- ◉ CMU trusted UMOI to choose those farm workers to be admitted in the initial group; mostly in the interest of time

- George Johnson resides in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. He was interviewed at his home on 10 September 2009. The following narrative is primarily based on that interview with clarifications and amplifications provided by others: He was asked to reminisce about how Central Michigan University (CMU) came to provide migratory farm workers with the opportunity to enroll in college.
- United Migrants for Opportunity, Inc. (UMOI) was located in Mt. Pleasant at the time. It had come into existence under Title III B of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). UMOI was in existence for three years before Mr. Johnson started working there. After his involvement began, a program was initiated to use bilingual college students in efforts to spread information among migratory farm workers about the services available to them from UMOI as well as from the state and federal governments. In the summer of 1969, about 35 students were hired to go into the migratory farm worker camps in Michigan to do this work.
- One of those students reported that a young woman farm worker (Lupe Castro) made it known that she wanted to go to college. The opportunity to go to college was not something that was available to migratory farm workers at the time; this was an entirely new area for exploration. After hearing this, Mr. Johnson met with James Hayes, a Vice-Provost at CMU and a new UMOI board member, to discuss her interest. Mr. Hayes decided to embark on the effort to enroll her; a decision Mr. Johnson considers the key factor in the success of the overall effort to provide the opportunity for migratory farm workers to go to college.
- At the time, colleges across the state were enrolling ethnic minority students from the cities. The Vice-Provost's decision was based on the statistic that the minority group retention rate beyond the first year across the state was only 20% under the then current admissions criteria. The logic argued that a change in criteria was worth the chance. What would it hurt to try something different considering the status quo low retention rate?
- Ms. Castro was speedily admitted in the Fall of 1969 due to the efforts of Mr. Hayes, and an unannounced, day-before-the-deadline visit to Ms. Castro's migrant camp by Mr. Johnson to talk to the family about Ms. Castro having been accepted for enrollment at CMU. They decided to allow her to go during that very visit and he immediately ferried her to the CMU campus to begin classes. Ms. Castro had a successful freshman year prompting Mr. Johnson to ask Mr. Hayes about starting a formal program to enroll migratory farm workers at CMU. The obstacle to establishing the program was funding; but along about the same time, OEO was making available the federal government's initial educational scholarships for ethnic minorities. An application was submitted and a combination of OEO and CMU money was pooled to support 15 four-year scholarships for migratory farm workers for the 1970 academic year. CMU established a Special Office for Admissions and trusted UMOI with the responsibility for choosing the migratory farm workers that were to be admitted that first year. Of the 13 recommended for admission and that subsequently enrolled, three students dropped out the first semester; these were attributed to home sickness. The 10 remaining completed their first year and eventually graduated.

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- Some of the first year students expressed a desire for Latino representation in CMU's administration which led to the hiring of Paul Ruiz into the Admissions office. He immediately embarked on working to bring-in non-migrant upper classmen from San Antonio, arguing that they would assist in keeping students from dropping out by providing tutoring and relating how to play the academic game. His superiors agreed to bring in 12 students to enroll as juniors in 1971. The counter argument was that CMU's money would be better used to help bring in more migratory farm worker students since the initial group was successful in its first year. In fact, based on that success, OEO awarded a second round of funding with the request that UMOI help expand the program to include other schools.
 - The initial group of migrant students enrolled in the fall of 1970 was hired by UMOI during the summer of 1971 to join those students from the summer before to help recruit additional migrant students. Then, more recruiting was done at Christmas time of 1971 in that Mr. Johnson traveled down to the Rio Grande Valley along with Noe Ochoa, a migrant student newly enrolled in the fall of 1971, to recruit students for the following school year.
 - The CMU special office for admissions was abolished after the first year with students admitted for the second year going through the regular admissions process. The second year of the program included about 25 admissions to CMU, with others attending Ferris State, Saginaw Valley, Delta College, and a few going to the University of Michigan for a total of about 60 students altogether.
 - One notable exception to the list was Michigan State University (MSU). Mr. Johnson recalled the time and difficulty involved in negotiations and meetings with rooms full of officials in efforts to include MSU in the program. MSU, after that expensive investment of time and trouble, chose not to participate. The experience was unlike anything involved in dealing with the participating schools. It made Mr. Johnson wonder about how difficult it could have been for Vice-Provost Hayes to secure CMU's various permissions and share of funding to admit the initial 13 students whose success had led to development of the full blown program.
 - Other related, significant events at the time included an approach by a number of University of Michigan, non-bilingual law students interested in providing services to migrant farm workers. There was a high level of interest in assisting them due to a high profile case in which a farmer blocked entry by a nun attempting to help a family in a migrant camp and a child died as a result. Those law students soon thereafter received a grant that established the Michigan Legal Assistance Program (MLAP) which has done great work over the years.

Migrant farm worker students: Marissa Miranda Zamudio

- ◉ The 1970 initial CMU group - Conrado Acevedo, Ramiro Castellon, Rosa Chapa, Sylvia Chavarria, Celso Gallegos, Marissa Miranda, Carmen Morales, Esperanza Perales, Graciela Rodriguez, Maria Socorro de Leon, Ezekiel Tovar, Santiago (Jaime) Vasquez, and Juan P. Zamudio
- ◉ Pushed for a counselor from their own culture
- ◉ Achieved academic success despite huge barriers

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- Marissa Zamudio resides in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, and is the current president of the CMU Latino Alumni Association. She was interviewed by phone on 1 November 2009 and asked to gather corroborating information and provide clarifications and amplifications to the general narrative. She provided this list of the first group of students that attended CMU.
 - She also related that some of the first year students expressed a need for a Latino counselor. They wanted someone they could feel comfortable with, that would best understand what they were going through, and that they could unequivocally trust to show them the way through the university academic process.
 - Santiago Vasquez, the only married student in that first group, recommended his brother-in-law, Paul Ruiz, for the position , which led to Paul's hiring into the Admissions office.

Central Michigan University (CMU): Paul Ruiz, Admissions Counselor

- ⦿ Critical mass of affirmative action oriented faculty and administrators
- ⦿ Quick infrastructure adjustments to accommodate a new, culturally different group of students
- ⦿ Early recognition of critical academic issues
- ⦿ Perceptive, on-the-fly, ameliorative reaction

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- Some of you may recall that those were the years of the civil rights movement, lettuce boycotts, the Vietnam war; campus unrest was rampant in some places, so all the other schools had this vague feeling of apprehension, and they certainly didn't want their ROTC buildings burned. I don't think it was a question of enforced morals, I think it was rather a chance for liberal faculty and administrators at CMU to come out of the closet and justify their natural inclinations politically. And there needed to be enough of them to support each other; and it happens that there were.
 - Dr. Paul Ruiz resides in his hometown of San Antonio, Texas. He was interviewed by phone on 20 October 2009. The following narrative is based on that interview:
 - Paul was a senior at St. Mary's University in San Antonio when he was offered a job in the Student Affairs office at Central Michigan University (CMU). He arrived on campus in January of 1971 with the understanding that he would take courses at CMU that would transfer to St. Mary's to fulfill his degree requirements for graduation in May, 1971.

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- Among the first orders of business was to compile data from the academic records of the first class of Migrant Farm Worker students that had just completed their initial semester's work. Aside from this group, there were perhaps two or three other Latinos from Saginaw and Bay City but not more than that. The first semester grades of the migrant student group indicated that it was not doing well.
 - Those were the days of fairly strict adherence to the 15 hours per semester course load and the students were having great difficulty with their academic work. Advisors counseled them to drop courses they were having the most trouble with to salvage their GPA's and thereby keep them from enforced scholastic withdrawal at the end of their first year. As a result, the first year migrant students averaged 20 hours of completed course work at the end of their first two semesters as opposed to the expected 30 hours considered normal at the time. The overall GPA of the group was very low.

- Individual counseling revealed an overall weakness in the grasp of everything academic, and recalling his own experience as one in a family of 15, going to college not knowing what to expect, and realizing how much he had relied on upper classmen mentors in achieving his own success, Paul proposed bringing in upperclassmen to act as role models, mentors, tutors, and help teach the migrant students how the academic game was played successfully. It was apparent to him that the alternative was to admit migrant students and see many drop-out over a number of years before a sufficient quantity of upperclassmen would be produced to establish a culture of college success among students who came from families at one of the lowest economic levels in the country. This long term strategy would produce too much failure. Paul realized that these students needed immediate role models, they could not wait. He successfully argued that these migrant students needed the very same type of student mentor support he enjoyed at St. Mary's.
- After CMU administration approval, Paul called his contacts at the Barrio Betterment and Development Corporation back in San Antonio. **Ciro Rodriguez**, now a US Congressman, and **Juan Balditt**, the director at the time, put the word out about the opportunity at CMU for Latino students who had completed two years of college. These Latino students would come to CMU beginning in September, 1971, and be financially supported in finishing their degrees in exchange for their commitment to be tutors, coaches, and advocates for migrant farm worker college students

Reasons to Bring in Urban Upperclassmen

- ① Provide role models
- ① Assist with academic support (tutoring)
- ① Help to provide social support
- ① Assist with learning how to negotiate academic life (how to play the academic game)

- The first group of 12 Chicano juniors was admitted that fall from San Antonio. Each of those students was required to provide 20 hours of tutoring at the newly established CMU Learning Center in exchange for their financial aid.
- When the decision to admit urban upperclassmen became known, a controversy ensued. The argument was that since the first group of migrant students had successfully completed the first year of study as measured by the fact that no one had been placed on enforced scholastic withdrawal, there was no need for the university to be spending money in bringing in upper classmen; those resources should be used to admit more migrant students instead. The reality was that CMU could not ethically discuss academic records with anyone outside of the administration; leaving everyone outside of the administration uninformed as to the tenuous nature of that first migrant student class's scholastic health.
- Dr. Ruiz describes the resulting campus Latino culture as one of spunky, idealistic Chicanos, some migrant others urban, who believed that students from one of the most economically disadvantaged levels of American society could not only enter college, but graduate and do great things in their respective communities. Young people struggling together to succeed, supported not only by financial aid, but the know-how and help of those upperclassmen among them who came to CMU, to serve and learn.
- The stated goal set by the administration for that junior class of urban Chicanos was for it to help increase the overall GPA of the migrant students; this was accomplished the next semester.
- There is only anecdotal evidence to support the assertion that bringing in upperclassmen helped to cut down on the migrant student drop-out rate. Dr. Ruiz, however, recalls going to meetings of representatives of other Michigan universities that had migrant students due to the efforts of UMOI and OEO. These other university representatives were forever curious as to why CMU's drop-out rate among Latino migrant students was so much lower than the rest. Dr. Ruiz attributed it to being the only school to bring in upperclassmen to immediately create a college-going culture among a group of hard working but not well prepared migrant students.

Urban upperclassmen: Isidore Flores

- Beyond providing tutoring and mentoring, upperclassmen expected to be politically active
- Upperclassmen helped provide the organizing momentum in establishing the Latino student group: Chicanos Organizados Para Progreso y Accion (COPA)
- Upperclassmen helped to establish an academic and political culture of success for Latinos

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- My father saw a notice in the newspaper want ads about a meeting to be held at St. Mary's University for people with two years of college interested in going north to CMU on grant money. This was appealing for the obvious reason; who wants to take loans if you don't have to. That gathering was when I first met Paul Ruiz. He described what would be expected of the 12 students to be chosen to go north. He described the tutoring and helping to show how to be a successful student in academia, but he also made it clear that he was expecting those chosen to be politically active. He wanted Chicanos; the term of the day used by the younger set to describe politically active Mexican-Americans.
 - Those were days of campus activism because of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. In addition, Chicanos were trying to establish Latinos as an independent minority group and away from being bunched in with women and African Americans; not just to try and develop separate federal and state program funding streams, but to establish an identity as well.

- To develop some sort of cultural and political presence on campus, all the Latinos came together and formed an organization with the acronym COPA which stood for Chicanos Organizados Para Progreso y Accion or Chicanos Organized for Progress and Action, and I was elected the first coordinator. The organization soon developed two main sects: one that prioritized political actions first and social events second; and the other prioritizing social events first with political actions second. The social events instigators tended to be women while the political events instigators tended to be men. This tendency wasn't allowed to be a show stopper; there was good representation from everybody at both political and social events. It just seemed to be an issue when members of one bunch started thinking that the other was taking up too much time planning their events at the weekly COPA meetings.
- The Cesar Chavez led lettuce boycott was a popular cause. And the dances were a lot of fun. And then there was the civil rights issue incident at the Black Stone Bar in downtown Mt. Pleasant. The bar was accustomed to not serving the local Chippewas. When the Chicanos walked in and were refused service, the Civil Rights guys in suits from Washington City were in town in three days.
- Dr. Ruiz recalls recruiting other groups of upper classmen, but speaks fondly of that first group. He attributes to them the recognition of having provided the political spark for the state policy of granting immediate in-state status to migrant farm workers that want to go to college in Michigan.

Barriers to Educational Success

- ⦿ Lack of financial support
- ⦿ Inadequate academic background
- ⦿ Lack of academic support
- ⦿ Lack of social support

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- In general, these are the recognized barriers to success in higher education. Let's point out how various actions by the stakeholders spoke to these issues.
 - Dr. Ruiz uses the word "courageous" in referring to the CMU administrators that were pushing to admit and support migrant students. No university administrator wants to be associated with failure; it hurts the career. They were taking a big chance. He quotes one, Albert Miles the Vice President for student Affairs, and quite the advocate, as telling the financial aid director, "find the money Pablo needs for his urban Chicano students, and find a way to double the number of migrant student grants." In addition to CMU's financial aid efforts, UMOI put up a bunch of bucks, and so did OEO.

- Aside from establishing the Latino student oriented Learning Center, which later grew to serve the whole university, the first Writing Center on campus was started. The Writing Center was open to all students but was instigated because professors in English and the social sciences were reporting that the migrant students were sorely lacking in English writing skills.
- In a particular sense, the academic curriculum was used to assist in the acclimatization of the migrant students to college life. The migrant students were encouraged to take courses with content that would seem familiar or of particular interest like a Sociology course dealing with cultural differences, or a Latin American history course, or a ballroom dance course to fill their PE requirement that was rich in Latin dances popular at the time, like the Cha-cha-cha. The Latino students by-and-large took advantage of that advice and would group-up to take those courses.
- And we've already spoken about the role of the upperclassmen in helping along with academic support through tutoring and peer-to-peer mentoring, and in helping to establish COPA that provided the structure and events for constant, mutual social support.

Factors Leading to Program Fade Out

- Critical funding sources change priorities
- Key CMU administrators begin to take jobs elsewhere
- Changes in key UM/OI personnel and location occur

- There was never a decision to end the program. It faded away as some of the elements that supported it began to change or be lost. In 1973, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) was passed and funding for migrant programs passed from OEO to the Department of Labor which changed the priority of migrant programs from support services to employment and training. The higher education support piece was later transferred to the Department of Education where today's College Assistance Migrant Program (the CAMP program) is administered.
- Paul Ruiz left CMU in 1975 to work for the Saginaw School District; and the original administrators involved with the effort at CMU also began to take other jobs and move away.
- George Johnson left UMOI, and then UMOI left Mt. Pleasant and moved to Lansing to be closer to state government.
- As these events unfolded, the critical mass of support began to be lost and the momentum of the program with it.

Hindsight

- ◉ More time was needed to institutionalize the program
- ◉ Earlier and Later research indicated CMU efforts were the appropriate ones
- ◉ Given the opportunity and necessary supports, young workers from the lowest economic levels can achieve higher education success

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- Admitting migrant farm workers into college and providing the necessary resources to maximize their chances for success was so different a concept, that more time was needed to establish long term institutionalized support for the program before critical departures began to occur.
 - My later readings of the literature for dissertation research revealed that what CMU did was what had been found through prior research to be the necessary elements for higher education success. In fact the CAMP program, the descendent of that CMU experiment, provides counseling, tutoring, skills workshops, and financial aid stipends for the first year of college for migratory farm worker students. It ought to be for four years; but I guess we should be happy it survived to this point. We need to start working to make it better.

Thank You

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