

School of Transborder Studies celebrates 15th anniversary

School, a national leader in transborder education, marks the occasion with quinceañera

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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During the summer before his freshman year at Arizona State University, Salvador Macias participated in the AGUILA Youth Leadership Institute, a college access organization designed to help young people navigate their way through the academic world.

One of the speakers at the summer event mentioned he had graduated from ASU and earned a degree from the [School of Transborder Studies](#), the first school in the United States to focus on U.S.-Mexico transborder communities.

Macias was intrigued. He knew nothing about the school, but as an immigrant from Mexico, he thought the school would fulfill his desire to learn more about the relationship between the two countries.

The school did just that — and so much more — for Macias.

Now an immigration and criminal attorney in Phoenix, Macias said his time at ASU — he graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts in political science and a Bachelor of Arts in transborder Chicano/a Latino/a studies — was instrumental in his personal and professional development.

“My parents didn’t go to college,” he said. “They didn’t even understand what a midterm was or the rigors that would go along with preparing for your classes and buying books. To have a counselor that understood my family’s background was huge.

“I think ASU, because of its success ... it can be very overwhelming to be on campus. You can just kind of blend into the background. What the school did was provide a space for me to find community. It provided me a place to be at home and a place where I felt seen and supported in ways that I guess the general education system hasn’t necessarily considered.”

The School of Transborder Studies recently celebrated its 15th anniversary with a quinceañera, in which approximately 150 former and current students, faculty and community supporters celebrated the school whose roots stretch back to 1997 with the establishment of the Department

of Chicana and Chicano Studies. The department became the School of Transborder Studies in 2010.

“The 15-year anniversary of the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University marks a significant milestone in advancing the understanding of transborder dynamics and the lived experiences of Latinos/as in the U.S. and border communities,” said Professor Irasema Coronado, also the school’s director. “Over the past decade and a half, the school has played a pivotal role in shaping scholarship, policy and community engagement focused on the Latino/ a population in the U.S. and the border region.”

Reyna Montoya, who received a Bachelor of Arts in transborder studies with a concentration in immigration policy and economy in 2012, said she treasured her time at the school because, as an immigrant with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status who grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood and attended predominantly white schools, she finally felt appreciated for what she was as opposed to criticized for what she wasn’t.

“I think it was the first time that I felt professors really valued my sense of knowledge and saw my experiences as an asset rather than a deficit,” Montoya said. “For example, when I was younger, having to learn English was seen as something that was a deficit. But at the school it was embraced. It meant I was bilingual, and there’s so much value in having multiple perspectives.”

Montoya said she can draw a straight line from her time at the school to her current role as founder and CEO of Aliento, a nonprofit organization that serves undocumented, DACA and mixed-immigration-status families.

“It gave me the language to understand more deeply about my own personal experiences, trying to make sense of the world, and also having more historical context about why policies are a certain way and how migration patterns have been there since the beginning of human existence,” she said.

“It also gave me a historical overview about how human behavior perceptions, from politics to media to government, really impact our day-to-day lives. It allowed me to understand how the world is very complicated and complex, more than we even think it is.”

Coronado said one of the hallmarks of the school has been its focus on “critical conversations about migration, identity, sustainability and social justice.”

Macias treasured those conversations from his proseminar class taught by Miguel Montiel, now an emeritus professor in the school. He said that, each week, the 15 students in the class would discuss, disagree and argue — but always with respect — about a topic critical to the Mexico-U.S. relationship.

“It was, ‘OK, how do you solve health? How do you solve immigration?’” Macias said. “We would have some students saying we should be boycotting, or we should be protesting. Others are saying, ‘No, we should be at the table. We shouldn’t be inside the building.’

“What I loved about it is that after the semester, you kind of realized that the issues we were tackling are way bigger than just one strategy. You have to get them from every single angle.”

Coronado said the work of faculty and students and the support of community partners has made the school a “national leader” in transborder education. The school plans to expand its offerings into a comparative study of borders and collaborate with the West Valley campus on an expansion of the [Latin American studies program](#).

“Looking forward,” she said, “we remain committed to deepening our impact, expanding research initiatives and empowering the next generation of transborder scholars and advocates.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Guests listen to school director Irasema Coronado at the School of Transborder Studies's 15th-anniversary celebration April 7 at the PERA Club in Tempe. Approximately 150 former and current students, faculty and community supporters attended to celebrate the school. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez (left), associate dean of inclusion and student success at the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, chats with Arizona State Rep. Lorena Austin, a graduate of the School of Transborder Studies, at the school's 15th-anniversary celebration April 7 at the PERA Club in Tempe. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News