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Mayra Puente receives AERA award for 'Platicando y Mapeando' educational research methodology

Maria Zate
March 21, 2024

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Mayra Puente, an assistant professor at the UC Santa Barbara Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, has received the AERA (American Educational Research Association) Division J Outstanding Publication Award for the article “Platicando y Mapeando: A Chicana/Latina Feminist GIS Methodology in Educational Research.” Published in the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, the piece was co-authored with Verónica N. Vélez, a professor at Western Washington University Woodring College of Education.

Puente and Velez together developed the “Platicando y Mapeando” (talking and mapping) methodology in educational research, using Chicana/Latina feminist pláticas (conversations) methodology and geographic information systems (GIS) software and maps, along with U.S. Census quantitative secondary data to track the experiences of rural Latinx youth in pursuing higher education.

From the “Platicando y Mapeando” methodology research, Puente wrote her dissertation to complete her Ph.D. in education at UC San Diego in 2022. Her dissertation, “Ground-Truthing en el Valle de San Joaquín: A Mixed Methods Study on Rural Latinx Spatiality and College (In)Opportunity,” earned two awards from AERA last year. In March 2023, she received the AERA Rural Education Special Interest Group (SIG) Dissertation Award, followed by the AERA Division G 2023 Dissertation Award in April. In addition, she was a semi-finalist in the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education and Educational Testing Service 2023 AAHHE & ETS Outstanding Dissertation Competition.

“Ground-Truthing en el Valle de San Joaquín” examines the intersectional roles that Latinx identity, racialized rural space and college opportunities or lack of opportunities played in the college access and decision-making of rural Latinx youth from California’s San Joaquín Valley agricultural region. By mapping socio-spatial narratives of rural Latinx youth in Tulare County, Puente demonstrated barriers to higher education access and choice experienced by this student group, with implications for researchers, policymakers and practitioners invested in addressing these barriers.

Puente first joined the Gevirtz School in November 2022. Prior to her graduate studies at UC San Diego, she earned her B.A. in political science, with a concentration in race, ethnicity and politics from UCLA, where she also pursued minors in education studies and Chicana/o studies.

Her passion for higher education access and equity for Latinx populations is driven by the educational barriers she faced as a first-generation college student from a Mexican immigrant farm-working family, and her higher education advocacy work for rural Latinx youth in the San Joaquin Valley. As a UCSB professor, Puente seeks to extend her research and service to California’s Central Coast, studying the higher education (in)opportunities of institutionally marginalized students and communities within the region.

Read more about Puente’s research and the “Platicando y Mapeando” research in the Gevirtz School’s LAUNCH magazine.

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