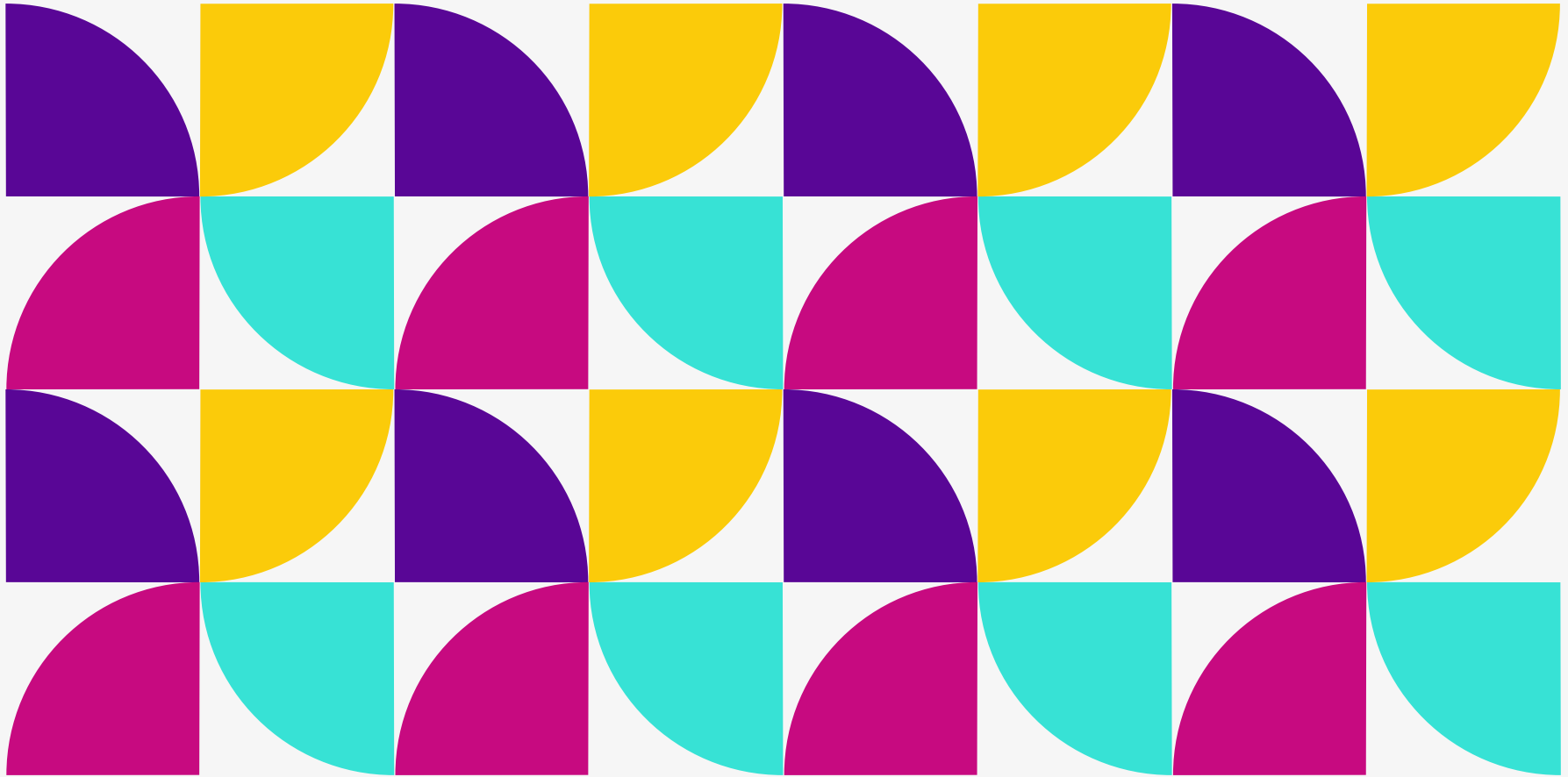


JUNE 2022

Pride: Spotlighting our alumni



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ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Pride: Spotlighting our alumni

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The spirit of Pride lives through a collective affirmation of liberation, unconditional acceptance of expression and identity, and a commitment to justice. The HRC student fellowship alumni highlighted in this project have each committed themselves to a more free and equitable world—for all. Each is making meaningful contributions to their communities, and their work collectively spotlights the intersectional approaches needed to manifest systemic change. Some are centering LGBTQIA+ voices in their work, others are increasing access to civil liberties and human rights, and others identify as proud members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

As our fundamental right to essential freedoms like expression and autonomy come under threat, it's important to remember that "thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle (Buddha)." These alumni are some of those lighting the way.

ABOUT OUR FELLOWSHIP

The Human Rights Center at the UC Berkeley School of Law works with University of California campuses to provide fellowships for students wishing to contribute their energy and expertise to human rights organizations worldwide. The Human Rights Center Fellowships provide opportunities for meaningful human rights work domestically and internationally. Every fellow in HRC's student fellowship program works closely with a distinguished partner organization to support that organization's mandate and gain critical skills as human rights professionals. Since 1994, HRC has supported more than 375 students in over 80 countries and territories.

Student fellows come from a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, journalism, law, environmental science, public policy, public health, and medicine. Their portfolio of projects includes using open source investigation to verify chemical weapons attacks as international war crimes, exposing stark educational inequities faced by foster youth in California, mentoring refugee filmmakers in the IDP camps of Kenya, and drafting legal briefs on behalf of political asylum seekers in the United States, among many others.



AIMEE VILLAREAL

featuring

Los MENTirosos

A culturally-rooted approach to healing and justice

AIMEE VILLARREAL (SHE/HER/ELLA)
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES AT OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY
2011 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

Aimee Villarreal describes herself as a home-place ethnographer, emphasizing the importance of conducting hyperlocal research in one's own community instead of traveling far from an established context to do so. It makes sense then that Villarreal's HRC fellowship with Somos Un Pueblo Unido, a Santa Fe-based immigrant rights group, focused on regional policing issues where Villarreal could speak to the context as a hometown resident.

"It was a project in which we were investigating how police agencies in the state of New Mexico were implementing an anti-bias-based policing law that had gone into effect in the state legislature," Villarreal remembered. She conducted a statewide survey of every police agency in the state on their compliance with the new law, and then graded each agency on their performance. Her alarming report led to a fresh approach—one year after its publication, police agencies across the state reached 100 percent compliance with the anti-bias law.

"Every social movement has revolved around the issue of police brutality," Villarreal said. "We keep confronting this issue over and over again because it hasn't been resolved. In small ways, like we did in Santa Fe, we can push police agencies to change—but it also depends on the politics of the region."

Villarreal, who works primarily with immigrant, indigenous, Chicana, and queer communities, has spent seven years teaching Mexican American studies at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. As anti-LGBTQ legislation continues to gain traction across the state, including a proposed version of Florida's Parental Rights in Education Bill known as the "Don't Say Gay" law, Villarreal and her peers have spearheaded a unique project to teach youth about trans issues and gender identity.

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Los MENTirosos ("the liars") is a Panza Fusion-inspired drag king group made up entirely of Chicana women and nonbinary people. It was established through a belly dancing group known as Zombie Bazaar, a collective created to encourage women to accept their bodies and heal through dance. One day, a member spontaneously painted on a mustache for a performance piece. She felt so empowered that she encouraged others to do the same, and Los MENTirosos was born.

"It was another way to push into the realm of acceptance of the body, explorations of the body, and gender identity. Drag put another element into this project," explained Villarreal. The group began hosting Drag King Storytime events for children, and choreographing thought-provoking dance showcases entirely in Spanish for mixed-age audiences.

"They are very invested in education and representation, and also making trans issues more visible using drag as pedagogy," Villarreal said, underscoring the importance of developing performances for San Antonio audiences aimed at confronting and healing anti-queerness and silence around sexuality in heavily Catholic, Latinx communities at the U.S.-Mexico border.

"The aesthetic of Los MENTirosos is your tío at the Quince," Villarreal laughed. "The way that we're approaching drag and the way we approach the community through dragtivism is very culturally-rooted and responsive."

Reflecting broadly on Pride this year, Villarreal speaks with hope about the youth activism she encounters in her work and as a parent to a nonbinary teen.

"The future is nonbinary, I suppose. All I see with my students and young people is a really broad acceptance and a natural fluidity among the youth," Villarreal said. "They are really leading us in the direction we need to go."





Photo by Brooke Anderson | @movementphotographer



BLAINE BOOKEY

Accountability through litigation

BLAINE BOOKEY (SHE/HER)
LEGAL DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR GENDER & REFUGEE STUDIES
2008 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

As an HRC student fellow with EarthRights International, an environmentally-focused nonprofit based in Washington D.C., Blaine Bookey worked on litigation holding corporations responsible for human rights abuses all over the world. Now working as an attorney and the Legal Director of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies at her law school alma mater UC Hastings, Bookey says that her fellowship continues to influence her approach to her work.

“I’ve continued to work on human rights issues using not just the courts, but a multi-faceted approach to social justice issues,” said Bookey, describing the importance of centering people’s stories. “Litigation is just one piece of an overall puzzle.”

Working within the labyrinth of refugee law, Bookey says that legal gaps in protections for LGBTQ people seeking asylum in the United States persist, especially thanks to the remnants of Trump-era rollbacks on the U.S. protection system.

“We’ve seen high rates of violence against LGBTQ people, even a recognition by this administration that there should be some exceptions to our harsh border policies because of the dangers they face,” Bookey said.

“There has been a real advancement and recognition over the last several decades that violations of the rights of LGBTQ people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity are human rights violations, even though they weren’t necessarily contemplated at the time that our modern human rights instruments were drafted and adopted,” Bookey said.

“At the same time LGBTQ rights have solidified in the international human rights sphere, there has been recognition on a parallel track in refugee law that LGBTQ people are entitled to protections on the basis of that protected status.”

Reflecting on Pride this year, Bookey underscored the importance of celebrating as a community and keeping it central to activist movements.

“When there are celebratory moments that are also surrounded by a lot of setbacks and pain, we have to come together as communities to have those moments of joy, recognition, and solidarity to keep us motivated and to build stronger, more lasting movements, because that’s what’s needed to achieve long term change.”





Taken in Oaxaca, by Moya Photography



DERRIKA HUNT

Visit <https://www.dreamers4change.org>

Expanding horizons and fomenting dreams

**DERRIKA HUNT (SHE/HER)
DREAMER AND CURATOR
2018 HRC STUDENT FELLOW**

Founder, dreamer, and community advocate are just some titles that could describe Derrika Hunt, but she identifies first and foremost as her mother's daughter. Hunt, whose mother Sylvia Renee died at just 36, has manifested her memory in the Black Girls Dreaming project, a five year-long effort to explore imaginations of future within the dreams of Black girls. The program is an extension of the Passports4change project hosted by Dreamers4Change Foundation.

"My mother was a poor Black woman, and she died because of it," Hunt said of her mother's early death. Before passing, Renee made her daughter promise to live an abundant, vividly curious life. "[She said] 'You are going to travel the world, you are going to write books, you've got to do all of these things because I cannot do them,'" Hunt remembered. "[And] I do get to do them and more. I have become my mother's dreams in full."

"In my mom's memory, we've been able to do all of these things with Dreamers4Change Foundation. Though she didn't live, all of these beautiful things have lived and will continue to."

Hunt, whose HRC fellowship took her to Assam, India in 2018, defines her life's work as making the world a safer, more liveable place for Black and Indigenous people. She's traveled across the world from South Korea to Rwanda to Brazil, and each time brought stories back to communities of Black and Indigenous youth when returning to her home in South Florida. She welcomed their deep curiosity about her travels, but found in many an internalized notion that they'd never have a chance themselves to experience the world outside of the United States, or the West at large. Hunt believed dreaming and imagination could take them places beyond their reality.

"A lot of the youth were like... 'You're asking me to dream something that feels impossible.' But I did, because I believe the future we deserve rests in the imaginations of Black girls and femmes."

The Black Girls Dreaming project is an exploration for how to imagine beyond, using travel as a functional tool to expand the horizons of Black girls and dare them to imagine a different reality—one where their lives aren't systemically under attack. So far the project has brought girls to Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, Abu Dhabi, Thailand, and Mexico. The project investigates the intersections of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism—requiring participants to consider the complexity of having American passport privilege abroad, and the irony of treatment as second-class citizens at home in the United States.

"I'm so tired of burying Black girls that I love. We've been talking a lot about life expectancy, and who gets to live a long life. Many of the young people participating in our programs, they've already buried a parent," Hunt stressed. "The thing I'm most invested in is exploring: in this short life, can Black girls and femmes have joy? There are a whole lot of issues that come up with that, including the need to examine power and privilege, but I'm willing to take those risks if it means we get to witness Black girls and femmes have glimmers of joy, in spite of the world being on fire around them."

Black Girls Dreaming is just one project of Hunt's nonprofit Dreamers4change, which is centered around Black, queer, femme-centered principles rooted in life-making. Lately, they've been exploring the concept of girlhood outside of the gender binary—opening projects up to wider youth participation.

"If a more possible world is going to happen, it starts with us and how we begin to define who can be a part of the work that we're doing," Hunt said. As a Black, queer woman herself, Hunt operates with the Combahee River Collective framework of looking at how race, class, gender, and sexuality in tandem.

"I really am celebrating Pride this year and I'm really grateful to step into the fullness of my queer identity," Hunt shared. "I am so grateful for the Black lesbians who came before me because they influence how I move through the world. Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and so many others. I'm grateful to be a part of a legacy and framework gifted to us by the Combahee River collective that says 'if Black women were free, it would mean that everybody else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression,' because I really believe that in my deepest core."



GREG MULLINS

The catalyst of opportunity



GREG MULLINS (HE/HIM)
LIBRARY DEAN, EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE
1996 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

Greg Mullins began his Human Rights Center fellowship with an eye on the rights issues he saw being centered concurrently in both trans and queer communities and human rights circles. “I thought that overlap was so fascinating because there’s a question of the particular versus the universal,” Mullins remembered.

“There’s the question of culture, of cultural respect, of difference, and of social cohesion and unity. That’s really at the heart of what a lot of gender and sexuality and queer scholarship, education, and activism has been about – understanding how it is that our lived experiences actually infuse and impact everything that we think, do, and say.”

Mullins’ summer internship with the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (now Outright International) turned into a year-long volunteer role. That opportunity gave Mullins a critical structure for social justice work that’s evolved with him over years of practice. “I really had to understand how human rights frameworks come into being, how they evolve, what are the pressure points and the mechanisms for getting them to evolve and progress even further, and then how to mobilize those frameworks in pursuit of a particular goal,” said Mullins of his time with Outright International.

Those frameworks, which Mullins now uses as a professor and Library Dean at Evergreen State College, have fundamentally impacted the orbit of his career. “What I learned at that internship changed the way that I think about human rights, social justice, and the way that justice can be achieved,” he said.

“It changed my research trajectory, it changed my teaching trajectory, and launched a platform for at least a generation of my students to be taking that knowledge and thinking about how to use those same tools and implement them in all kinds of ways.”

Bringing practice and theory into the classroom as a pedagogical tool, Mullins began teaching human rights in relationship to literature, culture and LGBTQ+ studies. Reflecting on the importance of LGBTQ+ perspectives in education, he challenges the system to include world views and experiences beyond those of dominant groups—maintaining that not doing so deprives students of a full complete education.

“Education impoverishes itself if it’s not including all of the lived experiences, voices, and perspectives of all people,” Mullins asserted. “The current efforts to silence some of those voices are actually a testimony to success, because people wouldn’t be trying to silence the voices if the voices weren’t being heard.”

As Pride celebrations continue around the country, Mullins is taking the time to contemplate how trans women of color led the Stonewall rebellion in New York City, leading a year later to the first Pride March to reject shame and embrace liberation for all within the LGBTQ+ community. He says that the initial catalyst for Pride is central to his annual celebration and reflection.

“I’m always remembering that period of time when the framework was liberation,” Mullins said.



MEG SHUTZER

Humanizing lived experience

**MEG SHUTZER (SHE/HER)
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER AND DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER
2019 HRC STUDENT FELLOW**

Meg Shutzer, an investigative reporter and documentary filmmaker, knows how powerful it is to amplify the stories of people who have been barred from authoring their own narratives. She's currently working on an investigation detailing years of misconduct at a Louisiana juvenile detention center, where she's interviewed more than sixty survivors of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

"I've learned how important it is to listen really closely and to create a space where people feel safe sharing. Because in this case, a lot of these survivors just feel like no one's ever wanted to listen, and they have just buried this stuff," Shutzer said about her reporting.

Shutzer, an alumna of Berkeley Journalism's Investigative Reporting Program, honed the skills she employs in her work today in part through her HRC fellowship, where she produced an audio story about crackdowns on the LGBTQ community in Tanzania with the Center for Investigative Reporting. For Shutzer, the experience underscored the importance of holistic storytelling that represents the fullness of a person's experience outside of their struggles—to humanize someone beyond their trauma.

"That's been a huge part of the project I'm working on now—thinking with each survivor when we share their story, what are the ways we can show that they are so much bigger than that one experience?"

In her current work, Shutzer actively confronts the various opportunities and challenges her intersecting identities as a queer white woman afford her in the reporting process—both in investigating blind spots and forging connections she might not have been able to access without her own experiences as a queer person.

"There are a lot of ways that being a queer woman has me attuned to the ways that gender and sexuality might intersect with the experience of some of these kids," Shutzer said, noting that LGBTQ+ children are incarcerated at disproportionate rates and she has seen those statistics play out in her reporting. "But sometimes seeing those connections is a reminder of what I might be missing as a white person reporting on an issue that predominantly involves Black children – hence investigating blind spots," she added.

In reflecting on this year's Pride celebrations, Shutzer hopes that the celebration of pride can be channeled towards protest – especially for trans rights and women's rights.

She addresses the fear of prejudice-fueled attacks against the LGBTQ community that's inhibited some celebrations.

"It feels like a really scary time for the queer community in a way that I've never felt before, and yet the joy of pride is still obviously very present in the Bay Area."



PETER STARK

People-centered asylum work



PETER STARK (HE/HIM)
SUPERVISOR FOR UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES
2011 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

When Peter Stark was working in Myanmar as an HRC student fellow, he directly observed the power of social organizing under an oppressive regime. “When I was there it was a hopeful time. Democracy was around the corner, and everyone felt it in the air that it was getting better,” Stark remembered, reflecting on the severe turn of events following the 2021 military coup. “To have that door slammed shut in such a terrible way has been really difficult.”

Stark came away from his fellowship summer with the powerful impression that when civil rights are under attack, “people are resilient, and people will find a way.” He’s encountered that precept in his work as a USCIS officer since 2014, where he listens to refugee and asylum claims and determines credible fear of persecution, which is key in granting asylum.

“You are supposed to be a neutral adjudicator, but you are always going in as a human,” Stark said. “My experience is part of who I am, so there is no way I could just leave it at the door.”

Stark grew up in a religious Mormon family, and didn’t feel supported in expressing his true self in his youth. When he conducted credible fear interviews with asylum seekers traumatized from recent border crossings, he drew on that experience.

“Being gay myself, I’ve been able to have more sensitivity towards those claims,” Stark explained. “When people talk about certain contexts of their life that maybe other people wouldn’t understand—I understand what it is to be in the closet, I understand what it is to hide yourself, to hide yourself to some people, but not others.”

Although Stark concedes that it’s taking time for the federal bureaucracy to catch up to the goals of the increased refugee ceiling in the United States, he says there are alternative legal opportunities for people seeking safety that circumvent more protracted routes.

“We are seeing different uses of humanitarian programs that are outside the asylum and refugee contexts, which is really exciting because they are actually much more responsive and much more nimble than the current refugee and asylum regime that we are in.”

Stark says it will take a shift in policy for systems-level change to manifest, but he’s working to implement available programs to help people at the individual level.

“People are complicated, and I understand that I’m complicated, so I have a lot of empathy for them,” Stark said.



08 **RAED RAFEI**

The necessity of a queer lens



RAED (EL) RAFEI (HE/HIM)
PHD CANDIDATE AT UC SANTA CRUZ
2018 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

Raed (El) Rafei's exploration of the layered dimensions of queer community began as he came of age in 1990s post-civil war Lebanon. Although much of the country remained fiercely divided across sectarian lines, Rafei discovered that the bonds of queerness transcended religious and regional divides as he met other queer men from across Lebanon in chat rooms from his Tripoli home.

"Being queer allowed you to have a parallel identity to navigate all these sects," Rafei recalled. "Queerness allowed for a reimagination of these bonds that were bruised during the war."

Today, Rafei is still reimagining the bonds forged by the queer experience of Lebanese and diasporic communities, exchanging chat rooms for cameras and film studies.

Rafei, who has worked as a multimedia journalist and producer for outlets including CNN, Al-Jazeera, and the Los Angeles Times, co-wrote and co-directed his first feature film in 2012. He has since released a number of hybrid films and visual essays, and in 2017 moved to California to pursue his PhD in Film and Digital Media at UC Santa Cruz.

A common thread in Rafei's work is the complication of Western concepts and legacies of queerness, instead centering Lebanese artists and the queer Arab experience that exists beyond the boundaries and lineage of queer Western constructs.

"Queer for me, is not really only about sexuality, it's much more than that," Rafei said. "It's a lens on the world: how we think about family, time, space, the future."

Rafei's fellowship with the Human Rights Center in 2018 expanded on this lens, specifically by interrogating a Lebanese law that prohibits "relationships against the order of nature." In probing how elusive the concepts of "nature" and "natural" prove to be, he framed his reply by juxtaposing communities celebrating different notions of the word—a frame of muscled men sculpting themselves at a gym set against a public garden.

"It was much more than just centering it on homosexuality," Rafei said. "For me, homophobia is a reflection of how everything in society is intricately woven in people's heads, how they really think of the family or society. All the pieces are kind of interlinked."

Rafei was in New York when the Supreme Court ruled against the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013, and has since seen a community shift in the awareness of forms of oppression that intersect with LGBTQ rights. That shift leans into Rafei's thesis of intertwining lenses and the importance of queer perspective.

"Issues of decolonialism, Black lives matter, and social justice have become very frontal," Rafei said. "Queer people have really been at the forefront of thinking of this interconnectedness."



*If you'd like to follow Santiago's adventures,
you can follow him on TikTok @stjamesvazquez*

SANTIAGO VAZQUEZ

Planting the seeds for change

HUGO ENRIQUE SANTIAGO VAZQUEZ (HE/HIM) PARALEGAL FOR THE CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER OF LAMBDA LEGAL 2020 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

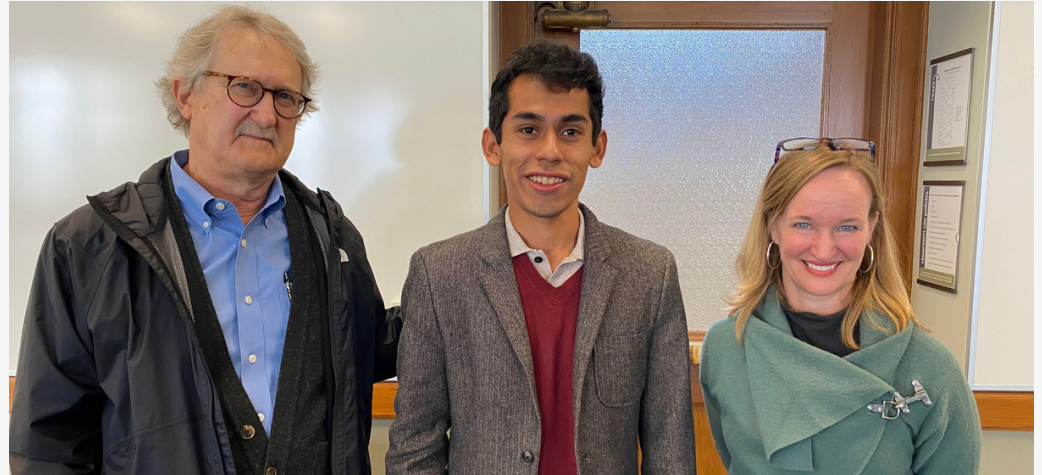
Before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Santiago Vazquez planned to travel to the U.S.-Mexico border for his 2020 HRC fellowship. He intended to work with the Organization for Refuge, Asylum, and Migration, visually documenting the stories of LGBTQ people in Tijuana seeking entrance to the United States due of discrimination against their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression (SOGIE) at home. Faced with no choice but to pivot after global lockdowns stymied travel, Santiago was determined to pursue his work supporting asylum seekers.

“Fortunately I was still able to do the core function of what I sought to do, which was work as a translator for refugees seeking asylum, and particularly those who identify as LGBTQ,” he said.

Santiago also worked preparing clients for asylum interviews by helping them express their stories. For many, it was their first time narrating their lived experiences aloud. “The first time they really [tell their story] is when they’re going through the asylum process,” Santiago explained. “There was a cathartic element to just letting people voice out their stories.”

When it comes to storytelling and information-sharing more broadly, Santiago says that the internet was widely accessible through smartphones within the Tijuana refugee community, offering opportunities for LGBTQ people to access care, and resources like safe housing within the refugee camps.

“They were on social media,” Santiago said of his clients. “When it comes to healthcare and HIV, you really want to make sure you promote your information as widely as possible. It’s very important to get online and promote the material there, and also distribute it in different languages that people can find accessible.”



Santiago’s HRC fellowship experience helped lead to his current work as a paralegal with Lambda Legal, the oldest and largest national legal organization whose mission is to achieve full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and everyone living with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work

He describes the fellowship as “planting the seeds” for students to access unique opportunities like his current work, where he focuses on legal advocacy and community organizing.

“What means most to me in my work is that I do my part to connect the dots and make sure the right people get to talk to one another,” Santiago said. “Letting these conversations happen and letting these networks just create.”

Reflecting on Pride this year, Santiago emphasized there remains much work to be done globally to expand the rights of people facing prejudice due to their SOGIE. “I really hope that I can be a part of this movement to create more centers and resources that support the LGBTQ community,” he said, stressing that the cost of societal indifference to the communities is their lives.

“As a society, we have to stay attentive and continue to build upon the foundation we have inherited, otherwise people fall through the cracks of the foundation and lives are lost.”



THANH MAI BERCHER

Collective recovery and restorative justice



THANH MAI BERCHER (THEY/THEM)
COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATOR, PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE & RESEARCHER, SPRING UP
2016 HRC STUDENT FELLOW

As an HRC student fellow, Thanh Mai Bercher co-facilitated trauma-informed, social-emotional learning with youth in Nablus, Palestine. This was the project they planned for, the one they expected to pursue. What they didn't expect was to inadvertently become a resource for peers and youth interested in learning about Thanh's queer identity and life experience.

"I had everyone from teenagers to teachers wanting to talk to me about my experience being queer, and that was really cool," Thanh said. "Even now, in my work, I meet a lot of nonbinary youth who feel like they aren't trans enough and for them to meet someone who's nonbinary and is older, who works with nonbinary people as their job, is really exciting."

Thanh, who today works primarily with queer and trans youth at the Public Health Institute in Oakland as a community health educator, frequently applies lessons learned from their time in Nablus to their current work.

"Queer and trans youth can benefit from a lot of the same coping mechanisms and collective recovery put in the box of refugee recovery," Thanh said, underscoring their enthusiasm for working as a peer educator with these youth groups. "We can have these conversations openly, and I don't think we've been able to have them before in such formal settings [before]."

To truly understand the intersecting challenges facing queer and trans youth in Bay area communities, Thanh says to look at the larger picture of their lives in context—not care silos that often treat the symptoms of oppression instead of the root. "Everyone has the pronoun stickers, and yet you don't understand the material conditions of our lives," Thanh said. "Anything working with people needs to be approached through the social web that is their lives."

For those celebrating Pride, Thanh encouraged an interrogative mindset, asking whose voices are and aren't being amplified within the queer community—namely those of Black trans women.

"People need to be reminded that a majority of [Pride] community members don't have the freedom to navigate their lives outside of the police," Thanh said. "Looking at how many people I work with on a daily basis that are harassed, stopped, or assaulted by police officers, it's difficult to celebrate a month like June with what it's become, and not remember that a lot of us are not able to do that."

"Pride started as a riot against the police. All of that should be remembered and honored."



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