

CRES NEWSLETTER



A DAY WITHOUT IMMIGRANTS

On February 3, 2025, students across UC campuses participated in the nationwide "Day Without Immigrants" movement, emphasizing the vital role of immigrants in the U.S. economy and society. At UC Merced, students and supporters convened at the Pavilion Dining Center at 10 a.m., initiating a march that spanned 4.5 miles over two and a half hours, culminating at Yosemite Crossing shopping center. The demonstration concluded around 2:45 p.m. at the intersection of Yosemite Avenue and G Street, where participants continued their advocacy for an additional three hours (Merced Focus, 2025). Of the protests that have occurred on and near campus since UC Merced's launch in 2005, this is the furthest that UC Merced protesters have ever marched.

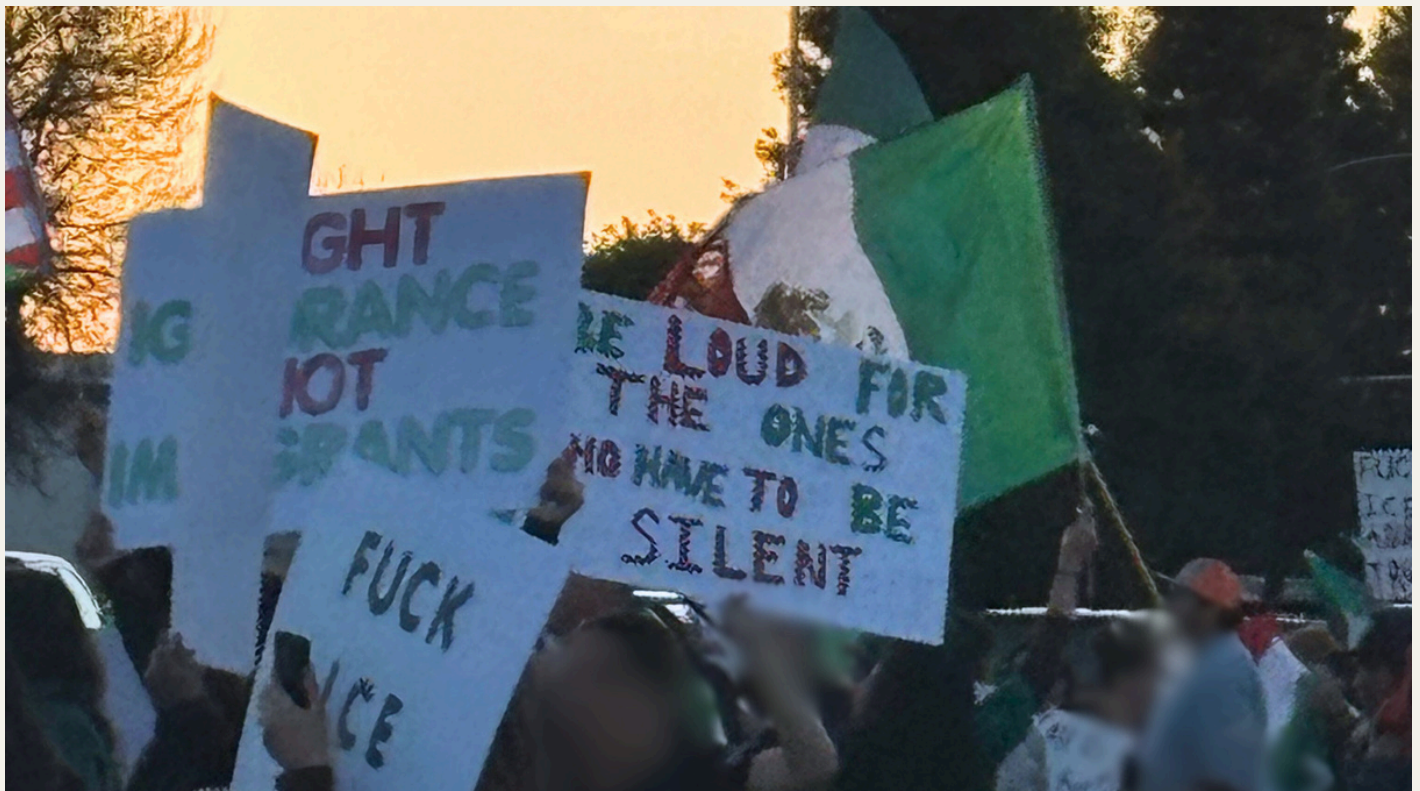
The protest was part of a broader national movement responding to the Trump administration's intensified immigration enforcement policies, which aim to strip Latinx Americans and undocumented Americans of their rights. Participants aimed to highlight the indispensable contributions of immigrants to the U.S. economy and society by abstaining from work, school, and commercial activities for the day (ABC30 News, 2025). At UC Davis, students led by the social advocacy group Sin Fronteras, organized protests supporting all immigrants and undocumented individuals, aligning with the national Day Without Immigrants movement (The Aggie, 2025). These demonstrations were part of a broader effort across California, with businesses closing and thousands of people rallying to highlight the contributions of immigrants (San Francisco Chronicle, 2025).



Students at UC campuses across the state have actively expressed resistance to the Trump administration's immigration policy plans and actions. At UC Berkeley, nearly 200 students and activists gathered at Sproul Plaza to show solidarity with undocumented community members, protesting the administration's immigration crackdown, which has separated families and put innocent people in custody (Berkeleyside, 2025). The Trump administration has intensified efforts to arrest and deport undocumented individuals, leading to widespread fear and anxiety among immigrant communities. In the first 50 days of the administration, ICE made 32,809 enforcement arrests, nearly matching the total number of at-large arrests in the entire fiscal year 2024 (Department of Homeland Security, 2025). This aggressive approach has resulted in family separations and heightened concerns within immigrant communities (Unidos US, 2025).

PROTESTS AGAINST TRUMP'S POLICIES

The Trump administration's recent directives targeting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives have significant implications for higher education institutions, including the University of California (UC) system. In January 2025, an executive order was issued aiming to abolish DEI programs within educational institutions, extending beyond admissions to encompass scholarships, hiring practices, and student organizations (Inside Higher Ed, 2025). The Department of Education warned universities that non-compliance could result in the loss of federal funding (AP News, 2025). At Sacramento State University, students staged walkouts opposing federal policies affecting DEI programs and immigration. These policies also have increased restrictions on protest activities on campuses, prompting concerns among students about their rights and the future of DEI initiatives (State Hornet, 2025). These protests underscore UC students' commitment to advocating for immigrant rights and opposing unjust policies, reflecting a broader national discourse on immigration and student's rights.



STUDENT EXPERIENCES: TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN THE CURRENT ERA

With the current attacks on the transgender community, the CRES Newsletter wanted to highlight the experiences of transgender students at UC Merced. Meet Kendra and Kylie, two trans women and undergraduate students sharing their thoughts on recent anti-trans legislation as well as their experiences on campus. With their insights, we aim to shed light on the realities of student life, access to resources, and share feelings of support.



Kendra Sesco

5th Year History Major, CRES Minor & Incoming PhD Student

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“Go into the Humanities. It’s the safest place for you, and you are needed here. And find me, if you see a tall goth AF trans girl with curly hair and fantastic makeup, it’s probably me – I promise I will make time to talk to you and help you feel less alone. The world makes me put up high walls, but I’ll always open the gates for trans people who need community.”

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How would you describe your overall feelings about the current political climate in the U.S. as a transgender college student?

“Fury, heartbreak, dread. But I think, for me, it runs deeper than my feelings – let me explain. I’ve been a UROC-H scholar for the past year, and I start the Interdisciplinary Humanities PhD. Program in the Fall.

In my UROC research and my dissertation, I archive oral histories with trans people from all over United States about life and death within the political realities we face here in this exigent and perilous moment, I interrogate anti-trans legislation, using my home state of Florida as a case study, through the prism of Genocide Studies, and I construct a theoretical framework to address key knowledge gaps in the field of Genocide Studies about how and why genocidal processes target gender transgression. So when I say it’s about more than my feelings, I mean I have shown and continue to show, through qualitative, evidence-based analysis, that what we are seeing here, what we are enduring here, is an intensifying genocide against trans people in the United States.”

In what ways do you feel that recent political decisions (e.g., legislation affecting transgender rights, campus policies, or national debates) have impacted your daily life?

“I still have family and friends in Florida, but I can never go home. Even my people back there tell me to stay gone, it’s not safe for me to come back. It’s sobering and sad to hear the people you love and care for tell you not to come home because they worry you might get killed. So I carry that emptiness inside me. Both of my partners are trans and in similar situations, one has family in Texas and one in Wisconsin, and we’re all cut off from people we love. I’ve also experienced a sharp increase in harassment from Trump supporters since the election. And it’s always Trump supporters, let me be extremely clear on that point – the MAGA movement is committing genocide against transgender Americans, and the only people who ever have ever threatened or harassed me have done so wearing MAGA shit or with MAGA shit on their vehicles.”

Can you describe a moment when the current political situation directly affected your personal or academic life?

“No, I can’t. There isn’t a single moment, it’s every moment. All of them. ”

What has your experience been like as a transgender student at UC Merced?

“My experience as a student unto itself has been pretty great, and I attribute that to the SSHA faculty here. I have had so many brilliant and sweet professors who have held space for me and encouraged me and really believed in me through some extremely dark times. The entire HCRES department is the environment I always needed; sometimes I get sad thinking about how badly I needed people like this when I was a kid, when I was just out of high school, because I’m significantly older than most of the students here and it’s hard not to think about how I could have done this sooner if I had people like these in my young life.”

Have you found support networks, either on or off campus, that have been particularly helpful to you during this time?

“I thought I had a strong little support network when I started at UCM. I was wrong. I’ve lost people I never thought I’d lose since I started here. We have the Lambda Alliance and the Pride Center here on campus, so those are nice... I would like to see a student group specifically for transgender students, maybe I can put something like that together in the coming years, we’ll see. I think my biggest support network has been my professors, but I doubt they know it. I don’t know, it’s difficult for me to trust that people won’t fold if I need to lean on them anymore, so I keep a lot to myself – it’s better to make friends with pain than to be abandoned. I think every trans person who reads this can probably relate to that. I’ve only met a few trans students here, but like just knowing that they’re there, sitting class with them and seeing how brilliant they are, what a gift to the world they bring, knowing that there are other people like me on campus on any given day whether I see them or not... that helps.”

How do you feel about safety and acceptance in public spaces, including on campus, due to political discussions around transgender rights?

“I’ve never felt safe or accepted in public spaces, but it’s much, much worse now. I will say that I feel more safe and more accepted on campus than I ever have anywhere else – which is good but at the same time, like... applying for grad school felt like rolling the dice on my life, because there is no life outside of this for me, and I really felt like if I didn’t get in I wouldn’t be able to survive. And I have been harassed on campus by the hate groups and genocidal evangelists that the UC allows to spread violence and bigotry on our campus, and once by two kids who clearly weren’t enrolled here who rode down Scholar’s Lane on their bicycles yelling slurs at me – and I probably wasn’t the only one. So when I say I feel safer here than anywhere else, that statement comes with an asterisk.”

Is there anything else you would like to share?

“Our lives are not a thought experiment, and you cannot “both sides” anti-transness any more than you can any other form of bigotry. There are very few binaries in life and ethics, but this is one. One of my narrators in my oral history archive told me, ‘The people I love aren’t just dying, they’re actively being killed... the people I love most in the world are constantly under threat and all of the people at this lunch table or in this meeting room are just going to go about their lives like nothing is happening.’ Paraphrasing another, who is a chronically unhoused trans woman in NYC, that anti-trans legislation is just genocide with other weapons, that you push people into lives that you know aren’t livable and then pretend that you didn’t kill them when they terminate that life – and the effect is that she has to see her sisters dead in the street and just ignore them because she has to survive herself.

Sit with those. Ask yourself where your line is. I’ve spent a lot of time now studying genocide and studying fascist movements, and the roots and rise of early 20th century fascism, and what I hope your readers understand above everything else I’ve said is that this current historical moment we’re living through in the early 21st century – these are the days that you need to know where your line is, what you will and will not tolerate, and asking yourself what a world worth living in looks like. None of these attacks on trans people are harmless, and no one who is pushing them are acting in good faith. They are killing us and they know it. The question is, are you going to help them by pretending it isn’t happening?”



Kylie Posadas Gonzalez

2nd Year Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Major

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“I wanted to speak out to the trans people this may reach. You are loved and you are worthy, you deserve to take up space and don't let anyone bring you down because of your gender identity. We are more than just trans-people, we are people. Keep fighting, keep going, it gets easier, and remember not everyone is going to accept us, but we can learn to accept ourselves and instead choose to spread love and compassion.”

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How would you describe your overall feelings about the current political climate in the U.S. as a transgender college student?

“School is already a very challenging space to navigate and I feel like for me personally as a trans woman and I'm sure for other trans people, this only adds to the stress. Sometimes, I find it hard to participate in class

or say what's on my mind out of fear of being persecuted or clocked. Clocked is a term we trans people use to describe when someone realizes that we're trans, so being clocked is a fear that I have because of my voice. My identity isn't something that I can simply exist. I feel like people around me are always trying to sort of place me in a category or figure me out. Now with the current political climate, these fears have worsened. It's also made me realize that, if I don't take up space, someone else will define my space for me and instead I'm deciding to use my politicized body as a means to educate people and speak for the trans people who aren't privileged enough to be in these spaces. For example, education settings, classrooms, just a college campus.”

How do you feel about safety and acceptance in public spaces, including on campus, due to political discussions around transgender rights?

“I feel relatively safe on campus, and I understand dangers are for all women, not just trans women, but something that concerns me at times are bathroom policies and how my presence may bring attention to me. But it also goes back to what I previously said about taking up space. Trans people use the bathroom that align with their gender identity not to view people, but for safety. If I were to enter the men's restroom that could potentially be very dangerous for me. I also feel that it is important to be a part of discussions around transgender rights because I give a first-hand perspective on the topic that many people can't speak on.”

What has your experience been like as a transgender student at UC Merced?

“Like trans people everywhere, I've had a mix of good and bad experiences. People can be harsh and judgmental but I never let that get to me because I know myself, and I'm more than just my gender identity. I'm a person, a daughter, a tía, a friend, and so many other things. I'm grateful for the academic staff and classroom settings here at UCM. I have always felt welcomed and respected. I can't say the same about the social setting. There are many times I've been excluded or made fun of because of my gender identity. I've been told that I'm a man or questioned about my body, but it has also taught me to seek out spaces where I'm accepted and not questioned about surface level stuff like how I look. It also makes me infinitely more grateful for the people who value me, for me and have shown me that they care for me.”

If you could make one change at UC Merced to better support transgender students, what would it be?

“I think spreading awareness about transgender people and erasing the one picture the general public tends to have of us. Trans people are real, and we are everywhere. I think creating a school wide awareness would create a more welcoming environment for trans people and also teach non trans people that we are just like that them. we have stresses over exams, we are late to class sometimes, we enjoy spending time with friends, etc. I also feel creating a more welcoming social space would relieve a lot of added stress we experience related to our gender identity.”

La Familia

Who is La Familia?

La Familia de UCM is a Latino based organization which aims to raise the retention rate of self-identifying Latino/a/x students at UCM. We do so by incorporating the concept of la Nueva Persona and our three pillars: Academic, Community Service and Social Networking. La Nueva Persona varies by definition based on the individual asked: As Academic Chair, I personally define this as using your experiences to become a better version of you every day, while also uplifting other Hermanos with guidance. Our pillars lay the foundation for LF-UCM.

The Academic Pillar supports our student's education by providing workshops, study spaces, and the LF Library which includes textbooks and notes donated by Alumni. Our Community Service Pillar provides opportunities for our Hermano's to better our surrounding community by taking part in community service. Our Social Networking pillar focuses on easing the transition into higher education by creating connections with Hermanos while also developing networks for academic and professional success.

How do we uplift the community?

La Familia de UCM as a Latino based organization strives to uplift the community in spaces where our voices often go unnoticed, in this case we emphasize Latino voices in higher education. We involve ourselves in our community in spaces such as our Kid's Class afterschool program, serving as mentors for the marginalized youth of Merced and as coaches for Merced United's "Lady Birds". As a cultural organization we also strive to share our platform with our fellow cultural orgs, uplifting not only our voices but the voices of our fellow members.



Why should students join La Familia?

La Familia de UCM stands as a resource for students who wish to better themselves through our vision of La Nueva Persona and inclusion of our Three Pillars. Although we are a Latino-based organization our space welcomes all, because we value Hermanidad. As our saying goes, "Stepping into our space (academic, community, or social), you become a Hermano and stay and Hermano."

MY EXPERIENCE ABROAD

Aubrie Cortez



My decision to select the Yonsei University program for Fall 2024 was influenced by my future career goals and seeking new experiences. In the Fall of 2022, I studied abroad in Italy, which provided me the opportunity to experience navigating life on my own. Studying abroad in Italy was a transformative experience that greatly impacted my life. After returning home, I struggled to find the words to describe the feeling and experience. However, as time passed, I pieced together the emotions the experience brought to me as it revealed passions within myself that I was previously unaware of. The experience sparked a new goal that inspired me to advocate for increased undergraduate participation in studying abroad, specifically among other first-generation students and students of color.

As a first-generation Mexican American, I find it important to insert myself in spaces that seemed impossible due to my background and financial standing. Studying abroad only ever appeared as an out-of-reach goal that was not meant for me to experience because neither of my parents have heard about it and it appeared to be far too expensive. After researching, however, I realized it is more accessible than I had initially thought. While I did not properly prepare my first time, I was committed to ensuring that my second experience abroad would be well planned out. I applied for scholarships early on, including the Genelia Philips Study Abroad Scholarship, UCEAP Global Scholarship, and the Gilman Scholarship. Out of the three, I received two. I highly encourage all first-generation students to apply to scholarships as it is what funded the majority of my trip. I had also come to learn that financial aid travels with you when you go abroad. While I received multiple scholarships that funded my trip, I also was covered through financial aid. My advice to students who are looking to study abroad is to apply to scholarships early on. Although it may appear expensive, scholarships and financial aid generally cover the expenses of the experience and allow you to have money left over to travel while you're abroad.

I've gained many valuable experiences from studying abroad, but I would say walking away with new perspectives was the most impactful. After studying abroad, I've stopped limiting myself from trying to experience new things because of the thought that it is unreachable. I've since been able to push through imposter syndrome and apply for internships and job positions because I have come to realize that anything is possible. You should not limit yourself from gaining new experiences out of the fear that it will not work out. I encourage students to study abroad because it is important to take up space in areas that attempt to limit accessibility. By taking up space, we are challenging the notion that people from our background don't belong in them. My experiences have been transformative both times, for different reasons. I came out of the experience feeling more motivated to complete my 4-year degree because I know there is so much of the world I want to see. It allowed me to experience life without my parents, taught me how to properly budget, and made me feel less afraid of post-graduation life because I know there are plenty of opportunities so long as I seek them out.



Additionally, I've learned that I would love to continue working in the study abroad field as an advisor. By taking courses with professors who are American but teach in a foreign country, I learned that my end goal is to become a professor in a foreign country. Studying abroad not only provided me with many insightful experiences but also opened my mind to the endless possibilities that I can achieve in life and to new passions I did not know I had. The possibilities now feel endless because if I was able to achieve studying abroad after it appeared unachievable and out of reach, then I can achieve any goal as long as I stay motivated and reach out to those around me for support.

CRES Spotlight

Barrio In A Box

By:
Thania Orellana
and Frank Gomez

They say my mama chose this
But who chooses two jobs
And a crib with hunger in the walls

Where every wall's a border
And every window knows
You're not meant to leave
The box they gave us.

Give us fences instead of roots
Contain us like smog,
Call it freedom
With a lease and no yard.

Mama walks to work at 5 am
So white ladies can sleep in.
Her hands cracked from bleach,
She signed in ink. They erased in silence

They call it an opportunity.
We call it the barrio.
Both are lies.

Maria at the Clinic

By:
**Thania Orellana
and Frank Gomez**

People say she's dramatic.
"Just cramps," they tell her.
But her pain worsens
Deep where no insurance code can find it.

No papers, no Medi-cal,
Only a white receptionist's smile
Too empty and too wide,
The kind you wear
When you've already decided
Who's worth saving.

Maria learned
To tuck pain behind her ribs like secrets
To bleed in silence,
To not ask for too much
In a country that counts
Everything you take.
She buries her pain
Under three kids and a janitor's shift.

Abuelita's Hands

By:
**Thania Orellana
and Frank Gomez**

Dried like tortillas left out too long,
curled like tamale leaves
She doesn't need English
to tell you
She built three generations
with hands that nobody deceives

CRES Graduation Party



On May 15, 2025, students from the History and CRES programs were invited to celebrate graduation with their peers and faculty. Students holding leadership positions and making contributions to the programs were recognized for their hard work. Featured here are CRES majors and minors, HCRES faculty, the students who have served as CRES Club student leaders, as well as the newsletter's own Aubrie Cortez and Haddiqa Khan. Congratulations to all graduates! Go forth and be great!

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