

Martín-Baró Scholars Program Reflection Assessment Report

Date of submission: Jan. 31, 2022

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Name of Program: Martín-Baró Scholars Program

Type of Program: Non-degree seeking

College of Arts and Sciences Division: Humanities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This reflection assessment report briefly describes a unique program for first-year students that earns five cores over one academic year (A1, A2, C1, CD, SL), and reflects upon the challenges that affected our work during the 2020-2021 academic year, which was conducted entirely online. The pandemic and the online modality clearly compromised our ability to meet our program goals. Although we met two out of three PLOs, we did, most importantly, meet all 19 of our core learning outcomes. We made major adjustments to our community outreach component to adapt to our learning environment (doing online voter registration outreach, and working on new interviews to create a second edition of a student-driven book of biographies). Our program should be able to truly take flight again as the pandemic fades when we can safely meet our community-engagement goals. One interesting result of our constrained environment was that the academic work in terms of speeches and papers was outstanding—probably *better* than in a typical year. Perhaps this was due to students who self-selected into the program feeling the urgency of the times and wanting to do important research, or some other factor, but students did outstanding work by any measure. Looking ahead, the MBS program may well change in future, dialing down from 16 units to 12 units in the next two years. I will soon be working with our deans and department chair as we consider this major recalibration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MBS PROGRAM

We are now in the midst of working with our 20th cohort of the Martín-Baró Scholars. I have served as director of the MBS Program for 10 years and have revised the curriculum significantly over the years. MBS, as we call it, eludes simple description: we are a freshman-only living-learning community, a public speaking class, a composition class, a literature class, a class on cultural diversity, and we typically perform significant service in one community each year. Yet MBS is truly meant to be a coalescence of all of these endeavors, to be truly interdisciplinary.

We are designed to meet the following cores: A1 (public speaking), A2 (written communication), C1 (literature), CD (cultural diversity), and SL (service learning, though we prefer the appellation “community-engaged learning” as a more accurate description of our work).

Mission Statement

Our mission statement (below) remains the same. I think this statement does accurately portray our aspirations as a program (although I have debated whether or not to omit the footnote, which emphasizes that we treat social justice as both a process and a goal). It is perhaps a bit clunky, but I do think it’s accurate, so it is probably OK as is:

The mission of the Martín-Baró Scholars Program is to introduce students to the complexities of policies that affect the underserved in San Francisco and the Bay Area. This community-engaged program inculcates advocacy and encourages students to act as well-informed, compassionate, and patient agents of change, focusing on long-term goals associated with ethically establishing social justice.*

* Adams, Bell and Griffin define social justice as both a process and a goal: “The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining ... and interdependent.” (Adams, Maurianne and Lee Anne Bell, Pat Griffin. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge, 2007)

Program Learning Outcomes

Below are our PLOs, and I suggest one change to PLO 3.

Students who complete the Martín-Baró Scholars Program will be able to:

1. Identify and analyze policies and systems in San Francisco and the Bay Area that have historically created inequities.
2. Research, present on, and work alongside underserved people in at least one neighborhood of San Francisco.
3. Co-create and implement a community-engaged project with enduring impact on the community they serve.

I will change PLO 3 to read [Students will . . .]:

Co-create and implement a community-engaged project that leaves a **positive impact** on the community they serve.

Upon reflection, especially this last year when we were online, it is very difficult to measure what might constitute an “enduring impact.” I feel we have done this in the past with some of our projects (installing a garden and providing computers for a homeless shelter, for example, or the Changemakers project, which still generates interest to this day in the Western Addition, and it may turn out to become a textbook in the SF Unified School District). In any case, some more cautious language might be warranted here for PLO 3. I am open to any ideas on wordsmithing that last PLO to make it as accurate as possible.

Curricular Map

To create an accurate curricular map would be daunting, given our 19 course learning outcomes and 3 Program Learning Outcomes. A complicated schematic would probably do it some justice. (I actually envision something like one of those complicated charts generated by philosopher Roy Bhaskar in *Plato, Etc.*, and this would actually be kind of fun to create, but it would be a time-consuming act of algebraic art that my poor skills would not do justice to.)

Just briefly, however, as an example of the interconnectedness of the main assignments: Students are asked to research the neighborhood that will eventually be serving as part of their outreach. Students also focus on policy issues in two long papers (one somewhat traditional research paper in the fall, but a more sophisticated “Rogerian” style research paper in the spring), so they can get a sense of the complexities and constraints of policy solutions that they seek to one day ameliorate.

For a more detailed sense of what we do, I think the very best evidence of the interconnectedness of our assignments is actually in our very detailed syllabus (these come in at about 17 pages per semester now). In that document, which I can provide, for both semesters, in every major assignment, we list each CLO that we are aiming to meet. One pragmatic thing I can do with my next syllabus, however, is also link our PLOs to our community engagement assignments. Our engagement work is meant to meet all 3 PLOs, so I can easily make that change.

I should also note that if this program is to be recalibrated to a 12 unit offering rather than 16 units, as seems imminent, a whole new curricular map would need to be created. And so much else would need to change as well (we would, for example, in a class designed to meet the A1, A2, and CEL cores, have 8 fewer course learning outcomes, which would allow us to focus more on our engagement projects in future). Again, I can happily provide the syllabi as evidence that we have indeed mapped out our complicated curricula.

Difficult Environment for Data Collection but Demonstrable Success

I find it difficult to bring an empirical lens to the learning that occurred last year. Indeed, it is difficult, even with some distance, to bring much objectivity to *so much* that occurred last year. Data collection, I admit, was not foremost on my mind as we focused on keeping students engaged and interested in remaining in school in a pandemic year that was very emotionally challenging for most of my students. The most salient and significant feature of our year together was that 1) we actually made a living-learning community cohere and succeed in an all online environment, and 2) we succeeded in meeting all our learning goals. Indeed, in nearly every case, students did outstanding research-based essays and presentations. The best evidence of all this would be the Zoom recordings of speeches and the research papers, which I can make available for anyone interested. (One empirical measure of the excellent work was that one of the essays written for the course was selected as part of the top 10 at all of USF for *Writing for a Real World*, while another presentation from my class was selected for the Speakers Showcase, a top 3 selection throughout all USF first-year public speaking classes.)

My 15 students last year produced an astonishing 608 pages of research-based writing (incorporating a total of 724 sources), all with passing grades and most with excellent grades. And they also did (for the most part) outstanding speeches (only two speeches out of 30 over the the entire academic year were not as fully developed as they could have been). In short, despite, or perhaps because of the pandemic, students were motivated to take their learning seriously, to a degree I may never see again.

I can say, without question, with an unwieldy but unambiguous electronic mountain of evidence, that all students achieved all of our CLOs.

Whether we met our PLOs is another matter . . . I would not say that we left an “enduring impact” on a single community last year. It was simply too difficult to do from home last year.

As I will mention in my recommendations later, I think we will need to revise PLO number 3. And much more substantially, we might soon be recalibrating the entire program to be less ambitious by focusing on 3 cores rather than 5, and going from 16 units to 12.

Addressing The Big Picture: Relationships, Results, Research

At the most basic level, our program’s goals of emphasizing relationships, results, and research were met. These goals are common to all living learning communities, and I was pleasantly surprised to see that all 15 of my students rose to the occasion, demonstrating amazing resilience, despite the pandemic, to uphold the core principles of the program.

Relationships

One of the most rewarding parts of this or any living-learning community is seeing the potential for student relationships to form with each other. (This bonding, much research suggests, is key to retention.) Bonding among students certainly was one of things I was most concerned about

during the pandemic. Interestingly, despite the pandemic, students themselves organized outside of class meetups to get to know each other. Students traveled from around California and Nevada, simply to meet each other face to face. This meetup was obviously not something I encouraged, but when I found out about it, I gained an even greater appreciation for the importance of the community aspect of our class. The time students spent with each other (alongside their many Zoom meetups on evenings and weekends) seemed to pay off in terms of very good group projects (especially the neighborhood research projects).

Naturally I also spent quite a lot of extra time getting to know students, mostly discussing their research, but also listening to their struggles and concerns. I spent on average far more time with students on Zoom, than I do in a typical year. One hour meetings were very common with all students last year. In fact, I could not begin to calculate how many hours we all spent together online, but it clearly helped in terms of maintaining interest in the class and in each other as we muddled through a difficult year, establishing a level of candid conversation that allowed students to feel heard and respected as they worked through both research questions and life questions.

Naturally, the final set of relationships that we aspire to create—students getting to know community partners—was a concern of mine last year. Unfortunately, there were simply very few opportunities for students to establish professional relationships with folks off-campus. Although we had wonderful guest speakers, it was rare for students to follow up with them in a way that they might have if we were on campus.

Results

Obviously, our community-oriented class is accustomed to big projects (writing books, helping restore a garden, aiding a homeless shelter). Last year, given our constraints, we had to measure our results quite differently.

We did, however, help in a significant way from home. My 15 students aided USF Votes in helping to register hundreds of people to vote in 2020, they collectively completed hundreds of hours of outreach in a crucial year for democracy itself. They volunteered many hours of their time, far beyond the call of the class, which required 20 hours of outreach per person. I was astonished by their seriousness and resolve. The tensions of the 2020 election clearly motivated them to do significant online outreach and some of them also did in-person voter registration outreach if they were in states that allowed it.

Unfortunately, there is no way to disaggregate my class contributions to USF Votes from the rest of the organization, but we did indeed make up the lion's share of the program. I, too, attended every meeting, and logged in many hours text-banking, trying to make sure everyone we knew and who was eligible voted in the 2020 election. Regardless of our small part in the outcome, students felt the urgency of the times, and many of them will be going on to work to support democracy issues through USF in Sacramento, USF in DC, and USF in San Francisco programs.

Research

The hundreds of pages of impassioned research my students generated, in addition to the many hours of excellent presentations, speaks volumes about how seriously students took the class. Although I assigned 12 pages total for each essay (1 page Abstract, 10 pages of writing, 1 page of sources) as a minimum, see the chart below for how much each student produced.

I should emphasize that there was no extra credit for extra pages. I did ask students to research a policy that they felt passionate about, and added that if they felt that they needed more pages to say what they really needed to say, that they could do, without penalty, No group has ever produced so much work with these assignments (nor will a future group ever likely do so again). Again, I ascribe this off-the charts work to the seriousness of the times, which these students well understood.

Student	Policy paper (F20)		Rogerian research paper (S21)	
	pages	sources	pages	sources
1	12	14	14	13
2	20	16	17	18
3	23	34	37	31
4	35	49	30	38
5	23	22	23	38
6	25	23	19	37
7	10	16	13	20
8	16	21	29	33
9	14	18	16	24
10	16	19	20	27
11	19	27	18	16
12	21	29	16	26
13	22	36	17	17
14	16	12	28	21
15	18	16	21	13
	290	352	318	372

608 pages total written by students over AY 20-21

724 sources total synthesized over AY 20-21

Despite the obvious conclusion about these students' devotion to research, empirical measures, I think, are inadequate to the task of describing last year's success. I realize that a page count is one of the cruder measures of overall achievement, but again, this was far more than we have received on average in our history as a program.

Looking ahead: A major shift

The unwieldy nature of this program is currently being addressed. I'd like to reshape the class to be a 12-unit offering, spread out over one year. This will certainly create some other recalibrations as well. The ideal version would move from a team-teaching model to just one instructor. It would ideally fulfill A1, A2, and CEL only, with 6 units in the fall, and 6 more in the spring. There's more to say about that shift, but suffice it to say, after 20 years of ambitious work in this course, it is time to revisit the framework to make it more sustainable. This program has become my major focus in life, especially when I get to serve alongside my students in the world, but it is time for a change to make the whole program more focused.

A note of thanks

I offer my sincere apologies for the lateness of this report. I come from a deadline culture in publishing, so I take deadlines seriously, and this is the first time in my professional life that I've missed one. It was, however, personally a very tough year (cancer, plus two cancer scares for myself and my wife); I was also fielding significant issues with my kids struggling, three deaths in my family (though none from covid), and of course there was the general ambient distress of the pandemic. I don't make any excuses about the lateness here. I simply wasn't up to the task in October when my full focus was on my class and my family.

In any case, I truly appreciate the extension of the deadline so I could take time to really think about my program and what could make it better. The main thing for me to do next is to dial down the number of cores and units to make the whole thing more manageable.

I'm sorry I lack the skills to make this a more empirically based document, but the best evidence of our success last year would be to ask literally any of our students, and they would likely reply that our class and community became a kind of lifeline for us all — a truly open space for us to rise to the moment and learn a lot.

Again, thank you for reading this, and thank you in advance for your feedback.

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read "David Hill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Hill".