

## Martín-Baró Scholars Program Reflection Assessment Report

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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 2021-2022 academic year, which was conducted in person. The continuing challenges of the pandemic 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 adjustments to our community outreach component, and had to meet our outcomes all in the spring, which was less than ideal. Our program should be able to truly take flight again as the pandemic fades when we can safely meet our community-engagement goals, which are closely tied to PLO number 2, discussed in this report. One interesting result of our first year back in person was that the academic work in terms of speeches and papers was outstanding—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 21st cohort of the Martín-Baró Scholars. I have served as director of the MBS Program for 11 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 that emphasizes 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,” or CEL, as a more accurate description of our work). We are already in the process of being redesignated as CEL by February of 2023.

### **Mission Statement**

Our mission statement (below) remains the same. I think this statement does accurately portray our aspirations as a program:

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)

The footnote is a bit clunky but it does help for students to know that we are serious about defining the complexities of our mission.

### **Program Learning Outcomes**

Below are our PLOs. I suggest one change to PLO 3 and we will be focusing on PLO 2 this year.

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, it is 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. There is of course some ambiguity in the term “positive impact” as well, so again, we are open to changing our terms to ensure accuracy.

## **Curricular Map**

Meeting our 19 course learning outcomes and 3 program learning outcomes is daunting, but I offer here a sketch of how the program proceeds and how our major assignments interconnect. In the fall, we typically introduce a neighborhood case study assignment, which calls upon students to research in groups, spend time in a designated neighborhood which we will later support in our community engagement endeavors. This assignment meets numerous course learning outcomes as well as PLOs 1 and 2, and indeed the off-campus research component in certain neighborhoods prepares students to meet PLO 3 as they work throughout the year with a community partner. Concurrently, students are reading literature (often set in San Francisco; e.g., stories that touch upon the Chinese Exclusion Act, or the fate of the International Hotel). Our readings and assignments are carefully calibrated to echo our eventual work in engaging community. Students begin their engagement work in fall (this year we are primarily working with Groceries for Seniors in Chinatown and the Richmond Neighborhood Center, with 12 hours in the fall, and 12 more in the spring). Students and I are also supporting USF’s Food Pantry, which is very much in need of support as food insecurity touches our campus in a major way. Concurrently students are presenting articles on food insecurity in class in what we call Research Round Tables. This meets several of our public speaking learning outcomes, gets students comfortable in presenting information, and leads to both a policy research project in the fall, while also helping the entire cohort co-create a curated display at Gleeson Library in spring. In the spring semester, students will apply their knowledge of food insecurity in San Francisco to co-create a Food Justice Forum in April (our community partners are invited to co-create this event as well). In the spring students also write a Rogerian style research paper which calls upon them to invoke an almost dialectical approach to addressing a complex issue of their choice (ideally something related to food justice). Students also present their work at

Creative Activity and Research Day in May, and then write final reflection papers while also revising one of their earlier essays to meet the final learning outcome focused on revision. Ideally, the throughline of the entire course helps support an ethics of engagement as well as research skills that will then launch students into the passionate pursuit of justice of some kind.

For a more detailed sense of what we do, I think the very best evidence of the interconnectedness of our assignments is probably in our very detailed syllabus (these come in at about 17 pages per semester now).

It's all ambitious to say the least. In future, I suggest we change the course from 16 units (8 in fall, 8 in spring) to 12 units (6 units in fall, 6 in spring), and meet cores A1, A2, CEL. I should also note that if this program is to be recalibrated to a 12 unit offering rather than 16 units, we would also need to recalibrate our curricular map. 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. Data collection, I admit, was not foremost on my mind as we focused on keeping students engaged in a transition 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 supported a living-learning community through a difficult learning environment, when many of our students were out of class with COVID, and 2) we succeeded in meeting all our learning goals. Indeed, in nearly every case, students did outstanding research-based essays and presentations. 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 13 first-year students last year produced an astonishing 610 pages of individual research (incorporating more than 700 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 26 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, and they were, as they themselves reported, grateful to be back in a classroom after a year of online instruction.

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. Because we could not find community partners willing to work with large groups in fall, we confined our outreach activities to the spring, which did not give us enough time to get to know them well. Student reflections indicate powerful experiences at Groceries for Seniors (based in Chinatown); the Richmond neighborhood Center (especially when they had the chance to deliver groceries to homebound seniors); and the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center, which we also supported, but one semester of interaction did not quite live up to our high standards of engagement.

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 13 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 and indeed the transition year that we experienced last year, with students masked, and in some cases quite cautious about inter-personal interaction. Student relationships really blossomed during the group projects (especially the neighborhood research project and the library display project).

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 outside of class, 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, but it clearly helped in getting us 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. We did create opportunities for students to establish professional relationships with folks off-campus, but a second semester of work off campus would have been immensely helpful in this regard.

## *Results*

Obviously, our community-oriented class is accustomed to big projects (writing books, helping completely 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. Students made the most of their time with our three community partners: They completed a total of 253 engagement hours, which is just short of our goal of 260 hours. Not too bad considering the constraints. (Please see our discussion of PLO number 2 below for more on our mixed success.)

## *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, my 13 students generated 610 pages of individual research (incorporating more than 700 sources).

I should emphasize that there was no extra credit for extra pages or sources. 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. Only one group has ever produced so much work with these assignments — and that was during the pandemic year of online instruction. I ascribe my students' off-the-charts work to the seriousness of the times, which these students well understood.

Despite the obvious conclusion about these students' devotion to research, empirical measures might not suffice to describe last year's modified successes. I realize that a page count is one of the cruder measures of overall achievement, but again, it is an interesting and significant indicator of student engagement.

## **Focusing on PLO 2 (Partially met)**

We partially met Program Learning Outcome number two last academic year, which was to:

Research, present on, and work alongside underserved people in at least one neighborhood of San Francisco.

The neighborhood reports and research presentations were outstanding. Students learned about the Fillmore/Western Addition, the inner Mission District, the Tenderloin, and Chinatown. They each spent significant time in these neighborhoods, and conducted impressive library research. The reports were longer than ever, on average, synthesizing many sources (13 students collectively generated 127 pages with 130 sources). The academic side of the PLO was an unqualified success.

The pandemic, however, interfered greatly with our ability to fulfill the community engagement side of PLO number 2. Our first semester (fall 2021) was spent in search of a single community partner that could absorb all our students as a class. Covid concern was still significant, and many organizations were still not ready to welcome long-term visitors or volunteers. (Not even the Food Bank was accepting large enough groups to accommodate our class except on Saturdays.) And, unfortunately, a number of my students also contracted Covid last fall as well during the spike in omicron cases. Our approach, then, was to have students work in one of three communities: the outer Richmond, Chinatown, or the Fillmore / Western Addition. After connecting with the Richmond Neighborhood Center, Groceries for Seniors in Chinatown, and the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center in the Fillmore, we split our class into three teams that spread out to serve alongside these centers which put them in close contact with community members. Simply put, we did not have enough time to get to know our partners this year. Surprisingly, we came close to meeting our target of 20 hours of outreach per student. (This would have meant 260 collective hours for our class, and we reached 253 hours.) Of course, as we point out, the quality of interactions is more important to us than the hours, and every student reported in their reflection papers significant community-engagement experiences.

### **Looking ahead: A major shift**

The unwieldy nature of this program is currently being addressed. It is, after all, the most unit-intensive one-year program at all of USF. 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, which will be sad, since we have had an incredible record of successful collaboration. I would love to continue to do what we do, but it is becoming unsustainable, and I'd like to create a more sustainable version of the course for whomever succeeds me in the future as director. The revised course 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 for this course, it is time to revisit the framework to make it more sustainable. (There is another living-learning community considering also recalibrating from an 8-unit program up to 12 units, to more accurately reflect the community-engagement component.) In any case, 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.

Again, thank you sincerely for reviewing our submission, and thank you in advance for your feedback.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "David Hill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.