

Manuel Figueroa's students in Chicano and Latin American Studies learn how important social and cultural issues can affect them. Occasionally, these classroom discussions turn into lighthearted moments like this one.



Cross the bridge from the second floor of McKee Fisk to reach the Social Science Building and, for a minute, you are *literally* traveling from one culture to another. For down the hall is an outpost for a rich and colorful field of inquiry in the social sciences known as the Chicano and Latin American Studies Program.

To consider this area of study as an isolated part at the end of this bridge is inappropriate. Because in essence, the Chicano and Latin American Studies Program is the bridge itself. It's an academic and resource center dedicated to fostering stronger ties with our Chicano and Latin American neighbors — linking the present with the past and the future, and our own little world with the community around it.

In this field you can find Manuel Figueroa. A native of Chile and a professor

in this program since 1981,

Figueroa counts as his primary concern the bridging of cultural

differences and enrichment of cultural interests in and outside the university.

"Our program," he explains, "has a very strong tie with the community. We become involved not only as teachers but as source persons for the different social and economic groups in the community."

Involvement and commitment guide most of Manuel Figueroa's activities. Before joining CSUF, he was responsible for curriculum planning and liaison development as dean of education at Chile's Catholic

University. As a graduate student at Stanford, he participated in research projects that benefited communities in Guatemala and Mexico. His published works, coupled with a distinguished career in academia and government service in Mexico, speak of educational development in cultural and social contexts.

Here, in the Chicano and Latin American Studies Program, Figueroa has chosen to cross yet another bridge — one that enables him to become as productive in research and teaching as before but, this time, with more emphasis on developing stronger ties with the Chicano and Latin American communities of Fresno.

"The commitment to quality education, in all aspects, is our most important concern," he states. "And I think we work hard at that, as demonstrated in our program's increasing enrollment. But we need to work more. We need to reach those students who, in the past, were not reached at all, to provide meaningful education for everyone."

But Manuel Figueroa won't be satisfied with mere increases in enrollment figures. For him, being a part of the Chicano and Latin American bridge has meant constant participation and dedication. As a strong advocate of involvement and growth, he handles each school term with vigor and renewed spirits. "I see myself in a very continuous process of growth," he opines. "Always moving to higher goals, I need to generate new ideas and new projects. That keeps me alive — intellectually and emotionally alive."

... Reaching out to our
HERITAGE