

Through previous research opportunities, I have been fortunate to work on issues as varied as: changing patterns of land use on Indian Communities, direct democracy and state land preservation, environmental risk in urban, low-income neighborhoods, university entrepreneurship initiatives, and political education among 2nd generation Mexican-American youth. While these different projects have allowed me to explore distinct areas of social science research and application, they have also helped me to hone in on my continuing research interests regarding critical ethnography, community self-organization, and the potential collaboration between social science research and activism.

Through the support of a National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates grant, I was able to work for an academic year as a research assistant in Arizona State University's Center for the Study of Institutional Diversity, assisting a professor and doctoral student in research regarding trends in state land use and direct democracy. Collecting ballot language from hundreds of state initiatives and referenda and compiling spatial data into analyzable maps, I learned-as-I-went the basics of statistical and geographic information system (GIS) software in order to play a supporting role for the study. The initial results suggested a complex relationship between direct democracy activity and quantitative changes in state land use, where contentious local, stakeholder interests or attitudes sometimes conflicted with nationwide trends. As part of the same REU-program, I also developed an independent research project, using GIS again to analyze changing land use patterns over time within two of Arizona's semi-urban Indian Communities – the Pima-Maricopa and Ft. McDowell Yavapai. I was interested in looking at these changing patterns as they related to the emerging discourse of sustainability, and the communities' ongoing projects of economic self-determination. I found that while land development within these two communities had accelerated dramatically, initiatives such as the construction of the state's first LEED-certified office building, and shifts away from land and pollution-intensive industries over the last decade had allowed the communities to maintain lower-density land use (when compared with contiguous municipalities) as well as wildlife corridors, while expanding the economic opportunities available to community members. I presented the findings of this project in the 10th annual Central Arizona Project for Long-Term Ecological Research to a diverse audience, including conservation biologists, economists and archaeologists. Through these different projects I was able to develop skills in applied research methods as well as experience working in an interdisciplinary environment, maintaining regular contact with academics from various fields as well as community members, state archivists and political office-holders.

Following this experience I worked again as a research assistant for the Phoenix Extreme Heat Vulnerability Assessment, a project sponsored by the National Center for Atmospheric Research and Arizona Department of Health Services. As part of a team of researchers, I conducted dozens of household interviews in several Phoenix neighborhoods, accurately recording GPS coordinates, and compiling survey data over a period of two months. This project, in addition to providing methodological experience in working directly with community members, helped me

to see directly, the profound variation in environmental risk, even within the nominally “developed” North. For a course on the anthropology of innovation, I created and implemented a semester-long, ethnographic research project, looking at entrepreneurship programs and student participation. This project allowed me to systematically observe how university resources were being utilized by student entrepreneurs and to suggest ways in which the university could make better use of space and resources to provide a jumping-off point for new, small businesses. I found that the facilities currently available were seen as useful to only a handful of more-mature student businesses and that traditional 9-5 office hours were preventing working and full-time students from taking part in the kind of innovation-driving interactions that the University had hoped for. I presented my results in a lecture presentation and as part of a larger report to administrators and faculty. Most recommendations were implemented the following semester. While very different in their aims and scale, these projects gave me a better appreciation of what kinds of research and research fields are possible, and more importantly, the potential for even small interventions to improve lives and opportunities for research participants.

As a senior thesis project, I designed and carried out a year-long ethnographic study of 2nd generation, Mexican-American political education. Here, I was able to combine working as a researcher and as an activist, by participating within a local chapter of the nationwide organization – *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* as well as the Phoenix-based migrant rights organization, *Puente*. I attended weekly meetings, helped organize events, hosted workshops for high school students and participated in a national planning conference organizing resistance to Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070. My participation as a researcher, conducting interviews and taking notes on organizational practices, allowed me to contribute to the group as a fellow activist, suggesting ways of improving group interactions and pointing out opportunities for collaboration with other organizations. This project was supported by both the Barrett Honors College at ASU and the José Franco and Francisca Ocampo Quesada Research Award, which assists scholarly engagement with Arizona’s Mexican American community. The project culminated in a thesis paper which was defended with activist collaborators present, and submitted to both the MEChA and Ocampo Quesada archives as well as the Chicano Research Collection at Arizona State University as a means of ensuring its accessibility to the community through which it was made possible. Through fruitful and sometimes challenging dialogue with current and former activists, Chicana/Chicano scholars, and community members, I was able to develop close and lasting, intellectual relationships, a goal which I expect to aim for in all future research endeavors.

Presentations:

- Helepololei, J. Zhang, S, York, A. (2009, January). Patterns and Institutions of Land Use on Indian Communities. Poster presented at the annual Central Arizona-Phoenix Long Term Ecological Research Poster Symposium, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.
- Conley, S. Helepololei J., York A. (2009, January) Trust Land Preservation, Development, and Direct Democracy. Poster presented at the annual Central Arizona-Phoenix Long Term Ecological Research Poster Symposium, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.
- Conley, S., Helepololei, J. York, A. (2008, June). In Land We Trust: State Trust Land in the Four Corners Region. Poster presented at the Annual Regional Symposium of the Long Term Ecological Research Program, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM.