



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

School of Law

TAMU Law Answers Webinars

Conversations in Law & Social Justice Webinar Series

“Leadership: Mentoring the Next Generation”

Presented March 11, 2021

Panelists:

- **Jasjit Singh**, Director of Programs, California ChangeLawyers
- **Eliana Kaimowitz**, Immigration Branch Chief, California Department of Social Services; ChangeLawyers program graduate
- **Sulema Medrano Novak**, former Co-Chair, Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) Latina Commission
- **Grissel Seijo**, Vice-Chair, Latina Leadership Academy Committee, HNBA Latina Commission
- **Irma Reyes**, Mexican American Legislative Caucus Executive Director
- **Tannya Oliva Martinez**, Director, Moreno/Rangel Legislative Leadership Program, Mexican American Legislative Leadership Foundation; Policy and Case Manager, Mexican American Legislative Caucus
- Moderator: **Prof. Rachel Moran**, University of California, Irvine School of Law

Disclaimer: While some of the panelists are attorneys, they will be discussing the law generally, and nothing in the webinar should be considered as legal advice. Attendees should consult their own legal advisor to address their own unique circumstances.

TRANSCRIPT of webinar video at https://youtu.be/CvpMh8t_11U:

- Howdy. My name is Luz Herrera. I'm a professor and associate dean at Texas A&M University School of Law. Welcome to the “Leadership -- Mentoring the Next Generation” webinar. It is the third installment of our Spring 2021 [TAMU Law Answers](#) -- Conversations in Law and

Social Justice [webinar series]. So this is part of a webinar series. We have three additional webinars that are coming up. And they happen every other Thursday at noon Central time.

The webinars that are coming up, the next one is going to be on "Justice for Immigrant Youth, an Update on Family Separation." I know there's a lot of interest in this issue. Also "Training Social Justice Lawyers Today." And then the final installment for this semester will be "Farmworker Employment Justice."

And so we look forward to seeing you there. You can register for these upcoming webinars at [TAMULawAnswers.info](https://tamulawanswers.info). And you can also see past webinars that are recorded and saved on that same website. Today's webinar is co-sponsored by [Texas A&M School of Law](#), The [Network for Justice](#), which is part of the American Bar Foundation's project "The Future of Latinos in the United States," and the [American Bar Association's Commission on Hispanic Legal Rights and Responsibilities](#).

I have the great pleasure of introducing our moderator and our organizer for today's panel, distinguished professor of law Rachel Moran. She is at UC Irvine School of Law. And she will go ahead and introduce the rest of the panelists. But before I hand it over to her, I want to make a couple of announcements. Some of the panelists are attorneys. We're not going to be really discussing legal issues. We're really talking about mentoring. But nothing in this panel should be construed to provide legal advice. If you have a legal question, please save it for your attorney, or let us know where you're located and we'll give you a number for a lawyer referral service.

After the initial presentations, we will have a question and answer session. But you can also, throughout the presentation, type in your questions in the Q&A function that appears in Zoom. And the panelists will address your questions as time permits. And so thank you all for being here. And Professor Moran, thank you so much for leading this effort today.

- Well, thank you very much, Luz. I very much appreciate the kind introduction. And I'm also grateful to a number of people who have made this event possible. Of course, Luz Herrera is one of them, along with Leticia Saucedo, who co-directs the Network for Justice. But I also would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Kirsten Evans at Texas A&M, who has been the events coordinator, as well as Olivia Countryman, who helped me to identify our wonderful panel of speakers as my research assistant.

I also want to thank Dean Robert Ahdieh for his support of this event, as well as my own dean, Song Richardson at UCI and Ajai Mehrotra at the American Bar Foundation. Now, it's my great pleasure to introduce our panelists. And I'm just going to give you their names, because we will have their bios in the chat function if you want to learn more about them.

But we actually have representation from three different leadership training programs. We wanted to include a national program, as well as programs from California and Texas, because we thought these two states are going to be vital in preparing leadership for the Latinx community. So representing the Hispanic National Bar Association's Latina Leadership

Academy are Sulema Medrano Novak, who is a former co-chair of the Latina Commission, as well as Grissel Seijo, vice chair, Latina Leadership Academy Committee.

And she said during our meeting, our pre-meeting, that whatever I said about her, she wanted to be sure everybody knew she was Puerto Rican and raised in the South Bronx. So I got that in there, Grissel. And then next we have the ChangeLawyers program from California. We have Jasit Singh, who is the director of programs. And we have a program graduate, Eliana Kaimowitz, who works as immigration branch chief for the California Department of Social Services.

Finally, we have from Texas, the Mexican-American Legislative Leadership Foundation. And we have Irma Reyes, who is the executive director of the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus and former director of the Moreno/Rangel program. And we also have Tannya Oliva Martinez, who is the current director of the Moreno/Rangel program, and also is a graduate herself of this program.

Now, our plan is to let each of the three talk about both the creation of the program and the experience of going through the program. And then we'll have, if time permits, a moderated roundtable with questions. And then we want to make sure to have time for questions from you. And if you do have questions, please put them in our question and answer function. If you have submitted questions beforehand, I have those. And I will try to include some of those, as well.

All right. Let me turn it over now to Norma and-- excuse me. Sulema Medrano Novak, who is substituting for Norma Garcia, and also Grissel. Thank you.

- Good afternoon, everyone, and morning somewhere for those of you attending from the West Coast. My name is Sulema Medrano Novak. I'm a partner at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath and the former chair of the Latina Commission. And I'm happy to be here with all of you.

So I'll give you a little background on the Latina Leadership Academy and the Commission itself. And then I'll pass it over to Grissel to talk more about the specifics of the program. That way we can split up the conversation for everyone. So the Latina Commission is a group of 25-- approximately 25 lawyers from across the country, Latina lawyers from across the country, from in-house, corporations, nonprofit, the judicial sector, private firms.

And we are a Commission that was formed over 10 years ago by one of the Hispanic National Bar Association's woman presidents. And one thing she noted was that there wasn't a significant presence of Latinas in certain sectors of the legal community. And she created this Commission with the mission and the duty to not only research what the status is of Latinas in certain sectors, but also come up with a plan on, how do we increase that visibility? And how do we increase our pipeline and strengthen our pipeline to get more Latinas interested in not only law but also certain sectors of the law?

So that's how the Commission was formed. The Commission then, in turn, started a Latina leadership program, an Academy. And it has selected-- it's grown and grown over the years. In fact, we now do regional versions of the program. But the program really is an opportunity for Latina lawyers to have a safe space to talk about the issues and the barriers that we face in the legal community that really prohibit us from staying and advancing.

And in fact, this is, I think, a good way for me to segue over to Grissel. Grissel has been a pivotal leader in this program. She's helped us develop and refine the programming. And so I think this has really her swansong. And I'm going to ask her to and let her kind of give you more details on what the programming includes and how we've developed the programming over the years.

- Thank you, Sulema. So let me split it. What we've done is we've split the mentoring and the programming into two. So anyone who's been practicing from zero to 10 years, they would qualify for what we call the Latina Leadership Academy. And we have, to Sulema's point, both national programming and regional programming across the United States.

And what it covers is great mindset, negotiation skills. It covers executive presence, executive coaching, negotiating family, negotiating moves. So that is the focus for the younger attorneys, anybody who's been practicing 10 years or less. And then there is a program for 11 years or more. And that's called the Executive Program.

And that really is taking your career to the next level. If you are currently in-house to go to deputy counsel or a GC role, that focuses on strategizing mentality, also negotiation skills, networking. There's a big component in networking and board service, how to use the skills that you have now to propel your career to the next level.

So we do both programs. I "graduated" from both. So when I was a six year associate at a big law firm, I did the Academy. And my biggest takeaway from there is, don't let your job become your career. Your career, you own. The job is a space that you're in right now and you do a good job and you run results.

But you need to look at your life in a career trajectory and understand where you want to be, because many times myself, I was in a big law firm, I would kind of lose-- I would lose my center. I'd be like, oh, I don't have time to go to this networking event. Or I can't really attend this lunch. It's a little bit easier now in this COVID world where we can actually attend things virtually.

But my biggest takeaway was never forgetting building my professional familia. As a graduate of the Executive, It's a similar concept which flows through. When I was doing networking or when I was creating professional pathways, I always thought, if I'm really strategic about reaching out to the CEO or the GC or the partner, am I going to look like I'm a brown-noser? Am I going to look like I'm selling out? Like, what does it look like to my family if I want to do these things?

And really, the Executive changed my mindset and said, look, everybody has a family. And if you take that family and you think, how am I going to create my professional familia, then what do you do? Where's your board-- where's your personal board of directors? Where is your personal trajectory to the career?

So really, the Academy and the Executive are meant to address these issues-- our voice, our imposter syndrome, if we have it. I asked Professor Moran to say that I was born and raised in the South Bronx. It is fundamentally who I am. I don't look at social inequity without looking at language and equity or race and equity. And that comes from where I started.

So the Academy and the Executive-- which are both free, by the way. Super critical piece. It's free programming, one-day programming. And some are six month programming, depending on which program you're doing. But it's free. And it's helpful. And it's there. And in the virtual world, it means that you're committing to at least four hours in one month. If you're doing the Academy-- tomorrow, for example, we're having Academies from 12:00 to 5:30, or several months if you're doing the Executive.

But it's an investment in your career that is completely free as long as you're a practicing attorney. The Academy is only for Latinas. The Executive has both male and female. So it's important to know that it runs the gamut. But our focus has been on women, in part because we're only 4% of the women in law, which I often say this, and I always will say this-- my mere presence in the room is an act of civil rights. So I will turn it back to you professor, Moran.

- Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. And we actually did have a question that was sent in about imposter syndrome. So maybe we can come back to that later and how you help people address that, because that actually was raised in one of the questions from our audience before the panel began.

Now I wanted to turn to ChangeLawyers Jasjit Singh and Eliana Kaimowitz.

- Thank you so much. So my name is Jasjit Singh. I'm the director of programs here at California ChangeLawyers. I've been here almost three years. I've been in California 99% of my life. And I wouldn't have it any other way. So I know time is limited. So I'm actually going to break it down really quickly into who we are, what we fund, and how we support our Fellows. And I'll try to keep it relevant to the conversation that we're having.

So starting with who we are, I think we'll start with why we exist. We exist because there's a breakdown of trust and confidence in the legal system from communities of color. And that lack of trust exists because there's a lack of representation. And we just touched on these numbers. And I'll throw some more numbers in here.

But 40% of California's population-- at least according to some of the stuff that I've been reading-- identifies as Latinx, but only 7% of the attorneys in California are Latinx. And then the information gets even more grim when you look at nationwide. Only 2% of attorneys are Latinx

women. So you can see similar distressing numbers when it comes to the black, Asian, and Indigenous populations across the United States, and especially in California.

So we exist as a statewide foundation that empowers the next generation of lawyers, judges, and activists. We call these change makers ChangeLawyers. We hope that they will be the ones who right historical wrongs in our courtrooms, classrooms, and beyond. So we were founded in 1989 by the State Bar of California. A couple of years back, we became an independent organization. And then we changed our name to ChangeLawyers.

So we're working to diversify the legal system, but it's not just about diversity. We're working to build a better system overall. So we fund and support a lot of stuff. I'm not going to go into all the details. But last year, I think our funding exceeded \$1.1 million.

And I work on our policy, grants, and scholarships work. So we provide grants to high school programs, college programs, and law school level organizations working to increase interest in law school, law school enrollment, and then also law school success. Our 1L and 3L scholarships are really important part of the program. We work with affinity bar organizations, law firms, and other entities who are dedicated to our mission statement to co-sponsor scholarships.

And we look at the numbers. We see the data. And our goal is to provide these diversity scholarships to shift the scales in favor of underrepresented communities. So a majority of our scholars identify as female, a very strong majority. Over a third identifies as L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+. And a large majority-- I think almost 70%-- come from Latinx and Black backgrounds. And then we also have strong representation from Asian, Arab Middle Eastern, and Indigenous identifying individuals.

So we provided 60 scholarships last year. In addition to these scholarships, we also provided them with ongoing training, mentorship, and partnerships with bar prep organizations. And I think we've gotten books from the ABA. And I thank you ABA. I know they're on here somewhere listening.

So relevant to this, we have ongoing year-long and summer-long fellowships that fund-- that provide funding to organizations who can then hire legal fellows at the organizations. Our summer fellows are usually second and third year students in law school. And then our year-long fellows are usually law grads or recently barred attorneys.

Currently we have year-long fellows at Uncommon Law, which is an Oakland-based nonprofit working on prison reform and criminal justice. We also have a year-long fellow at Al Otro Lado, which is a nonprofit working on immigrant rights down at the San Diego-Mexico border.

And in addition to these ongoing programs, we have the type of programs that have funded Eliana, who-- she can go into the details about her work. But these are collaborative funding opportunities that we have. So thinking about how we support our fellows really quickly-- when

it comes to our fellows, we don't see ourselves as much of a leadership training program as we see ourselves as a job placement training program that adds leadership components to it.

So a good example is right now we have fellows that we just selected for a newly-launched immigration legal fellowship program with the state of California in partnership with other nonprofits and the Department of Social Services in California. And 90% of our fellows identify as Latinx. Some of the requirements we had was the ability to speak Spanish, due to the placements that we're putting these folks in. They are being placed around the state of California.

They're currently being given intense deportation defense training. We have ongoing leadership training set up for them, including imposter syndrome training. We are setting them up with networking opportunities, career coaching, resume workshops, and then most importantly, we're providing them with strong salaries.

Oftentimes, immigration attorneys in spaces like this do not provide strong salaries. And we're doing that. We recognize that there is no reason for folks of color to come into spaces and not get the salaries that they absolutely deserve. So we support them through our networking, our training, and those strong salaries not to just create good attorneys, but to create great leaders who can move our communities towards justice. I hope that was five minutes.

- Thank you so much. Good afternoon or good morning or good evening to who all we are speaking to today. My name is Eliana Kaimowitz. I am currently the immigration branch chief at the Department of Social Services. But really, I'm here as a ChangeLawyers graduate, as a fellow attorney, and a fellow person who needed mentorship along the way and found it in sometimes unexpected places.

I do want to begin just a little bit sharing-- echoing what Jasjit shared about the fact that although we are progressive California, and in terms of demographics, our numbers, we have a large Latino, person of color community, progressive community, that is not necessarily reflected in our legal profession. And so for those of us who are in those spaces, you can sometimes feel very alone, very isolated, and like it's not clear where you are going.

So I want to share just a little bit about how I heard about this fellowship program. So I was, let's say, a mid-career fellow. I had been out of law school already for eight years. And the person who shared the information about this fellowship with me was an alum from my law school. So she and I had gone to Penn Law School together on the East Coast. She knew about my interests in immigration. She knew that I was a bit lost as a lawyer because I couldn't quite find a place that worked for me, having been at a big law firm, worked at a small nonprofit, and then worked internationally on human rights work.

And it was perfect timing. But I think one of the takeaways for me is that really, mentoring begins at the peer level. When you are in law school and the friends you make and the people who are your support network, they become key throughout the rest of your career as everybody

kind of goes their own way to kind of looking out for each other and supporting each other in the different career choices that you make.

So I was able to learn about this fellowship. It was at a good time, when California was really looking into a way to bring immigration into state government, right? Immigration is often thought of as a federal job, as something that the feds do, or you're an immigration attorney. And those are the options. So this was bringing an opportunity to work on law and policy at the state level.

And it was a very unique opportunity. I really, really appreciated it. It is really what allowed both, I think, the state government of California to see the value of having a lawyer, having someone who had experience being from the Latin community, being from an immigrant community, work directly on these issues. One of the things I have tried to express to my fellow government attorneys is that in order to solve things, you have to know the community that you're solving for and know what the daily situation is that people experience.

And that's really important when you're in higher-level policy positions and trying to find solutions for people. What does it actually look like on the ground? What does that community actually want? What are the things that my experiences representing clients and being from the community bring to the table?

So that is one take away. I think the other thing I want to share is that, for me, again, this was a mid-career fellowship opportunity. I had already been in many different spaces. And it really reminded me of all the ways in which you can use your legal degree.

I think that's another thing that mentors remind you is that law school wasn't a waste. There are so many things that you learned along the way. Maybe you're not litigating. Maybe you're not directly representing clients. But your legal skills can be put to great use in a variety of settings. And in this particular instance, the fellowship really focused on analyzing legislation and tracking federal policy and litigation related to immigration law, which was a very, very hot issue at the time.

And you needed, definitely, an understanding of law and policy to be able to adequately tell the governor what was happening on DACA, what was happening on changes at the border or changes in many different spaces. And so that's another kind of reminder here as we're talking about mentorship. I think people along the way can remind you that all the things that you did learn in law school, all the reasons you went to law school, there's lots of different ways to use that.

I think the program did so many things for me. I think one of the really important things for a legal fellowship program for me as a mid-career fellow was it gave me the opportunity to mentor others. So I think that's another piece of mentoring that I was in cohorts sometimes with people who were just out of law school. I had been-- I was an old lady by then. I have kids. I have navigated work-life balance issues. I've navigated high pressure jobs.

There was just a lot of things about being the only person of color in the room, had navigated that, as well. All of those things that I could speak to for some of the younger folks that I was working with or were in my cohort of legal fellows. And I think that was-- that's another kind of reminder about this mentorship thing, which is that it's not just about where can you find a mentor, but how can you be a mentor, even as a peer?

I think the other thing that it was invaluable to me is that I ended up working both in the Governor's Office and then later finishing my fellowship at the Department of Social Services, where I found a mentor who was another female Latina attorney who was of my age. And we both agreed to mentor each other as we walked through many difficult spaces and we dealt with many difficult things being the only ones in the room.

So I think one of the takeaways from me here is that mentoring is an ongoing continuum. It's a process. You find fellow peers as mentors when you're in law school. You can find support in many different ways, but we should all be looking out for opportunities, not just to find those people who can remind us of our value, our skills, and our importance, but also to make sure that we are sharing that with others, whether it is people who are coming behind-- the future generation, or as young attorneys with your peers, because again, that network for me has been really, really important.

I think, I love the way that ChangeLawyers talks about the importance of building community amongst legal professionals. I think the way we talk about what a career means, a place where you can stay for a long time and have an impact, and the fact that they're supporting both from high school students to mid-career people. Again, I think just that idea of the continuum of fellowship is really important. And that social change is just important for us to be able to advance all the goals we want to, and for it not to be-- for us not to be the only ones in the room in the future, for there to be really a change in the structure of many of our institutions and many of our legal spaces so that both the law and the policy and the people doing the work are really reflective of the needs and the populations that we serve. So thank you very much for this opportunity today.

- Well, thank you so much to ChangeLawyers for those comments, Jasjit and Eliana. And now we want to turn to the Mexican-American Legislative Leadership Foundation, Irma Reyes and Tannya Oliva Martinez.

- Thank you so much, Professor Moran. My name is Irma Reyes. I am the caucus director at the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus. We are the oldest and largest Latino legislative caucus in the country, older and larger than California's legislative caucus as well as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

I also had the privilege of serving as the program director for the Moreno/Rangel Legislative Leadership Program in 2019. And shortly you'll hear from Tannya Oliva, who is the current program director and alumna of the 2019 class. The Mexican-American Legislative Leadership

foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to fostering the development of leadership skills among Latino youth.

The foundation was established by the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus, MALC, to encourage Latino youth to engage in the political process and furthered this goal by sponsoring the Moreno/Rangel Legislative Leadership Program in 2003. And it's really neat to see-- let me see here-- Chris Pineda is joining us. And he was actually the first program director back in 2003. So thank you, Chris, for joining us.

And just a little bit about the program, the Moreno/Rangel Legislative Leadership Program. It's named in honor of the longest-serving Hispanic member of the Texas House of Representatives, Paul C. Moreno from El Paso and the first Mexican-American woman to serve in the Texas legislature, the late Irma Rangel from Kingsville.

We commonly refer to Moreno/Rangel Leadership Fellows as MALC Fellows. The selection process for the Moreno/Rangel program has become more vigorous throughout the years. Now applicants go through a two-interview process after submitting their application and MALC staff reviews their qualifications.

Following the two interviews, fellows are selected by focusing on their background, policy interests, geographical location, and career aspirations. This allows for the best experience fellows can have during the program. For example, if an applicant that has deep roots in Houston with a background in immigration advocacy will likely get placed in a MALC member's office from that region that has championed those efforts.

The leadership program offers Latinx undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity to gain firsthand, real experience in the functions and operations of the Texas House of Representatives during a legislative session. For those out-of-staters joining us today, the Texas legislature meets for 180 days every odd number year. Participants learn how state government works and interacts with the public and become better equipped to serve communities they represent.

MALC fellows work full time in Austin, Texas for the entire duration of the legislative session in a MALC member's office. Fellows work alongside experienced legislative staff and participate in weekly seminars where they will interact with other program participants, Latino leaders, elected officials, and state agency representatives. In addition to learning the legislative process and developing their leadership skills, MALC fellows receive a monthly stipend to assist with living expenses.

At the Texas Capitol, careers routinely develop from unpaid internships with many legislators having served as interns, fellows, or staffers before running for office. At MALC, we know that unpaid internships should not be the norm. And since the program's inception, a monthly stipend has always been provided to fellows. Following MALC's lead, many fellowship programs have surfaced for the Texas legislature. And the majority of them are paid.

This is essential for recruiting quality participants and compensating full-time staff work so that Fellows can pursue a career in this field without having to suffer economic hardship like an unpaid internship could cause. The really neat thing about the MALC program is not only do we offer Latinx students the opportunity to get their foot in the door at the Texas Capitol, but we also provide a rigorous orientation where we dive into the legislative process.

Throughout the fellowship, the program director serves as a mentor to all the fellows. I still speak and am very close to the former class, which I was a program director for, the 2019 class. And in addition to this, the weekly seminars provide valuable resources in not only leadership but also key meetings with stakeholders like state agencies and advocacy groups to further a fellow's policy knowledge on issues important to the legislature.

We're proud to announce that the 2021 class of Moreno/Rangel fellows is the largest in the program's history, with 20 legislative fellows working full time in a MALC member's office during the 87th Legislature. And I'll kick it on over to Miss Tannya Oliva to share her experience as an alumni and as a current program director for the Moreno/Rangel Legislative Leadership Program.

- Hi, everybody. To all of those who are watching and who are joining this important conversation, my name is Tannya. And I, like Irma said, I am a Moreno/Rangel program graduate and this year's program director. And I'd like to share just a little bit about my experience as an alumni and how that has framed the way I'm running the program this year.

But before that, I just really-- since this is a conversation about training the next generation, I just wanted to highlight that it's people like Irma who are just doing this work daily. She has been a great mentor to me personally. And I know and I've seen how she mentors other Latinx students who are very passionate about public service.

And so she touched a little bit about the benefit that the program offers a stipend, right? And so I'm sure many of you watching have had to work a couple of jobs and study at the same time. At least that was my experience. And that often becomes a barrier to advancing in your career and your education, just because when that's your reality, there is less opportunities for you to have an internship where you're learning and working in areas that you're passionate about.

And so for me, the Moreno/Rangel Legislative Leadership Program provided me with that exact opportunity. The way I initially found out about the-- I first found out about the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus through a friend who worked at the Texas Capitol. She actually interned for one of our MALC members. And she told me that-- she was like, the caucus works on all of the social justice issues that you're passionate about.

And so I was like-- after interning with them for a few months, I found, I learned about the program and I applied. And then I stayed-- so the fellows are, like Irma said, they're assigned to different MALC member offices. And so I wanted to stay with the caucus. So I was a MALC fellow at the caucus.

And I was just really excited about the program because it was a perfect opportunity to gain legislative experience. My time there was during the 86th legislative session. And now we're in the 87th legislative session. So it was in 2019. And to also be able to work on issues that I'm passionate about and that I know that the fellows shared those same passions and-- Irma Reyes and Jaclyn Uresti -- they are super strong Latinas who have been in the fight for so long. And so we're all getting the chance and the opportunity to learn from them.

And so I had just graduated that December of 2018 from college. And so coming out of college, it was just a very-- just a true blessing, not only to be able to have an income that allowed me to pay my bills, but to be part of a historic program, and like I said, learn from a team run by strong Latinas who really put people and equity at the center of policy and governance.

And so this program really is an opportunity for Latinx youth to have those same job opportunities as other people have, to work in public service and to be part of that decision-making process, because we offer-- our unique experiences offer that view that has to be there when we're making-- crafting legislation and when the legislation is being-- it's passing through the legislative process.

And so it matters. And in my class, there were 15 other fellows, and 16 with me. And so it was, like Irma said, this 2021 class is the largest class yet. And so we-- I always say that this fellowship really has changed my life completely. And I know Irma has heard me say this, but I'm an immigrant from Mexico. And I wasn't very familiar with the opportunities here to thrive. And I just never imagined to be where I am today.

And I just think that it's programs like the ones being highlighted here and their directors, their supporters and participants, who make it all possible. And so I just want to share a couple of aspects of the program that were helpful in preparing me and my colleagues to be leaders and instruments of social change. Like Irma said, we have a weekly speaker series. And the guests were ranging from elected officials, community leaders, reporters. And there was also a lot of experts on different policy areas.

And something that I always really admired was the effort from the program directors that-- from Irma and the team that, always ensuring that we're highlighting and learning from diverse voices and we're including people of color and women who are leaders in those issues and efforts here in Texas.

And so the relationships that we built, my peers and I during that session, they-- those are tools that we still continue to use. I can tell you that because of these relationships and these resources and opportunities that came from the program, people in my class have become campaign managers. They have gone to law school, grad school. They're policy directors in different organizations. They're chiefs of staffs, organizers, leaders in our communities.

And others are very passionate about running for office. And so this program is just amazing. And I'm really excited to see all the great things that are class of-- our 2021 class of fellows are

going to do during the 87th legislative session and also beyond. And I know that one of our current MALC fellows, Lorraine Garcia, she's a law student at A&M. She's watching us. So I just wanted to give her a shout out.

Yeah, so just tell everybody you know about this amazing program that runs every Texas legislative session. And thank you so much for listening. And Professor Moran, I'll hand it to you.

- Yeah, I know you wanted to share the photo of the--

- Oh, yes.

- Did you still want to do that, just so everybody can see the cohort?

- I do. I don't know if you can all see it now, but that was our class of 2019. And then hopefully soon we'll have-- due to the COVID restrictions-- but we hope to have one of the class of 2021.

- Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing that. It kind of brings it all to life with the photo. Well, I wanted to go ahead and start with a question about the-- I mean, I mentioned Olivia Countryman, my research assistant. And she worked very hard to find leadership training opportunities. And it turns out there are not that many out there for the Latinx community. Do you have thoughts about why there are relatively few programs and what might be done to increase the opportunities?

How about-- well, you can start in any order, but just to get us off, what about Sulema?

- Yeah. So there is a lot of professionals that spend their careers leading these conversations and conducting these leadership programs. And I apologize that the lighting in my office is kind of reflecting on my face. So what we found-- the Latina Commission has found-- is that it can be expensive. And so I think that's why there is the limitation because the hope is to extend this programming for free to our students who need it, to our pipeline, to our younger professionals.

And even at the executive level, it's expensive. So we've been trying to find sponsorships. In fact, what Grissel has done and other volunteers has done is they have learned the material and trained other Latinas on how-- and other attorneys, on how to present the materials. So we've all learned how to present the materials. In fact, an expectation of the commissioners was-- and not everyone, because not everyone is comfortable getting in front of a group and taking the lead on presenting these kind of hard topics.

But for those of us who are up for the task and able to, one of the goals has been to train them so that we can expand this type of training programming and to do it on a more condensed manner in different regions. So we're a national organization. We host this one-day Latina Leadership Academy at the annual conference. In fact, Grissel and Norma have rolled it out to do it at the mid-year conference.

So now we have it twice. And it's generally a full day. Now with it being virtual, the structure is a little different. The Executive program that focuses on some of the harder issues that happen when you hit your ceiling in your organization, that has been a longer program, a six month program.

Now, again, for example, that particular program-- that's expensive because we've hired an executive coach. We actually have three executive coaches that break out-- not only do the group programming, but they also break out and have individual sessions. And so we had to find a sponsor. And so a lot of the programming has either been through sponsorship of companies, of similar organizations, or individuals who want to expand the leadership programming, or through volunteers who have learned the programming and are willing to reproduce it.

So that's how we've been able to maintain and expand the programming. And unfortunately, I do think that cost is one of the barriers.

- Would anyone like to add any additional thoughts on that question?

- I think there's a cultural portion to that or perspective, right? As a Latina born and raised in the South Bronx, if I am making big law money, then I should be helping my family. Then I should be giving back. There is almost no sense of selfishness that I had to contend with, right?

Is it OK to invest in me if I have a two-year-old? I now have a 12-year-old. But at the time. Was it OK to invest in me? Was it OK not to pay for another computer for one of my cousins but to take that \$2,000 and invest it in myself so that ultimately I can pay for a computer for five cousins, because it would help my career grow?

So there's a socioeconomic aspect as well as a cultural aspect to spending the kind of money that leadership-- leadership coaching requires. But when you think about people in the C-suite usually have executive coaches assigned to them by big corporations-- it is an investment, an investment in career. Sorry, Eliana. I didn't mean to cut you off.

- No problem. No, just piggy backing off of that a bit, I think that the other aspect of it is, if you assume that you're going to have a leadership space, you would want to see other Latinas there. You would want to see other kind of people who have had a similar experience that you've had there, kind of being able to speak to your experience.

And I think that first of all, the numbers are not high. There are not that many people have had all of these experiences. And those same people are being asked to do a number of things as the only ones. They are asked to be speaking about their experience as the only Latina in something. They are being asked to speak as the only person of color at their firm or as the longest being leader of their non-profit.

And in many different spaces, people are asking them for their time because they are the only ones in those-- representing those spaces. And so those same folks are then asked to mentor

others or to provide direction or share in these spaces of leadership. So I think part of it is kind of the fact that there are so few folks. And people have a lot of other time commitments, right?

If you're high up in an organization, it's because you have a more-than-full-time job. And you have your two-year-old. And you have your 12-year-old. And you have the time that you want to be able to spend for yourself so that you can balance all of these things. So I think part of it is-- to me, I've still always found it helpful to be in leadership spaces where perhaps it is not a fellow Latina, but it's a Black man who has experienced many things that I can find similarities in. Or it's a fellow woman who has also experienced the work-life balance. I think part of it is just not assuming that our leadership spaces have to necessarily look like us until we have those numbers.

- OK. If no one else wants to add to that one, any answers or thoughts, I wanted to move to another question that was submitted by one of the audience before we had our session. And that relates to this problem of imposter syndrome. And I know that came up in some of the comments at the beginning of our presentations. And the question really is about, how do you deal with that feeling of being an imposter? This actually builds a little bit on the sense of the lack of diversity, the exceptionalism in the space, and then feeling like, do I actually belong in this space?

So how do your programs address that, if at all?

- So I'll just go real quick. I actually had talked about some of the webinars that we've done. And it actually links back to what-- the previous conversation. So I'm actually going to put the link in here. It's the [CaliforniaLeadersSummit.org](https://californialeaderssummit.org). We actually have a bunch of webinars, one including how to beat imposter syndrome. I think that's in there. Another one is how to confront microaggressions, how to-- self care and healing, networking for introverts. There's a lot of stuff in here that I feel like we created based off the feedback we got from our scholars and fellows.

We need to hear about this. We don't know how to deal with this. And it goes back to also a cost thing. Of course, we can't do that for every single person. But this is a free resource that anyone can click on and hopefully take away from it some level of learning or understanding that could help them. So I'm just throwing that in there in terms of what we specifically do. And that access is to anyone, including any of us on the panel or any single person around the world who wants to watch.

- So some of the data that we collected through the Commission's efforts has shown that a lot of folks who have identified as experiencing imposter syndrome a lot of times are the first in their families to go to school or to be in that space, and oftentimes develop it because they feel like they're the only. So it's like this idea of, I'm the only. And so because I'm not like them, then maybe I'm not supposed to be here because I stand out.

So a lot of our programming focuses on identifying some of the cultural differences, but also training and coaching on how to maximize those as qualities and not deficiencies, and also putting-- particularly we find that imposter syndrome was cultural, being Latina, and being our

gender, right? So it's a double whammy. And so the programming is really trying to put folks that look like you, women who look like you and had similar experiences in a room and talk about these issues, because then you're no longer the only. And that builds confidence.

So the data has shown that when you're in a classroom with people who look more like you, you're in a setting with people who look more like you, that you feel like you belong and that builds confidence. So trying to build that confidence on not only putting them in that room and in that setting, hearing other people's experience and knowing they're not alone and they're not the only, and then also training on how, a lot of times what we find is these commonalities, these common traits among us-- grit, hard work, resilience-- that these things are what makes you who you are and what gets you to where you're at.

It's not luck. You know, a lot of that is part of the imposter syndrome. I'm lucky. I got here by luck. And in fact, you hear that in our community, too. I can't tell you how many times my family has told me how "lucky" I am. And I think, well, the difference between you and I is nothing more than hard work, that I've put in the time. And so again, just breaking down cultural barriers. Sometimes it's not just the other. It's not the majority who makes us feel that way. But it's sometimes within our own culture that can create that imposter syndrome.

Grissel instructs on this all the time. So I'm sure she could add a few things to help with that.

- Mommy!

- Oh, jeez.

- I completely agree. So one of the things I always talk about is FEAR. It's False Evidence Appearing Real. So it's your own FEAR. Imposter syndrome is your own fear of being present, of not belonging. And the reality is, you've earned the space. You've earned your space at the table.

No one in big law, no one in big corporations, no one in non-profit will hire somebody that they don't think is good enough. We hire people who we know are good enough. Law schools admit students they know that are good enough. They don't think, oh, Latina, so let's just admit her. No, right? Corporations don't think, oh, Latina, so let's give her an in-house counsel role.

So it is about facing our realities vis-a-vis our fear. The reality is, no one gets a job for free. You earn it. The reality is, no one gets admitted to law school without having gone through the application process, the LSAT, the blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You've earned it.

So I always invert the word FEAR and ask people to look at what that R is. Have you driven results in your life and in your career? And if so, then your place in that space is your reality and shouldn't be your fear.

- OK. We actually have another question from the audience. And this is from Chris, who was previously an executive director. And he was so happy to hear about the placements and the long-term trajectories of people who go through the program. And what he was wondering is, how do you keep track of everybody who goes through your programs? And then how do you try to make sure they continue to stay in touch with each other? For example, Tannya had said how important it was to stay in touch with members of her cohort. How do you facilitate that kind of ongoing connection across the various graduates of your programs?

- Yeah--

- So-- Tannya, you can go ahead.

- I'll let you and then I'll--

- OK. We routinely stay in contact with our former classes, especially the most recent ones. So anytime that there is a job opportunity that we know of, there is a volunteer opportunity that we know of, or just general check-ins, we do keep in close contact.

I just talked to a 2019 cohort fellow just this morning. But as a more broader alumni class, we have been looking at ways on how to have a big group, either online-- well, online for now-- with all of the cohorts dating back to 2003. So Chris, we'll be reaching out to you soon on that. But it's been a work in progress that we wanted to connect with all of the Moreno/Rangel fellows so we could highlight their achievements and also connect them to current Moreno/Rangel fellows so that way they can learn off of their experiences even if they were two decades ago, but they're still very valuable and helpful now in their experience.

- And I just wanted to go back to the last question really quickly, just because that's why representation matters so much. I was remembering of a conversation I actually had with my peers. And we were talking exactly about imposter syndrome. And we we're saying-- and I think in the conversation, we were all like, wow, you feel it too? And then it was kind of those shared experiences.

And just by having the class where you can have those conversations and then looking at who are being the leaders of those programs? And then I look at Irma and then I look at Jackie. And then you start having those experiences that then change that thought in your mind that was wrong. Because then you start seeing it and then believe in it for yourself, and then trying to uplift other peers, as well, other Latinx students.

And so that's why whenever we talk about also how we all stay connected, you develop friendships, right? You develop these relationships with each other. And then when you find, oh, there's this job opportunity, then we text each other. We create groups. I know the current class of fellows have a GroupMe where they are constantly talking and sharing.

And I had one for my class. And we still all-- we talk and then we share about the different opportunities that we have. And then during orientation, we also had-- we invited former fellows, like Irma said, to be mentors for our current fellows, as well, and see, what are the things that-- looking at what things do people do after this program? Because this program is maybe a first step, a second step. But the careers continue, right? And then you are able to see how much of an impact that program has had for many people. So that's how we stay connected. And we track.

We love spreadsheets. So we track and we save people's contact information and then try to keep them as involved and engaged in our social media and any events that we hold.

- Well, this is terrific. We're coming towards the end of our time together. So I wanted to have a speed round with everybody. And it's just like a one sentence-- your best piece of advice for people who are thinking about how to make these transitions, become leaders within their fields. So I know it's hard, but just really quick so everybody gets to give us one of their best advice in a quick sentence.

And I know that's very difficult. Maybe it's an unrealistic exercise. But try your best. And so we'll start with Sulema and Grissel.

- My best piece of advice and what has helped me tremendously is really networking, taking that time-- it is a lot of time investment. But I would say that networking is extremely important to learn about opportunities, whether it's training, job, personal, and just trying to identify those organizations that provide those opportunities to network.

- OK, great. Grissel?

- I would say leadership is knowing your heart. Know what brings you passion, because that flows and will provide you everything that you might need. It'll provide you looking for the networks, to Sulema's point. It will provide you with the executive presence that you're going to need, because your passion and your purpose come across completely different from anything else. So do a self-assessment. Remember why you went to law school. Remember it. Write it down. Put it away. And bring that journal entry back out when life happens.

- OK. How about Jasjit and Eliana?

- They already took the good answers. I guess thinking-- I'd say seek out folks, just more specifically about networking. Actually see who you-- who really inspires you and just reach out to them. I think social media and the way LinkedIn works-- I mean, anyone-- if anyone wants to add me on LinkedIn, feel free. I'm happy to help.

Just getting connected with folks in that sense, just feel confident to actually reach out to someone. I think we really need to be confident and just know that we belong here and that we should reach out to anyone. And hopefully that person responds.

- And Eliana?

- I would say it's never too late to find a mentor and it's never too late to be a mentor. I think both of those things are true. And you may need different mentors for different things and at different points in life. And so don't stop looking just because the ready-made group wasn't there for you, either in law school or at your law firm or at your organization. There's always opportunities to find people to talk to, to give you good advice, and for you to do that for others, as well, as you start accumulating.

- OK. Irma and Tannya, and we're at the 1 o'clock mark, so we have to be really succinct. But I do want to hear from you.

- I'll add that if there is a specific area in the law or policy that you are interested in and passionate about, become an expert in that area, because there is nothing more valuable than an expert in a certain policy area in any field. Those are my 2 cents.

- And Tannya?

- Just really quickly, I think we're constantly learning and growing, right? And so I would say just-- so what I try to do also is continue to challenge myself and don't limit yourself by any sort of social constructions or past experiences. And also sharing resources with others, because you never know how it's going to impact someone else's life and career.

- OK. Great. So with that, I wanted to turn it over to Luz to have the last word.

- Yes. Thank you so much for this great presentation and conversation, and particularly thank you to Professor Rachel Moran for organizing this and to Olivia Countryman who helped her. Those of you who are interested, please come back for our next three webinars, which again, the next one is the 25th of March and then every other week since then. We're sharing the information there.

You will find the recording of this webinar and other previous webinars on TAMULawAnswers.info. So we hope you join us. I've also in the chat put in a pitch for you all to join our Network For Justice online platform because that's a great way for us to continue the conversation and to be connected. So thank you so much. And we'll see you in two weeks.