In 1996, when CCSRE was inaugurated and I served as its founding director, the faculty and staff of the Center realized an important mission lay ahead. As we opened the doors of the CSRE undergraduate degree program and welcomed the first cohort of outstanding and eager majors, I was convinced we were on the path to creating a special community of scholars—undergraduate majors, affiliated graduate students, and faculty—with the potential to establish Stanford University as the premier institution in higher education promoting the study of race and ethnicity. As a historian whose intellectual origins are closely tied to the emergence of ethnic studies scholarship and as a faculty member with over twenty years experience at the university when the Center was launched, I understood how CCSRE was a product of the past, a beneficiary of contemporary influences, and a harbinger of the future.

The convergence of several developments triggered the creation of CCSRE and set its trajectory – the maturation of the study of race and ethnicity, the legacy of student activism and advocacy for ethnic studies curriculum, and the commitment by university leadership to build CCSRE as one of Stanford’s towers of excellence. Through the auspices of a Mellon Foundation supported seminar that George Fredrickson (founding Co-director of the Research Institute of CSRE) and I initiated in 1992, some 30 to 40 faculty across many disciplines participated in rich discussions about comparative studies in race and ethnicity. In 1994, when a new burst of student activism captivated campus, discussions had already begun about harnessing the intellectual energy of the Mellon Seminar and funneling it into some organized unit.

A hunger strike by a group of Mexican American women students in May 1994, supported by a coalition of students of color and others, greatly accelerated the push to develop what became CCSRE. These students, angry over the firing of the highest-ranking Latina administrator in the university, sat in protest in the middle of the Quad and refused to eat until their demands were discussed. Among their many demands was the establishment of a Chicano studies program. The university agreed to start a process of deliberation on this issue; the President and Provost asked the Dean of H&S at that time, John Shoven, to constitute a committee. He selected Ramón Saldívar, the first Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, to chair the committee.

The only degree-granting program in ethnic studies at Stanford at the time was the Program in African and African American Studies, also an offshoot of student activism in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. And though groups of students of color had raised the question of Chicano, Asian American, and Native American curriculum since the 1970s, no formal programs had been created. It was no surprise that Asian American and Native American students joined with the Chicana students and requested the university and the committee to consider ethnic studies more broadly. The committee did so, but after careful consideration opted not to follow what had been the standard ethnic studies model in higher education for over a generation: separate programs focused on the study of individual groups, or departments with distinct, and often semi-autonomous programs tied to study of one group.

The committee, and the affiliated faculty who later assumed the charge of establishing CCSRE, opted to create something new on the intellectual landscape of ethnic studies. A Program in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity, one that considers both domestic and international contexts, allowed flexibility for students to focus their studies.

Al Camarillo Reflects on 15 Years of CCSRE

A hunger strike by a group of Mexican American women students in May 1996, supported by a coalition of students of color and others, greatly accelerated the push to develop what became CCSRE. These students, angry over the firing of the highest-ranking Latina administrator in the university, sat in protest in the middle of the Quad and refused to eat until their demands were discussed. Among their many demands was the establishment of a Chicano studies program.
on particular groups in relation to others, or to focus primarily on comparative dimensions. This was the hallmark of the new CSRE model, one that has shaped the development of many other new programs and centers started at universities across the nation over the past fifteen years.

The CCSRE model was further reinforced when the decision was to not only create an undergraduate teaching program but to build a center that would galvanize the intellectual energies of a growing number of faculty committed to the study of race and ethnicity. CCSRE thus embarked on a dual mission: promote undergraduate studies and develop a menu of intellectual activities, research projects, and programs involving graduate students and faculty through the Research Institute of CCSRE (RICSRE).

Through RICSRE’s longstanding seminar series, visiting scholars program, dissertation fellowships for doctoral students, research working groups, and other programs, a vibrant intellectual community formed over the years. The Center began in 1996 with about 30 affiliated faculty – that number today stands at 130, with colleagues from all seven of Stanford’s schools. Furthermore, several institutes and centers with specific research foci are organized under the CCSRE umbrella. The CSRE undergraduate program also grew remarkably; five years after its founding, it was recognized as the fastest growing undergraduate major at the university. In June 2013, we will honor the largest graduating class of CSRE majors thus far.

CCSRE’s impressive growth and expansion over the past decade and a half, and its emergence as the leading center of its kind in American higher education, could not have been possible without the investment in its work by leadership in the School of Humanities and Sciences (H&S) and by the Provost and President. A generous endowment gift supports the Center and the ongoing commitment of H&S resources makes possible the operation of the undergraduate program and RICSRE. In addition, since 2007 the Provost has supported the Faculty Development Initiative (FDI), collaboration between CCSRE, the Office of the Provost, and schools and departments across the university to recruit and hire the best young and senior scholars whose work focuses on the study of race and ethnicity. Over the past five years, eleven faculty have been hired in cooperation with the FDI— all are formally affiliated with CCSRE. Directing the FDI as Special Assistant to the Provost, and viewing first hand the impact that each faculty member is having on campus and in her/his field of study, is one of the most gratifying experiences in my long career at Stanford.

I look back with great pride and a sense of accomplishment of how the vision has been realized that we—students, faculty, administrators, and staff—had in 1996 to build a center of excellence to promote the curriculum development and research in the area of race and ethnicity at Stanford. The expanding community of people at the university who have contributed to the growth of the Center, aided by the Center’s Advisory Board, form a collective with intellectual and social bonds unparalleled in my experience at the university. I know that the current leadership of the CCSRE will build on the strong foundations already established and take the Center and Stanford to even greater heights of scholarly distinction in the study of race and ethnicity in the U.S. and internationally.

Al Camarillo (Director, 1996-2002)

Al Camarillo is Professor of History and the Leon Sloss, Jr. Memorial Professor. He is widely regarded as one of the founders of the field of Mexican American history and Chicano Studies. He is the only faculty member ever to receive the six highest awards for excellence in teaching, service to undergraduate education and Stanford alumni, and university-related public service. He currently serves as President of the Organization of American Historians.
Snippets from CCSRE’s past

Stanford Students Strike. A hunger strike by a group of Mexican American women students in spring of 1994, supported by a coalition of students of color and other supporters, helped pave the way to the creation of CCSRE.

Chicano Studies Major at Stanford After 27 Years of Struggle

Planning helped fasters remain healthy

by JANET BASU

A fast poses real medical risks, but four Chicana students who abstained from food from Wednesday morning, May 4, to late Friday night, May 6, came through healthy through advance preparation, medical and volunteer monitoring, and the water and electrolytes needed to protect them from dehydration.

Doctors from Stanford’s Cowell Student Health Center checked the four daily, and student volunteers used advice from the health center to counsel other students who pledged shorter fasts.

“The strikers followed instructions about water and electrolytes and allowed themselves to be monitored,” said Dr. Irvin Friedman, director of the Cowell Student Health Center.

Friedman and Cowell nutritionist Laura Branim-Rodriguez stressed that they do not encourage fasting because of the associated health dangers. Their role was to provide advice and medical help to minimize those dangers as much as possible.

Even a seemingly healthy person undertaking a fast of more than 24 hours can develop health problems, they told the strikers.

“Fasting is even greater for people with diabetes or heart disease, and those who are ill or taking medications. And, Friedman stressed, even a doctor’s care cannot guarantee a safe fast.”

Friedman credited seniors Gloria Sanchez, a biological sciences major who plans to pursue a medical degree, with organizing the student volunteers who watched out for the strikers’ health.

“‘Smart’ fast was goal

Sanchez said that she had reservations when her friends decided to begin a hunger strike. But then she decided, “If it was a fast we were going to do, it was going to be a smart fast.”

Before the strike started, she began researching and calling experts for advice. She realized that the hunger strikers would need baseline blood tests and other medical exams so their health could be monitored if the strike turned out to be lengthy.

Sanchez established a sign-up system so that those pledging short fasts could be screened, those with health problems would be urged not to fast. On Wednesday morning, she notified Friedman and Branim-Rodriguez, who quickly met with the strikers and organized a plan for medical checks.

Branim-Rodriguez gave the strikers and supporters a four-page handout describing the consequences of fasting and describing the symptoms that call for extra care — dehydration, light-headedness, nausea or fainting.

Minimizing danger

The most critical danger in a fast is from loss of fluids and of potassium, sodium and other electrolytes, the electrical conductors that are essential for nerves to function, and that help

the absorption and retention of water. A faster also suffers from a lack of carbohydrates, requiring the body to break down fat, muscle and vital organs to get enough glucose to feed the brain.

For these reasons, nutritionists Branim-Rodriguez said that fasters should drink electrolyte replacement liquids, such as Gatorade, plus dilute juices and vegetable broth to provide some energy. She said it is unsafe to fast on water alone.

Sanchez was unable to persuade the four hunger strikers to drink juice, but she persuaded them to drink electrolytes.

“I told them it would be difficult to be coherent and mobile, because neurological function is based on these electrolytes,” she said.

Student volunteers raised funds to buy a medical electrolyte replacement fluid, which they mixed in careful proportions. Their efforts paid off when one of the four women became very dehydrated and was stabilized by an increased level of electrolytes. Volunteers also monitored all the other fasters.

“We kept going up to them and saying, are you fasting? Are you drinking water more?”

“We did not have little information as if they should water with them. In addition, we sought advice and

On Monday, May 8, students and supporters celebrated what they called a partial victory at a noon-time rally outside the Old Union. Among those who fasted for the duration of the strike were, from left, junior Tamara Alvarado, sophomore Elvira Prieto, senior Eva Silva, freshman Felipe Barragan, and senior Julia Gonzalez-Luna.

‘It touched me to have all sorts of people come forth and give their services, with no divisions’

and Alejandro Martinez, director of counseling and psychological services at Cowell, as well as Yvonne Maldonado, assistant professor of pediatrics at the Stanford Medical School.

“It touched me to have all sorts of people come forth and give their services, with no divisions,” Sanchez said. “I’m glad I could use my education this way. It’s an empowering thing to be able to help my friends, and it was a big responsibility.”