What fields did you get your bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in?

I received my BA in English and Literature at Yale in 1977. I then came to Stanford to do my graduate work, where I completed my MA in 1979 and my PhD in English and Comparative Literature in 1983. Before I came back to Stanford as a Professor of Comparative Literature in January 2012, I was the Class of 1942 Professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

How did you first get involved with the Center?

Because I had been hired as part of the Faculty Development Initiative (FDI) led by Professor Al Camarillo, I first became involved with the Center in January 2010, when I joined the faculty as a professor in the Department of Comparative Literature. In the Autumn 2010 Quarter, I was appointed by Prof. Matt Snipp, the Center’s Director, to Chair and Director of the Undergraduate Program in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. But I also have had a long historical relationship to the formation of Chicano/Latino Studies at Stanford. When I was a second year graduate student in the Department of English, I was selected to one of the first cohorts of the Chicano Fellows Program, a program then housed in the basement of the Nitery—now El Centro Chicano. Through the Chicano Fellows Program, advanced graduate students were selected and trained to teach undergraduates in courses in Chicano/a Studies before Stanford had CCSRE. It served as the University’s response to the lack of ethnic and race-centered courses within the School of Humanities and Sciences. Together with our Stanford faculty mentors who worked closely with us, the Chicano Fellows Program gave us hope, pedagogical knowledge, and optimism in our new and emergent fields of ethnic studies.

As you prepare to move into your new position in September, what do you see as the current status of the Undergraduate Program in CSRE?

I think that the undergraduate CSRE program is in excellent shape. Last May 2012, we celebrated our 15th anniversary and we graduated one of the largest and most successful senior classes. CSRE now has some 70 majors. With the successful recruitment of eleven new faculty (myself included) through the Faculty Development Initiative over the past three years, CSRE has been able to add more than twenty new courses to our core curricular offerings. Additionally, in the Spring 2012 Quarter the School of Humanities & Sciences approved a new major in CSRE since its founding in 1996 of the original four CSRE-IDP majors in Asian-American, Chicano/Latino/a, Native American, and Comparative ethnic studies. As a result of this approval, we will be inaugurating in the Autumn 2012 quarter the new CSRE-IDP major in Jewish Studies. The creation of a new major in Jewish Studies represents not only the opening of the study of race and ethnicity to the international and planetary scale, but also represents a timely broadening of the historical scope in our understanding of the processes and formations by which race and ethnicity shape the human experience. Jewish Studies will take our Program in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity in an international direction beyond what has been an American-centric concern with race and ethnicity. We are in now in a better position to study race, racism, and patterns of racialization in a globally comparative context.

We are also continuing to excel in providing our undergraduates with courses encouraging student learning and development through community development. What’s unique about our CSRE Service Learning Initiative is that our model is an organic part of the overall set of undergraduate degree requirements. We are doing a very solid job of reaching students in the early part of their Stanford undergraduate careers—before many of them come into contact with departmental majors and minors. I was very happy to see that CCSRE provided students interested in the race and health concentration of the CSRE major the opportunity to work with Dr. Laura Saldivar in her public service internships at Ravenswood Family Health Center in East Palo Alto and in the Menlo Medical Clinic in Menlo Park. CSRE students were able to work with Dr. Saldivar in a seminar setting as well as ‘shadow’ her in her practice at Menlo Medical Clinic, a clinic affiliated with Stanford Hospital. Additionally, Professor Al Camarillo’s “Service Learning Workshop on Issues of Education Equity” partnered with East Palo Alto High and engaged students in one-on-one tutoring and mentoring relationships. Students were able to work with their high school mentees through winter and spring quarters, supporting them in developing major term papers and standardized tests.

One of my hopes is that in the future we can see more collaboration with Stanford University’s Bing Overseas Program, directed by Ramón Saldivar. I’d love to see us collaborating not only with the BSOP Overseas Center in Cape Town South Africa but also in Europe and Latin America.

Finally, in September 2012 we initiated CSRE’s first Bing Honors College (BHC). One of the three September Studies programs, BHC is a three-week program for students actively
engaged in researching and drafting their senior honors theses. CSRE BHC participants work individually and collectively on their theses during this time. As a result, our CSRE students will begin their senior year in an atmosphere of shared intellectual purpose with a serious commitment to independent scholarship.

Patricia Seo, a graduate student in the department of Sociology, and I worked together to achieve the following three goals:

- Accelerate progress on honors theses by offering students an uninterrupted block of time in which to focus on their work.
- Enhance opportunities for students to form mentoring relationships with faculty and advanced graduate students in their field.
- Foster a sense of intellectual community among students pursuing honors work, both within and across academic disciplines.

Do you have any big plans for CCSRE?

Yes, as a result of several planning meetings over the past year and a half with my colleagues in CCSRE, we are in the final stages of submitting a proposal for a Joint CCSRE Ph.D. Program. Our proposed CCSRE Ph.D. Program in Race and Ethnicity will offer two tracks: one in the social sciences and one in the humanities.

I also plan to continue offering a big public CSRE class on contemporary music (rock en español) in the next year or so. This public course will be based on our highly successful Spring 2012 CSRE course, "Occupy Art."

The word “occupy” was on the minds of my CSRE and IDA colleagues H. Samy Alim, Jeff Chang, Tania Mitchell, Ramón Saldívar and me when we developed an entire course around the Occupy movement, looking at its historic roots and present-day applications through the lens of the artists involved. Last spring, we rolled out #OccupyArt live on the web-- President Obama award a National Humanities Medal to Ramón. I only wish my hard-working parents were alive to have seen this incredible event!

I’ve always learned so much from Ramón’s leadership, teaching and research, centering as they do on globalization, transnationalism, and Chicano/a Border studies. As President Obama noted, “You’ve helped guide our growth as a people,” he told my brother Ramón and the nine medal winners. Who wouldn’t want to follow in Ramón’s footsteps? All of my brothers and sisters were raised in the Global South’s border town of Brownsville, Texas, and like Ramón, we’ve all had an interest in transcultural issues since we began our academic studies.

Briefly, I think Ramón has done an incredible job in directing the Center and in highlighting the truly great work those of us in the Humanities and Ethnic Studies are doing at Stanford. I say all of this with complete honesty—even though I am a little biased—Ramón is, after all, my brother! I’d like to continue encouraging our work on the undergraduate level, and continue to make CSRE one of the best majors for our students and to make it the best intellectual experience they can possibly have at Stanford.

I plan to design with Samy Alim and Jeff Chang a CSRE big class on the global flows of rock en español in the Americas and hope to bring established rock bands from Latin America, Mexico, and California to our new Bing Music Center. The course will center on transcultural Latino/a music and identity.

Lastly, one of the most exciting things that CCSRE has done exceedingly well over the past several years is the creation of Service Learning Programs and Outreach programs. Through our rich Service Learning Programs, our CSRE undergraduate students are able to thoughtfully and rigorously connect their volunteer service work in the nearby multi-ethnic communities with their academic work at Stanford. Through this form of engagement, our undergraduate students are able to gracefully apply their knowledge of critical race and ethnic formation theories and their skills in critical thinking they’ve developed at Stanford to the wider nearby urban communities in Silicon Valley and beyond. Our CSRE Service Learning Programs give our undergraduates the opportunity to think more reflexively about the very nature of service learning work. I’d like to see this continue and grow under my faculty leadership.

How do you feel about succeeding your brother, Ramón Saldívar, in this post?

I am very happy and honored to be following in my brother Ramón’s footsteps. As you can imagine, all of the Saldívars—my six brothers and sisters and our families—are immensely proud of Ramón. It was just a few months ago in a moving and terrific White House ceremony that my family and I saw--streamed