



Ann Lopez Ph.D.

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"Success is 90 percent persistence and 10 percent ability. Never give up. You can go home and cry, but you must come back."

Ann Lopez, 2010.

Early Life and Education

Born May 17, 1945, Dr. Ann López has devoted her life to environmental education and community organizing in support of Mexican migrant families' social justice in the United States. Initially, López became interested in the environmental field as a young child. She loved running in the hills of her hometown in Altadena, California. She had an early love of nature, animals, and plants. Her parents noticed her fascination with nature, letting her keep creatures she had found in the woods. Her preoccupation with nature led her to be interested in biology, which was the closest field of study relating to the environment in the 1960s. She appreciated the extreme certainty of biology and its emphasis on environmental processes. In 1967, Ann López obtained her B.A. at the University of California Riverside majoring in Biology. Following this in 1969, she obtained her Master's at UC-Santa Barbara, and in 2002, she obtained her PhD in Environmental Studies from UC Santa Cruz.

In 2007, UC Press published López's book, *The Farmworkers' Journey*. The book explores the farmworkers' binational circuit that stretches from the west central Mexico countryside to central California. López conducted a series of interviews with farm workers and their families along the circuit. In the book, she also presents her research on subjects including corporate agribusiness operations, how binational institutions subjugate Mexican farmworkers, and exploitation of farmworkers by employers. The book won an Honorable Mention Award from the Society for the Anthropology of North America in 2008.

Since 1969, Lopez has taught environmental science, ecology, and botany courses at San José City College. She believes that one of the main reasons she obtained the job was because of the college riots, occurring during this time, to demand more Latino professors at the college. She still remains one of the only Latinos that teach in the environmental field. Even though she has retired, she still teaches a Saturday course she designed for the environmental science program. Most of her students in this class are minorities.

Career

The Center for Farmworker Families is a nonprofit organization that was established by López in her living room in 2008. While writing her dissertation, López was able to study sustainable farming systems in Mexico, learning about the negative impacts NAFTA had on farm worker's livelihoods. López recalls sitting with families of migrant farmers on multiple occasions, hearing of horrific stories of death, loss, child malnutrition and other tragedies migrant families experienced. López states, "It was intolerable that people did not know this was going on since NAFTA was supposed to create jobs, not destroy them." These experiences led her to found The Center for Farmworker Families. One of the main objectives of the organization is to promote awareness and education about migrant farm worker's livelihoods and to debunk common stereotypes pertaining to immigrant populations. The organization also serves migrant families by providing resources for education, along with advocating for California state law reform to support migrant families. Currently, a bill is going forward to the California Assembly, titled AB2010, allowing farm workers to remain in migrant camps long enough for their children to complete the school year.

Mentoring

López's mentors include one of her 9th grade teachers who, unlike most of her other teachers, had faith in her ability as a Latina student. This particular teacher gave her more confidence as a woman of color in the academic setting. Also, López' grandmother, also a lifelong teacher, always encouraged her to become a teacher. Further, while obtaining her undergraduate degree, one professor she had, Dr. Jackson, led her independent study on Chicano Studies, offering a supportive environment for López to build an understanding and historical context for what it means to be Latina. Also, Pat Zavella, a dissertation advisor to López, offered a lot of support for studying farm worker livelihoods. A large aspect of López' life has been mentoring minorities in the environmental field. She is often answering questions, giving advice, troubleshooting, and offering networks for those minority students interested in a career in an environmental field. She also serves as a mentor for farm workers and their families.

Highlights

The highlight of López' career has been the acknowledgement of her importance in people's lives as an educator and community organizer. She believes that having the acknowledged support from students and farm workers is an ongoing highlight. However, the lowest point of Lopez's career has been the bias she has faced as a minority in academia. In the past, she often worked with colleagues that did not believe that she was smart enough as a Latina woman serving as a college professor. The situation worsened and she submitted a 20 page report highlighting the perils and prejudice she faced while obtaining her PhD.

The students Lopez has taught are the main reason she has continued in a career in the environmental field. She also knows that her work in the environmental field is creating awareness and progress for the environment, migrant workers and their families. She hopes to continue to combat biased viewpoints and legislation that prevent migrant families from leading productive lives in the United States. When asked what advice López would give to minorities considering a career in the environmental field, she states, "Success is 90 percent persistence and 10 percent ability. Never give up. You can go home and cry, but you must come back."

This interview was conducted in 2015.