

Universidad Sin Fronteras

San Antonio, TX



Adjunct Faculty Pocket Guide

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Adjuct Faculty

Background

University Sin Fronteras (UNSIF) could not have arisen without the collaboration between two organizations that had already been holding their own classes and workshops on organizing and internal political education since the 1980s: the Southwest Workers Union (SWU) in San Antonio, TX and Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide (PS) in Atlanta, GA. Both long-standing social movement organizations contributed the infrastructural support critical to the creation of the UNSIF. They, therefore, became its first two anchor organizations. Ruben Solis, after transitioning out of his position at SWU, took on the responsibility of establishing UNSIF.

In 2010, a group of activists met in a series of Tertulias (round-table talks) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We became concerned about the lack of qualitative connection between a new explosion of community activists and more experienced organizers, and among one another. Bridging the distinct histories and perspectives of three generations of movement activists would be difficult without a university developed by and for our social movements. Sending busy activists to schools that are outdated, racist, classist, and lacking in diversity would be wrong. We needed a new way to educate.

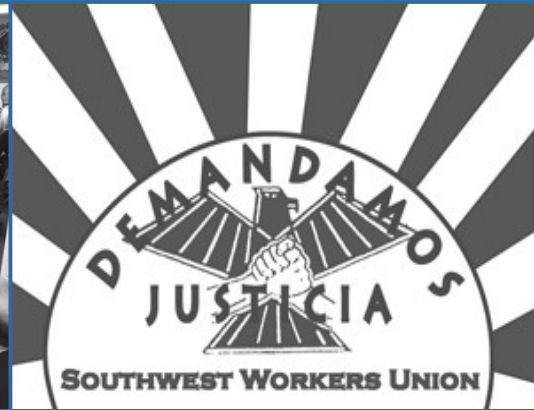
In 2011, we decided to try to meet that need by founding the University Sin Fronteras. In 2012 the nine members of a new board established the basic concepts for our curriculum, pedagogy, and semester system. Our first classes, held in Atlanta, served as an experiment in applying those concepts. Some students from the first course helped plan the second one. Some practices, particularly the Round Robin process to encourage each person to participate in discussions (see more under Pedagogy), quickly became institutionalized. By 2013, however, we realized that we were trying to expand too quickly, without giving each potential campus secure roots. The third board, therefore, focused on strengthening our understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the existing six campuses in Atlanta (the Flagship Campus), Detroit, San Antonio, San Juan, Jacksonville, and Bemidj .

Mission

The USF mission is to embody and reflect the principles, concerns, and ethics of global people's struggles. The USF is a public and accessible space for education that advances systemic social change.

The USF works with social movements, organizations, and individuals:

- To **provide inter-generational continuity**.
- To **develop critical consciousness** through emancipatory pedagogy.
- To **restore shared knowledge** while simultaneously **creating new systems of education** to determine our own future.
- To **produce thinking and action** within collective learning spaces.



Vision

Knowledge is not the privilege nor domain of the powerful few but a right of all people. We envision **education as a vehicle for social movement development**, rather than a commodity to be bought, sold, or corrupted. People construct and carry knowledge in multiple ways. **Emancipatory education is informed by the wisdom of our communities** to which we are accountable and ensures continuity of histories, cultural traditions and legacies.

In order to achieve social and political impact for systemic change, our education systems will collectively create a cohesive analysis of the past, present, and future in order to direct and solidify social movement development. **We envision education as a collective leadership development** process between and among generations..

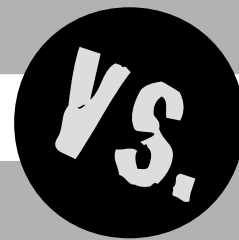
Methodology & Pedagogy

UNSIIF operates with collective knowledge. Teams of adjunct faculty members frame the discussions, but we seek to learn from everyone. The pedagogy follows critical education and circular learning, similar to the work of Freire (2000) and other critical pedagogues (for example, Apple, 2004; hooks, 2003; Lather, 1991; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007). **Everyone shares their knowledge rather than self-defined experts presenting their ideas** to passive recipients presumed by “the experts” to have no knowledge of their own. Instead of competing for who can come up with the most “correct answers,” we put **everyone’s knowledge on the table.** Elders and youth learn from each other. **People with important knowledge and skills to share may lack school-taught skills such as writing, and we realize that education takes place in many ways and in many places, often far from a classroom.** We respect these special means of learning, particularly those that have served communities of color.

Ever wonder why a Round Robin?

“popcorn”

pedagogy **allows anyone to pop into a discussion** whenever they have something to say and creates a form of free-wheeling brainstorming in which quicker, extroverted (not necessarily deeper) thinkers with loud voices and self-confidence gain more power.



“constructivist”

(Hmelo, Duncan & Chinn, 2007; Piaget, 1967) pedagogy in which **everyone has knowledge to share.** In our discussions we go around the circle in a *Round Robin* to **encourage each person to offer their thoughts and knowledge** unless they wish to pass. Participants do not raise their hands to show what they know. When we break temporarily into small groups, we use the Round Robin process to report back to the large group rather than having one person speak for each small group.

4 Core Curriculum Areas

These 4 areas serve as a frame for the content of classes.

**THE HISTORY OF
CAPITALISM &
GLOBALIZATION**

**COLONIALISM
&
LIBERATION**

**INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT
OF OUR SELVES,
ORGANIZATIONS, & SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS**

**EMANCIPATORY
EDUCATION, LEARNING &
CULTURE BASED IN
LIBERATION RATHER
THAN OPPRESSION**

For example, a course on **“Contextualizing The Blues Tradition: African Cultural Resistance To Transatlantic Enslavement, 1600-1850, ”** examined the dominant narratives about enslavement and resistance in the Americas, transatlantic relationships that fed the creation of blues music, and invited reflections on a quotation by Amilcar Cabral, African revolutionary leader from Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau — **“In what ways has imperialist domination in our present-day attempted at eradicating (directly or indirectly) the core cultural elements of the oppressed people in the U. S. South?”**

Structure

Currently, eleven people serve as members of the board, representing each of the campuses, the anchor organizations — Project South (GA), Southwest Workers Union (TX), East Michigan Environmental Action Council (MI), Caribbean Institute of Social Movements (PR), the New Jim Crow Movement (FL), and the Indigenous Environmental Network (MN) — and one board member each from New Mexico, Minnesota, and Washington, DC. A three-person executive committee consists of the president, vice president, and secretary.

Campuses. A campus is held by an anchor social grassroots movement organization in a specific place. Each campus represents the importance of the role of that particular space, place and processes. The coming together of six campus sites brings together six places and spaces with a body of practice and knowledge that becomes part of the whole. The University Sin Fronteras is what the six campuses bring together and the synthesis of the six places and people who make it real.

Anchor Organization. We did not want to become a university involved only in study and knowledge, burdened by a super-bureaucracy, and lacking any clear connections to social change organizations. Through the anchor organizations, decisions about courses come from people involved in practice in the field rather than from an office of isolated scholars. Each of the local campuses and our university as a whole seek to support the activities of the anchor organizations, particularly by offering classes about their fronts of struggle.

Based on the history of working collaboratively to organize the first U.S. Social Forum in 2007, Project South, Southwest Workers Union, and East Michigan Environmental Action Council were the first three UNSIF anchors. Additional anchor organizations are required to embrace to the **OLE framework, where all classes seek to enhance, deepen, and advance (O) Organizational Development, (L) Leadership Development, and (E) Emancipatory Education** that serves activist organizations and their leaders. More importantly, they must demonstrate rootedness in the community, a reputation for building open, collaborative and converging spaces, and a base of relationships in order to ensure relevance and accountability to the community. These organizations also commit to selecting and supporting a campus coordinator from within its staff or community. Most important is that these organization create entry points into social movement and collective action by communicating the story/narrative of the purpose and history of the UNSIF as an intellectual, political, and structural anchor that relates to the specific politics, climate, and culture of their location.

Anchoring the campuses in organizations involved in community activism makes it more feasible to understand the context for and needs of each of the communities served by a campus. We develop a stronger understanding of what works in different contexts when people from different campuses engage in occasional joint meetings and classes, sharing campus materials, and other forms of communication. Interconnectedness can also involve student and faculty exchanges, through travel or Web meetings..

Structure Cont.

The Campus Committee. The campus committee is composed of volunteers who were student-participants in the University Sin Fronteras courses and classes and want to get more involved. The CC develops the campus and the campus curriculum. The CC meets to brainstorm the curriculum based on needs of the local anchor organization and fronts of struggle, the core curriculum for the upcoming semester, the adjunct faculty to teach the classes, the time and place, as well as to assign people to bring snacks and to take notes, photos and videos for the entire course.

The Campus Coordinator. The campus coordinator is the anchor organization's coordinator for the local campus of the University Sin Fronteras. The campus coordinator is the overall coordinator and formal liaison with the Director of the anchor organization.

Notes, Reflections and Synthesis. Formal notes are the record of the proceedings of the class, but moreover are records of the new knowledge-creation taking place in each of the semesters, classes, and courses of the USF. The notes become important for student-participants' reflection and synthesis. The notes are archival data on the process of decolonizing education, learning and the very roots of epistemology.

At the end of each class, participants create a **one-page reflection** paper written during the last 10 minutes of a two-hour class. The reflection answers an essential question (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Participants reflect, put name and e-mail address on the one-page paper and turn it in.

The **synthesis** is a written summation of the knowledge shared, discovered, or created and its meaning. The synthesis is a collective process that goes deep into the essential meaning of the lesson(s) to the knowledge identified and created knowledge, into the roots of knowledge. The synthesis process allows for new knowledge to take the place of old assumed knowledge (decolonizing), and establish a new radically different infrastructure supporting a *raceless* society.

Post Class Process

Reflection: Everyone writes a one- page reflection on what participants are trying to understand and/or do as activist, individuals or organizations

Document: Note takers document and edit the learning occurring in each class.

Synthesis:After each of the classes in a course of study, we use the lesson-plan, the notes, and the reflection papers to create a synthesis of the cumulative shared learning and thinking, compiling these into a one-page summation of the course's conceptual core value.

Archive: All of the notes and syntheses constitute an archive of each semester

“Facilitator” or “Teacher”

Why not both?

Adjunct faculty volunteers as the teaching staff or professors at USF. They are people who are committed to emancipatory education and decolonizing it. Adjunct faculty comes from each community where we have a campus and are often part of the campus committee. **The adjunct faculty’s role is to put together the lesson plan following UNSIF guidelines.** They frame the topic for each class in the first 15-20 minutes of the two-hour class. They ask the first question (“What is?”) and facilitate the round robin discussion. Based on the shared knowledge coming from the round robin, the adjunct faculty uses examples to lead to the second question (“How does it operate?”). Another round robin occurs in the small group and the adjunct faculty summarizes the discussion to lead to the third question (“upon reflection, what will you do immediately to implement the new knowledge starting tomorrow?”). In addition to supporting semester classes on a particular campus, individual instructors often present seminars to several of the campuses in support of organizing work. For example, seminars at the Unite to Fight Institute in Atlanta in 2014 allowed people to work together while also making plans for their individual sites.

