

Urban Justice: Exploring Contemporary Civil Rights through City Politics

Course Description:

This course delves into the intersection of urban governance and contemporary civil rights movements in Los Angeles. Students will explore the pivotal role city politics and power dynamics play in shaping social justice agendas, examine case studies of recent civil rights challenges, consider the impact of state and national law on local policy, and engage with the strategies that communities, organizers, movement lawyers, and coalitions employ to advocate for change. Through a blend of theoretical frameworks, practical applications, and a guest speaker series, that will include organizers, movement lawyers, and elected and appointed officials, this course equips participants with a nuanced understanding of the complexities of advocating for equity and justice in Los Angeles's political landscape. Together, we'll examine the challenges and opportunities Los Angeles faces in promoting civil rights and fostering equitable communities. The course is intended to be a small, participatory, and collaborative co-learning space.

Bio

Cindy Pánuco is a practicing civil rights attorney and was appointed by Mayor Karen Bass to serve as a Commissioner on the City of Los Angeles's Civil Rights Commission. Her additional experiences in law and policy include serving as a vice president and chief programs officer at the nation's largest pro bono law firm (Public Counsel), a partner at a renowned plaintiff-side civil rights, international human rights, and employment firm (Hadsell Stormer et al.,) and as a legislative assistant and deputy press secretary to former Congressman Xavier Becerra. Cindy has dedicated her entire career to working on behalf of low-income and historically excluded communities, and on cases involving constitutional rights, immigrants' rights, police and law enforcement misconduct, prisoners' rights, first amendment rights of protestors, and human rights violations. From 2010 – 2019, Cindy was on the legal team representing Obaidullah—a prisoner held without trial by the United States government at Guantanamo Bay Cuba. In 2017 her team secured Obaidullah's transfer from Guantanamo, and eventual release to his home in Afghanistan in 2019. Cindy also serves on a number of nonprofit boards including two statewide nonprofit organizations that provide free legal services to low-income and underserved communities across the state, California Rural Legal Assistance, and One Justice. In 2012 she created the Judicial Externship Program of the Mexican American Bar Association of Los Angeles County (MABA) and in 2015, she was elected President of MABA. Cindy is a first-generation native of Los Angeles County, raised in Norwalk by immigrants from rural Mexico. She is a 2003 graduate of the University of Southern California where she earned the Ms. USC award during the 2002-2003 school year and the Latino Alumni Association's Hubbard Award in 2003.