

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



## Dr. Arcelia Gutiérrez

**Class of 2013 | B.A. in Spanish and B.A. in Latin American Studies with a minor in Management Science**  
**Currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Film and Media Studies at UC Irvine**  
**McNair Program Alum**

An alum of UC San Diego and graduating with two Bachelor's degrees in Spanish and Latin American Studies, Dr. Arcelia Gutiérrez found her passion for Latinx history and media throughout her undergraduate experience. While she explored various topics in the realm of Latin American and Latinx Studies and their histories, she ultimately found her place in research, contributing to the growing field of Latinx media studies and media activism.

As an undergraduate at UC San Diego, Dr. Gutiérrez started as an Economics major, but quickly declared a minor in Spanish due to her heritage and exposure to the language in her home since she was a child. She explained that in her class with Dr. Luis Martín-Cabrera, a current UC San Diego professor in Spanish and Latin American Cultural Studies, strongly disagreed with his take about a novel being read in class. During office hours, she contested his perspective and utilized her critical thinking skills to support her take. Dr. Cabrera encouraged her perspective, guiding her that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer, and when she submitted her paper, she even earned a 101% on the assignment! This experience also shifted her focus in college, with her dropping her Economics major to a Management Science minor and declaring a double major in Latin American Studies and Spanish. With the support and encouragement from mentors like Dr. Cabrera, Dr. Gutiérrez said she was convinced to apply and pursue graduate education in her field.

The Spanish major at UC San Diego was pivotal for Dr. Gutiérrez's development as a critical thinker and scholar. She fondly recalls taking an undergraduate class with Dr. Luis Martín-Cabrera, a current UC San Diego professor in Spanish and Latin American Cultural Studies, that allowed her to develop a sense of intellectual curiosity and freedom. When discussing a novel for the course, Gutiérrez internally questioned the interpretation of the reading offered by Dr. Martín-Cabrera. Too shy to offer her dissenting view in class, Gutiérrez approached Dr. Martín-Cabrera during office hours and offered her reading of the novel. To Gutiérrez's surprise, Dr. Martín-Cabrera supported her view and encouraged her to develop a critical essay to defend her perspective. After receiving a 101% on the assignment, Gutiérrez learned to embrace her intellectual curiosity and trust her critical thinking skills. Dr. Martín-Cabrera's innovative and inspiring pedagogy motivated Gutiérrez to shift her focus in college, thereafter dropping her Economics major to a Management Science minor and declaring a double major in Spanish and Latin American Studies. With the support and encouragement from mentors like Dr. Martín-Cabrera, Gutiérrez said she was convinced to apply and pursue a graduate degree in her field.

With this background in research, Dr. Gutiérrez went on to pursue her Ph.D. at the University of Michigan from 2013 to 2019, exploring a range of topics before landing on her dissertation focus. She came into the program intending to study Chilean and Venezuelan literature and cultural production, but after taking many courses, she shifted her focus onto transnational Latin American and Latinx media, with a focus on the "narco" genre and television industries. After her preliminary exams, a set of tests all Ph.D. students have to complete before becoming Ph.D. candidates, she landed on Latinx media activism as the focus of her dissertation.

Coming out of graduate school, Dr. Gutiérrez knew she wanted to pursue teaching because it would allow her to challenge students and encourage them like she had been at UC San Diego. At the end of her Ph.D., she had three chapters of her dissertation ready and found a job at the University of Kentucky, where she worked as an Assistant Professor in the Hispanic Studies Department and taught Latinx courses. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Film and Media Studies at UC Irvine, and her job entails three main tasks: research, teaching, and service. As an R1 institution, UC Irvine emphasizes research; thus, Dr. Gutiérrez's research interests focus on Latinx media studies and look at social media and race relations as it applies to Latinx Twitter. She is now working on a book manuscript about Latinx media activism from the 1980s to the present, looking at how Latinx people have challenged the dehumanization of Latinx people through media. With her many years of experience in research, Dr. Gutiérrez continues to emphasize the importance of balance between work and social life, advising that students take advantage of the community around them to support their needs.

For students aspiring to go into research, Dr. Gutiérrez advises them to join research programs, such as the McNair Scholars program, to help prepare for a research career. She also stated the importance of good mentors, and having a team of mentors to provide unique perspectives on the project as well as support you through the journey. Most importantly, Dr. Gutiérrez mentioned "finding what you're passionate about and not what others are telling you to do," because the work you want to produce should be meaningful and hopefully, have an impact on the world.