

## Le(o)gacy: You will get this done...

Warmth. Refuge. Mentor. Profe. The most common words used to describe Leobardo “Leo” Estrada. Most of us would say that we would never have finished our programs without him. All of us miss him terribly. Although he never described his theoretical approach to working with his students, academics would call it identity-affirming, culturally resonant, or trauma-informed. Where universities pay their “diversity and inclusion” officers big bucks and spin their wheels on how to best support their students, we realize that Leo had the formula down: warm smile, welcoming office, laughter, clear guidance, and constant reassurance. He was more than just a nice guy. With academic integrity and acumen that were above most others, he provided encyclopedic advice on all things urban planning. He helped us with our research and writing, getting us to the finish line with our dissertations and theses. “You will get this done,” he said. So, we did.

This co-authored piece provides our best attempt at writing about our profe who left us too soon. Through tears and laughter, we constructed our individual recollections and put together this introductory section on his life and contributions. We hope that it provides the reader a glimpse into this giant that came before us.



## **NINA M. FLORES**

Doctoral Advisee 2011 - 2016

It was pouring the morning, when for reasons unknown, I decided to answer the phone. Driving in erratic Southern California storm traffic, I can still picture the blur of brake lights through the streaks made by my ineffective windshield wipers. On the other end of the line came a measured, calm voice:

"Hello, this is Leo Estrada from UCLA. I'm reading your PhD application and wanted to talk. Tell me about this jury consulting. Wait, do I hear rain? Are you driving? Pull over so you're safe..."

I already trusted this caring voice in my ear and quickly adhered to his advice. From the stillness of my parked car, windows fogging and rain hurtling against it in uneven bursts, two things happened: 1) my first of hundreds of conversations with Leo unfolded, meandering from PhD life to family to travel, and 2) I experienced the first hint of authentic care that he so carefully imparted to all of his students – a way of moving through this world that forever shaped my own approach to teaching and mentorship.

A week later I received my acceptance to the program. A month later I met Leo in person for the first time. Now that voice in my ear was intentionally instilling confidence, building a foundation for me to believe that I belonged in this program, belonged in academia. He believed in me long before I believed in myself.

"I'm not worried about you -- you're going to excel."

I think about these words often, especially as I continue creating my own career path. What does it mean to excel? What does it look like? Feel like? Who can help us imagine new ways of excelling? Will they be accepted in an academic world that prizes quantity of publications and citations over quality of teaching and mentorship?

Often, if I mention that I'm an alum of UCLA's urban planning program, people quickly follow up with the question: "Do you know Leo Estrada?" As we share smiles and laughs and stories, the truths eventually start to tumble out:

"He's the only reason I graduated."  
"I wouldn't have made it through the program without him."  
"Everyone else had given up on me except for him."

When I think about the decades of students who benefited, and continue benefiting, from his authentic care I see the inimitable influence of Leo's guidance.

I see how he excelled in a profession in which we're charged with holding students in our care as they engage in the process of learning and unlearning.

I see his quiet resistance to the soul-crushing acceptance of "publish or perish" - the mantra of academia.

I see that resistance echoed again and again with his endless commitment to teaching, service, mentorship, and student support as the key priorities in higher education.

I see how to apply and replicate his model of care-based mentoring -- guiding students, working with them to build their agency, and helping them balance personal, academic, and professional growth.

I see how rare it is to have encountered someone who dedicated their career to uplifting everyone from students to junior faculty to the campus as a whole.

I see the power, impact, and lasting legacy of his choices and recognize that as Leo's former advisees we have a model for prioritizing authentic care through the choices we make every day, every month, every term.

Leo used to joke about one day calling upon his "revolutionary army" of students from across his decades of teaching and mentoring. We hear your call Leo, and we will champion your legacy. Rest in peace and power.

## **MARCIA HALE**

Doctoral Advisee 2011 - 2018

Where would we be without our teachers? Our mentors? I can imagine a dozen scenarios for my own life less-realized. However, I know for sure that the more actualized version of life that I get to live would not have unfolded without the mentorship of Professor Leo Estrada. A true teacher, Professor Estrada cared as much about the lives of his students as he did for society as a whole. The vision of justice and the commitment to community that drove his work translated into care for each individual that he worked with. This integrity or cohesion was a defining aspect of Leo's character for me.

I met Leo as a second-year student in the Urban Planning Master's Program. While away for fieldwork in Guatemala over the summer, I received notice that I was offered a fall teaching assistantship. I had no way of knowing at the time the pivotal role this position would play in my life. I returned home to LA and met Professor Leo Estrada, just a couple of weeks before classes began. That office on the fifth floor would become my refuge over the next seven years. And the class, Planning with Minority Communities, was

so profoundly rich, in principles and in pedagogy, that it continues to teach and guide me today. I would TA the class three times over the next few years. What I remember most is the first time I heard Leo deliver his closing punchline at the end of that first quarter. In a lecture hall of 80 students, he asked people to turn and look at one another, to acknowledge and appreciate each other and the community that had been built over the course of the semester.

At the time I was too green to appreciate the complexity, but that moment has stayed with me ever since. It was the first time I seriously considered pursuing a PhD and creating a life as a teacher and an academic researcher. Later, as I began teaching my own classes, I modeled my pedagogy after Leo's classroom. My intention for our time together is to build a community in which we come to know and care for one another. From this care and connection, we collectively engage questions of and frameworks for justice and equity. It wasn't until the middle of my third year as an assistant professor building university and community partnerships that I realized another layer of this course. Planning with Minority Communities was about learning the significance of being in community! What an incredible lesson, especially for planning students. It is not about the activity of engaging or building community, but rather about being a part of community. Emotionally, psychologically, spiritually we further equity and justice from within, not externally. Profoundly revolutionary for a planning school.

Leo was a revolutionary in so many ways. His care for students and for his broader communities compelled this incredibly successful and accomplished researcher to spend an enormous amount of his

professional life mentoring. While he was not rewarded by the institution for his efforts, having ended his career as an associate rather than as a well-deserved full professor, I know that he found his rewards in the light of life and purpose that he saw in his students' eyes. He tended that light as sacred, not least of all by allowing himself to be guided in his mentoring by the students themselves. He listened deeply to each of our goals and aspirations, curiosities and commitments, and challenges and heartaches. He guided us by affirming us, never imposing will or expectations of his own or of the institution. He recognized the knowing, the vision, inside each of us that had brought us into the program. He believed in and nurtured that vision, mentoring us in how to harness the institution and its certifications to aid in realizing the vision. Leo was part wizard, part Yoda, part Paulo Coelho, part bouncer, part gatekeeper, shepherding us through the institutional morass – teaching us how to navigate with our hearts and integrity intact.

These characteristics translated across disciplines, sectors, and cultures. Leo served as an expert demographer to the U.S. Census Bureau. He lent his expertise in race and ethnicity, working toward a more representative census and a more just allocation of resources. He served as Special Assistant to the Chief of the Population Division and as Staff Assistant to the Deputy Director. He was a technical advisor to the National Center on Health Statistics, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, and National Institute for Drug Abuse. Leo was beloved by students that he worked with in the U.S. and around the globe. He coordinated the UCLA Study Abroad program in Geneva - Global Environment and Sustainability,



now transferred to the University of Geneva. He also served as one of the coordinators of the Urban Futures Program that includes UCLA, the University of Geneva and the University of Sydney. Through Leo's mentorship, I was able to experience both of these programs, which informed my comparative research. I was inspired by his work and guided into my own at the intersections of global migration, the climate crisis, and the use of international and regional frameworks to forward social and environmental justice. But I also witnessed how Leo became a part of each community that he participated in, and was quickly valued as an expert, mentor, and bridge builder.

Leo left this world far too soon. But his legacy lives on in the countless people he taught, mentored, supported and inspired. Like Leo himself, his legacy is nuanced and carries evolving wisdom. In this current moment, its message is: It's not what you know – it's how you know it, what you do with it, and how you live and create from it that matters.

**PALOMA GIOTTONINI**

Doctoral Advisee 2012 - 2018

I completed my PhD in the summer of 2018. About one year later, I was offered a lecturer position at the Department of Urban Planning. I have no words to describe the array of emotions I felt when I was assigned to Leo's office, the same office that I had visited so many times during my PhD. As I opened the door, I realized that everything was there in the exact same position, his books, his writings, his computer, a vast collection of his students' dissertations, many

of them typewritten, additional evidence of a legacy that spans many generations. As I entered the office, I automatically sat in the chair facing Leo's desk, the same chair I used on many occasions during office hours. It took me a while to use his chair, and every time I did, I felt his enormous presence in the room.

As many of his students will attest, Leo's mentorship was not only special and different to anything we had experienced before. His support was crucial in a system that rarely offers nor recognizes anything quite like it. To Leo, his students' lives were as important, and sometimes even more important, than their research. Leo never questioned why we spent our limited meeting time discussing issues outside of our academic life. He understood that some of us had to take care of our children, our elders, even our friends.

He was an unstoppable supporter of diversity in academia. This was an especially important part of his *quiet protest*. In one of our first meetings, I expressed concerns about falling behind, noticing that everyone in my cohort was single, younger, and educated in the US, while I was the only international student with a thick accent and a 9-month-old baby at home. With a slight smile Leo said that I had nothing to worry about, that it is OK to have a life. As a reassurance, he said that sometimes, when things got complicated, other professors would send students to him. He was commonly asked by other departments to guide, support, and push many students to get through their programs, even when he was not on their committees.

There was a lot of dignity in the support he provided. His support was quiet, benign, but constant. It was always there but barely felt. It was not an overt "Yeah you can do this!". He gave the quiet support one



Remembering Leobardo Estrada, 1945-2018

gets from someone who will never openly say they are there to push you, but will make sure you stand up, will hold your hand, and will walk beside you to see that you keep going.

It is clear to me that his enormous legacy, his mentorship, his work has touched and changed so many lives inside and outside the academic realm. Every time I meet someone who knew Leo, I learn something new about him, some other project, some other activity that he took on. Every time the story or the experience is about a meaningful thing that changed someone's life for the better.

In one of my last office hours sessions in his office, I was talking to one of my students. A young first-generation undergraduate student from an immigrant background who was in his last year at UCLA. He was questioning his decision to get an education as he had to sacrifice many things. He was questioning his belonging in this university. Apart from his studies, he had a full-time job and had to contribute to support his family. He humbly said: "I don't know if I'm doing the right thing, Profe, sometimes I think I should just quit and do more for my family." (Profe is short for Professor, in Spanish, and something Leo was called often). In that conversation I recognized, even more, the power of Leo's mentorship and support to underrepresented students. I took that student calling me "profe" as a badge of honor, as a welcome into the legacy of Leo. Most importantly, I understood my commitment to continue his work, a responsibility which I think is shared by many of us, his students. Leo gave us a great example of how not to fall into the traps of academia, to keep our humanity, to guide and support those like us, to always find adequate words of encouragement for those who are struggling on this lonely path. Leo opened the gates widely and shared his key with us.

#### SARAH SOAKAI

Doctoral Advisee 2016 - 2018

I first met Leo at the UCLA faculty lounge for PhD Welcome Day. I left with the impression that I had no idea what I was getting into. Apparently, I did not. I am not sure I would have survived my first year as a doctoral student without Leo. When I lost a child my first year, Leo helped me focus on self-care and the task at hand as a first-year doctoral student and then as a second-year (getting through core graduate course requirements and comprehensive qualifying exams). Before he passed away, Leo helped me figure out the nuts and bolts at the beginning of the exam process. I completed the exams, in part, for him, his passing, and his legacy.

Like many students, office hour meetings with Leo were what I needed to survive, thrive, and succeed

in graduate school. Part of Leo's mentoring meant reading out loud some of my writing. After reading through the final course papers from Law and the Pacific Islands and Advanced Planning History and Theory, Leo argued that the institution (the academy) should bend, cater, acclimate, and adjust to the student, not the student to the institution. This was part of Leo's mentoring philosophy. As one of the first Latino sociologists in the country, he understood the importance of navigating institutions unlikely to bend, cater, acclimate, adjust to students, especially students still in/on the margins of the academic institution like students of color and women. Leo mentored and equipped such students with the confidence and tools to navigate and negotiate the academy that is still very much set in its old traditions even though a supposed progressive, liberal facade is espoused.

Since I was advised by Leo at the end of his professional career and because he is who he is, he had already been through a slew of various, diverse students from different backgrounds with multiple experiences. As a former educator at a Title 1 public high school, mentoring and teaching such a diversity is not an easy endeavor, and anyone that says differently, has not really mentored and taught. Leo did both seamlessly among a cadre of diverse students. I am no exception. I am sure he had questions, issues, and found a faith I practice (I am LDS/Mormon) and that is essentially part of my being awkward and limiting. I sensed this through meeting with him on a weekly basis my first year, but he did what is supposed to do in mentoring and teaching me through to reach program milestones.

At a demography symposium honoring him, in addition to the scholarly rage folks expressed about Leo never reaching full professorship at UCLA (yet he was chair of the Academic Senate not once, but twice!), Maria Blanco<sup>2</sup> described how Leo democratized mapping. He perhaps democratized many things as a pioneer in Latinx Sociology and Urban Planning. During contemporary moments when the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated injustices and racial polarization continues to manifest in different ways across the United States, Leo's legacy reminds us all that while 'knowledge is power, understanding is liberation.'<sup>3</sup> Leo understood.

1. Lehi's dream in The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ.
2. Demography, Redistricting, and Power: A Symposium in Honor of Dr. Leobardo Estrada's Contributions to the Academy and Community, May 31, 2019, UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative, Luskin, Urban Planning.
3. Manulani Aluli Meyer, National Pacific American Leadership Institute (NaPALI) 2017 Summer Fellowship.

## SUSAN NAKAOKA

Doctoral Advisee 2009 - 2014

The borderlands, liminality, double consciousness, in-betweenness – there are many terms that describe the space that people of color occupy in the academy and, more broadly, in the U.S. Embodying warmth, support and a trauma-informed approach, Leo normalized our existence in higher education. As a Japanese American/Chicana, a mother, a student entering a doctoral program at the age of 41, I imagine I had more than my share of insecurities. This was true even though I had done my undergraduate and master's degrees at UCLA - despite my comfort with the institution, still, a feeling of unworthiness lingered.

Because my main advisor was on sabbatical during the year I entered, Leo agreed to be “co-advisor” for me. As the years went on, Leo functioned as my primary advisor, as we had developed a relationship and flow to our work. Leo shepherded me through the program, ensuring that I met each milestone and warning me to stay out of the politics at my full-time job, which was eating me alive. His office at the end of a hall meant safety and warmth when the rest of the building was cold and disconnected. Leo provided a haven for me and so many others.,

Culturally affirming, student-centered, trauma informed, Leo embodied all of these education practices. Students' differences were cherished, not picked apart. Our style and ways of knowing were valued, not critiqued. The rigor and quality of our work was pushed, with gentle nudging and insightful editorial advice. I remember working on a publication that was based on my master's thesis, and although Leo was not familiar with the project, he offered a way to organize the article that respected my frame of intersectionality, while allowing me to hone in on the ways in which race, class, and gender oppression impacts Japanese American women political activists. His broad knowledge and insight guided us on a wide array of research and writing projects.

Even though I had years of teaching experience, I continued to learn from him as I watched him teach “Planning in Minority Communities,” a class that he had created and taught for many years. We talked through each assignment, the syllabus and the class discussions. Most doctoral students don't get the type of pedagogical support necessary to embark on their career of teaching, but Leo provided that for many of us. Even though I graduated in 2014, I continue to teach that course in the summer, introducing new crops of students to his photo, his words, and his assignments. The students, mostly students of color from the LA area, smile as they imagine this giant that came before them.

What I'll remember most about Leo is his warm smile that greeted me with inquiries about my son, my

partner, my parents, my trips to Hawai'i and invited me into conversations about his wife and son and their family vacations in Puerto Ricos. These weren't just meaningless pleasantries. These were life-affirming words that meant that my identity as a woman, mother, partner, person of color, was important, quite “normal” and, most of all, that I belonged.

## TISHA HOLMES

Doctoral Advisee: 2012-2015

I met Leo in the Spring of 2012 when I was assigned to be his teaching assistant for *Urbanism: A Spatial Look*. I heard from others that he was a wonderful mentor who cared deeply for his students but never found an opportunity to make it to his office before then. When we met to talk about the class, I understood why his sign up sheet for office hours was always full.

In the classroom, he brought an ease to lecturing, engaging students and designing assignments which helped students creatively learn about the history of urban development from ancient to modern cities. During our meetings, he shared stories about his inspiring academic career, his wife and sons and how much he enjoyed Puerto Rico and golfing. When he offered me an opportunity to lecture, he provided thoughtful encouragement and helpful feedback on content and classroom management. His wide-ranging knowledge and ability to give critical insight with care were endearing. As we made it to the last weeks of the quarter, I felt I found my place in the academy because Leo taught me the value of engaged student mentorship and community activist pedagogy. Then, my father had a stroke. I abruptly left to return to Trinidad to help him recover and hoped to return in time to administer and grade final exams. He passed away two weeks later and sent my world into a tailspin. It was at this point I considered withdrawing from the program.

During that emotional summer, Leo gave much support and care, emphasizing that I needed to be with my family and gave me the space to grieve. When I reached out to talk about my options, his quiet demeanor calmed me as I shared my struggles with grieving, caring for my toddler and meeting the demands of a doctoral program. He empathetically encouraged me to keep pursuing the PhD and committed to help me through the process. At our meetings, he always inquired about my family before we started talking about my progress. I remember his warm laughter when he would try to troubleshoot my dissertation writing blocks and we would brainstorm solutions like playing the lottery. Forever the pragmatic optimist, he was able to quell my anxieties with his step-by-step guidance (and his candy stash), giving me hope that I would eventually prevail. When I

graduated and started working at his alma mater FSU, I felt that even if we were physically far apart, I still was close to him, holding office hours with my first generation students of color in the very building where he went through his doctoral studies. I promised to visit California to bring him a Florida golf ball for his retirement gift. Like my father, his untimely passing left a raw, sad void that even to this day is difficult to accept.

Leo's legacy and impact on the lives of his students and the communities he worked with cannot be understated. His intelligence, grit and passion made him a public intellectual giant. His kindness, patience and compassion made him a beloved educator, mentor and friend. Thank you for believing in us, for sharing your light unconditionally and for showing us the way. We cherish and miss you dearly. Rest in peace and power mi querido Profesor.

#### YOH KAWANO

Doctoral Advisee 2015 - 2020

Prior to the start of every lecture, I salute a poster that shows Leo smiling back at me. I am seeking guidance, calm, and fortitude before I confront the cacophony of the classroom. I think back to the many encounters I had with Leo in the past 20 years, when he welcomed me to the confines of his office on the 4th floor of UCLA's School of Public Affairs. On one such encounter, I vaulted into his office in distress, tormented by the spectacle that awaited me the following week – the qualifying exams. As I pulled out my notes and rambled incoherently, he stopped me, put my notes aside, cleared the table, and said in his calm and soothing voice, “this is how it is going to be.” In the next ten minutes, he explained how the exam was going to be conducted, what I needed to do to prepare both mentally and physically (bring your favorite snacks he said), and if I did those things, how I would succeed without any doubt in his mind. Somehow, in an instant, my mind was cleared and I knew exactly what I had to do to succeed. As we suddenly found extra time on our hands, we proceeded to talk about my family and the state of international soccer.

Much like John Wooden, the “Wizard of Westwood,” Leo had a profound and lasting impact on each and every student who had the fortune to be mentored by him. Leo taught us that academic success was more than a good GPA, a peer reviewed publication, being cited by others in your field, or hard nosed scholarly rigor. He knew that we are also parents juggling multiple jobs, students living in poverty, immigrants adjusting to life in Los Angeles, collectively dealing with a life full of uncertainties. He understood and related to the pressures we faced

by our own decision to pursue higher education and whether or not it would pay dividends moving forward. We were humans navigating a treacherous and uncertain path. We were all *different* in the types of burdens we shoulder, each with a unique path to success that did not necessarily align with higher education expectations. During my last office hour meeting with him, he told me how he was undergoing his fourth (or maybe it was his fifth?) round of chemotherapy. “There are two kinds of people there. Those who choose to show despair on their sleeves, and those who see it as an opportunity to recover.” Even in the most critical moments of his life, Leo refused to succumb to the negative pressures of life, instead choosing to chat with the nurses and ask about *their* well-being.

I am not alone. Leo is “El Padrino,” as he is fondly referred to by those whose lives he has touched, and in his many years of service. He has a legion of grateful former students. He has left an indelible legacy of care, respect, and mentorship, making us all better human beings because of it. In academic standards, how is this impact measured? The problem is that it is not. Karen Webber, from the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Georgia, conducted a summarized research analysis on the impacts of global higher education, focusing on the institutional measure of faculty productivity. Her investigation into academia seeks to provide analytical data on faculty productivity, painting a picture largely devoid of the very essence of academic life: students. Webber acknowledges these shortcomings as “challenges.” Qualitative measures such as advising, mentorship, total amount of time and effort spent with students, are all “hard to quantify and do not address the quality of effort at all,” and get marginalized in productivity measures (2011 Webber, p108). Instead, conceptual models of faculty productivity rely on measurable metrics such as teaching workload, extramural funds received, number of citations made and referenced, quality of judgement through the peer review process, leadership with research expertise, recruitment efforts, collaboration with peers, commitment to teaching, allocation of time in academic tasks, etc (2011 Webber). The “publish or perish” mentality continues to solidify this trend that measures research productivity through the enumeration of publications produced in a short period of time. Faced with the mounting pressures associated with this de facto rule, early faculty find it increasingly difficult to satisfy the endless demands from students, instead forced to produce measurable research outputs that contribute to their dossiers for advancement considerations.

In the minds of those of us who have received the “Leo Estrada” treatment—and here I am not only speaking of students, but of colleagues, community activists, and an entire cadre of affected individuals—it

is a shame that Leo was not formally considered for the totality of his legacy. Higher education needs to do better, allowing its platform to acknowledge and reserve its highest platitudes to those who have made the largest impact on those who matter most: students.

Webber K.L. (2011) Measuring Faculty Productivity. In: Shin J., Toutkoushian R., Teichler U. (eds) University Rankings. The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective, vol 3. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1116-7\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-1116-7_6)

**REMEMBERING LEOBARDO ESTRADA, 1945-2018**

(Reprinted from the Los Angeles Times, Nov. 7 to Nov. 9, 2018.)

Leobardo (“Leo”) Felipe Estrada, who recently retired after a four-decade career at UCLA, passed away on November 3, 2018 at his home in Playa del Rey, California, surrounded by his family and close friends. He was 73.

Born in El Paso, Texas on May 6, 1945, Leo was the son of Leobardo Estrada, a prominent Baptist minister, and Isabel Estrada. When Leo was four years old, the family moved to Dallas and eight years later to Los Angeles where he graduated in 1962 from El Rancho High School in Pico Rivera. He attended Baylor University, graduating in 1966 and continued his education at Florida State University, earning a Ph.D. in Sociology and Demography in 1970.

Leo began his teaching career in 1970 at North Texas State University in Denton where he taught Sociology. In 1977, he joined the faculty at UCLA’s Department of Urban Planning and retired after four decades in June 2018. In 2015, he was the first Latino elected to the rare honor and responsibility of representing the entire UCLA faculty in their governance of the university as Chair of the Academic Senate. Over his 48 years in academia, he took sabbaticals and summer leave to do research or teach at the University of Texas El Paso, the U.S. Bureau of the Census in Washington, the University of Michigan’s Survey Research Center, the University of Geneva, Switzerland and the University of Sinaloa in Mexico.

Leo was the ultimate teacher. Teaching and mentoring were his deepest passions at UCLA and the other campuses where he worked. He trained, inspired and empowered hundreds of students whose careers were launched and advanced in great part due to his support. His success with students came from a unique and effective blend of Socratic listening and questioning, appreciation of the whole person, gentle yet persuasive pushing, and savvy guidance for surmounting challenges especially those of students without role models in educational pursuits. At his retirement, many of his colleagues recognized and praised his role in making UCLA’s Urban Planning program more student-centric.

As a researcher, Leo reached far beyond the academic spheres. He was a leading applied researcher on the elderly, urban conflict, census policies and methods, and most importantly, in redistricting efforts impacting Latinos and other racial/ethnic minorities. His seminal demographic work for redistricting produced the 1990 redistricting changes for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and led to the first Latina being elected to the Board of Supervisors. He provided primary evidence for the leading advocacy organizations on voting rights such as NALEO, Advancement Project, and MALDEF. And

as an entrepreneur, he participated as a partner or research leader in several research and consulting companies.

Leo served on the boards of numerous organizations and corporations including AARP, SCAN Health Plan Group, Broadway Stores, National Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies, Hispanics in Philanthropy, The California Endowment (as a founding member), Santa Marta Hospital, among many others. He also served on dozens of advisory boards.

Over the long term, Leo’s most significant legacy will be his untiring commitment and numerous contributions to community empowerment and social justice. For example, in 1991, he was appointed by Mayor Tom Bradley to the Christopher Commission that assessed police-community relations following the Rodney King beating. His tireless and insightful work on the Commission contributed to new approaches to community policing that have spread throughout the nation. Through direct and indirect efforts and time, Leo supported numerous organizations in Los Angeles and beyond, especially those dedicated to improving the lives of the underrepresented. He was a passionate force committed to helping women gain financial stability as exemplified by his two-decade service on the Board of New Economics for Women. He fully exemplified the importance and value of community service to his colleagues, the urban planning field and UCLA, the institution he loved, appreciated, and transformed.

But, above all, Leo treasured and loved his family. He was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, brother-in-law, and uncle. He is survived by his beloved wife of 36 years, Ivelisse Rodriguez Estrada; their two sons Andres and partner Lucianne Ungerbuehler and Ricardo and partner Shadeh Shabestari; and their much-loved grandson and son of Andres, Ezana Estrada. He also leaves behind a son, Adam Estrada of Austin Texas; three sisters, Priscilla, Irma and Omega of Dallas Texas; and a large extended family throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico.