The 7th Annual Gesa Kirsch and Center for Writing Studies Graduate Student Symposium Keynote

Kim Hensley Owens

Friday, April 22 1:30-2:30 FLB 1080: Lucy Ellis Lounge

In Lak’ech, The Chicano Clap, and Fear: A Partial Rhetorical Autopsy of Tucson’s Now-Illlegal Ethnic Studies Class

I’ve divided this talk into three broad movements—in the first, I give an overview of the Mexican American Studies, or MAS, how it was connected to the place and history of Tucson, and some of the effects of its implementation and subsequent removal. In the second movement, I dive in more specifically to particular choices the teachers in the MAS programs made. I’ll trace rhetorical effects of various opening rituals many MAS classes used—namely, reciting In Lak’ech and doing the Chicano clap. I show what teachers and students experienced and what others feared in those rituals. For the third movement, I explore the rhetorical evolution of the In Lak’ech chant, tracing its path through various languages, authors, and nations to arrive in Tucson classrooms. I dissect its various forms to better understand and contextualize this critical component of many MAS classrooms. Throughout each movement, I draw on interviews I conducted with former Mexican American Studies teachers and students as I work to illustrate how this now-illegal tricultural curriculum incorporated and embraced cultural and linguistic borderspaces and to deepen understandings of the rhetorical effects of pedagogical choices within and beyond classrooms.

Kim Hensley Owens is Director of the University Writing Program and Associate Professor of English at Northern Arizona University, having previously been Associate Professor of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Rhode Island. Kim earned her MA and PhD from UIUC’s Center for Writing Studies, and prior to coming to Illinois for grad school she taught middle and high school English in Arizona. Kim is interested, broadly, in how rhetorical studies can affect and improve the lives of people inside and outside the academy. That broad focus has included work like today’s, which focuses on pedagogies and linguistic and cultural inclusiveness, and work focused on rhetorics of health and medicine, as in her 2015 book, Writing Childbirth: Women’s Rhetorical Agency in Labor and Online. Other publications include chapters in edited collections and articles in Composition Studies, Computers and Composition, Pedagogy, Rhetoric Review, Enculturation, and Written Communication.