

## **A Race & Pedagogy National Conference** **Reflection from Amanda Díaz**

*Class of 2018*

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As a naive, shy, and ignorant first-year, at the 2014 RPNC, the hunger for racial justice was introduced to me. Despite growing up in a racially diverse Bay Area (pre-silicon valley boom) I had no idea what racism was or the struggles people of color had in this county. I was deprived of my own history as a public school high school student and it wasn't until I was introduced to these topics at the RPNC in 2014 that I began to delve into re-learning my own existence and history.

At the 2014 RPNC, I had the opportunity to hear Winona LaDuke, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Angela Davis, and Henry Louis Gates speak about the radical work of racial justice and environmental justice in the United States. Listening to these powerful people of color as an 18-year-old determined the legacy and the fate I was to leave at the University of Puget Sound. These narratives, stories, and calls to action drove me to get involved in various students of color organizations like Latinx Unidos, RPI, and overall advocating for the exact institutional and structural issues LaDuke, Bonilla-Silva, and Davis identified at the conference. That is one of the many impacts of the RPNC, it ignited a sense of obligation to use the keynotes message into practical anti-racist work at a predominantly-white university.

In 2016, as a sophomore, following the leadership of Akilah Blakey (student and RPI Intern at the time), and in collaboration with Lydia (student and organizer), and Andres a (student and organizer), we tried to include student voices in the planning process of the next RPNC in 2018. We did a series of presentations and summits trying to get young people involved. As my years at Puget Sound continued, I reflected a lot on the lack of support for students of color and a lot of that stemmed from the ignorance and lack of understanding about issues of race and inequity in the United States. This is why the RPNC is so crucial to this university's future. In 2015, marginalized student groups on campus came together and organized a list of demands and a walk-out in solidarity with Black and Brown students at Mizzou (University of Missouri). This group, called Advocates for Institutional Change, only wrote 15 demands in 2015 but there are a hundred we could list off today. However it is the RPNC, and continual work of the Race & Pedagogy Institute, that is actively and desperately trying to have the necessary conversations about race on campus that are tools the admin will need in order to institutionally support students of color. Thanks to the Race and Pedagogy Conference, we've slowly gotten closer to having conversations

about race but we also need to act on it. At the 2014 National Conference, the sessions and keynotes were not mandatory; students had to miss class to attend. Students in STEM courses even received unexcused absences for attending the conference sessions during class time. The university needs to pride itself not solely on the fact that we're holding a conference about race but also believing in the ideas that people are sharing and acting upon them inside and outside the classroom.

In 2017-2018, because I was the ASUPS President my involvement transformed from talking to students about RPNC to advocating at an administrative level with the Board of Trustees and with the President's Cabinet. As ASUPS President we pushed through and passed a financial code revision to allow ASUPS funds to contribute \$1.50 per student government fee to the Race and Pedagogy Reserve, with the expressed intent of being used to support a speaker for the Race and Pedagogy National Conference every four years. This financial code revision puts away around \$3,500 every year for the RPNC. After weeks of debating on the issue where the senate was split, we also allocated a couple thousand dollars for the founders of Black Lives Matter to speak at the 2018 RPNC.

At the 2018 RPNC I was honored to participate in the Spotlight Session Panel: Immigration, Advocacy, Activism, and the Northwest Detention Center. It was an interesting set of panelists especially since none of them were immigrants. I think I was the only person of color on the panel and the only one who was at least a child of an immigrant, though not an immigrant herself. It was important for me to pass along the message of Maru Mora Villalpando when she says that those who are directly affected by the issue should be at the forefront of the movement and those steering the conversations, not academics and lawyers. The 2018 RPNC was yet again such an impactful experience not only as a recent graduate but also as an alumnus and as a working professional. Multiple pages of my notebook were filled in with quotes, advice, and stories of the powerful people of color who shared their narratives.

Students at the University of Puget Sound complain about “not knowing something was racist” or not knowing about what institutional racism or the school-to-prison pipeline is. Part of it is that UPS curriculum can allow a student to NEVER take a race-based course. The other part of it is that students aren't taught the importance and the necessity of learning about race and racism in the United States. The RPNC begins to close the gap on both of these problems and sets a precedent for students to believe that UPS truly cares and values diversity. The Race & Pedagogy Institute, which organizes the RPNC should have the infrastructure, the resources, the financial support, and the opportunity to create this conference every year so that each student is impacted the way I was.

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*Amanda Díaz was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her experiences as a child of undocumented Mexican immigrants fueled her interest and ignited a sense of obligation and*

*commitment to immigration advocacy. She graduated from the University of Puget Sound and created her own B.A in American Border Studies. Amanda currently works at OneAmerica, and previously worked as a paralegal at an immigration law firm primarily working with victims of domestic violence to obtain legal status. As an undergraduate, Amanda advocated for sanctuary campus policies, spoke out against racial injustice, and organized “know your rights” workshops, town halls, protests, and rallies. Amanda served as the student body president and the president of Latinx Unidx, and founded Advocates for Detained Voices, a club that provides resources to students and families impacted by deportation and detention at the Northwest Detention Center.*

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