SUNY Cortland
Foundations and Social Advocacy Department

To: Foundations & Social Advocacy Department Personnel Committee
From: Dr. Joseph Rayle
Date: Monday, December 2, 2025
Re: Classroom Observation of Dr. Jose Ortiz

I was able to see Dr. Ortiz's December 2, 2025 session of his FSA 103 course Gender, Race, and Class Issues. The classroom contained approximately 20 students seated around tables.

He began class by reminding students about an upcoming presentation and paper project. He also reminded them about the final exam time. He covered some references he expected to see in the final project and answered questions about references and paper format.

Dr. Ortiz moved on to providing feedback about an ethics project turned in online. This feedback included overall observations about student writing. In particular, he provided ideas about how to make their writing clearer. An example of this was "Pretend the reader doesn't know what the case is, so it is your job to briefly explain it to them." He went over correct in-text citations and works cited.

Over the Thanksgiving break, students were to watch the documentary "I learn America." He lectured about the issue of language use in the US. For example, in the first hundred years of U.S. history, schools were often taught in native languages, including such European languages as Polish. He explained that with the emergence of support for language assimilation, schools were taught mainly in English in order to enforce Americanization of immigrants. For present, there is a push for English-only instruction, while some instruction is occurring in native languages, reflecting gains of the civil rights movement.

From the video, he discussed "Dreamers" as part of the migrant experience and how the challenges faced by this group, and the strengths they possess. He contrasted accommodations made by educators (acceptance) and the continuing threat of deportation faced by migrant families.

Dr. Ortiz then put questions up to prompt student group discussions about the video. The students were seated in groups around tables. Everyone seemed to be engaged in discussing the film. He asked the whole class to share the results of their discussions. Student responses indicated a deep and insightful understanding of the issues raised by the documentary. Following each student comment, Dr. Ortiz expanded upon their ideas to further draw out more info. The students were engaged and got a lot of value from the information and ideas in the film. Their comments included personal connections and issues that affect professional educators. A prominent theme here was the struggle that teachers have with languages other than English, particularly with regard to establishing a relationship with non-English-speaking students. Dr. Ortiz emphasized that immigrants have a wide variety of experiences; a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work.

The class moved onto a discussion of Jean Anyon's 2005 work that covers issues presenting barriers to high-quality public education in metropolitan issues. A Gladsen-Billings article dealt with achievement This covered the issue of educational attainment, specifically as represented by the NAEP scores. He covered discrepancies in reading scores between white and minority students. The data showed a 20-point difference between white students and minority students. He showed that her main point is the achievement gap is analogous to the national debt and deficit. Her argument is that educational deficits accumulate over time. Educational debt has accumulated since the slavery era. He went on to connect this to conditions faced by Blacks Americans in public schools, comparing the physical plant differences between the schools. This issues covered at this point extended to double taxation, in which Blacks paid taxes that were funneled to white schools, meaning their children didn't get the same benefit of that money. As a result, black families sometimes chose to contribute to their own children's schools. They paid taxes and received no benefit.

The class moved onto segregation. Although Brown vs. Board ended segregation, Dr. Ortiz showed an NY Times article demonstrating segregation in NYC. He went on to demonstrate this phenomenon in other metropolitan areas in the US. The students were asked to reflect on students' educational experiences resulting from ongoing segregation in the US. The students discussed this issue in their groups. Again, everyone was on-task and involved in the discussions. He called on individual students to provide comments. A range of students responded to the questions. Again, the comments reflected a clear understanding of the effects of segregation on educational opportunities for different groups. He went on to point the lack of interaction between groups, with the result that students' experiences of different groups is limited. Segregation leads to a lack of understanding between groups.

The lesson progressed to the era of school integration. This included a brief video about the Little Rock Nine. This explained who these students were, and how they were recruited. The video showed how it was necessary to use the 101st Airborne Division to ensure the students' safety as they integrated the schools. Dr. Ortiz drew connections with Derrick Bell's Silent Covenants and the focus on 'separate' as opposed to 'equal'. He asked "What is lost with separate (but truly) equal? Can the US exist in silos? Students discussed this in groups again. There was a solid degree of student engagement with the ensuing conversation. It should be noted that a variety of students responded

The lesson circled back to the issue of educational and economic debt as demonstrated by Gladsen-Billings. Segregation is a significant contributor to the educational debt/deficit. This follows from the exclusion of people of color from the political process. Further, he argued for a 'moral debt,' which connected to an earlier educational ethics project completed by the class.

There followed a class activity called "Fixing Gotham" in which tax inequality is addressed. Can Batman do more for people than Bruce Wayne paying a 90% tax on capital gains over $10 million? This was drawn from a meme trending on social media. Students pointed out the social issues that

could be addressed through greater funding for educational and social programs. This last exercise seemed to connect with the student's use of social media.

In conclusion, it is clear that Dr. Ortiz is a fine teacher who possesses an easy rapport with students. His teaching supports the mission of the FSA department and provides crucial instruction to future educators. His students are engaged by his teaching approach and well served by his carefully planned and organized lessons.