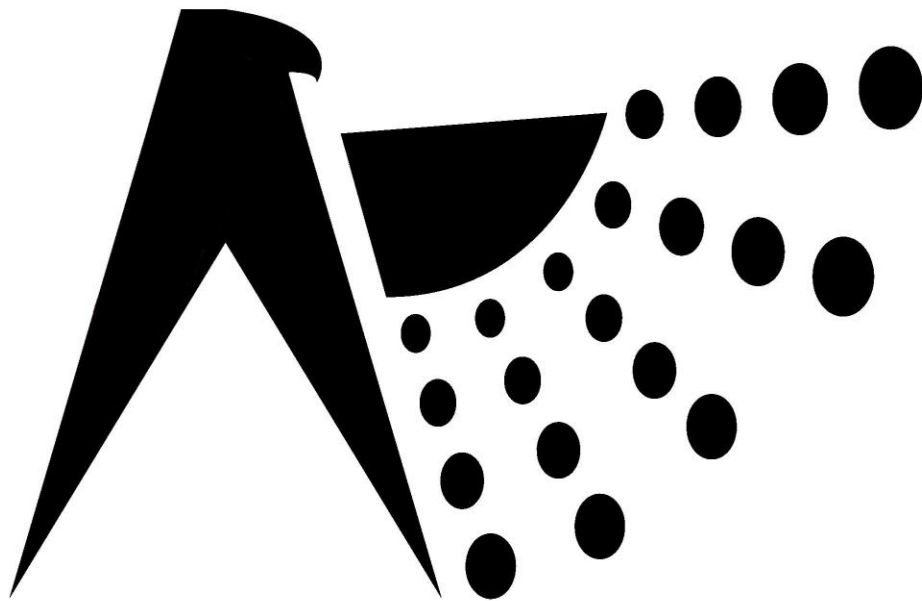


**Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán
Loyola Marymount University**



MEChA de LMU
la unión hace la fuerza

Brief History of MEChA

The Chicana Movement of the late 1960's helped spark historical and cultural pride in our people. Chicanas and Chicanos demanded to be treated as equals, and they denounced acculturation and assimilation. They expressed their new-found empowerment and pride through poetry, literature, art, and theatre. The contributions of the Chicano Movement are numerous and continue to be valuable to our society.

In March 1969, the Crusade for Justice organized that National Chicano Youth Conference that drafted the basic premises for the Chicana/Chicano Movement in what is known as El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán (EPA). A synopsis of EPA stipulates:

- (1) We are Chicanas and Chicanos of Aztlán reclaiming a land of our birth;
- (2) Aztlán belongs to indigenous people, sovereign and free from foreign culture;
- (3) We are a union of free pueblos forming a bronze nation;
- (4) Chicano nationalism, as the key to mobilization and organization, is the common denominator to bring consensus to the Chicana/Chicano Movement;
- (5) Cultural values strengthen our identity as La Familia de La Raza, and
- (6) El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, as a basic plan of Chicana/Chicano liberation, sought the formation of an independent national political party that would represent the sentiments of the Chicana/Chicano community

In April 1969, over one hundred Chicanas and Chicanos came together to form the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education at UC Santa Barbara. The students, educators, activists, and community members present drew attention to the needs and concerns of Chicanas and Chicanos both in the community and in the institutions of education. They formulated El Plan de Santa Barbara (EPSB) which led to the successful development of two very important contributions to the Chicano Movement: Chicano Studies and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). EPSB proposed two basic goals for MEChA:

- (1) MEChA was to become organically tied to the everyday social and political life of the Mexican American communities with the aim of developing those communities
- (2) MEChA was to become a permanent, well-organized power block for the purpose of redirecting university attention and resources to the needs of Mexican American students, educators, and communities

EPSB sees self-determination for the Chicana/Chicano community as the only acceptable way for our people to attain socioeconomic justice. EPSB argues that a strong nationalist identity is a necessary step in building a program for self-determination.

“Nationalism transcends all religious, political, class, and economic boundaries; it is the one common denominator that all members of La Raza can agree upon.”

Thus, self-determination challenges those involved in the principle struggle to respect the rights of all Chicanas and Chicanos. EPSB exhorts members to preserve Chicana/Chicano culture in this culturally diverse community both in the community and in the institutions of education. A Chicana/Chicano community is a necessity defined as an educational, socioeconomic, empowered Chicana/Chicano community.

El Plan de Aztlán and El Plan de Santa Barbara serve as the historical foundation for the establishment of a viable Chicana/Chicano Movimiento and are therefore fundamental to the MEChA philosophy.

Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán is a student-led organization that promotes and encourages higher education, cultura, and historia. MEChA was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of our people. We believe that mobilization through political involvement and education is the avenue towards social change.

- **M – Movimiento** – This organization is part of the Movement that strives to maintain the human rights, cultures, languages, and sovereignty of our people by means of empowerment and self-determination through education
- **E – Estudiantil** – This identifies the organization as a student group organized in a range of autonomous chapters. We make our own independent decisions as students when determining the role we will have in the Movement.
- **Ch – Chicana/o** – At the heart of our name is our identity. It is a conscious affirmation of our political identity and our connection to this land through our indigenous ancestry. It is a commitment to return to the communities at large and struggle with and against the forces that oppress our people. The word was once a derogatory term, but during the Chicano Movement it was redefined and used as a badge of ethnic and cultural pride.
- **A – Aztlán** – The mytho-historical birthplace of the Aztec (Mexica) people, traditionally defined as the SW United States. In a philosophical sense, it is our homeland where in our ideological and philosophical beliefs are directly connected to the land. It provides a liberated space of expression, free of oppression.

Groundings and Philosophy of MEChA

The Chicana/Chicano student movement has been plagued by opportunists that have sought to redirect the energies of our efforts and divert us from our struggle for self-determination. The educational plight of Chicana and Chicano students continues to be ignored by insensitive administrators. Overall, Chicana/Chicano junior high, high school, and college push-out rates have risen, forcing many Chicanas and Chicanos to a life of poverty. These factors, in combination with a growing right-wing trend in the nation, are creating greater hardships on Chicanas and Chicanos. Along with this, the current administration has started the process of dismantling Affirmative Action and Civil Rights protections.

In spite of growing repression and lack of progress by our people, we must remain optimistic. As MEChA, we must accept the challenge and combat all forms of oppression and manifestations of this oppression as experienced through racism, sexism, and homophobia both inside and outside of our Movement in order to better develop a more meaningful educational plan of action. We recognize that our bullets are our books and our victories are an increase in Chicana/Chicano graduates committed to our people's progress. We must dismantle the co-operation of Raza students from becoming "corporate Hispanics" claiming to be leaders of our community with no understanding of El Pueblo Chicano. Instead, we must seek to train future community leaders to be consciously committed to serve the people of Aztlán.

We must also support Chicana and Chicano worker struggles to abolish economic and political exploitation. In the final analysis, we recognize that the destiny of the movement will be determined by each member accepting responsibility for carrying the Movement forward. This requires self-discipline as well as an understanding that our behavior becomes a reflection of MEChA. For this reason we must be consistent in our thinking and in our action, rationalizing our inconsistency and accountability. Members in leadership roles setting poor examples only betray the Movement. We are seeking the freedom of our people and, thus, our motivation should be high. We need to commit ourselves fully for the sake of La Causa. Finally, as members, we must vow to work for the liberation of Aztlán, attaining political and socioeconomic justice for our people. MEChA is more than a name; it is a spirit of unity by comadrisimo/carnalismo, and a resolution to undertake a struggle for liberation!

Tierra y Libertad!

Chicana/o & Chicanismo

Hispanic and Latino denies our indigenous heritage. These terms further ignore the unique historic and socioeconomic aspects of the Chicana/Chicano people. This cannot be ignored. We cannot coin terms for unity sake when these terms fail to fully represent our diverse communities. Chicanismo does not seek to use the word “Chicano” as an umbrella term when representing La Familia de La Raza. Rather, Chicanismo seeks to educate our communities about our historia and cultura to further create a movement of self-determination for liberation of Aztlán, something that Hispanic or Latino has yet to recognize or represent.

We see the process of Chicanismo as evolutionary. We recognize that no one is born with a Chicana or Chicano identity. Chicanismo is an extension of political consciousness; it is a decision to dedicate oneself to building a Chicana/Chicano Nation. Chicanismo is a concept that integrated self-awareness with cultural identity, a necessary step in developing political consciousness. Therefore, the term “Chicano” is grounded in a philosophy, not a nationality. Chicanismo does not exclude anyone, rather it includes those who acknowledge and work towards the betterment of La Raza.

Chicanismo involves a personal decision to reject assimilation and work towards the preservation of our cultural heritage. Recognizing that all people are potential Chicanas and Chicanos, we encourage those interested in developing a total commitment to our movement for self-determination for the people of Aztlán to join MEChA. Thus, by all means necessary, we Chicana/Chicano estudiantes of Aztlán dedicate ourselves to taking our educational destiny into our own hands through the process of spreading Chicanismo, in the spirit of carnalismo.

MEChA is committed to ending the cultural tyranny suffered at the hands of institutional and systematic discrimination that holds our people captive. We seek an end to the oppression and exploitation of the Chicana/Chicano community.

We proclaim that we are people of Aztlán and that we recognize our indigenous unity with our brothers and sisters of Ixachitzlan (Alaska to Tierra del Fuego). We declare that we are the descendants of El Quinto Sol. Our fundamental drive is to organize and challenge Chicana/Chicano estudiantes to maintain self-respect and dignity to overcome historical prejudices and discrimination against the Chicana and Chicano people. The historic mission of MEChA involves an educational plan of action that builds an educational ladder of the advancement of our people. We recognize that the strength of our movement is rooted in our barrios, and we pledge to reach out to the community and schools to establish new educational opportunities. We also recognize that our MEChA chapters are much stronger when they are rooted in and accountable to the Chicana/Chicano community. Thus, we commit ourselves to return to our community and contribute to the development of the Chicana/Chicano Nation.

“Chicana/o” – an extension of political consciousness; a personal decision to dedicate oneself to building a Chicana/Chicano Nation; a personal decision to reject assimilation and work towards the preservation of our cultural heritage; a philosophy, a developed state of mind

“Chicana/o Nationalism” – no specific nation to adhere to as Aztlán is not a necessarily defined territory; the common denominator that all members of La Raza can agree upon; a means of unification; a realization and understanding that we share a common experience, and that our communities face similar social problems created by systems of power and oppression; a nationality that transcends all religious, political, class, and economic boundaries

External Structure of MEChA

In the past, the structure of MEChA allowed any individual wanting to organize a chapter on any particular campus the opportunity to do so. This could occur without prior knowledge of the history and philosophical objectives of MEChA. This resulted in a vast numbers of MEChA chapters with dissimilar and contradictory objectives as well as conflicting philosophies.

In recognizing the ineffectiveness of this organization method, we propose that the following structure be adopted so that every member is accountable to its chapter, every chapter is accountable to its Central, every Central is accountable to its Region, every Region is accountable to its state, and every state is accountable to National MEChA.

- MEChistA (Individual)
 - Chapter (MEChA de LMU)
 - Central (Los Angeles Central)
 - Region (Altas Califas Sur)
 - State (California)
 - National MEChA

Campus MEChA – a group of individuals at a high school, college, or university campus

The general membership at a campus chapter shall consist of any student who accepts, believes, and works for the goals and objectives of MEChA including the liberation of Aztlán. College students shall be limited to six years active membership at the undergraduate level and two years active at the graduate level in a non-voting advisory role. The leadership of the campus chapter will officially recognize the active membership of the chapter. When MEChA meetings are being conducted and MEChA business is being discussed, voting shall be limited to active members only.

Affiliation – Each MEChA chapter shall gain its affiliation through and only through the recognized Central they geographically fall under. In order to become a MEChA chapter recognized by the Central, the chapter shall accept and adopt the following:

- (1) orient all members by reading and discussing historical documents of our movement including El Plan de Santa Barbara, El Plan de Aztlán, and Philosophy of MEChA
- (2) make important aspects of the Chicana/Chicano movement relevant to members
- (3) send two representatives to Central and Regional meetings so that the chapter may be recognized as a chapter with voting privileges

Each chapter is governed by its respective constitution, Central constitution, Region constitution, State constitution, and National MEChA constitution.

Central – a collection of chapters in a particular area within a MEChA region

Centrales shall outline and implement plans of action for their particular region. The Centrales shall be divided by counties with isolated campuses going to the nearest active Central. Each campus shall have one vote, and a meeting shall be official when 50% +1 of the voting membership is present. The Central shall have two standing positions including the Internal and External Directors. Member campuses shall alternate hosting Central meetings with the hosting campus in charge of notifying participating campuses.

Responsibility of the MEChA Central

- (1) screen, recruit, and educate campuses wishing to form a MEChA
- (2) keep a record of all officially chartered MEChAs in their Central
- (3) seek fundraising for activities, academic outreach, and a newsletter

Region – a collection of chapters/centrales in a particular area

The MEChA region shall consist of all representatives from the MEChA voting campuses. The Region is a logistical planning committee and receives its direction from the voting campuses. Each region shall convene once a month.

Responsibility of the MEChA Region

- (1) screen, recruit, and educate campuses wishing to form a MEChA
- (2) keep a record of all officially chartered MEChAs in their Central
- (3) seek fundraising for activities, academic outreach, and a newsletter

Responsibility of the MEChA Region Representative

- (1) take a written report back to the campus, outlining issues under consideration
- (2) vote on issues in the manner their campus has decided (each chapter shall have one vote; a quorum shall be 50% +1 of all Region campuses)

State – a collection of chapters, centrales, and/or regions within a respective state

There will be two statewide conferences during each year that will focus on one and no more than two major issues at which time a plan of action will be discussed. The purpose is to come out of each conference with a well-planned strategy to take action on the imminent issue

Statewide Rules

- (1) only MEChA campuses certified by a Regional process will be allowed to vote
- (2) community people shall be allowed to participate as observers only
- (3) individuals or groups with a history of party-building and cadre raiding within MEChA are not welcome to attend statewide conferences
- (4) all entertainment shall be culturally, educationally, and/or politically oriented
- (5) non-voting individuals attending the statewide conference shall not be allowed to participate in debate or discussion of questions before the assembly
- (6) in a general assembly, there will be one vote per campus; in the workshops, voting shall be done by students certified by a Regional process

National MEChA

National MEChA is composed of the following ten regions: Alta Califas Norte, Alta Califas Sur, Calpulli Montañas del Norte, Centro Aztlán, Centro Califaztlán, Este Aztlán, Mictlampa Cihuatlampa, Tierra Mid-Atl, Pacific Northwest, and Southeast Tejaztlán.

National MEChA is governed by the National MEChA Constitution.

National MEChA is structured by regions. There are two representatives from each of the recognized MEChA regions that make up the National MEChA Coordinator Council (NMCC). The council meets at alternate regions throughout the nation to discuss issues affective their respective regions among other issues. The NMCC has the power to vote on important national issues on behalf of their region.

A MEChA National Conference shall be held once a year. The purpose of this conference shall be to bring all MEChA chapters together in an effort to form a MEChA National Conference structure that advocates a common philosophy, works towards unified goals and objectives, and reaffirms the principles of MEChA to consolidate our Movement.

At the MEChA National Conference, steps will be taken to establish ties amongst the MEChA chapters through Aztlán. As a vibrant and responsive network of activists who will respond as a unit to oppression, racism, sexism, and homophobia, we will work in harmony when carrying out campaigns of liberation for our people.

Goals and Objectives

Objective 1 – We recognize that Chicanismo is evolutionary, and that a Chicano identity is not a nationality but a philosophy. Chicano nationalism is the key to taking our people forward. MEChA will not discriminate against any member who work for and adopts Chicanismo as indicated in El Plan de Santa Barbara and the Philosophy of MEChA. This philosophy is the key to taking our people forward.

Objective 2 – In the spirit of our past and for the spirit of our future, MEChA will not condone, tolerate, or perpetuate sexism. Indigenismo teaches us that duality is the base for respect and dignity among our people. As members, we have instilled this principle as our foundation.

Process of Implementation

- (1) Every MEChA chapter will hold workshops and/or forums dealing with the contributions of mujeres to our movimiento;
- (2) At every Statewide Conference and National MEChA Conference there will be a gender caucus. These caucuses will be the Chicana and Chicano caucuses in which gender issues will be thoroughly discussed. There will be separate Chicana/o caucuses in which mujeres and hombres will have an opportunity to talk to each other about their experiences. Then there will be a combined Chicana/o caucus in which mujeres and hombres will discuss their experiences; and
- (3) At every Statewide Conference and National MEChA Conference there will be a Chicana Workshop in which the contributions made by Chicanas will be presented

Objective 3 – Understanding that homophobia exists in our community, MEChA must undertake the task of educating ourselves to put a stop to homophobic remarks in our organization. Being that there are Chicana/os who are of the LGBT community, we must work for providing a safe environment in MEChA. Therefore, MEChA will not tolerate disrespectful comments to LGBT members as they are a vital part of our Chicano community. Our LGBT community is a very important aspect not only in the growth of MEChA but also in providing strength and unity between our members

Process of Implementation

- (1) Every chapter must provide homophobia educational segments on their campus;
- (2) At every Statewide Conference and National MEChA Conference, there will be workshops focused on any concerns surrounding our LGBT community accompanied by discussions of the harms and injustices produced through homophobia. We must address these concerns to educate our members;
- (3) Any member who makes homophobic remarks must be stopped and corrected. MEChA will not allow for any segment of our Chicano community to be disrespected as these remarks are self-defeating in MEChA's purpose to help create a safe environment for members who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

Objective 4 – MEChA must commit its chapters to building a consolidated MEChA structure that is capable of applying political pressure at the local, regional, state, and national levels without being co-opted by outside interests

Process of Implementation

- (1) MEChA chapters should establish issue coalitions;
- (2) MEChA should identify community centers in each chapter's area and establish liaison with community people by doing a series of workshops on educational issues, and pressure community college/university EOP/EOPS/Financial Aid units to also regularly provide information workshops at such centers; and

- (3) Each MEChA chapter should establish and support the work of their respective Central by reaching out to local high schools, community colleges, and university with the ultimate goal of organizing a MEChA at every school in the area that will eventually become part of that Central

Objective 5 – Each MEChA must work for the establishment of an alliance for Chicano educational rights that will form locally and then linked to region, state, and national levels

Objective 6 – MEChA must create educational mentor/tutor-type programs organized at the Central level that shall serve as the foundation for all other organizing efforts for Chicana/Chicano educational rights. Such mentor/tutor programs should have the following:

- (1) Training members as mentors/tutors as a fundamental retention strategy as such training enhances the mentor's/tutor's own academic skills
- (2) Trained mentors/tutors become a key element in recruitment
- (3) Utilize mentors/tutors to work with parents in establishing a communications network on college preparation, educational issues, and advocacy through educational issues, and advocacy through educational institutions

Objective 7 – Each MEChA chapter must assess outreach, retention, and financial aid practices at their institution and analyze how these services impact Chicana/Chicano students. Such an assessment must include the demand for the recruitment/attrition numbers game, which brings Chicana and Chicano student into the university and then fails to provide adequate academic and financial support service to retain them, to stop.

Process of Implementation

- (1) Every campus outreach program must be analyzed to see if early outreach and supportive counseling is being provided at surrounding high schools
- (2) Demand that the campus fund a student-run, student-initiated summer academic enrichment program for high school students that will be organized by MEChA
- (3) Consider and understand that Chicana/Chicano attrition rates are high on all campuses, and demand that the community college/university fund the following educational modules: self-esteem, time management, stress management, study skills, writing lab, public speaking, critical thinking, library research, tutoring, and Chicana/Chicano resource center
- (4) Since such services are demanded from the university, MEChA must also demand that its membership be committed to these services and to academic achievement
- (5) Demand that MEChA's officers be funded through work-study and offer the rationale that MEChA coordinates youth leadership through retreats and Central activities
- (6) Demand that the financial aid office at the campus not acknowledge outside scholarships as affecting the final financial aid award from the university and state/federal aid.

Objective 8 – Given the poor track record of institutions of higher learning in fulfilling their mission to recruit and retain Chicana/Chicano students, demand the president or vice provost of the campus immediately establish a community advisory committee to promote the increased allocation of resources for our Gente; request a commitment from the president or chancellor to assess enrollment, retention, and financial aid practices then ask that a campus/community task force be formed to recommend changes to improve services

Objective 9 – In some cases, Chicano Studies programs have been co-opted by the mainstream educational system and communication with MEChA is at an all time low. Many faculty have submitted to the pressures of the system and no longer support student activism, leaving their departments vulnerable to attacks from administrators. To correct this disconnect, MEChA proposes the following:

Process of Implementation

- (1) Demand the immediate re-establishment of communication with students, i.e. student presence at departmental meetings
- (2) Demand the establishment of inter-campus Chicano Studies Concilio Networks at the local level with student and community participation
- (3) Demand the redirection of a portion of Chicano Studies resources into cooperative recruitment and retention projects with MEChA and the Chicana/Chicano community
- (4) Demand that Chicano Studies fund MEChA officers out of work study
- (5) Foster a positive relationship between MEChA and Chicano Studies

Objective 10 – At the present time, very few members are involved in student government even though they sometimes could win several seats with a concerted effort. While increasing MEChA's political power on campus, student government is a strong training ground to acquire leadership skills

Objective 11 – To augment education, each Central needs to organize a one week MEChA Leadership Retreat for high school student and incoming freshman that provides political and academic skills. In addition, MEChA must establish tutoring to assist grade school, junior high, and high school student in overcoming academic problem and instilling cultural pride.

Objective 12 – The establishment of a National Newsletter, augmented by Regional Newsletters that provide important information on issues occurring at various campuses; this also promotes tighter linkage through ongoing communications

Objective 13 – Collective fundraising at the local Central level should be organized with 50% going to the campuses that contribute to the Central fundraiser and 50% remaining with the Central to fund area projects. Incorporation and non-profit status should be pursued to organize fundraising efforts for educational programs promoted by the Central. Eventually, MEChA should work to establish a National Chicana/Chicano Scholarship Fund.

Objective 14 – MEChA must adopt principles to ensure that MEChA functions democratically. These principles include:

- (1) Leadership will reflect an equal representation of Chicanas/Chicanos
- (2) Individual members should not offer the endorsement of, or formally represent, any MEChA chapter without the authorization of the body;
- (3) Centrales and Campuses that accept the Regional Process and its position statements should resolve local disputes without interference
- (4) Organizational issues should be brought before the body for democratic discussion and resolution, without individuals or small groups deciding outside of the chapter, since this promotes factionalism;
- (5) Personal issues should be handled in an individual and private manner so that they do not affect organizational unity;
- (6) Slander and rumor spreading causes misinformation, disunity, and dissension and cannot be tolerated by MEChA;
- (7) Decisions of the Body must be respected and not undermined by individuals or small groups acting outside the recognized MEChA structure
- (8) Conflict of interests within a chapter shall call for an abstention;
- (9) Honest representation by members in disclosing outside organizational interests when such interests impede the democratic process of MEChA must be mandatory. Anyone attempting to orchestrate organized secret activity for any outside organization inside of MEChA must face expulsion and public exposure;
- (10) Respect for MEChA's integrity and autonomy as an organization is a requirement for membership in MEChA