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# Memoria y Resistencia: Sharing UD experiences at the Encuentro to Close the School of the Americas

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# Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center  
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

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## Memoria y Resistencia: Sharing UD experiences at the Encuentro to Close the School of the Americas

### Presented by:

Mary Niebler, *University of Dayton*  
Christina Baker, *University of Dayton*

**Session:** Community-Based Global Learning

### Abstract:

At UD, our Catholic and Marianist values inform us to uphold the human rights of all people, especially those whose agency has been diminished by unjust laws and corporate government policies. Guided by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, including solidarity with the poor, we seek ways to join together to bring about a more peaceful and just world. The annual SOA Watch Encuentro, a peaceful protest to close the School of the Americas (SOA), is such a movement.

Established in 1946, the SOA has operated at Fort Benning, Georgia since the 1980s. Technically closed in 2000, it immediately reopened as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) in 2001. For over 70 years, the SOA/WHINSEC has trained thousands in military tactics, prompting reigns of terror and human rights abuses throughout Latin America. Names like Efraín Ríos Montt, Manuel Noriega, and Mexico's Zeta Cartel founders are all graduates of the SOA/WHINSEC.

The SOA Watch started following the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, a champion for the poor, slain while saying mass in San Salvador on March 24, 1980. His assassins were members of the Salvadoran death squads, including two SOA graduates. Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, also a graduate, was identified as ordering the killing by the 1993 UN Truth Commission.

The Encuentro, held along the U.S. Mexican border, is an intersectional initiative, bringing together activists to share spaces, stories, and objectives for closing the SOA. With actions like the Presente! Litany, a roll call of the missing or murdered, the public is reminded that memory is strong, powerful and affective. This panel will focus on the stories of UD faculty, staff, and students who have been immersed in this environment of artistic interventions, activist speeches, and scholarly perspectives, all of which that they bring back to Dayton, OH and our campus.

**Presenter information:**

Mary Niebler is the Coordinator for Cross-cultural Immersions in the Center for Social Concern in Campus Ministry. She holds a BA in Education and an MA in Theological Studies, both from the University of Dayton. Mary seeks to provide students with impactful experiences of cross-cultural exchange, domestically and internationally, where they can synthesize their faith, vocation, and academics as global citizens. Mary has been involved in the movement to close the School of the Americas since 1998. She has great interest in the power of creative non-violent movements to enact social change for the good. She has taught a mini-course at UD on the Spirituality of Nonviolence and encourages students to engage in social activism.

Dr. Christina Baker is an Assistant Professor of Spanish in the Department of Global Languages & Cultures at the University of Dayton and was previously a Visiting Assistant Professor of Hispanic Studies at William & Mary. She earned her Ph.D. in Contemporary Latin American Literature at the University of Wisconsin and her M.A. in Latin American Studies at the University of California - San Diego. As a scholar-practitioner, Christina's interests focus on expressions of queerness, belonging and social justice via embodied performance. Spanning musical performance to cabaret, her work explores artistic and literary productions throughout the Latin/x American world with an emphasis on contemporary Mexico. She's published articles and reviews in the field's leading journals like *Symposium*, *Latin American Theatre Review*, and *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, among others.