



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

31 May 2017

Community members in the Denver Metro Area share stories of gentrification and the cannabis industry with the help of CU Denver

Denver—A new project from the University of Colorado Denver examines the lived experiences of gentrification and other social consequences of the state's booming cannabis sector. Sixteen stories from residents and stakeholders within the Globeville, Elyrea and Swansia neighborhoods, and other communities were recorded by students enrolled in Cannabis Culture, a new class offered through CU Denver.

These video-based stories will be shown to a public audience at the International Church of Cannabis (elevationists.org), 400 S Logan St, Denver, CO 80209, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm on Thursday, June 1. Light snacks and beverages will be available. The event is a non-consumption cannabis and alcohol event, and for individuals 18 years and above. The presentation is part of an ongoing partnership between CU Denver, Project VOYCE and The Facing Project.

“These stories will bring to light the perspectives of individuals who struggle to keep their communities healthy and encourage cannabis business owners to be responsible community citizens,” said Marty Otañez, associate professor of anthropology and instructor for Cannabis Culture. “Community members in Globeville, Elyrea and Swansia bear the brunt of the cannabis industry, hosting the highest number of licensed cannabis facilities in the world, along with the concerns that go along with them. These neighborhoods have a history of housing and racial injustice, but I’m glad the university is able to help bring attention to these issues through this class.”

Katherine Aguilar, a participant who lives in Swansea, experiences first-hand the two-fold greening of North Denver. “Near my house are grow houses that produce the so-called Green Gold and the noxious smell that goes along with it. At the same time, I see green public housing complexes and new parks that mostly benefit newcomers. The irony is that these developments have mobilized long-term residents to organize against green gentrification and displacement.”

The event is free and open to the public. To learn more visit www.ucdenver.facingproject.com.

###

The CU Denver course Cannabis Culture in the Anthropology Department provides students with the intellectual and creative skills to critically examine cannabis as a commodity and the implications of the cannabis sector on diverse cultures. Marty Otañez, the course instructor, partners with students to identify key issues among community members and other stakeholders interested to make the cannabis sector work better for more people. The course in May 2017 is framed around gentrification and the different responses of individuals whose lives have been influenced by the expansion of cannabis cultivation facilities, the absence of affordable homes and the human costs of displacement. The final visual projects produced by students working in collaboration with community members are designed to create conversations about the right to stay without being displaced and the right to remain protected from waves of uncontrolled investment.

Project VOYCE (www.projectvoyce.org) is a non-profit organization that provides leadership programs for students in the underprivileged sectors of Denver and teaches them how to combat challenges in their communities. VOYCE stands for “Voices of Youth Changing Education”, which provides an environment where students can discuss the problems facing their community, specifically issues regarding their educational systems and communities, and how they can change them. Project VOYCE encourages students to engage in civic problems and be critical of education which becomes instrumental in creating societal change within the disadvantaged communities that become stuck in the cycle of poverty. Project VOYCE increases the leadership potential for their mentees in hopes that they will soon be in decision-making roles. This way, representation is provided across social structures and socioeconomic lines.

The Facing Project connects people through stories to strengthen communities. The Huffington Post and Harlem World Magazine have hailed The Facing Project as “one of three oral history projects to watch.” The Facing Project inspires communities to tell first-person stories of citizens through the talent of local writers, actors, and photographers, in partnership with nonprofits, businesses, education, and government, to raise awareness and create community conversations about a topic area. Founded in 2012 in Muncie, Indiana, by J.R. Jamison and Kelsey Timmerman, the movement is in communities across the US facing topics from homelessness, to human trafficking, to hunger, among others. To learn more, visit: www.facingproject.com.

Contact:

CU Denver Facing Project
Marty Otañez
Cell: 415 306 4754
marty.otanez@ucdenver.edu