

Cynthia Brito, PhD

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URBAN PLANNING & POLICY | URBAN GOVERNANCE | MIGRATION | RACIAL EQUITY | COLLECTIVE CARE

PhD-trained urban planning and policy researcher, educator, and community-engaged practitioner with expertise in urban governance, migration, racial equity, mutual aid, economic justice, qualitative and survey research, grant development, program management, and community organizing.

EDUCATION

PhD in Urban Planning & Policy, University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), Chicago, IL

- **Honors and Recognitions:** Pipeline to Justice Scholar Awardee - Social Justice Initiative • Institute for the Geographies of Justice Fellow- Antipode • Scholar in Residence Fellow- Institute for Research on Race & Public Policy • Sawyer Predoc Fellow- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation • Diversifying Higher Education Fellow – State of IL • Pipeline to Inclusive Faculty Fellow - UIC

Master of Arts, Latin American & Latino Studies (LALS), UIC, 2012, GPA 4.0

Bachelor of Arts in Latin American & Latino Studies & Sociology, UIC, 2008

- **Honors:** Cum Laude, Honors College Graduate, LALS High Distinction, GPA 3.8

Associate of Arts, College of DuPage (COD), Glen Ellyn, IL, 2005

- **Honors:** Phi Theta Kappa, Honors Scholar, COD Alice Giordano Scholarship, COD Foundation Harkins Women's Scholarship, and COD Tom Galloway Memorial Scholarship

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2023–Present **Community Building & Restorative Economy Consultant**, [Co-op Education Center](#)

- Developed a **bilingual educational guide on restorative economy principles**, translating complex economic concepts into accessible community education materials.
- Conducted **community outreach in Chicago's Austin neighborhood** to increase participation in restorative-economy educational programming and build relationships with residents and community organizations.
- Developed outreach strategies, recruited participants, and supported community-based programming focused on **restorative economy, mutual aid, and collective action**.
- Provided **training and facilitated community engagement** around economic justice, restorative/solidarity economy principles, and community power.

2016–2018 **Director of Chicago Office**, [Inter-University Program for Latino Research](#) (IUPLR)

- **Directed operations for IUPLR's Chicago headquarters**, overseeing day-to-day administration, staff, research activities, and organizational priorities.
- **Coordinated and oversaw research working groups** across the IUPLR consortium, supporting collaborative research activities and ensuring alignment with organizational objectives.
- **Managed the distribution and administration of research grant funds**, including issuing calls for proposals, coordinating application review with the Executive Committee, and overseeing grants, invoices, deposits, and related financial reporting.
- **Led planning and logistics for the IUPLR Annual Conference**, including the call for proposals, coordination with the conference planning committee, engagement with Latin American partners, and communication with consortium centers.
- **Supervised, trained, and evaluated staff**, assigning and reviewing work to ensure organizational and programmatic objectives were met.

2015 **Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff**, Chicago for Chuy Campaign

- Provided **administrative and project management support**.
- Organized **meetings and events** on behalf of the Chief of Staff.
- Assisted with special projects.
- Prepared required **documentation and insurance liability** for special events.
- Managed daily tasks, fielded correspondence, and served as a **liaison for staff and other parties**.

2012–2016 **Paralegal for Civil Rights, Constitutional, & Employment Law**, [Hughes Socol Piers Resnick & Dym, Ltd.](#)

- Conducted **legal research, case investigation, and case management** for complex civil rights, constitutional, employment, and international matters, including work involving the Government of Mexico.

- Conducted **business and case analysis** for Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) litigation and supported client outreach and case development.
- Conducted initial case investigations, **interviewed witnesses, analyzed case information, and prepared research memoranda** for attorney review.
- Created, organized, and analyzed **case data and documentation** to support litigation strategy, case preparation, and attorney decision-making.
- Supported **trial and deposition preparation**, including organizing evidence, documentation, and case materials.
- Developed and implemented a **community outreach and engagement strategy** connecting the firm with Latine communities and community-based organizations throughout Chicagoland.
- **Translated legal documents and client materials into Spanish**, supporting communication and access to legal services for Spanish-speaking clients and communities.
- Managed a **complex and demanding caseload**, balancing multiple cases, deadlines, research assignments, client communications, and litigation-support responsibilities.

2008–2010 **Youth Experiencing Success (YES) Program Mentor**, [Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School](#)

- Managed the **program's annual budget and prepared monthly financial reports**, supporting program administration and resource management.
- Designed individualized **community internship opportunities** and coordinated student participation in community-based activities.
- Reviewed applications and interviewed prospective students while providing ongoing **academic, college, and individualized support** to students and families.
- Designed and facilitated **support groups, advisory classes, lesson plans, and student activities** supporting students' academic, personal, and social development.
- Conducted home visits, mediated conflicts, and implemented individualized **Performance Improvement Plans** to address barriers to student success.
- Participated in the **research, design, and implementation of social-emotional learning initiatives**.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6/2026 – Present **Member** Reparative Democracy Design Lab, [Othering & Belonging Institute \(OBI\) at UC Berkeley](#)

4/2025–Present **School Board Member & Co-governance Group Organizer**, [Berwyn North School District #98](#)

8/2024–4/2025 **Co-Founder & Candidate**, Berwyn Rising (Political Action Committee)

- Co-founded Berwyn Rising, a political action committee, and ran as part of a **four-candidate slate** for the Berwyn North School District #98 Board of Education.
- Led **social media strategy and content** for the campaign.
- Coordinated **volunteers and campaign events**, including canvassing efforts, throughout the eight-month campaign.
- Elected to the **Board of Education** in the April 2025 consolidated election.

2026 **Vice President**, Community Response Collective

2025 **Organizer and Grant Writer**, [Cicero-Berwyn Community Response Collective](#)

2018–2025 **Founding Member & Advisor**, [Revolutionary Youth Action League](#) (ROYAL)

- Co-founded and advised ROYAL, a Chicago-area youth organizing collective, for seven years, designing **weekly popular-education programming** and inviting prominent Chicago organizers to lead sessions.
- Helped win **policy change at both the school-district and municipal levels**, including authoring and formally presenting ROYAL's 2022 Climate Action Plan to the Village of Oak Park.
- Developed and led original youth programming, including a **youth hip-hop program and a youth-produced podcast**.
- Built coalitions with other Chicago youth organizations for joint mobilizations, and organized **rallies, protests, marches, and training events**.
- Regularly represented ROYAL in **public statements before the Village of Oak Park and other governing bodies**.
- Launched **Youth Bridges**, an initiative integrating newly arrived immigrant youth into ROYAL's programming, later featured in doctoral dissertation research on Chicago's mutual-aid response to the new-arrival crisis.

2019–2021 **Organizer**, [Freedom to Thrive, Oak Park](#)

2017–2020 **Co-Curriculum Chair**, New Leaders Council (NLC) Institute, [Chicago Chapter](#)

2017–2019 **Co-Chair**, [Diversity Committees \(DivCo\) of Oak Park](#), IL School District #97

2014–2019 **Mentor**, [Proyecto Atabey](#): Transformational Mentorship for Pregnant & Parenting Youth

2012–2017 **President**, [Dare to Dream: Get Educated!](#) Foundation for Latina Teens

2011–2015 **Founding Member & Organizer**, Latin@ Youth Action League

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2023–2026 **Doctoral Dissertation Research — University of Illinois Chicago**

Urban Planning and Policy

Dissertation: *Constellations of Collective Care & Gendered Exploitation: Mutual Aid in Chicago's New Arrival Crisis*

- Designed and conducted an **original qualitative study examining Chicago's 2022–2024 new-arrival crisis**, focusing on how mutual-aid networks responded to gaps in formal institutional support.
- Conducted and analyzed **35 semi-structured interviews** with mutual-aid organizers, city officials, and alderpersons, using qualitative coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns across cases.
- Examined how **race, gender, labor, and urban governance** shape the distribution of care, resources, and responsibility during urban crises.
- Analyzed **alternative systems of support, collective care, and political power** in response to institutional gaps.
- Synthesized findings into a doctoral dissertation and translated research findings into implications for **urban policy, governance, migration, community development, and equitable crisis response**.

2025 **Latine Homelessness in Illinois: Structural Drivers of Inequality**

Graduate Research Assistant, Institute of Research on Race & Public Policy (IRRPP)

- Led and administered focus groups with Latine community members to examine the **structural drivers and lived experiences of homelessness in Illinois**, coordinating participant outreach, logistics, and facilitation.

2021–2024 **Deadly Disparities in the Days of COVID-19: How Public Policy Fails Black & Latinx Chicagoans**

Graduate Research Assistant, Institute of Research on Race & Public Policy (IRRPP) & UIC Department of Sociology

- Conducted **interdisciplinary research, qualitative research design, and interviews** examining racial disparities and public policy affecting Black and Latinx communities.
- Supported **research analysis, writing, dissemination, and interdisciplinary collaboration**.

2019 **Chicago's Racial Wealth Gap: Legacies of the Past, Challenges in the Present, Uncertain Future**

Graduate Research Assistant, Institute of Research on Race & Public Policy (IRRPP)

2021–2022 **Crossing Latinidades: Emerging Scholars and New Comparative Directions**

Graduate Research Assistant, UIC — Andrew W. Mellon Funded

2021–2022 **DEI Initiative**

Graduate Research Assistant, School of Theatre & Music, UIC

- Designed and moderated **four semi-structured focus groups** examining students' experiences of identity-based marginalization, bias reporting, inclusion, and institutional support.
- Developed **focus-group protocols, discussion norms, and thematic areas of inquiry** informed by an existing institutional climate survey and equity framework.
- Conducted **qualitative data collection, transcription, coding, and thematic analysis**.
- Applied a **structured qualitative coding process** to identify recurring themes and patterns across focus groups.
- Authored a **comprehensive institutional climate report** synthesizing qualitative findings and student recommendations.
- Translated research findings into recommendations for **institutional policy, programming, and equity initiatives**.

2019–2021 **Sawyer Seminar: Radical Care Real Alternatives**

Graduate Research Assistant, Great Cities Institute, UIC — Andrew W. Mellon Funded

- Contributed to the Radical Care Real Alternatives Sawyer Seminar, engaging questions of **care, urban inequality, governance, and alternatives to punitive systems**.

2019 **Racial Equity in Education**

Graduate Research Assistant, School of Public Health, UIC

2018–2019 **Punitive Cities Project**

Graduate Research Assistant, Great Cities Institute, UIC

- Contributed to the Punitive Cities Project, examining **urban governance and punitive systems**.

2011 First Annual Hispanic Small Business Survey

Graduate Research Intern, Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (IHCC)

- Designed and implemented a **statewide Hispanic Small Business Survey** examining entrepreneurship, business ownership, business challenges, and factors associated with business closures.
- Developed survey instruments, built and managed a master respondent database, and administered a bilingual online survey to approximately **11,000 potential respondents**.
- Collected and analyzed survey data from **84 respondents**, identifying demographic, educational, generational, and business trends among Hispanic entrepreneurs.
- Synthesized findings into a formal report and developed implications for programs supporting Hispanic entrepreneurship and small-business development.
- Managed five data entry interns.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2026 **Introduction to Urban Studies**, Instructor of Record

2025 **Introduction to Urban Studies**, Teaching Assistant

2012 **Latinas in the United States**, Instructor of Record

2012 **Latinos in Politics**, Teaching Assistant

2010–2011 **Introduction to Latino Studies**, Teaching Assistant

PUBLICATIONS

- Scarborough, W., **Brito, C.**, Lehmann, A., Arenas, I., & Lewis, A. (2026). Research note: Texas's Operation Lone Star migrant busing program increased Hispanic homelessness in destination cities. *Demography*, 63(1), 15–28. doi.org
- **Brito, C.** (2025). The welcoming city? Chicago & the new arrival crisis. In *Twenty-first century Chicago* (Revised 2nd ed.). Cognella Academic Publishing.
- **Brito, C.** (2023, May 30). Commentary: Johnson must engage and provide funding for youth-led initiatives. *Crain's Chicago Business*. <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/craains-forum-chicagos-next-chapter/johnson-must-engage-and-fund-youth-led-initiatives-opinion/>
- **Brito, C.** (2022). Organizing in Little Village. In *Never Normal Again*.
- Decoteau, C. L., Garrett, C. L., **Brito, C.**, Basaldua, F., & Arenas, I. (2021). *Deadly disparities in the days of COVID-19: How public policy fails Black & Latinx Chicagoans* (State of Racial Justice Policy Report). University of Illinois Chicago, Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy. uic.edu
- **Brito, Cynthia**, Jarpe-Ratner, E., Welter, C. (2019). The Creation of a Social Justice Club in Collaboration with the Oak Park Elementary School District 97 Diversity Council. Final Report. Co-Principal Investigator.
- Torres, M. de los A., **Brito, C.**, Herrera, O., & Obregón, E. (Eds.). (2018). *Mapping new directions in Latino research*. Inter-University Program for Latino Research.

COMMUNITY AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

2024 **Women of Color Leadership Fellow**, [Cultivate](#)

2018 **Keynote Speaker**, Latin American & Latino Studies Degree Recognition, UIC

2017 **Chicago Chapter Fellow**, [New Leaders Council \(NLC\) Institute](#)

2015 **Influential Latino Leader of Chicago Recognition**, [Latino Leaders Magazine](#)

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS & PRESENTATIONS

2026, Featured Speaker, “**Nothing About Us Without Us: Centering Student Leadership in Building Systems, Not Initiatives, to Advance Equity Work**”, Bend the Arc Summit, Equity Imperative

2026, Plenary Speaker, “**Community Defense, Mutual Aid, & Organizing in Action**”, Chicago Latines in Philanthropy

2026, Plenary Speaker, “**We Keep Us Safe: Collective Action in a Resilient Anti-Trafficking Movement**,” Freedom Network USA

2025, Trainer, **The Praxis of Critical Environmental Justice**, Faith in Place

2025, Trainer, **How to Form a Mutual Aid Network in Your Community**, Sazonblea, Mijente

2021, Trainer, “**Latinx History 101**,” Storytelling for Racial Justice Fellows, InterAction

2021, Trainer, “**Abolition: Flexing Your Radical Imagination**,” Virtual Workshop for New Leaders Council (NLC) Institute

2020, Trainer, “**Abolition: Flexing Your Radical Imagination**,” Virtual Workshop for New Leaders Council Chicago

2020, Trainer, **“Talleres de Justicia Racial,”** Mujeres Latinas en Acción

2020, Speaker, **“Dismantling Racism & Building Coalition,”** Hanover Park’s \Leaders Reception, Village of Hanover Park

2019, Guest Speaker, Oak Park Series: “At the Table.”

2018, Presenter, **“Beyond Survival, Motherhood & Relationships,”** Intergenerational Mentorship & Advocacy Day

2018, Facilitator, **Peace Circle & Equity Facilitator,** New Leaders Council Chicago Chapter

2018, Presenter, **Identity, Intersectionality & Equity Workshop,”** Diversity Committee of Oak Park, D97, Whittier School

2018, Trainer, **“Racial Justice & Allyship Workshop,”** Diversity Committee, D#97, Holmes Elementary School

2018, Trainer, **“Racial Justice & Allyship Workshop,”** Diversity Committee, D#97, Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School

2017, Presenter, **“Chicago Social Movements & Immigrants’ Rights”** NLC Institute, Chicago

2017, Presenter, **“Mental Health Among Middle School Latinas,”** Dare to Dream: Get Educated! Conference

2016, Panelist, **“Between Here & There: Negotiating Boundaries Between Cultures,”** Triton College

2016, Presenter, **“IUPLR Virtual Projects,”** Bilingual Student Access to College & Career Attainment, CPS

2015, Presenter, **“A Feminist Perspective on Community & Domestic Violence,”** Little Village Youth Forum

2015, Presenter, **“Health & Reproductive Justice Forum,”** Mijente Lánzate Chicago Conference

ACADEMIC CONFERENCES

- 2025, Conference Presenter: **“Sin, Contra y Desde el Estado”: a Multifaceted Response to the 2023 Chicago Migrant Crisis,** Inter University Program for Latino Research 2025 7th Biennial Siglo XXI National Conference: Nuestra Presencia
- 2017, Conference Presenter, **“Latinas in Higher Education,”** Annual Statewide Conference for Teachers of Linguistically & Culturally Diverse Students
- 2017, Conference Panelist, **“We’re Not Just Changing Diapers, We’re Changing the World!”** Young Parents Transforming Their 2017 Communities, American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Annual Meeting
- 2016, Presenter, **“Latinas in Education: Issues & Opportunities,”** District 83 Bilingual Parent Summit
- 2016, Conference Presenter, **“Dare to Dream: Get Educated & the State of Latina Teens,”** 40th Annual Statewide Conference for Teachers of Linguistically & Culturally Diverse Students
- 2016, Conference Presenter, **“Dare to Dream: Get Educated & the State of Latina Teens,”** 11th Annual Statewide Conference Summit for Bilingual Parents
- 2015, Conference Panelist, **“Proyecto Atabey: Intergenerational Mentorship for Adolescent Teen Parents,”** American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Event
- 2013, Presenter, **“Intersectionality: Feminism & Activism,”** Latino Cultural Center, UIC
- 2012, Presenter, **“Community Briefings: Graduate Student Findings,”** Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Conference Panelist, **“Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Pilot Study,”** National Association of Chicano & Chicana Studies Conference XXXIX: Community-University Partnerships: Research & Activism from Latino Chicago
- 2011, Conference Panelist, **“Duranguense: A Desire for Identity”** Globalization & Cultural Production in the Americas: Globalization, Latin American Popular Culture & Public Space

GRANTS & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

- Secured and supported **11+ institutional grants totaling \$140,500** for youth leadership, racial justice, community response, resilience, and organizational development initiatives.
- Developed **grant proposals and funding narratives,** aligning community needs and organizational priorities with funder interests and requirements.
- Cultivated **more than \$100,000 in individual-donor support** (2018–2026) through grassroots fundraising and relationship development.
- Selected awards: Crossroads Fund (\$6,000 Seed Grant, 2026; \$15,000 Resilience Fund, 2025; \$10,000 Critical Response Fund, 2024; \$15,000 Youth Fund for Social Change, 2024; \$30,000 Solidarity Fund, 2023; \$15,000 Youth Fund for Social Change, 2023; \$25,000 Chicago Racial Justice Pooled Fund, 2023; \$10,000 Critical Response Fund, 2022); Community Foundation for Women (\$5,000 Rapid Response, 2025); Oak Park & River Forest Community Foundation (\$6,000 Women Leaders in Philanthropy, 2024; \$2,500 NextGen Leaders in Philanthropy, 2024); Village of Oak Park (\$1,000 Community Relations Commission Mini-Grant, 2019).

TECHNICAL SKILLS & LANGUAGES

- Expert: MAXQDA (Qualitative Data Analysis), Microsoft Excel, Google Workspace
- Proficient: Native / Bilingual (English & Spanish)