

A portrait of Alex E. Chávez, a man with dark hair and a light beard, wearing a dark jacket over a light blue button-down shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a brick wall.

Alex E. Chávez

*Nancy O'Neill Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Fellow of the Institute for Latino Studies
University of Notre Dame*

VERSES AND FLOWS: MIGRANT LIVES AND THE SOUNDS OF CROSSING

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Abstract & Bio

In his award-winning book *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Duke 2017), Dr. Alex E. Chávez explores the contemporary politics of Mexican migrant cultural expression manifest in the sounds and aural poetics of huapango arribeño, a musical genre originating from north-central Mexico. In this presentation, he draws on this work to address how Mexican migrants voice desires of recognition and connection through performance, and the politics such desires attain amidst the transnational context of migrant deportability. As a researcher, artist, and participant, Chávez has consistently crossed the boundary between scholar and performer in the realms of academic research and publicly engaged work as a musician and producer. In this presentation, he draws on these experiences to address the politics of his intellectual and creative work and how he engages both to theorize around the political efficacy of sound-based practices, the “voice,” and the disciplinary futures of borderlands anthropology.

Alex E. Chávez is the Nancy O'Neill Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, where he is also a faculty fellow of the Institute for Latino Studies. His research and teaching explore Latina/o/x expressive culture in everyday life as manifest through sound, language, and performance. He has consistently crossed the boundary between performer and ethnographer in the realms of both academic research and publicly engaged work as an artist and producer. He has published widely—including in the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, *Latino Studies*, and the *Latin American Music Review*—has contributed to numerous volumes, and his writing has also been featured in public venues such as the *Huffington Post* and *Revista Contratiempo*.

His book *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Duke University Press, 2017) is the recipient of three book awards, including the Alan Merriam Prize from the Society for Ethnomusicology (2018), the Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology's Book Prize (2018), and the Association for Latina and Latino Anthropologists Book Award (2018). Supported by the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation, *Sounds of Crossing* represents the first extended study of huapango arribeño music and explores how “Mexican sounds”—as a locus of aesthetic behaviors, performative acts, and signifying practices—resonate across physical, aural, and cultural borders and what they reveal about transnational migrant lives lived across them.

An accomplished musician and multi-instrumentalist, Chávez has recorded and toured with his own music projects, composed documentary scores (most recently Emmy Award-winning *El Despertar* [2016]), and collaborated with Grammy Award-winning artists. In 2016, he produced the Smithsonian Folkways album *Serrano de Corazón* (2016). He currently serves as a Governor for the Chicago Chapter Board of the Recording Academy.

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