

Norma Elia Cantú—Chicana writer, folklorist, and professor of literature
Norma Elia Cantú became a feminist in her early life as a child growing up along the Texas-Mexico border. Joining the Women's Movement in the 1960s, Norma recognized that the racism she encountered as a Latina denied her access to an equal education and gender bias denied her the freedom of expression and action. The oldest of 11 children, Norma delayed college studies to work and supplement her father's meager income as a laborer. It was an eye-opening experience as she faced the reality of women's plight in the workplace--being hired at lesser pay than men and seeing rampant sexual harassment overlooked by employers who considered it "business as usual." Getting a college education would be Norma's advantage in fighting discrimination and abuse against women. While an undergraduate student at Texas A&I University in Laredo, Norma engaged in the Sissy Farenthold's grassroots campaign to become governor of Texas.

Already politically active, she went on to Texas A&I in Kingsville to earn a master's degree and become even more politicized as she marched on behalf of the ERA. As a PhD student, she studied in Madrid on a Fulbright fellowship, returned to Texas A&I in Laredo to teach on the English faculty. She continued her feminist work, focusing on battling the city's illiteracy, caring for women and children from Central America who were held in border detention centers, and matching mentors with young "at risk" girls in local schools. Today, Norma continues educating and helping young women find their path to consciousness. "What I find surprising in my young students is their lack of knowledge about feminist history," she laments. Norma had hoped that the nation had reached the time when there was no longer inequity in pay, disparity and double standards were eliminated, and terms such as "glass ceiling" and "women's oppression" would be archaic. "But this is not so," she says. "So I guess 'women's work' is indeed never done. Yet I am an optimist and I continue the struggle." Founder of the Society for Study of Gloria Anzaldúa, she is now the Murchison Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. She attempts to heed Anzaldúa's urging by "doing work that matters" and sees that as a cornerstone to her current feminist work.