

Fernando Ricardo Valenzuela (they/them/el/elle)

Phone: (702) 785-1990

Email: fernando.valenzuela@uconn.edu (work)
commandonando90@gmail.com (personal)

Website: <https://fernandovalenzuela.substack.com/>

EDUCATION

University of Connecticut Ph.D Student in Social Work	Storrs, CT Aug. 2026 - Present
University of Connecticut Master of Social Work <i>Concentration: Community Organizing</i>	Storrs, CT May 2024
Puerto Rico Travel Study Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Project	June 2023
University of Nevada, Reno B.S., Neuroscience	Reno, NV May 2014

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Spanish: Fluent

Portuguese: Conversational

French: Conversational

RESEARCH INTERESTS

International Social Work | Anti-Imperialism | Marxism | Global Neoliberalism | Participatory Action Research | Critical Social Work | Labor & Unions | Community & Political Organizing | Social Welfare Policy | Critical Consciousness

ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Independent Research Consultant, CT University of Connecticut, School of Social Work	May 2024 - Present
DataHaven	March 2025 - Present
Trinity College, Hartford, CT Adjunct Professor <i>Community Learning Program, CACT 102: Building Knowledge for Social Change</i>	Jan. 2025 - Present
Hartford Resident Advisory Board Member, Liberal Arts Action Lab	Aug. 2025 - Present
University of Connecticut, Hartford, CT Assistant Academic Director, Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative	Aug. 2025 - Oct. 2025
Graduate Student Researcher	April 2023 - May 2024
Center for International Social Work Studies Graduate Student Intern	Sept. 2022 - July 2023

Institute for Community Research, Hartford, CT	
Project Coordinator, CT Youth Food Program Alliance	March 2024 – Dec. 2024
Graduate Student Intern	Sept. 2023 – March 2024
Hispanic Health Council, Hartford, CT	
Community Research and Advocacy Assistant	March 2022 – Dec. 2022
Social Justice Committee Chair	Feb. 2022 – Dec. 2023
COVID-19 Community Educator	June 2021 – March 2022

PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

CREC Magnet Schools, Hartford, CT	
Paraprofessional/Substitute Teacher	Oct. 2020 – July 2021
Nevada Learning Academy, Las Vegas, NV	
Spanish Vacancy Substitute Teacher	Oct. 2019 – Sept. 2020
Leopoldo Alas Bilingual Primary School, Madrid, Spain	
English Language Assistant and Cultural Ambassador	Sept. 2016 – July 2019
Pebetero English Immersion Camps, Extremadura, Spain	
Education Coordinator	Summers of 2017 – 2019

ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE

Connecticut Social Workers for Palestine (CTSW4P), CT	
Co-Founder, Steering Committee Member	Dec. 2023 – Present
<i>Notable Achievements:</i>	
• Raised over \$1,000 for a family in Gaza • Presented research at CSWE 2025 National Conference • Hosted several “Palestinian Story Hours” to uplift Palestinian voices and perspectives • Supported various state-wide coalitions at protests, rallies, and related events	
Graduate Student Organization (GSO), University of Connecticut School of Social Work	
Community Organizing Chair	Sept. 2022 – May 2024
Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), CT, NV, SC	
Organizer, Translator	March 2020 – Oct. 2022
United Substitutes For Higher Wages and Better Benefits, Las Vegas, NV	
Founder, Steering Committee Member	Dec. 2019 – Jan. 2021
<i>Notable Achievements:</i>	
• Received \$4.8 million in raises from CCSD for all substitute teachers, the first raise in over 20 years • Established the largest substitute teacher group in the State of Nevada • Fought for and achieved the continued payment of over 1,000 substitute teachers during the COVID-19 school closures for the months of March – June 2020 • Interviewed with numerous local, statewide, and national media outlets, including appearances on KNPR with Dr. Lois Weiner, the New York Times, and the USA Today	

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Semilla Cafe & Studio, Hartford, CT Barista, Shift Lead	Nov. 2024 – July 2025
Cheesecake Factory, Reno, NV Server & Trainer	May 2014 – June 2015
BJ's Brewhouse and Restaurant, Las Vegas & Reno, NV Server & Trainer	March 2014 – July 2016
Food Runner	March 2014 – June 2015
Lead Host	July 2013 – March 2014
Starbucks, Las Vegas & Reno, NV Barista	July 2006 – Dec. 2009

GRANTS & RESEARCH SUPPORT

University of Connecticut Student Research Funding (\$1,000) Project Manager and Co-Investigator (PI Rebecca Thomas; Co-investigator Fizza Saghir). Understanding Climate Change Crisis Through a Post-Colonial Lens: Comparing Perspectives of Global North and Global South Youth and Young Adults.	2022
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (\$10,000) Co-Investigator (PI Christine Caruso). HHC HEARS: Establishing a Community Advisory Committee to Address Health Equity and Social Justice.	2022

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

University of Connecticut Dr. Nancy A. Humphreys Memorial Fellowship (\$4,000) <i>Project Title:</i> Bridging Research with Political Advocacy: Utilizing Critical Participatory Action Research for Juvenile Justice Policy Reform.	2026 – 2027
School of Social Work Scholarship (\$10,000)	2026 – 2030
Nancy Tarr Berdon Fund	2024
Puerto Rico Travel Study Fund	2023
Global Citizens Award	2023
Frank V. Carollo Scholarship	2022 – 2023

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Valenzuela, F.R. (under review). Embracing Dissent: A Critical Autoethnographic Account of Labor Organizing in the Nonprofit Industrial Complex.

Thomas, R., Saghir, F., **Valenzuela, F.R.**, & Redner, Taylor. (2026). Understanding Climate Change Crisis Through a Post-Colonial Lens: Comparing Perspectives of Global North and Global South Youth and Young Adults. *Journal of Policy Practice and Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42972-026-00150-w>

Singh S., Adler J.G.,* **Valenzuela F.R.**,* Jeter J., Smith T.R. (2025). Moving from manufactured ambivalence to building power: Recommendations for voter engagement interventions through a participatory project with formerly incarcerated people. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.70013>

*Graduate student co-authors at time of submission

**Equal co-authorship

BOOK CHAPTERS

Valenzuela, F.R., Saghir, F., Thomas, R. (Accepted Feb. 2026). Post-Coloniality and Social Work: How Implementing Critical Frameworks Can Expand the Profession's Response to the Climate Crisis. In Sarkar, I. & Banerjee, P., (Eds.), *Pathways to Social and Environmental Justice*. CRC Press. (Invited).

Singh, S., **Valenzuela, F.R.***, Jeter, J., Tsarkov, A., & Adler, J.G.* (in press, January 2026). The necessity of critical participatory research in working towards justice in sentencing: Values enacted and lessons learned. In E. Ruhland, J. Baldwin, J. Lane, & A. Nellis, (Eds.), *American Society of Criminology Division of Corrections and Sentencing Handbook Series, Collaborating across differences in sentencing and corrections: Process and outcomes* (Vol. 11). (Invited).

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Singh, S., Adler, J., **Valenzuela, F.R.**, Jeter, J., & Board of Pardons and Paroles. (2026). Reentry After a Life Behind Bars: A Participatory, Multi-Method Approach to Understanding the Experiences of Public Act 15-84 Beneficiaries in Connecticut after *Miller v. Alabama*. In Connecticut Sentencing Commission [Report].
<https://ctsentencingcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Public-Act-15-84-Outcomes-Report-Final-Draft.pdf>

Singh, S., **Valenzuela, F.R.**, Adler, J., Jeter, J., Sparaco, R., Tsarkov, A. (December, 2024). *Addressing the Needs of Formerly Incarcerated People: How Beneficiaries of Public Act 15-84 Can Help Improve Prison Conditions*. Policy brief.

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CONFERENCES

Thomas, R., **Valenzuela, F.R.**, Saghir, F. (Forthcoming Oct. 2026). Anti-resilience and the climate crisis: Strengthening systemic responses for equitable and sustainable solutions. Council on Social Work Education 72nd Annual Program Meeting. Atlanta, GA, USA.

Smith, J.** & **Valenzuela, F.R.**** (June 2026). *The Power of Peer-based Learning Groups: Cultivating Community & Collective Action*. International Association for Social Work with Groups, 2026 International Symposium: The Power of Groups: Cultivating Hope, Acknowledging Fears and Taking Action. San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Singh, S., **Valenzuela, F.R.**, & Adler, J. (Jan. 2026). *Understanding the experience of a JLWOP sentence and re-entry subsequent to PA 15-84: Findings from a participatory project*. In D. Byndon (Organizer), *Leveraging State and National Research Partnerships to Affect Change in Youth Sentencing Policies* [Symposium]. Society for Social Work and Research 30th Annual Conference, Leading for Transformative Change: Aligning Social Work Science with Policy and Practice. Washington, D.C., USA

Valenzuela, F.R. (October 2025). *Social work, nonprofits, and unionizing: Examining organizational structure to promote equity and labor rights*. [Oral Presentation]. Council on Social Work Education 71st Annual Program Meeting. Denver, CO, USA.

Smith, J.** & **Valenzuela, F.R.**** (October 2025). *Uplifting Palestinian perspectives: Peer-based learning for critical consciousness and values-guided action* [Oral Presentation]. Council on Social Work Education 71st Annual Program Meeting. Denver, CO, USA.

Thomas, R., Saghir, F.,** & **Valenzuela, F.R.**** (September 2025). *Climate Change Crisis and Eco-Anxiety: Comparing Perspectives of the Global North and the Global South Young Adults Based in Connecticut* [Poster Presentation]. 2025 Connecticut Symposium on Climate Change and Health. Yale School of Public Health, New Haven, CT, USA.

Singh, S., **Valenzuela, F.R.** +, Adler, J.*, Jeter, J.+ (2024). *How We Improve Conditions Within: Preliminary Findings from a Participatory Research Project With Beneficiaries of P.A. 15-84.* In Judiciary/Labor [Panel], Moving Beyond Implications, Research into Policy, 2nd Annual Conference, Connecticut Scholars Strategy Network. Hartford, CT, USA.

Thomas, R., Saghir, F.,** & **Valenzuela, F.R.**** (October, 2024). *Understanding Climate Change Crisis: Comparing Perspectives of US-born and International Youth and Young Adults* [Oral Presentation]. Council on Social Work Education 70th Annual Program Meeting. Kansas City, MO, USA.

Patten, E.** & **Valenzuela, F.R.**** (April, 2024). *Reflections on the ethics and implications of United States social work practice following a cross-cultural exchange between students from a colonial power and its colony* [Oral Presentation]. The Social Work & Social Development Joint World Conference. Panama City, Panama.

Singh, S., Adler, J., Champagne, L., **Valenzuela, F.R.**, Jeter, J., Rhodes-Smith, T., & Petit, U. (January, 2024). *Building Power with "Third Citizens:" Centering Critical Consciousness in Co-Transforming the Voter Engagement Model.* In C. Elsaesser (Organizer), Unlocking Community Power to Co-Create Health Solutions [Symposium], Society for Social Work and Research 28th Annual Conference, Recentering & Democratizing Knowledge: The Next 30 Years of Social Work Science. Washington, D.C., USA

Caruso, C.C. & **Valenzuela, F.R.** (November, 2022). *HHC HEARS: Establishing a Community Advisory Committee to Address Health Equity and Social Justice* [Oral Presentation]. Connecticut Public Health Association Annual Conference. Plantsville, CT, USA

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INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Singh, S., Jeter, J., Smith, T.R., Adler, J.G.*, & **Valenzuela, F.R.*** (November, 2024). *Moving from Manufactured Ambivalence to Building Power: Recommendations for Voter Engagement Interventions Through a Participatory Project With Formerly Incarcerated People.* Invited speaker at the Office of Research and Scholarship Spring Fall Event Series, School of Social Work, University of Connecticut.

Valenzuela, F.R. (November 2024). *Community Organizing Career Panel.* Invited speaker at the School of Social Work, University of Connecticut.

Bulmash, A.,** **Valenzuela, F.R.****, & Weingart, Z.** (November, 2024). *Why Social Workers Should Care about Palestine* [Event Presentation]. Central Connecticut State University, Voice for Palestine: Advocacy and Awareness Night. Social Work Club. New Britain, CT, USA.

Valenzuela, F.R. (September, 2024) *Celebrating 30 Years of Advancing International Learning and Connections.* [Panel]. University of Connecticut School of Social Work, Center for International Social Work Studies 30th Anniversary Reception. Hartford, CT, USA

Bissereth, C.,** Demichele, J.,** **Valenzuela, F.R.**** & Washington, R.** (September, 2023) *Turning Passion into Power: Overcoming Colonialism Through Art, Culture, Acompañamiento, and Community Action* [Event Presentation]. University of Connecticut School of Social Work Hispanic Heritage Month: Past, Present, Possible in Puerto Rico through Prosperity, Power, and Progress. Hartford, CT, USA.

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GUEST LECTURES

Valenzuela, F.R. (Aug., 2026) *Introduction to Participatory Action Research*. Guest lecture at Smith College. Virtual, USA.

Valenzuela, F.R. (April, 2026) *Beyond Bars: Utilizing Participatory Research for Policy Reform in the Criminal Legal System*. Guest lecture at University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. Hartford, CT, USA.

Valenzuela, F.R. (November, 2025) *Critical International Social Work and Global Solidarity*. Guest lecture at University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. Hartford, CT, USA.

Valenzuela, F.R. (November, 2025). *Understanding Participatory Research*. Guest lecture at Southern Connecticut State University, School of Social Work. New Haven, CT, USA.

Valenzuela, F.R. (April, 2025). *Utilizing Political Organizing & Community-Based Research as Tools for Liberation*. Guest lecture at Southern Connecticut State University, School of Social Work. New Haven, CT, USA.

Kotey, D.** & **Valenzuela, F.R.**** (March, 2022). *COVID-19 Racial Disparities, Barriers, and Vaccine Hesitancy*. Guest lecture at Trinity College Liberal Arts Action Lab. Hartford, CT, USA.

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MEDIA APPEARANCES

Valenzuela, F.R. (February, 2025). *Semilla Cafe and Studio thrives after being at risk of shutting down last summer*. Interview. <https://www.fox61.com/article/news/local/hartford-county/hartford/semilla-cafe-and-studio-thrives-after-risk-of-shutting-down-last-summer/520-1c040ef8-bcb3-40ae-9dc0-330a59b2a8ad>

Valenzuela, F.R. (February, 2024). *With protesters from both sides on hand, Hartford City Council votes down Gaza cease-fire resolution*. Interview. <https://www.fox61.com/article/news/community/ct-cultured/debunking-covid-vaccine-theories-bipoc-community-connecticut/520-8f77e87c-7da5-4088-b281-a7e8650e10b3>

Valenzuela, F.R. (November, 2021). *Doctor debunked vaccine theories as hesitancy remains among CT's BIPOC community*. Interview. <https://www.ctinsider.com/capitalregion/article/hartford-ct-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-18689940.php>

United Substitutes for Higher Wages and Better Benefits, (September, 2021). *Pandemic Teacher Shortages Imperil In-Person Schooling*. Interview. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/pandemic-substitute-teacher-shortages.html>

Valenzuela, F.R. (April, 2021). *Substitute Teacher Blues*. Podcast. <https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/63-substitute-teacher-blues-with-cohost-fernando>

Valenzuela, F.R. (October, 2020). *CCSD substitute teachers to get pay raises*. Interview. <https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/education/ccsd-substitute-teachers-to-get-pay-raises-2167618/>

Valenzuela, F.R. (September, 2020). *Between COVID-19 and layoffs, schools may not have enough teachers to get through the year*. Interview. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/09/03/covid-back-school-layoffs-teaching-jobs/5638287002/>

Valenzuela, F.R. (August, 2020). *CCSD substitutes anxious over lost unemployment pay, new school year*. Interview. <https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/education/ccsd-substitutes-anxious-over-lost-unemployment-pay-new-school-year-2095872/>

Valenzuela, F.R. (July, 2020). *With schools sitting empty longer, support staff wait for answers about their roles*. Interview. <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/with-schools-sitting-empty-longer-support-staff-wait-for-answers-about-their-roles>

Valenzuela, F.R. (May, 2020). Clark County School Board to discuss long-sought raises for subs. Interview.
<https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/education/clark-county-school-board-to-discuss-long-sought-raises-for-subs-2019408/>

Valenzuela, F.R. (April, 2020). We can Make it Better. Podcast.
<https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/22-unlocked-we-can-make-it-better-with-fernando-valenzuela>

Valenzuela, F.R. (March, 2020). Education Post-COVID 19. Podcast.
<https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/32-education-post-covid-19>

Valenzuela, F.R. (March, 2020). 'The last straw': Most CCSD subs go unpaid during school closure. Interview.
<https://lasvegassun.com/news/2020/mar/24/last-straw-most-ccsd-subs-go-unpaid-school-closure/>

Valenzuela, F.R. (March, 2020). Brutally Honest: Coronavirus - Mutual Aid ideas, News and Updates from Educators, and Solidarity. Podcast.
<https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/bonus-brutally-honest-coronavirus-mutual-aid-ideas-news-and-updates-from-educators-and-solidarity>

Valenzuela, F.R. (March, 2020). The Continued Battle for Substitute Teachers. Podcast.
<https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/28-the-continued-battle-for-substitute-teachers>

Valenzuela, F.R. (February, 2020). CCSD workers speak out on payroll problems at school board meeting. Interview.
<https://news3lv.com/news/local/ccsd-workers-speak-out-on-payroll-problems-at-school-board-meeting>

Valenzuela, F.R. (February, 2020). The Myths of Subbing Leading to FullTime Teaching Positions. Podcast.
<https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/the-myths-of-subbing-leading-to-full-time-teaching-positions>

Valenzuela, F.R. (January, 2020). Long-Term Substitutes Fill Hundreds Of Teacher Vacancies In CCSD. Interview.
<https://knpr.org/show/knprs-state-of-nevada/2020-01-23/long-term-substitutes-fill-hundreds-of-teacher-vacancies-in-csd>

Valenzuela, F.R. (January, 2020). The Exploitation of Substitute Teachers. Podcast.
<https://littleredschoolhouse.libsyn.com/19-exploitation-of-substitute-teachers>

Valenzuela, F.R. (January, 2020). Clark County substitute teachers pursue better pay, benefits. Interview.
<https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/education/clark-county-substitute-teachers-pursue-better-pay-benefits-1929081/>