Four undocumented Mexican American students, two great teachers, one robot-building contest . . . and a major motion picture.

In 2004, four Latino teenagers arrived at the Marine Advanced Technology Education Robotics Competition at the University of California, Santa Barbara. They were born in Mexico but raised in Phoenix, Arizona, where they attended an underfunded public high school. No one had ever suggested to Oscar, Cristian, Luis, or Lorenzo that they might amount to much—but two inspiring science teachers had convinced these impoverished, undocumented kids from the desert who had never even seen the ocean that they should try to build an underwater robot.

And build a robot they did. Their robot wasn’t pretty, especially compared to those of the competition. They were going up against some of the best collegiate engineers in the country, including a team from MIT backed by a $10,000 grant from ExxonMobil. The Phoenix teenagers had scraped together less than $1,000 and built their robot out of scavenged parts. This was never a level competition—and yet, against all odds . . . they won!

But this is just the beginning for these four, whose story—which became a key inspiration to the DREAMers movement—will go on to include first-generation college graduations, deportation, bean-picking in Mexico, and service in Afghanistan. Joshua Davis’s Spare Parts is a story about overcoming insurmountable odds and four young men who proved they were among the most patriotic and talented Americans in this country—even as the country tried to kick them out. (Courtesy of Macmillan)

Reviews

“Spare Parts is an unforgettable tale of hope and human ingenuity. Against a backdrop of urban desert decay, a faltering school system, and our country’s cutthroat immigration policies, Joshua Davis offers a moving testament to how teamwork, perseverance, and a few good teachers can lift up and empower even the humblest among us.” —Héctor Tobar, author of Deep Down Dark

“A great feel-good tale of scrappy underdogs beating long odds. But there’s more to the story, and Spare Parts illuminates the human side of two polarizing political issues: immigration and education . . . Spare Parts is a delightful book . . . A great American story.” - Washington Post
Proposed Updates for 2018

1. Purchase the book for all incoming freshmen utilizing funds from the Orientation and Provost’s budget. Nationally, best practices include purchasing the book for all incoming students as shared at the National First Year Experience Conference in 2018. Freshman also indicated through survey feedback in 2017 that most students did not purchase the book nor bring a copy to the discussion group. The committee strongly believes that purchasing the book will greatly increase the likelihood that students will read the book and come prepared to discuss the content during Orientation.
   a. Estimated Cost: $6500 (includes 850 books and shipping costs)

2. Develop a facilitator training to be conducted once in the spring semester and once in the summer for all facilitators. The training will be developed and facilitated by members of the selection committee. Additionally, a facilitator manual will be developed with best practices for engaging freshmen in the reading discussion.

3. Develop summer engagement strategies to encourage participation in the book discussion prior to arrival such as a summer response contest for a chance to win prizes. This contest can be evaluated on the basis of writing mechanics, creativity and connection to overall themes. The themes can include but limited to: innovation/science/technology, persistence and opportunity, experiential learning, citizenship/ civic responsibility, mentoring/teamwork, risk taking, immigration, and inequality.

4. Create follow-up programming in the fall semester that peer leaders will assist in implementation, including:
   a. Movie screening of the documentary based on the film.
   b. Trebuchet building contest
   c. Possible talk with featured robotics teacher from Spare Parts, Fred Lajvardi.

2018 Selection Committee

Faculty:
- Babek Heydari, Associate Professor in the School of Systems and Enterprises
- Donald Lombardi, Associate Teaching Professor in the School of Business; Director of Veterans Programs
- Jennifer McBryan, Assistant Professor in the College of Arts and Letters
- Keith Sheppard, Professor and Senior Advisor to the Dean of the Schaefer School of Engineering
- Deborah Sinnreich-Levi, Associate Professor in the College of Arts and Letters
Staff:
- Kristie Damell, Associate Dean of Students
- Christopher Shemanski, Associate Director of Student Life

Students:
- Soindos Abdah, Class of 2018
- Emily Fea, Class of 2018
- Ali Hameed, Class of 2020

Other Universities that Used *Spare Parts*:
- Johns Hopkins University
- Providence College
- Washington State University- Vancouver
- Broward College
- North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC)
- Santa Ana College