**Exceptional Faculty: STC Professor and Human Trafficking Prevention Activist Jenny Bryson Clark**

When South Texas College professor Jenny Bryson Clark lectures, her voice carries far past the confines of the classroom to places like Allahabad, India and San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where the horrors of human trafficking, forced labor, and gang violence are devastating lives and destroying families.

When she’s not opening students’ eyes in her classes, Clark is often traveling the world researching, raising awareness, and fighting human trafficking and modern slavery.

“It’s the fact that so many people are forced to accept precarious labor conditions that drives my passion for exposing the systems that exploit them,” says Clark, who has been teaching at South Texas College for 19 years. She is also a founding board member of the Rio Grande Anti-Human-Trafficking Coalition, a local organization focused on helping human trafficking victims in the Rio Grande Valley.

An expert frequently interviewed by media, Clark is the co-editor of two defining textbooks on the subject: “The SAGE Handbook of Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery, 1st Edition” and “Human Trafficking: A Complex Phenomenon of Globalization and Vulnerability, 1st Edition.”

For nearly two decades, Clark has called the Rio Grande Valley home. As an associate professor of political science and chair of women’s studies at STC, she has been able to share her extensive knowledge and passion for social justice.

“I have been able to utilize much of my research in my classes,” says Clark.

That research includes work for the last fourteen years on forced labor in supply chains in the Global South—low- and middle-income countries located in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean—and the intersection between migration and human trafficking in Central America, tracing routes from places like El Salvador and Honduras through Mexico and into the United States. Clark was a co-principal investigator on a grant funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The research explored the connection between migration, human trafficking, and organized crime.

“It was somewhat difficult research,” says Clark, who added that interviewing cartel members about their illegal activities was obviously not an option. Instead, we interviewed government officials, civil society members, and migrants who were “using their life savings to embark on an extremely dangerous journey to try and get to the United States.” The highlights for Clark were an interview with former leftist guerilla and former congressman Raul Mijango, and an interview with a “coyote,” who was profiting from the migration business.

Clark’s research gives STC students a front-row seat to history as it unfolds. In her classes, Clark shares the big-picture perspective of how globalization and inequitable systems can cause poverty, migration, and human trafficking risks. Countries with poor economies force people to migrate to where they can find work. Entering a country without permission pushes them in to the informal economy, and at risk of being exploited and trafficked.

Across brothels, factories, mines, construction sites, and even private homes, it’s estimated that 40 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking. In the United States alone, the Global Slavery Index estimates that more than 400,000 people could be living in this modern slavery.

That’s why, for the past 15 years, Clark has been raising awareness through STC’s annual conference on human trafficking. This year’s conference, arriving in April, is set to be titled “The Trafficked Among Us: The Hidden Commodity.”

The planning committee includes students, as well as faculty from STC and UT-RGV, where Clark also teaches part-time. She collaborates with local organizations, including the Rio Grande Valley Anti-Trafficking Taskforce, the Texas Civil Rights Project, and Fuerza del Valle, a division of the Texas Civil Rights Project that advocates for domestic workers in the Rio Grande Valley.

“Our focus is on the factors that create vulnerability to trafficking,” Clark says about the event.

The first day of the conference is devoted to global perspectives on human trafficking. On the second day, attendees hone in on the United States and Texas. Keynote speakers this year include retired Ambassador-at-Large Luis C. deBaca, a highly decorated former federal prosecutor who spearheaded policy efforts against modern slavery and paved the way for the United States’ Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

Human trafficking has proliferated into a global crisis, and the conference seeks to raise awareness, Clark says. We need to address the systemic factors that allow trafficking to flourish. Human trafficking is defined as “a crime that involves exploiting a person for labor, services, or commercial sex” by The U.S. Department of Justice.

“People don’t really understand the scope of exploitation in global supply chains,” she explains, referencing a system in which global economies depend on labor and other services outsourced from remote countries. According to Clark, “it is in the peripheral areas of global supply chains, which is basically most of the Global South, that you find forced and precarious labor and trafficking.”

For example, a BBC investigation on human trafficking revealed a staggering number of women from places including the Philippines, Malaysia, and India being sold into deplorable conditions through an online black market.

Part of the difficulty in addressing human trafficking, according to Clark, is that trafficking is perpetuated by the contemporary global economy and the intersection of race, gender, and caste. She believes that real change depends on addressing the root causes, such as the political economy and restrictive border policies, at the national and global level. She was recently quoted in a Reuters article where she stated that governments are complicit in exacerbating vulnerability to trafficking through their security approaches to migration.

It’s this kind of political dialogue that gets her students fired up and ready to get involved. Clark’s grads have gone on to work for organizations including Fuerza Del Valle and LUPE (La Unión del Pueblo Entero), a community union focused on generating social change through civic engagement in the Rio Grande Valley.

Law school is also a common destination for Clark’s students. She has seen some of her students become human rights lawyers or work for nonprofit organizations fighting injustice.

And just as much as she inspires her students to seek meaningful careers, Clark says her students continue to fuel her passion for teaching.

“My students value education,” says Clark, who finds that they are incredibly engaged in her political science courses, where many topics hit home. For Clark, helping her classes grapple with both big-picture and local political issues is deeply gratifying.