“Higher education struggles to be relevant. Universities are slow to change, mostly due to tradition … It falls on the more creative and courageous to delve into the middle of the struggle,” says Dr. Steve Arvizu, former president of Oxnard College, in describing the contributions of one of Diverse’s 2011 Emerging Scholars.

For 10 years now, we’ve kicked off the new year by celebrating in the first edition the contributions of a select group of up-and-coming academics of color. In selecting the Emerging Scholars, our panel of editors and reporters looks for scholars who are breaking new ground in research and advancing our understanding of complex, contemporary issues with scholarship that is interesting and timely. Although they’re under 40, they’ve already established a legacy of excellence, and many are activists motivated by a yearning to effect change. We look for scholars whose work is relevant and impactful.

This year’s class of award-winning academics doesn’t disappoint. In the following pages, you’ll read about the anthropologist, whom Arvizu was referencing, whose upbringing in a migrant farm worker community inspires her research into human rights issues surrounding Mexican immigration to the U.S. You’ll meet a professor of dance who uses choreography inspired by African-American literature to explore ideas of identity, race, social change and social justice.

We feature a legal scholar whose work to end violence against Native women greatly influenced passage of the new Tribal Law and Order Act. Meet a researcher, seemingly on the verge of a vaccine for chlamydia, whose guiding principles were famously summed up by Dr. Maurice Hilleman: “Science has to produce something useful. That’s the payback to society for support of the enterprise.”

Like this class, previous Emerging Scholars have taken scholarship and service to new heights. Coming soon: A special web page, DiverseEducation.com/EmergingScholars/, where you will be able to reacquaint yourselves with previous winners and look for updates throughout the year on what they’re up to these days. In the meantime, we’re sure you’ll enjoy reading about this year’s class as much as we enjoyed writing about them.
mathematics. I have never heard of a professor who was Ardila’s dissertation adviser, notes that “what really sets Federico apart from others is his devotion to promoting and encouraging mathematics. I have never heard of a younger person besides him having positions of such responsibility.”

— By Lydia Lum