

Florida State University honors Latinx culture with inaugural celebration

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FSU's inaugural Latinx Cultural Celebration featured a keynote address by Nicaraguan-born activist Juana Bordas. (Paige Rentz)

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Florida State University students, faculty, staff and administrators gathered for a spirited cultural celebration of the Latinx community Tuesday, Sept.

17, in Ruby Diamond Concert Hall.

Guests of FSU's inaugural Latinx Cultural Celebration were welcomed by the sounds of the Latino Soul Orchestra, who provided Latin tunes before the event. Associate Professor of Education Lara Perez-Felkner and Assistant Professor of English John Ribo, who serve as co-chairs for the Latinx Faculty/Staff Network, hosted the program.

"We're so honored to be a part of this celebration and community that is joining together so many different cultures and backgrounds, students, staff, friends, community members and alumni," Perez-Felkner said.

Before the program officially kicked off event, the hosts invited the audience to take a moment to honor the land on which the university now sits — recognizing it as the ancestral home of the Apalachee, Seminole, Creek, Muskogean and Miccosukee people.

"Without them we would not have access to this gathering and this dialogue," Ribo said. "We take this opportunity to thank and honor the original caretakers of this land."

A processional of flags representing more than 20 Latinx countries followed the moment of silence. Students paraded into Ruby Diamond holding colorful flags, representing countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico.

FSU President John Thrasher welcomed attendees and reinforced diversity as one the University's top priorities.

"As the nation observes National Hispanic Heritage Month, it's wonderful to pay tribute to the histories, cultures and contributions of Florida State University's Latinx students, faculty and staff," Thrasher said. "FSU embraces and celebrates its diversity, and events like this help enhance our cultural awareness and educate our campus community about the contributions of generations of Latinx Americans."

National Hispanic Heritage Month runs from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 and honors the history, culture and contributions of American citizens and immigrants whose ancestors came from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Central

America, South America and Spain. In 1968, a week-long celebration was formed under President Lyndon B. Johnson. It expanded to a month under President Ronald Reagan.

Kristian Diaz, director of the Hispanic/Latino Student Union, offered the student welcome and said the event was the start of a new era at Florida State.

“Latinx students serve in several roles on campus where we continue to leave our mark every day,” Diaz said. “Most importantly, we celebrate and expand our culture through our Hispanic Heritage Month. As we proudly kick off this month we will bring our vast community together to engage in difficult conversations, but also create lasting memories through films, speakers and discussion-based events.”

Miguel Hernandez, interim director of the Center for Leadership and Social Change, kept the spirit of celebration going through his occasion.

“This gathering provides an opportunity to acknowledge,” Hernandez said. “It provides an opportunity to be acknowledged. I believe this is a humanizing experience from a personal standpoint — to be seen, to be valued, to be included in academic spaces, such as this one, that many of us in the Latino, Latina, Latinx faculty, staff and students call home.”

During his remarks, Hernandez presented a short video from FSU administrators on the importance of the celebration and then encouraged the audience to celebrate with cheers and applause as he shared a few Florida State highlights.

“Come celebrate the fact that FSU Law School has ranked in the top 10 for Hispanic students for more than a decade consistently,” he said. “Come celebrate with me the fact that our College of Medicine has been recognized for its excellence in diversity and has also ranked in the top 10 for its enrollment of Hispanic students, producing doctors for our community.”

Hernandez also said FSU was recently named an emerging Hispanic-serving institution with more than 20 percent of its undergraduate

population identifying as Latinx.

The event included the recognition of a star student and faculty member from the FSU Latinx community. Vivianne Asturizaga received the Rosalinda Gonzales Award. The award is named for the first Latina woman believed to have graduated from FSU in 1921.

Professor of Modern Languages Delia Poey received the Latinx Distinguished Service award. Poey's nominators praised her for being a campuswide champion for the Latinx community.

Faculty, staff, and administrators who completed the FSU Diversity & Inclusion Certificate also were recognized. The goal of the program is to find ways in which members of the FSU community can assist in creating a welcoming and inclusive campus for all.

There are currently more than 200 faculty, staff and administrators enrolled in the certificate program from more than 18 departments and 11 colleges, including the Panama City Campus and the Ringling Campus in Sarasota.

The program closed with a keynote address by Nicaraguan-born activist Juana Bordas, who serves as president of Mestiza Leadership International — a company focusing on diversity and organizational change.

"You are my sheroes and heroes," Bordas said. "You young people that are here today ready to celebrate your life and your culture and prepare to be the leaders of 21st century, because that's what Latinos are."

Bordas, who came to America as a child on a banana boat, was the first among her seven siblings to go to college. She discussed her own family's history and that of Latinx people from all over the world. She talked about Latin influences in America's culture from food to music and their journey for civil rights and equality in the United States.

Bordas said Latinx people they are positive, hardworking and inclusive, and she encouraged attendees to continue to learn about the Latinx culture and continue to portray those qualities in today's society.

"As we form our identity as a people, as we step forward and say we are

here to create the multicultural society, we are here to bring humanism, love and generosity into the mainstream,” Bordas said. “We are here for people to understand it doesn’t matter where you came from, we’re all a part of the human family.”

The Latinx Cultural Celebration was sponsored by the Center for Leadership and Social Change, in partnership with the President’s Council on Diversity and Inclusion, the Division of Student Affairs and the Latinx Faculty/Staff Network.
