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Viva Latinx

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VIVA Latinx

DePaul continues to
expand its innovative
programming and
resources for
Latinx communities

By Marilyn Ferdinand

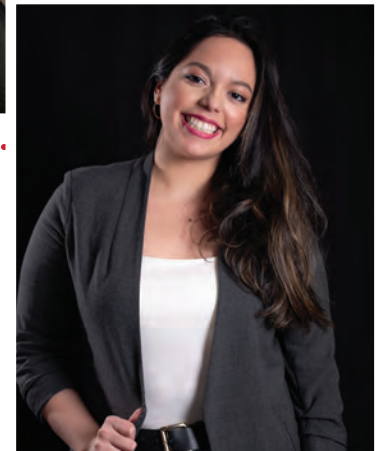
DePaul University's diverse educational opportunities have long included the history, language and culture of Latin American and other Spanish-speaking countries, as well as Latino/a/x communities in the United States. As an outgrowth of its commitment to this important segment of global society, the university's pedagogy and programming are more responsive than ever to the Latinx experience.

La DePaulia

La DePaulia has impeccable timing. The Spanish-language, online-only student newspaper that is run out of the DePaulia office was ramping up when the city received the news in late December that Hoy, the Chicago Tribune's Spanish-language publication, was shuttering its operations.

Since mid-January 2020, La DePaulia has been a lifeline of information for Chicago's Spanish-speaking student community and the city's Latinx population. Hillary Flores, La DePaulia's editor in chief, and Managing Editor Maria Guerrero track down news for their niche audience. Izabella Grimaldo writes and edits editorials as La DePaulia's opinion editor, Jonathan Aguilar handles photography and video as its multimedia editor, and a cadre of journalism students contribute as needed.

The DePaulia had experimented with dual English-Spanish stories and received positive responses. Shane René, the DePaulia's 2019–20 editor in chief, says, "A number of students in the communication program—mostly journalism—set up a Latinx journalists club that has been talking about trying to find a place to do [a La DePaulia] for a long time." When René and faculty advisor Marla Krause brought up the idea of a Spanish DePaulia, Flores jumped at the chance. The long winter break allowed her to pull a staff together, plan the stories and develop a look for the publication.



Top: La DePaulia Managing Editor Maria Guerrero working with Flores; Right: La DePaulia Editor in Chief Hillary Flores

“We don’t have the experience of journalists who have been in the industry for years, but we can definitely provide a youthful voice.”

–Hillary Flores

Originally, La DePaulia was designed to be a print insert in the DePaulia once a quarter, but only one print edition was produced before the novel coronavirus hit the United States, forcing DePaul and pretty much everything else to close in-person operations.

“Right now, social media is the most important thing,” Flores says. “We’ve been trying to keep people informed through email and Twitter. We also started a Facebook page for La DePaulia to keep people updated with the most current stories every day.”

Krause says, “They’re trying to reach people outside of the DePaul community, so their stories, for the most part, are pretty different from those in the DePaulia. But if they’re doing something that we think the DePaulia readers would be interested in, they’ll translate it into English for us, and if we’ve got something that we think the larger Chicago area would be interested in, then they’ll take the story and translate it into Spanish.”

Among the stories La DePaulia has covered was Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s approval of financial aid for undocumented immigrants. “We decided to cover it from a DePaul angle and how this is going to affect some students currently at DePaul, undocumented or documented,” says Flores. “It’s interesting to see how a lot of these students are in different positions within this crisis.”

“We have published an opinion piece on how ICE detainees are being treated,” she continues. “They’re still in crowded places, and many are not being given the equipment necessary to protect themselves.” Other stories have reported on the smokestack demolition in Little Village that spewed coal dust and other possible contaminants throughout the neighborhood and, venturing further afield, the

“All of us at DePaul seem to be involved in the community one way or another.”

–Bill Johnson González

ongoing controversy about whether Cuba’s health system is performing as flawlessly during the pandemic as it claims to be.

When reflecting on the role of student journalism in the larger media landscape, Flores says, “Obviously, we don’t have the experience of journalists who have been in the industry for years, but we can definitely provide a youthful voice. We want to push forward and bring that different angle to what is affecting our communities.”

Center for Latino Research

Since 1985, DePaul’s Center for Latino Research (CLR) has been a hub of activity that has reached out to engage Chicago’s diverse Latinx communities and scholars. Its new director, Associate Professor Bill Johnson González, is working hard to expand its mission of advancing scholarship in Latinx and Latin American studies and, especially, to reach out with that research to the larger community.

Johnson González explains that the center has three major components. The first is a competitive faculty fellowship program, begun in 2003 and supported by the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. “We grant up to three faculty fellowships in our college each year. The fellowships allow faculty to take time off from teaching to pursue their own research,” he says.

CLR fellows have pursued a broad range of projects in the fields of sociology, anthropology, history, art, film and media, literature, and education. The 2020–21 fellows are Associate Professor Emanuele Colombo, Associate Professor Delia Cosentino and Assistant Professor Joe Tafoya. They are pursuing research in narratives of the indigenous Guaraní people of South America who were settled in missions by Jesuits, an urban history of Mexico City as inflected by structures of the Aztec Empire, and influences on the political involvement of Latinx communities in the United States, respectively.

CLR’s second component is *Díálogo*, a twice-yearly, peer-reviewed journal founded in 1996 that is listed in major bibliographies and catalogs. One of Johnson González’s goals as CLR director is to build new structures in the journal that will allow it to expand its content and regional relevance.



Bill Johnson González, director of the Center for Latino Research

“Most of the past issues have been around a theme, and most of the research articles have been curated by guest editors who are experts on that theme,” Johnson González says. “But now we’ve opened Diálogo to general submissions. So, part of the issue is going to be dedicated to all the various fields we represent in Latino and Latin American studies.”

Johnson González also is interested in strengthening Diálogo’s regional identity. He plans to have a section in every issue devoted to research about Latinx populations in the Midwest. “This is something that could give Diálogo a real distinctiveness as the place where you want to publish work on Latino communities and dynamics in the Midwest,” he explains.

The third component is programming. Johnson González says, “We try to work with faculty and other institutes and centers at DePaul to bring guest speakers to campus or to put on events that are related to Latino and Latin American research.” A recent speaker series, “Precarious Lives: Anti-Latinx Racism, Immigration and Detention Centers,” featured a talk and Q&A with author Leo Chávez, a screening of Luis Argueta’s deportation film “The U Turn,” and an examination at the treatment of immigrants at U.S.-Mexico detention centers with journalist and author Andrea Pitzer. CLR also collaborated with the Center for Black Diaspora to bring prominent Haitian American novelist Edwidge Danticat to DePaul.

Johnson González doesn’t skip on other ways to celebrate Latinx culture, such as film series or museum visits. He is especially proud of the annual celebratory banquet for graduating Latinx students and the Oral History project of interviews with prominent Latinx community leaders.

“I’m sure other universities have their connections to various community groups, but I feel that DePaul’s connections are particularly close,” Johnson González asserts. “I am always inspired by our colleagues here at DePaul who have very deep and long-standing connections. For example, Juan Mora-Torres, an associate professor of history who is one of the members of our advisory board for Diálogo, is very deeply involved in the Pilsen community.

“All of us at DePaul seem to be involved in the community one way or another.”



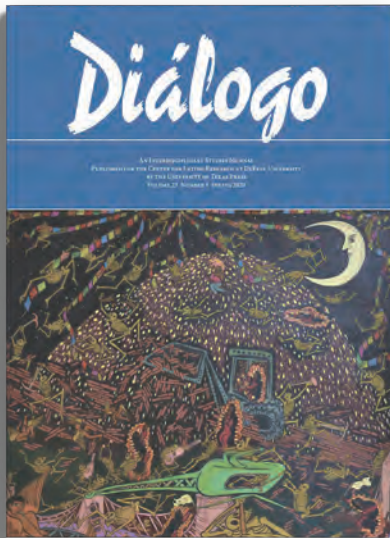
Former DePaul
Art Museum Director
Julie Rodrigues Widholm

Latinx Initiative and “LatinXAmerican”

One of the university’s most recent successes is the DePaul Art Museum (DPAM). Built and opened a short nine years ago, the small but mighty museum has already had a major impact on the Chicago art scene.

With its intense focus on Chicago art and artists, DPAM has amassed a collection that includes such renowned Chicago Imagists as Karl Wirsum, Gladys Nilsson, Barbara Rossi, Ray Yoshida and Ed Paschke; architectural drawings from the early 20th-century firm D.H. Burnham Co., builders of iconic structures in the Chicago skyline; and 114 contemporary works donated by collector Chuck Thurow by 59 artists associated with Chicago, including Phyllis Bramson, Nick Cave and Theaster Gates.

Julie Rodrigues Widholm, DPAM’s director and chief curator before becoming the director of the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive this past summer, as well as the Chicago Tribune’s 2019 Chicagoan of the Year for museums, took on the lack of representation of Latin American artists in museum collections, exhibitions and public programs with the multiyear Latinx Initiative.



Diálogo, DePaul’s peer-reviewed journal in Latinx studies

“We hope that students will find some familiarity in the galleries that maybe they hadn’t noticed before.”

—Julie Rodrigues Widholm

“The desire to create an initiative was in some ways inspired by Art Design Chicago, which was a yearlong focus on art in Chicago, spearheaded by the Terra Foundation for American Art in 2018,” says Rodrigues Widholm. “Seeing that kind of long-term planning, multiyear converging of different organizations, museums, artists and scholars was inspiring.”

As part of the initiative, the museum is preparing a far-ranging exhibit called “LatinXAmerican.” “We have chosen it specifically to be as inclusive as possible,” Rodrigues Widholm explains. “The title is a little bit of a graphic play. It’s meant to suggest the intersection of Latinx, Latin American and American identities.”

Rodrigues Widholm acknowledges that the terms “Latin American,” “Latino” and “Latina” do little to convey a specific sense of the geographic, postcolonial, racial and linguistic identities that exist within the Latin American and Latinx communities. With “LatinXAmerican” and the larger initiative, she says, “we’re interested in surfacing those differences, but also to create a conversation around them.”

As with everything at DPAM, pedagogical concerns are integrated into the planning process. “We’re inviting others to bring their questions here so that we can have public programs and symposia where we can talk about why Latin American art history feels so separate from Latinx art history or why Latinx contemporary art isn’t part of Latin American art history,” says Rodrigues Widholm.

Toward this end, the museum has partnered with DePaul’s Department of Latin American and Latino Studies to strengthen the impact of the Latinx Initiative on campus. Members of the DePaul community who will be invited to participate in these discussions include Vincent de Paul Professor Lourdes Torres, a sociolinguist of the Spanish language in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and Associate Professor Delia Cosentino, who teaches courses on the art of Latin America.

Rodrigues Widholm also thinks scholars who study migration patterns can contribute to the discourse. “We feel like it’s all part of what the artists are addressing in their work,” she says, “and we hope that students will find some familiarity in the galleries that maybe they hadn’t noticed before. We want them to feel like they belong here because their experiences or their parents’ experiences are part of what they experience here.”

The museum also seeks to expand its holdings of work by Latinx and Latin American artists. Recent acquisitions include Yvette Mayorga’s “A Vase of the Century 1 (After Century Vase c. 1876)” and

“fossil things” by Melissa Leandro. Some images from the 19th- and early 20th-century photography collection by artists such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Robert Hernandez and Martín Chambi capture historical impressions of Latin America; these include a photograph of the Zapatista riots in Mexico and a photograph of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.

The collection also includes etchings, paintings and mixed media works by Latin American and U.S.-based artists from the 1930s to the present, including Diego Rivera, José Bedia, José Bernal, José Guerrero, Luis Jiménez, Ester Hernandez, Derek Webster, Enrique Chagoya, Vincent Valdez, Bibiana Suárez, Graciela Iturbide, Vik Muniz, Angel Otero, Dianna Frid and Harold Mendez.

“The goal is to change art history, to make sure that the range of artists and experiences in the United States are adequately represented,” she says. “We want to expand not just representation, but also participation, so that everyone feels empowered to be a contributor to contemporary culture.

“The Vincentian question is, ‘What must be done?’ To us, this is what needs to be done.”



Diego Rivera, Wounded Soldier, 1931.



Yvette Mayorga,
A Vase of the Century
1 (After Century Vase
c. 1876), 2019. Photo
courtesy of the artist.