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September 24, 2025 / Hispanic Heritage Month / Online Monday, Wednesday and Friday at albionpleiad.com

Student-Led and Culture-Rich: OLA Hosts HHM Events



Iowa City, Iowa, junior and OLA Secretary Adah Bertling and Assistant Director of Student Engagement and Activities Lucas Beal sit at OLA's "Collective Heritage" event on Sept. 15 (Photo by Bonnie Lord).

Jocelyn Kincaid-Beal
Managing Editor

Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM) is a national, annual celebration that takes place from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. According to the National Museum of the American Latino, HHM is "an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the unique voices and experiences of Hispanic/Latino Americans and recognize their history, journeys, and achievements."

At Albion, students can celebrate and appreciate Hispanic Heritage Month via a multitude of themed events and field trips. This year, all programming is brought to you by the student leaders of the Organization of Latinx Awareness (OLA).

'All of us together make America, America,' Lopez said. 'All of our individual backgrounds should be celebrated.'

According to their constitution, OLA aims to bridge the Albion community with Latinx communities around the world, and to provide programming that fosters a positive atmosphere and emphasizes Latino history and culture.

Dallas junior River Morelli is the president of OLA, after being vice president last semester. Morelli said they were "nervous" to take this new position, but knew it was something they wanted to do.

"I was really excited in everything I got to do last year and I just kind of wanted to do more," Morelli said.

"I have a lot of passion and I have a lot of ideas that I want to see on campus, and I'm a huge advocate for the Latin community."

Morelli joined OLA their sophomore year because they wanted to see more Latinx representation on campus. They added that they've always been proud of their Mexican culture, and that being a leader in OLA gives them the opportunity to show "how diverse and great" Mexican culture, Hispanic culture and Latin culture are.

"I definitely feel like with the current political climate, it's very important to be proud of your culture and show that, especially being at a PWI (predominantly white institution)," Morelli said.

Morelli said they want OLA to be a space where students can have someone to talk to, about both serious and fun things. At their meetings, they talk about different Latino cultures, sometimes do crafts, plan events or talk about whatever members want to talk about, Morelli said.

Planning HHM: Events for Students, by Students

Morelli said that she and OLA secretary and Iowa City, Iowa, junior Adah Bertling have been planning their HHM events since May. Last year, OLA was not as involved in the planning of the HHM programming as they wanted to be, Morelli said. This year, Morelli and Bertling took time to plan what they wanted to see for HHM, and met with Associate Director of the Office of Belonging Rivkah Gamble over the summer to officially plan the programming.

"It was really important for me to take this initiative, just because I want people to have events where they actually feel seen and



Elkhart, Ind., senior Maggie Vongsa and Katy, Texas, senior Camila Tapia decorate a sign at OLA's "Collective Heritage" event. This was the first of six events OLA has planned during Hispanic Heritage Month (Photo by Bonnie Lord).

represented, not just events thrown together to say 'Oh, here's representation,'" Morelli said.

Morelli wanted to have events where students could meet people and make friends, and find pride in seeing their culture represented. Morelli said the events they've planned encapsulate Hispanic culture and the future of the community.



Chicago junior and OLA Treasurer America Lozano along with Dallas junior and OLA president River Morelli give a presentation on HHM at OLA's Sept. 15 event (Photo by Bonnie Lord).

"All of us together make America, America," Lopez said. "All of our individual backgrounds should be celebrated."

Bertling said that going from living in a large Hispanic community to attending a PWI was a bit of a "culture shock." Their sophomore year, Bertling realized they would have to get more involved on campus in order to



From left to right: Dallas senior Valeria Molina, Elkhart, Ind., senior Maggie Vongsa and Katy, Texas, senior Camila Tapia serve themselves food at OLA's "Collective Heritage" event (Photo by Bonnie Lord).

"I think with our political climate, a lot of people are afraid to show their Latin culture and express their identity," Morelli said. "These events are helping capture what we are, more than just stereotypes."

Fostering and Finding Community

When planning events for OLA, Vice President and Dallas senior Teresa Lopez said she asks: "What kind of events can we make to make people come out of their room and talk to other people?"

Lopez joined OLA her first year, but wasn't on the executive board until her junior year, when she was a social media chair. Lopez said she joined because she wanted to talk to Hispanic people and people from similar backgrounds to her. As vice president, her goal is for OLA to be that welcoming space for more Hispanic students looking for community.

Lopez added that OLA is a space for anyone who needs to find their community on campus.

"Some of us aren't Hispanic, but we're still here to be friends with each other, just find a community that's different," Lopez said. "We want a space for people that aren't in Greek life or sports to come together."

Lopez said it's important to celebrate not only Hispanic Heritage Month, but "every single month that represents other cultures."

find a sense of Latino community – and that led them to OLA.

"Finding that community was really helpful," Bertling said.

Bertling added that a lot of Albion's Hispanic students come from majority-Hispanic communities, so it can be hard to adjust to Albion, especially socially. OLA has become a space where those Hispanic and Latino students can come together, Bertling said.

"Having that space for them to actually feel, at least a little bit, like they belong in a space that sometimes makes you feel like an alien – I think it's really valuable," Bertling said.

Bertling said it's "very fulfilling" to "be actively doing something to foster that community on campus."

"Everybody's welcome. We have good events, the vibes are usually good, they're fun, but it's not exclusive," Bertling said. "I feel like most people think that OLA's exclusive to only the Latinos of Albion, but definitely not."

Morelli said that it's "really exciting" to be able to plan events that they and the rest of OLA want to do. A calendar of OLA's HHM events can be found on their Instagram page or on flyers posted around campus.

"It's been really rewarding just being able to even plan out these events, and being able to do them is even more rewarding," Morelli said.



From left to right: Bertling, Morelli and OLA Vice President Teresa Lopez holding their own traditional Mexican paper dolls at OLA's first meeting of the year on Sept. 2 (Photo illustration courtesy of River Morelli).

Spanish Speakers Say You Should Learn Spanish, Too



The students of two Spanish classes and an education class pose on the fourth day of their trip to Costa Rica. The group took their trip in May, and on this day spent their time in Jacó, Costa Rica (Photo illustration courtesy of Kalen Oswald).

Bonnie Lord
Editor-in-Chief

“Sana sana, cola de rana” is a Spanish saying which translates literally to “heal heal, frog’s tail” in English. According to Detroit first-year and native Spanish speaker Gladis Bazan-Vazquez, it’s just one example of Spanish phrases that “just don’t hit right in English.”

“It just sounds really comforting in Spanish,” Basan-Vazquez said. “It’s kinda like when you get a boo-boo and kiss it.”

In 2023, 287,431 households in Michigan spoke Spanish as their primary language at home, according to Data USA. At Albion College, Spanish is the only language with majors and minors available; there are currently a total 61 students taking Spanish classes.

Building an Accessible Community

For Spanish professor and department chair of modern languages and cultures Kalen Oswald, the benefits of learning Spanish start with the practical aspect of being understood and understanding others without relying on an intermediary.

“There are a lot of people in the United States whose first language is not English, and for most of those people, it’s Spanish,” Oswald said. “It just seems like a no-brainer that we should be trying to connect with these people instead of alienate them.”

Spanish lecturer Marcie Noble added that this need for connection includes emergency and medical situations. Though she said there is a “bare minimum” of accessibility for Spanish speakers at a governmental level, Noble has observed “a lack of accommodation in the vast majority of situations.”

This summer, while driving a friend to the emergency room, Noble said she discovered a Spanish speaker outside the building, struggling to access the resources to reach a family member inside.



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“It was a really complicated and specific situation,” Noble said.

Most often, though many states have laws requiring some kind of interpreting services, Noble said children of Spanish speakers or staff untrained in interpretation end up stepping in. According to Noble, the reason for this is a lack of funding.

‘It’s just fascinating and fun to see these different ways of seeing and experiencing the world.’

“If society isn’t going to come together and say ‘we think this is important,’ then I don’t think we’re going to see a lot of changes to that situation in the near future,” Noble said.

Knox, Indiana, first-year and Spanish minor Jeremy J. Mitchell said he is minoring in Spanish with the intention of practicing medicine accessible to Spanish speakers.

“It would be a giant problem if a patient and a provider couldn’t talk to each other,” Mitchell said.

In education itself, there are opportunities for greater accessibility for Spanish speakers. According to Mitchell, a student in one of his music classes uses an online tool to translate his handouts to Spanish.

Bazan-Vazquez, who went to a high school with a largely Hispanic population, said handouts were given in both Spanish and English. Bazan-Vazquez added that she wasn’t aware of any resources like that available at Albion College, though she’s content to receive her materials in English since she mostly speaks Spanish at home.

“Awareness could be better,” Bazan-Vazquez said.

The Beauty of Spanish

For Mitchell, Spanish is simply a “better language than English.”

Not only did Mitchell note that Spanish is the second-fastest language according to a 2011 study, but he said he enjoys its “particularity” for writing.

For Mitchell, there is efficiency in the language’s gendered terms, multitude of adjectives agreeing with the noun they describe and the wealth of commonly used tenses.

“In Spanish you have the subjunctive, which in English is rarely used and going out of style,” Mitchell said. “An example in English might be ‘would that I were,’ in Spanish it’s regularly used.”

In addition to being easy to spell and sounding “cool,” Oswald said the subjunctive mood is one of his favorite aspects of Spanish as a language.

“It makes these little subtle differences in what you’re expressing more precise and more interesting,” Oswald said.

Oswald said he started learning Spanish from his father, who was a Spanish teacher. He went on to study it in high school and college, as well as travel to several Spanish-speaking countries. Ultimately, it was a love for Mexican culture and a desire to connect with that culture through language that drew Oswald to Spanish.

“I realized the incredible cultural diversity in the Spanish-speaking world,” Oswald said. “It’s just fascinating and fun to see these different ways of seeing and experiencing the world.”

Cultural competence was an attractive part of learning Spanish for Noble, too.

“Apart from the beauty of the language itself, it’s also the access that it gave me to learning about other communities,” Noble said.

Noble said being multilingual gives learners access to a “level of empathy that they might not be able to attain without that additional skill.”

Inspiring Empathy, Delaying Disease

According to Oswald, this skill is more than just an exercise in social interaction, but in inner experience.

“It provides a way to have a deeper connection with people than you otherwise could,” Oswald said. “Learning a language necessitates a sort of perspective shift, a paradigm shift in your brain.”

Learning a language improves academic performance, memory, concentration, creativity and communication skills, states Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

“It can also help you live longer, and it can delay things like Alzheimer’s,” Oswald said. “It exercises your brain in such a way that is healthy physiologically.”


The MIT Press confirms this assessment, citing multiple studies wherein bilingual subjects developed dementia around four years later than monolingual patients.

Among these benefits – physical, mental, social, practical and cultural – Oswald and Noble both said they support a greater emphasis on language learning in the U.S.

“It helps the individual, and it helps the world,” Oswald said. “If more people learn a language, they gain an understanding of themselves and others through that perspective.”

COMIC: Voices of Resistance: Celebrating Latino Leaders


Noah Guevara
Multimedia Journalist



CHE GUEVARA

Guevara was an Argentinian-Cuban revolutionary and guerilla leader who believed in the liberation of Latin America. He was a prominent figure in the Cuban revolution, and traveled to assist other countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo to fight for their freedom.



According to: Britannica.com



SYLVIA RIVERA

Rivera was an advocate for the inclusion of transgender people of color in the movement for gay rights. She led a series of protests, and when legislation was passed protecting gay rights, she fought to ensure the trans community would be heard, especially those from marginalized groups. Rivera gave back to her community and worked towards ensuing equal rights for everyone.


According to: Womenshistory.org



DOLORES HUERTA & CÉSAR CHÁVES

Huerta and Cháves were two of the largest figures in the Chicano civil rights movement. Both fought for better wages and working conditions for the Latino community in the U.S., organizing labor unions, boycotts, strikes and marches to fight for justice.

According to: Latino.si.edu



OCTAVIANO LARRAZOLO

Larrazolo was one of the first Latino Americans to serve in the U.S. senate, and served in the 1910s and 20s. He devoted his life to achieving equity in education for Spanish-speaking Americans. He also secured the inclusion of a provision recognizing Spanish as it was used in conducting public business in New Mexico's constitution.

According to: Senate.gov

Five prominent Latino activists and what they fought for. Each panel serves as a reminder of what Latino activists have been able to accomplish throughout time in the fight for equity for the Latino community (Illustration by Noah Guevara).