

**Iowa State University U.S. Latino/a Studies Program 25 Year
Anniversary Symposium Digital Proceedings**

Introduction: Proceedings from the US Latino/a Studies Program 25 Year Anniversary Symposium

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I was hired in 2017 to resuscitate the US Latino/a Studies Program (USLS) at Iowa State University. I saw my first step as one of research. What had happened? What was needed? Both cautiously and enthusiastically, I spoke to students and colleagues to figure out how the US Latino/a Studies Program (USLS) could best serve the students at the institution and make connections to the community.

After numerous meetings and dynamic conversations with the chair of World Languages and Cultures (my home department), Dr. Chad Gasta, the USLS core faculty, Dr. Megan Myers and Dr. Brian Behnken, and various faculty, staff, and students throughout the campus, I saw how much dedication to social justice, equity, inclusion, and Latino/a/x communities existed. However, I also quickly understood that on such a large campus, this wonderful work was somewhat dis-connected. Thus, the theme of the day was “Connection, Commitment, and Inclusion.”

The aim of the day was two-fold: 1. to celebrate the existence of a critical program on the ISU campus, which deserves greater institutional support and needs to grow according to demographic changes and socio-political needs for Latinxers, and 2. To connect and feature the dynamic work being done on campus by our students, faculty, and staff for and about the Latino/a/x communities.

This day honored the founding director, Dr. Hector Avalos; showed off classes (old, new, and innovated); highlighted student testimonials; welcomed a special guest speaker (Dr. William “Memo” Nericcio) reflecting on stereotypes; opened a special art exhibit “Mextasy” at the Multi-cultural Center; exposed internship experiences; presented faculty stories of their place in their respective fields as Latin/a/x and Allied individuals; embraced program directors from the Mid-west to share unique observations about other Latino/a Studies programs; recognized support from the administration; and closed with amazing musical performances from student groups alongside delicious tapas. It was a day that underscored the importance and positive impact of Latino/a Studies for all at a critical, socio-historical moment when Latinx communities are increasingly under attack by media outlets. This symposium endorsed connections and commitment that center Latino/a/x community formation, knowledge making, and inclusion as part of the future of Iowa State University, Iowa, and the nation at large.



USLS 25 Year Anniversary Symposium flyer



Speakers from the US Latino/a Studies Program 25 Year Anniversary Symposium. From left, Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, Bill Johnson González, Lucía M. Suárez, Sylvia Martínez, William “Memo” Nericcio, and Brian Behnken.

On Saturday, September 28, 2019, I was proud to pause and feature how the US Latino/a Studies Program at Iowa State University is a student-focused, cross-disciplinary unit that offers high-impact classes, internships, scholarships, and work opportunities to students across campus. USLS serves as a safe learning place, where knowledge grounds us in good deeds and humanistic entrepreneurship. USLS provides meaningful learning opportunities through which we (faculty, staff, students, and local/state partners) participate in hopeful community building and constructive discussions about both differences and commonalities.

It is, thus, a program from which to imagine better ways to connect, create, and be constructively inclusive. Thanks to devoted faculty, dynamic staff, curious students, and committed community partners, I was honored to highlight that the US Latino/a Studies Program focuses on building on the founding principles of the land grant mission (... “to Create, share, and apply knowledge to make **Iowa** and the world a better place”).

The 25 Year Anniversary Symposium exemplified how the program supports cultural, intellectual, and social programming that shapes our society, and the future of the state as one grounded in respect,

uplift, and hard work, deeply enhancing the university, state, and national climate through pedagogical commitment, human connection, and expansive inclusion. The classes, internships, and personal stories featured at this all day symposium offered testimonials of all the ways that Latinxers, allies, and Latinx collaborators contribute to a more equitable life through education and community engagement. It also served as a spring board to further expand the work of our intersecting communities.

I remain grateful to everyone that gathered to focus on all that is possible and wonderful about Latinx Studies, our connected lives, and those whom we continue to welcome and include. The following digitally captured symposium allows us to remember all that was celebrated at the 25 Year Anniversary Symposium. It also serves as an archival register of what has been accomplished, and continues to be engaged, as we CONNECT, COMMIT, AND INCLUDE teaching, outreach, and collaborations of Latinos/as/x in the United States broadly, and in Iowa specifically. Importantly, these proceedings invite us to appreciate what exists, as we collaboratively and strategically improve and create more sustainable and necessary programming.