

# CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT



## HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month: A Rich Tapestry of Culture and History

Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to honor and celebrate the rich cultural contributions, histories, and traditions of Hispanic and Latinx communities. At Fort Hays State University, we proudly join in this nationwide celebration, recognizing the vibrant diversity and the profound impact of Hispanic heritage on our society.

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Hispanic Heritage Month is observed from September 15 to October 15 each year. This celebration started as Hispanic Heritage Week under President Lyndon Johnson in 1968 and was expanded to a month-long observance by President Ronald Reagan in 1988. The month-long period allows for the inclusion of various national independence days and cultural events that hold significance within the Hispanic community.

This period was specifically chosen to coincide with the independence anniversaries of several Latin American countries. Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua all celebrate their independence on September 15, followed by Mexico on September 16 and Chile on September 18. The celebration extends through October 12, which is recognized as Día de la Raza, or Columbus Day, in many Hispanic communities.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Hispanic Heritage month
- Lucero Ontiverous
- Hugo Perez
- Dr. Chita Espino-Bravo
- September Speaker Series
- "Sorting Out Race" Speaker Series
- Save The Date: Upcoming events





## A JOURNEY OF LEADERSHIP AND HERITAGE: LUCERO ONTIVEROS AND THE HISPANIC AMERICAN LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATION AT FHSU

Fort Hays State University (FHSU) is known for its vibrant community and diverse student organizations. Among these, the Hispanic American Leadership Organization (HALO) stands out for its dedication to representing and supporting the Hispanic community on campus. At the helm of this influential group is Lucero Ontiveros, a junior majoring in Human Resource Management, whose journey and vision for HALO are nothing short of inspiring.

Lucero's path to FHSU was influenced by the university's close-knit community feel and the opportunities it offers for personal and professional growth. "I chose Fort Hays mainly because I really liked how small it was and how much of a community it felt," she shares. Knowing key individuals and the presence of organizations like HALO, Alpha Kappa Psi, Society of Human Resource Management, and the International Business Club further cemented her decision.

Lucero Ontiveros is not just a student but also an HR Generalist at HESS Services, an oil field company. Her role is pivotal, especially in assisting the Hispanic community at her workplace by translating and resolving work-related issues. This experience, she believes, is a fantastic opportunity to grow her career early on while still in college.

Her leadership journey with HALO began with a desire to bring fresh ideas and expand the club's reach. "I wanted to see how I could be a leader for HALO and maybe bring new ideas that other people haven't thought of," she explains. Lucero's leadership is characterized by her ability to connect with new students, especially first-generation college students, and provide them with a support system that celebrates their culture and roots.

Hispanic Heritage Month holds a special place in Lucero's heart. "Hispanic Heritage Month means being proud of being Hispanic and not being ashamed of being a first-generation student," she says. She emphasizes the importance of expressing pride in one's culture and family heritage, encouraging others to celebrate their roots without fear or shame.

Lucero's cultural heritage has profoundly influenced her journey at FHSU. Coming from a family with limited access to higher education, she takes immense pride in being the first to pursue a college degree. "The Hispanic culture of being very self-disciplined has motivated me," she reflects. Her dedication to her studies and her vision for the future is a testament to her hard work and the values instilled in her by her heritage.





Under her leadership, HALO has engaged in significant activities beyond the campus. One notable initiative is their participation in the United States Hispanic Leadership Conference (USHLI) in Chicago. This annual event brings together high school and college students to network with influential figures, including government officials and business leaders. Lucero recalls the impactful experience of meeting keynote speakers and attending workshops, one of which led to inviting a prominent speaker, Martha, to FHSU.

Despite the challenges of getting people involved, Lucero remains optimistic and dedicated to HALO's mission. Her story is a powerful reminder of the importance of cultural pride, leadership, and the impact one individual can have on a community.





## CELEBRATING HERITAGE AND EMPOWERING STUDENTS: HUGO PEREZ LEADS THE HISPANIC COLLEGE INSTITUTE AT FHSU

Hugo Perez, the new Assistant Director of Student Success at Fort Hays State University (FHSU), is no stranger to the campus or the challenges faced by first-generation students. An alumnus of FHSU, Perez recently completed his eighth year at the university and his first in his new role. Before this, he served as the Assistant Director of Admissions for seven years, contributing to nearly 24 years in higher education since he began his career in 2001.

Perez's journey to FHSU began at Garden City Community College, where he started his college education before transferring to FHSU. During his time as a student, he was actively involved in various campus organizations, including a fraternity, the Hispanic Leadership Organization (HALO), and the cheer squad. These experiences left him with cherished memories and a deep connection to the university, inspiring him to return and help current students create similar experiences.



As a first-generation American with parents who immigrated from Mexico, Perez understands the unique challenges faced by Hispanic students. This personal connection drives his commitment to working with the Hispanic College Institute (HCI) at FHSU. "I want to help students have the same type of experiences I had," Perez shared. He emphasizes the importance of building connections with students from diverse backgrounds and giving back to the community by supporting those who may face cultural and educational barriers.

The Hispanic College Institute at FHSU, which Perez now leads, is a transformative program designed to prepare Hispanic high school students for higher education. The program, which will be held from June 4 to June 7, 2025, is a four-day, three-night residential experience on the FHSU campus. It offers students a comprehensive introduction to college life, including sessions on the admissions process, financial aid, public speaking, and networking with Hispanic leaders and mentors. The program is open to high school students from the classes of 2026 and 2027 with a GPA of 2.5 or above, and all expenses, including food, transportation, and lodging, are covered.

The Hispanic College Institute at FHSU was launched in 2016 under the leadership of Mirta M. Martin, who was named Fort Hays State's ninth president in 2014. Martin, who served as the first woman president at FHSU and the first Hispanic president for a Kansas Board of Regents institution, played a pivotal role in establishing the HCI. The program quickly gained national recognition, receiving the 2017 National Outstanding New Program Award from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).



This award underscores the impact and success of the HCI in supporting Hispanic students on their path to higher education.

Perez is particularly passionate about the impact of the HCI program, which has seen significant growth and success under his leadership. The program has rebounded strongly post-COVID, with participation stabilizing around 70 to 90 students annually. This growth is supported by expanding outreach efforts and collaborations with Hispanic and Latino organizations. Notably, students from various high schools, including Emporia High School, have joined the program, thanks to new community connections. The impact of the HCI is clear, with many participants choosing to pursue higher education at FHSU, and some even achieving advanced degrees.

Looking ahead, Perez has ambitious goals for the HCI. He aims to maintain strong attendance while enhancing the program's content and securing keynote speakers who can inspire and engage students. Recruiting FHSU students as camp counselors is another priority, as their leadership and commitment play a crucial role in the program's success. Perez believes in the power of representation, guided by the mantra "Sí se puede" (It can be done), famously championed by César Chávez. This vision aims to inspire HCI students to see the vast possibilities within their reach.



As Hispanic Heritage Month approaches, Perez reflects on the importance of cultural celebrations in fostering inclusivity and understanding. He takes pride in his Mexican heritage and is excited about upcoming events at FHSU, including a tailgate sponsored by HALO, which will bring the community together to enjoy traditional foods and celebrate Hispanic culture. Perez emphasizes that these events are not about promoting any specific agenda but about recognizing the rich diversity within the university community and creating a more welcoming environment.

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Perez also highlights the ongoing needs of the HCI program. Dedicated volunteers are crucial to supporting various events, and continued institutional backing is essential, especially amid current discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within Kansas. He calls on the FHSU community to step up and support the program, whether through volunteering, leading sessions, or participating in the HCI academic fair.

As he looks to the future, Perez remains optimistic about the continued growth and impact of the HCI, driven by his passion for helping students achieve their dreams.



## DANCING TO A NEW BEAT: DR. CHITA ESPINO-BRAVO LEADS CULTURAL ENRICHMENT AT FHSU

For Dr. Chita Espino-Bravo, dance is more than just movement—it's a gateway to cultural exploration and personal growth. As the director of the Fort Hays State University Hispanic Dance Sessions Dance Group, Espino-Bravo has been at the forefront of bringing Hispanic dance to life in Hays for the past sixteen years.

When Espino-Bravo first arrived in Hays to teach Spanish in the Modern Languages program, she noticed a void in dance opportunities, particularly those that celebrated Hispanic culture. Determined to fill this gap, she began leading casual dance sessions, which gradually evolved into a vibrant dance group. The group now serves as a beacon of Hispanic culture, offering a rich variety of dance styles that go beyond mere entertainment.



Many Hays residents are unfamiliar with Hispanic dance forms, and I felt it was important to expose them to something new," Espino-Bravo explains. The sessions initially focused on salsa, belly dance, and samba but have since expanded to include an array of dances. Espino-Bravo herself specializes in modern salsa and flamenco, each offering a unique cultural experience. While modern salsa is a lively social dance, her flamenco lessons delve into the dance's rich history and artistic depth.

Her passion for flamenco has grown over the years, fueled by weekly online classes with the renowned Sara Martin Flamenco School since 2020. "Flamenco is not just a dance—it's a form of art," she says, reflecting on how her initial apprehension gave way to a deep love for the challenging yet expressive dance.

Joining Espino-Bravo in leading the sessions is Dr. Nicole English, a sociology professor at FHSU with a background in Folkloric dance. English, who learned to dance from her mother, has danced across the U.S. and taught at prestigious institutions like the Kansas City Ballet and UMKC Conservatory Academy. At FHSU, she brings a unique fusion of flamenco, Arab, and Afro-Caribbean styles to the sessions, enriching the cultural tapestry of the group.





The Hispanic Dance Sessions are more than just a dance class—they are a cultural immersion. Supported by The Spanish Club, the Department of English and Modern Languages, and the Department of Sociology, these sessions offer students a way to fully engage with the language and culture they are studying. Espino-Bravo sees the sessions as a platform for self-expression and a remedy for stage fright. She encourages students to participate, even if just for the joy of moving to music. "Anytime you move to music, it's going to make you feel good," she says.

Dr. Espino-Bravo also shared her thoughts on Hispanic Heritage Month, emphasizing the importance of unity and support within the community. "Hispanic Heritage Month is a time for us to come together as brothers and sisters, celebrating our shared love for our culture. It's not just about recognizing our heritage; it's about living it—through love, food, dance, and the connections we build with one another," she expressed. For Espino-Bravo, this celebration is a reminder that the essence of Hispanic culture thrives when it is shared and experienced collectively

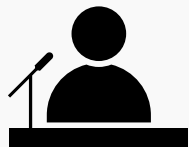
The sessions are open to everyone, including the broader Hays community and international participants via Zoom. Beginner sessions are held every Wednesday from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., followed by more advanced practices from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. These dedicated dancers perform at various events in the community, including the FHSU International Fashion & Food Festival, the HALO Festival, and Brookdale Senior Living.



Espino-Bravo is grateful for the support of Fort Hays State University and is proud to share the group's talents on campus whenever needed. Her message to students is clear: "Join in and think outside the box. Exploring new cultures will open your eyes, broaden your mind, and help you make new friends. The more you explore new environments, the more you grow intellectually and emotionally."

Whether you're looking to learn a new dance, embrace a new culture, or simply find joy in movement, Dr. Espino-Bravo's Hispanic Dance Sessions offer a welcoming space for all.





## SEPTEMBER SPEAKER SERIES

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SEPTEMBER SPEAKER SERIES



**Dr. Jay Steinmetz**

## THE ELECTROAL COLLEGE - WHY YOUR VOTE STILL MATTERS

**Tuesday, Sept 17,  
6:30 - 8:00PM**

**Cody Commons- Memorial Union**

Dr. Jay Steinmetz is an Associate Professor at FHSU specializing in political theory, American politics, and public law. His research interests include liberal theory in American political culture, presidential memory in popular culture, the legal development of free speech in the 20th century, film and philosophy, and the political development of the American motion picture industry. His book, *Beyond Free Speech and Propaganda: The Political Development of Hollywood, 1907-1927* (2018), details the political and legal forces that shaped the development of classic Hollywood and a producer-dominated film industry of narrative-based film entertainment.

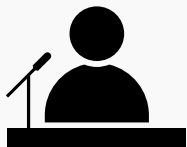
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For more information contact: [cle@fhsu.edu](mailto:cle@fhsu.edu)







## SEPTEMBER SPEAKER SERIES



### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SEPTEMBER SPEAKER SERIES

# STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN KANSAS

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24**

**TRAILS ROOM – MEMORIAL UNION**

**6:30 - 8:00 PM**

Dr. Micah W. Kubic has served as the Executive Director of the ACLU of Kansas since January 2022. With 25 years of experience in civil rights and racial justice work, Dr. Kubic leads the largest advocacy organization in Kansas, defending and strengthening the rights that belong to everyone under the Constitution. Dr. Kubic previously served as the ACLU of Kansas's Executive Director from 2015 – 2018, leaving to lead the ACLU of Florida, one of the largest affiliates, for three years between 2019 and 2022.

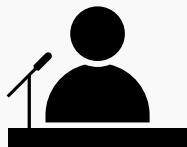


**Dr. Micah W. Kubic**

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For more information contact: [cle@fhsu.edu](mailto:cle@fhsu.edu)



## "SORTING OUT RACE" SPEAKER SERIES

### **Ann Dean, "The Power of Imagery and the Civil Rights Experience"**

Associate Professor, Department of History and Philosophy at Fort Hays State University

**September 12 at 6: 00 PM** at the Hays Public Library



**Ann Dean**

### **Dr. Marco Macias, "Unpacking Stereotypes: A Journey Through Mexican American Representation in Thrift Finds and Media"**

Associate Professor, Department of History and Philosophy at Fort Hays State University

**September 18 at 6: 00 PM** at the Hays Public Library



**Dr. Marco Macias**



## **Jeff Tully, "History of the Brown v Board of Education Case"**

Interpreter, National Park Service at the Brown v Board of Education National Historic Park

**September 24 at 6:00 PM at the Hays Public Library**



**Jeff Tully**

And a special bonus speaker that will visit campus after the exhibition has left Hays but will address similar themes. Dr. Pewewardy's visit is made possible by the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Civic Learning & Engagement, the Department of History and Philosophy, the College of Education, the Advanced Educational Program, and the Department of Communication Studies, Law & Political Science.

## **Dr. Cornel Pewewardy, "Seeing Red: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture and Sports"**

Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Central Oklahoma and professor emeritus, Indigenous Nations Studies at Portland State University, and vice-chairman of the Comanche Nation

**October 22 at 3:00 PM in Albertson 169**



**Dr. Cornel Pewewardy**



# Save The Date

UPCOMING EVENTS

## SWIPE Out Hunger

**Saturday, November 16th** in the **Black and Gold Room** at **Memorial Union**

Set up will be at **10 AM** with meal packing to begin at **noon**.

### Community partners



NOW PART OF



### On campus partners

Civic Learning and Engagement, Leadership Programs, Global Affairs, and Student Engagement.



## CONTACT INFORMATION

For any inquiries, information, or assistance, please feel free to reach out to the Civic Learning & Engagement Administrative Team

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