



# HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

## SEPTEMBER 15 - OCTOBER 15

### How Hispanic-serving institutions serve students, community

**ALGERNON D'AMMASSA**  
Las Cruces Bulletin

Around 64 percent of undergraduates at New Mexico State University identify as Hispanic



or of Spanish-speaking heritage. But among graduate students, that number drops significantly, to about 35 percent, according to Teresa Maria Linda Scholz, NMSU's vice president for equity, inclusion and diversity.

The number of federally designated Hispanic-serving institutions in U.S. higher education has grown rapidly, topping 600 this year, with NMSU among them. The criterion is simple enough: The institution must be a nonprofit college or university with at least 25 percent of its full-time undergraduates "identifies as Hispanic, Latine, Latino, Latina, Latinx," as Scholz explained in an interview.

The term Hispanic refers to language, while "Latino" and its distinctions refers to geography. Referring to her own background as a Guatemalan and the first generation from her family to graduate from college, she said, "My lens is very much from having lived in a country at the height of human rights violations. I'm a first-gen college (student). And so for me, as a Latina, as a Guatemalan U.S. American, serving at

an HSI is really important to me, personally and professionally."

The designation makes institutions eligible for grants. Last month, the U.S. Department of Education announced a round of HSI grants totaling nearly \$50 million, including programs to expand graduate opportunities, prepare elementary and secondary school teachers of diverse backgrounds and increase science and engineering career opportunities for underrepresented population groups.

"If we're Hispanic-serving, we should be serving our students, not just counting our students," Scholz said.

Latinos constitute a rapidly growing demographic - nearly three-quarters of U.S.



**Teresa Maria Linda Scholz,**  
NMSU's vice president  
for equity, inclusion and  
diversity. (NMSU photo)

Throughout Hispanic Heritage Month, observed Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, New Mexico State University is hosting a Latinx Heritage Month series of cultural events virtually and online. (New Mexico State University photo)

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*I am with my ancestors*

## In Doña Ana, a former saloon holds community's history

**JUAN CORRAL**  
For the Bulletin

The De La O visitors center, an adobe-made historical site built in the 1840s, was slated to become a parking lot in the mid 1990s.

When the Doña Ana Village Historic Preservation Committee got word of it, the group joined with the late New Mexico state senator Mary Jane Garcia to secure capital outlay sufficient to purchase the site.

Today, the De La O visitors center is surrounded by other historical places like the Doña Ana Plaza and Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria. The community center sits on El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail on Cristo Rey Street.

Committee members still push to keep the building a historical topic of conversation. DeAngelo Nieves, treasurer of the committee, said they continue to keep up with everyday necessities that allow visitors to enjoy the value of this amazing piece of history. He said he worked on the

restoration project for Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria during the 1990s.

Nieves said toward the completion of the project, the committee learned the Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces planned to knock down the building to build the parking lot for the church.

“Our committee founder and state senator at the time, Mary Jane Garcia, was able to secure the New Mexico capital outlay funds for Doña Ana County Government to purchase the buildings,” he said.

“While Mary Jane was able to secure funds for the purchase and start of work on the center, it wasn’t nearly enough money to complete the De La O visitors center project. In January of 2011, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held for the grand opening of a partially completed De La O visitors center.”

The community center is owned and operated by the Facilities and Parks Department of Doña Ana County.

“Our community and committee have been pushing for funds to complete the center and

state Senator Jeff Steinborn has been able to secure more capital outlay funds for more work on the center,” Nieves said.

Robert Herrera, director of the Facilities and Parks Department, began his position in April 2023 and since, Nieves said Herrera has been open and willing to work on the center.

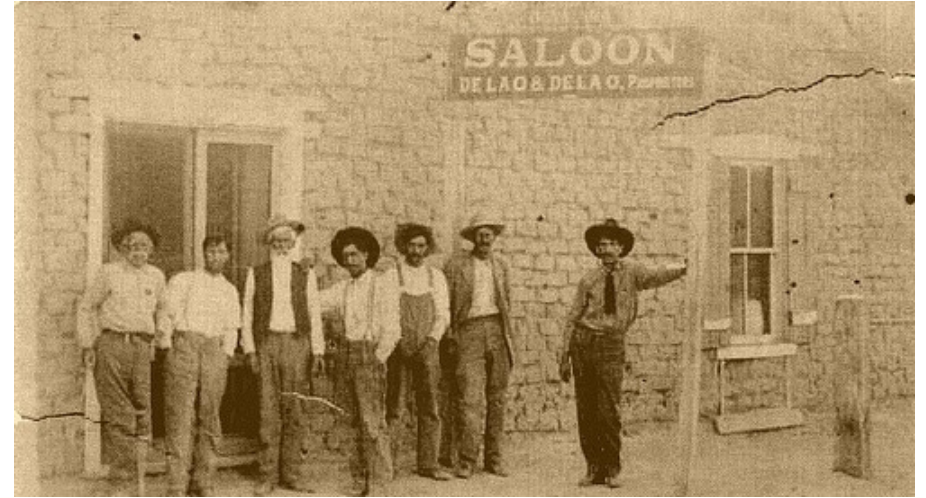
As the property and buildings continue restoration, Nieves wants community members to indulge in the history the area has to offer.

“In December of 1846, the U.S. military arrived in Doña Ana during the Mexican/American war. Based on the descriptions of the village by the U.S. military, we believe the buildings were constructed by the time the U.S. military arrived in Doña Ana,” Nieves said.

“The building that currently houses what is the only finished building of the De La O visitors center began as a family home before being used to house various businesses.”

Between the late 1800s and early 1900s, the building was home to the Doña Ana Saloon. This property was owned and operated by Roman and Guadalupe De La O.

One other neighboring building, known as the Wertheim building, was owned and operated as a general store for over 50 years by German immigrant Herman Wertheim from 1875. This building later



The De La O saloon in 1907, owned by brothers Guadalupe and Roman De La O, today houses the De La O visitors center in the village of Doña Ana, New Mexico.

(Courtesy photos by Doña Ana Historic Preservation Committee)

served as a post office.

The De La O visitor center today hosts events for community members but most importantly, committee members host field trips for Las Cruces Public School students here, as a venue for teaching about the area and region.

According to Yvonne De La O-Jasso, a committee board member and direct descended of the De La O family, the center will host events for days like Día de los Muertos or celebrations such as luminarias displays. It will be the center’s fourth celebration of Día de los Muertos, from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Nov. 2 with vendors and food trucks, she said.

“We will also have our luminarias event on Dec. 7. It is such a beautiful event. We don’t have any times right now but will release those later.”

De La O-Jasso said that as a descendent she takes much pride in this historical site.

“We have been there for decades and I myself feel that my

roots are very strong in this community. Much of the families in this community take pride in their ancestors because it’s almost as though we have built this area up,” she said.

“Building the church, digging the ditches, those were things that they valued as they were trying to build any type of homes. Eventually, the shelters and buildings were built, and one came about to be the De La O saloon.”

As the area evolved, she said she believed the sense of community never left this place.

“There is a pride to what the community could accomplish and from much of the help from former senator Mary Jane Garcia,” she said. “Just walking through it, I feel like I am with my ancestors. It is a place that can be used for so much. Tours for schools, community members can host weddings, family reunions, community projects and presentations. It’s a very valuable building.”



The De La O visitors center as it appears today in the village of Doña Ana, New Mexico. (Courtesy photos by Doña Ana Historic Preservation Committee)



*Passion for culture*

# Gallery manager links art and identity

**SYLVIA QUINTANILLA**  
For the Bulletin

“Las Cruces holds a special place in my heart. I love the diverse range of artists here in Las Cruces, especially because we’re a borderland city,” Natalia Martinez said during a recent interview.

Last June, Martinez was hired as the Doña Ana Arts Council’s new gallery manager. A native New Mexican from Santa Fe, Martinez came to Las Cruces to study at New Mexico State University. She received her bachelor’s degree in art history and museum conservation in the Spring 2023. During her time as an Aggie, she founded the Honors Art Collective program.

“Part of the reason why I moved down here is to represent those minority artists, or specifically Latinx or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and other people of color) artists that are engaging with borderland issues and also borderland culture and identity,” she said.

The arts council is a nonprofit located in down-

town Las Cruces. For over 50 years, DAAC has had the vision of a community where the arts thrive. They hold many annual events throughout the year, including the Las Cruces Arts Fair and the Renaissance Arts Faire. The council recently welcomed its new executive director, Karrie Porter, who succeeds

Araceli Solis.

DAAC was originally located in the Rio Grande Theatre, but has changed location a few times in recent years, settling into their current location on Water Street to expand their programming to a broad spectrum that includes cuisine, visual and performing arts and creative writing. Martinez described their location as lively in the midst of the events occurring downtown. This allows them to invite tourists and locals that love wandering downtown into their facility to view the works they have on display.

“Doña Ana Arts Council’s goal has always been to serve the community by providing events that support artists and celebrate cultural traditions,” Martinez said.

Currently on display at the gallery is artwork by Cheryl Nelson, a local watercolor painter who began her art career after her retirement. Martinez explained that Nelson uses a very abstract watercolor



**Natalia Martinez**  
(Doña Ana Arts Council photo)

**HISPANIC-SERVING**

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population gain per Census data from 2022 to 2023 – and that trend has its parallel in higher education enrollment. Yet nearly a third qualify for Pell grants based on financial need, and other supports may be needed as well to support the success of students from different economic classes and linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

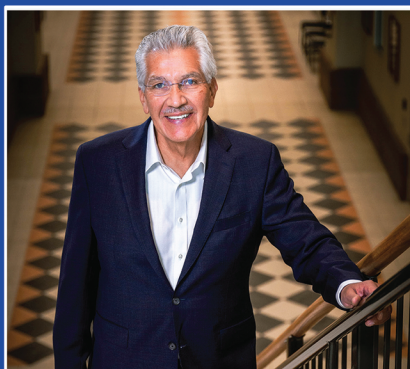
How well an HSI is serving those students, Scholz said, can be indicated in numerous ways. Are learning environments welcoming? Are Spanish-language materials available, or teachers of similar ethnic backgrounds? Is the university addressing Hispanic communities in their recruitment efforts? How are the academic outcomes for Hispanic students, measurable in grades and graduation rates? Are students finishing degrees, going on to graduate work at NMSU or flourishing in careers after college?

Scholz’s department oversees not only the office of Latin American programs but also the American Indian program, Black programs, LGBTQ+ programs and the Asian Pacific Islander program. Addressing a common misunderstanding, she emphasized that the purpose of these programs was not to segregate population groups, nor to treat individuals in any of these groups as homogenous, but to support faculty and students and fulfill NMSU’s land grant mission to benefit the community through its graduates, and its contributions to the region’s development through its research, technology and other services. With extension offices throughout New Mexico’s 33 counties, its reach is wide.

“When we’re serving our Hispanic, Latine students, which is our largest population, we’re also going to be serving our other minoritized students too. We talk a lot about intersectionality,” Scholz said.

“Our community colleges are very beautifully positioned to engage community and workforce development and providing opportunities for associates degrees, and other certificate programs,” she continued. “For me, that’s very core to being an HSI in the borderlands region, in the southwest.”

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**GALLERY MANAGER**

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process with recycled material.

Martinez went into detail on what the DAAC looks for in their artists. She expressed they are looking for artists that are pushing the boundaries of their media and their connections with the Las Cruces community and the global art community.

“First and foremost, we're an organization that promotes a broad representation of diverse groups of people,” Martinez said. “We want to show artists that are brave enough to really create a visual story of their identity or their cultural background or how they're engaging with socio-political issues in today's world.”

Among Martinez's responsibilities is curating exhibits that showcase artists' work to ensure they have a platform to market themselves and grow as artists,

whether they're new or long-time artists. Martinez also assists in the sales of their work. She presented her role as a gallery manager as a venue for ethnic representation, for her

represented and celebrated, I wanted to be a part of that here in Las Cruces and be involved in supporting other Latino and Latina artists here in Las Cruces as well,” Martinez said.

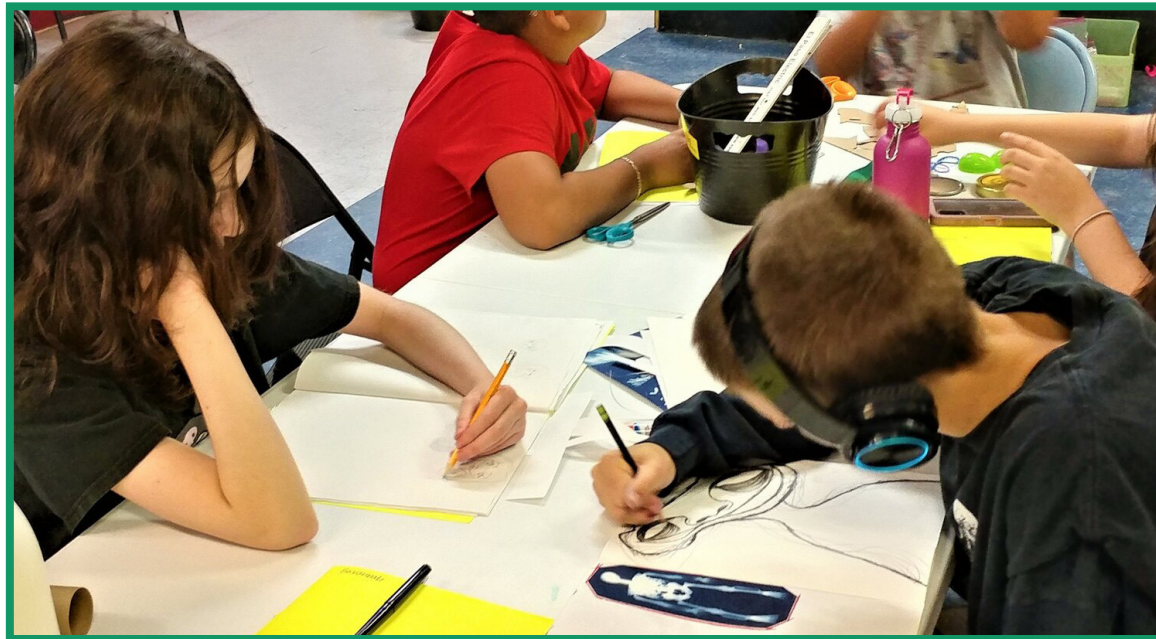
artistic processes, giving them a platform to show the community their creative output and helping them to express who they are.

“I think that's so beautiful: to

solicit authentic storytelling of the Latinos and Latino artists here. Allowing them to share their personal experiences, their traditions, their histories.”

Martinez recognizes that art also preserves and documents cultural practices and perspectives. She noted, through the arts, one can document one's cultural heritage.

More information on the Dona Ana Arts Council is available at [daarts.org](http://daarts.org), or by following them on Facebook and Instagram.



**Student artists participate in the Doña Ana Arts Council's "Career Art Path" program in 2023.**  
(Las Cruces Bulletin file photo)




passion for her culture to have a spotlight in the art world. “Being a Latina and growing up in Santa Fe, where Hispanic culture is well

The most rewarding part of her work at the arts council, she said, is connecting with each of the artists, learning about their

value and empower people who express themselves creatively,” she said. “It's extremely rewarding. I think it is important within this community to



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