

CELEBRATING HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH



At four years old, [Dr. Raul Fernandez](#) was placed in a gifted program which put him on a well-resourced path leading him to attend some of New York City's public exam schools and later Boston University. If not for this life-changing opportunity, he would have ended up at the former Stevenson High School in the Bronx, which at the time was graduating three out of every ten students. He uses himself as an example in his classes to teach students the importance of opportunities. "That's a big part of what drives my view of the world; it's the

identities I hold and the experiences I've had, and the understanding that if we want to change outcomes for people, then we have to change the opportunities they are provided."

Today, Dr. Fernandez is a senior lecturer in the Higher Education Administration program at Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. He has over a decade of diverse experience in higher education and is part of a [growing number of Latinx faculty](#) at BU.

Dr. Fernandez — the first person in his family to graduate college — came to BU in 1995 without much understanding of the higher education landscape. He began as an engineering major but quickly realized he didn't have the support he needed to succeed. He decided to switch his major to communications but faced many obstacles. His father said he sent him to school to be an engineer; if he wanted to do something else, he'd have to pay for it himself.

Dr. Fernandez took a semester off to earn money before returning to school. During that time, he found support amongst his Phi Iota Alpha fraternity brothers, who let him sleep on the couch and taught him to dance salsa. He also found community with his friends at Latinos Unidos (now known as Alianza Latina). "That group really helped me get through...if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have made it," he said.

As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, Dr. Fernandez questions the intention. "If it wasn't for moments like these, I wonder if they would forget we are here altogether."

Hispanic Heritage Month is nationally recognized from September 15 to October 15. It honors the influence and contributions of the Latinx community to history, culture, and achievements in the United States. The start day of September 15 was intentionally chosen because it coincides with the anniversary of independence for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. However, in the eyes of Dr. Fernandez, "we celebrate ourselves year-round!"

Dr. Fernandez believes that cultural observances are not for the people they honor but for others. "I think we have to ask for more accountability. What progress can institutions show since the last Hispanic Heritage Month? Where are the commitments? What has changed? Otherwise, we are showing up on display every year, sharing our stories, and frankly, not receiving much in return."

Showing up as a Brown person at a predominantly white institution forces them to reckon with you and your critiques about everything from the faculty to the curriculum, to the food in the dining hall, and names on the buildings, he said. "I'm still waiting for an institution to be like, this Hispanic Heritage Month; we are implementing changes, not just having conversations."

In recent years, [BU has seen an increase in Latinx students](#), and Dr. Fernandez hopes they find a robust and supportive community. "This is particularly important for those who hold an identity but haven't thought about what that means, or maybe don't understand as much about their history, culture, or the politics in Latin America." He believes that education and community are essential tools students can use to understand who they are.

-The Office of the Senior Diversity Officer

LATINX STUDENT GROUPS



Meetings every Tuesday
7PM - 9PM
Howard Thurman Center
808 Commonwealth Ave
alianzal@bu.edu

Alianza Latina is Boston University's largest Latinx student organization dedicated to providing programming that fosters community and encourages students to learn more about Latinx culture and identity, regardless of their own race or ethnicity. We implement weekly cultural, social, and professional meetings as well as community service events on and off campus.



For meetings information, please email
latam@bu.edu
or
latam@bu.edu

LATAM is a welcoming space for students from all around Latin America. Our goal is to create a sense of community within BU, where Latin American students can meet, connect and make lifelong friends through different social, recreational and professional events.



To learn more, please email:
alianzal@bu.edu

Sabor Latino is a dance group focused on Latin American rhythms, fusing modern dance styles with traditional Latin dances. In addition, we aim to foster strong ties between our members and the Greater Boston community through social involvement.

