

## Campus community celebrates diversity

By **Valentina Toro**  
Features Editor

Global cultures took center stage on April 29 as the university's Culture Fest brought music, dance and traditions together in a vibrant celebration of the campus community.

The event, held from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., featured a range of performances, student organizations and food trucks, creating a space where students could engage with different cultures through shared experiences and traditions.

"What inspired this fest, honestly, was the culture here on campus: the students that are always advocating for having a moment to celebrate everybody, no matter where you're from," Gian Melendez, graduate intern of Multi-cultural Affairs, said.

The festival showcased a diverse lineup of performances, including a DJ set and acts such as the Caribbean Vibe Steel Band, Mulan dancers and an OLAS dance team performance. African dance, samba dancers and a Greek showcase followed.

The rhythm of the event remained constant, as music echoed across the Academic Quad, and

crowds shifted from one performance to the next.

Food trucks lined the quad, offering a variety of options that complemented the festival's cultural focus, inviting students for a more immersive experience.

Organizers said Culture Fest was designed to go beyond a typical campus event by fostering a space where students feel recognized and represented.

"Culture fest aims to pay homage to everybody's culture and where they're coming from," Melendez said. "It's about being intentional about who our students are and giving them what they want."

For student performers, the event carried deeper meaning. Members of the OLAS dance team said participating in this year's festival marked a significant return.

"It is important for me and the OLAS dance team to be part of Culture Fest because this is the first year we've been able to perform in nearly 10 years," art education major Mariah Cotto, a junior and OLAS dance coordinator, said.

The fest gave the team a chance to connect with the campus community.

"We were able to express ourselves and our culture to our school and

continue something that we hope to do annually," Cotto said.

The team's performance concluded with a message of advocacy, as dancers ended with an "ICE out" statement addressing current social issues affecting communities.

"I ended our performance with this message because of everything going on in the world," Cotto said. "Our team is made up of dancers from South and Central America and the Caribbean. It was important to speak on it and make sure our communities are recognized."

Beyond performance, students pointed out the importance of events like Culture Fest in creating opportunities for visibility and connection.

By bringing together cultures in one space, the festival encouraged students to learn from one another while building a stronger sense of community.

"It showcases many cultures through performances and allows us to express ourselves through music and dance, creating moments not everyone gets to experience every day," psychology major Ariana LeCates, a junior and vice president of OLAS, said.



PHOTOS | LILY RAND

Mulan dancers present a traditional performance during Culture Fest.



Members of the OLAS dance team gather with signs during their performance.

## News Writer Victoria Cruz says goodbye

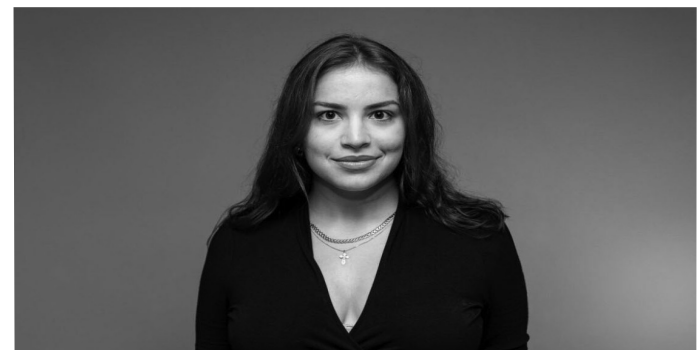


PHOTO | VICTORIA CRUZ

Business major, Victoria Cruz, a senior and News writer.

By **Victoria Cruz**  
News Writer

When I reflect on my time at the university, I am overwhelmed with emotion.

To begin to summarize my time and experience here is extremely difficult.

I came to the university after receiving my associates degree. My higher education journey has been anything but simple, but when I came here, I knew one thing: that I would make it count.

I joined WSIN radio, an organization I am proud

to be a part of. The people there: John Alston, Kaiya Bryant, Gerryiki Williams and Julio Merced, made me feel right at home.

Then, I joined the Southern News. Being platformed as a writer has been an immense privilege I have not taken for granted.

Solé Scott and Professor Cindy Simoneau gave me a chance at Southern News, and their support meant the world to me.

The entire team at the Southern News welcomed me with open arms. Having the opportunity to be a part of something so significant cannot be put into words.

The opportunity to write for you all has been a source of joy for me, and

I thank you for all your support.

The Reading Club became my introduction to student life.

When an opportunity to join the club as the vice president came up, I immediately jumped at the chance. I spent the year with my team. To them, I give my sincerest gratitude for my first place on campus.

Since then, I have risen to president, and running the club with new additions has been a wonderful. Here is to the all the pages read and the laughs shared.

Through it all, one of the greatest joys has been meeting my roommates, Melany Villavicencio, Natalia Gillner and Tiffani

Ramos. These three women have been there supporting throughout my campus media journey.

Whether it was accompanying me to events or encouraging me to get involved, they have inspired me to be my best self while being there for me in ways they will never know.

To know you all has been one of the greatest joys of my life. I love you all from the bottom of my heart.

Finally, I would not be where I am without my family. To be your daughter and sister truly is a privilege.

I was lucky enough that my brother Brandon became a fellow Owl;

sharing this experience with you makes me feel so lucky. To my youngest brother, Daniel, I cannot wait to see where you go and the person you become.

To my mom, I thank you for showing me what it means to be a hard-working, passionate and loving woman.

To my dad, I thank you for your support and teaching me what it means to be resilient. You all mean the world to me, and I would not be who I am without you.

And finally, to the university, I always knew I was meant to be an Owl. But thank you for showing me what that really means. It has been a hoot.

## Owls Decide: Beach or water park?

By **Valentina Toro**  
Features Editor



PHOTOS | LILY RAND

"Beach because you get to chill, tan and spend time with your family."  
-Exercise and sport science major Jayla Robinson, a sophomore



"Beach; it is more laid-back, and there's more activities to do."  
-Exercise and sport science major Dynastee Pena, a sophomore



"I just like being at the beach feeling the sand on your feet. Water at the beach is just better."  
-Sport management major Charles Cannon, a senior



"Beach because it's more relaxing than water parks."  
-Healthcare studies major Shalom Olawale, a junior



"I would say the beach because it's more relaxing, and you can enjoy the sun."  
-Nursing major Zohra Sarwari, a freshman



"I prefer the beach because to me, it's more peaceful."  
-History major Marquise Fernandes, a senior