# OLAS creates space for Latin and Hispanic students

**By Brandon Cortés**
**Features Editor**

For nearly two decades, the Organization of Latin American Students has been a cultural anchor at the university. Known as OLAS, the group gives students a space to celebrate heritage, find community and build awareness about the Hispanic experience on campus.

Leading the club this year is biology major Melany Villavicencio, a junior, who serves as OLAS's president. She said the group's signature event, the 19th annual Noche de Gala, shows both its longevity and its commitment to supporting students.

"Our biggest event is Noche de Gala," Villavicencio said. "Everyone dresses up formally, and all the money we raise goes back to students. It's a way for us to give back while also celebrating our culture."

The gala, held in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom, is more than just a night of dancing and celebration. OLAS gathered donations leading up to the event to fund the Calahe scholarship, which provides about $1,000 to Latino students each year.

Villavicencio said organizing the gala has been a major focus for her e-board this semester, as they work to secure contributions that will directly support their peers.

Founded almost 20 years ago, OLAS was created to support Latin American students while also giving visibility to the Hispanic community on campus. The group became widely known for its large dance team and strong membership before the pandemic forced it to scale back.

"Many years ago, OLAS used to be a big club on campus, like a massive dance team," Villavicencio said. "Unfortunately, due to COVID, we saw a big decrease. It wasn't until last year that they brought it back, and now we've slowly been seeing our numbers increase again."

That rebuilding process has also reshaped OLAS's goals.

The club continues to host fun, cultural events but is focusing more heavily on programs that highlight heritage and social awareness.

Recent collaborations include a Bailando Bachata night with the Latin American Student Association, where students learned the popular Dominican dance from OLAS dance coordinators.

"Besides being a place where students can feel free to express themselves, it's also a space for Latin American students to have a voice," Villavicencio said. "This year, we're trying to do more events that are culturally significant, especially with what's been going on in America recently."

For Villavicencio, OLAS is not just an extracurricular but a lifeline. A transfer student who grew up in a predominantly white town, she said joining the club provided an instant sense of belonging.

"I didn't feel like myself at my old school," Villavicencio said. "I remember my first OLAS body meeting, and I just felt so at home because I saw people that looked like me, talked like me and that I could also speak Spanish with. It made me want to stay here knowing that I had people who were like me."

Business information systems major Catalina Espinosa, a junior who serves as OLAS treasurer, said she joined the club for the same sense of connection.

"I like it," Espinosa said. "I joined OLAS because I think it's definitely a good place to get involved. You get to know more of your people here. You are connected to them. You get closer to them."

Like many student organizations, OLAS faces challenges with attendance and funding. Villavicencio said turnout is high at the beginning of each semester but tends to decline as workloads increase.

The group is working on donations to help fund this year's gala.

In the long term, she hopes to restore OLAS to the energy it had before the pandemic while continuing to serve as a voice for Latin students.

The e-board is also focused on building leadership skills among members. Students are encourage to take active roles in planning events, managing social media or coordinating with other campus organizations, fraternities and clubs.

Villavicencio said these opportunities pepare students for life after college, giving them confidence to represent their culture and community wherever they go, while also teaching them the value of leadership, teamwork and perserverance.

"My goals are to create events that are a bit more educational and bring more awareness to Hispanic culture," Villavicencio said, "and long term, to hopefully bring it back to where it was ten years ago, with a lot of members showing up and having a great time."




PHOTO | BRANDON CORTÉS
**OLAS members at their weekly body meeting at the Adanti Student Center.**

# Money sadly rules all

**By Solé Scott**
**Editor-in-Chief**

I am currently in my senior year of college, and I am in the process of getting my finances in order.

Money is the root to happiness because without money I would be depressed that I could not buy what my heart desires at that very moment.

I understand that for some people in this world, money is not what makes their day, nor is it the reason they find joy or purpose in their life. For me, money is what makes the world spin.

I have no problem labeling myself as materialistic because that simply is me.

This is not to say that I save it all. I have my vices. I love a good shopping spree at Gap, and I also love Marshalls and Burlington, which are a fraction of the price. I am a sucker for Coach and Marc Jacobs bags.

Right now I am building back my savings, and I am realizing how difficult it is in this economy because the cost of living is much higher than average wages.

I am ecstatic to graduate and get my degree because of all the work I have accomplished in four long years, but I am also terrified to live on my own, as I will be responsible for my apartment, household bills, car and more.

Every day, I search for jobs to apply to in the spring, but most jobs expect five years or more of experience for an entry-level position.

The financial system is already in disarray, so some jobs adding this as a requirement is not helpful for students entering the workforce.

After job searching, I look for apartments in Connecticut, specifically closer to New York City, as that is my ideal working location.

The rent is $2,500 at minimum for a studio or one-bedroom apartment that looks like a shoebox. Some apartment complexes do not include one parking spot per unit, nor do they include washer and dryer hookup

What frustrates me more is when older generations compare their experience, pointing out how they could afford a car and a mortage while working a grocery store job in the '60s and '70s.

News flash: federal minimum wage has not increased from $7.25 since 2009, which means we as a nation have lost buying power and poverty and inequality have unfortunately increased.

The value of money has declined over time and does not match basic living expenses.

In this day and age, we have reduced economic power that makes it difficult to save and build some kind of wealth.

I feel like I am always starting at the bottom and rarely increase financially.

Because money influences access to housing, education and even social standing, it becomes closely linked with power. For those who do not feel its weight, it may be a sign of personal financial security.

# Owls Decide: Do you use TikTok or Instagran?

**By Brandon Cortés**
**Features Editor**



**"Instagram. I don't like TikTok and most of my friends are on Instagram anyway.**
**-Exploratory major Naydelin Chica, a freshman**



**"TikTok. More people that I know use more TikTok than Instagram."**
**-Environmental systems and sustainability major Brandon Rivera, a freshman**



**"TikTok. TikTok is way better than Instagram in any single way."**
**-Special education major Perjah Delgado, a sophomore**

PHOTOS | LILY RAND



**"TikTok. TikTok because there is a greater variety on the For You page."**
**-Elementary education major Brynn Roscoe, a sophomore**



**"TikTok. My TikTok algorithm is more positive than my Instagram's."**
**-Exercise and sport science major Erik Stanzel, a senior**



**"Instagram. Instagram Reels are better"**
**-Nursing major Sydney Crockett, a junior**