Keynote connects cuture and identity

By Valentina Toro
Features Editor

Award-winning poet and cultural worker Magdalena Gómez brought conversations about identity and belonging to the university, drawing students, faculty and community members to a keynote centered on storytelling and social justice.

Hosted by the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program, the event featured a reading, a Q&A session and a book signing.

"The Latin American and Caribbean Studies program does a social justice keynote every year, and we try to focus on different aspects of Latin American culture, immigration and poetry," Melanie Uribe, director of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program, said.

Gómez, a former poet laureate, spoke about themes tied to her work, including intergenerational memory, Puerto Rican heritage, migration and the layered experiences of the Latinx communities.

Gómez is the author of "Mi'ja," an International Latino Book Award-winning memoir that blends poetry and prose to explore motherhood, migration and identity.

Her work often reflects the complexities of navigating multiple cultural spaces while also amplifying resilience and personal history.

"Her work isn't just for one community," Uribe said. "It really opens up conversations about history, culture and identity and creates space for reflection and connection across different disciplines."

Although the keynote had been planned since last year, organizers said the timing felt especially relevant.

"Magdalena brings a lot of social justice, immigration but also identity and feminism and belonging to her work that we thought was going to be an incredible opportunity to bring her to campus," Uribe said.

The event followed a week of tension and student activism on campus, creating an environment where conversations about belonging and representation felt more urgent.

"In serendipity, this is the perfect week because of everything that is happening around us," Uribe said. "We're going to have this amazing display of community and unity."

The university continues to prioritize programming that highlights diverse voices and perspectives. Uribe said Gómez's visit aligned with the university's broader commitment to social justice and cultural representation.

Students were invited to attend a smaller reception in Engleman Hall Room B121 following the event, giving them the opportunity to engage more directly with Gómez.

The gathering offered more personal space for conversation with Gómez allowing students to reflect on the themes presented during the keynote.

Uribe said the organization hoped students left with a deeper understanding of how storytelling can function as both an academic and creative practice.

By blending activism, scholarship and lived experience, Gómez's work demonstrated how narratives can shape knowledge and challenge traditional academic boundaries.

"I always hope that students go to the events because it brings a live experience to this academic space in a way that is both intellectual and emotional," Uribe said. "It's an opportunity to see how storytelling can be a form of scholarship and how creativity, activism and academics can all come together."



PHOTOS | WILLIAM GAGNÉ

Magdalena Gómez speaks to students during the keynote on April 8.



Gómez walks through the audience engaging with students during the keynote.

Students embrace culture through dance

By Valentina Toro
Features Editor

Music and movement filled the Adanti Student Center Ballroom as students gathered on April 7 for Salsa con Salsa, a beginner-friendly event hosted by the Organization of Latin American Students and Programs Council.

The event welcomed all students to participate in a guided salsa lesson followed by a build-your-own taco bar.

"I hope that students take away a few dance moves, and I hope they take away as well knowing that there's a space for everyone on this campus," biology major Melany Villavicencio, a junior and president of OLAS, said.

Salsa con Salsa blended dance, food and cultural expression.

The event created an environment where cultural appreciation and social connection came together in an interactive setting.

Organizers said the goal is to make cultural expression accessible to everyone regardless of background or experience.

"I'm so grateful that this campus allows organizations like OLAS and ProCon and other diverse clubs, and I hope that we just continue to grow altogether," Villavicencio said.

The collaboration between OLAS and ProCon was designed to expand outreach and bring more students into spaces centered around culture and inclusion.

By partnering with one of the largest programming organizations on campus, OLAS aimed to make the event more visible and accessible to students who may not typically attend cultural events.

Organizers said the event also served as a way to introduce students to Latin American traditions beyond common stereotypes, using dance as a form of storytelling and connection.

Salsa, a dance rooted in Latin culture, provided a way for participants to engage physically while learning about its cultural significance.

"It's a great way for people to get the authentic experience," biology major Craig Huydic, a senior, said. "It gives that authenticity to the students that require it."

In addition to celebrating culture, organizers emphasized the importance of hosting events like this during a time when conversations around identity and belonging remain especially relevant.

Creating inclusive environment on campus, Huydic said, allows students to feel seen and supported while also educating others.

"In the state of the world right now, I think it's incredibly important for people to get all sides of every person," Huydic said. " Especially during this time when people might feel like they need to hide it, it's one of our jobs to help people know that they can express it."

Events like Salsa con Salsa reflect OLAS' broader mission to build community on campus while sharing Latin American culture in meaningful ways.

Through programming that highlights traditions such as dance, food and storytelling, the organization works to create spaces where students can both celebrate their identities and learn from one another.

For many attendees, the event also offered an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones and learn more about different cultures and traditions.

Students with little to no experience in salsa were encouraged to join in, creating a welcoming and judgment-free atmosphere on the dance floor.

"It's a way for all students to come together," Huydic said. "Salsa may be rooted in specific cultures, but it invites everyone in and creates a space where people can learn from each other and feel like they belong."

Owls Decide: Morning or night classes?

By Valentina Toro
Features Editor



PHOTOS | LILY RAND

"Morning classes, I think I get them out of the way early."
-Nursing major Dayanna Cedillo, a junior



"Morning classes; my best classes happen in the morning."
-Sport management masters Ben Martin, a graduate



"Night classes because it's a better vibe."
-Sociology masters Joey Merly, a graduate



"Night classes because I'm not a morning person."
-Equity and justice in education masters Christopher Sheehy, a graduate



"Morning classes: I feel like you get them out of the way early, and you get the rest of the day for yourself."
-Nursing major Della Smith, a sophomore



"Night classes because I feel morning classes are harder to wake up to."
-Nursing major Mercies Owusu, a sophomore