
HCC hosts Bienvenidos for Hispanic students

HOLYOKE — Holyoke Community College will host its second annual Bienvenidos celebration today, a half-day event created specifically for current, new and prospective Hispanic students.

Bienvenidos will run 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on the second floor of the HCC Campus Center, just outside El Centro, the campus hub of support and cultural activities for Hispanic students.

“I think the name in Spanish captures this event perfectly,” said Julissa Colón, director of El Centro and a member of HCC’s Hispanic Leadership Committee, which organized the event. “Although Bienvenidos means ‘welcome,’ there’s something a little bit dry about the word welcome. Bienvenidos, culturally, is more like a welcome where you grab someone by the hand and lead them into the house. Our Bienvenidos is about seeing our new students and returning students and prospective students and saying, ‘You are so welcome here. We are so happy to have you here, and we want to show you that there already exists a community here that wants to help you and support you.’”

The event is free and open to all.

Bienvenidos will begin at 9:30 a.m. with “Café con Leche” — coffee and home-baked Puerto Rican breakfast treats, such as quesitos (flaky pastries filled with sweet cheese), and besitos de coco (a kind of shredded coconut cookie).

President Christina Royal will deliver the official Bienvenidos welcome, followed by remarks from Sharale Mathis, HCC’s vice president of academic and student affairs, and Colón, who will introduce El Centro.

“El Centro is a place for Latinx students to receive

wraparound support from the minute they walk into HCC until the day they cross the stage at graduation,” said Colón.

Besides Colón, El Centro’s staff includes two senior community outreach workers, an academic counselor, a financial services advisor, and a clerk, all bilingual and bicultural.

“El Centro is built for Latinx students,” she said. “We’re providing a place for wraparound support and also a place to celebrate people’s culture. Bienvenidos is specifically for Latinx students because, as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, we have a duty to these particular students, to ensure their success.”

Bienvenidos will include a panel of Hispanic alumni, talking about their experiences at HCC: Maritza Santiago, a 2015 graduate and a clinician at Brightside for Families and Children; Alexandra Santiago, a 2021 Latinx studies graduate now at Westfield State University; and Angel Vargas, a 2022 computer science graduate now at UMass-Amherst.

After that, HCC Spanish professor Raúl Gutiérrez, coordinator of HCC’s Latinx studies program and co-coordinator of HCC’s Honors program, will lead a workshop titled “Placemaking.”

Lunch is being catered by Sabon Latino, a Dominican-Puerto Rican restaurant in Chicopee, and entertainment provided by the music and dance company Bomba de Aquí, led by Holyoke’s Brendalíz Cepeda.

Attendees will receive goodie bags filled with school supplies and other items and be eligible for raffle prizes, including a laptop.

For more information, email elcentro@hcc.edu or call 413-552-2052. To register to attend the event, visit hcc.edu/bienvenidos22.