Hispanic Students Build Community

Every February, members of the CUA Student Organization of Latinos (CUA SOL) put on their best dresses and suits and make their way to the Edward J. Pryzbylewski University Center Great Room for Noche de Gala, a night of music, dancing, and celebration of a shared heritage. The party, held in association with the D.C. Latino Partnership to connect Hispanic student groups from the various Washington, D.C., area universities, amounts to a kind of “Latino Prom,” said Omar Estrada Torres, associate dean of students and faculty advisor for CUA SOL.

“Some students bring their brothers and sisters or boyfriends and girlfriends,” said Torres. “We’ll put on music and they’ll dance and enjoy each other. It’s a really great night.”

The Noche de Gala is one of many events hosted by CUA SOL, with the intention of building pride and community among the University’s Hispanic students, who comprise 11.9% of the undergraduate student population (a 6.2% increase from 2006). In addition to the gala, the group holds weekly meetings and monthly events, including bowling nights, dinners, community service activities, and study sessions.

Senior Paloma Arroyo-Lefebre, a social work major, is president of CUA SOL. She became involved with the group as a freshman.

“I was attracted by how close-knit everybody was,” she said. “It was great seeing people with my background and point of view, who understood me and knew where I came from.”

That sense of shared heritage and pride is what drives CUA SOL to reach out to the local community by encouraging Hispanic high school students to succeed. Several times a year, CUA SOL members, including sophomore Susana Molina and senior Pamela Cabrera, invite local groups like the San Miguel afterschool program and the Latin-American Youth Center to CUA for a glimpse of college life. After showing them around campus, the University students take time to answer questions the teenagers might have about college — whether it’s concerns about financial aid or leaving home for the first time.

“Some of the kids may not have parents who went to college, so I think it’s important for them to see us in college and see that we’re thriving, we’re giving back to the community, and we’re very proud to be Latino,” Arroyo-Lefebre said. “We try to get personal and be one-on-one, to be that one little voice that says, ‘Hey, you can do this. This is actually achievable.'”

This kind of outreach is important to Torres, who is heavily involved in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, an organization that strives to develop young Latino leaders. Torres has spoken several times at the institute’s annual Ready to Lead Conference on the importance of preparing for a college education. Developing Hispanic leaders is also a goal of the University.

“The University is intensely interested in continuing to increase the percentage of students who are Hispanic and that is reflected in our Strategic Plan,” said Very Rev. Mark Morosowski, interim provost. “According to a 2012 study, Latines make up about 40% of the U.S. Catholic population, compared to about 25% in the 1980s. As the national university of the Catholic Church, our enrollment of Catholics should mirror the U.S. Catholic population. We’ve made some progress on that front but still have quite a ways to go.”

— K.B.

New Rome Center: “A Three-Continent Endeavor”

The Catholic University of America and Australian Catholic University (ACU) are creating a new joint Rome Center, bringing together students and professors from both universities for study, spirituality, and immersion in the rich Italian culture at the center of the Catholic Church.

The new center will have much to offer students, including a location about a mile from the Vatican, newly renovated living quarters for undergraduates, a wing for graduate students, apartments for visiting faculty, a studio for architecture majors, a chapel, and a garden.

On Jan. 29, during the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Rome Center of The Catholic University of America and Australian Catholic University, President John Garvey described it as a “three-continent endeavor” that will offer an innovative learning opportunity for students. With similar missions “to bring to life Catholic higher education in our respective countries … we can learn from one another, and what better place to do it than at the epicenter of western civilization in Rome?” Garvey asked.

Noting that the center “has created enormous excitement in Australia,” Greg Craven, vice chancellor of ACU, said, “In terms of the character of the [Rome] center … this is two universities embedding themselves as universities in the heart of the Church, and I think that’s never been done before.” Craven was among a group of about 50 deans and administrators from the two universities who toasted the initiative at the ceremony held in Curley Hall’s Vincent P. Walter Boardroom.

Craven said that when Australian Cardinal George Pell heard the news, he “immediately jumped in his car and drove to the center to inspect the property.” Cardinal Pell, who recently stepped down as chairman of ACU’s Board of Trustees, was appointed last year as prefect of the Vatican’s Secretariat for the Economy by Pope Francis.

The joint operation of the Rome Center is the second collaborative venture involving the universities. Since 2009 the CUA School of Nursing has had a reciprocal student exchange with the ACU School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine. ACU, which this year celebrates the 25th anniversary of its founding, is larger than Catholic University, with seven campuses throughout Australia. Craven revealed at the signing ceremony that the Australian university consciously patterned its name and initials after those of CUA.

The partnership enables CUA’s Rome Center to move from its current location — a building in the city’s Prati neighborhood owned by St. John’s University — to the new campus, which is situated on the Janiculum Hill just above the ancient Roman neighborhood of Trastevere. The Rome Center, which marked its 10th anniversary last year, annually hosts 150 to 200 students, including about 30 to 40 from Loyola University Maryland.

Leaders from the universities will gather again in mid-July at ACU’s Melbourne campus to celebrate their partnership and in September at the new center for a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

— C.L.

For more on the new campus, visit rome.cua.edu/center.cfm. An article on the Rome Center (“Changing Lives: A Semester in the Eternal City”) appeared in the fall 2014 issue of the magazine and can be found at cuamagazine.cua.edu.

Web Extra: To view a photo gallery showing the new campus and the Jan. 29 signing ceremony, visit cuamagazine.cua.edu.
27 Years @ CUA

Susan and Danny Weir
Office Manager in Technology Services and Carpenter/Roofers for Building Maintenance and Grounds

Danny Weir had just retired from a career with the military when his wife, Susan, found a job at Catholic University in the executive vice president's office in 1988. Two years later, Danny would join her at the University in his second career — first as a painter, then as a carpenter and roofer. Over the last 27 years, Susan also worked in the treasurer's office before taking a job in technology services. The couple has been married for 41 years and has two children. Their son, James, graduated from CUA's School of Engineering in 1999.

On Working at CUA
Danny: In the military, we pretty much did the same thing each day. At the University, it is a different work order all the time. And sometimes, we've gotten to work together. We were both part of the trailers [Curley Court] getting here. The treasurer's office handled the financial side, and maintenance helped install them on campus.

Best Part of the Job
Susan: I just love it here. The people are great. Everybody I've ever worked for or met here I've truly loved. It's always been "family first" here and people treat you with respect.

Danny: It's a different sort of job. This isn't the usual 9-to-5. On any particular day I might be chasing a raccoon out of a dorm or birds out of an attic. The University itself is different every day. And working together is great. We're able to bring one car to campus and free up a parking space for someone else.

We also enjoy having the time off we get here. I've worked jobs where, if you don't work, you don't get paid. So the holidays here are great. So the holidays here are great.

Changes Witnessed
Susan: It seems lately that we're more focused on the University mission. And I like that.

Danny: The campus seems to be changing for the better. When we first came, it was a little dreary. But the upkeep of the grounds and new buildings, and updates to old buildings, have improved the campus.

Most Memorable Time at CUA
Danny: On Sept. 11, 2001, I stood on the steps of the Basilica and watched the smoke rise from the Pentagon.

Susan: We live nearby, but we stayed on campus later that day to help.

Danny: Even for a few days after there was a weird feeling in the air. Even for a few days after there was a weird feeling in the air.

Favorite Time at CUA
Susan: My favorite time on campus is August and Orientation, when new students come on board. I love seeing the kids come to campus.

Danny: I love the spring when flowers bloom and brighten campus. Especially in the early morning when there's no noise — no city coyotes [emergency vehicle sirens]. At 7:30 a.m. when I get to work, I like to drive through campus. I can see deer on the hill [north end of campus] and foxes by the trailers. It's eerie. A man used to sit outside of McMahon Hall with a handful of nuts and feed them to squirrels.

— M.M.H.

NSO Opens Music School’s 50th Anniversary Celebration

Hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and members of the Brookland community were in attendance Jan. 12 at the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO), led by Music Director Christoph Eschenbach, performed a free concert at The Catholic University of America’s Hartke Theatre.

The performance was the culmination of the 2015 NSO In Your Neighborhood series, a week of events in the Brookland and NoMa (North of Massachusetts Avenue) neighborhoods of Washington, D.C.

It also was the opening event of the music school’s 50th Anniversary Celebration, a year-long series of special events that will include a full program by the CUA Symphony Orchestra and choruses at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Concert Hall on Sunday, April 12.

In his opening remarks before the concert, Grayson Wagstaff, dean of the Benjamin H. Rome School of Music, said the concert marked a “historic evening” for the University, as it was the first time the NSO has performed on campus.

Speaking at a reception following the concert, University President John Garvey noted that, “It was a real honor to host the National Symphony Orchestra at Catholic University. It’s such a great gift to this community. On April 12, we’ll return this favor by returning to the Kennedy Center.”

The concert featured NSO Principal Flute Aaron Goldman and included Mozart’s Overture to Le Nozze di Figaro, K. 492; Concerto No. 2 in D major for Flute and Orchestra, K. 314; and Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, Jupiter.

In the hours leading up to the concert, a brass quartet from the NSO interacted with students as part of Studio X, the music school’s weekly music colloquium in which undergraduate gather for master classes, presentations, and performances.

“It is a really good opportunity to hear the unique characteristics of each instrument in such a personal, intimate setting,” Yost said. “Especially as a composer, that’s really important to understand how the instruments sound.”

Brendt said he was excited by the opportunity to see NSO musicians up close and personal.

For more information about the school’s 50th Anniversary Celebration, including the Kennedy Center performance on April 12, visit music.cua.edu.
First Steps Toward Change on West Campus

On one of the last warm days of November, University President John Garvey — dressed a bit more casual than usual in corduroy pants and hiking boots — hopped into a four-wheel-drive off-road vehicle with Jerry Conrad, associate vice president for facilities operations. They took a tour of the clearing and excavation site on Catholic University's West Campus — more than 40 acres of land bordered by Haerwood Road and North Capitol Street on the east and west, respectively — with Kurt Wiebusch, director of facilities planning and construction, and staff from the Office of Public Affairs.

The development of this land is part of the 2012 Master Plan. According to the plan — which will take some years to bring to fruition — a new main entrance to the campus will be completed in 2014 at the site involved moving the dirt from the highest areas and filling in some of the ravines. Approximately 100,000 cubic yards of dirt needed to be moved. (An average dump truck holds 10 to 12 cubic yards of dirt.)

Before the recent clearing work began, there was about 70 feet of difference in topography on the West Campus land. The highest hills were formed from deposits of fill materials (dirt and rocks) that came from excavations in other locations prior to the University's purchase of the land in 2004. The work completed in 2014 at the site involved moving the dirt from the highest areas and filling in some of the ravines. Approximately 100,000 cubic yards of dirt needed to be moved. (An average dump truck holds 10 to 12 cubic yards of dirt.)

Conrad said that meadows will be created adjacent to the new road. Some areas will be grassy and meant for recreational use. Others will be planted with wildflowers and other native plants to cut down on mowing needs.

In the future phases of the development project, parking will be established on the eastern edge of West Campus across Haerwood Road from Ward and Leahy halls and Harewood Theatre. This will allow for McMahon parking lot to be transformed into green space.

Conrad noted that this first phase of clearing and excavation were made possible by using bond proceeds allocated to the West Campus. Future work on the site will unfold over time as additional funding becomes available.

Commenting on what he witnessed during his tour, President Garvey said, “It’s only a first step in what will be a long process. Nevertheless, walking through this beautiful and expansive property, I had the sense that I was previewing the University’s bright future.”

— M.M.H

“Walking through this beautiful and expansive property, I had the sense that I was previewing the University’s bright future.”

Students Enjoy New Sports Court, Reflection Area

As part of the University’s continued efforts to create a vibrant living-learning environment on campus, students who live in Centennial Village (a neighborhood of eight residence halls near the middle of campus) now have outdoor spaces for athletic activity and quiet reflection. During the fall semester, the University completed construction of a sports court and space for contemplation in the middle of the on-campus residential neighborhood.

The court can be used for either basketball or volleyball. It’s the second outdoor court to be built on campus in recent years. Another court was constructed adjacent to the Eugene I. Kane Student Health and Fitness Center in 2011.

The contemplative garden contains amphitheater-type seating for individual or group reflection.

The court and reflective area are surrounded by a gently sloping grassy area where students can gather. All areas in the middle of Centennial Village incorporate substantial year-round landscaping.

“The unique openness of Centennial Village was always a great place to gather in warmer months, but the addition of the basketball court has made the village’s best characteristic available throughout colder months to socialize and exercise,” says Jonathan McGee, a senior philosophy major from Raleigh, N.C., and a resident assistant in McDonald House. “The reflective garden and surrounding patio make for the perfect place to do homework or even to set up a grill for a cookout. Both additions are well used and widely loved by those of us lucky enough to live around them.”

— L.C.
Champion of Religious Liberty

Mark L. Rienzi, Law

Mark L. Rienzi, associate professor at the Columbus School of Law, has dedicated much of his career to defending individual rights under the First and Fourteenth amendments, with an emphasis on free speech and free exercise of religion. On June 26, 2014, the United States Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision in McCullen v. Coakley — argued the previous January by Rienzi — declaring unconstitutional a Massachusetts law that outlawed even peaceful conversation outside abortion clinics in that state. Rienzi also is senior counsel at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty and has litigated several challenges to the Health and Human Services contraceptive mandate including those brought by Hobby Lobby and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Q: When did you decide that you wanted to be a lawyer?
A: I pretty much always knew I’d be a lawyer. My grade school teachers used to tell me that it would happen because I was always arguing with someone. But they didn’t say it as a compliment. They were annoyed with me because I was constantly challenging the rules.

Q: Why are you so passionate about the First and Fourteenth amendments?
A: Those two amendments are the backbone of individual liberty. They protect our freedom and the right of each of us to have and express our own values and beliefs. If we’re going to be a diverse, liberal society then we have to understand that our neighbors have the right to think differently. It’s part of living in a free society in America. When the government tries to restrict that freedom, everyone’s got skin in the game.

Q: How did you prepare for your argument before the Supreme Court — the first you’ve ever done?
A: I participated in several practice moot courts including one at the law school two days before I argued in front of the justices. I tell my students that before a big case any good appellate lawyer gets up in front of his friends and lets them tear him down. By the time you’re finished, you may not be able to anticipate every question, but you’re pretty well prepared. About a month beforehand, I went to the Supreme Court and asked the clerk if I could stand at the podium to get a sense of how close I would be to the judges. You’re very nearly face-to-face, only 10 to 15 feet away. The morning that I argued I could feel the pressure but at 10 o’clock they called my name and I stood up. Once I started, I was OK. I love to get up and talk about the First Amendment.

Q: What do you enjoy about teaching?
A: Everything. When I started working at the law school in 2009, I didn’t know how much I would really love teaching. Having the chance to talk about the Constitution and cases like Roe v. Wade with a bunch of smart 23-year-olds is great fun and very fulfilling. We don’t all end up agreeing, but that’s what makes the discussions so interesting.

Q: Is there something about you that might surprise our readers?
A: I like to cook. I make my own pizza using a secret recipe. But, I never share it. — C.L.

Honors Seminar Explores the Influence of Mary

The spring semester honors seminar, Mary as Woman, Mother, Idea, begins each class with a prayer. On the first class in January, the students pray:

“...Hail, for you conceived a guide for those gone astray. Hail, for you have a deliverer for captives...”

The prayer is taken from The Akathist Hymn, a series of devotions from the Orthodox Church that offers praise to the Mother of God.

At the end of the semester, the prayers will be compiled in a booklet as a keepsake for the students.

The interdisciplinary seminar is taught by seven University faculty members representing the disciplines of history, English, theology, and music. Each faculty member is an accomplished scholar who brings a specialized perspective to the study of the Blessed Mother.

In the fall, the University partnered with the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) on a landmark exhibition, Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea, that opened in December and runs through April 12. CUA has provided program support that draws on the scholarship of University faculty.

Marian themes have set a tone for the spring semester with the launch of auxiliary programs that, in addition to the honors seminar, included a lecture series; portions of drama, art, and theology courses dedicated to Mary; performances, and a two-day graduate student conference featuring a keynote address by world-renowned Marian expert Miri Ruben, author of Mary: Mother of God. A History of the Virgin Mary. A priority of the CUA partnership with the museum was to provide unique learning opportunities for students.

In addition to lecture and discussion, the course has included a guided tour of the Picturing Mary exhibit at NMWA, as well as guided tours of the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, and the National Gallery of Art.

The students also attended a portion of CUA’s premier event in conjunction with the Picturing Mary exhibit — the graduate student conference Picturing Mary: Mother, Woman, Idea held in March.

Each student in the honors course has been paired with one of the faculty members teaching the course to work on an in-depth research project related to Mary. “It is a level of mentorship not typical at the undergraduate level,” says Jennifer Paxton, assistant clinical professor in the Department of History, who is coordinating the seminar.

For his research project, freshman theology major Nicolas Novak is the only student working directly with two faculty mentors: Joshua Benson, associate professor of systematic theology, and Katherine Jansen, professor of history. His topic, “Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages,” draws on both of their fields, and Novak says he was thrilled when both professors agreed to help guide him through the project.

“Mary is basically God’s promise to us,” says Novak, explaining his excitement at spending a semester studying Marian themes. “The last words she speaks in the Bible at the wedding at Cana (John 2:5), ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ speak to the role she plays in guiding us toward God.” — E.N.W.

To learn more about CUA’s programming in conjunction with the Picturing Mary exhibit, visit honormary.cua.edu.
Tips for a Happy Marriage

• Communication is not automatic. Communication is vital to a good marriage. But good communication takes time, patience, and practice to develop. Family history, temperament, gender, personality, and experience all impact a couple’s communication patterns, and couples need to take time to understand these factors and patterns. As a couple’s schedule becomes more crowded by jobs, kids, and responsibilities in and outside of the home, it can become easy to overlook time for communication. Make some time to talk — and listen — daily.

• Don’t stop dating. One reason for the feelings of closeness in the beginning of a couple’s relationship is that they spend most of their time together doing fun things. It’s important to keep having date nights, sharing activities, and going for occasional getaways without the kids. And these don’t have to break a couple’s budget. A date could be playing a game together or curling up on the couch to watch a dollar movie rental. Make sure you both take the initiative to plan activities.

• Pray together. Social scientific studies show that couples who pray together not only feel more connected to each other, they also enjoy more satisfying sexual relationships. Why? Because sex is a mirror which reflects the various forms of intimacy present between a couple — physical, verbal, emotional, and spiritual. There is nothing more intimate than praying to the One who made you both, drew you together, and united you in a love which exceeds your own human resources (what Catholics call a sacrament).

• “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger.” These words from the Letter to the Ephesians (4:26) should be a rule of daily life for married couples. Properly handled, conflict is a doorway to deeper understanding and intimacy in a marriage and helps the relationship to grow. When anger does flare, couples should make it a point to reconcile before retiring for the night.

• Eat together at the family table and the Lord’s table. As children grow and family schedules get more complex, many couples settle for eating dinners or attending church in shifts. While occasionally there are unavoidable circumstances, fight to keep the habit of family dinners and family worship together. These offer the best opportunities for you to witness as a couple the gift your marriage is and the place of God within it.

— John and Claire Grabowski

John Grabowski is an associate professor of moral theology and ethics. He and his wife, Claire, are one of two American member couples on the Pontifical Council for the Family, and are involved in the upcoming World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. They also have worked together for the past 20 years to help couples prepare for marriage through pre-Cana programs and have been directing a “post-Cana” ministry for married couples in their parish for the last five years.

(Don’t miss the feature story on CUA couples on page 16.)