

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students:

National Hispanic Heritage Month is one of our most important celebrations at USC Upstate. From September 15 to October 15 each year, we focus on the historically significant and ongoing contributions of the Hispanic/Latinx community that are so important to the tapestry of our university, region and nation.

It is also a time to celebrate and recognize the achievements and leadership of our Hispanic/Latinx faculty, staff and students, who help define our excellence and illustrate daily that the diversity at USC Upstate is one of our greatest strengths.

USC Upstate launched National Hispanic Heritage Month with a compelling exhibit called “**Now We Thrive**” by **Yehimi Cambrón**. A native of Michoacán, Mexico, Yehimi immigrated to the United States at age 7. As I spoke with her, I was moved by her experience of coming to a country where many of us take opportunity for granted, yet she and others like her often find themselves invisible. Her award-winning art asserts the humanity of immigrants, depicts the complexity of their stories, and challenges assumptions about who is worthy of monumental celebration.

One who is worthy of monumental celebration at USC Upstate is **Dr. Araceli Hernández-Laroche**, professor of modern languages. She recently became the first Hispanic faculty member to be promoted to the rank of full professor, and she is also the university’s first tenured Mexican-American. Nationwide, she is among only 2% of Latina faculty members who are full professors and 1% of Latinas who are tenured full professors.

Dr. Hernández-Laroche is the director of South Carolina Latino Centro, or “El Centro,” where she and Assistant Director **María Montesó**, senior instructor in Spanish, work with student leaders to co-create a culturally diverse and inclusive campus where students feel like they belong. The work of El Centro is having a dramatic impact on campus, in the community and throughout the region and it thrills me to say, “We see you!” In the past year:

- The university hosted the first-ever South Carolina Latinx Student Summit, organized by El Centro in partnership with the Hispanic Latino Affairs Division of the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs.
- El Centro’s innovative pillars are being recognized nationally at such universities as Penn State, the University of New Hampshire Public Humanities Summer Institute, Marshall University and, most recently, at the University of Texas at El Paso.
- A new academic minor in Spanish Translation & Interpreting was approved by the Faculty Senate, and plans are being made for a major program.
- Ms. Montesó took 11 students to the University of Alicante in Spain for a four-week summer study program. Ten of the students were participants in the Avanzando Through College

program (for first-generation, primarily Hispanic/Latino students) or the Translation & Interpreting program.

- El Centro has hosted several events in Spanish and English, including monthly online Facebook lives sessions, “Las Professors y Tu,” that engage USC Upstate faculty and Charleston leaders in conversations on higher education.
- El Centro has supported Latinx early career scholars by inviting them to be keynote speakers during National Hispanic Heritage Month and highlighting their scholarship and civic leadership. Dr. Carlos Lavin, assistant professor in special education at the College of Charleston, spoke Sept. 28 on “When Students Lead, We Should Follow.” On Oct. 11, Kathya Landeros, Knafel assistant professor of humanities and art from Wellesley College, spoke on “Representing Youth Through Photographic Portraits.”
- El Centro’s base of support includes bilingual student groups and community organizations such as PASOs, Palmetto Luna Arts, Alianza Spartanburg, the Hispanic Alliance, South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs, and many more.
- And in April 2023, El Centro and Wofford College will co-host a regional immigration conference at USC Upstate’s Greenville Campus.

This is but a small sampling of the university’s commitment to diversity and its work to shine a light on Hispanic heritage, to “see” those whose cultural uniqueness is central to our identity as the No. 1 Top Public School in South Carolina. Thank you to all who live and teach the values we hold dear, and for recognizing that embracing diversity truly matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie L. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Bennie L. Harris
Chancellor