



SHAPING OUR FUTURE

2021 Latinx Youth Conference

JANUARY 23, 2021 10AM-2PM

Career Panelists

Arts & Entertainment

Student Moderator: Stephanie Tapia Ponce, Mass Communications Major, University of Minnesota (2022)



Fernanda Almeida, Actress, Model, and Contributing Reporter, Univision Minnesota

Originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco, Fernanda has made a name for herself as a host and correspondent for Univision Minnesota and model with Meredith Talent Agency. The fitness-loving, mom of two is happy to be part of this panel and support our community.



Ricardo Bennett, Filmmaker and Latino Youth Enrichment Programs Manager, CLUES

Ricardo is an experimental media artist, photographer, and filmmaker. Born and raised in the border city of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; he arrived in Minneapolis/Saint Paul in 2011. Ricardo has an intricate interest for the complexity of the human condition, which make great case studies for his practice. His work explores the challenges we confront as we move towards new paradigms that can help human creativity to flourish, while questioning and challenging the political, cultural, and economic dimensions of globalization.



Abby Dominguez, Photographer and Owner, Abby Dominguez Photography

When Abby is not behind the camera, she's sure to be looking for an adventure. She loves to keep busy! You can find Abby listening to a podcast, attending a fitness class, or researching a new travel destination, which is usually to attend a photography conference. Yes— even on vacation, she manages to think about photography because it's truly her passion! Abby has wonderful clients that bring to life the images that she loves to share. *[Photo: www.abigaildominguez.com]*

Business & Finance

Student Moderator: Joseph Vega Martinez, International Business Major, University of Wisconsin (2024)



Henry Jimenez, Executive Director, Latino Economic Development Center

Originally from Las Vegas, NV, Henry calls Minnesota home since 2008. He has dedicated his academic and professional life to advocating for and advancing his community. Prior to joining LEDC, Henry ran a variety of programs and organizations with local to statewide scopes. During his tenure at CANDO (Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization), Henry successfully increased the budget, widened community reach, and guided development of several community-driven programs that continue to benefit residents today. At the helm of MCLA (Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs), Henry worked to connect with Latino communities and business owners across the state, familiarizing them with MCLA's work, listening to their concerns, and including their voices in the legislative conversations happening at the capitol. Henry also serves as the founding president of the board of directors of COPAL (Comunidades Organizando el Poder y Acción Latina), a non-profit working to consolidate and activate the civic power of MN's Latinos. Henry's focus with LEDC is to help Latino entrepreneurs start or expand their businesses. He considers his work an honor and a privilege because of the opportunity it gives him to not only support the Latino community itself but also recognize and amplify its important place in Minnesota's economy. Henry lives in Richfield with his wife and two young children.



Lilian Medrano, Senior Human Resources Coordinator, CLUES

Lilian relocated to Minnesota from her home country Mexico in 2016. She is a Senior HR Coordinator at CLUES – Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio, where she's collaborated since 2018. Lili has worked as Sustainability Department Coordinator & Representative at Thomas Jefferson Institute (State of Mexico, Mexico) and as Communications and Institutional Dissemination Coordinator at PAAT - Psicoterapia al Alcance de Todos (Cuernavaca, Mexico), among other roles. Her first experience in the non-profit sector in MN was at Centro Tyrone Guzman where she volunteered for two years in their "Nuestros Sabios Mayores" elders program. Lili holds a Bachelor's Degree in Communication Sciences from La Salle University (Mexico) and is bilingual in Spanish and English.



Jesenia Morales, Group Accounting Manager, Mortenson

Jesenia has 24 years of industry experience and currently leads the accounting, business analysis and finance management of Mortenson's construction operations in Minneapolis, Iowa and North Dakota. She's known as an organizer of details to aid in developing and refining operational strategies for informed financial decision making. Jesenia values personal relationships and the opportunity to learn about her colleagues and their life's story. She's also a firm believer in creating a safe space for courageous conversations so that all can share their perspectives.



Luis Salado-Herrera, Associate Manager of Innovation and Advancement for Social Impact, Best Buy Co.

In his role, Luis works with internal and external partners to design strategies and programming that support Best Buy's Social Impact goals. This includes bringing career pathways programming to every Best Buy Teen Tech Center across the country, introducing new scholarship programming, and developing post-secondary supports for Teen Tech Center participants. Also, in partnership with his brothers, Luis is the co-founder of Bro Bros Closet, a vintage and streetwear retailer that serves customers across the country and internationally. Luis graduated with a B.A. in Leadership and Management from the University of St. Thomas. Outside of his professional experience, he volunteers his time to support the advancement and development of his local community. Currently, he sits on the Board of Directors at Youthprise – an intermediary and funder dedicated to reducing disparities with and for Minnesota Youth. Additionally, Luis is a mentor through the youth mentorship program at CLUES.

Communications

Student Moderator: Stephanie Flores Ortiz, Sociology Major, University of Minnesota (2021)

Nico Bauer, Public Engagement Liaison, Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan



Ivan Gil, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, CLUES

Originally from New York City but raised in Mexico, Ivan moved to Minnesota for High School and graduated from El Colegio Charter School in South Minneapolis. After graduating he moved to Los Angeles to attend FIDM, where he obtained an Associates of Arts in Merchandise Product Development. After working a few years in the Los Angeles fashion industry, Ivan moved back to Minneapolis to study at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science in Apparel Design. In addition to his work at CLUES, Ivan is CEO of a creative startup company called POSH WORLD and second time Conference Panelist at CLUES' Latinx Youth Conference.



Ricardo Lopez, Senior Political Reporter, Minnesota Reformer

Ricardo is the senior political reporter for the Minnesota Reformer, a nonprofit news outlet that covers state politics and other issues. Ricardo has also worked as a business reporter for The Los Angeles Times, a statehouse reporter for the Star Tribune, as well as a film reporter for Variety magazine in Los Angeles. He's a Las Vegas native and earned a bachelor's of arts in Journalism and Spanish from the University of Nevada, Reno.



Marc Valencia, Senior Consultant, NewPublica, LLC

Marc leads various projects for clients of NewPublica, a strategic communications, public relations, and community engagement company with a focus on new audiences and new communications. Marc emphasizes inclusiveness and equity in goals and interactions with relevant communities, an essential part of forging connections with people of color and multicultural communities. His clients include the Met Council, the MN Department of Transportation, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, and the Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Marc has more than 25 years of experience in sales, business development, marketing, communications, and outreach in the United States, Latin America, and Canada. He is passionate about efforts that improve education, health, transit, housing, and tangible quality of life for people and families of color. He is on the LatinoLEAD board, was member/president of Joyce Dual Immersion School's board, and cofounded and presided over the Council of Latino Staff of Kraft Foods.

Education

Student Moderator: Kenia Martinez Villa, Elementary Education Major, Augsburg University



Katie Aviña, Executive Director, El Colegio High School

Katie has worked with the Latinx community for twenty years in multiple capacities and has always believed in the potential of all her students. In her current role, she continues the mission and the vision of El Colegio of preparing our youth to be agents of change wherever their path leads them. Prior to her work at El Colegio, Katie served as one of the directors at Academia Cesar Chavez in Saint Paul. She has many years of leadership, experience, and knowledge in charter school management and cultural competency in education.



Lucía Cook, Special Education Teacher, Intermediate District 287

Lucía currently works as a teacher for the blind and visually impaired in the Twin Cities West Metro Area. She holds an M.Ed. in Special Education, Learning Disabilities from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and is currently completing a second M.Ed in Special Education, Visual Impairments through the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Lucía's work history includes 5 years as a special education paraprofessional and interpreter in the Minneapolis Public Schools, 2.5 years as a special education volunteer with the Peace Corps in Peru, and 4 years as a bilingual special education teacher in the Saint Paul Public Schools. Lucía is passionate about confronting and dismantling systemic racism in our schools and her career path has been widely influenced by this drive. Lucía is the mother of two young children, Rafael and Nico. In her free time, given the parameters of our current pandemic, Lucía enjoys cooking, spending time outdoors, reading novels and thinking about exercising.



Samantha N. Diaz, Legislative and Policy Director, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

Samantha has been the Legislative and Policy Director in the area of education at the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs since 2019. MCLA is a state agency that advises and informs the governor and legislators on matters of importance to Latinos in Minnesota. Prior to MCLA, Samantha served as the Associate Charter Liaison at Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter Schools.



Aaliyah Hodge, Program Manager, University of St. Thomas and President/Founder, People for PSEO

Brooklyn native Aaliyah grew up in St. Louis Park and now calls North Minneapolis home. Her passions revolve around expanding quality education options for students who have been systemically disadvantaged and marginalized. Aaliyah has worked as compliance director for the Harvest Network of Schools and was a sixth-grade paraprofessional. She is on the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits board, the Coalition of Public Independent Charter School's advisory council, Pillsbury United Community's Charter advisory council, and is Vice President of Minnesota's Authorizer Association. She has lobbied at the state level to remove barriers for participation in PSEO, especially for low-income students, rural students and students of color. She has a Master's in Social Policy and Community and Economic Development from the University of Minnesota and enjoys baking, traveling and spending time with family and friends.

Government & Law

Student Moderator: Kay Carvajal Moran, History Major, Augsburg University (2022)



Eric Armacanqui, Government Affairs Director, Minnesota Department of Human Rights

Eric has over five years of non-profit and public sector public policy experience, dating back to his time as the Policy & Legislative Affairs Director for the Children's Defense Fund of Minnesota and as a Legislative Liaison with the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs. The son of immigrants and farmers, Eric holds a Master's Degree from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs.



Emily Carr, Senior Project Coordinator, City of Minneapolis

In her role in the Housing Policy and Development division, Emily manages, negotiates, and underwrites affordable housing projects receiving funding to ensure the projects support city goals. Emily's work also includes assisting with program management and policy development. She holds professional certifications in Economic Development Finance and Housing Development Finance, a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota Morris, and a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs.



Sandra Filardo, Assistant County Attorney, Hennepin County

Sandra was raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina and came to the United States when she was 16 years old. Her parents were undocumented immigrants who worked very hard to ensure her success in the United States. An English as a Second Language student throughout high school, Sandra earned a Sociology Degree from Florida Atlantic University and a law degree from University of Miami School of Law. She previously practiced immigration law at Centro Legal, Inc., representing battered Latina women processing Violence Against Women Act applications. She has been an Assistant Hennepin County Attorney since 2001, initially working in the Child Support and Community Prosecution Division. She is now the Director of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office Community Engagement Unit. Sandra volunteers in her community, speaking to high school students about being an attorney and following their dreams regardless of their obstacles.



Honorable Arlene M. Ascencio Perkkio, Judge, Minnesota First Judicial District

Arlene Marie Ascencio Perkkio is a native of Brooklyn, New York. She is the eldest child of Puerto Rican parents who ran a travel agency and tax preparation service. Perkkio attended elementary and secondary schools in Brooklyn, graduating in 1983 from Packer Collegiate Institute. She received her undergraduate degree in political science from

Macalester College in 1987 and graduated from William Mitchell College of Law in 1991. While at Macalester she met her husband to be, David Perkkio, of Cloquet, Minnesota. They have resided in Mendota Heights since their marriage in 1991. The Perkkios have three adult children. While attending law school, Perkkio clerked for Ramsey County District Judge Donald E. Gross. Thereafter she worked as a criminal training specialist in the court system before opening her own practice in October of 1995. Her practice concentrated in criminal defense. She worked as contract public defender representing indigent defendants in Wright County and Dakota County. She was a panel attorney for the Minnesota Federal Defenders. Much of her practice focused on immigration consequences for non-citizen clients. She has also taught classes on that subject matter at her alma mater, William Mitchell College of Law. Perkkio tried over 30 cases to a jury as a lawyer. Perkkio has been a Judge in the First Judicial District of Minnesota since August 2011. Perkkio enjoys CrossFit, Pilates, weightlifting, Candy Crush, reading, and traveling.

Health & Medicine

Student Moderator: Yosmerith Hoyos, Neuroscience Major, Macalester College (2023)



Lyda Avila, Community Health Worker, CentraCare

Lyda was born in Colombia and has lived in Minnesota for the last 3 years. She holds a degree in speech language pathology and is a certified Community Health Worker. She works in a CentraCare clinic serving the Latinx community in Greater Minnesota.



Jesus Calvillo, Psychotherapist, CLUES

Jesus has worked as a psychotherapist at CLUES for over 6 years. He arrived in the U.S. from Mexico at the age of 7. Despite facing many challenges, he graduated from high school and pursued higher education studies, earning a B.A. in Psychology and a Master's in Counseling from the University of Wisconsin. His graduate research investigated the experiences of Latino youth in high school and college to understand factors that help youth succeed and graduate despite toxic environments. Jesus is specialized in adolescent practice and has worked with youth for over 10 years. His therapeutic focus includes using family systems with cognitive behavioral and interpersonal processing to repair conflicts within families and internal individual conflict.



Luz Cumba-Garcia, Ph.D Candidate, Mayo Clinic Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

Originally from Puerto Rico, Luz graduated in 2012 from the Universidad Metropolitana with a Bachelor's Degree in Cellular and Molecular Biology, where she performed studies on HIV epidemiology that resulted in two publications. She has conducted research in different countries including Brazil, Germany with the Nobel Laureate Harald zur Hausen, and Spain at the Institute of Parasitology and Biomedicine Lopez Neyra. In 2013, Luz obtained her Master's Degree from this institution, publishing her thesis project in the journal Nature-Scientific Reports. In 2014 she taught basic science skills to college students in China before being recruited to Mayo Clinic's Postbaccalaureate Research Education Program (PREP/PostBac). She has been there for 5 years, working on amyloidosis disease, neuroinflammatory diseases, and now analyzing the molecular signature of plasma extracellular vesicles shed from glioblastoma tumors. This work has resulted so far in a patent application and one publication. Overall, her research efforts have resulted in multiple awards and presentations at national and international scientific conferences. She also has an interest in science policy, science diplomacy, and regulatory affairs. Luz is currently a fellow at the government relations firm Lewis-Burke Associates LLC, specializing in public policy and advocacy for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies. She is a member of the Puerto Rico Science Policy Action Network (PR-SPAN) and the Science Diplomacy Network in Latin America and the Caribbean.



Dr. Lourdes Gomez Villaume, Hospitalist, Health Partners

Dr. Lourdes Gomez Villaume was born and raised in East Chicago, Indiana. She is the daughter of Mexican immigrants and was the first in her family to attend college. Dr. Villaume graduated from the University of Notre Dame where she studied Sociology in addition to her pre-med studies. She earned her medical degree from Loyola Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago in 2006 and completed her internal medicine residency at the University of Minnesota in 2009. Growing up in an area with many disenfranchised patients, Dr. Villaume has always had an interest in health disparities. During her training she was able to participate in medical missions, worked in health clinics for the underserved and participated in the Global Health course through the University of Minnesota. After completing residency, her husband was stationed at a Naval Hospital in southern California and she began her career as a hospitalist. There she served a predominantly Hispanic patient population in a hospital near the Mexican border. During her free time she volunteered at a free clinic with the University of San Diego School of medicine. Later, the family was stationed in Virginia and she had the opportunity to work in rural hospital in the Hampton Roads area. Dr. Villaume has recently been able to return to Minnesota and works at Regions Hospital. She continues to volunteer at her children's school, church and the community including being a sub mentor through CLUES Latino Youth Program.

Dr. Villaume also volunteers with One World Surgery and provides medical consults for surgeons taking care of patients in Latin America. She is an active member of the Society of Hospital Medicine, National Hispanic Medical Association, and a Fellow of the American College of Physicians.

Nonprofits & Philanthropies

Student Moderator: Isela Cereso Mendiola, Social Work Major, St. Catherine's University (2023)



Ambar Cristina Hanson, Community Relationship Officer, Mortenson Family Foundation

Ambar oversees the Expanding Opportunities for Children and Families grant program. Previously, Ambar worked as Chief External Relations Officer at Hiawatha Academies, a network of K-12 free public high-performing charter schools in South Minneapolis. Ambar moved to Minnesota from the Dominican Republic 22 years ago. Since moving to the U.S., Ambar has been dedicated to promoting and advocating for immigrant communities and communities of color to have equal opportunity and access to higher education, jobs that provide livable wages, health, housing, and safety. Before working in PreK-12 education, Ambar spent over ten years advocating for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors through several roles at Casa de Esperanza and the National Latina Network for Healthy Families and Communities. She provided trainings locally and nationally that promote a holistic strengths-based approach to working with survivors of teen dating violence, domestic violence and sexual assault. Ambar also served as a board member for the Emerging Markets Homeownership Initiative, East Side Neighborhood Development Company, and Cornerstone Montessori Charter School, as well as several advisory boards, panels and committees that promote economic and social justice. Currently, Ambar serves as a board trustee for the Latino Economic Development Center, Latino LEAD, and Bigelow Foundation. She is also a member of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Alumni of Color Association, and a fellow at the Cultural Wellness Center. Ambar lives with her partner and two children in South Minneapolis, where they enjoy dancing, hosting gatherings, and taking music lessons together.



Mario Hernandez, Strategic Services Director, Propel Nonprofits

Mario is a firm believer in the nonprofits' ability to build and sustain a more just society. He has been in the sector for nearly 20 years and has served in numerous executive leadership and board roles—executive director, vice president and chief operating officer, board chair, board vice chair, and board treasurer. Mario is excited to share what he's learned leading organizations with other current and emerging nonprofit leaders. He enjoys talking strategy, methodical operation plans and marketing campaigns, collective impact through collaboration, inclusive leadership development, and paying for it all through sustainable business models. St. Paul is Mario's home. He crosses the river daily. Family and connection to community matter to him.



Monica Hurtado, Racial Justice and Health Equity Organizer, Voices for Racial Justice

Monica Hurtado grew up in Colombia, where she trained as a doctor of family medicine. She moved to the US (Minnesota) in 2001, and from 2002 to 2013 she worked for a Latino youth development program funded by the Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative. She has been a Community Organizer for Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ) since 2014. As a VRJ staff member, she has been part of policy efforts like the fight for driver's licenses for all; she was also very involved with the co-creators table for the 2020 Census in Minnesota. Currently she is part of efforts in redistricting and building a coalition to address racism as a public health crisis. Monica's main interest is to use all these types of efforts as opportunities to continue building the collective power of Indigenous, Black, Brown and Immigrant communities in MN.



Irma Márquez Trapero, Executive Director, LatinoLEAD

Irma is an immigrant from Culiacán, México. At the age of nine, her family emigrated to St. James, a small rural farm town in Southern Minnesota. She is a proud DREAMer and former Deferred Action (DACA) recipient. She's passionate about the advancement of Latinos in the state of Minnesota and believes in the opportunity that Minnesota has to ensure it continues to be a great home for all communities. Irma has over 10 years of experience serving in the areas of community organizing, policy and political campaign work, immigration and employment law, education, and nonprofit. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Gustavus Adolphus College. She was also a 2015-2016 University of Minnesota's Humphrey Policy Fellow Alum. Since 2019, Irma has headed LatinoLEAD, a nonprofit organization of Latinx leaders across all sectors who join together to create innovative strategies to drive and define policies and perceptions that advance Latinx collective influence, success, and power. Irma also currently serves as a member of Make It. MSP Leadership Council, an initiative to have our region become a Top 10 metro at attracting and retaining talent, especially people of color.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

Student Moderator: Emma Vega Martinez, Biological Sciences Major, University of Wisconsin (2022)



Mauricio Leon, Senior Researcher, Metropolitan Council

Mauricio's work centers around climate change mitigation and adaptation at the regional and local scales. He works primarily on greenhouse gas emissions accounting and scenario planning techniques to inform policymaking for reducing the contributions of Minnesota's Metropolitan Region to climate change. He has previously worked in a similar role for the private sector. His work involves technical as well as outreach and education components. Mauricio believes that data, science, and community outreach are crucial to finding equitable solutions to climate change.



Cynthia Rico Mendoza, eCommerce Frontend Developer, Four51

Cynthia's job consists of fixing any bugs that come up, building new features requested by clients (e.g. a barcode scanner in our seller apps), doing code reviews, and attending a few meetings a day. She is on a team with four other developers that all work in the same code base for the same client. Cynthia was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico. She recently adopted a two-year old blue heeler named Lobo and loves to go on hikes to forage for edible mushrooms.



Michael Ruiz, Electrical Engineer, Xcel Energy

Michael has worked with Xcel Energy for over 6 years and has lived in Minneapolis the whole time. Before that, he served for 6 years in the Marine Corps Reserve while attending Rutgers University studying Electrical and Computer Engineering. Some of his hobbies include dancing, acting, and cooking.



Victoria Velez, Senior Process Development Engineer, Medtronic

Victoria Velez is a first generation Latina engineer who is heavily involved in the community and has tremendous passion for STEM advocacy. She attended Columbia University in the City of New York where she received her Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. Victoria previously worked for Boston Scientific and now works for Medtronic as a Senior Process Development Engineer on Neurovascular products. Victoria focuses her love of hands-on problem solving into engineering new medical technologies that save lives, such as balloon catheters, which help remove anything blocking proper blood flow in an ailing patient. Inside and outside of work, Victoria is involved in promoting diversity and supporting the Latino Community in the Twin Cities. She is involved in the Hispanic employee resource group and has served on the board for the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers Twin Cities chapter for the last five years. Victoria was also featured in TPT SciGirls Stories: Real Women Real Jobs, a documentary which profiles women from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds sharing both the challenges and triumphs of "a day in the life" in a STEM career.

A huge thank you to all the professionals that volunteered their time to meet our conference attendees and give them inspiring, visible examples! ¡GRACIAS!