Students and Faculty Attend Conference for Advancement of Latinx Population

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José Manuel González Vera and Kenia Carrera present a research poster at the 2019 NLPA Conference.

five students and a faculty member from the Utah State University Department of Psychology attended the 2019 National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA) Conference on October 17–20, 2019, in Miami, Florida. NLPA is a national organization of mental health professionals, academics, researchers and students. The group’s primary objective is the advancement and application of psychological knowledge to benefit the Latinx population.

“NLPA is very, very dear to me,” said Melanie Domenech Rodríguez, professor in the Combined Clinical/Counseling Program. “I consider NLPA my primary professional home because we can engage in a vision and practice of psychology that is not mainstream. Many of the sessions at the conference focus on research or practice that has a goal to liberate people.”

Domenech Rodríguez encourages students to attend conferences like NLPA as opportunities to engage with researchers and ideas outside of what they find in their formalized education. She recommends they reach out to people they admire and attend sessions with those individuals. Domenech Rodríguez said students become the psychologists of the future, so it’s important for them to strengthen relationships with current leaders who are making advancements to build the community.

“NLPA is such a unique academic context. It is a gathering of amazing scientists and practitioners who live and exemplify the principles of diversity, liberation, and social justice,” said Cari Alvarez, graduate student. “Learning terminology and theoretical models that help explain how the aims and implications of my research relate to public policy and advocacy was an invaluable experience.”

Domenech Rodríguez also recognizes the importance of students seeing so many Latinx psychologists. “For students to see the diversity within the community of Latinx psychologists, I think that’s really powerful,” she said.

“I enjoyed attending NLPA because I was surrounded by many Latinx researchers,” said José Manuel González Vera. “Being surrounded by people who look and talk like me made me feel empowered.”

Domenech Rodríguez added that NLPA is a place of belonging regardless of skin tone, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Many of the attendees at NLPA come from a work setting where they are alone in being a Latinx psychologist, NLPA provides an opportunity for those faculty, researchers, clinicians, and students to unite as part of a larger group and work towards changing the outlook of psychology in the United States.

“At NLPA, psychologists are aware that structures that create inequities can produce conditions of human suffering,” said Domenech Rodríguez. “When we engage in the development of treatments, the conceptualization of research projects, or any other areas of scholarship in psychology, the framework of the conversation is different from what many students experience in their regular classes and training programs.”
At the conference, students develop new ideas through attending poster sessions as well as conference workshops and presentations.

“My trip to NLPA was a scientifically restorative and energizing experience,” said Alvarez. “The sense of familia and commitment to the community are unlike any other conference.”

The Psychology Department supports NLPA through sponsorship as well as attendance. This year, five students attended the conference along with Domenech Rodríguez. Additionally, Domenech Rodríguez was honored this year with the Jeannett Castellanos Mentorship Award for excellence in mentoring.

“I am grateful for Dr. Domenech Rodríguez, who works tirelessly to create these spaces and opportunities both in and out of USU,” said Alvarez. “It was such a validating experience to see an entire room of incredible scholars publicly honor what I get to experience every day working with her.”

“Melanie is amazing! She supported me during every step of the way, from finalizing the poster, to helping me develop a summary of the research,” said González Vera. “She even provided me emotional support when I was nervous about presenting my research. She is truly the best.”

**Student Research Presentation:**

- **Moving cultural competence in the classroom: In person and online** by Cari Alvarez and Melanie Domenech Rodríguez

**Student Research Posters:**

- **Exploring the Effects of Family and Culture on Delay Discounting in Latinx Adolescents** by Byron Garcia, Kenia Carrera, Jazmin Lara, Cynthia Navarro, Molly Mecheamlil, and Rick Cruz
- **Implementation of the Family Check-Up intervention in a Latinx-Serving Community-Based Organization** by Kenia Carrera, Byron Garcia, Cynthia Navarro, Jazmin Lara, and Rick Cruz
- **Moderating Effects of School Ethnic Composition on the Associations between Cultural Variables and Academic Outcomes Among Latinx Youth** by Juan Estrada and Renee Galliher
- **The Feasibility of Padres Peparados Online: Teaching Positive Parenting Skills with Technology** by Samantha Corralejo, José Manuel González Vera, and Melanie Domenech Rodríguez