

GRACIAS Hopes to Get Others Involved in Making an Impact During Hispanic Heritage Month



Biology (pre-med) undergrad Ricardo Ramos and CS undergrad Lindsay Estrella bring their non-profit to Georgia Tech's campus with hispanic treats and games.

By Juan Anselmo

Submitted: Sep 29, 2023, 12:00PM EST

Formation and Purpose

For years, hispanics have faced many barriers while pursuing a higher education due to financial limitations, lack of knowledge of the college process, cultural and family expectations, and having to deal with imposter syndrome. According to GT student demographics, only 7.9% of the student body is of hispanic/latino descent. On top of that, a vast percentage of Hispanic college students are first generation as 44% of Hispanic students are the first in their family to attend college, as reported by Al Dia news. Often with no role models, the average hispanic will struggle to pursue higher education. The Growing Ramos Association Cultivating Inclusion and

Academic Support, GRACIAS for short, was founded to break those barriers, facilitating Hispanics' ability to attain a higher education. GRACIAS aims to help families and high school students of the Latino community by guiding them through the college process, providing scholarships and building a sense of purpose and belonging in institutions of higher education. CEO and founder, third year biology major Ricardo Ramos, saw first-hand what it meant for those around him to attend Georgia Tech. "I have heard countless times from anyone who has seen me win a scholarship or do research or in the clinic that it is so good to see a Latino go far, because it is that rare. Our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and/or siblings came here pursuing the American Dream. Let's wake up and make it a reality." said Ramos.

According to Excelencia in Education, only 45.8% of hispanics pursue a higher education. Of those that manage to get into colleges and universities, many are held back due to financial reasons. "Financials are a big thing, and seeing people not have educational opportunities just because of money is unfair to me. GRACIAS will change that," said GRACIAS member, business undergrad Gabe Gomez.

If one is lucky to get past the financial aspect, they're still faced with having to navigate through the college application process. Since very few around them have gone through it, many are forced to go through it alone. GRACIAS plans on providing mentorship programs to overcome this barrier. "One conversation is all it takes to change your life," said Ramos.

Of the few that manage to get into college, many often feel out of place. Most believe that getting into college is the challenge, but for many it's just the start.. Latinos are one of the least represented groups in most colleges; so many face imposter syndrome. GRACIAS strives to get hispanics involved so they don't feel alone. Director of outreach, CS undergrad Lindsay Estrella, helped start this organization to uplift the hispanic community. "I became involved because of my love for others. It is so fulfilling getting to meet new people from my community and hearing their stories. Life is hard and we never know what others are going through, my only goal is to be a person someone can lean on. I want my people to succeed," said Estrella.

"From the community, para la comunidad"

GRACIAS' goal is to get others involved for the community. For Ramos, he wants to see the organization grow and increase participation with overall growth in the metro Atlanta area. Being a niche organization, it allows them to hyperfocus on certain things they believe are

important. Organizations such as the Latin American Association or Corners Outreach focus on broader issues, while GRACIAS targets the important issues faced by Hispanics pursuing college. Luckily, this is an organization made of college students which allows them to make an easier connection to the average high schooler. This aspect also makes it easier to form connections with college organizations and recruit volunteers for their events and mentorship program. In the pursuit to get more Georgia Tech students involved, GRACIAS has already connected with student organizations, like the Latin American Student Organization (LASO) and GoSTEM, and they had a tabling event Thursday, September 21 on Harrison Square. GRACIAS is currently meeting with other organizations and having events to increase their presence so that more people “from the community...” can volunteer and mentor high schoolers, making a bigger impact “..para la comunidad”.

Making a change

Many hispanics are forced to live hard working lives instead of pursuing a college education; GRACIAS aims to make that a stereotype of the past. ““We are doing this so instead of people complaining of back pain or arthritis, they complain of short vacations or annoying coworkers; instead of people having to labor hard shifts to get by, they work a 9-5 and can rest with their family; instead of expecting a Latino wearing a bright long sleeve shirt or a construction hat or holding a mop, they are wearing a lab coat or a business suit,” said Ramos.

SOURCES

- 11, ByRenata KaminskiAugust, et al. “‘Why Am i Here?’ That’s the Feeling Many Latino Students Struggle with in Higher Education.” *Al Día News*, aldianews.com/en/education/education/imposter-syndrome. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.