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Through the Lens of the Hispanic Community at the University of Arizona

Through personal experiences and discourse with friends and peers, one commonly held sentiment amongst the Hispanic community at the University of Arizona is a feeling of a lack of focus on our community on a campus whose population is predominantly white. It is not uncommon to feel a wave of culture shock when entering an institution where you are the minority and hardly anyone speaks your language, has your last name, shares your experiences, or understands your culture. Personally, this unfamiliar experience began to slowly silence my voice, suppress my opinions, and discourage me from standing out in an environment where I am simply the minority. While I don’t think anything immediate can be done to prevent these common feelings, I often find that the primary factor that amplifies this experience for my community is the lack of understanding of Hispanic culture and/or issues plus a lack of moderation in class discourse to prevent ignorant remarks. It is comments like these that continuously silence the voices of minorities like me. There are only so many times I can correct an individual in class about inferring that my border town was filled with malicious and deviant criminals, that my beloved heritage is comprised of drug traffickers and drugs, that places I have traveled to my whole life shall be condemned, and overall that my culture is inferior. These are all comments I have been subjected to during class, creating a strong divide between the Hispanic community and the rest of the University of Arizona.

I believe that the University of Arizona may act by shifting the focus on the Hispanic community by emphasizing the importance of tact in a classroom and making it mandatory to take at least one class on Hispanic or Latino studies to combat the ignorance and demonization of the culture belonging to 25% of students. I firmly believe that the best remedy for ignorance is education and while I do not expect anyone outside my culture to fully understand my culture, I don’t think it’s too much to demand awareness that these misconceptions exist or that these seemingly harmless comments may actually be detrimental. I feel I can safely say that I speak for the Hispanic community when I say that our life consists of consistently trying to fight for the limited spots allotted to us to achieve success and trying to prove that we are deserving. In fact, it is quite common for our community to be composed of a high percentage of first-generation students. The Hispanic community should not have to fight for our voices to be heard or defend our heritage during class discussions or face ignorance in an environment that should promote diversity, inclusivity, and equity. The Hispanic community should not have to fight for a place at the University of Arizona. I believe my proposal to implement a curriculum requirement to learn about different cultures such as my own would create a more welcoming environment for Hispanic students. Education should be utilized as a tool to combat the ignorance that exists in campus spaces. Although I believe that most of the ignorance is not born with malicious intent, it does create a divide that can easily be amended by being proactive in the community, spreading awareness of the Hispanic culture, and encouraging more appropriate conduct.

Picture this: you’re in a gang theory class on a Wednesday afternoon where several groups are tasked with presenting different female gangs across different cultures. Group 5 begins to present on Mexican female gangs, and you hear the words “The women in the Mexican gangs often were initiated by sexual relations which they seemed to enjoy “. These are words that were not uttered in any other presentation, and you look at your group member in absolute disbelief. Furthermore, imagine you are in a Mexican cartel class and a side discussion inserts the idea that Mexico is dangerous, and full of corruption, and they can’t believe why anyone would vacation there or otherwise live there. These are all comments that may stem from ignorance and a lack of awareness, but they transform the classroom from a safe space to a hostile environment where I now feel like there is a need to defend my own identity. I believe that an added curriculum requirement as well as a classroom policy to moderate in class discussions will work hand in hand to maintain the initiatives of DEI. I have an immense sense of pride and appreciation for the University of Arizona as it is the place where I found opportunity, community, and the environment to become a better version of myself. I believe this initiative to create a safer space for Hispanic students is the ideal way to leave an impact on the University of Arizona and create a more welcoming environment for Hispanic students who enroll in the future. The University of Arizona has done an abundance of good, and I want to reiterate that the problems I mentioned are a few instances out of the thousands of interactions I have had on campus. However, I think it is important to nip the problem in the bud so that no other Hispanic students begin to bond over the alienation that happens due to ignorance in the classroom from time to time.