Exploring Cultural Awareness: Latinx/Hispanic

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11. Be aware that Cinco de Mayo is not Mexico’s independence day. This day celebrates when the Mexican army had a victory over France in Puebla when France wanted to invade the United States from the south during the Civil War. While Cinco de Mayo is a national holiday in Mexico (called Battle of Puebla Day), it is really only celebrated in Puebla.

12. English is not the official language of the United States. The U.S. has no official language, and therefore demanding that all citizens should “speak English” is invalid and non-inclusive. Also, be aware that Mexicans do not speak “Mexican,” they speak Spanish or one of the Native/Indigenous languages.

13. The family structure of a Hispanic/Latinx may be different than the Euro-American family structure. In Hispanic/Latinx culture the family is typically more patriarchal; however, due to changing culture, a matriarchal household is being seen as well. Traditionally, the family extends outside the nuclear family, and sizes and closeness vary from family to family.

14. Understand that Latinx are Americans, too. The Americas include all of North, Central and South America.

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Exploring Cultural Awareness – Latinx/Hispanic

This informal guide was designed to help acknowledge culture change when opening a dialogue between Latinx or Hispanic and non-Latinx. The items below were assembled by Latinx and Hispanic members of the University of South Dakota community to help encourage non-Latinx to learn some “Dos” and “Don’ts”.

The Latinx and Hispanic culture, heritage and identity are complex and cannot be covered in a quick reference guide, but these “Dos” and “Don’ts” are a great starting point for conversations. Hopefully, with the Latinx and Hispanic community’s help, we can expand and open some worldviews on campus.

Following are some of the most frequently-used pieces of information about Latinx and Hispanics:

1. **Do know the difference between Latinx and Hispanic.** Most people believe that Latinx and Hispanic are synonymous and interchangeable; however, this is not the case. Latinx refers to people or descendants from Latin America. The term Hispanic refers to the Spanish language and to people or descendants from Spain. Countries like Brazil, where they speak Portuguese, are Latinx countries but not Hispanic. Countries like Spain, in which they speak Spanish, are Hispanic but not Latinx since it is not in Latin America. Individuals from countries that are both Latinx and Hispanic may prefer one or the other or may not mind which they are called, but it is important to know the difference. Do also know that Latinx and Hispanic is not a race but an ethnicity.

2. **Be aware of the all-inclusive term, Latinx.** The term Latino in Spanish most often refers to males, so to be inclusive of females as well as non-binary individuals, use Latinx. Latinx can be used when you are unsure of one’s proper pronouns.

3. **Don’t assume that all Latinx/Hispanics are immigrants.** Many Latinx/Hispanics may be descendants from immigrants but were born in the United States. The foreign-born (immigrants) share among Latinx varies by origin group. Fewer than one-third (31%) of Mexican-origin Latinx are foreign-born. That’s far less than other major groups—Colombian (61%), Guatemalan (60%), Salvadoran (57%), Cuban (56%) and Dominican (54%). People born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens at birth.

4. **Don’t assume that anyone is undocumented and don’t ask anyone’s status.** The migratory status of an individual may be a sensitive subject for someone so it’s best not to ask.

5. **Don’t assume every Latinx person is of Mexican origin.** A person is Latinx if they come from or are descended from a Latin American country which includes Mexico, Central America, the Spanish Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) and South America.

6. **Do ask about our ethnic origin, culture or heritage.** We would love to share our culture, because it is significant to us, and each of us has something new to share with the world. Each of us also has different traditions and cultures since we all have different backgrounds.

7. **Don’t assume all Latinx people know Spanish.** Many Latinx individuals celebrate their heritage but do not speak Spanish. Many are also born in the United States and English is their first language. Latinx people speak a range of languages including Native American languages (Quechua, Aymara, Guarani, Nahual), Portuguese, French, Spanish and English.

8. **Don’t associate Latinx with one race or skin pigmentation.** Latin America is a large area of land that encompasses a wide variety of groups of people from all backgrounds. People of African, Native American and/or European descent may identify as Latinx.

9. **Do know that Latinx and Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States.** Hispanics and Latinos are the second-largest ethnic group in the United States, representing 18.3% of the population.

10. **Don’t say “illegal alien”: the term dehumanizes and criminalizes immigrants.** Use the term “undocumented immigrant” instead.