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'WE SEE YOU AND WE HEAR YOU'

STUDENTS WORK TO IMPROVE CAMPUS DIVERSITY BY TRANSLATING ADMISSIONS DOCUMENTS INTO SPANISH

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | February 8, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

Ensuring students who speak different languages feel at home at Christopher Newport is at the heart of a new project launched by two juniors intent on increasing diversity on campus. Alexandra Delgado and Niurka Verduzco Rios love being Captains and everything that it stands for, and want others to have the same positive experience on campus that they have had. That's the reason they have embarked on an initiative called Pasa La Voz, a Spanish phrase that means "Spread the Word."

The word they seek to spread is that CNU is a welcoming place for all. Pasa La Voz is an effort to translate admissions material into Spanish to make the process of applying to CNU easier and more inclusive for Spanish-speaking students and their families. The project is an effort to break down language barriers that could impede potential CNU students from applying for admission. It may also help families of prospective students better understand the process.

"By providing translated administrative materials, we will appeal to diverse cultural backgrounds, specifically to the Latino community. Our goals are to cater to these groups to promote Christopher Newport, build a more diverse student population," said Delgado, '25 [Criminology](#).

"Applying to college is a privilege and a stressful process in and of itself. For some Spanish-speaking students and their families, getting a higher education is not possible," she said. "And those who do wish to continue their education face the hardships of a language barrier, support, and a lack of resources."

"Sometimes when English is not your first language, it makes you feel like you're not smart enough to come here," Delgado said. "We want this to make people feel welcome and encouraged to apply."

Dr. Rob Lange, Dean of Admission, is excited about the project's potential to break through communication barriers and embrace all prospective students and their families.

"We fully support the goals of Pasa La Voz," he said. "This kind of outreach fully aligns with President Kelly's goal of diversifying our enrollment."

The Pasa La Voz project, "will alleviate these stresses and remind people that CNU is inclusive and accepting of all students and their backgrounds," said Verduzco Rios, '25 [Management](#).

Both Delgado and Verduzco Rios come from families who primarily speak Spanish. Verduzco Rios is a first-generation student.

They are confident that a program like Pasa La Voz would have helped them and their families dramatically during the admissions process, when they encountered documents written entirely in English.

Approximately 6.9 percent of Christopher Newport's student body identifies as Latino. Verduzco Rios and Delgado are hopeful that Pasa La Voz will increase the number of students whose native tongue is Spanish. In turn, having students from different backgrounds and cultures will enhance the community on campus.

"We want to make people feel comfortable here," said Verduzco Rios. "We want to show that CNU is accepting of them."

"Fully understanding our students is important," Delgado said. "We want everyone to know that 'we see you and we hear you.'"

"Translating the application documents into Spanish can go a long way toward building confidence that CNU is the right place for potential students," Delgado said.

"These little things matter," she said. "It shows a lot about CNU in terms of inclusion and integration. CNU already does a good job of showcasing what it offers multi-cultural students.

But little steps like this can make a big difference."

The initiative first developed when Dr. Kevin Anzzolin, a Lecturer of [Spanish](#), approached Delgado and Verduzco Rios with the idea when they were taking a course he taught, Business Spanish.

"Alex and Niurka are both great students who know what it means to come from a polyglot, multicultural household," he said. "They have taken various classes in Spanish here and are inspirational representatives of CNU."

Delgado and Verduzco Rios were awarded a grant from the [Office of Student Research and Creative Activity](#) and the [Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) to fund Pasa la Voz.

To get the project started, Verduzco Rios and Delgado, both members of Latino Student Association on campus, will translate various documents for the Office of Admission. From there, they will be available to Spanish-speaking admission candidates. The hope is that the initiative will grow to include other languages and additional CNU literature.

"I hope we can translate as many documents (brochures, posters, etc.) as possible and that we can let a lot of Spanish speakers—prospective students, their parents, the public—that at CNU, they are very much 'Bienvenidos (welcome),' " Anzzolin said. "We want future applicants to know that literally and figuratively, we speak their language.

"Ultimately, I hope it leads to greater diversity on campus. The United States is the fourth-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. In a very real sense, Spanish is not a 'foreign' language. Rather it is another language in which many people are more comfortable using," he said. "I think we're always looking for students who come from interesting places and have unique perspectives. Why not approach them in their own language?"

