

"How much Latin in the caucus?"

"Even when you're not, you are."

"Does bad Spanish equal bad Latina?"

"Latinx or Latino? That's the question."

CLAIMING OUR DIVERSITY, CELEBRATING OUR COMMON GROUND

Learn how AALL's Latino Caucus promotes diversity and inclusion and creates educational, networking, and visibility opportunities for Latino members and others.

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The items written on the sticky notes in the above graphic were some of the questions and comments the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Latino Caucus members contributed as part of an activity called Reflections on Identity during the AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, in July 2019. Their questions and comments, as well as their active membership in AALL, are indisputable proof that diversity and representation have made significant inroads within AALL, and within the law librarianship community in general since the Latino Caucus was created back in 2005. However, the following questions, among many others pertaining to sustainability, visibility, and inclusion, remain unanswered:

- Should we change our name from Latino Caucus to Latinx Caucus?
- How can we be part of truly inclusive environments?
- How can I project myself in my professional life taking into account all areas of my identity(ies)?

We strongly believe that the Latino Caucus is the place to be for those interested in seeking answers to these questions, and for providing minority law librarians with the tools, networks, and experiences necessary to become active contributors and visionary leaders in our professional organization as well as society at large.

Diversity within the Latino Caucus

Our members are Latinas, Latinos, Latinx, Hispanics, second- or third-generation Americans, Mexican-Americans, Central Americans, Caribbeans, and South Americans. We speak English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Créole, Quechua, Hebrew, and Japanese. We come from different racial and religious backgrounds as well as different sexual orientations and gender expressions. In addition, we are also rich in diverse professional and personal backgrounds. Initially, we might come to the Caucus expecting to meet Latinos just like us, and we most definitely do. However, we also learn quickly that there is an incredible diversity represented by the members of the Caucus. This rich diversity does not conflict with the traits that ultimately unite us. Quite the contrary, our differences allow us to challenge our world visions, to learn from each other, and to accomplish great things together. We are convinced that the more our identities are redefined to include more and more people, the more we all grow as law librarians interacting with each other at work or in the other communities we belong to.

The diversity and connections of our members also allow us to be part of other groups within AALL, and to help create synergy or common ground. We do not see the Latino Caucus as an attempt to separate us from the rest of the law librarianship community, but instead as a fundamental piece closely linked to all other special interest groups, committees, and professional opportunities. By virtue of being together, we can amplify our voices and reach out to other groups,

including the membership-at-large, with issues that might initially pertain to us, but that ultimately echo across a multitude of conversations that benefit everyone. Diversity, representation, visibility, and inclusion need to be part of everyone's conversation. As a group and through the indefatigable work of all our members, from 2005 through today, we empower each other to ignite these conversations, to be part of these exchanges, and to be leaders in implementing the solutions anywhere they might take place, be it New Orleans in July 2020, online, at work, or in our society.

Latino Caucus Throughout the Years

Fifteen years ago, a group of visionary Latina and Latino law librarians met during the AALL Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, and founded the Latino Caucus. Having a place to share our own experiences, to network, and to leverage the knowledge and expertise of its members was one of the lofty goals of the Caucus. Since its creation, the heart of the Caucus has always been to encourage and support the interests and contributions of Latino law librarians to the profession. And it has done just that.

Every year since the Latino Caucus's inception, we have featured a guest speaker in our business meetings

during the AALL Annual Meeting. Some of the guests have included Professor Joaquin Avila, executive director of the National Voting Rights Advocacy Initiative at Seattle Law's Fred T. Korematsu Center for Law and Equality; local Texas journalist, James Barragan; Yolanda Vazquez, clinical law professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law; and Valeria Elliott, director of Latin American Initiatives at the University of Denver, Sturm College of Law. Last year in Washington, DC, we had the opportunity to hear from Mark Lopez, director of Hispanic research for the Pew Research Center. These casual but insightful and often deeply moving conversations have always been a space for members to engage in professional and intellectual dialogue with one another.

Such conversations are the essence of our group. The ideas we share in our impromptu brainstorming sessions and intellectual exchanges have ignited our curiosity and propelled our members to achieve even more within our profession. We are convinced that our numerous and notable panels, webinars, sessions, academic papers, and partnerships have been the result of these conversations, both during the AALL Annual Meetings and throughout the year. Our network is at its strongest and



2019 Latino Caucus business meeting.

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most productive when our members are able to thrive in different environments due to the optimism, ambition, and the intellectual stimulation of the Caucus.

This could not be an article about the Latino Caucus if we failed to mention the famous Baile. For many years, the Latino Caucus has also organized a Baile (a gathering for dancing) during each AALL Annual Meeting. All of our members, as well as the members of other minority groups, are invited to attend and socialize with each other in this more casual and relaxed environment. Whenever we network on behalf of the Caucus, it is not uncommon for many AALL members to recount endearing and special memories of the Bailes. We are hoping the revival and rebranding of the Latino Caucus will bring back this enthusiasm and energy from our members, as well as all AALL members.

From Latino to Latinx

Many of us, upon our reflection on our identities in 2019, struggled to find the words to express our self-love alongside our feelings of being marginalized or unheard. Some even felt like they were not “Latinx” enough to be part of the Latino Caucus because their Spanish-speaking abilities were less than proficient, or their skin pigmentation was too white. For some of us, the subject of diversity has never even been discussed in our professional worlds, outside of marketing initiatives or the hiring of a diversity role. As we recognize how much community and strength we find within each other, how imperative this group is to our professional well-being and sense of inclusion, we also recognize how much work there is left to be done.

The best way to promote diversity and inclusion within the Association

and in the workplace is to encourage the celebration and exploration of our differences and our similarities. We are not blind to the tokenism that exists within our workplaces today with the hiring of a singular person of color and the claiming of “diversity.” We cannot simply hope and ask for change within the hierarchies of our institutions and organizations: in addition to these endeavors, each of us, individually, must be the catalyst for change. As we continue through our careers, we must strive for excellence so that when we find ourselves in seats of power and influence, we can instigate and promote change from within. But how can we get there? Sometimes, the smallest steps have the biggest impact. For example, during the upcoming 2020 AALL Annual Meeting in New Orleans, we will be voting on whether to change our caucus name from Latino to Latinx to be more gender-inclusive and to operate in accordance with AALL’s anti-discrimination bylaws.

We Will All Be the Solution

The next time you are in a meeting, a conference, or a networking event, ask yourself the following: What simple action could I take today to build or strengthen a relationship with someone who is completely different from myself? How can I move our relationship from a transactionally professional one to one with a foundation of friendship and trust? These are the questions that we in the Latino Caucus ask ourselves every time we meet in order to empower each other and to create an environment that fosters growth and innovation. In this vein of thinking, and due to high demand, the Latino Caucus is establishing a regularly scheduled guest speaker webinar in addition to our speakers at our yearly gatherings so

we can learn more about each other’s successes, our shortcomings, and how our identities contribute to our work.

Our path forward and much of our group’s success is dependent on the participation of our colleagues and their willingness to step out of their comfort zones to publish and present their thoughts, connect with new people, and build bridges across each of the diversity-focused groups of AALL. If you are looking for a sense of community or belonging within your profession, we in the Latino Caucus urge you to join us and our colleagues from diverse backgrounds in commemorating our history and building our future. ■

LEARN MORE

If you would like to learn more about the history of AALL’s Latino Caucus, visit bit.ly/AALLLatinoCaucus. In order to maintain a strong narrative of the rich history of the group, their project Latinx Voices features members and their contributions.

READ

“La Solución Seremos Todos (We Will All Be the Solution): Why the AALL Latino Caucus Matters to You,” from the February 2006 issue of *AALL Spectrum* at bit.ly/F06Latino.

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