

2024 INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH AWARDEES



Marissa Perez Cardona

College and Career Coordinator, Meriden Public Schools

Marissa was the first one in her family to achieve a college degree, graduating from the University of New Haven with a BA Communications. She fought for Universal Healthcare in CT as a Community Organizer before President Obama's Affordable Care Act. She is now the College and Career Coordinator making sure that all students are connected to college and career pathways. In all of these roles, Marissa finds true purpose supporting children and families that struggled with many of the same obstacles she faced as a first-generation college student. Her biggest accomplishments are marrying her husband, Secretary of Education and raising their two children.

Jason T. Martínez, Esq.

Associate University Counsel, University of Hartford

Attorney Jason T. Martinez is a Connecticut native and a resident of its capital city. As a full-time first-generation college student Jason worked several part-time jobs, where he developed a passion for connecting with people from all walks of life; and helping them in whatever way he can. In law school, Jason interned at prestigious Connecticut law firms, helped Connecticut small business owners register federal trademarks at an intellectual property clinic, graduated with honors, and landed an offer to join the corporate practice of a large Hartford law firm. In March 2021, Jason joined UHart's Office of the General Counsel where he provides legal assistance to the entire University, and served as Interim Title IX Coordinator 2022 to 2023.



Mario Oquendo, Jr.

Chief of Staff and Public Information Officer for the Hartford Fire Department

Born in Chicago, IL, to Puerto Rican parents from Las Piedras, Puerto Rico, Mario was raised in the City of Hartford. He is a 25-year veteran of the City of Hartford Fire Department. After 11 years as a firefighter at Engine Co. 5, Mario was promoted to the Special Services Unit as a Lieutenant. He is a proud member of Hartford Firefighters Local 760, board member of the Hartford Society of Latin American Firefighters, National Association of Hispanic Firefighters, Prospanica CT, a founding member of the Julio Lozada Foundation and served as a Community Relations Council member in Hartford Job Corps. Mario is happily married for the past 30 years to Jennifer M. Oquendo, has two wonderful children Deborah and Jordan, and his dog Jeter.

Diego Alberto Rojas

Sophomore, University of Hartford

Diego Alberto Rojas is a Sophomore at the University of Hartford studying Politics and Government. He is a First-Generation Latino College Student who is very active in SGA, HLSA, and Spectrum.



Sinthia Sone-Moyano

Deputy Commissioner for Educational Supports and Wellness, CT State Department of Education

Sinthia is an accomplished visionary leader and systemic thinker with extensive experience and capacity in developing a collaborative commitment for result-oriented, equitable learning environments, focused on the whole child in public, vocational, and urban educational organizations. She holds a bachelor's degree in public health from SCSU and a master's degree in business management from Albertus Magnus College, as well as a certificate in executive leadership and educational leadership Prek-3 from the UCONN, and in education leadership from Sacred Heart University. She is a proud graduate of Cohort 12 of the Superintendent Leadership Program with the Association of Latino Administrators & Superintendents.

Professor Karen Tejada-Peña

Associate Professor of Sociology, Hillyer College, University of Hartford

Dr. Tejada is a first-generation scholar and proud alumnae of UC Santa Barbara and SUNY-Albany. Her research focuses on Salvadorans in the U.S. Her published work examines political habitus, gender, transnationalism, and most recently, she is interested in crimmigration studies. Her current book project, *Putting them on ICE: Policing Salvadoran Communities in Long Island*, spans three years of ethnographic work in Nassau and Suffolk counties and was supported by a Russell Sage Foundation grant. She teaches courses in Hillyer College covering immigration, the criminal justice system, and introduction to sociology and UIS courses focused on racial/ethnic groups.



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!