

FACULTY + STAFF

UCLA Chicano studies center invites community to reflect on COVID's impact for Día de los Muertos

Nov. 1 virtual event features spoken word, musical performances and memorials to those lost



Jessica Wolf | October 29, 2021

Día de los Muertos is an important time of reflection for many Latin American cultures and communities. In that spirit, a group of Latino faculty, students, alumni and community members will come together on Monday, Nov. 1, for a special event organized by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center titled “Love and Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

As part of the center’s mission of building connections both at UCLA and with the broader Latino community, the virtual program will be free and open to the public with registration .

“There is much to reflect upon this year as we engage in fall traditions that honor our ancestors,” said center director Veronica Terriquez.

“We must recognize our individual and collective losses, heal from the suffering we experienced during the pandemic and learn from the devastation that was unequally experienced in our society.

“It will be a celebration,” she said, “but also a call to action.”

Part of the program will focus on reckoning with the ways in which COVID-19 has ravaged Latino communities. Arturo Vargas Bustamante, a professor of health policy and management at UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health, will detail the profound impacts of the pandemic on Latinos, from disproportionate mortality rates and economic hardships to the emotional toll on families and young adults. "We need to stop and reflect on how many people have died, how many people have been affected by these issues, not only directly but indirectly," he said. "We need to continue to try and understand and illustrate why and how Latinos have been so affected and what will be done to address these inequities. We should consider this time as a wake-up call for us to take a look at underlying issues in the health care system that need to be addressed."

The event will also feature "Calling on the Ancestors," a Mayan musical performance by ethnomusicology student Juan Francisco Cristobal, spoken word from UCLA alumna, author and poet Alyssa Griego, and reflections from Joshua Guzmán, an assistant professor in the department of gender studies.

As part of the broader commemoration of loved ones who have been lost, there will be memorials to revered members of the Latino community. Maylei Blackwell, an associate professor in the department of Chicana/o and Central American Studies, and Rafael Solorzano, a UCLA alumnus and assistant professor at Cal State Los Angeles, will offer a tribute to feminist author and activist Elizabeth "Betita" Martínez, who died in June. And in recognition of the work of celebrated multimedia artist Yolanda López, who died in September, Karina Alma, an assistant professor in the department of Chicana/o and Central American Studies, will share a presentation about honoring ancestors from diverse cultures.

Producing the event has been a UCLA community effort.

Armando Gonzalez, a second-year directorial student in the department of theater, film and television, helped film and edit pre-recorded segments of the virtual program. Originally from Tijuana, Gonzalez, who grew up celebrating Día de los Muertos with his family, said this year's holiday will be especially poignant because he lost his grandfather to COVID-19 last year. He's grateful to be studying on campus for the first time and to be able to lend his creative skills to the production of the event.

“It’s an event that not only highlights the beautiful cultural tradition of Día de los Muertos but creates a time for us to come together beyond the Latino community, outside the UCLA community, to realize how fleeting life can be and how important it is to appreciate one another,” he said. “It’s a human thing. We all grieve, we all have loss — it’s a part of life. But it is how you approach it that will get you through it, especially after a difficult time when we’ve been so disconnected but also connected in a global way.”