

The Bulletin

Amigos De Apoyo Fosters Safe Space for Latine Community

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The Bulletin Editor

College fourth-year Rio Valles founded Amigos De Apoyo, a supportive community for Latine male-identifying and gender-expansive individuals, this past spring.

In his first two years at Oberlin, Valles struggled to find community and felt like he wanted to transfer.

"Being at Oberlin was the first time I walked into a place and felt like my identity was apparent," Valles said. "I went to a pretty white high school, but it was the first time I was in classes where I was the only Brown face. I wanted more friends and people in my life who identified like me, I just didn't know where they were."

Despite the substantial number of male-identifying Latines on campus, there was not a designated affinity group. Valles added that he'd met graduating students who emphasized the need for a community organization that addressed topics surrounding the Latine experience.

After studying away in the Border Studies Program in Tuscon, AZ during the fall of 2023, Valles returned to Oberlin in the spring of 2024 and continued to work for the Multicultural Resource Commons, where he had started as a program assistant in the fall of 2022. Chris Donaldson, assistant dean for inclusion and belonging, encouraged Valles to make his idea for a new organization a reality, hold a first meeting, and have Amigos De Apoyo chartered.

An important aspect of the club is mental health check-ins, usually involving open-ended conversations. Occasionally, a topic in the news will come up and bring the group together.

"In March, a bridge in Baltimore collapsed, killing six Latinx construction workers," Valles said. "My dad's been a construction worker for 25 years, and other people in the group have family



Club members take a picture with MRC staff member Chris Donaldson.

doing that type of work. I remember we opened the meeting, and we just talked about that for 30 minutes."

Food has also been a unifying force for the club, where members have baked concha and grilled carne asada. In Mexico and Central America, the term carne asada can refer to both a traditional dish and social gathering. This past weekend, around 50–60 students, faculty, and community members gathered at Zechiel House for a carne asada to celebrate the start of Latine Heritage month.

"It's one of those staples of our culture that immediately brings everyone together," Valles said.

Amigos De Apoyo also emphasizes the importance of intersectionality, and the group has held events with the Brotherhood at Oberlin, a community celebrating the experiences of Black men. This past spring, the two groups held a watch party for a boxing event in Afrikan Heritage House.

In the future, Valles hopes to increase the presence of Amigos De Apoyo on campus and continue community outreach.



Adrian Alvarado, OC '24, and Cristian Jimenez



Valles grills carne asada at a Latine community event.



Amigos De Apoyo's booth at the 2024 Connections Fair.

Photos courtesy of Rio Valles