

# SPRING 2024



For more than 50 years, El Centro has provided students with support to achieve their academic goals.



A location with historic origin roots in community outreach, such as citizenship, education, housing, and technology. El Centro continues to stay true to its root as it serves the Avondale community



**E**

EXCELLENCE

**L**

LEARNING

**C**

Community



Greetings from El Centro! The Spring 2024 semester is over and the summer semester has already started for many NEIU students and faculty. Good luck to everyone! The El Centro newsletter is something to be proud of. Under the direction of Lizett Galan (Coordinator of Student Success and Social Media), the El Centro student workers (photographed below) are in charge of: identifying the audience, planning and gathering content, as well as designing the pages! I invite you to look at this and previous editions of the newsletter to be amazed by their great talent and hard work.



In the following pages, you will find that NEIU El Centro is at the service of students, their families and community members. We have provided many events in collaboration with elected officials such as Alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, State Representative Andrade, Natalie Toro and Congresswoman Delia Ramirez. Enjoy learning about the work done in collaboration with career services, library services and FAFSA workshops which provided useful information.

We created memories and moments of enjoyment while celebrating our students in “Noche de Estrella,” Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day and NPB Karaoke night, among others. On behalf of the El Centro team, thank you. Visit us soon!



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# MEET THE TEAM



On average, El Centro has more than 570 undergraduate and graduate students taking classes on campus. Students are one step closer to their degree with more than 75 class offerings per semester, ranging from upper & lower undergraduate and graduate levels. Learn more about our student population below.

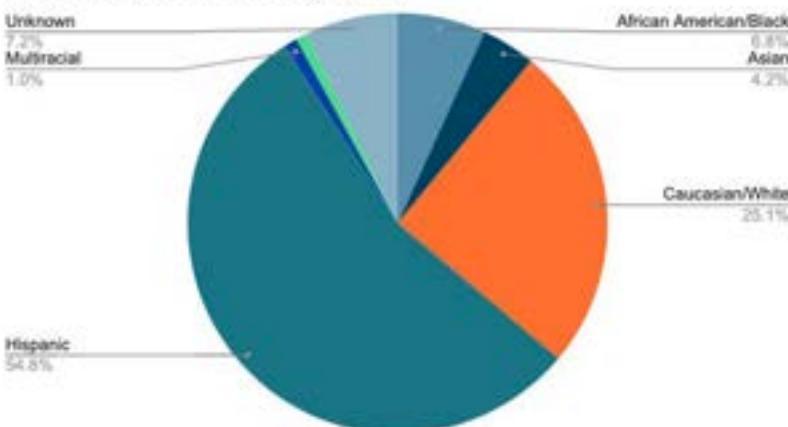
The support, partnerships, and events would not be possible without the El Centro team, student workers, and leadership from Maria (Rebeca) Lamadrid-Quevedo, Interim Director.

El Centro's Office Support Squad supports all logistics, operations, and more: Alma Hernández, Cynthia Ceron, and Veronica (Vero) Rodriguez. El Centro's Coordinators supports students with recruitment, financial aid, academic advising and more: Mimi Crespo, Danny Cortez, and Lizett C Galan. Maria (Rebeca) Lamadrid-Quevedo as Interim Director of El Centro.

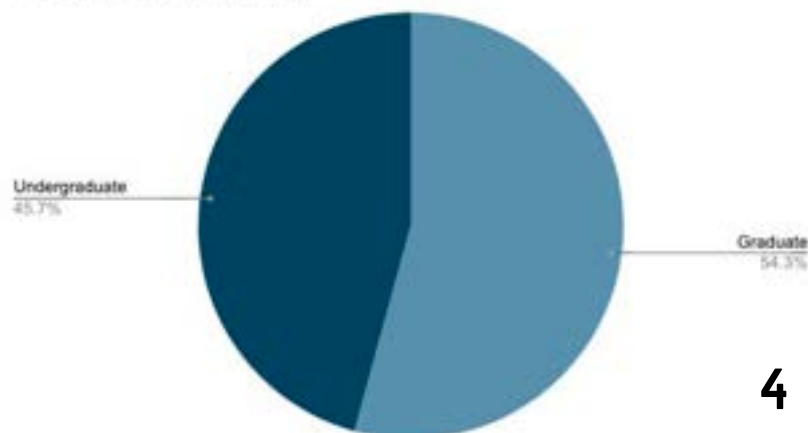
El Centro student workers, Emily Sosa, Simon Avila, Santiago Teran, Brayan Cruz, Aaliyah Bachelor, Marely Delgado and Eulalia Silverio, participate in student panels, campus tours, newsletters, and more.



El Centro Student Demographic



El Centro Student Level



# Community Events

El Centro serves the community through partnership with various community-based organizations to provide resources on education, citizenship, among other services. Our partnerships aim to improve the lives of community members living in the Avondale, Hermosa, Humboldt Park and Logan Square communities, and surrounding neighborhoods.

Interim Director, Maria Lamadrid-Quevedo & Financial Aid Coordinator, Danny Cortez visited El Consulado de Mexico for a FAFSA 2025 presentation. Local organization Palenque LSNA (Logan Square, Hermosa, and Avondale) provided a Citizen Workshop with Congresswoman Delia Ramirez.

## Financial Aid Presentation with El Consulado De Mexico



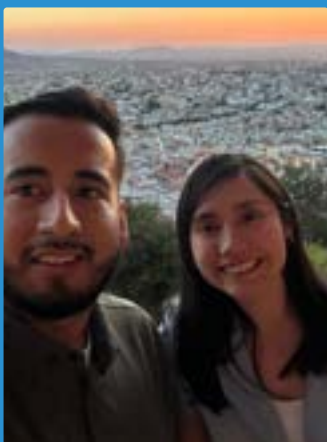
## Citizen Workshop with Palenque LSNA



# NOHRA DE FRANCISCO MEMORIAL TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP



## *José Muñoz Jr.*



Nohra De Francisco Memorial Travel Scholarship was established by Juan Moreno, El Centro architect. It's mission is to provide an El Centro student the opportunity to expand their horizons. This semester, two students received the scholarship: José Muñoz and Simon Avila.

José Muñoz, pre-med student majoring in Human Resource Development and Psychology and minoring in Spanish. He began at El Centro in STP 2019 and has grown into a phenomenal professional. José currently is the Coordinator of Future Health Professional club, NEIU 2024 Presidential Award Committee Member for the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, NEIU College of Arts & Sciences Student Advisory Board Member, NEIU ALPFA( Association of Latino Professionals for America), and part of the NEIU Soccer team. His involvement and “go for it” attitude led him to apply and be awarded the travel (all expenses paid) scholarship. After many years, José traveled to Zacatecas, Mexico. The cultural richness, family, and bomb tacos made him feel more connected to his roots. Zacatecas being the homeland of his father. José learned first-hand about the Mexican Revolution history in Zacatecas and the architectural richness in El Centro Historico.

José reflects on his time as an El Centro Scholar Freshman. He credits how welcoming the El Centro staff and how he continues to have a bond with his peers from his freshman year. He states, “...others contributed to become part of my leadership style, such as my great Freshmen Summer Transition Program Peer Leader, Bob.” He constantly reflects back on his journey and it motivates him to “keep hustling, so that one day, I can provide this same experience to future students like me.”

As a first generation college student from an immigrant family, José supports his family by being the one to purchase the family home in Burbank, Illinois. Since then, his goals have expanded to creating passive income through his commercial cleaning company and applying to medical school. José's passion is empower the Latinx community and promote the importance of healthcare.

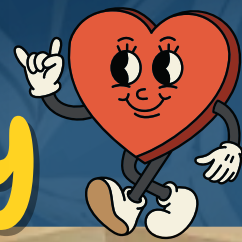
# SIMON AVILA

The second recipient for the Nohra De Francisco Memorial Travel Scholarship was Simon Avila. Simon is a pre-law Junior studying Justice Studies. Simon's family in Colombia are lawyers and it has inspired him to become a lawyer in the United States. He has been a student worker at El Centro for two years. He shares, "I started to get involved at El Centro, because of this location, they spoke Spanish and were more cordial. My first classes were at El Centro." Simon heard about the opportunity when it was announced at El Centro. He saw this opportunity as a chance to grow academically and personally. Little did he know, the scholarship committee was impressed with his story and granted him the opportunity. Simon wanted to travel to Los Angeles. He chose Los Angeles "as the destination I wanted to visit, because it is a vibrant and diverse city. It is full of cultural and professional opportunities. I am fascinated by its mix of cultures, its influence on the entertainment industry." When Simon returned, he shared his new perspective on scholarship opportunities. He states, "don't hesitate to try it [apply for scholarships]. Scholarships can open many doors and provide incredible opportunities. Even if the process seems challenging, the effort is worth it."



*Left: Simon Avila, Juan Gabriel Moreno, José Muñoz*

# STUDENT EVENTS Valentine's Day

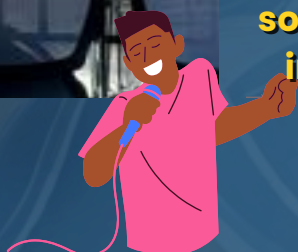


El Centro hosted a festive Valentine's Day. Students enjoyed free churros, coffee, and hot chocolate. Singing their favorite love song in a lively karaoke session.

## 🎵 Karaoke Night 🎵

### EL CENTRO

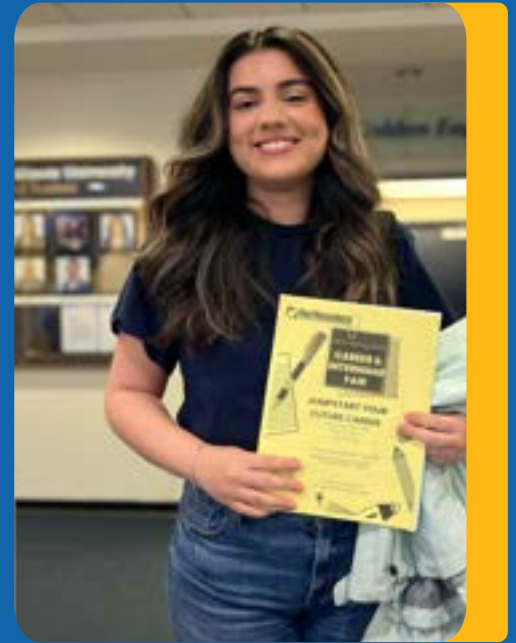
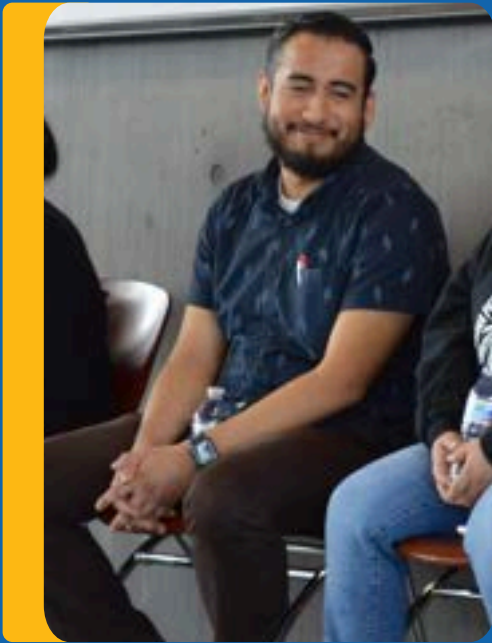
NEIU El Centro collaborated with Alfredo Aguilar and the Northeastern Programming Board to have a night filled with music and cheer. Karaoke Night brought students and community members together. Participants took the stage to belt out their favorite songs, creating a fun and inclusive atmosphere.





# Spring 2024 Scholarship Recipients

May  
2024



*Left to right: Ivan Ocampo, José Muñoz, Jennifer Vargas*

El Centro awarded \$10,000 in tuition scholarships this Spring 2024. Among the recipients, the following students shared how the scholarship impacted: Jacqueline Landi, Simon Avila, Benjamin Cerventes, José Muñoz, and Ivan Ocampo. Scholars have the opportunity to apply every semester to El Centro Tuition Scholarship. This financial assistance has supported students at pivotal times in their academic journeys, especially as first-generation college students. Students are required to complete 10 volunteer hours. Many return to support El Centro events, such as student panels, open houses, and more events. We'd like to highlight Jennifer Vargas, who received the \$2,000 Dr. Vinny Caraballo Scholarship from the Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE) program.

For Ivan Ocampo, graduating senior, the scholarship allowed him to focus on his Senior Graphic Design Project. Ivan has been a recipient for the scholarship in the past. He shared, “ I set out to create a virtual reality experience—something I had never done before—which proved to be a huge undertaking. It demanded a lot of my attention, and despite facing many challenges, I was able to achieve my goal.”

José Muñoz, Pre-Med double major in Human Resource Development and Psychology with a minor in Spanish, shares how “University tuition itself is costly, especially for a low-income, first-generation college student who has many life projects to execute; nevertheless, having the distinguished honor of being the NEIU El Centro Spring 2024 Scholarship recipient enabled me to self-promote mental well-being and facilitated me with more time to enhance my own commercial cleaning company instead of worrying about how to pay for the semester.” José entrepreneurial spirit continues to flourish through his family cleaning company.

# Scholarship Recipients



*“Having received this scholarship award has helped me focus more on my studies and not feel overwhelmed about the various amounts I would need to pay for the semester.”*  
*- Jacqueline Landi*



*Benjamin Cervantes is a few semesters away from graduating. He continues to stay connected with El Centro.*



*“This scholarship has greatly motivated me to continue working hard and to pursue my educational goals.”*  
*-Simon Avila*



*Left to right: Jacqueline Landi, Simon Avila, Benjamin Cervantes*

It’s no surprise this sentiment continues with Benjamin Cervantes, junior, and Jacqueline Landi, rising sophomore, both majoring in Computer Science. Benjamin started his journey in 2020 via the Google Computer Science Summer Institute (CSSI). During the last cohort for the Google CSSI, Benjamin returned as a CSSI Peer Mentor.

At the end of her freshman year, Jacqueline has begun her Computer Science classes and is part of the CAHSI (Computing Alliance of Hispanic-Serving Institutions) at NEIU. The scholarship allowed them to double down their focus on their academics instead of taking on more hours at work to pay for their tuition.

Simon Avila, junior in Justice Studies, states “I feel deeply grateful and more committed than ever to my education and my professional future.”

# CAREER WORKSHOP



Danny Cortez from El Centro hosted a Career Development Workshop in collaboration with Tamara Martin, NEIU Career Liaison. Students walked away with a profound new perspective on how to navigate the job market and learned about resumes, interviewing 101, NEIU's Power Closet, and networking.



## From the NEIU Career Workshop to NEIU Career Fair

Students that attended El Centro workshop applied the skills and networked at the career fair.



## El Centro Library & Learning Resource Center

Thanks to our Spring 2024 Library Student Workers, Alex, Elle, and Kelvin! NEIU librarians and staff are available to help with research and other library services via [live chat](#). Check back here for updates on hours, and visit our [library website](#) or the [El Centro Library & Learning Resource Center Guide](#) for research help and access to online materials.



El Centro presents . . .

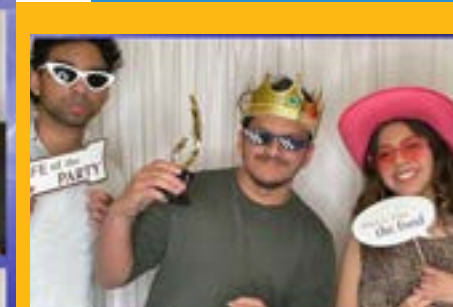
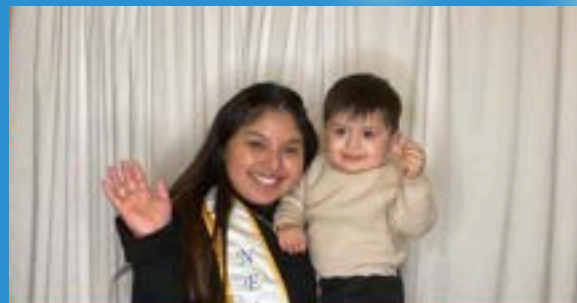
# NOCHE DE ESTRELLAS



For more than 10 years, El Centro Noche de ESTRELLAS (Empowering Students Through Recognition and Encouragement, Leading Leaders to Achieve Success) is an annual signature awards ceremony where we celebrate the many achievements of our students. To help us honor our students, we also invite family and friends to enjoy a lovely evening full of music and a delicious dinner.

A moment of appreciation for Rebeca Lamadrid-Quevedo for her 15 years of service at El Centro.

This year, El Centro honored 23 first year students, 20 El Centro graduates, and 37 students that achieved a 3.5 GPA or higher.



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE 2024 EL CENTRO SCHOLARS FOR THIS MILESTONE IN YOUR JOURNEY!

# Latinx Family Day



As a bilingual and bicultural campus, El Centro was beaming with excitement and community spirit for our Latinx Family Day. In collaboration with Proyecto Pa'lante, incoming freshmen and their families were invited to celebrate this milestone.



# SUCCESS STORY: MICHELLE VARGAS

The race is finally over! This Spring 2024, Michelle Vargas graduated with her Bachelors of Arts in Psychology and minor in Mathematical and Statistical Modeling of Complex Systems. Michelle began her journey at NEIU El Centro in Fall 2020. Her father and older brother are NEIU Alumni, so she knew NEIU would become a second home.

Michelle reflects on her college journey, stating “[She] enjoyed doing research, so I took that on really early on...I always make sure to keep my summers busy. Thankfully, it helped me understand and navigate my interest in what I wanted to do post-undergrad.” Her educational background experience was primarily in Pre-dominantly White Schools. Michelle shared how vital it was for her to be surrounded by diversity and Latinx/o/e community. She knew NEIU El Centro was the foundational place for her.

During Michelle’s spare time, she’s taken on some hobbies. Michelle shares, “I started to get back into running. I’ve always been on and off. But during the summer, especially when I do have time off, I’m committed to becoming more of a runner. I bought new running shoes, running training shoes, to hold myself accountable and to actually go outside and run.”

Michelle’s advice for first year students is to “network really early, talk to people, meet the faculty department. If you are undecided, like I was in the beginning, I recommend you go to events at the school. If there’s an event you’re specifically interested in, it may help you understand what you may want to major in. I would go to those [major related] types of events. I would not be afraid to explore. Also, internships-doing summer internships related to your major.”

Graduation is a surreal moment for many students. This bittersweet moment ended her chapter at Northeastern Illinois University while creating space for her next chapter in Fall 2024 at the University of Illinois in Chicago to become futura Doctora Vargas in Community & Applied Developmental Psychology.

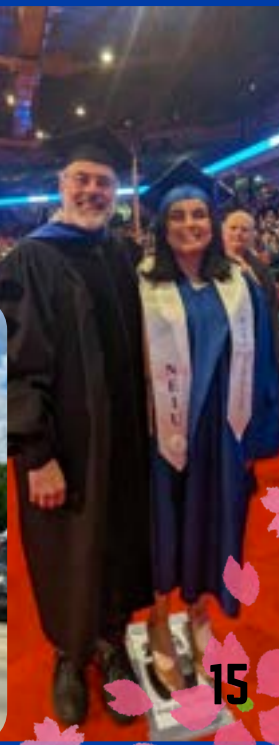
Michelle will be working with her future advisor, Dr. Amanda Roy, where she conducts research to understand poverty, violence and how it impacts adolescent’s foundational understanding of their identities in society.

Congratulations, Michelle Vargas!

Class of  
**2024**



Top photos, Michelle Vargas, 2019 with cohort peers.  
Bottom photos, Michelle Vargas, 2024 at commencement.



# Partnerships



In partnership with Junior Achievement, El Centro hosted 9 high schools: Joliet West, Joliet Central, Kelvyn Park, Thornridge, Gage Park, Bogan, Pritzker College Prep, Marine Leadership Academy, and Amundsen. El Centro staff Mimi Crespo and Danny Cortez visited Kelvyn Park, Amundsen, Foreman, ASPIRA Early College and Clemente to support students with their financial aid and next steps. More than 180 students learned about El Centro history, Success Program and community this Spring.



Students and counselors from Marine Leadership Academy



**El Centro wants to hear from  
YOU!**

**Do you have a story you'd like  
to share?**

## Contact



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**The El Centro Newsletter is created and edited by Lizett C Galan**