

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Fulbright Scholar Eloisa Sofia Puello Cabeza Shares Her Hispanic Culture and Heritage

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- ▶ Eloisa Sofia Puello Cabeza, second from left, poses with other International students during a Spanish Language Day celebration held during the Spring 2022 semester. From left are, Elise Semmartin, tennis player, undergrad student from France; Felipe Vélez, soccer team, grad student from Colombia; Lucía Berberena, 2021-2022 Spanish TA, from Uruguay; and Daniela Naupari, tennis alum, from Perú.

Former Teacher Assistant Returns to Gardner-Webb to Earn Her Master's

Eloisa Sofia Puello Cabeza, a native of Cartagena, Colombia, is intentional about sharing her Hispanic culture and heritage with her friends. The annual celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15) gives her even more opportunities to talk about her home and its people.

Puello Cabeza came to Gardner-Webb University in 2021 as a Fulbright FLTA (Foreign Language Teacher Assistant). The [Fulbright Program](https://eca.state.gov/fulbright/) (<https://eca.state.gov/fulbright/>) is the U.S. government's flagship international educational and cultural exchange program, creating connections in 160 countries worldwide. It is considered the largest and most prestigious educational exchange program.

Through the program, Puello Cabeza worked as a Spanish TA for the [Department of World Languages, Literature and Cultures](https://gardner-webb.edu/academics/colleges-schools/arts-and-sciences/world-languages-literature-and-cultures/) (<https://gardner-webb.edu/academics/colleges-schools/arts-and-sciences/world-languages-literature-and-cultures/>), and also audited a few classes. She was one of three Colombians selected for the specific grant she received.

“For me, receiving a Fulbright award is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” she related. “Fulbright grants in Colombia are really competitive and getting selected for one is definitely a milestone in someone’s

life. Coming from a city and country where resources and scholarships are limited, and coming from a low-income family and neighborhood, my possibilities to succeed in life were pretty narrow. Yes, it has broadened both my cultural and intellectual perspectives, but it has definitely made an impact in me and my family's life as well as those other Colombians that might get inspired with my story."



At the end of her Fulbright year, Puello Cabeza decided to return to Gardner-Webb to enroll in the School of Psychological Science and Counselor Education. The people she met on campus and the Southern hospitality of the surrounding community influenced her decision to come back and pursue her master's in school counseling. She is also working as a graduate assistant for Undergraduate Admissions.

"I made awesome friends here at GWU and at my church (Hope Community) that I definitely wanted more time with them," Puello Cabeza affirmed. "Another factor that encouraged me to come back was all the activities offered and all the fun events that I got to be part of."

She was surprised and impressed with the friendliness of the campus and Boiling Springs community. Her friends introduced her to late night Cook-Out runs for hushpuppies, which quickly became one of her favorite American experiences.

"I look and sound different to many people around here, but it surprised me how genuinely interested in knowing more about me people seemed to be," she reflected.



▲ Photo by Ezekiel Martin

While she loves her new friends and the area, Puello Cabeza said her Hispanic heritage keeps her grounded. “It means home to me,” she shared. “It reminds me of my grandparents and their grandparents, too. It reminds me that what I am now is the result of so many collective efforts; and therefore, I should be proud and grateful of it. My heritage also makes me feel connected to a bigger community, both the Hispanic and Latino communities.”

Last year, she worked with the Department of World Languages, Literature and Cultures to help people understand her Hispanic heritage. They presented Colombian movies at Tucker, celebrated Spanish Language Day, and volunteered at the library in Shelby, N.C., for Hispanic Heritage Month.

However, Puello Cabeza doesn’t wait for a special occasion to share her culture with her friends and the people around her. “Whenever I see the chance, I explain to them how X or Y thing is done differently in my country, which is cool for them,” she observed. “I’ve also prepared Colombian food for them and taught them a little bit of how to salsa dance.”

Puello Cabeza is proud of Colombia’s hardworking people and its rich natural resources. “They live in a beautiful land full of greatness and things to discover,” she asserted. “Colombians are warm-hearted and welcoming people. When someone goes to Colombia, they just don’t want to leave because they love it so much!”

National Hispanic Heritage Month

National Hispanic Heritage Month (<https://sites.ed.gov/hispanic-initiative/national-hispanic-heritage-month/>) is celebrated Sept. 15 through Oct. 15.

These dates include the independence days of several Latin American countries, such as: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua on Sept. 15; Mexico on Sept. 16; and Chile on Sept. 18. The month also contains holidays that recognize Hispanic contributions such as Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico Friendship Day celebrated in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This year's theme is "Building Prosperous and Healthy Communities." Each week has a different focus. September 19-25 was jobs and the economy and the other topics are:

- Sept. 26-Oct. 2: Climate
- Oct. 3-9: Education and Investing in Hispanic Serving Institutions
- Oct. 10-15: Mental Health and Wellness

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