

Heart of a Tiger: David Solis-Enriquez's exploration of heritage and history

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - Dodge City, Kansas, is a place where history, culture, and community intertwine. It is home to FHSU graduate student and history major David Solis-Enriquez. David's journey is not just about academic pursuit but also a testament to the rich tapestry of his heritage and to the inspiration and support he received from growing up in a nurturing community.

Born to parents who provided him with a strong foundation of faith and family, David's story unfolds against a humble backdrop. His father, a mill manager at a feedlot, never completed elementary school, while his mother dedicated her life to raising their family. Despite his father's limited formal education, David believes his parents instilled in him both immense curiosity about the world and an unwavering drive for achievement.

In a town where over half of the population identifies as Hispanic, growing up in a rural community and surrounded by diverse cultures shaped David's worldview. "I grew up experiencing a variety of Roman Catholic Hispanic cultures and a passionate interest in soccer." These experiences sparked his intellectual curiosity about his heritage and a commitment to preserving the community's stories.

Initially pursuing a business degree, David's transformative experience in Dr. Kim Perez's Modern World Civilization course opened new doors. He recalls a shocking lecture about the Zoot Suit Riots in World War Two Los Angeles. It was a period of significant racial tension and rioting that pitted American sailors against Mexican, Filipino, and Black immigrants. "I was unaware of such a significant historical event," he reflects, which led him to switch his major to history. "In history, I always learn things that are impactful and thought-provoking. The courses in our History Department are designed to encourage deep thinking. I knew then that I was hooked on history."

By his junior year, David qualified for the History Department's accelerated program, allowing high-achieving students like him to transition seamlessly from a B.A. to an M.A. in History. This pathway integrates advanced undergraduate and graduate coursework, facilitating timely completion of the degree.

Currently, David is working on his graduate thesis, focusing on the cultural significance of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe as it is celebrated in Dodge City. This event showcases the traditions brought by immigrants, interwoven into this ancient celebration. "There are all these new traditions and customs being interjected into what is an ancient tradition," he explains, illustrating how innovation influences cultural events.

The Feast is a nine-day celebration culminating on December 12th, commemorating the Virgin Mary's apparition to St. Juan Diego in 1531. Celebrated in diverse ways across Mexico, Central America, and South America, the festivities include Mass, processions, and cultural activities honoring Mary as the patroness of the Americas. In Dodge City, this celebration reflects the rich diversity of the Catholic community and the regional traditions immigrants have introduced to Southwest Kansas.

In his thesis, David highlights how these immigrant experiences shaped the evolution of this tradition, infusing it with new customs and traditions. A distinctive aspect of the Dodge City Diocese's observance is a two-day torch relay run from Wichita to Dodge City, which symbolizes the dedication of the faithful. Traditional dance groups, such as the Monarcas Mujeres—a female ensemble that represents a shift from male-dominated performances—further enrich these festivities, illustrating the integration of contemporary expressions into longstanding traditions.

David's research was spotlighted in Hollie Marquess's October 13 episode of the Victor E. History Podcast at FHSU. You can listen to it online at <https://victorehistory.com/>.

Outside the classroom, David actively engages in co-curricular activities. He serves as the president of Phi Alpha Theta, the national honor society for history majors. He participates in the Hispanic American Leadership Organization, which is devoted to preserving cultural traditions and supporting Hispanic students at FHSU. His commitment to service is seen in his involvement with Circle K, where he empowers youth, and Save the Kids, where he provides essential supplies to children in need.

David Solis-Enriquez embodies the spirit of Fort Hays State University, where initiative, innovation, and encouragement create pathways to success. His story reflects deep-rooted pride, an acknowledgment of past struggles, and a hopeful vision for the future, inspiring others to cherish their heritage and foster a sense of community. Through David, we are reminded that the strength of spirit within our students inspires change and elevates our shared journey to create engaged leaders who care about the world.

Every step of the way, David exemplifies that the pursuit of knowledge, love for one's community, and commitment to service can transform lives and ignite a sense of pride—the hallmarks of a Fort Hays State University education.

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