Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month with Flags of the Americas, Iberia, France and Connecticut in collaboration with the CCSU Africana Center and the Department of Geography.

In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Center at Central Connecticut State University, in collaboration with the Africana Center and the Geography Department, is flying the flags of the Americas, Iberia (Spain, Portugal), France and Connecticut. We offer the flags as a colorful contribution to the campus and a conversation starter in the tradition of the universal design for learning.

What is Hispanic Heritage Month? Hispanic Heritage Month “traditionally honors the cultures and contributions of both Hispanic and Latino Americans as we celebrate heritage rooted in all Latin American countries.” (www.hispanicheritagemonth.gov) It was first established as a week in 1968 during the Johnson Administration and expanded to a month in 1988 under President Ronald Reagan. The month also recognizes the Independence days of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Belize.

Why include all the flags of the Americas, Spain, Portugal, France and Connecticut in a Hispanic Heritage Month display?

Although the term Hispanic as used by the U.S. Census Bureau initially referred to Spanish-speaking residents of the United States, the Census Bureau currently uses the term Hispanic or Latino, which includes Haitians and Brazilians. Today, about 60 million people who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino, approximately 20% of the population, live in the United States. This number is even higher if we include the full range of Caribbean and South American communities. About 17% of Connecticut residents, and as many as 1,700 CCSU students, self-identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x. Significant West Indian communities also live in Connecticut. Today, Spanish is the second most common language spoken in Connecticut and Portuguese is third.
Although significant portions of Connecticut’s residents claim Latin American or Caribbean heritage, such residents often feel unseen. The same is the case for our students. To recognize the contributions that they make to CCSU, Connecticut, and the United States, we hang the flags of all the independent nations of the Americas, in addition to Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Dutch and French Antilles. To recognize the cultural legacies of Spain and Portugal, we hang those flags as well.

**Hispanic America: A Brief History**

On May 4, 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal Bull (Papal Decree) "Inter Caetera," granting the Crown of Castille the exclusive right to colonize the territories Columbus had “discovered” the previous year. On June 7, 1494, the Crowns of Portugal and Spain settled a dispute over the papal bull, which Portugal believed violated the Treaty of Alcáçovas of 1479 and the papal bull of 1481 granting Portugal the rights to all the lands south of the Canary Islands. In Portugal’s view, all the “discoveries” Columbus made belonged to Portugal. The terms of the Treaty of Tordesillas divided the world west and south of Europe between the two Iberian monarchies, along a line “370 leagues” west of the Canary Islands. Europeans knew almost nothing about the extent of the Americas at that point, but this treaty eventually was interpreted to give the Spanish Crown the entire western hemisphere except what is today northeastern Brazil. Thus, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, California, and most of the U.S. Southwest became Spanish colonies. The British, French, Dutch, and Danes challenged Spain and Portugal for territory in the Americas, in large part to be able to grow sugar with captive African labor, and by the seventeenth century, they had asserted control over numerous Caribbean Islands, as well as much of northeast and central North America. That common history is reflected in Jorge Morales’ *Roots of the Caribbean* mural, hanging in the CCSU Student Center. While some of those islands are now independent, others are not; some have their own flags, others do not. Martinique and Guadeloupe are departments of France and therefore fly the French flag. That is why we include the French flag in our display.

Today, the legacy of early Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the Americas is visible everywhere, if we only look and listen. Combined with the subsequent immigration of Spaniards to the Americas between 1870 and 1936, that colonization is reflected in the millions of people who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino, regardless of the American nation in which they reside. These flags are a small way to recognize the Hispanic and Latino American heritage of the Americas. Many of the flags also reference the contributions of Africans and native peoples to the history of their nation. We hope you enjoy them.

Check our website for a Fill in the Blanks activity, and email LALCC@ccsu.edu for the answer key! Stay tuned for a Flag Quizlet and Flag Bingo! How many of these flags can you identify?

For further information, LALCC@ccsu.edu.

With thanks to the staff of the Facilities Division for their assistance with this exhibit.
References:
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