

# Texas Baptists celebrate Hispanic higher education

July 2, 2025

Texas Baptists honored Hispanic students and education leaders during a fundraising banquet following the conclusion of the 2025 Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas annual meeting held at First Baptist Church in Duncanville.

## Scholarships

A total of \$8,500 was raised, funding [nine scholarships awarded](#) by Texas Baptists' Office of Hispanic Education to Hispanic undergraduate students attending a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated university and who are members of Texas Baptist churches.

**2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS**

**TEXAS BAPTISTS**  
Hispanic Education

 <p><b>Celina E. Aguirre</b> Dallas Baptist University Political Science Park Cities Baptist Church Dallas</p>	 <p><b>Luis Alfredo Esquivel</b> Baptist University of the Americas Biblical Studies Southwest Baptist Church San Antonio</p>	 <p><b>Osmara Dayanira Flores</b> Wayland Baptist University Clinical Counseling Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel McAllen</p>	 <p><b>Ana Martinez</b> University of Mary Hardin-Baylor Nursing Iglesia Bautista Getsemani Fort Worth</p>	 <p><b>Jazmin Lizbeth Olivarez</b> Baptist University of the Americas Business Administration Iglesia Bautista Elohim Bryan</p>
 <p><b>Marlon S. Vargas Zea</b> Baptist University of the Americas Business and Theology Iglesia Mas Alla de la Cruz San Antonio</p>	 <p><b>Jayson Villalobos</b> Howard Payne University Marketing Primera Iglesia Bautista Ade</p>	 <p><b>Sofia Villarreal</b> Baptist University of the Americas Human Behavior Life Church of San Antonio San Antonio</p>	 <p><b>Libni Shetler</b> Houston Christian University Nursing First Baptist Church Marble Falls</p>	

Texas Baptist Hispanic student scholarship recipients. (Courtesy image)

Scholarship recipients are:

- Celina Aguirre, a political science major at Dallas Baptist University and member of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.
- Luis Alfredo Esquivel, a biblical studies major at Baptist University of the Américas and member of Southwest Baptist Church in San Antonio.
- Osmara Dayanira Flores, a clinical counseling major at Wayland Baptist University and member of Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel in McAllen.
- Ana Martinez, a nursing major at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and member of Iglesia Bautista Getsemani in Fort Worth.
- Jazmin Lizbeth Olivarez, a business administration major at BUA and member of Iglesia Bautista Elohim in Bryan. Olivarez gave her testimony during the banquet about her call to ministry leadership. She also spoke of the value of education and her appreciation for Texas Baptists' financial support.
- Libni Shetler, a nursing major at Houston Christian University and member of First Baptist Church in Marble Falls.
- Marlon Vargas Zea, a business and theology major at BUA and member of Iglesia Mas Alla de la Cruz in San Antonio.
- Jayson Villalobos, a marketing major at Howard Payne University and member of Primera Iglesia Bautista in Azle.
- Sofia Villarreal, a human behavior major at BUA and member of Life Church of San Antonio.

## **Hispanic Education Initiative leaders**

In addition to awarding scholarships, the banquet celebrated 21 years of the Texas Baptists' Hispanic Education Initiative and honored the initiative's key leaders.

Albert Reyes, president and CEO of Buckner International, past-president of Baptist University of the Américas and first Hispanic president of the

BGCT (2004), called for the formation of a Hispanic Education Task Force in the early 2000s.

The task force was created in 2005, and Felipe Garza served as its first chair.

Gus Reyes, director of Hispanic partnerships at DBU, was the first Texas Baptists staff member to serve as director of the Hispanic Education Initiative before becoming director of Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission.

Gabriel Cortés was Hispanic Education Initiative director from 2014 to 2018. He then served as chief of staff at BUA before returning to Texas Baptists in 2024 as director of Hispanic education.

Rolando Rodriguez, director of Texas Baptists en Español, was Hispanic Education Initiative director from 2018 to 2024.

Lorenzo Peña led a special initiative focused on Hispanic higher education from 2022 to 2023 at the request of Texas Baptists' past-executive director David Hardage.

## **Celebrating the past**



Albert Reyes, president and CEO of Buckner International, delivers the keynote during the Texas Baptists Hispanic education banquet. (Courtesy photo)

Albert Reyes delivered the banquet’s keynote, sharing his own educational journey from Primera Iglesia Bautista in Corpus Christi through Mary Carroll High School to Angelo State University and on to a Doctor of Ministry in Missiology from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Leadership from Andrews University.

When Reyes was president of BUA, “the Texas high school completion rate for Hispanic teens was about 50 percent,” he said, “and the rate nationally was 33 percent in the early 1990s.”

“We have dramatically improved those numbers over the last 35 years. Today, the Hispanic high school completion rate is right at 88 percent,” he added, [citing data](#) from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

# Challenging the future

Reyes then pointed to demographic realities today and into the future, referring to statistics and projections from [Texas 2036](#).

“Today, Texas is home to 32 million people. By 2036, Texas is expected to gain another 3 to 5 million people, due primarily to domestic migration. In 2022, three years ago, Hispanics became the largest population group in Texas.

“By 2050, 25 years from now, the Hispanic population in Texas will be the largest racial-ethnic group in every age category. In other words, in the future, you will either be bilingual and bicultural, or you will be by yourself.

“By the fall of 2042, about 15 years from now, the number of Anglo, Black and Asian graduates is projected to fall by 26 percent, 22 percent and 10 percent, respectively.”

Further statistics point to the urgency with which colleges and universities need to engage Hispanic students.

“The National Center for Education Statistics reports the proportion of Hispanic high school students is highest in California with 56 percent, Texas with 53 percent and Florida with 38 percent,” Reyes reported from Texas 2036.

Closer to home for banquet attendees, [U.S. News & World Report](#) shows Dallas Independent School District reports Hispanic student enrollment at 70 percent in the 2023-2024 school year, Reyes said.

In light of these statistics, Reyes challenged Texas Baptist churches, colleges and universities to be “Hispanic-ready.”

“To educate is to redeem,” Reyes said, quoting a message he remembered

reading during his own journey in higher education. "To educate someone is to redeem everything God intended them to be and to equip them, to disciple them, to prepare them for a life of purpose."