

*Finding Belonging in Creativity: The Role of Art and Culture at DePauw University*

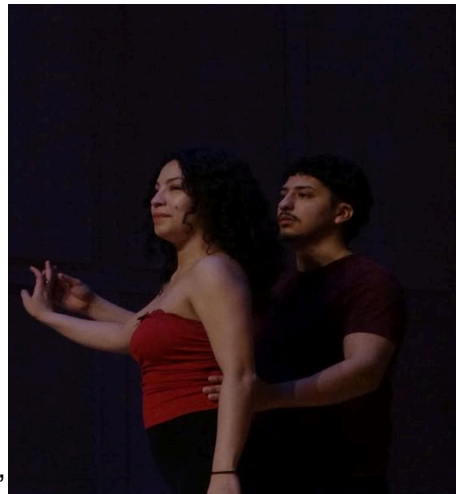
*By: Abigail Marin*

**GREENCASTLE, Ind.** — At DePauw University, art and culture aren't just extracurricular activities, they're lifelines. For many students, creative expression is how they connect, communicate, and find belonging in a community that values individuality and imagination. Students say both art and culture are deeply woven into campus life and shape their daily experiences at DePauw.

Every Thursday and Friday night, the sounds of salsa, bachata, and merengue echo through the dance studios in the Lilly Center. Inside, members of La Fuerza, DePauw's Latin American dance group, move to rhythms that reflect home, heritage, and heart.

"Dance gives us a way to share who we are," said Jackie Gervarcia, a first-year student and member of La Fuerza. "It's not just steps, it's about connecting with people who

share our culture or want to learn about it."



For students like Gervarcia, dance becomes more than movement. It serves as a form of storytelling, a bridge between cultures, and an invitation for the broader campus to experience diversity through art.

DePauw's creative pulse stretches far beyond the dance floor. Across campus, the Green Center for the Performing Arts (GCPA) buzzes with activity well into the evening. Students rehearse piano pieces, practice monologues, or collaborate on compositions that help them express their identities in new ways.

"I love the Green Center," said first-year pianist Melaney McDaniel. "It's a place where I can express myself and stay connected to what I love doing. DePauw gives us spaces like this that make it easier to grow as artists."

The Green Center of Performing Arts functions as more than a performance venue; it's a space where students rehearse, build community, and deepen friendships through creative work. Whether through music, theater, dance, or writing, DePauw's artistic environments give students room to show up fully as themselves.

For Confidence Korrie, a student involved in DePauw's campus newspaper, creativity takes shape through photography.

"I've always loved photography," she said. "Sharing my work through the club has given me confidence and helped me connect with people who see the world differently."

These individual experiences reflect a broader truth about DePauw's culture: expression is empowerment. Campus organizations such as La Fuerza, the Community for Latino

Concerns (CLC), and the House of Opulence encourage students to celebrate their identities while engaging with others across cultural lines.

During Hispanic Heritage Month, Professor Farah Ali reminded students of the link between identity and creative expression. “Be proud of who you are and where you come from,” she said. “When you express that pride creatively, you strengthen both yourself and your community.”

Students say that when their identities and artistic contributions are recognized, they feel valued and supported. Research supports this sentiment: studies from the Christensen Institute show that students thrive academically and emotionally when their learning environments reflect their culture, values, and lived experiences.

At DePauw, that idea plays out daily. From gallery exhibits and dance showcases to late-night jam sessions and poetry readings, students use art to connect their personal identities to the broader campus community.

“Art helps people feel seen,” McDaniel said. “When you share something personal through art, it naturally connects you to others.”

In the end, art and culture at DePauw are about far more than performance; they're about belonging. They give students the tools to honor where they come from, express who they are, and imagine who they can become.

As DePauw continues to invest in creative programs and cultural initiatives, one message remains clear: students aren't just creating art, they're creating community.

