

# Hispanic Heritage Month



My name is Professor Shirley Batistta-Provost and I have been employed at Monroe Community College for 26 years working with students and collaborating with faculty and staff at the college. Most of my tenure at MCC has been in Student Services, and adjunct teaching in the VAPA and Anthropology/History/Political Science/Sociology department. I currently work in the Office of Diversity/Equity and Belonging. My career has centered around the human condition focusing around culture, equity, fairness, human rights and diversity. The second part of who I am is that I am a “Black Latina” that defines so much of who I am and the experiences that have shaped my life.

Being a Black Latina I can honestly say it’s about time that society is finally recognizing that there are Hispanics who identify both being Hispanic and also being Black, embracing all of their heritage. I was born in Colón Panama (a country that is mixed of both European and indigenous ancestry (Mestizos) and about 15% of Afro-Panamanians and Afro-Caribbean. The native language is Spanish. I have two sisters who are American born and have lived and studied here in New York State (Geraldine at Syracuse University and Jeanette who graduated from Cornell).

Prior to working at Monroe Community College, I was Director and training instructor for US Airlines in Syracuse New York. I trained employees in both domestic and international travel, and diversity initiatives. I did extensive job-related training in several different countries training personnel in Brazil, Australia, Aruba, Montreal, Toronto and various places in the United States.

What I learned after traveling to so many places which is another reason why I got involved with diversity, is the lack of knowledge and awareness so many people (especially in the United States) lacked culturally. Regardless, if you are White, Black, Hispanic or what degree you have or job title, there are so many people who live in a cocoon of ignorance or the inability to try to understand people who are different than them, or try to understand that words are powerful and have a big effect of how we are perceived. I left the airlines and decided to continue with another degree in Diversity Training and Development. To bring my point home let me use my ethnic background as an example!!

It is my opinion that Hispanics in general have Black as part of who they are. “Ever wonder why we are called the rainbow people”? When many Latin Americans come to this country, there's a tendency to try to distance themselves from Black Americans. And that's true even among people who, phenotypically from Latin America, are Black. For example; someone like Big Papi, (the great slugger for the Boston Red Sox) who is clearly Black, very dark-skinned, does not identify as Black; he identifies as Dominican, as if that were separate somehow from being Black. In the U.S., most people strictly think African American when they hear of someone who is “Black,” but according to the Slave Voyages Project, during the colonial period, about 15 times as many slaves were taken to Latin America than the United States. These types of things warrant “discussions” that higher education can help our students understand things like bias, or why we think and do the things we do. Everyone (not just students) can learn and appreciate all the contributions everyone at MCC brings to the table.