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## Celebrating diversity through a Multicultural Thanksgiving

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Students and staff from various multicultural organizations join together for an early Thanksgiving celebration on Nov. 9 in the North Pod of the Memorial Union. Photo by Ian Ligget, Staff.



Bria Lamonica (<https://mainecampus.com/author/blamonica/>)

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On the evening of Thursday, Nov. 9, dozens of people celebrated Thanksgiving three weeks early.

From 5 to 7 p.m., students, faculty and local residents gathered together in the North Pod of the Memorial Union at the University of Maine to celebrate the annual Multicultural Thanksgiving potluck. Hosted and organized by the Office of Multicultural Student Life (OMSL) and the Student Heritage Alliance Council (SHAC), the purpose of this event was to celebrate and share the real meaning of Thanksgiving by bringing together people of all religions, cultures and ethnicities for a diverse meal.

"This event is a great way to meet new people and experience foods and traditions from other countries and cultures. The wide variety and range of ethnic foods meant that there was something for everybody, and there was a great turnout," Toni Tello, a first-year student, said.

Starting off the night with greetings and opening remarks, OMSL Director Silvestre Guzman introduced many of the volunteers and sponsors who helped to make the event possible.

Following Guzman's introductory speech, guest speaker and President of the American Indian Association (AIA) Dylan Smith talked with the audience about upcoming cultural events and activities throughout the year. After Smith's announcements, John Bear Mitchell of the Wabanaki Center and the Penobscot River Village Tribe shared a story that revealed a Native American perspective on the history of Thanksgiving, and the truth about the three-day feast that is often left out of history textbooks. He stressed the importance of dedicating this special time to loved ones and family members. Bear Mitchell asked the participants to sit next to someone they didn't know and take their hand, encouraging the students to take the time to meet new people and get out of their comfort zones.

Many students and staff volunteered their time to cook and prepare food for this celebration of love and friendship.

"I was surprised at the overwhelming number of dishes and different kinds of foods there were at each station," Tello said. "There were dishes from many different cultures, you could walk up to one table and get tacos and nachos, and then head to another for meat and lo mein with other Chinese dishes."

Dozens of multicultural clubs and activities groups dedicated their time to preparing these meals, including the South Asian Association of Maine, the Italian Student Union, the Asian Students Association, the Latin American Student Organization, the French Club, the Black Student Union and more.

Usually taking place in Balentine Hall on the south side of campus, Multicultural Thanksgiving was moved to the North Pod because of how much it has grown and expanded over the past few years. Guzman expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the immense number of volunteers and helpful staff members who made the event possible, hoping that it will continue to thrive and grow over the years.

OMSL hosts various activities and events throughout the year to unite students and to promote the celebration of diversity. Their next upcoming event will be a Cinco De Mayo celebration in the North Pod on May 5.

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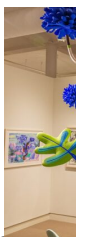


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