

# EYA choir grows into active ministry

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The EYA choir, which began as a spontaneous suggestion within Jhoan Ogando's friend group his freshman year, has blossomed into an active ministry on campus.

Ogando, sophomore graphic design major, said that EYA stands for "esperanza y amistad," the Spanish words for hope and friendship. He decided to create a choir that embodied those two ideals.

"I wanted to make a different community, where I welcomed everyone," he said. "I realized there wasn't a Latino choir [on campus] where we sing in Spanish."

Auditions are not required. To those who want to join but are worried because they don't speak Spanish, Ogando says, "I don't care. Come."

Although many of the songs contain parts sung in English, Ogando takes time during practice to review the pronunciation of parts sung in Spanish with everyone, without separating fluent speakers from non-Spanish speakers.

Carlie Alvarez, a recent EYA choir member and freshman vegetarian culinary arts major, said, "I enjoy how we are not limited to one language but are able to worship God through many."

Sophomore computer science major Erika Peralta loves music

and also found a community when she joined the choir last semester.

"It was pretty cool to see people from different Hispanic backgrounds, and even non-Hispanic backgrounds, join together to share a language and a God we love to praise," she said.

Ogando and his friends were the original members of the group, but today the choir has grown to 70 individuals. Although the EYA choir is not an official Southern choir, Ogando believes that more students have become aware of it. The choir's first performance took place a year ago at Lawn Vespers, and the group performs mainly for worship services, such as those at Merge Worship and Iglesia Adventista Hispana de la Comunidad.

To Ogando, the EYA choir is unique because it is not heavily structured.

"I go with the flow," he said. "I just let God tell me how everything should go."

The group practices once a week on Fridays, and its performances are spread throughout the semester at various locations. Those who attend do so out of their free will and not because they will receive worship credit.

*See CHOIR on page 3*

## CHOIR continued from page 1

"It's been kind of cool seeing how people still come, but at the same time when they don't ... it starts to get into your head a little, because you start to think, 'What have I done wrong or what can I do better?'" he said. "I have to pray to God to help me get through these feelings, because I know they're not productive."

When people come, Ogando believes it is important because it shows that students can still come together without needing

worship credit. He says it shows that they can take time out of their day to "be there and just sing and worship together."

As current Latin American Club (LAC) vice president, Ogando hopes to promote the EYA choir to new freshmen alongside the LAC booth at the organizational showcase next fall.

When he graduates, Ogando hopes to pass on the torch to someone else.

"This is not even about me," he said. "It's a voice on campus, specifically a Latino voice. I just really hope it becomes something bigger than me."



EYA choir members pose for a group photo. (Photo courtesy of source)