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Hope's Jesus Montaña to speak at ACEH about cultural transformations

Jesus Montaña knows what it's like to live life in two worlds.

Born in Mexico, he started his life and schooling in the U.S. as a Spanish-speaking undocumented immigrant. Today, he is a U.S. citizen working as an associate professor of English at Hope College, specializing in Latino literature.

On Friday, Montaña is set to keynote the Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony annual meeting. His talk, "The Language and Practice of Hope," will touch on immigration, deportation and life in border communities, illustrated by photos he's taken showing cultural transformations. Montaña has explored how Mexican American language moves through cultures and changes as people migrate into North America.

Montaña is set to speak at 7 p.m. Friday at the Holland Area Arts Council, 150 E. Eighth St. in Holland. Admission is free but donations are welcome.

"Everybody has a story. He'll be relating his own story and he's going to talk about his rise, from coming to the U.S. with no English to now being an English professor at Hope," said Marvin Younger, ACEH's president.

Younger said the program is set to recognize National Hispanic Heritage Month and Tulipanes, Holland's film, art, music and cultural festival.

"There's a whole range of people from around the world who share a common language, but are from very different cultures," he said.

Montaña has been teaching at Hope since 1999; the 2010 graduating class gave him the Hope Outstanding Professor Educator award.

A specialist in Latino and Medieval English literature, Montaña also introduced a course on the blending of Native American, Spanish and Northern European cultures in the American Southwest, according to a Hope biographical sketch on him. Montaña is 1991 graduate of University of Texas at Austin (bachelor of arts degree in English), and earned his master of arts and doctorate in English from Ohio State University in 1996 and 1999, respectively.

ACEH's goal is "to make sure people of many different cultures and backgrounds come together in safe environments," Younger said. "We want people to feel comfortable talking about their differences."

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