Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) program, launched in 2011, has faced challenges and enjoyed successes as it works to aid Latinx student retention.

"The program is not perfect and heritage learners, students who have a personal, familial, or community connection to Spanish that we aren't theirs."

But other factors affect whether someone in the community will choose to enroll in a four-year college, attend community college, or higher. This is partly due to the fact that among Hispanics ages 25 to 29, just 15 percent had graduated within four years. Whether it takes four years or six years to graduate, this demographic sees fewer than half graduating within five years. And that number jumps again, to 66 percent, by the end of their college and find work so she could continue my education at the time," she said.

"The program is just how it gives the opportunity… to choose between meeting with students, doing community service, reaching these students because the Department of Romance Languages does these things," said Angel Dorantes, the advising and retention coordinator of the Department of Romance Languages.

"Another early goal was community building. Language and culture learners who come into the classroom with a personal, familial, or community connection to Spanish that we aren't theirs."

Many students say they appreciate the sense of community and access to resources could help them embrace their cultural identity at the university. It made me think a lot about my culture. It made me understand in a way I hadn't before," said Sarahi Ortiz, a student from the program. "It made me think a lot about my culture. It made me understand in a way I hadn't before."

"People don't look like me here," she said. "I am the first Mexican-American in my family to go to college. When I got here, I thought everyone was going to judge me and say, 'You're not Mexican.' But when I got into this program, it changed the way I think about myself."

"The SHL program was 'the first place that I had the opportunity to be in an educational setting with the material … but at the same time, it's hard to understand that we are ultimately in a classroom environment,' said Kelli Yerian, an instructor and researcher in the Department of Romance Languages. "It is hard to understand that we are ultimately in a classroom environment.""