

UC SANTA BARBARA

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[Keith Hamm](#)

Los Angeles Times columnist Gustavo Arellano to receive Luis Leal Award

Reporter, author, columnist and food writer Gustavo Arellano has covered California's fastest growing — and now biggest — ethnic group for the past two decades. His coverage of the complex influences of Mexican-American culture on the Golden State and beyond has ranged widely from weekly satire to long-form investigations — a body of work that will be honored by UC Santa Barbara's Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature.

"I can't overemphasize how humbled I am to win this award," said Arellano, a columnist for the Los Angeles Times. "The previous recipients are scholars, playwrights, poets, essayists, thinkers. I'm just a Mexican with glasses from Orange County in the dying trade of journalism. To be with literary Latino greats at least lets me know someone has read some of my work!"

The award is named for the late Luis Leal, a pioneer of Latin-American and Chicano literature and distinguished professor at UCSB, where he helped establish the nation's first doctoral program in Chicano studies.

"Gustavo Arellano is a journalist who forcefully seeks the truth and upholds the tradition of a free press against anti-democratic forces that would deny us this right," said historian and UCSB professor Mario T. García, who worked closely with Leal to establish the annual prize, now in its 19th year. "I have admired Arellano's journalism, especially his work as a columnist as it fits into the genre of essay

writing.”

The child of Mexican immigrants — one of whom arrived in the U.S. in the trunk of a Chevy — Arellano was born and raised in Orange County. He earned a bachelor's degree in film studies at Chapman University and a masters in Latin American studies at UCLA. Before joining the Los Angeles Times, he wrote prolifically for OC Weekly, where his nationally syndicated column ¡Ask a Mexican! was simultaneously ridiculed for reinforcing Latino stereotypes and praised for bringing clearer cultural truths to the forefront.

Arellano is the author of three books published by Scribner: “¡Ask a Mexican!” (2007); “Orange County: A Personal History” (2008) and “Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America” (2012), and the co-author of “A People’s Guide to Orange County” (University of California Press, 2022).

García will sit down with Arellano to discuss his career in journalism, upcoming elections, Latino politics and the future of print media after presenting him with the award. Arellano will also take questions from the audience. [The event](#) will take place from 4–6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 7, in the McCune Conference Room of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building. It is free and open to the public.

Tags

[Awards](#)

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draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.