

SOL enriches high school students

BY ERIN NIEMEYER
NEWS EDITOR

Approximately 150 Latino high school students from nine Las Vegas schools visited UNLV Saturday for the fourth annual Latino Enrichment Program, organized by UNLV's Student Organization of Latinos.

"LEP is a high school recruitment effort to plant a seed in students heads to stay in school," said Ramon Avendano, SOL president and UNLV sophomore political science and business dual major. "We want to show them the opportunities at UNLV."

High school freshmen through seniors from schools including Rancho, Las Vegas, El Dorado, Chaparral, Valley, Southern Nevada Vocational Technical Center, Clark, Bonanza and Green Valley heard guest speakers, took a campus tour and participated in a variety of workshops during their seven-hour stay at UNLV.

Robert Ackerman, UNLV vice president for student services, told students he looks forward to "the time you'll come here and will welcome other students to the campus. "We're interested in you...because we know your coming to the university will help diversify the campus," Ackerman said.

Velicia Haron, UNLV Multicultural Student Affairs director, presented students with her formula for success. "Attitude plus preparation plus opportunity equals success," Haron said. "Everyone in this room has the attitude to be a success or you wouldn't be here today."

"If you sit back and (pass up) the achievements and advancements our ancestors struggled for, who will your children blame when institutions shut them out and return to the way this country used to be?" Haron asked. "The choices are yours."

Bryan Galwey, Ethnic Student Council president and UNLV graduate student, encouraged students to "start taking steps in the right direction."

"Today is the most important day of the rest of your life," Galwey said. "You have an obligation...to succeed."

"Don't talk about how there's no way to succeed. Make it happen," Galwey continued. "Utilize your resources be-

cause a closed mouth doesn't get fed."

Ignacio "Nacho" Aviles, a UNLV alumni and former SOL member, encouraged students to "never forget you're Latino...always have pride in being Latino."

Rancho High School's 1985 class valedictorian, Aviles said Latino youth "need positive role models so they can see the transition from going from high school to college and to the professional level."

Aviles, who has been involved in LEP since its inception, said the program was created out of concern for a high Latino dropout rate. "If these (high school) students see our (UNLV) students, they have something to strive for."

Three workshops, including admissions and financial aid, academic advancement and Multicultural Student Affairs, and university student life, were conducted to inform students about university procedures.

"We want them to know how to prepare for college and what to expect," Avendano said.

"We're trying to do something because we can't let it stay the way it is," said Luis Ayon, SOL member and UNLV freshman economics major.

Ayon, a 1995 Durango High School graduate, said he helped organize the event because "programs like this may help encourage students to stay in school."

Veronica Perez, senator for the College of Liberal Arts and two-year SOL member, helped facilitate the event for similar reasons.

"We've been blessed to have graduated from high school and now college," Perez said. "We need to help them do the same."

"I know we're not going to reach all of them. But hopefully we can reach some of them."

Marisa Cox-Vasquez, SOL special events committee chair who organized the event, said SOL "targets students who would normally not consider going to college...who need answers, motivation and a little direction."

"A lot of Latinos have come to UNLV or to other schools because of this program," Cox-Vasquez said. "It opens their eyes."

Many educators have failed Latino youths, according to

Cox-Vasquez. "My high school counselor came right out and said, 'Why are you learning? You're not going to make it.'"

"Kids need role models to show them the opportunities they have, someone they can relate to and understand," Cox-Vasquez said. "Most teachers don't understand Latino culture so they can't help them. They relate to us (SOL members)."

Cox-Vasquez was encouraged by the turnout and said she hopes UNLV's admissions department will co-sponsor the fifth annual LEP.

SOL members and their high school guests agreed the program was a success.

Sandra Sandoval, a Clark High School senior, said she attended the event "to get a better understanding of the university."

More programs to involve minorities to keep them interested in school are needed, according to Sandoval, who plans to study computer engineering in college.

Veronica Ochoa, a Rancho High School senior, said her desire to learn about career availability prompted her to get involved in LEP. Ochoa hopes to attend UNLV after graduation.

"It (LEP) made me feel good and that, as a Hispanic person, I could do anything I put my mind to," said Brenda Tobar, a Votec High School sophomore.

Multicultural Student Affairs provided funding for four school busses to transport students to and from the university while Student Services supplied lunch.

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