

Program brings workers in from the fields

By SHEILA ROSE
Of the Emerald

Most students in the High School Equivalency Program earn a lot more than their General Equivalency Diploma, says acting program director Carolina Murillo.

HEP is an intensive 10-week study program that helps 17- to 24-year-olds from low-income migrant and seasonal farm worker families complete their GEDs and find placements in jobs, training programs or colleges.

Testimony ends in Abscam trial

NEW YORK (AP) — The defense completed testimony Monday in the Abscam trial of Sen. Harrison Williams with the senator denying for the fourth day that he ever tried to peddle political influence for personal gain.

"I never used my office to advance my personal financial interest," the New Jersey Democrat told the jury as his trial entered its fifth week in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn.

Judge George Pratt said lawyers for both sides would begin final arguments Tuesday morning after the replaying of a tape and other "housecleaning chores" by the defense.

Pratt said that after the summations, which could take as long as 9½ hours to complete, he will give his instructions to the jury so it can begin deliberations, probably Wednesday afternoon.

The defense called 45 witnesses over seven days. Williams, who testified for more than 20 hours including Monday's testimony, was on the stand the longest.

Williams' testimony was similar to last week's — that he met with an undercover FBI agent posing as an Arab sheik to impress him in hopes the foreigner might loan \$100 million so the senator's friends could operate a Virginia titanium mine.

The government alleges Williams, a 22-year senate veteran, accepted a hidden 18 percent share in the mine for free in return for agreeing to help the venture get military contracts.

Williams, 61, on trial for bribery and conspiracy along with lawyer Alexander Feinberg of Cherry Hill, N.J., admitted he agreed to impress a phony "sheik" in hopes the loan would be approved, but denied he had lied.

federally-funded program takes 40 students each term out of the fields and brings them to live and study at the University. HEP provides free room and board in Bean Complex, instruction, tutoring, counseling, health care, transportation and up to \$15 a week for good class attendance.

"HEP is beyond test taking — beyond the GED," Murillo says. "It's career exploration, it's community involvement projects, it's self-improvement."

One of the program's tools is role models, Murillo says. For instance, a HEP student interested in law school might talk with a law student.

And every term there's a community project.

"Murals, a senior citizen dinner — whatever it is," Murillo says, "it's important to get involved. It's important to give something back to the community. We help them make a resume and explore different careers."

Career planning counselor Deb Casey says the program encourages student development.

"They make the choices, the changes, the decisions. We want them to take the power of their own lives in their own hands," Casey says.

HEP students discover "there's more choice," agrees recruiter Edana Paz.

Paz says one of the biggest obstacles facing a student from

a migrant farm family is family size.

"It's not uncommon to have six children," Paz says. "And four or five would be considered on the small side."

Because of the number of mouths to feed, the father "needs other hands" to help him earn enough to support the family, she says.

And there's the problem of the growing season overlapping with the school year.

"The potato season lasts until November, and already kids are saying 'I've got to get back by the end of the month,'" Paz explains.

According to Paz, many HEP students don't graduate from public schools because of credit deficiency — not because

of a lack of intelligence.

"The state will allow you to miss 11 or so days a year. Above that, and you don't get any credit at all," Paz says.

The program had two non-readers in the 11th grade, she says.

To meet the educational needs of students at varied levels, HEP offers an individualized alternative education system, Murillo says.

The intense program requires students to be in class from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., she says. There are eight to 10 students in each class.

But it pays off. Last year 96 HEP students earned their GEDs. This year, 84 percent of first-term students already are placed in jobs, Murillo says.

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