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MEChA to up Hispanic enrollment

By Rosana Villarreal
Of the Emerald

Concerned about having only 180 Hispanic students at the University, MEChA, the Chicano-Latino union, will make a concerted effort to increase Hispanic enrollment at the University, MEChA's director Francisco Garcia said.

MEChA is concerned about the underrepresentation of Hispanic students at the University. That is why its members want to develop a plan to attract more Hispanic students to the University and to retain the ones already enrolled.

"There are only about 180 Hispanic students in the University of Oregon, not too many," Garcia said. "We want more to come and graduate, but the drop rate is very high."

The Council for Hispanic Education is also concerned about enrolling more Hispanic students. But compared to other U.S. universities, the University has a good representation of Hispanic students, it said.

"The U of O is doing a good job at retaining Hispanic students," said Jan Oliver, acting director of the Council for Minority Education. "We're not losing students but we're not gaining them either. I can't say that the number of Hispanics has been getting larger."

To increase enrollment of Chicano-Latino students, MEChA, together with the Council for Minority Education, will use the State System Minority Tuition and Fees Award Program given by the State Board of Higher Education to attract new students.

The 32 fee waivers of approximately $1,500 will be granted to first-time freshman minority students who take 36 hours a year with a minimum GPA of 2.00.

Oliver said the Hispanic students will take more than 24 of 32 scholarships because they are the ones who have applied most, compared to American Indians, Alaskan natives or Black Americans.

A second way MEChA will use to attract more Hispanics, and keep the ones already enrolled, is by trying to unite the Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) and the students from all Latin American countries.

"We need to get away from the labels, Latinos, Chicanos, Hispanics; we should act like one," Garcia said. Raza (race) is the term Garcia says should be used to describe the people of Latin American descent. "We must work as a raza, as a group that works for a common cause, that strives for education," he said.

MEChA tries to keep the Hispanic students informed about the Union with brochures or writing directly to them. The group also holds regular meetings on Tuesdays at 4 p.m. to which all the Hispanics are welcome. During these meetings everyone's ideas are discussed and plans for the year are made.

Social gatherings and cultural events are a good way to attract and unite Hispanics. They help them feel less alienated, Garcia said. During the past year MEChA has been celebrating occasions like the Cinco de Mayo,(the fifth day of May) or El dia de los Muertos (the Day of the Dead), which are festivities originated in Mexico.

The coming year MEChA will celebrate occasions that represent all Latin America. That way they will involve everyone with a Hispanic background.

The final part of the plan to attract new students to the University is recruiting Hispanic staff members for the University. They would help as role models and show Hispanics can contribute to the University as professionals, Garcia said. Hispanics would like to have Hispanic professors teaching not only Spanish, but also Latin American history, economics, political science and many other fields.

"By being present, Hispanics would exchange cultural ideas with the Anglos and would contribute to the educational purposes of the University," said Garcia.

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