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Photo by Mia Bertelsen

From left, Isabel Soria, Rosa Cardenal, Luis Manuel Castillo and Lourdes Benitez take advantage of the University's HEP program this term.

University gives youth a chance

By Dan Eisler
Emerald Reporter

For many students, the end of fall term is the chance to return home and loaf around, then return to yet another term of school. For the students enrolled in the University's High School Equivalency Program, it means graduation and a chance at a better life.

The program, which has existed at the University since 1967, is designed to help migrant or seasonal farmworker youths who have not completed their high school education. The program provides instruc-

tion for a general equivalency degree, as well as vocational and career guidance to go on to college, job-training or other career choices.

The program's regulations stipulate that it be held at higher education institutions, said Steve Marks-Fife, director of the program since March.

"The original charter was set up to give youth of migrant and seasonal workers a view of what higher education was about and the services they can provide, rather than just getting a (general equivalency degree). The idea is to promote education," said Marks-Fife, who has been associated with the program at the University since 1978.

Although other universities have applied for the program, Marks said, the University remains one of two state institutions involved with HEP, along with Chemeketa Community College in Salem.

Since its inception, the University program has received federal funding, Marks-Fife said.

Funding was provided on a year-to-year basis until three years ago, when it was switched to a three-year grant, Marks-Fife said, adding that he would be writing a new grant proposal in January.

The program had a budget of \$399,000 last year.

The proposals are open competition, with more than 100 institutions of higher education vying for funding, Marks-Fife said.

Marks-Fife said the program at the University has been pre-

dominantly attended by Hispanic students because of its location in the middle of the Western "migrant stream," of farmworker families.

Students in the program must meet certain eligibility requirements. Applicants must be "migrant or seasonal farmworkers or dependent family members in households" where someone engages in farm-related work, according to an HEP information guide.

In addition, students themselves must have worked in farm-related work at least 75 days in the last two years and demonstrated the ability to do well as active participants in the HEP program, according to the guide.

Documenting a student's eligibility for the program "is getting easier all the time," Marks-Fife said.

While seasonal workers can be checked through previous employers, Marks-Fife said migrant workers can have their eligibility established through the Migrant Student Records Transfer, a national network based in Arkansas that keeps track of migrants all over the United States and can transfer records from state to state.

Traditionally, however, the program has gotten most of its students from a recruiter who goes out on the road to the migrant camps, Marks-Fife said.

The average age of students recruited for the program ranges between 17 and 24 years old, with occasional older students. They must be at least 17

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