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## HEP graduates overcome obstacles

■ **CEREMONY:** Students honored for achievements

By Jennifer Schmitt  
Higher Education Reporter

By working hard and succeeding in getting their high school diplomas, the 37 graduates of the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) proved that they were capable of accomplishing anything, said Hector Hernández, career and placement counselor of HEP at Thursday night's packed graduation ceremony in the EMU Fir Room.

"You will face obstacles both inside yourself and outside in the world," Hernandez said. "But you succeeded here and you can succeed out there, too."

Two students, Maria Birruete Rubio and Rodrigo Hidalgo Nieto, were awarded \$100 scholarships

from the Bean President's Council. Sara Leal, Maricela Samayoa and Olivia Sanchez, all mothers of three children, were given awards of special recognition for outstanding achievement. And Juan Garcia Tapia received a special award for his hard work and dedication.

"This is the first time that we have had three mothers with three children in the program," said Emilio Hernández Jr., director of HEP. "Also, this class had the oldest person graduate in the history of the program. They are some of the strongest people we have ever had here."

Olivia Sanchez, 35, left her husband and three children in Madras, Ore. to come and live on campus for a term while she studied to get a high school diploma. She missed her children and did not get to see her family much during the term. Now she is look-

ing forward to possibly going on to a college or university.

"It is a really hard thing to leave everything and come to HEP," said Karen Ulloa, academic coordinator of the High School Equivalency Program. "They are excellent role models and examples, not only to their children but to all women, of what you can accomplish."

Juan Garcia Tapia, 60, is the oldest student to graduate from the program. He had applied to the program over a year ago, but realized that since he had been out of school for so long, he had a lot to learn before he even came back to school. So, for a year, he studied at home and sent HEP weekly reports on how he was progressing.

"He has such a flame inside him," said Ulloa. "Not just for learning but for life in general."

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