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Laura Smit Emerald
During an academic session at the Knight Law Center, Ricardo Juarez (left), a first-year law student, talks to Oregon high-school students about opportunities to study in college.

Minorities look to future

■ A diverse group of high-school students visited the University to broaden its horizons

By Will Wyer
For the Emerald

The University gave about 600 Oregon high-school students of color a taste of college life as part of the annual Gateway to the Future program Thursday.

The program, sponsored by the Office of Admissions, helped introduce students to the possibilities of a college education.

Lerisha Harris, a high-school student from Salem, said the event helped her focus on her future.

"A lot of people don't have that chance to go to college," Harris said. "I'm gonna try to take advantage of the opportunity."

That is what event organizers aim to have the students come away from the event believing. Tana Atchley, an admissions counselor, said, "I think the most important thing is implanting in the minds of the high schoolers that college is a possibility for them."

"There are some students that are coming from communities where

nobody even graduated from high school and for them to even begin thinking about college, learning about scholarships, financial aid and the different possibilities that are out there is a good thing," Atchley said. "It opens a lot of doors."

Harris fits Atchley's description. "I'll be the first person in my family to go to college so that's a big thing to me," Harris said. "Also, I'll have a better life when I get older, a better job, a better understanding."

The event kicked off with a free continental breakfast followed by a performance by the Gospel Ensemble and a welcoming speech by Dave Frohnmayr. Students then moved on to a series of informative sessions about college life.

Students and parents learned about admissions and financial aid, and students broke into groups, divided by major.

Students chose between campus tours or a visit to the Multicultural Center and the ethnic student unions. After lunch, they had the opportunity to attend specific academic sessions depending on where their interests lie.

The day concluded with University student panels, where the participants had the opportunity to ask questions of college students. For

some of the volunteers, the Gateway program provides a chance to help high-school students relate to the volunteers' own experiences.

David Peterson is a University freshman who volunteered his time Thursday. "I know it was a hard transition for me and I knew from past experience that it's not as hard as it seems," said Peterson, who also participated in Gateway in high school. "I want to be able to break the ice and let them know how it is."

Peterson remembers attending the program last year and how it was instrumental in helping him decide which direction to take his own education.

"Toward the middle of my senior year, UO was one of the universities that came to visit my high school," Peterson said. "I was kind of leaning toward community college, but then I was told that since I could afford going to a university, I should go for it because it would be a better experience, more worth my while."

Organizers consider the University's largest recruiting effort for minority students a success simply for getting younger students to realize that the option of education does not stop after high school.

"I see people interested and that's satisfying," Atchley said.

Racism

continued from page 1

campus for Gateway to the Future, a program that has worked to recruit a more diverse student body to the University for more than 15 years.

But this year, the program is part of University President Dave Frohnmayr's top goal of improving diversity on campus.

"I just can't fathom it," said Jami-la Singleton, a student volunteer for Gateway who witnessed the incident. "This isn't OK to be happening on our campus."

Singleton added that the students had free time to explore the campus when the incident happened.

The Carson Hall lobby is unlocked and open to the public, unlike other residence halls that require a key for entry.

One of the students stopped, Michael Hill, 17, said he and his friends were not dealing drugs and, regardless of the circumstances, he just wants to forget about his encounter with campus security.

"The discrimination has to stop," he said.

ASUO President Jay Breslow, who was a student director in the Multicultural Center before being elected last spring, said he is furious about what happened.

"It's not DPS racial profiling, but it's definitely still a racist incident," Breslow said. "It's a horrible thing to have happen."

A report about the incident has been filed with the Bias Response Team, a group of students and administrators who advocate for victims of racism and educate the campus community about the case.

Fitzpatrick, who met with members of the response team Thursday afternoon, said DPS has a duty to stop people if they match the physical and clothing descriptions of suspects.

"We simply identified the folks, talked to them, thanked them for their cooperation and wished them well," he said. "We had a relatively positive contact."

Mark Tracy, assistant dean for diversity programs at the University

and a member of the response team, said he wants to deal with the aftermath of the incident instead of placing blame, especially on DPS.

"DPS did what they were supposed to do," he said. "We need to decide how we are going to deal with it as a University."

Frohnmayr released a brief statement late Thursday afternoon to say he discussed the situation with Fitzpatrick, members of the response team and others.

The three students received letters from Fitzpatrick that explained what happened and why — but did not include an apology — and Tracy went to Gateway sessions in the afternoon to discuss what happened and the resources available on campus for students who are victims of bias or racism.

Breslow said the biggest disappointment Thursday was the timing of the incident with the recruitment program.

"Bottom line — it was a racist incident," he said. "It happens every day, but we happened to catch this one."

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