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I would like to welcome our new students to El Centro de la Raza. Please take the time to learn about the resources UNM has to help you succeed. If you need help along the way, we are here for you. If you are continuing students, I want to remind you that every step you take to achieve your goal gets you closer to your dreams.”  

Rosa Isela Cervantes, Director, El Centro de la Raza

El Puente Fellowship Increases Multicultural Representation In Academia Globally

This year, El Centro de la Raza is ready to start the semester with a fresh twist to some of our most well-known programs. El Puente, a program designed to successfully prepare undergraduate students to thrive and succeed in graduate school, grew 100 percent. In the past, this program prepared 10 students per year. In 2014, El Centro is hosting 20 students.

“The purpose of the program is to motivate and encourage students to go to graduate and professional school,” says Eric Tomala-Viteri, Graduate Mentor for El Puente. “The idea is to create a pre-graduate environment where students are able to explore their identity as scholars.”

Through this program, students will be able to ask professors and current graduate students any variety of questions they may have about graduate school, research, and all the cultural elements that exist in graduate and professional programs. Fadi Jamaliddin, a student with a concentration in biology and psychology says he is already seeing the benefits of being an El Puente Fellow. “With this program, I’m building a network and developing multiple perspectives around research,” he says. “Any research with community input is always better than working alone.”

The fellows are not the only ones impacted with the interaction among individuals from different backgrounds and cultures.

“For me El Puente is about how we can learn as a community. I believe in collective and community learning practices,” says Tomala-Viteri. “I would like everyone to learn that we are not in higher education to gain knowledge for ourselves but to enriched and enhance our community.”

Dr. Eliseo “Cheo” Torres Shares why El Centro de la Raza has National Significance

Torres is the Vice President of Student Affairs at UNM. He is known internationally for his innovative approaches to education.

Why do you feel places like El Centro de la Raza are important for UNM and the state?

El Centro is one of the oldest ethnic centers in the state and the country and it’s a home away from home for many students. It offers them a place to feel safe, study, network and gain the skills they may not get in a classroom. Its a holistic approach to serving the students’ needs.

What do you think would happen if places like El Centro are not supported and developed?

Unfortunately the students wouldn’t get the skills and support they are getting at El Centro. I’m hoping that other universities can look to El Centro as a model for them to implement similar programs on their campuses around the country, because El Centro not only recruits, it retains and graduates a lot of students.
Cerebro y Liderazgo

El Centro News wants to share with our readers our new section, “Cerebro y Liderazgo.” This section aims to recognize local community members and leaders whose life stories inspire and promote the leaders of tomorrow. The “padrino” of our section is Sergio Bermudez, CEO of El Mezquite Supermarkets. Enjoy our new section, let us know your comments, and who should be featured next month.

Dreaming with the “Dreamers”

Many people say that one should never forget where you came from, but Sergio Bermudez, The CEO of the New Mexican chain of Supermarkets El Mezquite, is proud to show the world where he came from. As a business owner and philanthropist, Bermudez’s presence can be seen inside and outside of the supermarkets. For example during the 2014 El Mezquite Golf Tournament, paletas and traditional Mexican Sonoran style hot dogs were served to hundreds of attendants who had never experienced the addictive combination of bacon, grilled onions and guacamole on top of a sausage.

Bermudez came undocumented to this country, and now is CEO of a self-made multimillion-dollar family business; yet he is the first to recognize that his life story is one in a million. “I don’t have a degree and I know what it is to work 15 hours, seven days a week to learn everything. I strongly believe that education is the way to advance faster in life,” he says. “If students choose to take my route they must also be prepared to be working hard with their arms, not with their head.”

Some of the life experiences this entrepreneur has had are no different from the hardships many of the “Dreamers” students face to attend school, which is one of the reasons why the funds from this scholarship can be used by any student regardless of their immigration status. “Supporting students regardless of their legal situation is my way of saying ‘I believe in you just like you believe in our business.’”

Rosa’s Summer in Review

My first summer as Director of El Centro de la Raza went pretty fast and it was highly productive.

During the last months, the staff, graduate students, and I had the chance to take a critical look at ourselves as a team and individuals, and made revisions to our vision and mission. Our goal is to design the bridges to make our students competitive in a global society and economy.

An example of our new approach is the redesign of the El Puente Fellowship, where we selected students from diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds to interact and learn from each other through research, networking, and partnerships.

The process is not easy. It is rewarding because at the end of the day, staff and students are united in the same goal: to help one another succeed.

Please don’t hesitate to bring your ideas, questions, or concerns to the table. New ideas are always the catalysts for change.