The Chicano Education Program (CEP) is celebrating its 34th year at Eastern Washington University. CEP, through its various recruitment, retention, and programming initiatives, has promoted EWU to Chicano/Latino students throughout Washington as the ideal place for their higher education. To recruit and retain Chicano/Latino students to EWU, CEP, in partnership with other entities on campus, develops specific programming throughout the year to advance EWU’s commitment to diversity. The CEP takes a three-prong approach to achieve numerous objectives that are conducted during CEP’s annual Cinco de Mayo Celebration: CEP’s student/parent conference, a speaker series, and the dissemination of Chicano culture during the first week of May (May 2-6). Celebrating Cinco de Mayo provides an opportunity for the Chicano community to share with other population groups their cultural heritage, have an open dialogue on contemporary issues that impact all within our campus community, to recruit and retain Chicano/Latino students, and to share and invite the EWU campus community to learn about the Chicano experience.¹

Eastern Washington University has achieved many accomplishments under the rubric of “diversity,” but much remains to be done. Although not widespread, intolerance continues on EWU’s campus where classism, racism, sexism, discrimination, and homophobia rear their ugly heads. We are aware that a single week event will not eradicate intolerance, yet if we do not remain eternally vigilant, the quality of life and the education for our students and the general campus community will diminish. To improve the campus climate CEP’s Cinco de Mayo Celebration not only addresses issues of diversity cultural awareness, student recruitment, but the weeklong celebration implements solutions. Thus, the weeklong series of speakers, cultural activities, and the conference have long-term ramifications for EWU’s campus climate, diversity, and the recruitment and retention of Chicano and Latino students. The annual Cinco de Mayo celebration fulfills many aspects of the bot diversity initiative, but we wish to highlight that these efforts particularly address issues of inclusiveness, the celebration of diversity. Our activities are result-oriented and project-based.

CEP’s Cinco de Mayo Celebration and student/parent education conference has three major components: cultural and historical celebration of the Chicano experience; a student/parent educational conference, which itself has layers of objectives (discussed later); and a speaker series. Central to the components and objectives is the dissemination of information that conveys Eastern Washington University’s support for diversity and its proactive initiatives such as Cinco de Mayo Week and the student/parent educational conference.

¹ Cinco de Mayo commemorates the defeat of French forces by the Mexican Army on May 5, 1862 in Puebla, Mexico and the unifying of the Mexican nation after decades of internal fighting.
Eastern Washington University currently has the largest percentage (nearly 10 percent) of Chicano/Latino students of any four-year institution in the state of Washington. This is attributed to the long-standing support services offered by CEP, our strong alumni base, and the affordability of an Eastern education. However, to continue on this trajectory, Eastern needs to maintain innovative recruitment models and techniques. During the week of Cinco de Mayo, the Chicano Education Program utilizes various forms of outreach, recruitment, and diversity awareness as a foundation for its recruitment of Chicano and Latino students. One innovative approach is CEP’s student/parent conference, which has proven to be viable, innovative, and sustainable.

This conference is designed to attract 250 Chicano parents and students (currently 200 are registered for the May 2011 conference) to participate in a one-day long leadership development and education conference, college information and cultural performances at EWU. The conference focuses on providing participating parents and students with a critical base of college information staged through a series of workshops and information tables. The participants also have an opportunity to tour the EWU campus. In conjunction with the other Cinco de Mayo events, the one-day education conference is intertwined with other events, and a number of different objectives are achieved. Furthermore, these efforts are a cross-campus endeavor that includes the participation of Admissions, Financial Aid Office, Career Services, Eastern Advantage, the Visitor’s Center, various campus departments and colleges.

The objectives of “Chicanas/os in the 21st Century: Education, Voting Rights, and Social Justice, The Chicano Education Program Annual Cinco de Mayo Celebration and Student/Parent Education Conference” are as follows:

Recruitment: Overall Chicanos remain under-represented in higher education. The one-day educational conference attracts over 300 Chicano and Latino students from throughout Washington. CEP and EWU staff utilize this opportunity to educate young Chicanos and Latinos about the importance of higher education and promote EWU as the ideal setting for their education.

Dissemination of Culture: Throughout the week, the Chicano Education Program delivers a cultural explosion to the university campus in order to share and learn about Chicano and Latino heritage and history. The dissemination of culture allows other groups on campus to see commonalities and appreciate the differences that all groups share. In this manner, the university population is exposed to the nuances of cultural practices and other personal experiences, strengthening the social fabric of the campus.

Educational Attainment: Throughout the week many of the invited speakers will promote the importance of education. Several speakers will discuss their journeys as migrant children through the educational system and how they navigated this difficult terrain. Many in the target audience, middle- and high-school students,

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2 The 2010 Chicano Education Program’s Student/Parent Conference was attended by 375 parents and students.
are from migrant backgrounds or rural communities. Thus the audience will be afforded the opportunity to hear individuals from their economic background and be inspired to continue down a similar path. Simultaneously, these individual speakers are role models for all students at Eastern Washington University.

Career Opportunities: The invited speakers include a university law professor; a food, social, and feminist activist; a medical school student; a PhD student; and an educator with a community health organization. This broad group of individuals will bring their passion for their profession to the forefront and allow students to share in their personal experience and choice of profession.

Leadership and Development for EWU Students: Current EWU students take part in leading workshops, providing guidance and mentorship to visiting students, and engaging with visiting speakers and performers.