

# Diversity *and the* University

By Bob Evancho

**T**he ivy-walled college setting is viewed by many as a bastion of liberal leanings that fosters multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. And amid a culturally homogeneous, predominantly white citizenry such as Idaho's, the dichotomy may be more pronounced: where the campus may be considered an oasis of cultural sensitivity in a desert of class consciousness.

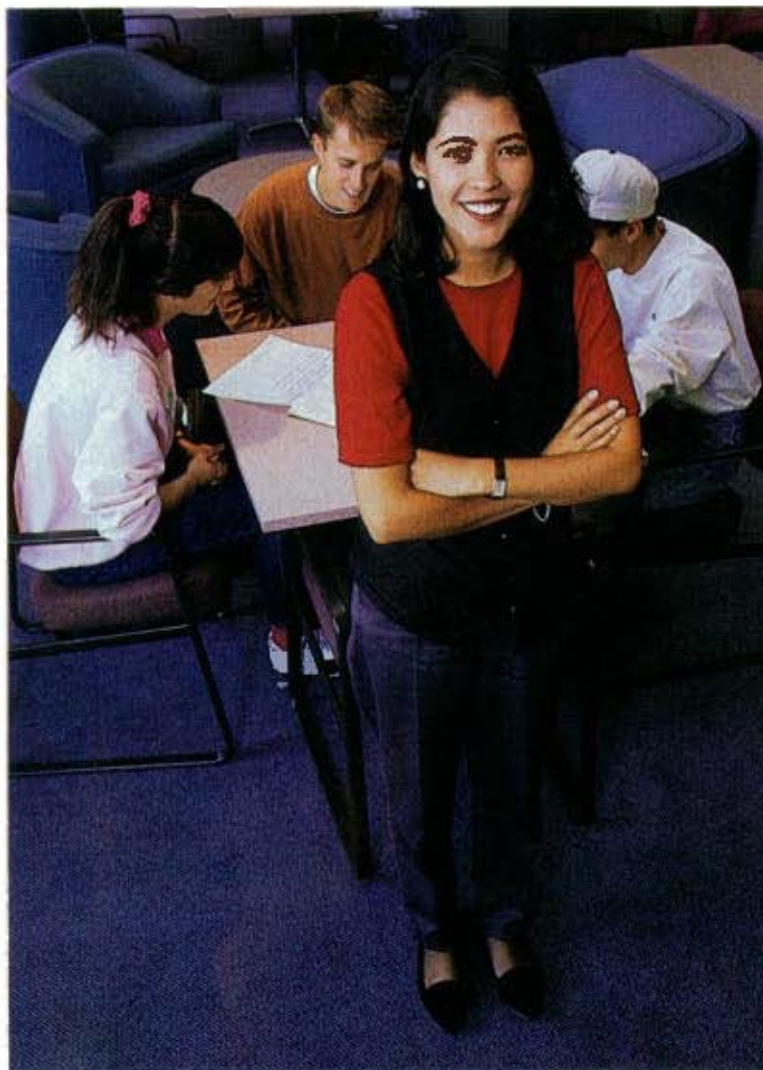
But from the standpoint of some BSU Hispanics and their advocates, that metaphor may be somewhat generous. To them, BSU's campus is America in microcosm, where the forging of a unified society from highly diverse constituencies is far from automatic.

When it comes to providing support for and assistance to its Hispanic students, Boise State seems to do as good a job as any of its sister institutions in Idaho. With the largest Latino enrollment in the state (473 students in fall 1994), well-established federal assistance programs for migrant and seasonal farm-work students, and an institutional mandate that embraces ethnic and cultural diversity, it appears the university is addressing such issues from a platform that is proper, pluralistic and politically correct.

But has it been enough? The challenges posed by rapid diversification certainly don't make the process simple. It would seem, however, that plenty is being done within the institution to advance and enhance the "Hispanic experience" at BSU. (See box, Page 31.)

But not everyone is impressed. Some people consider such efforts nothing more than widely used nostrums designed to placate an underrepresented group. Indeed, despite these endeavors to enhance the cultural and educational opportunities of BSU's Hispanic students, there seems to be no shortage of fault-finding. Assistance is available, programs are in place, and goals and objectives are outlined in the university's recently released Cultural and Ethnic Diversity Plan; yet critics still persist.

**Like other  
schools,  
BSU has found  
ethnic diversity  
difficult  
to achieve.**



CRICK SCHEER PHOTO

*Minority admissions counselor Fabiola Juarez-Coca is one of many Hispanics who work at BSU, but critics claim more Latinos need to be included in the school's faculty ranks.*

The concerns range from minor complaints to charges of institutional racism. Some critics are diplomatic; others such as financial aid counselor Francie Peña are more outspoken.

"Talk is cheap," she says of the Cultural and Ethnic Diversity Plan and other efforts to assist Hispanics, dismissing them as "fluff." The university, Peña contends, "would rather 'celebrate diversity' than address the issue of racism, whether it's individual or institutional."

Although Peña acknowledges BSU is "trying" in various ways to augment the Hispanic experience, she argues that, given local demographics, the campus has an insufficient amount of Latino students:

"Idaho's population center is in Ada County and the largest Latino population is in [neighboring] Canyon County, and all we have is about 450 students here? Before I came here [in 1984] I was the director of Talent Search [a TRIO program] at Idaho State University, and I opened a satellite office here. I had one woman as a recruiter and she had over 250 students coming here. And now we have all these support services and we can only get another 200 kids over a 10-year period? I don't think there is a commitment by the institution."

Ada and Canyon counties currently supply two-thirds of BSU's undergraduate Latino students. According to U.S. Census figures, the Hispanic population has risen 45 percent in both counties between 1980 and 1990.

"We are the largest minority in the state," notes Peña, who is nearing completion of her doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Idaho, "yet we are the forgotten minority. I think if we [at BSU] were doing our job, we would have twice

as many Hispanic students at Boise State."

And according to education professors John Jensen and Jay Fuhrman, the Hispanic students who are at Boise State often struggle with college life. The reasons, they say, range from insufficient institutional support to, in some cases, out-and-out racism.

"We are bringing in kids who are not only from a different culture, but kids who are at relatively high risk," says Jensen, director of BSU's Center for Multicultural/Educational Opportunities. "A lot of these kids are low-income, first-generation college students, and college itself is a different culture for them."

Administered by BSU's College of Education, Jensen's office directs the university's High School Equivalency Program (HEP), College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the university's three TRIO programs (Educational Talent Search, Upward Bound and the Student Support Program), all of which are designed to assist minority students, the vast majority of whom, in BSU's case, are Hispanic.

While the HEP and CAMP programs provide young Hispanics with opportunities that might otherwise be lost, that doesn't protect them from the sharp sting of prejudice. While the reality of a world in transition has brought men and women of all backgrounds together, racial and cultural intolerance still exists at times — even at BSU. "What these students encounter is not what an Anglo student will typically encounter," says Jensen.

Jensen, who has worked at BSU for 25 years, says some whites typecast young Hispanic students as undisciplined and troublesome. As a result, they have been subjected to incidents of discrimination



— some having taken place in the Education Building where the HEP, CAMP and bilingual programs are housed.

"Not every brown face on this campus is enrolled in HEP, but I get comments like, 'Those kids in your program are a little loud, you need to quiet them down,'" Jensen says. "And I quickly hear if a Hispanic kid is involved in a fight. [It's assumed he] must be a CAMP student or a former CAMP student."

Fuhriman, director of bilingual education, echoes Jensen's comments. "We bring a lot of Hispanic kids into this building, and you would think that with that kind of exposure, people who work in this building would get a little more used to them and would learn a little more about them and interact," he says, "but I don't see that happening."

Despite their concerns, both Jensen and Fuhriman readily acknowledge the university's efforts to help its Latino students. "I think the steps we have taken are significant steps, and I would say the institution has made a commitment," comments Jensen, who chaired the group that produced the Cultural and Ethnic Diversity Plan.

Still, he voices a complaint that is perhaps the biggest knock against BSU in regard to Hispanic needs: the dearth of Latino professors. Like many others, Jensen notes there has not been any significant change in the racial makeup of the university's faculty in more than a decade. "I think we need to make a more intensive effort to hire minority faculty," he adds.

With modern language professor Luis Valverde Zabalca's retirement 1992 and Margie Jensen's resignation from the College of Education to work at another university earlier this year, BSU has no full-time Hispanic professors.

Noting that people of color currently comprise a mere 3 percent of the university's faculty, Betty Hecker, BSU's director of Affirmative Action, calls the school's track record for hiring minorities "embarrassing." Part of the problem, she asserts, is that the university is "not doing a good enough job bringing them here."

There are, however, extenuating circumstances.

"First, there are not a lot of Hispanics who have Ph.D.s, and so we are competing with a lot of other schools for a small number of people," Hecker adds. "Second, we are not able to compete salarywise; we have lost

make any promises.

"We need to find someone who is the right match for that program," cautions Ruch. "What that person's background is ... we'll let the process sort that out."

"It would be a big mistake to hire a Latino who is not ready for the position and then set that person up to fail," Hecker remarks. "You don't do that person or the university any favors if the person isn't right. To get someone who is qualified is important. It would be great to have the best of both worlds, and I think hiring a Latino to this position is important. On the other hand, you don't sacrifice somebody just to say we hired a Latino."

Despite Ruch and Hecker's cautionary approach, BSU sociologist Dick Baker, who spearheaded the effort to add the Mexican-American studies minor to his department's offerings, remains hopeful.

"The Hispanic community is really anxious to have a Chicano scholar for this program," he says. "I hope the president and provost [Daryl Jones] are willing to be proactive in their search."

And as Latinos continue to become a larger, stronger and more vocal part of BSU's mosaic, the demands to infuse more diversity into the university's overwhelmingly white faculty will undoubtedly intensify.

Until then, students like Lisa Sanchez, Lucy Ramirez and Diana Garza can only wait.

"I think it's very important to have Hispanic professors," says Ramirez, a sophomore from Rupert, and current president of BSU's Organizacion de Estudiantes Latino-Americanos.

"It gives you someone you can identify with. It also gives you a feeling of support, much like a mentor; this in turn provides someone I can look up to."

Sanchez, a junior from Burley and former vice president of BSU's student government, agrees. She is quick to say that she has taken classes from many outstanding, well-intentioned, culturally sensitive white instructors at Boise State, "but it would be different if the person at the front of the class looked more like me," she adds.



Above: Francie Peña. Below: Jay Fuhriman, left, and John Jensen.

[Hispanic] candidates in specific searches because we couldn't meet their dollar requirements."

Boise State President Charles Ruch echoes Hecker's sentiments. "I think the most glaring area where we need improvement is in the faculty ranks," he says. "But that is a reality of higher education, period. There are not many non-white faces in the professoriat nationally, and so we start from a diminished pool."

Minority recruiting problems notwithstanding, there is a push to ensure that the director of the sociology department's new Mexican-American studies minor, scheduled to start next fall, is Latino.

Although they agree a Hispanic professor would be ideal, neither Ruch nor Hecker





## HELP FOR BSU'S HISPANICS

"For me it's a big concern," says Garza of the lack of Latino instructors. "Something all of us need are mentors who we can look up to. I see very few [faculty] minorities on this campus; any minority professor would be nice at this point."

While there is an obvious paucity of Hispanic professors on campus, efforts to increase the number of Latino support staff are more apparent. But most of those employees are in jobs working with fellow minorities — a source of yet more criticism.

"We tend to 'ghettoize' Hispanics," states Hecker. "We have not been good about giving them [job] opportunities elsewhere [on campus]. What we need to do is help [them] with career development."

Says Peña, "We know we can sweep the floors and clean the johns, but we need more [Latino] professionals here. The message the university is sending to Hispanics is, 'We'll educate you, but we won't hire you.'"

If the Hispanic talent pool for professional jobs is inadequate, then "we need to grow our own," avers Peña.

"The university says it wants to hire Mexican-Americans, but [it says] there are none. HEP and CAMP and Talent Search have been around a long time. There is no reason why we cannot mentor some of these students, provide them with internships, and eventually move them into professional positions."

While it's true that the number of Hispanic staffers is low — all told, BSU's full-time work force is 95 percent white — Fabiola Juarez-Coca, minority admissions counselor, believes the university is working toward diversifying its faculty and staff and improving its support system for Hispanics. The Parma native is a product of that system.

"Of course it's hard to justify putting minority people in administrative jobs if they don't have adequate training," says Juarez-Coca, a 1993 political science graduate, "but I think BSU has taken a lead role with its [Cultural and Ethnic Diversity] plan."

"As a student I was encouraged by many people at BSU and supported with a mentoring program. I think it has a lot to offer minorities."

Whatever the point of view, it is apparent more needs to be done.

"I think the university is learning how to adjust to diversity, and I think our situation mirrors society," says Ruch. "The question for me is, do we have a way to say it's OK for men and women of goodwill to differ, and do we have a thoughtful and orderly way for everyone to have their say and arrive at decisions that seem to fit Boise State?"

"I think that's happening. Is it as organized as we would like it? Perhaps not. Do we have a long way to go? Of course. But I believe we are taking steps to accomplish that." □

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The 473 students of Latino descent constitute the largest minority at BSU. This fall, 5.4 percent of Boise State's new freshmen are Hispanic — the highest percentage ever.

In response to these numbers — and the fact that Hispanics also make up Idaho's largest minority — BSU is engaged in several programs and projects that focus on Hispanic students and offer opportunities to learn about Hispanic culture. Here are some of them:

- The College of Education's Center for Multicultural/Educational Opportunities has brought in several million dollars in federal funding for its College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and High School Equivalency Program (HEP). In recent months both programs have received grants to continue educational support for area migrant or seasonal farmworkers or their dependents.

- In addition to HEP and CAMP, the College of Education has placed an emphasis on recruiting and retaining Latino students through Educational Talent Search, Student Support Program and Upward Bound, as well as the college's bilingual teacher preparation program.

- The College of Education is part of a program that received a \$245,000 gift from U S West to coordinate an education consortium called TEAMS, which stands for Teacher Excellence Appropriate for a Multiethnic Society and is designed to better prepare Idaho's teachers to work in the state's racially mixed classrooms.

- The College of Education's bilingual teacher preparation program publishes the *Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*. The journal is designed to present information and articles to second-language learners in the education field. With a readership that covers all 50 states and 25 countries, the journal is the largest bilingual education publication in the United States.

- The bilingual education program has also received three major grants from the U.S. Department of Education. One is for \$126,462 per year for four years for graduate-level bilingual teacher training. One is for \$190,828 per year for four years for undergraduate bilingual teacher training. The third is for \$158,479 per year for three years to train bilingual teachers at the College of Southern Idaho for the first two years, then transfer them to BSU to complete their course of study.

- BSU sociologist Dick Baker has con-

ducted interviews and compiled information about migrant workers in Idaho's Canyon County for his book *Las Dos Mundos: Rural Mexican Americans, Another America*, which is scheduled to be published by Utah State Press this month. He is now conducting research on the Hispanic dropout rate in the Nampa School District. Baker is also organizing a one-day conference on Mexican-American studies this spring.

- The sociology department will introduce a Mexican-American studies minor beginning next fall.

- The sociology department has produced a Hispanic-issues video to supplement the 18-part telecourse "Dealing With Diversity," which is part of its "Introduction to Multiethnic Studies" course.

- Adjunct sociology professor Laura Edles conducted a study that was designed to teach immigrants their legal rights and how to access agencies designed to help them.

- One of the strongest and most active student organizations on campus is OELA (Organización de Estudiantes Latino-Americanos.) The group promotes Latino awareness and Hispanic studies.

- BSU's College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs and anthropology department have implemented a Cultural Learning Program that is designed to give students and faculty firsthand experiences with cross-cultural issues. The program includes workshops and lectures by community scholars and summer institutes.

- A Multiethnic Center has been started by the Office of Student Special Services. The center offers workshops and other support services for minority students.

- The university's department of modern languages and College of Health Science have co-produced a video to help Anglo health-care workers better understand basic Spanish medical terms. Through the Continuing Education curriculum, the modern languages department also offers Spanish language classes for health-care workers and law-enforcement officials.

- A Spanish radio show titled "La Hora Latina" airs on KBSU-AM weekly. It features news, commentary and music for the Spanish-speaking community.

- The Admissions Office is piloting a Minority Access Program (MAP) that is designed to provide educational opportunities to a limited number of minority applicants who otherwise would not be eligible for admission. □