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WCC MEChA presses college

Students vow strike if progress not made soon on hiring Latinos

By MONICA KRAUTH/Democrat Staff Writer
Daily Democrat

For much of the fall semester at Woodland Community College, students from the campus club Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan have been reaching out to administrators because of anger over a lack of Mexican-American instructors on campus.

But students, unhappy with the lack of progress made at getting Latino instructors are vowing to go on strike March 30 unless their demands are met. They are also considering a legal challenge.

College counselor Jesse Ortiz said there has never been a Mexican-American instructor on staff, since the college first opened.

Employing Latinos who aren't necessarily Mexican isn't representative of the school's population, as 90 percent of the Latino population is Mexican, he said.

WCC public information specialist Art Pimentel said college President Angela Fairchild has made various promises to the students including a multicultural center that will be ready next year, reviewing the school's recruiting practices without breaking the Equal Employment Opportunity laws and the opportunity for the students to be a part of the diversity project team.

"(Fairchild) is committed to implement strategies to address the lack of Latino/Chicano representation among full-time teaching faculty and involve students in the process," Pimentel said.

However, student activist Eric Alfaro said since the project was enacted, students feel the district has not shown enough initiative.

That initiative includes EEO policy AP 3420, which was adopted by the district's trustees and is geared toward equal opportunity hiring practices. That policy has been removed from the district's Web site, leading students to believe it is not longer being pursued.

Pimentel said the policy is being reviewed by the district.

A copy of the policy obtained by The Daily Democrat states that if significant under-representation persists, monitoring by the state on an on-going basis is required.

AP 3420 states such an analysis must monitor minority groups that are underrepresented in comparison to how many qualified employees are available to be hired. The degree to which the group is underrepresented is also a factor.

The policy also suggests that an EEO advisory committee "review and advise on recruitment efforts; job announcements, interview protocols, retention efforts and other aspects of the hiring, retention, and promotion processes that impact the district's ability to attract and retain a diverse faculty and staff."

Ortiz said the EEO advisory committee has not met in more than two years.

"If Yuba College district followed their own policies related to equal employment opportunity, specifically administrative policy 3420, which was approved in October 2005, I think the district would be in a better position to deal with the concerns of the Chicano students, specifically the MEChA students," he added.

This should be a concern of the total community that the college serves, said Ortiz. "All (MEChA) is asking is to hire people that look like them. Following our policy will make a difference."

Pimentel, who is a former student body president at Sacramento State and also a former MEChA student in high school, said: "(The MEChA students) are doing what's right. It's important that they work closely with Dr. Fairchild. It's very clear that Fairchild cares. She's listening and taking their input."

Students argue the more Chicano/Latino instructors there are, the higher the retention rates would be for Chicano/Latino students.

Because Alfaro and others feel the district is breaking the law, he said student activists from both YCC and WCC are reaching out to The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund to see if they'd take the case.

If not, Alfaro said a student strike could occur on the WCC campus on March 30.

Pimentel said WCC is recruiting for three certificated positions for the spring semester - counselor, psychology instructor and a speech instructor.

All of the campuses in the YCCD will be closed for the winter holidays until Jan. 7. Classes begin on Jan. 22.

College fees drop \$6 per unit at YCC, WCC

Yuba College students, including those in Woodland and elsewhere across the state, get a welcome change Monday when they begin paying less for their education.

Enrollment fees will drop from \$26 to \$20 per unit.

A typical 3-unit class now costs \$78. It will cost \$60 when changes go into effect on Monday.

Cutting the cost of enrollment is hoped to make up for a stiff fee hike enacted two years ago, officials said.

At that time, state lawmakers raised student fees from \$18 to \$26. Afterwards, some 314,000 students left community colleges across the state, a report later showed.

Beginning Monday, the \$6 fee reduction will be available to all community college students enrolling for winter and spring courses, short-term courses and spring semester courses.

The California Community College Board of Governors approved the fee reduction as part of last summer's budget deliberations, and through the passage of AB 1808.

WCC's office of financial aid offers a variety of federal and state financial aid including grants, federal work/study programs, and loans.

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