

Providing Access and Educational **Opportunities** to the **Latino** Community Since 1969



MESSAGE from the DIRECTOR

While there are many educational challenges that we face in our nation, as we complete 2011-2012 academic year; I am happy to inform you that NEIU-El Centro Campus has made significant progress thanks to the support and commitment of Northeastern Illinois University, faculty, staff, our students, The El Centro Campus advisory board and the community at large. Our enrollment keeps going strong with over 1,000 students enrolled during the Fall and Spring semesters. We have also continued our work with the ASPIRA Early College (AEC) High School, as the Dual Enrollment Program between NEIU and AEC continues to grow. There are now two cohorts of high school students that have completed the program by taking college level courses at El Centro Campus while attending high school and we are pleased that many of them have either begun their college careers at NEIU or at other universities.

Since its creation, NEIU-El Centro Campus has been committed to providing the Latino community with educational opportunities and useful information to improve their lives. To achieve this, NEIU has joined efforts with local organizations to support their work, giving them a forum, and a place to connect with the community around. This work has been made possible through our El Centro Campus Community Education Program that has served over 300 community members with English as a Second Language courses and other workshops related to technology, health, housing information and educational resources. We have also continued to support the

cultural identity of our students by bringing art to our campus. Since 2009 El Centro has opened its doors to local artist, these artists have been able to display their art work at our Campus. We have been fortunate to host the work of multiple artists in various disciplines of art, past exhibits include works by: Victor Montañez, Patricia Pérez, Carlos Barberena, The Albany Park Arts Festival Artist Collective, and John Vergara among others. These art exhibits reflect the diversity of Art within the Latino culture through the works from contemporary Latino/a artist in the Chicago region.

Students are an intricate part of our success at El Centro Campus: we have been privileged to count with the support of students such as Patricia Pérez, an NEIU recent graduate who majored in Art and minored in Latino and Latin American Studies, who is also a renowned artist and community leader. She has collaborated tremendously in helping us to bring awareness about various Latin American culture, with Day of the Death-Sugar Skull Making workshops, the Frida Khalo's jewelry workshop, and plaster skulls creation. These workshops were received by the communities we serve with excitement and filled out quickly because of their originality. We are very grateful for Patricia's creativity and willingness to work with the community and we wish her well in her future endeavours.

We also continue to fulfill our University's mission by providing access to opportunities through our work with first generation and underprivileged students to help them with their academic, professional and personal success. In this edition we highlight the success of Miguel Loeza,

in *Student Success Story*. Miguel is one of the students whom we have served, who came from humble beginnings, but has achieved great things and continues to move forward to achieve newer goals.

I am pleased to announce that we have partnered with Northeastern Illinois University's Office of Development in order to develop a plan to endow our El Centro Campus Scholarship Fund. The lack of financial assistance for students is one of the top five inhibitors of students completing their education, having a scholarship fund will help our El Centro Campus students who are underserved in order to fund them through college while at Northeastern Illinois University. More information about this amazing plan will be posted in our upcoming newsletter editions.

Finally, this brief edition of Nuestra voz (Our Voice) highlights some of the programs I have described above. I invite you to read our newsletter and visit our website for more information about upcoming events. You have an open invitation to participate in NEIU-El Centro Campus events and activities.

We look forward to seeing you soon!

Maria E. Luna-Duarte
Interim Director of NEIU-El Centro



Guidance Inspiration and Academic Support Mentoring Program (GUIAS)



Noche de ESTRELLAS



Job Fair



Student Success Story

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Nuestra **Voz**
Our Voice

A newsletter of



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Job Fair

On April 28, NEIU- El Centro Campus in partnership with the Office of Career Services, held the Annual Job Fair [Feria de Trabajo] which provided part- time, seasonal, full-time career and internship opportunities to NEIU students and community members. Fifteen employers' attended the job fair which provided many career opportunities to our Northeastern Illinois University students and community members.

Noche de ESTRELLAS

On Friday, May 4, NEIU- El Centro Campus held the first Annual Noche de ESTRELLAS (Empowering Students Through Recognition and Encouragement & Leading Leaders to Achieve Success). During the reception several Northeastern Illinois University Main Campus and El Centro Campus student groups were recognized for their academic and leadership accomplishment: including the mentors/mentees from the GUIAS (Guidance Inspiration and Academic Support) Mentoring Program, participants of the Serve and Learn Volunteer Program, recent graduates that began their college career at El Centro Campus, and students who have high academic achievement.



Guidance Inspiration and Academic Support Mentoring Program (GUIAS)

The Guidance Inspiration and Academic Support Mentoring Program kicked off with the M³ (Mentor Meets Mentee) event. There were 20 El Centro Campus students who participated and completed the program. This program consisted of academic and leadership workshops, and students had the opportunity to attend professional conferences. Many of the GUIAS mentees are currently participating as mentors during our Summer Transition program to mentor first year students and help them make a successful transition to Northeastern Illinois University, where they will begin to navigate the higher education system.

Community Collaboration Events and Activities

These were some of the programs that we were able to host at NEIU-El Centro Campus with the collaboration of our community partners during the 2011-2012 Fiscal Year:

- Autism Awareness Seminar – Wednesday, September 21, 2011.
- Computer Literacy - October 15, 2011, October 29, 2011 and April 21, 2012.
- Give a Child a Smile - Friday, December 16, 2011.
- Sugar Skulls Workshops - October 28 and 29, 2012.
- FAFSA Workshop - Saturday, February 4, 2012.
- Dr. Seuss Birthday Celebration - Friday, March 2, 2012.
- The Vagina Monologues - Friday, March 30, 2012
- Citizens Utility Board (how to read your electrical and phone bills) - Saturday, March 31, 2012.
- Job Fair: Saturday, April 8, 2012.

- Health Fair: Saturday, May 19, 2012.

Art Exhibits:

- Sueños de Papel: Alma Domínguez, opening reception, Friday, November 18, 2011.
- Spirit of Tanzania: Opening reception, Friday, February 10, 2012.
- Little Village Art Exhibit: Wednesday, April 4, 2012.
- Life of an Artist: Jonathan Vergara, Friday, April 13, 2012.

Thanks to the wonderful support and collaboration of Northeastern Illinois University, our State Rep. Maria "Tony" Berrios, Alderman Ray Colon, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Albany Park Neighborhood Council, BUILD, ASPIRA of Illinois, Hermosa Community Organization, GEAR-Up from Chicago Teacher's Center, The Autism Program of Illinois, Citizens Utility Board, Latinas in Power (LIP) and many other organizations that have supported our efforts, we were able to have these successful events and activities.



Student Success Story: *Miguel Loeza*

Latino Excellence discovered by opportunity

Miguel Loeza, was born in Mexico and moved to the United States when he was nine years old. He grew up in the north suburbs graduating from Vernon Hills High School in 2005. After obtaining his high school diploma, he had no intention to attend college and began working in a factory. The work at the factory was hard and dirty. Miguel's work day would begin at 6am and ended at 3:30pm, many times he would go home exhausted and wanting to go to sleep. After working there for a year and a half, his factory co-workers encouraged him to attend college by telling him that he could have better way of life.

When Miguel made the decision to attend college, he visited his former high school counselor and learned about Northeastern Illinois University-El Centro Campus and the services we had to offer. He met with one of our Coordinators and shortly after he joined our Summer Transition Program (2007) at NEIU-El Centro Campus. Being part of STP was extremely challenging for Miguel since he had to work, commute from the north suburbs, attend school and do homework. He would wake up at 5am to get ready to begin working at 6am until 3:30pm; he would then go home, shower, eat and drive to NEIU-El Centro Campus for the STP program. Miguel said that "STP was a good program to meet people since I did not know anyone from the city and an opportunity to start the semester with a bit of an advantage."

When he began his first semester at NEIU-El Centro Campus, he wanted to get involved in extracurricular activities but at the time there were no student organizations at El Centro Campus to join. He talked to one of our advisors, and learned that in previous years a group of students had come together and tried to establish an organization with no success. Miguel took the initiative and met with one of the students who had previously tried to form the organization at El Centro and brainstormed some ideas. After several meetings and paper work submitted, a group of four, formed – the Student Alliance for Leadership and Education (S.A.L.E), the first student organization at NEIU-El Centro. The coming to life of S.A.L.E also marked the beginning of his campus involvement, achievement and beginning of long friendships at Northeastern Illinois University.

By the end of the first semester at NEIU-El Centro, Miguel was laid off from the factory where worked at. He saw this as an opportunity to focus more on his academics. He became a full-time student and more involved on campus. By the beginning of his second semester he knew more people and one of the members of S.A.L.E became his best friend and mentor. He introduced him to a small group of students at the main campus who had similar goals and where supportive of each other. This group became his extended family, as well as support system, guides, friends and mentors.

All of his friends were highly involved on campus at different levels. Many of these students were part of the Model Illinois Government (MIG) and Student Government Association (SGA). Miguel got the opportunity of his life time when he was invited to take part in MIG. After taking part in MIG he became more involved on NEIU's main campus making a successful transition from El Centro Campus to our University's Main Campus. By then, Miguel became member of the SGA, as a senator and decided to run for an executive position. He ran for the position of Vice-President and was elected to fulfill the position of Vice President of Student Government; he served as Vice President for one semester and then moved up to the office of the President.

Miguel also had an opportunity to go abroad during the spring of 2010 when he participated in a travel abroad program to South Korea and his journey as an international student and traveler began. After spending one year there, Miguel returned to Chicago.

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Since 2009 Miguel holds a position in NEIU-El Centro Campus Advisory Board.

At the present time, he is done with all of his major requirements to graduate walking on stage this past May 5th. He is currently traveling through Argentina where he is taking two courses. The study tour to Argentina will further expand his worldview. He wants to continue learning about the world and is interested in learning about other countries because he wants to pursue a career in International Relations. His major is Political Science focusing on doing international work. Traveling, learning about other countries, discovering other places and challenging himself are some of the things he enjoys.

In his words: "Northeastern Illinois University provided me with opportunities and I took them. Northeastern Illinois University- El Centro campus was the place where it all started, my springboard to a world full of opportunities. My circle of friends became my support system. Opportunities went my way and I took advantage of them. I did not do it alone. My family, friends, mentors, and advisors, they all form part of my success and I am forever thankful for supporting me at all times. It feels great to look back and see all that I have done, but there is more to achieve. This is not the end."