Awareness Points for Interacting with Latino Students

(by Stephanie Zighelboim, Student Services Coordinator, Office of Multicultural Affairs / Associate Lecturer in History and Foreign Languages)

The Hispanic/Latino population in the United States has experienced a significant growth and currently represents the largest minority group in the country. Population is expected to double by 2025.

Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate in the nation. They are also less likely than non-Hispanics to be enrolled in or graduate from college, and they receive fewer financial aid dollars than non-Hispanic undergraduates.

There are currently 89 Latino students enrolled at UW-Eau Claire. They come from different root communities: the majority is Mexican-American, while the rest come from Puerto-Rican, Cuban, and other Central and South American communities.

Recognizing the following can help promote the academic success of Latino students:

- **The terms Hispanic and Latino** are interchangeable, but the term Latino or Latina is preferred by most students. The term Hispanic can have a pejorative connotation of colonization that many try to avoid.
- **Try to avoid grouping all Latinos into one homogeneous group.** Latinos are a diverse community so try to avoid making assumptions. For example, only some Mexican-Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo. (It is a minor Mexican holiday). It is not a “Latino holiday.” Mexico’s Independence Day is September 15th.
- **Not all Latinos are Catholics, eat tortillas, or speak Spanish.**
- **Many Latino students have a strong sense of family** and they thrive in settings where cooperation with other students is encouraged.
- **Cultural identity is very strong for most.** If the student has a Spanish name, keep it Spanish. Ex: María should not be Mary and Pedro should not be Peter.
- **Encourage your Latino students to participate in ethnic activities on campus.** Many Latino students experience acculturation stress when they do not feel a sense of connection to their culture.
- **Offer your Latino students the opportunity to meet the student services coordinators at the Office of Multicultural Affairs.** We can assist them with any questions or concerns they may have.
- **Mentoring is key for Latino students.** Try to connect them with fellow Latino students or faculty.
- **Many Latino students are first-generation college students.** They may need more time in adjusting to their new environment.

Some ideas borrowed from:

http://publications.naspa.org/naspajournal/vol41/iss3/art9

http://www.tpronline.org/articles.cfm?articleID=151

Handout compiled by Patti See / contact seepk@uwec.edu for more information