

## Faculty Exchange

### The Magellan Faculty Exchange Experience at the University of Monterey, Mexico

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#### ABSTRACT

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I worked with faculty at the University of Monterey in Monterey, Mexico in Spring 2009 through Eastern Kentucky's participation in the Magellan Project. Experiencing a new culture provides a lens through which to approach challenges in our own culture in new ways. Citizens in the metropolitan areas of Kentucky have the opportunity to experience a variety of different cultures in their everyday lives. However, many rural communities of Kentucky have, in the past, had almost exclusively Caucasian populations. Today, Kentucky communities, like many in other states, are experiencing a shift to a more diverse group of citizens. In the 1990's Kentucky's Hispanic population had the eighth highest growth rate in the country. Faculty and students in Kentucky universities will benefit from having opportunities to experience diverse cultures. They, in turn, can help their communities be prepared for a more richly diverse citizenry. This article begins with a description of the Magellan Project followed by my experience with faculty at the University of Monterey and within the city of Monterey. Next, immigration of Mexican American families beyond gateway states such as Texas, into Kentucky will be discussed along with the challenges of closing the achievement gap of Mexican American children in Kentucky schools. This article will conclude with recommendations for ECU and for Kentucky schools providing education and community for Mexican American families and their children.

**Keywords:** Magellan Faculty Exchange, Exchange Experience.

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#### Introduction

I worked with faculty at the University of Monterey in Monterey, Mexico through ECU's participation in the Magellan Project in Spring 2009. I hope that others at ECU will take advantage of this program. Experiencing a new culture provides a lens through which to approach challenges in our own culture in new ways.

This article begins with a description of the Magellan Project followed by my experience with faculty at the University of Monterey and within the city of Monterey. Next, immigration of Mexican American families beyond gateway states such as Texas, into Kentucky will be discussed along with the challenges of closing the achievement gap of Mexican American children in Kentucky schools. This article will conclude with recommendations for ECU and for Kentucky schools providing

education and community for Mexican American families and their children.

#### The Magellan Project

ECU provides multiple learning and travel opportunities for students and faculty through its Study Abroad program (EKU Study Abroad, 2009). One of the opportunities for faculty is the Magellan Exchange Program. The benefit of the Magellan Exchange Program is the availability of one to three-week lecture opportunities (Magellan Exchange, 2009). Many universities participate in the Magellan Project both inside and outside of North America. Universities work cooperatively for low cost experiences by providing housing, meals, and office support.

I applied for a Magellan Exchange experience at Monterey by offering to share

EKU's College of Education experience with Task Stream Portfolios. I was accepted and spent one week in Monterrey. While there, I conducted workshops two different days with faculty from different departments. While the workshops were the primary purpose of the visit, in retrospect, much of my learning came from other sources during the trip.

### University of Monterrey

The University of Monterrey is a private institution with approximately 9,000 students, offering many undergraduate degrees, several graduate programs, and external programs (Allen, 2008). The campus is surrounded by the mountains of Monterrey. The lush, green landscape of the campus provides a backdrop for the modern architecture constructed in the 1960s. Working with faculty on eportfolios was a rewarding experience. Faculty members were warm and receptive. Their bilingual skills compensated for my exclusively English communication.

While eating lunch in the cafeteria one day with Ximena Barrientos Parra (Ximena planned my trip and took care of me while I was there), I had the opportunity to talk with the Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Victor Zuniga. He commented that there are similarities in Mexican and Appalachian culture. I found evidence in the research for his statement.

Important to the people of Appalachia are family, religion, and home (Marshall, 2007). The family is a "working, unpenetrable unit" (Bauer & Growick, 2003, 11). "Professional labels and titles do not mean as much as how the person acts and relates to others" (Bauer & Growick, 2003, 13).

Likewise, the Mexican culture maintains respect for the nuclear and extended family (familism). Family is

central to one's life and family takes precedence over the needs of the individual. Family members are interdependent (Dotson-Blake, 2009). Mexicans desire to relate in a warm and emotional fashion (personalismo) with focus on building relationships (Ramos-Sanchez & Atkinson, 2009).

Zuniga and faculty in the College of Education at Monterrey understand the similarities of Appalachian and Mexican American families through their work on the Georgia Project. The Georgia Project is located in Dalton, Georgia, where the carpet industry provides many jobs for the community. The Georgia Project was created to improve the education offered to Latino children, for whom English is the second language. The project sends teachers in the Whitfield County school system to Monterrey to learn about the lives and culture of their Latino students and it brings University of Monterrey-educated teachers to Whitfield County each year to assist with student instruction (Allen, 2008; Hernandez-Leon & Zuniga, 2003).

Dotson-Blake (2009) recommends specific goals in providing school-family-community partnerships within Hispanic communities of the United States. Some of those goals are (1) a culture of equal engagement, (2) a welcoming, collaborative climate, and (3) intentional, structured opportunities to interact. The Georgia Project seems to meet these goals.

### The Culture of Monterrey

The border between the United States and Mexico is blurred in many ways. Travelling along the highway from the airport to the heart of the city, you would never know you were in Mexico. The highway is lined with large American company complexes, such as John Deere, Kellogg's, and Johnson & Johnson.

In 2000, Nuevo Leon, the county for Monterrey, attracted 18% of the total foreign investment in Mexico. Mainly from the U.S. (70% of total investment), Holland accounted for 11%, Japan for 7% and Canada for 4% respectively (AGIM, 2009). In 2005, goods traded between the U.S. and Mexico were valued at \$290.2 billion. Mexico was our nation's 2<sup>nd</sup> leading trading partner after Canada (Foresight, 2006).

Many commercials on Mexican television are the same as the ones on American television. Translating commercial messages, such as for Home Depot, became a fun evening game aimed at mastering a few Spanish words.

I leaned on Moises (Moses), a cab driver, to show me Monterrey. One day, he took me to a traditional Mexican market. While there, I enjoyed watching three beautiful children eat cups of watermelon with their mom and dad. I asked if I could photograph them and they pleasantly gave permission. I was somewhat embarrassed to learn after more conversation that they, too, were visiting from Texas. The line is blurred, indeed.

Moises made sure I tasted the most traditional Monterrey dish, cabrito al pastor, kid goat cooked on embers based on the Jewish cuisine of the founders of the city (Wikipedia). It was delicious. I visited Cerro del Obispado, the country's biggest monumental flag sitting atop a mountain overlooking the city. While on top, I had the opportunity to photograph four middle school-aged boys posing as any of our Kentucky students would do.

As stated in the introduction, experiencing a new culture provides a lens through which to approach challenges in our own culture. Through my experience in Monterrey as an American, I began to consider the experiences of Mexican Americans settling in Kentucky.

## **Mexican Americans in Kentucky**

Gateway states such as California, Arizona, and Texas have for many years felt the impact of immigration from Mexico. Now Mexican immigrants are migrating into the Midwest and Southeast, including Kentucky (Schirmer, 2006).

According to census records for 2007, persons of Hispanic or Latino origin make up 15% of the total population in the United States and only 2% in Kentucky (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). During the 1990s, Kentucky's Hispanic population had the eighth highest growth rate in the country. In terms of actual numbers, Kentucky added 38,000 Hispanics—both native- and foreign-born—between 1990 and 2000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. From 1990 until 2004, Kentucky's Hispanic and Latino population grew more than 239 percent (Schirmer, 2006).

Mexican Americans in Kentucky are a young group. The median age of Mexicans in Kentucky is 24 compared to 36 for the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This young group has provided a new pool of children in our schools.

Even as total enrollment dropped between 1991-1992 and 2001-2002, the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) children in Kentucky schools quadrupled from 1,544 to 6,017 (Schirmer, 2006), 59% are Spanish speaking (Childress, 2006).

How are these Mexican-American students dispersed across the state? Hispanic children in comparison to total numbers of children per county in Kentucky range from 0.29% of the total in Owsley County to 9.41% in Shelby County (Kentucky State Data, 2006).

The map in Figure 1 shows counties with the highest percentages of Hispanic children in schools, ranging from 5% to 9%. While these counties are located in western and northern Kentucky, Mexican American



## Conclusion and Recommendations

With the likelihood that Kentucky will continue to experience a demographic shift to a more diverse populace, which includes a growing Hispanic group, I would like to make three recommendations. First, continue to offer opportunities for more and more students and faculty to experience, firsthand, cultures different from their own. Secondly, formulate a plan to bring in, by all possible means, a more diverse group of

education candidates. Those education candidates will be the teachers of the southeastern Kentucky of tomorrow. And lastly, consider funding and implementing a “Kentucky Project” fashioned after the successful Georgia Project to bring Monterrey teachers to Kentucky and to take Kentucky teachers to Monterrey. It is through connections, culture-to-culture, person-to-person, that we can truly close the achievement gap for Mexican American students and other groups, as well.

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