

Mail Tribune

[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [BUSINESS](#) [OPINION](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [TEMPO](#)
[CLASSIFIEDS](#) [JOBS](#) [AUTOS](#) [REAL ESTATE](#)
[FEATURED](#) > [OBITS](#) [BLOGS](#) [TV LISTINGS](#) [MOVIE LISTINGS](#) [OREGON OUTDOORS](#) [OREGON HEALTHY LIVING](#) [SPECIAL SECTIONS](#) [BUSINESS SERVICES](#)

NEWS NOW

[r Views: Marijuana businesses need banking service](#) ...

[Crescent fire closes Crater Lake's north entrance](#) ...

[Quake](#)

EDUCATION

Learning to lead

Summer camp keeps Hispanic youths focused on the future


[COMMENT](#) 1

[Recommend](#) 13


From left, Angelina Palomino, Ariana Segura and Raul Gonzalez participate in a leadership class during the Academia Leadership program at Southern Oregon University on Thursday. Mail Tribune / Jamie Lusch

By Kaylee Tornay
Mail Tribune

Posted Aug. 8, 2015 at 12:01 AM

Encouraging Hispanic students in middle school to go to college is a worthwhile pursuit, but Juanita Ephraim and Jonathan Chavez Baez decided it wasn't enough.

This week marked the third year of the Academia Latina Leadership program, an expansion of the 15-year-old Academia Latina at Southern Oregon University that gives Hispanic students in the Rogue Valley a glimpse of their potential futures in higher education. The leadership program is for incoming juniors and seniors who went through the Academia Latina program as middle schoolers or freshmen, and who still are focused on attending college.

"If you could hear their stories, you would be like, wow," said Baez, a minority outreach coordinator at SOU and director of Academia Latina Leadership. He listed broken families, problems with drugs and finances as just some examples of the hardships the students have had to overcome. "They have not let those circumstances stop them from what they want to do."

Many of these students are the first in their family to go to college. Of the seven students in the first group, Baez said, all seven are going to college. Five are headed to private colleges.

He describes Academia Leadership as good practice for college applications and classes as well. The students have to write two essays and provide three recommendations to apply. Once they're in the program, they attend three morning classes and perform community service in the afternoons.

COUPON OF THE WEEK

\$5 OFF Brew Fest Admission!
Love brews, art, food, and more? Get \$5 off admission to this amazing...
Gold Beach Brew and Art Festival

[SEE ALL ONLINE TODAY](#)
[MORE >>](#)

\$19 buys \$100 Towards a Windshield Replacement or Insurance Deductible + 1 Free Gift Card
Cascade Auto Glass

Lube, Oil & Filter Special -- \$39.95
TC Chevy

\$7 OFF Any Complete Car Care Oil Change
Quench and Drench

No Worries Alignment
Southern Oregon Subaru Volvo Mitsubishi

TOP JOBS

Has an immediate opening for an
Medford, or Classifieds

Clinical Application Coordinator
yreka, CA Classifieds

ORTHODONTIC CHAIRSIDE ASSISTANT
Medford, or Classifieds

RN Nurse Manager Full time with
Ashland, or Classifieds

[More Top Jobs](#)

TOP HOMES

- Medford, OR – ...
- Medford, Oregon – \$498,000 – Location Location Location!! Located in the Beautiful gated stone entry of Crown Ranch Estates in an area of nice upsacale homes. Build your...

[More Top Homes](#)

>> STAY INFORMED

Email
Newsletter

[Sign Up Today](#)

Despite the difficulties of some of the students' situations, giving back to the community is an integral aspect of the leadership program. This week, students volunteered with the Northwest Seasonal Workers Association in Medford and the Ashland Emergency Food Bank, facilities that some of the students have depended on at times in their lives.

"I've never volunteered at a place like that," said Raul Gonzalez, an incoming senior at South Medford High School, about the NSWA. Gonzalez was also in the leadership program last summer, after participating in Academia Latina in eighth and ninth grade.

The three classes the students attend throughout the week focus on leadership skills, maintaining physically and mentally healthy lifestyles and fostering their Latino heritage. Students are encouraged to speak Spanish whenever they want, and they are taught cultural traditions such as dances and songs. Part of the multi-step application process is an essay explaining what the student's heritage means to him or her.

"We are building the next generation of hard-working citizens who are eager to help out the community and keep breaking those stereotypes that still haunt us," Baez said.

Baez was a junior counselor at the Academia Latina program in 2003 after graduating from Phoenix High School. He received a bachelor's degree from SOU and a master's in higher education from Portland State before returning to SOU to work. Shortly after, he and Ephraim, who is the director of Academia Latina and a Talent Middle School teacher, decided to expand the program.

"We wanted to keep track of the students as they grew," he said.

They continue to do that through the school year as well as during the week of the camp. Because leadership participants are required to have a minimum 3.25 GPA, Ephraim and Baez both use their connections in the school systems to keep track of students' grades throughout the year. If anyone's grades begin to slip, it could result in a well-timed phone call to check in and remind the student: "Don't you want to come back to Academia?"

They almost always do. Both the middle school and high school programs continue to get more applicants than there are places, due to funding constraints. Baez and Ephraim say out of their usual pool of 130 to 150 applicants, they've been able to accept 100 students into the Academia Latina program only once. Both programs are funded by SOU, along with various grants and donations.

Sometimes, it's the students themselves who have conflicts with being able to return. For several, responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings or working in the fields prevent them from attending, which Baez says is "heartbreaking."

For those who are able to return, though, the experience leaves them with a lasting impression of their own leadership abilities and an excitement for academics.

"Anything's possible," said Phoenix High School junior Ariana Segura. "There's people there for you even when you think there isn't."

Reach reporting intern Kaylee Tornay at ktornay@mailtribune.com.

[» Comment or view comments](#)

Sign up for our newsletter and have the top headlines from your community delivered right to your inbox.

MUST SEE: Check out London's coolest offices
Press Association

PRESS ASSOCIATION

More videos:



TOP CLICKS

POPULAR EMAILED

Jim Belushi's Rogue River cabin preserves character of historic Elk picnic grounds [Aug. 12, 2015](#)

Costco considers Central Point for relocation [Aug. 13, 2015](#)

Highway 230 closed at Highway 138 because of fires [Aug. 12, 2015](#)

Grants Pass boy dies after raft capsizes on Rogue River [Aug. 16, 2015](#)

Murders at Crater Lake: The slaying of auto-parts reps in 1952 remains a mystery [Aug. 16, 2015](#)

Ashland police bait bike snares former EcoCab owner [Aug. 17, 2015](#)

SOUTHERN OREGON DIRECTORY

Featured Businesses

[Oregon State of](#)
[Southern Oregon Spartans](#)
[Mercy Medical Center Dubuque](#)
[Ashland Food Cooperative](#)
[Multiple Myeloma](#)

Find Southern Oregon Attractions

Search business by keyword

Search

[Add your business here >](#)