

Gear Up Grant to Aid Multicultural Students

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JC Vazquez

The GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant program provides assistance to multicultural students who are interested in pursuing higher education options, specifically careers within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. The Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University is a unit of the College.

The CPD's multicultural coordinator, JC Vazquez, will provide assistance and support to the program. The grant serves students in Utah and Nevada, 7 rural school districts, 3 Charter Schools, the Ute Indian Tribe, Utah State University and 4 community/ business organizations created a partnership to address the needs of these low-income and at-risk students in small rural communities in northern Utah. The Logan school district is included in the grant service area.

"I will share information with them and get them exposed to the faculty and staff at the College of Education," Vazquez said. "There are a large number of Spanish-speaking students and parents. We want to provide assistance to them so the information is accessible to

the parents. The parent part is essential to the Gear Up program."

Gear Up staff work to identify potential students—middle school and high school—and to arrange informational visits for the students and their parents, Vazquez said.

"If we identify students in other areas, we can collaborate with other colleges as well, to increase the diversity on campus," Vazquez said. "This is a good fit to the work the CPD does with the dean's office to help diversify the College."

But bringing the students to campus for a visit is only one component, he said.

"We want to provide them with the tools to stay and graduate," he said. "We want to make sure our efforts not only bring students to campus, but to be able to retain and graduate students."

The effort is, personally, very close to his heart, Vazquez said.

"Being a first-generation student and knowing first-hand the challenges of navigating the system and acquiring language in higher education ... after many positive and non-positive experiences, I think I can share with students some of those things," he said. "I want to get them excited to see themselves at Utah State."