Ohlone counselor breaks barriers for Latinos

LOUIS LAVENTURE
Editor-in-chief

For more than 18 years, Maria Ramirez has been a fixture in the Ohlone College counseling department. However, she has been so much more than that, not only to her people, but to the community as well. Ramirez has an unusual blend of ethnicities — Puerto Rican and Apache Native American, which ties her to the Latino community in a way most could never understand.

“I don’t want to just represent Latinos, but all of the Americas,” Ramirez said. “We look at indigenous people as a thing of the past, but we aren’t. We are now.”

Ramirez is the former president of the Latina Leadership Network, and co-chaired the group’s annual conference at the Ohlone College Newark campus over spring break. Ramirez is also a noted writer, poet and performer, dedicating a lot of her time to creative writing, a lot of which she sets to current rap music.

“To me, storytelling is the most ancient way of passing things on to the generations to come,” Ramirez said. “So I like to use rap music. I’ll do a poem and use rap like Dr. Dre or Eminem so kids will listen.”

Listen they have — and not just kids, either. The ninth International Conference on Chicano Literature and Latino Studies listened to Ramirez and scheduled her to perform some of her works in Spain on May 28.

“I never really wanted to go to Spain until I saw that the conference was going to the worst and never focuses on the positive things we do. This is something we have to change as a whole, as a people.”

Mexican-American student Gabriel Orrozco feels the same way about his culture and people. “It’s just like every man or woman for themselves,” Orrozco said.

“How can we thrive in society as a race if we can’t even come together on smaller levels?” Ramirez hopes that, through community outreach, counseling and performing, she can change the mentality of Latinos and Chicanos to reflect a more positive and supportive structure and environment.


Ramirez tries to help not only students and coworkers, but also Latinos, Chicanos and all minorities. “We have really bought into the stereotypes of our own people in many communities,” Ramirez said. “When our people are talked about, it is usually the worst and never focuses on the positive things we do. This is something we have to change as a whole, as a people.”

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COURTESY OF MARIA RAMIREZ

Maria Ramirez performs one of her original works.

Louis LaVenture