



Photo by JOE ELLIS/The Daily Barometer

Native Peruvian and ISOSU President Monica Rojas plays a drum native to her country during sessions in which she teaches students about Peru. ISOSU is the parent club to over 20 different international organizations on campus and will be hosting a new year celebration on Jan. 15.

To the beat of a different drum

ISOSU president discusses her Latin roots, visions for the future

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At first glance, Monica Rojas seems quiet and reserved, with dark hair curling over her petite shoulders.

But appearances can be deceiving. There's a great deal of passion and power packed into her small frame.

Originally from Lima, Peru, Rojas is finishing her senior year at Oregon State, working toward a degree in cultural anthropology. She was able to come to OSU through an international financial aid program, which waived her tuition in exchange for cultural presentations she would give periodically at local elementary, junior high and high schools.

"When people think of Peru, they tend to think about the Incas and other indigenous people," Rojas said. "I want to show them that my country is much more than that."

Rojas said that Peru is populated by a collage of different cultures, depending on the area in question. Along with the true Spanish and Incan undertones, there is also a strong African vein running through Peruvian culture that is key to much of the country's past, which pops up in traditional dance and art.

So when Rojas gives a presentation, she tries to incorporate as much of the diversities of her culture as she can, gearing each presentation toward the age group of her audience.

"When I go to elementary schools, I try to bring my instruments and things that they can touch because that is how younger kids learn the best," Rojas said. "It is so rewarding to see them excited and eager to learn."

An older student, Rojas first earned a degree in graphic design in Peru, but she said that the job of graphic designer was unsatisfying.

Then, when she became interested in tradi-

See ROJAS, page 2

ROJAS: Sees position in ISOSU as a chance to bring cultural experiences to OSU

Continued from page 1

tional Peruvian music she enrolled in the University of Washington's musicology program. Her interest in music led her to study traditional dance at the University of Oregon.

In the end, Rojas became infatuated with her cultural roots and wound up pursuing cultural anthropology at OSU. Rojas is a member of a Latin-American dance troupe, a residential advisor for West International Hall and president of the OSU Latin American Student Association. She has also been recently elected as president of the International Students of OSU.

Rojas first became fascinated with traditional dance when she was 15. Now, she has focused on the specific dance forms called the *Marinera Li Meña* and *Criollo*. *Criollo* is a mix-

ture of Native-American and Spanish roots, and the word itself is often used as an adjective to describe other aspects of Peruvian life.

"Afro-Peruvian music is amazingly rich," Rojas said. "Hardly anyone knows how to sing it anymore."

Rojas is currently researching and recording traditional songs to learn more about their history and how to perform them. Two of her favorite instruments that she said most represent her culture are the *Cajón*, which means "big box," and the jawbone of a donkey.

As for her role in ISOSU, Rojas sees her position as an opportunity to bring a variety of cultural experiences to OSU students. Her goal, she said, is to build more community

among international students.

"The college experience should not only be about classes and teachers," she said. "I think it is important to share knowledge and celebrate each other's different backgrounds."

In the spirit of celebration, ISOSU is sponsoring an International New Year Celebration from 9 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. on Jan. 15 in the Memorial Union Ballroom. The celebration is free to all students and will include a variety of food, dancing and games from around the world. Traditional dances, such as the Samba and salsa dancing, will be taught during the festivities.

"Anyone can come," Rojas said. "You just need to want to be interested in learning about

other cultures. It's important to benefit the community by providing an opportunity to learn about other cultures and share what we have of ourselves."

Rojas is also excited about the Spring Festival, which takes place spring term. There will be a fashion show, games, international foods and traditional music performed by students.

"This is our opportunity to learn about each other and teach others about who we are," Rojas said.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Spring Festival or the International New Year Celebration can contact ISOSU at 737-6348, or stop by their office in 140 Snell Hall.