

## OSU's HSU, ALAS students embrace best of both worlds

By JOY ESTIMADA

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Adriana Acevedo and Veronica Santillan, sophomores in business administration, are the president and vice president of OSU's Hispanic Student Union. Acevedo was born in Mexico and raised in Hood River, Ore., while Santillan — also raised in Hood River — was born in White Salmon, Wash. Santillan is the first person in her family to go to college.

Patricia Garcia, an OSU sophomore and treasurer of the Hispanic Student Union, was her high school's first Hispanic homecoming queen. She is also the first person in her family to go to college.

Monica Rojas, president of the Association of Latin American Students and a junior in anthropology, was born and raised in Peru. She came to live and study in the U.S. about four years ago.

Though three of these women are of Mexican descent and the other is Peruvian, they do have a few things in common: they share a rich cultural legacy and are working to stay true to that legacy while embracing the best of what the dominant culture has to offer.

Acevedo, Santillan and Garcia welcome assistance from Rojas and her organization, ALAS, which is primarily composed of international students who have come to study at OSU. The Latin American countries represented by ALAS include Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, El Salvador, Argentina and Mexico.

### True to a legacy



Photo by JOE ELLIS/The Daily Barometer

From left to right: Adriana Acevedo, Veronica Santillan, Patricia Garcia — officers for the Hispanic Student Union — and Monica Rojas, president of the Association of Latin American Students, are working together to educate students about their diverse cultural heritage. HSU, with the assistance of ALAS, will host Hispanic Night this Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Memorial Union Ballroom.

"I think that people are under the impression that there's some kind of rivalry between our organizations, and we all want to work to dispel that," Rojas said. "As soon as I became president of ALAS, I called Adriana and let her know that I wanted to help her with her events."

"They (ALAS) are really friendly people,"

said Acevedo, whose organization, the HSU, is primarily composed of Hispanics who have been living in the U.S. for several years. The countries represented by HSU include Spain and Mexico. "We have similar ideas on how to run our organizations, and we enjoy working with them," Acevedo said.

Here, the four women share their experi-

ences as women of color in the U.S.

### Adriana's and Veronica's experiences

"Whenever people ask 'what' we are, we tell them we're Mexican, not Mexican

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## HISPANIC: Cultural differences stand out

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American," said Acevedo, who is Santillan's cousin. "I guess we do that because we don't want to let go of our heritage and be renamed something else just because we live here.

"Sure, we identify with U.S. culture. We go to school in an American society, we have English-speaking friends and professors, but when we go home, we speak the traditional language and eat traditional food," Acevedo said.

"I don't want to see myself as American," Santillan added. "Calling ourselves Mexican, not Mexican American, is our way of staying true to our culture."

"It can be hard sometimes, though, calling ourselves Mexican. That's who we are and we're proud of who we are, but there are people out there who like to say that all Mexicans are wife beaters, drug dealers and alcoholics," Acevedo said. "It's unfortunate, but we get judged by our worst specimen."

The problem, Acevedo said, is that even if there may be more Mexicans in a U.S. region than any other ethnic group, Mexicans will always be considered a minority, and as minorities, Mexicans may always feel some form of racial oppression, often in the form of derogatory remarks about "being Mexican."

"But I grew up with my parents always telling me that we're all equal, that we should not be trying to distinguish one culture from another," Acevedo stressed.

Both Acevedo and Santillan admitted to growing up with a strong reverence for their families' ideals, even when they forbade them to do things that many other children were doing.

"It's not like we could ever just take the car and say, 'Bye, Mom. Don't wait up for me.' That was just unheard of. And I couldn't just 'blow them off' like some of my friends would want me to. ... In our culture, we're very family oriented. It's the way we were raised. Whenever people did anything in our family, it was a family gathering," Acevedo said.

Santillan spoke of how difficult it was for her family to see her leave for college. "I knew they supported me and they encouraged me to go, but I could tell that in the back of their minds, they wanted me to stay," Santillan said. "They're just worried because I'm the first one to leave in our family. I'm the first one to go to college."

### Patricia's experience

Born to Mexican parents in Hood River, Ore., Garcia has lived in the U.S. all her life and has never been to Mexico. But that doesn't mean that she doesn't identify with her Mexican heritage. Garcia could speak Spanish before she could speak English, and compared to the average American child, Garcia says her parents had always been "more strict" with her in many ways, leaving her torn between following her parents' traditions and following the ideals of U.S. society.

"My parents hardly ever let me go out," Garcia said. "And when it came to boyfriends, it was like, 'No, not 'til you're 18.' I used to always ask my mother why, and every time her answer was, 'Because that's the way. That's the tradition.'"

Religion, too, was a priority for Garcia and her family.

"Every week my family would go to mass and go to confession. Believing in God is really important to me. My parents used to make me go to church all the time, but as I've grown older, my parents have learned to let my religion be my choice," she said.

Garcia is still Catholic, but has considered becoming a Christian.

"I've done lots of things that my parents never thought I'd do. My being the first to go to college is one of them," Garcia said.

Neither of Garcia's parents had much of an education. Her father was always working in orchards or factories, and her mother traded her education for a job that would help support the family.

"I think I decided that getting a college education was important to me because I could see that my parents always wanted to give me so much, but they couldn't because of their lack of education and our poor financial situation," said Garcia, who made it to OSU on an Underrepresented Minority Achievement Scholarship. "Things like needing help with my homework were hard for my family because if I needed help, my parents couldn't necessarily give it to me. I want to change that for the time when I have a family."

### Monica's experience

Since Rojas first began living in the U.S., she has missed a few of her home country's traditions and has been

impressed and sometimes shocked by the ideals held by U.S. culture.

"I think what I miss most about home is the warmth people share with each other," Rojas said. "In Peru, every time you meet someone, you give them a kiss, and here, it's like you're not allowed to do that. ... You can't get close.

"The sense of family, too, is so different than where I come from. The children are so independent; they leave their parents' homes when they are 18. When I ask people here, 'Why did you choose to come to OSU?' they say, 'To get away from my family.' That's shocking to me. That would never happen in my culture. In my family, we are so close emotionally that several family members, even extended family, will all live together under one roof."

But there are a few things Rojas likes. "I love the civil respect that people here have for each other — the way that people respect your time and trust your work. When you tell someone that you will have something for them on a certain day, they believe you, and in Latin America it's just not like that. They don't respect your time in the way that they do here, and it's hard for people to trust each other."

Rojas attributes this distrust to the huge division of racially-motivated social classes in Peru. "We have a long and diverse history of abuse, slavery towards Africans, and genocide of the native people. In Peru, the Africans and natives are of the lowest social class, while the white Europeans are of the highest class. When you have such a huge division like that amongst a group of people, it becomes hard to trust each other," Rojas said.

Rojas said that if there was one thing she wanted people to know about Latinos, it's that they have a rich and diverse culture. "I want people to know that there are Spanish-speaking countries other than Mexico. ... I think that people only think of Mexico because the majority of the Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. are Mexican. But we come from many different countries that we are all proud of. People think of Latin American countries as sub-developed countries, but I want people to know that we are rich — rich in culture, rich in background, rich in land, music and religion. Everywhere you go, we are rich in many ways."