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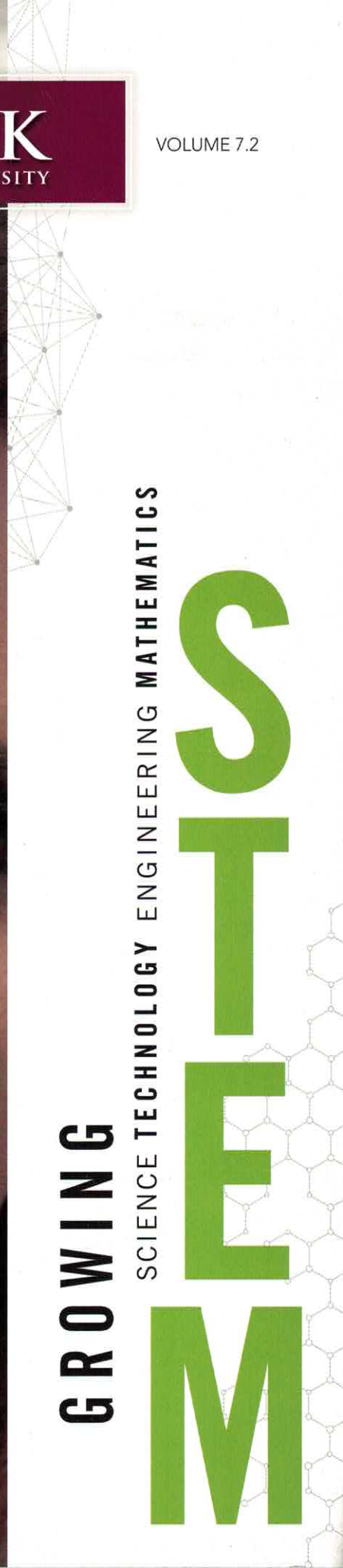
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# WORKING TOWARDS MORE

Angel Lopez is strengthening the connection between the Latino community and CMU

By Sharon Sullivan

First-generation Mexican-American Angel Lopez witnessed the harmful effects of addiction growing up in Aurora, Colorado. There were plenty of drugs, violence and gangs at his high school and many students ended up in jail or prison and some died.

So when Lopez heard Colorado Mesa University Director of Diversity, Advocacy and Health Bob Lang speak about an Addictions Counseling program, Lopez decided it was the perfect minor to compliment his criminal justice major.

Along with pursuing his degree, Lopez juggles three jobs. One of those jobs is coordinating the CMU Latino Student Alliance (LSA). LSA, one of six CMU Cultural Diversity Board alliances, sponsors events and activities to help educate individuals on Latin and South American culture.

This past semester, Lopez along with LSA focused on bringing important events to campus and strengthening the connection between the Latino community and CMU.

In September, Lopez collaborated with community organizations like the Hispanic Affairs Project, St. Mary's Medical Center, Mesa County Valley School District 51 and Mesa County Public Health to present the first, and hopefully annual, Latinx Youth Leadership Conference.

Grand Valley middle and high school students came to campus for a day of workshops and guest speakers. The conference centered on higher education, planning for the future and the importance of civic participation.

"A lot of Latinos do not vote or have positions in local government," Lopez said. "We want to encourage involvement and show they can have a voice by participating."

The conference also included presentations on mental health, reproductive health and a session on campus resources available to students.

"We talked about dreams and routes to get there," Lopez said. "Attendees afterward showed a larger interest in attending college."

Also last September, LSA along with community groups planned a peaceful campus rally in support of "Dreamers" — immigrants brought to the U.S. as children without documentation, who were assimilated and educated in the U.S.

Two-hundred and fifty people attended the demonstration, many of whom signed postcards for Congressman Scott Tipton urging him to support the DREAM Act of 2017, which would



Masks of the monarch butterfly, a symbol adopted by migrant rights organizations, are worn at a campus rally. The butterfly represents the beauty of migration and the right that living beings have to move freely. Angel Lopez (far left), CMU Latino Student Alliance coordinator, helped organize the peaceful campus rally in support of "Dreamers."





SHARON SULLIVAN

Angel Lopez stands in front of the "Inside Out/Dreamers Project" outside the Factory, one of Grand Junction's coworking spaces at 750 Main Street.

protect the youth from deportation and provide an opportunity to obtain legal status.

Recently, Lopez has invested a lot of time in an upcoming event — Cesar Chavez Day. The event will celebrate the late Chavez, an American farmworker who became a prominent labor leader and civil rights activist. The LSA is partnering with the Hispanic Affairs Project and Mesa County Valley School District 51 to host the event at Las Colonias Park in Grand Junction on March 31.

"Cesar Chavez helped out not only Latinos, but Irish immigrants and Filipinos who worked alongside Latinos in the fields as well," Lopez said.

The event will include cultural performances, food and speakers. And prior to Cesar Chavez Day, LSA will host Chavez's grandson who recently completed a documentary about his grandfather. There will be a question and answer session after the film.

Lopez plans to become a juvenile parole officer after he graduates in spring 2019. The 20-year-old settled on his career path after meeting retired Grand Junction Juvenile Parole Officer Jose Luis Chavez, who helped organize Grand Junction's 2016 Cesar Chavez Day event.

Along with his LSA responsibilities, Lopez works at Colorado Mesa's TRiO, a federally-funded student support services program that helps students overcome class, social and cultural barriers to higher education. He tutors students in criminal justice-related subjects, math, English and Spanish.

"I'm a peer mentor," Lopez said. "I can direct students. I'm there to help students succeed since many have a lot of obstacles."

While many college students spend weekend evenings with friends or attending campus events, Lopez is working as care staff for Hilltop's Life Adjustment Program, a residential center for people with traumatic brain injuries.

Pursuing his education and working three jobs keeps Lopez running but his parents instilled a strong work ethic in him from a young age. In high school along with working to help his family, he was a member of the National Honor Society, captain of the varsity soccer team and performed community service, which earned him a Daniels Fund college scholarship.

His ambition is not slowing down any time soon as he continues his college career and community involvement. •

