

Research on state Latinos to be presented at YVCC

by Melissa Sánchez
Yakima Herald-Republic

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YAKIMA, Wash. -- Question: How to supply local agricultural employers with a steady flow of labor?

Answer: Reject the federal E-Verify program. Create a new guest worker program. And give college credit to local young people willing to do the work.

At least, that's the solution offered by one Whitman College student who researched immigrant labor in the Walla Walla Valley's agricultural industry.

The college's latest "State of the State for Washington Latinos" findings will be presented tonight at Yakima Valley Community College as part of YVCC's Diversity Series.

"People are initially skeptical. But this is not your typical undergraduate term paper," said Paul Apostolidis, the associate politics professor who oversaw the students' research in fall 2008. "It's rigorous research, and it doesn't just stay within the academy.

"The whole point is to get it out there and make a difference, and be a tool that people can use to make a difference."

That has already happened in the Yakima Valley. The City of Sunnyside, for example, changed from at-large to district-by-district elections after one student found the town's electoral system was producing racially polarizing voting patterns.

The purpose of the studies is to close a gap in research about local Latinos, Apostolidis said. Research is being funded by a competitive federal grant administered by the Community-Based Research initiative at Princeton University, and by Whitman College

Last year Whitman students spent the fall semester conducting local research with a partner organization. Topics fell under three main categories: standards of living, voting and civic engagement. This spring semester, the students are making their findings public.

Research projects stressed the need for bilingual outreach about the federal Earned Income Tax Credit and voting materials. One study in Pasco found that Latino candidates who run for city council keep losing, even though their demographic makes up more than half the population.

Another student found that local residents often wrongly believe that new farm worker housing will bring down property values, school performance, and public safety. Erika Valencia offered feedback to farm worker housing advocates after studying the impact of one project in Wenatchee.

"Advocates must remember that the specifics about the type of housing they offer, the race and class roles, are more often than not intimidating to the surrounding community," Valencia wrote, adding that residents should feel as though "they have a say in what is going on around them."

Whitman students will present their research in Yakima as part of YVCC's Diversity Series.

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Learn from the researchers

- **WHAT:** Nine Whitman College students will present their findings from the 2008 "State of the State for Washington Latinos"
- **WHEN:** 7 p.m. tonight
- **WHERE:** The Deccio Building (Parker Room) at Yakima Valley Community College, 1000 S. 12th Ave., Yakima
- **INFORMATION:** You can download the complete reports at www.walatinos.org.

