



For Whitman student, culture more than an identity

Jazmin Lopez is a student representative of a national group specializing in Chicana, Latina and Native American women's studies.

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By **MARIA P. GONZALEZ** of the **Walla Walla Union-Bulletin**

WALLA WALLA -- In high school, hearing about her Mexican heritage and traditions filled Jazmin Lopez with pride. But with time, she learned that being proud wasn't the only way to regard her culture.

"I think it's more about learning," said Jazmin, a 20-year-old Whitman College junior and Walla Walla native. "If you feel really prideful with your culture, you tend to ignore those other cultures that are just as great."

Yet learning about Mexican culture is relevant to U.S. history, she said, because so much of it has been shaped by Mexican immigrants. She gives the life of Cesar Chavez as an example, or the "Pachucos" of the 1940s. The Pachucos were Chicano youth, particularly in Los Angeles, who banded to adopt a cultural style that included wearing zoot suits.

"That's a part of American history," she said. "I feel that should be in our history books at least."

Lopez will soon have a chance to learn more about the Chicano/a experience, which primarily includes Mexicans who have grown up in the United States.

This summer, Lopez was elected to be undergraduate representative of Women Active in Letters and Social Change (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social). She will serve a two-year term, sharing responsibilities the first year but assuming the full role as a senior. The group is a professional scholarly organization for women, representing more than 200 academics, graduate and undergraduate students specializing in Chicana, Latina and Native American women's studies throughout the country.

As an added honor, Lopez was recently awarded a stipend to travel to professional conferences, and to meet the full responsibilities of her post as undergraduate representative, thanks to a gift from



Jazmin Lopez, center, laughs with her mother Ema Lopez, in the lead, and friends Diana Madriz, left, and Melissa Romero as the group moves things into Jazmin and Diana's new room in Douglas Hall. As a successful student at Whitman College and member of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (Women Active in Letters and Social Change), Jazmin Lopez is beginning to cast a longer and longer shadow with her successes. U-B photo by Matthew B. Zimmerman

Whitman's offices of the president, provost and dean of students.

Lopez was elected to the post during the group's annual summer conference in Salt Lake City. She traveled with her adviser, Nohemy Solorzano-Thompson, assistant professor of Spanish at Whitman. It was the women's first time attending such a conference.

"I learned a lot about being Chicana," Lopez said. "I feel like it's a tradition being passed down.

"It's like a sisterhood."

When Lopez started her studies at Whitman, she considered focusing on biology. But she became fond of studying Spanish, and after meeting Solorzano-Thompson, chose Spanish as her major.

"Now in college I've been able to learn some of the literature that I missed out on as a little girl," Lopez said.

She has thought about becoming a high school teacher, but is also thinking about seeking a doctorate degree in hopes of becoming a professor.

At the moment, Whitman does not have a formal Chicano/a studies program, although Solorzano-Thompson specializes in the field.

"Jazmin is one of the brightest students I have ever had the pleasure of working with," Solorzano-Thompson wrote in an e-mail. "Her academic work exhibits great academic promise. I predict that she will be one of the intellectual leaders in the field of Chicana/o studies in the near future."

Although born in Walla Walla, Lopez's parents were Mexican immigrants. Her Mexican heritage was a key part of her upbringing. Lopez was active in the Latino Club at Walla Walla High School, and is now co-president of Whitman's Club Latino. The club plans cultural events for students and the greater community, including a yearly "Dia de los Muertos" celebration.

Although Latinos and other minorities make up a small fraction of the Whitman College student population, Lopez says she thinks she sees more Latinos attending the school each year. And although she recognizes not as many Latinos make it to college, she believes that won't always be so.

"I feel like that will change eventually," she said. "More will attend college and I think they need to know a little bit about their own culture and history."

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