

EMCC program bridges gap for Hispanic students

by Beth Kristin Ott
staff writer

Hispanic students at West Valley high schools were given an extraordinary opportunity this summer — the chance to attend college for free.

Estrella Mountain Community College offered a National Science Foundation Summer Bridge Program to Hispanic students who recently graduated from high school and plan to go to college.

Thirty students are attending the classes from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Depending whether a student's focus is math or science, his summer session will end in either early or late July.

Lunch is provided for the teens, and their only expense was purchasing one textbook. Most of the students in the program will receive about seven college credits, said Luvia Rivera, Bridge program coordinator.

"They seem happy to be here and really willing to learn," she said.

Easing the transition

The program is intended to help acclimate the students to college while introducing them to fields in which Hispanics are generally underrepresented — science and math, Rivera said.

"One goal was to increase their skills in math and science and another was to open them up to careers in those areas," she said. "Also we want to bridge them from high school to college and get them a head start."

The program is funded by a grant EMCC received from the National Science Foundation for \$130,000. EMCC received the grant because it is considered a "Hispanic-serving institution." The Bridge program is one of several programs funded by the grant.

"Hopefully we'll do this again, and we'd love to open it up to everybody," Rivera said.

The program allows the students to experience college on a smaller scale before the fall, Rivera said. Most of the participants plan to attend EMCC.

"We have activities for them to get to know the campus, they are meeting faculty and they are signing up for financial aid," Rivera said. "Their classes are structured like any other college courses, they have homework and tests and quizzes."

The math and science classes are in the morning, and after lunch, Bridge students will receive tutoring and career and personal development training.

In the classroom

Barbara Herzog is teaching introductory and intermediate algebra courses for the Bridge students.

"It's fantastic — this is one of the best intro algebra classes I've ever had at the school," Herzog said. "They came in so prepared."

Herzog, who was the first full-time math teacher on faculty at EMCC, said the Bridge program is a great idea.

"You really need to form a community of learners. This is going to give them an edge on forming that support group early," Herzog said.

Math instructor Ray Rivera agreed that the Bridge students have been highly motivated, and said his algebra and trigonometry classes are going well.

"The students are enthusiastic about it and they seem eager to be part of the college atmosphere," he said. "A large portion of them are first generation college students, so there are a lot of things they need to know about how college works and what it takes to be successful."

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