



Friday, October 3, 2003

## 2003 Hispanic Celebration Essay Contest Winner

By **Eva Villarreal**, senior biology major

If you walk down the halls of Oakland University you often see students of every nationality and color. But rarely do you see many Hispanic students. I'm one of them. My name is Eva Villarreal. This is my fourth year at Oakland University and I currently live in Oakland, Michigan, although I was born and grew up in the great state of California. My parents moved to Michigan during my junior year of high school. When I came here I was shocked to see that I was one of the few Hispanics at my high school. It was important to see diversity, but I was never one to stick to one ethnic group. Especially, since I was from California where there are so many nationalities and ethnic groups.

When it came time to attend a university I chose to attend Oakland University. I really liked the campus, and I like the fact that everything felt very comfortable. But again I was faced with the fact that I was only one of a handful of Hispanics. I felt a bit out of place but it didn't stop me from trying to meet as many people as I could, no matter what background I was from. This is one of the major reasons why I think my cultural identity enriches Oakland University. I'm successful in any situation because I love to meet people from every background. I never like to stay in one group and I love to learn about languages and cultures. That is why I am currently majoring in biology, and minoring in Spanish. In high school I took two years of Portuguese and a semester of Spanish. I also took a semester of German and Oakland University, and I have been tutoring Spanish at OU for the past three years at the Academic Skills Center. I have also helped students in Spanish for the Upward Bound program, and I have tutored students of all ages in Spanish.

As a result of all my contributions I have been able to impact the students of Oakland University as well as many other students in the surrounding community by exposing them to a language and a heritage that they might not have been exposed to. Not only do I use my language in school with all of my students, I have also become friends with my students and colleagues. I also enrich Oakland University with my heritage. I'm proud of being a Mexican American, and I love to share my traditions with those around me. I often bring in Mexican food to OU. I make ethnic dishes for potlucks and to share with my co-workers at the Academic Skills Center. I have often brought my students to my house to have dinner or for parties.

Overall, my biggest contribution to Oakland University is my knowledge of Spanish and how I have been able to help students in their classes. I truly enjoy helping students, and I want them to learn Spanish as best as they can. I know that as a tutor I have gone above and beyond to cater to my students so we can achieve the best results. That is one of the reasons I decided to minor in Spanish, because I wanted to learn even more that I already know as a native speaker. The extended knowledge of Spanish has allowed me to be a better tutor and a better speaker, which I appreciate.

As my time at Oakland University comes to an end I am happy to know that I have influenced the lives of people and that I was able to show them a side of my heritage that makes me proud. And hopefully someone else will see me and want to attend Oakland University because they want to be represented. Many times the way you feel about yourself is projected on to others and they create relationships with ethnicities based on the example that you've set. I hope to achieve this outcome. And I'm happy every day to show everyone where I come from and where I'm going.

### SUMMARY

Eva Villarreal, a senior biology major, took first prize in the 2003 Hispanic Celebration All Campus Essay Contest with her essay, "How Does My Cultural Identity Enrich Oakland University and Society?"

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