

Student recalls moving to U.S. from Ecuador

Series Note: This is the fifth part in a five-part series profiling international students.

By Jennifer Lewis and Anna Orso
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

While most 13-year-olds are busy worrying about their transition into high school, Melany Cordova worried about a bigger transition — moving halfway across the globe.

Growing up in Ecuador with her mother and stepfather, Cordova decided to pack her things and move to America with her older brother in search of a better education.

The idea came to her over a

phone conversation with her father, who moved to the United States when Cordova was a baby.

"It was very difficult because I was so close to my stepdad and my mom and my little brothers," Cordova (freshman-criminal justice) said. "And coming here, that was the first time I met my dad."

In addition to worrying about fitting in with her new family, Cordova also didn't know any English.

The language wasn't taught at her school in Ecuador, so she

moved to America for one summer planning to learn it.

After that summer, Cordova loved the country and decided to permanently move to the United States, where she said she learned English in five years.

Krysta Moore, who attended high school with Cordova, said it was hard for Cordova to pick up the language at first, but she adapted quickly. "We all were so intrigued by how fast she picked it up," Moore (freshman-nursing) said. "In our Spanish class she had to do her presentations in English, but we all helped her."

After being schooled in both countries, Cordova noticed a number of differences in the education systems.

In Ecuador, the students are not permitted to use calculators in math class, they must wear strict uniforms every day and they're in one classroom throughout the duration of the school day, even in public schools.

"Our school bus would come at 6:30 in the morning, and we would get to our classrooms and line up and just pray every day," Cordova said.

In addition to the cultural differences involving education, the Ecuadorian legal system is much more lenient with regards to common teenage transgressions, such as underage drinking.

Despite the fact that the legal drinking age is technically 18, Cordova said this rule isn't

enforced, adding that it's normal for young people to drink.

"It's normal there, because it's our culture," Cordova said. "That's why for me, coming to this country was weird, because I feel like since drinking is illegal here, people are more likely to do it."

After earning her high school diploma, Cordova decided to continue her education by attending Penn State.

While living in Ecuador, Cordova said she and her friends would talk about studying abroad at Penn State.

"We used to go on the Internet and search Penn State, and we saw that this college is worldwide," Cordova said. "Everyone wants to come here."



Cordova

Faculty to discuss drinking, SRTEs

By Alaina Gallagher
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Initiatives to curb excessive student drinking and the effectiveness of fully moving Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness forms online are two topics that will be discussed at today's University Faculty Senate meeting.

Faculty Senate Chairwoman Jean Landa Pytel, said the information on student life and drinking at Penn State would be presented to the senate in two different informational reports. The first will be given by Vice President of Student Affairs Damon Sims who will address the current initiatives in place at the university to curb dangerous drinking.

The second report will address initiatives that could be made by faculty members in the classroom to help decrease the problem of alcohol abuse, she said.

Student Senator Blake Bonnewell said he believes the first initiative would be a reiteration of well-known initiatives already in place, such as requiring the BASICS program and increased penalties for alcohol-related offenses.

Despite these initiatives, Bonnewell (senior-mechanical engineering) said he is looking forward to hearing the second report because it will discuss efforts faculty members could make in the classroom to discourage excessive alcohol consumption.

"I personally haven't experienced anything like that in my classrooms," he said.

Bonnewell said he would "love to hear" what faculty members are currently doing and looking into for the future.

Faculty Senate Immediate Past-Chairman Lee Coraor said there are a lot of advantages to cutting back on excessive alcohol consumption.

"I think that would be a good session for all the senators to hear," he said.

In addition, another informational report being presented will look at the effectiveness of having SRTEs online and the low response rate that is associated with them being in electronic form, Pytel said.

The data, which was collected during the past couple years, will hopefully generate feedback from the senate that might lead to the next steps in solving the problem, she said.

In addition, the senate will vote on revisions being made to the policy on academic freedom, which hasn't changed since 1987.

Pytel said she agreed with the modifications, which would update the policy and make it less redundant. The policy can act as a legal document and can offer faculty members both protection and restraint.

While the changes might not appear to be very numerous or significant to some, the document is "at the core of what we do," Coraor said.

The University Faculty Senate will hold its third meeting of the 2010-2011 academic year today at 1:30 p.m. in 112 Kern Graduate Building.

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HOT STUFF



Adam Shaner (senior-art education) shows his artwork made of hot glue at the opening of his exhibit, "The glue that holds U.S. together," Monday night in Patterson Gallery.

Airport to dedicate new control tower

By Edgar Ramirez and Katrina Wehr
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITERS

After almost seven years of planning and construction, the University Park Airport will dedicate its newly completed air traffic control tower this morning.

The control tower is a great step toward air traffic safety, University Park Airport Director Bryan Rodgers said. He said the airport is consistently busy and the tower will help regulate air control.

"At times, the air space can be quite congested, so what this does is bring control to an airport that otherwise didn't have the formal safety control," Rodgers said.

While the airport has always been safe, the tower provides a new dimension of safety that could not be achieved without it, Penn State spokesman Geoff Rushton said.

Rushton said air travelers will likely experience an improvement in airport efficiency.

"One of the key goals with installing a tower is greater efficiency in takeoffs and landings because you have direct communication between the tower and

planes," Rushton said.

Rodgers said he expects to see more air traffic with the completion of the control tower — and that will benefit the State College community.

"One of the things many [businesses] look for in a community is a valuable airport," he said. "With the addition of [the control tower], it makes us a more attractive airport. It's good for economic development."

Rodgers said the control tower also added six jobs to the airport.

State College Mayor Elizabeth Goreham said service at the airport will be even better with the newly added air traffic control tower.

Since air traffic controllers will now be able to better respond to local weather conditions, clearing planes for takeoff and landing will be much easier, she said.

"It's been in the works for a long time and will really be a benefit to our whole community in terms of service," Goreham said. "I'm delighted."

Rodgers said he is proud of the progress the control tower has made in terms of construction.

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Center part of free speech case

By Casey McDermott
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITERS

On Oct. 6, arguments for the Snyder v. Phelps case were heard before the U.S. Supreme Court, but a Penn State connection to the free speech case had already begun behind the scenes.

Nearly six months ago on July 6, the Pennsylvania Center for the First Amendment — a national research center housed within Penn State's College of Communications — filed a brief arguing that Fred Phelps' actions during a 2006 protest near the military funeral of Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder were a protected form of expression.

The center was one of four outside organizations who co-authored the amicus curiae, or "friend of the court," brief submitted as a way to take a stance on the matter of free speech as it applies to this case, said Penn State professor Robert Richards, the center's founding co-director.

"It's an old adage — 'bad facts make bad law' — and you couldn't come up with a worse set of facts than this case," Roberts said. "But the decision of the Supreme Court is not bound to the facts of this case. Its decision will affect a much larger swath of free speech than just that of this group of protesters from Topeka, Kansas."

"But what the Westboro Baptist Church did was an actual attack on an individual person."

Josh Crawford
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

At Penn State, though, not everyone agreed that the center's position.

Josh Crawford, a student whose criminal justice class at Penn State reviewed the case as if they were the federal judges involved, said Phelps' and the Westboro Baptist Church's use of "fighting words" during their protest set their demonstrations apart from other modes of free speech.

"Just because you yell at an old woman who is feeble and can't fight back doesn't mean it doesn't constitute fighting words," Crawford (junior-crime, law and justice) said, referencing a decision made in another First Amendment case, *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*. "There is no need for an actual physical altercation or eminent physical altercation to constitute, fighting words."

While the brief filed by the Pennsylvania Center for the First Amendment argued that Phelps' and the church's speech did not direct suffering specifically toward the Snyder family, Crawford said the language used

during the protests did seem to target the family.

Crawford also drew a distinction between the type of protests seen on Penn State's campus and those enacted by Phelps.

"A lot of demonstrations on campus are broad demonstrations that students who are passing by may become involved in," he said. "But what the Westboro Baptist Church did was an actual attack on an individual person."

Roberts said he agrees that the speech was offensive, but that doesn't mean it doesn't deserve the same free speech protection afforded to other viewpoints.

"Does the majority of society find it offensive? Yes. Do I find it offensive? Yes. But that's precisely why the First Amendment has to protect it," Roberts said.

A decision in the case isn't expected until well into 2011, Roberts said, but the Pennsylvania Center for the First Amendment's involvement in the case was through as soon as the brief was filed back in July.

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Corbett advisers' links to industry prompts dismay

Marc Levy
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARRISBURG — Democrats and citizen advocates are criticizing the composition of Gov.-elect Tom Corbett's transition team for the number of its members with ties to industries and companies that are regulated, permitted and, occasionally, punished by government agencies.

The 400-member transition team was selected to help guide Corbett, the state's Republican attorney general, as he prepares to take control.

The team's 17 committees are meeting with officials in state agencies and are expected to deliver reports to Corbett that highlight important issues and ways to improve and streamline the government's operations, Corbett aides said.

Selected for their expertise, viewpoints or life experience, the unpaid members also must sign a code of ethical conduct to guard against the kind of conflict of interest that is worrying critics, including state Democratic Party Chairman Jim Burn.

"We're extremely concerned,"

Burn said. "Disappointed? Yes. Surprised? No."

Bank executives and lobbyists are on the banking team. Representatives of large insurers, including Highmark Inc., are on the insurance committee. Representatives of power and water utilities, gas drilling companies, the coal industry and more are on the energy and environment committee. "Can you say, 'Letting the fox in the hen house?'" said Tim Potts, the co-founder of the citizen advocacy group, Democracy Rising PA, and a former House Democratic aide.

For example, a registered lobbyist on the energy and environment committee works for the law firm K&L Gates, which is registered with the state as a representative of Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. The Houston-based natural gas-drilling firm is butting heads with the Department of Environmental Protection over whether it is to blame for polluted residential well water near its Marcellus Shale operations in Susquehanna County.

Instead of relying on people who represent corporate interests, Corbett could have selected people

in the nonprofit and academic sectors who have the same expertise, Potts said.

A Highmark spokesman, Michael Weinstein, said the company was asked to fill a slot on Corbett's transition team and did so because it views it as a public service obligation. Questions about conflicts of interest, Weinstein said, are for the Corbett team to answer.

A Corbett spokesman, Kevin Harley, said he disagreed with the characterization that representatives of state-regulated industries.