

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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In an effort to increase awareness among college-bound Latino high school students, the Latinas Promoviendo Comundiad—a member of Lambda Pi Chi Sorority Inc.—sponsored a conference last Saturday afternoon in Barnard Hall.

The conference was sponsored by three other Columbia Latino Greek organizations—Phi Iota Alpha, Lambda Phi Epsilon, and Lambda Phi Lambda—and was funded by Latino Heritage Month. Students attended workshops on culture shock, group management and self-analysis, financial issues, resume writing, AIDS and sexuality, and a majors panel.

These workshops were designed to help the students, who were mostly from New Jersey and New York, deal with the harrowing application process and assimilate to the college environment.

Delna Ortiz, a graduate of Ithaca College and a member of the Lambda Pi Chi sorority, stressed the importance of interacting with college-bound Latino students.

“A lot of us . . . wish that we had had someone show us the ropes. We’ve learned from our mistakes; let’s pass [our knowledge] on to some other people,” Ortiz said.

Michele Grate, a senior at A. Phillip Randolph High School, said the conference was helpful.

“It takes the stress out of getting prepared,” Grate said. “It’s not often that you find people that are willing to help you with things like resumes and applications.”

Ortiz added many inner-city Latino high school students must deal with a new cultural environment once they go to college.

"A lot of times Latinos go to universities and they don't really know what to expect, what's out there for them. [Working with college students] will help a lot since we've already been through it," Ortiz said.

"You're taking kids from the inner city and putting them into universities upstate where it's a predominantly white community."

Grate agreed, noting that in most competitive schools the number of Latinos is very low.

"It's going to be a big transition. . . .If you want to go to a really competitive school, the majority are whites and, unfortunately, Hispanics are a very small percentage of the students," Grate said.

According to the Undergraduate Recruiting Committee, eight percent of the Columbia's freshman class are Hispanic.

Ortiz cited financial aid as one the major challenges people of color face when deciding whether or not to attend college.

In addition to academic issues, the conference addressed AIDS and other health issues in a forum led by Esther Carela, a member from the Latino Commission on AIDS.

Carela corrected misconceptions about AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

"[College] is the first time that were on our own, getting to see and grow as adults. It's critical that we have workshops where we can talk about it with our peers," Carela said.

Ortiz added that while the conference was educationally focused, it helped unite the Latino fraternities and sororities at Columbia.

"It also benefited us in that sense that we're working together in a community. It's not necessarily all about Greek letters, but we're here to do a common goal," Ortiz said.