

## Latino/Diversity Day Draws 500 Students from N.J. High Schools to Stockton

Students See Campus Life, Learn About Opportunities

***For Immediate Release; with photos on [Flickr](#)***

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**Contact:** Maryjane Briant  
Susan Allen  
News and Media Relations  
Galloway Township, NJ 08205  
Maryjane.Briant@stockton.edu  
(609) 652-4593  
[www.stockton.edu/media](http://www.stockton.edu/media)

**Galloway, NJ** - About 500 Latino and other minority students and their guidance counselors from high schools in Atlantic, Camden, Union and Passaic counties today heard about the importance of getting a degree from two Stockton administrators who came from backgrounds like theirs and were the first in their families to go to college.

"I came from Camden City," said Heather Medina, assistant director of Admissions, who organized Latino Visitation and Diversity Day at Stockton University. "I graduated 20<sup>th</sup> in my class...but unlike you, I didn't have a guidance counselor or teacher in my corner. One told me I 'was not college material.'"

That made her angry, she said, and also made her realize she wasn't showing her true capabilities. Determined to prove that guidance counselor wrong, she started at Stockton through the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program and earned her undergraduate degree in Marketing.

"I didn't let my past dictate my future," said Medina, who went on to earn a master's degree at Stockton.

"It doesn't matter how you start. It's about how you finish," she told the students. "You are here today because someone believes in you."

Thomasa Gonzalez, vice president for Student Affairs, told the students her family came to Newark, N.J. in the 1960s from Puerto Rico, and had no experience with the government, public education or applying to college.

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"I was the first one in my family to go to college," she said. "It's my input that you should give college consideration. You will not get anywhere if you don't put in an application."

She noted that people who go to college make more money, and gain experience and knowledge that make them better citizens and more able to serve their families and communities.

Students from Absegami, Cedar Creek, Egg Harbor Township, Oakcrest and Pleasantville high schools in Atlantic County; Camden County's Promise Charter School, Champ/Gear Up, Upward Bound for English Language Learners and Woodrow Wilson and the LEAP Academy, Passaic High School in Passaic County and Plainfield High School in Union County attended.

Many Latino students in southern New Jersey would be the first in their families to go to college. Stockton has held Latino Visitation Day since 1987, and the program has grown over the years. This fall, 12.8 percent of Stockton's 8,728 students identify as Hispanic/Latino.

Some of the students in attendance shared their hopes for their future.

"This is my first-choice school," said Nicole Paladines, a senior at Egg Harbor Township High School.

She's currently taking an advanced placement course called Hispanohablantes, which is designed for Spanish-speaking students to explore the language more deeply than in a traditional course. She aspires to be a nurse, so she "can help people," and being bilingual will help her to do that.

"Stockton's campus is so pretty. It's open, there's trees and positive scenery," she said.

Ariel Roman, a junior at Egg Harbor Township High School, wants to be an FBI special agent. He's taking law and business electives now, and plans to study political science in college. Although this is his first time at Stockton, he has a sister who currently attends and a sister who graduated. He called the campus impressive and stunning.

Jessica Grullon, graduate enrollment counselor and events coordinator, greeted students entering the Campus Center for the event. About 10 years ago, she was their age, a senior at Egg Harbor Township High School, attending the same event.

"Look at all these beautiful faces. It makes me so happy. It's important to continue the success of this program. The sky is the limit for these students and this event helps them to create a support system. Latino Visitation Day inspired me to become an advocate the way that Heather Medina was for us."

The event included presentations by students from Latino fraternities Lambda Theta Phi and Lambda Sigma Upsilon and the sorority Lambda Theta Alpha.

Dean of Enrollment John Iacovelli provided welcoming remarks and noted that his daughter-in-law, a native of Colombia, is trying to get him to loosen up. He showed off some dance moves to cheers and applause. "She keeps telling me it's all in the hips," he said, before getting serious.

"Use this day as an impetus to start thinking - look at your life and set your visions," he said,

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whether or not college is right for you. "Set those little mini-goals that will get you where you want to do."

Ryan Terrell, assistant director of Admissions, encouraged students to complete their financial aid forms. He joked that if you can make a Snapchat story, you can fill out the FAFSA form. He also made students aware of scholarships that celebrate diversity and leadership by covering the costs not covered by financial aid to help students attend college. "We want to make sure you succeed," he told the students.

Eighty-six percent of students at Stockton receive some form of financial aid, and 87 percent of freshmen come back for their sophomore year, which "far exceeds national averages," Medina said. Graduates are succeeding, she pointed out: "88 percent of our 2015 graduates are either in graduate school or have jobs within six months of graduation."

Stockton waives the \$50 application fee for students attending this event, and Terrell offered to answer students' questions on aid forms, "even if you're not applying here."

Medina said Stockton is looking for students in at least the top half of their class, and while national test scores such as the SAT are important, grades and the types of classes taken are the deciding factor. "A Saturday morning filling in dots doesn't tell me what kind of student you will be," she said of the SAT or ACT. Some students may be better off starting at a two-year community college first, she noted, and "Stockton is transfer friendly."

The day also included campus tours for students unfamiliar with Stockton, a peer-to-peer discussion and Q &A, along with a taste of Latino food and music.

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