

Hernandez / continued

information and in the learning process generate something that is uniquely their own. I strongly believe that individuals will always make a difference in broader social problems. They may not make *the* difference, but they will make *a* difference."

Beyond the classroom, Hernandez advocates strongly that his students become involved in "real life" experiences. In 1988 — thanks to a Graduate Student Leadership Development Grant from CSUF — Hernandez became involved in a statewide research project to study adolescent treatment facilities. For his next project, he plans to study the community response to homelessness in various cities.

"We're going to study this issue in Sacramento, Los Angeles and here in Fresno," Hernandez says. "The idea is to get students involved in the Fresno community so that after graduation they might be able to apply what they've learned to local problems."

The associate professor believes students should recognize and seize these "windows of opportunities." He encourages his scholars to participate in student government, committee work and research projects. He says that in these capacities students learn about organization and about impacting systems, and they develop a totally different view of their educational experience.

"Education impacts your sense of identity . . . how you view yourself," he says. "You're never quite the same after a significant educational experience. Unfortunately, sometimes not all aspects of that change are positive. What I find in working with students, particularly students from the Valley who may come from large families, is that they're often the first people in their family or peer group to attend college. In these circumstances education can alienate them from their support systems — from family, from culture and from peer groups.

"As you change and as your social circle begins to change, you begin to feel as though maybe you're losing something in the process. It's a very difficult transition for some students to make. It can be very stressful, not only for minorities but for anyone experiencing a significant change. I think it becomes even more pronounced for cultural minorities where there is a strong sense of connectedness to family, peer groups and the community.

"The Ph.D. program for me was that sort of an experience, but I feel very good about having completed the degree. Education has opened the door for a number of very positive opportunities for me."

Sharing his optimism and pleased with the cultural diversity here on campus, Hernandez is confident that this university has enough mechanisms in place and enough role models and programs to help buffer this sometimes difficult transition for students.

Discovery . . .

"I discovered Dancing Raisins," says Santos Hernandez. "I even bought the tape. It's a very good tape actually. My daughters, Sandra, 18, and Selena, 16, did one of their 'Oh Dad, how could you's?' when I told them I bought the Dancing Raisins."

A newcomer to the San Joaquin Valley, Hernandez has uncovered quite a few things since moving to Fresno: a little restaurant that captures the "local flavor," weekend trips to Yosemite, and fog. About the fog, he says it has a "certain softness. If you walk by a streetlight, you can see some of the reflections of moisture in the air."