



Cosme Zaragoza Foreign Languages

School of
Arts and Humanities

There is a passion that burns inside Dr. Cosme Zaragoza — a passion for the Hispanic people and their culture, a passion for their words. In his own words, this passion is revealed.

"I believe that we who teach language teach the most elegant component of the culture," the California State University, Fresno associate professor of Spanish explains. "Through the language, you are able to understand the people, their behavior, their way of life."

Dr. Zaragoza's desire to promote the Hispanic perspective, especially through the literature of its people, is no less passionate. In fact, it caused him to dramatically alter his life.

"I practiced law in Mexico for almost four years," the graduate of Guanajuato University Law School in central Mexico recalls, "but I wasn't

completely happy with litigation. My first love was always literature. So, I decided to make a big change in my life. I started all over again.

A student of the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture, Dr. Zaragoza has similarly strong feelings about the efforts to educate students in this area. He believes there is a historical omission of the Hispanic impact in United States history. His research during his four years at CSUF, primarily in Hispanic literature, is aimed at correcting this historical oversight.

"The Spanish language was one of the first languages spoken in the United States," he argues. "The Constitution of the state of California was written in both Spanish and English. Yet, the history of literature here in the U.S., from the point of view of the critics, fails to include the contributions of Hispanic authors. I think it is important to study the impact of the Hispanics."

The failure to include the contributions of the Hispanic culture in the history of the United States is not the only loss facing today's students, Dr. Zaragoza contends. Rich cultural opportunities right here in our community are being ignored as well.

"I feel sorry that we don't use the 'laboratory' we have right here in Fresno. We have a wonderful Hispanic community that we do not use to our advantage, especially for those students who do not have the op-

portunity to travel abroad.

"In order to understand a culture, we must have contact with that culture. We teach the parts of language and the students can speak it, but they still do not understand. If we could take our students to the barrio to interview people, experience the culture, we would gain a lot."

The Earth is ever-shrinking. Today, the future is highlighted by the multiplicity of cultures and people that are combining to create an international marketplace. According to Dr. Zaragoza, students who recognize this new world alignment will be better prepared to face their future.

"Napoleon used to say that a soldier who is bilingual counts for two. California used to be part of Mexico. We need to understand our history, our culture. If you speak two, three, four languages, you are able to understand more people, more cultures."

"If you are a business major, for example, how can you do business in Latin America without understanding the language and the culture. I think the foreign language requirement is important to implement in all fields. Since the population of minorities is growing, since Mexico is our neighbor, the opportunities for bilingual people are increasing. And not just in Spanish."

"We have to prepare ourselves and our students for this future. Knowledge of another language is the capital of that future."