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For Immediate Release

GSU's Latino Center for Excellence Sponsors Seminar on Higher Education

University Park, October 31, 2006 – On a recent Saturday afternoon, more than 200 parents and students from the South Suburbs and Chicago gathered at Governors State University (GSU) in University Park to hear some important truths and gain some valuable advice.

The Latino Center for Excellence at Governors State University sponsored the Bilingual Seminar on Higher Education, a daylong workshop for Hispanic families to learn both the obstacles their children face in gaining a college education and how important earning a degree really is.

According to Dr. Stuart Fagan, President of GSU, who spoke to workshop participants, "Over the past 30 years the number of jobs requiring a college education has grown from 28 percent to 60 percent, but the college enrollment and graduation rates for Latinos has not improved."

Senator Miguel Del Valle (D-2nd District), Assistant Majority Leader of the Illinois Senate, encouraged students and parents to work together to help the children succeed.

"There is a great demand for Latino students to meet the challenges of their education and to learn what they need to go to college, to get jobs, and have careers. Unfortunately, Latino students and their parents do not take advantage of all the opportunities."

Del Valle called for parents to demand more of the education system and to encourage their children to participate in the more challenging college prep classes offered at area high schools.

"I am very optimistic about the future of these students. There is progress. The numbers show the sacrifices Latino families are willing to make to help their children earn a college education. They will do the hard jobs, but they are always thinking of the future and opportunities to elevate the status of their children."

While the numbers are not improving at as fast a rate as Del Valle would like to see, more Latino students are graduating from high school and entering college. Because these students are frequently the first members of their family to attend college, there are often difficulties and misunderstandings.

During the workshop, parents and students learned about paying for college, preparing for higher education, choosing a career, parental support, and resources for undocumented students. Sessions were conducted in both English and Spanish by experts in their fields and participants were very pleased to receive the advice. Horacio Esparza of Blue Island attended the workshop with his wife and daughter, a junior at Eisenhower High School.

"We really need to look at the resources, colleges, what my daughter wants, and how to pay for it. I want my wife and me to be more involved and work to help our daughter. We, as parents, need to know what is going on. When parents don't speak the language there can be a disconnect. Programs like this are a great opportunity."

According to Jaime Leal of Evergreen Park, the Bilingual Seminar on Higher Education was an important community service. "I witnessed a spark of something big here," said Leal, a sophomore at Moraine Valley Community College. "The Latino community is learning that there are services to help them continue in school so that later they can make beneficial contributions to the United States."

Dr. Catalina Ramos-Hernandez, Director of the Latino Center for Excellence, was very encouraged by the positive response to the workshop and information. "People were very happy to have the opportunity to come to Governors State and learn more about higher education opportunities. There is a great demand for information sessions like this one. We will certainly host more of these in the future."

For more information about the Latino Center for Excellence at Governors State University, call (708) 235-7609.