

it's hard to hate someone whose story you know: *stories of growth and change*

This column features stories by Student Affairs professionals and students who are willing to share an experience (event, book, speaker, etc) which promoted growth, a change in perspective, an awareness of another, or when some knowledge that was previously missing slipped into place.

immigrating

Richard Diaz

As a young immigrant to this country, not a day passed by where I didn't wish we could go back home. This situation was really the first time I truly felt powerless. I didn't know how to improve the country that pushed my family out, and being far away from it was a constant source of suffering. Yet, out in public, I had to pretend otherwise. It seemed every day someone would ask me how I liked it here, and every day I would have to tell them I liked it a lot. Anything different from this



response would elicit discomfort for the person asking me the question. Followed by a barrage of other questions that will eventually lead them to conclude that I had it better here. Hence, not only should I like living here, but I should also be thankful.

My family left everything we owned and everyone we knew behind with the hope of educational and economical advancement. However, it seemed that neither educational nor economical advancement came as easily as was portrayed in so many films and folk stories. Growing up here, I witnessed first-hand the difficulty of navigating through an unknown and exclusive educational system. Being the youngest of four, I bear witness to the enthusiasm my brothers had as they started school. In my opinion, I think an immigrant's hope for a better life is inherently imbedded with

mission statement

The Student Affairs Diversity Council (SADC) strives to cultivate an environment that embraces and promotes the broad scope of diversity within the division.

educational success. So while my brothers tried their hardest to succeed in school, the reality of the matter was that they were up against a system that aggressively made them doubt their strengths, weakened their resolution, and tracked them into remedial types of educational paths. Without any mentors, role models, and with little understanding of the educational system in the United States, my brothers were bound to make mistakes. A few months back I learned a pretty simple theory; simply it states that if one is made to feel like they matter, one will eventually respond in a desired and positive manner. On

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calendar

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the other hand, if one is made to feel alienated, then it is likely for that person to respond in a negative, defiant and often self-defeating manner. In a school that marginalized my family and their identity, the responses of my brothers and their peers was predictable. What followed soon thereafter is simple. The more mistakes my brothers made, the more discouraged my parents became, and the more disillusioned we became with this country.

As we learned English, our responsibilities at home quickly evolved as well. With both my parents working non-stop, my brothers and I had free range to do as we wished. Our family dynamics were changing at a pace much too fast for my mom to control or comprehend. With my brothers making mistakes, my parents tried their best to help them, but it often resulted in more arguments and insults. I was no help either. I wasn't happy to translate for my parents, much less to advocate for them when bill collectors called,

or when problems arose. I felt overwhelmed with everything. I had a sense of how things should be, and the dissonance I was experiencing only created frustration for me. It truly was ironic; my family—the only factor that motivated my mom to leave her country—was now the one thing she feared losing in this country. Although I never said anything to her, I also feared losing our family. But unlike my

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mom, I blamed this country for everything that my family had to undergo. A short time later, both my brothers signed contracts with the military, and soon thereafter both of them were sent to war. The moment I learned about their deployment was the moment I truly decided that immigrating here was the worst decision of our lives.

Today, I can say with full certainty that immigrating to the United States had a huge impact on my personal and professional goals. Fourteen years ago, however, I had no idea what my personal or professional goals would be. Honestly, I lacked

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Roy Dale Webb: I Had Arrived At Perfection: The Lost Canyons of the Green River

**Tuesday, July 12
 12:00 - 1:00pm**

The J. Willard Marriott Library Green Committee invites you to bring your lunch and enjoy an adventurous discussion with Roy Dale Webb. Webb has run all of the Green River below Fontenelle Dam in Wyoming, most of the Colorado between Grand Junction and Pearce Ferry, the San Juan, the White River, and other rivers in the western U.S.

**Free Public Star Party
 June 15 - December 14**

The Department of Physics and Astronomy hosts public star parties at the South Physics Observatory every Wednesday after dark. All star parties are weather permitting, open to the public and free of charge.

Monday Family Nights at Red Butte Garden

Mondays at 6:00pm
 Bring your family and enjoy free performances. Learn more at <http://www.redbuttégarden.org/>

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vision back then. I had no idea what I wanted to become, or why I was going to school. In many ways, I was headed down a similar pathway as my brothers. The one thing that was different for me was that I found someone early on who I felt was very genuine in acknowledging her feelings towards this country. She was a teacher at my high school, and she was an immigrant herself. I never had her as a teacher, however, I met her through an afterschool program, to which I never intended to go, but rather stumbled upon by accident. After realizing I was an immigrant too, she asked me how I liked it here. While I gathered my thoughts, she answered for me: “It sucks, doesn’t it?” That relatively insignificant comment allowed me to build an authentic relationship with her, which ultimately allowed me to believe her when she suggested I should go to college.

At the University of Utah, the world started to make sense; I

realized that the suffering of my community is in part due to years of physical and psychological oppression. I realized that many people are truly ignorant of our history, our culture, and our language. Most of all, I was made to feel as if I did not belong in college. Yet, the more rejected I felt by the larger discourse of our campus, the more I pushed my beliefs, my thoughts, and my opinions onto others. More specifically onto White people, who in many instances were the culprits of my emotional and physical distress. A revolution inside of me started, which provided me with the methods to express myself authentically, to defend my community, but most importantly, to reinvent the world around me. There was a fire inside of me that protected those I cared about, and repelled those I thought of as perpetrators of the subjugated condition of my community. Going to college under this guise was physically, academically, and emotionally exhausting. But the fuel to keep going came from my family, my friends, and from organizations such as MEChA—a student led organization focused on activism, social change, and cultural nourishment.

My last few years as an undergrad at the University proved to be difficult. Applying to graduate school was no easy task

either, but I had enough people believing in my potential to succeed and to contribute to the Students Affairs profession that I ended up being recommended for admissions to the Educational Leadership and Policy program. During this time, the biggest proponents of my admissions into the program were, for the most part, White people. So here I was—the “angry” Latino—confronting a situation that I could not fully understand. It almost contradicted some of my beliefs and assumptions. Trying to make sense of this, I sat down with one of my good friends

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diversity dialogues

If your office, class or organization finds it challenging to discuss issues such as race, sexual orientation, power and privilege, religion or a host of other difficult topics, the SADC would like you to know that there is help. There is a trained group of facilitators who would be glad to assist you. You can contact Debra Daniels (ddaniels@sa.utah.edu) or Kari Ellingson (kellingson@sa.utah.edu) for more information.

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and we talked through all of it, and believe me, we came up with sociological reasons backed by theoretical foundations that explained why White administrators would care about me.

Having been admitted late into the program, my first choices for assistantships were already filled. Without the assistance of a graduate assistantship, there was really no way I could have afforded graduate school. Kari Ellingson approached me one day and told me there was an opening for a graduate student through the office of Orientation. I remember regrouping with my friend that day and jokingly thinking, "Orientation has got to be the least fitting position for

me... I'll probably drive students away from the University rather than make them feel welcome." After some coaching from him, I sat down with Gwen Fears and Michelle Jones who interviewed me. One particular question from them has stuck with me and it revolved around my perception of what would be the hardest part of this job. I don't know if it was the heat of the summer or the fact that they made me feel comfortable enough to be honest with them, but I remember telling them with no filter or no further explanation that the hardest part for me would be to work with White people. I finished the interview, and as I walked out of the office, I thought to myself, "I just talked myself out of that job, what kind of response was

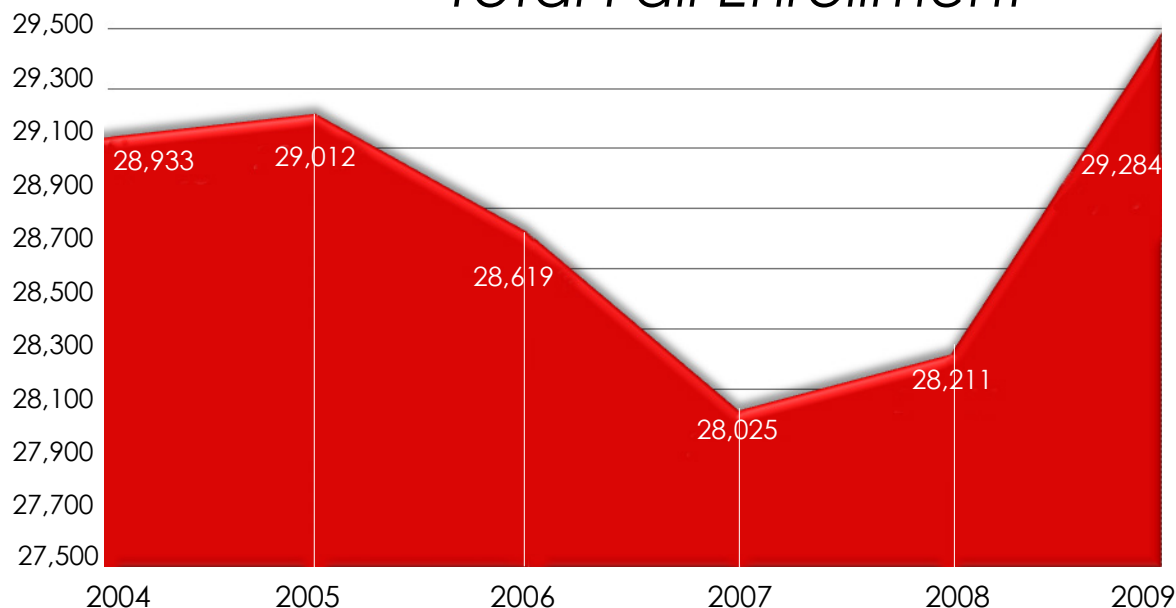


that?!"

I worked with Orientation for two years, and I truly have to be thankful to those who believed in me because I know I have grown professionally. I'll admit it was a very hard transition for me, and many times while giving me feedback, my director would comment that others in the office felt they hit a wall when they approached me. Of course, I felt

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University of Utah Enrollment and Retention Academic Years 2004-2005 through 2009-2010 Total Fall Enrollment



- > Overall enrollment increase of 4% from the prior Fall Term.
- > Second Bachelor's Degree students had a 16% growth in enrollment from prior Fall Term.
- > Origin of students: 91% from North America, 4.7% from Asia.
- > 54% of the student population is male.

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the wall was put up by them and not me. But the more my director encouraged a space where I was allowed to disagree with her, the more she supported my venture in programming that sought to inculcate social justice ideals to students or propose programming for students and families of color, the more I saw her, in her own way, inculcate values of social justice and equity in the department, the greater sense of belonging I felt.

Throughout these past two years, I have met White people who are committed to the work of social justice, who genuinely struggle to create change; White people who helped and supported my goals of social justice; White people who taught me things and encouraged me to grow and challenged me to become a greater professional; White people who trusted me. These individuals, I think, are the ones who made me transition into a different phase of my ethnic identity. I don't regret any of my feelings, nor any of the anger I

felt in the past. I think these were key moments of my identity development as a student of color in a predominantly white

From time to time the anger still comes back, the pain is still there, White people still piss me off, and I continue to seek the refuge and nourishment of my community, but I think the greatest difference between then and now, is that today I'm able to see white people as potential allies.

University, and these experiences have influenced the kind of professional I am today. Right now, I have a greater appreciation for the dominant culture. From time to time the anger still comes back, the pain is still there, White people still piss me off, and I continue to seek the refuge and nourishment of my community, but I think the greatest difference between then and now, is that today I'm able to see white people as potential allies.

Every now and then people still ask me where I'm from, and if I like it here. And from time to time, I share with them my experience, and why it is difficult to answer this question. I take the time to do this because, not only am I confident and able to do so, but also because I want them to learn, I want to them think about the hardships and difficulty experienced by immigrants in this country. I do this because this country is now

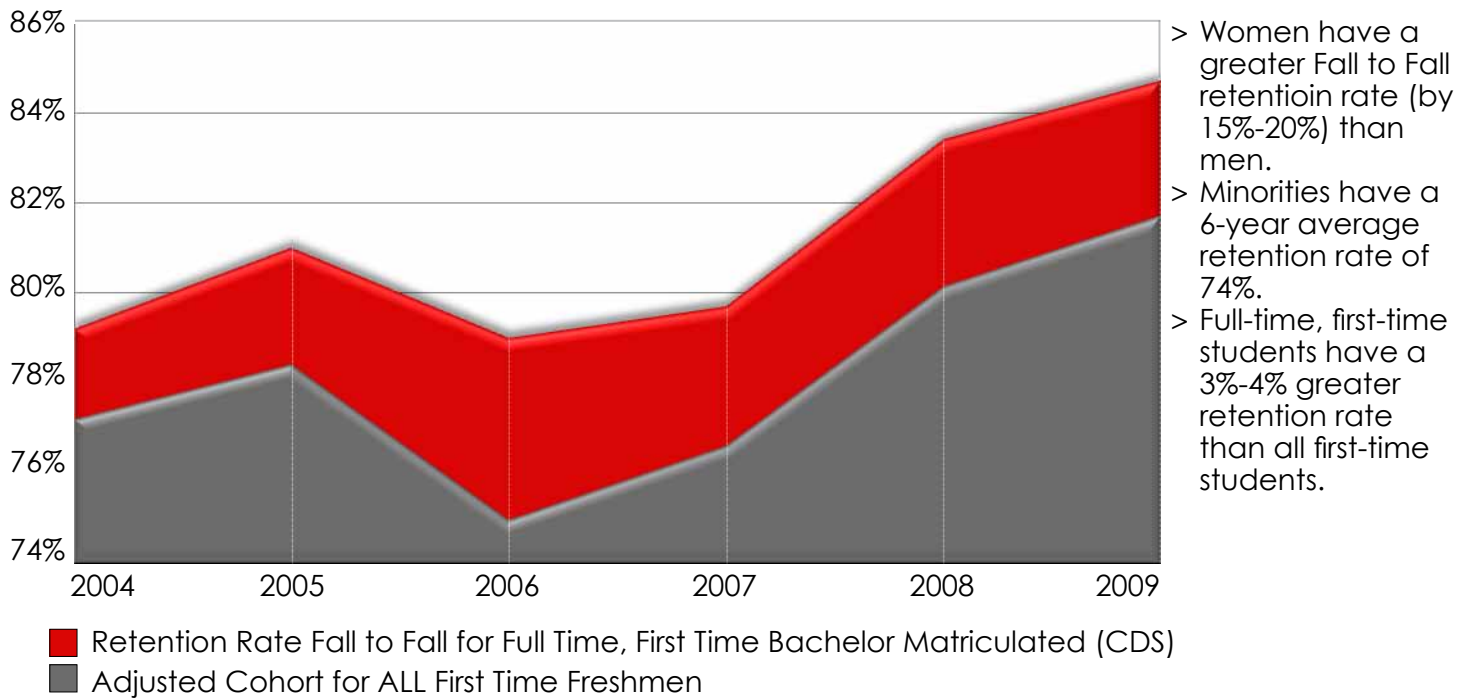
university of utah student affairs
diversity council

my home, and as such, I want to create a place I want to be proud living in. A place that is aware and fully accepting of all our identities and our experiences. Now with my Master's degree and as a Student Affairs professional, I will continue to fight to achieve change, to create access to higher education for my community, to foster a greater educated population, to promote safer spaces for our communities, to inspire hope, and to continue to validate, challenge, and support individuals' experiences, and identities, while finding individuals who can nurture and further develop my own.

Richard Diaz will receive his Masters in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Utah. He was the Orientation and Leadership Development Graduate Assistant from 2009-2011 and served as intern for the Office of Assessment, Evaluation and Research as well as the Student Affairs Diversity Council. He is currently working for Salt Lake Community College as Coordinator for the Horizonte Pathways Project.

6 July

University of Utah Enrollment and Retention Academic Years 2004-2005 through 2009-2010 *Retention Rates*



student affairs diversity council

Debra Daniels, Co-chair Women's Resource Center
Kari Ellingson, Co-chair Student Affairs, Student Development
Maria Baldwin Educational Opportunity Programs
Michael Bard Registrar's Office
Arlyn Bradshaw Dean of Students Office
Karen Cone-Uemura Counseling Center
Holly M. Cox Student Recruitment
& High School Services
Branden Dalley Union
Christoph Dressler International Center
Gwen Fears Orientation/Leadership Development
Adrienne Howell Educational Opportunity Programs
Scott Jensen Housing & Residential Education

Suzanne Jones Registrar's Office
Carol MacNicholl Center for Disability Services
Cathy Martinez LGBT Center
Susan Miller Campus Recreation
Nicole Miranda Student Recruitment
& High School Services
ASUU
Sana Muller Student Health Center
Cynthia Powell Financial Aid & Scholarships
Erica Rojas Bennion Center
Nick Rothacher Network Support
Claudia Snow Admissions Office
Nancy Trevino Career Services
Jim White