Youths Broadcast Own Stories

By Lou Mattei
SUN Staff Writer

A small group of Española Valley and Pojoaque High School students could become the next voices of public radio.

Nine students, including one from Santa Fe Community College, convened Monday and Tuesday on Northern New Mexico College's Española campus as part of a summer program to teach youths the fundamentals of writing, recording and editing stories for radio and digital broadcasts.

Judy Goldberg oversees the Santa Fe-based Youth Media Project, the group responsible for most of the instruction in the two-day seminar. She said the main idea behind the five-year-old Project is to encourage students to use their personal experiences to relate to the world at large.

"We started taking students out of the classroom and going out into our own communities to capture the stories that reside out there, and have that be an easy way to utilize reading skills, writing skills, creativity," Goldberg said. "That's also a great way to build commonality and to make conscientious decisions. I think there's too little credibility given to all the knowledge outside the walls of the educational institution."

Carmen Gallegos, 20, of Santa Fe, who was one of the seminar's lead instructors, took Goldberg's message a step further.

"This is about teaching students how to work with the tools in their day-to-day lives — cell phones, Twitter, Facebook — and gear that toward becoming a socially responsible person," Gallegos said. "It's like with me, I used to be a Walmart, brand-name person. Now, I'm like, 'We don't need any more Walmarts.'"

To back up their point, Goldberg and Gallegos played for the students Monday two weighty examples of stories produced and aired on public radio through the Project. One, by Gallegos herself, told the story of her personal struggle with her Mexican heritage during a religious conference she attended and reported on in Australia. Another was the somber retelling of a high school student's experience living through the rape of his best friend.

Students discussed the two stories from several angles, including structure, emotional impact and the use of sound effects. Then they started brainstorming for their own story topics centered on the theme of freedom — or the absence of it.

Pojoaque senior Steven Padilla, 17, of Española, said he participated in the program for college credit last school year and returned to learn more. He said he planned to tell the story of a cousin for the summer project.

"He made some bad choices, just selling drugs and stuff, and that caught up with him and he got thrown into jail," Padilla said. "So it's all about the loss of freedom. But I'm going to make it my own."

The program was funded by two collaborative college-preparation programs: Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE), ENLACE coordinator Marcia Brenden said. Those programs hired staff from the Project to teach the seminar, Goldberg said.

The end goal will be to keep the program around, offering what could become Española Valley's first dual-credit radio production or digital media course through Northern, Goldberg said.

But Gallegos said it could be challenging for her or any of the students to actually translate their skills into jobs given a decline in the prevalence of radio.

"We're so used to videos and TV that we don't like to have our eyes closed unless we're sleeping," she said. "Most kids now don't listen to the radio at all. It's becoming extinct."

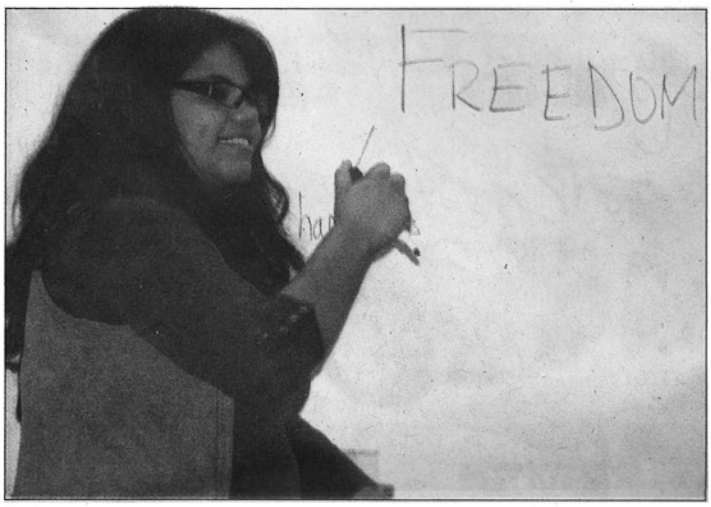
Several students were not ready to give up on the medium.

Española senior Gene Gurule, 17, said he's already been on KDCE once for an interview with Hands Across Cultures coordinator Chris Lucero and he wanted to try it again.

"It's interesting," Gurule said. "And the things they showed us so far sound cool, and it just seems pretty cool to do."

Padilla was also determined.

"I just want to get my voice heard," Padilla said.



(SUNfoto by Lou Mattei)

Youth Media Project educational and outreach coordinator Carmen Gallegos guides a brainstorming session Monday for Española Valley and Pojoaque High School students in a two-day radio production and digital media summer program at Northern New Mexico College.