Sac State program provides ‘life-changing experience’

Fifty-one graduates will receive their General Education diplomas (GED) at 3 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 19, in Sacramento State’s University Union Ballroom under the auspices of the University’s High School Equivalency Program (HEP).

Sac State HEP is one of 44 federally funded educational programs nationwide designed to help seasonal agricultural workers and their families earn the equivalent of a high school diploma. HEP also assists students with job, college, health and immigration information.

Individuals 16 or older who themselves, or whose parents, have worked in agricultural jobs for at least 75 days in the two years previous to application may qualify for the program. Qualified employment includes work in fields, packing houses, canneries, nurseries, ranches, farms, dairies, lumber mills and fisheries.

There is no charge for the classes, which are offered 6 to 9 p.m. three nights a week.

The classes address the GED’s core subject areas (mathematics, science, social studies, literature, critical reading and essay writing) in English and Spanish. Tutoring and GED test preparation are included and are conducted at Woodland Community College, Anderson Elementary in Dixon, Winters High School, the WorkNet Center in Lodi and El Concilio in Stockton.

HEP motivates students to make the most of their potential by encouraging them to view the GED as the first of many personal and professional goals they can meet. More than 60 percent of the graduates experience a job promotion, take college courses, begin a career or join the military. In short, they focus on specific goals and strive to achieve them. HEP has served more than 3,500 students since its inception in 1993.

Monica Campos is a case in point. The 24-year-old Stockton resident dropped out of high school seven years ago. She worked several years in a factory and was urged by her parents to return and get her diploma. “I tried a couple of times,” she says, but family problems prevented her from staying enrolled in an adult school. “My mom
got in touch with a HEP teacher and I enrolled in the program last summer,” she says, “and the teachers are very helpful and explain what you need to do.”

As the second member of her family to graduate, Campos plans to continue her education. “I’ve applied at Cosumnes River College and am on a waiting list for classes,” she says. “I hope to transfer to Sacramento State.” Her goal is to get a college degree and become a forensic psychologist.

Jose Olvera sees HEP as “a life-changing experience.” His mother put him in touch with the program, “but my dad really encouraged me to enroll.” Olvera’s older sister graduated from the program as well.

The Davis resident dropped out of high school six years ago and is glad to have gotten back on track. He just completed a CPR course and is slated for emergency medical training in October. “I want to continue my schooling and pursue a career in the medical field,” Olvera says.

Continued schooling is crucial for HEP graduates, according to the program’s director, Professor Maria Mejorado of the College of Education. “Most of them further their education and pursue their goals, which are the first critical steps in breaking the cycle of poverty,” she says.

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