President Gonzalez inducted into Hispanic Hall of Champions

Hi-res photo: http://bit.ly/1yKs6TV Caption: President Alexander Gonzalez, center, with Dr. Antonio Flores, HACU president and CEO; and Dr. Sandra Serrano, chancellor of the Kern Community College District and a member of HACU’s Governing Board.

President Alexander Gonzalez was inducted Monday, Oct. 6, into the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Hall of Champions during the association’s 28th annual conference in Denver.

“I want to thank you for this honor,” Gonzalez told an estimated 1,000 people attending the presentation. “I’m humbled yet proud to have been selected. To receive this recognition from HACU and its members at this point in my career is one of the most meaningful events I have experienced in all the years I’ve been a part of higher education.

“What makes it even sweeter is that it means the choices I’ve made and the goals I’ve set for myself turned out to be the right ones.”

Gonzalez, one of the longest-serving presidents in the California State University (CSU) system, will retire as Sacramento State’s leader at the end of the 2014-15 academic year.

He shared his personal story with the HACU crowd: He is the son of Mexican immigrants and was the first in his family to attend college. He talked about the IQ test his entire class took as part of a psychology course at East Los Angeles College. The Anglo students did well. The Hispanic students did not.

“I asked myself, why?” Gonzalez said.

That launched his academic career of inquiry, of asking questions to get correct answers and, along the way, of learning about test bias and cultural factors.

“As I learned more, I also became convinced that if I could do anything meaningful in my life, it would be to continue to ask questions and expose faulty reasoning and misconceptions about people … like you and me,” Gonzalez said.

After several years as a teacher, Gonzalez realized he could have more impact in a leadership role.

“Looking back now, I understand that it takes everyone to make a difference. It takes students and faculty, staff and administrators, family and friends, and organizations like HACU. I’ve come to understand that you can’t do it alone. It may sound trite, but it really does take a village,” Gonzalez said.

The President’s efforts on behalf of Hispanic students in particular will be an important part of his legacy after he leaves the helm of Sacramento State.
For example, he partnered with the Mexican consul general in Sacramento, various local elected leaders and Univision to launch Feria de Educación, an annual education fair held on campus to help Spanish-speaking families navigate California’s education system from kindergarten through the community college and university levels.

CSU Chancellor Timothy White on Monday recalled standing on stage with Gonzalez a few weeks ago at this year’s Feria de Educación.

“Our message was that the pathway to college is the road to the American Dream,” White said in a statement. “In the audience were thousands of Latino students ready to start their journey. Their success will be ‘Made at Sac State’ and made possible by President Alexander Gonzalez.”

The HACU Hall of Champions recognition is the latest of many honors for Gonzalez. In 2012, the Mexican government presented him with an Ohtli Award, given to outstanding leaders of Mexican descent. The Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce named him its Business Man of the Year, and Hispanic Business magazine chose him as one of the nation’s “Top 100 Influentials.”

HACU represents more than 400 colleges and universities in the United States, Puerto Rico, Latin America and Spain. It’s the only U.S. educational association that represents Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Gonzalez has served as chair of its governing board and worked to establish the organization’s Western regional office in Sacramento.

Gonzalez grew up in East Los Angeles and used the G.I. Bill to attend Pomona College, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in history, with honors. He went on to earn a master’s degree and a doctorate, both in psychology, from UC Santa Cruz. He was at Stanford University as a postdoctoral fellow of the Ford Foundation and the National Research Council for a year, conducting research on the psychology of time. He also attended Harvard Law School.

Gonzalez spent 18 years as a faculty member and provost at Fresno State and six years as president of California State University, San Marcos. He was appointed Sacramento State’s president in 2003.

The Hall of Champions honors individuals who have transformed and expanded opportunities for Hispanic students. Agnes Mojica, chancellor of the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, San Germán campus, was inducted into HACU’s Hall of Champions alongside Gonzalez.

“I’ve been very fortunate to have the support of my wife, Gloria, my sons and my many mentors along the way,” Gonzalez said. “It’s also been my good fortune to have colleagues who share my goals, and they do make a difference. I’m very thankful for all of it.”

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