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A balance of power: Project will spread information on alternative energy sources

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Reflection and gratitude from a new U.S. citizen

I remember crossing the border between Texas and Mexico in 1982 in a lime green Volkswagen Beetle, chasing the American dream, which at my young age could be synthesized as smoking Marlboro cigarettes, drinking Coca-Cola and watching "Charlie's Angels" and the Dallas Cowboys on TV. I did not know that one day I would realize the dream, nor did I know that the reality would be much different from what I had envisioned back then.

By LUIS PEON-CASANOVA
Advertising faculty member

The years that followed my arrival were filled with grand adventures, such as graduating from the University of Texas, and grand experiences, such as landing awesome jobs and finding a great wife in Nebraska, who taught me the value of home and family. As I grew older and wiser — and it did take me a long time — I came to realize that I have a responsibility to my community and to my fellow Mexican citizens, those who come here with very little or nothing, perhaps like your parents, your grandparents, your great-grandparents or nothing, perhaps like your parents, your grandparents, your great-grandparents or maybe even yourselves.

In light of the recent terrorist attacks on the U.S. and the debate surrounding the value of immigration, I feel a responsibility to communicate my experience and the experiences of those who are struggling to realize their own American dream. That’s why, after all these years, I decided to become a U.S. citizen. To you I promise that I will bear such responsibility and my new citizenship with care and pride.

Today I realize that I haven’t smoked Marlboros since 1989, and I don’t drink pop, either. The original (and still hot) Charlie’s Angels are in their 50s, and the Dallas Cowboys still capture my imagination on any given Sunday during the fall. Through thick and thin, I have always been a fan.

But I’m a bigger fan of other institutions such as our college. We’re people who make it what it is, and you can’t imagine how much I have enjoyed every minute of the past five years. I have learned so much, and I continue to be challenged to excel every day, just to keep up with you.

As we waited for what seemed like hours last Friday to start the ceremony in the Federal Building, I actually imagined we were all immigrants in a boat arriving at Ellis Island, separated only by time and circumstance. It was a strange but intriguing thought. Most of your families got here before I did, but as I looked at the faces of us, the newcomers, and you, the Americans, I saw a common bond that transcended time and space. I felt a connection, a sense of belonging like I had never felt before. I hope you did, too. For I imagine it’s hard to relate to the actual journey if you are not on it.

After we, the newcomers from Africa, Asia, Europe, North, Central and South America, the Middle East and elsewhere, pledged allegiance to our new country and received our certificates of citizenship from the judge, some of us immediately registered to vote outside of the courtroom.

Bruce Thorson, who documented the event with his camera, asked me, “What was your first American thoughts?”

“Mexican food,” I replied, as we headed out to join friends and family at La Mexicana restaurant. How appropriate.

I just wanted to express a heartfelt thank you to all who came to my naturalization ceremony and to let you know that it meant a lot to me to see so many of your faces there. I also want to thank those who wanted to come but couldn’t. To all of you, I’m humbled and honored by your presence, good intentions and kind words.

Professor Peon-Casanova wrote this message to his colleagues at the J School after he took the oath of American citizenship on Dec. 7.

A balance of power

Project will spread information on alternative energy sources

By ANTONA BECKMAN

R enewable energy.
The phrase sounds good, but many Nebraskans may not know much about what it means. People may have seen those two wind turbines north of Lincoln, but what do they do, and whom do they serve? And what other alternative energy sources are available? Would it be possible and efficient to use solar power? And what exactly are the benefits of ethanol?

In an effort to inform Nebraskans about such alternative energy options, the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, along with the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center, received a grant of $12,000 to help Nebraskans learn about and be more familiar with the energy options that exist. The project, titled Energy and the Future, started in the fall semester of 2007 with researchers from both the journalism college and the policy center. Project plans call for developing a one-hour informational video, a Web site marketing renewable energy and written materials for public distribution.

The project received a $1,200 grant is funded by the Nebraska Center for Energy Sciences Research, a UNL entity collaborating with the Nebraska Public Power District. The information from the grant will be released to 200 different public entities. In addition, public forums will be held to discuss the information and the video may be broadcast on NET.

Broadcasting faculty member Jerry Renald and advertising faculty member Amy Struthers are co-investigators on the project. Both have been leading student involvement, guiding a class of eight students who are extensively researching alternative energy. The goal of this program is to give Nebraskans a sense about what their options are when it comes to renewable energy," Struthers said. "We want to get people in Nebraska talking and getting them to be active citizens."

With general information as the key message, all parties involved stressed that they will not be choosing sides. The researchers simply want to help Nebraskans explore the options available for renewable energy. According to Struthers, information about many alternative sources — bio-fuels, solar energy, wind energy — will be included.

This grant is unusual not only because of the partnership between the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center and the College of Journalism and Mass Communications but also because students are involved.

“This is the first time I know of that we have worked with the journalism college for a student-driven project,” said Tarik Abdel-Monem, the policy center’s research specialist. “We are very optimistic and enthusiastic.”

Students are conducting interviews with Nebraska’s U.S. senators and representatives to get their views about alternative energy. They also have looked into what the general public is doing to utilize other energy sources, such as home solar panels. The project will span two semesters, bringing new students into the mix in January. The current class consists of eight hand-picked journalism students from the broadcasting or advertising sequences.

Struthers described the video as something that would resemble a documentary but include more than hard statistics. Not only will the video touch on professional and government opinions, but it will feature multiple vignettes highlighting individual people who use alternative energy.

“It will be fun to watch,” Renald said. “We’re excited about it. It’s the first time advertising and broadcasting students are working together like this.”

He explained that the broadcasting students will work alongside advertising students, learning more about marketing the information they will present. On the other side, advertising students will learn more about what it takes to capture and edit video.

Abdel-Monem and Struthers both held open meetings about the final products. They said Nebraskans will become more knowledgeable about their options, and an important ingredient will be the attention it deserves. Although the information may not change the behavior of every Nebraskan, it will give people an opportunity to make an informed decision about alternative energy.

According to the policy center, materials are to be finalized and produced in the summer of 2008, before presidential elections in the fall. A key part of this grant is to inform each candidate’s views on the issue of alternative energy. Abdel-Monem said the information that surfaces from this project will help the public make an educated vote choice.

From left, Sarah Jensen, Kurtis Hornma and Kristy Bohnet strike a pose outside the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.