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UTEP graduate student Alicia Rascon received the National Hispanic Leadership Institute Latina Rising Star Award.

UTEP student receives Rising Star Award

By: By Beatriz A. Castaneda

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A UTEP graduate student recently received the National Hispana Leadership Institute Latina Rising Star Award at the Mujer Awards in Albuquerque, NM.

Alicia Rascon is the founder of Latinitas, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to the empowerment and advancement of young Hispanic girls through media, art, culture and technology. She received the award as a result of her leadership at Latinitas with the programs that have impacted hundreds of girls.

"I was thrilled when I heard the news," Rascon said. "I truly respect this recognition of all the collective effort we have done in the program."

NHLI is a leadership organization that focuses on Latina professionals. Rascon, who is the chief executive officer was one of the three awardees at the Mujer Awards Nov. 6.

Latinitas started in 2002 as a class project at the University of Texas at Austin, while Rascon was an undergraduate student. Latinitas online magazine was the first in the country to focus on empowering young Latinas for future college plans, creating role models and working directly with young girls in both English and Spanish to grow into healthy, confident and successful Latina women.

Recent projects that have begun with Latinitas are after-school programs for high school girls. They are also building a new addition to the Latinitas Web site, where girls in the program will be able to create blogs, upload videos, post photos and create their own personal Web sites.

Latinitas magazine reaches out to many preteen and teenage girls and the programs also include news writing, digital photography and radio and video production.

"We have lots of volunteers that have helped so much with the program," Rascon said.

Paola Silva, sophomore international business major, volunteered for the Latinitas program at UTEP this past August.

"We brought Alicia to UTEP and we had a Latinitas fest where we had three workshops that focused on writing, online activities and even a fashion show," Silva said.

Silva said students should participate in the community and Latinitas is a good program to start with.

"As college students, I think we should definitely find an organization that interests us and to honor that main goal of empowering young girls or anyone in the community," Silva said.

Rascon said she met many talented Latinas from all over the country and felt inspired when she went to the conference.

"Energized and talented women can reach their dreams. If they are dedicated to their vision, they can become successful," Rascon said.

Rascon also said that UTEP Latina students, by putting hard work and committing to their goals, will ultimately succeed and potentially do whatever they want to do in their lives.

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