

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

César Chávez Acción y Compromiso Human and Civil Rights Award

Presented to a nominee who follows in the exemplary footsteps of César Chávez in philosophy, work, and leadership in improving the status of labor and the lives of workers.



Mary Ann Pacheco
Member, California

Mary Ann Pacheco still recalls a former student, who had returned to campus after earning a four-year degree in architecture. "I said to her, 'What are your plans for the future?' And she said, 'I don't have a future because I don't have papers.' Here she is, this beautiful young woman, full of talent and potential. She should be excited to go on and make a difference, and she can't."

This is why Mary Ann Pacheco is an outspoken advocate for the DREAM Act, which would provide a path to legal status for college graduates. "These are students who are going to be making a tangible contribution to society," Pacheco notes.

That Mary Ann Pacheco is fighting for Congressional passage of the DREAM Act surprises no one. A Professor at Rio Hondo Community College in Whittier, California, she has been an advocate and activist for social justice ever since she was a college student at the University of Southern California. She fought for the rights of Chicano students, including the creation of a student center that would provide a broad spectrum of services for Chicano students.

Her activism continued when she became a Professor at Rio Hondo Community College, where she fought for the collective bargaining rights of faculty and twice served as President of her local union. She has spoken out forcefully for academic freedom and union rights wherever they are threatened. What's more, Professor Pacheco has been, for more than two decades, an active member and leader in the Community College Association, California Teachers Association, and NEA. Her passion has been to ensure that faculty and minority students be treated equally and respectfully. Her longtime CTA colleague, Mary Rose Ortega, says, "When Mary Ann speaks, people listen."

A battle with breast cancer has not silenced Professor Pacheco. In particular, she continues to be a powerful advocate for Latino students. Speaking of the California community colleges, she said: "We are the place where many Latinos start their college career. The bad news is that they often don't move on. While 71 percent of Latinos who enter community college say they want to transfer to finish their bachelor's degree, only 7 percent do. That statistic troubles me." Professor Pacheco urges that programs be developed between community colleges and K-12 schools to help create a "culture of college" for Latino students.

Professor Pacheco has received CTA's César E. Chávez Si Se Puede Human Rights Award and the National Council of Higher Education's James Davenport Memorial Award. And in 2011, the Community College Association created the CCA Mary Ann Pacheco Ethnic Minority Award.



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