Higher Education

UTSA graduate Flores handed reins at Palo Alto

By Jennifer R. Lloyd

Ruben Michael "Mike" Flores learned to value higher education from his parents — migrant workers who relied on schooling as the way to improve their lives.

"Now, he'll seek to help other students do the same."

On Tuesday night, Alamo Colleges' trustees named Flores president of Palo Alto College, one of five in the community college district.

Flores has 19 years of higher education experience and spent the past 13 rising up the ranks at Palo Alto, most recently as interim vice president of academic affairs.

"This is a special institution. That's why I've been here and stayed here," Flores, 42, said at a public forum last month. "I drive in every day enjoying what I do."

Last year, the South Side community college enrolled more than 5,160 students, about 70 percent of them Hispanic, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Ana "Cha" Guzmán, who led PAC for more than a decade, left last month to become president of Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico.

A search committee initially dug through about 30 applications for the spot. Flores' top competition was Ernst Roberts II, who hailed from El Paso Community College.

Flores has a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio and a master's from Illinois State University — both in political science — and a doctorate in educational administration from the University of Texas at Austin.

After working in community colleges in Colorado and Michigan, he became PAC's director of institutional research, planning and development in 1999.

Javier Aguirre, a member of the search committee and PAC's faculty senate president, said trustees approved someone who can hit the ground running. Mary-Ellen Jacobs, who chairs the college's English department, called Flores warm, knowledgeable and dedicated to student success.

Flores has worked to create support for first-generation students such as his own parents, she said. Flores' father went on to become a dean at San Antonio College.

Rosie Castro, the Palo Alto College interim dean of student affairs, called Flores an innovative leader who is, in part, responsible for creating new student orientations on campus several years ago.

"I think he will be able to continue to provide leadership in making the strides in retention, in graduation, in bringing in more scholarship funding, in working together as a united staff and faculty with students," Castro said.

She added that Flores' quietly strategic management style reminds her of someone — her son, Mayor Julián Castro.

jlloyd@express-news.net
Twitter: @jlloydster