Campus mourns 'irreplaceable' professor

Flowers and a note adorn the office door of the late professor Rogelio Reyes on Tuesday at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus. Reyes died Monday morning of heart failure. (CHELCEY ADAMI)

By CHELCEY ADAMI
Imperial Valley Press Staff Writer
2:34 a.m. PDT, April 6, 2011

CALEXICO — Flowers began appearing on Rogelio Reyes’ office door early Tuesday as the campus began mourning the death of the popular San Diego State-Imperial Valley campus professor.

Reyes died Monday of heart failure. He had taught at SDSU-IV since 1986. Campus Dean David Pearson notified staff Monday of Reyes’ death.

"For decades, Rogelio has been a powerful positive presence on our campus, a model and a mentor to our students, a valued colleague to our faculty and staff, a most inspiring connection between our campus and the larger community," Pearson wrote in an e-mail. "Rogelio has represented the heart and spirit of our campus, the personification of that marvelous thing we call university. What a wonderful man. More than it is possible to express, we will miss him."

Staff echoed Pearson’s sentiments, describing Reyes as a talented, involved and caring colleague.

"He had a wonderful spirit. He was concerned for everyone: the students, the community, farmworkers, immigrants," said professor Donna Castañeda. "He was just such an energetic person. He was a very talented linguist. He was really almost irreplaceable."

Reyes frequently hosted rallies or activities focused on human and immigrant rights, similar to activist Cesar Chavez, who he knew at one point in his life, Castañeda said.

Just weeks ago, Reyes was placing boxes around campus as part of a clothes drive.

Assistant professor Lasisi Ajayi was one of Reyes’ closest friends on campus.

They met five years ago, and Reyes immediately made an effort to learn Ajayi’s native language, Yoruba, of the western part of Nigeria.

Reyes was well-traveled and was fluent in 27 languages, campus academic adviser Norma Aguilar said. He was a doctoral graduate of Harvard University and also received degrees in Croatia, Italy and Mexico.

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“It’s a sorrowful day for the campus and for me in particular. He was just willing to help, an activist,” Ajayi said. “For him, education is not just something to seek but to serve the community and the people, particularly the downtrodden people, the forgotten people.”

In 2007, Reyes received the Monty Award for Outstanding Faculty.

Aguilar said an informal memorial will most likely be organized this week to help process students’ and staff’s feelings, as well as a more formal memorial within the next couple of weeks to commemorate Reyes’ memory.

“He lived a full life and a productive life,” Ajayi said. “I think that’s what it is all about.”

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marisam at 10:55 AM April 07, 2011
Dr. Reyes was a great teacher and human being. He was always listened to his students. I'll miss talking him on campus about student issues. He was a great teacher!

Danielle92243 at 4:16 PM April 06, 2011
Those wishing to write their sentiments to the Reyes family may stop by the SDSU-IV Campus library in Calexico to sign one of the pages that will be placed in a scrapbook. You may sign the pages at the circulation desk at the front of the library. The pages will be available until Friday, April 22, 2011. The library hours are Monday-Friday, 10am-8:45pm, and Friday, 10am-3:45pm.

GabrielaRivera at 9:31 AM April 06, 2011
RIP Dr. Reyes, you will be missed.