

# Rhodes Scholar chooses his causes over comforts

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ITHACA — Stereotypes simply don't work when it comes to describing Eduardo Peñalver.

He's a 4.0-plus student at one of the United States' toughest colleges, but he doesn't claim to be a superhuman.

He's just been named as a Rhodes Scholarship winner. Yet rather than cavort among the elite, Peñalver instead helped lead a four-day campus protest this past November.

As he pursues a law degree, he has the credentials to someday command a considerable income. However, Peñalver's primary concern is helping the impoverished as a public-defense attorney.

"As a Catholic, your entire responsibility is to look after the poor. These are the people who Christ defended and mingled with," explained the 21-year-old Peñalver, a senior at Cornell University.

"People might claim to think that what I do with my education is foolish, but they're probably happy that I'm not going to be competing with them for the big bucks," Peñalver added with a laugh.

Peñalver recently acquired some practical experience in negotiating public issues through a four-day sit-in at Day Hall. As the president of La Asociacion Latina — an umbrella organization for Latin-American students at Cornell — Peñalver was prominently involved in a protest calling for a meeting with university officials. The group wished to discuss several grievances affecting Cornell's Latino students, among them the university's shortage of Latino faculty members.

According to Peñalver, approximately 6 percent of Cornell's 12,000-member

student body is Latino. Yet, he said, less than 1 percent of the college's 1,500 full-time faculty members are of Latin descent.

Peñalver and about 80 other students stayed at Day Hall during the sit-in's entire four days beginning Nov. 19, 1993. The protest proved successful, he said: Cornell administration has since met with the protest group and agreed to develop a cultural living center for Latino students, and also hire six Latino faculty members over the next three years.

"It's a definite victory. We trained a lot of the young students in the process

of protest. It's important to learn to defy authority like that," said Peñalver. "I think the key is not to become a part of that power structure."

In some ways, the native of Puyallup, Wash., seemed destined to battle authority figures. His father Ovidio, a pediatrician, was a political prisoner in his native Cuba before fleeing to the United States in the early 1960s.

Also, Peñalver noted that when he was a baby, he rode on the shoulders of famed migrant-labor activist Cesar Chavez during a protest in the early 1970s.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
Eduardo Peñalver sits on a staircase in the Ithaca home he shares with three other Cornell University students. Peñalver is one of only 32 Americans to be chosen for the Rhodes Scholarship.



The Cornell senior, who is majoring in history, was no sooner done with the November protest when he made news all over again. Peñalver had been named a Rhodes Scholar, becoming one of only 32 Americans to be chosen for the nation's most distinguished scholarship.

In promoting his campus cause, Peñalver is happy that the protest and the Rhodes Scholarship announcement came so close together.

"One doesn't get mentioned without the other, which is good," he remarked. "If I'd been suspended I still would have gotten the Rhodes Scholarship, so it would have been Cornell's loss."

Yet he noted that he was cautious about crossing the line of reasonable behavior. "They suspended us for a couple of days. But I definitely didn't want to get kicked out of school over a meeting," he said. "We were successful at pushing it to the limit without getting kicked out."

The Rhodes Scholarship will enable Peñalver to study for two years at Oxford University in England. He has also been accepted into Harvard Law School, but is leaning toward continuing his law studies at Yale University after returning from Oxford.

Although success has come in large quantities for Peñalver, he admits that he's as prone as anyone else to such human frailties as burnout — especially when faced with the pressures of an Ivy League curriculum.

"Cornell is rated one of the two or three biggest schools in the country for stress," he acknowledged.

For this reason, Peñalver is thankful that his affiliation with the Cornell Catholic Community — in which he's a parish-council member — offers him an opportunity for peaceful contemplation.

"I try to go to weekday Mass at least twice a week. It's a good time to go and just reflect a little bit; to get away from the day-to-day things," he said.

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## Recognizing

★ **Dr. James B. Wood**, vice president and medical director of **St. Ann's Home**, Rochester, who has been granted the title of certified medical director of a long-term care facility. The new program of the American Medical Directors Association recognizes physicians displaying competence in both clinical geriatrics and medical direction. Wood is one of 344 physicians nationwide who have completed the requirements of certified medical director. The American Medical Directors Association will recognize him at its annual meeting in San Diego, Calif., this March.

★ **Rhonda Peterson, M.D.**, who has joined the Southern Tier Health Associates family practice in Alfred. The practice is associated with **St. James Mercy Hospital** in Hornell.

★ Nazareth College faculty members **Virginia David**, **Annemarie House** and **Dennis Ritchie**, who were among the presenters at the New York State Social Work Education Association's annual conference in October.

★ **Roger Lathrop, RRT** was awarded the Respiratory Care Practitioner of the Year award by the staff of **St. Joseph's Respiratory Therapy** unit.

★ **Pamela Roby**, director of development for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, who received the **United Way of Greater Rochester's "Community Investor Award"** for her work on its evaluation task force.

★ **St. Joseph Sisters Diane Branch** and **Eileen Conheady**, who were chosen among 280 applicants nationwide for inclusion in "Sisters in Song," a grant project to benefit the retirement needs of women and men religious. Sister Branch is pastoral associate at St. Paul's Church in Webster; Sister Conheady is developing a new housing ministry for people with mental illness.

★ **Joseph Fenlon**, a seminarian from the Diocese of Rochester, who is beginning studies in first-year theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore, Md. He is the son of Mr. Thomas Fenlon and is a parishioner at St. Francis Assisi.

★ **Craig W. Curtis, M.D.**, who has been appointed medical director of the Occupational Health Services department of **St. Joseph's Hospital**.

★ New officers elected during the annual fall workshop of **Church Office Professional Employees**. They are: **Ann Rohnke**, St. Paul, Webster, president; **Rosalie Magee**, St. John the Evangelist, Rochester, vice-president; **Sandra Cooke**, St. Dominic, Shortsville, secretary; and **Mary Cantatore**, Holy Spirit, Penfield, treasurer.

★ **Anne Field, BSN**, cardiac rehabilitation nurse coordinator at **St. Joseph's Hospital**, who recently was elected president of the New York State Association for Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation.