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University of Miami Student Wins the 2002 Florida College Student of the Year Award

Gainesville, Fla (04-02)—Jose Felix "Pepi" Diaz, a senior in English and political science with a 3.44 GPA at the University of Miami, is the winner of the 2002 Florida College Student of the Year Award.

Diaz and 19 other students from colleges and universities across Florida will share \$55,000 in scholarships and prizes and will be honored Friday, April 12, at an awards ceremony and press conference at the Capitol Building in Tallahassee. He is featured on the cover of *Florida Leader* Magazine and is profiled at www.floridaleader.com/soty.

Diaz was selected from 144 applicants in the annual scholarship program sponsored by *Florida Leader*, SunTrust Education Loans, and Office Depot. The Florida College Student of the Year Award celebrates 15 years of recognizing outstanding Florida college students for their campus leadership, academic excellence, financial self-reliance, and campus and community service, something Diaz has shown throughout his collegiate years.

Diaz recently completed a successful term Student Government president at UM. He planned to be SG president from the time he was a freshman, and he has worked his way through the ranks, beginning as a Commuter Senator and continuing on as Interfraternity Conference Senator and Speaker of the Senate.

Among their many accomplishments, his cabinet got the wheels in motion to create "Ibis Ride," a student mass-transit system. This program allows over 150 students a day to have a safe and free way to get to their favorite hangouts on the weekends without the dangers of drinking and driving. Also, Diaz has created a

rewards program for president's honor roll students and created a "cyber café" on campus since becoming president.

Diaz, with plenty of support, including UM President Donna Shalala, lobbied for and achieved a seat on the UM Board of Trustees to provide a voice for the students within the governing body. "I felt it was important because the Board of Trustees is ultimately the final say on everything that goes on at the university," Diaz says. The voting seat is now a permanent one on the board.

Among other political activities, Diaz has been placed on the City of Miami Young Elected Officials Board, he has worked on Miami Mayor Wilfredo Gort's campaign staff, and he has worked in Senator Bob Graham's office as a staff aid.

Diaz also is the founding president of Sigma Phi Epsilon, and under his leadership, the fraternity has been awarded "Chapter of the Year" two years running, has the highest chapter GPA at UM, won the intramurals championship, and won the "Greek Week" trophy. "This is my biggest accomplishment on campus," Diaz says.

Among his other activities, Diaz serves as the Southern Interfraternity Conference president, the first-ever Hispanic president of the council. "By being a Hispanic, there have been many glass ceilings I have had to shatter," he says. "I was told that I could never get to be president of the Southern Interfraternity Conference because a minority could never get the vote of southern institutions. Over 250 schools were present, and I was elected as the first-ever Hispanic president of the council."

Diaz is also the first minority and Hispanic to be on the national board of the Order of Omega Honor Society, an organization he changed with his first action when he became president. "The UM chapter of the Order of Omega was the only group in the nation that still didn't allow women to become members," Diaz says. "After a lot of coaxing, we voted unanimously to allow women into our chapter." This vote allowed Patricia Whitely, vice president of student affairs, onto the board. Diaz is one of two student representatives on the City of Coral Gables Community Relations Board and was vocal in his role, realizing that the decisions made by the city affect the university community.

Diaz has managed to have some fun in between all of his achievements though. He is an avid Miami Dolphins fan. He has played intramural sports of almost every kind, including softball, basketball, football, and even water polo. If that wasn't enough, he ran for Mr. University of Miami two years in a row.

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In its 19th year, Oxendine Publishing produces three magazines, including *Florida Leader*, and sponsors the 13th annual "Best of Florida Schools" awards. Oxendine also publishes *Student Leader* and sponsors the 15th annual "Florida College Student of the Year Award" and the 5th annual "What Florida Students Think" survey. For more information and expanded coverage visit www.floridaleader.com.

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