

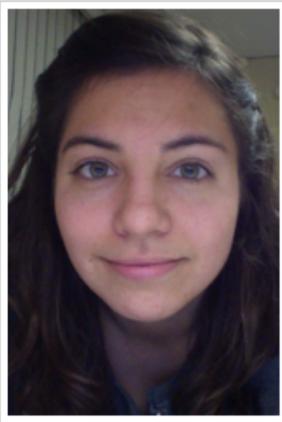
## Fall 2014 Contest Winners

Thank you to everyone who participated this year in our essay contest! We had some great essays!

This year, students were asked "*What is the importance of diversity at our university? What suggestions do you have to enhance the climate of inclusion and diversity on our campus?*"

Our top 3 responses are posted below.

### First Place - Alicia Cebada



1st Place - Alicia Cebada 

### Congratulations to the 2014 Diversity Essay Contest Winners:

First Place: Alicia Cebada, Elementary Education  
Second Place: Ting Ting Lin, Accounting and Finance  
Third Place: Shayna Taffinder, Social Science Education

Check out the winning essays on the VCSU Diversity Website:

<http://www.vcsu.edu/diversity/vp.htm?p=2929>

Thanks to all those who submitted entries and special thanks to this year's judging panel: Chris Carpenter, Greg Vanney, Jennifer Larson, Devans Meus, Jessica Sanden and Niklas Ernst.

### Diversity Services

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**Alicia Cebada**

**Major: Elementary Education**

**About Boxes – A Poem of Sorts**

Furrowed brow  
Which to choose?  
I study the paper form  
The glowing screen

Race, ethnicity, origins, heritage...

However worded,  
I am conflicted  
Confused  
Asked politely  
To choose between the dark lashes from my father  
And the fair skin of my mother  
To squeeze myself neatly  
Inside a box  
I do not fit  
Given only a tiny  
Four-sided figure to unravel  
The stories running through my veins:  
*What are you?*

At first I was diplomatic  
Tried to be un-melodramatic  
Identity divided, fair and square  
As the checkboxes came, I asked:  
*Who will I be today?*

I used to not care  
Silly survey!  
What did it matter  
What box I checked,  
What they knew?

But one day,  
It did.

Because when I saw the checkbox  
*Hispanic*  
*Latino*  
I began to remember the velvet blue nights of twinkly stars

And feel my father's warm voice, the prairie hush  
His stories  
Of young mischief  
Of six-foot great-great-grandfathers—mountain *vaqueros*  
With Irish red hair and green eyes  
Of the weeping woman—*la Llorona*—who wanders  
The New Mexican Mountains and Plains  
Looking for naughty children to steal  
I breathed in the spiciness of September,  
With chile roasting in barrels  
Winding through Albuquerque's streets  
I saw Christmas *luminarias*, glowing atop adobe rooftops  
I tasted cold mountain springs my elders, winking, claimed kept them young  
I saw my great-*abuelita*'s little house  
On the red and warm earthen ground  
Her wrinkled, shrunken frame  
Always shorter  
Eyes alit  
Weathered hands patting my little ones  
I saw color  
I saw open warmth  
I saw my *familia*

How could I  
Not own them as mine  
Even a little?

But when I saw the checkbox  
*White*  
*Caucasian*  
So deceptively bland  
I saw my grandfather's German-Danish-Russian-Polish  
Hands, chapped  
Engraved with work, dwarfing my own  
Small me laughing against the scents intermingling on his shirt  
The salty sweetness of hay, sweat  
Pollen from quiet backroads, and the earthy musk of tobacco and cattle  
My ears recalled the polka on early Sunday mornings  
George Strait's gentle drawl in the frosty afternoons of baking  
And my grandmother's victory laugh  
When she cleared house at cards  
I felt the dank cold of the basement, rushing up  
As we foraged for pickled treasures  
Summer chokecherry juice staining my fingers  
Steaming comfort of my grandmother's *knoefla* soup  
And the worn softness of yet another pile of stained, faded cookbooks

I saw community  
I saw quiet tenacity  
I saw my family

*How could I choose?*

And so  
I decided to claim all of me  
Or none of me  
To hold all of my family close  
Or choose the 'other' box  
Or none  
I decided boxes were just too  
*Small*  
For myself, for anyone  
I decided to try  
And choose the richness of stories  
To listen more closely  
Attentively  
To yours  
When it unravels, just a little  
To remember each I witness  
Is a gift

### **Closing Thoughts:**

The welcoming of stories: I think that is what diversity is at its roots. It matters less the demographics of Valley City State University, and more the individual curiosity we have about what makes each one of us who we are. If we have the heart behind diversity right—curiosity, kindness, and open ears—then actions that our community takes to promote diversity will stem from the right place. The importance and goal of diversity at Valley City State University should be to increase the flow and influx of these stories and perspectives, to give them a platform to be heard and shared. In this the value is two-fold: first, the members of our community feel that their voices and the stories they carry are valued by the community, and second, that each member has a chance to learn from others, respect their experiences, and understand *no one fits in a box*. VCSU already seeks to promote diversity in many ways, but if I were to try and offer suggestions on how to further enhance inclusion and diversity, it would be through writing prompts like this one or some type of publication where opinions, memories, personal stories of bravery and meaningful mentors, and family stories are shared. Perhaps having bulletin boards in the residence or Student Center halls devoted to answering a question of the month about a memory, tradition, or an opinion would be a simple way to promote students getting to know one another, and ultimately, “witness” one another.