

Students find PIIE in the sky

BY MARC KILLINGER

When **Ramón de Jesús Rodríguez** arrived at CU from Dallas four years ago, he ran into some trouble.

The son of Mexican immigrants, he was the first in his family to go to college. But after he arrived at CU he got into a fight and was arrested. In addition, two of his friends died: one committed suicide and the other, CU freshman **Lynn “Gordie” Bailey**, died of acute alcohol poisoning. Rodríguez’s grades plummeted. Within a semester, he left CU to take a break and attend a community college.

Just three and a half years later, Rodríguez is back at CU thriving with a 3.4 GPA and has gained invaluable experience as recipient of a prestigious paid internship through CU’s Public Interest Internship Experience (PIIE). Modeled after Princeton University’s Project 55 Program, which was founded by alumni of the class of 1955, PIIE assists students interested in the public interest sector by providing them grants for summer internships.

In 2005 CU became the first public university in the nation to start such a program. It was formed by Career Services, the Parents Fund, Student Affairs and the Alumni Association board of directors. Interns’ summer salaries are \$10 an hour for nine weeks, which totals \$3,600.

“It provides an opportunity for students who want to be out in the community contributing to the public good,” says **Peter Simons** (Psych’73, MPubAd’76), director of the Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement, which administers PIIE. The interns “are very high-performing, academically gifted students,” Simons says.

Rodríguez attributes his turnaround in part to the Restorative Justice program, an alternative to the student judicial affairs process. After his fight he was referred to the program, which unites perpetrators with victims and also has

those who commit crimes write letters of apology and do community service. It is the same organization he worked with as a PIIE intern last summer and got a job with this fall.

“I was repaired through a great program,” he says. “It helped me to resolve it all.”

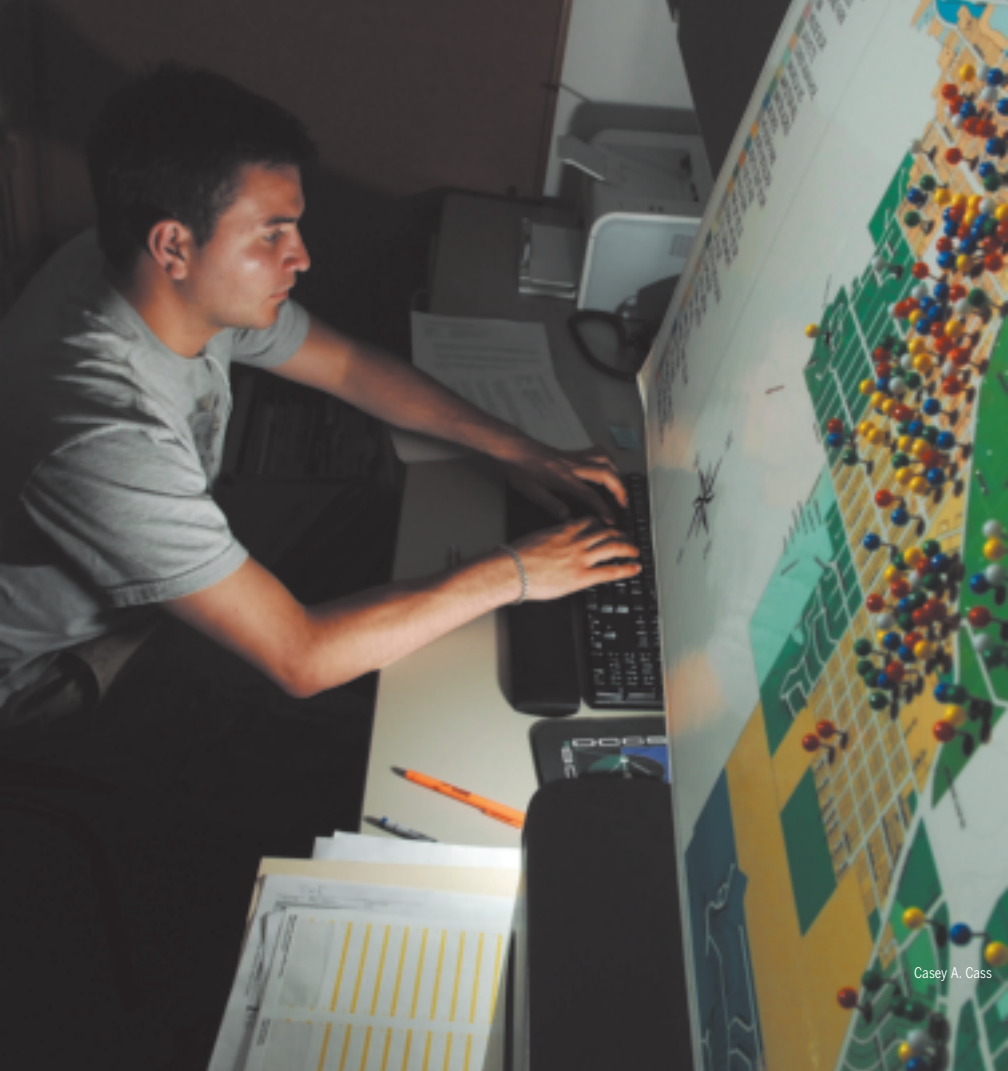
His community service was with G.O.R.D., which stands for Guidelines and Objectives on Responsible Drinking. It was formed after Bailey’s death, and Rodríguez is the group’s president. He says G.O.R.D. and Restorative Justice are complementary, as they address different aspects of the same problem — alcohol abuse.

Restorative Justice is a collaborative project involving University Police and the offices of ombuds, judicial affairs, housing and victim assistance. The approach is used when students who commit nonviolent crimes admit wrongdoing and both the perpetrator and victim are willing to meet. It brings together offenders and victims with the supporters of each side, as well as affected community members, to have a discussion.

According to Simons, Restorative Justice is the kind of nonprofit organization or governmental program that PIIE students seek for their internships. While four students per year have found summer internships through PIIE, Simons wants to ratchet up the program to serve more students and nonprofits, and even to provide year-long internships. This will involve participation by alumni to offer internships to students (see sidebar).

Simons says this career-seeking experience can be invaluable for students graduating in arts and sciences, for whom “it can often be hard to get your foot in the door. Internships more and more are becoming the key to getting jobs.”

There were three other PIIE interns last summer. Senior humanities and English major **Chelsea Bridges** worked



Casey A. Cass

Ramón de Jesús Rodríguez works at his Public Interest Internship Experience summer position with CU's Restorative Justice program. The pins in the map represent all of their quasi-judicial cases last summer, which are concentrated in densely student-populated areas of Boulder.

at Sage Community Partnership's Polaris House transitional living program for women. Ethnic Studies senior **Anthony Ciocco** of the Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole Nations worked with the Indigenous Training and Resource Council in Oklahoma doing documentaries, literature programs and a Mvskoke Ponvkv (Muscogee language) immersion camp. Finally, senior anthropology and international affairs major **Amy Vreeland** was at Greenhouse Scholars, which provides scholarships and other assistance, such as mentors and professional opportunities, to high-achieving, under-resourced college-bound students. Vreeland accepted an offer of a full-time position there this fall.

Meanwhile, Rodríguez says he continues to work as a case manager at Restorative Justice, preparing the participants who have agreed to go through the process for their meeting, lining up community service placements and meeting with facilitators. Restorative Justice has a huge caseload of offenders, 150-400 a year, so it's a stressful job — they're overwhelmingly CU students involved in brawls, minor theft, nuisance

and noise violations. The organization convenes a community board to meet with the offenders and victims.

Still, Rodríguez says it's worth the stress.

"It's great to get paid for work I was already committed to," he says.

The PIIE website is <http://careerservices.colorado.edu/student.cs?piie>About>.

Marc Killinger has been assistant editor of the Coloradan twice since 1995. He got involved with journalism through his involvement with nonprofit organizations, so he was excited to do this story.

CU PIIE needs you! The CU-Boulder Public Interest Internship Experience Program (CU PIIE) is looking for quality summer internship sites in Colorado private nonprofit 501(C)(3) and government organizations. If you would like the superior services of high-achieving CU students deeply committed to civic engagement and can provide a meaningful, well-organized internship that contributes significantly to your organization, please contact Lisa Lovett, Career Services internship coordinator, at lisa.lovett@colorado.edu.