



the Collage

Kutztown University's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Dec. 2017

Student highlight

Verenice Cervantes is a first-generation student looking to inspire minority students to seek opportunities available to them. Her plan of action? To lead by example.

Since first stepping on campus, Cervantes knew she wanted to become a Kutztown University student. She saw the opportunity that a medium-sized campus with dedicated professors presents for ambitious students who wish to stand out from the crowd. And like many students, she came to the university with a lengthy to-do list of goals, eager to begin checking them off.

Now in her junior year, it's evident she hasn't wasted any time on her academic and professional journeys, she's even managed to add a few more things to her list, such as another major.

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Through her business courses, Cervantes gained insight into many career opportunities. However, an avenue she hadn't considered was combining a part of her cultural identity with her workplace aspirations.

"I took my first Spanish class and I fell in love with my professor—with the program. I asked my boss for guidance as to whether or not I should do the



Verenice Cervantes | Spanish Business Administration

Spanish major. She spoke to me about the opportunities that I would have combining a Business major and a Spanish major.

After adding Spanish as a second major, Cervantes studied abroad for five weeks in Valladolid, Spain, and began tutoring as a Modern Language Studies tutor for Spanish.

In Spain, Cervantes was fascinated to learn that the culture was different in each place she visited. At KU, she works with non-native speaking students of Spanish. It's here where her own history and what she learned through traveling informs how she helps fellow students to learn both informal and professional rhetoric in Spanish.

She is directly transferring knowledge gained from the classroom and the opportunities she's had around campus into a skill set she will soon employ in the workforce. One example she cites, is being a tour guide, where her daily responsibilities of meeting incoming first-year students and providing them with information, mirrors future workplace tasks such as recruiting, giving presentations and closing deals.

Cervantes' growing knowledge and influence as a successful minority student, has also allowed for her to reach out to local youth in Reading, PA, through Big Brothers Big Sisters.

"I connected with so many students and I [realized], 'That was me, when I was young.' And in having this interaction with them—talking with them about things they can achieve when they get older, a different life they can have, and spending time with them—shows that someone really does care about them, means the world."

For 'Star Student' Cervantes, success begins with knowing your own self-worth and never settling for less than who you are—it's having an unflinching dedication to your work no matter how hard the task may seem and the motivation to press on—and remaining optimistic in the face of adversity.

"Whether I win or lose, I will always be [my personal] best, because visualizing my success [emboldens] me to take risks. In a world that is constantly changing, the biggest risk is not taking any.

Faculty highlight

Early in her career, Dr. Yasoda Sharma worked as a Social Welfare Executive for the B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, a health sciences university located deep in the foothills of the Lower Himalayan Range of Nepal. As one of the managers of the Social Welfare Department, Sharma was in charge of the free services provided by the hospital and was tasked with assessing whether or not people would qualify for the institute's free treatments. An incident occurred there that proved to be a catalyst in Sharma's career.

"I came across a very sad incident wherein a person was diagnosed with HIV... and in third world countries, you do not have much awareness regarding diseases such as HIV/AIDS. So, this person went home and killed his two-year-old and then himself. And me, being a social worker [thought]... if only this person had talked to me, maybe I could have stopped him from taking such a drastic step."

Sharma responded to the incident by appealing to the hospital's administration regarding the importance of establishing voluntary counseling and testing centers for clients diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Since the resources were limited, a grant

to the World Health Organization was written—and after nearly three years, the institute received funding.

"The inflow of patients was amazing... And as they would come in for the pre-test and post-test counseling, that's when I realized many of the women who were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and many women who were the spouse of a person diagnosed, were actually victims of domestic violence." She then decided to pursue her Ph.D. in that area and moved from India to Texas to study at the University of Texas at Arlington.

"I did my research in the Dallas/Fort Worth area where I collected the data from women who were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and women went through the same sort of stigma and victimization in the U.S.... Our society is structured in such a way wherein we promote patriarchy, where we inculcate the feeling amongst the younger generation that males are superior to females."

In the classroom, Sharma recognizes that the future of society rests in the hands of the young men and women she teaches every day. She creates a supportive learning environment, and equips students with the necessary skills and tools for sound, ethical decision-making. One of the ways Sharma accomplishes this is by promoting discussions about sensitive issues such as institutional oppression, the causes of poverty and gender-based violence.



Dr. Yasoda Sharma | Social Work

"What's exciting is that we are able to fulfill our mission of enhancing the societal condition where diversity is accepted and celebrated. And violence against women in all its forms must end, and especially, violence against those women with HIV/AIDS." Empowering women means empowering all of society. In working toward enfranchising women, we come closer to achieving widespread equality for all.

Dr. Yasoda Sharma was recently tenured and promoted to Associate Professor of Social Work. She is an elected board member and Chair of the Fundraising Committee for Family Promise of Warren County, Vice Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, Capstone reader for Kutztown University Master's students of Social Work and a Dissertation Committee Chair for the Kutztown/Millersville DSW student.

Critical Issues Forum

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences invited Dr. Ron W. Manderscheid, Executive Director of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors & National Association for Rural Mental Health, to campus for the Critical Issues Forum on November 2nd, 2017. His presentation, "Changes and Constants in National Behavioral Health," engaged community members as well as students and faculty. Student poster presentations, poetry, and artwork concerning mental health were on display during the reception.



Dr. Manderscheid speaks to students in Boehm.