Latinas among first doctoral graduates of School of Nursing

WHEN Lisa Martinez earned her doctorate in 2014, she realized a personal dream and became the first Latina graduate of the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis. One year later, Rocio Hernandez followed in her footsteps and was awarded the Excellence in Leadership Development Award during a graduation celebration.

“Professionally, the School of Nursing experience enabled me to look at my leadership roles in creative ways and examine how to best serve as a bridge between communities and institutions,” said Hernandez, a marriage and family therapist who, in addition to her professional practice, has worked with international consulates for binational health week for the past 15 years. “As a Latina, I appreciated that our voices were welcome at the school’s leadership table and that I had an opportunity to share my research with national policy makers.”

Hernandez and Martinez represent both 14 percent of the School of Nursing’s doctoral graduates and how leadership potential, when nurtured, furthers both the aspirations of an individual and impact on an entire population of people.

“The School of Nursing focuses on interdisciplinary learning, innovation and teamwork,” added Martinez, who works as a postdoctoral scholar for Ninos Sanos, Familia Sana furthering her dissertation work on health disparities, childhood obesity and how to prevent chronic diseases in California’s Central Valley. “This study was such an integral part of my education because it focused on a community-based approach to create out-of-the-box solutions.”

UC Davis nursing professor studies well-being of Latina caregivers

ESTER CAROLINA APESOA-VARANO, an assistant professor at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis, leads a study on Latina caregivers. A sociologist dedicated to advancing health for older people, she received $200,000 for her “Social Capital and Latina Caregiver Well-Being Study.” The project assesses the challenge of mental health needs of Latina caregivers of families with dementia.

“I’ve always been fascinated by the care-versus-cure conundrum,” she explained. “The care that nurses and others provide so the cure can happen is essentially invisible, yet without it, health delivery is incomplete.”

Apesoa-Varano published her first book, Conflicted Health Care: Professionalism and Caring in an Urban Hospital. Her background and research methods add a unique perspective to interprofessional education at the School of Nursing.

Latino Aging Research Resource Center

TO ADVANCE HEALTH and well-being of older Latinos and close gaps in care, the Latino Aging Research Resource Center focuses on older Latinos. The center is one of seven such minority resource centers funded by the National Institute on Aging and the only one focused on aging Latino cognitive health.

School of Nursing Founding Dean Heather M. Young serves as co-director. “We hope to entice young Latino scientists to add their expertise, to support them in their research and build capacity for the future,” Young said.
Embracing diversity in the classroom, representing the population

Hispanics constitute the largest segment of the population in California. This population is expected to triple by the year 2050 — a quarter of the total U.S. population — yet only 3 percent of the nation’s registered nurses are Hispanic. At the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis, leaders recognize a strong connection between a culturally diverse nursing workforce and the ability to provide quality, culturally competent care.

Faculty at the School of Nursing seek to transform health care through nursing education, leadership and research in partnership with the communities they serve. A cornerstone of the school’s vision is to teach culturally appropriate approaches to care and involve communities to design and conduct relevant research.

“There is an urgent need for California and the nation’s health care providers to have a workforce of culturally competent providers who can help address health inequities in underserved communities,” said Heather M. Young, associate vice chancellor for diversity, equity and inclusion. “The need to attract diverse nursing graduate students is paralleled by the need to recruit more faculty from minority populations.”

The nation’s health professions have not kept pace with changing demographics prompting disparities in health access and outcomes. As one of the only two nursing school members of the Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools, the UC Davis School of Nursing strives to achieve equitable health and well-being for the Hispanic community by recruiting and graduating health leaders and researchers who mirror the population of those receiving care.

“It is imperative that we be proactive in educating a future workforce that is both skilled and culturally responsive to and respectful of the community we serve,” said UC Davis Chancellor Linda P.B. Katehi.

Katehi calls on all schools within UC Davis to “reflect a rich tapestry of diverse perspectives” in order to become a University of the 21st Century. The School of Nursing is committed to a more diverse health care workforce to improve quality and access to care and to narrow racial and ethnic health disparities, yet more must be done before adequate representation becomes a reality. Since people respond to providers who understand their culture, nursing schools must prepare culturally competent providers who can improve individual outcomes and mirror the communities they serve.

Mary Lou de Leon Siantz, professor at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis, teaches and mentors students in leadership and policy, and conducts research in population health partnering with rural Latino agricultural communities. She is internationally recognized for her interdisciplinary efforts to prepare health professionals in leadership and respected for her research. The oldest of six children and daughter of a Latina immigrant, de Leon Siantz’s current research focuses on the well-being of Hispanic immigrant adolescents and identifying what education will inform better outcomes and produce healthy people.

In 2013, de Leon Siantz was appointed director of the Center for Advancing Multicultural Perspectives on Science (CAMPOS), a center that builds on Chancellor Linda Katehi’s vision to transform university culture and practices around recruitment, retention and promotion of women, especially Latinas, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. She is co-director of the Mentorship Core for the UC Davis Latino Research Resource Center (LARRC), one of seven national Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research. She is also an affiliated faculty member of the Migration and Health Research Center, dedicated to conducting research to improve the health of migrant populations in California and around the globe.