

The immigrant experience

Edelmira Segovia guides students to UNCW

by Veronica Gonzalez



When UNCW students walk into her office frustrated about their grades, Edelmira Segovia fishes her freshman transcript out of her desk.

After all, she wasn't exactly a straight-A student her first year at UNCW either. But that's OK, she tells them.

"Mine wasn't as pretty as I wish it were," she says, flipping through files in search of the transcript.

As director of the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Centro Hispano, the 35-year-old Segovia leads a center where any of the university's 600-some Hispanic students have a hub to chat about grades, get their essays edited, or find the motivation to maneuver through college – which

for many is a milestone in their families.

The ultimate goal of the center is not only to boost the number of Hispanics applying to UNCW, but to beef up the number of graduates.

For the public, Segovia serves as a valuable source of information on the Hispanic community.

From Peru to Pender County

Segovia's experiences as an immigrant from Lima, Peru and as the first in her family to go to college boost her credibility with students who find themselves in similar territory.

"The students can relate to me," says Segovia, who currently is working on her

Students relate to her immigrant past, says UNCW's Centro Hispano Director Edelmira Segovia. She emigrated from Peru at age 13 and is the first in her family to go to college.

photo by Amy Conry Davis

doctorate in education from UNCW. “I can relate to them. We share similar cultural backgrounds. We have a similar immigrant experience.”

Segovia’s family escaped the violence of Peru’s Shining Path terrorist group by moving to Pender County when she was 13.

After graduating from Pender High School, where she met her husband, she earned her bachelor’s from UNCW and a master’s at Appalachian State University.

Segovia then became a teacher and spent eight years in the Pender County school system working with students whose first language was Spanish.

Her last three years there, she was the lead English as a Second Language director and coordinator of the Migrant Program for the school system.

Guiding kids to college

While working for the school system, Segovia focused on preparing students for college, making sure they enrolled in

the right courses and took their SATs. She even got UNCW to visit the schools and speak to students.

“I was the bridge between the Pender County schools and the college,” she says.


When the position at the university opened up, she jumped at the chance to lead Centro Hispano, with encouragement from her mentors.

In November, Segovia completed a year as director.

“I felt if I was in the organization [UNCW], I could do a lot more,” she says. “I could actually pull them here and have strategies in place to make it a smooth transition.”

Segovia says she enjoys making the center a welcoming place for students.

“The biggest treasure in coming here has been following my former elementary and middle school students through college,” she says. “These students face hardships beyond our comprehension, and sometimes they can be so successful if they have the right resources.” ♦



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