HONORED ALUMNA OPENS DOORS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Nohemy Ornelas (M.A., Education, 2007) discovered her passion for helping students early in her career. This dedication to others, especially underrepresented students, earned Ornelas the College of Science and Mathematics Honored Alumna award for 2016.

Ornelas first made an impact on students’ lives as a financial aid specialist and counseling assistant at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, where she now serves as associate superintendent and vice president of student services. After earning her master’s degree at Cal Poly, she worked at Berkeley City College and Cuesta College, including two years as dean of student services, before returning to Allan Hancock in her current position.

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For Ornelas, advocating for student success is the most rewarding part of her job. Her role provides many opportunities to do just that by overseeing a number of support services, programs and departments, and managing several state and federal grants.

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As a member of Cal Poly’s Counseling and Guidance Program’s advisory board, Ornelas helps the faculty develop a cutting-edge curriculum. Her contributions to the counseling internship program are part of what makes Cal Poly’s degree stand out among others in the field.

She also provides one-on-one mentorship for students and contributes to increasing the diversity of the program’s applicants.

“Nohemy has been a key player in helping us recruit and retain individuals from diverse backgrounds. She’s made a big impact on our ability to attract outstanding Latino and Latina students,” said Steve Kane, the program’s coordinator.

Cal Poly biologist Jennifer O’Leary was awarded a prestigious Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation, one of only five worldwide. O’Leary is using her $150,000 award to expand a program that combines science with policy in the management of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Western Indian Ocean.

“I am extremely honored to receive the Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation,” said O’Leary, who is a California Sea Grant extension specialist at Cal Poly’s Center for Coastal Marine Sciences. “The award will allow me to continue my work in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean helping marine managers use science to assess MPA status and take proactive conservation action.”

O’Leary is co-director of the Science for Active Management Program in East Africa, which helps fishing communities and managers of MPAs apply science to marine conservation efforts. The program has been adopted nationwide in Kenya, is expanding nationally in Tanzania and the Seychelles, and has been used to train MPA managers from eight African nations. With her Pew fellowship, O’Leary will expand the program to other parts of the Western Indian Ocean and evaluate any resulting changes to social and ecological systems.