

## NEWSLETTER

# Office of First Generation & Peer Mentoring Programs

---

To say that this academic year has been different or difficult is an understatement, and yet we are here. We faced the ebbs and flows of something unimaginable, we have been tested emotionally, physically, and spiritually, which in many ways led the way for self-discovery, flexibility, accountability, resiliency, reliability, authenticity, and community.

Our students learned to learn in different ways, our faculty learned to teach in different ways, and our administration and staff learned to support all the moving pieces in multiple ways. I am proud to be a member of this community. Every single student, professor and staff member has played a role in maintaining a sense of community, a sense of belonging. We became more compassionate, we remembered to check-in, we became more generous with each other. Despite the uncertainty, and the challenges, there has been so much growth and love.

I hope that we keep this new found appreciation for each other close to our hearts as we return to campus. I hope that we can keep those things that helped us remain centered through the rest of our journey at La Verne and elsewhere. May we always remember what helped us through these moments, may we always remember how strong we are, and how important community is.

I am excited to return to campus and look forward to seeing our students, faculty and staff!

And, congratulations to all the students graduating this year! YOU MADE IT!

In Community,

-Aracely Torres

Director; Title III Grant and First Generation & Peer Mentoring Programs

# Office of First Generation & Peer Mentoring Programs

---

I want to begin by saying how proud our office is of everyone; students, staff, faculty and the administration. This has been a difficult academic year, and everyone did their best under the circumstances we were in. The time we have spent off campus, proved that quarantine can't break community. It was amazing to see so many departments come together during collaborations, faculty and staff partnering for a better student experience, and programs intentionally created to continue to create community in a virtual setting. I look forward to the day we are all on campus again; seeing everyone in the Campus Center, attending events, and being surrounded by all the beautiful individuals that make La Verne so wonderful! Great work this year Leo family, see you all soon!

*-Cassie Godinez, STEM Pathway Peer Mentoring Coordinator*

Reflecting on this past year feels surreal. Part of me feels like "did that really happen?" as I think of all the challenges that came with this past year. However, as I take time to stop and reflect I also see the many things for which I am grateful for. At the top of that list for me is my support system. All the family, friends and colleagues that were there supporting me through all the ups and downs. As I think of our students and Leo community I am grateful I get to work with people full of grit and perseverance. Our community has left me in awe as I look at how our students showed up and did the work even in the midst of everything. I am encouraged and inspired by the folx I get to work with. Folx that gave their best to make sure students still had the resources needed, opportunities to experience college life and most importantly were present for students even when dealing with their own life things. It was definitely a strange and weird year but I am so proud of where we are, what we have learned and how we can move forward to improve upon that in the year to come. As we wrap up this year I encourage you to take the time and also reflect on this past year. What did you learn? What are you grateful for? What are you taking with you into the next year?

*-Tiffany De Leon, Program Coordinator*

# Faculty Spotlight

## Kimberly White-Smith



### WHAT SCHOOLS DID YOU ATTEND?

University of California at Berkeley, BA, Psychology  
Teachers College, Columbia University, MA Curriculum and Instruction  
University of Southern California, Doctor of Education in Learning & Instruction

### WHAT DEPARTMENT DO YOU WORK IN?

LaFetra College of Education, Dean and Professor

**FAVORITE SONG?** Wrath of my Madness by Queen Latifah

**RANDOM FACT:** I have a certificate to teach yoga and can do a headstand.

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO FOR FUN?

I love dancing. I am not a good dancer, but that doesn't stop me from experiencing joy when I do it!

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE FIRST GEN STUDENTS?

As we collectively navigate the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic and witnessing the ongoing violence against communities of color and trans folks, I know that many students might be feeling numb or disconnected from their educational experiences. I want to share some strategies I incorporated as a college student and still utilize to maintain my mental and physical health.


In both the family I grew up in and my biological family, I am the first to graduate from college. I experienced some trauma prior to attending college that impacted my first year of school. I felt like I was in a daze. I was not fully in my body and certainly did not feel like I had control of my educational and life experiences.

It wasn't until I intentionally sought to heal my emotional wounds and prioritized my well-being that I turned that feeling of disconnectedness around for myself. I sought mentorship, therapy, and nurturing solid friendships to attend to my emotional needs. I also focused on my physical health by changing my eating habits and moving my body (walking, dancing, and exercising). This focus on my emotional and physical health has been the blueprint I have followed to support my personal and academic happiness.

## NEWSLETTER

# Peer Mentors Senior Recognition

---

A huge congratulations to our graduating seniors! Thank you for your contribution to our office and students. We are so proud of you and you will be missed.  
Yay you did it!!! 

## Itzia Chavez

Major: Psychology

Plans After College: Pursuing an MBA with a concentration in Leadership from CGU

Best Memory in First Gen: In-person monthly meetings, with lunch and interactions with all students.



## Marisela Gutierrez

Major: Kinesiology with a Concentration in Health & Human Performance

Plans After College: After college, I plan to continue my observation hours in my physical therapy aide job. I am currently at 400 hrs. I will also take the GRE and apply to graduate programs opening up in July!

Best Memory in First Gen: The best memory from the program was when I participated in the Mitch Matthews workshop called "Dream.Think.Do", hosted by the first gen program on campus. I felt very inspired and happy to see all the participants feel empowered to achieve their goals in life.

## NEWSLETTER

# Peer Mentors Senior Recognition

---

## Sarah Morales



Major: Social Science

Plans After College: Immediately after, during summer, I am participating in a program from the California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce called Creating a Path Success (CAPS), which will hopefully give me further career skills and experience, and connect me with potential employers. Additionally I will begin studying for the GRE and LSAT, make final plans for applying to graduate and law schools, and look into possible internships. If a job finds me first, I may spend a few years in the work field before jumping back into education.

Best Memory in First Gen: The best memories from being in the program would have to be when I would be able to create really deep connections with some of my mentees, our meetings were always wonderful and fulfilling. They pushed me to be a better version of myself, and they were so sweet and funny that it was such pleasure to be able to be their mentor. I also really enjoyed the weekly Friday meetings; they were always a good learning opportunity or a nice way to start to wind down for the weekend. Overall, everything was pretty great!

## Continued Senior Peer Mentors

---

### Amanda Lam

Major: Computer  
Science and Criminology

### Alexis Epps

Major: Biology

### Carla Espinosa

Major: History  
Political Science Minor

### Alexzandra Jimenez

Major: Chemistry

## NEWSLETTER

# Resource Corner

---

This might be our last newsletter of the year but we are not going anywhere. We want to remind our community that like many offices on campus, we are still here even during summer. Please feel free to contact us during the summer months for any questions or support you may need. Please see the last page of this newsletter for our complete contact information.

Here are also friendly reminders of great resources for on and off campus resources and support.

- [Well Being Resources](#)
- [Spiritual Resources](#)
- [Physical Resources](#)
- [Off Campus Resources](#)



NEWSLETTER

# Office of First Generation & Peer Mentoring Programs

---

For general questions email us at [firstgen@laverne.edu](mailto:firstgen@laverne.edu)  
For more specific questions about our office feel free to email our staff!



Aracely Torres

Director; Title III Grant and First Generation & Peer Mentoring Programs  
[atorres3@laverne.edu](mailto:atorres3@laverne.edu)



Cassie Godinez

STEM Pathway Peer Mentoring Coordinator  
[cgodinez@laverne.edu](mailto:cgodinez@laverne.edu)



Tiffany De Leon

Program Coordinator  
[tdeleon@laverne.edu](mailto:tdeleon@laverne.edu)

University of  
**La Verne**

Office of First Generation  
and Peer Mentoring Programs