

# CAREER PATHS

## THE IMPACT OF MENTORING

*"I have found that people of color who advance the farthest all share one characteristic – a strong network of mentors and corporate sponsors who nurtured their professional development."*

~ David Thomas, PhD, "The Truth about Mentoring Minorities,"  
Harvard Business Review, April 2001

### An Interview with Community Relations Council Director Sarah Nuñez



Sarah Nunez Zaire Kacz Photography

Each month the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Department asks a local person to share his or her experience of working with a mentor and mentoring others as well as acting as a sponsor and advocate. It is hoped that readers will increase their efforts to find a mentor as well as be mentors to others.

This month's interview features Sarah Nuñez, Executive Director of the Asheville Buncombe Community Relations Council, who shares the impact mentoring has had on her career and how she has mentored others.

#### **What do you like best about your job?**

At the Asheville Buncombe Community Relations Council (ABCRC), my days are totally different. One day I may be on a day trip across North Carolina, another I'll be in meetings or sitting at my desk with reports

and grants the entire day. I like that variety. I interface with a lot of people.

#### **Who helped you in achieve success?**

My supervisor at Western Carolina University (WCU), Mark Anderson, helped me to see my potential and gave me space to let my talents bloom and flourish.



Sarah Nuñez (left) with students at the Latinos and Access to Higher Education Forum.

Instead of micro-managing, he'd say, "OK, Sarah, go do it and let's see what happens." I could do so much more than I originally thought.

*What inspires me to be there for others is when they need a helping hand and a spiritual pick-me-up.*

#### **Can you describe a time when a mentor helped you make an important professional decision?**

At UNC Asheville, I helped found the first Latino-led student organization. I met with Alice Weldon, who said, "I'll do anything to help you further this mission." That pushed me and other students to take action. That helped us figure out how to navigate the university system and be a group to advocate for immigrant rights both on campus and in the community. It was a win-win when we realized that we weren't alone.

#### **Mentoring is a two-way street. Whom have you opened doors for to improve their professional and personal well-being?**

When I was at WCU, I worked with 250 students a year. At least 10 of these students I became close to, and over the years have given them advice on how to apply to college and get scholarships. Even though I am not in that position anymore, I still keep in touch with those students. This past year-and-a-half at ABCRC, I have worked with nine college interns who have all done an awesome job here. I tell them about job openings or write a letter of recommendation to help them.

I am such a strong believer in mentoring and sponsorship. I'll do it for anyone who calls. The time of life when I've needed mentoring the most, I didn't have it. What inspires me to be there for others is when they need a helping hand and a spiritual pick-me-up. I can tell when they need an ear to listen to or when they don't know who to trust or which way to go in life.

Finding a supportive network is a critical step towards getting a job and promotion. Having been in Asheville for 15 years, I know a lot of people and want to share that. That knowledge is not just for me, it is for everybody.

**– FIND A MENTOR –  
BE A MENTOR TO OTHERS**



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†Employment ads are posted on Thursday morning and updated at midnight on Wednesday, two weeks after the posting date.