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Professor’s educational journey inspires others

Sacramento State Professor Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner is the consummate success story.

As a young girl, she picked tomatoes and cut apricots in the fields of California alongside her migrant-worker parents. Today, she does a far different kind of fieldwork as graduate coordinator and qualitative researcher for Sac State’s Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program.

Turner recently became president-elect of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). Dedicated to higher education as a field of study, ASHE is committed to diversity. It promotes collaboration among its members and others engaged in the study of higher education through research, conferences and publications, including its highly regarded journal, The Review of Higher Education.

Turner’s passion is student access and equity in higher education. “I was raised on farm labor camps in California,” she says. “Though my parents’ opportunities were limited, they valued education and made many sacrifices for me to pursue educational opportunities.”

Her educational journey began at an elementary school in Hollister and proceeded to UC Davis, Kent State University, Kent Ohio, Stanford University (where she was named a Distinguished Alumni Scholar), the University of Minnesota, Arizona State University and, finally, Sac State in 2009.

“It’s good to be back home where I began,” she says, “and to be part of a program that is new and growing.”

Her extensive background includes serving as a counselor, a learning development specialist, a classroom instructor and a graduate assistant for academic affairs for minority students. Her résumé also includes being a research coordinator and interim dean for research.

Turner’s mother was determined that she make the most of her potential, which helps explain her unwavering focus on community college students making the successful academic transition to four-year colleges and universities. She is no less
committed to faculty diversity and has written extensively on the subject. And she advocates a pathway to college presidencies for women of color.

   Turner characterizes her rewarding educational journey as collaborative. Success, she contends, stems from “the support of others willing to travel with you providing encouragement along each step.”

   Turner’s will to see students succeed motivates her to continue on that path, and she remains an inspiration to her classes and colleagues alike.

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