New institute leader seeks to increase student success

Professor Andrea Venezia has been named executive director of Sacramento State’s Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP).

IHELP’s mission is to improve students’ readiness for, and success in, postsecondary education. Focusing on educational institutions that serve diverse populations, IHELP has played a large role in supporting student success in community colleges in California and elsewhere. Venezia is bringing in a focus on the transition between high school and college for traditionally underserved students in high school as well.

Venezia has extensive experience in research, policy development and implementation, public speaking and writing. Her main professional interest is in access to postsecondary readiness and success for traditionally underserved students, about which she has published a wide variety of policy reports, book chapters, journal articles and other materials. She focuses on the dissemination of applied research to ensure its accessibility for practitioners and policymakers.

A native Californian, Venezia grew up in Davis, earned her bachelor’s degree in English literature at Pomona College, her master’s in administration and policy analysis in higher education at Stanford, and a doctorate in public policy from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to coming to Sac State, she spent more than 20 years working in applied research and policy positions, including work at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Stanford’s Institute for Higher Education Research, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and WestEd in San Francisco.

The Sac State connection is hereditary: Her father was a criminal justice professor at the University from 1975 to 1996, and she is pleased to follow in his footsteps.

“Coming to Sac State means that I can work directly with students by teaching, mentoring, advising with theses and dissertations, and supervising their research,” she says. “IHELP will provide at least two graduate assistantships each year, and I get to stay involved in macro policy (state and federal) and micro policy (regional and local). It’s the best of all worlds for me.”

She is bullish on IHELP’s future. “We’ve raised more than $2.5 million during the past year, so IHELP is on great financial footing,” she says. “We have support from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Kresge Foundation, the California Education Policy Fund (through the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and the College Access Foundation.”

IHELP values its connections to the campus and currently is the evaluator for the CSU Chancellor’s Office’s grant to Sac State’s DEGREES program.

Venezia seems ideally positioned to run IHELP at a pivotal time when high schools and postsecondary institutions are under close scrutiny about their respective missions. She
considers it “an honor to become the executive director of IHELP.” She believes this is a time of great experimentation as both K-12 schools and postsecondary education institutions seek new ways to support success for underserved students.

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Alan Miller