

A Message from the Director



As we look back on our spring semester, we will undoubtedly remember the challenges we all had to face during the COV-19 crisis, but, most importantly, we will remember how we moved forward to support, honor and celebrate our students.

Considering the challenging times we are now living through, Northeastern has done everything it can to provide students with the support they need, including offering students an emergency fund and food pantry, online video teletherapy, and remote tutoring and advising. Please feel free to email the El Centro team at elcentro@neu.edu, if you have any questions about the University's support services.

Sadly, because of the crisis, Northeastern had to cancel its spring commencement on May 4. However, we are definitely planning to celebrate our spring graduates when it is safe to do so later this year. In the meantime, many of us, throughout the University, have turned to social media to honor our students with pictures and video clips.

In this newsletter, we'd like to highlight the achievements of four of our Spring 2020 graduating seniors, all of whom are part of the El Centro team:

Cynthia Ceron, *Office Support Associate*, plans to realize her dream of helping students with her masters degree in Higher Education.

Jonathan Davila, *Student Worker*, will become a Chicago Police Detective once he earns his degree in Justice Studies and Criminology.

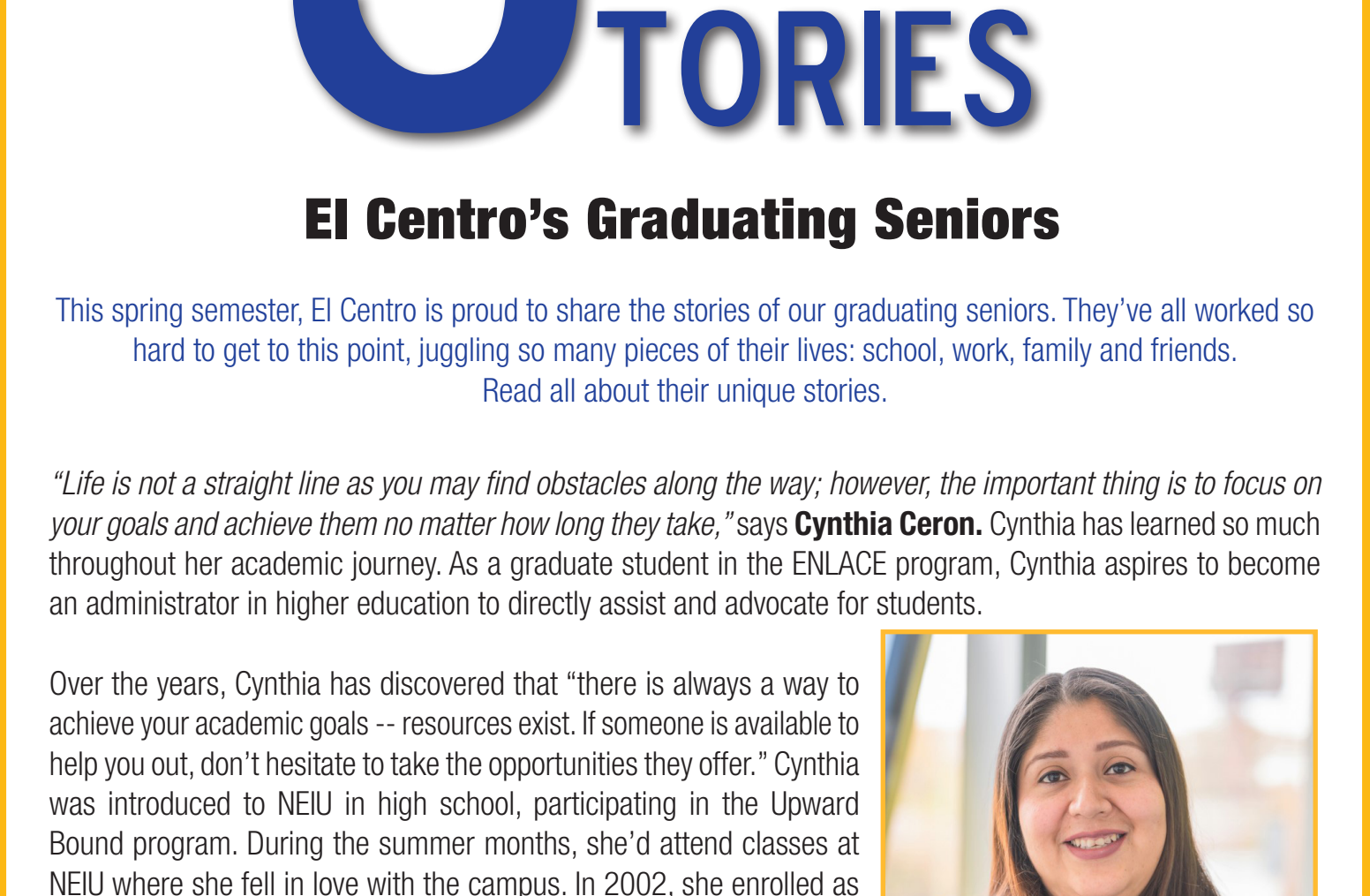
Xiomara Ramirez, *Student Worker*, aspires to nurture her own classroom full of young children once she receives her degree in Early Childhood Education.

Peter Gutierrez, *Student Worker*, will apply his talents in Social Work to help others.

Please join me in honoring our students and their outstanding achievements. During these challenging times, we have so much to cherish and even more for which to be thankful. Congratulations to all our students on their well-deserved successes!

Finally, I want to thank the El Centro team -- faculty, staff and student workers -- for their support and strength. It hasn't been easy transitioning to this new normal, but . . . ***This is Northeastern. We're in this together. Keep striving, stay focused, and we'll succeed together.***

Stay well and safe!
Maria Luna-Duarte, Ph.D.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

El Centro's Graduating Seniors

This spring semester, El Centro is proud to share the stories of our graduating seniors. They've all worked so hard to get to this point, juggling so many pieces of their lives: school, work, family and friends.

[Read all about their unique stories.](#)

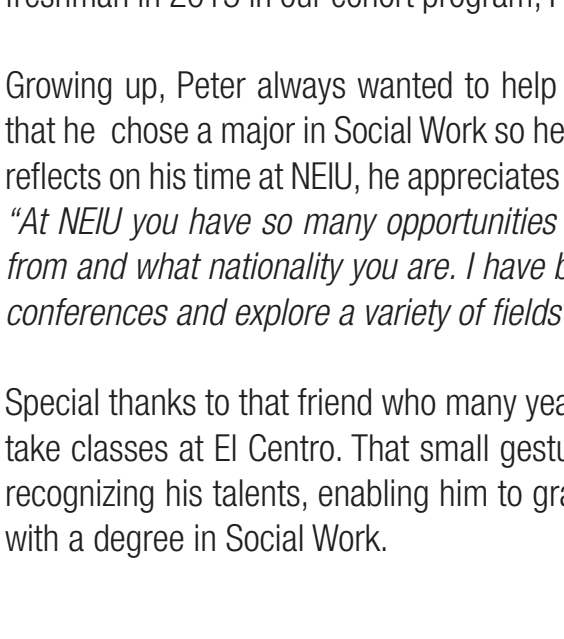
"Life is not a straight line as you may find obstacles along the way; however, the important thing is to focus on your goals and achieve them no matter how long they take," says **Cynthia Ceron**. Cynthia has learned so much throughout her academic journey. As a graduate student in the ENLACE program, Cynthia aspires to become an administrator in higher education to directly assist and advocate for students.

Over the years, Cynthia has discovered that "there is always a way to achieve your academic goals -- resources exist. If someone is available to help you out, don't hesitate to take the opportunities they offer." Cynthia was introduced to NEIU in high school, participating in the Upward Bound program. During the summer months, she'd attend classes at NEIU where she fell in love with the campus. In 2002, she enrolled as a freshman. Although she couldn't continue her education at the time, she would eventually find her way back to NEIU.

In Fall 2014, she began working at El Centro, but furthering her education was always on her mind. In 2017, Cynthia enrolled in NEIU's Masters in Higher Education program. In Spring 2020, Cynthia graduated, realizing her dream of becoming an agent of change.

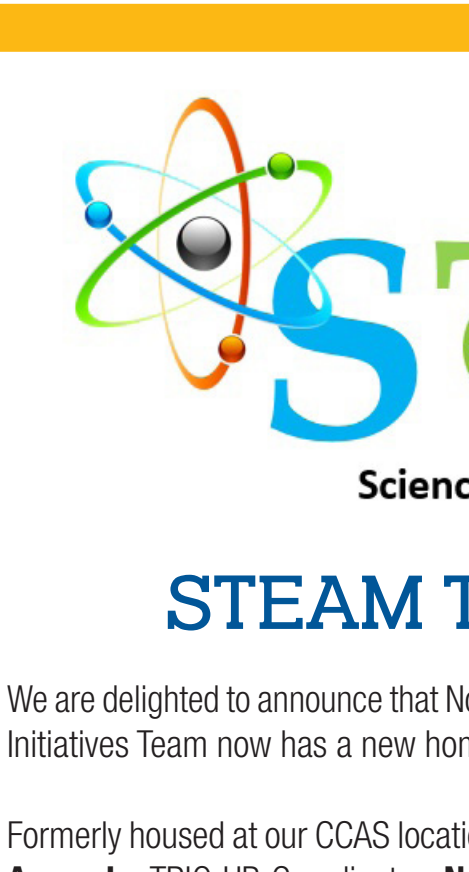


Having majored in Justice Studies and minored in Criminology, **Jonathan Davila** looks forward to joining the Chicago Police Department where he plans to become a Police Detective. Jonathan chose his major because he aspires to be an exceptional police officer. He strongly believes that the education he received at Northeastern will help him better serve the communities of Chicago.



For most of his years at Northeastern, Jonathan was part of the El Centro team. As a Student Worker, he performed various tasks, specifically assisting with El Centro's programming needs.

Jonathan has come a long way since 2015 when he first walked through El Centro's doors as a freshman in our cohort program. As he reflects on his achievements, he shares a piece of advice: *"Stay focused and don't worry about rushing to graduate. College is a marathon. Run at your own pace but make sure to finish."*



Xiomara Ramirez believes in the power of education. Inspired by her family's devotion to the field, Xiomara chose to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education. It is no surprise that Xiomara has such a strong passion for working with young children since, growing up, she admired her mother's work as the owner of a home daycare for nearly 30 years.

When Xiomara began her journey at Northeastern in 2015, she knew very well it would take a great deal of work and dedication to reach her academic goals. Having set her mind on teaching in the Chicago Public Schools, Xiomara sought out opportunities to gain experience as an educator. Among her accomplishments, Xiomara was accepted into the College of Arts and Sciences Education Program (CASEP) and, during her Junior year, was awarded the prestigious Golden Apple Scholarship.

As a Student Worker at El Centro and a graduating senior, Xiomara feels very grateful for all the resources Northeastern has provided. As Xiomara prepares herself for life after college, she reminds other students to *"begin with the end in mind."*

Fortunately for **Peter Gutierrez** and El Centro, Peter's friend convinced him to pursue his education at NEIU instead of enlisting in the military. Ever since, he has been an important part of the El Centro team. Starting as a freshman in 2015 in our cohort program, Peter soon became a Student Worker, assisting with special projects.

Growing up, Peter always wanted to help others. It's no wonder then that he chose a major in Social Work so he could help society. As Peter reflects on his time at NEIU, he appreciates all that he has been offered: *"At NEIU you have so many opportunities no matter where you come from and what nationality you are. I have been able to attend different conferences and explore a variety of fields and majors."*

Special thanks to that friend who many years ago encouraged Peter to take classes at El Centro. That small gesture put Peter on the path to recognizing his talents, enabling him to graduate this spring semester with a degree in Social Work.



Science Technology Engineering Art Math

STEAM Team Moves to El Centro

We are delighted to announce that Northeastern's STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) Initiatives Team now has a new home right here at El Centro.

Formerly housed at our CCAS location, the STEAM Team -- **Aaron Cortes**, Director of STEM Initiatives; **Bianca Acevedo**, TRIO UB Coordinator; **Nathalia Cardenas**, TRIO UBMS Coordinator; **Carmen Gallardo**, Folkloric and Parent Services Coordinator; and **Jesus Rodriguez**, Tutor Coordinator -- has been using their newfound space to plan enlightening initiatives.

According to Aaron, "The purpose of these initiatives is to provide low-income, first-generation, college-bound middle and high school students, who have academic needs, with opportunities to engage in high quality, rigorous academic experiences while developing their interpersonal skills."

Students enrolled in the program can participate in many innovative projects, including an after-school robotics team, college support sessions, and special events, such as Hour of Code, Girls that Make, Robotics Week, and STEAM Conferences.

In addition to helping students develop innovation, the program also helps them broaden their cultural awareness, providing the folkloric component in STEAM. Pictured below, students and team members celebrate after performing a Mexican folkloric dance at the 38th Annual Council for Opportunity in Education conference.

Welcome to El Centro, STEAM Team!



El Centro & Proyecto Pa'Lante Present at NEIU's Learn & Lead Symposium - Feb. 5

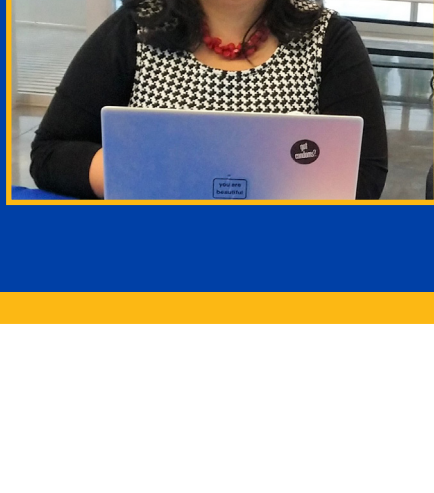
As a collective team, El Centro & Proyecto Pa'Lante shared their proven methods of racial equity, which provide a holistic relationship-building approach to enhance student learning, intercultural competencies, and leadership development for NEIU Latinx students.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday Celebration - Jan. 16

El Centro celebrated **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s** legacy and birthday by serving a delicious cake following a panel presentation by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association-Parent Mentors Program. Thanks to the Angelina Pedrosio Center and the MLK Planning Committee for helping us create this wonderful event.

Counseling & Health Services Are Back This Semester

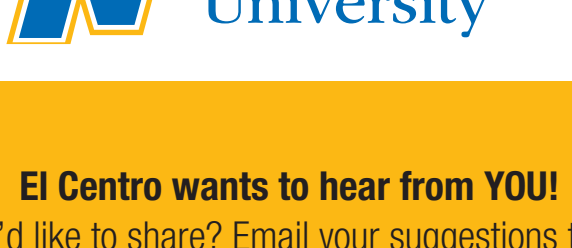


During the spring semester, counseling Services were offered at El Centro on Tuesdays 1:00 - 7:00 pm in the Welcome Center. Students can use counseling for a variety of reasons, including addressing issues they face with anxiety, depression, and relationships. Counseling Services are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL.

Dr. Michael McPartland (pictured above) provides counseling services for students at El Centro. Having received his Master's degree in Counseling Psychology and his doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Adler University, Dr. McPartland has worked in university counseling centers throughout Chicago and the Midwest and, for the past three years, has worked with students, faculty, and staff at Northeastern.



Health Services were also offered at El Centro during the spring semester. Students were able to stop by El Centro's main lobby from 2:00 - 5:00 pm on Wednesdays to meet with **Jennie Lasko**, one of NEIU's registered nurses. Students received health consultations, immunization reviews, first aid, and much more. Jennie is always happy to answer all your health-related questions.



El Centro wants to hear from YOU!

Do you have a story you'd like to share? Email your suggestions to m-crespo1@neu.edu.

The El Centro Newsletter is written and edited by **Mimi Crespo** and designed by **Fausto P. Ortiz**.