

SPRING 2021

EL CENTRO NEWSLETTER

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY



A Message from The Director



As we reach the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, El Centro continues to focus on supporting students, in part by highlighting their many achievements. In every issue of the El Centro Newsletter, our main goal is to showcase the extraordinary lives of our students.

With each student we interview, a pattern emerges: students pursue a college education at Northeastern, hoping it will lead to a better life. Many of our students are first-generation with parents who have immigrated to the U.S. from another country, and therefore do not have someone at home to guide them through the college experience. This is where student success programs like the El Centro freshman cohort are invaluable. To help students navigate college life, our team provides many resources, including success workshops, need-based and academic scholarships, and personalized one-on-one advising.

In this newsletter, as you read the student success stories of Susana Ortiz and Dania Saucedo, you'll notice many similarities between them. Despite their challenges, both students are determined to earn their degrees, securing a better future for themselves and their families. These are the stories that remind us how important it is to invest in our students.

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



When SUSANA ORTIZ joined the El Centro freshman cohort in 2014, she felt she had become part of something bigger: a community. Being a part of the NEIU community runs in Susana's family. When her mother took part in NEIU's Grow Your Own teacher program, classes were held at El Centro's previous location on Pulaski Road.

Throughout the years, Susana's parents have taught her to never give up on her dreams. This sage advice reminds Susana to keep going when she experiences challenges and setbacks. In 2017, though she took a much-needed break from school, she returned the following year, determined to finish her degree. As Susana explains, "My parents sacrificed so much to live in this country. I wanted to take full advantage of my resources and opportunities."

Now a senior majoring in Communications, Media and Theatre, Susana plans to pursue a master's degree in Higher Education. Inspired to study the performing arts after taking an Introduction to Theatre class with Professor Ellen O'Keefe, Susana says she loves "the community aspect of working in a theatre setting. Working as a social media and e-communications scholar for the CMT Department has allowed me a behind-the-scenes look at the many processes of creating and mounting a theatrical production."

As Susana looks back on her college experience at NEIU, she affectionately remembers her first year: "My favorite class was with Dr. Mitzi Ramos. There were maybe six of us in her Political Science class. It was a very relaxing and encouraging classroom environment." Susana also found support in the Summer Transition Program where she met new friends who were also first-generation and learned what it meant to be in a university setting.

Susana has learned many lessons along the way. She would advise students to take advantage of all the opportunities available. "You can do it! Get involved in activities like student clubs, the Pedroso Center, and Stage Center Theatre."



Calculating numbers and discovering results is what attracted **DANIA SAUCEDO** to the field of Finance. As an aspiring financial advisor, Dania looks forward to advising families and businesses, preventing them from financial hardship and instability.

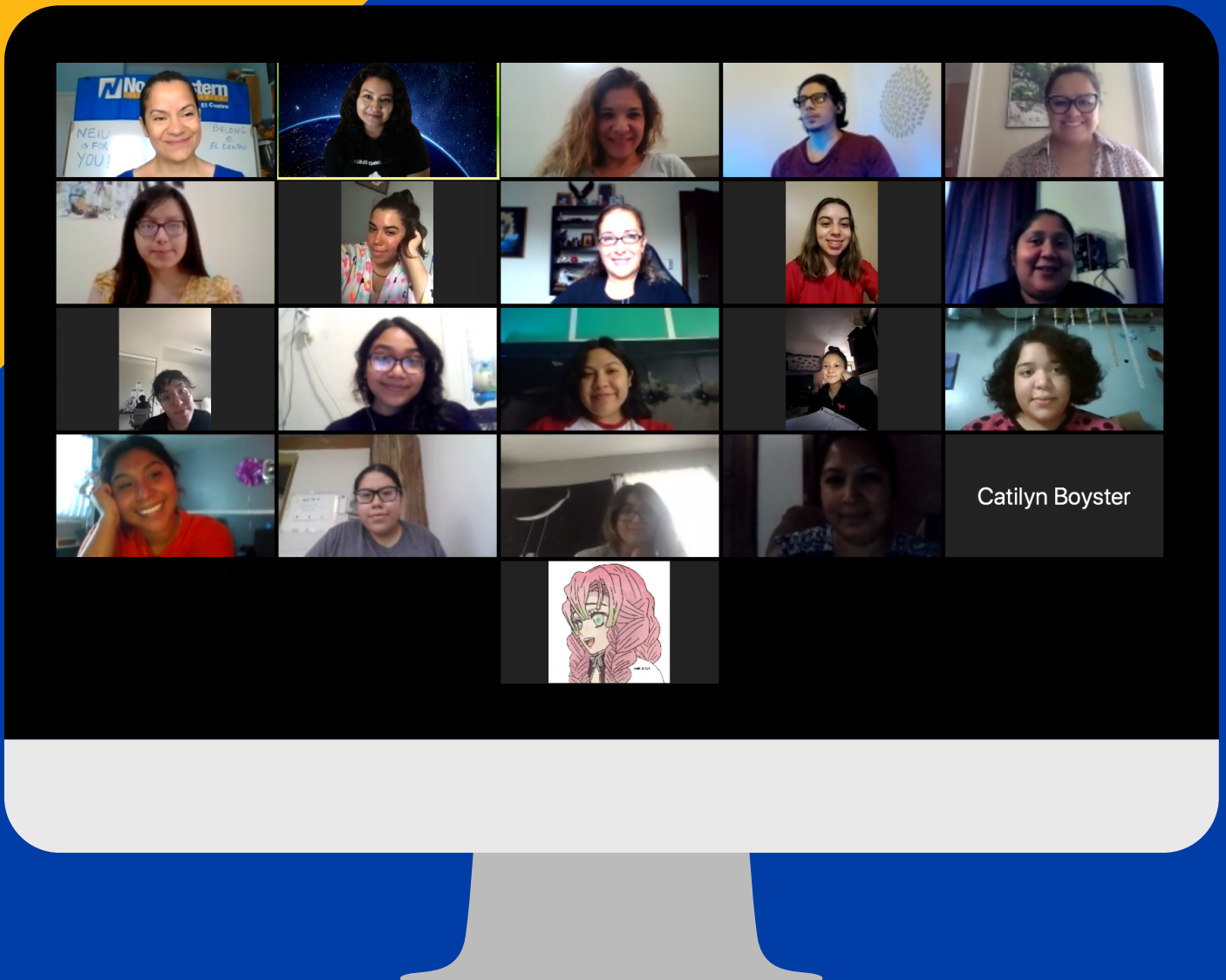
When Dania visited El Centro for the first time as part of a high school senior trip, she immediately felt she belonged. Attending El Centro was an easy decision for Dania to make for many reasons: positive atmosphere, small class size, freshman cohort program, academic and financial

support, and affordable tuition. Growing up in a single-parent household, Dania understood how difficult it could be to afford a college education.

Soon after enrolling as a freshman in Fall 2019, Dania quickly became part of the El Centro family. She actively participated in the cohort program and made lots of friends. The El Centro team noticed her mature, responsible personality and immediately hired Dania as a student worker. Dania has been a great asset to El Centro, helping the team create ways to engage students and promote services. Having the attitude necessary to succeed in college, Dania is well on her way to earning a bachelor's and master's degree in Finance.

In a short time, Dania has learned that self-discovery is a core element of the college experience. She explains, "Although incoming freshmen may find college intimidating, it is important they discover who they are and who they want to become. Don't get discouraged. Meeting new people and participating in different activities will help you discover your identity and interests."

Student Success Workshops



El Centro continues to offer weekly Success Workshops for our freshman cohort on Thursdays and for continuing students on Tuesdays. The workshops are designed to provide resources, share information, and build community. All NEIU students and staff are welcome to attend. Workshop topics include study techniques, student resources, scholarship opportunities, counseling, and health services.

Study Tip from an El Centro Student

*Establish a
Routine!*



Time Management

One of the major challenges that students face with online learning is time management. To make the best use of your time, you should establish a realistic routine.

To help you get started, create a step-by-step plan and use an online calendar tool that keeps track of your projects. Studying at the same time every day can also help you create a new study routine.

Don't get discouraged if you've already tried to set up a new routine, and it hasn't quite worked as planned. A common mistake that students make is to give up on a new routine before it has become a habit.

-Kathy Reyes Hernandez, Computer Science Major



In Other News

Fall-to-Spring Retention Rate

We are very happy to announce that El Centro's retention rate from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021 for first-time, full-time freshmen is **93%**, which is higher than the general admit rate of 78%.

NEIU Student Resources

NEIU offers students many support services, including an Emergency Fund, Food Pantry, Health Services, Counseling Services, Tutoring, and Advising. Visit the [NEIU Student Resources page](#) to learn more.

El Centro wants to hear from YOU!

Do you have a story you'd like to share? Email your suggestions to m-crespo1@neiu.edu. The El Centro Newsletter is written and edited by **Mimi Crespo** and designed by **Veronica Rodriguez**.

