

### A Message from the Director



**Congratulations to the NEIU Class of 2019!** During Commencement on May 6, Northeastern celebrated the many years of hard work and dedication its graduates have poured into earning their degrees.

Many of these graduates started their education as El Centro Scholars in our freshman cohort. Jennifer Vazquez, an El Centro success story, was one of the graduates that walked across the stage at Commencement. During El Centro's Noche de ESTRELLAS student awards ceremony, we proudly honored Jennifer with this year's Luis Ortiz Award for Excellence in Service.

El Centro first met Jennifer in 2015 when she came to us through our Summer Transition Program. She would soon be a part of the El Centro team, becoming one of our Student Workers. As a Peer Mentor Leader for NEIU's First-Year-Experience program, Jenny became more involved with the University, guiding freshman students through their first year of college. Currently, Jenny interns at an immigrant rights organization, where she supports many South Side communities, including Pilsen and Little Village, helping community members complete their renewal forms for DACA, residency, and citizenship. Jenny has certainly learned to give back to her community!

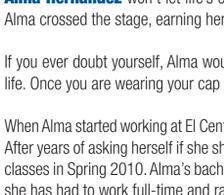
These are the stories that remind us how important it is to invest in our students. As the new school year approaches, El Centro looks forward to working with our students as they continue to develop their success stories.

Sincerely,  
Maria E. Luna-Duarte, Ph.D.  
Director

### El Centro's New Coordinator Lizett Gálan



El Centro is delighted to introduce **Lizett Gálan**, our new Coordinator of Student Success and Social Media. As an alum, having earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology and English with magna cum laude honors, Lizett is proud to represent Northeastern. As a first-generation college student, graduating from the City Colleges of Chicago and Chicago Public Schools, Lizett will easily guide our students through the many challenges they face in transitioning to college. Inspired by the wise words of Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," Lizett will pave the way for our students to pursue their dreams of a better life through higher education.



# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

**Alma Hernández** won't let life's challenges get in her way. After working tirelessly for the past nine years, Alma crossed the stage, earning her bachelor's degree in Spanish on May 6, 2019.

If you ever doubt yourself, Alma would be the first one to tell you, "Don't give up even if you are struggling in life. Once you are wearing your cap and gown, you will then start thinking... it was worth it."

When Alma started working at El Centro in January 2005, she had no idea she would pursue a degree in Spanish. After years of asking herself if she should return to the classroom, Alma gathered up the courage to start taking classes in Spring 2010. Alma's bachelor's degree in Spanish has been even more of a triumph considering that she has had to work full-time and raise three children while attending evening classes.

Fortunately, Alma has a very caring network of family and friends supporting her every step of the way. When Alma needed someone to babysit her young daughter, Luz, while she was in class, she knew she could depend on her mom and two oldest children, Cristal and Martin. And, sadly, when Alma lost her husband and uncle to deportation and death, she knew she could, once again, turn to her family at home and friends at El Centro for the emotional support she needed to carry on.

With her degree in Spanish, Alma dreams of giving back to her community. She fondly remembers working for Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, a non-profit organization that deals with immigration and deportation. "I love working with the Hispanic community. What I would love to do is go back to the immigration courts and help people with translating."

To lift her spirits, Alma often turns to the inspiring words of Frida Kahlo, one of Mexico's greatest artists: "Don't build a wall around your own suffering or it may devour you from the inside." Alma loves Kahlo's words because she also believes that "If you are suffering and don't find a way to get out of that suffering, it will kill you. Find help and support. That's why I love my family, friends and El Centro because of their unconditional support and love."

As the saying goes, "Education is the best investment you can make for yourself." This is especially true for our very own **Karina Barriga Alfaro**, a prominent future teacher. She always envisioned herself as the teacher students turn to, and El Centro has paved the way for her to be that teacher.



Needless to say, inspiration is contagious. When Karina joined the freshman cohort in the fall of 2016, El Centro was not Karina's first choice. However, when she first arrived, she felt impacted by the enormous amount of care the recruiter invested in her success. After hearing about the recruiter's journey to higher education, Karina was inspired to work harder, dedicating herself to making college a reality. Now a junior majoring in Early Childhood Education with a minor in Bilingual/Bicultural Education and a TESOL endorsement, Karina aspires to impact others through education in the same way education has impacted her.

As Karina pursues her teaching career, she frequently refers to words of wisdom to guide her along the way. For example, "One never stops learning," reminds Karina about how fascinating the field of education can be as she continuously learns from each interaction and experience. Learning is a never-ending process that affects the way Karina views school and life. For this reason, Karina says, "I genuinely value my own education and seek to get the most out of it." Another favorite saying that pushes Karina forward is "Everything happens for a reason." This is significant because she believes "There is a purpose behind every situation. This has served as a reminder that even the worst obstacles have a purpose behind them."

Karina reminds peers (and herself) that "As a student, you will be faced with loads of challenges; however, you should always remember that everything (including the all-nighters) will pay off in the end. You should not let anything deter you from pursuing an education. It is true when they say, Education is the best investment you can make for yourself." As Karina has always believed -- **Si Se Puede**.

### Health Fair



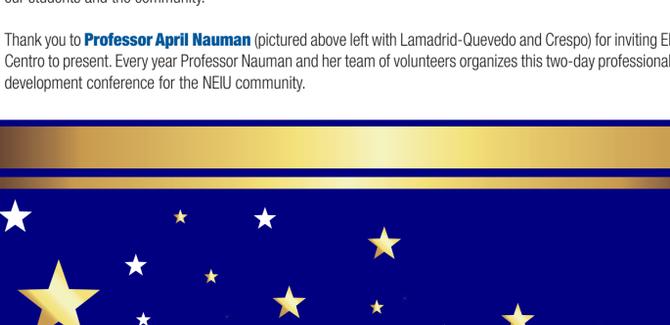
In collaboration with Student Health Services, El Centro hosted a health fair on March 27. More than 80 students, staff, faculty, family and community members participated in the event. Many different types of services were offered, including blood pressure and HIV testing. We look forward to future events.

### Golden Tours



Throughout the semester, as part of the Golden Tour travelling caravan, the El Centro team visited eight high schools to provide admitted students with the next steps of their enrollment process: placement testing and financial and academic advising. These visits are extremely useful, providing students with the information they need to attend NEIU.

### Open House



On March 13, El Centro hosted an Open House to welcome recently admitted students. More than ten families attended the event and visited with NEIU staff and faculty to learn more about Northeastern. Students also learned about financial aid, the enrollment process and support services.

### El Centro Presents at NEIU's Learn & Lead Symposium



On February 6, El Centro team members, **Rebeca Lamadrid-Quevedo**, assistant director, and **Mimi Crespo**, coordinator of the Learning Resource Center, presented at NEIU's Learn & Lead Symposium. The presentation, "El Centro: 50 Years of Supporting our Students and Community," described how El Centro helps students succeed in college through the El Centro Scholars Program, a first-year support program for freshmen. Founded in the 1960s, El Centro, one of Northeastern's four locations, has evolved into a comprehensive center serving our students and the community.

Thank you to **Professor April Nauman** (pictured above left with Lamadrid-Quevedo and Crespo) for inviting El Centro to present. Every year Professor Nauman and her team of volunteers organizes this two-day professional development conference for the NEIU community.

# Seventh Annual Noche De ESTRELLAS

(Empowering Students Through Recognition and Encouragement, Leading Leaders to Achieve Success)

El Centro celebrated its 7th annual Noche de ESTRELLAS event on Saturday, May 4. Every year El Centro honors its students: freshmen and continuing students who have earned a GPA of 3.5 or higher, freshmen who have completed their first year, and graduating seniors. This year, we honored Jennifer Vazquez with the Luis Ortiz Excellence in Service award. Jennifer, one of El Centro's student success stories, graduated this semester after providing many years of excellent service to the Northeastern and El Centro communities. More than 80 students, family members, and staff attended the celebration.



### El Centro Attends ILACHE Conference



On April 19, El Centro students and staff attended the 27th Annual Illinois Latino Council on Higher Education's (ILACHE) Professional and Student Development Conference at the University of Illinois in Chicago. This year's theme, March Apart, Strike Together: Building Coalitions to Advance a Latinx Educational Agenda, focused on providing strategies to assist students, faculty and staff during this difficult time in state and national politics.

### Congratulations to El Centro's Freshman Cohort



El Centro celebrated the success of this year's freshman cohort on April 26 with a trip to Play & Spin, an indoor amusement park. Each year, El Centro rewards its freshman cohort for completing their first year of college and registering early for the fall semester. Congratulations to our El Centro Scholars!

# Google

### Summer Program @ El Centro

El Centro will host the Google Computer Science Summer Institute Extension program beginning July 22. The program's goal is to increase the number of women, underrepresented ethnic minority, first-generation, and low-income college students in the field of computer science. Google's three-week intensive and interactive program introduces computer science to graduating high school seniors who have a passion for technology.

Tuesday, July 30, 2019  
6:30 - 8:30 PM  
Revolution Brewery  
2323 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
Come join us for some **BEER AND BITES**  
Admission includes 2 hours of unlimited pints of house beer, non-alcoholic beverages and a buffet of light appetizers.  
#dollars4scholars  
You may purchase tickets in advance for \$50 at [neiu.edu/dollars4scholars](http://neiu.edu/dollars4scholars) up until July 20, 2019. Tickets can be purchased at the door for \$60. (limited tickets at the door)  
Northeastern Illinois University  
El Centro's 50th Anniversary  
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](mailto:m-crespo1@neiu.edu).  
The El Centro Newsletter is written and edited by Mimi Crespo with contributions from Lizett Gálan and designed by Fausto P. Ortiz.