



The Mantle of Mentorship – Professor Mary Ortiz’s Many Gifts to Kingsborough



Professor Mary Ortiz

It all started in the classified section of the New York Times, where Mary Ortiz first saw an ad for a position at Kingsborough Community College. In the 25 years since, she has helped countless students overcome their challenges and go on to promising careers in the sciences. In addition to her skill, knowledge and experience as a teacher, Professor Ortiz benefits from an ability to relate, on a personal level, to so many of the students who walk through her door. She takes particular pride in being a mentor and advocate for female students: “When I was a student, it was rare for young women to pursue the sciences, especially engineering. This unfortunately remains the case today, so I make a concerted effort to encourage female students to persist in their efforts, to never give up on their dreams.”

Her passion for empowering students stems from her own experience. After graduating college, Professor Ortiz earned a Graduate and Professional Opportunities Program (GPOP) Fellowship. Started by President Jimmy Carter, the GPOP Fellowship was created to help women and minority students enter fields in which they were traditionally underrepresented. For Professor Ortiz, the fellowship ultimately enabled her to pursue her engineering studies in graduate school. “This fellowship opened doors for me that would have otherwise remained closed,” she says. “In the same way that I was lent a helping hand, I seek to open doors for the students at Kingsborough. To not only act as a mentor, but to pass that ‘mantle of mentorship’ down to the next generation.”

Professor Ortiz has increased her efforts to help students in recent years. When Hurricane Sandy left so many Kingsborough students displaced and devastated, she began what would become a new annual tradition.

“Students at Kingsborough already have to deal with tremendous adversity,” she says. “Many of them work two jobs just to afford to come to school. So when disasters like Hurricane Sandy strike, they can completely derail students’ academic careers. After seeing how hard it was for students to return to school after Sandy, I knew that I had to do more.”

Since Sandy, Professor Ortiz has made generous gifts to the KCC Foundation Scholarship Fund every year during the holiday season: “I make my own donations to the college, but I also encourage my friends and family to do the same during the holidays. I tell them, ‘Please make a charitable donation to Kingsborough.’” Her contributions, along with those of her fellow donors, ensure that students who are in good academic standing can receive extra financial support to pay for textbooks, transportation and tuition. In extending her generosity beyond the classroom, Professor Ortiz allows many more students to stay afloat financially so that they can continue thriving academically: “If students can make it through Kingsborough and earn their degrees, despite their many obstacles, then that means they have the inner strength and determination to handle everything else that comes their way.”

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