

ASU alum thrives as community liaison

Posted: October 13, 2014

Like many road warriors, Arizona State University's Stephanie Salazar has perfected the art of traveling light. iPhone? Check. Black handbag? Check. Full tank of gas? Check.

Add to these a Google-like knowledge of ASU people and programs and an exuberance about her alma mater that is simply uncontainable, and Salazar is ready for her day as director of East Valley community and municipal relations in ASU's Office of Public Affairs on the Polytechnic campus.

Charged with building community partnerships and ASU awareness in the communities of Chandler, Gilbert and Mesa, Salazar is part of the team that represents and advances ASU's agenda before elected officials, community leaders and government decision-makers.

"It's pretty thrilling to be able to tell people about all that the Polytechnic campus programs and faculty have to offer to our constituents, and to share ASU's design imperatives with the community," Salazar says. "There's still a Tempe-centric understanding of ASU in people's minds, so bringing them up to date on this growing campus and sharing news about all that's going on at Poly is important."

A "typical" day may include a breakfast meeting with a Chamber of Commerce group, representing ASU at a municipal council meeting or chairing a community taskforce. She may spend a few hours in her Polytechnic campus office, tracking down answers or ASU experts in response to questions that have come along on the website, phone or on email, or leading a campus tour with prospective Sun Devil families. Dinner might be combined with a fundraiser or meeting with a civic organization.

She says that ASU alumni come up after just about every meeting or event she attends, wanting to know how they can get involved.

"This work makes me realize the power that we have as an ASU network," Salazar observes. "I meet so many alums who want to invest of themselves, who want to know how they can help students."



ASU alumnus Stephanie Salazar, director of East Valley community and municipal relations in ASU's Office of Public Affairs on the Polytechnic campus, enjoys working to build partnerships with the communities of Chandler, Gilbert and Mesa. "This work makes me realize the power that we have as an ASU network," Salazar observes. "I meet so many alums who want to invest of themselves, who want to know how they can help students."

Photo by: Tessa Menken

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Salazar, in these kinds of conversations, is also full of questions of her own. What does your business need? How might ASU contribute to your community?

"I'm always trying to encourage people to move away from working in silos and collaborate and share resources," she says. "I'm also very aware of the importance of just building those one-to-one relationships that help to personalize ASU. It's amazing how excited people are to have a real person call them back and connect them to resources."

"Stephanie is a wonderful new addition to the public affairs team," remarks Angela Creedon, ASU associate vice president for community and municipal relations. "She is an extraordinary advocate for the university, and has already garnered the support and trust of our municipal elected and community leaders. Stephanie understands the value of building strong relationships and the value they bring to the entire university."

A graduate of ASU's bachelor of interdisciplinary studies degree program in the [College of Letters and Sciences](#), Salazar took on this new role in March after working for the last 13 years in university support roles under the umbrella of student affairs, focusing on off-campus student services, community relations and fraternity and sorority life.

"I think I'll always feel a strong connection to new students and helping them with their adjustment," she says.

"I struggled with finding the right path," continues Salazar, who started her college studies at Mesa Community College, expecting to pursue a degree in nursing until she discovered she didn't have the constitution for that work. "I know how much it can mean in those first few months of adjustment to have another person you can call on and to have the guidance of thoughtful mentors along the way."

Her first – and most influential – mentor at ASU was Kay Faris, now senior associate dean of undergraduate programs in the W.P. Carey School of Business, whom she worked for as an undergraduate student employee.

Salazar says conversations with and working with Faris helped her hone in on her true passions, which are at the intersection of business, teaching, counseling and sociology, and helped her settle on the interdisciplinary studies concentrations in business and sociology, and a minor in communication.

After graduation, she went directly on to earn a master's of education from Northern Arizona University, and has taught cultural diversity at Phoenix College.

Salazar still maintains strong connections with ASU's interdisciplinary studies faculty – and they reach out to her often as well.

In 2007 she worked with Kevin Ellsworth, faculty head of interdisciplinary and liberal studies, to establish a public sector community mentoring program that paired interdisciplinary studies majors interested in public sector careers with City of Tempe employees.

“It grew from a job shadowing experience to formal semester-long internships,” she notes. “We’re now trying to establish a similar arrangement with the Town of Gilbert.”

This fall B semester, Salazar is excited to be taking on her first teaching assignment at ASU: an online section of the course Behavioral Dynamics in Organizations (OGL 220).

It is a core course in the College of Letters and Sciences’ new degree program in organizational leadership, now available through ASU Online, at the ASU Colleges at Lake Havasu City and through the ASU partnership with Eastern Arizona College. Launched just one year ago, the major is already approaching 400 students; 100 new students declared the major in the last month alone.

“My friends tease me that when it comes to ASU, I’m going to be a ‘lifer,’” Salazar laughs. “I definitely am! There are so many incredible opportunities!”

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