

Yammilette G. Rodriguez
HLI Class of 2002



HOPE Leadership Institute alumna Yammilette Rodriguez's passion is working with the community. Through her position as the Regional Director for the Latino Issues Forum in the Central Valley, she is able to live that passion every day. Previous to her position with LIF, Yammilette served as Director of Undergraduate Admission at Fresno Pacific University where she saw the results of her work each year at graduation. She watched students who she had recruited to campus, helped along the way, and may not have thought college was a

possibility, cross the stage and receive their degree.

Yammilette believes that education is the key to all paths. For this reason, she feels that her greatest accomplishment to this point has been encouraging and guiding both her mother and sister to obtain their bachelor degrees in social work. Yammilette also views her sister as a role model for single mothers. Now working for a non-profit organization, her sister helps at-risk young women and wants to help women who are in similar situations to what she experienced. Yammilette says that if she "could be half the mother [my sister] is, then I would be an absolutely incredible mother."

Yammilette knows that there are a lot of women out there, like her sister, who are overcoming significant barriers and proving that they can accomplish even the most far-reaching of goals. For this reason she has been instrumental in starting and is incredibly active in the Central California Latina Network. She hopes that through the Network she can encourage all women to follow their dreams, overcome obstacles and decide as Latinas what kind of impact they want to make. Yammilette also feels that it is a blessing to see women succeed despite obstacles and tell young women that they too can do it.

It seems that being a mentor comes easily to Yammilette. She was an advisor to Amigos Unidos at Fresno Pacific, and has been bringing groups of ten to fifteen Latina students to HOPE's annual Latina Action Day Sacramento since 2003. She is committed to her students and believes that the conference is a great experience for them because it opens their eyes to and presents opportunities for their involvement in the public policy process for issues that are important to the Latina community. She says the HOPE conference gives students an opportunity to talk about issues in a place where their voices can be heard.

Bringing students to Latina Action Day isn't the only way that Yammilette has continued her involvement with HOPE since participating in the HOPE Leadership Institute (HLI) in 2002. While at Fresno Pacific she had a group of students compile survey results from the HOPE conferences and she is an active recruiter for the Leadership Institute. As part of HLI, Yammilette created what she describes as "incredible friendships" with women who she calls her "sisters". To Yammilette, the network is an unbelievable resource.

While in HLI, the most moving experience for Yammilette was in the Central Valley where she was able to gather with her classmates from the Bay Area and Los Angeles and visit La Paz. She says leading the women in song over Cesar Chavez's grave is a precious moment she will never

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forget. She also says being able to bring information specific to Latinas to Sacramento and D.C. was an amazing experience.

When researching and discussing issues in HLI, Yammilette found one that she felt passionately about, teen pregnancy prevention. Yammilette sees teenage pregnancy as part of the poverty cycle particularly in the Central Valley. She feels that the problem is due to the lack of information on both the health and higher education fronts and the lack of activities in small towns. This is why she is so passionate about mentorship, so that successful women can be mentors to the girls before they get to that point. According to Yammilette, sometimes our youth just needs to know that they are loved and cared for by their mentors.

Yammilette's background is common with many of the students she mentors which is why she can relate so well to them. She was born in Redwood City and moved with her family to Dinuba in California's Central Valley when she was 13 years old. Her parents were both laborers and instilled a strong work ethic in her but neither of them had attended college. Yammilette was involved in high school but it was small and didn't have college counselors to help prepare her for college. After her first semester at a community college close by in Reedley, Yammilette was surprised to discover that her classes did not transfer to a four year university. She then had to navigate her way through the system and transferred to Fresno State University where she received her B.A. in Business Administration and Marketing.

At Reedley College and Fresno State, Yammilette became involved in student life in a way she never did in high school. She was president of several student organizations and ran for student Senate which opened her eyes to the political arena. She wanted to be involved in every opportunity that was opened to her as way to pay back her mentors who helped and encouraged her to get to that point. In her senior year, Yammilette had the opportunity to get involved in a political campaign for Assembly where education was one of the primary issues during that race. The campaign was successful and Yammilette began her first job after college as a Field Representative for Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, covering education issues. It was through this experience that she developed her interest in higher education and governmental relations. When the opportunity to work in higher education arose, it was a natural fit and she was at Fresno Pacific for seven years. She completed her Masters Degree in Leadership and Organizational Studies at Fresno Pacific and submitted her thesis in "Latino Attainment of Higher Education."

Finding a balance between her personal and professional life is very important to Yammilette. As a Latina, she understands the importance of family and has made a point to set aside time every Sunday to spend with her husband and her immediate family. She still finds time to work to advance women at her church as part of the Women's Concern's Board. Here, women gather to discuss issues that are important to them and their families but have not traditionally been talked about by the church. Yammilette leads discussions where women could feel comfortable discussing issues such as domestic violence and teen pregnancy.

Yammilette says she is able to do all that she does because of the support of her husband, Jaime Rodriguez, who attends all of her events and is her strength.