



NEWS

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Compton College Alumna Completes Bachelor's Degree During Pandemic *Plans for Graduate School and Career in Mental Health Services*

Compton College alumna and mother of three Irma Leyva earned a bachelor's degree in May 2020 from California State University, Dominguez Hills a decade after becoming a teen mother the same year she graduated from Paramount High School. Now, she has plans to help her community with mental health recovery after earning a master's degree.

"I want to help my community and the population that suffers from mental illness," said Leyva. "The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting adults, children and babies' mental well-being, and I want to be part of the solution."

Leyva is currently applying to master's degree programs at the California State University campuses in Dominguez Hills and Long Beach. She is considering a career as a social worker or a psychotherapy counselor. While at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), Leyva completed an internship that inspired her to want to work with senior citizens and elementary school students.

She graduated from Compton College in 2018 with an Associate of Science for Transfer (AS-T) degree in administration of justice and an associate degree in general education with an emphasis in social and behavioral science. She also earned a teaching assistant permit from Compton College. She then transferred to CSUDH in fall 2018, followed by her graduation in May 2020, earning a bachelor's degree in human services with a concentration in mental health recovery. She made the dean's list at CSUDH two semesters in a row.

Leyva initially decided to attend Compton College in 2014 because the campus is conveniently located near her home and offered flexible class times allowing her to work and spend time with her daughter during the day and attend classes at night. The small campus environment kept her from feeling overwhelmed and it even began to feel like her second home. "There are so many resources available and the faculty and staff go out of their way to help students," she said. "I never felt like I had to face any challenges alone because of the support I received from my Compton College family."

The support offered by Compton College helped Leyva pursue her goals. When she decided to focus on her studies full time, she received financial aid and benefits from the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) programs that she needed to ease the challenge of completing a college education while raising a family. EOPS/CARE are state-funded programs that help eligible students 18 and older who do not have the resources to enroll in college. "I have to thank the EOPS/CARE program at Compton College for

helping me achieve my goals,” said Leyva. “There were several times I wanted to give up. If it was not for the free assistance and counseling services, I would not be where I stand in life now.”

Leyva credits EOPS Counselor Salvador Navarro with helping her feel secure with her academic decisions and giving her good educational advice. “The counseling services were a great support system for me and helped me to not feel confused or overwhelmed. They were always there to answer my questions and point me in the direction to reach what I wanted.” Additionally, Leyva says the book vouchers offered to EOPS students were a life-saving benefit. “When I first started at Compton College, the book vouchers and other financial assistance from EOPS helped me save money to buy diapers and formula for my young daughter.”

The EOPS/CARE program did indeed become her second family. Leyva is a student worker and peer mentor for the state-funded program; a position she has held for the past four years. She welcomed the opportunity to become part of a staff that is so supportive to her and her fellow students.

Leyva says that her daughters are her inspiration for her achievement in higher education. “I want to make them proud and set a great example for my girls.” She offers motivational words that sum up her experiences with adversity and success: “Everyone undergoes different struggles, but whether you succeed depends on how much you want it.”

Photo available online:

http://www.compton.edu/adminandoperations/communityrelations/images/2021/Leyva_Irma_1.jpg

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About Compton College

Compton College is the community’s education solution offering a full complement of transfer and degree courses, as well as career and technical education. Students may earn an associate degree or certificate, transfer to a four-year university or train for a career. Compton College is located at 1111 E. Artesia Boulevard, Compton, CA 90221.