

Spotlight Interview – Sugey Lara, SAS '08, GS '11

Sugey Lara, LMHC (Licensed Mental Health Counselor) graduated from CNR with a BA in Psychology in 2008 and an MS in Mental Health Counseling in 2011. She is a lead supervisor for “Endeavors,” a Christian non-profit organization based in San Antonio. “Endeavors” serves migrants, veterans, and persons living with disabilities. Ms. Lara serves as a bilingual (Spanish) clinical supervisor for the Migrant Wellness Program, specializing in providing trauma treatment for individuals and families seeking asylum in the U.S.

Susan Conte, OSU, SAS 1973, a member of the CNR Legacy Council and its Communications Committee, recently interviewed Ms. Lara.

Q: What led you to choose The College of New Rochelle?

A: As a Senior in a large inner-city NY high school, I did not think that college was an option for me. It was at that time that CNR launched the *College Now* program to bridge the gap between high school and college for young women, especially for young women of color. The program sought out high school girls with potential to succeed in college, not solely based on their SAT scores or their GPAs. Ms. Suzette Walker, a CNR alum, who later joined the staff of Student Services, invited me to come and tour campus. I fell in love with the history and the “feel” of the small college setting, 30 minutes from home. I was impressed that CNR was an all-women’s college when there were so few still around. It had withstood the test of time. The mission also spoke to me: *Serviam*, service to others. At home, my mother taught me to serve others and to build community. Since *Serviam* was one of the pillars of the college, I knew that CNR was right for me.

Q: How was your experience at CNR?

A: The college felt very personal to me. I felt “seen” as a student. That was not the case in my overcrowded high school where I wasn’t given much time or attention. At CNR, each faculty and staff member seemed invested in my growth--as a student and as an individual. Attending CNR was also an integral part of my development, not only as a member of society, but as a woman of color. I mourn the loss of that great institution because it was through CNR that I learned of my intelligence.

At CNR, I developed confidence in myself and in my ability to learn. That was tremendous for my self-worth. I gained so much from attending CNR, especially because I felt at home during the most difficult time in my life: the death of my mother. After she died, I felt so unsure of my future. It was at that moment that the college community came and wrapped its arms around me with compassion and care. When I lost my mother, I did not think I could “do” Graduate

School. It was the Dean, Dr. Marie Ribarich, who worked with me and made it a reality. Acts of kindness like hers reinforced in me that CNR was where I was supposed to be during the most traumatic time in my life. I don't think another college would have supported me in that way.

Q: Why did you choose CNR's Graduate School? How did your experience as a graduate student influence your professional life?

A: I went on to the graduate school because I knew about its excellent faculty. I wanted to learn from the best. Another plus was that it was designed to make graduate degrees accessible to working professionals. Classes were held in the evening and on weekends. That was perfect for me because, after graduation, I had to get a full-time job to support myself.

As a graduate student, I learned that, although life has deadlines and requirements, I can meet expectations with empathy. In my current work, when people are going through crises, I keep that in mind. When I supervise the clinicians, I can be understanding and accommodating when I learn that they are experiencing challenges.

One of my professors, Dr. Frank Rizza, always reminded us: "You don't go into this business to get rich. You do it to make a difference in people's lives." That has stayed with me. It's something I live by. I am rewarded in other ways, especially when I hear that those clients with whom I have worked are healthy, happy, and established in this country. CNR has taught me that there is value in being a positive presence in someone's life, especially during their darkest time.

Q: In closing, is there more that you'd like to say about your experience at CNR?

A: I feel that I found my voice at CNR, and now I have a seat at the table and a position of leadership. I am very grateful that I chose The College of New Rochelle.