

# **My WSU Professional Journey**

## **Dr. Vanessa Reynolds**

I remember coming back to campus after completing the HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities) National Internship Program (HNIP) in Washington D.C. and running into Lee Melvin, Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions (UGA). I shared my wonderful HACU experience and the fact that I was looking for a full-time job. He said, “we have a position open here, University Counselor Assistant II, and I think you would be perfect for it.” I was an Undergraduate Student Assistant in the Transfer Credit Evaluation unit within UGA and assisted LaJoyce Brown with high school visits/tours. It all started with a group of students from my alma mater, Western International High School. Both, Lee and LaJoyce knew that I was passionate about this work.

I returned to UGA as University Counselor Assistant II in October 2003 and earned promotions from 2007 through 2019, when I was promoted to the highest rank within my department, Counselor III. I have been a higher education advocate and community leader since I was an undergrad. I am passionate for student success as reflected in my WSU tenure and accomplishments over the last 20 years. One of my highest objectives in my role has been to provide educational opportunities and empower high school students across Metro Detroit and Michigan to pursue higher education. My dedication to this cause has not only benefited thousands of students but has also contributed to the overall advancement of society by fostering a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce. I am committed to empowering students and advancing educational opportunities, just like my alma mater’s mission to prepare a diverse student body to thrive. In addition, my recruitment efforts and collaboration with the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies is reflected in the [Fall 2023 increase of enrollment](#) and fostering the success of Hispanic students at WSU.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be influential in the enhancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion across campus. I am a founding member of WSU’s Latinx Faculty and Staff Association (LFSA), and have served in various leadership roles, including Vice-Chair, two-time Chair, and Past-Chair. LFSA’s mission is to build an inclusive community and provide support for Wayne State’s Latina/o/x faculty, staff, and students. I am so proud of our accomplishments, including creating a space for Latinos to come together and support one another as familia. I helped spearhead initiatives like the Latinx Welcome Back and Cafecitos events. Our Latinx Welcome Back event has brought us together to celebrate the National Hispanic Heritage Month with the entire campus community and welcome new and current Latinx students, faculty, and staff to campus for the start of the academic year. Cafecitos is very dear to my heart. This initiative started during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were all remote and I knew that as the leader, I needed to come up with something to keep us together and support each other. We had a few Cafecitos among our members during lunch hours to check-in and lift one another. Once we returned to campus, we extended our Cafecitos to the other EEGs (Employee Engagement Groups) to foster unity and collaboration among our groups. Our Cafecitos have created opportunities for networking and relationship-building while promoting a sense of camaraderie and solidarity across EEGs. Furthermore, through our collaborations with the EEGs, we helped create the EEG Council and I have represented the EEGs in the Social

Justice Action Committee and now the DEI Council, serving on the Hiring and Retention of Diverse Employees working group. I know that LFSA will continue to thrive because we have a dedicated and passionate leadership team in charge.

I also take pride in community building beyond the campus borders. I am one of the Co-Chairs of Advocates for Latino Student Advancement in Michigan Education (Alsame), a non-profit organization committed to making college education a reality for Latino students across the state. I also serve on the Conference Planning Committee for the Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC). The purpose of the MACAC Annual Conference is to provide professional development and networking opportunities for individuals within the college access and college admissions field.

I have not only been committed to advancing the education of all students, but also my very own. I am a [three-time WSU alumna](#). I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration, a Master of Education in Educational Leadership, and most recently, a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. I am a proud first-generation college graduate from Southwest Detroit, and the first Latina in my family to obtain a doctoral degree.

As I embark on this new chapter in my professional journey to serve as the Director of College Admissions and Success for the Michigan Hispanic Collaborative (MiHC), I will carry the resilience, strength, and dedication that has defined my time at WSU. I am thrilled for this amazing opportunity, and certain that WSU, CLLAS, LFSA, and MiHC will collaborate to continue to foster partnerships and leverage collective efforts to create an even greater impact on Michigan's Latino communities. Muchas Gracias LFSA and CLLAS for giving me the opportunity to share my journey as an AAUP professional staff member within WSU for the past two decades, and for being two of my strongest supporters. All of you have left footprints in my heart.

**I will ALWAYS be WARRIOR STRONG!**