

Professor honored for inspiring civic engagement

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College professor of anthropology Vanessa Martínez of Holyoke is the recipient of the 2022 Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award from Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education.



Vanessa Martínez

The award, presented in partnership with Brown University’s Swearer Center, recognizes senior faculty who practice exemplary engaged scholarship through teaching and research. Recipients are selected on the basis of their collaboration with communities, institutional impact, and high-quality academic work.

“Holyoke Community College is incredibly fortunate to have Vanessa Martínez among its faculty,” said Lisa Mahon, professor of English and service-learning coordinator at Holyoke Community College in a letter nominating Martínez for the award. “Her outstanding commitment to community-based learning, teaching, and advocacy has positively impacted our students, staff, and faculty, as well as the

greater Holyoke community.”

Martínez was recognized for teaching and scholarship that inspires students to take on leadership roles in their communities.

Through academic work that focuses on storytelling, culturally responsive instruction, and cultural humility, Martínez invites diverse groups of students to learn

about community-based organizations, advocate and fundraise for community needs based on engaged research, and think critically about the role they play in their communities. One example is the Women of Color Health Equity Collective, a Springfield-based nonprofit organization she co-founded that seeks to provide communities of color better access to maternal health, therapeutic services, and support. Through the collective, students learn about the social determinants of health and the role social inequality plays in health outcomes while researching community needs and developing advocacy plans to help create change.

“This is a wonderful and distin-

guished honor, and well deserved,” said HCC president Christina Royal. “Professor Martínez continues to be actively engaged in our community, and our region is better for it. It benefits our students, who get to witness some exercising civic engagement beyond the classroom.”

Martínez is also coordinator of HCC’s Honors Program and leads a new community leadership certificate program at the college to give students formal training to continue work at community organizations and take on leadership roles.

“Taking action in the world can and should start in your community,” Martínez said in a speech she delivered to graduates for Commencement 2021. “The actions can be big or small, they can be self-reflective or engaging of large groups. Remember, there are community agencies to assist, neighborhood mini libraries to build, book clubs to host, protests to plan, government policies to change, peer support groups to run and so much more.”

Born in San Sebastian, Puerto Rico, Martínez holds a bachelor’s degree from Columbus State University, a master’s degree from Georgia

State University, and a PhD from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. In 2011, she received the “Latino Teaching Excellence Award” from then governor Deval Patrick, and in 2015 she was selected as a Leadership Fellow by the American Anthropological Association.

In 2020, Martínez received the Elaine Marieb Award for Teaching Excellence, HCC’s highest faculty honor. She has been teaching at HCC since 2006.

The Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award is named in honor of Thomas Ehrlich, former chair of the Campus Compact board of directors and president emeritus of Indiana University. The award is presented annually as part of Campus Compact’s Impact Awards, which recognize the outstanding work of individuals and institutions in pursuit of the public purposes of higher education.

Martínez will share the 2022 award with Kimberly Buch, a professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. They and other award recipients will be recognized at Compact22, Campus Compact’s virtual conference, March 29-31.