

HCC student Miren Neyra Alcántara honored as Newman Civic Fellow

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HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College student Miren Neyra Alcántara of Holyoke is the recipient of a Newman Civic Fellowship, which recognizes college leaders who demonstrate a commitment to finding solutions to challenges facing communities locally, nationally, and internationally.

Alcántara, who lives in Holyoke, will join 212 college students from 39 states, Washington, D.C., and Mexico to form the 2021 cohort of Newman Civic Fellows, a program administered by Campus Compact, a Boston-based nonprofit working to advance the public purposes of higher education.

The Newman Civic Fellowship is a year-long program for students from Campus Compact member institutions.

Alcántara is a Latinx Studies major at HCC and president of the college's Latinx Empowerment Association. The LEA Club, as it is otherwise known, recently launched a book drive to stock a "Little Free Library" the club is putting together for low-income families in the Holyoke Flats, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

As LEA president, Alcántara spearheaded "Celebrating the Latinx Community," a social media campaign, and developed student-led panel discussions in collaboration with HCC's Black Student Alliance and Holyoke's Wistariahurst Museum.

She is a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and the college's Student Advisory Board. She works as a peer tutor and volunteers with community organizations including Climate Change Theater Action, Common Share Food Co-op, and SPARK Reproductive Justice Now.

She also teaches English to Central American immigrants through a program called Planting Literacy, an HCC collaboration with Head Start in Springfield.

She was nominated for the award by two of her professors, Vanessa Martínez and Raúl Gutiérrez.

"We're very proud of Miren," said Gutiérrez, coordinator of HCC's Latinx Studies program. "HCC is lucky to have her. Her academic endeavors combined with her involvement and leadership in the community make her a necessary agent of change. She truly embodies the essence of an activist scholar. Her academic abilities, compassion and leadership make her exactly what is needed in this world."

The fellowship is named for the late Frank Newman, one of Campus

Compact's founders and a tireless advocate for civic engagement in higher education.

Through the fellowship, Campus Compact provides fellows with a variety of learning and networking opportunities that emphasize personal, professional, and civic growth. Each year, fellows participate in numerous virtual training and networking opportunities to help provide them with the skills and connections they need to create large-scale positive change. The cornerstone of the fellowship is the Annual Convening of Fellows, which offers intensive skill-building and networking over the course of two days.

The fellowship also provides fellows with pathways to apply for exclusive scholarship and post-graduate opportunities. As part of the fellowship, students participate in some kind of civic engagement project of their own design.

"I am so excited about the fellowship and this opportunity," said Alcántara, who was also named a finalist earlier this year for Business West magazine's "Young Woman of Impact" award. "I plan to continue working on the LEA Club's "Little Free Library" project. We are hoping to expand on it, add some workshops with the children and adapt it in a way it becomes sustainable through the years as more students join and continue the club. I am also continuing my work with immigrant advocacy and Planting Literacy, as well as my recent involvement as a volunteer with the Women of Color Health Equity collective."

She will graduate from HCC in December 2021.

This is the second time an HCC student has been awarded a Newman Civic Fellowship. Last year, Marley Friedrick of Amherst, HCC class of 2020, was a Newman Fellow. He is now a student at Amherst College.



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