

Mrs. Vallarie Hernandez is deserving of the “Employee of the Quarter” due to her: professionalism; knowledge of her job; expertise with systems such as Banner, Concur, and Navigate; proactive problem solving; positive attitude and excellent customer service. In these areas she is an outstanding employee, but there are other areas where she is, I believe, unique among university staff members. Specifically, Mrs. Hernandez’s knowledge of how students access and enter the university and her willingness to spend time and energy focused on helping non-traditional students gain access to our community is something I have not encountered, to this extent, among my fellow USA colleagues. She is truly passionate about removing the perceived obstacles for adult learners or non-traditional students.

Mrs. Hernandez displays actions on a daily basis which prompt this nomination. Her interactions with current and potential students are always thorough, compassionate, active and well-received. Customer service is one of her many strengths, and one in which she applies herself well beyond what is expected on a daily basis. On top of the usual tasks for the multiple roles she supports, including being a secretary for a chair who oversees multiple programs, and directs a university-wide office (Office of Adult Learner Services – OALS), and is the NCAA Faculty Athletic Representative, she supports these roles and quickly develops expertise in new positions and takes initiative to problem-solve.

Mrs. Hernandez is a team player within the department as well as for the College of Education and Professional Studies. She readily shares her expertise and discoveries as we navigate the ever-change world of higher education. If she discovers a misconception or new information that makes our processes run smoother, she shares this with all of the staff. She communicates ideas well and shares her great ideas professionally. She has an increasing number of faculty and staff who consult with her to rectify the unknown.

Mrs. Hernandez’s advocacy for our students, from traditional to the adult-learner, is what I admire most about her. Her social intelligence, attention to customer service, and ability to put insecure or agitated students at ease are superb. For many students who come in, she secures an advisor immediately so they can determine where they stand and get the enrollment process started before they leave their first meeting with us.

For example, a student who did not have a BS degree, and his new job required him to be accepted and/or enrolled in college within 90 days of his first day on the job contacted the Office of Adult Learner Services (Vallarie) for assistance with his application process and she followed up regularly with admissions until he was approved. Once he was approved, she assisted him in contacting his majoring department (outside of our college) to make sure he met with the right person for his classes; helped expedite his paperwork so he was registered in time for a May class that was required in his field of study; directed him to specific webpages on USA’s site for Student Accounting, Student Health for immunizations, parking passes, campus maps, course descriptions of classes he needs, logging into “ecampus”, and more. She have even assisted with his coworker to help her get registered for a course.

Another student was sent to us by an advisor because she needed assistance with continuing her academic journey. She said that after meeting with Vallarie, she felt she had finally found someone who truly was an advocate to help her succeed in obtaining her degree. Months later, when tragedy hit her family, she was struggling to do her coursework and did not know what to do so she called us. Vallarie was able to refer her to our counseling services who in turn were able to help her work through this tragedy and continue with balancing her home and school life.

On a regular basis, we speak with adults who have experienced life issues that either hindered or prevented them from obtaining their degree – Vallarie is usually the first person who fields these calls and directs them to appropriate resources. After speaking with them either on the phone or in person, it is evident they need someone to listen to their story and encourage them – Vallarie has the skill-set to professionally and compassionately do that. They learn we will be here to help them from the beginning (applying to USA) to the end (graduation) and everything in between.

For these and so many additional reasons, I give my highest recommendation for Mrs. Vallarie Hernandez as "Employee of the Quarter".

Nominated by: Dr. Paige Vitulli  
Department of Integrative Studies

May 1, 2019

Mrs. Hernandez, since being hired in the Department of Integrative Studies a year ago, having previously worked in the College of Allied Health, has been a revolutionary force in providing quality service to USA students and faculty. I have witnessed Mrs. Hernandez provide effort, ideas and dedication well beyond her pay grade towards the task of both meeting the needs of our students in Hospitality & Tourism Management, Interdisciplinary Studies and Educational Studies programs, as well as helping recruit new students in these programs.

While I am not her immediate supervisor, on at least five occasions I have personally witnessed Mrs. Hernandez handle student questions, dilemmas and even what the student saw as a crisis. She is excellent at listening to student concerns and directing them to the resources they need to resolve the issue whether that be an advisor, a faculty member, a financial aid worker, etc.

Ms. Hernandez every day goes above and beyond, sometimes even beyond the efforts of the rest of us. She is not just a secretary; she sets the bar and the standard for student service in our college. Moreover, Mrs. Hernandez has proven to be a resource for other staff and faculty given her knowledge of various university information systems, policies and her relationships with other staff around the university.

She does all of this with a smile on her face and with a determination I wish I could bottle and put in all our students and faculty. In short, she is an enormous resource to her department and in a very real way for the college as a whole. In terms of the university's five priorities, Mrs. Hernandez is an "access" catalyst. She makes USA a friendly, easier place to navigate for everyone with whom she comes in contact.

Nominated by: Dr. James Stefurak  
Department of Counseling & Instructional Sciences

December 10, 2018