A Turning Point

Cristian Martinez: ‘Project SUCCESS gave me a sense of belonging at Cal Poly Pomona’

The first email I received about the Project SUCCESS program went ignored. It was the summer of 2016. I had just graduated from high school and wanted to enjoy my free time before I started college. So when Byron Howlett, the former interim associate vice president and dean of students, and Tim Alexander, the coordinator of the program, emailed me to see if I would be interested in joining Project SUCCESS that fall, thinking about academic support and mentoring was the last thing on my mind.

On my first day of school, I was nervous because I had never visited the campus and had no friends. I moved to Pomona from Carson, which is about an hour from campus. That quarter, I had classes from 8 until 11 a.m. every day. I thought this would be great for me. My classes would end early, and I would have the rest of the day to study and go out.

Accomplishing to the quarter system was tough. I ended up just going to class, sitting home to the off-campus room I rented and completing my assignments. After a couple weeks, I realized I never went out. I had housemates who struggled with substance abuse, which forced me to stay in my room because that was the only place I felt safe. The stress affected my mental health, and I had no one to confide in or ask for help. I was lost and alone.

The great thing about architecture is we have the ability to create a meaningful impact in people’s lives.

At Cal Poly Pomona, the College of Environmental Design also is striving to bolster diversity. In the architecture program, there are about 120 new undergraduate students every fall but sometimes only one or two African-American students, say Michael Woo, dean of the College of Environmental Design.

“Design professionals have a big role in working to bolster the diversity of its students. Recognizing the importance of diversity in the design professions, ENY is working to bolster the diversity of its students.”

Bouza has found great success in a field that is not very diverse. "The Los Angeles Business Journal named her the "2014 Executive of the Year—Women Making a Difference." As a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Bouza will be the AIA Los Angeles chapter 2019 president.

Of the estimated 125,000 licensed architects in the United States, around 18 percent are women. For African-American women, the number is much smaller at approximately 10 or 0.5 percent, she says. Despite the lack of representation in the profession, Bouza says through the support of colleagues and mentors, she was able to make her dreams a reality.

“As an African-American woman architect, I could look at the statistics and be discouraged that the odds are stacked against me,” she says. “But...