PACIFIC PORTRAITS

The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University

VOLUME THREE

BEE TREE
PACIFIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
Forest Grove, Oregon
The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove News-Times, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”
NARCE RODRIGUEZ

Narrative by Sophia Backus
Photographs by Macie Akai

Narce Rodriguez is a difficult woman to find. She's split across all six of Pacific University’s campuses, and a trip to the Health Professions location in Hillsboro seemed my only chance to meet this bustling woman.

I walk down hallways lined with lockers and professionals in their twenties and beyond. They are friendly and greet me as I search for the elusive room 211. It's not there. I do another loop and at the end of the hall, I see 211 right in front of me, with three large signs blatantly marking it. Inside the small office, I see Narce on a call. She pauses the conversation to come out and ask for a few more minutes, an apologetic smile on her face. A few minutes later, she waves me into her bare office, phone cord still tying her to her desk. A few salutations and she ends the call. “Sorry about that. That was my old boss at PCC [Portland Community College]. We're working to make a bridge program,” she explains, moving aside her computer and folding her hands on her desk. Specifically, they are working with the School of Business to make it easier to transition into Pacific’s program from PCC. “Today has been hectic. It's my first day at this location.”

While it may be her first day in this office, Narce has been working nonstop at Pacific since July of 2017. Narcedalia Rodriguez, better known as Narce, is the Chief Equity Diversity Inclusion Officer at Pacific University. While she is new to this university, she has worked at many others, including OSU, Arizona State University, Portland State University, and PCC. She started off as a recruitment officer at OSU and eventually became the Dean of Students at PCC.

Throughout the interview, she repeatedly expresses that students
are her favorite part about working at Pacific and other colleges.

“I’m a nerd,” she tells me, laughing. “I love school.” Narce attended OSU for her undergraduate degrees in Sociology and Spanish and Master’s degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, specifically in Class, Race, and Gender as well as Women’s Studies. She began her college career at OSU with a one year scholarship available to migrant workers and their children. “They provided us one year of tuition money to kind of get us set up and then the years after that we were sort of on our own, but at least it gave us that foundation to kinda get our feet wet with what college is about.” At that point in her life, however, it was time for her to go to college. She took time between her Masters and PhD programs to have her two daughters before deciding to continue on. Just a year in, however, events beyond her control prevented her from finishing her PhD program. She chose to leave to have more time for her two daughters, both quite young at the time, and her husband, sick from his time serving in the Gulf War. While she doesn’t want to take on the financial burden of the PhD program now, just a handful of years away from retirement, she still takes classes on empowerment and career advancement to scratch that school-loving itch.

Narce has lived in the Cornelius-Forest Grove area for nearly twenty years, but has known and loved the area since her days working at OSU as a recruiter. “I just liked the community and I liked that I could go into a high school and see people that looked like me,” she explains. “And I would look forward to coming [here] because I could get some tacos,” she adds enthusiastically, dissolving into laughter. Apparently, when she was in school, the closest taquerias to Corvallis were either in Woodburn or Forest Grove. She adds, “there’s a lot of work that needs to be done, but I feel very welcome.”

At Pacific University, she’s been working tirelessly to get the Multicultural Center, a new student-led
organization on campus, up and running. “We’re still in infrastructure mode,” she explains, but with the help of nine student leaders, she’s working to get connected with all the Senates, Centers, and departments on campus. She wants to unify Pacific around clear goals that everyone knows and works together to create and that is what she hopes for in the future for the Pacific Family.

“Every family has a different way of running a family. You might have a family that dinners at six and everybody sits at the table and then you’re gonna talk about your day… But you may have a family where the mom is out working two jobs and to have dinner is to just make sure that you have food to eat… It’s the same at Pacific. Can we all sit down and have a conversation and program times or do we just have these random conversations outside of the classroom?”

Narce wants to embrace the different communities that exist on campus and unite them. Her visions of equity and inclusion require collaboration across campus, but she sees this as an attainable goal. It will just require the Pacific Family to work together day to day, as it takes time to understand different perspectives, and practice to implement change. This monumental task doesn’t appear to phase her. She tells me confidently, “I am a little bit of everything because everything should have equity.”

Despite her dedication to it, Narce’s job isn’t her whole life. She loves to spend time with her family, especially her two grandkids, Marques and Tommy. Proudly, she shows me
photos of nine month old Tommy, and laments the fact that twelve year old Marques never lets her take photos of him. She goes on to tell me, “I love to spend time with my family. I have a big family and the babies that are all being born. I have a whole bunch of nieces and nephews that are starting to have babies so that’s fun.”

When she’s not in the thick of her large family, she likes her solitude to recharge. “I like just moments alone. I’m more of an introverted person, so I enjoy just looking out the window at birds and enjoying nature.” In addition to her home life, her dedication to empowerment in her community is highlighted by her active involvement with Adelante Mujeres and Central Cultural. She negotiated a partnership between Pacific University and these organizations for DACA vigils this October.

As I leave Narce’s office of warm smiles and laughter, I cannot help but think how brave and generous this woman really is. She came from hardship most students at Pacific have never experienced or had to imagine and made herself into an inspiring woman who has dedicated her life to making herself and her community a better place.

She is very new to the Pacific Family, but her passion for its growth and success is palpable. There doesn’t seem to be a doubt in her mind that we can make the campus a more inclusive place for all students, faculty, staff, and the community—we’re all a part of this family.