

## SLU Student Spotlight: Sima Petilli of LEAP to Teacher

by Becky Firesheets

Sima Petilli, a preschool special-needs educator and participant in SLU's [LEAP-to-Teacher](#) program who recently earned her master's degree at Lehman College, was not going to let anything stand in her way of becoming a certified teacher – not even the sudden, mid-semester transition to working, studying, and full-time parenting from home in response to COVID-19, all while also preparing for the edTPA, a challenging certification exam requiring prospective teachers to submit a portfolio of lesson plans, videos, and written responses.



“It’s very easy to get confused and overwhelmed, but in reality, the edTPA is like a wave. You ride from one wave to another,” Sima said of her experience tackling the different portions of the test.

Originally from Russia, Sima first came to the U.S. when she was 13 years old and then moved to Israel to complete her undergraduate studies. She returned to the States afterward to pursue a career in public relations as a Conference Director. But when the company went bankrupt, she realized she wanted a completely different lifestyle. For the past three years, Sima has worked as a special needs pre-school teacher in Manhattan, and loves it.

“You never know what could happen during a lesson!” she exclaimed gleefully. “This was a big shift in my career and I’m very happy with my decision.”

But in order to remain in her newfound dream job, Sima had to earn a master’s degree and pass the New York State certification exams.

“I’m a full-time working teacher, I have two kids and a house, and I was in grad school full-time. It’s a lot,” she admitted. “But I was very prepared because I had a lot of support from Professor [Jamel] Holmes. He always said, ‘Make a plan, work the plan.’ This really resonated with me.”

Sima didn’t just work her plan; she crushed it. In order to pass the edTPA and become a certified teacher, students must earn a 38. Sima scored a 50, six points higher than the national average.

“I was just so like, ‘I need to pass, I need to pass.’ I wasn’t concentrating on a specific number,” she said with a sheepish smile.

In addition to Professor Holmes’s class, Sima credited her success to consistent hard work. “When you take big breaks, you lose momentum. But if you stay on task, work every day, and keep going, you keep the momentum.”

Last but not least, Sima also gave a heartfelt shout-out to her partner. “My husband played a huge role. I was able to do this with a lot of his support.”

And now that she has earned her master’s, passed the exams, and wrapped up the semester of teaching?

“My kids were very excited when I finished, they said, ‘No more college for Mommy!’” Sima laughed.