

CSUCI Professor of Mathematics wins national mentoring award

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Youngstown University Associate Professor of Mathematics & Statistics Alicia Prieto Langarica said that meeting Wyels when Langarica was a junior minority mathematician was one of the best things that ever happened to her.

“The year my tenure application was approved, she invited me to spend my spring break at CSUCI, to help refocus my career and to guide me through grant applications and help me brainstorm for my sabbatical proposal,” Langarica wrote as one of many things Wyels did to help her succeed in academia.

Among many other projects, Wyels and CSUCI colleagues developed a minority-serving program called Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) to guide students into mathematics research.

Letters of support from former REU students offered a glimpse into how far above and beyond Wyels went as a mentor.

Alejandra Castillo, who is working for her Ph.D. in Statistics at Oregon State University, remembers meeting Wyels at a SACNAS conference in Los Angeles.

“As a undocumented student, I had already been warned that REU Programs were out of my reach due to my citizenship status,” she wrote. “Dr. Wyels quickly mentioned that the Mathematics REU at CSUCI was undocumented student-friendly. She then talked about how a few of her past students, though undocumented, have continued to pursue careers in academia and industry. This entire conversation took place within the first 20 minutes after meeting Dr. Wyels and she has continued to change my life ever since.”

Crystal Mackey, who is studying for a Ph.D. in Mathematics at the University of Texas at Arlington, was struggling in her graduate program.

“In the beginning of graduate school I quickly felt overwhelmed about remaining in good standing and I did not feel like I belonged in school,” Mackey said. “I was ready to leave the program. I called Dr. Wyels looking for support and she inspired me to use all my resources such as professors’ office hours, and to continue to work hard.”

Wyels said that if she has been effective as a mentor, it’s because she and her network considered their jobs to be more than advising students on math research or grad school.

“You have to look at the whole person. It’s not just about the math,” she said. “Especially our first generation students and underrepresented minorities. All that context can be critically important.”

Wyels says she treasures all the letters, but especially the letters from former students.

“When I’m on my death bed reading these I’ll say ‘maybe I made a little bit of a difference,’” she said.

The MS Mathematics degree is offered through CSUCI Extended University. Visit our [website](#) to learn more about the program.