

Guidance system

Aspiring college counselor thrives in hands-on program

By **Ashley Cisneros** for USA TODAY

After Mitzi Iniguez, 25, graduated with her bachelor's degree from University of California, Berkeley, she wasn't sure of her next move.

She reflected upon her path to higher education and thought about the key people in her life who helped along the way—specifically her encouraging mother and caring high school counselor.

"I thought about my student services job on campus and what I enjoyed doing, including tutoring and mentoring," she says. "I knew that a

career in college counseling was right for me."

After graduation, she knew that she wanted to stay local because of the network she had built in her community.

"My program is one of the better ones in California, it is credentialed, and a lot of my mentors attended San Francisco State University, too," says Iniguez, who is working at UC Berkeley while attending graduate school.

MITZI INIGUEZ

M.S. in counseling

San Francisco State University

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is tailored to each student with a variety of class options.

"I come from a very diverse community, and to be going to school with other people who

want to help diverse students is wonderful," she says. "I have gained a good understanding of the holistic

aspect of helping students and how to understand their educational goals in context with all aspects of their life."

While some cultures view counseling as a taboo topic, Iniguez wants all students to know it's wise and normal to seek

assistance.

"Through my career, I want to help students learn that counseling is for everyone. All of us encounter times in our lives when we may need to talk to someone and let things go," she says.

On a typical day, Iniguez works at her internship during the day and attends classes in the evening.

She says the portfolio she's developed during graduate school is an excellent tool for job interviews.

Iniguez says the grad school experience is much different from college, and it offers ample opportunities to grow academically, professionally, personally, and socially. Smaller class sizes offer intimate settings to connect with fellow students.

"Many of the students are older, have families, and work while attending school. You have a chance to learn from your classmates just as much as from your professors," she says.

Though the expense of grad school can be burdensome, Iniguez believes it's worth it.

"You're going to gain so much more financially in the end because your master's degree gives you a competitive advantage over other job seekers," she says. "Don't let money keep you from attending grad school if that's what you want."

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She says that her program's hands-on approach that requires internships is perfect for her because that's how she learns best. Iniguez enjoys the fact that multiculturalism is emphasized in every class. In addition, she likes the way that the program