

Education as the Cornerstone for an Inspiring Career

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by Jewelle Hicks, publications manager

As the chair of the HIM department at Chaparral College in Tucson, AZ, Mynilma D. Olivera-Vazquez, RHIA, has a great deal on her plate. Her responsibilities include overseeing all aspects of the HIM program, including teaching, hiring, mentoring students, and planning the curriculum. It's no small feat for a department with 14 faculty members and 46 students. When asked how she manages such a full load, Vazquez simply responds with a laugh, "Planning, planning, and more planning."

Recently Vazquez has been putting her planning skills to the test as Chaparral College's HIM program is seeking accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education.

Realizing the Value of Education

Vazquez saw the benefits of education early in her career. "When I was a practice manager, I realized that without education I would remain at the same level and continue to receive the same pay, so I went back to school. In 2000 I graduated from Macon State College with a bachelor degree in health information management."

The turning point in her career came while she was a coding auditor, instructing students on coding guidelines for the Department of Defense. "I realized I had a knack for teaching," she says. "I started as a substitute at Delaware Technical Community College, teaching medical coding and billing. I was offered an adjunct instructor position while holding a full-time position as director of HIM for Select Specialty Hospitals," she says. "In 2002 I was offered a full-time position and jumped at the chance. I have been in education ever since."

Looking Ahead

Vazquez is very optimistic about the future of HIM education. "Education must change to meet the demands of this new age of technology, therefore the future of HIM education will be online," Vazquez notes. "However, I see the classroom setting and the online environment working hand in hand to accommodate the needs of long-distance students and helping fill the need for qualified instructors."

Vazquez feels the major hurdle HIM educators face is not only educating students but the general public as well. "A lot of people still don't understand HIM and how comprehensive it is," she notes. "For example, it is still a struggle to get local and state medical associations to support and participate in HIM programs. They don't see the benefits of HIM education and why we are more qualified for certain roles."

The Teacher Becomes a Student

When reflecting on her days as a student, Vazquez says, "Being a student has definitely made me a better educator." Currently completing her master's degree in management and healthcare administration, she frequently uses her classroom experiences as a student in her own classroom as a teacher. "You have to be a student to be a good educator; there is no way around that," Vazquez notes definitively.

Vazquez has a strong belief that "education is the cornerstone for a career in HIM" and feels rewarded when her students become successful in their careers. Optimistic about the future, Vazquez feels the best is yet to come. "I think I'm living my dream now. It wasn't easy getting here, but here I am."

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