

'No dream is too small:' PhD grad advocates for diverse student success

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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable spring 2022 graduates (<https://news.asu.edu/20220419-sun-devil-life-look-some-asus-top-spring-2022-grads>).

This spring, Arizona State University student Anjanette Griego will cross the commencement stage to achieve her dream: a PhD in English (writing, rhetorics and literacies) (<https://english.asu.edu/degrees/grad/doctor-philosophy-writing-rhetorics-literacies>). Hailing from the small rural town of Dixon, New Mexico, this first-generation college student overcame many obstacles on the journey, and she did it with perseverance, confidence and faith.



Graduating doctoral student Anjanette Griego said that her goal is to “get more underrepresented, underserved students to college and through to graduation.”

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Upon admission to the doctoral program in 2017, Griego was awarded the competitive Graduate College Interdisciplinary Enrichment Fellowship (<https://graduate.asu.edu/current-students/funding-opportunities/awards-and-fellowships/graduate-college-enrichment-fellowship>), which allowed her to

focus on her studies while learning about student support and interdisciplinary research.

During the remainder of her program, she served as a teaching associate in the Department of English, teaching first-year composition to undergraduate students from all across campus. She's passionate about teaching writing and conducting research in writing studies, as well as identity and economic status in the college classroom. She said that her goal is to "get more underrepresented, underserved students to college and through to graduation."

Griego's research is on training, procedures, policies and resources for diverse populations; she currently holds a position as learning facilitator at Mesa Community College's Foundations for Student Success, where she works with the First Year Experience program. She provides one-on-one guidance, conducts workshops promoting college success and is very involved in the student ambassador program, which is based on student leadership.

Griego successfully defended her dissertation (<https://english.asu.edu/news-events/events/anjanette-griego-phd-defense-lets-talk-about-it-interrogating-theories-language>), "Let's Talk About It: Interrogating Theories of Language and Race During First-Year Composition Teacher Training," on April 14. Going forward, she plans to work hard to advocate for a more equal education system.

We had the pleasure of talking with Griego about her rewarding PhD journey, tips for student success and hopes for the future.

Question: What was your "aha" moment, when you realized you wanted to study in your field?

Answer: I've always been interested in advocating for more access to college for underrepresented populations. When I was in my MA program at the University of New Mexico, I started to investigate ways to recognize and understand each student as an individual, including their language, culture and background. When I became a PhD student at Arizona State University, I really connected to my field through my coursework and the conversations I had with mentors, instructors and my fellow classmates.

My family has also had a big influence on my goals. I come from a family who really believes in the power of education and has always supported me in my interests.

Q: What's something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: I learned so much while attending ASU. I learned so much from my students, who always teach me through their writing. I have also learned from my classmates. Their experiences and ideas have opened my eyes to new perspectives.

I have really been surprised by how much I have grown as a scholar. [Professor] Paul Kei Matsuda (<https://isearch.asu.edu/profile/1097693>) has taught me so much about second language writing. [Professor] Shirley Rose (<https://isearch.asu.edu/profile/1411622>) piqued my interest in writing program

administration. [Professors] Doris Warriner (<https://iresearch.asu.edu/profile/1154693>) and Keith Miller (<https://iresearch.asu.edu/profile/57091>) have taught me so much about research. All these wonderful mentors at ASU have helped shape me into the professional I am.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: I first chose ASU because it was closer to home (Dixon, New Mexico) and because of the Southwestern similarities. Now I see that that choice has brought so much to me and it was the *best* decision. Once I had the chance to learn about the people, the students and the wonderful support that my department offered me, I realized that ASU was where I was meant to be. It became home. I am proud to be a member of ASU and a forever Sun Devil!

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: Doris Warriner has taught me the most important lessons while at ASU. Not only has she taught me about multilingual literacies and about research, but she truly was there for me every step of the way as a student and person. One of my first in-depth conversations with Dr. Warriner was at a time when I was becoming very overwhelmed with school. She really lifted my spirits and let me know that I had what it takes to complete a PhD. She also understood how important things outside of school were to me and taught me how to manage everything. That was the biggest lesson I learned – is how to fully embrace every aspect of my life. To this day, no matter how busy she is, Dr. Warriner makes time for me, and she is genuinely present every single time we talk. To this day she still reminds me of why I deserve to be here. She is a role model.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd give to those still in school?

A: Believe in yourself! School is not easy but that is why the accomplishment is worth it. However, when the going gets tough, remember that you deserve to be there and take pride in what you bring to the table.

No dream is too small! Go after the life you want. No one is going to do it for you, so you have to have faith in yourself. Work hard and do what it takes to give yourself the life you deserve.

Q: What was your favorite spot for power studying?

A: I absolutely loved hanging out and studying in Ross-Blakley Hall (RBHL). I really liked the private rooms that were available for us. Plus RBHL just has such a cool aesthetic.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I am looking forward to focusing on building a career. I do not know yet where I will end up, but I find it amazing that there's a world of possibilities for me.

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

A: If I had \$40 million, I would set up a scholarship fund for underrepresented students from rural areas. I would love for students from rural areas to freely embrace the opportunity of an education of their choice (associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, trade). There are so many people from rural areas who shine bright and who need to be recognized.

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