

## Vanessa Calonzo

### Director of New Student Services & First Year Experience



**Jessica:** What do you do? How does your role serve students?

**Vanessa:** I am honored to serve as the administrator over the New Student Services Department in the Welcome Center. Our goal is to help prospective and new students get the support they need to explore programs, enroll, and get oriented to the college. You may see our team at outreach events in the community, providing tours around the campus (when we are open), and helping students understand the enrollment process in the Welcome Center. Essentially, we are the Welcome Wagon of South Seattle College.

**Jessica:** How long have you been an Otter?

**Vanessa:** As of April 2, I will have worked at South for 15 years :)

**Jessica:** What do you love about South?

**Vanessa:** I love South's family-like atmosphere and my co-workers who dedicate themselves to our students. Our campus has a great sense of humor as well. The best part is seeing our students grow and find passions in their time with us. It's an awesome place to work.

**Jessica:** What is something that you are enjoying doing right now?

**Vanessa:** Right now I'm trying to perfect the art of making an orange mocha on my Nespresso. I'm a coffee lover and I am definitely getting close.

**Jessica:** Could you share something you learned that you wish you knew sooner in your academic career?

**Vanessa:** When I was in college, I never even considered there were jobs at a college that were focused on learning and education. I lucked out falling in love with higher education through my extra-curricular activities, but I would encourage everyone to really explore careers out there and utilize your WorkSource Career Services and Counseling Services on campus. There are so many new and exciting careers that didn't even exist before. The more you research and reflect on the skills you need to develop, the more opportunity you have to refine those skills in college and in your extra-curricular activities.

I'd also say getting involved is one of the best things you can do to build your network of friends, future references, and people who know resources in general. Having a community when you're facing challenges with learning is so important.

**Jessica:** Could you share a bit about your academic/career journey? How did you come to your current position?

**Vanessa:** I started my career first as a Multicultural Student Mentor for the Asian Pacific Islander Center at Washington State University (WSU), when I was working on my undergraduate degree in Social Studies for Secondary Education Teaching. I also had the opportunity to serve as both an Orientation Counselor as well as a Program Coordinator for the Alive! New Student Orientation program at WSU.

After I earned my degree, I decided to work for a bit and after a couple random positions I got my opportunity to start working as a Program Assistant at South Seattle College in our Student Outreach, Admissions, and Recruitment (SOAR) Department. I grew in this department and eventually became the SOAR Director. In this time, I went back to school and got my Master's Degree in Education focused on Student Development Administration at Seattle University.

As the years have gone by, we added more responsibilities to our department with enrollment support, orientation activities, and we are now focusing our efforts on our newly formed Welcome Center. I've also been privileged to help with a variety of projects like the Seattle Promise program (which started at South originally) and I am currently assisting with the development of Guided Pathways, a model of system change at South.

**Jessica:** Anything else you would like to share about yourself?

**Vanessa:** I'm a proud Filipina/White mix woman and take my ethnic, cultural, and familial identity very seriously. I am a proud mother of 3 kiddos. You most likely will be hearing me giggle on campus because I love to laugh and learn about people. I've loved working at South and am a proud Otter.