

Recent Alumni Recognition Award Interview
2017 Recipient
Vanessa Torres, Class of '06

Q: How did you choose CIU?

A: I discovered my passion for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) while studying my undergrad at Ferman University. We were required to do volunteer community work, where I volunteered as a TEFL teacher. Looking back I'm thankful for that requirement, because it led me to my calling. I knew CIU had a heart for missions, and the best TEFL program in South Carolina. It was also right down the street from my house, so I applied and got accepted prepared me so well to be a teacher, not only TEFL but a teacher in public schools, which is what I do now.

Q: What impacted you during your time at CIU?

A: The TEFL program was awesome. My professors were awesome. They didn't just teach us about teaching, but they taught us to be Christ to our students. Along with TEFL, I also studied Intercultural Studies. I went to Indonesia on an ethnographic research trip, where God grew my heart for missions and my burden for the lost. The trip transformed my view on missions, and I saw my professors live out the examples they set in the classroom.

Q: What did you do after you graduated from CIU?

A: After CIU I started teaching English as a Second Language at USC. I worked with international students and loved it. My husband encouraged me to go into public school, so after praying about it I got certified to teach Spanish at Columbia High School. High school teaching is very demanding, so I stepped back after I had my first child, until God opened a door for me to teach elementary Spanish at Nursery Road Elementary School.

Q: What do you do now?

A: I teach Pre-K through 5th grade Spanish. We are moving into arts integration, which will allow us to incorporate arts into every class. Principle Love Ligons has done an incredible job leading this opportunity. Currently, I only get to see my kids once a week for 50 minutes, so I try to make every minute count. I apply principles I learned at CIU, using the natural acquisition approach, with a lot of physical response, teaching proficiency through reading and story-telling. As I read, the children act out stories with structures that I want them to learn. I'll ask them questions as I read, they answer, and eventually they are able to re-tell the story in Spanish and write their own version of the stories. Something magical happens when I use this kind of methodology. We're learning from brain based research that you acquire language by being exposed to it in a natural way, which is what I try to create in my classroom—a mini immersion experience.

Q: Tell us about your family!

A: My husband's name is Carlos, and we have two daughters: Sophia (5) and Isabella (2), and both are fully bilingual! My hat goes off to all people who have married teachers. All spouses of teachers are special people. We wouldn't be who we are if it wasn't for the support and love and patience of our spouses.

Q: Your advice/encouragement to CURRENT STUDENTS?

A: Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, do unto the lord and not unto men." Studying for a test, teaching a class, preparing a lesson, cleaning a house, taking care of kids, no matter what you doing, God is calling us to do it with all our heart. Sometimes you feel exhausted and unappreciated, sometimes it feels like no one notices. But God notices, He sees the extra hours you put in. He will give you the strength that you need to listen to him and make a difference for him. Don't ever stop running to the lord. We can't give what we don't have. He will give you the strength. Even when you feel at a road block or you can't deal with a challenging student. Keep going and don't give up.

Q: Your advice to ALUMNI?

A: Perseverance! Perseverance in what God has called you to do. "Do not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up." My heart goes out to those in difficult places with limited resources, know you're being used, and continue to persevere

*** Additional advice to teachers:**

- 1.** Take time each day to fill your cup. Do something that energizes and refreshes you. Read the Word, take a walk, work out, talk with a good friend....make it a priority to do this, because if you don't take care for yourself, you will not be able to care for others.
- 2.** Learn from veteran teachers. Observe seasoned teachers often. Ask them regularly for wisdom and advice. Take classes from them. Never stop learning and developing yourself professionally.
- 3.** Pray hard and pray often. Teaching is hard. Pray harder. Pray for strength, wisdom, and grace throughout the day, not just in the morning. Pray for your colleagues. Pray for your administrators. Pray for your students. Have a team of people praying for you and regularly update them, just as missionaries send out prayer letters to their supporters. You are on a mission field, and there are spiritual forces at work to destroy your faith and pull you away from your mission as a teacher, so the necessity for prayer support cannot be underestimated!
- 4.** NEVER give up! There will be days when you want to throw in the towel, that you don't feel cut out for teaching, that you feel everything is stacked against you, that your students don't want to learn what you are teaching...but don't you quit!! Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, trust Him in the dry spell, pick yourself back up again and try again tomorrow, because you WILL reap a harvest if you don't become weary in doing good!

Q: Prayer Request

A: (1) Pray for believing teachers to have opportunities to shine the light of Christ, because we teach in a culture that is becoming darker, and our hands are becoming more tied with what we are allowed to share. Pray that God would be glorified, and that Christ would be glorified in believing teachers. (2) Pray that kids who come from complete brokenness would be drawn into His love. (3) Please pray more community members would come in as mentors, after school club leaders, teaching assistants, business partners, etc, and pour out the love of Jesus on our kids! The harvest is ripe!