THE VALUE OF Higher Education

UAlbany President Robert J. Jones joins four other college and university presidents and a school district superintendent—all UAlbany alumni—to discuss the importance of higher education.
Miguel Aguilera, M.A.’98, Ph.D.’04
“Explaining Our World”

In an email from Tempe last spring, Arizona State University (ASU) Associate Professor of Religious Studies Miguel Aguilera confirmed that good things do come in threes.

Aguilera published The Maya World of Communicating Objects: Quadruplicate Crosses, Trees, and Stones (the University of New Mexico Press) in 2010. That same year, the ASU School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies faculty member was tenured. And last May, he received the Zebulon Pearce Distinguished Teaching Award, named for an 1899 graduate of the Territorial Normal School at Tempe, now ASU. In accepting the award, Aguilera acknowledged the “professors, colleagues, students, relatives and Maya consultants” who have inspired him. “I try to bring to my teaching what I admire most in many of them: a vivid interest in explaining our world and our place within it.”

His students attest to Aguilera’s success as both teacher and mentor. One noted: “Dr. Aguilera has influenced my scholarship and teaching in profound ways. While these have been critical to my professional development, my interactions with Dr. Aguilera have resulted in strengthening my character, as well. He has instilled in me ethics that guide my work and interpersonal relationships. Most of all, he has taught me that honesty and personal accountability are key for being a good researcher, teacher and human being.”

Aguilera learned those same lessons at UAlbany. Anthropology faculty Marilyn Masson and (now emeritus) Gary Gossen – to whom Aguilera dedicated his book – co-chaired his doctoral dissertation committee and “taught me what it means to be a scholar. They gave unselfishly of their time in guiding and mentoring me. Without them, I doubt I would have attained a tenure-track position, never mind Distinguished Associate Professor status, at Arizona State University,” Aguilera said.

– Carol Olechowski

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