

# Government and International Affairs

## EXTRAORDINARY EMPLOYEES

### Extraordinary Employee **Myriam Lechuga** makes life easier for graduate students in Northern Virginia

by LAURA NEFF-HENDERSON, APR

Over the course of her career, Myriam Lechuga has managed to work for several college, universities, and private companies all over the United States without ever moving away from her second home in Northern Virginia. A U.S. citizen, Lechuga hails from Havana, Cuba, her first home. Her family immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, when she was in grade-school.

Lechuga, who came to Virginia Tech in 2003, works as an administrative assistant and graduate coordinator for the Urban Affairs and Planning and Government and International Affairs programs. Both programs, part of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies' School of Public and International Affairs, are in the National Capital Region at the university's Alexandria, Virginia location.

In her dual roles, Lechuga handles the day-to-day operations and administrative needs of the programs. She recently began assisting with the Center for Public Administration and Policy as well. Most of her time now is spent working with graduate students in the three programs.

Lechuga serves as the primary point of contact for students – from their very first phone call to the university seeking information about a program, through the application process, class registration, progress toward degree, application for graduation, and graduation.

In 2008, Lechuga received the National Capital Region's Outstanding Staff Award in recognition of her excellent service to the university.



Lechuga has made it her job to serve graduate students in the School of Public and International Affairs.

#### ▲ AN UNEXPECTED PATH

Although higher education wasn't necessarily the career path Lechuga hoped for as an undergraduate studying international affairs at The George Washington University, in Washington, D.C., she says she wouldn't change a thing. As a college student, she had planned to pursue a career with an international organization or to enter the Foreign Service.

*“Working with students, especially non-traditional students who often juggle full-time jobs and families on top of classes and homework is one of the most rewarding parts of her job,” says Lechuga.*

Most of the students in the programs work full time and attend class part time, in the afternoon and evenings. Some only take one or two classes a semester and others spend two to three years in the program before graduating.

She understands the struggles of managing a full-time job. Lechuga earned her master's degree in arts management from American University while working full-time.

#### ▲ LIFE BEFORE ORANGE AND MAROON

Before coming to Virginia Tech, Lechuga worked with the graduate programs at several universities in the Washington, D.C. metro area, including the University of Southern California, University of Denver, and Florida Institute of Technology. She also worked with professional development programming at her alma mater The George Washington University.

From 1992-2001, Lechuga managed the foundation run by the American Society of Travel Agents. In that role, she oversaw dozens of scholarship programs and traveled the world raising money to support the foundation's undergraduate scholarships.

#### About this series

The Extraordinary Employee series highlights the achievements of Virginia Tech employees who go above and beyond, making a difference in the lives of others on campus and in the community.



Lechuga has volunteered at various Smithsonian museums during the last 20 years. She is seen here working at the information desk at the National Museum of the American Indian.

#### ▲ LIFE OUTSIDE VIRGINIA TECH

When she's not taking care of Virginia Tech students and employees, Lechuga spends her time taking care of the millions children and adults who visit the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Access to all of the facilities is free and, as of Nov. 17, the Smithsonian reports 24.5 million visits to date in 2014.

In her 20 plus year tenure as a volunteer with the Smithsonian, Lechuga spent about eight years as a docent at the Smithsonian Institution Building, also known as The Castle, where she led tours in English and Spanish. For another eight years she volunteered as a docent at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

While a docent she continued to work at the information desk at the National Air and Space Museum, where she stayed for 13 years. When it was time for a change, Lechuga sought out a volunteer position at the National Museum of the American Indian, where she's worked the information desk for about 10 years. She continues to work as an information specialist there.

“I had an interest in the arts and museums and I wanted to do something with some of my free time – and to be with people who had my same interests,” says Lechuga.

Occasionally, she also volunteers to help with special events at the Smithsonian or in the community, especially those that fall during National Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15 - Oct. 15). □

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