

Kristina Lopez's profile write up

Kristina Lopez, a Southern California native, is a self-described strong, independent Mexican American mother and an Associate Professor at Arizona State University School of Social Work who is driven by her Latino culture, community, and her passion for supporting people with disabilities. She has two wonderful daughters and a service animal named Coco who helps alert her when she is about to have a seizure. One of her family's favorite pastimes is attending Los Angeles Dodgers spring training games in Arizona. Kristina also has epilepsy and is one of the self-advocates on the Council.

Kristina loves to rollerblade and has been in several marathons around the country and around the world. Her favorite place to rollerblade is the California coast, where she loves hearing the crashing of the waves. She has also rollerbladed in London past Buckingham Palace, in the Netherlands, in Spain, and in Canada (if you live in the Phoenix Valley, you probably have seen her rollerblading around town right here in Arizona). Rollerblading became her passion because of her epilepsy: Her driver's license was taken away for two and half years, and she had to find a way to get around, and rollerblading was her answer. Adapting to circumstances helped her overcome a situation that is all too familiar within the disability community.

First diagnosed with epilepsy when she was 12, Kristina was a late diagnosis and she went through many different challenges related to the medical system, trying to get the right support. Kristina says her mom was instrumental in helping her move forward, calling everybody she could think of to get her daughter the assistance she needed, which Kristina is grateful for. During school, she was placed in special education classes with other individuals who had disabilities, such as autism. In these special education classes Kristina for the first time felt accepted and at peace. But she began to wonder why she did not see more Latino students getting services. Kristina decided to make a career out of trying to answer this question.

Kristina got her B.A. and M.A. degrees in Psychology from California State University Northridge. There she was in fellowship programs that were funded by the National Institutes of Health, which provided mentors. The work was focused on matching racial and ethnic minorities with the appropriate type of mentors that would help them understand the experience in academia. With this support and her own determination, she went on to earn her Ph.D., M.S.W., and M.S. degrees in psychology at the University of Michigan (Go, Wolverines!). She has been an Associate Professor at Arizona State University School of Social Work since 2018.

Dr. Lopez asks her students to focus on the core of social justice, trying to guide them to focus on equity and anti-racism practices. Among other published works, she is the author of [*Methods to Decrease Disparities in Age of Autism Diagnosis and Treatment Access among Latinx Children*](#). In this article, Dr. Lopez, along with her colleagues, reviewed the literature on Latinx children and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), identifying opportunities for social workers to be innovative in their use of frameworks, theories, and practice approaches to reduce disparities in ASD diagnosis and treatment among Latinx children. The article won the 2020 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Disability & Persons with Disabilities (CDPD) Disability Manuscript Award. CSWE is the national association representing social work education in the United States. Its members include over 800 accredited baccalaureate and master's degree social work programs, as well as individual social work educators, practitioners, and agencies dedicated to advancing quality social work education.

As a Council member, Kristina wants the Council to look at funding grants around reducing the disparities among racial minorities and individuals with disabilities. She knows from her own experiences and research that there are potential barriers within racial minorities that other individuals do not have to experience. She also wants to help the Council with making culturally informed interventions available, making sure that when a person receives services that culture, and race are taken into consideration.

A few final words of wisdom from Kristina: "Sitting here as a professor, sometimes I think how did this happen? I have been through brain surgeries, and I've been through all these medical tests, and it could just fall apart with a seizure. I also think that a lot of people thought I couldn't get here because of epilepsy. The best advice I can give people is don't give up, whatever your circumstances are."