

Welcome, New CUE Students!

We asked four of the students who started their degree programs at the UNC [Center for Urban Education](#) this fall to tell us a bit about themselves and why they want to be teachers. Thanks to Vanessa Valencia, Franklin DuCray, Camila Barrios, and Alejandra Banuelos for participating. And welcome to *all* of our new students!



CUE teacher candidate Vanessa Valencia with students at Maxwell Elementary

Vanessa Valencia

CUE teacher candidate Vanessa Valencia is a mom to a five-year-old son and has been working with children in a school setting for six years. She was at a private preschool for two years and then moved to Maxwell Elementary, where she works as a special education paraprofessional. “I love being able to help students grow and witness the great things they can achieve when they have great teachers,” said Valencia, “and that’s what made me want to become a teacher myself.”

Valencia enjoys being able to continue working while attending school, along with the small class sizes at the Center. “At the university I was attending before, I felt like just another student number; at the Center I feel like I have more of a connection with professors.” Valencia also likes

being able to take what she is learning in the classroom back to her job. "I have been learning many new ways to be able to support my students," Valencia said.

Valencia's favorite class this semester is Diverse Children's Literature with Dr. Sandy Mason. Valencia said, "I have been learning how to ensure that all of our students are represented in the literature we read in the classroom. As a person of color myself, I want my students to have a clear sense of belonging when I have my own classroom."

A fun fact about Valencia is that she loves spending her free time around her horses and chickens.

Franklin DuCray

Franklin DuCray's journey to the teacher prep program at the Center for Urban Education was shaped by a challenging past and a passion for making a difference in the lives of students. "Growing up, I faced significant obstacles, including a period of addiction and chronic health issues," explained DuCray. "On my 18th birthday, I moved out, got clean, and began a career teaching swim lessons.

"My experiences as a young child in the foster system and being labeled a 'problem child' due to severe ADHD have fueled my desire to support students who don't fit the traditional mold." He felt let down by the education system when he was young and wants to keep other children from facing the same struggles.

DuCray chose the Center for Urban Education because the program focuses on turning paraprofessionals into teachers and has a streamlined approach to getting more educators into the workforce. "The program's accommodating nature and strong support system align perfectly with my goals and needs as a working professional," said DuCray.

DuCray's favorite class this semester is College Composition taught by Sarah Campbell, which has helped him rediscover his passion for writing. "My confidence in my writing has doubled, thanks to Professor Campbell's teaching," he said.

Outside of work, DuCray is passionate about music and said his collection of liked songs is one of his most prized possessions. He's also an amateur DJ and music producer.



CUE teacher candidate Camila Barrios

Camila Barrios

New CUE student Camila Barrios was born and raised in Denver and is the oldest of four siblings. She attended various elementary schools and in each one, there was always a teacher who comforted her and pushed her to do her best. “I am grateful to those teachers for being rigorous with me—they knew I could achieve more than I thought,” said Barrios. She wants to show the same care and compassion to her students at Saint James Catholic School, where she is working as a paraprofessional in her very first job.

Barrios chose the Center for Urban Education because it offered many opportunities that other teaching programs did not, such as gaining real-life experience in the classroom. “The most exciting part of attending classes is the one-on-one time I get with my professors,” said Barrios. “The classes are small enough for teachers to give everyone the attention they need. It’s hard to fall behind because you’re always in dialogue with your professors.”

Her favorite class so far this semester is math, because she was never in a math class where she could get the support she needed to be successful. “I grew up thinking everything had to be perfect. The experience of not being afraid to make mistakes and not being reprimanded is truly liberating,” said Barrios.

A fun fact about Barrios is that she can touch her nose with her tongue, though she classifies it as a somewhat “useless talent.”



CUE teacher candidate Alejandra Banuelos explaining Día de los Muertos to students at Park Hill Elementary School

Alejandra Banuelos

New CUE student Alejandra Banuelos grew up in Aurora, Colorado, and graduated from New American Schools in 2019. She has a 21-month-old baby girl and was a stay-at-home mom for two years before deciding to continue her schooling.

Banuelos has always dreamed of becoming a teacher and was thrilled to get the opportunity to work at Park Hill Elementary School. She loves tapping into her creativity and sense of fun when working as a paraprofessional because it engages the students in the lessons, and they learn more than they would have otherwise.

One reason Barrios chose the Center for Urban Education was because she watched her sister graduate from the program and achieve her dream of becoming a teacher. Banuelos also appreciates that she can live off-campus and that she'll be able to get a certificate in American Sign Language during her program.

"The teachers are amazing and understanding here," said Banuelos. "I also enjoy learning from other students in the classrooms. Everyone is just so nice and respectful."

A fun fact about Banuelos is that she loves to draw and color as if she were still a child.

This fall, we welcomed 17 new students to the UNC Center for Urban Education. Director Dr. Rosanne Fulton said, "We are so glad to partner with all of you as you work to attain your dream of becoming a teacher. Your diverse backgrounds and experiences will allow you to contribute greatly to Denver classrooms and students."

Miss Our Last Issue?

Visit the [newsletter archive](#)! In the [October issue](#), we gave a shout out to principals for [National Principals Month](#) and heard from several of our teacher candidates who recently received [Daniels Fund Boundless Opportunity Scholarships](#). In the [September issue](#), we explained the role of CUE mentors in the lives and careers of our teacher candidates.

[Center for Urban Education](#)



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