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## Compassion in the Field

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# Compassion in the field

It's Saturday morning, and Miriam Morales-Ayala '15 is behind the reception desk at the Yamhill County Free Clinic. With a reassuring smile, she checks in patients and translates for Spanish-speaking clients when necessary.

Making sure people understand health issues and are treated with respect and compassion regardless of their socioeconomic or legal status are core values for Morales-Ayala, who will graduate in May with a degree in biochemistry and molecular biology and has her sights set on medical school.

"My goal is to use all the biochemistry I've been learning to simplify things for patients so they can understand what's happening medically," she said. "One of the biggest things I've learned is that patients are more likely to follow the directions and take responsibility for their recovery if they know what's going on in their bodies."

It's a concept she's exploring in her Linfield classes, according to Liz Atkinson, professor of chemistry.

"She not only wants to get the right answer, but she genuinely wants to understand the underlying principles of what she is learning, and she wants to help other students understand, too," Atkinson said.

Morales-Ayala is taking full advantage of her Linfield education. She studied abroad in Ecuador and balances rigorous science classes and labs with a variety of clubs and volunteer activities. Last summer she interned in the Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine at Oregon Health and Science University. In addition to the Yamhill County Free Clinic,

she volunteers in the medical/surgical department at Willamette Valley Medical Center. She assists Spanish-speaking parents at McMinnville High School. She coordinates Linfield College Latinos Adelante (LCLA), was the project leader for Hispanic Heritage Day, and last year served as president of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA). Both groups focus on cultural awareness and mentoring.

"My first year at Linfield, LCLA really helped me feel like I was at a second home," she recalls. "It was comforting to see other people who had similar circumstances succeed – being Latino, being a first generation college student, English being my second language, having to go home often because of family responsibilities."

Soft spoken with a kind smile, she leads by example, according to Jason Rodriguez, director of multicultural programs at Linfield.

"She's an understated leader – the best kind," said Rodriguez, who worked with Morales-Ayala to host Hispanic Heritage Day at Linfield, among other events.

At 16, Morales-Ayala had given little thought to college until a MEChA leadership conference and some key mentors showed her the possibilities. She's spent her time since then mentoring others. As a freshman, she served as an Oregon Campus Compact AmeriCorps summer VISTA leader, working with the "9th Grade Counts" initiative in Portland.

As a Ford Family Foundation scholar and first in her family to attend college, Morales-Ayala is inspired by her family.

"They work hard, they are passionate and they are able to thrive," she said of her parents, who migrated to Oregon prior to her birth. "They find ways to succeed



*Miriam Morales-Ayala '15, who plans to become a doctor, volunteers at two local health care organizations and wants to help patients understand what's happening when they are ill or injured.*

and give us what we need regardless of the obstacles and limitations they may face."

Her long-term goal is to ensure people – regardless of socioeconomic background and cultural barriers – have access to quality health care.

"I am learning from firsthand experiences serving those facing health disparities and this will make me a skilled and compassionate doctor and servant leader," said Morales-Ayala. "My liberal arts foundation has allowed me to build a mosaic perspective to make sense of broader topics and learn to critically analyze and question every situation I have been faced with in these different organizations."

Watch a video at [youtube.com/linfieldcollege/videos](https://www.youtube.com/linfieldcollege/videos)

– Laura Davis