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Eirian Williams: The Village-Builder of PAU

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Eirian Williams has welcomed students to Palo Alto University (PAU) since 1997, whether in her role as the Director of Financial Aid or in her current role as Director of Outreach Recruitment. But to say Ms. Williams welcomes students is an understatement. Her personality is more like an entire welcome wagon and the relationships she forms often nurture students through graduation and even beyond.

Williams is a natural recruiter and many students and alumni will recognize her from the Admissions Office, recruitment fairs, or for being a sympathetic staff member on campus. So effective is Ms. Williams at her job that she recruited her manicurist of thirty years to the undergraduate program. Now an alumna, Williams is talking to her about pursuing a master's degree!

As a young woman, Ms. Williams attended Sawyer College and expected her business degree to take her into the for-profit sector, where she might become an executive assistant. The president of Sawyer offered her a different path, though, and she was soon a Financial Planner in her alma mater's Financial Aid Office. She gained experience, obtained another position at Heald College, and eventually came to work for Barbara Bell at Pacific Graduate School of Psychology – what is now PAU.

At this point in her career, she was still thinking of being an executive assistant, but her interactions with PGSP (now PAU) students seemed to plant her roots deeper into the nonprofit higher education sector and she has been with us for almost 25 years.

Ms. Williams began to "adopt" students: the ones who couldn't get home for the holidays, the ones struggling in their studies, and the many work-study students she has supervised. Williams's hospitality didn't just extend to students, though.

She describes one experience, around Thanksgiving, when auditors were on campus – financial aid offices are audited every year per federal standards. With her mother, Williams hosted a Thanksgiving luncheon on campus with the auditors, staff, and work-study students.

Williams said this village and family atmosphere is what made her fall in love with PAU, but many signs point to the fact that she herself creates that environment.

Williams attends graduations and often shares tears and hugs with graduates and their families. Alumni keep in touch and some become friends. One dear friend of Williams is a PAU graduate she met 15 years ago. Williams was the Maid of Honor in her wedding last year. She met up with another alumna when she was recruiting for PAU in Atlanta. She hadn't seen that alumna in 20 years, but she's now a mother of three and has a private practice.

In talking about students she remembers, Williams can list off alumni who have obtained their doctoral degrees, are doing post-doctoral work, and several currently in exciting internships. "It's such a blessing to me, that I have the opportunity to speak life into my students and then my students speak life into me," Williams said.

Even off campus, at recruitment fairs, Williams networks with colleagues so they can all find the right program for each student. She knows a psychology degree might not be right for everyone, but that everyone might have a friend, colleague, or family member who might be a good fit for PAU.

"I believe in this institution. That's what makes my job easy. I think our school is the greatest school in the nation. I'm a little biased but look at the product we produce: empathetic clinicians who are exploring the next level of psychology."

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