Vanessa Valdez, Halliburton

OVERVIEW The mission of the WiE People Series is to inform and inspire current female students in the University of Oklahoma (OU) Gallogly and Mewbourne colleges through the elucidation of the diversity of opportunity related to positively impacting society through academic and professional pursuits. This WiE Series edition highlights Vanessa Valdez and features her personal journey.

MOTIVATION Very early in Vanessa’s life her parents exposed her to higher education. Being born near Lubbock, Texas, the family had easy access to Texas Tech games, as well as academic and athletic summer camps. Her dad liked to say, “it’s college or the military after high school”. And considering she still cannot do a push-up, Vanessa would say she picked the right path. There were really two defining moments early in her life when she really knew she wanted to pursue a college degree. The first was when she was a measly 12-years-old and was determined to attend a summer camp in Galveston, Texas. Her mom was a stay-at-home mom at the time, and went to work for our local newspaper for eight months just to earn enough money to send me to camp. This was one of the many sacrifices she made for Vanessa to achieve the level of success she has today. The second was when her dad went to work for Halliburton in 2007. Vanessa had just attended a special event at The University of Texas and the staff was very blunt about the cost of tuition. The salary Vanessa’s dad was making at that time, was less than the cost of one year at a Texas public university and he wanted to ensure nothing stood in her way of attending Texas Tech. This launched his 10-year (and counting) career with Halliburton and exposed Vanessa to the company in which she would eventually have a career. Vanessa says, “The day I became a first-generation college graduate from Texas Tech was the single greatest moment of my life. Mostly because I didn’t just do it for me, I did it for the sacrifices my parents made. And the sacrifices their parents made, and everyone in my family before me”. Vanessa was the first graduate to receive a dual-degree in Journalism and Public Relations at Texas Tech. She states, “I truly believe this combination helped launch me into my field today because I have a deeper understanding of communication and human interaction”.

INSIGHT Vanessa says, “Do not ever let anyone take away your power of self-belief. Eleanor Roosevelt said it best, ’no one can make you feel inferior without your consent’. My biggest regret in college was being afraid to ask for help or advice from professionals. I wish I would have leveraged the opportunities I had to learn from those offering their help. Today, one of the biggest compliments anyone can pay me is asking me for advice. Truly one of the greatest lessons learned: Always listen to your mother. It took me 24 years (and counting) to realize my mom might know a thing or two about life. Mom is the one woman who will always be a constant aid of support, criticism and praise”.

“I believe that fortitude is key. More than anything, be consistent. Go at it. Go at it. Go at it. When you succeed, don’t forget the responsibility of making somebody else success with you.” - Antonia Novello, 14th U.S. Surgeon General, 1st woman and 1st Hispanic to serve as Surgeon General

“Working women know their rights and proudly rise to face the struggle. The hour of their degradation is past...women are no longer servants but rather the equals of men, companions to them.” – Jovita Idar, Mexican-American journalist & activist