

In New Role, Angela Khoo Leads Transfer Center Based on Advice from Real-Life Experience



Angela Khoo likes to tell the story of the time when a nurse from Home Health Services, who was taking care of her 83-year-old mother, asked her to come over and help with translating. When Angela got to the house, the young male nurse instantly recognized her. He reminded her that in 2004 he was a 17-year-old international student from the Philippines with no direction and Angela had guided him through the process of getting into the nursing program. “I finally graduated in 2009,” he told her excitedly. “You’re the reason I’m a nurse today!”

It’s that kind of affirmation from students that has kept Angela in her role as a successful and popular counselor in the Peralta system for 16 years, from being an International Student Support Specialist at the District to serving as the athletics counselor at Merritt, and now in her new role as Transfer Center Counselor.

But what many people may not know is that this is Angela’s second successful career. Born and raised in Malaysia, she had just graduated from high when she was offered a marketing job with a big merchandising firm out of New York City.

“I was primarily chosen for my language skills,” says Angela, who speaks four languages, “but I soon became a successful fashion merchandiser and traveled around the world for my job visiting factories. I was young and it was an exciting time and I learned a lot. But it was a ruthless business and I knew that without a college degree there would always be a ceiling that would prevent me from going further. I started getting the yearning to go back to school.”

She discovered that the College of Alameda offered a program in fashion merchandising and quickly enrolled in the Fall of 1989. She ended up doing so well because of her experience that she was encouraged to take business classes and ended up with a full scholarship to Golden Gate University to study international business. As part of her program, she took psychology classes which she enjoyed so much that she ended up staying at the University to get a master’s degree in counseling psychology. While in school, she needed to find a part-time job—and that began the start to her second career.

Angela applied for and landed a job at the Peralta Community College District as an International Student Support Specialist and was assigned to Vista College (now BCC) where she was instrumental in taking the international student population to a new level. Then, after seven years, she got another opportunity.

“Marty Zielke from Merritt called and asked me if I was interested in a counselor/coordinator position on Saturdays as part of a grant program, and I accepted,” she says. “During that period I really began to love Merritt and think of it as home—the culture, the people, how family-oriented it was—much different than the other colleges or the District. So when I was offered a full-time tenure track position as an athletics counselor, I jumped at the chance.” (See photo, right, with Merritt track star Kemarley Brown, who went on to the 2016 Olympics, and with fellow counselor Marty Zielke).



Now, in her new position in the Transfer Center, she will focus on helping students succeed in continuing their education by bringing her years of counseling and her own experience to the table (including advising her own daughters, Amanda, 23, and Amelia, 21, who both go to Brown University in Rhode Island where she visits often).

“I want to provide students with the tools they need to transfer, while also making the best of their time at Merritt,” says Angela. “I plan to simplify the transfer process and prepare students both academically and mentally for their future by bringing schools to Merritt and offering year-round services and workshops. But I also want to share my own academic journey and encourage them and give them the confidence that they need to succeed. Because when students feel that you are genuine and they can trust you, they can start to see it for themselves.”

—Susan May