

# Carla Rojo

## *Following Her Passion from Stage to Television News*



Alumna Carla Rojo (Class of 2012) is a bilingual, on-air reporter for Univision Boston.

**W**hen Carla Rojo graduated from Lowell High School in 2008, she was all set to go to UMass Dartmouth to study psychology. But a few weeks before she was supposed to move, she backed out.

"It didn't feel right," said Rojo. "I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, and I really didn't want to waste a lot of money or time doing something I didn't like." Instead, she enrolled at Middlesex.

"To be completely honest, it wasn't my first choice, but I knew it was the best choice," she said. However, Rojo soon found herself struggling in all her classes. "I felt confused and unsure of my future," she said. "I was working as a waitress and that pretty much consumed my life. I put school on the back burner."

After a year, Rojo lost her financial aid and decided to take a break from college. During

her time away from school, she attended a friend's MCC graduation. While listening to Commencement Speaker Liz Murray address the Class of 2010, sharing her story of going from homelessness to Harvard, Rojo knew she wanted to get back to class.

"That speech really inspired me," she said. "It helped me realize all the sacrifices that had been made for me, and that I was wasting an opportunity. So, I decided to go back to school – and this time Middlesex was my first choice."

That summer, Rojo quit waitressing and got a job as a teller at Sage Bank in downtown Lowell. The bank was willing to work around her class schedule, so Rojo re-enrolled in the fall of 2010 to study communications.

"The first thing I did when I got back to campus was find the TRIO office," said Rojo. During high school, she had been involved in the federal program that targets and supports low-income and first-generation students.

MCC's TRIO Student Success Program provides support services – including individual tutoring, and academic and career advising – and assistance with transfer and



A talented actor, Rojo appeared in many Theater Department productions, including "Chicago," "Damn Yankees," "Ring Around the Moon" and "The Rimers of Eldritch."

financial aid. The objective is to enhance students' academic skills, while increasing retention, graduation rates, and transfer to bachelor's-degree programs.

Rojo worked closely with TRIO Advisor Joanne Jaber-Gauvin. "Joanne was the first person to help me when I walked in the door," she said. "I was really honest with her and asked her to help me. She did everything she could."

"And when it was time to transfer to earn my bachelor's degree, Joanne helped me through the entire process – from filling out applications to helping with my essays."

Jaber-Gauvin also encouraged Rojo to get involved on campus. "I've always liked writing and performing, so I chose to study communications. And I went to a general interest meeting for the Theater Department to get involved."

It was at this meeting that she met another mentor, Karen Oster, Chair of the Performing Arts Department. "I could tell at first that she was a little bit nervous," said Oster. "But she suddenly blossomed. She really gained confidence by having an outlet."

Rojo went on to appear in many Theater Department shows, including the musicals "Chicago" and "Damn Yankees," as well as two dramatic productions, "Ring Around the Moon" and "The Rimers of Eldritch."

Under Oster's encouragement, Rojo also served as president of the Performing Arts Club. "She has a warmth that emanates from her," said Oster. "Her interaction with others is beautiful to watch. She makes everyone around her feel special and feel like they matter."

"Carla doesn't take anything for granted," Oster added. "She takes every opportunity she gets and puts her whole heart into it. She's a driven, strong Latina woman who is proud of her culture and knows what she wants. She's a wonderful role model for young women."

"I learned so much from Karen," said Rojo. "MCC's Theater Program is the best around. And Karen really showed us that learning extends beyond the classroom."

In 2012, Rojo graduated with an associate degree in Communications. Under the guidance of the TRIO Program, she transferred to Suffolk University where she earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism, minoring in Spanish.

Rojo has taken her love of performing and writing from the stage to television. She currently works at Univision Boston as an on-air, bilingual reporter for the 6 and 11 p.m. newscasts.

"A lot of people think this is a very glamorous career, but it's not," she said. "I'm a one-man band. I do everything from chasing down a lead, to setting up my tripod and camera, capturing the videos and photos, doing the interviews, translating sound bites, writing the story, and producing the piece. It's challenging, but I love it."

Despite her busy schedule, Rojo still finds time to give back to her community. Earlier this year, Rojo spoke with Middlesex students in the Latino Connections Program, telling them about her educational voyage and career path.

"She made it clear that her path was not a seamless one, it took longer than four years, but with the support of so many of the different services at MCC – including TRIO –

she was able to graduate and succeed," said Maria Cunha, Associate Dean.

Rojo also participated in Lowell Women's Week 2015, moderating a panel discussion, titled "21st Century Latinas," organized by Latina Women Moving Forward.

Rojo credits MCC with preparing her for success. "I'm so proud of my time at Middlesex," she said. "I learned a skill that has served me well in life: Never be afraid to ask for help. The support I received – from both TRIO and my theater family – taught me that I can do anything."

This is the message Rojo hopes will inspire graduates when she addresses the Class of 2016 as Commencement Speaker and 2016 Distinguished Alumni Award Winner.

"I used to be really embarrassed about my journey, but I now feel like a lot of people go through that experience," said Rojo. "I want the graduating students to know they're not alone. There will always be a time where you feel like you're failing, but that doesn't mean you can't make a change," she said.

"And if I can inspire someone in the audience who was like me, then that's even better."

– Tura Linderholm

## 2016 Commencement

Commencement exercises for the Class of 2016 will be held at **10 a.m. Thursday, May 26**, in Lowell Memorial Auditorium, 50 E. Merrimack St.

This year's Commencement Speaker will be **Carla Rojo**, an MCC alumna and on-air reporter for Univision Boston. She will also be presented the 2016 Distinguished Alumni Award.

A first-generation college student, Rojo graduated from Middlesex with an associate degree in Communications in 2012. Under the guidance of MCC's TRIO Student Support Program, she transferred to Suffolk University and earned a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism.



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