Meet Rafael A. Zapata, chief diversity officer

BY DIANE M. STERRETT

As the College’s first-ever chief diversity officer, Rafael A. Zapata is leading the Office of Institutional Diversity, supporting the diversity goals outlined in the newly updated Strategic Plan: Achieving Excellence. Pursuing Truth. Transforming Lives.

Zapata welcomes working collaboratively with other departments, building on diversity initiatives already under way. “It’s [the Strategic Plan] very thorough and well-thought-out. I’m excited to be doing work institution-wide as part of my role,” he explained.

Bringing people together is one of his greatest strengths. Zapata comes to PC from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania where he worked since 2002 as assistant dean and director of the Intercultural Center. As director, his charge was to create a community in which people can share their commonalities and reach across cultural, geographical, and social lines to exchange ideas and experiences.

“I tried to embody the values fundamental to the center’s mission, which was substantive inclusion and engagement across campus,” he said. “I tried to share a vision and incorporate the ideas of others, as well as embed the work we did into the culture and mission of the college, which is very similar to PC’s.”

Zapata said PC’s mission resonates with the beliefs he was surrounded by growing up, attending Catholic schools from second grade through attaining his bachelor’s degree. “Through the interviewing process, I realized how much the values of PC and the Catholic Church are intertwined with my cultural heritage and social background,” he said.

Prior to joining Swarthmore, Zapata was assistant director of the Office of African American, Latino and Asian American Student Services at New York University for three years. Before that, while at the University of Pennsylvania, he worked as the Latino Graduate Program coordinator at the Albert M. Greenfield Intercultural Center, advising students and implementing programs to promote academic, personal, and cultural development.

Zapata earned his master’s degree in sociology at Arizona State University and a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Iona College. He has done doctoral work in sociology and urban studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

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