
Office of Institutional Research

Smith College
Northampton, MA 01063
(413) 585-3021

January 10, 2025

Dear AIR Colleagues:

It is with immense pleasure that I nominate Maria Lidia Ortiz Zamora of the Smith College Office of Institutional Research for the AIR Rising Star Award. Lidia is an exceptional emerging leader whose contributions to our office, our institution, and the IR community have already been exemplary.

Lidia possesses a rare combination of technical creativity and analytical skill, which she combines with a facility for visual communication to profound effect. Even at this early stage of her career, she is able to wield these skills, separately and in combination, across projects ranging from program evaluation, the development of visualizations of complex campus climate data, the redesign and streamlining of one of our office's most widely-used data products, and, upon her own initiative, the creation of a tool to automate a routine task in support of analysis of demographic disparities within campus programs. She is a founding member of the COFHE Early Career IR planning committee, has presented IR work at conferences ranging from NEAIR to AAC&U, and makes significant contributions to planning and hosting Smith's annual Women in IR and Assessment convening.

We in IR first worked with Lidia when she was recommended by a psychology faculty member for an undergraduate work-study assistant job in our office. Even as an undergraduate, Lidia distinguished herself by the extent to which she was able to connect insight with data analytics. Lidia approached IR with curiosity and creativity, looking at her work not just from the standpoint of a technical problem to be solved, but as an opportunity to make Smith a better place. We were lucky enough to hire her for a full-time professional role in 2022.

Lidia's principal work at Smith is in support of Smith's [Racial Justice Action Planning](#) process, a process intentionally designed to incorporate data-informed reflection and analysis into a supportive change process for improving equity and belonging on Smith's campus. As a professional with lived experience as a first-generation Latina college student attending Smith from a small town in Northern Maine, Lidia's powerful educational and professional qualifications are enhanced by her deep understanding of student experiences. These skills have served her well as she has advised me, other senior IR staff, and campus leaders on how to understand student feedback in the context of continuous improvement.

I want to underscore in particular how the visual data communication skills I mention above facilitate this kind of equity analysis work. Lidia's ability to create clarity through the visual presentation of complex data is particularly useful here, as every disaggregation (race/ethnicity,

first-generation status, aid status) increases the degree of difficulty of data presentation. I am often frustrated by how difficult it can be to retain an intersectional lens while keeping data presentation accessible, or even comprehensible. On more than one occasion I have found myself saying “well, that might have to be two different vizzes, it’s just too complex” only to have Lidia return a few hours later with a clear, understandable, and aesthetically appealing presentation of that very thing. Since working with Lidia, I’ve stopped saying “it’s too complex” and started saying “let’s let Lidia work her magic.”

Lidia took the initiative to develop a user-friendly data tool that ingests lists of student IDs and then produces cross-tabulations comparing its representation of various demographic factors to the structural diversity of the campus as a whole. This was a common, often time-consuming request from campus units who were monitoring the equity of access to their services. That kind of analysis is an important tool in institutional improvement, but is not the best use of technical and analytical skills for professional IR staff. I’ll note again that Lidia created this tool completely on her own initiative, just casually mentioning one day last spring that she had something to show me and then demoing a nearly complete tool. In November, she presented a fully-operational version of this tool at the NEAIR meeting in Newport.

Beyond her role in Smith’s equity and inclusion work, Lidia’s quiet demeanor does not prevent her from engaging beyond the Smith IR office. She has joined our team’s R programming group, and is now a core collaborator in building our data sources and reports, including the redesign of our departmental data packets synthesizing demographic, student success, outcomes, and survey data for academic units. I have been told by my technical colleagues who collaborate with her that her R coding skills are superb, her approach to data and report development is elegant, and her ability to explain her code and share her knowledge is immeasurably valuable to our team’s success. This is certainly consistent with the end results of her work. She has served on or supported multiple campus committees and is known and trusted by colleagues on campus and at peer institutions.

I am proud to have this opportunity to nominate Lidia for the AIR Rising Star award, and there is no question in my mind that Maria Lidia Ortiz Zamora is a rising IR star: her technical proficiency, analytical creativity, contributions to the IR community, and most of all her ability to synthesize research in the service of institutional improvement make her an ideal candidate for this award. I am confident that she will continue to make significant contributions to the field for many years to come. I appreciate the opportunity to provide this kind of public recognition, particularly for those, like Lidia, who will be leading it in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cate Rowen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Cate Rowen

Associate Vice President for Analytics & Institutional Research



Office for Equity and Inclusion
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-2141

January 8, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

I write with strong and enthusiastic support for Lidia Ortiz Zamora's candidacy for an AIR Rising Star Award and can attest to the fact that she has "made positive contributions to projects, initiatives, and/or publications that demonstrate noteworthy early achievement, the potential for ongoing achievement, and interest in advancing the field."

As the VP for Equity and Inclusion at Smith College, I worked with AVP of Analytics and Institutional Research Cate Rowen to define the position of Equity and Inclusion Analyst. We are incredibly fortunate that Lidia answered the call to be the inaugural colleague in this role. She has been an invaluable resource regarding many questions about equity and inclusion at Smith. Most importantly, she has been an essential in propelling three major projects. Early on, she served on the High-Impact Practices (HIP) Working Group, which I co-chaired with a professor of engineering. In 2023-24, she assisted in the implementation of campus climate surveys and the sharing of data. And throughout her time at Smith, she has been an essential partner in Racial Justice Action Planning.

The HIP Working Group sought to study which students were taking advantage of the many kinds of high-impact practices at Smith. George Kuh's research demonstrated that

these practices ranging from first-year seminars to study abroad to research experiences benefited all students but had an outsized impact for students from underrepresented groups. Alas, Kuh also found that the latter group was the least likely to participate in multiple practices and sometimes had lower quality experiences. We wanted to know whether this was true at Smith and whether we could identify barriers to dismantle. Lidia's analytical acumen was essential to our work. And when we identified one major barrier—viz., students and advisors are simply unaware of opportunities or how to apply for them—Lidia built an online inventory of HIPs. This prototype ultimately included not only HIPs by category but also filters for year of eligibility, application necessity, and other helpful variables. The HIP Working Group recommended that this inventory be used in the advising process. We could not have been as assertive in this recommendation without the proof-of-concept model that Lidia built.

Her work on campus climate survey data sharing has also helped to inform the community and lay essential groundwork for advancing equity and inclusion. The HERI surveys that the Office of Institutional Research administered in 2023 produced an enormous amount of data. Along with her colleagues, Lidia helped to sort this data a number of ways. Although I am a lay user of Tableau and Google Slides, Lidia is an expert. Ultimately, she assisted the Office for Equity and Inclusion in mounting data shares for the entire community on race and belonging, disability and belonging, and socioeconomic and belonging. Lidia created most of the slides that we used for these community events. They made it possible for us to get feedback from many students, staff, and faculty about whether the data and our proposed actions to address gaps resonated with them.

In addition to these significant projects, Lidia—along with Associate Director for Assessment Minh Ly—has been partnering with my office on a college-wide initiative

called Racial Justice Action Planning. This initiative calls for every department and office on campus to develop their own action plans that align with the college's equity and inclusion goals. Our Racial Justice Action Planning Coordinator, Marjorie Valdivia, supports units in the entire process, which includes education, reflection, and action planning. Lidia and Minh work with Marjorie to help departments and offices find existing data and/or obtain new data through surveys and focus groups, for instance, to assist them particularly in their reflection. This is delicate, complex, and sometimes emotional work. I've witnessed Lidia communicate professionally and compassionately with units as they grappled with difficult findings. Ultimately, departments and offices are able to develop more authentic action plans thanks to Lidia's "data therapy" sessions.

I believe that Smith has made strides in equity and inclusion in the past few years. Lidia Ortiz Zamora has played a crucial role in this progress as our Equity and Inclusion Analyst. She combines all of the qualities that I see in the senior colleagues that mentor her: expertise in her field, discretion, compassion, and strategic thinking. If she doesn't deserve an AIR Rising Star Award, I don't know who does.

Sincerely yours,

Floyd Cheung

Vice President for Equity and Inclusion

Professor of English and American Studies



**Office of Institutional Research
and Educational Assessment**
200 Stoddard Annex
Smith College
Northampton, MA 01063

To the nominating committee,

I'm pleased to write this letter of support for Maria (Lidia) Ortiz Zamora for AIR's Rising Star Award. I have had the pleasure of working with Lidia as she has held various roles in our office over the years: first as an undergraduate research assistant, then as a post-baccalaureate fellow in assessment, and now as our inaugural Equity & Inclusion Analyst. In my 19 years of working at Smith, I have trained and supervised many students and analysts. Quite simply, Lidia is one of the best employees I have ever had the pleasure of working with.

When our office onboards a new undergraduate student worker, one of the most important steps in their training is often to reorient the way they approach inquiry and analysis, and this shift of thinking can be a challenge for many. This was not the case with Lidia. Even as an undergraduate, her thinking was already both critical and creative. She carefully evaluates the information provided, explores it, collects additional information if needed, synthesizes it, and combines it with her own innovative thinking.

After graduating from Smith, Lidia's career as a researcher began elsewhere for a year, but we were lucky enough to hire her back as a post-bacc to support the assessment function in our office. In that role, she was able to grapple with the complexity of assessing student learning, and was able to provide insight to our institutional decision makers. Lidia then left Smith once again to earn her Master's degree, but after her time at Carnegie Mellon we were so fortunate to hire her back once more to support Smith's equity planning efforts, working closely with the Office of Equity and Inclusion. In her professional role for the past two years, Lidia has been my partner in designing, evaluating, and implementing data collection strategies to understand the experiences, success, and outcomes of community members (students, staff, and faculty) of all backgrounds. As a self-starter who excels at problem-solving in the face of obstacles, she engages in all of her projects with an intellectual curiosity, and is an enthusiastic learner who isn't afraid to ask questions or receive feedback.

Lidia has worked on a wide array of projects, and in her current role has a particular focus on inclusion and equity. Specifically, she has been the technical and analytic lead on projects that have informed initiatives around the writing curriculum, residential experience, student success in STEM, High Impact Practices, and campus climate. She has taken on a leadership role in developing and implementing Smith's ambitious campus-wide Racial Justice Action Planning.

She has worked with a variety of academic and co-curricular units in trying to answer their difficult and varied questions around belongingness. For each unit, Lidia produces customized analytic deliverables that strike the perfect balance of providing sufficient detail while also avoiding information overload.

I've also witnessed Lidia's eagerness to continually grow her technical capabilities and bring innovation to our office. She has learned new skills both at technical conferences and on her own and applied them to our work. Her efforts in this area have streamlined our office's workflow, enhanced reproducibility, and enabled us to produce next generation reporting that incorporates code, visuals, and narrative text. One example of this is her recent development of a Shiny app that automates routine demographic analyses. After identifying a recurring and time-consuming need (campus units looking for demographic data about who they serve), and problem (units aren't allowed record-level information about race), Lidia created an app that takes a list of participants, joins on demographics, aggregates the data, and produces tables and charts at the push of a button. This app is already serving as a major time-saver within the IR office and Lidia is exploring the possibility of deploying this as a secure self-service app for units across campus.

In a full circle moment for me, Lidia has rebooted our student research assistant program after a 3 year hiatus. While she had never supervised or mentored undergraduates before, she volunteered to take over this component and has been an attentive and supportive supervisor to our research assistant. She is patient and thorough with the student, taking time out of her own work schedule to be a teacher/mentor. She leaves room for the student to figure things out on her own, but then comes back together to discuss methodology and results, adjusting as needed.

In service to the wider IR profession, Lidia has been an active member of COFHE's early career professionals, strengthening the community of staff new to IR. She has presented her novel technical/analytic innovations at many regional and national conferences on a diversity of topics, offering the profession new ways to approach our work. While her assessment work has been IR-adjacent for most of her career, she participated in the NEAIR newcomers workshop this past fall, which I hope signals that she is at the start of a long and accomplished career in the field.

As a first generation Latina student she really excelled at Smith as a student and continues to impress as a true peer and exemplary colleague. She is an asset to our office, our institution, and the IR profession.

Best,
Minh Ly
Associate Director for Assessment
Smith College

January 8, 2025

Dear AIR Colleagues,

I am writing to recommend Lidia Ortiz Zamora as a candidate for the 2025 AIR Rising Star Award. Lidia is the Equity and Inclusion Analyst in the Institutional Research office at Smith College. I originally met Lidia at the 2022 WIRA (Women in Institutional Research and Assessment) conference. From May 2023 through the present, Lidia and I have served as inaugural members of the COFHE Early Career IR planning committee.

COFHE Early Career IR emerged from a clear need for programming and community building identified at the 2023 COFHE IR Convening. Alongside five members from a range of institutions representing COFHE's members, I founded and have led this group over the past year and a half. Our group has been unusually productive. We have hosted two virtual panel discussions on career trajectories, four skill shares with early career presenters, and a networking event. These events have reached 76+ unique participants at 30+ institutions. Lidia has been an invaluable member of this group.

In my work with her, one of Lidia's defining strengths is her unique approach to presentations. She is extremely clear and engaging and always chooses interesting topics. Additionally, her presentation slides have been far and away the most innovative and memorable of any IR presentation I've attended in my four years in the field. Her strength as a presenter was especially evident in the case of her presentation for COFHE Early Career on her R Shiny demographic analysis tool, which fully engaged the audience with quite technical material. Furthermore, in the two years I've known her, Lidia has presented at most of the conferences she has attended. This demonstrates a commitment to advancing the field that is rare for early career professionals.

Within Northeast IR and particularly within the small private college IR community, Smith has a stellar reputation and is well-known for its office's technical capabilities, thoughtful approaches, service to the profession, and joyful culture. Lidia has had a significant role in maintaining and strengthening this reputation.

The early career IR community is growing quickly, and I am pleased that this award has been introduced to recognize the contributions of these AIR members. Lidia is highly deserving of the AIR Rising Star Award.

Sincerely,

Corinne Greenblatt
Assistant Director of Institutional Research
Williams College

Corinne Greenblatt
Assistant Director of
Institutional Research

Provost's Office
880 Main Street, 3rd floor
Williamstown, MA 01267

Office: 413 597 4212
cg16@williams.edu
williams.edu

EDUCATION

Carnegie Mellon University, Heinz College Pittsburgh, PA **May 2022**
M.S. in Public Policy & Management – Data Analytics

Smith College, Northampton, MA **May 2017**
B.A in Psychology & Economics

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Smith College, Northampton, MA **October 2021-Current**
Equity & Inclusion Research Analyst

- Develop and enhance standardized data tools to support equity and inclusion planning for academic and non-academic programs.
- Analyze institutional, survey, and other data across populations- disaggregating data by key demographics - to identify equity gaps in access, participation, experience, and academic performance.
- Design and administer surveys to collect feedback from students, faculty, and staff across academic and non-academic programs at Smith to understand equity gaps in access, participation, and experiences.
- Collaborate with academic and non-academic programs to integrate data collection strategies that align with long-term tracking and monitor equity metrics sustainably over time.
- Supervise a student research assistant, providing guidance on data analysis and supporting their professional development in equity and inclusion research.

Trauma Responsive Equitable Education (TREE), Milbridge ME **June 2021-July 2021**
Research Assistant

- Analyzed institutional data around academic performance and attendance for program evaluation.
- Coded videos of student activities for Social and Emotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Classroom practices.
- Organized and helped lead the community events like the pet parade where 35 pets and over 100 community members attended and the community slime lab where 35 children participated.

Smith College, Northampton, MA **August 2018-July 2020**
Post- Baccalaureate Fellow in Assessment

- Consulted stakeholders in the Jill Ker Conway Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center and partner offices (Smith Botanic Garden, Smith Museum of Art) to create an assessment infrastructure to collect and maintain data efficacy.
- Developed, administered, and conducted statistical analyses of faculty and student surveys focused on programmatic assessment to promote equity and inclusion in higher education.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA **August 2017 – July 2018**
Research Assistant

- Aided with survey administration and classroom observations of 8th graders across the United States for a psychological study to understand how individual differences, student interactions in class, and societal expectations jointly influence students' self-concept, achievement, and future aspirations in math and science.

Educate Maine, Portland, ME **April 2017 – April 2018**
Research Analyst

- Analyzed how implementing different test-optional admission policies across 27 higher education institutions affects their college-bound population.
- Created data visualizations for the final report, Defining access: How Test-Optional Works.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Bujacich, M. & **Ortiz Zamora, M.L.**, Visualizing Equity Data with R Shiny (2024, November). [Speaker Session]. North East Association for Institutional Research (NEAIR) Annual Conference.

Ortiz Zamora, M.L., Aloisio K., & Foley K., Work Smarter, Not Harder Through Automation (2024, August). [Lightning Talk]. Women in Institutional Research and Assessment (WIRA) Annual Meeting

Ly, M., **Ortiz Zamora, M.L.**, Valdivia, M., Racial Justice Action Planning at Smith College (2024, May). [Speaker Session]. Association of Black Admissions and Financial Aid Officers of the Ivy League and Sister Schools (ABAFAOILSS) Annual Meeting

Ortiz Zamora, M.L., Smith College High Impact Practices Inventory Tool (2023, August). [Lightning Talk]. Women in Institutional Research and Assessment (WIRA) Annual Meeting

Aloisio, K., DiBartolo, P., & Joseph, V., Ly, M., & **Ortiz Zamora, M.L.**, Beyond “performing” equity: Building brave collaborative approaches to assess inclusive excellence (2023, January). [Speaker Session]. American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Annual Meeting

Ortiz Zamora, M.L., & Foley K., Paper is the New Digital (2022, August). [Lightning Talk]. Women in Institutional Research and Assessment (WIRA) Annual Meeting

Ortiz Zamora, M.L., Molina, K.M., & DiBartolo, P.M., Everyday discrimination, family context, and mental disorders among Latina/os: Does gender matter? (2016, November). [Poster Session]. National Latina/o Psychology Association (NLPA) Annual Conference

Ortiz Zamora, M.L., Molina, K.M., & DiBartolo, P.M., Everyday discrimination, family context, and mental disorders among Latina/os: Does gender matter? (2015, November). [Poster Session]. Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) Annual Conference

SKILLS

Technical: R, SPSS, Stata, Python, Tableau, Qualtrics, Microsoft Office, GitHub, SQL
Languages: Spanish (Native)