

Inspiring Confidence



Left to right: Admissions Recruiter Gaby Posteuca, keynote speaker Vita Blanco, and Entry Services Program Manager Amy Tam.

Clark College Entry Services and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion welcomed approximately 160 students from local high schools to the annual *Discovering College Confidence* event on March 11. This annual event provides opportunities for BIPOC high school students to participate in a series of activities meant to:

- Address the excitements and fears around college
- Explore pathways and supports available in the college environment
- Discover how embracing your identity can enhance your college experience

The day kicked off with a powerful keynote from Clark College alumna Esmeralda “Vita” Blanco, who shared her inspiring academic journey from high school diploma to higher education success. Students then participated in interactive workshops, engaging activities, and prize giveaways—all designed to help them envision a future in higher education.

The event’s workshops included:

- Navigating Financial Aid & Scholarships with Confidence
- Your Well-Being, Your Power: Taking Charge of your Mental & Physical Health
- Empower Your Voice: Choosing Careers That Align with Your Values
- Success in College: Learning Your Voice
- Running Start: Own Your Voice, Own Your Future

Participating schools in Clark County included Battle Ground,

Evergreen, Fort Vancouver, Henrietta Lacks, Heritage, Hockinson, Hudson's Bay, Mountain View, Prairie and Union high schools.



Amy Tam introduces Vita Blanco as she comes to the stage.

Keynote Address

Vita Blanco, a Latina, single mom, and woman of faith addressed the high school audience with her academic story that started at Clark College as an adult student in the high school diploma program, continuing for an associate of applied science degree, then transferring to Washington State University Vancouver to earn a bachelor's degree.

Here are excerpts from Blanco's address:

"On my third day [at Clark College]...I shared with Sam [May-Varas], 'I'm not returning tomorrow. Thank you so much.' And that was such a pivotal moment because I was able to be open and real—even though I didn't want to, and I was very ashamed, and that I didn't know how to do the homework. He sat with me, he told me that he believed in me, and that what I did in that homework was the reason why I needed to be here...It took just one teacher, one person to believe in me, in the classroom...I knew that I was supposed to be here."

"I had a high school GPA of 1.7. I was a dropout. Fast forward to when I graduated with my high school diploma with a 4.0—but better yet, I was able to help my youngest daughter. She asked me the week before I was going to graduate. 'Mom, will you help me with my eighth-grade essay,' and for the first time, I was able to show up for her and help her with her homework. That was such a joy to remember."

Blanco continued studying at Clark College and worked as a Student Ambassador. In 2019 she graduated with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Business Administration and was

awarded the Community College Presidents' Scholarship to attend Washington State University Vancouver. Read her story [here](#).

She said, "I started that fall...to get my undergraduate degree—I thought, yes, I learned everything at Clark College, but I had learned in a few months in that I had imposter syndrome. I thought, 'man, this is hard, this is harder than I thought,' but I began to persevere as I learned about imposter syndrome. Maybe it was some of my voices of upbringing, my community, my voices inside of me, and not feeling that I belong there. But I kept showing up."

"I believe that Clark College has really, really been able to help me overcome those fears and doubts and barriers that I faced."



Blanco ended her speech by asking the audience to stand up.

"Stand up because your worth being seen and heard.... your story matters, your voice matters, you matter, and your work is being seen and heard."

After graduating from Washington State University Vancouver with a bachelor's degree in integrated strategic communication, where Blanco served as student body president, she is now working for a local dentist managing a team of employees. She credits her time as a Student Ambassador working under Amy Tam as valuable experience.

"Amy [Tam] was my boss, and it was the grace that she showed me over and over again that I thought, what am I doing? How I'm showing up, I don't even know what I'm doing. And it was pretty amazing. I knew I knew how to help and love people, but she showed me grace over and over and that grace today still just reminds me how to show grace to others."

Schools can contact the Welcome Center at start@clark.edu to learn about future events, inquire about campus tours, and how to get started at Clark College.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley