

Getting Ahead with a Degree

Instructor applies life experiences

Usha Ramanujam gets inspired when she talks about her perspective students.

The Portland Community College Business Administration Program instructor knows how an associate degree or short-term certificate from PCC in accounting, can land good positions as payroll specialists, bookkeepers or assistants with accounting responsibilities at law firms, for example.

If they continue their studies at a four-year school, they can become accountants, move up the ranks of management, and earn professional certifications, such as the Certified Public Accountant or Certified Management Accountant

“They can take these classes and get one step ahead in their education, and it’s definitely cheaper,” said Ramanujam, who has been at the college since 2005.

At PCC, Ramanujam teaches accounting, which is a core course in the college’s business program. In her class, students learn the leading computer application software programs to become proficient in managing accounts and budgets. Once they’ve completed their studies, they can enter the workforce or transfer to public or private universities like Portland State, Oregon State or



PHOTO COURTESY PORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Portland Community College accounting instructor Usha Ramanujam applies life experience to support her students.

Reed College.

Student support is a hallmark of the Business Administration Program, which is offered at all four comprehensive PCC campuses. In addition to teaching, Ramanujam advises students on their academic and professional careers and underscores just how critical it is for students to have the support they need to move through the program and graduate.

“For first-generation college students, feeling supported makes all the difference in the world,” she said. “It’s time wasted if they get shuffled from one general advisor to another. There are a lot of steps ahead of them, and connecting them to the right people at the right time is crucial.”

Ramanujam grew up in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, in India. At the age of 19, she start-

ed working in India while simultaneously earning her first master’s degree in business. In 1988, she left India and went on to earn her second master’s degree, in accounting, at State University of New York, in Albany.

She found work in IBM’s internal audit department, and as an accounting instructor at a New York community college. She moved with her husband to Austin, Texas to work in IBM’s microelectronics division before taking time off to raise her children. When they moved again, this time to Portland, she completed the CPA examination.

“With my experience, I definitely know what PCC students are going through,” Ramanujam said. “They are working hard to support their families while in college, which I’ve done myself.”

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