

SU People



Isabel Lopez | Active Exploration

ISABEL LOPEZ '05 DEEPLY APPRECIATES her family's tradition of self-reliance. "I was born in Lima, Peru," says Lopez, a broadcast journalism major at the Newhouse School. "My mother and grandmother decided to immigrate to the United States when I was 4, because they always did what they felt had to be done, no matter how difficult. I've inherited a strong sense of independence from them."

Growing up in West Orange, New Jersey, she entered school with Spanish as

her native language. This created some initial difficulties, but she quickly mastered English and excelled in her studies. "Today, my bilingual skills help me a lot—in school, in getting jobs, in almost everything I do," she says.

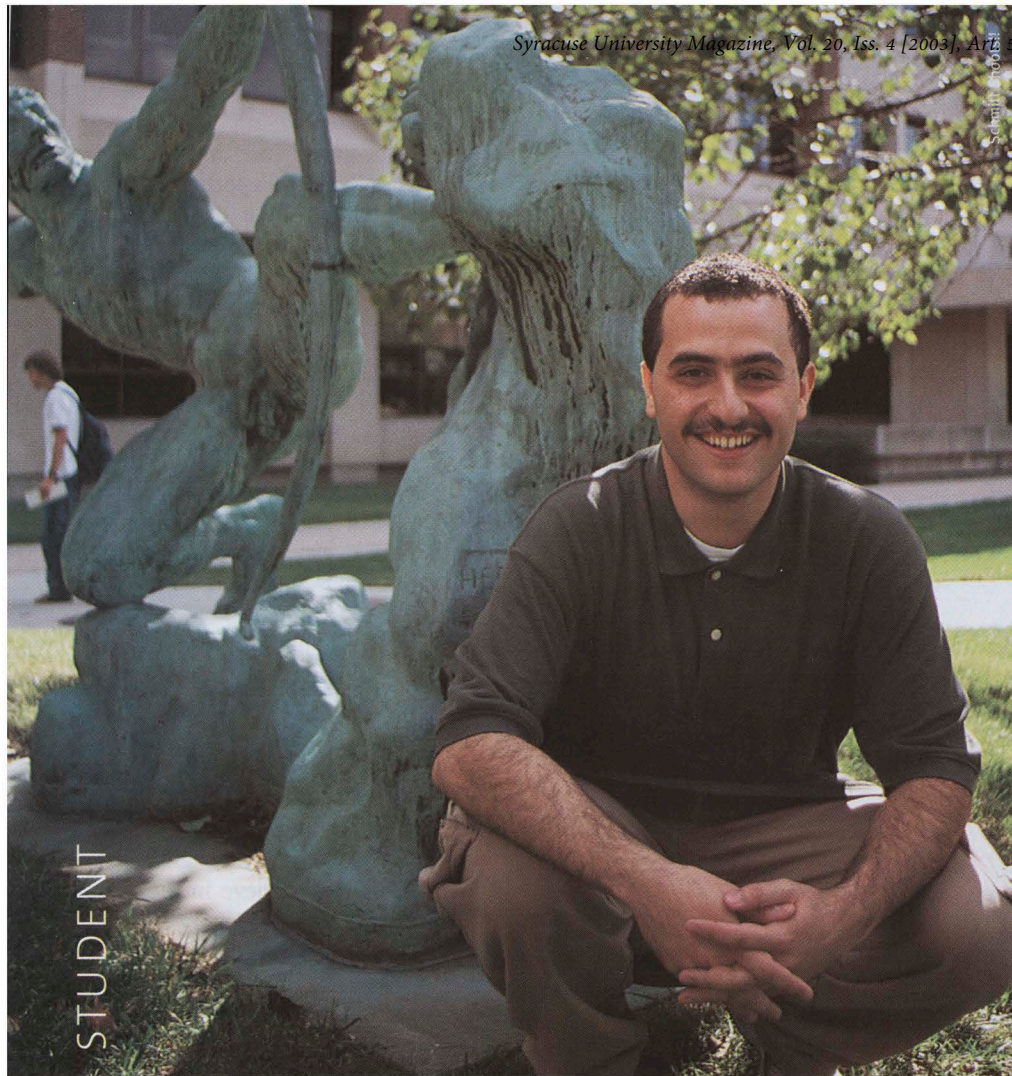
At Syracuse, Lopez adjusted easily to campus life, making Dean's List in her freshman year. She credits her mother with stressing the importance of education to her since early childhood. "She always wants the best for me," Lopez says. "I could have gone to

public school, but instead she took on the expense of sending me to one of the best private high schools in New Jersey. In the same way, when it was time for college, she encouraged me to choose SU, even though it meant going away from home."

One SU experience that has deeply affected Lopez is her participation in Race Dialogue Circle, a sophomore honors seminar taught by social work professor Carrie Jefferson Smith and teaching and leadership professor Mara Sapon-Shevin. The seminar challenges a diverse group of students to speak candidly about race relations. "We talked about racism—and a lot of other 'isms' in society," says Lopez, who has since served as a student facilitator for the course and helped revise its curriculum. "I feel more educated now about the barriers I face as a Latina and as a woman. Some students struggle more than others with feelings of oppression—and some students have trouble dealing with ways in which they make others feel oppressed. But the seminar opens people's eyes to various forms of oppression, and that is important."

Lopez transferred from the College of Arts and Sciences to Newhouse last spring, after deciding on a career in TV journalism. "I'm minoring in women's studies, and I think that gives me a fresh perspective that can only enhance my work as a journalist," she says. Her other campus activities include producing news pieces for UUTV, the student-run closed-circuit TV service, and holding a work-study job at the Office of Program Development.

Lopez is particularly proud to be a three-time recipient of Our Time Has Come scholarships, which were established through alumni funding to provide assistance to African American and Latino students at SU. "I'm fortunate to have received these scholarships," she says. "They helped relieve my family's financial burden—and my own. It's great to know there are people out there who care about education."
—David Marc



STUDENT

Mohammad Reza Khorasani

A Passion for Service

SOME STUDENTS SELECT A MAJOR based on the prospect of fame or an enticing income. For Mohammad Reza Khorasani '04, the choice was rooted in his religious convictions. "There's an expression from the prophet Muhammad: 'The best among the people are those who benefit the people,'" says Khorasani, a bioengineering major who will attend the State University of New York Upstate Medical University in the fall. "From a Muslim perspective, it's important for me to be able to serve others. My primary aim is to help people."

Born in Tehran, Iran, Khorasani moved to Syracuse with his family at a young age so his father, Mohammad Mehdi Khorasani G'90, could study computer engineering at SU. During high school, Khorasani volunteered at Upstate Medical University, which piqued his interest in medicine. Two summer internships in the hospital's pharmacology department, where he helped construct recombinant DNA, reinforced his

desire to enter the medical field. "The time I spent at Upstate allowed me to meet physicians, students, and patients, and observe clinics, wards, and research facilities," Khorasani says. "I became convinced that medicine was the only career for me."

Last summer, he put his bioengineering studies into practice at SU's Institute for Sensory Research, exploring how the ear's cochlear nucleus functions. "I have always loved math, physics, and engineering," he says. "Examining the human body in terms of its electrical and mechanical functions is a unique and enriching way to prepare for medical school."

Khorasani's passion for engineering mirrors his dedication to the medical field. An undergraduate teaching assistant in the physics department of the College of Arts and Sciences, he has spent the past four years tutoring peers. "Mohammad has always been interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the material," says phys-

ics professor Allen Miller, who oversaw one of Khorasani's assistantships. "His grasp of the concepts and his superior communication skills make him an effective physics coach." Khorasani also works as an academic excellence workshop facilitator, meeting with engineering students each week to help strengthen their understanding of a particular course. "It's obvious he is sincerely concerned about his peers' progress," says program coordinator Kate Drake.

Khorasani's dedication to helping those around him extends well beyond the SU community. He has baked gingerbread houses for hospital pediatric wards and served food at the Rescue Mission. As co-president of SU's chapter of Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society, a community service organization, he volunteers for a variety of activities throughout the year. "Volunteering is an eye-opening, fulfilling experience," he says. "It makes me appreciate what I have and it encourages me to give back to the community even more." Last May, Khorasani was honored for his exceptional commitment to service, receiving the Hisako Fujitsuka Award for Outstanding International Service and Caring. The award was presented by the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarship Programs and the Lillian and Emanuel Slutzker Center for International Services.

A member of the Persian Speaking Muslim Student Association and SU's Muslim Student Association, Khorasani says the University's policy on diversity was a strong factor in his decision to attend school here. "SU is a very tolerant place," he says. "I am proud to tell people that I attend the first university in the United States to have classes closed on Eid Ul-Fitr, the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Here, my beliefs are respected, as are the many different beliefs of those around me. I've been able to maintain my religious dignity and identity while taking an active role in the community." —Kate Gaetano



FACULTY

Charlotte Grimes | A People's Journalist

AS AN EIGHTH-GRADER IN A SMALL SOUTHERN ALABAMA TOWN, CHARLOTTE Grimes set out to respond to an essay question posed by a teacher and discovered her life's work: Should we, the United States, be militarily involved in Southeast Asia? "I didn't know how to answer that question, so I started reading newspapers and magazines and watching the news," says Grimes, the Knight Chair in Political Reporting at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. "The stories were mostly about body counts or what the administration said that day. I really couldn't find the kind of information I was seeking—such as what the people in Vietnam wanted, what choices they were making, and why they were making those choices. I became intrigued and wanted to be a war correspondent and go to Vietnam myself."

During this period, Grimes also followed the coverage of the civil rights movement and grew to respect the journalists who reported these powerful stories. That eighth-grade class made her realize that "all of life is an essay question," she says. As a reporter, she could gather facts on such issues as presidential elections, school board decisions, and health care, and present information to help people formulate opinions. "There are questions we, as a citizenry, need to answer," Grimes says. "Being a reporter was a way I could help people and have a helluva lot of fun in the process."

Since then, Grimes has logged more than 25 years as a journalist, including 12 years at the Washington Bureau of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. During her reporting career, she wrote stories that stirred people to action. Her series on the lives of rape victims in Missouri resulted in better services for them, and her investigative reports on foster care influenced state lawmakers to pass reforms. Sometimes a story can have a smaller, yet equally profound, effect on people. For example, she once received a phone call from a breast cancer survivor who had decided to become a patient's advocate after reading

Grimes's story on the subject. "What can be better than that?" she asks. "Nothing! Reporting is a privilege. You make a difference and people count on you. They make decisions based on what they read in the newspapers and see on the TV news."

Grimes left reporting in 1996 to help "rescue her profession"—through teaching. She sees journalism slipping into a celebrity culture, where reporters begin to matter more than their stories. "Although somebody else may sign your paycheck, you work for the people who depend on the newspaper or newscast," says Grimes, who has also taught journalism at Princeton and Hampton universities and did research on the profession at Harvard. "We talk of the power of the press and the rights of the press, but I also think of it in terms of the responsibility to help a democracy deliberate and shape itself. I firmly believe in the notion that an informed citizenry can make wise decisions to govern itself."

Newhouse Dean David M. Rubin believes Grimes's philosophy of journalism fits in well at the school. "In Charlotte Grimes we have a veteran Washington journalist with a particular perspective on political reporting; that is, she has always tried to make politics relevant to her readers by demonstrating how the decisions of politicians affect their daily lives," Rubin says.

In addition to passing on her journalist's idealism, Grimes intends to help young journalists develop strong writing and reporting skills, so they can accurately convey a story to the public. "To hold the Knight Chair at the Newhouse School is an extraordinary opportunity for me to give back to a profession that has given me so much," she says. Grimes is the first to fill the position, which is funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. There are 18 Knight Chairs in Journalism at major U.S. schools. "The Newhouse School and the Knight Foundation are two of the best in their fields," she says, "and I have the privilege of working with them both."

—Margaret Costello

Fernando Diz

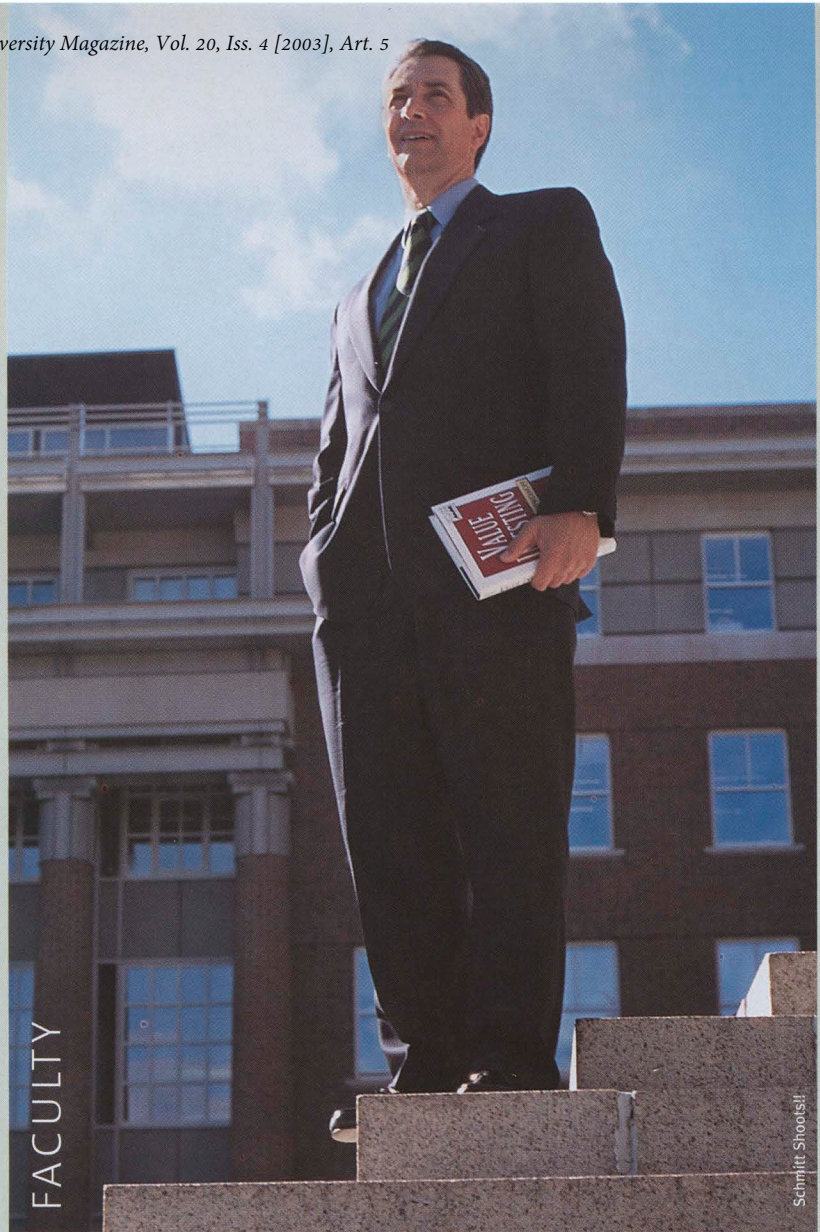
Financial Wiz

FERNANDO DIZ HAS NEVER FOLLOWED THE pack. In fact, he credits his success as a businessman and professor to being a free thinker. “You need to be an independent-minded individual to take the risks nobody else will take,” says Diz, a finance professor in the Martin J. Whitman School of Management and owner of M. & E. Financial, a consulting firm in King Ferry, New York. “You have to be convinced that you’re right against all odds. I constantly question my students and make them challenge what I say. They must not be afraid to ask questions to understand why something is relevant to them.”

A history lover, Diz reflects on his own childhood to trace the origins of his passion for finance. As a 9-year-old growing up in a family of entrepreneurs in Buenos Aires, Argentina, he accompanied his grandfathers on their visits to clients. “My family believed that to understand a business, you needed to experience all aspects of the business,” he says. “So I’ve done everything from sweeping the floors to dealing with banks. I have been exposed to the forces of finance, marketing, and operations. The power of finance has always been seductive to me.”

He was first attracted to teaching as a graduate student at Cornell University, where he helped teach a corporate finance course and enjoyed the intellectual interaction with his students. After earning a Ph.D. degree from Cornell in 1989, he joined the Syracuse faculty to offer courses in financial management and derivatives and now heads DIPA’s Management Internship Program in Madrid. He keeps his teaching fresh by drawing on examples from his consulting business and current market conditions. “If your research has nothing to do with the realities of business and you try to incorporate that into class, you lose credibility with students,” he says. “I tend to bring experiences from my personal business into the classroom, and students respond positively to that. They crave that kind of experience.”

Diz always looks for ways to keep his students connected to the business world through curriculum development and by recruiting professionals to speak. Last semester, he and Marty Whitman ’49 developed and co-taught a class in “distress investing.” Whitman—the chairman of M.J. Whitman Inc. and co-chief investment officer of Third Avenue Management LLC who recently gave a naming gift to the school (see related story, page 26)—explained how knowledge of the U.S. bankruptcy codes and proper investing can be used to make financially “sick” companies



healthy. The two men are currently drafting a book about distress investing based on the class. In his Options and Futures course, Diz uses the book, *Markets, Mobs & Mayhem: A Modern Look at the Madness of Crowds* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002), by SU Trustee Robert Menschel ’51, H’91, senior director of Goldman Sachs. This allows him to link classroom learning about investors’ irrational behavior with such historical events as the 17th-century tulip mania in Holland and the recent dot-com boom and bust in America. “Marty Whitman and Robert Menschel teach students that you cannot think like the rest,” Diz says. “You have to hold your ground and be an independent thinker to avoid the risks associated with booms and busts in the market.” Diz hopes the school maintains its commitment to creativity and continuous growth by remaining connected to business. “The stars are aligning for us,” he says. “I’m extremely excited about the future of the school. I believe we can become the leader in distress and value investing. That’s my dream.”

Diz, a private pilot, also dreams of one day flying his plane solo across the Atlantic and hopes to recruit a sponsor to finance the flight. When not aloft or working, he enjoys windsurfing and reading. “I read a lot of history and, over and over again, you see that when people or nations think they’re the best and invincible, they start declining,” he says. “My goal is to stay humble, keep listening, and keep rising. I’ve performed my best when people did not stifle my creativity and when they gave me responsibility. That’s the best recipe for growth.”

—Margaret Costello