

An SU Degree Leads to Top Temple University Research Position

By Josh Davis

Attending Salisbury University was something of a given for Michele Masucci. She grew up in the quiet Eastern Shore town. Her parents were involved in the community. Her father was a well-respected professor at the University.

Today Masucci is the vice provost for research at Temple University, one of the largest schools in the country and one with more than 130 years of history and achievement. Looking back on her undergraduate experience at SU, Masucci is quick to dismiss the notion that the University was merely an obvious stepping-stone on the road to success. Rather, she suggests, it was an early pillar in her education, a place that uniquely nurtured her interests during a crucial formative period where she, like many undergraduate students, was largely uncertain about her future.

"I grew up four blocks from the University, so it was like an extension of my home," she said. "My dad was a professor in counseling psychology in the Department of Education, and I was, like many students, trying to figure out what my talents and strengths were and where I fit academically."

Masucci gravitated toward geography during her first semester and said the rest "unfolded pretty quickly after that."

"Eugene Farace was the person who recruited me into the department," she said. "He was teaching a class on weather and climate, and I took that class and he encouraged me to declare geography as my major. He drafted me into geography; today I hear from my colleagues around the country that he did that to lots of them."

Masucci said the interactions with faculty made her undergraduate experience especially rewarding, with a number of professors, including Cal Thomas, Bob Rosing and Chapman McGrew, providing early guidance.

"I had extremely positive interactions with all of the faculty members in the department," she said. "Rich Lindenberg taught me all I know about cartography, and he was an early supporter before he ultimately went on to another department and to teach at Kent State."

The Geography and Geosciences

Department as a whole also played a pivotal role in Masucci's maturation.

"SU gave me a strong foundation," Masucci said. "The undergraduate program in geography at Salisbury is one of the top undergraduate programs in the country, which is talked about a lot. The program provided me with a very strong background, particularly within the sciences side of the field. Even though my current research is grounded in social science research traditions, that scientific foundation has been invaluable for me to do the job that I have right now in the role of VPR."

"Another major strength of the SU program – one that distinguishes it from other institutions in my experience – is to provide advising that both created a feeling of inclusion in the culture of the department and a community of support from the faculty. I've never really seen that elsewhere," Masucci continued. "We would go into these advising sessions and all the faculty would meet to advise a student every semester, so you wouldn't sit down with one person, you would sit down with the whole department and talk about what your career goals are and how you wanted to pursue them and what classes were the best classes for that track. The faculty were all in the room and they would tell you what they were going to teach in that class. All of that was such an incredible personal touch."

Masucci would spend entire days working in the cartography lab at SU, and she said the teachers, her fellow students and the overall environment fostered a sense of community, provided a "home base" within the department and instilled in her a strong work ethic that continues to pay dividends in her role at Temple today.

"It was a very collegial environment when I was a student there," she said. "That was my experience of the department."

After receiving a B.S. in geography from SU, Masucci went on to pursue graduate studies at Clark University, earning an M.A. and a Ph.D. in geography. Masucci taught at West Georgia University and Auburn University for several years before joining Temple's Department of Geography and Urban Studies in 1997.

"At the end of the day, I wanted to be



closer to family, and most of my family is based in the area, so I jumped at the opportunity when I was recruited by Temple," she said.

Masucci was named interim vice provost for research in 2012 and installed on a permanent basis in fall 2014. Currently, she is a professor of geography and director of the Information Technology and Society Research Group, and is considered a leading researcher in Temple's Urban Apps and Maps Studios.

Just a few hours away, Masucci said she is still a regular visitor to Salisbury and to SU. "I get back there pretty often," she said. "My mom lives in Salisbury – still just a few blocks away from the University. She continues to be a big part of the community there. We have family on the Eastern Shore, so I visit the region quite often, and I also do what I can to stay in touch with people at SU as well. I see faculty and students at conferences, and I try to visit the department at least once a year."

Most recently, Masucci visited the campus during a meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Division of the Association of American Geographers.

"Some of my students actually presented there," she said. "It was right in the department, and that was actually a really big thrill for me." ♦