



Wellness Ambassador Spotlight

Laurie Ferris and Veronica Alvarez

Wellness Ambassadors International House (I-House)



Laurie Ferris (L), Veronica Alvarez (R)

Laurie and Veronica have always been advocates for fitness both at home and in the workplace, so it was no surprise when they decided to become Wellness Ambassadors for I-House. Ever since Laurie started at I-House in 2005, she rallied co-workers to join lunchtime hikes on trails around campus. The camaraderie within this informal hiking club formed many friendships over the years. Last October, Laurie started teaching yoga to staff at lunchtime on Mondays. Veronica joined I-House in 2015 as a Human Resources Assistant. She is often the first person a new employee will encounter, and she makes everyone feel welcome with her positive attitude.

We recently chatted with Laurie and Veronica over coffee in the I-House Dining Commons to learn more.

Why were you interested in becoming Wellness Ambassadors?

Veronica: Changing to a healthier lifestyle has really changed my life for the better. I would like to give back by being of service and by spreading the word about the benefits of wellness to all staff and by sharing my experiences. I give the credit to Laurie though for being the unofficial wellness ambassador at I-House. She had really motivated and inspired me, so I suggested to her that she should be a Wellness Ambassador because of what she was already doing within the I-House staff community, such as yoga classes, and hikes during lunch. She proposed that we both sign up, and I'm glad we did.

Laurie: I appreciate all the great programs that *Be Well at Work* offers and truly believe that staff can benefit from them. I feel like I've been encouraging fitness and wellness at I-House for years, and now it's official, thanks to Veronica's suggestion. I hope to inspire people to become their own wellness ambassadors.

What has been your favorite part about being a Wellness Ambassador?

Veronica: Being a participant of the programs/challenges myself so that I may know firsthand from my own experiences and be able to answer any questions staff might have. We can all benefit at the same time.

Laurie: Going around the house and talking with other employees when we post flyers. I'm usually stuck at my desk doing web work, so it's good to see other departments "behind the scenes" at I-House. We have so many wonderful people that work very hard to make the I-House experience a memorable one for our residents. It feels good to show them that UC Berkeley really cares for the well-being of not just students, but employees too.

Wellness Ambassador Spotlight Contd...

Can you tell us one thing you have done as a part of your Wellness Ambassador role?

Veronica: The opportunity to inform staff about the upcoming workshops and challenges and answer any questions. Sharing the *Be Well At Work* resources. We seek to encourage and motivate staff to take charge of their well-being.

Laurie: I email our staff the monthly Wellness newsletters and encourage them to participate in upcoming programs. I also shared a presentation from the recent *Tips and Tools for Improving Your Sleep* workshop at the Tang Center. If people can't attend these workshops, I hope that they can at least benefit from the materials.

What do you hope to accomplish as an ambassador this year?

Laurie: Encourage more I-House staff to participate in the wellness programs and take a more proactive role in their own health. We would love to host a wellness event at I-House sometime.

Veronica: Raise more awareness about taking charge of our health and wellness by integrating mind, body, and spirit. For those that have health concerns—but also those that don't—we would like for them to know how they can still be proactive and practice preventive measures by incorporating more healthy food options and diet, exercise and fitness, and meditation and mindfulness. We'd like to reach out to our diverse staff, in particular our Spanish-speaking staff—about 30-40% of our employees. When possible, we are also trying to offer other languages.

What are your personal wellness goals for this year?

Veronica: Practice more meditations and take it to the next level. Doing more yoga, exercise and staying fit. I would also like to see more Non-GMO and organic food options so maybe advocate more for that.

Laurie: To continue training for Camino de Santiago in Spain. In 2018, I intend to walk the 500-mile Camino Francés. I walked the Portuguese route last year and will walk the short English route this summer. Training has been fun and has the bonus of getting me in better shape. I have a blog about the Camino and my journey at thecaminoprovides.com.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Veronica: Just that I'm excited and humbled by this opportunity to be a Wellness Ambassador. And I'm also really grateful to be sharing this role with Laurie who has been an inspiration in the workplace.

Laurie: It is an honor to share the role of Wellness Ambassador with Veronica who is someone that embodies the wellness lifestyle every day. I am continuing to teach yoga at I-House this semester and have invited colleagues to share their favorite fitness routines, relaxation techniques, and inspirational stories. I also resurrected an old I-House tradition of monthly Happy Hours, for us to explore different restaurants in Berkeley. I feel that with all the stress in our world lately, we need more of these fun activities to stay balanced and healthy. Go Bears! :-)

