



CONTACT:  
Mitchel Benson, (916) 568-3056  
[bensonm@losrios.edu](mailto:bensonm@losrios.edu)  
August 31, 2016

EDITOR'S NOTE: To request a photo of Marianna Sousa, please email [winklet@losrios.edu](mailto:winklet@losrios.edu) or [bensonm@losrios.edu](mailto:bensonm@losrios.edu).

**SCC'S SOUSA BRINGS LISTENING, UNDERSTANDING,  
'GREAT DIPLOMACY' TO LOS RIOS STUDENT TRUSTEE POST**

SACRAMENTO – In her 17 years mentoring student leaders at Sacramento City College, Kim Beyrer has seen student body presidents come and go. But none have been quite like Marianna Sousa.

“She was the first I ever called my ‘love president,’” Beyrer, SCC’s Faculty Coordinator of Student Leadership and Development, says of last year’s president. “She gave love. She exudes love. She had that care in her heart... She is so charismatic; she is hard not to love. You could try not to, but she has a great spirit about her.”

And now SCC’s love is the Los Rios Community College District’s gain. Sousa, 37, is Los Rios’ elected student trustee for the 2016-17 academic year. She represents all 75,000-plus Los Rios students on the District’s governing board. And Beyrer is happy to share her. Sousa’s instincts for listening, understanding, caring and – in Beyrer’s words – “great diplomacy” will suit the Communications major well in her role as student trustee.

For her part, Sousa has already put those instincts and capabilities to work: “I want to support [making] connections between community efforts and organizations and the college community. Community organizations should be investing in K-12 before students even get here” to community college.

Her goals align well with the District’s ongoing efforts to expand and enhance pathways for students to ascend from elementary school through college into their first jobs and careers.

Sousa’s own pathway to SCC dates back to the early 1980s, when she was an infant attending her mother Mariamma Sousa’s graduation from the college’s Dental Assistant program. One of Mariamma’s classmates held baby Marianna in her arms as mom walked the stage. But Sousa says it took an entire community to set her on her personal trajectory to community college.

Fresh out of Sacramento’s McClatchy High School in 1997, Sousa initially passed on college to pursue an apprenticeship and then career as a natural hair care stylist. Even while doing hair, she was receiving an education, just not the traditional “western education” sort of learning.

“I was raised by a community of African American scholars, artists and activists in Sacramento,” she said. “I worked on skills building and community building. I saw my duty to give back in the same way these people were pouring into me.”

So as she continued as a natural hair care stylist, she began giving back to the community in the form of spoken word presentations, rapping, singing and storytelling to young people, performing at black culture and black history events and organizing collections for the homeless community. Her youthful appearance, feel for drama, gift for language – spoken and written – and natural effervescence helped her make her mark.

Mellonie Richardson, Los Rios’ Human Resources (HR) Officer for Recruitment, hired Sousa for training events when Richardson was the District’s HR Training Specialist.

“She was captivating,” Richardson recalls. “She did a rendition of Nina Simone’s “Strange Fruit” that would bring you to tears. I just can’t imagine our community without her in it.”

Even before Sousa would become an SCC student, student body president and Los Rios student trustee, Richardson said, it was clear to those who saw her perform that she had a gift for connecting with and motivating students:

“She is honest. She is direct. She uses terminology they can relate to, and she holds them accountable,” Richardson said. “And she does it while still being cool – which is an art.”

Sousa, who was then in her mid-30s and had been working on hair for nearly two decades, was growing weary of standing on her feet all day, and she had developed a nasty case of carpal tunnel syndrome. And, as a single parent, she was thinking about what sort of future she would be able to provide for her young daughter, N’Sheema Kali Ralph.

Folks like Richardson and others she’d met with the Los Rios Colleges had impressed her, Sousa said, “And I decided, ‘I don’t want just a job. I want a career.’”

In January 2014, inspired by President Obama’s “Moms Return to School” program, she enrolled in Sacramento City College. Sousa jumped right in to math and language classes, including Journalism Professor Dianne Heimer’s Style for Media Writers, a tough boot camp of grammar and newspaper style. “It’s a pretty daunting class that scares the hell out of everyone,” Heimer said. “She came in with her characteristic enthusiasm and just knocked it out of the park.”

A year later, in spring 2015, Sousa enrolled in Heimer’s Mass Media in Society course. “That class fit her so perfectly,” Heimer recalled, “because we talked about how our society is affected by the mass media and she talked so articulately from her perspective.”

Heimer then recommended Sousa for Sacramento Voices, a prestigious nine-month-long community journalism program. She applied and was accepted. Here is an [online catalog of her work](#).

Along the way, she decided to turn her community activism into student leadership, and ran for SCC student body president against a couple of veteran student leaders. That's where she and Beyrer crossed paths for the first time.

"I was a little bit worried," Beyrer recalled. "I did not know her and she had not previously been involved in any student leadership on campus. She had a big learning curve coming in. She came in and campaigned." And, of course, she won.

A year later, Sousa ran for student trustee – this time unopposed – and she was sworn in at the June 8 Los Rios board meeting. Once again, she did what she's always done: eyed a challenge, took it on and then dug in to do the work.

"She really cares for the district and the students," Beyrer says. "She's willing to read those thick binders for those meetings. She is willing to put in the work and give it her all. She is a very, very strong capable young woman."

## **ABOUT LOS RIOS**

The Los Rios Community College District is one of the nation's most respected learning institutions and the second-largest community college district in California, serving the greater Sacramento region. Los Rios includes: American River, Cosumnes River, Folsom Lake and Sacramento City colleges; six major education and outreach centers; and specialized workforce and economic development programs, for regional businesses, governments and organizations. Los Rios colleges offer AA/AS degrees, certificates and transfer-education opportunities in more than 70 career fields. The District's 2,400 square-mile service area includes all of Sacramento County, most of El Dorado County and parts of Yolo, Placer and Solano counties. More than 75,000 students are enrolled in the four Los Rios Colleges. For more information, go to [www.losrios.edu](http://www.losrios.edu).