



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

George Santiago Jr. '86g, '94g

To George Santiago Jr. for his distinguished career in higher education, his commitment to diversity on college campuses and for his leadership within the Long Island Hispanic community.

As an Eagle Scout, George Santiago Jr. had a keen sense of geography, loved maps and wanted to become a cartographer. Earning his bachelor's degree from Rutgers University, Santiago was set to pursue his advanced geography degree at what he called "one of the best programs in the country," Penn State.

Once at University Park, Santiago discovered that cartography wasn't the right fit, but education was. "I was really interested in student affairs and higher education," he said. "I was able to blend my geography background with my graduate education. I did my master's thesis on geographic illiteracy. I continued my education administration studies to the doctorate program at Penn State."

For the past 29 years, Santiago has built a successful career in higher education. He started in student affairs, migrated to academic support services and then moved into academic affairs. For six years,

he was the executive associate director of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) where he was responsible for 145 colleges and universities in that region. "That really became my laboratory for senior-level management in higher education," Santiago said.

Today, he is president of TCI College of Technology in New York City, a position he has held since May. Prior to TCI, Santiago was president of Briarcliffe College in Bethpage, New York, a four-year institution with two campuses on Long Island and online. He began his tenure as provost but quickly moved to the president's office with a unanimous vote of confidence by the board of trustees. As the fourth president of Briarcliffe, Santiago says "expanding the educational opportunities for students of color on campus" was one of his greatest achievements, along with increasing retention and graduation rates.

"For most of my professional life, I've worked with an 'at risk' population. That's my area of focus; where I get the most satisfaction. It's working with students that are first generation, first to go to college, potentially academically underprepared and economically disadvantaged and providing them with the resources to be

successful. That's where my passion has always been and will continue until I retire," Santiago explained.

For his astute leadership skills at Briarcliffe, Santiago received the Outstanding CEO Award in 2014 from *Long Island Business News*. His management acumen extends beyond campus into the Hispanic community where he's considered among the top Hispanic leaders on Long Island.

In 2013, Santiago received the Excellence in Education Award from Penn State's College of Education Alumni Society—the highest honor bestowed upon a College of Education alumnus.

Growing up in New Jersey "from humble beginnings," Santiago credits the values learned in that blue-collar home for his successful higher education career and his good sense of philanthropy.

"Both of my parents were factory workers in the garment industry," Santiago said. "They worked for measly wages and under really bad conditions. While my sister and I didn't grow up with a lot of money, we did grow up with a lot of love and discipline. They always wanted us to continue with our education and better ourselves—better than they were so we wouldn't have to go through what they did."

"I reflect on those values in how I approach my work, how intentional I am about it, and how seriously I take it. Also, with the understanding that there is always someone else less fortunate and you have the opportunity to change that person's life somehow," he added.

Santiago is a member of the Penn State Alumni Association. He and his partner of 17 years, David, live in Bethpage, N.Y., with their two beagles, Spartacus and Fotoula—"cousins of the Westminster Dog Show-winning beagles, makes them royalty," quips Santiago.

