

Just Do It & SEE WHAT HAPPENS

A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

By air, it's at least a 16-hour trip from Asunción, Paraguay, to Kansas. It's a challenging journey for a seasoned traveler; even more so when an 18-year-old high school graduate leaves home to launch her college studies.

But luckily for Lea Giménez Duarte, her destination was Emporia and Emporia State University.

"If I hadn't arrived in such a welcoming city that was the right size for an 18-year-old coming alone to a completely different world, not speaking English, I probably would have given up and come back home. My path would've been completely different."

It's been a path with plenty of challenges, not the least of which was learning a new language. But it has led Giménez Duarte, at 37 years old, back home to be the youngest—and first female—Minister of Finance in Paraguay's history.

Interviewed for this profile by Dr. Ken Weaver, dean of The Teachers College at Emporia State, Giménez Duarte said her mother had initially urged her to become a teacher after coming across some information about ESU. Her academic path took a different turn, though, when she discovered her affinity for mathematics and economics in classes taught by Dr. Brian Hollenbeck and other faculty.

"I will never forget him (Hollenbeck) and his commitment to teaching. He had a transformative impact on my life," Giménez Duarte remembered.

Giménez Duarte graduated Magna Cum Laude from Emporia State, earning a bachelor's degree in economics in 2004. Ten years later, she was named one of ESU's Outstanding Recent Graduates. Due to responsibilities with her then-current job as an economist with the World Bank, though, she was unable to return to Emporia to accept the award.

In Paraguay for a reception celebrating programs strengthening relationships between Kansas and Paraguay, Weaver presented the award to Giménez Duarte this past June.

Sitting with Weaver in a conference room lined with photos of previous Paraguayan Ministers of Finance—all men—Giménez Duarte remarked, "To be in this room is pretty amazing. Sometimes I look at these photos and am reminded how huge a move this is for me. You have the whole budget of the country as your responsibility."

"It's a fantastic challenge, and it's the story of my life—I just do it and see what happens."

