A TALENT FOR MULTITASKING: As an Instructor of Dental Medicine at Columbia, Dr. Velasco’s busy weekly schedule combines all of her passions — teaching, mentoring, research, and practice. In short, she is doing what she loves best: multitasking.

“I have always been comfortable doing multiple things at the same time,” she says, a predilection which helped her simultaneously tackle two very different — and very difficult — educational experiences at Penn. She found role models at every turn: “It was fabulous to learn from people who were so well-rounded and doing so many interesting things. I had great mentors every step of the way, and no one ever denied me an opportunity to do something that interested me.”

Combining intensive clinical experiences at Penn Dental Medicine with lectures and seminars in the School of Education helped Dr. Velasco build a powerful combination of skills. “I will never regret the extra work,” she says of her decision to pursue a dual degree. “My coursework in education has made me a better speaker and a better writer — skills I need to be an effective teacher — and my solid clinical dentistry background is something I feel confident about every day.”

Two other aspects of her background — academic research and community health — have also inspired her, playing important roles in her educational plans and in her ultimate career choice of academia. ►

NO LIMITS
DR. MARIA VELASCO, D’10, GEd’10
INSTRUCTOR OF DENTAL MEDICINE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF DENTAL MEDICINE

It’s been less than a year since Dr. Maria Velasco (D’10, GEd’10) finished her residency and accepted a full-time faculty position at New York Presbyterian/Columbia University’s pediatric dentistry program, and her memories of time spent at Penn Dental Medicine are still vivid. Graduate school presented so many attractive and promising options, she remembers, that choosing a single focus for her education and eventual career seemed an impossible task. “There was so much to learn and so much that I wanted to do,” she says. “I didn’t want to limit my education in any way.”

Luckily, she didn’t have to: As a dual-degree student who combined a traditional dental degree with a graduate degree from Penn’s School of Education, she was able to craft a flexible curriculum that wove together her interests in dentistry, teaching, and research. After graduating in 2010 with a DMD and a Master’s in Higher Education, and completing a residency in pediatric dentistry at Columbia, she was offered an academic position that makes full use of all aspects of her unique background.

Never regret the extra work,” she says of her decision to pursue a dual degree. “My coursework in education has made me a better speaker and a better writer — skills I need to be an effective teacher — and my solid clinical dentistry background is something I feel confident about every day.”
ALUMNI AT PENN DENTAL MEDICINE

Following are those Penn Dental Medicine alumni who are part of the School’s full-time standing faculty and in key administrative roles; the associated and part-time faculty also includes a strong corps of Penn Dental Medicine graduates.

Joli C. Chou, M’04, GD’07
Assistant Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery/Pharmacology

Chun-Hsi Chung, D’86, GD’92, MS’92
Chair and Associate Professor of Orthodontics
Director, Postdoctoral Orthodontic Program

Robert Collins, D’71
Clinical Professor of Community Oral Health
Director of International Relations

Helen Giannakopoulos, GD’02
Associate Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery/Pharmacology
Director, Postdoctoral Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery Program

Martin S. Greenberg, GD’68, HOM’73
Professor, Dept. of Oral Medicine

Bekir Karabucak, GD’98, D’02
Associate Professor of Endodontics
Interim Director, Postdoctoral Endodontics Program
Director, Graduate Dental Education Programs

Jonathan Korostoff, D’85, GR’91, GD’92
Associate Professor of Periodontics
Director, Master of Science in Oral Biology Program

Heywood Kotch, D’77
Clinical Associate Professor of Preventive & Restorative Sciences
Assistant Dean of Clinical Operations

Ernesto Lee, GD’87
Director, Postdoctoral Periodontics/Prosthesis Program

Lawrence M. Levin, D’86, GD’90
Associate Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery/Pharmacology
Chief, Division of Dentistry, CHOP

Rochelle Lindemeyer, GD’79
Associate Professor of Pediatric Dentistry
Director, Postdoctoral Pediatric Program

Margit Maggio, D’87
Assistant Professor of Restorative Dentistry
Director of Preclinical Dentistry
Director of Advanced Simulation

Francis Mante D’95, HOM’99
Associate Professor, Division of Restorative Dentistry
Director of Biomaterials

Mel Mupparapu, D’96
Professor of Oral Medicine
Director, Division of Oral & Maxillofacial Radiology

Andres Pinto, D’99, GD’01, GR’07, GR’12, M’12
Associate Professor of Oral Medicine and Community Oral Health
Director of Oral Medicine Services
Chief, Division of Community Oral Health

Alan M. Polson, D’94
Professor, Dept. of Periodontics

Peter D. Quinn, D’74, GD’78
Schoenleber Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery/Pharmacology
Vice Dean for Professional Services, Perelman School of Medicine
Senior Vice President for CPUP, University of Pennsylvania Health System

Olivia Sheridan, D’90, GD’92
Clinical Associate Professor of Preventive & Restorative Sciences
Assistant Dean for Admissions

Thomas P. Sollecito, D’89, GD’91
Chair and Professor of Oral Medicine

David Stanton, D’88, M’92, GD’95
Associate Professor of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery/Pharmacology

Eric T. Stoopler, D’99, GD’02
Associate Professor of Oral Medicine
Director, Postdoctoral Oral Medicine Program

Robert L. Vanarsdall, D’72, GD’73
Professor, Dept. of Orthodontics
Director, Postdoctoral Orthodontic Program
Assistant Dean for Advancement of Dental Specialties

OCCURRANCES FOR RESEARCH:

Fascinated by research since high school, Dr. Velasco was thrilled to collaborate with Dr. Sunday Akintoye, Assistant Professor, Department of Oral Medicine, while at Penn Dental Medicine, assisting on a research project involving oral facial bone marrow stem cells. Later, as head resident at Columbia, she worked closely with Dr. Burton Edelstein, Professor of Clinical Dentistry and Clinical Health Policy Management and Chairman of the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences, where her research involved measuring patient satisfaction in the faculty practice there. Both projects resulted in an appreciation and deeper understanding of how research, teaching, and practice could work in harmony. “I realized I didn’t have to pick teaching over research or research over practice to grow in my career,” she says. At Columbia, she hopes to eventually focus her research on oral intervention for premature infants and adolescents, two groups of children who she notes are often overlooked in research.

COMMUNITY CARE:

A native of Ecuador and a fluent Spanish speaker, Dr. Velasco also felt a responsibility for helping local Hispanic populations receive good dental care. As a student in Penn Dental Medicine’s clinics, she saw a unique opportunity to be of service to Spanish-speaking patients: “I realized that so many important aspects of dental care were getting lost in translation, and that my language skills could help whole families get better care.”

At Penn Dental Medicine, she was able to combine the School’s community service requirements with her work on the Hispanic Student Dental Association to help build a program of free dental services for Hispanic residents of South Philadelphia. It was there that she learned how much she enjoyed working with children, which led to her choice to pursue a specialty in pediatric dentistry. (She selected Columbia’s residency program in part because of the school’s location in the largely Hispanic Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights.) Today, she is the first Latino tenure-track faculty member at Columbia University College of Dental Medicine, an accomplishment of which she is particularly proud.

Dr. Velasco’s new faculty position satisfies the desire she nurtured at Penn Dental Medicine to connect the fields of teaching, research, and practice, and to never put limits on learning. As she explores her new roles, she is eager to pass on her passion to a new generation of students.