Anjelica Palma Castaño considers herself passionate, even militant, about ensuring equal opportunities for people of color.

Now that the St. Paul woman is graduating from Metropolitan State University with an ethnic studies degree, she can't wait to launch her career.

"I really would like to open up a nonprofit organization that helps women and children in poverty, especially people of color," said Castaño, who has lived in poverty. That background, she said, makes her more aware of, understanding and compassionate toward the impoverished. Castaño said it also motivates her to help change the systemic problems that enables poverty to flourish.

If Castaño's Metropolitan State experiences foretell anything, she is well on her way toward her accomplishments.

Last year, she won the Metropolitan State Student Senate Academic Achievement Award. This spring semester, she was selected outstanding student in the university's College of Arts and Sciences.

Aureliano DeSoto, Castaño's Metropolitan State advisor, describes Castaño as inquisitive, critically engaged and thoughtful. Moreover, he said, she demonstrated tenacity and fortitude while battling ongoing financial challenges en route to becoming the first in her family to receive a college degree.

Castaño has worked the past four years as a sales clerk at the Science Museum of Minnesota. Most of the time she worked full-time while attending Metropolitan State.

Castaño's near-term plans include pursuing certification so she can teach elementary school, preferably in an urban area or abroad.

Whatever challenges she confronts, Castaño believes she's now well equipped to address them.

“I have really struggled, but I’ve worked to the best of my ability,” she said. “A big reason why I attended and finished college was to prove that I’m capable of great things.”