Kimberly Mahaffy took a less traveled road to becoming a sociology professor at Millersville.

While living in Massachusetts, Mahaffy worked in Welfare to Work programs in Lowell, Lawrence and Haverhill. As a counselor, it became increasingly apparent that so many women were struggling within the welfare system—taking two steps forward and three steps backward.

"I wanted to understand why. I wanted to put the pieces together," said Mahaffy.

Her need to understand and delve into the role of society in our lives ultimately drove Mahaffy toward being a professor. As she discovered, one of the keys to success in life is quite simply education.

Mahaffy has been a professor of sociology and anthropology at Millersville for 10 years. She is also director of Latino(a) Studies at Millersville and is quite proud of her Latina and Scotch-Irish ancestry.

"My mother is from Panama, so I grew up speaking Spanish," says Mahaffy, who spent her childhood in Erie, then lived in Chadds Ford as an adolescent.

As director of Latino(a) Studies, Mahaffy works with approximately 15 students who are minoring in Latino studies. She points out that the population of Latino students at Millersville University has increased in the past decade and now accounts for five percent of students with Puerto Rican, Mexican, Dominican, Cuban and other Spanish-speaking backgrounds.

"I enjoy the students at Millersville and the flexibility I am afforded to develop programs that will benefit students," she said.

A self-professed "problem solver," Mahaffy likes to examine issues from every angle, devising solutions to problems such as unemployment, low educational attainment, poverty, racial bias and more. She knows that the answers are not simple.

She is most compelled by social psychology in which students examine the issues of stigma, identity, race, class, gender and sexuality in society.

"There may be social forces at work, but that doesn't mean you can't create social change," she tells her students.

Mahaffy has lived much of her life in Pennsylvania and New England, but is fond of travel. She has visited Panama many times, as well as Texas, Mexico, Canada and Scotland. Her favorite place, however, is the Pacific coast of Oregon, where the beaches and woodlands capture her imagination.

At home, she is surrounded by her cats, mostly rescued felines that recognized her as a cat-lover. Whenever she gets the chance, she enjoys long-distance cycling and has participated in the 63-mile Seagull Century Bicycle Ride. She also enjoys cooking, canning, reading and catching up on classic movies.

One of the things that often surprises her students is that Mahaffy is a skilled marksman. As a youth in Western Pa., her father taught her to shoot a rifle, and she took a safety course for hunters at just 12 years of age. Back then, she learned to hunt for deer, squirrel and other game.

"I don't hunt anymore," she admits, "And my cats don't either. I keep them indoors."