

My interest in science and the pursuit of a doctoral degree in the sciences is rooted in my early childhood. When I was eight years old, my mother was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer, and soon after her diagnosis, she began to undergo treatment. Four days before her mastectomy, my father abandoned us, and, after a brief period of remission, my mother's cancer rapidly metastasized. She passed away when I was twelve years old. Losing my mother to cancer made me see the importance of finding the means to help prevent and detect malignant diseases. I became determined that I would grow up and be involved in a career to accomplish this, and following the advice of school counselors, I focused my energy and attention on excelling in math and science courses. My success in the classroom won me distinction as I moved from city to city between family members and eventually into the foster care system.

I was only eight years old when my family and I migrated to the United States from Mexico and being an immigrant with little knowledge of the English language allowed me to excel in math and science. I was placed in academic support programs and I believe these programs helped me to develop a passion for science and math. Without this early inspiration, I would not have succeeded in the same manner. These programs, and the great educators who taught and encouraged me, are what motivate me to inspire younger generations to take part in science.

As a result, I have worked hard to serve educationally underrepresented students at San Diego State University. Over the last two years, I have mentored incoming freshmen and transfer students who identify as first generation, minority students, former foster youth, and science majors. My work includes helping them access the proper resources that will allow them to succeed as aspiring scientists. I feel my work to inspire the future generation of innovators is just as important as my work as a scientist who is concerned with better understanding cell signaling pathways.

One of the projects I have developed to assist aspiring underrepresented students is the student advisory board for the SDSU Guardian Scholars Program (GSP), an academic support program for former foster youth. My initial vision for this program was to increase our community outreach, and by working with the assistant director of the program we established several connections with local public schools and programs oriented to help foster youth access a college education. Now, college students from our GSP program visit surrounding schools and programs, and share their stories in order to inspire foster youth students within the San Diego community to seek a college education.

As a result of my personal history, I understand, maybe better than most young adults, that life is difficult and that people suffer. This is why I am committed to assisting in the fight against human disease, and also with helping younger underrepresented students who have similar educational goals to mine. The encouragement and assistance I have received has helped me attain a university education and scholarships to carry out investigations with top research laboratories. But I am not done yet. My advanced degree will help to illustrate how a negative can be turned into a positive, and how by accessing the resources available, any student can succeed.