

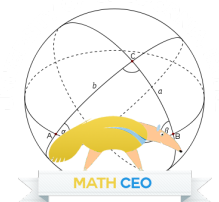
# Stories to be Heard



Showing paths to College through life experiences

UCI MATH CEO Community Educational Outreach

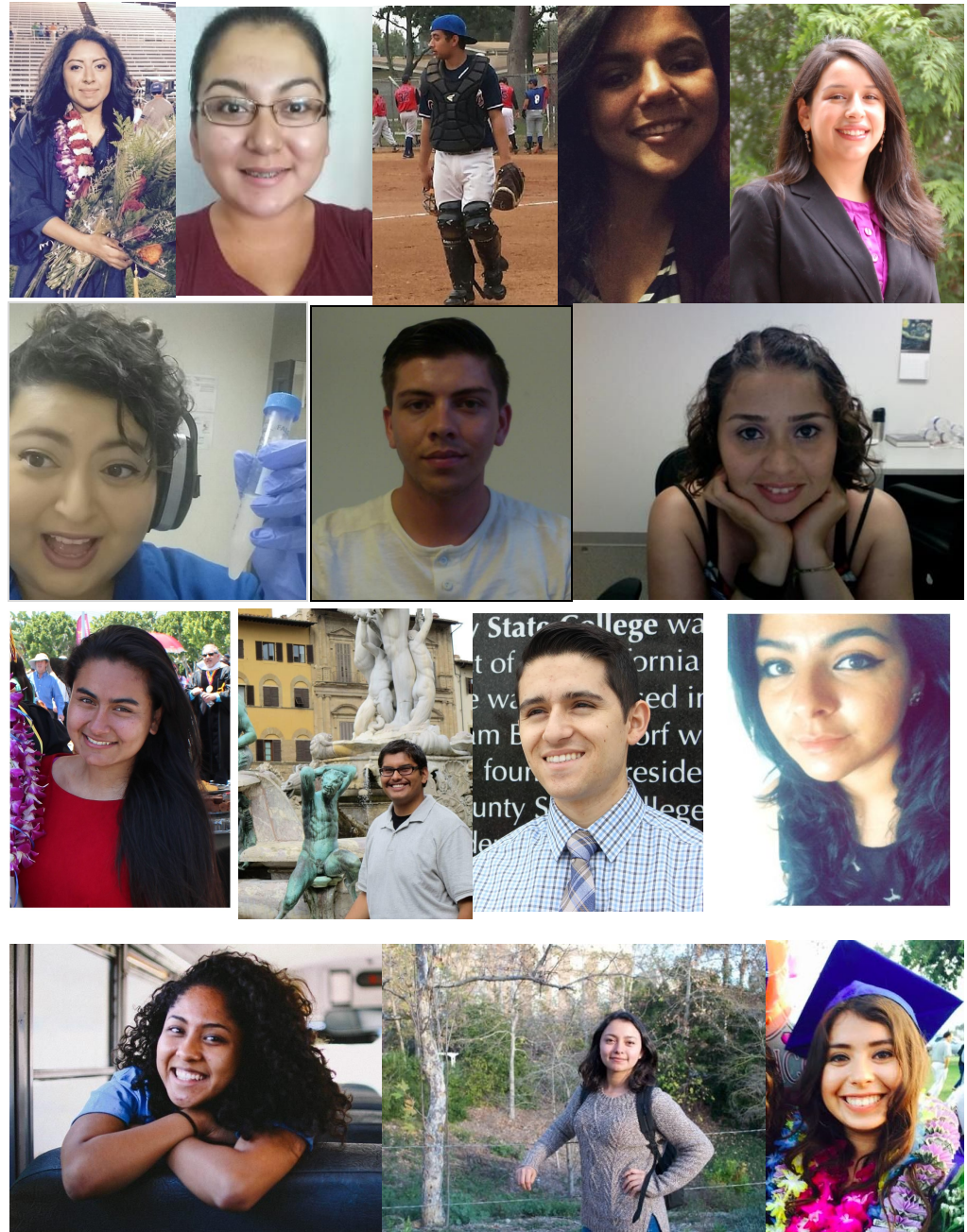
[www.math.uci.edu/mathceo](http://www.math.uci.edu/mathceo)



# Introduction

In these pages we present the life stories of many dreamers, patient and hard workers students, who always believed that studying a university career was possible. Their journey was full of challenges, obstacles, and achievements... but their families, and especially their parents, have always supported their efforts.

We hope that these beautiful stories will inspire you, and that you - the parents, may support your children unconditionally so that they realize their dreams of entering higher education.





## Selena



Hello, my name is Selena Perez, I am currently a third year student here at the University of California, Irvine, and pursue a career in education as a math teacher. I was born in Garden Grove and raised in Santa Ana, California. I am the youngest of six children and the third one of my siblings to attend college. Obtaining a higher education was something that was instilled in me since I was very

young. My mother would always tell me and my siblings, educate yourself so that you work in something you enjoy and take advantage of the educational opportunities offered here in the United States. This word of advice from my mother has stayed with me throughout my educational career and has motivated me to excel in academics.

My mother is from Morelia, Michoacan and migrated to the United States in pursuit of a better future. She is a single parent and due to her legal status as an illegal immigrant, she has had to work in many blue collar low paying jobs such as cleaning houses, hospitals, and

offices. In many instances, I helped her clean homes and assisting her made me appreciate my mom so much

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*"Although my mother wasn't able to help me in my homework, her encouraging words and unconditional **emotional support** always kept me with a positive mentality."*

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more. I realized how much she sacrificed to raise me and my sisters which further pushed me to do well in school. My mother also received a first grade education and due to this fact was not able to help us at home with school work. Although my mother wasn't able to help me in my homework, her encouraging words and unconditional emotional support always kept me with a positive mentality.

One of the fears my mother did face about our education was not being able to afford college for either of my siblings. As a single parent, she worked two jobs to make ends meet and paying for tuition seemed impossible. It wasn't until my older sister applied to college in high school that we became aware of FAFSA, financial assistance, and we realized that going to college was obtainable and affordable.

Apart from receiving financial aid, I also applied to two scholarships knowing that a UC tuition would be expensive. I applied for the Garden Grove Latinos Unidos

Scholarship and Padres Unidos Scholarship from La Quinta High School and thankfully I received both. Today, FAFSA helps me pay for my education and my mother

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<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/es/about>

helps with expenses such as food and shelter. I am very thankful because without this assistance, I would have not been able to receive a higher education in a UC system.



### *My advice*

I recommend that students become involved in school and in their community. Students should be involved so that they are great candidates when they apply to college. Colleges look at students grades but they also take into account how well rounded students are. I was

involved in Latinos Unidos, Girls League, was in soccer for four years, and helped in my church. These clubs and services I chose based on my interests and I recommend students do the same when deciding what clubs to be involved in. I also suggest taking AP courses in high school because students receive college credit if students pass the AP exams. For instance, because of the AP courses I took in high school, I was considered a sophomore standing my second quarter of my freshman year. This worked in my favor because I received an earlier registration day for my winter quarter. Overall, enjoy middle school and high school and make every year count. Do not slack off but rather push yourself every quarter so that you do better!

**AP**

AP (Advanced Placement) refers to advanced school courses of different areas. If your son takes them, it will help immensely in entering college.

<https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse>



## Martha

Hello, my name is Martha Ramos, and I am in my last year at UC Irvine, graduating with a degree in Pharmaceutical Science with a minor in Medical Anthropology. Both my parents are Mexicans and I am the baby of the family, having two older brothers. I grew up in South Central Los

Angeles in a predominantly African-American/Hispanic community. I don't remember much of my early school years. But the few things I do remember are not so great. Growing up my grades were not so good, and I struggled with English. Speaking English was not the hard part, what I had a hard time with was learning how to read and write. By the time I was in 5th grade, I was reading at a 3rd grade level. Displeased by the slow progress my mother would see, she pushed to have my brothers and I placed in better schools. I don't think I would at a 4 year University if it wasn't for my parents.

My brothers and I were put into the magnet program at our elementary school with the hopes of sending us to a better schools. My parents were thrilled when their hard work got us into one of the top ranking middle schools in

Los Angeles. That middle school also became our high school as it houses 6-12 grade. My brothers and I would

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***"Never would I have been able to reach a university level or attend a school as recognized as UC Irvine if it had not been for the **effort of my parents**"***

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get mad at our parents because we spent the next 6 years waking up at 6 in the morning in order to get to school on time. As most people know, school doesn't start until 8 in the morning. We always complained to our parents; *Why couldn't we go to the school that is around the corner? We wouldn't need to wake up so early. We wouldn't need to ride the bus. Our grades would be perfect.* My dad would always tell us that one day we would understand that they only want what is best for us. So every time we would complain, the only thing my dad would say is that going to school is like having a job, and that instead of paying rent with money we would pay our part by getting



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IRVINE

good grades. And his words stuck with me, and they motivated me to aim for straight A's in all of my classes. With this new mentality, by the time I got to high school, I was reading at my appropriate level and was on great academic standings.

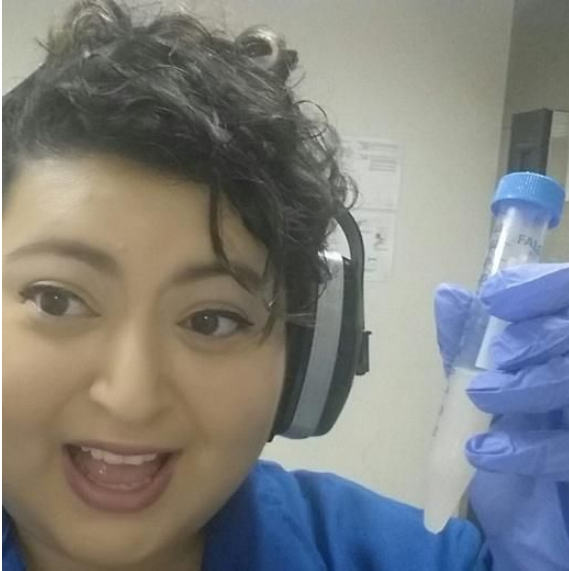
I think my parents knew how important there persistence was in our education. My mother, having immigrated here at the age of 26 was able to learn English and obtain a degree in Psychology. So she would always tell us that if she was able to do it, so should we. Following in her steps, my oldest brother obtained a degree in Spanish Literature while my other brother obtained his in Spanish Language. By the time I left high school, the only thing on my mind was that I too had to graduate college. While the 3 of them all obtained Bachelor of the Arts degree, I will be the first to hopefully get a Bachelors of Science degree by the end of this school year, June 2017.

Although I am proud to say that I will be graduating UC Irvine, it was not easy. Classes were very challenging, school became very competitive, and being away from home felt lonely at times. Although my parents couldn't help me with homework, didn't understand biology, couldn't change my grades, and weren't by my side all the time; they were always my number one fans. If I needed to talk to someone, my parents were always on the phone wanting to talk. Whenever I felt like crying, which is normal because of stress, my parents were always there. The best memories I have of my parents are of those in which they were there for me. One day I had to stay up late to do homework, and my dad, not

knowing what I was doing, would stay up late with me. He wouldn't help me, but he said he would make me company. My mom would always be cheering me on whenever I felt that I wanted to give up. So I guess what I want to say is that as parents, you have the power to influence your children's success. And now I am grateful that my parents never stopped pushing me to pursue higher education.



## Leonila



Hello! My name is Leonila Lagunes; I am a graduate student in my second year. I am the oldest of four and the first to attend university; in fact, I am the first to graduate high school. My parents were born in Mexico and immigrated to the US very young.

My parents didn't have the opportunity to go to college, but they work hard so that we can.

I was born and raised in Santa Ana. I attended primary school in Santa Ana; Garfield, Villa, Lathrop. During my first year in high school, my parents decided to move to Orange. I went to Villa Park High School in Orange. In high school, I never thought that university was for me. I was only focused on finishing high school and then finding a job. My grades weren't that great (mostly C's) and I didn't participate in sports or clubs. One day, a local community college gave a presentation to students from

low-income homes. I signed up and went to Santiago Canyon College, where I studies Mathematics. After 2 years, I transferred to Cal State University Fullerton. In 2014, I became the first in my family to obtain my degree. Then, I decided to attend UC Irvine, where I am now. At UC Irvine, I study Computational Biology. My dream is to teach students how math can be used to solve biological problems.

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*"I never imagined that I could be a scientist, or that I would like studying mathematics so much!"*

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Since I was very young I always had a passion for science, but at the age of 14, I could never have imagined that I could be a scientist and that I would love to study so much math! Although my parents knew very little about the sciences, they always supported me in my studies. They always say that only with an education can we be successful in America.



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## Maribel

I am Maribel Jaquez. I grew up in Coachella, CA where the majority of the population is Hispanic/Latino and it is primarily a rural and agricultural town. My parents came to the US for a better opportunity for their children. My parents

taught me the importance of hard work and education. Growing up, I always wondered how my father was capable of fixing and constructing things. As a young girl, my father took me to a construction site where he was building a house. On this day, my curiosity grew for understanding how to build and take things apart. My mother, taught me to take advantage of opportunities. She went from being a housewife, to a day care professional. The majority of the children that my mother has in her day care are children of migrant workers. Working with my mother, I saw how tired the children's parents came from work and I would often hear them discuss their struggles in regards to barely making enough to cover basic necessities. This realization motivated me to pursue my education.

When I started elementary school, I did not speak English as Spanish was the only language spoken at home. It was in the fifth grade where I realized I was reading at the second grade level. I remember talking to my teacher, asking her for help. Her advice was "In order to get better you have to work for it." Those words motivated me to set a goal to catch up. At the end of the year, I was reading at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level and received special recognition from the principal in front of the whole school. I had surpassed my goal and this experience taught me that I could achieve anything no matter how difficult it may be.

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*"Working in a daycare with my mother, I saw how tiring the kids' parents' work was, and I heard their struggle to **barely make enough** to pay for their basic necessities.*

*Understanding this made me more motivated to continue in my studies"*

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I decided to study engineering due to my curiosity to learn and understanding how things work. As a freshman at the University of California, Irvine, I quickly realized that my high school did not prepare me as well as other high schools my peers attended, and that there weren't that



many underrepresented minorities studying engineering. I then took it upon myself to encourage students to not only attend college but also expose them to STEM.

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STEM, according to its acronym in English, means Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

More information:

[http://blogs.calstate.edu/college/students/career\\_landing/stem/](http://blogs.calstate.edu/college/students/career_landing/stem/)

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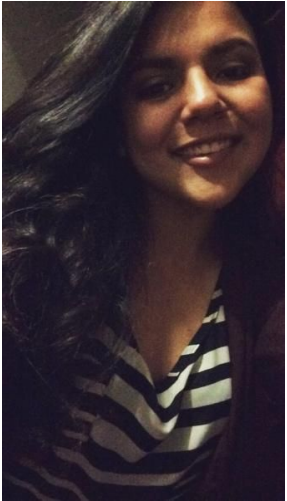
Aside from being involved in the community as an undergraduate student, I was also very focused on my studies. After taking an introductory class in materials, I found myself curious when it came to the selection of materials for different products. I did not know that I could foster my curiosity of learning in a research laboratory until I was informed of the opportunity through a senior student I met during my sophomore year. He saw potential in me and encouraged me to join a

research group. I enjoyed working in a research lab because it gave me the opportunity to be an innovator. I decided to go to graduate school because it would allow me the opportunity to become a leading expert in a topic of my choice. I am currently studying the optical and electrical properties of novel semiconductors for energy applications. I also decided to go to graduate school to become a role model for other young minority students to pursue careers in STEM.

I graduated from UC Irvine double majoring in Mechanical Engineering and Materials Science Engineering. I have a Master's of Science in Mechanical Engineering from UC Berkeley, and I am still at UC Berkeley finishing the PhD degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Reflecting on my journey, I did not think I would be capable of being the first in my family to graduate from a university and continue with graduate studies all fully funded. I am grateful for the support I have received to get to where I am today.

## Ana



Hi, my name is Ana Govea, I am 19 years old and this is my second year at UC Irvine. I was born in Uruapan Michoacan, Mexico and came to the U.S. when I was 4 years old. With the help and support of my parents my older sister and I attend four-year universities and pursue majors in the physical sciences. I also have two younger brothers that we hope follow in our footsteps and are inspired to go to college.

My journey into higher education was not easy. Coming here from Mexico at a young age was fairly difficult for me. It took me a long time to learn English and be able to communicate with other people here. However, my parents always encouraged me to never give up and continue learning as hard as it was. My parents served as a source of inspiration for me because they both worked long hour jobs that never paid well. In the first few years of us living here, my dad worked at a car wash and my mom washed dishes at a restaurant. Every night I saw them come home exhausted from washing cars in the burning sun and standing over a sink all day. Ever since I was small and realized they couldn't get better jobs

because they didn't go to school I made it my goal to get my education and get a career that could provide both for me and my parents as well. From that point on I haven't stopped working towards getting good grades and expanding my education.

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*"My parents always encouraged me to never give up and keep learning"*

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When I got older, however, I realized how difficult it would be to get into a good university, and apart from that, how hard it would be to pay for it. In high school, I did a lot of research and learned about scholarships, grants, loans, and financial aid. The thought of free money for my education made my goal seem more attainable. During my senior year I applied for FAFSA and when I was accepted into UC Irvine I learned that the money I received from FAFSA was going to cover a huge part of my tuition. The rest of the money came from the university itself.

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*"I realized that my parents could not obtain better employment opportunities because they had not gone to a university, so I decided to get a college education that could provide for me as well as for them."*

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Since I was small, I never thought I would end up in a great university like UC Irvine. Now that I am here, though, I plan on getting my degree in Mathematics and seeing where that takes me. I credit my success to first of all God, and then my parents for encouraging me and not shying away from the idea of college because of the cost. I encourage all of you to take the time to look at the information provided to you about college and really think about the benefits of higher education. Thank you for your time.

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<https://fafsa.ed.gov/help.htm>

## Gaby



Hello, my name is Gaby Campos, I am a transfer student majoring in Criminology, Law and Society, and this is my first year at UC Irvine. I am from a small town called Los Banos where the majority of the people are Hispanics who work in the fields. My mom, like many of my family members use to work in the fields too but now is a cook at Carl's Jr. She works there because unlike many of us she doesn't have many options. Her highest level of education is 3rd grade. She doesn't know how to read or

write very well. Despite her limitations, she always taught me to work hard.

Growing up I never really got to see her because she had to work. She would go to work before I woke up and would come home after I had already gone to sleep. She's one of the most hard working people I know. In a way, she had to be because she had three kids. I am the



oldest of three. I am a year and a half older than my sister and eleven years older than my little brother who is now thirteen. Growing up I always had to take care of them, so my biggest motivation is my family. I am not only the firstborn, but I am also the oldest out of ALL my cousins. I am the first to attend and graduate high school and the first to go to college and university. It always seemed impossible for me to go to a university. I don't think I am super smart. I actually believe myself to be very average but I also know that I am hard working. I have always loved to read and because I never had anyone around me with much of an education I always had to figure things out myself. It was extremely hard and I never actually thought that I would go to a University.

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*"One doesn't have to be a genius to be in an incredible school, you just have to **work and put in a lot of effort.** And never give up, no matter how hard it seems."*

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The reason why I am here, the reason why I keep going is because I want my family and other people to know that it can be done. You don't have to be a genius to be in an amazing school, you just have to work as hard as you

have to for it and never give up, no matter how hard. Anything you want to be you can be, anything you want to do you can do. I wish there would have been programs like Math Circle that would have helped me and made the process a little easier for me. Take advantage of everything available to you because even though it might seem boring and pointless, many people did not have the opportunities that you have right now and they wish they had. Your hard work and dedication WILL pay off.

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*"I wish a program like **UCI Math CEO** would have existed to help me and make the process a little easier. "*

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## Lesly



Hello, my name is Lesly Benitez and I was born in South Central Los Angeles. Because of the war in El Salvador my dad was forced to abandon his studies and flee to the United States. My mom

was able finish what is our equivalent to high school; however, she couldn't continue her studies because she had to come the the United States to help maintain her parents and her eleven brothers and sisters. They met each other in Los Angeles and had two daughters, my sister and I. I remember that we lived in a house with two other families and that we had several large dogs for protection because at that time there was a lot of crime in our neighborhood. My dad realized that the life he lived in Los Angeles was a dangerous one, so because he loved us and wanted a better life for us he left his old life and his friends behind and we moved to Anaheim.

I realized from a very young age that my parents sacrificed a great deal so that my sister and I could get an education and so that we could have opportunities that they never had. I remember that when we moved to Anaheim we lived in a tiny rundown apartment. I also

remember that my parents would sleep on the ground so that my sister and I could sleep on the bed. I learned to appreciate their actions from a very young age I decided that the best thing I could do to repay them was to do the best that I could in school. Seeing their proud faces and their smiles when they found out I was doing very well in school further motivated me to do better. Even from elementary school my goal was to be at the top of my class. This goal continued through middle school and high school and with a lot of hard work, commitment, and with the help of my parents I graduated high school at the top of my class. Now, I am studying Biological Sciences at one of the best public Universities in California. After I complete these four years, my goal is to attend medical school so that I can pursue my dream of being a surgeon.

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*"I learned to appreciate my parent's actions and I decided from a young age that the only way to pay them back would be **through my studies**".*

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In my first three months here at UC Irvine I have had numerous unforgettable experiences. The classes are harder but I love learning and I love new challenges. These past months I have learned how important it is to be involved in school. Since this past summer I have

been a part of a program that helps and supports minorities in the STEM field. I am also a member of two clubs that support Latinos in the sciences. This month I started working so I have less time for other activities; however, when I do have time I volunteer as a tutor at an underprivileged school. I recognize that both my parents and I have given up a great deal so that I can continue school so I plan to do whatever necessary to finish.

lot of us come from families with little resources but this should not keep us from going to a University. We need to understand the value of school because it is through school and through our studies that we will be able to offer our families a better life.

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*"I have seen the statistics that show the low percentage of Hispanics that obtain a college degree. **I've decided that I won't be a part of those statistics** and I know that if you and your children make the effort, you won't have to be a part of them either."*

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Ever since I was young I saw more and more of my Hispanic friends and my cousins drop out of school and I have seen the statistics that tell us that very few Hispanics actually get bachelor's degrees or higher, especially in the sciences. I have decided that I will not be a part of these statistics and I know that if you and your kids work hard you will not have to be a part of these unfortunate statistics, instead we can increase the number of Hispanics that receive a university degree. A



## Kaylee



My name is Kaylee Paola Acuña. My family comes from Guatemala. I was born in Van Nuys, California; I have visited my family in Guatemala three times and I would like to visit them again soon!

My father was lucky enough to study in Guatemala but my mother was not. That is why my dad has the opportunity of working in an office as a medical biller but

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my mother works cleaning houses, a job that I have a lot of respect for. My parents taught me to value education and I am very grateful for all that they have done to help me succeed. My parents did not have the experience of attending to a university and therefore could not help me with all the applications and procedures that must be performed to go to college. Nevertheless, what they could give me, and still continue giving me is their love and encouragement. When I was tired of trying very hard to understand something new that I learned in class, they reminded me that all that work was necessary if I wanted to attend to a university and accomplish my dreams, whatever they may be.

I am still not sure what profession I want pursue. I have thought about something in the medical field or in the area of education. I will definitely choose a career that allows me to help people.

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*"My parents did not have the opportunity to go to a university and because of that, they could not help me in the process of going to a university. Nevertheless, what they could give me and what they continue to give me is **their love and their words of encouragement.**"*

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I chose to study mathematics when I was 11 years old. From that age I felt a passion for this area. Now that I am

at UC Irvine I am studying mathematics which is a subject that I like more than any other. I have learned that to be successful at something, you must want it. Also, by learning math the career possibilities are endless!

My life at UC Irvine is a blessing! In my first year I was part of a program that helps students from low- income communities with information and tools to inspire them to pursue a college education. I was also part of the wrestling club. Now in my second year at UC Irvine, I am still part of these programs and I am a leader in both.

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*"I have learned that to be successful in something, **I need to want to do it.**"*

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Nevertheless, I always put my studies first, and that means that I can not go home on weekends because I have to study for a test or perhaps work on a project. At first it was hard not to see my family every day. My mom especially would get sad but I would remind her that this is temporary. That every day I spend without seeing her, I am spending towards creating my future, so that one day I can give her the life she deserves.

### *My advice*

Do not be afraid to engage in new things like clubs, sports, and volunteer work. The more things you try, the

more you discover about yourself and of things you love. Not everything that you try will be for you, but you must find something that motivates you to be a better person and a better student. I was outstanding in my studies because I had things like sports to motivate me every day to go back to school.

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*"Something that helped me a lot, was **having a good relationship with my professors.** They want to help students like you go to a university."*

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Something that also helped me a lot, was having a good relationship with my teachers. Many teachers want to help students like you to go to college. If you need help with a class, there is no better person to ask for help than your teacher.

## Kimberly



I am Kimberly González. Mathematics has always come easily to me; I am able to learn it quickly. I enjoy math and teaching others how to do it. I am delighted to see faces of happiness and relief when people finally acquire the answer and understand how to obtain it. When I think of it, mathematics is a part of me because I

enjoy solving problems, whether they be mathematical or otherwise.

I grew up attending schools in what is considered to be an underprivileged city, and I later attended high school in the neighboring city. While in high school I did not utilize any additional support from my high school, primarily because I was unaware of the availability of support.

My mother is an immigrant while my father is the child of immigrants. My mother and grandparents both came to the United States for the same reason, to better their future. My parents both graduated from high school but could not attend college due to financial instability and other complications, however, they have always wanted to give their children the opportunity to attend college.

Unfortunately, my parents were stuck at working

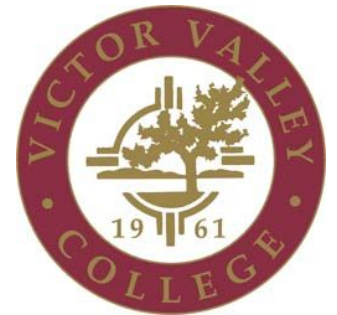
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*"My parents always wanted to  
give their children the opportunity  
to go to a university."*

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minimum wage jobs while also caring for five children. Although my parents are hard workers and have always been able to earn raises, it has not been enough to have college fund for their children, so if we wanted to go to college it was going to have to be done by our own drive, and so I did. My parents help me till this day with college by providing me with food and shelter and I greatly appreciate it.

I decided to attend community college for a couple of reasons. My main reason was that I had not prepared myself to pay for a UC tuition and did not know how, so I needed more time. I do not regret attending community college, I graduated with two degrees and got into a better UC because of it. I fully began to utilize my aptitude for math when I joined the Victor Valley College(VVC) Math Club, in which we partook in campus activities, engaged and assisted our peers in mathematics, and worked closely with math faculty. I also worked for the VVC Math Success Center





as a math tutor, where I was able to assist students facing difficulties in mathematics ranging from basic math operations to differential equations.

### Community Colleges (CC)

These are accessible ways to study for 2 years, before entering a university.

Advantages of a CC: [www.thoughtco.com/las-ventajas-de-los-community-colleges-1965540](http://www.thoughtco.com/las-ventajas-de-los-community-colleges-1965540)

I applied to UC Irvine and was accepted this past summer. At community college, I worked hard in my classes and made sure my grades were always good. I went to seminars and workshops for college transfer preparations, also did many extra curricular-activities.

### *My advice*

Visit counselors, attend college preparation workshops, the resources are available you just need to look for it. Do extra-curricular activities, join a club, do a sport, volunteer, and/or get a job. Fill out a federal student aid application, no excuses, [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov). Get very familiar with [collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org). When visiting your counselor ask about scholarships, they usually know about many, and have safe sites to go to. Write a scholarship essay, most ask the same thing. There are writing workshops for UC

and scholarship applications, attend those.

I am paying for my education with grants and scholarships. I receive financial aid from FAFSA, a Cal Grant, a UC Irvine grant and a chancellor's scholarship.



Cal Grants are grants of money given according to the need of University of California students to help them pay for their education.

More information:

<https://ucmerced.financialaidtv.com/es/play/1576-grant-programs/276-what-cal-grant>

My education is paid in full for this year. I was awarded all these funds by filling out the applications, having good grades, and doing extra curricular activities. There are also student loans that are made available that do not need to be paid back till after you graduate. Do not be intimidated, take charge, everything does not need to be done immediately, but it needs to be done. Good luck, it's possible, you can do it!

# George



My name is George Vazquez, I graduated from the University of California, Irvine in December 2014 a degree in mathematics. I have six brothers and two sisters that are older than me but one that is two years younger. I am the only one in my family to go to a university. I grew up in Compton and lived there for fourteen years, then lived in Bell Gardens for three

before coming to college. Before moving to Bell Gardens, I never thought of going to college, I always thought I would end up helping my father, who worked in construction, because that's what my brothers did. Then, when I moved to Bell Gardens, my counselor started asking what I was going to do with my life, she asked why I had bad grades and why I had not considered going to college. I always thought that school was for those who could afford it, until she informed me that there was financial aid for poor people like me. That's when I began to apply myself; I started taking advanced classes and

took part of the Jaime Escalante Program where I took a full year of mathematics classes during the summer. I



## JAIIME ESCALANTE MATH PROGRAM

The Jaime Escalante Math Program of East Los Angeles College (ELAC) is an association in ELAC and 128 high schools. The program offers intermediate and advanced math courses with a rigorous time limit.

More information:

<https://www.theescalanteprogram.org/>

<https://edexcelencia.org/program/jaime-escalante-math-program>

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*"I had the idea that university was only for those who had money, until she told me that there was **financial help for those without means, like me.**"*

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went from Algebra 1 in ninth grade, geometry in the tenth grade and in my last two years take Algebra 2, Trigonometry, Calculus and Calculus BC. I was

determined to improve my life because I did not want to always keep my guard up from gangs, go to churches for food and clothes all my life, especially if I had the opportunity to give back to the community rather than take. I saw college as a way to grow as a person and help improve the lives of my family. When applying to colleges I did not know what I was going to study until I began to search the various careers available. As the saying goes, you never know what you don't know. I did not know of all the different types of engineers, analysts, computer programmers and could not believe the salaries because my family never made half of what some of these jobs make. After all my research, I decided to study mathematics because with math, one can potentially be an engineer, a computer programmer or an analyst.

Once I got to UC Irvine, I was accepted into a program called California Alliance for Minority Participation (CAMP). I met two math graduates; one works in a finance company and the other is a professor of public health. During this program, I learned that you could do almost anything with mathematics, especially if combined with something else such as economics, computer science, biology and many other things. Thanks to the CAMP program, I never felt alone in the university with more than 30,000 people.

I am now a program specialist for the program and I love what I do because I have the opportunity to work with first generation minority students and I can pass on all the things I have learned. Additionally, I am attending

CSU Fullerton where I am working towards a Masters in Statistics. My goal is to earn my Masters degree and then apply to be a director of a program that helps the Latino community.



### CAMP Program :California Alliance for Minority Participation

CAMP tiene has various programs that support undergraduate students, including summer and academic year internships and support to help successfully complete a bachelor's degree in STEM careers (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

[www.mrl.ucsb.edu/education/undergrad/camp](http://www.mrl.ucsb.edu/education/undergrad/camp)

## Fernando



Hi, my name is Fernando Medrano. I grew up in South Central Los Angeles. I am the youngest of three brothers and the first in my family to attend college. In High-school I never thought about attending a university. My plan was just to graduate from High-school and start working. Once I graduated from High-school, I started working at a recycling center where my dad works. The work was hard, tiring, and paid low wages. I realized that if I wanted better opportunities I had to study and get a degree in order to improve my options. During the fall of that year I started my studies at a Community College. At the beginning I was nervous about going to college, because studying and working wouldn't allow me to become a full time employee, which would decrease my monthly income and increase my debts. However, I decided to take the risk and make an investment in my future.

Three years later I transferred to UC Irvine to study mathematics. At first, my parents were not very happy with my decision to go to a school that is fifty miles away. My parents didn't like the idea because I would have to move out from home and they worried about all the financial implications caused by my education.



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*"I convinced my parents that attending college is a good investment **that would give fruit in the future.**"*

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I convinced my parents that attending college is a good investment that would give fruit in the future. The money I am spending now will be worth once I get my degree and I am able to get a good job. If I had been working full time in my previous employment, I would have ended with a routine job that I wouldn't have liked. However, I am investing in my future and studying mathematics. I selected to study mathematics because I have always been interested in them, it contains really interesting topics.

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*"A degree in mathematics helps make me more competitive because my math classes show me how to analyze problems and allow me to **think differently about situations.** As I take math classes, I learn new tools that help me in many fields of study."*

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Mathematics is also a great career because there are many employment opportunities. A degree in math makes me more competitive because the math classes make me analyze problems and allows me to think of situations in a different way. As I take math classes, I learn new tools that I can use in many fields of work. Although I have only been in UC Irvine a couple of weeks, I have found that UC Irvine is a great school. People are very friendly, the atmosphere is calm, and there are many resources for students. It might seem that it will be long until your children need to go to college, but today is a good time to start planning their future. If I had started to prepare for university from the very beginning, I would have been better prepared for the challenges. Going to college should not be viewed as a gamble, or a waste of money and time, it should be seen as an investment for the future.

## Luis David



Hello! My name is Luis David Guzman-Avalos. I am in my fifth year of college. I study Applied Mathematics. I am Mexican-American, first generation. My parents were born in Mexico and emigrated to the United States when they were very young. I grew up in a small community called Huntington Park which is adjacent to downtown Los Angeles. Huntington Park consists of Latino families, and for this reason most businesses are

marketed in Spanish. During my childhood we were more than nine people living in a small house because, as my parents, many of my relatives emigrated to the United States, so we offered them accommodation while they could get a place to live.

Most of the students from my elementary and middle schools have Spanish as their first language. However, my school had many courses to teach English to students whose first language was Spanish. I attended USC / Mast High school located in downtown Los Angeles. In high school I was involved in many math courses and technology, and participated in sports. I practiced baseball and football. I am the first in my family

that was accepted in college, and hopefully, I will be the first to graduate from a degree in mathematics. My dream is to pursue a career in data analysis. I want to get a job where I can analyze data and design efficient methods for its analysis.

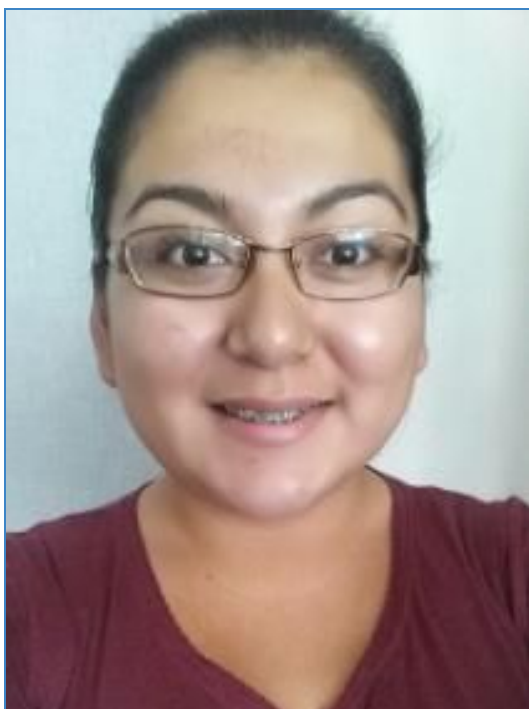
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*”My father and my cousin dedicated hours to helping me with my math homework. They believed that people with a solid mathematical background would go far in the United States.”*

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Since childhood I had a passion for Mathematics and Physics. My father and my cousin spent hours to help me with my math homework during my elementary school. They believed that people who have a strong mathematical background have better chances of success in the United States because much of the population prefers to avoid these topics. I learned traditional concepts of junior high school level while I was still at elementary school. My interest in mathematics continued and solidified during my years of middle and high school. As extracurricular activity I was involved in technology groups to quench my curiosity. I was struck with the idea that every human movement can be described and analyzed through mathematics. For this reason, I chose to study science and mathematics at UC Irvine.

## Cristina



Hello! I am Cristina Jaimes, I am the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Guatemalan mother. I was born and raised in La Puente, California. My mother did not finish elementary school and my father came from Mexico with a high school degree. It was difficult to my parents to help me in my difficult tasks because none of them speak English. My

grades were not the best ones, and although my parents did not study they always instilled in me the importance of studying. They always gave time to go to the school parent meetings.

Upon entering the seventh grade in a new city, I became very depressed. In a rebellious stage I did not do my homework nor I paid attention to my classes. Upon entering the last year of high school I started to realize

that I did not want to work from sunrise to sunset like my parents. Construction and house cleaning occupations did not call my attention. So I started to improve my grades, to take tutoring sessions offered by the school. As part of my desire to be happy with myself, I joined a cheerleading squad, cheerleading was one of my hobbies when I was 6 years old, but I stopped practicing it when we moved to San Bernardino, California. During high school I decided to set goals that were important for my future as honors classes and AP classes.

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*"During high school, I decided to set goals that were important for my future, like **honors classes and AP classes** (Advanced Placement)".*

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Coming from a family whose mother tongue is Spanish, English language was never an area where I excelled. However, I realized that I loved mathematics because my limitations in the English language was not a barrier for me to understand math topics. To me mathematics is a universal language. From the moment that I discovered my affinity with mathematics I decided that if I were to come to college, I would study mathematics. Now I have more than one year at UC Irvine and I love it! My dream of going to college and getting ahead is being fulfilled with the support of my parents. Now, I am planning to go to a

Pharmaceutical School and become a pharmacologist once I graduate from college at UC Irvine.

### HONORS COURSES

Honors courses are more challenging than the regular high school classes, and they are designed to meet the needs of talented students. An Honors class offers the same the curriculum offered in the corresponding regular class, but may cover additional topics or some topics in greater depth. Differently from AP courses, honors classes do not give students a chance to gain college credit.

[https://www.collegedata.com/cs/content/content\\_getinarticle\\_tpl.jhtml?articleId=10024](https://www.collegedata.com/cs/content/content_getinarticle_tpl.jhtml?articleId=10024)

### *My advice*

I recommend you to take honor classes during middle school. It was extremely difficult for me to start these classes at high school with other classmates who had already been taking them for years. I recommend seeking organizations or clubs that you find interesting, for example, I was in the club of cancer of my school because I have many relatives who have had cancer. I

developed a passion for the club and raised funds to find a cure for cancer.

To get a membership application with great potential to be admitted to a prestigious university, all you have to do is to be yourself. Do not spend time thinking about what it is that the university wants to hear or see because they want to see "you", exploits and show your talents, it will lead you to success. This is my first year of college, I live on campus in Mesa Court with a girl who was my classmate during high school. Every weekend, my parents pick me up to go home.

Enjoy Middle and High School because college is spectacular but very different. You should learn self-discipline because your parents will not be aware of what you do, there will be nobody to take care of you, at least not as before. Do not let the cost of your studies to stop you. It is better to take loans than quit school because it is an investment for your future. Thank God I filled out the FAFSA scholarship application on time (the money receipt by the government to study that one does not have to pay back). I also have work-studies which means that I work and study in parallel. I also have a grant and a scholarship by UC Irvine (none of this should be pay back). So, start filling out applications for scholarships as soon as it may be because they are a great economic relief for you and your family.



## Cynthia



Hi, my name is Cynthia Sánchez. I am from Colima México, one of the smallest States in my country. I come from a low income family whose major strength is the love we have for each other and the philosophy that

my parents instilled in all their children: *"The best way to succeed in this world is working hard and being honest with yourself"*.

I can say I knew that one day I will have a Bachelor's degree since I was eight years old. I did not know if my family could afford it, I did not even know, at the time, all that was needed to achieve my goal. My parents used to wake up at 2 or 3 am to start working to not stop until 5pm, my brothers and I did not have that ugly schedule but still we must wake up before 5am to help in the family business. I remember that one day I was very upset with my parents because they did not allow me to wake up until 11am on a Sunday! ... as my cousins used to do. Being somebody that tends to speak up her mind (a trait that according to my mom I have since I was born!) I

told my father that the situation was very unfair and inspired my brothers to complain too. My father heard everything we had to say and then just asked us: *"Do you like this job? Would you like to inherit this job from us and wake up very early every day?"*. Of course we answered "No". He told us that the only way to have a less strenuous job was studying. He said: *"I have a dream that only you can make a reality. I dream that one day all of you will have a Bachelor's degree, this is why your mom, all of you and I work very hard every day. Your mom and I want for you to have a better situation in life, but that is not possible if we do not work. The only tool to be successful in life that I can provide you with is your education. Promise me to work hard to go to the university, your mom and I will do everything we can to give you that opportunity"*. At that moment I started dreaming with making my parents happy because I had a Bachelor's degree.

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*"My father told me: The only tool we can give you to have success in life is your education. Promise me that you'll make the effort to go to college."*

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I worked very hard, I earned a lot of scholarships since I was in elementary school. I participated in a lot of school competitions, from declamation contests to be part of the indoor soccer team of my state. Sometimes I won

and many times I did not, but everything I did gave me a learning lesson. During college I was awarded with the best student award, almost every year. This award returns you twice the tuition fee you paid, thus I was able to pay for my tuition every year. It was during college that I met many amazing professors who told me about the possibilities to study a PhD in Mathematics in United States or Europe and I started dreaming again! One day, I came home and I told my parents that I wanted to study a PhD in Mathematics in United States, of course they supported my dream but two days later my parents approached me to ask me how expensive was to study a PhD in United States. I told them it was very very expensive but that they did not have to worry because I was going to earn a fellowship to pay for my studies. They smiled and said: *"We do not doubt that, we are here for you, tell us how to help you and we will do it"*. I earned my fellowship to come to study my PhD at UC Irvine. I just graduated a few months ago. I am a Doctor in Mathematics now!

**My advice for the parents:** Allow and encourage your children to dream. They will surprise you doing bigger things that what you dreamt for them.

**My advice for the kids:** Appreciate and recognize all the effort your parents do for you, all the things you have: food, clothes, electronic devices, etcetera are the product of the work of your parents. Be gentle with your parents, listen to their advice and study very hard, this is a way of saying "thank you" to them, and at the same

time, you build a better future for you. Do not give up to your dream just because the process is difficult, when you feel tired just think about the reward you will get for all your efforts, that will give you energy to continue, it worked for me. My best wishes for you all!

## Brianna



I am Brianna Reyes. My education is one accomplishment that I am most proud of. Where I grew up, going to college is not the norm. Instead, there are gangs, it's low income, and people often don't finish high school. As a child, my grandma took care of me often because my mom had to finish school. My dad didn't get to go to college because he needed to work to be able to support my mom and me. We would often move because we never had enough money to stay at one place. I knew we were poor, but it never really bothered me; I thought it was normal. So I did what I needed to do at school, and I was pretty good at it. But as I got older, I started to realize that not everyone was poor. In high school, I started to see that some kids grew up with money. They had parents that were doctors or engineers. They owned fancy things and lived in large houses. Stuff I didn't have and hadn't really considered until then. I felt different,

however, that was OK. I knew I was working hard in school and that it would pay off in the end.

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*"My motivation was **my family**...I wanted to be a good role model for them".*

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My motivation was my family. I am the oldest of my generation, having two brothers and over ten cousins. They are my world and growing up, I wanted to be a good role model for them. So after I finished high school I went to college, but that is when I began to struggle. My grandfather passed away and several people in my family started having health issues. I felt a great sadness, but I managed my way through because I was still doing great in my classes and I was joining programs and clubs to really build up my resume so that I could go to graduate school. However, at the end of my second year of college, when I was 19, I found out I was pregnant. I was still a teenager, about to have a baby. I didn't know what this meant; I was not married, didn't have a job, and didn't know what the outcome would be with the father of my baby. I didn't know if I would be able to finish college and reach my goals. That is when it started to hit me – that I was just part of the statistic. People from where I am, that have my skin color, are not meant to

finish college – that it was expected that I would be a teen mom, that it was expected that I end up living and raising a child in poverty. And I felt like I was no longer a good role model for my brothers or cousins, I felt like a failure.

When I started mentioning that I was pregnant and I might need to take a few semesters off from school, some of my professors were very condescending. They quickly lost faith in me and seemed to have forgotten of all the work I had done up to that point. At first I was sad, but that soon grew to anger. I wanted to channel that anger into something productive and when my son was born I tried going to school right away. I was back in school, but I was falling asleep in class. I couldn't pay attention, I was getting sick and became depressed. I felt broken. I ended up having to withdraw out of the semester. It was a dark time for me, but things got better eventually. I allowed both my body and mind to heal and then I tried again. I went back to school later that summer. It was still hard, but I kept trying. Eventually, because I persisted, those people that doubted me started to see how serious I was about my goals—that I wasn't just some statistic. I was back in school, working on interesting research projects. I was back to myself. I found other professors that wanted to help me finish school and succeed. Things were ok. Hard but ok.

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*“Eventually, because I persisted, those people that doubted me started to see how serious I was about my goals —that I wasn't just some statistic.”*

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I finally finished college when my son was 2 years old and was able to get accepted into graduate school with a scholarship. Everything seemed like it was going great, but graduate school was even harder than college. I struggled to be a good student, a good mom, a good wife, and at times I simply felt like quitting. I knew I had been here before so I began to ask for help. I let my professors know what was going on in my life and although they weren't required to care, they were understanding; they wanted me to succeed. Taking these steps to ask for help, I could see that it was possible to reach my goal. And I did. I graduated with a master's degree in Biostatistics from Duke University and a bachelor's degree in math from Cal State Northridge. My son is now 5 years old and I have a newborn daughter. I couldn't have done it without asking for help and continuing to push through the struggles. I am proud of myself and so thankful for all that helped me along the way.



## Fernando



I am Fernando Quintilla. Growing up, my parents valued and encouraged higher education, but as immigrants from Mexico, their education was limited.

My mom had no college degree, graduating only from high school, and my father did not even finish high school. Pursuing a college education with limited support seemed only a dream.

After graduating from high school, I was unable to afford the tuition at a university, so I enrolled at Saddleback Community College and got a job to cover the costs of college. I was able to balance school and work for the first few years of my college education with a B average. To be honest, I did not think I was going to graduate, but I kept taking classes because I did not know how to tell my parents that college was not for me.

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*"Growing up, my parents valued and encouraged **higher education**".*

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When I met my future wife I realized that I needed to be able to support us, that meant that I either had to quit college or I needed to finish college (which seemed impossible). After talking to my counselor, she told me that I had enough credits and was ready to transfer to a 4

year university. I began attending California State University of Fullerton (CSUF) with the plan of becoming a high school mathematics teacher because math had always come naturally to me.

After taking intense upper division courses in mathematics my dreams changed. When I saw why mathematics works and understood what it takes to make a mathematical statement, I knew that I wanted to go to graduate school. But getting to graduate school was not an easy path. Because of my grades in my community college, I could not afford to get anything lower than a B+ in the rest of my classes.

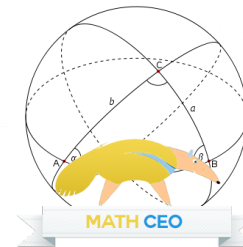
Throughout my remaining years at CSUF, I took some of the most difficult math classes of my undergraduate career while still maintaining a part time job to pay for school.

What motivated me was my wife. I saw how much time she put in her school work and I decided to do the same. In the end, I graduated with my B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) in mathematics, but my GPA was such that I was not able to enter a Ph.D. (Doctor in Philosophy) program directly. To pursue my career goals, I knew that a Ph.D. was necessary. I decided to apply to Master's programs and was accepted at UC Irvine where I worked extremely hard to perform at the same level as the Ph.D. student in my year. Last year, I passed all three Mathematics qualifying exams and petitioned to transition into the Ph.D. program. I was accepted into the program and I am

now preparing to present my thesis proposal and start working on my independent research project.

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### About the UCI MATH CEO program



UCI MATH CEO is a free mathematical enrichment program developed by faculty at UC Irvine to serve the underprivileged community of Santa Ana. Every week (for a total of 24 times throughout the academic year), a group of ~100 middle school students are brought to the UCI campus to work on fun but challenging mathematics activities with the help of (~35) UCI faculty, graduate and undergraduate mentors and learn about college and STEM careers. The program not only introduces kids to critical thinking at a young age, but provides a roadmap to a college education in STEM and hope for a brighter future. The educational materials created by the Math CEO team are freely available on this website (link to "learning materials"). To increase the quality of the program, weekly training is provided to mentors. Founded in Fall 2014, the UCI Math CEO has quickly grown to be one of the largest math circles in the country that specifically targets underserved youth.

For more, visit our website:  
[www.math.uci.edu/mathceo](http://www.math.uci.edu/mathceo)