

Doctors Academy helped forge a path to medical school

I was 5 years old when my parents made the difficult decision to leave our impoverished hometown in Mexico. My elementary school there only offered coloring activities and my mother did not want my education to end like her's did. To provide me with an American education and to escape violence, my parents gave up their life and family in Mexico.

Growing up as an undocumented immigrant in the United States presented challenges, like not knowing if I could pursue higher education in the U.S. regardless of excelling academically. Still, I maintained a strong work ethic despite the possibility of deportation to my hometown in Mexico, where educational opportunities are scarce and



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medical neglect is rampant. Growing up in the Central Valley, I recognized there was a lack of resources, but there were far more opportunities than I had in Mexico.

The UCSF Fresno Doctors Academy at Sunnyside High School, founded by Dr. Katherine A. Flores, is an especially important opportunity for students in Fresno Unified School District. Caruthers and Selma high schools also have Doctors Academy programs.

The Doctors Academy is

an educational pipeline program for students like me who are first in their family to dream of pursuing a medical career and are underrepresented in medicine. The DA offers academic preparation, medically related courses and summer internships with health professionals. These experiences solidified my early determination to become a doctor.

At Community Regional Medical Center, I volunteered at the front desk alongside Dr. Kenneth O'Brien, who practiced medicine more than 56 years and retired only to volunteer for a dozen more. Our daily conversations encouraged me to explore the hospital, from shadowing doctors to cleaning IV poles. Additionally, I interned at the Aesthetic Plastic Surgery Pavilion with Dr. Stephen Zuniga. Thanks to the opportunities the Doctors Academy offered, I had a stronger application when applying to UC Berkeley, and was awarded UC Berkeley's Regents' and Chancellor's Scholarship

which funded all of my undergraduate studies, thus removing the economic barrier which would otherwise have impeded me from attending.

My undergraduate career at UC Berkeley was defined by my drive to tackle larger sociopolitical issues and work alongside underserved populations. Having witnessed pesticides destroy the lives of poor Latino farm workers cultivating the fields of California's Central Valley, I majored in molecular and cell biology and spent four years conducting toxicology research in a chemical biology lab. I also applied a social justice lens to my interest in science by simultaneously pursuing a minor in global poverty and practice. Additionally, to promote awareness of health inequalities, pressing social issues and disruptive innovations, I led a team of undergraduates in creating one of the largest student-led TEDx Talk events in the world.

My existence in this

country as a previously undocumented immigrant is inherently political. Thus, I am personally invested in advocacy efforts regarding underserved communities. Research shows that patients have better health outcomes when doctors share and understand their backgrounds. The population of Latinos in the U.S. is expected to grow, and yet the doctor population does not accurately reflect patient population.

After graduating from college, I returned to Fresno to work with UCSF Fresno's Doctors Academy to increase students' knowledge of academic opportunities. Programs like the Doctors Academy are changing lives and creating even playing fields. Thanks in large part to the Doctors Academy, I will now be attending the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine on a merit-based David Geffen Scholarship, which covers all of my medical education-related expenses. The mentorship at the UCSF

Fresno Sunnyside High School Doctors Academy led me to this point.

Now, I am on my way to medical school this fall. While I am very early on my path to becoming a physician, I look forward to serving humble communities, like the ones I come from. My hope is that the community and elected leaders will continue to support aspiring doctors from diverse backgrounds by supporting the Doctors Academy and offering scholarships to medical students to serve communities where they are needed most.

We must take the steps to support aspiring doctors now, in order to ensure the future health of our Central Valley.

Now is the time to cultivate and empower the minds of our young, homegrown Central Valley aspiring doctors.

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