

I rarely find myself speechless, however sitting on Memorial Glade at UC Berkeley, soaking up the sun, I lost my ability to think clearly as I began to realize how fortunate I was to be a student at the number one public university in the world. It has not been a flawless or even natural adjustment, but it was one that made me proud and ecstatic to be a Golden Bear. Today I find myself surround by new friends, new passions, and a renewed drive to succeed.

At the beginning of my collegiate career, I had trouble finding a niche at such a huge institution, but as the year progressed and I began to join clubs on campus and volunteered, I began to find a small family at UC Berkeley. Feeling incredibly homesick, I became determined to find an organization on campus that fostered not only academic success, but also one that would become my home on campus. Hermanas Unidas de UC Berkeley became that home that finally made me feel whole. Hermanas Unidas is an organization that aims to increase the retention of Latina women in college while pushing its members to reach out to the community and give back. Some of my favorite volunteer services that I have done through Hermanas Unidas was making goodie bags for the homeless as well as leading a fundraiser to send hygiene supplies to girls in Africa who otherwise could not afford it. Although I am a very active member in Hermanas Unidas, it is not the only club I have joined.



*Monica with her mentee*

Alongside Hermanas Unidas, Project Smile has played a significant role in my transition into college. Project Smile is a volunteer driven organization. It has selective members who are interviewed and then chosen to be mentors to children in middle school who come from tough backgrounds. Our role as mentors is to inspire our mentee to pursue an education after High School and give them the tools they need to get there. My mentee, a sixth grader and I have grown very close to. We both plan to stay with the program until she graduates middle school. Next year, I have been selected to be the Enrichment Coordinator for Project Smile, which means I will be in charge of planning and executing scholastic workshops for the mentees so that they can get information on topics ranging from college to teaching them about different kinds of insects. These two organizations have kept me very busy, but I also joined an Intermural Volleyball team in order for me to relieve some of the stress caused by the rigor of college.

By no means has my college experience come effortless to me. I have had setbacks and most of these setbacks have been related to my academics. Coming to UC Berkeley from a small high school was challenging because there was a lot of adjustments I needed to make in order to do well in school. I have managed to pass all my classes with B's or better, while holding three leadership positions within my organizations. These three positions are captain of my Intramural Volleyball team, co-assistant of the community service chair in Hermanas Unidas, and a committee member for Project Smile. I also have an

internship with an organization on campus where I plan and execute various fundraisers. All these different roles that I have played within my clubs have taken a toll on my academic success. Although I did not pass my chemistry class with an "A," I did pass the class. Only 30 percent of my peers passed Chemistry and I was one of them. Although I did not receive an ideal grade, I was very proud of myself for passing the class while being very active on campus.

Going forward in my collegiate career, I have decided to take a step back from holding so many leadership roles in hopes of improving my grades. Next year I will be involved in the same organizations, but I will also be involved in a program called Global Brigades. Global Brigades sends UC Berkeley students to Honduras where students establish mobile clinics and assist doctors by examining patient's blood pressure, filling out prescriptions forms, among other things. Due to the fact that I speak fluent Spanish, I will not only be performing the health tests, but I will also be working with the doctors very closely as a Spanish translator to the patients. I am still very motivated to become a Pediatrician. I am still not sure if I would like to specialize in a particular field within pediatrics or just become a general Pediatrician. I have met with my academic adviser and he believes that I am doing very well thus far.

I am eager to continue my studies at UC Berkeley, before heading to medical school to become a Pediatrician. At this moment, I would like to thank the sponsors of this scholarship because without your financial support, going to UC Berkeley straight out of high school would not be a viable option for me financially.