

From English Language Learner to UC Student



From English Language Learner to University of California – Scholarship winner Alejandra Rueda plans to become a doctor



Future doctor Alejandra Rueda heads to UC Santa Cruz this fall as Gavilan College's Karl S. Pister Scholarship winner.

"It's been quite eventful, sometimes a little too much," she said, blinking back happy tears.

You should apply for this!

Rueda's career at Gavilan has been one of pushing herself to take on challenges. As a tutor in the Writing Center, helping students overcome language and writing difficulties, she drew on her own experiences as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. She advanced from tutoring to work in the classroom as a student instructor (SI), conducted workshops, mentored others, attended conferences, then was promoted to scheduling the other SIs. Rueda's dreamer advice: "I'm the same as you. You can do it if you want it."

Rueda said Karen Warren, her first "boss" in the Gavilan College Writing Center, and Student Life Coordinator Ryan Shook encouraged her to apply for the scholarship. Six

questions, 350 words each, and Rueda worked on it, brainstorming and getting friendly reader comments. This was the time to build on accomplishments.

The scholarship, named for former UCSC chancellor Pister, is open to students from 13 Bay Area community colleges who have overcome economic obstacles, shown a commitment to helping others and are eligible for financial aid. Students receive \$10,000 a year for two years. More information about the scholarship can be found here: <http://financialaid.ucsc.edu/types-of-aid/scholarships/pister.html>

From polite and shy to campus leader

After four weeks of working on the scholarship application, she submitted it. Along with two other Gavilan students, Rueda was invited to UCSC for a finalist interview. Handed a card with three questions, she had 15 minutes to think about her answers, then was escorted in to a group interview.

Why UCSC? Rueda toured UC Davis and UC Berkeley, both offering the studies she wanted to pursue. When she toured UC Santa Cruz, she knew it was the place, she already felt like a student, that she belonged.

How have you changed the life of another person? One student she helped, a mom with two kids, said it was hard to do schoolwork at home because of all the distractions. Rueda helped the student with the other homework while in the Writing Center. That student has returned to share with her, "The way you helped me also helped my daughters."

What has been a difficult experience? Arriving in Gilroy, not knowing English, Rueda said there have been many times people have said 'you can't do that.' Going through the ESL program at Gilroy's Brownell Middle School, she acquired her own voice. She learned when to ask for help and when to push forward, because communication is key.

"At the end of the interview, I told them all the things that UCSC could offer that would fulfill my dream of becoming a doctor," said Rueda. "Then I told them what I could bring to UCSC that would help others fulfill their dreams."

Returning to her car, mulling over the interview, she said she was surprised with that answer. "Did I really say that?" she shared. "Will it hurt my chances?"

Gifted, generous, compassionate

"Alejandra has left a legacy of student support that will continue long after she's gone," said Warren. "Her efforts have touched hundreds of students, helping them pursue their own dreams of achieving a college education."

She combines her love of writing and science with artwork, and her science instructors could count on her to create colorful chalk drawings in chemistry and artistic displays of insects in zoology.

"In Zoology and Botany, she competed with the best and did extremely well," said instructor Rey Morales. "Ali is an artist at heart, writer by trade and scientist by nature." Her lab reports were done in color, and she served as a board member of Science Alliance, promoting recycling, sustainability and community activism.

Visiting one of her favorite places on campus, Rueda checked out a botany experiment.

A spring of surprises, well earned

On March 17, Rueda awoke at 4:30 a.m. to go online and see if she had been accepted to UCSC. She just had to check. Her parents were awakened by her shouts of joy. On April 11, she learned she was the recipient of the Karl S. Pister scholarship.

"As I told all the students I have worked with," she said, "the dream is actually possible."

PHOTOS: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pxcex1hbtb16n6d/AACrifGksIAUf3vjGq5eS0m8a?dl=0>

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