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## Making a discovery: how Julianna Ramirez used her passion for science to find success

BY MICHELLE JOHNSON ON JANUARY 20, 2020

CULTURE

When Julianna Ramirez was 13 years old, she felt her dream of becoming a scientist falling out of her reach. A lack of funds and information about higher education left Ramirez uncertain about her vision for her future; one mentor involved in material engineering, though, inspired her to revisit the idea of pursuing her dreams and getting involved with the scientific community.

"One of my role models was the Big Sister I was matched with through a Big Brothers Big Sisters program," Ramirez said. "At that time I had given up on being a scientist because I thought, 'Oh, you have to get a Ph.D., like that's impossible.' Once she told me what getting a Ph.D was like, I looked into revisiting the topic of becoming a scientist."

Now a fourth-year student who is studying cellular, molecular and biomedical biology, Ramirez leads a busy lifestyle. From mentoring for the TRIO program, preparing for graduate school in the McNairs Scholar program or being a research assistant in the lab of an associate biology professor and interning in Washington, D.C. this semester, a large part of Ramirez's success stems from the determination she displays.

At 17 years old, Ramirez started the journey of her dreams. Ramirez is a first-generation student who grew up in a single-parent, limited income household — all factors that Ramirez used as motivation to get where she is at 21.

### The support system that shaped her future

Ramirez was born and raised in the Treasure Valley, frequently moving around the area. Raised by her father, her influence for success came from her home life.

"My mother had a lot of drug problems, always being in and out of prison," Ramirez said. "That actually had a lot of influence over me and why I am so driven. What my family members, like my mom, had gone through really just motivated me to want something in my life that I can work towards."

From a young age, Ramirez carried interest in the field of science. Like most children, she loved to watch television, but not the typical shows that come to mind at a younger age.

"I was always a curious child," Ramirez said. "One of the things I loved to do was watch this TV show called 'Nova.' The show had documentaries and science history a lot, and I think that was something that really sparked my interest and then turned into my passion for science."

Her father, Raul Ramirez, also saw her drive in anything that she pursued whether it was academics or other activities as she grew up.

"She was always a go-getter," Raul Ramirez said. "She didn't need any pushing. She just picked anything up right away and knew what she wanted to do."

Julianna Ramirez always had the motivation to succeed in school; other obstacles, though, would become struggles for her when she chose to go to college. That's where TRIO came in.

TRIO is a federally funded program designed to help students with disadvantaged backgrounds and involves multiple programs such as Upward Bound and Rising Scholars. Julianna Ramirez joined the TRIO program in high school.

"I was a freshman in high school when I saw the flyer for TRIO and it applied to me. I met the criteria, and I always knew I wanted to go to college," Julianna Ramirez said. "So it was being advertised to help you figure out the ins-and-outs of college and being a first-generation student. I obviously didn't know anything about the process. I was in TRIO all of high school and then when I got to Boise State, I joined TRIO Rising Scholars."

### The Road To College

When Julianna Ramirez was 17-years-old, she started her first semester at Boise State University. She quickly became heavily involved with many communities on campus, such as TRIO Rising Scholars and the McNair Scholars program.

The McNair Scholars program is an undergraduate preparatory program for first-generation and low-income students and/or underrepresented students. With her work in TRIO, Julianna Ramirez met her advisor, Anna Torti, who has come to be a big inspiration to her.

Torti is an educational specialist and the coordinator for the peer mentor program for the TRIO Rising Scholars program. She has been Julianna Ramirez's advisor since her first semester.

"From her first semester at Boise State, Julianna was quite certain about her choice of major and desire to work within the field of conservation biology," Torti wrote in an email. "She has never wavered in her dedication to this goal, though she has taken time to explore other areas at Boise State such as philosophy. She has been able to integrate these into her chosen field of study."

Julianna Ramirez has been president of the TRIO club for two years and has worked for the TRIO program for three years.

"I tutor for the program for various subjects," Julianna Ramirez said. "But my main role is peer mentoring. For the TRIO rising scholars for each incoming cohort, they're assigned a peer mentor. I work with the students individually throughout their whole first year."

As a first-generation student, Julianna Ramirez is always reminded that her hard work does not go unnoticed by her family. Raul Ramirez discussed how she has been an immense influence on those around her.

"Julianna being the first in our family to go to college means everything to me," Raul Ramirez said. "She is a role model for her younger sisters. It's extremely important to our little family and to our extended family as well."

Currently, Julianna Ramirez is in Washington, D.C. taking classes and interning under a congressperson for a nonprofit organization. This opportunity was made possible by a scholarship that she was awarded exclusively through the TRIO program. As the only student in the nation to receive the Keith Sherin Global Leader Semester in Washington, D.C. funded by the council for Opportunity in Education award, Ramirez is able to experience a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"So basically how it works is that the council offered a scholarship to one TRIO student in the nation and then that student comes to Washington, D.C, enrolls in Marquette [University], does the program and has an internship," Julianna Ramirez said. "So that's the program I am doing. I am taking government classes with Marquette students and then I'm interning for the National Parks Conservation Association."

Julianna Ramirez's passion for science has driven her college career and is also what inspired her to apply for the program.

"I consider myself a scientist," Julianna Ramirez said. "I want to be a researcher. I am interested in a lot of environmental science and to really make a difference in environmental science you need to know about policy, which is something I don't know a lot about. So that's a part of why I applied for the program and what I'm hoping to get out of it."

From pushing through hard classes to juggling multiple ventures at once, college can become easily overwhelming. Julianna Ramirez has some advice for others that has kept her motivation alive. One of the biggest pieces of advice she offered was to find a community that fits well with career goals and life outside of college.

"For me it has come down to networking and finding mentors," Julianna Ramirez said. "You hear that networking is big buzzword in academia but it really does help you a lot. Most of that has been through the TRIO program so meeting people, finding a community that speaks to you and that you feel comfortable with."

### The Promising Future Ahead

As for the future, Julianna Ramirez is ready for anything that comes her way. With her spot in the McNair program, her ultimate goal is to go onto graduate school.

"The goal of the McNair program is to help students from underrepresented backgrounds go to graduate school," Julianna Ramirez said. "However, I am thinking about taking a year off to do some traveling but ultimately my goal is to enroll in a Ph.D. program and continue with my academic career."

Ramirez was accepted into the Doris Duke Conservation scholars program, which is specifically for undergraduate students who want to work in conservation. Located in Santa Cruz, the program ultimately put the University of California Santa Cruz on her radar as one of her top choices of graduate schools to attend in the future.

"I did a program at UC Santa Cruz this last summer and I will be going back this summer," Julianna Ramirez said. "I will be working in a professor's lab who could potentially turn into my future graduate mentor."

Any obstacles that Julianna Ramirez encountered has never once stopped her from taking her life into her own hands and following her dreams. From a parent's perspective, it is something that Raul Ramirez has got the blessing of watching his daughter grow into an inspirational young woman.

"You know, as a parent watching your child grow, they blossom into these you know, people," Raul Ramirez said. "It's just a growth in her that I've never really experienced in my life. When you say, are we proud? We are extremely proud. But it's a gift for me, too, because I could actually see a young person grow into somebody that's going to make a difference, and you could just see it in her."

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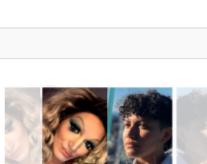


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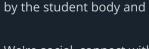
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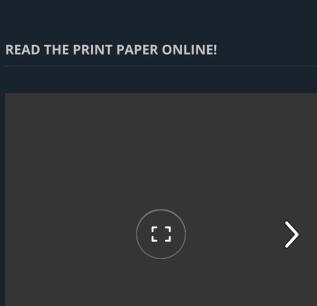
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