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my first couple of years, which pushed my graduation date back further and further. Plus, moving from a small village to an “enormous” city of 275,000 meant that there were many distractions from my studies and classes, and I struggled to stay in good academic standing with the university. But with determination, effort, and a positive mind, I eventually started passing all my classes, and even started to see myself as a student leader. I went from failing an elementary algebra course to completing ordinary differential equations, the highest math course required for my civil engineering degree. Now all I have left to complete are my core engineering courses, and then I will receive my degree.

Getting Involved

I have worked for Residence Life on campus both as a peer mentor and a resident advisor, where I provided socializing opportunities for students living on campus. I have also been a member of several Native dance groups and I am currently the University of Alaska Anchorage AISES chapter president. In this position I try to follow in the footsteps of previous presidents and incorporate cultural traditions, values, and activities into our yearly agenda in order to keep them alive. I think it’s important to pass our traditional values down to the next generation because they shape us, make us who we are, and define who we are as people. That’s partly why I think AISES is so important; it offers networking opportunities at a level that most organizations just can’t compete with and allows you to meet with other AISES members from around the nation. AISES really does open the door to opportunities — all you have to do is walk through and experience them.

What Comes Next

The representation of Alaska Natives/American Indians in the STEM field needs to increase. There are just too many situations where we have to hire engineers and mathematicians from outside to work with our Alaska Native/American Indian communities. Because of this, my career goal is to work with the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program and provide the opportunity to pursue higher education to students who live in communities with limited educational resources. My advice to aspiring students is, as long as you believe in yourself, you can do anything. It might not always be easy, but it’s during difficult times that you learn and mature the most. Just keep moving forward, and no matter how many times you fail, never give up.

— As told to Stephanie Mendoza

Jacquelyn Spring

CHITIMACHA

- University of California Santa Barbara
- Santa Barbara, California
- Biology



For me, there is nothing more fulfilling than acquiring the wealth of knowledge that doctors have and experiencing other cultures. Over the course of the years, my interest in biology and medicine has grown steadily, and I have had valuable experiences studying abroad. With the support and inspiration of my family and teachers, I have been able to get steadily closer to my goal of entering the medical profession.

A Growing Passion for Science

When I was growing up in Cameron Park, Calif. — a small town in the foothills around Lake Tahoe — I was surrounded by influences from the medical world. My mother was a medical sales representative, my grandmother was a nurse, my aunt was a school nurse, and my great-great-grandmother was a medicine woman skilled in curing snakebites. As a kid, I admired the medical professionals in my family and their ability to hear a person’s symptoms and immediately suggest a helpful course of action.

By the time I got to middle school, my interest in science and medicine had been sparked, but it had yet to become my passion. My biology teacher, Mr. Watson, felt that I had potential. His solution was to have me come up with a question to ask him each day. This strategy helped me become not only more involved in class, but also more

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naturally inquisitive. Soon, I didn't have to force myself to think of questions; they came naturally and from my own interests. I also had other phenomenal teachers who encouraged my interest in science. By the end of high school, my vague attraction to science had become a passion, which I carried with me to college.

When I got to UCSB, I decided to major in biology. One of the most captivating courses I've taken was Parasitology, the study of parasites. I was studying for the class in the library one day when I realized I could identify and differentiate different strands of malaria based solely on a slide image or a list of symptoms. This ability struck me as one of the most satisfying skills I had gained in my college career and reaffirmed my desire to become a doctor.

Experiences Abroad

In addition to a growing passion for science, I have long fostered a love for traveling. My grandma was a traveler, and when I was growing up, I was surrounded by inspiring souvenirs from her trips — maps, pictures, woven baskets, African masks, elaborate rugs, and so on. The first time I went abroad, I was 12 and I traveled with a student program to Europe. When I returned to the U.S., I knew I had to get back to the excitement of new lands, cultures, and people as soon as possible. Having fallen in love with the beauty of the Muslim-influenced architecture in Córdoba, Spain, I knew my next destination would be a Middle Eastern culture.

I got the chance for that experience when I traveled to Istanbul with a Turkish Coalition of America scholarship the summer after my sophomore year at UCSB. I found out about the scholarship through the University of California Education Abroad Program, where it was listed as a potential resource for financial aid students seeking to study abroad.

My experience in Turkey was amazing. During an eight-week program, I took three classes at the prestigious Bogazici University, which is located right outside the main city of Istanbul. In an American Literature class, I got to interact with Turkish students and experience a new perspective on American history and literature. I went to Turkey knowing very little of the language and the culture, but even within the first week my knowledge had increased immensely.

Looking to the Future

While the first week of my program in Turkey wasn't a breeze, I was able to adapt rather quickly. Studying in Turkey was a great opportunity for me to foster self-confidence and discover I am capable of going into an unfamiliar situation and taking charge of it. What I learned in Turkey will help me not only as a person, but also as a doctor someday. I would definitely recommend studying abroad to other students; the experience is enlightening and invaluable.

Having just finished my third year at UCSB, I'm glad that I chose a major that has given me the freedom to focus my studies in areas that really interest me. As I get closer to my professional goals, I am constantly thankful for having been exposed to the sciences so early by my family and teachers and for having had the chance to travel. Every success I achieve and every experience I have brings me closer to my goal — acquiring the knowledge I need to improve the lives of others.

—As told to Elizabeth Perry