



achieve

...opening a world of possibilities

BECOMING A LEADER

I grew up in East Oakland with my single mom, sister, and grandmother. Growing up, I was never aware of any struggles or hardships, I remember my mother being a superwoman, taking care of my sister and me and having a great job. She paid rent and my sister’s tuition, and she took care of other financial commitments all on her own. For the most part, I had a happy childhood. My mother shielded me from most outside obstacles. That was until an obstacle so large came along that she could not shield me from the harshness of life.

Near the end of my freshman year, our family had to move out of our house due to a large increase in rent. Since then, I have been living with my grandmother in her one-bedroom house with my mother, sister and our dog. We rotated between sleeping on an air mattress, the couch, and the living room floor. In October of my junior year, things got worse. My mother lost her job of 17 years because the company she worked for went out of business. We had no home and no source of income for about one year. Recently my mother found employment, and my sister moved out. However, my mom and I still live with my grandmother. Seeing my family dynamic change overnight is what keeps me motivated to attend a four-year college, make a name for myself, and gain my own financial stability.

I was introduced to **achieve** when I was 7 or 8 years old. My older sister is an **achieve** alumna, and I always used to see her in her Holy Names High School uniform. Oddly enough, at that young age I knew that I wanted to attend Holy Names regardless of the fact that it is an all-girls’ school. I remember going to **achieve** family meetings with my mother and sister

and hearing **achieve** staff talk about important things. I did not yet realize that they would become important to me later in life and that eventually, I would step into my sister’s shoes.

When the time came for me to apply to Holy Names, my mother told me not to get my hopes up too high; if I did not receive the **achieve** Scholarship, there would be no way that she could afford a private school tuition. Fortunately, I was given the chance of a lifetime; **achieve** stayed true to their vision and opened my first door of opportunity.

The **achieve** Program is the main reason I have made it so far in my educational career and achieved such great personal growth. The program exposed me to a plethora of opportunities that have shaped me into a soft-spoken yet influential leader. From the many plays, to the SAT and ACT workshops, an internship at Gerson Bakar & Associates, and exposure to numerous volunteer opportunities, **achieve** has prepared me to take on the world. I cannot fathom where I would be in the world without **achieve**, and I am extremely grateful to have been a part of such an astonishing program.

I am confident that **achieve** has prepared me to overcome any and all challenges. As I continue my educational career at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, I look forward to meeting new people, trying new things, and growing in my understanding of who I am as a woman, particularly a woman of color. I will always hold **achieve** dear to my heart and continue to “pay it forward” for the rest of my life.



CLASS OF 2020 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

Agnes Scott College	College of the Holy Cross	Kalamazoo College	Seattle University
Albion College	College of Wooster	Knox College	Smith College
Allegheny College	Denison University	Lawrence University	Spelman College
Amherst College	DePauw University	McDaniel College	St. Olaf College
Beloit College	Emory & Henry College	Mount Holyoke College	Stonehill College
Bryn Mawr College	Gettysburg College	Pace University	Ursinus College
Carleton College	Guilford College	Rhodes College	Wesleyan University
Coe College	Gustavus Adolphus College	Ripon College	Whitman College

METAMORPHOSIS

I knew this woman
Afraid to open up
Happy on the outside
Crying herself to sleep
Desperate tears soaking her pillow
Questioning her own self worth

I knew this woman
Always helping others
Selfless, giving, bottled-up
Putting everyone else first
But when would she start
caring about herself?

Then, like a new spring day
Change came upon her
Lighting up her future
Seeing herself in a cap and gown
Feeling accomplished and determined
Learning to love herself

Ready to change the world
Bring adventure into her life
Emerging from her shell
Now I know this woman
From the bottom of my heart
Because she is me



LESSONS IN APPRECIATION

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed my family's life dramatically. My dad is out of work, and my mom is currently being overworked because her business is considered essential. I am unable to experience my senior year of high school. With prom, Kairos (senior retreat), and graduation being canceled, seniors are unable to spend their last moments together before we begin a new chapter in our lives. In addition, my brother, Harrick, got robbed of his freshman year of college, the year where students meet new people, try out new things, and get to experience the freedom of college for the first time. My family attempts to keep positivity by having a daily walk around our neighborhood. This pandemic has brought me closer to my brother. When we are free, we will always take the opportunity to hike in McLaren Park and enjoy nature. After this pandemic, I will always cherish the opportunity to go outside and be able to breathe the fresh air. We have to go through this struggle in order to appreciate every little privilege we had before the pandemic started. We have to be strong at a time like this, because there will be a happy ending.

During the pandemic, the world is healing itself. Carbon dioxide levels are dropping significantly due to the lack of cars and factories running. Wildlife are going back to their natural habitats. When the pandemic is over, we humans need to learn how to live with nature without disturbing wildlife and their habitats. This pandemic has shown us how much impact we have on our earth, and how beautiful it can be when we are not damaging it with our actions.



JOURNEY OF HOPE

On September 7th, 2007, my family boarded a one-way flight headed for America. My parents, older brother, younger sister, and I were ready to say goodbye to our beloved friends and family in Vietnam. Although I was about to leave the only place I had known all my life, I felt a sense of excitement for what was to come.

We lived a humble life before coming to America. Our house was in a small neighborhood in the countryside of Southern Vietnam, where everyone knew one another. Although my parents earned decent wages working at the bank, our life was not luxurious; it was simple yet peaceful. We made the ultimate sacrifice by leaving everything we had to live in America so my siblings and I could gain access to better educational opportunities. This is one of the main reasons my education is so valuable to me.

Starting school here was very difficult. There was only one word I knew in English: elephant, which was not very useful. I faced other challenges as well, like not being able to fit in with most of my classmates and falling behind in class because of the language barrier. I had to work ten times harder than my peers just to catch up. But looking back, I am grateful for the challenges that I faced because they made me into the persistent and hard-working person that I am. Although it was difficult fitting in, I learned to accept myself and



embrace my identity through the help of my Vietnamese church community and its rich traditions. In gratitude for the love my community has shown me, I dedicate a lot of my time to the community by playing piano for mass, serving as lector, and singing.

Going through elementary and middle school with little guidance was very difficult, so I had no idea how I would make it through high school and college. My prayers were answered when the acceptance letter from **achieve** arrived at my front door.

Because of **achieve**, I was able to attend a great school with a community that made me feel accepted and represented. Many in my classes were also immigrants and first-generation students, so I no longer felt alone.

I was introduced to many new things because of the Program. Through the numerous cultural events all the **achieve** students attended, I was exposed to the expressive culture of theater. During my **achieve** summer internships, I was able to explore parts of the working-world that were foreign to me, which helped to cultivate and solidify my passion for healthcare and research. And as a first-generation college student, I would have been lost in the college search and application process had it not been for the guidance from **achieve**.

I hope to continue my education and pursue more opportunities along the path to achieving my dream. Inspired by **achieve's** goal of giving back to the community, I hope to return to Vietnam and help women who do not have the means to care for their health, just as someone once helped my mother. As I reflect on my life these past 18 years, I recognize that many people have helped me along my journey so far. I will carry what I have been given and make sure to pass on the same love and kindness to others.

PURSUING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, I went to mediocre public schools, excelling in academics but not focusing on my future. As a first-generation, low-income student with a passion for science, I sought to be an astronomer or astrophysicist but did not think about the means needed to pursue it. The most I thought I would **achieve** would be a public high school education, followed by City College, and later somehow a career in the sciences. The high cost of everything made luxuries such as a private education seem like an impossibility. However, that prospect became a possibility when my grandma asked me about attending Archbishop Riordan High School through an **achieve** Scholarship.

When I started Riordan, I essentially entered a foreign environment blind. I struggled to make friends because of my introverted tendencies. However, because of my ability to play the flute, I was able to join the ARHS Band community, which enabled me to make friends and truly acclimate. Shortly enough, what seemed like a foreign environment had grown to be familiar. By sophomore year, I ventured to get more involved and joined the Crusader Newspaper, the History Bowl, and became a member of the National Honors Society. With increased participation, I truly discovered what I would call home for the next four years.

Along with my adventures at Riordan, I was involved in many activities as a part of the **achieve** Program. From the summer school preceding high school to “college boot camp,” **achieve** gave me multiple unforgettable experiences that assisted me throughout high school and toward college. By far the most influential, however, were during my internships and college counseling.

I have always been interested in the sciences, specifically astronomy. During my sophomore and junior summers, I had the pleasure of interning at the California Academy of Sciences. My Planetarium internships allowed me to

delve deeper into my passions, for I was able to work behind the scenes and broaden my knowledge. In this context, I also had to do battle with my innate shyness, as I ventured far out of my area of comfort to interact with visitors on the floor. These internships were both fulfilling and unique learning experiences.

The **achieve** Program has urged me to pursue experiences I would not have otherwise. I heard of the Carleton Liberal Arts Experience through **achieve**: it was an all-expenses-paid week-long program at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Through the CLAE program, I had the opportunity to truly live out the college experience: a wealth of crammed knowledge and an unhealthy scarcity of sleep, yet good times nonetheless. The following year, I attended another summer program at The University of Chicago, where I took a course on minority poetry. These programs helped broaden my outlook on college and motivated me throughout the college process.

My college process truly began during the fall of my junior year. In October, **achieve** took the junior class on an East Coast College Tour, visiting many prestigious colleges in the Northeast. One college, in particular, caught my attention—Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. It is one of the few liberal arts colleges to offer an astronomy major and a master’s degree in any science. Again, thanks to **achieve**’s help, I was able to secure a full four-year scholarship to Wesleyan through the Questbridge Match Program.

Thanks to **achieve**, I have gained many opportunities that I had never considered. What seemed like a distant possibility is now an approaching reality as I enroll into a prestigious university across the nation. Now I believe that I have the ideals to succeed; one of them is to always go outside your area of comfort, and the other is to never settle, but rather pursue the impossible.



Alexa Isaguirre, Saia Lorenzo, and Van Dinh, 2020 Gerson Bakar Achievement Award recipients, with Xmas party guest speaker Dr. Geoff Manley



Kristin Leyson, Jamar Kittling and Ellis Cervantes
2020 Michael Lech, Tyrone McGraw, Jacob Valdiviezo Scholarship recipients



Class of 2020 at Christmas party



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DISCOVERING MYSELF



My parents left Mexico and came to the United States, where they eventually met. Being their firstborn, they have always had high expectations for me, and taught me at a very young age to be a leader for my two siblings; I had to be their role model.

It did not help that we lived in a very rough area of East Oakland. The community outside the house was dangerous, but there was not much we could change, given my parents' financial circumstances. Despite this, I tried to become the best version of myself, even if there were obstacles where I lived.

For this reason, I decided to apply to **achieve** so I could attend school at Saint Joseph Notre Dame in Alameda. The school was in a safe community, where I could feel comfortable.

Over the past few years, I have grown and matured as a person. I owe the **achieve** Program a debt of gratitude for helping me become the person I am today. The **achieve** Program took me in as an aspiring freshman and was helpful getting me settled in school and engaged in activities. I quickly learned that I could be comfortable feeling uncomfortable. I learned the value of grasping opportunities that I would not otherwise have had. I saw potential in the Model United Nations Club at my school. Model UN hosted a few local conference events, discussing modern-day issues such as climate change, poverty, and homelessness. With **achieve's** encouragement, I felt that this would be an opportunity I should not ignore. From this experience, I found that I enjoyed being involved in organizations and clubs that have an impact on the local and outside communities. I felt connected to the work I was doing with this club because I could relate to the issues we discussed.

The **achieve** Program helped me cultivate my outgoing personality and character to take advantage of leadership opportunities anywhere. I got involved in Campus Ministry and later became a part of the Executive Board. As a member of this group, I regularly organized events for my school. This year, I had the pleasure of being a member of the Kairos Leadership Team for my senior class. Kairos is a week-long retreat requiring very strong and passionate speakers. Being a member of **achieve** gave me an edge on leading this special retreat because I had experience with public speaking, having had multiple occasions where I gave speeches at **achieve** meetings, and by now, I was very comfortable doing so. I delivered one of nine "talks," and felt proud to have been a guide and leader for my class on their week-long journey.

I have enjoyed my summer internship opportunities through **achieve** immensely. My most recent internship was one I will never forget. I was fortunate enough to intern in the Legal Department of The Clorox Company. The Clorox team was friendly, hard-working, and generous. They took the time to share their insights with me on the wonders of working at a place like Clorox. My favorite part of the internship was my final task, which was writing an article that would be published company-wide for all Clorox employees to see. This project took roughly two weeks before it was completed, but the satisfaction of having accomplished this was indescribable and will be in my memory forever.

The best part of being in **achieve** however, was getting to attend all the cultural events, especially *Hamilton*. I could feel the performers' passion, and as a music performer myself, I loved the positive energy. Each character had personal struggles, which helped me understand that we all have our own issues. I became more open-minded after seeing this amazing musical production.

As I approach the end of my tenure at SJND with the **achieve** Program, I find myself reflecting on the experiences I have had with **achieve**: cultural events, the Annual Christmas Party, family meetings, summer internships, and the summer workshops that prepared me for applying to college. My experience with **achieve** has been that of learning to understand myself and my passions, and getting to know how I want to use the life skills I developed to make an impact on people around me. I find that I feel inclined to be an educator, whether it be a teacher, counselor, or mentor. It would be fitting for me to follow my passion to guide youth and to help them develop into confident leaders, just as I have been guided by **achieve**. 🎓



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