



# achieve

*...opening a world of possibilities*

## GAINING CONFIDENCE

My life began in Guatemala, a country with a vibrant culture, where people are fiercely proud of their heritage. I lived there for the first two years of my life. Sadly, after a murder attempt on my father during political struggles, life was never the same. My parents felt that Guatemala was no longer safe, so we sought asylum in the USA. I admire my parents' strength to leave their native country and seek a better life for us. From a young age, they taught me the importance of giving back and the beauty of diversity. When we first arrived in America, we received help from many organizations, so now we try to help others in need as we were helped during our struggles.

Growing up I had a lisp, which made me self-conscious. As a child I went to speech therapy, but never fully grasped how I was viewed differently until 4th grade when classmates made fun of my pronunciation. This self-awareness caused me to close off. Throughout elementary and middle school, I never voluntarily voiced my opinion. When I joined the **achieve** Family, I committed myself to go out of my comfort zone. Freshman year, I ran for Class Council to be the voice for others who, like me, were afraid to speak up. I tried to not let my lisp hold me back. I slowly started seeing a change in my confidence and was less nervous about public speaking.

My years in **achieve** have been beneficial in many ways. At the start of my journey, I was nervous about the Family Meeting presentations, specifically my first one. But as I gave my speech, my nervousness diminished, realizing that everyone in the room was supporting me. This experience built my confidence, allowing me to speak with ease in public. **achieve** also provided summer internships during which I discovered my passion for Computer Science. Interning at UC Berkeley's Unboxing Data Science Program, I was able to broaden my

Python coding skills and learn how relevant data science is to many careers. This program taught me how to connect science to prevalent problems in our society, fueling my passion for Computer Science and encouraging me to pursue it as my major.

Along with the endless support I have received from **achieve**, I also gained priceless memories. My favorite memory occurred during **achieve** Freshman Orientation. I was nervous to meet my peers, but it ended up being an unforgettable experience. Although many of us did not know each other well, we bonded through the shared experience of climbing the over 400 Filbert Steps. It was something that allowed us to motivate each other even when we were tired. It was the first time I experienced the endless support and bond I would gain over the next four years. During the College Boot Camp last summer, I bonded with the class of 2023 over our mutual stress of the college process. We furthered that bond on the College Tour, traveling to Boston together and learning so much about not only what colleges have to offer, but also about each other.

As I go off to college in the upcoming months, I will take the valuable lessons I learned during my time here. **achieve** has done so much for me and I would like to give back in a similar way. I am eager to help youth with their education as **achieve** has helped me. I hope to help by volunteering at non-profits and being a tutor. I will also take with me my new profound passion for Computer Science and learn through my education how to apply it to topics I am passionate about, like the immigrant and disability communities. **achieve** has taught me to be the best version of myself and to be a part of the world-changers of tomorrow. I will forever be grateful for my experience as an **achiever**.



### CLASS OF 2023 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES \*designates colleges students will be attending

Amherst College*	College of the Holy Cross	Kalamazoo College	Saint John's University
Albion College	Columbia University*	Knox College	St. Olaf College
Allegheny College	Cornell College	Lawrence University*	Stonehill College
Beloit College	Gettysburg College	Lehigh University	Trinity College*
Boston University*	Goucher College	Lewis and Clark College	University of Rochester*
Carleton College*	Gustavus Adolphus College	Macalester College*	University of St. Thomas*
Clark University	Hope College*	Reed College*	Valparaiso University
Coe College*	Juniata College	Rhodes College	Whitman College

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

As an African American teen from a single parent household, I have faced many challenges. To start off, I was born in prison. When my mom found out she was pregnant, she was super-stressed and did not know what to do. My father had just died in a car accident and my mom was young, with no family to rely upon. She ended up committing a crime and being incarcerated while pregnant. After I was born, I spent the first three years of my life in foster care. Even though my mom was released when I was one, she had to fight long and hard to get me back, to prove that she was fit to be my mom. This is why I have so much grit and determination. My mom has shown me that no matter what your situation, you need to always keep going to achieve your goal.

**achieve** gave me the opportunity to attend Riordan without the financial burden on my mom. With encouragement from **achieve**, I discovered my leadership potential. I joined Student Government and was elected Co-Student Body President this year and am the president of the Black Student Union. I also had the opportunity to participate in varsity sports. **achieve** has supported all of my endeavors.

**achieve** has helped me in many ways throughout high school. Through the many presentations at the Family Meetings, I have become confident when speaking to large groups. I have learned professional skills such as interviewing, completing job applications, and learning how to dress to impress. I have also become a better student. When I first started Riordan, I struggled

to keep up. Thankfully, my **achieve** mentor helped me get back on track. I attended weekly meetings where I was taught how to properly plan out my schedule. **achieve** has also helped me understand the importance of asking questions. I used to be afraid that if I asked the “wrong” question I would be ridiculed. **achieve** has taught me the value of being unafraid to succeed.



I have so many memories from my four years in **achieve**. During the summer before freshmen year, I attended the **achieve** Freshmen Orientation where I had a chance to meet my fellow **achieve** '23 students and get comfortable being part of the program. I loved the Christmas parties because I got to get dressed up, have professional pictures taken, and watch the performances of my talented **achieve** brothers and sisters. But my favorite memory was the **achieve** tour my junior year of Boston area colleges. When I first heard we were going to Massachusetts, I was a little nervous. It would be my first time flying to another state without my mom. When we arrived and I saw all the fall colors, I was amazed and knew I was definitely ready to go away to college.

I will be the first of my nine siblings to attend a four-year college. **achieve** has helped to transform me into a confident leader by giving me so many unforgettable opportunities and skills. I will use all I have learned these past four years to be a successful student and a person who will make a positive difference in the world.



## PRICELESS GIFTS

My parents and grandparents immigrated from the Philippines and have had to work hard all their lives. Growing up in Daly City, I had to deal with many family issues. My parents separated when I was an infant, so I lived with my dad, uncle, and grandparents. My mother has never been a part of my life and my father has faced challenges with addiction. We live with extended family in a really small home where privacy is difficult, and there is often conflict. Currently my father is incarcerated and will not be released until after I graduate from college. Through meditation, reflection, and my Catholic faith, I have been able to push through my family problems and grow stronger.

Aside from the scholarship, **achieve** has helped me in many ways. **achieve** taught me how to get out of my comfort zone through volunteering, internships, and a lifetime's worth of public speaking. **achieve** has also helped me with my procrastination and academic issues by requiring the use of a planner to keep track of important events, deadlines and dates. Also, by getting into my dream high school, as well as being accepted into college, my **achieve** Family has given me so much hope, stomping out my doubts about the future.

**achieve** has provided me with so many momentous experiences. Professionally, I had the opportunity to experience remote and

in-person internships. I attended an **achieve** job bootcamp in which I learned about work etiquette, including important skills such as organization, communication, cooperation and professionalism in the workplace. **achieve** gave me knowledge, but also joyous experiences with my peers. One great example of this is the Boston College Tour with **achieve** juniors and seniors. Bonding with my **achieve** siblings and traveling to a totally different environment was fun, educational, and most importantly, memorable.

Working as a summer intern at Kaiser Permanente had the biggest impact on me. I was placed in the pharmacy, where I worked in Ambulatory Care and Out-Patient Services. I assisted with office tasks, and I was able to get hands-on experience with patients and clients. The Kaiser Launch Program helped me appreciate the importance of hard work, responsibility, self-care, and bonding with coworkers. This experience confirmed that my future was in medicine.

As I look towards my college journey, I am now mentally and emotionally preparing to leave my humble home in Daly City and attend a college many miles away. The **achieve** Program has helped me to gain the confidence and skills I need to move on to this next step in my journey. Through all of our Family Meeting presentations, trips, cultural events and internships, **achieve** has taught me about work life in the adult world, doing good for others, and making every moment count. I have honed my ability to work with others, socialize, and leap out of my comfort zone. **achieve** has given me priceless gifts of knowledge and experience—academically, professionally and socially—and I know I am more than ready to venture into the unknown and make the world a better place.

# PERSONAL GROWTH

Growing up as a daughter of Mexican immigrants, our budget was always tight. However, we were always there for one another: cooking, taking care of each other, and our dad building us toys from found objects. As the eldest child, I was the family translator, even going to my abuelita's doctor's appointments and talking with her doctors. But I never saw any of this as a burden. In fact, it led me to love helping those around me, no matter what the task.

As I matured, it became more difficult to juggle my personal life with my school life. This school year, three of my grandparents suddenly became ill and my mom was the only available sibling to care for them. I took on my mom's household responsibilities: cooking, cleaning, and caring for my two younger sisters. I was not mentally prepared for this sudden transition because it was a bigger workload than I expected. In November of 2022, my family and I took an emergency trip to Mexico because my dad's mom was gravely ill. During that time in Mexico, I did not have adequate internet access, causing me to fall behind in school. Coming back, I felt like giving up because I had double the workload and a busy schedule. Even though it got hard at times, **achieve** was always there to support me and give me the help I needed.

As a first-generation student, I never imagined myself going to college because no one in my family had even finished high school. At my **achieve** interview, I remember being asked if I would go to college out-of-state and I said, "Yes!" with a big smile on my face. As the years passed and the summer before senior year was here, we began the college process: researching colleges, creating a fit sheet, and writing our personal statements. I made my college list and I started working on my applications. As I submitted my applications one-by-one, my heart was filled with joy. When I received my first acceptance to college, my family celebrated with me. This was the moment when I realized that I will actually be going to college and make my entire family proud.

Even though **achieve** is considered a scholarship program, it is so much more than that. It has helped me grow as a person, as a young woman who will make a difference in the world. I have learned so many essential life skills, like speaking in front of large groups, staying organized by using my planner, enforcing strict deadlines for assignments, proper work etiquette, and the value of giving back to my community. The cultural events, Christmas parties, and internships taught me to dress according to the event and built my confidence to converse with adults and to connect easily with those who do not share my life experience.

My most memorable **achieve** moments have happened during the **achieve** Christmas parties and during the Boston college tour. They are the events where I was able to bond with my peers. At the Christmas party we are strongly encouraged to talk to one another because we are sitting together and must cooperate during the dreaded Trivia Contest. During our college tour, we connected more and learned about one another during our long bus rides and communal dinners at fun restaurants in Boston. The college tour also gave me the opportunity to not only visit different campuses, but to think about what kind of college environment would be best for me.

As I move on to the next chapter in life, I will continue to help others as my family and **achieve** have taught me. I intend to go outside my comfort zone, connecting with others, especially those who may not share my culture or socio-economic background. Wherever I go, I want to build a tight knit community by working with local organizations that help those in need. **achieve** has taught me that family is not necessarily defined by blood relations, and has helped to make me into a strong young woman who will make her mark wherever she goes.



## *Congratulations*



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Sheily Melgar



**GERSON BAKAR ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Joseph Zuloaga



**GERSON BAKAR ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

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**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD**

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**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD**

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## LIFE LESSONS



My Pacific Islander and Black American heritages have helped shape my identity and my worldview. Being part of both cultures has given me two unique perspectives on life and communities in which to explore them. Due to my unique position, I straddle both communities. While I can find similarities and connections between them, I am not fully accepted by either as I contradict their assumptions. I am neither Black nor Pacific Islander enough for each group and therefore not fully included. Though I might wish for a stronger sense of belonging in both communities, I relish the outsider's perspective that this affords me.

My first connection to the **achieve** Program was through my older sister who was part of the Holy Names High School **achieve** Program and is currently in her third year of college. Having my older sister be a part of the **achieve** Program helped me understand what **achieve** offers students. Seeing her go through college applications, prep for SAT/ACT, and the scholarship process, gave me an insightful lesson on what was in store for me in high school. Learning how **achieve** was caring in leading her through those times gave me the impression that **achieve** could be the place for me to grow and mature into an adult. Through **achieve**, she also gained a profound group of people she can call lifetime friends. That is the community **achieve** offered and is exactly what I wanted to experience.

Now, in my last year in the **achieve** Program, I can proudly say that **achieve** has given me more than I ever expected. It has played a large part in helping me create my very first friendships at Saint Joseph Notre Dame High School. These relationships were vastly different from what I had expected, teaching me important lessons on building connections; that you can create amazing friendships with people who have vastly distinct passions from my own. This concept expanded when I entered into the workforce through **achieve** internships, creating bonds with adults at UC Berkeley and UCSF. With building new relationships, **achieve** has also taught me the important lesson of not being afraid to ask for help. Sometimes when I want to ask for help, I become self-conscious and push myself down, assuming that I will understand eventually. **achieve** taught me that asking for help shows maturity by taking responsibility for my own intellectual growth.

**achieve** has been able to provide long lasting memories that encompass moments of happiness and growth for me. An example of this type of moment is when I went to my very first cultural event, *Cabaret*. This was in 2019, and my first time ever attending a professional production. This musical taught me something very important early on in my high school career: that every person has a part to play in the betterment of our world. This can be through environmental policy, peacemaking, or just making a positive impact on the people you meet. It has been a strong ideal that I use today to push my various passions. Another highlight of **achieve** was my summer internship at UCSF Global Health, which expanded my interest in global health while building bonds with experts in the field from all over the world.

With the many lessons that the **achieve** Program has taught me, I have the skills to take the next steps toward my college career and future. **achieve** helped me learn how to create beautiful friendships with vastly different people. I understand that asking for help shows my maturity and strength rather than flaws. Through **achieve** volunteer activities, I now see that everyone is responsible for making what we call "home" a better place. With these lessons, I will be prepared to go to college, hoping to create more connections and friendships that last a lifetime. These valuable life skills will be an integral part of my identity and who I will become later in life. I hope to focus on global health as my area of study and work in government, benefiting the people around me.



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