



My name is Michael, and I am an immigrant from Peru. I moved to New York when I was three years old and was raised in a single parent household alongside my older sister.

I am currently attending New York University where I am studying Biology on the Pre-Health track. I volunteer as a research intern in the De Rubeis lab at Mount Sinai, and I have recently been awarded a grant through the Dean's Undergraduate Research Fund to pursue an independent research project.

I also volunteer as a Spanish Interpreter at the New York City Free Clinic to help the uninsured receive quality medical care. I have chosen to pursue a career in medicine because of my interest in medical science, aiding underserved communities, and advocating for health equity. Coming from a low-income household and having family members whom had difficulty accessing medical treatment at an affordable cost encouraged me to pursue this career path where I can help communities similar to mine.

What are the challenges you experienced/are experiencing as a Latino student in STEM?

As a Latino student in STEM I always questioned whether I was academically capable of succeeding in the STEM field. I struggled a lot with STEM courses, especially in math. I was even told to give up on STEM and pursue something else, such as writing. Because of this I often saw myself as academically inferior to my peers and was discouraged on pursuing my academic ambitions. There was also the decision of whether I should immediately go to work after high school to help my family financially or attend college to pursue my dream. Thankfully I have a supportive family that pushed me to go to college, but even then, I still feel like I could do more to help them.

What are the specific difficulties you have as first-generation college student?

The most difficult part of being a first-generation college student was the guilt I felt of leaving home to pursue a higher education. Leaving my family behind was pretty tough because we were always there to support one another, and I felt like I was abandoning them. Without a doubt my mom and sister were happy for me and wanted nothing else than for me to pursue my dream. Yet, I always found myself going home frequently during my first year because I just felt the need to make sure they weren't struggling with anything. Along with this and becoming depressed because of my poor grades, I nearly decided to give up on pursuing medicine all together. I've learned about "imposter syndrome" and initially didn't think I would be affected but attending a prestigious school with highly intelligent students and world-renowned professors was very intimidating, and I often felt like I didn't belong there at all. A lot of first-generation students struggle with similar challenges and many of them face far more difficult ones that even push them to give up on college completely. It's quite unfortunate because they deserve to be there just as much as anyone else.

Did you have Latinx mentors or role models growing up?

Growing up I would say my only Latinx role model was my mom. My mom is strong-willed and the hardest worker I know. She has balanced multiple jobs in the past so that our family could overcome financial difficulties. She would even help our less fortunate family members in Peru by sending them

money to help them with their financial burdens. I can't thank her enough for her dedication so that my sister and I could live a comfortable life. I always strive to have the same amount of motivation and generosity she has.

Are you part of an organization or group supporting Latinx in STEM?

I am not involved in an organization that specifically supports Latinx in STEM, but I am a part of the Higher Education Opportunity Program at NYU. This program supports underserved low-income New York State students to attend NYU through financial assistance and academic support. Many of us are minorities and are pursuing careers within STEM. This program has helped me so much and I can't thank them enough for believing in me.

Has your activism within the Hispanic community helped you define your career goals? And how?

Yes, specifically my experience at the NYC Free Clinic. Many of the patients only speak Spanish and do not have health insurance, so I want to become a physician who can advocate for underrepresented groups. Unfortunately, immigrants, refugees, people of color, and other underrepresented groups are often not treated with respect and compassion within healthcare. This is usually due to implicit bias and other forms of prejudice against particular minority groups. As a future physician, I hope to use my position to bring attention to this underlying issue and do whatever I can to help prevent the exploitation of minority communities.

What would you say/recommend to other URM youth willing to be part of STEM?

I would say do not feel discouraged especially if the peers around you are a lot more academically advanced. I've met students who don't need to study at all in order to get an A, while there were other students who studied for hours throughout the week and still only got a B. I'd also say as long as you worked hard and put maximum effort, be proud of yourself no matter what grades you get. I would also recommend seeking out help whenever you need to, whether that be financial, personal, or academic assistance. STEM isn't an easy career path and there are many challenges that one faces, but it is also in my opinion the most rewarding field. It always makes my day when my younger cousins ask me about science because I know that they're a lot more capable in life than what society makes it seem. So, if you find science, math, technology, etc. interesting then I say pursue that interest and don't let anyone tell you that you can't. Sometimes all it takes is the continuous support from someone.

In your experience, what are forms of support that would help retain Latinx students in STEM?

I think having a mentor is really important and will significantly help retain Latinx students in STEM. From my experience, it was hard for me to build a strong relationship with my professors. This was usually due to the large classrooms and the fact that I couldn't really relate to any of them. Also, from my time at NYU, I haven't had the chance to have been taught by any STEM professors from underrepresented groups. I believe if there were more Latino or Black STEM professors, it would help those students who come from minority groups gain more confidence in achieving their goals. This is because by having a teaching workforce that reflects the diverse student population, they can serve as role models and cultural liaisons. This will help meet the needs of Latino and other minority communities for they could look up to their professor and see them as someone they can relate to. Another form of support would be more funding for summer internships that can provide stipends to low-income minority students. Many internships are unpaid, and I have had friends who couldn't afford to spend their summer pursuing an unpaid internship because they needed to make money to help their families or to even support themselves. Therefore, by having more scholarships or

programs that could make up for that loss of income, minority students could pursue STEM internships over the summer and further diversify the STEM field.

Here is a list of some programs that support minorities and students who come from low-income households:

Pre-college Opportunity:

<https://www.nyu.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/how-to-apply/all-freshmen-applicants/opportunity-programs/pre-college-programs.html>

Undergraduate College Opportunities:

<https://www.nyu.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/how-to-apply/all-freshmen-applicants/opportunity-programs.html>

<https://oadi.cornell.edu/programs/student-opportunity-programs/arthur-o-eve.html>

<https://parttime.syr.edu/students/prospective-students/heop-program/>

<https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/asp/programs>

<https://www.cuny.edu/academics/academic-programs/seek-college-discovery/>

<https://www.suny.edu/attend/academics/eop/>

Summer Opportunities:

<http://www.shpep.org/>

<https://www.ps.columbia.edu/neramedprep>

<https://www.einstein.yu.edu/centers/hispanic-centers-of-excellence/opportunities.aspx>