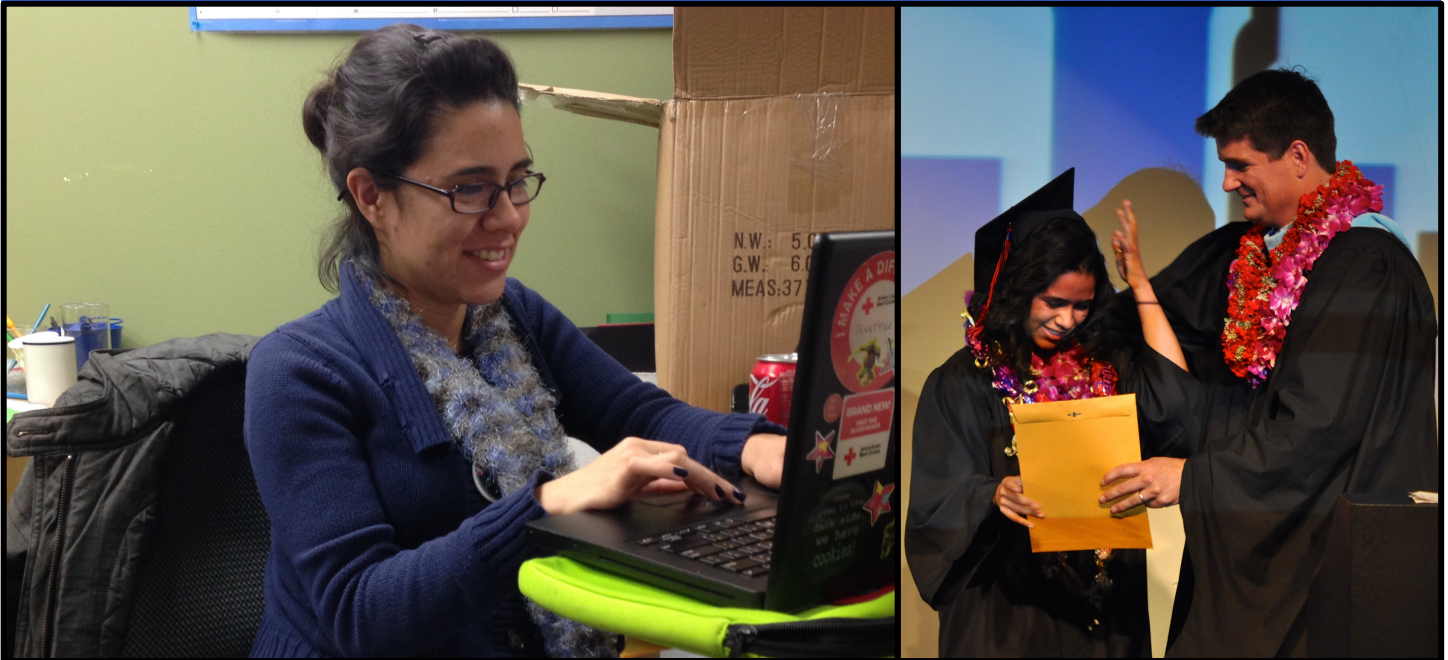


Middle College Graduate Profile

Jennifer Soto, 2010 Scholarship Recipient



Jennifer working at StarVista now; Jennifer receiving her Middle College scholarship award from Social Science teacher Michael Clardy at the 2010 graduation ceremony

Being asked to speak during her Middle College graduation ceremony in May 2010 allowed Jennifer Soto to feel more confident about herself as a speaker. Being presented with the Excellence in Social Studies award gave her confidence in her abilities as a student. Ripping up her graduation speech manuscript was her final high school challenge, one she set for herself, which reassured her that she would do well at San Jose State University.

During Middle College, Jennifer was hesitant to take the public speaking class, but she benefitted greatly from the course. She found value in face-to-face communication and became more confident with impromptu speaking. The skills she learned in the class allowed her to feel comfortable expressing her opinions when talking with people and convey a message to others, which is a vital aspect of her current job at StarVista in San Carlos as the Youth Outreach Coordinator.

Her original goal was to become a cosmetic surgeon so people could be happy about how they look and feel about themselves in general, avoiding social issues that could occur as a result of physical appearance. After taking classes in college including psychology and stress management, however, she discovered the often overlooked importance of mental health, which led her to transition from pursuing a career in medicine to entering the mental health field. Jennifer states, "You don't have to have the perfect body to be happy with yourself. If you're at peace with yourself and content, that means so much more than physical values. Realizing this helped me too."

In five years, Jennifer hopes to focus on chemical dependency and substance abuse through hands-on experience and to receive a certification to counsel individuals struggling with these issues. Throughout her life and in college, she was surrounded by friends and family members who had problems with drinking, but they would not acknowledge their problems as such. She is determined to reverse society's normalization of drinking and help people avoid setting themselves up for addiction.

After sufficient experience, a certificate, and earning her master's degree, she sees herself working to implement drugs and alcohol education as an elective or health class unit in high schools and even in middle school. Jennifer, who attended Aragon High School before going to Middle College, believes that educating students about the consequences of engaging in substance abuse will make teenagers reconsider risky behavior.

Jennifer concluded about her arrival working in the mental health field, "What matters is what occurs in your mind, what you try to achieve mentally. It doesn't age and it's something that can't easily be dismantled or taken away from you. Your state of mind is something you are in control of."

-- Written by Middle College senior Nina Luo