



# STEM Student Profile



## Kimberly Porras

*Environmental Science Major, UC Santa Cruz*

### Future Plans:

- Work in a lab, then law school

### Advice for Students:

- Stay focused on your own path and don't compare yourself to others.
- Take care of yourself; it's better to work steadily toward your goal than get burned out.



Growing up in Nicaragua, Kimberly Porras loved being in nature and wanted to protect it, starting with the endangered sea turtles she saw at her local beaches. At age 17 her goal to be an environmental engineer was on track. But then everything changed when her family decided to move to the U.S. Kimberly didn't speak any English and thought that she would never have the career she'd dreamed about.

It's taken almost 10 years of both working and taking classes but now Kimberly is about to graduate from UC Santa Cruz with a major in Environmental Science. She's had two paid summer internships and hopes to work in a lab and eventually go to law school.

So how did she do it? At first, Kimberly's goal was only to learn English. She

took ESL classes at her local Adult School and CSM, while working at places like Jamba Juice, Target and Safeway. At CSM, she learned she could transfer to a 4-year school to get a

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degree so she completed the ESL program and started taking classes she needed for transfer.

Biology professor Tania Beliz introduced her to the MESA program, where she learned about resources to help her like study groups, advice about transferring, STEM clubs and meeting STEM role models. A

breakthrough came when Olivia Viveros, CSM's MESA Director, encouraged her to apply for a paid summer internship for community college students at Stanford University.

"At the beginning I was so intimidated because I was never in a lab before and it was like, Stanford, right?" shares Kimberly. "But my mentor, Alicia Wong, was great, and it was like, 'Oh, my God, I'm doing this!'" In the Loh lab she researched human viruses and spike protein cells like the COVID-19 virus and learned lab skills. "It was just a great experience," Kimberly adds. "It really, really boosted my confidence to apply to other internships."

During the next summer, Kimberly spent 10 weeks in Massachusetts at the prestigious Woods Hole

Oceanographic Institution. She was part of the Partnership Education Program, which is designed for students from underrepresented groups in marine and ocean sciences. Her work involved collecting water quality data to develop research projects for the Buzzards Bay Coalition.

In Fall 2022, she transferred to UC Santa Cruz where she is a senior environmental science major focusing on data analysis and also works as a mentor to incoming transfer students. "I was always scared of transferring," she says. But Olivia from the MESA Program always said, 'Yes, you can do it! We can do it!' Definitely having a mentor there to support you. It really made a difference. I'm really grateful to have met Olivia, and grateful to have been part of the program when I was at CSM."