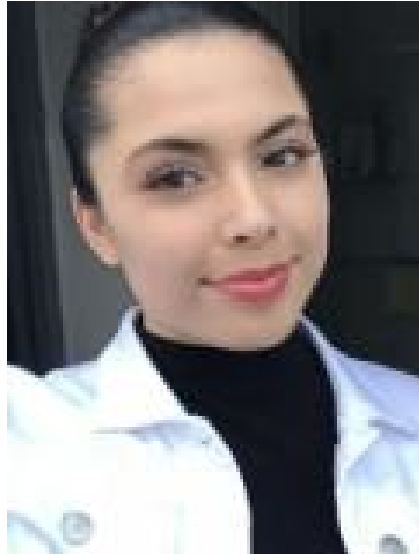




STEM Student Success Profile



Michelle Peña Garcia

Psychobiology Major, UCLA

Future Plans:

- A career in medicine

Advice for Students:

- Take time to meet with professors and create study groups.
- Reach out to people in fields that interest you. Keep in touch with people you've met.
- Apply for internships and scholarships.



Michelle Peña Garcia is an immigrant, a veteran, and a very happy UCLA senior with many options for a career in medicine.

Michelle moved to the Bay Area from Mexico as a teenager. After graduating high school and attending college for a year, she joined the U.S. Army. Returning to CSM after her service, she worked full-time while taking classes, and during the pandemic served as a mental health peer educator on campus.

She was always interested in healthcare, so majored in biology at CSM. Looking back, she shares that "I wish I would have dedicated a little bit more time to my academics and learned how important that was rather than working a full-time job and doing so many extra activities." If she could do it again, she would meet with professors during their office

hours and participate in study groups.

CSM MESA Director Olivia Viveros urged her to apply for an internship at Stanford University. Michelle didn't apply because she

"The Stanford internship has been the most valuable thing so far."

didn't think she'd be chosen. With more encouragement, she applied the next year and was selected for a medical research internship. That opportunity was key to her current success. "We should not be intimidated by the fact that this is such a reputable university," she declares. "Or about what we're supposed to know because they're there to help."

At Stanford she met her mentor Tim Chang and learned lab skills. The experience led to a job at UCLA. "If I'm honest," she adds, "that internship has been the most valuable thing so far."

"I'm always looking for connections, always reaching out to people or keeping in touch with people or exploring new options," Michelle says. Drawing on her internship experience at Stanford, Michelle contacted people at UCLA even before she was admitted, and she now works in a lab doing prostate cancer research. Coincidentally, her Stanford mentor now also works there and continues to give her good advice and support.

As Michelle approached her time to transfer, she worked on applications for the Latinos in Tech and Samsung scholarships. She asked two professors and

her supervisor from the mental health program for recommendations. She was awarded both scholarships. Michelle has not had to pay any tuition in the two years at UCLA.

Michelle's time as a peer mental health educator made her more aware of that aspect of healthcare, so one of her reasons to attend UCLA over Berkeley was to major in Psychobiology. "I had to really think about 'what am I going for?' Like, the name of the school, or am I going for what the school is going to offer me?" She also worried about moving and living alone for the first time, but she adjusted and is very happy. She may even stay an extra year at UCLA to continue her lab research and prepare for the next step in her life's journey. She's on the path to becoming a doctor, physician's assistant, nurse or clinical psychologist.