

Scholarship Success Stories

Mariele Ponti's Story

2017 recipient of the AAUW Healdsburg Branch SRJC Scholarship



I write to you four years after receiving a scholarship from your branch. In 2017, when I received the scholarship, I was completing my third year at community college. Three years prior I had begun my college career at SRJC, a returning student at twenty-five. In 2017, I was also taking courses at Laney College as part of the Legal and Community Interpreting program.

After receiving the scholarship I transferred to Mills College in Oakland where I studied for two years and completed my BA in mathematics. Honestly, even with the scholarship, studying at a four-year university was difficult due to the financial burden. My plan had been to work as an interpreter to support myself, but I didn't quite pass the state exam, so I looked for alternative jobs. After transferring from SRJC I was not prepared for such limited class schedules that made finding a job more challenging and costly. I had to take the maximum scholarship amount in addition to part-time jobs every semester just to make ends meet. This emphasized the importance of the scholarship for me. It took a weight off my shoulders and helped me out in a singular way. I completed my math degree in spring of 2019. I had excellent professors and really enjoyed math, computer science, and a couple of cross-disciplinary English and History courses. It was such a valuable experience to me!

During my studies toward my math undergrad degree, I took some computer science courses. I always loved discrete mathematics, algorithms and enjoyed coding. Upon graduation I continued to expand my interpreting practice, as a self-employed interpreter. In March of 2020 the state interpreter exam was canceled, and a new position I had been offered was put on hold. The decision to pursue computer science was logical, as it was the other career path I had considered. I was lucky to find the program at Virginia State University. I moved there to pursue my MS in computer science in July, 2020. I am graduating at the end of this summer. I have a 4.0 GPA and am currently searching for a job as a junior software engineer to begin upon graduation. I may stay in Virginia or relocate for a new job. I currently volunteer with the Karishma Foundation, the local network that allows rural schools and communities without internet to connect to a local Wi-Fi network. Outside of school I do many algorithmic problems and work on a couple of web application projects. I enjoy building projects and look forward to a role in which I can continue solving problems (and in which I can pay my bills).

I have always wanted to work for gender justice that doesn't exclude anybody. My long-term goal is to use my skills to contribute to organizations that work to advance racial and gender justice in a way that centers on Black, Indigenous, and immigrant women and the LGBTQI community. I believe that my math background and engineering skills can be assets for the movement in this country toward a real democracy.