

Scholarship

Scholarship Success Story

Isabel Nunez Perez's Story

2017 recipient of an AAUW Healdsburg Branch High School Scholarship



I grew up in Alexander Valley outside of Healdsburg on a vineyard with my family. My parents still live and work there; my father has been working that land for almost 35 years. In 2017 I graduated from Healdsburg High School which is when I received your Healdsburg AAUW \$5,000 scholarship which allowed me to focus on academics freshmen year without worrying about finances.

This scholarship also gave me the confidence to push forward as I challenged myself academically and re-located to Oregon. Going to university out-of-state was one of my biggest goals at the time. I remember feeling on top of the world when my name was announced as the recipient of one of the largest single scholarships awarded that night. I was in complete shock and so were some of my peers. No one who applied for this scholarship was aware of the potential \$5,000; applicants were only informed of a fraction of that amount. It was a very validating experience, as at that time I was pursuing Engineering, knowing that very few women and even fewer Latinas were in that field. It made me feel seen and that others also believed in this message of supporting young people, especially first generation-students, children of immigrants.

My transition to college was very rough. I still find it difficult to reflect on my first year and the unprecedented challenges that I had moving to Oregon. The diversity, comfort, and language of California was a security that I didn't realize I had until I left. I

describe this transition as a deafening silence that enclosed me and threatened to suffocate me; not hearing spoken Spanish, not being able to see myself in a stranger's face and, at some point in my time in Oregon, I also developed a mortal fear for my life.

There have been many Healdsburg grads before me who attended Oregon State that wouldn't have faced these challenges because they did not look like me or move through the world as me. What grounded me was an incredible community of women and femmes of color that I found when taking my first Spanish class. I began to develop more confidence in myself, feel secure in my decision making and speaking up for what is right. Through developing a close-knit network of peers, we were able to fight, organize and build our way through shared experiences of discrimination at its many intersections.

In my second year, I switched to Political Science, as my community has always been affected by unjust systems of government and understanding these systems has also been a lifelong passion of mine. I then learned how to navigate legislative spaces, advocate, and lobby at the state capitol in Salem, as well as develop my organizing skills. My friends then gave me the courage to run for student body president. My VP and I were the first dual Latina ticket to run and be elected. This opportunity did not come without its own set of challenges, of course, but it was an amazing experience. * I graduated from Oregon State University in June 2021 with a bachelor's in Political Science, option in Law and Politics, and a minor in Spanish.