



My name is
Jess Torres

and I am a graduate student studying the environmental DNA detection of California Tiger Salamanders in Dr. Derek Girman's lab.

I am a first-generation college student from Sonoma County and a tribal member of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo in New Mexico. I transferred to Sonoma State from the Santa Rosa Junior College and finished my undergraduate degree in Biology. I have been a Registered Veterinary Technician for three years. I love helping critically ill patients and the adrenaline that comes with working in a fast-paced emergency hospital. Working in the veterinary field is rewarding, however the opportunities I received at Sonoma State have helped me discover my passion for research and teaching.

As an undergraduate, I was a member of the Louis Stoke's Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP). LSAMP helped me participate in research as a paid assistant and through this program I was able to attend five-week field research course in Costa Rica. Without the opportunities from LSAMP, I would not have considered pursuing a graduate degree. As a graduate student, I became the first Mathematics, Engineering, Science, Achievement (MESA) Mentor Program Coordinator for our campus. In an effort to help new students navigate campus resources and their major, I connect experienced students with freshmen, sophomore or transfer students. I am so thankful for this opportunity because I am dedicated to encouraging the persistence of first generation and minority college students majoring in STEM.

Like many in STEM, I sometimes fall victim to imposter syndrome, and I am forced to remind myself of the obstacles I have overcome and the achievements I have accomplished. Insecure mind games aside, logistical challenges include securing funding for research and competing for tuition waivers. Earning any kind of degree in STEM is exceptionally difficult and requires a lot of self-assurance and self-discipline. Despite the hardships, Sonoma State has provided so many rewarding experiences. I have assisted in research projects that ignited an appreciation and love for herpetofauna. I am constantly impressed and inspired by the hardworking students in our MESA community. From learning how to be a good scientist from mentors and peers to teaching non-majors the captivating diversity and wonders of biology, I know I will always think fondly of the time I spent here.

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