

IE Mentorship Program Spotlight:

Guadalupe Aguilar and Stephanie Valenzuela, Phd Candidate

The McNair Scholars Program participates in the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Internship (IE) program founded and directed by Dr. Rick Cherwitz, Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. The IE program is a symbiotic opportunity which pairs current doctoral student mentors from UT Austin with St. Edward's McNair Scholars who shadow them in sitting in on graduate seminar, assisting with doctoral research and meeting graduate program professors and administrators. McNair Scholars are given the opportunity to discuss life as a graduate student with their mentors who, in return, gain a chance to directly contribute to the scholastic development of a future colleague. This year, we present the collaboration between SEU Scholar Guadalupe Aguilar and UT Organic Chemistry doctoral student Stephanie Valenzuela (pictured right).



Stephanie, please feel free to tell us a little about yourself. What program are you enrolled in at UT? How did you relate/connect it to your IE mentee's interest?

SV: I am pursuing a higher education in organic chemistry at The University of Texas at Austin. Currently, I am studying the assembly of nanoparticles using dynamic covalent bonding pairs. During my undergraduate studies at CSU, Sacramento, I went through the McNair Scholars Program. Being a former McNair Scholar made it easy relating to my mentee with our similar backgrounds, ambitions and goals in life.

How did you hear about the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Internship Program? What inspired you to become an IE mentor?

SV: My experience with the McNair Scholars Program was invaluable, and I knew I wanted to help out with the McNair Scholars Program in the future. Thus, when I read an email stating The McNair Scholars Program at St. Edward's University was looking for mentors I was eager to participate.

What were some of the topics that you both would discuss during your time together?

SV: Lupita and I would discuss things like challenges we are facing regarding pursuing a higher education and how to overcome them, how to apply to graduate schools, the importance of REUs and even how to get connected and reach out to potential graduate groups.

What events, activities, and courses did you invite, or encourage Guadalupe to participate in along with you on campus at the University of Texas at Austin?

SV: Lupita was always welcomed to be part of our group meetings, seminars, and outreach events. She was able to sit in on any classes that my primary investigator taught. Also, she could be part of the research that took place here in the laboratory, gaining hands on experience in a research setting. The opportunities were endless for getting experience inside and outside of the laboratory.

Stephanie, what advice would you give to incoming graduate students or undergraduates wanting to pursue graduate studies?

SV: Regarding preparing yourself for grad school applications: I highly recommend making yourself stand out from the crowd by partaking in outreach events that relate to your field and/or volunteering at events that help your community. Also, do not forget about doing well in your classes, developing relationships that will give you strong letters of recommendation and finding that one niche that makes you unique. Having a genuine desire for your education is always a must and will definitely help out with the application process.

When it comes to finding a program to choose, I would try to find a program with three-four faculty members that do research in your interest. Look at programs that are ranked differently, apply to a couple schools that may be a "reach", "middle" and "safety". This helps to make sure that you will most likely be accepted

into one of those schools.

To find a program, I would start off by finding schools in areas where you could see yourself living for a long term. Your reasons for choosing a location can vary depending on family, climate, culture or favorite hobbies. Do what makes you happy.

Would you participate in the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Program with the McNair Scholars Program again? Would you encourage other graduate students at UT to become involved?

SV: I would highly recommend this program to other graduate students! It is a great feeling knowing you are trying to make the academic culture better by promoting students from a diverse background to pursue a higher education. I plan on participating in this program in the future.

Guadalupe, after being involved in the program, what are your thoughts on its connection to pursuing graduate studies?

GA: I would definitely say to believe in yourself and lean on others when you are applying. Graduate school applications can be a tough journey and you may doubt yourself along the way, but as long as you have a good support system you can accomplish anything. Don't be afraid to ask for help and utilize the resources that not only the McNair Scholars Program provides but that the institution has for its students.