**STEM STORIES**

First Generation Series #4  
February 2018

**ADDING UP TO HER DREAM JOB**

If you want to be a teacher, then the University of Northern Iowa is the best school. This is what one of Zulema Argueta’s high school teachers told her when she started to consider becoming a math teacher. She visited the UNI campus during her sophomore year of high school and her decision was made. Zulema loved the campus, especially the size. It is a big university, but not too big. It has been is the perfect fit for her.

Born near Los Angeles, Zulema moved to Ottumwa, with her family when she was three years old. Spanish is her first language. She learned how to speak English from watching cartoons on the television. Her parents worked a lot but always made time for their children’s educations making sure that they got good grades and attended all parent-teacher conferences. Her father, in particular, put much importance on education and has encouraged Zulema to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher.

Zulema’s focus on math started when her Pre-Algebra teacher noticed that the subject matter came very easy to her. She started the process of moving her to Algebra I. She excelled in the class and eventually received an A+. It was at this point that she discovered that she really loved math.

In high school, Zulema joined the Teacher Education Association, which is a club for people who wanted to become teachers. This club gave students opportunities to shadow teachers, get out of their own classrooms and become part of the community. Zulema loved every part of this program and her dream of becoming a math teacher began.

Zulema’s experience at UNI has been amazing so far. Zulema raves about how supportive her professors and the number of support services available to her on campus such as the tutoring services, LSAMP (minorities in STEM), and TRIO. She has been involved in TRIO since she was a senior in high school. It is the support group that helped her get her college applications filled out.

Outside of the classroom, Zulema is active in a number of organizations. She is part of the Ethnic Student Promoters whose goal is to reach out to minority students to encourage them to go to college, by way of student panels and tours. She assists with FASFA Fridays by helping students fill out financial-aid forms. She also works at the Academic Learning Center. In her free time, she is part of The Movement, which is a Hip Hop Dance Team where she gets to move, have fun, and meet many new people.

Zulema is looking forward to her field experience as a student teacher. After graduation, she plans to go straight into teaching. She really wants to start doing what she loves: helping students. Her advice to students considering a STEM path is to do it. Just go for it. It will take time and dedication. Continue to push forward as the rewards will be worth it.

!”Do it. Just go for it. It will take time, dedication and a lot of work…don’t let a bad grade get you down. Still continue to push forward.”
-Zulema Argueta on pursuing a STEM major.

TRIO programs make college accessible to all citizens of the United States including first-generation college students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with a disability. Historically, these students have faced obstacles in the pursuit of higher education. TRIO has been providing support to pre-college and college students at UNI since 1984.

Story by Ginger L’Heureux, UNI STEM Graduate Assistant, gil@uni.edu