

ITE Diversity Scholars

ITE is pleased to introduce Jouselyn Lopez and Sebastian Velazquez, the inaugural ITE Diversity Scholars. Over the past year, the ITE Diversity Scholars Committee and ITE Staff have worked to put together a meaningful and sustainable program for young scholars. Understanding that being a first-generation college student is incredibly challenging, this program is unique in that it is built on providing multifaceted support: mentoring, internships, ITE student chapter participation, and \$4,000 in annual tuition support for up to five years of undergraduate work. The intent is to support at least one new recipient each year, with the opportunity to award additional scholars, should more support come forward. Both Jouselyn and Sebastian have incredible stories to tell, and shared them with *ITE Journal*.



Jouselyn with her mom, stepdad, and two siblings. (Inset) Jouselyn's father who inspired her to study engineering.

Jouselyn Lopez, *Legacy Fund Diversity Scholar*



Jouselyn Lopez of Phoenix, AZ, USA, says her first introduction to civil engineering was through her dad's love of math. "He didn't know how to read or write—but math was really his subject," she tells *ITE Journal*. "He would really push me and say, 'If you really want to be somebody in life, the way to go is not just literature, but also math.'"

Set to attend Arizona State University (ASU) this fall, Jouselyn will be the first in her family not just to graduate from college, but the first to graduate from both middle and high school as well. Her parents are both originally from the Mexican state of Sinaloa. "My grandmother, she was married and had 10 children," she notes of her mom's mom. "My grandfather died of cancer, so my mom had to drop [out of] school when she was 13 to come [to the United States] and provide for her mom."

Jouselyn's road to being named one of two ITE Diversity Scholars has been one of determination in the face of adversity. Her father was arrested and deported for driving without a license when she was in fourth grade. With two younger siblings—now ages 14 and almost seven—Jouselyn wanted to follow her mother's example of helping support the family. "My mom has always been the type of person to work multiple jobs to help us out," she says. "She did nails on the side, hair, anything she could get her hands on to help my dad, she would do it."

She says seeing her mom work so hard shaped and motivated her work ethic, pushing her to break the cycle and pursue her education. Her mother remarried when Jouselyn was around 11 years-old, and her stepdad provides a day-to-day parental presence in their family's life. Still, she held on to her father's love of engineering and took that with her throughout school.

Her life took another turn when she was a sophomore in high school—her mother was deported to Mexico. "From then on I was my brother's guardian," she says. "So in some senses, I took on more responsibility... because I wasn't just working to provide for myself, I was working to provide for all of us."

At that point, Jouselyn started working at a restaurant while going to school, and still works today at Yogi's Grill. Even while working and attending her high school—NFL YET College Prep Academy—and maintaining a 4.0 GPA, Jouselyn did an internship with AECOM on a light rail expansion project affecting her community the summer of her junior year. There, she had the opportunity to shadow engineers, and was especially inspired by the female professionals she met with. Now preparing to go to college, Jouselyn is excited not only to study the field of civil engineering, but to inspire other students.

"I'm doing work study with ASU to be a tutor for either reading or math," she notes. "The program helps students who are at risk of dropping out or students from low-income families and they don't have the education or the help to succeed in life."

She says at one point, she was considered an at-risk student, and wants to help more students break through those barriers. "I came from a family that had zero education, and I was supposed to break that boundary," she says. "I'm doing it—not because of the money I'll get paid—but because of the impact I can possibly have on them... Sooner or later when they can go to college and high school, they can be that helper that gives a lending hand to somebody else."