

Getting to Know ITE's Diversity Scholars

The purpose of ITE's Diversity Scholars Program is to increase underrepresented populations' participation in the transportation profession by supporting increased diversity at the undergraduate level. This program is open to any U.S. high school student or community college student transferring to a 4-year university of African American, Native American, Alaskan, Hawaiian, or Hispanic/Latino heritage with an interest in a career in transportation and seeking to study transportation engineering, planning, or a related field at a school with an established ITE Student Chapter. Financing is provided through the ITE Legacy Fund. *ITE Journal* recently caught up with the 2021 and 2022 Transoft Diversity Scholars.



Isaak Vargas

California Polytechnic State University
2022 Transoft Diversity Scholar

Hello, everyone, I am Isaak Vargas, a 17-year-old Mexican student and recent graduate from Watsonville High School (I was 16 when I graduated). While I attended Watsonville High School, I maintained a GPA higher than 4.0 while playing four sports and being involved in multiple clubs. I played soccer, baseball, volleyball, and ran cross country.

The best part of high school was definitely the friendships and bonds I built, because those will last a lifetime. You must be asking, "Wow. How did you balance all these things on your plate?" Honestly, my answer to that would have to be that I had no other choice but to figure it out and make it work. The expectation my parents had for me, and the expectations I carried for myself, left no other option. My parents expect a lot from me, along with my siblings. They weren't able to pursue their education as they had to work to support their parents and siblings. My parents are my motivation. They always look on the bright side of things, always working so hard and sacrificing everything for myself and my siblings. I think it is only fair if I take the opportunity they are providing for me, and take advantage of it.

So, what is my dream? Math has always been my favorite subject and I have always been interested in how things are built and the thought behind them. I did my research, and BOOM! Civil engineering shined down on me like it was calling down to me. Something that influenced my decision to major in and study civil engineering is the thought of my community and the people living in my community. Like me, the people of my community are on the lower end of the economic spectrum, meaning our community does not have the things it needs for the younger generation to be successful. I want to be that difference—I want to be the one to provide change and help the next generation to escape the constant cycle of poverty that they face.

My dream brought me to California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly). As some may know, Cal Poly is known for their engineering program and is recognized as one of the top programs in the nation. If I want to make a difference, I need to learn from the

best, and knowledge is powerful. Unfortunately, college is not free, and I am not wealthy, so I need help to be able to make this change. This is why I am so grateful to be an ITE Diversity Scholar. All four children in my family including myself are going to college in the fall, which means tuition times four. I want to get as much support as possible to at least lift the stress of paying for college from my parents' shoulders. So I want to say thank you to ITE from my whole family because I will be that change and make the world a better place one community at a time. Thank you for the opportunity to be one of ITE's Diversity Scholars.

