



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 31, 2024 CONTACT: Maria Hernandez PHONE: (909) 447-2406

El Monte High School Senior Pursues Career Goals, Receives Full-Ride to Georgetown University

EL MONTE – Nathalie Trigo Lopez has overcome numerous obstacles during her four years at El Monte High School (EMHS), but she will soon embark on a new, academic journey in pursuit of her career goals after her hard work and determination earned her a full-ride scholarship to the prestigious Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Trigo Lopez came to the United States from Guadalajara, Mexico as a freshman in 2020 – at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic – without speaking any English. Since leaving her childhood home four years ago, she has not only mastered a new language but excelled academically, demonstrating a level of dedication and perseverance that has earned her a coveted spot at Georgetown.

“I feel I am really good at listening and talking to people and trying to help them in any way I can,” said Trigo Lopez, who plans to major in psychology – a field of study that has captured her interest for the last seven years. “At some point in my career path, I want to be a psychologist or a social worker to support those who are going through social injustices and make the place where I live fairer for everyone.”

Trigo Lopez describes her journey to the United States as challenging. In 2020, she and her mother left Guadalajara to join her father in the United States, leaving behind her home, friends, and brothers. The transition was difficult. She began attending EMHS remotely due to the pandemic, and when in-person classes resumed during her sophomore year, she struggled, often feeling frustrated and upset while trying to communicate with her classmates.

“Once I started classes, it was scary to interact with others – I am a perfectionist. When I would try, people would look at me weird because they could not understand me,” Trigo Lopez said. “Because of that embarrassment, I had to learn English, I did not want to feel that way. I had to do something to change it. Most people were welcoming to me and would encourage me to speak English so I practiced and practiced.”

Trigo Lopez found the support she needed from her best friend and mother, who encouraged her to watch movies with subtitles to pick up the language faster. At school, Trigo Lopez counted on staff member Olga Castro, who worked with her in her first English Language Development (ELD) class and encouraged her.

“We are proud to celebrate Nathalie’s exceptional achievement, earning a full scholarship to Georgetown University is a remarkable feat for any student. For Nathalie to do so after doubling up on her English courses to catch up to her A-G English classes speaks volumes about her dedication and resilience,” El Monte Union High School District (EMUHSD) Superintendent Dr. Edward Zuniga said. “She is a true testament to the power of hard work. We, at El Monte Union, are thrilled to celebrate her success.”

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Initially, Trigo Lopez felt unhappy in the United States and planned to return to Mexico after graduating high school. During her second year, she began making friends who introduced her to academic programs like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and the Harvey Mudd College Upward Bound Program. With support from her English Learner Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA), Nari Cho-Berenthal, whom she considers a second counselor, she enrolled in both programs.

Going into her junior year, Trigo Lopez realized she had an opportunity through Upward Bound. The summer before her senior year, she was among 14 Upward Bound students chosen to visit Georgetown University and went on to apply to 12 colleges, including Georgetown. Her dream school, Georgetown, was one of eight schools to accept her.

During this time, Trigo Lopez's father was battling a severe health issue, which forced him to quit his job and impacted the family's finances. With help from her high school's College and Career Coordinator, Wyatt Bernthal, who also serves as EMUHSD's AVID Director, she appealed to colleges, informing them of her family's financial situation.

Georgetown came back with a financial aid package that sealed the deal for Trigo Lopez: a full-ride scholarship. Georgetown committed nearly \$90,000 in need and merit-based scholarships and grants to Trigo Lopez that will cover her tuition, housing, and living expenses annually.

"Nathalie went from someone who was nervous and had just arrived in the United States speaking little English to now being Georgetown-bound on a full scholarship. She is a great example of what our English learners can accomplish," Wyatt said. "Her story is inspiring and motivating to so many of our students and families throughout our District who are also new arrivals learning a new language. We are so proud of Nathalie and everything she has achieved and everything she will achieve in the future."

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

EMUHSD EMHS GEORGETOWN 1: El Monte High School senior Nathalie Trigo Lopez celebrates her full-ride scholarship to Georgetown University during the school's College Signing Day on May 14.

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The vision of the El Monte Union High School District is to empower and motivate our students to be resilient, college and career ready, lifelong learners and contributing members of our global society.