

## Two Redwood seniors win prestigious College Night Scholarship



For the first time in the program's history, the College Night Scholarship committee honored two graduating seniors with the prestigious four-year scholarship. Huy Nguyen and Mariah Villarreal – both of Redwood High School – will receive \$1,000 scholarships renewable for up to four years. Huy and Mariah are the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> scholarship recipients, respectively.

**Huy Nguyen** will be attending University of California, Santa Barbara, majoring in electrical engineering. Nguyen aspires to be a software or AI engineer working for a large company such as Amazon. Nguyen came to the US from Vietnam six years ago knowing very little English and, after being bullied because of his accent, decided to

teach himself English through YouTube. He would like to give back to the community and serve as a mentor to others like him to make sure everyone feels understood and included.

Nguyen is an outstanding scholar with a 4.47 GPA, and a community activist with many distinctions awarded for not only academics, but service and involvement in FBLA, yearbook, the architecture and engineering academy, and the California Scholarship Federation. He has interned at American Incorporated and SCICON, as well as participated in the Jump Start program at College of the Sequoias. There, he gained experience in electrical engineering, which led to his interest in a possible career in coding.

In Nguyen's interview, he shared about his love of tennis, which he has played since he was five years old. The mental and physical challenge of the game taught him to never give up on and off the court. He also expressed that attending College Night served as a motivation for him to maintain his academic excellence after engaging with college representative and learning about available opportunities.

**Mariah Villarreal** plans to attend California State University, Fullerton and hopes to pursue her master's or doctoral degree in psychology, focusing on working with children. Villarreal loves working with animals, reading to kids, and working with Rotary. She hopes to come back to Tulare County after she finishes her degree to build a community foundation. She credits College Night for preparing her for the future by providing information needed to succeed. Because of College Night, she knew exactly what to do and how to get into her top choice college, as well as many others.

Villarreal's extensive list of activities gave the committee true insight into who she is as a person and what is truly important to her. Her dedication to her family and helping to raise her sibling taught her persistence and that it was 'OK to not be OK', which drove her to strive for more in her life. She is also passionate about wrestling, track, FBLA, yearbook, photography, and journalism.

Her personal story and journey were an inspiration to the selection committee, which noted that she had overcome significant challenges to get to where she is today.

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**Student interns return to Circle J-Norris Ranch to participate in Long-term Oak Forest Inventory**



This week, 19 Tulare County high school students joined seven students from University of California, Merced to continue the Long-term Oak Forest Inventory (LOFI), which began at Circle J-Norris Ranch in 2019. Among the participants was Esmeralda Quintero, a fourth-year student at UC Merced. Quintero is also a LOFI alumni, having participated in the study while she was a student in Monache High School's Environmental Science Academy in 2021.

Quintero shared that she became interested in science in middle school and that she appreciates the knowledge that she has acquired so far, mainly concerning system sciences. "I enjoy seeing how systems work together and how we can collaborate among the sciences," she said. "In particular, soil science is a system that feeds us, regulates the atmosphere, and serves as a habitat for many microbes. The interconnectedness intrigues me."

Now in its fifth year, the LOFI project is forming its own connections. Each day that high school students conduct the survey, they are able to work alongside different students from UC Merced. While they work together, the university students are able to share their knowledge and interests, and discuss their paths and goals. "Through activities such as the oak inventory, we hope Tulare County students are able to see themselves in the UC Merced students that come to work alongside them," said Jessica Malisch, PhD, associate director of the UC Merced Natural Reserve System. "Our goal is to develop the scientists who will address the environmental challenges the Central Valley faces. Who better to face these challenges than someone who grew up here?"

In 2019, LOFI was launched with 100 oak survey circles, each is one-tenth of an acre in size. Students used GPS devices to locate the circles, which were randomly chosen with a mapping application. At each site, students counted, tagged, and recorded information on each tree – information that was added to the LOFI database. The



student interns and researchers completed the survey on 101 plots last year. Amanda Driver, lead teacher for Circle J-Norris, shared that this is the first year students are re-measuring the trees surveyed in past years. Driver also noted that she has seen an overall increase in tree health since 2019.

For more information on field science study opportunities at Circle J-Norris Ranch, contact Amanda Driver at [circlej@tcoe.org](mailto:circlej@tcoe.org), or visit [www.tcoe.org/CircleJ](http://www.tcoe.org/CircleJ).

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