

2021 NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) Recipients



Yesenia "Rubi" Landa

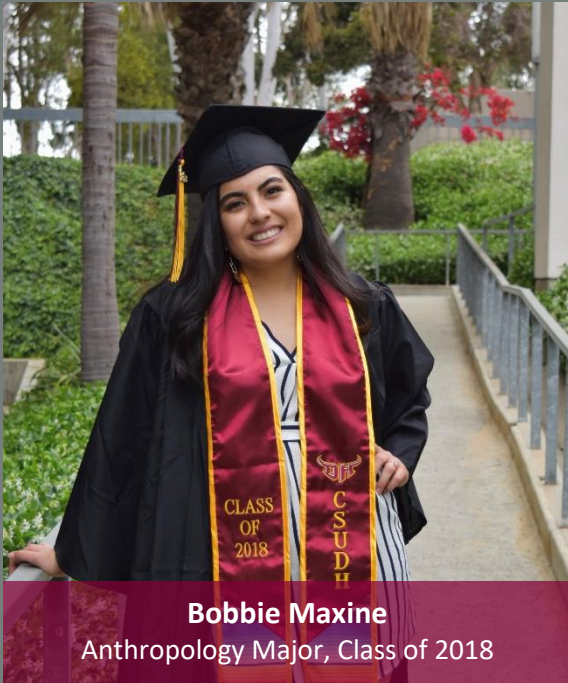
Anthropology Major, Class of 2021

As decision day was getting close, I woke up one morning to see a "congratulations" email from a graduate program I had applied to. I was so anxious and instantly checked my NSF portal, and a wave of happiness and relief was brought over me. I was in tears to know that I was now able to join the Department of Geography at UT Austin where I will be working with remarkable geographers, hydrologists and Mayanists. The NSF GRFP award is an amazing opportunity that has allowed me to follow my dreams to continue studying Maya natural resource management strategies using geospatial methods at one of the top programs in the country conducting this specific research. The GRFP award, gives me the financial support I need to study alongside advisors that will help me achieve my research goals. I am one step closer to reaching my goals of becoming a research professor at a university and I plan to give my students the same opportunities and mentorship I had during my undergraduate career.

At CSUDH I was welcomed with open arms by Dr. Sarah Lacy in the Anthropology Department and immediately got involved in independent research alongside her. I was then able to pick up a geography minor and had multiple courses with Dr. Parveen

Chhetri. When Dr. Kenneth Seligson got hired onto the Anthropology Department, I learned that he had LiDAR data I could use to apply skills from my geospatial information techniques class and applied it to current archaeological research. This first started off as an independent research study to help me gain skills applicable to the real world, but later became a passion. I could not have done this without the support of my three faculty advisors who have been amazing in providing me with research mentorship. Thanks to this research I had something to build upon when applying for the NSF GRFP. I worked for months on my application materials, and it was all worth it in the end. I also had support from the McNair Scholars advisors, Dr. Michelle Martinez and Gabby Montes. With McNair's support, I was able to build on my graduate school application materials before applying, as well as budget my time appropriately for GRE study sessions, writing, and time for myself. Aside from my DH mentors I had my parents as well who put everything on the line to come to the United States to give me these amazing opportunities I now have.

To other students currently feeling the stress of applying for graduate programs, I would tell them to push through and you will get there! This all takes time, patience, and faith. As a first-generation college student, I did not really have anyone to pave the path for me and guide me through this process. So, for anyone else experiencing this, I would suggest reaching out to professors. Do not be afraid to ask for help and openly express your interest in pursuing research and graduate school. Every professor I have talked to is super interested in helping students pursue their dreams. Additionally, do not let any setbacks hold you back. At one point during my community college career, I had a GPA below a 2.0. Once I transferred to DH I worked alongside my mentors and academic advisors to see every option available to get my GPA up. This involved work on my part to take as many classes as I could to get my GPA up. Time management was also key and required balancing work, research, and courses. Lastly, don't be afraid to apply to opportunities. My advisor let me know I should celebrate the "No's" I receive because it at least means I tried, and eventually I will get a "Yes". If I would have allowed my thoughts of me thinking I would not get the GRFP award take over, I would have never applied and would have never been given this amazing opportunity I now have.



Bobbie Maxine
Anthropology Major, Class of 2018

The NSF-GRFP has provided me with additional financial support to continue my doctoral research project. This fellowship has opened many doors in terms of flexibility to conduct fieldwork during the course of my study and allows me to meet additional requirements such as teaching and other assistantships. I am going into my 3rd year as a PhD student in the field of Biological Anthropology at Northwestern University. A large part of this journey was possible through my personal and professional development at CSUDH.

I began my undergraduate career at Long Beach City College and transferred to CSUDH after declaring my major in Anthropology, with a concentration in Biological Anthropology. There, I was able to participate in several funded research opportunities with the guidance of professors in the Anthropology department. In 2017, I received a competitive internship through the Natural History Research Experience program at the Smithsonian

Institution in Washington, D.C. I worked on human skeletal remains investigating oral health and food pathways of Paleo-Native American individuals. These research findings were presented to the American Association Physical Anthropologists in 2018 where I was able to network with potential graduate school advisors.

Shortly after, I had the opportunity to participate on a grant-funded fieldwork project in Ek' Balam, a rural Maya village located in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, with Dr. Sarah Taylor. This research experience sparked my current PhD project – to understand broader political-economic factors contributing to the development of metabolic diseases in Indigenous community settings and potential of Indigenous knowledge systems to mitigate these risks. My time in Ek' Balam significantly impacted my passion to pursue graduate education. My academic success would also not have been possible without Dr. Sarah Lacy. My senior thesis investigated the documentation and acquisition of human skeletal remains in the teaching collection at CSUDH. As I built biological profiles of the remains for this project, Dr. Lacy challenged me to think about the ethical considerations of working with humans, both in past and present contexts. After I graduated, Dr. Lacy and I attended the European Paleopathology Association conference in Croatia, where I presented these findings. My experience at CSUDH has had a profound impact on how I think about ethics, theoretical frameworks, fieldwork methods, and my positionality as a researcher.

I lived with the realities of a low-income status and marginalized identity. As a first-generation high school and college graduate, I worked three jobs to support myself through my undergraduate education. As a Latina, and the great-granddaughter of a Chichimec farmworker, I carry the weight of past generations on my shoulders. I had always felt limited in what I could accomplish and didn't always know what doors I could walk through. CSUDH, and now the NSF-GRFP, have brought me one step closer to being the only person in the history of my family to hold a doctoral degree. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that Hispanic females and people of two or more races remain the most underrepresented groups in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. I remain committed to diversity and inclusion initiatives, seeing that others have opportunities to dream, and encourage students to kick down doors to make it possible.