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Biomedical Engineer in the Making: Marian Jimenez Found New Possibilities at Pima

Marian Yadira Jimenez, a first-generation college student and 2022 Pima grad, is inspiring others to give themselves a chance.

By Kanika Samra, External Relations

Marian Jimenez, born and raised in South Tucson to Mexican immigrants, graduated from Pima in May 2022 with an Associate of Science (AS) in engineering. Today, she is wrapping up her second semester at the University of Arizona (UofA) pursuing a degree in biomedical engineering.

When she'd first enrolled at Pima, Marian had been an accounting major. Her high school chemistry teacher made the subject interesting and sparked her curiosity. But when it came to selecting a major, she went with her first interest, math. Soon after though she found her focus shifting and switched to marketing, then nursing and education. Each major came with its own challenges and never held her interest until she visited a Banner Health facility while working at the YMCA. Even though she was there to chaperon and encourage younger students to engage with careers in healthcare, that visit changed the course of her academic career. The group met a biomedical engineer and Marian was captivated. She made her last and final switch to an AS in engineering after that interaction.



Marian Jimenez
Photo by Tanner Grammar, External Relations

After drifting through college for a few semesters Marian had finally found an area of study that motivated her. It was also then that everything started to fall in place. She found work as a peer mentor at Pima's Desert Vista campus and learned about the [Pima-UAZ STEM Bridge program](#) at an event. She was accepted into the program which helped her transfer to the UofA in fall 2022.

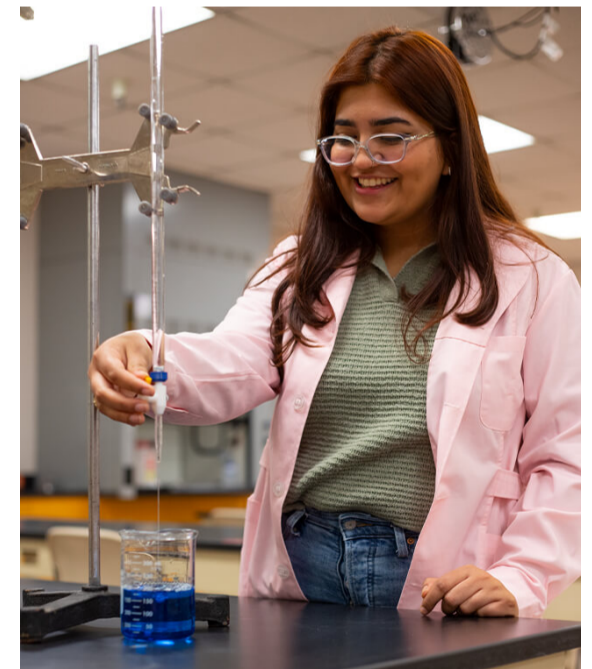
"Because I went to Pima, I was able to do this research, get a good foundation for my math and make connections with other students going through the same thing so, I didn't feel that sense of being alone."

-Marian Jimenez

transfer program students are paired with mentors and required to complete a research internship. Krysta Bready, biology faculty at Pima and Marian's mentor, encouraged her to apply for the Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) run by the Nanotechnology Collaborative Infrastructure Southwest (NCI-Southwest). NCI-Southwest encourages women, first-generation and students from underrepresented minorities to apply; all of which describe Marian. After going through a nail-biting process, she was invited to complete her REU internship at NAU's Center for Material Interfaces in Research Applications (¡MIRA!) in summer 2022.

Moving out of Tucson for the first time, Marian wasn't sure if she'd fit in or how she'd cope. To her surprise, the community at NAU, especially ¡MIRA!, made her feel at home instantly. She found [Pima graduate Jorge Muñoz](#) there and a host of other Latino, Hispanic and South American researchers who shared her language and culture. She also worked on cutting edge research to aid in the development of a non-invasive techniques for breast cancer detection via Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS) of saliva samples. At the end of her internship Marian presented her work at the National Nanotechnology Coordinated Infrastructure (NNCI) REU 2022 Convocation in Kentucky. Jorge, a Ph.D. candidate at NAU, attended the conference remotely and said, "It was clear that in addition to her hard work, her preparation at PCC provided her (Marian) with the tools she needed to meet the challenges in her investigations and deliver a top-notch presentation."

Looking back, Marian isn't surprised at her choppy start. As the first among her family to think of pursuing a four-year degree— her brother is ex-military, and her sister is a dental assistant— she didn't find helpful guidance at home. Luckily, her high school was very clear on one thing: Whether a student chose to pursue a college degree or not, they had to apply and learn about their options. That is how she learned of Pima's programs, and the lower financial burden made it a straightforward choice. Even though she didn't break out of her shell instantly, Marian said, "Because I went to Pima, I was able to do this research in the summer. I was able to get a good foundation for my math, which is very important and make connections with other students going through the same thing as I was. So, I didn't feel like that sense of being alone."



Marian titrates a solution in a lab at Pima's Desert Vista Campus

Photo By Tanner Grammar, External Relations

From increased self-confidence to becoming a motivated self-starter, learning time management skills as well as building a professional network; Marian says her college experience was educational in numerous ways. And she is passing on her wisdom. Last fall

her cousin, whom Marian helped through the application process, was accepted and enrolled at the UofA.

The one piece of advice Marian hopes students follow, is that “if you hear about something, don't be afraid to ask questions because that's how I got here.”

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Like Marian, you too can find your path in a STEM field. With an open mind and curiosity, she followed her interest and is on her way to a promising career. Explore **STEM programs** today!

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