



Samuel Huerta

EDISON HIGH SCHOOL
CLASS OF 2011
UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD
CLASS OF 2016

"You need someone to be there in your corner."

Samuel Huerta graduated from Edison in 2011, and is a recipient of the SAEP Scholarship.

He grew up on the Westside in the 78207 Zip code, right next to the Lincoln Courts. He learned early on that all actions have consequences, and that those impacts can last a lifetime, so he made the decision to keep himself busy and away from choices that could decide his future for him. While at Edison, he chose to do the Pharmacy Magnet program and participated in a variety of sports- all while volunteering. He also took on an externship for his Pharmacy Magnet Program. Because of this, at the end of his senior year he was able to get licensed as a Pharmacy Technician and began working while also enrolling at the University of the Incarnate Word.

UIW provided a great college experience for Samuel. His first few years were covered completely by scholarships and financial aid, and then he worked to fund the rest of his education. The classes were engaging, and a TRIO program provided first generation students like himself counselors and advisors to help encourage academic success. "I wasn't prepared for college. In high school I was always the smartest person, but in college it was a different subject. No one really talked to me about that before going in." But despite initial struggles, through working with his advisors and learning how to change his mindset of what it meant to study in college, he was able to improve his academic performance. He initially started studying Pharmacy, but changed his major to Accounting and graduated with his Master's Degree through a dual program in 2016.

Now, Samuel is an accountant with Valero- and his journey inspires him to continue giving back to others. He started volunteering at the Frank Garrett Center when he was 14 years old, and is now an active member of the Valero Volunteer Council. He has coordinated volunteer projects with many local organizations- Haven for Hope, the San Antonio Foodbank, SAMM Ministries, and United Way are just a few of the organizations he has worked with. In addition, he has taken on mentoring students in SAISD through Communities in Schools. "Many students are going to have hard situations: come from low income households, single parent households and other hard situations. Students are struggling. **But once you open these student's minds to show them that there's more than the environment they're in, they're going to have more grit- they're going to be stronger.**" As he mentors these students, he speaks about the importance of post-secondary access and attainment, "I've talked to hundreds of students about post-secondary. I tell them, 'Go to school- that's going to bridge the gap between being in poverty and breaking out of that.'"

Samuel has had to work for everything he has accomplished, and it has not always been the smoothest journey. "After my first semester of college, I was considering dropping out. No matter what I did, no matter how hard I worked, I would still get bad grades." While he was able to continue on in school, he wants to let students know that they are more than their setbacks, "You have your options. If someone would have told me that, I would have avoided a lot of work for nothing. You can change your major, you can take your time. I have classmates who graduated from high school with me, and weren't able to go to school at the time but are graduating now. And even though it took time- they still did it. You have options."

Samuel shares his story, because he knows how powerful it can be to hear that things are possible. "When we were young, we were told about going to college, and all the opportunities there are. Hearing those things seemed unobtainable. **But having someone talk to you, or mentor you, can show you what's possible. Any money you get will help you go to school, but so can the belief that people have in you.** When you're still young and first gen, you need someone to be there in your corner. Someone who's been through it before, that you can ask to for help."

Samuel created his path to college, and is now guiding others on their paths as well. He lends his time and his experiences to young students, opening their minds to the possibilities that exist for them if they believe in themselves, and work for them.



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