

## Great Minds in STEM Scholarship Program

To the Committee Members:

I was born and raised in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico. My childhood was filled with the culture and harshness of the city. Reynosa is a rough place to live at – violence and lack of financial prosperity is everywhere in the city. However, my parents always brought food, provide shelter, and gave an education for both my brother and me. Even during the hardest times, they were always giving to others with fewer resources than us. They planted a seed of gratitude in me at an early age and taught me to be humble with others. Their actions were the greatest catalysts that started my career while reminding me to always help others. When I got to the age of 13, my parents offered me to move to the United States with my relatives during my High School years. They motivated me to choose this path, and I could not be more thankful to them for the opportunity.

I went through the difficult transition of learning a new language and struggled to get decent grades on my classes. However, everything changed when I joined the Robotics Club sponsored by my chemistry teacher. Motivated by him and my friends, I decided to enter Advanced Placement courses. It was difficult to deal with the language barrier and the rigor of the courses. Every day I stayed after school for tutoring to keep up. After many months, I started to master the English language and was able to succeed in my classes without difficulty. I became a volunteer tutor for my chemistry class, and I started to tutor students for 2.5 years until my graduation and my transition to college.

I entered the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) without family financial support, which led me to obtain multiple jobs to sustain myself. Thankfully, after a year of working in retail/food services, I obtained a job during my sophomore year as a Science Tutor, where I could relive the joy of helping others to understand science. With UTRGV having the highest level of Hispanic students in the nation, I realized that I was not the only one that had to go through the struggle of learning a new language or adapting to a place. Many students went through this, but I knew there was a substantial difference I could make. I helped them not only in tutoring, but in communicating, mentorships, and in life/career advice. With this, more people started to look for me in search of advice or instruction. It got to the point where I would hold volunteer study sessions in which I would have groups of students putting their extra time in my hands. Many students got their grades up thanks to my teachings, and many others obtained scholarships or internships from my advice. I moved to work as both tutor and teacher assistant, where my level of responsibilities and desire to help others increased. It was difficult at first, but I never quit on teaching somebody who is eager to learn. During my undergraduate career I had many volunteering experiences such as HESTEC (Hispanic Engineering Science and Technology week), where I would participate with different organizations such as the Physics Association or the Society of Hispanics Professional Engineers, in order to motivate many young students to obtain a degree in STEM fields.

Currently, I am a graduate student working on a doctoral degree at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. Since my enrollment here, I have been in touch with many students from UTRGV, where I have encouraged them to pursue a graduate degree. Similarly, I have been working with

professors to do information sessions or presentations where I keep reaching out to more students to pursue graduate studies as well. My commitment to volunteering, student enrichment, and sharing my experiences with others led me to aspire to become a professor with a focus in transportation and vehicle dynamics. My aim is to provide back to my community and help others to realize their aspirations. I want to inspire a new generation of Hispanic and underprivileged students in STEM fields, specifically in transportation, safety, and vehicle dynamics. It is my objective to obtain an academic professor position at a university where I can do what I have done for so many years, teach, encourage, and provide opportunities for disadvantaged students.

Now my goal is to help as many students as I can as a professor. To help students and engage teams to collaborate. To demonstrate that regardless of where you come from, or how difficult a past can be. The future is always bright and innovative, and it only takes determination to make that into a reality. The determination was taught by my parents. The knowledge I obtained through my education. Finally, the inspiration I have obtained from helping so many students that one day will help me change the world.

Sincerely,

Ricardo Jacome