

Majo Orozco Fuentes: Renaissance Girl Pursues a PhD!

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From Mexico City to UWC Armenia, Lake Forest College to Yale, Majo has put her best foot forward wherever she has gone. When she came to LFC in 2020 as a pre-med student, she could have never expected to find herself where she is now. Reflecting on this uncertainty, Majo said, "I feel like going back to my freshman year, my first college class, I never would have expected myself to be first of all in grad school, second of all, for a PhD, and third of all, at Yale?" A vibrant journey of self-discovery, research experience, and mentorship brought her to her current program in Yale's Biological and Biomedical Sciences.

Maria Jose Orozco Fuentes declared a psychology major in the fall of 2020, adding on a neuroscience major the following spring. As she engaged with more psychology courses, she became unsure of where to end up. Would it be clinical psychology, medical school, a master's program, or a PhD? Majo began her Richter scholar program in Dr. Delventhal's lab with her future still up in the air. Throughout the rest of her time at Lake Forest College, Majo dedicated immeasurable time, effort, and passion to these relationships and research projects. She is working on two manuscripts in this lab, one about her thesis project, writing about the knockout of EMC-4 in *Drosophila*, and another project, with which she has taken a backseat role, helping run experiments and collect data. Majo's thesis project came from her discovery while working in the lab: "I noticed one day, when I came into the lab, that the flies that had the EMC-4 knockdown in glial cells were dying, and they were not supposed to." Majo decided to focus on the function of this gene, leading to many follow-up experiments and discoveries.

As for her other papers, Majo was a dedicated member of the Eukaryon journal, writing her feature article each year, submitting an outstanding report from her developmental biology class, and even serving as the chair of the Review Board. She has carried this passion to graduate school and is now a part of the Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine.

Majo decided to attend Yale for a myriad of reasons. "I intentionally applied to umbrella programs... I did not want to necessarily apply to Neuroscience or Molecular Biology because I feel like my interests are very interdisciplinary." One program that interested her happened to be at Yale, a fact that both scared her and filled her with excitement. Majo explained that some advised her to apply to more safety schools, knowing Yale is a reach school, but she asserts that there is no safety net regarding graduate school. On this topic, she notes: "Schools that value you- you should be there." In all her interviews for Yale, Majo felt "seen as a human rather than just a number or a researcher." No other program she applied to placed her in this light. When she was accepted into the program, Majo knew she had found her place.

Coincidentally, Yale was also the Alma Mater of Dr. Becky Delventhal, Majo's Richter scholarship professor and dedicated mentor at Lake Forest. Majo would joke with Dr. Delventhal by comparing her to Rory Gilmore, a TV character known for being an overachiever and attending Yale. Beneath all the playful banter, Majo got closer to an admirable professor who allowed her to see dream schools like Yale as a reality. "I feel like Yale was an idea, but she made me feel like it was possible." Majo urges students to build strong relationships with their professors, as they are also human beings and quite friendly.

When reflecting on her journey, Majo wishes she had taken things one step at a time rather than living in the tension and the pressure of it all. It is easy to fall into autopilot and simply carry out the necessary motions of the day. Majo advises current students: "Sometimes you just need to learn how to float, you know? Not swim. Just sit there and float in the middle of everything. I wish maybe I could have done a little bit

more of that." She also asserts that asking for help is incredibly important- whether it is to alumni, friends, or faculty- it is always worth reaching out.

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