

“From the Fields of Immokalee to Harvard’s Campus—One Student’s Journey”

Alexander Garcia spent his childhood dreaming of something more, something big. Like many of his fellow classmates in Immokalee, Garcia’s family has roots in agriculture. “I remember going with my parents to the fields. I think that’s where I started realizing the disparity within the community.” Garcia’s mother now has a shop of her own at the local bodegas and his father works construction. Neither of his parents graduated high school. When Garcia walks the stage this spring, he’ll be the first in his family to graduate high school and go to college. The oldest of four boys, he hopes his brothers look up to him as an example.

“It’s life-changing for me and my family,” shared Garcia when asked about college. “I think with a degree I’ll have more opportunities to provide for my family and give back to the world in terms of charity work.”

With his love for learning, Garcia began researching his options for college. While the University of Florida was top on the list, Harvard was also in the back of his mind. A few years earlier, Garcia’s cousin Jennyfer was accepted to the school and began her academic journey at one of the most respected and prestigious colleges in the country. “Had my cousin not done it, I probably wouldn’t have even applied. It really opened up something in me, and it let me know that if she could do it—I could, too.” And that’s just what he did!

When asked about the moment he found out he was accepted, “I jumped and screamed so loud! My parents thought I was having a heart attack or something. It was crazy!” When Garcia shared the news with Immokalee High School counselor Kelli Gamez, she began crying, and despite COVID-19 she gave Garcia the biggest hug. “We’re so excited for him. He’s just that kid you want to clone—the one that does his work, he participates...just that ray of sunshine in your class.”

“I want to tell my story,” Garcia added. “I want people to know it’s possible.”

The charismatic 17-year-old from Immokalee explained that growing up, there weren’t many resources available or people to talk to in terms of his sizable goals. “I want to be that for someone,” shared Garcia.

He noted that the community has come a long way since then, with different programs and mentorships now available in Immokalee. To help in that effort, Garcia offers science mentorship to younger students in the community. “Growing up, I didn’t have many science mentors. I often wonder if I’ve reached my full potential or if having a mentor would have expanded my knowledge.” That sentiment is why he gives back to the kids in his community, engaging them in science topics, giving lectures, and even completing experiments with them. “That’s something I love a lot, working with these kids and trying to get them excited about science. It’s important to plant the seed when they’re young so they can dream big. That’s important to me.”

Financial aid is helping Garcia on his academic journey, and he is also busy finding scholarships. His cousin Jennyfer will be graduating this year with a degree in Economics. Garcia's ultimate goal is to become a doctor. "I want to serve an underprivileged community like Immokalee. I hope to do something in primary care."

"He's going to shine," adds Gamez smiling brightly.