My academic journey as a first-generation student has been a transformative experience, not only shaping my determination to pursue a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology but also inspiring my commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion. This dedication is instilled by my goal to become a principal investigator within academia, where I aim to build and mentor a diverse research environment for students passionate about science.

This journey began at Pasadena City College, where I faced formidable challenges as a first-generation student navigating higher education. It was there that I found myself on academic probation due to a lack of guidance, mismanaging my courses while balancing a full-time job and military service. However, I persevered, actively seeking the necessary guidance, and support I desperately needed. Through my resiliency, I not only overcame academic probation but also improved my GPA in ways I had not thought possible. This experience instilled a sense of understanding and compassion for students facing similar challenges, sparking my dedication and commitment to student support and mentorship.

Since transferring to California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) I have continued to excel in my academic journey as I actively participate in undergraduate research. Initially I intended to enroll as a nursing major, but due to the competitive nature of the program I was instead offered the opportunity to enroll as a biology major. This was a blessing in disguise. After being exposed to different fields within biology, I was inspired to take research-based courses and gain firsthand experience in research. Having caught the research “bug”, I have now gained experience from being the lead on a molecular plant biology project to collaborating with peers on a separate molecular soil ecology project at CSUSM. Through these experiences, I not only developed my skills in research but also refined my interests, particularly sparking an interest in microbial ecology.

Wanting to expand on my research experience outside of CSUSM, I participated in the 2023 Stanford Summer Research Program where I had the opportunity to experience molecular cellular biology research in ribosomal quality control. Initially I was hesitant to apply as I struggled to see myself at Stanford University working at an R1 institution. I felt overwhelmed by imposter syndrome as a first-generation student and as a person of color in science. However, I overcame these doubts with the encouragement of my mentors and by trusting in my growth as a scientist, removing any doubts in my capabilities as a researcher as I actively pursue graduate school to accomplish my goals.

In addition to my experiences in research, I have gained leadership experience through my involvement in the TRIO McNair program at CSUSM. This services students from underserved communities in higher education and works on preparing participants for graduate school through a series of professional development trainings and workshops. I have been a participant in the program since Spring 2022 and assumed a student leadership role in Spring 2023 to mentor new McNair Scholars and assist the McNair staff in programming events. I am regularly involved in recruitment events, where I am able to connect with other transfer students, military veteran students, and STEM students who are also interested in growing in their preparation for graduate school. Additionally, I have been working within the CSUSM campus as a course embedded learning support (CELS) facilitator for Molecular Cell Biology, which includes two weekly classroom discussions where I facilitate peer-to-peer learning. My experience in supporting student learning and my background are assets that can help me in the future, as I can connect with a community of diverse students to help support their goals.

Through my academic journey and experience as a first-generation student, I have gained a unique perspective and resiliency. Drawing from these experiences, I am confident in my ability to foster a diverse and inclusive environment at Oregon State University while pursuing my Ph.D. Plant Pathology, with the ultimate aim of becoming a principal investigator within academia. Having overcome academic challenges and self-doubt, I recognize the significance of establishing a supportive space for individuals of all backgrounds. I believe I can contribute to building this supportive diverse environment through my experience, leadership roles, and passion for mentoring undergraduate students, creating a welcoming environment, ensuring all students can excel.