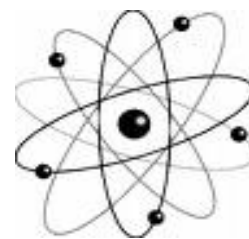


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SACNAS Impacts MU Post-Doc

By Alisa Warren, Minority Science Student Coordinator

Dr. Elene Valdivia is a Postdoctoral Fellow working on plant development with Dr. John Walker. She grew up in San Francisco, and earned a B.A. in Art from San Francisco State University. "Back when I went to high school Chicano girls did not go into science. You worked to eat and did not get to do what you liked. The choices were the teaching, nursing, or staying at home to raise children. I did not have to take Algebra because they said 'you wouldn't need it anyway'. Most of my friends stayed at home and had kids. My school did not have the resources like tutors and computers like the schools with money. Only two or three of my high school friends even went to college from a class of over 700 hundred kids," explains Dr. Valdivia.

"Dr. Frank Bayliss, a faculty member at San Francisco State University headed the MARC program. He always took students to the Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) meetings. I had not planned to go into science, but SACNAS was a great place to meet people, learn about summer internships and mentoring programs, and receive newsletters with stories about people and how they got into graduate school," says Dr. Valdivia.

Dr. Valdivia was a pioneer in her family and for women! "No one in my family ever had a science related career. I was inspired for the first time when I worked for five years as a freelance photographer at the University of California, San Francisco Department of Anatomy Research Facility. I became interested in science for the first time when I was around a group of women in science at the University of California- San Francisco Department of Anatomy. Dr. Dianne Ralston was my mentor and always asked me questions about how to photograph things and she always explained what she was doing to me. I was in constant awe over the women who went to battle with men and actually said 'I think you are wrong'. At first I thought, "I can't believe she said that to a man!" Dr. Valdivia said.



Dr. Elene Valdivia

This experience gave Elene Valdivia the confidence to pursue and complete her PhD in Biology and Plant Physiology at Penn State. Although she still enjoys taking photographs of plants and special events in her spare time, she now focuses on science with a worldwide audience. In November, Dr. Valdivia is giving a series of scientific talks in Madrid and Santiago, Spain on plant development and plant physiology. She is the invited guest of Dr. Ignacio Zarra at the University of Santiago. "Sometimes I still second guess myself a lot, and I can't believe that people are actually listening to me!" she says laughingly.

"A PhD indicates that you know a lot about one thing. It gives you the freedom to think, try new things, learn new things, and question standard protocols. I like the idea of learning something new all the time. I like doing research! Even during the frustrating times when things don't go right or you get great results but don't what do with it. So you just do more reading and eventually figure it out! My advice young scientists is to keep your mind open to new ideas, ask a lot of questions, and try something new. Don't just stick to what you know. Get out of your comfort zone--you might just surprise yourself," Dr. Valdivia confesses.

"We would like to start a SACNAS Chapter here at Mizzou because it played an integral role in my life. I have been a

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Website of the Month: Check out this useful website for undergraduates, graduates, post-docs, and faculty mentors!

SACNAS member for ten years. It would be open to everyone in science, engineering, and behavioral sciences. Since there is no MARC program at MU, SACNAS could do the same thing. Several students have already expressed an interest in getting involved and Biology professor Dr. Michael Garcia has agreed to be the faculty advisor. Last year there were 14 new SACNAS chapters nationally."

The mission of SACNAS (Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science) is to encourage Chicano/ Latino and Native American students to pursue graduate education and obtain the advanced degrees necessary for science research, leadership, and teaching careers at all levels. For over 30 years, SACNAS has provided strong national leadership in improving and expanding opportunities for minorities in the scientific workforce and academia; mentoring college students within science, mathematics and engineering; as well as, supporting quality pre-college science education.

The first meeting will be in mid November. For more information about SACNAS contact Dr. Elene Valdivia at: valdiviae@missouri.edu

