

First-Year Student Researcher to Pursue Passion for Helping People of Color

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Photo courtesy of Shari Linares

Shari Linares is anything but an average first-year undergraduate student. As she transitions from high school to college, Linares has already begun to build a strong foundation in psychology research that can be used to improve the lives of those around her.

Linares is a graduate of InTech Colligate Academy, a Logan high school that focuses on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education and preparing students for their future academic careers.

“InTech itself was very much a challenge,” said Linares. “However, it pushed me to become better in my classes, more responsible, and gave me the curiosity I would need to further my scholastic career.”

Through concurrent enrollment, an option offered at InTech, Linares was able to take classes on campus at USU for both high school and college credit. This gave her a jump-start on some of the general education requirements for a bachelor’s degree and helped her save on tuition costs for those credits. She says attending courses at USU pushed her outside of her comfort zone and allowed her to meet new people.

As part of her high school course work, Linares partnered with Psychology Professor Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodríguez and the Culture and Mental Health Lab at USU. With their support, she completed a major research project

that was presented at the regional science fair where it won first place.

“Melanie has been nothing but supportive of me and my fascination within psychology, and has encouraged me to follow my passions, my major research project being one of them,” said Linares. “She has opened doors and given me opportunities that I never thought possible, and I have been able to connect with more people than I ever thought possible.”

Linares’ junior project focused on stress factors that affect students. Her research found that students with higher workloads, employment, and increased homework had higher levels of stress. She also found an indication that students of color had higher levels of stress than their white male counterparts, even with identical workloads. Linares’ senior project worked to reduce discrimination-based stress in students. She plans to continue this line of inquiry as she pursues a bachelor’s degree in psychology at USU this fall.

“Following the news and seeing how the pandemic has worsened social disparities and seeing its debilitating effect on lower-income minorities who are unable to afford health care or safe work conditions truly frustrates me,” said Linares. “The pandemic has taken its toll, but I believe that it has given us an opportunity to improve these types of disparities.”

Linares says that her research has helped her realize a passion for helping people of color, a desire to creating safe spaces and places where individuals can share experiences, and given her insight into her future career.

“I have so much more confidence, and I know that what I am doing is very important,” said Linares. “Being able to make a difference within my community has proven that.”

Armed with a passion for research and the drive to make an impact in her community, Linares is excited to get back to her education and continue her research alongside those who have impacted her.

“Melanie and her wonderful grad students in the Culture & Mental Health Lab have truly lifted me to my highest potential,” said Linares. “I never would have thought that I, a Utah-born Latina woman, would be able to impact the world as I have so far. They have opened my eyes to psychology and that is something I will be forever grateful for.”

Since the publication of this article, Linares has been selected as an [Undergraduate Research Fellow](#) at Utah State University. She will join a community of researchers across disciplines and receive additional support from the Office of Research as well as faculty, graduate student mentors, and peers. The fellowship comes with a scholarship of \$1000 annually for up to four years of education.