

Violet Barton

Candidate Statement for President

Graduate Student Association

University of California Merced

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When I was 17 years old, a brutal [un]civil war in El Salvador disrupted my life. While my family fled to the United States, being forcibly displaced by war meant that I would face many barriers to completing my education, for years. My father worked as a custodian at UC Berkeley and impressed upon me the importance of an education. I remember walking on this campus feeling overwhelmed by the impossibilities of getting a PhD education. After many interruptions in my academic journey, because of my lack of money, I was able to complete my education at California State University, Hayward (now East Bay). With a double master's degree in Public Policy Development and Health Care Administration, I worked several years in health care and in a non-profit organization, advocating for survivors of sexual and domestic violence in the Bay Area. Now, I have returned to graduate school to work towards my Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Humanities. I consider myself a non-traditional student, a student with disabilities, a mother, an Indigenous descendant (Nahuat-Pipil), and a refugee. My research is focused on Nahuat-Pipil womxn in El Salvador, and their experiences of displacement, dispossession, and survivance in the aftermath of war. In 2018-2019, I was fortunate to return to my homeland for over 10 months to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, thanks to the generosity of the Fulbright U.S. Student Program Study/Research grant. When I think of all the opportunities and challenges graduate students face as we attempt to reach our educational goals and dreams, I am inspired by the dedication of my peers who work very hard and pour their passions into their research day after day, despite many limitations, while building community with one another. If elected GSA President, I would dedicate myself to listening and weaving your stories to map out a graduate and professional student agenda that humanizes and represents our collective interests as a diverse community of researchers, workers, and students.

I am a passionate and committed advocate for enhancing our graduate experiences at UC Merced. I have previously served as the graduate student representative for the CARE Advisory

Board, the Chancellor's Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, and Inclusion (CCCI), the Graduate Dean's Advisory Council on Diversity (GDACD), and the GSA Constitution and Bylaws Committee. I also served as a Student Advocate to the UC Regents (StAR), a member of the Anti-Oppression Committee, the Guide for the Executive Board of UAW 2865, and the graduate student representative for the systemwide University Committees on Affirmative Action, Diversity, and Equity (UCAADE) and Academic Freedom (UCAF). I have also co-founded several graduate student organizations/clubs on campus, such as the Graduate Students of Color Coalition (GSOCC), the Latinx Graduate Student Association (LGSA), and the Refugee Coalition. In these roles, I have worked to co-create welcoming spaces for all graduate students by centering on a campus climate that is diverse and inclusive, and the creation of the Graduate Cultural Resource Center (GCRC) in COB II 190. In 2017 and 2018, I received the UC Merced social Justice Leadership Award, the Outstanding Women's Award, and I was selected as *Student Advocate of the Year* by the UC Student Association (UCSA), on behalf of 250,000 UC students.

As our GSA President, I will maintain a productive working environment and focus on increasing transparency and accountability of our Association by making our processes more democratic and inclusive among graduate students to further build community with stakeholders across campus. I will center my efforts on advocating for the personal and professional needs of graduate students across disciplines, such as: food, housing, transportation, mental health, childcare, health access, and our education, as we navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic to make recommendations to the university to ameliorate these negative impacts. I hope to create more solidarity and unity among graduate students at UC Merced, and help humanize our amazing contributions to the university, the community, and UC as a whole. Our GSA, a place for everyone! Thank you for your vote! Tashtawi miak muchí né!