

# Success and inspiration through NMSU Honors College

Summary

Haylee Viramontes, a 2021 Gadsden High School graduate, credits her success to the support of her community and the opportunities provided by the NMSU Honors College. Through programs like the Conroy Honors Scholar and McNair Scholars Program, Viramontes gained confidence, pursued research in cybersecurity, and studied abroad in Japan. Now pursuing a master's degree in information security at Carnegie Mellon University, Viramontes aims to earn a Ph.D. and make a significant impact in her field.

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Haylee Viramontes always had dreams that reached much farther than Anthony, New Mexico, the small, rural town where she grew up.

“In high school, I really pushed myself. I was very competitive, for myself and for my family most of all,” said Viramontes, a 2021 Gadsden High School graduate and TRIO Upward Bound participant. “The community of Anthony is super supportive, and if you want to spread your wings and branch out, people will support you and be happy for you. I think that’s what helped me a lot.”

Despite starting her higher education journey at New Mexico State University thinking she was no longer going to be as competitive as she was in high school, a conversation with NMSU Honors College Dean Phame Camarena changed that.

“Haylee was in the first cohort of our Conroy Honors Scholar and TRIO-McNair Scholar programs, and her experience represents the best of what these programs can be for students willing to be bold and take advantage of the opportunities NMSU Honors provides,” Camarena said. “I have every faith that Haylee will make a difference in the world for good, which is something all of NMSU can be proud of, too.”

After participating in the Conroy Honors Scholar Program and the McNair Scholars Program and being awarded a Boren Scholarship to study abroad in Japan, Viramontes graduated from NMSU in May and began studying for her master’s degree in information security at Carnegie Mellon University this fall. Last week, she was named a CMU Rales Fellow, which supports scholars across more than 120 eligible STEM master’s and doctoral programs at CMU.

“When you think of honors, you think of harder classes, but I’ve learned that honors is an enrichment in your professional and personal life,” Viramontes said. “It’s interesting to me to think about where I came from and realize that it’s all because of the people I’ve come across who helped me get here, to where I am now.”

Viramontes said one key experience that has helped inspire her is traveling abroad. Her first Faculty-Led International Program was a two-week journey with Camarena and other students to London, Amsterdam and Berlin, something she never thought she’d experience due to fear. Following that program, she joined a small group of fellow FLIP students on a trip to Paris, Venice and Rome.

“Personally, it gave me a lot of confidence to navigate uncertain situations, circumstances and places, and gave me a bigger view of the world,” Viramontes said, adding that she had dreamed of traveling to Paris since she

was 11 years old. "It really brought me closer to the opportunities that are out there. Traveling opens your worldview because you see and experience things that you never thought were possible."

The following summer, Viramontes spent 10 weeks in Japan. She enrolled in an intensive language school and spent seven and a half weeks in Tokyo, where she was on her own. She called the experience "one of the most transformative experiences for me. I really pushed myself out of my comfort zone."

As an NMSU student, Viramontes worked on a research project that focused on cybersecurity for water systems in New Mexico. She presented her research poster at conferences at NMSU, the University of Maryland and the University of Washington. Last summer, she was accepted into the University of Connecticut's Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, where she worked on a U.S. Navy-sponsored cybersecurity project. She was also named the public relations officer for the Cybersecurity Club at NMSU.

Viramontes said that her end goal is earning a Ph.D., continuing her research and making a big impact in her field, possibly working for the federal government and protecting national security. And if she had to repeat any of her experiences, she would do everything all over again.

"My visions have always been big," Viramontes said. "One thing that I want to encourage others to do is do something that scares you. I was really scared of traveling abroad, but I did it anyway. I hope people see my experiences and are inspired to do the same and let go of the fear and self-barriers."