



Associated Colleges of Illinois

Edith Mercado
Elmhurst University
ACI General Scholarship



With dreams of being a physician, Edith Mercado of Genoa, Illinois, decided to study biology at [Elmhurst University](#) with minors in environmental science and Spanish, she says. She chose Elmhurst University because of the quality of the college's science programs.

"The science programs here, I feel like they're really advanced compared to my high school back home. To be able to succeed in the class, you have to be able to explain what we're learning to someone else. If you can do that, that means you know the material," Mercado says.

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Compared to many science students, Mercado's career interests are unusual. "I want to become an optometrist," she says. "Vision is so important. You look at life through your eyes, you know. So that's what interests me the most with optometry." After earning her

undergraduate degree, Mercado says she'd like to attend the Illinois College of Optometry in Chicago.

Mercado, a first-generation sophomore student, is a resident advisor this year, where she manages a floor in a campus residence hall. She also competes with the college's track-and-field team, as a sprinter and hurdler, which she has been doing since middle school. "I like to challenge myself physically, mentally and with classes. The feeling of overcoming that barrier is so good -- just a great feeling, which is why I love track and I love running," Mercado says. She has also participated in Habitat for Humanity activities and worked as a tutor for students taking general and organic chemistry classes.

Her ACI scholarship was helpful because she had used up other scholarships, and the tuition payments were hard to handle. Mercado is the oldest of four children in the family, including one brother and two sisters. "So, we had to pay \$4,000 last year," Mercado says. "It doesn't sound like much, but it is much coming from a family that doesn't make a lot of money because both of my parents, they didn't get high school degrees or college degrees. But when I found out I won the scholarship, it was such a relief because we didn't have to pay that much. It helped out with this year, too."

Like many college students, Mercado funds most of her education with grants, loans and scholarships. She is grateful for donors who contribute funds to help students. "I wouldn't be here without them," she says. "And, thank you so much for donating and realizing that there are many students like me who need the money in order to continue their education, especially first-generation students."