

WSU News

January 24, 2022

Adelante Scholar talks about her journey to WSU

By Tessa Karbowski, Strategic Communications Intern



Valeria Paunetto, originally from Puerto Rico, won the Adelante scholarship and plans to pursue a degree in social work.

Valeria Paunetto was sifting through her email when she saw an application for the Adelante Scholarship. She doubted her chances but decided to apply anyway.

After a couple of weeks, Valeria received a call. She picked it up and learned that she had won a \$20,000 Adelante Scholarship to attend Wichita State University. She is part of the first group at Wichita State University to receive the Adelante scholarship and wants to be an example to future candidates.

“It’s been a rollercoaster — an experience with its ups and downs, but I am here now and that is the important thing,” said Valeria, a freshman studying social work at Wichita State.

Adelante, which means to move forward, is a scholarship offered to people of minority backgrounds who demonstrate the promise of a bright future.

"When I got this scholarship, it was really something that changed my life. That was the moment where I realized all my hard work paid off and if I can do it anyone can."

—Valeria Paunetto

Valeria was born in Puerto Rico and lived there most of her life until 2016 when she moved to Wichita with her family and began attending middle school.

“I had to both speak and write in English 24/7,” Valeria said. “It was a difficult transition, but I made it through my first year with good grades after a lot of tears and hard work.”

Unfortunately, Valeria recounts that her high school not only lacked diversity, but she also still struggled with bullying and discrimination.

“I had a reality check in high school,” Valeria said. “I realized I can either let this get to me and give them the pleasure that they just let a person of color down, or I can show them that those stereotypes and hate are not going to do anything to me.”

Despite these challenges, Valeria is proud of what she has been able to accomplish.

“As a Latina woman, I definitely walk around campus with my head up high letting people know that when I walk into a room, that I am Latina, and more specifically, that I am Puerto Rican,” Valeria said. “It is very dear to my heart.”

For Valeria, receiving the Adelante Scholarship validated all the efforts she had made as a student, and how important it was that she persevered.

“When I got this scholarship, it was something that changed my life,” Valeria said. “That was the moment where I realized all my hard work paid off, and if I can do, it anyone can.”

After graduation, Valeria wants to use her degree in social work to open a private practice to help Hispanic families by providing mental health services.

For future students wishing to apply for the Adelante Scholarship, Valeria offers encouragement.

“You deserve to be in the place that you are. If you are asking yourself, ‘Do I deserve to be here?’, realize that you do because you have worked hard, and you don’t have to prove that to anyone else but yourself.”