



Valencia College Board of Trustees Foundation Report December 7, 2023

Fall 2023 Distinguished Grad

When Andy Silva was a kid in Venezuela, she dreamed of becoming an astronaut and, by middle school, she had turned her attention toward becoming a psychologist. Though her career goals changed, there was one constant: College was always in the plans.

That is, until she was 13 years old, and all those plans were nearly upended when her family fled Venezuela after being politically persecuted by the government. Moving to the United States, Andy spent most of her high school years wrestling with a dilemma familiar to many immigrant families. Her parents had given up everything for their children's future, but that future hinged on college – and Andy had no idea how to pay for it.

Today, Andy Silva is one step closer to realizing her dream. In August, she graduated from Valencia College and has been named Valencia College's Summer/Fall 2023 Distinguished Graduate.

Andy arrived in the United States knowing some English, but her English was rudimentary at best. English classes and writing essays were a struggle. Even making friends was difficult. By high school, though, Andy had begun to find her stride. Her English had improved, and she zeroed in on her studies.

However, college seemed like a distant dream for Andy. Thankfully, one of her teachers at Boone High School told her that students in Valencia's Seneff Honors College can receive a scholarship. From the small classes to the relationships that she developed with her instructors and classmates; Andy began to blossom.

She joined Valencia College's Student Government and eventually became Student Government President of the East Campus. There, she focused on helping student clubs rebound after the pandemic and increased the number of clubs from 12 to more than 30 during her term in SGA (Student Government Association).

Today, Andy is studying psychology at the University of Central Florida, where she is president of the UCF (University of Central Florida) (University of Central Florida) Transfer club ("Transfer Knights"), a student in the Burnett Honors College, and a scholar in the prestigious Ronald E. McNair scholars' program. She is working part-time in a research lab studying team cognition for astronauts – and she is working on her Honors Undergraduate Thesis on simulator training for astronauts. More than a decade later, she has come back to her childhood fascination with astronauts.

"Many of us," she says, "have found our way to Valencia College looking for more than was given to us, because being at Valencia is an opportunity a lot bigger than most of us can imagine."