



Kate Gienapp

Yazmin Molina, seen here, graduates from Western this coming Saturday with a dual degree in sociology and Spanish and an emphasis in criminal justice.

## Acting upon an opportunity

### DACA recipient earns degree from Western

Kate Gienapp  
Times Staff Writer

Yazmin Molina was 7 years old when she came to live in the United States, and like a lot of families that move to the Gunnison Valley, Molina's never left.

Yet, like other immigrants brought to the country as chil-

once again with his daughter Dalia by his side, Fernando decided to seek out opportunities — and safety — in the

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quickly got used to the serenity of a small mountain town. It wasn't unusual for her little brother, Fernando Jr., to walk to school by himself and ride his bike around town — practices that were unheard of in their hometown of Juárez.

“It was definitely a different culture coming from a very dangerous city to a very small peaceful town,” she explained.

**‘Gunnison is so welcoming’**

Molina graduated from Gunnison High School in 2014. And with the help of her family and the community, she

dren, Molina's future remained uncertain.

"It wasn't until our junior year of high school that I understood I was different than everybody else," said Molina, who was unable to apply for financial aid as an undocumented immigrant. "I was actually thinking about taking a few years off and coming back with the money that I needed but my mom said, 'Absolutely not.'"

When President Obama authorized the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2014, Molina was able to consider attending college here.

And that she did. Molina was accepted to Western State Colorado University, where for the last four years she's worked toward a dual degree in sociology and Spanish with an emphasis in criminal justice. She graduates this coming Saturday.

Prior to moving to the U.S., Molina, who was born in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, was no stranger to the states. She had previously entered the country to see family on a visitor's visa.

Ciudad Juárez sits across the border from El Paso, Texas, separated by the remains of the Rio Grande River flowing slowly through the concrete channels. The sister cities are close, even though they are separated by an invisible border.

Molina's father Fernando worked as a taxi driver in Ciudad Juárez and was robbed at gunpoint on more than one occasion. After being robbed

## Yazmin Molina

United States.

Upon the suggestion of family that resided in Colorado, he decided to give the Gunnison Valley a go. The rest of the family followed shortly after, with Molina and her two siblings, Fernando Jr. and Dalia, enrolling in school.

"It was really difficult at first, but I picked up the language very quickly at that age," said Molina, who spoke only Spanish upon entering the country as a child.

### Caught between cultures

The language barrier itself builds two different worlds — one of a person's previous culture, and one of the new.

"You go home and you speak Spanish," explained Molina. "You go to school and all you speak is English."

The culture of Gunnison couldn't compare to the big city that Molina and her family had known their entire lives. For starters, small town antics are a little different from the cityscape of Juárez, which has earned a reputation for gangs and drug cartels.

"My mom wouldn't even let us cross the street sometimes, because she was born and raised in Juárez as well, so she always had that mentality that it was very dangerous out there," Molina recalled.

Yet, Molina and her family

began the process of becoming a DACA recipient, or "Dreamer." She collected records from doctors and dentists and filed piles of paperwork.

Molina says Western has been immensely helpful to her and other DACA recipients by offering guidance and scholarships for Dreamers. A big reason Molina feels at home here is the community.

"Gunnison is so welcoming," she said. "In other cities, I can see how there is a lot of fear."

Still, it's hard hearing stereotypes about undocumented immigrants.

"What stresses me out the most is that people think we're not trying, and we're absolutely trying," she said.

On top of being a full-time student, Molina has worked at Community Banks to help pay her way through school and also interns at Six Points Evaluation and Training. When she has a moment to spare, she's also involved with the advocacy group Inmigrantes Unidos De Gunnison, where her mother Cynthia acts as vice president.

"I would love to help out the community. That was the purpose of me studying criminal justice," said Molina. "I want to know what our rights are and how the system works for me to be able to have a chance to help the community."

*(Kate Gienapp can be reached at 970.641.1414 or [kate@gunnisontimes.com](mailto:kate@gunnisontimes.com).)*