

I AM STEM

Victoria El-Hayek

Victoria El-Hayek grew up in Ohio and earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Bioethics from [Case Western Reserve University](#). She is currently a second-year medical student at [Ohio State University](#) and discusses how mentors and representation made a difference in her life. She is passionate about breaking down the barriers that keep minority and low-income communities from receiving quality health care.

Did you have any mentors?

I grew up in a community that was 97% white, so it was really hard for me to find that in my home community. Then, I was fortunate to go to Case Western where they had this organization for undergrads who were freshmen, where Latina students could get an older Latino mentor. When I came to Case that was the first thing I signed up for, I was like I need to meet somebody else like me see what they're doing, see how they've made it.

They paired me up with a student who's two years older than me and it was through her that I started to meet a ton of other Latino students, not only in Cleveland, but she showed me to go to national conferences in different cities. I went to a conference in Chicago to a conference in Baltimore, with three different national Hispanic organizations, which introduced me to thousands of Hispanics doing incredible things all over the country. It was through that mentorship that I started to realize that there are a lot of other people like me out there, you just have to kind of find them. I think that was something I really needed at that point because I just had never seen that growing up.

What advice would you give current students in middle or high school/yourself during that time?

It would have been nice to just have somebody sit down and tell me is that there really isn't a profession in this world that people like us don't belong in and because of that like you don't have to hide any part of who you are, where you come from because the fact that there's only 8% of Latinos in STEM right now is a huge weakness. I think they need people like us for the field to keep growing because right now, I think it's at a stalemate, and it's not going to change unless they have more diversity.

There are other people like me where our parents did come to this country in order to give us better opportunities than what they had and that set the foundation for us not only go against the odds, but be a part of changing the odds. That's important because you see that there's only 8% of Latinos in STEM, that can be terrifying. The only way to change that is to be a part of that. You can be a part of changing this process and making it better for not only yourself, but other people in our community.

“...THERE REALLY ISN'T A PROFESSION IN THIS WORLD THAT PEOPLE LIKE US DON'T BELONG IN...”



The NeoSTEM Ecosystem is a collaboration of organizations throughout Northeast Ohio who partner to improve STEM educational opportunities for all students. Formed in 2014, the NeoSTEM Ecosystem's goals are to improve meaningful STEM learning opportunities for all students in the Northeast Ohio region. As one of 94 ecosystems operating as a part of the STEM Learning Ecosystems Community of Practice, the NeoSTEM Ecosystem holds regular virtual and in-person meetings to learn about what community educational needs are and to develop solutions for those needs. For more information, please contact us at info@neostem.org.

Listen to the Interview →

