

2017 Undergraduate Award for Excellence in Chemistry

Vanessa Cupil-Garcia
Meredith College



Vanessa Cupil-Garcia has not allowed the hurdles presented by growing up in a family that lived below the poverty line to impede her as she has pursued her interest in science. She began her studies with the general idea of a career in science or engineering, but after as she put it, being “exposed to the research process,” she now wishes to throw her considerable energies into a career as a science professor. Her advisor Alexandra Ormond writes: “Vanessa has had a diverse research background experience by participating in research at Meredith College and two summer research programs at other institutions: Georgia Institute of Technology and Oregon Health and Science University. All of the research experiences were different and led Vanessa to continue to pursue studies in chemistry, although she is a chemistry and a biology double major at Meredith.” She is among the top 1% of all chemistry students at Meredith in the past 20 years. Vanessa has also distinguished herself outside the classroom and laboratory with a number of service activities both within Meredith (as Student Government Association Senate Chair) and outside its walls that included both children and adults. Vanessa proved essential in obtaining official organization status at Meredith College for the Iron Chapter of Iota Sigma Pi, a metropolitan chapter in North Carolina. Vanessa has also been crucial for ACS at Meredith College. Professor Wald Powell writes: “Under her leadership, ACS has been instrumental in organizing numerous activities that entertain, lead to peer bonding and attract promising science students as chemistry majors by holding events like Mole Day, Internship Panel,

Periodic Table Cupcakes Bash, and Liquid Nitrogen Ice Cream Social." Her mentors speak highly of her work not only as a teaching assistant and a laboratory scientist, but also as a person committed to helping others. Vanessa will begin to put her determination into action next fall as a Ph.D. student in the Chemistry Department at Duke University. As for the future, she puts it most clearly herself - "My research experiences have taught me how to think like a scientist, and my experiences as a Latina woman have made me determined to help other students pursue their goals without being hindered by the social and economic obstacles that I encountered."