

Entre Amigos: Amigo Club grants two exchange student scholarships



Joaquin Torres Hernandez and Karen Lucia Lopez Villanueva play a violin duet at a farewell gathering of Amigo Club and SOU faculty. Torres and Lopez were part of a business school exchange in Ashland in April with other University of Guanajuato students.

January 9, 2023

The recipients will enroll in Southern Oregon University's School of Business

By Kernan Turner

The Ashland Amigo Club has selected two Guanajuato scholarship recipients who will study winter and spring terms at Southern Oregon University as part of its Amistad student exchange program with the University of Guanajuato.

The students, Joaquin Torres Hernandez and Karen Lucia Lopez Villanueva, will enroll in the SOU School of Business.

Torres and Lopez spent a week in Ashland last spring, participating in a student exchange program sponsored by the business schools of SOU and the University of Guanajuato. Both accomplished violinists, they played at an Amigo Club farewell party.

“We’ve asked them not to forget to bring their violins with them,” Amigo Club President Betzabe “Mina” Turner said in announcing their selection.

Guanajuato professor Dr. Martin Pantoja, who was an Amistad exchange student in Ashland years ago, guided their selection through the University of Guanajuato, following criteria established by the Amigo Club scholarship committee.

The two will bring the number of Amigo Club Endowed Scholarship recipients to 12 since its creation in 2015. A recipient from SOU, Antonia Boyd, is currently wrapping up a semester studying at the University of Guanajuato. Students at either of the two universities are eligible to apply.

SOU exchange student writes from Guanajuato

The Ashland Amigo Club asked Antonia “Toni” Boyd, a scholarship recipient studying at the University of Guanajuato, to describe her experiences. Here is her reply, lightly edited for brevity:

“It’s been such an experience here in Guanajuato, Mexico. From the classes, the climate, the people, and the city, I’ve never before experienced so many new things at once.

“The semesters here are much longer, while the class structures are far more relaxed, in format, but not workload. I have been able to meet some new and nice people, including the two students who will be attending SOU on exchange this winter. We went to dinner and they introduced me to some of their friends. The students in my classes have been wonderful and very helpful as well. In every class I’ve had there has been at least one student who offered to help me or exchanged contacts in case I needed anything.

“It’s the beginning of the dry season here (at the end of October), and I’m not used to the sunny, hot weather here.

“One thing I had immediately noticed when I got here was how much more intense and direct the sun is.

“When I first got here, the rainy season in mid-summer was incredible. I had never experienced such intense storms. Coming from Oregon, rainy weather is nothing new, but the storms here caused my walkway to turn into a waterfall and cars below were getting stuck in flash-flooded streets.

“The most incredible part was the thunder and lightning of every storm. The lightning would hop from cloud to cloud with a pink hue and when it would finally strike, the thunder was loud enough to even make those who love thunderstorms, like me, jump from the booming sound. Some lighter rainstorms reminded me of home, and with the drier weather now, I do miss them.

“Something that surprised me was how I had to acclimate to the elevation here. While it’s not exactly mountainous terrain, Guanajuato sits at about 6,700 feet in elevation, compared with 1,900 feet in Ashland. For reference, nearly-mile-high Denver is about 5,200 feet. I didn’t think it was going to be that much of a difference until my landlord walked me to see my apartment here and we climbed the equivalent of seven flights of stairs. It was laborious for me but not for her. As an avid hiker familiar with steep inclines, it was a very bizarre experience. Three months later, the elevation hardly affects me.

“The learning curve with the full language immersion here has been very mentally demanding, requiring a lot more focus for everyday tasks and conversations. It has pushed me in ways I couldn’t have imagined, but it’s also allowed me to grow as a Spanish speaker, and also as a person. Experiencing different norms, people, sights, and sounds have given me a much broader perspective, allowing me to see the world from other people’s contexts and viewpoints.

“I also have to mention that the history is so rich here. Everywhere I go there are beautiful historic buildings and statues that you don’t see back at home.”

Amigo Club’s Entre Amigos (Between Friends) column about Ashland ties to its sister city Guanajuato, Mexico, appears periodically. Longtime AP reporter and bureau chief Kernan Turner is an Ashland resident and Amigo Club member.