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Graduate Profile: Moving Forward to Give Back

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Graduate Profile: Moving Forward to Give Back

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Being a student can be tough at times, but finding your support systems on campus will make your journey even more worthwhile.

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Like so many others, Nadia Barrera has had to shift and pivot in the midst of the pandemic to achieve her dreams of becoming a physical therapist. Despite the challenges, Barrera has had an eventful year of pursuing her passion at [Governors State University](#).

As a recipient of the prestigious Schweitzer Fellowship, Barrera embarked on a yearlong project at the Back of the Yards College Prep school in Chicago, where she met with students to increase their awareness of the opportunities of careers in the health sciences, including virtual afterschool meetings “field trips” she coordinated with community health professionals.

Her hard work and passion did not go unnoticed as the program grew in size, with participants doubling under her direction.

Now graduating as a [Doctor of Physical Therapy](#), Barrera sets out on a new journey still fueled by the dedication that empowered her through her academic career.

GSU Newsroom: What brought you to GSU?

Barrera: I came to GSU for its exceptional physical therapy doctorate program. I began my journey here during the 2018 summer semester. I fell in love GSU's campus, the welcoming feel of the physical therapy program, small class sizes, and the fact that I could commute and be close to home.

GSU Newsroom: What are some of the highlights from your time at GSU?

Barrera: I've had so many memorable moments over the last three years at GSU. One of the most memorable experiences that I had early on at GSU was spending several hours a week in the physical therapy program's Anatomy Lab. This is where I made my first friends at GSU who are still my best friends to this day. We spent many long hours together studying, stressing out and helping each other get through the long days of learning the foundational material for our program.

Another memorable experience that I had while I was at GSU was attending the [Public Health Brigade](#) to Panama. This trip was not just extremely memorable. It was transformational. Alongside a group of peers from GSU, we built outdoor latrines and sanitation stations for a small community in rural Panama who had been living without electricity and running water. We were able to empower families and work side by side with community members to promote the values of public health and wellness. This service-learning trip truly inspired me to continue a journey in serving my community here at home in Chicago.

GSU Newsroom: Who were some of the professors who shaped your experience and your future?

Barrera: One of my professors who shaped my experience at GSU is Dr. Maryleen Jones. She always brought so much joy and energy to every class that she taught, especially, neuroscience. Her passion for physical therapy, serving others and being involved in many projects and organizations has truly inspired me as a future physical therapist.

Dr. Jones also supported me greatly throughout my time at GSU as a mentor. She was my faculty mentor this past year during my time as a Fellow in the Chicago Area Schweitzer Fellowship where I had the opportunity to create a program at Back of the Yards College Prep on the south west side of Chicago to educate and expose Latinx students to careers in healthcare.

GSU Newsroom: What's next after graduation?

Barrera: After graduation, I plan on spending some much needed time with family, but also plan on getting my career as a physical therapist started as soon as possible. During my time in the program, I've been blessed to have many amazing clinical experiences in various settings. Currently my heart is torn between working in the outpatient orthopedic setting or the inpatient acute care setting working in a hospital.

Both are very rewarding and unique in their own ways, so I am happy to go wherever, life takes me!

GSU Newsroom: What advice would you give GSU students?

Barrera: My advice to GSU students is to get involved on campus, challenge your limits and don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone and everyday routine. Being a student can be tough at times, but finding your support systems on campus will make your journey even more worthwhile.