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### Two daughters graduating make one great Mother's Day gift for retired GSU staffer

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# Two daughters graduating make one great Mother's Day gift for retired GSU staffer

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**Raquel Rios-Aguirre**

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For retired [Governors State University](#) employee Raquel Rios-Aguirre, having two daughters graduate from a place she called home for nearly three decades is one of the greatest Mother's Day gifts she could receive.

Rios-Aguirre, a Park Forest resident, worked in three different areas at the university, starting in 1992. Though she retired in 2021, the university remained part of her life through her daughters, both first-generation students who will receive their bachelor's and master's degrees on May 14 at the Tinley Park Convention Center.

Lydia and Emily Aguirre's graduations bring a spiritual reaction from Rios, who enrolled her daughters in the Family Development Center when it first opened and took them to several GSU events throughout the years.

"It's a blessing," said Rios. "It's a true Mother's Day blessing to have both of my daughters attend college and to graduate from the university I retired from."

Lydia, 25, came to GSU after a year and a half at Gateway Community College in Phoenix, Arizona. When she left Gateway, she said GSU was a natural choice. After switching her major from biology to psychology, she decided to pursue an [Interdisciplinary Studies](#) degree with a focus on the environment. Post-graduation, she would like to conduct research to find ways to mitigate greenhouse gasses. She also is thinking of pursuing a graduate degree at GSU

Lydia said she is grateful to mom for creating a path to her goals in a place that seemed so familiar. "GSU feels like another home," she said. "Now that I'm graduating, it's like I'm that much closer to where I want to be and my mom made that possible."

For Emily, 23, who received her undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, GSU's mission—accessibility and affordability—resonates. When

she decided to pursue her graduate degree in [Business Analytics](#), the pandemic actually made it easier to secure.

“I’m glad I chose GSU because my courses were remote plus the university is close to home, so even when I had an in-person class, it was still accessible to me,” Emily said.

Both Emily and Lydia look back fondly on the special relationships they developed at GSU. For example, Professor William Kelly made Lydia’s college experience “that much more worth it because he gave us so much insight.” Dr. Kelly and others brought real-world experiences that influenced the young women.

“My teachers came from different backgrounds, so they have different stories to tell and those relationships are very special to me; to this day,” Lydia said.

Though Emily’s GSU experience has largely been one characterized by remote learning, that didn’t stop her from making valuable and meaningful connections at a school that stood in stark contrast from her undergrad alma mater.

“Coming from UIUC, which has a student body of 30,000, to GSU where there are small sized classes was a big culture shock and it’s like, ‘Wow, I can actually form relationships with my classmates,’” she said. “Sometimes my classmates would say, ‘Hey, I heard of a job opening for this, you should apply’ and I’m really appreciative of how people at GSU are friendly in this way.”

After graduation, Emily plans to expand on a long-held interest of her own: technology and computers. She’s thinking about pursuing a Ph.D. in data science or data analytics, potentially at GSU; until she decides, she plans on working in an information technology setting.

Both are appreciative of their mother, who has always encouraged them to pursue their dreams and guided them toward the place where she flourished for nearly 30 years.

“It’s like we’re continuing a legacy at Governors State,” Emily said.

Their mom said she’s so proud of her daughters for choosing GSU and for earning their degrees.

“I recall seeing them studying late into the night and being frustrated over subjects,” she said. “They persevered and are now graduating! I will continue to support them whether they want to continue their education at GSU or somewhere else.”