



## Cal State L.A. student finds her path in cultural anthropology

*Ceja to be honored as a 'Future History Maker' during Latina History Day conference*



Abbie Ceja aspires to be “well-educated, well-traveled and influential in humanitarian efforts.” Currently completing her anthropology degree at Cal State L.A., she hopes to one day manage a non-profit organization in her community and to cultivate the ethnology of the world.

But, her goals seemed out of reach a couple of years ago. Ceja initially struggled to find a clear direction for her future. When her parents divorced, she endured financial hardship and felt overwhelmingly disoriented by her family falling apart. She hopped around apartments with sporadic visits between parents. “The experience gave me the fortitude to become more independent, and I was determined to instead divert my energy in paving out my academic and career path,” Ceja said, who works part-time as a Starbucks supervisor while juggling her course load.

With a renewed focus and determination, Ceja’s goals are now within reach, having achieved a high GPA overall and becoming a member of the Golden Key Honors Society at Cal State L.A. She also took the initiative to enroll in a Leadership Exploration and Advancement Program on campus.

Recently, Ceja was named by Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) as one of five 2014 Future History Makers for “striving for excellence,” being a positive role model and creating change. “To be honored by the Hispanas Organized for Political Equality has validated my efforts the past three years while attending Cal State L.A.,” she said. “This recognition gives me the confidence, as a Latina, that I will be successful in my community.”

Ceja will be honored during HOPE’s 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Latina History Day Conference at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles on March 14. The HOPE Future History Maker Award is presented through a partnership of the Estée Lauder Companies and is given to high-achieving female Hispanic students who are involved in activities and projects that benefit the community, advancing in an academic field, or pioneering groundbreaking research or inventions.



Ceja, who believes in the importance of connecting with her community, has volunteered to help with vital building renovation projects within Greater Los Angeles. The most recent was an inspirational mural painting at Belmont High School, located west of downtown L.A. She also participates regularly in city walks advocating for health issues, such as AIDS Walk Los Angeles.

"I am so pleased to see that Abbie is being recognized by HOPE for making a difference in the community. She is such a very bright and committed student," said Cal State L.A. Professor James Brady, who is one of Ceja's faculty mentors.

Through a university grant, Ceja is also working with Cal State L.A. Professor ChorSwang Ngin to conduct research on the civil rights experiences of Mexican immigrant agricultural workers in California during the mid-1900s.

"With the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act this summer, the research is important in documenting the oral histories of those workers living under a discriminative society during that time period," Ceja explained.

Reflecting upon her accomplishments thus far, Ceja acknowledges her parents for their support of her educational pursuits. Additionally, she credits her anthropology professors for giving her the motivation to delve further in her studies.

"They opened my mind to the opportunities in the field of cultural and social anthropology," she said. "The faculty members have also provided me with a solid exposure to issues, ideas and cultures apart from my own. Cal State L.A. has challenged my intellectual knowledge of the social sciences allowing for deeper interest and understanding."