

## **Maria Oroyan**

**About:** Maria is a Junior, majoring in Chemical Engineering. She is a member of the Society of Women Engineers, part of the fundraising team for UNM Engineers Without Borders, and a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. She is also an [Innovation Intern](#) STC.UNM and mentor with the [UNM+AFRL Mentoring Program](#).

**Involvement with the STEM Collaborative Center (STCC):** Maria first got involved with the [STCC](#) the summer after her freshmen year when she came to five STCC events, including tours of [Albuquerque's Wastewater Reclamation Plant](#), [FatPipe ABQ](#), [ABQid](#), [Sandia National Laboratories' Advanced Materials Lab](#), the [Very Large Array](#), and Air Force Research Laboratory's [Space Vehicles](#) and [Directed Energy](#) Directorates. Maria said that participating in these summer programs helped her learn about resources on campus and in New Mexico.

Maria has also participated in the UNM+AFRL Mentoring program for three semesters. She said one of the greatest benefits of the mentoring program is developing lifelong mentoring relationships. Maria's current mentor, Captain Tim Wolfe, lent her [Chris Anderson's book, TED Talks](#), to prepare for the STC.UNM's Rainforest Student Pitch Competition. This book helped her learn how to present herself as well as her work related to science and technology. Maria is currently working together with Captain Wolfe to mentor a UNM freshmen student. Maria also goes above and beyond the mentoring program's requirements, and recently volunteered to talk with sixth graders at Lincoln Middle School's Career Fair.

**Let's celebrate:** Maria recently placed as a finalist in the [STC.UNM's Student Rainforest Pitch Competition](#). She submitted this [90 second pitch video](#) during the first round of the competition for a business idea, Aris, that produces self-defense jewelry devices. Maria moved on to the competition's final round where she gave a 90-second live pitch at Bow & Arrow. The audience of business professionals, entrepreneurs, investors, and others voted that Maria gave one of the top 5 pitches. She took home a \$1,000 prize.

In addition to the help Maria received from her AFRL mentor, Captain Wolfe, she also had support preparing for her pitch from Zeke Chavez, a recent graduate with a Bachelor's in Economics, and Lexi Palmer, the CEO of a NM start-up company called EquiSeq, which genetically tests horses for muscle-wasting diseases. All of Maria's mentors are well-versed in public speaking and have given countless pitches. They are committed to seeing others in the community succeed. These mentors helped Maria with presenting herself, recognizing a market, fleshing out the idea of self-defense jewelry, and developing a narrative for her pitch.

Maria emphasizes that she has a great support network in Albuquerque's technology and science scene, and she wants other undergraduates to know that it's here for them to tap into, too! Check out [this site](#) if you are interested in participating in the April 2017 Student Rainforest Pitch Competition.

**Next steps:** Maria's next steps for this year are to make a concrete, viable plan for moving her self-defense jewelry business idea into the next stages: validating the market, teaming up with a co-founder, and building a prototype. Academically, she is interested in gaining experiences in biotechnology and its applications in science and technology. She will stay involved in the UNM+AFRL mentoring program as a student mentor, because helping other undergraduates transition into college and not stress out is something she loves doing!

**Quote from Tim (her mentor):** Maria absolutely deserves recognition for this, I've been pondering how to spread the word. As a matter of fact, I had lent her my TED Talk book to read at the start of the semester. She of course quickly finished it, and we had just been talking about it at our last Friday session and hoping it helped her with her pitch. I should have known she'd learn advanced speaking skills just about immediately, and end up winning the whole thing! And stepping up with the LMS event is exactly what I'd hoped would happen through the co-mentoring model, that she'd feel empowered and continue to emerge as a leader among her peers. Sky's the limit for her, and I think Lisette is really benefitting from the system too.