

# Student At New Pharmacy School Plans To Give Back To The Central Valley

By Diana Aguilera



The Central Valley has struggled with a long list of health care issues for decades. Now with the opening of the Valley's first and only pharmacy school in Clovis just weeks ago. Instructors and students hope to make a dent in the problem and attract more health care professionals to the region. FM 89's Diana Aguilera explains how one young man plans to help by giving back to the community he calls home.

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Meet 25-year-old Jose Vera. Ever since Vera was young there was one thing that always sparked his imagination.

"I was always curious just medicine was always something that interested me," Vera says. "When you go see a doctor you get medication and in a week or so you get better. I always wanted to understand that more."

His fascination with health started while growing up in Ivanhoe, a small rural town in Tulare County.

"I've just always been interested. When I was younger I was always playing soccer in the streets and it was right next to a pharmacy and a primary care office," Vera says.

Just like in many places throughout the state there's a huge need for pharmacists in the San Joaquin Valley. When Vera realized this, he knew this was the path he wanted to go in.

*"I know I'm needed heavily here," Vera says. "It's just a huge demand and I can have the biggest contribution if I stay here."*



After graduating from Fresno State, Vera now forms part of the inaugural class of the Valley's first pharmacy school. The one-of-a-kind university in the Valley aims to help transform pharmacy into a primary care profession.

"My father is an agricultural farmworker to this day he still works. He wakes up every morning, goes and works, comes back and that's the reason why I keep pushing." Jose Vera

Just a few days ago, I drove to the California Health Sciences University campus in Clovis and met up with Jose Vera during one of his classes. When I got there he and his partners were wrapping up a team quiz.

We then walked to the cafeteria just in time for lunch. As we sat surrounded by other classmates, Vera says he's happy to be one step closer to his goals and hopes that one day he can give back to the community that watched him grow up.

"I know that everyone from the Hispanic community that speak Spanish they don't feel comfortable speaking to a doctor that doesn't speak Spanish," Vera says. "They feel like they don't understand them so I want to be that pharmacist/primary care that can help them, that can make them feel comfortable, and just give them the best treatment that they can possibly receive."



But Vera's journey has not been an easy one. It's been marked by sacrifices and determination. He says he learned it from his dad.

*"My father is an agricultural farmworker to this day he still works. He wakes up every morning, goes and works, comes back and that's the reason why I keep pushing," Vera says. "Seeing him be a hard worker kind of translated as myself being a hard worker and being motivated."*

Jose Vera talks about his family roots.

The dean of pharmacy at the school David Hawkins says students like Vera can also pursue an academic career in pharmacy. He says there's a shortage of teachers in pharmacy in the Valley.

"You take someone like Jose that already has a lot of research experience, who has a burning desire to pursue more research, he has a very high level of curiosity," Hawkins says. "So if we can get people like him to go through our program, get their doctorate degree and go on and do post graduate and residencies then they're prepared to go into

faculty position.”

“It’s not an option for me to leave, why would I leave? I want to accomplish my goals. I have goals to return to the rural communities in Fresno and Tulare counties.” - Jose Vera

School has only been in session for a few weeks and Hawkins says Vera has already made his mark.

| *Hawkins: We'd like to get Jose here in fact on our faculty in the future."*

| *Diana: "Have you told him that at all?"*

| *Hawkins: "I haven't told him that yet."*

Before the pharmacy school was open, Vera struggled debating whether to go the medical route or the pharmacy route. But when he heard about the school’s program he knew it would be the right fit. Especially since state law now regards pharmacists as health care providers.

“It was just a great option with all the legislation that just happened how pharmacist are now going into primary care,” Vera says. “That’s always what I wanted to do and it’s here in my own backyard.”

And students don’t just learn about medicine, they can get the chance to do research too.

“So this is the research lab, it’s brand new, still smells brand new and this is where I really enjoy putting in time because I love research a lot,” Vera says.

Vera started working in labs in community college, and has researched topics including bird migration and stem cells.

Now, he’s focusing on something dear to his heart.

“So obviously I’m from an agricultural community so this is another way I can contribute to them so just learning more about how the pesticides are causing neurological damage and early cell death which leads to Parkinson’s disease, Autism and Alzheimer, right,” Vera says.

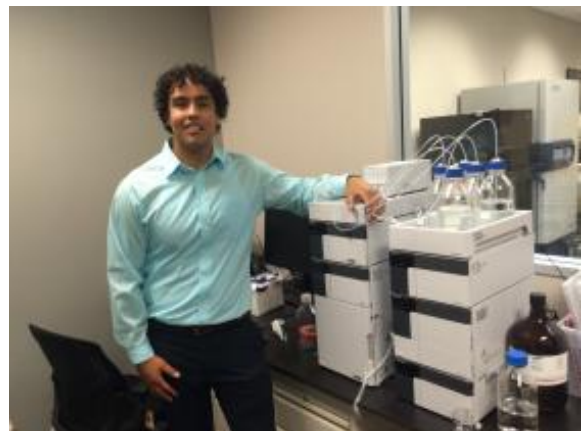
He hopes his research will ultimately help improve the health of those out in the fields, especially in Central California.

“There a lot of stories, my father very fortunately doesn’t work on the pesticide aspect of agricultural field but I know there’s a lot of people being expose to pesticides especially farmworkers,” Vera says.

Guided by professors, Vera plans on starting his research project in a few weeks.

While others dream of carrying out their health care professions in places like Los Angeles and San Francisco, Vera says there’s only one place he sees himself working in the future.

“It’s not an option for me to leave, why would I leave?” Vera says. “I want to accomplish my goals. I have goals to return to the rural communities in Fresno and Tulare counties.”



Vera and the other 73 students are expected to graduate in 2018.