

## Against the Odds

### Former foster youth welcomed at UC San Diego



*From left, Southwestern College student Hali Urista and Kimi Rodriguez-McSwain, adjunct counselor at Southwestern College.*

UC San Diego recently hosted a special group of prospective students on campus: former foster youth who are currently attending local community colleges. The daylong program for prospective transfer students was designed to introduce them to the campus and highlight resources made available to them—from help obtaining basic school supplies to advice on navigating the path to a career or graduate school—through the UC San Diego Guardian Scholars Program.

A highlight of the day was a moving lunch program featuring former California Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, who established the John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes to support current and former foster youth throughout the state.



*Program attendees included Rachel Gregg, field representative for California Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins; Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra Brown; UC San Diego Foundation Trustee Jeffrey Krinsk; Senator John Burton (ret.); and Travis Knowles, chief of staff for San Diego Councilmember David Alvarez.*

Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra Brown welcomed the group of students, recalling that early in her career, she was trained as a clinical psychologist who worked with foster youth. “I soon realized that many who grow up through the foster care system do not have the resources to get to college,” said Brown. “We want you to know that UC San Diego is here for you. We want to help you earn a four-year degree and go on to lead a successful career.”

Burton, who flew in from San Francisco for the event, congratulated the students for getting to where they are today, noting that only 54 percent of foster youth graduate from high school. Barely 2 percent obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher.

“You are already here against the odds,” he told the audience. “Now, you can do whatever it is you want to do in the future. The worst part of your life is behind you.”

He also encouraged the students to consider those who will still need help. “When you get to where you are going, remember that somebody is left behind you in the foster system, so it is your responsibility to pull them up.”

Hali Urista was one of the prospective students in attendance. Currently attending Southwestern College, she plans to transfer to a university and eventually become a professor of history—a career path that she has wanted to pursue since she was in elementary school.

“When I have a plan, I always see it through,” said Urista. “I really hope that other foster kids can see me and know that they can go to college, too. I’m just trying to be successful and be a role model for other foster kids who need help.”

Following the talk by Burton, students had the opportunity to meet the Senator and current UC San Diego students who are former foster youth, as well as campus administrators. Students also learned about the various programs and services offered at UC San Diego through the Guardian Scholars Program, which help ensure students’ academic success, offer support services and provide career development skills for life after graduation to eligible students. As part of the Burton Scholars



*Senator John Burton (ret.) spoke with the students and gave them gift bags with gift cards and flash drives to support their efforts to attend college.*



*Students from local community colleges came to UC San Diego to learn about the campus.*

Backpack to Success Program, the community college students also received care packs that included healthy snacks, flash drives and an Old Navy gift card for students to purchase school clothes.

To learn more about the Burton Foundation, please visit [johnburtonfoundation.org](http://johnburtonfoundation.org). [Click here](#) for more about the Guardian Scholars program at UC San Diego.

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