

## Preuss Students Get Behind-the-Scenes Look at UC San Diego Arts Programs



*Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications*

In the Mandell Weiss Theatre lobby, an actor moaned with his mouth wide open, warming up his voice an hour before the curtain would rise on Pirandello’s “Tonight We Improve.” His loud utterances blended right in with waves of chatter from a throng of high school students from The Preuss School UCSD.

Their March 1 visit was part of an immersion program to introduce Preuss students to the rich arts programs at UC San Diego. The students participate in tours, conversations with artists, internships, and are provided with free tickets to UC San Diego concerts and plays. The program was created by UC San Diego Arts and Humanities Dean Seth Lerer in conjunction with Preuss administrators and teachers, including Natasha Ippolito in theater, Mercy Hwong in music and UC San Diego visual arts alumnus Barak Smith in art.



“The Division of Arts and Humanities has a unique relationship to The Preuss School,” Lerer said. “Several of our alumni teach there; many of their students have aspirations in the arts; and the diversity commitments of the division match those of the school. Our goal is to reach out to Preuss to bring students to the campus who may not have seen a theatrical performance, or a musical concert, or an art exhibit or a creative reading before.”

Some Preuss students have not decided on career paths; others said they are leaning toward fields outside the arts, but all of them seemed completely engrossed during their recent visit.

“I plan to study biochemistry and neuroscience, minor in Spanish and do theater too,” said Richard Vu. “In English, we’ve been reading plays, and I got really into acting. I got, like, emotional.”

Amanda Say talked about taking Drama 1 at Preuss. “We’ve been studying Shakespeare and creating little scenes of our own,” she said. “I’m more of a director, and my favorite is comedy. One of the reasons we’re here is to watch a play for free!”

Ruben Landeros showed up in a tuxedo T-shirt. “I was stuck between two worlds last year when I had to choose an elective: drama or a robotics course. I actually picked robotics, but I think theater is something that is going to persist in my life. It’s something I will do on the side, maybe even minor in it.”

UC San Diego arts graduate students, such as department of theatre and dance Ph.D. candidate Heather Ramey, coordinate the interactions with Preuss. She created a theater internship and guides the students during their visits.



“I want to give them a chance to talk to graduates and undergraduates about what it is like to be involved with a production in the department,” Ramey said. “The tours give them an inside look at how the creative process works and how the theater space transforms.”

“My involvement with Preuss is inspired by my desire to develop outreach. It is not directly connected to my studies, but I think the development of young audiences and young artists is an important part of creating great theater.”



Recognized by *Newsweek* as the top transformative high school in the nation, The Preuss School is a unique charter middle and high school for low income, highly motivated students who strive to become the first in their families to graduate from college. The school is located on the UC San Diego campus.

The importance of the arts as a vital part of the curriculum can be traced back, in part, to the key role in the school's founding played by Cecil Lytle, a renowned classical and jazz pianist who, at the time, was provost of UC San Diego's Thurgood Marshall College. Now a professor emeritus in UC San Diego's department of music, Lytle is still active with Preuss. Each year, he plays a concert to benefit Preuss School graduates attending UC San Diego.

For Arts and Humanities Dean Lerer, the Preuss program serves several purposes.

"I'd like to enhance the students' experience of what we do at UC San Diego," he said. "But more pointedly, I'd like everyone in the community to recognize that all of our artistic and humanistic activities have, as their ultimate goal, the enhancement of cultural and personal life: the building of a diverse community, the exploration of identity, and the teaching of imagination. In these goals, I think, we share with the Preuss School a larger social mission of showing that education is as much about the world as it is about the classroom, as much about expressing the self as it is about studying the work of others."

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