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Q&A with Teresa Scroggins



Teresa Scroggins, a freshman from Imperial Valley, developed a love of languages and culture through her childhood experiences as a Navy daughter. She has lived all over the world including Japan, Washington state and California. She is fluent in both Japanese and Spanish, and hopes one day to travel the world again and work at an embassy. In the meantime, she spends her free time mentoring students at Chula Vista High School and motivating them to pursue their college dreams. She says it's her way of giving back since she had such a positive experience with the Early Academic Outreach Program when she was a high school student in Imperial Valley.

1. What was it like to grow up as a military child and live in Japan for six years?

Scroggins: Growing up as a military child was extremely difficult but, at the same time, incredibly rewarding. My father was an active member in the Navy so I grew up moving from place to place, having to start all over each time. Constantly moving made it easier to make new friends at all 11 schools that I have attended in the past 18 years. Another advantage of growing up with an active military member was that my family and I could travel anywhere there was a base for free. Thanks to the military, I have been to Japan, Korea, Singapore, Guam, Hawaii, Alaska and all over the U.S.

I moved to Japan in 2001, when I was just 10 years old, and I didn't speak a word of Japanese. As a military family, we could have easily lived on the military base but my mom decided we should live off base. She even enrolled me and my brothers in public Japanese school. It was a sink or swim situation because of the language barrier and the culture difference. Though the first year was extremely difficult, overall my time in Japan was positive and life-changing.

Through my father's career, I have been exposed to many different cultures and languages, which I am grateful for everyday. With each and every new experience, I found myself changed. In a way, one could say I was a thief, for everything I liked about that culture I would take and apply it to my life.

2. Tell me about your experience with the Early Academic Outreach Program and the impact it had on you.

Scroggins: I can honestly say that I experienced everything in the program firsthand. I went to every event that EAOP hosted or participated in—college expos, campus tours, SAT/ACT workshops and more. I even volunteered at the office and participated in the University of California College Prep summer online courses for two summers during high school that were offered in my town, Imperial Valley. At the time, I had just moved back to the United States from Japan and my family was in a difficult financial situation so I didn't think a university education was possible. Through the EAOP program, I learned that a university education was accessible and the doors of opportunity opened in front of me. My dream from then on was to do everything in my power to get into a good university.

I found all my EAOP experiences extremely beneficial in preparing me for college. The program gave me all the right tools and the confidence to pursue my dreams. I truly believe that if I hadn't been a part of the program, I would not be here at UC San Diego today. I am very grateful to the program, especially Mr. Thomas Gilkison, my mentor and the director of the EAOP at Imperial Valley.

3. How did the Summer Bridge program help you transition from high school to UC San Diego?

Scroggins: Summer Bridge was a four-week long stay on campus right before fall quarter, doing nothing but work, work, work. In that time, we completed two courses that actually required a full quarter to finish; needless to say, we had a full schedule. Summer Bridge was incredibly rigorous but I can say that all the hard work paid off in the end. By the time the fall quarter had started, I knew my way around campus, I was ready to take on my classes and, above all, I had my own group of friends. I experienced what college life would be like—the classrooms, discussions and sections, and even dorm life. It showed me the seriousness and importance of committing myself to my studies and being more assertive towards my education. Summer Bridge also helped me navigate, and be aware of, university surroundings and all the resources available on campus for students. I believe that Summer Bridge is a wonderful program that gave me a strong foundation and the self-confidence to maneuver my way through college and be successful.

4. Why is it important to you to participate in EAOP as a mentor?

Scroggins: Being a mentor to me is not just about giving back to the community or the program itself, but it is an opportunity to change the lives of students, just as EAOP changed mine. I know there are students who are fortunate enough to have family support, financial stability, and college preparation. But there are students who are not as fortunate, who are not informed about higher education opportunities and some are not motivated at all, and that could affect their futures. This is why it is important for me to be a mentor.

5. Any other advice for middle and high school students who are thinking about college?

Scroggins: I would advise them to work hard and utilize all the resources within their school in order to learn about college. Be prepared and everything else will follow. And don't hesitate to ask questions or ask for help. When I was in high school I would "bug" my counselor so much that when I went into her office all she would say is, "What do you want now?" I also want students to recognize that they will have to make sacrifices along the way but in the end, through hard work, dedication and commitment, they will be investing in their education and their future.

6. How did your childhood experiences impact your decision to study linguistics? Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Scroggins: My experiences have given me a worldly perspective and have shaped my character and career choice. I believe with each and every new language and culture one learns, one grows as an individual to become a well-rounded person that is tolerant of many different beliefs, views, personalities and values.

Ten years from now, I hope to see myself finished with a master's degree in linguistics and working for an embassy. I'd like to work for the American embassy in Japan or the Japanese embassy in the United States. I honestly just want to be spontaneous and travel all over the world to learn and experience new cultures and languages. And one thing is for certain, I will continue my education to the highest level.

Fun Faves

Favorite place at UC San Diego: The semi-forested areas that we have on campus

Favorite place on Earth: Under a cherry blossom tree. **Favorite class:** Currently, Making of the Modern World 2. **Favorite accomplishment:** Achieving academically despite the odds.

Favorite hobby: Singing. **Favorite UCSD memory:** 8/7/2010, Summer Bridge. **Favorite words to live by:** "If you start something, finish it!"

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