

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Erika Johnson

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The Power of One Voice

Undergraduate advances opportunities to make campus more welcoming to underrepresented students



Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Where others might see obstacles, Dejanay Wayne sees opportunity. For the past two months, the UC San Diego undergraduate has taken the initiative to meet one-on-one with campus leadership to share her ideas on how to make the university more welcoming to students of color. As a result of her newfound alliances, she secured bookstore giveaways to

help recruit underrepresented students to UC San Diego, introduced ethnic hair and skin products to campus, and is now working to develop a retention program that pairs current undergraduates with first-year underrepresented students.

“I tell other students if you don’t like what’s happening on campus, if you have something that’s really bothering you, just go talk to leadership about it,” said Wayne. “The worst thing they can say is no. And if you get that no, you just figure out how to make your idea better. I love constructive criticism because it makes me a better person.”

Wayne, a junior with a double major in Communication and Ethnic Studies and a minor in African American Studies, admits that her first two years at UC San Diego were rocky ones. At the start of her sophomore year, she learned some surprising news about her family, an emotional revelation that impacted her academic focus. Later, an incident at a party left her estranged from a student organization that she had joined and enjoyed. One day, she found herself at the registrar’s office ready to withdraw, plane ticket booked. But after a phone conversation with her mom, she realized the best decision was to stay.

Last fall, Wayne was introduced to Gary Matthews, Vice Chancellor of UC San Diego Resource Management and Planning, at a Black Student Union event. She learned of a student assistant position open in his office, submitted an application and was hired. She works three days a week and has become involved in the campus’ Long Range Development Plan advisory board as a student representative. She provides direct input on suggested services and support necessary for the continued success of students, especially those who are first generation.

Wayne credits Matthews as a mentor who empowered her to believe in herself and her ideas for positive campus changes. “Vice Chancellor Matthews has taken me under his wing and helps me realize that I have potential to do great things,” she explained. “It doesn’t matter how I am feeling before I get to work, once I walk through the door I am just so happy.”

Wayne meets regularly with Matthews to share her thoughts, and those of her peers, on how UC San Diego can expand campus outreach and inclusion efforts. One of her first projects involved a partnership with the Sunshine Market in Price Center to sell ethnic hair and skin products. Students can now use their Triton Cash account to purchase the products at



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comparable prices, saving travel time. Wayne explained that the addition, though small, is progress towards making students feel more included.

“Dejanay is an outstanding individual and student representative at UC San Diego,” said Matthews. “She embodies the spirit, drive and determination to excel at all she does, while also ensuring that she lends a hand to the youth of her community. Many talk about what they wish to do; Dejanay is action-oriented and achieves positive results.”

Over winter break, Wayne visited her high school and younger sister’s elementary school in Oakland, Calif. where she spoke about her university experiences and encouraged the students to pursue a college degree. To supplement her presentation, Matthews connected her with the UC San Diego Bookstore and Office of Campus and Community Relations, which provided UC San Diego T-shirts, banners, hats, wristbands and more to give away.

“I raffled off the items at the end of the presentation; the young kids were so excited, they even asked for my autograph on the posters,” said Wayne. “In Oakland, there are not a lot of role models or people who tell you that you can do something different. That’s why I wanted to talk to the fourth graders, to motivate them to go to college at an early age.”

According to Wayne, her high school freshman class in Oakland had 360 students. By senior year, about two-thirds had dropped out or transferred, and only about 60 participated in commencement. She estimated half of that number went to college and even fewer have continued past their freshman year. That’s why when she spoke to students at her high school, she was open and honest about her journey, emphasizing the connection between their current choices and future successes.

“I was real with them; I told them that these next four years are going to determine the next 40 years of their life, and that they need to start applying themselves right now,” said Wayne. “If my high school class had a college student come and tell me what it’s really going to be like, I would have gotten my act together.”

She recently shared her outreach efforts with Juan González, UC San Diego’s Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at UC San Diego. After hearing about her high school’s low graduation rates, he offered to make a trip to Oakland to share his story as a first-generation college student. Wayne also met with Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla about starting a buddy program that would connect current undergraduate students with underrepresented students to provide friendship and support throughout their first year. Throughout the next few months, she plans to share her outreach and retention efforts with even more campus leadership.



“Before we met, I didn’t know that the Chancellor had office hours to talk to students,” said Wayne. “We discussed the possibility of launching a peer mentorship program so that first-year underrepresented students would have a guide, someone to talk to about anything.”

After she graduates, Wayne would like to pursue law school or work for the campus Office of Admissions to continue her recruitment work. She currently serves as a crew leader to help first-year students transition from high school to college through a program sponsored by the East Bay College Fund. She communicates online with students several times a month to offer support and share in their challenges and successes.

“I like helping people,” said Wayne. “Having someone there and knowing you are not alone is huge. I want to set an example and encourage students to not give up, to find their place. I never thought that I would be working for a vice chancellor. I’ve learned that you can do anything you set your mind to do.”