

## **Marco Murillo, New President of UC San Diego Students, Credits Preuss School With Opening Scholastic Perspectives**

*He Transitioned from BorderHome to Charter School to Prestigious UC Campus*

May 17, 2007

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A stellar example of the pluses of educational reach-out to California's low income minority youth is personified in 20-year-old Marco Murillo, recently elected to represent some 27,000 students at the University of California, San Diego, as president of the Associated Student Board.

Murillo grew up in San Ysidro, the youngest son of a single mother who didn't finish elementary school. Fast forward two decades and Murillo is now UCSD's Associated Students president and a political science and history major who plans to go to law school.

He credits The Preuss School, an innovative college prep school on the UCSD campus, and the university for nudging him in a new direction. "It opened up perspectives I didn't see," he said.

Murillo was elected A.S. president last month and took office Friday. He said he plans to focus on access to higher education and affordability, campus climate and student control. His life experiences have ignited a passion for spreading the word about the importance of academic preparedness. Murillo also has a passion for social change and an abiding love of learning, said Preuss Principal Doris Alvarez.

"Leadership is in Marco's blood," she said. "I am so happy to see that he will continue to use his energy, creativity and passion for social change."

Murillo was born in San Diego but spent the first four years of his life in Tijuana. Then he moved back to this side of the border with his mother and older brother. By fifth grade, his mother couldn't really help him with homework. So he turned to his brother and teachers. His mother found other ways to show her support. She joined his school's parent-teacher association and cheered him on at games.

Murillo recalls that many of the people around him weren't planning to go to a four-year college. He said he didn't think about leaving home. All that started to change when Murillo was an eighth grader at San Ysidro Middle School. He was enrolled in the school's program for advanced students. One of his teachers handed him an application to The Preuss School at UCSD and encouraged him to fill it out. From many applicants, he was accepted through a random drawing.

Every day, Murillo embarked on a 90-minute commute to school. He carpoled from San Ysidro to National City, where a school bus took him to Preuss. His mother was working nights at the time. She would come back home from her job to drive him to the bus stop, without getting any sleep. The routine would be repeated in the afternoon, though someone other than his mother often picked him up. In his senior year, he caught the trolley, then hopped onto a bus to Preuss.

The extra effort and time were well worth it, he said. Before going to Preuss, he had only visited a college campus once. Now, he interacted with the UCSD tutors who came to Preuss regularly and could ask questions about their classes. He learned about all the opportunities the campus offers. His whole outlook shifted, he said. He also discovered history. He loves the subject so much that he made it his second major at UCSD.

Murillo also took part in student government. He hadn't planned to join the Associated Student Body at Preuss, but Principal Alvarez encouraged him to get involved. He became ASB president his junior year and class president his senior year. "Working with people, that's what I really like to do," he now says.

Murillo doesn't talk much, but when he does, people know it's important - and they listen, said Jeremy Howard, Murillo's ASB advisor and history teacher at Preuss. At the charter school, he led by example, Howard recalls. He was serious, worked behind the scenes and helped build school culture. He talked to Howard about what was going on in the student body and gave him input. He knew the students very well, the teacher recalls. He also kept his grades up in spite of his 90-minute daily commute.

Preuss helped Murillo raise the money he needed to afford a four-year college. He received several scholarships, including \$8,000 from UCSD Professor Cecil Lytle's scholarship fund. Financial aid covers the rest of his college costs. Murillo could have gone to other universities, but chose UCSD, Howard said.

Murillo joined the A.S. the winter quarter of his freshman year. He soon became the sophomore senator for Thurgood Marshall College. As a sophomore, he also started taking lobbying trips to Sacramento and later to Washington, D.C. He and other members of the University of California Students Association urged lawmakers to restore funding for academic preparedness. In the state's capital, he met with Assemblywoman Mary Salas, D., Chula Vista, and with staff members in the office of Assemblywoman Lori Saldana, D., San Diego. In the nation's capital, he met with staffers working for Rep. Susan Davis, D., San Diego. He shared his success story. Everyone was friendly and responsive, he said. "It was a great experience."

Murillo also worked to promote academic preparedness on campus. As an intern in the Provost Office at Marshall, he recruited tutors for Preuss and Gompers Charter Middle School. He spent 20 hours a week pairing UCSD students with teachers who asked for help.

Finally, he said he decided to run for A.S. president because his friends asked him. He forged alliances with many student organizations, which helped boost his candidacy. He was elected in April, with 34.5 percent of the vote. One of his priorities will be the opening of a student-run recruitment and retention center in 2008. The goal is to enhance existing academic preparedness programs by reaching out to high school students, providing tutoring and lending books to UCSD students, among other things. Murillo also will be working to foster relationships between the campus and La Jolla. The A.S. is looking into opening a kiosk at UTC to sell UCSD merchandise, he said.

The Preuss School, with an enrollment of 750 students, has recently garnered a number of awards. On May 16, it was recognized in a Washington, D.C. ceremony as one of 53 charter schools nationwide to be named "National Charter School of the Year." And in April The Preuss School was named a "2007 California Distinguished School."

Seventy-five seniors in this year's graduating class of 78 were accepted to four-year colleges or universities, including Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Duke, Fordham and Wellesley.

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