

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Sherilyn Reus and Erika Johnson

Feb 12, 2015



Photos by Erik Jepsen/Uc San Diego Publications

The Power of Partnerships

UC San Diego students serve as mentors to San Diego's K-12 Students

A 10th-grader struggling with algebra, a teen from a military family, a high school student contemplating college and a homeless youth finding stability in the classroom—these are just a few examples of the local, underserved students who are paired with UC San Diego undergraduate tutors through numerous initiatives. These programs, led by the department of education studies, the campus's undergraduate colleges and others, allow UC San Diego students to serve as tutors, mentors and positive role models. Yet, the undergraduates often find they learn just as much from their young partners.

Partners at Learning

One such initiative, the Partners at Learning (PAL) program, offered by the department of education studies, enables students to actively engage with San Diego’s diverse communities and become powerful advocates for higher education. Designed as an immersive service-learning program, nearly 500 undergraduates participate each year, committing more than 40 hours or more in their assigned classroom each quarter.

“This program is the reason I work in the early education field,” said Oliver LaPuebla, who was majoring in structural engineering when he began volunteering with PAL. “I felt energized through my experiences working with youth in the PAL program. I realized I looked forward to working with kids more than I had any eagerness to become an engineer.”

Believing he could make a difference in children’s lives, LaPuebla enrolled in the Master of Education program at UC San Diego after completing his undergraduate degree. He now teaches preschoolers at a child development center in National City—the same school where he completed his PAL volunteer hours.

LaPuebla is just one example of the many undergraduate students who find the PAL experience to be personally enlightening as well as impactful for local youth.

UC San Diego students may use PAL courses to meet specific requirements for some of the university’s colleges, or towards an education studies minor.

Thurgood Marshall College’s Partnership Schools Program

For UC San Diego students who are not education studies majors or minors, or who do not need PAL classes to satisfy college general education requirements, Thurgood Marshall College offers courses under its Partnership Schools Program. Working with UC San Diego’s Center for Research on Educational Equity, Assessment and Teaching Excellence (CREATE), the college created the Partnership Schools Program to provide UC San Diego undergraduates the opportunity to volunteer at The Preuss School UCSD or Gompers Preparatory Academy as positive role models and mentors for grades 6-12 college-bound youth.



“The Partnership Schools Program isn’t about satisfying GEs, it’s simply about giving back,” said Thurgood Marshall Provost Allan Havis. “Thurgood Marshall College helps to mobilize UC San Diego students to volunteer at these charter schools. It’s about serving the community, and that’s what it means to be a true scholar.”

Angela Fang, Partnership Schools Program student coordinator, added, “I think it is important that students take volunteering opportunities like the Partnership

Schools Program because it gives them a much more realistic take on what life and education is actually like outside of campus.”

Fang is a 2012 Preuss graduate and a former pupil of a Partnership Schools Program tutor. She credits this tutoring service as a big influence on her decision to take up the coordinator position. “What stood out to me the most during my time at the school was the dedication of our volunteers. I can’t begin to explain how eager each of the volunteers I encountered was!” Fang said. “But there was a particular undergraduate student I met named Jeff who inspired me to develop my career path early on. He was very passionate about our class discussions, and he clearly showed that through the academic support he provided us.”

The Partnership Schools Program Student Coordinator position, established in 2003, is funded by a grant from the Girard Foundation. Since the position was established, two Preuss graduates have filled the role.

Muir College’s CAMP

Muir College has launched its own tutoring service initiative as well. The Muir College Academic Mentoring Program (CAMP) is a collaboration between CREATE’s Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP), Muir College and UC San Diego’s department of education studies. CAMP helps ready UC San Diego students for onsite academic advising and mentoring to students at Castle Park, Clairemont, Gompers Preparatory, San Diego high schools and King Chavez Academy.

“In mentoring students, I was expecting to give my time and only receive gratitude in return, but what I received was so much more,” said Nico Salas, a CAMP mentor at King-Chavez Community High School. “Through talking with the students, I have gained a great sense of empathy and have come to understand that every student is different and requires a different approach to their education... Though some are uncertain of their futures, all are eager to discover what possibilities await them after high school.”

Eleanor Roosevelt College’s Math Tutor Corps

Eleanor Roosevelt College’s Math Tutor Corps brings together several UC San Diego organizations in order to support math students at Lincoln High School. The program offers undergraduates a 2-unit course (ERC 89) that helps them learn how to tutor mathematics from some of the county’s best high school math teachers. As part of the program, students serve as tutors for Lincoln High School students in math classes for at least four hours each week. Math Tutor Corps participants work primarily in algebra and intermediate algebra classes at Lincoln, courses where the greatest need for tutoring exists.

“For Lincoln High School students, this individualized support has effects beyond simply helping them to excel in math -- it helps them stay on track with their school work, provides them an alternative environment to learn and motivates them to pursue a high school and college degree in the future,” said Eden Berdugo, Math Tutor Corps Program Coordinator

The ERC/Monarch School Volunteer Program

In addition, the ERC/Monarch School Volunteer Program gives ERC students the opportunity to volunteer at the Monarch School, a K-12 school in the San Diego Unified School District that serves the educational needs of homeless and at-risk children. Over the past five years, more than 30 ERC students have volunteered at Monarch, providing academic tutoring and work in after-school enrichment programs at the school.

Students in this program must commit to at least one academic quarter to reduce the level of flux and unpredictability that most of its students already have to confront on a daily basis.

“I think the time commitment is absolutely worth it,” said past Monarch volunteer Karinne Caisse. “I am so pleased I could help those students discover the wonders of creativity, and moreover be a person in the world who they know they could rely on and who cared for them. They impacted my life in a way I have never been touched before, and it helped me discover more about who I am, who I want to be, and what I want to do with my life.”

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*