

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Christine Clark and Holly Xiao

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UC San Diego Advocates' Message to State Legislators

Higher Education Critical to California's Success



From left: Anne Krueger of Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College, Christine Clark of UC San Diego, Cheryl Broom of MiraCosta College, Bill Gay of Imperial Valley College, Laura Gropen of Palomar College, Cindy L. Miles of Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College, and Matt Ceppi of California State University, San Marcos.

Representatives from the three segments of public higher education—the University of California, California State University and California Community Colleges—visited the State Capitol April 29 for Joint Higher Education Advocacy Day. Teams comprised of leaders from the three segments met with legislators to showcase the unique partnerships among the college systems and share their vision for the state, which includes educational access to all students, energizing workforce development, fostering cutting-edge research and promoting civic engagement.

Representatives from UC San Diego participated in the event, which is part of the campus's ongoing advocacy initiatives that share UC San Diego's achievements, initiatives, research and education programs with elected officials and advocates.

Earlier this spring, graduate students met one-on-one with California legislators in Sacramento to share their personal stories and advocate for continued investment in higher education during Grad Research Day, held March 12.

A Shared Vision

Joint Higher Education Day started off with a welcome address by UC President Janet Napolitano, who spoke about the reinvigorated partnership among the three higher education segments. "The best thing about California is its educated work force," Napolitano said. "We set the bar for rest of the country, and we want to continue to do so."

Following the address, students, staff and faculty from UC San Diego, San Diego State University, California State San Marcos and the region's community colleges met with local legislators and their staff, which included Assemblymember Toni Atkins (D-78), Sen. Marty Block (D-39), Assemblyman Rocky Chavez (R-76), Sen. Ben Hueso (D-40), Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez (D-80), Assemblyman Brian Jones (R-71), Assemblyman Manuel Perez (D-56), Assemblymember Marie Waldron (R-75) and Sen. Mark Wyland (R-38).

"We're here to share our partnerships and to let legislators know that we are listening," said Cindy L. Miles, chancellor of Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District. "We know there is a demand for an educated work force in this economy and it's our mission to meet this demand which will ensure continued growth for the state."

UC San Diego's UniversityLink program was a topic of discussion throughout the day. The program, which is a partnership between UC San Diego and region's community colleges, offers eligible transfer students in the San Diego and Imperial Valley Counties guaranteed admission to UC San Diego. To be eligible for UniversityLink, students must come from a low-income background (having a family income of \$40,000 or less) and enroll in UniversityLink as high school seniors planning to attend one of the partner community colleges, or as a first-year community college student attending one of the participating community colleges. Partner schools include Cuyamaca College, Grossmont College, Imperial Valley College, Miracosta College, Palomar College, San Diego City College, San Diego Mesa College, San Diego Miramar College and Southwestern College.

In addition, UniversityLink is open to all student veterans, active duty service members and former foster youth regardless of their college year status.

UC San Diego's support of student veterans also was a highlight of many meetings. Chavez, who recently spoke at a conference on campus that UC San Diego sponsored for veterans, expressed his appreciation for the resources the colleges provide to student veterans, as they are a growing population throughout the state and especially in San Diego.

Chavez, who is vice chair of the Assembly Veterans Affairs and Higher Education committees, also advocated for increased support of public education.

"In California, we need to invest in education," Chavez said. "From K-12, to the community colleges, state colleges, and UC—it is critical to California's success."

Graduate Research Takes Center Stage

On March 12, UC graduate students traveled to Sacramento to discuss with California legislators the impact of graduate research on the state and society at large. Two UC San Diego students took part; Elizabeth Bacon a Ph.D. candidate in psychology who is working to discover better ways to identify children with autism at a younger age; and Michael Rivera, a Ph.D. candidate in political science who studies the role immigrants play in shaping public policy.

Both representatives spoke about the important role graduate students play at UC San Diego and its sister campuses in the UC system. Graduate student research has resulted in new technologies, new industries and an expanded workforce that directly benefits California's economy. A key factor in attracting and retaining top-quality faculty, these students tackle issues critical to our society—from sustainability, to public health and technology advancement—all of which solve key problems in California and beyond.

"I feel that many legislators don't know exactly what graduate education is and how it impacts society," said Rivera. "It was a great experience to put a face to UC graduate education; we were able to emphasize how UC graduate students provide a clear value to the California's culture and economy. I appreciated the opportunity to connect with legislators from the San Diego area and discuss the high value of investing in graduate education."

Rivera is a first-generation college graduate, and the University of California has played a critical role in his academic success. In high school, he took part in the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) where he received counseling and assistance with applying to college. After finishing his undergraduate degree at UC Davis, Rivera was drawn to UC San Diego for the quality of graduate training, and this fall he will move to the University of Texas at Austin to become an assistant professor of government.

"By meeting face-to-face with legislators and sharing all of the excellent work graduate students are doing, we personalize this important of UC education" said Rivera.

Students Recognized as Part of Joint Higher Education Advocacy Day

As part of Joint Higher Education Advocacy Day, three students from each of the three higher education segments in California were chosen to be featured on [banners \(PDF\)](#) that were displayed outside of Gov. Jerry Brown's office. Three UC students were chosen, including Rosemary McDonnell-Horita, a UC San Diego undergraduate student from Marshall College studying sociology, with an emphasis on social inequalities.

"I am honored to be recognized as a role model and representative of the University of California," said McDonnell-Horita. "While I recognize the impact that this has on my first year at UC San Diego, I am also very humbled. I feel as though there are so many students on campus and throughout California who are doing great things for the campus and community, and to be acknowledged within the same category as them is very humbling."

As a disabled student, McDonnell-Horita is very active as an advocate and works with the Youth Leadership Forum for students with disabilities, a five-day leadership forum for high school juniors and seniors to learn about self-advocacy, disability history and community involvement. McDonnell-Horita plans to obtain a graduate degree, and start her own nonprofit one day and will continue to advocate for people with disabilities.

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