

Coming Home: Returning To What He Loves Doing Best, Brett Wellington Looks Forward To Renewed EAOP Role

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When talking about his recent return as Assistant Director of the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) at the University of California, San Diego, Brett Wellington can't help but smile profusely. The seasoned college-prep administrator admits it's hard to hide his excitement about being back in the business he truly loves: preparing and motivating young, low-income students for higher education.

"I'm really happy to be back at EAOP," he says with a wide grin. In the coming months, he will take on ambitious new EAOP outreach efforts, which prompt him to exclaim, "I feel like I'm reinventing myself."

Before his hiatus from EAOP during which he pursued other career avenues in higher education, Wellington served in UCSD's EAOP office from 2000 to 2004. There he played a key role in carrying out EAOP's mission of providing essential academic and motivational services to low-income and ethnically underrepresented high school students in San Diego and Imperial counties to students for admission to the University of California, or other campuses.

Rising to the position of EAOP Assistant Director, Wellington developed expertise in designing and conducting workshops for students and parents on UC Admissions, including the UC application procedure and the writing of application's all-important Personal Statement. He was also instrumental in coordinating and developing other EAOP initiatives, such as UC PREP events, the UCSD Spring Tour (which attracted more than 700 participants), the UC/Los Angeles Basin Initiative Residential Structural Engineering Program, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Essay Contest.

He left UCSD in August of 2004 to join Alliant University in San Diego where he served as Associate Director of Admissions until 2005. Wellington returned to UCSD earlier this year as Assistant Director in Academic Affairs. Although the latter experiences were enriching, Wellington soon realized that he belonged back in academic outreach where he could "give people the means to access higher education, and to help people help themselves."

It is Wellington's personal connection to the students he helps that drives his passion the most for what he does. A 1992 graduate of UC Santa Barbara with a B.A. degree in Environmental Studies, he was himself the first in his family to attend college - thanks to assistance and motivation he received as a high school student from academic outreach initiatives. For instance, he fondly recalls participating in a summer sports day camp at UCLA. A combination of fun activities on the UCLA campus, and encouragement from counselors helped convince him to pursue higher education.

"I feel like I've come full circle by helping other students fulfill their dreams, especially when I see them here on campus as undergraduates," Wellington explains.

Currently, he is involved with EAOP in an ambitious federally-funded initiative to bring college preparatory and other educational services to K-12 students and their parents living in San Diego low-income housing

projects. The program -- funded through a three-year \$220,000 grant by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development--enables EAOP to work with the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego, and the Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Project in San Diego to provide 62 low-income families with specialized educational and motivational training workshops and tutorial sessions each week. Adding to the impetus of this program, UCSD's CREATE (Center for Research in Educational Equity, Assessment, and Teaching Excellence) also provides a strong writing literacy component.

The grant serves three housing units in Chula Vista, just south of San Diego, and gives EAOP the opportunity to work with community partners in "bringing education and college prep more directly to the people we serve," says Wellington.

In other EAOP activities, Wellington is also helping organize academic preparation services for schools such as Memorial Academy, Bell Junior High School, and Gompers Charter School.

Says Wellington, a resident of San Diego's Normal Heights area: "I'm thrilled about being able to give people the means to improve their chances for higher education, and thereby their chance for a better life."

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