

By Erika Johnson Jun 18, 2015

Future Educator Gets Second Boost from Local Family

Preuss School alumna and UC San Diego senior Indira Esparza to begin grad school with inaugural Weil Family Teacher Preparation Fellowship



Preuss School alumna and UC San Diego senior Indira Esparza will begin graduate school as the inaugural recipient of the Weil Family Teacher Preparation Fellowship. Photo by Erika Johnson/University Communications

Indira Esparza is not much older than the 12th graders she tutors at Garfield High School, yet she uses the opportunity to tell them that she was in their shoes not long ago and that they have the potential to go far. Esparza began her journey at The Preuss School UCSD, a charter middle and high school for low-income students who strive to become the first in their families to graduate from college. She received a scholarship from the Patricia and Christopher Weil Family Foundation to help support her

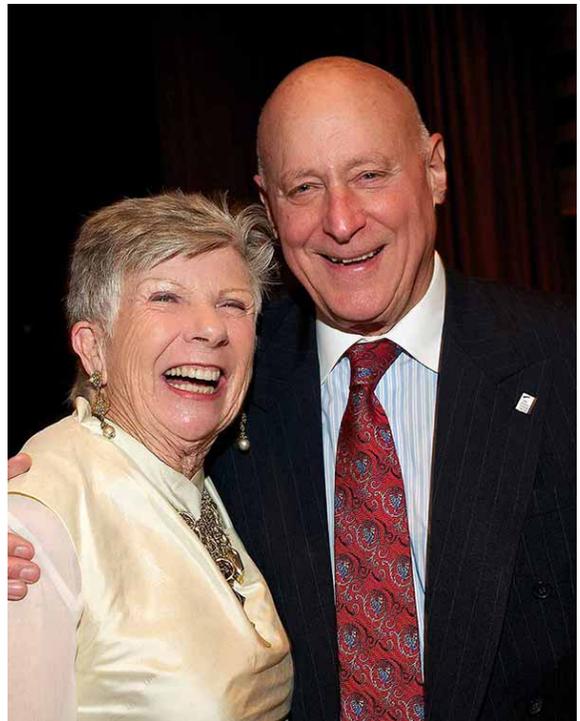
undergraduate studies at UC San Diego. This June, she will begin her master's degree in education and secondary teaching credential at UC San Diego, again with support from the Weil family, as the recipient of the inaugural Teacher Preparation Fellowship in the Department of Education Studies.

"I can't even put into words how grateful and how amazing it feels to have the support of the Weils," said Esparza. "When I got the email about the fellowship, I couldn't believe it. I feel very blessed and very happy about it."

Patricia and Christopher Weil believe education is the biggest game-changer in life. Both attended UCLA and were the first in their families to receive a university education. After moving to San Diego in 1998, they launched the Patricia and Christopher Weil Family Foundation to support educational opportunity for students from underserved communities, and were among the original supporters of The Preuss School UCSD. In 2004, they created the MKC Scholarship for graduating seniors, the first scholarship offered at Preuss, named after their three children—Matthew, Kit and Caitlin. Since then, they have supported more than 200 Preuss graduates, like Esparza, who go on to pursue a college degree.

This year, they established the Weil Family Teacher Preparation Fellowship to help support students pursuing a Master's of Education and teaching credential in UC San Diego's Department of Education Studies. The Weils are longtime supporters of Preuss; Patricia served as a member of the board for many years, Christopher is part of the school's Founders' Circle and their son, Matthew, is currently active on the board. In addition to their generous support of Preuss, the Weils are lifetime members of UC San Diego Chancellor's Associates and help fund a variety of other initiatives on campus, including the Division of Arts and Humanities, ArtPower!, and more. Christopher also serves as a trustee of the UC San Diego Foundation and has been a mentor at the Rady School of Management for many years.

"We are fortunate to have the support of the Weils, whose generosity enables us to recruit and retain a talented graduate student pursuing a career in K-12 teaching," said Amanda Datnow, associate dean of the Division of Social Sciences, professor in the Department of Education Studies and a board member at Preuss. "In line with the Chancellor's initiative to support graduate education, external funding allows us to attract students who might not



Patricia and Christopher Weil at the 2013 Preuss Promise Benefit Celebration.

otherwise be able to afford graduate school. We hope to grow the number of fellowships for stellar teacher candidates, like Indira, who advocate for educational equity and who will provide a transformative experience for the students in their classroom.”

Esparza, who is the first recipient of the new fellowship, will begin her graduate studies this summer to earn a single subject credential in English. Her goal is to teach high school in San Diego and later pursue a Ph.D. in education. She is interested in conducting research on the educational experiences of undocumented students, an issue she feels strongly about because it relates to her own story—she was born in Mexico and moved to San Diego with her family when she was 2 years old. She would like to investigate the effects of legislation like the DREAM Act, how undocumented students are integrated into the educational system and discover improvements that could be made.

“Indira has improved our understanding of what it is like to be an undocumented student and how we can help support,” said Patricia. “Since we awarded her the MKC Scholarship when she was a Preuss senior, she has always taken the initiative to stay in contact a couple times a year. It is special to have that relationship and see her grow.”

For Esparza, the decision to enter the educational field was based on her love of learning. As a political science major, her first inclination was to become a lawyer. But after she enrolled in her first Education Studies class, which she later added as her minor, she knew that she was meant to lead a classroom. “Ever since I was little I have always enjoyed school,” she explained. “Once I took an Education Studies class I realized I really like being in a classroom, so why not be the person who leads the class? Once I explored the field more, I discovered it made me really happy and decided it was the right fit for me.”

Since discovering her passion for education, she has immersed herself in every opportunity to connect with local students, and has encouraged her peers to do so as well. She serves as a Muir College Provost intern and a research assistant at CREATE (Center for Research on Educational Equity, Assessment and Teaching Excellence), where she helps undergraduates gain tutoring and teaching experience in the community.

She also mentors incoming Chancellor’s Associates Scholars—Esparza was among the first scholarship cohort in 2013—a program created to help make a UC San Diego education a reality for the region’s historically underserved communities. Paired with freshmen who have similar majors, she helps students with the transition to college life and the rigorous academic expectations of a university.

Esparza values the network that she has established, so the decision to remain at UC San Diego for graduate studies was an easy one for her. “UC San Diego has been a great place for me to grow,” she said. “People treat me here as though I was family; they are genuinely interested in my success. The

transition from Preuss to UC San Diego and now graduate school has been good. It's a home away from home."

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