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Virtual Celebration Honors Senior Successes at The Preuss School

The Preuss School UC San Diego Class of 2020 garners over \$1.3 million in awards



2019 graduates of The Preuss School UC San Diego. Photo by Erik Jepsen/Publications.

From the first day they arrive at The Preuss School, scholars are told that they are going to college. The charter middle and high school, located on the University of California San Diego campus, is designed to prepare low-income and first-generation scholars to succeed in college and career.

A virtual celebration will be held on June 18 to honor the accomplishments of 106 graduating seniors, who each have ambitious goals for service and academics, from becoming a counselor for disabled underrepresented children; to creating neurotechnologies for autoimmune diseases; to launching a nonprofit organization to empower first-generation students. The Preuss School was recently named the top high school in San Diego County by U.S. News & World Report, and nearly all graduates are accepted to colleges and universities.

The virtual commencement celebration will recognize senior successes while ensuring the health and safety of scholars and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ceremony will include a commencement address from Mary C. Daly, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, as well as recognition of the graduates, conferral of diplomas and a traditional tassel turn.

“It is with great pride and joy that we celebrate our graduating seniors and all of their amazing accomplishments,” said Helen V. Griffith, Ed.D., executive director of The Preuss School UC San Diego. “The class of 2020 is a remarkable group that will achieve heights unknown because of their ability to persevere and rise above this tumultuous twist to their final high school semester.”

Though scholars are excited for the upcoming commencement ceremony, feelings are bittersweet. The moment that they have been anticipating for seven years has been tempered by a necessity to celebrate virtually. “My advisory teacher, Ms. Tan, through her innate joy and radiance, has taught me to always look at the bright side of things,” explained class valedictorian Mayerling Colin. “Although I know everyone would have preferred to have graduation in person, I am choosing to view the situation from a different perspective. How many Preuss classes can say they have had virtual graduation? None. It is a testament of the community, strength and resilience of my class and everyone who has supported us in our journey.”

The Preuss School Class of 2020 shines academically with an average GPA of 4.09 and a total of \$1.3 million awarded in college grants and scholarships—including a Gates Millennium Scholarship and QuestBridge Scholarship, both covering all college expenses. In addition, 38 scholars from The Preuss School will attend UC San Diego with support from the Chancellor’s Associates Scholarship, which covers all educational costs. This year scholars were accepted



A Surprise Caravan to Announce Graduation Honors

On May 22, faculty and staff at The Preuss School held a special celebratory caravan to announce the 2020 valedictorian and salutatorian graduation honors. Each honoree—which included valedictorian Mayerling Colin and four salutatorians Jackie Le, Jason Nguyen, Kevin Nguyen and Quang Vo—received a banner to put in their front yard and medal from their advisory teacher. Then, a parade of faculty and staff drove by in their decorated vehicles, honking and waving banners to offer their congratulations. [Watch the video here.](#)

to over 70 universities across the nation, including UC San Diego, Yale University, Trinity College, UCLA and Cornell University. Read more about the successes and dreams of a selection of outstanding scholars below.



Diana Martinez Lee

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

College: Trinity College, Conn.

Academic goals: Pursue a degree in biology and minor in sociology.

Career path: Interested in working in medical research, particularly vaccine development.

Leadership involvement: Martinez Lee is part of The Preuss School squash team, where she also mentors middle school students. She also served as head programmer and driver

for the school's robotics team, the Midnight Mechanics. Martinez Lee also joined the Rho Kappa Honors Society and became involved with the local military and veteran community.

One of the most important lessons Martinez Lee learned at The Preuss School is to not let mistakes limit future success. "Being a first-generation college student, I grew up with anxiety over disappointing my parents and family members," explained Martinez Lee. "When it came time to make my own decisions over my education, I found that I had a constant fear of rejection, especially when submitting my college applications."



Emely Ariana Rodriguez Ramirez

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

College: UC San Diego

Academic goals: Pursue a degree in business.

Career path: Interested in starting her own non-profit organization that helps first-generation students succeed.

Leadership involvement: Ramirez joined the Yearbook staff in freshman year and rose to editor-in-chief by senior year. She has always loved taking photographs and is amazed by the power they hold. Ramirez has also been part of the

squash team since 7th grade, and takes part in three honor societies, including the National

Honor Society, Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society and Science National Honor Society. Through her involvement, Ramirez learned that she really enjoys helping people, and plans to continue developing this passion in college.

The most important lesson Ramirez learned at The Preuss School is the importance of resilience. “Preuss is academically a rigorous school, and it can be hard to not be overwhelmed or feel like giving up, especially when I would get a grade that I was not completely satisfied with,” she said. “But I learned to keep looking toward the future.”



Mayerling Colin

Hometown: Los Angeles, Calif., shortly thereafter moved to Mexico where she spent first three years of her life, then returned to U.S.

College: Yale University

Academic goals: Pursue a degree in neuroscience or history of science, medicine and public health on a pre-med track.

Career path: Colin’s dream job is to become a pediatric surgeon. She hopes to become part of the 6% of physicians in the U.S. that are Latinos so that she can give back to her

community.

Academic achievement: Colin is the class of 2020 valedictorian. She has also received a Gates Millennium Scholarship, one of 300 students selected to receive the national scholarship among an application pool of 36,000. “When I first found out I was a recipient of the Gates Scholarship, I screamed, jumped in joy, hugged my parents, and Face Timed my Advisory teacher, in that order,” said Colin.

One of the most important lessons Colin learned at The Preuss School is that you get to choose who and what defines your life. “Our adversities don’t define us; they push us to succeed and accomplish unfathomable things,” she explained. “The opportunities that Preuss gifts us make everything a possibility. Our teachers are committed to preparing us for upper-level education and they recognize the potential in every single one of us. We are allowed to reach beyond the stars, regardless of our background and where we come from.”

Jackie Le



Hometown: Gastonia, North Carolina; moved to San Diego at age six.

College: Swarthmore College, Philadelphia with a full scholarship from QuestBridge.

Academic goals: Plans to pursue a bachelor's and master's degree in biomedical engineering.

Career path: Le, who is one of this year's salutatorians, envisions becoming a biomedical engineer to help create new neurotechnologies for autoimmune diseases such as Alzheimer's Disease and Parkinson's Disease. He is also interested in inventing new types of prostheses for

physically impaired people, especially in developing countries.

Le has come to realize that he should seek experiences that allow him to grow, even if they may be uncomfortable. At times, he found himself disconnected from subjects that did not have a direct link to his plan to become a biomedical engineer. But he shifted his perspective and began to widen his horizons by joining new clubs like robotics, participating on the lacrosse team and more. "There were times I was fearful and reluctant to try these things but I sought the discomfort of experiencing them and in the process, I was able to find new interests, learn skills, and make new friends," said Le. "Thanks to Preuss, I will forever remember to try new things and engage myself in all that I do, especially in my future education."



Doan Le Tuyet Duong

Hometown: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; moved to California at age seven.

College: UC San Diego

Academic goals: Plans to major in cognitive science with a specialization in cognitive and behavioral neuroscience.

Career path: Duong is interested in pursuing both medicine and business. She is still deciding between two career paths, and was drawn to cognitive science for the flexibility of options.

Leadership involvement: In sophomore year, with the encouragement of her friends, Duong joined the lacrosse team, and became captain in her senior year. The experience allowed her to connect with peers both younger and older, who taught her about friendship, sportsmanship, values and family. Duong also learned that losing simply indicates room for improvement, which motivated her to work harder both on the field and in the classroom.

The most important lesson Duong learned at The Preuss School is to share talents and skills freely with others, and don't be afraid to ask for help when needed. Rather than focus on competition and individualism, scholars at The Preuss School cultivate community and collegiality. "At Preuss, we share resources and we're reminded every day that resources are there for us if we just look and ask for it," said Duong. "Before coming to Preuss, I was scared of asking for resources or for help because I felt inferior. But through the years at Preuss, I started to see that asking is a big step into becoming successful."



Ivan Preciado

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

College: Cornell University, New York

Academic goals: Plans to study history at the College of Arts and Sciences.

Career path: Preciado's dream career is to be a criminal defense attorney.

Leadership involvement: Preciado's favorite subject is history, and he is part of The Preuss School's social studies honor society. He also enjoys playing music, and is proficient

with the cello, violin, viola and guitar—all of which he has performed in The Preuss School orchestra.

During his tenure at The Preuss School, Preciado learned to embrace challenges rather than avoiding them. "I think one of the most important lessons that I have learned while being at Preuss is that embracing the difficulties leads to more success than complaining about the amount of homework or tests because it will eventually become normal to us and prepare us for life later on in the future," he said.



Davis La

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

College: UCLA

Academic goals: La will major in physiological sciences.

Career path: His goal is to become a respiratory therapist.

Leadership involvement: La had the opportunity to take part in a two-week summer program through UC San Diego's Health Information Partners to learn more about the medical

field. He lived on campus and got to explore many facets of the field, such as emergency medical transportation via helicopters.

One of the most important lessons La learned at The Preuss School is to make the most of every opportunity presented. “I learned to put my heart into each opportunity and not miss out,” he explained. “These opportunities are meant to help me grow as an individual and I’ve learn how to appreciate more what is being given to me.”



Yadirha Villegas

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

College: UCLA

Academic goals: Plans to major in psychology with a minor in disability studies. Afterwards, Villegas will pursue a master’s degree in counseling.

Career path: Her vision is to become a counselor educator, speech therapist or an autism spectrum disorder specialist with a goal of helping underrepresented communities and young children with disabilities.

Leadership involvement: Villegas calls herself a warrior. She was diagnosed with hip dysplasia at the age of six and endured multiple surgeries and bullying before joining The Preuss School in sixth grade. She found a welcoming space and support from faculty, staff and students as she pursued advanced classes. Villegas joined the cheerleading team—the first time she engaged in sports—which boosted her confidence and self-acceptance. She also found her voice by becoming part of the Associated Student Body. Other leadership involvement included Chelsea’s Light Peer Corps, which recruits student peer counselors, as well as the yearbook staff.

As a scholar at The Preuss School, Villegas learned that comparing herself to others does not achieve anything. “Preuss has been ranked the number one school in the county for a reason,” she explained. “It is full of studious and dedicated students that will always fight for that A+ in a class. It is really easy to constantly compare yourself to others and be hard on yourself because you got an A- in a class. I’ve learned to be happy with my achievements as long as they’re better than the ones before.”

To learn more about The Preuss School UC San Diego, [visit preuss.ucsd.edu](http://visit.preuss.ucsd.edu).

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