

By Erika Johnson Mar 17, 2016



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Hundreds of Prospective Students Encouraged to Pursue Their Educational Dreams

Chicano/a and Latino/a students and families learn about how to prepare for college at UC San Diego conference

The information they learned about university admission requirements was useful, but what Adriana and Raul Ojeda valued most was the hope inspired that their daughter Alysa could attend a university like UC San Diego. That's what the *Comienza con un Sueño* (It Starts with a Dream) event, held March 12 on campus, was all about. The aim of the college readiness conference was to help prospective

students and their families, especially first-generation and underserved Chicano/a and Latino/a students, realize that they are more than capable of achieving their higher education goals, and that barriers such as financial aid are not insurmountable.

“We are so thankful to have programs like Comienza con un Sueño. We now feel like it is possible for her to attend UC San Diego,” explained Adriana Ojeda, whose daughter is currently a junior at Eastlake High and interested in studying neurology. “Alysa is so excited. She wants to get the best grades and take the right classes to get here.”



Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla

Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla welcomed families when they first arrived, sharing insights about the role parents play in helping their students navigate the often complex pathway from high school to college. “We want parents and families in our community to have access to the best knowledge and information about college admissions, so that your son or daughter can successfully apply to UC San Diego,” said Khosla. “It’s important to us that families know that a UC San Diego education is accessible and affordable, and that we will provide a top-quality education and experience that is unparalleled.”



More than 1,000 parents and students from middle and high schools from across San Diego and Imperial Counties attended Comienza con un Sueño on campus. The event was organized by UC San Diego’s Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) and TRiO Outreach Programs, which help strengthen university-community ties by providing local K-12 students with college preparatory programs. The goal was to excite and empower students about their future by increasing awareness of college eligibility requirements and offering a glimpse of the

possibilities for educational and career success.

“We wanted the workshops to be accessible to the Latino community, one of the fastest-growing populations in the state of California, said Carri Fierro, director of UC San Diego’s TRiO Program. “We want these students to continue their education, and realize that you don’t have to give up your language, identity and culture to succeed at an institution of higher education like this.”



Cesar Figueroa, assistant director of Residential Life at Warren College

Participants also heard from Cesar Figueroa, assistant director of Residential Life at Warren College, who talked about his journey to obtaining a doctorate degree. He described how he grew up in Carson, Calif. during the height of gang rivalries, and how he struggled with illiteracy in elementary school. The turning point came when Figueroa's 8th grade U.S. History teacher helped him get on track for college.

"I'm no different than you; my story is much the same as yours," explained Figueroa. "You are destined for greatness. Don't let anybody ever make you feel like you can't. You can, and you will. Like Cesar Chavez said, 'si se puede.' Follow your dreams."

Throughout the day, families were invited to attend a resource fair and three sessions of workshops, many of which were offered in Spanish. Topics included how to prepare for standardized tests and the role of advanced placement courses, how scholarships and other financial aid resources can offset the cost of tuition, and how a university degree can translate to a meaningful career path. Additionally, numerous panels were held with current university students, community college students and parents, each offering firsthand knowledge about preparing for college.

"We have found that many of our first-generation and low socio-economic students don't believe they are eligible to attend an institution like UC San Diego," Rafael Hernandez, director of UC San Diego's EAOP Program. "This program is an opportunity for families to visit and see that UC San Diego is a viable place for them."

Many parents attended the event with their young children, seeking to get a head start. Angelica Maldonado brought her daughter, Angelica, a sixth-grader at Roosevelt Elementary School. "She likes the school very much and says she wants to learn more about it," said Maldonado. "She wants to come to UC San Diego when she graduates from high school; that is her goal."



From left, Carri Fierro, director of UC San Diego's TRiO Program and Rafael Hernandez, director of UC San Diego's EAOP Program

Seventh-grader Alexandra Salomon was excited about the chance to attend "Chemistry from the Kitchen to the Lab." "We learned how chemistry isn't just about the science; it's also shown in many daily activities like cooking," she said. She was also fascinated by the Stuart Collection public art after

taking a campus tour. “They showed us this one that was the Sun God, this arch made out of stone covered with grass. They said that every quarter if you walk backwards under the arch you get good luck.”

The Comienza con un Sueño event was sponsored by UC San Diego’s EAOP and TRiO Programs as well as the Office of the Chancellor and Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Students, staff and alumni from departments across campus took part, including the Office of Financial Aid; Office of Admissions; Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; Career Services Center; Housing, Dining and Hospitality; Cross-Cultural Center; Undocumented Student Services Center as well as community partners from school districts across San Diego.

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