UC SANTA BARBARA
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Julie Cohen

Full of Promise

When 18-year-old Daniela Ramos got an email from UC Santa Barbara last spring, she couldn't believe her good fortune. The university was offering her a full scholarship — $120,000 over four years — as part of a new campus program.

Ramos is among the first cohort of Promise Scholars, a group of exceptionally talented new undergraduates who already have demonstrated the potential for great success in rigorous academics, cutting-edge research and leadership. She and other Promise Scholars were recognized on Thursday, October 8, at a reception in their honor.

The brainchild of Michael Miller, director of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, the Promise Scholars program was developed in collaboration with Claudine Michel, assistant vice chancellor for student affairs. Miller and Michel worked with numerous faculty and staff members across campus to make the program a reality.

"By promising our scholars four years of predictable financial resources, we give them the opportunity to thrive academically and become active, productive participants of a world-class research institution like UCSB," Miller said. "Most importantly, the UC Promise Scholars program allows students and their families to plan for all four years rather than year by year like traditional financial aid programs."

The program not only includes financial aid but also support programming. This quarter, for example, the scholars are enrolled in “The Modern Research University: Pathways to Discovery and Creativity,” a course that introduces them to the nature of research in the various disciplines represented at UC Santa Barbara. The students learn through weekly lectures by faculty members who discuss their creative or scholarly research projects in science and engineering and in the social sciences, humanities and fine arts.

During winter quarter, the students will have the opportunity to participate in the Woods Scholars Program. Named for the late Clyde Woods, an associate professor of Black Studies, the program provides academic opportunities that prepare students to become research assistants.

In the spring, those same students will be matched with faculty members under whose guidance they will conduct research or take seminars in their particular area of interest. “The goal is that they’ll be research-assistant ready by the start of their second year,” said Mark Shishim, associate director of academic initiatives. He co-teaches the “Modern Research University” course.

“I’m excited to build a cohort model and follow it for four years,” Shishim added. “We want Promise Scholars to have regular social events, and the reception is the first. But we also want them to have regular out-of-class contact with professors.” That’s what the upcoming faculty night is all about. On Nov. 10, faculty members will serve as table hosts to groups of five to eight students in Carrillo Dining Commons. Over dinner, students and professors will discuss topical issues and share ideas.

“The final element that we hope to have in coming years is a residential component where the Promise Scholars would live together,” Shishim added. “We would love for them to be part of the Freshman Summer Start Program because then they would live together for the entire year. Our ultimate goal is to provide a small school approach at a big university.”

According to Miller, the program is the first of its kind at a public institution. “We’re really interested to see what will happen with key indicators such as this cohort’s time to degree and graduation rate,” he said. “This program could potentially revolutionize the way the financial aid is awarded and processed at the UC level.”

For Ramos, the program has already been life changing. She was deciding between two California state universities when the UC Santa Barbara offer arrived. “Coming to a UC and getting a full ride, I thought that only happened in movies,” she said.

Still, Ramos, who hails from Harbor City, California, said that the financial aid package wasn’t the only reason she chose UC Santa Barbara. For her, attending Spring Insight sealed the deal. “As soon as I walked in, I felt like I was at home,” she said. “Everyone was smiling at me and I felt completely welcomed by the upper classmen and the faculty.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.