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Destiny By Design

Noe Galvan knows what it means to forge his own path.

Born in the United States, the UC Santa Barbara senior moved to Mexico with his parents when he was an infant. Now 25 years old — and a small business owner — Galvan is about to graduate with a bachelor's degree in global studies. "When I was in Mexico I thought my destiny was going to be following whatever my family was doing," he said. "I had a designed destiny that was already given to me.

"But I decided to construct my own destiny," he added. "And that's pretty much what I'm doing right now."

And it all started with Domingo.

"In Mexico on Sundays everybody gives you money — your parents, your grandparents, your uncles, your aunts give you what they call Domingo," Galvan said. "And I remember my siblings going to spend it right away, but I always wanted to have more than them so I would save it and save it and save it, and I would always have more than them. And you feel kind of good. And it's not to be mean, I just can't believe I would have that mindset since I was a kid — that kind of very genuine ambition."

Galvan intended to become a veterinarian, and when he finished high school in Mexico he was accepted to a veterinary medicine program, but as an international student. His parents hadn't gone through the process of making him a Mexican citizen. And that's when he decided to return to the U.S.

He planned to settle in Chicago, where his brother lived, but Google sent him in another direction. In a search for community colleges with strong English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, Galvan happened upon Santa Barbara City College (SBCC). “I saw the pictures and I fell in love and I said, ‘I want to go there,’” he said.

And so he did. Arriving in Santa Barbara in 2012, Galvan found his greatest challenge was not speaking the language, so he enrolled in SBCC’s ESL program — at the most basic level. “I committed myself to speak English and not to have Spanish-speaking friends for one year so I would be forced to learn the language faster,” he recalled, noting that he made friends with other English learners, from Saudi Arabia, China and Sweden. “Not everybody spoke the same language, so we were forced to speak English. I think that worked very well.”

Completing the entire ESL program in record time, followed by general education requirements, Galvan transferred to UCSB two years ago — all while financially supporting himself — and established himself in the Department of Global Studies.

While at UCSB he continued as a full-time student, taking 16 or more units per quarter while working 40-plus hours a week. In addition to his job as an ESL advisor at SBCC, Galvan owns his own dog-grooming business and works at the online property management portal AppFolio.

He’s the first to acknowledge it wasn’t easy. “I could easily choose, oh, yes, go party and be irresponsible, not show up at work, and that’s it,” Galvan said. But I had to be responsible because I need to pay my rent, I need to pay my expenses. Sometimes I help out my family, so I have all this on my shoulders and I couldn’t choose anything over that.”

But if he could, “I would love having the experience of just going to school,” Galvan said. That just may be in the cards when he lands at Columbia University next fall, a plan that came to fruition only a few weeks ago. “After graduation I thought I was going to stay here in Santa Barbara, go to UCSB for my master’s and keep working at AppFolio and growing my business,” he said. Instead, he will head to New York City to study technology management.

“I applied to Columbia just to give it a try, and I got in,” he continued. “I’m building my own destiny, my own journey. My path. And I feel so bad leaving this behind — I’m so attached to it. I don’t want to let it go, but I have to. I have to because it’s

time for me to start another chapter of my life.” Galvan’s graduate education will be enabled through a private grant and a student loan. “I have committed myself to not work, and just enjoy,” he said.

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.