Chris Yanez showed up to his high school’s orientation for Upward Bound in a football uniform caked with dirt and reeking of his sweat. He hadn’t planned to attend at all. But when his mom found his invitation to the meeting poking out of his backpack, Yanez was forced to go “as is.”

As a high school freshman, he joined Upward Bound, a federally funded Department of Education college preparation program for high school students who are first-generation or low income. After some initial struggles, which included getting booted from the dorms at Pitzer College during the summer program for organizing pillow fights and sneaking out after hours, Yanez was given a second chance. By his junior year at Ontario High School, he was working hard to improve his grades and returning to Upward Bound that summer at Pitzer.

“Disappointment wasn’t a good feeling,” he says. “I told myself that if they could be patient with me and understanding, then I could change.” Buoyed by the support of his Upward Bound tutors and the prodding of his single mom of three sons — an immigrant from Ecuador — a more confident Yanez improved his grades and enrolled at Cal Poly Pomona. He began working for Upward Bound in 2012 as a tutor and also served as resident advisor on campus for three years during the summer. After completing his bachelor’s degree and earning a master’s and credential in school counseling from Cal State Los Angeles, Yanez ‘15, psychology) returned to Cal Poly Pomona’s Upward Bound in 2020 as an academic advisor to help students a lot like himself.

“I want to give back to the community,” he says. “I tell students I wasn’t the typical 4.0 student taking AP classes. Whatever opportunity I got, I took it and ran with it.”

Upward Bound is among dozens of equity programs that Cal Poly Pomona offers to ensure underrepresented minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students achieve academic success. Some programs, such as Upward Bound and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), date back to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and ’70s while others were created in recent years in response to the ever-changing needs of students. At Cal Poly Pomona, 52 percent of the more than 27,000 students enrolled are underrepresented minorities. About 46 percent of undergraduates receive Pell grants, federal funding for students who demonstrate exceptional financial need.

There is a 4 to 5 percent equity gap in student achievement for low-income students and a 10 percent gap for underrepresented minorities. That gap needs to be zero, says Terri Gomez, associate provost for student success, equity and innovation.

“Unless we’re targeting these students, we aren’t going to close the gap,” she says. Students who are first-generation, low income or who didn’t have the academic advantages of some of their peers may feel as if they don’t belong on a university campus. Equity programs help to dispel that notion by looking at what students do have rather than what they don’t, Gomez says.

“We often look at students through a deficit lens, but we should change our perspective,” she says. “These programs say, ‘We have a first-generation student who against all odds is here and they bring with them cultural assets and a deep commitment to breaking barriers.’ When programs take this approach, it helps students. They see that what they bring matters in these programs, so it matters in the classroom.”

While the focus of the programs may vary, they share commonalities: mentoring, a study space where students can gather and connect, and academic support like supplemental instruction, tutoring and workshops. They are largely funded with grants, but some programs also benefit from the generosity of donors who have provided for scholarships, laptops, and resources for those experiencing food and housing insecurity. In 2019-20, donors provided more than $250,000 to address students’ basic needs and other urgent needs at the university.

“Community support programs only go so far,” says Gina Johnson, executive director of central development. “Philanthropy really makes a difference in helping students excel and achieve success. People have been very generous throughout this pandemic. They are not forgetting about students who need the most help.”
A GROWING NEED

Both Gomez and Leticia Guzman Scott (’90, business administration; ’94, MBA), executive director of student support and equity programs, say that the COVID-19 pandemic further underscores how vital equity programs are. The pandemic has exacerbated economic disparities for low-income and underrepresented minority students, uncovering a significant technological divide.

Since the University Library and computer labs are unavailable, the university launched several initiatives for students to receive a free loaner or lease-to-own laptop, as well as lending Wi-Fi hotspots to bridge the digital gap.

Donors have played an important part. A new crowdfunding campaign helped more than 100 incoming students secure a personal device through the Bronco Bookstore’s discounted laptop program. In another effort, the College of Business Administration secured 240 laptops and 200 hotspots, including one year of internet service, and plans to continue working to secure more from InterConnection in partnership with Avanade.

Guzman Scott’s office oversees EOP, which serves 2,700 students throughout the year. Some are in Renaissance Scholars, a year-round program for former foster youth. EOP Transition Programs such as Summer Bridge and Transfer Bridge help incoming freshmen and transfers. EOP Tutorial Services and the Veterans Resource Center provide tutoring, mentoring and a physical space for students to connect. In the last couple of years, a new pilot program connected 24 academic coaches with about 400 first-generation, underrepresented freshmen in the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences.

Guzman Scott, an EOP alumna, says the program started as a movement in 1969 as social justice activists pushed for equity in access to education. Equity hasn’t been fully realized yet, so programs like EOP are critical, she says.

“I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for EOP,” she says. “A lot of EOP students are not on a trajectory to successfully graduate from college when they first get into the program. Then, they learn about graduate school, getting their dream job and how it can transform their future family’s life, as well as their own lives.”

Demand for EOP and other equity programs has increased over the past 30 years, as the number of first-generation and transfer students has risen, Guzman Scott says. As of 2019, more than half of Cal Poly Pomona students are first generation and transfers — 57 percent and 51 percent respectively.

Equity programs on campus are available to assist students at every stage — transitioning from high school to college, navigating the university years, and going from college to graduate school programs or a career.

THE CONFIDENCE TO PERSIST

At a conference several years ago, Rick Quintero recalls an attorney from a Fortune 500 company taking the stage. Donning an expensive Brooks Brothers suit, the woman talked about her participation in Upward Bound and how the program lifted her and her family out of poverty.

For Quintero, executive director of Cal Poly Pomona’s TRIO Pre-College Programs, the message resonated. Education is the key to socioeconomic mobility.

“Why not changed that woman’s life, but we are changing her family’s life for an entire generation,” he says. “That’s the power. It’s like a drug. We get hooked on changing the communities we grow up in.”

That drive has kept Quintero working in TRIO programs since he arrived at Cal Poly Pomona in 1995. He oversees eight Department of Education grants, with the majority funding Upward Bound at 10 high schools in Pomona, Chino, Montclair and Ontario.

Students attend Saturday academies and a six-week summer residential program, and parents learn about applying to college and securing financial aid.

Participants aren’t required to attend Cal Poly Pomona — as part of the program, they apply to three CSUs, three UCs and three private universities — but 36 percent do apply to be a Bronco. Upward Bound works to instill the confidence that first-generation and low-income students need to persist.

“Students don’t drop out of college because they get an F in statistics,” Quintero says. “They drop out often for economic reasons or they have impostor syndrome. We work with them on self-esteem and leadership skills.”

EQUAL ACCESS

The bulk of equity programs on campus, including I AM FIRST (first-generation students), Project SUCCESS (men of color), Bronco Scholars (first-year students needing additional math support) and PolyTransfer (transfer students), are designed to support students as they work toward earning their degrees.

For example, the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and its ARCHES program that provides academic advising, peer tutoring and mentoring, help ensure that students with disabilities receive equal access.

Students get help with how to meet deadlines, study more efficiently and take better notes, says DRC Director Tracee Passeggi.

“Without having accommodations, our students wouldn’t be able to have equal access,” she says. “Our staff is innovative and really puts access for students with disabilities at the forefront.”

Donors Peter and Tina Strand gave $50,000 in 2010 in honor of their son Jassen, an engineering student who died that year.

Last year, the couple contributed an additional $50,000 to expand the President’s Scholars program, which now designates one of the 26 scholarships for a student with a disability. (Turn to page 11 for more on the Strand family’s memorial fund.)

The DRC also supports students in their efforts to make change, such as in the case of Paul An, who graduated this summer. In his junior year, he created United with Differences, an annual campus event that spotlights disabled students. (Go to page 12 for An’s story.)
UNITED WITH DIFFERENCES

Recent Grad Shines Light on Students With Disabilities

By Melanie Johnson

Paul An grew up hearing what he was never going to do. Born with the rare genetic disease Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD), which attacks and weakens the body’s muscles, the 2020 graduate was told at an early age that he would never walk, play sports or be very successful academically. An, who gets around in a wheelchair, says he has battled depression over the years as a result of his DMD. One thing that has helped him grapple with the disease is sharing his story. Two years ago, he created United with Differences, an annual event on campus that would put a spotlight on the disabled. “I had this vision to create an event where people with disabilities could be heard,” says An ('20, business administration), who was a transfer student from Mt. San Antonio College. “I wanted to give people with disabilities a platform.”

The inaugural event in 2019 featured four speakers from campus and a keynote address by Stephanie Aiello, a makeup artist who became quadriplegic after a car accident. The second annual event in February 2020 featured four speakers from campus, including An, who grew up in Toronto. It was planned by the CLASS council as part of Disability Pride Week. The campus community was very supportive of United with Differences, An says. The Disability Resource Center and several student clubs and councils assisted with the planning and launching of the event.

Eric Sepulveda (‘19, communications), whose cousin has muscular dystrophy, volunteered to help plan the 2019 event. “I explained to [Paul] that I had a heart for that,” says Sepulveda, adding that his cousin got a chance to meet Aiello.

The student planning group was vision-driven and benefited from An’s leadership and dedication, he says. “Paul is awesome,” Sepulveda says. “You can tell he has a huge heart. The root of it is that he sees the powerful impact that an event like this can bring to other people. He took the time out of his schedule and really felt this burden to give others a platform to speak. He wanted to make sure people on campus would be able to hear how he lives his life.”

Before graduating this summer, An passed the event to other Cal Poly Pomona students in the hope that they will continue where he left off. The recent graduate is a motivational speaker. He has a blog and plans to create a podcast. “I want people to realize that people with disabilities, while we have a different reality, we are all kind of the same as everyone else,” An says. “We all have our struggles.”

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

The Strands Honor Son’s Life Through Memorial Fund

By Nancy Yeang

Four days before a final exam at Cal Poly Pomona, Jasen Strand was admitted to the hospital to drain fluid from his lungs. His parents, Peter and Tina, planned to call his professors to reschedule the exam, but Jasen was determined to be discharged to take his test on time. The day of his final, he was cleared to go home, took the test and scored 100 percent. “Some students may have taken advantage of the situation and used it as an excuse, but he was not that kind of kid,” Tina says. “He would not use his disability for any excuse. He wanted to be treated normal and be just like a normal person.”

At age 6, Jasen was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which causes muscle degeneration and weakness. His parents were uncertain about his future until he turned his disability into a pursuit to make others’ lives better.

He enrolled at Cal Poly Pomona in mechanical engineering in 2003, with a goal of designing wheelchairs that can navigate difficult terrain, such as mountain paths and sand. He was awarded a post-humous degree when he passed away in 2010 due to a complication caused by a ventilator tract he used for breathing. To honor Jasen’s life, the Strands, with the help of family, community members, and matching donations from Peter’s work, made an initial gift of $50,000 in 2010, to create the first program by one award, and 26 students received $3,500 scholarships this year. “His love for Cal Poly Pomona and his desire to help other disabled students is what he was all about,” Peter says. “Now, he will continue to do that through these scholarships.”

Cal Poly Pomona’s DRC helps students by addressing their specific needs, including testing and housing accommodations, mobility assistance, and sign-language interpretation or real-time captioning. “The DRC assisted all disabled students who needed help,” Peter and Tina say. “They made sure Jasen got everything he needed and made the process much easier for him and all disabled students to go through college.”

“We knew that he would have wanted to carry on what he can do at Cal Poly Pomona. He always loved helping people.”

To learn more about the Disability Resource Center and how to support it, email drc@cpp.edu or call 909-869-3333.

“His love for Cal Poly Pomona and his desire to help other disabled students is what he was all about. Now, he will continue to do that through these scholarships.”
When Jose A. Gomez was growing up in low-income housing in La Puente, just minutes from Cal Poly Pomona, university life seemed tantalizingly near yet unattainable.

“My mom was alone and worked in odd jobs cleaning houses and in factories,” Gomez says. “I remember being on welfare. It was just a really, really difficult and challenging time.”

For a time, his mother coiled water hoses at a factory and urged him to apply for a factory job in the hope of becoming a supervisor.

But professors and administrators at Cal Poly Pomona saw promise in Gomez (“‘93, sociology). He became student body president. He also chairs the Cal State BioSpace, an incubator that supports biotech entrepreneurs.

Cal Poly Pomona remains in his thoughts and in his heart, and he regularly looks for ways to help students bridge the gap between their resources and what they need to survive. In 2019, he created the Gomez Family Basic Needs Endowment – the first of its kind at the university – to support the Broncos Care Basic Needs Program, which provides food and housing aid to students.

“When you’re struggling,” he says, “it can be something really small that prevents you from making it through the week or the month or the semester.” He delights in helping students find a good meal, a place to sleep or clothes for an interview.

“This year he created a Faculty Excellence Award, which recognizes exemplary achievement and service to students, the university and the community by faculty in the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, as well as four annual scholarships for ASI student leaders. Giving back to the university that started him on a path to success is something he has been passionate about for years. He regularly looks for ways to help students bridge the gap between their resources and what they need to survive. In 2019, he created the Gomez Family Basic Needs Endowment – the first of its kind at the university – to support the Broncos Care Basic Needs Program, which provides food and housing aid to students. When you’re struggling,” he says, “it can be something really small that prevents you from making it through the week or the month or the semester.”

“Systemic racism exists in education and as faculty we have a direct avenue to challenge that and create change,” she says. “The change starts with us.”
By Melanie Johnson
Reggie Robles spoke his return to Cal Poly Pomona into existence. After graduating in 2012 with a degree in political science, Robles told friends and mentors that he hoped to one day return to campus to serve as the leadership development coordinator. In 2016, he did just that—leaving the University of Redlands after a 4½-year stint to take on that role for CPP’s Office of Student Life & Cultural Centers (OSLCC).

“It was a big dream,” he says. “I love leadership. Leadership is such an integral concept in how we develop a student to reach their potential.”

Robles runs Bronco LEAD (Leadership, Engagement, Advocacy and Development), which was created in 2014. The program has three certification levels for students—an introduction to leadership, a discovery course to determine who a student is as a leader; and Lead-by-Doing, which involves action-driven activities and positions on and off campus. More than 600 students have been certified since 2018.

Surveys of participants found that 93 percent of those who attended a leadership development workshop walk out with the confidence to apply what they learned, 95 percent learned something new about their capabilities and 94 percent said they feel prepared to share leadership concepts with their peers. Leadership goes beyond merely holding positions or offices, he says.

“It’s also the capacity to lead and then act, being able to develop yourself and have essential skills, being able to understand yourself, being able to understand others and care about the people around you,” Robles adds.

When he was an undergraduate, the El Monte native was active in several clubs, volunteered at ASI events and worked for OSLCC. He also began seeking out mentors.

Political Science Professor Renford Reese was one of them. Intellectually curious, Robles was the kind of student who would follow Reese to his office after class for more dialogue. He later played on Reese’s intramural football team. They remain bonded.

Reese recalls Robles meeting social justice activist Patrisse Cullors and Yusef Salaam to campus in 2019 to speak to students for two separate events, tapping into the zeitgeist of recent times.

“He’s adept at running leadership events,” Reese says. “He understood that social justice is a cause de jour, and he brought the right person in at the right time.”

Robles, who has a master’s from Cal State Fullerton and is pursuing a doctorate in education from Claremont Graduate University, says while there are inequities in education, it also offers a way for students to break through social and economic barriers.

“Advocacy from people like me and teaching students to learn to advocate for themselves is important, not just for education but in life,” he says. “It’s important to know who we are, so we can decide for ourselves what we can be.”
The following donors are recognized in the President’s Circle, a community of individuals who make an annual investment in the university of $2,500 or more to help cultivate student success. Donors choose:

- Everyone has a role to play.
- Their peers, or the donor who provides scholarships to deserving staff member who makes sure students find needed resources, the
- Position than everybody else.
- Getting their degrees. You kind of need that edge to be in a better
- Says. “It gives you that competitive edge. There are a lot of people
- Grad school that you might not have developed or refined,” she
- Myself is what drives me to create opportunities to students.”
- And that they were paying it forward. The desire to pay it forward
- Alumni chapter
- And is currently a member.
- The Cal Poly Pomona Latino
- Grant-funded program that readies students for STEM careers. As
- It’s also why he created the
- Program that prepares students for graduate school, and
- It’s especially important for Cal Poly Pomona to mentor and
- First-generation student says
- Higher pay. We teach them how to advocate for themselves.”
- “Unconscious bias and environments that tailor to ‘a one size fits all’ that don’t nurture people of varying talents — that’s the barrier,”
- Studies have found that women and underrepresented minorities are less compelled to seek roles in leadership and fight for
- “We teach them how to advocate for themselves.”
- Abigail Trujillo, a junior studying chemistry, participates
- Equity programs help students navigate around obstacles they
- Equity programs help students navigate around obstacles they may face on their individual paths to success. Whether it’s the
- It’s especially important for Cal Poly Pomona to mentor and prepare students for life after college. College retention is critical, but so is setting students up for success in graduate school and the
- It’s why Alas (’94, biology) runs the university’s chapter of the
- “Equity programs help students navigate around obstacles they may face on their individual paths to success. Whether it’s the
- “You help them gain those interpersonal skills for career or
grad school that you might not have developed or refined,” she
- “It gives you that competitive edge. There are a lot of people getting their degrees. You kind of need that edge to be in a better position than everybody else.”

**PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE NEXT PHASE**

**Cover Story continued from page 11**

**Biological Sciences Professor Steve Alas is not satisfied with just helping students earn a bachelor’s degree. As a professor and alum, he’s invested in preparing them for graduate school and a career.**

It’s why Alas (’94, biology) runs the university’s chapter of the Louis Stokes Alliance Minority Participants (LSAMP), a federal program that prepares students for graduate school, and Science Education Enhancement Services (SEES), which boosts the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students. It’s also why he created the Scholars Program in Research, Education and Science (SPIRES), a National Science Foundation grant-funded program that readies students for STEM careers. As an alum, he served as president of the Cal Poly Pomona Latino Alumni chapter and is currently a member.

Alas says, “Through my involvement of my life, there have been people who stepped in and helped me along the way,” Alas says, “There’s really no way to pay back what was done for me. I came to realize that the people who helped me stood on the shoulders of people before them and that they were paying it forward. The desire to pay it forward myself is what drives me to create opportunities to students.”

The equity programs he leads provide low-income students with a stipend (up to $5,000), as well as professional development activities, workshops and research opportunities with faculty. It’s especially important for Cal Poly Pomona to mentor and prepare students for life after college. College retention is critical, but so is setting students up for success in graduate school and the workforce, where many women and underrepresented minorities leave the STEM fields, Alas says.

“Unconscious bias and environments that tailor to ‘a one size fits all’ that don’t nurture people of varying talents — that’s the barrier,” Alas says. “Studies have found that women and underrepresented minorities are less compelled to seek roles in leadership and fight for higher pay. We teach them how to advocate for themselves.”

Abigail Trujillo, a junior studying chemistry, participates in SEES, LSAMP and SPIRES. The first-generation student says growing up in Fontana, her parents pushed her and her younger sister Vikva, a freshman majoring in Spanish, to go to college but

It’s why Alas (’94, biology) runs the university’s chapter of the Louis Stokes Alliance Minority Participants (LSAMP), a federal program that prepares students for graduate school, and Science Education Enhancement Services (SEES), which boosts the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students. It’s also why he created the Scholars Program in Research, Education and Science (SPIRES), a National Science Foundation grant-funded program that readies students for STEM careers. As an alum, he served as president of the Cal Poly Pomona Latino Alumni chapter and is currently a member.

It’s why Alas (’94, biology) runs the university’s chapter of the Louis Stokes Alliance Minority Participants (LSAMP), a federal program that prepares students for graduate school, and Science Education Enhancement Services (SEES), which boosts the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students. It’s also why he created the Scholars Program in Research, Education and Science (SPIRES), a National Science Foundation grant-funded program that readies students for STEM careers. As an alum, he served as president of the Cal Poly Pomona Latino Alumni chapter and is currently a member.

It’s why Alas (’94, biology) runs the university’s chapter of the Louis Stokes Alliance Minority Participants (LSAMP), a federal program that prepares students for graduate school, and Science Education Enhancement Services (SEES), which boosts the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students. It’s also why he created the Scholars Program in Research, Education and Science (SPIRES), a National Science Foundation grant-funded program that readies students for STEM careers. As an alum, he served as president of the Cal Poly Pomona Latino Alumni chapter and is currently a member.