

SBCC Promise...Four Years of Success

By George Yatchisin

Now four years in existence, the SBCC Promise — which provides all recent, local high school graduates with the opportunity to attend SBCC full-time for two years free of charge — has had more than 4,500 participants.

It has been even more successful than we had anticipated," says Geoff Green, CEO of the Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) Foundation. While the Foundation projected that 1,400 students would likely participate in the program annually, the figure has actually been 1,700.

But numbers barely explain the power of the SBCC Promise. Many of the students participating could not imagine attending college without it. Just ask Alyssa Nuno, a first-year sociology student who asserts, "The Promise is giving not only me but a lot of people the opportunity to go to college." In Nuno's case, it also gives her the chance to save for her future education when she transfers after earning her associate's degree. This Dos Pueblos High School grad has big plans, hoping to eventually apply to USC's physician's assistant program. "My family has never had a lot of money," she says, "so I'm trying to save as much money as I can."

Meanwhile, thanks to the Promise, Santa Barbara High School graduate Sarhai Gastelum has plans that are out of this world. Gastelum wants to be an astronaut. She jokes, "My mom told me, 'We stopped sending monkeys to space, so you should think about it.'" Gastelum says professor Stephanie Mendes and the Earth Dynamics class changed



Alyssa Nuno

The SBCC Promise gives her a chance to save for her future education.



Sarhai Gastelum

Class field trip costs are covered by the SBCC Promise, allowing her to participate.

her life — that's what SBCC and the Promise can do.

Gastelum's mother is from Mexico and has experienced immigration challenges, so Sarhai makes clear, "I wouldn't be able to go to college with my mom's situation." The Promise does even more for her, as it covers class field trips, for example, a five-day sojourn to Death Valley with the Earth Dynamics class. "My mom was so happy I could go," Gastelum says. "She told me, 'We all should have been born in Santa Barbara!'"

Indeed, while other community colleges have similar programs, the SBCC Promise has two important distinguishing factors. First, it doesn't assess family income. "Just because someone has resources on paper doesn't mean the family can or will use that money to support the student's education," Green points out.

Second, it doesn't set a barrier based on a student's high school performance. "We all know students who performed poorly in high school, and who later thrived in college," Green insists. The Promise has also changed the composition of SBCC. In the past, one third of local students attended full-time. Since the introduction of the Promise, two-thirds of local students now enroll full-time, and are earning demonstrably better GPAs as well.

The SBCC Promise relies on privately raised funds • Discover how you can help at www.sbccpromise.org