

DOCTORS ACADEMY

Graduates applaud Selma High's Doctors Academy program



2 HOURS AGO • BY STEPHANIE AVILA SPECIAL TO THE ENTERPRISE

Founded by the UCSF Fresno Latino Center for Medical Education and Research to encourage disadvantaged students to focus on careers in health and medicine, UCSF Fresno Selma High School's Doctors Academy is having a positive effect on students who have graduated from the program. Originally, Selma High School's Doctors Academy was launched at Sunnyside High School in Fresno.

"The rural Doctors Academy programs were started six years ago at Selma High School and Caruthers High School," said Mark Babiarz, principal at Selma High School.

Babiarz said the Doctors Academy came to Selma High School with the goal to prepare high school students to become competitive applicants to four-year universities by providing them with a rigorous academic program that includes experience in research and clinical settings, service learning and exposure to universities and colleges.

An important part of Selma High School's Doctors Academy is the college trips that are made available to the students.

"The Doctors Academy college trips have included Stanford University, UCLA, UCSF School of Medicine, UC Davis and USC," said Babiarz.

Laura Pérez, a Selma High Doctors Academy graduate in 2011, is currently a third-year undergraduate at UC Berkeley with a major in molecular environmental biology.

The first time Pérez visited UC Berkeley was when she was a part of Selma High's Doctors Academy.

"Once I stepped onto the UC Berkeley campus, I knew that it would be a place that would foster my way of thinking and growth in higher education," said Pérez. "Those trips exposed me to places beyond the Central Valley that I might not have visited otherwise. I think getting a feel of a different environment was crucial in helping me figure out where it was that I wanted to be after graduation, something that not a lot of underprivileged students have the chance to experience. In some sense, it gave me a chance at having a choice."

Upon graduation from high school and entering into a college, students who've been in the Doctors Academy are better able to handle the rigors of college, said Babiarz.

"The way they provided tutors and other members to prepare me on taking proper notes, how to be committed to my studies, how to be a professional in general, how to understand how college life would be like and to become a successful person in life really prepared me for college life," said Alexandra

Reyes, a Selma High School Doctors Academy graduate in 2012 and current nursing major at Fresno City College.

Said Babiarz: "Upon graduating, the goal is to then have the students return to the community of Selma or the Central Valley to address the disparity of health care service often found in smaller rural communities."

"Being part of the Doctors Academy is definitely more than being a student of academic excellence. It instills within us this sense of communal and cultural appreciation because we learn about the inequitable resources and services in our communities of color," said Pérez. "It's more than learning about health disparities within our Central Valley community, because a lot of us actually experience these struggles. Our community is often left in a cycle of teenage pregnancy, domestic abuse and poverty, all of which are a part of our health disparities, but being part of the Doctors Academy gives us a chance at overcoming these internal, structural struggles."

Austin Barkely, Selma High Doctors Academy graduate in 2012 and current biology major at Reedley College said: "Even though my start in [Doctors Academy] was by accidental reasons, I am really appreciative of the experiences I had with the program. The program gave me a sense of duty to not only further my education, but to also give back to my community."

According to Babiarz, during the six years that UCSF Fresno Selma High School's Doctors Academy has been in existence, all graduates of the program have been admitted to a four-year university and continues to offer support to alumni of the program.

"I am a third-year student at UC Berkeley now and all along my path from freshman year in high school up until now I have been in close communication with Doctors Academy coordinator and directors ... " said Pérez, "It's great to know that there is a support group of intellectuals who understand the struggle in the Latino community of achieving a higher education. Personally, the struggles that I have experienced since immigrating to the Central Valley are the roots of my devotion to give back to my community, whether it is as a doctor, educator, or scientist. And hopefully someday, as UCSF Fresno's Selma High School Doctors Academy alumni, we can help rebuild our communities and bring more than just hope to younger generations."

The Selma High School Doctors Academy program is open by application to any entering eighth- grade student. The application process includes a minimum grade point average, teacher recommendation and an interview.

"To middle school students applying to the program, I would say take the chance. Applying to UCSF Fresno Selma High School Doctors Academy is a great opportunity to be a part of a program who can offer so much to a student," said Barkely. "The program will help a student in college whether their major is medical based or not."

Reyes and Pérez urge students to apply for the program.

"Take this one lifetime opportunity. It's an awesome program. Trust me, this will benefit you. Once you are out of high school, you will be thankful for all the information and support you got from this program," said Reyes.

Said Pérez: "The program requires several responsibilities, but if you stick with it and try your hardest to accomplish your responsibilities, it can truly open many doors and choices that you might have not had otherwise."

