



# NEWS RELEASE

**Contact:** Judy Iannaccone  
Director, Communications  
**Phone:** (714) 480-7503  
**E-mail:** [iannaccone\\_judy@rscgd.edu](mailto:iannaccone_judy@rscgd.edu)

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **OC Resident Josué Cruz to Participate in the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy** *\*Josué Cruz is one of 30 selected from a nationwide pool of applicants\**

(Santa Ana)—Santa Ana resident Josué Cruz, has been selected to participate in the inaugural GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy (GUALA). GUALA is a 12-month leadership development program for alumni of the federal GEAR UP program. The selected Alumni Leaders will travel to Washington, DC, in June 2013 and receive training on grassroots advocacy, social media advocacy, and leadership skills during a week-long retreat. The Alumni Leaders will then return home to work toward creating positive change in education policy for their younger peers. Cruz was selected from a nationwide pool of candidates for the inaugural class of 30 Alumni Leaders.

GEAR UP, or Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a federally funded college access and success program serving approximately 700,000 low-income students across 43 states and three territories. GEAR UP programs serve students starting in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and follow the students through high school graduation or first year postsecondary. GEAR UP programs are designed to meet local educational needs, and services often include academic tutoring, financial literacy, FAFSA completion, college tours, parent engagement programs, and more.

GEAR UP Santa Ana is directed by Santa Ana College (SAC) in partnership with Santa Ana Unified School District, University of California, Irvine, and several community based organizations serving the city of Santa Ana. Over the last 13 years, the GEAR UP Santa Ana partnership has served more than 15,000 students, seventh through twelfth grade, in six middle schools and four high schools in Santa Ana. The GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy is a new program to engage alumni in a national effort to educate lawmakers and the public about the value of investing in targeted college access and success services. Using personal stories, Alumni Leaders will articulate the impact GEAR UP had on their success in postsecondary education.

Cruz, a 21-year-old biochemistry major at SAC, has set his sights on medical school. On May 24, he will graduate from SAC with a 3.41 grade point average. He plans on transferring to California State University, Fullerton; University of California, Irvine (UC Irvine); University of California, Los Angeles; or Occidental College in fall 2013. His journey to this point has not necessarily been easy, but one thing is for certain—"determined" is his middle name.

Cruz comes from a family of five that includes his father, a laborer; his mother, a housewife; his younger brother; and older sister also a student at SAC. His parents have always encouraged him to do well in school by telling him that education is a means to a better life. Even in middle school, he was driven to do well in school and smiles when he remembers how he and a group of friends would compete for the best grades. While enrolled at Willard Intermediate School, he participated in the GEAR UP program and spent seven days in the summer living at UC Irvine and getting a taste of college.

Once he knew college would be in his future, he researched what he had to achieve to ensure college admission—good grades, extracurricular activities, and community service. From his freshman year in high school, he charted his course towards college enrollment and the career of his dreams—medicine.

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At Santa Ana High School, he enrolled in Advanced Placement classes and got engaged in a wide range of activities at school and in the community. He was a member of the Naval Junior Officers Reserve Training Corps, a tutor with the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, president of the Red Cross Club. A highlight of these years was participating in CampMed at UC Irvine. For three days, he was mentored by medical students who gave him his first hands-on experience in the medical field.

Since enrolling at SAC, he continued his community involvement. He has participated in Senator Lou Correa's Young Senators Program, was selected to participate in the 2009 NCCEP Annual Youth Leadership Summit, has been a active member of the Student Ambassadors Program and the Honors Program and has been a regular volunteer in the Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen ever since he was in middle school. Last summer, he participated in the Santa Ana College Research Scholar Program. The six-week program featured research training seminars, presentations by scholars and the opportunity to execute a small group research project.

"This is one of the best opportunities I had at Santa Ana College," said Cruz. "It was the best thing to prepare me for a research institution like UC Irvine. I also benefited from the Transfer Mentor Program which paired me up with a mentor from UC Irvine. I tried to take advantage of everything that SAC had to offer."

"I feel happy that I have been selected for the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy. I have some knowledge of what it takes to go from middle school to high school and then to college. I look forward to sharing what I have learned about what you should do and shouldn't do and know what positive results having a mentor can make in your future."

GUALA is a program of the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), the national training and technical assistance provider for the federal GEAR UP program. The Kresge Foundation provided funding to support the program.

"We welcome the inaugural class of the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy," said Nathan Monell, NCCEP president and CEO. "These students exemplify the spirit of GEAR UP, and illustrate how the federal investment in the GEAR UP program is having a direct effect on these students' success in postsecondary education. We look forward to sharing their powerful stories with the community."

"Josué is a stellar student and a humble leader," said Lilia Tanakeyowma, Ed.D., SAC dean of student affairs and director of the Santa Ana GEAR UP Partnership. "Josué has shown other youth in our community that focused drive, attention to academic excellence and a servant leader attitude accomplish much."

For more information about the Santa Ana GEAR UP Partnership, contact the Office of School and Community Partnerships at Santa Ana College at 714-564-6970. To learn more about the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy, contact Judy Martinez at the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships at 202-530-1135 x 104 or [www.edpartnerships.org](http://www.edpartnerships.org).

#### **About the Rancho Santiago Community College District**

*The mission of the Rancho Santiago Community College District (RSCCD) is to respond to the educational needs of an ever-changing community and to provide programs and services that reflect academic excellence. Santa Ana College and Santiago Canyon College are public community colleges of RSCCD, which serve the residents of Anaheim Hills, East Garden Grove, Irvine, Orange, Santa Ana, Tustin and Villa Park. Both colleges provide education for academic transfer and careers, courses for personal and professional development, customized training for business and industry, and programs to train nurses, firefighters and law enforcement personnel.*

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District Office

2323 North Broadway

Santa Ana, CA 92706 - 1640

(714) 480-7500 Tel (714) 796-3900 Fax