

USC TRiO student is Harvard bound



Thomas S. Sayles, USC senior vice president for university relations (left), visits with Jorge Campos, Theda S. Douglas and Johnathan Franklin, the ceremony's keynote speaker and a USC TRiO alumnus who played for the Green Bay Packers and now works in community affairs for the Los Angeles Rams.

Photo by Sergio Gascon

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Once homeless Palmdale teen helps family save to buy home, gets accepted to Harvard

By Jade Hernandez

A once homeless Palmdale teenager defied the odds and was honored at a banquet Tuesday night because he will be heading to Harvard.

Jorge Campos is one of 106-upward bound students who was honored at USC in math and science. For the past 40 years, the university's federally-funded Trio Program has had one goal - to make college accessible for low-income students and students first in their families to go to college.

"Living in the present is OK, but constantly thinking about your future is even better," Jorge said. "It was kind of

hard for (my parents) to argue against Harvard once I told them that I really wanted to go."

Jorge, the son of Mexican parents, is heading to Harvard in the fall to study economics. While moving 3,000 miles away will be tough, his parents owe their son.

Before entering high school, his father lost his job resulting in the family of six becoming homeless for three months. That very same year, Jorge enrolled in college-level courses at Los Angeles Community College, which taught him about money.

"I took over my parents' finances, under

budgeting, and now two years later, we purchased our home," Jorge said.

The move to Palmdale meant Jorge trekked 70 miles one way for two years to graduate from his South L.A. high school.

"I think he's going to be able to give back to our world and inspire other young people and kids of color who didn't think that they could actually do it," said Theda Douglas, associate vice president of USC university relations.

Jorge credits USC for all that he has done to date, including getting a full ride to the Ivy League school.

USC TRiO programs mark 40 years of helping low-income pupils get ready for college

The programs have been life-changing for students like Jorge Campos, who was homeless at the start of high school but will be attending Harvard in the fall.

By Pamela Madrid

USC's TRiO programs marked 40 years of providing college-access skills to low-income high school students May 16 with their annual awards ceremony honoring the year's graduates.

"The success of the USC TRiO Programs has resulted from a strong commitment from our students to strive for excellence throughout high school, work hard, and persevere through any obstacles along the way," said Theda S. Douglas, USC associate vice president, government partnerships and programs.

The USC TRiO programs are designed to help high school students overcome class, social and cultural barriers to higher education. The program serves 2,500 college-bound, low-income students across 15 low-performing public high schools in South and Central Los Angeles annually, providing promising students with counseling, academic instruction, tutoring, assistance with the college admissions process and financial aid. USC currently hosts nine TRiO programs: four Upward Bound Programs, two Upward Bound Math-Science Programs and three Educational Talent Search programs. USC TRiO is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

More than 100 program graduates were honored at the May 16 event including Jorge Campos, an Upward Bound Math and Science scholar whose story defies the odds.



Jorge Campos Photo courtesy of Jorge Campos

Homeless to Harvard

During high school, Campos' day typically started with a 4:30 a.m. alarm. The 70-mile journey from his Palmdale home to Manual Arts High School in South Los Angeles, where he has just wrapped up senior year, was long and included two bus transfers. Despite the distance, Jorge knew it was a small price to pay, having recently emerged from homelessness.

Just before Jorge started high school, his father lost his job; the family of six was homeless for three months, living in a van, hotels and with relatives. The experience sharpened Jorge's resolve to succeed, and he enrolled in college-level community college courses the same year. He's just three classes shy of earning an associate's degree in natural sciences and mathematics.

And the big prize within his reach: Jorge is going to Harvard University in the fall as an economics major.

Being homeless also motivated Jorge to

learn about finance and how his family could transition from being a "high loan risk" to homeowners. Thanks to his diligence, the family purchased their own home in Palmdale two years ago. To this day, Jorge manages the family's finances.

The son of Mexican parents, Jorge grew up in South Los Angeles blocks from USC. He always knew college was in his future; it was just a matter of how, and where. During his freshman year, Jorge was invited to join the USC TRiO Upward Bound Math and Science Program at his high school, which provided him with valuable educational tools, and resources at USC.

"After enduring a series of hardships with my family, a renewed appreciation for education, and admiration for knowledge and its power, emerged. I discovered that I have a knack for learning. The USC TRiO Math and Science Program provided the tools, and support, to feed my insatiable drive to learn," Jorge said.

TRiO success

The TRiO programs include a 15- to 17-week Saturday Academy each semester. That academic support program meets at USC's University Park Campus, providing strong SAT preparation dedicated to increasing scores in math, reading and English composition. Program scholars can also attend a six-week summer residential program, which offers participants a glimpse into the college experience by allowing them to live at USC and take college-level classes for credit.