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Compton College Alum Begins Master's Program in Higher Education Counseling

“As a DACA student, I’m extremely grateful for the opportunities I’ve received and I’m interested in a career where I can help other underrepresented students navigate higher education and be successful in reaching their goals,” said Julio Reyes Cabezas, who graduated in 2019 from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and is currently working toward his master’s degree in counseling at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB).

Reyes Cabezas, who came to the United States from Mexico when he was four years old, received his initial guidance in navigating higher education at Compton College after graduating from Dominquez High School in 2012. “I originally didn’t see myself going to college because I didn’t know what it involved or how to manage everything,” Reyes Cabezas said. “Compton College gave me a chance to have a good foundation for my education both financially and academically.”

While at Compton College, he was given the opportunity to apply for the UCLA Center for Community College Partnerships Scholars program and was accepted to the university’s first undocumented student scholars cohort in 2015. “This was the first time I could really envision myself going to a university,” said Reyes Cabezas. “The scholars program took place on the UCLA campus, and we stayed in the dorms for a week. We learned about social justice issues, what college life would be like, and received valuable guidance on how to navigate college.”

Reyes Cabezas took advantage of all the resources and assistance offered to him at Compton College, which aided in his success. He enrolled in the First Year Experience (FYE) program which connects first-time college students with learning communities where students collaborate, study in groups, and learn skills for academic success. “I received an FYE scholarship that helped because during my first year, I had paid for everything out of pocket,” he said. “The following year, the California DREAM Act application became available and I applied for it.” I also received extra support from the Extended Opportunities Programs and Services and AB 540.”

Compton College also helped Reyes Cabezas develop as a professional through its student worker program. “I was one of the first FYE peer ambassadors and I also become a tutor for other students,” he said. “I worked as a math tutor and a Supplemental Instruction coach, so I was getting paid to study!”

With this strong foundation, Reyes Cabezas earned a spot as a Compton College honors student. He graduated in 2016 with three associate degrees: an associate degree in social sciences, and associate degrees for transfer in psychology and sociology. He then transferred to UCLA as a psychology major

with a double minor in education studies and labor and workforce studies. There, he found his rhythm and passion for helping others while also gaining work and advocacy experience. Under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), he worked as a peer mentor for UCLA's Center for Community College Partnerships; a resources and outreach coordinator intern for the Undocumented Student Program; the lead peer counselor for the university's Academic Advancement Program where he also conducted research on the resiliency of undocumented college students; and he was the internal advocacy representative for UCLA's Improving Dreams, Equity, Access and Success (IDEAS), a student-run support and advocacy group for undocumented individuals.

Reyes Cabezas currently works as a student services specialist at Fullerton College while also studying at CSULB to earn his master's degree in counseling, with an option in student development in higher education. This degree will set him up with a variety of career options including a college academic counselor, a student affairs practitioner, or a faculty member. His job helps him pay it forward by working one-on-one with undocumented students to provide them with support and referrals to needed resources both on and off campus, as well as conduct informational workshops. He also leads "UndocuAlly" training for faculty and staff and initiates additional/new support services for undocumented students. His current and future work is focused on "bridging the gap between systemic barriers in higher education and the need to retain and support these underrepresented groups." He believes that college is a great way to find a community and build one.

"Despite originally not planning to attend college, I learned that education *was* my purpose so I can help others like me," said Reyes Cabezas. "Each person, especially immigration impacted individuals, can discover their purpose and college might be the foundation for making that happen."

Photo available online:

http://www.compton.edu/adminandoperations/communityrelations/images/2021/J_ReyesCabezas.jpg

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About Compton College

Compton College is the community's education solution offering a full complement of transfer and degree courses, as well as career and technical education. Students may earn an associate degree or certificate, transfer to a four-year university or train for a career. Compton College is located at 1111 E. Artesia Boulevard, Compton, CA 90221.