



Educational Talent Search participants tour the campus of CSU Sacramento on the first stop of a college tour that includes multiple campuses in Southern California.

FEATURE

# Expanded Opportunity

## UPWARD BOUND, GEAR UP AND EDUCATIONAL TALENT SEARCH PROGRAMS FIND A HOME AND A SHARED VISION AT THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

On January 2, 2019, the School of Education began managing the College Opportunity Programs, three venerated programs that have collectively changed the educational trajectories of tens of thousands of Northern California middle and high school students across generations and geography.

The programs transferred from UC Davis Student Affairs to the School of Education, where they are now managed by Senior Director Renee Newton of the Resourcing Excellence in Education center. The transition nearly doubled the School's staff overnight, and expanded our locations beyond Davis to eight counties, at school sites as far away as Redding in Shasta County and Etna in Siskiyou County.

The School of Education was a natural home for Upward Bound, GEAR UP and Educational Talent Search, the three federally funded programs combined under one banner as College Opportunity Programs, said Newton. "These programs represent the historical federal education equity programs, some of which have been at the UC Davis campus since 1968," she said. "This move really advances the School's mission to engage with public

schools and community partners with a goal of eliminating educational inequities. It's an opportunity to explore and expand the School of Education's research-practice partnerships."

The students served by College Opportunity Programs are facing systemic inequities. They often live in regions struggling with poverty, unemployment, and low rates of high school completion and postsecondary education. They are frequently from low-income families and are potential first-generation college students. They are unsure how to prepare, apply or pay for college, and may instead be expected to work and help support their families as soon as they leave high school.

Each program is funded through multiple-year federal grants on a project basis, and each has a different approach to helping students thrive in high school and transition successfully to college.

## Educational Talent Search

Educational Talent Search (ETS) serves 500 students in rural Shasta County and 1,700 students in Solano and Sacramento counties. Two-thirds of participating students must be from low-income families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. Services are provided on-site at the students' schools.

"We're opening doors to college for students who otherwise wouldn't have the option," said Angela Radford, director of the Shasta ETS program. "These students have the drive and potential but not a lot of role models or resources." ETS staff provide career exploration, assistance with college searches, applications, tours, financial aid and majors, and academic advising that includes tutoring, SAT/ACT prep, course planning and study skills.

Shasta County families face higher-than-average rates of poverty and unemployment, and lower rates of high school persistence, postsecondary enrollment and college completion. "We're painting a new vision for our students," said Radford. "Without this program I think many of them would be swept up by the status quo. I have a very strong calling to help this generation and generations to come meet their full potential. Some of our students have no one in their corner. They don't always know they matter. We want them to know that we believe in them and that they can go on to be successful."

## Upward Bound

Like ETS, Upward Bound serves students in Shasta, Solano and Sacramento counties, but it has programs in Siskiyou County as well. Upward Bound works with high school students from low-income families and families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree, providing them with the support they need to successfully complete high school and go on to earn a college degree. That includes topics such as college applications, financial aid, career exploration and financial literacy.

In Yolo, Solano and Sacramento counties, Woodland-based staff members make weekly visits to students at their schools to provide services. Students attend a monthly Saturday academy, and spend six weeks on the UC Davis campus in a summer residential program. "About 90 percent of our participants go on to college because of the services they've received," said Sam Blanco III, who directs both the Upward Bound and ETS programs

located at the Woodland office. "Sometimes parents cry when their child is accepted into Upward Bound, because they know it means their child is going to college."

A different model is needed in more remote communities with fewer resources. In rural Shasta and Siskiyou counties, Upward Bound advisors teach a daily elective class at the local schools.

Tim Warkentin directs the Shasta County Upward Bound program, located in the small towns of Anderson and Cottonwood. "We serve one high school in each town, for a total of 120 students," said Warkentin. "This is a very rural area—most people work in ranching and farming. A lot of our students are from low-income families and don't get out of the county very often. Some have never seen the ocean. This program is about helping them see beyond what they know, and seeing a future where they can break the cycle of poverty and provide for themselves and their families."

Upward Bound staff in Siskiyou County serve students in the towns of Yreka and Etna, which are even smaller and more remote. Yreka has a population of nearly 8,000 people, while Etna, population 800, is in a rural area classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as "frontier" due to its low population and remote location. One-third of the 180 students at Etna High School participate in Upward Bound.

As both director of the program and a long-time Siskiyou resident, Maryann Kaae-Munson has seen the difference Upward Bound makes. "Some of our students leave the region to get their education and then come back, and that's our best bet to maintain a healthy, vital community," she said. "Then there are others who graduated from our high schools and went on to high-profile careers elsewhere, and they're proof to our students that coming

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ANGELA RADFORD



Clockwise from top left: COP program directors Stacey Garrett, Sam Blanco III, Maryann Kaae-Munson, Angela Radford, Cody Lane and Tim Warkentin.

“

Working in administration is difficult, but having Steph as a partner has helped me stay focused through all these years and has really driven me.”

BYRON LAIRD

just another meeting. What I hope we can communicate is a sense of urgency for people to join in and that there's this opportunity for people to make impactful change, whether that's in their classroom, in their community or both.

### What is it like to be working together while married?

**BYRON:** It's funny because I just don't think about it that often since I'm really immersed in it right now. And when I wasn't working with Steph, we would still come home and bounce ideas off each other. We met at the school and our personal relationship definitely had a component of work. We are both driven, passionate people, and we connected pretty quickly in that sense. I love working with Steph because it's awesome to see her in action, making a meaningful impact. How many people

can say that about their spouse? Working in administration is difficult, but having Steph as a partner has helped me stay focused through all these years and has really driven me. It's been an amazing experience, and I definitely wouldn't trade it for anything.

**STEPH:** It's been awesome to have Byron there through some of those really hard times, and I couldn't imagine doing a lot of the things that we're doing this year without our collaboration. A lot of the boundaries between work and home bleed over because we're working towards this common mission together. It hasn't all been just policy. It's also been organizing opportunities that are good for our students and just fun for us to do, like student camping trips. It's been really great to experience this wide range of things with him, and I have a feeling we're just going to keep going. ■

from a small school without a lot of AP and honors classes doesn't have to limit your potential.”

### GEAR UP

The GEAR UP program serves Colusa, Glenn and Tehama counties in the north Sacramento Valley area. “This is a high-poverty, rural agricultural area and has some of the lowest college attainment rates in the state,” said Stacey Garrett, director of GEAR UP.

GEAR UP uses a cohort model, starting with a group of students who are in sixth and seventh grades and providing services to them until the end of their first postsecondary year. The goals are to increase academic performance, college preparation, high school graduation rates, and student and family knowledge of college options and financing.

“We have a full-time staff member housed at each of the seven middle schools to provide services and support for not only this group of students, but also to their parents, the school and the school staff,” said Garrett. “For students, that might mean college and career field trips, tutoring and curriculum. It could be professional development for the teachers working with these students, parent education meetings, or electronic equipment purchased for the school.”

Advisors stay with students as they move through their grades and into high school, where students coming from other middle schools join the cohort. For this reason, the program initially serves approximately 1,800 students but serves nearly double as many by the time it concludes.

“We instill in families the idea that a plan for going to college is possible,” said Garrett. “We're helping to end generational poverty. I am very passionate about these students and their education. This has been my community for 25 years. I want there to be equal access to education for all, no matter whether you're rich or poor.” ■

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