News for Aztec Parents
Exploring what makes an SDSU education unique

What is The Aztec Experience?

Ask 100 students what stands out from their SDSU experience and you will get 100 different answers. Question 20 faculty and staff members about what are the pivotal moments in their students’ careers at San Diego State and the answers will be as varied as the students themselves.

Amongst all of those answers, however, you would find similar themes — ways in which each student’s experience at this university is unique and special.

We call these unique elements hallmarks of The Aztec Experience.

The four ways in which most student experiences are special include:

Leadership Inspired

San Diego State University provides countless and some unique ways for students to develop and hone their leadership skills. Many of the opportunities offered here, particularly to undergraduate students, would not be found at other universities. Such inspirational advantages prepare our students to lead in the world, not just go along with the crowd.

Diversity Redefined

Being an incredibly diverse campus already affords opportunities for students to learn and grow from ethnicities, cultures and sexual orientations that are not their own. Since students are often surrounded by this diversity regularly, the definition of diversity expands for SDSU students to include experiences and other distinguishing factors that make each individual extraordinary. We call this the frontier of diversity happening on a daily basis at the San Diego State campus.

Meaningful Connections

Students connecting with one another is viewed by many as a natural occurrence on a college campus. But are those connections true and meaningful? San Diego State is consistently aspiring to find new and better ways to connect students to each other, to faculty and staff, to the community at-large, and to the campus for life. Building these connections has been shown to help students be more successful in the classroom, as well as when they leave the university with a diploma.

Transformational Opportunities

Certain key experiences, particularly during a student’s college years can forever change the course of their life in the most positive of ways. SDSU encourages students to undertake such opportunities including completing an internship or mentorship, studying abroad and actively conducting research alongside notable academicians in various fields as some of the experiences that shape students for their futures.

These are just a few of the stories of The Aztec Experience.

Leading the Way to Wellness

From policy makers and changers to business movers and shakers, leadership takes many different forms. For one group of San Diego State University students, it’s all about making campus, and the world, a healthier place.

SDSU’s Peer Health Educators (PHE) program is comprised of undergraduate students — about 20 each semester — who are passionate about health education and outreach.

Participants learn about the health issues most relevant to their fellow students, including sexual health, nutrition and alcohol and drug use, and become skilled in the theory and techniques that can help create positive behavior change. The student leaders then raise awareness about health topics through formal presentations to student groups, workshops and semester-long, campus-wide projects.

Since the program’s inception in 1995, more than 700 undergraduate students have served as Peer Health Educators. In addition to implementing health promotion programs on campus, many of them, including Nicole Jackman, have gone on to pursue careers in health-related fields.

International Reach

Jackman, who graduated from SDSU in 2012 with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health, provided information and peace of mind to fellow female students as a gynecology session leader during her time as a Peer Health Educator. From there, she became the Sexual Health Intern for SDSU’s Student Health Services department.

Now Jackman is a Peace Corps Volunteer at a youth center in the central region of Uganda, where she promotes HIV awareness and testing, among other sexual health initiatives, including family planning and youth counseling.

“I was young, I can remember being interested in sexual health and empowering women about their own reproductive rights,” she said. “I just didn’t know this interest was labeled ‘sexual health.’”

“An old woman who is already old and has been married for some time is the best example of a successful woman,” Jackman continued. “These are the women that are请你等下继续进行。
CREATING A COLLEGE

Since 2002, Chase has worked to develop the University Honors Program at SDSU. For the past six years, Chase, Honors Program Director Stacey Sinclair, and the university as a whole have been laying the foundation to expand the successful program into a college all its own.

Transforming the Honors Program into the University Honors College is more than a name change. While SDSU’s honors program has long supported high achieving students, creating a distinguished University Honors College creates more opportunities for more students.

“Ultimately, we’re really committed to having as many students succeed as possible. The University Honors College creates a larger culture that informs the larger community. And that culture is a way of signaling to all students how important engagement, reflection, leadership, and transformational educational experiences are,” he continued.

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AND LEADERSHIP

Programmatic changes include modified GPA and curriculum requirements, additional tracks to completion and more openings for student participants. The objective? Putting the idea of inclusive excellence into practice.

“Center for Leadership and Community Service

Some students are unsure of where the opportunities for leadership might be discovered, but for those looking for leadership training for the years ahead, the Center for Leadership and Community Service provides countless opportunities for students to develop skills inherently found in leaders, regardless of their industry or purpose. Randy Timm, director of Student Life & Leadership, the Student Affairs department that oversees the program, said that the multiplicity of offerings in the center ensures there is something to suit every student who seeks out an opportunity.

‘There is sometimes a misconception that a leader must be very extroverted and aggressively seek out opportunities to lead,’ Timm said. ‘But many of the workshops and other opportunities available through the center are there to teach students more about themselves and their own leadership style, regardless of how introverted or extroverted they might be.’

Perhaps the most structured way in which a student can pursue leadership training and education is through the

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Leadership Certificate Program housed in the center. Open to any SDSU student at any class level, the program takes between 18 months and two years to complete.

Students who undertake the program are required to:

- Attend seven leadership workshops. Five of the workshops are required from a list that changes each semester.
- Participate in two experiential learning opportunities chosen from a varied list including the SDSU Leadership and Community Service Center for Leadership and Community Service and any SDSU Co-Curricular Transcript, a document that will allow students to highlight achievements and skills that are relevant to the work world and gained outside of the academic classroom.

“We know students who can display they have the ‘soft skills’ necessary to be successful and thriving workers in a professional environment — things such as the ability to work in a diverse, globally-focused environment and to effectively communicate and thrive in a dynamic world — are much more appealing to employers,” said Christy Samarkos, associate vice president for student life. “Therefore the skills and tools taught in the Leadership Certificate Program can significantly increase a student’s value and employability after graduation.”

These soft skills are known as relational leadership in the Center for Leadership and Community Service. Based on the research of Susan Komives and Timothy McMahon, relational leadership focuses on the idea that the effectiveness of a leader is based on their ability to create positive relationships within an organization. “There is nothing better than re-connecting with a student years after they’ve gone through leadership training and having them detail for you all of the ways the leadership training they pursued helped them succeed,” said Robin Adams, associate director in Student Life and Leadership. “Sometimes it takes them leaving the university to truly recognize just what well-prepared leaders they really are.”

Relational leadership tools and training are especially important to success in an ever-changing and increasingly diverse world. Equally important is a person’s ability to know themselves, embrace their individual story and the things that make them who they are as a person within society. Through development of these two areas, members of the San Diego State community hope that students will be better able to embrace diversity in all its forms, not only on campus, but beyond the Mesa as well.

The One SDSU Community initiative is the result of this desire to help students learn, grow and embrace our increasingly diverse society. Students who complete the program will have the achievement documented on the upcoming SDSU Co-Curricular Transcript, a document that will allow students to highlight achievements and skills that are relevant to the work world and gained outside of the academic classroom.

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A sampling of **ONE SDSU Community** activities and events:

- **Maysoon Zayid’s humorous and engaging presentation** about living with cerebral palsy shifted focus from disability to ability with humor and wit.
- **Scott Turner Schofield’s one-man show** employed multimedia storytelling to reveal a few of the stories from the life of a guy who happened to be born a girl.
- **Jamie Utt’s experience as a sexual assault survivor’s advocate** informed his presentation on creating a “sex-positive” culture on campus as a way to help prevent sexual violence.
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**One SDSU Community Receptions**

- **August 27, 2014, 4:30 - 5:30 pm**
  - Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union
  - Hispanic, Chicana/o & Latino/a, Pride Suite
  - Asian Pacific Islander, Metztli Room
  - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender, Student Life & Leadership
  - Jewish, Tehuanco Room
  - Women’s, Center for Intercultural Relations
  - African American, Center for Intercultural Relations
  - Native American, Student Life & Leadership
  - Filipino, Legacy Suite

**One SDSU Community Kick-Off Event**

- **August 27, 2014, 5:30 - 9:30 pm**
  - Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union
  - Montezuma Hall
  - Open to all SDSU students, faculty, staff and administrators
  - Live Entertainment
  - Cultural Performances
  - Spoken Word Festival
  - Student Organization Tabling
  - Refreshments

To date more than 3,500 students and members of the greater San Diego State community have attended One SDSU Community events. Programming and other activities are already planned for the spring. For more information, please visit [one.sdsu.edu](http://one.sdsu.edu).

For many students at San Diego State University, the experiences, people and lessons learned while working toward a degree prove to be life changing. For Ryan Vanshur, becoming an Aztec in the summer of 2012 not only changed his life, but played a key role in saving it too.

Vanshur, an Army veteran, father and senior majoring in International Business, was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma one month before his first semester at SDSU. He had to make a decision: heed his doctor’s advice and quit school before he started in order to focus on intense chemotherapy treatments, or take on the battle for his life and upper division coursework at the same time.

“I had already moved to San Diego and committed to SDSU, so it wasn’t really a choice,” Vanshur said. “I had to make the most of the opportunity given to me and prove to myself and everyone around me that I could overcome this challenge.”

Vanshur not only finished upper division coursework, but also graduated from SDSU in December 2014. He is now back at work as a firefighter in San Diego and plans to pursue a master’s degree in business at SDSU.

[continues from page 11]

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Ryan Vanshur
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choice,” Vanshur said. “I took it on as a personal challenge. I had done all this work to get here and all of a sudden it was going to be taken away from me. I wasn’t ready to give that up.”

Vanshur connected with Student Disability Services, taught himself course material when he couldn’t attend classes, and earned a 3.7 grade point average that first semester. He begins his senior year this semester as president of the International Business Society and recipient of the 2014-15 Dorothy Allshouse Endowed Scholarship. The $10,000 minimum scholarship awards non-traditional students who are attending SDSU after having been in the workforce.

A BROADER AND DEEPER IMPACT
According to Michelle Lopez, assistant dean for student affairs in the Division of Undergraduate Studies, Vanshur embodies SDSU’s commitment to creating and supporting a diverse student body packed with unique perspectives from all walks of life.

“I love that our campus fosters and inspires curiosity and encourages students to think critically about how they can be strategic in what they do outside of class to complement their learning in the classroom,” she said.

“With my scholarship hat, I’m looking for students who make a deeper and broader impact. When you take a student like Ryan, who has the potential to impact the community in a big way, that’s exactly what we’re looking for.”

For Vanshur, being an Aztec represents much more than earning a bachelor’s degree. It’s about taking every opportunity that comes his way, knowing that tomorrow is never guaranteed. In fact, he admits he doesn’t say “no” to much these days — a life philosophy that led him to Costa Rica last summer to study conflict resolution, and to SDSU’s Zahn Innovation Center, where he’s helping to launch a business as Chief Operating Officer for a company called Course Key.

“I am so passionate about this school,” he said, pointing to his gray SDSU shirt. “It was a part of saving my life.”

Meaningful CONNECTIONS
Friends, Mentors, Allies. There may be no better time in a student’s life than now to build meaningful relationships — the kind that deepen learning and forge the way for life-changing opportunities outside of the classroom. What’s more, research shows that when students feel connected, whether to a university-level mentor or to their own peers, they are more likely to persist toward graduation.

But with more than 35,000 fellow students and more than 5,000 faculty and staff members at SDSU, where do students begin? Of course, the clear answer to that question largely depends on where one hopes to end and what they want to achieve along the way. But not knowing the “right” answer is also part of the beauty of the Aztec Experience: the process of discovery is a journey in and of itself, and making meaningful, personal connections can help students not only define their goals, but realize them, too.

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Making the Connection
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SCHOOL
Excelling academically at SDSU requires more than attending class and logging study time in the library. Connecting with classmates, faculty and staff within their academic fields is vital to the success of all students, whether their goal is to land a job upon graduation or continue onto a graduate program.

WORK
Some students have known “what they want to be when they grow up” since they were young children. Others come to SDSU, understandably, still pondering that decision. Despite which side of the fence your student sits, the Aztec Mentor Program is a no-brainer when it comes to not only making connections, but also helping students make up their minds about which career path to pursue. The free program allows students to pair up with a vetted professional working in a career field of their interest, benefiting from one-on-one guidance, job shadowing and networking experiences throughout the semester. Visit career.sdsu.edu for more information.

LIFE
Whether it was the daily car rides to and from school, a few moments over breakfast, or pre-game pep talks on the field, as a parent, you’ve had to be strategic about finding ways to connect with your student despite busy schedules. At SDSU, we’re no different. When students aren’t in class, working at a part-time job, or volunteering, they’re busy, well, living life. But that doesn’t mean they’re disconnected. For students living in the residence halls, the Faculty In Residence program builds an out-of-the-classroom connection with one of the world’s most mystifying creatures: the professor. Actually, they’re real people, too, who just want to help students succeed. That’s exactly what students learn when they live, eat, and hang out with them in the same residence hall.

For students majoring in science, engineering and math, the S-STEM Scholarships Program is just one way to connect with classmates, faculty and staff within their academic fields. The program also connects participants with a $5,000 scholarship and engaging research opportunities. Learn more at www.csrc.sdsu.edu/s-stem.html.

CO-CURRICULAR
If we could sum up the Aztec Experience in one word, it would be “holistic.” When students are engaged on campus, just as much learning happens during class as it does outside the classroom doors. For students who participate in Aztec CORE, it’s the great outdoors that become the backdrop for lessons in life and leadership.

The free off-campus retreat is focused on developing student leaders through experiential learning. Students connect with each other and to SDSU staff during workshops throughout the day and over s’mores at night. Not only do they return from Mt. Palomar with new leadership skills, they return with a sense of connection to a new group of friends and mentors.
Estefanía Castañeda


This is but a short list of the ways in which 23-year-old SDSU alumna Estefanía Castañeda has been described by some of the people who came to know her well during her time at the university. A political science major, SDSU Quest for the Best award winner and Presidential Diversity Scholarship recipient, Castañeda is a study in transformation and achievement. A Fulbright scholar now teaching English at the Instituto de Educación Secundaria Mariano José de Larrain in Madrid, Spain, Castañeda was a stand-out student who has taken every obstacle put in her path and used it as motivation to achieve more and shine even brighter than before, Lopez said. “It is a pleasure to work with and advise such a wonderful student and human being.”

BREAKING DOWN BORDERS

Castañeda, a U.S. citizen, grew up in Tijuana, Mexico with her mother, Araceli, who works as a pharmacy technician, and her younger brother, Cesar. Beginning in junior high, Castañeda commuted back and forth across the U.S.-Mexico border daily to attend school in San Diego’s south bay. Her mother wanted the experience for Castañeda to develop better English skills.

“Once I started crossing daily for school purposes, I had to change so many things,” Castañeda said. “My backpack became heavier — everything became heavier.”

In March 2009, the heaviness she felt took on a whole new meaning. Castañeda, who was passionate about traveling to Japan after meticulously studying books about Japanese art and culture at the library, won a scholarship from her high school, High Tech High, to take a trip to the country that she had come to love. When she arrived back home, she was shocked to find a family friend, and not her mother, at the airport to pick her up.

“I knew something was wrong even before I got home,” Castañeda said. “When my mom wasn’t at the airport, I knew it was bad.”

Her mother, the one who had encouraged her to cross the border daily to expand her educational horizons, had her privileges to cross that same border revoked herself due to discrepancies with health insurance paperwork.

“Once she told me what happened, I started crying,” Castañeda said. “It was a pain I had never experienced before. She couldn’t be at my graduation. She couldn’t help me pick a dress. That first day, when I had to cross the border by myself, I felt really vulnerable. Even though I am an American citizen, I was afraid to cross. It was very emotional.”

Castañeda plans to pursue graduate studies in political science with an emphasis in border studies after she finishes her Fulbright program. She said she eventually wants to start or be involved with an organization challenging the idea of border enforcement and even the idea of borders themselves.

“Crossing the border is a necessity for so many people — either an economic or educational necessity,” Castañeda said. “Because of that reason, many people find it difficult to challenge border enforcement or borders at all. There is a world out there that should not be constrained by borders. I want to help create that world.”
Nowhere to Go But Everywhere

Summer study abroad programs offer international experiences for every student

Is your student interested in studying abroad, but not sure if fits into their semester schedule? Perhaps a summer program is the ticket to their transformational study abroad experience — with academic credits earned being a first-class bonus!

Applications for most summer study abroad programs are due in early March, so if summer is the right time for your student to immerse him or herself in global learning, there is still time to investigate program options and apply.

Here are just a few of the study abroad opportunities available to your student:

• If Latin American culture appeals to your student, how about a five-week Brazilian language, history, culture and literature program in São Paulo, Brazil? Part of the International Student Exchange Program, a consortium of international universities of which SDSU is a part, Fundação Armando Alvarenga Penteado offers a summer program along with language training for students from around the world.

Noah Hansen, director of the International Student Center, said anytime a student is considering studying abroad, the first step they should take is to attend an information session to learn more about the various types of programs available. Information sessions are offered at the International Student Center, located near Parking Structure 4 on the west side of campus weekly on Tuesdays at 2 p.m., Wednesdays at noon and Thursdays at 4 p.m.

Following attendance at an information session, students should complete a profile in the Aztecs Abroad database. Registering in the database establishes a student's interest in studying abroad, even if they are not decided on a program. Students can use the database to search hundreds of programs offered from departments across the San Diego State campus.

"For some students summer is a great time to go abroad as it allows them to have an international experience and inspires them to pursue new and diverse interests when they return to campus for the fall," Hansen said.

Leaving a MARC

San Diego State University may be a top-ranked small research university, but don’t let the title fool you. There’s nothing “small” about the research being conducted on campus throughout the year.

In fact, SDSU researchers were awarded nearly $108 million in grants and contracts last academic year alone. For the past 25 years, a slice of that pie has come from a National Institutes of Health grant dedicated to supporting an undergraduate program at SDSU called Maximizing Access to Research Careers, or MARC.

MARC provides hands-on research experience and mentorship to low-income, underrepresented student populations, helping them carve paths to meaningful careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Moments of Discovery

Sara Torres, a sophomore majoring in biochemistry, was one of eight students who participated in last summer’s Pre-MARC program, which prepares students to work in a lab setting while giving them insight into research careers and preparing them for the competitive MARC application process.

"It’s challenging, that’s what I like about research," said Torres, who has been fascinated with exploration and discovery since childhood. "It’s something new every day; you’re always going to be faced with a new problem to solve.

"Not every four-year university provides undergraduates the opportunity to do research. When you do have that opportunity, it definitely opens your mind to new things, and you see things differently. The people you meet along the way, and their perspective on life, it’s very interesting. When you’re in the same environment, and you feel the same as the person next to you, it’s just so much more motivating. You want to do your best — not only for yourself but for others, too."

Paul Paolini, professor emeritus in the biology department, runs the Rees-Stealy Research Foundation Laboratory where Pre-MARC and MARC students engage in original research focused on cardiac muscle cell dynamics.

"Working in a laboratory, involved in discovery, that’s the exciting part," Paolini said. "If you can figure out some aspect of a project that hasn’t been known beforehand — especially if you get that published — that gives you a sense of achievement, a sense of satisfaction that’s hard to characterize. It’s a matter of discovery and self-realization as students finally get this sense that they can do something that’s original and a contribution, and it makes a difference.”
Mentoring Initiates Reflection, Encourages Success

For SDSU alum Jordan Evans, participating in the Aztec Mentor Program was his way of not only encouraging bright new talent in the College of Engineering, but also a way to give back to the school that gave him so much.

“I was a huge fan of SDSU, even before I was a student,” Evans said. “It’s been 21 years since I graduated and I still am a passionate Aztec. This is a way for me to share my career experiences and lessons learned with others who will soon be alumni like me.”

Evans, manager of the Mechanical Systems Division for the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory at the California Institute of Technology, commonly called JPL, has participated in the Aztec Mentor Program, or AMP, since before the program even had its official title. And for his last mentee, mechanical engineering major Jeremy Caplan, Evans’ guidance and advice could not have been more transformative.

Caplan, 22, is in his senior year and signed up for AMP to receive guidance and maybe a foot in the door for internship opportunities before he graduated.

“When I saw that Jordan worked with NASA, I thought to myself, ‘Wow, I’ve gotta pick that guy as my mentor,’” Caplan said. “He really took the time to learn about what I want to do and helped me prepare for the future.”

Evans, who works in Pasadena, conducted the majority of his mentoring sessions with Caplan via Skype every Monday. The pair launched their time together by reviewing and revising Caplan’s resume and cover letter weekly and discussing how the revisions would eventually better communicate his skills to a future employer or internship coordinator — an internship that eventually materialized at JPL.

“I shadowed Jordan for the day at his job and eventually I was working in a different department, but for the same place,” Caplan said.

Delivering an internship opportunity isn’t something expected of a mentor when they participate in the program, according to SDSU Career Services, which coordinates the program. But, often, the relationship built between mentor and mentee leads to some type of hands-on career advancement opportunity.

“JPL is as close as it gets to a ‘real’ internship experience,” Evans said. “There are deadlines, there are projects, there are meetings, there are presentations.”

Delivering an internship opportunity isn’t something expected of a mentor when they participate in the program, according to SDSU Career Services, which coordinates the program. But, often, the relationship built between mentor and mentee leads to some type of hands-on career advancement opportunity. Since their time together in the Aztec Mentor Program, Caplan has launched his career search and is hopeful a job at Lockheed Martin or Boeing will be his upon graduation. Evans is now mentoring his fourth student and said he has no plans to stop participating in the AMP.

“An opportunity to impact the life of a student at San Diego State is something special and it doesn’t require much effort,” Evans said. “We spend about 15 to 17 hours together over the course of a semester and I think that’s a relatively small time commitment for a relationship that positively benefits both parties.”