

BECOMING A COLLEGE STUDENT IN HIGH SCHOOL

NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH LOS AMIGOS HIGH SCHOOL ALLOWS INCOMING FRESHMAN TO EARN AA DEGREES BY THE END OF THEIR SENIOR YEAR



He may be only 13, but Victor Lozada already has an idea of what he'd like to be when he grows up.

"I'm not sure," says the incoming freshman at Los Amigos High School in Fountain Valley. "But I'm thinking investment fund manager. They use a lot of math, and I love math."

Victor having a solid shot at eventually attending and graduating from college largely has to do with a new partnership between Golden West College and Los Amigos High called the Early College Academy.

Through its Dual Enrollment Program partnership with the Garden Grove Unified School District, GWC already offers high school students the opportunity to earn college credits through state-sup-

ported College Career Access Pathway Agreements.

However, this partnership with Los Amigos marks the first time the college is offering a four-year sequence of classes that will satisfy all the general education requirements for colleges in the Cal State and UC systems.

"By the time they finish high school, they'll have completed their first two years of college," says Matt Valerius, project director, Guided Pathways & Dual Enrollment at GWC, referring to the first cohort of 80 incoming freshmen accepted into the Early College Academy at Los Amigos High.

College Career Access Pathway Agreements are designed to help kids from low-income families and other underserved members of the community

who may be sitting on the fence about attending college.

Because the college-level classes they take while in high school are absolutely free, the students' families save a significant amount of money that otherwise would have gone to college tuition.

Valerius estimates that Early College Academy graduates save their family in the neighborhood of \$15,000 if they end up going to a Cal State University and closer to \$30,000 if they select a University of California school.

"This is completely transformative for the students and their families," Valerius says.

Victor, who attended Fitz Intermediate School in Santa Ana, says he's very excited.

"This is a great opportunity for me because my family doesn't have a lot of money," he says. "It will really help me along."

Victor dreams of going to UCI or UCLA.

"It's a good thing GWC is offering this program because many people don't have the financial ability to go to college," he says.

Late last year, administrators at Los Amigos High School began the process of seeking applicants for the Early College Academy from feeder schools in its district. Parents were notified about the program, and 141 kids were interviewed.

Eventually, 80 students, including Victor, were selected.

The students will take four college



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Eighty incoming freshman were accepted into the Early College Academy at Los Amigos High

classes each academic year — two in the fall and two in the spring. In their junior year, they will take just one college course in the fall because of regular state testing.

“This was in the works before I came on board last July,” says Los Amigos High School Principal Amy Avina, who came from South El Monte High School, which has a similar program with Rio Hondo College.

“We’re excited about having the Early College Academy with GWC at Los Amigos because our students traditionally are not from families with college-educated backgrounds,” Avina says. “Many of them will be first-generation attendees of college.

“Although our goal is for students to earn the equivalent of an AA degree

by earning 56 credits for college, the real goal is for them to immediately complete a college class their freshman year in the first semester so that they already have a transcript and can say, ‘I’m a college student,’ not, ‘Maybe I’ll go to college someday.’ It’s already done.”

Los Amigos Assistant Principal Julie Garcia and Erin Chase, AVID program coordinator, manage the Early College Academy.

“They definitely understood that this was a huge opportunity for them,” Garcia says of the applicants. “Their enthusiasm was very high. When we asked them, ‘Where do you see yourself or how do you see this impacting your life?’ They never said something that was selfish. It was all about them

wanting to help their family and community by creating a legacy of higher education for their siblings and peers. And that blew us away.”

Says Chase: “We were looking for students who had a high will and desire, and not necessarily the wherewithal or understanding of what it tangibly means to go through the steps in order to become a college student.

“Yes, they have the potential, but maybe they haven’t had the support. It’s just so much more probable that they’re going to finish with their four-year college degree if they’ve already finished with their AA or even if they’re well on their way to their AA while in high school.”

Jocelyn Alamo, 13, who went to Ma-

suda Middle School in Fountain Valley, will be joining her older sister at Los Amigos this fall — but as one of the 80 students in the Early College Academy.

“I’m so excited,” she says. “Education is really important for my family because my parents didn’t get to finish their schooling. I’ll be the first generation in my family to graduate from college.”

Jocelyn’s favorite subject is English.

She’s not sure what she wants to be when she grows up, but maybe an actress — she changes her mind a lot.

For now, starting this fall, Jocelyn will be focusing on her studies to get to college.

“I think every high school should have this program,” she says.