



NEWS

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El Camino College Student to Become First in His Family to Earn College Degree; Will Transfer to UC Berkeley in the Fall

Tilo Lopez enrolled at El Camino College right out of high school three years ago with a mission to continue his education and transfer to a university as soon as possible. He rebounded after some “really bad grades” during his first two years at Leuzinger High School, and by junior year, he came to a big decision.

“When you are on your own in high school with no resources and no one showing you the way, you have to make a decision on your own to change,” said Lopez, who was born and raised in Inglewood. “I came to a point when I realized that as the oldest of five kids with a single mother, it was up to me to change the education trend of my family. I knew that if I did it right, my brothers and sister would follow. I put some deep thought into this and changed my life for the better.”

Lopez’s higher education dreams are coming true – the history major will graduate from El Camino College on June 10 at Murdock Stadium as the first in his family to earn a college degree. He was accepted to both UCLA and the University of California at Berkeley and will attend UC Berkeley in the fall – one of about 85 ECC students admitted to the selective Northern California university.

“I’m definitely nervous about starting at Berkeley, but I’m ready to take what they have to offer,” said Lopez, who will major in history, with a minor in peace and conflict studies. “I’ve never lived anywhere but the South Bay – I know it will be a new world for me. But I looked at the class list and I am looking forward to taking many of them.”

At El Camino College, Lopez was president of the Political Science Club and was a member of the Honors Transfer Program, EOPS and Puente Project – all designed to support him with counseling, financial aid assistance, tutoring and other services. He found guidance through counselors and professors such as Elise Geraghty, whose best advice stuck with him: be disciplined.

“I really believe everything happens for a reason; I couldn’t leave and go to Berkeley right out of high school,” he said. “We have always struggled financially at home. Ever since high school, I was the financial backbone of my family. Now I feel good about going away, knowing that my younger brothers can help out.”

The other part of Lopez's plan came true as well – one brother attends ECC now and his sister and another brother are enrolled for the fall. Lopez received a Puente Project scholarship and financial aid at El Camino College; he will also receive financial assistance at Berkeley. He plans to take a year off from work and completely focus on school.

After earning his bachelor's degree, he plans to continue immediately with law school or grad school. He has his sights set on a potential career in the areas of policy making, public relations, and international law.

"I loved it at El Camino College; I have some of the best memories, some of the best friends, and some of the most awesome, intellectually engaging professors here, especially in the history department," he said. "My experience was amazing. Utterly amazing. I always knew where to find the resources – and El Camino College has a lot of them, you just have to ask. I was also juggling school and work. Thankfully I have really understanding employers who knew school was a priority for me and they were flexible with my schedule.

"I guess what I'm saying is that if you really want to go to college it is doable. You just have to use the resources and be a disciplined, determined student with a vision to the future. As long as you do it, and do it right, you should have no problem."

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