



NEWS

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ECC Honors Transfer Program Student to Graduate College with a 4.0 *Torrance High School Grad Headed for UCLA in the Fall*

El Camino College student Makoto Kishi will graduate from El Camino College on May 15 with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. The honors student is looking forward to transferring to UCLA this fall as a business and economics major. But Makoto wasn't always a star student. He credits ECC for helping him put aside years of apathy and putting him on a path toward earning a business degree.

Makoto grew up in Torrance and graduated from Torrance High School in 2006. He says he barely paid attention in high school, maintaining a 2.0 GPA. One teacher even referred to him as a vegetable in class, he said.

"I didn't care about life, I didn't care about school," Makoto said. "I didn't even have a backpack."

Makoto worked full-time after graduation, and eventually started volunteering on the weekends with a nonprofit soccer team. He started to coach the players, and ended up setting up his own nonprofit weekend soccer team called Trust Makes Kinship Soccer. He said his players started to see him as a mentor.

"They look up to me, and the least I could do is get my degree," Makoto said. "I have to practice what I preach about staying in school."

Makoto started to feel the push to go back to school, and finally felt motivated enough to take that step in 2011. But he knew it would be a long journey to his degree. Makoto placed into the lowest math course when he enrolled, and has had to take nine other math courses during his time at El Camino College. He mapped out the 29 courses he'd need to transfer to the University of California system with the help of a counselor. He also participated in the Honors Transfer Program, which prepares highly motivated students to transfer successfully to a university and complete a bachelor's degree.

"I knew from the beginning this would be when I graduated; I just studied, studied, studied," Makoto said.

Makoto credits his professors with inspiring him to push himself and expand his horizons. In high school, he'd only read a handful of books. But after meeting Professor Stephanie Schwartz in the El Camino College English Department, he became a voracious reader.

"I was just inspired," Makoto said. "For the first time in my life I enjoyed going to school. I would wake up every morning with a passion."

He still considers getting his first "A" grade at El Camino College one of his greatest accomplishments. After the rush of getting that first A, Makoto said he couldn't wait to get another.

"Once I got that A I couldn't stop," he added. "Nothing was going to stop me."

Makoto is still not sure what will come next after he earns his bachelor's degree – he's singularly focused on studying, he said. But his experience setting up Trust Makes Kinship Soccer, his weekend soccer team that gained 501c3 nonprofit status in 2013, makes him think about setting up another nonprofit in the future.

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