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A Promise Kept

How USD is Transforming Futures Through Faith and Opportunity

For more than 75 years, the University of San Diego has been a beacon — an educational institution rooted in beauty, goodness and truth — bringing to its campus global citizens, community Changemakers and lifelong learners. In 2017, USD's role as an anchor institution in the San Diego and Catholic communities became even stronger with the establishment of the Torero Promise.

"The Torero Promise is a guaranteed admissions program for students from local Catholic high schools who meet a certain academic threshold, as well as a promise that the university will provide the financial aid their family needs to make it possible for them to come to the university," said Vice President of Mission Integration Michael Lovette-Colyer, PhD. "It reflects a contemporary manifestation of the original vision of USD's founders, Bishop Buddy and Mother Hill. They imagined USD as serving the local Catholic community, which back in the 1940s was instrumental in raising the resources and providing the support for the university to be built. It's a nice way in which we go back and honor that part of the original vision."

The cohort has grown to a network of 10 Catholic schools, with the addition of Cristo Rey San Diego High School in 2022. "I was standing in the hallway [at Cristo Rey], and I heard someone scream from the office. They came out and said, 'we got the Torero Promise for all of our students,'" said Cristo Rey High School President David Rivera '96 (BA). "It's like winning a

championship. It was exciting, but it was not unexpected, knowing the people at USD, knowing the educators who are there and knowing the charism of the school which is something they take to heart."

Eligible students must have a weighted, USD recalculated GPA of 3.8, and have taken at least six semesters of classes at the honors level or higher. For Rivera, the opportunity is an "absolute lifeline" for his students, who can pursue an academic, faith-based educational experience just minutes from home. "Cristo Rey is at St. Jude's Church in the middle of the lowest income area of San Diego County. It's about a 12- to 14-minute drive to USD," said Rivera.

For USD first-year student and Cristo Rey alumna Victoria Castro, the Torero Promise made attending college and pursuing her career goals possible. "Taking part in the Torero Promise means represent[ing] USD and my high school because if it wasn't for them, I probably wouldn't even be at USD, or honestly, college in general," she said. With plans to pursue a business marketing path, Castro recognizes that the program opened up new opportunities for her. "I wasn't thinking very big, and I didn't have [many] expectations for my future because I doubted myself a lot. Once I got to [Cristo Rey], that changed and USD has always been in front of me."

For Cristo Rey alumnus and USD computer science sophomore Cavin Nguyen, the Torero Promise has been an incredibly impactful experience.

"Taking part in the Torero Promise represents commitment — not only from USD providing financial resources, but giving me the opportunity to reach my full potential," he said. "I want people to know that my journey to USD has been that of persistence. Coming from a low-income high school, I grew up with financial struggles. My parents would tell me education was the path forward, so I worked tirelessly to achieve good grades and create opportunities for myself. Meeting the Torero Promise's GPA requirements [and] getting to USD represents more than just being accepted into a university — it's the result of years of consistent effort."

"I think the Torero Promise is one of the very best things about USD," adds Lovette-Colyer. "Too many people have a sense that USD is the university on the hill, for families with a lot of resources. We're so much more than that. USD is a place where students from various backgrounds can come and have an amazing experience. It's made USD better."

This opportunity is a "game changer" for Rivera, who sees his students actively thinking about their futures and the career paths they want to pursue. "It's thrilling to see students not only get excited about USD and go through the admissions process and get accepted, but then to see them afterward still smiling and knowing they made the right decision by going to USD."

It's also been a rewarding experience for USD administrators, who have watched the program successfully grow since 2017. "When we first started the Torero Promise, a lot of families in the high schools didn't really understand it, didn't know what it was and didn't factor that into their college search process. More and more now, the schools are aware of it, the families are aware of it and it's something more students are thinking about as they discern their college path," said Lovette-Colyer. "The Torero Promise is a way in which we invite the community to come to us, literally, to be students at the university, to make sure they have those pathways and those supports to become a part of the USD student body. It's a manifestation of our anchor institution identity."

— Allyson Meyer '16 (BA), '21 (MBA)