First Place Winner of the UB 2006 College Visits Tour Essay Contest: Olivia Nuñez

Throughout life, we experience an infinite amount of wonderful moments. In the long run, some experiences are more memorable than others, such as a baby’s first steps, the first day of school, and learning how to ride a bike. As we grow older and more mature, our experiences evolve with us and transform to experiences such as our first date and learning to drive. Among these unforgettable moments is traveling without your family. This is usually a sign of independence and responsibility. As an adolescent, deciding which college to attend is one of the most important decisions I will have to make. Upward Bound has exposed me to a variety of colleges during their annual, well-organized college visits tour. The 2006 trip was to San Diego, California. We visited three universities and observed the culture and attractions San Diego has to offer. San Diego is famous for its restaurants, theaters, malls, zoo, miles of hiking trails, post-card perfect beaches and breathtaking sunsets. It was also a bonding opportunity for peers and staff members.

We departed from UTEP at 5:00 a.m. on March 13. This was an exhausting and exciting time. On the first day, we visited the University of Arizona. U of A was a big campus but had a cozy, intimate feel to it. It is ranked 14th among public universities in research expenditures by the National Science Foundation. It has the highest undergraduate graduation rate of any of Arizona’s universities, has many attractive features and a wonderful history. U of A seems to understand the students. During our stay, I was completely perplexed and amused at the variety of places set up for students to study.

Upon our arrival to San Diego, the first place we went to was the Fashion Valley Mall. I ran to the Cheesecake Factory as soon as my feet took me off the bus and I touched the ground. One of my aspirations was to see and enter the Cheesecake Factory. Without a doubt, I entered, was immediately stunned to see the vast variety of cheesecakes, and I bought a slice of raspberry lime cheesecake. Delicious! After the excitement of the fascinating Cheesecake Factory, I continued my journey through the mall. Within the mall, I visited many stores such as the Teddy Bear Shop, Gappetto’s, Louis Vitton, and Godiva. We realized our time was limited, had dinner and headed for the bus. When we arrived at the hotel, I unpacked and fell asleep wondering what wonderful things were in store for me.

Just as I had imagined, the next day as exhilarating. Our first stop was to San Diego State University. SDSU is the first U.S. University to offer a transnational triple degree from the United States, Canada and Mexico. SDSU ranks 9th in the nation for most bachelor’s degrees awarded to Hispanics and 12th in the nation for bachelor’s degrees awarded to minorities. It has nearly 300 student organizations. We received a pamphlet during our visit and watched a video on student life. We were then split into groups and had a walking tour of the campus. Several halls were presented to us as well as a brief explanation about what goes on inside. SDSU’s urban, cosmopolitan campus reflected the healthy diversity of the region. We ended our tour at the library in front of the Student Union, where we had our lunch.

After touring SDSU’s wonderful campus, we headed for the world famous San Diego Zoo. We were allowed 5 hours to explore this fascinating zoo. We began our journey by getting on the Skyfari Aerial Tram. This was an airborne shortcut to the other
side of the zoo, presenting amazing views of the zoo. Unfortunately, the weather was
cold and the air was twice as strong, not allowing us to enjoy the ride as much as we
would have liked. We also had a guided bus tour that covered 75 percent of the zoo in
about 35 minutes. My friends and I sat on the upper deck of the double-decked bus where
we could view all the animals at a slightly different angle. I really loved passing by the
giraffes! I also had the privilege to watch the Panda Bear exhibit, where we saw a happy,
joyful family. One of my favorite exhibits was the Polar Bear exhibit. There were views
from above as well as below the water. The zoo exposed me to the animal kingdom and
the importance of ecosystems.

Our day ended at Seaport Village, a shopping mall designed to capture the
ambience of Old Monterey, Victorian San Francisco and traditional Mexico. We strolled
around and watched ships sail across the bay. Many shops were open and there had many
souvenirs from different cultures. While my friends and I were there, we decided to dine
at a pizza place and enjoy the sunset while we ate. After our delicious meal, we enjoyed a
ride on the carousel and looked at all the interesting items the stores had to offer. My
favorite was the hat shop where we were allowed to try on all the silly hats. I don’t think I
had ever seen so many hats in one place! After trying on all the hats and enjoying the
village, we returned to the hotel.

Wednesday morning was greeted with a visit to the University of California - San
Diego College. UCSD is 5th in the nation and 1st in the UC system in federal research and
development funding. It offers cutting-edge academic programs, a wide range of majors,
and professional-level research opportunities. UCSD has six colleges: Eleanor Roosevelt,
Earl Warren, Thurgood Marshall, John Muir, Revelle, and Sixth. Each combines the
academic advantages of a major research university with the neighborhood atmosphere of
a small campus. Our tour guide was extremely energetic and did a great job with her
presentation. She explained the quarter system, the six colleges and student life. Due to
the fact that pupils were not on spring break, the campus roared to life when the class
bells rang. One of my favorite attractions was the library that was once a space related
movie as a space ship. Our tour guide also explained some of the activities they have for
students. As usual, we ended at the Union and had our lunch. While we were there, I
observed the college life and how different it is from high school. This was my favorite
college!

Post lunch we went to the Birch Aquarium. This is the public exploration center
for Scripps Institution of Oceanography. The aquarium allowed us to observe some of the
interesting, Pacific Ocean marine creatures that lurk underwater. I was mesmerized by the
jelly fish! The aquarium was extremely educational! After the aquarium we were allowed
to spend a few minutes on the beach. This was an amazing sight. The soothing rhythms of
the waves were relaxing and allowed you to appreciate what the world has to offer.
Cabrillo National Monument was the next stop. The breathtaking view of the ocean from
a high altitude was a once in a lifetime experience. We had about an hour to explore
before we watched a video on the history and discovery of San Diego. While we waited,
we explored the lighthouse. It presented life during the colonial times with a replica of a
typical home from that era. When our presentation was over, we headed to a shopping
center for dinner and departed San Diego. We were only 12 hours away from being back
home to enlighten our parents with all we had learned.