

Gerwin Mateo  
Unalaska City High School  
AASB June Nelson Scholarship

As a young adult, I served for the betterment of my community. As a minority, I've found my place in society and worked to achieve my voice and identity. From this, I've been able to serve my peers in multiple capacities regardless of status. These include my experience as the Student Representative on the UCSD School Board, to being a member of the Racial Awareness Committee formed by the Student Government. From these experiences, I've learned to advocate for others and support equity and inclusion, but additionally, I gained skills that will make me a prominent leader in today's society.

As I move forward, I leave the secluded island of Unalaska. While Unalaska has helped tremendously with my voice and identity, it has outgrown its purpose. I will move on with the next stage of my life, and with that comes a new set of challenges. Society is different than what I'm used to in Unalaska. Frankly, it is a difficult world to live in as a minority and I acknowledge it. But, I don't agree with it.

It happens regardless of what we generally think. Systematic racism is an issue that minorities face on a day-to-day basis, yet society throws it aside. I want to change that thought, we should not only acknowledge that it happens but challenge it. We should proactively advocate for our own success, as well as with others to collectively get what we want.

Currently, I'm planning to attend California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo(Cal Poly) in the fall. Although I'm happy that I was granted admission to such a prestigious university, I found myself in a situation that many minorities face when committing, the lack of diversity. Cal Poly is unofficially dubbed "the whitest CSU," and many of us feel like we won't find a community on campus. But, we are in the midst of change.

I want to join the Filipino group on campus, but work to collaborate with other minority groups on campus. I want to work towards total appreciation of our cultures, help prospective freshmen learn why Cal Poly is a great institution that could serve minorities, and advocate for our own success in academia. We will face ignorance, but we will face it head-on with strong hearts. As I move forward, I want to be the ideal change for Cal Poly and in larger sense academia.

In the end, I want to be the young adult that advocated for what was right for me, my school, and my culture. Although there is a lot to learn as I move forward with my life, I'll do so with formality, composure, and the willingness to receive criticism. I know that everything can't change all at once, it takes steps. But, I want to hit the ground running to the action that needs to be done.