



Winter 2005

[USD Magazine Contents](#)

Departments

[Campus Almanac](#)

[Alumni Almanac](#)

[Faculty Almanac](#)

[Sports Almanac](#)

[Alumni Gallery](#)

[In Your Own Words](#)

[Class Notes](#)

[1950s and '60s](#)

[1970s](#)

[1980s](#)

[1990s](#)

[2000s](#)

[Marriages](#)

[Births](#)

[In Memoriam](#)

Past Issues

FACULTY ALMANAC A Running Start

1 2 more →

Institute of College Initiatives Guides Students from Grade School to Grad School

by Krystn Shrieve

Remember the questions that filled your head when you first started to wonder about college?

Can I do it? How will I pay for tuition? And why can't I seem to make heads or tails of the algebra class that threatens to keep me from being accepted anywhere?

USD's Institute of College Initiatives provides a boost to students who want to pursue higher education by helping them answer these sorts of questions.

The institute was conceived as an umbrella covering a number of academic programs for primarily first-generation, low-income students. The oldest is TRiO Upward Bound, which focuses on Kearny High School students who want to go to college, and the newest is the TRiO McNair Scholars program, which offers assistance to USD college students who want to make the jump to graduate school. But the institute serves up many other offerings: Bridge is an intensive six-week summer program that helps transition students from high school to college; INScience fosters a love of science in elementary school children; Expanding Your Horizons hosts an annual conference to spur sixth- through 10th-grade girls to pursue careers in math, science and technology; and a chapter of the National Council on Youth Leadership fosters leadership and integrity among high school students.

"Students who participate in our programs deserve all the rights, privileges, abilities and opportunities that a college degree provides," says institute director Cynthia Villis, a licensed psychologist. She adds that while the institute's name is new, she first began to develop its programs in 1997.

"There is no doubt that our first-generation, low-income students will go to college," Villis says, "and we always hope that they will choose USD."

The institute pairs academic excellence with lots of personal attention.

The Upward Bound program offers low-income, disabled or first-generation potential college students academic tutoring, assistance with school applications and a five-week summer residential program in which the teens live in USD residence halls.



The Upward Bound program will graduate its third class of high school seniors at the end of the spring semester. In its first year, 24 of 25 seniors went to college and one opted to serve in the U.S. Navy. The second year, all 15 seniors went to college. This year, all 17 high school seniors plan to go on to college.

Potential candidates for graduate school are the focus of the McNair Scholars program, which started in 2003 with a \$1.1-million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Aimed at first-generation, low-income or disabled students majoring in math, psychology and the natural and social sciences, a key component of the program is encouraging the students to teach at the college level.

“We teach the students about the educational possibilities that await them beyond the baccalaureate degree, and beyond the USD campus,” says Christine Mullen, director of the McNair Scholars program.

McNair Scholars receive a stipend so they can participate in research projects with faculty mentors during the summers. They also receive a laptop computer, graduate exam preparation and the opportunity to travel to other universities to look at graduate programs. Throughout the academic year, the institute staff provides tutoring, helps with the graduate application process and writes letters of recommendation.

“We’re excited by the outcomes of the Institute of College Initiatives programs,” Villis says. “But there’s a lot more to do. There are so many students who want to go to college; we want to build a pipeline for them. Whether we help a fourth-grader, a high school student or a prospective graduate student make his or her dreams a reality, the results can be magic.” 