Believe You Can Achieve! With Upward Bound Episode 152

00:00:00 **Victor**

We offer what we affectionately call Saturday Success Academies, where they develop a lot of soft skills, whether it's leadership or time management. We talk to them about financial literacy, we talk to them about maturity, navigating relationships.

00:00:14 **Victor**

All the things that we wish we would've been taught in high school that's not taught, we find it our responsibility and goal to teach our students so that they're well-rounded individuals when they step onto a college campus.

00:00:30 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:32 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:36 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:52 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:00:56 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:01:01 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pamona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:01:07 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:01:10 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:17 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:19 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:22 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC, but most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:34 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:39 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mounty Podcast.

00:01:46 **Sun**

Welcome back to the Magic Mounty Podcast, I'm your host- Sun Ezzell. In today's episode, I talk with Upward Bound Director, Victor Rojas; Program Coordinator Luis Manriquez, and Academic Specialist. Stephanie Gonzalez.

00:01:59 **Sun**

Upward Bound supports first-generation or low-income students in graduating high school and pursuing higher education. Thanks for joining us today to learn how Upward Bound is helping students dream big and go far in their educational journeys. Enjoy!

00:02:12 **Sun**

Welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast. I'm so excited to be here today with the staff from Upward Bound. Welcome to the podcast.

00:02:26 **Victor**

Thank you. Pleasure to be here.

00:02:27 **Luis**

Yes. Thank you.

00:02:29 **Stephanie**

Thank you.

00:02:29 **Sun**

So excited to talk with you and learn more about Upward Bound Program and how you're supporting students on their educational journeys. But before we dive into that, I was wondering if maybe you could each introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your work with Upward Bound.

00:02:45 **Victor**

So, I will start us off and then I'll transition it over to our amazing team. But my name is Victor Rojas, I serve as Director for our TRIO programs, Upward Bound and SSS here at Mt. SAC. And I also serve as the Director of our Rising Scholars Program, which serves systems-impacted and formally incarcerated individuals. Steph?

00:03:07 **Stephanie**

Hello, my name is Stephanie Gonzalez. I serve as the academic specialist for the TRIO Upward Bound Program. I've been with the program since fall of 2017. So, I'll be hitting my five-year mark soon with the program.

00:03:18 **Stephanie**

As an academic advisor, I work one-on-one with our students, addressing their personal, mental health, academic needs. And a lot of my time actually goes to working with our senior class, providing all the resources to help them enroll into their college of their choice.

00:03:33 **Victor**

Luis?

00:03:34 **Luis**

Hello, my name is Luis Jacobo Manriquez, and I am the Program Coordinator of the Upward Bound Program. And I'm also an alumni and proud product of this program as well. I graduated in 2012 from La Puente High School, and I was able to go straight to Cal Poly, Pamona where I graduated with my Gender, Ethnicity, & Multicultural studies bachelor's degree.

00:03:52 **Luis**

And then as my current role, I coordinate like the summer program. I coordinate like the spring break, more of a behind-the-scenes person in regards to the programming of our program.

00:04:01 **Sun**

Wonderful. Well, thank you again, all for being here with us today to share about Upward Bound. And I was wondering for folks who might not know much about Upward Bound, could you tell us a little bit about what the program is and how Upward Bound supports students?

00:04:16 **Victor**

Sure, I'll tackle this one. So, Upward Bound is a federally-funded educational program within the United States. The program launched in the summer of 1965 after the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, otherwise known as the federal war on poverty during the Johnson administration, and was later transferred to the Department of Education and enacted as part of the Higher Education act of 1965.

00:04:42 **Victor**

The goal of Upward Bound is to provide certain categories of high school students better opportunities for attending college. The categories of greatest concern are those with low income, those whose parents haven't attended college in the United States, and those living in rural areas.

00:04:58 **Victor**

That doesn't really apply to us here in Southern California, but it is one of those categories of concern. The programs work through individual grants which are awarded to institutions, usually institutions of higher ed, but some are awarded to nonprofit organizations.

00:05:14 **Victor**

So, the money that's awarded is awarded in a five-year time span. So, your Upward Bound grant is for five years. And within those five years, you are to provide curricular and co-curricular support to students so that when you send them off to college, they not only attend college, but successfully, graduate with their bachelor's degree.

00:05:31 **Victor**

Some of the support that we offer students is we offer, as Stephanie mentioned, academic advisement, we offer after-school tutoring. We have peer coaches that help them navigate their high school journey into college. We offer what we affectionately call Saturday Success Academies, where they develop a lot of soft skills.

00:05:52 **Victor**

Whether it's leadership or time management, we talk to them about financial literacy, we talk to them about maturity, navigating relationships, all the things that we wish we would've been taught in high school that's not taught. We find it our responsibility and goal to teach our students so that they're well-rounded individuals when they step onto a college campus.

00:06:14 **Victor**

Some of the other things that we do, we offer a spring break college tour, where we take students during the week of spring break and we hop on a charter bus and we go visit colleges, whether it's in Northern California or down in San Diego or the central coast.

00:06:27 **Victor**

We also offer a six-week residential summer college experience. So, our high school students are Mt. SAC students. During those six weeks, we get them admitted through the special admit process. They take a college-level class here with us, and then week six, we spend it at a local college and we live there with them in the dorms and they experience college life for one week.

00:06:49 **Victor**

So, the goal is when they get to college, they'll have an idea of what to expect so that they don't feel like imposters once we do send them again to their college of choice as Stephanie pointed out. Sun, that's a little bit of what we do.

00:07:02 **Sun**

That's amazing. I didn't realize that Upward Bound had been around since the sixties, and that there were so many different parts to the program. Thank you for sharing. I learned a lot and I thought I knew a little bit about the program.

00:07:16 **Victor**

Yeah. One of the things we do that just came to mind is the program focuses again on the academic and non-academic resources and activities. So, we'll take them to museums, we'll take them to see De La Mel at LA Phil, we'll take them to a sporting event, a cultural performance of some sort - just again, to create that well-rounded individual so that they're better adjusted and informed when they do arrive at a college campus.

00:07:43 **Sun**

That sounds really amazing. Thank you so much for sharing. I was wondering, of course, every person is having their own unique journey and experience, but I was wondering if in the time that you've worked with Upward Bound students, are there any common threads of experience that you notice?

00:08:01 **Stephanie**

Yeah, so I can start tackling that one. So, we're currently served to support 73 students across two of our high schools, which is La Puente High School and Ganesha High School. So, that is where we're currently placed and we're supporting these students.

00:08:13 **Stephanie**

So, all of our students have to be either first-generation or low-income in order for us to be able to support these students. So, a lot of our students, because they are the first in their families to want to go to college, they have very limited knowledge of what colleges exist. Some of them even have low aspirations. These aren't conversations they're having at the dinner table because their parents themselves may not know how to support them.

00:08:37 **Stephanie**

One of my favorite things about working for Upward Bound is that we don't just get to work with the students, we work with their familias, with their parents, their guardians, their family members. Upward Bound is a very community program, and our whole goal is to not just educate the students, but also, the parents. We do parent meetings as well, where we guide the parents on how to support their children as well.

00:08:57 **Stephanie**

So, a lot of the students that we serve and their parents lack knowledge on how to support them, college resource guidance. So, that's where we come in. We expose them, we take them to the universities. We have those conversations day one, because a lot of these students, this is all new to them. The lingo, everything is completely brand new to them being first-generation.

00:09:18 **Stephanie**

Many of them are also low-income, so they lack a lot of resources. That's why, again, we do provide them with a backpack, with textbooks, with different school supplies that they may also need. So, those are some of the common threads that I've seen; because they are first-gen, because they're also low-income, some of them do have unfortunately low aspiration levels where they start off and they think, "I don't know, maybe college."

00:09:40 **Stephanie**

And we work with them to be like, "No, I am going to college and I can do college and I'm doing it." So, we get to see kind of that development of "What is college" to "I'm doing this college thing," which is very exciting.

00:09:53 **Stephanie**

Some of our students also, due to the pandemic, we've noticed mental health. It's been a rough two years for our students. They've been in isolation, they're little by little transitioning back to being in person. And we've tried our best to address some of the needs.

00:10:08 **Stephanie**

So, I think one of the things that I pride myself in the way we run the program is we're very intentional of our student needs; our workshops, our summer programs, our advising - they're not just events we put out to put out. They're put out with lots of heart and intentionality based on the needs of our students.

00:10:26 **Sun**

Thank you so much. Does anyone else want to chime in?

00:10:29 **Luis**

I think Stephanie nailed it on. Just changing the mindset of our students when we admit them to our program. We recruit students when . .. like oftentimes they start college before they start high school, by going to like Mt. SAC and experiencing like attending classes in college and living in the dormitory as well. So, we give those experiences before they even start high school.

00:10:51 **Luis**

And we want them, like Stephanie mentioned, for them to change their mindset. In order for them to believe like, "Hey, I belong in college." You know, they might not have like an older sibling who went through the college process. They might be the first one or like Stephanie said, we're very intentional in all the services that we provide and all the resources, because our primary goal is to ensure that all of our students graduate from high school, and that they're highly competitive to go to whatever college they apply to.

00:11:13 **Luis**

And we understand that oftentimes some of our students go to a community college, but making them understand like transfer process in order for them to go to transfer and graduate with a bachelor's degree. But yeah, that's some of the experiences that we've seen through our students.

00:11:26 **Victor**

I guess for me, the common thread, and I've been doing Upward Bound longer than Luis and Stephanie have, but whether it's here at Mt. SAC or at my previous institution - if you build that college-going culture and set those expectations high, and supersede those expectations; one of the common threads is that the expectation is for a student to go to the best college possible. And we set those standards high.

00:11:50 **Victor**

We tell them, it's not a question of if you go to college, but where you go to college. So, an expectation that we have within our program is you're expected to apply to four Cal States, you're expected to apply to four UCs. You're expected to apply to at least one community college, so that you have options. And if you worked your butt off, then you're going to be rewarded.

00:12:12 **Victor**

So, then the question becomes, I've gotten into all these places, now, let's have that tough conversation about where you're going to go. As opposed to having the opposite, tough conversation, I didn't get in anywhere because I didn't have that option because we hadn't built that college-going culture. So, I firmly believe that field of dreams, if you build it, they will come. And I think if you build that college-going culture, the students will rise to the expectations.

00:12:37 **Victor**

And we've seen in the hard work in our last four years, students have, and that proof is in the quality of the institutions our students are getting into.

00:12:45 **Sun**

Can you share what are some of the colleges and universities that your Upward Bound students have transferred to?

00:12:53 **Victor**

Steph, I'll let you take this one.

00:12:54 **Stephanie**

Yeah. So, every year, our students get into some amazing colleges and universities. And as Victor mentioned, through the hard work these last four years, we've seen that list go above and beyond.

00:13:03 **Stephanie**

So, just to highlight some experiences, last year, we were able to send one of our Upward Bound seniors from La Puente to NYU on a completely full-ride scholarship. So, they got over $90,000 in financial aid. They're currently out there enjoying New York.

00:13:18 **Stephanie**

Last year, we also, again, through the pandemic - these are students that we helped them on Zoom, not even in person, apply to college. Everything was done on Zoom. We also have some seniors who are currently at UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, UC Berkeley UC, UC Irvine, Cal Poly, Pomona.

00:13:34 **Stephanie**

This year, we currently have seniors that are actually going to commit to their schools this Saturday. And they also got accepted to schools like UC Berkeley, UCLA, again, UC Irvine, UC San Diego. So, we are definitely sending them to most of the UCs, Cal States, and some private universities as well.

00:13:52 **Sun**

That's incredible. Congratulations to your team and to all the Upward Bound students who are able to transfer to all those amazing colleges. That must be really exciting and motivating for the new students to hear about as well.

00:14:04 **Sun**

You mentioned an event on Saturday, and I was wondering, do you want to share any upcoming events that you all are working on in the next couple of months?

00:14:14 **Stephanie**

Yeah. So, as mentioned, this Saturday, we have our Senior Decision Day. So, our seniors will be coming here on campus with their family members. Again, as Victor mentioned, cultivating that college-going culture. So, they're bringing their families, their siblings. We're going to sit down, go over financial aid packages: housing, making sure that everybody's on the same page.

00:14:32 **Stephanie**

When it comes to housing, they will then commit to their schools. And then they will also be getting a free photoshoot session where they'll be taking pictures in their cap and gown. So, that's super exciting. That will be this Saturday.

00:14:42 **Stephanie**

We also have our end-of-the-year ceremony on May 13th - Friday, May 13th, which is where we will be celebrating all of our student success this year. And then the seniors announce formally the universities that they will be going to. So, it's a very exciting event.

00:14:56 **Stephanie**

We usually do invite the campus community to come out and join and celebrate our students. So, that will be Friday, May 13th. And then we jump straight into summer program mode, which Victor mentioned is our six-week summer program that aligns with the intercession here at Mt. SAC.

00:15:11 **Sun**

That sounds really exciting with lots of opportunity for folks to celebrate along the journey. That's so important.

00:15:17 **Victor**

The beauty of it is when we do these activities, like as Stephanie mentioned, they're family affairs. So, not only are we servicing the student at the high school, we are indirectly also serving their little brother, their little sister. So, as the little siblings see this, it then becomes again, that college-going culture in action. So, "Okay, my brother or my older sister is doing this. I see how much fanfare they're getting. I need to do this too."

00:15:40 **Victor**

So, it becomes generational. So, now, we're at a spot (and I'm going to put Luis on the spot here) where not only have we have served the oldest sibling, but now, we're serving also the youngest sibling or the cousin or the nephew, because we've seen those successes. And again, I'll turn it over to Luis to speak a little bit about that because he's proof of that.

00:16:10 **Luis**

Yeah, thank you, Victor. So, in regards to like my experience, when I was a student, I did not want to be in the program. My other older sibling was in the program. And like my other cousins were as well. So, it was kind of an expectation. But when I joined the program, like it clearly like changed my mind. It's like by all the resources, the services that they're providing, taking us to college, I felt like my community, I felt like a place of belonging.

00:16:32 **Luis**

In regards to the program, there's eight members in my family who are actually part of the program. And actually, six of us have a bachelor's degree. And then like four of us have a master's degree. One of our family members is currently a student right now in the Upward Bound Program.

00:16:45 **Luis**

So, like I said, it changes like future generations. I mean, for sure it's going to change significantly my family and like we're really, really appreciative of all the work that this program has done for not only my family, but for other families as well, because that's one common thing that we've seen is that one sibling like a couple years later, the other sibling's coming along. So, that's one of the beautiful things that we try to do, is make sure that all the family is involved, not just the student component.

00:17:11 **Sun**

That's really amazing. Thank you for sharing that about your family. I was wondering, what's it like for you to come back and be part of the Upward Bound Program as part of the coordinating team after having been an Upward Bound student?

00:17:26 **Luis**

Yeah. So, a funny story. So when I saw the position opening up, I'm like, I have to apply. Like for me, is like I have to give back to the program and the students were the same position as myself. So, I applied. When we completely got shut down, that was my final interview. So, I didn't hear back for a while due to the pandemic.

00:17:41 **Luis**

But then as things started going rolling down, I went through the interview process and I was like super, super excited when I finally got the call that I got hired, because for me, that was one of my goals to come back to Mt. SAC as a professional staff and give back to the community or the program that helped me and my family as well. And coming back, I noticed that when I was a student here, a lot of things have changed.

00:18:02 **Luis**

It's like better things, that is going to contribute to our students. In regards to when I was a student, like we didn't have the special admin program where our students are actually taking a college-level course and they are getting credits. So, they're already advancing and being more competitive when they're applying to colleges, then they're also getting exposed to out-of-state institutions as well.

00:18:21 **Luis**

So, I feel like the program over the years has gotten better like every year, because we're seeing like new trends with our students and their ambitions as well.

00:18:28 **Sun**

Thank you so much for sharing. In case there are any students out there listening to the podcast and thinking, "Wow, that sounds really great, I wonder how I might be able to get involved." What would your advice be?

00:18:40 **Stephanie**

In terms of our current Mt. SAC students, if anybody wants to give back, I know like Luis was part of the program and it's very rewarding to give back. I myself am also from La Puente, so to be able to go back to my city and help my students. Both my siblings went through the program, are currently in the program as well. So, Upward Bound is definitely very family-oriented and dear to our heart.

00:18:52 **Stephanie**

So, if anybody ever wants to give back, we do hire academic coaches to support us during the academic year, which are current college students. So, if you're a current Mt. SAC student or student at any university that is enrolled in classes, they can come work for us and be an academic tutor for our students.

00:19:16 **Stephanie**

So, they are a big component of the work that we do. They serve as mentors. They guide our students, not just academically, but also on personal development. So, some of the tasks that they would do is they would go out to the high schools with us and be part of our after-school tutoring, help the students in whatever subject they need in high school, as well as again, mentoring them.

00:19:35 **Stephanie**

So, we do hire staff every summer to work with us for the academic year. And then we also hire staff to be part of our summer enrichment program as well, that serve as supplemental support in the college courses that we offer. So, we're always looking to expand our team. We're always taking volunteers as well. If anybody wants to be part, we do a lot of exciting work out in the community.

00:19:56 **Sun**

That's great. Thank you so much. And if any faculty or other Mt. SAC employees are listening and want to help support Upward Bound, what are some ways that they could get involved?

00:20:06 **Victor**

We welcome that too. So, like I mentioned, during the academic school year, we offer our Saturday Success Academy. So, again, in these success academies, we like to expose our students to think that they're not being taught in high school. So, if there's an area of expertise that a faculty member has, that would love to share with us, whether it's English or writing, or a passion of theirs; leadership, some type of leadership development - we welcome faculty to come in and be guest lecturers for our students.

00:20:34 **Victor**

That's also amazing, right? When our students get to hear from college-level faculty at the high school level. So, a lot of times, they go back to their peers where they say, "Hey, I just got a lecture or just had a class by a college-level faculty member." And sometimes, to be quite honest with you, those messages are better received from a complete stranger than from us, the staff, if we teach them those lessons. So, by all means, we welcome anyone who'd love to share their gifts with our students.

00:21:02 **Luis**

And I do want to add to that. We actually started a conference during the pandemic known as TRIO: Building Your Legacy Student Leadership Conference. And we actually had our second annual last month. And we partnered up with other TRIO programs in our local communities, such as like Cal Poly, Pamona Upward Bound, [inaudible] College Upward Bound, and Pacific University Upward Bound.

00:21:19 **Luis**

We actually invited faculty, people from Mt. SAC where they actually presented in the conference. Whether it might be talking about like time management or it might be talking about financial literacy or having Mt. SAC students talk about their experience as Upward Bound students. So, we welcome all that, just to share the knowledge to our students, but also, to other programs and how they could introduce those topics to their students.

00:21:41 **Stephanie**

One thing I'd also like to add is one of the biggest components as Man mentioned before is our summer enrichment program. Our students gain so much from this experience to be able to take an actual college class. They go back to their high schools and they say, "If I could do that in six weeks, I can handle my AP courses. I can handle my honors courses."

00:21:59 **Stephanie**

So, every summer, we do offer special admin courses. We do work with different faculty across different disciplines. So, if any faculty member ever wants to have some of our Upward Bound students take their class as special admin students, we always welcome that. We built great collaborations with different divisions throughout these last couple of years.

00:22:17 **Stephanie**

This summer, we'll be offering six college-level courses. So, if there's any faculty out there across any discipline that ever want to work with us, we greatly appreciate those collaborations because our students really gain a lot from taking those special admin courses. And we've gotten great feedback from the faculty. Usually, the faculty tell me, "I had no idea they were high school students. If you didn't tell me ..." They are performing sometimes even at a higher level than some of the college students, they bring so much rich discussion to the classroom.

00:22:46 **Stephanie**

So, we've gotten great feedback from the faculty when they are in these courses. So, if any faculty ever wants to have some of their students in the summer, if they're teaching for special admin courses, we'd greatly appreciate that.

00:22:57 **Sun**

That's great. Can you share a couple of examples of classes that are offered?

00:23:02 **Stephanie**

Yeah, absolutely. So, some of the courses we've offered in the past is introduction to earth science. So, Geology 8 and with lab is possible. So, we've offered that class. Our sociology has been extremely popular across our students. So, we have offered intro to sociology, contemporary social problems, Soc 20, race and ethnicity. Kin 34, fitness for living has been another class we've offered. We've also offered intro to psychology, intro to dance appreciation.

00:23:29 **Stephanie**

So, we try to offer diverse amount of classes, whether it's social sciences, the arts or the sciences - we ensure that these classes also count towards a 3-G credit at the high school level. And then that the students also get college-level credit as well. We usually offer five to six courses every single summer. As mentioned, this summer, we'll be offering six across diverse disciplines as well.

00:23:51 **Sun**

That sounds so exciting. I wish I could go back in time and be an Upward Bound student. What a great opportunity. Thank you so much for sharing those examples, just to get people's wheels turning about whether they might want to reach out and try to offer a course with you in the future.

00:24:05 **Sun**

Thank you so much for the incredible work that you're doing. It's really inspiring to hear about the Upward Bound program, and I'm excited to get a chance to learn more about the program and hear from some Upward Bound students in the future.

00:24:18 **Victor**

Awesome.

00:24:18 **Stephanie**

Thank you.

00:24:19 **Victor**

Have a great day.

00:24:21 **Sun**

Thank you, you as well.

00:24:24 **Victor**

Bye

00:24:25 **Sun**

Bye.

00:24:27 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.