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LONG BEACH NATIVE RECEIVES UCSB WHITTED AWARD

Graduating senior will honor dad's memory

Sabrina Kwist, a senior who is putting her younger sister through school, has won the Alyce Marita Whitted Memorial Award at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

The Whitted award is presented annually to a non-traditional graduating senior who has demonstrated endurance, persistence and courage in the face of extraordinary challenges while in pursuit of an academic degree.

An awards ceremony will take place at 3:30 p.m. June 18 at the University Center's Corwin Pavilion.

"I have been blessed and humbled in receiving this award," said a grateful Kwist. "I would like to thank my sister, EOP, my 'mothers' and those who have fed me when I was hungry, took me in when I could not walk, and taken me for long silent talks. You are truly the friends whom I call family. Without you I may have given up the struggle."

Kwist will receive her bachelor's degree in sociology this fall. Some 3,700 undergraduate and graduate students are expected to get their diplomas either on June 19 or 20.

Nominators Britt Andreatta of the university's Orientation Programs and Yolanda Garcia of the Educational Opportunity Program noted that nothing stood out more than the senior's dedication to see others get a college diploma, especially her sister, Hanny, a sophomore studying psychology at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa.

"Sabrina is a student who has chosen to be involved and contribute to this campus and her fellow students at each stage of her own academic career while putting herself and her sister through college," said Andreatta.

Nominators said that Kwist "worked three jobs, often exceeding 60 hours a week" to pay their college costs, living expenses and mother's needs as she battled a serious illness. Although both students received some financial aid, the responsibility fell to Kwist to make up the difference.

Notably, Kwist's university jobs have served students in some way. She was a resident coordinator for housing and residential services and a peer advisor in the Program of Determined Students (PODS) program, which mentors low-income and first-generation college students.

Kwist took part in PODS during her first year and credits it for keeping her in school as financial challenges mounted. "She is able to speak with students about her experiences and the role PODS played in her success with such honesty and realism that she is able to generate enthusiasm and commitment among even the most cynical students," Andreatta said.

In addition to this weekly commitment, Kwist has helped teaching assistants run discussion sections for Interdisciplinary Studies 20, the university's freshman year experience course. Off campus, she worked with Upward Bound students in her hometown of Long Beach.

"Her passion for students to succeed at UCSB was clear in everything she did. I doubt I will see another student with this kind of skill for years to come," Andreatta said.

In addition to her studies, Kwist has been committed to working on issues of social justice and to bring about change. She co-chaired the Associated Student Commission on Racial Equality, which actively fought racism on campus and in the local community.

This year, she participated in an alternative fashion show, which educated the campus on sweatshops and the practices of the fashion industry.

Friday's awards ceremony will be especially poignant for the senior as she accepts the honor in memory of her father who died during her sophomore year.

"I am the first in my family to go to college and I know that without my father's struggle and sacrifice, I would not be at the university," she said. "My father was a single parent who balanced work and the job of raising two daughters. Although his death caused a lot of emotional, economic, and spiritual hardships, it also gave me the gift of courage and the passion for change.

"In struggling to attain my degree, I have learned that an education is truly my right, not a privilege. It is everyone's right. We cannot stand by and wait for change. We must actively engage in the struggle for social justice."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.