



California CARDINALS

By Ellen N. Woods

Among the University's undergraduate population, 60 students hail from the Golden State. Here we shine the spotlight on five students from the L.A. area to find what brought them nearly 3,000 miles from home, and how they are adapting to life on the East Coast.

Blue Oceans and Green Grass

SAMUEL LOPEZ

Hometown: Covina | Major: English | Minor: Theology | Class of 2020

When he headed outside during a light snowfall in his first winter at Catholic University, Samuel Lopez thought he was seeing ash.

"We are used to wildfires in California, and the falling ash that comes with it," he says. "It took me a minute to realize I was looking at falling snow. That was an incredible first."

Lopez is the youngest in his close-knit Mexican-American family and the first in his extended family to attend college on the East Coast. "My mom wanted me to go to a top-notch Catholic university, and I wanted to expand my horizons."

Growing up, Lopez was used to having his family around. Both his parents worked at the high school he attended with his brother and sister — his dad as the assistant principal, and his mom as the director for girls' sports.

"My older brother was known there as 'Little Lopez' and I was 'Little Little Lopez.' I was used to that kind of familiarity," Lopez says. After coming to Catholic, "Being at a place where no one knew me was jarring, yet liberating at the same time."

Lopez quickly found his "family" on campus by sharing his salsa moves as a member of *Pasión de Sol*, the Latin American dance team of the Student

Organization of Latinos (CUA SOL). He got involved in Campus Ministry and participated in a spring break mission trip to Jamaica, and he also sang with *Take Note*, a student capella group. Lopez, who is now the president of CUA SOL, says he found second homes on campus both at the Center for Cultural Engagement and within the Department of English, where he describes the faculty as "completely welcoming and friendly, yet constantly challenging you as a scholar."

The one thing he can't stop missing is "real" Mexican food: "It's so much fresher and well-seasoned at home." He also misses the "serenity and accessibility" of the ocean.

"Sometimes when I think about the differences between the East and West Coasts, I see colors — the blue of the Pacific Ocean and the gold and brown of the mountains," Lopez says. "When I moved here I was struck by the color green in the grass and the trees. There's nothing like that in L.A."

ONE MORE THING

Lopez loves the Los Angeles Dodgers — a passion he shares with his grandmother — but his favorite player never wore the uniform for L.A. When Jackie Robinson was a Dodger, the club was still in Brooklyn. "I have always been fascinated by the Civil Rights Movement. To me, Jackie Robinson is the ultimate role model. I have so much respect for the difference he made for equality through his work ethic, determination, and talent."



Drawn to the Center of Politics

ELISA D'EGIDIO

Hometown: Duarte | Major: Politics | Minor: Neuroscience | Class of 2019

When a blizzard was headed toward Washington, D.C., during Elisa D'Egidio's first year on campus, she bought a pair of snow boots and a winter coat. Back in L.A., her mom was following the dire weather forecast and quickly shipped a large care package. "We were snowed in and I made pasta for everyone on my floor," she recalls.

D'Egidio's grandparents and most of her aunts and uncles are Italian immigrants. "I have 50 first cousins, and we all live in the L.A. area. There's nothing like Sunday dinner at my *Nonna's* house."

She was the first in her extended family to go to college on the East Coast. "It was not an easy separation," she says. "I had about 250 people at my high school graduation party. There were a lot of tears. I remember going from table to table explaining why I was going so far away."

It was her love of politics that pulled D'Egidio to Washington, D.C. She plans to attend law school with the goal of working on mental health policy. She has had three Capitol Hill internships, including one with Congresswoman Grace Napolitano (D-Calif.), who is founder and co-chair of the House Mental Health Caucus. "I've met some American heroes like John Lewis and pioneers like Madeleine Albright. I worked

for the D.C. Mayor's office and met students from all over the country affected by gun violence at the March for Our Lives. I went to the White House Correspondents Dinner when Barack Obama was president, and I was at Paul Ryan's swearing-in ceremony.

"The politics professors are incredible and have great connections," D'Egidio says. "They took us to a White House briefing when we were studying media, and when we studied intelligence, the guest speaker was a former CIA director."

One of the most striking differences she sees between the two coasts is in the people. "It's always a nice day in California, so people are not in a hurry to get out of the cold. They are laid back, free-spirited, and willing to stop and enjoy the view. On the East Coast, people are more in a hurry, more driven, more inclined to multitask," she says. "One's not better than the other. I feel comfortable on either coast."

The aspiring politicians D'Egidio has met during her college years in the nation's capital make her hopeful for a bipartisan future. "I'm a Democrat from California. My best friend is an East Coast Republican. I've found it's a lot easier to listen to opposing views when you are friends first."



ONE MORE THING

As a high school student in Southern California D'Egidio started a chapter of She's the First, an international nonprofit that provides scholarships and outreach to girls who will be the first in their families to graduate from high school. Together with friends at the University, Cara Duffy and Abigail Fitzgerald, she cofounded a Catholic University chapter her sophomore year. The group now has 75 members, and in 2018, D'Egidio received the She's the First Student of the Year volunteer award. "We sponsor 10 girls from countries around the world including Guatemala, Peru, and Nepal," she says. "We do a lot of fundraising, but the best part is the letter writing. Getting to know these girls opens your heart."

A SoCal Yogi Finds her Seasons

JAESEN EVANGELISTA

Hometown: Burbank | Major: Biology | Class of 2021

When Jaesen Evangelista first explored campus during Orientation, she remembers thinking "The grass is real! Everything was so green. You just don't see that in Southern California."

As her first year at Catholic University unfolded, she fell in love with the seasons. "I couldn't believe the fall colors — the reds, the oranges, the yellows! And I now love fall clothes." When she saw her first snow, she was so excited she ran outside in her pajamas. Spring brought the cherry blossoms. "I went down to the Tidal Basin seven times. The clear skies, the water, and watching the blossoms blow in the wind. It was a shower of delicate pink flowers falling on the water. I could have watched that for hours."

Evangelista has no problem being in the moment, a quality she attributes to her Southern California upbringing. "I try to live a very centered life. I meditate and I practice yoga every day. Back home, I'll practice yoga on the beach, and often fellow yogis will spontaneously join me. That's normal in Southern California."

Almost everyone in Evangelista's family went to college in the Philippines or in California. "I wanted an adventure and I always knew I wanted to go across the country for college." As a pre-med student, Evangelista is also bucking family norms. "I come from a family of dentists — my parents, my grandparents, aunts, and uncles."

When she came to Cardinal Preview Day for accepted students, Evangelista fell in love with the community on campus. "The people I met were so inviting," she says. "I loved that I would be able to study biology within a Catholic liberal arts environment. The biology department is small and personable and the research opportunities for undergrads are amazing. Catholic quickly became my first choice."

As a new student, Evangelista threw herself into that inviting community. She is a resident assistant, a Cardinal Ambassador, and she serves on the Student Philanthropy Council. And she quickly found friends. "The people in L.A. are so friendly and laid back," she says. "People here are more reserved but that doesn't mean they are any less friendly. By Thanksgiving my first year, I had so many invitations to head home with East Coast friends for the holiday weekend."



ONE MORE THING

Evangelista is not headed back to California this summer. "It was such a hard decision, but I couldn't pass up the opportunity to be an intern in the research lab of my favorite professor." Throughout the summer, Evangelista will be assisting Biology Professor John Golin with his research looking at how DNA affects cancer treatments. "Sometimes drug treatments don't work," she says. "We are trying to find out why."

Hooked on History

CHRISTIAN GALLEGOS

Hometown: Reseda | Major: History | Minor: Politics | Class of 2019

As a high school student, Christian Gallegos came to the nation's capital as part of Close-Up Washington, D.C., a national program that gives students and teachers an opportunity to experience democracy in action. Gallegos and his classmates participated in a mock Congress, met their representatives, and visited the monuments.

He left after taking a firsthand look at the epicenter of national politics, but not before getting snowed in at the airport.

Gallegos was hooked by both the capital city and the weather. "I like the cold and I love the snow," he says, "I know that sounds strange coming from a Southern Californian, but I've never really liked the heat." As a history major, he says, "I couldn't really think of a better place to go to college. There's so much of our nation's history right here in D.C. and beyond, places like Mount Vernon and Gettysburg. And it's where history is being made every day."

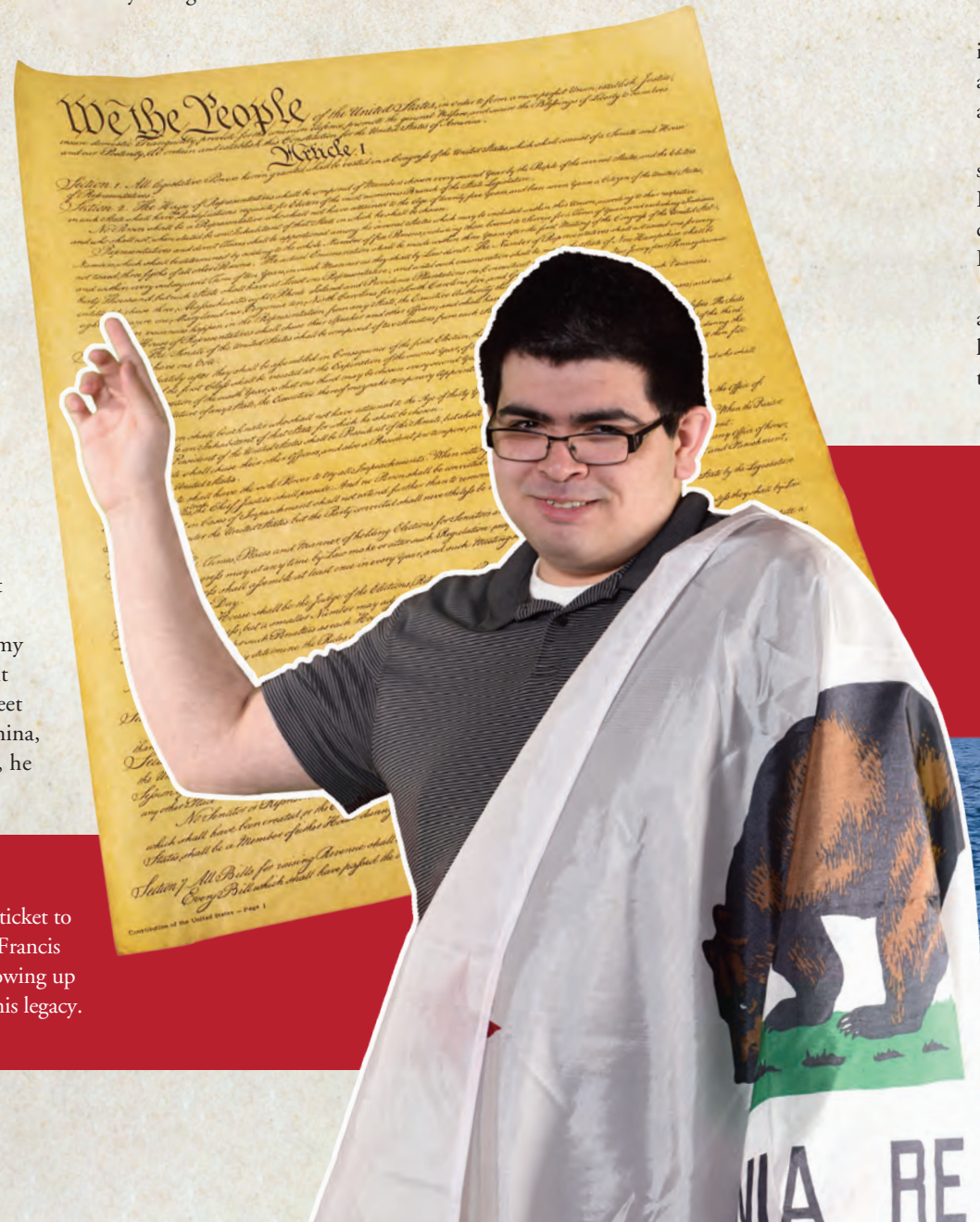
At the mention of the current state of American politics, Gallegos says history becomes all the more important. "It shows us that political discourse can bring a country to its knees or make it rise higher. Not paying attention is a problem that history has constantly shown doesn't work. That's how communism and fascism took root."

One political debate taking place in the nation's capital that has Gallegos' particular attention is immigration. "As a Mexican-American and someone who comes from a border state, it can be irksome sometimes to listen to the debate taking place in Washington, far from any border. While improvements are needed, the system is functioning far better than how those who've never experienced it might be led to believe."

Diversity, he says, is part of the fiber of California life. "Right in my little neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley, we have six different religions represented, and even more ethnicities. There are many street markets where vendors are from places like Guatemala, Vietnam, China, Ethiopia, and Mexico," says Gallegos. On the topic of ethnic food, he

mentions that "the best Mexican cook anywhere is my *Abuelita*."

Gallegos is proud of his California roots and his Mexican heritage. "During all four years of college, I've had a California flag and Mexican serape on my walls. They are great conversation starters. I can be quiet. So I appreciate when other people take the first step to ask about my background."



ONE MORE THING

Gallegos started his college years at Catholic University with a student ticket to the Papal Mass on campus in September 2015. "I got to witness Pope Francis canonize Junípero Serra, one of the founding fathers of California. Growing up in California it's hard to pass a highway or a school that doesn't show his legacy. I felt that I was part of history that day."

Ocean to Ocean

LIZZY RICH

Hometown: Palos Verdes | Major: Marketing | Minors: Theology and Entrepreneurship | Class of 2020

From her Los Angeles suburb, Lizzy Rich has an expansive view of the Pacific Ocean. "I'm happiest when I'm at the beach," she says. "I could sit there forever with my feet in the sand. It's so peaceful. I see God's vastness and beauty in the ocean."

Rich heads to the ocean first thing when she is home on school breaks. Often she will stop first at a favorite beachside stand to get an acai bowl. "That's my go-to meal. It's bright pink [pureed acai berries] topped with whatever you feel like that day; avocado, granola, honey, kale, dark chocolate. Food is so fresh and healthful in California."

Her love of Southern California extends beyond the beach. "Every terrain imaginable is accessible within an hour or two. You can surf in the morning and by afternoon be snowboarding in the mountains. If you are really ambitious, you could even fit in a hike."

So what exactly brought this diehard California girl east? "Both of my older siblings went to college on the East Coast so it wasn't a foreign concept," says Rich. "It was my mom who suggested Catholic specifically. I had been on campus during a junior high trip to D.C., and she remembered how much I loved spending time in the Basilica."

Rich is majoring in marketing with a double minor in entrepreneurship and theology. She is not shy about her devotion to the Catholic faith. "I love my business classes because in everything we are learning, I don't have to separate my faith. I would like to start a for-profit business that does

good in the world; where my faith influences my business decisions."

Rich has found her community on campus through activities such as the Ultimate Frisbee team and homeless food runs. "I met my best friend right away my first year because she is from Michigan and neither of us could go home on weekends. We were both so far from home." She says one of the perks of being a West Coaster is all the invitations she gets from friends who live along the East Coast. "I've been able to experience so many places beyond Washington, D.C. At the end of this semester a friend is taking me to the beach. I'm so excited to see the Atlantic Ocean!" **CU**



ONE MORE THING

Last semester, Rich studied abroad at the University's Rome Center. One of her business professors, Andreas Widmer — a former Swiss Guard — arranged a tour of the Swiss Guard barracks for her and some friends, and connected them with his relatives in Lucerne, Switzerland, who hosted the students for a weekend. "He's one of my favorite professors and these were once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. People at Catholic U go out of their way for each other like this all the time."