



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY STANISLAUS
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Article | May 29, 2013 | By [James Leonard](#)

Former Foster Youth Beat the Odds En Route to Graduation

Promise Scholars, a CSU Stanislaus Program that Offers Support and Guidance to Former Foster Youth, Will See Five Students Graduate This Week.

Their stories are all different. Some were born with drugs in their system and were taken from their birth parents. Some lost their parents at an early age and were raised by family members or foster parents. All have experienced challenges that could have easily stopped them from pursuing their goals.

This week, five of them will have one thing in common: They will graduate with bachelor's degrees from CSU Stanislaus.

The [Promise Scholars Program](#) at CSU Stanislaus provides former foster youth the support and resources they need to succeed in college. Led by Director Wanda Bonnell, the program gives students individualized attention, helping them identify and apply for financial aid resources and housing while offering academic guidance and counseling as they navigate the university landscape.

"The vast majority of foster youth and other children without parents do not see higher education as a likely future goal," Bonnell said. "For Promise Scholars, having a program that provides specialized, one-on-one support services gives them the confidence they need to succeed."

The Promise Scholars graduating this week — fittingly during [National Foster Care Month](#) — are:

(more)

- Paula Garcia (criminal justice): A Stockton native who transferred to CSU Stanislaus from Fresno State, Garcia has maintained a 3.0 grade-point average or higher each semester. She has applied to the criminal justice master's program at CSU Stanislaus and hopes to become a public safety officer.
- David Hernandez (psychology): Hernandez's parents stressed the importance of education, despite having little of their own. Although he lost his mother when he was 1 year old and his father when he was 8, the Modesto native took their lessons to heart. He plans to offer guidance to others as a school counselor after obtaining a master's degree.
- Eric Meneses (criminal justice): Like many Promise Scholars, Meneses has made it a goal to help others in need, and he has received several awards for community service. He's also in his third year as a resident adviser on campus, and he has managed both the Village Council and the Village Peer Conduct Review Board. Meneses, a Moreno Valley native, will next pursue his master's degree in counselor education.
- Jade Mosely (criminal justice): Mosely is a Long Beach native who landed in the Los Angeles County foster care system after being removed from her birth parents. She has excelled as a student, making the dean's list and being admitted into the Honors Program at CSU Stanislaus. She plans to apply for the Master of Social Work program in hopes of helping at-risk youth as a social worker.
- Monica Rucker (agricultural studies, minor in biology): Born and raised in Ceres, Rucker was taken from her birth mother and raised by an elderly couple. She found a love of agriculture with her rural family, and she later joined the Ag Ambassadors club at CSU Stanislaus. Rucker hopes to spend her life educating others about agriculture and offering support to foster youth.

The program has also seen five students graduate in previous years, with Jessica Tacdol becoming the first in 2008. Other Promise Scholars to graduate were Laura Rodriguez, Serena Vidaure, LaTasha Hayes and Iris Hernandez.

For students who are without parental support, the Promise Scholars Program offers much-needed stability. Rucker arrived at CSU Stanislaus uncertain of how she would pay for tuition

(more)

while working only a part-time job. Bonnell calmed and reassured her, helped her obtain financial aid and even provided a backpack with supplies she needed for her classes.

"I honestly could not have completed my education if it wasn't for Wanda's guidance and her patience to talk me out of my despair and give me a ray of hope," Rucker said. "I am forever grateful to her, and I hope she knows how much she means to me."

Hernandez said he was "nervous" when he transferred to CSU Stanislaus, but he has thrived as a student even after suffering a serious accident and later changing his major from kinesiology to psychology. In addition to excelling academically, he has served on the Promise Scholars Advisory Committee, worked with the Office of Service Learning and tutored students at Modesto High through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program.

He credits much of his success to the support he received as a Promise Scholar.

"The Promise Scholars Program has given me access to a great counselor and motivator," Hernandez said. "Wanda Bonnell is a mother figure not only to me, but to all of my Promise Scholar classmates. Had I not been in the program, I don't think I would have been as successful.

"To be the first in my family to graduate from a four-year university means a ton to me. It has been tough at times, but Wanda has kept me ready every step of the way."

For more information on Promise Scholars, contact Wanda Bonnell at (209) 667-3957 or wbonnell@csustan.edu.