

Media Contact: Hansook Oh
Communications Coordinator, BUILD PODER
818-677-4866
Hansook.oh@csun.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

(NORTHRIDGE, Calif., Aug. 17, 2017) – CSUN’s BUILD PODER’s newest cohort of 60 undergraduates culminated from their four-week Summer Jumpstart research intensive program on Friday, Aug. 11, with the third annual BUILD PODER Family Day celebration.

BUILD PODER, which stands for Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity, Promoting Opportunities for Diversity in Education and Research, was established in 2014 with a \$22 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. The program trains undergraduates in biomedical research with the goal of diversifying the professional research workforce.

A unique tradition since the first Summer Jumpstart in 2015, BUILD PODER’s goal for Family Day is to show parents how they can support their children as they aspire to become professional researchers. Many of the program’s students are the first in their families to go to college, and the extra challenges they face in navigating higher education are [well researched](#). Compared to peers whose parents graduated college, first-generation students have more difficulty transitioning from high school to college, take on the burden of succeeding with less financial support, are more likely to drop out of a four-year institution after their first year, and are less likely to be enrolled in a graduate or professional program four to five years after earning a bachelor’s degree.

Gabriela Chavira, a CSUN psychology professor and one of BUILD PODER’s principal investigators, said educating students’ parents is crucial to help first-generation students overcome these challenges.

“Families are absolutely essential to student success,” Chavira said. “They aren’t just involved in elementary through high school, but continue to play important roles throughout their child’s college education. It is important to help empower parents and ease any fears or worries they may have about their children pursuing an advanced degree.”

Family Day started with BUILD PODER students giving heritage presentations, where they shared their unique family history and identity. As the program is very diverse, these presentations allowed students and families to learn more in depth about the life experiences and cultural knowledge each student brings to the table.

New BUILD PODER student Mehrnaz Siavoshi, a biochemistry major who is transferring to CSUN from Pierce College, brought her mother to Family Day to see the supportive community the program provides.

(more)

Family Day

2-2-2-2

“I wanted to show her that we are not competing against each other, but that we are trying to bring each other up,” Siavoshi said. “She enjoyed learning about everyone’s cultural history [through the heritage presentations].”

The students and family members then went to the Ferman Presentation Room in the Oviatt Library to view current students’ research posters and ask questions about their work. Afterward, parents and students enjoyed a luncheon at the CSUN Orange Grove Bistro.

The day ended with a question and answer session with Chavira and students’ parents and family members. It provided an opportunity for Chavira to discuss the importance of supporting their children’s independence, as their children pursue opportunities that may take them away from home. BUILD PODER requires students to conduct summer research and encourages students to apply to programs at other research institutions. This summer, 40 students conducted summer research at other universities, some as close as the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Southern California, and others as far away as Northwestern University, Columbia University and the University of Florida.

During the question and answer session, Chavira addressed some parents’ unease at the idea that their children might spend an entire summer away from home.

“My goal is for your children to be in a place where they can say, ‘I can do this work,’” Chavira told the families. “They won’t be alone, they’ll be with other students who are also facing the same issues on their path towards graduate studies. Being away will help students to realize they’ve learned a lot during the school year and gives them the opportunity to be independent. And the likelihood of getting an offer into a Ph.D. program at the university they spend their summer at is higher.”

Maria Valencia, mother of new BUILD PODER student Yessenia Valencia Escobar, said that watching the heritage presentations and viewing students’ research posters helped her better understand what her daughter was doing at school. After learning all that it takes for her daughter to succeed as a researcher, Valencia felt less worried and more empowered to support her daughter.

“[Summer research] is something that is important for her future and I’m still afraid to let her go,” Valencia said as she teared up. “But if she has to go, I’ll help her in any way I can.”

Valencia’s daughter was also glad her mother could come learn about BUILD PODER.

“I’m very happy she came,” said Valencia Escobar, a junior majoring in psychology. “It makes it easier for me, now that she knows more about what I’m doing.”

For photos of the event, please visit our Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/buildpoder/>

###