



*Dean Armistead at the SEAL leadership Conference*

*Source: Katya Arimstead*

# CREATING A PLACE OF BELONGING

## *DEAN KATYA ARMISTEAD'S JOURNEY OF OVERCOMING DOUBT AND DISCOVERING PURPOSE AT UCSB*

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Waiting patiently in the Student Resource Building, I hear footsteps approaching behind me. I turn around and am greeted with a warm smile and wave. I introduce myself to the Assistant Vice Chancellor and Dean of Student Life at UCSB, Dr. Katya Armistead, and we make our way to her office. Filled with all sorts of memorabilia she has collected over thirty years of working at the University, her office reflects the multiple

contributions she has made to this campus.

On the wall hangs a framed T-shirt from a conference hosted by the Black Student Union with signatures from students thanking her for her support. She asks me to take a seat wherever I want, and I notice that unlike most faculty offices, she has a round table. We take a seat and start talking. Immediately, I feel all my anxiety around

interviewing the Dean of Student Life melt away.

If there is anyone who knows more about student life at UCSB than an actual student, it is Dr. Katya Armistead. From attending UCSB as an undergraduate to now serving as the Dean of Student Life, she has watched this campus grow. Witnessing the challenges students face on this campus, both as a student and administrator, Katya understands the importance of having students' voices heard. Passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion, she has made it her goal to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels like they belong.

### CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY FROM THE CLASSROOM

From being Swensen's Ice Cream's best soda jerker to leading multiple organizations at her high school, Katya's love for working with people and other students found its roots.

Involved in various clubs, she donated her time to causes that gave back to her community. As president of Zonta International, a women's rights organization, she worked with nearby schools helping children with special needs. She also worked very closely with the American Red Cross, serving as a camp counselor and even being selected to represent the organization at the Rose Parade for Rotary International.

Additionally, Katya served as class president for two years, was on the Parent Teacher Association, and even helped organize a campaign for a school board candidate. An active and hardworking high schooler, Katya took every opportunity to get involved in clubs and other extracurriculars through



**Dean Armistead with the SRB's first voting box**  
**Source: Katya Arimstead**

which she formed a strong circle of friends and her passion for volunteer work.

### BECOMING A GAUCHO

Though she was deeply engaged in high school activities, Katya struggled academically and, as a first-generation, low income student, from a single-parent household, she began doubting her chances of getting into college.

Luckily, a school by the ocean took a chance on her, and Katya began her journey at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Her first few years on campus were hard. As a young, mixed-race woman on a very white campus, Katya felt lost amongst her peers; she felt like everyone around her had so much more, and she struggled to find her sense of belonging.

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***"This is a very white campus. I didn't have belonging. I didn't know how to get involved."***

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From working multiple jobs to support herself financially to handling rigorous coursework that she felt academically unprepared for, Katya developed a sense of shame and failure. Unlike her high school self, she did not get involved on her campus, because she didn't feel like she could.

#### FINDING HER PLACE

Things began to change her sophomore summer. After making a pact with one of her friends to try something new that summer, Katya made her way to the Career Center and explored her options. Drawing from her experience as camp counselor for the American Red Cross, she applied to almost all camp counselor positions that were available. A few weeks later, she got a call from Jancy and Bill Dorfman inviting her to Camp Walt Whitman in New Hampshire.

Taking a leap, Katya packed her bags, flew across the country, landed in the Big Apple, and took a Peter Pan bus all the way to camp. Nervous of what this experience would bring her, all her qualms were calmed when she saw the faces of

the kids. She loved her time at camp working with the kids, meeting new people, being outdoors, and getting to travel. During this time, she began to see the old Katya, who loved being active and social, emerge again. Her experience at camp Walt Whitman served as an enormous confidence booster and changed the course of the rest of her college career.

#### COAST TO COAST

After attending camp for all her remaining summers of college, Katya graduated from UCSB and found herself in the real world. Pursuing her dream of acting, she moved back home to Pasadena to work on a film for a director she connected with while working at Arts and Lectures; however, that experience did not go as expected. She wrapped up that project right in time for camp, but this time she decided she was going to extend her trip a bit longer.

After camp that summer, she pursued her dream of living in New York and got a waitressing job at the bottom of the Empire State Building. Deep down, Katya knew she could do more.

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***"I had a sense of what my values were, I just hadn't fully operationalized them or been able to articulate them, especially when I was just trying to figure out my own identity and my own place in the world."***

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Soon, she started working in advertising and finally got the financial stability she was looking for. Through her role she interacted

with many high level professionals and learned the ins-and-outs of the advertising industry. Nevertheless, at the back of her mind loomed her memories of the time she spent at camp. She wondered how she could be a professional camp counselor for the rest of her life.

Things took a turn when her ex-boyfriend from college visited her, bent down on one knee in Central Park during her lunch break, and asked her to marry him. After visiting camp one last time, she moved back to Santa Barbara and began searching for the next step in her career.

#### A GAUCHO...AGAIN?

Katya was clear about one thing: she wanted to work at the University—she wanted to work with students. Starting in the Office of Admission and then moving to Campus Visit Coordinator, she ran a program bringing first-generation, low income, students of color,

like herself, to the UCSB. She made it clear to these students that this was as much their campus as it was anyone else's. Reflecting on her college experience, she wanted to ensure that these kids knew they had a place on this campus. She strove to better the experience for students of color, especially black students, here at UCSB and make sure they felt accepted, included, and welcomed.

The Campus Visit Coordinator Role was everything she ever wanted, and Katya could have done that job for the rest of her life, but soon an assistant director position opened up. Encouraged by her colleagues, she applied and got accepted for that role.

Working her way through the ranks, today Katya stands as the Assistant Vice Chancellor and Dean of Student Life at UCSB. She took her dream of working with the students and has dedicated over thirty years to student-focused administration.



Dean Armistead at a non-profit cooking school for youth.

Source: Katya Armistead

Every day, she gets the opportunity to work with students: problem solving, being creative, and guiding them towards their goals and aspirations. She's worked closely with the Black Student Union and numerous other cultural organizations, making sure these groups have what they need to be successful.

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***"Did I know where I'd be today? Absolutely not, but I aspired being student focused. Something on my mind was also that I wanted to make it a better experience for students of color, especially black students."***

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When she came to UCSB, she felt like she did not have people she could connect with and is now working to ensure no other student has to feel the same way. Katya is creating spaces for the students' voices to be heard. For her, the most important thing when it comes to supporting the student body is listening and advocacy. Students come to her angry about issues and Katya holds a special place for them to express their frustrations and be acknowledged. The first thing she asks students is how she can support them, what they need from her, and how they can overcome whatever problem they are facing. Additionally, in spaces where students are not represented, she makes sure to speak up for them and, if nothing else, say students that should be there.

## CHAMPIONING INCLUSIVITY

As the Dean of Student Life, Katya has filled in the missing gaps from her college experience, and is working towards creating a campus community where every student feels like they belong.



Source: UC National Free Speech and Civic Engagement Center

Realizing there was a lack of education around diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, Katya spearheaded a project to create a DEI module with the online education platform, Everfi. Initially facing resistance from the school due to the project's heavy costs, Katya knew how beneficial this project would be and worked hard, lobbying and inspiring people to raise the money. Finally, she got approval and helped build this model from the ground up, creating a common language that allowed the conversation around DEI to continue in all spaces around campus.

Additionally, while juggling multiple responsibilities, Katya wanted to ensure that initiatives for inclusion on campus continued even if she could not dedicate her own time to them. Thus, to support her vision of creating a more inclusive campus, Katya established the role of Assistant Dean of Equity and Student Communication. Working with Enn Burke, who filled the position, she she assisted in creating projects such as



*Dean Armistead at the monthly NUPF program meeting.*

*Source: Katya Armistead*

Gauchoback program in partnership with the National Conflict Resolution Center and developing an inclusive hiring manual for UCSB faculty. Katya's goal has been and continues to be to foster an inclusive environment where students feel empowered to voice their ideas and where diversity is celebrated.

#### BEYOND CAMPUS WALLS

Her efforts to create change among youth and beyond is not just limited to UCSB. Katya is highly involved in numerous other non-profits where she uses her skills and experience to uplift others in our community.

Currently, she is on the board for Leading from Within, a leadership development program for non-profit organizations. As the co-facilitator for their Emerging Leaders

Program, Katya empowers individuals looking to work within the nonprofit sector to develop their skills and leadership abilities. Additionally, as a Kathrine Harvey Fellow for Leading from Within, her cohort began a non-profit program called Youth Making Change, giving young people the opportunity to engage in organized philanthropy. Shaped by her volunteer experiences in high school, she knows how important these experiences are in building confidence and leadership skills, and has worked to create opportunities for the youth of Santa Barbara to engage in similar philanthropic initiatives.

Similarly, having faced financial struggles through most of her life, she knows the importance of achieving financial stability and independence, motivating her work with her work with Women's Economic Ventures (WEV). Through WEV she hopes to make a

positive impact on women and inspire them to succeed on their own terms. From waitressing at the bottom of the Empire State, to getting a job in advertising, and working her way up to Dean of Student Life at UCSB, Katya has proven that dedication and perseverance leads to success, regardless of where you begin your journey and hopes to share this message with other women.

Lastly, her goal to promote inclusion and diversity extends beyond just the campus environment. As the senior consultant at Equity Praxis Group, Katya brings the conversation around diversity, equity, and inclusion into the professional world, providing consulting services for businesses to act more effectively in fostering an inclusive workplace.

## EVERYONE BELONGS

Throughout her life, Katya has faced and overcome all sorts of challenges. She understood when things were not aligning with her values and looked for new ways to approach situations that allowed her to grow, even if that meant stepping outside of her comfort zone. Now, her work centers around helping others to do the same. She works with students finding ways to address their concerns and making sure that every member of the student body feels like they have a place on this campus. Additionally, outside of UCSB, she focuses on uplifting the youth, women, and young leaders of Santa Barbara to build the skills and confidence they need to make a difference in their communities.

Katya's dedication to empowering others stems from her own experiences of overcoming adversity, and through her work, she aspires to create a community where everyone belongs.

