

Examples of excellence

■ La Reina High School honors graduating seniors

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Xingzhu (Brianna) Dong

Brianna Dong's legal first name is Xingzhu (pronounced Ching-ju), but her classmates know her as Brianna.

International students like Brianna choose an English name to fully immerse themselves in the cultural experience, she said.

Originally from Xinjiang, China, she started attending La Reina High School four years ago after choosing to come to the United States, figuring an immersive experience in the U.S. would help her become a well-rounded person.

La Reina was her top choice, she said, because she thought the all-girl school would provide a safe environment.

It took a period of adjustment to get used to the new system, Brianna said.

"All my classmates and teachers are very supportive and friendly, so I felt welcome and like I could adapt very quickly," she said.

One of the differences between China and the U.S. is how much free time is available to American students. In China, she said, free time is practically nonexistent. In the U.S., it's a different story.

"Here we get off from school at 3:15 and, at first, I had a lot of free time that I don't know how to spend," said Brianna, adding that her school in China went until 8 p.m.

"But later I found a lot of things I was interested in, like robotics, golf, a lot of activities and clubs," she said. "I felt like I came here to explore what I'm interested in, what's my passion, and develop different skills. And that also helped me to not miss home so much."

As an international student, Brianna said, she felt like she could form a cultural bridge between China and the U.S. Some cultural exchanges happened during conversations in history and government class. She remembers bringing Chinese deserts to a Victorian tea party for an AP English class. Her classmates loved them, she said.

Some of the activities she took up were the literary magazine, chamber music and the robotics club her first two years, but it was her aptitude for science, technology, engineering and mathematics that earned her recognition at the school's most recent Evening of Excellence. She was the winner of the Excellence in STEM award.

Over the course of her studies at La Reina, she took AP classes in physics, calculus and statistics.

"Science just interests me, and I would like to devote more time beyond the school to study and learn science," Brianna said.

As for a career, she said, her passion lies with the humanities and social science, but she may do a double major or minor in mathematics and physics.

"My future plan is I want to be



Dong

a writer, researcher or professor in sociology or comparative literature," she said.

During her time at La Reina, Brianna stayed with host parents Donna Colehour-Lewis and Ronald Lewis. She plans on going back to China some day with her host mom and showing her the country.

Brianna is graduating with a 4.61 GPA and will attend Wellesley College in the fall.

Jennifer Martinez

Jennifer Martinez didn't always consider herself a leader, but in the past two years she stepped up her participation at La Reina High School so much that the school gave the senior class president a leadership award at this year's Evening of Excellence.

Jennifer has attended the school since sixth grade, but it wasn't until her junior year that she started to take on more leadership roles, including being active in school clubs.

Martinez's parents work at the school as the cleaning crew, and it was with their encouragement that Martinez applied to La Reina.

"They've known about this place and they've just seen how happy everyone here was and the quality of the education seemed great," Jennifer said. "I wasn't forced to apply, but they were definitely like, 'This is a great option,' so I took the entrance exam and I got in, and I've been here since the sixth grade and it's been great."

Going to an all-girl school helped build Jennifer's confidence. She said it made it a more secure way to learn.

"I was comfortable with myself and how I expressed myself in being around other women. I felt supported," she said.

Jennifer is the winner of this year's Alma Mater award, given to a student who has shown she is confident, capable and compassionate.

She said she would like to add "resilient" to that list.

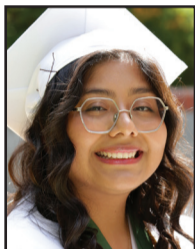
"It's a good school, but sometimes it gets a little competitive, and grades matter a lot, and sometimes you compare yourself to others and it obviously doesn't make you feel good, but you learn to overcome that and push forwards and do your best," Jennifer said. "At the end of the day, it all turns out OK."

Some of her favorite memories were retreats, which the school provides several times between grades six and 11.

"It allowed us to step away from school and the stress environment, and we could be with each other in a more relaxed setting," Jennifer said.

She has a weighted GPA of 4.3. This fall, she will attend UC Berkeley, where she will major in media studies.

She hopes to remain at Berkeley for grad school. As a career, Jennifer said, she hopes to open a marketing firm or have her own business of some kind.



Martinez

Nyrie Krumian

There's not much Nyrie Krumian would change about her high school experience, but she wasn't always so sure that would be the case.

"I didn't love it at first because I thought I was missing out on so much. There were no football



Krumian

games. It was much smaller," said Nyrie, the winner of La Reina High School's Excellence in Liberal Arts award.

She came to La Reina as a ninth-grader in 2019, following in the footsteps of her older sister, who began attending the school two years before. The academic, extracurricular and social opportunities the school did offer made up for those it didn't.

"I met some great girls and I met a lot of friends. . . I wouldn't change my high school experience," Nyrie said.

The school provided small classes, which Nyrie said sometimes felt like private tutoring sessions, and set high standards. The graduate said she pushed herself in ways she might not have at another school.

"I just think being at a school where so much is expected of you just really forces you to push yourself," she said. "I think being surrounded by people who do that forces you to jump on the bandwagon for sure. I think if I had gone to a school where it wasn't expected to take so many AP classes, I wouldn't have."

Nyrie lists many accomplishments from her four years at the school. After taking a graphic design class as a freshman, she won a Ventura County Fair graphic design contest. She also served as secretary for the National Honor Society and was part of the California Scholastic Federation.

Her other activities included the swim team, volleyball, academic decathlon, and stage managing and performing in the school play her senior year.

Being with her friends was one of the best parts of Nyrie's high school experience. She describes all her classmates as being very friendly.

"There's no one I wouldn't have a conversation with," she said.

Nyrie has an Armenian background and is an Armenian Catholic, which is different from the Roman Catholic faith that La Reina High School embodies. She said that regardless of a student's religion or lack thereof, the environment is inclusive.

Students are required to attend Mass on campus and take a religion class, but Nyrie said the culture is not indoctrinating.

"It's not forced upon anybody. Most of my class isn't Catholic," she said.

Nyrie said she does not yet know what she wants to pursue as a career, but she plans to major in psychology and brain sciences at UC Santa Barbara. She is graduating with a 4.65 weighted GPA.