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Jason Davalos

CSUSB Palm Desert Campus outstanding student sets sights on transforming healthcare

PALM DESERT, Calif. — In 2021, Jason Davalos was like many other high school seniors: unsure of what the future would hold.

The COVID-19 pandemic had upended life as he knew it. His final year at Palm Desert High School was spent in front of a computer screen, disconnected from friends, classrooms, and any clear sense of direction. But what started as a year of confusion ended with a decision that would change everything: he chose to become a nurse.

“I saw stories about the nursing shortage and how essential nurses were during the pandemic,” Davalos recalls. “I figured, why not give it a shot?” That leap of faith launched him into a transformative journey — one that now sees him being named the Outstanding Student of the 2024-25 academic year at Cal State San Bernardino’s Palm Desert Campus (PDC).

Davalos, a [University Legacy Scholar](#) at PDC, will graduate on Saturday, May 17, with a bachelor of science degree in nursing and a minor in Spanish, but his story is more than a degree. It's about purpose, resilience and a deep-rooted commitment to serving others.

His ultimate goal? To become a registered nurse in an intensive care unit, and eventually, a faculty member at a California community college or university, where he can pass on the torch to future generations of nurses.

Throughout his time at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, Davalos distinguished himself not only through academic excellence, but also through meaningful research. In a junior-year research course, he joined a team of peers under the guidance of Justin Schneider, assistant professor in the Department of Nursing, to investigate the impact of new graduate nurse residency programs on job satisfaction and retention. The project won first place at the inaugural PDC Student Research Showcase — a moment that sparked Davalos' love for research and presenting.

That passion only grew when he became a student assistant in the [CSUSB Nursing Street Medicine Program](#). Under the mentorship of Department of Nursing faculty members Diane Vines and Samantha Duffle, he presented at the 2025 Western Institute of Nursing Conference in Spokane, Wash. His presentation examined how a simple act — foot soaks for unhoused individuals — fostered empathy and built bridges between nursing students and vulnerable populations.

"Nursing Street Medicine forced me to confront personal biases and societal stigma," he says. "It taught me to approach every patient with the dignity and respect they deserve."

Davalos' next steps are already taking shape. After graduation, he plans to enter a nurse residency program, with eyes set on working in a cardiovascular intensive care or progressive care unit. Eventually, he says that he'll pursue a master of science degree in nursing education. His long-term goal is to become a clinical nurse educator and later, full-time nursing faculty.

"I want to inspire students just as my professors inspired me," he says. "To help others realize that they, too, can thrive in this field — even when it feels overwhelming."

Davalos credits his success to the examples set by his parents. His father, an immigrant who arrived in the U.S. at 14, worked his way through College of the Desert and San Diego State University to become a teacher. His mother, raised in a low-income household in Indio, also attended College of the Desert before building a career in healthcare administration.

"My parents dared to dream, and they instilled those values in me," Davalos says. "They saw me through every victory and struggle. For that, I'm forever grateful."

He also acknowledges the many professors at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus who guided him, each of whom left an indelible mark on his personal and professional growth.

Nursing school wasn't easy. Davalos admits that early on, he questioned whether he belonged. The material was difficult, the stakes high. But when he voiced his doubts, his professors reassured him: even they had once felt the same way. That validation kept him going.

"I was told that the fact I cared so much about becoming a competent nurse meant I was exactly where I needed to be," he says. "That advice helped me stay the course."

Among his proudest achievements is completing the Certificate in Healthcare Spanish at CSUSB. Under the instruction of CSUSB faculty members Carmen Dagostino and Nerea Marteache, Davalos traveled abroad to study at the historic University of Salamanca in Spain — an experience that not only broadened his worldview but also deepened his ability to serve Spanish-speaking patients with empathy and cultural understanding.

"Studying abroad made me a better nurse," he says. "I can now communicate more effectively with my patients, understand their stories and make them feel seen in our healthcare system."

Davalos attributes much of his growth to the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, a place he describes as "a tight-knit community" where students are known by name and supported in every endeavor.

"PDC gave me the tools to find my passion. All I had to do was claim them," he says. "More importantly, they even sponsored my education through the University Legacy Scholarship program. Now I get to enter the workforce fully focused on my career, without any worries about repaying student loans or debt. As I graduate, I'm proud to say I'm a product of PDC — and I always will be."

From unsure high school senior to aspiring nurse educator, Davalos' journey is one marked by purpose, perseverance and profound compassion. As he prepares to enter the next phase of his career, one thing is clear: the future of healthcare — and nursing education — is brighter with him in it.

Located in the heart of the Coachella Valley, the Palm Desert Campus is dedicated to providing a transformative educational experience for students and plays a vital role in expanding access to higher education in the region. With the campus seeing an increase in student enrollment, the new Student Services Building is part of a long-term vision to grow the campus and better serve the needs of its diverse student population.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Marketing and Communications at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.