Title
"with social change comes great responsibility"

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CSW Constance Coiner Award recipient Sabrina Tinsay with Virginia Coiner Classick at the CSW Awards Luncheon in June of 2010
I am an AB540 undergraduate student majoring in International Development Studies with minors in Political Science and Cultural Anthropology at UCLA. My personal goal is to find ways to empower our community and future generations through human rights activism and international development. My mantra for everyday life is “with social change comes great responsibility.”

In my lifetime, I have moved from the Philippines, to Chicago, to Orange county, to Garden Grove, to Tustin, to Nevada, to Cypress, and finally to Los Angeles. We were poor and life was a struggle. During my early years, I had difficulty learning to read and write. My mom took notice and we took the jeepney to see a children’s doctor at Makati where I was diagnosed with dyslexia. During this time, my parents were also experiencing multiple failures in their marriage and finances, and I became ill with stomach ulcers from stress. As I witnessed their arguments experience abuse, I often wished that my life would get better and hoped to find a way to serve the world. My mom was finally able to escape an abusive relationship and saved up enough money for one-way tickets to the U.S., where she, my siblings, and I could start a new life. I celebrated my eleventh birthday in the airport terminal on the journey from the Philippines to Hong Kong to Chicago. “America is where freedom is,” my mom assured me and my siblings.

In Chicago, I was an underprivileged student with little knowledge of English. To assimilate into American culture, I tuned into talk radio, watched Oprah, and listened to my mom as she read aloud. The most influential person in my life is my mother because she inspired me to promote women’s rights from an early age. My passion for human rights evolved as I began to gain awareness of the abusive relationship my mom had experienced and as I compared the poverty of my home in the Philippines with the wealth of the U.S.

During my first two years in the U.S., I volunteered as an assistant in a Sunday...
During my first year at UCLA, I experienced a few misfortunes. I became homeless when my job ended at a convalescent hospital due to the economic collapse, as well as my ineligibility for financial aid as an AB540 student.

In Fall 2007, I became a part of an international organization called Invisible Children, whose “Displace Me Movement” advocates for international development, children’s rights, and women’s rights. More than 68,000 students across the United States of America raised awareness about displacement and violence in Northern Uganda and Sudan by fasting and camping out for 24 hours in camps set up in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington DC, New York, Chicago, Nashville, Phoenix, Denver, Austin, Kansas City, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, and New Orleans. As a student organizer, I was responsible for coordinating the “Displace Me Movement” programs, corresponding with college students across the nation, and serving as a human rights activist on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Through such grassroots activism, we can promote equality and the transformative power of compassion in our community.

Transferring to UCLA in the Fall of 2008, I joined a student organization called Nourish International, which develops international ventures to eradicate poverty and to empower communities in developing countries. As a marketing director, it is my responsibility to promote Nourish International’s “Summer Bolivia Project,” which is building a sustainable farm in Bolivia and advocating for health education and agricultural disease prevention.

At UCLA, I also developed friendships with a network of AB540 students through IDEAS, a group promoting the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act and human rights for immigrants. Our hope is that a path to citizenship can be found for undocumented college students.

I have also become involved with the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) at UCLA, where underprivileged students at the university collaborate through academic workshops, tutoring, and community service in the greater Los Angeles area.
During my first year at UCLA, I experienced a few misfortunes. I became homeless when my job ended at a convalescent hospital due to the economic collapse and my scholarships ran out. As an AB540 student, I am not ineligible for financial aid. I moved from couch to couch because I no longer had the money for food, rent, school supplies, and tuition. During Spring 2009, I participated in a community event as a student guest speaker for BruinTent, where I spoke about my experiences as a female homeless college student and about how the homeless population is stigmatized. With help from the Daily Bruin, UCLA Community Programs Office, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, the University Religious Conference, UCLA professors, and the Los Angeles community, I was able to continue at UCLA.

As a human rights activist, it is my passion to empower our global community. In Fall 2009, I began an internship as a student activist at Earth Rights Institute, a nonprofit organization advocating for sustainable development. As a student activist I was able to apply my knowledge of international development from my studies at UCLA. I worked closely with Annie Goeke, the founder of Earth Rights Institute and Safe Water Today, to create awareness about preventing the spread of waterborne diseases in Haiti through use of the Tulip Siphon Water Filter. I also promoted Earth Rights Institute’s cause at UCLA’s Global Health Fair and Public Heath Department Event by teaming up with World Care and United African Congress to mobilize resources to assist the Fondwa community in Haiti in the aftermath of the recent earthquake.

In Winter of 2009, I participated in the Tour Rider Program of Global Inheritance, in their attempts to combat traffic congestion and the resulting environmental pollution. We worked to build a network of college students nationwide to implement the Tour Rider Program, which promotes creative solutions to environmental degradation. For example, we promoted the use of public transportation by rewarding concert goers who used public transportation to attend an Eagles concert at the Hollywood Bowl.

I am also a founder of the nonprofit organization called Hope to Children in the Philippines Institute, which aims to promote an early childhood development programs in the Philippines, which provide health, nutrition, and education services. My goal is to promote human rights and implement campaigns for global cooperation to address extreme poverty, overpopulation, climate change, and sustainable development. Implementation of environmental policy will help minimize pollution in the Philippines and thereby help reduce cancer, malaria, and other diseases. My hope is to build affordable housing in developing countries, such as the Philippines and to promote the well-being of women and children, as well as the health of future generations.

Indeed, my journey at UCLA is one that has been both challenging and fruitful. I now hope to attend graduate school in international studies. I believe that I can make a difference in our community as an activist for women’s rights, children’s rights, and human rights.