

# Metro Academies alum sets sights on law school

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After graduating from high school, Cory Mickels was working in construction when he had a revelation about his future.

"It was there I realized I wanted to work with my head, rather than my hands," the native of San Francisco's Bay View-Hunters Point neighborhood said. "I went back to the staff at my high school, and they pointed me in the direction of Metro Academies."



Metro Academies is an award-winning, innovative program at SF State that helps underrepresented students succeed in college. Mickels recently spoke about the program during the annual conference of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities in Washington, D.C. During the conference, SF State was **among three inaugural winners of the APLU's Most Visible Progress Degree Completion Award for its success in graduating and retaining students.**

Mickels, a junior majoring in political science, is now an alum of the two-year program with his sights set on a law degree. He is preparing to take the LSAT in December and credits Metro Academies with improving not just his study habits, reading, writing and math skills but also his confidence in the classroom and his belief he can be successful. Those are all things he says students from underprivileged backgrounds often lack coming out of high school.

"I think the major reason why people drop out of college, other than personal reasons, is because they lack the skills

to succeed," he said. "When you lack those skills, you lack the confidence to work through the feeling of inferiority that results. That's why Metro Academies is so important. They give you those skills. They give you that confidence."

Metro Academies, a partnership between SF State and City College of San Francisco, redesigns the first two years of college, the critical period when many students tend to drop out, to provide students with a structured sequence of classes. Students in each academy study in a cohort of up to 140 students that is like a "school within a school," and receive tutoring, extra counseling and one-on-one support from faculty.

The program has received \$675,000 in permanent, annual funding from the California State University System and a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education that will allow it to expand to serve all underrepresented students at SF State by 2015.

Mickels says there are three components that make Metro Academies so successful: First, socially relevant courses that connect the subject matter to real life; second, an interconnected curriculum that allows students to approach the same topic from multiple angles; and third, a cohort of students going through the same experience who support each other and share in the struggles and successes of the group.

"These three aspects, coupled with the fact that teachers were more like advisors for us, gave us the space and time to adapt to the challenges of college," he said. That, in turn, allows students to transition successfully to traditional courses once they have completed the Metro Academies program.

In addition, Mickels said, Metro Academies helps him give back to his community by allowing him to bring the intellectual and socially relevant conversations that take place in the classroom back home to his family and friends. He cites learning about the U.S. prison system, including analyzing prison statistics in math class, as one example.

"Metro Academies changed my dialogue," he said. "When you change the dialogue, you can change the community. My community dialogue currently is hopelessness, and if I plan on changing that spirit of hopelessness, I need to change the dialogue we're having so people can feel a sense of hope, a sense of change. Because that's where it started with me."

For more about the Metro Academies program, visit <http://metroacademies.org/>

-- Jonathan Morales