

GRADUATION



MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpo

A Graduate On the Fast Track

At 15 years old, Rena Nakasaka is youngest to graduate from CSULA.

Talented. Happy. Personable. These are some of the adjectives used to describe 15-year-old Rena Nakasaka — the youngest graduating senior at California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) — who will be receiving her bachelor's degree in English with honors this spring.

Nakasaka was admitted to CSULA at the age of 12 through the Early Entrance Program (EEP), now under the auspices of the university's Honors College.

CSULA's EEP admits extraordinarily gifted youngsters — some as young as 11 — directly into college, providing the early entrants with monitored evaluation, regular counseling sessions, and the opportunity to study with like-minded peers. Nakasaka is among more than 10 other EEP graduates receiving their baccalaureate degrees this year.

"I chose to apply to Cal State L.A. so I can get an early start in my academic

journey," said Nakasaka. "The best part of CSULA is being able to socialize with peers my age in EEP and to interact with the diversity of students on campus. I've also enjoyed taking anthropology classes as well as other courses taught by Caroline McManus and Michael Calabrese, among many others."

Despite her academic workload, Nakasaka is an active member of the G.E. Honors Club, and has served as secretary of the CSULA Speech and Debate Club.

"It was fun to be able to participate in a forensic tournament with one of my friends," said Nakasaka. "We usually debate about current legislation or law pending in Congress."

A Dean's List student, Nakasaka is also a member of CSULA's Phi Kappa Phi chapter, the oldest, largest and most selective collegiate honor society in the U.S.

When she has a break from her studies,

she enjoys sinking her teeth into a good book. An avid reader, Nakasaka shared that her favorite author is Oscar Wilde.

Nakasaka also tries to find time to play softball, which is a sport that she has loved since she was a little girl.

In the community, she has volunteered for the "Big Sunday" non-profit service organization. She helped build a middle-school garden and donated food and supplies to the homeless.

After graduation, Nakasaka plans to spend her summer traveling before pursuing her law degree. She has already been accepted to several law schools with scholarship, but has not made her final decision.

"I've always been interested in law, and over time I knew that it's what I really wanted to do," she said. "I'm so glad that I've been accepted to some of my top choices for law school. At this point, I want to focus on criminal defense and prosecution, so I can help implement and enforce the law and contribute to society."