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Summa Cum Laude College Graduates at Ages 12 & 14



Since 1969, West Los Angeles College has awarded degrees and certificates to students from a wide range of ages. But no one on campus can recall a pair quite as unique as siblings Rohit (*left*) and Pooja Datir (*right*). At the respective ages of 12 and 14, these tweens will graduate on June 8 with four Associate degrees each and Summa Cum Laude.

Their father, Rahul Datir, explained his two wunderkinds were inspired by their older brother who graduated from high school as the class valedictorian. If he could do it, said Datir, the siblings thought they could too and age was not an issue. Both siblings worked relentlessly. "I had to tell them 'Go to sleep. Play a game,'" Datir recalled with a laugh.

Their academic prowess was evident as early as the fourth grade when their teachers were running out of materials from higher grades to offer them. It was then that the pair switched to an online-based charter school. At the suggestion of a teacher, their parents, both of whom work in information technology, attempted to enroll the kids at their local Riverside Community College (RCC). However, RCC did not admit youth as young as Rohit and Poojah, so they enrolled at West.

"The conversion to fully online during the pandemic was actually helpful for us," said Datir. Prior to that, the parents or a friend would make the long drive from Moreno Valley to escort their children to in-person classes. They even rented a hotel near the college during exam weeks.

"It was only because of West LA that this was possible," explained Pooja. "Other colleges wouldn't even let us take classes."

"We felt really motivated because everybody there [at West] didn't treat us any differently. They tried to help us do it and the staff and faculty were really supportive so we were very happy on campus," said Rohit.

As if being college graduates before they are eligible to drive is not impressive enough, Pooja and Rohit have several other accomplishments of which to be proud. Rohit is fluent in Spanish and Pooja is an accomplished Kathak dancer. Kathak is a classical Indian story-telling form of dance. Both siblings have earned Black Belts in Tae-kwon-do, are CPR certified, volunteer at a dental clinic, and assist with tasks in the family business.

Despite their college degrees, Pooja and Rohit will continue in high school for two more years before transferring to a university as juniors.

"We'd like them to have a chance to experience some of the regular social aspects of being a kid and also to be a little older before enrolling at a university," explained their father.

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WLAC 12 & 14-YEAR-OLD SUMMA CUM LAUDE GRADS...continued

But when they are ready to advance, they aspire to attend an Ivy League campus or combined Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Medicine program with the intent of becoming physicians. “When our grandmother was passing, we saw how the doctors tried their very bests to make her last days easy for her and to keep her spirits up and we felt very inspired by that. Also, since a young age, we’ve liked to help people,” said Pooja.

“Too often community colleges are incorrectly thought of as a place where students who made some missteps in high school end up,” said Dr. James M. Limbaugh, College President. “In fact, colleges like West are filled with scholars who were remarkable students in high school who want to save on tuition, appreciate the smaller class sizes, want a transition period before leaving home, and so on. In fact, our 2021 valedictorian - Mina Guirguis - is also younger than usual. He graduated early from high school, completed his Associate Degree at age 17 and will transfer to UCLA as a junior in the Fall. West is a resource providing paths to success for students of every age and background from these extraordinary young students to middle-age freshmen who are looking to change or advance their careers. Our slogan “Go West. Go Far.” is a possibility for all.”

West Los Angeles College is an ACCJC accredited community college in Culver City offering career certificates and degrees, university transfer, and professional advancement courses. Known for its expansive views and small college feel, West is one of only 15 California community college authorized to offer a Bachelor’s degree in a subject. For West, that subject is Dental Hygiene. The college has been a leader in online education for over 20 years and has received numerous awards and recognitions for its online programs. Find more information or enroll at WLAC.edu .

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