Michaela Juels
Student Commencement Speaker 2019

Michaela Juels kept her emotions bottled inside. The UC San Diego senior recalls the pain of witnessing her mother suffering from mental illness, her lack of treatment options and the stigma her family experienced. As the years passed, she began opening up and discovered there were many others who could relate. Last summer, as she was wrapping up research on anxiety and depression, she received a devastating phone call—her mother had unexpectedly passed away.

The news shattered her plans. Her research came to a halt. She cancelled her Medical College Admission Test. Juels’ world was crushed, but she was not alone. As UC San Diego’s All Campus Commencement student speaker, she will share her story of finding loving support in the midst of tragedy, and the importance of recognizing that no accomplishment is an individual feat.

“All of our successes are not born in isolation—they are bred in collectivism and support,” said Juels. “At UC San Diego, there are so many around us who come from difficult backgrounds and experience hardships. I want my fellow classmates to know that they are not alone and that with adversity comes triumph and strength. I want to inspire hope for their future and faith in one another.”

Growing up as a tomboy who loved sports, Juels was constantly confronted by phrases such as “you play like a girl” or told to act more “ladylike.” Instead of succumbing to the hurtful assails, Juels was driven to challenge the opinion that she was somehow less capable—in athletics or otherwise. As a freshman, she joined the UC San Diego Women’s Lacrosse team, and was named Most Valuable Player three years in a row.

As a junior, she took on leadership of Girls Academy, a weekend retreat hosted by her sorority, Kappa Kappa Gamma. For the program, 50 students from The Preuss School UC San Diego take part in interactive workshops – from body positivity to pathways in STEM and bullying—as well as a service project. “Growing up with gender discrimination, being able to educate and empower these young girls is one of my proudest accomplishments,” said Juels.

An aspiring medical doctor, Juels knows she wants to make a difference. “Even though I cannot possibly know every student in the Class of 2019, I can tell you that I feel a deep, personal bond and sense of gratitude to my fellow peers,” said Juels. “We are all a part of the same mission, and share the same dreams and values. We all strive to see the world in a better way and break boundaries.”