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Michael Martinez goes for PhD, other 18 year olds finishing high school

By Josh Dulaney, Staff Writer
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LONG BEACH - While most kids his age are applying for scholarships, Michael Martinez has already turned down full-ride offers from the likes of Stanford University and Harvard.

The 18-year-old chemistry major recently graduated from Cal State Los Angeles and is headed to Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla where he aims to earn a doctorate in synthetic organic chemistry.

XBox is kinda boring.

"I definitely enjoy research more than playing around," Martinez said from his parents' home Friday. "It's a lot more satisfying.

His interest now is researching how materials from starch derivatives and sugar can be turned into more useful and valuable compounds.

"A lot of these natural products have potential to be used as a therapeutics and other agents to treat disease," Martinez said.

It all started with baking soda and vinegar volcanoes.

From a young age, Martinez thrived on conducting experiments. He was bright enough in grade school to politely challenge his instructors.

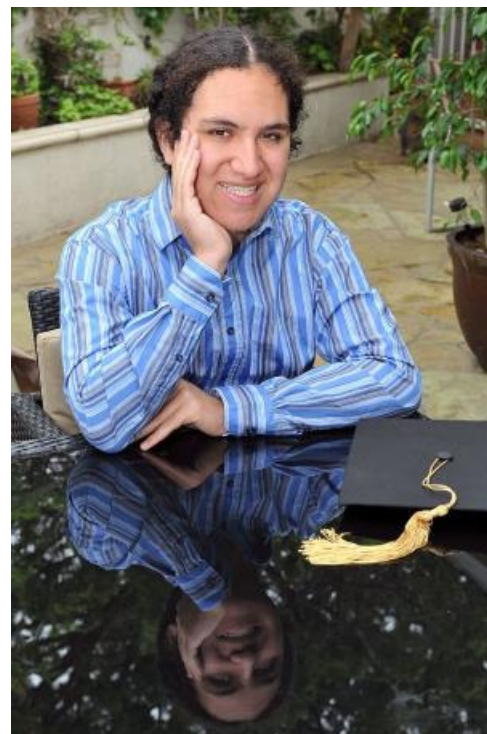
"We would go to the parent-teacher conference and he and the teacher would be having an argument," said Martinez's father, Mike Martinez. "It would be interesting to watch the debate."

Before graduating Tincher K-8 in East Long Beach, Martinez took science classes at Long Beach City College. He skipped high school and at 13 years old enrolled at CSULA through the Early Entrance Program, which allows gifted students as young as 11 years to go to college.

The decorated student earned the CSULA Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry's Freshman in Chemistry Award, and the Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science's Outstanding Undergraduate Research Presentation Award among other top honors.

His brother isn't far behind.

Joaquin Martinez is a 15-year-old junior studying engineering at Cal State Long Beach.



Michael Martinez of Long Beach never went to high school, yet he has a college degree from Cal State Los Angeles and is preparing to pursue a PhD in synthetic organic chemistry at the Scripps Research Institute. The 18-year-old showed his intellect at a young age and took college-level classes in his early teens. (Brittany Murray/Staff Photographer)

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Their mother, Barbara Martinez, has a doctorate in education policy.

"Michael and Joaquin are her most exciting research project," Mike Martinez said.

Michael Martinez hopes to someday join the faculty at a school like Caltech or MIT.

When he's not conducting research, he likes to run and roller-blade, and listen to rock bands like Arctic Monkeys.

"I'll listen to anything as long as it doesn't interfere with my studying," he said.

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