Four years ago I started to live. I am 29 years old now and I am just beginning to experience life its entirety I feel. I spent the majority of my previous life making wrong decisions and being influenced by surroundings and my poor judgment. I was given a second chance and I chose higher education to inform my new perspective and to be the tool that would open doors in the future. It took me three years to finally transfer to a university. I did not do it alone. With the help of family, friends, professors and programs like EOPS my goals are being accomplished.

Today, with a desire that the youth have more opportunities to choose different paths, I see that there must be political change in order for things to change culturally. This is the reason why I have chosen to run for Visalia City Council on November fourth. I would much desire to work on the culture side but then there would still be these political obstacles. One of those, of which I address in my platform, is to become less dependent of youth incarceration and to incorporate evidence based intervention and prevention programs. These programs are actually more fiscally responsible then the increasingly expensive prison system that yields little benefit when we have youth recidivism rate of 70%.

I still have many visions and goals that keep me going. What are your goals? What are your challenges? One advice I like to give to the youth is to find something unique inside you and cultivate that. Once we can live beyond negative influences I think we become a positive force that allows us to overcome our challenges and realize our goals. Str8 up!

Dominic Prado is a fourth year Community Studies student at the University of California Santa Cruz. He is currently running for Visalia City Council as part of the majors unique 6 month field study. He will graduate in June of 2010 and will return to Visalia to continue working for social change.