

DANNY MORA

OAKLAND TECH

MERRITT COMMUNITY COLLEGE • UC BERKELEY

When he writes lyrics or poems with lines like “I’ve been locked up six times, seen dead bodies, have homies in prison,” Danny Mora (or group BRWN BFLO) isn’t embellishing or crafting a persona. Nor is he glamorizing those hard facts. A few lines later he delivers these words: “We went from being locked up, not going to school...to graduating, now going to Cal Berkeley, rapping, being on TV, got a bank account, a car, I mean...we came a long way.”

A gang member in and out of Juvenile Hall growing up in Oakland, Danny’s “long way” looked to be headed in the wrong direction. But things began to turn around when his probation officer linked him up with Emilio Mena, a counselor with Youth Alive!’s Caught in the Crossfire program. A former gang member from Danny’s block, Emilio had a unique ability to relate, and stuck by Danny through situations like court dates and job interviews where he needed support and guidance. Danny persevered through high school, graduating from **Oakland Tech**. He went on to earn two AA degrees in Social Behavioral Science and Liberal Arts at **MERRITT COMMUNITY COLLEGE**. He then transferred to UC Berkeley where he’s working on an Ethnic Studies degree.

As a youth outreach leader, Danny’s background gave him a certain perspective that spoke to many Oakland teens. Like his own role model Emilio Mena, he’d been in their shoes. Between 2004 and 2006, Danny was a youth leader for AmeriCorps’ Youth UpRising Center in Oakland, where he led a “Rise Up Team” doing community outreach. Danny began working with the Youth Alive! Teens on Target organization in 2006. The program’s mission is “to prevent youth violence while developing youth leaders through relevant workshops, trainings, and other community awareness issues.”

“Danny is giving back, instead of getting back. Because he was able to overcome so many obstacles, kids listen to him. He learned more lessons in his short life than many people have learned three times his age, and he’s sharing what he’s learned with young people in Oakland, through his position with Teens on Target. He’s credible to the kids and he’s become a leader,” relates Deane Calhoun, Youth ALIVE! executive director. “Lack of positive peer role models is a risk factor for kids getting involved with violence, and Danny is one more role model out there working to make up the gap.”

He also evolved into a rap artist, poet, and public speaker. “My messages primarily focus on local issues, both political and social, like youth empowerment and gang prevention,” says Danny. “I’m also a testimonial speaker, where I describe my challenges as a youth growing up and my success today.” He’s been invited to speak at several Oakland public schools and youth detention centers, and his dynamic, inspiring presence has led to features in the Oakland Tribune, on KPFA radio, Youth Outlook Magazine, and KMEL’s Street Soldiers television show. He was also awarded a \$5,000 grant from Youth Grants for Youth Action to produce “Eye to Eye,” a CD and documentary exposing the reasons behind – and potential solutions to – Oakland’s high homicide rate.

In 2008, Danny received the **UC BERKELEY** Chancellor’s Award for Public Service given to students “who have distinguished themselves through their public service and...have improved their neighborhoods and the quality of life for local residents.” Danny, recognized for his violence prevention and youth leadership work at Youth Alive!, was one of four students honored from a pool of more than 20,000 candidates. He also won the Flor y Canto Poetry Prize at Berkeley for his poem entitled, “Imagine Peace.” Writing poems and songs is Danny’s “therapy,” and he thrives on the opportunity to express himself and his ideas through writing. “Through my lyrics, I re-explain many issues to the young and adults as well,” he says. “It’s what I call a combination of Hyphy and Education.”

Danny’s immediate goals include pursuing a master’s degree in Arts in Education – at Harvard. “Overall, I plan on living and being grateful for what I have,” says Danny. His advice for high-school students and community college transfers is to “stay humble and ready...The most important thing about transferring is going in knowing what you want to major in and do. There are many students here at Cal who have no idea what they want to do. Others do, but have no direct experience in that field. So I suggest that students get an internship or any experience in the field they want to study.”

Did you know there are 109 community colleges in California, and over 26 in the Bay Area? The Peralta Community College District includes Laney College, College of Alameda, Berkeley City College, and Merritt College. Did you know you can play sports, study abroad, and live on-campus at many community colleges?

UC Berkeley was founded in 1868; it was the 1st of 10 UC campuses. Today, UC Berkeley offers 7,000 courses in 300 degree programs. There are over 700 student groups. Which one might be right for you? Check out www.berkeley.edu to learn more.

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Check out www.ousd.k12.ca.us for more information about community colleges and UCs.

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