

# The Mercury News

From: <https://www.mercurynews.com/2015/04/07/oceana-student-reflects-on-senior-exhibition/>

## Oceana student reflects on Senior Exhibition

By [JEAN BARTLETT](#) | Pacifica Tribune

April 7, 2015 at 11:04 a.m.

The last Friday in March, Lian Patricio, 18, stepped into a classroom of her peers and shouted, "Hallelujah!" Everyone applauded. Lian, a senior at Oceana High School, had just learned she passed Senior Exhibition — a mandatory yearlong independent research project which culminates in a written and timed oral presentation. Lian's topic was: "California's Sentencing Laws." Lian spoke for 22 minutes. She accompanied her talk with a PowerPoint presentation.

"I was nervous," the senior admitted. "However, Oceana makes every student present so many times with so many projects that I've gotten somewhat used to it. But passing was very satisfying."

Lian moved with her family to Pacifica from the Philippines in 2010. She heard about Senior Exhibition in freshman year.

"I heard we had to write a 15-page paper and present to students outside of our class," Lian recalled. "It made many of us nervous."

Lian considers herself an introvert but said she joined clubs at Oceana in her freshman year because her friend strongly insisted.

“Joining clubs meant work and socializing,” the senior laughed. “I didn’t want to go through that. But my friend dragged me to all these clubs and I’m really thankful she did, because the clubs made me realize many things about the school, the students, the community and even about me.”

Clubs included: BAM (Because Art Matters) where Lian realized her love for art, and badminton where she made a lot of friends. Freshman year was also about community service hours. (100 hours are needed to graduate.) Lian worked as a teacher aide at Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School. She additionally volunteered at community clean-up events, at the SF-Marin Food Bank and in Oceana’s garden where she frequently worked with the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. At the end of freshman year, Lian had 175 community service hours.

Lian remained involved with GGNPC for several years and currently works with HomeSlice, a youth leadership program within the sustainable food system education and advocacy organization Pie Ranch, [www.pieranch.org](http://www.pieranch.org). As to her Senior Exhibition topic, she said she chose it originally out of curiosity.

“I knew about this issue in the U.S. called Mass Incarceration,” the senior said. “I found out that our country incarcerates so many people in prison that, in fact, we have more people behind bars than Russia. I decided to research it and found out so many things regarding our prisons that I’m pretty passionate about it now.”

All students present their senior topics to the Senior Exhibition coordinator at the end of junior year for approval. Through a thoughtful request process, an Oceana teacher agrees to mentor a student. Humanities/AP government teacher Erin Peters, who is additionally the mock trial team advisor, was Lian’s mentor.

“Ms. Peters was a lovely mentor and very supportive,” Lian said. “I had to change my essential question and rewrite my paper many times throughout the year because laws change constantly and each state is different.”

The students write their topic in sections which include: pro and con, conclusion and introduction. Each section is reviewed by the mentoring teacher and revisions are made. Each student must interview three “approved” experts. Lian interviewed: Jeffrey Brand, Professor and Chairman of the Center for Law and Global Justice; Kevin Phipps, Criminal Justice Instructor, Skyline College, and former SFPD officer; Jonathan Simon, Associate Dean of the Jurisprudence and Social Policy Program at Boalt Hall School of Law at University of California, Berkeley; and Judge Donald Ayoob, San Mateo County Superior Court.

Lian’s essential question was: “Should California reform its prison sentencing laws?” “I found that the laws aren’t the real issue,” Lian said, “it’s us, the people. Many of us have this mentality that we don’t want to associate with people who have committed a crime. But if more people were aware that nonviolent prisoners make up more than half of our prison population then maybe mindsets about convicts might change.” Lian went on to explain that because of this “mentality,” nonviolent former inmates are not successful “outside” and the cycle continues.

“Senior Exhibition taught me how to write a good paper, how to streamline information, how to be persuasive, how to conduct a proper interview, how to be more professional, how to present to strangers and how to be a better speaker,” Lian said. “I think all of this will help with my future, both for college and for work.”

What is her advice for those presenting next year?

“Don’t procrastinate,” the senior said. “The more time you spend on your paper the better the quality. Ask for help and accept it, including from your peers. Breathe.”

Pacifica Tribune correspondent Jean Bartlett can be reached at [editor@jeansmagazines.org](mailto:editor@jeansmagazines.org).