When Erik Martinez joined Jumpstart his freshman year he admits he was just looking for a work-study position. But now, a junior at UCLA, Martinez, who previously had no interest in education, credits Jumpstart with the reason he added the Education Minor to his studies.

Erik is like many students who join Jumpstart; he found the position on the Work-Study web page, read the description and thought to himself, “Hey, Why not?” But his time in the program gave him much more than the desired financial aid assistance.

“It’s something fun to do…it really captivated me and took me in and I stopped considering it a job.”

Jumpstart students find themselves in one of eight local low-income neighborhoods working with preschool children, helping them build the core language, literacy, and social-emotional development skills for success in kindergarten. According to the Jumpstart website, the national organization has structured the programs so that Jumpstart sessions take place two days per week, for two hours each time. Each session revolves around a core storybook and one book serves as the focus for two sessions. Session plans are organized in six unit themes -- Family, Friends, Wind and Water, The World of Color, Shadows and Reflections, and Things That Grow.

The UCLA Jumpstart program, which is considered a mega-site due to how many undergraduates participate, is looking to hire 80 students for the 2015-16 academic year. And there is a particular desire to recruit more males into the program so that the children can interact with and see strong male figures who are invested in them and their education.

“It's important for children have a range of role models from both genders especially at this young age,” says UCLA's co-site coordinator Sharon Hong, “children are developing their social-emotional,
cognitive, physical, creative, and academic skills necessary for school success. It is difficult to explain, but our Jumpstart children really do react differently to a male Corps Member than their female counterpart.

The effects of programs such as Jumpstart on preschool children have far-reaching implications. The National Education Association reports that, 'Children in quality preschool programs are less likely to repeat grades, need special education, or get into future trouble with the law.'

UCLA students who apply to the Jumpstart program won’t be disappointed in their experience. Students are not only rewarded by preparing children for a successful future, but at the same time they themselves get a variety of additional academic, social and professional development opportunities. “When I think of my college experience,” says Martinez, “I think UCLA, academics and Jumpstart. I feel like I created a family here. I will always remember the connections, the relationships I made, and it also it provides really interesting opportunities.”

For those who are thinking about joining the program, here’s a little advice from Martinez, “Patience is key, and laughter. Don’t be afraid to be silly, that’s what I always told my team last year...none of us are going to judge you.”

Jumpstart is part of the Center for Community Learning. For more information on how to apply, please visit the Jumpstart website.