

# A TWINNING COMBINATION

Long Beach sisters follow similar academic paths, take top 2 honors

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There's twice as much to brag about at Long Beach High School, which has twin sisters as the top students in the Class of 2021.

Uma and Maya Arengo have been named valedictorian and salutatorian, respectively, of their senior class of 340 students. They have been students in Long Beach since prekindergarten and have taken many of the same classes, especially in math and science, at the high school.

"We thought that it was a pretty great coincidence," Uma said, referring to the two achieving the top academic honors. "We were kind of amused by it, and we are very proud of that distinction."

Uma has a weighted grade-point average of 107.14, and Maya's is 105.47, the district said.

The 18-year-olds are co-vice presidents of the math team, AP Scholars with Distinction, National Merit semifinalists, National Hispanic Recognition Program honorees, and past participants in the Institute of Merit and Columbia University Science Honors Program.

They have differed only on elective classes and some extracurricular activities. Uma took several arts classes, including ceramics. Maya was enrolled in orchestra and plays the viola. Maya's favorite class was Advanced Placement World History, where she learned about other cultures across the globe. Uma's favorite class focused on creative writing, including poetry.

Long Beach High School guidance counselor Erik Steinmetz said the students always

have charted their own academic path, jumping ahead in the curriculum to take more advanced math classes and enrolling in college courses.

## 'Above and beyond'

"They always went above and beyond and sorted things out on their own," he said.

Their father, Sebastian Arengo, said he and his wife, Lauren, were pleasantly surprised when they learned of the academic honors. The couple also has a younger son in high school.

"We rarely have had to tell them to do their work. In fact, we have never had to tell them," Sebastian Arengo said of the twins. "They would . . . come home and do their work on time. We encouraged them to read, and we had books available to read here at home and to participate in academic activities like math fairs."

"While we encouraged them, we never had to force them," he added. "They embraced it and did a lot of it from their own desire."

Though together for all of their academic careers, the sisters soon will be separated when they attend college — on the opposite ends of the country. Uma plans to attend Yale University in Connecticut, and Maya is headed to Stanford University in California.

"Even though this is going to be the first time that we are actually separated from each other, it will be good for us to explore on our own and explore our own interests," Uma said. "There's always Zoom and FaceTime, and we will see each other on holidays and over the summer."

Both are undecided about their majors but are interested



Maya, left, and Uma Arengo are Long Beach High's top scholars. ■ Video: [newsday.com/longbeach](https://newsday.com/longbeach)

in fields related to math. They said their parents inspired them at a young age, and would have them practice academic lessons over the summer so they would not forget what they had learned.

Sebastian Arengo has a background in math, having majored in math and physics at Stony Brook University. "They like math, but they are pretty well-rounded, too. They both love reading," he said.

Like many high schools, Long

Beach has not yet finalized its plans for graduation. Both students are hopeful there will be some sort of ceremony after spending much of their senior year on a hybrid schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are now in school full time.

## 'Semblance of normalcy'

"For graduation, what we both want is at least a little semblance of normalcy," Uma said.

Looking back on the second half of their junior year and

their senior year, Maya said it has been quite the adjustment. "We grew a lot. We had to become more independent and figure out how we were going to get through this," she said.

They are not competitive against one another, but rather look to each other for support.

"When it comes to academics, we do help each other," Maya said. "Supporting each other — it is much more healthy and happier and easier to live that way."