



# ALUMNI PORTRAITS OF PERSISTENCE

## RKHS CLASS OF 2020-2023

BY KIMBERLY ARTEAGA

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### ALIZE MADRIZ

**RKHS ALUMNA 2023**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO**  
**MAJOR: MEDIA STUDIES**

Your first quarter or semester in college can be challenging especially as a first generation college student. So many challenges that can come up with academics like getting adjusted to a new environment and for many, being away from family for the first time. Alize Madriz, from the class of 2023, just finished her first quarter at UC San Diego. Alize is one of four siblings, born and raised in LA, from Mexican parents that always taught her and her siblings the importance of attaining a higher education.

Alize was admitted to college as a dance major. She was excited because dancing is something she enjoys doing: it is one of her biggest passions. However, fall quarter was challenging and she had to overcome a lot of obstacles including coming to the decision of changing her major to Media Studies. Alize is one of the many students that changed her major during their college career and happy to say she is really enjoying her classes so far. On average, students change their major at least 3 times during their college career.

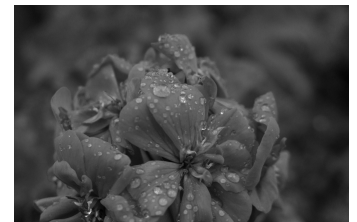
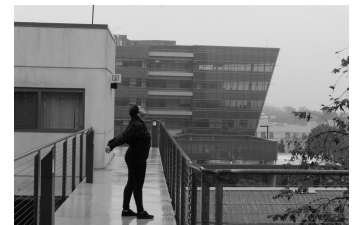


She is currently taking VIS 60, Introduction to Digital Photography where she gets to learn how to use the manuals in her own camera to take pictures. She is truly enjoying taking advantage of living in San Diego and having the freedom to take pictures anywhere she likes. Her first class assignment was submitting a portfolio with black and white pictures. Alize shared a picture and a description of her work, "...I'm really proud of what I was able to capture. My favorite picture was the most unexpected thing I captured that I think shows a deep message when looking at it. The picture of the boy playing in the puddle, I see it as a symbol of innocence, of childhood. I was walking around Old Town, a place that has a lot of history in San Diego. I saw a boy playing in the puddles ... gave me a bit of nostalgia of my own childhood that I miss." It is beautiful to see the excitement of someone taking a class they enjoy and all the learning they are doing.

Classes are not the only thing Alize is enjoying from the campus. UCSD, has a total of 7 colleges within the University. Each college has its own academic curriculum and it provides a sense of belonging through affiliation. Each campus has its own dining hall, lecture halls, and dorms. Alize's favorite location on campus is the sixth college dining hall. She has had a lot of great memories there and enjoys the food. She has also made time to be active on campus, participate in clubs, and attend sporting events. She recently applied to become a mentor for the summer bridge program she was a part of in the summer, and is thrilled to have the opportunity to help the next class have a smooth transition to college and a meaningful experience of summer bridge like she did herself. Alize is going to be a great mentor and we can't wait to see all the great things she will continue to do throughout her college journey.



One piece of advice Alize would like to give to all seniors is "Cherish these last few months of high school...Keep working hard on your last weeks left in your senior year and hang out with friends, make memories, and be proud of finishing high school!"



## SHCA & VAHS CLASS OF 2018-2023 COMMUNITY COLLEGE & CTE

### ELGIN BERRY

SHCA ALUMNUS 2023  
LOS ANGELES SOUTHWEST COLLEGE  
MAJOR: SOCIOLOGY

Navigating and persisting through college is hard on its own – but try doing so as a first-generation foster youth. According to the [National Foster Youth Institute](#), only 3-4% of former foster youth obtain a 4-year college degree and between 2 and 6% receive a two-year degree nationally. There are several odds stacked against them, ranging from a lack of stability and housing to challenging financial circumstances and support. Despite it all, there are many former foster youth who are persevering to make their postsecondary goals, including our very own SHCA alum Elgin Berry!



LOS ANGELES  
SOUTHWEST COLLEGE

Elgin is a first-year student at Los Angeles Southwest College, pursuing his Sociology associate degree for transfer with hopes of becoming a social worker. His major and career interests were heavily influenced by his personal experience. “When I was going through a tough time, when I didn’t even know if I was going to have a roof over my head, having a supportive social worker who cared for me made a tremendous difference in my life. That’s why I want to pay it forward and give back,” Elgin states. He’s following in the footsteps of many social workers who focus on sociology as their undergraduate major, before pursuing a Master of Social Work, because of its theoretical and practical approach to our societal challenges.



This past Fall, Elgin took (and passed) Intro to Sociology, but it wasn’t easy. The reason why may surprise some. No it wasn’t the rigor. Nor was it the teaching style of the professor. Rather, it was his newfound freedom in college. Elgin says “it was really hard to get used to. You would think that makes things easier, but it makes it so that the responsibilities you have on yourself are greater. You have to find the time to learn and have the motivation within yourself to succeed.” Even though Elgin has been successful in holding himself accountable, he’s still taken the steps to build his support system and network that’ll help him manage all of the free time he now has.

Just as he turned to his social worker throughout high school, Elgin has turned to Southwest’s [UMOJA Program](#) counselors to receive specialized counseling and find a community on campus. UMOJA is a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African-American and other students, typically found on every community college campus. In addition to counseling, they provide transfer support, leadership opportunities, culturally relevant social activities, and a safe space.



College also comes with a multitude of resources for former and current foster youth, such as the [Guardian Scholars Program](#). As a participant in this program, Elgin has access to priority registration, life skills workshops, counseling, scholarship opportunities, and so much more! Lastly, a lot of Elgin’s free time is also spent in the library. He says it’s the perfect place for fellow introverts who like to stay to themselves, need a quiet and calm place to study, or are in need of tutoring.

As Elgin continues to defy all the odds stacked against him, he shares some advice to current/former foster youth and future community college students. “Take it one day at a time! Don’t focus on too much all at once because it’s going to fry your brain and make you focus on things you can’t control. Just focus on the small goals first and everything will feel so much easier for you.” Coming from a future social worker, it’s a great piece of advice that all of us should follow.



LA Southwest College Library

## VAHS CLASS OF 2018-2023

### CARLO CLAVEL ORELLANA

VAHS ALUMNUS 2022  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE  
MAJOR: KINESIOLOGY  
PROJECTED GRADUATION: JUNE 2026



Since his time at Valor, Carlo has always been a model of grit and determination. He arrived at Valor Academy High School's brand new campus in Fall of 2018 not totally knowing what to expect. Like about 30% of the students population of VAHS Carlo did not attend Valor Academy Middle School for the majority of school; he transferred in during the 8th grade. He said the adjustment to some of the rules and norms of Valor's culture were difficult as a ninth grader. In his words, "It was kind of difficult to adjust to a smaller environment. The teachers were really nice, but strict at the same time. I was placed in a House and I didn't have any idea what that meant!" In addition to the social struggles, there were academic challenges as well. He failed one class in both the fall and spring semester of his freshman year, and had to make up the courses through Opportunities for Youth (OFY) the following year. "To be honest," says Carlo, "after freshman year, I didn't know if Valor was the place for me. I liked the teachers and students, but it was challenging to adjust to the academics as a freshman."

Carlo came back to Valor as a sophomore with a renewed energy for his studies, and did excellent during his first semester. He finished that term with his first GPA over a 2.50. By the time Carlo was a senior he was really rounding into form, and his senior year he earned a GPA of 4.05, one of the highest in his class! That newfound determination for academics came with the news that Carlo would be admitted to California State University Northridge (CSUN) during the fall of his senior year. He was very excited with that news and enthusiastically accepted his offer to be a Matador. As a standout soccer player on the VAHS boys team, in the fall of 2022 Carlo entered his freshman year as a Kinesiology major at CSUN. He wanted to take his interest in sports and apply it to an academic discipline regarding the human body. Kinesiology is defined as "the scientific student of human movement as well as physical activity and sport."

Much like his start to Valor, Carlo faced some challenges during his first semester in college. Valor's student population is typically around 500. By contrast, of 23 campuses of the CSU system ~ CSU Northridge is the fifth-largest by student population with over 35,000 enrolled students in each of the last three years. The transition for a college freshman is tough for almost everybody, but the contrast between a school of Valor's intimacy and CSUN's vast expanse presents extra challenges that our alumni must face. However, due to his experience transitioning to Valor, this time Carlo was ready. He put his head down and committed himself to his academics. After his third semester at CSUN this fall, Carlo's cumulative GPA increased to a 3.0! In addition to an emphasis on academics, Carlo is also part of the very selective intramural soccer team on campus. He says that the balance of athletics and academics is one of the elements that he enjoys most about being on campus. "It's really great that I have so many opportunities that are so close to home, I'm really grateful for the teachers at Valor - they prepared me well!"



#### CSUN Fast Facts:

- Largest Hispanic Serving Institution in the Country
- Offers Bachelor's Degrees in 133 different disciplines
- Only public 4-year university in the San Fernando Valley



## SHCA CLASS OF 2018-2023

# JORDY GOMEZ

SHCA ALUM 2021  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

"In high school, all I did was play video games and do my work. If I went to college, I went, if I didn't then I didn't. I didn't care" says Jordy. And it was something that continued into his first year of college. He would go back to his dorm and chill, then play more games.

It wasn't until his sophomore year of college, Jordy noticed his friends, who were seniors, had no job lined up after college. He did not want the same for himself. He wanted something more. He needed a plan.

In that moment he decided he would put his head down and focus. Every day was a chance to learn something new and do better. And every day that passed by, if he didn't do something new, it felt like a wasted day.

Something that Jordy realized about himself is that he enjoyed researching things and investigating how things worked. One thing he was curious about are taxes, for example. He wanted to learn how taxes worked and how having a business would impact you. He would use these skills to level up and improve himself.

You need to notice who you are. What do you like? What do you not like? Don't feel pressured to choose a major your Freshman year. Look at the classes that you gravitate towards. If you put the hard work in now, you will set your future self for success. If you relax now and just go with the motions without being intentional, your future self will have to work extra hard to be where you want to be. It's best to put the time and effort in now than later.

Initially, Jordy wanted to be on his own at UC Merced and wasn't concerned with making friends on campus. But he realized how important it was to make connections. He began to participate in more activities on campus and connecting with people in class. He discovered that many people who were business majors were in a club called Business Society. They have weekly professional meetings to work on hosting events and workshops that help fellow business students in their path after college. Thanks to joining that club, he has expanded his network and has gotten to meet people he would have never known. Even better, Jordy says, "It's amazing to notice how many people think like you and how quickly you can connect to others."



Business Society 2024



## Jordy Gomez

Director of Entrepreneurship

3rd year

Major: Management & Business Economics

Minor: Spanish

Now, he wakes up with the stock market at 6:30 am and reviews his portfolio. He gets ready for his classes and takes on every day as a new opportunity to learn something new.

Even better, he recently went to his academic advisor and learned that he can graduate a semester early from college!



# BRIGHT STAR SCHOOLS ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS TEAM

All Bright Star Schools Alums, high school graduates, will be supported in graduating from college for up to 6 years. Our goal is for our Alumni to earn a Bachelor's, Associate's, Career Technical Education degree, or workforce development certificate from an accredited college or program. If you are a BSS Alumni from the class of 2018-2023, we will be there to help you navigate, thrive, and succeed in graduating from higher education.



## KYLE PETRIE

BA, BOWDOIN COLLEGE

As the ASCS Coordinator at Valor Academy High School, Kyle's primary responsibilities revolve around ensuring that all Valor alumni receive adequate support with the financial, academic, and social-emotional concerns that they face while pursuing higher education. Kyle is primarily motivated by the belief that higher education is the foundation that will allow our students to be successful and happy in both their careers and personal lives. He has worked in urban public education for over 13 years. He initially entered the field as a high school history teacher in the Bronx, NY, as part of Teach For America. After his time in New York, Kyle spent seven years as an AP teacher, advisor, coach, and Director of Alumni Support at Gary Comer College Prep on Chicago's south side.

VAHS ASCS COORDINATOR  
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2018-2023  
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## KIMBERLY ARTEAGA

BA, UC SAN DIEGO

Kimberly Arteaga received her B.A. in Human Development and minor in Chicana/o studies from UC San Diego. She was born and raised in LA and the first one in her family to go to college and graduate. She has been supporting students in higher education, college access and retention programs for over 7 years. Part of her passion for working with students comes from her own-lived experiences. Through her multiple roles she has supported and guided high school and college students attaining a higher education and beyond. She has also worked with community members and parents in supporting students achieving their hopes and dreams. Kimberly is excited to continue working with students in her current role as the RKHS Alumni Support and College Success Coordinator.

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## IDERA ADAGUN

BA, BARNARD COLLEGE  
MPA UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (UW)

Idera is a proud Angeleno and Nigerian-American! She's worked in college access and success for the past six years, having served as a Lead Success Coach, Assistant Director of a college transitional summer program, College Counselor, and College Success Director. Her passion for postsecondary success stems from being involved in education nonprofits and growing up with a mother who completed college and a father who emigrated from Nigeria with only a HS education. They all provided diverse academic and socio-economic narratives that followed her through HS, Barnard College, where she earned her BA in Political Science with a minor in Africana Studies, and eventually an MPA program at from the UW. As the new ASCS Coordinator for SHCA & VAHS community college and CTE alumni, Idera hopes to help alumni reach their full potential, complete postsecondary programs, and enter into careers no matter the circumstances or challenges stacked against them.

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## ELIZABETH ROJAS

BA, COLLEGE OF SAINT BENEDICT AND SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Originally born and raised in South Central Los Angeles, Elizabeth, a first-generation college graduate obtained her bachelor's degree in Hispanic Studies and Communications from the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University in St. Joseph, Minnesota. She also studied abroad in Guatemala where she was able to connect to her roots through food and poetry. Elizabeth has served as a college coach, mentor, and college counselor at public and parochial schools in Minnesota, working with first-generation and low-income college students. She is thankful and grateful for the countless mentors she had along her journey. She looks to pay it forward to under-resourced and historically excluded communities, to ensure they have access to information, resources, and higher education.

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## GENOVEVA CORTES

BA, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES  
M.ED. HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Genoveva developed and launched Bright Star's ASCS Program to support the organization's alumni to persist in and graduate from higher education. ASCS tracks, supports, and coaches Bright Star Schools' alumni to get to and through higher education, with a goal of 55% of Bright Star Schools alumni graduating with a bachelor's or associate's degree, vocational certificate, or from a workplace development program within six years of high school graduation. She has over two decades of experience working as an elementary and middle school teacher, K-12 and college administrator, and program coordinator. She was Bright Star Schools' founding math teacher for Stella Middle Charter Academy in 2003, and currently serves as the Director of the Alumni Support and College Success (ASCS) Program for the organization.

ASCS DIRECTOR  
SUPPORTING ALL CLASSES WITH THE  
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<https://brightstarschools.org/Alumni-Support-and-College-Success>