



BRIGHTSTAR
SCHOOLS

ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

BY GENOVEVA CORTES

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BSSCA CLASS OF 2015-2016

BRANDON EDMONDS

BSSCA ALUMNUS 2015

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO, ALUMNUS 2020

MAJOR: COMPUTER SYSTEMS, CONCENTRATION IN GAME DEVELOPMENT

At CSUSB, Brandon enjoyed his college experience and is grateful for what he learned while a student there. He recommends CSU, San Bernardino for any student who wants to develop the practical skills they will need to be competitive in the workforce. This lifelong Angeleno didn't know what to expect when he first moved to San Bernardino but appreciated "going to college with people who have my complexion" and value diversity. He was well prepared for the skills needed to land a job in computer technology and is excited about launching his career in this field. When Brandon started CSU, San Bernardino, it was with the intention of becoming a pre-med major, like biology, because his goal was to become a doctor one day. As he started taking physical science classes, he realized it wasn't his passion and pivoted to classes in computers instead.

College is an opportunity to "try and figure out what major you want and look for something you will enjoy doing everyday" but it also "needs to be a benefit to you; something that will pay." True words of wisdom from this brilliant future computer software developer.



STEPHANIE MURGUIA

BSSCA ALUMNA 2016

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA, ALUMNA 2020

MAJOR: KINESIOLOGY



Stephanie knew she wanted a career helping people and never deviated from her major. Her kinesiology classes were required for graduate school in Occupational and Physical Therapy (PT) but after volunteering at a few places, she realized she didn't want careers in those fields. Now that she has graduated from CPP, she plans to attend graduate school at Arizona State University this Spring 2021 where she has been accepted into their Master's degree program in Special Education (Applied Behavioral Analysis Therapy). She will work with people who are on the Autism spectrum or have Down Syndrome.

Stephanie is fortunate to work for a company that supports her educational and career choices. They are providing tuition support in addition to the hundreds of hours she will need to complete before she sits for the BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst) exam. "If you need help, talk with your College Advisor because that helped me to stay on track in taking the necessary classes, otherwise you end up taking the wrong classes and waste time and money. Just explore careers by interning and volunteering. I started college thinking I would do PT or Occupational Therapy and I ended up doing something totally different."

There isn't anything this overachiever can't accomplish.

BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY MIKE CARRERA

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ESPERANZA MARTINEZ-GONZALEZ

BSSCA ALUMNA 2019
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
MAJOR: HUMAN BIOLOGY

Esperanza Martinez-Gonzalez is finishing up the fall semester at the University of California, Merced from the comfort of her own home in Los Angeles. A second-year Human Biology major who one day will become a doctor, Esperanza envisioned herself living on campus but since last March, like most college students around the world, she had to come home because of the Covid-19 pandemic. "This semester started a little rough for me the first few weeks because I needed to help my younger sisters with their school work. There was an adjustment period where I had to balance my time and I needed to learn fairly quickly." As many students across America adjust to distance learning, she's been able to adapt to her new environment. She no longer has her quiet dorm room in Merced and what now seems like a luxury, access to multiple libraries on campus and the learning center to study in. However, not one to give up, Esperanza ultimately found ways to complete her assignments and study for her exam efficiently and effectively.

What are her tips for future college students? "There are many things one should do, obviously prioritize school. But I also encourage being involved in school-based clubs, I was a part of the Pre-Med Club and the Soccer Intramural club. I would also recommend not being afraid of rejection, it is important to advocate for yourself. If you need to ask your professor a question or are interested in jobs or internship opportunities. You should always ask, the worst thing someone can say is NO."



ESPERANZA MARTINEZ-GONZALEZ (CENTER IN GREY SHIRT) WITH FRIENDS FROM UC MERCED. GO BOBCATS!

Esperanza is also a Dreamer, who was born in Oaxaca and brought to the United States as a young child. At BSSCA she excelled academically and participated in soccer and ASB. After receiving acceptance letters from multiple institutions, she had a lot of doors open to her but nevertheless needed to make a difficult choice. As an undocumented student, she faced uncertainty because of the current direction of the country. When she graduated in 2019, DACA was no longer available as the Trump administration ended DACA for undocumented immigrants in 2017. However, on December 7, 2020, DACA was restored and many students like Esperanza who in previous years did not have that opportunity to apply could now do so. She has also become an advocate for all Dreamers and is currently collaborating on a DACA workshop that will be hosted at [BSSCA on January 14th via Zoom](#). The goal of the workshop is to inform potential DACA applicants about the application process and available resources. Esperanza shares that "there are many students in the University system that are undocumented, but that should not stop you from reaching your goals. There are doctors, teachers, nurses, and many other professionals who share our struggles and have never stopped (accomplishing their goals)."

Email Mr. Mike Carrera if you'd like the Zoom link for the DACA workshop.

[THEDREAM.US](#) SCHOLARSHIPS AND OTHER INFORMATION FOR DACA AND UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN COLLEGE

[HOMEISHERE.US/DECEMBER-4-2020](#) UPDATES ON APPLYING FOR DACA AND RENEWING DACA

VAHS CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY KYLE PETRIE

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ROGER BARRETO

VAHS ALUMNUS 2018
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA - MERCED
MAJOR: BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (HUMAN BIO)



A man who has always marched to the beat of his own drum - Roger Barreto is a true pioneer. In the fall of 2018 he became the first graduate of Valor Academy High School to matriculate to UC Merced. One of the things he has enjoyed most during his two and a half years in college has been the ability to chart his own course. "I have control over what I want...by living hundreds of miles away from home, I have the freedom to control what I will and won't do." Roger went into college with the ultimate goal of being a medical doctor, and has continued down that path during his time at Merced. He's currently a Biological Sciences major with an emphasis on human biology. A non-traditional Valor student (he transferred in as a sophomore) Roger credits Ms. Patel's AP Biology class with piquing his interest in the subject and helping to develop his work ethic for the rest of his time in college. As he says, "I had to adapt to her class and learn the value of going to office hours. It [biology] is the class that most closely resembles a college course, both in terms of the material, the structure, and the pacing." In the very little spare time that his major affords him, Roger enjoys writing his own works of fiction and has continued his interest in music that is in part due to his tenure as Vice President of the band club. A true Renaissance Man, we are *thrilled* at Roger's current success and can't wait to see what he will accomplish in the future.

VAHS ALUMNA 2019
CALIFORNIA LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY
MAJOR: PSYCHOLOGY (CHILD DEVELOPMENT)

For those of us who know Madison, we know she does everything with a smile. Her freshman and sophomore years at California Lutheran University have been no different. Even with the challenge of having her freshman year cut short last spring, Madison has continued to stay the course and shown the positive attitude that helped her so much at VAHS. As she says, "Going virtual was a struggle, especially in the beginning. The fall semester it got a bit easier...and for the most part, my professors have been very understanding and easy to reach out to." According to Madison, that "can-do" attitude was developed in her interactions with both Ms. Eusebio and Ms. Orellana: "They are two strong and wonderful women that I owe a lot to. I am extremely grateful for all of their time, dedication, love, and hard work." Since matriculating to Cal Lutheran in the fall of 2019, Madison has been declared as a Psychology major. As a sophomore she has picked up an emphasis in Child Psychology and also added a minor in Spanish. Although Madison is uncertain as to exactly what she would like to do as a career, she is leaning towards something that involves working with children in a non-profit environment. If Madison could give advice to the seniors it would be "don't waste your time worrying about something that won't matter in a year." Truer words from a more genuine person have never been spoken! We all wish Madison the best as she continues her journey of growth and development through her time at California Lutheran University.

MADISON CORLETT

RKHS CLASS OF 2020

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

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SASHA THOMAS



RKHS ALUMNA 2020

**SANTA MONICA COLLEGE; EXPECTED GRAD 2022
MAJOR: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Sasha was a founding student at RKHS, and started her first year of school at Santa Monica College in the fall 2020. Sasha shares that her first semester at SMC has definitely been stressful, especially with regard to getting adjusted to the workload of college level classes. Although Sasha finished her senior year of high school in distance learning, she says getting used to the workload of college classes online was challenging. Now, that she has gotten more familiar with the format of classes, she feels more confident and prepared to undertake her second semester at SMC.

She started school at SMC in the nursing program, but after some reflection she decided to change majors to something she felt would be more fulfilling, Early Childhood Education. Sasha loves working with children and aspires to have a career where she can impact the lives of children.

She admits that she has grown tremendously after just one semester of college. She learned quickly that in college, you are treated as an adult and have a lot more responsibility than in high school. Not only did she adapt to these expectations, but she THRIVED! She says one of her favorite classes this semester was Counseling 20, a class structured like a student success seminar. She says this class has helped her with time management skills, study strategies, career exploration, lifestyle choices and critical thinking. As a result of what she learned in this class she was able to make decisions that ultimately will benefit her in the long run of her educational trajectory like changing her major to something that makes her happy, and learning important life skills that will help her be successful in college and life.

She shared that she really looks forward to the days post-COVID when she can safely travel and spend time with friends and family. As soon as it is safe, she looks forward to going on a family trip that was canceled due to the pandemic.

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 2015-2020, we will be there to help you navigate, thrive, and succeed in graduating from higher education.

KYLE PETRIE

BA, BOWDOIN COLLEGE

**VAHS ASCS COORDINATOR
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2017 - 2020
KPETRIE@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG**

Kyle Petrie has worked in urban public education for over 12 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.



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.

STEPHANIE CALDERON

BA, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
M.ED. CSU, LONG BEACH COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

**RKHS ASCS COORDINATOR
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2020
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Stephanie Calderon has over 6 years of experience supporting students and their families in college access and success programs. She currently serves as the Alumni Support and College Success Coordinator for Rise Kohyang High School. Her goal is to support all RKHS Alumni with their post-secondary plans to ensure they accomplish their goals and aspirations for the future.



Stephanie is a first-generation college graduate. She obtained her bachelors in 2014 from UCLA in Women Studies. Upon graduating college she decided she wanted to help facilitate the process for applying and earning a degree for youth in her community of Los Angeles.

MIKE CARRERA

BA, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE
M.ED. AND PPS, UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE

**BSSCA ASCS COORDINATOR
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2017 - 2020
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Mike Carrera has worked in education for over seven years, five of which have been at Bright Star Schools. Mike is a first-generation college graduate and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of California, Riverside in Latin American Studies and History. He also earned his Pupil Personnel Services credential and Master's in Education degree in 2019 in Education Counseling from the University of La Verne.



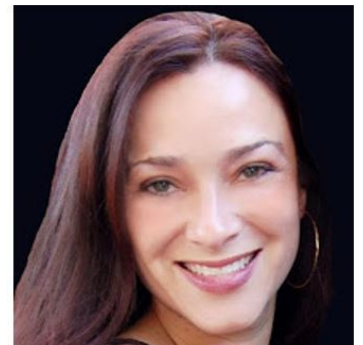
Throughout the years, Mike has held various roles at BSSCA and has assisted students and families on multiple levels. He is passionate about supporting the student body at BSSCA and is a firm believer that higher education can positively shift a student's life and career choices. As the new ASCS Coordinator, Mike is determined to assist all BSSCA Alums in navigating higher education and in contributing to students' success in college and career.

GENOVEVA CORTES

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

**ASCS DIRECTOR
SUPPORTING BSSCA CLASS OF 2015 - 2016
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Genoveva Garibay Cortes 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.



Geno 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 60% 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.