



# ALUMNI NEWS

BY DAVID SOLIS

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## BSSCA & VAHS CC & CTE COORDINATOR NEWS

**DAVID SOLIS**  
ASCS COMMUNITY COLLEGE & CTE COORDINATOR

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE**  
BACHELORS IN CHICANO/A & CENTRAL AMERICAN STUDIES

### About Me:

I'm a second-generation native living in Los Angeles, California who was born & raised in South Central Los Angeles during one of the most challenging times. In 1992 my community released generational pain, distress, and frustration after the Rodney King verdict which acquitted law enforcement officers from their actions. Various areas from the community were vandalized, looted, and destroyed. The flames from burned buildings & items sent a smoke signal - we are tired, we want justice!

What followed in the 1990s laid the foundation of who I am, what I do, and why I do it. They say that we are a product of our communities, that we are shaped by our people, or as my parents would say, "*Dime con quién andas y te diré quien eres*" (tell me who you hang out with and I'll tell you who you are). Growing up I witnessed friends, family, neighbors fall at the hands of the school to prison pipeline. I knew more people who were in prison as opposed to going to college.

In 2009, after graduating from high school, a new persona was born. I was the first one in my family to pursue higher education. I spent 4-years at Santa Monica College - navigating a system that I was unfamiliar with. In 2014 I received a letter from California State University, Northridge - "Congratulations! We are pleased to offer you admissions for Fall 2014." In 2017, I obtained what I desired the most and all my sleepless nights and family gatherings I missed paid off. I walked across the stage with my head held high as I listened to my name being announced as a graduate in Chicana/o & Central American studies. My journey taught me to give back to my community, to share my resources & knowledge, but most importantly to advocate for our people. For the last 10 years I have worked with students from South Central, WestLake McArthur Park, San Fernando Valley, and Pacoima to support them through their journey in higher education.

I'm the son of two migrants who left Mexico in pursuit of the "American Dream"

I'm a sibling to an older sister who grew up in a traditional Mexican household, with norms that could not be challenged, let alone changed.

I'm a sibling to an older brother who fell at the hands of the school to prison pipeline.

I'm a sibling to a younger brother who teaches me to pursue my passions

I'm a father to a daughter who will break generational cycles of traditions

I'm a partner to a strong woman who has persevered against all odds

I'm a writer, a poet, a student, a teacher, a mentor.

I'm all of the above and more than what society expected me to become.



# ALUMNI NEWS

BY MIKE CARRERA

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## BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2021

BSSCA ALUMNA 2028

HOLY NAMES UNIVERSITY: EXPECTED GRAD: SPRING 2022

BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE: PSYCHOLOGY & CRIMINOLOGY

## EMILY MILAN



### What's your Major and why?

I'm double majoring in Psychology and Criminology with an emphasis in forensics. Initially, I was only going to major in Criminology because I wanted to become a detective. When I was a child I would watch Law in Order with my mother and I was fascinated by the cases they solved. After taking a few Psychology classes, I added a second major because it had a huge impact on me. Not only did I reflect on myself but it also gave me a different perspective on children. I babysat growing up and it gave me a better understanding of why kids acted in certain ways. Ultimately, I think I'm leaning toward being a Social Worker because there's a huge need and I can become a positive influence on children in the foster system.

### What keeps you motivated during the pandemic?

Honestly, there were two main reasons why I persevered the first few months of the pandemic. I would admit that I wasn't motivated and it was hard for me to focus when everything went online. The first reason was that I didn't want to come back home. Second, I have a great support system on campus. My friend Jennifer would pretty much drag me out of bed and yell/remind me to do my work. Looking back, I'm really thankful to be surrounded by a great group of friends that support one another.

### What advice would you give current high school students about their college decision?

I would tell them to visit the campus. It's important to feel comfortable and envision yourself taking classes there. I love being a student at Holy Names University because it's a smaller campus and people are welcoming. Lastly, don't make your college decision because your parents want you to go somewhere but make that decision because that's where you want to go.



### How did your world perspective grow or change as a result of your time in college?

I value the people I surround myself around more. My friend circle has definitely become smaller because I prefer to be around people who motivate each other. I think it's important to have goals, small or big but always try to become the best version of yourself.

### What do you wish you had known about college-going that could have helped you even more successful?

The importance of internships and jobs related to your major. At BSSCA I had over 100 volunteer hours when I graduated. I stopped volunteering when I started at Holy Names because I got a job to avoid taking out additional loans. I also learned my junior year that the Social Justice office at Holy Names pays students who have unpaid internships. Lastly, I've decided to take a gap year before I apply to graduate school to gain more experience and find out what I truly want to do.



# VAHS CLASS OF 2017-2021

BY KYLE PETRIE

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## MELISSA VALDEZ

VAHS ALUMNA 2019  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA MERCED: EXPECTED GRAD 2023  
MAJOR: PSYCHOLOGY



**What skills/mindsets/attitudes did you learn while a student at Valor that helped you during your four years in college?**

Some students thought that the Annual Thesis Projects (ATP) would be pointless and not really helpful when going to college/university. However, I found it really helpful in writing multiple-page essays and presentations. The tips such as the 5 by 5 for presentation have helped me a lot as well because they show that I'm not reading off the slides but know the information.

**What do you wish you had known about college going in that could have helped you be even more successful?**

Something that I did wish to know about college before I attended is budgeting. I know that many people don't really think about this when going to college, but soon find out that it's best to budget.

**What have you enjoyed most about your experience being away from home and living on campus?**

I enjoyed meeting new people and connecting with others. I'm an introvert but I learned that I had to get out of my shell since I had to really rely on myself since I'm far from my parents.

**How did your world perspective grow or change as a result of your time in college?**

I learned about different cultures from my time here in Merced which has allowed me to connect with more people. I've seen how aspects of my culture are somewhat similar to theirs.

**What do you plan on doing with your degree in the future?**

I plan to be an Applied Behavior Analysis therapist in special education. This means that I plan to attend grad school after I receive my B.A.

**Is there anything else you'd like to share or advice you would give to current students/staff at Valor?**

It's okay if you don't know what you want to major in when you enter college. Try to take many different general courses which will help you find what you love. But if you already know what you want to do for college then I suggest trying to complete your general courses as soon as you can so you can focus on your under-division classes later on.



## RKHS CLASS OF 2020-2021

### SARAH JOUNG

Sarah is a first-year student at UC Davis, she is currently undeclared for her major, but knows she wants to pursue a degree in the STEM field. Sarah shares that her time away from home has been bittersweet as it is difficult to be away from her home and her comfort zone but has been challenged to meet new people and find her "home away from home" at Davis. She is currently looking forward to completing her first year and finding a new apartment & roommates to move into for her second year.

**RKHS ALUMNA CLASS OF 2021  
FRESHMAN  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS  
MAJOR: UNDECLARED (STEM)**



#### What is your major and how did you choose it?

I am currently an undeclared science major and would like to major in one of the physical sciences. Science has always been fascinating to me and I know I want to do something in that field but am currently exploring different topics through my GE courses to figure out which area in the sciences I'd like to focus on.

#### How has your experience in college been so far?

It has been a bit bittersweet, since I had to move to somewhere very different than what I am used to. I am learning a lot but it was definitely an adjustment to the place, quarter system and community.

#### What has been your most memorable experience so far in college?

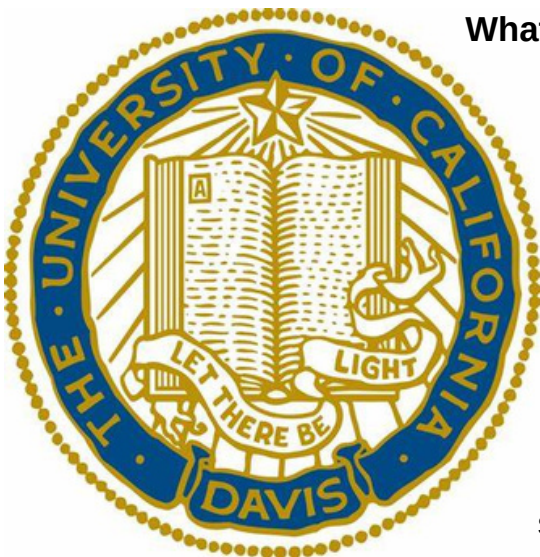
I think the experience of being on my own has been liberating. To be able to have control over my schedule, when I go out and everything is fun, exciting and tiring at the same time.

#### What do you look forward to for next year?

I am definitely looking forward to completing me GE requirements and figuring out what major I want to stick with.

#### What advice do you have for your peers in high school?

I recommend that you don't underestimate the difference between high school and college. Especially for quarter system, because it is very fast-paced and can take some getting used to. So, you have to learn fast and stay focused.





# 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 2016-2021, we will be there to help you navigate, thrive, and succeed in graduating from higher education.

## STEPHANIE CALDERON

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

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. She 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.

RKHS ASCS COORDINATOR  
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2020 & 2021  
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## MIKE CARRERA

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

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.

BSSCA ASCS COORDINATOR  
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2017 - 2021  
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## DAVID SOLIS

BA, CSU, NORTHRIDGE

David Solis is a graduate from California State University, Northridge where he majored in Chicana/o & Central American Studies. He is joining the ASCS team as the Community College & CTE Coordinator. He will focus on supporting students at BSSCA and VAHS who are interested in pursuing a post-secondary education at community college or earning a certificate/vocational degree. As a first-generation graduate he uses the power of 'storytelling' to share relatable experiences with his students to promote higher education as an option for growth. He has spent the last ten years supporting first-generation students through college access programs that focus on college & financial aid applications, community college experience, workforce development, and financial literacy. He believes education is one powerful tool, of many, that can shape and/or change our lives.

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## 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  
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## GENOVEVA CORTES

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

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 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 BSSCA CLASS OF 2016  
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