



ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

BY GENOVEVA CORTES

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MARCOS LUNA

BSSCA ALUMNUS 2016
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE ALUMNUS 2021
MAJOR: ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

For Alumni who want to live outside of LA but close enough to come home on occasion, UC Riverside offers not only a competitive and rigorous education but also a school environment where Black and Latino students are known to thrive and graduate. “I definitely liked UC Riverside a lot! I like the community that’s there, they offer a lot of help for students. I got the necessary things from my major.”

As an Electrical Engineering major, he wishes he would have known that “classes start out easy but get harder with time. They required a lot of time and effort.” Marcos breezed through his first year classes but started to struggle as he progressed through this demanding STEM pathway as classes got harder and harder. He was surprised to realize that he could not study the same or for the same amount of hours for his upper division classes as he did for the lower division classes.



What helped him succeed was what helps all Alumni thrive in and graduate from higher education: asking for help and taking advantage of resources! He was regularly going to office hours to meet with his professors and reaching out for help. With determination and self-advocacy, he succeeded in keeping his grades up and graduating with his degree.

On the weekends, he came back to LA to work with his father who is a Maintenance Manager, and used his skills in Engineering to even program a few things for his company. “I’ve worked on and off throughout college but the 1st year I didn’t work. Electrical Engineering students should join clubs like IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) that can help with a lot of resources.

They should also look for clubs in your major that can help you find internships, mentors, and can help throughout your entire college experience. It helped with my Senior Design project.” The Electrical Engineering major at UCR requires all students to design and create something that combines hardware and software. “I created an air hockey table with a robotic arm and was able to play against a human opponent. It was time consuming, but I worked in a group with three other peers.” Marcos did so well in robotics and had such a great experience in his undergraduate education that now he is preparing to apply to graduate school to earn his Master’s degree. What is his top graduate school to which he will apply to? Why UCR of course!

BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY MIKE CARRERA

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VIRGINIA LOPEZ RAMIREZ

BSSCA ALUMNA 2019
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
EXPECTED GRADUATION: 2023
MAJOR: PUBLIC HEALTH & PSYCHOLOGY

The November Alumni Newsletter is about two students who are currently living 64 km away (about 40 miles) from each other. Christian Martinez-Garcia is living in Copenhagen, Denmark and Virginia Lopez Ramirez is living in Lund, Sweden.

Class of 2019 Virginia Lopez Ramirez is living her best life in Lund, Sweden. As a Public Health major and Psychology minor, she took the opportunity to study abroad this year. Initially, she planned to stay for only a semester but she recently extended her stay till June of 2022. She loves it so much that she contemplating staying there. I asked her what she loves about living in Europe: "I love the culture. One, professors here are more understanding. For example, if you fail an exam they give you additional opportunities to retake it. Second, from 12 pm to 3 pm everything closes down and people go to coffee shops to socialize or have lunch with their families." It's been a great experience and she's embracing all that Sweden has to offer. She did admit missing her family and eating a home-cooked meal.



Virginia has some advice for those who are curious about studying abroad: "Go for it. I was originally not going to apply because of the pandemic but I had some extra time in my hands and I did it. It actually didn't feel real until I landed. I feel that my perspective has changed since I've been here. That would've never happened if I didn't come to Sweden." The future looks bright for Virginia. At the moment she doesn't know whether she wants to attend graduate school or medical school but she'll definitely continue her education once she graduates from UC Merced. Only time can tell. Who knows? She might even go to graduate school in the Czech Republic or the Netherlands.

BSSCA ALUMNUS 2019
MACALESTER COLLEGE
EXPECTED GRADUATION: 2023
MAJOR: PSYCHOLOGY & EDUCATION

CHRISTIAN MARTINEZ-GARCIA

Christian Martinez-Garcia has been studying at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota for the last 2 and a half years but decided to expand his experiences even more by moving to Copenhagen, Denmark for a semester to study abroad and taking advantage of as many opportunities as possible! This jet-setting Alumnus recently visited Amsterdam and ran a Marathon with only 3 runs to prepare. He also plans to visit Rome, Berlin, Barcelona, and other cities while he is in Europe. Initially, Christian considered studying abroad in different parts of the world but choose to study at the University of Copenhagen because it offered the best psychology program. "People are welcoming. I've always heard that Europeans don't like Americans but people out here have been nothing but nice. For example, my friend and I went to the park and people and saw people playing volleyball. They invited us to play." That kind of friendliness isn't always shown in certain parts of the world.



Not only is Christian visiting different parts of Europe, he's also embracing the history and architecture that it had to offer. He mentioned that's fascinating being able to visit historical landmarks throughout Europe. He recently had the opportunity to visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. I asked Christian what advice would you give students considering a study abroad program. "Do it!! It's a great opportunity, if you're worried about money there are tons of scholarship opportunities that help you pay for your program. Also, if you work hard enough you can definitely qualify for different opportunities. There are scholarships for low-income, first-generation, minority students, and more!! All you need to do is just apply." Christian hopes to one day work in education to help students reach their goals. He might be working at a Bright Star School near you.



VAHS CLASS OF 2017-2021

BY KYLE PETRIE

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ANDREA PEREZ

VAHS ALUMNA, 2017
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE ALUMNA, MAY 2021
MAJOR: FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS
MINOR: MARKETING

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

Transitioning from Valor to CSUN, I learned that it was so easy to manage the workload. I saw a lot of people struggling to get assignments done, but because Valor prepared us so well in that area I found to get things done rather easily.

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

Definitely managing my time. At valor it was easy to know when things had to be done and actually setting aside the time for it. When you're in college you have all the freedom in the world to be independent and no one to tell you when to get work done. So making sure you keep yourself on top of everything is key to your success.

What did you enjoy most about your four years at CSUN?

What I will always cherish from CSUN, would be all the people you get to meet. Coming from such a small school and going into something as big as CSUN you meet a lot of cool people.

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

Through my time in college, I learned so much about people all over the world, I had classes with people from different countries. This taught me how big the world is outside of high school, you get to meet new people and learn things from everyone.

What are your major/minors and what do you plan on doing with your degree in the future, or maybe some things that you are *already* doing with them?

My degree is in Family and Consumer Science: Consumer Affairs, and a minor in Marketing. In my career I wish to study people and fashion, one day I'll be working in one of the biggest fashion company, studying what new trends are "in."

What are your major/minors and what do you plan on doing with your degree in the future, or maybe some things that you are *already* doing with them?

Life is much more than just high school and all you may endure, there is still so much to see and accomplish.

Fun Facts about CSUN

- Their Oasis Wellness Center offers dozens of free activities and resources to support students mental and physical well-being: nap pods, massages, acupuncture, reiki therapy, nutrition counseling, and quiet places to meditate.
- There are hundreds of intramural sports you can participate in such as ping pong, soccer, boxing.
- The Student Recreation Center is a 138,000 square foot facility that offers everything from yoga, cycling, and Zumba to Red Cross certified CPR classes, basketball, swimming, and indoor rock climbing

RKHS CLASS OF 2021

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

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ALONIE SINGLETARY

RKHS ALUMNA CLASS OF 2021
SANTA MONICA COLLEGE
MAJOR: PSYCHOLOGY

HOW DID YOU PICK YOUR MAJOR?

I picked my major by thinking about what I really like and that I'm interested in and wouldn't mind studying!

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BEST PART OF YOUR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE SO FAR?

The best part of my college experience has probably been being able to work towards my dreams and take interesting classes.

HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE IN COLLEGE SO FAR BEEN DIFFERENT THAN HIGH SCHOOL?

The experience has been different mostly before of how the teachers teach. They have a different way of teaching from high school teachers.

HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR PROFESSORS SO FAR AT SANTA MONICA COLLEGE?

I really like my SMC professors! They are really understanding and don't mind going over material a second or third time to help us out.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS WHO ARE PREPARING TO APPLY TO COLLEGE?

My advice to the seniors would be to stay organized and up-to-date on all assignments in your classes so that you have enough time to finish everything for each class and no class or assignments get left behind. It is very easy to get mixed up especially with juggling a lot of classes at once.

Alonie, you are doing so great in college, and we are excited to see all the great opportunities coming your way. Keep up the amazing work!

Fun Facts about SMC

- **SMC is #1 in Transfer!!!!**
 - SMC has transferred more students to UC campuses than any other college in the country — for 30 years straight. SMC is also tops in transfers to USC and LMU, and the top feeder west of the Mississippi to the Ivy League Columbia University.
- SMC offers over 180 Degrees and Certificates



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.

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.

**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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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.

Kyle Petrie 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 2017 - 2021
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CARLOS FRANCO

**BA, CSU, DOMINGUEZ HILL
M.ED. CSU, LONG BEACH COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

Carlos currently serves as the Community College & CTE Coordinator for Bright Star Schools' Alumni Success and College Support (ASCS) program, where he brings his expertise in community college transfer success and in supporting Alumni in completing a Career Technical Education. He has over 15 years of experience working in education and for the last 8 years, has focused on higher education success for all students. A first-generation college graduate, Carlos' goal as an educator is to create a learning community of diverse, self-sufficient student leaders. Carlos holds a bachelor of arts in liberal studies from California State University, Dominguez Hills and a master's degree in education from California State University, Long Beach.

**BSSCA & VAHS ASSC CC & CTE COORDINATOR
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2017 - 2021
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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 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.

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.

**ASCS DIRECTOR
SUPPORTING BSSCA CLASS OF 2016
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