



# ALUMNI NEWS

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

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## RKHS CLASS OF 2020-2022

### ANTHONY MARTINEZ

**RKHS ALUMNUS 2022  
FIRST YEAR**

**LOS ANGELES TRADE TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
CTE PROGRAM: AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY**



Anthony graduated from RKHS with the class of 2022 and was always interested in learning more about cars. He is going to college at Los Angeles Trade Technical College where he is enrolled in the Automotive Technology program, a 1.5 years certificate program. If he decides to also learn how to repair hybrid and electric cars, it's an additional semester. He is really excited to study something he is passionate about in an environment that is hands-on.

#### How did you choose your program at LATTTC?

I always liked cars and wanted to learn more about them. I got to go to Trade Tech for a field trip where I got to see the classes and workshop. I really liked how everything was hands-on because that is how I learn best so it was a no-brainer.

#### Which campus programs have you taken advantage of so far?

Once I applied to LATTTC, I also applied to the LA College Promise Program. I went to their orientation and was able to get a free laptop for school and counseling support. I have also taken advantage of EOPS and DSPS services which help me pick classes and stay on track.

#### What is the best part of school so far?

So far, I really enjoyed one of my class projects where we got timed and had to explain the process of changing brakes on a car. It was pretty fun to do because we got to watch first then actually do it myself. I recently got a car, so I am excited to use what I learn to fix up my own car. That's one of the best parts of my school is that we can bring in our own cars to practice and learn from. I also enjoy that we get to learn on different types of cars because once I start working, I'll be able to have that knowledge and be able to have clients who own all kinds of vehicles.

#### What are you looking forward to for the rest of the year?

When I first started school, I saw a flyer saying that there's a limited paint and body class being offered, but it happened during the summer before I started school. I am excited to sign up for that class this summer because it will be another skill that I get to learn that's not usually part of my auto tech program. The more I learn about all aspects of car maintenance and repair, the better off I will be once I finish school and start working. I know there's always a demand for people who can do auto body paint and collision repair, especially in LA where people drive everywhere. It's a valuable skill to know.



## SHCA & VAHS CLASS OF 2016-2022

### CC & CTE PATHWAYS

# PAMELA SORATORIO

**VAHS ALUMNA 2017**  
**NATIONAL CAREER COLLEGE ALUMNA 2022**  
**MAJOR: ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE IN HEALTHCARE**  
**ADMINISTRATION & VOCATIONAL NURSING**



There seems to be a common outlook in life for young adults all across; life after high school will be simple, or so many believe it will be. While a few students have things figured out, others are still thinking about what's next, many are surprised by how their journey changes after graduation. Pamela was part of the first graduating senior class at Valor Academy High School in 2017. She enjoyed her time on campus, learned many skills, and improved many more. In her eyes, she feels the teachers and staff at VAHS prepared her for her college journey. The educators and staff at VAHS had a profound influence on her: "[they] care about the students. My high school experience prepared me. It gave me the tools which made my transition simpler." However, she does some constructive criticism: "I would have liked to have received more options. Stress the importance of trade school or community college. Everyone wants to get into these name brand schools just because it reflects a level of success."

Upon high school graduation in 2017, Pamela had been accepted and committed to attend Cal State Los Angeles. She declared an interest in Biology and Pre-Med. The area of study was of interest to her but it wasn't quite what she was searching for. After a few semesters she changed her major to Political Science since she had a passion for government and history. Eventually, she realized that neither of these fields were right for her and her career.

Soon after Pamela made the decision to leave CSULA in 2019 and enrolled in a private for-profit college called National Career College which gave her the ability to pursue a short career through their accelerated programs, flexible schedules, shorter pathways, and the financial support they had to offer. She was eligible for Pell Grants & Federal Grants which reduced her cost of attendance. During this transition period, Pamela was working at a nursing home which had a strong influence on her decision to make the switch. Her decision meant finishing her program of study relatively quickly, receiving support to find employment, and finding the financial stability she had been searching for. As of Summer 2022 Pamela has received her Associate of Applied Science in Healthcare Administration and completed the Vocational Nursing program at National Career College. Additionally, in September 2022 Pamela passed the National Council Licensure Examination.

Success comes with hard-work and determination. Pamela has a few recommendations on how she managed to graduate with her degree and earn her license. "Life does get in the way, it knocks you down, but you have to get back up despite the difficult days. Keep in mind that you are not only wasting your time but also your money if you don't take your studies seriously. You have to mentally want it. You have to be willing to make sacrifices to achieve your goals. You need to have a support system. Your circle must be willing to push you and motivate you to complete your academic goals. You also need a lot of self-discipline. You must be willing to dedicate days to your work."

Every student's journey to self-discovery will look different and you will find it if & when you allow yourself to explore your passions & interest: which is why Pamela is asking students to "explore your options, work the weird jobs, discover your strengths & weaknesses because these can lead you towards a career driven by your passions. [This] helped me flourish as a person. This is what I want to do with my life. Working directly with individuals. Despite the crappy days, I still find joy in those moments"



## SHCA CLASS OF 2018-2022

### JESSIE ESTRADA

SHCA ALUMNUS 2020  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES  
MAJOR: COMPUTER INFORMATION SYSTEMS

#### What is your Major?

I am a current Computer Information Systems and I'm focusing on coding. Initially, I thought I wanted to focus on IT, but I was hooked once I started learning about coding. I found the material engaging, and after a few weeks, I noticed that I would research and watch YouTube videos on my own time about coding. In addition, I'm taking extra elective courses to receive a certification once I graduate.

#### How does it feel to take classes in person?

It's different but in a good way. When classes were online I just rolled out of bed and turned on my computer. It was comfortable because I didn't have to leave my house but it was also mentally exhausting. It became a routine and at some point, it was hard to stay motivated because I was in front of the computer for hours. Now that school is in person I'm able to use the resources on campus, talk to professors, study with other students, and enjoy all the college amenities.

#### What would you tell students who are considering CSULA?

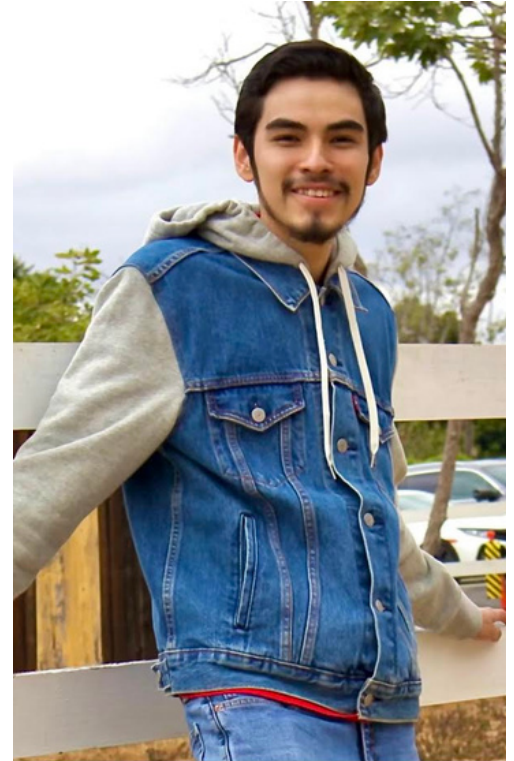
I would highly recommend students to consider coming here because it's a great institution. The university is very diverse and it's also not too big nor too small. The campus is easily accessible and easy to navigate. Lastly, it is also ranked number one in the United States for the upward mobility of students.

#### How did you manage to stay focused during the pandemic?

I always reminded myself that I'm going to school to have more opportunities in the future. My goal is to graduate and find a job that I enjoy and a career where I am financially stable. If I decided to slack off I wasn't fooling anyone else, I was only fooling myself.

#### What advice would you give first-year college students?

Don't be scared to ask for help. Most likely everyone is a little confused and has questions. One thing that I like about CSULA is the professors are very helpful. For example, anytime I have questions or need advice they're always welcoming and go above and beyond to answer my questions. It's also important to network, it might sound cliché but sometimes "it's not what you know but whom you know."





## VAHS CLASS OF 2018-2022

### KEVIN SOLANO

VAHS ALUMNUS 2022  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY  
MAJOR: POLITICAL SCIENCE



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

I learned how to study and create an environment in which I could thrive. Valor not only taught me how to do this but they allowed me to practice this as well as helping me get used to the idea of studying and how to study. I, of course, use this at college and recently this skill helped me ace one of my midterms, and I will always truly be thankful to Valor for that. They also made me get into that "college attitude." I know that sounds very blunt but what I mean to say is that they made me take school extremely serious, and made me realize that yes I need to work my butt off, yes I need to turn in my homework, and that no one is going to remind me to do that

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

I wish I had known a little more sooner about different UC's and how the system works and just simply know more about dorm life. When I first arrived here at Berkeley I was extremely nervous, not because of school and grades, but more about dorm life and out of campus life.

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

Being involved here at UC Berkeley it is very competitive but I have had the opportunity to join a few programs that they have to offer. To me, it made me feel involved and content with myself because I felt I belonged here. Other than that, I have enjoyed going out with my friends, enjoying the city, and taking time off from class to simply go to the gym and play some games.

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

I realized that I am no longer a kid anymore, I'm a full grown adult. The minute my parents hugged me goodbye is the minute I realized that everything is on me. The homework, waking up for my 8am classes, doing laundry, it's all on me and that made me grow up even more. In a way it makes you experience adulthood and helps you in every way. You get experiences that you would never get in high school, you get taught lessons that you never knew you needed, it made me open up my eyes because it made me realize that this city has so many opportunities in which I can take advantage of.

#### What is your major and what do you plan on doing with your degree in the future?

I plan on majoring in Political science and eventually, after getting my Bachelor's degree, being able to apply to Berkeley law, and perhaps becoming a lawyer, specifically an immigration lawyer. This is of course just a dream, but hopefully one day I can become the mayor of a city, then perhaps a congressman, and maybe even one day become the president of the United States. Although this seems like a far stretch, I would say I'm on the right path to achieving something great. I will one day use everything I learned to better this world. Brain Like Berkeley!

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

Some advice I would give to students is to take high school seriously, because when you leave for college, it's completely different from high school. You won't survive if you don't try and put your mind to it. To be honest you have to try 100,000,000 times harder than you did in high school, because this is your life. I hope the students realize just how amazing college is and how amazing these opportunities are. Hopefully I can see more VAHS students at Berkeley!!! GOOO BERKELEY BEARS AND VALOR LIONS. Valor x Berkeley collab coming soon.

# 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.

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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 SHCA 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.

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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 SHCA 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.

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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.

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