



ALUMNI NEWS

BY DAVID SOLIS

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SHCA & VAHS CLASS OF 2016-2020 CC & CTE PATHWAYS

NATHANIEL KOSOYAN

Uncertainty continues to play a significant role in the life of recent graduates. While some students have their post graduation plans figured out, others find themselves making changes in the last weeks before summer ends. Nathaniel Kosoyan graduated from Valor Academy High School in Spring 2020. During that time, he had earned his admissions to the University of San Francisco and was interested in majoring in Biology.

In Spring of 2020 our communities began to face the effects of the pandemic; transitioning to virtual learning, restrictions on campus, and uncertainty for first-time first year students entering college in the Fall of 2020. Nathaniel took some time to reflect on his decision to attend the University of San Francisco during this challenging moment in history. He took into consideration his family's current situation, the benefits of enrolling at a 4-year university, and his passion/career interests. After careful consideration, Nathaniel decided to change his post-secondary education plans; the best possible option for him was to attend Santa Monica College.

Santa Monica College is known to be the number one ranking transfer college for students to transition to the Cal States or UCs. Nathaniel saw SMC as a direct path to admissions to UCLA. His decision to change schools, evidently, had an effect on his academic/career choices. Nathaniel found himself having to decide between continuing to pursue biology or explore his passion for business at a deeper level. He looked at the pros and cons for each field and found that business outweighed becoming a doctor. His immense passion for business along with his self-determination to learn & understand more about the field were factors that led him to change his field of study.

VAHS ALUMNUS CLASS OF 2020
SANTA MONICA COLLEGE ALUMNUS CLASS OF 2022
ASSOCIATE OF ARTS: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



"Find something you love to do. Whether it's basketball, painting, drawing, you should always pursue a career in what you love to do. Once you have a job within that field, your passion, it will not feel like work to you." Nathaniel went on to recommend best practices while in school, "figure out what classes you need to take. Talk to the counselors to find out what classes would be most beneficial. The class content was important to me."

Nathaniel shared his thoughts on what it means to be successful: "A lot of people mix success with money. They think success is becoming a millionaire. To me success is feeling content and reaching the goals you set up for yourself. Having goals, working towards them, and accomplishing those goals is also being successful." Nathaniel graduated in Spring 2022 from Santa Monica College with an Associate of Arts in Business Administration

- Book recommendation: "Rich Dad, Poor Dad"
"This book will teach you about the realities of life. If you really want to achieve financial freedom this book will help you set yourself up for success."

SHCA CLASS OF 2018-2022

ERICK A. SALAZAR

SHCA ALUMNUS 2018
 CSU, FULLERTON ALUMNUS 2022
 BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE: PSYCHOLOGY
 MINOR IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

For the month of September, we are spotlighting recent Cal State Fullerton graduate Erick Salazar. During his 4 years at SHCA, Erick excelled in the classroom and on the varsity soccer team. It was no surprise that he would continue to excel in college. He majored in Psychology and minored in Criminal Justice. His plan is to one day become a school counselor. What better way to get started than by working at Stella High Charter Academy, formerly known as Bright Star Secondary Charter Academy, and help in the classroom as an Instructional Aide for the Math department. Erick really enjoyed his time at SHCA and wants to give back to the community that helped raise him.

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

Never doubt yourself, when I arrived at Fullerton I definitely felt like the minority and I remember seeing other students with better economic status and parents who had careers. As a first-generation college student, I had many questions. "Did I make the right choice?" "Am I smart enough?" "Should I have gone to SMC?" It took me about two years to gain my confidence but once that happened I never looked back. I found a great support system on campus and I started using all the resources at CSUF that many students never use, unfortunately.

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

I had a really great experience at BSSCA, now SHCA, the staff was supportive when I was a student and were always there to help. My strong work ethic and ability to network were two skills that I improved upon while I was in high school and they translated nicely at Cal State Fullerton. For example, when I had a huge assignment or test coming up, I would spend hours in the library but once I was done I did something fun to reward myself. College can be overwhelming and I did everything possible to not feel burnt out.

What are your career goals?

I've divided my goals into a few steps. First, while I'm at SHCA, I would like to work in the counseling department and be accepted to the Master's program at CSUF. Once I get my Master's in Counseling and my PPS credential (Pupil Personnel Services), I would like to become a school counselor. Lastly, once I've worked in education for a few years I would like to work in the jail system. I would love to help the formerly incarcerated reintegrate themselves into the community.

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

I really enjoyed living on campus because it allowed me to gain independence and start being an adult. I definitely learn through trial and error but I can say that I became a better student because of those mistakes. I always recommend students live on campus if it's financially possible.

How did you manage to stay on track during the Pandemic?

I decided to stay in Fullerton because I knew that if I went home I wouldn't be productive. It was difficult at first because everything was so new and I had to be accountable for managing my time efficiently. It also helped that my family was supportive and when I spoke with my parent they encouraged me to do well.



VAHS CLASS OF 2018-2022

SERGIO AMAYA

**VAHS ALUMNUS 2019
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
MAJOR: MECHANICAL ENGINEERING**



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

While at Valor I was able to pick up a lot of great skills. They taught me how to push myself to be the best person I can. Most importantly Valor taught me time management skills. Coming into college I never felt overwhelmed or stressed because in high school, Valor always prepared us for these exact situations.

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

Something I wish I knew about college before coming in is to not be afraid to ask for help. There are so many resources that college has to offer whether you need help with school itself or personal things.

What have you enjoyed most about your experience as a member of the CSUN community?

What I love most about being apart of the CSUN community is how welcoming everyone is. It may be a commuter school but that doesn't change the fact that everyone there wants to meet more people and make more connections. I was lucky to join Greek life my freshman year and it had launched my college life to extreme heights.

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

My world perspective grew throughout college because in college you meet so many more people that have different perspectives than you and how you view things. I have friends from different states and countries all with different lives, all teaching different things everyday.

What obstacles did you face from the Covid-19 pandemic? How did you overcome them?

The Covid 19 pandemic, it hit me and my family pretty hard. My dad was working little hours, but my mom and I had worked at a grocery store at the time. Me and my mom were working more than 40 hours a week to support our family and make it through. With school it was way more difficult to learn the subjects but I had to put my best foot forward and keep on going.

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

As of right now, I'm study mechanical engineering. In the future I want to work in the aerospace field and build planes.

Is there anything else that you would like to share, or advice you would give to current students or staff at Valor?

My last words are a big "thank you" to Valor for what you have done for me. You all have helped me grow as a person and I cannot thank you enough. For the students who are still attending Valor: please take advantage of the amazing school that you are in.

RKHS CLASS OF 2020-2022

MICHELLE BETAN-HERNANDEZ



RKHS ALUMNA 2022
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
MAJOR: BUSINESS

Recent RKHS graduate, Michelle started school at California State University, Northridge where she is majoring in Business. Michelle is ambitious and spent the summer before college preparing and laying the foundation for a successful career in business by participating in the Bank of America summer youth leadership program. As an intern for Bank of America, Michelle shadowed banking professionals and got hands-on experience. Shortly after completing her internship, she began the Early Start program through CSUN EOP. Her college journey just began, but Michelle is already getting ahead in her career and education!

How did you find out about the summer internship opportunity?

I found out about it through school and my volunteer service with Changeist. They let us know about different opportunities we can take advantage of, so I applied to it, went through the interview process, and was accepted. The process started in the beginning of senior year during the Fall semester. I had to submit my application as well as recommendations from teachers. Once they reviewed the application, they selected me for the interview, and I was able to move on to the final round and got placed for work during the summer.

How was your experience in the Early start program at CSUN?

The Summer Bridge program was honestly so helpful for me to get to know some amazing people on campus. More than anything it was a networking opportunity to connect with my peers and counselors on campus. Although they do emphasize the importance of academics, this experience was much more social than academic focused. It is really important though because sometimes we forget that in order to be successful academically, you also need a good support system from those relationships you created outside of the classroom. I learned so much about the campus overall like little hacks for getting around campus and even financial supports that I wasn't aware of.

How has your transition from high school into college been so far?

It is really early in the semester so honestly, I am still adjusting, and it will probably take a little while, but overall, I am enjoying everything so far. As a commuter student the biggest thing right now is making sure I time my transportation right so I can get to school on time. The drive is a little bit far so hopefully I can also be driving myself to school soon.

What advice do you have for your peers preparing to apply for college this year?

My advice is to definitely take advantage of everything you can during your senior year. Don't be afraid to fill out applications because you never know what could happen. Thankfully I applied to all these opportunities during my senior year, and managed to get in my college applications, EOP applications, and internship applications. It may seem like a lot of work at the time but it is all worth it in the end.

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 - 2022
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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.

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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.

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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 & VAHS CLASS OF 2017
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