



ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

BY GENOVEVA CORTES

GCORTES@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

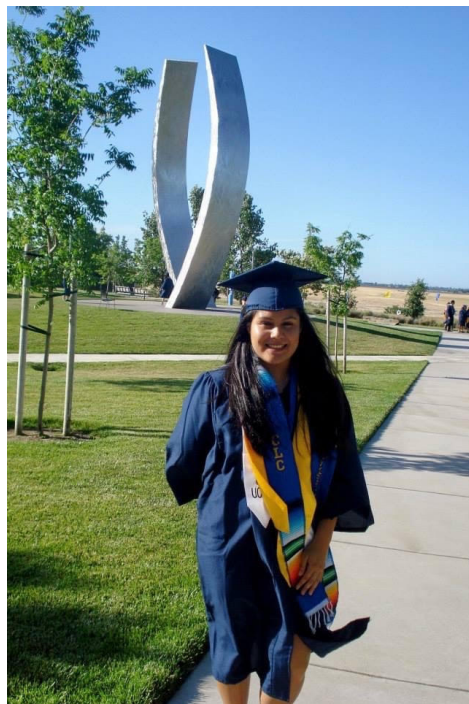
BSSCA CLASS OF 2015-2016

CLAUDIA CASTILLO

BSSCA ALUMNA 2010
UC MERCED ALUMNA 2014
MAJOR: SOCIOLOGY AND SPANISH

Claudia Castillo was from Bright Star School's very first graduating class and was there from the beginning when it consisted of one middle school with grades 5th and 6th: Stella Middle Charter Academy which used to be located at St. Agatha's Church off of La Brea and Adams Boulevard, where Stella Elementary Charter Academy (SECA) is currently located.

Upon graduation from BSSCA, Claudia moved to California's central valley where she attended UC Merced. Having been raised in the sprawling metropolis of LA, it was a shock to move from a boisterous and fast-paced urban environment to a quiet, rural community. However, Claudia was quick to adapt with the support of her friends. Her heavy course load, numerous extracurricular activities, and access to less distractions also kept her quite busy.



Little did she know this experience would serve her well when upon graduating from UC Merced, her family decided to uproot and move from Los Angeles to Salina, Kansas. After 7 years in the Midwest, Claudia has come to appreciate the calm and slow-paced lifestyle while capitalizing on the opportunities for advancement as one of the few Spanish speaking mental health care providers in a town with a growing Latino immigrant population.

Claudia is currently working full time as a Case Manager at a community mental health center while attending graduate school part time at Wichita State University where she will earn her Master's in Social Work. As someone who knows what it's like to struggle and not come from a position of privilege, she finds joy in helping others in need as well as herself. Her goal is to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker or LCSW upon which she'll have various options for employment: hospitals, schools, police stations, or go into private practice as a therapist, to name a few.



Claudia shares three critical pieces of advice that helped her be the accomplished and ambitious young woman she is today:

1. **Never give up**
2. **Ask lots of questions, ask for advice on how to succeed, and ask people you admire to mentor you**
3. **Never be afraid to ask for help**

BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY MIKE CARRERA

MCARRERA@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

ADRIAN MURGUIA

BSSCA ALUMNUS 2018
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES
MAJOR: CRIMINAL JUSTICE

It might seem like yesterday when Adrian Murguia was shredding tacklers on the football field. He's no longer making those moves but he's positioning himself at Cal State LA to pursue his goals. A current Criminal Justice major, Adrian is on track to graduate in Spring 2022. Not only has he been a full-time student these past 3 years, but he's held a part-time job as well. For some time, Adrian has worked 30 hours per week at In-N-Out while maintaining a high GPA. Although it is not advised to work more than 20 hours a week while attending college full time, only those who are determined, can prioritize, and have a strong work ethic, like Adrian, are able to keep those grade high. After 4 years of working there, he recently left and hasn't looked back. Adrian shares that it was one of the best decisions he has ever made. "It was difficult leaving my old job, I even second-guessed myself because I was comfortable and I was getting paid well, but I knew that In-N-Out wasn't my career path." Since Adrian works fewer hours this year, he's been able to get more involved in school clubs.

He was recently accepted to the prestigious National Criminal Justice Society at CSULA and mentioned that it's been an eye-opening experience. He's also had the opportunity to participate in Zoom meetings and make connections with the FBI, DEA, and local law enforcement agents. One piece of advice Adrian has for current Seniors at Bright Star, "I would highly encourage them to be involved in school clubs, even if you commute to school. It's important to put yourself out there and network with other students." At the moment we know that Adrian will be working in law enforcement in a few years. We will only have to wait and see where he chooses to apply.



BSSCA ALUMNUS 2020
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
MAJOR: MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

JASON BALTAZAR



The lucky winner of the ASCS raffle of the Jabra Wireless earbuds is Jason Baltazar. A Mechanical Engineering student at UC Merced, he has hit the ground running and already made the Dean's List his first semester. Not only is Jason crushing it academically, he's balancing a part-time job at Chipotle as well. I asked Jason, "How do you keep up with school?" He mentions "I try to keep a routine and finish all my assignments from Saturday through Tuesday. It's been difficult at times because it seems like I've been in the same routine for a whole year. Last Fall, I hit a wall the last 3 weeks of the semester and I felt like not doing anything. Luckily that was when I got my job at Chipotle, I think I just needed to get out of my routine and change my environment." He also mentioned that he enjoys taking classes online because he doesn't have to get ready for school and can just roll out of bed for his classes.

I'm sure it doesn't hurt that his older brother Brandon is also a Mechanical Engineering Major at UCM. Even with the help of his brother, Jason puts in the work, records his lectures, and watches videos on YouTube and Khan Academy to get a better understanding of the content. There are times when Jason spends the entire day on the computer and I mean the whole day from 8 AM to 12 AM studying or completing assignments. It's only the start for Jason but I wouldn't be surprised if we see him working at Boeing or Space X in a few years.

VAHS CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY KYLE PETRIE

KPETRIE@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

**VAHS ALUMNA: 2018
UNIVERSITY: CSUN CLASS OF 2022
MAJOR: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

NATALY LOPEZ

1. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE?

MORE FLEXIBLE TIME AND MORE ACCOUNTABILITY. I STRUGGLED WITH LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE MY TIME AND BALANCE RELATIONSHIPS.

2. HOW HAS THE TRANSITION BEEN FROM VALOR TO A SCHOOL WITH A LOT MORE STUDENTS?

VALOR HELPED A LOT WITH SUPPORT, BEING A FIRST GEN COLLEGE STUDENT, I HAD NO IDEA WHO TO TALK TO ABOUT CLASSES OR PROGRAMS THAT I COULD DO; I HAD TO LEARN HOW TO BE RESOURCEFUL AND HELP MYSELF GET THROUGH COLLEGE.

3. HOW HAS THE TRANSITION TO REMOTE/VIRTUAL LEARNING BEEN SINCE MARCH?

IT WAS REALLY HARD BECAUSE PROFESSORS EXPECTED SO MUCH WHILE MANY OF THE STUDENTS WERE EITHER FIGHTING THE DISEASE, TAKING CARE OF FAMILY MEMBERS, WORKING EXTRA HOURS AND MUCH MORE. IT WAS A REALLY DIFFICULT TIME FOR ME BECAUSE I WASN'T PRIORITIZING MY SCHOOL WORK. I WAS PRIORITIZING MY FAMILY.

4. HAVE YOU DEVELOPED ANY HOBBIES/INTERESTS HAVE YOU DEVELOPED IN COLLEGE? (CONTINUING AN INTEREST FROM VALOR IS FINE TOO)

I DID GET INTO A MENTORING CLUB THAT VOLUNTEERED IN SECTION 8 HOUSING. I LED AND MANAGED AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN FROM THE AGE OF 4-13. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I WORKED WITH CHILDREN AND THAT IS WHEN I REALIZED THAT I WANTED TO WORK IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION.

5. WHAT DO YOU PLAN ON STUDYING/MAJORING IN? HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF ANY POTENTIAL CAREERS?

I AM PLANNING ON MAJORING IN EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT. I THOUGHT I WANTED TO BE A TEACHER BUT I AM NOT TOO SURE WHAT MY NEXT STEPS ARE AFTER I GRADUATE.

6. WHICH TEACHER/CLASSES FROM VALOR HAVE HAD THE GREATEST IMPACT ON YOUR ABILITY TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN COLLEGE?

MS. CURRY- ALLEN HAS GIVEN ME SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW, EVEN AFTER GRADUATING FROM VALOR. SHE PRESENTED ME WITH A JOB OPPORTUNITY AND I HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT THE EDUCATION FIELD AND WHAT GOES ON. I HAVE LEARNED ALSO HOW MUCH WORK AND DEDICATION BRIGHT STAR STAFF PUTS INTO THEIR SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS. I AM VERY GRATEFUL FOR HER AND ALL OF HER SUPPORT.

7. KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW NOW, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF AS A HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR?

I WOULD TELL MY HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR SELF, NOT TO STRESS ABOUT THE FUTURE. EVERYONE EXPECTS YOU TO HAVE AN IDEA ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO STUDY OR WHAT YOU WANT TO WORK IN BUT IT'S OKAY NOT TO KNOW. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED IN FRONT OF YOU WILL LEAD YOU TO MANY EXPERIENCES AND MAYBE YOU'LL FIND YOUR PURPOSE THERE. THE AGES FROM 18- 21 OR WHATEVER, ARE FOR FINDING WHO YOU ARE SO TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME.



RKHS CLASS OF 2020

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

SCALDERON@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

EDWIN RAMIREZ



During his time off he was able to reflect and also spend lots of quality time with his family, going on road trips and camping. Now, Edwin is looking forward to beginning his journey as a student again in a new state, yes... new state! He will be moving to Nevada and continuing his studies in community college before transferring to a 4-year college. Right now, he is preparing for the move, and giving himself time to settle into his new home. This way once school begins in the Fall, he will be prepared to begin school with a fresh start and new perspective. It is important to recognize that everyone has their own path and their own way of pursuing their goals for the future. Some students, like Edwin benefit most from taking that time to grow and learn from experience what is best for them. I'm excited to see where this journey takes him and super proud of all your growth this year!

RKHS ALUMNI 2020
CURRENTLY TAKING GAP SEMESTER
INTENDED MAJOR: COMPUTER SCIENCE

Edwin was part of the very first graduating class at RKHS. Like many students, Edwin was not sure what he wanted to do right after graduating high school. There were a few options but ultimately for him it was best to take some time off of school, reflect and hone in on what he truly wants to pursue. It was really important for him to take the time to himself without external pressures and expectations. Ultimately, during this time in quarantine Edwin has learned a lot about himself, his aspirations and interests. These have shifted drastically from when he initially graduated from RKHS. In this sense, taking time off was exactly what he needed. A break, some time to breathe especially amidst a global pandemic where he knew distance learning would not be the most conducive to his specific learning style.



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
SCALDERON@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG**

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
MCARRERA@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG**

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
GCORTES@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG**

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.