



# ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

BY GENOVEVA CORTES

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## BSSCA CLASS OF 2012-2016

### OBED COY

**BSSCA ALUMNUS 2016**  
**CSU LOS ANGELES ALUMNUS, 2017**  
**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE: CIVIL ENGINEERING**

#### HOW IT STARTED.



When Obed was a student at BSSCA, he never thought he'd be able to attend college let alone graduate. His older brother had gone to college but couldn't continue because of finances and family struggles. His father abandoned the family right around Christmas when he was in middle school which plunged his family into poverty and despair, leaving them reeling from the shock. "We could hardly pay bills. We lost the house and our car." During that time, "there were no presents, no joy, or anything to be happy about. That really hurt." For Obed, the holidays had always been filled with great food, fun music, and a welcoming environment. He felt the loss of his father profoundly and dreamed of one day having the warmth of his family together again in his home, but a home that he would design and build. Now that dream is becoming more of a plan, and one day will be a reality. "I want to design my own home, my family home, where I can invite people to come over and experience what I had before my dad left. I am going to use (my expertise) in Civil Engineering to design my future house. That's one of my biggest motivations. I have something to base my dreams upon, I want to literally build my dreams, build what is in my head."

"I want to also set up an Engineering firm and build a non-profit organization that builds affordable housing and affordable apartment complexes for people who are homeless and provide them opportunities to work whether in construction or other areas of home building," something akin to "sweat equity" that is found in Habitat for Humanity. Obed envisions himself helping people the way he was helped. "If it wasn't for all the help I received in high school (from BSSCA) and from you (the ASCS program), I don't think I would have ever gone to college. I plan to pay it forward."

What exactly is Civil Engineering? The answer is complex but it basically is the discipline that deals with the design, construction, and maintenance of homes, buildings, roads, bridges, canals, dams, and sewage systems to name a few. "All forms of engineering are ways to solve problems," Obed shares. "Civil Engineering is a way to improve the quality of life in different environments with structures, making sure they are safe against earthquakes, loads from strong winds, as well as providing information like schematics and visuals. A Civil Engineer can determine if a design needs to change, a cost estimation, and what kind of shapes are being used for steel beams." In addition to designing, observing, and facilitating the structural integrity of buildings, roads, and channels, they also consider myriad environmental issues that would "mitigate the impact on wildlife and habitat, reducing noise pollution, improving street lights, how do we add or subtract a lane in the freeway to lessen traffic, how do we design dams and reservoirs and treat the water?" Civil Engineers create "things we use on a daily basis and that can improve people's quality of life." For his Senior project, he designed a water tank that considered the volume of water it could store, was resistant to earthquake and wind loads, and designed the supports that go into the foundation to keep it in place.

This ambitious, hard-working, kind, and hopeful young man will not only have earned his Bachelors over the summer, he is wasting no time in going farther in his field. In the fall, Obed will start his two year Master's program In Civil Engineering at CSULA. "With a Master's degree, there will be more job opportunities that will allow me to specialize in a certain area like Open Channel Hydraulics and bridge engineering." He could also focus on environmental aspects of civil engineering and will be able to conduct research. What a bright future this young man has ahead of him. There is no telling how his vision and work will impact us in the future but I am certain he will and we probably might not be aware of it. The work of a Civil Engineer is all around us if we just know where to look.

#### HOW IT'S GOING.



## BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY MIKE CARRERA

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# ANTHONY RUIZ

**BSSCA ALUMNUS 2019**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO**  
**EXPECTED GRADUATION: 2023**  
**MAJOR: PHILOSOPHY**  
**MINOR: POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Anthony Ruiz's class of 2019 just wrapped up his spring quarter at UC San Diego after a full year of distance learning. He finished the quarter on the President's list: a true testament to his hard work and dedication. As Philosophy major, Anthony plans to attend law school once he graduates from UC San Diego. He initially planned to major in Political Science but changed his mind because he enjoyed the philosophy classes. He now plans to minor in Political Science and feels that it would be beneficial when he becomes a lawyer.



The pandemic has certainly changed the way we live our lives. I asked Anthony how have things been different for him. "Life is different, school can be easier because you can watch a lecture in the middle of the night. But you can also lose track of time and fall weeks behind in a blink of an eye. Before the pandemic, if you didn't go to class you missed the lecture completely and there was no way to get that information."

Unlike most students, Anthony decided to continue living in San Diego and not come home with his family. It was a decision that paid off because he was able to stay on track and keep his independence. He also mentioned that he wasn't involved his first year because he wanted to get acclimated to the college workload. He planned to be more involved in the second year but those plans changed because of COVID-19. Even with the pandemic, Anthony has had the opportunity to live with Adrian Rodarte, Raul Enciso, and Jonathan Martinez, BSSCA Class of 2019 alums. They've created a close-knit friendship that has become more of a family these past two years.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Anthony had some time to reflect and decided to change something about himself that he didn't like. He decided to live a healthier lifestyle. Since the start of the pandemic, Anthony has lost over 100 pounds by exercising and eating better. He prioritized his health and made working out a lifestyle. He also mentioned that he gained a few pounds his first year and started feeling limited on the things he was able to do. Since losing weight, he joined the fencing club at UCSD and mentioned he's the only Hispanic in the club. Not only does Anthony feel better physically but he also feels more confident. Now that UCSD will have most of its classes in person in the Fall, Anthony plans to become more involved in school clubs and activities moving forward.



**VAHS CLASS OF 2017-2021**

BY KYLE PETRIE

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**VANESSA RAMIREZ**VAHS ALUMNA 2017  
CAL STATE FULLERTONMAJOR: BUSINESS ADMIN CONCENTRATION: LEGAL STUDIES  
EXPECTED GRADUATION: MAY 2022**What skills did you learn while a student at Valor that helped you during your four years in college?**

When I was a student at Valor, I was to be able to handle multi-tasking various projects and homework at once and complete them on time. Another skill I learned was to be able to skim text quickly and annotate the text. This skill especially came in handy when taking research-focused courses! Every day I still carry with me the idea that no matter your socio-economic background, where you grew up, or your family's history, you have the option to further your education and be successful in doing so.

**What do you think Valor could have done to make you even *more successful* on your journey through college?**

While I know that most students often change their mind or don't know yet, I think it would be helpful for some students to do career exploration during senior year, and even have people of different careers come in or have some students do some shadowing field trips.

**What do you enjoy most about your experience at Cal State Fullerton?**

I've been taught by professors with amazing track records and professors that have real world experience about the career I want to be in after I graduate from college. I also have found it easy to make friends even during class and people who just want to help you and cheer another Titan on. My campus is beautiful especially in the early mornings when the campus is quiet and the morning sun hits the orange trees and you hear the chime of birds. We have an arborterum nearby, and Disneyland not far down which made it sometimes hard to study.

**How did your world perspective change as a result of your time at Fullerton?**

Honestly, my world perspective grew without the need to try. Life just sort of happened. You develop a sense of empathy that reaches far beyond your realm of what is daily reality. Since 2017, my first year of college, I feel as though my class has been in college through some of the most world-breaking news in our lifetime. News that has forced us to re-adapt our perspective of not just the U.S, but to view your reality as world-wide perceptive. It's imperative to adapt and begin moving with purpose or intent all the while knowing and keeping a world perspective at the forefront.

**What do you plan on doing in the future? Both next year and beyond.**

I still am unsure about law school, but if that is something that is in the cards in the future then I will definitely do that. Right after I earn my degree, I plan on landing a full time position at my internship program currently with Fox Deportes. I really loved the digital/social business and production side of it all, so I would love to dive into that. I'm a multi-dimensional individual, so I know I will want to work in different sectors of the business world.

**Is there any advice you'd like to give to current Valor staff or students?**

Go big or go home. I've always been solid on that quote because I feel it can apply to any aspect of your life. Apply yourself appropriately, network, step out your comfort zone, meet the credentials needed, AKA 'come prepared and ready to take it.' You want to go to medical school, GO BIG. You want to own your own business? GO BIG. We only live this life once, GO BIG everytime!

## RKHS CLASS OF 2020

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

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### MAURICIO VALLE-TORES

**RKHS ALUMNUS 2021**  
**SANTA MONICA COLLEGE**  
**MAJOR: UNDECIDED**

Mauricio is a recent alumni of RKHS. He has unique plans for his post-secondary education. He was potentially moving to Mexico with his family upon graduating high school but was still determined to complete an education either in the US or in Mexico. After some time and deliberation with his family, they decided they will be moving to Mexico in late 2021 or early 2022. Rather than sit and wait to leave, Mauricio decided he wanted to attend SMC for this Fall semester and get started on his general education classes before making the move to Mexico. He is also working with his ASCS Coordinator to find a university in Mexico to apply to when he moves. Additionally, Mauricio is working a summer job to keep himself busy after graduation. He is still unsure if he will be returning to Los Angeles in the future, but wanted to make sure that higher education was an option in either scenario. Attending SMC now and then a University in Mexico will allow him to expand his opportunities in both countries.



### TIFFANY KWON

**RKHS ALUMNA 2021**  
**CSU, LONG BEACH**  
**MAJOR: PRE-NURSING**



Tiffany is a 2021 graduate of Rise Kohyang High School and is so proud to attend CSULB this fall. She is going in to school as a Pre-Nursing major and is so excited to be moving into her dorm in a few weeks. Tiffany was an outstanding student leader in high school and played an instrumental role in the Red Cross Club. She helped lead a school-wide blood drive amidst a global pandemic. She is excited to take her experience and begin her new journey as a nursing student at CSULB's amazing program. She is most excited about moving into the dorms and attending classes in person. Although some of her classes will be hybrid format and online, she is still excited for the opportunity and is hopeful that by her second semester she will be back to full in person instruction. She is also excited to join clubs on campus that will help her feel more at home such as cultural clubs and clubs for nursing majors. Keep up the great work, Tiff! You got this!



# 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  
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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  
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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  
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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  
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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.