



# ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

BY GENOVEVA CORTES

GCORTES@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

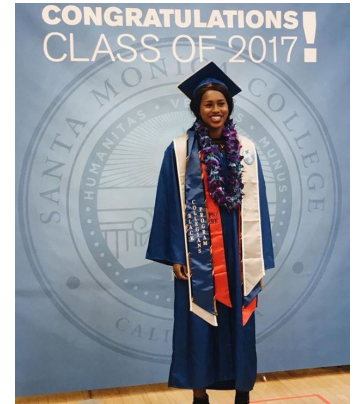
## BSSCA CLASS OF 2015-2016

### ALEXIS AMIRA HILL

**BSSCA ALUMNAE 2015**

**SANTA MONICA COLLEGE → UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES ALUMNAE 2019**  
**MAJORS: GENDER STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY W MINOR IN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES**

Alexis graduated from BSSCA with a 2.4 GPA, not high enough to get into any of her dream colleges. She immediately enrolled in Santa Monica College, changed everything about her study habits, and with determination, hard work, and self-advocacy, she developed the confidence and skills she needed to succeed. She joined the SMC's Black Collegians, a program designed to assist students of African descent in transferring to competitive four-year universities. Alexis graduated from SMC with an Associates degree in Liberal Arts and with a hard-earned 3.77 GPA.



While she had the choice of transferring to UC Berkeley, Loyola Marymount University, Cal Poly Pomona, Howard University, UC Davis, UC Santa Barbara, or UCLA, she decided to become a baby bear, a Bruin! At UCLA, she continued on that path to success and graduated with honors, completing a senior research thesis that focused on the way the child protective custody system in the United States unfairly targets Black mothers. Alexis is passionate about social justice and creating new opportunities for Black people and people of color. Throughout her college career, she has worked as a camp counselor for young Black men, was a peer counselor at UCLA working on helping Community College students of color transfer to UCLA and other UC's and CSU's, and worked with Million Dollar Hoods in exposing over-policing, the inequality of police overfunding and the underfunding of programs that would benefit communities of color.

What's next on the horizon for Alexis? Houston, Texas where she moved over the summer to prepare to become an elementary school teacher with Teach for America. There is no doubt she will transform the lives of this new generation of young people as she works to shape their minds and build their confidence.



## BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY MIKE CARRERA

MCARRERA@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

The December newsletter takes us to Fort Riley, Kansas, the United States Army installation located in North Central Kansas where two BSSCA alumni currently reside: Class of 2019 Andres Rosas and Class of 2018 Denilson Serrano-Chavez. Small insight, both students had no idea that one another lived in the same base before the interview. Talk about a small world!

### ANDRES ROSA



Private First-Class Rosa or Andres Rosa as many of us remember him from BSSCA with family.

#### BSSCA ALUMNUS 2019 UPPER IOWA UNIVERSITY & UNITED STATES ARMY MAJOR: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Upon completion of his basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Andres was stationed in Fort Riley, Kansas. His current title in the army is Information Technology Specialist and his main task is to provide and maintain communication. He shares that "living in Kansas is eye-opening, everything is flat for miles and you can't see any mountain or hills in the distance. Also, if you want to go somewhere you need to drive for a while and it's hard to find good Mexican food, but I love seeing different parts of the country. I never thought I wanted to leave LA because I assumed that everything I needed was there. Wrong. There's so much more out there and I want to see it with my own eye." Andres finds it interesting meeting new people from various parts of the country, hearing different accents, and experiencing diverse cultures. It's one of the many things he enjoys about the military. In Andres's own words "it's made me a stronger person and I'm also not scared to meet different people."

Although Kansas is quite different from Los Angeles, he appreciates the brotherhood and the independence the army provides. Andres asserts "a common misconception that people have about the military is that they believe if you enlist, you're automatically going to war. There's that risk but there are numerous jobs and different opportunities one can do in the service. Medical, technology, combat, and more." Overall, he's had a pleasant experience in the military and encourages any current Bright Star students who are interested or have any questions about the military to reach out to him for guidance or assistance. While he has several more years to serve in the Army, he is already planning and investing in his future by simultaneously enrolling in college at Upper Iowa University where he plans to earn his Bachelor of Science in Information Technology. He is interested in cyber security and all things technology, careers that are in high-demand in today's economy, especially in light of the pandemic we are in.

### DENILSON SERRANO-CHAVEZ

#### BSSCA ALUMNUS 2018 UNITED STATES ARMY

Most of us remember Denilson Serrano-Chavez as a quiet and respectful student while teachers and staff remember him as a delight to have in class. Some remember him working out at Mr. Escobar's beloved Metcon fitness class after school at the old 98th campus near LAX. He still exercises and stays in shape and is just as thoughtful but now he serves as a Calvary Scout for the United States Army. As a Calvary Scout, he works on the M2 Bradley, an American infantry fighting vehicle, and is the eye and ears of the Army. Just recently, he returned from his deployment where he served ten months in South Korea. His first few months living abroad were a bit challenging due to COVID-19 pandemic and certain restrictions. However, his experience living in South Korea was incredible. Denilson was able to experience a new culture through the people he met, the delicious food he consumed, and traveling throughout different parts of Korea. "One of the many benefits of being in the Army is being able to travel the world. I never imagined myself eating sushi or beef bulgogi in South Korea. I also never pictured myself being in a 17 hour time zone different than my family."



Calvary Scout Serrano-Chavez, second from the left, enjoying the outdoors and clean air while hiking in the mountains of South Korea with friends.

He also values the camaraderie with his fellow soldiers. Denilson recently took up fishing and hunting, activities that are popular and common in Kansas. As before, he continues to stay fit and strong, a requirement for anyone in the military. In the near future, Denilson plans to enroll in college to continue his education but for right now, he is content with serving in the United States Army.

For Alumni who choose the military as their pathway, if you enlist after high school graduation, you will still have access to support from the ASCS program for 2 more years once your 4 year service commitment is done, as the ASCS program provides up to 6 years of support with college and career guidance.

## VAHS CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY KYLE PETRIE

KPETRIE@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

### IRENE OLIVEROS

VAHS ALUMNAE CLASS OF 2017  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE  
MAJOR: ENVIRONMENTAL & OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH



Irene Oliveros was a member of Valor's founding class dating all the way back to her middle school years! A self-described introvert, she says that her transition to CSUN has been an amazing experience.

Even though her freshman classes often had an upwards of 100 people, she found the experience of being on her own a very liberating one. From her first day in college, Irene has been an Environmental and Occupational Health Major; one of the few among her peers who stuck with her original choice. She acknowledges that while she originally chose the major because it fulfilled her requirements for medical school, she has since become passionate about the physical environment and is looking forward to pursuing a career in the field.

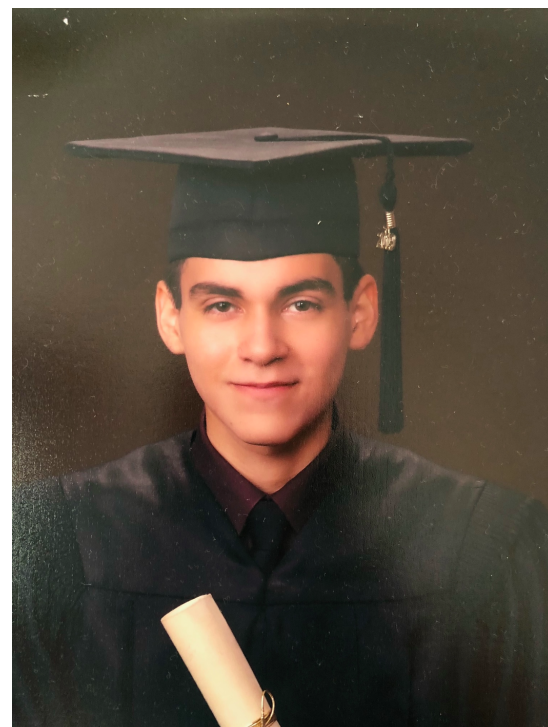
One of the many things for which Irene is grateful were the opportunities she had to present as a Valor student. She says, "Presentations that seemed *unnecessarily long* at the time have really helped me feel comfortable as a STEM major in college." If Irene were able to talk to herself from four years ago as a senior she would give the advice of not taking everything too seriously and enjoying the moments as they come. Irene is on track to graduate with her Bachelor's Degree within the calendar year 2021.

VAHS ALUMNUS CLASS OF 2019  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE  
MAJOR: COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

### MIKEL NUILA

One of the friendliest faces to ever walk the campus of Valor Academy, Mikel Nuila has kept smiling into his sophomore year at California State Northridge. He is currently a Computer Science and Engineering major which means he is learning how to work on both software (coding) and hardware (physical machines) in his career path. Mikel is not only a VAHS alumnus but also an alumnus of Valor Academy Middle School, so CSUN presented a new opportunity to expand his social circle. One hardship that Mikel acknowledges was the transition to virtual learning during the spring semester of his freshman year when the pandemic shut down in-person learning. Ever the eternal optimist, he rose to the challenge by taking these changes in stride and earning a *higher* grade point average (GPA) in the spring than he did in the fall!

Mikel specifically recognizes the help of Ms. Stern (Government/Economics) and Mr. Aguilar (Music) in his development as a learner and thinker. He attributes his strong work-ethic and creativity to the values he internalized in their classes which has contributed to his success in college. If he could give current seniors a piece of advice it is to work hard so that when you graduate you can pursue a career of your choosing and set a path toward a comfortable and happy life.



## RKHS CLASS OF 2020

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

SCALDERON@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

### KAREN CALDERON

**RKHS ALUMNA CLASS OF 2020**  
**LOS ANGELES CITY COLLEGE; EXPECTED GRAD 2024**  
**MAJOR: ANIMAL SCIENCE**

Karen is a first year Animal Science major at Los Angeles City College. She has been enjoying her classes thus far and is preparing for her very first college level final exams in a few weeks. Although she is a bit nervous about taking her first finals, she is excited because she has worked diligently all semester to ensure she is prepared. Karen has been an active college student all semester long by participating in workshops, EOPS, and studying hard for her classes. She was even awarded several scholarships prior to starting college at LACC due to her amazing success during her time at RKHS.



Karen plans to transfer from LACC to UC Davis where she will pursue a Bachelor's degree in Animal/Veterinary science. She also hopes to have the opportunity to intern or work with veterinarians during college so she can prepare for veterinary school. She has done lots of research about the process to become a veterinarian and is excited to continue networking and finding opportunities now and in the future that will help her achieve her goals. Keep up the great work, Karen!

# 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.