



ALUMNI NEWS

ALUMNI SUPPORT & COLLEGE SUCCESS PROGRAM

BY GENOVEVA CORTES

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BSSCA CLASS OF 2012-2016

AMBER AGUILAR

When Amber started “The Mount” as a Freshman 4 years ago, she was uncertain about her career goals but after a year, she decided to pursue a career as an elementary school teacher. Now that she has graduated, she is gaining relevant experience for her future career by working with children who are on the spectrum as a Behavioral Interventionist. What she loves most about her job is the progress she sees in working with her clients. She is working with a non-verbal young boy who also struggles to understand verbal commands. She practiced with him to turn around which was a huge step because he wasn't able to do that before. “Since I had an IEP in high school and middle school, I understand the difficulty of grasping information and being different. Seeing that I'm making a difference in these children's lives is what I love. I know a lot of these kids don't have people or the resources to support them. Being part of that is amazing.”



BSSCA ALUMNA 2016
MT. SAINT MARY'S ALUMNA 2020
MAJOR: CHILD DEVELOPMENT
MINOR: SOCIOLOGY



At Mt. Saint Mary's, Amber thrived and found that everyone was exceedingly friendly and welcoming. In addition to focusing on her studies and maintaining her high GPA, she'd meet her friends in the cafeteria of her small campus, exercise at the gym, and worked part-time at the Child Development Center. During Amber's Junior year of college, she had the opportunity to visit Sweden, Norway, and Denmark through her class in social work. She went for almost 2 weeks to learn why they are ranked the happiest countries in the world. Amber investigated their social and economic policies that influence their educational system, health care system, and other socialized benefits. She was shocked to notice there was “no graffiti anywhere, no trash, no homelessness, and I didn't see any people that looked like they were suffering or in poverty. Everyone bikes or walks to places, which shows just how active everyone is. There was so much nature and beautiful architecture.” She also explored various museums, ate at many restaurants, went on tours of the country, and just explored on her own with some new friends she made aboard.

While she is enjoying working, her goals are to return to school in two years to earn her Master's in Business Administration and one day open up her own Child Development Center. She advises incoming students to join clubs and “don't hesitate to make new friends” When you're starting out in college, “you're figuring out who you want to surround yourself with, whether they are a positive or negative influence on you.” She also recommends to “explore your new campus, make an effort to know your professors by going to office hours, ask lots of questions in class, don't be shy or think your questions are stupid because you might think you are saying the wrong thing.” This high-achieving and ambitious young lady never assumed for a second that anything would be handed to her which was why she was proactive in reaching out to people who could help her and utilized as many resources as she could to succeed. She finished strong her final semester at Mt. Saint Mary's, earning a 3.9, her highest GPA ever. It's only a matter of time before Amber finishes graduate school with her MBA and becomes the Founder, Director, and CEO of her own company.

BSSCA CLASS OF 2017-2020

BY MIKE CARRERA

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MARIA CARRILLO

BSSCA ALUMNA 2017
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES ALUMNA 2021
MAJOR: HISTORY

"First Generation College Latinas Graduate." It has a nice ring to it, Maria Carrillo and Paulina Somosa will be graduating this month from college. Although they graduated from BSSCA 4 years ago, they've established a new family tradition for their younger sisters to follow. While they are the first in their families to graduate from a university, they certainly won't be the last. Maria's younger sister Carol, a current BSSCA senior, will be attending UC Santa Cruz in the Fall. Paulina's younger sister Gina, also a BSSCA senior, will be attending Cal State LA. In addition, they also has another sister, Maria Somoza, who is a current freshman at UC Riverside. They've not only paved the way for themselves but have shown their younger sisters the pathway to higher education.

Maria Carrillo will be graduating from UCLA with a Bachelors's in History. She plans to take a gap year after graduation and apply for graduate school in a few months. She hopes to one day be a school counselor or a teacher but isn't sure at the moment and will take this year to figure that out. I asked Maria, what has been the hardest part of being a college student. "The hardest part of being a student for me is time-management because I've also worked these past 4-years. I had to juggle work and school, there were days that I had class in the morning and I went straight to work after. Many sleepless nights because I had to study or finish an assignment." Maria is currently a supervisor at Starbucks and has managed to excel academically and grow within the company. Balancing work and school hasn't been the easiest at times but she's made it work these past 4 years. It's a real testament to her character as she continues to push her limits to reach her goals and be a role model for her sister and others.



BSSCA ALUMNA 2017
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA 2021
MAJOR: ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE
MINOR: SPATIAL STUDIES

PAULINA SOMOSA



Paulina Somosa will be graduating from UC Santa Barbara with a Bachelors degree in Environmental Science and a minor in Spatial Studies. Earlier this year she was accepted into graduate school at UC Irvine and will be starting her Master's program in Urban and Regional Planning. She plans to one day run a building firm. Paulina has lived in Santa Barbara for the past 4 years and she's enjoyed every minute of it. She participated in various clubs and held multiple jobs throughout her time at UCSB. She initially started as a Biology major but ended up changing her major after her first quarter. She took an environmental science class that a friend recommended and was hooked. While she's been a mentor to her younger siblings all her life, she also had the opportunity to get a paid position at UCSB, mentoring freshmen students who struggled with the college transition. I asked Paulina what would be some advice she would give BSSCA seniors. She replied "I would say, school is going to be exciting and can also be overwhelming. You should always remind yourself about your priorities. Always practice self-care and find a balance between school and life. Lastly, don't be scared of rejection, there will be a time when you second guess yourself but the worst thing that could happen is a simple no."

VAHS CLASSES OF 2017-2020

BY KYLE PETRIE

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XOCHITL CANDELARIO

VAHS ALUMNA 2017

CALIFORNIA LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY ALUMNA, MAY 2021

MAJOR: POLITICAL SCIENCE



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

Perseverance. I had the pressure to be the first in my family to graduate all the while adjusting to a new environment - it took a toll on me. However, I continued to push through the struggles and didn't stop until I made it to graduation.

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

Teaching real life financial situations: filing taxes, taking out loans, & explaining credit scores would have been a big help. It's so easy to make a mistake without knowing it, that could have been a big help. Politics and current events are other key issues that really impact students' lives. It's really important that students know more about the world they're getting into after Valor.

What did you enjoy most about your experience at CLU?

Personal connections with my professors. Dr. Huang was my in-class professor, our department chair, and my faculty advisor. She was my campus mom! She takes her work very seriously and I am beyond grateful for her guidance and motivation. While her lectures were very challenging, they were also mind-opening. She definitely made a strong impact on my CLU experience and my future career.

How did your world perspective change as a result of your time at Cal Lutheran?

College is about life lessons: I learned to be independent, grateful, and determined. In college no one is after you to meet deadlines; you have to do it on your own. I also learned how to be more grateful ~ especially for my parents and their sacrifices. They were my biggest cheerleaders and deserve to be to be appreciated. Lastly, I learned determination. College definitely stressed me out, but it taught me that perseverance will go a long way.

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

As it stands now I have three plans and/or goals:

1. Apply to graduate school and enroll at either Cal Lutheran, a Cal State, or UC in a Public Policy Master's program. I would like to do this to make a direct impact in education, immigration, or international affairs. There is a lot of work to be done in these fields.
2. Attend law school or a doctoral program in order to get a degree in immigration or public policy. I would like to change many of the policies that I have studied in undergraduate school that are hindering people of color from being successful.
3. Work, work, and more work - because my loan debt will be *too high* considering all the time and effort I have spent attaining my degree at a private university.

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

- Value your parents. They did all that they could to ensure that you had your basic needs meet, and they prioritized your education.
- Never settle; always go after what you want!
- Be happy, be kind, and learn how to love yourself.

RKHS CLASS OF 2020

BY STEPHANIE CALDERON

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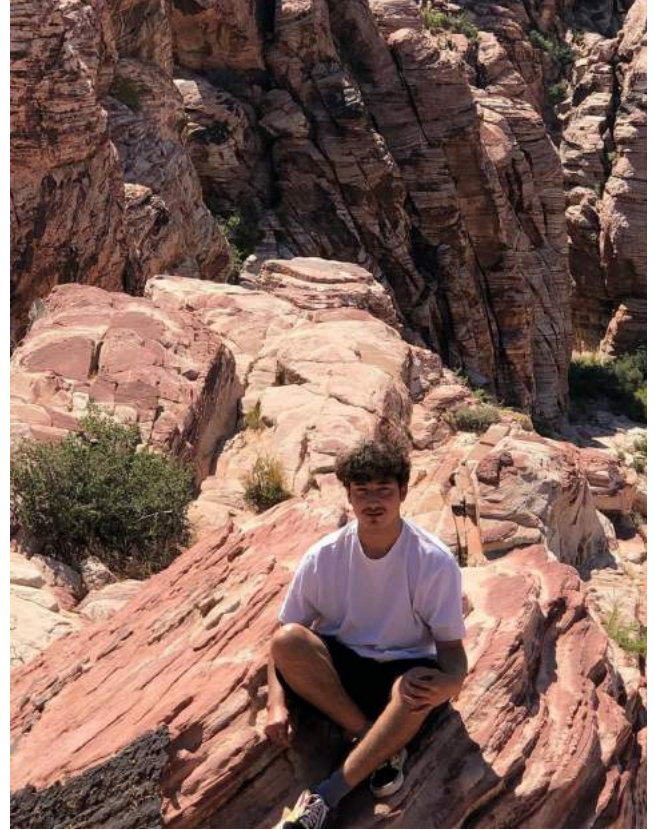
NESTOR CANCINOS

RKHS ALUMNUS 2020
CURRENTLY EXPLORING HIS CAREER PATHWAY

Nestor was one of the founding students from RKHS and decided to take a gap year during the pandemic because he felt that in person instruction was going to be the most conducive to his learning style and success in college. Throughout his gap year, Nestor worked on preparing to re-enter school and explored different career options he was interested in. Nestor says taking his time to make these decisions have been really helpful especially with so much uncertainty with school reopening and the ongoing pandemic. Now he is looking forward to working and finding a job that fulfills him.

"Now that I have taken some time off from school and been able to reflect on what I truly want, I decided to work full time and find what inspires me. I feel there was so much pressure and sometimes you just have to take a step back and do what you need to do in a place that makes you happy. Right now, the thought of school is too stressful so I'm going to work and then once I'm ready, I'll go back to school."

I am most looking forward to being able to hang out with friends and family after being at home for so long. It gets frustrating to not be able to do some of the fun stuff I would normally do, so hopefully this summer will be more fun than the last one. I'm looking forward to be able to travel again and go on road trips with my family this summer, and hopefully interview and land a job that makes me happy.



My biggest advice to Seniors is to take your time, don't feel rushed to have everything figured out when you walk the stage. For some people it takes a little bit longer and that's ok. You will have support no matter what decision you make (for up to 6 years from the ASCS Program).

- Do what makes you happy
- Take advantage of all the resources you have (like your ASCS Coordinator)
- Don't be afraid to do something different than your classmates or friends
- Don't be scared to ask for help.
- Make sure you have a resume no matter what! It will be so helpful once you graduate, even if its a rough draft.

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 7 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.