



ALUMNI PORTRAITS OF PERSISTENCE

RKHS CLASS OF 2020-2023

BY KIMBERLY ARTEAGA

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GEOVANY SOSA-JUAREZ



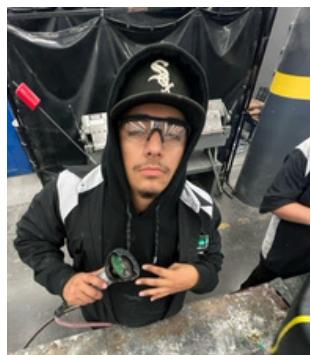
A college education looks different for everyone and there are thousands of pathways to choose from. College doesn't just mean the typical in-classroom learning but can also include hands-on experience and training. A CTE (Career Technical Education) program is able to provide you with both academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training to succeed in short-term careers, many of which lead to high paying jobs.

Geovany Sosa-Juarez is a current freshman at Los Angeles Trade-Technical College and is studying Automotive Repair and Related Technology. This program allows students to gain the skills necessary to maintain and repair cars, diagnose electrical issues, fix fuel injection systems, and overhaul procedures, as well as basic shop practices. The certificate program is approximately 2 years long and the best part of all is the program is free if you qualify for financial aid. Geo has been thriving and learning a lot through this experience. He has made a lot of new friends, connections, and memories. It's hard work but as Geo reflects, "Overall it's been going uphill for me but I have been able to keep up with my academic and social life."

Geo decided to embark on an automotive pathway because it was a family tradition. He grew up watching his father work on cars and he too wanted to learn, starting at an early age. He was always around cool cars and it caught his attention, and the louder the better! "I wanted to fall into the family tree and keep it going. More importantly, follow in my dad's footsteps. I really like cars, learning the in's and out's about them. I also flipped cars at some point and had fun doing it. I learned how to upgrade certain parts, how to modify them, and to use the horsepower and dino the cars, seeing if certain parts increase horsepower or downgrade power."



His classes have been really rewarding and he has had a lot of cool experiences. One of the automotive classes he looks forward to the most is autobody painting because it's soothing and peaceful. However, in this program you need to be dedicated and disciplined because classes start as early as 7:00 am. It is so worth it if cars are something you are interested in. For any alums interested in a career working on cars, Geo's advice is to "just go for it, what's the worst that can happen?" He feels really proud of his progress in the program and changed old bad habits he once had in high school. Although he was not involved at RKHS, he is reinventing himself at LATTC by being really involved in this program. It is not always easy for anyone to transition from high school to college but Geovany is doing great! We are all really proud of you Geo and hope you'll invite us to your graduation!



COMMUNITY COLLEGE & CTE SHCA & VAHS CLASS OF 2018-2023

THE MANY PATHWAYS TO NURSING

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been an ever-growing need for healthcare workers. According to economist Dr. William Wu of UCLA Anderson, in Los Angeles the largest job sector is healthcare and social services, making up 15-16% of the job share in 2019 and jumping to 17-18% post-pandemic. Oddly enough, this sector also harbors high percentages of vacancy rates especially when it comes to nursing. Hospitals across the city are seeing nursing vacancy numbers upwards of 30% compared to 6% before the pandemic ([CalMatters](#)). Despite the discrepancies, they both point to the fact that nursing is still a highly sought out and promising career to pursue.

There are various levels of nursing that one can pursue, including Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), Licensed Practical or Vocational Nurse (LPN/LVN), Registered Nurse (RN), Nurse Practitioner (NP), and Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN). One can also receive an Associate's Degree of Nursing (ADN), Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN), Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), and a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Each certification or level of education makes a student qualified to conduct a different aspect of nursing. As an example, in order to be a midwife, nurse practitioner, or nurse anesthetist, one must receive their masters. The higher one goes in their nursing education, the more money one makes. However, California is one of the highest paying states for nursing, with RNs making an average wage between \$87,990 and \$133,340.

Let's meet one of those RNs: Ebony Adagun, recent El Camino nursing graduate and older sister to your very own Community College and CTE ASCS Coordinator. Ebony took a rather "unconventional" path toward nursing and decided to apply to nursing programs, within the midst of a pandemic and 10 years after receiving a BA in Biology from CSULA. When asked why she decided to go into nursing, she states "I was in a rut. Being a single mother and working in a job that did not pay a livable wage were my catalysts. It also didn't hurt that I've always been a science nerd and loved helping people, so nursing just made sense." Ebony also shared that a common misconception individuals have is you **MUST** have a bachelor's degree to pursue nursing. That is not the case. An ADN still qualifies a student for the NCLEX, the state examination nursing students must pass to become a RN, and pursuing nursing at a community college comes with financial advantages like free tuition, EOPS (*if eligible*), and scholarships.

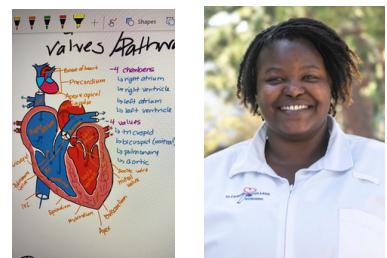
Surviving nursing school is easier said than done. Ebony did allude to this when she shared that the rigor of her pre-requisites and nursing classes were "a lot." She states, "It's more about the amount of studying you have to do. It's very fast-paced and a lot of your classes are only 8-weeks long. And you must pass with at least a 75%. So it can be very stressful." To overcome the challenges, Ebony relied heavily on her classmates, utilizing study groups, as well as her professors and health professionals around her to ask for study tips/tricks and nursing specialty questions. When it came time to prepare for the NCLEX after graduation, [UWorld](#) and [ATI Testing](#) practice exams were also Ebony's go-to resources. Thousands of practice questions and hundreds of explanations later, Ebony successfully passed the NCLEX!

When looking for nursing jobs, Ebony mainly prioritized county hospitals because of their new grad residency programs. According to the Los Angeles Community Hospital, this cohort-based, full-time opportunity provides newly licensed RNs who have less than one year of professional experience with comprehensive departmental training and intensive clinical practice to "effectively close the academic-to-practice gap." It's the perfect space to be in for a new graduate who may be looking for more guidance and care when starting their professional journey in nursing.

Ebony now works as a perinatal RN at Harbor UCLA Medical Center, where she is trained in both labor and delivery and postpartum! While she loves seeing babies born, supporting mothers, and stepping into the operating room to support, Ebony describes how her nursing job is one where she's constantly learning. "There's always new policies, new procedures, new recommendations from whatever council/group. No matter if you're a nurse, resident, or attending, everyone is learning something new at some point." That's what makes being a nurse so exciting for her.

Through all of the highlights and challenges that come with nursing, Ebony remained determined, put in the hard work, and reached her goal. It's one of the very many reasons why I'm so proud. For anyone who is interested in pursuing nursing, Ebony offers two pieces of advice: 1) "Do your best and if you need help, get help. Whether it be going to the tutoring center, watching YouTube videos, or asking for support in your personal life." And 2) "Don't rush! You'll be happy at 23 or 33 when you become a nurse! It'll pay off no matter what!"

**AN INTERVIEW WITH EBONY ADAGUN, RN
EL CAMINO COLLEGE
ASSOCIATES DEGREE IN NURSING (2022)**



SHCS CLASS OF 2018-2023

DAYANA LLAMAS MENDEZ

At first, Dayana loved UC Merced. Coming from a large city, she liked the campus and enjoyed the change to a small, rural town. She is an only child, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity to get away from home. Being the first in her family to go to college, she was excited to embark on her journey. It came with challenges as does anything new. Dayana had to learn to take care of her health, make her own choices, and above all, learn how to advocate for herself. Not only did she feel that college pushed her into adulthood and maturity but it also made her face the challenges that came with adulting.

One of the least expected challenges was the pandemic. She was having a hard time, as was everyone else, as everything changed overnight and she had to adapt to a whole new world of learning. She went for help at the UC Merced Academic Services Center and was offered a chance to take a break for the year by her advisor. Respectfully, Dayana declined. She knew that first-gen students who take a year off before going to college or while they are in college, have lower chances of returning to college. Dayana didn't want that for herself. She had firsthand experience from her family members and community that took a break, and never returned to college. She decided to keep going and finish.

Dayana says, "*There will always be obstacles in life that can deter you from your goals*". At some point in her college journey, Dayana realized that Merced wasn't for her. She wishes she had chosen another institution that was a better fit for her academically and had been established a lot longer. Despite these challenges, she found and created her own silver-linings that kept her at UCM and helped her become a leader on campus. She quickly learned to advocate for herself and wants other first-gen college students to know, *"Just because you may not have affluent parents who went to college, your voice matters. You have just as much a right as other students to speak up and advocate for yourself and others. Go and talk to financial aid, and if you don't get help from one person, then you find help from another. You have to be persistent, otherwise, time will go on and your matter may not be resolved within time"*.

One of Dayana's many successes is she was the very first freshman to be the president of a club on campus, where she helped homeless populations at Merced. Her second success, as a History major, is she won a grant to travel to Mexico City to do archival work. Her third opportunity was for a leadership conference in Chicago. She found the conference on her school's Instagram page and applied for it then and there. It was a conference that was not open for the public! She figured that if she took the chance to apply, the worst thing they would say is no, and thankfully, they said yes! She had a blast in Chicago and can see herself living there one day. Her trip to Chicago sparked an idea, to build a law clinic at UC Merced for students on campus who need legal help. She desires to go to grad school in Chicago and witness snow again!

Dayana has learned that the campus you choose will be your home for the next four years. She says, "Do your due diligence of reaching out to the staff and faculty of the campuses you're interested in and researching what resources, opportunities, and connections they have. Don't be afraid to reach out. If they are warm and welcoming or don't answer you, that will let you know what they are like. Heck! Even Barack Obama was told no. If it takes 9 no's to get 1, yes, so be it. You get to fall, as long as you pick yourself up. I used to be so hard on myself, but learned that I had to be easy on myself and give myself grace".

Dayana wants other alums to take their education into their hands, and make of it what they want. *"Go be the first. Go make history!"*

**SHCA ALUMNA 2022
UC MERCED
MAJOR: HISTORY**



BY KYLE PETRIE

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VAHS CLASS OF 2018-2023

JOSE ESCOBAR

VAHS ALUMNUS 2022
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
MAJOR: MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
PROJECTED GRADUATION: JUNE 2026

Since his time at Valor, Jose Escobar has excelled in all facets of his work. He graduated from Valor ranked third in a class of over 100 students, and during his first year at CSUN his academic excellence has continued. He is a member of the Extended Opportunity Program (EOP) and is also declared as a Mechanical Engineering major. He credits the habits that he built while at Valor with his continued success: "...at Valor I learned to always seek help and connect with our teachers and professors. Students were always encouraged to go to office hours whether it was to ask questions or form connections. Doing so allowed me to be successful throughout high school, and allowed me to continue this success in my first year of college." EOP is a great extension of the small school feel that is cultivated at Valor. It's a program that is designed specifically for first-generation students of color, and has the explicit goal of increasing their college completion rates. In Jose's words: "I can't imagine what my experience would be like without EOP. I really enjoyed summer bridge because I got to meet many people and make new friends, which I still talk to to this day." **At all Bright Star schools we strongly encourage all of our eligible students to apply to EOP.**



In addition to his participation in EOP, Jose cites CSUN's large campus with many work spaces as one of the major factors in his success. Like many Bright Star Students who are native to the San Fernando Valley, in high school he had not had the opportunity to explore the campus very much before he arrived. So when he showed up to school in the fall of 2022, the resources Jose found were a welcome surprise. "One thing that surprised me about CSUN is the amount of spaces it provides to do your work. Personally, I live in a small home, so I don't really have a place where I can do work in silence or without distractions. However, when I am on campus, there are many areas dedicated to providing a productive environment, and this has really helped me do my work and study with complete focus."

In the future Jose would like to finish his degree and pursue a career in Mechanical Design Engineering. He said that he has had some limited experience in Computer Aided Design (CAD) software and that he finds it very interesting and rewarding. Jose's advice to the current seniors is to take advantage of their experiences now, and to be ready to expand their horizons after graduation. As he says, "It doesn't matter what it is you are interested in, there will always be people that share your interests on campus. This is why networking is really important, because all it takes is one conversation to bring you the opportunity of your lifetime."



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 2018-2023, we will be there to help you navigate, thrive, and succeed in graduating from higher education.



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.

VAHS ASCS COORDINATOR
SUPPORTING CLASS OF 2018-2023
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KIMBERLY ARTEAGA

BA, UC SAN DIEGO

Kimberly Arteaga received her B.A. in Human Development and minor in Chicana/o studies from UC San Diego. She was born and raised in LA and the first one in her family to go to college and graduate. She has been supporting students in higher education, college access and retention programs for over 7 years. Part of her passion for working with students comes from her own-lived experiences. Through her multiple roles she has supported and guided high school and college students attaining a higher education and beyond. She has also worked with community members and parents in supporting students achieving their hopes and dreams. Kimberly is excited to continue working with students in her current role as the RKHS Alumni Support and College Success Coordinator.

RKHS ASCS COORDINATOR
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IDERA ADAGUN

BA, BARNARD COLLEGE
MPA UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (UW)

Idera is a proud Angelino and Nigerian-American! She's worked in college access and success for the past six years, having served as a Lead Success Coach, Assistant Director of a college transitional summer program, College Counselor, and College Success Director. Her passion for postsecondary success stems from being involved in education nonprofits and growing up with a mother who completed college and a father who emigrated from Nigeria with only a HS education. They all provided diverse academic and socio-economic narratives that followed her through HS, Barnard College, where she earned her BA in Political Science with a minor in Africana Studies, and eventually an MPA program at the UW. As the new ASCS Coordinator for SHCA & VAHS community college and CTE alumni, Idera hopes to help alumni reach their full potential, complete postsecondary programs, and enter into careers no matter the circumstances or challenges stacked against them.

SHCA & VAHS ASCS COORDINATOR
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ELIZABETH ROJAS

BA, COLLEGE OF SAINT BENEDICT AND SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Originally born and raised in South Central Los Angeles, Elizabeth, a first-generation college graduate obtained her bachelor's degree in Hispanic Studies and Communications from the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University in St. Joseph, Minnesota. She also studied abroad in Guatemala where she was able to connect to her roots through food and poetry. Elizabeth has served as a college coach, mentor, and college counselor at public and parochial schools in Minnesota, working with first-generation and low-income college students. She is thankful and grateful for the countless mentors she had along her journey. She looks to pay it forward to under-resourced and historically excluded communities, to ensure they have access to information, resources, and higher education.

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GENOVEVA CORTES

BA, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
M.ED. HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Genoveva 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 ALL CLASSES WITH THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS
CGORTES@BRIGHTSTARSCHOOLS.ORG

