BERKELEY COMMUNITY SCHOLARS

Support · Equity · Success

2025 IMPACT REPORT



30 new graduates. 116 scholars actively pursuing degrees. A 80% graduation rate. Behind these numbers is a common thread: a scholar who refused to give up, a mentor who showed up, a donor who believed, an advisor who was there for the entire journey, and a community that said "your success matters to all of us."

Every scholar's journey begins with a single thread—one that connects determination, opportunity, and community. When woven together, these threads form something extraordinary: a tapestry of possibility. This year's impact report theme, *A Common Thread*, celebrates the connections that run through Berkeley Community Scholars—between students and mentors, alumni and board members, and all of you who are committed to educational justice.

Seventeen years ago, community members recognized that too many Berkeley students—especially those who were first in their families to attend college, underrepresented on campuses, and from the lowest economic quartile—were being systematically excluded from higher education despite living in one of the nation's most educated cities. Since then, BCS has walked alongside more than 453 scholars on their journey to a college degree, every step of the way. Through BCS, they join a growing network of alumni who lead, mentor, and thrive in their communities.

As we reflect on the 2024–2025 year, we invite you to consider how our work—and your partnership—continues to shape the fabric of this community:

- *What possibilities unfold when every student, regardless of income or circumstance, has a support system that believes in them?*
- *How do mentorship, scholarship, and connection change the trajectory not just of one life, but of a family and a city?*
- *What kind of community do we create when college education becomes a shared responsibility rather than a privilege?*

Each page of this report offers part of the answer. The need is urgent: In a city where nearly 80% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and over 90% have attended college, many Berkeley students face significant barriers to accessing and completing higher education.

The cost of earning a college degree continues to climb. Tuition and living expenses at California's public universities now range from $25,000 to over $45,000 per year, while federal and state aid covers barely a third of those costs. To bridge the gap, scholars often work 20 to 30 hours per week—hours that should be spent studying, building networks, and fully engaging in their education. Research shows that working more than 12 hours a week reduces students' ability to focus on academics and makes it less likely they will complete their degrees in a timely manner.

For first-generation college students from the lowest economic quartile, national data shows only 30% will graduate. But BCS scholars graduate at nearly three times that rate—80% within 4.5 years, whether they start at community college or a bachelor's degree institution. This isn't luck. Each diploma represents intentional partnership between scholars, staff, mentors, and supporters like you.

This success comes from our four-tier approach: college success advising, community volunteer mentoring, career readiness programming, and scholarships. This combination of funding, one-on-one advising, mentorship, and emergency resources, including mental health assistance, creates a tapestry of support that enables lasting change. We're working to significantly increase scholarship support as college costs have doubled since the start of our program!

Throughout this report, you'll see how those threads come together: how a mentor's guidance sparks confidence, how emergency funds fill critical gaps, and how scholars' determination transforms barriers into achievement.

Every scholar adds a new thread to this collective tapestry, and every supporter strengthens the weave. Together, we are building something lasting: a community committed to educational equity and the success of its young people.

With gratitude and hope,



Gwyneth Galbraith
President



Sherry A. Smith
Executive Director

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RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT

Racial Equity Statement. BCS commits to advocating for racial equity, cultivating belonging, and dismantling the white supremacy inherent in the structures in which we operate. By centering racial equity and inclusion in our mission, we actively work to dismantle racist structures, attitudes, behaviors, and biases that harm our scholars and community.

OUR VALUES

Community. We are a caring and generous community built on inclusion and belonging. We respect diverse heritages and experiences, and share the joy and responsibility of supporting our youth's success.

Equity. Our scholars deserve access to the knowledge, networks, and resources that empower them to define their own pathways. We engage the community—and our students—to create programs that are inclusive, effective, and relevant.

Education. A college education is a powerful force and opens doors to opportunity, success, security, and joy.

OUR STORY

Weaving a Community of Support Since 2008

In 2008, concerned Berkeley community members recognized a troubling reality: while their city celebrated educational achievement, too many local students—particularly those from marginalized racial and economic backgrounds—were being left behind on the path to college. They came together with a shared commitment: every Berkeley student deserves the support to earn their degree. Berkeley Community Scholars (BCS) was born from that vision.

Seventeen years later, BCS has served 453 Berkeley scholars, each one connected by a common thread: they are the first in their families to pursue a college degree, come from households in the lowest economic quartile, and identify with groups historically underrepresented in higher education. When students are accepted into BCS, they gain more than scholarships—they become part of an intergenerational network where former scholars become mentors, and mentors become lifelong champions.

OUR MISSION

Berkeley Community Scholars empower Berkeley youth who face racial, economic, and other barriers to achieving their college dreams by providing a unique experience of scholarships, advising, mentoring, and a community of support.

OUR VISION

We believe that all Berkeley youth deserve the opportunity to achieve a future of success, security, and joy, and the support of a community that believes in them every step of the way. We work for racial and social equity so that our college-bound scholars—who embody the spirit, diversity, and values of our community—can access the resources to realize their dreams and aspirations.



THE BCS WAY: THREADS THAT STRENGTHEN SUCCESS

For nearly two decades, Berkeley Community Scholars continues to refine its program model to support young people facing multiple barriers to earning a college degree. We've learned that beyond a student's determination and abilities, a strong support system is essential. Students with access to dedicated people and resources are far more likely to complete their degrees.

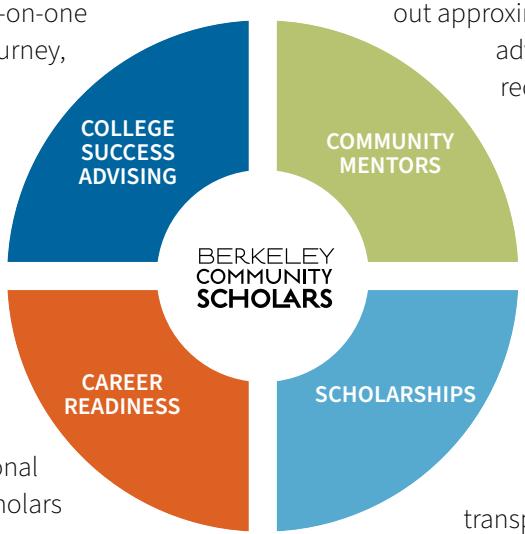
Our program weaves together four essential foundations, each one a thread that strengthens the others. This comprehensive framework acknowledges that college success requires more than good grades; it demands academic guidance, emotional support, professional preparation, and financial resources working in concert.

College Success Advising: Supporting scholars from acceptance to graduation

BCS advisors work alongside scholars to develop plans for financial aid and budgeting, selecting and registering for courses, and even dealing with the overwhelming first day of school. Our college advisors meet one-on-one with scholars throughout their college journey, building individualized plans to support academic growth, social and emotional well-being, financial literacy, and career readiness.

Community Volunteer Mentoring: Nearly 100 mentors create lasting connections

Scholars are matched with a community volunteer mentor during their time at BCS. Our diverse group of mentors—some of them BCS alumni themselves—reach out approximately once a month to lend an ear, offer advice, or provide encouragement. Mentors receive BCS training and participate in peer meetings, creating a cohesive support system that lasts two to four years.



Career Readiness: Preparing scholars for life after graduation

Partnering with *RepresentED*, we prepare scholars for their transition into professional life with an intensive series equipping scholars with essential skills:

- Job and career searching strategies
- Professional cover letter and resume writing
- Presentation and interview skills
- Confidence building and self-advocacy
- Professional networking and LinkedIn guidance
- Financial literacy for early career

Financial Scholarships: Removing financial barriers to success

BCS provides each scholar with $2,000 per term to cover educational expenses including tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, technology, transportation, and personal needs. Over their college career, scholars have access to $25,500 in support.

Three additional funds provide critical safety nets: **The Finish Line Fund** enables scholars to extend their college journey an extra term. **The Opportunity Fund** supports programs and activities that advance degree completion and career exploration. **The Emergency Fund** provides resources within 7-10 days to address unexpected financial crises.

A COMMON THREAD

What happens when one student receives support? At BCS, the answer is clear: they graduate, they give back, and they pass that support forward.

One such example really hits home. Bicky navigates college with guidance from her mentor Yilin—who once sat exactly where Bicky sits now. Yilin's mentor, Adena, also served on the BCS board of directors before becoming Berkeley's mayor. Three people. Three roles. One common thread.

This is the BCS model in action: a web of support where scholars become mentors, mentors become leaders, and leaders invest back into the community.



BICKY | CURRENT SCHOLAR
UC Merced '28

When Bicky discovered BCS at Berkeley High, she gained more than a scholarship—she found her support network. Now, as president of her college dance team, she's choreographing her first piece for nationals in Anaheim while pursuing a public health degree.

Last season, an injury sidelined Bicky from dance. The experience was frustrating, especially since dance made her college experience feel meaningful beyond academics. With her mentor's encouragement, Bicky used her recovery time to complete a CNA program, and that injury gave her unexpected insight. "I understood what it's like when patients can't move on their own," she says. The experience deepened her empathy for the people she'll one day care for.

At BCS, "I feel like I'm part of something bigger than myself," Bicky explains. "There's always someone to talk to, and I know I'm not alone. That sense of connection motivates me to keep going."

Her mentor, Yilin, understands exactly what Bicky is experiencing. As a former BCS scholar, Yilin knows the financial pressures, the academic challenges, and the weight of being first in your family to navigate college. When Bicky feels overwhelmed juggling her leadership responsibilities with her coursework, Yilin is there to help her prioritize and focus.

"The community makes the advice feel very real and personal. My mentor has been there herself."

That connection is everything, and helps keep Bicky moving forward, knowing that graduation is a destination she'll reach with her community beside her.



YILIN | BCS ALUMNA & MENTOR

Like many, Yilin's path through college wasn't linear. After starting at CSU, she left and went to Berkeley City College—a moment when many students can disappear from higher education entirely.

When Yilin met her mentor Adena, she was juggling family responsibilities, work, and uncertainty about what to do next. Adena became the steady voice she needed. "She would always tell me, 'You will figure it out,'" Yilin remembers. "At first, I thought she was just saying that. But every time she said it, I did figure it out."

That phrase became Yilin's anchor, transferring to and graduating from UC San Diego and into her career as a chemist. When Adena later encouraged her to become a mentor, Yilin hesitated. "I told her I wasn't ready. I'd just started working," she recalls. But Adena pushed back: scholars need mentors with recently lived experiences.

Now, mentoring Bicky, Yilin sees the truth in that.

"As a scholar, I felt supported. As a mentor, I realize the impact is mutual—I've learned so much from Bicky too. That's the beauty of BCS—it's about shared growth."

Berkeley's mayor knows firsthand the determination it takes to finish college when your path isn't straightforward. Adena left high school in tenth grade and spent seven years completing her undergraduate degree—two years at community college in Southern California, two more in the Bay Area, then three at UC Berkeley.

"Honestly, it's like a miracle that I finished school," she reflects. That experience shaped everything that came after.

Adena joined the BCS board of directors because she saw an organization that understood what students like her needed. She became a mentor because she wanted to stay close to scholars navigating the same challenges she'd faced. When Adena became a mentor, her first mentee was Yilin—and years later, when Yilin hesitated to mentor, Adena encouraged her to step up.

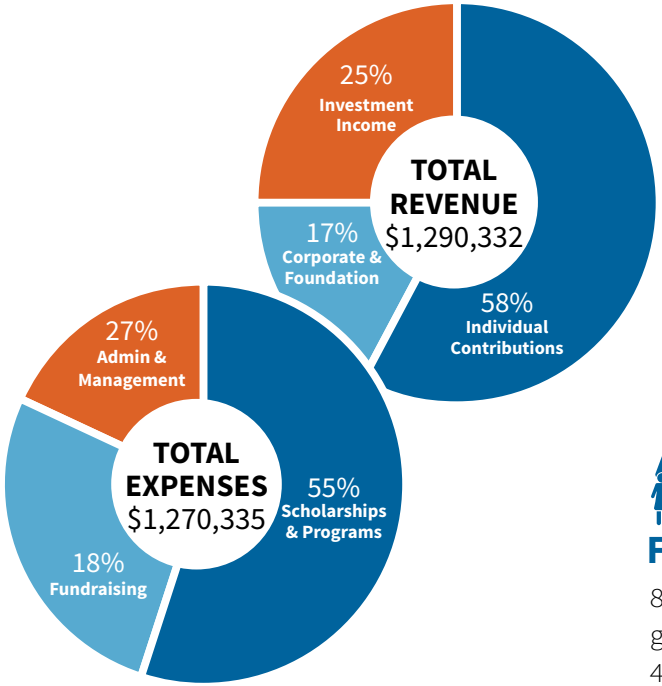
"The common thread here is that we are all investing in each other's success."

Now Adena carries that philosophy into civic leadership. "What I hope to continue in the city is exactly what I saw at BCS: a community where we invest in each other, where success isn't individual—it's collective."

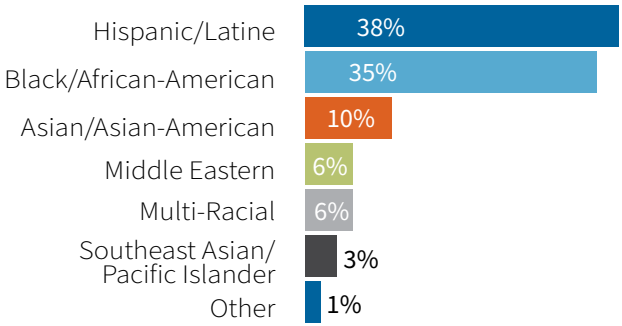


ADENA | FORMER BOARD MEMBER, CURRENT MENTOR & BERKELEY MAYOR

BY THE NUMBERS



Scholar Ethnicity



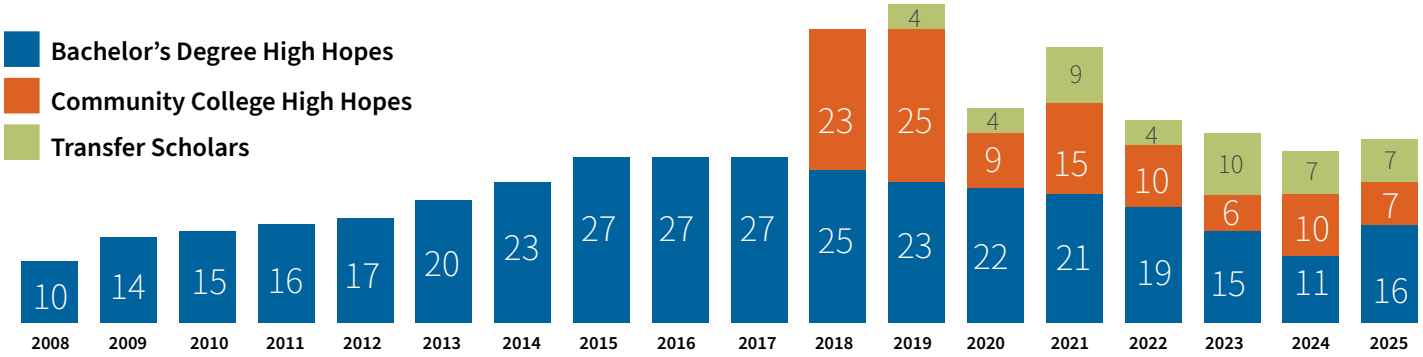
81%
First Generation

80%
Graduation Rate

81% of BCS scholars are the first generation in their families to go to college. 80% of BCS scholars have earned their degrees in 4.5 years compared to 30% of their national peers.

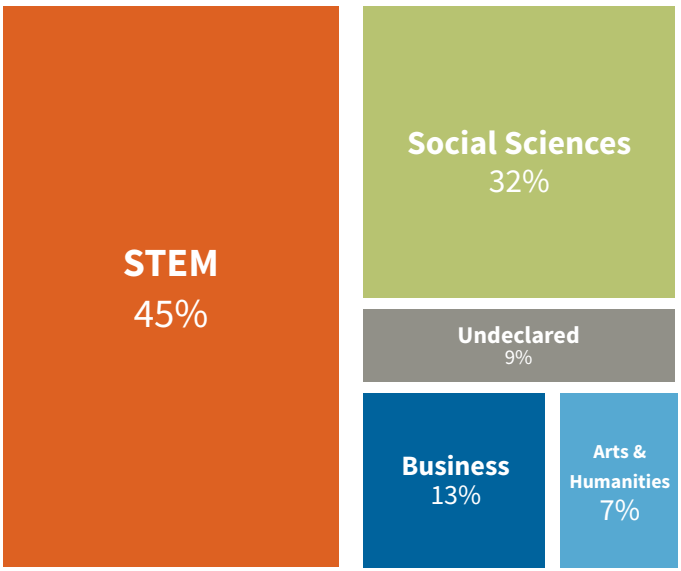
SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED, 2008-2025

The BCS college success program began in 2008 by supporting just **10** scholars. By the 2025 school year, the program has supported **453** scholars on their path to earning a bachelor's degree, attending both community colleges and bachelor's degree-awarding institutions.





College Majors



Colleges & Universities Attended

Barnard College
Berkeley City College
Cal Poly Humboldt
Chapman University
College of Marin
Community College of Philadelphia
CSU East Bay
CSU Fresno
CSU Long Beach
CSU Los Angeles
CSU Northridge
Diablo Valley College
Howard University
Johns Hopkins University
Laney College
Los Medanos
Samuel Merritt University
San Francisco State University
San Jose State University
Sonoma State University
Stanford University
Texas Southern University
UC Berkeley
UC Davis
UC Irvine
UC Los Angeles
UC Merced
UC Riverside
UC San Diego
UC Santa Barbara
UC Santa Cruz
University of Chicago
University of Denver
University of San Francisco
University of Southern California
Xavier University

IN GRATITUDE

We are grateful to everyone in the community who supported our scholars between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025, through mentoring, volunteering, or financial contributions.

Alejandra Alas
Sandy Alegria
Jose Alfaro
Lisa Aliferis & John Storella
Bridget Anderson
Angell Survivors Trust
Anonymous (4)
Rosemary Arca & John Germano
Ann Armstrong Guild Charitable Giving Fund
Juan Azuara
Linda & Mike Baker
Battle Family Foundation
Lila Beckford
Ina & Jon Bendich
Benevity Community Impact Fund
Berkeley Rotary
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Eric Bjerkholt
Karen & Warren Bird
Todd Boekelheide & Jen Bradwell
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Richard Gilbert
Hon. Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers
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Marti & David Grubb
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Marianne & Eric Haesloop
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Rashida Hanif
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Alexandra, CSU San Jose, Business Administration/ Marketing

Amira, CSU Sacramento, Exercise Science

Aqsa, UC Berkeley, Political Science

Ayush, UC Davis, Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior

Camila, UC Merced, Business Management Economics

Christian, CSU San Jose, Political Science

Ciara, CSU Sacramento, Psychology

Cindy, UC Berkeley, Psychology

Desiree, UC Merced, Cognitive Sciences

Emanuel, UC Davis, Computer Science and Engineering

Isabel, UC Riverside, Business Administration/ Marketing

Jennifer, CSU Sacramento, Health Science

Jeremy, CSU San Francisco, Business Administration

Jocelyn, UC Berkeley, Microbial Biology

Justin, UC Santa Cruz, Computer Engineering

Kelly, UC Santa Cruz, Global and Community Health

Maalena, CSU East Bay, Sociology

Mattiwos, UC Santa Cruz, Computer Engineering

Naeem, CSU San Francisco, Studio Art

Nia, CSU Sacramento, English

Nicole, UC Irvine, Criminology and Psychological Services

Randy, CSU San Francisco, Business Admin/Finance

Richard, CSU San Francisco, Biology

Roheen, CSU San Francisco, Studio Art

Shayla, UC Los Angeles, World Arts and Cultures

Shelsea, UC Davis, Design

Ty'Ler, Parsons School of Design, Photography

Yvette, University of Southern California, Health and Human Services

Zoe, Howard University, Finance