

BERKELEY COMMUNITY SCHOLARS

Support · Equity · Success

Dear BCS Community,

Since 2008, Berkeley Community Scholars has asked our scholars the same question: what makes a college degree possible?

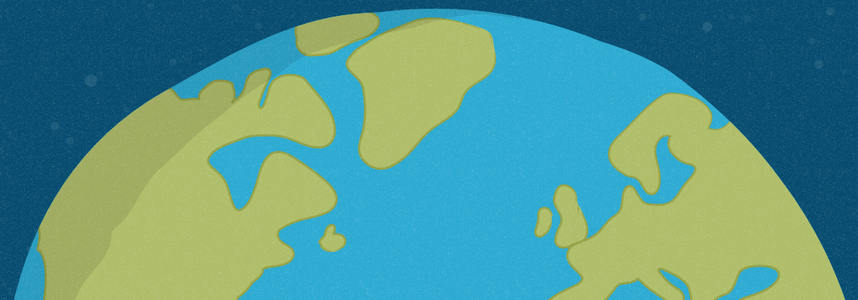
The answer to this question has changed over the years. We listened closely, and this year we made some of the most significant programmatic changes in BCS history. Some changes came quickly, and others took longer than expected. But every one of them began with what our scholars have been telling us.

We increased the general scholarship. Our scholarship grew from $16,000 to $24,000 per scholar, awarded over the duration of a scholar's time with us. The cost of college is much more than just tuition. Between housing, insurance, books, food, technology, and transportation, too many scholars were covering the gap by working long hours instead of studying. This was the first increase in the scholarship since its founding.

We formally launched the Opportunity Fund. The opportunities found at college open more than a classroom door. They lead to internships, certifications, research, and conferences, and those often come with costs. This fund covers those prospects with a short application.

We strengthened career readiness. A degree opens the door to a career, and scholars deserve support walking through it. Over the past year, we redesigned career readiness around three core principles: flexible learning through self-paced online modules, practice through one-on-one coaching and networking events, and connection with professionals in the community who can offer advice, introductions, and more.

We grew mentorship from one-to-one to a community. We created the BCS Community Network so scholars can build relationships with many mentors, including alumni, community leaders, and local employers, each with their own skills and connections. Now, scholars can reach out to people who fit where they are in their journey. It's the team every scholar needs along the way, and it stays with scholars long after graduation.



This was a lot to accomplish in one year, and it was worth it!

College doesn't just open doors — it opens entire worlds. In the pages ahead, you'll meet scholars exploring their worlds and see the range of support our small staff builds around them.

Our scholars do the work, and we are here to walk alongside them. Thank you for walking with us this year! You were part of all the changes you see in these pages.

With gratitude and hope,



Sherry A. Smith,
Executive Director



Gwyneth Galbraith,
Board President, 2022-2026

A Note from our Board President

As I step down after five years as Board President, I'm grateful and proud to be part of this extraordinary organization. In that time, BCS welcomed 120 scholars and celebrated 125 graduates, each one a young person whose path to and through college this community supported with great care.

I'm also deeply grateful to Executive Director Sherry Smith and the BCS team, whose devotion to scholars is the engine of BCS's success. With 10 new board members this past year and a new Board President and Executive Committee, this is an exciting moment of transition. I remain devoted to BCS's mission and to the impact we can achieve together.

With deep gratitude,
Gwyneth Galbraith,
Board President, 2022-2026

Everything a Degree Takes, in One Program

A degree takes more than tuition. It takes money for the gaps, an advisor who stays with you through every term, skills for the job search, and people to call. BCS brings all of it into one program. This year, we rebuilt three of the four parts around what scholars told us.

College Success Advising

Every scholar has a college success advisor who knows them personally, from the summer after high school to their first job.

Advisors help with course plans, financial aid, budgeting, and the problems that don't fit on a form.



Financial Scholarships

A scholarship every term for what financial aid doesn't cover: tuition gaps, housing, books, technology, and transportation.

New this year: for the first time in our program's history, the general scholarship grew from $16,000 to $24,000. The Opportunity Fund formally launched for internships, certifications, and conferences, alongside the Emergency and Finish Line funds.

Career Readiness

New this year: a redesigned program built around three steps. Scholars learn through self-paced modules on career exploration, resumes, LinkedIn, job research, and interviewing. They practice through one-on-one coaching and networking events with real professionals. And they connect through the BCS Community Network for introductions, internships, and practice interviews.

BCS Community Network

New this year: mentoring used to mean one mentor per scholar. Now it means a whole network of professionals and community members. After 18 months of listening to scholars, we built a circle of alumni, community mentors, and local employers that scholars can reach out to for advice, an introduction, or an informational interview.

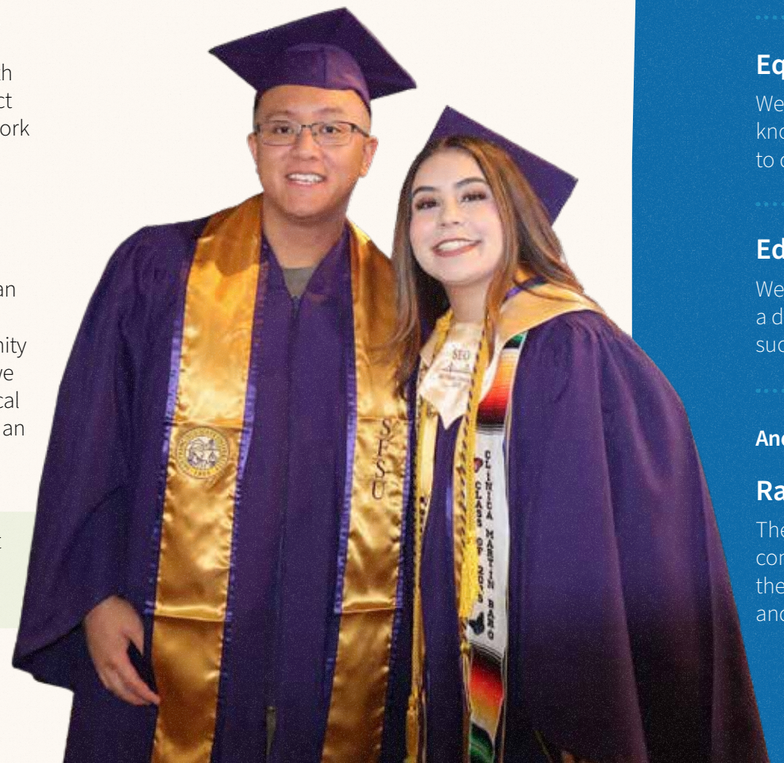
Each part of the program does work to complement the others. Together, they support scholars as they earn a degree and build what comes next in their lives.

100%

of graduating scholars surveyed were very satisfied with their advisor.

27

scholars received support from our Emergency, Opportunity, and Finish Line funds



Values

Behind every change to our program this year are three core values. These beliefs shape how we show up and walk alongside our scholars.

Community

We are a caring and generous community that is built upon inclusion and belonging, respects our diverse heritages and experiences, and shares the joy and responsibility of supporting the success of our youth.

Equity

We believe our scholars deserve the opportunity to access the knowledge, networks, and resources that will empower them to define their own pathways to achieve their goals.

Education

We believe that a college education is a powerful force and a doorway to opportunity for students seeking a pathway to success, security, and joy.

And we do this work, continuing to center our awareness on:

Racial Equity

The barriers our scholars face were built, not born. BCS commits to racial equity and belonging and to dismantling the structures, attitudes, and biases that harm our scholars and our community.

The Opportunity Fund

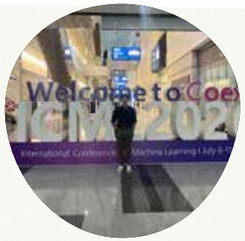
Opening up a world of possibilities

The general BCS scholarship helps close the gap between what financial aid provides and what college costs, term after term. This can include tuition and fees, housing, books, school supplies, transportation, and health insurance.

The Opportunity Fund does something different. This additional fund is for the opportunities that arise in the college environment: a conference, a certification, or an unpaid internship a scholar would otherwise have to pass on. Scholars find the opportunity, tell us how much funding they need, and why it matters. We respond in days rather than months.

Too often, a scholar misses out on an opportunity because no financial aid package covers it.

Here's what that looked like for two of the scholars who put the fund to work this year.



Alex R.

Senior

University of Southern California

Major: Computer science

Fellow, USC Center for AI and Society

In July, Alex stood in a conference hall in Seoul and presented his research to a room of people from around the world who study machine learning for a living. The International Conference on Machine Learning is one of the leading forums in the field, where major events are supported by frontier AI labs. Alex had just finished his third year of college.

The flight was his to pay, and summer is when the sources he would normally turn to are closed.

Although he knew about the Opportunity Fund at BCS for years, he hadn't thought to apply.

"If I don't necessarily need the Opportunity Fund, then I won't try to apply for it, because I want the opportunity to be open for other students that don't have the same opportunities that I have."

But the opportunity to attend ICML in Seoul was too good to pass up, and the fund would cover his round-trip airfare.

He spent three and a half days in Korea, where he presented his findings and sat in on other sessions. He even asked a question after one of the sessions that led to interesting discussions and a potential future collaboration with a professor he had never met. Mostly, he talked with researchers who had traveled as far as he had, about work that looked like his own.

"We might be hours away from each other, continents away from each other, but we're doing similar work."

South Korea was Alex's first trip to Asia. While he was there, he went north to the DMZ, ate his way through Seoul, and came home an admirer of its subway system.

> *Don't think your opportunity is too small for the opportunity fund. I think any opportunity is a good opportunity."*
>
> — Alex R.



Sifora K.

Second year

University of San Francisco

Major: Nursing

Certified Nursing Assistant

> *Just ask. Don't make the decision for them."*
>
> — Sifora K.

By the time Sifora's program sent her to her first clinical rotation this fall, she had already spent four weeks on a senior care floor in Castro Valley, taking vital signs and helping patients through the day.

Sifora had interned the summer before in a healthcare setting, but came away wanting more time alongside patients. She had her mind set on a Certified Nursing Assistant certification for that practical experience. Sifora calculated that the CNA certification would cost between $2,000 and $2,500, after registration and transportation fees. The school offered a payment plan, but without a job, the plan wouldn't help.

So she went looking for scholarships and found the Opportunity Fund in an email from her BCS advisors.

"I didn't know if going for CNA still qualified for that," Sifora said.

But she asked anyway, and found out it did. Emily Maciel, her BCS college success advisor, walked her through the forms and how the fund could pay for the certification. After two weeks of lectures and four weeks on the floor, where the nursing assistants let her do the work, Sifora was certified.

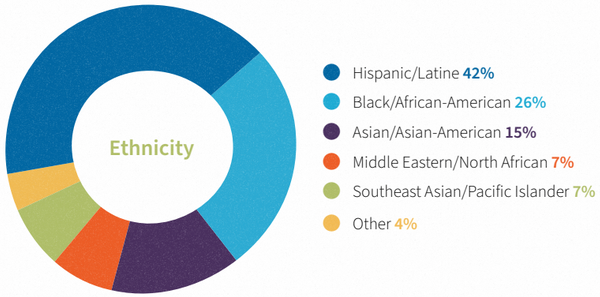
Back on campus this term, her instructors assumed she had already been working. They asked her if she had been a medical assistant or a CNA.

"Usually when you go to a hospital and touch people for the first time, you're like, um, do I do this? Now, I have this confidence that I built over the summer, and I feel kind of fearless."

The certificate is the first item on a plan she has already mapped out: a CNA job, then intensive care, then a doctorate in nurse anesthesia.

By the Numbers

Every number here is a scholar exploring their world.



80%
of BCS scholars graduate within 4.5 years

16%
of students from similar backgrounds nationally earn a degree within six years*

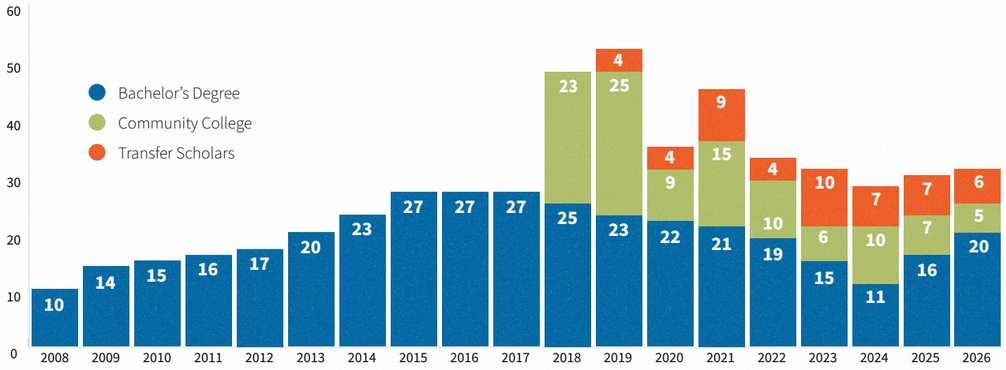
105
current scholars

279
alumni

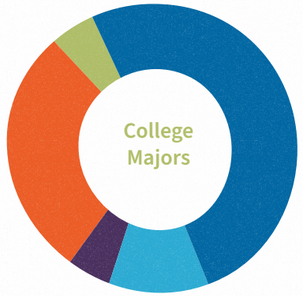
70%
of current scholars are first generation

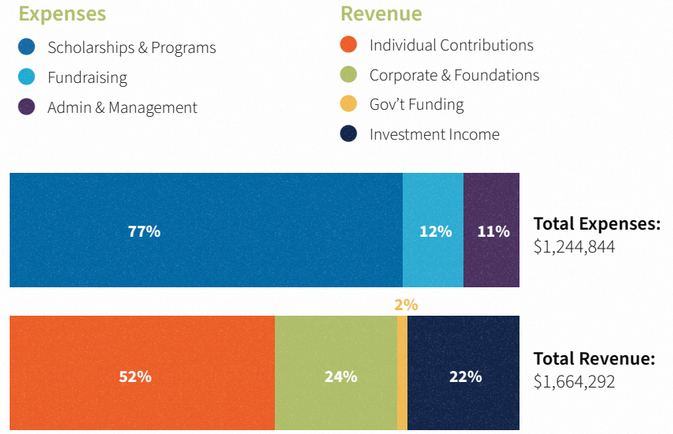
87%
of scholars come from families in the lowest economic quartile

Scholarships Awarded, 2008-2026



* Simone, S. A., & Brunt, N. (2026). Indicators of higher education equity in the United States: 2026 Historical trend report. The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education (COE).





Colleges & Universities Attended

- Barnard College
- Berkeley City College
- California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt
- Chapman University
- Claremont McKenna College
- College of Marin
- Community College of Philadelphia
- CSU East Bay
- CSU Fresno
- CSU Long Beach
- CSU Los Angeles
- CSU Northridge
- CSU San Francisco
- CSU San Jose
- CSU Sonoma
- De Anza College
- Diablo Valley College
- Howard University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Laney College
- Liberty University
- Los Medanos College
- Samuel Merritt University
- Skyline College
- 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 Arizona
- University of Chicago
- University of Denver
- University of San Francisco
- University of Southern California
- Xavier University

The Community Behind Every Scholar

Every name on these pages helped our scholars this year. We are grateful to everyone who supported them with their time, talent, dedication, leadership, and gifts. These lists cover the time period between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026.

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Lee Esche, Operations Manager
Emily Maciel, College Success Advisor
Ralph Nubla, College Success Advisor
Sherry Smith, Executive Director
Lynn Walker, Program Manager

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Linda Dow & James Morgenstern
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Moran Engineering
Jacob & Louise Epstein
Lisa Esherick
Tina Etcheverry
Elizabeth Farnsworth
Claire Ferrari & Chris Boas
Robyn Fisher
Molly Fraker
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William Helvestine
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BERKELEY COMMUNITY SCHOLARS

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2026 College Graduates

- **Ruaa A.**, UC Berkeley, B.S. Data Science
- **Andres A.**, UC Merced, B.S. Civil Engineering
- **Maria A.**, CSU San Francisco, B.S. Kinesiology
- **Nicholas B.**, University of Southern California, B.S. Psychology
- **Arianna B.**, UC Davis, B.S. Animal Biology
- **Tenzing C.**, Barnard College, B.A. Political Science, Minor in Psychology
- **Owen C.**, UC Berkeley, B.A. Sociology
- **Stephanie E.**, UC Merced, B.S. Biology (Molecular and Cell Biology), Minor in Psychology
- **Ivryaon F.**, CSU Fresno, B.S. Criminal Justice
- **Blaine G.**, UC Davis, B.S. Data Science
- **Adrian H.**, UC Berkeley, B.S. Mechanical Engineering
- **Emanuel H.**, UC Davis, B.S. Computer Science
- **Pierreline J.**, CSU East Bay, B.S. Computer Engineering
- **Pavithra L.**, Howard University, B.A. Bioethics and B.S. Maternal and Child Health Education
- **Nancy M.**, UC Santa Barbara, B.S. Biopsychology and B.A. Biology
- **Hana M.**, UC Berkeley, B.A. Psychology, Minor in Global Poverty and Practice
- **Ashanty M.**, California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, B.A. Social Work, Minors in Psychology and Dance
- **Zaki N.**, UC Santa Cruz, B.A. Business Management Economics (Accounting), Minor in Technology Information Management
- **Hanim N.**, University of Chicago, B.S. Biological Sciences (Evolution and Ecology), B.S. Chemistry, B.S. Biochemistry
- **Julianna P.**, UC Santa Cruz, B.A. Film and Digital Media, Minor in History of Art and Visual Culture
- **Miguel S.**, UC Irvine, B.S. Biomedical Engineering
- **Natalie S.**, Texas Southern University, B.S. Chemistry
- **A'shalan T.**, CSU Los Angeles, B.A. Pan-African Studies, Minors in Public Health and Healthcare Management
- **Sol V.**, University of Denver, B.A. Business Administration (Management), Minor in Entrepreneurship
- **Janai W.**, UC Irvine, B.A. Public Health Policy
- **Matthew Z.**, UC Santa Cruz, B.A. Business Management Economics (Accounting)

