

A MEMO PREPARED BY  
10,000 DEGREES ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



# **BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING BRIDGES**

**ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE OF  
10,000 DEGREES TRANSFER STUDENTS**

**APRIL 2024**

**To:** 10,000 Degrees & Other Interested Parties  
**From:** 10,000 Degrees Student Action Research Fellows  
**Re:** Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: Enhancing the Experience of 10,000 Degrees Transfer Students  
**Date:** April 2024

---

From January through mid-April, 10,000 Degrees and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities partnered to support us in an Action Research Fellowship. The Gardner Center, housed in Stanford's School of Education, partners with youth- and community-engaged practitioners to conduct research that advances positive and equitable youth and community outcomes. 10,000 Degrees is a nationally known nonprofit that works to support students from low-income backgrounds on their journeys to and through college by providing near-peer coaching, scholarships, financial aid assistance, and other resources.

Our action research team is composed of eight college students, selected after completing an application that explained our interest in participating. To be eligible to apply for the Fellowship, we had to have received a 10,000 Degrees scholarship for at least three years and be in college, including community college at some point in our journey.

Over a 15-week period, we developed a set of research questions that addressed 10,000 Degrees' interests as well as questions that we were interested in better understanding. We then created an interview protocol and conducted 40 interviews with scholarship recipients from January 25 to February 20, 2024. From these interviews, we identified, coded, and synthesized the main points to create a set of findings from our research. Our research questions and findings are outlined below, along with our recommendations.

## INTERVIEW POOL

For our research, we interviewed students who, like us, are currently in college, are currently or have previously attended a two-year college, and have received 10,000 Degrees scholarships for a minimum of three years. From the pool of 449 students who met these criteria, we interviewed 40 (including each other). Of the 40 students we interviewed, most were female (70%), similar to the full pool of students who met the criteria (64%). Eighty percent (80%) of interviewees were first gen (74% in full pool) and 5% were not first gen (10% in full pool), with some information missing.

By ethnicity, our interviewees were 15% Asian (compared with 20% in the full pool), 13% Black/African American (compared with 5%), 65% Hispanic/Latino/a/x (compared with 66%), 3% Multiracial/Multiethnic (compared with 4%), 3% White (compared with 4%), and 3% preferred to self-describe or did not answer (compared with 1%). We had no interviewees who identified as American Indian/Indigenous American (compared with 1%) or Pacific Islander (compared with 0%).

Half of our interviewees went to high school in the Marin region, with another 25% in the Sonoma region, 10% in the San Francisco region, 5% in the Contra Costa region, 3% in the Alameda region, 3% in the Santa Clara region, and 5% unknown. Of the interviewees, 38% graduated from high school in 2021, 13% in 2020, 20% in 2019, 5% in 2018, 13%

in 2017, 5% in 2016, and 8% in 2015 or earlier. Our interviewees are currently attending a two-year public college (43%), a CSU (33%), a UC (20%), or another four-year institution (private/nonprofit or public). The average college GPA of the interviewees is 3.23.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We identified four research questions:

1. Family Support for College: In what ways do 10,000 Degrees students experience family support for their engagement in college?
2. Initial Outreach from 10,000 Degrees: What are students' perceptions about the most effective ways for 10,000 Degrees to reach high school students?
3. Persisting through College: What are the factors that influence 10,000 Degrees students' choices and experiences related to persisting toward completion of a certificate or degree while they are attending college?
4. Transferring to a Four-Year College: What are the factors that influence 10,000 Degrees students' choices and experiences related to transferring from a two-year to a four-year college?

We developed interview questions that would help to answer these questions, which were grouped into categories. We conducted the interviews in pairs and coded interview data as a full group. After that, we worked in teams to develop findings for each category in each research question. The following sections reflect our teams' interpretation of the findings, with input from the full group along with our Gardner Center facilitators and guests who shared their reflections throughout the findings development process.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. Family Support for College

In what ways do 10,000 Degrees students experience family support for their engagement in college?

*Findings by Keiry De Leon and Yingpei Wang*

#### ***Family Support During High School for Going to College***

Of the 40 interviewees, more than three-quarters reported that they felt overall support, encouragement, or pressure to attend college from family members. This support and encouragement primarily took the form of emotional and/or financial support, while pressure from parents stemmed from expectations that they would pursue higher education. Interviewees felt emotional support in the positive encouragement and trust that family members place in the student, especially when the student is making important educational decisions. Financial support, while varying by family situation, was noted by many students as families providing necessary assistance within their means, including payment of educational expenses or guidance in applying for financial aid. While many interviewees felt positive encouragement, some students also experienced pressure posed by parental expectations that required them to find a balance between pursuing their personal educational goals and meeting family expectations.

For example, one student shared how her family provided tremendous support and joy when she was accepted to college, despite her previous lack of confidence. Another student recounted how the encouragement of relatives when she was first reluctant to attend college eventually helped her change her mind. Another noted that although only his mother was supportive, this emotional support was crucial to him. These examples demonstrate the importance of a family's emotional and encouraging support for a student's college journey and progress toward their college careers, particularly in motivating students to overcome challenges, build confidence, and

achieve their educational goals. Family support not only provides students with a sense of security, but also shapes their positive attitudes and expectations about higher education. This support took many forms, from celebrating academic achievement to encouraging the confrontation of uncertainty, each of which had a profound impact on students' psychological well-being and academic journeys.

When considering family support during college, almost half of the interviewees mentioned that they were first-generation college students. Some of these students shared that they were from low-income or immigrant families, with family members who lack knowledge of the education system and are therefore unable to provide adequate support and guidance along the pathway to higher education. Given these challenges, first-generation college students often seek academic guidance and financial support to achieve their educational goals. In many cases, they learn about organizations like 10KD through their guidance counselors or admissions officers, who provide them with the resources and support they need to move toward higher education. Those students who have former 10KD students in their families often receive referrals from those family members who have benefited from the program, and in turn, choose to participate in the program to pave their way to college.

For example, one interviewee stated that they were only in the United States with their father and brother and that the family immigrated to the United States in 2018. The father believed that the interviewee's access to higher education was impossible given that they were new immigrants. However, the interviewee was enrolled in high school due to legal requirements. After high school graduation, the interviewee's father expected them to work full-time rather than study, but engagement with 10KD convinced the student that they could go to college.

Even with parental support, students still had to deal with the challenges of high tuition, the need to move, and choosing a college far from home. At this turning point, their families helped them by providing financial assistance and specific support measures, such as sharing a car. This highlights the critical role families play in their children's transition from high school to college.

### ***Family Support During College***

More than three-quarters of the interviewees shared that they received and appreciated support and encouragement from their families in college, which, as during high school, included emotional and financial support. They mentioned how their families provided invaluable guidance, encouragement, and motivation, which played an important role in their academic and personal development. A prime example of this is that many students said that their parents helped with paying their rent and food as well as checking in on them by calling weekly and offering a few wise words of support.

### ***How Students Cope with Family Conflict***

Most of the students interviewed stated that they did not have any sort of conflict with their family, emphasizing instead the broad support they received. For those students who did face family conflict, the main cause noted was disagreement about the choice of major, often stemming from the student's choice not matching family expectations or from family members trying to interfere with the student's decision. This suggests that disagreements about a student's college major can trigger tensions between students and their families, especially when families hold clear expectations about the student's career path. Those students who faced conflicts with their families shared that they dealt with them by making independent decisions regarding their life choices such as majors, schools, or career paths.

### ***10,000 Degrees Engagement with Families***

Most of the respondents reported that their families did not have any contact or interaction with 10,000 Degrees (10KD). One interviewee stated that 10KD did not engage with his family in any way. Another interviewee mentioned that although his family was aware of his involvement in the 10KD program, family members did not have any interaction with the organization.

However, several respondents indicated that 10KD did provide critical support and guidance to both students and their families during the FAFSA application process, helping first-generation college students transition from high school to college. One interviewee shared that when he was a senior in high school, 10KD engaged with his family through a FAFSA support event, during which the academic counselor helped the student's mother complete the form. There is also an example of 10KD engaging with a student's family while still in high school and during the transition to college, assisting with budgeting, choosing the right school, and explaining what to expect from college life for the student and family.

Only a few of the 40 interviewees mentioned frequent connections established between 10KD mentors and family members. Those that did, however, described how this ongoing interaction through workshops, interactions, or counseling not only deepened families' understanding of the 10KD program, but also provided them with a wealth of information and resources and a sense of 10KD's commitment to the success of their children. These interviewees shared how through the support of their mentors, their families were able to engage more effectively in the student's educational process and thus better meet the challenges of the high school-to-college transition. In addition, one interviewee shared how 10KD supported their family when a parent broke her ankle, illustrating the range of support 10KD can provide. Interviewees also shared that during the COVID-19 pandemic, 10KD continued communication with parents, alleviating their worries and demonstrating the program's commitment to supporting their students through unforeseen challenges and reinforcing the sense of community that the parents had experienced prior to the pandemic.

## **2. Initial Outreach from 10,000 Degrees**

What are students' perceptions about the most effective ways for 10,000 Degrees to reach high school students?

*Findings by Gordon Cheong and Yuliana Morales Gomez*

### ***How 10,000 Degrees Participants First Heard About the Program***

More than three-fourths of the interviewees said that they encountered 10,000 Degrees (10KD) during high school. This is not surprising since 10KD mainly focuses on high school students, as they are the group most likely to face issues transitioning to college. A couple of interviewees shared that they heard about 10KD before high school, and a few encountered 10KD in college through posted advertisements amidst their search for financial aid, academic third-party counseling, or other services.

Roughly a quarter of the interviewees shared learning about 10KD from counselors. In addition, several students noted hearing about the program at school-sponsored events. Many described learning about the program directly from 10KD while attending presentations or workshops where they interacted with 10KD staff when they were presenting the program or helping students with filling out their academic forms. They also described meeting 10KD fellows who had talked with them one-on-one. Interviewees said that these meetings, despite serving different functions, demonstrated a part of what 10KD could offer to potential applicants and played a large role in convincing students to join the program. Interviewees also reported that 10KD sent out email correspondences, inviting potential students to consider signing up in response to a desire shared by students to learn more about the college process and ways to earn financial aid through filling out scholarship applications.

About a quarter of the interviewees reported hearing about 10KD from family members, who either referred the interviewees to 10KD or shared information about the programs through word of mouth. Family members played a large role in bringing more people into 10KD by sharing what they learned about the college journey between siblings or spouses, who usually had the same goal of attending college. Many siblings learned about 10KD from family members. For example, in some instances, cousins would introduce the program to the interviewee after having applied for it.

### ***Time to Engagement with 10,000 Degrees, including Prompts and Impediments***

More than three-quarters of the interviewees shared that they actively engaged with 10KD immediately or soon after hearing about it. Of those, more than half began engaging with 10KD immediately after being admitted to the program after submitting their application or sharing their interest in participating. The others joined roughly a half to a full year after being admitted into the program, in part due to either the COVID lockdown, shyness, or waiting until a task required 10KD's services (mainly filling out the FAFSA or some school admission application). One interviewee shared that they did not attend 10KD until their very last year in community college. A few others engaged with 10KD after taking a year off, perhaps in hopes that they could catch up with the college experience with 10KD's help. Those who began engaging immediately with 10KD often had more contact with staff and more quickly built personal connections with them compared to those who engaged later.

### ***Expectations for 10,000 Degrees***

While more than a third of the interviewees shared that they had no expectations going into 10KD, interviewees who did have expectations most often shared those were about financial support and college knowledge. Around half said they interacted with 10KD staff because they wanted to learn how to be more ready for college (college admission papers, academic plan, etc.). Interviewees shared that they expected to be a part of a support network with like-minded individuals focused on college readiness. They believed it would make their college journey easier, from both a social standpoint and having counsel for what classes to take.

Interviewees also described their financial incentives to engage with the program. This included filling out FAFSA, the scholarship that 10KD offers, or help filling out applications for other scholarships. Interviewees noted that 10KD has its own list where it features potential scholarships students can apply for. Approximately a quarter of the interviewees shared that they expected resource assistance, including learning from 10KD about how to access available support for basic needs such as housing, food, and transportation.

### ***How to Better Reach High School Students***

The majority of interviewees believed 10KD should present the program in high school classes or other in-person opportunities. Many interviewees stated that they heard about the program only from friends who had the opportunity to interact with them. One interviewee stated that teachers and counselors were unreliable for spreading information about the program. This may be because required counseling for high school students is usually limited to specific activities such as scheduling classes or working on applications, resulting in the sense that dedicating time to providing information about 10KD or other programs can waste precious time. If 10KD were to present themselves in classes, it would go beyond these limitations and speak directly to their target audience. In addition, some believed that holding events would help 10KD spread word for themselves to a more general audience compared to 10KD sending fellows to individual classes to deliver a presentation about the

program. Interviewees also noted the importance of 10KD connecting directly with families directly to help spread 10KD's influence.

Approximately one third of interviewees shared their belief that 10KD could expand its audience by utilizing familiar connections like the school staff (particularly those with a vested interest in student success or hold large influence in the school like the principal, teachers, counselors, etc.). One interviewee mentioned the importance of the personal one-on-one that happens when speaking with a familiar connection and suggested that 10KD services should be brought up during conversations where the student is looking for third party support for college.

Several interviewees shared that physical advertising (posters, flyers etc.) would be helpful and some interviewees suggested that digital advertising (texting networks, links to social media, etc.) would also be helpful to help bolster 10KD's reach by spreading word of its existence across campuses that they visit. Some students mentioned that providing services such as tutoring or partnering with other programs would help advertise the program, focusing on building rapport through reputation over advertising straight to students.

### 3. Persisting through College

What are the factors that influence 10,000 Degrees students' choices and experiences related to persisting toward completion of a certificate or degree while they are attending college?

*Findings by Afra Ahmad and Saidy Reyes*

#### **College Journeys**

When asked about their college journeys, most of the interviewees described their transfer process. Most of these students described that the transfer process was a good experience and an easy transition due to the support in applications and transcripts from 10KD staff and college counselors. Those who described the transfer process as difficult shared that it was because of COVID-19, working while in college, or family disagreements regarding finances and distance. One interviewee noted that in their experience, 10KD supported her during her transfer by going through all the steps of filling out the application, requesting transcripts, and holding Zoom meetings to discuss the process.

Some interviewees, describing the transfer process, shared that they had a hard time figuring out the new school system and its curriculum after transferring. Most 10KD students are first-generation, so it was not surprising to learn that navigating the new environment was challenging for them. One student reported that she did not have a mentor to look to for help because, unlike at her community college, the counselors and staff were not as easy to get in contact with to discuss classes and requirements.

Several students interviewed shared that they had never considered leaving college at any point in their college journey so far. That said, some described times when they were struggling to manage classes, take part in social activities, or when they felt uncertain about their future. They explained that at these times, their goals, the hard work they had put in, and the support they had received stopped them from leaving or taking a break because they didn't want to fall behind in any way. One interviewee shared that she had not considered leaving college because she had the support of her family and she wanted to finish her college degree.

When considering their motivation to persist through college, almost half of the interviewees shared that they were motivated by their personal goals, which often included having a successful career with a good-paying job. These goals often kept students in college when they might have considered leaving. The goals and ambitions of

these students are also what supported them when they were going through difficult times, such as considering leaving college due to changes in majors, shifting career goals, or wanting to take a break. Some interviewees described wanting to achieve their own college goals because their parents were not able to fulfill theirs.

Financial and emotional support from the family was another big factor in students' decisions about their college journeys, including whether and/or when to go to a four-year or community college. Some students shared how their parents reassured them that they would support them financially and be happy for them if they enjoyed what they were studying. Having that constant support from the people around them made it easier for students to focus on their studies more and resolve any issues they faced.

### ***Challenges for Students who Considered Leaving College***

Some interviewees described times when staying in college felt difficult or when they chose to take a break. For those interviewees that did consider leaving college, the reasons were varied. The top reasons cited were COVID-19, family issues, uncertain or changing goals, the cost of college, and physical or mental health.

Some shared that they needed to figure out what they wanted to do with their degree, describing uncertainty about what they were interested in and the next steps to continue their education. Some students shared that they were reaching the end of their college, and they felt hesitant about what they wanted to do and what their next step should be after graduating. For example, one student shared that she took a break because she did not know what to major in or what to do at all sometimes. At one point, the interviewee shared, she did not see herself doing something in her major and she was unsure if her degree would be useful for her future.

Several students considered dropping out of college because of personal, mental health, work, or housing issues stemming from financial issues related to the cost of college. For example, one interviewee shared that she considered dropping out of school twice due to financial difficulties and personal problems (including near homelessness). She was able to continue her studies by obtaining hostel accommodations and help from other support programs. Additionally, support from the Mesa program played a crucial role in helping her navigate these challenges and apply for necessary assistance.

Finally, several students faced difficulties through their college journey due to COVID-19 and financial hardships. Due to the new environment and curriculum, many students decided to transition to a community college closer to family/home because of high tuition and living costs. For example, one student described her first year of community college being online because of COVID-19. Due to the circumstances, she was not able to focus properly. She shared that 10,000 Degrees helped her get back on track with online tips and tools through her fellow who regularly did check-ins with her. Some students described how COVID-19 and difficult academics affected their mental health which caused them to return to a community college or reduce their classes and activities. For example, one interviewee went to community college after high school before taking a leave of absence during COVID-19. He received support from his family and from 10KD once he returned to school.

### ***How 10,000 Degrees Supported Students who were Considering Leaving College***

For those students that considered taking, or took, a leave from college, the majority shared that 10,000 Degrees demonstrated support by doing check-ins with them when they were taking a break. 10KD also demonstrated understanding of what the student was going through and from time to time encouraged students to come back to college. One student described how 10KD fellows would make sure to check up on their plans for college, constantly reaching out and helping her to make sure that everything was okay and that her plans were still in place. Another student mentioned that her 10KD fellow supported her through a process to receive a scholarship



despite not being a full-time student. Students considering leaving college also shared that 10KD provided emotional support when they needed it the most, with one describing regular check-ins to see how she was doing psychologically.

Some students shared that when they were having issues and considering leaving college, they did not have support from anyone, in some cases because they did not tell anyone. One interviewee shared that by not telling anyone about their potential decision to leave college they were left to deal with the situation alone. In some cases, students did not let 10KD know because they were either not aware that they could, it was a personal choice, or they did not communicate much at the time. One student noted that 10KD was not able to support them because they did not know about their home situation.

Some students described finding themselves lost and a little hopeless during the difficult times but having 10KD support, emotionally and financially, made it easier to push through. The program's reminders and constant check-ins reassured students because of the support and guidance they received from their fellows and counseling staff. One student shared that the guidance and resources provided by 10KD when she decided to re-enroll in school helped them make a smooth transition to their four-year college of choice. Many students consider their college experience to be very stressful at times because of needing to work multiple jobs to cover housing, tuition, transportation, and other living expenses while being a student. Some of the struggles for these students come from family situations or personal situations and they feel discouraged or feel like a failure, which leads them to not reach out for support.

#### ***Advice for Students who are Considering Leaving College***

For students who are considering leaving, about half of the interviewees advised them to gather and learn all about their resources, be aware financially, seek and/or accept support from your college and 10KD, participate in activities, and always ask questions, no matter how big or small. One interviewee advised students to communicate with their advisor, noting that they are ultimately the ones who want you to get the best possible outcome. Interviewees' experiences emphasized the importance of students seeking support and guidance when facing difficulties, as well as the value of maintaining open communication, which can help students find solutions to problems and even motivation to keep going during tough times.

Another common area of advice, mentioned by more than a third of the interviewees, was the importance of taking care of their mental health and prioritizing themselves over everything else. They advised students to take a break when needed and always reach out to counselors and family for support.

The next most common area of advice centered on having a positive mindset, since college can be very difficult and very exciting all at the same time. Interviewees advised students to “keep pushing through,” don’t give up, try new things, stay positive, not compare themselves with others, and stick with their dreams. One interviewee shared advice specifically for students who are transferring, offering her perspective that they should take advantage of their options and not be afraid of putting themselves out there, but not to put themselves down because they did not, or do not, take advantage of those opportunities.

#### **4. Transferring to a Four-Year College**

What are the factors that influence 10,000 Degrees students’ choices and experiences related to transferring from a two-year to a four-year college?

*Findings by Alondra Mares and Oliver Reyes Mazariegos*

### ***For Students in Community College and Planning to Transfer, How 10,000 Degrees Has Been Helpful***

Of the 17 students interviewed who were in community college, nearly all were planning to transfer.

Almost all of those students said that 10KD was helpful in providing mentoring and support through the transfer process. This included advice about selecting and transferring courses, planning for the transfer, and completing applications and resumes. Interviewees also noted that communication and reminders from 10KD mentors were helpful through the transfer process. They saw 10KD as a trusted organization where they could go for resources and advice.

Of the interviewees that were planning to transfer, several shared that 10KD was helpful financially. This incorporated help such as scholarship assistance, financial aid support, and additional resources. These additional resources included food resources, college success roadmaps, and career resources. For example, one interviewee mentioned that 10KD provided help including scholarship assistance and financial aid support, and he mentioned that 10KD helped him fill out his FAFSA application along with other scholarships that he was able to access through the 10KD portal.

A few students reported receiving no support from 10KD. However, these students said that was because they did not ask for support. For example, one student mentioned that she did not feel comfortable asking for support because she felt she was not part of the 10KD target student group, and a nursing student shared that she knows she will eventually get support, but she has not yet utilized 10KD services.

### ***For Students Who Had Transferred to a Four-Year College, How 10,000 Degrees Was Helpful***

Of the students who described challenges they faced during their transfer process, about two-thirds mentioned administrative difficulties. They shared that they experienced challenges such as staying on top of transcript/papers and deadlines, being able to add classes, having trouble with the new college system, and finding counselors. Additionally, they mentioned the loss of communication, as well as pressure to take a lot of units to be able to transfer and meet requirements for scholarships being offered by groups like 10KD. For example, one student shared that he took the maximum number of units allowed in the summer because he needed more classes. He mentioned it was stressful and he had to schedule a lot of meetings to switch counselors because his counselor did not provide the correct information which made it harder for the interviewee to understand what the next steps were.

About a quarter of the interviewees shared that their family and friends provided support, while more than half shared that 10KD staff offered support during their transfer process. The main supports they mentioned were communication (such as reminders and messages) and help navigating the transfer process. Interviewees described how counselors and 10KD staff supported them with completing their papers and credit requirements throughout college. One student shared that she did not know how to add classes when she first began college but thanks to her 10KD mentor she was able to add the right classes and complete her credit requirements.

About a third of the interviewees stated that there were more resources available for them at their college in terms of counselors that provided better assistance through the process. One interviewee shared that at her community college she had better help with adding classes and filling out scholarships. She also mentioned programs like EOPS and COMPASS that provided resources and support for food and gas. Some interviewees discussed the availability of support services with their community college. For example, one mentioned that she felt she had more support at her community college because she had an advisor who was able to guide her

through her college roadmap and who also provided resources with food, money, and other educational support like paper, pens, notebooks, etc.

Based on the data that was collected there were also some challenges related to housing, relocating, and transportation. Students mentioned moving out of state and finding that housing was difficult during the process of transferring to a four-year university. Some said that the commute to school was hard for them regardless of whether it was by public transportation or by car. For example, one student mentioned that her commute is a 30-minute bus ride and an hour drive, which is difficult on top of working.

While students noted the challenges and supports mentioned above, more than a third of the interviewees shared that a four-year degree would motivate them to carry on through their transfer process. An example of this was when a student talked about not knowing what to major in, but thanks to the motivation she had during her time in college, she knew that transferring to a four-year college would help expand her options.

### ***Things that Surprised 10,000 Degrees Students about Four-Year Colleges***

More than a third of students interviewed shared that they were surprised by the differences in the academic setting at a four-year college, including things like the challenge of courses, quality of professors, difficulty in signing up for and getting courses, and the semester/quarter system. A few students mentioned that they were surprised by being waitlisted, especially when it came to a required class. For example, one student complained about being waitlisted because it would affect her schedule and make it harder for her to continue her education and fulfill unit requirements for scholarships and other programs she would try to apply to. A few students also mentioned that they had no other option but to take a class with a professor who made it hard to adapt and communicate, meaning that they did not respond to emails about assignments, were tough graders, or did not provide details about assignments, making it hard for them to succeed in the class.

Many students reported having a hard time adapting to new campuses and trying to find resources and support since transferring felt lonely. For example, one student mentioned having a hard time getting around school and making it on time to class since the campus was so big.

About a quarter of the interviewees reported feeling surprised about the high cost of tuition, housing, food, and materials (such as books and school supplies). Students also complained about the lack of support there was when transferring to a four-year college when it came to financial aid and scholarships. Related to the high costs, one student mentioned that filling out the FAFSA application was extremely hard this year. He did not have the support from 10KD, who are on campus just once a month and the financial aid office is always busy, so it takes a while for them to respond to questions. The interviewee also expressed his concern about the lack of resources when it came to completing applications before the due dates.

A few interviewees reported that housing competitiveness surprised them. Housing competitiveness played out as difficulty for these students because they could not find housing on campus nor near the campus because everything was overly expensive. One student shared that this was overwhelming, so she decided to find a nearby apartment.

### ***Advice for Students Getting Ready to Transfer***

Half of the interviewees gave similar advice: ask for help. A few students pointed out where to go for help, explaining the importance of using the resources being offered, such as talking to counselors, professors, and transfer advisors. They also talked about the importance of having a support system to achieve better outcomes,

as well as the importance of looking into the schools and programs that are connected to your major to help facilitate the transfer process. One transfer student mentioned that when she first transferred, she felt confused, but once she began to be more open and find resources and join groups it made it easier for her to fit in and learn more about other programs and resources being offered on campus.

A similar number of interviewees suggested carefully considering your academic decisions. Some advised identifying schools that match your lifestyle. Interviewees suggested that starting there will help balance your academic and social life. Interviewees mentioned that doing this could help inform the design of a plan to keep track of academic pace, making it easier to manage time and set priorities. Additionally, this kind of planning can help to connect students with like-minded people, make friends, and choose a place where they feel happy. This, interviewees suggested, would make the transfer process smoother. As one interviewee described, she benefitted from her experience connecting with open minded people and making friends, which has helped her feel happy and has made her process smoother.

Finally, several interviewees highlighted the importance of paying attention to social adjustments, by finding a social network and balancing social and academic life. To this end, interviewees recommended that transfer students participate in events, clubs, activities, and study groups.

### “One More Thing”

When asked if there was “one more thing” 10KD could have done to support students, about a third of the interviewees suggested that the program could incorporate more events to offer deeper interactions between the students and mentors, as well as resources such as internship opportunities. They also suggested that 10KD could increase engagement by having a stronger presence on four-year college campuses and sending out emails as frequently as they did when they were at the community college. One interviewee shared an example of having a positive experience when 10KD offered a week stay at Saint Mary’s College for high school students where they learned more about college, networking, and dealt with working as a team through fun activities. Having events like this would be quite pivotal for students in which they would be able to engage with one another to build relationships and a sense of community with the program.

A similar number of students expressed interest in having more networking opportunities available to them. This would entail having more emails sent, as well as providing events in which students could meet with 10KD alumni to speak and gain a pivotal perspective on their work. For example, one student expressed interest in going into the news industry to her 10KD fellow, and the fellow later found a 10KD alumni who is a reporter at KRON4 News. She was able to set up a zoom meeting with the student and the reporter where they discussed her career and what her job entails. This is an example of how 10KD might facilitate networking opportunities for students and alumni.

In addition, several interviewees expressed a desire for more information related to financial assistance, particularly in the areas of housing, scholarships, and other basic needs. This information could be provided through workshops or counseling.

A few students mentioned ideas for improving the mentor program by working to better meet students’ wishes for their mentors. For example, one student desired a male mentor but was not asked if he preferred a male or a female. He described his wish for a male mentor based on growing up without a father, also sharing his enthusiasm for 10KD broadly. Another interviewee suggested having more language accommodations for students that are not English or Spanish native speakers, noting that many of her friends speak Portuguese and Chinese.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations flow from the findings and our own experiences.

### Outreach During High School

#### ***Combining In-Person Presentations with Physical and Digital Media***

- In addition to advertising through flyers on high school and community college campuses, 10KD should explore alternative ways of advertising, including a focus on expanding their social media presence to attract more students into applying. *This would be important because many interviewees say they think social media outlets would help get the word out about 10,000 Degrees.*
- Along with physical and digital advertising, 10KD should always include in-person presentations and attendance at events. These activities should be done before the application is due because it will allow students to apply before the deadline. *We think this is important because while many students recommended passive advertising or using school staff to spread the word about 10KD, presentations to classrooms is the most direct way of contacting the target audience. This recommendation responds to most of the interviewees mentioning the lack of information during their time in high school.*
- 10KD should try to be sure that a consistent plan for outreach is followed through at every school. *At interviews it seemed like 10KD staff were doing different things at different schools.*
- In addition to advertising its services through digital media, 10KD should consider developing web pages focused on individual college campuses. *We think it is important to make this effort to connect with high school students going into multiple different college campuses, so in addition to expanding the main 10KD website, they should make websites designed to disseminate information about local resources. Doing so can create a sense of hominess and make 10KD seem closer to students attending college.*

#### ***Variety of In-Person Connections***

- 10KD should explore different ways of hosting events, activities, and class presentations, particularly ones that demonstrate services that 10KD can offer beyond financial incentives. While workshops are helpful, there could be an open event that 10KD can do that can double as both advertising and as a service related to their mission statement. At these events on high school campuses, 10KD can give short presentations about their services to connect to more students. *This would be an important step because many interviewees say they wished for more knowledge on 10,000 Degrees while in high school.*
- 10KD should contact school counselors and request them to share information about their program with all of their students. *As seen in the research findings, high school students interact the most with their counselors for college and transcripts.* Relatedly, high schools should take the initiative to provide their students a college/career center to better expose them to helpful resources. *This is important because experiences with college/career centers and advisors during time in high school can help students find scholarships and guide them through college applications.*
- 10KD could consider reaching out to teachers for them to give an announcement in class so all students can hear about the program.

- 10KD should consider having strict requirements and commitments regarding communication with staff, scholarships, and attending events. *This is important because the connections matter, and not all students will keep in contact without this being mandatory.*

### **Communication with Parents/Families**

- If 10KD wants to be more effective in reaching out to the families of 10KD students, addressing language communication is important. 10KD should consider hiring an interpreter or finding bilingual staff to help ease communication. By doing so, 10KD can ensure that all families receive the necessary information and support to increase the effectiveness of the program and support students through their educational journey. *The observation that many 10KD students are first-generation college students suggests that a large percentage of their parents may not speak English fluently or speak English at all. This language gap may result in limited interaction between the program and the student's family.*
- To reach more family members 10KD could facilitate more meetings and send emails in different languages. *Many families do not speak English, so to get a hold of them the program would need to adapt and incorporate new languages into their system.*
- 10KD should share the program's resources and support with the parents so they can tell their children as they are getting ready to start college. *This way the students will consider the help more because it will come from a more reliable source.*
- 10,000 Degrees should consider holding more events and encouraging parents to join their children as they learn about different resources the program offers, as well as gaining a better understanding of the college their child is attending and learn how they can better support their child. This can have a positive impact and a better understanding of how the college system works. *This would be important because it allows parents to be present for their children's college journey in a more hands-on way. A lot of the students said that their parents are not involved with 10KD and college and barely know how it works. Trying to make events that can orient parents and family in general could result in a better support system for college students.*
- If 10KD wants to engage with the students' families more, they should consider holding more workshops later in the afternoon or on weekends and advertise them as being specifically for students to bring their parents.
- 10KD fellows should consider family dynamics when supporting students and engaging with their parents or guardians, including issues that relate to a family's culture and/or resources. *For example, one student said she wanted to go to college, but it was only her and her dad in the U.S. and her dad did not see the point of her going to college, telling her to work full time and that college was not a path for her. It is possible that this perspective was related to their cultural background as well as the family's lack of resources. Understanding these dynamics, 10KD may be able to better connect with parents, show them how college can be one of the ways to be successful. While it may be that culture (including expectations based on gender) leads parents to discourage college but it might also be their view of the cost-benefit of college given scarce family resources. 10KD can enter that conversation and make the case for college as a rational choice.*

## Support for 10KD Scholars During College

### **Proactive Communications**

- 10KD should consider implementing a mandatory survey administered each semester to gain insight into each student's mental state and life situation. Based on the results of the survey, the 10KD program can use email, Zoom, or other communication tools to provide proactive and personalized support and guidance to students. *This recommendation is based on the feedback from interview respondents that many students face confusion, anxiety, and challenges regarding their academics, career plans, and home environments. Through such a survey, the 10KD program can collect key data to assess the student population and identify individuals in need of additional attention and support.*
- In addition, the survey should gather information about students' language preferences before starting the mentor matching process. *Consider that many of the 10KD program participants are first-generation college students and come from a variety of language backgrounds. Even though English is mainly spoken in the United States, some students may be more comfortable communicating in their native language or English is their second language may not communicate very well in terms of communication. This not only promotes more effective communication and support, but also shows respect and sensitivity to the student's cultural and language background.*
- 10KD should continue to send constant reminders through text/email because they help the student stay on track and feel more comfortable asking questions.
- 10KD should consistently check in with students about decisions related to dropping or staying in college courses. They could also approach students that show signs of grades going down, when they seem like they need a little push or extra support. They could also have broader discussions focused on the benefits of obtaining a higher education degree. *By being more informed about how students feel, the 10KD staff would be more able to support weary students.*
- 10KD should consider having mandatory check-in meetings with the students at least for their first semester after transferring. *For many students the support or reminders seem to decrease around that time (first semester after transferring) or they feel completely lost in their new school, so having a fellow to share everything makes the new change easier.*
- Given how important the student/fellow communication is for scholars' college experience, 10KD should ensure that students' experience of being assigned to new fellows (when students change schools and when fellows leave 10KD) is smooth, including ways to build trust and understanding early in the transition process. *One student noted that she recently transferred and felt there was no one to ask for help, sharing that she felt lost and did not know where to go for help.*
- 10KD should incorporate parents into the program and encourage ongoing communication by having monthly meetings with parents during college. *Parents are a big factor that influences students to persist in college.*
- 10KD should consider options for facilitating more interactions within the program when students are in four-year colleges, meaning more helpful resources like events, opportunities for internships, as well as having a stronger presence on campus and sending out emails as frequently as they did when students are at the community college.

### **Degree / Transfer Planning and Navigation**

- 10KD should work to support students in a diversity of majors. They should bring together a system that can be universal for students in all majors to have equal opportunities. *Students who had a specific major mentioned that did not feel support from 10KD because there was not a lot of emphasis on what the student was majoring in.*
- 10KD could offer customized transfer services to each student who wants to transfer, with a detailed customized course schedule and transfer timeline based on the individual's career interests and academic performance. *These services could influence 10KD students' choices and experiences with transfer by explaining more what credits and classes count for transfer.*
- 10KD should provide an orientation to all students before they transfer, including sessions on how the four-year institutions work and how different they are from a community college. *Some students gave this advice, and it was a highlight that a lot of them did not know how to navigate four-year colleges. If 10KD provides learning sessions for students who are going to transfer, this will help students not feel lost and be prepared when they eventually transfer.*
- 10KD should keep working on the transfer process with students, including academic and personal support. *A lot of interviewees mentioned that they need support during the transfer process not only academically but personally. They said it is challenging to navigate the system and can be confusing, and some of them mentioned that when they are being oriented by a 10KD fellow it was a smoother process.*
- When planning programs to provide resources, 10KD should be mindful of the timing of inquiries so that students who are only available at certain times on certain days, possibly weekends, can access information related to credits and transfer planning.
- 10KD should continue to train their staff to be knowledgeable about newer transfer processes. *This is important because interviewees said that they struggled a lot with their transferring process.*
- Colleges must support students to navigate their academic journeys, ensuring that students have easy access to academic guidance, including offering services at times and places students convenient for students. Colleges could engage in proactive communications, as described above, to facilitate this effort. *This is important because interviewees described how difficult it can be to get advice, make appointments, get courses, etc. While interviewees hoped that 10KD staff would fill this role, it is ultimately the college or university's obligation to make sure students get the resources they need. One student noted that at her community college she could make appointments quickly, while it took several weeks at her four-year university.*

### **Resources**

- 10KD should maintain or create (or connect/refer) their students to programs and resources for students because there is always something that is needed as a college student. *From what students mentioned it is important to have support systems because it helps to continue with education even when it gets challenging.*
- 10KD could better influence students' choices and experiences that are related to persisting towards college completion by offering more scholarship opportunities.



- 10KD should provide more support and sponsorship for students who are away from home, especially when it comes to food and housing. Additionally, the 10KD program can provide instructional information to help students understand how to receive free food (for example, at a Food Bank) and find affordable housing options. *Since these students may face the added stress and challenges of being away from their families, providing financial assistance for food would go a long way in easing their financial burdens. These measures will not only help students focus on their studies but will also reduce their psychological stress and create a more stable and supportive learning environment.*
- Colleges should provide more financial guidance and emotional support. *That is something students struggle with the most, especially in the beginning due to the new environment, responsibilities, and pressure.*

### Community Building and Partnerships

#### 10KD Scholar Network

- 10KD should consider creating a team of student advisors who are responsible for collecting and communicating student feedback.
- 10KD should bring older students into the program and link them with newer students who are going to the same school as a transfer or freshman. *Older students tend to have a more realistic vision of how their school provides resources and come from similar origins to the younger, newer students. They may be able to provide insight that 10KD themselves cannot and there has been no mention of a networking program under 10KD as of now.*
- 10KD should have student speakers who go and talk about their experience with 10KD and how 10KD supported them during their transfer process.

#### 10KD Alumni Network

- To help students meet the psychological and emotional challenges they may encounter during the transfer process, 10KD could create an alumni resource sharing platform, which would allow students who plan to transfer and those who are in the process of transferring to reach out to alumni who have successfully transferred to gain access to transfer experience sharing and course advice. *In this way, students will not only receive necessary academic advice, but also psychological encouragement and support to help them complete the transfer process with more confidence.*
- 10KD should create a service to connect 10KD alumni and current students of the program based on major in addition to having field trips (i.e. Saint Mary trip). *This could also serve the basis for a new kind of event that can allow 10KD students to speak with alumni and ask questions related to career, academia, etc. This would also be an event in which students can get an additional stream of support besides getting it from family, school staff, etc.*
- 10KD should host alumni events that allow for job linking or internship opportunities which would be quite significant for the student.

#### Partnering with Other Organizations

- If 10KD creates a team of student advisors, this team could collaborate with a variety of volunteer organizations to plan and implement volunteer activities. *This collaboration will enable the student advisory team to engage in*

*social services under the name of 10KD, thus increasing their sense of social responsibility and teamwork. At the same time, these activities will help raise the visibility and influence of 10KD among students and the wider community, creating a win-win situation.*

- 10KD should consider collaborating or expanding collaboration with other similarly branded scholarship programs and present more financial opportunities. *We believe that 10KD shouldn't have to invest more into their scholarship, so instead it should work with similar groups that can help students financially in a similar fashion. This can also be mutually beneficial by allowing 10KD to advertise themselves to other areas in the process.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to express our gratitude to:

- The 40 students we interviewed — for sharing their time and their stories with us.
- The Gardner Center team — for bringing us together each week and for teaching, guiding, and coaching us to undertake this important work.
- 10,000 Degrees — for giving us the opportunity to support our community and a program that has been so important to us and for believing in, and amplifying, the power and voice of youth.



# MEET THE 10,000 DEGREES ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS

## AFRA AHMAD

*Sonoma State University*

My name is Afra Ahmad. I am a transfer student from Santa Rosa Junior College at Sonoma State University now. I decided to be a member of this fellowship because of the new experience and set of skills I will be learning from it. The goal to help improve this program so that they can better support their students is very important and I wanted to be a part of the process. This fellowship has taught me new ways to approach problems, be expressive, and confident in my opinions. As a first-generation student, who didn't know where to ask for help or what my resources were, I recognize the importance of having this type of support and resources being available during a student's college journey.



## ALONDRA MARES

*Sonoma State University*

Hello everyone my name is Alondra Mares and I am a transfer student currently attending Sonoma State University. This is my second semester so I am a junior. I recently transferred from College of Marin last fall. I decided to participate in this fellowship because I wanted to gain an understanding of research and development and knowledge of interviewing and gathering data to make college experience and the 10KD program better. 10KD has always supported me throughout my college journey and if it wasn't for their support I wouldn't be at SSU nor would I be participating in this internship that has shown me so many things having to do with communication, research, note taking and multitasking skills.



# GORDON CHEONG

*University of California, Davis*

My name is Gordon and I'm a fourth-year senior at UC Davis. As a 10KD student and soon to be alumni, I transferred from my high school to Santa Rosa Junior College in 2019, a year before my school was stricken dysfunctional by COVID (as did the same for every other organization). I felt like I had special experience being a part of this interview research project, having experienced at least a part of every focus point we were trying to learn for the past few months (i.e. considerations for giving up on school, community college transfer, lived through a global event, family stress, etc). Since I'm about to graduate, my 10KD story will soon come to a close. I hope this research properly presents what 10KD students like me want and hope for this exemplary college prep service.



# KEIRY DE LEON

*Cal Poly San Luis Obispo*

Hello everyone! I'm Keiry De Leon, and I'm currently a senior at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Before transferring to Cal Poly I attended the College of Marin, in Kentfield for two years. I decided to pursue a degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing, and a minor in Political Science. I chose to participate in this fellowship with the 10,000 Degrees program because I am passionate about improving educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. 10,000 Degrees has a unique mission of providing access to higher education for students from low-income communities and I'm inspired to break down barriers to that education. By participating in this internship, I am contributing ideas, skills, and knowledge to further the program's success.



# OLIVER REYES MAZARIEGOS

*Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico*

Hi! I'm Oliver Reyes Mazariegos, I am a first-generation student. I attended College of Marin and later transferred to a 4-year college. Currently, I am a senior at the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, studying Business Administration with a concentration in Construction Management. I decided to join 10,000 Degrees / Stanford Action Research Fellowship because I wanted to make an impact to 10,000 Degrees since they have helped me during my time in college and career development. I am grateful to be part of this opportunity because, not only am I giving back to 10KD, I am also getting the opportunity to develop my skills as I do that.



# SAIDY REYES

*College of Marin*



My name is Saily Reyes. I currently attend the College of Marin as a third-year Architecture major, hoping to transfer to a four-year institution next semester. Last summer, I was an intern at EAH Housing in Real Estate Development for the Bay Area Housing Internship Program (BAHIP), understanding the feasibility and aspects of affordable housing for low-income and marginalized communities and understanding accessibility design in buildings. I am part of the student government of the College of Marin (ASCOM), and this academic year I became a student representative on the Board of Trustees as a Student Trustee. Most recently, I became a fellow for the 10,000 Degrees and Graduate School of Education at Stanford. I joined in the hope of helping 10,000 Degrees with research because 10,000 Degrees has supported me with my education, and career goals and hoping that I can contribute to helping more first-generation low-income students.

# YINGPEI WANG

*University of California, Berkeley*

Hello! My name is Yingpei and I transferred from City College of San Francisco to attend UC Berkeley. My identity as a first-generation college student and new immigrant has deeply influenced my journey to Berkeley, and it has been an enlightening experience for me. Having just arrived in this new country, I was faced with a huge information gap about higher education, a challenge that many immigrants face when adapting to the complex college system. I decided to participate in this fellowship because I want to bridge this gap for other first-generation college students, especially those who come from immigrant backgrounds like mine. The support and guidance I received from the 10kd organization was key to overcoming these challenges, and now it's my turn to give back. I am passionate about sharing the knowledge and resources I have gained to help others make informed decisions about their education and future. This Fellowship Program is not only a great opportunity for me to develop personally and professionally, but also an opportunity to contribute to a community that shares similar experiences to mine. I aim to provide support and information to first-generation college students like myself to help alleviate the overwhelm and confusion they feel as new immigrants adjusting to a new country's education system. I hope that together we can build a supportive network that empowers students with more confidence and the ability to navigate their college careers successfully.



# YULIANA MORALES GOMEZ

*California State University, Sacramento*



Hello everyone! My name is Yuliana Morales Gomez. I'm a transfer student from Santa Rosa Junior College and am currently a Senior at CSU Sacramento. I am working towards two BAs in Sociology and Ethnic Studies with a Chicana/Latina focus. I joined the 10,000 Degrees Action Research fellowship to gain experience in conducting interviews and collecting data. 10,000 Degrees' striving to advance their resources for their students correlates with my career goals to help disadvantaged students navigate the college/university system. Talking one-on-one with students has allowed me to gain experience in helping and relating to what others undergo during their educational journeys.