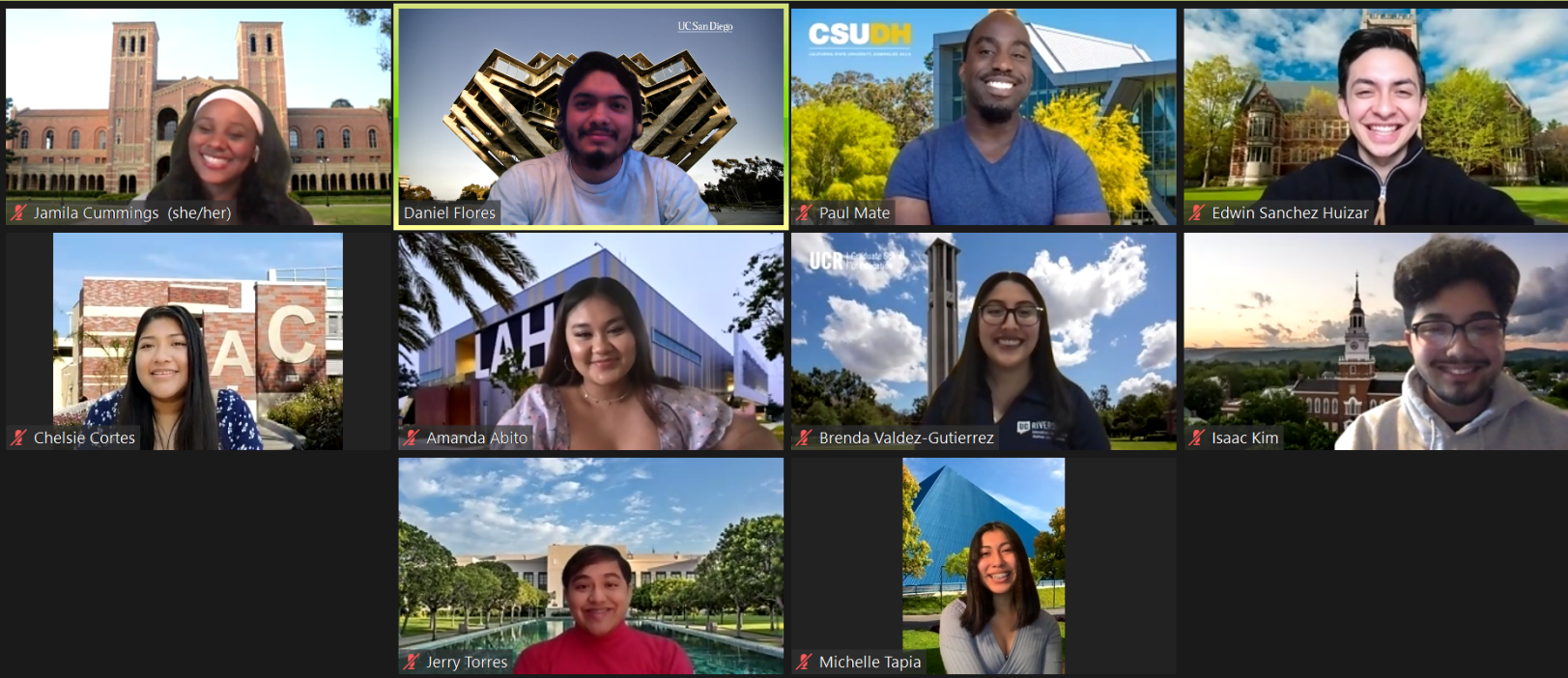


**A MEMO PREPARED BY
LASIF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS**



**COMMUNITY
SCHOLARS:
OUR STORIES,
OUR SOLUTIONS**

**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES
OF COLLEGE STUDENTS FROM
LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

MAY 2021

To: California Community Foundation (CCF), Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund (LASIF) Refresh Advisory Committee, & Interested Parties

From: LASIF Action Research Fellows

Re: Community Scholars: Our Stories, Our Solutions
Exploring the Experiences of College Students from Los Angeles County

Date: May 2021

In the winter of 2021, the California Community Foundation (CCF) engaged the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (Gardner Center) to support us in an Action Research Fellowship. The ten of us have each participated in a different college access / college success program that is part of the LASIF family. We each attend (or recently graduated from) a different school, including public and private four-year universities and public two-year colleges. All of us are from Los Angeles County, and all of us hope that our work during this Fellowship will benefit our community.

We developed a set of research questions that addressed CCF's interests in LA students' experiences, so that the Foundation could draw upon our findings as they designed the next iteration of LASIF. To CCF's questions we added others that addressed aspects of the student experience we were interested in better understanding. We also learned about Photovoice research methods to engage research participants in sharing their stories. We then created an interview protocol and conducted 56 interviews with other LASIF participants and with each other, from February 17- March 15, 2021. 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 DEMOGRAPHICS

We randomly selected four or five interviewees from the participants of each of our ten LASIF organizations.¹ The only criterion was that the participants were currently enrolled in postsecondary education. The ten organizations differ in size, so the pools from which the interviewees were randomly selected varied from fewer than 20 to more than 700, for a total of almost 2,000 participants. Overall, about 52% of interviewees identified as female; 43%, male; 2%, other gender identity; and 4% were missing these data. Sixty-one percent of interviewees identified as Hispanic or Latinx; 11%, Black or African American; 9%, Asian; 2%, American Indian or Alaska Native; 2%, White; 2%, multiple races/ethnicities; and 2%, other. Thirteen percent of interviewees were missing these data. The type of postsecondary institutions attended by the interviewees were as follows: 29% attended a California State University (CSU); 25%, a California Community College; 25%, a University of California (UC); 12%, a private institution outside California; 9%, a private institution in California; and 2%, a public institution outside California.

While the demographic information collected did not include complete information related to whether interviewees' parents attended college, we did hear from many that they were the first generation in their family to attend.

¹ Boys & Girls Clubs of LA Harbor, Bresee, College Access Plan, College Match, Fulfillment Fund, Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA), InnerCity Struggle, Male Success Alliance, Pasadena City College Upward Bound, and Sharefest

KEY FINDINGS

Our findings from the interviews are divided into seven categories:

1. Attitudes about College Going
2. Barriers and Challenges for College Access During High School
3. Supports During High School
4. College Knowledge & College Counseling During High School
5. Barriers and Challenges for College Completion
6. Supports During College
7. Career Exploration

1. Attitudes about College Going

How do family and community expectations influence a student's understanding and perception of postsecondary education? When and how are students first exposed to the idea of college and how does that impact their future experience?

- The influence of family on college going attitudes emerged as critical to more than 75% of interviewees, with students describing their family as having a significant influence on their attitudes about pursuing higher education. They described how their parents, siblings, and other family members pushed them to strive to attain a good education and to pursue their dreams and goals. Many interviewees suggested that push was in large part a result of being the first in their family to attend college and their parents' desire for their children to take advantage of opportunities that they themselves did not have.
- Most interviewees noted that their families offered emotional and motivational support, rather than support navigating postsecondary systems. This was a result of interviewees often being first generation college-going students, where parents did not have the experience that would allow them to assist with application processes or to easily understand interviewees' experiences applying to, or attending, college.
- On the other hand, some interviewees shared that their families discouraged them from attending college, noting that parents were not initially convinced that going away and engaging in something the family had not done before would be a good idea. A small share of interviewees noted that their families did not believe they were ready for college or wished for them to work to help support the family instead. These attitudes possibly reflect the challenges for families that have not participated in postsecondary education before to understand the long-term financial rewards of going to college and the tendency to focus on the often substantial short-term costs. Parents who did not attend college themselves may also feel that their children going to college creates a social division in their family, rather than understanding that their children are building on their values and hard work.
- More than 65% of interviewees noted the importance of friendships on their attitudes about college, describing how friends often acted as gateways to resources and organizations, and offered academic and emotional support. Some described how friend groups would consult with each other about financial aid, best college options, and majors. Most students felt that their friends supported them on their college journeys, whether or not they themselves planned to attend college.

- While all of those interviewed ultimately decided to attend college, some had this intention from an early age while others were unsure and did not consider college until their later years in high school. This latter group of students identified a range of factors that led to this shift, including things like learning about the opportunities that college degrees provide, seeing their friends attend college, or becoming more confident in their academic abilities.
- Many students reported feeling intimidated by the idea of going to college, noting insecurities related to academics, affordability, and lack of representation. However, they shared a common perception that college is a way to improve quality of life and social standing.
- The information that our interviewees received in high school—from families, friends, and other adults—as well as the experiences they were able to connect to, shaped their attitudes, and their attitudes then shaped their sense of whether college was right for them and whether they could succeed. The people who shared information about college, who created high academic expectations, and who helped them understand what they were capable of, created a desire within the student to meet those expectations.

2. Barriers and Challenges for College Access During High School

What are the greatest barriers and challenges facing students on their journeys to college, including at critical transitions from one institution type to another?

- About 70% of interviewees suggested that the greatest barriers and challenges during high school for college access related to a general lack of resources and information related to college, resulting in misconceptions and lack of knowledge. More specifically, interviewees noted that there was a lack of technical support for things like financial aid and college applications. Almost as many interviewees indicated that cost was a factor when they were considering college, with a significant number describing how paying for college would weigh on their family and themselves. Some explained that the pandemic had resulted in additional financial burdens.
- Academic barriers were noted almost as frequently as barriers related to college costs, with a majority reporting that they felt academically unprepared for college by their high school. A common theme was that while some students wanted to improve academically, there was limited opportunity to do so due to a lack of resources. For example, students pointed to limited seating in AP courses, no tutoring available on campus, and a need for ELS support. Similarly, the majority of first-generation students reported that they struggled with the use of academic language, and particularly with writing essays. Balancing academics, work hours, and/or extracurricular activities was another barrier noted by many.
- The majority of interviewees also described social and emotional barriers, with almost all sharing that they experienced impostor syndrome, insecurities about their own academic abilities, or concerns about the lack of diversity they might encounter. Some shared their experiences with mental health challenges such as unhappiness, worry, and loneliness and some described feeling pressure to disprove social stigmas.

3. Supports During High School

What supports are (or would be) helpful for high school students to graduate and successfully transition to college? What academic programs or educational outreach programs have helped students transition from high school to college?

- More than 80% of interviewees named their college access organizations as an important support during high school, finding them to be accessible and helpful. While there was some variation in the level of help offered, interviewees indicated that every aspect of the college application and financial aid processes were supported in many ways. For

example, organizations helped students to understand the college application essay questions, including identifying topics and providing editing support, and they helped them to complete financial aid forms such as the CSS profile and FAFSA. This type of support was especially relevant, as the majority of interviewees stated that cost was a major factor in their college decisions, with many noting their desire to minimize debt.

- Beyond assistance with applications and processes, interviewees noted that their college access organizations helped them to communicate with college administrators. For example, one student shared how their college access organization helped mediate their anxiety by assisting them in drafting well-written emails to administrators and counselors during the college application process.
- As noted earlier, interviewees shared that their families provided emotional support, with a majority indicating that they were first generation. Some interviewees indicated that their families went through a period of disapproval for their educational journeys due to their parents' traditions or beliefs and most families did not possess knowledge about maneuvering through the U.S. educational system. Even with these obstacles, the majority of students indicated that their family was a significant emotional and/or financial support for college access during high school, ahead of friends, school, or community.
- The extent and intensity of programming for parents/families varies by college access organization. Given the perception among many interviewees that their parents/families did not have all the necessary background information and experience to navigate the college application process, this type of programming is especially relevant for first generation students and those students whose parents may not be supportive of their children's college-going decisions without additional understanding built from trusted sources.
- The importance of one-on-one relationships stood out as having the potential to contribute to students' success in high school and their college access experience, as students often accumulate information from a variety of sources, including friends/peers, their school, their local community, and others during their high school-to-college transition.

4. College Knowledge & College Counseling During High School

What are students' perceptions about their access to information about college during high school? What are students' experiences with high school counselors, in particular with respect to their perception of which students receive attention and effective services, information, and advice related to college attendance? To what extent do counselors give information about community colleges, compared with information about four-year universities? How often was community college an option presented by counselors during high school?

- One of the most mentioned aspects of high school college and career counseling by interviewees was the challenge of accessing the staff. Many students shared their perception that counselors did not have adequate time to support all students, resulting in a range of approaches to providing students with information. For example, some counselors appeared to focus their attention on the students they viewed as more likely to attend college, while others provided information in larger group settings rather than individual meetings. Many of the students we interviewed reported a low frequency of contact with their high school counselor, and meetings that were generic rather than in-depth or individualized. Some students who experienced challenges accessing their high school counselors reported that they turned to their college access organizations for college guidance instead.

- More students shared negative perceptions and experiences with their high school counselors than positive ones. Their criticism fell into two overarching categories: (1) Most frequently, interviewees described counselors' lack of interest in supporting them, as well as perceptions that counselors favored certain students or groups of students. (2) The other main type of criticism related to counselors' lack of deep knowledge about college or other options, including the details of applications processes.
- Some noted that advising content seemed to focus more on four-year universities, requiring students needing to find information about other options elsewhere. This emphasis sometimes extends beyond counseling to the broader school culture. For example, when schools celebrate college acceptances, those who have chosen to attend community college are automatically excluded.
- A smaller number of students described having positive experiences with their high school counselors, taking advantage of their proximity. These students described support in three distinct areas: (1) the counselor having in-depth knowledge of college and other post-high school options, as well as related requirements and processes; (2) the counselor believing in the student and/or caring about their future success; and (3) a higher frequency of contact between counselor and student.
- Despite the large share of interviewees who described challenges related to accessing high school counselors and the quality of the advice and support they offered, every interviewee ultimately applied and matriculated to college. Some students specifically mentioned the helpful, supportive role played by college access organizations in guiding them to college. Even when high school counselors were supportive, students shared that sometimes the college access organizations were more able to assist with navigating the financial and college application processes.
- The experiences shared by many interviewees indicate that high school counselors often do not provide adequate support to all students.

5. Barriers and Challenges for College Completion

What are the greatest barriers and challenges facing students on their journeys through college, including at critical transitions from one institution type to another? For students who don't complete college, what factors play a role in that?

- The majority of interviewees shared that their greatest challenges during college related to academics. One of the most mentioned challenges for college completion by interviewees was the academic rigor and their lack of academic preparation for college-level work. Many students shared that compared to their high school, college classes were far more demanding, content moved at a faster pace, and exams were more challenging. In the interviews, students shared that their high schools failed to teach them how to adequately manage their time, advocate for themselves, and develop proper study habits. Consequently, for many students, grades suffered their first semesters.
- Many noted that the transition to online learning brought about by the pandemic made courses far more challenging. For example, several students explained that retaining information becomes more taxing because lectures are not as engaging asynchronously or synchronously. They shared that since the start of the pandemic, they struggled to find the motivation to remain engaged and seek support.
- Many described that their academic advisors failed to be readily available. In multiple cases, students reported needing support choosing classes for their major but failed to get advising because the only time slots counselors had available were after the deadline. The lack of counselor availability thus contributed to their academic barriers and challenges.

- Many students also shared that they required financial assistance to pay for college and living expenses, and that they faced a range of financial challenges: (1) A significant number of students reported having difficulty balancing their work and school schedules, and in some cases work schedules required them to enroll an extra year to complete their required units for graduation. (2) Managing money was reported to be difficult, especially for first year students. (3) Students reported that applying for financial aid is a complicated process and the disbursement is often delayed. (4) Students stated they were not advised on how to pay the debt for their loan. (5) A few students believed they would not be approved for financial aid due to their immigration status.
- Most interviewees reported various social and emotional challenges they had to overcome during school. For example, many students shared their own narratives of experiencing impostor syndrome. This resulted in feeling out of place at their institution, questioning whether they need to belong, and their lack of motivation based on academic standing. Some of the students we interviewed stated this took the utmost toll on their mental health, requiring them to prioritize their health thus resulting in contemplating dropping out of school.

6. Supports During College

How are LASIF organizations continuing to support students' education throughout college? What programs are available to college students to support their success? To what extent has college counseling (during college) supported students to move efficiently through college to graduation in a major/discipline of choice? Is there a role for LASIF / LASIF organizations to support college counselors to work more effectively with LASIF students? To what extent do students have access to mental health services? Is there a need for additional supports? What supports are (or would be) helpful for students to graduate faster, easier, cheaper (from LASIF organizations and others)?

- Interviewees reported that their college access organizations have helped them financially, academically, professionally, and emotionally during college.
 - Financial support: Many students shared that their organizations have provided them with financial support that has helped with tuition, textbooks, and technology (which has been extremely necessary in the era of online learning).
 - Academic support: Some students reported that their college access organizations have helped them manage their class schedules. Moreover, they have provided students with academic tutoring and counseling.
 - Professional support: Even more students explained that their programs have extended career and internship opportunities to them and have provided them with letters of recommendation and employment.
 - Emotional support: An overwhelming number of students shared that their programs have encouraged them to persist and grow. Many explained that their programs have created spaces for them to share about their experiences, build community, and network with their peers, which has helped them build resilience. Many also noted that during the pandemic, their programs were the only ones that had checked on them and made them feel cared for.
- While most students reported having support from their college access organizations during college, not all did and some reported a lack of clarity about what their relationship with these programs should be during these years. Some mentioned that they would have liked to have had a mentor during the transition to college. Those students who did maintain an ongoing relationship shared that this relationship helped them be more successful in almost all aspects of college.

- A majority of interviewees noted that their families offer emotional support and motivation during college. Family members often encourage students to keep striving for success while facing challenges such as homesickness. In addition, family members often provide resources such as money or transportation for students. Some interviewees shared that they were motivated to pursue college to earn a higher income to support their family.
- Many interviewees shared positive experiences with support systems offered by their college, including college access programs and advisors. Many shared that they were exposed to various programs, professors, advisors, and counselors that academically, emotionally, and socially, prepared them for success. Some described the availability of wellness centers that offer medical help, free therapy, grief counselors, and other supports such as organizations and clubs.
- In addition to college access organizations, families, and colleges, many students also noted that they had some sort of support from their friends. Numerous interviewees relied on their group of friends for information about events and programs, in addition to creating study groups, motivating each other to attain goals, and sharing a career-oriented attitude for college success.

7. Career Exploration

What career exploration experiences have students had during high school and college? What career exploration experiences do students wish they had/could still have? In what ways have LASIF organizations supported students to find internships and other work opportunities for exposure to career paths? To what extent have students been given opportunities to receive stipends for internships? Are students sometimes forced to pass up on an internship opportunity because it is unpaid?

- Many interviewees shared that they would appreciate a fair stipend for work experiences like internships, especially given that so many students have expenses which require them to work, leaving no time for unpaid activities beyond their college courses. That said, some shared that if the job or internship provided valuable experience or networking opportunities, then it might be worthwhile even without compensation. This was often a challenging issue for interviewees to discuss, with many becoming uncomfortable and having a hard time quantifying their worth. For many, this may be a result of being the first in their family to attend college and being taught to not be assertive in asking for compensation. Thus, while many interviewees acknowledged the importance of career-related experience that may not necessarily be financially compensated, this attitude should be understood within the context of the financial barriers faced by so many students, as well as broadly held perceptions related to impostor syndrome affecting many students' confidence in navigating compensation conversations related to internships and other career exploration experiences.
- Many interviewees were not exposed to different career paths. They reported that they did not feel like their schools provided them with opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, volunteer opportunities, and so forth. Most students who found internships, found them through their college access organization or while searching on their own. Many students reported that while their schools did offer career panels and workshops, they did not find either to be beneficial. Many interviewees felt that their high schools failed to provide students with meaningful opportunities.
- Some interviewees shared that they were part of internships or work opportunities that did not match their interests, but they greatly appreciated the experience and found ways to connect tasks and skills with necessary aspects of their future careers.

- Several interviewees commented on knowing that their campuses offered resources for possible internships, but some shared that they found them to be somewhat limited and that they did not align with their interests. Some have not explored career opportunities through internships but rather through jobs, volunteer opportunities, and/or clubs/campus organizations. Most students who currently do not hold internship positions plan to apply for one in the future, with many noting this would be likely to happen after the pandemic ends.
- Interviewees shared that they thought career exploration programs could offer a chance to see opportunities beyond their community. They described their interest in programs that would offer resources, networks, shadowing, internships (focused on career), and exposure to roles and opportunities that they would want to have in the future. Some noted that field trips would benefit them since it would open their minds and present more options for future careers. Interviewees shared that they felt this kind of support is necessary for every student as they consider options for what they want to do after high school and college.

RECOMMENDATIONS

During High School

College Access Programming

- High schools and/or college access organizations should strive to offer programming/support to students in the first two years of high school so that they are more likely to see college as a feasible option. For example, college access organizations might set up a panel with alums from their program to talk about college and act as an example of someone who has successfully accessed college. This might plant the idea of college during the early years of high school, helping students to get started early on the postsecondary education path. Hearing stories from alums from the same community or high school can be very inspiring.
- In addition to offering programming early in high school, they should offer programming during the summer prior to starting college. Summer programs could develop students' research skills, academic language, and other college basics like using APA and MLA formats in their writing. The summer before starting college is also a good time to learn the importance of accessing resources during college, including mental health and other services.
- High schools and/or college access organizations should take advantage of the strong influence that family members and friends have on high school students' attitudes toward college. Programming of this nature could focus on providing more opportunities for family members to build trust with school counselors or college access organizations; learning more about college options and the college application process; and better understanding the long-term value of a college degree. It could also include enhanced opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and support during the college application process.
- Some students learn best by listening to someone who they view as relatable. For this reason, institutions should "source locally" and hire people from all walks of life. In low-income communities, it is especially effective to have a "success story" who is also from the area. Mentors are incredibly impactful, especially those in whom students can see themselves.
- Every high school in Los Angeles County should be partnered with a college access organization, perhaps based on geography. The goal would be to create equal opportunities for all students and to at least partially address the lack of high school counselors and college access programming.
- Schools and community partners should host financial literacy workshops led by financial professionals. Beyond "saving money," these workshops should include content related to cutting back on expenses, short- and long-term loans, budgeting, and how to properly open a bank account.

- Schools and community partners should ensure that students understand the full range of college opportunities and financial aid offers. High schools and/or community partners should host workshops providing an overview of FAFSA and how to navigate the UC and CSU financial aid packages and processes. Information related to private institutions should also be shared, as they may offer more financial aid than the public schools.
- High schools and community organizations should support all students to become academically prepared for college. For example, high school teachers should do check-ins with all students, not just those excelling or falling behind. College access organizations may be able to address some of students' lack of academic preparedness by providing academic supports during high school (for example, tutoring, SAT classes, time management skills, study skills, etc.). Additionally, giving students something as simple as a well-being book (for example, 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens or a weekly/monthly planner) can encourage them to think of ways to become more organized and focused on academics. Perhaps these supports could be provided by program or high school alums, in person or through virtual sessions with students. This could serve both the alums (perhaps with a stipend) and the current high school students with academics and emotional support.

College Counseling

- High school counselors should serve all students at the school with individualized attention so that each student understands their full range of options and makes an informed decision about what they will do after high school.
- High schools need to hire more college counselors. It appears that the students who were able to form a relationship with a counselor received help; however, those relationships can be difficult to form when counselors have so many students and so little time.
- Community organizations should have academic counselors on their teams. While high school counselors are overworked and often inaccessible, academic counseling from organizations could be more efficient and easily accessed. Because organizations are community-oriented, students are more likely to feel comfortable and honest about any questions and concerns they may have. If enough resources were in place, counselors and community organizations could come together to provide more support for more students.
- High schools should ensure that counselors actually want to do their job and that they engage with students. This may mean having them re-interview for their jobs, recommitting to providing strong, equitable services to all students, with explicit job expectations and standards; or going through an assessment. Perhaps there should be documentation requirements for their meetings with students. In short, while there are some excellent counselors, our recommendation is to revisit the system and the staffing and address the significant shortcomings identified by so many interviewees. Our goal is to see high school counselors who are passionate about and committed to serving students equitably.

During College

Preparing Colleges for Students

- Our findings highlight that barriers are not tied to individual deficits but rather are the result of a system that is failing first generation students. It is not that first-generation college students are not ready for college. It is that colleges are not ready for them. Many students are navigating college for the first time. The lack of accessibility and diversity in these institutions has contributed to the additional academic, financial, social, and emotional challenges that these students face. In an effort to increase diversity and accessibility, college access organizations can start by developing relationships with college admissions staff to share with them the many talents and the particular challenges that first-generation low-income students face. In doing so, college access organizations can create pathways of enrollment for their scholars and help diversify institutions.

- Once minority students enter college, they often find school-affiliated organizations and clubs that aim to help them to form bonds and build their sense of belonging. However, connecting minority students with these organizations should be officially offered by all colleges as part of the orientation and registration process for new students. In addition, college access organizations can and should facilitate these networking opportunities.
- Colleges should ensure that financial aid processes are simplified and easy to understand. Loans should only be offered if financial aid is not available. Also, the different types of loans should be explained.
- Colleges should ensure that academic counselors are accessible from the time that students first register for classes, and that students are assigned to a counselor for guidance and resources.

Integrated, Holistic Student Supports

- High schools, college access organizations, and/or colleges should strive to address widely held feelings of impostor syndrome among students as they apply for, transition to, and attend college.
- College access organizations ought to provide clear information about whether their support will continue after students begin college, and in what ways students are welcome to continue to engage with the college access organization as they move through college. That support could include, for example, connecting new students with programs and services on campus as well as program alums at the same school.
- Community organizations should provide students just entering college with mentors for at least their first year. Ideally the mentor would attend/have attended the same college. The mentor would serve as a resource and someone who can “hold their hand” through the challenging transition. Many students we interviewed described making so many mistakes in freshman year, like taking a class with the wrong professor who is overly challenging or stressing about the first invoice that is released, before financial aid has taken effect. This is simple knowledge that is found with time, but first year college students need more guidance and support in the early days of our college journeys. We believe it would be appropriate to compensate mentors for this role. We hope that compensation would serve as a catalyst for the mentor to really put their effort into guiding the student and a genuine relationship would hopefully bloom thereafter.
- Colleges should offer additional academic support. This support could look like supplemental instructors for students in the same majors; accessible tutoring for students; extended office hours for certain classes/majors; and/or study sessions that serve both for learning and socializing.

Career Exploration and Compensation

- High Schools and colleges should offer more career exploration programs, including things like field trips for exploration, career fairs featuring employers promoting their organizations, job shadowing, and internships, so that students can have a well-rounded understanding of what they want to pursue in the future and not fall into what is given to them.
- Influential entities in the youth sector should become advocates for appropriately compensating students for work-based experiences.
- Most students want to be compensated for their time spent on internships or other work experiences, but some appeared to be uncomfortable advocating for themselves. We need to normalize paying students for their contributions in the workplace. LASIF and community partners should offer grants/stipends for unpaid internships and other career exploration experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to:

- The 46 scholars we interviewed—for sharing their time and their stories with us.
- Our organizations—for supporting us along our college journeys, for nominating us to be Fellows, and for scheduling (and sometimes rescheduling) our interviews.
- Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan—for helping us think about research in new ways that give voice to our community.
- The Gardner Center team—for bringing us together each week and for teaching, guiding, and coaching us to undertake this important work.
- The California Community Foundation—for giving us the opportunity to engage our peers and strengthen our voice to build better communities across Los Angeles County.



MEET THE LASIF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



AMANDA ABITO

LOS ANGELES HARBOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

I am Amanda Abito, a first year student at Los Angeles Harbor Community College. After a life of moving around, I finally settled in San Pedro, California. The Harbor Area of Los Angeles is where I discovered my passion for learning. There is no greater weapon than knowledge, and there is no greater tool than education. In accordance to this belief, my personal mission is to enrich the lives of the Los Angeles community.



CHELSIE CORTES

EAST LOS ANGELES COLLEGE

Hello my name is Chelsie Cortes, I grew up in East Los Angeles. I am currently attending East Los Angeles College but will be transferring to Cal State Long Beach this coming Fall. My major is Child Development and I hope to become a teacher in a low income community where I will advocate for my students, their family and the community. I joined this fellowship to learn about the community I am a part of and what barriers they face in their education.



JAMILA CUMMINGS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

I am Jamila Cummings and I am an LA native. I was born and raised in Pasadena, California, and currently am a first-year attending UCLA. I am pursuing degrees in education and public affairs as well as a minor in African American studies. In the future, I plan to earn my master's in public policy and attend law school. I am thrilled to be a LASIF fellow and look forward to giving back to my community and working on research that will create more opportunities for marginalized students.



MEET THE LASIF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



DANIEL FLORES

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

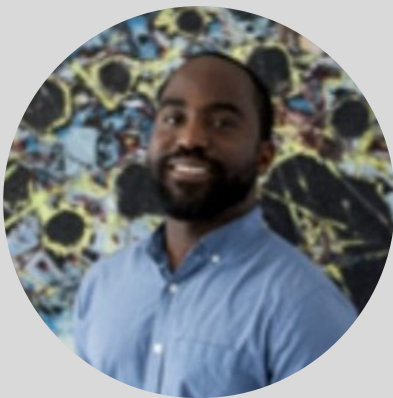
Hey! My name is Daniel Flores or (D-FLO) & I am a sophomore studying International Studies - International Business and Education Studies (double majoring) and minoring in Accounting at the University of California San Diego. Born and raised in Los Angeles, California. I have an ambition to uplift and empower my community through education, housing, and finances!



ISAAC KIM

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

My name is Isaac Kim, I was born and raised in Mid-City Los Angeles. I am currently a Junior at Dartmouth College pursuing a major in Psychology in Markets and Management along with a minor in Sociology. Through leveraging my education, I hope to uplift my community and its neighbors the same way it did for me. While my career pathway is still uncertain, I wish to serve students from low-income communities in whatever form that may be.



PAUL MATE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, DOMINGUEZ HILLS

Hello, my name is Paul Mate. I was born and raised in South Central Los Angeles. I attended El Camino College majoring in Psychology. I was inspired to study Psychology due to my mom's career in social work. I graduated in 2017 and attended California State University Dominguez Hills while taking on a supervisor role at an art gallery. I graduated in 2020 with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a minor in African Studies. My future plan is to apply for a Master of Social Work Program from a local college.



MEET THE LASIF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



EDWIN SANCHEZ HUIZAR
BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Hello! My name is Edwin and I am a sophomore at Bowdoin College majoring in Mathematics and Latin American Studies. I was born in Zacatecas, Mexico and raised in California, United States. I am passionate about math and research because it empowers people, uplifts untold stories, and has the power to drive policy.



MICHELLE TAPIA
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH

Hi! My name is Michelle Tapia. I am attending Cal State Long Beach pursuing my B.A. in Child Development and Psychology. I grew up in Echo Park, Los Angeles. As a first-generation student, I have utilized many resources while growing up. Giving back to low-income communities through academic support and youth advocacy is how I can show my gratitude.



JERRY TORRES
PASADENA CITY COLLEGE

Greetings! My name is Jerry Torres. I was born and raised in Pasadena, California. I am currently a Sophomore attending Pasadena City College. I was a part of the Pasadena City College Math Science Upward Bound Program. My educational plans are to graduate and transfer from Pasadena City College with 3 A.S. degrees. My intended transfer institution shall be UC Davis, where I'll be majoring in Environmental/Civil Engineering. Given this opportunity to do research, I have learned and discovered different things about myself and others. Thank you so much for this opportunity to work with such an amazing group of individuals.



MEET THE LASIF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



BRENDA VALDEZ-GUTIERREZ

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

Hello! My name is Brenda Valdez-Gutierrez, my hometown is San Pedro, CA and I am a junior at the University of California, Riverside. I am working towards achieving my B.A. in Education, Society, and Human Development with a concentration in Community Leadership, Policy, and Social Justice. As a future educator, I wish to continue advocating for equity and change in our school systems. I am a firm believer in allowing spaces for students to voice their stories and perspectives on issues that directly affect them. This fellowship has allowed students and I to do just that, and it has been rewarding knowing that this is a project for the community by the community.

*How can I pay myself the respect that I deserve all within two hundred words?
Someone teach me a way to summarize my journey without compromising life's beauty
Teach me a way to truly describe
an Arizonan sky,
A Sonoran Sunset*

*Can you smell my mother's cooking?
Can you hear the sounds of my city?*

*Amanda Abito, from everywhere and nowhere at all
A Brown, Asian, Indigenous, Latina
As Bodacious and Powerful as the words suggest*

*A seeker of knowledge and
Pursuer of peace*

A fool and her errands

What can I do to uplift the City of Angels?

*- Amanda Abito
Los Angeles Harbor College*

