



MISSION
—SCHOLARS—

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

MISSIONSCHOLARS.ORG

Our Mission

Mission Scholars uses comprehensive college admissions guidance, mentorship, and career development training to help exceptional, low-income students reach their full potential and become a force for change in our communities.

COLLEGE

ACCESS

Delivering unparalleled support on the journey to higher education.



Natalie Begins Eight-Year Medical Track at Brown with 3% Acceptance Rate

94%

enrolled in four-year universities

822

college acceptances to schools nationwide

38

colleges and universities attended by Scholars in **nine states**

AFFORDABILITY

Eliminating financial barriers through strategic scholarship acquisition.



Anelle Top 30 Awarded in Southern California \$50,000 Edison Scholarship

>85%

of cost of attendance covered by scholarships and grants annually

Top Merit Scholars:
3rd Gates Scholar in five years
1st Girls Inc. National Scholar
1st Edison Scholar

\$1.4 Million in scholarships awarded to the Class of 2024 for freshman year of college, totaling an estimated **\$5.4 Million** across four years

SUCCESS

Empowering futures from college to career success.



Kashaf Babson '27 Interns at State Farm through Internship Matching Program

92%

on track to graduate college in four years

100%

college freshman persistence rate

70%

secured paid summer jobs and internships in 2024, at Apple, Nationwide, UBS, Freedom 4 Youth, Penn Medicine and more

Letter From the Director

Dear Friends of Mission Scholars,

As I reflect on the past year, I am proud to celebrate a remarkable journey of growth and commitment with the Mission Scholars community. Here are a few highlights I am excited to share with you:

This year, our inaugural cohort – the high school Class of 2020 – graduated from college, marking a significant milestone in their lives and for our organization. We are thrilled for these graduates, and are gratified to see them continue their association with Mission Scholars as alumni mentors, sharing their experiences and inspiring our younger Scholars to pursue what they thought unimaginable.

In our efforts to more fully involve our Scholars' families in their educational journey, we have expanded our parent and guardian engagement programming. We have strengthened our bilingual workshops focused on college admission and financial aid, empowering parents with the knowledge required to support their children's aspirations. This initiative has fostered a stronger sense of community and collaboration among our families.

Our delivery is made possible by the steadfast support from our corporate partners and dedicated volunteers, who continue to create invaluable opportunities for our Scholars.

Through comprehensive workshops on financial literacy and professional development, along with personalized guidance on college applications and essays, our extensive network is equipping our Scholars with the skills they need to successfully navigate their unique pathways.

As our organization continues to grow, we are fortunate to have a dedicated team of staff members who care deeply about bridging the gap in college access, affordability, and success for students in our community. Together, we remain committed to our mission, and we look forward to the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

Thank you for your continued support of and belief in our mission. Your contributions have been critical in enabling our Scholars to achieve their academic and career goals. Together, we are creating permanent change in Santa Barbara, and we are making a profound difference in the lives of low-income students in our community.



Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Cassie Lancaster'.

Cassie Lancaster
Executive Director

In the News

MISSION SCHOLARS FOUNDERS NAMED LOCAL HEROES OF THE YEAR 2023

Santa Barbara Independent



GRADUATION CELEBRATION MILESTONE REACHED WITH FIRST COLLEGE GRADUATES

Noozhawk



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GET A JUMP START THROUGH UCSB SUMMER RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Santa Barbara Independent



Presenting the First Mission Scholars College Graduates

100% of alumni would recommend Mission Scholars to a younger sibling or peer.

Alumni Leading the Next Generation

In May of 2024, the Mission Scholars inaugural cohort earned their college degrees and returned to the Mission Scholars office as volunteers and leaders. These alumni, having just navigated the challenges of higher education themselves, now serve as College Coaches and workshop leaders, providing invaluable mentorship and firsthand experience to younger Scholars.

This peer-to-peer guidance helps to ensure a smoother transition to college, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity within the Mission Scholars family. This cycle of giving back strengthens our mission and reflects the strength and sustainability of our organization.



**Kathy Leads
As Keynote Speaker**

As a graduate from the University of Southern California's Viterbi School of Engineering, Kathy Ramirez-Gijon led as the keynote speaker at our 3rd Annual Leaders in Transition (LIT) Kickoff in July, hosted by Sensata Technologies.

Kathy inspired the Scholars headed to college, speaking to the power of mentorship and networking to grow their career and internship opportunities.



**Christian Mentors
Freshman Jonathan**

After earning a dual degree in Computer Science and Cognitive Science at UC Berkeley, Christian Reyes Santos meets his mentee, Jonathan Ortega, a first-year at the University of Redlands studying Environmental Science.

As an essential part of the College Success program, College Coaches and Mentees check in regularly for four years to set goals, tackle obstacles, and celebrate milestones.



**Jennifer Serves
The Local Community**

As a graduate from the University of Redlands with a degree in Sociology, Jennifer Reveles secured a full-time position in her field of expertise at the Family Service Agency of Santa Barbara as a Family Coach.

Jennifer is applying the knowledge she gained in college to make significant contributions supporting vulnerable families locally in Santa Barbara County.

Bella Launches Career at Electronic Arts

Five years ago, Bella Garfias couldn't have imagined she'd be working as an Associate Researcher at Electronic Arts (EA). Back in high school, the college application process felt overwhelming, and building a career path seemed insurmountable. As a Business and Marketing major at the University of San Diego, Bella searched for internships, and through her participation in the Mission Scholars College Success Program, she was introduced to Chris Bruzzo, then Chief Experience Officer at EA and current Mission Scholars Board President. Impressed by her potential, Bruzzo recommended EA's internship program, noting, "**Bella personifies first-generation determination**, and the partnership with Mission Scholars and EA was like striking a match to kindling."

Through the Mission Scholars and EA partnership, Bella secured two consecutive internships in EA Esports Content Strategy and Consumer Insights, where she analyzed competitive brands and player perceptions. She embraced the opportunity, confident in her marketing skills and supported by her team.

Now, Bella is leveraging her experiences as a first-generation college graduate and a full-time employee at a global corporation to give back.

She has returned to lead Mission Scholars workshops, guiding the next generation of college students with invaluable insights. Recently at a Mission Scholars-EA "Mentorship Hour," EA employees provided professional guidance to Mission Scholars college students, and Bella was front and center—not as a student, but as an EA professional, offering guidance to her younger peers. Reflecting on her new role at Mission Scholars, Bella remarks, "**Leading the next generation of Mission Scholars students is an incredibly rewarding experience**, especially as I was in their shoes not too long ago. Being someone who has been in their position gave me a unique perspective on how to better guide and support them."

Bella's journey underscores the transformative power of mentorship and the profound impact of investing in Santa Barbara's future leaders.



From Scholar to Staff Member: Kristine Joins the Mission Scholars Team

This fall, Kristine Carrillo, a senior at Brown University studying Education Studies and International and Public Affairs, took a big step in her professional career by joining the Mission Scholars team as a College Success Coordinator. Kristine has a breadth of experience interning at Mission Scholars, the New England Board of Higher Education, the Bonner Foundation, and the Education Department at Brown. By joining our team, Kristine is fulfilling our mission by leading her peers and inspiring future generations to follow in her footsteps.



Who We Are

Staff

Cassie Lancaster Katie Kinsella Jacqueline Mora
Yazmín Vega Escalera Paige Brenner Eubank
Shyra Jain Kristine Carrillo Mayra Mena Nolasco
Ramey Echt Daphne Tebbe



Advisory Committee

Kim Phillips Chris Bruzzo Julia Rodgers Estefania Contreras Joe Howell Judi Koper
Fhernanda Del Toro Arroyo Julie McGeever Danna McGrew Debby Peterson Daphne Tebbe

Development Committee

Julia Rodgers Bess Scribner Debby Peterson Suzanne Garrett
Rachael Stein Sheri Copus Angie McGrath Lizzie Peus Mary Blair

Volunteers

Abel Flores Prieto	Carla Neufeldt	Hope Saxon	Kirsten Kinsella	Oz Arconian
Adrianna Ruiz	Carli Cearnal	Hugo Dante	Kyra Rogers	Pamela VanderHeide
Alejandra Gutierrez	Carolyn Callahan	Jackie Navarette	Libby Paternoster	Rachel Skokowski
Alex Koper	Chris Eubank	Janice Brown	Dr. Lindsay Katona	Ridley DeSoto
Alex Regan	Christian Reyes Santos	Jasmin Ramirez	Liz Salgado	Sam Molina
Aliyah Brown	Christian Arce	Javier Castro	Lizette Serrato	Sami Weiss
Allie Kelleher	Christina Nuñez Ross	Jeanmarie Levy	Madeleine Francavilla	Shane Holt
Amber Wolfe	Darlene James	Jenny Kramer	Margot Dorion	Sharon Basham
Andy Gersoff	Dawn Carlson	Jeremy Alvarez	Mari Mender	Stephanie Durkin
Angelie Morales	Devon Nelson	Joe O'Brien	Merith Velasquez	Susan McMillan
Ann Johannessen	Diana Ciontea	Josh Timpe	Michelle Berkowitz	Teresa Bruzzo
Arash Merpour	Dianne Dixon	Kait Hamilton	Michelle Brenner	Tracy Jenkins
Bella Garfias	Elijah Marquez	Kaleen Baker	Mike Randolph	Vanessa Herrera
Dr. Ben Diener	Dr. Elizabeth Grossman	Karla Herera	Miles Maasen	Vanessa Alvarez
Bianca Castro	Emily Waterhouse	Kate Jeffery	Miranda Nichols	Violet Casillas
Bob Nuñez	Emmitt Jenkins	Kate Lee	Monica Alvarez	Viollette Meneffee
Brett Zylstra	Eric Reyes	Katherine Stewart	Nancy Zermeño	Wendy Santillan
Brianna Aguilar	Erin Leighland	Katherine Marton	Nathalie Perez-Cino	Westmont Liberal Arts Ambassadors
Brody McGonigal	Geno Rojas	Kathy Marden	Nathan Alvarez	Zoe Hinck
Cameron Walker	Haley Araki	Kathy Ramirez-Gijon	Dr. Nicole Callahan	Zuma Vallejo-Howard
Carla Perissinotto	Hannah Rael	Kevin Easter	Nicole Hyslop Allen	
	Holly Noble	Kimberly Klawuh	Oscar Gutierrez	

Driving Meaningful Change Through Vital Community Partnerships

Our thriving community partnerships strengthen our impact and maximize opportunities for local underserved youth and families.

When we founded Mission Scholars, the Santa Barbara Education Foundation served as our valued fiscal sponsor, offering essential administrative support and guidance that allowed us to focus on our mission and expand our impact. The growth and success of Mission Scholars is deeply rooted in the unwavering support that the Santa Barbara Education Foundation offered from the very beginning. We are profoundly grateful for their support.



SANTA BARBARA
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION



This summer, three Mission Scholars students participated in Cottage Health's paid Internship Program in the Education, Surgery, and Finance Departments, showcasing the power of hands-on training in their fields of study. Cottage Health's commitment to nurturing future professionals provides our students with valuable experience, connecting academic knowledge to real-world application. This is the product of a two-year collaboration with Cottage Health staff and local physicians advocating for our students to secure meaningful paid internships in healthcare.



"Witnessing surgeries firsthand in my internship has not only been inspiring, but also deepened my passion for potentially pursuing a career in surgery." - Adrian, Westmont College '27

Our work is possible thanks to the crucial support of our community connections and partnerships, including:

American Riviera Bank
Carpinteria Unified School District
Deckers Brands
Electronic Arts
Goleta Education Foundation
Heritage House
Housing Authority of Santa Barbara
Launch Generation
Montecito Bank & Trust
Next Gen Personal Finance
Partners In Education
Patagonia
PEAC Foundation
Pepperdine's Youth Citizenship Seminar
Pete Muller & The Kindred Souls

REACH Fellowship
Santa Barbara School of Squash
Santa Barbara Unified School District
Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara
Sensata Technologies
Smith Rivas
Sonos, Inc
Turner Foundation
Tutoring Machines LLC
UCSB Arts & Lectures
UCSB Promise Scholars
UCSB Pre-College Programs
Westmont College
YouthWell



CONGRATS

CLASS OF 2024!



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