

USC Rossier

*Center for Enrollment Research,  
Policy and Practice*



USC College Advising Corps

# **IMPACT REPORT**

2013-2025



# Message from the Executive Director

A cruel injustice marks American education: High school students without financial and navigational support from their families when applying to college are also the most likely to attend high schools that do not employ full-time college counselors. It is one way that college-going is as much an engine for reproducing inequality as it is an engine of opportunity.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Connecting to the outstanding work of the USC College Advising Corps (USC CAC) has blessed me with perspective on what is possible.

“ —————  
Until every school can provide adequate postsecondary counseling for every student, USC CAC offers a game-changing approach to making good on the promise of equal educational opportunity after high school.  
————— ”

Through the hard work of students who receive individualized support and inside knowledge of our highly trained advisers, USC CAC is changing the odds for students and changing life trajectories. This year, our advisers supported students on paths to everything from Caltech to tattoo art school and apprenticeships.

This is community empowerment, and inside this report you'll read stories of our impact, learn our model, and see the statistics about our reach. I hope you will feel compelled to engage further with us in our second decade: as a donor, volunteer, or follower.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Posselt".

**Julie Posselt, PhD**  
*Executive Director,  
Center for Enrollment Research,  
Policy and Practice*





# Message from the Program Director

The beating heart of youth work is relationships—authentic, face-to-face connections that drive transformation. Throughout my career the buzz has always been about finding the technological solution that would allow youth work to scale—the idea being that some component of the human element will be replaced by an infinitely scalable technology.

“

As we stand at the precipice of the AI age, that concept seems closer than ever. Yet, no technology can replace the human bond at the core of youth work.

”

Recognizing this, we came to the conclusion that scale in youth work is achieved not through technology, but through intentional program design. By harnessing the raw energy and enthusiasm of 40 recent college graduates, we make transformational impact in the lives of 10,000 low-income, first-generation students every year.

Our near-peer and strengths-based model creates a win-win-win result: students gain college access and goal attainment support; school districts benefit from expert partnership with higher education yielding measurable results; and advisers launch careers in the education and the nonprofit world.

Over the past decade, this formula has propelled over 88,000 students to go to college. This is the USC College Advising Corps.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a series of loops and a final flourish.

**Ara Arzumian, EdD**  
*Program Director,  
USC College Advising Corps*

# OUR MISSION

For the past decade, USC CAC has been committed to the same mission: increasing college access for first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students across Southern California.

We place near-peer college advisers—recent college graduates—into high schools that otherwise lack college counseling. They provide intensive, hands-on, personalized guidance to students navigating postsecondary decisions and the college and financial aid application processes. Advisers ensure that each student understands their options, identifies best-fit colleges and navigates the application process with confidence.

Since 2013, USC CAC has supported over 88,000 high school students. Our advisers don't just support applications, they build relationships, demystify college, and become trusted champions for students and their families. Whether by hosting college fairs and interactive workshops, helping refine application essays, organizing campus tours, or celebrating the outcomes on Decision Day, advisers offer comprehensive support that turns dreams into reality.

## OUR STUDENTS

USC CAC supports an average of



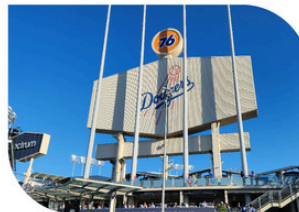
**10,000**  
high school seniors  
per year

across  
**8**  
school districts  
in LA County

Low-income students have **lower college** access rates than their **higher-income** peers.

**+88,000**

Over the past decade, USC CAC has directly assisted more first-generation, low-income, underrepresented students than can fit in **Dodger Stadium**.



**+100,000**

By 2026, we will have supported more youth than can fit in the **LA Memorial Coliseum**.



**73%**

of our students are  
low- to moderate-income  
students



**88%**

of students supported  
are people of color



**CHECK OUT CBS NEWS  
COVERAGE OF USC CAC**



## BY THE NUMBERS

Data gathered from  
2013-2022



**431,432**

one-on-one advising  
meetings



**346,744**

group advising meetings



**346,612**

college applications  
submitted



**88,752**

financial aid applications  
submitted



**57,131**

students enrolled in college



**USC CAC is closing by 27% the gap  
in college access between affluent  
and low-income students that  
marks most metropolitan areas  
across the country.**

**Over this period of time, students served by USC CAC:**

Enrolled in college at a rate

**2%**

higher than all high  
schools students  
in LA County

Enrolled at a rate

**3%**

higher than socioeconomically  
disadvantaged peers  
in LA County

# RESEARCH-BACKED IMPACT

In 2024, Dr. Michael Navia, Principal of Renaissance High School for the Arts, Long Beach Unified School District, completed a doctoral dissertation evaluating the effectiveness of USC CAC at his school.

His study explored how the College and Career Center at his school, staffed by a CAC adviser, supported first-generation and historically underrepresented students through the college and financial aid process. Drawing on interviews with students, parents and staff, Navia found that personalized advising, consistent mentorship and culturally responsive support fostered trust and built a strong college-going culture on campus.

“



**The positive impact on students' self-efficacy, coupled with the ability to bridge ethnic gaps in college readiness, underlines the value of investing in dedicated advisers and promoting strong school-home partnerships.**  
— Dr. Michael Navia

”

100%

OF STUDENTS AGREED THEIR ADVISER WAS KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE COLLEGE PROCESS



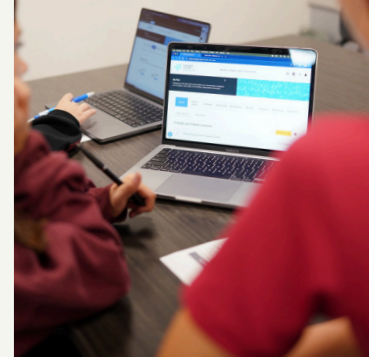
92%

OF STUDENTS FELT THE HIGH SCHOOL'S COLLEGE CENTER WAS RESPONSIVE TO THEIR NEEDS



100%

OF STUDENTS AGREED THE ADVISER HELPED GUIDE THEM THROUGH THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS WITH 68% OF THOSE STRONGLY AGREEING





# STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Our advisers not only provide college guidance — they also build relationships with students that establish a foundation of trust through which students expand their horizons.

## Crystallizing Her College Future: Crystal Jacquez

Before her senior year at Compton High School, Crystal Jacquez had only a vague college plan: she would attend community college and “figure it out later.” That changed when she met Mariah Jacobo, Jesse Cruz and the rest of the USC CAC advising team.

“

We would always walk into the college center carrying so much stress and leave feeling relieved, supported and inspired.

”

Mariah wasn’t just a college adviser to Crystal, she became a mentor, motivator and even her softball coach when the team had no one else to lead them. From helping with the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) deadlines to volunteering after school, Mariah made Crystal and her classmates feel seen and capable.

“Mariah was everything—our college adviser, our softball coach, our biggest



supporter. When no one else stepped up, she did,” added Crystal. “She didn’t have to coach us, but she did. And that showed us we were worth showing up for.”

Crystal now majors in Liberal Studies with a focus on elementary education at Biola University. She credits the encouragement she received from her advisers with pushing her to aim higher, and she now hopes to become the kind of teacher who provides that same light to future students.

“I speak on behalf of my whole senior class when I say: our advisers were our safe space. I don’t think many of us would be in college today without them,” said Crystal.

**Check out more  
heartfelt student  
interviews here**





# THE HEART OF OUR WORK: OUR ADVISERS

We draw our advisers from a competitive pool of college graduates, selecting them for their passion to serve students. They are as diverse as the students they serve, often knowing first-hand the obstacles our students may face, and work hard to provide their students with the opportunities they had to succeed in their college journeys.

## Be the Change that You Want to See in the World: Sebastian Ramirez



Sebastian Ramirez knows exactly what it feels like to navigate college applications alone. In high school, the only college counselor at his school quit during his senior year. With no one to guide him, Sebastian leaned on his academic counselor and eventually found his way to CSU Dominguez Hills.

It wasn't until he returned to that same high school as an intern that everything came full circle. Inspired by the mentor who once believed in him, Sebastian made it his mission to become “that person” for someone else.

“I wanted to be the person she was to me—to other students,” Sebastian said.

As a USC CAC adviser, Sebastian is now that mentor, guiding students through college applications, personal essays and financial aid forms with deep empathy and unwavering patience. One student he will never forget—a senior with a 1.9 GPA—was determined to get into a four-year university. With Sebastian's support, she retook four courses, submitted applications and practiced for an interview that led to her admission into CSU Dominguez Hills through the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). That moment—when she ran up to Sebastian shouting, “Mr. Ramirez, I got in!”—is what keeps him going.

**“If you believe in yourself,  
I'll believe in you. And if you  
don't, I'll believe for you.”**

# ADVISER ALUMNI: IMPACT FOR A LIFETIME

Over  
**90%**

**of former advisers  
continue working within  
education. Alumni stories  
demonstrate long-term  
impact and growth.**

**Our alumni carry the mission with  
them—into classrooms,  
communities and careers.**

**Hear more directly from our  
alumni here:**



# REDIRECTIONS TO COLLEGE SUCCESS: ALEX LUONG

As a first-generation college student, Alex Luong's journey to becoming a member of the USC CAC wasn't a straight line. While wrapping up his degree at CSU Northridge, he envisioned heading directly into graduate school but life had other plans. When acceptance letters didn't arrive, Alex couldn't help but be discouraged – until seeing a flyer for USC CAC changed everything. He applied and was selected to serve at his own alma mater, Alhambra High School.

“

We didn't have it all figured out back then, but we ended up exactly where we were meant to be. That in itself is a first-gen journey.

”

He felt a deep sense of connection to the community. Reflecting on his own high school experience, he was determined to shift the narrative around community college, a path he once saw framed as a “backup option.” Now, as an adviser, he proudly reframes community college as a smart, strategic choice.

Alex didn't just talk about it, he embodied it. He wore East Los Angeles Community

College gear across campus, modeling pride for students and demonstrating that community college is a viable route. Essentially, I felt as though I was sent back to my old high school to solve the problems I once experienced—and that still existed,” Alex added.

It left a lasting impression on one student, Elise. A perfectionist battling quiet self-doubt, Elise faced rejections from her dream schools and ultimately chose to attend community college, a choice Alex helped her see as a launchpad, not a detour.

Years later, their paths crossed again at USC. Elise had successfully transferred, and Alex had just been accepted into a master's program. They reunited at USC's Latinx Cultural Graduation, celebrating not just their academic milestones, but the resilience, hope and growth that define the first-generation experience.







## IN THE COMMUNITY

Through a shared commitment to equity and access, the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation and USC CAC have teamed up to support students on their journey to higher education. Through College and Career Accelerator Days and community events, our partnership creates engaging, hands-on opportunities for students to explore college and career pathways.

To deepen that impact, USC CAC Program Coordinator Mariah Jacobo created a “college playbook” using baseball analogies to make the college process more relatable—from stepping “on deck” in middle school to “scoring” in college.

“Baseball is familiar territory,” Jacobo shared. “We use the hitter analogy to make college feel relatable and achievable.”

The playbook simplifies complex topics like financial aid while sparking curiosity about higher education. It makes the path to college feel exciting, accessible, and within reach.

**“Together, we are empowering students to pursue their college aspirations by providing them with the tools, resources and guidance they need to navigate their academic journeys.”**

**- Nichol Whiteman,  
LADF Chief Executive Officer**

This collaboration blends education and sports to connect with students where they are helping them dream bigger, plan smarter and access the resources they need to succeed.

# WHAT WE'RE BUILDING NEXT

## CSU LONG BEACH COLLEGE SUCCESS PILOT

- Collaboration with Long Beach USD and CSU Long Beach Goal to increase college enrollment and retention rates.
- USC CAC alumni advisers hired as success coordinators, leveraging existing student relationships and experience.
- Students graduating from high school into the first year of college will be supported with resources and help in maximizing financial aid.

## SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY LA FIRES

- Community partnership with USC President Carol Folt, USC Rossier Dean Pedro Noguera and local school districts.
- Delivered free financial aid workshops to families affected by the LA wildfires.

## BROADENING THE DUAL ENROLLMENT NARRATIVE (BROADEN)

- Funded by California Community Foundation's Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund's (LASIF) new research and grant BROADEN initiative.
- Participating partner high schools are Dominguez (Compton USD) and Hoover (Glendale USD).
- Research findings will highlight how first-generation, low-income students use and benefit from dual enrollment programs, which allow high school students to take college courses and earn college credit.

**READ MORE HERE**



# GROWTH THROUGH THE YEARS

**USC CAC  
was  
launched**



**CHECK OUT LAIST'S  
COVERAGE ON WHY  
USC CAC WORKS**



**2013-14**



**2016-17**



**2020-21**

**2014-15**



**2017-18**



**2021-22**

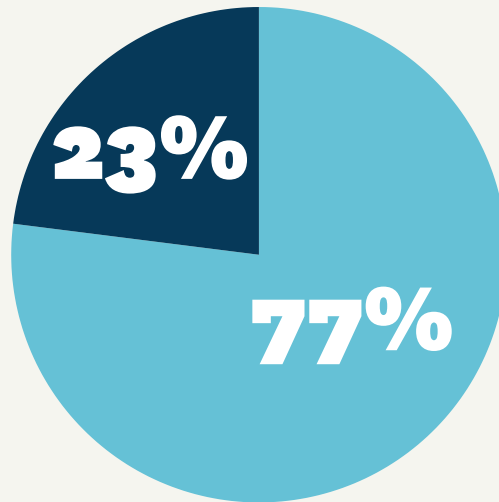




# CURRENT FINANCIALS

## 2024-2025

Total Operating Budget of \$2.5 million



● Adviser Wages & Student Support

● Administrative Costs



Number of Advisers

**37**



Number of Seniors Served

**10,625**



Cost per Adviser

**\$68,421**



Cost per Student

**\$238**

Donate here  
today

# THANK YOU

Support our next 10 years of impact.



**Taira Family  
Foundation**

**Sharon Lund  
Foundation**



**ECMC**  
Foundation

Our gratitude to our investors  
who ensure that we help over

# 10,000

students each year!



**SCHOOL  
DISTRICT  
PARTNERS**





# USC Rossier

*Center for Enrollment Research,  
Policy and Practice*

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