

College Is Real

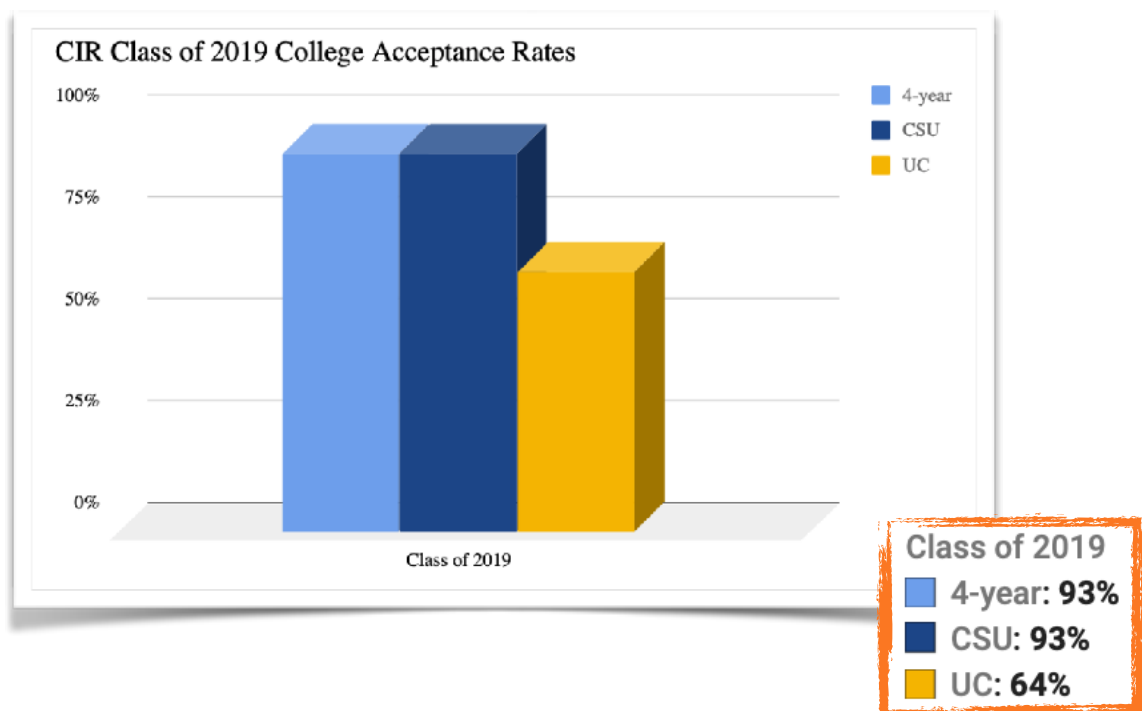
Fall 2019 Newsletter



Acceptance and Attendance for Class of 2019

The 87 CIR seniors in the class of 2019 approached college applications with an open mind and applied to almost all of the CSU and UC campuses, as well as some outstanding private universities, this past fall. It is clear that students are understanding how to appropriately select colleges that reflect their interests and applying to campuses that fit their needs. This is important to us as an organization because we are giving students the knowledge to make informed decisions. (See chart for the percentages of students accepted)

We couldn't be more proud of them as 81 of the 87 were accepted to at least one four-year university. This success is a reflection of our students' hard work and overall desire to be a first generation college student. Whether Cristal Molina at USC, Jason Varela at UCLA, Christina Ounniyom at SF State or Pa'Shance Davis at SJSU - we are so happy for the CIR class of 2019 and wish them the best of luck as they embark on their college journey.



Interested in contributing to CIR? Visit our website at www.collegeisreal.org

President & Founder Report

Brad Blake

CIR embarked on an ambitious mission a few years ago to change the college-going culture in the City of Richmond by implementing our program in the City's three public high schools - Richmond, De Anza and Kennedy. I am proud and grateful to say we have firmly established the program in all three schools. We are serving more than 400 students at the three schools and more than 150 college students each year. Most importantly, the program is having a major impact on hundreds of current and former students and their families.

With our growth and expansion of a variety of services and programs at each school and with minimal additional staffing, CIR's

budget has more than doubled over the past few years to more than \$700,000 per year. Most of our funding is done at the grassroots level and comes from generous individuals and a few benevolent private foundations. This year we are planning three fundraising events to increase our funding base - our annual gala on Sept. 26, our first-ever golf tournament on April 13, and an invitation-only "Real Estate Difference Makers" conference on Jan. 22 in SF. I really hope you can participate in at least one of them. Stay tuned for more information.

Thanks to all of you who have supported CIR. You are changing the lives of the students and their families.

Upcoming Fundraising Events

January 22, 2020

Real Estate Difference Makers Conference in SF to benefit CIR

April 13, 2020

First Annual CIR Golf Tournament Fundraiser at Round Hill
Country Club

September 26, 2020

Annual Fundraising Event, Dinner and Auction at Round Hill
Country Club

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Executive Director Report

David Millstein

A key reason for the success of the CIR program has been the assignment of volunteer mentors to assist our staff in guiding students through the high school years. Our mentors help nurture college aspirations and instill a sense of confidence in the students that they can succeed and achieve their dreams. But, our incredibly rapid growth in student headcount has a downside as we have not been able to grow our volunteer mentor pool as quickly. In fact, there is a serious shortage of mentors at the current time.

WHY BECOME A MENTOR? You can help change the life trajectory of a student in such a positive, meaningful way. Consider these comments by a recent alum about what having a mentor meant to him.

"My mentor has pushed me in the moments where I felt like I wasn't going to be able to make it anymore and maybe drop out and go straight into the workforce. That's when he stepped in and said, 'No, education is what's going to take you farther. A job is just 8 hours a day and a 30 minute break, but having a career is being able to pursue your dream. You have to see the bigger picture as this is just a small period of time in your life, so don't throw it all away.' Those words have impacted me and just kept me going." -Barry Britton, UC Merced

As you may already know CIR has three mentor programs - individual, group, and virtual mentoring. In addition to volunteering to mentor in one of these programs, you can help by:

1. Spreading the word to your friends, relatives, colleagues, and business associates, to join you.
2. Identifying contacts at local companies having employee groups that may want to meet their social responsibility goals by becoming mentors (this could be especially helpful for our group mentoring program).

With any questions about the mentoring program or how to get started please contact our Mentor Director, Destiney Norsouvanh, at mentoring@collegeisreal.org. You can also get more information on our website www.collegeisreal.org.

How to Donate to CIR

College Is Real, Inc is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with **Tax ID: 20-8651702**. All donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please do so by going to the CIR website (collegeisreal.org) or make your check out to "College Is Real" and mail it to:

College Is Real, c/o Brad Blake
550 Hartz Ave. S-200
Danville, CA 94526

CIR's Expansion to Kennedy High School

The principal of Kennedy HS, Felicia Phillips, is a Bay Area native and also a proud graduate of Kennedy HS! She is the oldest of four children, with three of them attending Kennedy and all four graduating from college. Felicia studied engineering at Harvard University, and after college she moved to Atlanta to work in the telecommunications industry. One of the biggest highlights of her career in telecommunications was having the opportunity to work on the team that hosted the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Her team was responsible for building networks that connected all of the sports venues to the media center so that broadcasters could share the results of the competitions with the world. Felicia's commitment to a career in education can be traced back to her middle and high school teachers challenging her to do great things. They guided her to the field of engineering due to her interest in math and science, and she had a great first career because of it. Wanting to pay it forward, particularly because of the relatively small number of students of color pursuing a career in engineering and science, she began her second, incredibly successful career in education.



Here are Felicia's thoughts on College Is Real's expansion to Kennedy High School:

"I didn't know much about College Is Real before the program came to our school, but as I spent more time with College Is Real staff, I began to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of the program. The commitment of the their staff, via their full-time presence on campus, is unwavering; they not only engage with the students in the program, but they become an integral part of the school community. And they are pretty relentless about building college knowledge, which complements our school-wide college and career readiness initiatives. I also appreciate the relationships that College Is Real staff builds with students. We all know the positive benefits that accrue when students have caring relationships with adults on campus, and it's great to see our students going to the College and Career Center to check in with Fabian, and to see him out and about on campus checking in with College Is Real participants.

We are excited about College Is Real's expansion on our campus, and I believe that the cohorts will double in number this year. I'm also excited about the mentoring component that is launching this year. Eventually, we would like to invite alumni and community members to serve as mentors to our College Is Real participants, And of course, what we're really looking forward to is seeing the first cohort graduate from high school with big plans for success in college and beyond!"

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CIR Alumni Martin Ocampo and His Career after College

Tell us your background and what you're doing now?

I was born in Oakland and raised in Richmond. My parents immigrated to the US to provide a better life for us. It's definitely something I didn't take for granted and it's what pushed me to pursue an engineering degree. I selected Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, to obtain a Civil Engineering degree. Shortly after graduating, I hired on with Chevron as a project manager and have worked in several other positions over the last seven years. For the last three years, I've also worked with my family to build a real estate portfolio in Texas (my home since working at Chevron). Over a short amount of time we've managed to grow our portfolio to over 30 units and have worked on a number of fix & flip properties.

How has CIR helped you?

CIR helped me in so many ways. Initially just mentoring me through the college process. I knew I wanted to attend college but I had no one to guide me in the process. CIR provided the necessary road map to apply for college, go on college tours, apply for financial aid and scholarships, and many other things. Through college, I stayed in constant contact with Brad (my mentor) who introduced me to several engineering/architectural companies that helped me further understand my career and where I ultimately wanted to be. Brad was always helpful and willing to guide me in the right direction when I needed it. If I remember correctly, he also knew someone

within Chevron that helped me land an engineering job out of college. It's funny how these connections made a significant impact on my life and professional career. Brad has also helped me develop and grow my real estate business. To this day I am very thankful for the opportunities that CIR has provided to me and continues to provide.

How have you seen CIR grow, being an original CIR member?

The growth has been exponential. The support that they provide now surpasses my expectations and it's visible in the results. The number of students that now pursue a college education if they participate in CIR is almost an anomaly when compared to the City of Richmond statistics. They have provided an avenue for students to succeed in school, in life, and in their professional career.

What advice do you have for current CIR students?

I would say to take advantage of the opportunities that CIR provides. It's difficult to think long term when you're young, however, the actions that you take now will have a very significant impact on your future. A little bit of hard work and initiative will change your life for the better. I know it because I'm living it right now. I would also recommend that you leave the Bay Area for college. You don't know the opportunism that are outside of your immediate area until you get out of your comfort zone.

De Anza High School's Newest Program Director Brooke Cullen



Tell me a little bit about your background.

I was born and raised in Marin County along with my five siblings. Because I have so many siblings (pets as well) and I'm on the older end of the lineup, helping others has been a consistent theme and passion in my life. As a result, I initially wanted to be a veterinarian or a neonatologist. But, early on during my undergrad studies I immediately fell in love with economics after taking the basic introductory course. Consequently, I obtained my bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of California, Davis in June 2018.

What led you to become involved with College Is Real?

My overarching passion, to help others in need, led to my involvement with College Is Real. But it wasn't until my senior year of college that I became interested in the education sector. During my last quarter at UC Davis, I took a course called Economics of Education. After evaluating countless economic empirical studies and models in this course, the extensive positive difference a higher education makes to a person and society became evident. And this positive difference is exceptionally pronounced for historically underrepresented groups. This realization prompted me to get involved in education involving underrepresented groups, joining the Prison University Project's math department at San Quentin as a volunteer and, starting with the fall semester last year, beginning my career with College Is Real as an Assistant Program Director.

What are you most excited about in your new role as a Program Director at De Anza HS?

I am most looking forward to going through the full school year here at De Anza, from start to finish, with all the College Is Real students. I am eager to develop meaningful relationships with my new students and further develop the relationships I have with existing students. It's going to be a wonderful year here at De Anza while I continue to collaborate closely with Angie at Richmond HS and Fabian at Kennedy HS.

What is your key aspiration for the next few years?

I aspire to continue making a difference in people's lives, specifically by making college real for students in this community.

Interview with CIR's New Board Member Jennifer Hernandez

Tell me a little bit about your background.

I am a daughter and granddaughter of steel workers. I was raised in Pittsburg, CA and currently live in Berkeley, CA. I received my B.A. with honors at Harvard University and my J.D. at Stanford Law School. Before beginning land use and my environmental law career, I clerked for Region 20 of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Now, I am a partner with Holland & Knight law firm, practicing land use and environmental law in between the firm's San Francisco and Los Angeles offices. I serve on the firm's Directors Committee and on other boards, including California Forward.

What led you to join College Is Real?

I am strong believer of upward mobility for California's young people. I do not believe in a one size fits all model. So, it's important for young kids to have solid and dedicated college graduates that can help guide them and us into the future. Through College Is Real, I am excited to join this effort in giving young kids an opportunity towards upward mobility.



Why did you want to be a part of its board?

The main reason I wanted to be a part of its board is through my interest in Contra Costa County. Contra Costa is an important county that is often unrecognized in regional initiatives. College Is Real works within the county and I am excited to be a part of their initiative in Richmond.

How do you feel College Is Real is impacting the community of Richmond?

The mentoring and academic support of the organization that is provided to Richmond students is a part of a whole village of commitment to the success of the community of Richmond and its students.

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CIR Alumna Returns to Richmond



We interviewed CIR alumna, Evelyn Corral Gonzalez. Evelyn has returned to Richmond as a high school history teacher.

How did being a part of College Is Real influence your educational trajectory?

College Is Real has influenced me in various ways, and it has played and continues to play a huge role in my educational trajectory. It has allowed me to understand the importance of giving back to my community. It is a place that will forever hold a special place in my heart.

What role did your mentor play in your life?

My awesome, humble, yet most caring mentor, Lisa Blackwell, played a huge role in

my education, as well as my personal life. Lisa took me under her wing during the hardest times in high school. We went from talking about possible colleges, to writing my personal statement, to then visiting UC Merced and deciding my major in Sociology the weekend before decision day. Lisa is more than a mentor to me, I consider her a second mother who's constantly checking up on me and my well-being. She has always influenced me to reach my full potential and has provided nothing but love and support throughout these past years of getting to know each other.

Why did you decide to become a teacher? Why Richmond HS?

I originally knew I wanted to give back to my community but I never necessarily knew how. It wasn't until I went to college and realized how unprepared I felt; I didn't even know how to send out an email to my professor! Coming from a low-income community and as a first generation Latina, I had no idea what I had gotten myself into. As the years went by, I started realizing the inequality in our education system and decided that becoming a teacher would allow me to teach others basic skills and ideas that could also be applied outside of school. Besides all this, it feels great coming back to Richmond knowing that I have something in common with each one of my students, being from the same community. At the end, I am just another example that if I could do it, so can they.

Program Director Snapshots

Angelica Arriaga

Angelica, or better known as Angie, serves as the program director at Richmond HS while also being our Senior Program Director overseeing our efforts at all three schools. She is entering her tenth year with CIR helping students to reach their dreams. Her initial interest in education came from her involvement as a student in a college access program, AVID.

College: University of California, Berkeley

Major: English and Chicano Studies

Fun Fact: Fabian Martinez (Kennedy Program Director), and our Mentor Director, Destiney Norsouvanh, were students of Angie's a few years after she started working for CIR.



Fabian Martinez

Fabian, or better known as Fabi, is the program director at Kennedy HS. He is a CIR alum of Richmond HS and continues to provide academic support, mentoring, and guidance for the students of Richmond. He is starting his first full school year at Kennedy and hopes to spark the change students want to see in their community.

College: San Jose State University

Major: Kinesiology

Fun Fact: Fabi enjoys eating tamales with ketchup.



A Huge Thank You to Our Staff and Board!

Board Members (2019-2020)

Brad Blake (Founder & President), Greg Chabolla, David Millstein, Renton Squires, Susan Lopera Overton, Robert Telles, Nick Sclavos, Pascal Yammine, Jennifer Hernandez, Eric Tuckness

Staff:

Angelica Arriaga, *Senior Program Director*
Brooke Cullen, *Program Director*
Fabian Martinez, *Program Director*
Destiney Norsouvanh, *Mentor Director*

How You Can Help

Become a Mentor

The best way to get involved is by becoming a mentor to our students! We offer three mentor models:

1. **Individual** - you will be paired with 2 students and meet with them at their school during lunch or after school at least once a month
2. **Group** - you will join a group of mentors once a month to meet with a cohort of students in a structured program
3. **Virtual** - similar to individual mentoring except you will be meeting with your mentee(s) virtually on your computer at a mutually agreeable time

To learn more, please email mentoring@collegeisreal.org or visit our mentor resource website cirmentor.weebly.com.



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