

JOHN W. GARDNER YOUTH ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP WITH KERN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

partnering with youth to create knowledge + ignite change within their communities

In the spring of 2020, as the pandemic took hold, an interdisciplinary team at the Gardner Center thought about ways in which we could leverage our experience to address the daunting challenges facing our partners and the youth they served. We considered:

- that while organizations often have quantitative data regarding the young people they serve, they often do not have a deep, qualitative understanding of their experiences and the ways in which their programs contribute to—or fall short of—supporting youth to thrive;
- that the desire by organizations for qualitative data creates a ready and interested audience for findings and recommendations;
- that these conditions could be harnessed to create a positive youth development experience—aligned with the principles and the goals of Youth Participatory Action Research¹—that elevates youth voice and supports partner organizations to learn from youth to improve their programs.

The Opportunity

We identified an opportunity to create a summer research experience for first-generation college students in California’s Central Valley. Supported by a grant from College Futures Foundation, we partnered with Kern Community Foundation (KCF) to design and implement a Youth Action Research Fellowship. The Fellowship leveraged the Gardner Center’s expertise and experience with youth-led research, adapting tools and processes to engage six KCF need-based scholarship recipients in building youth voice and generating data to inform efforts to advance equitable college attainment. Through the Fellowship, these young people received a stipend to learn research skills and conduct interviews with other scholarship recipients about the foundation’s scholarship program and their college experiences.

Getting Started

Before embarking on this journey, KCF needed to confirm its genuine curiosity and willingness to fully engage in the process. The foundation was clear on its readiness to listen to and learn from the student Fellows, including committing to providing an audience of staff and leadership for the emergent findings and recommendations. This was critical to ensuring that the Fellowship would be beneficial for both the young people it served and the foundation’s own

¹ Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): “research is done not just for the sake of it but to inform solutions to problems that young people themselves care about. YPAR can be useful for any young people wanting to make a difference, and is an especially powerful approach for young people who are experiencing marginalization due to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, or other forms of oppression.”
<http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/learn-about-ypar>

organizational learning and improvement. Beyond this basic commitment, KCF needed to support the recruitment of, and stipends for, the Fellows. Once underway, KCF also needed to provide information about, and outreach to, their program participants who would participate in the research. KCF engaged with the Fellows at key points in the process, including sharing its own research questions and engaging in discussions about organizational priorities, challenges, and opportunities.

The 10-Week Curriculum

The heart of the Fellowship was a guided 10-week process, providing training in qualitative research methods. The Gardner Center team supported the Fellows to undertake critical tasks and engaged actively as needed to advance the process.

The Fellows, ranging from a rising college sophomore to a recent graduate, participated in weekly 2.5 hour sessions facilitated by the Gardner Center, with supplementary support sessions as needed. In addition, Fellows engaged in approximately 12 hours of work each week that supported the collaborative development of research questions and the creation of an interview protocol. Fellows were assigned partners with whom they interviewed other KCF scholarship recipients. They were responsible for confirming and conducting the interviews, as well as documenting them with notes and reflective memos.

Once the interview process was underway, the Gardner Center team created a collective data set from the Fellows' documentation, which the Fellows used to create a set of codes. With their interview partners, the Fellows used these codes to analyze the data they collected, and then develop findings and recommendations.

Using the findings and recommendations generated by the Fellows and working closely with them, the Gardner Center acted as “communications support” to the Fellows’ “research team,” developing presentation materials (PowerPoint deck and Research Brief) with the information generated and input provided by the Fellows. In addition, the Gardner Center supported the Fellows to develop and practice their presentations. KCF ensured that the Fellows would be invited to present to their staff and leadership, which proved extremely valuable to both KCF and the Fellows. Additional presentations were also scheduled, including for Gardner Center staff and leaders from six other community foundations across California and College Futures Foundation, as well as local education leaders.²

The Impact

The foundation gleaned significant value from the research findings, and deepened their relationships with their scholarship recipients. The following quotes from the Fellows themselves speak to the Fellowship’s profound impact for them.

² See memo attached.

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE KCF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP—IN THE FELLOWS' OWN WORDS

On the Importance of Connecting Scholarship Recipients with One Another

- *The Fellowship was a great opportunity for me. ... I started reading more—it opened up my mind to taking my education and academics more seriously.*
- *I was very excited to do a collaboration with Stanford. It gave me a sense of opportunity and I felt excited... And having an experience with other marginalized folks helps you feel thankful for where you are and at the same time motivated. It was a reminder that we faced the same struggles, and despite obstacles we overcame it. We talked about community engagement and belonging—I felt that. And it bolstered my sense that change is possible.*

On Engaging in Research

- *Research is a tool. It depends what community you are working with, what the outcome will be. One reason I didn't get involved with research was because it didn't have to do with my community—e.g., urban schools, LAUSD—but now that I have done it with a community and with people I care about, now I keep wondering, “what can I do with it?”*
- *It transcends just reading an article for a class. Research has value, has power. ... Research is attention. It is care. It is resources. Being able to do this Fellowship means that we can provide a few of those to [our community]. I wish there was more.*

On Caring about Contributing to their Home Community in the Central Valley

- *[The Fellowship] opened my eyes to how under resourced the Central Valley is. It's one thing to say it and one thing to do research and really get it. ... Once I heard students' stories, it really opened my eyes and something I want to look at a lot more. ... I am more motivated to make a change.*
- *[The Fellowship] reawoke within me a sense of community. Inspired me to give back to a community that has given to me. ... Seeing the disparities people in my community face. Sparked that back up for me, cleared a path for me in a way. ... [The] Fellowship helped me figure out how I want to help my community. ... A lot of immigrant parents assume you are going to college to be a doctor or a lawyer. They see it as all about the money. But for me it's who I want to be, I want to be a helper in the world, support my family and my community.*
- *I hadn't really thought about my community—just leaving it—and this opened my mind to this is the community that built me and raised me—it made me realize the importance of giving back to my community.*

- *I feel very empowered by the research opportunity. I have done research in San Francisco and different places, but never the ability or understanding of how to conduct it in my own hometown. There is an incredibly low amount of research done on the Central Valley overall, so to contribute to that—to provide attention and resources to an area that really deserves it felt powerful. It made me feel powerful. In high school, and seeing relatives and siblings go through high school, it feels like an unjust system—but also unchangeable—and this Fellowship made me realize that I have more of a voice, more power than I realized initially. ... [A]lot of what is instilled in us is accepting things the way things are—to be obedient and accept the way the world is. But entering higher ed and now coming back to be part of this Fellowship taught me that I can question those things.*

On Increasing Commitment and Capacity for Making Change

- *KCF is already making a different structure—so our work is making change already. When you see change right away, that helps. Often as an undergrad you don't see that. This helped me—because you have to be speaking with people who can make the change. Otherwise you are doing research just for you. If you want to make change, you have to talk to people who can make change. ... You see how others are interested in the idea and that feels profound for me. I took so much time to do this and other people are interested—that is a positive engagement that makes me want to do more.*
- *When I finished, I felt proud, like I did something good. I felt proud, realizing that I contributed to it and helped improve things for future [scholarship] recipients. I gained a sense of pride—to give back to the Fellowship. ...I have done community service things like Relay for Life, Reading Across America, but never like this. This was the first time I felt like I was contributing to something big.*

To: The Kern Community Foundation (KCF) & Interested Parties
From: The KCF Action Research Fellows¹
Re: Exploring the Experiences of Kern County College Students
Date: August 17, 2020

In the summer of 2020, Kern Community Foundation (KCF) and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (Gardner Center) partnered to support us—6 KCF scholarship recipients—in a 10-week Action Research Fellowship. We developed a set of research questions that addressed KCF’s interests as well as questions that we were interested in better understanding. We then created an interview protocol and conducted 36 interviews with other scholarship recipients from July 8 to July 24, 2020. 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 and some new questions that emerged from our interviews.

INTERVIEW POOL DEMOGRAPHICS

We randomly selected the 36 interviewees from among all 2019-20 KCF scholarship recipients, excluding only those recipients who had received a scholarship for just one year. The interviewee pool reflected the scholarship recipient pool in several important ways. In both groups, 72% shared that neither parent attended college; 62% of scholarship recipients and 58% of interviewees had an EFC of \$0; 46% of scholarship recipients and 53% of interviewees attended a CSU; 34% of scholarship recipients and 25% of interviewees attended a UC; and 63% of scholarship recipients and 67% of interviewees were female.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings are divided into six categories:

1. KCF Scholarship Outreach, Process, & Support
2. Purpose of a College Education
3. Challenges & Supports During College
4. Academic Identity
5. Connectedness / Sense of Belonging
6. Scholar-Identified Needs

1. KCF Scholarship Outreach, Process, and Support

How can KCF improve outreach to high schools? Is KCF's application process effective? To what extent and how have KCF scholarships been helpful?

All interviewees expressed appreciation for the financial support and collective ways in which the scholarship impacted them personally. They also shared their experiences with the process of learning about and applying for the scholarship, and the supports that they lacked when making decisions related to financing college.

¹ Learn more about each KCF Action Research Fellow via the bios at the end of this document.

Scholarship

- Most interviewees described the KCF scholarship as a critical support for college success, reducing financial pressures so that they could better focus on academics. They specifically noted how the scholarship allowed them to reduce work hours and student loan burden. In addition, many shared that the scholarship serves to motivate students to work hard so that they maintain their Grade Point Average (GPA) to meet the requirements for scholarship renewal.
- Many noted that they were grateful to receive the scholarship, which provided a sense of accomplishment and validation, as well as affirmation that they could and should attend college. As such, it strengthened their college-going identity. In addition, many noted their appreciation for the scholarship's renewability and availability to all Kern County students (including those who are undocumented).
- Some interviewees described the scholarship as being more than a financial support; for them, it also acted as motivation that sparked them to put in more effort.

Application Process

- Most interviewees appreciated the simplicity of the application, including the single portal that offered many funding opportunities.
- Those who noted challenges with the application process often focused on writing the essay, highlighting their lack of experience in this type of writing in addition to the pressure they felt to share personal details in order to better their chances to be awarded the scholarship. Some expressed difficulty accessing the online application due to lack of internet access.
- Others cited challenges focused on their fear of losing the scholarship if they were unable to produce necessary documents by the deadlines, indicating that additional communication and support from KCF could be helpful.

Outreach

- Many interviewees expressed the view that high school counselors and teachers acted as gatekeepers to college opportunities, including the KCF scholarship, providing information to a select group of "good students."
- Interviewees identified using social media and email, as well as developing communication among KCF scholarship recipients as opportunities for expanded outreach.

Support

- Interviewees expressed challenges related to navigating the financial aid process. Some noted unique challenges for students who were undocumented and/or the first in their families to attend college. Related, some noted that they lacked support to understand the actual cost of college as compared with the "price tag" (full tuition) and were often not encouraged to apply to schools with higher tuition.

2. Purpose of a College Education

What purpose motivates college KCF scholarship recipients to pursue postsecondary education?

All interviewees described their college journeys as a path toward pursuing opportunity, stability, and/or upward mobility. Often tied closely to their families' hopes for them as the first in their family to attend college, interviewees described this family influence as both supportive and pressuring.

- Some interviewees described the purpose of a college education in pragmatic terms; others emphasized their passion to pursue a dream. For example, some interviewees discussed college education as tied to employment, which was sometimes described as a passion and sometimes described as a necessity to support oneself and one's family.
- Many of the interviewees who indicated that they saw college as providing the chance to pursue a major (usually in STEM) were unsure how this major related a possible career.
- Individual interviewees focused on the value of a college education to increase their knowledge of specific subjects or cultures; to broaden their understanding of the "real world" beyond their community; and to "put their community on the map."
- Interviewees indicated that the purpose of a college education for a student often evolves over time. In high school, many students saw the purpose of a college education as tied to meeting their families' expectations; once in college, they realized that they had freedom to define and pursue their own goals.

3. Challenges and Supports During College

What challenges have KCF scholarship recipients faced during their time in college? What supports have these students found to be helpful during college?

Challenges

Nearly all interviewees described challenges they faced during college, most often citing those related to adapting to the academic structure and rigor of college. Many expressed their feeling that they were not adequately prepared for the transition from high school to college.

- Many interviewees highlighted challenges associated with managing their time and developing effective study habits that would allow them to succeed academically and retain information.
- Many attributed their lack of academic preparedness to inadequate resources during high school, with some noting that even taking Advanced Placement (AP) and other difficult courses did not prepare them for the academic rigor of college. Related, many shared that they felt unqualified, based on their sense that their peers were more prepared than they were, contributing to self-doubts and imposter syndrome.
- In addition, many interviewees reflected that they sometimes lacked motivation and/or procrastinated on assignments.
- Other challenges related to establishing connections with professors, counselors, and advisors, resulting in a lack of resources to support them to be prepared to navigate the college experience.
- Other challenges raised by interviewees related to basic needs, immigration status, and social-emotional, family, and financial issues.

Supports

Nearly all interviewees described supports that helped them address the challenges, with the most frequently cited supports being peers, friends, and family.

- Most interviewees noted the importance of friends as a critical support. Some highlighted the value of having close friends in the same major, and the value of creating study groups with friends where they could learn together. Some noted the comfort provided by ongoing friendships that began before college. Friends and peers were cited as accessible sources of information needed to navigate the college experience.
- Many interviewees also noted that institutional supports were important when facing challenges navigating college. Specific supports mentioned included: office hours, connection with professors, meeting with academic advisors to develop a four-year plan, and having tutors. (Interestingly, many noted these same supports as challenges.) In addition, some noted that programs such as Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) created space where they found support and experienced a sense of belonging.
- Most interviewees shared that their families' primary role was to provide motivation and encouragement, with many interviewees noting their desire to "give back," "make their parents proud," and act as role models for younger siblings.

4. Academic Identity

How do KCF scholarship recipients perceive themselves as students? How do they define being a "good" student?

Most students viewed themselves as good students, for several different reasons, while showing self-awareness of their own strengths and areas for improvement. (Some of the obstacles to maintaining a strong academic identity are also included as challenges in an earlier section.)

- Interviewees identified a set of behaviors associated with good study habits, including: trying hard and studying; forming study groups and teaching others; attending, paying attention, and participating in class; being organized; engaging with peers and professors; and taking and reviewing notes. Some also identified habits that negatively affected their academic success, including procrastination and not engaging in some behaviors associated with good study habits.
- Some interviewees identified mindsets that they associated with a strong academic identity, including perseverance, determination, and prioritizing academics and learning over working for grades. That said, grades were cited by most interviewees as illustrative of academic achievement.
- Most of the interviewees encountered difficulty in the transition to college or an academic obstacle during college that challenged them to maintain a strong academic mindset. These experiences often caused them to feel inadequate, but most felt determined to learn from their mistakes and continue to put effort into their academic careers. Many described their college journey as one of adapting to the college environment, though it is not clear whether this reflects adjusting how they perceive of their capacity to thrive in the environment or changing their expectations about the college experience.

- Comparing themselves to students from other areas, with stronger academic backgrounds, challenged interviewees to overcome personal doubts and maintain their academic identity.
- Interviewees noted the importance of asking for help, with many indicating that they felt intimidated by professors which deterred them from reaching out.

5. Sense of Belonging / Connectedness

What makes KCF scholarship recipients feel connected to their college campus?

Interviewees identified two primary factors contributing to their sense of belonging: (1) relationships with peers / friends and (2) campus environment / safe spaces.

- Some interviewees described how their college experience changed once they connected with peers and developed friendships. These relationships offered support and made them feel that they belonged on their college campus.
- Interviewees explained that student organizations and institutional programs offered opportunities to build relationships and create connections between students from similar backgrounds and between students with similar academic / career interests.
- While relationships with peers and friends stood out as the most important aspect of interviewees' sense of belonging, many also mentioned that a diverse and accepting college campus and a small community made them feel comfortable and included. Similarly, some pointed out that a diverse college community made them feel represented and safe.
- Interviewees also cited a host of other factors that contributed to their sense of belonging, including (but not limited to): outreach to their high school by colleges; pre-orientation or orientation programs; engaged, student-focused college administration and faculty; institutional resources such as programs, counseling, and housing; and opportunities to be a mentor or leader during college.

6. Scholar-Identified Needs

What would be helpful for KCF scholarship recipients to know before starting college? Are there gaps in supports for students during college? What support might KCF provide to scholarship recipients during college?

Interviewees identified a range of needs prior to and during college, falling into six main categories: academic preparation and support; college knowledge; financial literacy; career exposure and experience; and connection to other KCF scholars and near-peer mentors.

- Most interviewees wished they had a better understanding of the college structure and rigor, indicating that they wished they had known early on the importance of taking advantage of available resources such as office hours.
- Many interviewees listed academic preparedness as a challenge, and many wished they had tutoring or other academic support, especially for upper division courses. They also described the importance of creating supportive space where they could study with peers.
- Some interviewees shared that they would have benefitted from some additional knowledge of the "basics" (for example, the course registration process, or to check their email regularly).

- Most interviewees wished they knew more about, and/or had experience in, their career of interest during high school and college. Specifically, interviewees expressed an interest in work experience and/or internships to give them better understanding of the career and a more competitive resume.
- Overwhelmingly, interviewees stated that a formalized community of KCF scholarship recipients would be extremely helpful for networking, friendships, and near-peer mentorship.
- Interviewees expressed a desire for more connection with KCF staff, including check-ins, meetings for advising, and academic support. Some also indicated interest in receiving information on internships or employment opportunities in the community, and some expressed a need to build their financial literacy. Finally, some indicated that they were not clear what supports KCF does offer to their scholarship recipients during college.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Kern Community Foundation

- Create an engaging, connected network of KCF scholarship recipients, by college or across colleges. The network could:
 - allow scholars to take leadership roles in the network that could be part of a continuation of the KCF fellowship or internship;
 - serve to connect current scholars with scholarship alumni through a digital database; and
 - use the KCF website to highlight current and graduating scholars via “where they are now” stories.
- Develop connections among scholarship recipients, KCF, and donors. This could include:
 - greater opportunities for KCF scholars to communicate and interact with a consistent KCF contact during college, including advising and check-ins that go beyond administrative reminders; and,
 - greater connection between scholars and donors, beyond thank you letters, to serve three purposes: share appreciation, build a network, and enhance support for the scholarship program.
- Support scholars to apply for the KCF scholarship and succeed in college, in ways that address needs that they identified. This could include:
 - supporting scholarship applicants to write the personal essay by shaping the essay prompts to be more future focused and providing a Q&A to address frequently asked questions;
 - building financial literacy, including support for students during the financial aid process to understand the cost of college and the impact of aid packages, through workshops and guidance related to financial aid packages; and,
 - establishing webinars or meetings for scholars to discuss the imposter syndrome and similar issues that impact the wellness of first-generation, undocumented, low-income students. These might include connecting high school or early college students with older students to discuss the college experience (possibly part of KCF scholarship recipient network, noted above).

- Enhance scholarship outreach to encourage students who may not traditionally attend college to apply (for example, first-generation, undocumented, or students with average grades). This may include:
 - increasing publicity and awareness of scholarships through social media, email, and KCF recipient network (see above);
 - tabling at events or participating in other school activities through ASB, college clubs, or other organizations on high school campuses;
 - participating at college nights for parents and families;
 - pursuing greater coordination and alignment among Kern County scholarship organizations to develop consensus about scholarship advertisement and exposure in schools; and,
 - starting to build college knowledge and a culture of college-going with a scholarship and network/program that begins as early as eighth grade, providing small scholarships as incentives to encourage recipients to engage in check-ins and accept support throughout their high school journey.

For High Schools and their Districts

- Ensure that counselors offer guidance and opportunities related to scholarship options and college choice, equally and/or equitably. To this end, counselors and/or teachers should:
 - encourage students who may not traditionally attend college (for example, first generation, undocumented, or students with average grades) to apply for scholarships;
 - provide support and guidance around scholarship options and college choice;
 - be provided with career pathways that allow teachers to more easily become counselors;
 - be provided with information that allow teachers to offer information about scholarships; and,
 - offer college packets for students with their options and what colleges and universities they qualify for.

- Strengthen college-going culture school- and district-wide, including the following ideas for high schools:
 - provide greater preparation for college, including study skills and college knowledge (i.e., information about how to navigate the college experience);
 - offer information about careers, and preparation for careers (e.g., internships, job interview skills, resume development);
 - promote college to students early on (freshman and sophomore years) so that they know what to expect their junior and senior years;
 - develop alumni nights where college students or graduates can share their stories with high school students and their families;
 - create KCF scholarship recipient clubs, beginning in high school, where applications may start early in the school year to ensure that all students receive necessary information;

- establish connections with local colleges in order to support mentorship and advising between high school students and college students; and,
- promote a college-going culture in the classroom.
- Support greater academic preparation for college, including the following ideas for high schools:
 - ensure that students understand the opportunities they have to take college courses during high school to complete general education courses before entering college;
 - prepare students for the academic rigor of college.

For Parents

- Find ways to share students' thoughts about gaps in preparation and supports in high school.
- Build financial literacy and support families during the financial aid process through workshops, advice, and guidance.

For Colleges / Universities

- **Navigating College.** Ensure that students, especially first-generation students, receive support necessary to navigate college structures and systems; and that they access the departments or specialized programs such as EOP and CAMP, where students find culturally relevant guidance.
- **Academic Support.** Provide students, especially first-generation, low-income students, with more tutoring and academic supports for upper division courses. Further, ensure that these students have help finding resources by offering mentorship and encouragement to access them.
- **Welcoming Environment.** Ensure that faculty create an accepting environment, and that they encourage all students to approach them.
- **Career Experience.** Provide opportunities for students to learn about and prepare for their careers of interest, including support for internships, job interviews, and resume development.

NEW QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE INTERVIEWS / QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Connections Between KCF Staff and Scholars

- What are key elements of successful communication between KCF staff and scholars?
- How do KCF staff transitions affect communications and support for scholars during college?

Community / Family Influence on Pursuit of Higher Education

- How have students' mindsets been influenced by the community and family they are a part of, and how have they impacted their motivation to pursue higher education?
- How have they made some students not even consider college?
- How have they affected their mindset/thinking about graduate education?

- How have they affected their experience during college?

Career Knowledge / Pathways

- To what extent are students entering college aware of major/career options?
- To what extent do students' understanding of major/career options expand during college? What supports that expansion?
- How many students change majors as they learn about new fields of study/career?
- Are there opportunities for students to learn about some of these career options in high school?
- Through what avenue (e.g., college courses, internships, organizations, etc.) have students been able to find their passion?

College Experience: Differences Based on Location

- Are there differences in the students' perceptions of their experience in college based on whether they attend college in the Central Valley or attend schools outside the Valley?

College Experience: Differences Based on College Type

- What are the differences in learning experiences between community college and 4-year university among KCF scholars?

College Experience: Differences Based on Gender

- Is there a difference between the confidence levels of male students and female students while in college?

College Experience: Differences Based on Birth Order

- What are the retention and confidence levels of first-born students as compared with younger siblings from the Central Valley pursuing higher education?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank the 36 scholarship recipients who shared their time and stories with us. We would like to acknowledge the Kern Community Foundation and College Futures Foundation for supporting this important work and the experience it has offered us. And we would like to express gratitude to the staff of the Gardner Center who offered us resources and guidance.



MEET THE KCF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



YESENIA AGUILAR

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

My name is Yesenia Aguilar. I am a rising senior at UCLA studying Political Science and Chicano/a Studies. I am a proud resident of Lamont, CA and I hope to one day come back and nurture the community that nurtured me. I was drawn to this fellowship because I am deeply interested in promoting college-going culture in Kern County and learning about the specific college experience that students from the Central Valley encounter. I have never done research before and the opportunity to gain experience in my own community seemed perfect. As a Fellow, I have learned how resilient Kern students are and how we are working collectively to build bridges for future generations. I want to thank the Kern Community Foundation for their support throughout my college journey; Jeremy, Liz, and Laurel for their guidance; and the other Fellows for allowing me to build with them.



ALEXIS CORONA

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, BAKERSFIELD

My name is Alexis Corona and I recently graduated from CSU Bakersfield. I was born in Orange County, but was raised in Bakersfield. During my Bachelor of Natural Sciences in Mathematics, I was a supplementary instructor, conducted research with a math professor, and tutored math for college athletes and for the Kern Workforce Academy. I chose to be part of this fellowship because I understand there are areas of improvement in education. I wanted to gather knowledge so I can implement my findings in my future academic classroom. I have learned that many students are very under-prepared with regards to the transition from high school to college, so most students desire a mentor. Therefore, I will act as a facilitator to my future students so I can spark an academic interest and help them to be better prepared for life after high school.



MEET THE KCF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



ELIZABETH MEZA TORRES

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

My name is Elizabeth Meza Torres and I'm a rising third year double majoring in Political Science and Spanish. I was born in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico but was raised in Delano, California. I was drawn to this application as soon as it was released because I wanted to discover a way to provide more resources to Kern County's K-12 education system. I knew this research would allow me to discover what my community lacked in terms of resources. I am thankful that through this fellowship I gained the stories of many first generation, low-income, and undocumented scholars who overcame hurdles and are now pursuing higher education.



ALFREDO QUINTERO FERNANDEZ

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

My name is Alfredo Quintero Fernandez and I grew up in Lamont, CA. I am a rising junior at UC Santa Barbara majoring in Sociology. I was motivated to apply for the fellowship because it is such a great opportunity to gain valuable research experience. I also saw it as a chance to use my story and experiences to help out the community that I am a part of. I have gained a lot of insight on the struggles that students from Kern County go through while attending college; everything that our fellow awardees have shared really resonated with me and I am super grateful to have heard their stories. This fellowship has inspired me to become more involved in my community and it has also given me a great experience that will go a long way as I continue my college journey.



MEET THE KCF ACTION RESEARCH FELLOWS



APRYL TOVAR
UNION COLLEGE

My name is Apryl Tovar and I am a senior at Union College in Schenectady, NY. I am a double major in psychology and anthropology and I have experience researching educational inequalities in Fiji. I am from Bakersfield, but attended Di Giorgio School and later Arvin High. During school, I noticed the educational inequalities in the Kern High School District. I have always wanted to address these inequalities in my work. As a KCF Action Research Fellow, I have expanded my interview skills and built a stronger connection with fellow scholarship recipients.



ISRAEL VALLE
FRESNO STATE UNIVERSITY

Hi, my name is Israel Valle, and I am from the small town of Earlimart, CA. I am about to enter my second year at Fresno State as a Kinesiology: Exercise Science major. I was thrilled to participate in this research with the Kern Community Foundation because it allowed me to improve my communication, interview, and research skills while learning and understanding more about aspects of the scholarship and my community. I've gained a lot since participating in this research including a clearer understanding of the similarities I share with many college students from the Central Valley in terms of our academic experience. I have also gained a sense of giving back to the community that has undoubtedly motivated and supported me throughout my academic journey.