



NEXTGEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM REPORT



Submitted by:

Suli Kenyatta

NextGen Program Leader

Judy Kruger

President & CEO

FALL 2023

What is the Santa Monica NextGen Leadership Program?

Launched in the Fall of 2021, the Santa Monica NextGen Leadership Program is led by the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Santa Monica College to partner students of color with Chamber members who have experience related to the student's field of study and cultural background.

This innovative program matches Santa Monica College students with mentors from the local community, including business owners, entrepreneurs, and industry professionals. Through six weekly 90-minute mentoring sessions, students gain invaluable guidance and insights to expand their professional development and career opportunities. To further strengthen leadership abilities, networking skills, and professional relationships, students complete reflective journal entries after each session. By facilitating meaningful connections with established local leaders, the program aims to empower students, unlock their potential, and equip them with resources to achieve their goals.



Santa Monica College Partners

Chris Baccus

Counseling Faculty

Adelante/Black Collegians

Sherri Bradford

Program Leader

Black Collegians

Destiny Johnson

Career Counselor

Adelante/Black Collegians

Maria Martinez

Program Leader

Adelante

Janet Tercero

Student Services Coordinator

Adelante

Jocelyn Winn

Student Services Coordinator

Black Collegians

Esmeralda Martinez

Career Counselor

Adelante/Black Collegians

Ann Marie Leahy

Career Services Advisor

Program Structure: A Look Back

September 2023 - November 2023

Recruitment

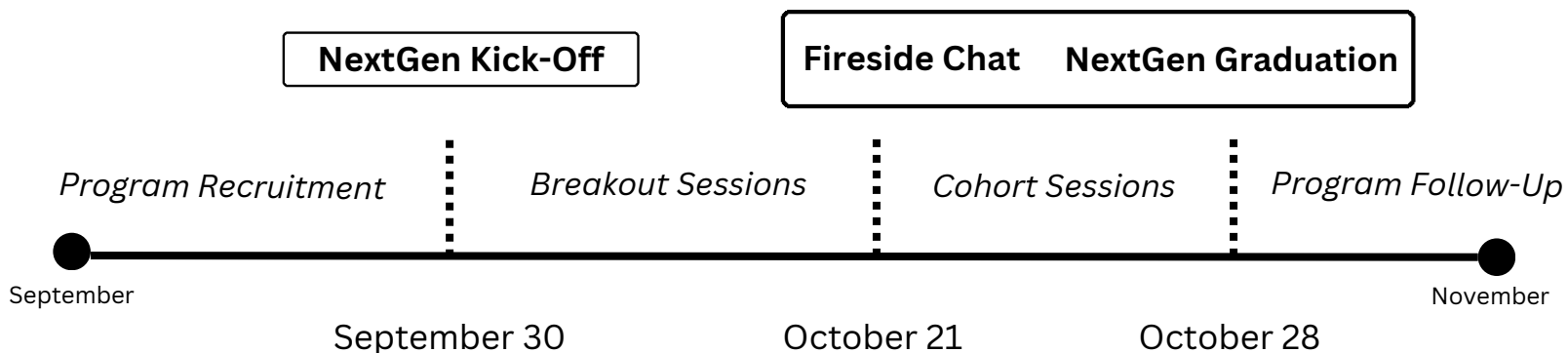
- Interest form sent to 1,200 Black Collegians and Adelante students
- From more than 70 interest responses, 50 students were selected to participate
- 19 Mentors selected from SM Chamber of Commerce members
- Fall 2023 Curriculum developed from student survey
- Programmatic materials and Mentor Orientation

NextGen Sessions

- Three 90-minute breakout sessions with mentors and mentees
- Fireside Chat with featured Mentor | Henry Bradley
- Graduation Ceremony at Santa Monica College
- Student closing with highlights and favorite moments

Program Follow-Up

- NextGen Leadership Certificate sent to graduating students
- Final Survey sent to students to gather feedback on experience
- Findings collected and reported to SMC Foundation Board of Directors
- Final Report Released and students added into LinkedIn NextGen Alumni Group





NextGen Breakout Topics

Finding Internships and Entry-Level Jobs

Mentors: Adam Cuevas, Sonia Ordonez

Students learned how to leverage online platforms like LinkedIn to identify relevant openings in their field of interest. Through interactive discussions, they gained expertise in crafting customized resumes, cover letters, and interview responses that highlight their qualifications. By the end of the program students had developed concrete approaches to boost their competitiveness for securing internships and entry-level positions in their target industry.

How to Advocate for Yourself in the Workplace

Mentors: Ebonicia Fisher, Roger Garcia, Katie Westbrook

Students learned critical skills for professional self-advocacy and how to confidently communicate their needs and perspectives in the workplace. Through interactive discussions and role-playing exercises, participants practiced how to manage difficult conversations and advocate for fair treatment and equitable opportunities. By the end of the program students gained practical knowledge and experience to navigate workplace dynamics and conversations with greater confidence and skill.

How to Research and Learn More About a Specific Industry


Mentors: Asha Haug, Jay Sherrard, Moe Universe Sr.

Students explored systematic approaches to thoroughly investigate key aspects of a particular field or sector. Through hands-on activities, they acquired methods to dig deeper and find reliable information to make data-driven career decisions, identify emerging opportunities, and stay current with notable industry advancements and innovations. By the end of the program participants had developed valuable research capabilities to inform both their career and industry knowledge.

Interviewing Do's and Don'ts

Mentors: Lennox Brown, Henry Bradley, Veronica Estrada-Edeh

Students learned how to thoroughly research companies and positions to craft informed, compelling responses for interview success. Additionally, students honed nonverbal communication techniques including eye contact, body language, and professional presentation. By the end of the program participants had obtained practical knowledge to confidently manage interviews and optimize their likelihood of receiving job offers.





Leadership (Corporate and Individual)

Mentors: Kathy Irby, Chief Rudy Flores

Students were equipped with skills for impactful leadership, both organizationally and personally. Students also explored principles of strategic leadership and decision-making in corporate settings to lead with integrity and purpose. By the end of the program students were empowered with practical expertise to positively influence others through conscious decision-making and ethical, socially responsible conduct.

Managing Interpersonal Relationships Before and After Internship or Job

Mentors: Rose Pelikan, Alan Ponce

Students discussed communication and conflict resolution strategies optimized for the workplace, with an emphasis on developing techniques to effectively collaborate, connect with colleagues, and manage interpersonal challenges. This breakout topic empowered participants with the knowledge to foster constructive teamwork, resolve conflicts, and thrive in collaborative professional settings. By the end of the program students were well-equipped to navigate office dynamics, cultivate strong partnerships, and actively strengthen workplace relationships to maximize productivity.

Navigating Racial Climate in the Workplace


Mentors: Delana Gbenekama, Nic Mysaysana

Students were equipped with actionable strategies to engage in constructive dialogues about race and respond to discriminatory behaviors in the workplace. The sessions examined unconscious biases, power imbalances, and steps individuals can take to catalyze systemic change within organizations. By the end of the program participants gained skills to actively cultivate diversity, challenge biases, and advocate for positive change in their careers and communities.

Networking Tips and Professional Associations

Mentors: Antonio Watson, Dez Bencosme

Students learned techniques to establish meaningful connections and harness social media for networking. Through interactive discussions, they learned best practices for informational interviews and relationship-building. By the end of the program, students gained the tools and knowledge to build relationships, convey professional strengths, and activate their contacts and abilities to foster connections that support their career aspirations.



Thank you to the Fall 2023 NextGen Mentors!



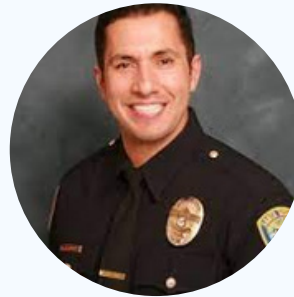
Dez Bencosme
Senior Concept Artist
Blizzard



Ebonicia Fisher
Game Content Moderator
Activision



Henry Bradley
Associate Content Operations
Specialist
Blizzard Entertainment



Chief Rudy Flores
Santa Monica Police
Department



Lennox Brown
Game Content Moderator
Activision



Roger Garcia
Associate Art Outsource
Director
Blizzard



Adam Cuevas
Producer
Activision



Delana Gbenekama
Special Assistant to the City
Manager on Equity and
Community Recovery
City of Santa Monica



Veronica Estrada-Edeh
Recruiting Associate,
Global Early Careers
Activision



Asha Haug
Director of Revenue
Management
Regent Santa Monica
Beach





Kathy Irby
Senior Vice President
Commercial Bank
of California



Jay Sherrard
CEO
Mass Media Films



Nichole Mysaysana
Player Experience Auditor
Activision



Moe Universe Sr.
QA Tester
Activision Publishing



Sonia Ordonez
UI/UX Artist
Activision



Antonio Watson
Associate Game Designer
Blizzard



Rose Pelikan
Executive Director
of Nursing
St. Johns Health



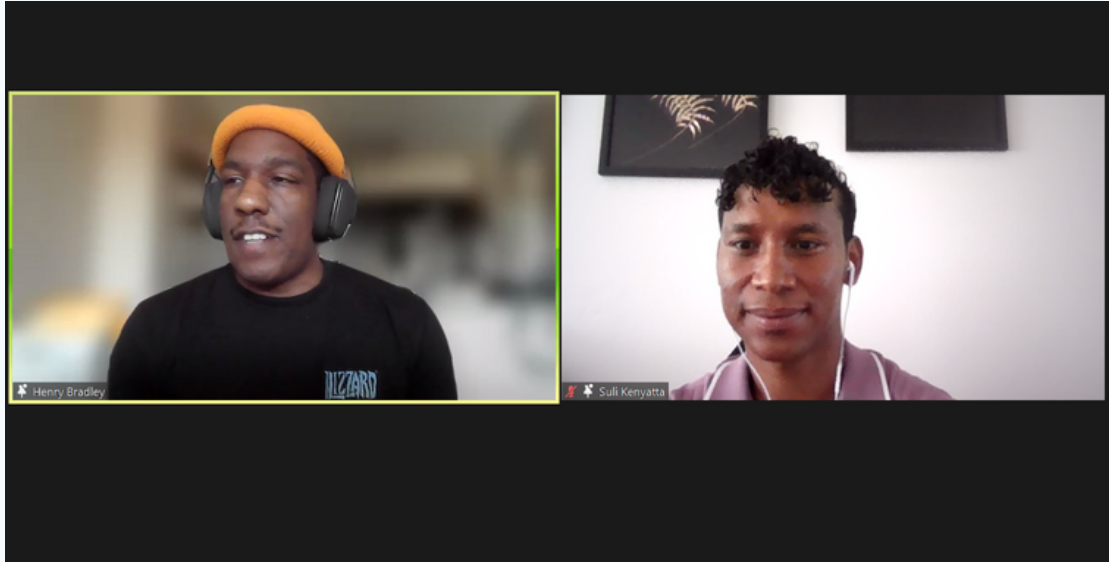
Katie Westbrook
User Researcher
Blizzard



Alan Ponce
Director of Learning
and Development
Regent Santa Monica
Beach



NextGen Fireside Chat



This year's NextGen Fireside Chat featured Henry Bradley who discussed with the cohort how he secured his position at Blizzard Entertainment and shared best practices that he learned while overcoming both personal and professional obstacles.

Thank you for sharing your story Henry!



The NextGen Cohort also heard from Jose Pelayo, Workforce Development Program Manager of the LAEDC, about [Gladeo LA](#) - A new career navigation platform for all Angelenos to help individuals gain awareness, preparedness, and access to middle and high skilled careers.

[Learn More About The Platform](#)

Fall 2023 NextGen Graduation



For the first time, an in-person NextGen graduation was held at Santa Monica College to provide an opportunity for students and mentors to meet and celebrate in Community. Thank you to Santa Monica College for the venue and Benny's Tacos for catering!

[Graduation Photos](#)



Thank you to the NextGen Program Sponsor!



Student Journal Reflections

I liked being able to actively converse and network with a variety of people. Another thing I liked was the in-depth discussions involved, still relevant to topics of leadership. What I learned after participating in this program is the strategy of having to put oneself outside their comfort zone to be successful through viable networking, communication, and active initiative. - *Rivka Carillo*


I learned about how to advocate for myself and how to deal with certain situations in a professional environment. - *Nahomy Rivas*

How transparent and open we were able to be with the Mentors. Also how we spoke with mentors in different professions. - *Aaron Adams*

I loved getting the opportunity to meet people from different fields and ask questions! I learned some really helpful tips with dealing with anxiety, some networking tips on how to or important things to say, and I learned about the importance of how you carry yourself now as it can affect certain aspects of your career in the future. - *Nevaeh Johnson*

I learned how to navigate the racial climate of a job, how to deal with it, approach it, and when to just leave the matter alone or redirect someone to other sources and that's that. It was an important lesson for me personally that really helped. Eye opening. I also liked learning more about tips on how to connect and utilize LinkedIn. I hadn't heard about it much before SMC so it was great being exposed to it and the push to create one. - *Ashley Lopez-Montiel*

I enjoyed being able to ask questions about how the mentors got to be successful in the career paths and listen to their journey. They made me feel like I am exactly where I need to be. - *Samuel Valencia*



Congratulations to the NextGen Fall 2023 Graduates!

Aminah Abdur-Rabbani	Stefani Hernandez	Ezequiel Ortiz
Aaron Adams	Cebelihle Hlatshwayo	Valentina Polo
Rivka Carrillo	Teara Hutson	Vanessa Ramirez
Yair Cervantes	Nevaeh Johnson	Jolie Ramos
Samantha Chatfield	Z Jones	Azariel Recinos
Richard Daniels	Ulises Diaz Lopez	Valery Reyes
Brendan Diaz	Ashley Lopez-Montiel	Nahomy Rivas
Jacinto Diaz	Camila Luna	Nevaeh Sylvers
Esmeralda Enriquez	Daphne Marcial Santiago	Angeles Valadez
Genesis Espinoza	Leslie Martinez	Samuel Valencia
Hanaly Gomez	Esthela Moncada	Jamilah Vaughan
Ana Gonzalez	Tatiana Morales	Takara Yaegashi
Kiraah Grandberry	Grace Olea-Garfias	
Sebastian Hernandez	Blanca Ortega Chevez	

SAVE THE DATE

Spring 2024 NextGen Program

March 2 - April 6

If you are interested in participating or sponsoring,
please email judy.kruger@smchamber.com to learn more!