

NEXTGEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM REPORT

**SPRING
20
24**



**SANTA
MONICA
COLLEGE**



Submitted By:

Suli Kenyatta
NextGen Program Leader

Judy Kruger
President & CEO

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. The Spring 2024 Cohort consisted of three weekly 90-minute mentoring sessions where students gained invaluable guidance and insights to expand their professional development, and culminated with an in-person graduation ceremony. 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

March 2024 - May 2024

Recruitment

- NextGen Interest form sent to Black Collegians and Adelante students listserv
- From more than 70 interest responses, **43** students were selected to participate
- **20** Mentors selected from SM Chamber of Commerce members
- Spring 2024 Curriculum developed from student survey respondents
- Program orientations provided for interested mentors and students

Mentorship Breakout Sessions

- Three 90-minute breakout sessions with mentors and mentees
- Breakout sessions had a max of six students to encourage intimate conversation
- Breakout Sessions comprised of three parts: Community Wins, Topic Discussion, and Group Feedback
- Student journals of conversation highlights and lessons learned submitted

NextGen Graduation and Fireside Chat

- In-Person Brunch Graduation hosted at BXP Colorado Center Community Room
- Fireside Chat with Featured **Keynote Speaker Jasson Crockett | Snap Inc.**
- Community Forum program recap and certificate ceremony
- Final Survey sent to students to gather feedback on experience
- Findings collected in Program Report and digital certificates provided to graduates





NextGen Breakout Discussion Topics

Civic and Community Engagement

Mentors: Mercedes Burks, Roger Garcia, Amanda Hommel

Students explored the importance of civic engagement, the role of individuals in community development, and strategies for meaningful involvement. Students also learned about various avenues for civic engagement, such as volunteering and advocacy. Throughout the program, mentors provided real-world examples and inspiration for how students could make a difference. By the end of the program students were equipped to actively engage in their communities around issues of their choice.

Finding Internships and Entry-Level Jobs

Mentors: Cesar Sepulveda , 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: Henry Bradley, Bryson Coleman

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: Danny Cizek , Josiah Clark, Adam Cuevas

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: Claudia Camp, Rose Pelikan

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 in professional and Individual settings

Mentors: Jordan Budisantoso, Delana Gbenekama

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: Tai Lail, Carey Littlefield, Angela Scott

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.

Networking Tips and Professional Associations

Mentors: Alejandro Arreola, Fernando Valdez, Katie Westbrook

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 Spring 2024 NextGen Mentors!



Alejandro Arreola
Game Designer
Blizzard Entertainment



Danny Cizek
Technical Designer &
Gameplay Engineer
Treyarch



Henry Bradley
Associate Content Operations
Specialist
Blizzard Entertainment



Josiah Clark
Associate Narrative
Designer
Blizzard Entertainment



Jordan Budisantoso
Rotation Manager
Activision Blizzard



Bryson Coleman
Associate Game
Designer (AI)
Treyarch



Mercedes Burks
Technical Artist (Rigging)
Sledgehammer Games



Adam Cuevas
Producer
Activision



Claudia Camp
Sr. Manager,
Public Relations & Events
Latin America
Blizzard Entertainment



Roger Garcia
Associate Art Outsource
Director
Blizzard Entertainment





Delana Gbenekama
Equity and Communications
Program Manager
City of Santa Monica



Rose Pelikan
Executive Director
of Nursing
St. Johns Health



Amanda Hommel
Sr. Project Manager, Workplace
Integrity Operations
Activision Blizzard



Angela Scott
Senior Personalization &
Content Manager
Activision



Tai Lail
Game Content Moderator/AP
Activision



Cesar Sepulveda
QA Functional Tester
Activision



Carey Littlefield
Test Lead II
Blizzard Entertainment



Fernando Valdez
Associate Director,
League Planning
& Execution
Blizzard Entertainment



Sonia Ordonez
UI/UX Designer
Activision Blizzard



Katie Westbrook
User Researcher
Blizzard



Spring 2024 NextGen Graduation



On Saturday April 20th, program participants convened for the second annual NextGen Brunch, hosted at the BXP Community Center in Santa Monica. The NextGen graduation provides the important opportunity for mentors and students to meet in-person for the first time and celebrate the completion of the program in Community.

Thank you to BMX for the venue and Benny's Tacos for catering!

Event Partners



NextGen Keynote Speaker



Spring 2024 NextGen Graduation Brunch



Keynote Provided by
Jasson Crockett
Senior Public Policy
Manager at SNAP INC.
and Incoming Board
Chair for the Santa
Monica Chamber of
Commerce

This year's Keynote Speaker featured former NextGen Mentor and Incoming Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce Board Chair, **Jasson Crockett**, to discuss lessons learned and best practices that he has learned throughout his personal and professional journey.

Prior to joining Snap Inc., Jasson was the Director of Community Business in the Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. Additionally, he has experience as a teacher and case manager for a nonprofit organization located in South-Los Angeles, and as an Associate with SEI Investments.

Thank you for sharing your story Jasson!

Student Journal Reflections

What Have You Taken From This Program?

I learned how to speak for yourself in the work environment, and how important is to create networking opportunities. Also, I learned how to contribute to the community and that generating spaces like this where we can have discussions are extremely important - *Gabriela Jimenez Oporto*

Two things I learned are just because you're missing a few qualifications for a job or position doesn't necessarily mean you're not the best fit for the roll, and that while you should highlight solo accomplishments it is also good to highlight times where you worked well with others. - *Caniya "Ny" Pettway*

I learned that having leadership is not about rank. One does not need to be an expert to lead groups of people as long as the impact is made. This opened my mind to seeing courage as a huge factor in leadership. As somebody who's very quiet and to myself it can be hard to push myself out there. I was told by one of the mentors that courage is an undervalued characteristic in leadership and it made me envision a lot of new things for myself. - *Andrea Davalos*

I learned that leadership is a skill anyone can gain, despite the color of your skin or background. I also learned that being an introvert doesn't limit one's ability to pursue a leadership role and that courage is vital to the learning of leadership. - *Brenda Carrasco*

I learned that networking should be something I shouldn't fear and that I should try to think of networking as making friends. I will try to implement different ways to network by attending workshops or events that interest me and socialize with the people in attendance. - *Jennifer Alvarenga*

Some topics that were touched on in the breakout room was the importance of a strong LinkedIn profile and how it can open many doors, especially when first stepping into the corporate world. I now know how to answer the most basic interview questions like "what are your biggest strengths and weaknesses" and "why do you want to work for us" and how these questions are set up as a way to stump you but by being yourself you can set yourself apart from other candidates. Also, before today's session I had only heard of LinkedIn but had never thought to use it, so after the session I created an account and am in the middle of creating a strong profile! - *Max Lopez*

I learned not to take rejection personally, and instead use it as a learning opportunity. Job interviews are to see if you are a good fit for a company, but also if they're a good fit for you. - *Channel Guice Thomas*

Congratulations to the NextGen Spring 2024 Graduates!

Jennifer Alvarenga	Natalia Gutierrez	Sakile Odimo
Alleen Calixto	Sebastian Hernandez	Gabriela Jimenez Oporto
Hawa Camara	Crystela Herrera	Caniya “Ny” Pettway
Brenda Carrasco	Chyann Griggley Laster	Azariel Recinos
Cynthia Chavez	Max Lopez	Rubi Santiago
Guadalupe Cuarenta	Natalie Lopez	William Shipp
Sonya Curiel	Talaya Mackey	Carmen Talavera
Andrea Davalos	Ali Mahmoudi	Channel Guice Thomas
Andrea Diaz	Damian Mireles	Ethan Manzanarez Valencia
Brendan Diaz	Tatiana Morales	Chrissy Washington
Meredith Duran-Arroyo	Juan Diego Núñez	Takara Yaegashi
		Daisy Zacarias



NEXTGEN MENTORS

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

THIS CERTIFICATE IS PROUDLY PRESENTED TO

CONGRATS!

for completing the Spring 2024 NextGen Mentorship Program

Kathryn Jeffery

Dr. Kathryn E. Jeffrey
Superintendent/President
Santa Monica College

Judy Kruger

Judy Kruger
President/CEO
Santa Monica Chamber
of Commerce



SAVE THE DATE

Fall 2024 NextGen Cohort

September - October 2024

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

