

# 1 injured, 50 shell casings found after Capitol Hill shooting Sunday morning

[seattletimes.com/seattle-news/1-injured-50-shell-casings-found-after-capitol-hill-shooting-sunday-morning](https://seattletimes.com/seattle-news/1-injured-50-shell-casings-found-after-capitol-hill-shooting-sunday-morning)

By Omar Shaikh Rashad

July 17, 2022



Seattle police are investigating a shooting outside a Capitol Hill nightclub early Sunday that injured one man and damaged several businesses.

The shooting occurred along the 1200 block of Pine Street at 2:30 a.m. on Sunday. Police officers already in the area heard gunshots and saw vehicles flee the scene, SPD Detective Valerie Carson said.

At 2:45 a.m., a 35-year-old man showed up at Harborview Medical Center with a gunshot wound to his leg, Carson said. He told authorities he had been shot near a nightclub on the 1200 block of Pine Street.

Detectives collected more than 50 shell casings and an unregistered gun at the scene of the shooting.

“We found a variety of different sizes of shell casings, which just wouldn’t have been possible to only come from one gun,” Carson said. “Detectives were able to tell that there had been multiple guns fired.”

Carson did not share how many types of shell casings were recovered.

Bullet holes riddled several establishments, including a Warby Parker store, Mexican restaurant La Cocina Oaxaqueña, bike shop Rapha, and an empty retail space — all on Pine Street.

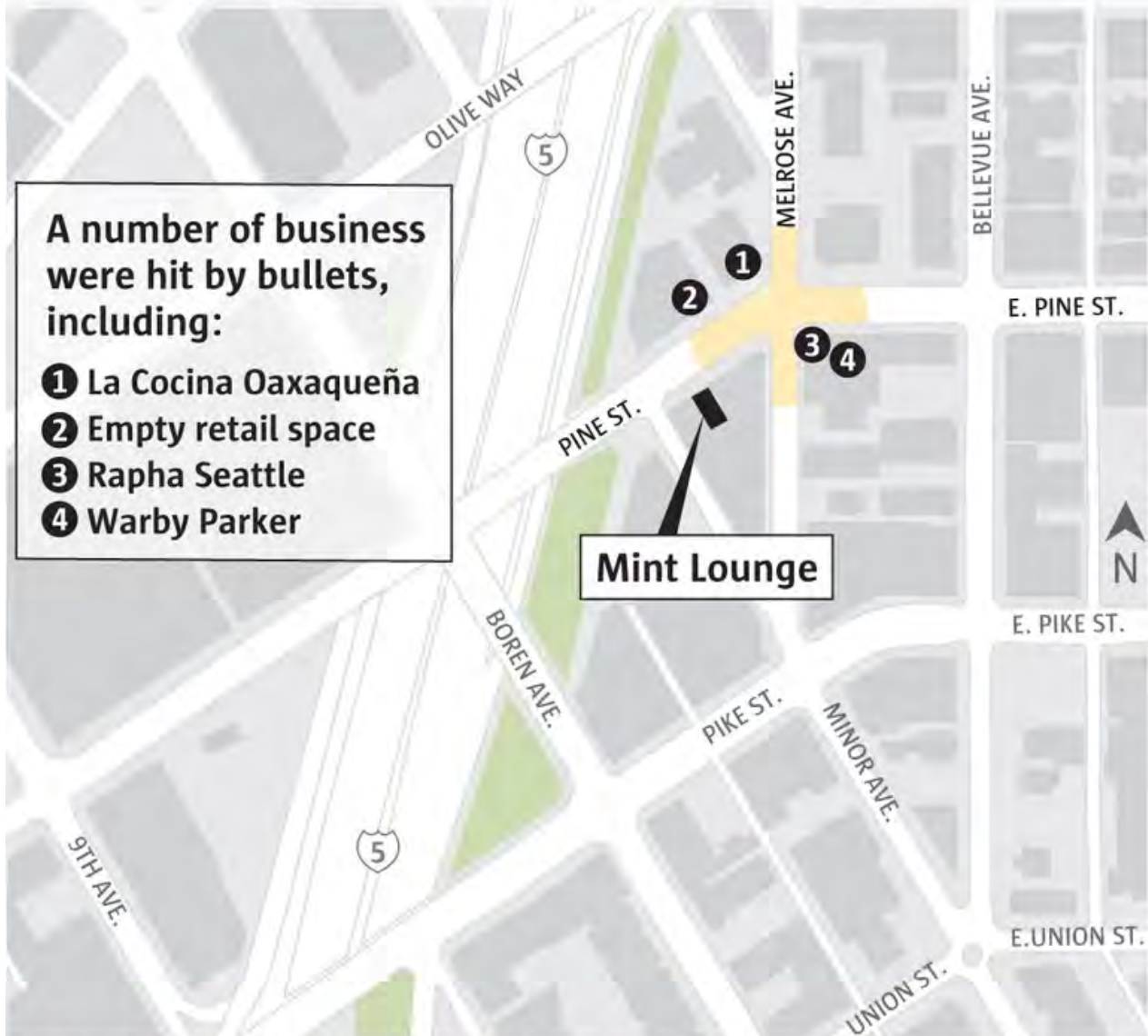
Christopher Strode, the operations manager at Rapha, showed up at the bike store at 7:30 a.m. and quickly noticed some of its windows had bullet holes and were cracked.

Sunday morning, Strode cleaned up glass on the ground and counted several bullet holes in three windows and the store's front door. Strode said the bike shop will remain closed until the windows get replaced.

“It just puts a dent in the day,” Strode said. “It sucks.”

Strode added that despite what happened, Capitol Hill is still a fairly safe area in Seattle.

## Site of early Sunday morning shooting outside Capitol Hill nightclub



Sources: Esri, Seattle Police Department

MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Misael Dominguez, who started La Cocina Oaxaqueña about 10 years ago, showed up at his restaurant Sunday morning to find bullet holes in eight of his windows. He and some of his employees began boarding up some of the damage, including the front door.

Inside, Dominguez collected more than five bullets, which punctured benches and seats, glass cups behind a bar counter and an air conditioning vent high up in his restaurant.

The only good thing was that his restaurant was closed at the time of the shooting and none of his employees or customers were hurt, Dominguez said.

Dominguez said Mint Lounge, a nightclub across the street, brings trouble to Pine Street in Capitol Hill. The nightclub patrons tend to head to the alley next to his restaurant after last call on Friday and Saturday nights, he said.

The alley can get raucous at night, and police should do something about it, he said.

“Especially if they know this happens almost every time, they should be here at least on Friday or Saturday night and make everybody go home,” Domniguez said.

This also isn't the first time bullets flew in his restaurant around last call. Back in February, Seattle police responded to what they called a gunfight in front of the Mint Lounge. Bullets flew through Dominguez's restaurant that night as gunfire was exchanged.

Now that his restaurant got shot at again just five months later, Dominguez said he's considering moving to somewhere else in Seattle, to be away from Mint Lounge.

Mint Lounge did not immediately return phone calls and emails from The Seattle Times.

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# UC regents approve tuition hikes. Here's how much more students can expect to pay

[sfchronicle.com/california/article/UC-regents-approve-tuition-hikes-Here-s-how-16333145.php](https://www.sfchronicle.com/california/article/UC-regents-approve-tuition-hikes-Here-s-how-16333145.php)

US & World // California

By Omar Shaikh Rashad | July 22, 2021



Students walk past Sather Gate on the UC Berkeley campus. The UC regents approved a tuition hike that will take effect in 2022.

Ben Margot/Associated Press

The UC Board of Regents approved a proposal to raise tuition rates that will take effect for incoming students beginning in fall 2022.

The regents approved the increases by a 17-5 vote Thursday, setting in stone a yearly tuition increase for incoming undergraduate students and all graduate students that will be tied to inflation.

The regents postponed a similar plan to increase tuition in March 2020 because of the pandemic. Sixteen months later, the regents picked up where they left off — to the chagrin of many students.

The UC Student Association condemned the tuition hike, saying in a press release that the “The UC president is now authorized to increase all system-wide fees by up to 5% annually” without sufficient oversight from the regents.

Undergraduate UC students who are California residents currently pay \$11,442 every year for tuition. Adding in mandatory and campus-specific fees, students end up paying around \$14,077.

Starting in the fall of 2022, the proposal would increase tuition annually for incoming freshmen and transfer students by inflation rates plus 2%. For the first year of the hike, that would mean an increase of \$534.

The amount charged above inflation would decrease every year by 0.5% and phase out entirely by 2026. Under the proposal, students would also be able to lock in their tuition for six years.

Yearly tuition hikes will be capped at 5%, and the money extracted from tuition and fees from California students that gets directed back into financial aid for them was bumped from 40% to 45%.

For nonresident students, the rules are different. Critics of the hike say out-of-state and international students are neglected as they already pay triple what California students do — nearly \$44,000 a year — but will receive less than half the same rate of increased financial aid from the proposal as California students.

The rules are slightly different for graduate students as well: All graduate students would be impacted by the hike in fall 2022, not just incoming ones.

UC officials estimated the university system would face a shortfall of \$694 million by the 2026-27 academic year without the tuition increases.

UC Chief Financial Officer Nathan Brostrom and Associate Vice President David Alcocer argued that the increases would support the university’s financial recovery following the pandemic, greatly benefit California students by locking in predictable tuition rates and allot greater financial aid to low-income students as a result of upping tuition.

I'm disappointed that the UC Regents voted to approve ongoing tuition increases today. This year, our state general fund allocates \$1.3B in new spending to the UC- it's the wrong time to ask students & families to pay more when the state's commitment has never been greater.

— Eleni Kounalakis (@EleniForCA) [July 22, 2021](#)

UC President Michael Drake noted that more than half of UC undergraduates will see no net increase. That's because 55% of UC undergraduates have their tuition and fees fully covered. Under this plan, 61% of California undergraduates will not see any changes or will actually pay less, he added.

But several regents were concerned over what impacts the tuition plan would have on nonresident students, echoing objections from student leaders across the UC system.

“You realize that by doing this tuition increase ... we are punishing the foreign students that are coming from poor countries?” said Regent Hadi Makarechian during the meeting, although he voted in favor of the tuition hike.

California Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis, who is also a UC regent and voted against the proposal, expressed concern that by making future increases automatic, the university system was “taking a vote to raise (tuition) without a vote in the future.”

Kounalakis also noted that the proposal was brought forth during a time in which the UC was being allocated unprecedented financial support from the state Legislature: Gov. Gavin Newsom's revised budget pours \$1.3 billion into the university.

Many students expressed fierce opposition to the tuition hike during public comment. Riya Master, external affairs vice president at UC Berkeley's student government, called in Wednesday and said low-income and nonresident students are targeted by the proposal.

“Other students like me will not be able to attend the UC if this tuition proposal passes,” Master said. “The UC will truly become a school for the wealthy, which is not what any of us wants.”

Thursday morning, Kalliope Zervas, UC Berkeley student government senator, criticized the very nature of voting on a tuition hike, adding that it would marginalize low-income, nonresident students at the university.

“How dare you parade yourself as a diverse system and market yourself off of the facade that you are inclusive?” said Zervas. “At this rate, you might as well only accept wealthy students as you are making it nearly impossible for the rest of us to attend.”

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# Cal Poly is isolating COVID-positive students in off-campus hotels

[mustangnews.net/no-covid-isolation-beds-isolating-in-hotels/](https://mustangnews.net/no-covid-isolation-beds-isolating-in-hotels/)

January 6, 2022



Cal Poly has become so overwhelmed by on-campus students testing positive for COVID-19 that the university began isolating COVID-positive students in local San Luis Obispo hotels on Wednesday, Jan. 5.

“The university engaged off-campus beds because it needed more than the 62 beds available on campus.” Cal Poly spokesperson Matt Lazier wrote to Mustang News via email.

In total, the university has 194 isolation beds, of which 132 are located in off-campus hotels, Lazier said.

On-campus students who test positive for COVID-19 are also currently being offered a \$400 gift card to Cal Poly’s University Store if they move home to isolate instead of relying on the university for isolation either on-campus or at an off-campus hotel.



“It is important to note that in all cases in which students return home, they are instructed to do so only if they agree not to travel by public transportation and only if there is no one at their home in a high-risk category,” Lazier said.

Students who test positive but live in on-campus shared apartments are being asked to isolate in their bedroom, including those with housemates who do not have COVID-19. Lazier said Public Health Officer Penny Borenstein has approved all of the university’s public health plans, including this isolation policy.

Mustang News confirmed with students placed in isolation arrangements that the university is using some rooms in the Cerro Vista and Poly Canyon Village residential communities to isolate COVID-positive students.

The university began isolating COVID-positive students in hotels two days after President Jeffrey Armstrong sent a campuswide email, assuring the community that COVID-19 transmission levels were not higher than what officials and administrators anticipated.

Lazier said he cannot disclose where students are being isolated, including which off-campus hotels are being used.

Lazier wrote over email that he is not currently able to confirm whether on-campus isolation beds are at full capacity. He said that he is also not currently able to confirm the date Cal Poly finalized contracts and arrangements with local hotels to isolate COVID-positive students in them.

Lazier said the university has a lower number of on-campus isolation beds this quarter after converting some into standard housing beds for students in significant need of housing.

As of Thursday morning, Cal Poly recorded 677 positive COVID-19 tests since Sunday, Jan. 2. Lazier said he was unable to currently answer how many of those positive tests belong to on-campus students who have yet to be placed into isolation arrangements.

*Editor’s Note: This story has been updated to clarify statements from University Spokesperson Matt Lazier and data from Cal Poly’s COVID-19 Dashboard that reflects positive test results, not the number of COVID-positive students.*

*This story comes from [The Hill](#), a team of data analysts and reporters focused on data-driven and investigative stories at Mustang News. [Click here to read more stories from The Hill.](#)*

# Muir Hall's third floor in quarantine after two coronavirus cases

[mustangnews.net/muir-halls-third-floor-in-quarantine-after-two-coronavirus-cases/](https://mustangnews.net/muir-halls-third-floor-in-quarantine-after-two-coronavirus-cases/)

By Omar Rashad | October 1, 2020



Three days into fall quarter, Cal Poly officials notified students living in Muir Hall that a resident on the dorm's third floor tested positive for the coronavirus, according to documents obtained by Mustang News.

Third floor residents were immediately put under quarantine in place, but they found out one week later, on Tuesday, Sept. 22 that another student on their floor also tested positive for coronavirus.

Quarantine in place is the lowest tier of precautionary measures taken by the university after a coronavirus case is recorded on campus. It allows for students to leave their rooms to get food and other essentials. Residents are also allowed to go out for runs and visit the campus bookstore.

University Spokesperson Matt Lazier did not confirm whether the third floor of Muir Hall is under quarantine in place, writing through email that "specifying smaller sections of residential communities directed to quarantine in place could, in essence, create a HIPAA

violation.”

This quarter, more than 4,000 students live in Cal Poly’s eight residential communities. Since Wednesday, July 8, 21 students have tested positive for the coronavirus.

Mustang News spoke with residents as well as RAs in the South Mountain dorms, which contain six buildings including Muir Hall. RAs asked that their names not be used since speaking with the media violates their contracts and they said they feared retaliation from the university.

RAs told Mustang News that officials do not have a way to enforce quarantine in place, and they said that some residents on Muir Hall’s third floor can be seen in groups of more than three people — sometimes without masks.

“For quarantine in place, there’s like basically no real enforcement and everyone knows that,” one RA said. “You can do whatever you want, basically.”

Third floor Muir Hall resident Brayden Martinez said that he does not usually see students disobey quarantine guidelines, but he said that university officials became relaxed with enforcing rules right after they informed his floor of its second coronavirus case.

University officials have been communicating with quarantined residents via Zoom, but Martinez said those sessions are not very informative. The tone that officials used in a recent meeting bothered him, Martinez said.

“They said we should be happy about being allowed to go outside and that really just rubbed me the wrong way,” Martinez said.

Cal Poly also does not share information about where outbreaks occur on campus, RAs said. Some RAs and students living on-campus said they feel “left in the dark” not knowing if another building in their residential community has a student who tested positive for coronavirus.

While all Muir Hall residents received notification of the first coronavirus case in their dorm, residents said that only third floor residents were notified of the second case. Residents located in the five other South Mountain buildings have not been notified of either coronavirus cases in their residential community.

Thomas Zimmerman, a student resident who lives on the second floor of Muir Hall, said he only found out about the second coronavirus case in his dorm after hearing rumors and talking with third floor residents. Zimmerman said all residents in the building should know of the positive coronavirus cases.

“I think they should open it up to the whole building, because it essentially involves the whole building. It’s not like we’re not seeing people from the third floor ever,” Zimmerman said. “We’re still going to be seeing them out and about everywhere, so we’re still partially exposed.”

Martinez, the student resident on the quarantined floor in Muir Hall, said that he still does not know what is going on and he passes on the “little information” he gets to residents on other floors.

“It’s definitely a game of telephone, especially when nobody even knows what the big picture is,” Martinez said.

South Mountain RAs said they had to go to Muir Hall’s third floor to do rounds, which involves checking on residents to ensure safety and wellbeing, but RAs said some of them did not know that floor was under quarantine in place.

For more than a week after the first coronavirus case in Muir Hall, RAs said they were not formally notified of the situation by officials, and they said they went through the third floor knocking on doors and checking on residents — business as usual.

“It’s frustrating when we get notified about things last minute and then they go, ‘Sorry you know all this COVID-stuff is last minute, like everyone’s trying to adjust,’ but it’s also like no, you had all summer to plan for this,” one RA said.

The combination of multiple coronavirus cases in dorms and not receiving timely information about coronavirus-related matters have made student residents living on campus feel stressed and let down, they said.

“It feels like they’re not giving us kind of what they promised, which was like information [and] a secure and safe campus to live on,” Martinez said. “Like, that’s kind of the whole reason why a lot of us are here moving into the dorms. We came here because we viewed it as a safe option, like, ‘Oh, we’re not going to come here and just immediately catch the coronavirus and have to be sent home.’”

# Cal Poly is isolating COVID-positive students in Cerro Vista — but officials haven't told residents

[mustangnews.net/cal-poly-covid-positive-students-isolation/](https://mustangnews.net/cal-poly-covid-positive-students-isolation/)

By Omar Rashad | October 29, 2020



Cal Poly is using Cerro Vista's Romauldo building to isolate COVID-positive students and residents in quarantine who may have been exposed to the coronavirus.

The university has not communicated its use of Romauldo to the 649 residents living in the other five Cerro Vista buildings.

University Housing officials have also instructed residential advisors — who are aware of the isolation and quarantine arrangements — to keep that information confidential from student residents.

Isolation is the highest tier of precautionary measures taken by the university after a coronavirus case is recorded on campus. Although quarantine is a tier below isolation, both precautionary measures are identical in that they do not allow residents to leave their rooms.

After a fifth student tested positive for the coronavirus on Muir Hall’s third floor earlier this week, University Housing officials relocated all of the floor’s residents — more than 30 students — to Cerro Vista’s Romauldo building on Tuesday, Oct. 27 to quarantine for two weeks.

University Spokesperson Matt Lazier did not confirm whether Cerro Vista’s Romauldo building is being used to isolate and quarantine students due to “privacy concerns.” He wrote in an email to Mustang News that “... we have, in consultation with County Public Health, moved 31 residents to separate quarantine quarters, where Public Health is ordering them to quarantine for 14 days, in effort to mitigate further potential spread of the virus.”

## Cerro Vista Apartments

Cal Poly is using Cerro Vista's Romauldo building to isolate COVID-positive students and quarantine other residents who may have been exposed to the coronavirus



Map: Omar Rashad/Mustang News • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Mustang News spoke with residents as well as RAs in the Cerro Vista Apartments. RAs asked that their names not be used since speaking with the media violates their contracts and they said they feared retaliation from the university.

The Cerro Vista residential community comprises six buildings including Romauldo. Directly connected to Romauldo by a hallway is the Hollister building, which houses 133 student residents.

The building's proximity to unaware residents who have never been exposed to the virus is a top concern, RAs said, because there is nothing that prevents anyone from entering Cerro Vista's Romauldo building.

RAs also explained how COVID-positive student residents break isolation guidelines often by leaving their room. Some of the COVID-positive student residents lock themselves out of their own apartments, and RAs must unlock their apartment door to let them in — a procedure known as a lockout.

“There's not one part of this procedure that doesn't concern me,” one RA said. “Right when I knew that this was how isolation was going to work, I had bad feelings about it, because obviously there's no one outside their rooms monitoring them.”

RAs also told Mustang News that student residents living in Cerro Vista should be made aware of how the university is using Romauldo.

When Aubrey Sturgeon, a first year animal science major, finds herself on the north side of Cerro Vista, she said she has passed through Romauldo to get to her room in Hollister a few times this quarter.

Sturgeon said it is concerning that the university has not communicated about Romauldo with her or her fellow Cerro Vista residents, especially since the building is so close to her.

“Just like not having that communication about Romauldo — it puts into question like what else the school's withholding,” Sturgeon said. “Like how many positive cases are there actually on campus? Like what are you withholding?”

Going forward, Sturgeon is going to avoid Romauldo because she knows there is a high likelihood that residents are breaking isolation and quarantine guidelines, she said.

Eva Flynn, who also lives in Cerro Vista's Hollister building, said that she does not go to Romauldo at all but remembers ending up in the building when she got lost during the first week of the quarter looking for her room.

“There's no real distinction between the buildings in Cerro Vista except for like a tiny little plaque on the wall but all the hallways look exactly the same,” Flynn said. “So you can easily just like walk into Romauldo by accident.”

Flynn said that because she takes social distancing and other COVID-safety guidelines seriously, she does not feel unsafe living one hallway from Romauldo. However, she said that she would have liked to know that Romauldo is currently housing COVID-positive residents.

“I do have a right to know, but I don’t really expect them to tell me because they haven’t been very open about the whole process,” Flynn said. “So I wasn’t surprised they hadn’t told us. But it still is frustrating.”

Brayden Martinez, who is one of the more than 30 residents from Muir Hall who had to move into Romauldo to begin quarantine on Tuesday, also said it is wrong for the university to keep Cerro Vista residents out of the loop.

“They’re basically endangering a whole other level of the campus population,” Martinez said. “The people of Cerro Vista are just going to keep going by with their daily lives, not knowing that there are a bunch of people who are in isolation and living right next to them. If I were them, I’d be a little concerned.”

Martinez added that the lack of communication and the time it takes for the university to inform students has been frustrating for him.

“It takes Cal Poly a very long time to actually tell us what is going on — usually about a day,” Martinez said. “That really just destroys people’s mental health.”



# MN Exclusive: Cal Poly is housing more students on campus than any other Cal State

 [mustangnews.net/cal-poly-housing-more-students-campus-than-any-cal-state/](https://mustangnews.net/cal-poly-housing-more-students-campus-than-any-cal-state/)

By Omar Rashad | January 16, 2021



Cal Poly is housing more students than any other Cal State with about 4,500 students living on campus this month, according to a Mustang News review of university housing plans within the California State University (CSU) system.

While every Cal State varies in the maximum number of students they can have living on campus, Cal Poly is also using more of its total housing capacity — 57.4% — than any other Cal State.

Cal Poly allowing thousands of students on campus amid the coronavirus pandemic has drawn scrutiny from the campus community. A group of faculty members penned a [December letter](#) to Cal Poly's administration — which now has over 300 signatures from parents, faculty, staff, students and alumni — calling on Cal Poly to delay in-person instruction, de-densify on-campus housing and guarantee biweekly testing to students.

Having a much smaller number of students on campus would lower the risk of transmission within the Cal Poly community, said Candace Winstead, a biological sciences professor at Cal Poly whose research focuses on public health disease prevention. Winstead is also one of the executive writers of the December letter to the Cal Poly administration.

College towns like San Luis Obispo have seen spikes in the 18 to 29-year-old age category that will then spread into older folks who have a much higher risk of severe disease, Winstead said.

“So just because you don’t have any current college students hospitalized doesn’t mean that their contribution hasn’t been to the hospitalizations,” Winstead said.

## Cal Poly’s housing plans dwarf the rest of the Cal State system

The CSU comprises 23 universities across California — 18 of which are housing less than 600 students on campus starting in January. Only two CSUs — Cal Poly and San Diego State University — are housing students on campus in the thousands.

Cal Poly’s normal housing capacity of 7,839 students is similar to San Diego State University’s of 7,500 students. However, Cal Poly is housing 2.5 times more students on campus than San Diego State.

### Cal Poly San Luis Obispo has more students living on campus than any other Cal State

18 of 23 Cal States (75%) are housing less than 600 students on campus starting January 2021. Cal Poly is housing more than seven times that.

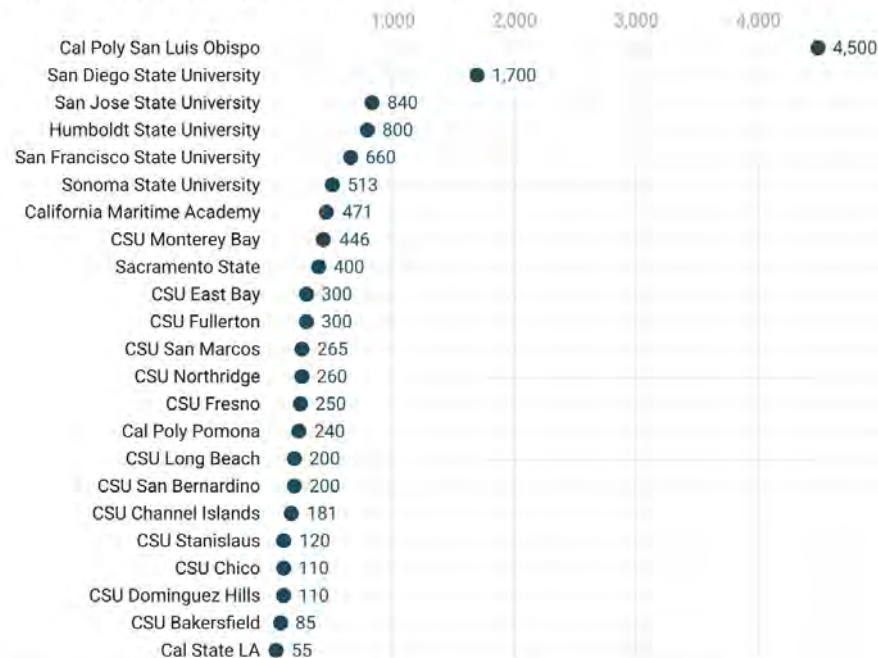


Chart: Omar Rashad/Mustang News • Source: Mustang News Review • Created with Datawrapper

Cal Poly Pomona, the only other polytechnic university in the CSU, is also dwarfed by CalPoly San Luis Obispo with just 240 students living on campus during its spring semester.

On top of using more of its total housing capacity than any other Cal State, Cal Poly is also one of only two CSUs that are currently housing more than 55% of its total housing capacity.

Of the 23 Cal States, 20 are using less than 25% of their total housing capacity.

### Cal Poly San Luis Obispo is using more of its total housing capacity than any other Cal State

20 of 23 Cal States (86%) are housing less than 25% of their total housing capacity right now during the coronavirus pandemic. Cal Poly is housing more than double the percentage points.

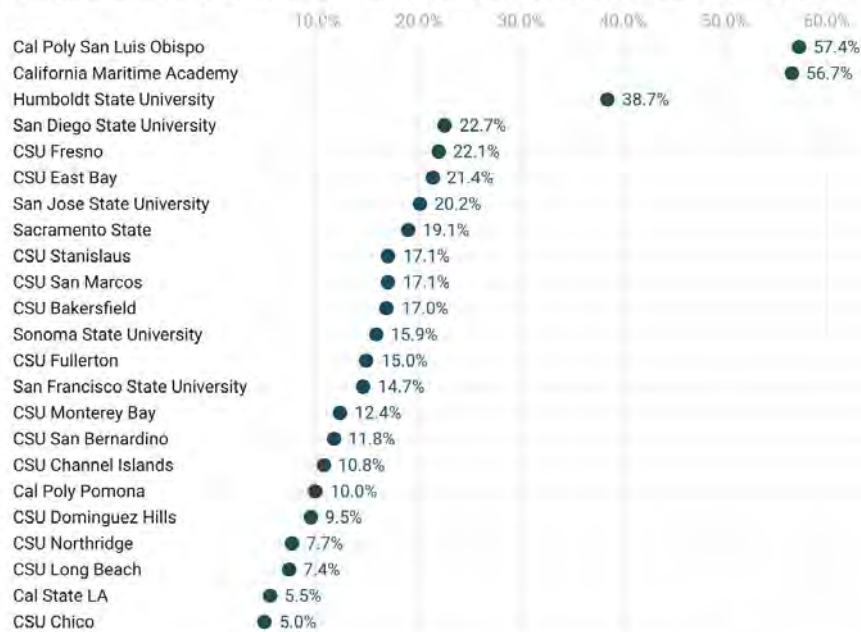


Chart: Omar Rashad/Mustang News • Source: Mustang News Review • Created with Datawrapper

To live on campus at Cal Poly, each student pays University Housing between \$8,000 and \$12,000 a year, according to [university housing contracts on the Cal Poly website](#).

During the fall 2020 quarter, University Housing accrued \$13.3 million in revenue after housing approximately 4,200 students on campus, Cal Poly spokesperson Matt Lazier confirmed over email.

Also during the fall quarter, Mustang News [reported a November spike in students testing positive for the coronavirus during the weeks following Halloween](#), mirroring a trend seen at the county level.

The 18 to 29-year-old age range is the second largest age demographic infected with COVID-19 in SLO County, comprising 29% of all its cases, according to the [San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health](#). From October until the new year, the 18 to 29-year-old age category had more positive tests than any other age demographic.

While Cal Poly is in consultation with SLO County Public Health regarding its university housing procedures and received approval from the CSU Chancellor's Office in December, former Chancellor Timothy White and Chancellor Joseph Castro wrote a [December memo to all 23 CSU presidents](#) which included a recommendation that they delay in-person instruction to late January or February to mitigate potential COVID-19 spread.

"The guidance was provided to campuses to help limit interactions and reduce the number of people on a given campus at a given time," CSU Chancellor's Office spokesperson Mike Uhlenkamp wrote to Mustang News.

Cal Poly has not delayed in-person classes and students who planned to live on campus moved in by Saturday, Jan. 9.

One Cal State that has taken on-campus housing precautions even further than the recommendation by the CSU Chancellor's Office is Humboldt State University — where the spring semester starts in January but students will move on campus in February and in-person instruction will start in March.

Officials at Humboldt State University were already strongly considering postponing move-in and in-person classes before receiving the Chancellor's Office recommendation because of Humboldt County's [fragile health care system and limited ICU bed availability](#), said Kristina Koczera, Humboldt State's interim director of Risk Management and Safety Services.

"We recognized we're going to continue to see a [COVID-19] spike until late January, early February-ish," Koczera told Mustang News. "So we wanted to put as much time for that downhill trajectory of numbers statewide before we start to attempt face to face instruction."

That approach was to prevent overwhelming ICU beds in the county, Koczera added.

Since the fall, Humboldt State University had 54 cases among its campus community after housing 800 students on campus and delaying move-in and in-person instruction back in August as well.

### **It's easy to gather in the apartments**

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As the winter quarter progresses, concerns remain over some students on campus continuing to congregate despite COVID-19 safety guidelines. Housing arrangements comprise single-occupancy apartments and residential dorms at Cal Poly's eight residential communities.

In a university-wide email, President Armstrong wrote how students in Poly Canyon Village continued to hold social gatherings, noting how it was one of three factors that led to an increase in infections of Cal Poly students in November.

Two-thirds of the 30 alcohol violations cited during the fall quarter occurred at the Cerro Vista Apartments and Poly Canyon Village, according to Cal Poly Police Department activity logs. Mustang News talked with Cal Poly RAs, who are being kept anonymous since they could face repercussions for speaking with Mustang News.

“I’m not at all shocked that’s what the numbers looked like,” one RA told Mustang News in regards to the volume of gatherings in Cerro Vista and Poly Canyon Village. “I think the main reason would be how much easier it is to gather [in the apartments]. You can have more people in a room and there’s a lot of space outside.”

RAs confirmed how they’ve had to address alcohol violations and social gatherings. With the way things are on campus, the university makes it easy to get away with having low-key gatherings, one RA said.

“I think the amount of students that came back reduced the perceived danger a lot of students may have had around gathering,” one RA said. “Being back at school with a lot of people and having a mindset of, ‘if it’s safe to come back to school, why isn’t it safe to gather,’ really contributed.”

## **Continued concerns over transparency**

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Another concern that continues to surface among faculty and students revolves around Cal Poly being transparent with the campus community about COVID-19.

One week after President Armstrong’s email in November about increased COVID-19 infections among students, Cal Poly surpassed its on-campus isolation and quarantine bed capacity and had to isolate students off campus at the Lamplighter Inn, as reported by [Mustang News in November](#).

However, Cal Poly’s COVID-19 dashboard didn’t reflect this as the university indicated it had at least [103 isolation and quarantine beds available](#) for students who tested positive for the coronavirus.

Cal Poly spokesperson Matt Lazier clarified in an email to Mustang News that COVID-19 at Cal Poly has been a fluid situation and “there are times when the number of students in isolation might not match up to the number of available beds.”

Instances of data lags or the cleaning of rooms for isolation and quarantine can lead to the mismatch, Lazier said.

Missing information from the dashboard concerns some faculty, including history professor Sarah Bridger.

For example, Cal Poly does not display how many coronavirus cases detected on campus over time. Tracking cases over time helps the public understand trends — like whether there’s a spike, drop or no change in the number of daily-reported COVID-19 cases, Bridger said.

“That chart that tells the narrative of what’s happening should be provided by Cal Poly,” Bridger said. “There is no way for somebody to know that information, to know those trends unless they’ve literally taken a screenshot of every daily dashboard.”

Typically displayed via a line graph, that information is commonly found on county public health department websites across California including [SLO County](#).

“That’s all useful [data] in terms of guiding future policy,” Bridger said. “If there’s a huge, steep outbreak that suggests that whatever the existing policy is isn’t sufficient and maybe some change should be made.”

*Reporter Ethan Telles contributed to this report. This story comes from The Hill, a team of reporters and data analysts focused on data-driven and investigative stories at Mustang News. [Click here to read more stories from The Hill.](#)*

# Cal Poly spends more than \$100,000 isolating COVID-positive students

[mustangnews.net/cal-poly-spent-100k-isolating-covid-positive-students-hotels/](https://mustangnews.net/cal-poly-spent-100k-isolating-covid-positive-students-hotels/)

By Omar Rashad

February 15, 2022



Cal Poly spent more than \$100,000 isolating students off-campus in January after a record-high number of students tested positive for COVID-19, according to documents obtained by Mustang News through a public records request.

Cal Poly officials signed contracts with three local hotels to isolate COVID-positive students: the Lamplighter Inn, Sands Inn & Suites and Hotel Buena Vista.

In the first week of January, more than 250 on-campus students tested positive for COVID-19, which was more than four times Cal Poly's on-campus isolation capacity of 62 beds.

University officials booked 41 rooms in the Lamplighter Inn for \$55,442.24, another 20 rooms in Hotel Buena Vista for \$25,452 and 13 rooms in Sands Inn & Suites for \$16,967.84.

University officials also gave out two dozen \$400 university store gift cards — another \$9,600 — to students who left campus to isolate at home instead of relying on the university to be isolated on-campus or in a hotel.

In total, off-campus hotel rooms and university store gift cards cost Cal Poly \$107,462.08.

“The university engaged off-campus beds because it needed more than the 62 beds available on campus,” Cal Poly spokesperson Matt Lazier wrote to Mustang News on Friday, Jan. 7.

Besides relocating students to on-campus isolation beds, off-campus hotels or sending them home, university officials also told students who live in on-campus apartments to isolate in their bedrooms even if they lived with others who did not have COVID-19.

All three hotels gave Cal Poly discounted rates, according to obtained documents. A room with a king bed at the Lamplighter Inn cost the university \$69 a night. At Hotel Buena Vista, a two queen and 1 king arrangement cost Cal Poly \$79.95 a night.

### Cal Poly San Luis Obispo spent more than \$100,000 to isolate COVID-positive students off-campus in January 2022

Besides sending COVID-positive students to three local hotels, university officials also gave out two dozen \$400 university store gift cards to students who chose to isolate at home. In the first week of January, more than 250 on-campus students tested positive for COVID-19, more than three times Cal Poly’s on-campus isolation capacity of 62 beds.

Lamplighter Inn   Hotel Buena Vista   Sands Inn & Suites  
University Store Gift Cards

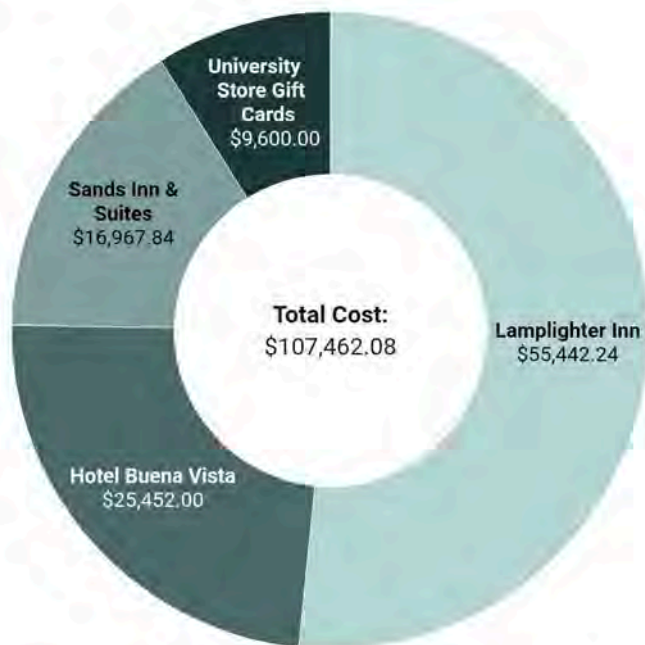


Chart: Omar Rashad | Mustang News • Source: Contracts between Cal Poly and local hotels obtained through public records requests • Created with Datawrapper

Amidst a COVID-19 surge due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant, Cal Poly was the only California public university to hold in-person classes three days into 2022.

On Jan. 5, three days into the winter quarter, officials reached out to local hotels to book rooms, according to obtained documents. Following the first week of January, 293 on-campus students were in isolation, university COVID-19 expert Aydin Nazmi confirmed to Mustang News.

During the first week of the winter quarter, it took 10 hours for agricultural business freshman Savannah Kennefick to be relocated to Hotel Buena Vista after taking a PCR test at the Health Center. All she could do was sit in her on-campus dorm, wear a mask and stay away from her roommates as she waited for more instructions, she said.

Kennefick added that in the hours she waited for instructions to get relocated, an isolation and quarantine staff member told her over the phone that the university was “really backed up” in relocating COVID-positive students.



Kennefick said she did not think Cal Poly should have allowed students to attend in-person classes or move back into on-campus dorms without first supplying a negative COVID-19 test result.

“I think it was not a smart decision to even think about returning to campus and not having a negative test and being able to go to in-person classes and at the risk of spreading it to other people — even if you didn’t know you had it,” she said.

Agricultural science freshman Matthew Hendricks also said it was not smart for the university to bring students back to on-campus dorms or in-person classes without testing them first. He attended three in-person classes prior to finding out he was positive for COVID-19.

It took nine hours after he took a PCR test at the health center for isolation staff to contact him with instructions on isolating at Hotel Buena Vista. In that period of time, he called three phone numbers for advice and more information on what to do but did not get through to anyone.

“It was definitely frustrating,” Hendricks said. “Not being able to talk to anybody and just kind of like sitting around, pacing in my room, waiting for what would happen or where to go.”

*This story comes from [The Hill](#), a team of data analysts and reporters focused on data-driven and investigative stories at Mustang News. [Click here to read more stories from The Hill.](#)*

# UC will sue Trump administration over new international student visa rules

[calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2020/07/uc-sue-trump-administration-international-student-visa/](https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2020/07/uc-sue-trump-administration-international-student-visa/)

By Omar Rashad and Katherine Swartz

July 9, 2020



President of the University of California Janet Napolitano, left, and John A. Perez, Chair of the UC Board of Regents speak before the start of the Regents meeting on January 23, 2020 at UCSF Mission Bay Conference Center. Photo by Anne Wernikoff for CalMatters

*Update, July 14: Immigrations and Customs Enforcement rescinded Tuesday its new rules requiring international students to attend in-person classes in order avoid deportation, after colleges around the country — including the University of California — sued to block them. The decision was announced as part of a settlement in a lawsuit filed by Harvard and M.I.T. in federal court. The state of California, along with 17 other states, had also filed suit over the rules, announced last week. ICE will revert to a previous policy in place since the spring that allows international students to take unlimited online classes during the coronavirus pandemic.*

The University of California will sue the federal government over new visa guidelines that would force international students to leave the United States if they are enrolled in a college or academic program that only offers courses online, university officials said Wednesday. California's international students had reacted with confusion and dismay after Immigrations and Customs Enforcement announced the policy change in a press release Monday, and professors were already scrambling to provide them with more options for in-person study.

“The University of California’s legacy and leadership would not be the same without the international students and faculty who have come to this institution,” said UC Board of Regents Chair John A. Pérez in announcing the suit. “To UC’s international students, I say: ‘We support you and regret the additional chaos ICE’s action has caused.’ ”

More than 160,000 international students attend California colleges and universities, according to NAFSA, an association of international educators — including about 40,000 at UC. The new rules would affect students on F-1 academic visas and M-1 vocational education visas. As colleges affected by the coronavirus pandemic plan for a fall semester that will rely heavily on online learning, international students currently in the U.S. would likely be faced with a few unpleasant options: attend class in-person and run the risk of contracting COVID-19, transfer at the last minute to another university, or undertake a costly journey back to their home countries.

Students returning from their home countries will be barred from reentering the U.S. if they are scheduled to take only online classes, ICE has said.

UC Davis senior Kymberley Chu, who is Malaysian and studying international relations and anthropology, called putting students in that position malicious and inhumane. “It’s just saying, ‘I’m gonna kick out all these foreigners, despite the fact that they have ties and relationships, people, places and the things we’re doing,’” Chu said. “We already have lives here.”

An ICE spokesperson declined to comment on the policy change, but Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Ken Cuccinelli told CNN that it would “encourage schools to reopen” their campuses in the fall and that the department was being flexible by allowing students to take some online classes.

“We’re communicating with the schools and most of them are going to a hybrid model — some online, some in person,” Cuccinelli said. “If a school isn’t going to open or they’re going to be 100 percent online, then we wouldn’t expect people to be here for that.”

Yet even at universities like UC that are planning a mix of in-person and online classes for fall, the guidelines seems to imply that individual students would have to certify they are not taking a fully online course schedule. It’s a reversal of visa rules implemented in March

that allowed international students to take all online classes during the spring and summer as universities converted to remote instruction.

Advocates for international students quickly condemned the new rules, while immigration experts said it was difficult to parse their meaning because the details have not yet been published in the federal register.

“The devil is in the details, which we only have partially because we’re literally trying to explain a law from a press release,” said Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, a professor at Penn State Law and board member of the American Immigration Council. For example, she said it was unclear whether a student enrolled in just one hybrid class combining online and in-person instruction could take the rest of their course load online.

UC’s lawsuit will argue that ICE failed to follow the federal Administrative Procedure Act when it introduced the new policy, a statement from the university said. Pérez said the university was also looking at ways to provide more in-person educational opportunities for international students. It’s not the first time UC has sued the federal government over immigration policy: The university won a major court victory last month when the Supreme Court struck down the Trump administration’s attempt to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA.

Often first-generation college students, international students can pay up to \$65,000 per year to attend the University of California or \$79,000 to attend the University of Southern California, among the top destinations nationwide for students from foreign countries. They do not have the same access to federal financial aid that U.S. residents do.

Rachel Banks, senior director of public policy at NAFSA, said the new policy sends the wrong message to those students as the United States competes globally for academic talent with countries including the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and Australia.

“While we’re struggling with this current administration in terms of our message, the rest of the world is sort of waiting for us to figure it out,” Banks said. “They’re out there saying, ‘The United States doesn’t want you, we do.’ ”

International students said they worried the new policy would force them to compromise their safety, whether by risking exposure to the virus or navigating a perilous return to their home countries.

Peter, a UC Santa Barbara student from China, said that with the campus offering a limited number of in-person classes for fall, he has no idea whether he’ll be able to find one. He asked to be identified by his first name only, due to fears that being interviewed would affect his visa status.

He had preferred to study online rather than in-person given the pandemic, but now wonders if that will be possible.

“Fully in-person courses are not acceptable because they’re really dangerous,” he said. “But if I am going to be fully online, I just need to buy a ticket as soon as possible and go back to China because there’s no other option,” he said.



Peter, an international student from Southeast China, is an incoming third year student at UC Santa Barbara studying economics. New ICE rules released on Monday state international students taking only online classes will be forced to leave the country. Photo by Max Abrams for CalMatters

Abel, a rising junior at UC Berkeley who also asked for his last name to be withheld to avoid retaliation in his home country, said he was still unsure exactly how much in-person instruction is required to keep his visa current. He came to the United States from Armenia at 16, he said, in part to avoid serving in the country’s military.

“I’ve followed every legal rule of the nation. I’ve paid my taxes, I’ve done everything on time. I followed the COVID-19 regulations of staying in the house, or whenever you leave, you should wear a mask,” he said. Suddenly hearing about the new visa policy, he said, “just induced so much stress.”

He’s concerned, he said, that if he returns to Armenia now he won’t be able to leave again.

Harvard and MIT became the first universities to take legal action against ICE over the regulations Wednesday, filling a joint suit, and some UC students had urged the university to do the same.

The new visa rules could also affect 11,000 students at California State University, according to spokesperson Toni Molle, and more than 21,000 at the state's community colleges — both of which plan to conduct classes largely online in the fall.

Even before the announcement of the suit, students and faculty were creating ways to help international students add in-person courses. Sumana Kaluvai, a 2019 UCLA graduate, created a Google spreadsheet to match international students looking for spots in in-person classes with U.S. residents who are willing to give away their space. The spreadsheet began just for the University of California, but within a day, she said, millions had viewed it and more than 50 schools across the nation are now represented.

“I didn’t know a single person who saw this coming. I think that’s why the reaction has been so crazy,” she said.

“After a certain point, it becomes difficult to rely on institutions and organizations to respond and help you out. So I think it’s important for students to have a tool for them to help themselves and make their own voices heard.”

Morteza Dehghani, a USC professor of psychology and computer science, posted a tweet along with other USC professors telling international students to email him for help arranging in-person instruction in the fall.

“I’ve received hundreds of emails since the tweet. Some of the emails are very emotional, you can feel that the students need support,” he said. “They’re scared, a lot of them are under financial pressure. They’ve already paid for their housing. A lot of them can’t afford to pay for another round-trip airline ticket, especially in these circumstances.”

Dehghani noted that international students make up a quarter of USC’s population, and that the regulations could potentially impact international student enrollment into the coming years.

“At least in Southern California, we have this opinion that we thrive when we bring the world’s greatest minds to our shores. So not only will this ruling will directly push them away, but it also makes it less likely for other students to apply and come here,” he said.

Chu, the UC Davis student, is looking for a one-unit, in-person class that will allow her to meet the new guidelines. Not complying would mean going back home, which is particularly hard since her parents live in the United Arab Emirates but her visa there has expired. If she was forced to leave the U.S., she would have to either go to Malaysia or New Zealand, where she has citizenship, but would be separated from family.

“How do you define home? Home for me is more than one place,” Chu said. “Not all international students have the option of going back home.”

*Rashad is an intern with the CalMatters College Journalism Network, a collaboration between CalMatters and student journalists around the state. Swartz is a contributor to the network. College Journalism Network intern Janelle Salanga and higher education reporter Mikhail Zinshteyn contributed reporting. This story and other higher education coverage are supported by the College Futures Foundation.*

# Community colleges could see influx of athletes as coronavirus disrupts sports recruiting

[calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2020/05/california-community-colleges-sports-coronavirus/](https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2020/05/california-community-colleges-sports-coronavirus/)

By Omar Rashad

May 13, 2020



Parker Tenove moved from Kansas to California to become part of the track and field program at El Camino College. When the coronavirus canceled the spring season, his plans fell apart. Photo courtesy of Parker Tenove

Parker Tenove remembers looking at his track and field schedule for the 2020 spring season, marveling at the opportunity to run at competitions in California cities from Santa Monica to Bakersfield.

He'd turned down scholarship offers from universities near his Kansas hometown to attend community college in Torrance, California, hoping the proximity to the state's tech industry would help him achieve his goal of becoming a computer engineer and tech entrepreneur. A strong performance as a runner, he thought, could earn him a scholarship to transfer later.



But as he became excited for the spring sports season ahead, a thought nagged at him.

“This is too good to be true. All this won’t happen.”

Thanks to the coronavirus, he was right: In March, the California Community College Athletic Association announced it was cancelling all spring sports, mirroring a similar decision by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which oversees university sports. The abrupt cancellation dashed the hopes of an estimated 9,500 student athletes who’d flocked to California’s well-known community college sport league — some paying up to \$10,000 a year in out-of-state tuition in a quest to be noticed by recruiters from top Division 1 teams. With athletic recruiting disrupted, community college teams could see a glut of players vying for spots next year, making that dream even harder to achieve.

The trickle-down effect starts at the university level. It’s unclear when the coronavirus situation will progress to a point where social distancing may not be required and college athletic programs can pick up where they left off. Without on-campus classes, NCAA president Mark Emmert said recently, sports are unlikely to resume in fall.

But the NCAA has extended eligibility for athletes impacted by the cancelation of spring competition, meaning college seniors could return to their spring athletic programs for an extra year. Those super-seniors could take up playing time and scholarships next year, making it harder for student athletes to get on NCAA teams, said Kelly Inouye-Perez, coach of UCLA’s Division I softball team.

“Right now, there are just a lot of unknowns,” Inouye-Perez said. “Every single coach in a spring sport is dealing with their circumstances, and not everybody is to the point of having answers to determine how this is going to affect current student athletes.”

That’s especially true for sports affected by corona-driven upheaval at the professional level. With the 2020 Major League Baseball draft consisting of only five to ten rounds, rather than the traditional 40, a large number of NCAA baseball players who were initially expecting to sign professionally will remain in school, said Andrew Checketts, coach of UC Santa Barbara’s Division I baseball team.

“Programs that get a lot of players drafted and graduate their players, those are the ones that this becomes a bit of a surprise for and makes it more challenging,” Checketts said.



El Camino College pitcher Aaron Orozco strikes out a batter during a game Feb. 29. Baseball players at the college saw their season shut down prematurely due to the coronavirus. Photo by Kealoha Noguchi/  
The Union

Fewer available spots on Division 1 teams mean that community college athletes who don't get their desired offers to transfer might decide to stay in the CCCAA, which has also offered players an extra season of eligibility.

That could set them back academically, said Reed Peters, coach of San Joaquin Delta College's baseball team.

"School-wise, it's kind of a waste of time. All their undergraduate stuff is done already so most of the stuff they're going to take doesn't really count anymore," Peters said. "It's hard to come back to that third year, especially when they feel like they should be at a four-year program."

Transfer scholarship offers may also be in even shorter supply because the NCAA has instituted a temporary ban on face-to-face recruiting.

"It's really difficult to actually offer a scholarship to somebody when you haven't seen them in person and evaluated them," Checketts said.

Current high school athletes, too, will likely be heading to community colleges in larger numbers as they see their opportunities decrease, said Los Angeles Pierce College Athletic

Director Susan Armenta.

High schoolers counted on using this season to impress scouts — whether they were juniors looking to rack up achievements or seniors who wanted to make up for lackluster performance in past years with a strong finish. Unlike college students, they won't have the opportunity to make up for lost time with another season.

“It's disappointing. All the work that they've put in feels like it's all for nothing,” said Charlene Falcis-Stevens, the athletic director at Torrey Pines High School in San Diego, though she added that even students who weren't able to compete still proved “that they were able to set goals and that they were able to be part of a program.”

Stephen Hansen, a track athlete at West High School in Torrance, said he was “super disappointed” at losing his junior season. He did not perform as well as he wanted in his freshman and sophomore years, he said, and was anxious to catch up.

“It's going to be a lot harder for colleges to judge what we've run and see if we'd be a good fit for a program,” Hansen said. “I definitely do think that there will probably be more people going to a community college to further their track career.”

How will community colleges deal with an influx of new players? Armenta said tryouts are likely to become more stringent—a problem she's happy to have if it means competition can resume. “At this point, we'll be excited to have a fall program if we're allowed,” she said.

Meanwhile, Tenove continues to train, running the streets of his neighborhood since parks and beaches have closed. He's going back to Kansas this month, but plans to return to El Camino College in the fall.

His college future now rides on next year's performance, he said. He's determined to transfer to a university within two years so he can stop forking over \$10,000 a year for out-of-state tuition. But the idea of giving up the 400-meter dash if he doesn't land a spot on a team is painful.

The balance of the physical and mental, he said, is what allows him to focus on academics.

“It's a wakeup call to how quickly things that matter to you can be taken away,” he said.

*Rashad is a fellow with CalMatters' [College Journalism Network](#), a collaboration between CalMatters and student journalists across California. College Journalism Network fellow Vanessa Arredondo contributed reporting. This story and other higher education coverage are supported by the College Futures Foundation.*

May 23, 2020

CalMatters

## For Muslim students, Eid celebration caps an unusually isolating Ramadan



**By Omar Rashad**

A normal Eid-ul-Fitr celebration for Eiman Abdoalsadig starts with putting on new clothes and attending Eid prayers with her family at King Fahad Mosque in Culver City.

The masjid would be packed – a long line of cars leading into the parking lot, and balloons decorating the area in honor of the Muslim holiday, which

marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Right after praying, the crowd would migrate to tables laden with donuts.

“It’s just being together with friends and family,” said Abdoalsadig, who is a junior at UC Irvine. “Even though Ramadan is over, we’re still together – and those donuts, that’s the little thing that connects me with other people.”

This year, Abdoalsadig will still dress up—but with the masjid closed due to social distancing guidelines, she’ll be spending Eid at home with her family, taking pictures in their backyard and ordering takeout from a local Halal restaurant.

The coronavirus has disrupted Muslim students’ experience of Ramadan and Eid, a time of year that traditionally centers around community, family and spirituality. Sheltered in place and sometimes separated from loved ones, they are making do with virtual gatherings and breaking long days of fasting in small groups or alone. But some also say they have found solace in religion from the stress of online classes and the looming pandemic.

During Ramadan, a time of fasting and religious devotion, a typical day starts with waking up at 4 a.m. for suhoor, the pre-dawn meal, and then proceeding to fast for the rest of the day until iftar, the sunset meal. Muslims also frequent their local masjid for nightly prayers and, during the last ten days of the month, stay up at night praying to Allah and reading the Qur’an.

That schedule can be hard to balance with classes during a normal year. Ramadan follows the Islamic lunar calendar, moving up about 10 days annually, and during the last few years, the month has coincided with the end of the academic year. Students might have to choose between missing a class and missing prayer, or find themselves distracted by classmates eating and drinking around them.

In some ways, the move to online classes has made observing Ramadan while balancing school easier, said Shaykh Mustafa Umar, educational director at the Islamic Institute of Orange County. For one, he said, students don’t have to commute to class or walk across campus while fasting. “They’re not driving to school (now),” Umar said. “You actually end up saving a lot of time even though the medium of the class has changed.”

But many Muslim students, like other college students, are facing new challenges that come with the sudden shift to online classes, including

helping their families out at home, said Hanaan Osman, a senior at UCLA and president of the university's Muslim Student Association. Dealing with all that while attempting to spend more time worshipping has been a challenge, she said.

"I feel like professors think that we have a little bit more time to dedicate to their classes now that we're at home. Then they start to assign more readings or they start to assign more lectures," Osman said. "Not only are we dealing with a pandemic, there are other responsibilities that we have to take upon ourselves now that we're home."

But Osman said this Ramadan has also turned into an opportunity to focus on her spiritual self. Perfecting her concentration while praying or reading Qur'an has given her a quiet confidence amid the upheaval of the pandemic, she said. "Allah doesn't burden a soul more than it can take," Osman said. "Being able to acknowledge that and know whatever is happening right now – I'm equipped to handle it with God's help."

Umar said he hears from Muslim college students who are worried about finding balance as increased religious activities and community organizing compete with academics for their attention. Parents share similar concerns, he said. It's important to make time for faith, Umar tells them, "especially in a society where there's a lot of challenges to being a Muslim."

For those struggling, his advice is simple: students need to be strategic about what they get involved in. Especially in times of distress, Islam teaches that with more worship comes more blessings, known to Muslims as barakah. "Ask Allah for help to put contentment in your heart and InshaAllah (God willing) you'll see there's more barakah in time than there used to be before," Umar said.

After the pandemic scattered students away from the CSU Northridge campus, senior Huzaifa Omer helped move the Muslim Student Association's weekly meetings and religious group discussions, also known as halaqas, online to keep members connected. More than a dozen people have shown up on Zoom in recent weeks to discuss topics like how best to observe Ramadan during quarantine.

"You have to count your blessings and you have to make the most of it," Omer said. "One way to look at it is we have our families, we have food and we're enjoying Ramadan. There are some people around the globe who don't

have these blessings and they're struggling."

Abdoalsadig has also logged onto virtual halaqas, and says seeing her friends during the holy month has made a difference, even if it's only online. While her Eid celebration might look different this year, she's grateful to be living with family, she said. "I know it can be difficult for other college students who aren't able to go back home because of the coronavirus so they're not able to celebrate Ramadan or Eid with their families," Abdoalsadig said.

That's the case for Amal Younis, a senior at San Diego State University who will be spending her first Eid alone this year. An international student, she has only been able to interact with her family in Cairo and Abu Dhabi through video calls and worries about their safety during the pandemic.

From a distance, it's hard to tell "how much testing is available and how much the government is controlling the narrative," Younis said. "You can't really know what's happening there."

Adding to her stress: Her student visa will expire two months after graduation, and she's not sure how the coronavirus could affect her application to extend her stay in the United States. She knows Eid is all about gratitude, but said right now, that's an emotion that's hard to muster.

Before Ramadan, she decided to quarantine with a Muslim friend. They ate together in the pre-dawn hours and broke their fast with dates at sunset. But with Eid coming up, Younis' roommate recently left to spend time with her own family. Without anyone to celebrate with, Younis said, the holiday will "kind of just feel like another day."

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# Ready for a ‘real’ college experience, transfer students find their hopes dashed

[calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2020/11/transfer-students-college-experience/](https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2020/11/transfer-students-college-experience/)

By Omar Rashad

November 10, 2020



Kaylin Tran imagined her first year at UCLA after transferring from Pasadena City College as kind of like a coming of age movie: She’d join clubs, make lifelong friends and pore over books in the university’s iconic library.

Instead, thanks to the pandemic, she’s sitting in front of a computer screen in her family’s San Gabriel home, paying \$14,000 a year for tuition instead of \$1,600.

“It definitely gives you a disconnect from the actual college experience, because it’s basically like, you’ve been at home for the past two years at community college,” Tran said. “Nothing feels any different.”

The limitations of online education are frustrating for many California college students, but they’re especially so for the tens of thousands who transferred from community colleges to four-year universities this year. With key social elements of a university



experience missing since most classes have moved online, new transfer students fear they won't be able to make meaningful in-person connections with peers and professors — part of the reason they wanted to transfer in the first place.

State lawmakers have pushed colleges and universities to make it easier for students to transfer in from community colleges. It's a way to open up educational opportunities for more Californians at a time when both the University of California and California State University turn away thousands of qualified freshmen applicants each year.

But barriers remain. Students are often prevented from transferring because they lack information about financial aid and navigating coursework and degree requirements, according to a survey of 800 community college students released in May by RP Group, a nonprofit research organization that studies California's community colleges.

“If we could imagine a world where COVID never happened, (colleges) still had work to do in terms of making sure that students are getting the information they need when they need it,” said Darla Cooper, RP Group's executive director. “The extra piece of that now in the COVID environment is, are you doing that virtually?”

So far, the pandemic doesn't seem to have dampened transfer rates: More than 62,000 new transfer students entered California State University this fall, up 4,000 from last year. Nationwide, the number of students transferring from a community college to a four-year college or university grew by about 3%, according to the National Student Clearinghouse.

But the coronavirus and the shift to online learning have made it more challenging for schools to support students once they've transferred. Some transfer students say the pandemic has heightened their imposter syndrome — the sense that despite getting accepted to a prestigious university, they don't truly belong.

“There's no physical transition from one step to the next for me to signify that, OK, I'm at UCLA now,” Tran said. “In some ways, I just feel like maybe I'm not supposed to be here. You know, maybe there is some flaw in the system that just magically let me in.”

That sense of disconnect could impact transfer students' success in college: Some studies have found a correlation between a student's sense of belonging and whether they returned to college the next year.

The increased price tag made the transition harder for Tran. Though she understands that professors still need to be paid during the pandemic, she said it's frustrating to see a jump in her tuition without getting access to the library or research center that she's paying for.

“It's like we're paying for the concept, but the actual product isn't really being delivered,” she said.

In theory, transfer students who weren't thrilled about their options could have deferred enrollment. Most California universities allow students to put a pause on their education, though they have to prove why they need the break and applications are reviewed on a case by case basis.

But the rules differ from campus to campus. For example, UCLA does not offer gap years but allows students to defer enrollment if the pandemic seriously impacts their ability to stay in school. At UC Santa Cruz, students were unable to defer for the fall but the option was available for winter quarter. And at UC Berkeley, new students can apply to defer but the university granted only a handful of requests for fall, and all were for freshmen.

Julia Kolman also had conflicted feelings about starting UC Berkeley online this fall after transferring from De Anza College, a community college in Cupertino.

“Not only am I a transfer, but I'm also now an online student among people who have been at the campus for multiple years,” Kolman said. “Like, is my college education the same as theirs?”



Julia Kolman visited UC Berkeley in April to give herself a tour of the campus she planned to transfer to in the fall. But the pandemic interrupted her plans. Photo courtesy of Julia Kolman

Setting up group chats with classmates helped Kolman feel more connected to the college community, she said, as did buying a UC Berkeley jacket. Kolman also intends on visiting the Berkeley campus a few times this semester.

“I just plan to drive up there because I like the area,” Kolman said. “I want to walk around the campus again and look at the buildings where my classes would have been and take in the campus and just feel like it’s mine.”

Even before the coronavirus hit, transitioning from a community college to a four-year university was not easy, which is why most California public universities have centers dedicated to providing support to transfer students.

Andrew Henry, an academic counselor at UC Berkeley’s [Transfer Student Center](#), advises

transfer students to put themselves out there by getting involved with events, clubs, and research opportunities. He said that even in a virtual world, that tip still applies.

“We do understand that it’s more difficult to attend events and feel that camaraderie and community building. But in some ways, it’s easier, right, as in you have access,” Henry said. “You can literally join an event from the comfort of your living room. And we try to make it as interactive as possible, whether that’s through zoom breakout rooms, games, activities, things like that.”

Transfer students at UC Berkeley can also enroll in a one-unit transfer transitions course, where they can connect with other students in similar circumstances. “It’s another place where they can feel like they belong,” Henry said.

However, UC and CSU students who have attended transfer center programs said they can only help so much during a time in which the college experience has transformed.

Andrea Trinidad, a third-year student at Cal State Long Beach, has known she wanted to be a physical therapist since she shadowed one at a nursing home during her senior year of high school. She was fascinated by the way the therapist interacted with patients and encouraged them on their paths to regaining motor skills, like learning how to walk again or move their hands.

When Trinidad, a kinesiology major, applied to transfer from Pierce College to Cal State Long Beach this fall, she was looking forward to finally getting hands-on experience in upper division courses. When the pandemic hit and courses moved online, she was among the students who considered taking a gap year, but wasn’t sure how or even if the university would permit her.

“I want to walk around the campus again and look at the buildings where my classes would have been and take in the campus and just feel like it’s mine.”

*julia kolman, uc berkeley transfer from deanza college*

Urged by her parents to continue her education, Trinidad signed up for fall classes at Cal State Long Beach, but said the experience has been disappointing. Even her labs are online, she said, and she frequently hears her professors rave about how much more fun and exciting activities would be in-person.

“It’s definitely been hard and I’m still kind of trying to accept the fact that it’s going to be online the rest of the semester, and I guess now it’s also going to be online for next semester,” Trinidad said. “So it definitely sucks because I was really looking forward to it.”

Aubury Freed, a new transfer student at UC Santa Cruz from Ohlone College in Fremont, also briefly thought about taking a gap year. But when her friends decided to go ahead with school, she did, too. Though her classes are online, she plans to move out of her family's home in Hayward to an off-campus apartment in Santa Cruz along with fellow transfer students.

“Just the change of setting, I feel like, will kind of inspire me to become more focused and take care of what I need to take care of academically,” Freed said. “I’m just hoping to get to know my housemates and then have a little community within the home that we make in Santa Cruz.”

Finding housing has been challenging, and Freed's confidence was shaken when the CZU Lightning Complex fires burned through the Santa Cruz Mountains in August and September, forcing the campus to evacuate. Still, starting a new chapter feels important for her mental health, she said.

“Even though things aren't normal, it's the new normal,” Freed said. “So I'm trying to normalize it for myself and for my own mental health's sake.”

*Rashad is a fellow with the CalMatters College Journalism Network. This story and other higher education coverage are supported by the College Futures Foundation.*

# Spilling trauma: Students from marginalized backgrounds feel pressured to write about hardship

mustangnews.net/college-trauma-students-from-marginalized-backgrounds-feel-pressured/

May 18, 2021



Isabella Carrera remembers not having nearby space to run around or enjoy the outdoors growing up in Panorama City, California.

The lack of green space — which includes parks and outdoor community areas — is an accessibility issue that heavily impacts urban, low-income communities. One day, Carrera wants to own a landscape architecture firm to establish green space in underserved communities, so inner city kids can enjoy the outdoors the way she wanted to.

However, Carrera's personal essays for scholarship applications don't include those ambitious goals for the future. Instead, she writes about immigrating to the U.S., being raised by a single mother and the personal hardships in tow.

Carrera has done this since high school and it almost feels like a routine, especially when essay prompts directly ask students how life challenges have impacted them, she said.

“I feel like I’m not writing about myself — I’m writing about someone else,” Carrera said. “It kind of messes with me, because this is my story. This is something that’s personal to me, and here I am writing about it, but I feel removed from it.”



“I feel like I’m not writing about myself,” landscape architecture junior Isabella Carrera said about writing on trauma in personal essays. “It kind of messes with me, because this is my story. This is something that’s personal to me, and here I am writing about it, but I feel removed from it.”

Applications for college, scholarships and jobs often ask students to weave a narrative about overcoming obstacles or life challenges. For students of color and others from marginalized backgrounds, writing about those topics may be uncomfortable because it can unearth trauma or deeply personal lived experiences.

But experts say that may not be what committees reviewing these applications are looking for. However, experts also say it doesn’t help that there’s a lack of transparency in what’s expected from applicants in these essays.

Researchers from Stanford University and Mount Holyoke College published a working paper in April, which found that personal essays in college applications have a strong correlation with reported household income, greater than SAT scores. After analyzing a sample size of 240,000 UC college application essays submitted in November 2016, researchers also found that students who wrote about helping others, educational opportunity and family death in personal essays were more likely from low-income backgrounds and had lower SAT scores.

On the flip side, students who wrote about achievement, seeking answers and human nature were more likely from affluent backgrounds and had higher SAT scores.

AJ Alvero, one of the lead authors of the paper, said he's worried that students from low-income backgrounds don't talk about their achievements in their essays and instead feel the need to explain why their grades dipped in high school or other topics including interpersonal relationships with family and community.

That's on top of "a huge transparency issue" in the college application process, Alvero said, because students may not know what admissions officers want from them in personal essays. More communication from admissions officers about what exactly they expect to see in essays can make a difference, he said.

"I'm sure admissions officers — they think they're already doing it," Alvero said. "I just don't know how much the average 18-year-old realizes what they're supposed to do."

This disconnect isn't limited to college applications. Students applying to scholarships and jobs also spend much of their time second-guessing the purpose of essay prompts in applications.

Carrera, who is a landscape architecture junior at Cal Poly, recalled how everyone in high school, from her friends and counselors to teachers and family, encouraged her to write about hardship. So she did.

While her application to Cal Poly didn't require a personal essay, many other universities Carrera applied to did.

She said she feels numb after having written about deeply personal experiences in college application essays and later on in scholarship essays.

"I do think it was a product of social expectations," Carrera said. "Especially like growing up, there was that kind of pressure to share to get into college. Now I'm kind of just like navigating, like, 'I don't know what to do now. Like, do I need to tell people this?'"

Lucy Bencharit, an assistant professor of Organizational Practice and Diversity at Cal Poly, said employers and selection committees want to see if applicants can overcome challenges, not necessarily read about their trauma.

While that's the intention, Bencharit said the impact may be traumatic for students from marginalized backgrounds.

"If we make it more clear what colleges and employers are asking for, then we can reduce the harm that those prompts might have on students," Bencharit said.

Students who feel the need to explain themselves and their identities in these personal essays may also view it as yet another instance in which they feel othered.



“There’s absolutely a phenomena where people from underrepresented identities have to teach majority group members about their experience,” Bencharit said. “The onus is put on them to further tax their mental, emotional, physical abilities to help others understand what their experience is.”

To Alexander Silva, a biomedical engineering graduate student at Cal Poly, essay prompts about hardship seem obvious in what they’re asking: describe your trauma. There isn’t any ambiguity in that, Silva said, and they feel othered if that’s the only direction in which they can take a personal essay.

As someone who is mixed race and non-binary, Silva looks at these personal essays in the broader context of always having to constantly explain their identity and experiences in various spaces at a predominantly white institution like Cal Poly. Silva said that makes them feel like a “display figure” for others.

During their freshman year at Cal Poly, Silva applied to more than 100 scholarships. In the personal essay sections of applications, Silva would write personal stories about how they served as their mother’s primary caretaker when she went through several surgical procedures.



As someone who is mixed race and non-binary, biomedical engineering graduate student Alexander Silva said they look at personal essay prompts focused on hardship and trauma in the broader context of always having to constantly explain their identity and experiences in various spaces at a predominantly white institution like Cal Poly. Silva said that makes them feel like a “display figure” for others.

Silva translated advanced medical vocabulary and navigated the healthcare system only to find gaps in service. That experience drives Silva's goal to enter the medical field in hopes of providing community-based care that fills in those gaps.

But they didn't get any of the scholarships they applied to, and Silva said that made them feel like their story didn't matter.

"Still being denied and still being turned away, I was thinking what do other people share that I can't share? What makes them worthy, and I'm not?" Silva said. "I think there's so many instances where I've been denied. I consistently evaluate that and say, 'Oh, I guess, like my struggle wasn't worth it.'"

Instead of writing about hardship and trauma, Silva said essay prompts that ask them about their aspirations, passions or joy would give them more agency to choose what they want to write about in an essay.

But packaging life experience into a 700-word essay is challenging, said Joan Meyers, an assistant professor of sociology at Cal Poly.

"You're being asked to tell the story of how you had certain gifts and certain struggles and they came together and you surmounted them to be this amazing applicant," Meyers said. "I don't think our lives are really like that. I don't think we have that sort of cohesion. But we are constantly being asked to produce this narrative cohesion."

Meyers said she knows from being on selection committees that presenting a cohesive narrative can up an applicant's chances of attaining opportunities.

That's why she feels conflicted when advising students on graduate school applications because limiting applicants to writing about hardship means constricting how they're viewed and who they can be, she said.

"People who already have privilege in terms of race, and ethnicity and class get to be this huge range of people that get to be unique and multiple," Meyers said. "People who are racialized in this country are reduced to a much smaller category of personas that they can have. That seems like a form of violence."

While Meyers said she knows those vetting scholarship applications can be well-intentioned, eager to give funds or resources to those who need them most, it still creates a competition of who can best prove their underlying need.

"If we're all racing to prove the most scarcity, it limits who we can say we are, and limits our way of talking about the abundance of our communities," Meyers said.

So when review committees receive applications about joy or passion, like the essays Silva wants to write, it's important for gatekeepers to still value them as much as essays about hardship or trauma, Meyers said.

Carrera also said she would feel more comfortable writing about her passions in application essays, rather than how much she and her mother have struggled.

"My end goal for my career is largely shaped by my experiences growing up and just the way I was raised," Carrera said. "But it does get kind of tricky because I want to be successful in the professional realm, but I don't want to have to put out a sob story to get there."

# Black alumni criticize Cal Poly's use of their images on banners

[mustangnews.net/black-alumni-criticize-cal-polys-use-of-their-images-on-banners](https://mustangnews.net/black-alumni-criticize-cal-polys-use-of-their-images-on-banners)

June 2, 2022



Zane Ellis-Rector remembers how relieved and excited he felt walking at his graduation ceremony last year in June. Most importantly, his family was there to see it all — including his 82-year-old grandfather.

He could hear his mother cheer excitedly in Spanos Stadium when his name got called. When he met up with her later, she was in tears.

Amidst all the emotion that day — and the 80-degree heat — Ellis-Rector didn't know a photographer had snapped a picture of him in his graduation cap and gown as he walked up to the ceremony's stage.

He also didn't know that about 10 months later, the university would put a picture of him on two banners on campus.

Ellis-Rector found out when one of his friends still attending Cal Poly sent him a photo of one of the banners in early May. At first, Ellis-Rector, who identifies as Black, liked that he was featured on the banners. He also questioned why out of all graduates, he was one of 12

featured.

“What are their true intentions? Is it to honor and celebrate students or is it to present the university in a certain way?” Ellis-Rector told Mustang News. “I think it is important to ask that question and be somewhat skeptical of those things.”

In May, Cal Poly put up banners of 12 recent alumni, featuring them at their graduation ceremonies. Each alumnus is featured on two banners, totaling 24 that currently hang on light posts.

The banners begin on South Perimeter Road near Spanos Stadium and run through campus by the Recreation Center, University Union and continue on Grand Avenue past Grand Market and the yak?it?ut?u dorms. The banners are placed on areas of campus that have high foot and car traffic; they also intersect with tours given to prospective students and their families visiting Cal Poly for the first time.

Mustang News conducted a review of all the banners and found that exactly half of them feature white-passing people and the other half are visibly people of color. That ratio is slightly more diverse than the student demographic: last year, Cal Poly students were about 54% white, according to Cal State enrollment data.

Mustang News also found that 25% of all the banners depict Black graduates, even though Black students comprised about 0.8% of the entire Cal Poly student body last year.

None of the graduates featured on the banners who spoke with Mustang News said Cal Poly communicated with them or asked them for explicit permission to use their picture in a university branded banner.

Cal Poly spokesperson Cynthia Lambert said signage at graduation ceremonies alert all those who enter that filming and photography taking place. By entering a graduation ceremony, Lambert added that students consent to “any use of their image in such photography and videography in all Cal Poly publications or productions in perpetuity.”

She added that signs are placed at several entrances and students are told about the waiver process as well.

Lambert said the banners have been an annual tradition since 2013. This year, they cost more than \$3,600. Each banner is 2.5 feet wide and a little longer than 7.5 feet. On the bottom, each one reads either “Mustang Pride,” “Mustangs Forever,” “Congrats Grads” or “Cal Poly Proud.”

When asked why Black students are overrepresented on the banners, Lambert said representing the student body in university marketing material is a “delicate balance” and that it is important to celebrate the campus’ diversity.

She added that it's also important to "show what we aspire to be — a more diverse campus that better reflects the state that we serve."

Lambert said no alumni have ever reached out with criticism or concern about being featured on them.

Ellis-Rector, who is on one banner on Grand Avenue next to the yak?it'ut'u dorms and another by the University Union, said he does not think it should be up to the fine print for Cal Poly to be able to use students' image and likeness in branded material, especially when it comes to Black students.

"I'd say it's an obvious and clear tactic," Ellis-Rector said. "They're very aware of what they're doing in terms of showing Black students on campus."

Ellis-Rector said during his second year at Cal Poly, he questioned whether he wanted to keep attending the university.

"If you talk to Black students, they all have some story as to how they felt not welcome or feel like they didn't have a sense of place," Ellis-Rector said. "I've had friends that left the school completely and dropped out."

Considering Black students' experiences on campus and little improvement from the university in changing that reality, Ellis-Rector said the university should not be using Black students to show that the student body is diverse before making an actual difference for them on campus.

## **Appearing diverse means overrepresenting Black students, study says**

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The phenomenon of using Black students to present a diverse campus is not limited to Cal Poly. A [2013 study](#) from researchers at Augsburg College and Rice University examined materials from 165 four-year universities and found that institutions across the United States consistently misrepresent the diversity of their student body in recruitment brochures and viewbooks sent to prospective students, enough for the researchers to conclude that the pattern is intentional and near universal.

"It is clear that racial diversity is being used as a commodity in the marketing of higher education and presenting an image of diversity is more important than accurately portraying the student body," the study reads.

It also noted that the greatest misrepresentation was the depiction of Black students in the marketing material. They made up an average of 7.4% of the student populations at the institutions examined, but comprised double that proportion — 15.1% — in photographs used in the marketing material.

The study also noted how the concept of diversity has become defined by many universities as having a sizable proportion of African American students. Hence, some institutions seek to show diversity by overrepresenting Black students in recruitment brochures.

The pattern of using students of color in marketing material is problematic and paradoxical, said Amanda Frye, a liberal studies professor at Cal Poly who studies the sociological intersections of race and education.

Diversity is framed as a 21st-century skill, and universities treat it as something they have and something they want to show, Frye said. But when universities portray students of color in branded or marketing material, Frye said they are transformed from being people into being an embodied form of diversity that can make a university appear diverse, which can have unintended consequences.

“The intention might be to create a more welcoming and inclusive-seeming environment,” Frye told Mustang News. “But what ends up happening is that the students of color — who have been commodified, feel alienated and less welcome — end up feeling even more marginalized as a result.”

Inaccurately depicting the diversity of a student body can also be counterintuitive if prospective students decide to attend Cal Poly under the impression that it is much more diverse than it is, said Megan Lambertz-Berndt, a Cal Poly professor who studies organizational communication and how individuals communicate social identities within organizational contexts.

“Having signage that does not accurately represent the student body at Cal Poly creates an unrealistic expectation of the on-the-ground experience,” Lambertz-Berndt told Mustang News. “This may cause individuals to either not stay, or have a less rich experience as one would have thought or hoped for based on the false ideas of what it was going to look like.”



Zane Ellis-Rector featured on a banner near the University Union. Ellis-Rector told Mustang News he was never contacted by Cal Poly before being put on two banners on campus. Omar Rashad | Mustang News

To Chloe Wardrick, the president of the Black Student Union at Cal Poly, the banners don't just tokenize the students of color on them; they almost invalidate the actual work and social change done by people like herself who have tried to create and foster community for students who come from marginalized backgrounds.

Wardrick, who knows Ellis-Rector personally, said she is glad to see him up on a banner but said it's hard to think of it as anything more than a tactical marketing strategy from Cal Poly.

"They're capitalizing on our effort, our pictures, our accomplishments," Wardrick said. "It just kind of leaves a bad taste in the mouth, honestly."

### **On two banners and 'stripped of power'**

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After a long day at work in early May, Kadin Stephens was with his girlfriend watching a reality tv show. At around midnight, he got a text message from an old friend.

It was a picture of one of the banners on campus featuring Stephens, smiling in his graduation cap and gown. Before receiving that text, Stephens had no clue that Cal Poly put a picture of him on two banners on campus.



At first, he thought it was cool. But then he thought more about it and talked it out with his girlfriend, including the fact that he had no choice in his image getting printed on two banners. To some degree, it felt exploitative, he said.

“It’s almost like, you’re stripped of power in a sense,” Stephens said. “I didn’t have a say at all.”

If Cal Poly had reached out to Stephens before putting him on a banner, he would’ve asked the university to not use his photo because he didn’t even like the photo they used. More than that, Stephens said he doesn’t want Cal Poly to be able to just use his photo and show that the university is a great place for Black students.

Stephens transferred to Cal Poly in 2018 as an electrical engineering major after attending Moorpark College. Soon after he had accepted his offer to attend the university, a member of Cal Poly’s Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity wore blackface to a racist gangster-themed party.

It was traumatizing for Stephens when he stepped foot on campus in fall 2018. It took a while for him to find a sense of place. Discovering two clubs on campus — the Black Student Union and the National Society of Black Engineers — helped with that.

Stephens said he got a great education from Cal Poly. He formed lasting bonds and relationships with a few professors, some who he never took a class from still gave him guidance and inspiration. But he also experienced racial bias in class from professors and peers.

Instead of putting him and other Black students on banners around campus, and overrepresenting the Black student population, Stephens said university administrators should find other ways to make a meaningful impact.

Hosting a panel of Black students who share their experiences — the good and the bad — could be one option, especially for prospective students, he said.

“I feel like that’s more effective than just hanging my image up there,” Stephens said. “Why not hear from the source of my thoughts and opinions about my stay?”

But Stephens said he doesn’t think university administrators would be a fan of that idea.

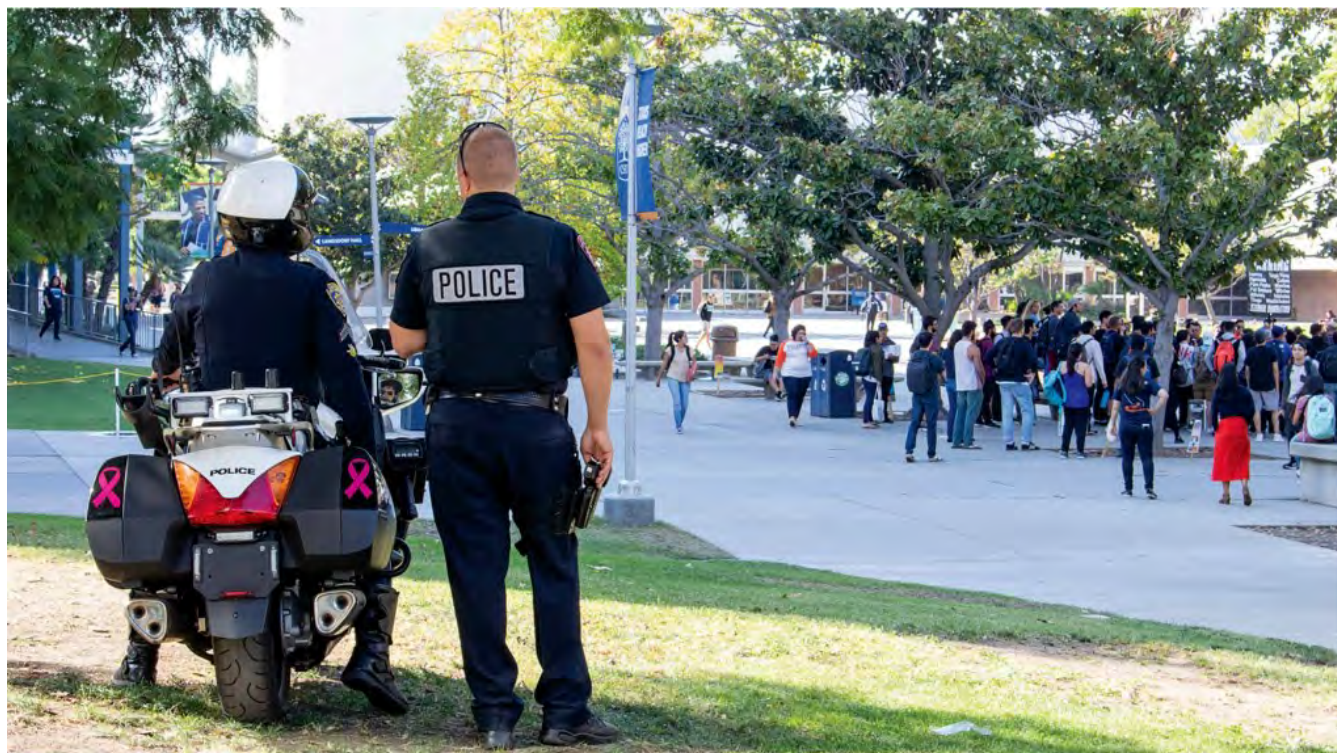
“They’re scared of students not coming to the campus because they don’t feel represented,” Stephens said. “They want to try to put up a front for everybody and say, ‘Hey, look, we have Black students here.’”

*This story comes from [The Hill](#), a team of data analysts and reporters focused on data-driven and investigative stories at Mustang News. [Click here to read more stories from The Hill.](#)*

# UC, Cal State police much less diverse than the students they serve

[calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2021/03/uc-cal-state-police-diversity-whiter-than-students/](https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat-higher-education/2021/03/uc-cal-state-police-diversity-whiter-than-students/)

Omar Rashad and Katherine Swartz | March 11, 2021



Campus police look on as a crowd forms in the Quad over a religious demonstration at Cal State University, Fullerton on Oct. 22, 2018. Photo by Riley Mcdougall, The Daily Titan

California's public universities are among the most racially diverse in the nation, but campus police departments don't reflect that diversity.

At 32 of 33 public university campuses, police officers are whiter than the students they serve, a CalMatters review of officer demographics shows. And in many cases, the disparities are glaring: Cal State Monterey Bay, for example, has a student population that is just over a quarter white. Yet of the university's 15 police officers, 12 of them are white — about 80%.

The same story repeats across the state. Overall, the University of California and the California State University systems employ nearly 800 sworn officers. Roughly half of them are white, compared with less than a quarter of students attending the two systems.

CalMatters obtained records of the race and gender of every active, sworn police officer at UC and CSU as of February 11, 2021 from the state's Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training. The statistics alone don't tell the whole story: Individual law enforcement agencies self-report racial demographics to POST and it may not capture all the ways identity intersects. And some campus activists think officer diversity is beside the point, when they're fighting to abolish the armed police departments entirely.

But at a time of heated debate about the presence of police on college campuses — a presence that police reform advocates say disproportionately affects students of color — the data shed light on a key aspect of the relationship between officers and the communities they are sworn to protect.

“Minority people don’t feel safe with cops and now it’s a majority white cop force on campus,” said Diego Rivera, a recent graduate of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo who identifies as Latino. White people make up about half of the university’s student body, but nearly three-quarters of campus police officers.

“Driving around at night I always had my eye over my shoulder just in case UPD wanted to pull me over for whatever reason,” Rivera said. “It’s like you still get a feeling of paranoia, you know, not being a white person on campus.”

While diversity has long been discussed in policing, the 2015 report from President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing recommended that police departments strive to better reflect their communities in terms of race, gender, language, lived experience, and cultural background. Diversifying would improve both community trust and the internal culture of police departments, the report said.

Cal State police chiefs “are really focused on community policing and trying to get the recommendations in the 21st Century Policing Task Force report implemented at every campus in the system,” said university spokesperson Mike Uhlenkamp.

At UC Davis, police chief Joseph Farrow acknowledged that his department needed to work harder to reflect the campus community. About 53% of the department’s 45 officers are white — far higher than the roughly 27% of Davis students who are.

“Racial diversity brings in the other stuff: The lived experiences, the different backgrounds, different beliefs,” Farrow said. “Are we there yet? Probably not. Do we have to keep working and be able to do that? Yes, we do.”

Other police chiefs on campuses with majority white departments said racial diversity is just one factor in building a representative department, and pointed to barriers they said made it hard to hire non-white officers.

“I think you can’t just take racial diversity and think that all the problems and the challenges are going to go away,” said Nader Oweiss, the recently-hired chief of police at Sonoma State University, where the department is 83% white.

In hiring officers, Oweiss said, departments also need to consider “whether they speak another language, they were born in the community, whether they worked in the community or went to school in that community.”

At the Chico State University police department in rural northern California, Chief Matthew Dillon said these days, not a lot of people want to be police officers. “We want our department to reflect the community we serve, but right now it’s particularly challenging because getting any qualified applicant is difficult,” he said. His department is about 88%white, compared with 43% of Chico State’s students.

But would diversifying campus police departments make a difference in how they serve their communities?

Kamille Magante, a 2020 graduate of CSU Dominguez Hills, says yes. The majority of police officers at the ethnically diverse campus are Latinx, Asian or Black — an anomaly in the CSU system — and Magante said that helped her feel comfortable using police services, like asking for an escort to her car at night.

“I felt that they understood a lot of the culture of the school and the history, and then the surrounding communities where all these students come from,” said Magante, who co-founded Pagsikapan, the school’s Pilipinx-American organization. “I feel like it created a safer environment, because those police officers understand who we are and our culture.”

But Melys Bonifacio-Jerez, a Chico State student who grew up in New York’s heavily policed South Bronx neighborhood, said they never feel safe around police officers, regardless of the officers’ background.

“Seeing police officers on campus and, like, institutions of learning — it distracts me from learning because I have that lived experience,” said Bonifacio-Jerez, who is also a member of the CSU Abolition Network, a group of students, faculty and community members advocating for police to be removed from Cal State campuses. “Honestly, that just re-traumatizes people like me.”

Some studies of city police departments show that non-white officers are just as likely as white officers to shoot civilians of color, and that diversifying police agencies does not necessarily create better relationships with their communities.

I’ve known since I was a kid that Black and Latino people are more likely to be killed by cops. I didn’t want the situation to escalate.

That’s because at the core of policing in America is the culture found inside departments and how it influences the way officers interact with their communities, especially marginalized ones, said Augustine Kposowa, a sociology professor at UC Riverside who studies criminology and policing.

“There is deep-seated racism that is built into American culture, and police come out of that culture,” said Kposowa. “The culture has way too many stereotypes, especially (of) Black men and Black women.”

Diversity in law enforcement should be encouraged, Kposowa said, but “by itself we cannot just depend on it and think it’s our solution to the policing problem.”

A few public university campuses, like Cal State East Bay, have successfully built diverse police departments.

“One of the reasons that I was comfortable coming to East Bay was because when I did a ride-along and when I met with officers at this department, I could tell right away that there was quite a mixture that reflected the population,” said Omar Miakhail, a lieutenant who oversees hiring for Cal State East Bay police.

Miakhail, who came to the United States from Afghanistan as a child refugee, said he understands the importance of police diversity from firsthand experience. The few times his family had to call police from their Hayward home, a white officer came to the door. Miakhail said he always felt that if the department had been able to send a Middle Eastern officer, his family would have felt more comfortable. “You want the person who responds to be able to understand you culturally, understand the circumstances you’re going through,” Miakhail said. “So when you don’t get that, I think that it causes barriers, which causes the issues we do have in law enforcement.”



Campus police officers Tejinder Arurkar, left, and Lt. Omar Miakhail walk around the Cal State East Bay campus in Hayward on Feb. 17, 2021. CSUEB has one of the most diverse campus police departments in the state. Photo by Anne Wernikoff, CalMatters

At East Bay, 25% of campus officers are Black, 30% are Latino and 13% are white, roughly mirroring the student population. Miakhail attributed the department's diversity to both its hiring practices and the campus' location in the ethnically mixed city of Hayward.

Officer candidates are first interviewed by a four-person panel, made up of only one police department representative and three other Cal State East Bay faculty and staff members "who understand the faculty and staff culture" and can make a collective decision on whether a candidate is the right fit for the campus, Miakhail said.

Efforts like those at Cal State East Bay are more likely to make a difference if campuses prioritize promoting officers of color to leadership positions, said Rashawn Ray, a sociology professor at the University of Maryland who researches police-civilian relations. That way, they are more likely to help shape department policy.

For José Simon Carmona, the diversity in his campus' police department is a step in the right direction. Carmona is a second-year health science major at Cal State East Bay and the diversity senator for the university's student government, a position focused on advocating for students who are Black, Indigenous and people of color. "I work in healthcare, and I visually see the importance of when a patient is able to see a physician that represents them, knows the issues and knows what they personally go through," Carmona said.

Still, he said more structural changes to the police department — like finding ways to stop racial profiling of students — were needed to help students of color feel safe on campus.

"Diversity is important, because officers are representing and serving in our community, but it doesn't fix all the issues," he said. "It's very hard to reform an institution that's meant to basically oppress."

*Rashad and Swartz are fellows with the CalMatters College Journalism Network, a collaboration between CalMatters and student journalists from across California. Felicia Mello contributed reporting. This story was produced in collaboration with Open Campus and supported by the College Futures Foundation.*