California approves $5 million to fund diversity in science and technology education

Cal-Bridge Program brings together the three levels of the California higher education system to diversify the California public university faculty and tech workforce

Wednesday, July 06, 2022

UCI Physical Sciences Communications



The State of California has approved $5 million in funding for the Cal-Bridge program which provides a pathway for underrepresented students in Community Colleges and the California State University (CSU) system to pursue advanced PhD degrees through the University of California (UC) system and join the California science and

technology workforce, including as public university faculty.

The Cal-Bridge program, launched in 2014, is a statewide partnership between 9 UC, 23 CSU, and 116 community colleges across California supporting undergraduate CSU students majoring in physics, computer science, and mathematics to matriculate into PhD programs across the state and nation. The new California state budget allocation will enable Cal-Bridge to expand the subject areas covered and extend its impact, supporting Cal-Bridge scholars all the way from their CSU undergraduate studies through their UC PhDs, thereby building a pathway for thousands of California students from diverse backgrounds to achieve the expertise needed to fill university faculty and technology leadership positions in California and beyond.

“Diversifying the professoriate will lead to a growth in gender, racial, and ethnic representation in the technology workforce more broadly by increasing the number of students from historically underrepresented groups completing degrees in STEM fields because they see faculty that look like them,” said Cal-Bridge Executive Director Alexander Rudolph, professor of physics and astronomy at Cal Poly Pomona. “As countries around the world are increasing their investment in science and technology, making sure our nation uses all of the available talent in developing our expertise and capabilities in these fields is an issue of economic and national security.”

“I’m so proud to have secured $5 million in the California State budget for the Cal-Bridge program to diversify the State’s science and technology workforce,” said Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Irvine), who was the chief sponsor of the effort to win funding for the initiative in the state budget. “Breaking down barriers to entry into STEM fields for historically underrepresented groups and diversifying California’s public university professoriate will help California continue to thrive as a world-class hub for innovation.”

Maria “Katy” Rodriguez Wimberly is a striking example of the power of the Cal-Bridge approach. An Army veteran, Wimberly took classes at the community college level before transferring to California State University, Long Beach where she joined the Cal-Bridge program in 2015. Wimberly graduated with a B.S. degree in physics from Long Beach and went on to earn a PhD in astrophysics at UC Irvine in 2021. She is now an NSF MPS-Ascend postdoctoral fellow in astrophysics at UC Riverside.

Commenting on how the Cal-Bridge program provided the support she needed for success, Wimberly said, “The network of mentors and peers Cal-Bridge has helped me create has been invaluable in my pursuit of an astrophysics PhD! I now have an incredible support system of similarly underrepresented astro grad students and mentors who actively work to build a more inclusive community.”

Rene Padilla is another Cal-Bridge scholar who credits the program with clearing his pathway to a PhD. Padilla started his education at Modesto Junior College, going on to receive his B.S. degree in physics from Stanislaus State in 2019. “Making the transition from a community college to a CSU campus was challenging,” said Padilla. “However, doing the transition from a CSU to a PhD was even harder and more complex. Nevertheless, the Cal-Bridge community gave me the necessary tools to successfully make the transition and move forward towards my dream school. Now, after several years, I am a candidate for a PhD in physics at UC Santa Cruz. I never imagined that I could make it that far but having the support from a program like Cal-Bridge made a big difference in my life. I am sure that increasing the resources of the Cal-Bridge program will increase the chances of students like me to get into high-level education programs.”

Phil Ting (D-San Francisco), chair of the Assembly Budget Committee and Nancy Skinner (D-East Bay), chair of the Senate Budget Committee together helped shepherd the appropriation into the state budget and are both excited to support the Cal-Bridge Initiative. Ting commented, “Cal-Bridge is a uniquely Californian treasure, ensuring fair and equal access to all the opportunities offered by our state’s outstanding higher education system. Cal-Bridge opens doors for all in our state to the most exciting and well-paid careers in science and technology, regardless of where they start their education. I’m excited to support Cal-Bridge, to see it funded in this year’s budget and look forward to watching it grow to benefit thousands of Californians over the coming years.”

Skinner added, “California has made progress in diversifying our public colleges and universities, but there is still much work to do. Black and Latinx students, in particular, remain underrepresented at our CSU and UC campuses. The Cal-Bridge program is essential to closing this racial gap, which is why I’m proud the Legislature and Governor have agreed to fund it in this year’s state budget. Cal-Bridge not only is effective at attracting underrepresented students to STEM fields, but also in ensuring that our cohort of future college professors in physics, computer science, and mathematics is diverse as well.”

For more information, visit www.calbridge.org.

About Cal-Bridge: The Cal-Bridge program has the mission to create a comprehensive, end-to-end pathway for undergraduates from the diverse student population of the CSU system through graduate school to a PhD, postdoctoral fellowship, and ultimately membership in the professoriate and science and technology workforce. Students in the program are referred to as Cal-Bridge scholars.

The program is a partnership between 9 University of California (UC), all 23 California State University (CSU), and the 116 community college campuses in California, thus fulfilling the promise of cross-segmental cooperation envisioned in the California Master Plan for Higher Education. Scholars are recruited from CSU and community college campuses across the state, with the help of local faculty and/or staff liaisons at each campus. Community college students transfer to a participating CSU to join the program.

-

Media Contacts

Prof. Kevork Abazajian
Cal-Bridge UC-South Director
Professor of Physics and Astronomy
University of California, Irvine
(949)824-0368
kevork@uci.edu

Alexander L. Rudolph, PhD
Executive Director, Cal-Bridge
Professor of Physics and Astronomy
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
(909)717-1851
alrudolph@cpp.edu

Press Releases
News Briefs
Awards
View PDF