



CENTER FOR CALIFORNIA STUDIES

2025

Annual Report



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Continued Collaborations
& Hodson Endowment

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As we come to the mid-point of the 2020 decade, I’m grateful for the opportunity to continue long-standing programs like the Capital Fellows Programs. We’re appreciative of the partnerships we have with the three branches of California’s state government – partnerships that entrust us with recruiting new leaders to work in public service for a complex and diverse state with the 5th largest economy in the world. We take that responsibility very seriously, and are committed to recruiting applicants that reflect the ethnic, geographic and economic diversity of the state. But recruiting people from all walks of life requires us to come to terms with the growing cost of living in the Sacramento area, where most Capital Fellows relocate to for their program. Up until last year we heard many applicants express apprehension about being able to shoulder the financial risk of moving to Sacramento for a monthly salary of just \$3253. In the fall of 2024 we requested an increase in the state budget that would allow us to provide a substantial increase to the Capital Fellows salary – a 50% increase to \$4888 a month. Such an increase would go a long way in making the program accessible to individuals who lack a financial safety net or are caregivers supporting other family members, valuable life perspectives that should be reflected among the ranks of our state’s decision-makers.

We were over-the-moon to learn, on January 10, 2025, that the Governor had approved our request in his proposed budget for 2025-26. The Legislature also enthusiastically supported the increase, and it was included in the final 2025-26 budget. This increase allows us to pay fellows \$4,888 a month, and took effect for the current class of fellows (2025-26 cohort). We saw the value of this salary increase in the faces of the 2025-26 Capital Fellows, once they learned of the increase. The importance of the salary increase was also evident in the record number of applications we received in December – an almost 60% increase over last year’s number. While there were a number of factors behind this increase, anecdotal evidence from our outreach efforts suggests that the higher salary encouraged many more folks, especially those with limited ability to take on financial risks, to apply.

The Center straddles two worlds: higher education and state government. Being based at Sacramento State offers us proximity to the state capitol, while also grounding us in one of the most innovative campuses in the largest public university system in the country. We are happy to be a part of the California State University, with whom we share common values of working toward a California where people from all walks of life and every group have the opportunity to learn and further their life trajectory and earning capacity, lifting their families’ economic wellbeing for generations. For us, those values are carried out through the Capital Fellows Programs, which strive to ensure that recent college graduates representing California’s diversity—cultural, geographic, ethnic/racial, linguistic, and political – have a chance to enter public service. Ensuring that the ranks of our state’s public servants reflect the range of life experiences and circumstances found among our state’s populace helps ensure that our state’s democratic institutions are informed by those perspectives.

Leonor Ehling, Executive Director
Center for California Studies

BRIDGING ACADEMIA AND
GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE
OF STRENGTHENING
CALIFORNIA’S DEMOCRACY.

The Center for California Studies is based at Sacramento State – the “Capital Campus” of the California State University. Being located in California’s capital strategically positions the Center to be the University’s link to the three branches of California’s government, other universities, think tanks, and outside partnerships involved with public service in California. This, paired with our extensive research, academic programming, and position as part of the country’s largest public university system, makes us uniquely equipped to fulfill our mission and accomplish our goals.

TO ACCOMPLISH ITS MISSION,
THE CENTER HAS IDENTIFIED
THESE GOALS:

**To foster in California’s
future leaders a dedication
to public service and a
commitment to the values
of representative
democracy.**

**To assist California’s public
officials and policymakers
in addressing the state’s
challenges through policy
research and productive
dialogue.**

CENTER FOR
CALIFORNIA
STUDIES STAFF

Leonor Ehling
Executive Director

Ambar Carlisle Salgueiro
Director, Jesse M. Unruh
Assembly Fellowship
Program

Megan Thorall
Director, Judicial Fellowship
Program and Deputy
Director

Laura Baker
Director, Executive
Fellowship Program

Erica Costa
Director, Senate
Fellowship Program

Rotce Hernandez
Director,
The Legischool Project

Shannon Swanson
Senior Outreach,
Marketing, and Social
Media Specialist

Sandra Bernard
Office Manager

Mal Almeida
Program Coordinator

Seraphina Soule
Program Coordinator

CENTER FOR CALIFORNIA STUDIES
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Capital Fellows Programs



A 50% Salary Increase for the Capital Fellows!

In January, we learned that Governor Newsom had included our request for a 50% increase to the Capital Fellows’ salary in his January 10 budget proposal to the Legislature. This wonderful and unexpected news was followed by overwhelming support for the increase among the Legislature, who ultimately included the increase in their final budget, passed in June. The budget increase will provide a much-needed 50% increase to the fellows’ salary, from the former level of \$3,253 per month to the new level of \$4,888 per month. This increase follows several years of rising housing costs in Sacramento, where the majority of the fellows live during their year of participation. And for participants in the Judicial Fellowship Program, who are placed in jobs throughout the state, the increase will be particularly impactful.

During their fellowship year, many Judicial Fellows are placed in courts in high-cost counties like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Alameda and Santa Clara, and the higher salary will greatly facilitate the housing search and livability of the program. Most importantly, the higher salary will help us fulfill our commitment to recruit individuals who come from economically challenging backgrounds into public service.

Hiring of Our New Director of the Senate Fellowship Program, Erica Costa

This spring, after a year-long search, we were elated to hire Erica Costa as the new Director of the Senate Fellowship Program. Erica is a former fellow, a holder of a graduate degree from Sacramento State, and a former Chief of Staff who brings many years of legislative experience to the position. Her extensive understanding of the legislative process, along with her passion for mentoring and her record of leadership, will ensure the continued success of the Senate Fellowship Program and the evolution and progression of the Center’s other programs.

Founded in 1982 and located at Sacramento State, the capital campus of the California State University (CSU), the Center possesses a unique trust: **to bring the resources of the state’s largest university system to the service of public discourse, civic education, and state government.**

Scholarships for Fellows Who Are Former Foster Youth

Thanks to a partnership between the Office of Sacramento State President Luke Wood and the John Burton Advocates for Youth, we will soon be offering a substantial scholarship to three former foster youth who are accepted into the Capital Fellows Programs. This scholarship is intended to help offset costs at the beginning of the fellowship program – like moving costs and housing deposits – that might dissuade many former foster youth from participating or even applying to the programs. We are hopeful this generous gift from the John Burton Advocates for Youth will allow us to recruit more former foster youth to the programs, a goal in keeping with our mission to recruit individuals that represent the diversity of life experiences found among California’s populace.



50% Salary Increase
for the Capital Fellows

THE JESSE M. UNRUH
ASSEMBLY FELLOWSHIP
PROGRAM

Assembly Fellows
2024-2025



“The Jesse M. Unruh Assembly Fellowship Program introduced me to the world of public service and has helped me understand where I can make an impact. The opportunity to engage with professionals and gain hands-on legislative experience has given me the foundation and direction I need to succeed in my future career.”



Gabriel Peña
Assembly Fellow, 2024-2025

Founded in 1957, the Jesse M. Unruh Assembly Fellowship Program is the oldest of the four Capital Fellows Programs and marked its 68th anniversary in 2025. The program was one of the Assembly’s earliest efforts to professionalize legislative staffing, and it became a partnership of the California State Assembly, the Center for California Studies, and Sacramento State in the 1980s. The goal of the Assembly Fellowship Program is to offer emerging public servants a direct and substantive experience in the legislative process.

“My fellowship experience has been incredibly informative, inspiring, and energizing. This year has been a truly unique opportunity that has provided me with numerous lessons and opened the door for a meaningful career in California politics.”



Melvin Ridley III
Assembly Fellow, 2024-2025

Key Updates for 2025

- The 2025 program year reflects continued growth in the Assembly Fellowship Program. The cohort includes 23 fellows in 2024 to 2025, and the program will expand to 25 Ffllows in 2025 to 2026. This is expected to become the stable cohort size in future years. The expansion has been supported through continued budgetary investment from the Speaker of the California State Assembly.
- Demand for Assembly Fellows continues to rise. 57 Assemblymember offices applied for a fellow this year, demonstrating strong interest in hosting participants and recognizing the value fellows bring to legislative work.
- Orientation remained fully in person and was conducted over nine weeks. Fellows completed intensive training on legislative process, policy development, political dynamics, and the professional expectations of Assembly offices. The extended in-person orientation strengthens cohort cohesion and better prepares Fellows for their placements.
- The academic and professional development components of the program were further strengthened this year. Faculty advisors and program staff provided expanded individualized advising, additional writing and research instruction, and structured skill building sessions throughout the year. These improvements ensure that fellows are prepared to contribute meaningfully in their placements and to pursue long-term careers in public service.



THE SENATE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Senate Fellows
2024-2025



Established in 1973, the Senate Fellowship Program is the second oldest of the four Capital Fellows Programs. Secretary of the California State Senate, Erika Contreras, a former fellow, continues to be a principal partner of the program. The nearly year-long fellowship begins with a four-week long intensive legislative orientation program then places fellows directly in the offices of state senators. The fellowship combines experiential learning, professional development, and mentorship alongside academic seminars and policy briefings from subject matter experts.

The program is a key initiative of the Center for California Studies, dedicated to building legislative staff capacity, strengthening California's democratic governance structure, and providing a springboard for the public servants of tomorrow.

“The Senate Fellowship Program granted me an opportunity of a lifetime. Over the course of a year, I gained hands-on experience working on several pieces of legislation that would help improve the lives of California residents across the state. I had the honor to serve in the Office of Senator Menjivar, who fiercely advocates to uplift and protect vulnerable communities residing in the San Fernando Valley. Through the fellowship, I gained lifelong friendships and new skills in my toolkit that will help my professional growth moving forward.”



Andrea Ayala
Senate Fellow, 2024-2025

Selection

The 2025 Senate Fellows Selection Panel played a pivotal role in selecting the program's 18 fellows. The panel was composed of representatives from the Center for California Studies, Sacramento State's Political Science Department, and bipartisan Senate staff members. A highly competitive applicant pool from across the state was assessed with an application, transcripts, letters of recommendation, personal statements and policy statements. Historically, the Senate Fellowship is a highly selective program and continues to be.

Training and Orientation

Civic education is central to the Center for California Studies' mission. Senate Fellows received extensive civic education training during their legislative immersion program, weekly academic seminar, and weekly brown bag lunches with state senators they work for. During orientation, they met with leaders from the state Capitol, state and local government departments, and policy experts. The academic seminar culminated with each fellow writing a comprehensive policy paper. These 40-page capstone projects provided an in-depth analysis of selected issues, emphasizing policy recommendations and actionable options for the future. This approach allows fellows to develop advanced research and communication skills while engaging directly with decision makers and practitioners. Lastly, they met with a state senator each week during the first half of their fellowship to gain insight into their journeys as elected officials and have an open discussion for the fellows to ask questions.

Legislative Contributions

During the fellowship, fellows were placed in the offices of state Senators and worked as legislative staff. They gained hands-on experience managing legislation, staffing committees, conducting research, analyzing bills and budgets, managing stakeholder relationships, and providing constituent services. They were also provided the unique opportunity to staff an elected official in various capacities, such as drafting talking points, attending committee hearings and providing verbal briefings on complex policy issues. These critical roles helped to deepen their understanding of the legislative process while contributing meaningfully to Senate offices.

Program Director

In the spring of 2025, the Senate Fellowship welcomed Erica Costa as its new Program Director. A longtime legislative staffer and former Capital Fellow, Erica brings over 18 years of experience in public service to this role. Throughout her career, Erica has served in various capacities, including chief of staff, district director, legislative director, and public health lobbyist. During her first year as Director, Erica provided guidance as fellows navigated legislative life and furthered relationships with key stakeholders in the Capitol to strengthen the fellowship.

Looking Forward

The Senate Fellowship Program continues to evolve as a bridge between education and legislative service. With its unique combination of professional, educational and mentorship support, the program reinforces its commitment to developing the next generation of leaders in California's legislative process.

“The Senate Fellowship has opened doors to incredible opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise. From the moment I began my placement, I was given the opportunity to work on key legislation, staff committees, and contribute as a valued member of the team; all without any prior experience. I am deeply grateful for the fellowship and everything I have learned and gained through this experience”



Adelyn Fowler
Senate Fellow, 2024-2025



THE JUDICIAL FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Judicial Fellows
2024-2025



In 1997, the Center for California Studies collaborated with the Judicial Council of California to create a unique program in the third branch of state government. At a time in history when the state court faced unprecedented changes in governance and funding, the California State University system identified its niche in the unique public management arena of court policy and administration.

Rooted in public service and experiential learning, the Judicial Fellows balance full-time work in the field of court administration in the executive offices of Superior Courts and Judicial Council offices across California with graduate-level academics through monthly field and academic seminars.

“My placement has allowed me to explore a part of California I had never been to before starting the program. At the court, I am working in an analyst capacity. However, I have gotten the opportunity to work in operations as well because of my position as a fellow. I have done research on court reporters, analyzed public outreach programs, and wrote a handful of policy memos. One of my favorite memories in the program so far was observing a Judges in the Classroom visit in a small town of under 250 residents.”



William Kegelmeyer
Judicial Fellow, 2024-2025

The Judicial Fellowship Program selects 10 fellows annually and is the only Capital Fellows Program to offer placement opportunities statewide. Placement locations in 2025 included Superior Courts in the counties of Alameda, Butte, Los Angeles, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, Santa Clara and San Mateo, as well as the Judicial Council’s Office of Governmental Affairs, Office of Policy and Research, Office of Court Research, Criminal Justice Services division, and the Executive office.

Judicial Fellows primarily served on-site at their placement courts and offices, with field and academic seminars held in person. Field seminar locations in 2025 included Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, Placer and Nevada Superior Courts. Additionally, the cohort attended the State of the Judiciary and participated in the Bench-Bar Coalition meetings at the State Capitol in March.

In June 2025, the class of 2024–25 completed their year-long fellowship Projects. These projects included the creation of a public CARE Court informational video, efforts to expand language access and interpreter services through a new interpreter scheduling platform, and an examination of the impact of Prop 36.

The class of 2024–25 concluded their fellowship at the end of June. In September 2025, we welcomed the incoming Judicial Fellows for in-person orientation in Sacramento. Orientation ran for two weeks and featured an introductory field seminar, additional professional development workshops, and an alumni networking luncheon. The 2025–26 cohort has learned more about the topics of case flow management and AI (artificial intelligence) during the fall seminars, building a strong foundation for work in their placements across California’s judicial branch.

Professional Development Fall Series

The class of 2025-26 participated in a three-part professional development series led by Syliva White-Irby of the Los Angeles County Superior Court. The goal of the intensive sessions was to further develop professional and situational awareness in the courts and learn how to engage effectively in person and in writing with executive level professionals and judicial officers.

Selection of the 2025–2026 Cohort

In 2025 the program continued the practice of in person interviews with the option of appearing remotely for selection interviews.



Keep up to date on the Judicial Fellows!

cajudicial.wordpress.com

[@cajudicial](https://www.instagram.com/cajudicial)

“My favorite experience I’ve had as a fellow has been observing Shelter Court, a type of collaborative court that is used across the state to increase access to justice among the homeless population.”



Kristina Mooney
Judicial Fellow, 2024-2025



THE EXECUTIVE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Executive Fellows
2024-2025



The Executive Fellowship Program was created in 1985 through the joint efforts of then-Sacramento State President Don Gerth and then-Governor George Deukmejian. It was the third of the now four fellowship programs comprising the Capital Fellows Programs. The Executive Fellowship Program started with 10 fellows in October 1986. The program expanded to 15 Fellows in 1994 and 18 in 1997. The Executive Fellowship Program continues to accelerate the personal leadership growth of public sector professionals toward preserving and protecting our democracy. Executive Fellows are skilled, ethical, and purposeful leaders who are committed to making a difference in California and who invest their career in protecting and securing opportunities for all communities to thrive.

“In the Executive Fellowship, I was placed at the California State Transportation Agency, where I worked on housing, climate, and transportation policy, developed skills in legislative analysis, and supported intergovernmental partnerships to advance innovative policies. Thanks to the hands-on experience I gained from seasoned mentors, I grew both personally and professionally and now not only have a clearer understanding of the career path I want to pursue but also am confident that I possess the tools to successfully reach it.”



Jayden Greenfield
Executive Fellow, 2024-2025



Fellows work full-time under the mentorship of senior-level executive staff in the executive branch and participate in graduate coursework, earning a certificate in Applied Policy and Government. Executive Fellows research and implement public policy by analyzing data and legislation, seeking public comment, distributing resources, and enabling inter-agency collaboration. Fellows prepare strategy documents, reports, and mission-critical communications in support of executive branch officials and communities across California.

The 2024-2025 cohort of Executive Fellows enjoyed a fast-paced and information-packed orientation, including the resurrection of the Placement Fair, where fellows had an opportunity to meet Mentor teams from 30 potential placement offices spanning the executive branch. Placements included the Go-Biz International Affairs Unit, Delta Stewardship Council, Health and Human Services Agency, Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, Department of Justice, Office of Governor Newsom – Communications, Department of Health Care Services, Government Operations Agency, Fair Political Practices Commission, Department of Public Health, California State Transportation Agency, California Public Employees Retirement System, Go-Biz Zero Emission Vehicle Market Development Office, California Community College Chancellor’s Office, Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, California Department of Transportation, Cradle-to-Career Data System, and Business, Consumer Services & Housing Agency.

In addition to their placement and graduate seminar work, Fellows actively participated in a four-part Cultural and Emotional Intelligence workshop series and individual goal achievement program. Field learning included a tour of the Department of Transportation’s Division of Equipment and a day-long bus tour of the Delta, led by the Delta Stewardship Council. Director Laura Baker conducted site visits to all 18 placement offices and fellows and Mentors alike participated in a mid-year workshop centered around giving and receiving productive feedback. The 2024-2025 cohort wrapped up the year in showcasing elements of their placement work through a capstone “Fellowship Project” that was on display at the Closing Ceremony and Showcase in late August.

In an update to the Program schedule, we welcomed the 2025-2026 Executive Fellows to Sacramento in early September. Fellows began their placements in late September following another successful Placement Fair and will conclude their fellowships in mid-July 2026.

Our newest class of fellows is eager to learn and connect. They are exemplary of the program’s values, with particular strengths in generosity, kindness, and commitment to public service. We are confident they will meaningfully contribute to our state’s important work and achieve significant professional growth during their fellowships.

“The Executive Fellowship offered me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work directly with top decision makers in California. It allowed me to start my career with significant access and credibility that would usually take years to earn, while giving me the support to grow before taking on my next big step.”



Damien Farhad Henson
Executive Fellow, 2024-2025





Founded in 1994, the LegiSchool Project is a civic education collaboration between Sacramento State and the California Legislature. LegiSchool encourages high school students to be civically engaged in their district and beyond. Our diverse programming throughout the year gives students the opportunity to talk about important state issues and engage in current events. To learn more about these opportunities and all of LegiSchool's civic education pursuits, please visit our website at www.csus.edu/legischool.

TOWN HALLS & MORE

- **February 2025**
AI and Technology Town Hall
- **April 2025**
Inaugural LegiSchool Podcast
Recognition of Essay Contest Winners
- **June-July 2025**
Virtual Civics Institute
- **October 2025**
Education Access Town Hall
- **December 2025**
Public and Mental Health Town Hall

Over the summer, LegiSchool once again hosted its fully Virtual Civics Institute, supporting 24 high school students from across California. The program provided weekly workshops, mentorship opportunities, and sessions focused on state government, public service, and policy engagement. The virtual format allowed students from diverse regions to participate without geographic barriers and to collaborate on final projects reflecting their interests in civic issues and leadership.

In October, LegiSchool held its third Town Hall of the year, focused on education access and the future of higher education, hosted on the Sacramento State campus. The event invited students and speakers to examine the challenges facing California's higher education systems, the importance of college access, and the evolving needs of today's learners. This conversation strengthened connections between high school students and the CSU community while highlighting policy trends in higher education.

Most recently, on December 12, LegiSchool hosted its fourth and final Town Hall of the year, a webinar focusing on public health and mental health in California. This program featured insights from individuals working in health committees in the California Legislature and explored how public policy influences health access and public health systems statewide. Through our Town Halls, statewide contests, virtual internships, and hybrid programming, LegiSchool expanded its reach, strengthened partnerships, and helped lift the voices of the next generation of civic leaders.

This year, the LegiSchool Project delivered a diverse range of civic engagement programs that connected California high school students to public policy, state government, and opportunities for leadership. Our first event of the year was in February, with a Town Hall on Artificial Intelligence and Technology, held at the California Secretary of State Building. This in-person event brought students into a key government setting and explored how new technologies, especially AI, are shaping our democracy and highlighted the growing importance of digital literacy, misinformation awareness, and public trust.

In April, LegiSchool hosted its first ever podcast event for the second Town Hall of the year in honor of Earth Day. This podcast conversation featured our high school student moderator to discuss environmental issues, climate change, and sustainability through a youth-centered storytelling and Q&A format. The event introduced a new podcast format and provided space for students to share their perspectives on environmental issues. Also in April, LegiSchool hosted the winners of our statewide essay contest, which asked students whether the voting age should remain the same or be changed. The program brought together students from across the state, gave them a chance to share their views on the voting age, and included conversations and meetings with policy leaders throughout the day.



EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CIVIC LEADERS

February Town Hall students touring the California State Capitol (left)



Essay Contest Winners



LegiSchool Civics Virtual Institute Summer 2025



October 2025 Town Hall

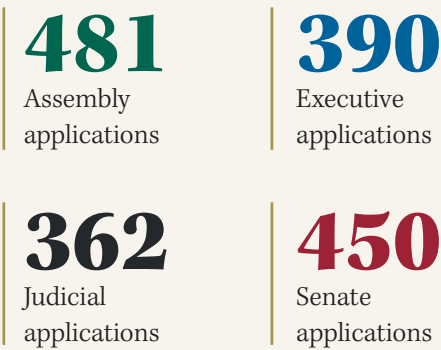
OUTREACH UPDATE

Outreach and recruitment efforts in 2025 consisted of fellows, alumni, and staff utilizing in-person career fairs, university classroom visits, email campaigns to students from various universities, virtual information sessions, and multiple digital platforms to promote the Capital Fellows Programs. Specifically, our investment in Handshake Premium enabled us to reach a much larger audience of potential Capital Fellows applicants.

As a result of outreach and recruitment efforts in 2025, we received 1683 applications for the 2026-2027 cohort of Capital Fellows, an increase of 59% compared with the prior application cycle for the 2025–2026 cohort. The breakdown for each program was as follows: 481 for the Assembly, 390 for the Executive, 362 for the Judicial, and 450 for the Senate.

Our Senior Outreach Specialist, Shannon Swanson, worked closely with branch partners, Center staff, various universities, and dozens of alumni to attract a diverse, robust, and public service-driven pool of applicants for the 2026-2027 cohort. We continue to use Instagram and LinkedIn to share information about the programs. This year, we invested in Handshake Premium, which allows us to efficiently promote the programs and directly message thousands of prospective candidates. Handshake is an online career platform designed specifically for college students and recent graduates, putting them in contact with employers for professional opportunities and events.

Annual increase of 59% in applications for the 2026-2027 cohort of Capital Fellows



Post-Fellowship Decisions, 2024–2025 Capital Fellows						
Program	Stayed with placement or with same Branch	Other State, Federal, or Local Government Service	Graduate or Law School	Private Sector (includes Legislative advocacy-related work)	Nonprofit Sector	Other
ASSEMBLY	17	0	2	0	2	1
EXECUTIVE	11	0	2	3	1	1
JUDICIAL	3	0	6	0	0	1
SENATE	13	0	0	2	1	2
Total	44	0	10	5	4	5

Fig. 1
CAPITAL FELLOWS APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FELLOWSHIP YEARS 2012-13 to 2026-27

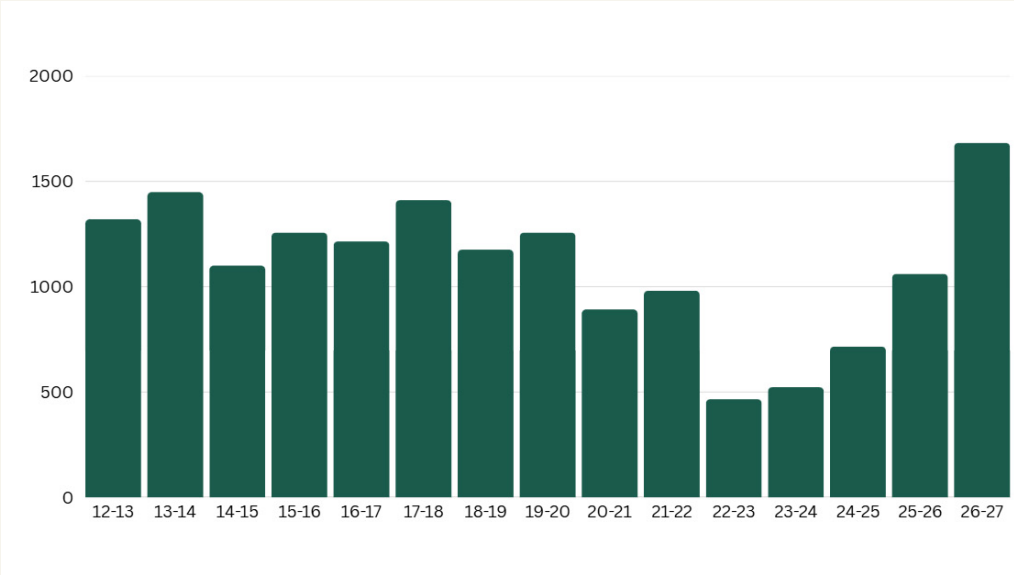


Fig. 2
2025-2026 CAPITAL FELLOWS APPLICATIONS ETHNICITY

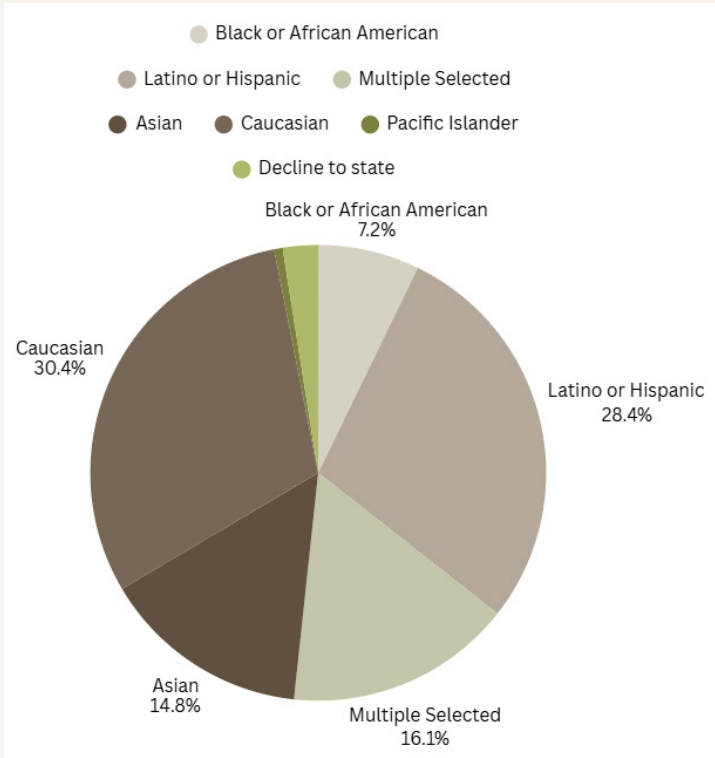
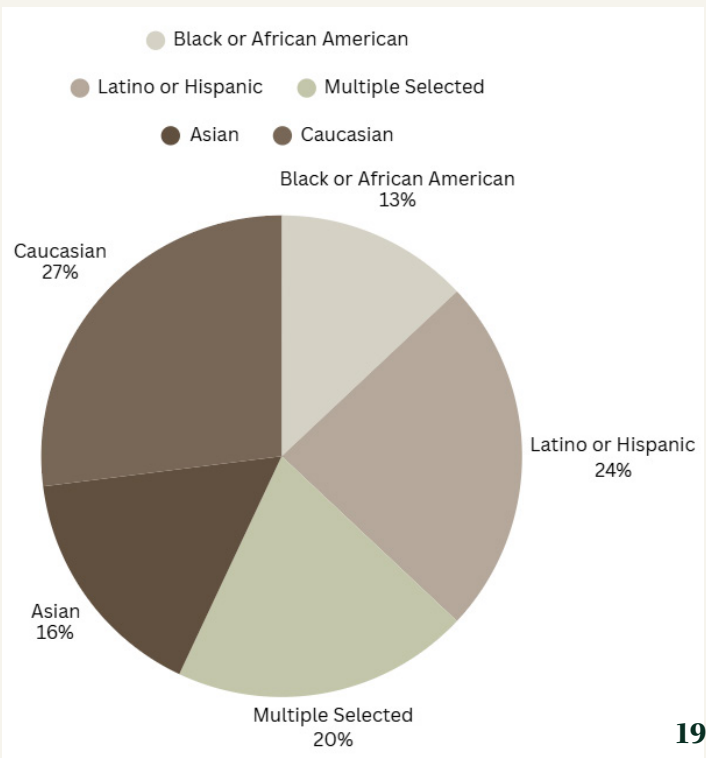


Fig. 3
2025-2026 CAPITAL FELLOWS COHORT ETHNICITY





CAPITAL FELLOWS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

The Capital Fellows Alumni Association (CFAA) is the alumni association for former Capital Fellows and serves as a central hub for professional development, mentorship, and community building across all four Capital Fellows Programs. Through a devoted and connected alumni network, CFAA fosters ethical leadership and supports the development of effective public servants committed to shaping sound public policy. The Association is recognized for creating and sustaining successful leaders through meaningful engagement, quality services, and exceptional opportunities that connect fellows across cohorts, branches of government, and professional sectors.

Throughout the past year, CFAA continued to strengthen connections between current fellows and alumni through a robust calendar of networking and community focused events. These efforts included the annual welcome reception for all Capital Fellows Programs at the start of the fellowship year, the annual holiday gathering, the all fellows picnic attended by more than one hundred fellows and alumni, and an end of year reception celebrating the accomplishments of the fellowship class. In addition to these larger events, CFAA hosted monthly opportunities for fellows and alumni to connect, fostering long term relationships and cross program engagement that extend well beyond the fellowship year.

CFAA also placed a strong emphasis on professional development and career transition support. During the spring, the Association hosted a job seeking session open to fellows from all four programs, featuring alumni panels representing the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches, as well as both the Assembly and Senate. Former fellows shared practical guidance on navigating the hiring process and leveraging fellowship experience into permanent roles. CFAA also organized an annual resume review and facilitated several informal networking coffee events near the Capitol, providing accessible opportunities for fellows to receive individualized feedback, building professional relationships, and engage with alumni who continue to volunteer their time and expertise in support of the next generation of public service leaders.

“For over 20 years, CFAA has partnered with the Center for California Studies to support fellows beyond the conclusion of their fellowship year. Through ongoing collaboration, CFAA provides opportunities for alumni to stay engaged, connect with current fellows, and maintain professional relationships that often span many years. We are committed to continuing this partnership and expanding opportunities for alumni and current fellows to connect, collaborate, and learn from one another.”



Noah Marty
CFAA Chair

Fig. 4
2025-2026 CAPITAL FELLOWS APPLICATIONS
UNDERGRAD TYPE

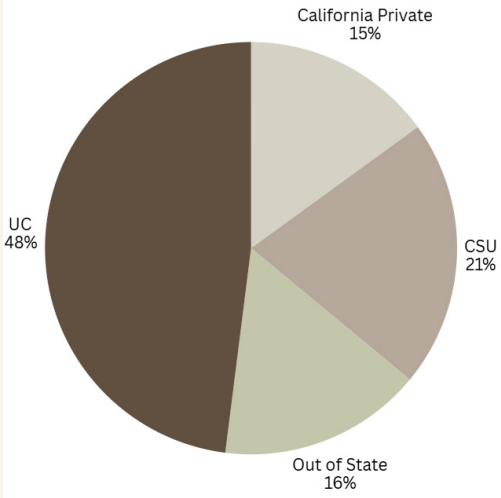


Fig. 5
2025-2026 CAPITAL FELLOWS COHORT
UNDERGRAD TYPE

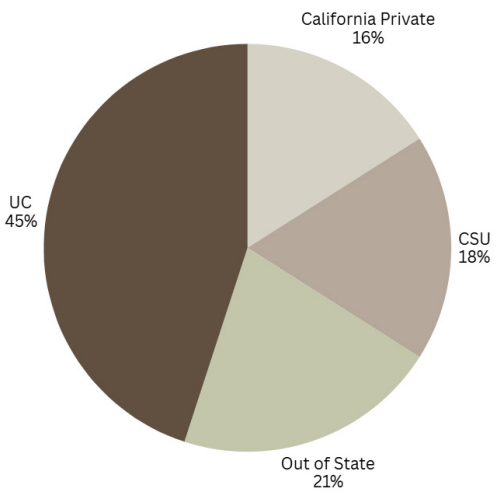
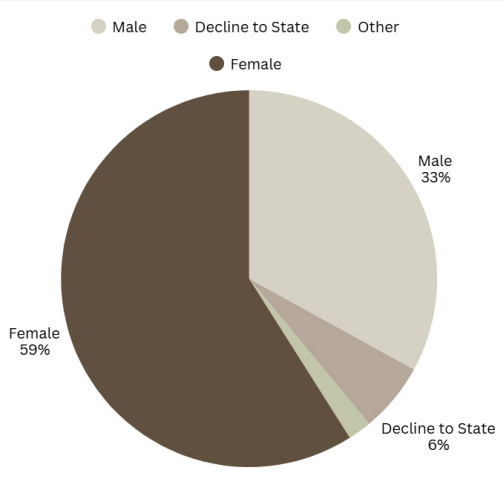


Fig. 6
2025-2026 CAPITAL FELLOWS
APPLICATIONS PREFIX*

*Applicants are provided the opportunity to state their prefix on the application, not sex or gender. For the purpose of this chart, “Female” represents the percentage of applicants who stated “Ms. or Mrs.,” “Male” represents the percentage of applicants who stated “Mr.,” and “Other” represents the percentage of “Mx.”



FACULTY RESEARCH FELLOWS PROGRAM

The Faculty Research Fellows Program began 30 years ago as a way to connect the vast brain power of the CSU faculty with the applied research needs of state policy makers. Through this program, policy-makers can request research of CSU faculty, who are provided grants to conduct the research. Five years ago, we were able to inject new resources and energy into the program, thanks to a generous grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We used the grant funds to evaluate the program and do some strategic planning to ensure the program’s relevance. Using the findings from the evaluation, we increased the amount of the faculty grants from \$15,000 to between \$20,000-\$30,000 per project. We also standardized the timeline for all research projects, so that most requests for proposals (RFPs) are issued in the spring, with the bulk of the work occurring over the summer, when faculty have more time to dedicate to research. Happily, these changes resulted in an increase in the number of faculty proposals per RFP. Over the past three years, we have also done a fair amount of outreach to executive and legislative branch partners, to let them know about this program and how they can use it to inform their decision-making. This has resulted in a steady stream of research requests from our branch partners.

In 2025, we issued four research grants to CSU faculty from four different CSU campuses. The research grants covered research for projects requested by three different state entities. Two projects were completed or near completion by the time of this writing:

- **“Artificial Intelligence and Energy: A Review of Impacts and Policy Implications”** by **Abbas Attarwala, Professor of Computer Science at Chico State.** This is a follow-up report to an earlier report done by Dr. Attarwala on the effects of AI on children. The current report looks at the high amounts of energy consumption by AI processes, consumption levels which are expected to grow exponentially in coming years. The report estimates the effects of AI growth on our ability to meet goals to reduce carbon emissions, and looks at potential recommendations to regulate AI’s growing energy usage.
- **“Advancing Gender-Responsive Budgeting in California: Lessons from Global Best Practices and Pathways for Implementation”** by **Rui Sun and Zheng Yang of CSU Dominguez Hills.** This study, requested by the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, looks at options to integrate gender considerations into budget processes to further equity and improve budget outcomes. The study considers models implemented in other countries and offers recommendations for policy-makers. The Commission has publicly endorsed the study and plans to disseminate it to state policy makers.

CONTINUED COLLABORATIONS

Although the Center for California Studies is somewhat unique in its role as a bridge between academia and state government, many CSU centers and faculty share our goal of helping to solve the state’s most pressing policy problems. In 2025, we collaborated with some of these entities on the following activities:

- **An event for policy-makers about the effect of wildfires on water quality, co-sponsored with COAST.** We worked with the CSU Council for Ocean Affairs, Science and Technology (COAST) to co-host a half-day program for policy-makers on the effect of wildfires on water quality. During the event, held on November 5, 2025, attendees heard from two panels: one featuring COAST-affiliated faculty, who discussed the latest research on this topic, and the other featuring policy-makers and advocates who discussed the real-world implications of the research. The program also included a luncheon during which attendees could view related research conducted by CSU students. The program was well received by attendees, and the Center is in current discussions with COAST to co-host a future event.
- **Education Policy Fellows Program.** For the past ten years, this program has been co-managed by the Center for California Studies and EdInsights, a center also housed at Sacramento State. This important initiative brings together 20 education professionals from throughout the state, supporting them with leadership training and equity-focused programming. Through a combination of in-person and virtual sessions, this program aims to contribute to policy development and implementation that promote more equitable student outcomes across education systems.
- **Continued sponsorship of research by Chris Towler of Sacramento State’s Political Science Department.** For the past two years we have sponsored Dr. Chris Towler’s Black Voter Project, an ongoing research project examining African American voting patterns and opinions. In 2025, Dr. Towler wrapped up his most recent round of longitudinal surveys. In the coming year we hope to have Dr. Towler present his findings to policy makers and the public.
- **California Journal of Politics and Policy.** Since 2020, this journal, formerly housed at UC Berkeley, has been based at Sacramento State due to the financial sponsorship of the Center and the dedication of Sacramento State faculty from the Department of Public Policy and Administration and the Department of Political Science.



HODSON ENDOWMENT



Timothy A. Hodson

The **Timothy A. Hodson Capital Fellows Assistance Fund** is dedicated to the mission of supporting Capital Fellows with needs-based awards. In 2025 over \$6,000 in funding was granted to 23 incoming 2025-26 Capital Fellows. These funds provide a critical financial bridge needed to start the fellowship, covering costs ranging from housing deposits to professional wardrobes. Center friends, colleagues, and the Hodson family continued to help sustain the Fund with their generous support.

Since the establishment of the Hodson Fund, we have aided 246 fellows from 14 consecutive cohorts. These inspiring future leaders represent the California promise and dreams that Tim Hodson often wrote and spoke about and would be so proud to see today.



CENTER FOR CALIFORNIA STUDIES

California State University, Sacramento
304 S Street • Sacramento, CA 95811
(916) 278-6906 • calstudies@csus.edu