

Sacramento Semester Program 2026

Impact Report: Celebrating 50 years of experiential learning in our state's capitol



Photo Credit: Moses Mackabee

Program Director Welcome

This year marked 50 years of the Sacramento Semester Program. In 1976 Gary Wilhelm, Richard Krolak, and Jean Torcom took an idea and made it a reality. They had the forethought and vision to see how well positioned Sacramento State was to be able to foster a thoughtful, well-trained, and passionate group of future policymakers. More importantly, they believed that this program should be accessible to the whole CSU system, opening the door for students around our state to come and intern here in Sacramento each spring.

As the director of this program, it is both an honor and a privilege to continue this 50 year legacy, including working to build from and sustain the incredible work of faculty like John Seyer and Tom Hober, or our more recent directors, Dr. Michael Wadle, and Dr. Maria Sampanis.

The Sacramento Semester Program is about more than just offering internship opportunities for CSU students interested in public policy. It is also about building a strong relationship between the nation's largest public university system and the passionate leaders in our California State Legislature. It is about ensuring that the future leaders of this state reflect the lived experiences of the people they serve. For fifty years, our program has opened the doors to the rooms where decisions are being made to the diverse and vibrant students who choose to pursue higher education in the CSU system.

There are many challenges facing our state and facing higher education. Uncertainty around the role of Artificial Intelligence and it's place in the classroom and job market have created new realities for those of us doing career readiness work for our students. Cuts to grants and other forms of federal funding to higher education institutions have placed increased pressure on states to step up and fill those funding gaps. But with these challenges also come new opportunities for our young people to engage with our policy makers in shaping the solutions that will help our state overcome and adapt.

Herein lies the beauty of the Sacramento Semester Program. We work to create a space of empowerment, where our students not only see themselves as capable of making real impacts on their state, but they also get direct experience developing the skills to meaningfully engage with policy. This work is a team effort, as you will see in the many updates included here in our 2026 annual impact report. And I can't wait to see how this program continues to grow.

Sincerely,

Jaime Jackson, PhD

Associate Professor and Sacramento Semester Program Director

Student Experience

The 2026 Cohort included 29 students representing 7 different California State University campuses. The vast majority of students are placed in the California State Legislature due to the focus of the program being on policymaking, but we are fortunate to work with a number of partners in and around the capitol community. Below is a list of this year's student intern placements.

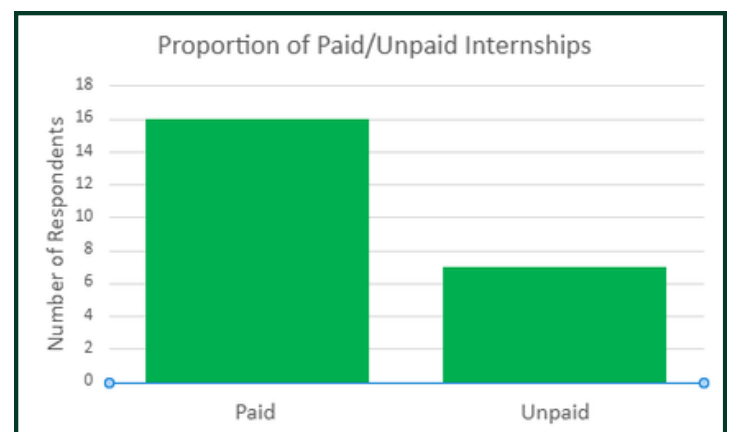
PLACEMENTS:

- California State Assembly and Senate
- Office of Sacramento Mayor McCarty
- California Student Aid Commission,
- California Special Districts Association
- Farmer's Insurance, Legislative Affairs
- Swing Strategies
- California DOJ, Office of the Press Secretary
- Environmental and Energy Consulting



One incredible shift that has had a significant impact on the access to internship opportunities for our students is the increasing number of sites that offer paid internships. After many years of advocacy, both the Assembly and the Senate now have paid internship opportunities, though the number allowed per office, per year is still restricted due to budget considerations. Nevertheless, with so many of our students coming from low-income backgrounds, the opportunity for them to secure a paid position makes it possible for our students to participate in this program, and to take on additional hours at their internships.

While paid internships are on the rise, our program continues to provide significant financial support to students in the form of scholarships and in housing stipends for visiting students. This year 21 of our students were eligible for scholarship support, and all nine of our visiting students received \$7,000 each in relocation and housing support. These resources from the California State Legislature make it possible for students of all backgrounds to participate in our program.



Hear from our students!

Viviyana King

Internship Site: Office of Assemblymember Elhawary (D)

I had an amazing time in my office. I felt like if there was maybe an experience I wasn't getting or if I wanted more meaningful work, I was able to convey that to my office and they provided that to me. With being an intern to a newer member there were definitely learning experiences but overall I was able to grow.



Giovani Grijalva

Internship Site: Office of Assemblymember Hadwick (R)

Everybody in my office were kind, knowledgeable, and willing to share their experience and wisdom. It was a really good office culture. It was a way to get work experience without a lot of pressure to perform perfectly.



Belinda Torres

Internship Site: Office of Senator Rubio (D)

My office was always really good about having a good relationship with me. When I joined they were in the middle of a big staff transition with the LD becoming the chief of staff. I will say I did have a good amount of hands on work with health committee that I really enjoyed.





David Corriea

Internship Site: Office of Assemblymember Lowenthal (D)

“

Asm. Lowenthals office offered me opportunities to work on various projects to include: staffing the member on a policy committee, staffing bills, taking meetings, and other special projects. The team, including the member, did a remarkable job to make me feel included and part of the team. This was deeply a positive experience, and I enjoyed every moment of this program.

”

Reanna Hanson

Internship Site: Office of Assemblymember Lackey (R)

“

This was absolutely the best office ever, I could not have picked a better office for me.

”



2026 Participating Campuses

 CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
LONG BEACH


SACRAMENTO
STATE


CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
FULLERTON


CAL STATE EAST
BAY

 **SDSU** | San Diego State
University

 California State
University Chico


Cal Poly
Humboldt.

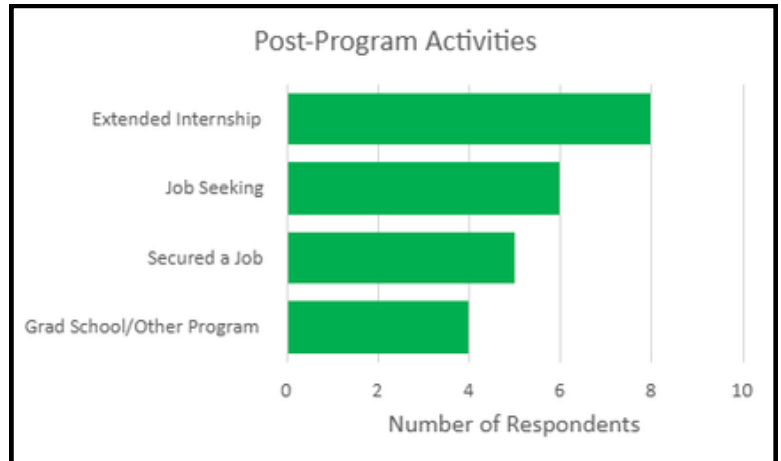
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Sacramento Semester Program

Post-Program Student Successes

One of the key goals we have for our students is ensuring that the experience they gain in the Sacramento Semester Program will open doors to future career success! We are so fortunate that our internship hosts share this goal and take the time to mentor their interns, regularly providing networking opportunities, encouraging students to get coffees with folks in the capitol community, and providing references for their interns when they leave the office.

By the end of the program in May, the vast majority of our students reported that they had their internship extended, were offered a job, had been accepted to graduate school, or had secured another opportunity through a different academic or internship program. Those that remain on the job market, benefit from an alumni board, program director, and former internship host that is committed to supporting them through this process which is why so many of our alums secure excellent jobs.



HEADED TO WASHINGTON D.C!!!!

Did you know that the Sacramento Semester Program is not the only CSU System-wide internship program? This year, the DC Scholars Program celebrated 20 years. Supported by Margaret McCarthy, an alum of the Sacramento Semester Program, this program runs out of CSU Fullerton and provides internship opportunities for CSU students in our nation's capital. Three of our fantastic Sacramento Semester Program alums from the 2026 cohort will be headed to D.C. this Fall semester to take their state experience to the next level! Congrats to Angel Diaz, Joanna Rogers, and Cesar Pina Calderon!



In the Classroom

Ever wondered what makes Sacramento Semester Program students so darn knowledgeable and prepared for the rigors of legislative work? We like to think that at least a small amount of this preparation is thanks to the academic components of the program. Each Spring the students take two courses during the program: POLS 182a - California Politics and Policy and POLS 182b - Skills Practicum and Speaker Series.

On Thursday evenings, the students spend the class learning about all the ins and outs of how policymaking works in the state of California from Professor Hussey. On Friday mornings, they get to do hands-on skills labs, take field trips, and hear from our capitol community with Professor Jackson.



This year's field trips included: 1. A visit to the Assembly Floor with a presentation from Assistant Chief Clerk Hugh Slayden, 2. Training in policy research and a tour of the California State Library with the California Research Bureau, and 3. Tips for developing constituent services skills and a visit to City Hall Chambers with the office of Mayor McCarty.

Meanwhile, the skills labs provide hands-on training in policy writing, bill drafting, program evaluation, data visualization, and so much more. These labs are often co-taught with professionals in our community. Between these visits and the speaker series, students leave with a vast network of professional contacts and future mentors!

Scholarship Highlights

Paid internships are on the rise, but so is the cost of attendance and the cost of living our young students must pay to pursue their education. As a result, we are committed in our program to providing as much financial support as possible to Sacramento Semester Program students. This support not only helps them to thrive in our program, but also ensures lower income participants aren't excluded from these incredible opportunities. Here are some highlights from this year's scholarship support.

1. Visiting students received \$7,000 each in housing support; 2. Twenty-one students with unmet financial need received an additional \$137,000 in scholarship support from the California State Legislature; 3. Two students received \$750 stipends from the Sacramento Semester Program Alumni Chapter; 4. One student received the \$3,500 Jonas Minton Water Preservation and Environmental Scholarship for the third year in a row.



Alumni Chapter Welcome Mixer and Stipend Awards

Scholarship Recipients: Jonas Minton Water Preservation Scholarship

Each year, one Sacramento Semester Student is awarded the Jonas Minton Water Preservation Scholarship. This award was started by Julie Carrasco-Minton to honor the important policy work of her late husband. In addition to caring deeply about environmental protection, Jonas Minton was also committed to mentoring and supporting the next generation of policy makers who shared his passion for water preservation. This year's recipient of the \$3,500 was Reanna Hanson who noted in her application, "As a Political Science student preparing for a career in law and public policy, I am motivated by the belief that environmental protection must include equity. Issues like groundwater depletion, agricultural runoff, drought management, wildfires, and water affordability are not just environmental challenges but questions of justice and governance."

Scholarship Recipients: Alumni Chapter Financial Hardship Stipends

The Sacramento Semester Program Alumni Chapter awarded two financial hardship stipends to Uruk Dekheel of San Diego State and Molly Mellon of Sacramento State. This hardship stipend specifically targets students in unpaid internships and was increased to \$750 per student this year thanks to the incredible fundraising efforts of our alumni! See photo above.

Sacramento Semester Program Alumni Chapter (SSPAC)

Teamwork makes the dream work, and as our alumni chapter continues to grow, so does their impact on our program. Each year, we are fortunate to have a few new members and a few returning members serving on the board. This not only helps with program continuity, but has led to a culture of mentorship on our alumni board. Below is the list of this year's incredible alumni volunteers.



2026 Board Members:

- Juan Carols Martir (2020), President
- Doonya Mahmoud (2023), Vice President
- Kadija Rhuma (2025), Secretary & Treasurer
- Nate Mendoza (2024), Events Coordinator
- Alison Kostusak (2019), Director of Fundraising
- Gavin Iribarren (2025), Director at Large

This year's alumni chapter board really built on last year's momentum to make this a very special year for our cohort. Of particular note was our 50th anniversary celebration, sponsored by the Office of President Luke Wood. Everyone was dressed to impress at the Julia Morgan House on May 8th and the board was able to kick off fundraising for next year's stipend program. We are so grateful to all the amazing program sponsors!



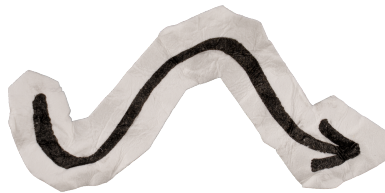
What's New at Sacramento Semester Program?

The program is thriving! And with increased community engagement have come new opportunities. For example, the professional clothing closet developed in partnership with the Sacramento Semester Program Alumni Chapter has received so many donations, we moved into a new space! This year's cohort looked great in their new clothes. Want to contribute to the closet? Here are a few items we would love:

- Ties
- Dress socks
- Men's suit jackets

Look for updates about our clothing collection coming again this Fall!

**NEW
SPACE!**



This year, we also entered the podcast space! Our two student assistants, Kadija Rhuma and Jacinta Brown helped us launch the NextGen: Civics & Policy Talk podcast. As if this project couldn't be more exciting, we decided to maximize student engagement by working with KSSU, Sacramento State's student-run radio station, whose space we've been using and whose team has been handling all our editing needs.



Episode one features an interview with Professor Kim Nalder, director of the Project for an Informed Electorate. We discuss what students need to know about navigating elections and political information in this mid-term season. Episode two is an interview with two of our 2026 Sacramento Semester Program students, Katy Meeker from Chico State and Cesar Pina Calderon from Sacramento State. They share what it's like to be an intern in the state legislature! Follow us on Spotify!



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Sacramento Semester Program

Get Involved!

Join the 2027 Cohort

If you are a CSU student (or know an awesome CSU student) consider joining us in your Junior or Senior year for the Spring Semester by applying to our program. Applications Open **September 1st** and close on **October 16th**. Use the QR code below to check out our website and learn more.

*Apply
here!*



Host an Intern in Your Office

If you have an office dedicated to mentorship and professional development, and want to work with a passionate and well-trained CSU student, consider reaching out to the Program Director, Jaime Jackson (jaime.jackson@csus.edu) to learn more about how your office can participate in our program. Students work with you for the full Spring semester, committing 24 hours a week to their work. The program includes a support structure to ensure your office is getting the most out of the experience, while also ensuring the student has a network to rely upon.

Make a Donation

Sacramento Semester Program is one of the College of Social Science and Interdisciplinary Studies' "Living Laboratories". Supporting our programs allows us to provide our internship students with additional resources that can off-set the financial burdens of participating in internships, thereby increasing access to these opportunities for all students. You can use the QR code here to help support this incredible program.



Listen to and Follow our Podcast

Head to Spotify and like and subscribe to the NextGen: Civics & Policy Talk podcast. This Fall, we will be covering civic engagement and get out the vote initiatives building up to and following the mid-term election season. Then in the Spring, we will be talking about the major policy issues of greatest concern to our students! Stay tuned.

