

RISING STAR

CELEBRATE



Dear Friends,

Happy 2019 SRA community! We hope you are feeling good about the year ahead and you're working toward achieving your goals.

We at Students Rising Above are looking forward to another year of supporting and advocating for college completion and career growth for the students we serve. **We are thrilled to share that 75 of our 75 Rising Stars high school seniors have applied to 146 colleges and universities across the country for a total of 987 applications submitted, including, Boston College, Sonoma State University, and UC Riverside.** We've had a few early decisions come in and everyone else is eagerly waiting to hear back from their future alma maters. For all those waiting in anticipation, we are right here by your side!

Now is also the time to recognize our 99 Rising Stars college seniors, who will be graduating this Spring and entering into the workforce. We are so very proud of each and every one of our upcoming graduates and cannot wait to see what the future holds.

It is with warm gratitude that we thank our dedicated donors, partners and growing alumni community. With your commitment and support, SRA is continuing to change the landscape of America's colleges and universities and, ultimately, diversifying the workforce pipeline. Together, we are helping today's youth find tomorrow's meaningful and sustainable careers.

We are excited to be hosting the **16th Annual Students Rising Above Gala on Thursday, March 21st at The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco.** Please join us for a celebratory evening to honor our entire SRA community and our work of 20 years toward redefining the future. Secure **online registration is available at <https://studentsrisingabove.org/>.**

Here's to 20 years strong and many more to come! Celebrate with us on social media: #20YearsofSRA

With Gratitude,
Carolina Martín
Executive Director
Students Rising Above

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SRA Alum and Systems Engineer Gives Back to SRA Community



E'Quacy Parker, SRA Alum, Cal Poly Pomona graduate and Systems Engineer, Raytheon Company

Meet E'Quacy Parker, Cal Poly Pomona graduate and Systems Engineer with technology and innovation leader, Raytheon Company, specializing in defense, security and civil markets throughout the world.

As a first-generation college graduate, E'Quacy is committed to pursuing a career in Aerospace Engineering and is grateful for Students Rising Above, who was "the backbone in his ambition to complete college and pursue his career goals."

Now in his first year of his dream career path, E'Quacy is giving back to SRA on a bimonthly basis. We are truly inspired by E'Quacy's ambition, tenacity and generosity!

[Read on to learn about E'Quacy's giving inspiration and college-to-career journey.](#)

What inspired you to give back to Students Rising Above?

E'Quacy: Since high school, I made a commitment to start a philanthropic journey to help empower others to pursue a passion in STEM. What better way to give back than to support the the organization that pushed me to be where I am today.

Let's talk about that journey - What was the college application process like? What led you to Cal Poly Pomona?

E'Quacy: For me, the college application process wasn't too intimidating as attending a four-year college was a lifelong dream of mine and I understood that I had to stay focused to make it happen.

With that said, there are so many application deadlines to keep track of and SRA really helped with this. My SRA Advisor, Robin, was great at this process and kept me on track. It was Robin who suggested I visit Cal Poly Pomona and I loved everything about it - from the diversity among the professors and student body to their robust Aerospace department.

What led you to your initial interest in Aerospace Engineering? When did you know you wanted to pursue Engineering as a career path?

E'Quacy: It all began in middle school when I took an interest in and excelled at Biology. From there, I got really into watching astrophysics videos and then it was my high school freshman English teacher who recommended Aerospace as a potential career path. It all took off from there!

Engineering and defense security are competitive industries - How did SRA help make it all happen?

E'Quacy: Overall, SRA was the backbone in my ambition to complete college and pursue my passion of a career in Aerospace Engineering. I wouldn't be where I am today without Students Rising Above.

While at Cal Poly Pomona, SRA helped me get my foot in the door through extensive internships, which really built out my resume, even before graduation. I was so fortunate to have worked with a great team of people at both Motive Power and BART, building unique skill sets with a focus in risk management and systems engineering.

These internships provided me with the functional job experience I needed to be a competitive candidate upon graduation; for this I am forever grateful. Additionally, it was my SRA mentor who connected me with networking opportunities, opening the door to my current role.

Was there anyone specific at SRA that impacted you the most?

E'Quacy: My SRA Advisor, Robin! She was my academic mother and always made sure I was happy mentally and emotionally. It was so nice to know that someone was there, looking out for my best interest, academically and overall.

What key qualities do you think makes a good leader?

E'Quacy: Having an open-mind, patience and humility. My mom had all of these qualities; she opened my mind to the world and always challenged me.

What does Students Rising Above mean to you?

E'Quacy: SRA is the one thing that helped me see the bigger picture at the end of the day. No matter what you've gone through, you can achieve great things through dedication, hard work, time and building relationships with people. With those four things, anything can happen.

Partners in Change: Bay Area Companies Celebrate the Holidays by Supporting Students Rising Above

A significant part of the college-to-career journey for SRA students is developing the skills and experience necessary to excel in the professional world upon graduation. SRA provides various trainings and skill-building workshops, as well as professional advising, career exposure and networking events, internship placements, and a career mentor program.

SRA is grateful for the many companies and organizations in the Bay Area who support us in this mission. Throughout the year, our many corporate partners support our students in various ways, like offering valuable internship opportunities, or hosting on-site “Career Insight” events.

During the 2018 Holiday season, there was an outpouring of support that SRA received from our partners, who opted to go above and beyond ways in which they already support our students.

For example, eager to help SRA celebrate our 20th Anniversary as an organization, Autodesk generously hosted an event in their incredible Gallery space in late November. SRA donors, volunteers and alumni marveled at the larger than life photos of SRA students projected on many of the gallery walls and left inspired after hearing from Autodesk’s Danny Guillory, Head of Global Diversity & Inclusion, along with SRA Board member, Stephen Jon Thompson, as they participated in a panel discussion about the future of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, led by SRA Co-founder, Wendy Tokuda.

Autodesk has been a committed partner in our work, with five SRA students having benefited from an internship at Autodesk, and three alumni are current Autodesk employees. Guillory shared that *“My experience with the students has been truly inspiring; the only barriers to their success are resources and connections, as they already have a resilience that far exceeds that of most people. The benefits that corporate partners gain from SRA include tangible business outcomes as well as a deep level of employee engagement. Having a direct impact on students’ lives is a truly profound way to participate in our community – and one that resonates with everyone at Autodesk.”*

As the holidays grew near, the following companies and organizations even included SRA into their holiday celebrations. As a part of DocuSign’s Global Impact Day, employees came together to write notes of encouragement to SRA students. Along with the gift cards for coffee, SRA students felt extra supported going into their final exams!

Excited to help their colleagues burn off those extra holiday treats, Equinix’s University Recruiting team organized a holiday event at SoulCycle in San Mateo, which also doubled as a fundraiser for SRA! Equinix employees, including Charles Meyers, Equinix CEO riding front and center, laughed, cheered, and sweat during the 45 minute ride, raising over \$7,000.

The event organizers, including Aman Musafar, Sheba Asghar, Chelsea Morton-Jones and Madison Butler, shared *"We're so excited about our new partnership with Students Rising Above. SRA is truly committed to seeing their students succeed and we've seen that through our partnership already. SRA has been so easy to work with and their students have already provided tremendous value through their internships with us. With SRA's commitment to their students and to our partnership it was a no brainer that we wanted SRA to be the beneficiary of our fundraiser."*



Equinix University organized a holiday event at SoulCycle in San Mateo, which also doubled as a fundraiser, raising over \$7,000 for Students Rising Above!

Holiday cheer was still in the air when Wells Fargo generously shared their downtown San Francisco Learning Center to host SRA's Career Development workshop. On Saturday, December 22nd, when many have already departed on holiday travel, over 30 volunteers from more than 25 companies supported over 90 SRA students with interview tips and tricks.

Products that Count, one of the largest networks of product managers in the world, also included SRA in their holiday party. At Yelp HQ, the party included cookie decorating and guest speaker Jon Lax, Director Product Design, Facebook. At the end of the evening, Products the Count Founder, SC Moatti, announced a \$5,000 donation to SRA (presented in the form of a 3 ft. check!) and even challenged guests to donate themselves by offering to match dollar-for-dollar for a donation.



Above Left: At Yelp Headquarters, Students Rising Above students, alumni, and staff enjoyed a festive evening in support of SRA, hosted by Products That Count. Above Right: Products That Count Founder, SC Moatti, presented SRA with \$5,000 donation, with Jen Naecker, Students Rising Above Director of Development.

Finally, thrilled to be able to surprise students home for the holiday break, the Warriors Community Foundation, philanthropic arm of the Golden State Warriors, truly made memories for students and advisors alike with 35 lower bowl tickets, a VIP tour of the arena, and exclusive shoot around experience for the December 27th game against the Portland Trailblazers.



SRA Advisor, Amy Niles, recounts *"The Warriors Community Foundation's donation meant that we were able to surprise our students and celebrate another semester completed by experiencing a VIP tour and a nail biter of a basketball game! We all had so much fun and it was a great way for our students to feel that they have a supportive community that goes beyond SRA!"*

Together with SRA, Bay Area companies are making a profound impact on the lives of underserved youth in our community, while creating a more engaging and fulfilling place of work for their employees.

Our ability to support every SRA student depends on the commitment we receive from our partners. When a community invests in the next generation, the returns are priceless. To all our corporate partners and career development volunteers - thank you! To discuss partnership opportunities, please reach out to JNaecker@studentsrisingabove.org.

SRA and ALL WAYS UP Foundation Partner To Empower Future Leaders

Students Rising Above is now in Southern California! We are excited to partner with ALL WAYS UP Foundation in Los Angeles to support young scholars in their educational endeavors.

ALL WAYS UP has been supporting future leaders and changemakers since 2009, investing in low-income and first-generation college-bound students. Their mission: "To help under-resourced students get into AND through college."

ALL WAYS UP has partnered with SRA to provide 40 college students with SOAR advising, with a focus on career development. Through the SRA Hub and with help from SRA advisors, ALL WAYS UP students will participate in five monthly hangouts and learn important skills, such as how to build a resume, navigate and take advantage of LinkedIn, find meaningful internships, and effectively grow a professional network.



"SRA and ALL WAYS UP share a mission to encourage first-generation youth to complete college and move into sustainable careers," said Carolina Martín, Students Rising Above Executive Director. "Together, SRA and ALL WAYS UP are supporting young people in their drive toward economic mobility -- creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce for the next generation."

Isabella Flores, SRA Content Manager, facilitated the kick-off workshop on January 2nd in Los Angeles. She received rave reviews and even convinced one scholar, traveling abroad to Ecuador to participate, *"Isabella's presentation made me realize that I should not let a time difference stop me from taking advantage of a great opportunity."*

Follow us on the SRA blog for more partnership news: <https://studentsrisingabove.org/media/#blog>

Mentor Spotlight: Building Lifelong Connections On The College-To-Career Journey



"Having a mentor like Solomon, provides guidance and hope for my future. He is not only a mentor to me, but also a great friend who I can turn to." - Eric Luu, UC Riverside freshman

January is National Mentoring Month! A time to recognize the real-life impact of a mentor and reflect on how we can all work together to ensure our youth have dependable role models to look up to, instilling positive change.

Did you know 1 in 3 young people grow up without a mentor in their lives? This is called the mentoring gap. At Students Rising Above, we believe strongly in the power of mentorship and the impact it can have on our students, now and down the line throughout their careers.

Meet Solomon Reda, Apple Program Manager, Applied Machine Learning, and a proud SRA mentor to Eric Luu, SRA student and UC Riverside freshman.

Solomon is a first-generation American who grew up in Orange County with a family that placed a strong emphasis on education. Solomon attended Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, majoring in Industrial Technology, and continues to stay involved through opportunities such as serving as Vice President of Student Affairs on the Advisory Council.

As a former basketball coach and having volunteered for numerous resume workshops hosted by Apple, Solomon has a passion for helping youth achieve their full potential. **We caught up with Solomon on what inspired him to become a mentor, why mentorship is so important and how we can all be mentors in our daily lives. Read the Q&A below!**

What inspired you to become a mentor?

Solomon: First and foremost, being raised by someone who dedicated her life to helping STEM majors pursue their dreams. Beyond that, five years into my career and as a minority myself, I decided it would be a waste of my talents not to help others, who would soon be entering the workforce and might be facing similar challenges.

One of the benefits of a mentorship is learning from someone else's experiences. What do you think your mentee is teaching you?

Solomon: Eric has taught me the value of learning from someone who gives you hope. I always thought this had to be your parents and I've learned through this life-changing experience that this trusted relationship does not have to be through direct lineage. When you have someone that cares about you, that goes a long way, it doesn't take much - it takes someone who roots for you and believes in you.

What has been your favorite memory with Eric so far this year?

Solomon: One afternoon, we had planned on getting together and I let Eric know I hadn't been feeling well and wasn't able to plan something big, but I still wanted to get together. We grabbed In-N-Out, had a great conversation, but it definitely wasn't fancy. About 30 minutes after I dropped Eric off at home, I got a text from him, letting me know how much it met to him. I understood in that moment that it doesn't take much - it takes being there.



What does the value of education mean to you?

Solomon: Education gives you options - options to obtain whatever success means to you and the environment around you.

What have you learned from this mentorship experience?

Solomon: There's a lot of nuances to college. Having experienced the college application process with Eric, I saw first-hand that the system is getting harder and harder to navigate. It's important to have the resources and people to turn to for advice and counsel.

This is why organizations like SRA are so important and impactful. SRA provides opportunity to kids that might have never known what opportunities were possible.

To learn more about our Mentor Program and how to get involved, check out our recent blog post: How Mentorship Changes Lives: <https://studentsrisingabove.org/2019/01/17/how-mentorship-changes-lives/>

SAVE THE DATE!



LADEJAH DILLARD
UC MERCED GRADUATE, MAY 2018

*Students Rising Above Cordially Invites You To
Celebrate 20 Years of Redefining the Future*

Thursday, March 21, 2019
The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco
600 Stockton Street
(Between California & Pine)
San Francisco, CA

*Reception 5:30pm
Dinner Program & Live Auction 6:30pm*

SECURE ONLINE REGISTRATION AVAILABLE AT
STUDENTSRISEINGABOVE.ORG

Business or Cocktail Attire