



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 2026

Growth Sector and Cal State LA Showcase Nation's First Engineering Degree Apprenticeship Pathway

Second Annual EDAP Showcase Connects Community College Students with Paid Work Experience, Engineering Degrees and High-Wage Careers



LOS ANGELES, CA - August 13, 2026 - Growth Sector, in partnership with California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA), hosted its second annual **Engineering Degree Apprenticeship Pathway (EDAP) Showcase**, bringing together 120 community college students, educators, engineering interns and industry leaders to demonstrate a new pathway from community college to a Bachelor of Science degree and engineering career.

The event welcomed Summer Bridge students from **Los Angeles City College (LACC)**, **East Los Angeles College (ELAC)**, **Los Angeles Mission College (LAMC)** and **Glendale Community College (GCC)**, alongside approximately 31 current EDAP engineering interns at Cal State LA and representatives from Caltrans, (Anthony Ng., Principal Transportation Engineer) and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP / Mario Morales, Utility Administrator).

Students participated in engineering lab tours, an industry panel, networking opportunities, and a poster session showcasing hands-on engineering projects and experiences. Cal State LA faculty provided students with firsthand exposure to engineering disciplines, research and real-world applications through faculty-led laboratory experiences.

Participating faculty included: Dr. Mark Tufenkjian, Associate Dean of the College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology (ECST); Dr. Charles Liu, Chair and Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Growth Sector SMART Intern Director at Cal State LA; Dr. Mehran Mazari, Associate Professor of Civil Engineering, who led students through the Concrete Lab; Dr. Joseph Lucey, Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering, who introduced students to the Fluid Mechanics Lab; and Dr. Deborah Won, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, who welcomed students to the IntelliMed Lab.

INDUSTRY & EDUCATION PANEL

The Aug. 7 showcase featured a discussion with engineering, education and workforce leaders about preparing the next generation of engineers and creating stronger connections between education and employment.

The student panel included:

- **Luz Campos**, Electromechanical Systems Engineering, Cal Poly Pomona
- **Vincent Esparza**, Electrical Engineering, CSU Northridge
- **Fahat Yousuf**, Aerospace Engineering, USC

FROM THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Growth Sector's EDAP model extends beyond traditional short-term apprenticeships by combining paid work and learning throughout the student journey from entering community college through transfer, completion of a B.S. degree, and entry into an engineering career.

Students can receive **up to \$80,000 in paid work experience** over a five- to six-year degree pathway while building engineering skills, professional confidence, mentorship and connections to prospective employers.

“Because of these skills and knowledge, I was able to represent Santa Ana College at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. Competing against teams from more than 100 universities across the country, our team advanced to the finals of the NASA ORBIT Pitch Showcase. Through our efforts, we secured the Complementary Use of AI Award, recognizing our integration of physical AI, computer vision, onboard autonomy, and AI-driven decision support, as well as the Integration Bonus Award, recognizing the real-world impact of our autonomous robotic system for both space exploration and Earth applications. Looking back, I realize that none of these opportunities would have been possible without the experience from the SMART internship.”

- Arthur Alcocer, SMART Intern at Cal State LA / EDAP Summer '25 Cohort

BUILDING THE ENGINEERING PIPELINE

Growth Sector is active in five states and has supported more than **3,300 community college students** and facilitated more than **1,000 paid internships**. Its programs connect students with engineering and STEM opportunities through academic support, paid work experience, mentorship and industry partnerships.

*“The **Summer Making, Academic Prep, and Research for Transfer Students (SMART) Internship Program** serves as a critical **paid pre-apprenticeship stage within the Engineering Degree Apprenticeship Pathway (EDAP) pipeline**, creating an early and intentional bridge from community college to engineering education, research, and ultimately the professional workforce. By engaging motivated community college students in hands-on projects across electrical, computer, biomedical, and mechanical engineering, immersive technical workshops, collaborative problem-solving, and faculty-mentored research, SMART helps students develop both the technical competencies and academic confidence necessary to successfully transfer to a four-year engineering program. More than a summer experience, SMART is a strategic engineering workforce-development intervention: it identifies emerging talent, strengthens students’ readiness for upper-division study and subsequent EDAP apprenticeship opportunities, and builds a sustainable pipeline connecting community colleges, universities, and industry. Through this paid pre-apprenticeship experience, students can see a clear and attainable pathway from community college to a bachelor’s degree and, ultimately, to a professional engineering career.”*

- **Charles Liu, Ph.D.**, Professor and Chair, Electrical and Computer Engineering / College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology, Cal State LA

GROWTH SECTOR LAUNCHES “DAY IN THE LIFE” VIDEO CAMPAIGN

The Cal State LA showcase also marked the launch of Growth Sector’s new **“Day in the Life” video spotlighting the nation’s first Engineering Degree Apprenticeship Pathway.**

New National Video Campaign Demonstrates How Community College Students Can Earn While Learning on the Path to High-Wage Engineering Careers: Watch Video
YouTube Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjNhg8QkocQ>

The campaign follows an EDAP student through college, engineering education and paid professional experience, providing a firsthand look at how students can **earn while they learn** and progress toward a B.S. degree and an engineering career.

The campaign will help introduce the EDAP model to students and families, educators, employers, policymakers and funders nationwide.

Growth Sector’s California EDAP initiative is supported by the **U.S. Department of Labor’s Building Pathways to Infrastructure Jobs Grant Program, the Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation, Crankstart, Tipping Point Community, Sobrato Philanthropies, and ECMC Foundation.**

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About Growth Sector

Growth Sector is dedicated to opening pathways to high-quality, high-paying STEM careers for students traditionally excluded from these opportunities. Through our innovative STEM Core Engineering Degree Apprenticeship Pathway, we combine academic preparation with paid, hands-on work experience. This dual approach supports community college students in transferring to four-year technical degree programs while simultaneously gaining real-world employment in their field of study.

Our Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship programs place students directly into the workplace, allowing them to earn while they learn. These paid positions provide invaluable experience and early career momentum before graduation.

The EDAP model builds a cohort-based peer learning community and provides paid engineering-related opportunities, ensuring that students receive both academic and practical support throughout their journey. By integrating education, employment, and a

robust support network, Growth Sector is helping students from all backgrounds gain the credentials, skills, and confidence to thrive in the STEM workforce.

(<https://www.growthsector.org/>)

About California State University, Los Angeles

California State University, Los Angeles is the premier comprehensive public university in the heart of Los Angeles. Cal State LA is ranked number one in the United States for the upward mobility of its students. Cal State LA is dedicated to engagement, service, and the public good, offering nationally recognized programs in science, the arts, business, criminal justice, engineering, nursing, education, and the humanities. Founded in 1947, the University serves more than 22,000 students and has more than 260,000 distinguished alumni.

Cal State LA's EDAP engineering interns are community college transfer students participating in the Summer Making, Academic Prep, and Research for Transfer Students (SMART) Internship Program, led by Professor Charles Liu in the University's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. The program provides students with hands-on experience in research and technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, computer vision, and augmented and virtual reality.

Since its inception, SMART has supported 78 interns, with more joining this summer 2026. It is part of Growth Sector's EDAP, supported by the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Science Foundation, which focuses on helping underrepresented students succeed in STEM. (<https://www.calstatela.edu/>)

Images are accessible through the link and interviews are available upon request.

ECST Flickr album: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjD1THA>

Photo Credit Line: Cal State LA/College of ECST

Media Contact:

Kimberly Goodnight | Media Playground PR | Growth Sector

Email: kim@mediaplaygroundpr.com