

# WHY COMMUTE?

## Data reveals increase in undergraduate commuters after COVID-19 pandemic.

Students celebrate April 2016 birthdays in the Collegium.

by HOPE LI  
chimes.design.b@biola.edu

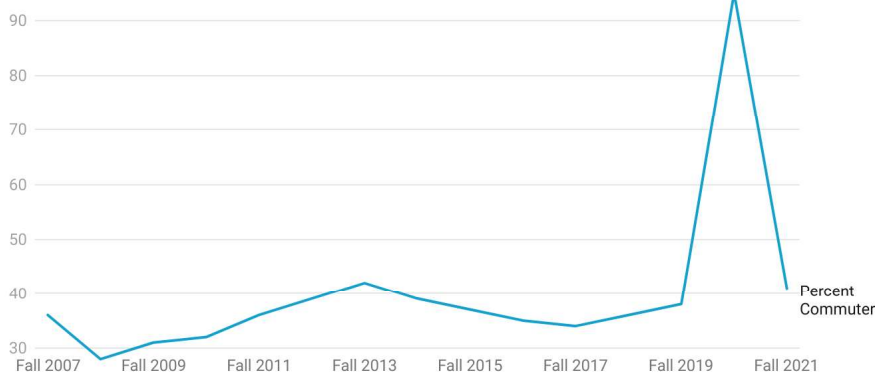
Undergraduate commuters make up 41 percent of all undergraduate students, compared to pre-pandemic numbers, at around 38 percent in 2019, according to the 2021-2022 common data set.

2013 marked the last time this population saw a three percent change, which correlated the Lot H parking structure's opening and Biola announcing construction on Blackstone Hall. Since then, the percentage of commuters changed by one to two percent increments.

Vice President of Student Development André Stephens attributed this 3 percent increase to multiple factors, including students' familial ties, especially in light of the pandemic.

"From the things I've read, especially last year, some students and families wanted to stay closer to home," Stephens said. "I imagine it's one of, among a number of factors, that students and families at least in this last year or two in the pandemic would...stay closer to home."

Biola's Undergraduate Commuter Population (percent)



Created with Datawrapper

DATA COMPILED FROM KATIE TUTTLE  
GRAPHIC BY HOPE LI

Freshman pre-nursing major Kenya Benitez had the same idea in living off-campus.

"I really liked that family bonding experience," said Benitez, who lives 30 minutes away in Anaheim. "I get to see my mom more because I'm [closer] to her."

### COUNTING THE COST

According to the 2021-2022 Housing Handbook, living in the residential halls requires a minimum \$1,843-per-semester meal plan, as of this school year, which consists of 10 meals per week without Flex dollars. Assistant Dean of Community Life Katie

Tuttle included this policy in the mix of factors influencing students to commute.

"One of my students, she only lives with one parent and a grandparent," Tuttle said. "She and her mom both lost their jobs during the pandemic, and...they were temporarily homeless. She's somebody that I imagine is not going to have the financial capability of not just paying for on campus, [but] paying for that meal plan."

### EDGING TOWARD A CLIFF

In light of higher education's demographic cliff, which pre-

dicts a 15 percent decrease in university enrollment numbers starting in 2025, Stephens mentioned cost-effective changes at Biola to address this.

“As that cliff is coming, we want to prepare for that. One way to do that is to add new programs that will pull a new pool of students that we are not enrolling, and that would help to stabilize that,” Stephens said.

Not only do these new programs like music therapy, which was added to Biola’s course catalog after 2019, expand the pool of applicants, but local high schools and community colleges bring more commuters.

This includes more transfer, Hispanic and first-generation students. Data records 60 percent of the 2021 transfer student population living off campus.

“Our closest feeder institution would be Cerritos College; that is our district community college in our area,” Tuttle said. “Last time I looked at the numbers, it was 70 percent Hispanic at Cerritos, and I think Caucasian was three percent...all of these close-by colleges, they’re very heavily Hispanic.”

As of 2021, Hispanic students make up almost 70 percent of the community college’s population, according to its website.

“They have really different questions,” said Tuttle about transfer students. “If I treat these transfer

## **“My classes and graduation have been my main priority since transferring [to Biola from Santiago Canyon College].”**

### **—senior communications studies major Lauren Sorensen**

students like they’re freshmen, not only will they feel missed, or missed, but their needs may not get met.”

Senior communications studies major Lauren Sorensen, who commutes two-and-a-half to three hours from Corona thrice a week, carries this experience with her as a transfer student from Orange County’s Santiago Canyon College.

“[I have] a very tight schedule that doesn’t leave room for a social life or any extracurricular activities, but fortunately before I transferred, I was extremely active in campus life,” Sorensen said. “My classes and graduation have been my main priority since transferring...my next priority is to utilize campus resources to update my resume and Handshake profile and meet with a career counselor to figure out my next steps from here, approaching post-grad life.”

#### **IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

Although living on-campus provides unique community-building opportunities, the Collegium offers similar connections.

“It’s a ready-made place for community,” Tuttle said.

Membership is \$75 per semester, or \$125 per year, which the staff gives back to members, according to the Collegium website.

The friendships business administration major sophomore Chanan Van De Brake made there in his 2019 freshman year prompted him to return the favor and work for the Collegium during his 2020 gap year, when events were virtual because of the pandemic, and in the fall semester this year.

“Not just [welcoming] new students, just students who didn’t have a community, helping them find one, because that’s what was done to me when I came in,” said Van De Brake about his job at the Collegium. “[I] was immediately welcomed into the commuter community, and that had a huge impact on me...[I was] like, ‘this is such an amazing gift. I want to do this for other people.’”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE COLLEGIUM  
DESIGNED BY HOPE LI