

# Berkeley News



## 1--Wheel the world: One MBA student's quest to make the outdoors accessible to all

By [Brett Israel](#), Media relations | APRIL 6, 2017



Figure 1 Photo by Pilar Elorriaga

After six hours of hiking in the rain and mud through the Patagonia, Matias Silberstein was ready to hunker down for the night. But his cousin, Berkeley MBA student Alvaro Silberstein — who was making the trek in a wheelchair — would have none of it. He insisted on pressing on.

Their team of 15 had arrived at their *refugio*, a shelter along their 30-mile journey in Torres del Pines, one of the most iconic natural places in Chile, if not the world. Everyone was wet and tired; Matias thought the terrain, difficult enough on dry footing, was too risky in the wet weather. Alvaro, riding in a custom wheelchair steered by the team, had already suffered a few falls, and was lucky to have avoided injury.

Alvaro, who organized the expedition of more than a dozen team members, has been in a wheelchair since he was 18, when a car crash left him paralyzed. Despite five more hours of trekking ahead, he would not allow the expedition to be cut short. If they stopped the hike, they would not have enough time to end their trip as planned; kayaking near a massive glacier.

“That was tough for me, both mentally and being cold and wet. It was really hard for everyone else walking in water,” Alvaro says. “But I said, ‘Let’s rest for one hour, have lunch, dry off and then continue the hike.’”

That's when the sun came out again. The group's spirits rose with the temperature. Matias muttered some choice words to the group, but had no option but to continue the hike and hope for the best.

## **A man on a mission**

That Alvaro and Matias found themselves in this remote wilderness was the result of six months of training, planning and crowdfunding. Alvaro (MBA'17) has been passionate about the outdoors since he was a child growing up in Santiago, Chile. After he lost the use of his legs and hands in a car crash with a drunk driver, he yearned for trips into the outdoors. But hiking trails and campsites are not often accessible to people with disabilities, leaving them unable to experience many of nature's greatest treasures.

To help make the outdoors more accessible, Alvaro began planning the expedition, which he called "Wheel the World." He assembled a 12-member team that included experienced mountaineers, disabilities experts, and a physical therapist who specializes in spinal cord injuries. A Chilean outdoor filmmaker and two photographers also joined to document the trip. The expedition earned sponsorship from several companies, including The North Face.

"We want to raise awareness, and increase the visibility of people with disabilities — people who are active, who have challenges and live life to the fullest," Alvaro, who graduates in May, recently told the Berkeley Haas School of Business.

The plan was to trek three iconic routes in a wheelchair at the southern tip of the Andes, in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park, known for its beautiful glaciers and lakes, sharp peaks and wildlife. The routes would include a strenuous hike to the Mirador Base de las Torres and hikes to Refugio Los Cuernos and the Grey Glacier Lake. Alvaro's crew planned to use a special wheelchair to help carry him on the trek. Horses would carry their gear and food.

If successful, Alvaro would be among the first to complete these routes in a wheelchair, and the first to reach the famous granite horns of Torres del Paine in a wheelchair.

But he didn't want to be the last. So came up with a plan. They would raise \$8,000 to purchase the special trekking wheelchair, then donate it to the park after the trip and create a guide so that others could use the chair. The 26-pound chair, made by French manufacture Joelette, is the same model some have used to reach base camp at Mt. Everest.

While planning the trip, Alvaro began training. To prepare for the excursion, he trained with the No Limits program at Berkeley, working with physical therapist and No Limits co-founder Rachel Kahn on strengthening and conditioning (See the video below for a glimpse of his training routine).

With a trek planned and a wheelchair purchased, Alvaro flew to Santiago to meet his team 10 days before their Dec. 18 launch date. By the time he was on the plane home from the trek, someone else was already trekking through Torres del Pines using the donated chair.



Photo by Pilar Elorriaga

## Into Patagonia

Most of the expedition team lives in Santiago. Once Alvaro arrived, the team spent several days practicing the teamwork needed to navigate the chair in unfamiliar terrain. Santiago's terrain is similar to the Bay Area's, with many hills suited for hiking.

"We did a lot of hikes that I couldn't do before," Alvaro says. "That was so much fun, I wanted to go almost every day to train."

Some days they hiked up to six hours on terrain steeper than they'd traverse in Patagonia.

"In Patagonia, you have weather that adds complexity, and you have to carry stuff, but the hikes themselves, the inclination, was more difficult in Santiago. That gave us a lot of confidence," Alvaro says. "We realized we can do this."

The team decided they needed to use ropes during their trek to stabilize the chair and improve safety and handling and allow up to six people to move the chair. As the expedition launch day approached, the team couldn't wait to hit the trails.

"We initially were planning to do a smaller route, but after training we all said maybe this will not be that hard and we can do the whole "W" route, which is a famous route through the park," Alvaro said.

The expedition met with fanfare in Santiago. The group did interviews with local and international media. One local news outlet would later repost pictures from every day of the expedition. Back in the Bay Area, the San Francisco Chronicle ran a story about the trek.

After days of training, the expedition set off on the W route with two local guides who would take ownership of the chair after Alvaro's trek.

Day 1 of the Wheel the World trek flew by, Alvaro says. Word had spread through the park about it, creating a festive atmosphere that night at their campsite. Many team members had only met days before, but by the end of the trip had become friends.

"The mood of the team was amazing. Everyone was taking pictures of us and asking to help when ours paths merged," Alvaro says.

Not even rain overnight and muddy morning soil could dampen their spirits as they set out on day 2 for a historic leg of the trip. Later that day, when Alvaro reached the Mirrador base of the Torres del Pines viewpoint, a feat never before accomplished by someone in a wheelchair, he was overcome with joy.

“It was really emotional when we arrived at the base,” Alvaro says. “Everyone was clapping; it was beautiful. It was something super special.”

### **The glacier**

Day 3 was hard. The final leg of the trip included 11 hours of hiking across 15 miles. The day started with six hours of hiking in the rain and snow. At the midway rest stop, with five grueling hours between them and the final stop, Grey Glacier Lake, Matias began to worry that the reward was not worth the risk.

So when the rain stopped, the sun appeared and the team embarked toward the glacier, they were reenergized as the glacier came into view. The last three hours of the hike featured spectacular views of the approaching glacier.

“That was the most fun part and the best way of ending the trip,” Alvaro says. “The kayaking at the glacier was amazing, unbelievable. The weather conditions were perfect, no wind. The glacier is huge and you are alone there.”



Photo by Pilar Elorriaga

When the expedition returned, they celebrated their feat with wine. One of the tour guides told Alvaro the trek had helped him put a tragic moment behind him. (For more listen to Alvaro describe the trip below). He ended the trek with a renewed sense of purpose and committed to lead the next expedition of the people who would use the chair.

### **Paying it forward**

Alvaro and the team were convinced that others with disabilities could follow their route. They had trained their guides on how to use the chair and compiled notes on best practices, and are now working on a website to share their story.

“It’s a beautiful place and it’s great if we can help make it more accessible for other people to visit,” Alvaro says.

Alvaro's hard work had already done just that. As he was returning home, a 12-year-old boy in a wheelchair was embarking on the same trip he had just completed.

"This was most rewarding part of the trip," Alvaro says. "I was super worried about what was going to happen, but later a guide told me, 'Dude, relax, everything went perfect. They had fun, and the trek was much easier since he weighed 50 pounds less than you.'"

Soon after, a 20-year-old woman with disabilities also completed a trek in the park.

So what's next for someone who's navigated the Patagonia in a wheelchair? Now Alvaro is embarking on another bold journey. Being a business school student, he's working to turn Wheel the World into a nonprofit. He already has an expedition planned on Easter Island, where he's looking to help people with disabilities test themselves in a very different outdoor environment. The plan is to explore Easter Island and then leave behind two trekking wheelchairs and two adaptive bikes (More on this trip's [crowdfunding site](#)). As if that weren't ambitious enough, Alvaro is adding a special twist to this island adventure.

"SCUBA diving," Alvaro said.

Follow Wheel the World's expeditions on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).



Photo by Pilar Elorriaga

# Berkeley News

## 2--#BenAtBerkeley: Sights, sounds and students speaking up

By [Brett Israel](#), Media relations, and [Anne Brice](#), Berkeley News | SEPTEMBER 15, 2017

*Berkeley student checks her phone in front of the police barricade. (UC Berkeley photo by Khaled Sayed)*

As conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro's visit to Berkeley unfolded, videos and pictures flooded social media documenting the campus's unprecedented preparations to ensure free speech would take place. The hashtag #BenAtBerkeley trended on Twitter and news coverage of the event trended on Facebook as people took to social media to weigh in on Shapiro's appearance.



Berkeley News was on the scene to hear from students attending the talk as well as student protesters. Scroll down to read, see and hear what people were saying about the event on and off campus and [click here to read our related coverage of the event](#), which moved forward without disruption.

A screenshot of a SoundCloud audio player. On the left is a small video thumbnail showing two young women. The main area features a play button icon, the text 'Flat Vox' and 'Students &amp; alumni reflect on free sp...', and a 'Share' button. Below this is a waveform representing the audio. The SoundCloud logo is in the top right corner, and a 'Cookie policy' link is in the bottom left corner. A timestamp '4:22' is visible at the end of the waveform.

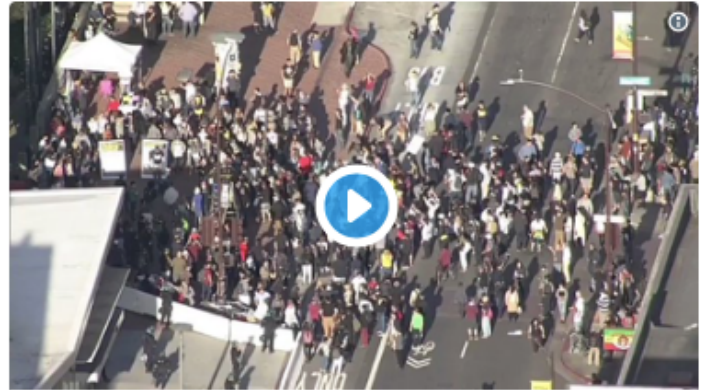


Malachi Jackson (UC Berkeley photo by Anne Brice)

“

I think there are a lot of outside elements influencing folks' perception of the campus, and making it seem like this really hostile place where you can't be conservative, and that's just not true. — Malachi Jackson, Berkeley student

About an hour before the event, peaceful protests began at Telegraph Avenue and Bancroft Way.



NBC Bay Area @nbcbayarea



LIVE VIDEO: Crowds and demonstrators gather at UC Berkeley for @BenShapiro event. [nbcbay.com/4NnX049](http://nbcbay.com/4NnX049) #ShapiroatCal

5:01 PM - Sep 14, 2017

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Kicked out of Sproul Plaza, UC Berkeley students say they're taking advantage of shut-down blocks and studying in the road



4:36 PM - 14 Sep 2017

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1 9 17



Simran (left) and Jagdeep (UC Berkeley photo by Anne Brice)

“

It's Berkeley. Everyone has the right to say and support what they believe in. I think people have the right to have the beliefs that they do, and until they are being aggressive about imposing them on other people, it's free speech. — Simran (left), Berkeley student, political science major

# Berkeley News

## 3--New CalFresh 'super clinics' to help hungry students

By [Gretchen Kell](#), Media relations | SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

A major push will start in October at UC Berkeley to begin helping an estimated 10,000 students apply to [CalFresh](#), a federally funded nutrition program that issues a free debit card for groceries to those who qualify. According to the [Alameda County Community Food Bank](#), which runs the program on campus, most individual college students who are eligible can receive up to \$193 in benefits a month.

A CalFresh "super clinic" will be held one Friday a month to introduce approximately 50 students at a time to the program. Currently, about 25 students attend [CalFresh clinics](#) on Fridays in Stiles Hall, on the lower level of the ASUC Student Union's Martin Luther King Jr. Building, for one-on-one help with their applications. [Pre-registration](#) is required for all clinics. Logistics for the super clinics will be available [here](#) soon.

"We're projecting to drastically increase the amount of our students on CalFresh, with the goal this school year of enrolling 200 a month – that's compared to 200 students, total, last year," says Ruben Canedo, chair of the UC Berkeley Basic Needs Committee.



*Stiles Hall, on the lower level of the MLK Jr. Building, is CalFresh headquarters. The UC Berkeley Student Food Pantry is next door. (UC Berkeley photo by Kirpa Singh)*

"We started with one clinic a month at UC Berkeley in May 2015 and would see four to five students, but now we're here every Friday," says Patricia Figueroa, outreach coordinator for the Alameda County Community Food Bank. She and a colleague from the organization's 13-member, multilingual [CalFresh Outreach Program](#) facilitate the Berkeley clinics. "I'm super excited," she adds. "This effort's come a long way."

Across the UC system, 48 percent of undergraduates and 25 percent of graduate students reported in a [2015 Nutrition Policy Institute survey](#) that they are food insecure, meaning they can't access adequate food due to a lack of money and other resources. Canedo says the study remains the largest one by sample size — 8,900 students — among the nation's four-year and graduate schools.

College students' eligibility for CalFresh is based upon factors including whether they are Cal Grant A or B recipients, Pell Grant recipients, eligible for federal work-study jobs or are in campus programs that support students from populations that historically experience basic needs insecurity, including former foster youth, student-veterans and first-generation college-goers.





Canedo says that at Berkeley, at least 9,000 undergraduates and 1,000 graduate students meet the criteria for CalFresh, and that “10,000 is a conservative figure.”

“There is a student need,” adds undergraduate Hong Heng, the campus coordinator for CalFresh, a program she also uses, “and one of the reasons I got involved is because students who are starving can’t succeed academically. With CalFresh, hopefully ‘When’s my next meal?’ won’t be a question.”

Contrary to what many college CalFresh applicants believe, “it’s absolutely true that being awarded CalFresh benefits has *no* impact on their financial aid,” says Cruz Grimaldo, director of the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office. “Those kinds of benefits are excluded in the calculation of a students’ financial capacity and are not considered a resource.”

*One-on-one CalFresh clinics are held on Fridays in Stiles Hall; super clinics will start in October. (UC Berkeley photo by Kirpa Singh)*

Next month, says Canedo, a message targeting Cal Grant recipients will be issued by the financial aid office through CalCentral, inviting those students to sign up for a CalFresh super clinic.

### **Pantry experiencing ‘highest usage’ yet**

On a recent Friday, volunteers at the popular [UC Berkeley Food Pantry](#) were restocking shelves for the second time that week. The pantry is a source of healthy food for more than 2,500 Berkeley students, but “it really should be called an emergency food pantry, since it’s just that – an emergency relief food supply for supplemental nutrition,” says Canedo.

In the first week of school alone, the pantry – next door to Stiles Hall in the MLK Jr. Building and part of a toolkit of [campus food security resources](#) – ran out of food twice. The pantry has been visited about 1,820 times since school started; during each of those four weeks, 455 students dropped by to pick up the five non-perishable items they’re allowed twice a month.



*Ruben Canedo, chair of the UC Berkeley Basic Needs Committee, says the campus food pantry is busier than ever. (UC Berkeley photo by Hulda Nelson)*

“At this moment, we have the highest usage of the pantry since it opened in spring 2014,” adds Canedo. “We’ve had to double-stock the pantry back-to-back for weeks.” The food items – some donated, others purchased at low cost – come from multiple sources, including United Natural Foods Inc., the Alameda County Community Food Bank, the Berkeley Student Food Collective, Clif Bar, Acme Bread Company and student gardens. But the pantry, with its very limited square footage, isn’t set up for the foot traffic it’s experiencing. “We’ve outgrown this space, and space is very limited on campus, so we have to make the most of what we have,” explains Canedo. “We also can’t order too much food because it doesn’t all fit, and we also lack funds for a few more freezer display cases, to store frozen foods.”

“Our ultimate goal,” he adds, “is to establish a center where all our basic needs programs can take place. UC Irvine is opening one in October that will be a fully integrated facility with a food pantry, a cooking space, a teaching space, offices and a multipurpose space. This should be a vision and a goal for every campus.”

Canedo recently launched the campus’s new comprehensive [Basic Needs Security website](#), a model repository of resources for students in need. He also is food/basic needs co-chair of UC President Janet Napolitano’s Global Food Initiative and is co-producing a report on the basic needs of UC students system-wide.

The uptick in students visiting the campus food pantry and enrolling in CalFresh can, in large part, be explained by the high cost of housing in the Bay Area, says graduate student Allen Ratliff, a Graduate Assembly delegate and chair of the Graduate Assembly’s Basic Needs Security Workgroup.

“Graduate students are spending substantial percentages of their income on rent, which means they have less to spend on food,” explains Ratliff. “The critical housing shortage and cost of housing affects the ability of graduate and undergraduate students to pay for healthy food. No student should need to receive CalFresh in order to have enough to eat; they should be funded well enough to eat. That said, many students need the support of CalFresh, and it is vital to expand access to CalFresh and the food pantry.”

## No more food stamps

CalFresh is a federally mandated, state-supervised and county-operated assistance program known outside of California as the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP). SNAP provides federally funded food benefits to low-income Californians, and in 2014, it began reducing barriers for college students to apply.

But many students are unaware of the CalFresh program, feel they may not qualify or don't know how to apply. "There's a lot of misinformation about it," says Figueroa. "Many people think, 'Food stamps? I don't want anything to do with that.' But all you have to do is carry what looks like a debit card, a card anyone would carry, and it gets replenished on a monthly basis."

"This generation will have no knowledge of food stamps – we don't use that language," she adds, "and food stamps don't exist."

What began as a grocery program now allows CalFresh enrollees to purchase food not only at supermarkets, but also at select farmer's markets and a few restaurants, says Heng, adding that "many of these options are within walking distance of campus." On Dec. 1, the campus's [Bear Market](#) at 2400 Durant Avenue also will accept the CalFresh card.

After applying, students wait about a month to hear if their applications have been accepted. The current approval rate for Berkeley students' CalFresh applications is 80 percent, says Canedo, adding that having county food bank employees help students apply is key. "That's why we bring them onto campus," he adds.



*About 400 students came to the food pantry during the first week of classes this fall. (UC Berkeley photo by Kirpa Singh)*



*Figueroa visits Berkeley each week to help students sign up for CalFresh. (UC Berkeley photo by Kirpa Singh)*



*The campus pantry allows students to choose five items per visit, but it also offers extras, like bread and fresh produce, that don't count toward the limit. Those items can disappear quickly. (UC Berkeley photo by Kirpa Singh)*

“We’re hoping to have upward of a 90 percent acceptance rate,” says Canedo. “We’ll be able to learn who was denied and why at mid-semester and then can appeal, since all students have been pre-screened in our CalFresh clinics.”

Berkeley also has partnered with the nonprofit [Code for America](#), which has created [GetCalFresh](#), a mobile-friendly site to help students find out if they’re eligible for CalFresh in about 10 minutes. Figueroa and her staffers use GetCalFresh to submit students’ applications, and to track and connect more easily with applicants. If students can’t attend a clinic, says Canedo, they’re welcome to apply on their own.

The CalFresh Outreach Program also will be available to conduct special CalFresh super clinics on campus Monday through Thursday for up to 80 students at a time who might be more comfortable attending with peers they relate to best.

For example, says Ratliff, graduate students “have described fears of encountering the undergraduate students they teach in the food pantry and at CalFresh clinics, and that’s a barrier to accessing those resources. The food pantry has hours specifically for graduate students, to alleviate this concern, and there need to be CalFresh clinics provided exclusively for graduate students, too.”

Figueroa says she isn’t worried about a steep rise in the number of students that will likely apply for CalFresh in the coming months, as she has more team members to deploy – all of them dedicated to helping hungry students enroll in the program.

Canedo agrees, adding, “That’s a good problem to have.”

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<http://news.berkeley.edu/2017/09/22/new-cal-fresh-super-clinics-to-help-hungry-students/>

# Berkeley News

## 4--Feeling bad about feeling bad can make you feel worse

By [Yasmin Anwar](#), Media Relations | AUGUST 10, 2017

Pressure to feel upbeat can make you feel downbeat, while embracing your darker moods can actually make you feel better in the long run, according to new UC Berkeley research.

“We found that people who habitually accept their negative emotions experience fewer negative emotions, which adds up to better psychological health,” said study senior author Iris Mauss, an associate professor of psychology at UC Berkeley.

At this point, researchers can only speculate on why accepting your joyless emotions can defuse them, like dark clouds passing swiftly in front of the sun and out of sight.

“Maybe if you have an accepting attitude toward negative emotions, you’re not giving them as much attention,” Mauss said. “And perhaps, if you’re constantly judging your emotions, the negativity can pile up.”

The study, conducted at UC Berkeley and published in the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#), tested the link between emotional acceptance and psychological health in more than 1,300 adults in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Denver, Co., metropolitan area.

The results suggest that people who commonly resist acknowledging their darkest emotions, or judge them harshly, can end up feeling more psychologically stressed.

By contrast, those who generally allow such bleak feelings as sadness, disappointment and resentment to run their course reported fewer mood disorder symptoms than those who critique them or push them away, even after six months.

“It turns out that how we approach our own negative emotional reactions is really important for our overall well-being,” said study lead author Brett Ford, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Toronto. “People who accept these emotions without judging or trying to change them are able to cope with their stress more successfully.”

Three separate studies were conducted on various groups both in the lab and online, and factored in age, gender, socio-economic status and other demographic variables.

“It’s easier to have an accepting attitude if you lead a pampered life, which is why we ruled out socio-economic status and major life stressors that could bias the results,” Mauss said.

In the first study, more than 1,000 participants filled out surveys rating how strongly they agreed with such statements as “I tell myself I shouldn’t be feeling the way that I’m feeling.” Those who, as a rule, did not feel bad about feeling bad showed higher levels of well-being than their less accepting peers.



*Putting on a happy face can take a psychological toll. (UC Berkeley photo by Yasmin Anwar and Melani King)*

Then, in a laboratory setting, more than 150 participants were tasked with delivering a three-minute videotaped speech to a panel of judges as part of a mock job application, touting their communication skills and other relevant qualifications. They were given two minutes to prepare.

After completing the task, participants rated their emotions about the ordeal. As expected, the group that typically avoids negative feelings reported more distress than their more accepting peers.

In the final study, more than 200 people journaled about their most taxing experiences over a two-week period. When surveyed about their psychological health six months later, the diarists who typically avoided negative emotions reported more mood disorder symptoms than their nonjudgmental peers.

Next, researchers plan to look into such factors as culture and upbringing to better understand why some people are more accepting of emotional ups and downs than others.

“By asking parents about their attitudes about their children’s emotions, we may be able to predict how their children feel about their emotions, and how that might affect their children’s mental health,” Mauss said.

In addition to Mauss and Ford, Oliver John at UC Berkeley and Phoebe Lam of Northwestern University are co-authors on the paper. The research was funded by the National Institute on Aging.

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<http://news.berkeley.edu/2017/08/10/emotionalacceptance/>

# Berkeley News

## 5--Berkeley students, alums take on 'back-breaking' work at wildfire evacuation center

By Will Kane | OCTOBER 14, 2017



*Shihong Xu, a UC Berkeley junior public health major, and Sarah Petnic, a 2017 graduate of the public health school, converse inside an evacuation center in Santa Rosa on Friday. (UC Berkeley photo by Jeremy Snowden)*

Matthew Smith spent his Friday night cleaning a toilet at an evacuation center in Santa Rosa. It was the fourth time since Monday the UC Berkeley senior stayed up all night helping the hundreds of Sonoma County residents who fled the roaring wildfires that have destroyed thousands of buildings and killed 35.

On Monday night, Smith, 33, drove to the Santa Rosa Veterans Memorial Building across from the Sonoma County Fairgrounds and started mopping floors, hauling garbage and talking with anyone who needed a sympathetic ear.

No one asked him. He just showed up. By his count he's missed his mid-term, skipped a term paper and has spent some \$750 of his own money to buy and donate flashlights and essential supplies from Target.

"I was there to do the stuff that no one else wanted to do, what needed to be done," said Smith, a Marine Corps veteran who fought in Iraq. "I know I can work, I can clean. I know about social work. I'm a Marine. I know first aid and triage. I can deal with stress."

At first it was just Smith driving to Santa Rosa each night, but by Friday he'd called in help: seven other UC Berkeley students, staffers and alumni, all with military experience or training in public health. They were just some of the UC Berkeley students who responded to the devastating fires; others have raised money on Sproul Plaza or opened their fraternity houses to evacuees.

Smith's group worked for 12 hours, 4 p.m. To 4 a.m., Friday to Saturday, cleaning, sanitizing, mopping and scrubbing the veterans building, normally empty but opened up this week as a shelter for fire evacuees.

Around them doctors, nurses and Red Cross volunteers administered medication, served meals and helped people who had lost everything start to piece together their lives.



*Jose Ramos Mora, a UC Berkeley senior studying business administration, wipes down the women's bathroom at an evacuation center in Santa Rosa on Friday. (UC Berkeley by Jeremy Snowden)*

"It is things like fires that we don't expect to be part of an infectious disease outbreak," Allie Jones, who is getting her master's in public health, said as she sanitized door knobs in a busy hallway. "With all the different tragedies that can happen, this is something I can make a small difference on."

Jay Kahn, a Kaiser respiratory therapist who had treated patients at the shelter since Tuesday evening, said having the volunteers do the basic work of keeping the area clean and organized helped him focus on patient care.

"These guys are the diesel fuel that has made this place go, and they have proved to be the backbone so we can give people the care they need," Kahn said. "What they go around and say is, 'How can we help you?' and they solve problems."

Throughout the night, the group set up an air purifier, cleaned up messes in bathrooms, wiped down every table in the dining room, sanitized dozens of cots and talked with evacuees about their courses at Berkeley, the football game against Washington State or life in the Bay Area.

"You came all the way from Berkeley to help us?" one woman said as she saw the group in blue-and-gold t-shirts. "I can't believe it. Thank you."

Jose Ramos Mora, a senior business administration major, said he didn't hesitate for a moment when Smith asked him on Facebook to come help with the unglamorous work, "you don't see on 'Scrubs.'"

"It has to get done," said Ramos Mora, who was a corporal in the Marines from 2005 to 2010. "It is just like the Marine Corps. Everybody has a job to do. As meaningless as it might seem, it is part of a bigger picture."





*The group of UC Berkeley graduates, students and staffs carry an air purifier into an evacuation center in Santa Rosa on Friday. (UC Berkeley photo by Jeremy Snowden)*

Sarah Petnic, who graduated from Berkeley in May with a master's in public health said she was eager to help and put the theory of her degree into practice. "I'm thinking about things like 'high-touch spots,'" she said as she scrubbed the backs of chairs in a dining room. "I'm trying to be systematic about it."

Petnic, Smith and others said they planned to return for another 12-hours shift Saturday night, and maybe Sunday night as well.

"I got a lot of help when I was in the Army, and so I wanted to help people, I wanted to return the favor," said Shihong Xu, a 28-year-old junior transfer studying public health. "What we did here is important for public health."

Told of the group's work, Chancellor Carol Christ said she was "deeply moved by the generosity of these students, staff and alumni. Their commitment to helping others is what makes UC Berkeley special, and is an inspiration to all of us on campus."

Smith, a social welfare major, said that spending so many hours with the evacuees had helped him think more about how the government should respond to immense natural disasters.

"We honestly need a corps of disaster-trained social workers and counselors, ready to quickly respond," he said. "We have doctors, we have firefighters, we have police officers, but we need people who can listen. So many people wanted and needed to talk. That's what they need."

Still, Smith said, a group of strangers didn't do a bad job.  
"When it all broke down, society came together," he said.