



CUREL - Division of Undergraduate Education

New Friendships & Partnerships



Congratulations to the 2025-2026 Chancellor's Research Fellows (CRFs)!

In addition to progressing in their research, CRFs also support undergraduate research by hosting workshops and mentoring students.

This newsletter will highlight some of their fall activities and provide updates on current CRFs and alumni.

Chancellor's Research Fellows 2025-2026



Janna Soliman

Senior CRF

Project:

Hyperosmotic Testing of Transgenic Corneal Epithelial Cells

- **Bioengineering**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Joshua Morgan
- **Hobbies:** Gardening and reading
- **Favorite Food:** Stuffed cabbage leaves
- **Ideal Superpower:** Mind reading
- **Email:** Jsoli076@ucr.edu



Nicole D'Souza

Senior CRF

Project:

The Effect of Mitochondria Modifying Agents on Neuronal Dysfunction Within the Cerebellum of Multiple Sclerosis Mouse Models

- **Neuroscience**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Seema Tiwari-Woodruff
- **Hobbies:** Hiking and trying new foods
- **Favorite Food:** Green Thai curry
- **Ideal Superpower:** Mind reading
- **Email:** ndso002@ucr.edu



Sreenidhi Surineni

Senior CRF

Project:

Investigating the Role of Dysregulated Splicing in Early Alzheimer's Disease

- **Neuroscience**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Sika Zheng
- **Hobbies:** Triathlons and reading
- **Favorite Food:** Pizza
- **Ideal Superpower:** Teleportation
- **Email:** ssuri011@ucr.edu



Hannah Velazquez

Project:

Tire Temperature Profile's Relation to Secondary Organic Aerosol Formation

- **Environmental Engineering**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Don Collins
- **Hobbies:** Thrifting and hiking
- **Favorite Food:** Burritos
- **Ideal Superpower:** Shapeshifting
- **Email:** hvela017@ucr.edu



Carissa Johnson

Project:

Memories Under Stress: The Impact of Adversity and Emotional Regulation Strategies on Visual Working Memory

- **Psychology**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Weiwei Zhang
- **Hobbies:** Building Legos and solving miniature puzzles
- **Favorite Food:** Quesobirria
- **Ideal Superpower:** Teleportation
- **Email:** cjohn176@ucr.edu



Atharva Nevasekar

Project:

Enhancing 5G Architecture Comprehension with Large Language Models and Multimodal Retrieval-Augmented Generation

- **Computer Science**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Zhaowei Tan
- **Hobbies:** Cooking and playing basketball
- **Favorite Food:** Tandoori chicken
- **Ideal Superpower:** Superspeed
- **Email:** aneva018@ucr.edu



Yaser Naji

Project:

Investigating Phospho-eIF4E Dynamics: Single-Molecule Analysis of Oncogenic mRNA Selectivity in Translation Initiation

- **Biochemistry**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Seán O'Leary
- **Hobbies:** Hiking and nature photography
- **Favorite Food:** Spicy Thai mint chicken stir-fry
- **Ideal Superpower:** Teleportation
- **Email:** ynaji001@ucr.edu



Mya Wilson

Project:

Franciscan Friar Toribio de Benavente Motolinia's Millenarianism in Colonial Mexico

- **Sociology & History**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Alexander Haskell
- **Hobbies:** Running & crocheting
- **Favorite Food:** Enchiladas
- **Ideal Superpower:** Teleportation
- **Email:** mwils086@ucr.edu

Chancellor's Research Fellows 2025-2026

**Sawyer Kumar****Project:**

Does Neutrality Prevent War?
Evaluating the Evidence and
Applying it to the Russo-Ukrainian War

- **Economics and Political Science/International Affairs**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Paul D'Anieri
- **Hobbies:** Long distance running and cooking
- **Favorite Food:** Dumplings
- **Ideal Superpower:** Immediate Recovery
- **Email:** skuma125@ucr.edu

**Sam Agustin****Project:**

The Role of Intersectionality on Queer Filipinas' Lived Experiences

- **Psychology**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Dr. Jack Caraves
- **Hobbies:** Going to concerts and reading
- **Favorite Food:** Sinigang (Filipino Sour Soup!)
- **Ideal Superpower:** Teleportation
- **Email:** sagus003@ucr.edu

**Grace Wang****Project:**

Harnessing the Lactone-Zwitterion Equilibrium in Rhodamines for Single-Molecule Conductance Switches

- **Chemistry**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Timothy Su
- **Hobbies:** Exercising, reading, learning new languages
- **Favorite Food:** Japanese curry
- **Ideal Superpower:** Mind Reading
- **Email:** gwang104@ucr.edu

**Eva Chen****Project:**

Asymmetric Total Synthesis of Norcrassin A

- **Chemistry**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Kevin Kou
- **Hobbies:** Reading, gaming, listening to music, and collecting trinkets
- **Favorite Food:** Green Thai curry
- **Ideal Superpower:** Information absorption
- **Email:** echen250@ucr.edu

**Keyanna-Milenia Pinzon****Project:**

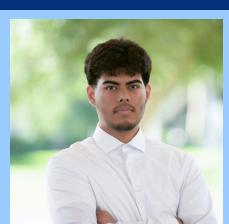
Tardigrade-Derived Proteins Protect Mitochondria from Oxidative Stress Implicated in Neurodegeneration

- **Bioengineering**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Joshua T. Morgan
- **Hobbies:** Birding, illustration, hiking, photography, and music
- **Favorite Food:** Nilaga and okkoy
- **Ideal Superpower:** Teleportation
- **Email:** kpinz002@ucr.edu

**Nayan Camalon****Project:**

Cosmic Dawn and the Decline of Ionizing Starlight in the Universe

- **Physics**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Anson D'Aloisio
- **Hobbies:** Skiing, playing the guitar, reading, and badminton
- **Favorite Food:** Rougail saucisse (Réunion Island food)
- **Ideal Superpower:** Flying
- **Email:** ncama024@ucr.edu

**Benjamin Tobar****Project:**

Mitigating Aeroelastic Oscillations and Interactions with Passive Flaps on Air and Hydrofoils

- **Material Science & Engineering**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Yuanhang Zhu
- **Hobbies:** Watching soccer, reading, and collecting new music
- **Favorite Food:** Bulgogi
- **Ideal Superpower:** Shapeshifting
- **Email:** btoba001@ucr.edu

**Mabel Tan****Project:**

Investigating the Interaction Partners of the RNA Endonuclease EndoU in a Mouse Thymocyte Cell Line

- **Biology**
- **Faculty Mentor:** Fedor Karginov
- **Hobbies:** Reading, making jewelry, gardening, cooking/baking, listening to music
- **Favorite Food:** Curry laksa
- **Ideal Superpower:** Insane luck
- **Email:** mtan066@ucr.edu

Gladis and the CRF Cohort



CRF Fall Events

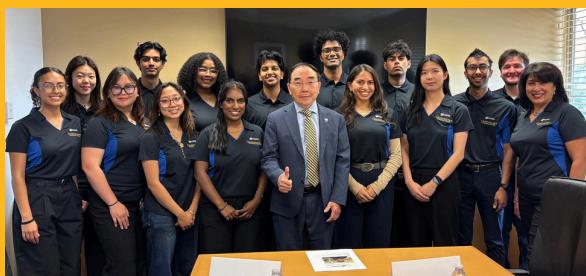
- CORO Fellowship

Callie Spaide led an informative presentation about the CORO Fellowship. She gave students insights into the fellowship's overall mission, admissions process, and its contributions to the career development of its alumni.



- Lunch with the Chancellor

The Chancellor's Research Fellows enjoyed lunch with UCR Chancellor, Dr. S. Jack Hu. Dr. Hu and the fellows discussed ideas for the university's future, student involvement in research, and Dr. Hu's path to becoming Chancellor!



- Research in Industry

Angela Ojeda and Dr. Joshua Misa joined us to share their experiences as researchers who now work in industry. They provided a glimpse into their job responsibilities, day-to-day activities, and overall career journeys.



Thank you to the Leadership Committee for their hard work and enthusiasm, which allowed us to host so many great events for the CRFs and campus community.

MENTORSHIP

CRF Fall Events

● Resume Workshop

Yaser and Sawyer shared the most effective ways that students can craft standout résumés to present their experiences to employers, professors, and scholarships.



● What Are Faculty Looking for in an Undergraduate Researcher?

Dr. Seán O'Leary and Dr. Annika C. Speer shared what faculty look for in prospective undergraduate researchers and how students can stand out when applying to join a lab.



● Research Orientation/Working with a PI

Carissa and Yaser outlined how to identify and approach potential research mentors, including reading faculty webpages, writing first-contact emails, understanding expectations and lab etiquette, navigating onboarding and safety/RCR basics, and using sample outreach scripts.



Thank you to the Mentorship Committee for a fantastic job hosting engaging events that help students prepare for undergraduate research opportunities.

CRF Fall Events

DISCUSSION & SOCIALS

CRF Holiday Party with delicious homemade dishes and a gift exchange game.



Dr. Speer, Associate Professor in the Dept. of Theatre, Film, and Digital Production, led a discussion to help CRFs enhance their public speaking abilities.



Senior CRFs Speak at the Board of Trustees Meeting

Janna, Nicole, and Sree spoke on the impact the CRF has had on their professional development and preparation for post-graduation opportunities. Their insights and accomplishments were a powerful testament to the program's success. They made Gladis VERY PROUD!

CRFs at the Southern California Conference for Undergraduate Research



Hannah said: "I greatly enjoyed my time at the SCCUR this year. While presenting, I got to speak with students doing similar research to mine; we shared insights about our different experiences working in a lab. It was also very fun to attend with my fellow CRFs and get to know them and their research even better."



Keyanna-Milenia shared: "Presenting my work to such a diverse audience challenged me to adapt my communication style, moving from explaining complex scientific terminology in a formal presentation to engaging in open discussion and then shifting into a more "defense-esque" conversation. Overall, attending this conference reinforced my belief that the future of research is bright."



Mabel said: "The SCCUR conference was a great opportunity for me to not only showcase my work so far but to also connect with fellow budding scientists from various institutions. I also further honed my presentation skills by talking to various people during my poster session."

2016-2017 ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT



Professor Cody Gonzalez, Ph.D.

CRF Project Title: In Situ Observation of the Electrochemical Lithiation of Polysilicon Thin Films

CRF Faculty Mentor: Dr. Sandeep Kumar, Mechanical Engineering

What was your most impactful UCR/CRF experience?

The UCR CRF experience helped me focus my goals to pursue research and my Ph.D. Since then I have earned my Ph.D. from Penn State as a result of that initial research exposure and publication in the *Undergraduate Research Journal* at UCR. I have also been awarded a fellowship with the Development Command Army Research Laboratory in Summer 2024, an Energy Faculty Fellowship with the Georgia Tech Strategic Energy Institute in Summer 2025, and a Klesse Fellowship at the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2026.



2024 Fulbright Research Award, Vietnam

2018 Fulbright ETA, Germany

How was your transition to graduate school?

I encountered a great amount of challenge moving across the country to Penn State for graduate school. However, the rigor of the CRF program helped mediate the imposter syndrome I felt at a completely new institution. The funds I had earned through the fellowship and the California Alliance for Minority Participation (CAMP) were a sign of the technical merit I was capable of.

Do you have any tips for our current CRFs?

You deserve to be a CRF; use the funds, the platform, and the technical challenges you overcome as a means of fighting imposter syndrome. You belong.



CRF Highlights

If you could share insight with someone who is just beginning this path, what would you want them to know about the impact of pursuing opportunities like this?

One piece of advice I would give to anyone beginning this path is to always apply! The fellowship I was awarded was designed primarily for graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty—and I was the youngest student accepted. You never know how the pieces will fall into place, but if you are passionate about a cause, always take the chance and submit an application!



Nicole D'Souza

Early Career Policy Scientist, Society for Neuroscience

I would like to sincerely thank my PI, Dr. Seema Tiwari-Woodruff, for being an incredible mentor who continuously challenges me to grow as both a scientist and an individual. Her guidance, trust, and high expectations have shaped the way I think, work, and approach research. I am also deeply grateful to Gladis Herrera-Berkowitz and her constant support, patience, and investment in my development.



Sreenidhi Surineni
2026 Marshall Scholar

I'd like to recognize Dr. Sika Zheng for trusting me with meaningful responsibility in the lab and pushing me to think more rigorously and independently. I'm also grateful to Gladis, Jennifer, and everyone at CUREL for their consistent guidance and for building a community that made UCR feel like home, especially through the Chancellor's Research Fellowship.

I also want to thank the professors and mentors who took time to talk with me, challenge my thinking, and open doors to new opportunities. Finally, I'm deeply thankful to my family for their sacrifices and steady encouragement throughout my time at UCR.

If you could share insight with someone who is just beginning this path, what would you want them to know about the impact of pursuing opportunities like this?

I would tell them to treat opportunities like this as a launching point, not a trophy. The biggest impact is not the line on your resume. It is the way your mindset shifts once you realize you are allowed to think bigger. You start asking questions you would have talked yourself out of before. You start building relationships with mentors and peers who raise your standards. You start seeing challenges as solvable problems instead of personal limitations.

I would also tell them to apply even if they feel “not ready.” The people who benefit most are often the ones who are still figuring things out but are willing to work hard, stay curious, and keep showing up. This path rewards initiative, honesty, and consistency far more than perfection.

Lastly, document your growth. Keep notes on what you tried, what failed, and what you learned. Over time, that record becomes evidence of your resilience, and it makes it easier to recognize how far you have come.

Listen to Gladis. She's an expert at these fellowships and awards, so if she tells you to do something, do it.

Winter Events



CRF Application Workshops

All of the Fellows will participate in guiding interested undergraduates through the application process, shepherding in the Fellowship's next cohort!

Visit the CRF Webpage for details.

- 1/15
- 1/27
- 2/09
- 2/24
- 1/20
- 2/05
- 2/19
- 2/25

13
JAN

CRF Panel for Application Season

Get advice and tips from CRFs on applying for the fellowship.

20
JAN

Veterans Advocacy Workshop

Learn about the challenges faced by student veterans and how to effectively advocate for change.

29
JAN

How to Give a Elevator Pitch

Learn how to prepare your CRF elevator pitch for the 26/27 application. This session will allow you to practice and get feedback on your 1-2 minute research pitch.

04
FEB

CHASS Faculty Mixer

Come meet CHASS faculty and learn about how to get involved in the exciting research that occurs across all departments in the college.

12
FEB

Proposal/Abstract Writing Workshop

Get advice from the Chancellor's Research Fellows on writing your abstract and proposal. This is a hands-on session, so bring your drafts to get feedback.

25
FEB

CRF Application Review Session

Bring your draft CRF application drafts for review and feedback.

engage.ucr.edu/research/chancellor_fellowship

Connect with the CRFs



New LinkedIn Page:

UCR Chancellor's Research Fellowship



Connect with the current cohort, CRF alumni, and faculty!

Instagram:



@ucr.crf



Stay updated on Fellowship projects and events!