

Graduate Studies Newsletter

Fall 2024



California State
University,
San Bernardino



Graduate
Studies

Message from the Dean

As fall semester comes to a close, it's time to reflect on all you've accomplished. Whether you embarked on your advanced degree program this fall or found yourself deep in your studies and wrapping up your research, I hope you are proud of the progress you've made toward your professional and personal goals. According to the Census Bureau, only 13% of U.S. adults hold an advanced degree, making your achievements all the more remarkable. Please know that wherever you are on your graduate education journey, you should be proud of how far you've come!

In celebration of our remarkable graduate students, we kicked off the fall semester with Graduate Student Recognition Week. From September 16th – 20th, we offered opportunities to hear from some of our outstanding students and learn from their experiences and achievements. Our office has also been busy connecting students to a number of unique funding opportunities, namely, the Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program, the California Pre-Doctoral Program, and the Graduate Equity Scholarships. And we continued to offer our Writing Accountability Groups, one-on-one thesis formatting support, and graduate application workshops and assistance throughout the semester. You can read about many of these events in our fall newsletter.

Looking ahead to spring 2025, we're getting ready for the annual Grad Slam: Three-Minute Thesis competition. Grad Slam is a communication competition that showcases the outstanding research of CSUSB graduate students while challenging them to explain their research in three minutes or less! Our campus competition will be held on April 9th, and this academic year, we have the honor of hosting the Cal State University system-wide competition, scheduled for May 9th. Please see page 3 of this newsletter for details and upcoming information sessions where you can learn more about how to get involved.

I hope you have a restful and rejuvenating winter break as you pause your studies and enjoy time with friends and family. We look forward to seeing you back on course toward your graduate degree in spring 2025!

Happy Holidays



Caroline Vickers
Dean of Graduate Studies

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Ask April!

Hi everyone! In my role as Graduate Student Resource Specialist, I receive many questions from prospective and current students that I'm happy to answer. While we do our best to provide helpful information on our website, it may be a bit overwhelming to find it when you need it quickly. So, to hopefully reduce some of the information overload that we probably all feel to some extent, I've created a new column called "Ask April." I hope you will find it helpful!

In this first segment of "Ask April" I'd like to share with you information about the Coyote Graduate [Student Guidebook](#). Developed by the Office of Graduate Studies, The Coyote Graduate Student Guidebook is a collection of campus resources and university policies pertaining to graduate students.

The guidebook is a yearly publication and is available on our website (csusb.edu/graduate-studies), in the graduate student canvas course, and is also included in our Graduate Studies Weekly Roundup email. It's a great reference if you are wondering about campus resources, student resources and support, campus life, or have questions about funding your education, graduate studies policies, steps toward completing your degree, your culminating experience, and much more!

We recommend that you either download a copy for easy reference or save the link to our website because we do make periodic updates to the guidebook as policies, procedures, or information changes.

We hope you will take the time to read through the guidebook and feel free to contact the Office of Graduate Studies with any questions you may have. Happy reading!

Wishing you wellness,
April Lane

P.S.

Do you have a question about graduate student resources or policies? Feel Free to reach out to me at alane@csusb.edu



By April Lane,
MPH, CHES

Graduate Student Recognition Week

Our inaugural Graduate Student Recognition Week gave our graduate students their time to shine! The weeklong event, which ran from September 16th – 20th, gave graduate students and alumni opportunities to build connections while showcasing their incredible achievements to the campus community.

During the week we heard from some of our outstanding graduate students during the Graduate Student Leadership Panel, caught up with alumni at the Graduate Student Alumni Mixer, and took time to recognize some of our awardees and dedicated faculty at both an awards luncheon and an online recognition ceremony. Here's a quick rundown of the week's events:

Graduate Student Society Meeting – The Graduate Student Society shared their plans for the fall semester. They serve as the voice of graduate students at CSUSB. If you're not yet a member, don't worry, there's still time to join! Catch up with the group on Coyote Connection.

Graduate Student Alumni Mixer – Current students and alumni enjoyed an evening of engaging conversation and light refreshments at the Graduate Student Success Center. Stay tuned for our next mixer!

Graduate Student Leadership Panel – Some of our most engaged and successful graduate students shared their experiences on topics such as funding opportunities, student government, and research competitions. The recording is available online on the [Graduate Studies Events](#) page.

Fall Writing Accountability Group Kick-off
The first meeting of the fall semester Writing Accountability Group (WAGS) was held at the Graduate Student Writing Center on September 18th. Writing tutors were on hand to offer feedback and encouragement during the hour of dedicated writing time. WAGS meets regularly throughout each semester. Contact Graduate Studies for more information.

Recognition Ceremony – This annual online event celebrated the two outstanding thesis awardees and the many faculty who dedicate long hours to reading and advising students on their theses and projects. In case you missed it, the recording is available online on our Events page. Our graduate student Coyotes are the pride of the pack. Keep an eye out for our spring events where we'll celebrate more outstanding achievements!



Michelle Hernandez (right) with her parents and Dean Vickers (center) at the Recognition Luncheon.

Get Ready for Grad Slam 2025!

Imagine synthesizing months (or years) of your painstaking research or creative project into an entertaining three-minute elevator speech, with only one slide to illustrate your points! Yet that's the goal of Grad Slam: Three-Minute Thesis, a lively research competition held at Cal State University campuses throughout California. In this popular event, graduate students give their presentations before a panel of judges and an audience of their peers; the top competitors are awarded cash prizes and go on to represent their respective campuses at the Cal State University system-wide competition.

Our CSUSB campus competition is scheduled for April 9th, 5:00 pm, in the SMSU South Theater. The CSU system-wide competition will be held on May 9th ; this year's competition is hosted by CSUSB! Our participants will receive coaching and public speaking tips, making this a fantastic professional development opportunity. Register online for an information session or visit our website. [CSUSB Grad Slam](#)

Information Sessions

Tuesday, January 21, 2025 - 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, January 22, 2025 - 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Monday, January 27, 2025 - 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.



Awards and Accolades

CSUSB Ranks No. 3 for Social Mobility in Best Colleges 2025 List

CSUSB has been recognized as one of the top universities in the nation – at No. 3 – when it comes to enhancing the social mobility of its students, according to the America's Best Colleges ranking by The Wall Street Journal, College Pulse and Statista.

CSUSB Alumnus Awarded Prestigious Change Agent Award

Patrick Marshall, MBA alumnus, received the prestigious Equity and Social Justice: Change Agent Award at the 2024 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education, congratulations, Patrick!

CSUSB Alumni Cherina Betters Named 2024 Exemplary Woman in Education

Dr. Betters, who serves as the Chief of Equity and Access for the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, has dedicated over 20 years to the field of K-12 education. She was awarded the 2024 Exemplary Woman in Education Award for her commitment to addressing educational inequities.

CSUSB Professor Awarded for Activism and Social Justice

Ahlam Muhtaseb, Professor of Media Studies, is the recipient of the Scholarly Influence Award for her work in social justice. This prestigious award is bestowed by the National Communication Association.

2024-25 Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program Fellows

The Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program (CDIP) prepares promising doctoral candidates to teach the diverse students of the Cal State University campuses. The highly competitive program offers mentorship and guidance by CSU faculty, as well as financial support, professional development opportunities, and grant resources. This academic year, one CSUSB alum and one CSUSB faculty member will participate in this unique program.

Graduate Studies would like to congratulate 2024-25 CDIP Fellows Megin Ghaffari, an alumna of CSUSB, and Akunna Uka, a University of California Los Angeles graduate who will be mentored by CSUSB professor Jordan Fullam.

Negin Ghaffari graduated from CSUSB with an M.A. in Psychological Sciences. She is passionate about investigating the relationship between early life stressors and health outcomes, particularly within Middle Eastern populations. Her journey in psychology is deeply personal; growing up in Iran, she faced religious discrimination that limited her educational opportunities.

During her academic career in the U.S., Ghaffari engaged in significant research projects, including her thesis on adverse childhood experiences and food addiction, which earned her the Student Success Initiative grant. As a Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Scholar, Ghaffari participated in a summer research experience at Yale University, investigating the relationship between childhood maltreatment and psychosis. She has also gained valuable experience as a writing tutor, Graduate Teaching Associate, and Coyote Research Ambassador.

Ghaffari is pursuing her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Mississippi, with plans to continue her research on early life stress and its impact on mental and physical health. Her goal is to become a faculty member within the CSU system, where she hopes to uplift diverse students and make research more accessible to underserved communities.

"As someone who did not have the opportunity for higher education in my own country," Ghaffari states, "it is a personal passion of mine to spread the opportunity for underserved communities for research and higher education."



Negin Ghaffari

Akunna Uka was a secondary school teacher and administrator for almost a decade before pursuing a PhD. Her work in the community aims to make education an emancipatory experience, with a focus on Black students and those from the working class. Uka holds an M.Ed. in Education Leadership from UCLA and has just completed her first year in the Ph.D. in Education program at the University of Southern California.

Uka is interested in the influence of community members in education governance, particularly Black community members in K-12 education policy implementation. For her dissertation research, Uka plans to study how community organizers on the Black Student Achievement Plan (BSAP) Steering Committee exert influence on the Los Angeles Unified School District. Uka is a community engaged scholar and is committed to critical qualitative methodological approaches in order to elevate the voices of community members through relevant and impactful research.

“I am so excited to have the support of CDIP to help facilitate my goal of ensuring quality education for every student,” Uka said. “Quality education not only provides students with knowledge and job skills. It also allows each person to develop their full potential with respect and understanding of cultures and communities. I look forward to working with my mentor Dr. Jordan Fullam, who is a servant-leader on his campus and has committed his career to teaching educators.”



From left: Dr. Jordan Fullam, Dean Caroline Vickers, and CDIP recipient Akunna Uka.

Four CSUSB Students Named Sally Casanova Scholars

Four CSUSB students – Benjamin Roath, Evy Zermeno, Gary Williams and Erick Herrera – were selected as California State University’s 2024-25 Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Scholars. The awardees will receive assistance preparing for a doctoral program, including one-on-one guidance from a CSU faculty member, financial support, and the opportunity to work with faculty from doctoral-granting institutions.

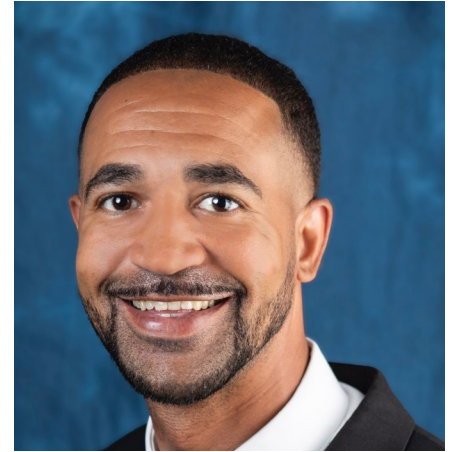
2024-25 Scholars

Benjamin Roath is pursuing a Master of Arts in English and Writing Studies with dual concentrations in applied linguistics and composition and rhetoric. His mentor is Dr. Caroline Vickers, Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of English. Roath’s academic interests include the intersection of multilingualism, sociolinguistics, and language pedagogy. He is currently involved in a research project that examines English learners’ access to university education, retention and degree attainment in STEM fields: The project garnered funding from the National Science Foundation. Roath intends to pursue doctoral studies in linguistics and explore how language is influenced by and interacts with social, cultural, and political factors.



Evy Mylene Zermeno is a graduate student in the history program; her mentor is Dr. Thomas Long, Professor of History. Zermeno’s academic interests include settler colonialism, California Indigenous history, public history, and museum studies. She is particularly interested in the history of marginalized communities within California and the lack of knowledge, representation, and narratives of these communities. Her recent research into Afro-Mexicans and Afro-descendants in California came to fruition when she co-curated the Afróntalo exhibition for the CSUSB Anthropology Museum. She is planning to pursue a doctoral degree in public history or ethnic studies, which would allow her to further incorporate decolonial perspectives in her curatorial and academic work.

Gary Williams is a student in the Master of Public Administration: Leadership program. Under the guidance of his faculty mentor, Dr. King-To Yeung (Associate Professor of Sociology), Williams is dedicated to exploring how systemic inequalities affect mental health and how leadership within public administration can address these disparities. While in his master's program, he plans to engage in comprehensive research that combines theoretical frameworks with practical applications to advocate for policies that promote mental well-being and social justice. Williams aims to contribute to more equitable and effective public health strategies.



Erick Herrera is an undergraduate student double majoring in sociology and ethnic studies with a minor in gender and sexuality studies. Mentored by sociology professor Dr. Megan Carroll, Herrera's academic interests include queer and transgender perspectives in mainstream media with an emphasis on how queer and transgender characters are framed through heteronormative contextualization and heterosexist conceptualization. Through the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, they are carrying out a two-year research project that focuses on how the portrayal of gay men in BL (Boys' Love) media is not often written by queer or trans people. Herrera plans to pursue a rhetoric doctoral degree, incorporating decolonial perspectives into their research, and addressing the production of reductive media portrayals of LGBT people.



Become a Sally Casanova Scholar!

The California Pre-Doctoral Program provides financial assistance for students exploring and preparing for a doctoral program. These funds enable current CSU students to explore and prepare to succeed in doctoral programs in their chosen field of study. Awards are based on competitive review of student applications and given to current upper-division or graduate students who demonstrate academic excellence while experiencing economic or educational disadvantage.

The funds may be used for students to visit U.S. doctoral-granting institutions, obtain membership in professional organizations, subscribe to academic journals, GRE preparation, and graduate school application and test fees, [Learn More Here](#).

2023-2024 Outstanding Thesis Award

At the end of each academic year, the Office of Graduate Studies recognizes two students for the exceptional quality of their graduate thesis or project. This year's winners were notable for their painstaking research and their potential applications in the field of medicine.

Cassandra Cavazos, M.A. in Psychological Science

Cassandra Cavazos won the Humanities, Education, Business, and Social Sciences category for her graduate thesis, *Serotonin 1A Receptor Modulation on Behavioral Flexibility in BTBR and C57BL/6J Mice*, written for her Master of Arts in Psychological Science. Her work shows that activating specific serotonin receptors may help alleviate some symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Her work targeted higher order restrictive repetitive behaviors in ASD such as insisting on sameness, or inflexibility. Working with mice bred to exhibit ASD, Cavazos found that activating the Serotonin 1A receptor significantly improved behavioral flexibility when solving the T maze. Currently, there are no FDA approved drugs specifically aimed at reducing restricted repetitive behaviors available for ASD, so breakthroughs in this area may well lead to life-changing therapies.

Cavazos is an active participant in the world of academia. While pursuing her undergraduate and graduate degrees at CSUSB, she held research positions at the Behavioral Neuroscience Lab at UCLA and CSUSB, presented at six conferences, and has three peer-reviewed publications under her belt. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Psychology at Rutgers University and was awarded the Deans Fellowship and Presidential Fellowship. She says a big part of what drives her to succeed is the support she receives from friends and faculty at CSUSB.

"I still talk to people that have graduated in behavioral neuroscience and we are all amazed at the support we got from the faculty, like Cynthia Crawford, Leslie Amadeo, and Dennis Amadeo," she said. "That led me to a lot of opportunities to get those fellowships and things of that sort. I have a very supportive mentor at Rutgers as well."

Cavazos will receive her doctorate in 2028. She plans to return to Cal State as a faculty member and inspire a new generation of researchers. "I don't think it's possible to succeed without the support of people who have been through it," she said.



Michelle Hernandez, M.S. in Biology

The winner of the Mathematics, Computer Science, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Life Sciences category is Michelle Hernandez, for her biology thesis, *Qualitative Assessment of Human Embryonic- And Induced Pluripotent Stem Cell Derived Neural Stem Cells Under CGMP Methods*. Her research applies Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP) to various stem cell production methods to identify the processes that best meet quality and safety standards for use in therapeutic products. Hernandez and other researchers hope that incorporating cGMP into stem cell research early will help accelerate FDA approval for related therapies, getting effective treatments into the hands of those who need them.

Hernandez compared neural stem cells derived from two different cell lines, human embryonic stem cells and induced pluripotent stem cells. Quality controls focused on safety, stability, purity, and the cells' ability to differentiate into various neural cell types. As researchers learn more about the differences in specific strains of stem cells, they can identify best uses for regenerative treatments, paving the way for more reliable and effective treatments for patients with neurological conditions.

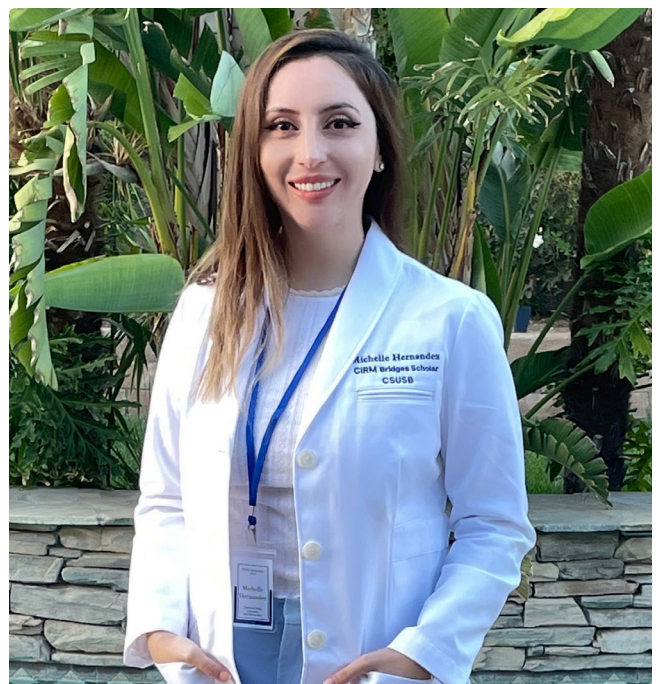
Hernandez was a California Institute of Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) scholar, which allowed her to perform her research at the Stem Cell Research Center at U.C. Irvine under the guidance of Dr. Brian Cummings.

"I had to relocate to Irvine and was working seven days a week in the lab, often from 8:00 am – 8:00 pm. It's literally a 24/7 research lab. But I really enjoyed it. I was exposed to different people's fields and how they're contributing to science, which is really awesome."

With her master's degree in hand, Hernandez is looking forward to putting her knowledge into practice. She says that while she enjoys academia, her goal is to work in the field of manufacturing cell and gene therapies. "In industry I essentially would be contributing to societal work. I want to be the one who helps get those therapies to production."

Hernandez would like to acknowledge the financial support and training she received through CIRM, as well as the individuals who helped her during her academic journey.

"I want to acknowledge Dr. Bournias-Vardiabasis for really encouraging me to go forward with my research and enter the CIRM program, and I want to give a shoutout to my whole thesis committee for their support. I also want to thank my parents. They never stressed me out about anything. Instead, they were always there to listen."



Michelle Hernandez

Calendar

December

- 9-13 Final Exams
- 13&14 Fall Commencement
- 17 CDIP Information Session
- 24-31 Winter Break

January

- 01 New Year's Day: Campus Closed
- 02 Cal State Apply Session
- 13 CSUSB Student Research Competition Deadline
- 17 Pre-Doc Application Due to Graduate Studies
- 20 Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
- 21 Grad Slam Information Session
- 22 Grad Slam Information Session
- 27 Grad Slam Information Session

February

- 04 Cal State Apply Session
- 12 Writing Accountability Groups
- 14 CSUSB Student Research Competition
- 14 Pre-Doc Application Deadline
- 17 President's Day

March

- 03 Deadline to Apply for Meeting of the Minds
- 13 Cal State Apply Session
- 31 Cesar Chavez Day (Campus Closed)

April

- 08 Cal State Apply Session
- 09 Grad Slam Competition
- 10 Meeting of the Minds Student Research Symposium
- 11 Thesis Consultation Deadline
- 14 Thesis Submission Deadline



Save the Date! Spring Semester Writing Support

Goal Setting and Time Management for Writers: Thursday, Jan 30 at noon

Writing Accountability Groups (WAGS)

WAGS Information Session: Monday, Feb. 3 at noon
WAGS Information Session: Thursday, Feb. 6 at 6:00 pm
WAGS Start Date: Wednesday, Feb. 12 at 5:30 pm

Watch for updates from the Office of Graduate Studies!

Considering a Master's or Credential?

Ask Erma! Contact Erma Cross at
(909) 537-4395
or catch her at an upcoming event!



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See csusb.edu for the most up-to-date information.