

THE SCOOP

UCI SCHOLARSHIPS

MEET OUR SCHOLARS

Yahir Leal
&
Julia Brestyansky

CAMPUS RESOURCE

UCI
ANTrepreneur
Center

DONOR HIGHLIGHT

Huang & Gao
Scholarship



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SCHOLAR OF UC IRVINE

YAHIR LEAL



Year
Senior



Minor
Urban Studies



Major
Environmental
Science & Policy



DPF Site
Sustainability
Resource Center

Raised in Garden Grove, Yahir Leal graduated high school during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when he struggled to find assistance with college applications due to limited interactions with his counselors. He stated that his early days at UC Irvine were challenging, particularly as he navigated the transition into university life. As a first-generation college student, Yahir encountered hurdles such as constructing his class schedule, choosing between majors, and adapting to the 10-week quarter system. However, by his junior year, Yahir experienced a pivotal shift in his collegiate journey. Initially focused solely on academics with minimal involvement in extracurricular activities, he began to seek out internships and join various clubs. This marked a significant shift in his college experience, transitioning from a purely academic focus to a more well-rounded university life.





Initially drawn to the sciences, Yahir discovered a passion for the policy aspect of Environmental Science during his undergraduate studies. This newfound interest has motivated him to pursue a master's in Urban Planning in the near future. Eventually, he set a personal goal to one day become a city planner for Garden Grove. Yahir's familiarity with Garden Grove has made him acutely aware of the city's challenges, particularly its lack of bike infrastructure and walkability, and its prevailing car-centric design. His vision encompasses a more sustainable and user-friendly urban environment that supports not just vehicles but also cyclists and pedestrians alike. With a focus on urban planning, Yahir hopes to implement innovative solutions that encourage a shift towards more sustainable modes of transportation, reflecting a broader commitment to environmental stewardship and community well-being.

Don't be shy or scared to try out different things. You'll find the group of people that make you feel comfortable to be with.

YAHIR LEAL

At the Sustainability Resource Center (SRC) at UC Irvine, Yahir Leal's involvement has substantially fostered his personal and professional development. Serving as a program assistant, Yahir has been instrumental in launching two key initiatives: The Sustainable Development Goals Leadership Certificate and the Environment at the Intersection Leadership Certificate. These programs aim to educate students on sustainability, reflecting Yahir's commitment to promoting environmental awareness. His role enabled him to enhance skills in public speaking, networking, and professional communication, further connecting him with peers and experts from institutions like UC Berkeley and UC Santa Barbara. This experience allowed Yahir to have future opportunities, such as a fellowship with a composting-focused non-profit. Yahir's journey with the SRC highlights the impactful role of the Dream Project Fellowship in shaping a student's academic and career trajectory, while expanding their network.



FUN FACT



Volunteers in Ants in Your Plants Garden (Arroyo Vista Student-Run Garden)



Yahir designed his own backyard garden with flowers and different vegetables



Recently expressed interest in martial arts like muay thai and jujitsu

SCHOLAR OF UC IRVINE

JULIA BRESTYANSKY



Year
Senior



Scholarship


Reward Opportunity
Advancing Distinguished
Students



Major
Earth System
Science


Julia Brestyansky graduated high school during the peak of the pandemic where she faced the cancellation of her graduation ceremony and an abrupt shift to online learning. Julia initially committed to San Diego State University but reconsidered due to the high costs and challenges of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Opting for a gap year, she spent nearly a year in Hungary with her family. Upon returning, Julia chose to begin her academic journey at Irvine Valley College (IVC), where she initially pursued a career as an environmental lawyer. However, after transferring to UC Irvine, she shifted her focus to Environmental Science and Policy, only to discover a lack of interest in policy studies. This led Julia to switch her major to a Bachelor of Science in Earth System Science, aligning more closely with her growing passion for environmental science.





Julia Brestyansky discovered a passion for research through hands-on experiences in labs, particularly in Patrick Rafter's Oceanography Lab. This shift led her to aim for a career in academia, possibly as a researcher or project scientist. Internships at Irvine Ranch Water District and with the California Stormwater Quality Association (CASQA) offered insights into public sector work and remote research, helping Julia refine her career aspirations. She prefers dynamic research environments over routine tasks, guiding her decision to pursue a PhD in Earth System Science.

Julia vividly recalls finding out she won the Reward Opportunity Advancing Distinguished Students Scholarship while exercising at the Anteater Recreation Center. Overwhelmed with excitement, she immediately shared the news with her father. Amidst her joy, Julia felt a deep sense of gratitude. She wondered if her writing skills or some unique aspect of her situation set her application apart. Despite not considering herself a perfect student, Julia recognized the competitive nature of these scholarships and was profoundly thankful for the recognition and financial assistance. Transferring from community college and living at home to mitigate costs, she appreciated how the scholarship alleviated some financial pressures, allowing her to devote more attention to her studies without the need to work excessively or take out student loans.



Julia is actively involved in the Sunrise Movement, an environmental activist group at the UC Irvine chapter. Her role significantly contributes to advocating for clean jobs and improved living conditions, not just for students but for the wider Orange County community. Julia's involvement extends to serving as a California Economic Resilience Fund representative, where she participates in discussions on the allocation of grants by the California Jobs First Initiative to promote economic resilience and job creation, especially targeting marginalized groups affected during the COVID era. In the realm of research, Julia's journey began in a Paleoceanography lab, analyzing sediment cores to study climate change. Her pursuit of knowledge led her to the Claudia Czimczik Lab, where she now focuses on radiocarbon analysis to further her ambitions in hydrology. Julia's blend of activism, leadership, and research at UCI highlights her commitment to both scientific exploration and societal improvement.

FUN FACT



Julia is a dancer that takes ballet classes and used to take heels classes.



Trained in piano during her childhood. Mainly plays the piano when she sings.



Recently expressed interest in karate classes.



UCI ANTrepreneur Center



Ruby Meija-Perez

Unit Business
Coordinator

As a proud UC Irvine alumna, class of 2019, her journey with the UCI ANTrepreneur Center began in her third year as an undergraduate student. Through her involvement in Sigma Eta Pi, an entrepreneurial fraternity, she was introduced to the center, which significantly transformed her career, mindset, and opportunities. Due to her involvement with the center, she has been able to participate in various accelerators and competitions with her startup, Puerta Abierta. This edtech initiative focuses on financial and mindset empowerment. She is dedicated on providing resources to help the next generation familiarize themselves and understand their finances. Recognizing the importance of financial literacy, she focuses on Gen Z, especially first-generation students. Currently, she is developing an app, aiming to be the "Duolingo for personal finance," to provide accessible and engaging financial education. As the Unit Business Coordinator, Ruby is responsible for operating and managing all behind-the-scenes activities at the center. As well, ensuring that all students are satisfied with the programming and are well-informed about the resources UCI and the ANTrepreneur community has to offer.

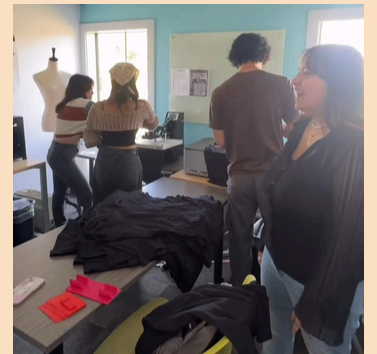
The ANTrepneur Center is a hub where UCI students can develop the skills needed to start, operate, or grow their businesses. It offers resources, events, programs, and services for those interested in innovation and entrepreneurship. Whether students are curious about entrepreneurship, have a budding idea, or have already started a company, the ANTrepneur Center provides a safe place to explore success strategies, take action towards their dreams, and join a supportive community of like-minded individuals. The center values transparency and clarity, the democratization of entrepreneurship knowledge, education, and process, as well as diversity and inclusion. In the future, the ANTrepneur Center aims to expand its influence and establish strong connections with the business community, industry experts, and alumni networks. It envisions becoming a leading entrepreneurial ecosystem that not only serves UC Irvine students but also impacts local and regional economic development.

Below are some of the services the center provides:

- **Podcast Room:** Offers a fully equipped podcast room designed for both audio and video podcasting. For entrepreneurial students to experiment with new ideas, market their products, or share their business insights. Ideal venue for launching a podcast series that could complement a startup, allowing students to reach a broader audience, attract potential investors, or gain feedback from listeners.
- **Maker Space:** This resource features all the essential tools needed to bring creations to life, including 3D printers, a heat press for t-shirt printing, and a laser cutter. These user-friendly tools and technology enable beginners and experienced makers to execute complex designs.
- **Legal Advice:** The center has a partnership with the UCI Law Startup and Small Business Clinic (SSBC). Through this collaboration, Legal Office Hours will be established at the ANTrepneur Center, offering student entrepreneurs the opportunity to walk in and receive free legal support for various matters related to starting and operating a business.



UC Irvine student using the podcast equipment to help grow his small business and engage with followers.



Students using the heat press to create custom t-shirts for their small business.



Side Hustle Challenge: Student selling earrings inspired by Taylor Swift as her small business challenge.



Side Hustle Challenge

A challenge hosted by the center where students who already have a side hustle or want to create one can showcase their products and services. The center assists them in making their first sale in a marketplace that resembles a farmers' market.



The Hub

Provides workspaces where students facilitate learning, brainstorming, and interaction with other students. At The Hub, students will find dedicated desks and collaboration tools such as electronic whiteboards, stand-up desks, and even under-desk treadmills.



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HUANG AND GAO SCHOLARSHIP

Donor Spotlight



Mingyong Huang and Emily Gao are first-generation immigrants from China who both earned education degrees from Chinese universities, but instead of becoming teachers, they pursued careers in the business world. Their desire to support undergraduate students at UC Irvine stems from their struggles, as they couldn't afford to continue their education upon moving to the United States. This experience gave them a deep appreciation for learning and a desire to help others access opportunities they missed. They have chosen to focus their scholarship on psychology and political science, fields they believe are crucial for understanding and improving society. Psychology aids in understanding human behavior and mental health, while political science is vital for grasping governance and justice. By supporting students in these disciplines, they aspire to nurture compassionate and knowledgeable leaders capable of addressing complex social issues and driving positive change. Although their foundation is still small, Mingyong and Emily hope their scholarship will make a real difference by alleviating financial burdens on students and allowing them to concentrate on their studies and personal growth. For UCI, they aim for their contribution to foster a diverse and inclusive academic community where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. They are committed to promoting a culture of giving and supporting programs that enhance student learning and community engagement. They dream of UCI becoming a top choice for Asian students studying abroad, believing that this will foster better understanding between the United States and Asian countries. They also hope to see more Asian Americans stepping into political roles and participating in civic activities, thus strengthening connections between these regions and contributing to a more inclusive and understanding society. Mingyong and Emily's journey from having very little to being able to help others has been incredibly rewarding. This sense of gratitude and the desire to give back drive their philanthropy. They hope to inspire others with similar backgrounds to support and uplift their communities, making the world a better place, one student at a time.



Scholarship Awarded for the 1st time during the 2024-2025 Academic Year



Awarded to undergraduate students majoring in Psychology of Political Sciences