Connecting with UCSD Alumni

Who are Chancellor’s Scholars?

These scholars are some of the best and the brightest students who receive admittance to UC San Diego, and they are coming in with top GPA’s and test scores.

They all have in common:
♦ Demonstrated academic excellence
♦ Leadership potential

However, these top students have had to work hard to achieve their place here, faced with difficult life challenges. Chancellor’s Scholars have one or more of the following attributes:
♦ First generation college attendee
♦ Hail from a 4th or 5th Quintile school
♦ Financial need

Thank you to the UCSD Alumni who joined us this past year. Scholars were ecstatic to hear from individuals who had once been in their shoes and are now thriving in their respective fields. The order of the photos above corresponds with the order of the names below. If the cohort year is listed, the participant was is not only a UCSD Alum, but a Chancellor’s Scholars Program Alumni!

February 1—Alumni Q&A Breakout Rooms
Chris Cheng, 2016 cohort, Software Test Engineer, Illumina
Jocelyn Ornelas, 2016 cohort, Ph.D., Mathematics, UC Merced
Jessica Cao, 2014 cohort, Business Marketing Insights, Twitter
Abdkarin Abdullahi, 2013 cohort, UCSF Medical School
Hao Yang He, 2016 cohort, Associate Designer, Blizzard Entertainment
Thy Vu, 2018 cohort, Masters, Speech-Language Pathology, University of Redlands

March 8—Alumni Q&A Panel
Trevor Irwin, 2013 cohort, Engineer of Software and Systems at Chilldyne
Pearl Chen, 2007 cohort, Product Sales & Support Specialist at Lonza
Mario Mejia, Senior Product Manager at Cox Communications
Brandon Buzbee, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor, Campaign & Global Networks
Chancellor’s Scholars Alumni Spotlight

Abdikarin Abdullahi
2013 Cohort
Currently:
MD Candidate
UC San Francisco Medical School

What have you been up to since graduating?
Since graduating from UC San Diego in 2017, I have been working towards my medical degree at UC San Francisco School of Medicine. Being a medical student during the pandemic has been a very interesting experience, and I have been thankful to have the opportunity to play a small role in our institution’s response to the pandemic. I am now taking a gap year between my third and fourth year of medical school to obtain a public health degree at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. During this year, I’ve focused on health policy research and worked in the Maryland General Assembly on important public health policies as a legislative intern in Delegate Peña-Melnyk’s office.

How has the Chancellor’s Scholars Program helped you reach your education and career goals?
The two most direct ways that the Chancellor’s Scholars Program supported my career goals was through community and mentorship. Our regular sessions on leadership development (led by Suzan and the incredible Dr. Gates at the time) allowed me to find my voice and grow into my own skin as a leader. These sessions were also collaborative learning spaces where I developed strong connections with my peers, and the Chancellor’s Scholars Association was an important aspect of that. Suzan was always open to students dropping by her office for impromptu discussions, and she was kind enough to provide me with a strong letter of recommendation for my medical school applications.

How has the Emeriti Mentor Program helped you reach your education and career goals?
Dr. Fisher has been a valuable and trusted mentor and confidante during every major step of my career. He provided instrumental advice during my time at UC San Diego and helped me explore my interest in medicine. He once again served as a trusted advisor when it came time to ultimately select which medical school I would attend, and we have stayed in semi-regular contact since then. Outside of the significant benefit to my career progress, I’ve learned a lot about how to be an effective mentor from working with Dr. Fisher.

Do you have any advice for current Chancellor’s Scholars?
Really take advantage of every aspect of the program! From your Emeriti Mentor, to Suzan’s expertise, to your Chancellor’s Scholars peers, each component of the program can have a tremendously positive impact on your personal and professional development if you are engaged and active throughout your time at UC San Diego.

Abdi at the 2017 CSP Closing Reception with Dr. Marguerite Jackson (top) and at the 2014 CSP San Diego Food Bank Volunteer Event (bottom)
Phi Beta Kappa at UC San Diego

What is Phi Beta Kappa?
Phi Beta Kappa is the most prestigious and widely recognized undergraduate honor society in the liberal arts and sciences in the United States. It was founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary and has operated continuously since then. Don't let the Greek letters in the name fool you! This is an honor society, not a social fraternity. The name ΦBK was chosen in 1776 by the founding members because they stand in Greek for the Society's motto "Love of learning is the guide (or pilot) of life."

What’s the big deal about Phi Beta Kappa?
As the oldest and most demanding undergraduate academic honor society in the United States, membership in Phi Beta Kappa is recognized worldwide. It is a sign of exceptional academic achievement in the major and across a range of other subjects. Initiates are in outstanding company. Members of Phi Beta Kappa have included many U.S. Presidents, Supreme Court justices, legislators, Nobel prize winners, and leaders in academia, business, science, and the law. Fewer than 10% of colleges and universities in the entire United States have been approved to have their own Phi Beta Kappa chapters. Once they join, new members can connect with other PBK’ers to expand their social and professional networks with other high achievers who have expansive interests.

Undergraduate Eligibility Criteria
Students do not apply for membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Invitation to join comes from the Chapter at its initiative. At UC San Diego, Sigma Chapter electors follow national Society criteria to assess the excellence of students’ academic record, the breadth and quality of the courses taken, and evidence that a student has pursued a serious line of work and is of good character. Current local minimal criteria can be found at: https://pbk.ucsd.edu/eligibility/index.html

The UC San Diego election process:
- In winter quarter, the Chapter's electors review the records of potentially eligible current or recently graduated students. In recent years electors have individually reviewed more than 2200 students to select from that group students who will be invited.
- Letters of invitation to initiation: Once the review is complete and a set of students is selected, invitations are sent to the candidates who have satisfied all the criteria, inviting them to join the Society. Notification that a student is being offered the opportunity to join Phi Beta Kappa is generally sent in April. Invitations are sent by e-mail to a student's "@ucsd.edu" address.
- Staying involved once after joining: Initiates are invited to maintain active affiliation with the Society through its Alumni Associations in major cities, and via national social media platforms on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram as well as through publications and programs. All members receive a quarterly newsletter, "The Key Reporter" if they keep the National Society informed of their address.

For more information about PBK at UC San Diego, visit the official website at: https://pbk.ucsd.edu/ or contact the chapter co-president, Dr. Kathleen A. French at pbk@ucsd.edu.

Recently Initiated Chancellor’s Scholars

Brian Khov
2018 Cohort
Cellular and Molecular Biology

Kyoko Downey
2019 Cohort
Literature/Writing and Psychology

Phi Beta Kappa Alumni

Jessica Cao, 2014 Cohort

“I accepted my nomination to Phi Beta Kappa because of the society’s prestige. As a nationally recognized invitation-only honor society, I felt it would help showcase my success in college on my resume. I also wanted the opportunity to network among its Alumni Association.”
Dream to Reality Panels

A unique component to the Chancellor’s Scholars Program consists of quarterly informal seminars, bringing together a sector-specific panel for a dialogue. The goal is to offer students an up-close look at what it takes academically and professionally to succeed in each of these sectors. We host two Dream to Reality Panels a quarter. This allows students to have an opportunity to ask questions to a wide range of professionals in an array of fields. Special thanks to UCSD Alumni Board Director Sam Knight for recruiting alumni panelists for these sessions.

November 18—Health Sciences
Professor Barbara Brody, Dr. Jack Fisher, Alumnus Dr. Ben Kelley

February 24—Arts & Humanities
Professor Steven Adler, Professor John O’Neal, Aluma Jessica Ross

March 3—Social Sciences
Professor Wayne Cornelius, Ellie Werner, MFT, Alumnus Brandon Buzbee Alumna Nat Morgan

March 31—Math & Physical Sciences
Professor Mark Paddock & Professor Jim Lin

May 5—Engineering & Computer Science
Professor Peter Chen, Professor Jeanne Ferrante, Nathan Klarer, Emily Deere

What our scholars have to say:

“It was really inspiring to hear from CSP Alumni, Mentors, and Retirees and listen to their journeys through college and beyond. Lately, I have been trying to determine my next steps for the future, and it was incredibly reassuring to hear from the alumni and volunteers that their pathways were not necessarily linear. Many of them emphasized the importance of allowing yourself time to decide what path to pursue, and not being afraid to pursue something totally different than what was expected. This has really stuck with me as I continue forward and has helped me be a lot more open to new opportunities and alternative plans!”

Hailee Rodriguez Terry
2021 Cohort
Speculative Design

“Throughout my first year here at UCSD and as a part of the Chancellor’s Scholars Program I have been able to virtually meet and interact with many mentors and alumni. These interactions have been super valuable to me, not only allowing me to work on my social and networking skills, but also giving me insight into all the opportunities available to me. Hearing specific stories and being able to talk to real people who have had long and fulfilling careers has given me a lot of hope and inspiration for my future. Receiving advice and genuine mentorship has made me a lot more confident in my ability to thrive both academically and in my personal life.”

Sarah Griffith
2020 Cohort
Chemistry
First-Year Presentation & Poster Sessions

Every year, first-year Chancellor’s Scholars get the opportunity to build their communication and teamwork skills. During Winter Quarter, they present to their fellow peers and Emeriti Mentors on an academic topic of their choosing. This year, all topics chosen fell under the theme of "Health and Wellbeing."

One standout group was selected to present at the Emeriti Association General Meeting on April 27, as an introductory act to Professor Barbara Walter. This year’s outstanding group was “Technological Impacts on Brain Health,” formed by Chancellor’s Scholars Sparrow Hargrove and Julie To. They got the audience thinking about how technology affected their everyday lives, from social media addiction to mental health and depression.

During Spring Quarter, scholars translated their oral presentations into poster presentations. On Friday, May 6, scholars and mentors joined us for our Annual Poster Presentation Session. Scholars were able to have valuable conversations about their work with their peers and mentors.

Are there any volunteer events you’d like to see the Chancellor’s Scholars Program participate in? The Chancellor’s Scholars Program and Chancellor’s Scholars Alliance are always looking for ways scholars can give back to the community. Let us know of your ideas by emailing ChancellorsScholars@ucsd.edu or calling (858) 534-0207.
Is it important to mentor the recipient of your donation to see firsthand the positive effect on them?

My feeling is yes. This is because later on when they graduate and go on with their lives, if they stay in touch with me, that’s a very nice thing. Before mentoring undergraduate students, many of the people I mentored were pathologists in training. When I would go to national pathology meetings, I would meet people who I had trained. It was a wonderful experience, because they were really appreciative of what goes into both mentoring and being mentored. That is something that I much appreciate.

How do you see scholarships as leveling the playing field?

There are legacy students in private universities, where a person can gain admittance to a very high quality university simply because their parents had gone there. I’m not disparaging those connections, because those connections can be important in a positive way. But the thing that bothers me is that the most important principle should always be merit. There’s students who perform well in high school, who show that they can gain a benefit from going to a good university. I think the tragedy is that we don’t have more resources to help more people.

Why do you think that major scholarship donations are important at UCSD?

They are important because otherwise, there are people out there who may never get a college education. Those are lost opportunities. The University of California was created for people all over the state from every background. Of course, the university is a place where scientific discovery is also enormously important.

How have you seen your Scholarship recipients grow and evolve over time?

What motivated you to become an Emeriti Mentor?

I’ve always been a mentor. And I was well mentored as a medical student in Dublin. I realized that this is something very helpful when a student is trying to organize their thoughts and trying to plan where they’re going to make their effort. It’s beneficial to have a mentor to talk to, that can be a neutral person. Not a person who’s going to give you answers necessarily, but somebody who is there listening to your experience and trying to answer whatever questions you do ask them.

What motivated you to make a major gift to fund a Chancellor’s Scholarship?

What motivated me was seeing that this program existed and hearing about how it works. This is a unique program. The idea came from Dr. Mel Green, Emeritus Professor of Biology. He encouraged the Chancellor to facilitate increasing the number of scholarships, along with a yearlong student program. When I heard about it, what appealed to me was this program component was unique to UCSD.

My wife has been very supportive. That’s very important when you’re making gifts. It has to come from both partners. She’s always been very generous and very supportive. Since we don’t have children in college, it was an opportunity to put some money where it would be helpful to somebody else, and help them get on with their education. I do feel very strongly that a university education is, I think, almost a requirement in this time. That’s not to say that a person cannot acquire skills that will give them an economically healthy life. But to me, it’s the life of the mind, that matters most. And for that reason, I’ve been very attracted to the idea of donating to the Chancellor’s Scholarship.

There is another reason that’s very close to my heart. Growing up, I heard from my mom, how she had really wanted to go to college. The family was running a big ranch at the time. The women were expected to stay and keep all the cooking and other things going. What my mother really regretted is that she never got a college education. And I also regretted very much because I could see how smart she was. So for me, this is very important, trying to help people who might be like her, and who were not able to have the opportunity.

Does making a major scholarship gift correspond with your core life values?

Yes, absolutely. When I look around the university, I see not only a place where people can take courses and get degrees, but also a tremendous cultural center here in San Diego. We have a nationally recognized theater. We have great musicians. To me, a university is an absolute oasis of civilization, when you have things like that.
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How have you seen your Scholarship recipients grow and evolve over time?

I am thinking of a mentee named Iris. She's from Bosnia, originally, and was wonderful student who did very well. She got a job she really liked in private industry, and is continuing to do very well. She contacts me every year just to let me know what's going on in her life. And I appreciate that very much.

Do you have anything to say to anyone else who may be considering making a gift to a Chancellor's Scholarship?

I cannot think of a more worthy cause. Not only do I know that the gift is being given, but I also know that the university then multiplies that gift. And so the gift is like part of a down payment, which the university turns into an opportunity. Then, a student who is good enough to be in the university on their own merits, but doesn’t have the available finances, can get into this program. I think that a very small thing can turn into a real consequence in the life of a student. And I'll give you an example. There was a president of the University of California back in the days when Berkeley was the only campus. He used to ride his horse around the campus and talk to professors and students as he went around. One day there was a student who loved literature and was struggling with math. And he was feeling kind of depressed and sad. And wondering whether he should continue his career, when along came this man on a horse and lifted his hat and saluted the student. Well, the student felt nobody's ever done that for him before, acknowledge him. And he was motivated to keep going. Now his name was Irving Stone. He ended up writing some of the most popular books in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Now, if he hadn't met the man on the horse, he would have missed that opportunity to get that little extra bit of courage to persevere. And so I would say that this is one of the things that we can do as mentors and donors.

The first three months of college are very hard. And then after that, it's still hard. So that's when a mentor can sometimes be helpful in discussing the obstacles and helping the student to understand that others have been in that situation and have persevered. My Irish great grandmother used to say that patience and perseverance would bring a snail to Jerusalem. And so that piece of folk wisdom is always in the back of my mind.
Speed Networking Sessions
Events made possible with the help of UCSD Emeriti & Retirement Association Volunteers

Throughout the year, the first and second year Chancellor’s Scholars Program held Interview Practicum and Speed Networking Sessions with the help of UCSD Retirement and Emeriti Association volunteers. The purpose of these events was to expand the professional and personal network of first- and second-year Chancellor’s Scholars with the expertise and wisdom of our wide range of Emeriti Mentors and Retirement Association volunteers. In addition, these events help our scholars to practice and perfect their elevator pitches, a useful tool for future networking opportunities. After our sessions, scholars reported they are more comfortable talking to a wide array of individuals.

Thank you to all of the volunteers that participated!

Steven Adler          Gail Lew
Feroza Ardesthir      Jim Lin
Mae Brown             Allen McCutchan
Madeline Butler       Phyllis Mirsky
Peter Chen            Donna Mulcahy
Ann Craig             Chris Neilsen
Becky Burrola         Mark Paddock
Eileen Callahan       Henry Powell
James Colbert          Russ Schnapp
Matthew Xavier        Lisa Shaffer
Jill Hammons          Paul Shilling
Jake Jacoby           Deborah Spector
Bob Knox

Would you like to help smart, talented, and industrious scholars improve their communication skills? The UCSD Chancellor’s Scholars Program hosts several Speed Networking and Interview Practicum sessions throughout the academic year. We are always looking for experienced individuals to help during these sessions, provide valuable feedback, and offer suggestions for improvement. We have 5 events planned for the 2022-2023 academic year. If you are interested, email ChancellorsScholars@ucsd.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!
Follow us on Facebook to see more photos!
Meet Our Mentors
In each issue, we will introduce two of our dedicated mentors

Madeline Butler
Professor Mandy Butler served in the School of Biological Sciences where she was a Teaching Professor and the Academic Coordinator for the Undergraduate Laboratories for 13 years. Professor Butler received a BS in Biology from Fairfield University and a PhD in Neuroscience from the University of Rochester. Before coming to UCSD, she worked in biotech developing RNA-targeting therapeutics for diabetes and neurological disorders. While at UCSD, she designed and taught lab courses for Biology majors and oversaw the operations for all the teaching laboratories. Dr. Butler is also a long-time member of the Board of the Doris A. Howell Foundation for Women’s health which provides scholarships for undergraduates doing research.

“...I have always loved teaching and found it an exceptionally rewarding experience. I especially liked getting to know the students in my classes and discussing their career plans and what they valued most in terms of future careers paths. Having spent time in both the corporate and academic world, I felt I had some valuable advice to share with students who were unsure of which career would best fit their needs and desires. At retirement, I knew I wanted to stay connected the University and especially to the students, and The Emeriti Mentor Program seemed a great way of meeting that goal. One of the most attractive aspects of the program is that it gives both the student and mentor the time to develop a meaningful one-on-one relationship over several years. I have been so impressed by the Chancellor Scholars, their hope and curiosity, and especially their resilience during these past two incredibly challenging pandemic years. It has been a pleasure being able to share my career and life experience as well as my knowledge of how to navigate the campus, which can be so overwhelming for first-year students in particular. In return, my mentees keep me informed about campus life, the challenges they face, and the issues they care about most. I think the program provides a wonderful opportunity for those of us looking to do something worthwhile that utilizes our past experience and provides a service to the university and its students."

Peter Chen
Professor Peter Chen received his bachelor and doctorate degrees from UCSD and continued with research and teaching in the Bioengineering Department. His research included hemodynamics, microcirculation, long-term effects of implantable biosensors, blood substitutes, effects of mechanical stresses on cells, bioreactors, cartilage tissue engineering, in-vivo video microscopy, and biomedical instrumentation. After retiring, Peter continued to promote the use of the microcirculation as a diagnostic tool for vascular diseases, and remained active in the research on cartilage regeneration, focusing on finding the salient features that mandate targeted and efficient cells growth. Peter received the Malpighi Gold Award for excellence in the production of a motion picture on microcirculation. He was nominated Bioengineering Teacher of the Year by students and received the Barbara and Paul Saltman Distinguished Teaching Award from UCSD.

“When I retired in 2015, Suzan made a passionate appeal to recruit bioengineering mentors for the CSP. No one can say no to Suzan. I signed up on the spot and was happy to know that I will be working with mentees on a one to one basis throughout their studies. I have always been close to my students, but with large classes it was difficult to spend quality time with individuals. Joining the EMP allowed me to achieve what I wanted to do all along. The EMP provides the best support for scholars in alleviating their initial apprehension in a new environment, building up their self-confidence early on, and coaching them on realizing the importance of social and communication skills. It is reasonable to say the EMP is a major contributing factor in preparing Chancellor’s Scholars to be society ready when they graduate. The function of a university is to provide a comprehensive education for individuals, including technical knowledge. UCSD Chancellor Scholars are fortunate that mentors can provide them with practical life skills and a complete college experience. It is essential that we work together to ensure the continuation and success of the EMP. The UCSD community can help by talking regularly with the scholars and encouraging them to stay positive, providing or helping them with internship opportunities on and off campus, and contributing generously to activities sponsored by the program so the students can participate without financial worries. Above all, be prepared to become a mentor when retiring. The Chancellor's Scholars are a tight knit group and this family is growing. Before the pandemic, we would gather for a farewell dinner with existing mentees from all 4 years. It is a most gratifying experience when you see the four young people engaging in a lively conversation, welcoming and advising the freshman and saying goodbye to the senior. I am still in communication with previous mentees and some of us continue to participate in the yearly Triton 5K. I like to stay in contact with everyone for as long as I am able.”
Chancellor’s Scholars Alliance

Congratulations to our
Graduating Senior CSA Board Members!

Henry Chan
BS Computer Science, Phi Beta Kappa
Minor in Cognitive Science
Entering the workforce, has a position at MongoDB

Benson Vuong
BS Computer Science
Entering the workforce

Rachel Luu
BS Mechanical Engineering
Pursuing a PhD in Material Science & Engineering at MIT

Eric Xiao
BS Computer Sciences, Cognitive Science, Linguistics
Pursuing a Master’s Degree at UC San Diego

Ixchel Rivas Torres
BA Economics and International Relations, International Business, Business Admin & Management
Entering the workforce, has a position at Sempra Energy

Jack Zhong
BS Joint Math/Economics and Environmental Systems
Entering the workforce

Connect with CSP Alumni on LinkedIn!
LinkedIn is a great networking tool that will be incredibly useful to you in all future endeavors.
If you haven't already, please make sure to connect to the following profiles: Chancellor’s Scholars & UCSD Chancellor’s Scholars Alumni
Follow the CSP LinkedIn page: UC San Diego Chancellor’s Scholars Program Scholars
Make sure to add “UC San Diego Chancellor’s Scholars Program” to your profile’s “Education Section.” This will automatically add you to the CSP page’s alumni section.
Please Donate Generously to the Emeriti Association’s Chancellor’s Scholarship Fund

Through the Chancellor’s Scholarship Award, scholars receive $5,000 a year for four years at UC San Diego. Your monetary support of this program allows bright young scholars to achieve a higher education and helps them meet the challenges they face at a rigorous university like UC San Diego. Please help us continue to award these prestigious scholarships to students in need. With your financial help today, we can ensure that future scholars continue to receive outstanding educational and leadership opportunities at the university. Chancellor’s Scholars are the future leaders of America. With your contribution today, we can help make these scholars’ dreams a reality.

To donate, please mail your check (made payable to UC San Diego Foundation – Fund # 4556) to the: UCSD Retirement Resource Center, 9500 Gilman Drive, MC 0020, La Jolla, CA 92093-0020.

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Follow us on LinkedIn: @ UC San Diego Chancellor’s Scholars Program