

SJSU | UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM



NEWSLETTER

FALL 2025

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

DR. ANDREW CARTER



Greetings from the UROP team! As I write this message, we are finding our footing after a semester of tremendous growth for the program. UROP has grown both in size and scope each year it has been on campus, but this year is particularly special. This fall, we welcomed our largest cohort of students and faculty to the program, with 102 and 52, respectively. Over the summer, we interviewed over 220 applicants and received a total of 86 faculty research projects—which is exciting but lets us know there is more work to do to meet the growing interest in undergraduate research on campus and provide opportunities for the next generation of scholars and practitioners at SJSU.

Grounded in UROP's purpose is a focus on fostering interdisciplinary collaborations with students and faculty across campus. This year's cohort represents students from 34 different majors working with faculty from all Colleges on campus. We are also excited to launch our pilot community-based cohort this year, where select community partners work directly with students interested in applied research in non-profit, community-based settings. We look forward to deepening these partnerships in the years ahead and expanding to new contexts and sectors.

Building on the success of our previous cohorts, which saw students co-author research articles, present at academic and industry conferences, and win several awards, this year's cohort is already hard at work and equally primed for a variety of successes. It is very exciting to see the range of fruitful research partnerships already developed, and the ambitious scope of work our students are engaging in. Be on the lookout for their culminating presentations in the spring at the Celebration of Research and UROP Research Showcase.

As we settle into the end of the Fall semester, there is incredible energy and momentum for the program campus and community wide. Stay tuned for what we have next in the pipeline!



MEET OUR PEER MENTORS

DANINO CORSIS

Biological Sciences Major

UROP Cohort Year: 2024-25



LUISA TORRES

Psychology Major

UROP Cohort Year: 2024-25

VELDANA KOSTIC

MPH Student

Program Graduate Assistant



MEET OUR PEER MENTORS

From Danino

“

Participating in UROP has been the defining moment of my college career so far. Not only has the program provided me with the opportunity to engage with research directly, but also the necessary tools to thrive in both a research and professional setting. I have enjoyed sharing these very same tools and experiences with this year's UROP cohort. Balancing research and a full college curriculum is no easy feat. My goal as a mentor has been to be the guiding hand

for students who look to thrive in both their classes and their research. I hope this year's cohort will be that same guiding hand to future UROP cohorts. I look forward to seeing all the incredible work students have been participating in this year in the upcoming Celebration of Research and UROP showcase.

From Luisa

Having graduated from UROP this past spring, I've greatly enjoyed supporting the new cohort as they navigate the same process I went through just a year ago. Serving as an additional layer of support has helped me grow as a communicator, a connector to relevant resources, and a collaborative member of a team dedicated to supporting undergraduates holistically. Forming meaningful connections with the students I mentor has been one of the highlights of my semester. It's incredibly rewarding to watch them overcome challenges and embrace their new endeavors as both individuals and researchers. I look forward to continuing to contribute positively to their experience as they prepare to present their work in the spring. This year's projects are just as compelling as those from previous semesters; I'm confident that the upcoming Celebration of Research and UROP Showcase will be exciting and inspiring events!

From Veldana

As we reach the halfway point of the program, I've been reflecting on how meaningful this experience has been. Working with our undergraduate researchers has been a true highlight—their curiosity and dedication continually inspire me. As a first-generation college student who didn't have early access to research opportunities, I'm committed to creating supportive spaces where students can build confidence and pursue their goals. In my role as a peer mentor and part of the program's leadership team, I aim to support them not only in their research but also in finding opportunities, such as internships, scholarships, conferences, and more, that will set them up for long term success. I'm also incredibly grateful to Dr. Carter for giving me this opportunity. His guidance has played a meaningful role in my professional growth and continues to shape my development as I advance through my Master of Public Health program. I'm excited for what we'll accomplish in the second half of the program and grateful to be part of this community.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

DR. LESTHER PAPA | PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT



Dr. Lester Papa is a fifth-year Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department, serving as a dedicated faculty mentor for the Master's of Clinical Psychology program. Now in his second year participating in UROP, Dr. Papa brings both research expertise and a strong commitment to student development. He previously collaborated with peer mentor Luisa Torres and is currently mentoring one student, continuing to foster a supportive and hands-on research environment.

Dr. Papa's research examines microaggressions and their impact on communities of color, shaped by his upbringing in a Filipino immigrant household in Hawai'i. He studies how college students perceive racial and ethnic microaggressions, including differences in detecting comments from in-group versus out-group members.

He also leads the Filipinx Bay Area Skin Stories Project, documenting colorism experiences in Filipino and Filipino American communities, particularly in understudied rural areas, and exploring their effects on mental health and self-perception.

Dr. Papa is equally passionate about expanding early research opportunities for undergraduates, recognizing how essential these experiences are for future graduate study. His past UROP mentees have presented at conferences and developed their own research projects, reinforcing his commitment to providing supportive, skill-building mentorship. While he first joined UROP to help open doors for students, he returned for a second year because of the program's strong sense of community—among faculty mentors and among students who progress through shared goals and milestones. He values how UROP sets students up for continued success, whether they remain in his lab or pursue other research opportunities across SJSU.

In his advice to UROP students, Dr. Papa emphasizes the strength of SJSU's student-centered approach and encourages students to take full advantage of opportunities that many undergraduates at other institutions may never receive. He urges students to reflect on what genuinely drives them, identify the research questions that excite their curiosity, and pursue those interests with confidence. At the same time, he reminds them to create a sustainable schedule that balances research, academics, and personal life—and to prioritize “filling their own cup,” ensuring they care for their well-being as they grow as scholars and individuals.

STUDENT PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, AND AWARDS

Congratulations to our students on their accomplishments



HUNTER NGUYEN
(04-05 COHORT)

Co-presented his research paper titled “Procedural Design Error Detection in CAD Modeling Operations Using Graph-Based Neural Networks” at the International Mechanical Engineering Congress and Exposition on November 17th in Memphis, TN. This work is based on collaborative research with his UROP faculty mentor Dr. Yunjian Qiu.



THANEESHA SINGH
(04-05 COHORT)

Presented her research poster “The Role of COUP-TFII and ETS in Modulating PCV Identity” at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students” on November 19th in San Antonio, TX. This work is based on collaborative research with her UROP faculty mentor Dr. Theresa Dinh.



KALIA CASTRO
(04-05 COHORT)

Co-presented her research poster "Comparing the Effects of Different Small Molecule Modulators on SIRT1 Activity" at the American Chemical Society Western Regional Meeting on October 26th in San Jose, CA. This work is based on collaborative research with her UROP faculty mentor Dr. Ningkun Wang.

STUDENT PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, AND AWARDS



SASHA BENJAMIN
ALIYAH MANANSALA
(04-05 COHORT)

Served as undergraduate student co-authors on the 2025 Silicon Valley Pain Index. This work is based on collaborative research with their faculty mentor Dr. Anji Buckner.



CONNIE CHEUNG
MIRAH RASOARIMINO
(CURRENT COHORT)

Attended the conference "Safety in Motion: Combating Human Trafficking, Exploitation, and Violence" on October 29th in San Jose, CA.



OLUWAKEMISOLA KAKA
(03-04 COHORT)

Presented her podium presentation titled "Designing Adjuvants to Improve Colistin Treatment of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*" at the American Chemical Society's Western Regional Meeting on October 25th in San Jose, CA. This work is based on their collaborative research with their faculty mentor Dr. Laura Miller Conrad.



ANSHULA THIRUMARAN
(04-05 COHORT)

Presented her research poster "NLP in Real-Life Application for Virtual Medical Care and Diagnosis" at Accelerating Cleantech through AI Synergy: ASQ Annual Leadership Summit on December 6th in Santa Clara, CA. This work is based on her collaborative research with her UROP faculty mentor Dr. Christopher Pham.

STUDENT ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

KIMBERLY MARTINEZ | 2023-24 COHORT

Kimberly Martinez, a UROP alumna from the 2023–2024 cohort, graduated from SJSU with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Child and Adolescent Development. She is earning an M.A. in Counseling at Santa Clara University, focusing on health psychology and non-clinical higher-education support for first-generation and LGBTQ+ students. As a first-generation college student, Kimberly’s path toward research—like that of many UROP students—began with a curiosity for the unknown. During her undergraduate years, she became increasingly aware of how policies and institutional systems disproportionately affect first-generation and LGBTQ+ communities. Wanting to understand these issues systematically, she saw UROP as a “structured way to turn those questions and curiosity into an actual project instead of just conversations with friends or classmates.”



During her time in UROP, Kimberly worked under the mentorship of Dr. Robert Marx on a mixed-methods study examining the impact of anti-trans legislation on access to gender-affirming care in Texas and Tennessee. The project combined surveys with in-depth interviews and aimed to translate findings into practical tools and resources for providers and youth. Kimberly’s passion for supporting marginalized communities now extends into her professional life. She currently mentors undergraduate and community college students through the Latino Education Advancement Foundation (LEAF) and serves as a Puente mentor at Mission College, where she helps Latino students build community, navigate higher education, and cultivate a sense of belonging.

Kimberly describes her UROP experience as pivotal to her development as a scholar and emerging professional. Through the program, she learned how to refine broad concerns into focused research questions, navigate academic literature, and understand the full research process from project development to data collection. Presenting her work at the UROP Showcase and later at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research strengthened her public speaking skills and ability to communicate complex, often sensitive topics with clarity and care. With guidance from her mentor and support from the UROP community, she became more confident in answering challenging questions, acknowledging when work is still in progress, and engaging with research effectively. She credits Dr. Marx’s supportive and approachable mentorship as one of the most formative aspects of her experience and a model for how she now approaches her own mentoring roles.

The skills and insights Kimberly gained through UROP are actively shaping her graduate studies and her work with student mentees. Her experience affirmed her commitment to equity-driven, evidence-based practice and helped her clarify her long-term goal of becoming a counselor who advocates for first-generation and LGBTQ+ students. Though she is currently focused on direct student support, UROP “planted a seed”—one she hopes to return to through future research aligned with counseling and policy advocacy. Kimberly confidently recommends UROP to any student curious about research, emphasizing that the program offers structure, community, and skills that extend far beyond academics. Her advice to current UROP students: embrace the learning curve, ask every question (big or small), and remember that your “lived experiences are part of what makes your research meaningful.”

UROP ANNUAL FALL SOCIAL



UROP hosted its annual fall social event on November 18th in the MLK Library. The event brought together current students, alumni and faculty to connect and engage in community building. Those in attendance celebrated the exciting diversity of partnerships and early successes of our current students in addition to the impactful work being done by program alums. The event was catered by Nirvana Soul, who brought the drinks and pastries. We are excited to see the budding collaborations being forged across the cohort and scope of projects our students develop in the spring!



WELCOME 2025-26 COHORT

STUDENT

Aarav Ghai, interdisciplinary engineering
Aditya Nagpal, comp. sci. and linguistics
Adriana Carranza, marine biology
Aiden Jiang, chemistry
Alexandru Grigoriu, chemical engineering
Alistair Bond, chemistry
Amarjargal Ayurzana, computer science
Andrea Kristina Cortez, electrical engineering
Aneesh Matcha, data science
Ara Anandkumar, data science
Archi Patel, comp. sci. and linguistics
Ares Casas, biological sciences
Ashton Derazizyan, undeclared
Aubrianna Crutchfield, forensic science
Ayaan Gazali, software engineering
Bilva Gummadi, aerospace engineering
Bradley Haraguchi, computer science
Caitlin Gocecamat, psychology
Charan Bhuma, undeclared
Chloe Ferriols, nursing
Colin Lou, computer science
Connie Cheung, sociology
Connor Buckley, computer science
Corey Lisemby, climate science
Cynthia Weiss, physics
Daniel Taddeese, business administration
Dave Wang, undeclared
Debora Thekkekkara, economics
Erik Thompson, computer science
Erika Ebreo, biological sciences

FACULTY MENTOR

Dr. Aaron Romanowsky
Dr. Navrati Saxena
Dr. Cleber Ouverney
Dr. Laura Miller Conrad
Dr. Madalyn Radlauer
Dr. Robert Marx
not yet partnered
Dr. Mike Nguyen
Dr. Navrati Saxena
Carli Lowe
Dr. Gurmeet Naroola
Dr. Sonia Singhal
not yet partnered
Dr. Phylis Johnson
not yet partnered
Dr. Aaron Romanowsky
Dr. Yunjian (Jojo) Qiu
Dr. Lester Papa
Dr. Kris Borgen
Dr. Bianca Hinojosa
Dr. Ben Reed
Dr. Kezban Yagci Sokat
not yet partnered
Dr. Elizabeth Madden
Dr. Curtis Asplund
Milan Balinton
not yet partnered
Dr. Sarika Pruthi
Dr. Navrati Saxena
Dr. Sonia Singhal

WELCOME 2025-26 COHORT

STUDENT

Ethan Yang, political science
Evelyn Cazares, mechanical engineering
Evelyn Gallo, aerospace engineering
Hannah Tofesha, public health
Henry Li, biomedical engineering
Hoang Nguyen, pre-nursing
Jay Timbol, software engineering
Jayden Thai, computer science
Jayvart Sharma, comp. sci. and linguistics
Johan Weldegabriel,
Jonathan Garcia, philosophy
Josh Bautista, electrical engineering
Josue Rebollar, aerospace engineering
Julia Cruz, chemistry
Juniper Clark, animation and illustration
Jyoti Sah, biological sciences
Kate Morifusa, mechanical engineering
Keira Huynh, biological sciences
Kiana Bakrani Balani, computer science
Kiyone Tanaka-Gacayan, comp. sci. and ling.
Le Duy Nguyen, software engineering
Lena Munad, data science
Lisha Nishat, data science
Mahdiah Chowdhury, data science
Malik Moncrief, sociology
Mirah Rasoarimino, business administration
Miyuki Tokuhara, computer science
Monique Ngo, biological sciences
Naman Mishra, computer science
Natalie Mcadams, behavioral science

FACULTY MENTOR

Dr. Elena Klaw
not yet partnered
not yet partnered
Dr. Janet Bang
Dr. Esperanza Huerta Espinosa
Dr. Bree Grillo-Hill
Dr. ben reed
Dr. Nurettin Senol
Dr. Navrati Saxena
Dr. Gurmeet Naroola
Dr. David Daum
Dr. Mike Nguyen
Dr. Elizabeth Madden
Dr. Marie Haverfield
Dr. Christine Ma-Kellems
Dr. Rabia Aslam
Dr. Mike Nguyen
Dr. Cara Maffini
Dr. Fabio Di Troia
Carli Lowe
Dr. Fabio Di Troia
Dr. Xiaohong (Iris) Quan
Drs. S. Haley & D. Lazerson
Dr. Yuwei He
Dr. Katherine Wilkinson
Dr. Kezban Yagci Sokat
Dr. Vishnu Pendyala
Dr. Katherine Wilkinson
Dr. Harit Agroia
Dr. Jess Chong

WELCOME 2025-26 COHORT

STUDENT

Nhu Ta, computer engineering
Nikole Morales, design studies
Nisitha Kakulapati, ecology and evolution
Omarirfan Gochyyev, data science
Pan Cho Thu, business administration
Pearl Shah, comp. sci. and linguistics
Peyton Higa, mechanical engineering
Pranav Santhakumar, ind. & sys. engineering
Pranjal Adhikari, data science
Rachel Winmill, nursing
Rafan Quader, computer science
Rahel Fekade, biomedical engineering
Rina Devarajan, biomedical engineering
Rishona Martin, public health
Rupashi Bahl, data science
Sahaj Thind, public health
Sai Akshaya Buddharaju, data science
Sameer Ali, electrical engineering
Samiha Rahman, communication studies
Samipya Bhusal, computer science
Sarah Hwee, civil engineering
Sasha Selvan, business administration
Seline Venzon, computer engineering
Shelby Shuberg, biomedical engineering
Shriya Awari, business admin
Sierra Blackhurst, aerospace engineering
Siobhan Walter, business administration
Snehal Bakshi, business administration
Spencer Oyen, history
Steve Kuo, computer engineering

FACULTY MENTOR

Dr. Mike Nguyen
Dr. Daniel Rivers
Dr. Theresa Dinh
Dr. Harit Agroia
Dr. Xiaohong (Iris) Quan
Dr. Harit Agroia
Dr. Yunjian (Jojo) Qiu
Dr. Kezban Yagci Sokat
Dr. Anji Buckner
Dr. Harit Agroia
Dr. ben reed
Dr. Bianca Hinojosa
Carli Lowe
Dr. Dina Izenstark
Dr. Navrati Saxena
Dr. Julia Swan
Drs. S. Haley & D. Lazerson
Dr. Mike Nguyen
not yet partnered
Dr. Yue Luo
Dr. Yunjian (Jojo) Qiu
Dr. Esperanza Huerta Espinosa
Dr. Yue Luo
Dr. Madalyn Radlauer
not yet partnered
Dr. Aaron Romanowsky
Drs. S. Haley & D. Lazerson
Dr. Gurmeet Naroola
Dr. Travis Boyce
Dr. Vishnu Pendyala

WELCOME 2025-26 COHORT

STUDENT

Taissia Bazhenova, undeclared
Tanequa Bailey, software engineering
Tina Le, business administration
Tunir Bhattacharya, data science
Umer Ghaffar, electrical engineering
Vani Sethi, comp. sci. & linguistics
Varun Chalamalasetti, business administration
Viktoria Padovich, aerospace engineering
Vyshu Vaddiraju, biological sciences
Youngjin Kim, aerospace engineering
Yumilka Wagas, biomedical engineering
Zoe Mouser, undeclared

FACULTY MENTOR

Dr. Anna Jeong
Dr. Mike Nguyen
Dr. Xun (Peter) Xu
Dr. Nathaniel Bogie
Dr. Yuwei He
Dr. Vishnu Pendyala
Dr. Tijana Rajkovic
Dr. Gurmeet Naroola
not yet partnered
Dr. Yuwei He
Dr. Theresa Dinh
Dr. Jacqueline Bergman

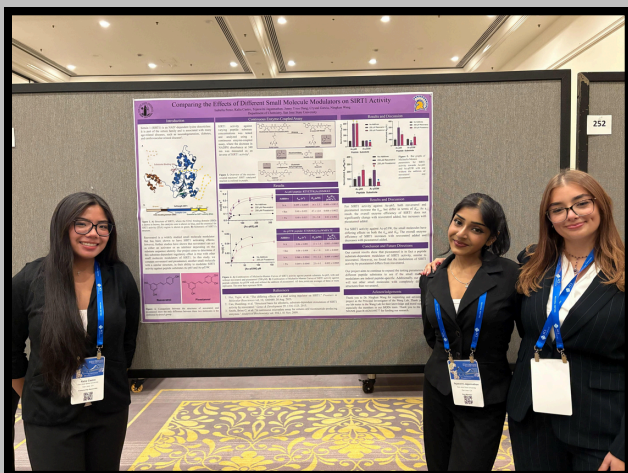


WELCOME UROP COMMUNITY PARTNERS

This academic year, UROP is partnering with select community partners to provide students interested in community-based research an opportunity to engage directly in applied settings. Welcome **African American Community Services Agency** and **Roots Community Health Center** to the program.



UROP STUDENTS IN ACTION



Kalia Castro (24-25 cohort) and collaborators present their poster at the American Chemical Society Western Regional Meeting in San Jose, CA on October 26, 2025.



Mizan Rupan-Tompkins and Hunter Nguyen (24-25 cohort) attend Y-Combinator technology startup accelerator firm in San Francisco, CA. Mizan and Hunter have been accepted into the firm's highly competitive startup incubator program.



Connie Cheung and Mirah Rasoarimino (2025-26 cohort) attend the "Safety in Motion: Combating Human Trafficking, Exploitation, and Violence" conference in San Jose, CA on October 29.



Sasha Benjamin (middle right; 2024-25 cohort) attends press conference for the Silicon Valley Pain Index at SJSU on July 15, 2025.

PROGRAM UPDATES/ UPCOMING EVENTS

2026-27 PROGRAM APPLICATIONS

Are you interested in participating in UROP as a student or faculty mentor? The open enrollment period for students will begin in mid-April. Follow our social media and website for more specific details. Students can fill out an interest form to receive program updates and get notified when applications go live. [Faculty can submit projects for the 26-27 program HERE.](#)

CELEBRATION OF RESEARCH

Each year UROP students participate in the campus-wide Celebration of Research event, where they share the work from their year-long faculty partnership. This year's Celebration of Research will take place during SJSU Research Week on April 13-17.

UROP RESEARCH SHOWCASE

The 2nd annual Research Showcase will take place on May 14, 2026. The Showcase is the flagship and culminating event of the program, and allows students to present their work to various audiences, including friends and family, community, university leadership, and others. The event is open to the public.

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