



ACHIEVEMENT REWARDS FOR COLLEGE SCIENTISTS

INTRODUCING THE SCHOLARS
2025-2026

ACHIEVEMENT REWARDS FOR COLLEGE SCIENTISTS

SAN DIEGO CHAPTER

san-diego.arcsfoundation.org

ARCS MISSION

ARCS® Foundation, Inc. advances science and technology in the United States by providing financial awards to academically outstanding U.S. citizens studying to complete degrees in science, engineering and medical research.

WHO WE ARE

October 4, 1957 was a game-changer. On that date, Russia launched Sputnik, a 183-pound spaceship, roughly the size of a beach ball, into space. This surprise launch shocked the United States and forced it to rethink its place as the technological leader of the world. It also ushered in the Space Age and the Cold War. The Russian action touched all areas of America, including politics, patriotism, science, the military, and education. In response, the U.S. undertook an unprecedented push to educate Americans in science and math.

As part of that initiative, a group of women in Los Angeles saw the opportunity to make a difference by creating a partnership between science and society. Their goal was to re-establish and re-energize the technological superiority of the United States. They started the first ARCS Foundation chapter in September 1958. ARCS (Achievement Rewards for College Scientists) is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization founded and administered by women who support American leadership and aid advancement in science and technology, now comprised of 15 chapters across the nation.

In 1985, four San Diego women established ARCS Foundation San Diego: Karen Bowden, Karon Luce, Barbara McColl, and Pattie Wellborn. Forty-one years later, ARCS San Diego has provided over \$13.3 million in financial awards to the brightest STEM scholars at four local academic institutions. By investing in these scholars, we are securing a better future for America and the world.

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SAN DIEGO CHAPTER

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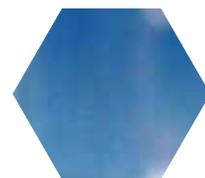
2025-2026 SCHOLARS SAN DIEGO CHAPTER

The San Diego chapter of ARCS began in 1985 and has grown from the original four founders to 100 members today. As we enter our 41st anniversary year, we have made awards totaling over \$13.3 million. Our academic partners are:

[San Diego State University](#) | [Scripps Research](#)

[University of California San Diego](#) | [University of San Diego](#)

ARCS Scholars are selected by their institutions in recognition of their achievements and their exceptional promise to contribute significantly to their fields. Basic requirements have been established by ARCS® Foundation, Inc.: Scholars must be U.S. citizens, have at least a 3.5 GPA, and they must be enrolled full-time in academic degree programs in science, technology, engineering, math, and biomedical research. Awards are \$10,000, unrestricted, and renewable for three years. The San Diego chapter focuses on supporting students in doctoral programs, and the ARCS Scholars we have funded have a 98% graduation rate. For the 2025-2026 academic year, the San Diego ARCS chapter has awarded \$500,000 to 50 Scholars.



SUMMARY

ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter 2025-2026 Scholars

**Navigate document by clicking on the Scholar NAME
or click to the section by clicking on an INSTITUTION**

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Kian Bagheri - Civil and Environmental Engineering
Genesis Barzallo - Global Health
Elizabeth Morgan Becker - Ecology
Brittany Michelle Conley - Biochemistry
Emily Anne Darin - Molecular and Marine Biology
Morgan Venness Farrell - Cell and Molecular Biology
Gregory James Jordan - Biology
Dennis Dimitri Krutkin - Bioinformatics
Amanda Nancy Lee - Computational Science
Nancy León-Rivera - Biomedical Sciences
Christina Rodama Veziris - Clinical Psychology

SCRIPPS RESEARCH

Stephan Miguel Freeman - Chemistry
Diego Daniel Gomez-Ceballos - Molecular and Cellular Biology
Anthony Harout Gurunian - Biophysics
Catherine Yicong Li - Biomedical Sciences
Pierre Phillip Loch-Temzelides - Chemistry
Karena Minyun Ng - Immunology
Ariana Sulpizio - Biomedical Sciences
Madison Fay Wagner - Chemistry
Drason Han Zhang - Chemistry

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Rimjhim Agarwal - Biomedical Sciences
Hannah Rose Battey - Public Health
Daniel Milgram Beaglehole - Computer Science and Engineering
Morgan M. Caudle - Clinical Psychology

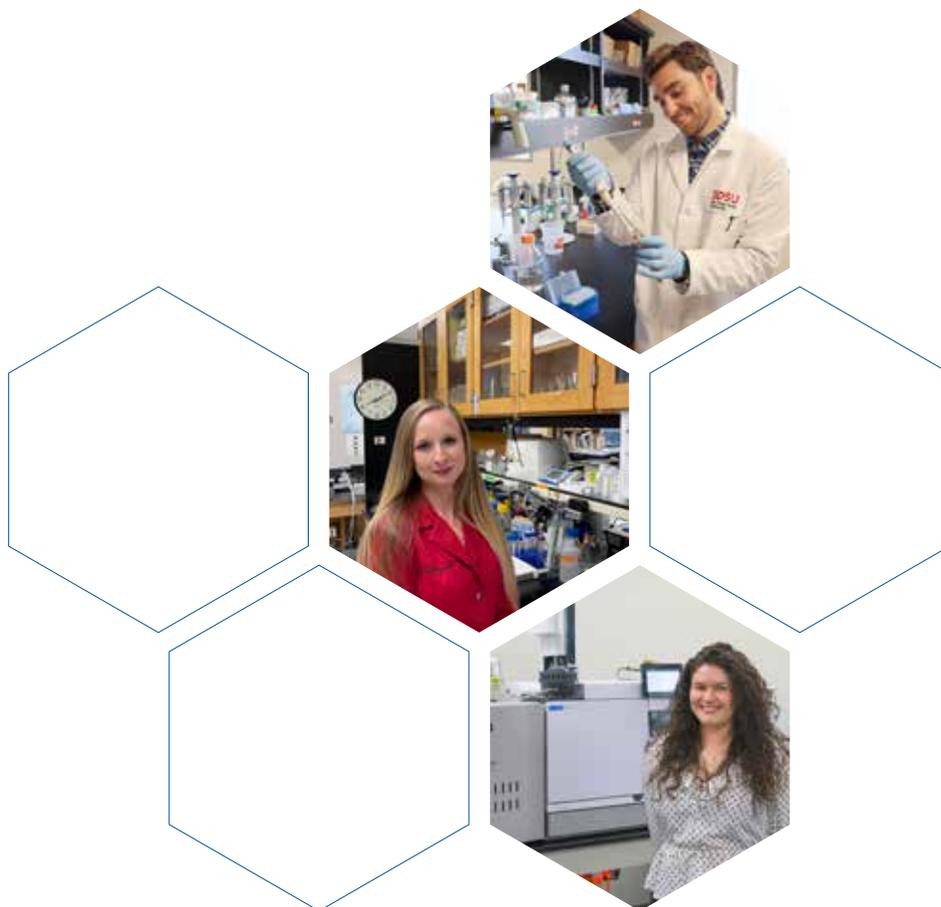
Kayla M. Erler - Structural Engineering
Dane Ford-Roshon - Biomedical Sciences
Wilfredo Gabriel Gonzalez Rivera - Biomedical Informatics
Rayyan Mohammed Gorashi - Bioengineering
Jonathan A. Gunn - Bioengineering
Dylan Cole Hirsch - Mechanical Engineering
Katherine Eugenia Izhikevich - Computer Science
Sarah Lane Ko - Materials Chemistry
Benjamin Aaron Lam - Chemical Engineering
Araz Majnoonian - Global Health
Daniel Milshiteyn - Chemistry and Biochemistry
Spencer Louis Nelson - Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics
Renny Ka Hang Ng - Biological Sciences
Renee Elizabeth Oles - Biomedical Sciences
Avery Pong - Bioinformatics
Natalie Elaine Quach - Biostatistics
Jared Simmons - Biomedical Sciences
Chesson Scott Sipling - Physics
Noah Stapper - Clinical Psychology
Lauren Alexandria Valdez - Neurobiology
Brandon James Vogt - Bioengineering
Olivia Jade Weng - Computer Science and Engineering

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Basma Adams - Nursing
Sandy Jean Jellen - Nursing
Kristina Maria Lopez - Nursing
Jessica Lee Ritchie - Nursing

SDSU | San Diego State University

The San Diego State University doctoral programs here are offered jointly with either the University of California Davis, the University of California San Diego, the University of California Irvine, or the University of California Riverside as noted in the Scholars' profiles.





KIAN BAGHERI

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Engineering

Concentration: Civil and Environmental Engineering

Specialization: Stormwater Management

Donor: Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickinson Foundation

Kian utilizes computer modeling to study the impacts of stormwater on urban and natural systems. His research focuses on a range of stormwater management applications from quantifying pollution generation to mapping flooded areas. Within his stormwater models, he has estimated trash mobilization by stormwater, the benefits of rainwater harvesting through a life cycle assessment, the impacts of climate change on drainage systems, and transborder water management issues. These topics help support management strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of high quantities of stormwater runoff.

Personal Interests: I enjoy hiking, biking, fishing, rock climbing, scuba diving and other activities that allow me to be in nature.



GENESIS BARZALLO

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Health and Human Services, School of Public Health

Concentration: Global Health

Specialization: Analytical Environmental Chemistry and Exposure Science

Donor: Robin Luby

What if a simple wristband could track invisible pollution? Genesis is developing a method that turns silicone wristbands into wearable samplers, detecting pesticides and smoke-related pollutants in daily life. Her research shines light on exposures linked to agriculture, wildfire smoke, and household air. By making hidden health risks visible, Genesis's work helps protect vulnerable communities and expands scientific understanding of how pollutants affect people's health.

Personal Interests: I enjoy baking sweets and sourdough, sewing my own clothes, paddleboarding, and spending as much time outdoors as possible!





ELIZABETH MORGAN BECKER

San Diego State University / University of California Davis

College of Sciences

Concentration: Ecology

Specialization: Plant Community Ecology

Donors: Elwyn Heller Foundation of San Diego / ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter



Elizabeth's research focuses on the successful restoration and conservation of grassland ecosystems, which are declining rapidly from global climate change and invasive species. Grasslands have a vibrant array of plant and animal life which support human health and well-being through the ecosystem services they provide, such as carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, and hunting and foraging opportunities. Elizabeth examines the mechanisms which drive diverse, climate resilient, and invasion resistant grasslands. Her research will provide actionable guidance for grassland managers globally.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I enjoy spending time outdoors, drawing, traveling to new places, and reading.

BRITTANY MICHELLE CONLEY

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Biochemistry

Specialization: Molecular Mechanisms of Disease

Donor: The Reuben H. Fleet Foundation



Metabolic enzyme isocitrate dehydrogenase 1 (IDH1) helps provide cells with metabolites used in metabolic pathways. Mutations in IDH1 produce a toxic metabolite, driving tumor formation and leading to cancers such as leukemias and brain cancers. Brittany's research focuses on elucidating the mechanism of IDH1 and the role of these mutations in fatty acid metabolism. This research sheds light on how mutations in IDH1 affect both cancer progression and fat metabolism, helping to inform better targeted therapies and offers insight into the link between cancer-related proteins and fat breakdown in cells.

Personal Interests: In my free time I enjoy spending time with my family, and baking, especially desserts.



EMILY ANNE DARIN

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Molecular and Marine Biology

Specialization: Genetic Engineering in Marine Systems

Donor: [Danielle James](#)

Emily's dissertation research focuses on how microbes influence animal development, specifically how microbial factors activate developmental programming through bacterial sensing. She studies this phenomenon in the marine tube worm *Hydroides elegans* (*Hydroides*), commonly found on boats and ship hauls. *Hydroides* larvae require a bacterial cue to reach adulthood, allowing them to settle near adults. Through this research, Emily has been able to elucidate how the immune system plays a beneficial role during development. This can be translated to human development where microbes influence overall immune health in children.

Personal Interests: In my free time I enjoy surfing and raising chickens.



MORGAN VENNESS FARRELL

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Cell and Molecular Biology

Specialization: Environmental Microbiology

Donor: [The Reuben H. Fleet Foundation](#)

Coral reefs are rapidly declining worldwide and require innovative solutions to stop this decline. Morgan is focusing her PhD work in studying how bacteria influence marine animal health and development with the objective of driving innovations that restore degraded coral reefs. She has uncovered a strategy that bacteria use to signal to coral and other invertebrates that they have found a suitable habitat to settle down. From this research she has developed a restoration device that helps increase marine invertebrate populations.

Personal Interests: Outside of my research, I enjoy being outside in nature snorkeling, hiking, camping, and practicing photography.





GREGORY JAMES JORDAN

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Biology

Specialization: Cancer Biology

Donor: Hervey Family Fund



Ovarian cancer is the most lethal gynecological malignancy and the fifth deadliest cancer in women, largely because it frequently returns after chemotherapy. Greg is investigating how a communication system inside ovarian cancer cells, known as the Notch signaling pathway, enables cancer cells to resist chemotherapy and drive tumor regrowth. By elucidating the function of this pathway, Greg's research can help guide the development of drugs that block Notch signaling, with the potential to prevent ovarian cancer relapse and significantly improve long-term outcomes for patients.

Personal Interests: My interests and hobbies include: spending time with my wife, surfing, hiking, playing guitar, playing tennis, and doing martial arts.

DENNIS DIMITRI KRUTKIN

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Bioinformatics

Specialization: Computational Biology, Metagenomics

Donors: ARCS Foundation – San Diego Chapter



Dennis' research focuses on leveraging metagenomics – the practice of reading all the genetic material in a sample to discover which microbes are present and what they are doing, without growing them in the lab. Dennis applies this approach across multiple fields: understanding the human microbiome and health, guiding mouse studies for early therapeutic intervention, revealing how diet shapes the gut microbiome, and supporting ecological restoration and pollution cleanup. His work builds clear, reliable tools that turn massive data into practical decisions for medicine, agriculture, and environmental recovery.

Personal Interests: Outside research, I enjoy traveling, trying new foods, working out, hiking local trails, and spending time with friends and family.



AMANDA NANCY LEE

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Computational Science

Specialization: Artificial Intelligence and Radiology

Donors: Kenneth and Marjorie Blanchard / ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter

Amanda’s research focuses on the development of cutting-edge solutions for healthcare applications centered around the detection and treatment of chronic disease. In particular, she is interested in AI-based approaches that utilize clinical imaging and genetic data. Her graduate research has primarily involved the development of an end-to-end algorithm for CT-based diagnosis and staging of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. In addition to this project, Amanda is developing “self-supervised” AI methods, which use unlabeled data, to expedite medical imaging tasks (e.g., pathology classification, biomarker discovery, and abnormality detection) in chest radiographs.



Personal Interests: I enjoy mentoring undergraduate students, participating in Masters rowing, running half marathons, and learning to make new espresso drinks.

NANCY LEÓN-RIVERA

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Cancer Biology

Donor: Tanya Shierling / ARCS Foundation – San Diego Chapter

Triple-negative breast cancer is one of the most aggressive forms of breast cancer, with limited treatment options and frequent relapse after chemotherapy. Nancy is researching how cancer-associated fibroblasts, which are non-cancerous cells that become activated by surrounding signals in the tumor environment, affect cancer growth and response to treatment through a process called autophagy, or cellular recycling. By uncovering how these fibroblasts create a protective environment for tumors, Nancy hopes to identify new ways to weaken that support system, improve chemotherapy effectiveness, and reduce relapse in patients.



Personal Interests: I enjoy spending time with family and friends, relaxing at home, and playing board games together.



CHRISTINA RODAMA VEZIRIS

San Diego State University / University of California San Diego

College of Sciences

Concentration: Clinical Psychology

Specialization: Neuropsychology, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Donor: [Laura Mateo](#)



Prenatal alcohol exposure and childhood adversity act as adverse factors that disrupt typical neurodevelopment. These prenatal and postnatal adverse experiences affect brain functioning and behavior, resulting in symptoms that are related to increased risk of trouble with the law. Christina’s research aims to understand the underlying neurodevelopmental processes affected by the dual impact of prenatal alcohol exposure and childhood adversity and how this impact can increase the likelihood of trouble with the law. Christina also aims to develop better diagnostic measures that will lead to earlier identification of prenatal alcohol exposure.

Personal Interests: I enjoy reading, playing games, taking walks, and spending time with family and friends.



Scripps Research





STEPHAN MIGUEL FREEMAN

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Chemistry

Specialization: Organic Chemistry

Donors: Drs. Mara and Larry Ybarrondo / ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter



Extracts of the bark of the Galbulimima tree are used in the traditional medicine of Papua New Guinea to relieve pain and induce hallucination, and these effects are attributable to forty small-molecule natural products found in the bark. Stephan is working to access these natural products by chemical synthesis – evidence suggests that Galbulimima alkaloids target central nervous system receptors, but identification of receptor targets has been limited by the low quantities of individual alkaloids in the bark (approx. 10 ppm). Reliable synthetic access to Galbulimima alkaloids will help to discover these molecules' mechanism of action, and might produce a collection of new CNS-active small molecules.

Personal Interests: I love the piano! When I'm not at the lab, I'm working on Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* – one of my favorite pieces ever written.

DIEGO DANIEL GOMEZ-CEBALLOS

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Molecular and Cellular Biology

Specialization: Renal Cancer Biology

Donor: Paul and Cleo Schimmel / ARCS Foundation – San Diego Chapter



Diego studies how our body's internal clock (circadian rhythms) affects kidney function and disease development. He focuses on how the kidney responds to changes in oxygen availability through the hypoxia response, a pathway that has been shown to be under circadian regulation. Specifically, he investigates how certain proteins called transcription factors, which act like master keys that unlock specific parts of our DNA to control these biological pathways. Diego's research looks at how these factors influence the progression of Clear Cell Renal Cell Carcinoma, the most common type of kidney cancer, and how these interactions vary between healthy and diseased kidney states.

Personal Interests: I love to do boxing/kickboxing, hiking, work on cars, play water polo, see a good play, and read historical books.



ANTHONY HAROUT GURUNIAN

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Biophysics

Specialization: Biomolecular Condensate Biophysics

Donor: [The Reuben H. Fleet Foundation](#)

Biomolecular condensates are liquid droplets in the cell which are composed of proteins, salt, and water. Anthony is investigating how these droplets can come into contact with cell membranes and induce a localized voltage, kind of like a tiny battery. This can have significant implications for neuroscience where membrane voltages are responsible for the electrical communication between brain cells. By connecting the fields of condensate biophysics and neuroscience through his research, Anthony hopes to open the door for novel therapeutic approaches in the future.

Personal Interests: I am a classically-trained pianist, and enjoy playing tennis and chess.



CATHERINE YICONG LI

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Virology

Donor: [Toby Eisenberg](#)

The genetic information of human immunodeficiency virus 1 (HIV-1) is encoded in RNA that folds into complex and dynamic 3D structures. Catherine is studying a structured region of the HIV-1 genome essential for viral packaging, which is when new copies of the virus are assembled in the host cell before being released as infectious mature viruses. She is determining the viral packaging capabilities of thousands of RNA mutants to build a quantitative model of HIV-1 RNA function in cells, which will elucidate a novel target for antiviral drug development.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I enjoy reading fiction, taking long walks, watching theater, and traveling.





PIERRE PHILLIP LOCH-TEMZELIDES

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Chemistry

Specialization: Synthetic Organic Chemistry - Total Synthesis

Donor: [The Reuben H. Fleet Foundation](#)



Cembranoid natural products from the coral *Sinularia flexibilis* have long been studied for their unique structures and biological activities. Among them, sinularin (also known as flexibilide) has been investigated for its anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory, and anti-bacterial activities. Pierre's research focuses on the total synthesis of sinularin. This undertaking helps to further understand the bioactivity of this natural product and potentially create medically relevant analogs. It also provides insight into the preparation of all-carbon macrocycles common to the cembranoid motif, a known challenge in synthetic organic chemistry.

Personal Interests: Outside of the lab I am interested in computers (hardware and software), amateur electronics, music, and cooking!

KARENNA MINYUN NG

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Immunology

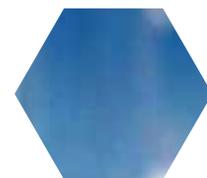
Specialization: Machine Learning

Donors: [Karen and Robert Bowden](#)



Karenna's research focuses on developing antibody language models, which are machine learning tools trained on millions of antibody sequences. Antibodies are crucial for immune defense and widely used in medicine because of their ability to bind targets with high specificity. However, improving their effectiveness using traditional methods is tedious. By leveraging powerful computational resources to analyze large sequence datasets, she aims to train models that learn structural patterns, identify beneficial mutations, and support the efficient design of novel antibodies with enhanced binding and stability.

Personal Interests: I like to dance, travel, and try new ice cream and coffee shops with friends!



ARIANA (ARI) SULPIZIO

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Chemical Biology

Donor: [ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter](#)

Ariana studies small molecules that affect the cGAS-STING pathway, a crucial component of our immune system. When a cell experiences stress from cancer or infection, DNA can mistakenly accumulate in the wrong areas. The cGAS-STING pathway detects this misplaced DNA and signals the immune system to respond. In her research, Ariana has characterized a new inhibitor that could help treat autoimmune disorders caused by the overactivation of this pathway. She has also investigated different classes of pathway activators, revealing important insights that could lead to anti-cancer therapies targeting the cGAS-STING pathway.

Personal Interests: Outside of lab, I enjoy running, playing field hockey, singing in local choirs, and teaching piano lessons.



MADISON FAY WAGNER

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Chemistry

Specialization: Organometallics/Catalysis

Donor: [Dorothy Georgens](#)

Madison specializes in organometallic catalysis, which utilizes transition metals to enact chemical reactions. Her main area of interest is transient directing group (TDG) chemistry, a strategy that uses simple amino acids to control selectivity of products and allows for precise tuning of chemical compounds. Madison's main project involves the TDG controlled difunctionalization of alkynes to yield tetraphenylethylene derivatives. These compounds have applications in materials science, bacteria imaging, molecular motors, and cancer cell diagnostics. Her work has expanded the utility of TDG-enabled chemistry and allowed for detailed study of tetraphenylethylene derivatives.

Personal Interests: I served as Miss Rodeo California 2019 and am heavily involved in the equestrian industry and the western lifestyle.





DRASON HAN ZHANG

Scripps Research

Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences

Concentration: Chemistry

Specialization: Organic Chemistry

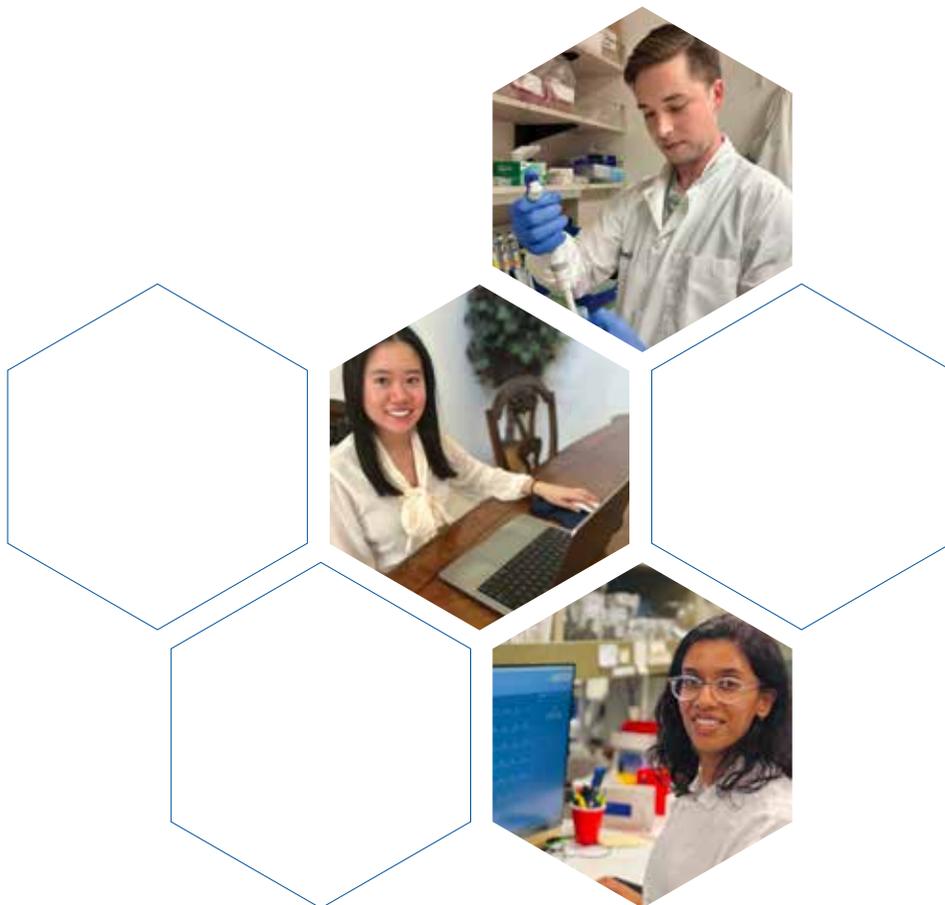
Donor: ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter



There is a need for next-generation opioids that reduce risk of addiction and abuse while maintaining therapeutic efficacy. To do so, it is important to understand the biological processes impacted by opioid receptor signaling. However, such studies are complicated by the variety of different effects that these compounds may induce. Drason is synthesizing novel opioid compounds to examine their efficacy, localization in brain tissue, and downstream biological pathways. He hopes that in doing so, he can help improve the ability to design analgesics with zero or minimal addictive potential.

Personal Interests: When not in the lab, I enjoy chess.

UC San Diego





RIMJHIM AGARWAL

University of California San Diego

School of Medicine

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Immunology

Donor: [The Paul Bechtner Foundation / ARCS Foundation – San Diego Chapter](#)



Chikungunya virus is a mosquito-borne virus that causes fever and joint pain. Due to climate change, outbreaks are now appearing in new areas like France, Italy, and southern China. While many people recover quickly, about 30% of infected individuals, primarily women, develop chronic joint pain similar to arthritis, which can last for years. My research focuses on understanding how the immune system responds to chikungunya virus in chronic cases. This knowledge could help us develop better treatments to reduce long-term arthritis symptoms and improve quality of life for those affected.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I enjoy reading, exploring San Diego with friends and traveling.

HANNAH ROSE BATTEY

University of California San Diego / San Diego State University

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

Concentration: Public Health

Specialization: Epidemiology

Donor: [Lambert Foundation for Education](#)



Hannah is investigating the most common bacterial pathogens responsible for community-acquired pneumonia. Her research focuses on identifying which bacterial peptides are recognized by the immune system during infection. Currently, pneumonia treatments often begin without confirming the bacterial cause, leading to potential disease mismanagement, prolonged illness, and negative outcomes. Hannah aims to discover bacterial T cell epitopes that could be used in developing rapid diagnostic assays or vaccines, improving both treatment precision and patient outcomes.

Personal Interests: I enjoy long solo hikes whilst listening to audiobooks, backpacking with my twin brother, traveling with friends and enjoying new restaurants in San Diego.



DANIEL MILGRAM BEAGLEHOLE

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Computer Science and Engineering

Specialization: Machine Learning

Donor: [Beyster Family Foundation](#)

One of the biggest mysteries in the study of deep learning is why neural networks are able to perform well at test time (i.e., on data that was not used for learning). Daniel's work demonstrates that neural networks achieve this remarkable test performance by learning a particular statistic that is specific to the given dataset (a phenomenon known as feature learning). Daniel has shown how this mechanism can explain a variety of "intelligent" behaviors in deep learning, including the emergence of edge detectors in networks used for vision tasks. Further, he demonstrated that the mechanism of feature learning identified in his work can be implemented in a simple, fast, and interpretable method that gives state-of-the-art performance on tabular data.

Personal Interests: Research is my passion, but I am also an avid Brazilian Jiu Jitsu practitioner. I also enjoy playing guitar, learning to surf, and reading philosophy.



MORGAN M. CAUDLE

University of California San Diego / San Diego State University

School of Medicine / College of Sciences

Concentration: Clinical Psychology

Specialization: Experimental Psychopathology

Donors: [Carlos and Sharon Arbelaez](#)

Anxiety, mood, and traumatic stress disorders are highly prevalent and associated with impaired physical health and cognitive functioning. Despite the existence of evidence-based treatments, many individuals do not fully recover; therefore, there is a need for the development of novel treatments. Under the mentorship of Dr. Jessica Bomyea, Morgan is assisting with testing the effects of a novel computerized cognitive training program aimed at improving symptoms by improving cognitive functioning. Additionally, she is investigating the effects of this cognitive training program on neural functioning and related symptom change.

Personal Interests: In my free time I enjoy traveling to new places and snowboarding.





KAYLA M. ERLER

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Structural Engineering

Specialization: Seismic Protective Systems

Donor: [The Reuben H. Fleet Foundation](#)



Kayla specializes in research on the use of seismic isolation devices to protect buildings and bridges from damaging earthquakes. These devices have proven highly effective in reducing the forces transferred to structures and minimizing the need for repairs and downtime after seismic events. Her thesis focuses on the performance of these devices in bridges under extreme earthquake conditions, aiming to improve the understanding and reliability of design practices and ensure California's bridges—often critical lifelines—are adequately protected.

Personal Interests: I spend as much of my free time as possible out with my beloved horse, whom I raised from birth.

DANE FORD-ROSHON

University of California San Diego

School of Medicine

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Neurobiology

Donor: [Elizabeth and Joseph Taft](#)



In health, the blood-brain barrier restricts blood and blood components from accessing brain tissue. However, in some neurological diseases, the blood-brain barrier can become dysfunctional, allowing blood proteins to access the brain. Dane studies how these blood proteins activate harmful inflammatory responses within microglia, the immune cells of the brain. By uncovering new ways to control how microglia respond to blood proteins, Dane hopes to identify new strategies to treat conditions such as multiple sclerosis, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease.

Personal Interests: I really enjoy skiing, running, and being outdoors, but my favorite pastime is cycling, whether its mountain biking, road racing or track.



WILFREDO GABRIEL GONZALEZ RIVERA

University of California San Diego

School of Medicine

Concentration: Biomedical Informatics

Specialization: Precision Medicine

Donor: [Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation](#)

Wilfredo focuses on combining genetics, genomics, and social science to understand the underlying causes of significant health disparities among individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in the United States. As a first-generation Latinx in higher education, his work emphasizes the critical need to include these underrepresented groups in genomic research to enhance the accuracy and generalizability of precision medicine for all populations.

Personal Interests: I am interested in exploring the world around me and looking for nice coffee shops to enjoy reading or coding.



RAYYAN MOHAMMED GORASHI

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Bioengineering

Specialization: Biomaterials and Sex-specific Disease Modeling

Donor: [ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter](#)

Rayyan's research leverages biomaterial tools to better understand sex differences in heart valve disease. Current treatments are limited to pharmaceutical drugs or invasive, total valve replacement procedures. Drug treatments are often ineffective for females due to an incomplete understanding of female-specific disease mechanisms. Rayyan utilizes biomaterials to create physiologically relevant disease models to study sex-specific mechanisms. More broadly, Rayyan seeks to understand the sex differences in heart valve disease progression to create more equitable treatment options for both male and female patients.

Personal Interests: I enjoy nature/landscape and portrait photography, surfing, working out, video games, and spending time with family.





JONATHAN A. GUNN

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Bioengineering

Specialization: Immunotherapy and Nanomedicine

Donor: ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter



Jonathan is developing a new way to use self-amplifying RNA as a “protein factory” inside the body. By packaging this RNA into tiny particles and injecting them directly into lymph nodes, his research makes it possible to produce helpful proteins for long periods of time from just one dose. In cancer treatment, this includes proteins that attract and organize immune cells to better fight tumors. Jonathan’s work could lead to more effective, affordable, and widely accessible therapies for patients.

Personal Interests: Chess, tennis, pickleball, hiking, traveling.

DYLAN COLE HIRSCH

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Mechanical Engineering

Specialization: Control Theory and Reinforcement Learning

Donor: The Reuben H. Fleet Science Foundation



Today, we increasingly rely on complex algorithms to control our hardware, such as in self-driving cars and robotics. These algorithms allow such technologies to autonomously achieve feats that previously required human oversight, but they can fail in unpredictable ways, resulting in harm to people and infrastructure. Dylan’s research focuses on designing algorithms to make these technologies safer by utilizing modern advancements in applied mathematics and machine learning. He is also interested in re-purposing the same algorithms for medical applications via automatically designing pharmaceutical treatment regimens that maximize patient safety.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I like running, cooking, and watching movies.



KATHERINE EUGENIA IZHIKEVICH

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Computer Science

Specialization: Computer Security

Donor: [Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation](#)

Katherine studies how to detect attackers in enterprise networks before they cause data breaches or ransomware attacks. She is currently building a system that detects, in real time, when an attacker is planning their next attack on a given enterprise. The scientific contribution of this system lies in differentiating between benign behaviors (e.g., employees simply checking their email), misconfigured behaviors (e.g., TVs attempting to connect to every device on the network), and malicious behaviors (e.g., attackers looking for vulnerabilities to exploit).

Personal Interests: I was a ballerina for 16 years, but have recently become a runner. I love to read and creatively write.



SARAH LANE KO

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Materials Chemistry

Specialization: Energy Storage Materials and NMR Crystallography

Donor: [Kathryn Crippen Hattox Endowment](#)

A major component in the mitigation of global warming is the advancement of sustainable and efficient energy storage. Sarah investigates the synthesis and structure of novel materials for use as lithium-ion battery electrodes for the improvement of energy storage materials. She seeks to understand the charge storage mechanisms in unique new materials and the synthetic mechanisms to access these materials, with the goal of utilizing this understanding to improve batteries towards longer lifetimes, higher capacities, and faster charging.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I enjoy reading, baking, singing, trying new coffee shops, listening to music, and hanging out with my dogs.





BENJAMIN AARON LAM

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Chemical Engineering

Specialization: Nanoengineering and Nanotechnology

Donor: Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickinson Foundation



Benjamin's research focuses on the intersection of chemical engineering, nanotechnology, and materials science with the goal of advancing medical device technologies and improving human health. His current research focuses on understanding the nanoscale interactions between peptides and nanoparticles in their assembly and disassembly and developing computational tools to explain the experimental phenomena through molecular simulations. These discoveries offer knowledge that would enhance peptide-based therapeutics, drug discovery, diagnostics, environmental monitoring, and nanotechnology.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I enjoy volunteering, being outdoors, and spending time with family and friends.

ARAZ MAJNOONIAN

University of California San Diego

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

Concentration: Global Health

Specialization: Gender-Based Violence Prevention

Donor: ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter



Araz is conducting pioneering research to evaluate domestic violence support services nationwide in Armenia. Her study, the first of its kind in the country, adopts a participatory approach involving survivors of violence, domestic violence support center staff, and partner organizations to assess the impact and accessibility of these services. By generating evidence-based insights and recommendations, her research aims to enhance support for survivors and inform policy and practice. Her work contributes to the global fight against gender-based violence, offering valuable lessons for low and middle-income countries.

Personal Interests: I love outdoor adventures that include chasing waterfalls, climbing rocks, and traveling. I also like to spend time volunteering with human rights advocacy organizations.



DANIEL MILSHTEYN

University of California San Diego

Physical Sciences

Concentration: Chemistry and Biochemistry

Specialization: Lipid Biochemistry and Biophysics

Donor: [ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter](#)

Daniel studies the regulation of negatively curved lipids in cell membrane dynamics and environmental adaptation. His primary research focuses on the biophysical roles of cholesterol in mitochondrial fission driven by multi-organelle contacts. In addition, he collaborates with scientists from the Extreme Biophysics Research Coordination Network to understand the roles of lipids in adapting model organisms to survive in deep-sea or high-pressure environments. Daniel is training in interdisciplinary approaches including super resolution live-cell microscopy, membrane biophysics, and synthetic biology to understand the implications of lipid composition across scales from cell membranes to organismal physiology and disease.

Personal Interests: In my free time, I enjoy listening to music, getting lost in nature, and roller skating.



SPENCER LOUIS NELSON

University of California San Diego

Physical Sciences

Concentration: Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics

Specialization: Protein Ubiquitination

Donor: [ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter](#)

Spencer studies the biophysical impact and regulatory roles of protein ubiquitination through the use of novel ubiquitinated-protein purification techniques. His primary research focus explores how differing ubiquitin chains can alter the aggregation, degradation and toxicity of amyloidogenic proteins, particularly those related to neurological disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. Through his research, he aims to elucidate the specific consequences of protein ubiquitination for aggregating proteins and hopes this will aid in the development of novel therapeutics utilizing targeted protein degradation strategies.

Personal Interests: When I'm not in the lab I enjoy watching anime or tending to my collection of carnivorous tropical pitcher plants.





RENNY KA HANG NG

University of California San Diego / San Diego State University

Division of Biological Sciences

Concentration: Biological Sciences

Specialization: Olfaction

Donor: Virginia Lynch Grady Endowment



Day/night cycles impact both physiology and behavior to help animals adapt to rhythmic environmental cues, but it is unclear whether primary chemosensory neurons (including neurons which mediate the sense of smell) respond to stimuli in a rhythmic way to then guide rhythmic behaviors. Renny studies the context-dependent neuromodulation of olfaction, and his current research project characterizes how day/night cycles modulate olfactory acuity and odor-guided behaviors. His research reveals how neuromodulatory impairment in the sensory periphery can gate day/night-regulated behaviors, apart from the influence of central circadian mechanisms.

Personal Interests: Hiking, camping, marksmanship.

RENEE ELIZABETH OLES

University of California San Diego

School of Medicine

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Microbial Genetics and Genomics

Donor: The Reuben H. Fleet Foundation



Renee is investigating how gut inflammation affects beneficial bacteria in our intestines and whether these changes worsen diseases like Inflammatory Bowel Disease. She focuses on a common gut bacterium called *Bacteroides fragilis*, which usually helps keep our gut healthy. Renee studies how this bacterium adapts to the stressful conditions of inflammation, such as exposure to harmful oxygen molecules. By understanding these bacterial changes, her research aims to uncover new ways to treat or prevent Inflammatory Bowel Disease, ultimately improving gut health and patient outcomes.

Personal Interests: Outside of lab, I enjoy rock-wall climbing and painting.



AVERY PONG

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Bioinformatics

Specialization: Cancer Biology

Donor: Hervey Family Fund

Avery is studying how immune cells communicate with one another in the context of cancer treatment and inflammatory disease progression. He uses computational tools to mine next-generation sequencing data rendered from RNA molecules in tumor cells (for cancer studies) and inflamed fibroblasts (for allergic conditions). This yields information on which cells are producing proteins that could be used to interact with other neighboring cells. At the scale of hundreds of thousands of cells, this research delivers insights into wayward, diseased communication axes that could be targeted by therapeutics to improve patient outcomes.

Personal Interests: I like to climb, play piano, dance, play ultimate frisbee, and road bike.



NATALIE ELAINE QUACH

University of California San Diego

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

Concentration: Biostatistics

Specialization: Causal Inference

Donor: ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter

Reducing tobacco use remains a significant public health goal. In particular, cigarette smoking is a preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Natalie's research develops an approach to uncover the mechanisms through which e-cigarette use influences cigarette smoking abstinence. By shedding light on the mechanisms in which e-cigarette use impacts smoking abstinence, Natalie's research strengthens the scientific tools available to researchers and supports the development of strategies to increase smoking cessation and improve public health.

Personal Interests: I enjoy spending time with family and friends, playing board games, and meditating.





JARED SIMMONS

University of California San Diego

School of Medicine

Concentration: Biomedical Sciences

Specialization: Dermatology

Donors: Hervey Family Fund



Jared's work in the Gallo Lab focuses on interactions between cell types in the skin and how they control inflammation. He has found that fibroblasts, the major structural cell of the dermis, are far more important to inflammatory response than was previously thought. A better understanding of the unique activity of these cells will provide new targets for developing therapeutics, and it may pave the way to improving outcomes in skin infections and inflammatory skin diseases which affect millions of people.

Personal Interests: My husband and I got a puppy this year, and he keeps us very busy!

CHESSON SCOTT SIPLING

University of California San Diego

Physical Sciences

Concentration: Physics

Specialization: Physical Approaches to Computation

Donor: Wally Schirra Memorial Endowment Fund



Conventional computers, while ubiquitous in modern society, fail to solve a wide variety of problems efficiently. Chesson's research aims to combat this: he is studying an alternative computing paradigm known as "MemComputing" which relies upon physical principles, rather than algorithms, to excel where traditional approaches have struggled. Such optimization is of paramount importance to avoid the computational bottlenecks being faced in the domains of private industry (passenger aircraft scheduling), public safety (autonomous self-driving vehicles), national security (RSA encryption), and more.

Personal Interests: I love running (from 5ks to ultramarathons) and backpacking! I also enjoy drumming and performing live with my band.



NOAH STAPPER

University of California San Diego/San Diego State University

School of Medicine / College of Sciences

Concentration: Clinical Psychology

Specialization: Suicidality

Donor: ARCS Foundation – San Diego Chapter

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death and 1 in 10 individuals experiences suicidal thoughts in their lifetime. Noah’s research focuses on novel treatments for individuals that are experiencing thoughts of suicide. More specifically, he studies brain stimulation techniques, such as transcranial magnetic stimulation, as well as the use of ketamine to reduce suicidal thinking. Although ketamine has shown strong short-term benefits, its effects are often temporary. To address this, Noah studies how combining ketamine with cognitive behavioral therapy might provide longer-lasting relief. To optimize targeted treatments Noah also studies neurophysiological biomarkers of suicidal ideation and treatment response.



Personal Interests: In my free time I enjoy gardening, cooking, and taking a run along the beach.

LAUREN ALEXANDRIA VALDEZ

University of California San Diego

School of Medicine

Concentration: Neurobiology

Specialization: RNA Biology in Neurodegenerative Diseases

Donor: Hervey Family Fund

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is a very progressive and fatal age-related disease that manifests as muscle paralysis—due to death of motor neurons—in its early stages. After learning about this disease, Lauren has joined the Chaim lab and focuses on RNA damage and RNA binding protein dysfunction in result of oxidative damage in patients with ALS. For her project, she is attempting to identify where in a neuron this disease begins as science and society are unsure of this answer.



Personal Interests: I love all types of arts and crafts activities as well as reading.



BRANDON JAMES VOGT

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Bioengineering

Concentration: Sex Differences/Cardiovascular Disease

Donor: Kurt Benirschke Family



Brandon's research focuses on uncovering the mechanisms underlying sex differences in heart valve disease. By studying both sex-specific and patient-specific drivers of disease progression, he aims to identify optimal drug combinations tailored to individual patients. His work seeks to advance targeted therapies for heart valve disease, improving treatment outcomes across diverse patient populations. Ultimately, his research supports the development of personalized medicine approaches that reduce disparities in care and provide new insights into the heterogeneity of disease progression and treatment responses.

Personal Interests: My interests outside of research include going to the movie theater, rock climbing, and running.

OLIVIA JADE WENG

University of California San Diego

Jacobs School of Engineering

Concentration: Computer Science and Engineering

Specialization: Hardware-software Codesign

Donor: Donald C. and Elizabeth M. Dickenson Foundation



Olivia conducts research on designing hardware with the software in mind and vice versa to make computing devices more efficient and resilient. This benefits science and society because high-energy physicists require cutting-edge computing technology to complete their experiments, like at the CERN Large Hadron Collider. In collaboration with CERN physicists, I build neural network software and hardware that meets their computing needs so that they can discover new physics.

Personal Interests: I regularly attend the theater.



University of San Diego





BASMA ADAMS

University of San Diego

Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science

Concentration: Nursing

Specialization: Diabetes

Donor: Laurie and Michael Roeder / ARCS Foundation - San Diego Chapter



Basma studies how diabetes medical technology, especially insulin pump therapy, affects long-term diabetes management. She explores not only the technology itself but also how psychological factors like burnout, confidence, and emotional well-being influence how people use these devices every day. By examining both the medical and human sides of diabetes care, her research aims to improve treatment outcomes and help individuals manage their condition more effectively over time. She aims to improve daily life for people with diabetes through her research to shape more personalized, effective treatment strategies that go beyond medicine to support long-term health and well-being.

Personal Interests: I enjoy writing, reading, and spending time with my friends, family, and my two affectionate cats.

SANDY JEAN JELLEN

University of San Diego

Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science

Concentration: Nursing

Specialization: Oncology

Donor: Beyster Family Foundation



There is a high incidence of women who have experienced a form of physical sexual violence. Patients who have experienced sexual trauma are particularly vulnerable because they can become anxious and retraumatized during their medical experience. Sandy's focus is on improving the screening process for identifying patients with a sexual trauma history in order to provide trauma-informed care. Her research will also study the relationships among sexual trauma (yes/no), resilience, help-seeking experiences, and coping within the adult gynecologic oncology population.

Personal Interests: I enjoy traveling with my family, exploring different cultures, local cuisine, and visiting all the Disney parks around the world.



KRISTINA MARIA LOPEZ

University of San Diego

Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science

Concentration: Nursing

Specialization: Perianesthesia Nursing

Donor: [Beyster Family Foundation](#)

The use of minimally invasive technologies like robotics continues to increase in surgical specialties. Patients undergoing robotic surgery may be discharged home directly from the recovery room. Kristina's research will explore potential relationships between patient comorbidities, anesthetic agents, and same-day discharge rates in robotic gynecologic surgery patients to improve quality care, prevent postoperative complications, and reduce unexpected overnight admissions.

Personal Interests: In my downtime, I enjoy hiking, walks on the beach, Jeeping, and being out in nature.



JESSICA LEE RITCHIE

University of San Diego

Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science

Concentration: Nursing

Specialization: Critical Care

Donor: [Beyster Family Foundation](#)

Over 20 million patients receive treatment in intensive care units (ICUs) each year in the United States. Many of these patients are unable to participate in care decisions and rely on family members or other appointed surrogates to advocate on their behalf. Deficiencies in collaborative decision-making between surrogates and the clinical team result in negative mental and physical outcomes for both the patient and surrogate. Jessica's research will focus on understanding ICU surrogate experiences of shared decision-making during episodes of acute clinical deterioration within adult ICUs.

Personal Interests: Outside of work and study, I enjoy traveling and spending time outdoors with my husband and young daughter.



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