

INSIDER



January 2026

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...



Leslie Bruce

Before you bid farewell to year-end retrospectives, I hope you'll pause with a cup of tea and savor the following pages, which highlight the final months of ARCS San Diego's activities in 2025.

No moss grew under the feet of this membership! Thanks to the hard work of our outstanding Board of Directors and Committee Members, we truly *engaged*—with Scholars, Members, and Educational Partners alike. We also connected with corporations interested in

supporting science at the La Jolla Playhouse Innovation Night, with the hope that one or more will choose to sponsor our 2026 Scientist of the Year Celebration. Together, these efforts strengthened our commitment to our chapter and, most importantly, to the Scholars we serve.

Scholar engagement began at the Fall General Meeting, where 18 new Scholars introduced themselves and their research. They joined members at luncheon tables, allowing for meaningful, personal connections. All Scholars were also invited to our annual — and always fabulous — Scholar picnic at **Catie Madani's** home, where they had the opportunity to mingle further with one another and with many Members.

Members delighted in each other's company on several other occasions as well, including the Fall General Meeting, the Frozen Zoo Field Trip, and the Holiday Tea & Bubbly Party hosted at **Barbara McColl's** incredible home. We were also thrilled to welcome two new members into our family of smart women—please join me in welcoming **Sheryl Nespor** and **Meera Venkatesh**!

Our engagement with Educational Partners was equally rewarding. We met with Presidents, Deans, and Department Heads, as well as Scholars, during three check presentation ceremonies. In addition, chapter representatives were honored on behalf of ARCS San Diego at SDSU Philanthropy Night.

When you add these engagement opportunities to the generous financial contributions of our Members and supporters, it's clear 2025 concluded spectacularly. By year's end, we netted \$60,678 in Member Giving – almost

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE... Continued from Page 1

\$7,000 more than last year at his time! Thank you to everyone who supported the campaign, and special thanks to **Danielle James** for her generous \$3,000 matching gift for donations made before the end of the year. That push netted almost \$20,000 in donations! (If you have yet to make your annual contribution to Member Giving, it's certainly not too late and you can do so [here](#).)

What a pace! We are *thriving*—thanks to all of *you*. Best wishes for a very Happy New Year to you and your loved ones. I eagerly look forward to all that 2026 will bring.

Warm regards,

Leslie K. Bruce, President

ARCS Foundation, San Diego Chapter

Holiday Tea & Bubbly Party (December 13, 2025)

Over 60 ARCS members, spouses, and guests gathered on Saturday, December 13 at the beautifully decorated La Jolla home of **Barbara McColl** to celebrate the holiday season. While sipping tea and wine, we enjoyed an array of delicious pastries and charcuterie and delighted in the opportunity to reconnect and reflect on another outstanding year for ARCS.

Our sincere thanks to **Rachel Collins** and her team for organizing this joyful event, and to **Michael Roeder, Barbara Bry,** and **Leslie Bruce** for capturing the festive spirit in these photos.



Cathie Atkins, Rachel Collins



Clint Bruce, Leslie Bruce, Ann Hill



Barbara Doren, Laurie Roeder,
Joy Kirsch, Paulette Roberts



Yolanda Walther-Meade,
Cindy Goodman, Laurie Roeder

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Holiday Tea and Bubbly Party

(December 13, 2025)... Continued from Page 2



Barbara McColl



Brian Thomas, Gwynn Thomas,
Linda Johnson



Sharon Arbelaez,
Yolanda Walther-Meade, Susan Johnson



Jim Harrah, Suzanne Dixon, Mike Dixon, Sue Dramm,
Teri Harrah, Elizabeth Taft



Sue Dramm, Karen Bowden

USD Check Presentation ***(December 11, 2025)***

The USD Hahn School of Nursing hosted ARCS representatives **Cathie Atkins** and **Leslie Bruce** for the annual check presentation ceremony on December 11, 2025. ARCS Member and USD Liaison **Caroline Etland**, also an Associate Professor of Nursing attended as well. USD President **Dr. James Harris**, School of Nursing Dean **Dr. Jane Georges**, and **Dr. Cynthia Connelly**, who serves as Director for both Nursing Research and the Doctor of Philosophy Nursing Program, expressed their gratitude for our past support (\$775,000) and ongoing support of four Scholars currently in the program.

Second-year USD ARCS Scholar, **Sandy Jellen** provided a nice overview of her research that explores the role of sexual trauma screening within the gynecologic oncology setting. Sandy is receiving strong support from the nursing leadership. In addition to her

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USD Check Presentation

(December 11, 2025)... Continued from Page 3



Caroline Etland, Jane Georges, Cathie Atkins,
Sandy Jellen, Leslie Bruce, James Harris

work toward the PhD, Sandy also serves as a Clinical Nurse Specialist at the UC San Diego Health Cancer Services. She expressed her personal appreciation of the ARCS Scholarship.

It is clear that the School of Nursing has strong support from the President and USD clearly appreciates what we do for their students.

Scholar Picnic (November 16, 2025)

Despite a surprise run of rain showers, the much-loved Scholar Picnic at **Catie Madani**'s beautiful home, with its sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and Mission Bay, went off without a hitch. Guests enjoyed an array of delicious food and drink, including made-to-order tacos from the taco truck and an assortment of irresistible desserts. Scholars mingled with ARCS Members and one another, creating a lively and welcoming



atmosphere. **Leigh Pierce**—who has led and participated in numerous San Diego-based biotech ventures—gave a candid and engaging talk about her career path, encouraging Scholars to keep an eye out for new opportunities and emphasizing San Diego's role as one of the nation's leading biotech hubs. Overall, it was a warm, upbeat gathering that fostered new connections between Members and Scholars.

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Scholar Picnic (November 16, 2025)...

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Tamia Strachan, Michael Madani, taco provider



Chesson Sipling



Rachel Collins, Cathie Atkins,
Brittany Conley, Tanya Schierling



Alexa Hudnut, Leigh Pierce



Leigh Pierce, Madison Wagner



Leslie Bruce, Leigh Pierce, Catie Madani



Field Trip to Frozen Zoo (San Diego Zoo Safari Park) (November 13, 2025)



Nineteen ARCS members were treated to a fascinating field trip to the animal hospital and “frozen zoo” at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, thanks to ARCS Member **Danielle James** who serves as a Volunteer Research Assistant at the park and Field Trips Co-chair **Cindy Wollaeger**. Members rode in a flatbed truck through the park to places the public cannot go. We were shepherded by experienced, well-trained veterinarians



and technicians, seeing for ourselves how animals of every stripe, size and weight receive healthcare. One vet who couldn't attend was at the zoo giving a root canal to a grizzly bear!

In addition to the hospital, labs and pharmacy, members were in thrall with the Frozen Zoo® which, according to the department's own



Front center (l to r): Tami Strachan, Laurie Roeder
First row (l to r): Toby Eisenberg, Linda Johnson, Cindy Wollaeger, Rachel Collins, Kimberly Miller, Ann Siemens, Cindy Goodman, Danielle James, Kristin Boyd, Jill Baltan, Lisa Perich
Back row (l to r): Alexa Hudnut, Teri Harrah, Leslie Bruce, Andy Correnti, Margaret Zoehrer, Cassie Freund, Megan Owen

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Field Trip to Frozen Zoo (San Diego Zoo Safari Park) (November 13, 2025)...

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description, is “nothing short of a treasury of life on Earth. This indispensable resource, part of our Wildlife Biodiversity Bank, holds frozen living cells from more than 11,500 individual animals of 1,300 species or subspecies, many of them endangered or even extinct. Within these microscopic samples lies the extraordinary potential to reintroduce valuable genetic diversity into wildlife populations, safeguarding species for generations to come.” The Frozen Zoo® which changed conservation science forever, was founded by none other than **Dr. Kurt Benirschke**, our Scientist of the Year in 1997 and father of ARCS San Diego Chapter President Elect, **Ingrid Benirschke-Perkins**.



Afterwards, the members enjoyed lunch and camaraderie at The Watering Hole restaurant within the park as various animals lumbered by on the fields below. A big thank you to **Leslie Bruce** for the write-up and **Mike Roeder** for the photos from this enlightening field trip!

SDSU Check Presentation (November 12, 2025)



Front row (l to r): Jeff Roberts, Cathie Atkins, Tanya Schierling, Adela de la Torre, Leslie Bruce, Bill Tong
Back row (l to r): Adrian Vargas, Carmelo Interlando, Kian Bagheri, Amanda Lee, Morgan Farrell, Christina Veziris, Nancy Leon-Rivera, Gregory Jordan, Brittany Conley

SDSU hosted the ARCS check ceremony with President **Adela de la Torre**, Provost **Bill Tong**, Sciences Dean **Jeff Roberts**, and Associate Dean **Carmelo Interlando** in attendance. President de la Torre offered a particularly heartfelt expression of gratitude for ARCS's scholarship support, echoed by both Dean Roberts and Provost Tong. ARCS representatives **Leslie Bruce**, **Tanya Schierling**, and **Cathie Atkins** were present, and each of the eight attending ARCS Scholars shared brief overviews of their research and personally expressed their thanks for the organization's support.



UCSD Check Presentation (November 4, 2025)

The UCSD check ceremony was held at Joya Kitchen this year, where a lovely spread of food was offered. **Leslie Bruce, Sue Kalish, Elizabeth Taft, Pam Werner** and **Cathie Atkins** attended from ARCS. A good number of the ARCS Scholars from UCSD attended and we were joined by the Executive Vice Chancellor, **Elizabeth Simmons**, the Dean of the Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs (GEPA) **Judy Kim**, as well as the Assistant Dean of GEPA, **Giulia Hoffman**.

They all expressed sincere appreciation for the support their students receive from ARCS. Leslie gave a brief overview of ARCS and **Wilfredo Gabriel Gonzalez Rivera**, a UCSD ARCS Scholar who has won many awards in addition to ARCS, provided his thanks to ARCS explaining his amazing journey as a first-generation, low-income PhD candidate from Puerto Rico who earned his BA in computer science and biotechnology from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez to acceptance to one of the top Biomedical Informatics programs in the country at UCSD.



Natalie Quach, Elizabeth Taft, Brandon Vogt, Cathie Atkins, Pam Werner, Judy Kim, Leslie Bruce, Elizabeth Simmons, Rimjhim Agarwal, Sue Kalish, Dylan Hirsch, Renny Ng, Wilfredo Gabriel Gonzalez Rivera, Benjamin Lam

Fall General Meeting (October 28, 2025)

Seventy-two members, ARCS Scholars and guests heard 19 new inspiring ARCS Scholars explain their ground breaking research at the October 28 General Meeting at La Jolla Country Club.

"My favorite quote is 'Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars,'" said **Pierre Loch-Temzelides**, who is studying chemistry at the Skaggs Graduate School of Chemical and Biological Sciences at Scripps Research. His research focuses on understanding how natural products from coral can be used to treat diseases.

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Fall General Meeting (October 28, 2025)...

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Many of the new Scholars are first generation to graduate from college. **Madison Wagner**, who is also studying chemistry at Skaggs, is the first in her family to graduate from high school. Her road to graduate school included starting at community college and serving as Miss Rodeo California 2019.

The Scholars are involved in diverse research—investigating treatments for ovarian cancer and aggressive breast cancer, simple ways to track pollution, and strategies on how to prevent suicide.

Noah Stapper, who is in a joint program with SDSU and UCSD, told the audience that every 40 seconds, someone in the world commits suicide and 50 people attempt it. His research examines how combining ketamine with cognitive behavioral therapy might provide longer-lasting relief.



Nancy León-Rivera, Leslie Bruce, Doris Ellsworth, Barbara McColl, Margaret Dudas



Madison Wagner, Kimberly Miller, Peggy Hanley, Anthony Gurunian



Karen Bowden, Barbara Starkey, Robin Luby, Meera Venkatesh



Ginny Chacos, Jessica Ritchie, Kelsey Dale, Brittany Conley



Jill Baltan, Laurie Roeder, Teri Harrah

The Scholars also talked about what they do outside of the lab— hike, surf, play the piano and guitar, ride horses and participate in many sports including tennis and water polo.

Hearing the 19 Scholars speak with such passion and clarity, it was impossible not to feel optimistic about the future and why we are ARCS members.

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Fall General Meeting (October 28, 2025)...

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Ann Hill, Gregory Jordan, Greta Treadgold, Toby Eisenberg



Ginny Chacos, Genesis Barzallo,
Cindy Wollaeger



Alice Brown, Barbara Starkey, Jan Shaw, Pattie Wellborn



Noah Stapper, Priscilla Moxley, Danielle James,
Ann Siemens, Brandon Vogt



Karenn Ng, Robin Luby, Meera Venkatesh, Diego Gomez-Caballos



Gwynn Thomas, Lisa Perich



Grace Miller, Dane Ford-Roshon,
Marti Panarisi, Sarah Ko, Kelsey Dale



Cathie Atkins, Suzanne Dixon, Tami Strachan,
Pierre Loch-Temzelides

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Fall General Meeting (October 28, 2025)...

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Dylan Hirsch, Cindy Goodman, Sue Hylton, Rachel Collins, Sue Kalish, Carolyn Sharp, Elizabeth Taft, Rimjhim Agarwal

Innovation Night at La Jolla Playhouse (October 20, 2025)

Four ARCS members joined hundreds of other guests at Innovation Night at La Jolla Playhouse to honor fellow ARCS member **Dr. Martha Dennis**. Accolades from San Diego titans of tech flowed freely both in person and via this inspiring video introduction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XDomKmZ2tA>

La Jolla Playhouse Managing Director, **Debby Buchholz**, described Martha as, “a trailblazer whose pioneering work in telecommunications, technology and business has shaped industries and inspired generations. Beyond her remarkable professional achievements, Dr. Dennis has given deeply of herself to strengthen our region through mentorship, philanthropy and advocacy for the arts and sciences.”



Martha Dennis



Leslie Bruce, Barbara Bry, Martha Dennis

Attending from our Chapter were **Leslie Bruce, Kristin Boyd, Barbara Bry** and **Ann Siemens**, making efforts to connect with corporations potentially interested in sponsoring ARCS Scholars through our Chapter.



SDSU Philanthropy Night (October 20, 2025)



Robin Luby, Elizabeth Becker, Morgan Farrell,
Cathie Atkins

On a beautiful mid-October evening, San Diego State University hosted its annual *Celebrating Philanthropy Dinner* honoring donors who have contributed more than \$1 million to the university—a group that proudly includes ARCS San Diego. This year, marking our 40th anniversary, ARCS has surpassed \$3.5 million in total contributions to SDSU—an extraordinary milestone! Representing ARCS at the event were Cathie Atkins (VP, University Relations), **Ingrid Benirschke-Perkins** (President Elect), **Robin Luby** (ARCS member and major SDSU donor), and current SDSU ARCS Scholars **Elizabeth Becker** and **Morgan Farrell** (2025–2026).

New Member Profile



Meera Venkatesh is a long-time resident of San Diego having come from India in 1970. She retired three years ago after a successful career at General Atomics and Fujitsu before that. She is a strong supporter and passionate about women in STEM and has mentored many female professionals in their careers. She came to the US as an American Field Service exchange student in 1966 and has received a Bachelor Degree in Physics from India and a Masters Degree in Computer Science from Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles. She loves to be with family and friends and has traveled extensively with her husband.



Updates from ARCS Scholars & Scholar Alumni



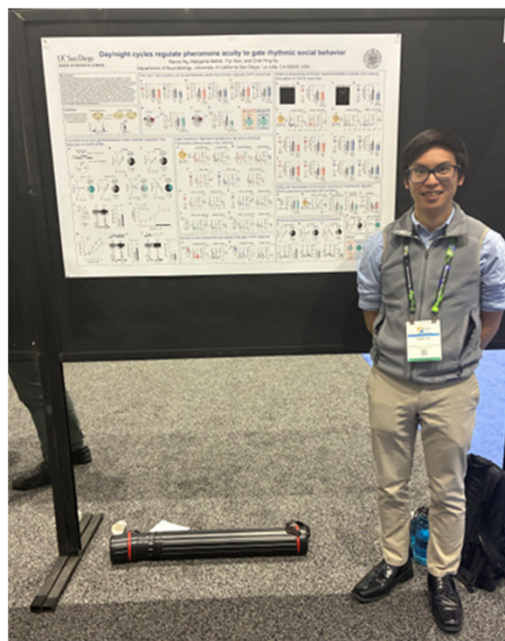
Avery Pong (2025–2026 ARCS Scholar at UCSD), a leader at Nucleate San Diego, was excited to share the organization's 2024–2025 Impact Report, which underscores its commitment to equity in STEM and its role in uniting academia, industry, and nonprofit partners across San Diego's biotech ecosystem.

In 2024, Nucleate expanded to 45+ chapters across 21 countries, uniting 800+ volunteer leaders, 600+ teams, and 180+ ventures that have collectively raised \$570M+ to advance human and planetary health.

This year's report centers on the people behind the science: PhD students, post-docs, and early-career researchers launching companies at a time when support systems are disappearing. You can learn more about Nucleate and the 2024-2025 Impact Report here: <https://nucleatehq.medium.com/amid-funding-cuts-nucleates-2024-2025-impact-report-spotlights-a-resilient-pipeline-of-c0250518a12d>



Renny Ng (2025–2026 ARCS Scholar at UCSD) was thrilled to present his research at the Society for Neuroscience meeting in San Diego in mid-November. The title of his paper was "Day/night cycles regulate pheromone acuity to gate rhythmic social behavior."





Scholar Alumni – Where Are They Now?

Plants and birds are a passion for **Sandy DeSimone, PhD (1995-1997, SDSU)**, who did her doctoral research on coastal sage scrub, a globally endangered shrubland. After receiving her PhD in 1997 in Ecology through the SDSU/UC Davis Joint Doctoral Program, she took on the role of Director of Research, Education, and Land Management at the 4,000-acre Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary in southeast Orange County, where she and husband, Starr Ranch Manager Peter DeSimone, live in one of the historic buildings on the Ranch. Dr. DeSimone's programs, both land management and education, are research-based.



In 1997, Dr. DeSimone initiated a series of experiments to test non-chemical methods for controlling the highest priority upland weed on Starr Ranch, artichoke thistle. Seasonal staff, recent college grads, are the heart of land management and do the hard work of non-chemical weed control, vegetation and bird monitoring, and education programs. After several years of research on biology and non-chemical control of artichoke thistle, the Starr Ranch field crew comprised of a full-time field supervisor and four seasonal field assistants, started work. Since 1999, Starr Ranch has used an experimentally based method that has reduced artichoke thistle cover by 95% in a work site after one season of non-chemical treatment. Land managers from Ventura to San Diego Counties have visited Starr Ranch to hear about the research-based, sustainable land management practices and visit the restoration sites.

Dr. DeSimone also developed the "Starr Ranch Field Ecology Programs," an innovative approach that integrated ecological research into education. People of all ages participate in the programs, taught by biologists, and have a hands-on experience in simulated or actual field research. Local and regional partnerships that focus on Southern California conservation issues are also a critical aspect of Dr. DeSimone's work, and she works closely with academic and agency partners on tree pests, fire prevention, mountain lions, bird monitoring, and rare riparian fish and macroinvertebrates.

To learn more about the work done at Starr Ranch Sanctuary, you can view this 5-minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqyCUIXxFQo&t=219s>

Jeffrey Chao, PhD (2001-2005, Scripps Research) obtained his PhD from Scripps Research in 2005, where he worked with James Williamson on the structure and function of RNA-protein complexes. His postdoctoral studies with Robert Singer at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, NY (2005-2012) focused on understanding RNA localization and developing fluorescent microscopy techniques for imaging single mRNAs.



In 2013, he established his own group at the Friedrich Miescher Institute (FMI) for Biomedical Research in Basel, Switzerland. His group combines

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Scholar Alumni – Where Are They Now?...

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biochemistry, structural biology and single-molecule imaging to investigate the mechanisms that control post-transcriptional regulation in the cytoplasm. In 2019, he was promoted to Senior Group Leader at FMI and continues to work on the regulation of gene expression with his team.

Estella Siau Tai, MS (1995-1996, UCSD) is a native of Taiwan and immigrated to the U.S. to attend high school. She lived in the Bay Area and attended UC Berkeley to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Bioengineering. Thereafter, she moved to San Diego and graduated from UCSD with a Master's degree in Bioengineering.



She taught at a private high school for a year, then worked in the biotech industry for 4 years before transitioning to be a full-time mom. She was privileged to homeschool her children a few years before teaching Mandarin and subsequently science at The Cambridge School in San Diego. She has found teaching at Cambridge both challenging and rewarding, and what she values most is learning and discovering together with her students.

ARCS Calendar of Events

JANUARY

- Tuesday, January 27 – Winter General Meeting (La Jolla Country Club)

FEBRUARY

- Tuesday, February 17 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)

MARCH

- Tuesday, March 17 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)

APRIL

- Tuesday, April 21 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)