

# The SEES Informer

Science Educational Enhancement Services

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**Keep In Touch:** It is always great to hear what our alums are up to. What's new in your life? A new program acceptance to grad school, credential program, med/dent/vet/pharmacy school or other degree? Please reach out and let us know!

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## From Era to Era

With the close of the 2024-2025 school year, the SEES program ends its 12-year window under the leadership of SEES Director, Dr. Steve Alas. Since 2013, Dr. Alas has led the program through many firsts and created new programming under the SEES umbrella. Dr. Alas created the BioTier



SEES Directors: Dr. Paul Hiemenz (1987-1999), Dr. Barbara Burke (1999-2013) and Dr. Steve Alas (2013-2025).

program and ran it from 2013-2018, developed the NSF SPIRES program, which initiated in 2019 and will run through 2026, invented the STEMpire with its summer competitions and animated movie, and he built the summer Discovery Camps in 2015, which continue to this day. He also led the CSU-LSAMP program at CPP and ran all the

traditional functions of SEES. His passion for investing so much into the program came from having been a SEES student himself when Dr. Paul Hiemenz, SEES founder, was Director. Wanting to pay forward what his mentor did for him, Dr. Alas said, "If I can help half as many students as Dr. Hiemenz did, I'll call it a successful career." During his time, Dr. Alas tripled the membership of the SEES program and expanded its offerings. He gives much credit to his predecessor, Dr. Barbara Burke, who spent so much time setting him up for success the last year before her retirement.

Dr. Alas frequently comments on the love he has for his students, also saying, "My SEES & LSAMP students have been the highlight of my career." He mentions the transition being bittersweet, but that 12 years of dedication at that level has left him fatigued and feeling that someone with more energy and new ideas is what SEES deserves in order to continue the high level of caliber it has been as a program. A new era begins with Dr. Janel Ortiz becoming the 4<sup>th</sup> Director in SEES history since 1987. She comes with a wealth of programmatic experience and Dr. Alas mentions he is excited to see what she will do with the program – "SEES is like a canvas that allows you to create amazing student programming to support those under its umbrella. With her science education background and experience, she's going to do great."

Incoming SEES Director  
Dr. Janel Ortiz with Dr. Steve Alas.







## Mentor & Mentee SEES ANNUAL PICNIC

A yearly tradition for the SEES program as we welcome incoming freshmen with the opportunity to bond with their SEES mentor through a day full of fun activities and free food!

### **| An Afternoon at Bonelli Park**

As the first SEES event of the school year, mentors and mentees were treated to a variety of activities including kayaking, soccer, volleyball, cycling, & more. With enjoyment and excitement radiating through the air, attendees created memories to last a lifetime.



**KAYAKING**



**LUNCH**



**PIÑATA**





# *SEES PICNIC*





# Student Spotlights

*Highlighting some of our many outstanding students*



**Julia Chaidez**

*"I've always been drawn to STEM and felt inspired by the endless possibilities within this field. Computer science is an important part of nearly every industry and has the potential to shape a better future."*

*Computer Science | Mentor | LSAMP Scholar*



**Ethan Chavarin**

*"I want to train the next generation of scientists, be an activist for different organizations and communities, explore the beauty of chemistry, and develop impactful research."*

*Chemistry (ACS) | Mentor | LSAMP Scholar*



**Diego Ponce**

*"My long-term career goal is to become a cardiothoracic surgeon. To get there I plan on shadowing physicians, gaining medical experience as a CMA, working as hard as I can for my education, and persevering the best that I can."*

*Biology | NSF Scholar*



**Lilliana Ceballos**

*"My long-term career goal is to become an occupational therapist. I want to use my knowledge to help people recover from their injuries and to regain their movement. To achieve this, I plan to go to graduate school."*

*Kinesiology | Mentor | LSAMP Scholar*





## Rosalie Williams

*"My long-term goals are to go to graduate school and earn a PhD in astronomy and astrophysics. In a broader sense, my goals are to continue research which has become a true and complete passion for me."*

*Physics | SPIRES*



## Sophia Ramirez

*"I am passionate about building healthier environments and increasing the accessibility of greenspace for communities that have been historically overlooked, so contributing to projects and programs dedicated to those issues is my goal."*

*Biology | Mentor | LSAMP Scholar*



## Damian Varela

*"I'm a SEES Mentor, Scholar, and have been a Discovery Camp counselor. With each of these experiences, I have learned so much about myself and who I want to be."*

*Computer Science | Mentor | LSAMP Scholar*



## Kenia Velasco

*"I've always been fascinated by technology—its revolutionary impact and deep connection to culture. It wasn't until my junior year of high school that I realized I could turn this passion into a career."*

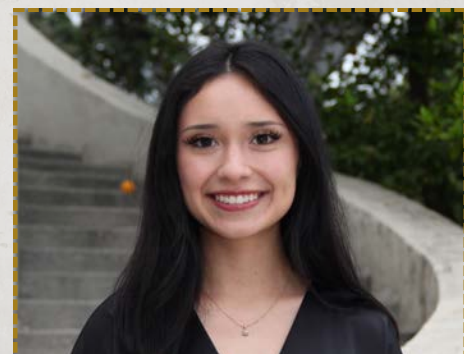
*Computer Science | Mentor | SPIRES*



## Jonathan Rivas

*"I envision applying my skills to places like NASA or JPL. I hope that my experience in both theoretical and experimental research has equipped me with the adaptive tools to address complex research challenge."*

*Physics | Mentor | SPIRES*



## Esbai Rabadan

*"With this program, I gained more than resources. I found mentorship, community, and the confidence to see myself as a future professional. They gave me the tools I didn't know I was missing and connected me with people who reminded me that I belong here"*

*Biology | Mentor | SPIRES*



# NIGHT AT QUEEN MARY'S DARK HARBOR

## NSF SPIRES & LSAMP RESEARCH SCHOLARS SOCIAL

**On Thursday, October 23rd**, SPIRES and LSAMP scholars gathered to immerse themselves at one of SoCal's most famous and festive Halloween attractions, the historic and notorious, Queen Mary's Dark Harbor!

Every fall, the ship and its harbor are decorated into a Halloween spine-chilling festival full of attractions such as haunted mazes, live entertainment, and festive carnival games. Rooted in the ship's ghostly and sinister legends, the haunted mazes are one of many enticing allures of this spooky annual event held in Long Beach, California.

As part of the eerie and ghoulish fun, our students were able to explore the harbor surrounding the Queen Mary and find their way through the festivals' frightening labyrinths. Prior to arriving at the ghostly harbor, our student scholars enjoyed a dinner of steaks, burgers, and other delicious meals accompanied by Classic Rock anthems at the delightful Yard House restaurant. It was a festive and fun break from STEM courses and projects for our NSF SPIRES and LSAMP participants!







On October 10, 2024, the SEES Mentors provided a night of cookie-making, popcorn popping and movie watching. The SEES Mentor-Mentee program goes back to the beginning of the program in the 1980s. Over the generations, the program has provided support to thousands of incoming first-time freshmen in the sciences. This year was no exception as 55 of our SEES students stepped up to be mentors and help new students navigate college life, the curriculum, difficult course material, college clubs, and SEES events. Many of them become close and continue their friendship beyond college and continue the journey of life as friends. We thank all the mentors over the 38 years of SEES history who ever spent time guiding those who came after them. Thank you for paying it forward!!!





# SEES ANNUAL *Christmas Party*



## A Night Full of Holiday Cheer!

The SEES Christmas Party is a beloved annual event celebrated since the establishment of the SEES program in 1987 by its founder and first director, Dr. Paul Hiemenz (1987-1999). The night is always filled with festive activities, joyful celebrations, and holiday cheer.

This year, students, SEES alumni, and faculty came together to enjoy a delicious meal of lemon caper chicken, creamy mushroom ravioli, fresh salads, and decadent desserts.



The evening continued with attendees gathering around the venue's grand piano, where renditions of classic Christmas songs blended with laughter and lively conversations, creating a picturesque, warm, and joyful atmosphere.

In addition to celebrating the holiday season, guests also took a moment to wish a happy birthday to SEES Director, Dr. Steve Alas, whose birthday fell that same week.

It was truly an unforgettable evening!

**Friday, December 6**

**2024**



# Christmas Party





# DINING WITH BRONCOS

February 16, 2025

Hosted by Alumni Affairs & SEES Director Dr. Alas, our annual Dining with Broncos event provides students the opportunity to network and socialize with CPP alumni. The non-academic environment also serves as the perfect setting to build new relationship, potentially as mentor & mentee.





# SEES Snow Day

As winter comes to an end, SEES mentors and research scholars got to enjoy a beautiful, sunny snow day!





JANUARY 31, 2025

# SEES-McNair Mixer

**McNair, SPIRES, and  
LSAMP Scholars Social**

One of the key objectives of the NSF SPIRES and NSF CSU-LSAMP fellowship programs is to prepare students for success in their respective STEM fields after graduation. Whether they immediately enter the workforce, attend graduate school, or explore additional avenues. These programs facilitate this mission by providing professional development workshops, financial support, and opportunities to work with faculty on scientific research projects. As a result, our student scholars are not only equipped with hands-on experience in their fields but also develop the necessary skills needed to navigate professional settings confidently.



The SEES-McNair Mixer certainly exemplified these goals! On Friday, January 31st, scholars from our SEES fellowship research programs and Cal Poly Pomona's McNair Scholars Program came together to participate in a professional networking mixer, where students were able to connect and learn about one another's research projects, involvements on campus, and their future career aspirations - all the while eating delicious treats!



Developing Leaders  
Through Graduate Education





# SEES & McNair





# CSU LSAMP MIXER

March 15, 2025



## GATHERING ALL LSAMP SCHOLARS!

This event served as a networking opportunity for LSAMP Scholars from participating Cal State Universities. The scholars were introduced to new connections outside their current program with possibilities of new friendships, opportunities, or learning experiences.

## PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES:

- Cal Poly Pomona
- CSU Fullerton
- CSU Long Beach
- CSU Los Angeles
- CSU Dominguez Hills
- CSU Northridge







# 2025 SEES Award Winners



**Julia Chaidez (Hiemenz Award)**

Julia traces her journey into computer science, beginning with a middle school exercise that revealed a talent for logical thinking. Encouraged by a STEM-focused upbringing, Julia embraced challenges—such as being the only girl in her high school computer science class—and developed a passion for creating inclusive, supportive environments in STEM. At Cal Poly Pomona, she has honed her skills through roles as a Discovery Camp counselor, team lead for the *Echoes of Art* project with sheCodes, and an intern at Salesforce, where she contributed to a platform addressing food waste. As a 2-year LSAMP research scholar, she explored research in cybersecurity, focusing on IoT vulnerabilities and machine learning applications. Through academic excellence, mentorship roles in SEES, and community engagement, she demonstrates a deep commitment to using technology for good and empowering others. “I have met so many of my closest friends through the program and Dr. Alas has been a valuable mentor in my life,” she says. Julia states that winning the Hiemenz award would help her continue advancing in cybersecurity while giving back to the SEES community that supported her growth.



**Kenia Velasco (Hiemenz Award)**

Kenia can reflect on her journey from isolation to empowerment through community and mentorship. As a first-generation college student, she initially struggled with loneliness and a reluctance to seek help, despite joining the SEES program. Her transformation began when she became a SEES Discovery camp counselor, where she found friendship, belonging, and a passion for inspiring young students in STEM. She says, “I have helped encourage young students to explore science, and I have loved every moment of it.” Through SEES, she built lasting relationships, developed confidence, and became a dedicated mentor, determined to support others the way she once needed. She states, “Now, every time I step into the SEES room, I am reminded of how much this community means to me.” Her involvement extends to being an NSF SPIRES scholar, where she researches accessible user interface design, and sheCodes, where she will serve as Internal Vice President organizing major events to empower women in technology. Academic success, leadership roles, and community engagement have shaped her into a confident, purpose-driven student who deeply values the support and sense of belonging SEES gave her.



# 2025 SEES Award Winners



**Damian Varela (Burke Award)**

Damian's story walks us through a student facing isolation and disappointment during the pandemic and the college application process. After accidentally enrolling at Cal Poly Pomona he initially felt directionless and, at times, alone. However, a chance encounter with the SEES program during orientation gave him a sense of belonging. Although he initially drifted through his freshman year, a renewed commitment in his second year to engage with SEES transformed his college experience. He says, "This time, I decided to go all in. I longed for that sense of community that made up much of my life. I began making the conscious effort to show up more and be more involved." Through programs like NSF SPIRES, Discovery Camps, and becoming a SEES mentor, he rebuilt a strong sense of community, found joy in teaching and research, and regained confidence in himself. SPIRES allowed him to connect with other research scholars, has helped him build valuable professional skills by working with a CS professor, and allowed him to grow. Now, he not only feels at home at Cal Poly Pomona, but also takes pride in helping create the inclusive and supportive community that helped shape him.



**Esbai Rabadan (Andersen Award)**

Esbai has been open about sharing the transformative journey of a first-generation college student who discovered the difference between equality and equity through personal experience. Lacking academic guidance at home, she found critical support through the SEES program at Cal Poly Pomona. SEES provided her with mentorship, research opportunities, and a strong community that helped her overcome self-doubt and develop the confidence to succeed. Her personal life also shaped her aspirations, witnessing her father's struggles with mental illness, addiction, and recovery inspired her to pursue a career as a Physician Assistant. Motivated by her family's sacrifices and her passion for equity in healthcare, she hopes to serve underserved communities and break generational cycles of medical mistrust. Through academic growth and personal resilience, she has come to believe in her ability to overcome barriers and make meaningful change. She shares, "Comparing myself to the freshman version of me, to the senior standing today, I can confidently say that I have grown into a version that truly believes in being able to accomplish anything I put my mind and heart into



# SEES & LSAMP

## SPRING AWARDS CEREMONY & RECEPTION

FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2025



On Friday, April 18<sup>th</sup> at Cal Poly Pomona's Kellogg House, our SEES Scholarship awardees and LSAMP PROUD STEM Scholars were commemorated for their hard work and accomplishments through this year's Annual SEES and LSAMP Dinner and Awards Reception.

It was an eventful evening filled with moments of celebration, excitement, sorrow, and praise for our awardees and program leaders. After 12 years of serving as the SEES and LSAMP program director, Dr. Steve Alas shared his final public appearance as the SEES director with fellow adored alumni, CPP professors and staff, as well as the future SEES director, Dr. Janel Ortiz.

Truly a night that will never be forgotten for all who have contributed and seen the program grow and flourish.





# Award Winners



Paul C. Hiemenz Award



Julia Chaidez

Paul C. Hiemenz Award



Kenia Velasco

Barbara A. Burke Award



Damian Varela

Dora N. Andersen Award



Esbai Rabadan

LSAMP PROUD Award



Sophia Ramirez

LSAMP PROUD Award



Philip Nicoll

LSAMP PROUD Award



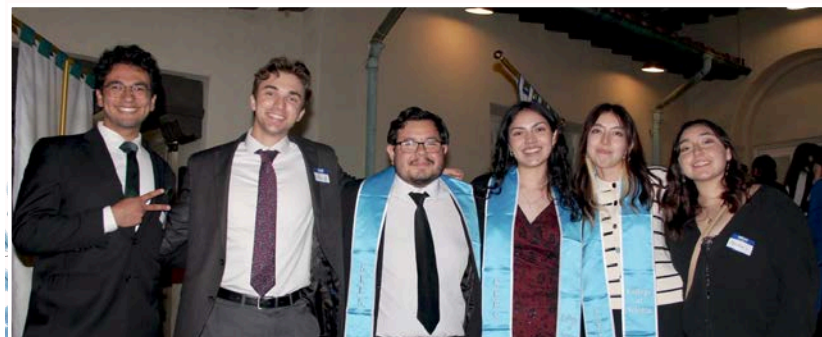
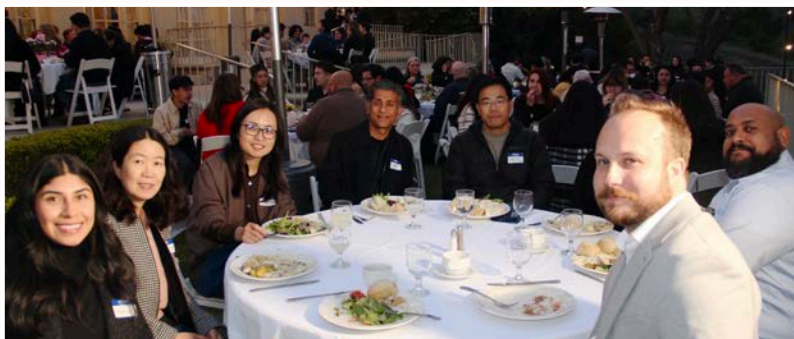
Shawn Chen

LSAMP PROUD Award



Mina Thorensen



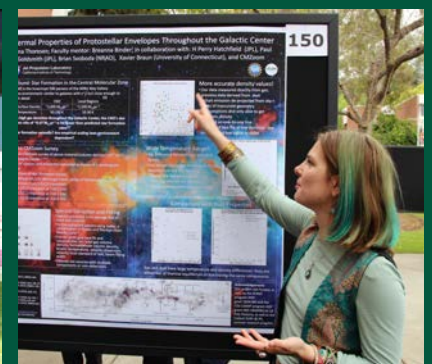
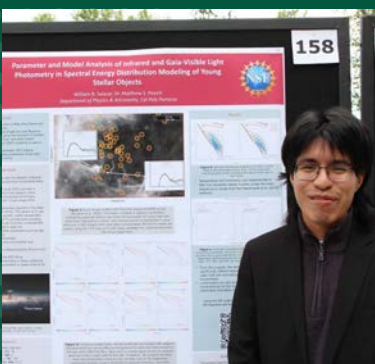
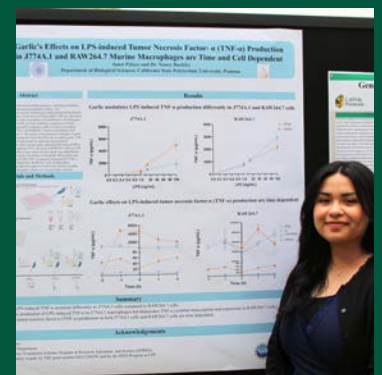
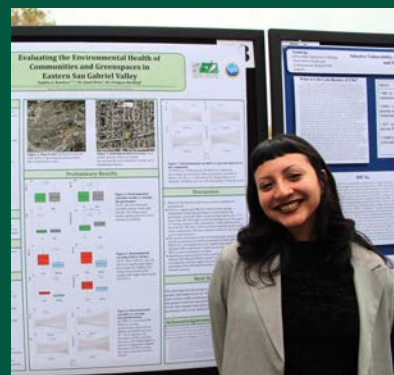
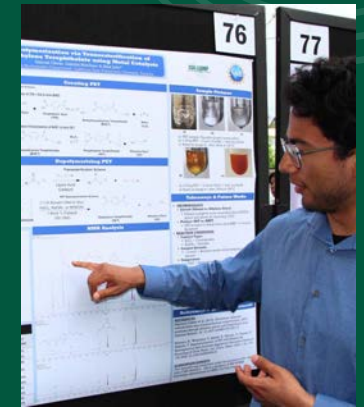
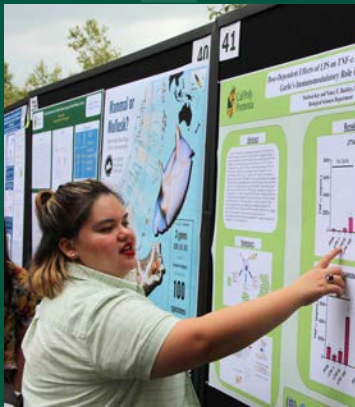
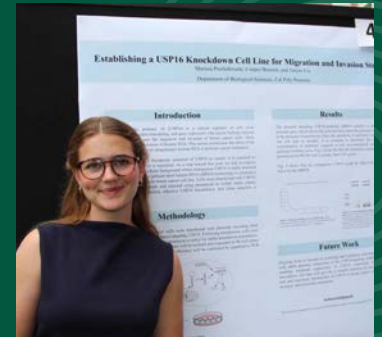






# College of Science SYMPOSIUM

SEES SPIRES and LSAMP Research Scholars presented their research at the College of Science Symposium on Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup>. It was a proud moment for professors and program leaders of the College of Science to see their students present their success and hard work.



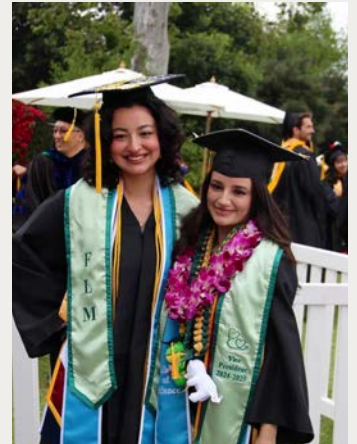




# Commencement

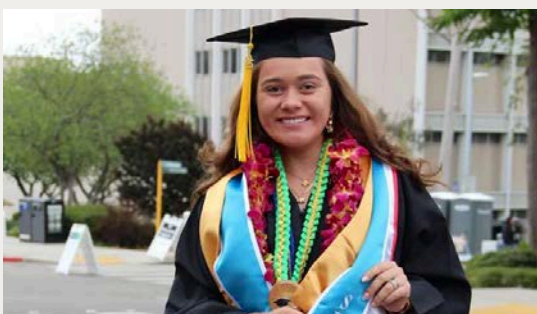
## CLASS OF 2025

*As the academic year concludes, the graduating class of 2025 crosses the stage to receive their degrees in the disciplines of the College of Science. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to our SEES students, whose contributions as mentors, camp counselors, research scholars, and more, have left a meaningful impact on our community. We are confident that you will continue to succeed and inspire in your future endeavors. Congratulations to the Class of 2025.*



***Congratulations!***



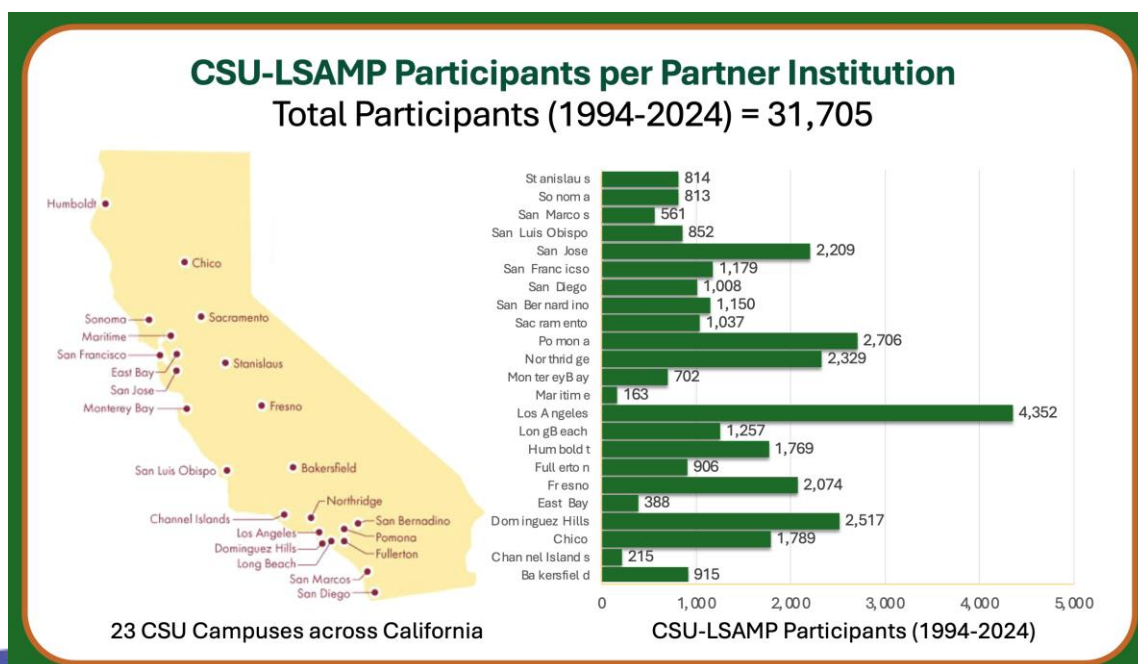




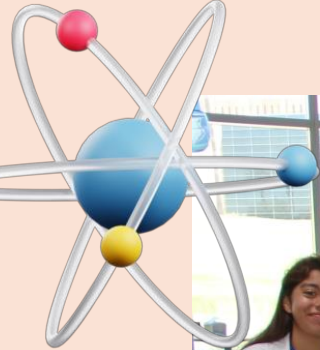


# Sun Sets on CSU-LSAMP

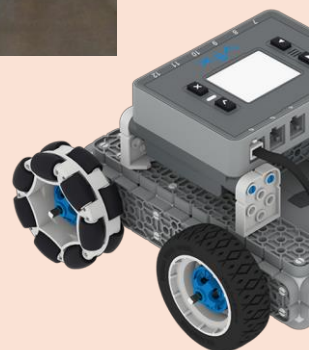
After more than 30 years of supporting students across the CSU system, the CSU-LSAMP program ceased to exist on May 2, 2025. The National Science Foundation (NSF) called for the program's termination, ending dozens of alliances across the country. The NSF stated that it had established new priorities and that the program no longer aligned with those priorities. It was a sad event in the history of the CSU. No warning came, only an email announcement that the program officially no longer existed. CSU-LSAMP leaves behind a rich legacy of student achievement. The program elevated almost 32 thousand STEM students who went on to graduate college at higher rates than non-LSAMP students and who saw almost 25% of its students go on to attain Masters and PhD degrees. The program will be terribly missed, but SEES will continue to fund students to do research, to provide professional development workshops, aid students to desire to present at conferences, assist with grad school applications, and guide those who pursue graduate education.



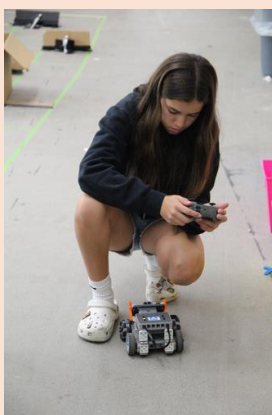




# 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Discovery Camp



The 2025 Discovery Camps marked the tenth anniversary of the Discovery Camps' inception. Since the beginning of the camps in 2015 when 107 campers attended the camps, the program has grown to hosting 910+ campers each summer. The inaugural year offered Science, Computer and Horse camps. Today, the Discovery Camps are comprised of Science, Computer, Horse, Robotics, Imagination, Entrepreneurship and Fashion Tech camps. The foundation of the program is the amazing camp counselors who dedicate themselves all summer to (1) engage campers in the STEAM fields at an early age and develop both joy and curiosity within life, physical, & social sciences, and in technology, (2) provide campers with an inclusive environment where they can foster positive relationships, (3) increase camper self-esteem and confidence in social settings, and (4) promote creativity and teamwork in group settings.





# Student Accomplishments

## Acceptances into Graduate/Professional Schools

- Ethan Barnett: Master of Mathematics, Claremont Graduate University
- Ethan Chavarin: PhD in Chemistry at the University of Minnesota
- Brianna Fernandez: Master of Oral Health Program, USC
- Berenice Fregoso: Doctor of Pharmacy, Western U
- Mark Haddad (LSAMP): Master of Computer Science at UT Austin
- Addison Hebbert: PhD in Microbiology, UC Riverside
- Dominick Hernandez: Master of Criminalistics, Cal State LA
- Mora Labisi: PhD in Computer Science, Northwestern
- Gaby Lopez: PhD in Chemistry at Penn State University
- Lizette Martinez (LSAMP): PhD program at the University of Minnesota
- George Mariscal: Joint Doctoral Program at San Diego State/UC San Diego
- Alison Munoz: Master in Nursing, Western U
- Jazmin Oropeza: Master of Chemistry at Cal Poly Pomona
- Robert Parsons: Master of Computer Science, Georgia Tech
- Stephanie Tovar: Credential program at Cal Poly Pomona
- Rachelle Rivera: Criminalistics MS program at Cal State LA
- Juan Rodriguez: Credential Program at Cal Poly Pomona
- Brandon Valadez: Medical School, Western U
- Crystal Vera: Credential program at California State University, Northridge
- Julia Zazueta: Medical School, UC Riverside

## Acceptances into summer programs

- Sarah Abdeen (LSAMP): REU at UC San Diego
- Berthy Aroche: Stars REU Program at CPP
- Julia Chaidez: Salesforce Internship
- Marissa Chavira: REU at Montana State University
- Shawn Chen (LSAMP): University of Michigan Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP)
- Joshua Estrada: Lutron Electronics summer internship
- Randy Hernandez: REU at University of Michigan
- Miriam Khalil: REU in bioengineering at UC San Diego
- Brandon Koehn: REU at USC Wrigley Institute for Environment and Sustainability
- James Mendez: Yale Biomed Amgen Scholar
- Philip Nicoll: Summer research program at CPP
- Chau Nguyen (LSAMP): Summer research program at CPP
- Matthew Polino: REU at USC Jumpstart Program
- Sophia Ramirez: Center for Diverse Leadership Fellowship program at UCLA
- Marco Rios: Capital One Cybersecurity Internship, McLean, VA
- Jan Rebolledo Jimenez: Microsoft Explore internship, Redmond, WA
- Gabriel Robles: Barclays Software Engineering internship, Whippany, NJ
- Daniel Risser: REU at the Savanna River Environmental Sciences Field Station
- Alyssa Tran (LSAMP): Supply Chain Summer Internship, Frito-Lay