NEWSLETTER

VOLUME XXVI | ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-2026

IN THIS ISSUE

- WELCOME DR. ORTIZ
- INTRODUCING
- CSU-SPaRA
- STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS
- ANNUAL PICNIC
- MESA & RAÍCES VISIT SEES
- QUEEN MARY DARK HARBOR
- FRIENDSGIVING & BOWLING NIGHT
- WINTER CELEBRATION
- SACNAS X SCHOLARS MIXER
- BASES X SCHOLARS MIXER
- AWARDS CEREMONY
- SEES AWARD WINNERS
- PROUD SCHOLARS
- COLLEGE OF SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM
- COMMENCEMENT
- END OF THE YEAR EXCURSION
- STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS



WELCOME, DR. ORTIZ!

Starting in Summer 2025, Dr. Janel Ortiz became Director of the SEES Program and has since completed her first year in the role (2025–2026).

Dr. Ortiz is an Associate Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences and the Center for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (CEMAST). She has led outreach initiatives such as Womxn in the Wild and the Prete Fellowship Program, while conducting research focused on urban wildlife and conservation education. Most recently, she earned early tenure and promotion.







As SEES Director, Dr. Ortiz continues to support SEES students through her commitment to research, outreach, and mentorship—fostering an environment where students can grow as scholars, researchers, and future professionals.

SEES also extends its gratitude to Dr. Alas for his 12 years of service as Program Director (2013 to 2025). His dedication and leadership helped shape the program and its lasting impact on students.

Introducing the CSU STEM Pathways and Research Alliance (CSU-SPaRA) Program



The California State University STEM Pathways and Research Alliance (CSU-SPaRA), formerly known as the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP), was formed by participating CSU campuses in the Spring of 2025.

CSU-SPaRA is a coordinated systemwide program aimed at preparing the next generation of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workers by providing academic support and professional development to students from the California State University (CSU) system.



Each of the 23 SPaRA programs provides activities and services designed to improve the retention, graduation, and degree attainment of undergraduate students in STEM. Additionally, the program seeks to increase the number of CSU students who enroll in STEM graduate programs.

At Cal Poly Pomona, CSU-SPaRA aims to help eligible students conduct major-related research during the academic year and to provide advising and financial support. Currently, the program supports 146 students.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

Highlighting some of our many outstanding students with strong connections to SEES.



Janet Pelayo

My long-term career goals are to earn my master's in biological sciences and support students who are underrepresented in STEM.

Biology | Mentor | SPIRES Scholar



Brayan Quevedo Ramos

My long-term goal is to become a statistician who designs and manages large-scale research studies. I plan to keep being curious, being open, and pushing myself to become the best statistician possible.

Computer Science | Mentor | Discovery Camp Counselor



Gabriel Martinez

Eventually, in my career, I want to work at a nuclear fusion power plant, and I plan to achieve this by pursuing a PhD in Chemistry. This has been a goal of mine for a while, because it is something that could be of great benefit to the world around us.

Chemistry | Mentor | CSU-SPaRA Scholar



Beatriz Jimenez

My long-term goal is to become a Family Physician, D.O. After I graduate and take the MCAT, I hope to attend Western University to study medicine.

Biology| Mentor| Discovery Camp Counselor

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

Highlighting some of our many outstanding students with strong connections to SEES.



Joshua Banuelos

Long-term, I want to run my own business related to Computer Science in some way. I plan to first get a job in the CS industry to build experience and later start my own business using this knowledge.

Computer Science | Mentor | Discovery Camp Counselor



Christina Palos

My long-term career goal is to become an occupational therapist. I plan to achieve this by graduating with my bachelor's in kinesiology and getting my master's in occupational therapy.

Kinesiology| Mentor| Discovery Camp Counselor



Paloma Vasquez

For my last year at Cal Poly, I would like to continue research and hopefully find an internship in the area. After receiving my degree from here, I plan on pursuing a master's degree in toxicology or environmental chemistry, hopefully in California.

Biochemistry| Mentor | Discovery Camp Counselor



Gabriel Robles

My first internship was at Apple, where I worked to create unique marketing campaigns for students. Afterwards, I worked at LACSD, where I worked as an IT intern. Most recently, I was a Software Engineer intern at Barclays' New Jersey campus, where I plan to return full-time in July.

Computer Science | Mentor | Student Researcher

MENTOR X MENTEE ANNUAL PICNIC

Saturday, September 13th

The SEES Mentor-Mentee Picnic is an annual event that warmly welcomes both our first-year and returning students. The day was filled with exciting outdoor activities, including paddleboarding, kayaking, biking, competitive games, and more. This year's picnic was particularly special, as both our former Program Director, Dr. Alas, and new Program Director, Dr. Ortiz, were present to welcome SEES students.





















MESA & Raíces Programs Visit SEES

Friday, October 24, 2025



As support programs for historically underrepresented STEM students, MESA and Raíces provide students at two-year colleges with resources and guidance to navigate their academic and professional paths. Both programs offer opportunities, such as college visits and transfer application support. They reached out to SEES to help their students gain an inside look into the STEM programs at Cal Poly Pomona.

On Friday, October 24th, SEES hosted MESA and Raíces at Cal Poly Pomona, providing a tour of the College of Science and College of Engineering. The visit included guided tours of engineering, biotechnology, and chemistry research laboratories, as well as the BioTrek. Additionally, MESA and Raíces students participated in a student panel with engineering, biology, and chemistry students, who shared their undergraduate experiences at CPP.





QUEEN MARY DARK HARBOR

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24TH

To celebrate the Halloween season, mentors and research scholars came together for an exciting visit to the Queen Mary Dark Harbor. The evening was filled with thrilling attractions, haunted mazes, live entertainment, and unforgettable moments as everyone enjoyed the festive atmosphere. As groups split up to view different attractions, students were able to make new friends and bond together! The outing provided a wonderful opportunity for mentors and scholars to connect outside of research activities and create lasting memories while embracing the Halloween spirit.









Friendsgiving Potluck & Bowling Night



This academic year, SEES Mentors planned new events to bond and celebrate the fall season together. Our SEES mentors hosted a Friendsgiving potluck, where each mentor brought a dish to share for dinner. A highlight of this lovely event was the gratitude wall the mentors made, writing notes on things they had been grateful for during the year!

Earlier in the autumn season, a few of our SEES mentors and research scholars took a trip to a bowling alley for a night of fun competition! Despite the stress of midterms, projects, and research, our SEES Mentors still found the time to participate in our SEES community!





Winter Celebration

DECEMBER 05, 2025

A beloved annual event of the SEES program is the Winter Celebration, a gathering that began when the program was created and developed by Dr. Paul Hiemenz. This year's celebration was hosted at the Garner House in Claremont. The evening was filled with warm greetings, joy, and laughter, as first-year, returning, and alumni students shared dinner and sang carols together.



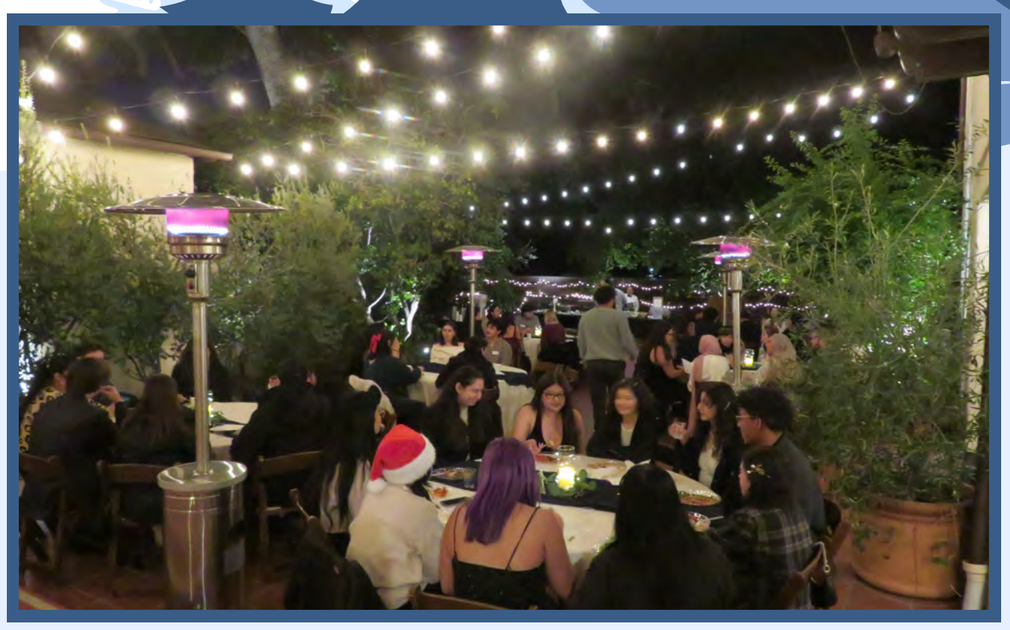












Winter Celebration

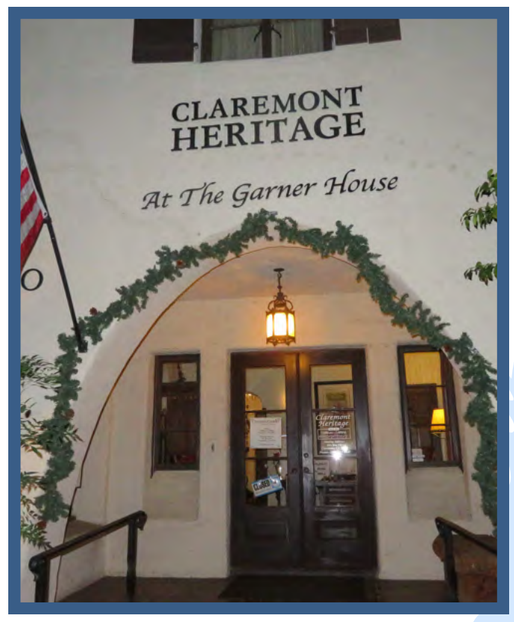
DECEMBER 05, 2025



















SACNAS x SPaRA



The Society for Advancing Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) is an inclusive organization dedicated to fostering the success of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans, from college students to professionals, in attaining advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership in STEM.

During this social mixer, CSU-SPaRA and SACNAS students networked and chatted while they let their creativity shine as they painted! The event helped students wind down and find community amidst midterm season.







BASES X SPARA TRIVIA MIXER

FRIDAY, APRIL 17TH

The BASES program at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona supports first-year students by fostering a supportive learning community, offering opportunities for professional and resume development, and involving students in research focused on addressing inequalities within the health sciences—providing them with a strong foundation for academic success.

On Friday, April 17th, SEES hosted a trivia social for the CSU-SPARA and BASES programs. Students worked together in teams to win prizes, such as goody bags and Bronco Bucks—bringing them together and allowing them to explore different programs that support student success.















SEES ANNUAL AWARD CEREMONY

FRIDAY, APRIL 17TH

The SEES Award Ceremony is one of our most beloved annual traditions held for CPP alumni, faculty, SEES members, and our talented awardees. This year, the ceremony was once again held at Cal Poly Pomona's Kellogg House with a more private reception—centered on family and friends of awardees, making for an unforgettable night celebrating our scholarship winners.

Each of our distinguished awardees has made significant contributions to the SEES community—as mentors, research scholars, and camp counselors—and exemplifies the spirit and mission of our program.





To recognize his impact and legacy, SEES introduced a scholarship award in honor of former SEES Program Director Dr. Steve A. Alas, who stepped down last year after 12 years of service. His endless dedication and devotion to student success in research and the next generation of STEM students shaped the lives of thousands of students. The first recipient of the Dr. Steve A. Alas Award was Lilliana Ceballos, a Kinesiology major, CSU-SPaRA Research Scholar, and Discovery Camp Counselor. She is an exceptional student who embodies the commitment and academic excellence that the award represents.

SEES ANNUAL AWARD CEREMONY





























SEES AWARDEES



AFNAN SALEH

DR. PAUL C. HIEMENZ SEES AWARD

Afnan is a recipient of the Dr. Paul C. Hiemenz SEES Award, recognizing her academic excellence and leadership. As a Biology major, Afnan conducts research in neurodevelopmental and neurological disorders across multiple institutions. Their academic focus is driven by contributing to scientific discovery that improves long-term outcomes for underserved populations. Afnan is committed to pursuing a PhD with the goal of leading innovative research that expands equitable treatments for neurological disorders.

DR. STEVE A. ALAS SEES AWARD

Lilliana is a recipient of the Dr. Steve A. Alas SEES Award, recognizing her excellence in research and dedication to inspiring the next generation through the SEES Discovery camps. A Discover Camp counselor, she has also completed internships at therapy clinics and researched the effects of prolonged sitting on joint mobility in the Motor Neuroscience Lab with Dr. MinHyuk Kwon. Lilliana plans to attend graduate school to become an occupational therapist.



LILLIANA CEBALLOS



JANET PELAYO

DR. BARBARA A. BURKE SEES AWARD

Janet is a recipient of the Dr. Barbara A. Burke SEES Award, recognizing her contributions to improving and enhancing the SEES program. As a Biology major with a Chemistry minor, she has served as a SEES student assistant and conducts research under Dr. Nancy Buckley investigating the effects of garlic on inflammatory immune responses. Janet plans to pursue a Master's degree in Biological Sciences at Cal Poly Pomona and hopes to support underrepresented students in STEM.

DORA G. ANDERSEN SEES AWARD

Berthy is a recipient of the Dora G. Andersen SEES Award, recognizing her resilience and determination throughout her academic journey. She has participated in the NSF SPIRES Fellowship, STARS, and CSU-SPARA programs, where she conducts research with Dr. Taylor Thane on nickel-catalyzed cross-coupling reactions of azetidines. Berthy plans to pursue a PhD and support students in their academic pursuits.



BERTHY AROCHE

CSU-SPARA PROUD SCHOLARS



AFNAN SALEH

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH IN STEM

Afnan is recognized for outstanding research in STEM, highlighting them as a CSU-SPaRA PROUD Scholar. As a Biology major, Afnan conducts research in neurodevelopmental and neurological disorders across multiple institutions. They hope to contribute to scientific discovery that improves long-term outcomes for underserved populations. Afnan is committed to pursuing a PhD with the goal of leading innovative research that expands equitable treatments for neurological disorders.

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH IN STEM

Matthew is recognized for his outstanding research in STEM, highlighting him as a CSU-SPaRA PROUD Scholar. As a Chemistry major, he has participated in research at multiple institutions and will be pursuing a PhD in Chemistry at the University of California, Irvine. Matthew aspires to become a research professor and mentor first-generation and underrepresented students in research and higher education.



MATTHEW POLINO



BRITNEY COLLIER

OUTSTANDING SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

Britney Collier is recognized for outstanding service and leadership, highlighting her service as a CSU-SPaRA PROUD Scholar. She has served as a BASES mentor and as Public Relations Chair for the National Society of Black Engineers, supporting underrepresented students in computing-related fields. As a Computer Science major, Britney has conducted research as an NSF SEES SPIRES Research Scholar and interned at J&J MedTech, applying technology in a healthcare setting.

OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Minh is recognized as a PROUD Scholar for his outstanding academic success, graduating summa cum laude with a B.S. in Chemistry. As an LSAMP and CSU-SPaRA scholar, he conducted research on the synthesis of plant-derived molecules with pharmaceutical potential and received an Honorable Mention for the prestigious National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. Minh will continue his studies at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, pursuing a Ph.D. in Chemistry.

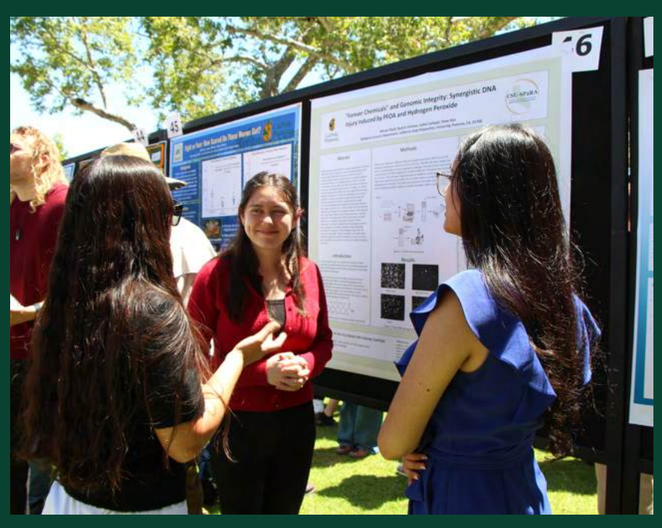


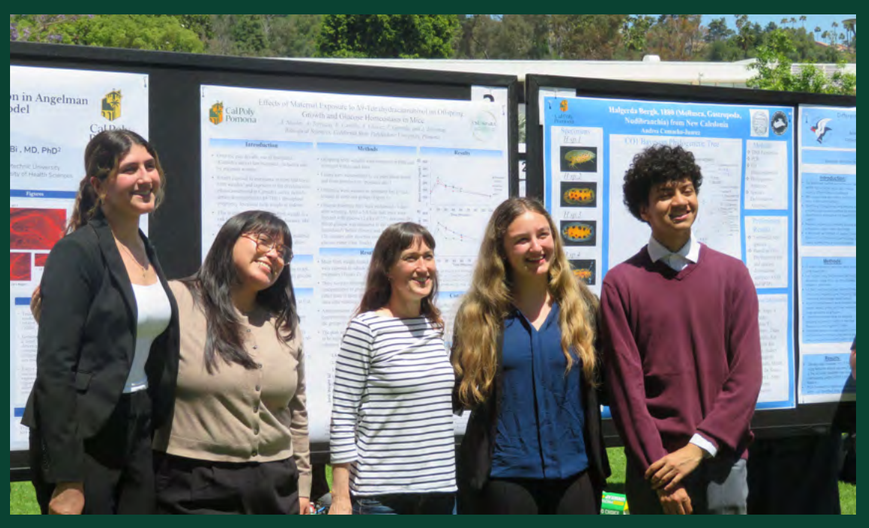
MINH LU

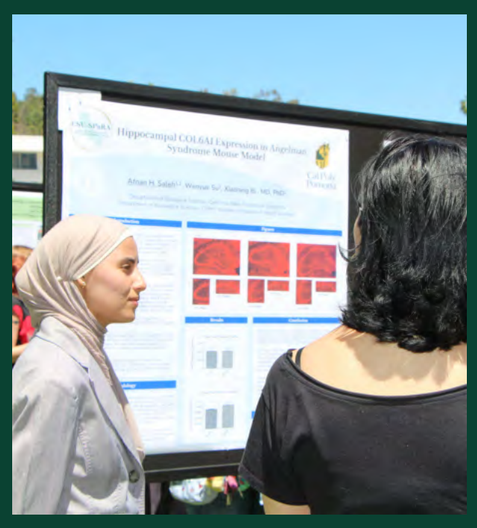
FRIDAY, APRIL 24TH

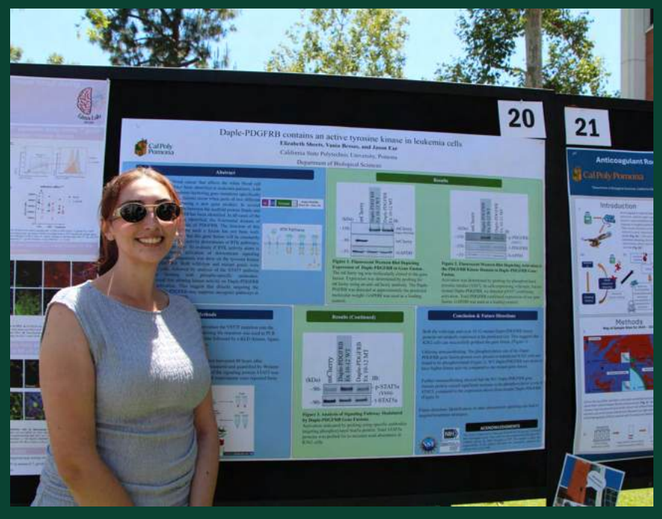
College of Science Symposium

THE 19TH ANNUAL COLLEGE OF SCIENCE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM WAS HELD IN THE UNIVERSITY QUAD ON FRIDAY, APRIL 24TH, 2026. MANY OF OUR SEES STUDENTS PRESENTED THEIR RESEARCH AND CULTIVATED CONNECTIONS WITH FACULTY AND FELLOW RESEARCH SCHOLARS.





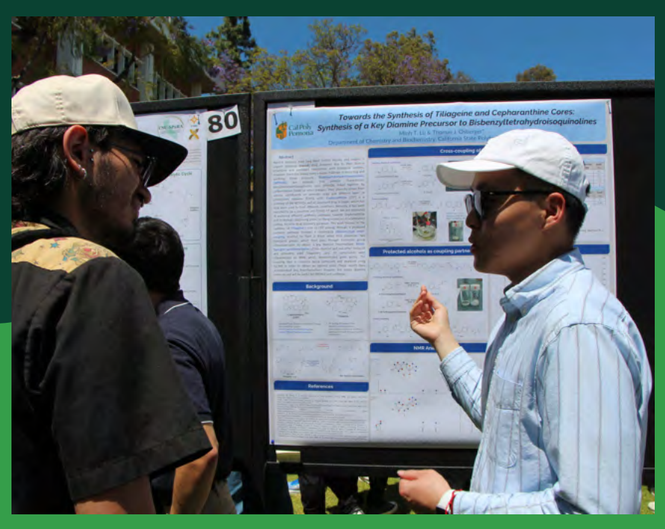


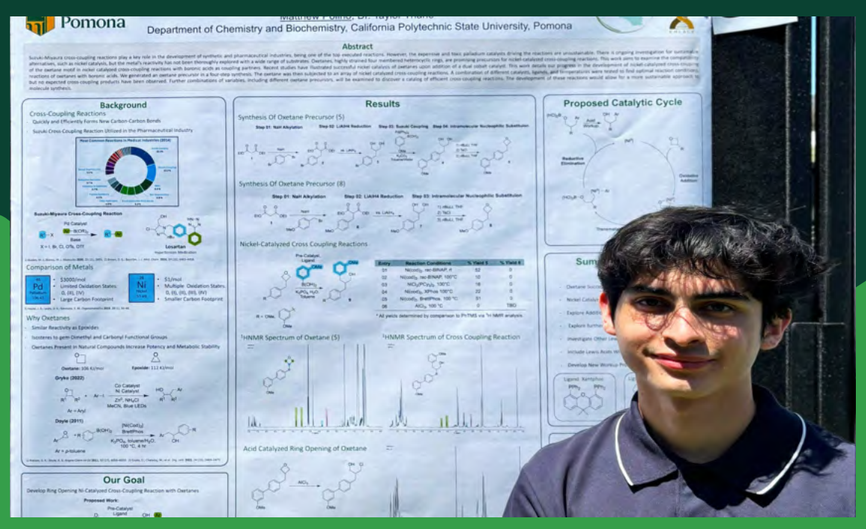


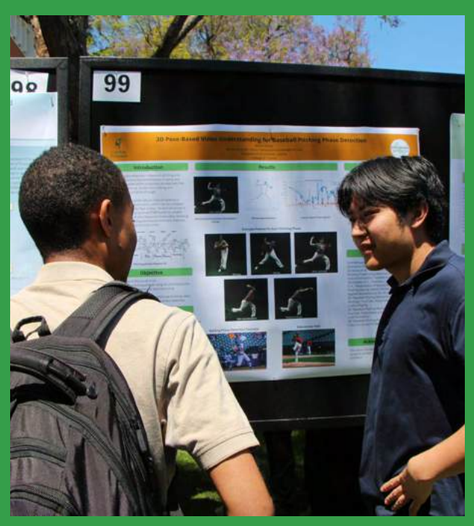




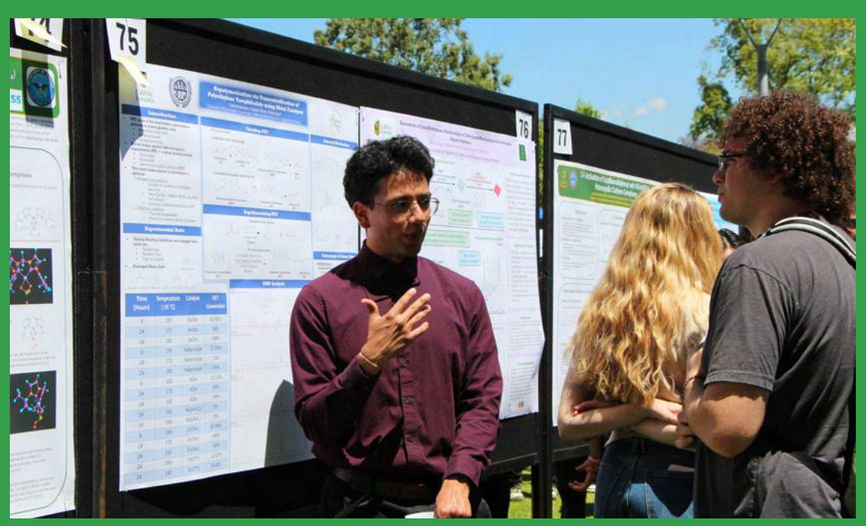












Commencement

CLASS OF 2026

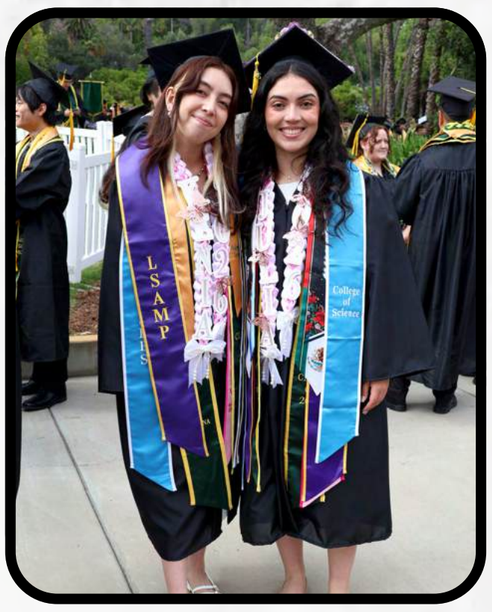
On Saturday, May 16th, our SEES Class of 2026 received their undergraduate STEM degrees as they walked across the stage of their graduation ceremony—marking the end of a new beginning. We are honored to have been a part of their undergraduate journeys as our CSU-SPaRA Research Scholars, Discovery Camp Counselors, SEES Peer Mentors, and more. We know each of them will continue to achieve great accomplishments in their careers and communities as they have while at SEES. Congratulations to the Class of 2026!

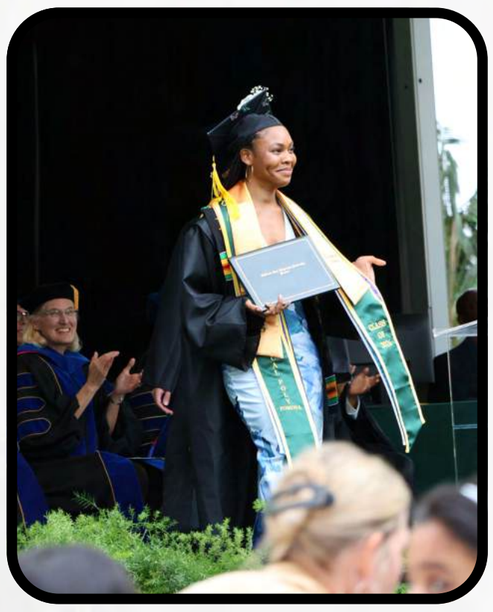




Commencement

CLASS OF 2026

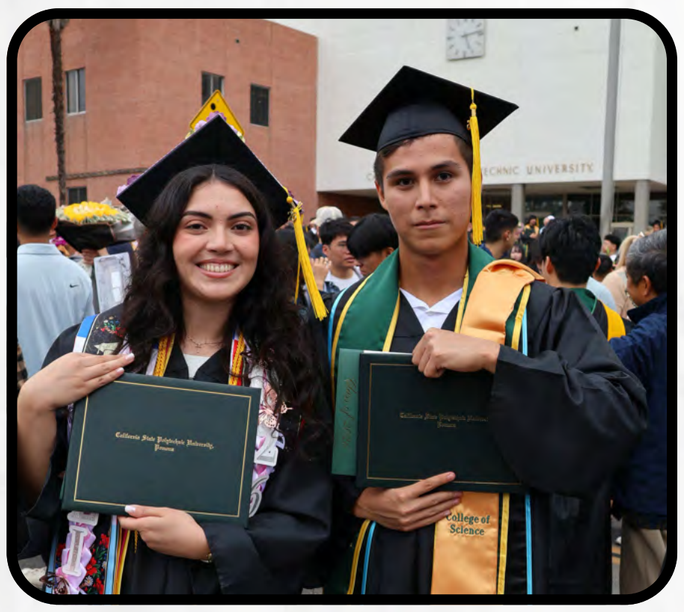










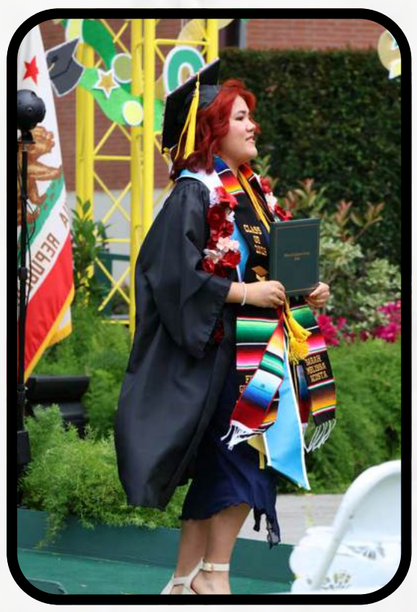






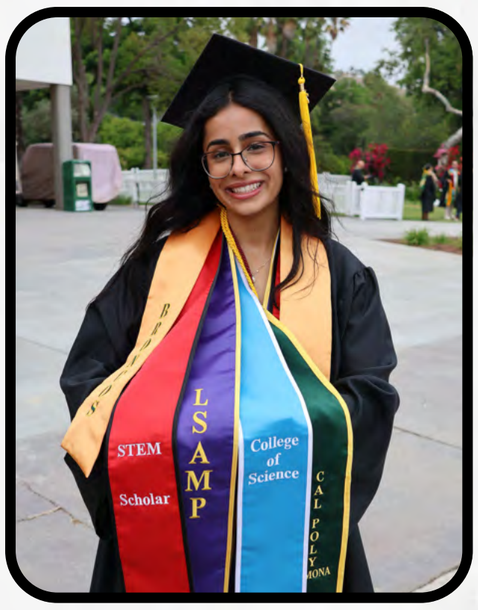
















END OF THE YEAR EXCURSION

Saturday, May 23rd

Every year, SEES invites its most involved members to an excursion to explore the beautiful scenery and adventurous activities Southern California offers. This year, on Saturday, May 23rd, students from our research scholar and mentorship programs embarked on a whale watching cruise in Long Beach. Our students ventured out into the Pacific Ocean, enduring the cold, windy weather, to view marine animals, including whales, dolphins, seals, and more.













STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Highlighting some of our students' achievements, including acceptances into REUs, professional or graduate programs, publications, industry positions, internships, and more.



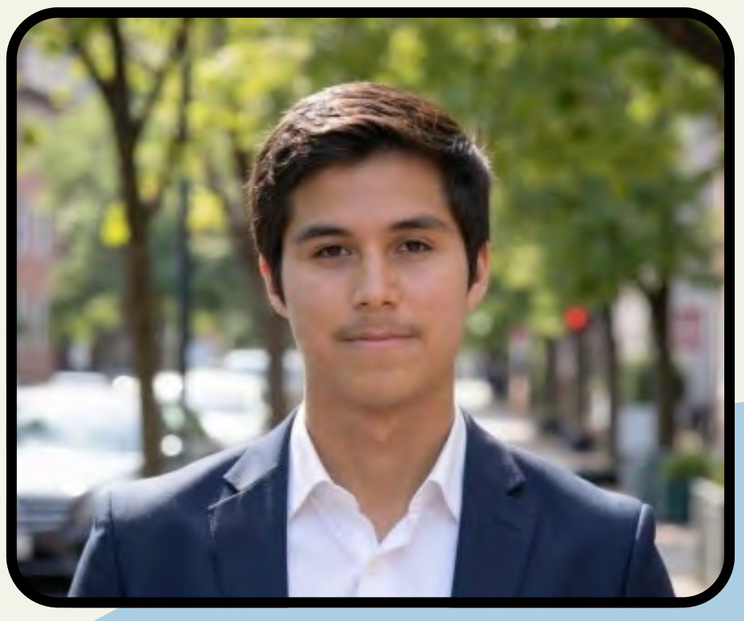
Abbygail Benitez - Pharmacology REU, Western University



Jelani Everette - Quest Diagnostics Laboratory Technician



Laila Tatum - Iowa Summer Institute in Biostatistics (ISIB) Research Fellow, University of Iowa College of Public Health



Joshua Estrada - Raytheon Technologies Corporation (RTX) Software Engineer



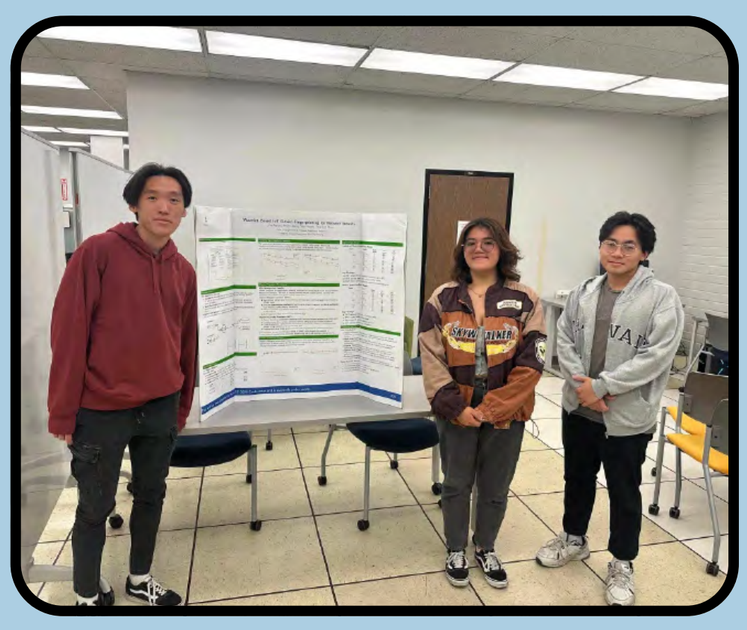
Sydney Pacheco - Presented at SIAM Mini conference



Elizabeth Sheets - Master's in Biological Sciences, Cal Poly Pomona



Madison Kay - CDU/UCLA Undergraduate Cancer Research Training Program (UCRTP)



Sarah Acosta - Published the following paper: Amamra, A., Nguyen, V., Cheung, A., Acosta, S., & Pham, T. L. (2026). Wavelet-Based IoT Device Fingerprinting. Electronics,

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Highlighting some of our students' achievements, including acceptances into REUs, professional or graduate programs, publications, industry positions, internships, and more.

Afnan Saleh - Chuck Lorre Summer Research Fellow, Stanford University School of Medicine REU

Alyssa Tran - PepsiCo Frito-Lay Supply Chain Intern

Arianna Escalante - Presented at MAA Eastern Conference

Bianca Barbosa - Silver Lake Research Co. Manufacturing Intern

Britney Collier - Johnson & Johnson MedTech Student Data Scientist Co-Op

Gabriel Martinez - Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA) Laboratory Intern

Gabriel Robles - Barclays Technology Developer Intern

Jacob Levine - UC Riverside Computer Science Department REU

Juan Rodriguez - Partners in Education (PIE) Fellow, Cal Poly Pomona

Lilliana Ceballos - Walnut Physical Therapy Intern; Sarrico Physical and Occupational Therapy Intern

Lou Canela - Presented at MAA Eastern Conference

Matthew Polino - Ph.D. in Chemistry, UC Irvine

Michelle Reyes - Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) Intern

Minh Lu - Honorable mention for NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and Ph.D. in Chemistry, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Miriam Khalil - Published Xie C, Velandia MAM, Marecek S, Khalil M, Hao J. Nicotinamide mononucleotide and nicotinamide riboside attenuate cytokine production in human keratinocytes via suppression of the p38 Pathway. Mol Biol Rep. 2026 Mar.

Randy Hernandez - University of Michigan College of Pharmacy REU





THANK YOU!

Another great academic year ends for our SEES students, who shape our community and provide lasting memories to the program.

To our graduates, you will always be a part of SEES, and we'd love to stay in touch!

Scan the QR code to join the SEES Alumni community.