

# UC Merced

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Undergraduate

# Student Athletes:

## A New Social Class of Undereducated and Overworked College Graduates

Athena Velasquez

### Abstract

Universities across the country are quickly diminishing the title of a student athlete. As Division I universities accumulate millions in profit from sporting events and merchandise, student athletes are simply known for the position they play and not the degree they are working towards. Since these athletes are seen as such they are often pushed to their physical and psychological limits, causing sometimes irreversible damage to the body. The students themselves exhibit no power in situations where they must perform at their peak level even if they are mentally and physically stressed, which will certainly reduce their performance in the classroom. Since student athletes are not treated as students, the consequences are seen in the workforce when cities are in need of social workers or are wondering why there are declining numbers of primary care physicians. Being able to treat student athletes as scholars has been difficult throughout universities especially since students are admitted with lower scores than their non-athletic counterparts. Still, the student is admitted underneath the title of a student and should be given a chance to utilize their resources for their education. The education of college students delegates the success of a nation and since student athletes are not driven to learn but only to use their athletic prowess, this nation is breeding a new social class consisting of overworked and undereducated college students among those who actually graduate. If regulations are not implemented regarding the admittance of under-qualified student athletes, then it should seem that at least students should be able to obtain a working degree by the NCAA not bifurcating a student athlete's role in college as they are given the opportunity to learn and play sports in a healthy manner.

Student athletes are seen by some as extraordinary beings who are able to utilize both mind and body to succeed in life. Others may view student athletes as overrated youth who exploit their athletic abilities through colleges when their only goal is to play professional sports. Both cases can be true, and it can be easy for a college athlete to start neglecting their coursework. Sara Ganim, the author of, “CNN analysis: some college athletes play like adults, read like 5th-graders,” reported that “it is simply too much to ask athletes to jump into a tough schedule of practice and games, plus keep up classwork” (Ganim, 2014). This problem is strictly seen at the collegiate level, mostly institutionalized within the NCAA who knowingly recruit athletes with low grades that would not have been allowed entry into the school otherwise. This may seem like a paved road for poorly performing student athletes to be able to obtain a degree despite their track record, but it is not so. Ganim adds, “it’s nearly impossible to jump from an elementary to a college reading level while juggling a hectic schedule as an NCAA athlete” (Ganim, 2014). Specifically, Division I universities nefariously exhibit their student athletes such as they are seen on television, in video games, and displayed on merchandise. Many students care for their education, but student athletes are geared more towards caring for their school rank rather than their diploma, seeing as that is the reason for their recruitment. As fidelity towards sports increases, the chances of athletes becoming overworked and leading to injuries increases as well. Injuries can later foretell lasting psychological effects and physical stress on students if not handled properly. With student athletes considering that their scholarship will be forfeited if they are injured or do not perform as expected by the team, they can lose sight of what is healthy for their mind and body. Additionally, with mental stress thrust upon student athletes, it can be difficult to succeed in the classroom especially when the student is already below average. Instead of coaching staffs re-evaluating their coaching style and technique to aid these students, investigative research has shown some schools have been known to illegitimately give student athletes grades they did not work for or pass classes they could not have otherwise passed on their own. Division I schools responsible for these acts are overall allocating scholarships to students that they later redefine as sole athletes, who in turn obtain a degree that was not fully worked for. If a student athlete is also overworked and injury prone due to overuse from sports, studies suggest there is no future for that individual as a professional athlete nor as a fully educated college graduate seeing as that they would not have learned as much as they should have as a student. These series of events are observed more abundantly in NCAA Division I sports seeing as that this division is the highest ranked college sports division. Ganim states, “NCAA sports are big business, with millions of dollars at stake for big business” (Ganim, 2014). Thus, Division I universities are more willing to sacrifice the education of their student athletes than lower division universities. This detrimental behavior is causing an increase in college graduates who cannot perform as well in a post-graduate world as college students who were able to take full advantage of their education. The NCAA board must be reviewed and staff must be re-evaluated to promote the well being of student athletes in regards to their mental and physical health as well as their prosperity post graduation.

In April of 2013, sports fans winced with compassion as 20-year old Kevin Ware, a basketball player for the University of Louisville snapped two bones in his leg on national television. As one of his bones tore through his skin and protruded outward, fans and fellow sports players wondered what could have caused this dramatic accident, seeing as that Ware did not land on his feet too harshly after blocking a basketball shot just preceding the accident. Tripp Underwood, the author of “College athlete’s gruesome leg break sparks national conversation about injury prevention in young players,” writes, “there is a lot of speculation as to what could

have caused Ware's leg to break so badly... [but] stress reactions-chronic stress in the bone-can weaken the overall structure of the bone" (Underwood, 2013) which can give possible causation to Ware's injury. This game was unique in that it was leading up to the final championships in NCAA Division I college basketball, meaning that the coach would have prerogative to excessively train the athletes and it is not farfetched to inquire that Ware had been overtrained. Jingzhen Yang, the author of "Epidemiology of Overuse and Acute Injuries Among Competitive Collegiate Athletes," reported, "the most common acute injuries were sprains and strains, which constituted almost two-thirds of all acute injuries (62.7%)...49.0% [being] of overuse injuries and 49.7% of acute injuries" (Yang, 2012). Competition season may very well be a caveat for even more stress and overuse. Vetter, the author of "Correlations between injury, training intensity, and physical and mental exhaustion among college athletes," states that, "fifty percent of the total number of athletes reported chronic injury ... [because] the training involved 2-3 hours of moderate to high intensity 4.5 days a week" (Vetter, 2010) and seeing that this is survey data, many athletes may have not reported being overworked or physically exhausted when they in fact had been. This does however provide a range of how to gauge the effect of which overuse and overtraining have on causing injuries for college athletes.

Mental exhaustion can be a result of overtraining as well. Student athletes who are constantly under pressure to outperform their physical expectations suffer mentally due to the stress attributed to their hectic lives. An athlete who has suffered an injury is even more vulnerable towards a decline in their mental health as their scholarship may be in danger. Gregory Wilson, the author of "Comparing Sources of Stress in College Student Athletes and Non-Athletes," notes that "athletes experience unique stressors related to their athletic status such as extensive time demands; a loss of the 'star status' that many had experienced as high school athletes; [and] injuries" (Wilson, 2005). This mental health deterioration may result in a loss of interest in school and a decline in grades for these students, risking their degree.

Psychological well-being of a student athlete has multiple contributing factors and can be viewed as a cycle of stress and injury. Britton Brewer, the author of "Grading College Athletes," remarks, "psychological factors have been found to play important roles in the occurrence of, and recovery from, sport injury ...[with] a consistent positive association between life stress and sport injury" (Brewer, 2003). This stress-injury relation can be modified with appropriate stress management skills such as not overtraining athletes. Elizabeth Hedgpeth, the author of "Incorporating Stress Management into Athletic Injury Rehabilitation," suggests that, "athletic trainers be proficient in stress theory regarding the psychological aspects of injury, as well as techniques to address them" (Hodgpeth, 1998). When athletes experience high constant level of mental stress, their grades begin to slump, causing even more stress for the individual. A student athlete with an injury already will have increased levels of stress and might maintain their injury longer or obtain a new one. Thus, advocacy of mental and physical health of all student athletes can be seen as an important contributor to how well they perform in the classroom and banal to coaches or trainers who would favor the sustained the health of their athletes.

Grades for some college athletes suffer prior to any sports related stress or injury and are more recently being brought to the attention of reporters and professors. Kavitha Davidson, the author of "Why Don't Colleges Care About Athletes' Grades," observes that, "the federal graduation rate for all institutions is 59.2 percent, and 57.2 percent for public colleges," which is much less than the non athlete graduation rate. Davidson also reveals that "the graduation success rate is an NCAA concoction that takes into account athlete-specific circumstances, most notably transfers" (Davidson, 2014) meaning that the data is knowingly skewed. The chicanery

of this data was revealed when the NCAA stated that they take into account transfer students which are not included in the national graduation rate, meaning that their numbers had been exaggerated. While many students athletes do in fact graduate, many athletes have low GPAs, not in correspondence to being overworked. Ganim states, “ 60% read between fourth-and eighth-grade levels. Between 8% and 10% read below a third-grade level [and] the University of Louisville earned a profit of \$26.9 million from its men’s basketball program” (Ganim, 2014). The reason why many student athletes cannot read or write at a college level but are still admitted into competitive universities levies on the fact that they can produce substantial revenue. Ganim notes a professor at the University of Georgia who states that universities, “are able to graduate athletes, but have they learned anything? Are they productive citizens now?...To get a degree is one thing, to be functional with that degree is totally different” (Ganim, 2014). While the NCAA has set up tutors and summer academic programs for these students, there has been more failure than success as there is an obvious threshold to how fast a student can learn. A student may be able to transition from a 9th grade reading level to a college reading level more easily than from a 4th grade level which is where many of the athletes are academically originating from. These students athletes must also worry about their athletic priorities seeing as that if a student becomes injured and loses their scholarship, they will furthermore lose the extra tutoring provided. Coaches will go to great lengths to have a student athlete remain in school, as long as they are an asset to the team. Davidson points out that “athletes have lower grading standards and easy--or even fake--jock classes” (Davidson, 2014). Also, some professors are allowing students to pass a class with little to no effort put forward, usually because they cannot write essays well enough to pass the class initially. Or it may even be written for them. No matter the case, the NCAA has ignored the flawed and illegal system universities are employing to gain profit and distribute fake degrees, if the athlete is even able to graduate.

Overtrained athletes who are also not educated are a direct result stemming from the NCAA’s lack of control pertaining to athletic regulations. Universities are recruiting athletes, not students and have little intent for undereducated athletes to become educated. It seems that if universities were concerned about graduation rates, there would be an increase in programs to aid the students. When these students are handed degrees, they cannot be fully productive with their degree if they did not fulfill the required coursework. It can also be deduced that universities have no intent for student athletes to play professional sports. When a freshman athlete is drafted to play professional sports, the university is forfeiting millions in potential revenue. Thus, many coaches simply are preparing athletes for present profitability and not future success. Through overuse and overtraining, an athlete’s skill and willpower is in a sense used up in college and they cannot move forward into the professional sports world. This leaves college athletes in a rare position where some cannot academically compete with their peers nor future co-workers and also are unable to play professional sports due to exhaustion and injuries. These individuals are left with a degree they cannot uphold and a sport they can no longer play. Starla Muhammad, the author of “Not making the grade-Why big time college sports continue failing Black male student athletes,” discovered that “nearly 3,000 students and student athletes enrolled in so-called ‘no-show’ classes” (Muhammad, 2014) which allows the students to write a paper for a course, without having to take the full course. They are minorities, many African-American who are admitted illegally but have an opportunity of obtaining a college degree. When these minorities obtain degrees they have not worked for, they cannot give back to their community productively and the universities are providing them a disservice. It can even be said

that these African-Americans who constitute a large body of college athletes, are being exploited with promise of an education when in reality they are solely being used for capital gain. A more important deduction can be made that whilst many universities may show an increase in enrollment of minorities, it is not taken into account the percentage that play sports and will graduate college uneducated. It seems that when universities admit minorities to play sports that they will later give back to their communities, but in reality only socio economic hindrance in underserved communities is promoted and maintained. Muhammed concludes that “if you have all White men or overwhelmingly White men making the decisions in college sports you’re going to have a limited perspective on who to hire, on decisions to make and what’s important” (Muhammed, 2014). With this, it can even be theorized that the NCAA is characterized by institutionalized racism through the exploitation and malservice towards African American student athletes.

The NCAA foundation is in need of review, focusing on admittance regulations as well as coaching evaluations if communities are to benefit from minority students attending college and earning a degree. A student athlete must be primarily considered a student, and then an athlete. Training methods as well as admittance and teaching styles need also be amended to allow student athletes a fair chance at earning a college degree. It is in a university’s best interest to believe in its students so as they can give back to their institution as well as their community. If universities continue to admit student athletes that do not meet academic requirements, the least a university should consider is the option of extra coursework and tutoring to ameliorate the situation of the student athlete. Athletes should also be closely monitored for chances of injuries and when they are injured, should undergo mental as well as physical rehabilitation. Programs such as these will help maintain the health of the student as well as maintain their grades. This change must happen seeing as that in underserved communities, minority athletes are being plucked from their community, with promises of assistance in obtaining a degree that they believe can be paid for through their athleticism, only to return back home, overworked and with false credentials. Some will still not be able to read and write at a high school level. If student athlete admittance is not amended, injustice will be continuously provided to underserved communities as well as the students attending these universities. Only when a student athlete’s degree is more important than their team’s title can the NCAA be seen as a cooperative and rewarding system to be a part of and not the illegal and capitalist system that it is today.

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## **Biography**

Athena Velasquez is a Los Angeles resident who majored in biology with an emphasis in microbiology and immunology as well as a minor in political science at UC Merced. With her degrees, the Nevada native hopes to tackle issues pertaining to bio ethics as well as civil rights including those of race and gender. Upon graduation she worked abroad teaching English in China for 8 months and is currently completing an EMT course. Athena aspires to own her own business while working in the healthcare profession as well as pursuing her hobbies in singing and software engineering.





## Fall 2015 UCMURJ Editors

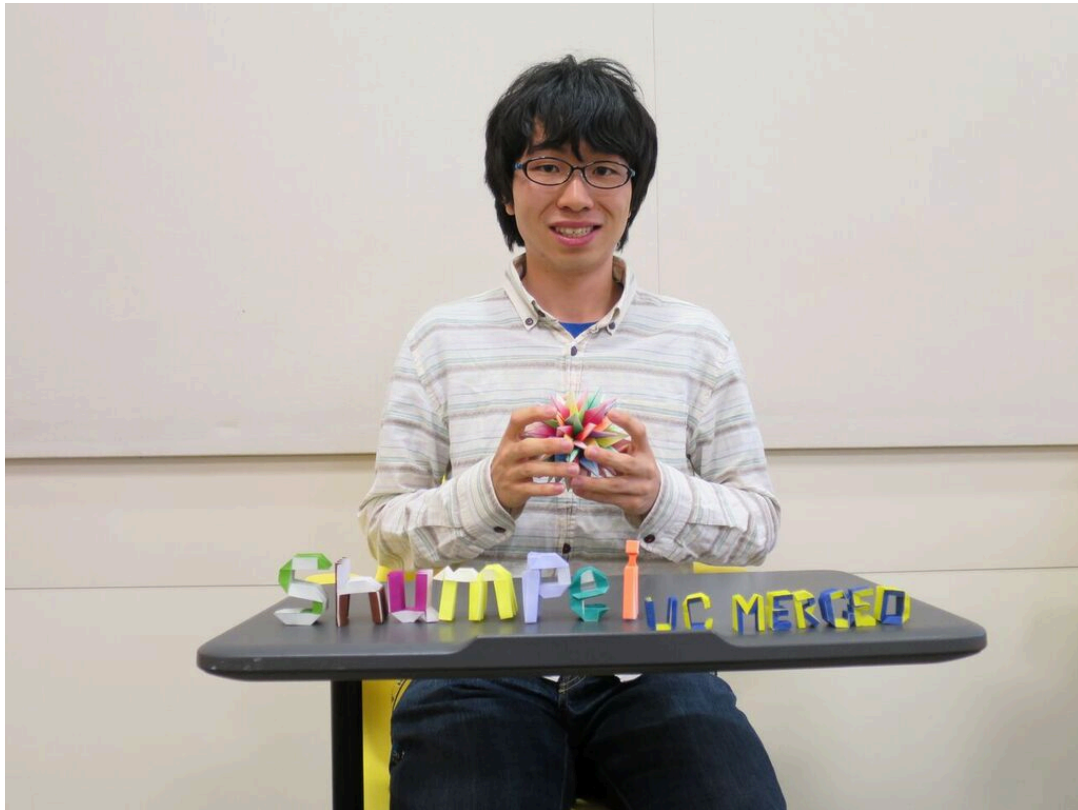
Senior Editor - Anthony Robert Spinks

My name is Anthony Robert Spinks and my major is Business Management and Economics. I am from Van Nuys, CA. That is in the San Fernando Valley for those who do not know. I have many interests such as sports, computers, writing, and volunteering. Currently I am not in any sports though I would love to play for the basketball team for UC Merced. I wanted to be a UCMURJ editor because I wanted to enhance my writing skills for business and to be able to have a skill for my classes as well. My future goals are to be in the marketing department with the Sacramento Kings. I currently will be applying for an internship with the company so I am looking forward to the future. My dream goal is to be a CEO of the company one day.



Photographer - Shumpei Kuwana

I was born in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan, and lived in Nikko-city in Tochigi for 19 years. I went to Diablo Valley College, which is in San Francisco bay area, from 2013 to 2015 and transferred to UC Merced on this August, so I am junior of transfer. My major is Business, especially majoring Management. My hobby includes traveling by train, making origami, which is Japanese traditional art, and playing and watching soccer. I have completed to ride half of Japanese Railroad line, about 89 lines. I became a member of UCMURJ editor because I want to improve my English skills, especially grammatical skills. In addition, I also want to get more experience because I have never experienced editorial things so far, so I want to learn it. My future goal is to go back to Japan to start my work. I want to work at the place where English is required so that I can make good use of experience in the United States.



Graphic Designer - Jasmin Hinojosa

Hello! My name is Jasmin Hinojosa and I am originally from Los Angeles. I am currently studying here, at UC Merced, as a Management and Business Economics major with a double minor in N.S.E.D. Education and Writing. I have many interests, some of which include conceptualizing graphic art/design, watching Netflix and sleeping in. I became a UCMURJ editor because I wanted to gain experience in editing and improve my own writing by learning what other editors feel good writing is. As far as my future is concerned, I do not know what exactly I am going to do, but I will for sure travel.



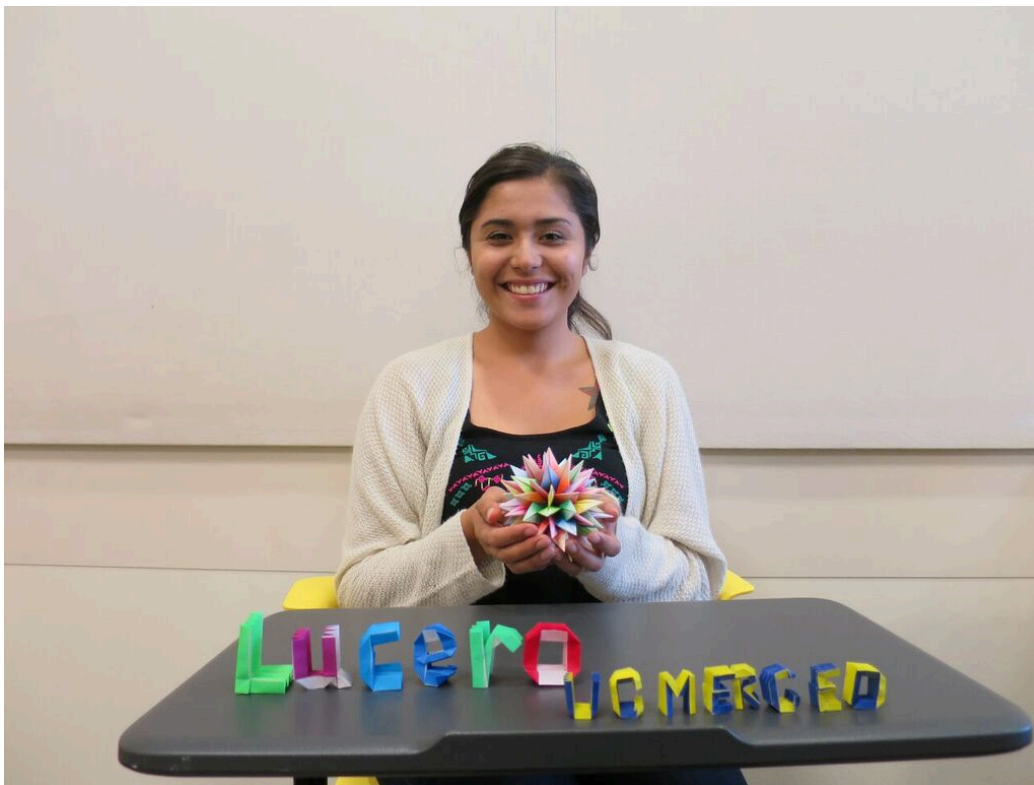
Web Editor - Jeffrey Ball

My name is Jeffrey Ball. I was born and raised in Sacramento, California. I am a fourth year Biomedical Engineering major and I currently do not have a minor. Upon graduating high school, my interests included chemistry and math, but as I get further into the coursework for my degree, my interests have expanded to include physiology, biology, and disease research. I wanted to be a UCM Undergraduate Research Journal editor because scientific research journals are very involved in scientific progress so journals are an important part of my career interests. I feel that being an editor for a research journal is a great way to build skills necessary to one day be published in a scientific research journal and will also be a valuable attribute on my resume to researchers I hope to be employed by. My future goals are to lead and or own a cancer research firm.



Public Relations - Lucero Soto

Lucero Soto was born in Salinas, CA but moved to Sacramento, CA when she was 8 years old. She is a third year Sociology Major with a minor in Chicana@ Studies. Being part of the URJ will be a great experience as well as a insight on publishing research. Lucero aspires to attend graduate school, also in the future becoming a high school teacher. As a member of M.E.Ch.A de UC Merced Lucero is a proud Chicana. She has two American Bullies a female and male who she loves very much. Lucero hopes to help the URJ as the Public Relations inform the University of the great opportunity.



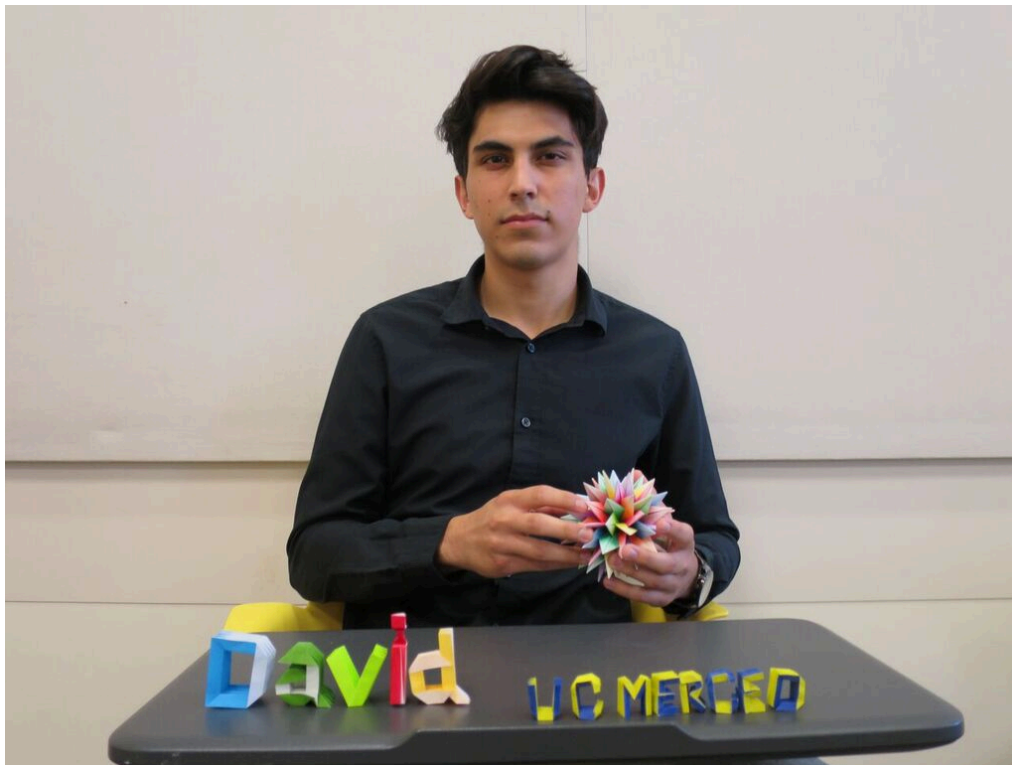
Research Profile Manager - Iliana Rosales

I am a fourth-year Political Science major/writing minor. I was born and raised in Los Angeles, specifically the South Bay area. Coming to UC Merced was definitely a new experience for me, as I was accustomed to the fast-paced environment of the city and there is not much in my current surrounding environment aside from the university. I am grateful to attend such a diverse institution that is made up of individuals from all types of backgrounds. The University of California, Merced has become my home and it where I have grown as an individual. Attending UC Merced has allowed me to discover new interests and passions, such as writing/blogging, photography, hiking and volunteer work. One of the reasons why I joined the UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal was because of my love for writing and journaling. My position with the journal is the Research Journal Manager; this position allows me to interview undergraduates who are conducting research on campus, which I love because I get to post their interviews on Instagram to influence others to take advantage of the resources that are available at UC Merced.



Web Editor - David Leanos Badillo

I was born in El Distrito Federal or more commonly known as, El DF. El DF is the capital of Mexico City. I lived there for about 10 years before my family migrated to California in the pursuit of a safer life. I am currently pursuing a major in Computer Science and Engineering with minors in Math and Physics. I've always been interested in puzzles, fixing cars and playing chess, which is probably why I love computer science so much. I am interested in being a UCMURJ editor because I want to learn how to work better in a team environment and also get some insight into publishing papers. I plan to get pushing later on as well. In the future I'd like to pursue my own undergraduate research on the impact of the Mexican Government's use of technology to suppress civil unrest. Later on I also hope to do research in the field of numerical analysis and quantum computing.





Tabling Manager - Jahmeel Walker

My name is Jahmeel Walker, senior political science major at UC Merced. I joined the UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal without any real expectations, except to gain experience in journalism production. I like to consider myself a writer. I enjoy writing poetry and short stories in my leisure time, and want to venture into as many forms of creative writing as possible, just for the pleasure of writing. A high school friend of mine that studies journalism at Brown University inspired me to try journalism and I did by joining the Undergraduate Research Journal. My role as a part of the UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal was the tabling coordinator. I was most responsible for presenting the journal to directly to students. As the tabling coordinator, I had to schedule times for my peers to publicly promote the journal by passing out flyers and inform students of the journal as they walk to and from class. The most challenging part of being the tabling coordinator is finding the target audience. It is not easy to decipher what a researcher looks like. But the table coordinating flows most smoothly when my peers were enthusiastically promoting the journal to students.



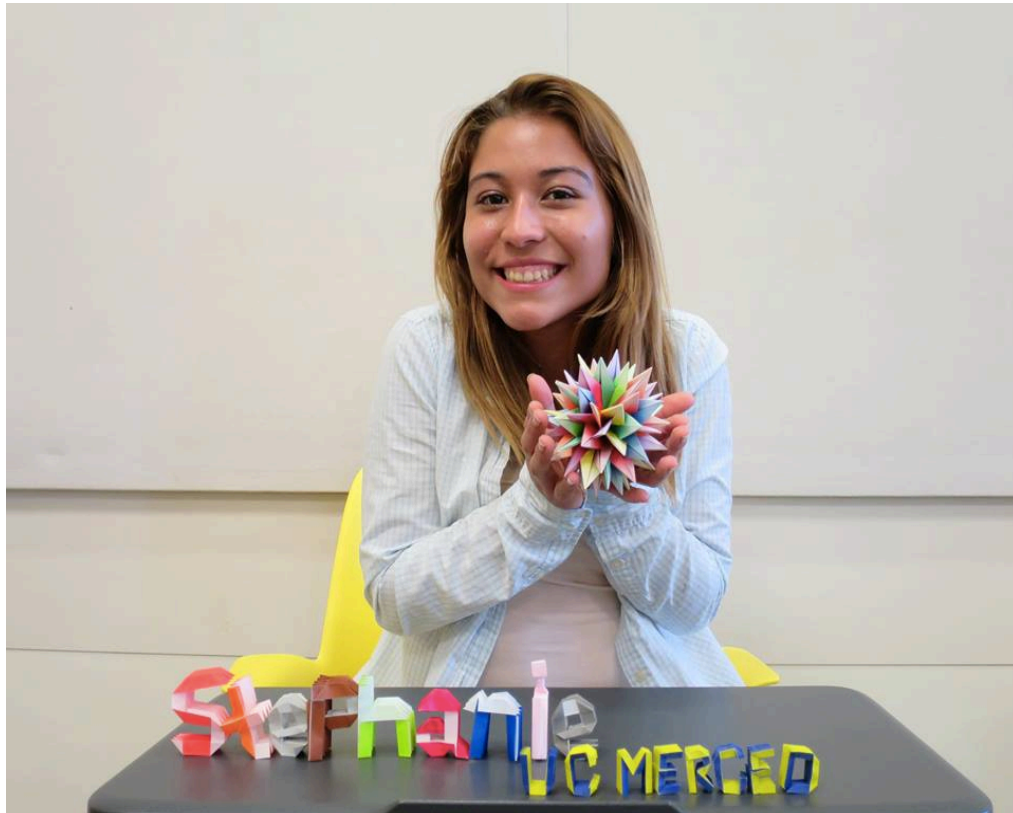
Treasurer - Alexander Biwald

Alexander Biwald is the Founder and President of a nationally recognized numismatic investment firm. While pursuing a career in numismatics Alexander has grown to understand the importance of client satisfaction, leading him to become one of the youngest Client Associates at Merrill Lynch Wealth Management. At age 20 Alexander was a (5x) ANA Chicago Platinum Night Seller, (2x) Long Beach Signature Seller, (2x) PNG NY US Coins Signature Auction Seller, and a March 2014 Baltimore Auction Featured Seller, receiving a featured part in the world-renowned collectors magazine Coin World for the upgrade of a high-end Lincoln Cent that generated \$11,750 at auction.



Class Presentation Manager - Stephanie Maldonado

Hi my name is Stephanie Maldonado I'm a second year Political Science major with a minor in Anthropology. I'm originally from the San Fernando Valley. My dream is to one day becoming a Lawyer. As a Political Science major, I have become a critical thinker, reader and writer. My writing can be spontaneous, creative, and formal and often times direct and indirect. The main reason why I'm excited to read all research submitted by my peers. As a writer, my main goal is to communicate my ideas to the readers without favoring my ideas over others. When writing, my favorite approach is creativity writing, because it allows me to use my imagination, and it is a form of free expression. I can truly say that the Undergraduate Research Journal will open the doors for me to be exposed to all different writing styles and I look forward to start working with my peers.



Faculty Coordinator - Dr. Iris Ruiz

Dr. Iris Ruiz has been a Lecturer for the Merritt Writing Program at UC Merced since 2010. She teaches courses in advanced composition, journal editing, first and second year composition and Chicana Studies. Iris has been a member of the NCTE/CCCC Latin@ Caucus since 2000, contributing to Writing and Working for Change projects, Reflections, the formation of the WPA POC Caucus, and she served as the principal author the current NCTE Position Statement in Support of Ethnic Studies Initiatives in K-12 Curricula. She has recently been elected to the position of Co-Chair for the NCTE/CCCC Latin@ Caucus and has a book in production with Palgrave MacMillan.

