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Four undergraduates and one professor receive Chancellor's research awards; UCSB Library awards six students for exemplary research

[Shelly Leachman](#)

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With commencement impending for the UC Santa Barbara Class of 2023, several graduating seniors and one faculty member have earned special recognition for their contributions to undergraduate research. Chancellor Henry T. Yang and the UCSB Library have each announced their award winners for the academic year.

The Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research has four student winners: Matthew Ho (computer science), Elayna Maquinales (history), Elizabeth (Liz) Munday (sociology), and Lindsey Washiashi (biology). Jarett Henderson, a lecturer in the Department of History, has received the Chancellor's Faculty Award for Undergraduate Research Mentoring.

In nominating Ho for the award, computer science professor William Wang, wrote, “Matthew stands out as one of the most exceptional and innovative researchers I have had the pleasure of encountering.” Wang pointed to Ho’s oral paper for the prestigious International Conference on Learning Representation, a rare achievement for an undergraduate, as a “testament to his brilliance, dedication and problem-solving capabilities.” Ho’s research in the AI realm — in particular his work to enhance AI’s ability to provide explanatory, cause-and-effect responses, Wang said, has the potential to revolutionize the field and impact industry.

Maquinales was nominated by history professor John Majewski for her original research paper about the relationship between Cherokee slavery and U.S. abolitionists. Analyzing newspaper articles and primary sources, Maquinales’s paper, Majewski noted, is “appropriately critical of both abolitionists and modern scholars who see Cherokee slavery as fundamentally different from white Southern slavery.” He cited her “ability to make such cogent and original arguments,” pointing to her addition of new insight to the literature, in characterizing her work as “in a different category than even the best undergraduate research papers.”

In consultation with sociology professor Tristan Bridges, Munday produced an original research project that sought to learn whether people exposed to racially stereotypic content would prompt people to racialize fictitious characters. She designed her own social psychological experiment and indeed was able to prove her theory, thus adding a new layer to existing work. “This was a highly innovative project ... demonstrating a great deal more work than I have ever seen an undergraduate take on,” Bridges wrote in his nomination, placing her among the best research assistants he’s ever worked with.

Even among the best Ph.D. students he has trained, Washiashi is an exceptional researcher, noted nominator and Distinguished Professor Joel Rothman. Washiashi worked as a research assistant in Rothman’s lab since starting at UCSB in 2019. She collected and analyzed data for a project investigating sensory mechanisms and behavior in the model organism *C. elegans*, making substantial contributions and serving as co-author on the resulting major research manuscript. “Lindsey’s ardor for scientific exploration, active participation in discussion and debate, and her ability to learn lab procedures and the scientific method are only a few of the qualities that make her stand out as a truly exceptional undergraduate researcher,” he wrote.

Henderson, the research mentoring winner, was nominated by history professor Brad Bouley for his “profound effect on the research interests and abilities of the students who pursue advanced projects here at UCSB.” As the teacher of a course centered around the Undergraduate Journal of History, who also oversees the journal’s production, Henderson uses the class as an opportunity to introduce his students to the professional practice of history, Bouley said. As a mentor to students in a senior thesis seminar, Henderson “guides students to creating superior research projects ... his influence was apparent in the very best work students submitted.”

The increasingly competitive Library Award for Undergraduate Researchers (LAUR) recognizes students who produce a scholarly or creative work that makes expert and sophisticated use of the collections, resources and services of the UCSB Library. First- and second-place recipients in each of three broad categories receive \$750 (first place) and \$500 (second place).

Among the six recipients for 2023 is Liz Munday, a Chancellor’s research award winner, who won the first-place LAUR in social sciences for her project, “Visualizing Race: How Stereotypes Activate Racialized Thinking When Racial Cues Are Not Present.” Taking second place for the social sciences is Leila Katibah, for her project, “The Politics of Pegasus Spyware: Examining the Impact of Surveillance on Journalism.”

In the humanities and fine arts category, first place went to Victoria Korotchenko for “The Fate of the Motherland’s Children: Youth Action, Trauma, and Experiences within the Russian Revolution (1917–1923). Second place was awarded to Cheyenne Assil for “MoMA and American Art: A Re-Evaluation of the Museum of Modern Art and its Presumed Eurocentric Attitude.”

Finally, for science and engineering, Hally Zhou and Harry Hebler won first place for their joint project, “Methods of Assessing Air Pollution and Economic Development in Colombia,” while Kareena Johnson took second place for her work, “PC1-p15 Expression Does Not Induce Mitochondrial Fission via DRP1 Phosphorylation in Polycystic Kidney Disease.”

Media Contact

Shelly Leachman

Editorial Director

(805) 893-2191

sleachman@ucsb.edu

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