

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
LONG BEACH

# UNIVERSITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2020

A CELEBRATION OF  
INSTRUCTION, RESEARCH,  
SCHOLARSHIP, CREATIVE  
ACTIVITY AND SERVICE.



## OUTSTANDING GRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT AWARD

### Rebecca Howard

Psychology, College of Liberal Arts



As a Master's student in the Psychological Research program, Rebecca Howard continually displays the intelligence, conscientiousness, insightfulness, and extraordinary work ethic that make her an outstanding member of the department. According to her faculty mentor, Professor Courtney Ahrens, Howard is among the best graduate students Ahrens has mentored in the last 17 years.

Howard's research focuses on sexual assault and intimate partner violence with a specific emphasis on institutional and cultural betrayal. She has already begun to contribute to the trauma psychology field through her professional and university-based conference presentations and written works, such as her Master's thesis, a number of peer-reviewed journal articles, and most prominently, an invited book chapter.

In collaboration with several distinguished researchers in her field, her book chapter most notably expands existing literature by focusing on the feminist conceptualization of rape, power, and social change. In particular, Howard offers a critical discussion about how structural and social systems work to silence survivors. She also provides concrete recommendations that individuals, campuses, and organizations can use to help break the silence around sexual violence. This chapter has the potential to make a lasting impact on the field.

In her short time at CSULB, Howard has accomplished more than most. Her goal is to become a university professor who conducts research about sexual violence prevention and policy. With her research and academic accomplishments, she is well on her way to achieving that goal.

## OUTSTANDING GRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT AWARD

### Bryen Irving

Physics & Astronomy, College of Natural  
Sciences & Mathematics



Though Bryen Irving is presently a graduate student, he exhibits all academic skills necessary to sustain a brilliant career in physics. His innovative research, as well as high-grade point average, has demonstrated his commitment to succeeding in his chosen field. What is more astonishing is that he does all of this while he works as a full-time engineer.

Besides having a passion for graduate-level gravitational wave physics, Irving received his undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Applied Mathematics and Physics at USC. As he started his career in the automotive industry, he knew over time that his interests lay elsewhere and decided to pursue a career as a full-fledged research physicist.

Irving has already collaborated with experts in the field, such as Dr. Jocely Read of CSU Fullerton, and has presented his research at several conferences. As an accomplished researcher, he has written and defended his Master's thesis, and has been published twice in his short time as a CSULB physics graduate student. As a result of his research contributions, he was referenced as the first author in one of his publications.

Irving will continue to build on his research experience at CSULB as he pursues a Ph.D. in physics at Stanford University. Irving's research advisor, Dr. Thomas Klaehn, adds that his understanding, drive and skillset will make him successful as he pursues his scientific career in physics.

## OUTSTANDING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT AWARD

### Stephanie Leal

Chemistry & Biochemistry, College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics



As a member of Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD), an NIH-funded research program for undergraduate students, Stephanie Leal has dedicated her future career to making a difference. As an undergraduate major in biochemistry, she currently is a research student in CSULB's cancer biology laboratory.

With Leal's educational diligence and passion, she is widely recognized by both her peers and professors as eager to learn and meticulous in her work. She has already accomplished much in three years of undergraduate research work. Recently, the work of her and her colleagues was published and presented at CSULB, as well as in a regional conference where she won first place for undergraduate poster presentation.

Besides graduating Magna Cum Laude and being a Sally Casanova Scholar, Leal conducted independent research for her Honors Thesis. Also, she independently prepared and submitted a research proposal for the 2020 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

In the future, Leal can be found at UCSD, where she will complete her Ph.D. within the Biomedical Sciences program. She plans to continue her educational pursuits by researching the cellular mechanisms of cancer and other diseases.

## EARLY ACADEMIC CAREER EXCELLENCE AWARD

### Laura D'Anna

Health Science



Dr. Laura Hoyt D'Anna believes that everyone should have the right and opportunities to achieve equitable and optimal health. Based on this passionate premise to advocate for others, D'Anna raises the issue of racial and ethnic health disparities in her work. She is dedicated to inciting this same passion for social justice in her students.

Within her academic discipline of public health, D'Anna is most engaged in how experiences of discrimination affect health and health disparities. Her goal is to implement teaching strategies that inspire curiosity and higher-level thinking. She also illuminates these health disparities to her students as they explore real-life public health issues.

Since her appointment in 2016, D'Anna has brought over \$4.71 million in direct research and research training funding to CSULB. She has served as principal investigator for three, multi-year projects totaling \$3.95 million. These projects were funded by nationally-recognized organizations, such as the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, the Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program administered by the Regents of the University of California, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

D'Anna serves as the director of the CSULB Center for Health Equity Research (CHER), where she works with a highly-skilled research team and students. CHER administers an annual intensive research-training institute designed to prepare early career faculty to conduct community and health-based research in minority-serving institutions. The CHER Institute also includes a webinar series focused on funding and research support for early-career faculty. She has partnered with numerous community-based organizations and university faculty, and most notably has a long-standing collaboration with Dr. Alex Washington from the CSULB School of Social Work.

## Vahid Balali

**Civil Engineering & Construction  
Engineering Management**



As an assistant professor within the Department of Civil Engineering and Construction Engineering Management for three years, Dr. Vahid Balali has found teaching to be the most rewarding aspect of his work. This passion has translated into providing unique opportunities for his students to integrate into his academic research.

This holistic approach comes from his belief that teaching is a dynamic art. He hopes that his style enables students to be thoughtful, critical, independent thinkers and writers. In order to keep up with the latest pedagogy, Balali takes every opportunity to improve his teaching strategy, either through constant research, his own experiences as a student, the work of his peers, or through attending pedagogy workshops.

Balali also created a new course for CSULB students, CE575: Construction Optimization and Decision Making for Heavy Civil Infrastructure, first available in Fall 2017. This course educates students on all the innovative practices emerging in civil engineering, effectively preparing them for their careers. He also serves on numerous on and off campus boards and committees, many of which are dedicated towards improving student experience, or ensuring that CSULB remains a center of engineering innovation and research.

Already, Balali has been recognized for his own achievements. He was selected as one of the Consulting-Specifying Engineer's (CSE) top 40 Under 40 in 2017 and was named an Engineering News Record (ENR) California Top Young Professional in 2017. He has demonstrated considerable research contributions; has published a total of 18 peer-reviewed journal papers, and 22 peer-reviewed conference papers in the prestigious conferences.

## Fangyuan Tian

**Chemistry & Biochemistry**



As an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at CSULB, Dr. Fangyuan Tian has dedicated her career to teaching the next generation of chemistry professionals. Interwoven in her teaching, she is committed to providing scholarly research, professional engagement, and community service opportunities for her students.

In her teaching, Tian truly believes in using her coursework as a way to engage students with essential skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. She has developed a new Chemistry graduate course to help students explore the topic. She has also taught five different fundamental courses, supervised 25 undergraduate students and four graduate students in their research.

As a stellar researcher, Tian is passionate about solving environmental and energy-related questions. She has published six peer-reviewed papers as the single corresponding author with only CSULB students as co-authors and has received \$480,000 in grants. So far, there have been 29 students involved in her research projects in the past four years.

Tian is continually seeking ways to help her community. She has served on many committees, aided in moderating university science events, and served as a peer reviewer for federal agencies and research journals. She also believes in educating the community through her service, such as her annual outreach event for local AP chemistry students. Overall, Tian is a commendable educator, researcher, and community servant.

**Jason P. Schwans**  
Chemistry & Biochemistry



As a faculty member for the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Jason Schwans is committed to creative teaching strategies to make challenging courses more accessible to students. His lab and classes take on an interdisciplinary approach by combining organic chemistry and biochemistry so students can apply theoretical ideas into practical applications.

Chemistry courses are among the most challenging for students, and the foundational courses, in particular, have low-pass rates. Schwans takes an innovative approach in his teaching by asking his students “why,” and examining trends, to engage his students and make them curious about chemistry.

Schwans also promotes a growth mindset in his classes. With his interactive classroom environment, he continually adapts to the feedback and questions of his students. This non-traditional approach for STEM classes is implemented in his freshmen introductory courses, and to the graduate students researching in the CSULB labs.

Schwans is passionate about improving student success in courses with low pass-rates. He has recently served as the lead for the BUILD learning community, and at present, serves as the leader of the CNSM learning program.



**Ashley Carter**  
Biological Sciences

Since 2008, Dr. Ashley Carter has demonstrated incredible care, compassion and love for his students. His belief that ‘Without people, a lab is just an empty room full of potential’ drives his passion for student success. He is driven by his students’ success and works with them to make their dreams a reality.

In fall of 2013, Carter was appointed as an undergraduate academic advisor for the Biological Sciences department. Students seek advice for a broad range of concerns, from understanding their degree requirements, planning their career upon graduation, or finding alternative majors.

Students often seek Carter’s advice regarding other prevalent issues they might be dealing with, such as improving their study habits, addressing mental health issues, or other personal matters. Many of Carter’s students have gone on to great success after CSULB. His students have presented posters at prestigious symposia and conferences, and gone on to medical school or Ph.D. programs.

Carter has also dedicated himself to becoming the best advisor for a student’s holistic health he can be, frequently attending voluntary workshops devoted to giving further insight to student-based issues, such as Safe Zone Ally Program, VET NET Ally program, and Suicide Prevention workshops. He truly believes that advising must go beyond understanding the academic requirements for a degree, and addressing the underlying issues that influence student success and welfare.

**Paul Weers**  
Chemistry & Biochemistry



As a professor and graduate advisor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Dr. Paul Weers believes in a personalized advising model for his students when they arrive on campus and navigate the challenging thesis-based Master's program in Biochemistry. Students are admitted to the program based on a holistic review. Weers involves himself in every step of each student he advises; from preparation for the biochemistry placement exam, selecting a research mentor, advancing to candidacy, and eventually presenting their thesis research to the department.

Students face numerous obstacles while pursuing their degree. Weers is dedicated to finding the right solutions to overcome these obstacles and enabling them to achieve their academic goals, which is a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

This successful advising model within the program has been instrumental in allowing students to achieve their dream of a MS degree, and move on to careers in industry, teaching or continue their education in graduate or professional school.

For five years Weers has also served as a Training Director of the BUILD program, guiding students from the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in a research-enhanced curriculum to apply to graduate school. This NIH-funded program provides underrepresented students with the necessary training to become successful in a career in the biomedical sciences.

**OUTSTANDING FACULTY MENTOR FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT  
IN RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY**

**Jeffrey High**  
Romance, German, Russian Languages  
and Literatures



While many professors are experts in their field, few, however, demonstrate the same enthusiasm, generosity, and keen ability for mentorship as Dr. Jeffrey High. The incredible reputation of the CSULB German Studies Program both nationally and abroad are due in large part to High's dedication and leadership.

High believes that everyone with a curious mind and a generous heart can benefit from a meaningful education. As a result, he views his scholarly work as a mentorship opportunity that involves his students. This includes every aspect of his work; from his academic books, articles, speaking engagements at conferences, teaching opportunities, and even co-directing plays.

With High's students contributing on every research project since his arrival at CSULB, many of his students have gone on to accept full scholarships at Ph.D. programs in English, German Studies, Philosophy, and Law programs at top universities such as Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and Vanderbilt.

High's commitment to mentorship is clearly considered a highlight of his academic accomplishments. Elaine Chen, a CSULB teaching associate who is off to Harvard in the fall writes; "When I look at the achievements of my colleagues, themselves artists and thinkers of incomparable distinction, I imagine that perhaps Socrates is the only teacher in the history of the world with a better track record. And to be honest, Professor High is really giving him a run for his money."

## IMPACT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE YEAR IN RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

### Shailesh Chandra Civil Engineering & Construction Engineering Management



A true engineer understands that education beyond the classroom is critical for any future engineer. Dr. Shailesh Chandra, assistant professor in the Civil Engineering and Construction Engineering Management department, understands this principle and provides pathways for research for his students.

Chandra consistently goes above and beyond to provide quality research for his students and the campus. With his freeway congestion mitigation tool and transportation economic mobility research, he has provided much needed transportation problem-solving solutions and research over the past 18 months.

Furthermore, Chandra is dedicated to fostering the growth of the next generation of students through mentorship. Two of his students have achieved national recognition for their work and were selected to the prestigious 2020 Transportation Research Board Minority Student Fellows Program. Most of his recent publications feature research from CSULB students and have included them as co-authors.

In order to continue providing these opportunities to the campus, Chandra submitted 16 research proposals, with an incredible 36% receiving funding. This has totaled over \$360,000 in external grant funding. Within the past 18 months, seven of his articles were published in several journals. He is a testament to the incredible things one can achieve when passion and hard work are combined.

## IMPACT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE YEAR IN RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

### DISTINGUISHED FACULTY SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

### Guido Urizar Psychology



Dr. Guido Urizar's integrity, research prowess, and commitment to mentoring underrepresented student populations make his achievements no surprise to his colleagues in the CSULB Psychology department and community collaborators.

Among Urizar's greatest priorities are his commitment to serving underrepresented populations through his PRO-Health Research Program. His published work focuses on the critical public health issues relevant to our underserved Long Beach communities. He has become a foremost authority in community-based participatory research, speaking at panels and publishing several manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals. Most of this scholarly work includes his students as co-authors, which demonstrates his commitment to taking a hands-on approach to mentoring his students in community-based health research.

Urizar has continued to secure grants to fund his research and opportunities for the public good. This funding has been used to design, test, and implement free health programs for low-income families in Long Beach.

Urizar was also instrumental in securing the 2014-2019 BUILD Grant, the largest grant received in CSULB history. This grant has provided the campus with the research infrastructure needed to provide research training for over 280 underrepresented students and make them highly competitive for doctoral programs in diverse areas of health-related research.

**Bruno Pernet**  
Biological Sciences



Since 2004, Dr. Bruno Pernet (Professor of Biological Sciences in the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics) has demonstrated his commitment to carrying out original scientific research in collaboration with students. The research he and his students has carried out has significantly contributed to CSULB's reputation, and provided his students with training and experience that has helped them go on to continue their education in graduate or professional programs, or to acquire jobs in their field.

Pernet believes that student research experiences are most valuable when students are involved at all phases of the process. He works with students from making observations, to asking initial questions, to presentation of study results in the form of research papers. Since 2004, his lab has published 34 peer-reviewed papers and book chapters, 16 of which have students as first or co-authors.

Pernet has also obtained numerous competitive external grants to support his lab's research, which focuses primarily on the ecology and evolution of marine invertebrate larvae and on the biology of non-indigenous marine species. Occasionally his expertise has been of interest to the broader community, as well. For example, his recent study of the seashell decorations of the Watts Towers was aimed at an audience of art historians and preservationists.

His research contributions are also evident through his involvement in the broader scientific community. Most significantly, Pernet served as the Editor in Chief of the journal *Invertebrate Biology* from 2010-2016. This publication, established in 1880, is among the oldest continuously published scientific journals in the United States.

**Clorinda Donato**  
Romance, German, Russian Languages  
and Literatures



Dr. Clorinda Donato has been a dedicated professor in the Romance, German, and Russian Languages and Literatures department for over 30 years. Throughout that time she has demonstrated creative teaching strategies and considerable advancement of her field.

In particular, Donato is passionate about bringing her scholarship to her students, and demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of her work in her teaching methods. For instance, Donato worked closely with Dr. Stephen Cooper, a Professor of English, to create a symposium celebrating the 75th anniversary of the publication of John Fante's *Ask the Dust*.

Since then, they've compiled a volume of essays, interviews, correspondence, and photographs entitled *John Fante's Ask the Dust: A Joining of Voices and Views*. She also has two forthcoming volumes in Fall 2020: *The Life and Legend of Catterina Vizzani: Sexual Identity, Science and Sensationalism in Eighteenth-Century Italy and England*, and *Juntos: Italian for Speakers of English and Spanish*, with co-authors Cedric Joseph Oliva, Daniela Zappador-Guerra, and Manuel Romero.

Donato is a prolific writer and researcher, but besides these aspects of her work, she also serves as Director of both the George L. Graziadio Center for Italian Studies and the Clorinda Donato Center for Global Romance Languages and Translation Studies. In short, Donato has demonstrated extensive research, writing, and curiosity in her field, and is passionate about disseminating that knowledge to all.



## OUTSTANDING PROFESSOR AWARD

### Vas Narayanaswami Chemistry & Biochemistry



Since her start at CSULB in 2008, Dr. Vasanthi Narayanaswami has combined her passion for life-changing biomedical research with education. Not only does Narayanaswami leave a lasting impact on her students, she is also committed to changing the lives of the world around her, through extensive research in heart disease.

As a professor, Narayanaswami demands the best from her students, and, in turn, is willing to adopt best teaching practices. Through experimental or innovative teaching techniques, such as breakout sessions, case studies, and active group discussions, she has found a winning formula in her chemistry and biology courses. She has also played a significant role in institutionalizing the task of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training at CSULB. RCR teaches students to focus on ethics and integrity in the medical and health-related fields, which the bulk of her students hope to enter.

Narayanaswami takes the time to design her courses to best serve the future careers of students, with an emphasis on health and disease. She taught all the foundational biochemistry courses in the department and has further expanded the department's course offerings for graduate students. She has published 27 peer-reviewed publications, with over 40 students as co-authors as well as some students joining her in one of the many 150 international, national, and regional conferences or symposia presentations.

Narayanaswami's work is supported currently by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and in the past by the American Heart Association (AHA). She is passionate about increasing diversity in the biomedical workforce and is currently serving as the program director for the NIH T34 program at CSULB to increase diversity in the biomedical field.

## NICHOLAS PERKINS HARDEMAN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AWARD

### Alan Colburn Science Education



Since becoming a K-12 science teacher in 1986, Dr. Alan Colburn has seen firsthand the impact effective teachers can have in a classroom. As a professor of Science Education, Colburn has dedicated himself to giving his own students experiences that help them like science and become the kinds of teachers who understand how science works and inspire their own students' love of science.

He also works with colleagues across campus, and is dedicated to collegial shared governance. Colburn has been an active member of the Academic Senate and Faculty Personnel Policies Council for decades, playing roles in the development of dozens of campus policies and serving various leadership positions in both committees. He's served on many other committees to list, mentored faculty colleagues at all ranks, helped create a master's degree program, been a graduate advisor, college assessment coordinator, and other activities.

After teaching a variety of courses at CSULB College of Education, Colburn recently taught a science class for prospective elementary teachers. He also works with graduate students, student teachers, and new university faculty as they explore the nature of science and scientific reasoning.

Colburn's interests include inquiry-based science teaching, misconceptions, the nature of science, and issues related to evolution, creationism, science and religion. A popular professor with his students, he is dedicated to helping students have great experiences in his class.