

NEXT GENERATION CRIME AND JUSTICE SCHOLARS PROGRAM



The Next Generation of Crime and Justice Scholars Program is a one-year leadership initiative created by Dr. Nancy Rodriguez to support first-generation and justice-impacted students in preparing for graduate studies in criminology and related fields. Through the program, participants engage in undergraduate research, receive mentorship and guidance on the graduate school admissions process, and foster community with fellow scholars through skill-building workshops.



ALEJANDRO

Cabrera-Maldonado

Alejandro Cabrera-Maldonado is originally from Boyle Heights in the East Los Angeles area and spent a significant part of his life growing up in the San Gabriel Valley city of El Monte, CA. He is interested in studying the practices and procedures of probation and parole programs to assess if they impact recidivism rates, particularly for men of color. Alejandro is interested in pursuing a Ph.D. in Chicano/Latino Studies at his dream school, UCLA. Ultimately, he plans to pursue a career as a researcher and educator focused on the different models of mentoring at-risk and gang-involved youth. Alejandro is a volunteer for the West Coast Credible Messengers organization, where his role as an academic peer mentor helps incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and at-risk/gang-involved youth in vulnerable communities. In his free time, Alejandro enjoys spending quality time with his loved ones, playing basketball, and lending a hand to others whenever and however he can.

ALINE

Nava

Aline Nava was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. She is interested in investigating the cross section of substance abuse and mental health with delinquency. Aline is interested in pursuing graduate school to improve forensic sciences, particularly the science of collecting and analyzing specific forms of evidence. Currently, she works at a transportation company transporting clients with Autism Spectrum Disorder between their home and daily activities. Beyond academics, she enjoys indoor cycling, attending entertainment events, and trying new cafes.





ANGELA

Sandoval Mejia

Angela Sandoval Mejia, a Northern California native, has spent her entire life in the Bay Area, with roots in Bay Point, California. She is deeply interested in understanding the intersection of juvenile behavior and substance abuse, particularly how familial and personal influences can contribute to criminal activity. Angela is committed to pursuing higher education to develop knowledge that will increase the effectiveness of policing and interventions that support individuals struggling with substance use disorders. Angela serves as the Leadership Development Student Assistant at the Womxn's Center for Success at the University of California, Irvine, where she continuously seeks opportunities to develop her leadership skills. In her personal time, she enjoys dancing, listening to music, exploring new cuisines, hiking, and spending quality time with her beloved Shih Tzu, Gucci.

ANGELES

Martinez

Angeles Martinez grew up in San Diego, CA. She is keen on exploring the intersection between undocumented status and criminalization, particularly the systemic inequalities that lead to crime involvement. Angeles is interested in pursuing graduate education and law school to study the evolving nature of legal status and become an immigration and criminal attorney. Angeles currently works at the UC Immigrant Legal Center, where she contributes to supporting the undocumented community by doing case work, conducting independent research and developing informational material. In her free time, she enjoys staying active at the gym, playing tennis, and listening to music.





CELESTE

Andrade

Celeste Andrade grew up in Ontario, California, all her life. She is interested in researching the correlation between psychological conditions such as psychosis or mental disorders of juveniles and delinquency rates. Celeste aspires to pursue a graduate degree in Criminology or Forensic Psychology to examine the relationship between mental health and crime. At this time, Celeste works as a trainer at Starbucks, allowing her to work with new employees and adapt to their learning styles while working in a fast-paced environment. During her free time, she enjoys making new coffee recipes at home, listening to mystery and crime podcasts, and going on long walks.

DAYANA

Ramirez-Venegas

Dayana Ramirez-Venegas was born and raised in Salinas, a small city in northern California. Growing up in a community deeply impacted by systemic challenges, Dayana developed a passion for addressing youth incarceration, particularly the role of gang culture contributing to delinquency. Dayana aspires to attain her J.D. and work as an immigration or criminal defense attorney. She is driven by a commitment to advocating for underserved populations and working toward systemic reform. Currently, she works as a part-time retail sales associate. In her free time, she prioritizes self-care and personal growth by going to the gym and immersing herself in Latinx literature that focuses on the complex history of Latinos in the United States. Additionally, she remains actively involved in various organizations, such as the Latinx Resource Center and the Latinx Pre-Law Association that align with her passion for social justice and community empowerment.





ELIJAH

Guerra

Elijah Guerra grew up in many different areas but considers Pomona, California, his hometown. His research focuses on probation and parole, examining whether their regulations promote rehabilitation or lead to reincarceration. Elijah aspires to attain a PhD in criminology with the ultimate aim to work with incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and gang-involved individuals through continued research. He also hopes to work in a non-profit organization dedicated to mentoring these individuals toward a better future through securing employment, starting their own businesses, or pursuing higher education. He is passionate about showing others from similar backgrounds that the sky's the limit and that they are just as capable of success as anyone else. Currently, he volunteers with West Coast Credible Messengers, mentoring at-risk youth and guiding them toward alternatives to violence. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his family and furthering his knowledge of criminology.

QUINEA

Oard

Quinea Oard hails from South Central Los Angeles. Her research interests focus on the experiences of individuals impacted by the justice system, particularly the social and psychological outcomes of incarcerated youth. Quinea aspires to attend UC Berkeley for a PhD in African American Studies and would ultimately like to pursue a career in research and advocacy to address systemic inequalities, such as mass incarceration and high criminalization in Black and Brown communities. She also aims to empower justice-impacted communities to prevent the internalization of the external negative perceptions imposed by society. She works as an Office Assistant for the Underground Scholars Program, where she helps connect system-impacted and previously incarcerated students with resources to attain academic and personal success. In her free time, Quinea enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and exploring historical narratives related to African American culture and justice reform.





SAGE

Cerda

Sage Cerda is from San Diego County. She is interested in examining the relationship between mindfulness and impulsivity in adolescents with the ultimate goal of promoting self-regulation and informed decision-making. She is deeply committed to supporting the prison-to-university pipeline and advocates for the rights of currently incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and justice system-impacted individuals. Sage aspires to become a criminal law attorney and use her legal expertise to further her advocacy efforts. Sage is the president of UCI LIFTED and vice president of the Underground Scholars Student Initiative, where she amplifies justice-impacted voices. She also works as a peer life coach, helping students achieve their goals in higher education. In her spare time, Sage writes music on criminology and world politics, even performing her original work at the Underground Scholars 2024 Graduation Ceremony.