

April 2020

## THE STEP SCHOLARS PROGRAM

# APRIL

## NEWSLETTER

### STEPPING UP IN 2020

The STEP Scholars program stepped into the new year with fresh ideas, partnerships, and motivation to provide scholars with beneficial opportunities. To start off the year, the team organized a Spring Welcome with fun games, prizes, and vision boards. Scholars had the opportunity to envision their 2020 year throughout the event. After this, student coordinators Jasmine and Alex decided to put their knowledge and experience into effect by teaming up with UROC to inform scholars about undergraduate research opportunities at UC Merced.

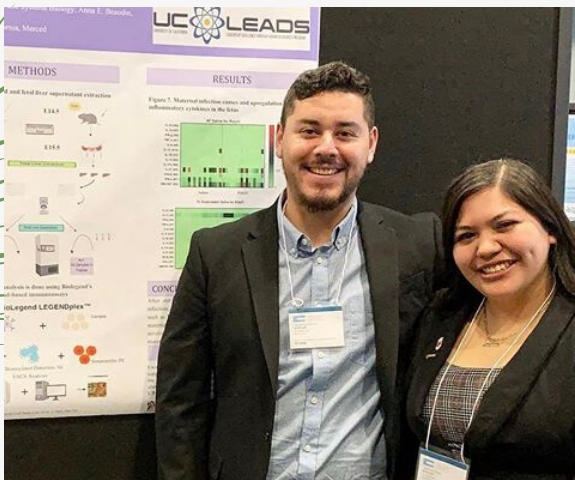


Shortly after this, our lead student coordinator, Breanna, organized a Valentine social full of interactive activities, a photo booth, and candy grams. Scholars enjoyed having the opportunity to take home polaroid pictures after the event. Towards the end of the month, Jasmine and Melissa coordinated a Scholarship Night for UC Merced students to learn about the continuing student scholarship, external scholarships, and general tips and resources for scholarships. The STEP team also ended off face-to-face events with a Student Budgeting Workshop and a Tye Die Wellness Wednesday.



## STEP PARTICIPATES IN WESTOP CEN CAL TRiO DAY

On February 23, STEP had the opportunity to participate in WESTOP CenCal TRiO Day where high schools across the Central Valley participated in a huge event to celebrate TRiO Day. On this day, our coordinator, Alexandra Chavez, was invited to present on campus involvement in higher education. Chavez encouraged students to participate in clubs, organizations, campus jobs, and extracurricular activities. She also provided them with resources to find these opportunities across California campuses. Student coordinators also had the opportunity to share their experiences with campus involvement at UC Merced. The STEP team looks forward to TRiO collaborations in California.



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

On March 7, our student coordinators Jasmine Posada and Alexander Del Toro attended the Koret UC Leads Research and Leadership Symposium at UC Irvine. Jasmine's project focused on hematopoietic stem cells (HSC) using a maternal infection model to understand fetal hematopoiesis and abnormal HSC function after infection. Alexander's research focused on the development of ethanol tolerance and investigating molecular mechanisms that guide this manipulative behavior. After their presentations, our student coordinator Alexander Del Toro received the top honors award for the category of Biological Sciences. We would like to congratulate both Alexander and Jasmine for their hard work and dedication to their research.



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# SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

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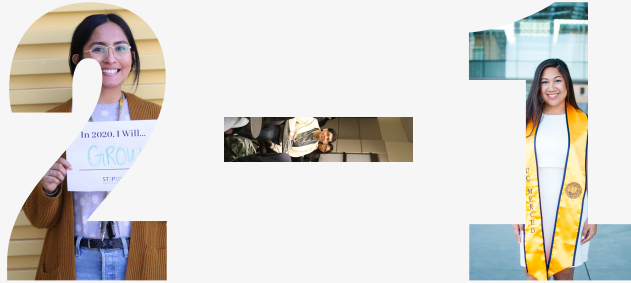


## AHSAN LAKHANI

Every month the STEP Scholars Program identifies a scholar who has either demonstrated outstanding qualities, consistent participation, or academic excellence. This month, the STEP team has nominated our senior scholar Ahsan Lakhani. Ahsan is a frequent visitor at the Bright Success Center and always comes in with a smile. The team will miss his presence after he graduates this semester.

Ahsan is a first generation, low-income, Visalia native. He transferred to UC Merced in the Fall of 2018, and since then, he hit the ground running. He got involved in STEP, TRV, UROC, and a student organization where he mentors students and helps them enter research labs and gain industry internships. He hopes to pursue a PhD in Biomedical Sciences and create university and industry research internship pipelines for community college students in the San Joaquin Valley. Before UC Merced, he hadn't considered a PhD, because there was never an opportunity to learn more. He hopes to fill this gap and become a research mentor so future generations have access to opportunities he could have only dreamed of.

# CHANGES IN PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS



Due to the health concerns revolving around COVID-19, the STEP Scholars Program has decided to change participation requirements for the Spring 2020 semester. Instead of the usual 3-2-1 requirements, STEP will now be requiring scholars to complete TWO events and ONE meeting with STEP staff. To complete event requirements, students will have the option of completing online workshops hosted by the Bright Success Center or participate in virtual field trips to locations such as Monterrey Bay aquarium and even Mars. Students who decide to participate in these events will be required to fill out the alternative event form on the STEP Scholars website to fulfill requirements. In order to fulfill meeting requirements, scholars will be asked to schedule a meeting with either their designated student coordinator or the Program Coordinator. STEP staff will be conducting online meetings for the remainder of the semester. If students have already fulfilled these requirements before campus closure, students will have completed their requirements for the given semester. Please contact staff for further clarification.

## STEPPING INTO THE TRANSITION

With the online transition in teaching, STEP will no longer be requiring scholars to have in-person contact with staff and will be given alternatives to complete requirements throughout the remainder of the semester. STEP does apologize for the abrupt transition, but does look forward to opening up physical resources, such as printing services, laptop rentals, and test prep rentals as soon as the situation gets better. In the meantime, we hope that everyone remains safe and healthy during these uncertain times, but we also hope you receive the support you need during these transitions. Our team will continue to provide direct services through online meetings, workshops, webinars, and so much more. STEP wishes you well and hopes to see you soon!



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# A MESSAGE FROM OUR COORDINATOR

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**“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Hello STEP Scholars. I hope this message finds you well and in good health. I understand that there are many challenges that we are currently facing collectively and individually. There is little my words here may actually do to alleviate your stress and confusion, but I hope you find solace in knowing you are not alone. There are resources that you all can utilize to help, whether it be for public assistance, mental health, physical health, and more. I want to emphasize that there are options to help support you and your loved ones. The community of us at UC Merced, including STEP, is here to support your academic and basic needs as best as we can. The campus is still operating though only essential offices remain physically open. If you need to reach out to a team member, please do not hesitate to send us an email! You can locate most staff and faculty's email through the UC Merced Campus directory. Physical offices that remain open include the health center and the bobcat pantry! If you need to see someone in the health center, please schedule an appointment online prior to visiting their office. CAPS is available online if you are having feelings of sadness, anxiety, or unease amidst sheltering in place. Please reach out to them if you are experiencing a need with mental health. Though academics is very important, I want you all to prioritize your well-being first and foremost. **“We need to do a better job of putting ourselves higher on our own ‘to do’ list.”** —First Lady Michelle Obama

STEP is here to support you by helping you accomplish your academic, career, and financial goals. We have a series of online events that you can attend or watch at a later time. We are all available to meet for 1:1 sessions for assistance with the aforementioned topics or if you simply need to talk. I want to emphasize to you all that the team's biggest priority is to help you all succeed while at UC Merced. If we do not know the answer to a question, we will be diligent in connecting you to someone that does. To us, the challenge may be that we are remote, but that still does not take away from this goal. I hope that you find it in yourselves to reach out to us if needed or someone close to you. Again, you are not alone. I am wishing you all the best. We will overcome!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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- MOCK INTERVIEWS | April 6 & 7
- SPEAKER SERIES WEBINAR| April 9, 16, & 30
- ONLINE FIELD TRIPS
- ONLINE BSC WORKSHOPS