



**Grad Rebel Advantage  
Mentors**

**Congratulations to the 2023-  
2024 cohort!**

# IBTIHAJ AHMAD

**M.S.E Student,  
Department of Civil and  
Environmental  
Engineering**

**Advisor: Dr. Haroon  
Stephen**



## **Academic Bio**

I am a graduate student specializing in water resources and environmental engineering. My current focus is on an NSF-funded project in wildfire sciences, utilizing remote sensing and machine learning to assess vegetation damage caused by wildfires. I have two peer-reviewed journal publications, and I chose UNLV for its diverse academic environment and esteemed faculty.

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

I chose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor because I vividly remember the uncertainties and anxieties I faced while applying to graduate school. Back then, someone took the time to guide and support me, making all the difference. That experience inspired me to pay it forward and assist others in a similar position. Moreover, I am especially committed to supporting marginalized communities, and recognizing the unique challenges they face. Being a mentor allows me to create an inclusive and supportive space, ensuring everyone has an equal chance to succeed and thrive in academia.

# KIRSTEN DUNN



**Ph.D. student,  
Interdisciplinary  
Neuroscience Program**

**Advisor: Dr. James  
Hyman**



## **Academic Bio**



Kirsten is a neuroscience Ph.D. student interested in translational research and analysis paradigms of memory circuit dysfunction in neurodegenerative disease.



## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**



I've informally mentored several students, and found the process so rewarding. A recent mentee just started her Ph.D. studies at the NIH-partnered neuroscience program through Brown University, and it's been so exciting to follow her progress. I'm eager to learn how to be a better mentor. Helping other students realize their dreams inspires me to continue chasing my own.

# CLAUDIA CHIANG-LOPEZ

**Ph.D. student, Cultural Studies, International Education, and Multicultural Education**

**Advisor: Christine Clark**



## **Academic Bio**

Claudia is a first-generation Asian-Latinx immigrant. They are a PhD student in Education, and a graduate certificate student in Program Evaluation. They study the intersection of dis/ability, race, and pushout. A 2-time UNLV graduate, they decided to study at UNLV once again to learn more about the community.

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

In her roles as a Point Foundation BIPOC Scholar, AAHHE Fellow and AACTE Holmes Scholar, Claudia has seen the importance and impact of mentorship from folks who are only a few years ahead of you. Because of this, they hope to share their skills in navigating graduate school with their mentees.

**EMILY COOMBES**



**Ph.D. student, Sociology**



# SOPHIA GOERGI

M.D. student, Kirk  
Kerkorian School of  
Medicine



## Academic Bio

Sophia graduated magna cum laude from UNLV with a Bachelor of Science in Biology with a concentration in Pre-Professional studies and a double minor in Psychology and Neuroscience. UNLV felt like her second home in undergrad so she decided to stay for medical school and is now a fourth-year student at the Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine.

## Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?

Being a first-generation American and first-generation college student, Sophia often doubted whether she would achieve her educational goals. She accounts having relatable and reliable mentors to look up to for the reason she is where she is today. She hopes her mentees gain confidence in themselves to continue pursuing their educational goals.

# LILIAN HERNANDEZ

**Master of Public Health student,  
Department of Environmental and Occupational Health**

**Advisor: Dr. Erika Marquez**



## **Academic Bio**

Lilian is a second-year Master of Public Health student concentrating in Environmental and Occupational Health. She has a bachelor's degree in public health and is dedicated to reducing health disparities, particularly among Nevada's Hispanic/Latino population. Her research focuses on addressing Hispanic community health disparities. Lilian chose UNLV for its diversity and commitment to strengthening Nevada's public health.

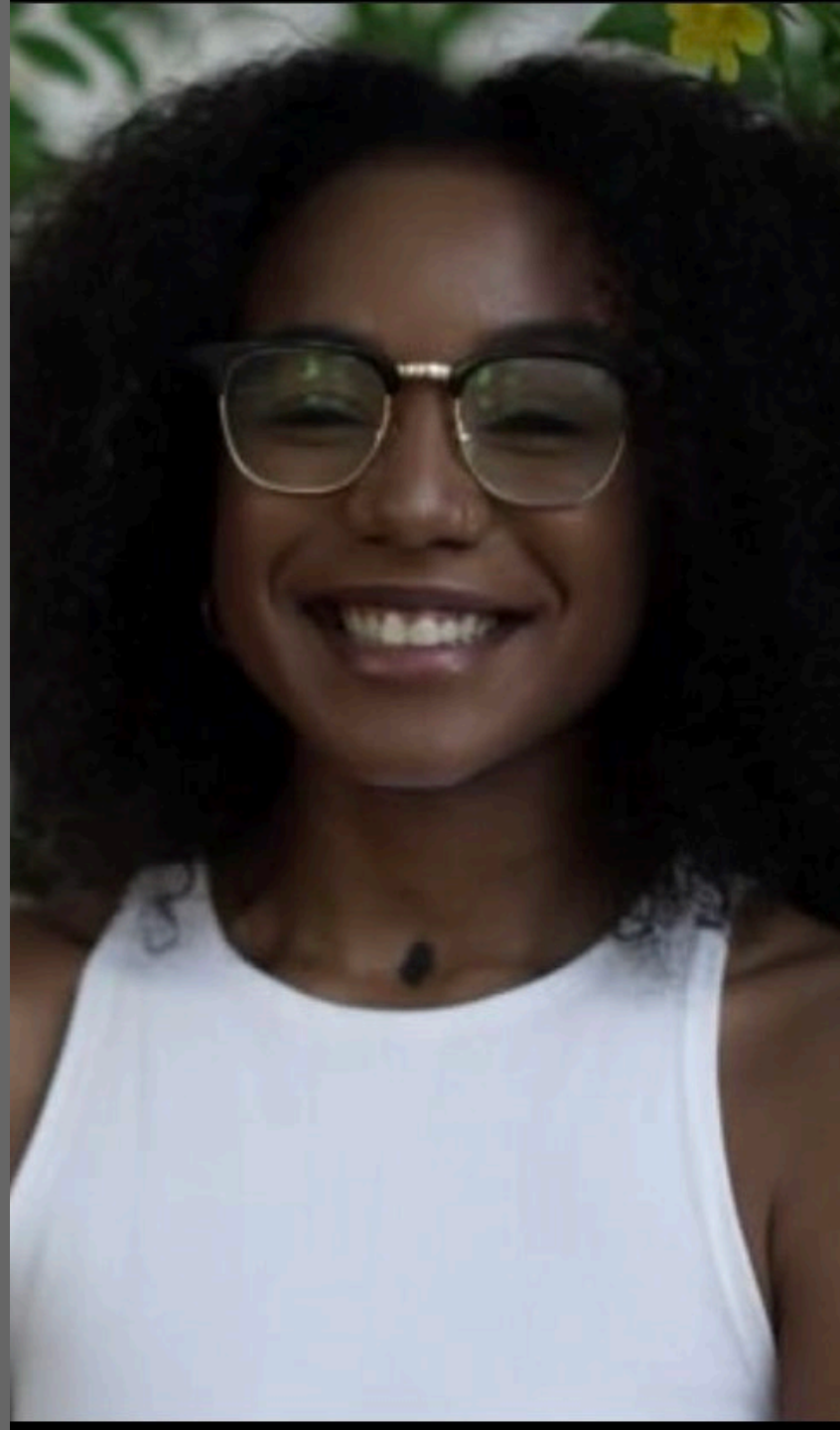
## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

Lilian became a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor because she was once a Grad Rebel Advantage mentee and recognized the immense value of mentorship in her own professional growth. She hopes to pay it forward by providing guidance, support, and insights to her mentees, helping them successfully navigate their journey to graduate school.

# BRITTANY HOLMES-SUTTON

**Master's student, Couple  
and Family Therapy  
Department**

**Advisor:  
Dr. Brandon Eddy**



## **Academic Bio**

Brittany Holmes-Sutton is a graduate student in the Couple and Family Therapy Program. She has a passion expanding mental health resources to more communities. Brittany's research focus is recidivism and its impact on Black males and their families. UNLV has always felt like home to Brittany. Go Rebels!

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

Brittany chose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor because she wants to connect students with opportunities beyond their undergraduate degree and increase representation within graduate programs. Her hopes for her mentees is that they leave the experience feeling more confident in their abilities as students and as individuals, overall.



**DAVID KING**

**Chemistry Ph.D.  
Student, Department  
of Chemistry &  
Biochemistry**

**Advisor: Dr. Pradip  
Bhowmik**



I specialize in organic/polymer chemistry where I synthesize materials used for battery applications, fire retardants, photoluminescent devices, and biosensors. I participated in the Grad Rebel Advantage Program as an undergraduate and it helped me immensely in preparing for grad school. I can't wait to serve as a mentor to give back to the program and help other students that were in a similar position as I was!

In the future, I want to become actively involved in a research-related career to investigate new materials that offer the same or improved properties to replace commonly used materials that damage the environment and are harmful to human health. Creating a bridge between chemistry and the environment encourages a healthier interaction with our changing planet and modern society. My ambition stems from the global effort of conservation and sustainability of our planet.

# DARLYN MAGANA



**M.S Student, Department  
of Couple and Family  
Therapy**

**Advisor: Dr. Brandon  
Eddy**



## **Academic Bio**

Darlyn Magaña is a first generation student. She is currently a second year graduate student in the Couple and Family Therapy Master's Program in the UNLV Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine. Her research interest is the role the OBGYNS in Las Vegas have in perinatal mood disorders in moms of color.

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

Darlyn completed the GRA when she was in undergraduate, and had an incredible experience being able to ask questions along with learn about the variety of opportunities there are as a graduate student. She wanted to continue to be able to support other students who are interested in learning about higher education to get the resources and information they need to go out and accomplish their own goals.

# Miles A. Mercer

**Interdisciplinary Health  
Sciences Ph.D.  
candidate, Kinesiology &  
Nutrition Sciences**

**Advisor: Dr. Julia  
Freedman Silvernail**



## Academic Bio

Miles is a third-year Ph.D. candidate studying preventative techniques to reduce running and return to activity injuries found in recreational and sedentary populations. He chose UNLV due to its strong biomechanics program to continue to improve his research techniques and teaching expertise.

## Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?

Miles believes that graduate school is a great opportunity, but the process can be intimidating and confusing. His goal is to encourage students to continue their education and see potential options available in the field. As a kinesiology hands on learning is essential and he aims to share his experiences throughout graduate school.

**TAM NGUYEN**



**M.S. student,  
Quantitative Finance**



# DESTINY PINDER-BUCKLEY

M.F.A. Creative Writing  
student, Department of  
English



## Academic Bio

Destiny Pinder-Buckley got her B.A. in English and French from Augustana University in Sioux Falls, SD as a first-generation college student. She studied abroad a total of four times. She chose UNLV for her next adventure because she wanted to immerse herself in a new diverse city with a literary community.

## Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?

Destiny wanted to be a mentor because she understands the difficulty in pursuing graduate degrees for fields in the Liberal Arts. People seem to understand when you want to be a lawyer or a doctor, but a writer? She wants to inspire students to follow their dreams and find a program that gives them community.

# MELISSA SELTENREICH



**Ph.D. student,  
Department of Teaching  
& Learning**

**Advisor:  
Dr. Shaoan Zhang**



## **Academic Bio**

Mrs. Seltenreich has been a teacher for 13 years in Las Vegas. She is researching motivation, self-regulation, and social-emotional competence in pre-service and in-service teachers.

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

Mrs. Seltenreich chose to be a UNLV mentor to help undergraduates successfully complete their academic journey. She is hoping to learn best practices to help mentor students.

# YASHMEETA SHARMA

**Juris Doctorate  
Candidate**

**Advisor: Monte Smith**



## **Academic Bio**

Yashmeeta earned her BA in political science with a minor in philosophy and her M.Ed. in instruction and curriculum from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Prior to law school, Yashmeeta served as an educator at Title 1 schools in Las Vegas.

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

Yashmeeta decided to be a Rebel Mentor because she believes in the importance of helping and learning from each other well. As a first generation student, she recognizes that graduate school is a challenge and is grateful for the people who have brought her to this point. She hopes the people she mentors will be able to pay it forward.

# MARGOTH TELLO



**DPP student/Public  
Policy**

**Advisor: Dr. Milia Heen**



## **Academic Bio**

Margoth was born in Guatemala and raised in Utah. She has earned her MPA from the University of Utah and is currently in her last year of her Doctorate Degree in Public Policy (DPP) from UNLV. Her passion focuses on educating on trauma informed care, reducing mass incarceration, and utilizing restorative justice. Her research focuses on reducing incarceration rates of women under community supervision here in Nevada. I chose UNLV because the DPP program was an opportunity not only to learn but to actually work on helping the community.

## **Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?**

As a first-generation college student, Margoth navigated the university experience no assistance. She would love the opportunity to help provide guidance to students so that unlike her, they have someone to guide them and answer questions along the way. Margoth hopes to share her experience and help them gain valuable insights throughout the program.



# KARIN TIDGEWELL

Doctor of Public Policy  
student, School of  
Public Policy and  
Leadership

Capstone Advisor:  
Dr. Michael Bruner



## Academic Bio

Karin's policy work examines how to best assist military children with their frequent transitions between schools, focusing on the goals of improving academic performance and reducing gaps in their education. Her work with military children has led to additional research on several highly mobile student populations, resulting in establishing frameworks to assist local school districts to meet the unique educational needs of these students.

## Why did you choose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor?

Karin's path to graduate school was a direct result of the right people entering her life at the right time and their willingness to candidly share their experiences with her. Karin believes that graduate education should be accessible to all students who are committed to learning at the graduate level, and paying forward the encouragement and opportunities she received drove Karin to be a UNLV Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor.