

Grad Rebel Advantage Program

Congratulations to our incoming
2020-2021 Mentors





Mentors

ALINA SWAFFORD

**Ph.D. student,
Department of
Kinesiology and Nutrition
Sciences**

Adviser: Dr. John Mercer



Academic Bio

Alina is currently a third-year doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Health Sciences program with an area of study in biomechanics. Her background is in Sports and Exercise Science. Alina's research interests are in improving performance and injury prevention. Alina's specific academic and research interests are what drew her to UNLV.

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

After her second year as a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor, Alina chose to be a mentor again after seeing how beneficial this program was to undergraduates. She hopes to provide insight and reduce stress about the graduate application process while helping her mentees gain confidence toward picking their future path.

ANDROMEDA HIGHTOWER

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

**Advisor:
Dr. Peter Wiens**



Academic Bio

Andromeda's research focus examines how cognitive and cultural biases interact in the process of preparing future educators for the complex, multi-faceted challenges of today's and tomorrow's classrooms. UNLV's emphasis on research and widely-experienced Teaching & Learning faculty were strong factors in the decision to join the UNLV T&L PhD program.

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

Preparing future educators involves a great deal of mentorship, so Andromeda relentlessly pursues opportunities to build and improve upon mentoring skills as a teacher educator. Andromeda believes that being a mentor for mentees means being sociable and fun, creating spaces for reflection, and building a foundation for future personal growth.

ARIANA GARCIA

**Ph.D. student,
Department of
Educational Psychology
& Higher Education**

**Adviser:
Dr. Blanca Rincón**



Academic Bio

Ariana is a third-year doctoral student studying higher education. She chose UNLV because of the supportive program faculty and the diverse student population. Her research broadly focuses on access and equity issues facing higher education with a special focus on graduate education.

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

Throughout her undergraduate studies, Ariana received significant mentorship from graduate students, faculty members, and staff that were instrumental in introducing her graduate school and giving her tools to be successful. She hopes to pass on that information, share her experiences, and be a resource for future graduate students.

**AISLIN
EDALGO**



**M.A./Ph.D. student,
Anthropology**

Advisor: Pierre Liénard

Academic Bio

Her research is focused on the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland between the Catholic and the Protestant populations. Specifically, her project examines the associations between sectarian crime rates and ethnic heterogeneity levels.

She chose UNLV primarily for the great fit with her advisor's research interests.

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

She chose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor to help undergraduate students learn about graduate school and the application process.

She hopes her undergraduate mentees gain a better understanding of how to apply to graduate school and how to choose which graduate school is the right fit for them.

BRIANNA RIVERA

**Masters Student,
School of Public Health –
Epidemiology &
Biostatistics**

Adviser: Dr. Brian Labus



Academic Bio

Brianna is a graduate student working on earning her Masters in Public Health with a concentration in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Her interests are in infectious diseases and injury prevention. She has 4 manuscripts in the process of publication from her research work in the past two years. She is currently working on her thesis on Vector-borne diseases and is helping with the current COVID-19 pandemic as a contact tracer through the Southern Nevada Health District.

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

I want to be a Grad Rebel Advantage mentor because I was part of the program as an undergraduate student and it helped me prepare for graduate school. I want to be able to share my experience and help undergraduate students get a better understanding of graduate school that will help them decide if they want to pursue a graduate degree and prepare for their next steps.

**DANIEL
PEREZ**

**Ph.D. candidate,
Department of
Anthropology**

**Adviser: Karen G. Harry,
Ph.D.**



Academic Bio

Daniel is a fifth-year anthropology doctoral candidate with an emphasis in archaeology. His research focuses on anthropological approaches to understanding identity through prehistoric ceramics in the American Southwest. Daniel chose UNLV because of the strong research emphasis the Department of Anthropology has placed in the prehistory of the Grand Canyon.

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

Daniel chose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor to provide guidance to students who have been provided an opportunity previously unavailable to himself. Furthermore, he is interested in providing undergraduate students the insights he has gained in preparing for and succeeding in graduate school.

EMILY STRICKLER

**Master's Student,
Department of
Environmental and
Occupational Health**

**Adviser: Dr. Jennifer
Pharr**



Academic Bio

Emily is a second year Master's of Public Health student, studying how the built environment impacts community health outcomes. She holds a bachelor's degree from Stanford University, where she majored in Human Biology. Emily chose to attend UNLV for graduate school so she could make a positive impact in her hometown.

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

Emily is a first-generation college graduate, which inspired her to become a Grad Rebel Advantage Mentor. She hopes to provide guidance to students in a similar position as they navigate their academic dreams. Emily hopes to be a safe sounding board for her mentees who might be afraid that their questions might be "silly."

**JAMES
LARSEN**

**Ph. D.
Student
Hospitality Admin.**

**Adviser: Dr. Amanda
Belarmino**



Academic Bio

James' research is focused on emotional engagement between casino hosts and their guests. Las Vegas is the greatest city in the world for this line of inquiry—there's a literal living laboratory blocks away from UNLV, and James has spent the past six years of his hospitality career working there. He looks forward to nurturing the symbiotic relationship between a world-class university and a world-class casino-hotel industry.

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

James started mentoring as a senior in college and has continued since then. He sees mentoring as a relationship that benefits both parties—and that's why he has sought out mentors at each major decision point in both his academic and professional careers. For the Grad Rebel Advantage Program, James brings experience with higher education from private universities, public universities and online universities in the liberal arts, business education and research programs.

JESSE LEE BARNES M.S.

**Ph.D. student, Public
Affairs**

**Advisers: Dr. Jaewon Lim
and Dr. Krystyna Stave**



Academic Bio

Jesse earned a B.A. in Political Science from UC Berkeley in 2016 and an M.S. in Water Resources Management (WRM) from UNLV in 2019. Jesse is currently a Ph.D. student in Public Affairs. UNLV provided the perfect opportunity to work with fantastic professors and to conduct research on WRM issues.

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

Without mentors' advice, Jesse may never have gone to graduate school. Jesse comes from a low-income background and is a first-generation college student. Mentors exposed Jesse to the benefits and joy of education, and he hopes to do the same for his mentees.

JENNIFER CLARK

**Ph.D Candidate,
Department of Biological
Sciences**

Adviser: Allen Gibbs



Academic Bio

Aiming to discover the ingredients for a healthy, happy life, she took up the study of biology. Physiology, genetics, nutrition, and development have been the focus of her research using the fruit fly as a model organism for humans. Her learning doesn't stop in the lab at UNLV, she conducts her own science experiments at home. Towards her goals of a health life, she is growing the superfood spirulina in an aquarium at home as well as sprouting her own greens, and planning on how to grow her own gourmet mushrooms for a healthy diet.

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

After surmounting some uniquely difficult challenges in her grad career including changing advisers and the death of a lab mate, she decided that she wanted to pass along all the wisdom she wished someone would have told her when she started.

JILLIAN EBRAHIMI

**Graduate Student,
Department of Education**

**Adviser: Kristin Della
Sala**



Academic Bio

Jillian is a secondary science teacher in Las Vegas, Nevada pursuing a Master of Education degree in order to better serve her students. Jillian chose the University of Nevada, Las Vegas because of its commitment to serving its diverse community and its close partnership with the local school district.

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

Jillian became a mentor in hopes of encouraging undergraduate students to pursue graduate programs early. Graduate school can create countless opportunities and provide invaluable experience in preparing individuals to pursue the career of their dreams.

KAYLEIGH MEIGHAN

**Ph.D. student,
Department of
Anthropology**

**Advisor: Dr. Alyssa
Crittenden**



Academic Bio

Kayleigh is an MA/PhD student studying medical anthropology and public health. Her interests include care during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum and her current research involves co-sleeping practices in the US. She chose UNLV because the expertise of faculty members at UNLV are best suited help meet her academic and professional goals.

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

Applying to graduate school can seem nebulous and arduous. Kayleigh seeks to bring her experience from a prior graduate school preparation program and her personal journey to her mentorship. She believes that having a mentor and advocate through the graduate school application process makes a world of difference for aspiring students.

**LINSEY
BELISLE**

**PhD. Student,
Department of Criminal
Justice**

**Adviser: Dr. Gillian
Pinchevsky**



Academic Bio

Linsey is a fourth year PhD student in Criminal Justice and Criminology. Her research interests include correctional reform, gender responsive practices, teaching pedagogy, and harm reduction. Her dissertation focuses on examining gendered racial differences in adverse childhood experiences among justice-involved youth.

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

Linsey has served as a mentor for the past two years, and is looking forward to working with another cohort of undergraduates this upcoming year. She really enjoys working with undergraduate students, helping them explore grad school options, and navigating the grad school application process.

SERRINA NASROLLAHI

**MPH candidate,
Epidemiology &
Biostatistics, Department
of Environmental &
Occupational Health**

Advisor: Dr. Ann Vuong



Academic Bio

Serrina is obtaining her MPH in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at UNLV, where she received her B.S. in Biology. Her goal is to become a Las Vegas physician trained in applied epidemiology. Serrina is currently completing a secondary analysis on data from the CDC's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) database.

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

Serrina was in the first cohort of UNLV's Grad Rebel Advantage Program. Upon completion of the program, she received news that she got into graduate school! She hopes to aid her mentees in identifying their strengths/weaknesses and developing a strong idea of who they are as applicants.



Co-Mentor

**AARON
CHENG**

**Undergraduate Level,
Department: School of
Life Sciences; School of
Medicine (Research)**

**Adviser: Edwin Oh Ph.D.
(School of Medicine)**



Academic Bio

Aaron is currently a Junior pursuing a degree in Cell and Molecular Biology and minors in psychology and neuroscience. He spends much of his time researching rare neurogenetic disorders that affect neurodevelopment under Dr. Edwin Oh (Medicine). After undergrad, Aaron plans on pursuing a dual M.D./Ph.D. program.

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

Aaron chose to be a Grad Rebel Advantage Program Mentor because he found the program to be very insightful for his own career. He hopes to share some of the things he learned with his mentees while forming a meaningful relationship with them.