

A Commitment to the Principles of Equity and Diversity

Five UC San Diego graduate students selected for the national Bouchet Graduate Honor Society

Michelle Sadrena Pledger’s life story, which involved both financial and familial hardships, helps inform her work as an educator. She said reading books provided an opportunity to envision possibilities for her future, and as her love of reading transitioned to a love of learning, she realized success in life is vitally linked to success in education.

History Ph.D. student Kevan Malone also finds resonance in a supportive learning environment, helping to make courses in history relevant to undergraduates by connecting them to current discussions of diversity and inclusion.

Both First Gen students, Pledger and Malone are two of five UC San Diego graduate students accepted into the [Bouchet Graduate Honor Society](#), a prestigious organization recognizing scholars who serve as examples in both character and service to those underrepresented in higher education. The society is named for the first African-American doctoral recipient in the United States, Edward Alexander Bouchet.

“UC San Diego has been an active part in the Bouchet Society for more than a decade, each year recognizing the impact of our graduate students who exemplify the spirit and principles of equity and diversity,” said UC San Diego Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Becky Pettit. “This recognition is important, and one piece of a campus-wide commitment to continually develop a culture of inclusive excellence for our entire community.”

An organization with 17 chapter institutions, the Bouchet Graduate Honor Society was established in 2005 by Yale and Howard universities to develop a national network of preeminent scholars who exemplify academic excellence and foster environments that support traditionally underrepresented students. UC San Diego was the first university on the West Coast to establish a chapter of the national organization, starting in 2008.

With Pledger and Malone, the university’s 2019 honorees are Angela Berti of Physics, Ailie Fraser of Computer Science and Engineering and Chandler Puritty of Biological Sciences.

“These five outstanding UC San Diego graduate scholars were selected from a dynamic group of nominees, all of whom demonstrate a commitment to the tenets of the Bouchet Society. I congratulate them each for their continued contribution to not only bettering UC San Diego, but also higher education in general, through their research, scholarship and leadership,” said Paul Yu, interim dean of the UC San Diego Graduate Division.

The new members will be formally inducted into the national organization at the 16th Annual Yale Bouchet Conference on Diversity and Graduate Education, held April 5-6 at the Yale Graduate School of Arts and Sciences campus.

This year’s conference focus is “Reflections on Racism and U.S. Racial Tensions in the 21st Century,” and will provide an opportunity for the students to share their work and network with other scholars from across the nation who are committed to diversity in higher education.

Angela Berti, Physics

Angela Berti is a fifth-year Ph.D. candidate in physics, concentrating in observational astrophysics. Her research focuses on the relationship between galaxies and dark matter halos and their co-evolution throughout cosmic time.

At UC San Diego, Berti has thrived as a researcher, a student leader and a role model to underrepresented students interested in attending graduate school. She helps students prepare with confidence by leading GRE preparation workshops, and she has mentored students interested in graduate school as a graduate advocate for UC San Diego’s Summer Training Academy for Research Success (STARS) program since 2016.



Berti, who also tends a garden at the Science and Engineering Research Facility on campus, is a class representative on the Physics Graduate Council and a co-leader of the Graduate Women in Physics (GWIP) group. She is also a 2019 recipient of the Carol and George Lattimer Award for Graduate Excellence within the Division of Physical Sciences.

Ailie Fraser, Computer Science and Engineering

Ailie Fraser is working toward a Ph.D. in computer science at UC San Diego’s Jacobs School of Engineering, where she is part of the Design Lab and focuses on human-computer interaction. Specifically, her work aims to support and improve people’s creativity while they work with digital

tools, such as software packages. She does this by harvesting existing expert content and presenting it in context.

When she was president of the Graduate Women in Computing group at UC San Diego, she helped the organization secure funding to develop a mentorship program for graduate students. The goal is to strengthen the support network available for students, especially women.

Fraser is still on GradWIC's board and serves on the diversity committee and on the Ph.D. admissions students committee for the Department of Computer Science and Engineering. As an undergraduate, she majored in math, computer science and music and she still loves playing and listening to music as well as singing and composing.



Kevan Malone, History

From a strong, working-class family background, Kevan Malone is a stellar Ph.D. student in the Department of History researching race, migration and urbanization at the United States-Mexico border. Malone was awarded the Jane and Jiao Fan, Ph.D. '94 Prize for Best Advocate for Graduate Studies, and selected to travel to Sacramento for the 2018 Graduate Research Advocacy Day, a University of California-led initiative that invites select students to meet with elected officials to share the impacts of their research.

His dedication to working with underrepresented students and promoting their retention on campus is unparalleled. Malone serves as teaching assistant for the undergraduate course "Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.: Asian-American History," where he empowers students to learn the course material while encouraging them to consider how understanding histories of race, class, gender and inequality shape their own lives.



Additionally, Malone was enthusiastically recommended to serve as a teaching assistant for the Division of Arts and Humanities PATH Summer Academy, providing guidance and leadership for community college students who are transferring to UC San Diego to study the humanities.

Michelle Sadrena Pledger, Education Studies

A student advocate and a teachers' teacher, Michelle Sadrena Pledger is passionate about dance, international travel and, most importantly, she said, "ensuring that the education of tomorrow is more empathetic, equitable and effective for all students."

Pledger — who recently earned a doctorate in educational leadership with an emphasis in social justice education — is working to close opportunity gaps and deficit thinking that many students of color encounter on a daily basis by helping reshape education to be more culturally responsive and sustaining.



Pledger worked as a high school teacher for 12 years before joining the Center for Research on Equity and Innovation at High Tech High's Graduate School of Education, where she currently co-directs the Deeper Learning Hub and the national Share Your Learning campaign. She earned a master's degree from UC San Diego's School of Global Policy and Strategy and now a doctorate from the joint doctoral program offered by Cal State San Marcos and UC San Diego's Department of Education Studies. She is "committed to disrupting inequity in education and cultivating a community of practitioners who honor the lived experiences of all their students," she said.

Chandler Puritty, Biological Sciences

Ultimately, Chandler Puritty strives to combine her lifelong passions. A Ph.D. candidate in the Division of Biological Sciences studying plant community ecology, Puritty envisions herself working at the intersection of science and the inclusion and empowerment of underrepresented students. While her research focuses on precipitation and interactions between native and invasive plant species in Southern California ecosystems, she is also recognized as a campus leader committed to advancing diversity efforts.

A graduate of Howard University, Puritty has been recognized with a broad list of honors and achievements, including a campus Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action and Diversity Award, now called the UC San Diego Inclusive Excellence Awards. She is passionate about mentoring young

students and has worked for UC San Diego's Summer Training Academy for Research Success (STARS) and for the new PATHways to STEM (PATHS) through Enhanced Access and Mentorship Program.

In 2017 she published a broadly discussed article in Science titled "Without inclusion, diversity initiatives may not be enough." Beyond the classroom, she has served as president of the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association and co-founded the Ecological Society of America's first Black Ecologists Section.



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