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## Three UC San Diego Undergraduates Awarded National Competitive Scholarships

Kaylan Agnew, Neil Sapra and Chiara Ricci-Tam are the University of California, San Diego's latest undergraduates to be recognized with national competitive scholarship awards. Agnew, who studies socio-cultural anthropology and global health, received the Donald A. Strauss Public Service Scholarship for her project, Sustainable Water Solutions for Sierra Leone. Sapra and Ricci-Tam each received a Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship for their research in the sciences.



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Created as a memorial to the late Don Strauss, the Strauss Foundation recognizes California college juniors who've shown commitment to public service and education. Agnew was selected for her work as project coordinator for Community Hope Project, a small nonprofit student organization working to bring clean water to the Hill Cut community of Sierra Leone.

“Our goal is to assist them in developing into a healthy and sustainable community, which is difficult in a post-civil war area like Freetown, Sierra Leone,” says Agnew. “People are dying daily in Freetown because of contaminated water, mostly affecting small children and the elderly. We decided we needed to work as a team to help solve this issue.”

The \$10,000 scholarship provided by the Strauss Foundation will assist in Community Hope Project's construction of biosand water filters, among other aspects of implementing their plan. Agnew and her team will return to Sierra Leone in the coming summer and hope to construct more filters than originally expected in the Hill Cut community. “The future holds much possibility now, and we hope this project will be the start of many.”

In addition, Neil Sapra and Chiara Ricci-Tam can be added to the growing list of Goldwater Scholars at UC San Diego. As recipients of the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship, the most prestigious award bestowed upon students studying the sciences, Sapra and Ricci-Tam will receive \$7,500 each to support their pursuit of a career in sciences, engineering and mathematics. A highly competitive national award, universities are allowed only four undergraduate nominations.

“When I saw my name on the scholarship recipients list, a big goofy smile struck my face,” said Sapra, who studies computational physics and applied mathematics and is researching computational methods for drug discovery and design at the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences under Michael Gilson, M.D., Ph.D. He plans to pursue a Ph.D. in computational physics and aims to improve the predictive power of physics-based models used in computational drug-design by exploring new paradigms, such as quantum mechanics.



UC San Diego Price Center

Ricci-Tam echoed Sapra’s excitement at receiving the award.

“I feel incredibly lucky and grateful to everyone who has supported me and enabled me to achieve what I have so far,” she said. A molecular biology major, Ricci-Tam works as an undergraduate researcher under Joseph Pogliano, Ph.D. and investigates *Staphylococcus aureus*, the most common species of staphylococcus that causes Staph infections, and workings behind its resistance to antibiotics. She plans to graduate in the coming fall and pursue a Ph.D. while continuing her research.

The UC San Diego students were nominated by David Artis, dean of Undergraduate Research Initiatives, who works with students interested in applying for competitive awards, like the Goldwater and Strauss Scholarships. “This year we are proud to see our students yet again receive both prestigious awards,” said Artis. “Kaylan, Neil, Chiara and all our past scholars show that our students are at the forefront of not only research and academia, but service and sustainability as well.”

Academic Enrichment Programs (AEP) at UC San Diego provides resources to support students interested in pursuing advanced degrees in any field. Participants also receive assistance and guidance in applying for graduate schools and scholarships. For more information about undergraduate research opportunities at UC San Diego, visit the [Academic Enrichment Programs webpage](#).

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