



GETTING OUT OF YOUR STORY RUT

How a Culture of Generosity Can Inspire New, Impactful Narratives





Devlin Smith

Assistant Director for Stewardship
and Donor Communications
UC Riverside

devlins@ucr.edu



Kara Schnabel

Stewardship Associate
Director
Mayo Clinic

schnabel.kara@mayo.edu



Sarah Miller

Development Communications
Manager
UC Riverside

sarah.miller1@ucr.edu



THE MONDAY MORNING FLOOD

Sound familiar?

Emails, calls, and pings:


“We need a brochure!”

“Can you draft a social post?”

“How about a newsletter piece?”

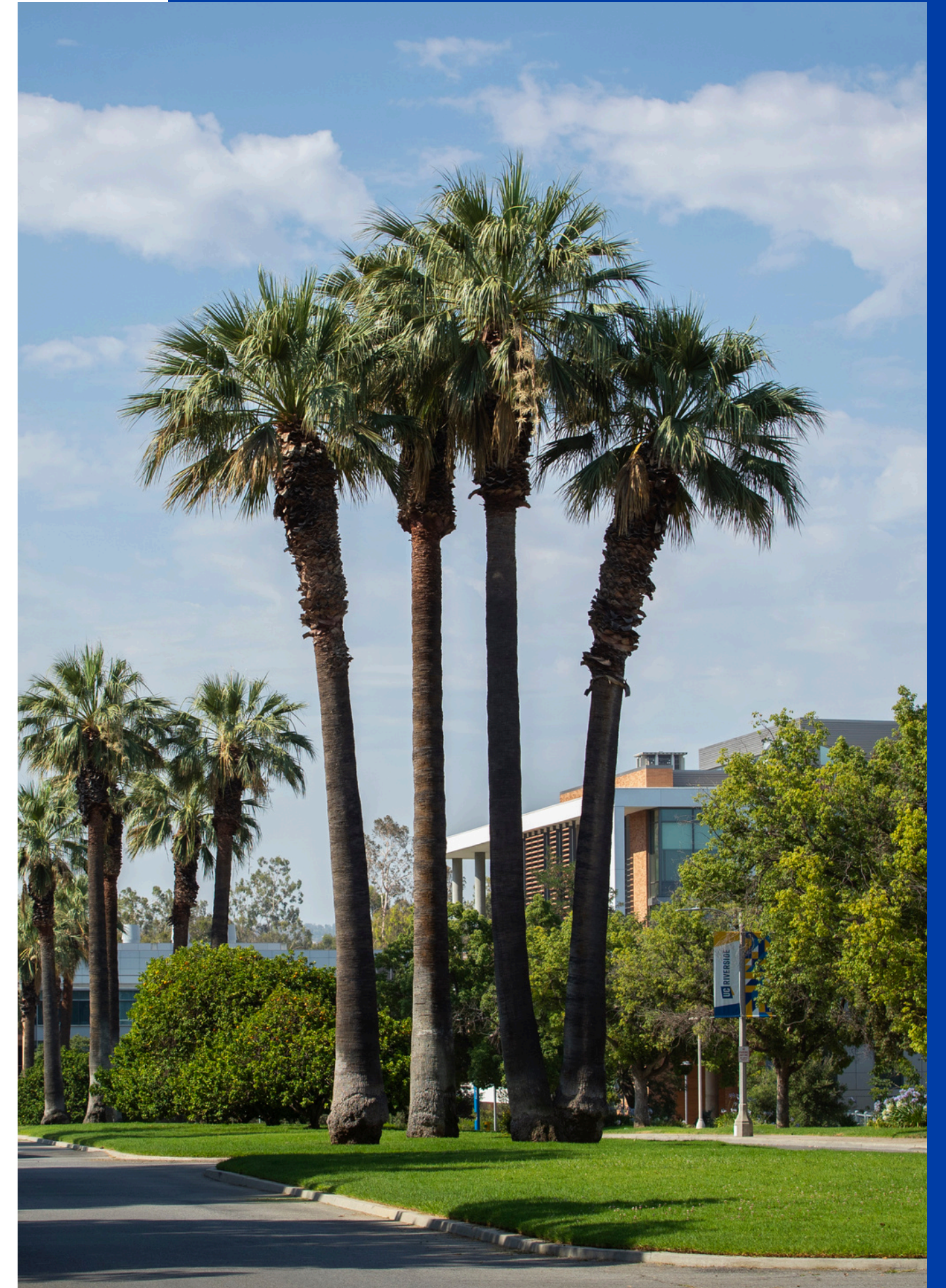
Perhaps: pressure to reinvent the wheel every time.

Result: rushed, repetitive, or even more work than necessary.



IN THIS SESSION WE'LL COVER

- A “start here” roadmap for content overload moments
- Collaborating across campus
- Telling donor stories
- Tools and resources





CONTENT FIRST, FORMAT SECOND

Start with the story,
format comes later

What already exists?

Content Ladder

Take one strong story and scale it up (feature article) or down (social snippet), or add a new lens (generosity!!).

Reframe requests:

“What story can we highlight? And where might the generosity angle be?” vs. “We need a new piece.”

Saves time + ensures cohesion.

REPUROISING

ORIGINAL ARTICLE SNAPSHOT

UCR News headline:

Campus shatters previous fall admissions record

- “Campus shatters previous fall admissions record.”
- 5,400+ first-year students.
- 70% from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Focus: growth, access, UCR’s popularity.
- Opportunity not yet presented: philanthropy.





REPUROSED

WITH A CULTURE OF GENEROSITY


Angle:

Growth fueled by community support

- 99% of undergrads who are awarded aid receive need-based scholarships and/or grants.
- Scholarships and donor generosity make record enrollment possible and sustainable.
- Connection point: “Behind every record-setting class is a community of donors who make UCR accessible.”
- Builds a bridge between institutional pride and philanthropic invitation.

Sample updated framing line:

Behind every record-setting class is a community of donors like you who make UCR accessible. 99% of undergrads who



REPUROSED

ALWAYS MORE TO THE STORY

Scholarship Impact

Meet Sofia (fictional composite)

- First-generation student, transfer from community college, admitted with the record-breaking 2025 class.
- Her scholarship: covered books + transportation, making full-time study possible.
- Scholarship tells a bold heart, brilliant mind story that personalizes a large statistic and grounds the UCR community values.

Quote (fictionalized for example):

“Without support, I would have had to delay school again. Now, I get to graduate on time — and give back sooner.”



REPURPOSED ACROSS CHANNELS

A brief overview of the repurposed content across channels

NEWSLETTER



Pair the record-breaking admissions milestone with a scholarship story to show how donors help make access possible for the newest Highlanders.

SOCIAL



Highlight the headline stat with a student quote — a fast, shareable way to connect donor generosity with enrollment growth.

APPEAL



Have student scholarship recipient sign the appeal letter, tell how scholarships impacted their life, and give the reader a chance to be a hero by giving to support.

BROCHURE



Frame the admissions success as a point of institutional pride, then weave in donor support as the thread that keeps UCR accessible and thriving.



PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

For story & content creators

- Match the story to the channel:
 - Social = short human quote
 - Appeal = emotional tug & invitation to get involved
 - Annual report = full narrative
 - Newsletter = short quote & link to annual report
- Highlight all types of donor involvement to normalize giving at all levels.
- Ask: Does this story have an angle that illustrates the generosity of UCR's culture?



DONOR STORIES BEYOND THE DOLLAR

It's not always about the dollar amount

Donor impact ≠ only “big gifts.”

Types of stories to elevate:

- Multi-generational giving, family legacies: “30 years, three generations of Highlanders”
- Young alumni making their first gift, relatable, accessible: “Every month, I give what I can because UCR gave me xyz”
- Lower level donors who also volunteer, attend events, or mentor students
- “Honor gifts” values-based, emotional: “In honor of my professor who believed in me”

By showing many ways generosity takes shape, we show how generosity is already a part of the Highlander culture.



COLLABORATING ACROSS CAMPUS

- What do you do if you're afraid to ask for help?
- Who should you ask to get the information you need?
- Can working with campus partners save you time?

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it. I do that every day. Asking for help isn’t a sign of weakness, it’s a sign of strength. It shows you have the courage to admit when you don’t know something, and to learn something new.” – Barack Obama



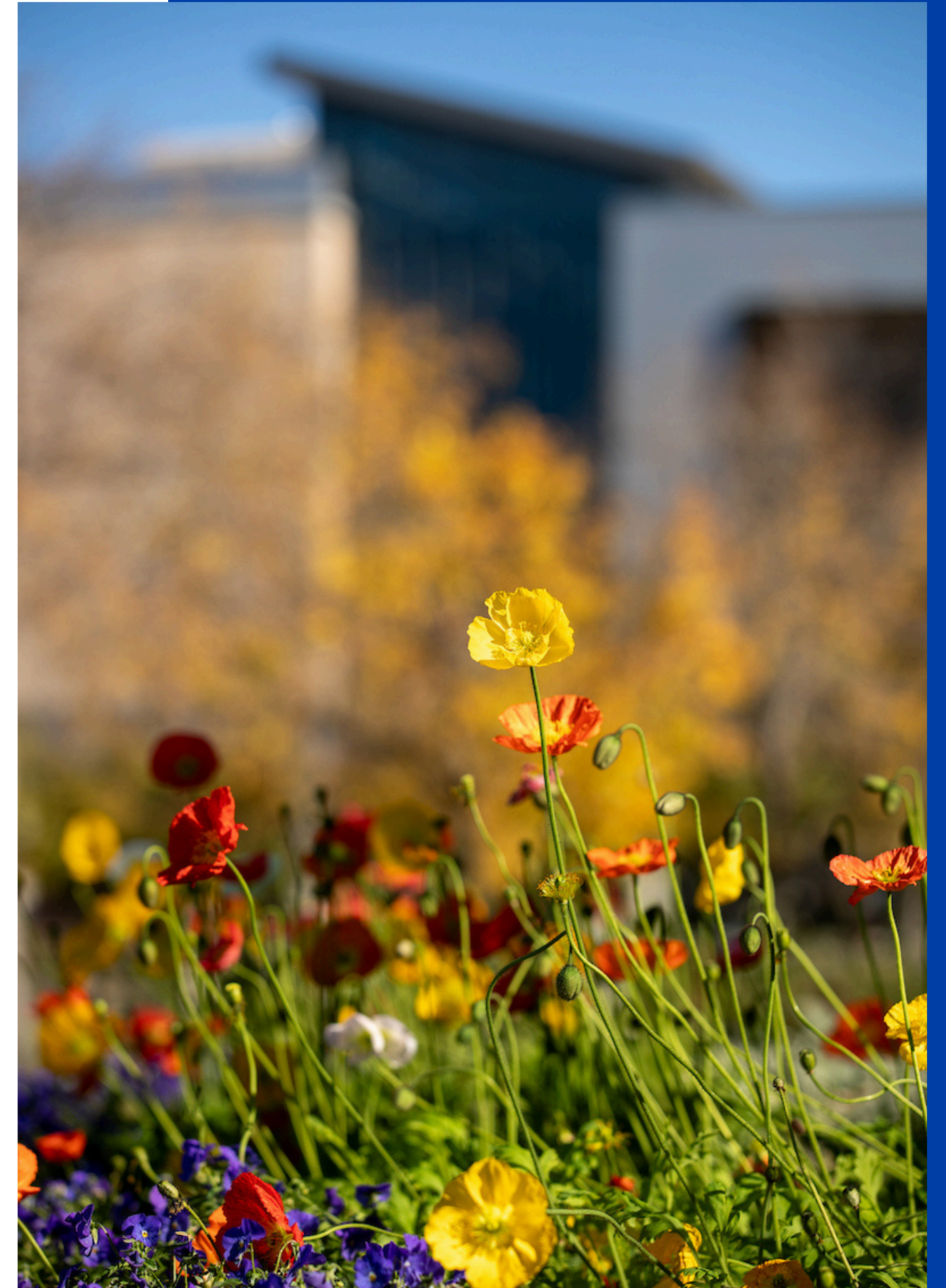
WHO TO ASK

- Development Staff
- SPIOs
- Alumni Association
- University Relations
- University Library
- Stewardship & Donor Relations
- Student Affairs Departments



HOW TO SAVE TIME

- Discover content you can repurpose
- Network and make connections
- Benefit from existing research and data
- Learn shortcuts
- Jump to the front of the queue





TELLING DONOR STORIES

- Why are donors giving?
- What's their connection to UCR?
- Who are they impacting and how?
- Are there any sensitivities to be aware of in telling this story?



Teaching changemakers like you how to tell trauma-informed and impactful stories



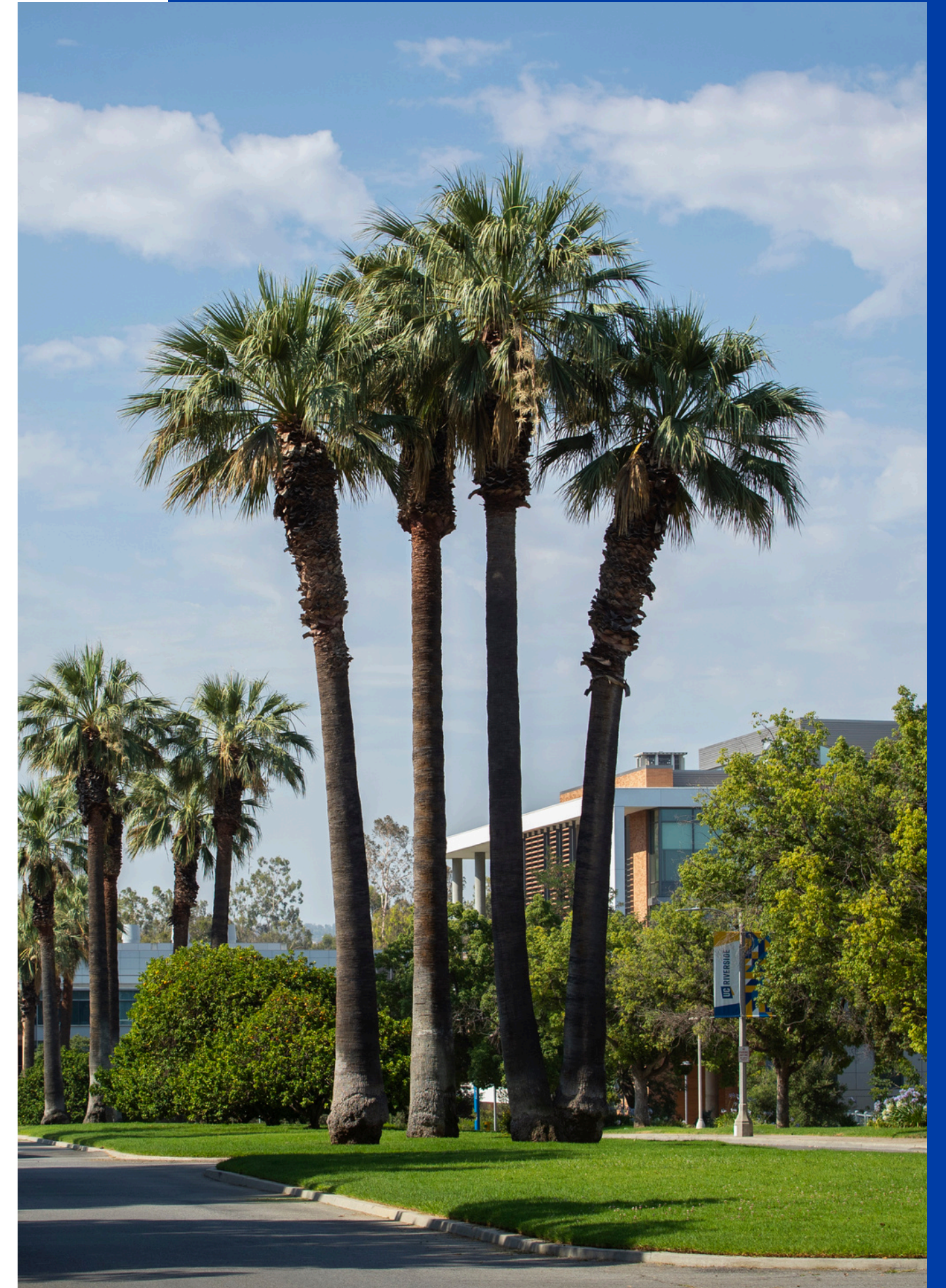
TRAUMA-INFORMED STORYTELLING

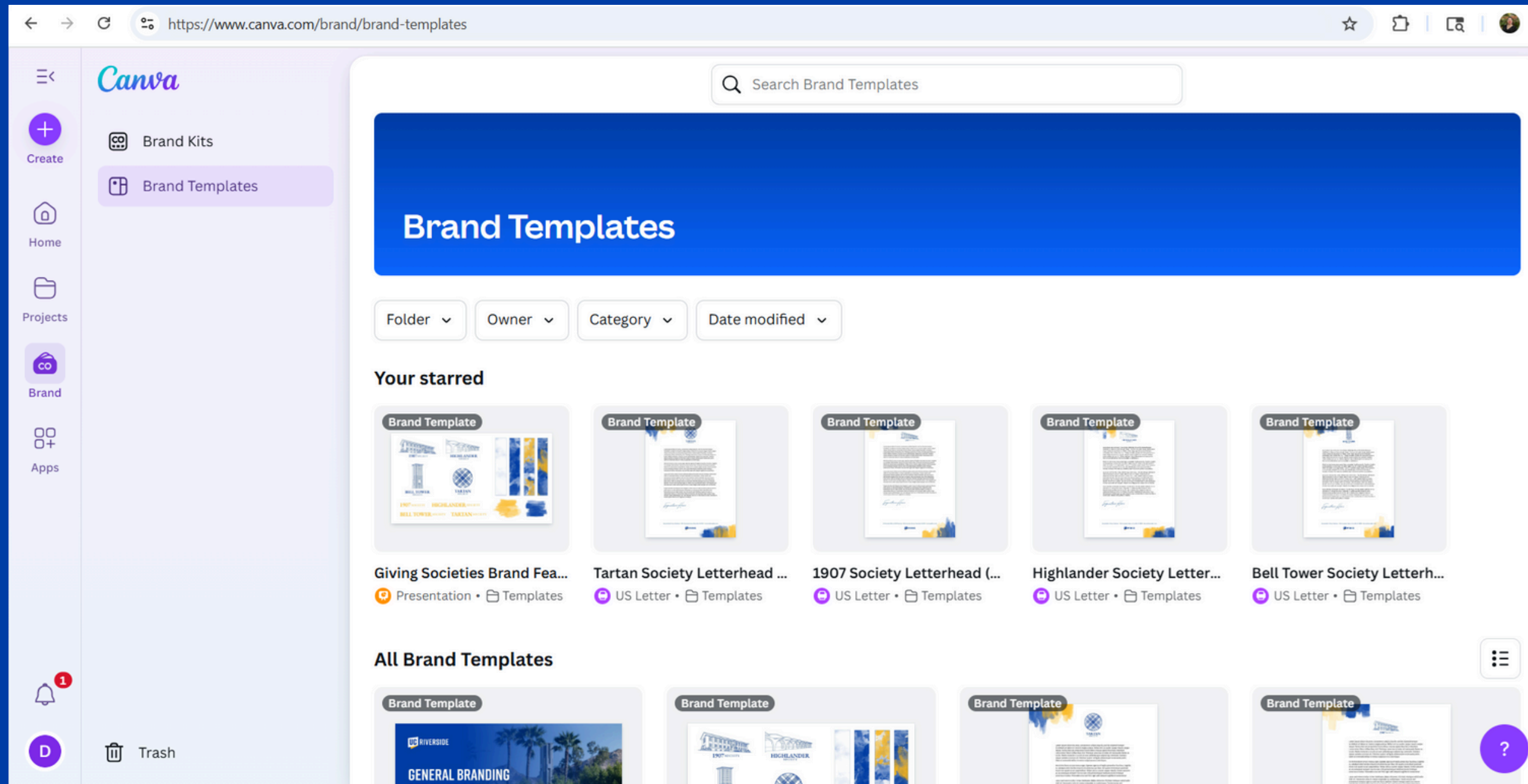
mariabryan.com

Maria Bryan is a nonprofit communications expert certified in Trauma & Resilience, Trauma-Informed Space Holding, Trauma-Informed Coaching, and Somatic Embodiment & Regulation. She hosts the podcast “When Bearing Witness” and offers trainings (including free workshops!) in trauma-informed storytelling.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- Canva
 - ScholarshipUniverse
 - ThankView
 - UCR Magazine
 - UCR News
 - UCR Social Media
 - UCR Story Bank
 - Stewardship Word Bank
- Coming Soon!
- FundMiner
 - Lux/Salesforce
 - Our UCR Portal





SCHOLARSHIP UNIVERSE

Scholarship Universe

Don't search, MATCH. The more questions you answer, the more scholarships you match with.

Get started on Scholarship Universe today!

1. Log in to ucr.scholarshipuniverse.com using your UCR NetID
2. Answer questions on **Scholarship Universe** year-round.
3. Check back to see what scholarships you match with!

VISIT SCHOLARSHIP UNIVERSE [🔗](#)



BOB STOCKTON SCHOLARSHIP IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY 2021-22 RECIPIENT PROFILE

Preeti Juturu '22

Major
BA Public Policy
BA Economics

Activities
UCR Mask Mutual Fund & COVID-19 Safety Initiative Founder • Highlander Newspaper Contributor • Associated Students of UCR Senator • R'Pantry Volunteer

Other Awards and Honors
Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Research & Creative Achievement • UCCS Governance Fellow Award

My Story

Hailing from an immigrant family and growing up in a small, unincorporated town experiencing rapid development in rural San Joaquin Valley, my lived experiences and observations have fostered my commitment to equity and social justice within the contexts of environmental justice, public health, and policy work. Having firsthand experiences with limited healthcare access due to limited physical access, coupled with negative health outcomes as a result of the regional agricultural industry, I came to recognize the inherent ties between where you live, your environment (built and natural), and your health outcomes. I chose to pursue a dual degree at UCR.

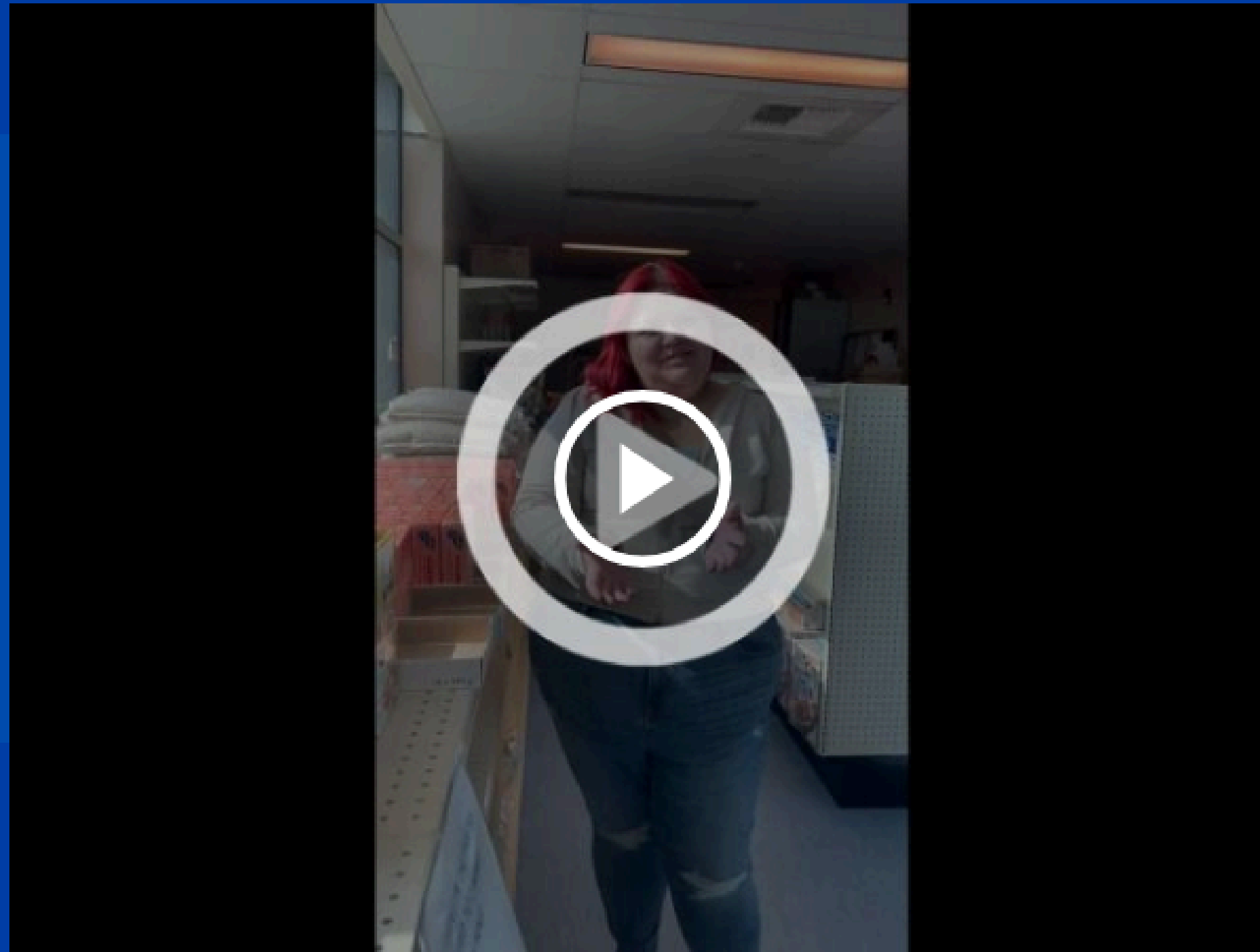
My Career Goals

Through my coursework at UCR, I became fascinated by environmental health research and advocacy. My mission is to build the capacity to conduct research and engage with community members to advocate for and develop meaningful, research-based environmental policy that benefits our most vulnerable residents in the Inland Empire and beyond.

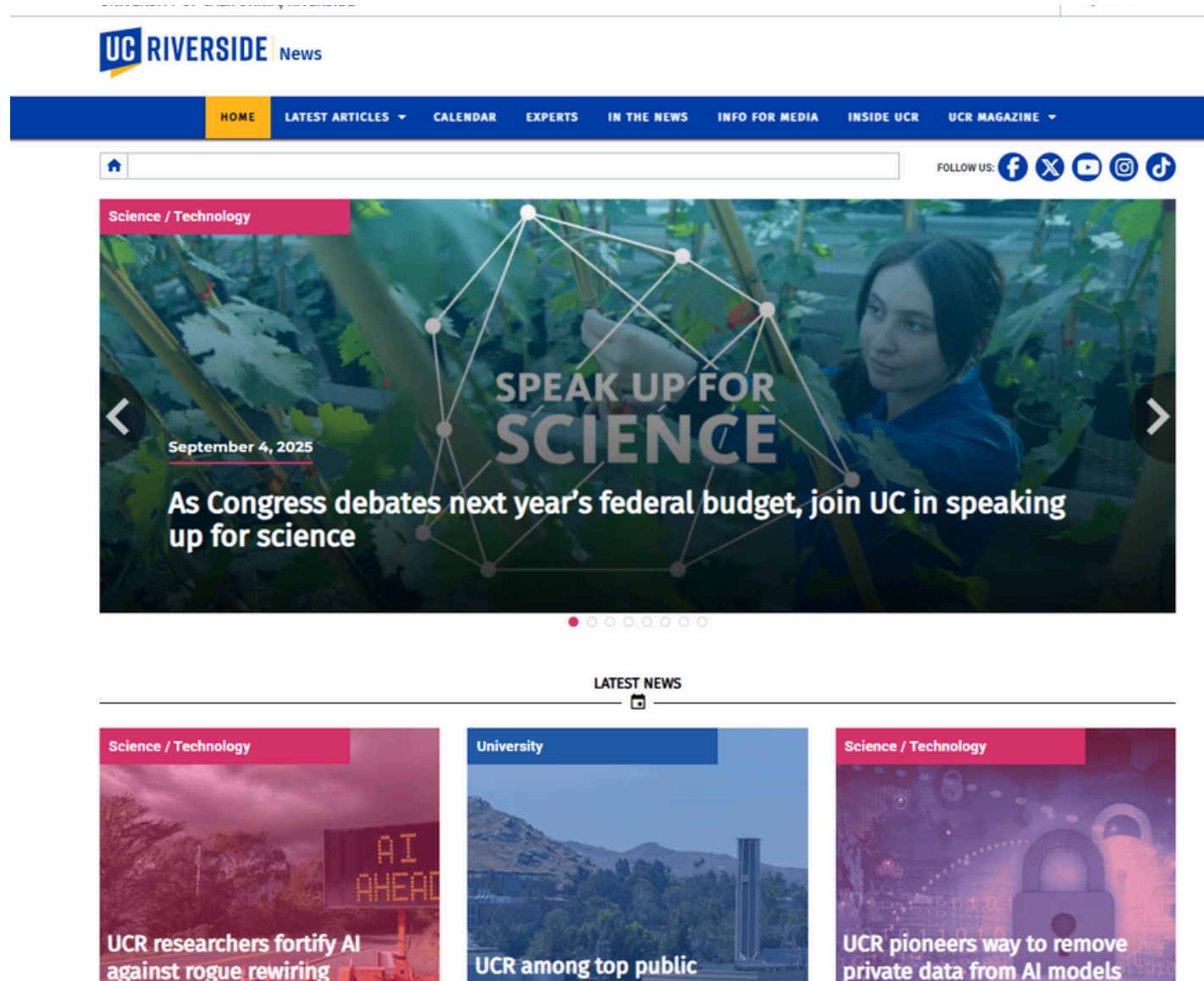
My Message to You

Due to your generous contribution, I have the resources to continue conducting research that can be used in supporting local environmental health initiatives. Additionally, when I start my M.S. in community health sciences at UCLA in the fall, I will be able to continue supporting Inland Empire communities. I will forever be grateful to you for this support and hope to honor the legacy of the late Bob Stockton and his dedication to environmental policy.

THANKVIEW



UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

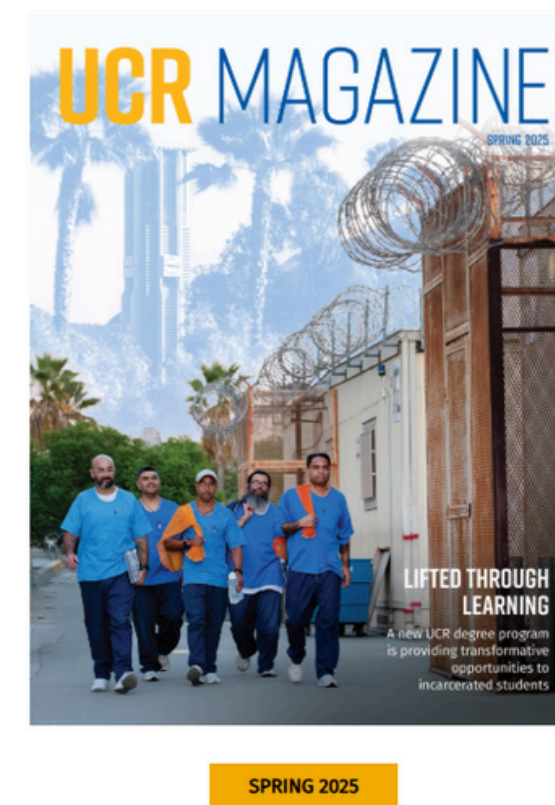


news.ucr.edu



UCR MAGAZINE

Published quarterly by UC Riverside's University Relations team, UCR Magazine keeps alumni, friends, and community members connected.




magazine.ucr.edu

BRAND.UCR.EDU

Story Bank

UC RIVERSIDE Brand Identity

HOME BRAND TRAINING RESOURCES SUPPORT



STORIES

Telling the UCR Brand Story

These "Bold Hearts. Brilliant Minds." brand stories are available to share through marketing and communication platforms to tell the stories of the people representing UC Riverside. The stories can be used in newsletters, social posts, emails, websites, ads, etc. They're organized by the UCR brand pillars of **Community**, **Mobility**, and **Transformation**, and by affiliation, school, or college. The story's header signifies the person's affiliation. Each story will feature a description along with supporting assets including narratives, quotes, social tags, and multimedia content.

STORY NOMINATION FORM

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

Search


UC RIVERSIDE Brand Identity

HOME BRAND TRAINING RESOURCES SUPPORT

SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Social media provides community members (including students, potential students, parents, alumni, and Riverside residents) with a closer, more personal look at UCR and its research, departments, organizations, clubs, and events.

facebook



STEWARDSHIP WORD BANK



Office of Stewardship &
Donor Relations

Stewardship Word Bank

Our donors do so much more than “fund” scholarships, research, projects, etc. The following verbs can help you describe donor impact. Words associated with **Bold Hearts**. **Brilliant Minds** are in **red**. For more information on campaign language and collateral, please visit brand.ucr.edu.

Accelerate	Enhance	Motivate
Activate	Enlighten	Move
Advance	Enliven	Nurture
Advocate	Enrich	Partner
Affirm	Envision	Promote
Amplify	Espouse	Propel
Assist	Excite	Provide
Benefit	Exemplify	Push Boundaries
Bolster	Facilitate	Raise
Boost	Forward	Reach
Build	Foster	Reinforce
Care	Fuel	Reinvigorate
Celebrate	Fulfill	Rejuvenate
Champion	Furnish	Renew
Charge	Further	Replenish
Commemorate	Grow	Represent
Commit	Guard	Research
Construct	Guide	Restore
Create	Heal	Revitalize
Cultivate	Heighten	Revolutionize
Cure	Illuminate	Serve
Dedicate	Impact	Shepherd
Develop	Improve	Spark
Direct	Influence	Strengthen
Discover	Inform	Study
Drive	Infuse	Sustain
Educate	Innovate	Teach
Elevate	Inspire	Transform
Embolden	Institute	Undertake
Embrace	Invigorate	Uplift
Empower	Launch	Uphold
Enable	Lead	Validate
Encourage	Learn	Visualize
Endorse	Lift	
Energize	Model	



Office of Stewardship &
Donor Relations

You can also explore new ways to talk about our relationship with our donors.

Advocates	Commitment	Guardians	Patrons
Ambassadors	Community	Investors	Proponents
Associates	Cooperation	Involvement	Representatives
Backers	Dedication	Leaders	Safekeepers
Champions	Endorsement	Mentors	Stakeholders
Collaborators	Facilitation	Partners	Trust

Messaging Bank

The following is a selection of verbiage to consider when drafting donor stewardship communications. Messages associated with **Bold Hearts**. **Brilliant Minds** are in **red**.

Scholarships:

- Thank you for your commitment to the XX Scholarship Fund. There is no better way to build a bright future, both for UCR and our world, than to help a promising young person achieve their dream of receiving a world-class education.
- It was a pleasure to learn of your recent commitment to [scholarship] at UCR. Thank you for helping to ensure that promising XX DISCIPLINE students can benefit from the educational opportunities of XX. Your generosity touches their lives and enriches our university community, and I offer heartfelt gratitude to you for making such a meaningful investment.
- As UCR continues to focus on increasing and broadening financial assistance for our students, it means so much to have your support. Thank you, once again, for making it possible for deserving XX UNIT students to realize their extraordinary potential.

Research:

- Students in fields ranging from education to mechanical engineering come to UC Riverside for the opportunity to participate in hands-on research projects with industry leaders. This experience reinforces what our students are learning in the classroom and helps prepare them for successful careers. By investing in XX Fund, you are readying the next generation of visionaries and pioneers.
- Research is a fundamental element of what UC Riverside is, dating back over 100 years to the establishment of the Citrus Experiment Station at Mt. Rubidoux by the University of California. Through your partnership, the XX LAB can continue its groundbreaking research into XX DISCIPLINE and carry on UCR's proud tradition of scientific exploration and innovation.
- Every day, research teams at UC Riverside are tackling big challenges like climate change, food insecurity, and mental health. With your pledge to XX Research Fund, they can continue that important work.

Student Support (non-financial aid):

- UC Riverside aims to provide students with a holistic educational experience, where they have opportunities across campus and around the world to put the knowledge they have accumulated in their classes into action. Through internships, community service, study abroad, and other experiential learning experiences, students are developing their skills,



Office of Stewardship &
Donor Relations

building their networks, and enhancing their resumes, becoming highly sought-after job and graduate program candidates. Thank you for investing in our students' futures through your support of XX Fund.

- UC Riverside is proud to have been named the No. 1 university in the country for social mobility three years in a row, recognizing the difference we make in elevating low-income graduates to a higher standard of living. An important factor in our students' success is supportive programs like XX PROGRAM. Thanks to your generous gift to XX Student Support Fund, we will continue ensuring that all UCR students thrive.
- In the 2024 UC Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), 37% of UC Riverside students reported that in the last 12 months, they were hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food. With your assistance, UCR can help students facing food insecurity and ensure that they have all the support they need to succeed in reaching their educational goals.

Faculty:

- Professor XX's innovative thinking, impactful research, and interdisciplinary collaboration continues to enhance the excellence of undergraduate and graduate education at UC Riverside. UCR is proud to have someone of Professor XX's stature on our faculty and are grateful for the role you continue to play in supporting their important work here.
- This month we were elated at the news that XX, XX PROFESSOR of XX, had been awarded the XX PRIZE in recognition of their trailblazing work in XX DISCIPLINE. Through your dedication to UC Riverside, top faculty like Professor XX can continue to call our campus home.
- This month, UC Riverside conferred degrees on approximately 6,100 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students. At each of the ceremonies and celebrations we hosted, students acknowledged the role their professors played in their academic success. Your gift to XX Fund enables these vital connections between our faculty and their students to flourish.



QUESTIONS?

REACH OUT!

Devlin Smith • devlins@ucr.edu

Kara Schnabel • schnabel.kara@mayo.edu

Sarah Miller • sarah.miller1@ucr.edu



THANK YOU!

