Natural instincts

Triple-scholarship recipient Kyle Suen furthers his love of nature through studies and research

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Dhanika Pineda/UCI
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This past fall, Kyle Suen participated in California Ecology and Conservation, a field program held through the UC Natural Reserve System.

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Steve Zylius / UCI

Kyle Suen has always been surrounded by nature. From his childhood he remembers frequent visits to state parks and hikes with his family. In high school, he remembers exploring the rolling hills and forest trails around his hometown of Walnut Creek.

Now, in his third year of college, Suen continues to explore nature through an academic lens as an Earth system sciences major at UCI.

This past fall, Suen participated in California Ecology and Conservation, a field program held through the UC Natural Reserve System. Along with a cohort of students from various UC schools, Suen was fully immersed in ecology and field research throughout the seven-week intensive course. During the fall quarter, Suen didn’t step foot on the UCI campus. Nature became his classroom.

“We traveled around California to a lot of different UC-owned and protected natural reserves,” Suen says, “They [taught] us what ecology is, and we [got] to go out into the field, meet new people and get a taste of what it’s like to be a researcher. It was a really cool experience that I was actually only really able to do because of the scholarships I got.”



Kyle Suen braves the elements at the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Center last November. Sam Daley

Suen is a triple-scholarship recipient – the Physical Sciences Dean's Scholarship, the UCI Regents' Scholarship and the Distinguished Honors Scholarship. He explained that the financial support allows him to pursue academic opportunities and experiences, such as California Ecology and Conservation, that he wouldn't have otherwise been able to.

"It's been really nice to have support for the necessities, like tuition and housing, so I can focus on research and diving into the things I want to explore during college," Suen says.

While he doesn't quite know the exact path his career will take after he graduates in 2024, Suen knows that he wants to work with and for the environment. He has been "lab-hopping" to learn about different fields of study.

In his sophomore year, Suen worked in the Adam Martiny lab, where he helped collect and analyze water samples from Newport Beach. In summer 2022, Suen participated in the Center for Oldest Ice Exploration Research to study ice samples and create a fire map of Antarctica.

Suen knows there is still a lot more nature to explore and looks forward to doing just that. Exploration and research are not solo activities, and Suen is happy to be able to do it all in the collaborative environment of UCI.

"When I was choosing schools, I tried to look for ones where people are happier to work with each other than to compete with each other," Suen says. "And I really found that sense of support at UCI."

If you want to learn more about supporting this or other activities at UCI, please visit the Brilliant Future website at https://brilliantfuture.uci.edu. Publicly launched on Oct. 4, 2019, the Brilliant Future campaign aims to raise awareness and support for UCI. By engaging 75,000 alumni and garnering $2 billion in philanthropic investment, UCI seeks to reach new heights of excellence in student success, health and wellness, research and more. The School of Physical Sciences plays a vital role in the success of the campaign. Learn more by visiting https://brilliantfuture.uci.edu/uci-school-of-physical-sciences/.

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