Fulfilling the promise

UCI Cal-Bridge graduates secure state higher-education faculty positions
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Katy Rodriguez Wimberly and Manuel Paul pursued their doctoral degrees in physics and astronomy at UCI and have recently been offered faculty positions at California institutions of higher education. Both were scholars in the Cal-Bridge program which creates pathways for underserved students to pursue advanced degrees through one of nine University of California campuses.

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UCI

Katy Rodriguez Wimberly and Manuel Paul pursued their doctorates in physics and astronomy at UCI and are now both fulfilling their promise as they begin new positions as faculty members at California institutions of higher education.

Uniting them is their status as Cal-Bridge scholars. Cal-Bridge is a higher education program that provides a pathway for students from historically underrepresented populations to move up from the California State University system to a University of California institution to pursue advanced degrees in physics and astronomy.

Rodriguez Wimberly has accepted a tenure-track position in the Department of Physics & Astronomy at California State University, San Bernardino, starting in the fall. Paul has been offered a tenure-track faculty position at Cosumnes River College, a community college in Sacramento, where he will start teaching physics and astronomy courses in August.

Cal-Bridge serves students at 116 California community colleges, all 23 CSU campuses and nine UC locations. It was designed to open doors to educational opportunities to women people of color to help diversify the state's science, technology, engineering and math professoriate and workforce. Launched in 2014, Cal-Bridge supports students through their Ph.D. studies at UCs by providing funding for tuition and research projects, professional development and guidance from mentors.

An Army veteran, Rodriguez Wimberly became a Cal-Bridge scholar in 2015 as a student at California State University, Long Beach. She was accepted into the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program and earned a Ph.D. in astrophysics at UCI in 2021 before becoming a NSF MSP-Ascend postdoctoral fellow in astrophysics at UC Riverside. As a professor at CSUSB, Rodriguez Wimberly will remain part of the Cal-Bridge program as a faculty mentor to physics and astronomy students at the university. She will also join the Cal-Bridge leadership team as statewide director of the mentorship program.

"Cal-Bridge was crucial for me not only in preparing for graduate school but creating and expanding my network of amazing and caring scientists; many of my astrophysics research collaborators I've connected with through Cal-Bridge," says Rodriguez Wimberly. "My network and the support they give me has enabled me to create the career of my dreams, which is doing excellent astrophysics research, contributing to an equitable and inclusive STEM community through mentorship

work and research and staying in Southern California with my family."

Originally from San Bernardino County, Paul went to CSUSB, as an undergraduate majoring in applied physics. He went on to UCI to pursue his Ph.D. and was awarded an NSF GRFP fellowship in his first year. Paul will also continue with Cal-Bridge, recruiting students at his new campus to apply to the program as they transfer to a CSU to complete their four-year bachelor's degree.

"The Cal-Bridge network has benefitted me tremendously by connecting me with an advisor who supported and encouraged me. I would have never applied to graduate school without that support," Paul says.

Kevork Abazajian, UCI professor of physics & astronomy, is the leader of Cal-Bridge at UCI, which is the longest-serving and top UC institution in terms of accepting Cal-Bridge scholars. He is also co-director of the organization's physics and astronomy operation statewide.

"Katy Rodriguez Wimberly and Manuel Paul are perfect examples of the personal success that students from underrepresented communities can achieve through Cal-Bridge," Abazajian says. "With the help provided by initial funding by the NSF and more recent financial support through the State of California, we hope to continue the growth and prosperity of the program."

If you want to learn more about supporting this or other activities at UCI, please visit the Brilliant Future website. 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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