25 UC Irvine students earn Environmental Changemakers Certificates in program’s first year

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UCI School of Physical Sciences



Snow-capped San Gabriel mountains as seen from the UCI Ecological Preserve.

Picture Credit:
Steve Zylius/UC Irvine

Beginning in 2023, UC Irvine undergraduate students had the opportunity to complete the Environmental Changemakers certificate program. The program, jointly created by the schools of engineering, physical sciences and social ecology,

aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of environmental issues and the policy challenges that surround them. In its first year, the program certified 25 undergraduate students from five schools across the campus.

Program participants complete one course each from the three schools, which equips them with interdisciplinary training in addressing climate change and sustainability issues.

Alex Chang, an undergraduate student majoring in criminology, law and society, pursued the program to explore how climate change and social justice are intertwined. “I learned about key environmental and social justice issues,” Chang said. “I became well-informed on how to pursue solutions to improve the conditions of disadvantaged communities.”

The certificate program was designed to better prepare students for careers in industry, government and nonprofits.

Sabrina Vargas, an Earth system science major, plans to leverage what she learned in the program to pursue a career in water treatment or oceanography. “I was able to take a well-rounded approach to climate change that I can use in my future career,” Vargas said.

As workforce demand grows, students benefit from instruction in both the scientific and societal aspects of pressing climate issues. Sarkis Agadzhanyan, a civil engineering major, learned the importance of sustainability practices in engineering design and development. “The knowledge I acquired will benefit my future work as a consultant,” Agadzhanyan said.

Following a successful first year, there are plans to expand course offerings to allow more students to participate in the certificate program.

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