Finding Belonging in Math

Marissa Corr, Bachelor of Science in Mathematics
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UC Irvine School of Physical Sciences News



Marissa Corr is completing her bachelor's in mathematics and will be starting a Ph.D. in education in the fall.

Picture Credit:
Tatiana Overly/UC Irvine

School of Physical Sciences: Let’s start with the basics! Tell us your name, major, and where you're from.

Corr: My name is Marissa Corr. I'm a mathematics major. I'm originally from Wildomar, CA, but I've lived in a handful of different states, and we moved to UC Irvine from Idyllwild, CA, a small community in the San Jacinto Mountains.

SoPS: Why did you choose to attend UC Irvine?

Corr: The main factor in my decision to come to UC Irvine was the quality of life for my family. As a single parent to boy-girl twins who are now 10, on-campus family housing and a great elementary school nearby were a must, and UCI had both. We visited the campus before I made my decision, and when we walked into Aldrich Park, it felt so warm and abundant. I just had a feeling that UCI was the place for us. It just felt right.

SoPS: Can you share a standout moment or experience at UC Irvine that has shaped your personal growth or career goals?

Corr: This quarter I interviewed students of color and low-income students in the Department of Mathematics at UCI to learn what challenges they face. My end goal is to come up with actionable suggestions for the department. My advisor for this project, Associate Professor of Sociology Dr. Paul Hanselman, has committed to helping me through it and it's so touching to me when faculty give their time and energy to support me, even though they have nothing to gain from it. It's inspiring really but it has been essential to me getting these extra opportunities.

SoPS: Looking back at your time at UC Irvine, what achievement are you most proud of, and what makes it special to you?

Corr: One of my current projects feels especially meaningful. I'm currently helping Math Department Undergraduate Vice Chair Dr. Chris Davis design a math course to supplement Math 13 – a class that can be very challenging for math majors. It marks the shift into proof-based mathematics and is a prerequisite for most upper-division courses. So, I'm hopeful that Math 13X – which will run this fall – will help students feel more supported in Math 13, but also to feel like they belong in mathematics. I've been able to use the interviews I've done with students of color and low-income

students in the math major to inform the direction for 13X.

SoPS: How have your activities outside the classroom helped you grow personally and academically while at UC Irvine?

Corr: I have had so many interesting experiences and opportunities since I've been at UCI. I've been fortunate to explore topics I'm interested in through reading courses on category theory and abstract algebra with grad student Ari Rosenfield and Associate Professor Dr. Manuel Reyes. I've also gotten hands-on programming experience doing data analysis with the Postsecondary Education Research & Implementation Institute and Dr. Di Xu's lab in the School of Education. With each experience I get to learn where my passions lie, and what energizes me. And I've gotten a glimpse into what graduate school is about, which was enough for me to want to pursue graduate studies.

SoPS: Was there a class or professor that had a major impact on your academic journey? Tell us how they influenced you.

Corr: Jesse Wolfson's guidance was completely pivotal for me. He gave me the opportunity to do research on equity in our math classes – something I thought was important to know, to guide our steps in the math department's Inclusive Excellence Committee. And he supported me in presenting the findings in an interesting way – at a "Data Equity Walk" event last October.

SoPS: What do you have planned after graduation? What's next for you?

Corr: I am taking the summer OFF – spending time with my kids, refurbishing our dining room set, getting outside, and just slowing down to recharge before I start my PhD in Education here at UCI in the fall. I am so excited to refine my research interests and skills, and to continue to learn about how postsecondary mathematics can best be taught and learned.

SoPS: Looking further ahead, where do you envision your career going, and how has your UC Irvine education influenced these aspirations?

Corr: Math is so cool and fun, and it has the potential to be empowering and unifying, but so often that isn't what students experience. Ultimately, I want to help people. I don't know if I want to stay in academia, but I love the idea of applied research – research that borders on activism, and involves the communities being researched. I've found a direction here at UCI. And more than a specific career vision, I've learned that being true to myself and following what I think is right are the best guiding lights.

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