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*Articles by Carson Medley  
CSU, Chico Thesis Editor*

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## JARED AXEN: THE NURSE WHO ALSO SINGS



*Jared Axen (MS, Nursing, '20)*

**W**hat year did you graduate? Did you write a thesis or a project? If so, can you talk about your research and big findings?

I graduated last spring 2020. I wrote a professional paper about how to improve nurses' knowledge of diabetes management in acute care setting. My big finding was that a nurse must address how to motivate other nurses to learn. So many nurses have been working in the profession for a long time and they are used to making decisions on factual information. Then, 10 years pass, and what you thought you know, you suddenly discover you didn't know. This leads to nurses making bad decisions despite the best intentions.

**What is your current profession?**

I've been a registered nurse since 2009. Since 2014, I've been a traveling registered nurse. I take temporary three-month contracts and go where the problems are. Currently, I live in Downey, California, and drive 100 miles to work and back. When COVID-19 arrived, I stayed on past my three-month contract. I will also soon be working in the movie industry for a company that provides COVID-19 support. My job will be helping Hollywood get back to normal life.

**Why did you go back to graduate school?**

If you're going to be in any industry long enough, make sure you get your bachelor's degree. The master's degree, though, is for you. I earned a 4.0 for my Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). I earned a 4.0 for my Master of Science in Nursing (MSN). I put the pedal to the metal and started grinding gears. When graduate school starts to get hard, you do it because you want to. Nursing is an extremely physical profession. I'd been working as a stroke and neuro nurse for 10 years—always reminded how easy it is to get injured. The MA gave me options. Now if I get injured on the job, I can still find work. Plus, I found nursing education interesting because it taught me how to work with adult learners. For example, I will be using the knowledge I gained in graduate school when I soon start working with adult learners in the film industry and helping to motivate these professionals to follow health mandates.

**You have become known as the "singing nurse." Can you tell me a little bit about how this got started?**

I like to think you are always taking a part of yourself to whatever profession you enter. I'm an artistic person. Music oozes out of me. When I was an undergraduate, I made money cutting grass. I had 33 customers on my lawn route. I became known as the singing gardener. I've always been a musician. It's my personality. I don't identify with my profession. Nor do I define myself by my profession. It's so tempting to tell people I'm a nurse when they ask me what I do, you know, and start talking about my profession. But I think it's important to maintain your individuality. When people ask me what I do, I tell them I'm a musician or an artist, but I work as a nurse. I'm a singer songwriter. And one day I started singing to my patients. It's just what I do—sing. A few patients told the news about it. The rest is history. I was on *The Jay Leno Show*. I've been on *Good Morning America*. I've been on

*"When graduate school starts to get hard, you do it because you want to."*

the television show *The Doctors*. I've been interviewed all over America. But I've been singing to patients since 2007—long before the media and television found about it.

**I saw an interview with you where you said that your job is to get the patient from the hospital to home, noting that often the patient gets lost and "feels like just a number" and singing reminds patients they are human beings. Can you talk a little about this?**

You know that feeling when you go to the DMV and you take that number and feel like you've become one of the cattle? The mentality becomes "Next." That's the experience so many hospital patients feel. Suddenly, they're not in control. When you're a patient, it becomes so easy to get lost and redefined as a number. I think about how I can make my patients feel like they're still human beings. My time as a neuro and stroke nurse helped me create this outlook. These patients have a sudden change of status. They've lost something—part of their individuality has gone missing. My secondary goal is to help patients find their identity, their humanity, and not lose who they are.

**Do you remember the first time you ever sang to a patient?**

Oh, yeah. It was 2007. I was in college. The patient had just received her cancer diagnosis. I came in singing as I brought her medication. She had been so sad but started smiling right away. That was the moment I knew my singing was therapeutic. Nursing starts at the doorframe.

**What has the pandemic been like for you?**

Very similar to what you would hear in the media before you would actually see it. I remember seeing my first patient who had COVID-19. I felt uncertainty and fear. I remember trying to figure out the precaution standards. I've worked the first and second wave of COVID-19 but mainly the second wave. I've seen so many patients who present with symptoms of bad pneumonia but with acute and chronic

effects on the body. Something you don't often see unless the patient is really septic or suffering from burn trauma. Then, as a nurse—as a human—your own emotions enter. You start to think: What am I bringing home to my family? I could be asymptomatic. I've had horrible nightmares almost every week since COVID-19 began. The nightmares are always about me coming down with it and hurting the people I most love. Most of us join nursing because we care and want to help people. For us the most terrifying thing to learn is that we hurt someone rather than helped them. I didn't realize how many nurses felt this way until we all started to talk about it. Yeah, we all have nightmares. Most of my nightmares are equated to naked dreams. I think I'm all geared up and I enter the isolation room and look down and I've got nothing on. I'm not even wearing a mask. Patients with COVID-19 have acute changes quickly. I'm all the time running into a room to start CPR. In my nightmares, I do the same thing only right when I walk into the room, I realize I'm not wearing my mask or glasses. I ran into the room thinking so much about saving my patient that I forgot about saving myself. This is how nurses are wired.

*"I think about how I can make my patients feel like they're still human beings."*

**How many cases have you seen?**

I don't know. It's like grad school—only think about the problem in front of you. I remember in March and April, I would message my family and let them

know I was working with a COVID-19 patient. I don't do that anymore. I work a COVID-19 assignment every night now. I've been taking three to four shifts a week. You get really good really fast working with these patients. I've gotten good at being a COVID-19 nurse.

**What do you mean?**

You start to recognize sudden changes in a patient's status. You become more confident and careful and better at taking care of your own self. I check my temperature twice a day and monitor for symptoms. After every shift I go home and shower like I'm in the science fiction

movie *Gattaca*. My hands bleed all the time from scrubbing them so much.

**What is it that people need to understand, or don't seem to understand, about COVID-19?**

That it's still here. We're all so ready to get back to normal life. But it's all around us.

**What is a day in the life of Jared like?**

The professional me is up by 4:15 p.m. I've already washed and dried my own personal protection. I've got this routine of cleaning my gear and myself right when I get home and before I go to bed. I tell my wife right away not to touch me. I'm not deployed. But I'm not available. I feel like a soldier folding my parachute. It's on me to make sure my equipment is all safe and ready to use again the next day. I wear a couple of different reusable masks: NIVO or N95. I swap out the filter. Things like that. I think like this—the soldier folding his parachute—every time I clean my equipment. It's a good detox for me: come home, clean my gear, and shower. This process gives me a mental break from being a professional so I can get back to my personal life. My shoes are left at the front door in a bucket of bleach. Clothes folded inside out and put in the hamper. I then take my gear and inspect it. Nothing changes. Pack it away. Now I can say hello to my wife and dogs and garden. Then I get on the road and drive more than 100 miles a day for work. I work three to four shifts, and a minimum of 12 hours each. I'd say most of us nurses have PTSD. I didn't know it was common until we (all the nurses) talked about it. The mental anguish comes from the possibility of thinking we might have contributed to the pandemic in a harmful way. Knowing we could bring it home. When these patients are really sick, they lay prone for days to help remove fluid in the lungs. Their lungs are so sensitive that the weight of their own heart sitting against the lungs makes it so they can't breathe. I remember hearing about



*Axen on the job.*

nurses training themselves to sleep prone. That's my mentality. Yeah, I sleep prone now.

**Any advice for our future and current graduate students, not limited to nursing, about how to juggle the balance of life, school, and work in the stressful time of a pandemic?**

Because of Chico's online MSN nursing program, it was possible for me to juggle life, work, and school. I'm grateful. I finished my professional paper while I was working four nights a week in a COVID-19 unit. That's what I did while working in graduate school. Worked full time while I got my degree. My dad also died in 2019. It was rough. So, the first advice I have is that you have to *want* the master's

degree because you're genuinely interested. You get it because *you* want to. The second thing is going into graduate school with the understanding that life happens. Just because you're going to school does not mean life outside of school stops. I would argue that a good professor, like the ones in

my nursing program, will teach you how to prioritize. I always suspected the amount of graduate school assignments worked into my curriculum was to teach me how to prioritize my personal and professional responsibilities. And here's the third thing. I saw a mouse running across the freeway in LA traffic the other day. The mouse got across because it focused only on what was coming at it during that moment. Just address each problem as it comes at you. If you can, try to anticipate the problem before it arrives.

**What's next for you?**

I want to make sure I can use my COVID-19 experience and my graduate degree to help others get back to life. As a stroke and neuro nurse, my job is to teach my patients how not to come back. I want to help people get back to normal. I want to help industries learn how to work again. How does normal life

***“The mouse got across because it focused only on what was coming at it during that moment.”***

continue? By looking at safety and education.

**Will we get back to normal, Jared?**

What's normal? I've never believed normal means you're without scars. With stroke and neuro patients, it's easy to focus on the boulder in the road and not how the journey continues. Normal life is when you can walk around the boulder. It will always be there.



# ALONDRA ADAME:

## FIGHTING THE IMPOSTER SYNDROME ONE WORD AT A TIME

**W**here are you from?  
I'm originally from Sutter,  
California, about an hour away  
from Chico.

**What is your discipline?**

I'm currently in the MA in English program.  
I started in fall 2019.

**What (and where) was your undergraduate degree?**

I attended Chico State. I've been a Wildcat ever since I graduated high school, so for about five years now.

**Was there one specific moment, event, or maybe a professor or mentor who planted the seed to attend graduate school?**

I could probably write a whole essay based around this question. During my senior year, I had some doubt about entering the teaching credential program since I had become so enveloped in creative writing. I submitted a poem to a university's journal, and it was accepted for publication. I also read a poem at a Chico State event where I met an editor-in-chief from a literary magazine (*The Nasiona*) who offered to publish my poem and later accepted an essay I wrote for publication. Around the same time, two of my professors (Dr. Rob Davidson and Dr. Ayde Loya in the English Department) encouraged me to think about graduate school based on work of mine they'd seen over the last few semesters. I think those events helped me feel confident enough to change my plans and apply so I could keep writing creatively and learn how to develop my craft.

**What does a graduate degree mean to you and maybe to friends and family members?**

I am one of a handful in my extended family to graduate with a BA, and one of the first to pursue graduate school. I think a graduate degree means that I am closer to the opportunities my parents hoped I would have when they immigrated here. I believe a graduate degree at Chico State is a way to learn and write more in a discipline and city that I love.

**What was your first day of graduate school like?**

Terrible. I cried a lot. I had an asthma attack outside of my first class. I was so stressed, and I felt like I didn't belong. I was the youngest person in my class, and I was the only brown person in the room. It was a really isolating experience, which surprised me since I'd already spent four years in Chico. I thought I'd feel at home, but I wasn't prepared for the



explosion of internalized negative feelings bottled up from the past.

**What are the greatest obstacles you've had to overcome to get where you are now?**

Bipolar depression and the effects of racism. The town I grew up in truly did nothing to protect me from the racism I faced in school. I didn't have the language I do now that could explain how microaggressions and stereotypes affected me or how being "not racist" just was not enough. It affected my self-esteem, my ability to learn, and my mental health. I wasn't diagnosed with

bipolar depression until the end of my freshman year of college. It's a constant battle, and it's not something I think I'll ever overcome, but I've accepted that it's part of who I am.

**Tell me about your work with Adelante. What is your position? And why did you want to become a mentor?**

I love Adelante! I'm currently an outreach coordinator but I was also an ambassador. I mainly act as social media lead ([follow us!](#)), which has been a beautiful experience. Students can feel when a university social media account is operated by students. We know what affirmations we need to hear and what opportunities we can personally recommend as graduate students. There is a personal touch there that people have taken notice of and I'm proud to help cultivate that voice. The best part is seeing the pride that the student and faculty researchers in our program have when they share our content about them. They did amazing work this past summer, and I can't wait to show it off for them.

**How has the pandemic shifted the way you perceive mentoring? It seems to me that your job is now 10 times as difficult. How have you survived?**

The pandemic hasn't shifted much in terms of how I mentor or teach. I've always believed that education should be student centered. I'll be teaching a section of ENGL 130 this fall and I'm constantly thinking about accessibility, flexibility, and multimodality. Surviving right now just means being compassionate and forgiving as we try to move forward—forgiving not only to others but to ourselves.

*“Surviving right now just means being compassionate and forgiving . . .”*

**You have lived through face-to-face classes and now online learning. What were the greatest challenges you experienced? What advice do you have for our incoming graduate students who will experience their first semester at Chico State virtually?**

The greatest challenges I have experienced with online learning are Zoom fatigue and motivation. There's more pressure on engagement through the screen that often doesn't translate. I also just don't like working in the same place that I sleep, if that makes sense. It makes it more difficult to relax at home. My advice to incoming graduate students is to



*Adame teaching and living in a virtual world.*

carve out an hour or so when you're not looking at a screen. Even as I type this, I can feel the strain on my eyes after a nonstop day of having Zoom meetings, answering emails, scrolling through social media, and working on the course I teach. Give yourself some space that is solely yours to relax and detach from your research or writing for a while.

**What do you think faculty should know that they might not know about how graduate students are struggling with this new educational environment?**

I think faculty should know that graduate students might be juggling multiple responsibilities that are outside of their control. The pandemic has and will continue to affect our learning experience, so providing ways to allow asynchronous work will be a lifesaver for overloaded students.

**Have you had the "I didn't know what I didn't know" experience in graduate school?**

I experienced the "I didn't know what I didn't know" moment on my first day of graduate school. "Literary Theory" was a course I felt I didn't have any experience with throughout my undergraduate education. I took a lot of classes focused on education, creative writing, and literature, so theory was new to me. I wouldn't change anything about that experience, though. I like being reminded that I don't know everything since it hypes up my motivation to learn.

**What are some common myths about graduate school that you would like to dispel?**

Graduate school isn't impossible and you're probably "smart enough," whatever that means. It's definitely difficult, I'll give you that. But I feel like some people make it seem impossibly hard when it really just provides an intensive education that asks more of you than classes you've taken in the past. However, it's one of the coolest things ever if you're truly invested in your discipline. I have so much fun in my classes, and my work brings me so much joy.

**We hear a lot about the imposter syndrome that many graduate students feel. Is this real?**

Imposter syndrome is real. It doesn't always look like a student who is struggling in their classes. Sometimes it looks like a student who is actually going beyond and above with every aspect of their education, work, and social life. It can look like overcompensating and high levels of stress over the quality of their work. The main feeling in imposter syndrome is "I don't belong," which is something I have come to accept. I don't belong because this institution wasn't made with me in mind, but I aim to take up space regardless. This will be an uncomfortable process, but we deserve to carve out spaces for ourselves.

**What advice would you give someone who might be thinking about graduate school but starts to second-guess the choice, like maybe they're not smart enough or don't have the money?**

You are probably "smart enough" for graduate school and possibly qualify for scholarships and state university grants that cover most of your tuition. You might have to pay out of pocket, but payment plans are available to students. Most students have one or two part-time jobs in graduate school. I think my advice would be to ask yourself if you have the right time-management skills and dedication to your interests.

**What drives you?**

Representation drives me. Only 2% of Latinas have a doctorate and only about 3% of people in the country have a doctorate. I have young women and girls in my circle that I hope to set an example for. I also want to join the tradition of great Chicana writers and educators that I have come to know and respect. I have always aimed to be someone I could look up to.

*"I also want to join the tradition of great Chicana writers and educators . . ."*

**What is teaching during the pandemic like?**

Wild at first. My preparation for the class I teach was online. I had a lesson plan set and switched over the summer and took part in the *Go Virtual* program. It was a crash course and rushed.

**What was your reaction about the spring semester being online?**

Relieved. This semester was hard because we were holding out. Now I can plan ahead rather than "maybe being transitioned into in person." I'm supposed to be graduating this semester.

**How do you feel, particularly being a first-generation graduate student, about having your Spring 2021 Commencement be virtual?**

It sucks. It will never add up to what you thought was going to happen in your head nor will it feel as important. My parents don't understand what I do most of the time, anyway. My parents are Mexican with a strong sense of respect for teachers. My mom was a teacher in Mexico. She knows what graduations mean. There will be a Zoom meeting. It won't be a

big happy family. Now it just feels like you are working to work. It's so hard to feel any level of relaxation or excitement. I would love to do an in-person reading. Through Zoom it's not the same energy. Different vibe.

**As a writer, what's your posing spin from this pandemic...if there is one?**

Forcing people to recognize their inherent loneliness. If I'm in a public space, I'm not alone. I can't imagine moving into an apartment and being alone. That's what this pandemic world feels like. Being alone in an apartment.

**Will this deter first-generation students from going to college?**

Most have left home and gone to college with a feeling that "I can change who I am now." College will give you the room and space to do this. But with coronavirus, your parents aren't going to let you leave home and go to college. The excuse is not there. You will be in the same situation for sure. These students are living at home under their parents' rules. I have first-gen students in English 130. I sent out a survey. So many responses were the same: "My parents are nosey, and they are going to pop in. They don't understand that you are in front of people but also in a room by yourself." You bring your own cultural issues you already bring into the public but now you bring them into private. This is why I allow my students to turn their cameras off. I just want their attention, not for them to feel forced to bring me into their world.

**What advice do you have for graduate students who are taking their first Zoom class?**

If you can, do the readings. I mean *read* the works. Take notes. Have questions. Prepare. It will make you feel better even if you don't actually know what's going on. A lot of the first day is getting over the fear.

**What's next for you?**

I'll be applying to MFA programs and hopefully working toward a doctorate after that. I think I might take a break between one of these degrees to work or teach for a while if I can. I really enjoy working with students. 

***“You bring your own cultural issues . . . This is why I allow my students to turn their cameras off. I just want their attention, not for them to feel forced to bring me into their world.”***



Adame's ENGL 130 class.

Note: They gave Adame consent to publish photos.

# GUSTAVO MARTIR:



*Martir smelling the roses despite the pandemic.*

## WORKING WITH THE MIND, NOT THE HANDS

### **W**here are you from?

I was born in Los Angeles, California, but raised in Sacramento.

### **What was your discipline?**

In May 2020, I graduated with my master's degree in psychological sciences.

### **What (and where) was your undergraduate degree?**

I was an undergraduate here at Chico State. I graduated with honors in psychology.

### **Was there one specific moment, event, or maybe a professor or mentor who planted the seed to attend graduate school?**

Dr. Neil H. Schwartz, my thesis advisor, is the architect of my thinking. I have said before that it is an honor to have been Dr. Schwartz's last student, for I am receiving all the knowledge and wisdom of his accomplished academic career spanning over three decades and his proven record as a mentor. His

former students now have positions in respected universities. I met some of them at my first conference and we bonded—we became academic siblings. At this conference, along with other familial experiences, Dr. Schwartz taught me that it was possible to embed core family values into our work as researchers and academics. And I, as a first-generation college student from low-income Mexican immigrants who work hard, took that lesson to heart. Indeed, Dr. Schwartz showed me the real world of academia, while also teaching me how family fits into it but always comes first. It is because of this lesson that I will pursue my doctorate degree.

### **What does a graduate degree mean to you and even to friends and family members?**

My dad worked laborious jobs and is now a truck driver. My mom cleans hotel rooms. They work extremely hard to give me and my siblings the opportunities they didn't have. A graduate degree means that their

sacrifices have been worth it. A graduate degree means that I can change my family tree forever. I remember a time when I was 10, I helped my dad with a construction job. I came home to my mom at the end of the day with bloody hands and told her that I did not want to do the work my dad does. My mom told me—and I'll never forget—to work with my mind, not my hands. I intend to continue my graduate education to become a researcher and fulfill my mom's wish for me and my siblings to work with our minds—our thinking—and not our hands.

### **You have lived through face-to-face classes and now online learning. What were the greatest challenges you experienced? What advice do you have for our incoming graduate students who will experience their first semester at Chico State virtually?**

Graduate school is an inherently solitary experience. I remember spending long hours at the library, working deep into the night writing my thesis. The pandemic and forced virtual learning



Martir working from home.

have exacerbated that solitary experience. My advice to future graduate students is to create a physical and psychological barrier between home and school/work. Something that worked for me while I was completing a summer research program at UCLA was to create a realistic to-do list in the morning and follow it throughout the day. You will soon learn how much work you can accomplish in a day, which you can adjust depending on your workload. I would also advise incoming students to foster relationships with your fellow cohort members. They are your colleagues and you will see that you can learn from them as much as you can learn from your professors.

**What are some common myths about graduate school that you would like to dispel?**

I think one of the biggest myths about graduate school is that when you get your degree the only job waiting for you is to become a university professor. However, a graduate degree opens doors into various job sectors other than education, like governmental affairs, the film industry—you can even open your own business. Earning a graduate degree gives you the opportunity to deeply learn about a topic, as well as develop sharp problem-solving skills. It is up to you where you want to apply what you know and what you can do. For me and my brother—Juan Carlos (Political

*“... we are in the initial stages of building our own nonpartisan, nonprofit organization.”*

Science, Psychology, '20)—we know people and politics. In fact, we are in the initial stages of building our own nonpartisan, nonprofit organization centered on eliminating the issues plaguing our communities through data-driven policy recommendations at the local, state, and national level. Our underlying belief is echoed in the words of César Chávez that “the end of all education should surely be service to others.”

**We often hear about the imposter syndrome a lot of graduate students experience. What advice would you give someone who might be thinking about graduate school but starts to second-guess the choice, like maybe they're not smart enough or don't have the money?**

I know graduate school can be financially taxing; I worked three jobs my first year of graduate school to afford it. But I learned to apply what I learned in the classroom into my work. That is, I would take the concepts from my readings that we discussed in class and apply into my work assignments. Work paid the bills but also served as a way to apply what I learned to real-world situations—where it counts. Scholarships and fellowships are other sources I used for money. The key is to know about them and to then apply. And keep applying. After being denied the first time, I reapplied and earned a spot in the CSU, Graduate Equity Fellowship Program. I received funding to work on research, alongside my faculty mentor—and former student of Dr. Schwartz—Dr. Marie Lippmann.

Under the guidance of Dr. Schwartz, I also applied to and earned the CSU Sally Casanova Pre-doctoral Program Award, a program aimed at diversifying the CSU's professoriate by endowing the CSU's top students with summer research opportunities and funds to facilitate and strengthen their doctoral application. The CSU also offers funding for the first three years of your doctoral studies through the Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program. I actually won that award this year, but I had to

decline it because I was denied admission to a doctoral program. In any case, yes, you need to have a competitive CV, but there are a lot of resources out there for you to secure funding for your education.

Yet, finances are only part of the arduous graduate school journey. The imposter syndrome, depression, and anxiety are toxins that fill the air we breathe along the way. I learned that these toxins arise out of high levels of stress, so it is important to develop personal rituals, what people call self-care, to cleanse yourself of them. After spending all day working on my presentation that I was about to deliver at the Student Research Competition, I walked home practicing deep breathing techniques and listening to “The Fire” by The Roots in my earphones. A long walk with some good music is my personal ritual. The key is to find personal rituals that allow your brain to work silently in the background, while you take a breather. That way when the time comes, you are ready.



Martir at his thesis defense.

Graduate school is hard. No doubt that to be successful you must do the work. But sometimes, regardless of how hard you work, you second-guess yourself and your decision of attending graduate school; you might even think you're not smart enough to continue. Without invalidating your experience, I want to tell you it is OK. This means that you are on the right track. I began overcoming my imposter syndrome by accepting that I am learning the ropes of research and, oftentimes, failure is the best teacher.

Moreover, I learned that sometimes the smartest thing you can say is you don't know.

*“ . . . oftentimes, failure is the best teacher . . . ”*

**What drives you?**

Everything I do is for my family. I am able to remain stable in my graduate school journey because of their unconditional support. My family is my foundation. But it is my inherent belief in people and in my community that really drives me. Going to graduate school equipped me with refined cognitive abilities to reason and grapple with issues plaguing our communities, and it provided me the opportunity to develop my interpersonal skills needed to work with teams to solve these issues. With a graduate degree, I can help my community and yours to move toward a better future by implementing what we know works.

**Tell me about your thesis and why you chose this topic?**

For my thesis, I investigated which aspects of a pro-environmental message—the source of the message or the way it is framed—would have a larger influence on liberals' and conservatives' environmental attitudes. Essentially, I found that liberals are more likely to be

sensitive to the *source* of the message, while conservatives are more likely to respond to the *frame* of the message. This is interesting, especially in light of other research that shows political differences in cognitive processing. That is why my future research will be nested in political psychology, with an emphasis in learning and cognition principles. I chose this topic because, in many ways, it satisfies my natural interests in philosophy, politics, and psychology.

**What was it like having to graduate virtually?**

It sucked not being able to walk the stage this past spring. Completing graduate school is hard and to have been able to celebrate that accomplishment with my family and all the people that helped me along the way at Chico State would have been extremely moving. My brother Juan Carlos and I were supposed to walk the stage together in front of our family during Latinx graduation—Juan Carlos double majoring and myself earning a master's degree. Instead, we waited until our respective degrees came in through the Postal Service to hug our parents and thank them for their sacrifices. Our degrees now hang in our family home.

**What's next for you?**

I applied last year for my doctorate, but I was denied from every school. The rejections hurt, but rather than internalizing the pain, I worked on my CV. I followed up my thesis by conducting research on the metacognitive processing of political information; I became a graduate ambassador for CSU, Chico; I was tapped by the University library to build a Fake News Workshop centered on helping

*“ . . .graduate school equipped me with refined cognitive abilities to reason and grapple with issues plaguing our communities, and it provided me the opportunity to develop my interpersonal skills needed to work with teams to solve these issues.”*

undergrads build an armor for processing political information, as well as to create a LibGuide where students, staff, and faculty can access evidence-based practices to combat the spread of misinformation. I was going to present research at my first conference, but it was canceled. I recently completed a summer research program at UCLA under the mentorship of Dr. Efren Perez. With his guidance, I presented a research proposal to further investigate the identity of people of color, particularly as it relates to mobilizing them by galvanizing support for environmental issues. While I currently work for Chico State's Student Learning Center and the Adelante program—where I build and deliver trainings and workshops for students seeking graduate study—I continue conducting research. I intend to use the lessons I learned from being denied in the last round to build a competitive PhD application for psychology programs this fall. 



*Martir and his family after passing his thesis defense.*



**JIMMIE BRADLEY:  
IF YOU BELIEVE,  
YOU WILL ACHIEVE**

**W**here are you from?

The “where are you from” question is complicated for me since I have moved around an excessive amount. The quick answer is that before moving to Chico, I went to Riverside City College and lived in Riverside, California.

**What (and where) was your undergraduate degree?**

My undergraduate degree was at Chico State. I majored in social sciences with a secondary degree in Asian Studies.

**What is your graduate school discipline? What year?**

Interdisciplinary studies. I am in my second year of graduate school.

**Was there one specific moment, event, or maybe a professor or mentor who planted the seed to attend graduate school?**

There were a few moments, but most of all I believe that Tasha Alexander from TRIO pushed me to attend grad school. She also provided resources to help me get here.

**What does a graduate degree mean to you and your family members?**

As a first-generation college student, when I complete my master’s degree there are many implications. I will be the first

in my father’s entire family to have a graduate degree. This is an opportunity for me to advance my family’s status within society. This will also create financial opportunities that were not afforded to anyone in my family—ever.

**What was your first day of graduate school like?**

Weird. I had a lot of emotions. The overwhelming feeling of gratitude, the feeling of “do I belong here,” and the “let’s do it” thoughts and emotions.

**What are the greatest obstacles you’ve had to overcome to be where you are now?**

Honestly, the greatest obstacle for me has been related to finances. Being both first-generation and a returning student, I had to make my way financially. This has been a roller coaster, but thankfully Chico State has helped me tremendously. I have been awarded scholarships as an undergraduate student and now I am in a fellowship as a grad student.

**Tell me about your work with Adelante. What is your position? And why did you want to become a mentor?**

As an Adelante coordinator, I am working with various groups to encourage students to pursue the possibility of attending graduate school. We also create a support system in the form of a community of graduate students that help one another. This help includes mental, emotional, and physical supports. We have connections to most student services including advising, financial aid, and others. I decided to get involved because I wanted to help students from backgrounds like mine.

**What is the best part of being a mentor?**

I love my job! First, I am helping many students that are relatable to me and my situation. It is very gratifying. Secondly, I am working with student services programs that helped me along the way, programs like TRIO, EOP, Basic Needs, and Study Abroad.

**How has the pandemic shifted the way you perceive mentoring? It seems to me that your job is now 10 times as difficult. How have you survived?**

The pandemic has changed everything. I’m now working from my laptop versus running around campus all day. Since I am an extrovert, I have really worked to adjust to COVID-19 life. I’ve been using Zoom,

WhatsApp, Skype, Hangouts to socialize with friends and family. That is the only way I have survived. It is not harder, but very different. Mentoring from home during this pandemic has made me practice my Buddhism much more on a daily and consistent basis. I also must pay more attention to my mental health and how I’m feeling. Before I was so busy, I just didn’t have time to even think about my feelings. But one good thing is to be able to work and be in class in my pajamas!

*“The overwhelming feeling of gratitude, [mixed with] the feeling of ‘do I belong here?’ and the ‘let’s do it’ thoughts and emotions.”*

**You have lived through face-to-face classes and now online learning. What were the greatest challenges you experienced? What advice do you have for our incoming graduate students who will experience their first semester at Chico State virtually?**

Yes, the most important thing is to pay attention to your mental health. If you need a Zoom screen break, take a break. If you need to take a walk, do it. Just make sure that you socially distance and wear your mask! Also, do not be afraid to openly communicate with your professors. They were in the same situation as you not that long ago. Oh, and by the way, the professors in graduate school treat you completely different now that you have moved up to the big leagues. Here at Chico State, nearly all the graduate professors are laid back and understanding. Lastly, time management is the difference between success and failure in grad school. Always remember that!

*“The best thing that we can do is have a master’s after all the dust settles.”*

**What do you think faculty should know about how graduate students are struggling with this new educational environment that they might not know?**

Faculty hopefully will learn and understand that many students are still adjusting, not only to online learning but also to COVID-19 life. Also, considering that not even our own government officials were prepared for this pandemic and all the changes that it has brought us. Furthermore, a lot of us graduate students are not financially stable and are trying our best to make this work, with no prior experience.

**Have you had the “I didn’t know what I didn’t know” experience in graduate school?**

Yes, I think we all have the “I didn’t know what I didn’t know moment.” Some of us are not willing to admit it, but we all have those moments. Mine was related to the understanding of LGBTQ+ history and their social problems in America.

**What are some common myths about graduate school that you would like to dispel?**

There are many common myths about grad school. First, the myth that it is too expensive. At Chico State, it is only a few extra thousand per year. Next, that we all must write a thesis; there are different kinds of culminating activities. Another myth is that because of the looming economic depression, this is a bad time to be in college. The exact opposite is true. This is the *perfect* time to be in grad school. Regardless of what we do, the next two years will be a transitional time in America. The best thing that we can do is have a master’s after all the dust settles.

**Tell me about your year traveling abroad?**

I spent summer 2019 in Khon Kaen, Thailand. It was amazing. I studied Buddhism in a predominantly Buddhist nation. Everything about Thai society is

related to Buddhism. I visited temples and spoke to monks. I ate Thai food all day every day for three months. I studied Thai medicine and Thai public health. I took Muay Thai kickboxing. I also traveled to Cambodia and the Philippines.

**The media is full of references to the imposter syndrome that graduate students feel. How prevalent is this?**

I think that most, if not all, first-generation graduate students feel the imposter syndrome at least some of the time. That feeling you do not belong here. It is the belief that you are not smart enough or good enough to succeed at this level. I have moments of imposter syndrome. But we do belong here. We must realize that we were selected by professionals in academics because we are more than good enough. We are the best that society has to offer, but we must realize our potential first and foremost. If we believe, we will achieve.

**What advice would you give someone who might be thinking about graduate school, but starts to second-guess the choice, like maybe they’re not smart enough or don’t have the money?**

For those that may be second-guessing: Just do it! It really can’t hurt to try. I gave it a try, and here I am now.

*“We must realize that we were selected . . . because we are more than good enough.”*

**What drives you?**

What drives me? Well, that’s a big one. I mean I can write a small book on what motivates and drives me. But the short answer would be a combination of my mother and the thought of how many people I can help. My mother was a single mother, to four kids that just would not give up, no matter how bad it was. I also think of how many young minds that want to hear my story and can benefit from it.

**What kind of emotions do you think you will feel when you hear your name called out during Commencement?**

I cannot say precisely how I will feel, but I believe that it will be a combination of pure gratefulness and educational solace.

**What’s next for you?**

I am not completely sure what will be next for me. I would love to start teaching locally either at Butte College or even part time at Chico State. If not a local teaching job in the North State, maybe teaching English overseas. I like the sense of community that I have here in Chico. But if I am presented with a great opportunity in a doctoral program, I would not turn it down. The world is changing daily, and I don’t want to plan too much. I kind of just go with the flow of things.



Bradley living the dream in Thailand.



# DAVID STACHURA: THE BIOLOGIST STUCK IN GROUNDHOG DAY



David Stachura, Associate Professor, Biological Sciences and Lantis Research Chair

**You are a renowned biologist. How has the pandemic changed what you do? How have you evolved and adapted?**

Thanks! I'm not sure how renowned I am, but I really try to get students involved in research here at Chico State. I'm surprised to learn that people don't know how much research we are actually doing in the Biology Department. The pandemic has changed a lot of how I and my team function in the laboratory. Restrictions at the University really limit how much we could get done over the past year. I wouldn't say I've really evolved; it's more of a coming to terms that we need to really focus on being safe and making sure COVID doesn't spread at school. Lab meetings are not as useful (I'm not a big fan of Zoom meetings), and I don't get to have the interaction with students that I really love. But that will pass. I will say that this pandemic has caused two of my master's students to dedicate their work time to completing their theses, which was great.

**Are there any correlations between your research—understanding blood and immune cell formation, differentiation, and proliferation in order to treat diseases such as anemia, thrombocytopenia, and leukemia—and the research currently underway to find a vaccine?**

Lots of correlation. Basically, we study how immune cells are made and function. So, our research doesn't really deal with how to stimulate those cells with vaccines but

how to make more of those cells artificially and make sure they are healthy and functional. So, we're not really focused on a vaccine but the overall function of the immune system. I'm also working with a biotechnology company here in Chico that is developing a stem cell treatment to try and treat the symptoms of COVID-19, so that is ongoing research that I'm also participating in.

**Has the pandemic changed any of your research interests?**

Not really. I am still focused on really understanding the genetics behind the generation and function of the immune system.

**Has the pandemic given you any new perspectives on your current research/pedagogy?**

It has made me realize that I really don't like teaching online. I really enjoy doing hands-on work with students, and that has basically been completely removed from my pedagogy. There really is only one way to learn and teach science: it's by doing it. You can read about it and have someone show you videos all day, but it will never cement the concepts in your head like actually performing an experiment at the bench. And you never get to understand the same rush of science—figuring out something that no one else knows—without the experiments.

**How disruptive has this been for you and your students?**

Extremely. But I really feel bad for my students. Their ability to get research

*“... you never get to understand the same rush of science—figuring out something that no one else knows—without the experiments.”*

done, which is required for them to graduate, has been severely impacted and slowed to a crawl.

**What are the greatest challenges this has presented, and how have you overcome them?**

Well, like I said, it has really slowed things down in the lab. I'm not a patient person, so it's been tough. I do research because I want to know the answer to a question! I try to overcome this by working as hard as I can on directed research problems.

*"You do [science] because you have a deep need to understand the world around you."*

**What were your initial thoughts last spring when we were told that campus would be closed?**

I saw it coming. I teach "Immunology," and we had been following the pandemic closely in class. But my thoughts? Man, this is going to be tough. I just feel so bad for our students that are getting a vastly different college experience than what they expected and deserve.

**Here is the million-dollar question. How have you juggled recently born twins with your professional life? Do you work from home—and how does a biologist work from home?**

How do I handle twins? It's tough. My wife and I both work full time, so we have a nanny and other daycare that the kids go to. But it's still a challenge. And I mostly work from the lab. I have animals

to care for, and studying development of the immune system really requires being present in the lab. I'm one of the few people allowed on campus to do research.

**Do you have any advice for current graduate students who are struggling to adapt to this new learning environment?**

Hang in there—it'll hopefully get better. For

the sciences? It's rough. It's hard to get research done. Try and get all you can done at home (reading, planning, etc.) to be ready to hit the ground running when things get back to normal.

**What about advice for future graduate students, maybe current Chico State undergraduates, who are hesitant to attend graduate school because of the current state of worldly affairs?**

I absolutely would be hesitant. My advice is: science is tough, and you have to love it. You don't do it for a paycheck. You do it because you have a deep need to understand the world around you. So, make sure you have that desire. If not? Now's the time to explore something new!

**What silver linings or lessons have you learned from the last six months, professionally and personally?**

Personally? I'm happy for the health of my family and that we have enough resources to survive this time. Sadly, that's not the case for a lot of my students and colleagues. Professionally, it's given me more time to think about what I want to do long term. I've had more time to read and write, which I value a lot. It's making me plan for the future more effectively. We've actually submitted four manuscripts during the pandemic and gotten two accepted so far.

**What is a day in the life of Dr. Stachura like?**

Oh, man. This is going to sound like the most banal, suburban day ever! I get up, wrangle my dog and two kids, make breakfast, clean up, get them off to daycare, and get to work. Work's been weird lately because everything seems

so fluid. I need to have Zoom meetings, make class, try to work with students to get their research going, deal with committee work, and grade. Then I head home (my wife usually picks the kids up), we make dinner, clean everything up (there's a lot of cleaning with children, as you know), get them to sleep, and have a glass of wine (some nights it's two). Next day? Repeat. It's terrible with COVID-19 and the wildfires. It's like the movie *Groundhog Day* every day.

*"Try and get all you can done at home (reading, planning, etc.) to be ready to hit the ground running when things get back to normal."*

**It's a year from now. There is a vaccine. It has been announced that the pandemic is behind us. Go forth with your life. What's the first thing Dr. Stachura is going to do?**

Woohoo! I eagerly await this day. I'd grab the family and head on vacation. Somewhere tropical. Where I don't have to stress about our daily lives! 🍷



The Stachura twins working from daddy's home office.



Dr. Stachura, ready for an unmasked world.

# JOANNA HERRERA: LIVING THE DREAM DESPITE THE CHAOS



Herrera, left, IDST graduate student and Adelante Success Coordinator.

**W**hat is your discipline? What year?

Interdisciplinary Studies: Latin American Historical and Cultural Studies.

**What (and where) was your undergraduate degree?**

Chico State. I was a double major. I earned a BA in Latin American studies and Spanish in 2016.

**Was there one specific moment, event, or maybe a professor or mentor who planted the seed to attend graduate school?**

As a returning student, I had my mind set on what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to get back to my roots and learn more about my own culture. I have to give a big shout-out to the Latin American Studies Department and the Spanish Department, because they have some fantastic professors there that care very much about their students. I was lucky enough to be one of those students and have Dr. Stephen Lewis and Dr. Sara Cooper guide me through my undergrad education. I remember thinking I wanted to go the full distance and getting a PhD has always been a dream of mine. I clearly remember Dr. Lewis encouraging me to keep Chico State and the Teaching International Languages (TIL) program in mind. I initially was accepted into the program before discovering that I could create my own MA program through Interdisciplinary Studies. Having support from professors like Dr. Lewis and Dr. Cooper meant everything. I will never forget the growth I had while interning with Dr. Cooper at *Cubanabooks* press. Dr. Cooper pushed me to believe in myself and my own potential even when I faltered. Being a first-generation Latina, I did not have any family members who went to college—no one else paving the way. Having someone so respected believe in you even when perhaps you don't believe in yourself was instrumental to my success.

**What does a graduate degree mean to you and maybe to friends and family members?**

A graduate degree is the American dream for us. It means

everything. It is why my parents came to this country. It is that idea that here there is a possibility to provide a better life for your family. Where I come from (I was born in Peru), school is private and expensive. There are very few public universities. Thousands of students try to get in. If you do not have the money for tuition, you will not go to school. There is a true lack of social mobility. My parents came to the United States so I could have the opportunity to get a good education and achieve more than they had. Earning a graduate degree truly means I can provide for my family in a way no one else can. It means a complete change in the trajectory of my life.

**What inspires and drives you?**

My daughter inspires me. She is the catalyst for my own personal journey. Being an immigrant, we often don't address the layers of trauma connected to leaving everyone behind you know and love. Leaving behind family in Peru, coming to a place that wasn't home and where we were not welcome, living in poverty with constant struggles to make ends meet creates layers of trauma. I have been driven to break these layers of generational trauma and begin healing and carving a new path for myself and my daughter. She inspires me every day

*“Where I come from . . . Peru . . . . If you do not have the money for tuition, you will not go to school. There is a true lack of social mobility.”*

to be the best person I can. I recently caught her role-playing with her stuffy. I was the stuffy and she was the baby. The stuffy said, “I want to be with you right now, but I have a meeting. The baby said, “I so happy you back, Mama.” And stuffy responded: “I love you so much my baby. I back.” I can see she is processing everything as she watches me work from home all day. She will sit in my lap and type emails and say: “My Mama is the best in the world. Daddy works with hands and Mommy with her brain.” At two and a half, she already is witnessing the dedication, sacrifice, and hard work it takes as a first-generation graduate student, mom, and full-time employee.

**Tell me about your position with Adelante.**

I am the student success coordinator. I coordinate the Wayfinders Mentoring Program and support collaborations with important groups and services on campus for Latinx and low-income students. I oversee and coordinate with nine graduate mentors, who in turn support 90 undergraduate mentees enrolled this fall 2020.

**What is student success to you?**

Being able to achieve academic, professional, and personal goals. I set out to help students achieve their goals and overcome any obstacles they may face on their journey. My goal is to help these students envision themselves as graduate students, embrace their potential, and feel connected to others and this campus on their academic journey. I am grateful to be a part of a support system that, along with incredible staff and graduate mentors, provides students with connection, a sense of community, and the resources to achieve their dreams.

**What is the best part of what you do?**

Working and connecting with students is the best part of what I do. Seeing students succeed and have their own victories motivates me to keep going. Some days are tough. Some days are a struggle, and then I'll have a Zoom meeting where I really connect with a student. Moments like this fill me with energy, inspiration, and a sense of purpose.

**How in the world have you balanced being a graduate student while also working and being a full-time mom?**

I won't deny that it's been hard, especially during this pandemic. My nanny quit on me last week. My daughter is almost three and super active. If I leave her to her own devices and put on a movie for an important meeting, I will come back to my living room in complete chaos! Thankfully, there's nothing in there that can hurt her, we've thoroughly baby proofed, but as you can imagine food and toys are everywhere. What's tough is all the extra time it takes to get organized again. What it really means is that it seems like I am working all day long, because honestly, I'm interrupted all day long. Home and work life have melded together, where once there were distinct boundaries. My daughter will wipe yogurt in my hair during an important Zoom presentation. People don't often realize that in between meetings, I am changing diapers, cleaning up messes, and the thousands of things moms do, just usually not while working and hosting Zoom sessions at the same time. My philosophy is to find where can I see the positives every day. Even though the presentation where I was splattered with yogurt was a disaster, later that day I was able to sit down and read three or four stories to my daughter. Over the summer, I shared many ice creams, laughs, and moments in between meetings that I would not have been able to do if I were in my office on campus. I try to remember these moments always. It does feel like I am often treading water, as if I can't complete any one project to my satisfaction and perhaps that's my own perfectionism. I've learned to give

myself a lot of grace in parenting, in working, and in life. I remind myself that achieving and "doing" does not define my worth or my value. I remind myself that I'm showing my daughter what it means to follow your own passions and dreams and what it looks like to support others doing the same.

***"I am grateful to be a part of a support system that, along with incredible staff and graduate mentors, provides students with connection, a sense of community, and the resources to achieve their dreams."***

**What do you think faculty should know about how graduate students are struggling with this new educational environment that they might not know?**

I recently attended a reading of an important piece by Alondra Adame called the "Audacity to Live." In this reading, one attendee asked how the author's lived experiences affected her course design, curriculum, and interaction with her students. If there is one takeaway from that conversation for faculty, it is

this: be generous, be compassionate, and be flexible with your students right now, especially your first-generation students of color. Graduate students have so much on their plate right now, often working several jobs on and off-campus, holding different leadership positions with support programs like our very own Adelante, research, courses, and then add the stressors of the pandemic. Everyone is stretched thin, so offer students as much flexibility as you can and please remember that attending school virtually is not easier, it is often harder because it tires the eyes and mind and lacks the uplifting component of being physically amongst your peers.

**Have you had the "I didn't know what I didn't know" experience in graduate school?**

Yes! I find myself doing that all the time—especially when it comes to financial opportunities to fund my graduate education. I was not aware of the scholarships, fellowships, and ways to help support my graduate education. And often, if I did know about them, I never pursued applying thinking I would not get any funding. Not true at all! Now that I work alongside so many talented and resourceful graduate students, I find myself discovering the many missed financial opportunities I could have taken advantage of. That is why I believe Adelante's work is so vital—we are a program that is dedicated to spreading the word about all the resources available for



Herrera and her inspiration, Amelia

Continued from Herrera p. 15

graduate school. I often hear our Adelante graduate students comment that they wish Adelante had been around when they were contemplating grad school as juniors and seniors—and I absolutely agree. That drives me to help support others like me who would benefit from these resources.

**When you earn your diploma, what kind of emotions do you think you will feel?**

I will almost certainly cry. I know it will be more emotional that receiving my BA. I think after all that we've been through, with being impacted with the Camp Fire shortly after my daughter was born, recovering from that loss and finding our way with a new baby, struggling to complete my graduate courses, finding the job of my dreams only to be hit by the pandemic and sent home a few short weeks later—it's been quite humbling. We are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, experiencing some peace and much happiness. I plan to finish my thesis soon and I can't wait to receive that diploma, because my MA has been an even greater challenge than any of my education before. It will be a testament to my resilience and my capacity to keep moving forward in the face of the most challenging of times. I will cry and so will the rest of my family.

**What's next for you? Doctorate? Going straight to work? Sleeping?**

The dream of the PhD is still there, but after my MA, I plan to take some time to really devote myself to this program that I love. I remember thinking that the only way I'd take time away from being with my daughter full time would be for a program like this. I want to really create something of value for students who come from the similar backgrounds and challenges. I do this work for my daughter, my family, and my community. Don't get me wrong, the PhD will happen, it's not a matter of if, but when. There is no better way to show my daughter what an education means to me, and I can think of no better way to mirror to her what it looks like to follow your passion. 

# GRADUATE STUDIES AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

## Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program (CDIP)

CSU, Chico alumni **Richard Burton**, NURS, (faculty mentor: Dr. Phyllis Salopek) and **Tina Hanson-Lewis**, BIOL, (faculty mentor: Dr. Lisa Kendhammer) have been selected as 2020-2021 CDIP recipients. [Hanson-Lewis' graduate program advisor was Dr. David Stachura, profiled on p. 12!]

Burton completed the Nursing Program at CSU, Chico with his BSN in 2013 and, after earning a master's in Nursing Education, returned in 2020 as assistant professor in the School of Nursing. Upon completion of his program in Doctor of Nursing Practice at Regis College, his hope is to, again, return to Chico State as faculty.

Hanson-Lewis earned her BS (2015) in Biochemistry and MS (2018) in Biological Sciences at Chico State and also served as an instructor before moving on to further graduate education. She is currently an Education Ph.D. candidate at State University of New York at Buffalo.

Established in 1987, the Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program offers loans and mentorships by CSU faculty in an effort to increase the number of doctoral students applying for future CSU instructional faculty positions. These loans are forgivable over five years with postdoctoral teaching employment within the CSU system. As of fall 2020, over 2,000 doctoral students participated in this program. 

## Pre-Doctoral Scholars Program (Pre-Doc)

**Fiona Chin**, ART, (faculty mentor: Dr. Rachel Middleman) was selected as a 2020-2021 Sally Casanova scholar (also known as Pre-Doctoral Scholars).

Sally Casanova Scholars receive one-on-one guidance provided by faculty members within the CSU and the opportunity to work with faculty from doctoral-granting institutions.

The program also offers participation in a summer research experience program at a doctoral-granting institution and visits to doctoral-granting institutions to explore opportunities for doctoral study. In addition they may attend a national symposium or professional meeting and may receive support for related activities, such as membership in professional organizations and journal subscriptions. They may also receive support for graduate school application and test fees. 

## Future Editions

*If you have any ideas for future stories you would like us to consider, or any notable events in your life, please contact either Carson Medley (cmedley@csuchico.edu) or Dean Sharon Barrios (sbarrios@csuchico).*

*We would love to hear from you.  
Thank you for all that you do.*