About Our Program

The UC Irvine School of Medicine Postbaccalaureate Program is designed to assist applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds in gaining acceptance to medical school, with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of physicians in underserved areas. The program, which has been in existence since 1986, has successfully placed almost 90 percent of its participants who applied to U.S. medical schools or other health professional schools. Students in the program are provided with a supportive environment as they strengthen their learning skills, demonstrate proficiency in the sciences, and prepare for the MCAT exam and application to medical school.

Over the course of the one-year program, students will complete a total of 40 quarter units in mostly upper-division biological science courses. An intensive MCAT exam preparation phase is conducted during the spring quarter. Students receive one-on-one academic counseling on a regular basis to formulate the classes that will best meet their academic needs and discuss the areas they can further develop in their application to medical school.

Welcome Our Newest Cohort

We are excited to announce the 11 students in the 2018-2019 cohort of the UC Irvine Postbaccalaureate Program. The students began the program on June 21, 2018.

Jessica Arizmendi De La Torre, UCLA
Erick Deloera, UC Davis
Pooya Ganjali, UC Berkeley
Manuela Herrera, UCLA
Aeryus Holloway, Dixie State University
Mimi Lam, UC Riverside
Nicollette Pepin, UC Irvine
Alexis Pellecer, UC Santa Barbara
Helena Stevenson, UC Davis
Alejandra Villagomez, UC Davis
Bernice Villa-Real, San Diego State University

Congratulations to the students of the 2017-2018 UC Irvine Postbaccalaureate Cohort

We wish them all the best in their future endeavors!
POSTBACCALAUREATE ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

Recent Graduate: Pedro Alvarez, MD, MPH
(2012-2013 Postbaccalaureate Cohort)

“\[ quote \] I’m excited and humbled by the prospect of taking on a bigger role in patient care and achieving my dreams of being a physician for the community.\[ /quote \]”

My pre-medical journey began at the age of 12 when I came to the US with my family. Six months into our stay my father had a work related accident which required many doctors and physical therapy appointments. I accompanied my dad to these appointments to translate. Through this, I was exposed to the field of medicine and developed a sense of respect and appreciation for the care physicians were able to provide my father and people like him. Although my parents were my biggest supporters in pursuing higher education, having never finished high school they were unable to provide me guidance in this. At UC Santa Barbara I was overwhelmed and did not have a solid grasp of academic English. When I graduated from UCSB I realized that I needed to enhance my GPA as well as needed the guidance in the application process to medical school. I applied and was accepted into the UCI School of Medicine Postbaccalaureate program in 2012.

The advising and mentorship components of the program were the most pivotal in my success to matriculate at UCI School of Medicine, especially as a first-generation college student. I remember having many conversations with Dr. Peterson and the staff in the medical education department about academics, research experiences, and my overall application which guided me to where I am today. This advice was invaluable. The Postbaccalaureate program prepared me for medical school in multiple ways. The upper-division science coursework provided a strong foundation that helped me in my first two years of medical school as it was the second time I was looking at biochemistry, immunology, and physiology. Additionally, the rigorous schedule of the program and its elevated expectations of my academic achievement helped me prepare for the intense demands as a medical student. As a medical student, I enjoyed staying connected to the program as a mentor for the new students. Since my mentors were a part of my success by helping me prepare and develop the study skills necessary to accomplish my goals, I wanted to do the same for those going through the program. I think the main reason why I have been able to get as far as I have is by surrounding myself with the right kind of mentors. My mentors have helped to shape me into the person I am today.

I’m excited and humbled by the prospect of taking on a bigger role in patient care and achieving my dreams of being a physician for the community. Recently I moved away to the bay area to begin residency in family medicine at Stanford. While a little more difficult, I plan to stay active as a program alumni by keeping the “door open” to any Postbaccalaureate student or pre-med student who is seeking guidance and mentorship. My five year plan is to get married to my beautiful fiancée Dr. Olivia Sanchez, complete residency, and do a fellowship in community medicine, advocacy, or health policy.

Medical Student: Christleen Casem, MS2, UC Irvine
(2015-2016 Postbaccalaureate Cohort)

Growing up in a single parent household in the Philippines, I did not believe that I could become a doctor. However, moving to the U.S. gave me a new hope because in my naïve mind, I assumed that if I work hard, then I will someday achieve this dream. Unfortunately, as my family and I continued to live and face the adversities that most immigrant families encounter, this goal seemed to become less and less achievable. Thankfully, my mother instilled in me the value of education and I continued to do well in my studies, despite lacking mentorship and guidance. As I prepared to graduate with a BS in Psychology, I became involved with the McNair Scholars Program where the director helped me realize that I can still pursue my dream and it was not too late. As my senior year began, I deferred graduation for two years and completed the classes required for medical school admission. However, maintaining a full-time job was a necessity rather than an option so I oftentimes found myself not having enough time to study. Thankfully, I learned about the UC Postbaccalaureate Consortium and after two attempts at applying, I gained admission into UCI School of Medicine’s program.

The Postbaccalaureate program helped me tremendously with solidifying my study skills and habits while efficiently managing my time. I really appreciate the monthly meetings I had with my advisor to go over my progress in each class and to come up with a plan to make sure that I continue to do well. It was also during these meetings when I realized that asking for help was encouraged instead of frowned upon and now this is habit that continues to serve me. Most importantly, we had opportunities to network and hear inspiring stories from individuals who successfully completed the program and were already practicing physicians or medical students. It was empowering to hear the alumni’s stories about their struggles and how they overcame the challenges they encountered because it proved to me that it is possible for individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds like mine to become physicians.

After completing the Postbaccalaureate program in 2016, I spent the following year as a UCI School of Medicine conditional student where I took physiology, neuroscience, and biochemistry with the first-year medical students. Upon successful completion of the program, I was granted admission to UCI School of Medicine in 2017. As I completed my first year of medical school, I further appreciated my experiences in the Postbaccalaureate program. The classes I took prepared me to learn challenging concepts covered in medical school, my study skills and willingness to ask for help gave me confidence and also helped me stay engaged and motivated, and managing my time well ensured a healthy mind and body. Now as a mentor of the program, I intend to stay connected for as long as I can offer my guidance. I believe in the Postbaccalaureate program’s mission and I would love to inspire future physicians in the way that I was inspired by the mentors who gave advice and encouragement when I was in the program.

“The Postbaccalaureate Program helped me tremendously with solidifying my study skills and habits while efficiently managing my time.”
Congratulations and good luck to our Postbaccalaureate and Conditional Program alumni who matriculated this summer to medical school at UC Irvine. We wish you all the best!

We are proud to announce the below program alumni who graduated with their Medical Degree in June 2018:

- **Pedro Alvarez, MD, MPH**  
  *Family Medicine, Stanford University*

- **Athena Arias, MD, MPH**  
  *Family Medicine, Scripps Mercy Hospital-Chula Vista*

- **Cecilia Canales, MD**  
  *Anesthesiology, UCLA Medical Center*

- **Diana Garcia, MD**  
  *Family Medicine, Harbor UCLA Medical Center*

- **Lesley Lara, MD, MPH**  
  *Family Medicine, Scripps Mercy Hospital-Chula Vista*

- **Ariana Malagon, MD**  
  *OB/GYN, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center*

- **Angel Mendoza, MD**  
  *Internal Medicine, UC Davis*

- **Jose Sanchez, MD**  
  *Internal Medicine, Mayo Clinic School of Grad Med Ed-MN*

- **Andy Trang, MD**  
  *Psychiatry, University of Arizona COM-Tucson*

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**Keep in Touch!**

**School of Medicine Postbaccalaureate Alumni:**  
We always enjoy hearing from you and want to know about your latest professional and personal activities.

Please feel free to send us updates at [pbsom@uci.edu](mailto:pbsom@uci.edu).

Join our [UCI SOM Postbacc Alumni Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/UCI SOM Postbacc Alumni/) and stay connected!

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