

Sylvia Zuniga

s1zuniga@ucsd.edu | (619) 252-0526 | [Personal Website](#)

Personal Statement

I am fourth year undergraduate at the University of California, San Diego, majoring in Cognitive Psychology and minoring in Cognitive Science. I am interested in research topics in the Cognitive and Social Psychology fields. I am specifically interested in social norms, problem solving, decision making, and human learning. I am currently a research assistant at the Social Cognitive Development Lab at UC San Diego researching how ChatGPT influences society.

Education

Bachelor of Science in Cognitive Psychology and a Minor in Cognitive Science at the University of California, San Diego

Sep 2021 – Present, Expected Graduation Year: 2025

Chancellor's Associates Scholar

Triton Research & Experiential Learning Scholars Scholar

GPA: 3.81

Relevant Course Work

I've performed strongly through my studies in Psychology, Cognitive Science, and Computer/Data Science, with a focus on cognitive processes, human behavior, and data analysis. My coursework reflects a solid foundation in both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, particularly in areas like cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and programming. I've consistently achieved high grades, showcasing my ability to excel in interdisciplinary fields.

Psychology

Cognitive Psychology (A), Behavioral Modification (A+), Clinical Psychology (A-), Social Psychology (A+), Developmental Psychology (A), Gen Psych: Biological Foundations (A-), Research Methods in Psychology (A), Social Cognition (A+), Psychology of Gender (A), Psychology of Evolution and Human Nature (A-), Psychology of Human Sexuality (TBD), Visual Cognition (TBD).

Cognitive Science

Intro to Cognitive Science (A), Neurobiology of Cognition (A), Sensation and Perception (A-), Beauty and the Brain (A+), Humor (TBD), Cyborgs (A+).

Computer and Data Science

Statistics (A+), MATLAB Program for Engineer Analysis (A-), Intro to Python (A+), Data Science in Practice (TBD), Design Communication (A).

Awards

I have earned multiple prestigious awards and scholarships throughout my academic career, recognizing my academic promise, research contributions, and commitment to furthering my education. These honors have supported my participation in conferences, research programs, and opportunities to present my work, demonstrating my dedication to both personal growth and contributing to the academic community.

Chancellor's Associates Scholarship Program – University of California, San Diego

Aug 2021 – Present

Amount: Full Ride (~\$52,120)

The scholarship is a full ride to UC San Diego and is given to admitted students of UCSD who are California residents, are of low income families, demonstrate academic promise and commitment to earning a bachelor's degree.

Best Presenter Award – CSUSM 30th Annual Psychology Student Research Conference, San Marcos, 2024

May 2024

The award was reward to three people, including me, whose presentations were considered effective and professional during the poster presentation session at CSU San Marcos Psychology Conference. I presented my poster on how ChatGPT is integrated in student life shortly after its release (more details under conference section).

Triton Research & Experiential Learning Scholars (TRELS) Research Summer Program – UC San Diego, 2024

Jun – Aug 2024

Amount: \$5,000

The TRELS program is a program at UC San Diego that provides students with hands on experience with research, guided art/creative projects, and public service opportunities, all under the guidance of UCSD faculty members.

The award is given to undergraduates who need funds for their summer research. Once accepted, I was required to work on my project 30hrs a week, meet with the cohort once a week, and present my research through slide presentation at a conference on campus.

Anderson Travel Award

Dec 2023

Amount: \$200

The award is available for Psychology undergraduates of UCSD that have attended or are planning to attend a conference with the intent of presenting psychology research the student has done at UCSD. I received this award to help with the expenses of the SPSP conference application.

Muir Student Travel Scholarship

Nov 2023

Amount: \$300

The award is available for undergraduate students of UCSD that have attended or are planning to attend a conference with the intent of presenting research the student has done at UCSD. I received this award to help with the expenses of the SPSP conference application.

IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Excellence, Achievement) Scholars Program – Jacob's School of Engineering – UC San Diego

Jul 21st, 2021

Amount: \$1,000

The award is given to top incoming engineering students from diverse backgrounds. This award also granted acceptance to the Summer Engineering Institute Program. Both the scholarship and the program set up students to succeed in engineering before the start of their first year.

Quest Bridge – 2020 National College Match Application – Semi Finalist

Sep 2020 – Dec 2020

Applied for the possibility of getting a full ride from my top private universities. The process involved multiple phases of essay writing, providing history of all volunteer hours and extracurriculars, as well as financial and demographic information. I was a Semi Finalist but was not awarded a scholarship nor accepted to any of the universities.

Research Experience

I have gained extensive experience in research and leadership roles, contributing to projects focused on cognitive development and the impact of technology on society. My work includes leading teams, conducting studies, analyzing data, and presenting research findings. These roles have strengthened my skills in research methodology, collaboration, and project management, providing me with valuable opportunities to contribute to the scientific community.

Research Assistant – Social Cognitive Development Lab, University of California, San Diego

Dr. Gail D. Heyman (PI), Dr. Tal Waltzer (Mentor and Direct Supervisor)

Jun 2023 – Present

The Social Cognitive Development Lab located at UC San Diego and is dedicated to discovering connections and contributing to the broader scientific community. The lab has conducted research from various topics such as academic dishonesty, many areas of children's psychological development, and artificial intelligence.

I am the current lead of two ChatGPT studies and have directly contributed to making coding schemes, categorizing data, analyzing data, writing abstracts, and writing manuscripts. The studies were conducted a couple of months after ChatGPT's initial release. The purpose of the study is to gain insights into people's behavior surrounding the AI and understanding the effects it has had on society. My general duties as a research assistant are conducting peer reviews, piloting studies, providing feedback to other Ras, and presenting my research.

Lab Website: <https://scdlab.ucsd.edu/home>

Review Team Lead – Social Cognitive Development Lab, University of California, San Diego

Dr. Tal Waltzer (Mentor and Direct Supervisor)

Jun 2023 – Present

The review team conducts literature reviews, peer reviews, pilot studies, special tasks, and any other request from senior members of the lab. The team's goal is to assist members with tasks and the gathering of information.

I am one of the three leaders of the SCDL's review team. I oversee guiding and instructing the team during sessions, creating and setting up tasks, answering any questions from both team members and senior staff, and assured that tasks are completed within the deadlines.

Triton Research & Experiential Learning Scholars (TRELS) Research Summer Program – UC San Diego, 2024

Jun – Aug 2024

The TRELS program is a program at UC San Diego that provides students with hands on experience with research, guided art/creative projects, and public service opportunities, all under the guidance of UCSD faculty members.

For the TRELS research program, I worked on my project 30hrs a week, met with the cohort once a week, and presented my research through slide presentation at a conference on campus.

Presenting Experiences

I have shared my research on the societal impact of ChatGPT through multiple academic presentations, including poster sessions and talks at various conferences. These experiences have provided me with opportunities to showcase my work to diverse academic audiences, fostering collaboration and feedback while further developing my skills in presenting research findings.

Poster Presentation – UC San Diego Lab Expo 2024

Feb 2nd

Presented a poster about the research I have been working on at the Social Cognitive Development Lab at UCSD. Specifically, about the social psychology aspects of ChatGPT after its release in the Winter and Spring quarter in 2023 at UCSD.

Zuniga, S., Gabrenya, A., Waltzer, T., & Heyman, G. D. (2024). How is ChatGPT integrated into society following its release? Students and their new tool. Poster presented at the UC San Diego Lab Expo, San Diego, CA.

Poster Presentation – Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) Annual Conference, San Diego, 2024

Feb 8-10th

Presented a poster about the research I have been working on at the Social Cognitive Development Lab. Specifically about the social psychology aspects of ChatGPT after its release in the Winter and Spring quarter in 2023 at UCSD.

Zuniga, S., Gabrenya, A., Waltzer, T., & Heyman, G. D. (2024). How is ChatGPT integrated into society following its release? Students and their new tool. Poster presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology annual convention, San Diego, CA.

Poster Presentation – CSUSM 30th Annual Psychology Student Research Conference, San Marcos, 2024

May 3rd

Presented a poster about the research I have been working on at the Social Cognitive Development Lab. Specifically about the way students have integrated ChatGPT into their lives after its release in the Winter and Spring quarter in 2023 at UCSD.

Zuniga, S., Gabrenya, A., Waltzer, T., & Heyman, G. D. (2024). How is ChatGPT integrated into society following its release? Students and their new tool. Poster presented at the CSUSM 30th Annual Psychology Student Research Conference, San Marcos, CA.

Slide Presentation/Talk – UC San Diego Summer Research Conference (SRC), San Diego, 2024

Aug 14th - 15th

Presented a talk about my research project, conducted at the Social Cognitive Development Lab, about the exposure, use, and attitudes surrounding ChatGPT following the months after ChatGPT's initial release.

Zuniga, S., Waltzer, T., & Heyman, G. D. (2024). Naturalistic research on ChatGPT experiences. Talk presented at the UCSD Summer Research Conference, La Jolla, CA

Academic Writing

In both my research and my academic career, I have written papers on psychological research. The papers are written based on research I had conducted from start to finish (from data collection to manuscript) or based on research I had major involvement in.

Manuscript on ChatGPT Research – Social Cognitive Development Lab (SDCL) – UC San Diego

As of Fall of 2024, I am writing a manuscript about my ChatGPT research conducted at the SCDL. The research is composed of two studies that took place in the first couple of months after ChatGPT's initial release in Nov of 2022. The studies conducted consisted of one observational study 2 months after ChatGPT's release and an interview study about 3 months after the first study. Our current narrative is that this data functions as a case study that can help close gaps in norm spreading literature as well as help policymakers and lawmakers determine future artificial intelligence regulations.

Research Deliverable – Triton Research & Experiential Learning Scholars (TRELS) Research Summer Program – UC San Diego, 2024

For the TRELS Scholarship, a deliverable was required to show proof of the research conducted by the scholar during the program. I chose to write a short paper as my deliverable, detailing my findings on student's and non-student's attitudes on ChatGPT and possible implications for these findings. My personal goal for this paper was to get an idea of what data and results I currently had from the studies and assess what kind of narrative I should pursue for my manuscript in the future.

Gender Research Paper – Psychology of Gender – UC San Diego, 2024

Dr. Lauren Wong Bevand

For the Gender course at UCSD, we were required to conduct a small study of our choice based on three options. I chose to conduct a study that would analyze how gender and leadership is perceived by members of society. I collected data from 10 participants. Participants were asked to "draw an effective leader" and to write any words that would help describe their leader if they wanted to. 70% of participants were female and 60% of participants identified as part of the LGBTQ community. The paper highlighted that participants who were both female and queer were more likely to draw a female leader with a transformational leadership style, while heterosexual participants were more likely to draw a male leader with a transformational leadership style.

Professional Development

R Programming Language Summer Workshop – Social Cognitive Development Lab (SDCL), 2024

Jul 3rd – Aug 8th

Attended a 5 week workshop with the goal of learning the basics of R. During the workshop, we attended lectures and met in study groups to discuss what we learned during the lectures. We would work through practice problems together then complete quizzes based on the material independently. The topics covered were: Basics of the language, Subsetting, Assignments, and Environments; Importing and Managing Data, The Apply Family and Other Functions, Managing, Summarizing, and Visualizing Data.

Bachelor of Science Paper (Psychology Requirement) Information Session – Social Cognitive Development Lab (SDCL), 2024

May 8th

Hosted an informational session at the SCDL explaining what the B.S paper requirement was for lab members. I provided helpful resources and tips as well as guided the Q & A between members and senior lab members.

Volunteering

Sun God Festival – Associated Students office of Concerts & Events (ASCE) – UC San Diego

Apr 30th, 2022

The Sun God Festival is a student-run music and arts festival. I volunteered for the whole event and oversaw taking photos for attendees posing in front of the Sun God. I made sure the pictures were taken at the best possible angles.

Bear Gardens – Associated Students office of Concerts & Events (ASCE) – UC San Diego

Apr 1st & May 27th, 2022

Help with multiple tasks and stations at the daytime carnival, including setting up and cleaning up the carnival, setting up and hosting carnival games, music, taking pictures of the event, and assisting attendees.

Customer Service Volunteer – SHARP Health Care

Sep 2019 – Sep 2020

Attending patients' gift shop needs, helped improve people skills and job experience in a professional setting.

Vice President of Local Chapter at Hilltop High School, Publicity Manager, Technology Manager, and Volunteer – Key Club International

Jul 2019 – Mar 2020

This organization focuses on community service to help improve the community, help to develop leadership in its members, and help develop my design and publicity skills.

Activities

Member and Part of the Event Committee – Psi Chi at UC San Diego

May 2023 – Present

Attend weekly meetings to discuss opportunities, professor spotlights, participate in committees (research, business, event, volunteer, journal, Psi BETA), help plan and set up events, promote professional engagement with the psychology community.

Vice President and Member – Hilltop High School Robotics Club

Jul 2017 – Jun 2021

Learn to build and program robots to compete in VEX Robotics competitions Locally and Nationally. Participated in the FRC competition in Del Mar in 2019 and 2020 as a robotics designer, safety captain, and mechanic. Focused on leadership, team work, and community, including community service.

Member – Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE)

Jul 2017 – Jun 2022

SHPE is a national society who aims to empower the Hispanic community in STEM. SHPE helps its members find their place as Hispanics in the engineering world, providing career services, scholarship opportunities, informational sessions, and more.

Additional Skills

Languages: English and Spanish

Programming Languages: Python, R, MATLAB, HTML, git_bash

Programs: Google Hub, Microsoft Office, VSCode, Jupiter Notebook, GitHub, Canva, CapCut, MediBang Paint