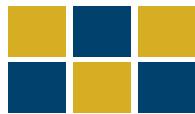


THE AGGIE BRICKYARD



assembling the blocks of ecology at UC Davis





STAFF Q&A
PROGRAM
COORDINATOR



FEATURES
ON STRIFE AND
SOLIDARITY



COMMUNITY
UPDATES



STUDENT
PERSPECTIVES

KEYSTONE



Photograph by Sylvie Finn

- ♦ COVER: Photo by Dr. Amanda Stronza, Texas A&M University. An elephant herd moving through the Okavango Delta, Botswana. Dr. Stronza, GGE student Megan McDaniels, and co-authors study human-elephant conflict in the region.



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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the thirteenth edition of the Aggie Brickyard, fellow Keystones! This spring, we are thinking about how the Brickyard has served as a time capsule or marker of sorts, curating snapshots of the GGE and its students every time an issue is released. As editors, we enjoy showcasing the diverse thoughts, talents, and values of the graduate group's members – in this issue, we highlight **faculty reflections**, including interviews with our new chair Brian Gaylord and graduate coordinator Angie Nguyen, as well as all the content so generously shared by our students. We also try to capture the current milieu through our **perspective piece** exploring our graduate group after the strike, followed by a **student Q&A** that seeks to put a finger to the pulse of the GGE student body. While creating this issue, we began to realize the myriad ways in which we rely on each other and our shared resources and ideas to shape our program and our experience within it. Keystone allows us to reflect joyfully, critically, and creatively on the people, places, institutions, and ideas that support us as well as the role that we, ourselves, play in supporting our GGE community.

There are many different definitions of 'Keystone':

- Dictionary: A keystone species is a species on which other species in an ecosystem largely depend, such that if it were removed the ecosystem would change drastically.
- National Geographic Society: In a marine ecosystem, or any type of ecosystem, a keystone species is an organism that helps hold the system together.
- Wikipedia: A keystone species is a species which has a disproportionately large effect on its natural environment relative to its abundance.
- Cottee-Jones and Whittaker (2012): Keystone structures are ecological structures which “exert a disproportionate effect on ecosystem function in a wide range of ecosystems”, the loss of which “may lead to the deterioration of important ecosystem functions.”

The idea of keystone can expand beyond that of keystone species. As Fred Nelson notes in his Student Q&A, a keystone is the center stone that holds up an archway in engineering and architecture. The Student Q&As in this issue encourage us to think about what keystone structures exist, or could be developed, within the GGE to further support our community. In his reflection as chair, Dr. Brian Gaylord encourages us to also think about keystone decisions, or the major choices we make during our time in graduate school which may motivate our research and our futures.

While we celebrate the many keystones that are present at Davis, we also recognize the keystones that many of our peers know to be missing both here in the GGE and in higher education at large. Feeling conflicted about this contrast eventually developed into some sense that perhaps the Brickyard could be its own keystone - one that brings together these seemingly disparate perceptions of the GGE and allows us to hold both at the same time. A space for celebration and recognition of holes yet to be filled, calls yet to be answered. Following the strike and both the sense of community and divisiveness that emerged from it, having a space to reflect on both our strengths and weaknesses as a group is critical; we hope you'll imagine us as a community that can hold these two extremes with compassion, gentleness, and curiosity. As editors of this issue, we might think of ourselves like a beaver at work on a dam—a keystone structure—gathering ideas and fitting them together in such a way that we are all somehow amplified, better, far-reaching in our togetherness despite our challenges and our differences. We hope you enjoy reading this issue of the Aggie Brickyard and are inspired by the words and art of your fellow GGE'ers. We look forward to continuing to share perspectives of the GGE with you in issues to come!

Sincerely,
Your Aggie Brickyard Editors

FROM BRIAN'S BRAIN

Letter from the Chair, Brian Gaylord

April 11, 2023

This issue of the Brickyard concerns keystones. Keystone species have a disproportionate impact relative to their population abundance. In our professional lives as ecologists, we can by analogy identify keystone decisions that carry special weight. Enrolling in graduate school represents one such decision. I ponder why we choose to pursue an advanced degree, and the advantages and challenges that may accompany different answers to the question, "Why am I here, in the GGE?"

As I write, it's disconcerting to realize I've been at this for 30 years (whoa!). During those decades, many wonderful students have arrived, learned, conducted fabulous research, published great papers, and graduated – and their motivations for doing all the hard work span a broad gamut. It is impossible to capture the full intentionality behind such efforts. Nevertheless, there are themes that seem worth thinking about.

One place to start might be to pose in caricature a subset of the more common reasons that individuals enter graduate school. Those I touch on here include some I see in myself, and others I've witnessed in students. Perhaps a couple will resonate with you, and maybe one or two won't. For each of the cartooned representations below, the idea is to do a bit of musing about the pluses and minuses of differing aims for graduate work. Ruminating early about one's motives and their origins may help both with achieving one's goals, and avoiding pitfalls along the way.

Love nature always. Many students enter the GGE because of an ardent connection to the environment and its living parts. Are we talking here about tree hugging? Possibly a little. Students aligned with this category often end up in field work, and most will cherish even wet, windy, cold, and buggy days (and early mornings). A benefit to this incentive class is the visceral, perhaps emotional and maybe even spiritual-like link to what a person is studying, which can energize scientific efforts and serve as sustenance for intellectual growth. It can also buoy against heavier times when things get difficult. If you are a student whose central reason for doing ecology is to exult in nature, you may find the process of developing concrete research ideas a trifle staid. You may profit from thinking hard about questions of wider applicability, especially ones with the potential for conceptual advance.

Satisfy curiosity. Students under this umbrella find joy in following their noses. An advantage is the freedom that comes from chasing intellectual topics that strike your fancy. The most earnest practitioners of this approach pursue their focal questions regardless of obstacles, and therefore refuse to be limited by certain techniques or technologies. A disadvantage is the need to repeatedly learn new techniques or technologies. If you are a student who embraces curiosity as a defining feature of your graduate endeavors, you are probably among the happier of your cohort. Maybe you are the person others see whistling in the lab late at night. Some vigilance could also be useful, as it can be easy to get intrigued by something that only a few people (or maybe just you!) care to understand. My sense is that many older-school faculty have a strong dose of this curiosity attribute in their personality portfolios.

Discover new stuff. Students in this category want to figure out things that no one else has touched. In some ways, this goal is harder to tackle in ecology compared to other disciplines (say particle physics), due to the interconnectedness and squishiness of our brand of science. But if you have a reasonable definition of "new," you can make important inroads and gain satisfaction. A challenge is if novelty is the goal in and of itself, frustration can ensue if results don't pan out, or if another research team beats you to the punch.

Save the planet. Student numbers in this category are on the rise, reflecting growing concern about environmental pressures and degradation. Such individuals have a bigger-picture perspective that extends to the whole globe, and are interested in the application of research, not just the acquisition of knowledge. Advantages include the ascendance of this motivating axis among scientists, and the breadth of positions available after completion of the degree – including jobs in education, conservation, restoration, policymaking, and regulation, whether within the ivory tower, at consulting firms, or via nonprofits and government agencies. A disadvantage is that you may find yourself most interested in what will happen after graduate school, when you feel you will be able to really make a difference. Certain types of research during your graduate years could seem like an impediment to your true goals, as could structures of funding that require you to work on finite-scale questions dictated by grants.

Fix the human condition. This category is also increasing among students. It is laudable, important, and timely, aimed at righting wrongs and making the world a more just place. It has a healthy dose of idealism, and pushes for faster change than systems sometimes want. Its benefits are exactly those of its goals: an improved social framework. Challenges include academic inertia, and an incomplete match with the responsibilities of university training, which for the GGE is in ecological research. Such imperfect alignment of purpose can induce disillusionment if you are a student who desires an alternative pattern of prioritization compared to one focused strictly on environmental science. If a primary intent is to elevate your professional stature by means of the title of MS or PhD (with the goal of developing an authoritative voice for effecting change), graduate school can feel restrictive. It may seem like it is slowing the rate at which your career is advancing towards a more fundamental target.

Solve puzzles. Some students gain strong satisfaction from wrestling with intellectual or logistical challenges. If you tend to fit this category, you may find graduate work to be very much up your alley, even when long hours or physical demands are considerable. On the other hand, you may see the attractiveness of research decline somewhat when funding interests dictate your lines of exploration, or when you are asked to devote effort to fleshing out answers to questions to which you feel you already know the outcome.

Study a favorite organism. GGE members occasionally enter graduate school because of an abiding interest (obsession?) with a particular group of plants or animals. Folks of this flavor may become widely respected experts in their chosen taxon. It may take more effort to identify scientific questions that upend fundamental principles or reconfigure existing thinking.

Become famous. Some researchers are motivated by the reputational gains tied to various perceptions of success. Students who enter graduate school with an aim of fame may possess unusual focus, sometimes joined by a projected aura of confidence. A subset will move quickly through graduate school and onto positions beyond. Less ideally, individuals with this trait may find teamwork difficult. If you see yourself in this category, you may find value in thinking more about others, maybe even picturing yourself in their shoes. As noted by my predecessor in her role as GGE Chair, kindness is worth a long look. In extreme cases, overly driven individuals have been known to fabricate findings, in which case alternative careers may be in order (in at least one instance, fictional novels became an option).

A list such as the one I've sketched here is certainly incomplete. Moreover, and in all likelihood, your reason for entering graduate school (or doing science more generally) is probably some mishmash of several of the oversimplified rationales above. As you traverse the path towards your degree, it may be helpful to reflect occasionally on why you decided to pursue it, and watch for the good and not so good places your decision may tend to carry you. To the extent that your major professor and committee members are also aware of how your graduate experience intersects with your desired direction in life, they will be better poised to support your journey. The hope is that graduate school will be a rewarding part of it.

STAFF Q & A

*We wanted to highlight keystone members of the GGE community. Brickyard staffer **Emily Mensch** interviewed Ecology Graduate Program Coordinator **Angie Nguyen**. This interview was conducted over video call and has been edited for length and clarity.*

Could you introduce yourself- where you're from, how you found yourself in this role, anything you'd like to share about yourself?

I was born and raised in Saigon, Vietnam. I was raised by my grandmother in a multigenerational household where I grew up with my cousins, aunts, uncles, chickens, ducks, dogs, a kitty, and a rooftop garden. That was really great, just being able to learn from so many different people and surroundings. I come from a very strong family background in education, people in my family are teachers and took educational career paths, so I grew up wanting to be a teacher and I had many internships and jobs that were all involved in education. I tried student teaching, but didn't find that to be a good fit for me.

I really enjoyed the interaction I had with my high school counselor and my years here at UC Davis. Being an introvert, it's not always easy to communicate and navigate a new environment, especially on a big campus. In that regard, I was overwhelmed and didn't know how to connect and ask for help so I was very lost in the system. When I became an undergraduate academic advisor, I used that opportunity to share my experience with undergrad students and help them through their educational journey. I also got to share my perspective and experience especially as a first generation college student, learning English as a second language, and from a low-income background. I work with other campus partners to provide students with the right resources and support to help them be successful in their academic journey at UCD and beyond. Being in the advising world really helped me connect with students and it has been a very fulfilling career for me.

I also enjoy working in grad education. Previously, I worked with grad students in atmospheric science, hydrology, and soil science, and plant science. I love learning about the type of research students are doing and I learn so much from students. I admire grad students and how well they can juggle research and classes, hold employment while balancing parenthood and other obligations, and provide services to the community. Graduate education is not easy and I feel fortunate to play a role in supporting them through their journey.

In what ways do you view yourself as a keystone for GGE students? How does your role support students?

In general, I see myself as a student advocate. I empathize with the challenges that students have to juggle in grad school, and I hope students feel safe and comfortable coming and sharing things with me so that I can connect students to the right resources. I'm here to listen and help students navigate through solving different situations. I'm also on the other side, and have connections to faculty and leadership where there's room for me to voice concerns and help with improvements. I really empathize with the challenges in graduate education and students trying to juggle their education with other priorities. Students play such a vital role in our ecosystem. It's my role to work and support students and help them through their graduate education.



What is the most challenging and most rewarding part of your work with students?

Ecology is such a unique group, spanning across many different colleges and departments so it is great to have this opportunity to interact with students from so different backgrounds and interests. GGE students and faculty are doing really interesting and important research work and I am grateful to have the opportunity to be a member of this group. The GGE is a huge program with many needs. It also seems that the program has evolved in some ways and staff turnovers also posed additional challenges for students and faculty. It is rewarding to be in this position where I use problem solving skills to help faculty and students navigate through difficult situations. I enjoy learning about students, their research projects and interests, and also their post-graduate goals! I love the one-on-one interactions with students. I appreciate how supportive and open this community is and I look forward to getting to know students and faculty to better support them and the program.

What does a typical day look like for you?

I'm not a routine person, but I have my own structure. I like to start the day off by reflecting on what I did or did not do in the previous days, and look into where the urgent needs are. Since I manage almost every aspect of the program, I learn to juggle and prioritize urgent matters that come up and plan for long-term projects. Every day is a new day and so I have to adjust to whatever situation that comes up. I like that every day is different and interesting!

What is a lesser known part of your role? Anything that surprised you when you started here?

Every grad group functions differently and is unique in its own ways. I'm not new to graduate education, but I'm very new to the Ecology Graduate Group specifically so I'm learning to adapt to the environment here. My previous role was in a department-based group so a lot of things are straightforward. The GGE is housed under the Department of Environmental Science and Policy, but it belongs to a cluster. In addition to learning my role, I'm also learning who does what in the cluster and how different units function together to support the GGE.

What do you wish GGE students knew about the resources you or the program can provide to support them?

I would like the students to know that I am here for them. They are the reason why I picked this profession. As the first point of contact for students, I want them to feel safe to come to me to ask questions or if they need something. I know that when I accepted this position, it's 100% remote. That's due to personal and health reasons, and I am very fortunate to have this job opportunity. Even though I am not in person, I am always available via email, phone, zoom, etc. Like many grad students, I work irregular hours sometimes and I hope that students know they will get responses that they need in a good time. I am available to accommodate grad students' busy schedules by being available outside of the normal business hours. I look forward to getting to know everyone! Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or if there is anything I can do to help. <3

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PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



Clockwise from top left:

- *John Veon weighing a harvested mallard at a private duck hunting club in Stuttgart, AR, which contributed to analyses observing changes in body mass in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley from 1979–2021. Photo courtesy of John Veon.*
- *“Conducting fieldwork for our genetic study of plankton food web interactions in the San Francisco Estuary (Holmes & Kimmerer 2022). Here I am collecting samples in the Cache Slough Complex, a tidal freshwater region that is a focus of marsh restoration efforts.” Photo courtesy of Ann Holmes.*
- *A collage of elephants overlapping with human land-use activities in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. In a recent study, Megan McDaniels and co-authors investigated long-term human-elephant conflict in Botswana. You can read a plain language summary blog here: <https://tinyurl.com/y33myynh>. Photo courtesy of Megan McDaniels.*

On Strife and Solidarity

Kay Garlick-Ott, Ed. Brandi Goss

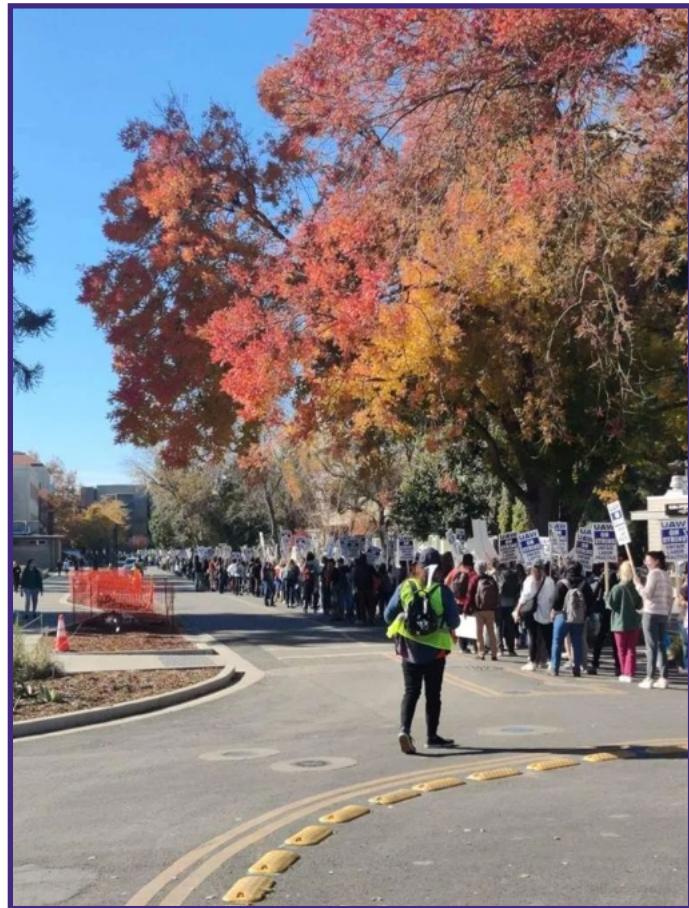
On November 2, 2022, graduate students, postdocs, and academic workers at the University of California voted to authorize a state-wide protected strike in response to unacceptable working conditions and unfair labor practices committed by the UC since bargaining began in Spring 2021. Across four bargaining units represented by the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), 97% of UC workers voted to authorize this strike and by the following week, we were encouraged to walk out and join our peers on the picket line.

At Davis, workers marched holding blue-and-white “UAW on strike” signs and raising their voices in defiance of UC’s inaction at the bargaining table. By the third day, the line of workers was so long you couldn’t see where it began or ended.

Strike captains and bargaining teams arranged community activities, including speakers and dance lines, banner-making and strike Q&As. Other students made cold calls and sent text messages to rally support remotely, or emailed state representatives to fund improved working conditions.

Less than two weeks later, postdocs (PD) and academic researchers (AR) came to tentative agreement and ratified their contract (AR: 79% yes, PD: 89% yes), which boasted higher wages and increased childcare. Nearly a month after that, the academic student employee (ASE) and student researcher (SR) bargaining teams came to a tentative agreement and voted to ratify their contract as well.

The strike ended on December 23, with strong dissension across the campuses and low support especially from Merced (ASE/SRU: 27/25%), Santa Barbara (35/57%), and Santa Cruz (20/19%) for ASEs. At Davis, 66% of ASE and 74% of SRU voted to accept the contract after significant discussion given that it contained serious compromises regarding the contract’s access needs articles, removal of cost of living adjustments (COLA), and limited improvements for dependent care. While many were prepared to continue the strike to win additional improvements, other students at Davis were skeptical that they could keep the momentum of the strike going into the Winter quarter, as picket line numbers



dwindled to a couple hundred from starting numbers in the thousands. Overall, a supermajority of students were happy to accept the higher income, which will likely improve welfare across the board and set a powerful standard for other institutions of higher education across the country.

A call to action

In the GGE, the strike served up a bounty of community camaraderie: Signs sported clever ecology themed text, like “I can’t save the bees if I can’t pay rent” and “UC is a parasite.” A pots and pans band led by the Ecology Kids of Color evolved into a walking drum line. Lunch on the grass, sharing our highs and lows; cold because it was windy that day, huddled together, coffee cups nestled between mittens, discarded later once the sun came out. Online, *snekgate* tore through the eco-soc listserv resulting in a GGE version of that internet dress fiasco from 2015. We are a graduate group that boasts a humble,

collaborative community and fun, outgoing spirit. The strike highlighted these qualities, showing us that the bonds we forge go beyond our first year Odyssey, beyond ECL200A and B.

And yet, the strike left some students feeling alienated and wondering whether the community they saw and felt was a performance, a farce. It's easy to be fair weather friends, but when the going gets tough, do we stick around for each other? By week three, students who continued to strike approached the picket line hyper-aware of who wasn't showing up and this vigilance translated into awkward conversations at home and in their friendships. Reasons for why their colleagues and peers couldn't picket abounded, and picketers took it upon themselves to speculate about whether these reasons were good enough – would cold-calling them make a difference? Students who didn't picket or didn't picket "enough" felt ostracized and blamed by their peers for their lack of participation when sometimes this was out of their control. Ultimately, choosing to picket or not picket was personal, but in our hurt, anger, and fear, it isolated us; made some of us feel abandoned while others felt attacked.

The strike also strained our professional relationships. To forecast reactions from faculty and rally support, students hosted a faculty Q&A in which faculty were encouraged to air their grievances and ask questions. Three primary concerns came up: fellowships, job safety, and fallout for undergraduates. These concerns motivated some faculty to seek answers by entering conversation with their students and looking up the chain to encourage action by the administration. Others reacted through illegal retaliation, including pressuring students to continue working rather than join a movement that would ideally improve their working conditions. Some students continue to suffer the consequences of their now-fractured dynamic with previously supportive advisors. And, the way forward remains opaque as deadlines for contract implementation loom and threats of wage garnishment hang in the air without clearly communicated plans from the university for either.

When it came time to vote for ratification, choosing to vote Yes meant acknowledging the emotional, physical, and financial burden that the strike placed on our graduate group. And yet, there was a strong movement to reject the contract because it did not support all students, particularly through its lack of adequate access needs articles, improved family care, and COLA. In some cases, students felt this break in trust acutely and resolved to drop out of their degree program if a better contract were not secured.

We are a graduate group of passionate students, many of us motivated by personal investment in good science that helps people. After the strike, we wonder what holds us together; as we see that the bonds we thought were strong are breakable. Through the strike, the GGE experienced a reckoning. Emerging from the other side, as we measure what we're up against and assess our reserves, we ask, what makes us a community?

Strike Poem

Becca Nelson

With the La Niña years,
comes inflation:
we work invisible,
in 100 degree heat.

Leaves scuff the street in fiery pools.
Our wages stagnate.
Someone's moved in
to the physics building.

We speak power
to river water.
The banks of the American
throw mist, braid blue
around Sacramento.

Some river voice speaks,
spells us forward,
stamps the grass with dust
unionizes, amplifies air
to charged static.
We shut it down.

Solidarity rivers
a wildness
to stand for
sun and shatter
for which we fight
and scatter seeds.

We become unrelenting.
The rain leaves no shape
in the grass, only glimmer.

Ecology Graduate Student Association: Spring Update

Tara Pozzi and Alana Luzzio (Co-Chairs)

Hi GGE'rs - we are your EGSA co-chairs for 2022-2023, Tara and Alana! After a couple year hiatus of in-person events, we wanted to go big this year as we all get reacquainted with seeing our GGE community more regularly. So with gratitude for previous EGSA co-chairs and committee members who carried us through tough times (and in stellar, creative ways!), we entered this year keen on helping support the various EGSA sub-committees' events with organizing logistics for in-person events again, funding food for y'all, and keeping that GGE spirit alive! So far this year, EGSA has been able to support various activities such as snacks at E&E seminar, Stats Support Group, Asian and Pacific Islander Alliance, the Fall Welcome Potluck, the GGE Symposium, Mardi Gras, and GGE Peer Mentorship program. These events are due to the amazing work of the following committee chairs plus committee members:



Diversity Committee: Fred Nelson

Diversity Committee Admissions and Awards Subcommittee: Jessica Greer

Treasurer: Brooke Wainwright

Academic/Symposium Committee: Becca Nelson

Public Engagement Committee: Margot Flynn

Social Committee: Tali Caspi & Hollis Jones

Open Lab Meeting: David Mitchell & Brooke Wainwright

Charity Committee: Bradyn O'Connor

Executive Committee: Paige Kouba & Katie Lauck

As we move into the rest of the academic year, we are hoping to set up regular, informal GGE hangs. We also have new merch on the way (thanks Reed for organizing swag & Ava-Rose for the sweet new GGE logo)! Please reach out with questions or thoughts about EGSA. We love chatting and thinking of ways to do this grad school thing better!

Executive Committee Update

Paige Kouba & Katie Lauck (Reps)

Tuesday April 25, 2023

Dear GGE,

Since our last Brickyard update, the Executive Committee has been processing the usual faculty applications and bylaws revisions, as well as navigating the plethora of questions brought about by the historic student workers strike this past fall. We have also gratefully welcomed Angie Nguyen, our new student affairs coordinator, as well as Brian Gaylord, the GGE's new chair, who have both been putting tremendous effort towards supporting the GGE community of students, staff, and faculty alike.

One matter of special note to students is the resolution of the Plan II Masters Degree. To make a long story short, the GGE will no longer be awarding MS degrees to continuing (Ph.D.) students upon completion of their Qualifying Exam. The Plan II (exam-based) Masters Degree granted by the GGE will henceforth be a terminal degree only. It is still possible for a student who submits a thesis for a Plan I (thesis-based) MS Degree to continue in the program in pursuit of a Ph.D.

The admissions cycle has run its course again, and as we look forward to welcoming the Fall 2023 cohort of incoming First Years, we hope to bring them along for a new and ever-improving Odyssey orientation trip. Last but not least the GGE welcomes new faculty members: Dr. Giulia Marino, Dr. Mikaela Provost, Dr. Carson Jeffres, and Dr. Elizabeth Crone.

It has been a privilege to serve as your Student Representative for the past two years; I'm honored to have been chosen for this role, and I learned a lot about respectful discussion of diverging points of view. Always fun to see how the sausage gets made :) As I step down from my post, I am pleased to introduce our newest EC Student Rep, Becca Nelson, who will join continuing Rep Katie Lauck! Should you have any questions about GGE student affairs, please contact your EC Reps at ranelson@ucdavis.edu and kslauck@ucdavis.edu.

My best, Paige

Academic Symposium

Becca Nelson & Meranda Corona (Co-Chairs)

On Friday February 3rd, the 16th Annual Graduate Student Symposium in Ecology took place, our first ever hybrid symposium. GGE students presented talks and posters, showcasing interdisciplinary research. Zoe Wood won best oral presentation for her talk on plant insect-ecology and photography, and Mary Badger won best poster for her work on eDNA Metabarcoding in American Kestrels. The symposium featured a beautiful, ecology-inspired art gallery. Congratulations to Mia Godbey for the winning art contest submission, titled "Great Blue Heron" and to Ava-Rose Beech for designing our new GGE logo.

On behalf of the Diversity Committee, Jasmin Green led a discussion on the state of diversity and inclusion in the GGE, presenting survey results. Paige Kouba presented on efforts to make the Odyssey more inclusive, and Cody Pham shared research on equitable teaching practices. We were honored to have Princeton University professor Dr. Shane Campbell-Staton as our symposium keynote speaker. During his keynote address, Dr. Campbell-Staton talked about his research on ecology and evolution in the Anthropocene and his science communication, including an upcoming PBS documentary that features GGE student Tali Caspi.

Much gratitude to all of our presenters, artists, and attendees. We would like to thank our dedicated team of volunteers: Mickie Tang, David Mitchell, Amanda Wong, Reed Kenny, Bradyn O'Connor, Zoe Wood, and Tessa Putz along with the Graduate Student Association and the EGSA for funding. When discussing his research on tuskless elephants, Dr. Campbell-Staton raised the idea of "keystone genes". We would like to further offer the idea that the GGE is a "keystone community" that brings together art, science, and engagement.

Diversity Committee

Fred Nelson (Chair)

Jasmin Green, GGE Ph.D. candidate, delivered a compelling presentation at the EGSA Symposium on February 3rd, 2022. The presentation, titled “State of the Grad Group: Diversity and Inclusion,” focused on the results of the 2021 student climate survey conducted within our graduate program in the Fall Quarter of 2021. The survey highlighted the experiences of students, the challenges faced by underrepresented groups, and the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students. As a final point, the presentation stressed that students are capable of influencing change within the GGE.

In one (1) word: What community values are important to you?

Mentimeter



The word cloud above is from the presentation. The survey was administered to students via the GGE student email listserv in the Fall Quarter of 2021. 50/146 registered student members of the GGE responded to this survey. GGE members Abbey Hart, Gina Tarbill, MJ Farruggia, Eric Post*, Andrea Schreier*, and Anne Todgham* created the anonymous student experience survey. They were advised by the UCD Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on question development and how best to keep responses anonymous. (*faculty)

As we progress through our degrees, we must reflect and challenge ourselves not only on how we build community but also on how we maintain community. Naturally, this varies from year to year and cohort to cohort. All in all, I'm proud to be a part of the GGE because I'm represented by heavy hitters, ardent advocates, and courageous comrades. We accomplish more when we work together.

Charity Committee

Bradyn O'Connor (Chair)

The GGE Charity Committee is pleased to announce that we had a successful annual Mardi Gras Charity Event on April 28th! The proceeds from this event will be donated to Empower Yolo, a local charity which offers a variety of assistance to victims of domestic abuse and people experiencing homelessness. We had a blast and were able to raise just under \$1000 for an excellent cause!

Diversity Committee Admission and Awards

Jessica Greer (Chair)

The Admissions and Awards committee (DCAA) is a branch of the larger GGE Diversity Committee. It was initiated in 2012-2013 when GGE students saw the need to increase the diversity of cohorts and worked to develop the holistic review approach from the ground up. Holistic review or “whole file” review is an evidence-based process for admissions that considers a broad range of an applicant’s characteristics, including both quantitative and behavioral attributes. This work by GGE students led to the 8-trait holistic review rubric, which is now used during the applications process and directly influences how prospective GGE students are ranked for admissions and awards.

In fall 2022, after a core group of the membership graduated and moved on, the DCAA committee decided to go on hiatus for the time being. The last co-chairs, Katie Lauck and Jessica Greer, stepped down from their positions. However, Jessica has continued to be a contact for the group during the hiatus - if any GGE students are interested in continuing to work on issues related to the holistic review process or other projects along that vein, she is happy to meet and transfer knowledge or help get the committee up and running again. You can get in touch with her here: jesgreer@ucdavis.edu

Open Lab Meeting

David Mitchell & Brooke Wainwright (Co-Chairs)

Open Lab Meeting continues to provide a weekly space for GGE students to present their work with student colleagues. Generally we use our meeting times to practice QE presentations, professional conference talks, public outreach lectures, or simply to share our research ideas and methods with colleagues for feedback. This event continues to provide a unique service in the GGE as a low-stress, collaborative space for students to improve their presentations, share advice, give frank feedback, discuss research designs, and transmit knowledge from their own experiences. This year, we have been meeting back in person with hybrid options for attendees. Despite busy schedules, sign-ups and attendance have been strong this year, and we look forward to what is to come. Many thanks to all who participate!

Public Engagement Committee

Margot Flynn (Chair)

The Public Engagement Committee had a blast engaging with the public at Picnic Day this year. We examined aquatic microorganisms, animal pelts, backyard bird specimens, and animal tracks in Academic Surge with over 1,000 visitors! While the wiener dog race seemed to be a real draw (once again), we think the real hero of the 2023 Picnic Day was our brand new sticker sales set up. Our Picnic Day volunteers sold ecology themed stickers, created with love by your own GGE peer Margot Flynn. Our sales raised money for future EGSA events and outreach while putting the UC Davis Ecology name on Nalgenes and Hydroflasks across campus. If you’d like to purchase remaining stickers, please reach out to the Committee Chair (Margot at mtflynn@ucdavis.edu). The Public Engagement committee will be practicing our cow-milking and ecology hootin’ and hollerin’ until next Spring when we can see you all out there again!

Social Committee

Hollis Jones & Tali Caspi (Co-Chairs)

The Social Committee is dedicated to hosting creative events to bring our GGE community together. We are so grateful to everyone that came out and joined us in this endeavor and we look forward to continuing to do so! We started out this past year's line-up of events with a delicious and comfortable (pajamas encouraged) backyard Breakfast for Dinner event where we served up cereal and waffles in the moonlight. We then welcomed our new GGE members to Davis by hosting the GGE Fall Welcome Potluck in Northstar Park where everyone's culinary prowess was on display. And then by popular demand (by us?) we brought back the Hot Choccy Movie Night for a second year in a row and watched (you guessed it!) Shrek 2! We also, as usual, hosted a recruitment trivia night and Q & A with prospective students to help them make the important decision of where to go for grad school. And to wrap up the year, we just hosted our most retro event yet - the Millenium Bash! feat. dumplings from The Dumpling House. A huge thank you to all of our members for their work on these events and excellent gif selection: Andrea Odell, Elsie Platzer, Lily Klinek, Sophia Simon, and Brooke Wainwright!

COMMUNITY

Society for Conservation Biology

Alana Luzzio & Anderson Tate-Montenegro

Save the date for the SCB's 7th biennial North American Congress for Conservation Biology (NACCB 2024) June 23-28, 2024! Congress will take place in the beautiful city of Vancouver, British Columbia, at the University of British Columbia. Planning is underway; please reach out to Alana (aluzzio@ucdavis.edu) or Anderson (atare@ucdavis.edu) if you would like to join the organizing committee! These conferences bring together the community of conservation professionals and students in North America.

The NACCBs attract professionals working across various disciplines, including scientists, conservation policy and planning, practitioners, and managers from universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, First Nations, private foundations, and publications. Participants will present and discuss new research, developments, and strategies to inform policy changes and conservation practices needed to address the current state of rapidly changing conservation challenges. Join the regional community of conservation professionals and serve as a networking nexus for conservation in North America! Please reach out to Alana or Anderson if you are interested in either joining the Society of Conservation Biology – Davis Chapter or would like to hear more about these events! Local chapter officer positions are available.

Your So-Co



Movie Night



Millenium Bash



Sylvie Finn, 2022 Cohort

Interviewed by Ava-Rose Beech

Ava-Rose: The last few years have been tough with COVID, the strike, and everybody's own personal reasons. As you reflect on your experience here at Davis this year so far, what have been some keystone species for you?

Sylvie: I feel like the kind of obvious answer to me is having the cohort structure that we have. I think coming in, especially coming from another institution, it's been super helpful to have kind of a built-in framework of community, and even though I wasn't able to be a part of Odyssey, the little bit of Odyssey that I was able to be a part of was also really helpful. Having the core course, and having Odyssey, having these kinds of things where the cohort is all together, and we are all doing them together, has really created a community. When it was happening, the pre-seminar snacks were really nice, seeing people from other cohorts at happy hour. But I think just the social community has been really incredible and created a sense of stability and safety within this structure.

Ava-Rose: Definitely, I think that is super effective. Do you feel like there are any keystone species or structures outside of our cohort or any other things outside of that community that have been positive supports for you?

Sylvie: Yeah, I guess academically I have an incredible lab group and now I have two incredible lab groups, so both of those are really supportive and generous communities. Personally, I am involved in a lot of Jewish community which has been a really stabilizing and supportive community for me making this transition out into California.

Ava-Rose: What is one keystone that you think is missing in the GGE or at Davis, and why do you think it is critical for graduate students to have this keystone?

Sylvie: I'm not sure how it fits into the realm of keystone because I can't think of it as like an entity on its own, but I think having more intergenerational communities within the GGE would be really helpful. And there are so many different people within other grad groups doing interesting things that I wish there were a way to unite all of these people that really share

values and interests. I'm not sure what that would even look like because there are just so many grad students that I think it's hard to get everyone together on something. I do feel like the strike was a unifying thing across all grad students so that was really cool to see. But just kind of day to day, socially, the people we interact with are kind of constrained in a way. I think within the GGE, it is easy, because we're such a giant grad group that covers so many different groups, to just kind of stick together with the people you know.

It feels like it's also natural even in larger GGE settings to gravitate and stay with people you are comfortable with. So I think honestly one avenue for this kind of cross cohort, cross grad group connection might be within people's lab groups that people have different lab mates in different graduate groups, like pop bio, or entomology. So I think there is some natural movement but more on an individual basis. I also think that as people progress through grad school their capacity for socializing probably wanes, but when possible if there could be, I don't know, more consistent happy hours, or other social events, like parties which I haven't been able to go to. But maybe other informal gatherings like the pre-seminar snacks, which got people coming to seminar more, and got people to gather in a half social half academic, elastic way. Which is different from a party in that maybe not everyone wants to or can go to a party. I feel like the pre-seminar snacks were a major thing that was so nice, and I met people from other years and other grad groups there, and it is not a huge time commitment. Yeah so that might be one of my top ideas.



Ava-Rose: Yeah, that definitely makes sense. Maybe outside of the student community, are there any keystones, administratively, or other graduate student resources that you feel are missing from our community? Is there anything you can imagine making the ecosystem of the GGE healthier?

Sylvie: Well, when you say keystone, and you say GGE, I immediately think of Angie, who I know is also being interviewed for this issue. I've never met Angie! I feel like I wish there was a meet and greet with Angie. I know Brian Gaylord is having open office hours, but that feels a bit intimidating. But I really appreciate that he's doing that. Yeah, just to add to more transparency between administration and students I think something is missing. I also think that something that just dawned on me which is not necessarily about keystone, but I think will be great for the GGE to have, and maybe it already exists, but a list and resource of funding opportunities would be a particularly great idea. I started making one of these for my lab because I feel like not everyone is aware of these opportunities, and then if there is someone in the GGE who has gotten that fellowship you have a point person. Something similar to the crowd-sourced list of courses, but for funding opportunities. I think that could be really helpful in a practical sense. Especially because I think one thing maybe the GGE doesn't have a lot of is funding sources, so being able to point people in the right direction might be really helpful.

Ava-Rose: We have talked about this a bit already, but do you have any other ideas of how to implement keystone structures that might be missing? Or any other ideas of things you wish existed as keystone structures in the GGE?

Sylvie: One thing I thought of is the idea of a GGE retreat. And even if that's less accessible... At some point we had a GGE welcome picnic, so maybe having one of those more often, maybe in the Fall and in the Spring or something like that. Also to bring faculty and students together, I feel like that would be a really nice opportunity to bring people together. I would envision a retreat for all cohorts of the GGE would be a lot of people to bring together, so a picnic could be more feasible. Also, just thinking back to the GGE symposium, which I think is such a cool thing, I wonder how we could get people more involved with that. I think because it is such a large grad group it is easier to not get as involved. Whereas when I was a grad student at Tufts it was a super small department so everyone was involved with everything. All of the grad students had office desks next to each other so we were constantly with other people from different years and labs. And Davis has many incredible things that Tufts didn't have. It's different being in a small community versus a really large one.

Ava-Rose: Do you have any final thoughts you want to share about your experience so far in the GGE?

Sylvie: Something I love about being in the GGE is just being surrounded by so many people interested in similar related topics, and I feel like I am just constantly inspired by all my peers doing such interesting and important research. And I feel really grateful to be here where there is this community of so much cool ecology happening, all the time, all over campus.

Melissa Grim, 2022 Cohort

Interviewed by Ava-Rose Beech



Ava-Rose: The last few years have been tough with COVID, the strike, and everybody's own personal reasons. As you reflect on your experience here at Davis this year so far, what have been some keystone species for you?

Melissa: I think definitely the biggest rock in my world since grad school has been the first-year cohort. I moved to Davis in July, and was just kind of depressed being in Davis on my own for the summer. I am close to my family and relied on them a lot, but since the academic year started more importantly it has definitely been the first year cohort, and the relationships that I have built there. Yesterday I had the worst day and just texted Emily crying, and was like I need support. It is also more than just the emotional support, it's the professional support too. I came to grad school straight from undergrad so I really rely on other

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students in the cohort who have a master's, or worked professionally before grad school. I often feel insecure that I came straight from undergrad. I feel like there are things that I don't know I need to look out for in terms of making or maintaining boundaries. So the experience of other people in the cohort who do have more experience has been so helpful for me since starting grad school.

Ava-Rose: What is one keystone that you think is missing in the GGE and why do you think it is critical?

Melissa: This is from the perspective of a first year, but I do wish there was way more faculty or administrative involvement, like more of a connection between admin and students in the GGE. Right now it feels like we are kind of at an arm's distance. For example, at the GGE picnic, it felt like mostly just first years, and I felt like the faculty or admin turnout was something that was missing. I wish it felt like faculty, other than just faculty who had taken on first years, were interested or invested in showing up. I think it also kind of extends to cohorts above us. I think that the cohorts directly above us were the most impacted by COVID, which is definitely not an environment that supported community building. But I think just bringing together that greater community, including other cohorts and faculty, would be so beneficial. As far as admin involvement, I know Brian hosts office hours with some frequency, but maybe something like that could happen more often, or in a more approachable way. One-on-one seems pretty intimidating. I definitely think with Brian it is hard because he is split between here and Bodega. I know there is that kind of diaspora between Davis and Bodega anyways for folks in the GGE who work there. But I do think, in a way, fostering those student-admin connections is something I would really like to see as a first year, in the next couple years. I would love to see by the end of my Ph.D. that kind of a bigger change.

Ava-Rose: Do you have any other ideas of how to implement keystones that might be missing?

Melissa: I guess one example of something that I see as a missed opportunity was the GGE symposium. I was kind of disappointed by the turnout. In all fairness, I couldn't see the zoom or who joined on zoom, but there were all these students speaking throughout the day and it would be nice to see not just people's advisors showing up, but other faculty who are invested beyond the keynote speaker.

I think there is a big challenge in the GGE because it is a huge grad group that spans many departments, and there is this disconnect between students who feel like

we belong in the GGE while faculty or admin might feel more connected to their different departments. And I totally sympathize because there are also so many advisors who span many graduate groups. But it would be great to see faculty express interest in the graduate group. Maybe it starts with grassroots involvement from students encouraging their advisors to be involved. Like students forwarding events to their advisors and encouraging them to attend. But I don't want it to be just students. I think maybe it has to be sort of bottom up and top down, like either we as grad students encourage that sort of stuff, and/or people at the top start encouraging faculty to be more involved and show their interest? I think another thing that wasn't as heavily advertised was that first year students were super regularly attending happy hour. That happens to work well for first year students because we have a seminar right before. But maybe just advertising happy hour more regularly and letting people know, for sure there will be a group there, and we would love to see people's faces there. I think it can still be hard though because at happy hour I definitely get pretty intimidated when talking to cohorts above us, and we all end up just talking in groups of people who we already know. So maybe if you are at happy hour with a student from another cohort we already know, introducing people would be one way to approach things. I also loved last quarter, the social board did a really great job of hosting the millennium bash. You know, I think it is kind of tough, it was late at night, and some people have families so maybe they weren't able to attend. But maybe doing something like hosting a picnic in the park again, or a kickball game or something that is a bit more accessible and approachable for more people. And again, if people are sticking to the groups they already know, encouraging people to introduce themselves to new people, and make new connections.

Ava-Rose: Do you have any other final thoughts or reflections you want to share with the community here?

Melissa: There are so many things I feel like I owe a shout out to after the first year. I think knowing about all these resources, like the student pantry, or student health and counseling services. It's been so helpful to talk to other students, and taking advantage of my resource, which is people, to just learn about those opportunities. But I also want to give a huge shout out to Angie, who was able to come on in JoAnna's wake and just hit it out of the park. I haven't had a ton of interaction with her yet, but I know so many people in the first year cohort have been helped by Angie. And I know she is a very humble person, but I truly think Angie is the keystone for grad students in the GGE, she is just incredible.

Gillian Bergmann, 2020 Cohort

Interviewed by Brandi Goss

Brandi: These last few years have been tough, in the world and in the GGE for a variety of reasons. As you reflect on your experience here at Davis, what have been some keystone “species” or “structures” for you in the GGE that helped you cope with these challenges?

Gillian: I think most of the keystones of support I've had have been on the “species” level, so individuals who've been really awesome to interact with and get support from. I started grad school in 2020, so I think there were probably support structures in the GGE that I missed out on because I joined at the height of the pandemic. I still don't interact with a lot of people other than a few close friends in my cohort. So I think the keystones that I've had have been multiple friends in my cohort, particularly people that were in my study group for the ECL 200 series. We spent a lot of time interacting with each other in an academic capacity and also had some similar interests and that kind of expanded out into doing extra-curricular reading groups and thinking about ways to collaborate academically. But it was also just a good way to spend time with people in my cohort. They've just been really positive influences on my experience here. The other people that have really made a difference are my advisor and my co-advisor. It took me a while to realize that I needed a co-advisor just because of the intersections of concepts and study systems in my project that didn't necessarily align very well with what my main advisor has done before. So I needed some additional academic support but also just having another person to go to when I'm struggling with certain things whether it's personal or on the scientific side has made a big difference. The faculty on my QE committee have helped a lot too. Just getting to know more faculty in the GGE and getting a wider breadth of scientific experience and having opportunities to socialize with other scientists has made a big difference. In summary, I think it's been a lot of just building relationships with individual people. I'm in the GGE mentorship program now and mentoring a first year and I'm really excited for that and to both get more structural support from the grad group and to provide more structural support for other people.

Brandi: What is one keystone that you think is missing in the GGE or at Davis and why do you think it is critical for graduate students?

Gillian: I can think of a couple. A complaint I've heard a lot is that there's just not a ton of integration of faculty into the

GGE culture. I've had lots of great one-off interactions with faculty in the GGE, but I think it would be awesome to have them more involved in the student programming that we do, whether it's having more faculty participation in social committee events or having them come to open lab meetings (as appropriate because I know it's a student space). I think some other grad groups have seminars where students give practice talks and I think maybe something like that where folks from across cohorts and faculty could come listen to practice talks and research updates from people in the program would be a really cool way to get feedback and interact with the program on a larger scale. And then at the University level I think there needs to be more targeted mental health support for graduate students. We have a lot of distinct mental health challenges as grad students, and there's not a lot of data on the mental health of graduate students across university programs nor how effective current mental health structures are on campus. Collecting that data and coming up with new support structures for graduate students would be really helpful. These could include support groups for different intersections of grad student identities, better access to mental health professionals on campus, and streamlining the referral process for off-campus services.

Brandi: Do you have any ideas about how to institute it? What would it take to put it in motion?

Gillian: I think for the GGE specific stuff the easiest one to set-up would be creating more social events where faculty are



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encouraged or even required to participate because that is something that could be done by the social committee. Framing these events as a regular part of GGE culture where every quarter we have a potluck or event and everyone, faculty and students, are encouraged to come would be important for this to be successful. For the seminar idea, we need a group of grad students and faculty to develop a structure for the seminar and what kind of content would be appropriate. We'd need to make it distinct from the open lab meetings because I don't want to step on what they're doing already. But maybe something almost like a professional development seminar where students at the end of their degree who are preparing for their exit seminar or job talks for their next professional step could come and present a research plan as a practice run for a job interview. We could intermix these kinds of talks with alumni job talks similar to the seminar you ran last year where they discuss job options for recent graduates. For the mental health resources, starting with some sort of data collection like an anonymous survey would be helpful. We could ask people "have you used mental health services on campus or off campus, were they sufficient for you, what worked for you and what didn't work for you, how has the grad experience affected you mental health-wise." I personally don't think they're working, but maybe I'm biased so I think collecting some data to assess that at a larger scale and then using that information to identify the shortcomings to come up with programs that address those needs. I think streamlining the referral process to off campus resources would be the easiest and quickest to do. I also think proposing graduate seminars on emotional intelligence skills, healthy coping mechanisms, and ways of dealing with life and grad student specific trauma, so even if you aren't able to work with a mental health professional individually you still have access to these coping tools and camaraderie with other graduate students. That would probably require some consultation with the counselors on campus and grad studies, but I've seen similar seminars offered through grad studies before so I think it would just be a matter of working with them to set up a longer-term structure for that.

Fred Nelson, 2017 Cohort

Interviewed by Brandi Goss

Brandi: These last few years have been tough, in the world and in the GGE for a variety of reasons. As you reflect on your experience here at Davis, what have

been some keystone "species" or "structures" for you in the GGE or at Davis that helped you cope with these challenges?

Fred: Excellent question. I think about what a keystone does and you know we talk about keystone species as being important. But a keystone is also that big stone that holds the archway together and without it, it collapses. With that context, I'll say that we all have been struggling a lot and that has been a point of connection. You know, it's hard to go through a lot of stuff by yourself, so I can say "hey you're having a tough time ? Same!" and just having a support network of fellow students has kind of been like an informal mentorship network where I get some information and they get some and we trade back and forth. So those are the species, if you will. And I'll touch on the structures as well. There has always been this gap between what the university thinks we want and what we actually need. Even though these gaps exist, I'm comforted to know that people are at least talking about it and that helps keep me stable.

Brandi: I'm curious if you could expand a little on what you mean when you say there's a gap between what they think we need versus what we actually need?

Fred: Yeah, gone are the days of pizza parties and movie nights, let's be real, I got movies at home. And after the strike, the structures that be just resumed programming. It feels like we're in the Matrix movie but being constantly offered both the red and blue pill.



Brandi: Yeah, I understand that—this resumption of normalcy even though it feels like everything has changed.

Fred: Exactly, and who said normal was great to begin with? Normal is most of the students are depressed, normal is people working so hard, well over the 50%, and getting paid next to nothing. That's normal, and when people say they want to return to normal I respond with "you can, but I'm moving forward."

Brandi: In regards to the first piece you were talking about, with students in the program that you've really connected with, do you feel like that sense of community has changed over time?

Fred: Absolutely, I've realized that community does change, and change is the only constant in life. When we fight change, we fight people. People graduate and new ones enter, and everyone brings different values and that's not bad. Structures that were helpful and hip back in 2006, may not do much for us now.

Brandi: So would you say that a lot of the changes you've seen have been positive ones?

Fred: I feel like it's been a revolution in the sense that it revolves over time, so it's hard to say it's been mostly positive. It has been going in a direction. I will say that I love that students feel like they can speak up, now more than ever. Professors love to say "we're on a first name basis," but ignore the very real power dynamics at play.

Brandi: What is one keystone that you think is missing in the GGE or at Davis and why do you think it is critical for graduate students?

Fred: Reflection. The pandemic was an awful time for a lot of people, myself included, but it gave me a lot of time to slow down and think. Am I enjoying myself? Am I doing the things that I want to do? And am I willing to put my life and my health on the line for my research? So, reflection isn't bad, but it calls for a reevaluation of structures that were once good but in the current context might be detrimental. We are still missing that piece, and I see new students coming into the program kind of split—do we continue a tradition that has nothing to do with us, or do we

make our own lore? Do we create a new call to action? Or do we just put our heads down and do research? That's something we can all ask ourselves and reflect on.

Brandi: I like that answer a lot because I think it gets at the idea that those historical structures might still be working for some groups of people, but it requires a lot of reflection to understand who those groups of people are and who gets left out or for whom those structures are to their detriment.

Fred: Yeah, when I entered people were adamant about diversity and inclusion and I remember thinking to myself "who said I wanted to be included? Inclusion into structures that undermine my presence and are hostile to anyone who doesn't fit a certain mold?" So, I'm always thinking, what am I being included in exactly?

Brandi: Do you have any ideas about how to institute this reflection? What would it take to put it in motion?

Fred: This is something I've been thinking about a lot lately, sitting on too many committees and we'll spend all year talking about one thing and then another year trying to implement it and then when we implement it no one knows about it or has the bandwidth to continue it. So I'm always thinking "is this the best avenue?" I think about coming here knowing that I would have to advocate for myself in ways that seek to uplift and encourage other students. I'm convinced that the best way to institute change is just to create disruption. That's how things get done these days. It would take leadership to put that into motion.

ART AND SCIENCE

Refugium

Becca Nelson

The light you hold makes
the small tree flower

among split scree and tangled
cypress, so that a chorus

of bees fills the air,
so sweetness settles

on ashen soil, so that
everything is okay from

a long way off
in the scattered dazzle,

hummingbirds blur between
petals, almost snow but gentle

blankets the cliffs
in a soft bright shower.



Bats of Yolo Bypass, Zoe Wood

“day 68 and the trail had become a river”

*(as experienced by a weary thru-hiker on
a 148-day hike the Pacific Crest Trail)*

Zoe Wood

what were once icy traverses up sunrise passes,
which gave way to frozen lakes,
which gave way to pine trees –
have given way to slipping down slushing snow,
no matter the time of day, as the elevations
we now walk no longer freeze overnight.

It's true that my eyes welled as I entered the valley – I walked 900 miles to here - to Yosemite, that is - I felt this way with my arms outstretched, thumb up for a ride, ten, twenty, fifty cars passed, looks of confusion, amusement, disappointment in their fleeting glances.

Perhaps they saw the tape on my knee, an artefact of the pain in my shoulder and using my hiking poles less. Maybe they saw the stains in my clothes, which haven't been laundered in two weeks, save for a river rinse.

But I doubt they saw the purple mountainheath, or the *Streptanthus tortuosus* jewelflower, the *Primula* shooting stars or the forget-me-nots. If I were to guess, they also missed the chickadees flying low, the grouse and their young, the two coyotes that crossed my path in the meadow, and the bighorn sheep perched above the lakes.

They didn't see the day coming to a close atop Mount Whitney or the rainbow beside the waterfall as they turned the corner. I guess we both will have missed, however, the flowers that bloom in the aftermath of when the trail became a river.

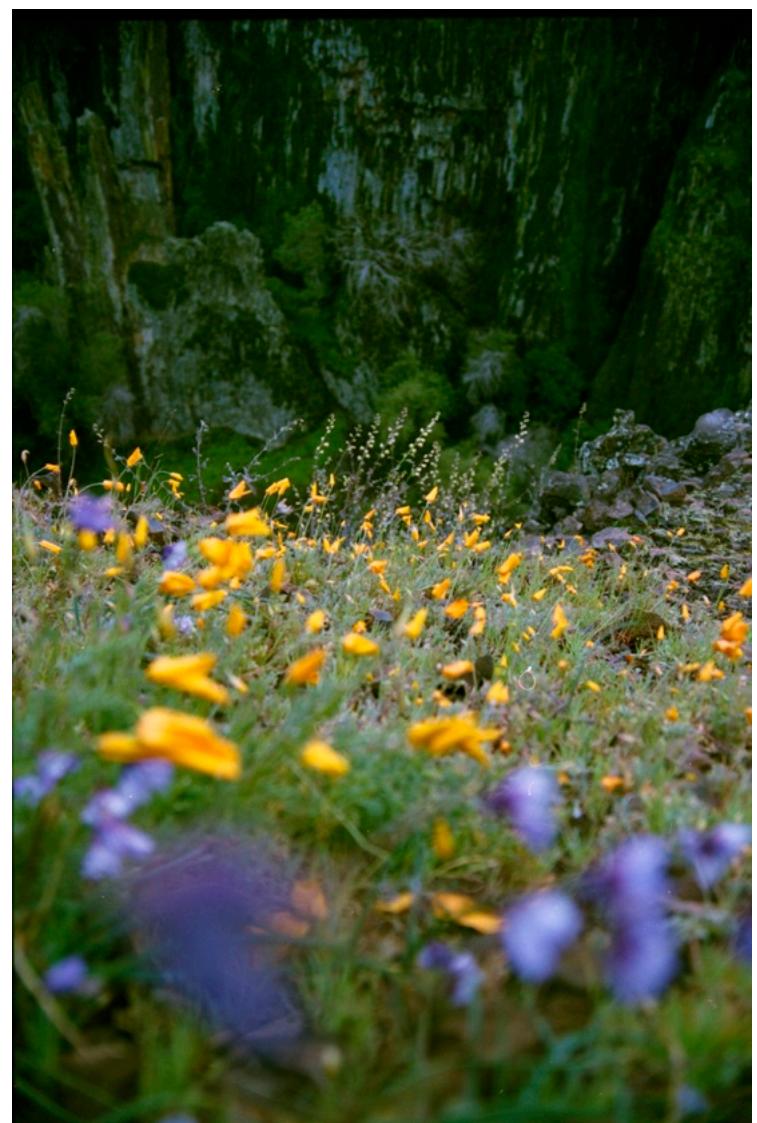


Table Mountain I, Zoe Wood



Table Mountain II, Zoe Wood

Capay Valley
Becca Nelson

The rain-sluiced stream
flushes with sediment.
Willow bud and burst
among first fiddleheads,
pursed amber.

The killdeer pierces,
rain calls. Rocks clatter,
squeezed by heat, pressure,
tectonic heaving, millions of years
left in streaked rivers
of quartz, fine mica

that maps to places
we want to remember
before the cold gravel tract
and the redbuds waiting to open.



*Felt Cute Might Delete Later #chickpic
(Tern Chick Blues), Kay Garlick-Ott*



*New logo for the Graduate Group in Ecology (GGE),
Ava-Rose Beech*



*Plastic potted plant
made of plastic debris
from the beach in
Hawai'i, Amanda Wong*

Academic Student Employee Contract Updates

Katie Lauck

EGSA Executive Committee Representative Katie would like to update everyone on the status of contract negotiations from last fall, and how they apply to our pay scales and employment going forward; read on for more!

In December, the grad student unions (UAW 2865, UAW-SRU) ratified a new contract with the UC, ending a six-week strike. The main changes were increases in salary, especially for the lowest-paid GSRs, and new protection against bullying supervisors.

For more information on the changes, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/2d8wtf66>.

We highly recommend that all GSRs and TAs check their offer letters for errors. In many cases, GSRs are being offered one or more steps lower than called for in the contract. While we are not union representatives, and can't guarantee that we got everything right, we wanted to pass on our basic understanding of how to check offer letters for accuracy.

1. TA salaries are easier. More information at <https://tinyurl.com/3xcxc32m>.
 1. At 50%, for Spring 2023, you should receive \$2777/mo pretax.
 2. At 50%, for Fall 2023, you should expect \$3236/mo pretax with fewer than 3 quarters of experience, \$3333/mo pretax if you have fewer than 6 quarters of experience and \$3433/mo pretax if you have more than 6 quarters of experience.
2. GSR salaries are more complicated. More information at <https://tinyurl.com/4kr6ff4k>.
 1. First step is to determine your "Step" or salary level.
 1. If you were hired as a GSR prior to the strike:
 1. Use this table to determine what step you should have been hired at: <https://tinyurl.com/2j2v6zp7>.
 2. Then, use this chart to transfer that step to the current salary scale: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9xsnbn>.
 2. If you were not hired as a GSR prior to the strike, use this section of the contract (item 3b) to determine your step: <https://tinyurl.com/3jb6da3p>.
 1. Summary: 0-2 quarters of GSR/TA at least 25%: Step 1. 3-5 quarters of GSR/TA at least 25%: Step 2. 6+ quarters of GSR/TA at least 25%: Step 3. There's no provision for increasing past step 3. Are you salty about it? Cuz I'm salty about it.
 2. Once you've determined your step, use this chart to determine your annual 12 month salary, i.e. "4/1/2023 Annual") <https://tinyurl.com/2p9xsnbn>.
 3. Finally, divide by 12 to estimate what you should be getting monthly pretax for Spring 2023. I haven't seen an equivalent chart for the Fall so if you want to look forward, I would recommend trying to use the union's resources: <https://tinyurl.com/4kr6ff4k>.

If you'd like help with deciphering this rabbit warren of horribly disseminated information, I'd recommend contacting our newly elected Unit Chair, Samantha, at msabbott@ucdavis.edu. She will be able to direct you to the right people. If you think your offer letter is incorrect, the fastest way to get it corrected is to reply to the person who sent it with what you think should be corrected. This is how I've gotten my offers corrected. If you want or need union backup, or are unsure of what is correct, Samantha is the person to contact. Good luck, all!!! Feel free to reach out if you have any questions or notice anything that needs correction: kslauck@ucdavis.edu

Can you spot the key(stones)?

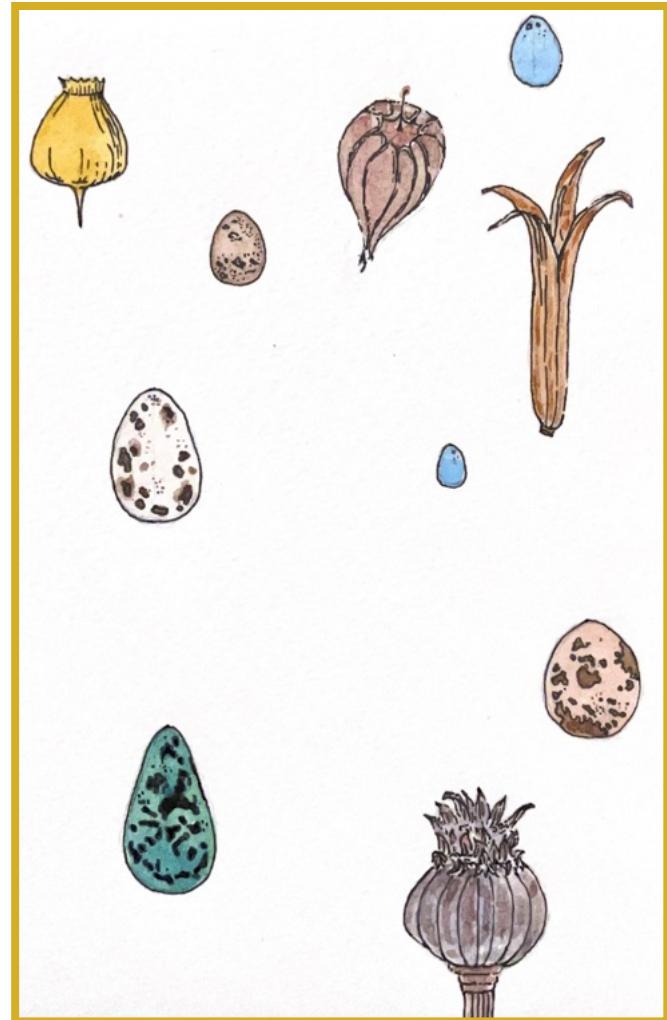
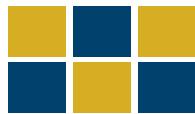
Search for some hobbies and things that support GGE students through graduate school- words or phrases can be forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonal!

ESYKAF I LB I HGO I DUT S TEPNTC
 SAMPAOGERDST JCP I HOZ X OQLMPOJ
 FDNZ I RVSZCZU I LADU J JWFKFVE JMH
 K CFGDAF YSZ SKRS
 SNGB I LGOD DQHT VARQ
 KILKP ITBDJV I KTDYY J RNMFOQMOTFXWBGKQ
 YBNF NNET JM V W J TFOODOWOLNPSSLSS J ENJW
 IHVGVDAMAACQQVXFQC I HKGUGXSS I BMIKJ
 ZIMQ I VHHOJ I SYTQSUPKNRPVLQCGAZCNDEH
 QYPHPN J Z J ZWKBDZVSACOGYRKOMTNZKXRVR
 YF I OKTGVAAUO I QSBKCLSMXTFLENAJVZIUE
 VDWTT C I YQE I OMPSURFINGNZBTSGNECBVS
 RAOSFPFUGFMBOARDNFOMHYFWFUCQAMUJALR
 OFD J LDGBATSODPOYEXBZEHEKTIOBYXRPUG
 DNR I ENLUPXCISKUTFRI I PTHOBMJNOMPECW
 RAMWELLNFLDHBIKBNNDODAMTABNWOLSL
 FWJQCWN AOUJD C M KTGZGCTYRLXVQON
 XFWDL SYVAGFFDABDYGIXEEEZHMHE
 BGFL OWE RARRANGINGUTHVCIVYW
 SNKHJ I EKQIWPDABHJC CVYXS
 UBRKSTUA INRCKUTZPOXTR
 ZCLTL YFZC NONVDUR
 OXAOKDGUE DVFONGCFY
 NYNPLYSKGKLPKBWWXV
 TLDYWEJSPPSJI
 MIFRVCPQCINN
 RUZRYEZSEDSCRYG
 CFGABWJYITZRRUF
 WL VHEOBDAHCIX
 MWORLELGEX
 VJBQLKRNEAYK
 HHXHLAZKPP
 BZPGMULQD
 IZBDALKELMOTY
 APTKYYTNOKAMI
 CYGZVEJBWKI
 TOLXLPBQIC
 HDRRQHS
 MBJKCJJTZ
 GN I KABKOE
 DXIWQFS
 VFJZCV
 VXB
 YL

Word Bank

Angling	Studio Ghibli	Surfing
Birding	Baking	Bananas
Flower Arranging	Ceramics	Crochet
Harry Potter Audiobooks	Food	Foraging
Pets	Instagram	Love Island
	Rock Climbing	Singing

THE AGGIE BRICKYARD



Artwork by Ava-Rose Beech

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**WANT TO GET INVOLVED?
COMMENTS, CORRECTIONS,
OR CONCERNs?**

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