

Alumni Profile

Irina C. Irvine, PhD – Ecology and Evolutionary Biology PhD Program



Career

Please provide a brief overview of your career path since graduating from UCI.

During my last few years of school, I was in the National Park Service career internship program at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. I was working in habitat restoration and conducting some of my PhD experiments in the park. After graduation, I became their permanent Restoration Ecologist where I stayed for five years. I recently transferred to the Pacific West Regional Office in San Francisco and now manage the region's Ocean and Coastal Resources Program. This includes all of the West Coast, Hawai'i, Guam and American Samoa parks, including the coral reef conservation program.

What made you get into the career that you are in?

The problems of the world are many and daunting. I saw the great need for good people to DO something to protect what we have and restore what has been lost.

What do you see yourself doing in five or ten years?

I love what I do and the people with whom I have the honor of working. I'll be working for the National Park Service until I retire or die, whichever comes first.

How do you hope to make a difference?

I know I make a difference one square meter at a time and teaching others to do the same. Collectively, we conserve what we can and restore what was degraded. I help national parks protect the treasures they are in charge of, I help train the next generation of ecologists and stewards.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

Sept 2006- Feb 2011

What program were you in?

Ecology and Evolutionary Biology.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

Excellent faculty (and the school's name resonated with me).

Reflections

Was there one thing or one person at UCI that really helped or made a difference in your graduate/postdoctoral career? If so, tell us about whomever or what it was?

Yes, Dr. Jennifer Martiny was my mentor and she was/is very good at it. She struck the perfect balance between close attention to my work and allowing me to be independent and explore my hunches (yes hunches are good, you just need to back them up with data). There were many times when I would say to her, "I have these really cool results, but I'm not exactly sure what they mean." She trained me to understand what they mean and write up my results in a meaningful, accessible way.

Alumni Life

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who is just getting started with their graduate career at UCI? (Examples – Podcast: *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*; Book: *Who Moved my Cheese*)

This may seem counterintuitive for a scientist but I recommend Malcolm Gladwell's Blink.

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Communicate with your committee often, they are on your team to help and guide you, even if you think what they are asking may take you a bit longer or seem unnecessary/annoying/fill in your adjective. Trust them.

What advice would you give to a current graduate student as they look towards their future careers?

If you can work it into your busy schedule, be a volunteer, take internships, or work in a related field to build your network and experience. This is vital for your CV because the world is so competitive now. It isn't enough just to have a few letters after your name. Experience and good references really help. Also, you get to learn what you don't want to do...and that is powerful information.

What person inspires you?

Dr. Jane Goodall. Her quote guides my life: "What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

Is there a typical 'down' weekend for you—how do you relax?

We're restoring our 1905 Victorian cottage, so my weekends for the past year are spent working on the house/money pit. It's not really relaxing but it is fulfilling. I'll go to the beach with my dog and hike in a lovely park when we're done to relax and get fresh air.