

Alumni Profile

Claudia Hardi – Master of Arts in Teaching Program



Career

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

Ever since graduating from UCI, I have been living the dream. I am currently teaching Biology and AP Biology at my alma mater, Beckman High School, and loving every moment of it. Sometimes I have to literally pinch myself to make sure that I am actually teaching at Beckman!

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

Growing up, I was always that one kid who would volunteer to read aloud, solve a math problem, or even help my peer understand a complex problem. I would play “school” with my stuffed animals and teach them what I was learning in class. Despite these indicators of interest, I did not fully realize my passion for teaching until high school when my Calculus AB teacher asked me to tutor one of my peers before the final. During this time, I realized how teaching is so much more than delivering instruction; it is also about building relationships and establishing connections. The peer I was tutoring was someone I rarely talked to during class, but during tutoring we established many commonalities. We talked about friends and career paths. We shared our high school experiences and how we saw these experiences fit into our futures. Sure, he learned how to solve integrals, but I would argue that I learned more. I learned that I loved to get to know other people and their stories through teaching.

There is no career like teaching; each and every day I have the opportunity to learn from and learn more about the incredible students who walk through my door. I seek to serve them as best as I can as their teacher so that they grow not only as students but as individuals. I strongly believe that every student has the ability to learn and the ability to impact the world positively...as long as they believe in themselves. My role is to learn about how each of them learns best so that I can support them on their journey of growth. To me, being a teacher is an absolute honor and privilege.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

I attended UCI as a graduate student during the 2017-2018 academic school year.

What program were you in?

I was a part of the Masters of Arts in Teaching program in the Education Department.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

Many teachers who I respect were credentialed through the UCI MAT program and spoke extremely highly of the program. As a result, I decided to look more into it by attending a "Coffee Chat." There I met Virginia Panish and Sue Vaughn (our MAT Single Subject Coordinator), who are two incredible individuals whose passion for education and equity were so evident that I knew I had to apply to the program in order to work with them. Having been through the program, I now know why my teachers and colleagues spoke so highly of the program and am so glad that I decided to apply!

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?

Though the program was filled with so many incredible professors and individuals, the one person who really made a difference in my (and I know many others) graduate career is Sue Vaughn. Sue worked tirelessly for us, always putting us first and seeking to do what was best for us. She cared for us outside of the program and genuinely wanted to see us succeed. In addition, she was extremely down-to-earth; she kept it real with us. She taught us that though this next year (and years to come) might be difficult, we just had to "hold on to our knot." In other words, we had to remember why we are doing what we are doing. She opened up to us about her own personal experiences and invited us to share our stories with her. I also had the incredible opportunity to work closely with her as a student representative who hosted events for our cohort and during this time, she trusted us to lead and provide support for our peers. She believed in us and encouraged us. We love you, Sue!

Above all else, Sue Vaughn is a major reason why I am at Beckman High School today. Without her leadership and support, I would not have been able to student teach at Beckman, which opened so many opportunities for me to build connections and become familiar with the school culture from a faculty standpoint. Therefore, Sue helped to make my dream come true, and for that I am forever grateful.

Alumni Life

What is the most unexpected life lesson that you gained from your time at UCI?

I'm not perfect. This might seem obvious, but to be honest, for me it was tough. From a young age, I was always been the "gung-ho" overachiever who strives for near-perfection (because we all know perfection is impossible). I believed that everything I did was a reflection of who I was, so I sought to try my absolute best in everything and minimize the chance of me making mistakes. However, in a career like teaching, many factors are out of your control. For example, before the first day of school, you don't know who your students will be. Much less, you don't know what academic and life experiences they have had walking into your classroom. Furthermore, you can't control what emergencies might arise in the middle of that

lesson you spent ten hours planning yesterday. Therefore, I've really learned to roll with the punches. Of course, I still put 110% into everything I complete and what I have control over, but I've learned to be more flexible with how lessons and events turn out. Teaching is all about adapting to your students and the learning environment. I constantly ask myself what is best for them? Sometimes it is exactly what you planned. But other times it is not...and that is completely okay. In those moments, I have to trust my instincts--as a teacher who cares about my students--to make the best decision possible for them. In short, I've learned to do my best, but also let go of the uncontrollable.

How do you balance work/life?

Over time, I've learned that you have to make time for what matters to you. How you spend your time dictates what you deem to be most important. For me, relationships are everything. That's a huge reason why I decided to pursue teaching; I love getting to know the stories and experiences that my students enter my classroom with so that I can make my classroom a welcoming environment they can learn in. However, I also truly value the relationships that I have outside of school, with my friends and family. These people keep me centered, remind me of who I am, and live life with me. Above all of that, they share their stories with me and allow me to be a part of their life journey, which is such an honor. Therefore, I make it a priority to carve out time to spend with my friends and family--whether it is going to brunch or watching a movie--every week. In addition to spending time with my special people, I also dedicate time every day to my faith by reading the Bible, listening to praise music, going to church, and/or leading worship. My faith is a central part of who I am, and reminds me of why I am doing what I am doing. It gives me hope and the strength and hope to persist in the midst of difficulties.