

Student Profile

Julian Merchant – Master of Arts in Teaching Program



Career

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

After graduating from college, I worked a vast number of different jobs. I worked in a traditional office as an urban planner with the Federal government. I was a barista at a hip coffee shop in San Francisco. I guided a group of teenagers across the country on bicycles. I've also flown drones in Japan while filming a surf contest. My post-college life has been filled with seemingly random opportunities, which I now realize have shaped me into the person I am today.

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

I decided to become a teacher because of a need to make the world a better place. After working several different jobs I wasn't passionate about, I realized that I wanted to spend my life making knowledge and education more enjoyable for kids. When I look back on my most memorable experience, most of them involve mentoring or coaching. I decided to pursue teaching as a way of making a difference in the lives of teenagers.

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

In five years, I hope to be established as an English teacher in an innovative school district. I would like to coach sports or lead clubs at my school. I am passionate about the guitar and music, so I would like to start a songwriting club. Outside of school, I would like to travel and see as much of the world as possible. Hopefully via bike.

How do you hope to make a difference?

My main goal is to inspire kids to enjoy reading. When I look at the massive impact books had on my own life, I feel the need to share that knowledge with young people. I hope to inspire my students to think outside the box and create a life they are proud of.

Your Time at UCI

What program are you in?

I am in the MAT and teacher credential program in the Department of Education.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

I chose to attend UCI because of the amazing things I heard about the MAT program. I have a friend who attended the program a few years ago, and she always speaks of the life-altering impact UCI had on her life. I wanted to be a part of that legacy and as prepared as I could to teach at the highest level.

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

When I decided to become a teacher, I thought about taking a shortcut and teaching in a state that doesn't require a teaching credential. However, after learning about the MAT program at UCI, I decided that I wanted to sacrifice a year to learn as much as I could about education. I know that I will enter the classroom extremely well prepared to become not only a respected teacher, but a leader in education.

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI?

My most memorable experience at UCI is my first day of student teaching. As soon as I stepped into my classroom at OCSA, I knew that I had made the right decision to become a teacher. I immediately felt at home and despite only having a few weeks of classes, I felt prepared to become an impactful teacher.

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*)

As a former urban planner, I love the 99% Invisible podcast. Most of the episodes are fascinating and they get you to think differently about your environment.

What book or podcast would you suggest to someone who has just graduated and is transitioning to the working world? (Examples – *The First 90 Days*)

*The one book that rises to the top is *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. This is one of the most life-changing books I have ever read. Aside from being an introduction to Stoicism, it's a book packed with practical life advice – perfect for new graduates. Be sure to get the Gregory Hays translation.*

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

I would say to relax and take one thing at a time. Since I've been out of school for a few years now, I was worried that I had lost my academic mindset. It was tough at first, but I stuck with assignments. Readings that would have taken me 10 minutes in the past took me much longer to process. Once I got back into the swing of things, I started to really enjoy my classes. I now love being back at school despite the initial growing pains.

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

I would advise graduate students to write down their future goals. I sit down once a month and write them all down. I find it helps me focus on where I want to be and helps me block out the negativity.

What are your hobbies/passions outside of your work/research?

I have many passions aside from teaching. I enjoy playing guitar, creative writing, surfing, traveling, and cycling. Recently, I have been getting more into health, nutrition, and meditation.

How do you balance work/life?

I do my best to set aside specific hours to do my work. I find that if I don't establish a schedule, I end up working on homework all day and drive myself crazy. I like to get my homework done and then exercise, read, and spend time with my friends.

What person inspires you?

My younger sister, Sarah, who just graduated from Teacher's College at Columbia University is my biggest source of inspiration. Seeing how she handles anything that is thrown her way with such grace inspires me to try my best in school and in life. She's my hero.

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

On a typical weekend day, I like to go surfing, meet up with friends for brunch, or take a day trip to explore a new area of Southern California. So far, I have enjoyed visiting Carlsbad, Malibu, and Julian (best town name I've heard).