

Student Profile

Erika Libiar Estrada – Master of Public Policy Program



Your Time at UCI

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

For some time, I had been ruminating on the idea of a graduate degree, and it so happened that application season coincided with a lot of political turmoil--domestically and internationally. Coincidentally, I started coming across a lot of research on the comparative effectiveness of different cancer treatments (at that time I was working on a Ductal Carcinoma in Situ (DCIS) project at work). In this setting, I met a DCIS patient that had a lasting impression on me. She had lost it all. A policy reform had made it nearly impossible for her to afford her medication. I was speechless. There was nothing I could do to help her or comfort her. It felt dishonest to tell her it would be okay, as I didn't know what reforms would be implemented next. Several weeks passed, and I was still haunted by her. I knew she wasn't the only one, and I wanted to learn about how and why that was so. A month later I decided to apply to graduate school in Public Policy for patients like her, the community at large, and to represent Latin@s in a place they are too often ignored.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

After meeting with different schools, UCI felt like the obvious choice. The department was extremely welcoming, the campus was inviting, and most importantly...the students were happy! Meeting students in the program, and hearing about their coursework, opportunities, and experiences made me realize it was the perfect fit! I wanted to not only gain an education, but a network filled with excited and motivated students ready to make a difference!

If you are conducting research, how would you explain your research and its significance to your grandparent?

My work focuses on understanding the public processes and systems you encounter and whether such things are doing their job. In example, healthcare...are the ACA reforms beneficial to you? How have they impacted your life? Are they working? What has been difficult or beneficial?

What are your hobbies/passions outside of research?

I love the outdoors, as such, I try to spend as much time as I can hiking new trails and forcing my dog Newton to socialize! Which coincides with my passion for advocacy, and highlighting the need for environmental conservation and animal rights. Additionally, volunteering has played a large role in my life. Since the age of 16, I have been volunteering with an organization called Advance! On to College. At Advance! anyone wishing to pursue higher education is given free 1:1 counseling! We help with college applications, financial aid, admissions essays, and scholarships free of charge. And last but not least is photography, capturing moments in time has become one of my favorite pastimes.

Reflections

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI to date?

The lobby trips to Washington DC and Sacramento on behalf of graduate students at UCI were the culminating experiences of my first year! They combined by passions for advocacy and public policy. Where having the opportunity to practice some of the things I had learned throughout the year made it especially exciting and validating! Additionally, being able to share those experience with members of my cohort made it especially memorable.

Career

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

In ten years I see myself working in government relations, still advocating for the environment and animal rights, and volunteering with organizations aiming to make the future a better place.