

Alumni Profile

Sharon Shenhav - Psychology & Social Behavior PhD Program



Career

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

Soon after I graduated, I began a post-doctorate position. My post-doctorate position primarily provided me with additional time to work on my publications, particularly ones that were based off of my dissertation. Additionally, it gave me the

opportunity to be exposed to other related areas of research.

During my post-doc, I moved abroad. While I learned that some aspects of academia were similar to the U.S., there are also important differences that I'm still learning about and adjusting to. In terms of my research, I've been thinking through the ways that I can extend and apply my current research interests/expertise to another culture. In addition to my post-doc, I privately tutored graduate students writing their theses in Psychology and began to work as a freelance academic editor.

How do you hope to make a difference?

Much of my research focuses on intercultural romantic relationships and the ways in which families respond to young adults' relationships. Both in my research and anecdotally, I have found that when individuals date someone of another culture, it can result in family conflict. I hope to make a difference in the ways in which families communicate about this area of conflict, as well as find solutions to ease the stress and anxiety that can result from this type of conflict. Subsequently, I hope to find connections between improving family communication on the topic of intercultural relationships and promoting more positive intergroup attitudes. Exactly how I'll achieve these goals is still a work in process, but I hope to do so through research and teaching, as well as through workshops and writing articles in outlets geared toward the general public.

Your Time at UCI

When did you attend UCI?

Fall 2011-Spring 2017.

What program were you in?

Psychology and Social Behavior (now called Psychological Science).

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

Choosing to come to UCI involved a lot of consideration, weighing pros and cons of various programs, and thinking through where I could see myself fitting in best. In the end, I chose UCI because I felt that it was a good fit in terms of my research interests, as well as thinking that the working style and personality of my advisor would be a good match (and indeed it was!). I also liked that being exposed to and involved in more than one lab was encouraged.

When I came to UCI for my interview, I found that I actually enjoyed my time both during my conversations with various professors as well as interacting with the current graduate students. Before I made my decision, I also made a point to talk with current graduate students to ask them about their experiences in the program as well as other aspects of their lives, such as their social lives. Students appeared to, overall, be happy with their decision to have attended UCI and, after visiting and speaking with graduate students from other programs, I can confidently say that this was not the case everywhere.

I additionally considered funding and, of course, the paradise-like location of Southern California which differed vastly from the frosty northeast that I was coming from.

Reflections

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

*When I was an undergraduate, I ended up becoming a psychology major out of a process of elimination – that is, I went through the list of possible majors and decided what I did **not** want to major in and was left with psychology. I found some of the introduction courses interesting but wasn't yet sold on making psychology my career path. I then enrolled in Research Methods with an inspiring professor and found out that I loved research. I found myself staying up late totally engaged in designing a research study for our final project. From there, I took another engaging course with the same professor and completed an independent study project with her. I worked for 3 years before I came to UCI and, as I gained additional exposure to research, I found that this was something that I could see myself enjoying making a career out of and decided to apply for graduate programs.*

What is your most memorable moment/experience at UCI?

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?

*I can't answer with just **one** thing so I'll say that the friendships I made within the program made a huge difference during my graduate career, and still do today. Because I moved to California without support from a physically close-by social network, having close personal connections with a few other students helped me not only adjust to the new surroundings, but also to get through the more stressful periods of graduate school. I'm still in touch with those same friends and now we help each other navigate current and future career decisions, as well as matters of work-life balance.*

Additionally, I felt extremely lucky that I ended up with two advisors that I felt truly had my best interest at heart throughout my time in the program, and they still continue to do so today.

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*)

For anyone interested in close relationships, I recommend the website Luvze.com which includes both articles written by relationship researchers in an easy and fun to read format, as well as podcasts focused on various topics in the close relationships literature.

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*)

*I'm currently reading *The Gratitude Diaries* by Janice Kaplan and recommend it highly. The author weaves in interesting research findings about gratitude across various aspects of life – relationships, money, career – and, at the same time, tells her story about how she implemented these research conclusions/lessons into her own life. I've found it helps to put things in perspective, especially when feeling uncertainty about the future.*

Pro tip: Reading the book while sitting at an outdoor café or on the beach heightens feelings of gratitude 😊

What advice do you have for a new graduate student?

Prioritize friendships. Having a social support system will help you to adjust to the demands of graduate school and those same people will also be the people to celebrate achievements with.

I also made an effort to meet people outside of graduate school, which helped me to stay balanced. As much as I valued my friendships with other graduate students, it was

also refreshing to sometimes hang out with friends who were entirely unconnected to that part of my life.