

Student Profile

Kristen Goodrich – Social Ecology PhD Program



Your Time at UCI

What made you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

Before starting my PhD program at UCI, I worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and later was based at a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Estuarine Research Reserve. Much of my professional experience involved translating science to environmental decision-making, primarily in the natural sciences. After being situated in a highly urbanized and binational setting, however, I

felt that to effectively understand system changes across time and climate impacts on coastal ecosystems, for example, we must consider the human dimension as well. Although I had my Masters degree in Marine Affairs and Policy, I wanted to expand my worldview and learn the skills that would allow me to conduct research and see the science-to-management relationship from a different perspective.

Why did you choose to come to UCI?

The School of Social Ecology! When I began exploring programs and evaluating their fit, I was elated to find a school dedicated to supporting interdisciplinary scholarship with such a vibrant history. The School, grounded by three departments, each focuses on the study of relationships between people and their environments. As such, I had the opportunity to take courses within the School of Social Ecology and across the University. This would allow me to explore multiple disciplinary perspectives not only in theory and through method, but also in practice while learning from respected scholars in areas of policy, human security, and team science.

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

Grandma, have you ever experienced a flood? People in the community I study in Tijuana do every time it rains. Except there, sewage, sediment, and trash come along with the flood waters. And downstream, the sediment and trash-laden floodwaters choke and pollute the Tijuana Estuary, one of the last intact wetlands left in southern California. This situation is an example of the relationship between people and

environment – social ecology – what I study at UCI. It plays out all over the world, especially in urban areas. I'm trying to learn more about this relationship, and by talking to the people who live there, perhaps we can understand when nature helps and harms people, and together, identify creative ways to improve quality of life in flood prone areas while protecting the environment. Win-win!

What are your hobbies/passions outside of research?

You can find me in or on the ocean anytime I'm not working. Right now, I'm training for a stand up paddleboard race to fundraise for the World Wildlife Fund. I brew beer with hops I grow and won an award for a recipe I lost (never to be replicated!). Recently, my husband and I bought our first home. Although it's tiny, it's historically designated, so we spend a lot of our time planning for (and sometimes doing!) restoration projects.

Reflections

What are you most proud of accomplishing (so far) in your graduate program?

In 2016, I was awarded the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation Fellowship. They recently featured my work here: <https://www.switzernetwork.org/leadership-story/kristen-goodrich-flood-resilience-us-mexico-border-region>. I am honored to be part of such amazing cohort of talent and leadership in the environmental fields. On the shoulders of the Switzer network, I have felt supported to explore equity and the ways I engage as a researcher as a foundation of my personal and professional impact. Through the fellowship, I've also been able to develop my research portfolio to include an area of great interest and importance to me, psycho-social resilience among environmental professionals.

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

The Flood Resilient Infrastructure and Sustainable Environments (FloodRISE) project has offered me an enormous opportunity to be embedded in an interdisciplinary research team and explore the process of the co-production of science with community. My research has been primarily based in a canyon community vulnerable to flooding, Los Laureles, Tijuana. As we geared up to conduct a household level survey, we were able to secure the participation of a group of incredible women who were survey enumerators for the Mexican census, many of who lived in the community we were studying. What seemed like insurmountable challenges to us (canyon conditions, terrain, access) was attainable to them. While celebrating their achievement (over 350 completed surveys) at the end of our time in the field, one of the women expressed that by being a part of the project, it made her more aware of her vulnerability to flooding and that she was taking action to prepare her own home and encouraging her community to do the same. For me, that moment felt like an authentic step towards

engaged scholarship, and has encouraged me to keep imagining ways to collaborate with community partners to design questions that need to be answered and learn from their knowledge and expertise.

Career

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

I look towards my dissertation research and beyond, with the goal of continuing my work in southern and Baja California, a microcosm of the delicate state of our planetary and human condition. I see enormous potential to build a social science platform and research agenda that promotes binational, interdisciplinary, and university-community approaches to some of our most pressing environmental challenges - pollution, land use change, habitat and biodiversity loss, changes to our biophysical processes, climate change impacts – and apply what is learned about human perceptions and behavior to inform policy and strengthen programs.

How do you hope to make a difference?

Leadership can be overt and it can be subtle. It can take shape in the generation of new ideas and often the investment of the 'heart work', a term that my colleagues in community development use, that it takes for those ideas to become tangible. I know leaders whose palpable strength is felt behind-the-scenes through planning, convening, and negotiating. These leaders create spaces for co-leadership, collaboration, and progress. The structural foundations they build allow for individual and collective strengths to radiate. I hope to take what I've gained at UCI – a transdisciplinary orientation and action research perspective – and at a time where we must hasten our steps towards resilience, like them, lead by listening.