



# DECADE Press

## DECADE's Recent Achievement: A Brief Discussion with Associate Dean Susan Coutin

by Sara Villalta



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### ABOUT DECADE

Diverse Educational Community and Doctoral Experience (DECADE) aims to increase the number of women and underrepresented minorities receiving doctoral degrees at UCI.

### CONTACT US

You can reach Jessica Pruetz, 2016-2017 Editor for the DECADE Press, at [pruetzj@uci.edu](mailto:pruetzj@uci.edu)

Dr. Susan Coutin has been Associate Dean of Graduate Division since 2010, and has been a part of DECADE since its initial stages. I sat down with her to discuss Graduate Division's recent achievement of matching the number of underrepresented minorities at the graduate level to that of the undergraduate level in 2010, when the idea for DECADE first came into being. Dr. Coutin explained that her involvement with DECADE started the moment Dean Leslie came to her and her colleagues on a Monday and announced that she had a desire to apply to a comprehensive grant competition through the Department of Education. Since Grad Division had the goal of increasing diversity at the graduate level, and the grant could be used in the pursuit of that goal, Dean Leslie, Associate Dean Coutin, and the remainder of the team were adamant about applying, despite the five-day window between *that* Monday and Friday—the proposal deadline. The team consequently cleared their calendars, and after a week of round-the clock work the idea of DECADE transformed from a more abstract concept to the model that we are familiar with today. Dr. Coutin remembers this time vividly; she recalls working so intensely that there came a point when she had to complete a portion of the revisions for the grant proposal by midnight, only to have her colleague send the proposal back with their subsequent revisions by three in the morning, so Dr. Coutin could continue to work on the proposal. Considering the recent progress in graduate diversity, their commendable efforts have not been in vain.



DECADE's mission extends beyond increasing diversity among graduate students

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Before ending our discussion, I asked Dr. Coutin why she personally believed reaching that initial DECADE and Grad Division goal, which she and her colleagues worked so tirelessly to put into grant proposal form, is important for UCI. She replied by stating, "There's many reasons why it's important for UCI. Number one, we want everyone who has the potential to pursue a PhD, we want everyone who has the talent to be able to do that. We don't want certain communities not being able to pursue those goals. That, I would say, is the bottom line. We want to promote excellence in every way and we can't promote excellence unless we have an opportunity for everyone to pursue [their] goals to the degree that they're capable of." Additionally, Dr. Coutin explained that DECADE's mission extends beyond increasing diversity among graduate students. The mission aims for a diverse professoriate and scientific community as well—an aspiration that cannot be realized without a diverse graduate population. Lastly, the Associate Dean expressed her belief in the power of diversity and its subsequent effect on creativity. She believes diversity "can contribute to increasing creativity" by merely including people from different backgrounds with different experiences and different perceptions. These dynamics "can improve a whole team, a whole cohort, that's going through [a] doctoral program."

When asked if she had any closing remarks, Dr. Coutin emphasized that the work she has done for and with DECADE has inspired her in terms of her own research and teaching, her commitment to being a faculty member, and is one of the things she's proudest of as Associate Dean. As DECADE Recruitment Co-Chair and, most importantly, as a first-generation graduate student, I left our brief meeting feeling truly grateful that there are people in influential positions who are fully committed to diversity, within the university system and beyond.

*Dr. Susan Coutin is concluding her term as Associate Dean in Graduate Division at the end of June 2017. On behalf of Graduate Dean Frances Leslie, we want to thank her for her exemplary service in this role and for all her contributions to DECADE.*

## Congratulations to Graduate Student Recipients of the Following Awards!

### 2017 Faculty Mentor Program Award

#### Award Recipients

Gabriela Gonzalez, Criminology, Law and Society  
Daniel Jaimes, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering  
Mariela Rivas, Education

#### Honorable Mentions

Katherine Cosby, History  
Vanessa Delgado, Sociology  
Georgia Halkia, Public Health  
Amy Shine, Drama and Theater  
John Peca-Medlin, Mathematics  
Benjamin Vig, Mathematics

### 2017 President's Dissertation Year Fellowship Award

#### Award Recipients

Dominique Ingato, Chemical and Biochemical Engineering  
Anna Kwa, Physics and Astronomy  
Meredith Lee, Culture and Theory  
Colleen Nell, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
Veronica Newheart, Education  
Sara Sameni, Biomedical Engineering

#### Honorable Mention

Chad Palumbo, Chemistry



# Looking Back, Moving Forward:

**An Interview with Former DECADE Leader and UCI Graduate Dr. Jessica Kizer**

by Miles Davison

DECADE was founded in 2010 with the goal of increasing recruitment and retention for diverse graduate students at UCI by 2020. DECADE thrives with learning and leadership opportunities, and the DECADE community has grown due to the efforts of graduate students across campus. One of these students is Dr. Jessica Kizer, a recent graduate from the Sociology Department at UCI and future faculty member in the Sociology Department at Pitzer College. Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with Jessica and speak with her about her involvement with DECADE over the years. In this article, I will share three key pieces of information from that interview that I feel will



inspire graduate students to get more involved in DECADE and their local communities.

***One: DECADE started with a few students in a small room.***

Jessica began graduate school in the first year of DECADE's existence. As a former McNair scholar, she came to UCI with an appreciation for diversity and a desire to be involved at the graduate level. When she started Competitive Edge in the summer of 2010, she was the only student from the Social Sciences, as the program was primarily STEM-focused. Rather than feeling discouraged, Jessica saw the potential in DECADE and sought to recruit more students from the social sciences. As Jessica recalls, the first DECADE meeting

consisted of about five students. Despite the relatively low numbers, the students were dedicated to growing DECADE by providing various outlets to highlight diversity. For Jessica, this meant being involved in starting the DECADE Journal Club and editing the first edition of the DECADE Press. While DECADE is currently a large organization that offers plenty of workshops, events and school-based councils, it began as a small contingent of graduate students who wanted to make a difference.

***Two: DECADE can be a source of career preparation.***

As a leader in DECADE, Jessica had the opportunity to participate in numerous leadership positions that will

The DECADE community has grown due to the efforts of graduate students across campus.

serve her in her future career. Most notably, Jessica appreciated the opportunities for mentorship that DECADE provided, as they allowed her to gain

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experience that served her well in the job market. Unexpectedly, Jessica also gained valuable experience being on the DECADE council, as she learned more about the administrative operations behind DECADE as she met with Deans and worked with members of Graduate Division on various initiatives. Therefore, Jessica feels that in addition to the welcoming community, the leadership opportunities in DECADE also provided her with invaluable experiences that will aid her as she plans to advocate for diversity in a larger capacity as a professor.

***Three: DECADE can be what we want it to be.***

DECADE recently reached its goal of matching undergraduate diversity, and this goal would not have been met without the efforts of students like Jessica Kizer. When speaking with Jessica, it became apparent that the DECADE community is successful today because of the graduate students that were motivated to build the organization. Moving forward, DECADE can continue to thrive, but it will be up to us—and future students—to continue to grow, improve and create new avenues for highlighting diversity on campus. If I've learned anything from speaking with Jessica, it's that our actions may contribute to something larger than we immediately realize, and that even a small meeting with five motivated people can grow into a vibrant, inclusive community.

*Dr. Jessica Kizer is a recent graduate from the Sociology Department at UCI. Her research examines how skin color affects criminal justice, educational and labor market outcomes. She will join the Sociology Department at Pitzer College as a faculty member in the fall.*

## DECADE Journal Club: Spring 2017



DECADE graduate students and faculty mentors gathered in the GRC to discuss the article "Performance Feedback, Power Retention, and the Gender Gap in Leadership" by Bear, Cushenbery, London, and Sherman.



## 2016 DECADE Mentor Graduate Diversity Award Presentations

DECADE's Mentor Graduate Diversity Awards (MGDA) allow Faculty Mentors to support activities that improve recruitment, climate, academic progress and career success for a diverse graduate student



DECADE Faculty Mentor recipients of the 2016 MGDA discussed the progress of their programs, and their impact for diverse student populations.

# Community Meeting: Diversity and Leadership in the Lab, Classroom, and Beyond

by Henry Lem

This quarter's DECADE community meeting focused on the role of leadership in mobilizing students to make impacts in their respective communities. Three main themes emerged from this meeting: "leadership" as service to others, the role of leadership in the classroom, lab, and community, and leadership as a necessary skill for success in graduate school and beyond.

The meeting began with students providing their definition of "leadership." Many students agreed that leadership meant being a good role model to those around them, and assisting others in becoming the best versions of themselves. From this discussion emerged one very similar theme about leadership: one's ability to serve others in an unselfish manner, which leads others to feel empowered and inspired to make an impact in their work and community.

Another student then commented on how the thought of "leadership" brings up images of a white male in higher positions, who does not know how to mentor or lead a team. This comment propelled discussion towards thinking about the types of leadership witnessed in the graduate experience. As one student from STEM expressed, lab-mates tend to veer away from collaboration or assisting peers, but those who demonstrate leadership

will often take the initiative to think through some of the issues together, even though they differ in research specialties. A student from HASS then returned to the issue of race and gender in leadership. She explained how age and gender posed certain challenges in asserting her leadership in the classroom. As a woman of color in a leadership role, she felt students implicitly challenged her leadership since students often mistook her for a student.

At this point, discussion shifted gears from leadership in the classroom/lab, to leadership in the community. One student expressed how as an instructor of color, he found it helpful to lead students as instructor and an ally, especially for students who self-identify as diverse. DECADE Student Council members then explained how their roles have helped to shape their confidence as leaders for diversity and inclusive excellence. One council member was able to contextualize how he came to be in a leadership role. Having lacked a sense of belonging, diversity leaders had reached out to him to join the community, which inspired him to begin empowering others in a leadership capacity.

Finding opportunities for leadership can be difficult given the hectic work schedule of graduate school, as one student explained. Yet most students agreed that leadership is a skill worth developing to build and sustain a community of trust and solidarity.

***DECADE is dedicated to positively reshaping the graduate community, and we are always looking for the next leaders in student diversity and excellence. We welcome any inquiries about how you can start making an impact in DECADE at the school or departmental level.***

# Introducing DECADE's 2017-2018 Student Council

## **Co-chair (STEM)**

Sara Sameni, Biomedical  
Engineering

## **Public Relations**

### **Co-chair (Lead Editor)**

Nestor Tulagan, Education

## **Co-chair (HASS)**

Martín Jacinto, Sociology

## **Public Relations**

### **Co-chair (Social Media)**

Ceazar E. Nave, Physiology  
and Biophysics

## **Secretary**

Michelle E. Zuñiga, Planning,  
Policy, and Design

## **Education Chair**

Taffeta Wood, Education

## **Recruitment Co-Chairs**

Miles Davison, Sociology  
Sara I. Villalta, Sociology

## **Campus Coordinator**

Francisco Carranza,  
Microbiology and Molecular  
Genetics

