

# CMSI Lead Mentor Impact Statement

## LEAD MENTOR PROGRAM:

A first of its kind for coastal and marine sciences at UC Davis, the Lead Mentor position is modeled on successful programs on campus for other majors and colleges. The main goals are to foster a sense of community within the Marine and Coastal Science major, enrich students' experience with professional development training, and connect students to mentorship and work experience opportunities.



The 2020-2021 academic year was unusually challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic, continuous waves of reckonings with social injustice, and the purely virtual nature of our work. It was daunting to launch a new program in this climate, but I learned so much from this experience.

I am the first child of Indian immigrants and did not have a marine science career mold that I could easily follow or an established mentorship structure I could rely on. So, it was such a pleasure to develop resources about demystifying the process between undergraduate coursework and post-Bachelor's degree career options, improving the students' sense of community, and providing support to marginalized scientists within the MCS program. And, spending time

with bright, curious undergraduate marine scientists in our virtual classroom was an energizing and restorative weekly event in a truly tough year.

Overall, this was an incredibly rewarding experience that opened my eyes to the creativity and organization involved in program management, while also demonstrating to me how truly enjoyable and invigorating mentorship is.

- Priya Shukla

## A little bird told us...



Claire McKinley, PhD  
@c\_mckinley



IMPORTANT: Today in class we were talking about goals and someone put in a plug for [@priyology](#)'s mentorship courses and another student wrote in the chat "Our Queen Priya".

11:12 PM · Mar 10, 2021



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*When undertaken with the utmost integrity, the lead mentor position has the potential to be a bridge between students and niche resources, act as a stellar guide for undergraduate leadership teams, and become a pivotal force in the academic journeys of undergraduate students. The lead mentor role provides a unique space for students like me to reach out and have conversations about exploration and student experiences that I would be initially too intimidated to have with faculty.*

*Priya's excellent facilitation skills, ability to channel authenticity in professional contexts, and capacity to innovate, all contributed greatly in creating a welcoming atmosphere in the Professional Development and Career Discovery courses she taught. Through taking those courses, frequenting her office hours, and working closely with her on the Marine Science Club's leadership team, I am significantly more equipped and confident in navigating my career possibilities as a Marine and Coastal Science major."*

- MCS Major, Jacqueline Rajerison

# Timeline

- Fall Quarter: Professional Development
- Winter Quarter: Career Discovery
- Spring Quarter: Journal Club
- Year-Round:
  - Mentor/Mentee Program (Fall - Spring)
  - Marine Science Club Mentorship
  - Resources on Website
  - Research Opportunities Database



## Classes

**Lead Mentor Role:** Priya designed three first-time courses in the 2020-2021 academic year that catered to undergraduate students: professional development (Fall 2020), career discovery (Winter 2021), and journal club (Spring 2021). Priya used her expertise to write lectures on a variety of topics and capitalized on her network to invite guest speakers to join the students throughout the year. She also designed notebooks for reflections on the discussion topics for the Winter and Spring quarter seminars that have since been adopted by other classes and programs on campus.

## Professional Development Seminar - Fall

**Description:** The professional development seminar for sophomore, junior, and first-year transfer students interested in a career in the marine science attempt to teach students (1) how science works, (2) skills that will make them a successful student, and (3) how to find career experiences during their time as undergraduates that will prepare them for careers after completing their Bachelor's degree.

**Examples of Class Topics:** Academic Science, Science Writing, Applying to Grants/Jobs/Graduate School, Science Ethics

**# of Students: 12**

**# of Guest Speakers: 7**

**Diversity of Majors:**

- Marine & Coastal Science (10)
- Evolution, Ecology & Biodiversity (1)
- Environmental Science & Management (1)

**Diversity of Colleges:**

- Biological Sciences (6)
- Agriculture & Environmental Science (3)
- Letters & Science (3)

**Reviews:**

“ This course was amazing!!! I learned something new every single class and Priya is an exceptional instructor. This class helped me connect more with my major and made me more excited about my future in Marine Science.”

“ I loved [this course]! It made me feel very supported as a student. It made me realize that there was so much I didn't know about the field in general. I obtained information that would be personally difficult for me to find otherwise.”

“ Priya is so understanding and flexible and did an absolutely incredible job of setting expectations and creating a very well-thought out and detailed class even with its own cool website!! She's also funny :)”

“ [Priya is] very self aware and actively works to improve the class and how it's run. She comes across as professionally authentic, like you can tell how real she is while being the professional. She models resourcefulness and encourages the class to strive to be so as well. She seems very earnest to pass down her knowledge and I really appreciated that energy. I felt incredibly supported by her.”

## Career Discovery Seminar - Winter

**Description:** This career exploration seminar for juniors, seniors and transfer students in the marine sciences consisted of a casual conversation with guest speakers, who span different marine science career paths at different stages. Students were also encouraged to attend Resume-building, Job-Finding, and Interviewing workshops that were offered outside of class via UC Davis' Internship and Career Center.

**Examples of Class Topics:** Research Diving, Boundary Spanning, Academic Careers

**# of Students: 23**

**# of Guest Speakers: 19**

**Diversity of Majors:**

- Marine & Coastal Science (17)
- Biological Sciences (1)
- Evolution, Ecology & Biodiversity (2)
- Environmental Policy Analysis & Planning (1)
- Wildlife, Fish & Conservation (1)
- Geology (1)

**Diversity of Colleges:**

- Biological Sciences (13)
- Agriculture & Environmental Science (6)
- Letters & Science (4)

**Reviews:**

“ This was likely one of the most helpful courses I have taken. Helpful in the sense that it gave me a much better idea of the many things I could do post-college.”

“ This course opened up a whole new avenue of potential careers for me. I never knew how integral marine science was in many disparate areas of our lives. In fact marine science has never been more relevant given the effects of climate change on marine ecosystems.”

“ The course was incredibly helpful. I'm a first gen student and my family doesn't have any experience with ecology so it was really helpful to hear about all of the career options.”

“ This course has inspired, encouraged, and educated me more in one quarter than any other class has ever done. Truly an essential experience for aspiring ocean scientists.”

“ Such a spectacular course! The people I took it with were all wonderful. It was one of the highlights of my week. It definitely gave me so much to think about when choosing jobs and career paths within marine science. The content had spectacular variety. The guests gave such nuanced perspectives. I loved it!”

## Journal Club Seminar - Spring

**Description:** The Journal Club for the Bodega Marine Lab Seminar Series consisted of a discussion group where, before each seminar, the students discussed one of the current speakers' papers and then watched the seminar.

**Examples of Class Topics:** Readings on estuarine sediments, Arctic seaweed communities, and Indigenous shellfish management in New Zealand. Two class sessions also included conversations with the seminar speakers themselves.

**# of Students: 7**

**# of Guest Speakers: 2**

**Diversity of Majors:**

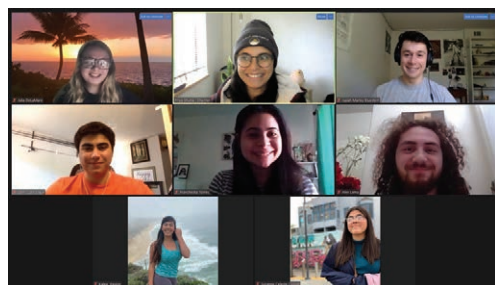
- Marine & Coastal Science (7)

**Diversity of Colleges:**

- Biological Sciences (5)
- Agriculture & Environmental Science (2)

“ This course was a phenomenal introduction to so many possible fields within marine biology and really helped me get an understanding for what I can do after (and even before) graduation with my degree, as well as what I'm specifically interested in. As one of my classmates put it, this class saved me a lot of time and potential future failure by showing me what to stay away from while showing me what I'd like to focus on.”

“ This course [sic] was the MOST helpful class I could have taken as an unsure undergraduate in the major of Marine and Coastal Sciences. As a senior I was growing increasingly anxious and nervous because I felt like I had no guidance and there was really no way for me to know about all the opportunities and all the paths that I could take so I thought, especially as an underrepresented minority. So this course [sic], Priya, and all the guests were such a joy to be in contact with. even though I didn't really ask many questions because I'm shy, I got so much out of it.”



**Reviews:**

“ Priya did a fantastic job leading our discussions and created a welcoming environment where everyone in our class was comfortable sharing their opinions. I would gladly look forward to taking a class taught by Priya again and I hope I have an opportunity to do so again.”

“ This is probably one of the most important courses I've taken in college. I hope that the college prioritizes mentorship classes like this that allow students to get to know the professional world in a comfortable setting. My chosen career wasn't presented, but I now know so much about what Marine scientists are doing here and on the west coast.”

# Mentorship Program - Grad Students Mentoring Undergrads

**Description:** This program spans throughout the academic year and has two groups: (1) students interested in general mentorship and (2) students applying to graduate school. Undergraduate and graduate students were provided with basic training about what creates a successful mentor/mentee relationship. Mentors/mentees met on a monthly/quarterly basis depending on what worked best for them.

**Lead Mentor Role:** Priya recruited undergraduate and graduate students for the mentorship program, used a detailed survey and her own knowledge of the graduate and undergraduate students to pair them. She also curated the training resources, checked in with pairs on a regular basis, and provided quarterly workshops that would be of interest to both mentors and mentees: Resume-building, Applying for Federal/State Government Jobs, and Fieldwork Safety.

## # of pairs: 22

- Grad School pairs (6)
- General Mentorship pairs (16)

## Marine Science Club

**Description:** The Marine Science Club is a student organization that seeks to connect a broad and diverse group of individuals who are passionate about the ocean and raise awareness about marine environmental issues. We strive to increase ocean literacy by hosting outreach events on and off-campus and providing educational opportunities to the greater Davis community.

**Lead Mentor Role:** Priya helped the Marine Science Club craft their mission and diversity statements, cultivate their leadership within the undergraduate marine science community, brainstorm community engagement ideas during the all-virtual COVID era, and develop a funding program that awards their fellow undergraduates with quarter-long paid research fellowships.

## Resources Website

**Description:** To help undergraduate marine science students at UC Davis navigate experiences beyond coursework, including research, funding, internships and jobs, as well as learning about the culture of science/academia. The website is available at [uccmsi.github.io/mcs-resources](https://uccmsi.github.io/mcs-resources).

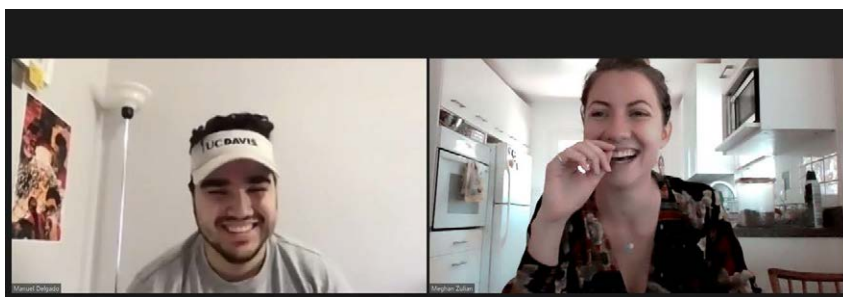
**Lead Mentor Role:** Priya's goal for this website was to level the playing field so that information related to succeeding in a marine science career was located in a central location. Priya created the website from scratch and populated it with several resources for students which span research opportunities, applying to internships/jobs/graduate school, mentorship, and undergraduate funding opportunities. Content from all mentorship courses are also available on the website in perpetuity.

### From Meghan (mentor):

“Recognizing the importance of mentoring in my own undergraduate experience is what prompted me to join the CMSI mentoring program. I have thoroughly enjoyed watching my mentee grow as an academic and scientist over the past year. I can not fully express how exciting it is for me to see such a brilliant, flourishing young scientist getting opportunities to conduct research and explore career paths. On a more individual level, as a graduate student, it is often difficult to measure one's progress and feel validated in one's work. In what has been, and continues to be an excruciating year, knowing that I played some small role in Manny's success has kept me motivated and, at times, reminds me of the expertise I have to offer, even relatively early on in my career.”

### From Manny (mentee):

“1) I was inspired to join the CMSI mentorship program because I wanted to be guided by someone with more experience in the field and use their advice to decide what career path I want to pursue. (2) Working with Meghan has been awesome, I feel like I always learn a lot and always take something from our chats, even if it's that we're only human and exhaustion is real. Through the mentorship program, I've been motivated to follow through and be held accountable on any task or advice Meghan gives me, like attending office hours, directly contacting people I want to work with/for and writing essays for applications. (3) The mentorship program has benefited me by giving me perspective, and I've been able to maneuver through applications, navigate academia and better manage my time using Meghan's advice.”



Mentor/Mentee pair Meghan and Manny during a virtual meeting

### From the Marine Science Club:

“With the guidance and support from CMSI and the Lead Mentor, the Marine Science Club at UC Davis successfully achieved its goals throughout the 2020-2021 school year. CMSI provided funding that allowed us to increase accessibility to community and information as well as expand the opportunities available for our club members. This included financially supporting the founding of a research scholarship that effectively removed financial barriers and directly led to increased student participation in marine-related research. The Lead mentor's advice and guidance were invaluable. Priya Shukla's careful and thoughtful mentoring throughout the year facilitated establishing a robust club framework that we are confident will echo through the years as the organization continues to thrive.”

## Research Opportunities Database

**Description:** A collaborative database with other environmental science programs on campus where research opportunities for undergraduate programs are posted.

**Lead Mentor Role:** In addition to developing this collaboration, Priya also provided information on the Resources Website (which links to the database) that helps undergraduates figure out different paths towards adequate compensation and away from free labor. This information is available to all students with access to the database.