

UC Berkeley's 2020 John Gardner Public Service Fellows



Sarah Rigney (Philosophy)

Sarah Rigney graduated from UC Berkeley with high honors in Philosophy. Before coming to UC Berkeley, Sarah attended a community college in the Sierra Nevada Foothills, where she served as a Senator in student government and was an active member of the Sierra Foothills Young Democrats. She has also volunteered for the California Dreamers and the California Democratic Party State Convention. Sarah continued her passion for community organizing at Cal by serving as the undergraduate representative for the UC Berkeley Philosophy Department Equity Task Force (ETF). The ETF worked to address systemic barriers faced by women and underrepresented minorities in their pursuit of a Philosophy Major. Sarah created a Best Practices Guide for students and instructors and was credited with helping to create a more equitable environment in the Philosophy Department.

In her senior year, Sarah was selected as a Cal-in-Sac Fellow and worked for CA Senator Steven Glazer where she conducted policy research and held meetings with stakeholders on Education and Public Safety policies. She was honored with a California Resolution for her efforts. In spring 2020, she participated in the UCDC program where she interned in the office of Senator Kamala Harris, conducting research for the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump. During her time working in Senator Harris's office, she also worked for the Congressional Black Caucus, handled constituent affairs, and attended meetings and briefings with stakeholders.

Sarah places great value on the creation of public policies that provide long-term improvements in people's lives. She has a special interest in criminal justice reform. When Sarah was 13 years old, her older brother was incarcerated, and she joined the millions of American families whose lives are controlled by the American carceral state. These experiences cultivated a passion to reform the criminal justice system and seek opportunities to be an ally for marginalized communities. Sarah's Gardner Fellowship placement will be at **Initiate Justice**, where she will work on training those most impacted by mass incarceration to be leaders in their community to advocate for change. She will also be working on legislation that improves the lives of those currently incarcerated before the CA Senate and Assembly.



Varsha Sarveshwar (Political Science)

As a UC Berkeley student, Varsha Sarveshwar dedicated herself to fighting for young people — in local politics, state politics, and student government. She aspires to a lifelong career effecting meaningful change in California through politics and policy, and she is excited to begin this career as a 2020-2021 John Gardner Public Service Fellow. As a Fellow, she hopes to work on education equity issues in a local or state elected official's office.

Varsha's interest in politics and inequality stems from her childhood. Before she turned 18, her family moved nine times between cities and towns in Orange, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties. As a result, she knew first-hand that the education she received at a given time depended on where she lived. Later on, Varsha became concerned about other barriers facing young people, including higher tuition and fees at public colleges and universities, student loan debt, lack of affordable housing, and a chronically weak job market.

At UC Berkeley, Varsha turned to politics as a way to advocate for change. She served as the President of Cal Berkeley Democrats, where she planned events with elected officials and connected students to party networks. In 2018, Varsha managed Rigel Robinson's campaign for Berkeley City Council. The candidate received 56% percent of the vote in Berkeley's student-supermajority district and became the youngest councilmember in city history. Since then, Varsha became an alternate member of the Alameda County Democratic Central Committee, a delegate to the California Democratic Party convention, and a political staffer on Assemblymember Rob Bonta's campaign.

Varsha also became a leader in student government. In spring 2019, she was elected External Affairs Vice President of the Associated Students of the University of California, UC Berkeley's student government. Later that year, she was elected President of the UC Student Association, representing more than 275,000 students. In these roles, Varsha strengthened the relationship between students and the city, co-authored and passed an initiative renewing UC Berkeley students' free local transit access, co-hosted a hearing of the Assembly Select Committee on Campus Climate on campus, and worked with UC leaders and state lawmakers to address students' needs in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to her extensive political activities, Varsha maintained her focus on academics. She worked on campus as a research apprentice, a political science tutor, and an

undergraduate student mentor. She also wrote a senior political science honor thesis that examined the impacts of increased ideological diversity on the California state legislature since 2001.

Varsha graduated from UC Berkeley with a B.A. in Political Science and minors in Public Policy and History in spring 2020. She is a recipient of the 2020 Political Science Departmental Citation, the 2019 Travers Scholarship in Ethics and Politics, the Percy Undergraduate Grant for Public Affairs Research, and the Chancellor's Award for Public Service.

For her Gardner Fellowship, Varsha will be working in **California Governor Gavin Newsom's Office** focusing on Higher Education Issues.



Nicholas Shafer (Anthropology and Arabic Language and Literature)

Guided by a genuine passion for intercultural exchange and diplomacy, Nicholas Shafer is committed to pursuing a career centered around service and international relations. He is graduating from University of

California, Berkeley with dual B.A. degrees in Anthropology and Arabic Language and Literature with minors in Public Policy and Global Studies, and has spent his final year dually-enrolled at the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad in Amman, Jordan, where he completed advanced level Arabic coursework as a David L. Boren Scholar. He is also a proud graduate of Foothill College, where he focused on political science and anthropology, and is deeply passionate about destigmatizing community college educational pathways in American society.

Coming from a monolingual household in Menlo Park, CA, Nicholas discovered his passion for languages and international relations through Spanish and has continued to study Arabic, French, and Hebrew. He has spent three of the last six years living in Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Israel, and Jordan. While at UC Berkeley, Nicholas has advocated for the campus transfer student, anthropology, and Middle Eastern studies communities. In addition to serving as the President of the Anthropology Undergraduate Association and the Director of External Relations for the Re-Entry and Transfer Student Association, he has held leadership and mentorship positions at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and Center for Jewish Law and Israeli Studies.

Concurrently with his on-campus activities, Nicholas has also pursued his interests in international relations, global education, and effective diplomacy through internships with the State Department in Algeria, the Office of International

Relations at the Smithsonian Institution, and the High Atlas Foundation in Morocco. Additionally, since 2018, Nicholas has served as a program manager and trip leader for the Ibrahim Leadership and Dialogue Program in the Middle East and has led more than 50 undergraduate students on month-long educational trips to Israel, the West Bank, Jordan, Oman, and the UAE. In recognition of these activities on and off campus, he received a UC Berkeley Leadership Award and the McCown Prize, given to the most outstanding member of the Anthropology graduating class, and was also a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship in Fall 2019.

Ultimately, Nicholas hopes to explore the role of innovation in diplomatic statecraft and promote a nuanced, fresh foreign policy towards the Middle East in a shifting international landscape. He aspires to serve in the trenches of American diplomacy and foreign affairs and hopes to complete graduate studies in public and international policy.

For his Gardner Fellowship, Nicholas will be working at the **USAID—Middle East Bureau**. He hopes to gain an understanding of the policymaking process, coalition building, peacebuilding initiatives, and innovative approaches in foreign affairs.