UCI OCEAN

Spring 2026 Quarterly Newsletter

2026 GRADUATE ADVISORY BOARD

Welcome Letter from the UCI OCEAN Graduate Student Advisory Board

Welcome to the 2026 Spring quarter!

We hope you enjoyed a restful and rejuvenating spring break.

The Organizing Collaboration for Educational Advancement Network (OCEAN) has entered an exciting new chapter, and we have several updates to share.

New Identity

First, OCEAN has rebranded! To better represent our expanded reach beyond Orange County, we have adopted a new name, Organizing Collaboration for Educational Advancement Network. Our new name reflects OCEAN's growth and its commitment to fostering partnerships with stakeholders and collaborators regionally, nationally and internationally.

Graduate Student Advisory Board

We are proud to announce the formal launch of the **OCEAN Graduate Student Advisory Board,** established during the 2026 Winter quarter. Led by Franchesca Quintero, Melissa Danielle Wright, and Taryn Williams, the board is collaborating closely with leadership to strengthen our organizational infrastructure and capacity-building efforts, while also learning the intricacies of RPP work, including partnership building, community engagement, and sustainability.

Spring Seminar Series & Conference Season

Our biweekly seminar series will continue throughout the 2026 Spring quarter. In preparation for the upcoming conference season (AERA, ISLS, NNERPP, and more) we will dedicate several sessions to practice presentations, share proposal ideas, and discuss networking and engagement for the annual meetings.

Project Spotlights

We know many of our RPPs have had a number of successes so far this year, and we are eager to learn more about these successes and share them with the wider community. If you have not already, please take a moment to complete the ***OCEAN Member Google Form***. Your input helps us spotlight your projects and foster deeper connections across the network.

Thank you,

The OCEAN Graduate Student Advisory Board
Franchesca Quintero, Melissa Danielle Wright, and Taryn Williams

Melissa Danielle Wright

Melissa is a first-year PhD student in the Teaching, Learning, and Educational Improvement (TLEI) concentration. Drawing on her extensive background as an English Language Arts teacher and English Language Development (ELD) Coordinator for grades 6–12, Melissa is committed to sustainable research practices that bridge theory and the classroom. Her current work explores the intersection of AI Literacy and Disciplinary Literacies, with a core philosophy of honoring and integrating the funds of knowledge held by expert practitioners.

Franchesca Quintero

Franchesca is a first-year PhD student in the Human Development in Context (HDiC) concentration. As a first-generation college student and the daughter of immigrant parents, Franchesca came to UCI with the goal of conducting research with and alongside the Latine population. Broadly speaking, Franchesca is interested in better understanding the role Latine families, particularly immigrant families, play in shaping their children's educational motivation and persistence.

Taryn Williams

Taryn is a second-year PhD student in the Teaching, Learning, and Educational Improvement (TLEI) concentration. She came to UCI after teaching in a variety of settings for over ten years and realizing that she wanted to do more to address the systemic inequities affecting her students. Her research is broadly focused on improving educational opportunities for students through the lens of teacher education. Outside of UCI, Taryn loves to travel and has been to all 7 continents.

Spring 2026 Seminar Schedule

All School of Education graduate students, faculty, and interested community partners are invited to attend.

The Spring 2026 Quarter Seminar Series will be led by OCEAN faculty, graduate students, and community partners.

2026 Spring Quarter Sessions:

- April 2 from 12 - 1 p.m.
- April 16 from 12 - 1 p.m.
- April 30 from 12 - 1 p.m.
- May 14 from 12 - 1 p.m.
- May 21 from 12 - 1 p.m.

To RSVP, please email Adam M. Lara at adam.lara@uci.edu

OCEAN Faculty Fellow Spotlight

Nia Nixon, Ph.D

The UCI OCEAN Faculty Partnership Seed Fellowship supports a collaboration between Dr. Nia Nixon and Lynwood Unified School District to explore how generative AI can foster inclusive STEM learning environments. By leveraging the **TRAIL platform**, the project identifies real-time patterns of exclusion or dominance and develops AI-driven interventions—such as conversational nudges—to ensure equitable participation for historically marginalized students. This partnership bridges foundational research in human–AI teaming with authentic K–12 classroom dynamics to advance ethical, practice-informed educational technology.

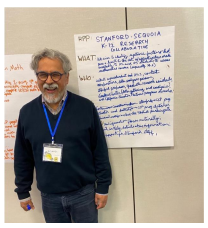
OCEAN RPP Dissertation Fellow Spotlight

Daniel Ivan Garcia

Daniel's dissertation centers the agency of Latine families through a multi-year research practice partnership that co-designed a culturally inclusive framework for STEM-integrated preschool learning. This work, advances educational justice by transforming traditional family-school interactions into collaborative knowledge systems grounded in the Funds of Knowledge theory.

Winter 2026 HIGHLIGHTS

California Research-Practice Partnership Convening at UC Irvine



On January 2026, the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP), California Education Partners, and UCI OCEAN hosted the California Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) Sub-Networking Convening. The two-day event brought together over 57 leaders from 23 prominent universities, foundations, and school districts to build a robust infrastructure for evidence-based educational equity across the state.

On Thursday, January 29, 2026, the CA RPP Subnetwork design team members worked toward a consensus on future “change pathways” and advanced joint research focused on multilingual learners, student voice, and mathematics.

On Friday, January 30, 2026, the CA RPP Subnetwork, in addition to local School District Leadership teams (including Santa Ana Unified, Tustin Unified, and Lynwood Unified) explored the “CORE DNA” of their partnerships, identifying how these collaborative structures can help districts achieve their specific student outcome goals.
The event featured a diverse array of stakeholders, including STEM-focused RPPs and district leaders committed to systemic change.

The convening also comes at a moment of growing national leadership for the OCEAN team.

Adam Lara, Associate Director of OCEAN at the UC Irvine School of Education, has been invited to serve on the Steering Committee for the NNERPP.

The steering committee helps guide the network’s strategic direction and supports major initiatives, including planning for the annual NNERPP forum and strengthening the field of research–practice partnerships nationwide. In this voluntary role, Lara will collaborate with national leaders while continuing to lead OCEAN’s work connecting researchers, school districts, and communities across California.

Monroe UC Irvine Community School

Community School Leadership Council Launched

The Monroe UC Irvine Community School partnership officially launched the ***Community School Leadership Council***. The purpose of the Leadership Council is to bring together school staff, families, students, and community partners to improve learning, support families, and guide school priorities.

Integrating Community-Based Science & Dual-Language Learning

Dr. Symone Gyles and graduate student Diana Romano are working on a research project consisting of re-designing a 3rd grade PLTW unit around 'Variation of Trains" with 3rd grade teacher Mr. Silva and 3rd grade families, co-designing lessons to integrate family, community, and cultural knowledge to promote more meaningful and engaged community-based STEAM learning experiences.

SABER en Familia - STEM Family Nights

On March 12, 2026, the Monroe UC Irvine Community School partnership launched its SABER en Familia STEM Family Nights in partnership with the Santa Ana Early Learning Initiative.

OCEAN Seminar Series Highlights

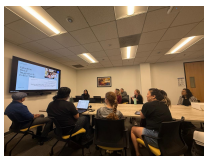
BASIC Summer Learning Academy

On January 15, Ph.D. students Julian Levine, Taylor Michelle Wycoff, and Mariana Gomez Becerra presented on their research-practice partnership with **BASIC Summer Learning Academy** in Borrego Springs.

A Conversation with Teachers of Students with Vision Impairments and their UCI Collaborators

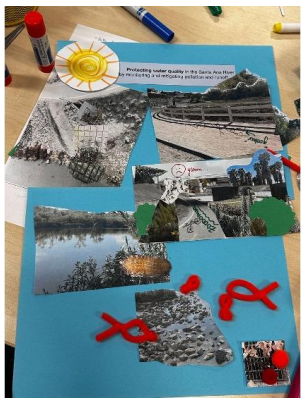
On February 12, we had an incredible seminar featuring Professor Stacy Branham and PhD Candidate Isabela Figueira, alongside two phenomenal local Teachers of Students with Vision Impairments. For three years, this team has been working to lower the barriers blind and low-vision high school students face when transitioning to college. It was powerful to hear them share their progress and insights.

Racial Educational Imaginaries



On February 26, Dr. Eupha Jeanne Daramola shared her framework on racial educational imaginaries, highlighting why community-based partners are essential to the advocacy and policy and systems change landscape. We also dove into the intersections of research-practice partnerships and policy change to create a more just educational system.

Project CoAST



Project CoAST (Community, Agency, & Systems Thinking in High School Environmental Engineering), part of an RPP led by professors Rossella Santagata, Hosun Kang, and Symone Gyles, finished the first phase of their curriculum implementation. Ph.D Students Aakriti Bisht and Taryn Williams, along with postdoc Yuxi Huang, visited Segerstrom High School in Santa Ana to teach the first pilot lessons of the environmental engineering curriculum they co-designed with local high school students and teachers. Based on the results of this first implementation, they are now focused on editing and revising the curriculum and will teach it again during the next pilot phase at Anaheim High School in May.

Recent Publication

From The Ground Up: The Journey of the Monroe UC Irvine Community School Partnership

We are thrilled to announce our latest publication with the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. In this article, Symone, Adam, and Andres share the origin story of how Monroe Elementary is evolving into a University-Assisted Community School (UACS). We dive into our collaborative research on community-based science and dual-language learning, while reflecting on the power of Research-Practice Partnerships (RPP).

Upcoming Events

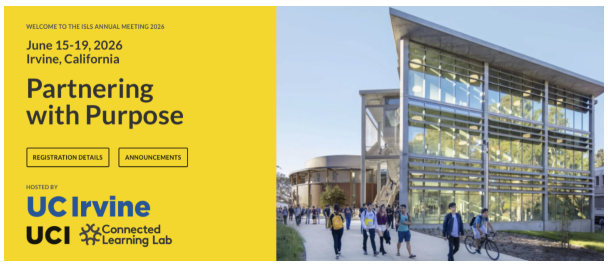
2026 American Education Research Association Annual Meeting

Are you going to AERA?

Stop by some of your colleagues' sessions!

School of Education AERA 2026 Presentations

2026 International Society of the Learning Sciences Annual Meeting



June 15-19, 2026
UC Irvine

2026 NNERPP ANNUAL FORUM

NNERPP
NATIONAL NETWORK OF EDUCATION RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS

July 22-24 in Los Angeles, CA

The **2026 Annual Forum** is happening in **Los Angeles from July 22–24!**

NNERPP is looking for "sparks"—ideas, questions, or strategies that can drive learning for others across the network. This is a collaborative matchmaking process where submissions help shape the forum's themes and design.

- **Submit Your Ideas: Use the [Idea Submission Form] to share what's on your mind.**
- **Deadline:** Please submit your thoughts by **Thursday, April 30, 2026**.
- **What's Next?** The NNERPP team will review submissions to find shared interests and will reach out the **week of May 18** to discuss next steps and potential involvement in designing these sessions.

Stay tuned for registration details coming soon.

2026 National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference

The Institute for Educational Leadership's 2026 National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference is in Long Beach, California, a beautiful city with one of the busiest seaports in the country!

Just as a lighthouse helps ships safely navigate dangerous waters, this year's theme, ***Guiding Lights, Brighter Futures*** is a reminder: everyday matters for every child. A brighter future is only possible with collaborative action and leadership as our guiding lights toward shared goals. In uncertain times, our combined efforts and renewed commitment are more important than ever. Meeting the moment requires strength in community and connections. Every year this conference is a place to recharge and refresh, bringing together people from across the country who believe all children deserve a safe place to live and opportunities to learn and thrive.

California Education Research Association 2026 Annual Conference

UCI OCEAN

Catalyzing Research-Practice Partnerships

UCI OCEAN is a network of research-practice partnerships between K-12 schools, nonprofit organizations, and the UCI School of Education. We engage in actionable scholarship to positively impact the diverse communities that we partner with. Our mission to is help develop community partnerships that foster: collaboration, mutual respect, community needs and priorities, and the use of research to improve learning and education. Our core capacity at OCEAN is to conduct research that can inform the decisions and improvement efforts of our partners.

To learn more about OCEAN, our learning community, and how we engage in research-practice partnerships, and how we can support your efforts in cultivating community-centered research practice partnerships, please reach out to our Associate Director, Adam M. Lara, Ph.D at **adam.lara@uci.edu** and visit our **website**.

Did you miss the e-mail? Have you updated your information with UCI OCEAN?

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