

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present Volume 18, Issue 1 of the UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal. As we compiled this issue, we were struck by the depth, creativity, and timeliness of the research that these undergraduates were conducting. The work in these pages examines some of today's most pressing issues, from examining how natural selection has evolved cancer suppression across species and within organisms, to offering a Marxist analysis of Trump's 30-minute shift at McDonald's, to developing an educational platform for learning-by-teaching in CS1 courses. These undergraduate authors are investigating challenges that are shaping our world, bridging biology, political economy, medicine, and computer science.

What makes this volume particularly special is not just the individual quality of each project, but the collective effort that brought them here. This collection is a testament to what we can accomplish when we encourage, recognize, and celebrate undergraduate research. The challenges our authors addressed in their research required resilience and creativity, and the work of reviewing and refining these contributions demanded the same from all of us.

We want to extend a genuine welcome to all who read this volume. If you are considering submitting your own research, we encourage you to join this community. Your questions matter. Your voice matters. And together, we can advance UC Merced's mission to expand knowledge and create positive change.

Thank you to our authors, our faculty advisors, and our editors. We would like to extend a special gratitude towards: Ayush Pandey, Jerrold Shiroma, Paul Gibbons, Susan Varnot, and Zach Gatto. It is your collaborative efforts that made this issue possible: it was your insight and dedication that helped bring this journal to life. Whether through editorial guidance, peer review, project coordination, or scholarly contribution, everyone has played an essential role in creating a space where undergraduate research can be recognized and celebrated. We are grateful to serve and represent our undergraduate community, and we hope these pages inspire you to pursue your own research.

With warm regards,

The Editorial Team UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal, Volume 18, Issue 1