

AY 2026–2027 GSA Election

Candidate Information

FOR ELECTORATE REVIEW

Dear UC Riverside Graduate and Professional Students,

In this document you will find detailed information about each of our candidates for the UCR Graduate Student Association AY 2026–2027 upcoming election on May 18th, 2026. Please take time to review the candidates' answers to our questions about who they are, what they believe in, what inspires them, and how they intend to use their office to serve the graduate and professional student population at UCR and beyond during the next academic year. Each of these candidates are exceptional and talented individuals who have a passion for leadership and a strong belief in the value and importance of public service.

Many of our candidates have chosen to include their contact information and we encourage you to reach out to them if you have any questions.

Finally, we appreciate your engagement and interest in our elections and wish to offer you our sincere thanks for taking part. The GSA would not be the effective and instrumental organization that it is today without the continued support of the talented members of the graduate and professional student population at UC Riverside.

In Service and Solidarity,

The UC Riverside Graduate Student Association

Katia Hatem

Candidate for President

College of Natural & Agricultural Sciences

Department of Chemistry



Tell us about yourself:

"My name is Katia Hatem and I am a 4th year PhD student in Chemistry at UC Riverside. I earned my bachelor's degree from UC Irvine and my master's degree from California State University, Long Beach, where I developed a strong interest in research and decided to pursue a PhD. Since starting at UCR, I have been actively involved both in my research and in the graduate student community. My research focuses on atmospheric chemistry, specifically the ozonolysis of alkenes and the formation of Criegee intermediates. I am drawn to this field because of its real-world relevance, particularly in understanding climate and air pollution. Alongside my research, I became involved in GSA as a way to contribute beyond the lab and support the broader graduate student community."

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"My platform is centered on advocacy, transparency, and meaningful support for graduate students. Through my experience in GSA, I understand how effective advocacy and clear communication can directly improve the graduate student experience.

I will prioritize continued advocacy at the campus and state levels, especially around funding and cost of living, building on efforts that have already led to tangible results. I am also committed to improving transparency by ensuring that information, resources, and opportunities are clear and accessible to all graduate students.

In addition, I will focus on strengthening community and engagement by supporting initiatives such as events that connect graduate students and their families, including programs like "Bring

Your Kids to College Day." My approach will be proactive, collaborative, and focused on making GSA a stronger, more effective voice for the graduate student community."

Why are you applying?

"I am applying for the GSA President position because of my strong commitment to improving the graduate student experience at UC Riverside and my extensive involvement within GSA. Having served as Vice President of External Affairs and now as Webmaster, I bring both advocacy experience and an in-depth understanding of GSA's internal operations. These roles have given me insight into how GSA functions, where we are effective, and where we can continue to grow.

As part of the advocacy team, I contributed to efforts that helped reduce proposed higher education budget cuts from 8% to 3%, demonstrating the impact of coordinated graduate student advocacy. Alongside this, my work as Webmaster has focused on improving communication and accessibility for graduate students. Together, these experiences have prepared me to lead with a clear understanding of both the challenges and opportunities within GSA."

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA Vice President of External Affairs

GSA Webmaster

GSA Representative and President for Chemistry mini-GSA

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at khate001@ucr.edu

Pamela Romero

Candidate for Vice President of External Affairs

School of Public Policy

Public Policy



Tell us about yourself:

"My name is Pamela Romero, and I am a first year Master of Public Policy student at UC Riverside. I earned my undergraduate degree at UCR in Political Science with a minor in Labor Studies, where I first became involved in advocacy and organizing work. During my undergraduate years, I advocated on behalf of students at both the state and federal levels, participating in lobbying efforts in Sacramento and at UC Hill Day in Washington, D.C.

I was also actively involved in labor and community organizing through the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, where we partnered with the UCR Labor Center to host Know Your Rights events focused on issues such as wage theft and worker protections. I later participated in the Labor Summer program with the UCR Labor Center, which further strengthened my commitment to advocacy and policy work.

I currently serve as a Legislative Affairs Officer for GSA, where I advocate for graduate students and work to elevate student voices in policy spaces. I come from a working class immigrant family and am a first generation graduate student, and my background has shaped my commitment to equity, access, and fighting for communities that are often overlooked in policy decisions.

Through my academic training and leadership experiences, I am committed to using policy as a tool to create meaningful change and to advocate for stronger support systems for students."

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"Graduate students should vote for me because I bring both experience and a genuine commitment to advocating for our community. I have been involved in policy and advocacy work since my undergraduate years, and I currently serve as a Legislative Affairs Officer where I have advocated for students at the state level in Sacramento and will be continuing that work in

Washington, D.C. I understand how to navigate policy spaces and push for change, but more importantly, I understand what graduate students are going through because I am experiencing it alongside you.

My platform centers on improving the everyday realities of graduate students. I will focus on issues such as affordability, including the rising cost of living and financial insecurity many of us face, as well as strengthening graduate student worker rights and access to resources. I also want to ensure that students are better informed and engaged with the decisions that impact them, especially when it comes to policies at the campus, state, and federal levels.

My approach is rooted in active advocacy, transparency, and accessibility. I plan to continue strengthening relationships with policymakers and ensuring that graduate student voices are represented in those spaces. At the same time, I want to improve communication between GSA and the broader graduate student body so that students feel informed, heard, and included. Advocacy should not happen behind closed doors, it should be something students can see, understand, and be a part of.

As a Master of Public Policy student, I am passionate about using policy as a tool to create meaningful change. I plan to continue working in policy after I graduate, and this role allows me to both apply my skills and fight for improvements that directly benefit graduate students now. I am committed to being a strong, reliable advocate who will listen, represent, and push for the changes our community deserves."

Why are you applying?

"I am applying for the Executive Vice President position because I am deeply committed to advocating for graduate students and improving the conditions that directly impact our daily lives. My involvement in advocacy did not start recently. I have been engaged in lobbying and policy work since my undergraduate years, which is what led me to become a Legislative Affairs Officer. This role has allowed me to continue building on that foundation and take on more responsibility in representing student interests.

As a Legislative Affairs Officer, I have actively participated in advocacy efforts at multiple levels. I have traveled to Sacramento to lobby alongside the legislative team, and I will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to continue that work at the federal level. These experiences have strengthened my ability to communicate with policymakers, navigate institutional spaces, and push for policies that benefit students.

In addition, I have already stepped into many of the responsibilities of this position. I have proxied for the Executive Vice President in meetings and have consistently attended meetings. I have also worked closely with the current Executive Vice President, who has provided mentorship and guidance, allowing me to better understand the expectations of the role and how to effectively represent graduate students. Through this experience, I feel prepared to take on this position with confidence.

What sets me apart is that my commitment to this work is both professional and personal. As a graduate student, I have experienced many of the challenges that our community faces, including financial stress, access to resources, and navigating systems that can feel overwhelming. Because of this, I do not just advocate in theory, I advocate from lived experience. I care about a wide range of issues affecting graduate students, including affordability, worker rights, and overall well being, and I am committed to fighting for meaningful change.

My academic background in the Master of Public Policy program directly aligns with this role. I plan to continue working in policy after I graduate, and I see this position as an opportunity to both deepen my experience and create tangible improvements for graduate students now. I am

passionate about advocacy and committed to continuing this work in positions where I can make the greatest impact.

If selected, I will bring experience, dedication, and a strong understanding of policy advocacy to this role. I am ready to represent graduate students, amplify their voices, and continue pushing for the changes our community needs.”

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA Legislative Advocacy Officer

GSA CAPS Liaison

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at

prome014@ucr.edu

Prakriti Singh

Candidate for Vice President of External Affairs

College of Natural & Agricultural Sciences

Department of Chemistry



Tell us about yourself:

"I am a fourth-year PhD student in Chemistry at UC Riverside, where my research focuses on atmospheric chemistry, particularly the formation and properties of brown carbon aerosols. My work involves studying how these particles interact with water and light, and how their properties evolve over time, with implications for air quality and climate. I completed both my bachelor's and master's degrees in Chemistry at Ramnarain Ruia College in Mumbai, India, where I built my foundation in analytical and physical chemistry and developed an early interest in research.

Beyond research, I currently serve as Secretary of the Graduate Student Association and as Vice President of the Chemistry GSA, where I have been actively involved in student representation and organizing events that foster community, connection, and support among graduate students. These experiences have shaped my interest in advocacy and in strengthening graduate student support systems at both the campus and broader levels."

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"My platform is centered on making graduate student voices more visible and impactful in the spaces where key decisions are made, at the UC system level, in state policy discussions, and beyond. As graduate students, our research, funding, and overall well-being are directly shaped by decisions made outside our campus, yet many of these processes feel distant or unclear to the broader student community.

One of my main priorities is improving transparency and communication around these external processes. I want to ensure that graduate students are better informed about policy changes, funding challenges, and advocacy efforts, and understand how these directly affect their academic and professional lives.

I am also particularly motivated to advocate for issues related to research funding, cost of living, and the experiences of international students, who often face additional structural challenges but remain underrepresented in policy discussions. By bringing forward real student experiences and concerns, I aim to contribute to more informed and inclusive decision-making.

Finally, I will focus on strengthening coordination between GSA leadership and external bodies such as UCGPC, ensuring that our advocacy efforts are consistent, proactive, and aligned with the needs of the graduate student community. My approach will be grounded in clear communication, active engagement, and thoughtful representation, with the goal of making external advocacy more accessible, relevant, and impactful for all graduate students."

Why are you applying?

"I am applying for the Vice President of External Affairs position because I am interested in representing graduate student interests beyond the department and campus level, particularly in system-wide and policy discussions that directly impact our community. Through my involvement in GSA as the Secretary and my role as Vice-Chair in Chemistry GSA, I have seen how decisions made at the UC system and state level affect funding, research opportunities, and student well-being. This role offers a unique opportunity to engage with those spaces and advocate more effectively for graduate students.

My interest in this position has been shaped by observing the work of past and current GSA leadership in external advocacy, especially in coordinating with UCGPC and engaging with policy-related issues. I am motivated to contribute to these efforts by bringing a thoughtful, informed perspective and ensuring that graduate student voices are clearly represented in broader conversations."

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA Secretary

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at psing099@ucr.edu

Tyler Cohen

Candidate for Vice President of Internal Affairs

College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences

Department of Sociology



Tell us about yourself:

"I'm from Portland, Oregon metro area but I've lived overseas in Christchurch, New Zealand and Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand. Having global experience but also being American lets me relate to international and domestic grad students alike. I am a sociology PhD Candidate, and my research focuses on social health and community. I don't currently have a pet, but I have been a dog-sitter on Rover and participate in Riverside animal shelter's 'dog day out' program. I've been a gardener forever and I take care of a plot in R'Garden. Not every grad student dedicates as large a portion of their time to extracurriculars/ service work, but this stuff is my jam!"

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"Call people in: increasing participation in GSA including committees, including via outreach and events that include prizes, teamwork, and creative activities.

Responsiveness: I respond to email in a timely manner and I am especially motivated to help peers make their event ideas into reality.

Fairness: this year while facilitating the BIPOC committee, we have had wider convos about how to connect values of fairness to our daily lives as grad students.

Creativity & Innovation: I'm someone who is full of ideas and I can help departmental GSA reps brainstorm and plan fresh ways to engage.

Solidarity: We, like a bridge, are only as strong as our weakest links!"

Why are you applying?

"I care about making the 'grad student community' something real that each of us has memories of. We all have our own paths in work and life, but the more we can foster a culture of generalized helpfulness across graduate students and beyond, the more reliably likely we all are to thrive.

The 'grad student community' inspiring me to run comes from participating in GSA as the CHASS AAO, R'Garden, UAW 4811, and the Recreation Governing Board, plus organizing small on-campus gatherings via Sociology Graduate Student Association, and working/playing with fellow grad students too via AEOR, recreational sports, and informal community-building efforts. Last spring, I coordinated a watercolor pop-up at the HUB that will be repeated towards the end of this May in the HUB.

No matter what, as VPIA, an appointed role, or SGSA rep, I'll do my best next year to increase the frequency of watercolor pop-ups. But as an elected or an appointed officer, I'd have a formal role to help out with all sorts of stuff!"

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA CHASS Academic Affairs Officer

GSA Representative for the Department of Sociology

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at tcohe008@ucr.edu

Pertab Rai

Candidate for Vice President of Academic Affairs

Bourns College of Engineering
Department of Bioengineering



Tell us about yourself:

"I am a 5th-year Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Bioengineering. My research circles around nanoscale biosensing, more specifically designing novel point-of-care diagnostic tools. Apart from research, teaching, and GSA-related work, I love to play badminton, cook (when I get time), read novels, and travel."

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"As the current Vice President of Academic Affairs, my team and I in GSA, have successfully been able to process events amounting to ~ \$10,000. This year, we have a significant increase in mini-GSA registration and participation. My goal for the coming year is to continue this trend, increase student-faculty interaction through AAOs, led by mini-GSAs, to resolve issues our graduate students have, and maximize their involvement in GSA. Moreover, I intend to streamline the reimbursement process, as it goes through multiple layers."

Why are you applying?

"To support the well-being of the graduate student community, enrich their on-campus experience, and assist in the process of organizing of events."

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

*GSA Vice President of Academic Affairs
GSA Chief of Staff*

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at
prai005@ucr.edu

Marielys Burgos Meléndez

Candidate for Vice President of Academic Affairs

College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences
Department of Dance



Tell us about yourself:

"Marielys Burgos Meléndez (she/ella), MA in Dance Studies, is a dance researcher, experimental artist, communicator, advocate, audio describer, and pole dancer in vaivén, whose life thrives on social justice, decoloniality, and intersectional feminism. She is pursuing a PhD in Critical Dance Studies at the University of California-Riverside, investigating intersections of erotic/pole dance, labor, economies, transmission, and placemaking in Boriké and the USA. Marielys has worked in arts administration for over a decade, is a 2023 Bessie Award nominee for Outstanding Performance (Ensemble), a 2023 Health Humanities and Disability Justice Fellow at UCR, and the Conference Travel Grant Coordinator for the Graduate Student Association."

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"As the 2026-2027 GSA Vice President of Academic Affairs I will:

- (1) Advocate for increased funding for mini GSAs to better meet the diverse academic and community needs of graduate students across departments.*
- (2) Develop outreach initiatives to increase departmental representation within GSA and encourage broader graduate student participation in meetings and initiatives.*
- (3) Support students in the planning and development of departmental events, including guiding them through the process of requesting GSA funding to ensure successful programming.*

- (4) Collaborate with the incoming CTG Coordinator to design and implement comprehensive orientations for GSA representatives and departments throughout the academic year.
- (5) Ensure that GSA representatives receive thorough CTG training at the start of each academic year to strengthen communication between the CTG program and the graduate student body.
- (6) Strengthen collaboration with the Student Disability Resource Center to better understand and address the needs of graduate students with disabilities, including co-developing events and initiatives that serve this community.
- (6) Advocate for organization-wide training on accessibility and accommodations within GSA to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for students with disabilities.
- (7) Work closely with the Vice President of Internal Affairs (VPIA) to continue comprehensive bylaw revisions that reflect the evolving academic and professional needs of graduate students across departments.
- (8) Work with the next CTG Coordinator to propose additional bylaw revisions that expand and improve student access to CTG reimbursements."

Why are you applying?

"Several experiences have motivated me to apply for the GSA Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) position. As Conference Travel Grant (CTG) Coordinator (2024–2026), I have supported the broader graduate student body while gaining insight into student needs, particularly the importance of accessible resources and financial and academic support for research and professional development. My commitment to advocacy—especially strengthening graduate student representation in governance at both the UC system and UCR levels—has further driven my interest in this role. Additionally, working closely with the GSA President and Vice President of Internal Affairs has provided valuable experience in leadership, collaboration, and engagement with university administration.

I am committed to fostering transparent communication, meaningful collaboration, and strong relationships with university leadership, while ensuring that graduate student voices are represented and prioritized in decision-making processes. This commitment is reflected in my initiative to reactivate the Department of Dance mini-GSA, which had dissolved during my first year. Recognizing the need for departmental representation, I mobilized colleagues and served as a liaison between former VPAA Katie Vidueira and my peers.

In my role as CTG Coordinator, I identified a need for clearer guidance in the application process and introduced departmental orientation sessions in collaboration with GSA representatives—an initiative not previously implemented. As VPAA, I will expand this effort by ensuring all GSA representatives receive comprehensive CTG training and supporting them in the coordination of at least one annual departmental orientation.

Drawing on over a decade of experience in administration and event coordination, I will support departments in developing initiatives and community-building events, particularly those that have not yet accessed GSA funding. I will also prioritize outreach to departments without GSA representation and continue advocating for increased funding for departmental GSAs to better serve the diverse needs of graduate students."

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA Conference Travel Grant (CTG) Coordinator

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at mburg029@ucr.edu

Sushmita Joardar

Candidate for Vice President of Public Relations

Bourns College of Engineering
Department of Bioengineering



Tell us about yourself:

"As an international student from Bangladesh, I came to the United States to pursue higher education after completing my undergraduate studies in Electrical, Electronic and Communication Engineering. I later earned my MS in Electrical Engineering from UC Santa Cruz, where I developed a strong interest in bioelectronics. That interest eventually led me to pursue a Ph.D. in Bioengineering at UC Riverside.

My research focuses on nanopore based electrical sensing, where I study new ways to better detect and analyze proteins at the single-molecule level. Outside of academics, I enjoy traveling and connecting with people from different backgrounds. These experiences have strengthened my communication skills and helped me become a more thoughtful and engaged member of the graduate student community.

Over the past year, serving as Vice President of Public Relations has been a meaningful part of my graduate experience. It gave me the opportunity to connect with students beyond my department and help create spaces where graduate students could relax, meet one another, and feel part of a stronger community. I was especially happy to help organize events such as Grad Bash and Coffee and Bagels, which brought students together outside of work and research and gave them a chance to take a break, connect and enjoy campus life together."

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"My priority is to help build a graduate student community where students feel informed, included, and connected. I want GSA communication to be accessible and relevant, so students are aware of the resources, opportunities, and events available to them and feel comfortable engaging with the organization.

If reelected, I will focus on strengthening outreach, increasing engagement, and making communication more inclusive. That includes improving newsletters and social media, working more closely with student organizations and campus partners, and creating opportunities for graduate students to connect outside the demands of academic life. I want to continue supporting events that help students recharge, meet one another, and feel more connected to campus.

I would approach these priorities through thoughtful communication, active listening, and collaboration. Having studied and lived in different cultural and academic environments, I care about outreach that reflects the diversity of the graduate student body and makes students feel welcomed, represented, and supported."

Why are you applying?

"My experience this past year, and the positive response from students at events like Grad Bash and Coffee and Bagels, inspired me to run again. Serving as Vice President of Public Relations showed me how meaningful this role can be and how much thoughtful communication and community building matter.

Organizing those events was especially rewarding because they gave students a space to relax, meet others, and enjoy a sense of community outside of their academic responsibilities. Those experiences motivated me to continue in this role and build on the work we started this year.

I want to continue bringing energy, care, and new ideas to GSA's outreach while helping create a graduate student community that feels more connected, visible, and supported."

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA Vice President of Public Relations (2025-2026; one term)

GSA Graduate Student Health Insurance Policy (GSHIP) Officer (2024-2025; one term)

Chair of the GSA Social Committee (2025–present)

GSA Representative of the Bioengineering mini-GSA (2024-present)

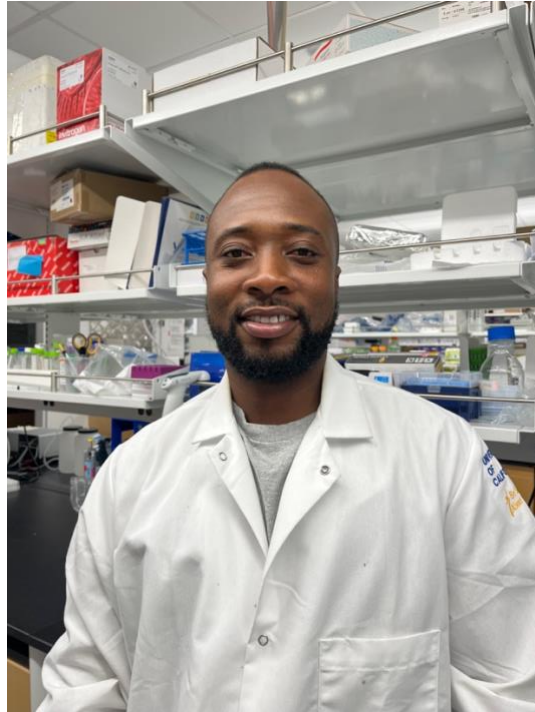
Member of the GSA Social Committee (2024-2025)

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at sjoar001@ucr.edu

Samuel Asiedu

Candidate for Finance & Grant Writing Officer

School of Medicine
Biomedical Sciences



Tell us about yourself:

"My name is Samuel Opoku Asiedu, and I was born and raised in a small town in Ghana, West Africa. I grew up playing sports and spending time outdoors, which instilled a love of nature and an active lifestyle that has stayed with me throughout my life.

After high school, I attended the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and earned a degree in Biological Sciences. I joined a research institute at the university to further explore research in infectious diseases affecting the poor and vulnerable in the society. After three years of working as a Research Assistant, I decided to further deepen my understanding about microbial pathogenesis by enrolling into master program in microbiology at the same university. Currently, I am 4th year PhD candidate in the Biomedical Sciences program with my home lab PI being Dr. Meera Nair. "

What is your platform and what are your priorities?

"When elected as the Finance and Grant Writer position, I envision using my position to increase and deepen UCR graduate students' participation in grant applications, with the end goal of graduate students winning research grants and fellowships. I plan to champion this vision by organizing regular workshops with seasoned professionals who have a track record of winning grants, funders, and successful grant recipients. As a Finance and Grant Officer, I aim to lead by example by applying for and securing grants for GSA."

Why are you applying?

“As a current Finance and Grant Officer, I strongly believe my prior experience as a Finance Officer, along with my tenure as Chief of Staff, has equipped me with the skills necessary to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of this role. Furthermore, serving in this position would enhance my expertise in budget preparation and grant writing—skills that will ultimately support my long-term goal of becoming a Principal Scientist.”

What are your previous roles serving in the GSA (if any)?

GSA Finance & Grant Writing Officer

GSA Chief of Staff

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about my campaign at

sasie001@ucr.edu