

2021-2022 Outstanding Thesis/Project Award Recipients Continue Tradition of Excellence

The Office of Graduate Studies is proud to announce the winners of the 2021-2022 Outstanding Thesis/Project Awards! At the end of the academic year, graduate programs nominate one thesis or project for consideration; the submissions are judged by a panel of faculty for their originality, significance, quality, and outcomes.

After careful consideration, the winners are:

- Diana Ramirez, Master of Social Work, for her project, Barriers to the Use of Palliative and Hospice Care among the Latino Population
- Chelsea Schweer, M.A. in Mathematics, for her thesis, Verifying Sudoku Puzzles

In recognition of their achievements, each recipient received a check for \$500 and an engraved glass award and was honored during Graduate Education Week. Graduate Studies extends its hearty congratulations to Diana and Chelsea! Read on to learn more about our awardees and their work.

Diana Ramirez, MSW

Diana's social work project explores the language and cultural barriers that inhibit access to palliative care among Spanish-speaking patients and their families. Research shows that hospice and palliative care services are underutilized in the Latino community; Diana theorized that the services were literally misinterpreted when explained to Spanish speakers. In her role as an interpreter for the UCLA palliative care program, she suspected that the word 'hospice' in particular was often interpreted wrongly by those less knowledgeable about the nuances of the language and culture.

"It is hard to interpret the word 'hospice' in Spanish," Diana said. "My literature and my participants proved my theory. The word is often translated wrongly and has a very negative connotation. My research also showed that there is a lack



Diana Ramirez.

of bilingual providers and interpreters who are native speakers. It is important because end-of-life care is a very delicate conversation to have."

It was during one of these conversations that Diana decided to go back to school to become a social worker. "While serving as an interpreter in the school's palliative care program, I realized that I wanted to be the one in the social work role. It became my inspiration to go back to school."

Diana juggled working full-time at UCLA Health as an administrative assistant while pursuing her master's in social work. Since she needed a program that fit her busy schedule, she enrolled in CSUSB's online Social Work Pathways Distance Education program.

"It worked out beautifully. I am a full-time employee, so this was the only way I could pursue my master's. I am beyond grateful for the Pathways program."

Diana has recently landed a part-time position at a hospice. After gaining more experience in the social work field, she plans to continue her education.

"My next goal is to pursue a Ph.D.," she said. "While doing my research, I realized that Latinas are not represented in the research field. I also feel there is a lot more I can continue with my topic."

Diana encourages others to take the next step in their education: "I came to the U.S. at age 13 and English is my second language. I was scared of writing a thesis, but I now have my master's and won the outstanding thesis/project award. I have also presented at national conferences. My advice: Don't be afraid, and do your best. If I can do it, anyone can do it."

Chelsea Schweer, M.A. in Mathematics

Chelsea Schweer's enthusiasm for mathematics is apparent the moment the topic comes up. As a math teacher at Alta Vista Innovation High School, she loves to find instances of how mathematics is part of our everyday lives and incorporate them into her lessons. But her curiosity leads her to delve deeper into mathematics theory, the questions that lurk beneath the surface of seemingly simple problems. Her thesis topic, *Verifying Sudoku Puzzles*, suited her perfectly.

Chelsea's topic addresses the question of how to verify solutions to Sudoku puzzles with the minimum number of checks, a deceptively simple question.

"My advisor, Dr. Aiken, gave me the question," Chelsea said. "It was something he had come across in an online math forum and felt there was more to it beneath the surface. I like to think that he was waiting for the right person to come along and solve this puzzle."

While answering the original question was relatively simple (for a mathematician), Chelsea's thesis digs deeper; she explores matroid theory and develops a detailed proof to support her solution.

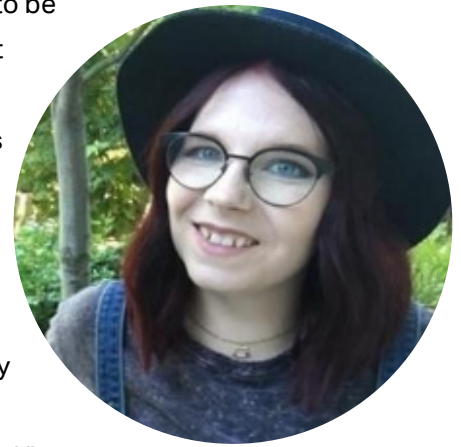
"The answer we were trying to prove was that this was a matroid," Chelsea said. "This would mean that there's a larger type of matroid out there that hasn't been

discovered."

There were many challenges to exploring this new territory, and Chelsea said the search for the right solution took her on a two-year journey into matroid theory and weekly meetings with Dr. Aiken to review solutions.

"In math you have to come up with a theory, then prove it based on what others have done. In this case there were no resources to refer to. We had to come up with the names, definitions, and structure. It gave the whole thing an interesting twist."

Chelsea's M.A. in Mathematics has landed her a position at CSUSB as a part-time lecturer teaching Intro to Mathematics courses; she also continues to teach at Alta Vista. Her goal is to be a professor or lecturer at a community college or university. She credits the success of her thesis topic to the dedication of her thesis adviser: "I'd like to give a shout-out to Dr. Jeremy Aiken – without him, it wouldn't have happened."



Chelsea Schweer

Congratulations to both of our Outstanding Thesis/Project Awardees, as well as all those who were nominated by their programs. Graduate theses, projects, and dissertations are available on CSUSB Scholarworks: scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/