

2025-2026 Outstanding Thesis Award Winner Carolyn Cueto



Carolyn Cueto

The 2025-2026 Outstanding Thesis Award competition saw psychology student Carolyn Cueto rise to the top of a crowded field of talented student researchers. Cueto's thesis, written for her Master of Arts in Psychological Science, examines how alcohol consumption during adolescence affects sleep, daily activity rhythms, and alcohol-related behaviors in adulthood; it also explores potential therapies.

Titled, "[Effects of Orexin/Hypocretin Receptor 1 Antagonist on Adult Drinking Behavior and Rest/Wake Activity After Adolescent Alcohol Consumption in Rats](#)," Cueto's research involved measuring ethanol

consumption in adolescent Wistar rats, recording sleep/wake activity patterns, and reassessing their behavior in adulthood. One neurological system that is thought to contribute to sleep/wake rhythms and alcohol consumption is the orexin system, which regulates arousal, sleep, motivation, and reward. Cueto's thesis hypothesized that drugs blocking orexin receptors could reduce the craving for alcohol and improve sleep. Her study found that treatment targeting the orexin-1 receptor antagonist reduced the motivation to seek out alcohol but did not reduce alcohol intake when it was made freely available. The treatment also improved sleep quality, suggesting use for treating sleep disorders. Overall, the results are promising.

"Development has a huge impact into adulthood and it's important to include this aspect in research," Cueto said. "My thesis also includes exploring a novel drug as a potential therapeutic for alcohol use or substance use, so this particular aspect of my project was my favorite part of my thesis. I see potential in this type drug for therapeutic discovery."

Cueto says she was inspired to pursue a master's degree by her undergraduate mentor, Dr. Leslie Amodeo. Dr. Amodeo served as her principal investigator for her undergraduate honors thesis and encouraged her to apply for the master's in psychology program. "It's why I decided to stay at CSUSB," she said.

Cueto is now pursuing a Ph.D. in neuroscience at Virginia Commonwealth University. She encourages others considering graduate school to be open to new opportunities.

"Definitely get involved in opportunities such as programs, internships, take advantage of school events, and conferences. Grad school should not be a competition. Be receptive and ready to learn. Don't compare your work with others. Everyone does different research disciplines and that's okay."

Cueto's thesis is available on [CSUSB ScholarWorks](#).