How Students Have Influenced Us

University Communications  
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As the UA’s 153rd Commencement approaches, we asked UA employees to tell us about students who have influenced them. Here are the stories we received.

Julianna Renzi | Senior in Environmental Science, Economics and Honors Student

Julianna Renzi inspires me. I met Julianna at a Flinn Scholars dinner when she was considering attending the UA. Toward the end of the evening, I mentioned that I teach a class in Namibia, and she exclaimed, “I was born there!” Since it’s a small country on the other side of the world, this isn’t something I hear every day. She and her parents left the country when she was 3 and hadn’t been back. Two years after she decided to attend the UA, I was thrilled to be able to take her back in 2015 when she participated in the six-week class. During this time, Julianna inspired me with her zest for living and embracing other cultures. She set out to learn Otjihimba, a language spoken by the Himba of northern Namibia, and I was amazed at how much she learned in just a few weeks. We had a wonderful class and since then she has gone on to experience many new adventures, and I am inspired by her zest for life.

Thomas B. Wilson  
Associate Professor of Practice and Bart Cardon Academy for Teaching Excellence Fellow  
Honors College

Destinee Ogas | Senior in Biochemistry

Destinee Ogas has been a student worker at the Asthma and Airway Disease Research Center for four years. It has been an honor to see her grow and achieve her goals despite any adversities she faced. She was accepted at the University of Hawaii at Hilo (Daniel K. Inouye College of Pharmacy), and is on her way to achieve her dream of becoming a pharmacist. Destinee has inspired me to work harder, to be a better person, and to learn how to appreciate life all together. She is always positive and cheerful. She is intelligent and resourceful, and I hope that all of her amazing qualities lead her to great things in life. Thank you, Destinee, for being such an inspiration to our team!

Natalie Provencio Dean  
Research Specialist  
Asthma and Airway Disease Research Center, UA Health Sciences

Destinee was raised in
a small, rural town and overcame financial hardship and great personal loss to excel scholastically and became the first in her family to attend college. This summer, she will be moving to Hawaii to begin her studies at the Daniel K. Inouye College of Pharmacy, and ultimately obtain her doctoral degree. She has worked alongside me this past year as a pharmacy technician, and has really impacted the way I approach my interactions with patients. Destinee has an innate sense of patience and caring, and approaches her patients with a genuine empathy, treating each one as if they were her own family member. Her positivity radiates and uplifts those around her. I admire these traits very much, and try to emulate them in my own practice thanks to Destinee.
Ben and Jordan are both participants in the Undergraduate Biology Research Program and they have both been part of the (Daniela) Zarnescu lab, in molecular and cellular biology, for the past three years. These two are amazing. They are incredibly bright and incredibly giving of their time and resources. Both were selected to be Beckman Scholars (the highest designation we have in UBRP for undergraduate researchers, and Beckman Scholars are leaders among undergraduate researchers). Ben, who immediately became a UBRP ambassador when he was selected for the program, volunteered to be our first UBRP volunteer chairperson. He has, over the past three years, organized service days where UBRP students and their friends could volunteer as a group at the Community Food Bank, at Beads of Courage, and for other worthwhile causes. He also, on his own initiative, headed up an effort to create a library in a small village in Ghana (Debibi), which involved gathering, sorting and shipping 1,000 books through the African Library Project. Ben also is president of the MCB club. Jordan, who also gives freely of his time to tutor students, and as a UBRP ambassador (secretary), and made a financial donation back to UBRP, a program he values. Both students were selected as Outstanding Senior by their respective departments. Jordan was named Outstanding Senior for the College of
Science.

Both are headed to Johns Hopkins University in the fall, where they will continue their studies as doctoral students.

These students are always ready to help, they have great ideas for how to move projects forward, and they never fail to contribute to efforts in which they are involved in ways both big and small. The world is a better place because of them and we will miss them, A LOT, when they graduate.

**Carol Bender**  
University Distinguished Outreach Professor  
Director of the Undergraduate Biology Research Program

**Stephanie Choi | Senior in English, Literacy, Learning and Leadership, and Honors Student**

From the moment I met Stephanie Choi, I knew good human beings existed. Full of promise and hope, her journey through the last four years has been inspiring. She has been active in many initiatives, including Students for Sustainability, Residence Life and community service. She transforms the world with positive energy, kindness and a true drive to make a difference.

**Lysette Davis**  
Coordinator for Student Engagement  
Honors College

**Hilla Hascalovici | Senior in Finance, Management Information Systems, Operations Management, and Honors Student**  
**Leila Shevins | Senior in Management Information Systems, Retailing and Consumer Science, and Honors Student**

One of the privileges of being a faculty member in (the Honors College's) First Year Experience (program) is meeting students like Hilla and Leila early in their academic careers, as they bring new excitement, passion and incredible talent to our University. As part of our University community, Hilla and Leila have contributed in so many ways to making Arizona a very special place. For me, both personally and professionally, they have made being a faculty member at the University of Arizona an incredibly rewarding experience. I know the best is yet to come for you, so best wishes, Hilla and Leila, and as we say in Eller: Always
remember to "Bear Down and Suit Up!"

William T. Neumann  
Professor of Practice  
Department of Management Information Systems, Eller College of Management

Jessie Roberts | Senior in Finance
Jessie is among the most hard-working, nicest and positive students I have ever been around. Jessie’s enthusiasm for education and the professional development of others has inspired me to be a better career coach. Thank you, Jessie, for making the Eller College a better place.

Jeff Welter
Associate Director for Professional Development
Undergraduate Programs, Eller College of Management

Jennifer Schmidt | Senior in Marketing
Jeni influenced me because I marveled at her maturity and grace in handling a difficult situation as a student. Jeni recovered and made the most of her senior year. It is in the difficult times that true leadership is demonstrated.

Pam Perry
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs
Eller College of Management

Megan Sluga | Junior in Spanish, Public Health, and Physiology, and Honors Student
Gabby Huffer | Junior in Physiology and Honors Student

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a team to have a successful outcomes infrastructure. We are very fortunate to have energetic and enthusiastic students work with us on our outcomes projects. They are integral to our activities.

Megan Sluga has been involved in our projects for the last two years and has been self-motivated, well-organized and has exhibited interest and diligence. Reliable data requires reliable people and Megan has helped us with this.

Gaby Huffer has been involved in our joint outcomes projects over the last year and a half. She has helped us track how we effectively use an electronic data-capture system and has worked closely with Cecilia Anderson following the mandate suggested by E.A. Codman [1] that “every hospital should follow every patient it treats, long enough to determine whether or not the treatment has been successful, and then to inquire, ‘If not, why not?’ with a view to preventing similar failures in the future.”

Both students have helped us with our Sisyphean task. We are better for our relationship with students.

Michael Dohm
Assistant Professor
Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, College of Medicine – Tucson

Iustin McCarthy-Contreras | Senior in Management Information Systems and Operations Management
Iustin has taught me so much. His influence on me and others is his modeling of tenacity, attitude and compassion. After this tumultuous year, I am so grateful that he chose to manage his studies, academics, and personal life with such a positive attitude. I am so proud of him for choosing the Management Information Systems and OM major. He is certified in yoga, passionate about educating others, and thriving. He is a true inspiration.

Nancy Roberts
Career Coach
Professional Development Center, Eller College of Management

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