

## 2020 Student Community Action Award Presentation

### IVY DENHAM-CONROY

PRESENTED BY

Raquel Galarza, Health Education Manager  
Rosa Romero, Program Director, UEPI;  
Adjunct Faculty, UEP

### KAYLA WILLIAMS

PRESENTED BY

Chalyce Williams, Mom

### SARAH LASOFF

PRESENTED BY

Martha Matsuoka, Associate Professor, UEP;  
Executive Director, UEPI

### RYDER BENNELL

PRESENTED BY

Sharon Cech, Regional Food Systems  
Director, UEPI; Adjunct Professor, UEP

### MAGGIE SMART-MCCABE

Presented by

Rosa Romero, Program Director, UEPI;  
Adjunct Faculty, UEP

## About the Awardees

Ivy Denham-Conroy (Spanish Studies, UEP minor) has worked at Food Energy and Sustainability team (FEAST) since she transferred to Oxy in 2017. She has also taken advantage of internship opportunities through UEPI and UEP, as a Community Food Systems Intern. At UEPI, in addition to working in middle school and elementary school garden rebuilding projects, she, along with her peer Evie Wasson, planned and taught gardening lessons to local students in Highland Park at Loreto Street Elementary. This was one of her favorite internships ever and teaching kids about how to grow food and the importance of their relationship to the earth from such a young age was such a privilege and something she hopes to continue doing for the rest of her life. As Associate Director of FEAST this spring, Ivy along with the rest of the FEAST team, has continued shaping FEAST into an educational and accessible space and resource for the Occidental and Highland Park communities. She is confident these collaborative efforts will continue after her graduation with the strong and compassionate team they currently have. Ivy's experiences and accomplishments at Oxy would not be possible without her peers and mentors at UEPI and FEAST and she is extremely grateful for their collaboration and inspiration that has helped her get to where she is today.

Kayla C. Williams (Urban and Environmental Policy, Education minor) has dedicated her time at Oxy to learning the tools to empower communities much like her own. Coming from the Bronx, NY Kayla grew up seeing good people slip through the cracks and vowed to do everything she could to disrupt this cycle both in her professional and personal life. In the summer of her first year, Kayla participated in the UEP Housing Internship and interned with Esperanza Community Housing Corporation. Through this internship, Kayla saw the importance of community organizing and popular education and ultimately decided education was the means through which she was best able to support and empower communities. This realization was cemented by her work at the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL) throughout her four years at Oxy. Whether it was as an Education in Action (EIA) Facilitator or Co-Coordinator for the EIA program Kayla has found ways to use community partnerships to push education at Oxy to be meaningful both for students and community members. In many ways, these experiences, along with her coursework, were formative in her decision to become an educator herself. Since making that decision Kayla has served as a tutor for students in transitional housing through the School on Wheels program, tutored various children of Oxy staff, and has had several teaching assistant jobs. Each of those experiences pushed Kayla to think critically about what community-based learning looks like and areas that institutions like Oxy can grow in work they do. Additionally,

Kayla has supported students on campus through her work with the Obama Scholars Program and as the Club Liaison for the Diversity and Equity Board. Though Kayla is being named as the recipient of this award, she recognizes that her commitment to this project is in large part a reflection of the love, energy, and time that mentors and leaders have poured into her for her entire life and is accepting it on their behalf.

**Sarah Lasoff** (Urban & Environmental Policy) was first introduced to community organizing in high school when a community member encouraged her to start her own Youth Climate Action Group in Ashland, Oregon, a group that eventually pressured the Ashland City Council to pass local legislation addressing the climate crisis. When she started her higher education at Occidental College, she searched for another place that empowered people to organize and create change and she found the labor movement. As a student organizer, Sarah joined Occidental's Student Labor Alliance and fought to end the overwork of campus workers. As an intern at a local non-profit, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), and at a labor union, UNITEHERE Local 11, she worked on city-wide campaigns that helped win protections for hotel and retail workers. She is incredibly grateful for her professors, mentors, co-workers, fellow students, and Los Angeles community members for supporting her growth and leadership during these last four years.

**Ryder Bennell** (Media Arts & Culture) moved from Maine to Los Angeles eager to get his hands dirty in Southern California's legendary food systems. Having lived and worked on several biodynamic farms prior to Oxy, his love for sustainably-produced food led him straight to UEPI's office within his first week of school. For the past three and a half years, he has worked side-by-side the project coordinators on the USDA-funded "Market Together" grant, a multi-teared project that aimed to bring farmers market managers into the digital age through hands-on training. Through this work, Ryder has had the pleasure of learning from a wide array of folks all over Los Angeles county, ranging from farmers, to community organizers, to entrepreneurs, to municipal workers, and hundreds of LA residents. His efforts have included: geo-mapping local businesses in the Northeast LA area; conducting social media training workshops with the majority of the city's farmers market managers; organizing the LA farmers market symposium; developing the overall strategy for project's deliverables; leading cooking demonstrations at farmers markets; and collaborating with the project partners to write and publish the final evaluation report. During his last semester of college, he helped conduct preliminary research on the potential for food incubators to serve as a point-of-entry for minority owned businesses. None of this would have been possible without the guidance

(and patience) of Megan Bomba, Sharon Cech, Rosa Romero, and Raquel Galarza who have been his rock for the past four years. Ryder would also like to extend his gratitude to Sylvia Chico, the team at The Moving Forward Network, and the entire UEPI department for all of their support.

**Maggie Smart-McCabe** (Diplomacy and World Affairs) found her passions for environmental justice, public health, and community arts through her time at Occidental. As a UEPI intern, she researched and implemented strategies to increase food assistance program accessibility at local farmers markets. As a Values and Vocations Fellow, she worked with Pacoima Beautiful and Avenue 50 Studio on projects to increase the visibility of local artists' work in public spaces and addressed issues of environmental justice. She also served as an Education in Action Facilitator for the Urban Agriculture and Sustainable Landscaping Practicum where she assisted with community-based learning curriculum. However, some of her most meaningful work at Oxy was through her role on the Diversity and Equity Board, where she worked with friends and mentors on projects such as opening the Lavender Lounge. This semester, she led a group of queer students on a project with Restorative Justice for the Arts that was meant to conclude with a student-led mural in the Lavender Lounge. Although this and many other culminating events have been indefinitely postponed due to this semester's unprecedented circumstances, she is so grateful for the transformative experiences and loving relationships she has found at Oxy through her inspiring friends and mentors.

## Thank you

*Special thanks to the presenters for their recorded presentations and UEPI staff Elena Lopez '16 for the creation of the tribute video.*

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