

Office of the President

TO THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA:

DISCUSSION ITEM

For Meeting of September 17, 2025

UC INSPIRES: STUDENT-RUN CHARITIES—UC’S COMMITMENT TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND SERVICE TO OTHERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UC Inspires Series was launched in 2024 to showcase the exceptional public impact of the University from its classrooms and research laboratories to its athletic fields and community town squares.

This discussion will highlight how UC students are not just committed to raising their grade point averages (GPAs), but also to uplifting their respective communities through charitable service.

The following five student-run charities will be featured:

CAMPUS	NAME OF CHARITY	TYPE OF CHARITABLE WORK	STUDENT LEADER
UC Berkeley	Teach in Prison	Connects undergraduates with incarcerated learners at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center (formerly San Quentin State Prison). Its mission is to expand access to education in carceral settings, foster mutual learning, and challenge the narratives surrounding incarceration by creating spaces where dignity, empathy, and academic achievement can thrive.	Ella Morrison Undergraduate student in Ethnic Studies and Film and Media
UC Davis	School of Freedom	Provides education to young Afghan girls who have outgrown the limited schooling opportunities available to them in war-torn and Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.	Walid Jailani Undergraduate student in Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior
UC Irvine	Food Recovery Network	Member of a national network of the largest student movement against food waste and hunger in America. Its mission is to reduce food waste and food insecurity through a combination of volunteer, educational outreach, and community building events.	Chloe Annalicia Selby Class of 2025 B.S. in Earth System Science B.A. in Environmental Science & Policy
UC Merced	Bobcat Community Builders	Addresses critical social issues such as homelessness, food insecurity, and waste	AJ Heard Undergraduate student in Civil Engineering

		reduction while cultivating a culture of service and civic engagement.	
UC Riverside	Project Sunshine	Students bringing meaningful, play-based programming to hospitalized pediatric patients that promotes emotional healing, stress-relief, and well-being.	Eliana Arroyo Undergraduate student in Neuroscience

BACKGROUND

Teach in Prison (UC Berkeley)

The Teach in Prison Program at UC Berkeley is a student-run, community-engaged initiative that connects university students with incarcerated learners at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center (formerly San Quentin State Prison). Its mission is to expand access to education in carceral settings, foster mutual learning, and challenge the narratives surrounding incarceration by creating spaces where dignity, empathy, and academic achievement can thrive.

Origin

The program originated in 2000 as a student-led DeCal course at UC Berkeley. DeCal courses are designed and facilitated by students on topics not covered in the regular curriculum. Relaunched in fall 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic halted in-person programming, Teach in Prison continues to operate as both a hands-on tutoring program and an academic course. Each week, UC Berkeley students travel to San Quentin to provide General Education Development (GED) tutoring in mathematics and English. On campus, students meet weekly for a class that blends debrief sessions, student-led workshops on justice and equity, and panels with activists and scholars on a wide range of issues related to the carceral system.

Participants in the program are primarily UC Berkeley undergraduates—many of whom are aspiring educators, social workers, lawyers, and policy makers—who bring diverse lived experiences to their work. Several tutors are themselves formerly incarcerated or system-impacted, contributing unique perspectives that build trust and authenticity in the prison classroom.

Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries are incarcerated men at San Quentin working toward their GED or seeking academic enrichment, many of whom face educational barriers rooted in systemic inequities.

Teach in Prison creates a community impact that extends well beyond the classroom. For incarcerated students, it offers concrete skills, hope, and the humanizing experience of being seen for their potential rather than their past. Studies have found that completing a degree while incarcerated reduces recidivism by nearly 50 percent, with rates as low as one to two percent in some of the best educational programs. For UC Berkeley tutors, the program provides a powerful space for growth that deepens empathy, strengthens critical thinking, and inspires lifelong commitment to social change.

In bringing the resources of a world-class university into a prison setting, Teach in Prison fosters educational achievement, builds public trust, and contributes to safer, more connected communities.

Presenter Ella Morrison is a senior at UC Berkeley studying Ethnic Studies and Film and Media with deep passions for community-accountable creating, teaching/learning, and organizing. She positions herself at the intersections of abolitionist imaginaries, intellectual thought, and creative praxis. She serves as a student organizer for Teach in Prison, where she is responsible for all coordination between Teach in Prison and San Quentin to make tutoring possible each semester. She also facilitates internal organizing meetings and handles Teach in Prison's administrative needs to support more than 30 UC Berkeley students who volunteer at San Quentin each semester. Additionally, Ella is a tutor in Bay Area juvenile halls through the Incarceration to College program and an ACES Chancellor's Public Fellow supporting Dr. Victoria Robinson's Introduction to Abolition Pedagogy and Practice undergraduate course.

The School of Freedom (UC Davis)

Origin

Walid Jailani founded The School of Freedom in 2021 initially as a grassroots remote teaching program in response to the Taliban's ban on girls' education in Afghanistan. In 2023, the effort became an official UC Davis student club, offering tutoring, mentorship, and college readiness support to underserved students, including refugees and English learners. In 2024, the project became a registered nonprofit organization, which has opened the door to new partnerships, expanded resources, and a broader mission.

Mission

The project's mission is to remove barriers to education by providing accessible, culturally responsive, and high-quality learning opportunities that empower students to excel academically and grow into leaders in their communities.

Beneficiaries

- Afghan girls and women denied access to formal schooling
- Refugee and immigrant students in the United States
- English learners needing tailored academic and mentorship support
- Underserved youth preparing for higher education and leadership roles

Impact

- Delivered remote education to over 150 Afghan girls in our first year, grew into more than 1200 girls, providing a complete curriculum that addressed both academic and emotional needs.
- Partnered with K–12 schools in the U.S. to provide tutoring, homework support, and college application guidance to English learners and underserved students.
- Built a diverse volunteer network of UC Davis students and community members who tutor, mentor, and provide translation services.
- Expanded our reach beyond UC Davis to serve multiple communities through direct school partnerships.

- Began strategic planning for the launch of a charter school that will serve newcomer, refugee, and underserved students with a tailored curriculum and wraparound support services.

Presenter Walid Jailani is an undergraduate at UC Davis majoring in Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior with a minor in Education. As an immigrant and former English as a second language (ESL) student, Walid understands firsthand the barriers many students face in pursuing their education. That experience inspired him to found The School of Freedom, where he currently serves as president. The project's mission is to ensure that no student is denied access to learning because of gender, language, or circumstance.

Through this work, Walid and his project colleagues have collaborated with school districts, university student organizations, and international partners to design programs that provide tutoring, mentorship, leadership training, and academic pathways for underserved students. Walid is passionate about bridging educational gaps and creating opportunities that allow students to realize their full potential, whether in Afghanistan, where the project's work first began, or here in the United States.

Food Recovery Network (UC Irvine)

Overview

Food Recovery Network at UC Irvine is part of a national network of the largest student movement against food waste and hunger in America. Its mission is to reduce food waste and food insecurity through a combination of volunteer, educational outreach, and community building events, creating over 200 hours of programming in this past academic school year.

The USDA identified that in 2023, 47.4 million people¹ lived in food-insecure households, while at the same time millions of pounds of food were being wasted. This project challenges students to think critically about current food systems and to actively work towards a sustainable future.

Food Recovery Network was awarded the UC Irvine Office of Campus Organizations' 2024 Outstanding Environmental and Sustainability Program Award and the UC Irvine Sustainability Resource Center's 2024 and 2025 Outstanding Sustainability Initiative Awards.

Volunteering

The organization offers several options for members to volunteer. On campus, the Spring 2024 volunteer event "Move Out Donation Drive" engaged 6,530 students and collected 2,467 lbs of food donations within UC Irvine Housing communities. This collaborative event directly contributed to UCI's sustainability initiatives and was featured nationwide in the Campus Race to Zero Waste competition. Off campus, the Food Recovery Network works directly with several farmers at our local farmer's market to collect excess food and donate it to Mary's Kitchen, a non-profit food pantry in Anaheim, California averaging 200 pounds of food recovered a week.

It also joined Orange County organizations including Second Harvest Food Bank and Food

¹ "Food Security in the U.S. – Key Statistics and Graphics," U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service website: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics>. Updated 1/8/2025.

Finders to host holiday donation drives and convention center event recoveries, including the Natural Products Expo. This academic year, 9,159 lbs of food were recovered thanks to the efforts of its volunteers.

Educational Outreach

The Food Recovery Network engages in educational outreach with the UC Irvine community by hosting tabling programming that focuses on sharing statistics on food waste and tactics to reduce food insecurity. It hosts educational events like the Sustainable Movie Night, where students develop a better understanding of food systems internationally and nationwide. It also visits Orange County high schools to teach students about ways to reduce food waste individually, as well as in their communities.

Community Building

The Food Recovery Network dedicates time to building UCI's campus community with free-to-attend events on campus. A favorite is its Grocery Bingo event, where students play Bingo and all of the prizes are free grocery items which directly aid individuals facing food insecurity. Additionally, it hosts ARC Cooking Labs, which are cooking classes for students at the Anteater Recreational Center. The organization remains committed to creating a welcoming space for everyone and uniting students passionate about making a difference. It believes that together, UCI can build a stronger, more sustainable community—one food recovery at a time.

Presenter Chloe Annalicia Selby graduated from the University of California, Irvine in June 2025 with a Bachelor of Science in Earth System Science and a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Science and Policy, with specializations in Oceanography and Geographic Information Systems, respectively. She received the Earth System Science Departmental Service Award and the Distinction in Research Award. She served as the UC Irvine Chapter Vice President from 2022 to 2024 and Chapter President from 2024 to 2025. She has just been accepted to the Food Recovery Network national 2025 Student and Alumni Advisory Board.

Bobcat Community Builders (UC Merced)

Bobcat Community Builders (BCB) is a student-run charitable organization committed to creating positive change in the Merced community. Its mission is to address critical social issues such as homelessness, food insecurity, and waste reduction while cultivating a culture of service and civic engagement. BCB believes that together, UC Merced can build a stronger, more compassionate tomorrow.

BCB was founded in November 2023 by UC Merced students AJ Heard, Daniel Guel, and Dailon Moore. Inspired by AJ's study abroad experience in Singapore, where donation bins provided simple ways to give back, AJ returned to UC Merced and noticed that usable clothing and bedding were often discarded as trash. Taking immediate action, AJ personally salvaged items from dumpsters and donated them to the Merced Continuum of Care "D Street" homeless shelter. Recognizing the greater potential for organized impact, AJ shared the idea with his peers, sparking the creation of Bobcat Community Builders.

Since its founding, BCB has mobilized an average of 230 student volunteers each semester,

nearly 1,000 to date. Volunteers come from all majors, class standings, and backgrounds, including first-time service participants, students fulfilling service requirements, and local community leaders such as the Mayor of Merced, pastors, and Rotary members.

BCB's service efforts extend across Merced and beyond. Beneficiaries include local homeless shelters, animal shelters, elderly homes, and the unhoused community, as well as national organizations such as Samaritan's Purse and the National Parks (Sequoia and Yosemite). Partnerships with the City of Merced, UC Merced, Merced College, local nonprofits, and businesses have been key to sustaining and expanding our impact.

Since its launch, BCB has contributed more than 2,760 volunteer hours to the community, recovered and redistributed over 500 meals, and provided clothing and bedding for more than 250 individuals in need. The organization has hosted over 35 community events ranging from clean-ups to supply drives, helping to reduce burdens on local agencies such as the National Park Rangers while uplifting vulnerable populations.

Its work has been recognized by U.S. Representative Adam Gray, State Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria, State Senator Anna Caballero, and Merced Mayor Matthew Serrato.

Beyond the numbers, BCB has inspired a growing number of UC Merced students to embrace community service, with many describing it as a life-changing experience that reshaped how they view their role in society.

Presenter AJ Heard is a Civil Engineering undergraduate at UC Merced set to graduate in December 2025. As the founding President and current External Vice President of Bobcat Community Builders (BCB), AJ has been instrumental in establishing and nurturing strategic partnerships that strengthen the organization's impact.

Beyond his role at BCB, AJ is an entrepreneur with two limited liability companies, one in media production and another in the food sustainability market. His passion for global engagement has taken him abroad to Singapore and Cape Town, South Africa, where he studied and expanded his perspective on community-driven change.

On campus, AJ is deeply involved in leadership initiatives, including the National Science Foundation I-Corps program, UC Advocacy Network, Civil Engineering Student Association, the engineering fraternity Theta Tau, and more.

AJ's commitment to service extends far beyond UC Merced. He has contributed to international humanitarian projects in Guatemala and Ethiopia, reflecting his dedication to improving lives worldwide.

Recognized as a community leader in Merced, he has received the Distinguished Leadership Award from the Margo F. Souza Leadership Center and the Distinguished Volunteer Scholarship from University Friends Circle. Looking ahead, AJ aspires to specialize in water treatment and resource management to strengthen infrastructure in developing nations, continuing his journey of service and impact both locally and globally.

Project Sunshine (UC Riverside)

For over 25 years, Project Sunshine has brought the healing power of play to children facing medical challenges. It began in 1998, when college student Joe Weilgus, moved by the sight of children alone in hospital rooms, returned dressed as a clown to lift their spirits. His actions sparked a movement that quickly spread across college campuses and workplaces. Today, the organization partners with over 500 medical facilities and nonprofits in 175 cities across the U.S., Canada, Israel, and Kenya. Each year, it reaches more than 250,000 pediatric patients and their families, mobilizing 18,000 trained volunteers to deliver meaningful, play-based programming that supports emotional healing, socialization, and resilience. At the core of Project Sunshine's work is the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to play, even while hospitalized. Play reduces stress, promotes healing, and helps normalize unfamiliar medical environments.

UC Riverside is proud to be one of 85 active college chapters across 25 states, all united in delivering the healing power of play to children with medical needs through passionate and dedicated volunteers. The chapter at UC Riverside is led by an enthusiastic group of undergraduate student leaders from a variety of majors and interests. Many are interested in careers in health care or education, and some have experienced sustained childhood illnesses themselves. All student volunteers gain firsthand experience in service, advocacy, and compassionate care.

This past year alone, UC Riverside's chapter served approximately 75 children and even more family members through direct programming. In addition, we packed and distributed over 2,500 activity kits containing age-appropriate crafts and supplies for patient family members to hospitals across the nation. There are over 300 UCR undergraduate students who engage with Project Sunshine through two tiers of involvement. Some meet weekly to pack activity kits, while others receive training to make weekly personal visits to children in the local Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Fontana, California.

Collaborations with campus organizations such as Delta Chi, Latino Medical Student Association Plus, UCR Hearts, Best Buddies, and others have further expanded Project Sunshine's impact and outreach. These combined efforts exemplify the organization's mission to bring healing and normalcy not just to patients, but also to entire families navigating medical challenges. Whether through a kit or a warm interaction in a hospital room, Project Sunshine creates small yet powerful moments of connection. With continued support from volunteers, communities, and medical partners, the organization remains a force for play-powered healing—one activity, one child, and one volunteer at a time.

Presenter Eliana Arroyo served as Project Sunshine's Events Coordinator during the 2024–25 school year. She is a rising third-year Neuroscience major with a minor in Education with has a passion for childhood wellbeing. Outside of Project Sunshine, she also conducts autism research with Associate Professor Katherine Meltzoff's laboratory and served as the Marketing Director for the Latino Medical Student Association Plus chapter at UCR.

Eliana describes working with Project Sunshine as one of the best experiences to date in her time at UCR. She has enjoyed both participating in weekly visits to pediatric patients at Kaiser Fontana, as well as leading on-campus initiatives and working closely with a dedicated team of volunteers to promote “the healing power of play.”