



**SAN DIEGO**  
Community College District

# Honorable Mention

## 2025 Newsletter

As the SDCCD Honors Program coordinators were exploring ideas for this year's Honorable Mention, we were struck by the fact that all of us have the great good fortune of working with incredibly imaginative students. So rather than doing interviews and updates on our current and past district Honors students, we decided to feature the work of our creatives. We're proud to present the work of six Honors students! Here are the winners of the SDCCD Honors Program's inaugural Honorable Mention Creatives Contest for 2025!

SDCCD Honors Programs encourage the cultivation of curiosity and make possible the exploration of ideas and subjects beyond customary coursework and programs. The Honors Program helps students create and engage in intellectual challenges and promotes an enthusiastic learning environment.

# Noelle Ocen-Odoge



Noelle is a multidisciplinary artist and City College Honors student, born and based in San Diego, CA. She draws inspiration from nature, culture, and community life. She currently works between photography and painting, creating pieces that celebrate marginalized communities and shed light on social justice movements, using art as a vehicle for change.

Noelle's artistic journey began in 2018 after a transformative trip to Japan sparked her passion for photography. Her practice today is both healing and engaging, exemplified by her recent exhibition, *The Feast*, an immersive event exploring the connection between art, identity, and food.

The exhibition encouraged viewers to reimagine their own connection with food, themselves, and their community. Committed to the transformative power of art, she founded Liberation Through Art, a nonprofit dedicated to fostering self-discovery and collective healing in her community. Noelle plans to continue her education in art by pursuing a master's in fine art at UCSD or UCLA.

Through her art, Noelle seeks to provoke reflection and foster connection and promote healing in her community, always striving to capture the innate beauty and complexities of the human experience.





# Elliott Linwood



Elliott Linwood is a conceptual artist whose work examines various types of performance scores, methods of notation and documentation as vehicles for storytelling. The index is a recurrent feature of his work. As a typographic programmer, he designed

list publications such as phone books and catalogs embedded with algorithms which generated indices pointing to other parts of the book. These considerations inform the cross-referencing functions that appear across a wide range of media, from large-scale grids of photographic imagery and sculptural installations to his daily more contemplative Life Art practice. A queer sensibility and sense of humor often infuses the work. "Scale" of 2024, for instance, is a visual log entry in a diary series about navigating San Diego landmarks - such as Balboa Park - on a daily basis; so, the image points to the moment, place, activities, vibe, etc. Elliott has been enrolled in the Honors Program in Sculpture, Photography Portfolio, and Public Art classes offered at City College.



Scale

# George Buchanan



George Buchanan Jr. is majoring in Psychology at San Diego State University. A graduate of San Diego Mesa College in 2023, he earned a 3.7 GPA with honors and was honored to serve as the Commencement Speaker. George is proud to be the first Black male to graduate from his neighborhood in Columbus, GA, and the first in his immediate family to graduate from college—a testament to his resilience and commitment to education.

As a first-generation college student, George is passionate about supporting families, which drives his aspiration to become a Marriage and Family Therapist. He aims to specialize in serving the African American and Veteran community, believing that failed marriages aren't failures but opportunities for growth and healing. His involvement in community service includes managing and coaching an Alpine Little League T-ball team, currently serving as head coach for an i9 Soccer team and actively participating with the Salvation Army.

As a member of The Association of Black Psychologists, Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Psi Chi and the San Diego State University Psychology Club, George advocates for mental health and representation. He was awarded the 2023 President Scholarship and is also a member of the Women Voters League of San Diego. Currently, he works as a Project Assistant at San Diego Mesa College and is a proud retired Navy veteran.

## From Intimidation to Inspiration: George Buchanan's Journey Through the Mesa Honors Program and Beyond

George Buchanan's story is one of transformation, driven by encouragement, dedication, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. Initially intimidated by the prospect of an Honors program, George, now a successful Black Leadership Fellow, credits the program with shaping his academic and professional trajectory.

"I was hesitant," George admits, recalling the moment his English professor, Jennifer Derilo, suggested he join the Honors program. "But she saw something in me, and I trusted her." That trust proved pivotal, as George discovered a rewarding experience that fueled his desire to excel.

# George Buchanan



His journey wasn't just about academic achievement; it was about fostering a growth mindset. George emphasizes the importance of striving for excellence, a principle that opened doors for him, particularly as a transfer student. "Working hard and aiming for top grades not only improved my performance but also deepened my understanding of the subjects," he explains. His acceptance into a competitive program solidified the value of his efforts, prompting him to advise students: "Always do your best, even if you don't see the immediate payoff."

The Honors classes themselves played a significant role in George's development. The rigorous coursework and emphasis on study skills prepared him for his transfer to San Diego State University and beyond. "The extra assignments and study skills I gained were invaluable," he says. "It wasn't just about the grades; it was about developing a growth mindset and enjoying the process of learning new skills."

George's experience underscores the broader benefits of completing academic programs. He encourages students who are hesitant to give it a try. "It's not a hard requirement, and the professors are there to support you," he assures. "It had a profound positive impact on my life." He also acknowledges that life can sometimes intervene, emphasizing that students can always return to the program when circumstances improve.

Since graduating from SDSU with degrees in psychology, communications, and black studies, George has continued to embody the principles he learned. As a Black Leadership Fellow at the Student Equity Center, he assists students and shares his own story, serving as a beacon of inspiration. "It's a way for me to give back and help others navigate their academic and professional paths," he explains.

George's success is rooted in discipline and initiative. He advocates for seeking out resources and opportunities that align with personal goals. "Don't be afraid to ask for help and take the initiative to pursue what you want," he advises.

George Buchanan's journey from an intimidated student to a confident leader is a testament to the transformative power of education and the importance of striving for excellence. His story serves as a powerful reminder that with dedication and support, any student can achieve their full potential.



# Michelle "Shel" Savage



Professor "Shel" Savage is a dedicated City College alumna who holds degrees in both graphic design and art history. Deeply engaged during her college years, she was particularly influenced by MEChA and Chicano art. This passion led to a notable collaboration with mural artist Salvador Torres, producing a book capturing the essence of the mural on Harbor Drive in Barrio Logan. Shel later transferred to the University of California San Diego, deepening her studies in art history and exploring film production.

Her academic journey took her to Rome in 2020, where she pursued a master's in art history, making the ancient city her immersive classroom. Now an adjunct at San Diego Mesa College, Shel is fervently dedicated to student success, constantly seeking resources to enhance their educational journey.

## My Journey

The Honors journey was a twofold journey when I returned to college. I decided to finish my studies, earn an AA degree, then transfer to a four-year university, and start a career now that my children have grown. Slowly, I returned to school by taking one course, a book-making class with Andrea Singer. Her excitement was contagious, and I knew exactly what I wanted to be. I have always had the desire to teach, and Professor Singer gave me hope that I could teach as well.

The first thing I did was research on how to get accepted to a four-year university. My first step was the transfer center, and they told me that Honors courses would increase my chances of being accepted to a university. Afterwards, I went to the Honors office, and I learned that I could convert any class into an Honors class. This intrigued me. Additionally, I was told that I needed at least 15 units of Honors courses to graduate with Honors, but if I did not graduate with all 15 units of Honors courses, the Honors classes I had taken would still be beneficial.

Armed with this knowledge, I started looking for my first Honors course. My interest in history began after taking Justin Akers' Chicano Studies 141A: United States History from a Chicano Perspective course. As a result, I made Chicano Studies 141B: United States History from a Chicano Perspective into an Honors class and created a book for the community mural in Barrio Logan. I had volunteered the semester before and helped restore it with Salvador Torres, and during that time, I discovered that it was impossible to see the mural in its entirety. The book I created is an accordion style book that I learned how to make in a book arts class. This book makes it possible to see the mural in its entirety.

# Michelle "Shel" Savage



Once it came time to apply to transfer, I realized that I had taken Honors classes in the past and I ended up with 15 units. I applied to University of California San Diego and California state schools. University of California San Diego ended up accepting my application and granted me the Chancellor's Scholarship. Wondering why and how this happened since I did not apply for this scholarship, they explained to me that it was an algorithm having to do with me taking Honors classes and having a financial need. This was amazing: I was on top of the world. No words can explain how I felt. All my hard work, the many sleepless nights, and the many times I went to school hungry were all starting to pay off.

This journey was the most thrilling time of my life; I got out of my comfort zone and started to live life. Life is an experience that only happens once, and I am so glad I took that leap of faith when I decided to invest in myself. I had to be my own cheerleader in order to succeed in my educational journey and go back to what my teachers stressed in high school, which were to think critically, be a creative problem solver, and dream big!

I graduated from University of California San Diego in 2020 during the pandemic. That same year (2020) I went to Rome, Italy to obtain a master's degree at John Cabot University in Visual Arts in art history. I struggled studying in another country during the pandemic, but I had faith that this would all work out in the end. Now, I am an adjunct faculty for San Diego Community College District teaching in the fine arts department at both Mesa and City Colleges, and I have begun to fulfill my dreams of becoming a tenured faculty one day. I have also collaborated with Salvador Torres, and we are going to publish the book I made as an Honors project in my Chicano Studies class. This was all possible because I decided to make a class an Honors class.

# Lauren Foltz

I am a psychology major, but I truly love art and dedicate a lot of credits towards art classes. I wanted to create something seen as threatening and make it beautiful. I was researching references when I found the frilled lizard whose scientific name was perfect (The Chlamydosaurus). It was a good design to use with ceramics as it is able to be hung on a wall and looks like it is a live frilled lizard in that its collar is risen and is meant to be making a realistic threat display.



The Chlamydosaurus



# Lida Wang



Hi, I'm Lida Wang and I'm going to be studying philosophy and cognitive science at UC Berkeley this fall 2025.

I'm a PATH (Preparing Accomplished Transfers to the Humanities) mentee and placed 2nd in the San Diego Intercollegiate Philosophy Tournament talking about this thesis that I'm sharing with you: why free will is untrue and unproductive. I love understanding how people think and hope to continue the conversation on how we can understand ourselves, how we can find new ways to understand the world, and, ultimately, how we can make our lives better.

## Why free will is untrue and unproductive

People who argue free will exists have arguments that are incredibly similar to flat-earthers. Both free will believers and flat-earthers support their stance by an all-too-simple test, the results of which say nothing about the bigger picture when you take a step back, both literally and figuratively, for the flat earth and free will arguments, respectively. I'm only going to argue against the existence of free will with logic and completely ignore the biological arguments against free will, because I don't find the biological arguments all that practical, because they don't tell you how to better operate within this world, which is what I'll address in why free will is unproductive. My argument against free will has two parts:

- (1) free will is untrue and
- (2) free will is unproductive. Free will is untrue because a person's past (e.g. family, friends, environment) affects every decision they make. Free will is unproductive because
  - (1) it stops critical examination of people's behaviors and
  - (2) is not sufficient for people to take control of their lives, especially when it comes to habit formation.

Circling back to the flat-earthers comparison, to prove they are right, flat-earthers would say, "Just look outside." In a similar vein, free will believers would say, "Think (insert thought here)" or "Move (some part of your body)." These two groups of people propose all-too-simple tests for supporting their claims. We can agree (I'm hoping) why the flat earth argument is wrong. The flat-earther is examining the shape of the earth from an angle that cannot take into account the whole shape of Earth. It is only through other methods like circumnavigating the earth and seeing Earth from space can scientists prove the earth is round. Free will believers are also evaluating their beliefs from an angle that is too narrow.

If you take a big step back, doing something intentionally or voluntarily can also be a predetermined action. Intentionality and voluntariness are both feelings that can be explained by

previous conditions. For someone to encounter this test, participate in the test, do the action, and feel like they did the action intentionally can all be predetermined. Even the intentionality that free will believers laud cannot escape the scope of determinism.

Every situation a person encounters in their life and every decision they make in their life is the result of a convergence of causes. When someone makes a decision, what is going through their head and the pros and cons they are considering are the result of their previous experiences. These previous experiences can potentially be from their childhood, but it doesn't have to. Some people cite childhood experiences as the explanations for all adulthood actions and decisions, but that ignores the experiences a person has after childhood. Anything a person had previously encountered in their lifetime is fair game for consideration when they encounter their next decision. No decision is made in a vacuum devoid of external influences, but free will is trying to assume the existence of such a vacuum before a decision is made. This is untrue because every decision a person makes has to do with the environment they're in and their considerations from their previous life experiences, both of which are external influences.

Let's say you're still not convinced. You still think free will exists. Now I'll address why believing in free will is unproductive. The implications of free will is some people choose to do evil – whatever that means, freely and without being prompted by external forces. We can now label those evil-doers as evil. What's next? Or how about what did we just do? We stopped our judgement. Slapping on the label "evil" is a cop out to critically examining the situation for why someone would choose to do evil. But to a free will believer, when someone chooses to do evil freely, that's the end. That's who they are. We're not looking into their past for the causes of their evil actions because if someone chooses to do evil freely, their past did not affect their decision to do evil at all. We're just stuck with this evil label.

Hooray?

Hooray not. How about the people who sometimes freely do good and sometimes freely do evil? Suppose such a person does good when they provide for their family but they do evil when the way they make money is through hurting other people. What now? Are we just going to splinter such a person into the good and bad person? In another philosophical discussion about what identity is, there is also an argument for the splintering of a person. From moment to moment, a person's identity changes because a person is constantly changing, therefore splintering this person one instant to the next. Already the identity splintering argument isn't all that convincing for many people, and now when it comes to the good and evil of a person, we suddenly are ready to splinter them. Somehow, splintering a person just got more appealing when it comes splitting a person into good and evil.

When we assume every person has free will and we look down on other people's decisions that we can't understand, what we're actually doing is arguing from a position as an outsider to the person making the decision and putting an undeserved burden on the person for making the mistakes. The common sentence starter is "If I were you, I would (insert something here)." What we don't understand as an outsider to the person in question is we don't know what was going through their mind at the time of making a wrong decision. We don't know their past traumas, their personality disposition, their social pressures, their cultural pressures. We can't see the person clearly nor can we understand them.

All of this can be applied to considering people who are “lazy” and/or are “poor.” Meritocracy is built off the idea of free will. Meritocracy says some people “deserve” success, because they “freely” chose to work hard and others don’t, because they “freely” chose to be lazy, in the process ignoring other factors that affect a person’s success, such as their – I’m repeating myself here – past traumas, their personality disposition, their social barriers, their cultural pressures.

Okay, fine. Maybe there is no free will. So what’s next? What are we supposed to make of this lack of free will? Do I not have any agency in my life? I’ve some good news. You still have agency! Having control of one’s life and a lack of free will are not mutually exclusive. This world that we live in runs on a long list of constraints or universal rules. For example, even if you believe in free will, it doesn’t matter how free your will is,  $1 + 1$  will not equal 3. Even if you believe in free will, it won’t matter how free you think your mind is, you cannot think of or act on ideas and concepts that are completely outside the scope of any of your experiences or knowledge. If there was no such thing as constraints in this world, math and science are completely out the window. Both everything and nothing is possible at the same time. This world would be pure order and pure chaos at the same time.

To learn about these constraints and how to use them to your advantage, you can still have control of your life. If anything, you’ll have better control of your life than before. One example is habit formation. It is a common misconception that one can change their habits through sheer willpower alone, thinking if one has the conviction alone, one can change their habits. But conviction is only one piece of the habit-formation puzzle. Other factors that affect habit formation are one’s environment and even one’s plan. For example, to quit smoking, often conviction is not enough. One may also need to change one’s friend group, never have cigarettes on them, and someone who can keep them accountable. Free will believers really think free will is the be-all-end-all for control in one’s life when really it could get in the way of getting better control of one’s life. The “free” choice to have conviction to change something can only get you so far. In this habit formation example, the universal rules or constraints are the factors that affect habit formation (e.g. environment, conviction, plan). To understand what these constraints are and to use them in one’s life is what gives one agency in one’s life, even in a world without free will. So now, what being free means to me has nothing to do with free will. It is understanding how the world works and acting intentionally within these constraints/rules. Learning what these are and then using them is the purpose of knowledge and wisdom and is also what would then make life feel free and under one’s control.

The free will argument has endured another critical examination and failed miserably. In fact, not only is free will false, it also provides the foundation to misinterpret the world and operate ineffectively in this world. The major free will argument about intentionality was refuted because even intentionality does not escape the scope of determinism. Going forward, free will is dead, but that does not mean that all is lost. We can better operate in the world through a determinist lens and also learn to operate within the constraints of this world. In this way, we not only gain more control of our lives, we also see the world for what it is.