



The Maddy Institute

The San Joaquin Valley – Inspiring Public Leadership

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2024



A NOTE FROM THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As the San Joaquin Valley's public policy institute, The Maddy Institute is committed to uplifting our region through leadership development, non-partisan public policy analysis, and bipartisan discussions on important issues facing our valley. As an alumnus of the Maddy Institute, it is an honor to serve as the organization's Executive Director and help continue Senator Ken Maddy's legacy.

We are more than a public policy institute; we are a community driven by a shared commitment to the betterment of the San Joaquin Valley.

It is a privilege to lead an organization that has played a pivotal role in shaping leaders and fostering an environment of thoughtful and bipartisan discourse. These words encapsulate the very essence of our mission and the spirit that binds Maddy alumni together.

Our commitment to leadership development through our legislative internship program remains unwavering, and we continue to strive for excellence in providing you, our alumni, with opportunities to support the institute's growth and impact. The Maddy Institute has always stood as a beacon of non-partisan public policy analysis, ensuring that our region's challenges are met with thoughtful solutions that transcend political divides.

As we engage in bipartisan discussions on public policy issues facing our region, we are reminded of the power of cooperation and the enduring legacy of Senator Ken Maddy. His integrity, legislative skill, and bipartisanship laid the foundation for the Institute we cherish today, and it is our shared responsibility to carry that legacy forward.

I encourage you to stay connected with the Maddy Institute, share your thoughts, and actively participate in the discussions that shape the future of our region. Your insights and contributions are invaluable, and together, we can continue to make a meaningful impact.

Sincerely,

Blake Zante, Executive Director

MADDY ALUMNI: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Philemon Norris, Deputy District Attorney, Riverside County

Philemon interned with CA State Senator Michael Rubio in Summer 2011. He graduated from Thomas Jefferson School of Law in 2018 in San Diego California. He began his career as an attorney as a prosecutor in Albuquerque, New Mexico for three years before relocating back to California where he is currently continuing the practice of law as a Deputy District Attorney for Riverside County

"Having the amazing opportunity to receive the Maddy Institute's Legislative Scholarship Internship was such an insightful and life-changing experience. The internship allowed me to learn so much about the needs of Central Valley constituents while simultaneously allowing me to make an impact on those who were in need. The Maddy Institute provided me countless opportunities to help give back to the Central Valley. Whether it was speaking on behalf of a state elected official at local events or aiding our youth on behalf of local leaders, I gained insight on what it means to be a good public servant which assisted me on my path to law school. I also will never forget the people who I interned for in my office. Between the late Al Wagner and Supervisor Leticia Perez, these individuals made my experience interning with the Maddy Institute one I will always cherish. Some life lessons they have shared with me, I will never forget. I am thankful to The Maddy Institute and The Maddy Institute Scholarship Committee who gave me the opportunity to intern."



Ana Jovel Melendez, Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs, California Environmental Protection Agency

Ana interned with Assemblymember Sarah Reyes in the Spring 2003. She is currently Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs at the California Environmental Protection Agency. Immediately prior, she served as Director of Legislative Affairs at the State Water Resources Control Board. As Deputy Secretary at CalEPA, Ana will be coordinating the legislative activities of one office, two boards, and three departments dedicated to improving California's environment.

"My Maddy Institute internship scholarship provided me with the opportunity to learn firsthand the importance of working in a legislative office and the importance of public service. The internship was key in setting me forward in my professional trajectory."

MADDY ALUMNI: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Hector Ramirez, Attorney, California Community College Chancellor's Office

Hector interned with U.S. Senator Anthony Cannella in Fall 2013. After graduating from McGeorge School of Law in 2022 and passing the California Bar Exam in July of the same year, Hector embarked on an exciting new chapter in his career. He has been serving as an attorney for the California Community College Chancellor's Office in Sacramento, CA. His work primarily focuses on higher education law and administrative law.

"As a first-generation student who transferred from College of Sequoias to the University of California, Merced, the Maddy Internship was a pivotal moment for me. The internship provided me with invaluable skills and opportunities that have been instrumental in shaping my career path."



Leila Alamri-Kassim, Attorney and Lecturer, Fresno State

Leila interned for former CA State Senator Dean Florez in 2010. She earned dual Bachelor of Arts degrees (Magna Cum Laude) in both Political Science and Women's Studies from California State University, Fresno where she was a Smittcamp Family Honors College President's Scholar. Leila then earned her Juris Doctor degree from the San Joaquin College of Law, where she graduated with Distinction. For years Leila served diverse populations including working with immigrant communities through the New American Legal Clinic, providing low-income communities with free legal aid at Central California Legal Services, and supporting victims of domestic violence at the Marjaree Mason Center. She is also a Lecturer for the Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies Department at Fresno State.

"My internship experience through the Maddy Institute was my first exposure to real-world politics at the local level. It was eye-opening to be immersed among the inner workings of the state government. Although I ultimately pursued a career outside of politics, my internship with the Maddy Institute emphasized the importance of local governments. After law school I went on to practice public agency law where I worked with public agencies throughout the Central Valley including local cities, counties, and school districts. Through my internship, and my experience as an attorney, I learned that if you really want to make a difference starting at the local level is where we can make the most change."

MEET OUR LEGISLATIVE SCHOLAR INTERNS

SPRING 2024



Camalah Saleh, Fresno City Council Member Tyler Maxwell

Camalah is a second-year at California State University, Fresno double majoring in Political Science and Communication. She is also a member of the Smittcamp Family Honors College. Camalah's passion for local politics has been shaped by first hand experiences of its direct impact in our daily lives and is looking forward to learning more about its process. On campus, Camalah serves as the president of the League of Women Voters student unit where she works with others to increase voter participation among college students. Additionally, she proudly represents her community as a delegate for Assembly District 31 and serves as the Communication Director for the Arab-American Caucus. Camalah has also had the experience of working on the political campaigns of Anna Caballero, Manpreet Kaur, and the No on C Coalition during the 2022 general election. Beyond her political involvement, Camalah also works as a student assistant for the Maddy Institute. After obtaining her bachelor's, Camalah plans to attend law school to become an immigration attorney. Her goal is to give back to her community by one day establishing an immigration law firm in Sanger, CA - the town her family immigrated to when she was three.



Gabriella Vides, Kern County District 4 Supervisor David Couch

Gabriella is in her second semester at California State University, Bakersfield as she obtains her Master of Public Administration degree. In May of 2023, she graduated from CSUB with her bachelor's in Political Science, emphasizing American Politics and Power & Justice. After obtaining her master's degree, her academia goal moves forward towards a doctoral degree in political science that will hopefully one day allow her to perform research in understanding political behavior in young people and how that is impacting politics within the United States. Being raised in Bakersfield, Gabriella has deep roots in this community, and she strives to be one of the people that actively makes it a better place for everyone.

MEET OUR LEGISLATIVE SCHOLAR INTERNS



Huda Alazani, Fresno Office of U.S. Representative Jim Costa

Huda is a senior at Fresno State majoring in Political Science with the goal of pursuing law school after obtaining her bachelor's degree. She is also a president's scholar with the Smittcamp Family Honors College, where she currently serves as the president for the Council of President's Scholars. On campus, Huda is a member of clubs such as Pi Sigma Alpha, the League of Women Voters, and she serves as the Vice President of the Students for Palestinian Liberation. In addition, she also works as a student assistant at the Maddy Institute and as a peer writing mentor for the Department of Political Science on campus. Last fall, she interned with the Fresno County Public Defender's office, where she was able to explore her interest in law at a local level. Huda is passionate about serving her community and believes in providing opportunities, which she hopes to achieve by becoming an immigration attorney in the future. Through her internship, she hopes to provide valuable insight, become more involved locally, and be of service to her community.



Lorraine Mireles Vega, Fresno Office of CA Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria

Lorraine is a senior at California State University, Fresno. Her major in Political Science reflects her aspirations to attend law school after completing her Bachelor's degree. Lorraine is actively involved in Pi Sigma Alpha and serves as a co-captain on Fresno State's Mock Trial Team. Growing up in a household with Mexican-immigrant parents, Lorraine has first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by first-generation Mexican-American women. This upbringing ignited her interest in politics and government, especially given her family's mixed status. Hailing from the Central Valley, she is deeply committed to empowering and advocating for underserved communities. Lorraine's dedication extends to various causes, including women's rights, immigration reform, social justice, and environmental protection. Thrilled to contribute to her community, she eagerly embraces the opportunity to learn and serve the Central Valley through her role in Asm. Esmeralda Soria's office in Fresno.

MEET OUR LEGISLATIVE SCHOLAR INTERNS



Juan Lara, Fresno Office of CA Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula

Juan is a graduate student at California State University, Fresno pursuing his Master's in Public Administration. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science in 2022 from the University of California, Merced. Juan was born and raised in Fresno, CA and desires to pay forward his education not just for his family but for the Central Valley, a community that holds the same experiences and physical/mental struggles he grew up witnessing. Raised by Mexican immigrants, he experienced first-hand the struggles low-income, first-generation, and Latinos encountered. He grew up in a family with very few understanding and interest in government and civic engagement but understood fear would transcend that when policies threatened immigrants like his parents with no guarantee that they could safely or fairly work nor spend time outside their home without fearing deportation. Ultimately, this influenced Juan's interest to study and gain a better understanding of politics and subsequently pursue an education in how to manage/lead in the public and nonprofit sectors, with the goal of expanding his personal/professional growth and learning from and with his community. Juan is a dedicated and passionate individual about public administration and community empowerment who wishes to gain first hand experience within the local legislative system and work with other community members with the dream of strengthening and supporting underrepresented communities in the Central Valley.



Jackson Bonnar, Visalia Office of CA Assemblymember Devon Mathis

Jackson is a sophomore at the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, majoring in political science. Jackson was born and raised in Tulare, California and devoted himself to his academics with a strong passion for politics, law, and U.S. history. After college he looks to go into the field of politics as a diplomat. He is currently President of College Republicans and board member of Turning Point USA at his school, and regularly volunteers his time to local groups and communities. Jackson is excited to be working with Mr. Mathis' office to learn the ins and outs of local government, and making the Central Valley a better place.

MEET OUR LEGISLATIVE SCHOLAR INTERNS



Natalia Sanchez, Merced Office of CA Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria

Natalia is fourth-year political science major with a minor in sociology attending the University of California, Merced. She was born and raised in the Central Valley, more specifically, from Modesto and has gained an understanding on the issues within the Central Valley firsthand. The issues Natalia has witnessed throughout her community have shaped her into the person she is today seeking out a career within the legal or government field. As she approaches graduation, she hopes to better serve her community with the skills she has learned while attending UC Merced and through the various experiences she has had on campus and off campus. Natalia has gained skills through her job as a Lead Student Assistant at UC Merced's Recycling and Waste Center helping the school's mission to zero waste. She has also gained amazing experiences as the Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law Fraternity President, Coalition of Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) California Dream Network Intern, and as a volunteer in the University's California Dream Resource Center. All these experiences have supported her goal to help people once she graduates, and hopes to work as an attorney or within public policy to ensure her community will be well-taken care of. She is excited to learn at Esmeralda Soria's District Office in Merced and learn how constituent work within local politics works and how to best serve the Central Valley Community.



Rashel Olvera, Fresno Office of CA Senator Anna Caballero

Rashel is a senior at Fresno State pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. Throughout her time at Fresno State, she has had the opportunity to be a part of many wonderful on-campus and off-campus organizations. For instance, Rashel is incredibly proud to be a member of the National Political Science Honor Society, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, as well as a UCLA law fellow. After college, she has the goal of obtaining a Juris Doctor degree and having a career in immigration, hoping to assist individuals in their process of becoming official U.S. citizens. Her goal is to simplify complex legal matters as much as she possibly can to increase the likelihood of success for her future clients. She is very excited and optimistically looks forward to giving back to her home, the Central Valley.

MEET OUR LEGISLATIVE SCHOLAR INTERNS



Rocio Robles, CA Governor's Office of Planning and Research

Rocio is a third-year student at the University of California, Merced. She is pursuing a degree in Political Science. Rocio was raised in Bakersfield, California. Her biggest passion is being able to give back to her community and help those around her. She currently serves as a Senator At-Large for the Associated Students of UC Merced where she collaborates with others to ensure that students feel comfortable to use their voice and fosters a welcoming environment for all. Rocio has interned for former Assemblymember Rudy Salas where she learned the importance of public policy and state governance. Witnessing firsthand the impact of legislative decisions on the lives of her community reinforced her commitment to becoming an agent of positive transformation. She is excited to have the opportunity to learn and grow through interning in the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. After graduating, Rocio hopes to go to law school and become a public defender to continue helping her community, especially those from a marginalized community.



Verania Vizcarra, Merced Office of U.S. Senator Alex Padilla

Verania is a junior at the University of California, Merced majoring in Political Science. She is a first-generation student from Watsonville, California, a predominantly Latino community. Growing up she experienced first-hand the struggles low-income, first-generation, Latino, and women experience. Verania understood the disparity in resources that underrepresented communities faced. Her drive for social change has pushed her to become more active on campus by becoming the president of the Democrats at UC Merced and involving herself in local political campaigns. Through these experiences, Verania was able to make connections with organizations such as CADEMS and local politicians. She was also able to develop her leadership skills and start creating her network. She is passionate about accessibility to housing, immigration rights, women's rights, social justice, and the environment. She hopes to pursue a career in politics to help bring change to her communities and those like.

MEET OUR LEGISLATIVE SCHOLAR INTERNS



Yesenia Barajas, Modesto Office of CA Assmeblymember Juan Alanis

Yesenia is a fourth-year, first-generation student at California State University, Stanislaus majoring in Political Science. She is from San Jose, California, and later moved to Modesto, California. Her passion for politics grew when she decided to participate in activities on campus under the leadership of CADEM. This included visiting classes to teach students the importance of voting and helping them register to vote. Knowing that she was doing something to make a difference, as small as it may be, led her to discover that she wanted to pursue a future in public service. During the Fall 2023 semester, Yesenia had the opportunity to serve as a Congressional Intern for the Panetta Institute of Public Policy. With this experience, she spent a semester in Washington D.C. in the office of Congresswoman Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA-44). At the U.S. Capitol, Yesenia had the opportunity to develop her leadership skills, grow her network, and explore more of her passion for politics. Before graduating, she wanted to intern in a state office to deepen her understanding of state governance and policy in the Central Valley. Yesenia wants to help create a better future for her family, friends, and community. When she graduates, she hopes to obtain a Master's degree in Public Administration and pursue a career in public policy.



Yeyfer Andrade, Kings County Administration Office

Yeyfer is a United States Army Veteran of 6 years. He was enlisted in the Army as an 88M and eventually cross-trained into military intelligence. Yeyfer has served in many different capacities in the military that developed his professional skills and relations with foreign allies. He also served with many different organizations in his time in the military such as USASOC, ICE, Border Patrol, and many foreign ally partner forces. After he got out of the Army, he enrolled at the College of the Sequoias. He is currently in his last semester at COS double majoring in Political Science and Business. His interests are in Intelligence Studies and International Relations. Yeyfer is also a member and senior photographer for ACVH (A Combat Veterans Hope) a local non-profit organization that empowers Combat Veterans through engagement with each other and their local community while ensuring every generation of Combat Veterans successfully integrates back into their local community.

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STAY CONNECTED WITH THE MADDY INSTITUTE

Over **500** Legislative Intern Scholars have had the opportunity to learn about the legislative process and many have gone on to become leaders in politics, law, business and non-profit organizations. We have been able to grow this program and increase opportunities for Valley students due, in large part, to the donations of those who realize the importance of "paying it forward."

As an Alum, you can help us continue our goal of inspiring public leadership. Ways you can help:

- Give back to the areas of the Institute that mean the most to you
- Make a *lasting* impact by becoming a Maddy Associate before the end of the year
- Connect with fellow Alumni and our current interns to foster long-term relationships
- Hire fellow alumni in professional development opportunities when possible

Not only are you contributing to a life-changing experience for these Valley students, you also planting the seeds of the next generation of Valley leaders.

The Maddy Institute
4910 N. Chestnut Ave. M/S OF 123 Fresno, CA 93726



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