

Curriculum Vitae

Maria Christina Huerta-Avila

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EDUCATION

San Diego State University

2023 - present

B. A. in Psychology, Emphasis in Neuroscience
Minor in Cultural Proficiency
Minor in Counseling and Social Change
Current Overall GPA: 3.78
Anticipated Graduation: May 2026

Southwestern College

Associate Degree in Psychology, Honors 2022 - 2023
Associate Degree in Accounting, Honors 2003 - 2008

RELEVANT COURSEWORK

Psychology: Neuropsychology, Cognitive Neuroscience, Developmental Psychopathology, Stress, Trauma, and Combat Experience, Psychology and Culture, Drugs and Behavior, Behavioral Neuroscience (*in progress*)

Cultural Proficiency: Seminar in Cultural Competency, Psychology of Women, Music and Culture, Chicana/o History (*in progress*)

Counseling and Social Change: Stress Management, Counseling and Helping Professions, Quest for Identity, Counseling Skills and Practice (*in progress*), Counseling/Social Change (*in progress*)

Preparation in Scientific Research: PSY 410-Advanced Research Methods Laboratory, PSY 499-Special Study, Scientific Writing, Responsible Conduct of Scientific Research, Colloquium in Biomedical Science

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Undergraduate Research Assistant

June 2025 - present

Jessica McCurley Ph.D., MPH

Health Innovation, Justice, and Action (HIJA) Lab

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

Health psychology and health-related social needs research lab with a focus on health disparities, depression, cardiometabolic diseases, behavioral intervention development and behavioral economics, worker and migrant health, implementation science, and community-based participatory research.

- Serving as study coordinator for a NIH-funded Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based intervention program to improve mood and physical activity among low-wage hospital workers with depression symptoms
- Working with REDCap, a web application for building and managing online surveys and databases
- Using and designing text message intervention components using Mosio, a text messaging software for clinical research
- Formatting and translating a CBT workbook from English to Spanish
- Attending weekly study-specific and general lab meetings and bi-weekly professional development meetings

Undergraduate Research Assistant

August 2024 - June 2025

Phillip J. Holcomb Ph.D. & Katherine J. Midgley Ph.D.

NeuroCognition Lab

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

While at NeuroCognition Lab Worked Closely With:

November 2024 - June 2025

Francesca Pesciarelli Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Biomedical, Metabolic, and Neural Sciences

University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (UNIMORE)

Modena, Italy

Fullbright Visiting Scholar

Cognitive neuroscience research lab looking at the neuronal basis of language comprehension and production, primarily through event-related potentials (ERPs), to track the sequence and timing of neural events of language processes in the brain.

- Recruited 29 participants for bilingual ERP study
- Conducted phone interviews with 30+ participants in both English and Spanish
- Administered the Multilingual Naming Test (MINT) Sprint 2.0 assessment in both English and Spanish to 20+ participants
- Capped participants for EEG recording
- Gave verbal instructions of tasks to English monolingual and Spanish (L1)/English (L2) bilingual participants in English and/or Spanish
 - Instruct on eye-blink control
 - Instruct on button press
- Followed protocol for recording EEG on computer program
- Set-up and ran calibrations on EEG equipment
- Lowered impedances on electrodes:
 - 28 in cap, behind ears, next to (R) eye, and below (L) eye
- Analyzed EEG recordings live to identify and rectify
 - Artifacts
 - Disconnecting electrodes
 - Participant task adherence

- Translated words for new priming stimuli from Italian to English and Spanish (Mexico)
- Worked on psycholinguistic norming study of translated English/Spanish stimuli
 - Gender Stereotype
 - Valence
- Built Qualtrics surveys and collected information for new database, English and Spanish

Intern

January - May 2024

Supervisor: Dana Stevens MPA

Community, Action, Service, and Advocacy (CASA)

San Diego, CA, United States

Community partners focused on providing opportunities in research, education, advocacy, and service to further create safe and healthy neighborhoods.

- Researched local ordinances that address flavored tobacco products
- Analyzed SB793 and local ordinances ban on flavored tobacco products

Undergraduate Research Assistant

June - August 2023

Georg E. Matt Ph.D.

Center for Tobacco and the Environment

Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

Research lab with the mission to advance our understanding of the relationships among thirdhand smoke exposure and human health.

- Pilot tested a smartphone application for mapping tobacco, electronic or e-cig, and cannabis (TEC) waste
- Trained in SDSU's Tobacco Product Waste Reduction Project (TPWRP) Data Collection Protocol for surveying areas
- Hand sketched defined boundaries of sidewalks, landscape, and blacktop on 16 x 20in. printed google map in preparation for data collection
- Collected data for study
- Recorded, quantified, and categorized TEC waste on TEC app
- Answered FAQs on TEC waste for the TEC app
- Followed protocol to dispose of instruments used with TEC waste
- Trained in collection of nicotine residue on non-porous surfaces
- Followed protocol procedures when testing nicotine levels in used cars
- Reviewed video project scripts content for accuracy on thirdhand smoke facts
- Worked on a step-by-step tutorial on instructions for IRB research staff CITI trainings
- Attended weekly CTE and TEC app development meetings

SCIENTIFIC PRESENTATIONS

Huerta-Avila, M., Jardel, J., Holcomb, P., Midgley, K., Pesciarelli, F. (2025, November 19-22).

Gender stereotype through the lens of the bilingual brain: An ERP study [Poster]

- presentation]. 2025 Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists (ABRCMS), San Antonio, TX, United States.
- Huerta-Avila, M.**, Jardel, J., Holcomb, P., Midgley, K., Pesciarelli, F. (2025, October 17). *Gender stereotype through the lens of the bilingual brain: An ERP study* [Oral presentation]. 2025 Undergraduate Research Symposium (URS), San Diego, CA, United States.
- Huerta-Avila, M.**, Holcomb, P., Midgley, K., Pesciarelli, F. (2025, February 28). *Gender stereotype through the lens of the bilingual brain: An ERP study* [Oral presentation]. 2025 San Diego State University Student Symposium (S3), San Diego, CA, United States.
- Lavallee, S., Greiner, L., Tran, K., **Huerta-Avila, M.**, Kwack, J., McCallum, R., Matt, G. (2024, Oct. 27 - 30). *A citizen science approach to tobacco product waste: Mobilizing communities for policy change using an interactive smartphone app* [Poster presentation]. 2024 American Public Health Association (APHA) Convention, Minneapolis, MN, United States.
- Huerta-Avila, M.**, Matt, G., & Greiner, L. (2024, May 31). *A tale of two buildings: Do smoking policies impact discarded waste from commercial cigarettes, e-cigs, and cannabis?* [Poster presentation]. 2024 First Annual Symposium on Tobacco and the Environment, Center for Tobacco and the Environment (CTE), San Diego, CA, United States.
- Huerta-Avila, M.**, Matt, G., & Greiner, L. (2024, March 1-3). *A tale of two buildings: Do smoking policies impact discarded waste from commercial cigarettes, e-cigs, and cannabis?* [Poster presentation]. 2024 San Diego State University Student Symposium (S3), San Diego, CA, United States.
- Huerta-Avila, M.**, & Matt, G. (2023, August 11). *Engaging local communities in tobacco control: Pilot testing a smart phone app for mapping tobacco product waste* [Oral presentation]. 2023 NextGen Smoke & Vape-Free Latinx Scholars Summer Research Presentations, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, United States.

HONORS AND AWARDS

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| NIH-NIGMS SDSU Maximizing Access to Research Careers (MARC) Scholar | 2024 - present |
| \$21,500 award for students selected to participate in the NIH-funded training program supporting students earning their bachelor's degree in a STEM field who will transition into and complete research-focused graduate degree programs | |
| NIKE HSI Scholarship Program Scholar | 2025 |
| \$10,000 award granted for academic and extracurricular accomplishments to support educational and long-term goals | |
| Dean's List | Fall 2023 - Fall 2024 |
| Academic Achiever for the Office of Educational Opportunity Programs, Outreach and Success (EOPOS) | Fall 2023 - Fall 2024 |
| CSU Trustees' Award for Outstanding Achievement, SDSU | 2024 |
| One student from each of the 23 California State University (CSU) system campuses is recognized for demonstrating superior academic performance, personal accomplishments, community service, and financial need. One | |

scholarship of \$7,000 is awarded to each campus awardee with a limited opportunity to receive an enhanced award.

CSU Trustee Jack McGrory Scholarship	2024
Enhanced award of \$10,000 given for superior academic performance, exemplary community service, and significant personal accomplishments.	
ME2WE Scholarship, \$1,000	2024
A scholarship founded in 2020 and inspired by Margaret Ellavsky to support students who have made a positive impact in their community.	
NextGen Smoke and Vape-Free Latinx Scholars Program	2022 - 2024
\$40,000 award for students selected to participate in the Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program of California (TRDRP). A cohort of five students transferring to SDSU from Southwestern Community College were funded to work on tobacco-related research projects and engage in local tobacco control policy and educational activities for two years beginning their final semester at community college.	
Undergraduate Research Excellence Award, SDSU S3 Poster Presentation	Spring 2024
Tau Sigma, National honor society for SDSU transfer students	Spring 2024
Psi Chi, National honor society in psychology	Spring 2024
Phi Theta Kappa, International honor society for two-year colleges	Spring 2023
Psi Beta, National honor society for two-year colleges in psychology	2022 - 2023
Community Health Group Scholarship, \$1,000	2022

FELLOWSHIPS

National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP)	2025
Supports graduate students pursuing full-time research-based graduate education in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM). [<i>Application submitted</i>]	

WORK EXPERIENCE

Peer Mentor	Summer 2024
<i>Educational Opportunity Programs, Outreach & Success (EOPOS)</i>	
<i>Transfer Bridge Program</i>	
San Diego State University	
San Diego, CA, United States	
Program Coordinator: Alan G. Estala	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentored 15 incoming transfer students through an intensive transitional three-day program during the summer• Created a community with incoming transfer students by acclimating them to SDSU• Developed skills in leadership, communication, team building, accountability, motivation, public speaking, and active listening• Led discussions and presentations	

CERTIFICATIONS

SDSU's University Seal of Biliteracy & Cultural Competence 2024

- *English & Spanish*
 - A standardized measurement of biliteracy skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking
- *Transfronterizo student & District English Language Advisory Council (DELAC) school representative*
 - Validation of culture and linguistic immersion experience

ORGANIZATIONS

National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health: SDSU MARC 1T34GM149430 2024-present

Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) 2024-present

Educational Opportunities Program, Outreach & Success (EOPOS) 2023-present

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) 2017-present

COMMUNITY OUTREACH EXPERIENCE

Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Student Advisory Board Member 2025-present

HSI Student Advisory Board

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

- Attend bi-weekly meetings
- Work with a group of students and faculty to plan and bring about activities with a focus on bringing information to students on different academic and proactive topics that can positively impact the environment at SDSU

STEM Student Volunteer 2024-present

Pre-MARC Class

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

- Present in class on building a CV, an e-portfolio, and an Individualized Development Plan (IDP)
- Record and share a short video on how to get involved in research at SDSU
- Provide shadowing experience in the lab setting and while recruiting participants
- Participate in interviews and answer questions related to research in psychology

SDSU's Center for the Advancement of Students in Academia (CASA)

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

- Table for CASA where I inform students interested in a career in STEM on applying to CASA Programs that would be beneficial for them while at SDSU's Student Symposium
- Participate in the interview process for new MARC applicants
- Table for CASA and help guide visitors at Explore SDSU Admitted Student Day

Student Member 2023-present

Project Rebound Student Alliance (PRSA)

San Diego State University

San Diego, CA, United States

- Support community building by participating in service events to increase student success
- Provide guidance to justice impacted students while focusing on academic support, life skills development, and fostering a positive learning environment

Volunteer 2017-present

Olivewood Elementary PTA

National City, CA, United States

Varying by degree of involvement a combination of general volunteer activities which have included:

- Set-up and/or clean-up for festival, ticket sales
- Run game booth at festival
- Book fair set-up, clean-up, and/or managed cash register
- Set-up picture booth for promotion

Treasurer 2023-2024

Olivewood Elementary PTA

National City, CA, United States

- Prepared financial reports
- Completed and submitted taxes, insurance, federal and state government reports
- Helped organize and plan for the book fair
- Helped recruit a new officer for the position of president

Vice-President 2022-2023

Olivewood Elementary PTA

National City, CA, United States

- Performed presidential duties in president's absence
- Worked as primary aide to president
- Trained treasurer in financial reports, taxes, and government reports

Parent Participant 2022-2023

Parent Roundtable Discussion with the Superintendent

National City, CA, United States

- Participated in monthly open conversations around parent-driven topics
- Advocated for parents whose first language is not Spanish to read to their children in their first language and to keep using it at home
- Proposed that the Spanish version of books that students read in class be included in the school library
 - The goal was for parents, who cannot read in English, to be able to discuss and be able to help their children with reading and comprehension
 - The school board approved this proposition

Parent Volunteer May 2022

Learning How English Works (LHEW) Pilot Parent Session

National City, CA, United States

- Attended pilot session and provided ideas and input on future sessions

Collaborator/PTA Representative

April 2022

A Reason to Survive (ARTS)

National City, CA, United States

- Attended collaboration meeting and provided input on the importance of art in school

President

2021-2022

Olivewood Elementary PTA

National City, CA, United States

- Presided over PTA association and officer meetings
- Coordinated work of executive board
- Promoted events such as the Third Annual Suicide Prevention Symposium presented by Rady Children's Hospital and Ninth District PTA
- Worked towards providing affordable and high quality spirit gear
- Served as official contact, communicator and representative of Olivewood PTA

Olivewood School Community Member

2021-2022

Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP)

National School District

National City, CA, United States

- Selected to participate in the process to develop the Local Control Accountability Plan
- Attended yearly meetings and provided input and insight into the actions and priorities of the plan

Olivewood School Parent/PTA Representative

2021-2022

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Committee

Olivewood Elementary School

National City, CA, United States

- Attended monthly meetings
- Collaborated with teachers, school counselor, school psychologist, and school principal while providing input from the perspective of parent/PTA representative

Olivewood School Parent Representative

2017-2022

District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)

National School District

National City, CA, United States

- Attended monthly meetings
- Advised the district administration by providing a parent perspective on student success
- Collaborated with school representatives to improve our school environments

Olivewood School Parent Representative

2017-2022

District English Language Advisory Council (DELAC)

National School District

National City, CA, United States

- Attended monthly meetings
- Acquired information to improve second language acquisition in our local school
- Provided input to support parents of students classified as English learners

Treasurer

2019-2021

Olivewood Elementary PTA

National City, CA, United States

- Maintained financial records to track unit funds and financial transactions
- Prepared annual budget and financial reports
- Completed and submitted taxes, insurance, federal and state government reports
- Organized activities for 500+ students
- Helped decorate and read for classes during Reading Across America events
- Designed and collaborated with PTA officers and school staff to complete a schoolwide online plan to give away 100 books in one month (25 classes per week for four weeks)
 - Focused on improving online learning outcomes for students during the pandemic
 - Motivated students to participate in class and to make overall academic or behavioral improvements
 - Selected books based on the Accelerated Reader Bookfinder (AR) lexile levels ranging from 0.9-5.9

Olivewood School Parent Representative

2017-2021

School Site Council (SSC)

Olivewood Elementary School

National City, CA, United States

- Attended yearly meetings
- Collaborated with school administration, teachers, and other parents to develop and monitor the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA)
- Provided input to manage expenditures related to the improvement of school programs and academics

SKILLS

Languages: Bilingual Spanish and English (read, write, speak)

Experience: SPSS, Excel, Word, Qualtrics XM, Canva, REDCap, Mosio