



Three Mellon Mays Fellows Ready to Continue Their Humanities Studies in Grad School

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Three Mellon Mays graduates will earn their degrees this year and move on to graduate school:

- Monique Garcia, history, Chicana and Chicano studies (master's program in history at Cal State Fullerton)
- Mia Powell, sociology (Ph.D. program at Penn State)
- Isaiah Thompson, religious studies and history (master's program in history at Cal State Fullerton)

The [Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship](#) program, designed to support undergraduate students like Garcia, Powell and Thompson in pursuing doctorates in the humanities, was established at CSUF in 2018 through a [\\$444,319 grant](#) from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Monique Garcia

Monique Garcia was familiar with CSUF even before she applied for admission. The double major in history and Chicana and Chicano studies had an older sister who was a President's Scholar at the university and Garcia often accompanied her to scholar meetings.

"I felt at home at the campus and enjoyed the community feel," she said. She entered CSUF as a history major.

"I came to love history at a young age as it helped me learn more about others as well as myself. Using primary sources, memoirs and artifacts we are able to learn more about who we were, which allows us to better understand each other. Each history course I took gave me new knowledge and perspectives. I owe so much to the history department and its dedicated and passionate professors.

"But I still longed to learn more about the history and culture of my people. The Chicano and Chicana studies department offered me this. The information that I learned in my Chicana and Chicano studies courses has provided me with a unique perspective and I hope to be able to integrate the knowledge that I have gained in my major courses into my future research and the courses I will teach as a future professor."

Becoming a professor has long been one of Garcia's dreams. When she learned about the Mellon Mays fellowship, she applied.

"My acceptance into the program was truly life-changing," she said. "It is such an honor to be part of a program that strives to diversify the university system. This program gave me the opportunity to attend conferences and present my research on how Chicanas navigated the patriarchy in the Brown Berets. I also participated in two internships the summer of my junior year. I interned at UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center. I came to learn more about digital archives and preservation, and was able to get a sense of the hard work that goes into making archives fully accessible to the public."

Garcia also interned at CSUF's Chicana Research Center transcribing oral and visual histories, including three visual recordings of David Sanchez, the founder and prime minister of the Brown Berets.

"CSUF is a home away from home for me. I am so glad that I will be working on my master's degree here."

Mia Powell

Originally from the Bay Area, Powell hoped to experience a new environment and new people at Cal State Fullerton.

“Interestingly, I somewhat stumbled upon my chosen discipline of sociology. I was admitted to CSUF as a political science major, but prior to my first semester, I realized that while I was interested in political processes, I wanted to build my base knowledge in how our social structures affect and reflect our political system,” she said. “With that understanding of my academic interests, I decided that sociology would be a great foundation for my academic and career objectives.”

For as long as she could remember, Powell wanted to pursue a graduate-level degree but as a first-generation college student and woman of color, she didn’t know how to achieve that goal.

“I genuinely feel as though my Mellon Mays journey began by being in ‘the right place at the right time,’” she said. “I was sitting in a classroom and my professor, who later became my Mellon Mays mentor, shared the invitation to apply for the program. I immediately poured myself into that opportunity. Without this program, I wouldn’t have had the tools or confidence to pursue graduate study, and now I’m headed to Penn State to start a Ph.D. program.”

Powell’s advice to other students considering graduate school is to ask professors about any opportunities or programs.

“We have some amazing programs on campus that provide incredible opportunities. Take advantage of them.”

Isaiah Thompson

When Isaiah Thompson finished high school, he was interested in a career in ministry. While taking a community college class on philosophy of religion, he grew more interested in how religion and philosophy touched on history.

“My sister had attended Cal State Fullerton and had a great experience, so I decided to apply,” he said. “I believe it was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

At Cal State Fullerton, Thompson discovered he could pursue both interests in religion and history. In fact, at his orientation, he was the only student majoring in religious studies. He met with a faculty adviser and learned about the Mellon Mays fellowship.

“Once I was accepted into the program, I found a community of like-minded scholars,” he recalled. “The financial support the program offers helps alleviate the financial stress so you can really concentrate on your research. You are paired with a faculty mentor who takes your academic experience to a whole new level.”

Thompson recalls walking into the office of history professor Jochen Burgdorf, his faculty mentor, and asking how he conducted research.

“He pulled up a 12-page article he’d written and then he showed me a separate document — about 50 pages — that contained his research notes. He’d organized it, with citations for notes and comments, and explained this is how he did systematic research. He walked me through his entire process. That was a game changer for me. Thompson also discovered that it was okay not to have all the answers.

“That’s why we conduct research,” he said. “That’s how you learn. You gain understanding by cultivating a curious mind.”

Thompson particularly likes a quote by memorist Frank McCourt: “You might be poor. Your shoes might be broken. But your mind is a palace.”

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