



# Founder Region Fellowship, Inc.



Awards Dinner and Gala  
May 2, 2025

*Solving Puzzles by Degrees!*



# Fellowship Awards Dinner and Gala

Celebrating the  
2025 Award Recipients

**Friday, May 2, 2025**

**7:00 PM - 9:30 PM**

**Concord Hilton Hotel**



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# 2024-2026 Fellowship Board

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## History

Founder Region Fellowship is the Founder Region's identifying project, which was started in 1948. The Founder Region Fellowship is a non-profit 501(c)(3) program that provides awards to women in the final phase of their doctoral studies. It is almost entirely supported by the Soroptimist members and clubs within the Founder Region. A byproduct of this support is the affirmation of the importance of the recipient's work and value as an individual. We support women working in fields traditionally held by men or in fields of great social significance to the world. We hope the recipients will reflect and further Soroptimist ideals by becoming a strong voice for all women.

The program began in 1948 as a committee in the Pacific Region. In 1952, the Pacific Region was divided into three regions, one of which was the Southwestern Region. The Southwestern Region administered the program until 1976. In 1976, the Southwestern Region was divided into three separate regions, Sierra Pacific, Sierra Nevada, and Founder, with the Fellowship program staying with the Founder Region. On March 17, 1986, Founder Region Fellowship, Inc. was formed, and the board of directors was elected by conference action. The first president of Founder Region Fellowship, Inc. was Julia" Bess" Combs, a past Governor of Founder Region and SI/Oakland-The Founder Club member.

These are just a few of the fields of study in which the candidates are seeking a doctorate: Anthropology, Botany, Chemistry, Clinical Psychology, Comparative Biochemistry, Computer Science, Disease Ecology, Educational Leadership for Social Justice, Electrical Engineering, Epidemiology, Integrative Biology, Law, Marine Biology, Social Welfare & Zoology. Applications are accepted from schools within the boundaries of the Founder Region that offer doctoral programs.

**377 Grants Awarded to Deserving Women**

**\$1,859,625 Awarded in Total Funding**

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## 2025 Award Recipients

Sinclair O'Grady UC Berkeley

Ruiting Wang UC Berkeley

Suchitra Narayanan UH Mānoa

Grace Hu UC Berkeley

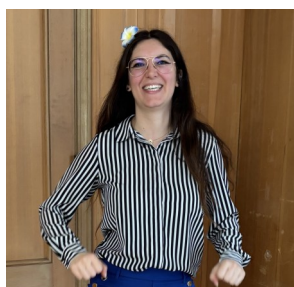
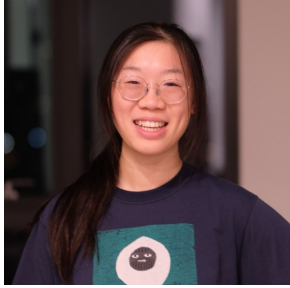
Tiffanie Ah Loo Chaminade University  
of Honolulu

Danielle Bartz UH Mānoa

Nour Akiki UC Berkeley

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## 2025 Award Recipients



**" We won!**

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## 2025 Awards Agenda

**7:00 PM Doors Open to Main Ballroom**

Dinner begins with Salad

**7:10 PM Call to Order**

Governor Elise Balgley

Presentation of Colors

Girl Scouts of Diablo Shadows

Community Welcome

Mayor Carlyn Obringer

Official Response

Governor-elect Jackie De Vries

Inspiration

Kay Kelley, District II, FRF Director

Welcome

Cindy Rasmussen, District V, FRF Director

Presentation of Platform Governor Elise

**7:30 PM Entrée Served**

Please enjoy your entrée and dessert during the program.

### **Fellowship Awards**

**7:45 PM Program**

Opening Remarks

President Vicki Ham

Recognition of Past

President Vicki

Fellowship Presidents

Presentation of 2025

Fellowship Board

Fellowship Recipients

**9:30 PM Closing Remarks**

President Vicki

Table Drawing

FRF Treasurer Danelle

Announcements

Conference Coordinator

Kris Chorbi

Recess

Governor Elise

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## Colleges/Universities

### Institutions offering doctoral degrees in Founder Region:

California State University, East Bay - Hayward  
Dominican University of California - San Rafael  
Graduate Theological Union - Berkeley  
Life Chiropractic College West - Hayward  
Mills College - Oakland  
Saint Mary's College - Moraga  
Samuel Merritt University - Oakland  
San Francisco Theological Seminary - San Anselmo  
The Sanville Institute - Berkeley  
Saybrook University - Oakland  
Touro University California - Vallejo  
University of California, Berkeley  
University of Hawaii at Mānoa - Honolulu  
University of Massachusetts Global - Fairfield  
The Wright Institute - Berkeley  
Chaminade University of Honolulu

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## 2025 Award Recipient

### Sinclair O'Grady

#### Clinical Psychology

University of California, Berkeley

*Dissertation: A Prospective Follow-up Investigation of Females with Childhood Diagnosed ADHD in their Mid-Thirties: Examining Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behaviors and Emotion*



**Berkeley**  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



Sinclair began competing in snow skiing at the age of seven. She was frequently the sole female in a male-dominated sport. She never thought that, in the long run, it would teach her about the interconnection between culture, psychological perspectives, behaviors, and mental health. She said, "My fascination with cultural differences, curiosity, development roots, and queries regarding human behavior led me to study Psychology."

Sinclair attended undergraduate school at New York University, where her college experience deepened her understanding of women's challenges. Through mentoring, she encouraged women to pursue careers in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Programs.

To further her understanding of mental health issues, she took an internship working with child and adolescent patients in the Psychiatry unit at Bellevue Hospital. At Columbia University, she conducted research on the effects of maternal stress. She measured how stress affected the fetal and infant brain and behavior development. She observed clinical trials seeking ways to prevent postpartum depression in low-income Hispanic women.

Sinclair is continuing research for her doctorate program, which focuses on adolescent girls and women and the emotional difficulties brought by ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and the relationship it has to adolescent suicide, suicidal tendencies, and other mental health disorders.

## 2025 Award Recipient

### Ruiting Wang

#### Systems Engineering

University of California, Berkeley

*Dissertation: Innovative and Sustainable Strategies in Freight and Logistics*



Ruiting was born in the small city of Xiaoshan in Zhejiang, China. She moved to Beijing to attend Tsinghua University and then to UC Berkeley to start her Ph.D. program. Her very supportive parents are engineers in the energy sector, working at a coal plant. She jokes that since her research is focused on decarbonization in the energy and transportation sectors, her work is slowly taking away her parents' jobs.

Through her academic and professional journey, she has actively contributed to women and underrepresented groups in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) by mentoring, providing academic service, and engaging in community involvement. Her impressive list of nonprofits and committees she serves on is a testament to her unwavering dedication.

Ruiting strives to address one of the most pressing global challenges: transportation decarbonization. By reducing greenhouse gas emissions in transportation, she wants to create a sustainable future.

Her doctoral research addresses the challenges of vehicle electrification and sees it as the key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. She is working not only on the vehicles we drive daily but also on electrifying long-haul, heavy-duty trucks and understanding their design for more efficiency.

Her research investigates the equity and benefits of vehicle electrification for all communities, including those in underserved areas. The outcome of her work will inform policies and urban planning initiatives for our communities.

## 2025 Award Recipient

### Suchitra Narayanan

#### Astronomy

University of Hawaii at Mānoa

*Dissertation: Organosulfur Chemistry in the Birthplaces of Planets*



UNIVERSITY  
of HAWAII  
MĀNOA



Born over one month premature with oxygen deprivation, her nursery in the outskirts of New Delhi lacked basic equipment for her survival. After twelve hours of anxiety, she was taken to the nearest hospital for the next several weeks. The doctors didn't expect her to survive. Grateful for the scientific advancements that allowed for survival, her family always emphasized the importance of education, reminding her that knowledge is "the one thing no one can take away from you."

Suchi has always been drawn to the connections between fields. She links chemistry to her first love, the piano, via the analogy "notes are to songs as atoms are to the Universe." She finds herself combining astrophysics and chemical engineering to better understand how the planet we call home formed and evolved. She now finds herself bridging fields: astrochemistry, origins of life, and climate change. Navigating higher education as a first-generation college student meant that she not only had to figure out academic pathways largely on her own, but also needed to find ways to communicate what she has learned to her family who never understood this side of her. This experience has made her an effective communicator and mentor.

Her interdisciplinary background allows her to push the boundaries of planetary chemistry while making science accessible to broad communities. She aims to connect our understanding of the Universe to Earth's formation and future, reinforcing advocacy for planetary stewardship. Suchi plans to pursue a postdoctoral fellowship in astrochemistry or an adjacent field, advancing research that fuses chemical engineering and astrophysics to deepen our knowledge of the cosmos and apply these insights to atmospheric and climate studies.

## 2025 Award Recipient

Grace Hu

**Bioengineering**

University of California, Berkeley

*Dissertation: Closed-Loop Bioprinting for Spatiotemporal Control of Tissue Interfaces in 3D*



From 3D printing and energy to rocket science and biotechnology, Grace chases curiosity. As a female Asian American engineer, she has learned how to adapt to the world and is resolved to stand up for others who aren't able to do so. She never saw minorities and people of color represented well in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programs. Grace wanted to promote inclusion for diverse students in the more significant movement for equality.

Grace first learned the art of 3D printing and could rapidly fabricate elastomeric lattices, which sparked her interest in applying additive manufacturing for health applications. As a SpaceX participant, she formulated custom adhesives to help launch the next-generation Starship for interstellar travel, which gave her a better grasp of magic in materials chemistry.

Grace hopes to eventually commercialize the custom bioprinter she has built to facilitate clinical adoption and investigation of developmental biology. She has been engaging with startup experts to understand better the hurdles in making her closed-loop bioprinter open-access and translating it for equitable tissue/organ replacement. Her expertise can help inform stem cell ethics and biotechnology policy. Her medical device research, funded by the Department of Defense's NDSEG Fellowship, aims to support wound healing for Army veterans.

The collective long-term vision of tissue engineers is to build whole, functioning organs for transplantations, which would benefit wounded veterans and people suffering from organ failure. Using a patient's stem cells would be even more tremendous in enabling personalized medicine without negative immune responses. She feels that by making 4D printing technology accessible and affordable, we can create genuinely transformative biomaterials beyond science into society.



## 2025 Award Recipient

Tiffanie Ah Loo

**Clinical Psychology**

Chaminade University of Honolulu

*Dissertation: Serving and Protecting as a Mother: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study*



Chaminade University  
of Honolulu

Tiffanie grew up in Japan, where her parents provided a stable and secure environment that allowed her to grow up in a safe and nonjudgmental society. From her experience of safety and stability, she could recognize those less fortunate than her. With this perspective, she entered the social services field and began working at a residential care facility for foster children, where she became an advocate for the resident youth. This experience shaped her goal of a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology.

Tiffanie worked closely with women and girls across Hawai'i. One of her most impactful and meaningful jobs was as a Juvenile Probation Officer for Girls' Court. She has also mentored women through the Hawai'i School of Professional Psychology Mentorship Program.

Upon receiving her Ph.D., Tiffanie plans to develop and implement community-based organizations specifically to support foster youth in rural Hawaiian, Micronesian, and Pacific Islanders. The program will focus on the foster care population, especially those who are aging out of the system, and support trauma-informed culturally responsive services for young adults.

Tiffanie's research explores the lived experience of police officer mothers in the Honolulu Police Department. The study focuses on how these women lead a dual role as mothers and law enforcement agents. Tiffanie is also working on affecting policy changes around working women, gender bias, and workplace conditions women face by women in this field.





## 2025 Award

### Danielle Bartz

#### Marine Biology

University of Hawaii at Mānoa

*Dissertation: An Interdisciplinary Assessment of Current and Historical Shark Nursery Habitat in Hilo Bay, Hawai'i*



UNIVERSITY  
of HAWAI'I  
MĀNOA



Born in Florida, Dani developed a deep love for nature from an early age. Her childhood was filled with curiosity and wonder. She was introduced to the ocean when she was two years old, learning how to snorkel and hold her breath. She was awed after that first underwater glimpse, a clear sign of her passion for the ocean.

Dani continues to immerse herself in activities that keep her connected to the natural world. From freediving, spearfishing, and surfing to horseback riding and camping on the beach, she harvests seafood like lobsters, limpets, or octopus embracing a lifestyle of sustainability and living off the land. She is an eager and determined marine biologist, conservationist, and nature-lover, ready to contribute to the health of our oceans and inspire future generations to cherish and protect the natural world.

Nearshore estuaries are vital nursery habitats for many marine species, including coastal-pelagic sharks, but these ecosystems are increasingly impacted by human activities. In Hawai'i, where sharks hold deep cultural and spiritual significance as ancestral gods, changes in their populations are more than ecological concerns—they affect the cultural fabric of the islands.

The purpose of her research is to investigate the historical and current abundance patterns of juvenile coastal-pelagic sharks in Hilo Bay, identify ecological drivers of observed changes, and assess the potential impacts of these changes on conservation and cultural practices. By leveraging local ecological knowledge and modern genetic techniques such as environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis, she aims to fill critical gaps in our understanding of how human activities and environmental shifts affect nursery habitats for endangered sharks.

## 2025 Award Recipient

### Nour Akiki

#### Mechanical Engineering

University of California, Berkeley

*Dissertation: Circular Economy for Large Scale Volumetric Printing: Development of Recyclable and Advanced Materials for Meter-scale Computed Axial Lithography*



Berkeley  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



Nour was born in Lebanon, the middle child of two boys. She had a deep and special bond with her mother and grandfather, who inspired her to continue her education and reach her highest goal of receiving a Ph.D. As a first-generation Ph.D. student in engineering, success did not come easy growing up due to chronic bullying. As the top student in school, she became a target of jealousy and emotional harm.

Upon graduating from high school, she was accepted into her dream school, the American University of Beirut, the top university in Lebanon and the Middle East. There, she studied mechanical engineering. Despite hearing, “How can you be a woman studying engineering?” and “Mechanical Engineering is for men.” She used these comments as motivation to pursue her career.

After graduation, Nour plans to focus on Fitoto Technology LLC, a start-up company she and her lab mates developed. The company leverages 3D printing to customize medical devices, such as rapidly producing earmolds for infants with hearing loss faster than traditional hearing devices.

Nour's research focuses on novel and sustainable materials for the futuristic volumetric 3D printing technique called CAL (Computer Axial Lithography). Nour expects promising results from this work in medical applications. She is currently in the process of filing a patent application for breakthrough material and methodology.





## Examples of Volunteerism

**Sinclair:** “I was a founding member of the Peer Undergraduate Mentor Program at NYU, designed to support women pursuing STEM. I gained leadership experience by pairing over 200 female mentees per year with advanced female undergraduate mentors, providing a supportive and encouraging community via finding research opportunities, assisting in the writing of undergraduate research grant applications, and advising about career paths in STEM research.”

**Ruiting:** “In my role as a mentor with the UC Berkeley Educational Opportunity Program STEM, I provided guidance and academic support to a student, who is a first-generation college attendee and woman pursuing a career in GeoSystems Engineering. My mentorship focused on enhancing her confidence in navigating academic challenges, exploring career opportunities, and preparing her resume, all while ensuring she felt empowered to succeed in historically male-dominated fields.”


**Suchitra:** “I volunteered with local Girl Scouts troops in the San Francisco, Honolulu, and Boston areas, leading hands-on STEM activities designed to inspire curiosity and confidence. Many of these students had never met a woman scientist before, and my presence alone often encouraged them to see themselves in research roles.”

**Grace:** “I spent three months abroad in South Africa as a Code for Cape Town volunteer at CodeSpace Academy. In this role, I visited numerous high schools and demonstrated the advantages of computer programming skills for young South African women, where our conversations made me more conscious of how I could empower women to follow their scientific dreams.”

**Tiffany:** “As a mentor in the Hawai‘i School of Professional Psychology Mentorship Program, I have guided classmates, focusing on skill development, clinical application, and navigating systemic challenges. Additionally, my dissertation research on police officer mothers highlighted the experiences of women balancing their professional and personal identities within male-dominated fields, emphasizing the interplay of gender, resilience, and mental health.”

**Danielle:** “I volunteered at several local invasive fish removal events this year, and a shark-themed Halloween event at the Imiloa Astronomy Center where I taught ~900 children about shark anatomy. I have made a strong commitment to mentoring more girls in my field.”

**Nour:** “I volunteer to engage younger audiences and spark their interest in STEM. At the Lawrence Hall of Science, I demonstrated volumetric 3D printing by creating models of spiders and snakes in just 30 seconds. The children were fascinated by the technology, and I hope it inspired them to explore 3D printing and other cutting-edge technologies.”



## Past Presidents

Founder Region Fellowship was incorporated on March 17, 1986.

**Kris Chorbi 2022-2024**

SI/Eureka

*“Bee” the Dream through Education*

**Pam Parker 2018-2020**

SI/St. Helena Sunrise

*“Empowering Change through Education”*

**Carol Steele 2014-2016**

SI/Fort Bragg

*“Share the Joy of Learning & Education”*

**Joyce Strand 2010-2012**

SI/Oakland-The Founder Club

*“Keys of Knowledge”*

**Dion Weaver 2006-2008**

SI/Antioch

*“Investing In The Future,  
One Woman At A Time”*

**Linda Mc Doniels 2000-2002**

SI/St. Helena Sunrise

**Dorothy Avila 1996-1998**

SI/Oakland-The Founder Club

**Norma Rhodes 1988-1992**

SI/Oakland-The Founder Club

**Cheryl Poncini 2020-2022**

SI/Oakland-The Founder Club

*“Education Inspires Big Dreams”*

**Bobbi Enderlin 2016-2018**

SI/Benicia

*“Education Creates Shining Stars”*

**Linda Sue Hansen 2012-2014  
& 2002-2004**

SI/Vallejo Gateway

*“Shining the Light on Education”*

**Barbara Lanier 2008-2010**

SI/El Cerrito

*“Reach For The Stars”*

**Mary Ann Redden 2004-2006**

SI/Antioch

*“Getting It Done Together”*

**Nancy Walker 1998-2000**

SI/St. Helena Sunrise

**Del Nickerson 1992-1996**

SI/Oakland-The Founder Club

**Julia “Bess” Combs 1986-1988**

SI/Oakland-The Founder Club

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**Thank you for your continued support of  
Founder Region's identifying project,  
where we empower the outstanding  
women leaders of tomorrow.**



**President Vicki,  
Treasurer Danelle,  
Directors Amelia, Kay, Colleen,  
Tess & Cindy**

**For more information, please visit  
[www.FounderRegionFellowship.org](http://www.FounderRegionFellowship.org)**