

FEBRUARY 2023



NAJA CHRISTMAS

Hi! My name is Naja Christmas, and I am a 4th year studying Asian American Studies, East Asian Studies, and Korean Literature and Culture. I enjoy studying Korean, working out at the gym, traveling, reading, and volunteering for Compassion International.

## **Involvements at UCI:**

- Research which focuses on the intersectionality between the African and Korean Diaspora in America/Korea
- I am a Chancellor's Excellence Scholar, the Foreign Language Areas Studies Grant recipient, and the recipient of the Asian American Studies Humanities Award for the last two years since I transferred to UCI
- I am the Rules Committee Chair and the Special Interest Transfer Senator for ASUCI
- I am also the Student Equity Advisory Commissioner under the Student Advocate General Office and the delegate for the African Black Coalition, Black Student Lobby, and Transfer Student Lobby Day
- I am Vice President of Scholarships for my identity organization and founded the Transfer Student Podcast on UCI's campus
- I am one of the founding board members of the UMOJA club and Black Gaming Society which assists Africa Diaspora/BIPOC transfers to integrate into UCI through the gaming community
- I am an active Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity member and co-chair for Mentorship. I am also a UMOJA peer mentor
- I developed a program to assist underrepresented students with a direct pathway to university within the UC system with my work in Phi Theta Kappa
- This previous year, I was on the diversity and equity team that assisted in creating new hiring practices to assist with creating consistent standards for hiring committees at UCI. On this team were faculty, staff, and students that represented a range of ethnicities throughout the UCI family. Before we began to work, there were 12 weeks of trainings before our individual sessions. I also facilitated a hiring team for diversity and inclusion on my campus at UCI.
- I assisted in creating the Anti-Racism/Pro-Blackness training series with the help of many of the active ethnic organizations on campus, in order to make these videos for staff and student employee trainings.
- I do all of this to fight for diversity, equity, and inclusion within UCI because I believe that we are stronger together -- I want all of us to know there is room for each of us to thrive here at UCI





**What has been the most fulfilling experience you have had in a leadership role?**

Through my position as the Special Interest Transfer Senator and Rules Committee Chair, I have passed legislation that assists Transfers the Special Interests I represent on campus. I have been able to advocate for the betterment of these students through my work in the Senate and it has shown me that working in advocacy is so impactful. I truly feel it is the way to make a great impact and dynamic change - it has been truly fulfilling to be a contributing member of the ASUCI Senate.

**What accomplishment are you most proud of?**

For the graduate program I will matriculate into at UCI in Fall 2023, I did a series of interviews to showcase blended families in Korea. My research focuses on African and Korean in Korea. Afro-Korean representation is few and far between, so I was proud to be able to start these interviews and work on a research niche that expands the representation of Koreaness, in order to create more inclusion throughout the Indo-Pacific. It is an in-progress project, but it got me into my graduate program and I am proud to have been the person to start this inter-global project of unity. My time abroad changed me and set me on a new trajectory, so I'm proud to be at the fore-front of this research.





**Who is your role model at UCI? How have they impacted you?**

Julia Lee (Department Chair of the Asian American Studies Department) and James Kyung-Jin Lee (Director, Center for Medical Humanities). These two individuals have shaped me and modeled me so much while I was in the Asian American Studies Department. They challenged my thinking, my intentionality for my research, my love for my field, and above all me - they challenged me as a human being. I have learned so much from both of them, and they impact Asian American Studies and Global Asia. They are pedagogical masters and they both poured knowledge into me. They also both selected me as my primary and secondary advisors for graduate school, which is the honor of my life.

**Everyone experiences some form of failure in their life, how have you dealt with it? What advice would you give to your first-year self?**

I constantly fail, which is fine - I learn so much from failing. I have now learned how to fail upward! As an independent transfer student, I don't have the right to fail downward, which I have accepted, so instead I have learned how to take what I need from the failure in order to ensure that it never derails me.

The advice I would give my amazing first-year community college self is to stop working so much and apply for scholarships. Working toward academic goals is the best way to get the funds you need for university, even though leaving the structure you built is scary. Focus on your foundations and remember to protect your GPA as if when it takes damage you do, because when it takes damage - you do too!

