#UCIGrad: Karina Jhaj, B.A. in Environmental Science and Policy

Jhaj came to UCI in 2018, and, despite the pandemic, stitched together an education in sustainability.

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Jhaj weaves sustainability into every part of her life — including the clothes she wears, which are mostly all second-hand. At home, she has her grandmother’s old hand-crank sewing machine, which she hopes to use more and more to make her own clothes.

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Karina Jhaj is graduating with her B.A. in Environmental Science and Policy. She knew it was the major for her because in her time at UCI and in her life, one word stitches together everything she does: sustainability. The word was there back in high school when she made the decision to eat foods with low carbon costs; it was in the work she did to help make UCI a more sustainable place by being first an intern in and then the president of UCI’s The Green Initiative Fund (TGIF) — a program that helps students discover ways they can help reduce the environmental impacts of activities happening at UCI; the word is in her post-graduation plans to do an internship with NASA where she’ll be learning how to solve environmental problems using aircraft that collect data on Earth system processes — “we’ll assist in the operation of instruments onboard an aircraft to sample atmospheric gases, as well as to image land and water surfaces in multiple spectral bands,” Jhaj said; and, the word is even in the way she dresses. Jhaj makes her own clothes by crocheting them, and when she buys new clothes, she buys them at thrift shops so she can promote sustainability in the clothing world. She championed sustainability at UCI against the backdrop of the pandemic, which saw her, like innumerable others, going to school remotely for a bulk of her education. “I didn’t get the full experience I think I could’ve had,” said Jhaj, who, regardless, in the time she did have on campus, felt she still connected with the people in her major and to her professors. “I came into the school with no idea of what I wanted to do, and felt that I had no interest or passion I really wanted to pursue,” she said. “I'm really glad they already had this major at the school and now, from that, I have this opportunity to pursue my actual interests.”