

Transfer student leaves sustainability legacy at UCLA

Rayna Jackson | April 14, 2018



USIE Student Facilitator, Mark Biedlingmaier leading his seminar/Photo Credit: Rayna Jackson

When Mark Biedlingmaier applied to UCLA as a transfer student in 2014, he was excited at the thought of attending a university where he would be challenged both academically and culturally.

However, his dreams of studying at UCLA were not immediately realized when he became one of the thousands who did not get accepted. Instead of seeing the experience as ‘the end of the world,’ Biedlingmaier became even more determined to get into UCLA.

“The rejection really inspired me to start working even harder,” Biedlingmaier said. “I knew I couldn’t walk away. I had to prove to myself and UCLA that I was valuable and I was someone who could contribute to the community.”

Biedlingmaier was right, it wasn’t the end. It was the beginning of a four-year journey that will end with him graduating with a major in Geography/Environmental Studies from UCLA this spring.

Making the most of UCLA

Once Biedlingmaier got his second chance, he knew he had to make every moment count by exploring unique opportunities that would help him feel like a “true Bruin.”

“Transfer students have less time here so we have a little bit more of a sense of urgency to go after some of the more unique higher stake programs offered,” Biedlingmaier said.

One such program that immediately grabbed Biedlingmaier attention was [Undergraduate Student Initiate Education \(USIE\)](#). Through USIE, he would join a cohort of juniors and seniors, who develop and facilitate a lower-division seminar for their follow peers under close faculty supervision.

Last year, Biedlingmaier passed the rigorous application process, and this year he completed two quarters of pedagogy courses. This spring, he is facilitating the seminar, “Environment 88S: Introduction to Applied Sustainable Living.” The seminar explores how student’s daily actions can have significant environmental impacts on local, regional, and global levels.

Dean and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Patricia Turner, gets excited when she hears of transfer students like Biedlingmaier who are “actively engaged in making education their own.”

“USIE students represent some of our most talented and committed students,” Turner said. “They are mentored by a group of truly distinguished faculty members.”

Carl Maida, adjunct professor from the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, first mentored Biedlingmaier, through UCLA’s [Sustainability Action Research](#) program. There students are partnered with campus stakeholders to “research, rethink, investigate, and tackle UCLA’s greatest sustainability issues.” Now, Maida serves again as Biedlingmaier’s mentor through USIE.

“Mark’s passion is sustainability and his experience in the field is extensive,” Maida said. “He is taking this topic and making it relatable and hands-on for students.”

The concepts from his seminar seem have proven to have a large appeal with both North Campus and South Campus students. Biedlingmaier’s seminar has reached enrollment capacity and even has a waitlist.

“I’m excited about the first lecture,” Biedlingmaier said. “I’ll be laying out the problem that we have right now and how we all fit into it.”

And over the ten-week quarter, Biedlingmaier’s goal is to ensure that students are equipped with the information and tools they need to reduce their negative impact on environment.

Maida believes that Biedlingmaier’s seminar will have a lasting impact on both students in his course and the campus at-large.

“This practical approach to teaching sustainability hasn’t been taken before with students,” Maida said. “It’s exciting to see Mark taking it on and introducing his peers to some very important concepts.”

Biedlingmaier says that by being a tangible part of the campuses sustainability efforts, he has proven that UCLA made the right choice by investing in his education.

“I feel validated,” Biedlingmaier said. “It feels like my journey was all worth something and through this course I have left my mark at UCLA.”