

Announcement

Earth Futures Undergraduate Frontier Fellows Program Summer 2026 and Academic Year 2026-2027

The UCSC Earth Futures Institute is pleased to announce the continuation of our undergraduate research opportunities called **EFI Frontier Fellowships**. Each Frontier Fellowship provides the chance for an undergraduate student to do *meaty interdisciplinary research on a topic relevant to planning Earth's future*. Supervising these projects is also a chance for faculty to pursue project ideas that have long interested them but are difficult to fund from traditional funding sources. ***Each award includes a summer stipend of \$6000 for the student plus \$2000 for research expenses and/or a faculty honorarium.*** Information on the Earth Futures Institute and its goals is available on the Institute's website: <https://earthfutures.sites.ucsc.edu>.

The EFI Frontier Fellows Program is open to students and faculty (including emeriti) from all departments across all five academic divisions.

Program Description:

- 1) The duration of the program is from the beginning of Spring Quarter 2026 to the end of Spring Quarter 2027, inclusive.
- 2) Students and faculty will jointly write a short proposal outlining the goals of the project, the approach, and the deliverables. ***Proposals are due March 8, 2026.*** The proposals will be reviewed by the EFI Frontier Fellowships Advisory Committee with the goal of having them in place by the beginning of Spring Quarter 2026. Thanks to support from generous donors, ***six awards are anticipated this year.***
 - One project is for an interdisciplinary project involving the Genomics Institute.
 - One project is for an interdisciplinary project involving the Humanities Division.
 - The remaining projects are open to all divisions.
- 3) To facilitate the interdisciplinary nature of the projects, ***two faculty advisors are recommended***, preferably from separate academic divisions but, in any case, from different fields. One faculty advisor is acceptable if the advisor possesses the requisite breadth of expertise. ***Lecturers may co-propose in collaboration with faculty.*** Each faculty team is limited to one student.
- 4) ***How to apply:*** Project proposals should have a strong title and briefly describe the proposed work to be done and its impact and importance. A proposed budget for the faculty allocation (up to \$2000) should be provided. Projects will be judged on the following criteria: 1) importance of the work to planning the future of Earth over both short-term (decades) and/or long-term (millions of years). 2) Originality: has this idea been thought of before, or is it new? 3) Interdisciplinary nature: Is the project consonant with EFI's strategy of viewing Earth's Future through multiple disciplinary lenses? 4) Feasibility: Is it likely that the project, as envisioned, can be completed with the available time and resources? 5) Faculty commitment: Are faculty with

the required expertise available and committed to the success of the project? Submit proposals by filling out the [2026-2027 Form](#) and sending it by email to earthfut@ucsc.edu. **The due date for proposals is March 8, 2026. Note that the signatures of participating faculty are required on the form.**

5) It is envisioned that students will do foundational background reading and project planning during the Spring Quarter, giving them a running start to focus full-time on project work over the summer. **Students are expected to work full-time during the Summer Quarter of 2026** under the direction and supervision of their faculty advisors. **Students will receive a \$6000 summer stipend, and the \$2000 allocation per project to faculty** is intended to cover research expenses, salaries for possible graduate student mentors, faculty honoraria, etc. Students are not academically enrolled or employed by UCSC during the summer and do not receive academic credit; their stipends are paid through UCSC student fellowships.

The student will continue to work on the project during the 2026-2027 academic year, and the **project must be completed and submitted by the end of the Spring Quarter of 2027.**

6) The deliverables, together with a short summary report, will be evaluated by the Frontier Fellowships Advisory Committee. Work deemed to meet the high standards of the program will be denoted an **Earth Futures Institute Frontier Project**, and students who successfully complete the program will receive the designation **Earth Futures Institute Frontier Fellow**.

7) **Deliverables: Each project must have at least one clearly defined deliverable**, but its nature may vary depending on the nature of the research. The standard model is the senior thesis, which is a **substantial original document** written by the student under the guidance of their advisor(s). It is hoped that, in many cases, the results will develop into publishable papers. This mode is appropriate to the methods of documenting and promulgating research results in the sciences, engineering, and social sciences but may not properly reflect the nature of scholarly work in other divisions. To encourage participation by faculty from all five divisions, **faculty may define other types of deliverables** that are more appropriate to the nature of their discipline.

8) In addition to the deliverables, **a short final report is required of all projects** as part of the final materials submitted to the Frontier Projects Review committee. These reports will be archived and posted on the Earth Futures Institute website as a permanent record of the program. **If results are of sufficient interest, students and their faculty advisors may be asked to provide information about the work to media and other interested groups (e.g., UCSC alumni) both on and off campus.**

9) **Acknowledgement of Frontier Fellows support:** All presentations of the results, including reports, publications, websites, oral presentations, posters, gallery shows, and exhibits, should include an acknowledgment of EFI support. A suitable statement for publications is: "This work was partially supported by a Frontier Fellowship from the Earth Futures Institute at UC Santa Cruz to [name of student]."

10) **Faculty roles:** Faculty and students should write their research proposal together. Faculty will supervise students over the summer and will continue to supervise the research during the academic year 2026-2027, ***possibly by offering one or more quarters of Independent Study.*** They will actively assist the student in successfully completing the agreed-upon deliverables and promulgating the results according to the proposed plan.

11) **Eligibility:** ***All Academic Senate members are eligible to supervise an EFI Frontier Project; emeriti faculty are specifically welcome. Lecturers are eligible to supervise in collaboration with at least one Senate member.*** Students must be in good academic standing in order to apply, but students who already have earned their degrees or will have earned their degrees during the fellowship period (April 1, 2026 through May 31, 2027) are not eligible.

12) **Relationship to UCSC departmental senior theses and graduation requirements:** The nature and magnitude of the research to be undertaken is comparable to that envisioned in original, research-oriented senior theses (as distinct from a literature review), and it is therefore possible that some students will want to satisfy their senior thesis requirements through a Frontier Fellows project. It is the responsibility of each student to make sure that their project permits them to fulfill all UCSC and departmental requirements.

13) **Additional background:** Background on the Earth Futures Institute and its goals is available at the EFI website: [Earth Futures Institute](#).

For reference, a list of senior thesis requirements and options for all UCSC academic departments and programs is at:

[EFI Initiative - Senior Thesis Tracking Spreadsheet](#)

A copy of this announcement is located at:

[Announcement EFI Frontier Fellows Program 2026-2027](#)

The downloadable application form is available at:

[Application Form Frontier Fellows Program 2026-2027](#)

For additional information, please contact EFI Director Prof. Sandra Faber at earthfut@ucsc.edu
Please put "Frontier Fellows Project" in the subject line.