



The Climate Initiative

2023

**Collegiate Climate
Policy Institute
Cohort**



Christine Wenzel

Christine Wenzel graduated in 2021 from the University of California, San Diego with a B.A. in Global Health and a minor in Climate Change Studies. Her experiences and studies in university have driven her to build her career focused on multi-disciplinary solutions to the climate crisis which draw on the knowledge of all peoples, not only academia.

For two years she worked at the Global Action Research Center, a social change nonprofit in San Diego, as an intern and administrative assistant, co-leading their Young Environmental Justice Advocates program and assisting at the community garden. Currently, Christine works at a startup that uses big data and machine learning to research public health topics on social media platforms. She has been accepted to several graduate school programs for fall 2023 and is excited to pursue her Master's in the field of sustainability. Particular areas of interest for Christine include youth empowerment, climate justice, global health policy, gender equity, and food security.



Alexa Quinones

Alexa Quinones is a bilingual and ambitious young student with studies in the degree of Mechatronics Engineering and currently studying her bachelor's degree in Chemistry. Alexa is very passionate about the space industry and climate advocacy. She is currently doing a lot of research in this area, and she is part of NASA L'SPACE Academy. Alexa is currently working with NASA scientists, engineers, and students in the development of a NASA mission-related team project.

Alexa also has a solid background in values, a proactive attitude, with a lot of commitment, creativity, and leadership. Alexa is very immersed in the science and the aerospace engineering field, and she is always participating in the organization of workshops where most of the people can learn about the importance of the science and engineering in the advance of space industry. She is doing a lot of research about how the spacecrafts can be even more efficient and how many more materials we can discover through the sciences like Chemistry. Alexa feels very inspired to study Aerospace Engineering and learn more about the Astrochemistry as well.



Andrea Terrero

I was born in Havana, Cuba, but moved to Miami when I was six years old. As I grew up in Miami, I noticed our summers getting hotter, our hurricanes getting worse, and our flooding levels increasing, which led me to pursue climate advocacy.

Currently, I am working as an organizer for CLEO Institute, a non-profit organization focused on climate action while studying at Miami Dade College. I hope to continue working with non-profits as a career in order to make genuine change. Outside of school and work, I write poetry, which I hope to publish in the future, and play the guitar.



Jason Paz

My name is Jason Paz and I was born in Carol City, Florida. I come from a Colombian background. Both of my parents are from Cali and most of my family still resides there. I have a close relationship with where I'm from; I spent most of my childhood playing outside on the streets and listening to my parents talk about their culture.

Growing up I spent much of my time playing sports such as basketball and cross country. At the end of my high school career, I decided to go to school and work full-time. Concurrently I began to study to become a licensed electrician so that one day I can become the head of my father's company. Currently, I am working for my father's electrical company in the hopes of one day expanding it in the future.



Belle Li

Hello, my name is Belle Li, and I am from Southern California. I am majoring in Sustainability and minoring in Hispanic Studies and Rhetoric & Leadership at Pepperdine University as a Posse Scholar. After graduating, I plan to attend law school with an interest in environmental law.

My passions lie in advocacy, especially for environmental and social justice issues, which often get intertwined. I am so excited to study abroad in South America for the 2023-2024 academic year and hope to return with a more holistic view of the impacts of change I can make. Lastly, you could find me roller skating, surfing, or crocheting when I am not in school or working.



Breille Irahoza

I am Breille Irahoza. I am an international student from Burundi, in East Africa. I'm a junior at Vassar College, majoring in environmental studies. I am curious about the intersection of chemistry and the environment.

My future career plan aligns with exploring environmental chemistry research, green chemistry, and engineering for a better, healthy, and inclusive world.



Finja Mlynek

Finja Mlynek is a senior high school who has been a organizing climate justice protests since she was 15 years old. She is a member of multiple youth led organizations and loves working with fellow young activists to create change.

Born in Germany, she now lives in New Mexico where she is working towards studying International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies in college. Finja is passionate about making activism more accessible and getting young people more interested and involved in politics. In her free time, Finja volunteers as a blog writer and likes to study languages.



Haya Thamer

Hi! I'm Haya Thamer, a first-year global studies major at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill! Going into the global studies field at my school, I hoped to focus on public health and the environmental issues and inequities that we face nationally and internationally. The interdependencies that shape our globe tie into how we use our resources, manage our waste and govern our communities. Without a cultivated knowledge of both the local and the global, we wouldn't be able to address the bigger issues facing our generation now, like climate change; it starts with us.

I can't wait to work with my wonderful CCPI cohort to discuss these issues and bring them to light, as well as work with each other to find ways in which we can contribute to the well-being of our communities and our whole.



Isabella Rizzo

Hello! My name is Isabella. I am a graduate student at the University of Texas San Antonio working towards my MSc in environmental science. My thesis relates to how abiotic stressors affect green leaf volatile expression in plants. I graduated from Trinity University in '21 with my BS in biology with a concentration in cellular and molecular biology. I am still trying to figure out what it is I want to do with my life while working towards a career in biological research or bioenvironmental engineering.

I am very interested in working with nonprofits for fundraising and advocacy as well. I am passionate about the human rights implications of climate change, particularly for women and girls in developing countries and environmental racism. I have a sassy blonde mutt named Lemon and I love jitterbug, chocolate malts, and movies with Jennifer Coolidge.



Jayda Jeffery

Jayda Jeffery has lived in both St. James and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is a 21 year-old senior at Louisiana State University majoring in International Relations and Political Science. Jayda currently serves as the Vice President of the Louisiana NAACP Youth & College Division. During her studies at LSU, she has placed an emphasis on serving her community with unconventional approaches.

Being born and raised in Louisiana has given her a firsthand experience of environmental injustice. One of her goals is to create policies directed towards bettering the lives of those in rural minority communities who suffer from the environmental consequences of industry being valued higher than people.



Jessie Cohen

Jessie Cohen is a 2021 graduate from the James Madison College at Michigan State University with degrees in Comparative Cultures and Politics and Journalism. After graduation, Jessie spent eight months traveling the US and working with various nonprofit organizations, and recently returned home to Michigan after spending time working on a reforestation project in Brazil's Atlantic Rainforest.

She is deeply passionate about climate justice and preserving the beauty of the natural world and is looking forward to a career in climate advocacy.



Oluchi Njoku

Oluchi is passionate about environmental justice and climate policy. She believes in ensuring the preservation and protection of a healthy accessible environment for all living beings is crucial for our future.

Oluchi's hobbies are going to the beach, writing stories, making art, reading, trying new food, and hanging out with friends and family. Her professional goals are to continue working in climate policy and start her MPA program.



Kenza Idrissi

My name is Kenza Idrissi and I am a sophomore studying Political Science and Global Interdisciplinary Studies at Villanova University. On campus, I am actively involved in the Student Government Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Department and the Center for Access, Success, and Achievement, fueling my commitment of DEI and social justice initiatives both institutionally and in the greater global community. I believe in creating meaningful and sustainable changes to our world's largest issues through the power of community involvement and collaboration. I seek to fight for the communities that are often forgotten and fight for a world where silenced voices can finally be heard and have a seat at the table.

I am particularly interested in the key issues of housing, health, and climate change, yearning to fight for the marginalized communities these factors disproportionately affect both in our country and beyond our borders. I am thrilled to join the 2023 Collegiate Climate Policy Institute cohort, collaborating with peers across the country and equipping myself with the right tools to forge and advocate for climate policy in a world that so desperately needs it.



Ofelia Noemi Garcia Prado

Ofelia Garcia Prado is a senior at UCLA double majoring in Environmental Science and Climate Science and minoring in Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences. Her love for the environment came from her home country of Mexico and her community of Inglewood, CA.

She hopes to work in climate justice, specifically against environmental racism and its impacts on public health. In her free time she plays soccer, dances ballet folklórico, reads, and crochets!



Sarahi Perez

Sarahi Perez is a second-year student at Miami Dade College's Honors Dual Language Program. Here, she is pursuing an Associates in Arts degree in Business Administration, hoping to specialize in entrepreneurship at her desired transfer institution. On campus, she co-founded Queer Collective, the first LGBTQ+ club on the MDC Padron Campus in 2021. Through her role as Vice President of the student organization, she ensured a welcoming space for the LGBTQ+ presence on campus. Afterwards, she worked on guiding the club towards intersectional advocacy work as a Generation Action chapter with Planned Parenthood, a national reproductive justice organization, and a GenCLEO chapter with The Cleo Institute, a statewide climate justice organization.

In July of 2022, she was contracted as an organizer for The Cleo Institute, where she focuses on creating, and growing, a climate advocacy presence on her home campus. Her most recent work focuses around launching a campus wide campaign to lead Padron Campus towards sustainability and climate action alongside a coalition composed of student organizations/leaders, faculty, and administration. She is now accomplishing this with the help of her chosen interns for the semester...



Sarahi Perez

... In the winter term of 2022, she also began an Organizer-in-Training internship with SAVE LGBT, the longest serving LGBTQ+ advocacy organization in South Florida. Here, she leads weekly voter outreach activities, such as canvassing and phonebanks, to appoint progressive leaders and legislation in our community. Upon completion of her A.A degree, she seeks to apply to an out-of-state 4 year institution to broaden her knowledge of business and political communications, and progress towards her future as a leader.



John Rukeyser

Raised in Rockport, MA, John (Jack) Rukeyser now resides in Silver Spring, MD - calling the DMV home since attending American University in Washington, DC. The outdoors of Maryland and throughout the Mid-Atlantic have been a major part of both his free time and passion for environmental legislation.

Jack enjoys spending his time supporting local environmental campaigns, like that of the Maryland Environmental Human Rights amendment bill. In his free time, Jack can be found exploring the wilderness of West Virginia, attempting amateur stargazing, hiking, and spending time with his cat Comet.



Nicholas Sablan

My name is Nick Sablan. I'm 23 years old, I grew up in San Bernardino, California, and I'm so excited to be a part of The Climate Initiative's second annual CCPI. When I was 11, I joined my local YMCA's Model United Nations program. It was through this experience that I was first exposed to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, further discovering what I wanted to do with my life; to improve the lives of others by advocating for the values of equality, peace, and sustainability in global society.

Since then, I have earned a BA in Political Science at California State University - San Bernardino, and I am currently finishing my Master in Global Affairs with the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada and the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos in Spain. Professionally, I've worked with youth in the non-profit sector for several years. I am currently an outdoor education instructor at the Pali Institute in the San Bernardino National Forest. I hope to pursue a long-term career promoting sustainable development within the non-governmental/inter-governmental organizational field. I am eager to learn more about turning my passion for advocacy into a career!



Tristan Quintanilla

Tristan is an aspiring public policy analyst from the American territory of Guam. He earned BAs in Political Science and CHamoru Studies from the University of Guam, where he was recognized as both a Dean's List scholar and President's List scholar. Tristan has three years of experience as a public policy analyst, having worked for two Guam senators.

He also has experience as a representative in the Guam Youth Congress, where he served for four years and was the Youth Congress representative on the Government of Guam's Commission on Decolonization. Tristan is passionate about public policy and eager to make a positive impact in his community.



Nathalie Saladrigas

Nathalie is a Miami native of Colombian and Cuban descent. She is passionate about climate action, LGBTQ rights, reproductive justice, racial equity, and workers' rights. Her passion began in high school when she began understanding the impacts of political and societal structure on her intersecting identities.

She is the founder of an eco-conscious candle company that donates 10% of proceeds towards climate action. Furthermore, she is a student activist and organizer fighting for generations to come.



Julia Nicholson

Julia Nicholson is a climate activist, social justice advocate, and environmental conservationist studying environmental science at Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi. They are president of the Islander Green Team, a student-run, environmental organization on the campus, striving to conserve and protect, while educating and engaging the coastal community.

They have organized coastal clean up efforts, reduced single-use plastics and food waste on their college campus, mobilized the community to engage in local issues in policy, and worked closely with grassroots organizations to unite against the climate crisis.



Maggie Peacock

Maggie Peacock (she/they) is a climate activist, ocean conservationist, and a student at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi studying environmental & political science.

Maggie is passionate about advocating for young people to have a seat at the table where decisions are being made & showcasing how social justice issues, like access to reproductive healthcare & LGBTQIA+ rights, are inextricably tied to the climate crisis. They are the Co-Founder of the Gulf of Mexico Youth Climate Summit (GOMYCS), TEDx speaker, and Earth Echo Youth Leadership Council member.



Sean Schrader

"Sean Schrader is a first year MBA student at the University of South Florida, where he graduated with his bachelor's degree in business management in May of 2022.

Sean is very passionate about civic engagement, and community involvement and has been involved with multiple organizations such as the Office of former Congressman Charlie Crist, the City of Clearwater, FL, and the University of South Florida in the student government. Outside of his community efforts, Sean enjoys bike riding, and spending time with family and friends."



Morgan Mitchell

I was born and raised in Columbus, Georgia. I graduated from Kennesaw State University in the Spring of 2021 with a Bachelors in Political Science and minor in African American Diaspora Studies. Following that, I decided to take a two year gap year before pursuing law school to serve with Teach for America. I am currently a second year Americorps member teaching 8th grade English in rural and historic Selma, Alabama.

It is here where I actively capitalized on my passion for the environment and advocating for awareness and environmental engagement within the Black southern community. In the Fall of 2023, I will enter law school with plans to focus on educational and environmental law.



Jeremy Tyler Lee

Jeremy Lee from North Carolina is excited to take part with the Collegiate Climate Policy Institute. Lee has been engaged with the political process since he was 13, becoming interested during the 2016 election. Lee has participated in the National History Day competition, making it to compete in the state competition in Kentucky. In 2020 Lee worked as an intern for Senate Candidate Charles Booker in Kentucky, who has pushed for more climate initiatives, and worked as a volunteer for now President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris' 2020 Campaign.

Following the Georgia Run-Off election, Lee launched a national organization committed to encouraging youth political engagement and voter turnout, The Blue Project. Working with several national political figures such as the first drag queen to hold public office Maebe A. Girl, Progressive Activist and Candidate for Congress Shahid Buttar, Congressional Candidates Jason Call and Shervin Aazami, and Kansas State Representative Christina Haswood. In 2021 Lee began college at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington studying Political Science, and continuing to remain active in local and state politics.

After his first year Lee moved to Eastern Kentucky and began volunteering for Senate Candidate Charles Booker and numerous local officials. In June 2022...



Jeremy Tyler Lee

(continued)

...Lee saw the devastation that failed policy had as several residents became victims of the devastating flooding in Eastern Kentucky, President Joe Biden visited the area along with Governor Andy Beshear, as they surveyed damage and ensured victims knew that help was on the way, it meant a lot to Lee seeing a sitting president visit an area so overlooked.

On July 6, 2022 Lee was honored with the title Kentucky Colonel by Governor Andy Beshear. Lee continues to remain persistent with politics and is excited to join a group of other like minded individuals in DC to focus on climate policy.