About the Environmental Leadership Incubator (ELI)

ELI is a nine-month program that trains UCSB undergraduates to become environmental leaders through student-initiated projects that seek to turn innovative ideas into positive environmental change. The ELI program combines ten weeks of coursework and leadership skills training with project implementation and mentorship by real world professionals.

A nine-month experience, ELI starts with a seminar-style, fall quarter course that meets weekly for three hours. The fall seminar launches students on their independent or team-based environmental leadership projects and trains them in the hands-on skills they will need to turn their project ideas into reality. By the end of fall quarter, students are also matched up with expert project mentors who have years of experience in their respective fields and are excited to share that expertise with ELI undergraduates.

After the ten-week intensive ELI course in the fall quarter, during which students turn their project idea into an action plan, students spend the winter and spring quarters bringing their action plans to fruition. ELI students may work independently or in teams. Projects may occur at the campus, community, or national levels and can be aimed at social, cultural, technical, and/or policy change with the goal of creating long-term and scalable impacts. Project ideas can be innovative ideas or an extension of an existing initiative.

During the winter and spring quarters, students work with the support of their mentors and the ELI Program Manager. Students meet on a bi-weekly basis with the ELI Program Manager to share project updates, track progress, discuss challenges, and brainstorm next steps. ELI students begin working with mentors at the end of the fall quarter and continue meeting regularly throughout the winter and spring. The mentorship commitment is completed at the end of spring quarter, when the students present the final results of their projects at the ELI Capstone Presentations.

Capstone Presentations provide an opportunity for students to showcase their work and thank their mentors in front of their classmates, mentors, professors, family, friends, and other interested individuals. The Capstone Presentations are held at the UCSB University Center and are open to the public to learn about the ELI program, our change-making students, and their innovative leadership projects.
ELI Mentorship

Students in the ELI program actively collaborate with mentors throughout the program. Students are matched up with expert mentors at the end of the fall quarter, based on project topics, needed skills, and compatibility. Students and mentors meet on a regular basis throughout winter and spring to discuss project progress, to identify useful resources, and to work together to overcome challenges.

The ELI program welcomes mentors from a wide range of backgrounds. ELI mentors make a 6-month commitment (December-May) to support an ELI student or student team and leadership project by providing project-related advice, as well as general guidance regarding leadership and professional development. Students are matched with mentors at the end of the fall quarter (at the middle to end of November). Starting in December/January, mentors and mentees begin communicating regularly until the end of the spring quarter (end of May) when students present about their environmental leadership project at the Capstone Presentations.

Mentor support may come in various forms but is likely to include regular conversations about project goals and progress, recommendations for project development, and contacts for furthering project objectives. The frequency of meetings or communication between mentors and mentees is determined by the mentor and mentee, based on availability and needs; however, bi-weekly meetings or check-ins are recommended for initial discussions. We welcome all mentors and other interested individuals to attend the Capstone Presentations at the end of May.