2024-2025 SPOTLIGHT
Institute for Social Research

SACRAMENTO STATE

Looking Back, **Moving Forward**

There is much to celebrate as the Institute for Social Research (ISR) looks back on the last academic year. We began by commemorating ISR's 35th anniversary and honoring our founders, Dr. Carole Barnes and Sandie Sutherland, whose vision and leadership launched the Institute. Since then, ISR has continued to grow and evolve. This year, we updated our mission to better reflect who we are today and the value we bring to the university and the communities we serve. I'm so proud of our mission, vision, and values—and even more proud of our talented and dedicated staff who make our work possible every day.

This year also brought challenges. The loss of federal funding for several programs we supported as applied researchers and evaluators has been difficult —not only for ISR, but for the millions of Californians who rely on those programs for food, educational opportunities, and safety. These changes remind us how closely our work is tied to the well-being of our communities.

I remain optimistic about the new year and look forward to building new partnerships with local agencies and organizations. **These challenging times underscore the importance of our current mission**: to partner with communities and decision-makers to conduct meaningful, applied social research that fosters positive change in the Sacramento region and throughout California.

As we wrap up 2025, **I want to personally thank our partners, colleagues, and friends for your continued collaboration and support**. I look forward to the opportunities ahead and wish you all a joyful and inspiring start to the new year.

Shannon Williams, PhD
ISR Executive Director

Applied Research with Societal Impact

ISR is an interdisciplinary, applied research center located at Sacramento State Downtown. Throughout its 35-year history, ISR has engaged with state and local agencies, community-based organizations, private foundations, and academic institutions across the region. Each year, ISR supports 25 to 30 research and evaluation projects. Read on for highlights from four recent projects that illustrate the breadth and impact of ISR's research efforts.

The Year in Numbers

- **29** research projects
- **18** staff
- **60** student assistants
- **36** faculty collaborations

Statewide Research Informing Collective Action

Guiding California's Public Health Approach to Firearm Violence

In 2025, ISR completed a two-year collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) to develop a resource for evidence-based, community-driven firearm violence prevention strategies. The **California Public Health Roadmap for Firearm Violence Prevention** (Roadmap), released in August 2025, brings together research and real community experiences to outline eight key primary prevention strategies for California's local public health practitioners and policymakers. For this project, ISR conducted: a comprehensive review of existing firearm violence prevention research, interviews with violence prevention experts across the U.S., surveys with California's county public health and behavioral health agencies, and listening sessions in communities impacted by firearm violence.

Cover of CDPH Gun Violence Report

ISR's Commitment to Community-Based Research

As a key component of this project, ISR partnered with 10 organizations across the state to plan, recruit for, and facilitate listening sessions in their communities. ISR compensated each organization and worked closely with their staff to invite participants, adapt questions and listening session formats for their communities, and receive training on listening session facilitation.

After the sessions, ISR created community briefs for each organization that highlighted key firearm violence facts and community insights that emerged in their listening session. This process gave organizations a chance to review ISR's understanding of their community's discussion before findings were integrated into the Roadmap. This approach ensured that the listening sessions provided meaningful, accurate findings to inform the Roadmap's strategies for firearm violence prevention.
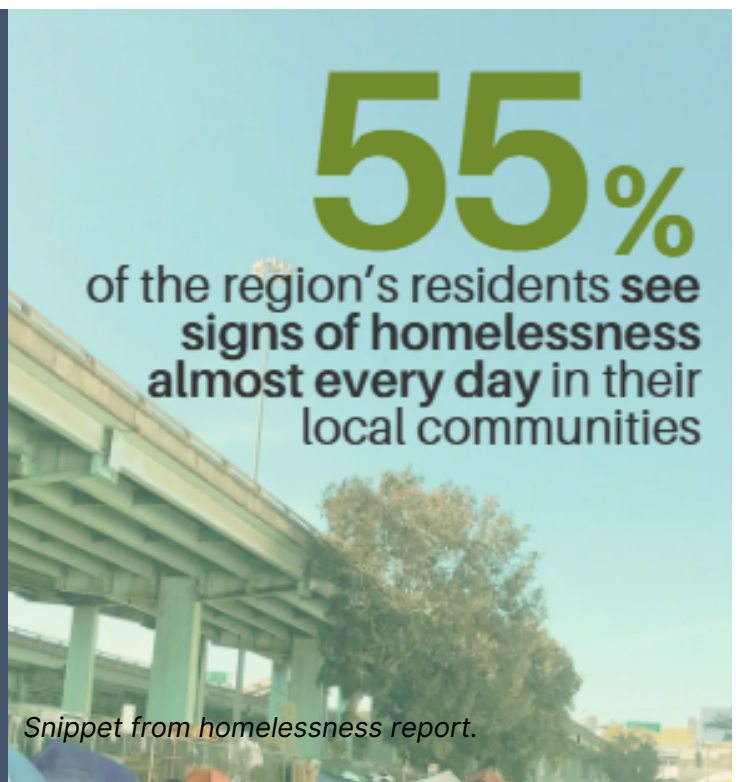
Research for and about the Sacramento Region

Survey on Community Perceptions of Homelessness

ISR developed and maintains the [Sacramento Regional Survey Panel](#), a unique regional asset established in partnership with [Valley Vision](#) to understand public perspectives on issues that matter to the region. Established in 2017, the panel includes representative households from the six-county region (Sacramento, Yolo, El Dorado, Placer, Sutter, and Yuba). Over the years, residents have shared their views on civic amenities, community safety, transportation, livability, and environmental conditions. These insights have informed policy recommendations and helped ensure that regional priorities reflect community values and needs.

Results from ISR's latest survey highlighted the depth of public concern about homelessness and the ways residents are engaging with the issue. The **Perceptions of Homelessness in the Greater Sacramento Region survey** collected responses from 1,750 residents across the six-county area. Findings confirm that homelessness remains both visible and urgent: more than half of respondents (55%) reported seeing signs of homelessness—such as encampments or individuals living in vehicles—almost daily in their communities. Among urban residents, that figure rises to 75 percent. A majority of respondents (53%) expressed significant concern about homelessness in their local area.

Sharing insights with the community

ISR makes all survey findings available to the public. Results from this survey were shared with regional organizations working to address homelessness; local elected officials; lawmakers in Washington, D.C. during the annual [Capitol-to-Capitol](#) advocacy event; and community members via a virtual briefing. Full results and county-level summaries can be explored [on our website](#).

55% of the region's residents **see** signs of homelessness **almost every day** in their local communities

Snippet from homelessness report.

Interdisciplinary Approaches
Evaluating Local Climate & Community Development Efforts

ISR serves as the evaluation partner for two [Transformative Climate Community](#) (TCC) initiatives in the cities of Sacramento and Bakersfield. Funded by the California Strategic Growth Council, TCC empowers California's most disadvantaged communities to choose their own community-led development and infrastructure strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen the economy, and improve public health. Each initiative includes community engagement, displacement avoidance, and workforce development efforts to ensure that the community's future is inclusive and resident-led.

- In **Sacramento**, ISR partners with the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (SHRA) to evaluate the [Sacramento Integrated Multimodal Place-Based Living (SIMPL) Project](#). The SIMPL Project's efforts, led by 15 project partners, promote the environmental, health, and economic well-being of the historic River District. Project strategies include equitable housing and neighborhood development, transit access and mobility, decarbonized energy, urban greening and green infrastructure, and health and well-being.

- In **Bakersfield**, ISR partners with the City of Bakersfield to evaluate the TCC Southeast Strong initiative, focused on the Southeast Bakersfield community. Southeast Strong is comprised of more than 16 community-based organizations and agencies working together to develop new low-income housing for seniors, complete energy efficient upgrades to existing homes, establish and maintain a community garden, and make active transit and urban greening enhancements to the main transportation corridor.

ISR supports both projects by designing evaluation plans and data collection tools that assess their collective impact. ISR also provides technical assistance to partner organizations and supports reporting—including case studies and evaluation reports—that tell the story of progress and lessons learned in the community.

SIMPL Project River District Tree Planting. Photo courtesy of Sacramento Tree Foundation.

Southeast Strong Partner Kickoff Meeting. Photo courtesy of GRID Alternatives.

Innovative Methodologies

Illuminating Student Experiences in Campus Programs

For over 30 years, ISR has served as the **external evaluator for campus-based instructional grants**. One of these grants is the SIRIUS ([Sustainable Interdisciplinary Research to Inspire Undergraduate Success](#)) II project. This project builds on the success of the SIRIUS I project, which redesigned courses to integrate Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs) in the biology, chemistry, geology, and environmental studies departments at Sacramento State. SIRIUS II expands this model by incorporating additional disciplines (e.g., mathematics, statistics, geography, physics, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and civil engineering) and integrating faculty from multiple institutions (the four Los Rios Community College District institutions and Sierra College) into a faculty learning community.

Innovation in Practice

ISR's SIRIUS II evaluation uses in-class modified student focus groups, adapted from the Small Group Analysis (SGA) technique. This innovative method provides a practical alternative to traditional student focus groups, which often face recruitment and participation challenges. In this method, 30-minute focus groups are held during regular class time. Students reflect on questions individually and write down their thoughts before engaging in small group discussion. Each group then shares major takeaways with the full class. This method encourages engagement, additional perspectives, and deeper conversation among peers.

Over 80 students participated in five in-class modified focus groups, highlighting diverse student perspectives from various courses within the SIRIUS II project. Findings from these focus groups, along with other data collection methods, were used to demonstrate the impact of CUREs on student development and success.

Student responses from in-class modified focus groups.
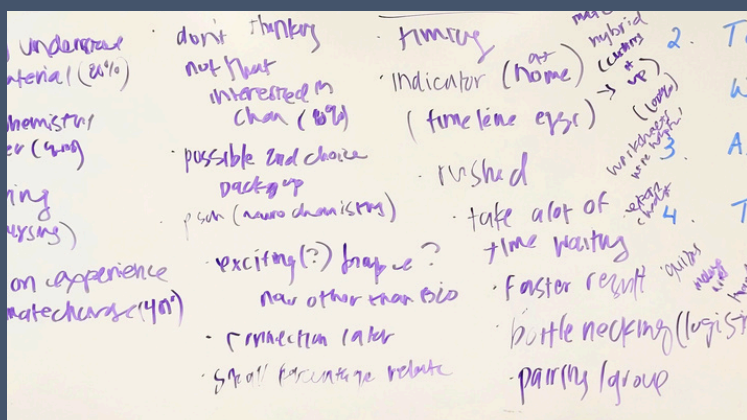
Student Opportunities for **Professional Research Experience**

ISR is committed to growing the next generation of applied researchers. Each year, ISR offers hands-on, applied research experience and professional preparation to dozens of undergraduate and graduate students through paid student assistant positions, academic internships, and programs like Pathways Fellows. Read on to learn about the ways we intentionally expanded our support for Sacramento State students in 2024-2025.
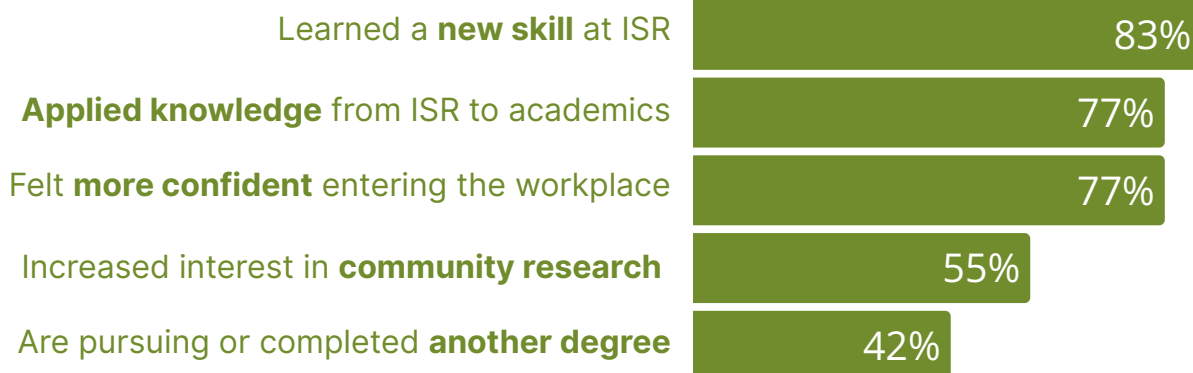
Student Insights
Learning from a Decade of ISR Students

In 2024, we collected feedback from 77 students who worked at ISR in the past 10 years to understand their experience and get feedback that could strengthen ISR's student engagement. Through an online survey and interviews, former ISR students—including employees, graduate research assistants, undergraduate interns, academic placement students, and recent graduates—reflected on their time at ISR and shared updates on their academic and career trajectories. Their responses highlight ISR's role in student learning, research engagement, and workforce readiness. Students described their time at ISR as welcoming and foundational to their future pathways.

Former ISR students shared that they...

Learned a **new skill** at ISR	83%
Applied knowledge from ISR to academics	77%
Felt **more confident** entering the workplace	77%
Increased interest in **community research**	55%
Are pursuing or completed **another degree**	42%

ISR staff and student researchers on a nature walk (left to right): Ranesh, Autum, Ian, Demondza, Julie, Anthony

"ISR's focus on collaboration and innovation had a **significant impact** on me.

"A wonderful place to learn, make connections, and **get started in my career**.

"ISR gave me a lot of knowledge and it has **influenced me to go into research** after graduate school.

Strengthening Student Support

ISR's New Student Coordinator Role

In 2025, ISR created the **Student Coordinator position to strengthen the student experience** through structured orientation, training, and regular supervision to student employees and interns. The role was designed to foster connection and community-building among students working across different projects and schedules. More broadly, the Student Coordinator serves as a bridge between students and the professional research environment—supporting mentorship, workplace preparedness, and meaningful engagement in ISR's applied research projects.

ISR's Student Coordinator and student researchers (left to right): Adrian, Caroline, Mayra, Natalia S., Humberto

Mayra Adame, ISR's Student Coordinator and Research Associate II

Mayra Adame is ISR's first Student Coordinator and is exceptionally well-suited to serve in this inaugural role. Mayra is a Sacramento State graduate (BS and MA in Sociology) who joined ISR in 2021 as a Research Associate. She was first introduced to applied research through the Sacramento State Pathways Fellows Program, which affirmed her commitment to using research to support underrepresented communities. Her combined background in student support (including as a tutor, mentor, and student supervisor) and applied social research uniquely positions her to guide Sacramento State students as they navigate the transition from academic learning to professional practice.

Student Spotlight

In 2024-2025, 60 student assistants contributed to research activities at ISR. Hear from two of those students, Caroline Nguyen and Natalia Sedano, about their ISR experience.

Sandie Sutherland Fellow
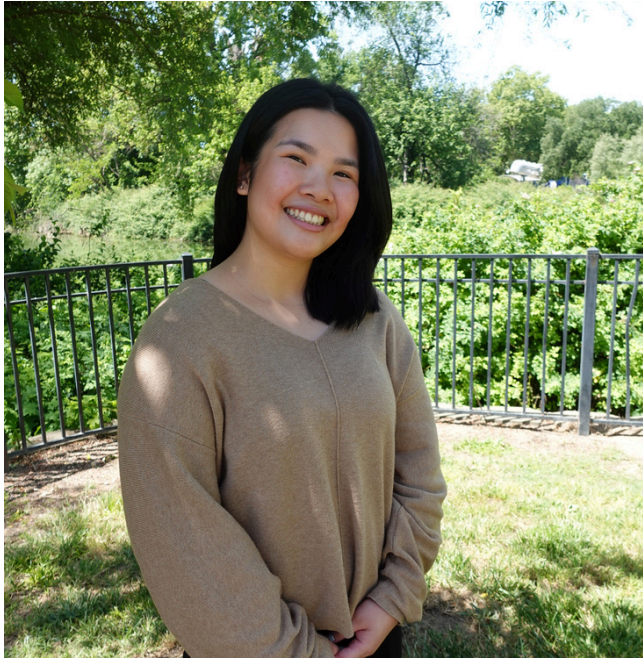
Caroline Nguyen (BA, International Relations, 2025) joined the ISR team in 2023 as part of an undergraduate fellowship program, and became ISR's inaugural Sandie Sutherland Fellow (honoring the legacy of a founding ISR researcher). Caroline worked on 10 research projects at ISR and supported an array of research activities, including survey development and programming, literature review, and data entry.

Caroline is exploring options for graduate school and pursuing a career in crime analytics. She expects that the skills she learned at ISR—particularly around handling sensitive data—will serve her in that work.

Her advice for other students looking to work with ISR is to **"take every opportunity you can get from this experience."**

Natalia Sedano (BA, Psychology, 2025) started as an Undergraduate Fellow and went on to complete her Pathways Scholarship Fellowship at ISR. In those eight months, Natalia worked on eight research projects, with much of her time spent on synthesis of primary and secondary data, as well as qualitative analysis.

Natalia especially enjoyed learning and building relationships with the ISR team, noting that "creating connections here can really help for career advancement." Natalia plans to apply for psychology graduate programs, with hopes to join a university research lab.

Her advice for other students working with ISR is **"Don't be shy in asking questions because everyone's always willing to help."**

Pathways Fellow

Campus-wide Impact
Preparing Students for Research

Sacramento State recently earned the prestigious designation of an R2 University in recognition of its high level of research activity. ISR's robust research portfolio played a meaningful role in the University's advancement and continues to contribute to this designation through new initiatives that strengthen research capacity across campus. Read on to learn about how ISR contributes to University-wide efforts to prepare students for leadership and success on their professional paths.
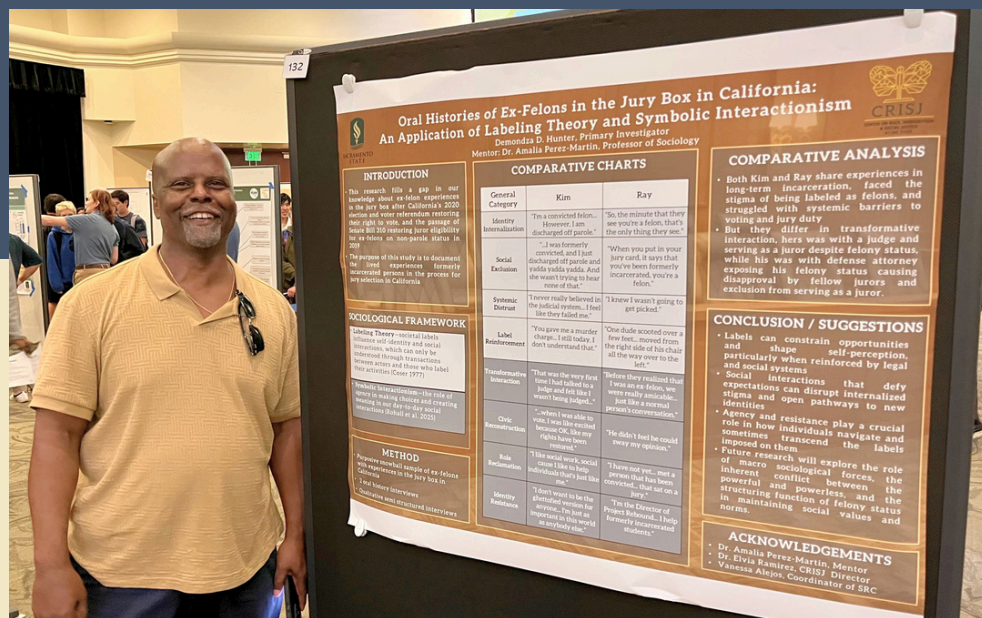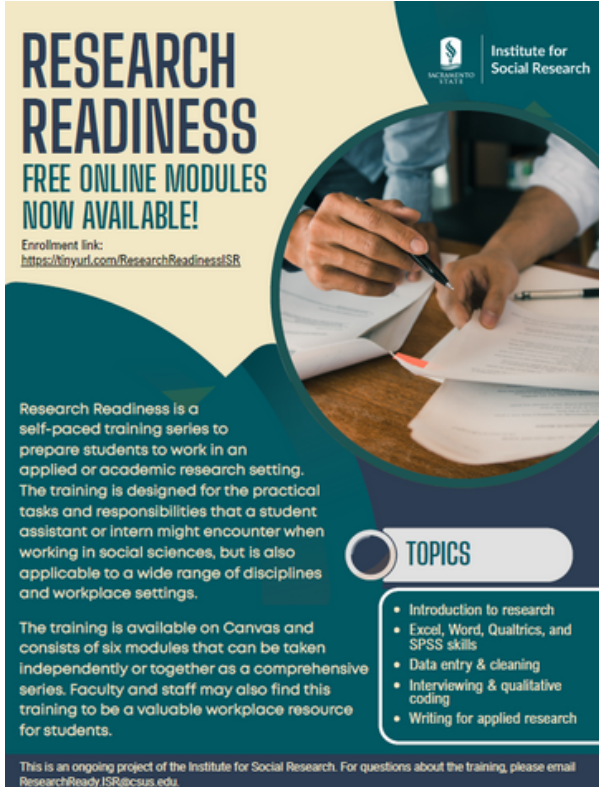
ISR student researcher Demondza Hunter presenting at the Student Research Center's 2025 Fall Poster Forum

Research Readiness
Trainings for the next generation of researchers

Practical, applied skills are a crucial complement to academic training for Sacramento State students entering the workforce. To share those with the broader campus, the ISR Student Coordinator held four trainings for Pathways Fellows in 2025. ISR also developed and launched **Research Readiness, a series of training modules** designed to provide Sacramento State students with practical skills and tools commonly used in research roles. The self-paced training series, available to all Sacramento State students and faculty, prepares students for research in academic, industry, and other professional settings.

The series includes six modules that can be used independently or as a suite, covering topics like cleaning data, developing surveys, conducting literature reviews, and coding qualitative data. This training was developed with support from the Campus Career Center and is an ongoing ISR project, with content scheduled for annual updates. For more information, email researchready.isr@csus.edu.

Guidelines for AI Use in Applied Social Research

ISR is actively participating in campus-wide exploration of artificial intelligence (AI) and its workplace applications. While AI can enhance our research toolkit, its adoption requires thoughtful guidelines and implementation so that we use it responsibly, ethically, and appropriately in our research and continue to support skill development for early career researchers.

ISR recently developed its own guidelines for AI use, guided by our Mission, Vision, and Values and the CSU's ETHICAL Principles AI Framework for Higher Education. The guidelines provide a framework for how AI can strengthen research quality while underscoring our commitment to authentic research that safeguards individual and community voice, prioritizes human expertise, and maintains transparency.

Our vision

To set the standard for applied social research that makes a difference.

Our mission

Partner with communities and decision-makers to conduct meaningful, applied social research that fosters positive change in the Sacramento region and throughout California.

Our values

- We work collaboratively to customize studies for our partners' research needs.

- We operate with scientific integrity.

- We integrate the expertise of partners and communities.

- We are committed to growing the next generation of applied researchers.

- We recognize that our research is more meaningful and valid when it is grounded in the contexts of the communities we seek to understand.

- We ensure that research results are accessible.

- We position our partners for future success.

Institute for Social Research

SACRAMENTO STATE

Email isr-info@csus.edu
Phone 916-278-5737
Website www.csus.edu/isr