
**UC Tech Awards 2023 Applicant**

**Category:** DEI LEADERSHIP
**Name:** Shohreh Bozorgmehri, Director Student & Academic Services (1)
**Number of people:** (1)
**For:** Founding Women in Technology at UCI
**Location:** UC Irvine

1. **Person submitting the application/nomination**
	1. **Name, title, department, location/organization, and please indicate if you are faculty or staff:** Max Garrick
	2. **Email address:** mgarrick@uci.edu
	3. **The name of your organization:** UCI Office of Information Technology
2. **Award category:** DEI Leadership
3. **Name of person, name of the team, or name of the project to receive the award**: Shohreh Bozorgmehri
4. **All project team members - if applicable:** N/A
5. **Which location was affected by the work?** UCI
6. **Summary:** We nominate Shohreh Bozorgmehri for her visionary leadership in founding Women in Technology @ UCI (WiT@UCI), a campus-wide community that supports the development, leadership, sponsorship, and empowerment of women in IT at UCI. The first two webinars exploring the impact of remote work on women in IT and the importance of male allies propelled WiT@UCI – and Shohreh – to the [front page of UCI.edu](https://news.uci.edu/2022/02/28/tech-equity/). Her championing of two new programs, Applause and LEAP, created two important vehicles for improving visibility and developing leadership skills of underrepresented populations in tech.
7. **Narrative**

We enthusiastically nominate Shohreh Bozorgmehri for the **UC Tech DEI Leadership Award**, in recognition of her visionary leadership in founding [Women in Technology @ UCI (WiT@UCI)](https://womenintech.uci.edu/). Shohreh's efforts have transformed the campus culture and elevated conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in the tech community at UCI.

**Background.** IT powers our University and enables our mission, but women in technology still face significant challenges. Only 28% of computing and mathematical roles are held by women, and half of women who enter the tech industry leave by age 35. Additionally, women are promoted to manager positions at a much lower rate than men. Shohreh recognized these challenges and took action to create a culture that supports the development, leadership, sponsorship, and empowerment of women in IT at UCI.

**Founding.** Shohreh founded WiT@UCI in early 2020, recruiting a diverse [advisory board](https://womenintech.uci.edu/about/our-team/) made up of staff, faculty, central IT, academic IT, and health IT. She found executive sponsors within Human Resources, Equal Opportunity & Compliance, Office of Inclusive Excellence, and the Office of Data and Information Technology. With Shohreh's leadership and the support of these sponsors, the board quickly got to work building a supportive workplace community for women and underrepresented groups in IT, which became all the more vital as we began to navigate remote work and new challenges posed by the pandemic.

**First event.** Recognizing that the shift to remote work could stall career advancement, Shohreh partnered with Debra Richardson, founding dean of the Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Science, to organize [WiT@UCI's first webinar](https://www.ics.uci.edu/community/news/view_news?id=1864).

Featuring prominent IT leaders within the UC community, the webinar offered a powerful message of encouragement and empowerment to the attendees, many of whom were grappling with the implications of remote work. With 243 people in attendance, the webinar featured a faculty expert on optimizing effectiveness in a virtual environment, followed by a panel discussion featuring Van Williams, UC’s CIO, and Jenn Stringer, UC Berkeley’s CIO. The panelists emphasized the importance of taking risks, seeking new opportunities, speaking up and asking, practicing empathy as a leader, and considering stepping into a new leadership role. By providing this forum, Shohreh and WiT@UCI helped to foster greater resilience and adaptability in the technical community.

**Second event.** To create a truly inclusive workplace community for women and underrepresented groups, it takes a concerted effort from all members of the organization. Shohreh understands this and has actively sought to cultivate allies across UCI. One such effort was the invitation of Karen Catlin, author of *Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces*, to speak at [WiT@UCI's second webinar](https://womenintech.uci.edu/news/allyship-that-makes-an-impact/). This event attracted over 300 attendees from across the UC system -- a third of whom were men. Joined by Jason Valdry, Assistant Dean in the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, and Jennifer Wong-Ma, Associate Professor of Teaching in the Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences, Karen provided valuable insight on practical topics such as dealing with interruptions during virtual meetings and responding to male colleagues being addressed by their professional or professorial titles while female colleagues are not. Karen also emphasized the ally's responsibility in promoting an inclusive culture. The event sparked a book club and a mini movement of allies dedicated to creating a supportive environment for everyone across campus.

**Applause program.** Shohreh's vision was instrumental in launching the groundbreaking program, [Applause](https://womenintech.uci.edu/applause/), which has created a powerful platform for highlighting and celebrating agents of change for women in the technical community at UCI. Through Applause, Shohreh has created a vehicle for improving visibility of underrepresented populations in tech and empowering women across campus. After three years, the program has recognized 26 individuals and has become an annual tradition, serving as a powerful testament to Shohreh's unwavering commitment to supporting women in IT at UCI.

**LEAP program.** Shohreh identified a critical need for developing our future women technology leaders. To this end, she joined with Stacy Rose, Assistant Director, Network and Telecommunications Services, and the UCI Merage School of Business to create the [Leadership, Equality, Allies & Presence (LEAP) program](https://merage.uci.edu/it-leap/womens-leadership.html). The first of its kind at UCI, LEAP is specifically designed to provide women in IT roles with the tools, skills, and confidence needed to advance their careers through effective leadership, influence, communication, and presence.

Through five comprehensive half-day sessions, LEAP empowers women leaders to develop a powerful personal leadership presence, shape organizational culture, create actionable plans for success, and engage in valuable networking opportunities that foster long-lasting peer coaching groups. With an impressive 120 alumni and counting, LEAP is already making a significant impact in retaining and developing our future leaders at UCI.

**WiTIN.** LEAP inspired a groundswell of action, catalyzing new initiatives that foster greater inclusion and support. One such initiative is the [Women in Technology Inclusive Networking (WiTIN) initiative](https://womenintech.uci.edu/news/women-in-technology-inclusive-networking/), founded by a peer group of LEAP alumni with Shohreh's support as a vocal champion. Under the WiT@UCI umbrella, WiTIN is a networking and mentorship initiative for women in IT. By hosting engaging events featuring insightful presentations followed by open networking sessions, WiTIN facilitates valuable connections that support building critical skills in areas such as public speaking, DevOps, cybersecurity, project management, and inclusive teamwork.

**Community.** Shohreh's leadership has been instrumental in creating a thriving community of women in IT and their allies at UCI through WiT@UCI. Her commitment to recognizing individuals who embody the group's values, sharing opportunities, and fostering a culture of inclusivity has resulted in a 200-member strong community and multiple successful events and programs. She has also served on the leadership committee for [UC Women in Technology](https://www.ucop.edu/uc-women-in-technology/) to contribute and shape efforts to support women in technology across UC.

It is important to note that Shohreh could not have achieved this success alone. She is grateful to the numerous volunteers, sponsors, and advisors who have contributed to the growth of WiT@UCI. Her dedication to recognizing their contributions speaks to her leadership style and commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive community.