

# ELI ELSTER

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## EDUCATION

### **University of California, Davis**

PhD in Evolutionary Anthropology

September '24 - Present

Concentration in Human Behavioral Ecology, advised by Manvir Singh

### **University of California, Davis**

Bachelor of Arts in Cognitive Science and English, *summa cum laude*

September '18 - June '22  
Cumulative GPA:

3.96/4.00

Thesis for honors in English – The Political Dimensions of a Poem: Aesthetics, Translation, and Politics in Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End*. (Advisor: Dr. Colin Milburn). Awarded Highest Honors.

## PUBLICATIONS AND REFEREED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Bacon, R., Thomas, T., **Elster, E.S.** (accepted). Trends in Afterlife Beliefs in the United States. Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

**Elster, E.S.**, Singh, M. (in press). Strategy and experience required: Social learning cannot explain the varieties of supernatural belief." *Religion, Brain, and Behavior*

Combette, L. T., Emmons, N., **Elster, E.S.**, & Kelemen, D. (in press). Cats, Bats, and People: Cultivating Children's Understanding of Genes and Trait Inheritance. *Journal of Cognition and Development*

**Elster, E.S.**, Glowacki, L. (2025). "We Are One People": Group Myths Also Draw Cues from Self-Concept Formation. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

**Elster, E.S.**, Leshinskaya, A., Ranganath, C. (2022). Patterns of Causal Judgment Diverge From Patterns of Recall: a Test of the Outcome Density Effect. *Proceedings of the 44th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*. Cognitive Science Society.

**Elster, E.S.**, Leshinskaya, A., Boorman, E., and Ranganath, C. (under review). Divergent signatures in causal judgment and relational memory. *Open Mind*.

## PRESENTATIONS

**Elster, E.S.** (2025). How experience shapes extraordinary beliefs. Presented at the California Workshop on Evolutionary Social Science.

**Elster, E.S.** (2021). Canonizing the Uncanny: The Power of Spiral Sight in Patricia Grace's *Potiki*. Presented at the UC Davis Undergraduate Research Conference.

## HONORS, AWARDS, AND GRANTS

**CISS Undergraduate Research Intern Sponsorship**, Boston University

Fall 2022 & Summer 2023

Awarded \$1500 and \$1250, respectively, to fund undergraduate mentees in the Child Cognition Lab.

**Veloyce Glenn Winslow Jr. Award**, UC Davis

2022

Given to the graduating man believed to be the most outstanding in the areas of leadership, scholarship, integrity and service in the university community.

**Leon Mayhew Award**, UC Davis

2022

Given to the top undergraduate majoring in music, art or literature for academic achievement and service to the university.

**Lois Rosenberg Outstanding Graduating Senior Award**, UC Davis English

2022

**Phi Beta Kappa**, UC Davis

2022

**Honorable Mention for Prize for Creativity in Undergraduate Research**, UC Davis

2021

**Prized Writing Honoree**, UC Davis

2020 & 2021

- Hideous Green Knights Sleep Monstrously: A Night of Debate in Davis. (2021).
- Through the Hourglass. (2020).

**Our Shared Memory Prose Fellow**, University of Chicago

2020

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**Research Assistant**, Anansi Database Project

2022 - 2023

Coding narrative and character attributes in stories, myths, and folktales from cultures around the world to create a database of worldwide literary practice.

**Research Assistant**, The Center for Mind and Culture

2022 - 2024

Assisting Dr. Rachel Bacon in consolidating demographic and religious behavior data from the past eight decades to develop agent-based simulations of religious change.

- Leading data management and analysis for a study on changes in afterlife beliefs in collaboration with Dr. Bacon and two graduate students; writing numerous scripts and functions in R to ensure survey data is accurately consolidated.

**Project Manager**, Child Cognition Lab at Boston University 2022 - Present

Coordinating several applied and basic cognitive developmental research projects exploring children's and adults' reasoning about living and non-living natural phenomena.

- Collaborating with PI, post-docs, and graduate researchers and supervising a team of ~20 research assistants to simultaneously carry out data collection, coding, transcription and other aspects of 4-5 research projects
- Managing the Evolving Minds Project, a National Science Foundation-funded project exploring children's learning from a novel multi-week STEM curriculum on evolution that emphasizes explanatory reasoning.
- Assisting with multiple qualitative studies on how preconceptions about scientific concepts affect children's learning and how students reason about and react to information gaps in science curricula.

**Research Assistant**, Dynamic Memory Lab 2021 - Present

Collaborating with Dr. Anna Leshinskaya to examine the relationship between causal reasoning and recall in the "outcome density effect."

- Revising, testing, and analyzing the results of covariational causal reasoning tasks using R, HTML/CSS, Javascript, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and a variety of computational models.
- Led regular discussion groups of papers in memory research among fellow RAs, graduate students, and research scientists to build a stronger lab community.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SERVICE

**Session Instructor**, Anthropology Outreach Program at UC Davis 2024 - Present

Teaching introductory classes on anthropology and archaeology for elementary-school students in the Sacramento area

**Administrative Assistant**, Omo Valley Research Project 2022 - Present

Assisting Dr. Luke Glowacki with various aspects of OVRP, a non-profit dedicated to providing educational opportunities to students in Ethiopia's Omo Valley.

- Designed newsletters to fundraise for OVRP, resulting in ~\$9,000 of donations.

**Contributing Writer**, New England Primate Conservancy 2022 - Present

Authoring monthly entries on primate species to collate the most updated research into accessible summaries for the public and press.

**Founder and Head of the Education Division**, Neurotech@Davis 2022 - 2023

Piloted and designed a 15-week introductory neuroscience curriculum based on the Brain Bee "Brain Facts" textbook for two weekly classes of 20-25 students in Health Sciences High School, a primarily first-generation school in Sacramento.

- Recruited four undergraduates to assist with teaching and, before passing leadership on to them, expanded the program into two additional Sacramento schools.

**Contributing Writer**, Unsilenced 2021 - 2023

Translated numerous scientific articles on agriculture, mental health, and artificial intelligence into accessible summaries.

- Collaborated with Trinity Agtech, an agriculture non-profit, to translate papers on sustainable farming for agricultural workers.

**Co-founder and Co-President**, Neuwrite @ Davis 2021 - 2023

Led monthly science communication groups for undergraduates, graduate students, and research scientists to promote and improve science communication.

**Editor-in-chief of Content**, Open Ceilings 2019 - 2022

Led a board and submissions committee of 40+ members to produce *Open Ceilings*, a fully undergraduate-run literary magazine created to promote and provide a space for diverse voices in the Davis artistic community.

- Recruited and trained over 25 editors in content and copy editing skills.
- Acquired grants from academic departments totaling \$1100 to build a scholarship fund for selected contributors.
- Organized multiple statewide intercollegiate galas for literary magazines to collaborate and engage with new audiences.

**Contributing Writer and Section Editor**, Davis Political Review 2018 - 2020

Mentored several undergraduate authors in writing articles on UC/California political issues and wrote feature-length articles on free speech, activism, and *de facto* school segregation.

- Co-led the creation, design, and dissemination of DPR's first print publication in five years and authored the publication's highlighted piece.

## TEACHING

**Teaching Assistant**, Department of Anthropology, UC Davis 2024 - Present

Instruction of lab and discussion sections for ANT 001 and ANT 101 (~60 students per quarter); grading of assignments and exams.

**Workshop Facilitator**, Writers Without Margins

2022 - Present

Designing and leading writing workshops in the Barbara McInnis House, a homeless respite shelter, and the Boston Public Library to provide trauma-informed narrative therapy to underserved populations.

**Undergraduate Instructor**, UC Davis

2022

Independently designed and taught "Literature and Time," an upper-division English course on the relationship between narrative structures and philosophical perspectives on time.

**Wordslinger**, 916 Ink

2020 - 2022

Co-designed and led three creative writing workshops per week in Sacramento schools and juvenile detention facilities for up to thirty students to encourage self-expression in underserved populations, resulting in ten published anthologies of student work.