

# HONORABLE MENTION

## 2026 Newsletter

**San Diego  
Community  
College District  
Honors Program**



**SAN DIEGO**  
Community College District  
[SDCCD.EDU](http://SDCCD.EDU)

## SDCCD Honors Program STUDENTS CREATE!

As the SDCCD Honors Program coordinators reflected on the success of last year's showcase, we were reminded once again of how fortunate we are to work with such incredibly imaginative students. We've decided to keep the tradition alive by putting the spotlight directly on our student artists and visionaries. We are so proud to present this year's selected works!

Here are the winners of the SDCCD Honors Program's **2nd Annual Honorable Mention Creative Contest (2026)**, whose submissions respond to the question: How have recent national events impacted you, your community, or the nation?

SDCCD Honors Program encourages the cultivation of curiosity and makes possible the exploration of ideas and subjects beyond customary coursework and programs. The Honors Program helps students create and engage in intellectual challenges and promotes an enthusiastic learning environment.



### Ashley McCollough, Poem

A. McCollough is a student at San Diego City College as an English major. They are studying towards being a High School English Teacher. They like to read ergodic fiction and watch surreal sci-fi movies. Their favorite color is purple and they're allergic to tomatoes.

*I wrote this poem the day after Trump was elected as president the second time out of frustration with the election results.*

### The Devil You Know

May wear a red hat.  
May have a college degree.  
May be well-known.  
May look like your Mother.  
  
May wear a white coat.  
May have good intentions.  
May be fine as hell.  
May look like your Father.

May wear a suit.  
May just follow orders.  
May be rich.  
May look like you.

But the Devil you don't know,  
Lurks in the shadows  
Waiting. Plotting. Collecting.  
Seeing. Feeling. Hearing.  
Taking.



## Nancy Titus, Essay

Nancy Titus was born in Haiti and raised between Haiti, Chile, and the United States. Now a healthcare student at San Diego City College, she carries the experience of growing up across cultures and languages. Writing is one of the ways she makes sense of her journey, reflecting on identity, resilience, and the quiet process of becoming.

## Between Homes, Between Time

My life has unfolded in chapters of departure. Not dramatic departures. Not the kind that makes headlines or history books. Quiet ones. The kind that happens in living rooms and airports. The kind where suitcases are packed carefully and adults speak in voices that are calm but heavy. The kind where hope and fear sit together in the same bag.

I left Haiti when I was young. Too young to understand that leaving a country can also mean leaving a version of yourself behind. I remember warmth. I remember the rhythm of Creole rising and falling like music. I remember the closeness of family, the feeling that home was something solid beneath my feet. I did not know that solidity could disappear. Children adapt quickly. We grow where we are placed. So I grew.

Another country shaped my childhood. Another school system trained my thoughts. Another culture influenced how I laughed, how I moved, how I imagined my future. I made friends. I learned new customs. I built a life that slowly stopped feeling temporary. Home shifted from geography to familiarity. Then life shifted again.

Another departure. Another promise of stability. Another beginning in the United States. This time, I was old enough to understand that starting over is not only about new streets. It is about new codes. New expectations. New ways of explaining yourself. It is about answering questions that seem simple but carry complicated answers. "Where are you from?"

The truth is layered. It does not fit neatly into one sentence. We worked hard. We studied. We assembled stability piece by piece. We refined language. We softened accents. We learned how to belong without fully forgetting where we began. Slowly, the unfamiliar became routine. I allowed myself to imagine a future that did not include packing again.

Then recently, national conversations began to grow louder. Debates about immigration. Discussions about deportation. Uncertainty surrounding protections like Temporary Protected Status. Questions about who belongs and who does not.

For some, these are political discussions. For me, they are physical. They enter my body before they enter my thoughts. My chest tightens when I read certain headlines. I check the news late at night, telling myself I am just staying informed. I know exactly where my documents are. I can reach them without looking. I call it organization. But somewhere inside, I know it is preparation.

The Haitian community in the United States carries a history that is rarely simple. Many of us did not migrate just once. We left Haiti. We rebuilt elsewhere. We left again. We reconstructed our lives once more. Each time, we told ourselves that this would be the

final beginning. Each time, we tried to grow roots deep enough to last. But roots that are lifted repeatedly learn a different skill than permanence. They learn resilience. They learn flexibility. They learn how to survive in uncertain soil. Survival, repeated enough times, becomes heavy.

Multiculturalism is often described as richness. And it is. To carry multiple languages in your mouth. To move between cultural codes. To understand the world through layered lenses. These are gifts. But gifts can also be complicated.

Sometimes it feels like holding pieces of yourself that do not fully settle anywhere. Haiti lives in my blood, in the cadence of my family's prayers, in the quiet strength that defines our history. The country of my childhood lives in my memories, in the way I first learned to see possibility. America lives in my ambition, in the education I am pursuing, in the future I am carefully building.

I belong to all of them. And yet, sometimes I feel claimed by none. If I were to return to Haiti, would it feel like return or arrival? The Haiti of my childhood has been reshaped by instability and hardship. And I have been reshaped too. Distance changes both places and people. I would carry accents and experiences that might not fully fit. If I were to leave the United States, I would not only

be leaving a place. I would be leaving years. Years of study. Years of reconstruction. Years of becoming.

Time is what makes this moment ache differently.

When you are young, beginning again feels survivable. You do not yet understand the mathematics of loss. You do not count years invested. You do not measure life in professional milestones or long-term plans. But I am no longer beginning from childhood.

I am building a career. I am investing in education. I am imagining stability not as a luxury but as a necessity. Starting over now would not mean learning a new classroom routine. It would mean surrendering accumulated time. And time does not return itself gently. There is a quiet fear that accompanies aging in uncertainty. It is not fear of labor. Haitians know how to labor. We have reconstructed our lives in multiple nations. We have studied in unfamiliar languages. We have supported families across borders. We have endured instability before. But resilience is not the same as infinite reinvention. At some point, the heart grows tired of proving that it can survive. At some point, what we long for is not another demonstration of strength, but continuity. A place where we do not have to introduce ourselves from the beginning.

A place where our presence is not provisional. A place where planning ten years ahead does not feel naïve.

Recent national events have not made me angry. They have made me aware. Aware of how fragile stability can feel. Aware of how easily belonging can become conditional. Aware of how deeply I desire permanence. The Haitian community continues to show up despite this fragility. In churches where Creole hymns rise with steady faith. In hospitals where Haitian nurses care for patients with quiet devotion. In classrooms where students study long after others have slept. In small businesses built slowly through sacrifice.

We are not rootless. Our roots are braided across histories and geographies. But even braided roots long for stillness. What I am asking for is not political. It is human. The right to build without preparing for departure. The right to age without calculating the cost of another beginning. The right to belong without rehearsing an explanation. I have lived enough chapters of departure. What I long for now is a chapter that does not begin with leaving and does not end with uncertainty.



### Aryam Manasrah, Essay

Aryam Manasrah is a second-year student studying English with aspirations of being a high school English teacher. She is Palestinian-American and is committed to representing her values and beliefs every day. She plays soccer and snowboards in the winter and makes sure that her hijab doesn't stop her from doing nothing because life should be lived to the fullest. She plans to transfer to a four-year university and aspires to get her Master's degree as well.



## Dear War

Dear War,

Many people classify you as a conflict between different nations or groups of people within a nation. Others classify you as a necessity to getting what they want in life. Others are hurt by you, hate you and wish you never ever happened. And some people reflect on you and find hope in preventing you ever again. But I think you are inevitable at the same time. I'm complicated because I am hurt by you, hate you and wish you never ever happened but I find reflection in you and hope to prevent you ever again even if history tells me you are inevitable. Russia and Ukraine have been acquainted with you for four years. Palestine and Israel have been acquainted with you for 78 years. Sudan have been acquainted with you in its own civil war for three years. Syria just finished being acquainted with you after a civil war that lasted 13 years. And even if it's not classified as a war, the USA's government vs the people such as ICE vs. immigrants, cartels from Venezuela, and Iran. You bring so much hurt, suffering and hostility. Entering people's hearts and minds with resentment, distress and heartache. You force people to pick sides and animosity towards each other. When you are presented in front of us against our wills, it should be connecting, unity and togetherness. That is what I think you offer us. I am Palestinian-American and I am writing this letter to you because you need to know how you have brought positivity to my life in some respects while heartbreak some days as well. I still go back to Palestine every year even if it's hard because I have family there and the impact I have as an American will never be braver than the impact I have as a Palestinian. I'm proud of my identity so thank you for showing everyone that you can be proud of your identity too. Even if we should be proud of that every day without a war. But you have hurt so many people and I just want you gone. You have made me fearless in the eyes of the oppressors but scared for my people. You have brought me connectivity towards telling my story while disconnecting for the people who don't want to listen. You have shown me who I can trust and who I cannot trust. So no thank you for ruining everyone's life but thank you for teaching us a lesson in healing and being stronger.

Sincerely,

Aryam Manasrah



### Damiam Alfaro, Essay

I am an aspiring writer majoring in Sociology at San Diego Miramar College. The reason I decided to approach this opportunity with an essay is that my favorite activities are writing and reading. I am using my skills on those activities to raise a voice on national events that not only impact me directly, but our community as well.

## Contemporary National Events and Their Social Impact

It is almost impossible to ignore the elephant in the room: the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE, and its treatment of reliable working-class immigrants as the prominent national event occurring currently. It even feels like a responsibility, a call to action for us people with Latinx descent to respond to these injustices of the government that is currently oppressing us. Regardless of our citizenship or residency status, or of those close to us, we are not different from those Latinx brothers and sisters that are being deported unannouncedly, we are directly linked with them, socially, biologically, emotionally, and humanly. We ought to respond and retaliate against the injustices that they are currently experiencing. How? There are powerful legislatures and approaches that politicians need to implement in order to halt this change. It is discouraging to see that we have to wait for senate and political action to occur for our people to be protected, but is there another alternative?

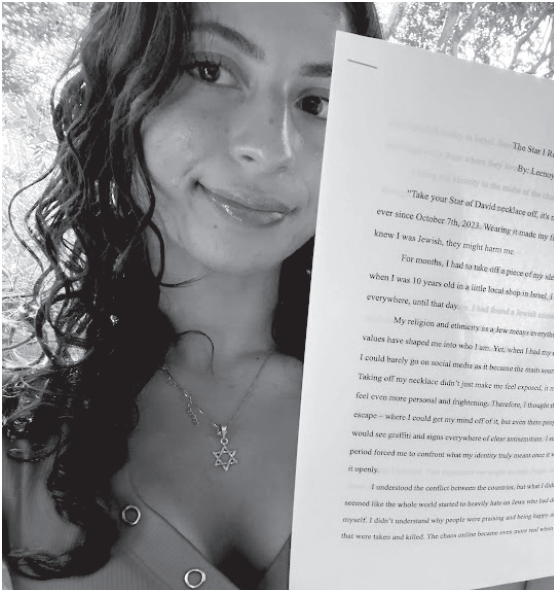
Something we can do in the meantime? How are we supposed to help our Latinx brothers and sisters against this treatment? Protesting, going out to the streets with our colleagues, friends, and close family and protest:



Figure 1.1: Anti-ICE protests in Downtown and North San Diego areas

The goal of this essay is not to incentivize violence, or to promote hostile behavior against agents of the government, politicians, or legislatives. The goal is to spread the idea that protest is the most efficient method to retaliate, and preeminently, to have political participation in the country that shelters you for people without a direct involvement in the legislative branch. Everyone has the right and the responsibility to politically participate in one's country, especially when that participation involves the retaliation against injustices of your own people.

Just as the civil rights movement in the 50's and 60's, the labor movements in the 70s, the farm workers with the Grape Strike, and even modern civil social movements such as Black Lives Matter, we have to stand up and participate politically by protesting in the streets. Strikes, street blocks, engaging in discussions with your peers and colleagues, and other non-violent methods are what make real change while the legislative branch halts this oppression, not posts in social media, nor insulting politicians, nor damaging public property is going to make a change, but protesting socially is what really makes a change. This is a call to action to organize collectively and interact with everyone you know who has a Latinx linkage, which you probably know someone if you live in California. California is the state with most Latinx people in the entire country. If we organize within the state of California, other states will follow along, and the legislature will have no other option than to deny the continuation of the oppressing treatment of immigrants.



## Leenoy Barkhordar, Essay

My name is Leenoy Barkhordar, and I am from San Diego, California. I currently attend San Diego Mesa College, where I am studying political science with the goal of becoming a lawyer. At Mesa, I also serve as a Senator for the Associated Student Government, where I advocate for student voices and continue to develop my ability to write with impact and purpose. As a Jewish student, my experiences have shaped my perspective and inspired me to write about identity, resilience, and standing up against injustice. Writing has always been a meaningful outlet for me; it allows me to process my thoughts and express myself with confidence, and is, in many ways, my form of therapy. Through it, I not only reflect on my own experiences but also stand up for others and affect positive change.

## The Star I Refused to Silence

“Take your Star of David necklace off, it’s not safe,” my parents would tell me constantly ever since October 7th, 2023. Wearing it made my family worry about my safety, as if people knew I was Jewish, they might harm me.

For months, I had to take off a piece of my identity; my necklace. Ever since I got it when I was 10 years old in a little local shop in Israel, I had never taken it off, it came with me everywhere, until that day.

My religion and ethnicity as a Jew means everything to me. My cultural traditions and values have shaped me into who I am. Yet, when I had my necklace off, I lost sight of who I was. I could barely go on social media as it became the main source of the antisemitism I was seeing. Taking off my necklace didn’t just make me feel exposed, it made everything happening online feel even more personal and frightening. Therefore, I thought that school was supposed to be my escape – where I could get my mind off of it, but even there people would make remarks, and I would see graffiti and signs everywhere of clear antisemitism. I started to lose myself. This period forced me to confront what my identity truly meant once it was no longer safe to express it openly.

I understood the conflict between the countries, but what I didn’t understand is why what seemed like the whole world started to heavily hate on Jews who had done nothing - including myself. I didn’t understand why people were praising and being happy about the Jewish hostages that were taken and killed. The chaos online became even more real when it collided with my own family’s reality

in Israel. Seeing a video of the aftermath of a missile attack just a few buildings away from where they lived was a feeling I could never explain.

Losing my identity in the midst of the chaos was one of the hardest things I've had to go through. But, I knew that I had to pull myself out of this dark place and find myself again. I learned that fear could strip you of who you are, but resilience is something you have to actively choose.

This is when I decided to become my high school's Jewish Club's Vice President.

Stepping into this leadership role became the turning point I desperately needed. It truly helped me reconnect with who I am. I had found a Jewish community within my school where I could trust and console in as we were all experiencing the same pain. I organized discussions, supported younger students who felt unsafe, and helped create a space where we could speak without fear. This community helped me not only find myself again, but embrace my identity more than I ever had.

With society wanting Jews to stay silent and be ashamed of who we are, I decided I was done letting fear control my identity. After a powerful talk with my parents, I put my necklace back on and haven't taken it off since, proudly showing who I am and where I come from.

Putting my necklace back on wasn't just returning to a routine, it was reclaiming the confidence and identity I had lost. This experience has taught me how fragile and powerful identity can be when the world tries to silence it. It has shaped me into the kind of person I want to be, someone who leads with courage and unwavering pride in who I am.



## Kian Agheli, Photo Essay

Kian Ali Agheli is an Honors Student transferring from Mesa College in pursuit of a Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics. He is a lifelong San Diego resident. He writes on a regular basis. When asked why he writes, he says this: "I write stories because, like any person, I need to make sense of the world." His act of making sense of the world takes the form of a wide study of language, literature, and art. In that spirit, he volunteers on a weekly basis at our very own Mesa College World Art Collection. He bikes to campus from the nearby Serra Mesa area. In his free time, he listens to music and audiobooks from the Internet Archive.

## Tilting

The ground we share is tilting. Yesterday's journey is a bit different, a bit more complicated, when taken again today. The emotional content of our everyday journeys is augmented. Our hearts are working hard. Today is a time to find, reach, and surpass ordinary limits.

One day, the ground will tilt back. Those who did not stumble will feel well-exercised. We'll look back. We'll laugh. Some will start crying. We'll dust off fallen friends.

We'll congratulate them. We'll be united by the memory in our feet of the incline of the ground only a day ago. Walking will feel springy.

There will come a time when we take peace for granted. A time of true peace. At such a time, I think I may miss today's everyday troubles. Then, I'll: remember the rest; stare into space while I hold my breath; laugh off my stupor; and take a long nap. My dreams will be inspired by today's realities.

*The photograph was taken along Mesa College Drive, at the border between the residential district and the commercial district.*



The SDCCD Honors Program offers high-achieving, highly motivated students a flexible, accessible curriculum that emphasizes equity and social justice. The Honors experience includes more interactive classrooms, smaller class sizes, and an emphasis on critical and creative thinking, research, writing, and presentation skills. The goal of the District Honors Program is to facilitate and increase transfer to the UCs, the CSUs, and other distinguished universities, as well as enhance employability for vocational students. The District Honors Program is truly a model of excellence for multi-college districts. Students in the program not only distinguish themselves during their time at SDCCD colleges, but also many go on to graduate from prestigious universities, earning undergraduate and graduate degrees.