

Sustainable Shopping???

At UCLA??

It's More Likely Than You Think!

Interviews by Keifer Lamberth

Interview 1 ~ Lia from Market at UCLA

Why don't you just start by introducing yourself and your organization?

Okay, so my name is Lia Pletcher. I'm a second year student at UCLA. And I founded the organization Market at UCLA, which is basically a student flea market for students to help organize campus events, sell their stuff, and shop from other students on campus as well.

What was the motivation and inspiration behind starting Market at UCLA?

I'm from Northern California, and I grew up in a very outdoorsy family. I was outside in nature kind of all the time, it was just something I really grew to cherish. As I grew up, and smoke seasons became a regular thing, fire seasons became more intense, I just saw this connection between everything around me and how it impacts the environment a little bit more. I've always also been super interested in fashion, so realizing that there's a connection between the two and sustainability and all the things that are marketed towards us, just thinking more about how the two intertwine. Moving to school as well, I've always been interested in flea markets, so it was really cool going around LA and being able to see an abundance of those. That just brought an inspiration to me thinking why don't we have one here? It'd be really great for students to have a platform to sell their own stuff as well.

What's the general reaction that you get when UCLA students come across your organization? What do they resonate with?

There is a pretty strong positive reaction. Many of my friends, who were the first to hear about it,, were particularly supportive. I think, partially just because we have similar interests in fashion, sustainability, and the intersection between the two. But also, I think the opportunity for students to easily create their own business within the organization is something that's particularly exciting. I've been very happy with the amount of support.

Were there any other organizations around campus that inspired you to start your organization or any that you look to for inspiration?

I initially thought of this idea because I wanted to sell my own stuff. I've been selling on online platforms such as Depop, Poshmark, Mercari, all three at the same time, sometimes. I've been selling on all of those and visiting flea markets around here. I was kind of surprised to find out that there wasn't something with an easy signup for students to do the same thing on campus, because again, I think there is quite a market for it. Initially, I was looking around for clubs to join actually, and when I couldn't quite find something that matched exactly what I wanted, I figured I might as well create my own.

Some of the clubs that inspired me (I think also, after I started the club, I became a little bit more involved in that environment, so I was a little bit more aware of the clubs around me and what they were offering) were all the other amazing fashion sustainability clubs on campus such like Refine and Unravel. Those inspired me a lot because they had their clothing swaps, and I really liked the idea of a community sustainability event on campus, but I also wanted to make it profitable for students. Also FAST is just fantastic, and also the UCLA Farmers Market too just because they are able to put together and set up an event on campus where students are able to shop.

How do you try to make your organization accessible to all students compared to other secondhand clothing shopping platforms like Depop, for example?

One thing about Depop, Poshmark, all those apps online is that for each piece of clothing that you decide to sell, you have to upload a whole post with it, which is not super labor intensive, it is an additional bit of work. The main mission of Market at UCLA was to be a sustainability event first, rather than just a for-profit resale event. If you do have all these extra clothes piling up or clothes you realize you don't wear it can feel like a lot of work to sell on these online platforms if you see this huge pile, and you realize you have to make posts for every single one of them, and then ship them out. I think having an in person on campus market does overall increase accessibility because you can just show up and sell what you have. Also, it's easier to shop for your peers too when they're just walking around and see our events. It's a little bit more of a time commitment in a single day, but I'd say less, and if not, a different kind of commitment than selling your stuff online. Also, I think there's a really great personal connection selling with people within your community too because you walk by, you see your friends, all that and you can make new connections too.

On campus, what barriers do you see for students to access like sustainable shopping? You've already talked about how you're working to get rid of some of those barriers, but if there's anything you would want to expand on in that scope, feel free.

I think one thing that's difficult is location. It's definitely a privilege in LA to have all of these flea markets nearby, but they're still not directly on campus. If you use your Bruin U-Pass TAP card, and you take a bus, yes, that's more cost effective, but it takes a lot of time out of your day. Ubering to these places too for a student budget really just is not that accessible. I think being able to bring a flea market and this kind of shopping experience to campus really helps break down some of those barriers.



Interview 2 ~ Faith & Paula from UCLA Farmers Market

So why don't you just start by introducing yourselves and your organization?

Faith: My name is Faith Forrest. I'm a third year political science and English major.

Paula: My name is Paula Preda, I'm a fourth year history and communications student. We're co-directors of the UCLA Farmers Market, which is a student run farmers market that happens biweekly on Bruin Plaza.

We talked before about how UCLA Farmers market is a really long running establishment that's been on campus for around 20 years now. How did you two get involved in the organization, and what are your current goals for it?

Paula: I got involved with it during my freshman year, just because I was really attracted to the community that the UCLA Farmers Market creates. I think that's what makes it a special organization. Even though we have restrictions on how many farmers and vendors we can have at our markets, and it can be difficult to get that Bruin Plaza spot and facilitate the market, we have been able to create a community around Farmers Market with our fundraisers, educational workshops, and our morning markets, where students sell art and clothing. Building this community has been very fulfilling because the people that we've hired in the past two years, have all been very dedicated and very friendly. I think farmers market just attracts a very inclusive bunch of people who are just passionate about sustainability and creating a space that's for everyone.

Faith: I joined Farmers Market my freshman year on the workshops committee, one of my best friends, Marika, was in farmers market starting fall quarter of our freshman year, and whenever we would hang out in her dorm she would be making slideshow videos of how to make miscellaneous soup with random ingredients. Those slideshows were posted on the Farmers Market Instagram, and I thought it looked so cool, so I applied. One of the coolest things I think that we've done with farmers market since I've been in it is our biweekly newsletter, which we started last year. Everyone in Farmers Market signs up for a certain slot in the newsletter. Each newsletter, we have a recipe and a seasonal produce highlight of a fruit, vegetable, or plant that's in season. We also have a fresh feature, which is where we highlight another student organization. For example, we've highlighted the Westwood food Co Op in this section. We've also highlighted bus routes showing how to access farmers markets in the greater Los Angeles area and things that we posted on our Instagram. Right now on our Instagram, our marketing team has been making these really delicious looking videos on how to make food. It's also great just getting to put on fundraisers with other clubs. We're currently planning a house show with Unravel, which is a sustainable fashion student organization. Getting to cultivate a community of people who really care about either food, health, sustainability, shopping local, I feel like I've learned so much from the people in farmers market because they're all just such passionate individuals.

What is the general reaction people have when they see your markets on Bruin Plaza? How do they resonate with and respond to your message?

Faith: People either are super excited about it, or super shocked that it exists. Most people think of the Westwood Farmers Market on Thursdays when we say that we're in UCLA farmers market. I think that a lot of people who live on the Hill especially appreciate the opportunity to grab fresh fruit bought locally from California. I think that everyone just loves good food, and I think it is really good food.

Paula: Yeah, I think farmers markets have this very nostalgic association for a lot of people. Especially going to college and living in a big city, you don't really get that kind of slowness and interaction with where your food comes from. When people interact with these vendors, these people are raising these strawberries and raising these raisins. I think a lot of people really appreciate being able to reconnect with their food, especially in a city where you don't see or drive by fields of corn or grapevines. It's easy to be detached from where your food comes from. I think it evokes really good vibes for people.

You've mentioned a few other student organizations that you collaborate with, what are some of these organizations that you're frequently partnering with? What are some that you're looking to collaborate with in the future or that you draw inspiration from?

Paula: We've partnered with CalFresh so that students can use EBT money to shop at our markets now. We've partnered with Zero Waste UCLA, they've tabled at our markets. They've helped us avoid using single-use plastics, because those are very common in farmers markets.

Faith: We have a lot of crossover with the Westwood Food Co-Op too. We're working with Unravel right now, to put on a house show where we'll be serving food options, and we'll also have racks of donated clothes for people to peruse. It's cool getting to work with people in another branch of sustainability that's not just food.

Sustainable shopping can be tough for students to access. Where do you see these obstacles, and how do you work to make this experience accessible for other students?

Faith: Our free newsletter is one accessible resource that anyone can subscribe to. Knowing what produce is in season, I think is not typically general knowledge to people, it definitely wasn't general knowledge to me before I joined farmers market. I think that's really important. Providing a way for students and anyone on the UCLA campus to access local and fresh food is one thing but also providing them with the resources of how to cook them how to access them is just as important. Like I said earlier, our Instagram has videos of bread and produce that you can get from the farmers market as well as meals that you can make with them and how to prepare them

Paula: Also in an hour and a half we're holding a free workshop. We're partnering with the teaching kitchen to hold a cooking demonstration where students eat the food we teach them to make. All of our workshops have been free so far; sometimes it'll be taste testing local produce and things like that just to educate people about how to eat seasonally, locally, and more sustainably.