



# Channel

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHANNEL ISLANDS / 2021 *Spring Magazine*

Nursing students step up  
to help out *page 16*

# Channel

Spring 2021 / Vol. 26 / No. 1 / Biannual

Channel is an official publication of California State University Channel Islands. It is published twice a year for students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors and the community at-large by the Communication & Marketing office within the Division of University Advancement.

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#### INTERIM PRESIDENT

Richard Yao

#### VICE PRESIDENT FOR UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

Nichole Ipach

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#### CHANNEL MAGAZINE STAFF

##### EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Nancy Covarrubias Gill '05

##### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Joanna Murphy

##### COPY EDITOR

Pamela Dean

##### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Pamela Dean

Nancy Covarrubias Gill '05

Kim Lamb Gregory

Andrew Lorenzana '16 and '19

##### STUDENT WRITER

M. Riley Luhrsen, English

##### GRAPHIC DESIGN

Sarah Schumacher

##### PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Whitney Howard

Kevin Mapp

Joanna Murphy

Brian Paumier

##### STUDENT PHOTOGRAPHER

Clepsy Hernandez, Art

##### DISTRIBUTION COORDINATOR

Kristin Steiner '17

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#### CSU Channel Islands Mission Statement

Placing students at the center of the educational experience, California State University Channel Islands provides undergraduate and graduate education that facilitates learning within and across disciplines through integrative approaches, emphasizes experiential and service learning, and graduates students with multicultural and international perspectives.



Channel Islands

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY



Ekho after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Beginning Anew*



As we prepare for the Fall semester, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for everyone in our campus community — our students who have shown such resilience and determination in spite of the multiple crises surrounding our society; our faculty and staff, the majority of whom so expertly transitioned their work and instruction into the virtual space while balancing the many other pushes and pulls of life; our essential staff who have worked on campus throughout the last year and a half while the majority of us were able to work remotely; and of course, all of you in the community who have supported us throughout this time with your generosity and care.

I always say in times of crisis a community can grow closer together or things can go off the rails very quickly. I am deeply grateful our campus community came together to navigate all of the challenges throughout the past year — by leaning into our shared experiences, working through adversity, and solving problems. Perhaps most importantly, we have the opportunity to build upon the bonds we developed and strengthened through these shared experiences, to continue learning with each other how to make creative, critical, and innovative thinking work for us, and to grow collectively stronger through our shared mission and values.

As we look ahead, there is still much work to do. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt on our campus and across higher education for years to come. There has been a monumental shift across society, a chance to reflect on and even reset the lives we had pre-COVID. While we do this reflection on an individual level, I call upon us as an academic community to do the same. Our lives may never “go back to normal” completely. So, what can we do with this unique opportunity? We share this incredibly special moment to start anew, identifying places where the old normal was not working and figuring out how to make the new normal better.

I look forward to being back on campus with all of you. The vibrancy of our campus community has always been a point of pride for me, and I am very much looking forward to connecting with everyone once again.

Sincerely,

Richard Yao, Ph.D.  
*Interim President*

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**ON THE COVER** Nursing student Joshua Gonzalez administers a vaccine

# Farewell to the Chief

by PAMELA DEAN

## Campus bids a fond goodbye to Police Chief Michael Morris

### CSUCI'S CHIEF OF POLICE

Michael Morris retired in May after 29 years as a police officer.

Morris has been a fixture of the CSUCI Police Department since 2006, when he joined as a Lieutenant. A law enforcement officer since 1992, Morris served in the police departments of both CSU Bakersfield and the City of Lemoore before coming to CSUCI.

In 2017, he was appointed Chief of Police at CSUCI, a position which includes oversight of not only the University Police Department, but also the Transportation & Parking, Environmental Health & Safety, and Emergency Management programs.

Morris' ties to the CSU system and CSUCI in particular run deeper than his role as Chief of Police. He is a CSU graduate himself, having attended CSU Bakersfield, and his daughter is a recent graduate of CSUCI.

"Mike's strong connection and his unfailingly positive, collaborative approach has helped this campus through some of its greatest challenges, including multiple wildfire evacuations and, most recently, our response to COVID-19," said Interim President Richard Yao.

Indeed, Morris recalls the 2013 Springs Fire as one of the most noteworthy events he helped lead the campus through. Although he was a Lieutenant at the time, former Chief John Reid was at an off campus meeting when the fire broke out. As second in command, Morris

found himself suddenly in charge of the Police Department's response to what turned out to be the most significant crisis the campus had ever faced.

"The entire campus community including University Glen, had to be immediately evacuated," Morris recalled. "The fire came directly to the campus and burned completely around the University's property down to the sidewalks, all the way out to the Pacific Ocean and halfway

installation of inside locks on classroom doors and more security cameras placed around campus.

He is also proud of the positive relationship the Police Department has built with the campus community.

"Working at CSUCI has been incredibly meaningful for me," Morris said. "The police department here has a different relationship with the campus community than any other place I have worked and any other place I know of. It's based

on relationships and trust. It is very special and very unique and I'm very proud to have been a part of that."

Morris will keep busy in this next chapter of life. He and his wife plan on camping in their recently purchased fifth-wheel trailer. And at only 52, he may even launch into another career although he is uncertain what that will look like.

"I have a lot of work life left in me," he said. "I'm going to stay active, I'm not done working, but I don't know what that next chapter looks like yet. But I'm excited about the journey."

One thing he is sure of, he is leaving his team on solid footing. His former Lieutenant, Drake Massey, is serving as Interim Chief until a permanent replacement is found.

"We have the building blocks in place for students and staff to return to campus in the Fall," he said. "The Police Department is in good shape and will be able to move full speed ahead."



to Malibu. Fortunately, nobody on campus was injured and there was minimal property damage."

During his tenure as Chief, Morris began the process of implementing the recommendations from the President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, revamped the Police Department's training program and ensured every CSUCI police officer received training on principled policing with a heavy focus on implicit bias and procedural justice.

Morris is especially proud of a comprehensive campus security assessment that resulted in a number of major enhancements, including the

RIGHT Michael Morris



# Here comes the sun...

by PAMELA DEAN



## Campus installs cost-saving solar array

LAST DECEMBER, CSUCI BEGAN installing a solar array that will provide approximately 68% of the University's electrical energy needs on an annual basis.

"CSUCI has been working diligently toward having a solar array that will provide clean, renewable energy for the campus and greatly reduce costs for electricity," said Tom Hunt, Assistant Vice President for Facilities Services.

The University has entered into a 30-year Power Purchase Agreement with REC Solar. In the agreement, REC Solar pays all installation and upfront costs and the rate CSUCI will pay in return for the electricity produced is lower than what the University currently pays Southern California Edison (SCE).

"This will result in immediate first-year savings and a projected \$8 million in cumulative savings to the campus over 30 years," Hunt explained.

"Another benefit of the solar agreement is that it provides stability for electricity costs," added Roxane Beigel-Coryell, CSUCI's Sustainability and Energy Manager. "It provides the University with a stable, contracted rate for the power generated by the solar, reducing the impacts of SCE rate increases on campus budgeting."

The solar array will produce 3.63 megawatts of AC power in the peak of the day, more electricity than the campus consumes. CSUCI will receive credit for the excess power fed back to SCE.

"Our campus has a long-standing commitment to sustainability," said Interim President Richard Yao. "The solar array is the latest of many steps we have taken to make the University green. The array will make CSUCI one of the largest producers of green energy in the California State University

system and will result in significant cost savings for our campus."

The array is being installed in a field at the front of the campus off Lewis Road. Installation should be completed by the end of summer 2021.

In addition to the solar array, the University has been named a Tree Campus USA for nine years, a Bee Campus USA since 2018, and has installed drought-tolerant, pollinator-friendly landscaping. Its newest buildings are constructed and designed with green features including recycled and renewable materials, energy-efficient windows and lighting controls that enhance daylight and shut off when rooms are not occupied. The University also received a Gold STARS rating last year from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education recognizing CSUCI's breadth of sustainability initiatives.

**ABOVE** The new solar array is installed near University Drive and Lewis Road.

# An action plan for inclusive excellence

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**EVERYONE DESERVES THE** opportunity to get a quality education. Once on campus, everyone deserves to thrive and feel as if they belong.

This is the basic concept behind what CSUCI leaders call the “inclusive excellence” initiative, which is now turning into an action plan.

“The inclusive excellence action plan doesn’t introduce new content,” explained Interim Chief of Staff Kaia Tollefson, Ph.D. “It synthesizes and organizes existing commitments, focusing the actions needed to realize racial and social justice.”

Tollefson and Associate Professor of Nursing LaSonya Davis, D.N.P., N.P., are working together to develop an Inclusive Excellence Action Plan framework. Davis is working in her capacity as the President’s inaugural Faculty Fellow for Inclusive Excellence.

“We’re going to do an assessment of all our department programs and determine where equity and inclusivity are already on campus,” Davis said. “As we move forward, we will develop a plan to address any gaps and create transformative change.”

As a first step, Tollefson collected the ideas and actions faculty, staff, students and mem-

bers of the administration have brainstormed since 2018 when the University included inclusive excellence as one of four strategic initiatives. The other three are educational excellence, student success, and capacity and sustainability.

Tollefson pulled all the ideas and recommendations into an elaborate,

lines, and evaluation strategies. What they develop will be incorporated in the campus-wide Fall budget planning process, which is so important. Aligning inclusive excellence action planning into campus policies and procedures is how we can make sure diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded in all we do.”

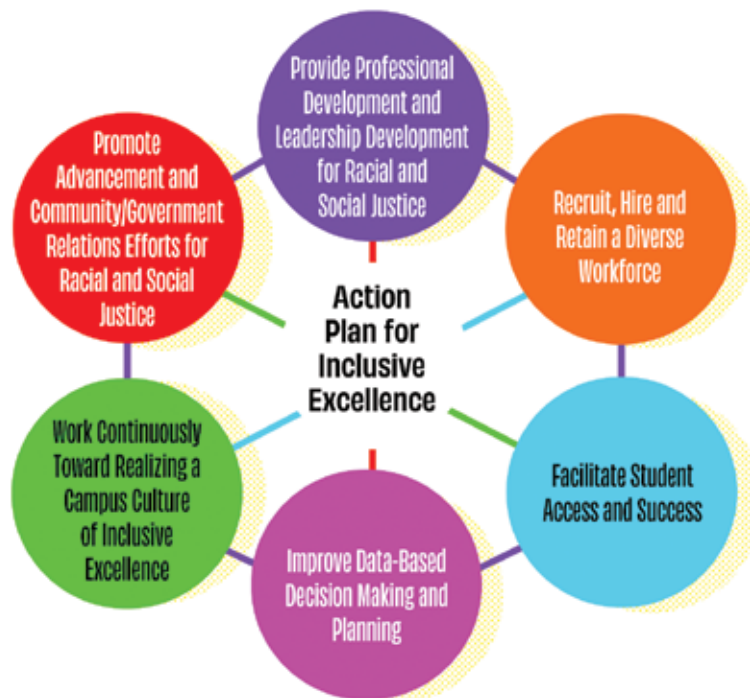
Some of the suggestions put forth included providing the campus community with learning opportunities and leadership development on dismantling racism and developing a hiring strategy to ensure diversity in the faculty—to name just a few examples.

“This is a process of working together and using our minds and hearts at the same time,” Tollefson said. “This is academic work but it’s also heart work.”

The action plan will include faculty, staff, administrators

and students, and when the students graduate, both Tollefson and Davis hope they will take these values with them.

“I hope, when students graduate, they will not only have a degree that will take them to their highest level of achievement. I also want them to leave CSUCI with a sense of what inclusive excellence is,” Davis said. “And to translate that into everyday life.”



color-coded plan that is now streamlined and ready for the next step: action.

Six action teams have been formed to assess what’s working and what needs improvement.

“We’re trying to be as aggressive as we can be,” Tollefson said. “Once these teams are formulated, they will create their individual action plans and come up with their deliverables, priorities, time-





# CSUCI welcomes new Provost

by PAMELA DEAN

**W**HEN YOU ASK MITCH AVILA, PH.D. to sum up the mission of CSUCI and his core purpose as its new Provost, he will show you a picture of a simple wooden chair created by Ray and Charles Eames, the icons of midcentury industrial design.

“The Eames’ motto was ‘We design the best for the most for the least,’” he explains. “That’s what we do here at CSUCI and in the CSU. That’s what defines my role as Provost. We provide the best instruction, for the most amount of students possible, and as a state-funded public institution — for the least amount of cost.”

That philosophy informs Avila’s work and is the foundation of his vision for the campus over the next five to seven years.

A 27-year-veteran of the CSU, Avila began his career as a full-time lecturer at Fresno State and moved on to philosophy professor, department chair and associate dean for Academic Programs within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Cal State Fullerton. He most recently was dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at CSU Dominguez Hills.

As Provost, Avila is the senior academic administrator for the University. He is in charge of all academic programming and faculty hiring. He began his role in early January, in the midst of the pandemic. His immediate goals were straight forward and narrowly focused — center his team’s energies on providing the highest quality student experience during this challenging period.

“Our main focus during the Spring semester was to teach courses well. This is a very difficult time, people are under a lot of stress. Our students are under a lot of stress. We need to simply focus on the primary work of instruction.”

At the same time, he is setting the stage to launch major initiatives in the Fall of 2021. And with the confident ease of the seasoned CSU veteran that he is, he ticks off those future initiatives:

Growing the campus and adding academic programs that match the needs of the workforce.

Ensuring all students are career ready upon graduation. Hiring more tenure track and diverse faculty. Improving communication within Academic Affairs so that everyone has the opportunity to hear what is going on. Improving working conditions for lecture faculty. Developing career pathways for staff and investing in the scholarly and creative activities of faculty.

While all these initiatives are critical, it is the last one that Avila feels is especially important.

“Investing in faculty scholarship and creative activity will enable the campus to grow and flourish. This is important to the long-term trajectory of the University,” he emphasized.

According to Avila, when faculty are active scholars or artists, it adds value to the student experience and helps prepare graduates with the skills employers are looking for.

“Faculty who are active scholars and artists are the ideal instructors to transfer to students the skills needed to create new knowledge and new applications in our dynamic economy,” he explained.

In the short time he has been with CSUCI, Avila has been impressed with the University, the quality of the management team, the exceptional people and the positive morale among the teams that have been built.

He aims to make a lasting impact and help prepare the campus for the future.

“I am deeply committed to the mission of CSUCI. The equity work we do is very important. I understand where the campus wants to go and how to move it forward,” he said and added his signature comment: “Good things ahead!”

“We provide the best instruction, for the most amount of students possible, and as a state-funded public institution — for the least amount of cost.”  
—Mitch Avila



ABOVE A midcentury furniture icon, the Eames chair

LEFT Provost Mitch Avila

# *Leading in a time* **OF UNCERTAINTY**

by PAMELA DEAN



## RICHARD YAO TAKES THE REINS AS INTERIM PRESIDENT

**R**ICHARD YAO, PH.D. UNDERSTANDS leadership transitions can be challenging even under the best of circumstances.

And the circumstances he faced when taking over as CSUCI's Interim President in January were anything but ideal. He began his new role as the University and the country were staring down a global pandemic, racial and social unrest, and economic uncertainty.

But Yao was no stranger to challenge and difficulty. He had already helped lead the campus through several significant crises.

In November 2018, just a few months after he joined CSUCI as Vice President for Student Affairs, the community was rocked by the Borderline Bar & Grill mass shooting. Almost 50 CSUCI students were at the bar that night.

When Yao rushed to a nearby community center where families of the victims were gathering, he feared the worst. Luckily no CSUCI students were physically injured, but many were emotionally scarred.

"We had to quickly figure out how to provide the support that individuals needed, as well as the campus community, because so many people were impacted by this in so many ways," Yao recalled.

Along with the rest of the campus leadership team, Yao would not have the luxury of solely focusing on this tragedy for long.

The very next day, as he was preparing his remarks for that evening's planned candlelight vigil, the Hill fire began barreling toward the University, quickly forcing the campus to be evacuated. Yao's Student Affairs team jumped into

action figuring out how to help the scores of students living on campus who had no transportation and no place to go.

The University then grappled with the logistics of when to bring students back to campus with the Fall break a few weeks away and finals around the corner. Ultimately, it was decided to close the campus and have students return after the Thanksgiving break in late November.

He believes these experiences, which stretched his leadership beyond the parameters of Student Affairs, helped bring the campus community together and helped him quickly connect with faculty, staff and students. He also feels the University is better prepared today to deal with crises because of them.

“These incidents really helped us learn a lot about emergency preparedness and those lessons learned have been incorporated into our current practices,” he explained.

Yao is not daunted by the many challenges CSUCI currently faces either. He believes the campus community’s unified sense of purpose around the mission of providing its largely first generation, underserved student population with the best education possible, makes overcoming these hurdles a little easier.

“We are all committed to not only students accessing higher education at CSUCI, but most importantly, enabling their success, and not just here, but post-graduation as well,” Yao said. “We want to ensure they are both serving in our communities and leading in them as well.”

It is this unification around common goals which he sees as instrumental in moving the University ahead.

“We may have different ideas on the best way to achieve our goals, but that is part of the process of moving an organization forward,” he said.

During this interim period, Yao intends to lay the foundation for CSUCI’s future success. His overarching priorities consist of facilitating the natural growth and evolution of the University’s mission pillars, including supporting

high-impact learning, such as undergraduate research and community service projects.

He also wants to improve communication and continue to make the campus more culturally diverse and inclusive. This includes recruiting, hiring and retaining more diverse faculty, staff and students.

As a Chinese Filipino American, Yao is the first person of color to lead the campus.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master’s in Clinical Psychology from Eastern Illinois University,

and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara. Prior to joining CSUCI, he served as the founding Dean of Students at Nevada State College (NSC) and Chief Student Affairs Officer.

“I fell in love with psychology from the minute I took that first psychology class in high school,” Yao explained. “I always wanted to help others.”

Throughout the course of his time as a clinician, he worked with clients

who suffered from chronic and persistent mental illness, children and families in the foster care system, and eventually transition-aged youth who aged out of the foster care system.

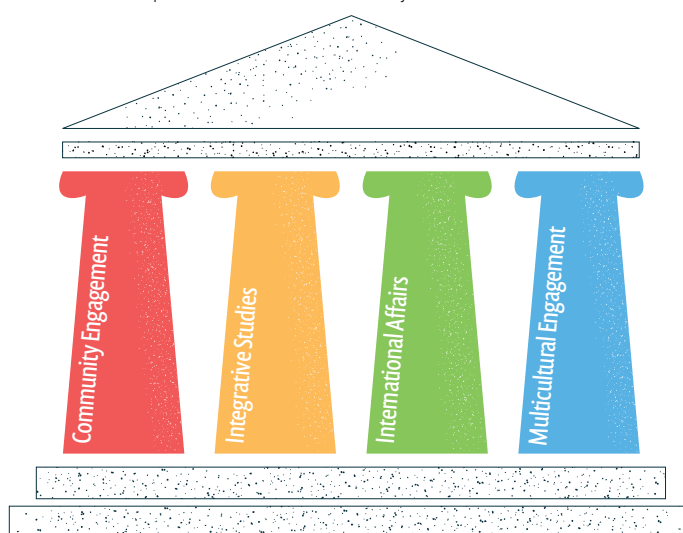
A chance opportunity to teach an intro level psychology class at a community college in Nevada launched his foray into higher education. He eventually became a full-time lecturer at NSC before moving on to leadership roles in Student Affairs.

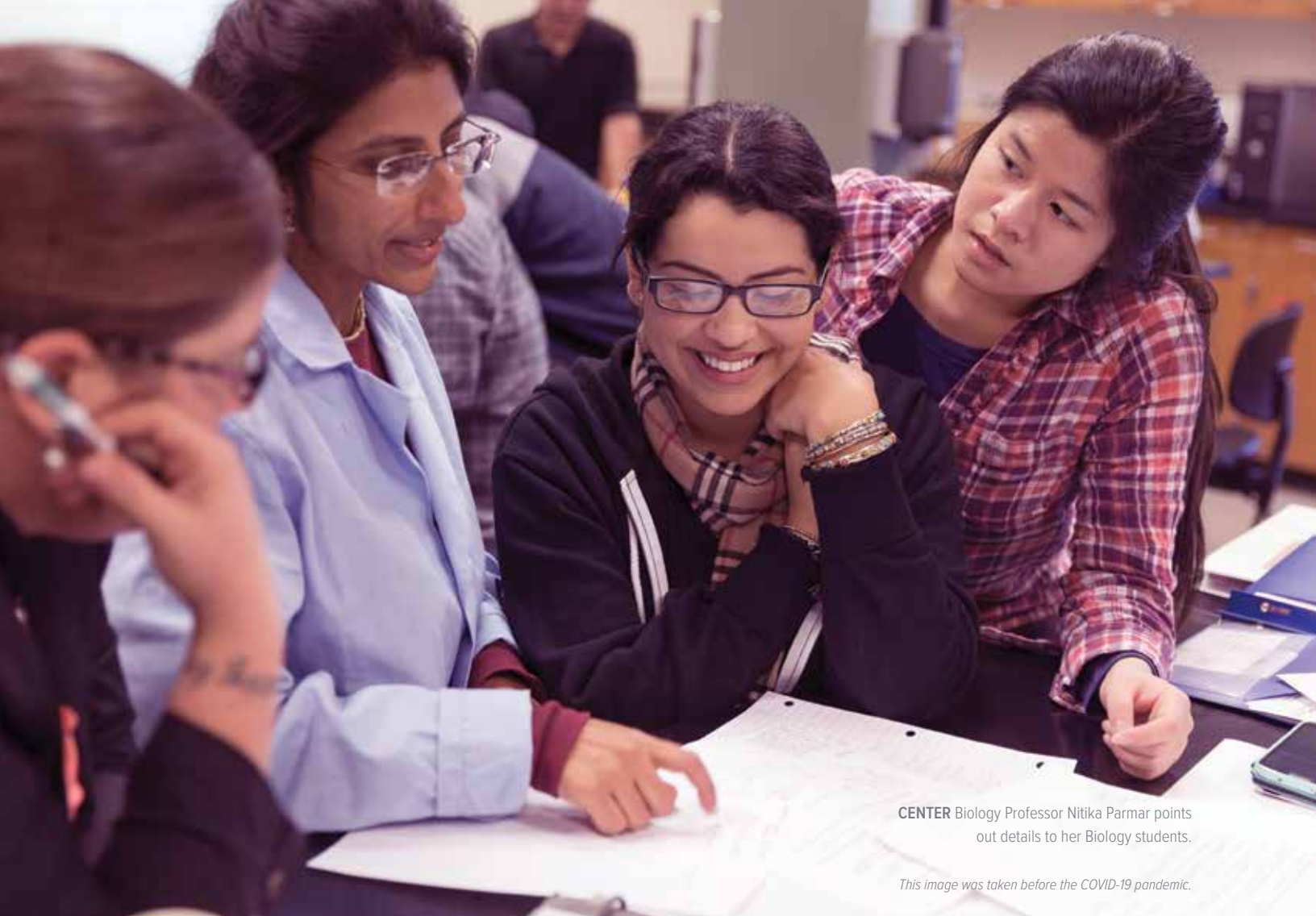
Yao is looking forward to welcoming students back to in-person classes in the Fall. And again, has an eye toward their psychosocial health in relation to their academic success – looking to not only bring students back on campus physically but to ensure they flourish while they are here as well.

“Because of the pandemic, our students have experienced some degree of trauma on many levels. Their lives have changed,” Yao said. “We need to support them academically, psychosocially, and emotionally, so when they come back they are able to thrive and not just get through.”

### FOUR MISSION BASED PILLARS

The CSU Channel Islands Mission Based Centers were created to facilitate the implementation of the University Mission Statement.





CENTER Biology Professor Nitika Parmar points out details to her Biology students.

*This image was taken before the COVID-19 pandemic.*

# Dancing into research

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**A**s a child growing up in India, Biology Professor Nitika Parmar, Ph.D. aspired to become an Indian classical dancer.

“But as I grew older and went to college, I wanted to become a doctor and go to medical school,” Parmar said. “But I could not stand the sight of needles and blood, so while I was getting my master’s degree, I got extremely interested in biotechnology and molecular biology.”

Her passion for teaching combined with her inquisitive nature led her to an undergraduate degree in Biophysics followed by two master’s degrees in Biotechnology and

Biochemical Engineering from Pune University and the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi.

She then relocated to California where she earned a Ph.D. in Molecular Biology.

“I was very interested in going to California because in my mind was the image of driving your car along the beach in the sunshine with the wind in your hair,” she said. “California is a cool place to study.”

In 2006, she joined the Biology faculty at CSUCI after working as a scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, for three years.

At CSUCI, she learned she loved teaching.

“Teaching is such an amazing art,” she said. “When you’re teaching, you’re learning yourself. Students are so inquisitive — they ask you to re-explore your own beliefs.”

Parmar also loved involving graduate and undergraduate students in her research, which ranged from potential cures for cancer to tissue regeneration using stem cells.

“The potential of stem cells is really amazing,” she said. “Let’s say somebody has a spinal cord injury and is paralyzed. You develop the right stem cell therapy and eventually they may be able to walk again.”

There is still a long way to go before these therapies become available, but Parmar is very optimistic about this field.

Parmar developed a stem cell program at CSUCI with a grant she wrote 11 years ago for \$4.5 million. Through another 2016 grant from the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine (CIRM), Parmar launched a program in which graduate students can get paid internships to do stem cell research at such cutting-edge institutions as City of Hope, Stanford University, and Scripps Research Institute.

Mathematics Professor Cynthia Wyels, Ph.D., has worked on grants with Parmar for science and mathematics students.

“Nitika brings her formidable intelligence and her calm demeanor to collaborate on initiatives such as writing grants to support our students,” Wyels said. “Rarely do I see people exemplify competence and kindness to the degree she does.”

When the pandemic struck, six graduate students, armed with the scientific method and directed by Parmar, began researching exactly how the coronavirus attacks human cells. The research continued through the Spring semester with undergraduate students in the Biology program.

“They are deciphering which proteins this virus encodes and how the virus can be attacked therapeutically,” Parmar said. “They are actively investigating the variants of the virus and what changes in the viral sequence which makes it more deadly.”

Except during the pandemic, Parmar has taken a group of undergraduates on a tour of India every year since 2015. The students visit 16 biotechnology companies and academic institutes, learn about Indian food and culture, and, among other activities, visit a sustainable village near Mumbai called the Govardhan Eco Village.

“That is my favorite place on this planet,” Parmar said. “It’s managed by monks with

advanced academic degrees. These engineers and scientists have devoted their lives to saving nature and the environment. They use their skills and knowledge to make a soil biotechnology plant, a wastewater plant, conduct organic farming, generate fuel from plastics, among several other incredible initiatives. They empower women in rural areas and educate children free of cost.”

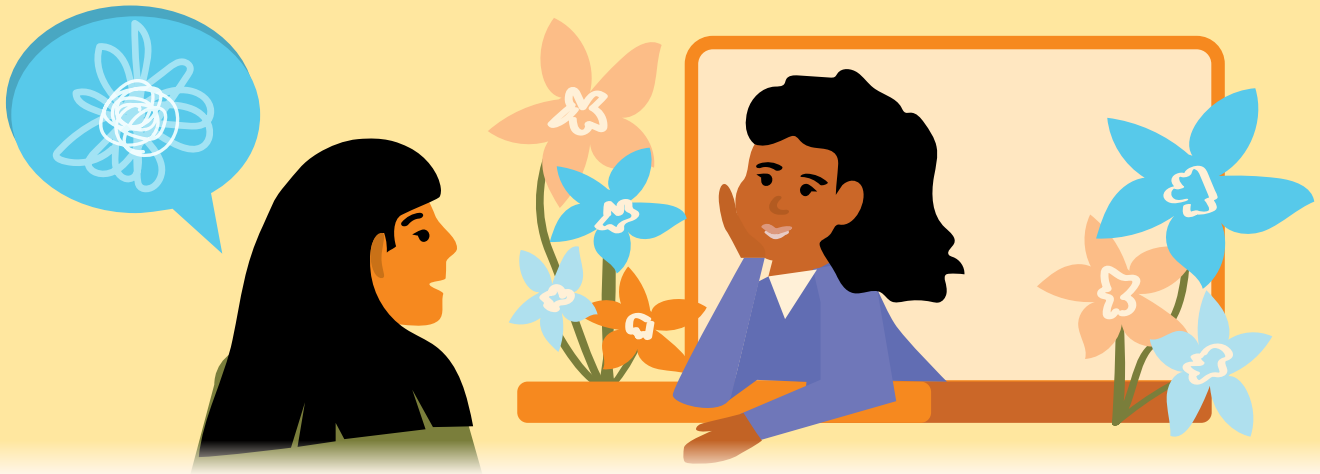
Class of 2021 Biology and Global Studies double major Patricio Ruano went on the trip to India and came back excited about his majors, and his plans to attend medical school.

“I’ve never been more excited to pursue biology research than when being taught by Dr. Parmar,” Ruano said. “As a first-generation student, pursuing medical school seemed like an unattainable dream. But much of the faculty—especially Dr. Parmar—has supported me in every step of this journey.”

For Parmar, trading her dream of becoming an Indian classical dancer for helping students pursue their dreams was the best choice she ever made.



RIGHT Professor Nitika Parmar



# Navigating tough times through therapy

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

WHEN COVID-19 WAS DECLARED A GLOBAL pandemic, Psychology and Chicana/o Studies senior Monica Hurtado was living on campus, attending classes and holding down a job. Nursing student Rachel Holst was living with her family, attending classes and working as a professional chef.

Their circumstances were different when the pandemic struck in the winter of 2020 but both Hurtado and Holst were hit hard and sought help from CSUCI Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS).

"I will be forever grateful for CAPS," Hurtado said. "I want to tell everyone 'this is a resource you should utilize. And it's free.'"

CAPS offers short-term therapy for students who want to talk about anything from homesickness to anxiety to a recent breakup. The professionally trained therapists can help with substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, poor academic performance, or even painful, abusive life experiences they have never talked about before.

And there's no cost to students as it's all covered by Student Health fees.

"With the pandemic, there are now layers on top of the usual stressors of relationships, loss of a job, depression or anxiety," explained Director of CAPS and clinical psychologist Kirsten Olson, Ph.D. "Abruptly, students had to move home. They might have been put in the role of teaching school or caring for younger siblings while they're trying to learn online themselves. People were losing jobs, there was lots of financial distress."

Associate Vice President for Student Affairs Cindy Derrico, Ph.D. said common themes among students were isolation and a sense of feeling deprived of the full college experience.

"This two-dimensional online connection has created some flexibilities for students, but also contributed to students feeling isolated," Derrico said. "Many of their friendships were formed in class. And they were really sad when we had to cancel (2020) in-person commencement."

"COVID hit me hard because I lived on campus and I really depended on housing," Hurtado said. "I couldn't move home because there is mental illness in the family and it's not a safe environment. So, I packed all my things and was able to move in with my older sister."

The catering part of Holst's job disappeared with the pandemic, she was caring for her terminally ill mother-in-law, and struggling with her diagnosis of adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

"It was like I got hit by a truck. I was overwhelmed," Holst said. "There was nothing I could do to control it."

The usual 700 students CAPS assists yearly remained steady despite the fact that CAPS had to offer services virtually, and there were not the usual walk-in appointments. But confidential sessions using Zoom for Healthcare did enable CAPS to offer after-hour services, instead of the customary 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. office hours.

Holst was able to get medical referrals for her ADHD and learn coping skills to combat feeling overwhelmed. Hurtado's therapist gave her tools such as journaling, walking and meditating. Both said non-judgmental, compassionate, confidential care from CAPS was critical for weathering the pandemic.

"What is unique and special is we're not your siblings, we're not your professor, we're not your roommate," Olson said. "We are there in a professional role to really hear you and allow you to hear yourself."

*"We are there in a professional role to really hear you and allow you to hear yourself."*

**-KIRSTEN OLSON**



# Student experiences drive change

*Newly-formed board offers student perspective to campus leaders*

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**J**azmin Guajardo is a pre-Nursing student whose entire first year in college was virtual. Ray Visaiz is a graduate student working toward his teaching credential, and Bailey Morris is a sophomore Health Science major with invisible disabilities.

Their varied experiences are just a snapshot of the different perspectives every CSUCI student has, which is why Interim Vice President for Student Affairs Toni DeBoni created

to the decision-makers on campus.

With inclusion and diversity in mind, DeBoni opened up applications to the entire student body. Out of the roughly 40 students who applied, DeBoni and a selection committee comprised of Student Government representatives chose 10 students with diverse outlooks and varying concerns.

“We prioritized applications in which they highlighted different identities,” DeBoni said.

requirement for a scholarship be relaxed as many students who would like to apply for a scholarship are struggling under the 15-unit load, especially if they have to work an outside job.

Visaiz, who is a graduate student within the School of Education, brought a graduate student’s perspective to the board. “I love it here at CSUCI,” Visaiz said. “But I really want graduate students to have social opportunities to get together, and a graduate honors



the Vice President for Student Affairs Student Advisory Board. The process began in Fall of 2020 when now Interim President Richard Yao was Vice President for Student Affairs.

“This creates an opportunity for students to have space for dialogue with the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Dean of Students,” DeBoni said. “This opens the conversation and allows for collective action.”

DeBoni and Yao formed the board after receiving student feedback that expressed a desire for more direct access

“We wanted the experiences and voices of marginalized and underrepresented students on the board.”

As a first-generation college student, board member Guajardo experienced difficulties during the pandemic that were shared by many of her first-year and first-generation peers.

“It’s hard for first-year and first-gens to gather during the pandemic,” Guajardo said. “First-year students are usually working, and they tended to work more during the pandemic.”

After surveying fellow classmates, Guajardo asked that the 15-unit

program for more visibility on campus.”

Because of a childhood congenital heart abnormality, Morris has difficulty with fine motor skills, a learning disability and hearing loss. Morris wants to make sure students with disabilities are part of the University’s mission toward inclusion and diversity.

“I’ve been advocating for disability rights and mental health awareness on campus,” Morris said. “It’s very near and dear to my heart because I’ve dealt with these obstacles first-hand.”

[> READ MORE AT GO.CSUCI.EDU/CHANNEL-SAC](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-sac)

TOP LEFT TO RIGHT Angel Novo, Emily Bugielski, Tiffany Carillo, and Aurora Rugerio

BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT Ray Visaiz, Bailey Morris, Celeste Hellstrom, and Jazmin Guajardo



## Nursing students

to help out  
**step up**

T

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

ears welled up in the patient's eyes as CSUCI Nursing senior Carina Fasano swabbed the older woman's arm and injected her with a vaccine—and hope.

"I saw the smile in her eyes and she thanked me and then teared up," Fasano said. "She said 'I'm so excited to see my family again!' And I couldn't help but tear up too."

Fasano is one of about 250 Nursing students in their second, third or senior year who vaccinated thousands of people against COVID-19 after this winter's massive vaccine rollout.

Some gave injections during public vaccine clinics, while other students took health histories, made calls or did anything else they could to assist the health care workers in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties and the City of Los Angeles.

"CSUCI Nursing students have been an integral part of the County of Ventura's response to vaccinating our public," said Ventura County Public Health Officer Robert Levin,

M.D. "Plenty of people say they are interested in helping to vaccinate but these students show up. We are grateful for their partnership."

"They amaze me," said Program Chair and Professor of Nursing Lynette Landry, Ph.D., R.N. "They're willing to jump right into the fire—they want to contribute. When most of us are afraid to go to the supermarket, there they are, right out on the front lines. I am so proud of them."

Ashley Hayes, who finishes CSUCI's R.N. to B.S.N. (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) program in December of 2021, is fully aware of what it means to be on the front lines of a pandemic.

"It feels hopeful, it feels stressful," Hayes said. "It feels like we are making history and that we are having our community involved in this history. It's a great feeling."

Training to be a nurse during a pandemic has its pros and cons, according to Landry.

"They will come out with a unique set of skills other students haven't gotten because they are being trained during





a worldwide pandemic,” Landry said. “In another sense, they’ve been deprived of the clinical time and time in the lab that they need to graduate.”

Working in the simulation lab on the Goleta campus helped students log clinical hours, and when area health care facilities called for volunteers to help out during the pandemic, it created a perfect opportunity for students to get in-person experience with patients.

“The practice is great not only for their nursing skills, but for their personal interaction skills—being able to talk to patients, maybe put them at ease if they’re nervous about getting a shot,” said Nursing Lecturer Nancy Mitchell, R.N.

Before volunteering, Nursing students were trained at either the Ventura County Public Health Department, Cottage Health, St. John’s Regional Medical Center, St. John’s Pleasant Valley Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, the City of Los Angeles or the Los Angeles City Fire Department.

“Cottage is very appreciative of the CSU Channel Islands Nursing students who have helped staff our vaccination clinics,” said Laura Canfield, Patient Care Services and Chief

Nursing Officer for Cottage Health. “This is a talented group making a significant contribution to protecting our community.”

Class of 2021 Nursing student Aimee Proffitt was one of the students who participated in a drive-up vaccination clinic offered through Cottage Health in Goleta.

Proffitt even vaccinated her grandparents and her mom through an open car window.

“I was so excited, I could barely stay professional,” Proffitt said. “Not only were they isolated because of COVID and their age, my grandma is partially deaf and blind. A year ago, I never imagined I’d be giving my own grandparents (and mom) a shot to prevent this bizarre virus that came through the world.”

The experience of volunteering during a pandemic reminded Nursing student Rebecca Warden why she chose to become a nurse.

“It feels huge — it does! It doesn’t seem like it in the moment and then you take a look back and it’s like, we’re doing so much for everyone,” Warden said. “I’m excited. Everyone’s excited.”

FROM TOP LEFT TO RIGHT Nursing student Joshua Gonzalez administers a vaccine; Nursing student Sarah Wilson gives Marie Terzll a vaccine; Nursing student Leah Eldridge helps at a vaccine clinic.



# Commencement ‘drive-in’ style

by NANCY COVARRUBIAS GILL and PAMELA DEAN

Although this year’s commencement ceremonies honoring both the Class of 2020 and 2021 were a bit unconventional, they did not lack for enthusiasm, excitement and pride.

Graduates streamed into the University in cars packed with proud family members and colorfully decorated with congratulatory messages, flags, streamers and balloons. Some even squeezed in the family dog.

The hybrid celebrations included six ceremonies

spread over three days on May 21, 22 and 23.

As they drove onto campus, graduates donning festively decorated caps and gowns were greeted by cheering CSUCI faculty and staff lining the sidewalks as “Pomp and Circumstance” played over loudspeakers. In keeping with COVID protocols, they then lined up their cars in a parking lot similar to a drive-in movie theater and listened to both live and recorded speeches.







“Our students have worked so hard and persisted and they are here, and their families have worked so hard and are here. I’m glad that we all get to share that today,” said Assistant Chemistry Professor Brittnee Veldman who participated in the cheering line for all six ceremonies.

The events included a welcome by Provost Mitch Avila and a congratulatory message from Interim President Richard Yao. Speeches were made by Academic Senate Chair and Professor of Physics Greg Wood; 2020 honorary doctorate recipients, Irene Pinkard and Esther Wachtell; 2021 honorary doc-

torate recipient, retired CSUCI Director of Facility Support, Raudel Bañuelos; 2020 Student Government President Sara Ruiz; and 2021 Student Government President Sophie Nguyen.

After all the in-person presentations, each graduating student’s name was announced and displayed on large screens visible in the parking lot. Afterwards the students

and their families drove to one of the multiple stages set up in parking areas around campus where the graduates were able to exit their vehicle, accept a diploma cover, and cross a stage where a professional photographer took their picture.



RAUDEL J. BAÑUELOS, JR.

# Honoring a living legend

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**RARELY DID A SIGNIFICANT** campus event begin without Chumash elder Raudel J. Bañuelos, Jr. standing before the crowd, waving an eagle feather over fragrant sage, honoring the east, the west, the north and the south—in a traditional Chumash blessing.

Bañuelos worked on the grounds now occupied by CSU Channel Islands for 40 years, starting in the early 1980s when the buildings housed the former Camarillo State Hospital. He was asked to join CSUCI in 1997, five years before the University officially opened and retired from the position of Director of Facilities Support in December of 2020.

To honor the decades of work, heart and devotion he has shown to the University, Bañuelos was presented with an honorary doctorate during this year's Commencement ceremonies.

"Raudel is truly a living history of the grounds that have come to house CSU Channel Islands and it is a great personal honor to be able to bestow the honorary doctoral degree upon him," said Interim President Richard Yao. "He was instrumental in the campus' work in restoring the sacred Round Mountain, or Sat'wiwa, and has been a vital member of the CSUCI community since its inception, providing sage advice and wisdom to all of the University's

presidents on matters concerning local Chumash traditions and customs and providing blessings and land acknowledgments at pivotal campus events."

As vice tribal chair for the Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians, Bañuelos has dedicated himself to learning

an enormous honor to work nearly 40 years upon the land of my ancestors, keeping our traditions alive."

Bañuelos, who said he is "still in awe" at receiving the recognition, has served all four University presidents, but Yao said he feels a special connection with Bañuelos.

The campus was still reeling from the extraordinary events of Fall 2018 when Yao accepted the position of Vice President of Student Affairs in 2018.

"I am forever grateful for Raudel's leadership in helping our campus heal after the Borderline Bar & Grill mass shooting and the Hill and Woolsey Fires in 2018," Yao said. "I had the honor of co-leading many of our campus healing circles with Raudel. While these were extremely challenging circumstances, to say the least, working with Raudel throughout this process remains one of the most impactful and meaningful experiences I have had throughout my time at CSUCI."

Bañuelos plans to stay connected to the University and continue to learn

and share the Chumash traditions.

"Never forget that this is a special place filled with positivity and history," he told the Class of 2021 and 2020. "The sacred mountain of Sat'wiwa that overlooks our campus is filled with strong medicine that cradles us."



and sharing the traditions of the ancient Chumash, who lived in the area more than 10,000 years ago.

"I've served as a vessel between the Native community and the campus," Bañuelos said. "They have fostered the importance of this commitment and I thank them. It has been

{ DONOR Profile }

# A PLANNED GIFT

*for a Sharp future*

*by* PAMELA DEAN





**VICKI AND DICK SHARP** HAVE dedicated their lives to education. Both are retired professors who spent the majority of their careers teaching at California State University, Northridge (CSUN).

They are also long-time friends of CSUCI and are graciously leaving a portion of their estate to the University through a planned legacy gift. The gift will be used to establish the Vicki and Richard Sharp Scholarship Endowment for Education Fund which will one day provide scholarships for students in the School of Education.

“We are giving our money to CSUCI because of the wonderful students and faculty,” Vicki explained. “We want to do something that is good for humanity and we want to help students get ahead.”

Their affection for CSUCI began when, shortly after the University opened, Vicki started teaching computer classes at night for the School of Education. The couple fell in love with the beauty of the campus, its hard-working, first-generation students and the close-knit and kind faculty and staff.

Their affection for each other began in 1970 at the then San Fernando Valley State College, CSUN’s former name. Vicki had just relocated from Missouri after completing her Ph.D. at St. Louis University. Teaching positions were scarce in the Midwest but plentiful in California and she had been hired as an assistant professor to teach math in the college’s Elementary Education department.

Dick, a math professor in the department, heard about Vicki’s arrival and had to check out the newcomer for himself. He invited her to dinner that very evening and eight weeks later they were married. The pair recently celebrated their 51st wedding anniversary.

Together the Sharps spent more than three decades teaching at CSUN, once even having to share office space, which drove Vicki crazy. “At home he is very neat,” she recalled. “At work, not so much.”

Vicki taught computers to aspiring teachers and authored many books on math games for teachers, computer education for teachers, books on healthcare websites and websites for teachers, as well as books on using soft-

ware programs such as Microsoft Office and Photoshop Elements.

A math lover, Dick also wrote many books on math games and using the internet. He also penned articles for medical health sites and educational math websites. The couple authored educational books together as well.

In addition to writing and teaching, the Sharps have led a colorful life including traveling the globe and brushes with iconic people.

While studying for his doctorate degree at Boston University in the 1950’s, Dick met and befriended Martin Luther King, Jr. when the renowned civil rights activist was also there working on his Ph.D. Dick later joined MLK in his March on Washington D.C. in 1963.

Raised in Providence, RI, Dick hitchhiked across the country to California at 16 and fell in love with the state. He knew one day he wanted to live there permanently. He received his undergraduate degree from the University

*“We want to do something that is good for humanity and we want to help students get ahead.”*

**VICKI SHARP**

of Pennsylvania. Early on in his career he spent time as a middle school math teacher and then a college professor at NYU where he was asked to develop the math curriculum for the newly established federal Head Start program.

He eventually found his way back to California and was hired as a math professor at Valley State.

Vicki was raised in Missouri and earned her bachelor’s degree from Washington University. Dick retired from CSUN in 2005, Vicki in 2009. Both have emeritus status.

The couple hope their gift helps CSUCI’s largely underserved population get a leg up in life.

“From my time spent teaching at Channel Islands, I found that the students are so appreciative,” Vicki said. “A lot of them are first generation and need help. We want to help them find their way in the world.”

Photo Courtesy of Vicki Sharp

# Holding down the fort

by PAMELA DEAN

THE MAJORITY OF CSUCI'S FACULTY AND staff have been working from home since the COVID-19 pandemic forced the campus to switch to mostly online learning in March 2020. But not every job could be done virtually and not every class could be taught online.

Courses such as science and nursing labs, ceramics and sculpture, and a few performing arts classes continued to be taught in person. And jobs such as groundskeepers, lab technicians, public safety, construction, and some student support services continued to be done on campus.

Out of CSUCI's approximately 1300 staff, about 116 continued working on campus, either full or part time, providing essential support services or in-person instruction. In the Fall 2020 semester, CSUCI had 963 students enrolled in 49 in-person classes. In the Spring 2021 semester there were 76 courses and approximately 624 in-person students.

Groundskeeper Martin Montejano has been working on campus the entire time. Last June CSUCI's staff of 16 groundskeepers was reduced to just six when 10 of Montejano's coworkers had to stay home to take care of children and family members due to the pandemic. Normally, Montejano is in charge of maintaining the North Quad of the campus, but for about six months he and his remaining coworkers had to cover the entire campus.

"It felt eerie and weird to be on campus without anyone else. I'm used to the foot traffic, to seeing people and jump-starting my day by saying hello to people," Montejano said.

Montejano was happy when his co-workers returned in January.

"It's good to have my co-workers back. The vibes in the shop got better," Montejano said. "I missed everyone. We are like family."

LEFT Michael Mahoney



ABOVE Airam Flores-Aguilar  
LEFT Martin Montejano

Airam Flores-Aguilar is a Disability Accommodation and Support Services Analyst. She has been providing on-campus alternative testing services three days a week since partial in-person instruction began in Fall 2020.

"I miss seeing all the students and the staff, building connections and enjoying the beauty of this campus," Flores-Aguilar said. "Technology has helped my team stay connected and continue serving students since we went virtual, but that in-person connection is definitely missing. I am glad I am able to come to campus and interact, socially-distanced, with students."

Instructional support technician Michael Mahoney has been working full time on campus supporting the Microbiology and Medical Microbiology labs.

Mahoney, along with fellow technician Catherine Hutchinson, provide the prep and maintenance work needed to make these labs possible. They perform tasks such as preparing chemical solutions, setting up equipment, growing bacteria and managing the hazardous chemical and biological waste that is a byproduct of the labs.

Mahoney has enjoyed the peace and quiet of campus during this time.

"I'm doing the same work, but because there are fewer people, I can use lab space that would normally be occupied as an additional work area. Otherwise, I would usually have to wait for a gap between labs," he explained.

An unexpected benefit Mahoney is also enjoying—an increased amount of wildlife sightings.

"Since the campus population is greatly reduced, I'm also seeing more animals like deer, rabbits, and coyotes which used to be a rare event."





Small donations go far at the Dolphin Food Pantry

## Putting their money where their heart is

Robust employee giving helps propel CSUCI

by PAMELA DEAN

**C**SUCI faculty and staff are known for their commitment to helping students succeed. They show that commitment every day through their hard work and dedication to their jobs. But they also show it with their pocketbooks, collectively donating more than \$45,000 every year to CSUCI.

“Giving to the University is a way I am able to support programs that inspire me or I believe in that are different from my daily work and involvement with the campus,” said Diana Enos, Interim Associate Director of Human Resources. “The giving program provides flexibility to change or add to my designation as our student needs change and this flexibility is another draw for me.”

Many faculty and staff donate to CSUCI on a regular basis. Some give via monthly payroll deductions and some give yearly lump-sum gifts. Others give occasionally. Even small gifts, such as \$10 or \$15 a month, make a difference.

“Small donations become part of a larger, collective gift that really add up,” said Nichole Ipach, Vice President for University Advancement. “Through aggregation these gifts help empower the University to sustain many of the programs that help our students succeed.”

Programs helping students with basic needs such as the Dolphin Food Pantry or the Ekho Your Heart Emergency Grant Program are popular targets for employee giving.

**ABOVE** Tanya Yancheson, Coordinator of Campus Life Marketing & Repopulation Initiatives, prepares food bags.

**RIGHT** Diana Enos and Dana Baker

“I give because I believe in social justice, institutional growth and community responsibility,” explained Political Science Professor Dana Baker. “Giving to our Basic Needs program ensures students can learn and focus on their intellectual and personal growth rather than their day-to-day survival. Our brilliant students are teeming with potential. It is a loss to all when their flourishing becomes compromised by economic circumstances.”

Donations for scholarships, the new Adopt-A-Grad program, and unrestricted funds that go toward the University’s highest priority needs are also common.

According to Ipach, a strong employee giving program can help convince potential donors to invest in CSUCI. It is proof that faculty and staff truly believe in the mission of providing high quality, affordable education to all students, regardless of their background or economic situation.

“When CSUCI staff, faculty, and administrators make a gift, their generosity sends a powerful message illustrating their dedication to our students’ success,” Ipach explained. “For our students, this creates a sense of belonging and self-efficacy that propels them forward toward their academic goals. For our surrounding community, they see how our employees are going above and beyond the ‘call of duty’ and are inspired to join them. As a result, CSUCI employee donors are among the most critical supporters of our institution.”



**ERIC  
MEISSNER**  
'15 M.S.  
Biotechnology



Photo Courtesy of Meissner Filtration Products

## FLOURISHING IN THE FAMILY BUSINESS

by PAMELA DEAN

CAMARILLO-NATIVE ERIC MEISSNER never planned on working at the business his parents founded in 1984, Meissner Filtration Products.

“I was in the same position many high school and even undergraduate college students are commonly in,” Meissner recalled. “I had no idea what I wanted to do after college.”

In 2009, he earned dual bachelor’s degrees in Information Technology and Supply Chain Management from Wisconsin’s Marquette University and set his sights on a position at Harley Davidson or Miller Brewery. When the struggling economy put a damper on his plans, he ended up fixing computers and troubleshooting IT systems at a fortune 500 financial services company. But the corporate culture was a shock to his system and after a year he realized how special a family business can be.

“I always knew the family business was an amazing place, but I didn’t realize how unique it was until I spent time outside the company,” Meissner said.

He headed back home to Camarillo and began working as a Procurement Coordinator at Meissner Filtration. The company specializes in making filters that physically remove particles such as bacteria and virus from liquids and gasses. The single-use systems they design and fabricate are essential to the manufacture of medicine.

A few years into his new job, Meissner realized he needed a deeper background in science than his undergraduate degree provided.

“I found myself visiting a customer pharmaceutical manufacturing facility and entered a meeting with engineers and scientists who wanted to discuss technical details. Although I knew a fair amount about our filters and systems, how our customer used our products was completely foreign to me,” Meissner recollected. “I realized if I wanted to grow in the company and avoid embarrassing situations, I would need to build a foundation in bioprocessing.”

Meissner didn’t have to look far to find a university that offered the exact master’s program in Biotechnology that he was looking for.

“Most science programs I had looked into focused on academic research which would help me little at my work, but the program at CSUCI focused exactly on what our customers were doing – the process of making medicine. It was a bonus that classes were less than a 20-minute drive from my house. On top of all that, I could continue working full time since many classes were offered at night.”

Meissner believes the degree he earned at CSUCI was essential to his success at the company.

> READ MORE AT [GO.CSUCI.EDU/CHANNEL-EM](http://GO.CSUCI.EDU/CHANNEL-EM)

Cara Johnson Bentley, '16 B.A. English

# Bringing unheard voices to light

by PAMELA DEAN AND M. RILEY LUHRSEN

**W**ITH THE BELIEF THAT POWERFUL stories can inspire powerful social change, CSUCI alumna Cara Johnson Bentley founded her own publishing company to help bring to light the voices of authors usually ignored by mainstream publishing.

“So much of our literary canon consists of work by straight, white, non-disabled men—and usually these guys had a lot of money supporting them,” Bentley explained. “Representation is a powerful force for change. We want to look beyond that one corner of society, to seek out and amplify the voices that don’t have that privilege. We’d like to see marginalized voices become the standard, not the exception to the rule.”

Bentley, an English major, graduated in 2016 and started Epoch Press in Scotland with the dream of helping inspiring stories from seldom heard voices reach a broader audience. The company focuses on publishing nonfiction creative writing from underrepresented groups.

“I love how storytelling, particularly creative nonfiction storytelling, can cross barriers between people,” Bentley explained. “It is a way of connecting with our humanity, sharing lived experiences and limiting feelings of isolation.”

The Camarillo native was raised by a single mom who encouraged her from an early age to attend college, even chronicling that hope in Bentley’s baby book. Her mother’s hope became reality when Bentley became the first college graduate on her mother’s side.

Bentley was drawn to CSUCI because of the campus’ impressive catalog of online library resources, its interdisciplinary approach to education, and the opportunity to be a part of a university that was still developing its identity.

While attending CSUCI, she found herself appreciating the more intimate learning environment and the abil-

ity to engage more with her professors. Bentley credits a course taught by English Professor Sean Carswell, called the Publishing House, for giving her the foundation she would use to start Epoch Press.

She also notes a creative nonfiction writing field trip led by English Professor Bradley Monsma allowed her to gain a new appreciation for creative nonfiction writing that would later become the focus of her publishing company.

Bentley’s journey to Scotland began when she enrolled in CSUCI’s international program and studied in Florence, Italy. During that time, she visited Edinburgh and knew immediately it was a place she wanted to call home forever.

“Studying abroad isn’t only for the wealthy,” Bentley advises. “I was able to study in Florence for a year for the same tuition as my home campus and still was eligible for financial aid. Most of my personal growth occurred during that year, and in the process of learning Italian I also learned more about language, speaking and communication in general.”

After leaving CSUCI, Bentley enrolled in the University of Edinburgh, completing a program in Literature & Society and receiving her MSc (Master’s in Science). She then studied creative writing at the University of Aberdeen where she received her MLitT (Master’s in Literature). In March of 2020 she founded Epoch Press.

The company recently completed a successful Kickstarter campaign in order to fund the printing of its debut issue as well as pay its contributing writers.

Creating one’s own business can be a daunting task, especially in publishing. Bentley has advice for anyone looking to start their own publishing company.

“Make sure you have a realistic idea of how much work it is going to be, and to know the sacrifices that will be made in order to create something really meaningful.”



Photo Courtesy of Cara Johnson Bentley



# Fighting wildfires with the help of beavers

by KIM LAMB GREGORY



**CSUCI'S ENVIRONMENTAL Science & Resource Management (ESRM) research teams and alumni help tackle some of California's most perilous environmental problems—like wildfires.**

Lisa Cox, '10 B.S. ESRM has been a voice of fire information for the media during the Woolsey Fire and Thomas fires, among others, and is now a Public Affairs Specialist for the US Forest Service in San Bernardino.

"Once I had about 15 media interviews in a day for three days straight," Cox said of the Apple fire in Riverside/San Bernardino counties. "The media were texting, calling, emailing. I loved it – it was exhilarating."

On another front, Assistant Professor of ESRM Emily Fairfax, Ph.D., gained national attention for her research into beaver dams and how they can create fire resistant green oases that can serve as a refuge for wildlife and stop fires from advancing.

"My research was the first to show that if you have beaver damming in a creek, the area around the beaver dam is going to stay pretty green and not burn," Fairfax said. "They are creating fire-resistant patches in the landscape."

Fairfax's research also appeared in several international publications and podcasts, including Science News Magazine, National Geographic, BBC Wildlife, the National

Wildlife Federation's *Artemis*, and a highly-ranked ecology journal called *Ecological Applications*.

ESRM student Brandon Osorio was among the student researchers who joined Fairfax's research team by mapping beaver dams to see how they fared during the 2020 fire season in the Southwest.

"We're expanding our research to look into what are known as



Photos Courtesy of Lisa Cox

megafires," Fairfax explained, referring to fires that burn more than 100,000 acres. "We are looking at how ecosystems fared during the aftermath of fires in Colorado, Northern California and Oregon."

"It's really cool looking at beavers and finding out how they support plant life and organisms around them," Osorio said. "Beaver dams help prevent droughts and flooding by slowing the water down and spreading it out."

Because of the pandemic, most of the research was conducted virtually by mapping fire regions and beaver dams before and after a wildfire. But

student researchers looking into other environmental advantages of beaver-damming—such as Ramie Klocko—did get a chance to actually wade through rivers looking at beaver dams near Atascadero along with Fairfax.

"Beavers are listed as pests, so they have kind of a bad rap, but what a lot of people don't know is they're native to the area and they can do some great things for us if we let them," Klocko said.

Cox said her career evolution into her perfect job began with her ESRM degree and a desire to connect people with nature. Cox then volunteered with California State Parks in Malibu and then worked as an intern with the California Condor Recovery Program. After graduating from CSUCI, she joined the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in San Diego as a park ranger, but when Cox was assigned to work as public information officer for the Gap Fire in 2018, she felt she had found where she belonged.

"I just kept racking up assignments and falling harder and harder in love," she said. "I love the speed of it, how fast-paced it is, the teamwork. Every single person is important and essential."

In April of 2020, Cox accepted her dream job with the San Bernardino National Forest.

"When I got the offer, I just started crying and I was like 'oh my gawd, yes!'" Cox said. "I don't think I've ever been this happy to accept a job."



MAX ROBERTS '15 B.A. SOCIOLOGY

# THE SCIENCE OF LONGEVITY

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**G**ROWING UP WITH HIS PARENTS IN A Midtown apartment in Ventura, Max Roberts saw sociological patterns that caused him to form questions.

“Such as why is there so much homelessness? Why do people struggle to pay bills?,” Roberts said. “Neither of my parents attended college, and although they worked hard, I saw them struggle to pay our rent and bills. Whereas across the road, people were in nice houses and driving Mercedes.”

So when the first-generation college student enrolled in CSUCI, he was drawn to the study of sociology, and all that’s happened since he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2015 indicates he made the right choice.

Roberts, who will soon be awarded a Ph.D. from Utah State University (USU), attracted national media attention for his research into the differences in longevity between Black and white Americans.

Roberts’ research showed the national life expectancy gap between Black and white Americans has been shrinking over time. However, in Washington D.C., the Black-white longevity gap among men was more than 400% greater than the national gap, with white men living more than 17 years longer than Black men.

Roberts’ groundbreaking research was featured in publications such as *The Washington Post*; *New York Magazine*; as well as *Scientific Reports* —

the largest public access health journal in the West. The research also appeared in the world’s second largest open access public health journal, *BMC Public Health*.

“I was fortunate and excited when the article was picked up by *The Washington Post*,” Roberts said. “Policy makers generally don’t read research articles every day, so when you can bridge the gap between the academic research and policy, you can begin to bring about change.”

In March, the Utah State University College of Humanities and Social Sciences declared Roberts the recipient of the Doctoral Student Researcher of the Year Award.

CSUCI Associate Professor of Sociology Luis Sánchez, Ph.D. mentored Roberts and introduced him to undergraduate research.

“It was a pleasure to teach and train Max in research methods, but he always possessed the skills and attributes you cannot teach,” Sánchez said. “Max is resilient, gritty, and never backed down from a challenge. It’s no surprise he’s been able to put everything together and is making profound contributions to public health research.”

Roberts is continuing his research by looking into how disparities in education affect a person’s longevity. He hopes to finish his dissertation this summer and apply for a position as a health scientist at a national, state or local health institute.

> READ MORE AT: [GO.CSUCI.EDU/CHANNEL-MR](http://GO.CSUCI.EDU/CHANNEL-MR)



LUIS TORRES MARTINEZ, '18 B.S. COMPUTER SCIENCE

# If I can do it, you can too

by PAMELA DEAN

**B**ORN IN ZACATECAS, MEXICO, LUIS TORRES MARTINEZ and his family immigrated to Oxnard when he was a baby. His parents had been agricultural workers back in Mexico and dreamed of a better life for their two children. But life was not much easier in the U.S., and his mother and father worked long hours to make ends meet.

“My dad would already be at work when my mom woke up my sister and me. At 6 a.m. we would walk a quarter of a mile every day to our babysitter’s house so my mom could go to work,” Torres Martinez recalled. “When my mom would pick us up, I’d see my dad for about an hour before he’d get ready to work his second job.”

His parents wanted more for their children and instilled in Torres Martinez the importance of an education.

“Since the age of six, I knew education was something my parents wanted for me. I adopted that goal because I saw how much they had to work to give me and my sister a comfortable life. I knew I didn’t want to physically exhaust myself as much as they did,” Torres Martinez said.

He would go on to become not only the first college graduate in his family, but the first to graduate from high school as well.

Torres Martinez transferred to CSUCI after a few years at Ventura College, majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Mathematics and Security Systems

Engineering. Under Professor Jason Isaacs' tutelage, he was part of a team of CSUCI students who placed 3rd in NASA's 2017 nationwide Swarmathon competition. The team designed an algorithm to power a swarm of sample-collecting robots on Mars. He also competed in the prestigious Association for Computing Machinery International Collegiate Programming contest that same year.

After graduating in 2018, Torres Martinez parlayed his computer science expertise into a Database Administrator position with Santa Barbara-based Yardi. The company produces and sells property management software. In this role, Torres Martinez helps organize and store internal data, as well as monitoring and troubleshooting the company's servers to ensure optimal performance.

He aspires to move up the company ladder into management and hopes his story provides fuel to others who doubt they have what it takes to become a college graduate.

“I am a first-generation high school, community college, and university graduate and I am proud of what I’ve done. I know I didn’t do it alone,” Torres Martinez emphasized. “It’s been a journey paved with the help of my parents, family, friends, instructors, role models, and strangers along the way. I am proud of where I’ve been, where I am, and where I’ll be. If I can do it, you can do it too. *Sí se puede!*”



Photo Courtesy of Gabriela Alvarado

# The Legacy of Robert and Norma Lagomarsino

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

## UNIVERSITY ARCHIVIST EVELYN

Taylor believes if there was one moment that captured the essence of Robert Lagomarsino, it would be the day more than 15 years ago when he and his wife Norma, drove down in the rain from their Ojai ranch to attend a formal event on campus.

“He and Norma pull up in their truck, both of them dressed very nicely,” Taylor said. “I remember he had on very nice light brown pants—with mud all over his boots and the bottom of his pants. And Norma and I look at each other and she said ‘Well, you know Bob!’ It was such a human, unpretentious moment.”

According to those who knew him, humility was second nature to former California State Senator (1961-1974) and U.S. Representative (1974-1992) Robert J. Lagomarsino, who championed the development of CSU Channel Islands and authored one of the early pieces of legislation to bring a state university to Ventura County. In recognition of Lagomarsino’s efforts and long-time support, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2005 from CSUCI.

When Lagomarsino passed away on February 7, 2021 at the age of 94, he left a legacy of philanthropy that will continue to change the lives of students and families in perpetuity.

“Without him, we likely wouldn’t be here,” said Vice President for University Advancement Nichole Ipach. “When I would talk with Bob and Norma, it was clear they understood the value a regional public university would bring to this area. They under-

stood what it would mean to the social mobility of our students — what it means to the economic vitality and quality of life and all of those things a university brings to a region.”

Lagomarsino was also key to establishing Channel Islands National Park. He went on to procure the funding necessary to purchase island property in the park from private owners.

“Without these efforts, it would not have been possible for the park to obtain Santa Rosa Island or the east end of Santa Cruz Island,” said Emeritus Professor of Political Science Dan Wakelee, Ph.D., who helped establish CSUCI’s Santa Rosa Island Research Station.

Robert and Norma Lagomarsino also donated their personal collection of papers, memorabilia and more to the University’s John Spoor Broome Library archives. Having known the Lagomarsinos, Taylor considers it a privilege to be a steward of the Robert J. and Norma M. Lagomarsino Department of Archives and Special Collections.

“I loved them,” Taylor said. “They were classy and elegant, but also personable and fun. Both had a tremendous sense of humor.”

Norma, who died in 2015, helped Taylor pull together the memorabilia such as Congressional transcripts from the Watergate trial; final reports and photographs of the Challenger explosion; an invitation to tea from the Queen



of England; letters; medals; thousands of photos and documents from his travels to destinations like South America, the Far East, the Soviet Union, and Europe.

“The Lagomarsino collection is a reflection of our history,” Taylor said. “In terms of our local history, state history and the United States place in world history. A mistake so many people make is thinking that political collections are all about politics, but they cover culture, economic policies, society, religion — everything that makes us human beings.”

One of the University’s highest honors is the Robert J. Lagomarsino Award, which each year goes to an individual or organization continuing the spirit of philanthropy Robert and Norma embodied.

TOP Robert J. Lagomarsino and his wife, Norma in 2007.

BACKGROUND Congressman Lagomarsino’s desk and memorabilia is on view as an exhibit at the John Spoor Broome Library.



One University Drive, Camarillo, CA 93012-8599  
*Spring 2021 / Volume 26 / Number 1 / Biannual*



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