

Channel

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHANNEL ISLANDS / 2022 Spring Magazine



New President Takes
Unexpected, Challenging
Path to Lead University.

page 16

Channel

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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



FIELD OF DREAMS
CSUCI Commencement
May 21 & 22, 2022.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Gratitude for the present and planning for the future

It has been quite an exciting year already, and I am honored and privileged to address you here as the new President of CSU Channel Islands. My personal and professional journey has seen me in various roles that have facilitated my leadership development, from clinical psychology, to student affairs, and then to the Office of the President. Through it all, becoming President of Channel Islands is unquestionably the highlight of my career.

I want to thank the many people from our campus community, our region, and beyond who have supported me and sent their congratulations. I'm here today because of the support and commitment that so many of you have demonstrated to CSUCI since our inception, and because of your unwavering dedication and commitment to our students' success.

Our campus and community came together in these challenging times, and the resilience of our community is inspiring. As I have previously stated, it would have been easy for us to become caught up in these challenges and lose sight of our commitment to student success, but instead, we have grown closer and rallied together in support of our mission on so many levels.

As we approach our 20th anniversary, it has never been more important to assess where we are and embrace the responsibility and magnitude of the work we have left to accomplish as we move into our third decade. I know that we will continue to be partners in this work, accepting the challenges, having the difficult conversations, facing the barriers we must overcome, and celebrating every accomplishment. We will continue to work together, engaging with each other to achieve our common goal of realizing a vision of student success for our primarily first generation and historically underrepresented students.

Thank you once again for your support, confidence, and trust. Let us be proud of what we have accomplished while looking forward to what the future holds for CSU Channel Islands.

Sincerely,

Richard Yao, Ph.D.
President



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ON THE COVER Back Left to Right:

Luis Sanchez, Professor of Sociology (sitting); Russell Bradley, Director of the Santa Rosa Island Research Station (standing); Front Left to Right: Kaylena Mann, Psychology major and President's Scholar; Richard Yao, President; Sheradyn Ruef, Computer Science major and President's Scholar.

CSUCI NEWS

by KIM LAMB GREGORY



University named a top producing institution for Fulbright Scholars

The Fulbright Program has named CSUCI a 2021-2022 Top-Producing Institution for Fulbright Scholars. In a list published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on behalf of the Fulbright Program, CSUCI is among 11 masters-granting colleges and universities across the nation that had two Fulbright Scholars named for 2021-2022. This year's Fulbright Scholars are Professor of Finance Priscilla Liang, Ph.D., and Professor of Applied Physics Geoff Dougherty, Ph.D.

CSUCI is already starting off strong for next year, too, with Professor of Political Science Scott Frisch, Ph.D. being awarded a Fulbright for 2022-2023. Read more at go.csuci.edu/fs



Congresswoman Brownley provides grant for Native American and Indigenous Studies academic program

CSUCI will begin working to develop a new Native American and Indigenous Studies academic program thanks to a \$250,000 check presented to the University by Congresswoman Julia Brownley. The roughly two-year planning process will begin in Fall of 2022 and will include hiring faculty, community outreach, and developing a curriculum covering the histories, cultures, arts, languages, and environmental stories of Indigenous peoples. Read more at: go.csuci.edu/nais

Teacher residency partnership gets two grants to expand program

Two \$250,000 grants from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing will enable a successful CSUCI teacher residency partnership program to expand and explore new opportunities. One of the grants went to the teacher residency program launched in 2019, which provides full tuition for CSUCI teaching credential candidates who are selected as residents, plus a stipend up to \$10,000. The program is in partnership with the Oxnard School District, Oxnard Union High School District, Rio School District and the Santa Barbara Unified School District. The other grant went to the Santa Paula Unified School District to enable the district to join the residency program in Fall 2022. Read more at: go.csuci.edu/trp

Program that paves the way to college for farm working families gets a boost

A CSUCI program designed to provide farm working families a pathway to college has just received a \$50,000 boost from Reiter Affiliated Companies' philanthropic arm. Called "University Culture," the program began in 2010 and has since provided hundreds of underrepresented families with information about financial aid, college life, what to expect from higher education, and the kinds of non-financial supports that every college student needs. Read more at go.csuci.edu/univ-culture

Student advocate for LGBTQ individuals is named a Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellow

Chemistry major Cameron Bartosiewicz who founded the national Youth Pride Association has been named a 2022-2023 Campus Compact Newman Civic Fellow. Bartosiewicz, who founded the 501(c)3 to support and advocate for LGBTQ youth, is among 173 students from 38 states and Mexico to be named a Newman Fellow. Bartosiewicz and the other college students were awarded the year-long fellowship based on their commitment to finding solutions to a variety of challenges facing communities locally, nationally, and internationally. Read more at go.csuci.edu/ccncf



Saving a child's life while working from home

by ABIGAIL NAPP



WHEN INDY VALENCIA HEARD THE shouts, he ran towards the commotion. In the neighbor's apartment above, a recently adopted pitbull dog was attacking a four-year old girl while her mother tried to intervene.

"It was the kind of scream where something was very wrong, and I heard rustling on the floor," said Valencia. "I got up and went straight upstairs through the door. I saw them on the floor – the little girl, the mom and the dog. The little girl's face was in the dog's mouth."

Valencia wrestled the dog and pulled the animal off the child, saving her life. Emergency responders arrived soon after.

Valencia has worked at CSUCI for 16 years as a Lead Information Tech-

nology Consultant. Thankfully, he had been working from home that day.

"I was happy to be able to help and be at the right place at the right time," he said.

Word spread of Valencia's courageous act on campus.

When Lieutenant Christopher Jetton from the University's Police Department heard of Valencia's heroism, he gave him a coin to recognize his bravery.

"Because Valencia intervened - and he had no obligation to - the young girl didn't die," said Jetton. "He placed himself in harm's way to save someone else's life."

Since then, the little girl has recovered. She often plays with Valencia's young daughter.

Jetton nominated Valencia for an important award in Ventura County, the Citizen's Medal of Merit, given by the Peace Officers Association of Ventura County (POAVC). The awards began in 1974 and are typically given out every two years.

On March 19, 2022, 500 people attended the POAVC ceremony in the Air Force One Pavilion at the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley. For the special occasion, Valencia brought his son with him to receive the Citizen's Medal of Merit.

"It was nice to be thought of," said Valencia. "The night was very fun and energetic with lots of people celebrating the acts of helping others."

ABOVE, left to right: Indy Valencia and CSUCI Interim Chief of Police Drake Massey.

Nursing alumna saves the life of a mother of two

by KIM LAMB GREGORY



AFTER A 12-HOUR NIGHT SHIFT AT LOS ROBLES

Regional Medical Center in Thousand Oaks, emergency room nurse Claire Gillette was exhausted. The CSUCI alumna almost skipped a hot yoga class but decided a workout in a heated room might be just what she needed.

Had Gillette not made the last-minute decision to join the class on that autumn day in 2021, and had she not been prepared with nursing skills she learned at CSUCI, a Thousand Oaks wife and mother of two in the front row of Gillette's class would no longer be here.

"Claire is the only reason I'm alive today," said Erika Cole.

The class was almost over when Gillette, who was in the back, heard a commotion in the front of the class. Class members were gathering around a woman curled up on her yoga mat, her face blue.

"Is she O.K.?" someone asked, followed by a friend's

panicked, "Erika!"

Gillette rushed to the front of the room, knelt, and searched for the woman's pulse.

There was none.

"The music's going, it's hot and humid, and I'm screaming, 'Turn off the music! Cool off the room! Get me an AED! Call 911!'" Gillette said.

Gillette began pumping Cole's chest, doing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Twice, Cole's heart rhythm flatlined, and twice, Gillette had to shock her with the AED (Automatic External Defibrillator).

"I was getting tired and somebody said, 'She's got two kids!' and I thought 'I'm going to save her if it kills me,'" Gillette said.

After Cole was rushed to Los Robles and regained consciousness in her hospital room the next day, the first thing she did was ask to meet Gillette.

"Claire walked in and said, 'I'm pretty sure I broke all

ABOVE: Erika Cole and Claire Gillette.



your ribs, but I was put in that room to save your life,” Cole said. “I started crying. My husband and kids will have me around. I’ll get to live to see my grandchildren.”

Cole was diagnosed with Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, a rare but temporary condition in which the heart muscle becomes stunned or weakened, usually because of emotional or physical stress. She has all but completely recovered and found a new lifelong friend in Gillette.

Cole and Gillette talk almost every day now and even got matching tattoos of the number 8, as the incident happened on October 8, both Mother’s Day and Cole’s birthday fell on May 8 last year, and the figure 8 is the symbol for infinity—which felt fitting for two new friends for life.

“I live for and love my boys,” Cole said of her two sons, ages 11 and 15. “Claire is the reason I have air in my lungs and a beat in my heart. I can’t possibly express what she means to me, but the easiest thing to let everyone know is that Claire and I are truly my favorite love story.”

“I was getting tired and somebody said, ‘She’s got two kids!’ and I thought ‘I’m going to save her if it kills me,’” Gillette said.

ABOVE: Emergency Room Nurse and Nursing alumna Claire Gillette (left) saved mother Erika Cole (right) during a hot yoga class.

Supporting social mobility through education

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

New Vice Provost plans to “pay it forward” for students

Jessica Lavariega Monforti, Ph.D., joins CSUCI

WHETHER IT'S IN SCHOOL OR IN life, new CSUCI Vice Provost Jessica Lavariega Monforti, Ph.D., sees individual success as a team effort.

“I was always raised to work hard, but not alone,” Lavariega Monforti said.

Growing up in a Latino household, a sense of family, neighborhood, and community are at the root of her achievements, which is why Lavariega Monforti wants to create a similar environment for CSUCI students — especially for those who, like her, are the first in their family to attend college.

“When I was in K-12, I was surrounded by a lot of naysayers,” Lavariega Monforti said. “My best friend was pregnant at 15, and statistics were not in my favor. But between my parents and a handful of faculty members, somehow I stumbled onto a career I didn't know existed when I was 18. I really look forward to the opportunity to pay it forward here at CSUCI.”

Lavariega Monforti grew up in Long Island, New York in a neighborhood where big family Sunday dinners were the norm.

“My dad was a mechanic, and my mom was a hairdresser. My mom was the one who said, ‘You're going to college,’” Lavariega Monforti said. “She wanted me to not depend on other people for my survival.”

Lavariega Monforti earned a bachelor's degree in political science and women's studies from Florida State University, then moved north to attend Ohio State University where she earned a bachelor's, a master's, and a Ph.D. in political science. Her career took her to

Texas, rural Georgia, and eventually California

where she became Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at California Lutheran University (CLU) before joining CSUCI in January of 2022.

Her experiences in these different demographic cultures reinforced her belief that a

strong social foundation of friends, family, and professional colleagues is critical to success, especially for students of color.

Lavariega Monforti said students and faculty alike mocked her Latina/o heritage.

“I remember kids in my graduate cohort ended every single word with an ‘o,’” she said. “Once, a very famous political science faculty member said ‘What did you get on your GRE? I want to know if you're smart enough to be here.’”

Among the initiatives Lavariega Monforti is excited about is “block scheduling” for first year students beginning with the Fall 2022 semester. Basically, a cohort of students will have blocks with 12 units of founda-

tional courses, which they will take together as a group. The group will serve as a “village” for the students to help them develop a sense of togetherness and belonging.

“When students first come to college, they are often less worried about academics than they are about fitting in,” Lavariega Monforti said. “That tends to be why we can lose students, because 70% of a student's college experience is spent outside the classroom.”

Provost Mitch Avila, Ph.D., is confident Lavariega Monforti's experience and vision will benefit CSUCI.

“Dr. Lavariega Monforti is motivated by the belief that education can empower students and help them and our communities achieve their potential,” Avila said. “Her background and experience will be a critical asset for CSUCI in the coming years as we pursue our graduation and retention goals and advance the mission of the campus to serve the region.”

“I just want to remove the barriers for students so they can go out and do amazing things,” Lavariega Monforti said.

“Dr. Lavariega Monforti is motivated by the belief that education can empower students and help them and our communities achieve their potential,”
—Mitch Avila



A journey across the country to home

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED

New Dean of the Martin V. Smith School of Business & Economics successfully transitions into role

Susan Andrzejewski, Ph.D. helped secure major donations for renovations

IT'S BEEN QUITE A JOURNEY FOR Susan Andrzejewski, Ph.D., from her East Coast days as a psychology student to her West Coast move and becoming CSUCI's Dean of the Martin V. Smith School of Business & Economics (MVS School).

"It's been very busy, but incredibly wonderful and rewarding," she said about her journey to CSUCI.

Andrzejewski grew up in New York but eventually left to study psychology at Bethany College in the northern panhandle of West Virginia.

"That was the first experience that really got me hooked on the transformational power of higher education," she said. "I never went to school thinking I'm going to become a college professor someday. It was really faculty members, advisors, and mentors who gave me the opportunity to build my skill sets and pushed me to think in ways that were sort of counter-intuitive to how I first went into the college experience."

Andrzejewski received master's and doctorate degrees in social psychology from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, where she was a graduate student in social psychology.

"What really drew me into marketing is kind of this intersection between

business and social psychology. A lot of my research in marketing focused on consumer behavior and the idea that basic psychological principles really influence what happens in the consumer marketplace," she said.

She started her academic career as a faculty member in marketing and Associate Chair of the Business, Organizations, and Society Department at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, before leaving to become a CSUCI Marketing professor.

"After being an East Coast transplant and after being here in Ventura County for eight years, I fully understand why people love it here,"
—Susan Andrzejewski

What drew her to CSUCI was the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work at a relatively new university that needed help developing a Marketing option, and one that was supportive in providing every student with the opportunity of having a high-quality college degree.

"It was also just having a university that was so laser focused on what really drives me, and that's providing a high-quality, interdisciplinary, experiential, and inclusive educational experience," Andrzejewski said.

Andrzejewski served as Interim Dean of the MVS School prior to her appointment as Dean last November. She also had previously served as the Chair of the Business program and Director of the Entrepreneurship & Small Business Institute.

"I'm incredibly honored to lead the MVS School," Andrzejewski said. "I have loved all of my roles in higher education, but it's truly exciting to interact with our students, meet our incredibly successful alumni, and work with our talented and dynamic faculty, staff, donors, and community partners."

Her vision is for the MVS School to become a premier business school through helping MVS School graduates lead successful professional lives long after they graduate from CSU Channel Islands.

During her time here, Andrzejewski was influential in securing a recent \$10.5 million donation to the MVS School from the Martin V. and Martha K. Smith Foundation, with funds being used to renovate a building for the MVS School and provide students with educational experience enhancements.

In her spare time, Andrzejewski likes to cook, read, travel, and spend time with friends and family, including her wife, Jennifer Maravola.

"After being an East Coast transplant and after being here in Ventura County for eight years, I fully understand why people love it here," she said. "It is a gorgeous and welcoming community. I absolutely love Ventura County."



Joyce Spencer, Director of Environmental Health & Safety

Staying on top of COVID-19

by ABIGAIL NAPP

THROUGHOUT THE WAVES OF COVID-19, Director of Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S), Joyce Spencer has been prepared.

Her mighty team consisting of five staff plus herself, has been working non-stop, programming on-campus vaccine clinics, testing, contact-tracing, and developing event guidelines, while coordinating with Ventura County Public Health, the California Department of Public Health, and Cal/OSHA.

With more than 7,000 student and employee lives under her watch, Spencer is reluctant to celebrate her successes. Like many people in charge of safety, she considers no news to be good news. Under her effective supervision there have been no COVID-19 outbreaks on campus, only a few cluster cases which were closely monitored.

Spencer became CSUCI's EH&S Director in January 2021 after serving as the Health & Safety Manager for seven years.

When COVID-19 hit, it reminded her of other crisis situations. But when the campus had to pivot to virtual instruction in March 2020 and most employees were working remotely for weeks, then months, uncertainty grew.

"The drama was there, and we had no precedent," she said. "There were things we had to do in the past, like evacuate the campus for a fire, so in some respects, COVID-19 was along those lines. But for a long time, we didn't know how and when everyone would be able to return to the campus."

Communication and collaboration on campus and across

the CSU system among administrators, faculty, and staff made a difference, especially from the Office of the President.

"Without President Yao and his team supporting us, there's no way we would have been able to pull off what we did," she said. "It's been tremendous. I couldn't have asked for a better president at that time."

Spencer noted that her graduate studies at Loma Linda University (she holds a master's degree in Public Health) and her experience as a contractor working with environmental hazardous material at Naval Base Ventura County were critical in her ability to manage events.

In moments when health directives changed, creating separate rules for faculty, staff, students, and the public, Spencer kept a cool head.

"I would say you have to be very grounded," said Spencer. "There's a lot of regulations and a lot of interpretation."

Before students returned to campus during the Spring 2022 semester, Spencer prepared for a new scenario: testing thousands of students on campus all in the same week. Since the onset of COVID-19 in Spring 2020, Spencer's team has worked to ensure all communication channels available — in-person events, emails, and even social media — are utilized to share guidance and information on COVID-19.

"Our goal is not to be the enforcer, but the supporter," she said. "To foster the attitude of compliance for the sake of everyone's safety."

Fortunately, as circumstances unfolded, that frontline response was not needed.

"It's great to have life back on campus after it seemed deserted for so long," she said. "We have that youthful vibrancy again."



BELOW CSUCI's Environmental Health & Safety team (left to right): Jorge Buckner-Rodas, Marissa Zosimo, Joyce Spencer, Jacqueline Chavez, and Jack Mohr. *Not pictured Derick Nguyen.*





“An American Journey” makes tangible the atrocities of enslavers and endurance of Black and African American people

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

CSUCI JUNIOR LISA MARIE RUIZ LAID HER HAND on her chest as she looked down at a table filled with rusted chains, shackles, and yokes.

“My heart is pounding,” said the Chicana/o Studies and Psychology double major. “Imagine people...humans... having to endure this.”

The chains once used by enslavers to enforce bondage were part of the “Forgotten Images” exhibit displayed March 24-26 at CSUCI’s Grand Salon.

The traveling exhibit was part of “An American Journey,” an unflinching look at United States history seen through artifacts, experiences, and accomplishments of Black and African American people from the 1600s through present-day. Viewers of the exhibit had opportunities to view and reflect upon the impact and relevance of historical artifacts in the context of the ongoing struggle for racial justice in the U.S. and around the world.

Sponsored by an Oxnard-based organization called the Juneteenth Celebration of Ventura County (JCVC), the exhibit came to campus thanks to the efforts of CSUCI’s Major Gifts Officer Carrick DeHart, JCVC co-chair Angela Landers and her husband, Brian Landers, and the John Spoor Broome Library.

The Landers couple felt it was important to expose the public to the exhibit because, in Brian’s words, “There are a lot of things that are relevant today that stem from this systemic racism.”

The artifacts were collected by Oxnard natives David and Sharon McLucas, who spent more than 25 years attending estate sales and auctions collecting more than

20,000 pieces of African American history, spending more than \$500,000.

“I had a collection of Aunt Jemima salt and pepper shakers, and my husband had a collection of music. From there, we just combined it with the history, and our passion — and our paychecks,” said Sharon.

Outreach and Engagement Librarian Lydia Collins was responsible for highlighting parts of the exhibit for the campus.

“Some of the items really stuck out to me, like the ‘For colored only’ signs,” Collins said. “As a black woman, I feel like it’s still there. There are places where I don’t feel I belong — we are in 2022 and sometimes I still feel that way.”

High school students from around the county toured the exhibit with David McLucas as their guide.

“The Ku Klux Klan struck me the most because they would hang Black men for no reason,” said high school student Isaiah Compton. “It made me mad and sad.”

David McLucas was hands-on with his narration, inviting students to feel the length of a whip or the weight of a 40-pound ball and chain.

“If you go to museums you aren’t going to hear the things I talk about,” he said. “We want to be right in your face with this. We want you to feel the burden and the weight and anguish that went along with these devices I’m showing today.”

As she toured the exhibit, CSUCI Black Student Union President, Corrin Thomas, was moved to tears.

“It really got me. I never knew. I was never taught a lot of this,” Thomas said. “Everything got me.”



ABOVE LEFT Exhibit guests view artifacts in the exhibit “Forgotten Images” in CSUCI’s Grand Salon. **CENTER** A Plantation Bell is displayed as part of the “Forgotten Images” exhibit.

ABOVE RIGHT David McLucas discusses artifacts with guests viewing the exhibit.



From CSUCI

by ABIGAIL NAPP

WHEN KUANFEN LIU CONDUCTS, THE graceful pulse of her gestures captivate choirs, orchestras, and concert-goers across the Central Coast and beyond. Some say her hands dance with the music.

In June, Assistant Professor of Performing Arts/Music KuanFen Liu, Ph.D., will fulfill a childhood dream and guest conduct a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Liu feels both excitement and humility about achieving this impressive career milestone.

“I chose the path of conducting by accident,” she says. “But I always dreamed about coming to the United States, studying and performing on the world stage.”

The invitation to play at Carnegie Hall arrived on a fortuitous day — her birthday — via Facebook messenger just over a year ago. A colleague remembered her conducting style and recruited her for the opportunity.

Since that day in January 2021, Liu has been organizing non-stop activities to make the concert available to musicians of all levels. CSUCI students and alumni will perform as part of the choir at Carnegie Hall alongside Liu thanks to an Instructionally Related Activities grant

from the University. Additionally, 100 students from Santa Paula High School, Ventura High School, and the Kirkland Choral Society will join the choir performing at Carnegie Hall.

The choir has been practicing in a hybrid setting - both in-person and via Zoom for out-of-town singers. When the group finally meets in-person in New York City, they will perform in front of an audience of 2,800 people. The New England Symphonic Ensemble will accompany them.

Liu is counting down the days. The process of rehearsing and experiencing the distinct parts of the music coming together is what invigorates her.

“I’m really looking forward to the two piano rehearsals beforehand and the dress rehearsal with the orchestra in Carnegie Hall,” she said. “I find satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment when I lead the ensembles and feel fully immersed in the experience of the musical collaboration.”

Few musicians ‘make it’ without a rigorous commitment to their art. The discipline and dedication Liu has shown in her career started early in life. In addition to supportive parents, Liu had both talent and drive.

“It was always in me and it felt predestined,” she says.



Photos courtesy Renata Hundley and Jonathan Holliday

“It was like, ‘Yeah, that’s what I’m going to do.’ I knew I would pursue music.”

By seventh grade, Liu was enrolled in a conservatory in her native Taiwan, practicing piano five to seven hours a day.

At Tunghai University in Taiwan where she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts, a professor discovered a natural ability in Liu: conducting. He encouraged her to pursue the field in the U.S. and reminded her there were few female conductors in the world. “You need to be one of them,” he told her.

Liu took a chance and applied. She was one of four accepted master’s students at the Eastman School of Music, a prestigious music conservatory in Rochester, New York.

Liu said the experience was profound and amazing. While her professors in Taiwan had attended top conservatories in the U.S. and Europe, no one could prepare her for the adventures and challenges of living outside of her comfort zone and learning English.

After Eastman, she earned a doctorate at the University of Southern California before landing a lecturer position at CSUCI almost 20 years ago.

Liu said the learning curve as a professor was steep. She had to adapt her formal musical training and teaching

methods to a new audience with little to no formal background in music, but she quickly caught on.

“It was only by knowing our students and talking with them that I discovered they are so eager to learn what I know,” she said. “It really changed me and gave me a brand new perspective on how I could contribute to make a difference in my students’ lives. I realized my approach was going to be, ‘Ok, how can I help them?’”

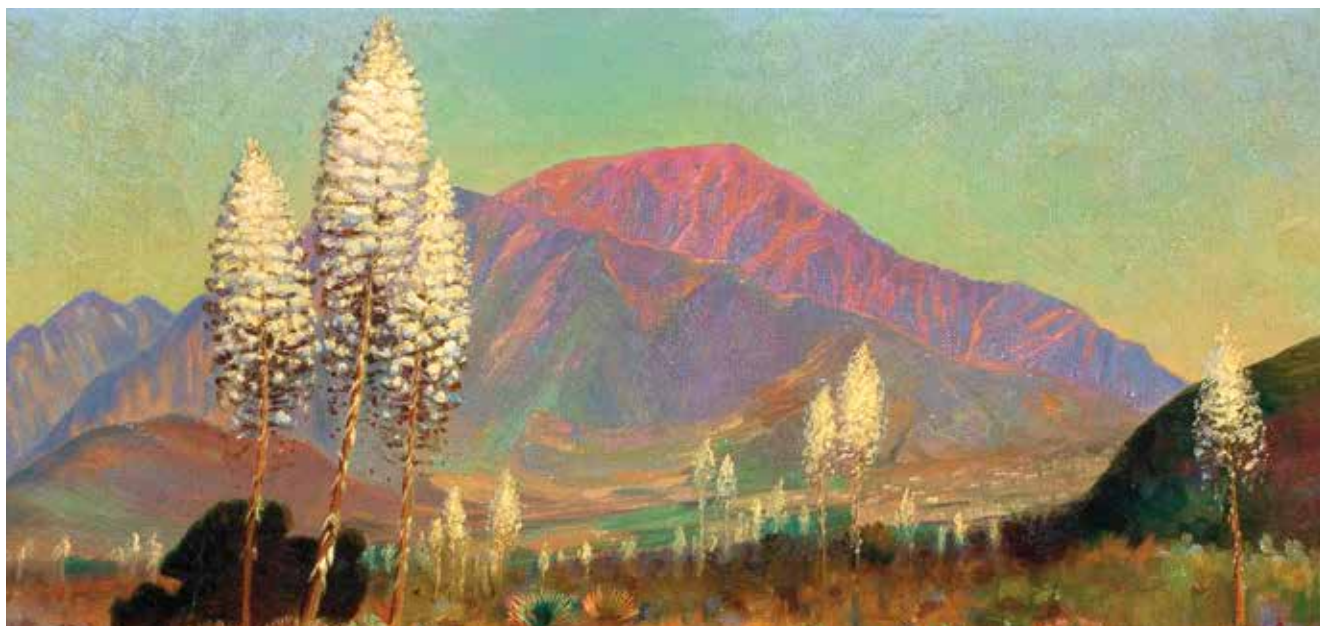
Liu says she is a servant of the music, the composer, and of course, the musicians, who make the music come alive.

Liu spends hours studying the musical scores and finding ways to demonstrate the intention of the composer and style of the works they perform. Rehearsals are planned down to the minute and always begin on time.

When she’s not commissioning new pieces that touch upon issues of concern, like climate change, and leading her orchestra and choir, Liu listens to Bach. It reminds her of what drew her to music so many years ago.

“I feel people can always find comfort and inspiration when they listen or study classical music,” she said. “And that’s my ultimate goal — to broadly disseminate classical music to whoever wants to know some part of it, big or small.”

ABOVE Assistant Professor of Performing Arts/Music KuanFen Liu has conducted concerts all over the United States.



Art students create a catalog and web-based exhibition for a California art collection

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

WHEN BELOVED SISTER AND DEVOTED nurse Cherie Nedderman died unexpectedly in January of 2019, she left her vast collection of California artwork with no home.

Her heartbroken brother, Ted Nedderman, and his wife, Nancy, were left to decide on the best place for Cherie's 58 "plein air" or "outdoor" paintings of California that covered the walls of her Camarillo hilltop home.

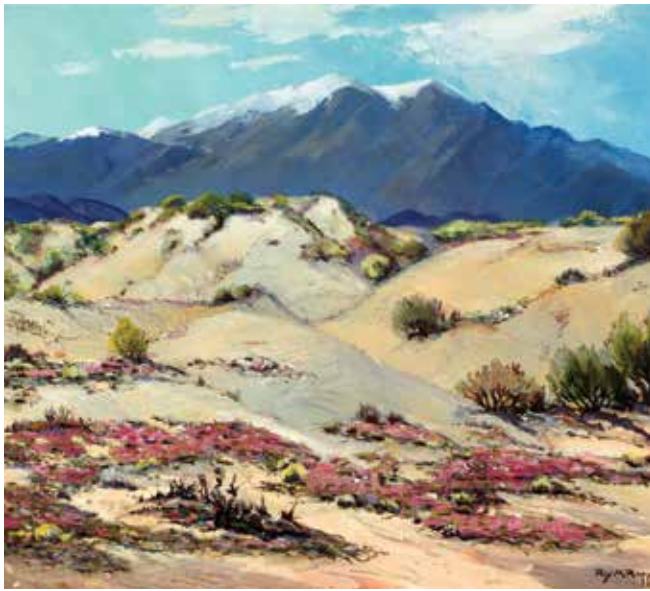
"She would sit outside and gaze at the hills. That was the view from her backyard," said CSUCI Art Program Chair and Professor of Art Liz King. "Inside her home, her art was in

every room, every corner."

The Neddermans decided CSUCI was a perfect new home for the collection and Art Program faculty members were delighted.

"I think it's so valuable to our students because, in Art History, you study all types of art," King said. "But to study art of the California region where you live and travel becomes undeniably meaningful — it literally hits home."

Working together with Art faculty, students developed two projects related to the Nedderman collection: a 120-page catalog entitled "Personal Visions, Shared Passions: The Cherie



Nedderman Collection of California Art at CSUCI” and the web-based exhibition “The Nedderman Collection of California Art in Dialogues with CSUCI Students.”

A show of selected works from the collection is scheduled for Fall of 2022 in the John Spoor Broome Library gallery.

These projects were initiated and coordinated by Art History professor Irina D. Costache, Ph.D. She worked closely with Art history students September Cirri, Rebecca Ferrera, and Alexandra Infeld, who curated the art in the catalog and the web-based exhibition and wrote introductory texts.

The students on the graphic design team — Kimberly Anderson, Ashlee Nogy, and Karla White — developed the layout of the catalog and cover. Art professor Luke Matjas, who coordinated and guided their efforts, called it an “epic undertaking.”

The project was integrated into an advanced Art class taught by Professor of Art Matt Furmanski.

“The donation of the collection artwork by the Nedderman family presented not just an amazing gift of California landscape painting, but a great opportunity for our students to create a catalog, website, exhibition, and other associated elements,” Furmanski said.

The catalog includes quotes by students from different majors who wrote about their impressions of the paintings as part of assignments in several Art History classes.

“These paintings give me a sense of calm and peace, as if I am reliving my life in them, in these settings,” wrote ’21 Health Science alum Luisemundo Vicente.

“These paintings can simply be thought of as a love poem to California,” wrote ’21 Psychology alumna Lizbeth Galeno.

In an advanced art class taught by King, six web design students worked with faculty members to create a dynamic exhibition for the web in which art from the Nedderman collection was paired with CSUCI students’ landscape artwork.

Art Lecturer Christophe Bourély paired student artwork that reflected the themes, colors, and styles of the art in the Nedderman collection.

“This professional-level project,” which went live at the end of the Spring semester, “is a unique opportunity for students to participate in a real-life work experience” King said.

“We have moments during our class sessions where two or three members start bringing ideas together, and when we get to see the end result of the design/idea, it’s amazing,” said Art student web designer, Dulce Yanzon. “Seeing multiple diverse minds come together to create such a brilliant design is astounding!”

The collection was photographed by Art/Photography Lecturer Larry Lytle which made it possible for student teams to see the paintings remotely during the pandemic.

“This project is a perfect example of the rich dialogues and dynamic learning environment of our University” said Costache.

Cherie passed away too soon at age 71, but the art collection that she loved will endure and be appreciated by generations to come.

“Nancy and I are thrilled that the collection will be showcased soon,” Ted Nedderman said. “We know Cherie would have been so happy that there will be many who will enjoy the art she so lovingly and carefully selected.”

ABOVE The Neddermans’ collection of *plein air* California paintings.



ABOVE President Richard Yao serves CSUCI in many capacities: connecting with donors, restoring a Chumash trail on Round Mountain — Sat'wiwa with staff and students, and engaging with students' research projects.

All roads lead to CSUCI

New President takes unexpected, challenging path to lead university

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED

RICHARD YAO, PH.D., SEEMS A natural at his role as the new CSUCI President with his many years of educational experience, but he is the first to acknowledge that serendipity played a part in where he is today.

Yao recalled when he was just 24 years old, single, and struggling financially when he moved to Las Vegas back in the 1990s. He had no plans to pursue a career in higher education but was making a small wage at a non-profit and was having a hard time getting by. One of his colleagues who was also a part-time faculty member asked if he was interested in filling in for her to teach an introductory psychology class at a community college.

"I was so broke and needed extra work," said Yao, who accepted the job and at the same time his destiny. "I absolutely loved teaching, especially with the highly diverse population of students at the community college, and that was when I knew I was going to be in higher ed for the rest of my career," he said.

But Yao's journey of self-discovery started well before that chance of fate that led him to where he is today.

Yao was born in Brooklyn to parents of Chinese and Filipino descent who immigrated to New York from the Philippines.

Yao said his parents had very little when they arrived in the United States, but they had their education. They were both physicians, and they provided a stable and loving family life for him and his siblings.

"Higher education in my family was the expectation from the very beginning," he said. "The long-running joke in my family is that I'm not a 'real' doctor. Yes, I have my Ph.D. and am a clinical psychologist, but you know how siblings are, especially ones with medical doctorates. They keep me humble, for which I'm grateful. Of course, as a younger sibling I'm also happy to return the favor by teasing them about the pitfalls and delusions of superiority!"

As a Chinese Filipino American, Yao is the first person of color to lead the campus. "When I arrived at CSUCI

RICHARD YAO

JUNE 2018
Joined CSUCI as
VP for Student
Affairs

JAN. 2021
Became Interim
President of
CSUCI

JAN. 2022
Appointed as the
4th President of
CSUCI

in 2018, I thought I was well on my path in terms of understanding diversity, equity, inclusion, and understanding the theoretical and epistemological foundations of this work," said Yao. But he shared that even at the age of 50, he's learned more about himself in the last four years at CSUCI than ever before, especially as it relates to his own racial identity and development.

Yao said his parents were very traditional in the way they raised him, but they never had explicit or direct discussions about race and racial identity, even while he was growing up in places with very little diversity.

"Looking back throughout my childhood and adolescence, and really most of my adult life, I now understand that many of the struggles I experienced were attributable to the vagueness and ambiguity associated with my racial identity development," Yao said. "This is especially important to me now, having realized later in life what little attention was given in my youth to such an obvious element of my identity, and knowing how helpful that explicit support would have been to me in my childhood, adolescence, and young adult years. I have shared this story frequently with colleagues and students at Channel Islands, and I carry it with me every day in the work of realizing our student-centered mission — realizing how essential it is to know who we are and who we are serving, and how equally important it is for our students to know and bring who they are into each and every one of their learning experiences here."

Yao said his experiences growing up made him curious about human development and behavior, leading him to study clinical psychology. He earned 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.

Throughout a good portion of his career, Yao balanced his clinical work in the community with his part-time teaching responsibilities at the community college. He



eventually became a full-time lecturer at Nevada State College (NSC) and also specialized in forensic psychological assessments for the juvenile and family courts. During this time, he shared a private practice with his wife, C.J., who is a clinical social worker.

However, navigating his teaching and service responsibilities with Nevada State while balancing his private practice became too consuming, and he had to make a decision — either go all-in on higher education or invest fully in his private practice.

He chose higher education, eventually becoming the founding Dean of Students at NSC and Chief Student Affairs Officer.

While at NSC, he worked with Erika Beck, who after becoming CSUCI's President in 2016, encouraged Yao to throw his hat in the ring for CSUCI's Vice President for Student Affairs. He did so successfully and served in that role from 2018-2021.

From his earliest time at CSUCI, Yao has helped lead the campus through some of the most challenging realities imaginable. Just a few months into his leadership of the Division of Student Affairs, he was responsible for helping to support students and employees in navigating the aftermath of a mass shooting that occurred at the nearby Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks, and the very next day through the evacuation of campus caused by the Hill Fire. About two years later, the COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary to move classes and co-curricular activities online.

It was during the COVID-19 pandemic when Yao stepped into the role of Interim President for CSUCI in January 2021, and he credits getting through those trying times to the dedication, commitment, and support of the entire campus community — the faculty, the Environmental Health & Safety team, facilities workers, Student Affairs staff, Human Resources staff, and student leaders.

"One of the things I love most about the members of our campus community is that they will push you to expand your insight and awareness — and challenge you to develop your understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility — all of which is especially important when considering our student population and region," he said.

"To be the first person of color to lead CSUCI is an incredible honor, and I fully recognize the magnitude and responsibility that comes along with it, particularly within the Asian Pacific Islander community. I understand that I'm standing on the shoulders of those who continue to lift me up and make it possible," he said. "I'm just very, very honored to serve in this role."

Yao lives in Camarillo with his wife, C.J. They have three children and two grandchildren.

While he spent many formative years in Las Vegas, he enjoys being here, especially with how welcoming the community has been.

"I have fallen in love with California and Ventura County," he said.

ABOVE President Yao congratulates a graduating student at Commencement.

Digital initiative contributes to student success

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED

HOW DO YOU SPELL SUCCESS?

It is CSUCCESS for the team that launched the pilot program and, more importantly, for the students who benefited from the CSU community wanting to close equity gaps and enhance student achievement through this initiative.

CSUCCESS (California State University Connectivity Contributing to Equity and Student Success) is an initiative launched on 14 CSU campuses to create more equitable opportunities by providing industry-leading technology for incoming freshman and transfer students to use through completion of their degrees.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many CSU students indicated a lack of access to a computer or mobile device as an obstacle in the way of their achievement. In response, more than \$18 million was used to purchase more than 21,000 laptops and tablets, along with 10,000 mobile Wi-Fi hotspots for students across the CSU system.

Associate Professor of Communication J. Jacob Jenkins, Ph.D., led a CSUCI research team to collect data for the campus' CSUCCESS program.

"I think the real success of CSUCCESS is its ability to break down those barriers of inequality, especially considering the student population of the CSU, including here at CSUCI, with a large percentage of first-genera-



tion and low-income students," said Jenkins, who is also a campus coordinator of Affordable Learning Solutions and founding director of California Alliance for Open Education.

"We're living in a digital world, and the COVID-19 pandemic hastened that transition more, while at the same time exposing certain inequalities even more," Jenkins said. "Our educational resources are more virtual and online but then you have to have technology and computers to access those things."

The research team received 124 survey responses from CSUCI students who participated in the CSUCCESS program this past year and found the program successful with limiting or reducing barriers for students.

Before receiving the iPad bundle through CSUCCESS, only 51% of students felt they had a reliable computing device, and only 75% felt they had reliable internet service for completing required coursework.

After students received CSUCCESS iPad bundles, these numbers jumped to 97% and 92% respectively, and 97% of students felt the iPad bundle helped with their coursework.

Assistant Professor of Education Talya Drescher, Ph.D., a committee member, said the CSUCCESS program was extremely beneficial to her students, one of whom is Rylan Bemis.

"Coming from a low socioeconomic background, I was really nervous about being able to keep up with my schoolwork since I came to CSUCI with just a five-year-old Chrome book," Bemis said. "Receiving the free iPad for use throughout my time at CSUCI has made it easier on me to keep up with online assignments and to make all my Zoom classes without worrying if my computer will work that day or not."



ABOVE RIGHT President Richard Yao presents iPad bundles to students.

LOWER LEFT CSUCI's Information Technology Services helps set up the iPads with the students.

Commencement 2022

by NANCY COVARRUBIAS GILL

Traditional in-person ceremonies return to CSUCI

CSUCI celebrated commencement with four in-person ceremonies held over two days on Saturday, May 20 and Sunday May 21 at the South Quad of the campus.

This year marked the return of traditional commencement ceremonies held since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020. The 2020 ceremony was entirely virtual and in 2021 a hybrid drive-up/in-person ceremony was held on campus.

Thousands of parents, families, and friends cheered for more than 2,500 graduating students who received bachelor's or master's degrees, and credentials, during the morning and afternoon ceremonies.

Honored staff members were selected by President Richard Yao to ring the Navy ship bell signaling the beginning of the commencement ceremonies. Debbie Anaya, a Senior Cashier at Islands Café, rang the bell at the Saturday ceremonies, and Karen Gundelfinger, Executive Assistant to the Provost, rang the bell at the Sunday ceremonies.



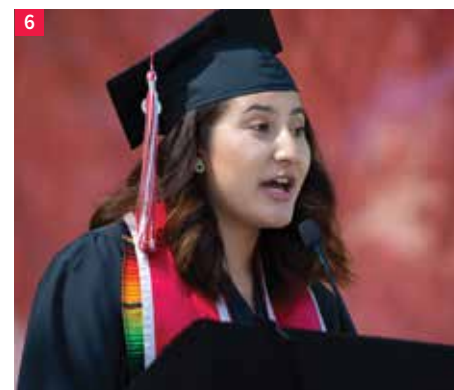
- 1 Bell ringer Debbie Anaya
- 2 Bell ringer Karen Gundelfinger
- 3 Student speaker Riley Atrops
- 4 Light of Learning carrier Debra Hoffmann
- 5 Student speaker Christian Sandoval
- 6 Student speaker Paulina Mata
- 7 CSUCI's Mechatronics Engineering inaugural graduating class
- 8 Student speaker Oliver Abinader
- 9 Light of Learning carrier Marilyn Buchanan

To view the recorded ceremonies, visit go.csuci.edu/commencement2022

The Light of Learning symbolizes the University's commitment to the life of the mind and the central role played by outstanding faculty. The Honorary Marshal who carries the Light of Learning is selected by the President as an administrator or faculty member who has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to students and the University. Debra Hoffmann, Library Head of Public Service & Outreach (Emeritus Faculty), was selected to carry the Light of Learning for the Saturday ceremonies, and Marilyn Buchanan, Professor of Education (retired), was chosen to carry the Light of Learning for the Sunday ceremonies.

President Yao and graduating students Christian Sandoval, B.A. Psychology; Paulina Mata, B.A. Communication; Riley Atrops, B.S. Chemistry; and Oliver Abinader, M.A. Biotechnology, provided remarks during the four ceremonies.

During the Saturday morning ceremony, an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters was awarded to Jeffrey T. Green, Founding CEO and Chairman of The Trade Desk (article on page 22). At the Sunday morning ceremony, an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters was awarded to Peter J. Taylor, President of the Educational Credit Management Corporation Foundation (article on page 23).





Data-inspired philanthropy creates new possibilities

by ABIGAIL NAPP

WHEN THE TRADE DESK CHAIRMAN, CEO and Founder Jeffrey T. Green discovered he would receive an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from CSUCI, he was thrilled and surprised.

“I was floored. I work with CSU Channel Islands because I believe the University is doing important work that is making a difference in the lives of many students,” he said. “It’s incredibly humbling to understand that the University believes this collaboration to be worthy of this kind of recognition, and it only emboldens me to want to do more.”

Since co-founding The Trade Desk in 2009, the 45-year-old billionaire has built one of the most leading-edge advertising technology companies in the world. With its corporate headquarters in Ventura, the company has also become a top recruiter for CSUCI alums.

“What strikes me about these talented graduates is not only the core skills they develop in the classroom, but also their highly developed sense of curiosity,” said Green. “I believe this is key to success in technology and probably in most fields. It’s so important to be curious about how things work and why things are organized the way they are.”

Green’s influence has impacted various initiatives across campus. His company employees participate in curriculum development and instruction for the digital advertising classes offered through CSUCI’s Martin V. Smith School of Business & Economics. Over the years, the Trade Desk has developed a talent pipeline and has hired 27 alumni.

Green said CSUCI alumni have a strong work ethic and appreciation for success.

“That sense of grit and drive is something I admire a great deal in people that we look to recruit,” he said. “It’s forged early in life, and CSU Channel Islands does a great job of helping [them] leverage it to be successful. We could

not be more thrilled to bring that spirit into our company.”

Green has also contributed to the CSUCI community through his family foundation. Since it launched in 2020, the foundation has made significant gifts and pledges exceeding \$3 million in support of peer mentorship programs and scholarships.

Green said he’s been impressed by the impact of these programs on CSUCI students, as well as the University’s



leadership for developing these programs. With years of experience running successful data-driven organizations, he has applied similar standards for measuring the progress of his philanthropic efforts at CSUCI. He plans to scale his efforts to other campuses in the California State University system.

“Not only have we seen significant improvements in terms of lowering drop-out rates, but we also get really positive feedback from embedded student peer mentors on what it means to them to play that role and how it is helping them in ways they had not anticipated,” he said. “It’s this kind of success that allows us to grow these programs and think about how we can apply the same thinking in other areas.”

ABOVE From left to right, President Richard Yao, Jeff Green, and CSU Trustee Wenda Fong at the May 21 ceremony.

An extraordinary life of service makes a difference

by ABIGAIL NAPP

WHEN PETER J. TAYLOR FIRST VISITED the CSUCI campus, something positive happened.

"I fell in love," he said. "It's a great spot with a fascinating location and a small-town college feel, which you don't often get in public universities."

During the May 22 commencement ceremony, Taylor received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from CSUCI for his efforts to help underserved students access and attain an education at four-year universities, like CSUCI, and technical colleges across the country.

A lifelong champion of higher education for all, Taylor has held an influential role in shaping California's public universities, having served as the University of California's first CFO and as a trustee of the California State University system.

After a successful career in several fields, including the California State legislature, investment banking, higher education management, and now philanthropy, Taylor's energy and optimism gives the impression he's just getting started. In fact, he's an expert.

Over the years, he's come to understand what works and what needs to change in universities so students can succeed.

"It's critical to make our democracy sustainable and uplift people from less fortunate circumstances, so they have a shot at earning a sustainable wage," he said.

Taylor's first involvement with the workings of higher education began in college when he served on a scholarship committee named after a family member who attended UCLA in 1927. After graduating with a B.A. in political science and history, Taylor continued to volunteer on committees years later, including a diversity committee and a task force on African American admissions.

Taylor's professional life took him to the California State legislature and then to finance, where he worked for 16 years. After retiring from investment banking, Taylor returned to his early love.

"We have a higher education system where you can look at a young person in the eye and tell them that if they do the right things, they will have a great shot in life," he said.

"They'll be exposed to ideas, people, and opportunities that will help them move toward circumstances they may have never believed were possible."

Taylor spent the next several years involved in the administration of public universities. He became the first Chief Financial Officer of the University of California, directing the financial management of 10 campuses, five academic medical centers, and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Later, he served as a trustee of the California State University system for seven years.

That said, Taylor knows today's students face unique challenges.

As the current President of the Educational Credit Management Corporation Foundation (ECMC), in Los Angeles, Taylor has led several initiatives to close achievement gaps by focusing on transfer students, single mothers, and individuals interested in pursuing a technical education. During his tenure, more than \$250 million in grants and investments have been awarded.

At CSUCI, Taylor's efforts have been integral to students' success. He has supported the University with a significant grant from the ECMC Foundation to support a summer bridge program designed to enhance transfer success for students in the Martin V. Smith School of Business & Economics through providing academic and financial support. The interventions provide opportunities for students to engage with faculty mentors, connect with campus support services, and engage with clubs and other opportunities. He also supported the campus' Basic Needs food pantry through a grant to the Cal State system. Taylor has also been involved with the CSUCI Foundation Board and served on the presidential search committee for former President Erika Beck.

"Our education system is the cornerstone for sustaining the opportunities that we have. It's a pathway forward," said Taylor.

The ECMC Foundation continues to provide help for students dealing with hunger and housing, two needs that have become of increasing concern for universities.

Moving forward, Taylor said ECMC will concentrate on education outcomes for men, and in particular, men of color.

RIGHT CSU Alumni Trustee Larry Adamson, Peter Taylor, and President Yao at the May 23 ceremony.



Alum forges challenging, successful path into higher education

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED

HOW DOES A SELF-DESCRIBED “KNUCKLEHEAD kid” from Compton on academic probation turn his life around and forge ahead into a successful career in higher education?

You get help from mentors, push through the hard times, and never, ever give up, advised Jeffery Alexander Jr., Ed.D, who is living proof that it can be done, and who is being recognized for his success.

Due to his determination and professional achievements, and for his commitment to giving back to the university that gave him so much, Alexander was chosen as CSUCI’s 2022 Distinguished Alumni awardee.

“I’m a proud alum and I care a lot about CSUCI, so it was an honor,” said Alexander.

Alexander described leaving Compton to join the CSUCI community as “complete culture shock,” which took a toll on his grades. At one point he was earning a 1.29 GPA and about to be academically disqualified.

Alexander credits former CSUCI administrators Trae Cotton, Greg Sawyer, and George Morten, as well as Professor of Psychology Virgil Adams, for “taking me under their wing, making sure I had support, because it was tough.”

In 2004-2005 Channel Islands was very different than it is today, he explained.

“While there are more African-

American students now, the population is still not very big but when I was

going there you literally could count African-American students on your hand, so it was a very difficult transition for me.”

“I didn’t even know doctors existed outside of a doctor’s office. That’s how green I was to just the world and education. Coming from where I did, I just didn’t really see that, so I had no clue,” Alexander said. “Just having those four Black men at CSUCI instill the confidence in me and those expectations they placed on me really powered me though.”

Alexander graduated from CSUCI in 2009 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication and earned a Master of Arts in Education from Ashford University.

“I looked up one day and I was in a doctoral program. Being a doctor is still really surreal to me because it was never the intended goal,” said Alexander, who received his Doctorate in Education from CSU Fresno in 2020.

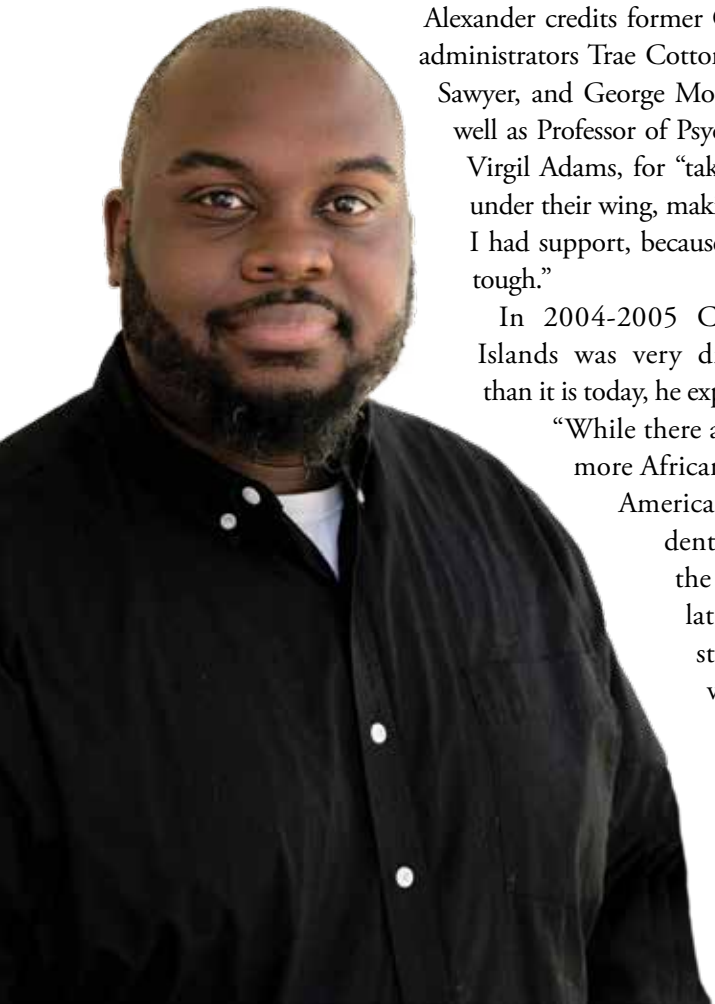
“I couldn’t imagine where my life would be if I did give up at 18 years old and dropped out. I would definitely not be in the position I am today. I would not have the level of comfort in life if I made that decision. Yes, it was a tough time. It was difficult to get through but pushing through it and coming out the other end, it was just so much greater,” he said.

Now he’s helping other students in his role as Associate Dean of Student Services at Pasadena City College.

“It’s me honoring the work that was instilled at CI. There are countless people there who helped me to get this far. So, for me, it’s the giving back and continuously attempting to help put particularly African American students in a better position than they currently are,” he said.

Alexander is still involved at CSUCI as President of the Black Alumni Chapter (article on the next page).

Director of Career Development & Alumni Engagement, Amanda Carpenter, Ed.D., said the Distinguished Alumni Award is highly competitive, but Alexander stood out and was selected from the CSUCI Alumni & Friends Association because of “the way he connects with the community and his unwavering commitment with supporting students’ success, particularly for Black students.”



BLACK ALUMNI CHAPTER DEBUTS, GROWS, AND PROVIDES INSPIRATION

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED

THE BLACK ALUMNI CHAPTER (BAC) IS THE FIRST OFFICIALLY recognized chapter of the Alumni & Friends Association (A&FA), setting the stage for future chapters to engage at CSUCI.

The BAC came about when '09 B.A. Communication alum Jeffery Alexander wanted to re-connect and help Black students and alumni in particular.

Alexander, who is Associate Dean of Student Services at Pasadena City College, said he had seen similar Black alumni chapters at other schools and wanted to bring one to CSUCI.

Alexander serves as the BAC president. He recruited '10 B.A. Communication alum Jeremy Booker, and they both started working directly with Associate Vice President for Student Affairs — Retention, Outreach, and Inclusive Student Services, Charles Osiris, Ph.D., who sponsored the effort and supported their work.

Director of Career Development & Alumni Engagement Amanda Carpenter, Ed.D., said the A&FA started meeting with the committed group over the Summer and Fall of 2021 on developing the fundamental structures they would need for the group to be officially recognized as the inaugural BAC chapter at CSUCI.

"We're hoping to grow that and establish additional chapters particularly when we think about our alumni base growing at a critical time for our campus," Carpenter said. "We're celebrating our 20th anniversary coming up in Fall 2022. We have 24,000+ Dolphins as of 2022 and our alumni represent our largest constituency group as an institution."

**"Helping to start the BAC is just one way I can give back to the University that gave so much to me."
—Jeffery Alexander**

The goal of the BAC is to "create and promote opportunities for students and alumni to connect, thus building a greater sense of community on campus and beyond."

The BAC supports current Black students and alumni through mentorship, career development, and networking opportunities; supports CSUCI's efforts to recruit and retain Black students, faculty and staff; promotes and encourages a campus climate conducive to student success; and guides students as they navigate and overcome challenges through their collegiate experience and beyond.

"We're excited, but there's still a lot more work ahead," said Alexander, who received CSUCI's 2022 Distinguished Alumni Award (see article on previous page). "Helping to start the BAC is just one way I can give back to the University that gave so much to me."

Alexander said the focus right now is to grow the BAC chapter. The best way to reach BAC is through their social media channels, including Instagram @BlackAlumniCSUCI and on Facebook @CIBlackAlumniChapter.



ABOVE TOP Alumnus Jeffery Alexander, '09 B.A. Communication.

ABOVE RIGHT Alumnus Jeremy Booker, '10 B.A. Communication.

LAUREN CRUZ, '08 B.S. BUSINESS & KEVIN CRUZ, '08 B.S. BUSINESS

Paying it forward

Alumni Lauren and Kevin Cruz graduated from CSUCI in 2008 and have been giving back ever since.

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED



WHILE ALUMNI COUPLE LAUREN CRUZ and Kevin Cruz have both had successful careers since they both graduated from CSUCI, they often reflect back on their time at the University and how it has been influential to their and others' success.

That is one of the reasons why they make a recurring gift to the University as members of the President's Circle, which helps support future students to pursue their academic aspirations.

"We've been donating at the President's Circle level ever since we graduated. We also donate whenever there's a unique fundraising opportunity," Kevin explained.

The couple first met in 2006 while taking a Business class together at CSUCI, and in their last semester at the University, they started dating.

They both graduated from CSUCI in 2008, with Kevin earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Business with a minor in Economics, and Lauren earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Business with an emphasis in entrepreneurship.

They also continued their education in law school, with Kevin at the University of Maryland School of Law, and Lauren at New York University School of Law. They both graduated from their respective graduate schools in 2014.

Throughout school, Kevin worked in the banking industry, where he used his business school knowledge. After graduating law school, he continued in the financial sector, this time as general counsel in charge of the legal department for a company that has banks and a credit union as its clients.

Lauren works for a law firm that prosecutes class actions on behalf of investors for public companies.

Lauren said she still uses skills she learned from her Business undergraduate degree in various ways.

"In my mind it's all been very cohesive as far as education that helps me thrive in my career today," Lauren said.

Both Lauren and Kevin have local ties to the community. She grew up in Thousand Oaks, and he grew up in Simi Valley, so it seemed a natural choice when they originally decided to attend CSUCI.

They completed their degrees while the University was still in its four-year probationary period before becoming fully accredited through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges in 2007. Kevin noted that it was exciting to graduate the first year after the University was fully accredited.

"We took sort of a gamble on making that work for us. I think it paid off well, and we're really thankful for what the school set us up to be able to do that even though we started at the small-town underdog, just-getting-started school," Kevin said.

"We really enjoyed watching the school expand and grow over the years just before we even went there and now,"
—Lauren Cruz

"It gave us a lot of flexibility when we were there, since it was a pretty small community at the time, and the administration was wonderful. They made sure we got the classes we needed," Lauren added.

With their careers now in full gear and a growing family (the couple has two young children), they reflected on what the school has given them and others.

"We really enjoyed watching the school expand and grow over the years just before we even went there and now. It's just been blossoming, and we really enjoy supporting that process, just as graduates of the school and people who live in the community that it really supports and helps develop," Lauren said.

Kevin said he believes CSUCI provides a lot of great advantages to students who live in the area, and the University also helps the community thrive.

"It's also important because we met there, we graduated from there, so it's very near and dear to us, and we like to support it," he said.

Patricio Ruano '21 B.S. Biology & B.A. Global Studies

Medical School Dreams Come True

by ABIGAIL NAPP

PATRICIO RUANO KNEW HE WANTED TO be a doctor from the moment a cardiologist saved his father from a near-fatal heart attack in rural Guatemala. But he doubted his academic potential.

At CSUCI, everything changed. His vocational wish became an attainable goal.

"I feel almost indebted," said Ruano. "CSUCI turned me into the person who could get into medical school."

In college, Ruano spent many enriching years filled with meaningful mentorships, professional experiences, and rewarding community service activities. In 2021, he graduated with not one degree, but two, a B.S. in Biology and a B.A. in Global Studies.

Now, two years into medical school at Michigan State University, he understands why the values, skills, and nurturing relationships he developed at CSUCI remain vivid and inspiring.

"Every professor I had at CSUCI was a dream professor," he said. "In medical school, I talk to classmates who tell me how their universities were more of an academic institution that didn't prioritize teaching. At CSUCI, they're there to teach and mentor."

Ruano grew up in Los Angeles and was the first in his family to graduate from a four-year university. At CSUCI, he completed the summer bridge experience and was part of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) for first generation students.

His interactions with faculty and staff were personable, memorable, and validating from the start. The genuine warmth and encouragement of one particular staff member, Kari Moss, who was excited by his desire to become a doctor, stayed with him years after orientation.

"Hearing those words — so sincere — from professional staff was a big deal," he said.

Ruano soon overcame his academic doubts and excelled. He pursued scientific research, clinical experiences in regional hospitals, and an impactful study abroad trip to India.

As a freshman and sophomore, he completed an undergraduate research fellowship, surveying a bat species on

Santa Rosa Island. Then he worked in a laboratory with Professor of Biology Nikita Parmar, Ph.D., analyzing the interaction between cancer cells and artificial sweeteners, like Sweet'N Low®.

"It was crazy stuff working with cancer cells at 19 and 20 years old," he said. "That was a huge privilege and honor."

During his junior year, he participated in a trip to India also led by Parmar. While touring an eco-village just a half-hour east of Mumbai, he met with Hindu leaders who talked about spirituality and healthcare. There, Ruano learned how treatment

included not only the diagnosis and eradication of disease, but also the connection and care for the patient's wellbeing.

"Now in medical school, I've seen how it can become algorithmic as you look for the diagnosis, but I still hear the words of the Swami we met in rural India," he said. "His ideas really gave me a purpose. He said, 'Wherever you are, whatever you do, you need to have compassion and empathy.'"

Another extremely foundational experience at CSUCI was becoming a COPE Health Scholar. For two years, Ruano gained on-the-ground clinical medical experience at the local St. John's Hospitals.

One day, when his studies are complete, he hopes to return to Ventura County as Dr. Patricio Ruano.



ABOVE Patricio Ruano at Michigan State University medical school.

ALUM CREDITS UNIVERSITY WITH BUSINESS PREPARATION

by MICHELE WILLER-ALLRED

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS OF CSUCI ALUMNI CONTINUE TO shine, and Kevin Schallert is no exception as the Chief Operating Officer of a biotech company offering a more cost-effective way for people to do COVID-19 testing.

Schallert graduated from CSUCI with a bachelor's degree in Political Science and was on the University's sailing team. But he also studied Math and had an interest in Quantitative Biology. That led him to working as a research associate with the Southern California Research Learning Center for the National Park Service, where he helped with bird population studies out on the Channel Islands.

Schallert developed a professional background in high-growth startups and mathematical programming. When the pandemic began, he took a leave of absence as managing partner of Chambre LP so he could work full-time on figuring out a way to help.

He ended up becoming co-director of the COVID-19 National Scientist Volunteer Database, a curated database of more than 10,000 professional scientists from all over the United States and surrounding territories who wanted to volunteer their time, expertise, and consumables to help people respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

In response to the pandemic, Schallert co-founded and became Chief Operating Officer of FloodLAMP Biotechnologies, which aims to provide rapid, high-quality, and easy-to-run molecular COVID-19 testing that is also affordable.

“We think there’s a lot of industry reasons why testing is more expensive than it should be — we’d like to make technology more freely available, and make it so anyone has access to low-cost, molecular testing.”
—Kevin Schallert

“We developed a test that is primarily used by first responders. While this test had previously cost \$100 to administer, it can now cost about \$1 per person, and it doesn’t require any training or expensive equipment,” Schallert said.

He explained that the test is operated primarily now by firefighters in city government, who were able to increase its use from just giving tests to unvaccinated employees to testing every employee multiple times a week.

“We think there’s a lot of industry reasons why testing is more expensive than it should be — we’d like to make technology more freely available, and make it so anyone has access to low-cost, molecular testing,” he said.

Schallert said being at a smaller university such as CSUCI was beneficial in preparing him for the business world by giving him the skill sets needed to succeed.

“When we joined the sailing team, we were able to talk to everybody, from professors who came out with us to the President of the University. We had the confidence to work with anybody no matter what their perceived status was to solve problems,” he said.

While Schallert doesn’t race sailboats anymore, he appreciates keeping in touch with the friends he gained while at the University, as well as the confidence he gained by interacting with other students, faculty, and staff, with different backgrounds and perspectives, which has helped him work collaboratively with others to find solutions for world-wide issues.



Christiane Ochoa, '10 B.S. Psychology & B.A. Spanish

Alumna and U.S. diplomat credits her professors with putting the world within her reach

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

I F NOT FOR THE CSUCI FACULTY members who showed her a world of possibilities, 2010 alumna Christiane Ochoa wonders if she ever would have become a U.S. diplomat.

Ochoa, now 34, is a Population, Health and Nutrition officer with the US Agency for International Development (USAID), helping to provide health programs to developing countries all over the world.

The first in her family to attend college, Ochoa and her sister were the children of a single mother in North Hollywood.

"My mom just worked all the time," Ochoa said. "Sometimes we lived with friends, sometimes with family. But we had food on the table and a roof over our heads."

It wasn't until she enrolled at CSUCI that she learned she could reach for the stars — like when retired Professor of Physics Jerry Clifford, Ph.D., guided her through the night sky.

"He had these binoculars and he showed me a little red star and said, 'If you look at this, you can see it's really an entire galaxy,'" Ochoa said. "I felt so small and it filled me with wonder."

The faculty members who helped her discover her potential were

numerous, including Associate Professor of Psychology Beatrice de Oca, Ph.D., who helped Ochoa with a research project, or Art Lecturer Christophe Bourély, who

changed her life.

Each night in Granada, Spain, Ochoa would hike up the hill to the Alhambra palace and watch the sun set over the city.

"I'm Spanish on both sides of my family," she said. "It gave me a very deep connection with my ancestors and that country."

After she returned home and declared a second major in Spanish, Ochoa signed up for the Peace Corps in Madagascar, where she counseled mothers about nutrition and vaccinated undernourished babies.

She graduated from CSUCI with a dual degree in Psychology and Spanish, then went on to earn a Master of Public Health (MPH) at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health in New York, which led to her current job as a U.S. diplomat.

Ochoa is now living in Eugene, Oregon, preparing for her next overseas assignment, and making plans to marry her fiancé, Jake Coalwell, whom she met at CSUCI.

Professor of Psychology Kevin Volkan, Ph.D., Ed.D., wrote her a recommendation to help her get into Columbia.

"Christiane is really an exceptional person," Volkan said. "She is truly a testament that our students have no limits to what they can accomplish."



ABOVE Christiane Ochoa works as a USAID officer.

JANA PLAT, '13 B.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political Science alumna works her way to the White House

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

WASHINGTON D.C. ALWAYS BECKONED Political Science alumna Jana Plat, but she never imagined she would one day have a desk in the White House.

“My mom worked for Joe Biden’s first senatorial campaign in ‘72, so I heard all of these stories about it,” Plat said. “For me, it’s a full circle moment that I’m here.”

Plat works in the Office of Public Engagement for the Biden administration, and is finding the nation’s capital just as exhilarating as she imagined.

“There are endless possibilities here,” Plat said. “There is such a large international component I wasn’t prepared for in D.C.”

Plat grew up in Ventura where her parents ran a window and door company while Plat held court with her two older brothers.

“I was always Judge Jana instead of Judge Judy,” she said.

Plat’s penchant for public service began at her politically active mother’s elbow.

“I have been involved in campaigns since I was eight,” Plat said. “I loved PTA meetings. I loved city council.”

After Plat enrolled at CSUCI, she served as a senator in student government and took every opportunity to get involved in public service.

“I got to know Jana when she was a member of our Model United Nations team,” said Professor of Political Science Andrea Grove, Ph.D. “It’s great to see that she’s in public service, which was always her goal when she was at CSUCI.”

Plat worked on California Senator Hannah Beth Jackson’s campaign during her senior year and accepted a job with Jackson as one of her district representatives. Then, Plat moved to DC in 2014, determined to succeed there.

“I came here with one suitcase, one pillow and haven’t looked back,” Plat said.

Plat landed a job at the Progressive Policy Institute and then Business Forward, which led to her current job in the White House.

Among her favorite stories about President Joe Biden was when he stuck his head out of a meeting in the



ABOVE From left to right, Aspen Institute Fellow Al Fitzpayne, President Joe Biden, and CSUCI alumna Jana Plat at the White House.

Roosevelt Room one day and asked about retrieving a guest’s cell phone in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB).

“I said, ‘Mr. President, I will go get it,’” Plat said.

She kicked off her heels, sprinted through the West Wing, across campus and up two flights of stairs to get the phone, then raced back, the phone in one hand, her stilettos in the other.

“I ran into a U.S. Marine and had to hang onto him, drenched in sweat, while I put my shoes back on,” she said.

Plat delivered the cell phone to President Biden, who thanked her and proceeded to make a surprise call to the guest’s mother.

Plat credits CSUCI with a career that allows her memorable moments like this, and a promising career in a city she loves.

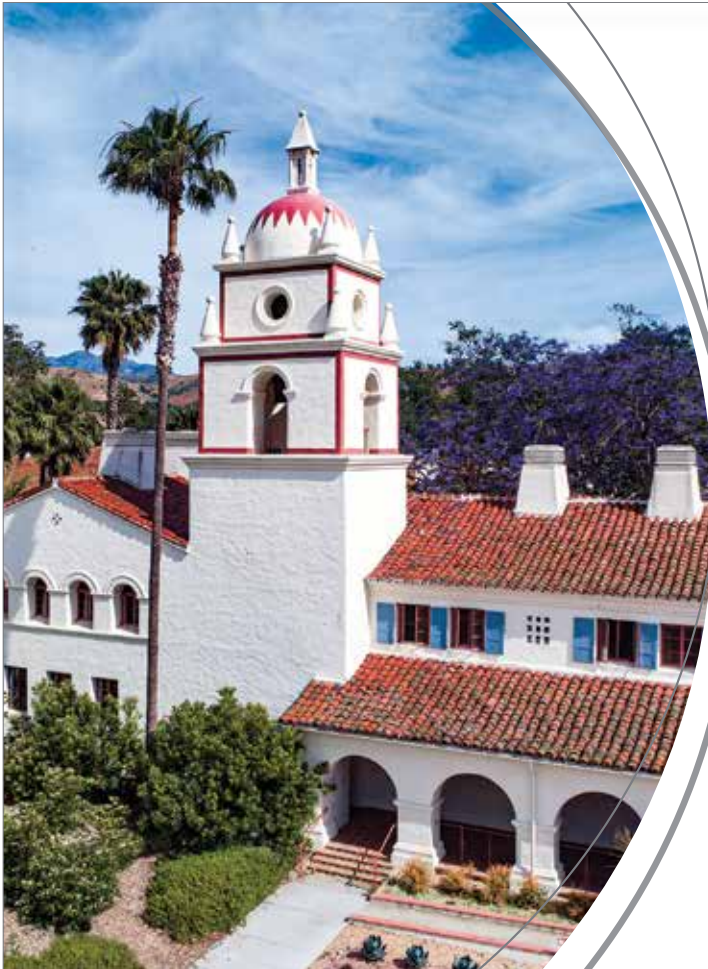
“I wouldn’t have the support system I have without CSUCI,” she said. “There were so many facets of the University that gave me the confidence to support my dream.”



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