

# Channel

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHANNEL ISLANDS / 2024 Spring Magazine

## Restoring Lahaina

A trip to Maui to help with restoration efforts inspires students and faculty with hope to return.

page 16





# Channel

Spring 2024 / Vol. 28 / No. 2 / 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 by the Communication & Public Relations office.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please send correspondence to [channel@csuci.edu](mailto:channel@csuci.edu), mail to: CSU Channel Islands, Communication & Public Relations, One University Drive, Camarillo CA 93012-8599, or call 805-437-8415.

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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



## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Dear *Channel* readers,

CSUCI first began publishing a bi-annual University newsletter, *Currents*, before the University officially opened in 2002, which later developed into a full-color magazine renamed *Channel*, highlighting campus news and accomplishments, and stories about our students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, and community partners.

Now two years into our third decade, the University continues to make strides towards our sustainability goals. Accordingly, beginning in Fall 2024, we will significantly reduce the number of printed magazines. We will continue to have *Channel* available in a web format as a digital magazine at [go.csuci.edu/channel](http://go.csuci.edu/channel).

When a new issue is published, readers will receive an email that includes a link to the *Channel* webpage where current and past issues of the magazine can be accessed. Though the default setting will be to provide digital access in this way, for any reader who prefers to receive a printed copy of *Channel*, we will gladly accommodate that request.

Readers can notify us of their preference to receive a printed copy of each new issue through any of the following methods:

- Email [channel@csuci.edu](mailto:channel@csuci.edu) and note a preference to receive a printed version mailed to a stated address.
- Call 805-437-8415 and leave a message noting a preference to receive a printed version mailed to a stated address.
- Scan the QR code below and note a preference to receive a printed version mailed to a stated address.

We continue to enjoy sharing news and articles about CSU Channel Islands with all readers. Thank you for your understanding as we implement these changes to advance our sustainability goals.

Sincerely,

Nancy Covarrubias Gill, '05

*Channel Executive Editor*

*Associate Vice President for Communication & Public Relations*

Scan here for *Channel*





## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Our identity for the next decade and beyond*

As we conclude another academic year at CSU Channel Islands, it is clearer than ever what sets our institution apart and the significant value we offer to the region we serve. In the final weeks of May, I had the opportunity to attend various events such as Project CI (formerly known as “Arts Under the Stars”), the Celebration of Service hosted by the Center for Community Engagement, the Student Research Conference, the Choral Spectacular 2024, as well as several program-specific and affinity-based pre-Commencement ceremonies for graduates. The highlight was undoubtedly our Commencement ceremonies held on May 18.

Events like these, along with countless others throughout the year, plainly answer the question, “Why CSUCI?”. They showcased the impact of our dedicated faculty and staff on the current and future successes of our students, their families, and the broader community. It is through such events that we see the true value of CSUCI and the transformative effect it has on the lives of those we serve.

Looking ahead, we are gearing up for our strategic planning effort, CSUCI for 2030+, which will be informed by a comprehensive review by the WASC Senior College & University Commission (WSCUC), our self-study for reaccreditation, and recommendations from various campus collectives that have spent the last two years studying campus data and recommending actions for continuous improvement. This strategic plan aims to bridge past initiatives with future goals, emphasizing values like diversity, inclusivity, and professional growth, while fostering cross-divisional teamwork.

As we embark on our third decade, I am excited about the prospects for CSUCI. Embracing challenges and navigating changing landscapes, we are introducing the concept of One Health to address interconnected challenges holistically. I encourage you to read the article on pages 14-15, which provides more details about how CSUCI will use this One Health approach in our strategic planning through 2030, as well as inviting you to learn more and engaging in our campus-wide Vision Chat at [go.csuci.edu/vision-chat](http://go.csuci.edu/vision-chat). Additionally, we look forward to the Fall semester when we will receive feedback from our recent WSCUC accreditation visit, guiding our successes and identifying areas of improvement to steer CSUCI into the next decade.

I express my gratitude to our students, faculty, staff and University supporters for their unwavering dedication and service, which continues to uplift and inspire our community.

Sincerely,

Richard Yao, Ph.D.  
*President*

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**ON THE COVER** Twenty CSUCI students traveled to Lahaina, Maui in January to assist in restoring land destroyed by the fires in August 2023.

# CSUCI NEWS



Excelencia in Education is partnering with CSUCI to accelerate Latino student success.

## Partnership with Excelencia in Education to Champion Evidence-based Program for Latino Student Success

CSUCI has gratefully and proudly accepted an invitation to partner with Excelencia in Education, the nation's premier authority on efforts to accelerate Latino student success in higher education. Through this partnership, we will be able to share, on a national stage, evidence-based programs developed at CSUCI that have been proven to support higher education achievements – not only for Latino students, but for all historically under-represented groups in colleges and universities.

CSUCI is one of 24 colleges and universities nationwide supporting this release to inspire educators, community leaders, funders, and policymakers to replicate and scale data-informed practices that benefit Latinos in higher education. Read more at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-lss](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-lss)

## Online Health Science Degree first in the CSU system

CSUCI offers first online Bachelor of Science (BS) in Health Science degree completion program in the CSU system. The fully online program intends to serve working professionals who would like to complete their four-year degree to advance in their careers as well as individuals newly interested in joining a growing industry.

The critical need for health care professionals across the nation is what inspired CSUCI's efforts to design an online Health Sciences degree. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects the health care and assistance field

to add nearly 4 million jobs by 2026, which would constitute about one-third of all new jobs. Looking further out, the BLS predicts the need for medical and health service managers will rise by 28.4% between 2022 and 2032.

Read more at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-ohs](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-ohs)

## Campus Releases Sustainability Report 2022-2023

The University's Annual Sustainability Report for fiscal year 2022-2023 has been released. The Sustainability Report provides updates on CSUCI's progress toward energy, water, and waste reduction goals, sustainability initiatives, and helpful tips to reduce negative impacts on the environment. This year's report also features a link to CSUCI's new interactive Solar Energy dashboard. The report is available at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-sr23](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-sr23)



Alejandra Arroyo



Sheila Ferer



Alejandra Arroyo (left) and Sheila Ferer showcased their work at TAGC2024.

## Biology students shine at The Allied Genetics Conference

Alejandra Arroyo and Sheila Ferer, undergraduate scientists in the Tapia Lab at CSUCI, recently showcased their groundbreaking research at The Allied Genetics Conference (TAGC) 2024 in Washington D.C., shedding light on how organisms adapt to dry environments and the drying and rehydration cycles.

Arroyo's work focused on substances known as com-



patible solutes and how they help different organisms survive extremely dry conditions. Ferer discussed her new method to study how yeast cells change their proteins when they go through periods of drying out and then getting rehydrated. Read more at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-tagc](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-tagc)



CSUCI CERT completed its training to support emergency preparedness.

### First-ever CSUCI CERT group completes training

The first-ever CSUCI Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), made up of volunteers from campus and the local community, recently completed their training to support emergency preparedness. CERT is made up of volunteers who are trained in a variety of roles so they can assist in the event of a disaster. Read more at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-cert](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-cert)

### Master of Public Administration (MPA) program to start in Fall 2024

The new MPA program will provide a diverse student body with an unparalleled, student-centered graduate education. Faculty will help students to grow leadership, management, and innovative problem-solving skills in public administration and policy analysis, grounded in the values of ethical behavior, teamwork, and diversity. Graduates of the program will demonstrate responsibility to society and commitment to service, education, and the benefits of life-long learning. Read more at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-mpa](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-mpa)

### National Marine Sanctuary Foundation awards \$375,000

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Debris Program, via a subaward from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF), awarded \$375,000 to CSUCI's Santa Rosa Research Station

project: "High-Impact and Large Marine Debris Removal throughout the National Marine Sanctuary System."

This project will continue the removal and sustainable disposal efforts of marine debris on the northern Channel Islands. In addition, the project will help identify new accumulation sites and conduct removals on identified high-impact beaches and create volunteer opportunities to expose students to organizations such as the National Park Service (NPS), NOAA, Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS), and NMSF.

### Global Studies alumna launches non-governmental agency to benefit Madagascar

During the year she was volunteering with the Peace Corps as a teacher in Madagascar, CSUCI alumna Alyson Lucas witnessed daily the severity of the country's water crisis. Lucas went to Madagascar with the Peace Corps right after she graduated in 2022 with a degree in Global Studies and stayed until Fall of 2023. Then, she and another Peace Corps worker from Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Will Huestis, started their own non-governmental agency (NGO).

It's called Zarasoa – which means "sharing good" – and the mission is to train Madagascar locals to harvest rain-water using a technique developed by a similar NGO that concentrates on a different part of the country. The system involves building 5,000-liter basins to trap rain-water, and has proven to be an economical and effective alternative to drilling for water. Read more at: [go.csuci.edu/channel-al](https://go.csuci.edu/channel-al)



CSUCI alumna Alyson Lucas is launching Zarasoa to train Madagascar locals.



Assistant Professor of Communication Katherine Elder and Political Science Lecturer Tim Allison give a lecture to a political science class.

# Lessons in democracy

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

IT IS A WELL-DOCUMENTED FACT THAT COLLEGE-educated people are more likely to vote and become actively engaged in their communities. It is therefore unsurprising that many CSUCI faculty consider it part of their mission to teach students the nuts and bolts of democracy so they can make informed choices at the ballot box—particularly in 2024.

At least 64 countries, including the U.S. and the European Union, will head to the polls in 2024, making it the largest number of people ever to vote somewhere in the world—about half the global population.

“We haven’t had this great moment of upheaval in

generations,” said CSUCI Political Science Lecturer Tim Allison. “Like the days surrounding Pearl Harbor or Watergate, today’s headlines require us to cast an informed ballot if we care about democracy.”

Assistant Professor of Communication Katherine Elder feels the same way. She teaches a class called Political Communication, in which she covers elections, debates, the press, campaigns, political communication theories, navigating social media, and more.

“We have this uncommonly polarized election coming up,” Elder said. “I think this is an opportunity in real time for students to evaluate and analyze the messages flying around in our social and political world.”

Elder and Allison require their students to volunteer for a campaign of their choice to familiarize them with phone banking, social media posting, drafting opinion editorials, or working with campaign staff.

“Working on this campaign was an eye-opening and amazing learning experience,” one student wrote when reflecting on the experience. “It really helped me better understand how a campaign is run, especially at a municipal level.”

Allison teaches a course called “Campaigns and Elections,” in which he demystifies the voting process





Left: Assistant Professor of Communication Katherine Elder speaks to the class. Top: Lecturer Tim Allison. Above: Students listen to the lecture and take notes.

and familiarizes students with the mechanics of a political campaign, often with guest speakers like former Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, Ventura County District Attorney Erik Naserenko, and Ventura County Registrar of Voters, Michelle Ascencion.

“It’s important to remember that not every state does their voting processes the same way,” Ascencion told the “Campaigns and Elections” class. “Vote by mail, for example, is very secure in California because every ballot has to be signed, and when you mail it, your vote is locked in, and you can’t vote again in person.”

Hearing from Ascencion was enlightening to stu-

dents like Jasmine Williams.

“I really didn’t know voting by mail was that secure,” Williams said. “Hearing that from the voting registrar’s perspective, I feel a lot safer voting by mail than in person.”

Faculty members in these courses do not share their political leanings but seek to empower their students by teaching them critical thinking skills so they can develop their own views.

“Teaching people about how democracy works is critically important right now, especially for young people,” Allison said. “I don’t care if

they’re Republican, Democrat, Green Party, or anything else—I just want them to be educated.”

**“Teaching people about how  
democracy works is critically  
important right now, especially  
for young people,”  
-Tim Allison**



Serve It Up CSUCI students, faculty and staff. BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Carolina Rios, Victoria Ferrer, Jasmin Garduno, Pooja Darji, Susana Navarro, FIZZ, Sierra Allison, Edilma Gomez, Ashley Rayne Lowry, KARA, MJ Stutzman, Daniel Seo, Jennifer Raymond, Emily Spitler-Lawson; FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Chaitali Vadgama, Monique Zavala, Janessa Barrera, Jacqueline Villa, Maddie Fernandez, Alyssa Banaszekiewicz

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# *Serve It Up*

## *A deeper learning experience*

by PAMELA DEAN

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**S**HOVELING MUD AND MOLDY HAY ISN'T YOUR typical college curriculum. However, for students enrolled in CSUCI's Serve It Up Learning Community, the lessons gained from helping to tidy up a local therapeutic riding facility were invaluable.

The Serve It Up Learning Community was created by faculty members Susan Lefevre and Emily Spitler-Lawson, in partnership with CSUCI's Center for Community Engagement. Serve It Up focuses on service, activism, and social justice as a way to help students gain life skills and a sense of community. As part of that focus, 13 first-year students in Spitler-Lawson's Serve It Up English 105 course spent a day during the Spring semester volunteering at the nonprofit Ride On Therapeutic Horsemanship program in Newbury Park. The students cleared mud and moved hay onto trucks

after a winter storm caused a drainage channel to clog and overflow, ruining the ranch's feed supply.

Although the tasks may have seemed menial, the experience had a profound impact on many of the participants.

"I tend to forget that the world can be a very beautiful, loving place, and organizations like Ride On give me hope," said Pre-Nursing major MJ Stutzman. "I felt oddly connected to nature for the first time in a very long time. I came home and emptied hay out of my shoes for a good 30 minutes. I also found this to be a very good bonding experience for us as a unit. I talked to students that I never really had an actual conversation with, and that's always a great thing."

The Ride On program teaches adaptive horseback riding to children and adults with physical and cogni-





Student volunteers hauled out old hay, cleared mud from a clogged drainage channel, and spent time outdoors and with the therapy horses.



tive disabilities. The organization also provides physical, occupational, speech, and language therapy, specializing in using the horse's movement to improve specific medical conditions.

In addition to cleaning up the ranch, students learned about the nonprofit's mission and how riding and interacting with horses can help those with disabilities in multiple ways. They also got to spend time with the horses.

"My favorite part of the day was definitely getting to meet the horses," said Pre-Nursing major Susana Navarro. "Being around them brought me a lot of peace, which is something I needed, and it put a smile on my face."

According to Spitler-Lawson, visiting the Ride On program helped many of her students who plan on pursuing careers in health care gain new insights into how they can utilize their majors.

"Lots of students hadn't even thought about horses as an opportunity for therapeutic care," explained Spitler-Lawson. "Many of my students are Health Science majors and told me that they saw how they could connect horses with their career path."

"I learned so much about horses and their endless benefits," added Madison Fernandez, another Pre-Nursing major who attended the event. "After getting to feel the horses, I could instantly see how they might comfort someone with a disability or medical condition. I experienced the gentleness of horses and how they can boost your emotional well-being and confidence."

Lefevre has taken students to volunteer at the Ride On facility in the past and agrees the experience has a powerful impact on students.

"Some have never been near a horse or gotten dirty. Being outdoors is a wonderful experience for them," said Lefevre. "It really opens their eyes and shows them a totally different world. It doesn't feel like academics to

**“Some have never been near a horse or gotten dirty. Being outdoors is a wonderful experience for them,”**

**–SUSAN LEFEVRE**

them, but at the same time, they are putting together all the things they have learned."

"Every single time we've gone out to do a service event as a group, the feeling after helping our community is so rewarding," said Liberal Studies major Victoria Ferrer. "It felt so nice to once again be a part of something bigger than myself. Being a volunteer has so many benefits, not only for me but also for those we get to help."





# Commencement 2024

CSUCI CELEBRATED COMMENCEMENT WITH TWO in-person ceremonies held on campus May 18 at the South Quad. Thousands of parents, families, and friends cheered for graduating students who received bachelor's or master's degrees, and credentials, during the morning and afternoon ceremonies. Students eligible to graduate were 2,380 with more than 1,550 participating in the ceremonies.

During the morning ceremony, an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters was awarded to Vanessa Bechtel, Chief Executive Officer of the Ventura County Community Foundation, who was a first-generation student and is a staunch supporter of higher education. During the afternoon ceremony, former CSUCI Counseling & Psychological Services counselor Angela Timmons, who has dedicated her professional life to supporting peoples'

mental health, received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters. Both community leaders were honored for their continued support of CSUCI and its students. **To read more about the honorary doctorate recipients see page 12 or visit: [go.csuci.edu/HD2024](https://go.csuci.edu/HD2024).**

Graduating student speakers selected to provide remarks during the ceremonies included Sean Himebaugh in the morning, and Daisy Navarette, ASI Student Government President, in the afternoon.

Ivana Montalvo sang the National Anthem in the morning and Miguela Soriano in the afternoon. Welcome greetings in Spanish were offered by Maurine Barboza in the morning and Silvia Acosta Pérez in the afternoon.

**To read more about Commencement 2024 visit: [go.csuci.edu/ch-comm24](https://go.csuci.edu/ch-comm24)**





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1 ASI Student Government President Daisy Navarette takes a selfie of the commencement audience during her afternoon speech.

2 A pair of graduating friends

3 CSU Trustee Larry Adamson speaks at Commencement.

4 Julia "Jules" Balén, Faculty Development Fellow and Professor of English and Freedom & Justice Studies carries the Light of Learning.

5 Maurine Barboza offered a welcome in Spanish in the morning.

6 Graduates pose proudly.

7 Silvia Acosta Pérez welcomed guests in Spanish in the afternoon.

8 Academic Senate Chair and Professor of Mathematics Jason Miller carried the CSUCI Mace and welcomed graduates and guests.

9 Newly-graduated friends celebrate.

10 Miguela Soriano sings the National Anthem in the afternoon.

11 Ivana Montalvo sings the National Anthem in the morning.

12 Sean Himebaugh spoke in the morning.



# Local leaders honored

*Honorary doctorates bestowed on two county leaders whose lives were shaped by higher education*

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**V**ENTURA COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (VCCF) Chief Executive Officer Vanessa Bechtel and retired CSUCI Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) counselor Angela Timmons each received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree during CSUCI's 2024 Commencement ceremonies on Saturday, May 18.

Timmons' support for the University includes developing a community for CSUCI's Black students and supporting countless other students during their most challenging moments when she was a counselor with CAPS.

Timmons was born and raised in Oxnard, developing a passion for gospel music early in her life. With that love came confidence and inspiration. Timmons attended Columbia College in Missouri, where she and several other students formed a gospel group called Children of God. The group gained popularity and performed all over the state of Missouri. Timmons then went on to pursue her degrees in social work at Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University) before earning a Doctor of Public Administration from the University of La Verne.

Her passion for gospel singing enabled her to make lasting connections when she served as the Director of



Social Services for Ventura County. She also served as a counselor from 2014 to 2019 for CSUCI's Counseling & Psychological Services until her retirement from the University.

She is overwhelmed with gratitude at receiving an honorary doctorate, and thanks those upon whose shoulders she stands, and the CSUCI campus. "Whenever I set foot on campus, it's magical," Timmons said, "I am in awe of the professors, the staff and their dedication to the students, making students the center of the equation."

Bechtel and her sister grew up in a low-income home. Her mom was a hospice night shift worker, and her father had many different jobs – from selling RVs to doing photography at street fairs in San Francisco.

After graduating from UCSB with a degree in Law and Society, Bechtel went on to earn her master's degree from the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California.

Prior to joining VCCF in 2015, Bechtel served as the Executive Director of the Santa Barbara City College Foundation.

She had heard about CSUCI's mission to create fundamental access to education and wanted to be a part of it when she came to Ventura County.

"I love Cal State Channel Islands," Bechtel said. "Having just volunteered this past semester in a communication class, I was in awe of the close rapport the professors had with their students. I would have really loved to have gone here, and it would have been really helpful to me."

According to President Yao, "The impacts on our region of these two extraordinary women are as profound as they are deserving of this honorary doctorate bestowed upon them by the CSU Board of Trustees."

**To learn more about Timmons and Bechtel, visit:**  
[go.csuci.edu/hondocs2024](https://go.csuci.edu/hondocs2024)



ABOVE: President Yao congratulates Angela Timmons on her honorary doctorate; LEFT: Vanessa Bechtel speaks to the Commencement crowd having received her honorary doctorate.



# Triplet sisters thrive

by PAMELA DEAN

**E** SUCI SECOND-YEAR students Ashleigh, Jasmine, and Whitley Williams are triplets and best friends.

The 19-year-olds from Lake Perris in Riverside County all chose to attend CSUCI but have different majors and different career aspirations.

Ashleigh is majoring in Anthropology and minoring in Psychology. She is deciding between becoming a medical examiner or pursuing a career in forensic science.

Whitley is majoring in Psychology and wants to become a child life specialist before pursuing a doctorate in Clinical Child Psychology. "I feel like more attention needs to be paid to the mental health needs of children," she explained. "I want to help children feel better about themselves."

Jasmine is majoring in Political Science and minoring in Freedom and Justice studies. She plans to attend law school and then practice global law for the United Nations. Currently she is serving as vice president of the Black Student Union.

They all picked CSUCI after falling in love with its lush beauty. The

fact that it was 10 minutes from the ocean was also a major plus.

"When we toured the campus, it was very green and open and had a lot of history. We were really drawn to that," said Jasmine.

The sisters are extremely close and supportive of each other. Moving away from home and adjusting to life on a university campus was a lot easier because they had each other.

"When we all decided to go to the same school, it was very comforting. I knew I would have two other people to lean on for support," Jasmine said. "I am not stressing out like some other students I know who don't have family around them. I always have a friend to talk to."

The three share a room in Santa Cruz Village on campus, along with

one other student. After attending for a year and a half, they are still enthusiastic about the University and find CSUCI professors approachable, engaging, and passionate about what they teach.

"I really like the small class sizes and the ability to interact with the professors one-on-one," said Whitley.

"It is exciting for me to meet and interact with other anthropology majors," added Ashleigh.

And they wouldn't trade being triplets for anything in the world.

"It's fun being a triplet and having your two best friends as sisters," said Ashleigh. "We know everything about each other, and we know each other's secrets. We are always around each other and never get bored. We also help each other accomplish our goals."



The Williams triplets are close friends and sisters. FROM LEFT: Jasmine, Whitley and Ashleigh.



A view of sat'wiwa, the Chumash's sacred mountain also known as Round Mountain in the distance, and the CSUCI campus in the foreground.

# The meaning of One Health – for the world and for CSUCI

by JENNIFER PERRY AND KAIA TOLLEFSON

**N**OW IN ITS 20S, WHAT DOES THE NEXT decade and beyond look like for CSU Channel Islands – for its students, faculty, staff, and community partners, and for the region as a whole? What is the vision for tomorrow and into the future? Launched in Fall 2023, One Health/CSUCI 2030+ is the University's framework for answering these questions. "One Health" is the thematic glue binding together several CSUCI 2030+ strategies that we are now working to define, with action planning to follow.

This introductory article focuses on exploring the meaning of One Health – for the world in general, and for CSUCI and the region we serve in particular.

Adopted by organizations, institutions, and agencies around the globe, at its simplest, One Health is a formal recognition that the health and wellness

of people, the economy, and the environment are all interconnected, and that today's issues must be addressed by working together across different professions, networks, and technologies. Achieving this level of collaboration requires rethinking traditional approaches to education and further promoting what CSUCI excels at doing.

It is easy to see the concept of One Health showing up within CSUCI's popular health-related programs, including Health Science, Nursing, and Psychology, but it is relevant to all disciplines and careers. The top skill sets sought after in many industries today are those needed for adapting and responding to a rapidly changing world. They are found in One Health approaches to education, which emphasize collaborations across academic areas and career paths, creative problem-solving, and adaptability. Central to this



is a curriculum that provides “hands-on, minds-on” opportunities, known as experiential learning, which provide authentic opportunities to study and address real-world issues.

The One Health concept can be incorporated into and expanded across all aspects of University operations, campus life, and community engagement. In fact, we think of these areas of University operations as “divisions” – including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Business & Financial Affairs, University Advancement, and the Office of the President. A One Health perspective would see these areas not as “divisions” but as branches on the same tree. A University working to advance One Health for the region we serve will be most effective when all of these branches are understood to be growing from the very same trunk, growing from a deep and healthy set of roots, with every operational unit across campus holding the same vision for advancing human, environmental, and economic health for the region and for our campus.

Anyone who has worked on campus in the Modoc gardens or on trail restoration on sat’wiwa (the Chumash sacred mountain also known as Round Mountain), visited Santa Rosa Island, paddled at the Channel Islands Boating Center, presented at the Student Research Conference, performed at Project CI (formerly known as Arts Under the Stars), participated in a learning community, served as a volunteer through the Center for Community Engagement – and the list goes on and on – has participated in an event that embodies the ethos of One Health.

Similar ideas of interconnectedness are found in other widespread initiatives, such as the ocean-focused Blue Economy, which are inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and resilient. Within our region, this includes working with different organizations and agencies that help protect our public lands, natural resources, and cultural heritage. We acknowledge CSUCI’s responsi-

bility to our coastal region, which includes globally significant natural and cultural resources, industries and professions, and student opportunities.

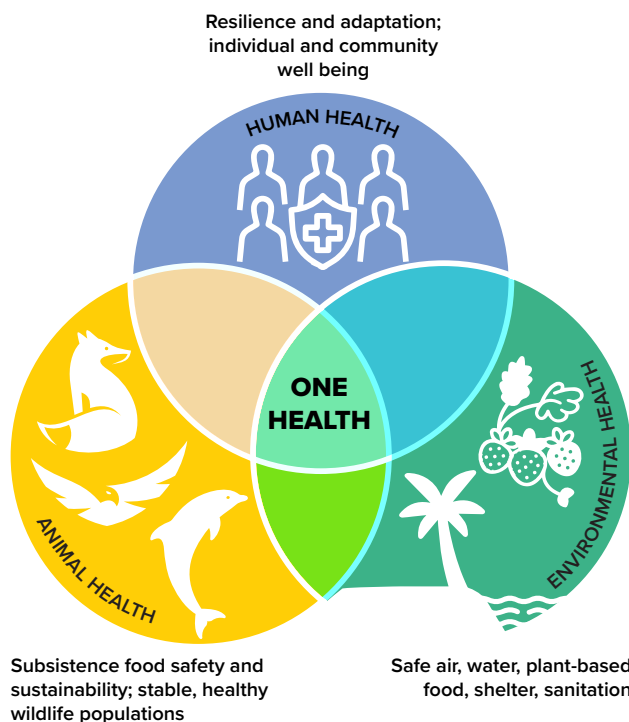
Our coast, islands, and ocean waters are designated in a number of ways – as a global Biodiversity hotspot, National Park, National Marine Sanctuary, Whale Heritage Area, and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – and they are variously managed by the National Park Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Forest Service, California State Parks, The Nature Conservancy, and the US

Navy, among others. Our lands and seas, including their agriculture, fisheries, and deep-water port for trade and defense, are also of profound economic importance which cannot be overstated – whether in terms of the sheer amount of physical area and resources encompassed by these agencies, organizations, and companies; their influence and relevance nationally and globally; or the impacts of and opportunities for associated industries and careers.

In just one example, the University and Santa Barbara Zoo have forged a partnership that includes planning for a Zoo-managed

conservation center on CSUCI’s main campus, which will be the first of its kind in the nation. The center’s purpose will be to care for locally threatened and endangered animals, such as snowy plover birds and amphibians. The center will incorporate professionals, students, and community members into the operations and outreach through coursework, research, employment, volunteerism, and more. The outcomes will benefit our animals, graduates, communities, and ecosystems alike.

In future Channel magazines, we will spotlight different areas of One Health and strategic planning at CSUCI as we explore the power of intentional collaboration in realizing a vision of wellness and interconnectedness within our region and beyond.







A trip to Maui to help  
with restoration efforts  
inspires students and  
faculty with hope  
to return

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

# *Restoring Lahaina*





## *A trip to Maui to help with the Lahaina restoration efforts had such an impact on CSUCI students, faculty, and the residents of Lahaina that planning is already underway to return next year.*

The 20 students on the 10-day service-learning trip say the experience changed them.

"The services we provided to the communities affected by the fires in Lahaina were life-changing," said Anthropology and Environmental Science & Resource Management (ESRM) double major Charla Robertson. "What the people there continue to endure is sobering, and I wish we could've stayed even longer to volunteer with them."

CSUCI has a long relationship with Lahaina, with faculty-led research trips to Maui going back more than a decade. Much of the research was conducted under the direction of CSUCI biologist and whale expert Rachel Cartwright, in cooperation with a whale research organization in Maui called the Keiki Kohala Project (KKP).

In fact, research conducted by Cartwright and the KKP with the help of CSUCI students has been cited internationally in publications such as Smithsonian Magazine and The Guardian.

"We've been surveying the whales in this area and collecting their fluke (whale's tail) images all the way back to 2008, so we know these whales well," Cartwright said. "And our images were quite key as we collected a lot from student trips."

When fires tore through Maui in August of 2023 causing billions of dollars of damage, the faculty and students who had been to Maui on research trips were heartsick. The fire destroyed 3,000 structures, reducing the historic town of Lahaina to blackened ruins.

The boat captain students always worked with had lost his vessel and many of CSUCI's non-government organization (NGO) partners had lost their homes.

CSUCI students and faculty have helped with restoration efforts around New Orleans for years following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, so they knew years of cleanup and restoration lay ahead for the citizens of Lahaina.

Besides helping with restoration, the students could gather valuable research on how the whales, water and environment were affected by such a catastrophic fire.

Professor of Mathematics Cynthia Wyels, Professor of Environmental Science & Resource Management (ESRM) Sean Anderson, Associate Professor of ESRM Clare Steele,

ESRM Lecturer Dorothy Horn, and Cartwright put their heads together and arranged the service-learning trip.

During the 10 days, the students did whatever was needed—handed out supplies, planted or removed vegetation and cleaned up debris—while also engaging in research.

"I think you can't just parachute in after the disaster, but we have data going back years. We also have necessary skills," Wyels said. "During the Thomas Fire, our students used drones to do archaeological mapping, for example. And this is super relative to the climate change research we've been doing, too."

Once they arrived in Maui, the students got to work.

Three teams of students rotated each day, with one team monitoring terrestrial fire impact and checking water quality.

"The second team lent their backs for anything local that the NGOs needed," Anderson said. "It could be demolition or planting, babysitting or handing out water."

The third team took boats out to see how the fire had affected the whales and calves off the coast.

"The experience was above and beyond our expectations," Steele said. "We had two separate boats launching from two locations, and it was complicated by the lack of a harbor (because of the fire), but we were able to do a good job of looking at the whale population."

After the team returned home, the students got to work analyzing images and samples they had collected in Maui, and Anderson had Lahaina volunteers speak to his Spring semester class called "Disaster Recovery and Environmental Modeling."

The students also created their own WhatsApp group to find opportunities to volunteer locally—especially for work involving helping the environment.

Before long, a thank you letter arrived from the Mauna Kahālāwai Watershed Partnership, thanking the students for their hard work, weeding and planting local Hawaiian plants in the Olowalu Valley.

"Your actions have echoed the essence of 'Aloha 'Āina' – love of the land," the letter read, in part, "and we are deeply appreciative of your enthusiasm."



**"The services we provided to the communities affected by the fires in Lahaina were life-changing."**

*-Charla Robertson*

TOP LEFT: Sampling ocean water; TOP RIGHT: A crew of ESRM students restore the forestation of Lahaina; BOTTOM LEFT: The CSUCI volunteer group gathers for instruction; BOTTOM RIGHT: A CSUCI volunteer supports a plant in the restorative area.



LEFT: Mechatronics Engineering student Grant Kohne solders components for a robot. ABOVE: Mechatronics Engineering and Computer Science double major student Kenna Chase, programs aspects of the robot's operating system code.

# Entering the Robot Rodeo

*Competition highlights CSUCI's partnership with Naval Base Ventura County*

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**I**TS WEBSITE DESCRIBES Fathomwerx as “60,000 square feet of awesome.”

Associate Professor of Computer Science Jason Isaacs describes it as a “maker space on steroids” in Port Hueneme, where CSUCI students work on projects to help solve real-world challenges for the U.S. Navy.

“It’s a place to go to work on

engineering prototypes,” Isaacs said. “Fathomwerx has all the capabilities—machinery, tools, test equipment, an above-ground pool, a drone cage, all in a very large building just off the base.”

A team of Mechatronics Engineering and Computer Science students in Isaacs’ classes spent much of the Spring 2024 semester designing

a robot to compete in the “Robot Rodeo,” a competition held in May in which robots – created by teams from CSUCI, University of California, Santa Barbara, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo – navigated an obstacle course built at Fathomwerx.

“We want to have robots at some point down the line able to perform shipboard operations, reducing





LEFT: Kenna Chase and Computer Science student Matthew Gonzalez and Mechantronics Engineering student Alex Marchand assemble the mechanics of a robot. RIGHT: the robot arm in action, moving to grab a pipe.

the number of sailors who have to be on board and risk themselves in dangerous maintenance tasks on a daily basis,” explained ’23 CSUCI Mechatronics Engineering alumna Sara Centeno, who now works as a Robotics Staff Researcher in the Office of Technology at Naval Sea Systems Command or NAVSEA.

Centeno oversees “Robot Rodeo,” which was developed by Isaacs and Alan Jaeger. Jaeger teaches business classes at CSUCI and is also the Office of Research & Technology Applications Manager at the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme division. Jaeger and Isaacs set up the competition to test the robots for possible real-world applications on U.S. Navy ships.

For the competition, the Fathomwerx crews built a scaled-down version of a ship that they will put on a “shake table” with hydraulic lifts to mimic the motion of the sea.

“On a ship, it’s much more com-



Associate Professor of Computer Science Jason Isaacs

plex for robots. There are portals [the robot] must step through, very steep stairs that are more like ladders,” Isaacs said.

The “Robot Rodeo” is just one of the projects that have resulted from the valuable partnership forged between Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) and CSUCI.

“Naval Base Ventura County is the largest employer in the county, and a lot of people don’t even realize we’re here,” Jaeger said.

“We have internships, job opportunities, and we pay for employees to go back and get master’s degrees.”

NBVC has also hired professors like Isaacs to conduct research for the Navy, and during these fellowships, to learn about CSUCI students like Centeno who might make good employees.

“As students at Channel Islands, we know the area, we’re connected with the area, and we benefit from the multidisciplinary community at CSUCI,” Centeno said. “It gets you to consider many different ways to approach a problem.”

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) students are needed, but there is also a need for students in other disciplines, Jaeger said, adding, “The Navy needs good people from every discipline at CSUCI.”

# A NEW ONLINE DICTIONARY OF THE LOCAL CHUMASH LANGUAGE

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**A** CHUMASH DIALECT SPOKEN BY THE Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians thousands of years ago is alive and thriving with a new online Chumash language dictionary hosted by CSUCI.

Ventureño Chumash, also called *mitsqanaqan*, is one of six (some say seven) documented Chumashan languages, each named after one of the 21 missions built along the California coast by Spanish missionaries from 1769 to 1833. There have been other Chumashan dictionaries; however, this is the first online dictionary specific to the Barbareño/Ventureño Chumash, who lived in Ventura County and the northern Channel Islands for thousands of years.

Matthew Vestuto, Chairman of the Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians (BVBMI) Tribal Council, has been working for years to get an online presence for the *mitsqanaqan* dictionary, which was first developed in print and released in 2019 by Cal State Fullerton Linguistics Lecturer Timothy Henry-Rodriguez.

“First and foremost are the various Chumash speakers who, despite oppressive social conditions and economic constraints, still understood the importance of recording their language and the urgency to do so,” Henry-Rodriguez wrote. “Their bravery and strength truly inspire me continually.”

Words in *mitsqanaqan* say a lot about the Chumash people’s daily life, and they are heavy on verbs or actions. For example, there is a word for “food” (*’uwmu*), but there are also words for being full of food (*aqkum*), or giving food (*axakš*).

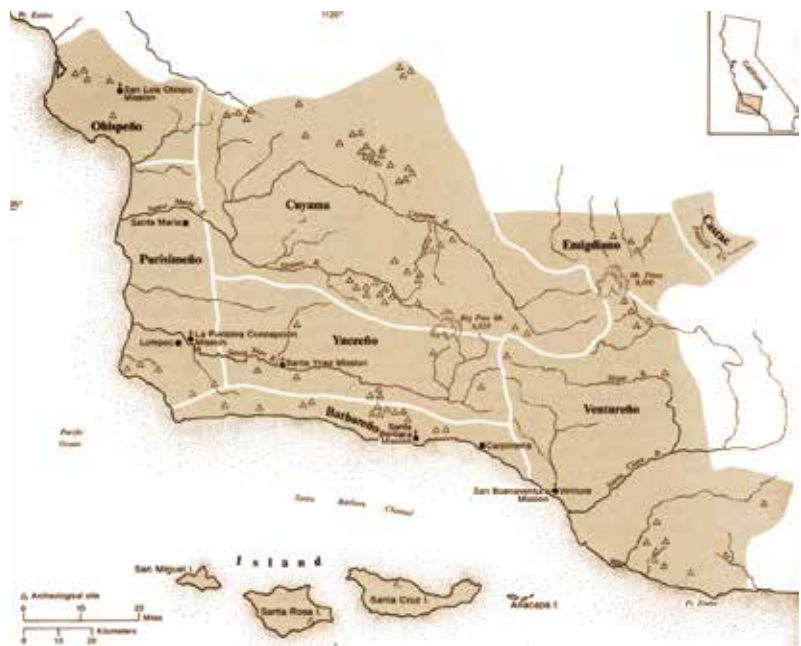
Because the Channel Islands were central to Chumash life, there are many words describing places and activities there. For example, Anacapa Island was *’anyapax*, Santa Rosa Island was *wima*, and a settlement on the south side of Santa Rosa was *liam Liam*.

The language began to disappear when the Spanish missionaries arrived, who forced the Chumash to work for them and introduced European diseases to which the Chumash had no

natural immunity. The Chumash way of life—and their language—changed.

“The age-old American story is that when Indigenous people went to boarding schools, they were taught their language was savage and not worthy and to not speak it,” Vestuto said. “That affects people. For a university to say, we hold your language in high esteem—to say it’s something we want to support—also affects us, but in a good way.”

Vestuto and fellow researcher and tribal secretary Salvador Tumamait-Ambriz were guests at a recent



Map of the Chumashan languages in Southern California

on-campus event at which the first phase of the dictionary was rolled out. Additional phases will follow in the future.

At the event, President Richard Yao emphasized the campus tradition of honoring the place where the University now sits, and the people who lived here.

“CSUCI has the responsibility and desire to maintain strong relationships with the BVBMI,” Yao said. “And together we share a commitment to working in collaboration to be stewards of the land and its natural and cultural heritage.”

Map source: (Robert F. Heizer, ed. 1978. *California: Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 8.) Washington: Smithsonian Institution.)





# “G-aiming” to improve transfer student success

by PAMELA DEAN

**A**N EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM IN THE MARTIN V. Smith School of Business & Economics (MVS) aims to help transfer students achieve academic and career success in a fun and engaging way.

Funded through a \$287,000 grant by the Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) Foundation, The Transfer Envision Network or “TEN” is a 10-week “gamified” professional development and career readiness challenge for transfer students majoring in Business. The program was designed and developed by Jessica Muth, MVS Director of Career Success Initiatives and an MVS faculty member.

Students in the TEN program have the opportunity to take part in numerous activities designed to help them succeed in school and land jobs within their major when they graduate. Examples include attending on-campus guest speaker events in accounting, finance, and entrepreneurship and learning how to craft resumes for today’s AI-enhanced employer screenings.

What makes TEN especially engaging is that students can track their progress and participation on a game-like app called Suitable. Moving through four different levels, they earn points and rewards along the way.

“We wanted to explore student success in a more holistic way,” said Muth. “We came up with this experimental design that provides monetary incentives and connections to the regional business community and also includes an easy-to-use tracking app that has game-like elements.”

Each time they complete all activities in a level, students are rewarded for their persistence, earning incen-

tives such as MVS apparel, notepads, a branded padfolio, and a cord to wear at graduation. When they complete all four levels, they are matched with a career mentor and earn a \$1,000 reward.

“By connecting students to regional and campus resources designed to help them achieve career-readiness goals, we believe the program will lead to improved student retention and graduation outcomes that will help eliminate equity gaps,” said Muth.

The ECMC Foundation funded the program to explore the impact of co-curricular, career-readiness experiences on transfer student success. TEN’s effectiveness

will be measured by whether students remain in school, complete more units, spend more time studying, and land a job within their major within three months of graduating.

The program ran in the Spring semester of 2024 and will run again in the Spring of 2025 with two cohorts of 60 different students participating each time.

So far, student feedback has been positive.

Jess Silva, a third-year student participating in TEN, feels the program is helping her

meet and engage with other students who are new to CSUCI.

“As a transfer student, I was really connected to my previous college,” said Silva. “TEN has helped me meet other transfer students who haven’t already established roots here at CSUCI.”

“Our hope is that transfer students will find value in the program,” added Muth. “By making professional development opportunities accessible, we can further support our students while also strengthening the regional workforce.”



The Suitable app gamifys progress.

ABOVE: FRONT ROW: Jessica Muth, Irene Flores, Roni Peter, Sofia Maldonado, Evelin Martin Del Campo, Elizabeth Merino Alcantara, Jessica Silva; MIDDLE ROW: Joseph Vallejo, Jesus Solorio, Areli Tiscareno, Aidee Raygoza, Citlalli Garcia; BACK ROW: Kathleen Farrand, Alex Shaw



A STEAM Carnival attendee enjoys the physics of a square bubble blowing device.

# SCIENCE CARNIVAL IS REBORN AS INAUGURAL STEAM CARNIVAL

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**A**sked why she wanted to be a scientist one day, seven-year-old Jacqueline Contreras said: “Because they’re cool and all the science that explodes? It just blows my mind.”

Contreras was among more than 2,000 kids and their parents who attended CSUCI’s first-ever STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) Carnival, held at the University’s Central Mall in March.

The STEAM Carnival evolved from the Science Carnival, launched in 2009 by Professor of Chemistry and Acting Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences, Phil Hampton.

Hampton planned the carnival to interest kids in pre-K through grade 8 in STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), showing them and their families how fun STEM studies and careers can be.

“I started doing the Science Carnival because I just wanted a time when families could come and enjoy the love of science and have fun with it,” Hampton said. “So many of our schools are under-resourced and unable to provide STEM science programming.”

The first Science Carnival consisted of about 40 CSUCI students running 30 activities for a crowd of about 250. The carnival kept growing, eventually moving to Rio Vista Middle School in Oxnard, where it was held from 2012 until the last carnival before the pandemic in 2020.

“We had one virtual event in 2021, but we haven’t been in-person until now,” said Hampton, wearing his STEAM Carnival Wizard hat. “One of the biggest changes to the event has been the addition of the letter ‘A’ – from STEM to STEAM – which I consider a long ‘A’ representing ‘Anything Else,’ including the





The STEAM Carnival brought together local students, from pre-K to eighth grade and 72 exhibits from anthropology to physics, chemistry, biology and archeology. TOP LEFT: Acting Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences Phil Hampton wears his STEAM Carnival Wizard hat with Provost Mitch Avila watching.

Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Education, etc.”

The STEAM Carnival featured 72 exhibits for all ages, including an anthropology exhibit in which kids were transfixed, watching Marcus Eriksen from Leap Lab in Ventura carefully glue together fragments of a triceratops horn found in Wyoming last summer.

Another child lifted a tiny shell from a hands-on shell display and put it up to his ear to hear the ocean. Toddlers banged on hanging pots and pans for a fundamental lesson in sound, and other children experimented with basic principles of physics by creating giant bubbles through cubes of various shapes.

A Health Science booth enabled young guests to

perform CPR on a dummy, while at a booth next door, there was a long line to dissect pig lungs, cow eyeballs, and sheep’s hearts.

Besides adding arts and humanities to the STEAM Carnival, campus tours were available, and a “Photograph Your Future” booth was set up where kids could dress up in lab coats, graduation gowns, and other career costumes and get a Polaroid photo taken of themselves to imagine what they could be with a college degree.

“Ever since 2009, I wanted a night where families could experience the wonder and amazement behind science,” Hampton said. “Now, I want them to see the University, too, and picture themselves here someday.”

*John and Sheila Suarez*

## A passion for social activism and public education

by PAMELA DEAN

**J**OHN AND SHEILA SUAREZ'S DEDICATION to social activism, including advocating for social justice and supporting public education, drew them to become supporters of CSUCI. Civil rights, the environment, economic justice, and the protection of the First Amendment also rank high on their list of causes.

Sheila grew up in Santa Maria, California, and spent her career as a public health nurse in Los Angeles County.

Growing up in Cuba, John's father taught him to question authority. He went on to become a UCLA Psychiatry professor and develop that University's Psychiatry and Law program. He has also published extensively on topics like legal psychiatry and the separation of church and state.

The two have been married for 35 years and became involved with CSUCI when they moved to the Thousand Oaks area in 2005. John has even spent time as a guest lecturer in CSUCI's School of Education.

“It was exciting to be part of a new university and help mold it. Channel Islands was a wonderful new beginning,” said John. “We were also drawn to the opportunity to support low-income students as they pursue education. That was very appealing to us as social activists. And over the last 20 years, we have seen the University deliver on its promises.”

John and Sheila are members of CSUCI's President's Circle, as well as founding members of the Legacy Society – whereby individuals have designated a planned or deferred gift to the University. The Suarez's plan on leaving a portion of their estate to the University. In 2022, the couple established the Jonathan & Liane Schweid Memorial Scholarship in memory of Sheila's two deceased children.

"I lost my children when they were young and just starting to be social activists," said Sheila. "So, for me, the great part of this is my trying to do what I believe they would have done, had they survived."

The couple is impressed with the dedication of CSUCI's faculty and staff, who they say are "always warm, welcoming, and committed to getting things



Sheila and John Suarez are planning to leave a portion of their estate to CSUCI.

done.” Their gifts are intended to support CSUCI’s continued growth.

“We want the University to grow and develop new programs, as well as bolster and strengthen the existing ones,” said John. “We also want to offer opportunities to students in need who may not have the chance to attend college without financial help.”

Reiterating their belief in the value of education, John said, “It’s important to us to support groups who have experienced barriers and difficulty getting an education. My younger son and his son are both teachers. We have three generations of teachers in our family, and I am very proud of that.”



# ***Living Peace Foundation***

*Helping students share their gifts with the world*

by PAMELA DEAN

**T**HE LIVING PEACE FOUNDATION, originally called the Center For Living Peace, was founded in 2010 by Kelly Hallman with the help of Jeff Berkus. Hallman believed that “when we share our gifts with others, we live peace and create a ripple effect to touch our families, communities and beyond.”

The Foundation has undergone several transformations. It initially started as a center in a strip mall in Irvine, California, that offered classes for children “to connect to self, others and the world.” In 2015, the Center for Living Peace decided to change direction, becoming a foundation and relocating to Santa Barbara, that concentrates on supporting nonprofits that advance compassion, collaboration, and peace.

That’s when the Living Peace Foundation mission of “Helping people find their gifts and share them with the world” was crystallized.

Living Peace’s relationship with CSUCI began in earnest after a campus visit and tour by members of the Living Peace Foundation Board. According to Berkus, the Board was sold on supporting the University from the moment they arrived.

“We could tell this was the right place, with the right story, to bring our mission to life,” explained Berkus. “It was clear CSUCI was special and had the capacity to make efficient and effective use of our support.”

On the tour, Berkus and Hallman were joined by fellow Living Peace

Board members Wendy Read and Jim Hallman. They were given an overview of the Basic Needs program, which provides emergency housing, grants, nutrition, and other assistance to students in need. They also heard a presentation from the Executive Director of Regional Educational Partnerships,

explained Berkus. “When students don’t have to worry about sustenance, they can focus on their studies and why they are there.”

An additional \$50,000 was given to support the restoration of sat’wiwa (the Chumash sacred mountain also known as Round Mountain).

During the tour, Berkus wanted to deepen his understanding of why the mountain was so meaningful to the Chumash. An avid runner, he sprinted to the top of the bluff and took note of the peaks to the west, east, and north. Due south was the ocean.

“It’s a compass,” explained Berkus. “The Chumash were honoring the path of the sun and the moon. Sat’wiwa is the perfect bluff connecting ground and sky energy. You could feel it.”

According to Berkus, the Foundation was also impressed by President Richard Yao’s understanding of the importance of human connection to nature and one another.

“We are happy to support CSUCI’s sat’wiwa restoration efforts and students’ basic needs because we believe the dialogue, the communication, and the programs are tracking with basic Indigenous principles,” said Berkus. “Each presentation we hear reinforces our excitement about our commitment and continued connection to the University.”

He added, “Each of these donations is designed to allow students to find their gifts and share them with the world.”



The Basic Needs food pantry

Jennifer Perry, who spoke about the history and vision for sat’wiwa, a small mountain on the south side of campus that is sacred to the Chumash people who, for thousands of years, inhabited the land on which CSUCI is located.

Believing CSUCI embodies Living Peace’s vision, the Foundation has given the University several gifts to assist students, including a recent \$25,000 donation to bolster the Basic Needs Program.

“Basic Needs was a natural fit,”

The view of CSUCI campus from sat’wiwa.



DEVIN RUIZ \ \ '23 B.S. MATHEMATICS

# Math alumnus is a champion of math and martial arts

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

**C**SUCI ALUMNUS DEVIN RUIZ CROSSED THE stage at the 2023 Commencement ceremony, accepted his degree in Mathematics, walked down the ramp, and did a backflip.

“His backflips were a perfect reflection of his fearless spirit and determination,” said Associate Professor of Mathematics Cynthia Flores. “Devin is a champion of mathematics who leaves an impression on everyone who works with him.”

Ruiz is also a taekwondo champion. He holds 17 state titles, four district titles, and two world titles from the American Taekwondo Association (ATA), now known as ATA Martial Arts.

After graduating, Ruiz now spends his days working at Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) and his evenings teaching martial arts to kids.

“I like the work-life balance of the Navy,” he said. “You have your 40 hours a week, and then I go home and have the rest of the day to do taekwondo.”

Ruiz is now in the Financial Management Career Program (FMCP) at NBVC. Trainees in this program are being prepared to become Department of the Navy (DON) financial management professionals at U.S. Navy and Marine Corps commands located throughout the United States.

At night and on weekends, Ruiz teaches kids martial arts at the Ignite ATA Martial Arts in Camarillo.

“I set a bar for my students, and I don’t drop the bar,” Ruiz said. “They have to meet the bar that I set, but eventually, I want them to set their own bar and live up to it.”

The focus and discipline of martial arts helped Ruiz when he



was at CSUCI as a student and now as he is embarking on a career in finance.

“My mind is moving a thousand miles an hour,” Ruiz said. “Whenever I needed to do something study-related, taekwondo helped me focus.”

Ruiz was introduced to his first taekwondo class at age 11 and was immediately hooked.

“I loved it the very first day,” he said. “I started competing about a year later and got my first California state title. I love competition. I like to learn and love to practice.”

Ruiz and his older sister grew up in Ventura where he graduated from Ventura High School with their mom working in real estate and their dad working as a disc jockey for Los Angeles FM stations. Ruiz would often go to work with his dad, making his radio debut at age five.

“He put me on the radio when I was young with ‘Devin the Dude’s CD and DVD review,’” Ruiz said. “Whenever new songs or albums came out, I got to review them—sometimes movies, too.”

Both of Ruiz’s parents noticed his math skills early and encouraged him to attend college. He is the first in his family to graduate from a university.

Once at CSUCI, Flores inspired Ruiz to further develop his mathematics skills, which eventually resulted in a fulfilling career in the U.S. Navy civil service.

“He embodies a sense of what it means to be both curious and courageous,” Flores said. “I’m so proud he is an alumnus of CSUCI.”

Devin Ruiz is a taekwondo champion and martial arts instructor, as well as a mathematician.





Dominique Burns \* '14 M.S. Biotechnology and Bioinformatics

# Alumna makes an impact in behind-the-scenes patient care

by MARYA BARLOW

**S**HORTLY AFTER GRADUATING from CSU Long Beach with a biology degree, Dominique Burns found herself applying for a laboratory job in a field she had never heard of before.

"I stumbled upon a position in histology," she said. "I had no clue what histology was, but I quickly discovered it was an integral part of healthcare and patient care."

Histologists or histotechnicians play a crucial role in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases by turning tissue samples into microscope slides for a pathologist to study. For Burns, it proved to be an ideal job, combining her passion for patient care with work in a lab setting.

"It's really an art form to be able to get that perfect section of tissue so the pathologist has a clear view of everything in the tissue," she said. "As you get good at it, it's very exciting."

Burns spent a decade as a histotechnician in both diagnostic labs and hospitals before becoming the manager of molecular and genetic pathology at Stanford Health Care in 2021. She now manages five departments, planning the direction of new tests, technologies, and specialized treatments. She works closely with medical directors throughout the hospital. In 2020, Burns helped Stanford become one of the first hospitals in the nation to go live with digital pathology – allowing physicians to read tissue slides remotely.

She says her master's degree in biotechnology and bioinformatics at CSUCI is what enabled her to move seamlessly from hands-on lab work to management in one of the nation's best hospitals.

"My degree at CSUCI opened up a new realm of opportunity for me to



Dominique Burns works in histology, an integral part of healthcare in diagnosing diseases.

move into the molecular and genetic pathology manager role," she said. "It provided me with so many skills for professional growth and gave me the tools and confidence to grow my career into a leadership role."

Born and raised in Ventura County and graduating from St. Bonaventure High School, Burns grew up playing sports and hoping to become a doctor of sports medicine. A clinical internship during her senior year at CSU Long Beach convinced her she was more suited to the lab. She hopes that her example will show students that there are many fulfilling ways to provide patient care without necessarily being a doctor.

"You can still have a deep impact on patient care even if it's not hands-on," she said. "It's behind-the-scenes work that allows us to treat the true problem and not just the symptoms. Without the lab, your doctor would be guessing."



**Damaris  
Juarez  
'21 B.A.  
History**

## SPREADING READING JOY AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO STUDENTS

by MARYA BARLOW

AS A COMMUTER STUDENT from Oxnard at CSUCI, Damaris Juarez always had a favorite campus spot to study – the John Spoor Broome Library.

“With two sisters and two brothers, my home could get noisy, so I needed a good place to do my homework,” she said. “I would always go to the reference desk to ask questions, and over time, I developed a great relationship with the librarians.”

Juarez graduated from Pacifica High School and became a History major and first-generation student, who entered CSUCI with plans to become a teacher. However, her long days at the library and the relationship she built with former librarian Elizabeth Blackwood set her on a new path.

“I was able to serve in a year-long internship with the John Spoor Broome Library,” she said. “Through that internship, I was able to find my passion for the field of library information sciences. That’s where I discovered I wanted to be a librarian.”

Today, Juarez is the library media technician for the elementary school she attended as a child – Ramona Elementary, a dual-language immersion school in Oxnard. She holds story times with all of the school’s 580 children in kindergarten to fifth grade, tracks students’ reading goals and comprehension, leads the accelerated reader program, teaches students how to research and use the library’s resources, and manages the library’s inventory.

“For me, the best part is forming a welcoming library environment for the students and letting them know that I believe in them,” she said. “Like many of them, when I came to Ramona as a student, my first language was Spanish. I learned English there. I love connecting with them, telling them about my experience, and spreading encouragement.”

Juarez is also working toward a master’s degree in Library Science at San Jose State University – a challenge for which, thanks to CSUCI, she is well-prepared.

During her internship at the Broome Library, she developed a

guide for first-generation students on how to conduct academic research, use the library’s academic database, and understand primary and secondary sources. She also co-authored and published “Virtual Undergraduate Internships: One COVID-19 Side Effect that Academic Libraries Should Keep” – an academic journal article on virtual undergraduate internships with academic libraries.

Juarez remains in close contact with CSUCI. She recently invited Associate Professor of Chicana/o Studies, Jennie Luna, to speak to her Ramona students for Read Across America. Two of her sisters, Merari and Eunice Juarez, also hold degrees from CSUCI.

Juarez dreams of one day returning to work as an academic librarian on the campus where her career journey began.

“I will be forever grateful to CSUCI for supporting me and providing a culturally welcoming and responsive community,” she said. “CSUCI helped me to believe in myself and keep going to achieve things I never would have imagined.”



Iliana Espinoza ✧ '14 B.A. Environmental Science & Resource Management

# *From classroom to conservation*

## Alumna finds career calling in National Parks

by MARYA BARLOW

**B**EFORE SHE TOOK A COURSE CALLED “THE National Park” during her junior year at CSUCI, Iliana Espinoza had never been to a national park.

“I’m always going to be grateful to Professor Don Rodriguez,” she said. “Prior to taking that course with him, I didn’t know about the National Park Service. Because of his encouragement, I’ve made it my career.”

Today, Espinoza works in the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. These are side-by-side national parks that attract nearly 2 million visitors annually to see the world’s largest trees as well as the parks’ majestic mountains, caverns, and foothills.

As property management specialist for the two parks, Espinoza is responsible for managing more than 2,500 personal property items, including the site’s lost and found, employee badges and keys, contractors, and volunteers.

“Here at Sequoia, you get people that come from all over the world for vacation,” she said. “Even though I’m in the office and not always interacting with them, I love seeing how excited they are to be in the park. It makes me feel like I’m making a difference.”

Growing up in Inglewood, Espinoza loved hiking in local parks and envisioned one day working in the environmental science field. A field trip while attending Lennox Math Science and Technology Academy high school, she was able to visit various California colleges that brought her to CSUCI.

“I just fell in love with CSUCI,” she said. “I loved that it was in the mountains and close to home, so I could see my family.”

As a student in CSUCI’s Environmental Science & Resource Management program, Espinoza found small classes and dedicated professors who nurtured her growth through field research and hands-on learning experiences.

With CSUCI professors, she traveled to Hawaii to conduct conservation research on humpback whales, perform ecological research through service learning in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and visit Yosemite National Park, Channel Islands National Park, and the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

During her senior year, Espinoza joined Rodriguez’s research team which was studying the question of how to make national parks more relevant to 18-to-25-year-old minority students. After presenting her research to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Espinoza was invited to apply for a job.

In the 12 years since, she has held positions as a park guide and supply technician at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and as a fleet management specialist at Yosemite National Park. In 2022, she became a property management specialist at Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

“I definitely want to stay in the National Park Service,” Espinoza said. “I love working somewhere where the mission is to protect and preserve public land.”





Barbara Clark '23 B.A. Art & Sheree Gardner Cogan '23 B.A. Art

## Best friends support each other through later life degrees

by MARYA BARLOW

**W**hen Sheree Gardner Cogan and Barbara Clark say earning their college degrees took a lot of drive, they mean it – literally and figuratively.

While in their late 60s, the pair supported each other in earning their bachelor's degrees in Art, driving the 285 miles between their homes in San Luis Obispo and CSUCI together each week for two years.

"It was really important to me to get my degree and so worth it," Cogan said. "We both kept each other going and motivated."

Cogan and Clark became friends while taking art courses at Allan Hancock Community College in Santa Maria. Both had raised families and had prior careers – Cogan in interior design and medical marketing, Clark in running a flower and gift shop.

"Sheree was all about going on to get a bachelor's degree and at first I wasn't interested," said

Clark. "But then, I thought, 'If she's doing it, why shouldn't I?' And she just pushed me along."

After finishing their associate degrees, both were admitted to CSUCI's Art program. During their first semester, they traveled to CSUCI by train and bus twice weekly – a 15-hour journey from door to door. Later, they bought a car and enjoyed sharing the drive.

"There was never silence," Cogan said. "We were always talking, listening to lectures, reading from our books, discussing our papers. We got a lot of study time in the car."

Chair of the Art program Marianne McGrath, and Lecturer, Christophe Bourely, worked with the pair to create a hybrid schedule that allowed Cogan and Clark to do their work at home and visit campus once a week.

"The professors were so supportive," Clark said. "They pushed me to grow, take risks, and build a strong portfolio. Even after graduating, they continue to help and

push me. I have lifetime mentors and friendships there."

In May 2023, the two best friends cheered each other on as they received their degrees before friends and family at CSUCI's commencement ceremony at the South Quad. Both earned 4.0 GPAs and completed their degree in two years as full-time students.

"I'm much more confident now that I have my degree," Cogan said. "This was a longtime goal for me and now that I've done this, I can do anything."

Today, they exhibit and sell their work regionally. Cogan specializes in pastels and acrylics; Clark in oil painting. Both are considering getting their teaching credentials so they can teach and inspire other art students. Clark is also applying to Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) programs to continue studying art.

"I'm a forever student," she said. "I'm so glad to have Sheree as my best friend. It's just a blessing."



# Class Notes

**D**olphins are natural communicators! We love to hear from our Dolphin alumni around the world—27,000 and counting—so we can help share life changes and achievements.

Submit a class note to: [go.csuci.edu/class-note](https://go.csuci.edu/class-note) or scan the QR code on the right.



**2012**

**Blake Kibby (B.A. Political Science)** – Moved to Minnesota and married Danika (2012 B.S. Math). Blake works for Best Buy corporate and Danika with Target Corporation as a data scientist. Bought a house, have two dogs, and a 2-month-old baby.



**2020**

**Jessica Erwin (B.S. Biology)** – In 2022, Jessica graduated from the University of the Pacific with a Master of Science in speech-language pathology. She now works as a speech-language pathologist (SLP) with children from birth to 3 years old. Jessica provides therapy for speech, feeding, and swallowing, and offers parent training for various disorders and syndromes.



**2012**

**Angela Glenore (B.A. Business)** – Received NASA Early Career Achievement Medal in July 2023.



**2020**

**Andrew Doran (B.A. Communications)** – Hired as the Director of Development for Casa del Herrero, a non-profit agency in Montecito, CA.



**2013**

**Sugar Sungkamee (M.B.A. Business)** – Completed an MBA in Business. Sugar is the chef and co-owner of Jitlada Southern Thai Restaurant in Los Angeles.



**2021**

**Melisa Castanon (B.A. Sociology)** – Melisa recently completed her Master's in Social Work and is now making a difference as an Associate Clinical Intake Coordinator at Our House Grief Support Center in Los Angeles. Additionally, Melisa diligently works towards completing required hours for her Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) certification.



**2019**

**Agnes Denes (M.B.A.)** – With a deep passion for science and innovation, Agnes' goal is to contribute to the well-being, beauty, and sustainability of our community and our world. She started her own consulting business, Denes Consulting. Her areas of expertise include formulation for all product categories, technical marketing, claims design and validation, testing and safety substantiation, and regulatory compliance.

## *Admitted Dolphin Day*



*Members of the CSU Channel Islands community spent a Saturday in April at Admitted Dolphin Day and showcased academic programs and student services to admitted students and their supporters.*