

Channel

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHANNEL ISLANDS / 2024-25 Winter Magazine

Dolphin pride
shines as campus
celebrates inaugural
Homecoming Week
page 16



Home Sweet HOMECOMING

Channel

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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.

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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.

Editor's Note

Our apologies to Ventura County Registrar of Voters Michelle Ascencion for incorrectly identifying her in photo captions included in the Spring 2024 *Channel* issue for the article "Lessons in Democracy" found on pages 6 & 7.



Channel Islands

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY



Kevin Hayakawa, Assistant Professor of Physics, aims a telescope into the night sky during a trip with CSUCI students to the Santa Rosa Island Research Station in the Channel Islands National Park on Nov. 1, 2024.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Connections, Collaboration, and a Sense of Belonging

In the early days and weeks of 2025, I spent time reflecting on the many achievements of 2024, big and small, that have shaped our University. Several of these are featured in this issue of *Channel* — from the AI Base Camp (pg. 8) to the establishment and continuation of community partnerships like the Brain Injury Center of Ventura County (pg. 9), a clinical lab science certificate in collaboration with local hospitals (pg. 20), and the launch of our new Doctor of Educational Leadership in Equity & Justice (pg. 11).

It is also essential to look ahead toward the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. The hard work of the new year, of right-sizing our budget to enrollment, will require continued innovation and collaboration within our University community. We will focus on strengthening our community partnerships to better meet the specific needs of our region, ensuring that our programs are relevant and impactful, but also acknowledge the areas where we can improve and grow. By embracing both our achievements and the lessons learned from our challenges, we can position ourselves for even greater success in the future.

Our network of over 29,000 alumni stands as a testament to our institution's impact, with our graduates serving in their communities as role models, mentors, and leaders. They are living proof that embracing education and community can lead to a student's previously unimagined possibilities. We take pride in having alumni leaders across many sectors, including healthcare, biotechnology, education, finance, social services, and more, all contributing to the tapestry and quality of life within and beyond our region.

A highlight of Fall 2024 was our inaugural Homecoming celebration (pgs. 16-18), which served as a week-long opportunity for alumni, students, faculty, staff, and supporters to come together and celebrate our community. It was a fun and exciting week honoring our University's 22-year history and the future ahead that is ours to build. Together, we have not only celebrated our successes but have also faced challenges with resilience and determination, further solidifying our commitment to excellence and inclusion.

We have also welcomed new leaders in key positions who have already done much to help realize CSUCI's mission and values. Their collective knowledge, expertise, and dedication have already proven invaluable to our success and future growth. Among them is Bradley Olin, our new Vice President for Business & Financial Affairs (pg. 7). After feeling an instant connection when he first visited the campus 12 years ago, he has returned with a commitment to enhancing the student experience and a passion for fostering community.

We look forward to new opportunities and experiences in 2025, which include building new connections, fostering collaboration, and nurturing the sense of belonging that makes our University such an incredibly special place.

Wishing you all a prosperous New Year.

Warm Regards,

Richard Yao, Ph.D.
President

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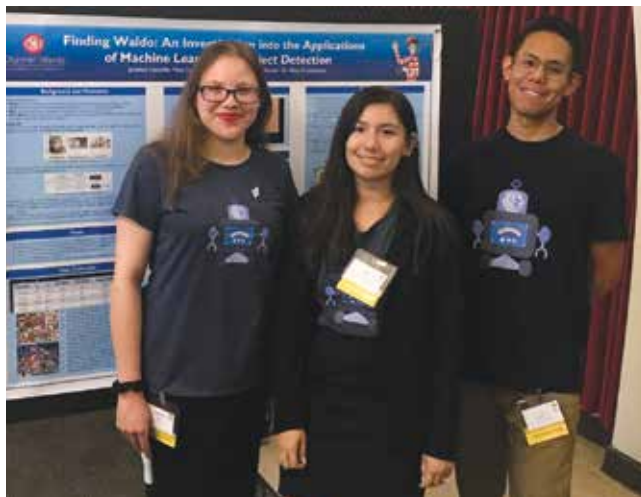
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ON THE COVER CSUCI starts the tradition of a homecoming week celebration.

CSUCI NEWS



Students pursuing data science will graduate with a very promising job outlook.

New Degree in Data Science

A new Bachelor of Science degree in the field of Data Science is slated to begin in Fall of 2025. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), students who choose the degree will graduate with a very promising job outlook. Employment of data scientists is projected to grow 36% from 2021 to 2031, according to the BLS, much faster than the average for all other occupations. And the pay for data scientists with bachelor's degrees in the U.S. was \$100,910 per year in 2021. If you land a job as a data scientist in California, the average salary is \$166,000, according to Indeed.com.

"The job of data scientist is a rapidly emerging job title," explained CSUCI Chair of Mathematics Geoffrey Buhl. "A data scientist uses tools from mathematics, statistics and computer science to turn data into useable information that can inform decision-making processes and answer questions." Every corporation will need a data science department because the corporation is generating streams of data, according to Buhl, "just like everybody has an accountant when there is a lot of money coming in."

Buhl developed the curriculum along with Associate Professor of Mathematics Alona Kryshchenko and Assistant Professor of Mathematics Isaac Quintanilla Salinas. The faculty members designed the degree to require fewer units so that students can pair their data science major with another area of interest by carrying a double major.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-datasci

Students Present and Win at Conference

In 2011, CSUCI sent four students and one faculty member to The Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) conference. Fast forward 13 years to this Fall - 34 students and six faculty members attended what is now known as the National Diversity in STEM (NDiSTEM) conference, the largest multidisciplinary and multicultural STEM diversity conference in the nation. This year, out of 1,700 abstracts, 1,100 were selected, including over a dozen from CSUCI. Out of 101 awards, five were presented to CSUCI students, more than to any other CSU.

CSUCI's commitment to providing opportunities for student research and supporting diversity in STEM is supported by faculty organizers who have a history of finding ways to get students to this conference, like



Thirty-four CSUCI students and six faculty attended NDiSTEM in 2024.

finding external funding sources such as student travel grants, that make it possible for students to attend. Faculty participation has also increased, which has been valuable in developing the CSUCI campus culture in STEM to emphasize belongingness and the valuing of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-sacnas-ndistem

Grant to Help Students Facing Homelessness

Thanks to a \$1.7 million grant from the Rapid Rehousing and Housing Security Program – part of the Basic Needs Initiative through the CSU Chancellor's Office, CSUCI's Basic Needs program can now better support

students facing homelessness. The grant will be distributed in the amount of \$400,000 annually from 2024 through 2028 with a one-time amount of \$100,000 allocated to cover initial startup costs. The funding will support CSUCI's efforts to develop and enhance strategies for students facing homelessness and housing insecurity. The grant will also help CSUCI provide support that many students need to continue their education, graduate, and realize their career goals.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-rapidrehousing

Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In 2019, CSUCI joined the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)'s Better Climate Challenge by pledging to reduce its carbon emissions by 50%. The University did not only meet the challenge but surpassed it by reducing emissions by 60% from 2019 to 2023. In October, the DOE published the "2023 Better Buildings Initiative Progress Report," which summarizes the achievements of DOE's Better Buildings public and private sector partners since the initiative's inception in 2011. The DOE recently recognized CSUCI as one of the DOE partners with a profile on DOE's Better Buildings Solution Center. To date, Better Buildings partners like CSUCI have saved nearly \$22 billion in energy costs nationwide, resulting in more than 220 million metric tons of avoided greenhouse gas emissions.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-greenhousegas

High Rankings Received from US News & World Report and Washington Monthly

CSUCI was ranked #22 overall out of 118 universities on the newly released *U.S. News & World Report* 2025 Best Colleges report, which features annual college rankings for the coming year. That's up eight places from the 2024 report. *U.S. News & World Report* ranks its colleges and universities according to region, so CSUCI's high marks were in the report's Regional Universities (West) category. The overall high ranking was the result of multiple high scores across a set of widely accepted indicators of excellence.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-usnwr24

CSUCI is one of the most affordable universities in the West according to *Washington Monthly's* 2024 annual College Guide. CSUCI ranked 24th out of 201 colleges

and universities in the western region on the "Best Bang for Your Buck" list, climbing two rungs from its 2023 ranking. Each year, the *Washington Monthly* creates a region-by-region ranking of public, private nonprofit, and for-profit colleges in its "Best Bang for your Buck" category, based on how well an institution helps students attain marketable degrees at affordable prices.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-wm24



NAACP Recognizes University with Community Empowerment Award

The Ventura County NAACP presented CSUCI with their Community Empowerment Corporate Award in recognition of the University's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and more. President Richard Yao accepted the award on behalf of the University at the local NAACP's Annual Freedom Fund Award Banquet held in October.

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-ceca

NASA Grant will Enable Students to Shadow JPL Planetary Scientists

Students majoring in a STEM (science, technology, engineering or mathematics) field have a chance to shadow NASA planetary scientists, thanks to a \$375,000 grant procured by Assistant Professor of Physics Kevin Hayakawa. "The grant is specifically for a minority-serving institution, which we are," Hayakawa said. "It's meant to increase the visibility and opportunities for minorities -- to increase the number of STEM majors in historically marginalized groups. They'll get a chance to see what a day in the life of a planetary scientist is like."

Read more at: go.csuci.edu/ch-nasa-grant



A \$375,000 grant will allow CSUCI STEM students to shadow NASA scientists.



Director of Basic Needs, Tanya Gonzalez



Biology Professor Ruben Alarcón



Anthropology major Eleanor Fishburn

Staff, faculty and student receive President's Award

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

WHEN CONSIDERING MANY DESERVING NOMINEES for the 2024 Innovation Awards, CSUCI President Richard Yao selected three individuals — one staff member, one faculty member, and one student whose exceptional work exemplifies the University's "One Health" strategic vision.

"These are individuals who have been living the One Health world view through their work at CSUCI, and they've been blazing a path for us all," President Yao said at the August Convocation ceremony in the Grand Salon.

One Health describes a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to education that considers human, animal, plant, environmental, and economic health in an interconnected manner.

The President's Staff Award for Excellence went to Director of Basic Needs Tanya Gonzalez, who serves the students "in a way that is fully holistic and perfectly exemplifies the spirit of One Health," according to the nominating party.

Gonzalez makes it a point to be available to discuss any challenge or victory a student has whether it involved home, classes or something else.

"In my work, I always strive to remain authentic, apply accountability, empathy, and care in all I do and advocate for positive change whenever possible," she said.

When Ruben Alarcón accepted the President's Teaching & Innovation award, he recalled his Ph.D. dissertation on high elevation plant pollinators. "Pollinators are scarce during a drought," he observed.

"The plants that survive are those that depend on a wide range of pollinators rather than just one."

The observation that connectedness helps during hard times stayed with him, so when he arrived at CSUCI, he established connections with area schools, beekeepers, businesses and the agricultural community, with rich rewards.

"I found that members of the agricultural community were welcoming and willing to provide my students and me with access to their fields and orchards for research," he said.

Alarcón believes that establishing more connections can turn CSUCI into a central hub for the community, government agencies, nonprofits and other industries.

"Perhaps by establishing more connections for CSUCI, we can all get through the drought," he said.

Anthropology major Eleanor Fishburn received the President's Award for Student Innovation for her work helping the campus appreciate the cultural significance of the land upon which the University sits, which is an ancestral home of the Chumash people.

"This land is very special to me," said Fishburn, whose family goes back nine generations in Ventura County. "I would not have chosen any other school. My grandmother was born right down the road."

As a Chumash tribal member, Chair of the Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians, as well as Secretary of the Barbareño/Ventureño Band of Mission Indians, Fishburn was also able to facilitate relationships between the campus and local tribal leaders.

New VP of Business & Financial Affairs lands Dream Job

by DAISY RATZLAFF

IT WAS 12 YEARS AGO, WHEN BRADLEY OLIN, CSUCI's newly appointed Vice President for Business & Financial Affairs and newest member of the President's Cabinet, set foot on the campus and felt an instant sense of connection. The Southern California native, who grew up in West Los Angeles, was visiting the campus as a System Budget Analyst for the Chancellor's Office to gain a better understanding of campus operations.

"I fell in love," Olin said. "It was the energy, the people, the physical space, the vibe. I knew I wanted to be part of this. I left telling myself that someday I was going to work here."

He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and Latin American Studies from Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, received a Master of Public Administration from the University of Southern California, and a Doctor of Educational Leadership from California State University, Long Beach. Olin had initially planned to become a city manager but little did he know that he would eventually return as CSUCI's chief financial officer.

"I began my career working as a city planner, helping people navigate bureaucracy to get things done," he said. "(But) then the great recession invited me to make a career change."

As Governor Jerry Brown eliminated redevelopment agencies, thousands of professionals, including Olin, were forced to look for new opportunities. This pivotal moment prompted him to reflect on his core values and consider a new path, which led him to the CSU Office of the Chancellor.

"It wasn't originally in my wheelhouse," said Olin. "I wasn't thinking about higher education as a public agency, but there is a whole apparatus it takes to run a place like this. College and university campuses are almost like cities in themselves."

Olin's unique background in policy and navigating complex bureaucratic landscapes helped him find his place in the system-wide budget office, where he imple-

mented financial policy and made strategic financial decisions for the CSU System.

After four years in the Chancellor's Office, Olin moved to San Jose State University, where he served first as Director of University Budget Planning & Risk Management, and then as Assistant Vice President for Academic Budgets and Planning/ Chief Academic Resources Officer. There, he oversaw university budgeting, institutional research, and served as the designated Chief Enrollment Planning and Reporting



Bradley Olin fell in love with CSUCI twelve years ago while visiting from the Chancellor's Office.

Officer, gaining experience that he now brings to Cal State Channel Islands.

"San Jose State is the oldest and first CSU, with deep traditions and structures," Olin said. "And on the other side is us – the baby CSU, still evolving and growing into our shoes. (While) there are things we can learn from an institution that has such a long and storied history of over 160 years, no institution is the same."

What excites Olin about CSUCI is its distinct atmosphere and potential.

"We are unlike any other CSU, and that's a good thing," he said. "When I first came in 2012, I could see the potential everywhere. I still see that potential all over the place, and I'm looking forward to helping us achieve it."

To read more visit: go.csuci.edu/ch-olin



Exploring the impact of AI on education, privacy, and ethics

by DAISY RATZLAFF

IF YOU ASK CSUCI STUDENTS STEVEN LANG, Andrew Fox, Rene Salazar, and Luis Gonzalez, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has helped them to overcome language barriers, foster creativity and assist with coursework and research. At a recent CSUCI AI Basecamp event, these students were among the diverse panelists from CSUCI and surrounding communities who discussed various aspects of AI and its impact on education, privacy, and ethics.

Lang, a Computer Science student and information security worker who runs the Networks and Security Club on campus, initially had reservations about using AI tools but found them beneficial after trying them out.

"When ChatGPT was introduced about two years ago, I thought it was a little bit of a cheat. I also didn't want to rely on another tool to learn," said Lang. "However, one day I decided to try it out and the first question I asked was 'How do I water my cactus?' and I went on from there."

Fox, the 2024-25 Student Government President, is pursuing double majors in Political Science and History. He was introduced to AI after overhearing other students discuss it in class.

"I had no idea what it was, (but) I asked it to write a poem about Luke Skywalker and Han Solo – I am a huge Star Wars fan – and it did. It had this creative energy to it," said Fox. "It really blew my mind. It felt like I was seeing colors for the first time."

The event was co-hosted by the Division of Academic Affairs' Teaching & Learning Innovation team and Extended University. It featured welcoming remarks by President Richard Yao, two panel discussions and workshops on various AI-related topics such as Information &

Visual Literacy in AI, student data analysis using GPT-4, integrating AI in education, AI demos, and effective large language model (LLM) query frameworks.

During his remarks, President Yao highlighted CSUCI's advancements in AI, recognizing faculty members such as Business Professor Ray Bowman, and Computer Science and Mechatronics Engineering Professors Michael Soltys and Jason Isaacs for their contributions. Bowman's creation of bots to aid entrepreneurial students and the integration of AI at the Writing & Multiliteracy Center have supported student learning and streamlined processes.

President Yao pointed out the potential of integrating AI into our work, noting that Student Government was the first organized body on campus to pass a resolution in support of equitable access and responsible use of generative AI for academic purposes. He also emphasized the University's commitment to leveraging AI's capabilities while maintaining core values like equity, diversity, accessibility, privacy, respect, and integrity.

"By embracing AI responsibly and ethically, we can create a dynamic and inclusive academic environment that empowers both students and faculty to thrive and excel in our fast-evolving world," said President Yao.

To read more about AI, visit: go.csuci.edu/ch-ai

"...the first question I asked was 'How do I water my cactus?' and I went on from there."

Top left: Business Professor Ray Bowman; Center, from left to right: a panel discussion at the AI Basecamp event; Top right: Student Steven Lang

Partnership helps rethink brain injury care

by DAISY RATZLAFF

AN INNOVATIVE partnership between CSUCI and the Brain Injury Center of Ventura County is changing how individuals affected by brain injuries receive support and care. This unique collaboration has not only benefited the center but has also been instrumental in shaping the careers of many CSUCI students.

"We are fortunate to have this partnership with CSUCI. It has made a huge difference," said Chrissy Stamegna, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Center of Ventura County. "I don't think we would be where we are today without it. We have been able to provide a lot of different services and really extend our mission."

The Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing compre-



Left to right: Chrissy Stamegna, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Center of Ventura County; Lily Zepeda, Care Transitions Program Director; Berenise Lemus, Care Transitions Support and Banner House Administrator; Kristen Linton, CSUCI Associate Professor of Health Science.

hensive services to 700 survivors and their families annually, has long been a beacon of hope for those navigating the challenges of life after a brain injury. With a mission to enhance the quality of life through education, advocacy and support services, it has been a vital resource for the Ventura County community.

"There has been an increase in numbers, as well as awareness (of brain injuries). People didn't used to see things like concussions as a brain injury," said Stamegna. "Now, we know it is a mild traumatic brain injury, and people are more likely to seek medical care and treatment rather than just say, 'Oh, you just bumped your head.'"

At the core of the partnership is a shared vision to provide holistic and personalized care for brain injury survivors, with a focus on education, rehabilitation and community integration. Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines the expertise of CSUCI faculty and students with the specialized services of the Brain Injury Center, individuals receive comprehensive support tailored to their

unique needs and circumstances.

The collaboration has also created opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience and clinical training in brain injury rehabilitation. Since 2015, the partnership has served as a launchpad for students pursuing careers in healthcare and social services, as well as a pathway to graduate programs in physician assistant studies, social work and nursing. Under the guidance of the center's experienced professionals, students can apply their classroom knowledge in real-world settings, refining their skills and deepening their understanding of brain injury care.

"It's been a dream to work with the Brain Injury Center," said Kristen Linton, the driving force behind the partnership and a CSUCI Associate Professor of Health Science. "Our students are more prepared for clinical roles. They are one-on-one with clients – helping with cooking and socialization, learning about their needs and staying connected with the community."

To read more visit: go.csuci.edu/ch-bip



Members of the Brain Injury Center team assist a patient.

Computer Science student and alumnus speak at Cybersecurity Awareness Month event

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

KEEPING OUR ONLINE INFORMATION SAFE IN THE age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a major challenge, according to several experts who spoke at an October CSUCI Cybersecurity Awareness Month event.

Computer Science student Steven Lang and '24 Information Technology alumnus James Piedrasanta were among the speakers, with Lang discussing AI and cybersecurity and Piedrasanta sharing the results of his study into college students and cybersecurity.

"National Cybersecurity Awareness Month aims to help people avoid cyber threats and encourages more people to join the field of cybersecurity," explained CSUCI Chief Information Security Officer Carlos Miranda. "Each year there is a theme to encourage best practices in cybersecurity. This year's theme was 'Secure our World.'"

The audience was made up of area high school students who learned about the latest in cybersecurity and about possible careers in the field.

Both first generation college students, Piedrasanta and Lang are finding career success in the rapidly expanding field of cybersecurity, which has been complicated by the proliferation of AI.

"With Artificial Intelligence, malicious actors can generate text that is designed to mimic a real email," Lang said. "Before, the emails would be silly or not be spelled right or obviously not generated by an English speaker. But with AI, you can get this computer-generated output that makes it look authentic."

As an Information Security student assistant, Lang keeps up on the latest in AI and is now CompTIA Security Certified, which means he qualifies for a job in the field when he graduates.

Also, CompTIA Security Certified, Piedrasanta works as an intelligence specialist at the Navy Reserve Center in Port Hueneme. The San Fernando Valley native graduated from a Los Angeles community college, then joined the U.S. Navy for 8 ½ years.

"I used to be a mechanic in the Navy, and I still wanted to work in machine maintenance and troubleshooting. I felt like Information Technology was a good transition," he said.

While at CSUCI, Piedrasanta conducted a research project about cybersecurity and college students after observing students who visited the campus' Veterans



Computer Science student Steven Lang speaks at the CSUCI Cybersecurity Awareness Month event in October.

Resource Center.

"Military and non-military students would come in, print out documents, open up their email and just leave the page open," Piedrasanta said.

While conducting his senior capstone project, Piedrasanta found that seniors about to graduate were most likely to be casual about cybersecurity.

"It could be that seniors have a lower level of awareness because they're leaving the safety net of the University," Piedrasanta explained to the audience, suggesting it might be an indication that graduating seniors need to be vigilant about keeping their information safe.

Other speakers included representatives from area information security firms, as well as representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation who said the bureau is always looking for job applicants well-versed in cybersecurity.

Lang and Piedrasanta believe CSUCI is an ideal place to gain that expertise.

"Before I came to CSUCI, I was a mechanic with no prior Information Technology knowledge," Piedrasanta said. "But when I graduated, I was certified and felt very confident."

New degree launched for doctorate in Educational Leadership for Equity & Justice

The inaugural cohort for the newly-launched doctorate degree in Educational Leadership for Equity and Justice (DELEJ).

by DAISY RATZLAFF

CSUCI WELCOMED ITS INAUGURAL COHORT for the newly launched doctorate degree in Educational Leadership for Equity and Justice (DELEJ) this past summer. Designed to address pressing issues in education, the program aims to cultivate transformative leaders committed to promoting equity and justice. With nearly 80 applicants competing for just 25 positions, the program ultimately accepted 27 individuals ready to make a difference in their communities.

“It’s been a labor of love for multiple people,” said Andrea Bingham, the newly appointed Director of the Educational Doctorate Program and Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, who joined CSUCI in July 2023.

The program is rooted in an initial partnership between CSUCI and Fresno State that began in 2016. After four years in the partnership, a decision was made to create a unique program tailored specifically to CSUCI. During the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years, professors Tiina Itkonen, Charles Weis, Annie White, and the Dean of the School of Education collaborated with Bingham to help develop the curriculum for DELEJ, which involved extensive preparation of documents, proposals, and marketing plans.

“Reviewing feedback from graduates of our prior doctoral program and our Advisory Committee resulted in significantly improved courses, a program roadmap, and dissertation-in-practice support from

the prior partnership program in which we participated with Fresno State,” said Charles Weis, CSUCI’s Program Chair & Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, and School Counseling & Psychology.

Bingham said launching the program required significant effort and dedication.

“When that decision was made, we began to pull together what needed to be done to develop the DELEJ program and get it approved,” she explained. “There was a lot of work involved in preparing for the launch.”

The DELEJ courses and the program were granted approval by the University’s Academic Senate, Provost, and President Yao in the Fall of 2023. In the Spring of 2024, the program received approval from WASC, the accrediting commission for schools of Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Chancellor’s Office, paving the way for the program to open applications. Bingham and other faculty also conducted informational sessions that attracted nearly 250 attendees.

“We ultimately ended up with 78 total applications, which is really wonderful for a first-year program, but it put us as the faculty and admission’s committee in a very difficult position because as we were going through these applications we were just so impressed with the level of leadership and with the level of achievement,” she said.

To learn more visit: go.csuci.edu/ch-delej



CSUCI Professor of Biology Ruben Alarcón speaks to a class about sustainable agriculture in Ventura County.

In the Spring 2024 issue of Channel, we introduced “One Health” as a global initiative and theme underlying CSUCI’s 2030+ strategic priorities and goals. These emphasize our commitment to the region’s communities, economies, and environments. We continue this series focusing on agriculture as a major land use in the region, as well as an economic driver, employer, and area of technological innovation in Ventura County.

INNOVATION AS THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE IN VENTURA COUNTY

by RUBEN ALARCÓN, Professor of Biology

ID RIVING TO AND FROM CSUCI’S CAMPUS, you’ll notice that Ventura County’s landscape is occupied by fields, orchards and nurseries, encompassing about 150 square miles of irrigated lands. If you include open range where livestock can forage (303 square miles), nearly 24.6% of Ventura County is in some way involved in agricultural production, which directly employs more than 25,000 people. Impressively, Ventura County agriculture is a \$2.1 billion industry that consistently ranks 10th in the state in terms of gross dollars, and 11th in the United States. Our County’s contributions help California rank first in the United States in terms of food and agricultural products, and as the fifth largest supplier globally.

Agriculture has a long history in the county and has involved a diversity of communities, with the title of the #1 crop having changed over time. A century ago, Lima beans, lemons, walnuts and apricots were the dominant crops, but now strawberries are consistently at the top, followed by nursery stock, lemons, celery, raspberries and avocados which jockey annually for second and third place.

However, there are many issues that need to be addressed if agriculture is to persist in the region into the next century: labor shortages and rising operational costs, dwindling water supplies and climate change, regulations and the challenges of farming in an urban/agricultural interface, as well as the never-ending threat of new pests, pathogens and weeds.



Above: CSUCI Professor of Biology Ruben Alarcón

For agriculture to continue to play a significant role in Ventura County, it will take innovation and collaboration. Grazing, cover cropping, and no-till planting should be considered part of the same sustainable “toolkit” as a Geographic Information System (GIS), drones and automation. Every viable approach, as well as drought-, pest- and pathogen-tolerant crops, need to be tested and optimized for our climate and region. This work requires partnerships between public and private entities, including the tech industry, heirloom breeders, insectaries, higher education, and other valuable stakeholders.

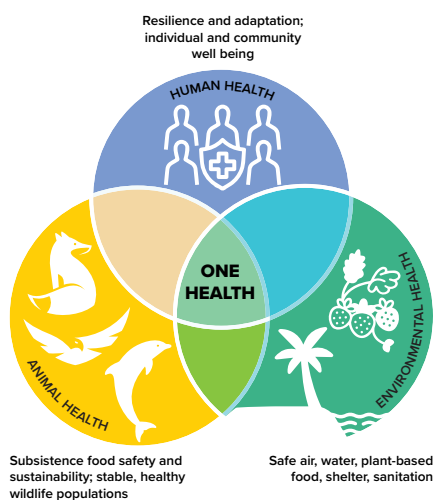
To quote Jules Pretty, “The health of our planet depends on the health of its ecosystems, and sustainable agriculture is key to maintaining that health.” Given the history and importance of agriculture in the region, faculty at CSUCI are working to create an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Science degree in Sustainable Agriculture. Students will not only have a strong foundation in STEM-based soil and plant science courses but will also learn about agrobusiness and the struggles of farmworkers and labor rights. In addition, students will gain real-world

experience through a required internship with local agricultural companies/organizations. In collaboration with the University of California’s Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center (UC HAREC), located on a 114-acre farm property on the west side of Camarillo,

CSUCI students will be able to raise crops each semester in their farming practices course and tend bees in a new apiary capable of maintaining up to 80 colonies.

Ventura County is also a leading hub in biotechnology and the development of unmanned naval vessels. Given that they are in one of the country’s top agricultural producing regions, and the fact that UC HAREC and CSUCI are supporting agricultural research and education, the region is poised to establish itself as a leader in sustainable agricultural solutions through innovative

cross-pollination. Together with the proximity of Port Hueneme, the only deep-water port between Los Angeles and San Francisco, which handles over \$15 billion in annual trade, we can ensure that agriculture will be a part of Ventura County’s future in sustaining healthy communities and ecosystems.





Professor of Marketing named President's Faculty Fellow

by DAISY RATZLAFF



FOR EKIN PEHLIVAN TEACHING IS MORE than just a profession. As a Professor of Marketing in the Martin V. Smith School of Business & Economics, Pehlivan has dedicated two decades, 10 of them at CSUCI, to teaching her students through real-world challenges while championing the transformative power of education. Recently recognized with the prestigious President's Teaching and Innovation Award in 2022, she has now been appointed as the 2024-25 President's Faculty Fellow.

After completing her master's degree in Turkey, she attained her doctoral degree from Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts, where she thrived as part of the first doctoral cohort.

"I was able to work with a lot of amazing people. I loved every minute of it," Pehlivan said. "I know a lot of people don't talk about their Ph.D. that way. If I had the chance to do it again, I would."

Her academic journey took her to various positions, including adjunct roles at Bentley University and Brandeis University's Heller School of Social Policy and Management. In 2012, she moved to California with her husband, who had accepted a position at Chapman University in Orange County. Through a doctoral friend, she learned about an opening for a marketing professor at CSUCI.

She recalls the lasting impression left on her after interviewing with President Emeritus Richard Rush.

"He was one of the first people that I met, and after he spoke about this University, I thought, 'I want to be here.' I remember calling my husband and telling him 'This doesn't feel just like a job; what I do could matter here.'"

Pehlivan joined CSUCI in the Fall of 2014, and her husband became a marketing professor at the University three years later. In response to the business closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, she took a sabbatical year to work on establishing CI Solutions through the support of CSUCI's Entrepreneurship & Small Business Institute, and to support the efforts of the Writing & Multiliteracy Center to create the first-ever Plot-a-Thon – which is an interdisciplinary, team-based competition that celebrates student learning in data analysis, visualization, and storytelling through a series of Fall training

workshops culminating in a two-day data visualization hackathon in the Spring.

CI Solutions is a student-run marketing agency that provides students with real-world experience while helping small businesses and non-profits with their business needs. Since May 2020, CI Solutions has empowered nearly 40 graduates, now thriving in the workforce and continues to involve 18 current students on 12 active projects.

"The University has been incredibly supportive of my projects focused on increasing post-graduate outcomes of our students. I am one of those people who likes to experiment and try new things, and I don't think I would have received this kind of support anywhere else. This is a special place for that," she said.

As part of her role as the President's Faculty Fellow,

Pehlivan will work on developing a student recruitment marketing plan aimed at increasing awareness of the University's offerings, understanding that CSU Channel Islands is often regarded as the "best-kept secret of the CSU system."

"We need to let people know about the amazing things we do," she explained.

This year's student recruitment marketing plan, planned and coordinated by CI Solutions students, involves ads across seven different digital channels, focusing on testing various messages under three main themes: campus life, a smart invest-

ment, and post-graduate outcomes.

"The idea is to build a flexible, repeatable and sustainable student recruitment marketing plan including other types of outreach methods, like email, and text messaging as well as digital ads," she said.

Pehlivan's passion extends beyond teaching and mentoring; she recently achieved a significant personal milestone by obtaining her U.S. citizenship.

"It's a big deal for me," she shared, describing the emotional moment of sharing the news with her campus community. "This is my community. My friends are from this campus. My students are my community."

Her dedication to education and her students has not gone unnoticed; she has received multiple legacy awards after being nominated by her students.

"To be honored by your students just feels different," she said. "They don't have to acknowledge you after graduation, if they don't want to; yet they choose to recognize your impact. That means everything to me."

"I am one of those people who likes to experiment and try new things, and I don't think I would have received this kind of support anywhere else. This is a special place for that."
—EKIN PEHLIVAN

Above: Professor of Marketing Ekin Pehlivan was appointed the 2024-25 President's Faculty Fellow.



Dolphin Pride Shines as Campus Celebrates Inaugural Homecoming Week

by DAISY RATZLAFF

CSUCI MARKED A HISTORIC MOMENT IN ITS 22-YEAR history as students, faculty, staff, and alumni came together to celebrate the University's first-ever Homecoming Week, October 21-26.

"Returning to campus for Homecoming feels like stepping back in time," said Ruthie Preston, a 2015 graduate. "Seeing old friends brings back a flood of cherished memories. It is heartwarming to witness the new generation of students embracing the spirit of the University."

Monday's kick-off pep rally featured music, a performance by the CSUCI cheer team, and a parade of decorated golf carts.

"Homecoming is very special to me, and I am so excited because we are showcasing so much of our talent," said Eboni Ford Turnbow, Vice President for Student Affairs. "It's so fun to see all the golf carts, trucks, vans and all the people participating."

Ford Turnbow said the celebration was a testament to the vibrant community spirit that defines CSUCI, adding it was a joy to witness the campus come alive with enthusiasm and camaraderie. She also recognized the hard work of event organizers, especially Director of Orientation & Engagement Programs Ariana Robles and Director of Career Development & Alumni Engagement Amanda



Homecoming was a festive celebration with local music, delicious food, dancing, a classic car show, and cameos by CSUCI mascot Ekho.

Carpenter, who co-chaired the Homecoming Committee.

"It's been extremely rewarding to see this vision become a reality for our campus," said Ford Turnbow.

Richard LeRoy, Vice President for University Advancement, highlighted the importance of the event by noting how wonderful it was to see familiar faces returning to campus.

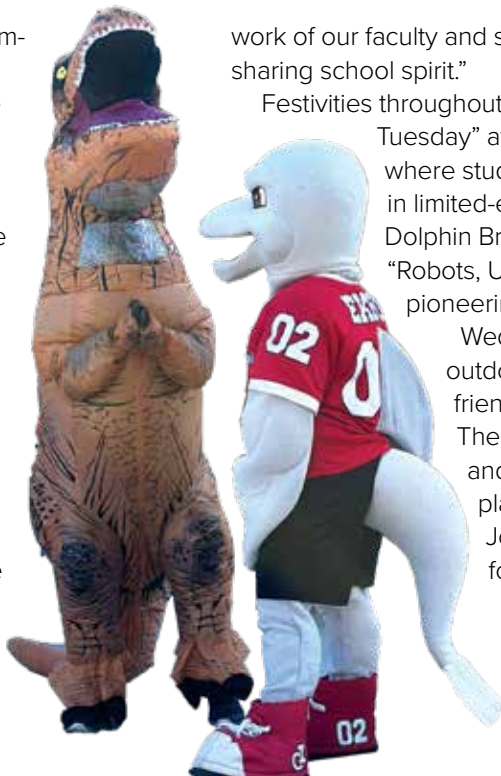
"Homecoming is building a new tradition for our campus, deepening the connections between our alumni, our students, and our mission, and celebrating the success of our University in serving this region," he said. "It's about the achievements of our alumni, and the

work of our faculty and staff. It is about shared affinity and sharing school spirit."

Festivities throughout the week included "Foodie Tuesday" at the Central Mall, "Float and Sip," where students enjoyed root beer floats in limited-edition Homecoming mugs, a Dolphin Brunch, a Farmers Market, and "Robots, Unveiled," showcasing CSUCI's pioneering robotic program.

Wednesday evening featured a free outdoor movie night with families and friends gathering under the stars. The 21st Annual CSUCI Graduate and Professional School Fair took place on Thursday in front of the John Spoor Broome Library, followed that night by "Burton's

Continued on page 18>





Above: Headliner L.A. band Ozomatli's impromptu music jam on Central Mall; Right: Comedian/actor Jay Pharoah performed Saturday night; Below: Dancers performed at the Homecoming Street Fair

Continued from page 17

Wonderland: A Homecoming Block Party" at the Student Union Treehouse Courtyard, where costumes were encouraged.

On October 25, participants were invited to join the Haunted Homecoming Sunset Kayak event at the CSUCI Boating Center. Later that evening, the Alumni & Friends Social ushered in Comedy Night in the Grand Salon. Before the performance by Saturday Night Live alum, Jay Pharoah, President Richard Yao welcomed students and alumni back to campus.

"CSUCI now has over 29,000 alumni," said President Yao. "Remarkably, over 80% stay in the region, with many having become leaders in diverse fields such as education, healthcare, biotechnology, finance, social services, and more. Their accomplishments not only inspire our current students but also play a vital role in enriching the communities we serve."

Homecoming Week wrapped up on Saturday, October 26 with free sailing, paddleboarding, and kayaking at the CSUCI Boating Center. Families enjoyed watersports along with a picnic, music and games. In the afternoon, the Central Mall came alive with a Homecoming Street Fair featuring food, music, a classic car show, and entertainment.



2005 Class Ambassador Melissa Mirkovich-Scholes challenged her fellow Dolphins to give

back to the University that "gave us a once-in-a-lifetime experience" by supporting the #ClashoftheClasses Class Giving Challenge. This week-long initiative successfully raised \$9,305 through 133 contributions from alumni, faculty, and staff. Gifts came from alumni across the country, including Colorado, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia.

"Returning to CSUCI is a poignant reminder that no matter where life takes us, we always have a home and a community that we can come back to," said 2015 graduate Ruthie Preston. "Homecoming holds a special place in my heart."

FROM *Regret* TO *Rediscovering* EDUCATION

Charles "Chip" Bolcik
studied abroad in
Andalusia, Spain as a
senior at CSUCI.

by DAISY RATZLAFF

FORTY-SIX YEARS AGO, CHARLES "CHIP" Bolcik made the life-altering decision to leave college and pursue a career in acting, convinced that he didn't need a degree to achieve his dreams. It was a decision that would haunt him for decades, filling him with regret for not completing his studies and a longing to study Spanish, a language he had fallen in love with during his first year of college.

"It bothered me the whole time that I didn't have a degree," he said. "My parents pushed me to stay in college, but I said, 'I don't need college.' Looking back, it seems so foolish. I was 21 when I quit, and by 25, I was thinking 'What did I do? Now I am too old to go back.' It really ate at me."

Growing up in Gaithersburg, Maryland, Bolcik's acting career began with Disney's All-American College Player Program, where he earned college credits during summer work. After successfully navigating auditions among 12,000 hopefuls, he landed a role that launched him into a lucrative acting career.

"I was making a lot of money for someone who was 20 years old," he says. "I bought a car. It was so cool. I decided I didn't need college anymore."

Bolcik's career flourished, leading him to theater and later voice-over work for TV commercials. He met his wife while performing at a comedy club in New York, and they've been happily married for 38 years, raising two children together.

"We just had this really great life," he said. "I owned an airplane, and we used to fly all over the country."

Despite his successes, Bolcik felt a persistent embarrassment about not having a college degree, especially coming from a family that valued higher education.

"The two things that I never accomplished were my college degree and being fluent in Spanish," he said.

"I know how to skydive, I know how to fly an airplane, I know how to make compost, I know how to garden organically, I know how to pour cement, I know how to make pottery. There are so many things I have learned, but I was really embarrassed for 46 years for never getting my college degree."

During his first year in college, Bolcik developed a passion for Spanish. This passion resurfaced two and a half years ago after a trip to Barcelona, Spain with his daughter, where he realized he wanted to speak the language fluently.

"That experience at the hotel made me go 'Next time I come here, I am going to speak to them,'" said Bolcik. "So, when I came home, I signed up for a class and I loved it."

His learning journey continued at Moorpark Community College, where he thrived, even amid the after-math challenges of the COVID pandemic.

"Learning a language for me is like a game," he says. "It's really fun."

After two semesters, he realized he could finish his degree and he enrolled at CSUCI. During the Fall, Bolcik took six classes that included Biology and a lab, History, English, Healthy Aging, and a Medical Interpreting class in Spanish – all of which he calls his "favorite class."

"Every class I take, I pledge to myself to really learn it. And as soon as I start a class, I think 'This is so exciting. I want to change my major!'" he said. "Every class has been like that. I just love learning."

Last Spring, Bolcik studied abroad in Andalusia, Spain, where he took five classes entirely in Spanish, including grammar, translation, linguistics, and two literature classes.

Read more at go.csuci.edu/ch-bolcik



Hospital partnerships shape future healthcare leaders

by DAISY RATZLAFF

AS THE DEMAND FOR SKILLED HEALTHCARE professionals continues to rise, CSUCI students like Karen Henriquez are stepping into the spotlight, ready to make a difference. A graduate of the Clinical Laboratory Sciences (CLS) program, Henriquez shows how the program, in partnership with five local area hospitals—Los Robles Regional Medical Center in Thousand Oaks, Adventist Health Simi Valley in Simi Valley, St. John's Regional Medical Center in Oxnard, and Community Memorial Hospital and Ventura County Medical Center in Ventura—prepares aspiring Clinical Laboratory Scientists to meet the urgent needs of the healthcare workforce.

"I've always been very interested in microbiology," said Henriquez, who joined the program after receiving a bachelor's degree in biology from a nearby university. "The CLS program was very good at teaching, and I liked that it was close by."

Henriquez's journey began in Fall of 2023 with a specific goal in mind: to follow her passion and become a vital part of the healthcare system. Throughout her 52-week internship at Los Robles Regional Medical Center, Henriquez worked side-by-side with an experienced clinical lab scientist, gaining invaluable insights into the daily operations of hospital laboratories.

"I really liked identifying bacteria," she said. "I would

test myself and most of the time I got it right. It was fun to challenge myself."

During her internship, Henriquez rotated through various departments, including hematology, urinalysis, blood bank, and microbiology.

"It was a lot of work, a lot of studying on your own," she said. "You really have to put in the work, but everyone was really nice and willing to help."

The comprehensive training, which involved four days of work at the hospital and one day a week of review classes with CSUCI faculty, not only boosted her confidence but also her commitment to a career in clinical laboratory science. She now works as a Laboratory Technician at Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in Los Angeles.

"The partnership with local hospitals is critical," explained Amy Denton, the program's coordinator. "One of the things that is important about this program is, the hospital staff are the ones that do 90% of the work. They are the ones who train the students, teach them how to use the instrumentation, and test them on their skills."

With the hands-on mentorship provided by hospital staff, students are well-prepared to pass their licensing exams and step into their roles as Clinical Lab Scientists. After completing their training, students become eligible to take one of three state-approved licensing exams,



CSUCI '24 B.S. Biology alum Jason Evans and current CLS student, works in a lab at Community Memorial Hospital.

which, upon passing, grant them the license needed to practice as a CLS.

“We often refer to it as a 52-week interview. We get to know the student and they get to know us,” said Beth Marsing, the director of Laboratory Services at Community Memorial Healthcare in Ventura. “Our students do not just observe testing processes, they get to see real-life scenarios and situations, so they can use those experiences throughout their laboratory career. Our expectation is that by the end, the student could work side-by-side with our staff.”

Since its launch in the 2016-2017 academic year, thanks to the vision of prior Provost Dawn Newman, the CLS program has attracted over 100 applicants annually. Yet only a maximum of 10 students can be accepted each year due to the limited capacity of each hospital’s laboratories, which can only accommodate one to two students. CLS certification can only be fulfilled within a hospital laboratory setting, not a university lab.

Denton highlighted the majority of students who have graduated from the program have secured employment, underscoring the strong demand for qualified clinical laboratory scientists in California’s healthcare system.

“This program has a really high rate of getting students into the workforce because it trains them to do the clinical lab work,” she said. “A physician does the final sign off, but they do the tests. Other lab assistants can’t work independently. A CLS can, so they are in demand.”



Marsing emphasized the importance of the program especially as hospital staff retire and the population ages.

“The laboratory field is in a critical shortage as we are seeing more people retiring than we are seeing coming into the field,” she said. “The program helps ensure we continue having potential new employees as our staff begin to retire and cut back on their hours.”

Reflecting on the program, Henriquez said that it has truly prepared her to provide patient care in the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare.

“I still use all of what I have learned,” she said. “The program made me know more, and showed me to be more aware of details, because in the end patients depend on you. So, you need to double - and triple-check everything.”

To learn more about CSUCI’s post-baccalaureate Clinical Laboratory Sciences certificate program visit ext.csuci.edu/programs/.

Deaf and blind student embraces evolving adaptive dance program

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

THE DANCE FLOOR THUMPS UNDER Sarah Ysordia's feet as the music moves her. She pops her shoulders, snakes out one arm, then the other, then snaps her head to the left, to the right.

Like a shadow, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter Destiny Bradford moves along with her, tapping her back, her arm, taking her hand to sign into her palm, letting her know the next dance moves.

"When I stand as a blind person and there are a lot of details happening around me, my interpreter uses her hand motions to demonstrate to me what they're doing with their footwork," Ysordia said. "I have a kind of muscle memory, and I am constantly using my muscle memory to remember every part of my dance."

Ysordia is a dancer and third-year CSUCI student who is both deaf and blind. Born in Oxnard, she has been dancing since she was three and deaf since she was two.

Ysordia was diagnosed as a child with Usher syndrome, a genetic condition which can cause vision and hearing loss. Her vision began to fade at age nine, and in 2020, when she was 35, she became completely blind.

After high school, Ysordia enrolled in Moorpark College but struggled with her failing eyesight. She took a break and enrolled in a Los Angeles program for the blind, where she learned living skills as a deaf/blind person.

In 2009, she gave birth to her son Gabriel. Raising him as a single deaf/blind mother re-ignited her desire to work with others with disabilities — both par-



CSUCI student and dancer Sarah Ysordia participates in integrative dance.
Below: Sarah Ysordia

ents and children.

She re-enrolled in Moorpark College in 2017 and in spring of 2022 graduated with associate degrees in liberal studies and behavioral and social sciences, as well as having earned a teaching certification in child development.

Still yearning to become a dance teacher, she enrolled in CSUCI in Fall of 2022 as a double major in Dance Studies and Political Science.

"I like public speaking and advocating for those with disabilities," Ysordia said. "I like to make sure other people's voices are being heard. I also like being involved politically because I think sometimes students with disabilities are scared to speak up."

Ysordia's timing was good. Associate Professor of Dance Studies Heather Castillo was designing CSUCI's new major to reflect dance that originated in the U.S., and to make Dance Studies as inclusive as possible.

"Integrative dance is a natural extension of this program," Castillo said. "We all learn in different ways, and some of us are going to need more support than others. Our space is open to everybody."

Part of integrative dance is incorporating Ysordia's interpreter Bradford, who is also a dancer, into the choreography.

"We all need one another to get where we're going," Ysordia said. "There will always be challenges in life, but when you find your soul and your destiny, no matter what you go through, you will succeed."



Inspired to make a difference

by PAMELA DEAN

FOR YEARS, ELISABETH Fowler has been helping to make the world a better place through both philanthropy and her own hands-on engagement.

She and her husband Greg are committed to supporting the communities they live in and together created the GA Fowler Foundation more than a decade ago to help a variety of causes at home and abroad.

Since its inception, the foundation has worked to address challenges in health care, conservation and education. And Fowler herself has poured her time and energy into numerous nonprofit causes in her Santa Barbara community. So much so that in 2021 she was named Santa Barbara County Philanthropist of the Year, and in 2023, she was honored as the 80th Person of the Year by the Santa Barbara Community Foundation.

"My mother was my role model who believed and demonstrated that in order to make a difference, you had to be engaged," Fowler said. "The volunteer work that I am involved with is priceless to me and since I have lived in Santa Barbara, I have had the privilege of working with some of the oldest non-profits as well as some of the newest. All of them are so interesting and inspiring."

CSUCI is fortunate to call Fowler a friend. In 2020, the GA Fowler Foundation began supporting the University and its students through generous contributions to a variety of essential areas including the University's Highest Needs, the Peer Mentor Ambassador Program, and the John Spoor Broome Library.



"Mental health is an area of such great need. Supporting students ... is so important to their resiliency and academic success." —Elisabeth Fowler

Most recently, the Foundation made a significant gift to CSUCI's Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) program in support of students' mental health care.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, CSUCI has seen increased demand

for counseling and psychiatric services among its student population, many of whom are uninsured or underinsured.

"Mental health is an area of such great need. Supporting students, especially first-generation students who may not be fully prepared for the stress of attending college, is

so important to their resiliency and academic success," Fowler said.

The gift helps support CAPS' partnership with the Community Memorial Health System Psychiatry Residency Program to provide psychiatric consultation and treatment to CSUCI students seeking behavioral health care.

"The Fowler Foundation's gift to CAPS is making a positive, direct, and measurable impact on mental health support for CSUCI students," said Kirsten Gabriel, Senior Director of Counseling & Psychological Services. "Through this initiative, residents provide a higher level of behavioral health services, which can be life-saving.

Not only do our students benefit from no-cost psychiatric services on campus, but we are also training the next generation of mental health professionals dedicated to serving our community. We are deeply grateful for this support."

Alumni & Friends Association Update



Alumni & Friends Association board members: Back Row Left to Right: Eric Meissner '15, Dhruv Pandya '17, Nicolas Palacios '17, Alex Gallardo '14, and Richard LeRoy. Front Row Left to Right: Melissa Mirkovich-Scholes '05, Brenda Bravo '10, Leah Lacayo, Nausheen Ahmed '14, and Waheed Akberzie '14

“Due-ing away” with membership fees

C SUCI'S ALUMNI & FRIENDS ASSOCIATION is adopting a “no dues necessary” policy in an effort to make joining more accessible for all alumni.

“The Alumni & Friends Association Board recently voted to shift from a dues-paying membership model to a more inclusive program, bringing all of our Dolphins together under the CSUCI alumni umbrella without paying an annual membership fee,” said Amanda Carpenter Director of Career Development & Alumni Engagement. “The new program is designed to foster a lifelong connection between alumni and the University, without the barrier of membership fees. This will help ensure all graduates, regardless of financial status, can remain actively involved and benefit from the University’s resources and community.”

The new policy went into effect in November. Current Lifetime Members will now be recognized as Legacy Members whose foundational support helped establish scholarships, alumni programming, and outreach.

New Alumni & Friends Chapters Promote Connection

The Alumni & Friends Association recently started two new chapters for Latine and Black alumni. The new chapters help students and alumni connect with each other, broaden their career networks, build lifelong friendships and give back to their alma mater through service and support. Each chapter has their own social activities, networking events, newsletters, and mentoring programs. More information can be found at: www.csuci.edu/alumni

New Board Members Hope to Make an Impact

The Alumni & Friends Association Board welcomed two new members this year. Both have deep ties to both the University and the community. *Channel* connected with Alex Gallardo and Nicolas Palacios to discuss why they chose to serve on the board.

ALEX GALLARDO, '14 B.S. Business, Economics minor; Vice President of Community Impact and Financial Wellness, Premier America Credit Union.

Channel: Why did you choose to join the Alumni & Friends Association Board?

Gallardo: I've always felt of home at CSUCI and really enjoyed my experience as a student. The faculty and staff made a difference for me and I see it as a way to give back to a university that has done so much for me.

Channel: What do you hope to contribute and accomplish?

Gallardo: I hope to contribute a unique and new perspective and to help the board find new and creative ways to engage our alumni network.

Channel: Why do you feel it's important to give back to your alma mater?



Gallardo: I have seen first-hand how the skills I learned at CSUCI have helped me in my career development. I want to give back because I see myself in these students and understand the challenges that come with navigating the school system. I feel like there is an opportunity to engage the students more and create a large network of working professionals.

NICOLAS PALACIOS, '15 B.S. Chemistry; '17 M.S. Biotechnology & Informatics; Global Marketing Manager, Amgen



Channel: Why did you choose to join the Alumni & Friends Association Board?

Palacios: Since mov-

ing back to Ventura County, I wanted to give back to CSUCI using my experience as a student and professional. The Alumni & Friends Board is a great way to impact both current students and my fellow alumni over the long and short term.

Channel: What do you hope to contribute and accomplish?

Palacios: I hope to contribute my perspective as a first-generation college student who successfully navigated multiple graduate degrees and as a professional in the healthcare/pharmaceutical industry.

Channel: Why do you feel it's important to give back to your alma mater?

Palacios: Just as CSUCI helped me accomplish my goals, I believe it's just as important to give back to ensure better opportunities for those who come after you.



Left to Right: Ron Werft and Dhruv Pandya received awards at the President's Dinner.

Cottage Health and Computer Science alumnus honored at President's Dinner

by KIM LAMB GREGORY

CSU CHANNEL ISLANDS' COMMUNITY partners and alumni are fundamental to the University's ongoing success, with alumni serving as role models and community partners providing internships, mentorships and career opportunities for students.

To show the University's appreciation, President Richard Yao recognized Cottage Health and Computer Science alumnus, Dhruv Pandya, at the annual President's Dinner, held in September at the Commemorative Air Force SoCal Event Hangar in Camarillo.

The event, which was sponsored by the CSU Channel Islands Foundation and Premier America Credit Union, was themed "Soaring to New Heights."

During an awards ceremony that followed a student research showcase and dinner, President Yao presented Pandya with the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Award and Cottage Health with the prestigious Robert J. Lagomarsino Award.

"Cottage Health's dedication to fostering hands-on experiences and supporting our students, faculty, and academic programs has not only enriched many educational journeys but has also empowered our students to thrive and succeed in their professional endeavors," President Yao said.

Two hundred of CSUCI's 1,225 graduates with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing came through the partnership with Cottage Health, which is almost 20 years old.

"We are incredibly grateful to CSU Channel Islands for this recognition," said Cottage Health President & CEO

Ron Werft. "The nationwide shortage of registered nurses with baccalaureate degrees in particular, has been a persistent challenge — one that has become even more critical in today's healthcare landscape. It takes strong partnerships to address this challenge, organizations working together to find new and better solutions."

It's been a remarkable journey for Pandya, who arrived on the CSUCI campus 10 years ago from his native India with his suitcase and \$1,500 in his pocket.

After graduating in 2017 with a Master's in Computer Science, Pandya went on to land a job in cybersecurity at J.D. Power and Associates after setting up shop in a local Starbucks with a sign on his laptop that read: "Looking for jobs in cybersecurity."

It worked, and now Pandya is Director of Information Security at Wistia, as well as a volunteer for numerous nonprofits, an archer, CrossFit athlete, and published poet. Dhruv was honored with the "40 Under 40" upcoming leaders award in 2022 by the Pacific Coast Business Times.

"I was very humbled and excited to learn I was going to get this award," Pandya said. "This University has just given me so much. To have a place like CSUCI means a lot for an immigrant who cannot go home easily."

Pandya has given much in return to his new home. His nomination letter from Director of Career Development and Alumni Engagement Amanda Carpenter read, in part:

"Dhruv is a strong advocate for kindness and compassion, believing in the power of individual acts of kindness to make the world a better place."

MELINA ORTEGA ✧ '21 B.A. PERFORMING ARTS/DANCE

Communicator with a Flair for Dance

by PAMELA DEAN

“I MET SO MANY PEOPLE AT CSUCI WHO changed my life for the better. I learned so much about myself and what I want out of life,” said Melina Ortega.

Raised in Oxnard, Ortega attended Pacifica High School. She began her college career as a Psychology major until a chance conversation with Heather Castillo, Associate Professor of Performing Arts, made her change direction.

“I have loved dancing since I was very young and began taking dance classes when I was nine,” Ortega explained. “I chose Psychology because of my desire to open a dance studio for children with special needs. But that conversation with Heather made me realize I really wanted to perform.”

Ortega soon changed her major to Performing Arts, where she found the guidance and support that helped her believe in herself and her ability to perform on stage.

“[Heather] took the time to get to know every single one of us in that dance room and cared for us like we were her own. She was the first person to tell me I belonged on stage and then gave me every tool, alongside the magical MiRiPark, [Performing Arts Lecturer] to make my dreams come true,” Ortega said. “She taught us to live fearlessly, but not recklessly, a motto I carry with me in everything I do. To this day, she and Miri attend my shows and present me with amazing opportunities. They continue to

believe in me and care for me even after graduation.”

In addition to blossoming as a dancer, Ortega launched a career in Information Technology while a student at CSUCI.

“I worked as a student assistant in the Solution Center, answering the phone lines for different departments,” Ortega said. She then moved on to Teaching & Learning Innovations where she began working with Ekhhobot, a chatbot tool for communicating with students.

“I helped develop the personality of Ekhhobot, creating the knowledge base of information, and creating outgoing campaigns. The summer after I graduated, I took over the chatbot entirely.”

She then went on to work for the University’s Student Academic Success & Equity Initiatives program as the Coordinator for Strategic Communication and Student Success Chatbot, where she continues to work today.

Ortega still dreams of one day opening a non-profit organization that offers a variety of dance and art programs to underserved communities.

“As a first generation Mexican American, I understand how difficult it can be to experience the arts. I was blessed to have access to the arts growing up, but that is not the case for a lot of families,” she said. “Not being able to develop creatively because of lack of funds is an issue I feel passionately about. I’d love to do whatever I can to mend that bridge.”



Melina Ortega loves to dance and solve technology issues.

JACK HOLDEN * '18 B.A. BIOLOGY & ALEXIS MUMFORD * '18 B.A. COMMUNICATION

High school sweethearts attended CSUCI together

by PAMELA DEAN

ALEXIS MUMFORD AND JACK HOLDEN WERE local high school and college sweethearts who attended CSUCI together.

Both grew up in Oxnard and went to Santa Clara High School where they began dating as sophomores. They just married in October.

Mumford knew from a young age she would

in Student Government, serving as Director of Events for two years before becoming Vice President for Student Government. While Vice President, she was chosen to participate in the American Committees on Foreign Relations Young Leaders Initiative in Washington D.C.

As a commuter student, Mumford saw getting involved at school as a way to make friends and build connections.

"When you're part of something, you want to stay on campus and try new things," Mumford said. "As Director of Events, I wanted to give students real chances to connect, be informed, and get involved. My first year taught me how to market creatively, to get commuters to stick around and encourage housing students to step out of their dorms. I once had students dress up as breakfast items to market an event."

Holden knew he wanted to follow in both his mother's and father's footsteps and become an optometrist.

"I have a science mind and growing up around optometry, I saw early on that it was an enjoyable field to be a part of," he explained.

After earning his optometry degree in 2022 from the Southern California College of Optometry at

Marshall Ketchum University, he joined his parents' practice, Family Optometric Group in Oxnard.

In addition to providing primary and specialty eye care for adults and children at his parents' office, Jack and his brother Patrick, also an optometrist, have learned to perform an innovative new post-op procedure adjusting the lenses of patients who have had cataract surgery. They have partnered with a local ophthalmologist to provide this groundbreaking procedure to patients in the area.

Whether it's expanding the frontiers of optometry, taking over the family business or starting a family, the future is certain to be bright for the newly married couple.



Jack Holden and Alexis Mumford graduated CSUCI in 2018 and were just married in October.

attend CSUCI. Her mother, Monica Rivas, works at the University and helped steer her daughter in that direction.

Holden felt attending the University was his best option: "CSUCI is local, affordable, and offers a great education," he said.

The pair graduated in 2018, Mumford with a degree in Communication and a minor in Psychology, Holden with a degree in Biology.

Mumford now works as a media strategist for Salem Media Group in Camarillo, strategizing digital and radio marketing campaigns for businesses.

As a student at CSUCI, she was extensively involved

SIERRA GUTIERREZ ✧ '08 B.S. BUSINESS; '10 M.B.A.

Alumna Equipped for Successful Banking Career

by PAMELA DEAN

SIERRA GUTIERREZ DISCOVERED HER PASSION for banking while working as a part-time teller during graduate school.

The Simi Valley native graduated from Royal High School and attended CSUCI where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Business with a minor in Economics in 2008 and a Master of Business Administration in 2010.

During her MBA studies, she accepted her first role with Premier America Credit Union. "I found that I had a deep appreciation for the credit union movement and the opportunity to provide banking solutions and financial literacy to our community members," Gutierrez explained.

She has been with Premier America ever since and currently serves as Eastern Regional Director, overseeing 10 branches from Simi Valley to Burbank. She aspires to continue growing within the industry and one day become a CEO or COO.

She credits CSUCI for providing the exceptional education that prepared her for a career in her chosen field.

"I learned many management and communication skills that helped boost my career growth and strengthen my competencies," Gutierrez explained. "The exceptional quality of my undergraduate business courses inspired me to pursue my MBA

at CSUCI. With a concentration in International Business, I also had the unique opportunity to engage in short-term study abroad programs in China, Chile, and Argentina, which I found profoundly enlightening."

Gutierrez is also an avid volunteer. She has been on the United Way Board of Directors for the past five years and has held the position of Secretary of the Executive Board for the past three.

"Ventura County is my home, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to contribute to an organization that positively impacts those in need within our community," Gutierrez said.

"I believe it is essential for everyone to volunteer with organizations that resonate with their core values."

Gutierrez also serves on the board of directors of Braves Baseball Academy in Van Nuys. She has been the recipient of numerous recognitions including being chosen for the Pacific Coast Business Times 40 Under Forty list in 2018, the Greater Conejo Valley Chamber of Commerce's 40 under Forty list in 2024, and the 2024 Milton M. Teague Award for Outstanding Community Volunteerism from the United Way of Ventura County.

Her three children—Robinson, 12, Cole, 9 and Reagan, 2 often join her in volunteering at United Way events.



Andrew Bautista ✧ '20 B.A. Art

Creating his own artistic path

by PAMELA DEAN

CHOOSING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN THE ARTS was a leap of faith for Andrew Bautista. Many of his family members worked in the medical field. Believing he should follow in their footsteps, he began CSUCI as a Health Science major, but quickly discovered that was not the right path for him.

"After taking a few classes, I realized health care wasn't for me. I am a creative person. My dad was also very creative but didn't have an opportunity to pursue that path," Bautista explained.

The painting experience convinced Bautista to change his major to Art. He went on to take several classes with Art Professor Luke Matjas, who became a mentor to him and gave him the confidence to pursue a career in graphic design.

"Luke put me through my paces. His classes were an eye-opening experience for me and introduced me to art in the digital space," Bautista said. "He made me confident that I was meant to be there, no matter what I thought of myself. Whenever I was wavering, he was the one to pick me up."

A year after graduating, Bautista found his dream job as a graphic designer with Camarillo-based Bownet, a portable sports-training equipment company. He is now their senior graphic designer and social media content creator.

"I love sports, and at Bownet I get to watch them every day," Bautista said. "All of my co-workers are sports fans too. It's nice to be engulfed in something you enjoy. It doesn't feel like work most of the time; it feels like I am hanging out, talking about sports and I work on the side."

Bautista grew up in El Rio, a small unincorporated town near Oxnard. He attended Pacifica High School and thinks he may one day

Even though he had never taken an art class, Bautista decided to give a painting class a try. The problem was that the class had begun three weeks earlier and was already full. But instructor Beverly Decker didn't hesitate to encourage Bautista to jump right in.

"She made an exception for me and she gave me the confidence that I needed at the time because I was really unsure of what I wanted to do. She reassured me that I was doing the right thing. I owe a lot to her for her encouragement."

become a university art professor, perhaps even at a school like CSUCI with a large Latino population. He wants to inspire students the same way Professor Matjas inspired him.

"I am a person of color and there aren't a lot of people of color in the art industry. Being a Latino is very important to me. I want to show students that you can be a person of color and succeed in the creative space. If I could be someone's Luke Matjas, that would be a full-circle moment for me."



Lori Macdonald ✱ '05 B.A. Liberal Arts

Alumna leads as instructor for California Grand Juries

by DAISY RATZLAFF

LORI MACDONALD'S PASSION for education and community is as strong as ever. After dedicating 18 years to CSUCI and retiring in 2020, the 2005 Liberal Arts major has taken a unique path from being a non-traditional student and University staff member to serving as an instructor for Grand Juries with the Civil Grand Jury Association of California.

"I was part of that very first class in 2002 and worked in the Office of the President for Dr. Richard Rush. Over time, I was offered a position in the Enrollment Center by the Vice President for Student Affairs," she said. "I actually worked at the University from the moment it opened and retired during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Reflecting on the early days of CSUCI, when the campus only had a handful of students and classrooms, along with the Bell Tower "but not much else," Macdonald said it was "thrilling" to be part of something that was just beginning to take shape.

"It was so much fun to see this thing being built that was beneficial to so many different people and the community," she said. "We were pioneers; people getting a message out about the possibilities that higher education could bring."

Macdonald said her years of work as an Enrollment Center Specialist and a Coordinator of Student Recruitment Programs allowed her

to witness the transformative power of education, especially for students from underserved backgrounds.

"It's like dropping a pebble in the pond and you get that ripple that forms outward," Macdonald said. "It doesn't just change a family; it changes whole communities."



Upon retiring, the Southern California native, who spent much of her youth in Palmdale, initially anticipated a quieter life. However, she quickly found a new calling.

"I thought I would be sitting on my laurels, not doing much of anything," she said with a smile. "In reality, after six months there was this little blurb on Nextdoor about becoming

a Ventura County grand jury member, so I applied and was chosen."

Selected through a blind process after passing background checks, Macdonald served on the grand jury for two years, becoming the foreperson in her second year.

During that time, she was also approached by the Civil Grand Jury Association of California to train new grand jurors. In her current role, she now travels several months a year to conduct training sessions – both in-person and via Zoom – across different counties, where she educates jurors about responsibilities and provides practical advice.

"I am training other grand juries on how to be a grand juror, including report writing, which is mandated by penal code," she said.

Macdonald's passion for the University hasn't diminished. She remains active in the alumni community, attends events like Dodger Day and the Campus Reading Celebration, and engages with the Retiree

Association. She especially enjoys connecting with former student assistants whom she managed during her time at the University and considers one of her greatest accomplishments.

"It brings me great joy to see how successful they have been, going where life takes them," she said. "It's kind of like watching your kids grow up. It's fun."

Class Notes

Dolphins are natural communicators! We love to hear from our Dolphin alumni around the world—29,000 and counting—so we can help share life changes and achievements.

Submit a class note to: go.csuci.edu/class-note or scan the QR code on the right.



2010

Amanda Howard-Fairrington (B.A. Communication) –

Owner of Denver Birth and Wellness, a company that offers a dedicated team of birth and postpartum doulas, CPR instructors, and a variety of childbirth and parenting classes. She is excited about the future of her growing business and its positive impact on the community!



2017

Haley Winters (B.A. Early Childhood Studies) –

Recently completed her Master of Education at Loyola Marymount University and has been promoted to Senior Project Management Coordinator at Amgen.



2013

Brittaney Latta

(B.A. Psychology) – Started an online private practice as a trauma recovery, queer psychotherapist.



2017

Nicolas Palacios (M.S.

Biotechnology & Bioinformatics)

– Promoted to Global Marketing Manager at Amgen.



2014

Alex Gallardo (B.A. Business Administration & Economics)

– Serves as the Vice President of Community Impact and Financial Wellness at Premier America Credit Union. In addition to his professional role, Alex is dedicated to giving back as the Vice President of The Enclave at Ventura and a Board Member of the Ventura Community Development Corporation.



2020

Courtney Richardson (B.S. Health Science) –

Completed her M.S. in Biology in 2022 at Grand Canyon University. She has taught courses in Anatomy/Physiology and Microbiology at Carrington College Boise. While at CSUCI, she married Torey and welcomed their first daughter during her master's program. She is now taking a break to welcome their second daughter but plans to return to teaching in the future to inspire aspiring healthcare students.

FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT

1,323

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

\$3,918,450

TOTAL DOLLARS RAISED

299

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"We are deeply grateful to our supporters and partners for their commitment to CSU Channel Islands' mission and vision of serving our region. Through your investments, we are able to provide essential scholarship support for students, create meaningful experiential learning experiences, and establish career pathways for students that will strengthen our communities. Together, we can realize our shared passions and make a positive impact on our community—and the world."

—CSU Channel Islands Foundation Board Chair Dr. Mark Lisagor

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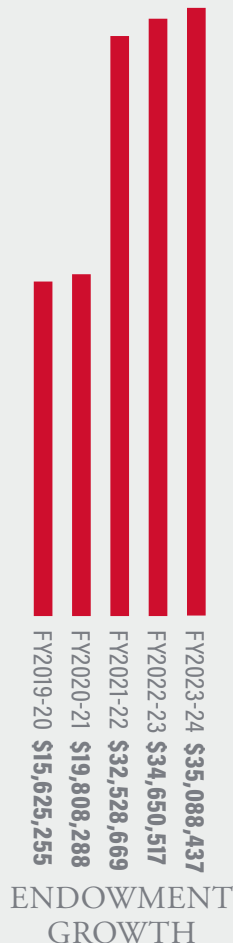
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2024: A LOOK BACK AT THE YEAR IN GIVING

PHILANTHROPIC HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR INCLUDED:

- A \$1 million pledge from the TOLD Foundation to establish the TOLD Fund for High Impact Practices.
- A \$125,000 gift from Mary "Tipper" Gore to the Peer Mentor Ambassador Endowment.
- A \$70,000 gift from Elizabeth Fowler and the GA Fowler Family Foundation to support Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS).
- A \$50,000 pledge from Paul & Christine Magie to support the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

NEW DONOR-FUNDED SCHOLARSHIPS::

- A \$100,000 pledge from the Crankstart Foundation for transfer student scholarships.
- A \$50,000 pledge from John and Linda Zaruka in support of the Zaruka Family Scholarship.
- A \$30,000 pledge from Peter and Karen Wollons in support of the Wollons Family Endowed Scholarship.
- A \$25,000 gift from Dr. W. Charles Weis and Patricia Walsh in support of the Weis Leadership Endowed Scholarship.
- A \$25,000 gift from Dr. Lynn Wan and Dr. Gil Onaka in support of the Wan Family Endowed Scholarship.

A LOOK AT THE ENDOWMENT

The Foundation manages CSUCI's endowment funds with the intent of generating additional income from the philanthropic gifts given to the University. As of June 30, 2024, the Foundation's endowment had a value of \$35.1 million. The endowment paid out \$697,689 in 2023-2024 directly supporting scholarships and academic initiatives such as student research. As of June 30, 2024, the Foundation's total assets are \$100.6 million, a growth of 110%.

ENDOWMENT VALUE ON JUNE 30

\$35.1 M

SUPPORT OF ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

\$697,689

HONOR ROLL OF DONORS

These charitable gifts in support of CSU Channel Islands were made from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024, with the exception of Legacy Society and Society of Distinction. Every gift makes a difference and every donor is appreciated. Thank you!

On behalf of the students, faculty and staff, we gratefully acknowledge the following donors:

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Why I Give ~ PILAR PACHECO

"The Bracero Scholarship grew out of the Bracero Oral History Project, a service-learning project created in collaboration with the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and involved many campus areas and community organizations.

The Bracero Scholarship was created by CSUCI students who sold t-shirts to fundraise for the first scholarship. I donate to it because it allows me to continue to honor the Braceros' legacy, their families and their stories by awarding the scholarship to a student with a familial connection to the Bracero Program. And it gives me an opportunity to pay it forward to a student who embodies the same strength and fortitude as their ancestors, and dedication and commitment to themselves, their education and the community."

— Pilar Pacheco, Director, CSUCI Center for Community Engagement



▯ Deceased *Major Gift Donor | The above totals represent the total deductible gift amounts (pledge and pledge payments) made in FY24.

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Why I Give ~ JEFF GREEN FAMILY FOUNDATION and THE TRADE DESK

"I believe in our community. There is a lot of diversity in our community and there are very few places where that all comes together. CSUCI is one of those places. I think the greatest hope for any community is to educate its citizens well—all of them." — The Trade Desk's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and co-founder Jeff Green



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Know your options and opportunities.

There are a number of ways you can make a bequest to CSU Channel Islands. Learn more at csucilegacy.org or contact **Grace Durst at 805-437-3615 or email grace.durst@csuci.edu**.

Thank you for considering ways to support the CSUCI mission to prepare students for the dynamic and ever-changing world in which we live.

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