



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOPHIA DARVISH

Sophia Darvish worked as a legislative intern for Rep. Salud Carbajal and Rep. Lou Correa as part of the Panetta Congressional Internship Program.

PANETTA SCHOLAR

WASHINGTON EXPERIENCE COULD HELP STUDENT SOLVE REAL-WORLD ISSUES

Congressional internship widens education

By Lou Ponsi,
contributing writer

All through high school, and now at Cal State Fullerton, Sophia Darvish has always sought out opportunities that enrich her mind and help shape her passions. Among the most fulfilling of those opportunities for Darvish, who is in her fourth semester at CSUF, was her participation in the Panetta Congressional Internship Program.

As a Panetta Scholar, Darvish, a criminal justice major, spent the Fall 2023 semester in an 11-week internship in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington D.C. The Panetta Institute was founded and is co-directed by Leon Panetta and his wife, Sylvia. Panetta served in several Democratic administrations as Secretary of Defense, director of the CIA

and White House Chief of Staff. As part of the internship, congressional representatives, along with state and local elected officials, taught the interns policy issues related to income inequity, inflation, health care and Middle East politics. The first two weeks of the internship took place in August at Cal State Monterey Bay, where the interns attended lectures, including lectures given by Panetta himself.

“We were learning all about the government and bipartisanship and basically how things work,” Darvish said. “And then we were sent to D.C. and spent 11 weeks there working full time for a member of the House of Representatives.” In Washington, Darvish worked as a legislative intern for U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal of California’s 24th District, which encompasses portions of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. Her duties included preparing and maintaining reports and memos, drafting letters to constituents, organizing messages from constituents, answering phone calls, attending briefings and giving tours of the U.S. Capitol building. Only 25 students from the CSU system, Santa Clara University, St. Mary’s

WASHINGTON » PAGE 5

SERVICES

Guardian Scholars Program gives foster youth a boost

25 years of providing scholarships, housing

By Nicole Gregory,
contributing writer

The Guardian Scholar Program was created in 1999 through a partnership between Cal State Fullerton and Orangewood Foundation to support foster youth in their journey through college. On Jan. 30, the program will be honored on its 25th anniversary during the Cal State University Board of Trustees meeting. Support for foster youth is critical; roughly two-thirds of foster youth are going to be homeless within the first 12 months of leaving foster care, said Chris Simonsen, CEO of Orangewood Foundation, which helps

SCHOLAR » PAGE 2



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUNELYN MERWIN

Alum Junely Merwin is currently studying for a master’s degree in higher education at CSUF.

DOCUMENTARY SERIES

Examining the history and evolution of Black beauty

Kristin Rowe shares cultural expertise

By Jenelyn Russo,
contributing writer

Kristin Denise Rowe’s decision to join the contemporary natural hair movement in the early 2000s has allowed her to bring a unique and important voice to the conversation around Black beauty. An assistant professor in Cal State Fullerton’s Department of American Studies, Rowe teaches courses such as “Women, Race and Ethnicity in American Culture” and “The Body in American Culture,” where she and her students ex-

BEAUTY » PAGE 5

#7

IN THE NATION FOR
BEST VALUE

The Wall Street Journal, 2024

Cal State Fullerton.

TITAN VOICES

One student’s bravery started a movement to support former foster youth



Sylvia A. Alva
CSUF president

It started in a moment of crisis for a student, challenging the status quo and stretching the university to work differently, to respond with compassion, and to do the right thing.

In the late 1990s, a freshman turned 18 and aged out of foster care during the summer between high school and college. She suddenly found herself without housing. Cal State Fullerton dorms were not staffed year-round and her hopes of attending college seemed to end before they could begin.

The student reached out for help and with the approval of then-President Milton Gordon, staff were given the green-light to challenge “how they always did things.” They were empowered to provide housing solutions that broke the mold of typical dorm life. A partnership with Orangewood Foundation took root, and through both private support and innovative thinking, the student could move into the dorms before the semester started.

The bravery of just one student courageous enough to ask for help, started a movement.

It soon became clear this was not an isolated experience. While former foster youth often met the rigorous qualifications to attend Cal State Fullerton, circumstances beyond their control could many times derail their academic journey.

Cal State Fullerton responded by creating the Guardian Scholars Program. This work continues today and actively promotes social mobility by empowering students to disrupt cycles of poverty and trauma, and it is now being done all over the United States, thanks to the Titan community and partners like Orangewood Foundation.

Our Guardian Scholars Program was the first of its kind 25 years ago and led to the creation of 90 additional student support programs for former foster youth at universities and colleges throughout the country, including all 23 CSUs.

According to the National Foster Youth Initiative, only 3% to 4% of former foster youth obtain a four-year college degree because it is uncommon for students to have the financial resources, mentorship, support, stability and guidance they need to complete postsecondary education.

The Guardian Scholars Program breaks these barriers by providing a nurturing support system with wrap-around services and a community that enhances belonging and success for our students. Additionally, substantial tuition and housing support are offered through the program.

Founded in 1998 with three students, 304 Guardian Scholars have since graduated. Notably, this year marks our largest cohort with 27 current students expected to graduate in May. Numerous Guardian Scholar alumni advanced on to earn master’s degrees in fields such as social work, counseling, education and international business.

The program recently expanded its services to graduate students and nine are participating. This number is likely to grow as word spreads and more students decide to pursue graduate degrees.

On Jan. 30, I have the privilege of speaking about the legacy and impact of this program to the California State University Board of Trustees. Longtime Guardian Scholars supporter and partner Chris Simonsen, CEO of Orangewood Foundation, and alumna Becky Wells, a foster youth advocate, will join me. Our Guardian Scholars Program will be profiled as a compelling example of inclusive partnerships and demonstrates the impact private support makes to our students.

As president of Cal State Fullerton, it is an honor to amplify these stories and express my gratitude to students, leaders and partners whose bravery and compassion challenged the status quo. They conducted their work through an equity lens and built a supportive community that gives students the foundation to excel.

This is what makes us a Titan family.

Learn more and consider supporting our groundbreaking Guardian Scholars Program.

Sylvia A. Alva began leading Cal State Fullerton as president in August 2023.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JUNELYN MERWIN

Junely Merwin entered foster care at age 15, one month after giving birth to her son. In addition to her master’s degree studies, she now works with a foster youth program at a community college.

Scholar

FROM PAGE 1

foster young people develop skills for self-sufficiency.

Young people in California can stay in foster care until they’re 21 if they continue to meet with a social worker, among other requirements. But the challenges they face are daunting.

“The biggest issue is they don’t have that network of adult and family supporters to help them,” Simonsen said.

If they’re able to graduate from high school and are accepted at Cal State Fullerton, current and former foster youth can receive a range of support as they step into higher education.

“Aside from providing the scholarship, we may also help with securing housing on campus as some students may not have a place to live once they begin their tenure at the university,” said Felipe Martinez, who coordinates the Guardian Scholars program, which has been replicated in universities throughout California as well as in other states. “We currently support 129 Guardian Scholars.”

Junely Merwin was part of the Guardian Scholar Program during her undergraduate years; she graduated from CSUF with a bachelor’s degree in 2019.

“I entered foster care at the age of 15, cradling my 1-month-old son in my arms, with no family support,” she said. “Throughout the five years I spent in foster care, I navigated through three foster homes, several high schools, and the challenges of attending college while being a teen mom in the system.”

Merwin is on track to achieve her master’s degree in higher education at Cal State Fullerton later this year.

“The Guardian Scholars program is crucial for foster youth due to the unique challenges they face,” Merwin said. “Foster youth have little to no family ties and often lack resources and a community to guide them through higher education and adulthood. These individuals often have a history of trauma and must overcome the challenges associated with both foster care and pursuing higher education. The Guardian Scholars program serves as a vital support system, providing advocacy, guidance, and connections to essential resources.”

Merwin said her journey in foster care was marked by the challenges of dealing with unsupportive foster homes, social workers, and the system itself. But in the midst of this, she encountered adults who believed in and supported her dream of earning a college degree.

“Their encouragement became a driving force behind my determination to secure a good job, providing the stability that my son and I deserved,” she said.

She currently works with a foster youth program at a community college and intends to continue once she graduates.

Becky Wells also credits the Guardian Scholars Program for encouraging her to get her college degree as a young single mom. She graduated from Cal State Fullerton in 2000 and is grateful to Ron Davis, the program’s founder — “I call him my adoptive father,” she said — and Gene Howard, who was at Orangewood Foundation during that time. Both were integral in supporting and encouraging her to continue her education.

“It’s hard to put into words something that I feel so deep in my heart

and has impacted my life so profoundly; the program has changed my life and countless others,” said Wells, who now lives near Austin, Texas, with her husband and children. “I appreciate the Guardian Scholar Program not only for the financial assistance I received but also for the lifelong friends I’ve made. It truly is a family.”

The Guardians Scholars Program provides holistic support to foster youth, Martinez said. “It provides an opportunity to level the playing field as much as possible.” To respect their privacy, students are never asked to share their stories.

“We also provide training to faculty, staff and campus partners, which allows them to learn more about the foster youth population and helps them recognize the impact that this can have on fos-

ter youth as they navigate the university,” Martinez said.

Guardian Scholars who’ve gone on to receive master’s degrees have focused on counseling, social work, education and international business, he said.

The Cal State Fullerton staff at the Center for Scholars is passionate about helping foster youth surmount their challenges.

“It is incredibly rewarding to work with students and help them thrive on campus,” Martinez said. “This population of students has been told that statistically they should not be in college, much less have graduated from high school. They are overcoming obstacles, changing statistical narratives and creating opportunities for themselves and those who will come after them.”

TITAN OF EMPOWERMENT

From a fan in the stands to a voice in demand.

Communications major **Robbie Loya**, is turning his broadcast dreams into reality through an opportunity provided by the **Titans Sports Network** at Cal State Fullerton.

Loya, 23, has already broadcast more than 100 games through Titans Sports Network and ESPN+; leading to multiple job offers.

Learn more about Titans Sports Network:

Cal State Fullerton.

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ARTS

A game-changer: Underdogs take on the political system

Jon Bruschke's debut musical

By Greg Hardesty,
contributing writer

Jon Bruschke knew he was onto something big when he overheard his 16-year-old daughter, Andromeda, singing at home.

But she wasn't belting out a tune by one of her favorites, Taylor Swift.

Rather, the Fullerton Union High School student was singing a song from her father's first musical, "Change the Game," staged Jan. 5-6 at the Laguna Beach Cultural Arts Center and being shopped around for potential performances at other venues.

Bruschke is a professor and speech and debate coach at CSUF, so a musical isn't the first thing that comes to mind when guessing a pet project of his.

But Bruschke, who's been playing the keyboards and writing songs since he was 18 years old, is a member of the "three-chord rock band" True to the Universe, a longtime fixture on Orange County's live music scene.

So, tunes are in his blood.

And Bruschke's multicultural and high-achieving speech and debate team at CSUF was the inspiration of "Change the Game," a story about grassroots empowerment, local politics, a patchwork community of young adults from different ethnic backgrounds, and with the message that maybe it's not how to win, but rather how to change the game.

As for Andromeda singing her father's original songs?

She's one of the 14 members of the cast of "Change the Game," many of whom are CSUF alumni or current students.

Andromeda, who has been dancing since age 3 and sings and acts, plays a student/reporter and is one of five members of a quasi-chorus who perform in the musical.

The plot

The plot centers on students at the fictional Cal State San Marita who convince their political philosophy professor to take on big-money developers and run for local office. It's a story of underdogs who take on the system by coming together to make a difference in the world by changing their community.

"They succeed not by beating people at their own game but by changing what



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JON BRUSCHKE

"Change the Game," written and directed by CSUF speech and debate professor Jon Bruschke, was staged at the Laguna Beach Cultural Arts Center early this month.

the game is about," said Bruschke, the musical's writer, producer and director who for the last six years has served as chair of CSUF's Department of Communication Studies.

"They realize they must make the world better for everyone and not just for themselves," said Bruschke, who began his career at CSUF in 1997 after attending the university as an undergrad-

uate (1984-88) and earning his doctorate in communication from the University of Utah in 1994.

'Cooking with ideas'

Bruschke grew up in Salt Lake City and fell in love with speech and debate in high school when he had to take it as an elective after the metal shop class filled up.

"My brain was cooking with ideas at the

time, and I latched onto it," he recalled.

He says coaching CSUF's speech and debate team has been the most meaningful thing he's done in his life.

"What set us apart is we would get a variety of students — Latinx kids, Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.," Bruschke said of his early years as speech and debate coach. "They'd all come together in one room. We were always overmatched by USC, Harvard, Northwestern, and other powerhouse speech and debate teams. But by the time our students were seniors, they were competing nationally."

In 2004, the CSUF speech and debate team hit a high-water mark with an appearance in the quarterfinals of the National Debate Tournament.

Bruschke said his experience with the speech and debate team informed the plot of his musical.

"Seemingly every demographic came together, and it made them feel they belonged," he said of his speech and debate team.

"What I would love to be is the Gene Roddenberry of musical theater," added Bruschke, referring to the creator of "Star Trek" on TV. "I want to be the guy who brings everyone together and helps build a future where everyone is included and has a place."

'Not going to end here'

Bruschke began working on "Change the Game" in the spring of 2020. He would bounce ideas off bandmate and CSUF philosophy professor Andrew Howat.

In August 2022, the musical had its first workshop performance at the Maverick Theater in Fullerton. A year later, four shows were held at the Chance Theater in Anaheim.

Musical arrangements in "Change the Game" are by Howat and Bruschke.

Bruschke's son, Milo, 20, co-wrote the lyrics with his father. The 17 songs in the musical originally were recorded in Howat's home studio. A key hip-hop section was contributed by Tyrone Stokes, who goes by the stage name Lyrically Twisted.

Bruschke said he hopes "Change the Game" will be staged again soon.

"It was a blast, and it's not going to end here," Bruschke said. "I made a promise to the cast that I will push this as far as we can make it go."

For more information about "Change the Game" visit changethegamemusical.wordpress.com.

FROM SKETCHES TO SUCCESS

Pencil Mileage Club sharpens art students' skills

CSUF News Media Services

With an illustration portfolio of more than 20 children's books, including collaborations with Penguin Random House, Disney, Hasbro, Nickelodeon and NBC, Cal State Fullerton alumna Eren Unten attributes much of her professional success to the opportunities provided by the university's Pencil Mileage Club.

Since 1996, PMC has provided a space for aspiring animators and illustrators to build skills, collaborate and forge lasting friendships. The club also offers opportunities for students to visit studios and network with industry professionals.

"Some of the fondest memories I have are the studio visits and working late in the animation room with friends," shared Eren '03 (B.F.A. art-entertainment art/animation). "Another fond memory is how I got to hang out with the person who would later become my husband."

Her husband, Wayne Unten, who earned a bachelor's degree in art-entertainment art/animation in 2003, has been a character animator at Walt Disney Animation Studios since 2005. He has worked on films like "Bolt," "Frozen," "Wreck-It Ralph" and "Moana." Most recently, he was the head of animation on Disney's new film, "Wish."

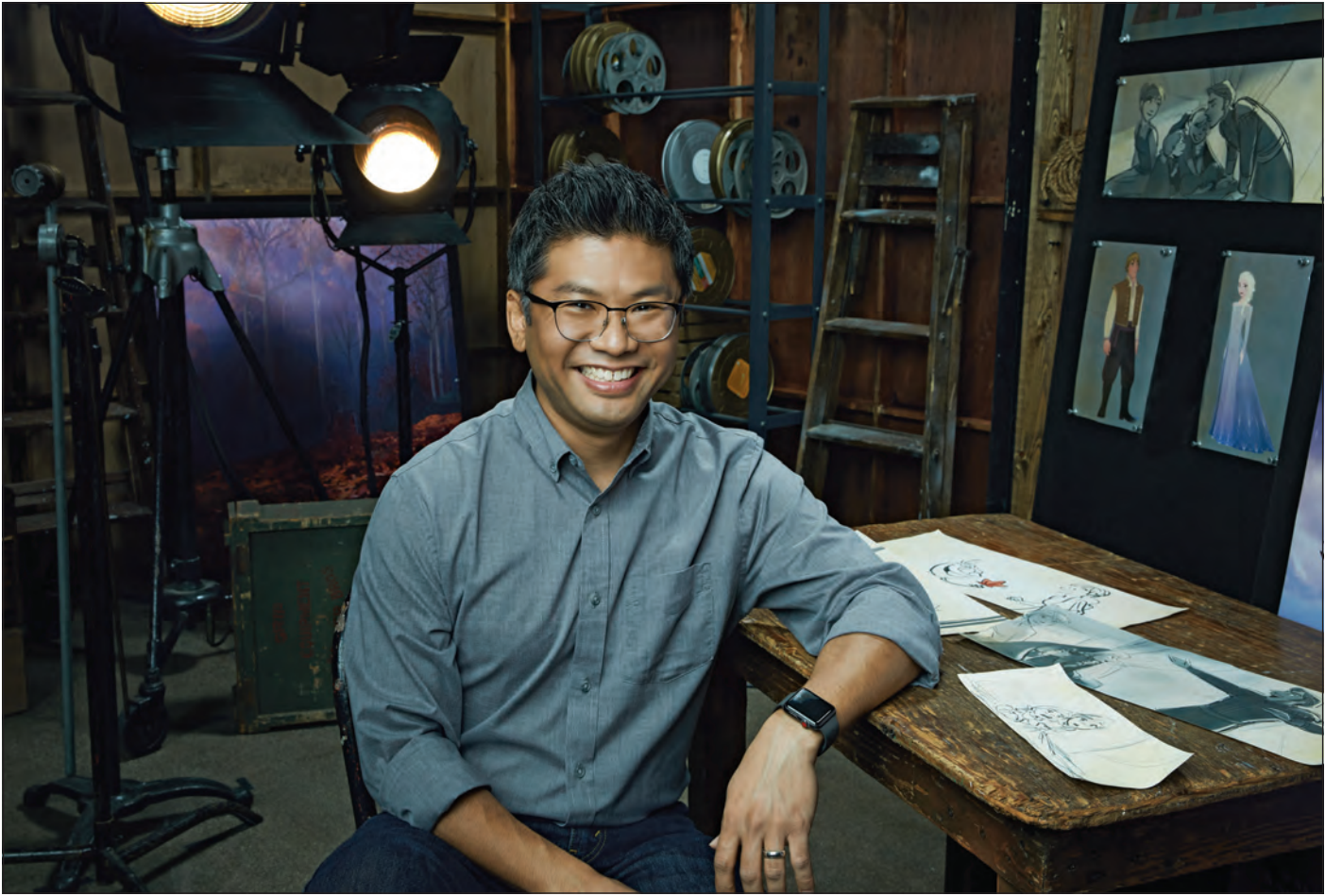
He, too, acknowledges PMC's influence on his career. Despite his busy schedule, he remains connected through the club's social media and Disney Animation Studios outreach events.

"As a past member of Pencil Mileage Club and a CSUF alum, I enjoy talking to students whenever I have a chance," Wayne Unten said. "I remember how challenging learning animation could be, but also how fun and inspiring it was to attend talks from those working in the industry."

"Animation is a craft, and like any craft, the knowledge of it is passed down from one generation to the next," he said. "It's always a pleasure when I get to be a part of that."

As one of the largest and oldest student organizations in the College of the Arts, PMC prepares students to thrive in the animation industry. The couple praises PMC not just for its professional impact but for creating a community of enduring personal support. To this day, the Untens remain close with friends they met through the club.

"Pencil Mileage Club is one of the biggest support systems that visual artists and people interested in the animation industry have on campus," said Ramón Aquino, the club's current president. "People who graduate from Pencil Mileage Club work professionally in the in-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Wayne Unten works for Disney.

dustry, and many prospective students come to CSUF to be part of PMC."

Aquino is committed to expanding membership and creative initiatives. He also gave some backstory as to how the club earned its name.

The term "pencil mileage" comes from industry professionals who often tell students that they need to "get in their pencil mileage." This means that they need to spend time drawing and expanding their skill sets. That's what the club is all about, explained Aquino.

Students have opportunities to expand their skills through various events, including Arts Week. The club hosts an annual Arts Week in collaboration with the Arts Inter-Club Council to promote performing and visual arts for the campus community. The club also hosts an annual film festival in May, which showcases student films in 2D, 3D, stop-motion and live-action.

The 24 Hours Animation Contest is a global competition in which students create a 30-second animated film in just 24 hours. Pencil Mileage Club has been participating in the contest for more than 10 years. In 2023, 65 students from CSUF competed, creating 13 animated films.



Eren Unten has illustrated more than 20 children's books.

Aquino, who previously worked as a production intern at Cartoon Network, said the club is preparing him for a career in production management, outreach and recruitment.

"Not only has Pencil Mileage Club

given me the technical skills and abilities necessary to improve in my craft, but it also has helped me connect with peers, alumni and faculty to build a community and safe learning environment," said Aquino.

FEDERAL FUNDING

\$9 million grant for research and development, underserved students

CSUF News Media Services

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded Cal State Fullerton two grants totaling nearly \$9 million to support research and development and improve retention and graduation rates for underserved students.

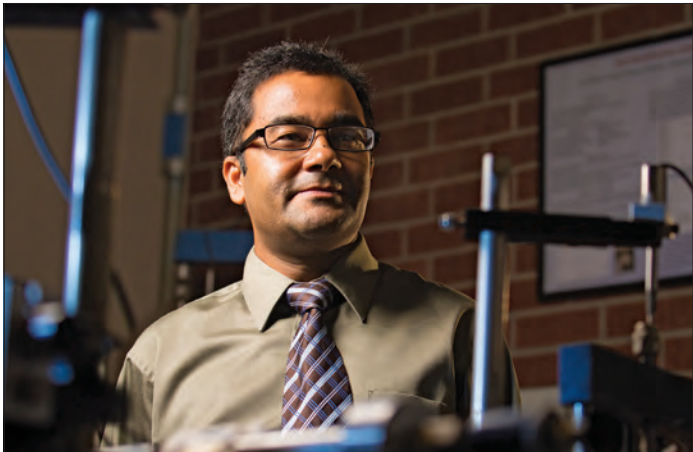
Cal State Fullerton is the only California State University campus to receive the grants to propel students, including students of color, to earn a college degree and close equity gaps in higher education.

The grants are part of the U.S. Department of Education’s \$93 million in grant awards to 20 inclusive and diverse colleges and universities nationwide to support research and development at Minority-Serving Institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, and to improve completion rates for underserved students.

CSUF is a Hispanic-Serving Institution and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution.

A \$4,997,384, four-year grant will go toward the new “Investing Now to Expand Faculty Research Through Capacity Building Program” to support technology infrastructure for research enterprise, increase research opportunities for faculty and students and promote cross-disciplinary collaborations.

“This highly competitive grant funding will help us enhance our current research development infrastructure and provide support to eventually increase our research productivity and extramural research funding,” said Binod Tiwari, associate vice president for research and sponsored projects, who will



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
Binod Tiwari, associate vice president for research and sponsored projects at CSUF

lead the program.

“I’m glad that the funding agencies rated our projects very high, and as a result, we received funds under both the Research and Development Infrastructure program and the Postsecondary Student Success Grant program — nearly 10% of the total funds available in these programs.”

A second grant of \$3,999,436 over three years will be used to establish the new “Fullerton RISES: Re-Imagining Success for Every Student” program. The program aims to provide support and interventions for students at risk of being, or on, academic notice.

“We believe in the transformative and uplifting power of education,” said Yuying Tsong, associate vice president for student academic support, who will direct Fullerton RISES.

“We are thrilled to receive this grant from the Department of Education to carry

out our commitment and dedication to providing students the needed support to succeed academically and reach their academic goals and aspirations.”

Fullerton RISES’ support will target students with a 2.5 GPA or lower. Strategies will contribute to improving retention and degree completion for all students and closing equity gaps in timely graduation and retention of first-generation, underrepresented, minority college students, Tsong said.

Some of the program’s activities include proactive and holistic academic advising, supplemental academic support and skills-building, and extended time to improve grades before disqualification from college.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Research and Development Infrastructure program provides funds to help transform research infrastructure, including strengthening research productivity,

faculty expertise, physical infrastructure and partnerships leading to increases in external funding.

The department’s Postsecondary Student Success Grant program aims to equitably improve postsecondary student outcomes, including retention, transfer, credit accumulation and completion, by leveraging data and implementing, scaling and rigorously evaluating evidence-based approaches.

These grant awards will help create opportunities for students of color and other underserved students to succeed in today’s most cutting-edge fields, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in the announcement of the grant awards.

“This is how we raise the bar for college excellence and attainment in this country and close equity gaps in higher education that have no place in the 21st century,” Cardona said.

CSUF EDUCATORS

Research on inclusive classrooms for newcomers gets national recognition

CSUF News Media Services

Alumnus and high school science teacher Juan Pablo García teaches students new to the U.S. educational system who speak Spanish, Thai, Portuguese and Farsi.

“Many newcomer students who recently arrived in this country have a difficult time adjusting to the new environment, both at home and school,” said García, who teaches biology and chemistry in English and Spanish at Anaheim High School.

“They had to leave their entire lives behind and start all over. This means establishing new friendships, navigating new spaces that may or may not support them, and understanding social norms and expectations.”

At Cal State Fullerton, secondary education professors Alison G. Dover and Fernando Rodríguez-Valls are at the forefront of preparing future teachers like García to teach newcomers — immigrant students who come from diverse countries and cultures and often are not proficient in English. Their mission is to disrupt practices that support English-only education.

“In the College of Education, we’re training our teacher candidates in just, equitable, inclusive and anti-racist practices,” Rodríguez-Valls said. “We’re teaching them to evaluate overt and hidden biases and how to eliminate barriers that limit newcomer students from fully using their linguistic repertoires and developing all their identities.”

In California, an estimated 2.5% of public school students are newcomers or students who have been in the U.S. for fewer than three years, Dover noted. Of these, 40% of students (about 2.3 million) speak a language other than English at home — representing speakers of more than 50 languages — yet monolingualism remains the norm within most schools.

“Newcomer students bring tremendous cultural and linguistic richness to our classrooms,” Dover said. “Our research focuses on how teachers and school districts can learn from and engage newcomers and emergent plurilingual students — multilingual students who are adding English to their linguistic repertoires.

The educators developed the Summer Language Academy and Saturday programs for newcomer students in partnership with four local school districts, including Anaheim Union High School District.

Since 2016, over 1,000 students from 23 countries who speak more than 14 languages have participated in the programs. The programs with AUHSD won Golden Bell awards from the California School Boards Association in 2019 and 2022.

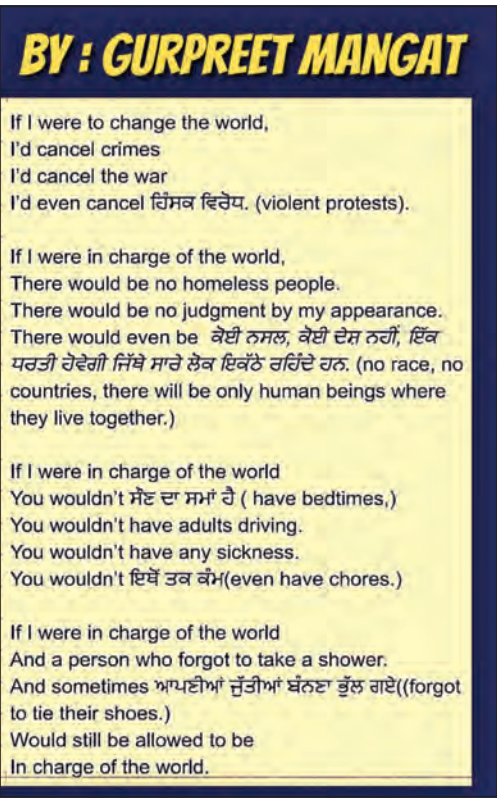
Grounded in seven years of research, the educators turned their nationally recognized work into the book, “Radically Inclusive Teaching With Newcomer and Emergent Plurilingual Students: Braving Up.”

The 2022 book (Teachers College Press) offers a critical analysis and resources for the work teachers can and should do with newcomer and emergent bilingual students. While providing classroom and case studies, the book features multilingual poetry, narrative, artwork and graphic comics written by teachers and newcomer students.

“Nationwide school districts are looking for guidance and support and how to create systems and programs that



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JUAN PABLO GARCÍA
Secondary education professors Alison G. Dover and Fernando Rodríguez-Valls received national awards for their research.



Newcomer student Gurpreet Mangat, a graduate of Kennedy High School in Anaheim, wrote a poem in Punjabi and English as part of the Saturday Language Academy.

draw from the linguistic richness of newcomer students,” Dover said.

The book was honored with the 2023 James N. Britton Award from the English Language Arts Teacher Educators-National Council of Teachers of English and the Ambassador Julian Nava Award for the Best Educational Themed Book from the International Latino Book Awards.

Despite California’s schools being the most linguistically diverse in the country, the educators argue that schools must change how they welcome, embrace and include newcomer students, Rodríguez-Valls said.

Dover relayed that their book emphasizes deep reflection by teachers and



Anaheim High School students learning English worked on creating zines, or small magazines, that contain useful information that a newcomer student could use to navigate the school.

learners.

“We ask teachers to reflect upon their educational socialization and language journeys and how they can leverage their experiences as resources in the classroom,” she said.

The book’s companion website, Braving Up, includes resources, videos and examples to illustrate what radically inclusive teaching can look like and resources to support teaching and learning in plurilingual classrooms. Dover also discusses their research in the Teaching Multilingual Learners podcast.

As an education graduate student, García who has a master’s degree in education-secondary education and bachelor’s degrees in biological science

and Spanish, had the opportunity to take courses that taught him strategies to support newcomer students. He also completed the single subject credential program to teach science and a bilingual authorization credential, and participated in the Summer Language Academy as a student teacher.

In his classroom, for example, García makes sure that course materials are available in the languages of newcomer students. These students also are paired with classmates so they don’t feel isolated from the rest of the class.

“I use many of the strategies I learned in my CSUF coursework in my class today and connect newcomer students to resources to meet their needs,” he said.

Beauty

FROM PAGE 1

amine the intersection between beauty, pop culture, race and gender politics.

Rowe’s passion for research and her many published works in this area resulted in an invitation to contribute to the 2022 Comcast Xfinity docuseries, titled “The Black Beauty Effect,” a three-part series that focuses on the history, evolution and contribution of Black people in beauty and culture.

As an English major undergraduate student, Rowe was drawn to storytelling, film and pop culture. At the same time, she decided to join the contemporary natural hair movement, when a critical mass of Black women stopped chemically straightening their hair via relaxers in favor of natural hair styles.

Prior to that time, a significant part of Black beauty culture was centered on chemical relaxers. Rowe argues that at that same juncture, there became an overarching interest across races around going green, going organic and going natural, with an emphasis on “dechemicalizing” various aspects of our lives.

These movements, along with the introduction of YouTube in 2005, allowed the internet to become a space for Black women to teach each other how to style and maintain their natural hair. It wasn’t long before a community took shape, and Rowe felt the pull to contribute to the discussion.

“It was really just being in it,” Rowe said. “Being in the community, in the movement, being a product of it and observing things. And it was thinking that someone should write this down or unpack this.”

When the team from FaceForward Productions contacted Rowe in 2021, they explained the project and that they were looking for published experts to speak on the field of Black hair and Black beauty. She spent a day at Soho Works in West Hollywood being interviewed for the documentary, placing her voice alongside significant Black cultural creators, such as celebrity makeup artists, magazine editors, scholars and cosmetic company founders.

“The Black Beauty Effect” debuted in November 2022, highlighting the “social change in the beauty industry through the lens of successful Black women.”

The docuseries is in three parts: Episode 1 – “The Beat Effect” focusing on makeup, Episode 2 – “The Skin Effect” spotlighting skin care, and Episode 3 – “The Crown Effect” focusing on hair, the episode where Rowe makes the most significant contributions.

Rowe attended a premiere for the documentary in Los Angeles and is more than pleased with the finished product.

“I keep describing it as kind of an archival love letter,” Rowe said of the documentary, “the way they put all the voices in conversation with each other, along with the images and the video footage.”

Rowe feels the topics surrounding Black beauty are important and timely,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Kristen Rowe, assistant professor of American Studies, was asked to contribute to “The Black Beauty Effect” documentary series.

with the docuseries playing a role in archiving and sharing the history of these contributions to society. She also sees the project as an entry point for wider discussions around race and gender.

“There are so many things to talk about,” Rowe said. “What do people have access to and how does that inform their experiences? How do different modes of presentation vary from class to class? There’s not just race, but ethnicity ... body and size politics ... all these things are embodied and wrapped up in beauty as well.”

While Rowe has not made viewing “The Black Beauty Effect” a required part of her courses, she has informed her students about the docuseries and introduces many of the topics into the curriculum of her upper-level classes and electives.

Additionally, Rowe is under contract to write a book on art, pop culture and representation in the context of the contemporary natural hair movement using a Black feminist framework to review texts and new media.

All three episodes of “The Black Beauty Effect” are now available for viewing on Netflix, and Rowe feels it is a critical project that contributes to a relevant conversation.

“I think what they’ve made is so wonderful and so important,” Rowe said. “It is a topic that a lot of people connect to because it provides language and scholarship for things they’ve observed in their world and in their bodies ... If it had nothing to do with me, I would still encourage you to watch it.”

Washington

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College of California and Dominican University of California are selected for the internship.

Students’ housing, tuition and travel are funded by the Panetta Institute for Public Policy.

Darvish also drafted and wrote co-sponsored recommendations for the congressman on bills related to voting rights, criminal justice reform, civil rights and LGBTQ rights.

To be considered for the internship, each candidate intern had to have an exemplary scholastic record along with an interest in politics, policy and public service.

Darvish also had to participate in several rounds of interviews with university officials, culminating with an interview with then CSUF President Fram Virjee, who recommended Darvish for the internship.

“I was surrounded by some of the most powerful and important people at Cal State Fullerton,” Darvish said of the interviews. “They were really there just to hear about me and learn about me. I felt supported and uplifted by them.”

In his letter to Darvish informing her of his recommendation, Virjee wrote:

“Sophia, I wish you much success and thank you in advance for aspiring to represent Cal State Fullerton in this very prestigious position. As you know, this is a highly competitive process, and I congratulate you on your outstanding application and interview. I know you will have an amazing experience in this program and am also confident that you will represent CSUF in an outstanding manner.”

Darvish was then interviewed by members of the Panetta Institute.

Before earning the Panetta Congressional Internship, Darvish participated in a fellowship with the Progressive Turnout Project, which focuses its efforts on mobilizing the Democratic Party and motivating Democrats to exercise their right to vote.

Darvish also completed an internship with U.S. Representative and CSUF alum Lou Correa, D-Anaheim, where she was the first line of communication with constituents and assisted with casework updates and directing



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOPHIA DARVISH

Sophia Darvish had to pass several rounds of interviews with university officials as well as the Panetta Institute. She has also interned with U.S. Representative and CSUF alum Lou Correa.

calls to appropriate resources.

“I just try to apply to anything and everything that piques my interest, and hopefully I can do a better interview with that job or other internships,” she said.

As the daughter of Iranian immigrants, Darvish began taking an interest in public affairs and government while a student at nearby El Dorado High School, where she was involved with several campus clubs.

Darvish was a member of ASB, partic-

ipated in Mock Trial and in the ED Law Academy, where students received a primer on the legal profession through coursework and in-person meetings with attorneys and judges.

“I was always listening to podcasts and reading up on the news,” Darvish said. “So, I think that’s what made me so engaged, especially my experiences in high school impacted my interest in the whole field.”

She became more impassioned with

criminal justice reform from reading two books: “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson and “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander.

Both titles deal with injustices in the criminal justice system.

“Those two books got me even more interested in criminal justice ... in the whole process,” Darvish said. “It’s such a real-world thing. You really have the opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives.”

WOMEN'S SOFTBALL

Promising lineup brings grit, accountability, depth to the diamond

By Brian Robin,
contributing writer

There would be no standing still this offseason. Not after they weren't the last team standing when the Big West softball season ended last spring.

And the subject of why the Cal State Fullerton softball team wasn't the last team standing still stings Kelly Ford eight months later. So much so that the CSUF softball coach spent as little time talking about what happened on a sunny May afternoon in Long Beach as she could — and as much time talking about what transpired from that weekend as she could.

"This group is hungry. That definitely slapped us down," Ford said, concisely summarizing how the Titans lost the Big West Conference title on the final weekend of the season.

Needing only one win in three games to win their second consecutive Big West title and sixth since 2016, the Titans got swept by Long Beach State, losing the title on the last day of the season and denying Ford her sixth title in 11 seasons. Ford's astute and audacious scheduling —the Titans had one of the most demanding schedules in the country last year — earned CSUF an at-large NCAA berth and a cross-country trip to Clemson for the regionals, where the Titans went 1-2.

This explains Ford's succinctness in dismissing how one of her grittiest teams had a conference title snatched and grabbed away. Yes, the Titans were missing their two top-of-the-lineup igniters in Megan Delgadillo and Antonette Dean, who both tore ACLs within four days of each other midway through the season. Ford said losing Delgadillo changed the whole environment like few other athletes she's ever coached.

And yet, even after the Titans lost two games to Auburn at the Clemson Regional, a quick zoom-out revealed all was not bleak. CSUF went 34-21 with that tough schedule, beating No. 3 Florida and No. 8 Tennessee. Along the way, the Titans gave Ford her 800th career victory by knocking off Oregon State, earned 10 All-Big West accolades and still went 20-7 in conference.

Now, the page turns, and Ford finds new ways to keep the Titans moving as she plots the path of snatching and grabbing that title back.

Enter new mental training and conditioning coach Zach Sorensen, who has the Titans thinking accountability. Taking over from Brian Kane, a Ford favorite

who was a former acolyte of legendary mental guru and Cal State Fullerton Athletic Hall of Fame member Dr. Ken Ravizza, Sorensen won over Ford with an eight-word mantra that has her players' attention.

"Zach is of that mindset of 'What are you going to do about it?' You throw something out about it, and he's going to ask you that question," Ford said. He puts thoughts and dreams into action. A lot of times, people put dreams out there. He will look you in the eye and ask you, 'What are you going to do about it?' Our accountability is at an all-time high."

According to Ford, so is the Titans' depth, not only on the field but in the dugout. A new NCAA rule opened the door for teams to have four full-time assistant coaches and — with the blessing of Athletic Director Jim Donovan —Ford wasted no time fortifying her staff. Joining longtime chief lieutenant Jorge Araujo was Jamee Juarez, a three-time All-Big Ten standout at Ohio State and Venezuelan National Team member, and one of the greatest players in CSUF history — Gina Oaks Garcia.

Ford had been trying to lure Oaks Garcia from Claremont Mudd Scripps, where she coached the past six years. That mission finally accomplished, the Titans welcome back one of the most decorated players in program history — if not the most versatile.

A pitcher/infielder, Oaks Garcia still holds the program record for career runs scored (150) and ranks in the top 10 in total bases (314) and walks (74). She owns the single-game record for RBI with her eight against Kansas in 2001. In the circle, she ranks in the top 10 in strikeouts (685), wins (74), complete games (72), shutouts (25) and saves (4).

She was a two-time All-American and four-time Big West Champion who became the first player in Big West history to earn First-Team All-Conference honors at two different positions.

"I've gone after both for years, and they've brought a new standard, a new vibe and a lot of expectations," Ford said. "They're holding these ladies accountable, and I've given them a lot of freedom to bring in the gritty."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

The 2024 Titans team up for a photo during their annual Mystery Retreat recently at the YMCA Camp Surf in San Diego.

Along with that grit and aura comes a team that is so deep that Ford said only one position is solidified: Delgadillo leading off and playing center. Two seasons ago, the Big West Field Player of the Year led the conference in hits (80), runs (57) and stolen bases (50), while slashing .404/.462/.444.

From there, matters are wide open. So wide open that senior Peyton Toto, a three-year starter at shortstop, may find another position. That's courtesy of freshmen middle infielders Sarah Perez and Jazmin Williams and Biola transfer Colby McClinton, who was the PacWest Player and Freshman of the Year. Ford said that trio and outfielder Kate Verhoef had the upperclassman rhapsodizing about how good the freshmen are.

"There's not an award she didn't win at Biola, and she wanted to be challenged at the Division 1 level. That kid is super athletic," Ford said about McClinton.

Not that the upperclassmen are slouches, starting with junior pitcher Haley Rainey, who inherits the ace mantle from the departed Myka Sutherlin after going 9-5 with a 1.53 ERA and earning All-Big West Second Team honors. Behind her are five other pitchers seeking to start the one weekend game Rainey won't. The list starts with left-handed pitchers Staci Chambers and Leanna Garcia, both of whom redshirted last year.

After you get through Delgadillo, the Titans return Hannah Becerra, who led the Titans in runs (39), RBI (28), doubles

(8), home runs (8) and walks (32), which also led the Big West. Ford said that Becerra — a first-team All-Big West selection — was disappointed with her season last year, which bodes ill for opposing pitchers who will likely treat Becerra like she's radioactive.

Also back for more are seniors Toto, catcher Jessi Alcalá, outfielder Bailey Wallace, and pinch-hitter Kika Ramirez, who is expected to play a more prominent role this year.

"I keep thinking about what's so special about this group right now. They're not afraid to laugh and cry together," Ford said. "They're not afraid to face fear and lean in when things get tough and they're showing a lot of the characteristics of a championship team. I've seen it in such a short time. We've been together 10 days and I've seen a transformation in 10 days unlike what I've seen before."

"In the fall, I thought we had talent. But this spring, there's been a shift. It's that 'special sauce,' that 'mojo,' that synergy. I call it 'competitive greatness,' when you're competing with someone, you want to make each other better. If you're both playing third base, I'm going to dive a little further, you're going to dive a little further than me. They're trying to make that position better for the team and they don't care who will play it. They're pushing each other and coaching each other, but more importantly, they're giving and taking feedback from each other."

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