



President Sylvia Alva poses with Pastor Ralph Williamson and Christ Our Redeemer congregants. PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSU OUTREACH

SUPER SUNDAY MESSAGE: COLLEGE IS THE TICKET TO OPPORTUNITY

CSUF president speaks at Christ Our Redeemer African Methodist Episcopal Church

By Lou Ponsi, contributing writer

For 19 years, on a Sunday in February, presidents and administrators from all 23 universities within the Cal State University system deliver an impactful message to congregations at nearly 80 predominantly Black and African American churches, informing worshipers of the comprehensive list of benefits that come with a college education. The initiative is known as “Super Sunday.”

On Feb. 25, Cal State Fullerton President Sylvia Alva spoke to the congregation from the podium at Christ Our Redeemer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Irvine. At the invitation of Pastor Ralph E. Williamson, Alva was making her first Super Sunday visit to the church since becoming CSUF president in August. CSUF administrators, faculty and staff members also turned out to support the mission. “We’re so grateful to Christ Our Redeemer for giving us this platform to motivate and encourage young people and families to continue to pursue their dreams of the life-transforming

opportunities that a college degree can provide,” Alva said. According to the latest estimates, a college degree has an average lifetime value of \$2.8 million and even in tough economic times, degree holders have better access to health insurance and retirement plans, lower rates of unemployment, and report higher levels of health and happiness, the president said. Additionally, college graduates volunteer more, vote more, and are more likely to assume leadership roles in their communities, Alva said. And contrary to the commonly held belief that a college education is beyond

the financial reach of families with limited means, a significant percentage of CSU students graduate with little or no debt, Alva said. “Whether you’re the first in your family to attend college, looking to transfer from a community college, or an adult who wants more for yourself through a certificate or a graduate degree, I know you will find that a Cal State degree is still the most affordable in the country,” Alva said. The majority of CSUF students receive financial assistance, and nearly two-thirds have their entire tuition covered through non-loan financial aid, the president said. SUPER » PAGE 3

VISION & VISIONARIES

Cal State Fullerton’s former ‘first lady’ honored Margaret Faulwell Gordon introduced innovations

By Jenelyn Russo, contributing writer

In honor of their accomplishments in their respective fields and their service and support of the university, Cal State Fullerton recognized four Distinguished Alumni and two Honorary Alumni on Feb. 24 as the 2024 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Award recipients. Established in 1994, the biennial awards are the highest honors presented by CSUF to alumni and community supporters. As former dean of the College of Extended and International Education and professor of anthropology at Cal State Dominguez Hills from 1998 to 2012, Margaret Faulwell Gordon introduced several innovative programs that left a legacy of prioritizing access to higher education.

But the Titan community knows her best as former first lady to Cal State Fullerton for more than two decades, serving alongside her husband, President Emeritus Milton A. Gordon, during his time as the university’s fourth president from 1990 to 2011. In honor of her time at CSUF, which left an indelible mark on the campus community and helped to move the institution forward, Gordon has been named a 2024 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Honorary Alumni award winner. Gordon was born in San Diego and later moved with her family to Los Angeles. She earned her bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees from UCLA before heading to Chicago where she accepted a teaching position at Chicago State University. It was there that she met her husband, Milton, who served as the university’s dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The couple headed west to California as Gordon’s husband became the vice president for academic affairs at Sonoma State University in 1986 and then president at CSUF in 1990. While serving as first lady at CSUF, she held her roles as dean and professor at CSUDH. GORDON » PAGE 2



Margaret Faulwell Gordon was married to Cal State Fullerton President Emeritus Milton A. Gordon, who served as the university’s fourth president from 1990 to 2011. PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

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OUTSTANDING PROFESSOR

A career dedicated to inclusion in the classroom

Preparing teacher credential candidates

By Nicole Gregory,
contributing writer

Professor Janice Myck-Wayne’s teaching career began not long after President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Act in 1975, which put her at the forefront of the movement to integrate disabled students with the rest of students in public schools throughout the U.S.

Before this act, disabled students were placed in special schools or segregated classrooms that kept them apart from other students, which hurt them educationally and socially.

“I started as a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing,” said Myck-Wayne of her work in South Los Angeles in the early 1980s, just as students with mild disabilities were being moved out of segregated schools and into the general education campus. It was not an easy process.

“We weren’t trained to navigate this transition,” she said.

Today, Myck-Wayne is an early childhood special education credential coordinator in the Department of Special Education in the College of Education at Cal State Fullerton. Preparing teacher credential candidates to teach all children in California is at the center of Myck-Wayne’s work. She’s conducted research into teacher training, inclusive practices and early education and received almost \$4 million in grants to prepare students to teach children in inclusive classroom settings.

She was named Cal State Fullerton’s 2023 Outstanding Professor.

“We’ve made some great changes,” she said of the effort to include disabled students in schools. “We’re not institutionalizing people anymore, but we still have a way to go.” For instance, she says the federal education code does not use the word inclusion when

referring to disabled students.

Everyone benefits when children with disabilities are integrated with the general student population, according to research. “The outcomes for the children with IEPs (individual education planning programs) are greater,” said Myck-Wayne. “The outcomes for the general ed students are also greater. It builds a sense of empathy and integration into society,” she said, adding that full integration is not practiced in every school district.

Integrating students at an early age also helps prepare society to accommodate people with disabilities. “When we shelter kids in structured classrooms, we really haven’t prepared them or society for children or young adults to be out working with jobs.”

Myck-Wayne sees this as a broader social justice issue. “Do we know how to make accommodations for people with vision loss or hearing loss or physical disabilities or intellectual disabilities?”

Born in Minneapolis, Myck-Wayne’s family moved to Frankfurt, Germany, when she was a baby, then returned to the U.S when she was in second grade, eventually landing in Thousand Oaks.

Her parents didn’t realize at first that she was hard of hearing in one ear, possibly due to an ear infection as a toddler. But Myck-Wayne made her own adjustments. “In the ‘60s, there were really no services for me,” she said. “I went to school and kind of advocated for myself.”

Teachers said she wouldn’t follow directions and complained that she would not sit straight because she was constantly turning to listen with her good ear.

“It wasn’t until I was older and becoming a teacher of the deaf that I understood what I struggled with for so many years,” she said. “No one recommended hearing aids. Now, in today’s world, if we had a child with single-sided deafness, we would put a surround sound system in the room so that wherever that child was and the teacher wore a mic, the teacher’s voice would be right there with them.”

As she got older, she didn’t plan



Janice Myck-Wayne is a professor in the Department of Special Education in the College of Education at Cal State Fullerton.

to become a teacher. She attended UC San Diego as a history major and German literature minor and considered working at the State Department. “I just happened to take a sign language class at a community college. I fell in love with sign language, and then looked at what careers I could follow,” she said.

She found it rewarding to work with families and children who had hearing loss and disabilities. “That was really a pivotal part of my career because I got to work with families in the very beginning and help them understand the system and help them be advocates for their children. That really kind of changed my focus of my career at that point.”

Myck-Wayne continues to push for change, particularly in California, and worries that the field of special education is not drawing enough students. “We just don’t want to rest where we’re at,” she said. “When you look back 50 years, it’s appalling to see what we did to people. There was a eugenics movement in the 1920s, which forced sterilization of people with disabilities, and we’re horrified.

“What will we say 50 years from now about what we’re doing now?” she asks. “Are we moving forward enough? As long as humanity can move a little bit forward, I think that’s where I’m hoping it will go.”

Gordon

FROM PAGE 1

Gordon’s passion for anthropology was rooted in a love for language and linguistics, and when her grandmother became ill, she became interested in the way in which she was being treated. While in Chicago, she went back to school for her master’s degree in public health and brought curiosity and enthusiasm for topics around aging and health care with her to CSUDH.

An esteemed leader in higher education, and specifically within CSU, Gordon loved her roles at CSUDH. But she had an equal commitment to her responsibility as first lady at CSUF. She joined her husband at events whenever possible, from athletic games to arts performances – anything that celebrated the students and faculty on campus.

The pair hosted many events at their home during this time, including welcoming the Titan students in the Guardian Scholars and President’s Scholars programs, gatherings that Gordon recalls as “special moments.” All of the CSUF events were meaningful, but her favorites were the graduation ceremonies.

“I really enjoyed graduation,” Gordon said. “It was very special. You see all these students, many of them first-time graduates, and their families here. It was just a very exciting time.”

Gordon felt that the visibility of the university’s president to students and staff was of crucial importance, and she accompanied her husband every chance she could to help make that possible.

“My particular role probably was mostly the events at Cal State Fullerton that I could attend, along with my husband, and it was so wonderful,”

Gordon said. “I think it was good that the president’s family is visible, so the campus knows the president is an actual person. I think it makes a big difference.”

The Gordons have made several gifts to CSUF in support of a variety of organizations, including MAMM Alliance for the Performing Arts, the African American Faculty and Staff Association and the President Milton A. Gordon and Dr. Margaret Faulwell Gordon Endowed Scholarship at CSUF, established in 2018 to honor her husband’s legacy.

“I think education and accessibility to education is extremely important,” Gordon said. “Neither Milton or I would have gotten where we were without it, and I think that insofar as is possible, it feels good to give back.”

Gordon was widely loved and respected by the Titan community and could often be seen talking to students and staff during her time on campus. She is humbled to be named a 2024 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Honorary Alumni award winner.

“I’m extremely honored by it,” Gordon said of the award. “To me, Cal State Fullerton holds such a special place in our lives. And now to have received that reward ... it was quite meaningful. I can’t really express it. I was not expecting it.”

During Gordon’s time at CSUF she not only served as a support to her husband in his role as president but she gave selflessly of her time and energy, investing in the campus and inspiring the community. And she remained dedicated to moving the university forward in the areas of accessibility and diversity.

“I think being a Titan means that you are involved,” Gordon said. “It’s more than just wearing ‘Titan’ across your sweatshirt. It means that you share your life. I think Cal State Fullerton embodies that in a way that I don’t necessarily see in every university. ... It just seems so special there.”



Michael Faulwell Gordon accepts a 2024 Vision & Visionaries award on behalf of his mother Margaret.

#1

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AUTHOR

Powell implores students to use education to help others

Battling injustice a responsibility

By Lou Ponsi, contributing writer

Speaking in front of a diverse, standing-room-only gathering of students, professors and administrators at the Laurel Multipurpose Room at Cal State Fullerton, Kevin Powell, author, activist and noted hip-hop historian, touched on topics such as civil rights, education, acceptance and diversity.

As he appealed to the students to apply their education to serving others, Powell's overarching theme was empowerment.

"I love the beautiful diversity in this room," Powell said. "All of you in this room give me hope."

Hosted by the Department of African American Studies, Powell's Feb. 26 visit was his second to the university and was among the highlights of CSUF's celebration of Black History Month.

In introducing Powell to the audience, department chair Siobhan Brooks delivered a list of Powell's achievements.

"He has penned articles, essays and blogs for a wide range of newspapers and magazines and major websites, such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Nation, NPR, Essence, Ebony, Rolling Stone, Esquire, HuffPost, The Guardian, The Progressive and British GQ," Brooks said. "He also ran for Congress in his adopted hometown of New York City in both 2008 and 2010 and he has lectured, worked, and traveled across the country and the world."

Brooks, incidentally, contributed to the magazine African Voices Celebrating 50 Years of Hip-hop, which Powell edited.

Powell opened the discussion with a primer on the origins of Black History Month and why the monthlong celebration takes place in February.

"It wasn't because February is the shortest month of the year," Powell quipped. "Absolutely not."



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Noted historian Kevin Powell spoke at Cal State Fullerton to a packed room on topics including civil rights and education.

Powell explained that February was chosen primarily because the second week of the month coincides with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Lincoln has been credited for the emancipation of slaves, although that's debatable, Powell said, and Douglass, a former slave, was a leader in the abolitionist movement, which fought to end slavery.

Negro History Week, which was created by Carter G. Woodson in 1926, was a precursor to Black History Month.

Acceptance of Negro History Week grew over the years and into the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when the week expanded to Black History Month.

President Gerald R. Ford officially

recognized Black History Month during the country's 1976 bicentennial.

"As a slave, Douglass was told if you learn how to read or write, you could get savagely beaten," said Powell, who then implored the students to not take their education for granted.

"Black history is American history," he said. "Latinx history is American history. Asian history is American history. Indigenous people's history is American history. Queer people's history is American history. Disabled American history is American history. Jewish history, Muslim history, Italian American history, Polish history ... all of it is American history."

Powell's journey began in Jersey City, N.J., where he was raised by a single

mother, with no father in the home.

He worked his way into Rutgers University and went on to establish himself as a hip-hop writer for Vibe Magazine, where he did several interviews with Tupac Shakur, and has continued to evolve over the years.

Powell has also authored 16 books, including the acclaimed "Grocery Shopping with My Mother," which is an anthology of poems he wrote about his mother.

"These poems are a testament to the healing work of Kevin Powell, as they revel in the power of forgiveness, abundance, and lineage," wrote Mahogany L. Browne, Lincoln Center's Inaugural Poet-in-Residence.

During the discussion, Powell also took note of a world rife with division.

But what's worse, is that people are OK with it, he said, and that is where education comes in.

Initially, Powell acknowledged that his motivation for pursuing an education was to make money, and there is "absolutely nothing wrong with that," he said.

But with education comes responsibility.

"Get your education, get your bag, get your coins, have your career, but we need folks who have the courage to say, 'When all this stuff was going on in America in the 2020s, what did you do?'" Powell said. "That's the real purpose of an education to me; not just to benefit yourself, not just to get a bunch of degrees and have a fancy CV (curriculum vitae). Who cares what my CV means or how long it is if I don't care about other human beings."

So, for Powell, what started out as a mission to combat racism evolved into a mission to battle injustice in every form.

"How can you say you want freedom for all people, and then you turn your backs on homeless people or the migrants in this country?" Powell asked rhetorically.

"How can you be upset about George Floyd but then a woman gets raped every day, over and over throughout the day, and you aren't upset about that? And so, you begin to realize It's all connected. It's all connected because we're all connected."



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Powell's work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, NPR, Ebony, The Guardian and many other prestigious publications.



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Powell's visit last month was his second to CSUF and a highlight of the university's Black History Month programs.

Super

FROM PAGE 1

Ensuring the success of Black students is a priority across the entire CSU system.

The CSU has committed \$10 million to help its universities implement initiatives that were recommended in the Chancellor's Strategic Workgroup Black Student Success Report, released in 2023.

"The result of this work is a call to action for the CSU to think broadly and act boldly," the report states. "The workgroup seeks to catalyze the cultural change urgently needed to advance Black student success."

Super Sunday always takes place during Black History Month, and Alva told the congregation about a chance encounter she once had with Rosa Parks, the civil rights icon who famously refused to vacate her seat for a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Ala., on Dec.1, 1955, violating the state's segregation laws at the time.

Ironically, Parks and Alva rode on a bus together in the early 1990s.

Parks was the keynote speaker at a conference Alva was attending, and the two women were on the same shuttle back to their hotel.

"We had a nice conversation," Alva said. "She was kind and thoughtful. When I got back to my hotel room, I began to reflect on the historical impact that she had had on our country and on our nation's civil rights journey. Her life and her brave

actions remind each and every one of us of the personal responsibility we have to stand up for what is right and what is just. Our country is a work in progress, but it's changed for the better because of her actions."

Alva told the congregation that their collective voices and life experiences are needed to achieve greatness within the CSU system.

Whether being the first in their families to attend college, looking to transfer from a community college or looking to return to college as an adult, the doors at CSUF are wide open, Alva said.

"One thing is certain, a college degree continues to be the golden ticket to lifelong growth, security, and opportunity," the president said. "And it's the best gift that you can give yourself and your family."

Following the service, outreach directors and staff manned a table in the lobby with information about the CSU application and admission process, as well as financial aid scholarships available to Cal State students.

This is part of our community," said Tonantzin Oseguera, vice president of student affairs at CSUF. "And we know that we have several students and staff members who are part of this congregation. So, we're coming to spiritual homes and sharing the message of why education is important, and that it's achievable, that it's affordable, and that we can help to elevate the communities in different areas. It's something we like to do."



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
University Outreach Coordinator Julianne Vartanian, left, meets with the Christ Our Redeemer congregation.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

Leadership motivator, author Jennifer McCollum to speak

CSUF News Media Services

The Women’s Leadership Program at Cal State Fullerton’s College of Business and Economics will host a seminar tomorrow in honor of International Women’s Day.

Designed to prepare students and alumni to address the challenges and opportunities that today’s women face in the workforce, the event will be headlined by keynote speaker Jennifer McCollum, former CEO of leadership development firm Linkage Inc. and author of the 2023 bestseller “In Her Own Voice: A Woman’s Rise to CEO.”

“For the last 23 years, I’ve been building, growing and managing businesses in the leadership space, particularly focused on advancing and accelerating women leaders,” said McCollum. “I believe that while we have made progress as women leaders, we are not making progress fast enough.”

McCollum noted her experiences as the “only”: the only woman, the only leader in the room. She had to overcome these stereotypes as she launched her career in the 1990s and 2000s.

In recent years, with the #MeToo movement and COVID-19 pandemic, awareness has grown of the challenges that women face.

While many of these challenges are external biases, also significant are internal self-limitations that can inhibit women from reaching their full potential unless they make a concerted effort to rise higher, according to McCollum.

“The purpose of my book was to create more awareness of what women leaders themselves can do and what organizations can do to support them,” said McCollum.

“We were tracking what was happening both with the impact of COVID-19 on women and other underrepresented populations and the rise and surge of the social justice movement. This helped us better understand with greater sensitivity the impact of women in the workforce and women who had been pushed out of the workforce due to the pandemic.”

Today, McCollum is concerned that the fall of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts is negatively impacting the move toward gender equity that grew out of the pandemic.

Register for the seminar at https://events.fullerton.edu/rsvp.aspx?Event_sk=514.



Jennifer McCollum, former CEO of Linkage Inc., will speak at tomorrow's seminar hosted by the CSUF College of Business and Economics and Women's Leadership Program.

AFTER GRADUATION

Business alumna searches for success, lands job at Google

CSUF News Media Services

A first-generation student with her heart set on a career in finance, Mayra Gomez didn’t see a lot of women leaders in business when she was growing up.

That changed when she joined Cal State Fullerton’s Women’s Leadership Program.

“That was the first time in my life I saw women in business leadership roles. They were so successful in their careers, and I think that really helped me build my confidence and know that I can be there one day,” said Gomez.

The Women’s Leadership Program in the College of Business and Economics prepares students to succeed in leadership positions by providing them with individualized mentorship from a certified career coach and opportunities to network with industry leaders and develop their business skills through immersive seminars.

Today, Gomez is one of those leaders, serving as a finance program manager for tech giant Google.

Gomez is in charge of improving the organization’s financial processes. She leads national and international projects that focus on studying, revising and improving operations, so that Google’s financial programs run smoothly.

“Cal State Fullerton helped me identify what I wanted to do after I graduated and helped me gain the leadership skills I needed to succeed in my career,” said Gomez, who graduated in 2018 with a bachelor’s degree in business administration-business economics and business analytics.

Gomez has always been fascinated with numbers and finance.

“Coming from Oxnard, California, I was very interested in understanding what makes an economy successful, and how to generate economic growth and wealth,” she said.

To expand her classroom experience, she took advantage of campus opportunities that not only bolstered her business portfolio, but also helped her build an important network of industry professionals.

She graduated with a full-time job as an engagement financial adviser analyst for Deloitte — all thanks to a connection she made as part of the college’s Business Inter-Club Council.

“While I was working with the council, I met a student who had just gotten a job at Deloitte. During the next recruiting cycle, she encouraged me to apply,” said Gomez.

After landing her first job with Deloitte, Gomez moved on to a finance transformation consultant position with KPMG US, where she worked with clients to improve their financial processes and



Mayra Gomez, business administration alumna

implement new technology.

During her undergraduate career, Gomez was involved in the university’s Sales Leadership Center, where she gained crucial sales experience, networked with corporate partners and graduated with a certificate of professional sales. She said the center taught her valuable skills like how to think strategically about branding and how to advocate for herself when it comes to professional growth opportunities.

Gomez also saw herself grow as a leader through her work with the CSUF Economics Association, where she gained experience managing a team, overseeing large-scale projects and motivating others to achieve a common goal.

“Mayra’s strong intellect was evident to me from the start. However, I most admired her strength of character. She always took full responsibility for her own learning, and I am not at all surprised that she has achieved success in her professional life,” said Andrew Gill, professor emeritus of economics.

Inspired by the Women’s Leadership Program and the impact that it had on her career in business, Gomez plans to continue working with the program in the future to meet with students and share her experiences.

“I didn’t have a lot of resources before I got involved in this program. When I graduated, I really wanted to come back and help others,” she said. “It means a lot to me to use my education and experiences to support others on their journeys.”

ADMINISTRATION

Kimberly Shiner named interim VP for University Advancement

CSUF News Media Services

Higher education leader Kimberly Shiner has been appointed interim vice president for University Advancement at Cal State Fullerton. Shiner will serve through Dec. 31 while a national search for the permanent role is conducted.

Shiner will lead the Division of University Advancement's Alumni Engagement, Central Development, College and Program Development, Government and Community Relations, Strategic Communications and Brand Management, and Administration and Finance teams. She will also serve as interim executive director of the Cal State Fullerton Philanthropic Foundation.

"With more than 20 years of experience in higher education, Kim brings a wealth of expertise to Cal State Fullerton," said President Sylvia Alva. "The University Advancement division is an outstanding team of professionals who have had many important accomplishments like the 'It Takes a Titan' campaign, which raised \$270 million for the university. I am grateful to have Kim lead this team and keep important momentum going."

Shiner launched her career in higher education at USC where she was part of two historic campaigns that raised \$6 billion for the university and \$2.2 billion for the Keck School of Medicine. Continuing her work in the California State University system, Shiner served as associate vice president for university advancement at Cal State San Bernardino. She played a key role in the university's first comprehensive campaign, which exceeded its \$50 million goal and was completed a year ahead of schedule.

Most recently, she served as vice president for college advancement and communications at Pitzer College in Claremont, where she led the college's strategic vision to elevate philanthropy within the academic community.

Throughout her professional life, Shiner has distinguished herself as a champion for higher education and diversity, equity and inclusion. She currently serves on the board for



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Kimberly Shiner, interim vice president for University Advancement

Leadership California, a statewide nonprofit whose mission is to move women from success to significance. She is an alum of Leadership California's Issues and Trends program, the African American Board Leadership Institute, and the Inland Empire Economic Partnership Regional Leadership Academy.

"I am thrilled to join the Titan

community, working alongside President Alva and the dedicated University Advancement team," said Shiner. "Returning to the CSU is a homecoming filled with purpose. Together, we will continue to amplify CSUF's mission, fostering meaningful connections with students, faculty, staff and external partners, as we advance a path of

excellence, growth and collective success."

Shiner earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in public administration from Cal State Northridge.

Her appointment follows the departure of Greg Saks, who now serves as vice chancellor of external relations and communications for the CSU system.

DIVERSITY

Actress Issa Rae: 'Success is when opportunity meets preparation'

CSUF News Media Services

After hitting the upload button for the first episode of her YouTube series, "The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl," Issa Rae said she fainted from fear.

Although she was nervous about the criticism she would face, she launched the web series in 2011 to explore the life of "J" who navigates through the awkwardness of adolescence.

"I was so scared, but what I wrote in the first episode resonated with people in a way I hoped but didn't imagine," said Rae, an award-winning actress, producer, writer and comedian who participated in Cal State Fullerton's "Beyond the Conversation" series. Hosted by Associated Students Inc. and the Division of Student Affairs, the series invites speakers to campus to engage students in dialogue about diversity, equity and inclusion.

Rae is notable for her Peabody Award-winning HBO series, "Insecure," which garnered her multiple Emmy and Golden Globe nominations. She made her mark on the big screen, starring in Greta Gerwig's cotton candy colored comedy "Barbie," which dominated theaters as the biggest box office hit of the summer and "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-verse," Sony Picture Animation's highest grossing animated release.

Her mother fostered her sense of humor, Rae said. When she was a child their mother switched off the television



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
Issa Rae, actress, producer, writer and comedian

and gathered Rae and her four siblings, signaling it was time to play the "don't laugh and smile game."

"The objective was to be the last one sitting who hadn't laughed at anyone," said Rae. "It toned our comedy skills."

Despite current tensions in the country, Rae explained that humor is

palatable and diverse representation in comedy can create breakthroughs in audience reception.

"You can hit someone's funny bone, and it makes them open to criticism," Rae said.

She described the lasting impact of the 1998 American television sitcom, "Will and Grace," which opened doors for LGBTQ+ representation in the media.

Even for Rae herself, breaking into the Hollywood landscape came with warnings and cautionary tales. She wrote a script with her colleague's roommate, an ode to '90s movies like "Love Jones" and Black stories that did not exist in film at the time. Afterward, they traveled from San Francisco to Los Angeles to sell their pitch.

"We kept receiving feedback that we needed to make the script more 'multicultural,'" said Rae. "It was very clear that it was code for white voices and characters. It was devastating."

Although the Hollywood filmmaking industry is "turning off the faucet for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives," Rae emphasized the importance for Black creatives in positions of power to demonstrate their storytelling capabilities to the world.

Scratching the surface of Black stories within the diaspora, Rae said she is committed to acting, producing, writing projects and hiring writers that accurately reflect the modern Black woman.

During the production of "Insecure,"

Rae said she felt that the media pigeonholed representations of Black women as "flawless, fierce and superhuman." She could not relate and dedicated "Insecure" to portray the awkward experiences and tribulations of contemporary Black women.

After graduating from Stanford University in 2007 with her bachelor's degree in African American studies, Rae created music videos, and wrote and directed plays for fun. On campus, she met screenwriter Tracy Oliver, who helped produce "The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl."

"There's constant imposter syndrome that I face to this day, but 'The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl' was such an affirmation that people wanted to see the stories I was releasing," Rae said.

Her confidence boosted after her creative projects were met with internet virality and high ratings. She advised CSUF students to build their digital portfolio and explore content creation on social media platforms.

"This room will be the people you can work with, forge bonds, make billions, grow in business and change the world together," said Rae.

Though the Hollywood landscape is fickle, Rae emphasized that "success is when opportunity meets preparation."

"This is your world. All the good you want to see, all that you want to say, is in your hands," said Rae. "You are going to be your biggest believer."



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

ASI student leaders with Issa Rae

SPORTS

Shyanne Rainey finds her water polo home at CSUF

By Brian Robin,
contributing writer

She's 22 years old, which — in the world of Cal State Fullerton's women's water polo team in Year Two of the built-from-scratch program — makes Shyanne Rainey the equivalent of Grandma Moses. It's an appropriate reference, one Rainey and her twin sister Samantha would be the first to nod their heads in appreciation.

The two were on the phone earlier this season, both gushing about the situations they both found themselves in at the end of their collegiate water polo careers. Samantha Rainey is a goalie for Concordia after transferring from Biola. Shyanne? A center/two-meter player for the Titans, brought to CSUF from Azusa Pacific.

"My sister and I were talking about how we found our retirement homes," Rainey said. "It's amazing. I've never played for a coach who cares this much, and neither has she. We both have coaches who care. We're both in our happy retirement home for water polo."

If Rainey is the poster child for "retirement," perhaps CSUF coach Kyle Witt should start passing out AARP cards to all his players. After all, the occupant of her "happy retirement home for water polo" is also the answer to a happy Titan trivia question:

Name the first player in program history to be named Big West Player of the Week.

That would be Rainey, who drew the honor three weeks ago after scoring 12 goals, drawing three exclusions and collecting three steals in three games: wins against Biola and the University of Toronto and a gritty 15-10 loss to No. 7 Arizona State. Against Biola, Rainey powered home six goals — half of the Titans' 12. She scored four of CSUF's eight against Toronto, adding two against the Sun Devils.

Last weekend at the Claremont Convergence Tournament at Claremont McKenna, Rainey led the Titans to a 3-1 record, scoring 11 goals in the four games. She's fourth in the Big West with 36 goals, crashing a statistical party occupied by the usual characters from established programs such as Cal State Northridge, Long Beach State, UC San Diego and Hawaii.

"We got more than we bargained for in a good way when we got Shyanne," Witt said. "... Her stats are phenomenal, and she's earned everything she's gotten.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Shyanne Rainey goes for the long pass.

She'll tell you that her teammates are the reason for her success, but part of that is she sets herself up for the success she's gotten through all the work she's done, and now here at Cal State Fullerton, all that hard work is paying off."

And make no mistake. Rainey has paid her dues in numerous ways, starting with coming out of a Porterville High program not known as a water polo hotbed. She and her sister helped change that, with Rainey leading Porterville to the 2019 Division 2 CIF Valley title, winning four letters and three league titles.

That brought her to Azusa Pacific, where — even after showing her prowess at Junior Olympics for her club team — Rainey still had to take a plunge of faith and try out for a spot with the Cougars. She earned one just in time to run into the pandemic, living with a former club teammate in a hotel for two weeks.

The following year, APU played only conference opponents. And her final year, Rainey played for a new coach, who was pregnant most of the season.

"That was cool. My four years at APU were not normal. One curveball after another," Rainey said. "But it was worth it."

And yet, even after she scored 72 goals over parts of three seasons, the best was yet to come. After earning her BA in kinesiology, Rainey had the COVID

year remaining. She entered the transfer portal and noticed CSUF had a new program under a familiar coach. Rainey had played against Witt's teams when he was coaching at Loyola Marymount.

Witt, naturally, had done his homework. The moment he got Rainey's email, he had his opening pitch ready and waiting.

"I emailed him and then set up a phone call once I was in the portal," Rainey said. "He said, 'Shyanne Rainey. We stopped you shooting backhands and forced you to turn.' He was telling me how he took away my shot. He was telling me my own stats.

"He knows how to play water polo, and he knows how to coach. My other team wasn't like that. I wanted something new from a coach I could learn from, and he's lived up to that. He loves to coach, he loves to play, and I never had a coach who was so dedicated. I wanted to play for Kyle. ... When I got accepted, I asked if there was a spot for me. He said, 'Of course,' and walked me around campus telling me about the program. I'm here playing, and it's an amazing thing. I'm a Christian and it was like God worked his way into giving me a passionate coach my last year of playing."

Rainey and Witt are on the same wavelength in and out of the water, so much so that Witt said that Rainey

would deflect any praise toward her teammates. Which, on cue, Rainey did, saying her Big West Player of the Week honors came because her teammates put her in position to do so. Two of them even baked cookies and brought balloons.

When you understand how Rainey scores her goals, you understand she underestimates her own pool cred. Rainey plays the center, or two-meter position, easily the most demanding spot in the pool. The position demands are ruthless: combining the decision-making of a quarterback with the physical prowess of a middle linebacker. Oh, and let's throw in the hands of a hockey center.

Everything offensively goes through her, meaning when Rainey gets the ball, two- to three-meters out from the opposing goal — with water splashing about and bodies crashing about— she must instinctively and immediately decide what to do.

And make that decision while the opposing two-meter player is physically pounding her above — and below — the water with as much rope as the referee will give her. Sometimes two players converge on her, speeding up the internal clock in Rainey's head.

Does she pass ... shoot ... or take enough punishment to hopefully force an ejection, giving the Titans the water polo equivalent of a hockey power play?

"In water polo, there's the goalie and the center and everyone else. Everyone else is decently similar. Interchangeable," Witt said. "But comparing it to basketball, you can't compare people to Shaq(uille O'Neal), and you can't compare people to Kobe (Bryant). The center position is so unique that it takes a year at the craft to understand stuff.

"You can't coach people to be the center. ... It's the work ethic and all the work you do before you get the ball and once you get the ball, it's the choices you make between drawing the double team and passing it out, shooting or earning the ejection (from a defender). Those three choices are tough, and you can't make the wrong choice. You have to make the right choice in that moment. She makes mistakes; she's human. But she moves on from mistakes in the right way and soaks up coaching. She probably complains that she doesn't get enough coaching."

In Rainey's case, absolutely. She's found her happy retirement home and she doesn't want to get out of the pool.

"I'm sad only playing one year here. I told my teammates I wish this program was here sooner," she said.

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