



PHOTO COURTESY OF DISNEYLAND RESORT

Cast member alumni of Cal State Fullerton and Fullerton College celebrate new members of Disney Aspire with Mickey Mouse in this 2022 file photo.

## FINANCIAL AID

# DISNEY ASPIRE HELPS TITANS REACH THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

### Program covers fees, tuition, books

By **Jenelyn Russo**,  
contributing writer

Cal State Fullerton is in its first academic year of partnering with Disney Aspire, The Walt Disney Co.'s education investment and career development program. The program provides 100% coverage of required tuition, fees and book expenses for full-time and part-time hourly cast members (Disney employees) across the U.S. at a college or university that is part of the Disney Aspire network.

In 2023, CSUF along with Fullerton College, the university's primary com-

munity college feeder school, became the first brick-and-mortar locations for the Disney Aspire program, allowing local employees to not only meet their career goals but to engage in an on-campus college experience.

Since its launch last year, CSUF has admitted 645 Titan students through the Disney Aspire program, and as of last month, the university has received nearly 140 applications for the Fall 2024 term.

CSUF graduate student Bradley Tumbleton began working at the Disneyland Resort in March 2019 as a lifeguard at the Grand Californian Hotel, a great fit for his swim and water polo back-

ground. After graduating from UCI in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in English, Tumbleton took a gap year and went abroad to Spain to teach English.

Upon his return to the States, Tumbleton was rehired by Disney and is back on the pool deck. While exploring the pursuit of a master's degree to help launch his career, he heard about the Disney Aspire program from some of his fellow employees.

After looking into CSUF's program options, he came across the master of science in education option with a concentration and certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, offered through CSUF's Department

of Modern Languages and Literatures. It was exactly what Tumbleton was looking for in a graduate program, and he took it as a sign to apply to Disney Aspire.

Tumbleton was accepted by both CSUF and Disney Aspire and began the pursuit of his master's degree last fall. Disney Aspire has covered the cost of his tuition, fees and books in their entirety and provides support through the program's facilitating vendor, Guild Education.

"They're very helpful," Tumbleton said. "You get a Guild coach that will visit with you pretty frequently if you

**ASPIRE » PAGE 5**

## SKECHERS CHALLENGE

### Art major's feline illustration wins top prize in national contest

Teeny Nadeau draws \$10,000 scholarship

By **Lou Ponsi**,  
contributing writer

Teeny Nadeau was thrilled when opening an email last December notifying the art major that she was one of 10 finalists in the BOBS from Skechers Paws for a Cause Design Scholarship challenge.

Her prize for being a finalist was a free Bobs from Skechers shoe.

"They were like, since you're a finalist, you can have a free pair of shoes, any of the Bob's line on our website," Nadeau said. "So that was pretty cool. I got a free pair of shoes. I was like, OK, that's probably all I'm going to get out of it."

She was wrong.

A more prestigious prize was coming.

Open to students enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S., the BOBS from Skechers Paws for a Cause Design

Scholarship program invited applicants to create a cat- or dog-themed print for a BOBS from Skechers shoe. A winner would be named in both categories.

Nadeau submitted her black and white mosaic of several cats dressed in regal attire.

"I've always really liked fancy attire on animals," said Nadeau, a double major in Illustration and Entertainment Art Animation. "I thought it was funny and cute. I designed it kind of based on what I would have wanted to see as a kid, because I've always really liked cats."

Applicants were also asked to write about the design and share a personal story about a shelter/adopted pet or what the BOBS from Skechers collection means to them.

On a deeper, more heartfelt level, Nadeau's design was a way of honoring her cat Firefly, who had recently passed away after battling cancer.

"I wrote a poem for Firefly because I just needed a way to get my grief out, and so I included that poem as well in my submission," Nadeau said. "She was my birthday cat when I turned 7, and yeah, she was my best friend. We grew up together."

Some time passed and then during the

winter break, on Jan.19, Nadeau was informed that her design won first place.

"I just see this email like, 'Congrats, you've won,'" Nadeau said. "And then I called my mom, she called her parents, and we just ... we were just so incredibly over the moon."

Nadeau's winning design will be used for a limited-edition BOBS shoe, and the Skechers Foundation is also donating to a nearby animal welfare organization in the name of Firefly.

The gifted artist also receives a \$10,000 college scholarship from the Skechers Foundation and one-on-one mentorship sessions with key Skechers design professionals.

Her Skechers design mentorship will begin in May.

"I just couldn't believe that I had been given this opportunity," she said. "Because to be honest, I wasn't sure how I was going to pay for the next year of Fullerton."

The finalists included multiple students from 20 schools nationwide, including colleges in California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin.

**CHALLENGE » PAGE 2**



PHOTO BY LOU PONSI, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER  
Cal State Fullerton student Teeny Nadeau shows off a pair of shoes that sport her winning animal-print design of goffy cats.

## I WANT TO ADVOCATE FOR STUDENT VETERANS

Cal State Fullerton

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VISION & VISIONARIES

# CSUF education: A foundation for career, philanthropic work

## Longtime home builder Coler giving back

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.

Growing up in Placentia, the emerging campus of Cal State Fullerton was a “backyard playground” for Scott Coler when his parents moved to the area in the 1960s. As such, Coler never considered attending anywhere other than CSUF for college, and in 1984, he earned his bachelor’s degree in business.

The education Coler received from CSUF laid the foundation for a 35-plus-year career in the residential building industry, primarily as a home builder. The Titan alumnus now prioritizes giving back to the university through volunteer positions with the College of Business and Economics and the Cal State Fullerton Philanthropic Foundation.

In recognition of his contributions to the Southern California housing industry, and for his continued support of CSUF students, Coler has been named a 2024 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Distinguished Alumni award winner.

Coler entered CSUF straight out of high school, and although he lived in Norco at that time, there was no question he would attend the college that was a significant part of his childhood experience. He explored different majors until he settled on finance and never looked back.

“It’s just such a great program,” Coler said. “It has such a high degree of rigor. I really felt like I was learning a skill that I could use. I knew if I had to work hard at getting my degree, then there proba-



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSUF alum Scott Coler, president of Capital Pacific Real Estate, has given back to the school’s College of Business and Economics.

bly would be something good that came out of it.”

After graduating with a finance degree and a concentration in securities and investments, it was a job posting Coler found at CSUF’s Career Center that led to his first position as a financial analyst for a real estate company.

That opportunity eventually introduced him to Capital Pacific Homes in the early 1990s, and Coler has remained in the home-building industry ever since. He held the position of division president of the company’s Las Vegas division, and he led the charge behind the company’s expansion of its Southern California operations in the early 2000s.

Coler’s passion as a home builder is rooted in the idea that buying a home is the most significant and emotional purchase most people will make in their

lifetime, a decision that often serves as the foundation for their family.

“I feel what we do is a very important part of creating the fabric of our society,” Coler said. “I take absolute pleasure in the design, construction and delivery of homes that people really love and embrace as a place to raise their family. So, I feel it’s an important industry, and it’s a needed industry.”

During the financial crisis of the late 2000s, when most home-building companies went through severe financial turmoil, Coler guided Capital Pacific Homes through restructuring and recapitalization as Capital Pacific Real Estate, Inc.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Coler has pressed pause on the company for now and has been enjoying the chance to fully immerse himself in

giving back to CSUF, as he credits much of his success in the industry to the business finance education he received.

“I was often complimented by our financial partners and our other partners on how well we executed a lot of our business plans,” Coler said. “What I learned at Cal State Fullerton in terms of how you apply it even today was a big part of our company’s success, and so I felt like I needed to do something to give back.”

Coler has been giving back to CSUF’s College of Business and Economics as a past president and former member of the college’s Executive Council. He is also a current board member for the Center for Real Estate and a mentor participant in the Executive in Residence program. He believes the real-world experience Titan students gain in the classroom prepares them as they launch their careers.

“I can show students how you can use the skills you learned in the areas of finance to model out projections and financial estimates and pro formas that investors and builders actually use in making investment decisions to develop,” Coler said.

Additionally, Coler serves on the Cal State Fullerton Philanthropic Foundation Board of Governors and is currently the Finance and Investment Committee chair, where he oversees more than \$200 million of the foundation’s funds that are invested.

Never considering himself a “stand-out alum,” his selection as a 2024 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Distinguished Alumni award winner took Coler by surprise. But he’s taking the recognition as an opportunity to encourage other Titan alumni to give back to the institution that has given them so much.

“It’s part of community life, and it’s being part of giving back to something that has been so important,” Coler said. “I just wholeheartedly encourage any alumnus or alumni from the university to consider doing something and not be shy about getting involved and being a part of giving back to the university. So many people I know have gone on to do so well thanks to their education that there’s just so much potential there.”

## Challenge

FROM PAGE 1

“To see so many emotional submissions from across the country was inspiring,” said Kathy Kartalis, senior vice president of global product for Skechers. “Narrowing the decision down to the finalists was a real challenge, but we are thrilled with our two winning entries. We look forward to seeing people across the United States wearing their patterns later this year.”

The sales of BOBS have helped to save and care for approximately two million animals, Kartalis said.

Nadeau first learned about the Skechers Paws for a Cause Design scholarship in a computer-aided illustration class with Jesse Pak, lecturer in art.

She credits the instructor for sharpening her illustration skills, providing constructive criticism and boosting her confidence in her design’s development.

Nadeau’s passion for art began with her fascination with dragons as a young child.

“And my favorite TV show as a kid was American Dragon Jake Long, which was a show about a kid who could turn into a dragon whenever he wanted, and I just thought it was the coolest thing ever.”

Nadeau’s mother had a rule, however,

which was not to watch cartoons in the morning before school.

But she made an exception when she watched Nadeau pausing the frames of TV shows and redrawing them.

“And she was like, ‘If you’re learning animation in the morning, you can watch this show,’” Nadeau said. “So, I was like, of course I’m going to keep doing this. I didn’t know that my mom was fostering this animation in me, her recognizing that it could be a passion.”

She participated in art classes at Saddleback’s College for Kids program.

“And I just loved it. I was mostly self-taught up until then. I really have always liked digital art, so I did digital animations and illustrations.”

Nadeau went on to earn an associate degree from Saddleback before transferring to CSUF, where she has immersed herself in the art community.

She serves as a social media specialist for CSUF’s Collective of Women in Animation, a nonprofit with chapters around the world that seeks to “empower and advocate for people of under-represented gender identities in the art, technology, production, and business of animation.”

Nadeau is also the director of public relations for the Arts Inter-Club Council, a liaison for all arts organizations designed to increase communication within the College of the Arts and promote the growth of the art community.



PHOTO BY LOU PONSİ, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

CSUF art major Teeny Nadeau designed this winner in the Skechers Paws for a Cause scholarship competition. Nadeau will receive a \$10,000 scholarship and mentorship from a Skechers professional.

I ALWAYS WANTED TO TEACH SPECIAL EDUCATION

At Cal State Fullerton, I earned my teaching credential and master’s degree, and researched communication strategies for children with Down syndrome.

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## POLLAK LIBRARY

# Movies renew interest in 'Dune' author archives

## Herbert's notes, letters a popular resource

By Nicole Gregory,  
contributing writer

Among the archives in the Special Collections of Cal State Fullerton's Pollak Library, the papers of Frank Herbert, author of the epic 1965 science fiction novel "Dune" have been the most popular, and now even more so since the newly released "Dune" movies.

Interest in Herbert's typewritten drafts, letters and forward-thinking ideas about the environment is surging once again.

In 1957, Herbert studied the shifting sands of the Oregon coast, a subject that fascinated him — they had been known "to swallow whole cities, lakes, rivers, highways," he wrote in a letter to his literary agent, pitching it as a magazine article. No editor wanted it, but those dunes later took shape as the landscapes of the planet Arrakis in "Dune."

The story of "Dune" first appeared in the December 1963 edition of "Analog," a science fiction journal, where it was printed in serial form. Copies of "Analog" can be found in the archival boxes at the library as well as correspondence Herbert had with his agent and writer friends, reviews of his books, notes, and heartfelt fan letters.

Like most writers, Herbert had his share of rejection. The archival boxes of his papers in Pollak Library contain rejection letters Herbert received for "Dune" from publishers unwilling to bring it out

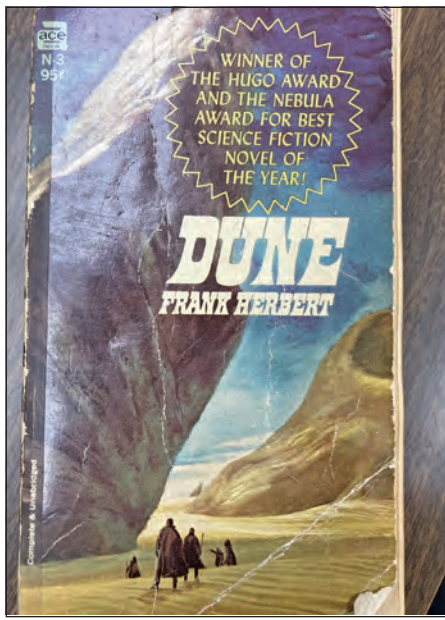


PHOTO BY NICOLE GREGORY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER, COURTESY OF WILLIS E. MCNELLY SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTION: FRANK HERBERT PAPERS (COLLECTION), SC-06-FH. CSUF UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.

CSUF's Pollak Library is home to Herbert's archival collection.

as a book — there were 20 in total — with complaints that the novel was too long and the plot too complicated.

To date, the book has sold approximately 20 million copies worldwide.

Teachers integrate Herbert's archives in classroom studies, from literature to religion.

The rough manuscript pages for "Dune" — a story many students know only from the movies — reveal the workings of a writer's imagination. They are

filled with scribbled notes and edits.

"It's very cool," said Lisa A. Mix, director of the Archives and Special Collections. "You can really get a sense of his process. You can see where he crossed things out and wrote things in. I tell students, 'This is the primitive version of track change,'" she said.

Herbert's papers also offer a glimpse into the beginnings of the environmental movement in America. "Students are interested in the 'Dune' manuscript, but also Herbert's research materials and notes in relation to the environment and climate change, and how those issues are portrayed in science fiction," Mix said.

"A professor in anthropology had his students work on an exhibit on the anthropology of religion. Some of the parts of the Herbert papers and 'Dune' were a part of that because Herbert invents several religions in 'Dune,'" she said.

The Frank Herbert archives are part of a larger collection called the Willis McNelly Science Fiction Collection, Mix said.

"Willis McNelly was a faculty member here at Cal State Fullerton in the Department of English," she said. "In the 1960s, he was instrumental in getting science fiction recognized as literature. He was very active in both the Science Fiction Research Association and the Science Fiction Writers of America."

In 1967, McNelly was a speaker at the Science Fiction Writers of America meeting in Berkeley.

"At that meeting, he met several science fiction writers, including Frank Herbert," Mix said. "Because he was teaching science fiction as literature, he developed friendships and professional relationships with Frank Herbert, Ray

Bradbury, Philip K. Dick and other science fiction writers. He was very aware of the importance of these writers, preserving their manuscripts, as he put it, 'not just keeping them in boxes in their garage,' but having them preserved eventually in a library where scholars could come and do research on them."

Herbert donated original manuscripts and other papers to Cal State Fullerton in his lifetime, and after he died in 1986, his widow donated more. In 2015, Cal State University had a yearlong celebration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of "Dune" in which some of the archival material was included in displays.

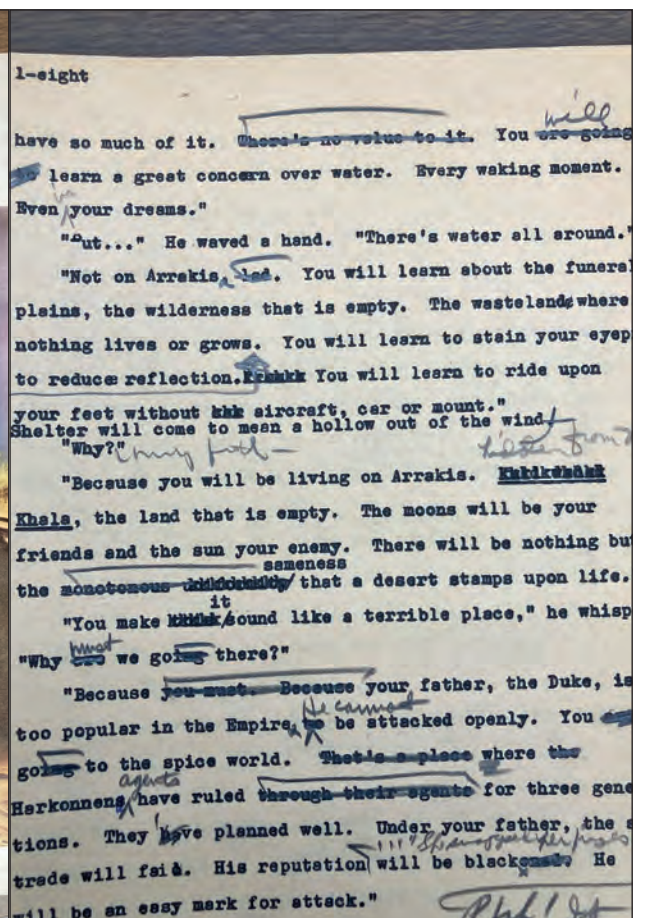
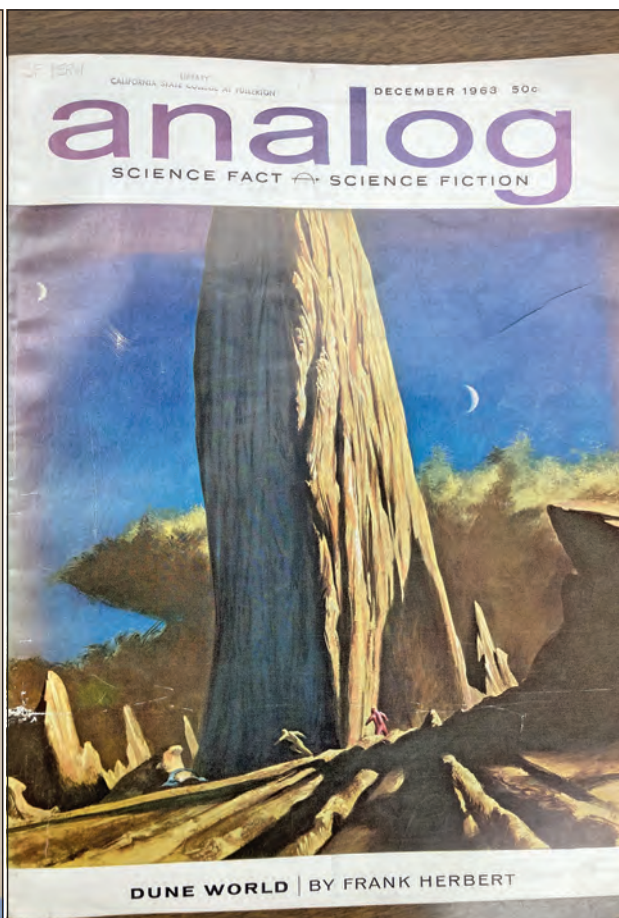
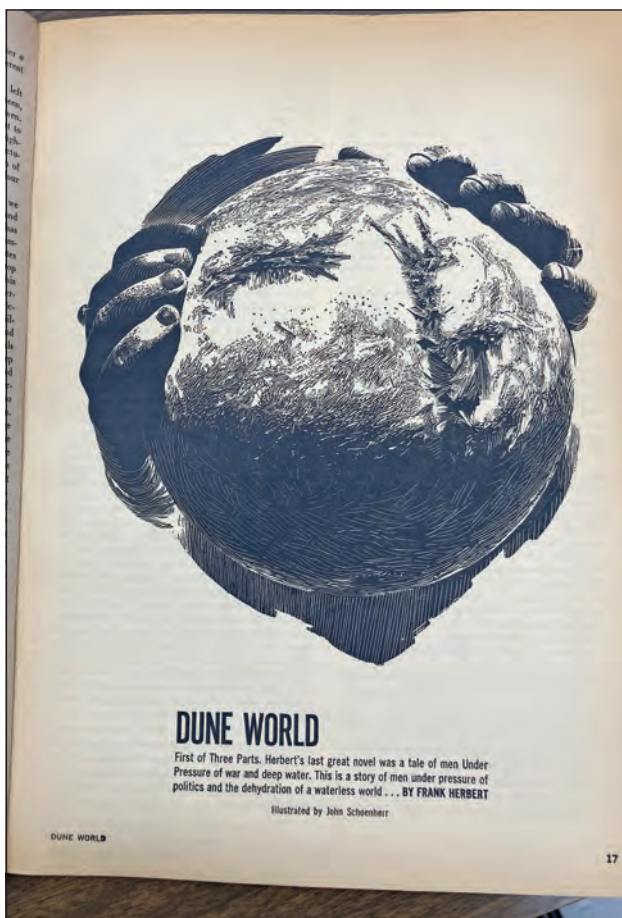
Herbert was born in Tacoma, Washington in 1920 and knew early on that he wanted to be a writer. He worked for several newspapers before eventually becoming a freelance writer.

The Pollak Library Special Collections also includes the Freedom Center, which consists of political literature and ephemera "from all aspects of all points on the political spectrum — from the Daughters of the Confederacy to the Bernie Sanders campaign," Mix said.

There is also a large local history collection, much of it about the growth of the citrus industry in Orange County, as well as the university archives and an extensive map collection, which includes several showing California as an island.

Relics in these collections tell stories of historic moments but also of how people were thinking at the time and shaped their history.

"One thing I like about archives is that you can look at an issue from many sides, and you can find different documentation from different perspectives," Mix said. "I find that very interesting."



PHOTOS BY NICOLE GREGORY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER, COURTESY OF WILLIS E. MCNELLY SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTION: FRANK HERBERT PAPERS (COLLECTION), SC-06-FH. CSUF UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS. The collection includes notes, manuscripts and 20 rejection letters, criticizing the book's length and complicated plot.

## 'BEYOND THE CONVERSATION'

# 'Abbott Elementary' actor Williams shares the power of comedy

CSUF News Media Services

When he first saw the 1997 sci-fi blockbuster "Men in Black," 4-year-old Tyler James Williams giggled as intergalactic creatures chased after a secret agent played by Will Smith.

Comedy captivated him. "The fire that was lit that day is what has kept me in comedy over and over again," said Williams, an award-winning actor, musician, songwriter and producer 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.

Williams' commitment to embodying characters that showcase a "thread of emotional vulnerability" and compassion, allows him to tell powerful stories while tugging at the audience's heartstrings.

His notable roles include Chris in "Everybody Hates Chris," Cyrus in "Let It Shine," Lionel in "Dear White People" and Noah in "The Walking Dead." Williams received the 2023 Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role as Gregory in the hit series "Abbott Elementary."

Turning down more acting roles than picking them up, Williams said he finds joy in playing supporting roles that "have a lot of heart."

In the fictional, underfunded Philadelphia public school of "Abbott Elementary," teachers scramble to support their students' academic success and make a sustainable living from paycheck to paycheck.

Exposed to the inequities in the United States' educational system, Williams shared he is more informed of the plight of teachers around the country and "hyper-aware" of his duty to humanize teachers' lived experiences.

"On the grander scale, as a country we're understaffed with teachers, but specifically with teachers of color and



Tyler James Williams, award-winning actor, musician, songwriter and producer, shares his experience.

even more Black men," said Williams. "I'm advocating for Gregory Eddie, for that position to be filled, inviting Black men into the conversation and romanticizing the true art that is teaching."

"Abbott Elementary" wrapped three seasons with 59 episodes, and Williams shared that the show will return for a

fourth season.

Williams explained his draw to comedy as an antidote to negative national news.

"People don't change when they feel angry. You have to disarm them," said Williams. "It's like when you're on a date with somebody and one of the first things

you want to do is make them laugh. It makes them comfortable enough to talk about difficult issues if they understand that they are not under attack."

Williams' hilarious side-eye glances to the camera in "Abbott Elementary" are not scripted but improv. He shared that the ability to gauge timing and specificity in acting will "open doors" for students.

Looking back on one of his first roles, Williams said "Everybody Hates Chris" provided the "best training ground" for his professional career.

"I did scenes with some of the best stand-up comedians in history," said Williams. "I was able to stand 10 toes with Chris Rock."

Alongside Williams' diagnosis of Crohn's disease at 24 years old, he shared he is diligent about his mental health. Williams emphasized the importance for students to "protect their peace" and form an unbreakable mind-body connection.

For aspiring actors, he said it's crucial to fall in love with the camerawork, preparation and character development.

"Work on yourself as a creative and work on being surefire. Later in your career, you are going to make bigger choices," said Williams. "That's what's going to help you be a precision sniper as an actor versus somebody who does a big song or dance."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Williams wrapped filming "The United States vs. Billie Holiday," a film that follows the Federal Bureau of Narcotics as they target jazz singer Billie Holiday for her song "Strange Fruit," which recounts the atrocities of the Jim Crow era.

To immerse himself in the role of saxophonist Lester Young, Williams had to separate his feelings from reality.

"I was playing a character who actually existed. It raises the stakes a lot more," said Williams. "You're not just telling a story; you're telling someone's story. There's a responsibility to tell it the right way."

"Our job is to humanize the stories of those who don't get humanized."

## VITA

## Gaining hands-on experience through tax preparation assistance program

CSUF News Media Services

Marie Hernandez, president of Cal State Fullerton's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, spends hours processing hundreds of returns each tax season.

VITA is a volunteer-based initiative supported by the IRS in the College of Business and Economics. The program provides free tax preparation assistance to individuals and families with \$65,000 or less in income, individuals with disabilities, elderly taxpayers, limited English-speaking taxpayers and international students.

Transferring from Rio Hondo College to CSUF, Hernandez has been immersed as a volunteer in the VITA program for three years.

Advancing through the certification requirements as a volunteer, Hernandez witnessed the profound impact tax services have on clients' lives, inspiring her to pursue a leadership role in the program to support fellow volunteers' development.

"I find fulfillment in assisting others through the complexities of filing taxes and making the experience less intimidating," said Hernandez, who is majoring in business administration with a concentration in accounting.

Nearing graduation, Hernandez said she is in the process of leveraging her education to pursue a career in public accounting.

She landed a summer internship with

Deloitte, an accounting firm that provides audit, assurance, tax, consulting, and risk and financial advisory services to a broad cross-section of the largest corporations and governmental agencies.

"Upon transferring to CSUF, I was not aware of the school's reputation as a prime recruiting location for accounting firms in Southern California," said Hernandez. "However, I quickly discovered the abundance of resources and networking opportunities available to students through student-led organizations and the College of Business and Economics."

After graduation, Hernandez plans to continue her education at CSUF and pursue a master of science degree in taxation with a concentration in accounting.

"Reflecting on the benefits VITA has provided me as a volunteer, I can attest to how the program has empowered me," said Hernandez. "I always recommend the program to students who are searching for accounting opportunities to help them succeed in the business landscape."

Through the VITA program, IRS-certified student volunteers gain hands-on experience in tax preparation.

Students from any major can sign up and participate in free trainings that cover basic, advanced and foreign certification during the fall semester, with recruitment ending in November. Volunteers are required to interact with clients from diverse backgrounds, which improves their interpersonal skills while fostering a sense of social responsibility.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Accounting student Marie Hernandez, third from left, is president of CSUF's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program.

"The VITA program helps students prepare for a career in public accounting. Hands-on tax preparation builds a solid foundation for the Uniform Certified Public Accountant exam and future job interviews," said Jon Durrant, assistant professor of accounting and adviser of the VITA program.

Tax preparation is an essential life skill that is not taught in many schools. Many clients who visit the VITA site qualify for federal and state credits, but are unaware of eligibility or how to claim

the credits, resulting in missed opportunities, explained Hernandez.

The annual VITA program runs the last week of January through the Saturday preceding April 15.

"Our services aim to bridge the gap in access to professional tax assistance," said Hernandez. "Regardless of income level, our goal is to provide our community with access to quality assistance, maximize their tax refunds and empower them to make informed financial decisions."

## MUSIC GRADUATE

## Singer steps into Los Angeles, San Francisco opera spotlights

CSUF News Media Services

When she was younger, Thalia Moore's father took her to see Kathleen Battle sing live in concert.

"She's a Black soprano, and she's one of the best," said Moore. "I remember watching her use her voice to inspire a crowd, and I thought, 'I want to do that.'"

In Cal State Fullerton's College of the Arts, the aspiring singer and music student continued to find her voice while learning from award-winning faculty and stacking her portfolio with performances.

In fall 2023, she got the email she was waiting for. She landed her first contract with the San Francisco Opera, performing as a chorus soloist in the company's production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera, "Omar."

Stepping on stage at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, the Class of 2024 grad made her professional debut.

"I never thought I would be there as a student, so it was a very 'wow' moment for me," she said.

When the curtain rose on opening night, she couldn't help but think about the two people who helped her achieve her dreams — her mom and dad.

"My mom has been so instrumental in supporting me. Not only did she sign me up for training camps and help me work with voice teachers, but she's always there to see me perform," said Moore. "My dad passed away about 20 years ago, but on that night, I was thinking about how much it would mean to

him to see me perform in an art form he loved."

That was just the beginning. After her first professional run, Moore went on to audition with the Los Angeles Opera, where she was offered a soprano role in the production of "Highway 1, USA." She performed with the L.A. Opera chorus from February through March at the Los Angeles Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

Set to cross CSUF's Commencement stage in May, Moore has already signed her next contract. This summer, she will return to the Bay Area to begin practicing with the San Francisco Opera for its upcoming performance of "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," which will debut in October.

"The preparation from the music department has been super helpful. I came to CSUF as a transfer student, and immediately, the musicianship of the school drove me to be successful. Between the performances and working with faculty, the environment pushed me to be better," she said.

No stranger to the spotlight, Moore transferred from Norco College to join University Singers, CSUF's top choral ensemble.

The ensemble has a history of collaborating with renowned orchestras like the Los Angeles Philharmonic and working with famous conductors like John Williams.

Under the direction of Grammy Award-winning music professor Robert Istad, students in the ensemble learn to perform in professional environments, network with industry contacts and develop their skills so that they're ready to



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Thalia Moore made her professional debut at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco.

land roles right after graduation.

During her time with University Singers, Moore performed at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, the Collins Street Baptist Church in Australia and alongside famous artists like singer Andrea Bocelli.

One of the most important lessons she learned was sight reading, reading and singing a musical piece that the performer has not seen or learned before.

"Now that I'm working in professional choirs and opera choruses, I realize not many people know how to sight read. It's a special skill, and it's helped me become a better performer."

Throughout her undergraduate ca-

reer, Moore also competed in regional and national voice competitions, assisted with the production of opera shows, found community in the African American Resource Center and Losquadro Keller LGBTQ Resource Center, and benefited from the support of Music Associates.

"Whether she's singing with renowned opera companies or working here at CSUF, curating a program for the Advanced Vocal Workshop course, or commissioning a song cycle for her senior recital, Thalia's creativity and commitment to her craft are always on full display," said Kerry Jennings, associate professor of music.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Thalia Moore, a 2024 music graduate, has performed professionally at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco and at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles.

## TOWN HALL

# Former Assembly speaker promotes civic engagement

CSUF News Media Services

Anthony Rendon can tell you exactly when he first became interested in the environment.

"It was a geography class that I took during my junior year here at Cal State Fullerton," said Rendon. "I never really thought much about the environment until I took that class, and I ended up becoming the executive director of the California and Los Angeles League of Conservation Voters. That says a lot about the impact that that class and that experience had on my life."

Since that first geography course, Rendon has turned his interest into more than a decade of work on environmental issues and a decorated career in education, public policy and government. He previously served as the speaker of the California Assembly for seven years and currently represents the 62nd district.

During an April 12 Town Hall Meeting, the CSUF alumnus shared his journey from being a college student to becoming the second longest-serving speaker of the California Assembly.

Students also had the opportunity to showcase their political knowledge to an audience of local government officials and public affairs leaders. Their projects tackled relevant topics, including homelessness, climate change and voter engagement.

Political science graduate student and Class of 2024 grad Mert Bayraktar said the Town Hall gave students a chance to make their voices heard, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable concerns.

"There are so many problems out there to fix, and if we were doing this alone, it would be too much for us to solve," said Bayraktar, who serves as president of Pi Sigma Alpha, CSUF's chapter of the National Political Honor Society. "It's about teamwork, and it's encouraging to find that we're all striving for the same excellence that we hope to achieve. Cal State Fullerton is the place to do this kind of work."

Scott Spitzer, associate professor of political science, said the event is most students' first experience with civic engagement, and with the nation facing uncertainty about issues like home insecurity, the environment and the upcoming election, their academic research in

these areas will be paramount to inspiring change in the future.

"The leaders who are here today hold positions of authority and power in our communities and government. They're doing important work, and they are coming to hear from our students," said Spitzer. "At a time of great upheaval in national politics, our students are engaging as citizens in real discussions with these leaders. We empowered them to share their ideas in hopes that they will continue these conversations in the future."

"When you think about the extent to which your experiences here will impact your life, they will to a tremendous degree," said Rendon, who earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 1982 and master's degree in 1994.

As a student, Rendon said his professors and classes greatly influenced his passion for the environment and the arts, and throughout his career, he's remained committed to projects that promote those areas.

"Whether it was making sure there was an arts curriculum in early childhood education or supporting the construction of an arts center in Los Angeles, the arts have been infused in every single thing I've done — and that started here at Fullerton," he said.

Before he got involved in politics, Rendon was an educator and a nonprofit executive director. During his career, the state of California passed legislation that cut funding for his nonprofit, which required him to lay off hundreds of people. That's when he realized the importance of getting involved in government.

Rendon has worked on several impactful projects during his political career, including passing a \$52 billion transportation funding plan, an extension of California's cap-and-trade program, a first-of-its-kind clean air measure, and legislation to address the affordable housing crisis and single-use plastic packaging.

For students who want to make a difference in politics, Rendon said the most important part is researching the issues.

"You have to understand the extent to which politics and public policy impact your life. This event is a good place to start," said Rendon. "Make sure that you continue to do that throughout your careers."



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Anthony Rendon, CSUF alumnus and former speaker of the California Assembly, speaks at the annual Town Hall Meeting.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Mert Bayraktar, Class of 2024 political science graduate student

## Aspire

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need the help, which is great. And for the process, you apply as a student regularly without kind of any other added steps."

Tumbleson remains a full-time hourly employee at Disney while attending CSUF full time, which keeps him busy, but he is finding the TESOL program to be a perfect fit. He is on schedule to graduate in spring 2025 and is considering returning abroad to teach English or stay locally as an adult noncredit ESL instructor.

"The program itself is awesome,"

Tumbleson said. "We're a small group of students all doing this, and it's quite specific to teaching English to speakers of other languages in Southern California. I'm learning a lot."

CSUF Titan Natalie Fontanet was hired by the Disneyland Resort in November of 2021. She began working in merchandise and is now an attractions cast member in Fantasyland. After graduating from North High School in Torrance in 2019, she went on to El Camino College and earned an associate's degree in psychology with the intent of transferring to a four-year university.

Her mother learned of Disney Aspire and seeing that the program aligned with her desired next steps in higher education, Fontanet applied and was accepted. While continuing to work part

time at Disneyland, she is majoring in psychology and has an interest in becoming a behavioral analyst for correctional facilities.

"Becoming a Titan has been really fun, and they make me feel like I'm in a welcoming community," Fontanet said. "I was able to make some friends from some classes ... including a friend who also works at Disney. We're able to lean on each other and have a good support system with one another. So far, it's been a good experience."

As a first generation college student, Fontanet is grateful for the opportunity to see her goals to fruition. Her younger sister is currently a high school senior and also plans to apply for the Disney Aspire program at CSUF to complete her bachelor's degree, which is a big fi-

nancial help to her parents.

"I'm first gen, so everything is really new, and I haven't had any help from my parents," Fontanet said. "I'm really happy that I don't have to lean on loans or lean on my parents to help me pay for schooling. I'm just really excited to be able to complete this on my own with the help of Disney."

Both Fontanet and Tumbleson encourage fellow employees who are considering applying to the Disney Aspire program at CSUF to not hesitate and take that step forward.

"I would recommend not to sit on these thoughts," Tumbleson said. "I think a lot of people might be saving it for later ... but the reality is a lot of cast members do it. I'm doing it. So take it seriously. It's been good."



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Left, CSUF grad student Bradley Tumbleson works as a lifeguard at the Grand Californian Hotel. At right, Natalie Fontanet, center, is an attractions cast member in Fantasyland while majoring in psychology at Cal State Fullerton.

## SOFTBALL

## Titans: Grateful for Delgadillo, who is 'grateful for the game'

By Brian Robin,  
contributing writer

The first time Kelly Ford saw Megan Delgadillo on a softball field in person, Delgadillo treated her future coach to a home run. This would stand out like a combination of Halley's Comet and a unicorn sighting. You're not going to see many of these, and you're going to appreciate them for what they are.

"That certainly made an impression," Ford said.

It did — but not for the reasons you'd think. Ford wasn't recruiting Delgadillo out of Riverside Poly High School for her thunder. Looking at Delgadillo's career in terms of home runs is like looking at the Venus de Milo and wondering where the arms are. You've missed the plot about Delgadillo's softball character.

That character is a unicorn in more ways than one.

It starts with the raw power Delgadillo truly possesses. That power comes from a brain that never stopped processing what was happening — or going to happen — on a softball field.

The Cal State Fullerton softball coach and her chief lieutenant, associate head coach Jorge Araujo, saw a player who possessed elite skills at every other level of the game. Speed, arm, instincts, ability to get on base and — most importantly to Ford that intangible that simply imposes her will upon a game.

"Having 'Cheese' on our team, I liken it to having another coach on our staff," Ford said, referring to Delgadillo's nickname. "She's the player-coach out there. Players come to her for sure for skill refinement and to listen to her comments. But where she really shines is her scouting. Boy, she can just watch a game and see things that a lot of players don't notice. She just has a real mind for the game and looks at the game through coaches' eyes."

Delgadillo may go by the nickname "Cheese," and Ford spoke about the way Delgadillo "oozes joy every moment on the field." But there's nothing cheesy about her game. The senior outfielder established herself as one of the biggest difference-makers in CSUF softball history, one who already ran, slashed and ignited her way into the program's record books.

Two years ago, Delgadillo had a season for the ages, one where she took an eraser to both the program and Big West record books that bore a remarkable resemblance to her legs. She stole 50 bases, shattering Brooke Clemetson's 2018 pro-



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES  
Megan Delgadillo, nicknamed "Cheese", has been setting records at Cal State Fullerton.

gram record (35) and Dionne Anderson of UC Riverside's 2014 mark (47). Her 50 steals gave her 97 for her career, breaking Ari Williams' program career record (93).

All the while, she led the Big West in hits (80) and runs (57), while slashing .404/.462/.444. Naming her Big West Field Player of the Year was as big a no-brainer as it was for Ford and Araujo to recruit her.

"We all know I'm not the biggest girl who will hit a ton of home runs. I have what, one in my career?" Delgadillo quipped, her open, sardonic sense of humor manifesting itself. "But I'm able to use what I've been born with. My legs are pretty long; that helps me have that advantage when it comes to stealing bases."

To anyone who knew Delgadillo's mentality, this was not only understandable but expected. This is a player who viewed it as an insult to start her college career in right field because she played center field in travel ball and high school. Center field is where leaders played and even as a freshman, Delgadillo viewed herself as a leader.

Except Kelsie Whitmore was already there. Delgadillo had to contend with one of the greatest pure athletes in program history playing what she viewed as her position.

"That was a hard pill to swallow. I wanted to play center, be the leader in the outfield," Delgadillo said. "Three weeks into the season, we're playing Notre Dame in the Mary Nutter (Tournament), and Coach Jorge (Araujo) came up to me and said, 'We're going to put

you in center and move Kelsie to right.' ... That's when I knew I arrived. That's where I belonged. It was a big deal. Even at 18, I was able to be the leader on and off the field."

This shows you another level of Delgadillo's character, a hidden power source. It shows you why she was able to put together that kind of season as a sophomore. What kind of havoc would Delgadillo wreak as a junior? How many records would she break as a junior? How many more wills would she break of opposing pitchers, tied into mental knots every time Delgadillo reached base.

Because Delgadillo's not shy about saying, "They know by now I'm either going to steal on the first pitch or the second. ..."

Well, here's where Delgadillo's character faced its greatest test, when the lightning temporarily disappeared from her legs. Twenty games into the 2023 season, she was slashing .338/.375/.353 with 10 stolen bases in 13 attempts, going into a game against Baylor at Anderson Family Field. With a runner on first, a Baylor batter blooped a ball into short center field. Delgadillo ran in with the ball to keep the runner on first when she stepped awkwardly.

The pop from her right ACL going out could be heard by her teammates in the dugout.

"I was done from there. I felt like my whole leg went numb. I screamed, 'My knee, my knee,' and I couldn't feel my leg anymore," she said.

An MRI the following Monday revealed a torn ACL and 19 days after tear-

ing it, Delgadillo underwent surgery. Her psyche, however, remained torn.

"I didn't cope well. That's the best way to start this off," she said. "I was honestly devastated. All I could think was ...how I'm letting the team down. ... The main thing that helped me was Ford let me travel with the team. Softball is a big part of my life, and if I wasn't able to do that, I would have been ... irritated with everything. That made me feel like I meant something to the team."

Ford made it clear she was.

"When she went down in March, that changed everything," Ford said. "We had to recreate ourselves offensively. She went down and four days later, Antonette Dean went down. Between the two of them, they had the highest batting average and the most stolen bases. It was devastating."

"But she was at every practice and every game she could be at. I've never seen a player be so dedicated when they were going through the trenches of ACL surgery and rehab. She was at every single practice, cheering her teammates on, and she traveled with us to regionals. She absolutely still made a difference. I've never seen a player respond like she responded when she was injured. She's truly a special human being."

Delgadillo didn't pick up a bat until October, the first month she was able to jog. But her fanaticism to get back into center field brought her into the weight room five days a week, where CSUF trainers Tessa McEvoy and Mandolyn Peterson let her blow off steam and gain 30 pounds of heretofore withered muscle back.

It shows. This season, Delgadillo is batting .436 with a .464 on-base percentage and a .529 slugging percentage. She leads the conference in hits (68), runs (41), stolen bases (36 in 37 attempts) and is tied in triples (four).

The records continue falling. Earlier this year, Delgadillo broke Gina Oaks Garcia's 21-year-old program mark for career runs. She's earned two Big West Player of the Week awards this season. That gives her six for her career.

"I was so excited to be back, and even though I had a lot of nerves about being the same player I was, I knew it was OK to be different," she said. "My body will be a lot different than it was, and I was OK to transition myself into that. I take care of my body a lot better now. I don't take it for granted. I was able to do my recovery and know my limits, but I feel like I came back a lot more grateful for the game."

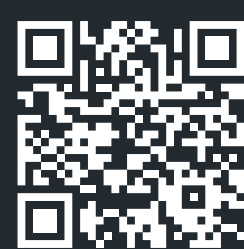
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