



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Oscar Sosa Cordova is a first-generation college graduate with a bachelor's in civil engineering.

ENGINEERING

GRADUATE TAKES NEXT STEP TOWARD A CIVIL ENGINEERING CAREER

Oscar Sosa Cordova illustrates the value of hard work, and he's working at paying it forward

By Nicole Gregory,
contributing writer

Soon after Oscar Sosa Cordova graduates from Cal State Fullerton this month with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, he will start a summer job at SafeWork CM, a project management company in Anaheim. Then he plans to pursue a master's degree.

The first person in his family to graduate from college, Sosa Cordova is acutely aware of the opportunities he's had that were never available to his parents, who were farmers in Mexico

before coming to the U.S.

This awareness motivated him to make the most of every resource Cal State Fullerton offered, and then, in turn, to help others take advantage of those resources.

Sosa Cordova became a McNair Scholar, a program that prepares undergraduate students for doctoral studies. He also served as president of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers at Cal State Fullerton.

As a DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) student, he could only apply for scholarships that did not require U.S. citizenship.

Growing up in Anaheim, Sosa Cordova

always assumed he was born in the U.S. like his friends. But he eventually learned that he was born in Veracruz, Mexico, and came to the U.S. with his parents when he was 3.

During high school, Sosa Cordova worked at a part-time job to help support his parents and siblings. He had no idea how to apply to college.

"I didn't know the difference between colleges nor how to navigate them," he said. "It was not until I got into the PUENTE Program at Katella High School with Ms. Gracian that I became more exposed to the college system."

His grades were good, and he dreamed of applying to the UCs and CSUs. He

quickly realized he could not afford them, and putting his family in debt to pay for his schooling was out of the question. Instead, he got a full-time job right after high school, working 10 to 12 hours a day, 6 to 7 days a week.

"I was making enough money to help support my family with the rent," Sosa Cordova said. "My father was disabled since I was in middle school, and my mother was the only source of income."

The difficulties did not dampen his desire to go to college.

"This only put into perspective how fortunate I was to just have the opportunity, even though it wasn't fully

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN FOY

CSUF alum and fitness coach Sean Foy (pictured with daughter Brooke) discovered new motivation after an injury.

EDUCATIONAL GROWTH

Here's how a fitness guru built a lifelong career out of a college football injury

When Sean Foy realized his CSUF teachers 'cared about me,' that epiphany changed his life

By Lou Ponsi,
contributing writer

In 1982, Sean Foy chose to attend Cal State Fullerton for one reason ... to play football.

(Yes, Cal State Fullerton fielded a football team for several years until the program was scrapped in 1992.)

Foy's ultimate dream was to play in the pros.

"I couldn't have cared less about college," said Foy, a 1986 CSUF alum who grew up in Placentia and attended El Dorado High School. "I was in college to play football. I was not a student coming out of high school. I could care less about it."

Then, a twist of fate early in his junior season rerouted the trajectory of Foy's life.

During the first game of his sophomore season, Foy blew out his knee in a game against Boise State.

He would miss the rest of the season.

"What am I going to do with my life if I can't play football?" he recalls thinking. "Like, the dream is gone, right?"

During the downtime, a conversation with a physical therapist caused Foy to experience an illuminating realization.

"He came to me and he said, 'Sean, you may have injured your knee, but that doesn't mean you can't train other areas of your body and mind,'" Foy said. "So, he was the one that got me thinking that there's a mental side to your performance. I actually became a student."

Foy discovered that he loved nourishing his mind and feeding his spirit as much as building his body.

He returned to the field and became a student-athlete in the truest sense of the word.

"I could move again and play the game that I love," Foy said. "But I actually became a student. I actually began to love to learn, and that was because I was

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DIVERSITY

\$250,000 grant to help advance Black student success, foster inclusive excellence

Money is part of a \$4.6 million allocation to CSU campuses

CSUF News Media Services

To advance Black student success and elevate Black excellence, Cal State Fullerton was awarded a one-time grant of \$250,000 from the California State University system that will be used to expand pathways for first-year students, support learning communities and inclusive curriculum, and reinforce equitable searches for tenure-track faculty.

The grant is part of a systemwide initiative led by the CSU's Black Student Success Workgroup to reimagine how the nation's largest four-year public university system supports Black students and addresses persistent trends in low Black student enrollment, retention and graduation rates. The CSU announced a 2024 allocation of \$4,630,846 to 23 campuses, which is part of a \$10 million commitment over the next three years to fund priority areas outlined in the report "Advancing Black Student Success in the CSU."

CSUF President Sylvia Alva, who previously served as the CSU's executive vice chancellor for academic and student affairs, led the workgroup and acknowledged the many CSU students, faculty and staff who shared their experiences. The report was the culmination of interviews, listening sessions, surveys and other activities conducted throughout spring 2023.

"In the past three years, our nation has faced crises like the pandemic, financial instability and social injustices against Black individuals," Alva said. "While this has raised awareness about Black experiences, it has also highlighted the disparity between our ideals and actions within the CSU. Our collective mission, therefore, is to bridge this gap and unlock the full potential of Black excellence."

The funding allocated to Cal State Fullerton will support two key initiatives

Conducting Equitable and Inclusive Workshop Search Series: CSUF is sup-



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

The grant will be used to support learning communities, advance inclusive curriculum and address trends of low Black student enrollment, retention and graduation rates.

porting tenure-track faculty searches through the recruitment, interviewing and evaluation of candidates using research-based best practices to mitigate bias. Workshop topics included Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Fundamentals: Focusing on Unconscious Bias; Crafting an Equity-Minded Position Announcement; Creating an Intentional Recruitment Plan; Creating Equitable Evaluation Criteria and Interview Questions; and Post-Selection Strategies. The university also is enhancing the search experience by partnering with the Black Faculty and Staff Association and other faculty and staff groups in the on-campus interview process.

Equitable Pedagogy Module: The Equitable Pedagogy Module is a universitywide intervention focusing on anti-Blackness and the impact of white supremacy in classroom practices, along with building learning communities for syllabus change to diversify the

curriculum. The program promotes equitable teaching practices to improve student success and encourages faculty to critically examine their curricula by providing stipends and learning communities for faculty to create changes in their syllabuses.

To advance this work, Patience Bryant was recently appointed Cal State Fullerton's inaugural executive director of Black student academic success, effective May 6.

"I am excited to embark on this journey with our newly appointed executive director of Black student success," said Cecil Chik, assistant vice president for diversity, inclusion and equity and chief diversity officer. "With the financial commitment from the Chancellor's Office, our campus can continue to make intentional impact on our Black student experiences in and outside the classroom."

These initiatives were informed by

the active participation of CSUF Black student leaders, Black faculty and staff, Black alumni, college deans and recommendations from the systemwide report, which featured best practices from all 23 campuses.

Best practices at Cal State Fullerton

- During the 2022-23 academic year, Cal State Fullerton successfully conducted a cohort hire by modifying job postings and implementing intentional recruitment efforts in the College of Education. As a result, three out of four hires were Black faculty members, contributing to an increase in Black faculty representation from 5% to 12% since 2018.
- CSUF's Institute of Black Intellectual Innovation is developing a leadership team comprising faculty and alumni to drive institutional change through collaborative research, artistic performance and relevant conferences. The university also supports faculty research projects fostering collaborative partnerships related to innovative cultural production, research and service.
- The university updated its Student Opinion of Teaching evaluations to address race, equity and respect in the classroom. This change aims to gather feedback on crucial aspects of the learning environment.
- To foster diversity, equity and inclusion across campus, Cal State Fullerton's Division of Human Resources, Diversity and Inclusion has initiated a mandatory DEI goal for Management Personnel Plan employees as part of their evaluations.
- Cal State Fullerton's Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Programs has developed a bias communication protocol that brings the assistant vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion into the communication process for bias- or hate-related incidents on campus. The university has successfully coordinated centralized communication and care, campus communication and care, and direct communication and care to impacted communities.

Engineering

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funded," he said. "I gave value to what I had and vowed to return one day."

Two years later, he attended Fullerton College and Cypress College, where he received his associate's degrees, and then transferred to Cal State Fullerton in the fall of 2021.

He had developed his interest in civil engineering when he worked in construction.

"I noticed that the LatinX community was heavily in the labor force, yet there weren't many in the roles of an engineer," Sosa Cordova said. "This brought me curiosity as I saw that the Hispanic community clearly knew how to read and implement designs but did not have the degree to 'qualify' them to move up the rank."

Even as a young person, he wanted to build something that would outlive him and to create generational wealth.

"Civil engineering was the major that would help me reach that goal and showcase to future generations what hard work can get you to," he said.

One scholarship, the Dr. Pinak Chakrabarti Scholarship in Civil and Environmental Engineering, gave him

an early boost. Sosa Cordova also found support at the Titan Dreamers Resource Center.

"The center was a symbol of hope for me," he said. "For the first time, I found a place that gave me a better answer than 'you can't.' It showed me how to navigate my status and utilize resources that I never knew existed. I found a community that has gone through difficulties and continued to persevere, which resonated with me."

He volunteered at the center and helped develop the mentorship program with the College of Engineering and Computer Science.

"I've been able to witness the growth of students as my mentees have been able to find independent jobs and even acquired a scholarship I suggested to them," he said.

Sosa Cordova's family, including his parents, his sister and her fiancé, his brother and his family, and maybe even his aunt and uncles, will attend his graduation ceremony.

While celebrating this major achievement, Sosa Cordova has his eye on the future and his next step in developing a career.

"I will be pursuing a master's degree," he said, "and then strive to obtain my Practice of Engineering license, which will officially make me a civil engineer in the state of California."



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Cordova put his education goals on hold to support his family, but was committed to pursuing higher education.

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PROFESSIONAL HONOR

Ecologist earns top faculty award for wildlife research, teaching, service

Paul Stapp receives 2024 Outstanding Professor Award

CSUF News Media Services

Over the past two decades, Cal State Fullerton ecologist Paul Stapp has researched the ecology of wild mammals, including the impacts of bubonic plague on prairie dogs and effects of mice on nesting seabirds on the Channel Islands.

Colleagues and students describe Stapp, professor of biological science, as one of the best ecologists and mammalogists and an exemplary educator in the classroom and in the field.

For his exceptional teaching, scholarship and contributions to the university and the California State University system, Stapp is the recipient of Cal State Fullerton's 2024 Outstanding Professor Award.

"Paul is clear, concise and calm, yet rigorous in the classroom and creates a positive learning environment," said William "Bill" Hoese, professor of biological science and 2021 Outstanding Professor, who nominated Stapp. "He shines as an instructor and uses hands-on approaches in the field."

Stapp's former students also praise his commitment to his field and extraordinary work as a scientist and teacher.

"Dr. Stapp's dedication to teaching and mentorship was evident in every lecture and discussion, and his passion for the field of mammalogy was infectious," said Lauren Simpson '13 (B.S. biological science), a senior wildlife biologist for an environmental consulting firm who researched bat activity and diversity with Stapp.

"His positive presence and influence have greatly enhanced my life, academic progress and professional career."

Veterinarian Kim Conway, who studied bot-fly parasitism of ground squirrels under Stapp, also credits him for her career success — she's a veterinary research scientist at the California Department of Public Health.

"What has always stood out to me about Dr. Stapp is that he wholeheartedly cares deeply about his students and



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Paul Stapp, professor of biological science

truly wants them to succeed lifelong," said Conway '14 (B.S. biological science, health science).

Outstanding scholarship in ecology

Stapp has received nearly \$2 million for 71 external grants and contracts for his teaching and research activities. His diverse research program includes studies of invasive species, wildlife infectious diseases, urban ecology and the roles of animals in desert, grassland and island ecosystems.

He has authored over 100 publications, including peer-reviewed articles, with many research papers co-authored by his students, and has given more than 140

conference presentations.

Stapp has trained dozens of students to become ecologists and biologists and developed a biological science curriculum to ensure student success.

For Stapp, the most rewarding part of his career has been advising students to become independent researchers, which to date totals 23 undergraduates and 32 graduate students in biology and environmental studies.

He has guided students' investigations on such projects as the dynamics of human and coyote interactions in local communities, pathways of rodenticide exposure for urban coyotes and using contraception to control Catalina Island's bison herd.

"My students and I investigate how human activities, such as livestock grazing, pest management and roads and light pollution affect the persistence of wildlife populations — and how these problems can be mitigated," said Stapp, who holds a doctorate in zoology from Colorado State University and joined CSUF in 2002.

He has also advised students in the Southern California Ecosystems Research Program on projects such as investigating the effects of runoff water on the presence of Argentine ants in natural areas and how nest predation affects songbirds.

Outstanding teaching and service

During his tenure, Stapp has taught ecology, vertebrate zoology and wildlife biology courses. He currently teaches introductory ecology and conservation biology classes and a course that provides intensive field experiences for students. He regularly teaches a research design and professional development course for new graduate students.

Stapp is passionate about improving the quality and stature of graduate education at CSUF and is a past chair of the Academic Senate Graduate Education Committee. Since 2006, he has served as adviser of the graduate biology program.

His service activities include chairing the CSUF Institutional Animal Care and Use and Graduate Education committees and representing the CSU system on a state board reviewing wildlife pest research.

Last year, he was recognized with the President's Special Award for Service from the American Society of Mammalogists for his work as publications director for the society's two scientific journals.

Stapp said he is honored to receive the university's top faculty award.

"I am so grateful to the faculty and staff in the department and college for fostering such a positive and supportive environment," he said. "I feel fortunate to have worked closely with many gifted and special research students and professional colleagues over the past two decades. Hearing how our interactions were meaningful to them is heartwarming — and an unexpected gift."

INCLUSIVITY

Educator and doctoral candidate works to improve Title IX experiences at community colleges

Leighia Fleming, '24, finishes at the top of her class, aspires to become a college president

CSUF News Media Services

Educator Leighia Fleming wants to improve community colleges' response to and prevention of discrimination and harassment on campuses and address systemic changes needed to support Title IX coordinators and sexual assault survivors.

To tackle these issues in higher education, the Cal State Fullerton doctoral candidate in education delved into the unique experiences of Title IX coordinators at California's community colleges.

Fleming focused on coordinators who are employed to investigate sexual misconduct, develop policy, coordinate the process and develop preventative educational training.

"I chose this topic of study because I want to create equitable college campuses free of gender-based violence," Fleming said. "The intent was to document their experiences due to the regulation changes at federal and local levels."

Fleming is finishing her doctoral program at the top of her class with a 4.0 GPA and will be the first in her family to hold a doctorate. She is earning a doctor of education in educational leadership with a concentration in community college leadership.

She plans to attend her College of Education commencement ceremony this month and recently participated in the university's Pan-Afrikan Recognition Celebration.

"Having a doctorate will provide me with opportunities to be in spaces to help disrupt and dismantle systems in higher education that are harming students," Fleming said. "This degree is in honor of my ancestors and parents, who paved the way for me to access education."

Fleming is the Title IX coordinator and interim dean of students at Coastline College in Fountain Valley. She earned a bachelor's degree in liberal studies from Dominican University of California, where she was a soccer and softball student-athlete and first learned about Title IX. She also holds a master's in organization and leadership from the University of San Francisco.

Title IX, a federal law passed in 1972, ensures that male and female students and employees in educational settings are treated equally and fairly. The law protects against discrimination based on sex, including sexual harassment.

Fleming's study aimed to answer the demands of Title IX coordinators, the impact of changing regulations on their personal and professional lives, and their perceptions of success and institutional betrayal.

"Until we provide community colleges with the resources and tools to change the campus culture, Title IX statistics



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Educator Leighia Fleming at the university's May 5 Pan-Afrikan Recognition Celebration

will stay as is," said Fleming, who authored an upcoming book chapter on college sexual violence.

Her journey to becoming an educational leader

Fleming's dissertation chair is Inez Moore, assistant professor of educational leadership, who, as a former community college dean, guided her on how to create equitable policies and change in institutions.

"Through Dr. Moore's mentorship, I believed I was worthy and deserved a seat at the table. Having a Black female dissertation chair allowed me to feel safe

and brave as I navigated the research process," Fleming said.

Fleming chose to pursue her Ed.D. at Cal State Fullerton because of the college's mission to support a just, equitable and inclusive classroom, and it's where her mother, a retired educator, received her teacher education. At CSUF, for the first time in her college tenure, she also was taught by Black professors.

"This was a moment for me because I finally felt seen in a classroom setting," she said.

Fleming has been involved in campus activities, including serving on the college's inaugural Ed.D. Student

Advisory Board. She is the recipient of the university's Graduate Equity Fellowship and the college's Dean Kirtman Fellowship for Equity-Minded Educational Leaders.

During her doctoral studies, Fleming was inspired by her professors, along with some former high-ranking college administrators, to aspire to become the head of a college.

"I now have a desire to become a college president. I discovered this was my ultimate goal through the doctoral program at Cal State Fullerton," she said. "I want to create student-centered, equitable, caring and healing colleges."

AWARD

Human Communications instructor is a guiding light for students

Julia Schneiderman receives 2024 Outstanding Lecturer Award

CSUF News Media Services

When Julia Schneiderman walks into a classroom, everything shines a little brighter.

“From attending student events in a show of support to providing words of advice, it is safe to say that she leads her students with her heart,” said Amy Vanessa Garcia ’23 (B.A. communication studies). “Her bubbly personality and warmth can light up even the dimmest of Zoom sessions and classrooms.”

For her compassion, positivity and unwavering dedication to student success, Schneiderman was recognized with Cal State Fullerton’s 2024 Outstanding Lecturer Award.

“There are good instructors, truly talented instructors and once-in-a-generation instructors — and Julia is the latter,” said John Brusckke, chair and professor of human communication studies.

Schneiderman joined the human communication studies department as a lecturer, teaching such courses as Communication Theory, Rhetoric of Popular Culture, Sex Communication and Public Speaking. Throughout her 12-year career on campus, Schneiderman has taught 51 courses, and her achievements in the classroom are best captured through her students’ experiences.

On student opinion questionnaires, Schneiderman regularly receives high ratings, praising her expertise in the subject area, her respect for students and her ability to foster an inclusive learning environment.

“Julia is an irreplaceable asset to the human communication studies department, to the university and to the community. She is beyond deserving of public recognition at CSUF, and the 2023-24 Outstanding Lecturer Award is most fitting,” said Javette Hayes, associate professor of human communication studies.

Leading with her heart

“My greatest hope is that all students under my tutelage will increase their communicative effectiveness to not only enhance their own lives but the lives of others, and that they will all rightfully take their place at the table,” Schneiderman said.

Her work in the human communication studies department is not only defined by her collaborative mindset and eagerness to support others, but also by



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSUF President Sylvia Alva, left, presents Julia Schneiderman, lecturer in human communication studies, with the 2024 Outstanding Lecturer Award at the April 25 Academic Senate meeting.

the impact she’s had on current students and alumni.

When Schneiderman begins teaching at the start of every semester, she always takes a minute to survey the room. She promises herself that she will meet every student and learn their story to ensure that they succeed.

“Woven into the tapestry of every classroom is a set of complex individuals. Part of my job is to understand how these complexities may negatively impact their academic pursuits in order to remove as many barriers as possible,” Schneiderman said.

Her flexibility and strategic thinking became paramount during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within weeks, Schneiderman

adapted to a new teaching modality and began setting up her classes for success. Using breakout rooms on Zoom, giving in-class surveys and leveraging multimedia teaching tools, she kept her students engaged.

“She always prioritized the students,” said Tuong Manh Le ’23 (B.A. communication studies), who is pursuing his master’s degree in social work at USC. “She became a light, a supporter for us to continue our educational journey with the firm belief that everything will work out.”

Beyond the classroom, Schneiderman is known for her work in the community, developing and presenting sex-trafficking prevention material for at-risk youths in

Orange County middle and high schools.

She also created Everybody Loves Mail, a nonprofit organization that encourages children of all ages to write letters, create artwork and develop creative writing projects that can be shared with community members, such as elderly people, severely or terminally ill children and adults, and military families.

“To devote the amount of time and energy to her classroom work, to maintain a scholarly presence in the discipline, and to still manage to engage in service to our university and community is remarkable,” said Gary Ruud, associate professor of human communication studies. “She is most deserving of this award.”

AWARD

Kinesiology grad turns passion for sports into research career

Ryutaro Ichihara '24 named Outstanding Graduate Student

CSUF News Media Services

Ryutaro Ichihara fell in love with sports on the soccer field.

“Soccer really became the core of my life,” he said. “Growing up in Japan, my dream was to become a professional soccer player.”

When he was 19 years old, Ichihara moved to the United States, where his love of the game led him to Cal State Fullerton. His plan was to pursue a career in professional sports, but what he didn’t account for was finding something that he loved even more than soccer — research.

“Professor of Kinesiology John Gleaves helped me to find my path and showed me the possibilities in sports and philosophy,” said the Class of 2024 kinesiology grad.

Throughout his undergraduate and graduate career at CSUF, Ichihara conducted research on the authenticity of sports in Western culture, as well as

the connections between cerebral palsy and physical activity. He presented his findings at multiple academic conferences and found his purpose in teaching others about sports philosophy.

For his academic and research excellence, Ichihara was named the Alumni Association’s 2024 Outstanding Graduate Student, an honor that comes with a \$1,000 award.

“I was born and raised in Japan, but I was reborn and reared in the U.S. at Cal State Fullerton,” he said.

‘Physical activity environments should be fit for everyone’

When Ichihara began working on his thesis in the master’s program, he was inspired by his brother.

“My brother has cerebral palsy, which is a neurological disorder that disrupts the connection between the brain and limbs,” he explained. “I learned a lot about how he engages in different activities, but not everyone has that experience. I wanted to help people understand how people with cerebral palsy experience physical fitness.”

For many people, physical activity is a normalized idea, Ichihara said. It’s assumed that everyone can partake in physical fitness to some extent, but these spaces often don’t account for people who have different capabilities.

In his thesis, “Towards True Inclusion: Developing a Phenomenology of Physical Activity With Cerebral Palsy,” Ichihara explains that it’s common for people with cerebral palsy to experience an “otherness” in physical activity settings because their participation looks different from that of able-bodied individuals, which can result in feelings of isolation and frustration and cause a retreat from fitness altogether.

“I wanted to understand my brother’s experiences, and how they are different from mine,” said Ichihara, who presented his research at the 50th International Association for the Philosophy of Sport’s annual conference. “It’s important to challenge ableist attitudes and expectations because physical activity environments should be fit for everyone.”

To collect his data, Ichihara gathered literature and quotes from individuals with cerebral palsy to understand their

experiences, emphasizing the importance of increased accommodations and support to make physical activity more accessible and inclusive for people of all capabilities.

For his research achievements in this area, Ichihara was recognized with the university’s 2024 Giles T. Brown Thesis Excellence Award and received a \$500 scholarship. He also won first place at CSUF’s Titan Grand Slam competition and went on to compete at the California State University Grand Slam statewide competition.

“Ryutaro exemplifies the epitome of an exceptional graduate student at Cal State Fullerton, seamlessly intertwining his studies in kinesiology with philosophy to craft a groundbreaking master’s thesis,” Gleaves said. “It truly is a privilege to be part of his journey and to watch him thrive here at CSUF.”

Taking on teaching

During his undergraduate career, Ichihara’s first research project was centered on understanding burnout among young athletes. In Western culture, athletes often feel excessive pressure to “make it” in the sporting industry, he explained.

But athletes who embrace Budo, a Japanese samurai cultural belief, place more emphasis on one’s mentality, mind and self-mastery. This makes them more likely to experience sports with authenticity and happiness, Ichihara said. He had the opportunity to present this research at the 2022 International Association for the Philosophy of Sport Conference.

On campus, Ichihara has continued to let sports and physical activity guide his service, working as an exercise class leader for the Employee Wellness Program and a group fitness instructor and personal trainer in the Student Recreation Center.

Helping students, faculty and staff reach their fitness goals, Ichihara said, has helped him find happiness in teaching and seeing others reach their potential. After graduation, he plans to pursue a career as a university professor in sports philosophy, where he can further his research and support students the way his professors supported him.

“Kinesiology professors Matt Llewellyn and John Gleaves made me realize that I want to be a college professor,” said Ichihara, who also co-founded Aikotoba, a language company that helps Japanese people learn English. “They helped me understand the challenges and joys of teaching, and they really gave me a light at the end of this long tunnel after finishing my soccer career. I want to be that person for my students.”



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Ryutaro Ichihara, Class of 2024 kinesiology grad

CSUF GRAD

Alumna credits her education with helping her open doors

Katie Hennessey also gives back to the College of Communications

By **Jenelyn Russo**,
contributing writer

Cal State Fullerton alumna Katie Hennessey always wanted to be a sports reporter.

A lifelong sports fan and former athlete, Hennessey pictured a career that included holding an ESPN microphone while reporting from the sidelines.

While she may not be a sideline reporter, Hennessey is a two-time Emmy winner who is on her second stint with the “worldwide leader in sports” as a senior talent producer. She has a resume that spans working in marketing and publicity for Walt Disney Studios to booking talent for ESPN’s “This is SportsCenter” commercials. And she credits the communications degree she earned from CSUF for putting her on the path she’s on today.

Born and raised in the Inland Empire, Hennessey received some pointed advice from her father’s friend, who recommended that if she wanted to be in the sports and entertainment business, she should pursue CSUF’s communications program.

So, after graduating from high school in 2008, Hennessey began working toward her degree in broadcast journalism in CSUF’s College of Communications. On campus, she served as an ASI representative and covered sports for Titan TV.

She also completed multiple internships for networks such as MTV, KCAL/CBS and NBC. Hennessey felt that her time with MTV was the most pivotal.

“That was the one where I think I cut my teeth the most,” Hennessey said. “I worked multiple VMAs. I did movie and TV awards. I was answering phones and doing assistant work. I learned a lot on that internship and got a good experience there.”

Hennessey graduated early in 2011 and landed a job with ESPN right out



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATIE HENNESSEY

CSUF alum Katie Hennessey, senior producer at ESPN

of the gate, thanks to a campus tour she was asked to give to some network representatives who were visiting the university. She kept in touch with those contacts, and, upon graduation, reached out and was able to secure a position as a media operator.

Hennessey relocated to Bristol, Connecticut, and was responsible for taking in sports feeds from across the globe and packaging them for ESPN’s use. She held the 6 p.m.-to-4 a.m. position for nearly three years before she decided she needed a change.

“The role was very tedious and not exactly what I wanted to do, but I got my foot in the door, so that was the good part,” Hennessey said.

Hennessey headed home to California

and joined Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, a position she landed by staying in touch with contacts from her time at MTV. She worked with the marketing, publicity and media strategy team responsible for campaigns for movies such as “Avengers: Infinity War,” “Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens,” “Black Panther” and “Frozen II.”

“I did a lot of hands-on publicity and talent relations, working junkets and working premieres across all films globally,” Hennessey said.

In 2020, she felt the pull to head back east, not only to work for ESPN again but also to be back in the same location as her then-boyfriend and now-husband, ESPN associate director and three-time Emmy winner Jonathan Weaver.

This time around, Hennessey came to ESPN with an even deeper skill set, and she initially took on a part-time talent coordinator role that evolved into the senior talent producer position she holds today. She is not only responsible for daily bookings for college shows, but she also handles the marketing and events side of talent production.

One week, Hennessey could be booking Megan Rapinoe, and the next week she could be booking the Delta State Fighting Okra mascot. And her booking work on SportsCenter has earned her two Emmy awards.

“Being able to interact against such a variety of lines of business, as well as a variety of athletes and celebrities ... I’m very blessed that I get to work on two sides of the business,” Hennessey said. “It’s definitely exciting.”

She credits her time at CSUF for helping her solidify her communications experience and for teaching her how to network, a skill that she has leveraged for each of her roles.

Hennessey also feels that CSUF’s diversity helped open her mind to people who come from all walks of life – something that has helped her in her current position.

“I’m able to engage with people and personalize my experience with them, and I think that I learned that by humanizing people when I was in college,” Hennessey said.

A first-generation college graduate, she continues to support CSUF’s College of Communications through the Hennessey Family Scholarship, established in honor of her late sister to support students who have an interest in the sports or entertainment industries.

As for what it means to be Titan, to Hennessey, it means being yourself and creating your own path.

“Every person I ever met at Cal State Fullerton or ever have stayed connected with, they’ve all done something so uniquely individual,” Hennessey said. “It takes people who are willing to take the risk and be themselves to formulate this whole great campus of people who are creative thinkers or have these big dreams.”



Hennessey, a first-generation college graduate, established the Hennessey Family Scholarship at the CSUF College of Communications in honor of her late sister.



Hennessey with her husband, ESPN associate director and three-time Emmy winner Jonathan Weaver.

Guru

FROM PAGE 1

mentored; loved by my teachers. They cared about me.”

Foy went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in exercise physiology from CSUF and played professional football in Europe for two seasons.

“It was such a blast to travel all throughout Europe and just really have a taste of being overseas,” he said.

As a devout Christian, Foy earned a Master of Divinity degree from the bible college and embarked on a long career in field personal wellness, helping clients to maximize and maintain their personal potential.

The husband and father of two has started several businesses, including the Personal Wellness Corp., an international health-and-wellness education and consulting firm, and Stronger U Academy, which offers health and wellness services for corporations and individuals.

Foy has also authored a series of exercise books and is co-author of the No. 1 New York Times bestseller, “The Daniel Plan,” which offers a holistic approach to a healthy lifestyle by focusing on five key essentials of faith, food, fitness, focus and friends.

Foy is now collaborating with the American Council on Exercise and is the principal contributor to a recently launched course titled “Mindful Movement: Coaching Clients to Become More Active.”

The American Council on Exercise is a nonprofit education and certification provider for health coaches and exercise professionals throughout the world.

Aimed at educating professionals in the health and wellness space, the Mindful Movement course equips health coaches with innovative techniques, key concepts and resources to help clients find purpose and enjoyment in movement and in building a stronger mind-body connection.

“So, we’re giving the coaches a toolbox on how to help individuals sit less, move more, and ultimately thrive,” Foy said.

Foy and his colleagues are hoping to reverse the findings of a World Health Organization study revealing that 80% of U.S. adults and adolescents are insufficiently active, making physical inactivity the fourth-leading risk factor for mortality.

Foy becomes emotional when reflecting on the epiphany he experienced as a CSUF student.

“They really cared about me,” he said. “And they helped me to find what my passion was and what I really wanted to do with it. I’m forever grateful. I owe a great debt to Cal State Fullerton.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN FOY

Foy has launched a number of businesses geared at health and wellness and incorporates his Christian faith in his work.

CSUF TENNIS

Women's team's story is still being written

The scores don't tell the whole tale, but coach Trang Huynh-McClain and her players have the ending well in hand

By Brian Robin,
contributing writer

Modest as she is, Trang Huynh-McClain nevertheless saw this coming.

Through the self-described "ups and downs" during the season, the Cal State Fullerton women's tennis coach had her eye fixed on the destination she knew was reachable.

When the Titans dropped three matches in seven days in late March, Huynh-McClain had that innate sense that all coaches — regardless of sport — with a glass-half-full mindset possess somewhere in their DNA — that this speed bump was just that. Trouble to overcome. Lessons to learn.

The record shows that the Titans fell one game short in their quest to win the program's first Big West women's tennis title. It shows Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's 4-3 victory over CSUF in the conference tournament finale, when Cal Poly's Melissa LaMette rallied from 5-2 down to beat the Titans' Milena Gevorgyan in the deciding third set of the final match. You will read that LaMette prevailed 2-6, 7-6, 6-4 to give the Mustangs their second Big West title, one that came after three consecutive losses in the conference final.

You will read that fact in stark, impersonal words that leave no room for interpretation or equivocation. But, reading that, you will miss the full story of what this represented, because the record here conceals far more than it reveals.

You may have to initially draw Huynh-McClain out to talk about this season's journey. But once she gets going, you get swept up in the accomplishment. The record becomes barely relevant, and the journey becomes the story.

"I expected it," she said. "This was the constant message we've been sending to the team since the beginning of the season. We were a very talented team, and we could go out and win our conference title. We had a lot of ups and downs during the season, but I think the whole team saw how we were all really good at trying our best every day and sticking through it together. I think it

showed toward the end of the season, when we put our heads into it and showed we could really do it.

"I think it's a great feeling for them. Hearing the message from us is a different thing than actually going out and seeing that it's possible. I'm really proud of them, and I'm sure they are proud of themselves for making this one of the best seasons in our school history."

The record shows that the season produced a 17-9 overall record that featured a 6-1 pounding of Loyola Marymount, the Titans' first victory over the Lions since 2016. It also came with a 5-4 conference record in which only one loss — a 5-2 loss to Long Beach State on March 29 — came by more than one set.

That was the third of three consecutive setbacks, following a 4-3 loss to Cal State Northridge and a 6-1 non-conference blitzing by the University of San Diego. Huynh-McClain said this was the proverbial fork in the road the Titans' season would travel. Would it take the oft-traveled path into mediocrity? Would CSUF — featuring players from six countries (U.S., Canada, South Korea, Russia, Ukraine and Armenia) — merely meander through the rest of the season?

"I definitely saw a lot of growth with how we handled adversity throughout the season. They got through the adversity by going back to keeping things simple," Huynh-McClain said. "We talked a lot about playing to win and enjoying the moment, because many times, we find ourselves thinking about the past or trying to figure out what could happen or what could have happened.

"We worked a lot on staying in the moment and taking one point at a time. We stuck to our game plan and stuck to what we know to do to beat the other person. It was simply a matter of keeping things simple. We knew our talent was there. All we needed to do was trust in ourselves and execute it. If we've done the work every day, we have it inside of us."

What came next illustrated this in 3D living color. The Titans closed the regular season winning six of their last seven matches. Adding in victories over Hawaii (4-2) and UC Davis (4-1) in the Big West Tournament, CSUF won eight of its last nine going into that final against Cal Poly.

Two weeks earlier, the Titans had dispatched Cal Poly, 4-3, at home. This time, the Mustangs flipped the script, finally getting over the top after three previous final losses. It came with former



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSUF women's tennis coach Trang Huynh-McClain, in orange, leads a cheer ahead of a match at Cal State Fullerton.

CSUF assistant Ellie Edles-Williams — who was the Titans' assistant the last time they reached a conference final, in 2018 — now helming Cal Poly.

Not that she expected a loss, but Huynh-McClain sees where this could lead.

"They were runner-up three straight years, and this year they finally made it. This is only our second time getting to the Big West Championship final," she observed. "The future is bright."

It is. Very bright. The only player departing is senior Natalie Duffy, the Titans' team captain and a Big West Honorable Mention selection. Duffy's 16-7 overall singles record included a victory over Oklahoma State's Anastasiya Komar, the No. 8-ranked collegiate player in the country.

Huynh-McClain's optimism that the Titans will be back in the conference finals sooner rather than later is rooted in the fact that three of CSUF's top four singles players — No. 1 Josie Usereau, No. 2 Sein Myoung and No. 4 Seha Yu — are all freshmen. Usereau became only the second Titan in program history to be named Big West Freshman of the Year, going 13-6 overall and 5-4 in the Big West. The Quebec, Canada, native was an All-Big West First Team selection in singles and Second Team in doubles. In the fall, she was the singles runner-up at the Dennis Rizza Classic and reached the quarterfinals of the ITA West Intercollegiate Championship.

Myoung (12-9 overall in singles, 6-3 in conference), who hails from South Korea, where she was the No. 2-ranked

U-18 player, joined Usereau on the all-conference first team for singles and second team for doubles. Her countrywoman, Yu, was 15-7 overall in singles, including a sparkling 8-1 in conference.

Probably the biggest jump in talent came from a player who could be excused if her mind was elsewhere — junior Mariia Nikitash. Playing mainly at No. 6 singles, Nikitash went 15-7 overall and 5-3 in conference — all while worrying about her family back home in Kyiv, Ukraine.

"She has been going through a lot of things, with the war in the back of her head and not knowing what's going on," Huynh-McClain said. "She'd tell me, 'I haven't heard from my mom for a few days, and I hope she's OK.' She's always working hard, not letting it be an excuse for not focusing. She's a very strong individual who inspires a lot of us."

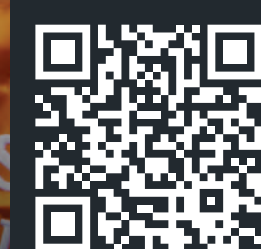
You hear those stories, you see how far Huynh-McClain has brought the Titans in only her second year at the helm, and you understand her foreshadowing, her optimism. You understand the journey isn't close to its destination. You don't have to draw it out of her. She'll proudly show you the receipts.

"This is one of the proudest moments of my coaching career," she said. "To see how much our players have grown and how they are all so appreciative and hungry for more. That's what keeps college tennis fun. After every year, we reset, and it's a new thing you get to continue building from wherever you left off from last year."

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