



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Roy Choi, Cal State Fullerton alumnus and restaurateur, is flanked by Wenda Fong, left, immediate past chair of the California State University board of trustees, and CSUF President Sylvia Alva.

COMMENCEMENT

CHEF ROY CHOI URGES CLASS OF 2024 TO 'LEAD WITH KINDNESS'

'94 grad awarded honorary doctorate

By Lou Ponsi,
contributing writer

Mixing inspiring words with self-deprecating witticisms, renowned culinary entrepreneur Roy Choi implored the 2024 graduating class from Cal State Fullerton's College of Business and Economics to use their education and expertise to "bridge some of the inequities with the choices that you make in the businesses that you build" and to "lead with kindness, love and generosity."

Choi, who graduated from CSUF in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, was the commencement speaker for the graduation ceremony, which was held May 22 in Titan Stadium.

The celebrated chef and architect of the gourmet food truck movement was awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree for his accomplishments in the culinary world, which he intertwined with activism within social justice causes.

Choi is the host of the Emmy award-winning series "Broken Bread," which centers around using food as a vehicle for change.

"Luckily, we have this thing called food that we were able to use as a bridge to be able to get our philosophies and change the world in our small way," he said.

A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Choi, 54, gained acclaim as co-founder of the Korean-Mexican taco truck, Kogi BBQ, and for his New York Times bestselling autobiography, "L.A. Son: My Life, My City, My Food."

Born in Seoul, Korea, and raised in Los Angeles, Choi has been credited for being a main architect of the gourmet food truck boom.

"I think I finally have to grow up now that I've got this honorary doctorate," joked Choi, who was named one of Time magazine's "TIME 100 list of the most influential people in the world" in 2011 and 2016. "I've been avoiding it for a very long time. I like being a kid inside."

Choi acknowledged being in a "very, very dark place in life," and having no ambition during his early days at Cal State Fullerton.

"I did not want to be here," he said. "I did not want to do much at all. I would spend a lot of time alone, walking through this arboretum, hanging out on the top floor of the Humanities building, eating my lunch, just walking with an angry face throughout campus."

Choi said his outlook began to change, however, when he got more involved in campus life, making friends and joining clubs.

He recounted his transition from his role of "class clown" to being a dedicated student who learned lessons from pro-

fessors that he applied in and out of the classroom.

"And they started to change my point of view and the way I looked at the world," Choi said. "And then I started to find my activist voice here on campus. And I started to figure out who I was. I started to stand up for things, and all that happened here on this campus. Those things became the building blocks of eventually who I had become in life and the things that we try to put out there into the universe."

In 2020, "Broken Bread" earned Choi a James Beard Foundation Award for Outstanding Host in a Television Series.

Choi is also co-host of the Netflix cooking series "The Chef Show," with Jon Favreau.

Choi was named one of the top 10 Best New Chefs of 2010 by Food and Wine magazine, the first food truck operator to earn the distinction.

His restaurants include Sunny Spot, in

CHOI » PAGE 5

ADMINISTRATION

New president plans to continue strengthening Cal State Fullerton

Rochon foresees collaboration in advancing regional role

CSUF News Media Services

The California State University board of trustees has appointed Ronald S. Rochon president of Cal State Fullerton. Rochon currently serves as president of the University of Southern Indiana.

"I am honored to join the Titan community and excited to work alongside the university's talented faculty and staff to further support the success of its dynamic and diverse student body," said Rochon. "I look forward to collaborating on strategies that will continue to strengthen Cal State Fullerton's position as an intellectual and cultural catalyst in Southern California and advance its key role in workforce and economic development for the region."

Rochon succeeds Interim President Sylvia A. Alva, who has served in the role since August 2023.

"Dr. Rochon is an innovative and student-centered leader who fosters a culture of collaboration and cultivates a community of care at the institutions he has served," said Wenda Fong, chair of the CSU Board of Trustees. "With a career-long

PRESIDENT » PAGE 3



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Ronald S. Rochon assumes his role as president of Cal State Fullerton on July 22.

SUCCESS STORY

Project Rebound: Most graduates since inception of program

35 students formerly in prison earn degrees

By Nicole Gregory,
contributing writer

Last month, 35 students who participated in Project Rebound at Cal State Fullerton graduated — a number higher than any other year since the program began on the campus in 2016.

Project Rebound helps people who come out of prison earn college degrees and take their next steps toward a career or further education.

REBOUND » PAGE 5

I WANT TO ADVOCATE FOR STUDENT VETERANS

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Joshua Bhasera celebrates graduation with, from left, master's clinical psychology graduate Emily Orozco, master's psychology student Sherry Guler, and bachelor's psychology graduate Katie Hancock.

AWARD

Dedicated to others: Bhasera named Outstanding Senior

Psych major always ready to help people

By **Larry Urish**,
contributing writer

The word “unbuntu” refers to an African values system that stresses the intimate relationship between individuals and their social and physical surroundings. Often translated as “I am because we are,” it serves as a reminder that people are continually shaped by their connection with others.

Recent Cal State Fullerton graduate Joshua Bhasera learned to embrace unbuntu at an early age, and the concept underscores much of who he is and what he does. Thanks to his giving nature – along with his dogged determination and academic accomplishments – not only was the Zimbabwe native deemed this year’s Outstanding Undergraduate Student in Psychology, but CSUF also granted Bhasera the Alumni Association’s Outstanding Senior Award, further honoring him by selecting him as a speaker at one of last month’s commencement ceremonies.

Then again, Bhasera has been honoring the university since the moment he first stepped onto the campus in 2022. While carrying a full academic load, he demonstrated keen research and study-presentation skills while volunteering for an assortment of worthy causes.

Bhasera repeatedly identifies the source of his giving nature. “My parents emphasized that other people are important,” he said. “‘Unbuntu’ puts the group ahead of the individual.”

His parents led by example. “They were very involved with our community (Kadoma, a mining town), especially with church,” Bhasera said. “For example, there was an old-people’s home near where we lived, which was in a state of neglect. They found out and began volunteering there in 2007. Since then, they’ve done everything they can to help out.” Their altruistic behavior extended to a local school for the blind and a children’s home, among other efforts.

Bhasera and his siblings regularly joined their folks. “It’s deeply humbling to be part of that work, alongside my parents,” he said. “You can’t do that and not appreciate your own life and the good circumstances you’ve been given. It gives you humility about life.”

Succeeding at CSUF wasn’t easy for Bhasera. “He left home at 12 to go to boarding school in South Africa, because his parents felt his education was so critical,” said Lisa Mori, clinical psychologist and CSUF professor of psychology who mentored Bhasera.

Bhasera came to the U.S. in 2019 to attend Fresno City College and trans-

ferred to CSUF in the spring of 2022 because of the university’s academic notoriety and diverse environment.

“Imagine being so young and on your own, in a completely different culture and country, away from anybody you know,” Mori said. “What’s even more astonishing is his fortitude and maturity to persevere and achieve so much under those circumstances.”

Prior to starting at CSUF, Bhasera worked at an adolescent substance abuse inpatient facility. It’s no surprise that he decided to focus on clinical psychology, given his caring nature.

“Studying psychology is an extension of my overarching purpose to serve others,” he said. “It allowed me to help people while getting an education.” His interest in a clinical emphasis coalesced with his first clinical psych class, taught by Mori. “That’s where the passion (for the specialty) all came together, like the pieces of a puzzle.”

Bhasera’s academic prowess soon extended to clinical research. “He was an amazing research assistant, and he’s always been a great student,” said Sherry Guler, a CSUF graduate research assistant pursuing a master’s in psychological research.

Mori concurs: “In only one year, Josh was the ‘first author’ of two undergraduate study presentations and served as ‘second author’ in studies at two additional conference presentations. For an undergraduate to do this in just one year, it’s pretty amazing.”

One such study looks at the influence of adverse childhood experiences on college students’ mental health. “Sherry (Guler) led the study, and I assisted,” Bhasera said. However, said Guler, “Josh helped me every step of the way. ... My biggest goal for him was to let him get hands-on experience from start to finish, including our presentation at the conference.”

The conference in question was the Western Psychological Association’s annual convention in San Francisco, which took place in April.

While at CSUF, Bhasera volunteered early and often. He served as an “ambassador” at the Counseling and Psychological Services’ Wellness Room; as secretary of the Psychology Department Student Association; and as a “wish-granting intern” at the Orange County and Inland Empire chapter of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

After taking a year off to return home and travel, Bhasera plans to earn a master’s degree in clinical psychology. One of his passions: providing equal access to quality mental health care for all, regardless of their financial situation.

Mori is one of many who see a great future for Bhasera. “He’s a very special person, and he’ll achieve great things and make a difference in the world. It’s been an honor and a privilege to work with him.”

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STUDY ABROAD

Communications students getting a front-row seat at Paris Olympics

Hands-on broadcast, print opportunities

By **Jenelyn Russo**,
contributing writer

This summer, a group of Cal State Fullerton students will experience a study abroad trip of a lifetime as 26 Titans from the College of Communications head to Paris to cover the 2024 Summer Olympics.

From print stories and news packages to social media posts and daily blogs, these broadcast journalism students will be getting a front-row seat to what it's like to cover the world's biggest sporting event.

The group will be led by CSUF Department of Communications assistant professor Gayle Jansen Brisbane. A former sports broadcaster, Brisbane brings 20 years of experience in television news, including 16 years at KSAZ-TV Fox 10 in Phoenix. She will be joined on the trip by visiting professor Bob Young, a journalism faculty associate at Arizona State University and former sports writer for the Arizona Republic.

Students on the 22-day trip will complete two courses, one in sports broadcast journalism and one in sports reporting, which will expose them to both the video/news side and print side of sports media coverage. For many of the students, the classes will be applied toward earning CSUF's Sports Media Certificate. A new offering within the Department of Communications, the certificate will provide hands-on opportunities for Titan students who are interested in a career in sports media.

"In sports right now, with the addition and the technology of live streaming, it is opening doors, and there are so many more options out there," Brisbane said. "The fact that we have now this specialized Sports Media Certificate, I think increases our ability to help our students realize their dreams."

The 26 students were selected by Brisbane from a group of applicants and will work in teams to develop a content calendar with story ideas that cover a range of Olympic topics, including Orange County athletes and coaches, the fan experience and local Parisian culture. While they will likely not have

full media access to practices or games, many will be conducting research and interviews prior to heading to Paris and will add some local footage and flair once arriving in France. In addition to posting daily social media content and blogs, the students will pitch their print stories and news packages to local So-Cal media outlets for publication.

One of the attendees is third-year Titan student Lina Naranjo. A member of Titan TV and set to graduate in spring 2025, Naranjo is majoring in communications with an emphasis in broadcast journalism and is working toward a career as an entertainment reporter.

Naranjo has already completed an interview with American rower Kara Kohler and is developing some cultural entertainment story topics. Additionally, she is part of the student team that handles CSUF's social media and podcast content and is looking forward to capturing Olympic moments through those channels as well.

"I think it will be a good opportunity for me to meet new people, see different cultures, expand on my communication skills and get out of my comfort zone a little bit," Naranjo said. "I'm really looking forward to making as many connections as I can. ... I want to improve on my editing skills too, my time management skills ... and just become more independent."

Fifth year student Robbie Loya is finishing his degree in communications with an emphasis in journalism and was asked by Brisbane to serve as one of the student executive producers for the study-abroad program. He will help oversee all of the written stories and video work produced by the student team.

Thanks to CSUF, Loya already has an extensive resume of sports broadcasting experience that he will be bringing to Paris. As a play-by-play broadcaster for CSUF and UC Irvine, he has reported more than 100 Division I games on ESPN+. He also recently secured a broadcasting position with the Lake Elsinore Storm, the Single-A minor league affiliate for the San Diego Padres. Despite his full schedule, he knew this was an opportunity he could not pass up.

"I think it shows what Cal State Fullerton is all about and that their goal is to give us opportunity," Loya said. "The saying goes, what does it mean to be a Titan? And for us, it's to achieve the un-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBBIE LOYA

CSUF Department of Communications assistant professor Gayle Jansen Brisbane with Robbie Loya.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBBIE LOYA

Fifth-year student Robbie Loya will serve as executive producer for the upcoming trip.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LINA NARANJO.

Third-year student Lina Naranjo plans to become an entertainment reporter.

achievable ... and I think our students have certainly done that with this huge opportunity."

Brisbane will be pushing her students to produce high-quality content, and she is hopeful that study-abroad trips like this, along with the Sports Media Certificate, Titan TV and the Titan Sports Network partnership with the Big West Conference and ESPN+ will make CSUF

a premier destination for those pursuing a career in sports journalism.

"I think that doing any kind of study abroad is just such an amazing, life-changing cultural experience for students," Brisbane said. "I hope that it unlocks their drive and their curiosity for the sports media industry and really provides some inspiration for them to just really go for it."

BUSINESS

Honors student Huxtable hired by accounting firm KPMG

CSUF News Media Services

When business honors student Kyrstin Huxtable graduates this month, she already has her first professional job lined up with Big Four accounting firm KPMG.

As an undergraduate, Huxtable got her foot in the door at the global accounting firm after landing two paid summer internships with the company's Embark Scholars program. She gained experience in their tax, audit and advisory service lines as an intern.

"I'm thrilled to work there. The people, the culture and the opportunity for growth are what has kept me coming back," said Huxtable, who is earning a bachelor's degree in business administration with concentrations in accounting and finance.

"KPMG is a place where I can grow as a young professional. I see a lot of opportunities for learning, the ability to take charge of my work and ownership of what I accomplish."

Huxtable, who begins at KPMG's Irvine office in late fall, will work as a deal advisory and strategy associate, helping business clients with complex financial reporting and deal-related accounting issues.

"What I like about this position is that it is much more dynamic than doing audit or tax," said Huxtable, who will study for the CPA exam this summer. "I will be exposed to so many different accounting challenges and business transactions, and I will have the opportunity to work on various projects."

In addition to being on the dean's list

every semester and graduating summa cum laude with a 3.9 GPA, Huxtable has been involved in campus and College of Business and Economics programs and activities.

"The wealth of opportunities at CSUF and everything I was involved in during my time here allowed me to explore all of my various interests, grow both personally and professionally, and helped me figure out my career path," said Huxtable, who originally was interested in a career in corporate communications and marketing.

As a member of the Business Honors Program, Huxtable found a community of like-minded peers and developed valuable professional and leadership skills, including leading events and activities for the program's alums. She traveled with fellow honors students to Argentina and Brazil earlier this year, where they toured businesses and learned about the global economy.

This academic year, Huxtable served as an accounting peer leader in the Supplemental Instruction program. In this role, she developed session plans and materials for students to improve retention in historically difficult bottleneck courses.

"Through the position, I solidified my accounting knowledge and skills while connecting with students and helping them succeed," Huxtable said. "It's the best feeling when students understand concepts and practice problems."

Since last summer, Huxtable has been part of Titan Capital Management, which gives students hands-on learning opportunities in real-world security analysis and stock and bond portfolio



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Business honors student Kyrstin Huxtable

management.

"I have learned useful skills like fundamental business analysis, financial modeling, equity research and valuation techniques," she said. "We get to do many things one wouldn't normally do in a classroom setting. We are managing real money and striving for real results."

As part of Titan Capital Management, Huxtable was a member of this year's Chartered Financial Analyst Institute

Research Challenge Team. The team won first place in the CFA Society of Los Angeles research challenge — the fifth year in a row that the CSUF team won the title.

Huxtable's other activities have included serving on the Business Student Advisory Board, the Dean's Advisory Board as a student representative and as an assistant opinion editor for the Daily Titan student newspaper.

President

FROM PAGE 1

commitment to student success and data-driven decision making, Rochon is an exemplary fit to lead the university and set an ambitious trajectory for CSUF's future."

With over 30 years in higher education, Rochon's academic and professional career has focused on advocating for educational excellence, access and equity.

Under his presidency, the University of Southern Indiana experienced increased growth in the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's performance funding metrics of overall degree completion, at-risk degree completion, STEM degree completion, student persistence and on-time graduation. He has intentionally guided the university to be a catalyst for change, creating a talented,

educated citizenry that meets the leadership, entrepreneurial and workforce needs of today's society.

In 2021, Rochon implemented the university's third strategic plan, "Accelerating Impact: 2021-2025," with four overarching goals: improving student success; fostering impactful engagement; elevating visibility and reputation; and strengthening financial viability. This effort led to Rochon securing continued and significant state funding for USI, including the largest single capital appropriation for the university as of 2024.

Prior to his role as president, Rochon served as the university's provost from 2010 to 2018, overseeing the revamping of USI's University Core Curriculum and working with faculty to secure the approval of the university's second doctoral program in educational leadership. In both his USI leadership roles Rochon has engaged in direct fundraising and solicitation of public funds and private gifts to advance institutional priorities.

Rochon came to USI from Buffalo State College in Buffalo, NY, where he served as the inaugural dean of the School of Education and associate vice president for Teacher Education and professor. He was director and co-founder of the Research Center for Cultural Diversity and Community Renewal at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, as well as interim director of the School of Education and associate dean of the university's health and physical education college. His professional teaching career has included work at Texas A&M University, Washington State University and University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Nationally, Rochon serves as the chair of the Board of Directors for the American Association for State Colleges and Universities and chair of the Board of Directors for the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, and has served as board chair for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

In 2021, Indiana Gov. Eric J. Holcomb

appointed Rochon as commissioner of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact, and in 2020 he was appointed to the Governor's Workforce Cabinet. He recently was named to Indiana Business Journal Media's "Indiana 250" list for the third consecutive year. This recognition includes the state's most influential leaders across many industries, such as education, healthcare and manufacturing. An active civic leader, Rochon serves on the boards of WNIN Public Broadcasting, Deaconess Health Systems and the Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, among others.

A first-generation college graduate, Rochon earned a bachelor's degree at Tuskegee University and master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His doctoral work was in educational policy studies, with an emphasis on educational history and policy analysis.

Rochon will assume the university presidency on July 22.

GRADUATION

CHEERS TO THE CLASS OF 2024

CSUF BY THE NUMBERS

Cal State Fullerton commencement ceremonies were held May 20 – 23.

12

Total number of commencement ceremonies

11,390

Total eligible* graduates – undergraduate students

1,957

Total eligible* graduates – graduate students

120,000

Total number of registered guests and family members at commencement ceremonies

*Eligible students qualified to walk at commencement; however, they may decide to opt out of the ceremonies.



Photos by Drew A. Kelley, Contributing Photographer Tuesday, May 21, 2024

- Alexis Sutherland blows a kiss during CSUF's commencement ceremony at Titan Stadium.
- Bri Felipe sends a smile to the audience during CSUF's commencement ceremony.
- Laura Solorzano and her service dog walk the grass after receiving her degree.
- A graduate's customized mortarboard sends a message to her family.
- George Rico celebrates during CSUF's commencement ceremony on May 21.
- Vanessa Lopez sends her boyfriend a heart during CSUF's commencement ceremony at Titan Stadium.
- Magna cum laude graduates celebrate during CSUF's commencement ceremony.
- Devin Engle poses for a photograph during CSUF's commencement ceremony at Titan Stadium.
- Proud families cheer their graduates.
- Center, wearing leis, Noelia Chavez, left, and Marlene Lopez wave to their family during CSUF's commencement ceremony at Titan Stadium.
- Hannah Alva, left, and Micah Fajardo acknowledge their supporters.
- Catlin Barrientos, right, helps Aida Aryan with her cap ahead of the start of the event.
- Emelia Owen, left, gestures to her family.

Choi

FROM PAGE 1

Venice, and Best Friend, in Las Vegas.

"I felt like his comments were very inspiring, you know, coming from the same school and accomplishing what he's accomplished," business school graduate Joshua Kazakos said. "It just goes to show that it could be from any of us, which is great. I really liked his message about feeding the world and being the change that you want to see."

Graduate Theresa Abadjian was also uplifted by Choi's commencement address and appreciated his candor.

"I thought he was amazing," Abadjian said. "His personality was really out there, which was inspiring. The way he spoke, the story he had to tell, and he was really inspiring to people who are afraid to take on something new."

As a person who's overcome challenges in life, graduate Matthew Macias was moved by Choi's ability to redirect his life and his commitment to giving back.

"There's been lots of stuff that has really touched me today and gave me inspiration to continue forward," Macias said. "I'm at this level where it's like, do I want to keep going, or do I want to stop? He did it in 30 years. Maybe I can do it a little sooner and continue to give back to the world."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Roy Choi has published an autobiography, won awards for his TV series "Broken Bread," has restaurants in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and is credited as an architect of the food truck movement.

Rebound

FROM PAGE 1

The program was begun in 1967 in San Francisco by John Irwin, a formerly incarcerated man who'd served five years for robbing a gas station. He earned college credits in Soledad prison, and after his release, he achieved a doctorate at UC Berkeley. Irwin began Project Rebound to help people coming out of prison matriculate to San Francisco State University.

"Most people question, do formerly incarcerated people have what it takes to succeed and excel at this level?" said J.C. Cavitt, interim executive director of Project Rebound at Cal State Fullerton.

The answer is yes, he said, and pointed to several indicators. Project Rebound students have a higher retention rate than that of other students throughout the CSU system, and at CSUF they have a higher GPA than other students.

"In our campus in particular, we were actually outshining our counterparts, the traditional students on campus, GPA-wise, which was very interesting," he said.

Very few Project Rebound students ever return to prison. "Our recidivism rate to this day still remains below one," said Cavitt. "I think definitely has folks' attention when you compare it to and contrast it to the state's recidivism rate."

That rate was about 42% in 2019, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Project Rebound expanded to nine Cal State University campuses in 2016, including Cal State Fullerton, and today the program operates in 19 of the 23 CSU campuses.

"The Fullerton campus did a lot of advocacy work, reaching out to community partners and philanthropic donors so that we can offer more robust services to the students, recognizing that

many formerly incarcerated students come with unique challenges and needs as they navigate higher ed," Cavitt said.

He's proud of the dedication shown by Project Rebound students, particularly at graduation time. "I have the opportunity to watch our students grow and transform, face adversity and somehow have the grit and the tenacity to continue to overcome obstacle after obstacle and barrier after barrier," he said. "And one of the things I think I'm most proud of is people are not stopping at just a bachelor's degree."

One 2024 graduate, Stephanie Jeffcoat, a political science major who first learned about Project Rebound through an outreach event at her church, Second Baptist in Santa Ana, intends to continue on to law school, with a focus on dependency law.

"Academic advising tailored to my unique needs and circumstances, financial assistance for textbooks and other educational materials, and emotional support through counseling and peer support groups," she said, naming the support she received from Project Rebound while at Cal State Fullerton. "These services not only eased my academic journey but also enriched my personal growth and resilience," she said.

Project Rebound provides support such as helping students fill out financial aid forms and job applications, create a resume and write cover letters. It also provides guidance for scholarship opportunities. Students can qualify for a \$500-per-semester stipend to cover books and supplies, meal support and a parking permit. Some housing is also available.

Mentorship is an important source of support for the students, with mentors coming from the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute on campus.

"We pair our incoming students with retired professionals to help them with professional development, but also give them some inside learning on a major or a career that they're interested



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

James "JC" Cavitt, interim executive director of Project Rebound, speaks about the program's success at Cal State Fullerton.

in," Cavitt explained. "We also provide peer-to-peer mentoring. Our incoming students every semester get paired with a senior-standing Project Rebound scholar, and it's kind of the buddy system. They help navigate them through getting to classes, how to have conversations with your faculty, how to upload stuff to the computer."

"That's been a huge gap for many of our students — they're so far behind in technology, and sometimes navigating that can be extremely frustrating for them."

Cavitt, himself a formerly incarcerated person, graduated from Cal State Fullerton in 2019 with a bachelor's de-

gree in sociology and went on to get a master's in social work. He vividly remembers the sense of community and nonjudgmental support he received from many people in Project Rebound, especially Romarilyn Ralston, the executive director at the time. Cavitt is on track to receive a doctorate in marriage and family therapy next spring.

Like Cavitt, many Project Rebound students continue their education after graduation. Of the approximately 60 students who've graduated since the program began at Cal State Fullerton, "almost 25% of them have gone on to post-secondary, either master's programs, EDD, or PhD programs," Cavitt said.

FAMILY

3 brothers earn their business degrees together

CSUF News Media Services

Noah, Adam and Joshua Bijelic are close-knit brothers and share a passion and acumen for business.

The three brothers chose Cal State Fullerton for their higher education studies and each earned a degree in the business field.

The brothers participated in the College of Business and Economics' commencement ceremony, with their parents and family members cheering as they crossed the graduation stage — at the same time.

"It's rewarding to see your child accomplish their educational milestones. But to see all three of my boys accomplish it together is something I never fathomed would occur," said Adriana Silva-Bijelic, the grads' mother. "We couldn't be more proud of them."

The Class of 2024 grads, two years apart in age, agreed that the university offered them the best education and opportunities to pursue their respective careers in business.

"During the college application process, Cal State Fullerton stood out as my top choice, largely influenced by my older brother, who was a student at the time," said Joshua Bijelic, 22, the youngest brother who earned a bachelor's degree in business administration-finance.

"Having visited the campus during high school, I was immediately impressed and felt that CSUF was the ideal place to build and plan my future."

Noah Bijelic, 26, the eldest brother, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration-accounting in 2021 from CSUF after transferring from Rio Hondo College. He graduated with a master's degree in taxation.

"It's a big achievement that we're graduating together," Noah said, especially since he and Joshua missed in-person graduations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "We've all worked

hard to get to this point, and now, I have had the honor to share this big moment alongside my younger brothers."

Adam Bijelic, 24, who enrolled in the College of Business and Economics because of his strong interest in understanding how businesses operate, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration-human resources management.

"Graduation marks the beginning of a new chapter in my life. I am excited about the future opportunities and the career path ahead," he said.

Silva-Bijelic, a real estate broker, and the grads' father, Sinisa Bijelic, a faculty member in computer information technology at Rio Hondo College, encouraged their sons to attend the university.

"We felt that Cal State Fullerton is one of the top-rated schools for business and economics, and with the university conveniently located close to home, the boys could easily get to school, keep their jobs and save their earnings, all while getting a great education," Silva-Bijelic said.

As an undergraduate, Noah interned at a construction firm in Whittier, which turned into a full-time position as a staff accountant.

"Cal State Fullerton is a very reputable school that many companies know will deliver the best in the field," Noah said, adding that he manages accounts receivable and payable for monthly billings and payroll reports.

For his graduate thesis, Noah researched the impacts of new technology, including the use of artificial intelligence, in the tax profession. He plans to complete the CPA exam and, one day, start his own tax firm.

Adam earned an associate degree in business administration from Rio Hondo College and then took a gap year. In 2021, he enrolled at CSUF.

He joined the Tennis Club and attended college events, such as career fairs, guest lectures and networking



PHOTO COURTESY OF JESSE ANDREW VILLAMIL

From left are business grads Joshua, Noah and Adam Bijelic.

mixers, to connect with industry professionals and alumni.

"These connections opened doors to internship and job opportunities and valuable advice that have helped me navigate my career path," said Adam, who held two part-time jobs while in college.

He plans to pursue a graduate degree in human resources at CSUF and is seeking a career as an executive recruiter.

"I am drawn to this field because I am passionate about connecting talented individuals with opportunities that align with their skills and career aspirations," he said.

After his 2020 high school graduation during the pandemic, Joshua enrolled as a freshman. Following in his older

brothers' footsteps, Joshua decided to study business and discovered an interest in finance, particularly in cash flow analysis and financial analytics courses.

With his college degree, he plans to advance to a finance-related role with Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, where he works part time, and aspires to become a chief financial officer for a company. He also wants to return to CSUF to earn an MBA.

"Cal State Fullerton has provided me with a comprehensive education and opened up numerous career opportunities aligned with my interests," Joshua said. "Graduation day was a time to recognize the hard work my two brothers and I have invested in to build a strong foundation for our futures."

SPORTS

Recapping the Titans' outstanding moments in 2023-24

By **Brian Robin**,
contributing writer

There came redemption in two sports, riding shotgun with continued excellence. Speaking of continued excellence, there was more of that sprinkled about as well.

When you look back on the 2023-24 Cal State Fullerton athletic season, you'll find breakout performances interspersed with the arrival of new stars — interspersed with the return of names Titans' sports fans recognize on sight.

Megan Delgadillo and Tegan Andrews, welcome back to prominence.

Roberto Ordonez, Davina Xanh, Abel Jordan, Josie Usereau, welcome to the big stage. One you illustrated wasn't too big for you.

The Titans won conference titles in men's soccer, women's soccer and softball. They were runners-up in men's golf and both indoor and outdoor men's track and field. Individually, the haul was more impressive. Andrews (men's golf), Jordan (men's 100 meters), Trinity Barnett (women's 100 meters), Alyssa Heinlein (women's 400-meter hurdles) and the men's 4-by-100-meter relay team all claimed conference titles.

And the CSUF Dance Team returned to a familiar spot atop the pyramid, winning its UDA National Championship for the 18th time. It was the program's second Division 1 Jazz title in three years.

There are moments worth revisiting. Moments like these from the just-concluded 2023-24 season.

Remarkable Roberto

Even before the rest of the Big West would learn, much to their detriment, CSUF men's soccer coach George Kuntz knew what kind of player Roberto Ordonez was. The quick feet, the instincts for goal, the vision, the soccer IQ. It was all there.

What wasn't there before this year was his health. A mysterious back ailment kept Ordonez sidelined for the 2022 season. When he finally got healthy, even Kuntz was awe-struck.

"In the spring, he showed flashes of how good he could be. We knew he was excellent on set pieces: corners, free-kicks, dead balls. But his touch, his ability to hold the ball, his ability to possess the ball were things over and above anything that we thought he could do," Kuntz said.

What Ordonez did in 2023 was lead the Big West with 28 points and 10 assists. His nine goals were second in the conference and those 10 assists placed

him eighth in the nation. They also helped him become the first Titan in program history to earn Big West Offensive Player of the Year.

Meanwhile, he and teammate Erick Serrano — the Big West Midfielder of the Year — led the Titans to their first Big West Regular Season title since 2017. Both were named to the United Soccer Coaches All-Far West Region Second Team.

Don't forget us

While Ordonez was turning heads and defenders, the CSUF women's soccer team turned the screws for its 10th Big West Regular Season Championship — a title that came with a screw-turning final day of the regular season.

CSUF came into the season finale at Cal State Bakersfield one point behind Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. It needed a win and a Cal Poly draw or loss against UC San Diego. The Titans took care of the former, blasting CSUB, 4-0. UCSD took care of the latter, parlaying Alexis Nguyen's goal in the 89th minute for a 1-0 shocker.

UC Irvine ended the Titans' season in the conference tournament for the second consecutive year, snapping an impressive run-in that included a five-game winning streak and a nine-game unbeaten streak. And Head Coach Demian Brown, who signed a contract extension in February that keeps him at Titan Stadium through the 2026 season, welcomes back all but defenders Maddie Phantumabamrung and Jesslyn McCave.

Redemption song

CSUF softball coach Kelly Ford normally is an open book about her team — except when you bring up the events of May 2023. Needing one victory in three games to capture the Big West Softball title, the Titans were swept by Long Beach State, which snatched and grabbed the crown from the Titans' heads.

Ford graciously, but firmly, brushed aside all mentions of that event. If it was discussed, it was discussed internally as fuel for the Titans to rectify that oversight. Which they did in May 2024.

CSUF took two of three from its rivals the final weekend of the season, beating The Beach, 10-4, in a season finale that illustrated revenge is truly a dish best tasted cold. The Titans went 39-19 overall and 22-5 in conference, including 11-1 at home. They swept four of their nine home conference series.

The momentum carried into the NCAA Stanford Regional, where third-seeded CSUF overcame an opening loss to Mississippi State to win its next three

games: over St. Mary's, Mississippi State and host Stanford to force a second game in the double-elimination tournament. The Cardinal ended the streak with a 4-2 victory in the finale.

As expected, the Titans carried off a plethora of postseason honors. Haley Rainey was the Big West Pitcher of the Year for her conference-leading 17 wins, a 1.76 ERA and two no-hitters. Peyton Toto was named the Big West Co-Defensive Player of the Year, recording more than 300 putouts at shortstop and first base, to go with slashing .345/.396/.468.

And then, there was Megan Delgadillo, who returned from a season-ending knee injury in March of 2023 on her own redemption campaign. The Big West Field Player of the Year in 2022, Delgadillo picked up where she left off — and left everything behind. She batted a personal-best .417, slugged a season-best .515, went 44-for-46 on stolen base attempts and scored 49 runs. En route, the First Team All-Big West selection set program career records for runs (172) and hits (272). She broke the conference record for stolen bases when she swiped her 122nd base against Toledo, and now sits at 151.

Redemption song 2.0

When we last left Tegan Andrews, he redshirted the 2023 season battling injuries and his own head.

We pick him up now as the Big West Men's Golfer of the Year after the senior won three events, finished with six top-10s and carted off the conference's individual title. Andrews' 14-under-par 202 in the conference tournament at La Quinta Country Club included a program-record-tying 63.

It also paced the Titans to a runner-up finish in the conference.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Roberto Ordonez controls the ball in a game against the Air Force at CSUF on Sept. 14 of last year. The Titans won the match 2-1.

Break on through

Ordonez wasn't close to being the only athlete to break out this season. In women's golf, sophomore Davina Xanh became the program's third Big West Golfer of the Year, placing in the top-10 in all 10 tournaments and finishing with the best scoring average (71.43) in program history.

Usereau, a freshman, became only the second Titan in program history to be named Big West Freshman of the Year. She was an all-conference first-team selection in singles and second team in doubles. In the fall, she was the singles runner-up at the Dennis Riza Classic and reached the quarterfinals of the ITA West Intercollegiate Championship.

Jordan, a sophomore from Madrid, Spain, missed qualifying for the NCAA National Championships by one spot, finishing 13th at the NCAA Regionals in the men's 110-meter hurdles with a time of 13.53 seconds that was 0.01 seconds from the 12th and final spot. Instead, Jordan will content himself with his Big West Men's Track Athlete of the Year trophy, winning the conference 100-meters in a school-record 10.19 seconds and running the second leg on the conference-winning 4-by-100-meter relay team.

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