



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

CSUF nursing graduate student Sophia Santana works in the nursing simulation center.

## LIFE CHANGING

# TRAGEDY MOTIVATES NURSE TO EARN HER MASTER'S AT CSUF

Sophia Santana saved a fan in 2021 at the Astroworld Festival in Houston

By **Lou Ponsi**  
contributing writer

Sophia Santana was elated after passing the difficult licensing examination to become a registered nurse.

And to celebrate Santana's achievement, a friend purchased tickets for the annual Astroworld Festival at NRG Park in Houston, Texas.

The popular music extravaganza, which began in 2018, was founded and hosted by rapper Travis Scott and, over the years, featured star performers such as Lil Baby, Megan Thee Stallion, Lil

Wayne and Drake.

"It was to do something beautiful and fun and memorable for me," Santana said.

As it turned out, the Nov. 5, 2021, concert was indeed memorable for Santana and thousands of others, but not in a way anyone could have possibly envisioned.

By the end of the day, eight people were dead — two more died in the hospital in the days following — dozens were transported to the hospital and thousands sustained injuries.

The 10 deaths were caused by compression asphyxiation, the result of massive crowd crush of concert goers

breaking through barriers and scaling walls attempting to get a spot near the stage. The youngest victim was a 9-year-old boy.

Santana was so impacted by the experience that she enrolled in the master's degree program in nursing at CSUF in order to qualify for a wider range of career options in the field.

"I want to continue to help in more different ways than just one," said Santana, who has completed the master's program and will walk with her graduating class after the spring 2026 semester. "Cal State Fullerton has the best program in California for nursing."

## Putting training into action

There were numerous lawsuits after the incident. A grand jury failed to indict the organizers. There were questions raised about security, emergency planning and the safety of the venue design as some of the contributing factors.

"That was one of the only times in my life that I ever felt panic," Santana said. "There was one person who was squished on one side of my ribs, another person on the other side, one in the front and one in the back. I remember going, 'I can't breathe.'"

Santana, who was 22 at the time, was knocked to the ground but managed to

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

Lorenzo Bizzi, Cal State Fullerton professor of management

## FACT FINDING

# Business professor debunks sales myths

Bizzi blends research with engaging storytelling

By **Larry Urish**  
contributing writer

Bloodletting cures illnesses. The sun revolves around the Earth, which, by the way, happens to be flat. Handwashing is unnecessary for doctors. Mental illness is a moral failure. Left-handedness should be corrected.

These are but a few examples of conventional wisdom that for centuries were widely accepted as irrefutable truth.

Lorenzo Bizzi knows a thing or two about debunking "truth."

In his book, "Myths vs. Science of Selling," Bizzi, professor of strategic management at Cal State Fullerton's College of Business and Economics, examines more than two-dozen elements involving sales, the process of turning

interest into revenue through value exchange.

The book is composed of an engaging combination of data, unearthed through dogged research, and creative storytelling. Each chapter discusses a specific sales element, which includes such topics as goal setting, prospecting, ingratiation and listening tactics, empathy and much more.

"I wrote this book after reading other books on sales, which are simply incorrect. They're not backed by research," said Bizzi, whose work has been featured in such publications as The Financial Times, Inc. magazine" and The Harvard Business Review, among many others. "In today's social-media environment, it's easy to have a voice, but people have to exaggerate to be heard. (The resulting) overinflated claims that are screamed out create a gap between what's really true and what people claim to be true."

Bizzi's research, done over four years, involved scanning hundreds of books, reports and articles. "In doing this research, I compared the facts with what these other books were saying." Their claims simply didn't pass muster.

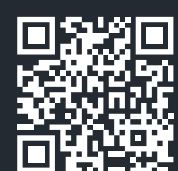
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DISTINGUISHED ALUMS

# Kristin Crellin pays it forward at CSUF and CSU system

## SchoolsFirst senior VP supports community

**By Jenelyn Russo**  
*contributing writer*

*In celebration of their accomplishments in their respective fields and their service and support of the university, Cal State Fullerton is recognizing five Distinguished Alumni on Feb. 28 as the 2026 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Award recipients. Established in 1994, the biennial awards are the highest honors presented by CSUF to alumni and community supporters. Over the next several weeks, we will profile each of this year's honorees and highlight their achievements and contributions to their profession and the community.*

Kristin Crellin's higher education journey may have taken an unconventional path, but it led her to Cal State Fullerton, where she attended night school to complete her bachelor's degree in history in 1995.

Crellin is in her 36th year with SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union and is the current senior vice president of Community and Membership Development. She is also an active alumna at both the CSUF and CSU levels, where she is a member of the CSUF Philanthropic Board of Governors and serves as the chair of the CSU Foundation Board of Governors.

Additionally, Crellin is president of the Education Foundation for California Schools, SchoolsFirst's nonprofit she helped establish that supports education programs in California schools.

In recognition of her commitment to CSUF, the CSU system and the local education community, Crellin has been named a 2026 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Distinguished Alumni award winner.

An Orange County native, Crellin grew up in Villa Park and began at a community college out of high school before transferring to San Diego State to study history. Prior to completing her degree, she shifted direction, leaving



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

Kristin Crellin is a recipient of a 2026 CSUF Vision & Visionaries Award.

SDSU for court reporting school and taking a part-time role at SchoolsFirst as a secretary to the president. Within six months, she knew the credit union was where she wanted to build her career.

"We say that we're building the future for those that build the future," said Crellin of SchoolsFirst. "I enjoy working with the educational community every day to see how we can help them and how we can make their lives easier so that they can go to work every day and do their job and not worry about their finances."

While she had landed on her career path, Crellin still had a strong desire to complete her degree, and CSUF had the night class offerings she needed to make that happen.

At graduation, Crellin was nine months pregnant with her first child, and three weeks later, when she filled out her daughter's birth certificate paperwork, she checked the "college graduate" box

for the first time, a milestone memory that stays with her to this day.

"That was the first time anybody asked me if I was a college graduate, and that was the first time I was able to check that box," Crellin said.

While her time at CSUF looked different from that of a full-time student, Crellin always felt supported. She recalls how the late Arthur Hansen, CSUF professor emeritus of history, gave his night class students the same level of attention as his full-time students.

"It meant everything," said Crellin of the opportunity CSUF gave her to finish her degree. "I never felt that I was getting a lesser education than those who were there full time. The people that I worked with and went to school with in the history department were super helpful to me. They made me feel just as special."

Crellin's rise at SchoolsFirst began with several lateral moves that helped

her find the right fit. She eventually became an assistant manager in electronic services, coordinating ATM placements across the community. It was work that gave her a sense of purpose.

"That was the first time I was ever out in the community, and I found that I really enjoyed that," Crellin said.

Now in her sixth year as senior vice president, Crellin oversees all school and community relations, business development and membership departments at SchoolsFirst. Her efforts have been instrumental in developing products and services that meet members' needs, including computer loans and classroom supply loans.

Crellin became an active CSUF alumna a few years after graduating, which gave her a new perspective on how the university supports its students. She first served on the Guardian Scholars Advisory Committee, a program that supports current and former foster youth in higher education.

"Coming back as an alumna, I learned of all the opportunities that the university gives to the students, and that really spoke to me," Crellin said. "I wanted to help the university to help these students to be successful."

Crellin has remained an active alumna, serving on the College of Education's Dean's Advisory Board and as a past president of the CSUF Alumni Association. At the CSU level, she represented CSUF on the CSU Alumni Council, where she also served as past president.

When CSUF President Ronald S. Rochon called Crellin with the news of her Vision & Visionaries Award selection, she was "100 percent surprised" and moved to tears.

"I know the people who have received this (award) previously, and to be in their company is such an honor," Crellin said.

Crellin's husband and son are both CSUF alumni. Looking back, she remains grateful for the foundation the university gave her.

"It makes me feel really proud to tell people I am an alumna of Cal State Fullerton," Crellin said. "We are a very proud Titan family."

## Nurse

FROM PAGE 1

get back to her feet when adrenaline kicked in, and she shifted into rescue mode, looking for anyone who could be helped.

"I genuinely don't know what it is in me, but I just knew I had to go and do something that mattered," Santana said.

She noticed a young man on the ground being tended to by another concertgoer.

The man on the ground was Arturo Sanchez, who had made the three-plus-hour drive from his home in Dallas with friends to Houston for the festival.

Amid the chaos, Sanchez, who was 23 at the time, ended up on the bottom of a pile of people and was barely breathing.

Looking back on the moments, he resigned himself to his fate.

"In those moments ... I was going to die," Sanchez said. "This is where my story ends. I can't do anything because I literally couldn't move."

Meanwhile, Santana was still trembling. Her hands were shaking.

"I'm still not OK," she said. "And then that's when I saw Arturo on the floor. And there was this guy at his head, and I had thought that that was one of his friends trying to wake him up. I had thought he had passed out."

Drawing on her training, Santana performed lifesaving measures, including elevating legs to improve blood flow to the heart.

"And I just, I remember thinking like, I really hope this works," Santana said. "I really, really hope it works for this guy."

It was later determined that he went into cardiac arrest.

Sanchez was taken by medics to the hospital, but Santana kept his phone, both to prevent theft and communicate

with his friends and family.

Later on, she learned Sanchez was hospitalized and had survived, thanks in large part to intervention.

Santana and Sanchez eventually met in person and they maintain a close friendship.

They stay connected through social media, and Santana has even made a few trips to Houston to meet up with Sanchez.

### A lasting impact

The Astroworld tragedy attracted massive media attention at the national level, and in June 2025, the disaster was the subject of a Netflix documentary series titled "Trainwreck: The Astroworld Tragedy."

The documentary featured first-person accounts from Sanchez and Santana, along with other survivors, and interviews with family members of deceased victims.

More than four years later, Sanchez still battles the emotional fallout.

"I had to go see a neurologist because of my concussion," Sanchez said. "I had to see a cardiologist because of my heart attack. I needed medication because, obviously, I was suffering from PTSD, depression and anxiety."

Reflecting on the tragedy, Sanchez is determined to live fully and help others understand the importance of safety and compassion.

"I definitely say that I value life," he said. "After that festival, I started doing stuff for me. ... I started traveling more, seeing the world, you know, experiencing new things."

In the immediate aftermath, upon learning Santana saved his life, Sanchez said he was still so shaken that he couldn't yet grasp the magnitude of her actions.

As time goes on, he gets it.

"Obviously, all my friends love her," Sanchez said. "My family loves her. Because, you know, without her, I wouldn't be here."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

Graduate student Sophia Santana in the Nursing Simulation Center at Cal State Fullerton

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## SHE'S BLENDING TECH AND BUSINESS — AND LEADING WITH PURPOSE

At CSUF, Taylor Livingston found a community of mentors and industry experts, led campus-wide initiatives and double-majored in computer science and business.

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OUTSTANDING EDUCATORS

Alums recognized for helping high school students embrace STEM

Rabanera, Pilchman teach outside the box

By Nicole Gregory  
contributing writer

Two Cal State Fullerton alumni, Al Rabanera and Daniel Pilchman, received Outstanding STEM Educator Awards from the Orange County Department of Education last November for their efforts to make science, technology, engineering and math classes accessible for high school students who otherwise might not feel capable of participating in those studies.

Both educators hope their awards will shine a light on the importance of ensuring that all students feel welcome and supported in STEM studies.

“This recognition affirms that when we center students’ humanity, hold high expectations and truly believe in them, STEM spaces become places of possibility rather than exclusion,” said Rabanera, who won the award for his work at La Vista High School, an alternative school in Fullerton, where he has worked for 22 years.

Though the award recognizes his achievements as an educator, Rabanera said his work is hardly done. “It represents a journey from feeling unseen in educational spaces to being

recognized for work grounded in equity and hope,” he said. “I see this award not as a finish line, but as encouragement to keep pushing for systems that truly serve all students.”

Rabanera received his master’s degree in education from Cal State Fullerton and his doctorate in educational leadership at UC Irvine.

La Vista is a continuation high school; its students are at least 16 years old and are at risk of not graduating or are part of La Vista’s Teenage Pregnant and Parenting Program. Rabanera said many students “arrive carrying years of messages that they are not math people. My work has always focused on changing that narrative by creating learning experiences rooted in dignity, belonging and high expectations.” He’s helped integrate student identities into STEM instruction to help students feel comfortable in STEM classes.

Pilchman, who received the award for Outstanding Career Awareness Educator, teaches Career Technical Education at Woodbridge High School in Irvine. He obtained his teaching credentials from Cal State Fullerton and a doctorate in philosophy from UC Irvine. He’s currently working toward a master’s degree at CSUF in a program called transformative teaching, which focuses on diversity, equity, social justice and culturally sustaining practices.

His career technical education program is a reinvention of what used

to be called “shop” at Woodbridge High School. “Shop classes were a beloved part of school for a long time and then sort of fell off — there was less funding and less interest at high schools,” Pilchman said. “Now there’s a lot of interest in revitalizing those programs. Technology has changed a lot — there’s a lot of space for reimagining the way that we teach skills and handcrafting.”

Pilchman said he works to make sure all students “feel comfortable, safe and welcome,” in this program, which led him to return to Cal State Fullerton: “Diversity work and equity work is something that I’ve always been really passionate about. This is a chance for me to see the research in terms of shop education or manufacturing, skilled education and equity. How do we make it so that it benefits everybody?”

In Pilchman’s classes, students learn 3D printing and make small lamps, which involve computer design and basic circuits. More advanced students learn engineering skills in making specialty props and costumes for the school’s theater productions — all of which can translate into technical careers.

“We get to use the machines to make toys or other fun stuff, but these are the same materials that they’re going to go on and use in aerospace or biotech,” Pilchman said.

He hopes his award highlights that “there’s really important work to be done

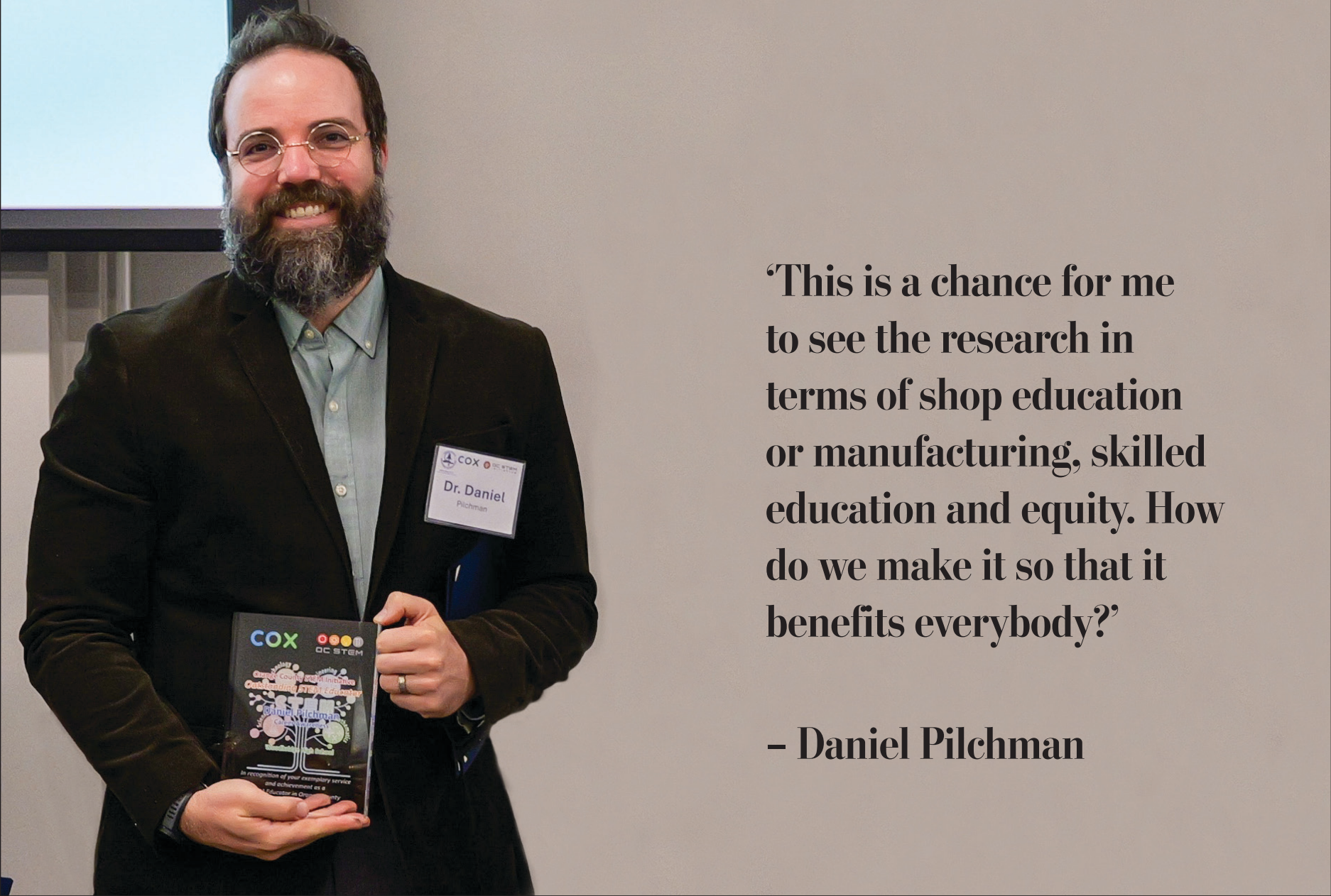
in making sure that career education is accessible so that all of our students feel like they can be involved in it.”

It’s important to “make sure that this is something that our students with special needs and our English learners are able to access,” Pilchman said. “Those are students for whom the college track is going to be a particular challenge.”

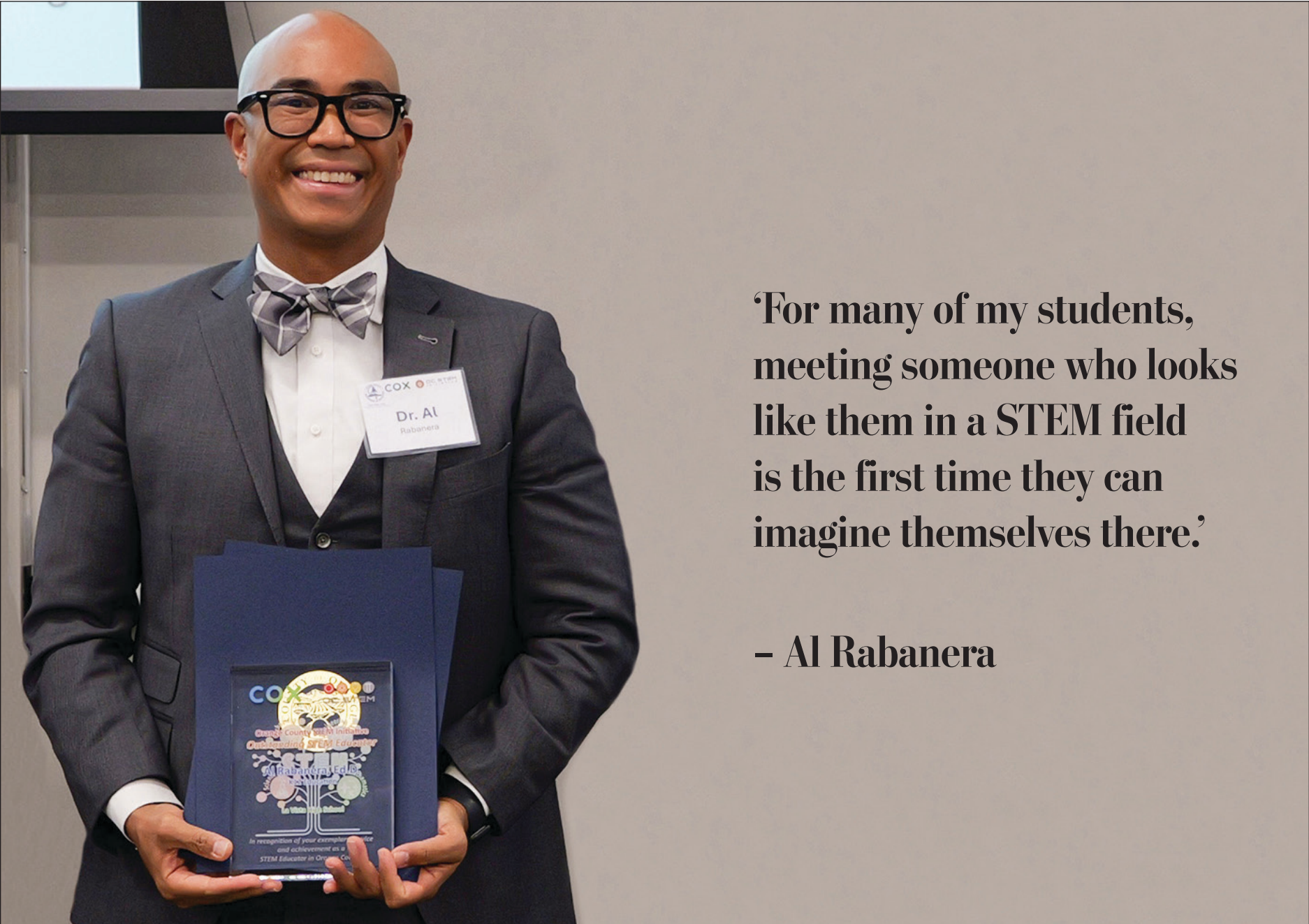
He credits the College, Career, and Life Readiness team at the Irvine Unified School District office, the Gene Haas Foundation and the Irvine Public Schools Foundation for their support and work in this area.

Rabanera said that through partnerships with the Fullerton Museum Center, Fullerton Library, the Muckenthaler Cultural Center and others, he’s able to bring industry professionals and higher education partners to speak with La Vista high schoolers.

“For many of our students, these partnerships provide the first time they see someone who looks like them or comes from a similar background working in a STEM field,” Rabanera said. “Representation matters. For many of my students, meeting someone who looks like them in a STEM field is the first time they can imagine themselves there. Partnerships also allow us to provide mentorship, hands-on experiences and resources that schools alone often cannot offer.”



STEM educator Daniel Pilchman, center, teaches career technical education, manufacturing and product design at Woodbridge High School in Irvine.



STEM educator Al Rabanera, center, is a math teacher and educational leader at La Vista High School in Fullerton.





PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

Alum Judy Segura, second from left; CSUF President Ronald Rochon, fifth from left; and Dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science Sang June Oh, seventh from left; meet with the inaugural cohort of Next-Gen Innovators.

ENGINEERING, COMPUTER SCIENCE

# 10 students selected for Apple Next-Gen Innovators program

Cal State Fullerton

Cal State Fullerton student Haley Barrios Gomez started exploring mechanical engineering when she was 16 years old. Her experience living with congenital limb loss inspired her to design a custom prosthetic device for her arm.

Today, she aspires to develop accessible 3D prosthetics for others like her.

For her academic excellence and career aspirations in the field, Gomez was among 10 Cal State Fullerton students selected for the inaugural cohort of Next-Gen Innovators — a new mentorship program run by Apple that is designed to inspire and prepare sophomore and junior students for careers in hardware engineering. The program offers one-on-one mentorship with Apple engineers who offer personalized support, access to collaborative learning experiences and exposure to a wide variety of technical careers.

Over the next eight months, students from the College of Engineering and Computer Science will engage in a series of virtual sessions with Apple to build career insights and expand their professional network. They will be paired with a mentor from Apple's hardware engineering team and receive personalized guidance tailored to their goals. The program will also feature technical and personal development workshops.

"My Apple mentor encouraged me to explore all areas of mechanical engineering, so that I can be a well-rounded engineer and carry that expertise into my own company someday," said Gomez, a transfer student from Irvine Valley College. "As a first-generation student, I thrive when I am able to talk to mentors and develop that human connection. Hearing their perspectives is truly valuable."

Cal State Fullerton is one of 23 colleges



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

Cal State Fullerton student Haley Barrios Gomez, center, speaks with alum Judy Segura, left, and Assistant Vice President for College and Program Development Mike Karg, at the Dec. 11 kickoff event for the Apple Next-Gen Innovators Program.

and universities from across the country selected for the Apple initiative. At a Dec. 11 kickoff event, student participants, university leadership and Apple representatives came together to celebrate the program and what it means for the future of the industry.

"We're talking about one of the best branded and best producing technology companies on the planet — not just the

nation, the planet — and they have chosen us. They have chosen you," said CSUF President Ronald Rochon. "I remain excited because of each of you, what you can do and what you will do."

Sang June Oh, dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science, spoke to the transformative nature of the program and its ability to open doors for students.

"Many of our students are the first in their families to attend college, and programs like this, grounded in strong mentorship, have the power to open doors and create life-changing opportunities," said Oh. "We are deeply grateful to the Apple hardware engineering team for their commitment to sharing their expertise and inspiring the next generation to excel across a wide range of technical careers."

EDDY AWARD

# Cal State Fullerton recognized for workforce development

Cal State Fullerton

The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. has awarded Cal State Fullerton the 2025 Eddy Award in recognition of the university's efforts to strengthen programs supporting career-ready graduates and driving greater regional workforce development and economic transformation.

The Strategic Engagement Award recognized Cal State Fullerton and Cal State Los Angeles, Cal State Dominguez Hills, Long Beach State, Cal State Northridge and Cal Poly Pomona for their commitments to excellence and innovative approaches to fostering sustainable prosperity.

Leaders from regional business, government, education and community organizations attended the November Eddy Awards presentation at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena. The event supports the nonprofit organization's mission of research in key industries, collaboration with educational institutions and equitable economic growth in the Los Angeles region.

Former NBA star Metta Sandiford-Artest, formerly Metta World Peace, announced the Eddy Award, which California State University Chancellor Mildred García accepted on behalf of the six CSU campuses. Her speech highlighted the CSU system's ongoing commitment to innovation, expanding access to higher education, and deepening community engagement across California.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.

CSU Chancellor Mildred García, right, accepts the LAEDC Strategic Engagement Award alongside presidents from five of the six recognized CSUs: from left, Cal State Los Angeles President Berenecea Johnson Eanes, Cal State Long Beach Acting President Andrew Jones, Cal State Northridge President Erika Beck, Cal State Dominguez Hills President Thomas Parham and CSUF President Ronald Rochon.



NEW MINOR

# Urban Studies gives students tools to impact their communities

Drawing from courses across 10 departments

By Lou Ponsi  
contributing writer

With more than 3 million people calling Orange County home, the 34-city, 948-square-mile region is large, complex and dynamic, said Zia Salim, professor of geography and the environment at Cal State Fullerton.

The county is also part of a much broader metropolitan area, sharing its northern border with Los Angeles County, making the entire 5,000-plus-square-mile expanse the perfect “classroom” for examination through the lens of urban studies.

So, it made sense for Salim and Mark Drayse, also a professor of geography and the environment, to lead the effort to establish an Urban Studies minor at the university.

“We live in an area that has a lot of cities and neighborhoods around us, and the students experience the topics we talk about in Urban Geography every single day,” Salim said. “So, I think that idea has been in our heads.”

Developed from existing courses across 10 departments within the colleges of Health and Human Development and Humanities and Social Sciences, the Urban Studies minor became an official area of study that started in the fall 2025 semester.

Salim and Drayse had been contemplating the idea of urban studies for several years and connected with a student who was also interested in the topic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the student researched the feasibility of an urban studies minor by first searching for any course related to cities, basically anything that had an urban focus, the professors said.

“Multiple colleges already teach this content. Salim said. “We took an existing set of classes and brought them together in a coherent framework that now students can add in as something they



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZIA SALIM

CSUF geography and sociology students learning about Santa Ana's urban past and present visit the old Orange County courthouse, which was dedicated in 1901.

can show an employer or share in an interview.”

The professors put a proposal together and, in 2023, sent the proposal to several department chairs for feedback and went through the approval process at several layers of administration.

“I think that was one of the things that was really attractive about this idea to me and Zia, is that you're doing an interdisciplinary minor, one that's pulling from different departments but is still really grounded in studying the city,” Drayse said. “I think one of the

great advantages is that one thing that every one of our students has a deep knowledge of is the city ... of living in an urban environment. The city becomes their classroom.”

The 18-unit Urban Studies minor requires students to take a three-unit geography course titled Cities and Suburbs.

Students then choose to take either a three-unit course titled Urban Anthropology or Sociology of City Life.

From there, students select four electives from nearly 30 courses from a

wide variety of disciplines.

Among the electives are American Nightlife; Activism, Engagement and Professional Development; Race, Sex and American Urban Culture; Barrio Studies; Barios and Health; Immigrant Orange County and Urban Planning Principles.

Professor Elaine Lewinnek, an urban historian, American Studies scholar and coordinator of the Environmental Studies Program, said the Urban Studies minor is designed to address “issues of the moment,” such as sustainability, disability, and artificial intelligence, by drawing on courses from multiple departments.

The minor helps students see thematic connections across multiple disciplines, said Lewinnek, who co-authored “A People's Guide to Orange County,” described as a “tour guide that documents sites of oppression, resistance, struggle and transformation in Orange County, California.”

“These are issues that are really issues of the moment, issues that might structure our students’ careers and their lives, but they’re issues that are fundamentally interdisciplinary,” Lewinnek said.

An Urban Studies minor can be useful for career opportunities in local government, urban planning, real estate, social services and other fields.

“Understanding urban spaces is crucial for navigating issues like homeownership, generational wealth, health, education and identity,” Lewinnek said.

Any student interested in learning about the unique structures and needs of urban populations can benefit from the Urban Studies minor, said Celestina Barbosa-Leiker, dean of the College of Health and Human Development.

“Our mission is to help improve the health and well-being of our surrounding communities, and this minor offers a unique opportunity to impact the health of those living in urban areas,” Barbosa-Leiker said. “Across service-learning projects and opportunities for research and scholarship, this new minor complements the many opportunities that CSUF students have to serve their communities.”

\$24 MILLION GIFT

## Samueli Foundation invests in STEM community college transfer programs

Cal State Fullerton

Cal State Fullerton’s efforts to strengthen pathways for transfer students in science, technology, engineering and math programs received a multimillion boost from the Samueli Foundation.

The foundation’s \$7 million gift to CSUF aims to build on the university’s leadership as a top destination for transfer students and boost bachelor degree completion for community college transfer students.

CSUF, Fullerton College, Irvine Valley College and Orange Coast College received a total of \$12 million from the Samueli Foundation. Cal State Fullerton and each of the community colleges will receive \$3 million to enhance collaboration. In addition, the four institutions will form the Orange County STEM Regional Collaboration, with a three-year, \$4 million funding initiative that CSUF will lead.

Workforce development programs at Golden West College and Saddleback College also received funding for skills academies, paid internships, and expansion of high-demand fields such as nursing. In total, the Samueli Foundation gave \$24 million to expand workforce development opportunities for students at six Orange County college campuses.

Construction of CSUF’s 42,000-square-foot Innovation Hub at the College of Engineering and Computer Science is underway and set to open in the summer of 2027.

“Cal State Fullerton is grateful for this investment, which will open doors for more students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics,” said Cal State Fullerton President Ronald Rochon. “This support strengthens our collaboration with local community college partners and creates stronger pathways to careers that will drive innovation and power the future of Orange County.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON

Cal State Fullerton, Fullerton College, Irvine Valley College and Orange Coast College received a total of \$12 million from the Samueli Foundation.

The university will hire full-time STEM transfer advisers embedded in the College of Engineering and Computer Science and the College of Natural

Sciences and Mathematics. CSUF also will expand outreach surrounding transfer pathways and student support through peer advising, transfer coaching

and services increasing research placements with student stipends, ensuring financial barriers do not limit participation.

## Bizzi

FROM PAGE 1

While most business books are about as exciting as reviewing a stack of Excel spreadsheets, Bizzi’s writing blends structured, left-brain research and right-brain creativity. Every chapter has four clearly delineated elements: The Myth, The Facts, The Logic and What To Do, as well as a helpful overview, Recommendation. Along with an intriguing tagline accompanying each chapter title, “Each chapter begins with a story,” Bizzi said. “While the scientific backing in this book is something I’m proud of ... people relate to and remember stories much better than dry facts.”

Chapter 4, Sales Conversation, discusses two types of selling. One, rooted in decision outcome, brings in higher sales in the short term but is ultimately less effective. The other, focused on the decision process, is more honest and better over the long haul.

“The classic technique focuses on the outcome of the sale,” said Bizzi, who has been nominated twice, by two Cal State Fullerton presidents, for the Wang Family Excellence Award, which honors the top instructor in the Cal State University system. “Instead, salespeople should focus on the process, with the goal of reducing buyer uncertainty about the product. Even if you don’t close the sale, you increase the clarity of the buyer. And that’s good.”

Seller’s Attitude, the focus of Chapter 12, unpacks two forms of excitement that don’t work, as well as one that does.

Excitement rooted either in the seller’s personality or used as a sales tactic is less effective. However, excitement about the given sales situation can reap benefits for both seller and buyer.

“Excitement about the situation is different,” Bizzi said. “That’s about the sales process itself, the presentation that you’re making when you’re talking with the buyer about the product. When sellers display excitement about the context of the situation they’re in with the buyer, the buyer perceives that sellers are anticipating that the sale will go well. ... Thus, the buyer tends to believe the seller is credible and trustworthy.”

In Chapter 17, Casual Conversations, Bizzi emphasizes storytelling, an effective element used throughout his book. “Facts and data alone are boring,” Bizzi said. “Sellers start with a story because it provides an emotional

salience that creates a connection. They bring in the facts only after they build a story. However, storytelling must not be a replacement for the facts; it must be combined with facts. Combining emotions and rationality creates the most powerful impact.”

One essential factor that sets “Myths vs. Science of Selling” apart from other sales books is that it tackles the subject from a variety of angles. “Most sales books say, ‘Do this one thing, and you’ll be successful.’ This is the essence of exaggeration,” Bizzi said. “That’s why sales professionals are encouraged to look at all of the elements covered in my book. ... If there’s one single thing I’d like to tell salespeople, it’s this: There is not one single thing that they need to do in order to achieve success. There are many elements involved. That’s a core point of my book.”



SPORTS

# New coach re-energizes women’s basketball team

## Bonner approach produces results

By Brian Robin  
contributing writer

There is a contrarian streak that runs through John Bonner, a streak that takes the improbable and bends it to the possible — before bringing it to reality. A contrarian streak where the beauty is in the versatility, because in Bonner’s Contraryland, it’s applicable on — and off — the court.

You can see it on the court, where the first-year Cal State Fullerton women’s basketball head coach winds up and turns his team loose in a full-court, frenetic style rarely seen in today’s half-court, bombs-away-from-beyond-the-arc era.

Call it Bonnerball. And call it successful. Bonnerball has CSUF leading the nation in turnovers created per game, an incendiary 28.2. The Titans rank second nationally in steals per game (16.8), a full steal ahead of a program you’re probably a bit more familiar with occupying that Olympian real estate, UConn.

And you can see it off the court, where Bonner is in the early stages of building a program that goes beyond Xs and Os and firewagon basketball. He has this rather novel concept that nurturing positive relationships and building a family atmosphere with a perpetual open door could pay dividends across the board.

There are his “Weekly 10s,” regular sit-downs with his players where they talk about everything from goals and stress factors to Marvel movies. Any topic is on the table — as long as it’s not basketball. Bonner says his Weekly 10s usually stretch to 20 or 30 minutes, and his players get angry if he must cancel a Weekly 10 for whatever reason.

“I hear people say it doesn’t work at this level. Well, Tennessee does it,” he said about the full-court, feral, pressing style. “I wanted to see if it would work at this level, and I wanted to see if we could win with that style and with relationships and chemistry. I’ve spent a lot of time trying to foster relationships with the players, making sure they were focused on building relationships with their teammates, where they could teach and learn from each other.

“I wanted to build an environment that is family-based. That is transformational instead of transactional.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAL STATE FULLERTON  
CSUF women's basketball coach John Bonner watches from courtside during an exhibition game against Claremont-Mudd-Scripps at home. The Titans beat the Athenas, 91-53.

Transformational instead of transactional? In this environment? Is Bonner a contrarian — or a comedian?

Can you be transformational in the transactional Age of What Can You Offer Me That’s More Than What Three Other Schools Are Offering Me? Maybe that works at a Division II program like Cal State Dominguez Hills, where Bonner spent the previous nine seasons turning the Toros into a national power that went to two NCAA Division II Elite Eights in three years. That was highlighted last year, when CSUDH lost to Grand Valley State, 70-58, in the national championship game.

But at CSUF? A place that has been a graveyard for women’s basketball coaches for much of this century? After racking up a 127-82 record, four regular-season or conference-tournament titles, five postseason berths and two trips to the NCAA Division II tournament, Bonner’s answer is an unequivocal yes. He was ready for this. To him, this was the right time for a change, and the opportunities at Fullerton gave him what he was looking for.

“A missed opportunity,” as he called it, noting the plethora of alumni who graduate, leave and come back to work. This meshed neatly with the atmosphere he wanted to create.

“I told the administration at my interview that creating relationships was going to be the base that we want to do here,” he said. “I believe if you invest in a player and let them know you care about them as more than a player, you can coach them harder. Between the lines is just between the lines. They know that’s basketball.

“But as soon as practice is over, whatever they’re stressing about, I’m checking in about those things because I care about them as much as a student and a human being as much as what they can get done on the basketball court.”

Bonnerball is getting plenty done on the basketball court. Through last weekend, after CSUF dispatched UC Riverside, 83-71, via an uncharacteristic (we did mention Bonner is flexible in his contrariness) shoot-the-lights-out afternoon from behind the arc, the Titans are 9-9 and 5-3 in the Big West. They’ve already surpassed their win total from last season.

Included in those five conference wins are victories over two of the Big West’s traditional bullies: Hawaii (82-80) and UC Santa Barbara (62-61).

The Titans ended a 12-game losing streak against Hawaii despite making only two 3-pointers and shooting 41.3% from the floor. But CSUF forced 27 turnovers, turning those into 31 points. Bonnerball is the new normal. Twenty-five days later, the Titans welcomed 2026 with a New Year’s Day thriller over UCSB, courtesy of a buzzer-beating putback by sophomore forward Cristina Jones, one of two players — along with graduate student guard Kya Pearson — who followed Bonner from CSUDH.

Jones leads the Titans in scoring (16.4), rebounding (8.5), steals (68) and minutes per game (29.8). After her 25-point,

eight-rebound outing against La Sierra University in December, Jones became the first CSUF Big West Player of the Week in two years. This, from a player who averaged 9.3 points and 6.1 rebounds as a freshman at CSUDH. And from a player who has yet to take a 3-point shot.

About the 3-pointer. The Titans are last in the Big West in every 3-point shooting category: shooting percentage, 3-pointers made and opponent 3-point percentage. That’s what made their 10-for-18 afternoon bombing UCR out of Titan Gym somewhat of an outlier. But rest assured, there was plenty of Bonnerball as well; CSUF forced 27 turnovers and had 16 steals, turning those into 27 points.

Jones is one of seven players averaging more than 20 minutes a game, which defines Bonnerball. Use the entire court as a canvas and “Weaponize conditioning,” as he’s fond of saying. Run opposing guards into the ground, step on the gas harder, and force your opponents into spending catch-your-breath time-outs.

This was brought to 3D living color Jan. 10, when CSUF forced Cal State Northridge into 43 turnovers, the third most turnovers committed by a Division I team this season. The Titans shook off the fact that they shot 34.3% from the field, rolling up 25 steals and scoring 36 of their 73 points off turnovers in the 73-58 win.

That Bonnerball worked so quickly is remarkable when you consider he was hired on May 9 and found only three returning players: sophomore guards Maddy Tauro, Jana Falsdottir and Madelynn Muniz. All three average more than 20 minutes a game. The Titans are one of the youngest teams in the Big West, with six freshmen and five sophomores. Pearson and junior forward Talia Maxwell are the only upperclassmen.

“It’s a pleasant surprise how well our playing style works,” Bonner said. “I’m surprised how well it works at this level, and I’m very surprised how quickly we came together. But the work ethic and the buy-in we have every day is leading to these opportunities.”

There will be more opportunities to spread the contrarian gospel of Bonnerball, with its weaponizing conditioning, conga line of steals and creating more turnovers than Porto’s Bakery. And not just because Bonner arrived on campus after the spring portal had closed, limiting his options.

No. Because one of the essential truths—perhaps the essential truth that Bonner and all of his contrariness wants you to know—is Bonnerball is more than basketball.

Cal State Fullerton

TOP

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Colleges in the West

■ Washington Monthly (2025)

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