Let the Gaming Begin
Extension Crossing

Students traverse the first pedestrian bridge to be installed on campus in 15 years. The 141-foot-long, steel-framed expanse lies 19 feet above East Peltason Drive and connects the new, five-story Continuing Education facility (left) with the rest of the campus.
Behind the Games: Alumna encourages other minority women to enter technology and engineering fields  
Plus: Playing With Gender Stereotypes

Technology Is Part of Life – and Art: Beall Center exhibit showcases the few constraints of “expanded media arts” and how the field intertwines with the human experience

Fountain of Youth: Anthropologist explores how avatars create a Second Life free from Parkinson’s and other impairments

A Bold New Sports Franchise: Seeing video games as the next frontier in college athletics, UCI launches player scholarships and a first-of-its-kind arena  
Plus: UCI’s eSports Elite

Taking Legal Power to the People: Alum’s apps promote autonomy for clients with disabilities

Winter 2017
Vol. 2, No. 1
Letters to the Editor

Fall 2016. “Reaching for the Sky”

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Ashley Yukimori
Director, field study program
School of Social Ecology, UCI


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There is no treatment for this progressively degenerative, fatal brain disease, not is there a cure, and although it seems to be an easy solution for other brain diseases, it’s not going to be a slam dunk. We need all the publicity we can get to educate the masses on the need for research funding.

John E. Reding
Orange

I was an undergraduate at UCI in the ‘70s. Said Shokair was a mentor to a lot of students, and it happens to be one of them. As an alumna, I get (and love) UCI Magazine, and much to my surprise, there was an article about him (“Outside the box,” page 19). Glad to see it looks like he’s still doing great things at UCI.

Medhanie Ephrem
Deputy director of planning & construction
Long Beach City College

I am writing to express my gratitude for showcasing the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program’s support of faculty-student collaborations in UCI Magazine (“Research A to Z,” page 14). We will continue to make you proud, you have further energized me to do more.

Said Shokair
Research director
Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, UCI

We Want to Hear From You

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Common Grounds

While students can now spend hours playing video games in UCI’s new eSports arena, during the campus’s earliest days, Gateway Commons (now Gateway Study Center) and the adjacent plaza were the places to be. Designed by architect William Pereira, the commons included the campus’s main cafeteria and spaces where students could gather to study or socialize. In fact, the first graduation ceremony was held inside on June 25, 1966. Outside, Gateway Plaza has been a hub of activity since its completion in 1965, with countless pep rallies, cheerleading tryouts, protests, memorials and other events. Today, it remains a central area for students to congregate and share ideas.

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A Record-Setting 100,000 Applications

UCI is No. 1 in the University of California system for its jump in freshman hopefuls and for in-state minority bids. A diverse group of 102,210 students applied for fall 2017, and that number—a campus record—is expected to grow since the count for transfer applications was still being finalized at press time. “These spectacular results represent exactly what we have set out to achieve—sending the message to all California residents that an exceptional UC education is accessible to them and that UCI is where they want to be,” said UCI Chancellor Howard Gillman.

Additional highlights:

- **Count so far:** 85,053 freshman applicants, 17,157* transfer applicants
- **Closing the gap:** UCI is behind UCLA by just 387 in the number of California-resident freshman applicants. For fall 2016, the gap was 1,312, and in 2015, it was 2,767.
- **Leading the growth:** UCI had the largest increase in all UC campuses in freshman applications (7,272).
- **Outpacing the system:** UCI saw 10 percent growth in California-resident applicants and 9 percent growth overall, compared with 6 percent and 3 percent, respectively, systemwide.

* pending finalization at press time

“Out our data provide additional evidence that deep space travel poses a real and unique threat to the integrity of neural circuits in the brain.”

Charles Limoli, professor of radiation oncology

NBC News

Oct. 10, 2016

Eco-Friendly Fleet

UCI will be the first college campus in the nation to convert its student buses to an all-electric fleet. The Anteater Express shuttle service, run by the Associated Students of UCI, is acquiring 20 buses from BYD (Build Your Dreams) for $15 million. They’ll be built at the company’s Lancaster plant and roll onto campus for the 2017-18 academic year, joining UCI’s hydrogen electric bus to provide more than 2 million rides each year. Going all-electric supports the University of California’s pledge to emit net-zero greenhouse gases from buildings and vehicles by 2025. UCI will slash tons of carbon dioxide and harmful soot annually by replacing diesel with electric buses. “Thanks to a phenomenal partnership between our student organization and the divisions of Student Affairs and Administrative & Business Services, we will move our students this fall in a fleet of zero-tailpipe-emission vehicles—and be the first university in the country to do so,” said Dan Dooros, associate vice chancellor of student affairs.

New ICS Dean

Marios Papaefthymiou—an expert in the design of energy-efficient, high-performance computers—began his term as dean of The Donald Bren School of Information & Computer Sciences in January.

Previously, Papaefthymiou was chair of computer science & engineering at the University of Michigan, a position he had held since 2011. He also served as director of the campus’s Advanced Computer Architecture Laboratory from 2000 to 2011. In addition to his academic achievements, Papaefthymiou co-founded Cyclos Semiconductor, a developer of energy-efficient resonant clocking technologies that allow computers to function at high levels with drastically reduced power consumption.

“Learning for Life”

Students take a break in the courtyard of the new, five-story Continuing Education building, which opened last fall. Completion of the 76,000-square-foot facility follows another significant development: the renaming of UCI Extension as the UCI Division of Continuing Education. According to Gary W. Matkin, who has served as dean of the unit since 2001, these two milestones reflect strong momentum for what he calls the “60-year curriculum”—a pursuit of lifelong learning. “This building is the culmination of more than five decades of growth and achievement for the continuing education arm of the university,” he said.
SPOTLIGHT

Vice Chancellor for Business Operations

Ronald Cortez has been named vice chancellor for administrative & business services. Cortez, who begins his new role Feb. 13, brings a wealth of experience in the public sector, such as managing multibillion-dollar budgets and spearheading innovative ideas to streamline large-scale enterprises and improve efficiency. “My goal is to foster an environment of encouraging new administrative ideas and innovation,” he said.

Previously, Cortez was vice president of administration & finance and chief financial officer at San Francisco State University. From 2008 to 2013, he was associate vice chancellor for administrative services at UC Santa Barbara. Prior to that, Cortez was deputy county executive officer for Santa Barbara County. He’s a U.S. Air Force veteran.

Isn’t It Grand?

Greg Louganis ’81 was a grand marshal of the 128th Rose Parade, themed “Echoes of Success,” on Jan. 2. The four-time Olympic gold medalist, considered to be the greatest male diver of all time, shared the role with fellow Southern California Olympic legends Janet Evans (swimming, shown at center) and Allyson Felix (track and field). The trio have been strong proponents of Los Angeles’ bid to host the 204 Summer Games. Louganis, an HIV/AIDS activist and LGBT rights advocate, is reportedly the first openly gay individual to serve as a Tournament of Roses grand marshal. “I hope it inspires people,” Louganis told the Pasadena Star-News, “and that they know they are loved.”

“As much as I am upset with the efforts of Republican legislators to make it harder to register and vote, I don’t think that’s the primary explanation for the Democrats’ failure at the top of the ticket.”

Richard L. Hasen, Chancellor’s Professor of Law and leading election scholar

The New York Times

Nov. 12, 2016

MIDI Music

Pamela Z, a pioneer in solo vocal performance with electronics, uses gesture-recognition MIDI devices to control music and video during a show in UCI’s Winifred Smith Hall. Part of the Gassmann Electronic Music Series, the evening event included short pieces from her concert repertoire as well as excerpts from larger works such as “Baggage Allowance” and “This Impossible Building.”

The performance incorporated live webcam video “to create a cacophony of sounds to make music,” says Chris Dobrian, a professor of music and founder of the annual series. “It was strange and beautiful, and she did everything live. She created minisymphonies singing and speaking. It was a very experimental show – but spectacular.”

The Gassmann series comprises concerts and lectures focused on computers and music and is a component of the integrated composition, improvisation and technology graduate program. Says Dobrian: “As director of the computer music laboratories, I’ve thought it essential to be always bringing in ideas, scholars, researchers, composers and performers from outside the department.”

A Clinical Trial in South America to Cure Diabetes

Jonathan Lakey is on a mission: freeing people with Type 1 diabetes from daily insulin injections and developing a long-term treatment for this devastating chronic disease that affects about 33 million people worldwide.

In his lab, the UCI professor of surgery and biomedical engineering is creating cell clusters called islets (right), which can be transplanted into the pancreas to stimulate insulin production without immune system rejection. The cells, cultivated from a pig’s pancreas, show promise but have yet to be approved in the U.S. for patient studies. (Lakey is also working on manipulating human stem cells into islets.)

So Lakey is collaborating with scientists and surgeons at Argentina’s Eva Perón Hospital and the National University of General San Martín, which have received government approval and financial support to transplant Lakey’s distinctive islet cells into Type 1 diabetics.

The Buenos Aires team first contacted Lakey last year after hearing of his work, and together they’re establishing a clinical trial that also can meet U.S. Food & Drug Administration standards for safety and efficacy. That way, Lakey adds, a successful treatment trial in Argentina can be replicated here. “This could put us years ahead of the curve,” he says.
Saving Our Planet
Human modification of the Earth’s landscape is the most serious threat to the environment, says evolutionary biologist Tim Bradley.

How does one become involved with the largest environmental causes in recent California history? UCI biologist Tim Bradley started small. In the 1970s, he – then a young assistant professor at UCI – was studying the miniscule brine flies and brine shrimp in Mono Lake’s salt marshes as its water was increasingly being drained for distant urban use. The unfolding environmental damage led to the Save Mono Lake movement, for which Bradley helped provide the scientific evidence that was used to get a court order stopping the pumping. Nearly 30 years later, Bradley – now a professor of ecology & evolutionary biology – is focused on averting a public health disaster at the Salton Sea. And the clock is ticking. On Jan. 1, 2018, Colorado River water diverted to the sea will instead be sent to urban water districts, an action that will shrink the sea, kill off most remaining fish, destroy a fertile bird habitat and release a plume of toxic dust over the region. To help avoid these calamities, Bradley founded UCI’s Salton Sea Initiative, which brings together multidisciplinary research, teaching and service resources to tackle the matter.

He sat down with UCI Magazine recently to talk about the Salton Sea project, the role nature should play in our lives … and his backyard.

Q: What first interested you in the Salton Sea?
Bradley: I was doing research on mosquitoes that live in the sea marshes. And as I explored the growing problem in more detail, I realized that there were environmental justice and economic issues and both engineering and biological problems. From this came our Salton Sea Initiative.

Q: What needs to happen to save the Salton Sea?
Bradley: One aspect is trying to feed the fish, which are threatened by the rapid increase in water salinity. Another is the people whose public health could be threatened by the toxic lake dust. The way to solve both is to build marshes along the shore as the sea recedes to cover the dust and produce fish habitats. And that creates habitats for the migrating birds. We can solve the public health and environmental issues simultaneously, but it does require engagement and money – and a lot of work.

Q: Are you drawing upon your Mono Lake experience in your current work with the Salton Sea?
Bradley: Absolutely. It’s incredibly parallel. In both cases, the environmental issues of shrinking and increased salinity threaten(ed) public health. And in both cases, the reason(s) was water being transferred away to urban areas.

Q: You were born and raised in Oklahoma, a rural state. How did that spark your love of biology?
Bradley: Even though we lived in Oklahoma City, our home backed up to a creek and a lot of wild land. I could go out at any time and wander along the creek and look at turtles and catch fish and frogs. I was much closer to nature than the average person. That nature path resonated with me – and still does.

Q: You came of age in the late 1960s and early ’70s – the dawn of the environmental movement. How inspirational was that to you?
Bradley: It was very inspirational, because of my love of nature. I was appalled to see how much damage we were doing – and continue to do – to the Earth. Biologists in general and field biologists in particular see this as an era in which mankind has changed the planet and, in doing so, significantly damaged our biological systems. This went from being a wild planet to one managed by humans.

Q: What do you think people should know about the natural world around them?
Bradley: In the past, people had a sense of the natural world because they operated in it. But we’ve separated ourselves from that so much. I remember a bumper sticker in the ’60s that said, “Have you thanked a green plant today?” Everything that we eat and all the oxygen we breathe derives from a plant. Our lives are absolutely dependent on green plants. Now there are biology majors to whom I have to explain this.

Q: Which is more damaging to life on Earth: pollution, climate change or human domination of the planet’s resources?
Bradley: Human modification of the landscape is the most important issue globally. The fact that we have plowed all over the prairies, that we’re cutting down a huge proportion of forests, that we have harvested so much out of the sea that we’ve actually depleted entire species – these things have a more profound effect than climate change.

Q: Do you have a favorite plant?
Bradley: It’s not very neat. I’m told that there are two kinds of gardeners. One of them is someone who loves design, and the other is someone who loves plants. I’m more of a plant-lover type. We have plants to support insects at the base of the food chain. We also have fruit trees – citrus, plum and apple – and tropical flowering plants, which are unique to this environment.

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Q: One of the issues biologists face is explaining the theory of evolution to people who reject the idea. How do you address this?
Bradley: What I try to make people aware of is that evolution occurs, and it is an absolutely essential part of biology. It doesn’t address the question of whether God exists. These are two fundamentally different ideas. I have no idea how life originated. What I’m arguing about is whether fish can evolve, bacteria can evolve and fruit flies can evolve. They do. When it becomes a societal or religious matter, that’s when it becomes very difficult.

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Fran hobbles around on a walker in one of her lives, her steps slow and tentative. She is just shy of 90. Her hands tremble with Parkinson’s disease, and her eyesight is blurred by macular degeneration.

It’s her other life that brings a spark to those aging eyes. In that one, Fran bounds across a ballroom dance floor like someone in her 20s. She executes the precise moves of tai chi. She is a click away from dozens of friends.

Many people probably would regard the first scenario as Fran’s real life and the second one – which she enjoys as Fran Serenade in Second Life, an immersive, three-dimensional digital environment shared by the avatars of thousands of other participants – as fantasy. Don’t tell Fran. You will get a gentle but firm rebuke.

“It feels real to me,” says Fran from her Long Beach retirement home. “It just added a dimension to my life that I never had before.”

You won’t get an argument from Tom Boellstorff, a UCI anthropology professor who studies Fran and hundreds of other people in Second Life. He maintains that terms such as “real” and “virtual” make a distinction in people’s lives that doesn’t really exist.

“This is part of a debate that goes well beyond Second Life,” says Boellstorff, who began surveying Second Life inhabitants in 2004. “Even in our physical world, not everything we do is real. And not everything we do online is unreal.

“You can lose real money on the internet. If you’re learning German online, it’s still a real experience. Even if it’s online, you still feel real emotions.”
'Something Very Different'

Only about 200 people could be found in Second Life when Boellstorff started his research. Now as many as 60,000 individuals are exploring the virtual world’s many “islands” at a time.

He uses the same tools to examine people’s lives that anthropologists would employ in any environmental setting — interviewing people, observing their interactions — but Boellstorff’s realm is the internet.

“I wanted to do something very different from traditional anthropological field work, and something that didn’t have a connection to what I had been doing,” says Boellstorff, who joined UCI’s anthropology department in 2002 and subsequently published a pioneering book on gay and lesbian Indonesians. “It’s a real fun twist to the research.”

He shifted his focus to Second Life residents with disabilities about four years ago, specifically, how they use technology to do things they can’t in the physical world.

Before entering Second Life, each participant selects an avatar — a graphical image that will represent him — or herself — and a fictitious name. Many people, including Fran, are hesitant to reveal their real names for privacy and other reasons, wishing to keep the two lives separate.

Boellstorff picked Tom Bukowski.

Two years ago, when he published Coming of Age in Second Life, Boellstorff was surprised by the stereotypical responses to his book and subjects. People too often believed that virtual-world residents were simply escaping reality.

“They certainly don’t have people like Fran in mind when they say that,” he says. Fran and the hundreds of other Second Life participants Boellstorff has interviewed enjoy a rich social life online. “My friends in Second Life are just as real as friends in real life,” Fran says. “I’ve met people from other countries and all over the nation.”

“In our physical world, not everything we do is real. And not everything we do online is unreal.”

UCI anthropologist Tom Boellstorff studies hundreds of individuals in Second Life through his avatar, Tom Bukowski.

Engaging Mirror Neurons

One thing Boellstorff didn’t expect to learn in his latest project: The benefits of Second Life don’t exist solely in the mind.

In the strange alchemy of the brain, Fran found she could do things she once dismissed as impossible. Somehow, watching her avatar perform a difficult tai chi move planted the suggestion that maybe she could too.

Soon, she did.

“Looking at what my avatar was doing, I started to notice that my leg muscles felt as if I were actually using them, and gradually, I became physically stronger,” Fran recalls. “Crossing the street became a bit easier. The curb that once seemed a mile high was more manageable.”

“I could see my body taking on strength,” she says. “I could move better. I could walk better.”

Her daughter agrees.

“One of the most remarkable things we noticed seven years ago, when Mom first entered the virtual world, is that her strength, balance and other Parkinson’s symptoms improved,” says Fran’s daughter, who joined Second Life herself and adopted the avatar name Barbie Alchemi. “She told us she began to feel as young as her avatar looked.”

“When I saw the changes in Mom, I realized we needed to use Second Life to help others with Parkinson’s,” Barbie says. “She and Fran founded Creations for Parkinson’s to raise money for research. Barbie built a virtual island in Second Life called Creations Park where visitors can dance, swim like a mermaid, ride horseback and ice skate.

So what’s really happening in Fran’s brain? Barbie suggests it could be a phenomenon related to mirror neurons, which she learned about during research on her mom’s illness.

“As children, our brains develop as we observe our parents and imitate their actions,” she says. “Mirror neurons can continue to change our brains — and perhaps our bodies — at any age.”

This was also experienced by Jadyn Firehawk, the avatar name for a former environmental sciences professor with disabilities whom Boellstorff has studied.

“My brain is inside my avatar seeing what my avatar sees.”

UCI anthropologist Tom Boellstorff studies hundreds of individuals in Second Life through his avatar, Tom Bukowski.

Fran, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease, says her online experiences have improved her physical and emotional strength.
Hickok, professor of cognitive sciences and author of The Myth of Mirror Neurons: The Real Neuroscience of Communication & Cognition. "To really settle the matter," he says, "it would be great to do a controlled clinical trial on this, but I'm not a medical researcher."

**Life ‘Building’ Therapy**

Jadyn created a virtual Yosemite in Second Life, modeled after the physical Yosemite, complete with the sounds of birds and waterfalls. She used to hike in the valley as a professor. But enjoying its natural beauty the conventional way is no longer an option. Years of stress triggered PTSD symptoms related to her traumatic childhood.

"I just became overwhelmed," she says of the publish-or-perish academic world. Depression and a suicide attempt left her unable to work.

Through Virtual Ability, a Second Life community for people with disabilities and their families, she discovered Ethnographia, an island Boellstorff set up a year ago. Visitors use art and building tools to work through their difficulties.

"Instead of writing about your experience, you can build your own experience," Boellstorff says. "Almost anything you want." Jadyn is currently constructing a museum that showcases significant events in her life.

"It’s helped me in a lot of ways," she says of her new "build," the Second Life term for virtual worlds participants craft out of wood, stone and other materials. "Second Life helped me to cope."

Meanwhile, Fran has lost some of the progress she initially made. Walking is more difficult, as is hearing. "Parkinson’s just takes away one thing and then another," she says. Still, her neurologist is astonished, her daughter says.

"She told us she’s never seen any other patient with Parkinson’s disease for 12 years who’s doing this well," Barbie says.

"Second Life just added so much to my life," says Fran, who still ventures online occasionally to dance or meet friends. "I’ve had experiences I never would have had otherwise. I call it the fountain of youth."
The blind monk prowls the jungle, using sonar and karate kicks to stalk and pulverize his enemies. Nearby, his four teammates – endowed with magical powers and Rambo-grade weaponry – battle a platoon of exotic beasts, including a land shark that bursts out of the ground and swallows everything in its path.

A Bold New Sports Franchise

Seeing video games as the next frontier in college athletics, UCI launches player scholarships and a first-of-its-kind arena

By Roy Rivenburg | Photos by Steve Zylius

These and other peculiar creatures run rampant in “League of Legends,” a wildly popular video game that some predict will overtake football as the superstar of college sports. Already, the game’s pro playoffs pack stadiums and draw online crowds that reportedly rival viewership for the World Series.

Reading these electronic tea leaves, UCI made headlines last fall by fielding the nation’s first school-sponsored eSports team at a public university. The campus wooed top players with scholarships and built a trailblazing computer arena, all financed by corporate donations.
This is not going to be just another sport.”

One of his professors assigned a paper on any publicly traded company. Deppe chose Irvine-based Blizzard Entertainment, a video game powerhouse. The industry, he soon discovered, was exploding. Back at UCI, he stumbled across the school’s mammoth gaming club, which had scooped up three straight “League of Legends” championships and hosted sold-out affairs at the Bren Events Center and Orange County fairgrounds. The group was such a phenomenon that students from South Korea, Atlanta and other far-flung locales enrolled here, in part, just to join it. Coupled with the university’s thriving computer game science major, the club had propelled UCI to No. 1 on College Magazine’s 2015 list of the best schools for gamers.

Holy moly,” Deppe thought. “I bet nobody at UCI knows about all this.”

He was right. “I couldn’t even spell eSports,” Parham jokes. But once Deppe’s gaming idea hit the radar of UCI bigwigs, things moved at breakneck speed – nine months instead of the usual two or three years it takes for a major initiative to materialize. Deppe, who now serves as acting director of UCI’s fledgling video game science department.

Great Moments in Video Game History

1950: A computer named Bertie the Brain plays tic-tac-toe with visitors at a Canadian exhibit.

1954: After going us the A-bomb, Los Alamos employees cook up the first computer-based video game.

1962: “Spacewar!” debuts at MIT. It’s regarded as the first computer-based video game.

1967: Ralph Baer, now known as the father of video games, develops his first prototype. Five years later, Magnavox turns Baer’s blueprint into Odyssey, the first home video game console.

1968: UCI launches its pioneering computer science department.

1972: Atari introduces “Pong” as an arcade game. The pilot version, operating at a tavern in Sunnyvale, lures so many players that it becomes jammed with quarters and stops working. A home version rolls out three years later.

1978: Japan’s “Space Invaders” is such a hit that it causes a nationwide coin shortage in the island nation.

1980: Inspired by a missing slice of pizza, “Pac-Man” debuts. It was originally called “Puck-Man.”

1981: Nintendo unveils “Donkey Kong” and a character named “Jumpman,” who later becomes “Mario.”

1982: Disney capitalizes on the video game trend with the movie “Tron.”

(continued on page 25)
You get immersed in fantasy worlds and the lives of the characters you’re playing. It’s like literature, except you have a say in what happens.”
A Doorway to Anteater Football?

If the idea catches on, could UCI be upstaged by a bigger school?

Not likely, Deppe says, citing various Anteater trump cards and selling points. Geographically, the campus is surrounded by such industry stalwarts as Blizzard, Amazon Game Studios and Riot, which often hire recent graduates. Academically, UCI’s pioneering information & computer sciences school dates back to 1968, and its computer game science major boasts the largest number of undergrads in the U.S. From that milieu, the campus’s vibrant video game scene bubbled up organically and would be difficult for a rival college to replicate, he says.

Although nearby USC enjoys similar advantages and could seemingly pose a threat, Deppe contends that the Trojans’ main focus is football. “If you want to be a rock-star video game player, you’ll go to a gaming school, not a football school,” he says. “Anteater players will be celebrities on campus in a couple of years.”

Still, Deppe and his staff aren’t taking UCI’s ahead-of-the-curve status for granted. To bolster funding, they commissioned an eSports anteater logo for merchandise. And they hope to sell ads on team jerseys and during live reports from the arena’s webcasting studio. Eventually, they’d like to expand beyond “League of Legends” and launch scholarship teams for other popular video games, such as “Overwatch.”

Also on the drawing board are summer camps and programs designed to coax more women and underrepresented minorities to eSports, which tend to be dominated by white and Asian men at the professional level. Noting that only a handful of females applied for UCI’s inaugural “League of Legends” scholarships, Deppe concedes that the current team lineup “isn’t a model of diversity, but we’re taking steps to change that.”

eSports might even revue dreams of Anteater football. Atari co-founder Bushnell recently debuted a virtual reality system that can be played on large outdoor fields. The time is near, he says, when a virtual reality football team at UCI could run plays against opponents in Oregon without either side leaving home—or suffering concussions. Says Deppe: “Welcome to the next frontier in intercollegiate competition. It has tremendous potential, and UCI is leading the way.”


UCI’s eSports Elite

The campus is fielding two “League of Legends” teams for the 2017 season, which got underway in January. The Gold squad, shown here, is competing in a national tournament program sponsored by Riot Games. The Blue Team — consisting of Ruifeng Zhou, Peter Brown, Jeffrey Du, Kendrick Chen, Kyle Wilson and Xingmin Bao — is playing in a lower-tier eSports league. In addition to bragging rights, the winners receive scholarship prizes worth thousands of dollars.
Gaming and entertainment giant Electronic Arts has a winning hand when it recruits new talent. Who would turn down a job that pays you to play games and create fun? But it has another ace in the hole: software engineer and UCI alumna Laura Wright Teclemariam ’04, who attends as many recruitment events as she can.

“Recruiting isn’t part of my core job responsibilities,” says Teclemariam, senior product manager for Bay Area-based EA, “but I think it’s important for students to see a female minority in technology, so they realize some of us have made it into this field.”

She directs for EA’s internal engagement and advertising platform, a big job at this gaming superpower, which has 8,500 employees worldwide. Black Enterprise recently named her one of the top 10 African Americans in the video game industry.

Although gaming is popular with African Americans — according to Nielsen figures, they’re the second-largest ethnic group to play, after Asian Americans — only 2.5 percent of game developers are black. The statistics are troubling. A Black Enterprise article says, “Not only are African American tech professionals..."
missing out on obtaining some of the coolest jobs ever, and also there has been an issue with the stereotyping and negative portrayals of black characters in games. Like many African Americans in the field, Teclemariam hopes the tide will turn and is trying to help make that happen. "I take responsibility to pave the way for other young girls and boys of color, [to] let them know there are role models that look like them," she says.

From Playing ‘Pac-Man’ to Engineering

Her own entrance into the field was almost a fluke. Raised by a single mother in Vallejo, Teclemariam always loved games, playing "Pac-Man" on an Atari 2800 when she was 5 years old. At 7, she learned to type on a computer when her mom bought a Xerox word processor. In middle school, her mother bribed her into getting a’s by promising Nintendo video games as rewards. "I didn’t know at the time that I would enjoy working on video games as much as I enjoyed playing them," Teclemariam says. And she certainly hadn’t considered it a possible career path.

In high school, she set her sights on becoming a doctor, which seemed to her to be the best path to the American dream. "My mother worked so hard," she says. "I wanted to make her proud." There was just one problem, Teclemariam learned after taking a job at a local clinic that had a program for high school students interested in the medical field. The first time she saw blood drawn, she grew nauseated and nearly fainted. "Medicine definitely wasn’t for me," Teclemariam says now, laughing at the memory.

Teclemariam earned a B.S. in electrical engineering at UCI, which had grown its programs. "I’ve always had my mom’s tenacity and ability to push through," Teclemariam says. "But it’s rough when you’re the only one. It was scary at first to feel alone culturally and not share any cultural moments with anyone in my department." Motivation from UCI mentors such as Robin Jeffers, director of Undergraduate Student Affairs for UCI’s Henry Samueli School of Engineering, helped her thrive. She also became involved with the campus’s Center for Opportunities & Diversity in Engineering, which works specifically with women and underrepresented minorities.

Jeffers was impressed by Teclemariam’s perseverance and strong leadership and communication skills. "She was collaborative, initiating several study groups that included students from a variety of backgrounds," Jeffers says. "She brought the fun, but she made sure that work/studying was the priority."

She recalls that Teclemariam tutored, mentored and worked with her peers at CODE. "She was competitive," Jeffers says. "It was always with the goal of everyone improving." College left a lasting impression on Teclemariam, along with many good memories. "I loved the clubs, the organizations, the resources that the university gave us," she says. But she acknowledges the challenges. "It had been so rough that I cried when I crossed that stage at graduation."

"At a Crossroads"

Teclemariam spent the next two years at Deloitte Consulting in Costa Mesa, but her goals were evolving. "I was at a crossroads," she remembers. "I wondered about getting an MBA, but I felt like I belonged in the emerging field of entertainment tech. Social media was just getting started, and people were trying to figure out how to use it in terms of entertainment."

She opted to strike out on her own, establishing Avid Exposure LLC, a North Hollywood startup that merged a digital company with a marketing and advertising agency. Among Teclemariam’s clients: Monster Energy and Interscope Geffen A&M Records. "That startup made me the person I am today," she says. "I learned so much about hiring, taxes, marketing, sales and operations – from A to Z. In retrospect, if I’d done some things differently, I’d be like Mark Zuckerberg now."

Teclemariam managed Avid Exposure for five years, but her personal life was changing. She had gotten married, and her husband, Nerays, a chemical engineer, had a job in the Bay Area. With two young daughters and a home in Northern California, Teclemariam had a long commute to the office in Southern California. So she reluctantly decided to close the business and move on. "I have empathy for any woman entrepreneur with kids," she says.

But good things awaited in the Bay Area. Teclemariam became involved with Tapjoy, a $100 million startup, serving as product manager for its developer platform. And then two headhunters reached out from EA. "I thought, ‘Two headhunters? They must really want me,’" she says.

The company – known for such popular games as "Madden NFL," "FIFA," "Star Wars: Galaxy of Heroes" and "The Sims" – allowed her to get back into entertainment through video games. "It’s an exciting sector to talk about and be passionate toward every day," Teclemariam says. "I decided to become a product manager because I wanted to be the customer’s voice and help the technical team build a product that customers will not only use, but love."

She also plans to keep going to those recruiting events. "When I was growing up, girls were never targeted," she says. "A lot of my efforts revolve around targeting them. Even if they don’t get a chance to talk to me, they can see my face. They can see there’s a woman of color there."

"Recruiting isn’t part of my core job responsibilities, but I think it’s important for students to see a female minority in technology, so they realize some of us have made it into this field."
Playing With Gender Stereotypes

Experts take aim at trite assumptions about male and female gamers

Who plays video games in the United States? Don’t answer that question too quickly. You’re likely to be wrong.

Although 60 percent of Americans assume gaming is mainly a pastime for young males, a recent Pew Research Center study found that equal numbers of men and women are involved.

That may not surprise players on campus — or the estimated 75 million female players in the U.S. — but video game stereotypes die hard. In fact, relatively few young males actually play. The Pew study found that male gamers between the ages of 10 and 25 represent only 15 percent of the market.

“People have some entrenched stereotypes,” says Constance Steinkuehler, a digital media expert and pioneer in video game study, who joined the UCI faculty in January. “They presume girls aren’t competitive and don’t play, but there’s not a lot of basis for it.”

That doesn’t mean male and female players are equally drawn to the same games, however.

“Statistics indicate they often choose different games,” Steinkuehler says, referring to the phenomenon of “casual games,” a relatively new genre that created a seismic shift in the industry a few years ago. Intended for — as the name suggests — the casual player, these include a slew of mobile games such as the super-popular “Candy Crush Saga.” The easy-to-access games don’t require the time commitment necessary with the more complex “hardcore” games.

“Some of the [male] hardcore gamers used to be critical of these kinds of games, which are popular with women, because they didn’t see them as being hardcore enough,” Steinkuehler says. “But there’s money there for the industry; casual games are a huge market that draws both women and men.”

There are other differences between male and female players, but research indicates no gap in ability. “Women advance at least as fast as men do in … games,” says a 2016 UC Davis study in the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. “This stereotype of female players as inferior is not only false, but also a potential cause for unequal participation in digital gaming.”

One issue for female players is that they’re rarely represented on the professional/celebrity circuit. “But it’s not because women have no aptitude for gaming,” says Kathy Chiang, one of the founders of UCI’s Association of Gamers. “It’s hard for a woman to feel comfortable when there aren’t any female role models,” she says. Chiang, who graduated from UCI in March 2016 and now manages the campus’s new eSports arena, “All of this could be a result of the history of developers and publishers marketing their games specifically to men.”

“People have some entrenched stereotypes. They presume girls aren’t competitive and don’t play, but there’s not a lot of basis for it.”
“E.E.G. Kiss,” by Karen Lancel and Hermen Maat

Viewers and participants wear devices to measure brainwaves during a kiss. The biofeedback data is projected in the space.

Technology Is Part of Life – and Art

Beall Center exhibit showcases the few constraints of ‘expanded media arts’ and how the field intertwines with the human experience.

By Shari Roan | Photos by Will Tee Yang

Winter 2017
I’m standing before a wall-sized screen in a darkened corner of the Beall Center for Art + Technology. A blend of amorphous human figures in rainbow shades begins to take shape. Within minutes, I see my own silhouette emerging on the screen, first in ghostly white, then slowly changing color and blending into the forms of people who have come before me. While the UCI venue’s “Embodied Encounters” exhibition feels like a cross between a really cool science center show and an interactive art display, it’s ultimately representative of a novel art movement that incorporates technology to express the 21st-century world. While the art-tech movement is not new, the growing presence of digital devices in everyday life has more artists pondering technology to express the 21st-century world. While the UCI venue’s “Embodied Encounters” exhibition feels like a cross between a really cool science center show and an interactive art display, it’s ultimately representative of a novel art movement that incorporates technology to express the 21st-century world. While the art-tech movement is not new, the growing presence of digital devices in everyday life has more artists pondering technology to express the 21st-century world.

The docent accompanying me, a freshman drama student named Isaiah Tadros, smiles at my reaction. “It raises questions about everyday life, maybe suggesting that we should all slow down,” he says, noting that it requires a minute or two to see one’s silhouette appear on the screen and become vibrant with color. “All of these exhibits produce many different interpretations. Most of the people who come here say the show is really different than they thought it would be.”

And just a gadget, that isn’t going deeper into what art needs to do?” Expanded media arts pieces can encompass three-dimensional printers, lasers, cameras or computers. The trend is here to stay, because technology is now inexorably linked to the human experience, says May, a London-based artist who created his own custom software for “Shadows of Light.”

“Technology provides radical new tools for artists to explore and experiment with,” he says. “Technology is a human creation; it’s a mirror reflecting our creativity and inventiveness, and that brings all the trappings of the best and worst aspects of humanity. This is not a new trend, of course. Artists have always explored the rough edges of humanity’s relationship to the universe we inhabit, as well as between ourselves.”

Some visitors find expanded media arts more compelling than contemplating a 19th-century impressionist landscape. Familian notes: “I’m interested in works that engage all our senses, not just our eyes,” he says. “You can contemplate a painting, but our world is no longer static. This art form reflects the complexity of the world we live in.”

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Expanding the Possible

Part of the intrigue of blending art and technology is that it has few constraints. Even the name of the medium is open for discussion. Co-curator David Familian, artistic director of the Beall Center, calls it “expanded media arts.” “To me, it’s not about what technology you’re using, because what you’re really doing is adding new possibilities to a medium,” says Familian, who has been curating for almost nine years, with a focus on digital technology and art. “It expands on what’s possible. But the work still has to be about something; the artist has to have an idea. If it’s just a gadget, that isn’t going deeper into what art needs to do.”

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“Tapping STEM Fields

The “Embodied Encounters” exhibition, which closed last month, featured works by seven contemporary artists from across the globe. “Cardiomorphologies,” a 2007 installation by Australian artist George Khut, creates geometric shapes through the viewer’s real-time heart and breath rate data. It comprises a floor-to-ceiling screen with video images that are controlled by the heartbeat and respiration of the participant, seated a few feet away in a comfortable leather chair and wearing a pulse oximeter on a fingertip.

Another display, from the Amsterdam-based duo of Karen Lancel and Herren Maat, invites visitors to wear electroencephalogram headsets that measure brainwave activity. They either kiss or watch another couple kiss, as the data – the participants’ sensory perceptions – are displayed visually as EEG waves.

A previous exhibition at the Beall Center, in the spring of 2016, explored the interface between biotechnology and art and featured “necklaces” containing synthetic amino acids and bacteria that produced energy to run a musical synthesizer.
“Time Lenses,” by Sha Xin Wei, Todd Ingalls and Julian Stein

The artists use live video to produce a rhythmic aspect to the activity of viewers in the space, projected on three screens.
“Artists have always explored the rough edges of humanity’s relationship to the universe we inhabit, as well as between ourselves.”

There are an increasing number of art programs around the country that teach computer programming and the creation of interactive art, he says. The trend is more popular in Europe, but shows up occasionally in the United States, with the Beall Center positioned as an ideal venue to explore the emerging medium. The spring 2016 exhibition featuring biotechnology was a joint effort of the Beall Center, the UCI Center for Complex Biological Systems and the campus’s Newkirk Center for Science & Society.

“We want to be the place people would come to see the way in which emerging arts are actually working,” says Stephen Barker, dean of UCI’s Claire Trevor School of the Arts. “Our students are increasingly well-trained in their interfaces with technology. We have to make sure that, as a research arm of a research university, we stay one step ahead. We want to make the Beall Center not only a showcase but an academic program to create possibilities for the training of a new generation of artists working across metadisciplinary space.”

He encourages faculty from other disciplines, such as the STEM fields, to collaborate with the arts programs. It’s a myth, Barker says, that people can’t be logical, critical thinkers and also creative, accessing both the left brain and the right brain to reach new levels of intellectual productivity.

“We’re trying to be a catalyst for conversations between people who are not used to talking to each other but have common interests,” he says. “Everybody has this creative disposition, but it’s bred out of us. The School of the Arts is the place where you can rediscover it.”

“Usually, the artists possess a certain amount of technological know-how, Familiam says. “They’re not saying, ‘I’m going to call up a scientist and engage with him a little bit and make some art.’ Most artists in this area have long-term relationships with researchers,” he explains. “It’s about knowing what your medium is. We expect painters and sculptors to know their medium as well.”

May taught himself to code at age 8 and says he’s equally attracted to art and technology. He recognizes, however, that not every artist has sufficient training in such fields as computer coding. Recently, he released an open-source digital art platform for anyone to use.

“Artists are inspired by modern materials and feel free to tap into the expertise of people in other occupations to bring ideas to life, says Irish artist Rhona Byrne, who also exhibited in the “Embodied Encounters” show. “In my work, I try to rethink the capacities of materials,” she says. “Technology has always impacted how art is made, as it opens up new potential for stretching ideas. I like to collaborate with people from different disciplines to push the possibilities. Combining knowledge, technology and skills can have really exciting outcomes.”

Michael Iseri, J.D. ’15 calls himself hardheaded. His life path backs up that assertion. In high school, he was shot in the skull while walking with his twin brother. He lost nearly 3 pints of blood and had surgery to remove the embedded pellet-gun shot. A 1-inch difference in the bullet’s trajectory could have been lethal. Born with oromotor dyspraxia, which made it difficult for him to form words, Iseri overcame a severe speech impediment to graduate summa cum laude from UC Berkeley.

He doggedly applied to more than 15 law schools a year for three-plus years before being accepted at the UCI School of Law. Administrators of the LSAT had maintained that Iseri’s disabilities did not warrant any special testing accommodations – a ruling he labels “clear, outright discrimination” – so his scores were less than stellar. When UCI gave him a chance, he proved himself, graduating on time and passing the bar on his first try.

“All this has provided me a different perception of life than most people,” Iseri, 30, says today. “I have a greater appreciation and understanding of people’s stories, and I empathize with and relate to people who are struggling.”

Combing this perception and his education with a natural affinity for technology, he recently launched an enterprise called LAWPP that markets two mobile apps to lawyers and public-interest corporations. The Esq. A.I. computer application offers simplified versions of legal documents so that clients with learning disabilities, autism or language barriers can complete them in a way that promotes self-determination and respects their autonomy, Iseri says.

Essentially, Esq. A.I. utilizes a simple interface and custom artificial intelligence to automate almost any legal need. It enables anyone – from a seasoned attorney to a first-time client – to fill out legal documents, forms and letters quickly and correctly. For cybersecurity reasons, no contact is transmitted on the internet, ensuring that it remains under attorney/client control. The program can switch easily to many different languages, which is especially useful for pro bono and public-interest law clinics. LAWPP also provides guides with streamlined legal information and maps of local legal resources in California. The two published so far explore small-claims procedures in landlord/tenant and housing disputes, traffic citations, etc.

Iseri says his products will let attorneys set up mobile clinics focused on basic public-interest law out of an overnight bag – necessitating only a touch-screen tablet and a wireless printer.

“It’s like the automobile in the age of the horseshoe carriage,” he says. “More importantly, technology is an equalizer in terms of people with physical disabilities, ADHD or autism.”
Block Party

UCI sophomore Idara Akpakpa (left) and redshirt senior Victoria Dennis leap above the net to thwart a shot by UC Riverside in a 3-0 victory Oct. 22 at the Bren Events Center. The win was part of a three-match streak that also included Cal State Fullerton and Long Beach State.
Winter 2017

The quarter started with a reading of Homer’s Iliad, a work that begins with the supreme Greek hero, Achilles, sulking in his tent because the Greek commander, Agamemnon, has taken Achilles’ concubine, Briseis, to replace his own concubine, Chryseis, who for “theostrategic” reasons has been returned to her priest father. “Concubine” is a term commonly enough employed in Homer criticism for Briseis and Chryseis, but these two women are both prisoners of war, prisoners for life, taken as spoils by the victors and used for their pleasure. Another perfectly legitimate term for them is “sex slaves.”

Another phrase, with a contemporary echo, might be “comfort women.” This was the connection made independently by two different women of Korean descent in my section. Neither had a family member taken as a sex slave by the Japanese military in World War II. Both, as it happened, had only recently been touched by this matter, one of the two very profoundly, on a trip to South Korea, by a Korean art film on the subject. Homer is far from oblivious to the catastrophe that defeat in war was for captured women, and yet for him their plight is just one item on the list of inevitably ghastly consequences of war. Our era regards rape as avoidable even when war is not – not a simple aspect of war then but rather an instance of war crime.

Rape, New Criticism and the Humanities Core Course

By Jack Miles

The literary theory dubbed “New Criticism,” dominant in American academic and popular criticism half a century ago, has long since gone out of fashion, but I find its core insight – that the intent of an author is separable from the effect of the author’s work – validated again and again. Several such validations came at points in my teaching of a section of a recent Humanities Core Course on the theme of war.

The quarter started with a reading of Homer’s Iliad, a work that begins with the supreme Greek hero, Achilles, sulking in his tent because the Greek commander, Agamemnon, has taken Achilles’ concubine, Briseis, to replace his own concubine, Chryseis, who for “theostrategic” reasons has been returned to her priest father. “Concubine” is a term commonly enough employed in Homer criticism for Briseis and Chryseis, but these two women are both prisoners of war, prisoners for life, taken as spoils by the victors and used for their pleasure. Another perfectly legitimate term for them is “sex slaves.”

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Later in the quarter, we read Bertolt Brecht’s Mother Courage, a play in which, near the end, Katrina, the German protagonist’s good-hearted but simple-minded daughter, is raped. Brecht was a playwright virtually all of whose success has been due to effects other than those he intended. He did not want his plays’ audiences to love the heroes and hate the villains. He did not want them to embrace the victims and indict the perpetrators. As an orthodox Communist, he wanted to write plays whose audiences would recognize the entire dramatic personnel as trapped in an evil capitalist system in which they were all equally victimized. In the Cold War, accordingly, he stood with communist Russia and against capitalist America. But to his horror, at the 1949 Berlin premiere of Mother Courage, German women in the audience broke out in sobs at the rape scene, recalling the reign of terror rape that Berlin endured when it fell to the Red Army in 1945.

After Mother Courage, a male student whose German grandmother’s house had burned down during an American bombing observed that he had grown up in a world of fiction and cinema in which Germans were always villains, never heroes; always perpetrators, never – like Katrina – victims. Was there perhaps a rape victim among the German women in his extended family? The victim of an American soldier? The victim of a Russian? He never said, but I wondered. In retrospect, I might have asked, but the fact is that I didn’t. To the limited extent that as a section leader I was ever truly the author of my class, I not only never intended but about which, at times, I could scarcely speak.

Miles is professor emeritus of English and religious studies. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1996 for God: A Biography.

Rape, New Criticism and the Humanities Core Course

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Making an Impression

The Irvine Museum has donated its entire permanent collection to UCI, which will build a premier exhibit space on campus to showcase the artwork. James Irvine Swinden, president of The Irvine Museum, announced the transfer of the remarkable trove of California impressionist paintings – valued at about $17 million – in November.

“We are privileged to accept this gift, which not only renews a long and supportive relationship between UCI and the Irvine family, but also lays a foundation for advancing UCI as a destination for people who want to understand the world and human experience through California art,” says UCI Chancellor Howard Gillman. “Our ambition is to become the focus for the study and appreciation of California art. After all, what better place to be the steward of this genre than a campus of the University of California?”

The Irvine Museum was founded in 1992 by UCI benefactor Joan Irvine Smith, her mother, Athalie Richardson Irvine Clarke; and her son, James Irvine Swinden. It houses famous works of art dated from about 1890 to 1940 from such legendary painters as Frank Caprri, Anna Hills, Granville Redmond and William Wendt.

Until the campus identifies an alternative site, the artwork will continue to be displayed at the current location of The Irvine Museum, near John Wayne Airport. Tours of the exhibitions will remain free and open to the public.

“We are so pleased to contribute to the original vision for the campus outlined by its architect, William Pereira, which included an art museum,” Swinden says. “Our collection has attracted art lovers to more than 70 exhibitions since the museum opened 24 years ago, and it will provide the basis for a world-class museum that others who appreciate this important genre can support.”


“Ampy Sora Bridge,” by Franz A. Bischoff, oil on canvas, c. 1912

Courtesy of The Irvine Museum
Mogul Makers

Nurtured by UCI's Cove, alumna and her sister develop dolls to inspire the next generation of female business leaders

By Janet Wilson

These dolls wear high-top sneakers – not heels – and there’s no one named Ken in sight. They’re a diverse group of girls who are whizzes at computer coding, marketing, finance, robotics and graphics – and who use their skills to start successful businesses.

The Middle School Moguls are the brandchild of alumna Gina Heitkamp, MBA ’14 (above, right) and her sister, Jenae Heitkamp-Olivas. With backing from The Cove at UCI, the dolls debuted at 120 select Target stores across the U.S. for the 2016 holiday shopping season.

Heitkamp, 35, returned to school for her master’s degree after developing websites and social media platforms for myriad companies. For a 2014 student entrepreneur competition, she and her sister decided to write a children’s book about five girls whose online startup goes viral. When they conducted market research of 5- to 12-year-olds, the girls said, “Oh, yeah, a book would be great – but we want a doll.”

Heitkamp won the competition and used the $15,000 prize to have prototype dolls made. Her sister quit her job and moved back to Orange County with her family to work on the business full time. The five characters and corresponding storylines come straight from the sisters’ experiences. The dolls now include a social media influencer, a graphic designer, a financial wizard, an engineer and a coder. At first, they were dressed in business suits, but girls said they looked like moms.

“Through our research, we found kids wanted something more dynamic and characters that related to them and the way they look,” Heitkamp says. Now Jada the Graphics Guru sports a headband with cat ears, edgy safety pins and pink high-tops. McKinley the Business Boss wears tights of two different colors and a cutoff blazer over a tutu-style dress.

The company is in talks with a multinational cartoon company and several national retailers. While the road to success has been tough, Heitkamp says, “The Cove has been incredibly critical to our growth.” The sisters received free office space, “a la carte” legal and business mentoring, and investors. They were one of several teams picked to pitch their startup to cartoons and toys and educational applications for this, from after-school kids clubs or summer camps to cartoons and toys and educational products.

Their main goal, she emphasizes, is to encourage the next generation of female business leaders: “Seeing the little girls playing with the dolls, reading the stories and getting inspired is what really motivates us to keep moving forward.”

Heitkamp says. “We’re putting them on the map. It was a real high point.”

When the investors emerged from the pitch room that October day, the sisters had been selected for $250,000 in seed funding – the first in a series of investments that are putting them on the map. “It was a real high point,” Heitkamp says. “They sounded very much like one of the Middle School Moguls as she discusses what’s next. “We could be a global brand,” she says. “There are so many different applications for this, from after-school kids clubs or summer camps to cartoons and toys and educational products.”

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By the time kids are 7 or 8 years old, gender stereotypes on their heads, completing a $1.3 million round of funding last fall to fully develop their brand. Amid hundreds of the dolls in their Cove office, they describe their own path.

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“We had one prototype with a broken arm that I took with me,” Heitkamp recalls. “I had to convince the buyer that within 12 months we would be ready to ship them. It was terrible. But she did it. Her sister and others say Heitkamp is a skilled presenter. “Gina is terrific at meetings and pitching,” Heitkamp-Olivas says. “We have a great concept, but there’s a lot of great concepts out there. The reason we’ve gotten so far with all these big companies is because of her.”

John Kensey, a veteran investor who co-manages The Cove’s investment fund, also praised Heitkamp. She’s “one of the best young entrepreneurs I’ve ever worked with, and I’ve worked with a lot,” he says. “She’s a very quick learner, and I like the way she worked through that bad experience with the first manufacturer. She didn’t get flustered; she just put her head down and charged and came out of it fine.”

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Cynthia (Stokes) Gaudry '72, civil engineering
Her fingerprints turn up all over LAX— from the emergency defibrillator cabinets inside each terminal to a 2.5-mile elevated people mover scheduled to debut in 2023. As deputy executive director for planning and development at the airport, Cynthia Guidry oversees a staff of about 160 engineers, architects, planners and others working on various construction and improvement projects. "LAX is a city unto itself," says the Texas transplant, who moved to Los Angeles at age 5 and later attended Canyon High School in Anaheim Hills. After graduating, at UCI, Guidry began her career in sanitation for L.A.'s public works department but soon switched to aviation. She also earned an MBA from Pepperdine University. Her team is currently laying the groundwork for a $3.5 billion airport face-lift that includes remodeled terminals, a consolidated rental car center and the people mover, which will connect LAX to a Metro station.

Kevin Liang '01, neurobiology, Ph.D. '07, neurobiology & behavior
Designer lab coats and a domed university are two of the ideas Kevin Liang has helped bring to life as a health industry entrepreneur. Hailing from Vietnam, Liang was part of UCI’s first undergraduate neurobiology class before earning his doctorate and launching several companies. His stylized doctor/scientist apparel—which features a silky lining and waterproof pockets—was conceived when Liang was a grad student and “could not find a lab coat that I was excited to put on every day.” In 2011, he co-founded Ceresti Health, a Carlsbad-based startup that offers customized mobile tablets to assist and train families taking care of Alzheimer’s patients at home. The digital system provides access to a daily action plan, expert coaching and other resources. It also sets up a personalized collection of family photos, videos, favorite music and interactive activities intended to trigger soothing memories and lift the patient’s mood.

Willow Osage ’15, physics
Cheerleading and plasma physics might seem like an odd combo— unless you’re Willow Osage. Born on a hippie commune (known for making hallucinogens and nut butter) in Missouri’s Ozark Mountains, she later moved to Northern California with her parents and became captain of a nationally ranked high school cheer squad in Fremont. At UCI, Osage— whose last name was invented by her parents—researched plasma physics and submillimeter galaxies while working as a cheerleader camp instructor. After graduation, she landed an engineering job at Broadcom, then jumped to Irvine-based Clarify Communications, where she designs software and hardware to test high-speed semiconductor chips. In her off hours, Osage is studying for a master’s in electrical engineering at Cal State Fullerton. She also volunteers as a mentor to UCI’s physical sciences students.

Dion Shepherd Jr., M.A.S. ‘16, community & society
Going to jail isn’t normally considered a good career move, but Dion Shepherd Jr. thought it could help him better understand his ex-con and at-risk-youth clients. So the Detroit native voluntarily spent two months in the slammer as part of an AML undercover documentary series called “60 Days In.” The unrevealing experience wasn’t Shepherd’s first television gig. In 2013, he trained as a bounty hunter on “Dog and Beth.” On the Hunt,” then worked as a bail bondsman, security guard and youth counselor. More recently, he and his fiancée, Ashlee Wade— who’s studying at UCI for a master’s in legal & forensic psychology— started the Justice League Consulting Group, which aims to assist former inmates in finding jobs and acclimating back into society. The pair are also involved with gang prevention efforts.

In Memoriam
Ralph J. Cicerone, chancellor emeritus
Ralph J. Cicerone, UCI’s fourth chancellor and internationally acclaimed atmospheric chemist, died Nov. 5 at the age of 73. His research helped shape environmental policy at the highest levels nationally and globally. Chancellor from 1998 to 2005, Cicerone oversaw a rapid rise in UCI’s academic capabilities, as well as the construction of major research halls and the $375 million teaching hospital at UC Irvine Medical Center. He left UCI after being elected president of the National Academy of Sciences, where he wielded international clout on scientific issues until his retirement in 2016. “For his powerful and profound work as a chemist and Earth system scientist, and for his recognized stature in his discipline, we in academia salute Ralph Cicerone,” said UCI’s sixth and current chancellor, Howard Gillman. “For his courageous work uncovering the causes and effects of climate change, the world owes him a debt of gratitude. And from UCI, we offer Ralph our own special thanks for his extraordinary contributions to the global preeminence of this institution.”
Cicerone arrived at UCI in 1989 and was founding chair of the Department of Earth System Science and dean of the School of Physical Sciences. “His design for the Earth system science department was unique and well ahead of its time, bringing together top scientists from engineering, physics and chemistry to study a problem of crucial importance to humanity: climate change,” said Kenneth C. Janda, current physical sciences dean. During his tenure as a researcher, Cicerone received the prestigious Bowers Award & Prize for Achievement in Science from the Franklin Institute and was recognized on the citation for the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. In 2015, he won by collaboration with Jerome Franklin Rowland Jr. Once a varsity baseball player at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he was the driving force behind reining UCI’s baseball program in 2012. Cicerone Field at Anteater Ballpark was named in his honor.


In Memoriam
Let’s make a mountain out of an anthill.

Anteater pride is strong. We are currently ranked as the #9 public university in the country by U.S. News & World Report. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. This Giving Day, your donation can help us raise our ranking even more. Various criteria determine the rankings, but one category we can definitely impact is the alumni giving rate. So we call on all UCI alumni to keep the momentum going and build our reputation as one of the nation’s premier research universities.

When everybody gives, we all gain.
Donate April 12 at givingday.uci.edu

Up in the Air

Yuki Takahashi practices his craft in front of John V. Croul Hall on a late November afternoon as the setting sun hits Rowland and Frederick Reines halls. Takahashi, a fifth-year doctoral student in math, founded UCI’s Juggle Buddies club in 2014.
In a world where commitments are often unfulfilled, we view a promise differently. When one is made, we will not rest until that promise is delivered. From the way we connect people with roads, bridges and walking trails to neighborhood parks, sports complexes and 21st century schools, we’re making Orange County a better place to live.

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