A Learning Revolution
Fiat Lux

The university’s motto, translated from Latin as “Let there be light,” seems embodied by an early fall morning at Aldrich Park.
In this edition of UCI Magazine, we focus on how the campus is experiencing “A Learning Revolution” in myriad ways. Our cover story, “New School of Thought” (page 14), introduces the Anteater Learning Pavilion, a state-of-the-art building that fosters student participation in “active learning.” “Studying the Students” (page 22) details researchers’ plans to pilot a U.S. survey analyzing undergraduate life and learning – with an eye to improving both. “Connecting the Disconnected” (page 26) tells the story of a postdoctoral fellow who as a child was homebound herself and studies the effectiveness of telepresence robots in the classroom. And finally, “Safeguarding the First Amendment” (page 32) explains how UCI is leading the way nationally in teaching students the value of protecting free speech in today’s politicized climate. 

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On the Cover: Inside the new, state-of-the-art Anteater Learning Pavilion, which opened Sept. 25.
Letters to the Editor

Fall 2018: “The American Dream”

Financing my education was on me. Summer employment as a mason’s laborer helped. But a job on campus at Langson Library made it doable, albeit barely. There were times when I didn’t have enough money for food, so I’d visit the dorm dining halls looking for scraps. I survived.

You should be proud of what you’re doing for those who need a helping hand. They’ll work hard, take nothing for granted and push themselves in order to prove that they deserve the chance to have their dreams come true too.

Jim Murphy ’75
North Piscataway, NJ

The full edition of the magazine, “The American Dream,” was the most meaningful I have ever received – and I am a 1971 social science graduate. I am very proud of what UCI is doing to bring underserved California high school graduates into a university setting and give them the tools to succeed. I have benefited greatly from my education at UCI, although I didn’t think so much of it at the time. In times of so much income and wealth inequality, it’s very important that UCI is giving the disadvantaged a chance to rise. Keep up the good work.

Steve Stewart ’75
Dover, Ohio

“The American Dream Permanently” touched a chord with me. I was a poor kid from New Jersey. College was a dream for me. That changed when my aunt and uncle enabled me to live with them in their California home. Because of their kindness and generosity, I was able to attend Bakersfield Junior College and then transfer to UCI, where I obtained my B.A. in 1973.

“Go to school,” my aunt and uncle told me. I did and was able to attend the University of California, Irvine. Because of their support, I was able to attend the University of California, Irvine, and I am very proud of what UCI is doing to bring American ideals to our students.

Dana Point

We Want to Hear From You

When submitting a letter to the editor, please include your full name, UCI graduation year or affiliation (if applicable), mailing address, city of residence, phone number and email address. Submissions that do not include this information cannot be published. Contact information is for verification purposes only – not for publication or commercial use. Letters should be 150 words or less and may be edited.

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Chair-elect, UCI Alumni Association
Jack Toan ’95, MBA ’02
Chair-elect, UCI Alumni Association
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1968

The new Engineering Tower (left) and computer science buildings are dedicated during the fall convocation, held outdoors in Campus Park (today’s Aldrich Park).

1988

The convocation tradition continues with incoming freshmen and transfer students carrying out a “Zot!” cheer in the Bren Events Center during September’s Welcome Week.

2018

FLASHBACK

Winter 2019
“One of the startling things about our enormous misdemeanor system is just how unequal it is. It often goes after low-income and impoverished individuals. It sweeps in people of color, often disproportionately, for order maintenance and other low-level offenses.”

Alexandra Natapoff, UCI professor of law
Jan. 2, 2019

Trouble Brewing for Beer Drinkers

Scientists are projecting that human-caused climate change will result in another consequence: a disruption in the global beer supply. While this is certainly not the most significant effect of climate change, beer is the world’s most popular alcoholic beverage by sheer volume consumed, and the news grabbed international headlines. A study published in Nature Plants in October, researchers from UCI, China, Mexico and the U.K. report that concurrent droughts and heat waves, exacerbated by anthropogenic global warming, will lead to sharp declines in crop yields of barley, beer’s main ingredient – potentially putting the patient potable out of reach for hundreds of millions of people. “The world is facing many life-threatening impacts of climate change, so people having to spend a bit more to drink beer may seem trivial by comparison,” said co-author Steven Davis, UCI associate professor of Earth system science. “But there is definitely a cross-cultural appeal to beer, and not having a cool pint at the end of an increasingly common hot day just adds insult to injury.”

As the campus’s 2018-19 Dalai Lama Scholars, seniors Elisa Tran (left) and Lara Nguyen are leading this year’s third annual OC Make-a-thon, an intensive three-day event that brings together students from multiple disciplines — many of them in engineering — to develop products for people living with disabilities. Participants in the 2019 event, which will take place the second weekend of April at UCI Applied Innovation’s Cove facilities, will work on projects ranging from a campus navigation app for visually impaired students to more accessible bathroom doors and adaptive gardening. “I was inspired to be a part of the OC Make-a-thon after working at a camp for people with disabilities for three years,” Nguyen says. “I met some of the most resilient individuals who tackled structural barriers with such grace and happiness. However, I saw the injustice in that simple daily tasks such as swimming, eating or walking on sidewalks became dangerous undertakings that required additional assistance. … The OC Make-a-thon will bridge the discrepancy and misunderstanding between the abled and disabled communities.”

“Even when fires are not threatening them from both sides, freeways are a brutal part of California’s physical and metaphysical infrastructure. … The roads crisscross the soul, seeming to open up all kinds of destinations but, overcrowded, under construction, whimsically closed for unstated reasons, pretty much block your way to wherever you might be thinking of going.”

Amy Wilentz, UCI professor of English
July 15, 2018
Helping Colonoscopists Raise Their ‘Batting Averages’ With AI

Dr. William Karnes arrived at UCI eight years ago with the goal of wiping out colorectal cancer in Orange County. Since then, the gastroenterologist has enacted measures to motivate and remind people to get their colonoscopies. Now he’s trying to make sure those colonoscopies are darn near perfect. Karnes has joined with a local startup company called DocBot to develop an artificial intelligence application to detect precancerous polyps, called adenomas, that doctors might miss. “I see colonoscopy as a colon cancer prevention tool because any polyp that can be removed can never turn into a cancer, and any polyp you leave behind can,” he says.

The AI application uses an algorithm to spot adenomas based on a database of polyp images and other data that Karnes and his colleagues have collected over the years. The program runs during a colonoscopy, warning the doctor of a possible polyp that could be as small as 1 mm, flat and therefore hidden, or otherwise difficult to detect. A multi-center clinical trial to test the technology will begin this year. If it’s successful, Karnes says, the rates at which doctors detect adenomas – their individual “batting averages” – will rise, and more cancers will be prevented.

“Seven to 9 percent of colon cancers diagnosed today are in people who were up to date on their colonoscopies,” he says. “It’s because we missed something. I’m hoping that this technology can help every colonoscopist bring his or her detection rate up to 50 percent. If we do that, we’ve prevented a lot of colon cancers.”

Let Food Be Thy Medicine

Rachel Sunico, a fourth-year UCI medical student, recently wowed her family by whipping up a healthy appetizer of lettuce wraps stuffed with quinoa, fresh bell peppers, onions, garlic and Thai-style peanut sauce. “It was amazing – a quick and easy dish to make,” says Sunico, who picked up her kitchen skills not from a TV cooking show, but in a hugely popular culinary medicine class that she created with another fourth-year medical student, Jennifer Nam. “The course gave me confidence about what to say to patients,” Nam says. “I can tell them, ‘I tried this recipe, and it actually tastes pretty good, even with less salt and sugar.’” Currently in its second year, the class – funded in part by the Susan Samuel Integrative Health Institute – enrolls 20 students per semester and has a lengthy waiting list. Dr. David Kilgore, a clinical professor who directs the course, notes that 80 percent of chronic diseases involve lifestyle factors, such as diet. “We now know that food is powerful,” he says. “This is some of the most important information my students can learn.”

Detecting Cancer-Causing Polyps

U.S. doctors’ individual adenoma detection rates* vary widely.

LOW: 7%
HIGH: 53%

The ADR goal, set by professional medical groups, is 20% or higher for female patients and 30% or higher for male patients.

For each percentage point increase in a doctor’s ADR, the risk of his or her patients developing colorectal cancer within five years of a colonoscopy drops by about 5%.

*The ADR is the percentage of patients undergoing a first-time screening colonoscopy who have one or more conventional adenomas detected and removed.

Setting the Stage

Several hundred students learned the ins and outs of sophisticated theatrical productions during the Cirque du Soleil KA Symposium hosted in November by the Claire Trevor School of the Arts. Here, Holly Poe Durbin, head of costume design at UCI, serves as a canvas for “makeup gypsy” Kathleen Price of Cirque du Soleil.

The daylong event covered topics such as stage management, dance, musical theater, technical direction, rigging, automation, costumes, audio and lighting. It was organized by Erik Smith, a third-year M.F.A. student in stage management; Joel Veenstra, associate head of stage management for the Department of Drama, who received an M.F.A. in drama at UCI in 2011; and Kim Scott, Cirque du Soleil senior manager of sourcing and partnerships, who earned an M.F.A. in dance at UCI in 1998. “In this day and age, with art funding being cut, it’s important for us to partner with outside entities to get the most relevant, up-to-date information for students,” Smith says, adding that UCI does not have a theatrical makeup class. “Cirque is known for high-level costumes and makeup, and this was an opportunity to give students a chance to learn and ask questions from someone at the top of their field.”
Rising Rivers

Paraguay’s bountiful rivers have long been a boon to the South American nation’s economy. But severe flooding, exacerbated by deforestation and wetlands degradation, has taken a toll. Large cities – including the capital, Asunción (at right) – which have seen a huge influx of people from the countryside in recent years, are being hardest hit.

UCI experts in civil engineering, climate science and social ecology are working with Paraguayan civilian and government officials to help address these challenges. The university’s Blum Center for Poverty Alleviation and its Resilient Infrastructure & Sustainable Environments program sponsored a fact-finding trip last year during which researchers toured flood-savaged areas and opened a dialogue with local stakeholders.

“Our goal is to work collaboratively with our counterparts to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnections and trade-offs between climate, the environment, agriculture, trade and the displacement of populations,” says UCI team member Brett Sanders, professor of civil & environmental engineering. “With that, we can hope to get a better handle on problems related to health, the environment, the economy and society as a whole.”
Gary W. Matkin  
Dean, Division of Continuing Education  
Vice Provost, Division of Career Pathways

Continuing Ed’s Evolution

You won’t find a crystal ball or tarot cards in Gary W. Matkin’s office, but if you want to know what’s coming down the pike in higher education, it’s a good place to start. Over several decades of running continuing education programs – first at UC Berkeley, then at UCI – Matkin helped pioneer innovations that later spread to main campuses, including online classes, open textbooks and free chemistry lectures on YouTube.

At UCI in 2001, the former Big Eight accountant helped establish the University of California system’s first online degree, a master’s in criminology, law & society. Modern university extension operations are a far cry from “the night school people” era of the 1970s, he says, gesturing toward a stuffed toy owl on his desk, the one-time universal symbol of the field. Today’s continuing ed mascot would be “a person sitting in front of a computer in their pajamas at 2 o’clock in the morning,” Matkin says. “The digitization of learning has revolutionized the way we think about education.”

Another continuing education shift has been away from humanities courses – such as Contacting Your Inner Self and arts seminars taught at UCI by the likes of comedian Carol Burnett and film director Sydney Pollack – to training that is “much more workforce-relevant,” he says. The tilt toward professional skills is also influencing main campus instruction. Matkin, who serves as dean of UCI’s Division of Continuing Education and vice provost of its Division of Career Pathways, recently sat down with UCI Magazine writer Roy Riverburg to discuss other changes on the horizon, including the possibility of a cyber UC campus and how universities might soon bear similarities to Scouting.

Q: What’s the next big trend in higher education?

A: Alternative digital credentials, also known as “badges.” The concept is similar to Boy Scout badges: if you can start a fire without matches, you get a badge. No fire, no badge. That’s exactly what we’re doing with learning now. Do you know how to program in Python? If yes, you get a badge. If not, you don’t. Digital credentials are based on competency rather than learning achievement. Traditional university courses reward you with a letter grade, which tells an employer almost nothing about what you can actually do. Digital credentials will make universities more accountable by measuring specific skills needed to enter the workforce. They will become an important part of mainstream higher education.

Q: I understand UCI is now exporting continuing education classes to other universities.

A: One of our newest things is that we’re cooperating with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and other universities to share our courses. Their markets are not as big as ours, so they cannot possibly develop new classes and find instructors in every field that we can. Sharing our programs allows them to serve their populations and gives them a presence they wouldn’t otherwise have. We’re also licensing some courses, which means we get a fee and the school provides its own instructor.

Q: Do you foresee a cyber UC campus?

A: It’s inevitable that the University of California will offer an online undergraduate degree, particularly for those 3.5 million Californians who have attended some college but had to drop out because of life circumstances. That’s a forgotten population.

Q: Does that mean the traditional four-year college experience might someday become obsolete?

A: No. Certainly, online education doesn’t work for every subject — drama and dance being among the exceptions. Beyond that, it’s imprudent in our society that when people get out of high school, they need a period to get their feet on the ground and learn how to be an adult. So, from a sociological standpoint, the idea of a residential college experience is not going to go away anytime soon.

Q: How do modern students differ from past generations?

A: Millennials and their successors are much less patient with learning, much less willing to commit to a 10-week program than a five-week program. They’re looking for quicker gratification and more relevant learning concepts that they can apply right away. So we’ve had to go with the market and shorten our courses.

“Whereas UCI’s main campus concentrates on getting people on the career train, our mission is to move people up from second class to first class.”

Q: Who’s the primary audience for continuing ed programs?

A: Generally, our students are professionals who are either upgrading or changing their careers. About 86 percent already have a bachelor’s degree, and 40 percent have an advanced degree. Whereas UCI’s main campus concentrates on getting people on the career train, our mission is to move people up from second class to first class.

Q: What are your most popular courses?

A: Project management, paralegal training and a lot of our information technology courses. On Coursera’s online learning platform, our career success program and micro- and macroeconomics do well. Our biggest seller is Grammar and Punctuation. Over 330,000 people have looked at it.

Q: Are you constantly announcing new programs and courses – from “hybrid culinary arts” to “spa and wellness management.” How do you predict what will be popular?

A: We generally hire people who are subject-matter experts in their field, and we rely on them to keep up with market trends. Every year, at least 30 percent of our offerings have to be replaced. We are always looking ahead five to 10 years to position ourselves for new markets.

great deal more pressure on teachers to be curators of texts and knowledge. Modern students don’t necessarily have the ability to sort through and find the most authoritative information on any particular subject.

Q: What about continuing education students?

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Students in Jacqui Lewis’ abnormal psychology class are not listening to her. They’re too busy checking their cellphones. And that’s fine with her.

Over in the auditorium, no one is at the podium. Hundreds of students’ voices nearly drown out advanced biology instructor Matthew Mahavongtrakul, standing in the back talking to a few of them. It’s all part of the lesson plan.

Clustered in “smart” classrooms in UCI’s new Anteater Learning Pavilion and across campus, students are increasingly using sophisticated technology and each other to learn. Online readings are paired with in-class discussion and exercises.
It’s called active learning – nationally recognized, research-proven – and it’s flipping traditional teaching on its head. Broadly defined, active learning is anything that requires students to participate, rather than passively taking notes and employingrote memorization for exams.

“There’s a paradigm shift occurring in higher education,” Mahavongtrakul says. “It’s no longer so much about a sage on the stage lecturing to students; it’s about faculty facilitating learning alongside students.”

Real-World Preparation
In groups of six to eight, they huddle over assignment questions on their laptops, check their phones for highly cited research papers, famous paintings or history archives; and, most importantly, talk each other through solutions. Their answers are displayed on multiple screens to the whole class for further feedback.

Extensive research has shown that engaging students in structured teamwork helps them retain knowledge, earn better grades and gain collaborative skills that employers prize.

“It’s easier to see information on pop-up monitors on tables at eye level than high on a screen at the front of the room – and simpler to conduct online searches.”

Working through knotty problems with classmates is also gratifying. “You feel immediate affirmation, and you can come together and find answers as a group,” Khan says.

Mareil Tisbury, a fourth-year cognitive sciences major, says the approach has improved her study habits and overall learning. “It helps you not spend too much time cramming for an exam,” she says. “And it allows you to think things out, to organize your thoughts.”

Instructors agree that active learning is a boon. “It’s less of a burden on me than standing and talking for three hours, and it’s less of a burden on students than paying attention the whole time and trying to extract everything I’m saying,” says Alex Bower, a pedagogical fellow who is Lewis’ teaching assistant. “You take breaks to actually engage in what you’re talking about. It sets a nice pace for everyone involved.”

A Learning Curve
In addition, teachers can gather immediate feedback on how well the class is comprehending the material. Research shows that students better study habits and overall learning. “It helps you not spend too much time cramming for an exam,” she says.

The structure was designed from the ground up to support increased interaction. In 15 classrooms and two auditoriums, every seat either swivels 360 degrees or rolls easily. Old-school audiovisual equipment has been replaced by sleek computer screens on all four walls and at each group desk – all linking wirelessly to laptop or mobile devices. But it’s not just about the technology; it’s about students using it.

Working Together
In American history courses, they seek out slave records on the internet or create an online 1800s frontier town. In neurobiology, they match disease symptoms to disease diagnoses and research treatments. And in science communications, they calculate how many elephants it would take to raise sea levels, compared with glacier melt.

A hallmark of UCI’s active learning is that it spans every discipline. While the concept largely began in Stanford University’s chemistry department and has been picked up by science educators across the U.S., classes here range from dance to public health to mathematics. Most students say they like the new techniques, once they realize that there’s a structure to the exercises and that they could earn better grades.

“It’s no longer so much about a sage on the stage lecturing to students; it’s about faculty facilitating learning alongside students.”
on the spot how well key concepts are understood, then immediately retool instruction as necessary. The mini-tests are geared to today’s tech-savvy students.

Round 3: “Jeopardy!”-like questions might be projected on a screen, with groups competing to answer the fastest via smartphone, clicker or tablet. Aggregated results are instantly visible. Or scratch-off lottery-style tickets might give teams a star when they reveal the right answer – the fewer the tries, the more points earned. Rewards can range from a bag of candies to a percentage point toward final grades. Students also receive bonus coupons for attendance, participation and tackling tough subjects. “They absolutely love it,” Bower says. Quizzes are often given about two-thirds of the way through class, when attention spans may be flagging – similar to the seventh-inning stretch at a baseball game.

“Instead of waiting until the end of class, stellar undergraduates coach students who are behind, not just in one class but for the entire semester, and in traditional techniques, which led to a retool of instruction as necessary. The mini-tests are geared to today’s tech-savvy students.

Retaining Knowledge
Research by UCI faculty and others has shown that active learning improves student performance, not just in one class but for the entire semester. In traditional lecture-style science and engineering courses were covered. Retaining Knowledge

Visible Benefits
Gina Ruggiero teaches English to second language learners, many of whom, she says, weren’t taught to communicate effectively in high school. “They’re good for about 20 minutes of lecturing,” Ruggiero says. “After that, we often lose their attention because they’re struggling to process material. And even though they’re very competent, we also have to compete with the constant stimulation and distraction of today’s technology. Once we’ve lost them, it’s hard to get them back.”

An oil painting of a woman in agony, photos of homeless people and a cartoon of a person with voices coming out of his head flashed on the monitors. Next up, with the push of a button, Lewis showed some- times harrowing YouTube and health clinic videos of such patients struggling through conversations with doctors. She also played an interview with a highly successful individual with schizophrenia who’d triumphed over the disease with medication and psychoanalysis. At the end of class, Lewis and Bower had teams hunt for the latest research on treatments. They offered clues for online searches, but it was up to the groups to locate the primary materials – just as they would need to do in academic or counseling careers. Kandan, Khan and the rest of their cluster scanned peer-reviewed papers online. One that looked promising was a decade old and probably out of date. With the clock ticking, they hit on something: a study on a new virtual reality therapy that enables people with schizo- phrenia to quell hallucinations by assigning avatars to handle them. Lewis learned. The students had unearthed research so cutting-edge that it wasn’t yet in any textbook. The class then explored how this new therapy grew out of more traditional techniques, which led seamlessly to a discussion of topics that would be on the final exam.

Some of the benefits of active learning are already visible. Lewis, who’s taught for 30 years, says that attendance is up and grades have improved in her classes. Bower says he’s excited to contribute to the transformation of education: “Students are no longer just regurgitating and accepting everything, they’re engaged with and questioning things and learning to think for themselves.”

Video: muci.edu/ALP
Back to School

On paper, Andrea Aebersold had it all. She’d earned a doctorate and was an associate professor of literature at Washington State University. But she began to tire of teaching to class after class. Something was missing.

Aebersold’s class, faculty instructional development and implement her efforts, hundreds of instructors have learned the joy of working with students in ways she’d never believed. “It’s a big time commitment. To change your teaching is no easy task,” she says. “While colleges elsewhere offer short seminars, I think giving them an hour-long workshop and saying ‘OK, you’re good’ doesn’t help them in a lasting way.”

Aebersold had been attending faculty meetings for over a year, was told that faculty might consider active learning a fad, but demand for her class is high, from adjuncts to veteran professors. The first course filled so fast that she scheduled a second one, which was booked in hours, and there’s a waiting list for a third. In all, more than 200 instructors have been certified or are awaiting training.

Christine King, an assistant professor of biomolecular engineering who arrived at UCI a year ago, was told in an initial review by a disgruntled student, “You should take a class to learn how to teach.” Now she’s teaching techniques gleaned from Aebersold’s course into her biomechanical coding classes, and she and her pupils are energized: “Oh, I love this way of teaching, especially for engineers,” King says. “We’re active learners; it’s natural to us. It’s stupid for me, as a lecturer, to say, ‘Just believe me that it works’ versus ‘Let’s physically do it.’”

In Aebersold’s course, faculty team up at tables exactly as their students will. Together, they practice lively, 10-minute activities that prod students to write on deadline, analyze concepts and even tell instructors what’s confusing. The most common one requires them to first consider individually an open-ended question, then discuss it with their neighbor, and then present their answer to the whole room.

“I’m so happy with the way they’re learning, and saying ‘OK, you’re good’ doesn’t help them in a lasting way.”

Nearby, mathematics professor Rachel Lehman reviews the first course filled so fast that she scheduled a second one, which was booked in hours, and there’s a waiting list for a third. In all, more than 200 instructors have been certified or are awaiting training.

Christine King, an assistant professor of biomolecular engineering who arrived at UCI a year ago, was told in an initial review by a disgruntled student, “You should take a class to learn how to teach.”

“Just believe me that it works” versus “Let’s physically do it.”

“Students sometimes jot down on “exit tickets” anything they didn’t understand that day and hand them in before leaving. When instructors tailor the beginning of the next class to the issues raised, Aebersold explains, students are often pleasantly surprised to have their questions answered and buy into the new form of teaching.

She politely drills into her charges’ heads that despite the seemingly informal style, active learning demands careful planning and a structural underpinning. “Students must be certified by UCI’s Active Learning Institute after being observed using the novel methods. That often means enrolling in Aebersold’s class. It’s a big time commitment. To change your teaching is no easy task,” she says. “While colleges elsewhere offer short seminars, I think giving them an hour-long workshop and saying ‘OK, you’re good’ doesn’t help them in a lasting way.”

Aebersold had been attending faculty meetings for over a year, was told that faculty might consider active learning a fad, but demand for her class is high, from adjuncts to veteran professors. The first course filled so fast that she scheduled a second one, which was booked in hours, and there’s a waiting list for a third. In all, more than 200 instructors have been certified or are awaiting training.

Christine King, an assistant professor of biomolecular engineering who arrived at UCI a year ago, was told in an initial review by a disgruntled student, “You should take a class to learn how to teach.” Now she’s teaching techniques gleaned from Aebersold’s course into her biomechanical coding classes, and she and her pupils are energized: “Oh, I love this way of teaching, especially for engineers,” King says. “We’re active learners; it’s natural to us. It’s stupid for me, as a lecturer, to say, ‘Just believe me that it works’ versus ‘Let’s physically do it.’”

In Aebersold’s course, faculty team up at tables exactly as their students will. Together, they practice lively, 10-minute activities that prod students to write on deadline, analyze concepts and even tell instructors what’s confusing. The most common one requires them to first consider individually an open-ended question, then discuss it with their neighbor, and then present their answer to the whole room.

“I’m so happy with the way they’re learning, and saying ‘OK, you’re good’ doesn’t help them in a lasting way.”

Nearby, mathematics professor Rachel Lehman reviews the...
UCI to pilot a national survey on undergraduate life and learning – with an eye to improving both

By Roy Rivenburg | Photos by Steve Zylius

The framed “Doonesbury” comic strip in Richard Arum’s office sums up a quandary facing hundreds of American universities. It shows a dean telling his boss about a report that says nearly half of U.S. students made no gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning or writing skills during college, partly because they spent so much time socializing instead of studying.

His boss shrugs off the numbers. “As long as we give them good grades and a degree … who cares if they can’t reason?” he asks.

The dean replies: “Uh … employers?”

The cartoon then switches to a high-rise corporate office, where a supervisor is asking a young hire why he’s late. The answer: “I got trapped in a paper bag.”

Although the punchline is fictional, the statistics behind it are real. They come from a 2011 study that Arum and another sociologist conducted at two dozen colleges across the country. (UCI wasn’t included.) Painting at the comic strip, Arum jokes that being immortalized in the Sunday comics “is the high point of my career.”

Actually, the report he co-authored – which also noted that modern students devote half as much time to homework as their 1960s counterparts – sparked extensive media coverage and prompted reforms at a number of schools.

Eight years later, as dean of UCI’s School of Education, Arum is poised to find out if anything has changed. This fall, he’s launching a new survey – one that promises to deliver unprecedented insights – in partnership with Michael Dennin, vice provost and dean of undergraduate education. Using pop-up smartphone polls, artificial intelligence and untapped school databases, the pilot program will be funded with a $1.1 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

It’s the academic equivalent of Amazon or Netflix mining customer information to pinpoint and better serve their needs, says Arum, who chaired New York University’s sociology department before coming to UCI in 2016. Ultimately, UCI’s survey will be rolled out nationally and the results used to bolster student knowledge, graduation rates and career progress.

Students

Studying the

By Roy Rivenburg | Photos by Steve Zylius

UCI Magazine
“Efforts to discover what’s working and what’s ineffective at universities are important to improving student success,” says Michael Itkowitz, who directed the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard program and is now a senior fellow at Third Way, a Washington, D.C., think tank. UCI’s diverse student body and widespread reputation for supporting disadvantaged undergrads make the campus a logical testing ground for the project, he adds.

In announcing the study, Mariët Westermann, Mellon Foundation executive vice president for programs and research, noted that “colleges and universities face growing pressure to prove their value to their students and society at large.” Ideally, she said, the data will “help all of us understand better what the worth of a liberal arts education is.”

**Asking the Right Questions**

Gauging what makes college students tick isn’t a novel quest. Researchers have been trying to analyze, categorize and synthesize undergraduate psyches for decades. Think back to when you were about 6 years old. How often did your parents or other adults in your house limit your TV watching? Take you to an art museum? Punish you for bad grades?

When you were 13, how often do you recall witnessing students kissing or “making out”? Students cutting school?

Did your high school have tennis courts? A theater for dramatic productions? Metal detectors at school entrances?

Unfortunately, the findings are largely outdated, Arum says, citing demographic shifts, antiquated polling methods and a past tendency to canvas only top-ranked universities. To tackle the issues that plague colleges of all stripes, a broader snapshot is needed, he says, especially as the number of Hispanics rises nationwide.

In addition, campus researchers plan to use new survey tools. “You’re not going to get good answers with multiple-choice questions,” says psychologist Jacquelynne Eccles, a Distinguished Professor of education and partner on Arum’s survey team.

Although details have yet to be hashed out, she hopes to try such open-ended prompts as “Tell me what you want to do with your life and why” and “Design an ideal degree in that time frame, he sees room for improvement. “If you landed only 88 percent of your airplanes,” Arum says, “you wouldn’t be satisfied.”

“One o
In studying the effectiveness of telepresence robots in classrooms, a postdoctoral researcher who was homebound herself as a child finds that they can be life-changing

By Rosemary McClure

In Orange County, a 9-year-old named Kathy is able to attend school despite a disabling illness that confines her to home. The same is true in New York, Maryland, Virginia and a few other U.S. locales, where an estimated 200 children go to class each day regardless of health issues.

Their technological hero? A telepresence robot – picture it as an iPad on a rolling stand – that goes to class in their place, allowing them to become virtual students who can make friends, listen to teachers and ask questions in real time.

"Telepresence robots can make quite a difference for students with an illness," says UCI postdoctoral fellow Veronica Newhart, Ph.D. ’18, who’s studying the use of such technology to bring homebound students into the classroom – and the classroom into their homes. "It gives them the chance to be fully immersed in school activities." It’s a topic of particular interest to her. As a child, she was absent from school for large blocks of time because of a congenital heart condition. She hated the isolation she felt.

Consequently, Newhart was intrigued when she heard about telepresence robots, so named because they give users a presence at a remote location. Executives utilize them to participate in meetings virtually; physicians employ them to see far-flung patients.
And, more recently, homebound children have started using them to join their peers in classrooms. The robots, which stream live video of the remote student, foster social interaction and enable them to stay on top of their schoolwork.

Newhart became intrigued by the technology in 2019 but didn’t pursue it until she came to UCI five years ago to pursue a doctorate in education. Last year, she received a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in the National Institutes of Health–funded UCI Institute for Clinical & Translational Science training program.

Her project—which encompasses the School of Education, School of Medicine, Department of Informatics and Department of Cognitive Sciences—involves assessing the impact of telepresence robots on home- and hospital-bound students: Do they help kids engage with classmates, and does this contribute to improved health outcomes?

“Disconnected humans get depressed,” Newhart notes. “This use of technology as a way to include children who are otherwise isolated fascinates me.”

Classroom Integration

One of her goals is to update the educational services provided to homebound children. “The same system has been in place for more than 80 years,” she says. “A tutor is the child’s only connection to the classroom. The same system has been in place for more than 80 years,” she says. “A tutor is the child’s only connection to the classroom. The robot provides new avenues for kids to participate in class.” In addition to going to school, the robots sometimes go on field trips or to birthday parties or other off-campus sites.

For Kathy, who has use of a robot thanks to an eccles, who specializes in child pathologist. “She loves the relationships she’s been able to form in the classroom.”

Creating Empathy

The technology benefits others besides the individual user.

“It provides new avenues for kids in the classroom as well,” Eccles says. “Not only will they get to know this homebound child, but they will get to learn about sick children and what various illnesses can do. It will help them be empathetic to children who are going through these life situations.”

That aspect is clear in Kathy’s classroom, says Hosler, her speech pathologist.

“Whenever her teacher asks who wants to pair up with her on an assignment, everyone in the class raises their hands; they all want to,” she says. “It’s good for her and for them. They learn how to be compassionate and show how much they care.”

“Even the teachers are affected,” Hosler adds. “Being in constant contact with an ill student is an eye-opener for them too.”

Eccles, who specializes in child development and motivation, believes the robots will help dispel negative preconceptions.

“As a country, we isolate children from the illness experience by keeping the ill child at home,” she says. “This technology offers the opportunity to change that.”

Kathy and her third-grade classmates have already overcome those challenges. She has made friends with everyone and developed deeper relationships with a few peers.

“There are two children who have been very close to her since kindergarten,” Hosler notes. “One little boy has really taken her under his wing. He’s very social and have done a lot of things together. It’s really sweet – just the two of them, having fun together.”

For reasons of confidentiality, the girl’s name has been changed.

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It looked like a prank.

Tess Messiha, a UCI law student, scared her classmates the first day she attended school as a telepresence robot. She didn’t intend to punk them. It just worked out that way.

“I had come into class before most of the others arrived,” she remembers. “Friends had helped me get set up early – so the robot was just sitting there when people came in. Then we started a group activity, and everyone was shocked when I moved. There were a lot of odd looks on their faces because they didn’t know I could move the unit myself!”

Messiha was using a telepresence robot called the Double 2 to remotely attend class after being prescribed bed rest for a pregnancy. “It was weird, but they all had a good sense of humor about it,” she says.

The Double 2 looks a lot like a Segway with an iPad on top. It displays a live picture of users like Messiha and has built-in cameras, microphones and accelerometers – even a gyroscope – the same technology as a Segway.

It allows homebound students to participate in class by giving them total control over its movements. The user maneuvers it remotely through an application that also acts as a videoconferencing device. The unit has limited ability to move from place to place. Stairs are a problem, and moving from one building to another isn’t possible.

In Messiha’s case, friends helped transport it from class to class.

Her torts professor, Richard L. Hasen, didn’t know what to expect when Messiha began using the robot. “It was much smoother than I anticipated,” says the Chancellor’s Professor of law and political science. “I had the face of the student at the height of her actual seat. I could make eye contact and call on her.”

When Messiha had a question, she held up a red card to get his attention. “Basically, I could treat her like she was in the room,” Hasen says. “It was seamless.”

Messiha agrees: “It felt like a normal class day even though I was in bed.”

She had been anxious about her studies when she learned that she couldn’t attend school and was afraid she’d have to rely on recorded lectures or even take a leave of absence.

Her first child had been born prematurely, and Messiha’s doctor ordered bed rest 32 weeks into her second pregnancy. She was homebound for three weeks but didn’t miss a single day of class, thanks to her robot. Son Dylan was born without incident last February.

Messiha’s Double 2 was loaned to her by postdoctoral researcher Veronica Newhart’s Telepresence and Social Connectedness Lab at UCI. A gift from the university’s Class of 2016 enabled the facility to purchase three robots for homebound students. The campus Disability Services Center coordinates their distribution to students as needed.

“I was very pleasantly surprised at how far UCI was willing to go to help accommodate my situation,” Messiha says. “Medical conditions arise sometimes, and you just never know how a school is going to handle it.”

The robot was the perfect solution to her problem, she says: “If someone can’t be there in person, it’s the next best thing.”

– Rosemary McClure

‘The Next Best Thing’: A Robot Double

JOIN THE UCI ANTI-CANCER CHALLENGE JUNE 8, 2019

HELP US LEAD THE CHARGE AGAINST CANCER

When you ride, run, walk or volunteer, you move us one step closer to finding cures for a disease that touches us all. The UC Irvine Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center devotes 100% of the proceeds to lifesaving cancer research. Your participation in the Anti-Cancer Challenge will help us make the next discovery. With so many breakthroughs in sight, the time to act is NOW!

Register today: Anti-CancerChallenge.org
In his convocation address to the incoming class of 2022 last fall, UCI Chancellor Howard Gillman gave freshmen an inkling of how the university can inspire their minds, but he also cautioned them to be prepared to hear things they might find repugnant.

“As the great University of California President Clark Kerr put it,” Gillman said: “‘The university is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas.’

“This is why we cannot, and will not, censor or punish people merely because they express ideas we do not like,” he continued. “Even if you think the idea is disrespectful. Or hateful. Or dangerous. We will protect against harassment and incitement and true threats and other actions that are not protected under American law. But we will not treat the mere expression of an idea as something to be punished or censored.”

Gillman went on to explain the university’s mission in the pursuit of knowledge and the need to defend its scholarly values, suggesting: “Let us model for the world how a diverse community can live and work together, even when we do not always agree.”

It’s little wonder he gave such emphasis to the matter: College campuses have been roiled in recent years by questions and clashes regarding speech. How does an institution balance students’ security with the right to confrontational speech? How does a university mitigate the harmful effects that hate speech can have on minorities and other marginalized people? How does a campus prevent disagreements from escalating into disruptions?

A National Challenge

These are not new questions for the chancellor. UCI is no stranger to speech-related turmoil on campus, and Gillman has been at the forefront of the discussion to find solutions. He co-taught undergraduate seminars on free speech with fellow constitutional scholar Erwin Chemerinsky, founding dean of UCI’s School of Law, who is now dean of UC Berkeley’s School of Law.

That course and their 2017 book, Free Speech on Campus, laid the foundation for UC President Janet Napolitano signed into being in October 2017, specifically to address free speech at universities. The center has offices at UCI and UC Washington Center in D.C., and

SAFEGUARDING THE FIRST AMENDMENT

UCI is a home for the new National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement

By Jim Washburn
“We cannot, and will not, censor or punish people merely because they express ideas we do not like. Even if you think the idea is disrespectful. Or hateful. Or dangerous.”

and she says it was a “great experience” for her students to be able to ask him questions directly. The chancellor started with a presentation on the historical significance of free speech. “Everything you think is true about the natural world, about the nature of life, about a just society — everything that you believe to be true — was not too long ago considered a dangerous, heretical challenge to the sacred beliefs of established authorities,” Gillman told the students, adding that it’s only through dissenting voices, divergent viewpoints, free speech no matter the cost that knowledge evolves.

Undergraduate Esme Park says the lecture was eye-opening. “Going in, my thoughts were: ‘We have to limit speech, because if we allow people to say hateful or ignorant things, it could cause more harm than good,’” she says. “I’m a stubborn person and thought nothing would change my mind.”

“Getting to talk with someone as knowledgeable as the chancellor didn’t completely change my mind, but I understand now that I’m coming at it from a very emotional point of view. He said it’s good to have that, but you also have to understand the historical value of free speech — and the consequences that could come if you start limiting people’s speech.”

We have hard work to do to understand and save the world,” he added. “Someone has to do it, and it’s a sacred privilege to be in a position where you get to shoulder that burden.”
The free speech movement was born at UC Berkeley three decades before Michelle Deutchman was an undergraduate there, yet its growing pains were still evident when, during her freshman year, in 1994, she found herself amid a violent student protest over a controversial speaker. That sparked an abiding interest in free speech issues that ultimately led to her being named the first executive director of the University of California’s National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement in May 2018.

The Southern California native earned a bachelor’s degree in political science at UC Berkeley in 1997 and a law degree at USC in 2002. She has spent the majority of her career in civil rights advocacy, free speech issues and education, much of it with the Anti-Defamation League, where she most recently served as national campus counsel, overseeing relations between the ADL and colleges across the country. She continues to lecture on First Amendment matters at the UCLA School of Law.

Guiding its fellows program; meeting with educators, administrators and other stakeholders in the issues of speech on campus; and organizing the center’s first conference, to be held in Washington, D.C., in March. At her University Tower office, just off campus, Deutchman discussed her new role with UCI Magazine contributor Jim Washburn.

Q: What was the event at UC Berkeley that engaged your interest in free speech rights?

When I was a freshman, a student group brought David Irving, a Holocaust denier, to campus. That was very shocking to me, and I was part of a silent candlelight vigil to protest his being there. Next to us was a group of anarchists who were using a log to try to bash down the door where he was speaking, and the riot police showed up. Because I was interested in all the related speech and policy issues, I interned with the ADL in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1995. Then I went to work for them a year after I got my law degree. A huge portion of what I did with them concerned the First Amendment and free speech. In the last several years, I focused more on college campus speech in particular.

The ADL has been a very strong supporter of the First Amendment. Much of what I was doing there was arriving at ways to respond to speech on campuses that people might find heinous or offensive without stifling it. I continue to believe that the underpinning of free speech is that all voices must be heard.

Q: What are some goals of the National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement?

You want to have inclusive, diverse and equitable campuses, while at the same time making sure you’re a safe guardian of robust ideas. One goal of the center is to think about, talk about and come up with ways to effectuate that, to balance those two things.

Our intent is to be a dedicated place for researching and making contributions to the study of free speech, so we won’t just be reactive to speech-related events but can be proactive. Universities and colleges are thinking about and struggling with these issues. The center will be sharing best practices from across the country as well as developing policies on topics ranging from student conduct to handling potentially disruptive speakers or events on campus.

Q: Provocative speakers and controversial issues have indeed resulted in campus disruptions. Where does one begin in addressing that?

Whether speech is protected or not is the easy question. The hard question is: When ugly speech is protected, which it usually is, what do you do in the face of that? How do you help people who feel targeted by that speech – and vulnerable? When does the university use its bully pulpit to make a statement, to perhaps say, “This person is allowed to speak here, but we don’t support their views?”

The center aims to be at the intersection of figuring out not only how we safeguard speech but how speech can be utilized to fulfill the mission of higher education, which is intellectual curiosity and robust discussion and challenging each other.

While there are some important issues that certainly need to be worked out, the idea that there’s some sort of crisis regarding speech on campuses is overstated. It’s important to remember that free speech is happening on campuses every day across the country, in class, in dorms, in the quad. Universities offer an unparalleled opportunity to share and learn from people who are different from you – politically, ethnically, religiously, socioeconomically, culturally.}

“Whether speech is protected or not is the easy question. The hard question is: When ugly speech is protected, which it usually is, what do you do in the face of that?”

Speaking Freely

Three questions with Michelle Deutchman
True Grit

Freshman Sienna Lyford punches out from a sand trap at the UCI Invitational held in October at the Santa Ana Country Club. She is second on the team in scoring, firing a season-low 68.
I grew up in Burlington, Iowa, the hub of a vast, surrounding farming region. While my mother’s family had significant education, my father had taught his. I was drawn to the arts and began acting in community theater productions before I was a teenager, excited by the thrill but not realizing that I’d already begun a journey of experiential reading, research and exploration. A creative life has always felt like an endless improvisation. I had no idea what a critical life might be. After floating through a high school in which my senior-year English teacher had also taught both my parents, I was determined to “move on” (i.e., get out), so I applied to a university as far away as possible – Amherst College – and, miraculously, was accepted. (I didn’t apply anywhere else.)

When I arrived, I immediately realized how utterly unprepared I was and began for the first time to read. So began the activated stage of my Kahnemania. I added critique (i.e., interrogation) to creativity. I didn’t do much formal studying at Amherst; I read, started my own theater company, played music, painted, read some more – I became an inveterate amateur—a lover of the thrill of inquiry, a.truster of fast thinking. And to my incredible good fortune, I discovered Nietzsche, the German philosopher-artist, the “genius of gaps” whose poetic prose showed me the power of intuitive, irrational connectivity. I kept creating and kept critiquing.

I moved to London to do theater, but reflecting other people’s words became tedious, too slow! I became a modern dancer and choreographer, made a couple of LPs as a guitarist, continued painting, and kept writing – first poetry, then prose. I began to sense that I was gradually, finally becoming worthy of calling myself an undergraduate, an amateur.

I traveled the world as a dancer and choreographer, first with the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, then with a multimedia company. Moving Being, soaking up the broadest experience I could. After nearly a decade, I needed a big change. I reconnected with a woman I had met at my first freshman mixer (talk about being a lucky undergraduate), came back to the U.S. from Europe, married and entered a creative writing program (where I would earn my third M.F.A.). That was when, still reading Nietzsche, I almost accidentally discovered the work of French philosopher Derrida in a little book entitled Œuvres: Les Styles de Nietzsche (Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles), in which he claims that style (the general overall sense of one’s being in the world, or fast thinking) is the essential — that style is the gaps, the connectors, the dynamics that matter. Vital! Nietzsche’s promise fulfilled. Rapidly completing an M.F.A. in fiction, I cobbled together a doctoral committee from the English, comparative literature, philosophy and art departments and wrote a dissertation on Nietzsche, Derrida and postmodernism. A slow-thinking document on fast thinking, my first book, Autoaesthetics: Strategies of the Self After Nietzsche, in which I work through Nietzsche’s and Derrida’s ideas to explore the style and substance of other writers, including Stendhal, William Faulkner, Stéphane Mallarmé, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. This hybrid Ph.D. brought me to UCI to work on critical theory, yet here I am in the Claire Trevor School of the Arts. Today, as dean, I aim to keep that double theme vibrant: fast thinking of the amateur confronting the slow thinking of the researcher. My task is keeping the quality of the presentations emanating from a “conservatory” (art, dance, drama, music) and the research emerging from an “academy” (theory, literature, history, criticism) equally high.

“My ‘artful’ life has always felt like an endless improvisation.”

And now, as both dean and executive director of the new UCI Institute and Museum for California Art – which will be appearing on campus in a few years – my improvisation continues. The “art world” is all about fast thinking. I encourage viewers to experience a work before beginning to form a story about it, before making it mean something. Drawing on Derrida, I try to suggest that a painting or sculpture is a spur to multiple readings, a raw stimulus to discovery. I encourage a “pre-thought glimpse” before slow thinking crashes in (and generally) takes over.

As I say, I’ve been lucky. I’ve been the improviser who’s played in and across the gaps, invented and followed new directions, adopted new ways of seeing. Each year, as I welcome a new class of first-year students to the school of the arts, I suggest that they become—or remain, if they’ve become too—aware of their own fast thinking. The danger of a research university is that we tend to forget fast thinking — looking, seeing, feeling, responding to the world’s richness. It’s too bad, because fast thinking (since we do it anyway, pervasively) is a vital part of our capacity for slow, deliberative, analytic thought, opening countless new strands in the root system of our thoughtful experience. I know it may be counterintuitive to suggest being a perpetual undergraduate, but the point is that it’s intuitive. There’s plenty of time to go to graduate school.

Barker is dean of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts and executive director of the UCI Institute and Museum for California Art.
Uncharted Waters

UCI informatics doctoral student Mark Baldwin (right) follows blind canoeist Andrew Skvarla as he paddles to the Off Da Couch Race starting line in Upper Newport Bay in October. Baldwin developed a steering system that enables the visually-impaired to compete in remote-controlled outriggers by themselves. Video: m.uci.edu/paddling
Prescription for Resilience

Ramon Resa overcome incredible obstacles to become a successful pediatrician who caters to the children of migrant farmworkers

By Greg Hardesty

A couple summers ago, a pediatrician who practices in Porterville, in the San Joaquin Valley, paid a visit to the former UCI College of Medicine.

Overcome with emotion, he sat pensively on a bench, composing himself, near the old medical school, a building that today contains only a few labs where researchers study the effects of pollution.

The journey that Dr. Ramon Resa took to get through medical school at UCI – and into his practice of 30-plus years in Tulare County – was one of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Now 65, he returned to campus in 2016 to film scenes for a feature documentary on his life, “Ramon Rising,” which is set to travel the film circuit in early 2019 and, if its creators have their way, eventually end up in classrooms across the United States – and beyond.

He recalls of his visit to UCI: “I felt a connection to this place that made me who I am today. It affects me emotionally when I think about the things that happened to me.”

When he was only 5, Resa began picking crops in California’s Central Valley. Born in Carlsbad, New Mexico, he had been abandoned by his teenage mother and taken in by a couple – with 16 other children – who expected him to work.

Life beyond toiling in orange groves and grape fields seemed a Hollywood fantasy. Hindered by a speech impediment and at times paralyzed with depression and feelings of deep isolation (as well as hunger and fatigue), Resa was told in high school that he belonged in wood shop – that any ambition beyond blue-collar labor was folly.

Higher education, he realized, was his only escape from the life apparently preordained for him. “My situation was so toxic that I would do anything to get out of there,” Resa says.

He wanted to build a successful career to make sure his children would have what he never did. Intent on proving wrong the countless people who had said he’d never make it to college, Resa pressed on and was accepted at UC Santa Cruz, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in 1976.

During his interview for admission into UCI’s medical school, Resa remembers, he was questioned by a local attorney tasked with screening minority candidates; he has no recollection of interacting with any Latino faculty or staff.

Asked why he wanted to be a doctor, he responded: “To be a role model for the kids that remind me of the kid I used to be.”

Resa, who says he never saw a Latino doctor, lawyer or teacher while growing up, kept to his word.

After graduating from UCI’s medical school in 1981, he returned to the Central Valley, where he’s been providing care to the children of migrant farmworkers ever since.

“When I was a kid, the doctor’s didn’t understand me and didn’t care,” Resa says. “Now when I see kids in my office who are smelly and dirty, I don’t judge them because I didn’t understand me when they’re coming from. I want to show them that they can become doctors or lawyers or anything they want.”

With the new documentary, based in part on a memoir he published in 2010, Out of the Fields: My Journey From Farmworker Boy to Pediatrician, Resa’s public profile is poised to reach an even larger audience.

“It’s a story for our era that must be told,” says Diane Wagner, executive producer of “Ramon Rising,” which will be edited from its feature length of 90 minutes to just 45 to make it classroom-friendly. “The film has a message that particularly resonates today, with all the negative noise [Latinos] are hearing. It’s staggeringly the adversity he went through.”

Although Resa has become a fixture on the motivational lecture circuit – addressing groups at Google and Disney, among other venues – he’s not a polished professional. He talks from the heart, and his story of never giving up on one’s dreams resonates. His major emphases: the importance of education and diversity/inclusiveness.

“What makes Ramon unique is that he has accomplished so much but remains so humble, vulnerable and open,” says Wagner, who earned an MBA at UCI in 1992 and owns Epic Indy, which creates media content to effect social change.

“He makes it clear that he’s nothing special, that he’s not brilliant – just average but very resilient. He’s relatable, which makes his message powerful.”

In his book, Resa details the difficulty of medical school, where he at times endured prejudice and hostility from students who, he says, viewed him as nothing more than a woefully underqualified beneficiary of affirmative action.

True to form, he proved them wrong. “I don’t think I ever adapted [to medical school],” Resa says. “I struggled through it… I was so out of it and stressed the whole time.”

He refers to this period as “the zombie years,” letters urging him on – especially one from his aunt – helped him persevere.

Today he and his wife of 40 years, Debbie, are the proud parents of two successful children, daughter Marina, 36, an actress and family therapist, and son Joshua, 31, who just completed a fellowship in pediatric oncology in New York.

Resa says he hopes the film inspires not only people with migrant-worker backgrounds, but everyone who struggles with low self-esteem, depression, poverty and abuse.

“When people hear my story,” he says, “they say, ‘I’ve never heard anyone speak about the kind of problems I’ve experienced except you, and you had it much worse than I do. Now I know that if you could overcome all you’ve been through and end up being a doctor, then I can make it too.’”
Dr. Arnold Chanlin, M.D. ’65
He’s part physician, part artist. As an Air Force doctor in the late 1960s, Arnold Chanlin was just as likely to wield a paintbrush as a tongue depressor. While stationed on a military base in Delaware for two years, he chambered out more than 100 oils and watercolors and staged three solo exhibitions. As a civilian, he has maintained that pattern: family medicine and pediatrics by day, canvases and portrait photography after hours. A few of Chanlin’s paintings became album covers for chamber music composed by Ernest Bloch. And his photos have landed publications at the Orange County Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, the Huntington library and two other institutions. Before studying medicine, the Pittsburgh native—who grew up down the street from Andy Warhol—earned a bachelor’s degree in art education and taught silkscreen and jewelry design.

Jenny (Fieldstein) Stackle ’95, psychology & social behavior, MBA ’99
Sometimes you feel like a nut; sometimes you don’t. Ditto for gluten, eggs, dairy, sesame seeds, soy, sulfites and several other allergens. So when Stackle cooked up—literally, with a kitchenaid mixer in her home—a crunchy granola bar recipe that swiches the most common food allergy triggers, she noticed her own Allergic reaction as it grew in popularity, and she credits her involvement in a UC Irvine program with designing the bar.

Ty Loomis ’02, social science
The sound of his thin bone snapping in two echoed like a gunshot. Ty Loomis crumpled to the gym floor in agony, his Anteater basketball career ending in a nightmare of screams, blood and teammates throwing up at the sight of his gunshot. A year later, though, he was back in action on the beach pro-circuit, going on to win two Association of Volleyball Professionals championships and capturing a silver medal in the 2007 Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro. Loomis has been involved with professional volleyball since his college days, and his beach volleyball career led to him being voted one of two winners of AARP’s 2018 College & Careers Program, which awarded him a grant to pursue a career in entertainment.

Lané Demas, M.A. ’05, history, Ph.D. ’08, history
Jennifer Liu Demas, M.A. ’06, history, Ph.D. ’10, history
In 1989, a dentist who became the first African American professor at Harvard University invented the golf tee. His story is recorded in Lané Demas’ latest book, Game of Privilege, which chronicles the history of Blacks on the fairways, from slave caddies to Tiger Woods. Demas’ forte is African American sports history. His first tome tackled racial integration in college football, and his next will deal with professional downhill skiing. He won a grant to be a scholar-in-residence at the University of Virginia, where he will conduct research on the history of African American skiing.

Oge Agbodún, M.F.A. ’15, acting
Plenty of actors work as waiters while trying to launch their careers. Oge Agbodún recently added a twist to the tradition: As part of a quirky Shakespeare production at New York City’s Shake & Bake Theatre, his character served an eight-course meal (including Cheesecake-dusted macaroni and cheese) to audience members during the play. “Maybe I should have left a tip,” wrote one reviewer. Agbodún, who grew up in Atlanta and Nigeria, is no stranger to unusual roles. In 2017, he portrayed a barbaric Ugandan warlord in the national tour of “The Book of Mormon.” At UCLA, he played everyone from the Ghost of Christmas Present to the title character in “The Trial of Dian Kihimu,” by author and UCLA professor Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Offstage, Agbodún enjoys yoga, CrossFit, and junk food. “Nothing like a sugar coma before bed,” he quips.

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