

The Anteater

FALL 2025

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE UC IRVINE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



Meritorious Spirit

Cherished Sweatshirt
Tradition Turns 15

Leading by Example
With ZotGPT

Alumna Storyteller
and Magic-Maker



From the President

Dear fellow Anteaters,

It's an honor to introduce myself as the new president of the UC Irvine Alumni Association.

Last fall, I had the privilege of welcoming students at the freshman convocation, and their energy was infectious and inspirational. As a new class of Anteaters begins this fall, future alumni themselves, I'm reminded of the possibility UC Irvine has offered for the past 60 years. This entering group is truly exceptional; with more than 124,000 applicants, the typical Anteater earned a 4.1 GPA. And in a reflection of the University of California's commitment to expanding access, more than a third of incoming students across the system are the first in their families to attend college.

This issue of *The Anteater* marks a turning point: It's the final print edition of our alumni magazine. Since its debut in fall 2024, *The Anteater* has brought stories of innovation, impact and Anteater pride to life. As we look ahead to 2026, we're excited to transition to a new digital format and an enhanced alumni web experience. This evolution will allow us to share stories with greater creativity and flexibility, make it easier for you to engage with and share content, reduce our environmental impact – and reach an ever-expanding circle of Anteaters making their marks across the globe.

It's fitting that this transition coincides with UC Irvine's 60th anniversary. Throughout this issue, you'll find stories that honor our past and illuminate our future. We're proud to reintroduce the UC Irvine Medal, celebrating extraordinary alumni and friends whose contributions have shaped our university. You'll also read about the more recent freshman sweatshirt giveaway tradition and how the campus is leading the way in artificial intelligence usage in an educational setting.

This edition is packed with inspiring alumni content. You'll meet Charmaine Chan '06, a visual effects supervisor whose work has dazzled audiences worldwide. Jonathan Steller '09, M.D. '13, an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, is helping launch an experiential elective course that prepares students for commercial and government spaceflight opportunities. You'll also get to know a quintet of alumni head coaches who are mentoring the next generation of UC Irvine student-athletes. And you'll be inspired by philanthropists like Mary Watson-Bruce, Ph.D. '82, whose generosity continues to uplift our campus.

During our first 60 years, UC Irvine made an immeasurable impact on our community and the broader world through life-changing research. As we shape our next 60 years, I'm filled with gratitude for the possibility UC Irvine continues to offer to our students, our alumni and the larger community.

I invite you to stay connected, share your stories and celebrate what it means to be an Anteater. Thank you for being part of this incredible journey.

With pride and gratitude,

Lindsay Miller '08

President, UC Irvine Alumni Association

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Shining Examples of UC Irvine's Spirit

Coinciding with its 60th anniversary, the university is awarding the UC Irvine Medal – its highest honor – to seven recipients who have boosted the campus's mission through their unwavering dedication, service and generosity.



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Zot! Zot! ZotGPT!

UC Irvine is leading the way with its own proprietary AI system – assisting faculty and staff in their everyday work and shaping the way students engage, learn and navigate their careers.

On the Cover: First bestowed in 1984 by then-Chancellor Jack W. Peltason, the UC Irvine Medal depicts Langson Library backlit by a rising sun, symbolizing light and learning. Steve Zylus / UCI



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UC Irvine Alumni

THE ANTEATER



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The Magic Tinkerer

From *The Mandalorian* to *Jurassic World Rebirth*, Charmaine Chan '06, award-winning visual effects supervisor at Industrial Light & Magic, has helped create some of the most compelling moments on screen. She is also amplifying women's voices in VFX worldwide.

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‘A Real Gift’



Beloved sweatshirt giveaway turns 15 while leaving an impression on campus and students alike

By Greg Hardesty

By 2011, about midway through his term as chancellor of UC Irvine, Michael Drake had seen enough. He and another campus leader, Michael R. Gottfredson, then executive vice chancellor and provost, decided to do something about the sea of sweatshirts students were wearing that usually bore the logos of other well-known Southern California universities. And thus, a cherished campus tradition was born: free UC Irvine sweatshirts for new students.

All incoming Anteaters – including transfers – enrolled in a degree program get a limited-edition sweatshirt bearing the current year and varying slogans and colors – such as an image of Peter the Anteater peeking out of a pocket or “Eater Nation”

emblazoned on a sleeve. This fall, the navy blue sweatshirts commemorate the university’s 60th anniversary with an embroidered logo on the hood.

“It’s the Aston Martin of sweatshirts,” says Kat Wong, associate director of student engagement at the UC Irvine Alumni Association, noting the hoodie’s \$90 retail value. (The sweatshirts, made of a cotton-polyester blend with applied words and logos, are only available as giveaways to qualified students and are not for purchase.) Wong previously was the clothing and gift buyer at the campus bookstore and had a hand in creating many of the sweatshirts. “I put a lot of love into the designs,” she says.



Students, alums and campus officials say the giveaways, which mostly take place during Welcome Week, have been critical to building UC Irvine affinity and pride.

"Whenever I walk around campus, I'm delighted to see so many of our students proudly displaying that they attend this great university," says Chancellor Howard Gillman. "And now many of our alumni are also sporting UC Irvine's name and proclaiming their membership in our Anteater community."

The giveaways have become a cultural touchpoint for entering Anteaters. This fall, more than 100 alumni will hand out 8,500 sweatshirts over several days at the Newkirk Alumni Center.

Calvin Tran '18 volunteered last year and recalls the significance of receiving his sweatshirt in 2016. "Growing up in a low-income household, most of my clothes were hand-me-downs. I rarely had anything brand-new. So when I got the sweatshirt, it wasn't just about school spirit. It felt like a real gift," he says. "More than that, it

made me feel welcomed. It wasn't just about giving out sweatshirts. It was about building community." Tran, who had a buzz cut at the time, also quips that the hoodie was practical too, as it kept his head warm in the winter.

Senior Sacred Moseley, the incoming UC Irvine Student Alumni Association president, has worn her oversized, heather-grey 2022 sweatshirt nearly daily while living on campus. "Honestly," she says, "it's one of our most important traditions in terms of student life. It helps students really feel they're part of the campus without having to try too hard."

In launching the now 15-year-old practice, Drake tasked Ramona Agrela, who was then associate chancellor and chief of staff, with securing the sweatshirts. She found gift funds to make it happen; University Advancement now pays for them.

Says Agrela, currently UC Irvine's vice chancellor and chief human resources officer: "These days, everyone is wearing a UC Irvine sweatshirt. The original vision has been realized."

Around the Ring

Extraordinarius

O.C. foundation leader **Shelley Hoss, M.B.P.A. '87**, will be recognized as the 2025 Extraordinarius at the Lauds & Laurels ceremony Nov. 7 at the Hyatt Regency Irvine. The campus's highest alumni honor, the designation is awarded by the UC Irvine Alumni Association. Hoss has dedicated her career to enhancing the quality of life in Orange County through strategic philanthropy and leadership. CEO of the Orange County Community Foundation since 2000, she has transformed the organization

into one of the nation's most impactful nonprofits. "My experience at UC Irvine was foundational to a nearly 40-year career in philanthropic leadership," Hoss said. "The exposure to best practices in both for-profit and nonprofit management sparked a passion for transformational leadership that continues to inspire me. I'm deeply honored to be recognized by the university that launched a lifelong journey of growing the good in Orange County and beyond."

Since 1971, Lauds & Laurels has recognized more than 900 members of the UC Irvine community for their outstanding contributions to the university, their professions or society. The 2025 Lauds & Laurels ceremony will also honor 15 other distinguished alumni for their exceptional achievements and contributions – each representing a different UC Irvine school or unit. To read more, visit engage.alumni.uci.edu/lauds.



Memory Care

Interested in cognitive science and fueled by a commitment to helping seniors in Orange County assisted living facilities, undergraduates **Neha Gujjula** (left) and **Kaitlin To** (right) are leading UC Irvine's chapter of the Brain Exercise Initiative. As co-presidents of the chapter, the duo lead a group of students dedicated to helping diminish cognitive decline and alleviate the pandemic of loneliness. Said Gujjula, a neurobiology major: "With memory retention, engaging with the residents and getting to know them are important – we want to build a relationship with each person we work with." The BEI members volunteer at various memory care and assisted living facilities in Orange County, where the student-led club holds weekly activity sessions in reading aloud and math exercises. They also host trivia competitions, puzzle games and craft activities to enhance memory and problem-solving skills. Added To: "A lot of times, we're decades apart from the residents we're working with. But as we engage with them, the brain exercises become a lighthearted activity that bridges the generations."

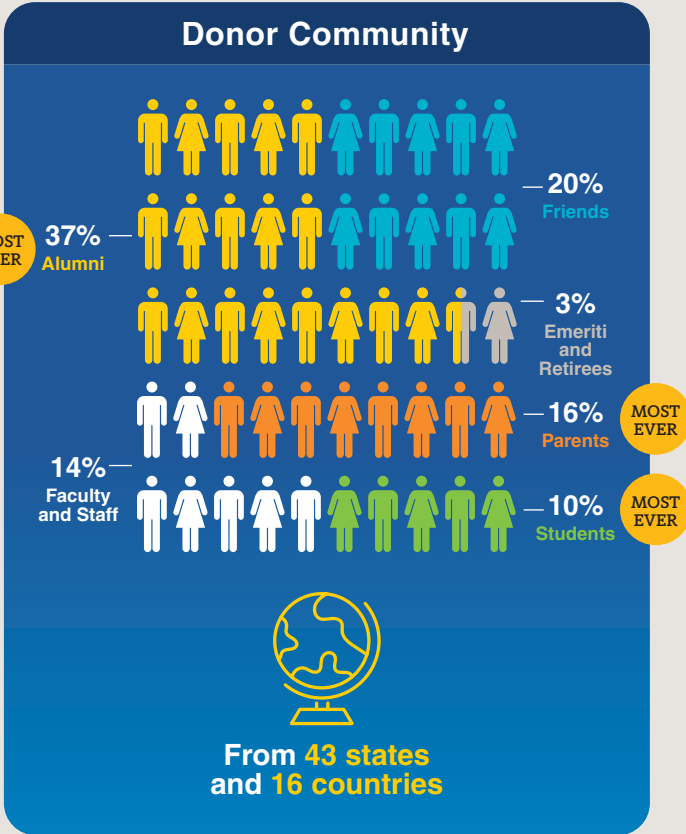
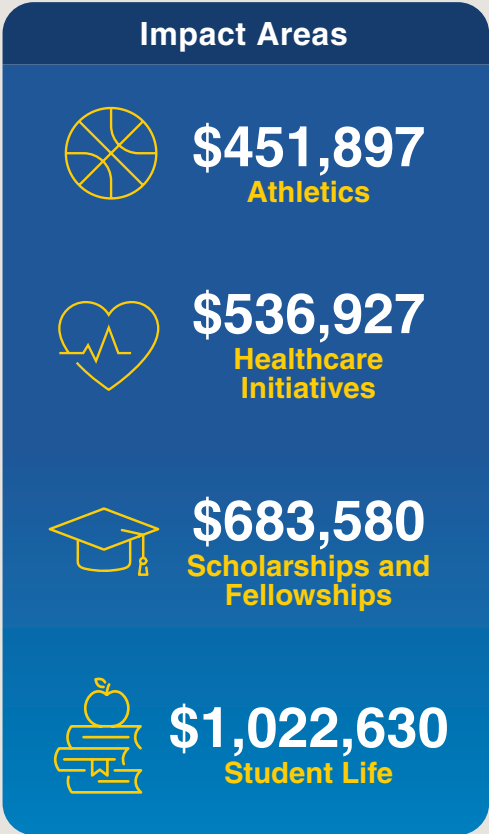


At First Zot!

Incoming Anteaters learn how to properly Zot! during the Student Parent Orientation Program this summer.

Giving Together for UC Irvine

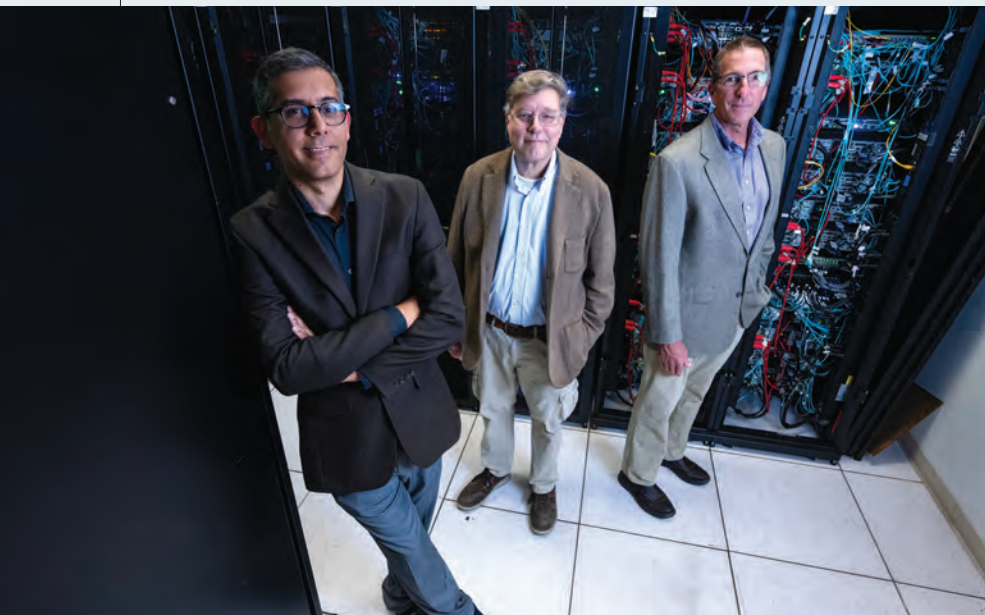
Anteaters and friends from around the world came together to make UC Irvine’s ninth annual Giving Day a record-breaking success. For a third consecutive year, the number of gifts increased – to 4,275. In total, the UC Irvine campus raised \$2.69 million from 3,538 donors – another record high. And the most ever alumni, parents and students contributed. The gifts support a wide range of initiatives, including student scholarships, faculty research and academic programs. Said Brian T. Hervey, UC Irvine’s vice chancellor for University Advancement & Alumni Relations, “Thanks to the collective generosity of our community, our ninth annual Giving Day was a tremendous success. Together, we advance opportunity, innovation and excellence with the help of our alumni and friends.”



Ahead of the Curve

Using AI to Solve Geophysics Challenges

The UC Office of the President has funded a \$6 million, three-year initiative led by researchers at UC Irvine to use artificial intelligence tools to address the geophysics challenges embedded in the Earth's crust. The Geophysicist.AI project plans to harness sustainable geothermal energy, sequester carbon dioxide underground and provide safe, long-term storage of spent nuclear fuels, among other aims. "Our goal is to develop a scalable artificial intelligence ecosystem that integrates large language and physics-informed models with massive amounts of real-world data to transform geophysicists' ability to solve the most difficult subsurface challenges," said co-principal investigator Eric Mjolsness (center), professor of computer science. He is working alongside lead principal investigator Mohammad Javad Abdolhosseini Qomi (left), associate professor of civil and environmental engineering and materials science and engineering, and co-principal investigator Russ Detwiler (right), associate professor of civil and environmental engineering.



HEPA Filters Reduce Pollution Exposure in Classrooms

A study conducted by the Joe C. Wen School of Population & Public Health has found that adding HEPA filter air cleaners to classrooms can significantly improve air quality and reduce pollution exposure for students. "Not all classrooms have the same air quality – especially in communities with lower socioeconomic status and higher minority populations, where children are often exposed to more air pollution," said corresponding author Veronica Vieira, chair and professor of environmental and occupational health. From July 2022 to June 2023, researchers examined air quality in 17 Los Angeles Unified School District elementary schools – specifically, 186 classrooms, 99 with portable HEPA filter air cleaners and 87 with standard non-HEPA air cleaners. "Our findings were striking given that portable filters were in addition to existing HVAC systems," Vieira said. "Classrooms with HEPA filters had 39.9 percent lower levels of ... fine particulate matter and 13.8 percent to 82.4 percent less outdoor air pollution infiltrating indoors."



Hope for More Personalized Antidepressant Treatments

Finding the right antidepressant treatment can be a frustrating, time-consuming process. Now, a new UC Irvine-led study supported by the National Institutes of Health offers hope for a more personalized approach. Published in *JAMA Network Open*, the study reveals promising progress toward predicting how patients with major depressive disorder will respond to antidepressant medications using brain imaging and clinical data. The research demonstrated that brain connectivity patterns – specifically in the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex – could significantly improve predictions of treatment response across two large, independent clinical trials. "In spite of the availability of several antidepressant treatments, including medications and psychotherapy, many individuals with depression have difficulties finding the treatment that works best for them," said Diego Pizzagalli, founding director of the Noel Drury, M.D. Institute for Translational Depression Discoveries at UC Irvine and Distinguished Professor of psychiatry and human behavior and neurobiology and behavior. "As a result, for many, treatment follows a trial-and-error approach. Discovering brain-based markers predicting positive antidepressant response promises to allow a more personalized treatment and thereby speed up reduction of symptoms."

Health & Wellness

A Proactive Approach to **Prostate Cancer**

By Amy Paturel

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among men in the United States – and the second-deadliest.

“Unfortunately, prostate-specific antigen – or PSA – testing, the only screening method available, isn’t a routine part of most men’s annual checkups,” says Dr. David I. Lee, director of the UCI Health Comprehensive Prostate Cancer Program.

Decades ago, PSA testing, which measures levels of a protein released by the prostate gland, to screen for prostate cancer was standard care. But in 2012, the United States Preventive Services Task Force advised against PSA screening, citing concerns about overdiagnosis and unnecessary treatment.

In 2018, after a European trial reported a 20 percent drop in prostate cancer deaths and 35 percent fewer cases of metastatic disease among men who were tested, the USPSTF softened its stance, encouraging men to talk to their doctors about the pros and cons of screening.

The lack of specific guidelines led to confusion – for both men and their providers – and in 2023, only 38 percent of men between the ages of 55 and 69 had an annual PSA test, according to the National Cancer Institute. To complicate matters, the USPSTF advises against screening men 70 and above, placing older men at risk of developing an aggressive prostate cancer that goes undetected – men like former President Joe Biden.

“Since most men don’t have symptoms related to prostate cancer, PSA testing is the only way to catch it early,” says Lee, who recommends a baseline PSA test at age 40 and continued screening until a man has a life expectancy of less than five years.



Like any other screening tool, PSA testing isn’t perfect. Some cancers develop between screenings or don’t produce enough antigen to detect. And high PSA levels don’t always mean cancer.

“PSA levels can rise for many reasons, such as infections, an enlarged prostate, even recent sexual activity or a rectal exam,” Lee says.

It’s also possible to have prostate cancer with a “normal” PSA level, especially among high-risk groups like Black men and those with a family history. “That’s why we monitor PSA trends over time, rather than acting on a single test,” Lee says.

Screenings typically include a PSA test plus a rectal exam. If results are abnormal, your doctor may order imaging or a prostate biopsy.

Fears about side effects like incontinence and sexual dysfunction prevent some men from seeking treatment. But today’s nerve-sparing methods and targeted treatments are far more precise than they used to be.

“Minimally invasive, nerve-sparing techniques – like high-intensity focused ultrasound and robotic-assisted surgery – have significantly improved outcomes,” Lee says. Some men don’t need treatment at all. With active surveillance, doctors closely monitor low-risk cancers with periodic PSA testing and imaging.

“Men need to take advantage of the tools we have to diagnose prostate cancer in its earliest stages, when it’s easier to treat,” Lee says. “Getting screened doesn’t mean you’ll be rushed into invasive testing or treatment. It just helps safeguard your future.”

Did You Know?

Early detection is key: The five-year survival rate is 99 percent for prostate cancer that’s localized or regional when first diagnosed.

Protecting Against Prostate Cancer

Being proactive about your prostate health could save your life. Here are four ways to take control:

1 Get screened.

Men between the ages of 55 and 69 should request an annual PSA blood test.

2 Know your risk.

Black men and those with a family history of prostate cancer have a higher risk of developing the disease and should consider a baseline PSA test at age 40.

3 Don’t ignore symptoms.

While early prostate cancer usually has no symptoms, trouble urinating, blood in the urine or pelvic pain requires further investigation.

4 Choose the right care team.

Look for a center with access to the most advanced technology and a multidisciplinary team of experts who specialize in minimally invasive techniques.



Medicine Meets Micro- gravity

Launching students
into space-age careers



When Dr. Jonathan Steller was an undergraduate and then a medical student at UC Irvine, space medicine wasn't yet on his radar. But during his residency in obstetrics and gynecology, Steller attended a space-themed birthday party where he mingled with a group of people working in the aerospace industry.

"I had this aha moment: If we're planning to go to Mars or colonize space, we'll need to understand the effects of spaceflight on reproductive health and fetal development," says Steller, now an assistant clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at UC Irvine who specializes in caring for high-risk pregnancies as a maternal-fetal medicine physician. That spark led to investigating how the environment beyond Earth's atmosphere influences gynecologic and

reproductive health, as well as roles with NASA and Vast Space, a private company aiming to launch a commercial space station next year.

Now Steller hopes to give future doctors an earlier liftoff into the world of space medicine. In collaboration with Dr. Ariana Nelson, an associate clinical professor of anesthesiology at UC Irvine who also works with NASA and Vast Space, Steller is co-developing a space medicine, engineering and design program in the School of Medicine. The zenith of the program is Concepts of Space Medicine and Orbital Systems 401, a four-week elective course that immerses students in the science of space medicine. COSMOS 401 kicked off in the 2024-25 academic year to rave reviews. Steller spoke with *The Anteater* contributor Kirsten Weir about its successful launch – and where its flight path is headed next.

What was your goal in creating the SpaceMED program and COSMOS curriculum?

Currently, there's only one aerospace medicine residency in the country, at the University of Texas Medical Branch. That's the only pathway to becoming a NASA flight surgeon. That means there's no clear path for people who do residencies and fellowships in other specialties – whether OB-GYNs or internal medicine specialists like cardiologists or endocrinologists – to study space medicine unless you do both residencies.

And that's been fine, because NASA flight surgeons take care of NASA astronauts, who are chosen, in part, because they're the healthiest humans on the planet. We haven't needed lots of cardiologists to care for astronauts with heart problems or endocrinologists who understand how space affects people with diabetes or thyroid disease. But that's all changing now. As the commercial spaceflight industry continues to grow, there's a greater diversity of people going to space. We'll need more doctors who have baseline space medicine knowledge to help them stay healthy.

Our program is meant to be both foundational and inspirational. For students who do want to be flight surgeons, this program will give them a strong foundation and, hopefully, make them competitive candidates for this aerospace medicine residency. Some might become specialists who can consult with flight surgeons or commercial spaceflight companies. But others might go on to do important space research related to their specialty. We want to give students the knowledge to contribute in a variety of ways as humans expand into space.

What does the program entail?

During the first two years, SpaceMED covers a lot of introductory concepts, including systems engineering and human systems integration. Traditionally, NASA built spaceships first and then decided how to fit the humans inside them. The new and better approach is putting humans first and building the spaceship around them – in other words, thinking about their health and safety from the beginning instead of trying to fix things later. So in COSMOS 101, we talk about engineering and design and also introduce students to space-related insults like radiation, microgravity, and the vibration and acceleration that astronauts experience during takeoff.

During the second year, each lecture coincides with topics students are learning about in their

standard medical school curriculum. So when they're learning about hematology, COSMOS 201 participants will also learn how space affects the blood. When they learn about cardiovascular and pulmonary health, we'll be teaching them about what happens to the heart and lungs in space. We'll do that for every system of the body. Then, in the third and fourth years, students get much more hands-on experience, visiting aerospace industry facilities and conducting their own capstone research projects in space medicine.

How did the first year go?

Initially, we planned to launch the program with COSMOS 101, for first-year students. But the commercial spaceflight industry turned out to be really interested. They were eager to have students come do electives with them, so we decided to also roll out COSMOS 401, for fourth-year students, last year. Two students from the School of Medicine participated, spending a month visiting NASA and several private spaceflight companies. They met with astronauts and aerospace medicine physicians, toured spaceflight facilities and took a parabolic flight to experience some of the g-forces astronauts feel when traveling to space.

The students loved it, and they're excited about the possibilities. One decided to do a combined M.D.-Ph.D. program and is now studying space radiation and neurobiology. Another student launched the first regional chapter of the Organization for Space Medicine, Engineering and Design and is now planning its first local event – a “hackathon” where engineers will collaborate to miniaturize X-ray machines for space. Other students have started a research project to look at how the space environment affects pharmaceuticals.

What's next for SpaceMED?

We hope to develop SpaceMED into a full mission-based program. We're continuing to build it out to make it as rich as we possibly can. We don't need every doctor in the world to understand what the space environment does to the human body, but with the expansion of human spaceflight, we will need some. We designed this program so future doctors can gain the knowledge and skills they need to help push space medicine forward.



“As the commercial spaceflight industry continues to grow, there's a greater diversity of people going to space. We'll need more doctors who have baseline space medicine knowledge to help them stay healthy.”

Anteater Spotlight | Broadcasters

By Victoria Clayton



Melissa Mecija '04, *political science and psychology*

Anchored Plans

Broadcast journalist Melissa Mecija '04 will co-emcee the UC Irvine Alumni Association's 2025 Lauds & Laurels ceremony in November, recognizing Anteaters who have dedicated themselves to the university, the community or their profession. The ABC 10News broadcaster has spent the last 15 years earning the trust of San Diego viewers, and she says UC Irvine has been an integral part of her success.

In fact, it was through a chance encounter on campus – and a little help from an Anteater friend – that Mecija found her professional footing.

During her junior year, she was a resident advisor for Mesa Court. (Later, she was also house advisor for Pi Beta Phi.) When legendary newscaster Vikki Vargas, former NBC4 Orange County bureau chief, visited campus for a story, a fellow RA got Vargas' contact information and passed it along to Mecija, who soon became Vargas' intern. Her love of journalism, however, had already been cemented.

"When I started UCI, I was like many people – not sure what I wanted to pursue," says Mecija, who had worked on the yearbook at Fullerton's Troy High School and even covered a major political convention for a local newspaper. But working for *New University*, UC Irvine's student newspaper, where she covered former Sen. Ted Kennedy speaking at Crystal Cove, tuition rate hikes and a criminal trial, sparked her passion for news.

"The idea of being able to cover history as it happens fascinates me," Mecija says. "And I've always loved the combination of words and pictures."

She worked at several news stations before settling down in 2010 at KGTV, where she's done it all – traffic/weather anchor, investigative reporter and weekend morning newscast anchor before being named weekday morning anchor. How does this

wife and mom of three young kids get to work by 3:30 a.m., regularly volunteer at community events and win Regional Emmy Awards to boot? "It's only possible because of support from my tight-knit family," Mecija says.

These days, the campus has grown almost beyond recognition, but she says what she learned here has stood the test of time. Her political science degree deepened her understanding of government accountability, while her degree in psychology gave her greater insight into human behavior. And her participation in the Kababayan Filipino Club, where she danced with the Kaba Modern group, has fueled her love for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Says Mecija: "Being at UC Irvine was incredibly lucky. What happens in your young undergrad life can truly make a lifelong impact."



News Sense

Kalyna Astrinos '06, *psychology & social behavior*

The only thing that worries Kalyna Astrinos '06 about co-emceeding the UC Irvine Alumni Association's 2025 Lauds & Laurels ceremony? "I don't want to mispronounce anyone's name!" says the KCAL morning news anchor and reporter, laughing. She gets it – her own name isn't exactly simple. (It's Kah-LEE-na As-TREE-knows.)

Astrinos grew up in Modesto and credits her family for steering her to UC Irvine. "My dad came to this country from Argentina and always emphasized the value of education. He earned his degree, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps," says Astrinos, who is also proud of her Greek and Puerto Rican heritage. She recalls her father often traveling to Irvine for work and insisting she'd love the campus and community. He was right.

"I loved every minute. No matter the class size, professors were brilliant, accessible and genuinely cared," Astrinos recalls.

Her leap from psychology & social behavior major to broadcast journalist? Also Dad's influence. "He watched a lot of TV news, so I did too – and I was hooked," Astrinos says. Determination did the rest. While still at UC Irvine, she joined 102.7 KIIS-FM's

street team, driving from Irvine to Burbank for little pay, sometimes studying with a friend in the car for upcoming tests. That job led to other radio work and eventually on-camera gigs covering traffic, news and red carpets. A reel she pieced together landed her a job doing traffic for ABC7 L.A., then it was on to Bakersfield and San Diego.

In December 2019, Astrinos scored her big break as KTNV Las Vegas morning anchor – just months before the pandemic shut the city down. "Embedding yourself in a new community is hard when everything's closed," she says. Still, she thrived, earning two Regional Emmy Awards for best morning show and breaking news coverage during the civil unrest after George Floyd's killing.

Now back in Southern California, Astrinos juggles anchoring with community efforts like school supply drives for kids in need. After losing her father to pancreatic cancer in January, she's also determined to honor his legacy by raising awareness and funds to fight the disease.

And Astrinos never misses a chance to rep her alma mater: "I've taught everyone at KCAL 'Zot! Zot! Zot!' They even do the hand gesture."



SHINING EXAMPLES OF UC IRVINE'S SPIRIT

By Cathy Lawhon

"You deserve a medal!" In 1984, then-UC Irvine Chancellor Jack W. Peltason applied the approbation literally when he established the UC Irvine Medal to recognize those who significantly boost the university's mission through their dedication and generosity. This year, on the occasion of the campus's 60th anniversary, seven individuals will join the previous 119 awardees.

Founding Chancellor Daniel G. Aldrich Jr. received that first UC Irvine Medal. Since then, additional recipients have included President Barack Obama, Nobel laureate F. Sherwood Rowland, former California Gov. Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, dance innovator and founding faculty member Donald McKayle, and donors such as Henry and Susan Samuelli and the Chao family. Pulitzer Prize winners, authors, inventors, industry leaders, scientists and innovators in myriad fields are among those feted.

A one-time special edition of the medal called the Founders Award was bestowed in 1990, recognizing Joan Irvine Smith, who was instrumental in facilitating the Irvine Company's \$1 sale of land to the University of California system, and Jean Aldrich, wife of the founding chancellor, among others.

Michael Drake, the campus's fifth chancellor, serving from 2005 to 2014, and his wife, Brenda Drake, were the most recent honorees, receiving the medal in 2017. During their tenure, UC Irvine rose to one of the top 10 national public universities in *U.S. News & World Report's* annual ranking.

The UC Irvine Medals are overseen by the UC Irvine Foundation, and recognition is awarded in lieu of honorary degrees.

Southern California sculptor Margaret Inez Owings designed the front side of the medallion. It reflects the circular campus plan, depicting Langson Library backlit by a rising sun, symbolizing light and learning. The verso of the medal features the official UC seal (designed by Tiffany & Co. in 1895) and its motto "Let There Be Light."

"This year's recipients join the pantheon of those who have made exceptional and enduring contributions to our mission of teaching, research and public service," says Chancellor Howard Gillman. "We are honored by their participation in the life of this university."



Jo and Paul

Butterworth

It's easy to see why alumni Jo and Paul Butterworth have a soft spot for UC Irvine. Paul Butterworth earned a bachelor's degree here in 1974 and a master's in 1981 in computer science. Jo Butterworth graduated with a bachelor's degree from the School of Social Sciences in 1975.

The campus provided the education and eventual business contacts that formed the foundation for their six tech startups over the last 45 years. Maybe more importantly, mutual friends in their Langson Library work-study program introduced them to each other, facilitating a long and happy marriage.

So when it came to devising an estate plan, "both Jo and I had a similar feeling about it," says Paul Butterworth. "Everything we've done started at UCI. We were lucky and had some success, and it feels right to pass that along to others."

In February, they made a \$35.5 million estate gift to UC Irvine – the largest alumni bequest ever. It will fund student and faculty awards, scholarships,

fellowships, new research initiatives and faculty chairs in the Donald Bren School of Information & Computer Sciences.

In addition to the couple's philanthropy, Paul Butterworth volunteers as a member of the UC Irvine Foundation board of trustees and serves on the Dean's Leadership Council for the ICS school.

Co-founder and chief technology officer of enterprise software developer Vantiq Inc., he also co-founded cloud platform development company Emotive Communications and service-oriented architecture management firm AmberPoint, acquired by Oracle in 2010. Paul Butterworth was co-founder and senior vice president of Forte Software, bought by Sun Microsystems in 1999, as well.

His advice to other alumni: "I couldn't have attended UCI without financial help, so I like being able to contribute to future generations. They're the ones who will make the world go 'round. To anyone who feels like UCI has helped them, help the future."





Julie

Hill

Julie Hill doesn't let closed doors or what she calls "specious barriers" get in her way. So years ago, when an "old boys' network" functioning as a corporate board made golf a hiring prerequisite, she learned the game in six months.

"I still play golf," she says, "but not well."

Hill's commitment to opening doors and eliminating barriers led her to chair the UC Irvine Foundation in 2017, a position she held for six years. Her business experience in marketing, home building, healthcare

"The deans are our product – the ones generating the knowledge. Understanding their work is critical to better community connections."

and finance helped her develop strategies for uniting her fellow trustees in promoting the campus.

"There had been few opportunities for trustees to get to know the deans," Hill says. "Using the vernacular of business, the deans are our product – the ones generating the knowledge. Understanding their work is critical to better community connections."

Two hallmarks of her tenure were facilitating access and upward mobility for first-generation students and helping to foster interdisciplinary studies. Under Hill's leadership, the UC Irvine Foundation also established the UCI-OC Alliance, which paves new educational pathways for historically underrepresented students. She remains passionate about preventing domestic violence and supports the campus's Interdisciplinary Center on Family Violence.

A former president and CEO of the U.S. division of a large U.K.-listed company, Hill went on to establish her own land development business. She has served on numerous public and private corporate boards of directors globally, often as the first woman. Her recipe for success: Show up, pay attention, tell the truth and don't be too attached to the outcome.



Goran

Matijasevic

With his tasteful Anteater tie and a pocketful of Anteater lapel pins at hand, Goran Matijasevic, M.S. '85, Ph.D. '91 (engineering), is one of UC Irvine's best boosters. The senior assistant vice chancellor for alumni and constituent relations circulates effortlessly among engineers and dancers, technology innovators and undergraduates, evangelizing for the campus.

Name an organization that reaches into the community on the campus's behalf and Goran, as he is widely known on campus (like Cher or Plato, he needs only one name), has probably been involved with it. As executive director of UC Irvine's Chief Executive Roundtable, he helps foster strategic research collaborations externally and across campus disciplines. The UC Irvine Alumni Association taps him for alumni engagement, and the UCI-OC Alliance turns to him for community outreach and connections. He serves on the Graduate Division Dean's Leadership Council and the Calit2 Division Council. Off campus, he sits on

the boards of innovation accelerators Octane and SoCalBio.

"I'm sometimes asked, 'Why are you in this role when, with your experience, you could be a researcher yourself?'" Matijasevic says. "But I really enjoy translating the research and identifying opportunities for connections with industry."

An enthusiastic supporter of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, he attended 65 UC Irvine arts events during the last academic year. Matijasevic has funded four graduate student scholarships – two in honor of late colleagues in engineering and math and two in dance in the name of his late wife and himself. Their first date was a UC Irvine dance recital.

Additionally, he received a Lauds & Laurels award as Distinguished Engineering Alumnus (2008) and Lauds & Laurels' Outstanding Staff Achievement Award (2017).

Matijasevic encourages fellow alumni to help spread the UCI spirit beyond campus: "We continue to be a hidden gem to the community outside, but the 'Zot! Force' is slowly coming into its own."





Sheila
and Jimmy

Peterson

“If you want to change the world, you need to be affiliated with a university.”

Sheila and Jimmy Peterson say they remember that advice from fellow UC Irvine supporter Susan Samuelli more than 20 years ago. That's one reason they agreed to chair the just-completed \$2 billion Brilliant Future campaign, which exceeded fundraising and alumni engagement goals.

Another motivation for accepting the six-year commitment was more personal. “UCI saved my life,” says Jimmy Peterson, retired CEO of Microsemi Corp.

In 2017, he checked into UCI Health's Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center with Stage 4 melanoma. Today he's cancer-free.

both worked in the semiconductor industry,” says Sheila Peterson. “That and our seven kids were all-consuming. But while we were making some money, we always gave back. We were raised that way.”

They will leave future campaigns to other chairs, but the UC Irvine Foundation trustees still have goals for the campus. They value the dedication to interdisciplinary research and education and want to see that thrive. And they aren't finished encouraging support from Anteater alumni.

“Many who came to UCI may have been given a hand up,” says Jimmy Peterson. “They should be willing to give back with their hearts, minds and wallets.”

“We always gave back. We were raised that way.”

While the Petersons are receiving the 2025 UC Irvine Medal for their service, they humbly assign credit for the Brilliant Future campaign's success to University Advancement leadership and staff. Still, they take ownership of some pride points. Starting the fundraising effort just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit presented a major challenge.

“We blew through it as if it wasn't there,” Jimmy Peterson says. “And I'm also very proud that 70 percent of the gifts were under \$100 and 80 percent were from first-time donors. The community really stepped up.”

Philanthropy has long played a role in the San Juan Capistrano couple's lives. “We



James

Irvine Swinden

From gallery walls to hospital halls, James Irvine Swinden's gift to UC Irvine celebrates the beauty of California and promotes interdisciplinary research.

In 2016, he facilitated the transfer of 1,300 paintings from The Irvine Museum Collection to the newly formed UC Irvine Institute and Museum of California Art. In addition, he donated 280 reproductions of art from the museum that now hang in the hospital, nursing school, medical school, law school and administrative offices.

"The medical and nursing professions have become increasingly interested in how art affects the recovery of patients," says Swinden, president of The Irvine Museum. "And I am interested from the standpoint of how we can use art to enable improved care for patients by developing better observation skills. Eventually, I would like to see all the schools involved with the art."

An attorney, he and his mother, Joan Irvine Smith, made a lead gift to the School of Law, fulfilling a long-held dream of his grandmother, Athalie R. Clarke.

Swinden is a UC Irvine Foundation trustee and serves on the Sue & Bill Gross School of Nursing Dean's Cabinet and the law school's Board of Visitors. In addition, he chairs The Irvine Museum Collection at what's now called the Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art.

In 1997, the UC Irvine Alumni Association honored him with its Lauds & Laurels award for being an Outstanding Community Friend.

The Irvine family's roots run deep at UCI: Swinden's mother and grandmother were instrumental in the founding of the campus. Clarke was awarded the UC Irvine Medal in 1987, and Irvine Smith received the same award in 1990.



Zot! Zot! ZotGPT!

UC Irvine demonstrates how universities should be using AI

By Alison Van Houten

It was late summer of 2023. "ChatGPT 3.5 was all the rage," says Sarkis Daglian, UC Irvine's director of AI, cloud and client solutions. Tom Andriola, vice chancellor for data and information technology, was eager to roll out a proprietary artificial intelligence system by winter break – no short order.

"When I saw ChatGPT for the first time, I recognized it as a gaming-changing moment," Andriola says. "There are always technology advances, but game changers are rare."

"OpenAI and its counterparts are now bringing the history of the world's knowledge to our fingertips. So

for me," he adds, "the only logical answer was to lean in early and lean in hard so that members of our community could get their hands on these amazing tools and start to learn how they work and what it could mean to them."

The list of requirements came into focus: It needed to be private, AI-agnostic and equitably accessible. By January, Daglian and the rest of the tiny team had developed a closed AI system called ZotGPT and launched it for faculty and staff, free of charge. This May, complimentary access was made available to students too, who would otherwise have to buy subscriptions to similar tools.



“For our students, it’s shaping the way that they learn, interact and, ultimately, navigate their careers.”

 **ZotGPT Chat**

There are four branches beneath the ZotGPT umbrella. In addition to the flagship Chat service, which lets anyone on campus converse with the large language model of their choice, ClassChat aids faculty with instruction tasks like uploading reading material and assignments for their courses.

Thirty percent of campus currently uses ZotGPT in one way or another. (While alumni do not currently have access, it may become available in the future.) “The outreach from administration to leverage ZotGPT in different ways to make their daily lives more efficient, more effective, and save on costs – which is timely right now for the campus – has really accelerated in the last four to five months or so,” Daglian says.

Take Caryn Neiswender, a learning experience design strategist in UC Irvine’s Paul Merage School of Business. She has used ZotGPT for course development, instructional design and routine tasks as well as to create custom bots specifically for individual courses – all without programming expertise. Says Neiswender: “The ZotGPT suite of tools provides an innovative toolbox that not only facilitates effective use of GenAI but also provides a safe space for exploration and development.”

While learning how to harness generative AI has helped departments across campus save time and money, it’s becoming bare-minimum knowledge for students. “It’s going to be a core skill, like the use of email or the web,” Daglian says. “We’re having the same conversation we were having 20 years ago around the internet and using that – and then Google.”

Says Andriola: “For our students, it’s shaping the way that they learn, interact and, ultimately, navigate their careers. That responsibility was not lost on me and led me to push the ZotGPT team hard to bring tools out that everyone could use.”

No matter what students go on to do, Daglian says, they’ll interact with AI, which is now being utilized in every sector.

“We are ahead of the curve,” he continues, noting that only about 15 U.S. universities have deployed AI to their entire campus. “That’s a testament to our leadership and to the innovation of this campus that we had the foresight to see that AI is the next big thing in terms of a transformative technology that could help every aspect of the university.”

 **ClassChat**

Then there’s Creator. “When we first launched ZotGPT, everyone had amazing ideas on how to use it,” Daglian says. “However, we don’t have the bandwidth to bring every use case to life.” Creator is a user-friendly tool that enables staff and faculty to create their own custom AI assistants (and choose who they want to access them).

 **Creator**

 **ZotGPT API**

ZotGPT also has an application programming interface – or API – which allows users to approach it programmatically. Researchers who work with large datasets or analysis code and want to use a large language model, or LLM, (a type of neural network) might use ZotGPT API to find things they might otherwise overlook in their data. Another example? The Jack and Shanaz Langson Institute and Museum of California Art used it to analyze images of artworks to streamline the cataloging process.

The ZotGPT team has created an on-demand Academy as well as a Prompt Library to get users started, and it’s adding new features like integration with file storage systems and additional models for researchers. It’s also looking toward the next frontier, agentic AI (systems that can autonomously act), where one can string multiple instructions, datasets and systems together into a single work chain.

“
Everyone
has a story
to share.
”

The Magic Tinkerer

Alumna Charmaine Chan 'o6 uses her skills in VFX to create new creatures and worlds and highlight the contributions of her female peers worldwide

By Kristin Baird Rattini

Charmaine Chan's title at Industrial Light & Magic is visual effects supervisor, but this 18-year company veteran views herself, at heart, as a storyteller and tinkerer. On nearly 40 projects, including such blockbusters as *Andor*, *Star Wars: Episode VIII – The Last Jedi* and this summer's *Jurassic World Rebirth*, Chan has drawn on her arts training at UC Irvine and her talent for creative problem-solving to help bring incredible creatures and worlds to life. And in a side passion project called Women in Visual Effects, she's bringing to light the vital role that women like herself play in the industry worldwide. "Everyone has a story to share," Chan says.

Her story began on the Big Island of Hawaii, where she was raised with the sense that everyone is one big *ohana*, or family. Chan was 8 when her family's first computer, with Tetris preinstalled, sparked her imagination. "I remember thinking, 'Wow, what can I do with this?'" she says. "I've always been someone who likes to dig in and figure things out." She learned computer programming at school and taught herself HTML to design websites, including her own Spice Girls fan page complete with graphics and videos. "I was drawn to the visual side of things," Chan says. "It was art and tech coming together."

The timing of her studies at UC Irvine – she graduated with a bachelor's degree in studio art



in 2006 – allowed her to thoroughly explore and combine both elements. “UCI gave me such a well-rounded education,” Chan says. “I dabbled in so many different tools and mediums. It was during the transition period from analog filmmaking to digital, so I learned the fundamentals of art as well as the new technology.”

She joined ILM in 2007 and instantly felt a sense of *ohana* at the company that launched the visual effects industry. “I pinch myself every day that I get to work with the people I do,” she says. “There’s so much joy. Everyone is constantly teaching each other and learning and is so full of fun and imagination. We feed off that energy and passion and continue to create outstanding work because of that.”

Chan found her niche at ILM as a compositor, the team member who assembles all visual elements into the final image on screen. “You have your fingers in almost every department and learn from so many different artists,” she says. “But it’s up to you to figure it all out, which circles back to me loving being a tinkerer.”

The role and visibility of VFX creatives like Chan changed significantly with the advent of real-time rendering, in which virtual environments are projected onto LED screens behind actors during filming instead of being inserted afterward. In 2018, Chan worked on set for Season 1 of *The Mandalorian*,

ensuring that the real and digital sets blended seamlessly while star Pedro Pascal, as the Mandalorian, traveled from arctic tundra to desert planet. “When an actor feels that they’re in a fantasy location that doesn’t exist, that it feels absolutely real, that’s when you know you’ve done your job right,” she says.

Chan’s work with director Gareth Edwards on the 2023 movie *The Creator* was especially rewarding – and not just because her first project as a VFX supervisor won five Visual Effects Society awards. “There’s something special about working with a director who comes from a VFX background,” she explains, “who knows the lingo and exactly what’s needed to translate the image in his mind onto the screen.”

Since 2016, Chan has shared on screen the stories of more than 60 female VFX artists from around the world through her Women in

Visual Effects interview series. She has always been surrounded by women in leadership at ILM, but she was disappointed that so few were featured in behind-the-scenes interviews and footage. “It was something that needed to happen, not just at my company but across the industry,”

Chan says. Her series has led to presentations at industry conventions and collaborations with such organizations as Women in Animation and Animated Women UK.

Chan moved to ILM’s London office in 2019 and has relished her time there. “It has been such a positive move,” she says. “London has so much history and so many stories to tell.” She seizes every opportunity to travel throughout Europe, snapping lots of photos along the way that may very well make their way into her next VFX project. “The fun thing about visual effects is that even though we’re creating a fantasy, you need to ground it in reality,” Chan says. “We want people to connect with what they’re watching. So we need to step outside, into the world, and see what we can bring into our work.”

UC in Europe

Are you an Anteater living abroad? Find out how to connect with fellow Anteaters and other University of California alumni in Europe and participate in various educational and networking activities sponsored by the UC Trust.

<https://m.uci.edu/UCTrust>



Ripple Effect

A Generous Refrain

Mary Watson-Bruce, Ph.D. '82, has built a legacy with steady, consistent giving inspired by community, music and memories

By Christine Byrd

Mary Watson-Bruce has called UC Irvine home since 1971 – as an alum, gerontologist, community advocate and faculty spouse. But over the last several decades, she has been quietly building a legacy, one modest gift after another, year after year, to programs and departments that speak to her heart. Now the total impact of that philanthropy surprises even her.

Watson-Bruce arrived in Irvine with her husband, Dickson (Dave) Bruce, a scholar of American history who had landed a tenure-track job in what was then the comparative cultures program. Their romance is itself a bit of American history: They met as college students in Texas – he a white man and she a Black woman – two years before the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision solidifying the right to interracial marriage.

At UC Irvine, surrounded by academics, Watson-Bruce wasn't content being simply a "faculty wife." She wanted to conduct research and gain expertise in her own right. So she enrolled in the social sciences doctoral program, graduating in 1982 with an emphasis in gerontology. "My grandmother was a midwife and a Methodist minister, and she meant the whole world to me," Watson-Bruce says. "She's the reason I went into the study of aging."

She put that degree to work as UCI Health's associate director of geriatric medicine for a decade, helping to establish the Health Assessment Program for Seniors, which continues to thrive. Even beyond her job, Watson-Bruce advocated for health and housing in Orange County, serving on the boards of the Alzheimer's Association; the Irvine Senior Foundation; the Volunteer Center of Orange County, now OneOC; and Irvine Housing Opportunities, today called Innovative Housing Opportunities. Her impact on the development of affordable senior housing and senior day care facilities in Irvine earned her official recognition from the city, including being inducted on its Wall of Recognition in Colonel Bill Barber Marine Corps Memorial Park.

While Watson-Bruce's professional life focused on aging and health advocacy, music has been a lifelong passion, passed down from her mother, grandmother and great-grandfather. In 1997, she and several church friends co-founded the Orange County Women's Chorus. The 60-member group is still going strong today, with Watson-Bruce joining them to sing alto on tours in Wales, Canada and Croatia – plus two performances at New York City's storied Carnegie Hall.

When Dave Bruce died in 2014 after a brief illness, Watson-Bruce and their daughter, Emily, decided to honor his 37-year career on campus, during which he had mentored countless graduate students, served as associate dean of graduate studies, and directed the program in comparative cultures before it was absorbed and he joined the history department. They established the Dickson Bruce Dissertation Award Endowed Fund, with gifts from friends, colleagues and former students. Later, Watson-Bruce started using her mandatory annual IRA withdrawals as tax-free contributions to grow the fund – as well as to support other causes close to her heart. Through a bequest, she plans to donate an even larger sum to bolster the legacy in her husband's name.

"People don't realize you don't have to plop down \$10,000 or \$20,000 to make a gift," Watson-Bruce says. "I give in bits, and it all adds up. You can give within your budget year after year, and then you end up having given lots of support to organizations you love."

She doubled down on her support of a variety of UC Irvine programs in the past decade. A longtime opera aficionado with season tickets to the Long Beach Opera and the LA Opera, Watson-Bruce founded the UCI Opera Guild to help fund student opera performances on campus. More recently, she joined the Claire Trevor School of the Arts Dean's Arts Board and the school's Medici Circle, which provides scholarships to arts students. She also serves on the School of

Humanities Dean's Leadership Council, where projects that have piqued her interest include multidisciplinary research exploring the Black Panther Oakland Community School.

"You get chances to attend conferences or learn about interesting research projects on campus," Watson-Bruce says. "And often, once I know more, I believe I'd like to help a student make a trip to get into a library archive to research or something small like that. That's how I end up giving to all these different things."

Now, with 29 consecutive years of giving – totaling well into six figures – she will be the face of the campus's fall initiative, encouraging others to "Give Like Mary."

"I give because I can," Watson-Bruce says. "I support the organizations and programs that I want to exist, because they in turn support me through community. Giving has allowed me to create a community that helps me age with joy, dignity and fun. That's really important."



GIVE LIKE *Mary*

*"I give in bits, and
it all adds up ...
and then you end
up having given
lots of support
to organizations
you love."*

HEARTS OF BLUE AND GOLD

Alumni coaches
home in on
UC Irvine as a
destination

By Mark Whicker

ASHLIE HAIN '04

The new geography of intercollegiate athletics has no GPS, no detour signs, no direction home. For five UC Irvine coaches, then, it's even more comforting to embrace the familiar. They all played for the university once upon a time.

Ben Orloff '09 was a .320-hitting shortstop and the first Anteater to become Big West Player of the Year. Now he runs a baseball program that went 43-17 last year and made it to the NCAAs and has had seven players called by the MLB draft.

Ashlie Hain '04 has been in charge of women's volleyball for 10 years, on the same court where she set a campus career assist record that still stands and led the Anteaters to back-to-back NCAA tournaments. Her teams have upset four nationally ranked opponents.

David Kniffin '03 coached the men's volleyball team to the NCAA title in 2013, becoming only the second to do that in his initial season. He was on former UCI coach (and current CEO of USA Volleyball) John Speraw's staff for two other national championships. As





BEN ORLOFF '09

a player, Kniffin buoyed the Anteaters to their first No. 1 ranking.

Dan Klatt '01 has spent 21 seasons overseeing the women's water polo team and is in his fourth season coaching the men. He is a nine-time Big West Coach of the Year and took the women to nine conference titles; his men got to the NAAs for the first time in 30 years in 2023. Klatt himself was an Olympian and a two-time All-American, playing for the one and only Ted Newland at UC Irvine.

Mike Saunders '90 has brought the men's tennis team back to Big West prominence, winning its second straight conference championship – and third in the last four years – this past spring. The three-time Big West Coach of the Year was a member of the Anteater teams that made four straight NCAA appearances, including the 1989 team that finished fourth in the nation.

The advantages of coaching at one's alma mater are clear. It's easier to relate to the struggles that players might encounter, particularly in the classroom. It's also more natural

to recruit others to a place you believe in. In such cases, the truth reverberates.

"The person who comes here will be committed," says Kniffin, who is now the longest-tenured men's volleyball coach in Anteater history and was himself mentored as a student-athlete by the program's first coach, Bob Newcomb. "We can't offer the same ancillary support other schools do. But UCI will never

pretend to be something it's not, and that's important. The really high-level players look for the whole package."

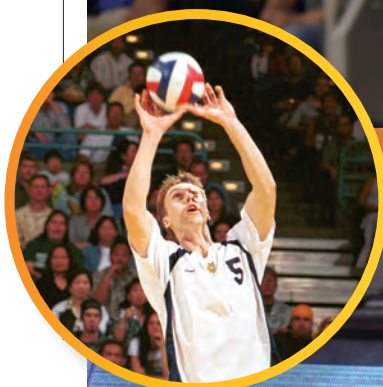
Such coaches also draw on the ways they were recruited. Saunders, from Utah, was picked up at the airport by legendary former head coach Greg Patton, who drove him not to the campus but to the beach. "I was sold," Saunders says, laughing. "He cultivated a brotherhood on those teams. We captured the imagination of the local tennis community. So in recruiting, I'm able to pitch all the wonderful benefits in an authentic, genuine way."

Klatt is from Fresno, so he also was attracted by splendor in the sand. "I was a Central Valley kid who was able to hang out with guys on the beach and play basketball and surf," he says. "I thought, 'This is a crazy good life.'"

Hain, from Thousand Oaks, was coaching at American River College, near Sacramento, when the UC Irvine job opened up. She had a husband, a baby, a house and tenure as a professor of kinesiology. But Hain saw a chance to "create a culture."

"My little boy has already gone to the new hospital," she says. "Our new area of health sciences is so awesome with its architecture, so clean. You can have a great lifestyle here."

“UCI will never pretend to be something it's not, and that's important. The really high-level players look for the whole package.”



DAVID KNIFFIN '03



Orloff, from Simi Valley, was recruited by UC Irvine coach Dave Serrano – and no one else. “I didn’t have a lot of options,” he says. “I was 150 pounds maybe. No power. Didn’t check a lot of boxes. We try to recruit guys with more skill than that, but often we’re going after the same type of kid. What comes with that is gratitude and a strong set of values, and that carries over. Being here before, it gives me more credibility with the recruits. I’m not just saying how I think it is. The kids sense that the coaching staff knows how it works here.”

There is coaching stability throughout the UC Irvine Athletics program. Men’s golf coach Paul Smolinski has been at UC Irvine for 27 years. Men’s basketball coach Russell Turner has completed his 15th season, and women’s soccer coach Scott Juniper is in his 19th year. Tamara Inoue, the women’s hoops coach, finished up a decade last spring.



DAN KLATT '01

And even though the campus keeps growing – horizontally and vertically – the coaches haven’t lost sight of their old sanctuaries. Sometimes they hang in Aldrich Park. “It’s a real oasis in the community,” Kniffin says. “Coming from Northern California, the expanse of space is impressive.”

Maybe the best part about UC Irvine is the equality in strength of the academics and athletics it provides. Says Saunders: “We’ve had more players than not who are very good at balancing. They can chase their dreams, but they make sure they’re preparing for life after tennis.”

Will the shifting collegiate landscape change the university’s idyllic nature? In the eyes of these five alumni coaches, UC Irvine will always be a destination as well as home.



MIKE SAUNDERS '90



UCI SportsZone



OC Sports Awards

UC Irvine student-athletes shined at the first OC Sports Awards at Angel Stadium of Anaheim. Volleyball player **Hilir Henno** was honored as the Male College Athlete of the Year; track & field's **Kailah McKenzie** was the Female College Athlete of the Year; and baseball player **Will Bermudez** was recognized with the Heart & Hustle Award. The star-studded event, sponsored by the Orange County Sports Commission and intended to be annual, celebrates the achievements of athletes and prominent sports figures who have made a significant impact on the Orange County sports community.

Off to a Good Start

Six student-athletes have been named to 2025 Big West preseason teams. Men's soccer players **Agaton Pourshahidi** and **Brady Treinen**, women's soccer player **Mihaela Perez**, women's volleyball player **Campbell Jensen**, and men's water polo players **Luka Krstic** and **Jack Stevens** were all selected.

Best of the Big West

UC Irvine captured the 2024-25 **Dennis Farrell Big West Commissioner's Cup**, awarded annually to the Big West institution that has the highest degree of success in all men's and women's conference-sponsored sports during the academic year. It's the first time the Anteaters have topped the standings, tallying 148.8 points, the second-highest total ever. UC Irvine won three Big West Championships, starting with men's water polo winning a second consecutive Big West title with a perfect 5-0 conference record. The spring sports teams brought home championships in baseball and women's outdoor track & field, the first in school history. Men's tennis was second in the regular season but went on to win the Big West Championship for the third time in the last four years and advance to the NCAAAs.



Tracking All-Americans

Liam Miksic and **Zharia Taylor** earned second-team All-America honors with their impressive finishes at the 2025 NCAA Division I Outdoor Track & Field Championships at the University of Oregon's Hayward Field.

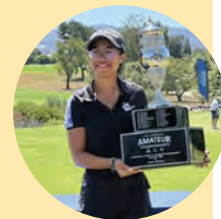
Miksic placed 12th in the men's javelin with a toss of 70.13 meters (230.1 feet). It was the second-best mark of his career, just short of his school-record 71.06 meters (233.1 feet). He closed out a decorated career as a second-team All-American, four-time NCAA regional qualifier and three-time Big West champion. He is UC Irvine's first NCAA Division I All-American in the men's javelin.

Taylor tied for 16th in the women's high jump. She easily cleared the opening height at 1.74 meters (5 feet, 8.5 inches) on her first try, then got over the bar at 1.79 meters (5 feet, 10.5 inches) on her second attempt. That height and her number of attempts put her in the top 16 for second-team All-America honors. Taylor is the first Anteater on the women's side to advance to nationals since 2009 and the first to earn All-America honors since 1997.



Swinging Summer Success

Golfer **Katelyn Kong** became the second Anteater to compete at the U.S. Women's Open. She followed that impressive feat with another, winning the 59th California Women's Amateur Championship at Santa Ana Country Club, beating Anteater teammate **Katherine Gerbing** on the way. The rising sophomore capped the summer making a run at the U.S. Women's Amateur Championship. Kong advanced to the Round of 16. Fellow sophomore **Alona Avery** competed in the 125th Women's Western Amateur Championship at Red Run Golf Club in Royal Oak, Michigan, advancing to the Round of 64.



Upcoming Events

November

3 Día de los Muertos

Sponsored by the School of Social Ecology, the third annual free event will feature a virtual community altar, mariachi music, Aztec and Ballet Folklórico performances, face painting, and sugar skull and flower-making craft booths.



6 Beyond Lecture

Discover how your smartphone could become a powerful tool in unlocking the universe's deepest secrets through cosmic rays and cutting-edge physics research when Daniel Whiteson, professor of physics and astronomy, speaks at the Ruth Ann and John Evans Family Beyond Lecture.

7 Lauds & Laurels

The 54th annual Lauds & Laurels distinguished alumni awards and dinner will honor 21 exceptional Anteaters, celebrating their outstanding contributions to the university, their respective fields or society at large.

13 Connect the Zots

Anteaters will gather in dozens of cities across the country for simultaneous casual networking events.



15 UCI Health — Irvine

You're invited to celebrate the grand opening of UCI Health — Irvine, a hospital designed to bring together advanced medicine and the serenity of nature. Join us as we prepare to open our doors to the community and step into a healthier future, together.

20 Hockey Fights Cancer Night

UCI Health is a proud sponsor of this National Hockey League event at the Honda Center that unites the hockey community in support of cancer patients and their families.

20-23 Little Women

Based on Louisa May Alcott's beloved novel, *Little Women: The Broadway Musical*, at the Irvine Barclay Theatre, follows the lives of the March sisters as they navigate love, loss and self-discovery in Civil War-era America.



Events subject to change. For updates and additional information, scan the QR code or go to: <https://engage.alumni.uci.edu/magazine-events>.

December

4 Men's Basketball vs. UC Riverside

Join the Anteater men for their Big West Conference home opener against the Highlanders of UC Riverside.

January

1 Women's Basketball vs. Cal State Bakersfield

Join the Anteater women for their Big West Conference home opener against the Roadrunners of Cal State Bakersfield.

February

9 Lunar New Year

UC Irvine's Lunar New Year Celebration is a tapestry of joy, diversity and community that invites guests to experience the rich heritage of this timeless holiday.

19 Dance Visions

Presented by the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, Dance Visions highlights the range and depth of faculty choreography through original works performed by UC Irvine's exceptional dance students.



28 Homecoming

Celebrate Anteater pride at UC Irvine's homecoming as we throw the ultimate Anteater block party and return to a street festival vibe in front of the Bren Events Center. Come home to UCI, visit your old stomping grounds, and enjoy live entertainment, great food and a festive atmosphere before the men's basketball team takes on the Gauchos of UC Santa Barbara.

UC Irvine Alumni

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The Inside ZOT!



Known for his powerful performances, **Ethan Henry Herisse '24** was born in Miami and raised in Massachusetts by parents who emigrated from Haiti. In 2019, he was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for his portrayal of Yusef Salaam (one of the Central Park Five) in Ava DuVernay's Emmy-nominated miniseries *When They See Us*. Herisse's other TV credits include *Chicago Med*, *The Mindy Project* and *Key & Peele*. He was discovered by a scout in 2010 while coaching his sister for the talent portion of a Miss America pageant. In 2012, Herisse's family moved across the country to Burbank to support his newfound passion. Both of his parents have master's degrees in health administration, and Herisse studied chemistry at UC Irvine while simultaneously pursuing his acting career, graduating six months before the release of *Nickel Boys*, which features him in a breakout role.

What is your favorite movie?

It's always changing; there's never just one. Right now, I'll say *Waves*, directed by Trey Edward Shults.

What influences your acting?

Life! Real life is so vast, and we each have our unique perspectives. I get the privilege of getting to explore the world (or different worlds) with a perspective that isn't my own. It's always fun because there's so much I can explore, create or pull from my own life when stepping into a new role.

What was your best inspirational moment?

I was most recently inspired by the number of talented creatives at the Oscars. I feel so lucky to have been in a room with so many people I look up to and call them my peers.

What is your most influential read and why?

The Underground Railroad, by Colson Whitehead. Colson explores the oppression of African Americans over the course of U.S. history in such a unique and captivating way in the novel. I learned so much and was left deeply affected. Fun fact: I read *The Underground Railroad* in Writing 39B in my first year at UCI. Another fun fact: I starred in *Nickel Boys*, the film adaptation of Colson Whitehead's novel of the same name.

What is your favorite spot on the UC Irvine campus?

Aldrich Park. You can't beat it – buying a hammock and using it at Aldrich was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

What is your favorite UC Irvine memory?

I can't choose just one memory, so I'll say the times I got to hang out with my hallmates in Bahia at Mesa Court. They made my first year at UCI truly special.

Who are your heroes?

My parents. I'm thankful for them every day.

What is your most treasured possession?

My Blu-ray DVD player.

What is the best advice you've ever been given?

The best advice I've been given came from a talented actor, Jovan Adepo. He encouraged me to remember that amid press, events or award campaigns, the most important part is the work. Getting to act and create is the best part of the job.

What is the best advice you could give?

Chase what you are passionate about. Whether you make that passion into a career or not is up to you. The most important thing is to keep it in your life in one way or another. Keep the things that light you up inside close.

BRILLIANT FUTURE
THE CAMPAIGN FOR **UCIrvine**

BRILLIANT, THANKS TO YOU

The Brilliant Future campaign may have closed, but your impact is just beginning. Because of you, this became the most ambitious – and successful – campaign in the history of UC Irvine and Orange County, raising more than \$2 billion.

Thank you for being a part of this extraordinary journey.



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