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IMPACT

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COLLEGE OF NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Message from the Dean 3

Faculty Spotlight: Andre Ellis 4

Redefining Inclusion at Cal State LA 4

A Roadmap to Health Professions 5

Cal State LA Math Professor Receives CSU's Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award . . 6

Bringing Data to the People 7

Diversifying the Faculty of Tomorrow 8

Student Spotlight: Nancy Flores 8

Three NSS Faculty Members Awarded Cal State LA's Outstanding Professor Award 9

Staff Spotlight: Violet Capistran 10

Student Spotlight: Eric Medina Castañeda 11

Meet Our New Faculty Members 12

Faculty Spotlight: Ericka Verba 14

Celebrating Ethnic Studies 15

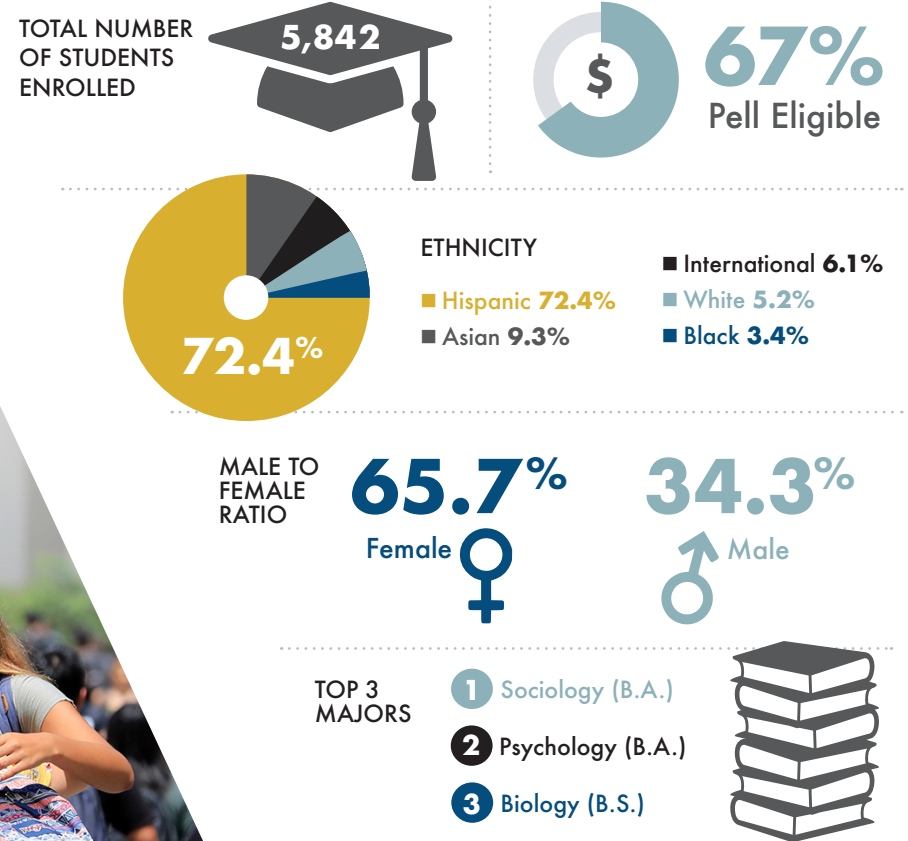
Student Spotlight: Janielle Cuala 16

Faculty Spotlight: James Brady 17

Alumni Spotlight: Ed Vivanco 18

Giving Update 19

ABOUT US



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A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

When I think about our past, present, and future achievements here at the College of Natural and Social Sciences, the word *impact* comes to mind: the *impact* faculty and staff have on the lives of students, the *impact* faculty and student research have already made on society, and the *impact* our students will make on their immediate communities and the world at large.

Our ambitious mission to be agents of change and transform greater Los Angeles is evidenced by the number of innovative programs launched in the college within the last year. In this issue, you will read about the Sci-FIT program made possible by a \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. The Sci-FIT program promotes inclusive pedagogical approaches to teaching science to our diverse student population. Also featured are our outstanding NSS faculty such as Silvia Heubach (page 6), who was awarded the Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award by the CSU Chancellor's Office. They are all deeply committed to student success, not only within the college, but throughout the University.

I take pride in the college for being at the forefront of data science — especially in its use for socially conscious and equity-minded civic engagement. Thanks to the National Science Foundation, the college (along with the City of Los Angeles and Community Partners) was awarded \$1 million to increase data accessibility and promote civic engagement among underserved populations. During the summer, six of our community-minded and committed students worked alongside local area non-profits utilizing the City

of Los Angeles' data to improve upon their programs and service deliveries.

Looking back on the history of NSS, I am reminded of the impact we have made in transforming ethnic studies education. 2018 marked the 50th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the Department of Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies, the first in the nation, and the Department of Pan-African Studies, the second in the nation. These disciplines have provided our students with tools to understand their collective histories and cultures, and navigate an increasingly complex world.

When I took the helm of the college three years ago, I reinforced my commitment to support programs that enhance the educational experiences of our students. It is still my belief that these experiences will not only prepare our students to meet the challenges of a dynamic society — as stated in our vision statement — but also give them the tools to prepare for the workforce, and to positively impact their environment.

Pamela E. Scott-Johnson, Ph.D.
Dean

OUR MISSION

We are agents of change, promising to serve and transform greater Los Angeles and the global society through innovative and intentional learning environments, socially conscious and equity-minded civic engagement, and impactful (inter) disciplinary research.





FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ANDRE ELLIS

As the director of the Sci-FIT program, Professor Andre Ellis works with colleagues across the University on improving the educational experience for students.

Asked about his long-term hopes for the program, he says, “We often teach the way we were taught. But, maybe there are ways to change how we teach and how we see our students that will make a positive impact on their educational experience. It’s difficult to do individually, but if enough people are open to making changes, perhaps we can succeed collectively.”

Ellis knows he’s fortunate to be working on such an inspiring project. He says with a laugh, “It’s the best project I’ve worked on in my entire academic career. We look forward to the meetings—which you can’t usually say about typical meetings!”

“It’s difficult to do individually, but if enough people are open to making changes, perhaps we can succeed collectively.”

REDEFINING INCLUSION AT CAL STATE LA

Cal State LA awarded \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute

In the fall of 2018, the College of Natural and Social Sciences received a \$1 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) to train faculty to better engage with and teach students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, especially those in STEM, in order to lower the equity gap. The project will also engage administrators and staff to examine institutional practices and policies that have hidden modes of bias that impact positive student experiences and outcomes.

With the help of the HHMI grant, the college established the Science Faculty for Inclusive Excellence and Transformation (Sci-FIT) program to create an “equity-focused professional development program for faculty,” says Andre Ellis, the grant’s principal investigator and professor of geosciences and environment. The program is designed to create institutional transformation by substantially and sustainably increasing the capacity for inclusion and equity.

Using an inquiry-based approach, the program brings together like-minded faculty and staff from colleges and departments across the University to identify educational inequalities and understand how their teaching practices might contribute to inequities

in students’ outcomes. By participating in the program, faculty will be mindful of their own modes of thinking, have the tools and resources to change their teaching practices and, hopefully, eliminate the equity gap.

During the Spring and Summer of 2019, faculty attended equity workshops in partnership with the University of Southern California’s (USC) Center for Urban Education. Faculty were trained on new ideologies and practices, in order to bring those learnings back to campus to train the broader faculty community.

The program’s impact extends beyond faculty and staff. The grant also aims to increase student engagement by fostering their scientific identities and building their sense of belonging. To do this, faculty will incorporate new teaching methods and learnings into all introductory science courses, and ultimately in all intro to upper division courses over the next few years. The intention is to get to know students on a more personal level, understand how their unique experiences and differences can be an asset in the classroom, and ultimately transform their educational experience.

“This isn’t just a one-time project,” says Ellis. “We’re looking for real, institutional, sustainable change.”

“It is imperative that programs like HCAO exist to provide access to professional fields and narrow the achievement gap in higher education.”

A ROADMAP TO HEALTH PROFESSIONS

The Health Careers Advisement Office prepares students to pursue health related graduate programs

Tatiana Eiley, an aspiring medical student and 2019 Cal State LA graduate, owes some of her undergraduate student success to the Health Careers Advisement Office (HCAO).

“I am so grateful to the Health Careers Advisement Office for being a great resource during my last two years as a pre-health student.”

The Health Careers Advisement Office aims to “provide excellent resources and support in order to mobilize the diverse student body to successfully enter health professions schools and go on to serve communities in need,” according to Maite Villareal Rodriguez, HCAO’s advisor. The office’s objectives are to: 1) expose Cal State LA students to a diversity of health careers, 2) effectively coach them to maximize their competitiveness as candidates, 3) cultivate a vibrant pre-health community of students internally and externally, and 4) inspire students to serve in a capacity that impacts their local communities.

To achieve its objectives, HCAO provides individual and group advising, workshops and panel presentations, mock interviews, personal statement review, networking

opportunities for clinical experiences and shadowing, a health careers course, weekly newsletter, application support, mentoring program, scholarship opportunities, health professions fair, and linkages with professional schools.

“HCAO truly shaped my competitiveness as a medical school applicant. Even as an alumni, I still utilize the resources provided by the office. I will always appreciate the support and guidance from Maite,” says Eiley.

HCAO has formed strong partnerships with student health career organizations to expand its student outreach across the University. Last spring, HCAO held its first Health Professions Fair with over 40 health profession schools and more than 500 students in attendance.

“I would like to see HCAO become a leader in the health career pipeline within Los Angeles,” says Villareal Rodriguez. She adds, “Though the program has grown in the last two years, we look forward to expanding our resources as we work with community partners, funders, and individuals who can help HCAO increase Cal State LA students’ acceptance rates into

health professions schools at a time where we face severe healthcare professional shortages in California.

According to the California Future Health Workforce Commission Report, “seven million Californians, the majority of them Latino, African American, and Native American, already live in Health Professional Shortage Areas — a federal designation for counties experiencing shortfalls of primary care, dental care, or mental health care providers. These shortages are most severe in some of California’s largest and fastest-growing regions, including the Inland Empire, Los Angeles, and San Joaquin Valley, and in most rural areas.”

HCAO offers a long-term solution to this problem: With an HCAO office and advisor present, Cal State LA students are more successful in applying and gaining acceptance to health professions schools.

“With more than 1,200 students registered as pre-health, 81% are first generation college students and 97% identify as ethnic minorities. It is imperative that programs like HCAO exist to provide access to professional fields and narrow the achievement gap in higher education,” says Villareal Rodriguez.



CAL STATE LA MATH PROFESSOR RECEIVES CSU'S FACULTY INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP AWARD

“I have been given the freedom and support to develop as an instructor and a leader, and I am proud of the impact of my work on student success.”

Silvia Heubach, a mathematics professor at Cal State LA, was named a 2018 recipient of the prestigious Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award, an award given to faculty leaders who have implemented innovative practices that significantly improve student success. Heubach was one of only 26 faculty members in the California State University system to receive the award.

“I was really honored to be Cal State LA's first recipient of the Faculty Innovation and Leadership Award. During my 23 years at Cal State LA, I have been given the freedom and support to develop as an instructor and a leader, and I am proud of the impact of my work on student success,” says Heubach.

A committee of faculty and student representatives from the CSU Chancellor's Office selected the inaugural awardees out of more than 360 nominations. “These exceptional recipients demonstrate leadership in their respective fields and incorporate cutting-edge techniques into curriculum,” said CSU Chancellor Timothy P. White. “Their commitment to student success ensures that the value of a CSU degree continues to increase.”

“I feel very blessed that I have been given the opportunity to develop courses that make mathematics meaningful to a wide range of students and to change their perception of and attitude towards mathematics,” she said.

Heubach was the principal investigator on a National Institutes of Health grant that focused on improving the quantitative reasoning skills of life sciences majors at Cal State LA. In 2012, she helped to redesign a series of math courses pertaining to the life sciences. Since then, nearly 5,000 students have enrolled, pass rates have increased, and students have shown improved attitudes towards math.

Additionally, Heubach is the faculty learning community coordinator for a four-year “First in the World” grant funded by the US Department of Education. The project targets bottleneck courses in STEM disciplines, and uses the “flipped” approach to teaching, where students read textbooks and view lectures online on their own, reserving classroom time for active learning, to help students learn and achieve a deeper understanding of difficult concepts.

She has also played a leading role in revamping the path to higher-level math for incoming students. First year freshmen, who would have been required to take developmental mathematics courses, begin instead with a general education math course that includes a co-requisite support course. As part of a team of math faculty, administrators and staff, Heubach led the redesign of the general education statistics course, which has an enrollment of nearly 2,000 students this fall.

“Students research issues like incarceration, poverty, and food insecurity rates—all of which are problems they may be going through—but now they look at them through the lenses of policy, non-profits, and government.”

BRINGING DATA TO THE PEOPLE

Cal State LA awarded nearly \$1 million from the National Science Foundation

Cal State LA has been awarded a nearly \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation to increase data accessibility and promote civic engagement among students and underserved communities in Los Angeles.

The grant will establish a partnership between Cal State LA, the city of Los Angeles and Community Partners to increase access and use of the city's big data collection.

Through the partnership, training will be provided to residents and nonprofits using the city's open data portal and GeoHub, a first-of-its-kind geospatial open data platform for exploring, visualizing, and downloading location-based open data created by Mayor Eric Garcetti's office. The goal of the grant project is to empower city residents—especially those in traditionally underserved and digitally disconnected areas—and nonprofits to engage in civic decision-making.

Cal State LA will also introduce GeoHub, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, and data-driven decision-making to students by weaving big data education into undergraduate and graduate curricula through civic engagement and service learning opportunities with the University's nonprofit partners.

Cal State LA students will work closely with nonprofits to train the organizations in assessing and analyzing data specific to their areas of interest. Furthermore, selected students, known as the Social Equity Engagement geo-Data Scholars (SEEDS), will participate in an immersive internship experience with non-profit organizations during the summer months to improve upon the agencies' programs and service deliveries using the open data portal.

Community Partners, a nonprofit that provides expert guidance, services and support to more than 150 social good programs and initiatives, will connect Cal State LA students to community organizations that can benefit from access to the city's open data portal.

“There are so many ways to use the data,” says Jessica Bodoh-Creed, project manager for the grant and a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology. “We want our students to think about problems that they face in different ways. Students research issues like incarceration, poverty, and food insecurity rates—all of which are problems they may be going through—but now they look at them through the lenses of policy, non-profits, and government. This is eye opening for them, and it brings something more to the table for us.”

The partnership will provide an innovative way to make data accessible and understandable, and to connect people and information to the improvement of policies for positive change.

“We will now be able to reach one of the overarching goals of open data: creating a community of practice where data ignites new conversations within a neighborhood with city officials, sparking meaningful community change.”

“This grant opens up a world of opportunities to train students on how they can leverage city data to advocate for their neighborhoods,” said Sari Ladin-Sienne, chief data officer in the Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Budget and Innovation.

DIVERSIFYING THE FACULTY OF TOMORROW

Cal State LA awarded \$453,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

In 2018, Cal State LA received a grant for \$453,000 from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to establish the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) program. The long-term goal of the program is to diversify the professoriate by mentoring, training, and providing financial support to select undergraduate students. Cal State LA represents one of the five-member California State University (CSU) Consortium, and one of the few public institutions participating in the fellowship program. Cal State LA's participation will broaden the impact on graduate programs and subsequent engagement of students as future faculty on institutional missions of diversity and inclusion.

Enrique Ochoa, professor of Latin American Studies and history, and founding faculty coordinator, says, "This program is unique because it is truly an asset-based program. Students are encouraged to bring their knowledge and their unique backgrounds that they have historically been told to 'check at the door'." He continues, "This program helps students see that they are highly capable and able to reach for and accomplish their dreams." The inclusion of the students' lived experiences will impact their college experiences and hopefully motivate them to add their voices to the academy, through scholarship and overall engagement.

Every year, four rising sophomores or juniors are selected to become MMUF fellows. Fellows are funded to prepare for entry into doctoral programs. Fellows, through their academic year and summer training, develop and strengthen their writing skills, oral presentations skills, create and conduct research. Given the long-term goals, fellows also learn more about what it means to be a university faculty member. Says Ochoa, "Changing demographics in the United States demand that we develop a professoriate that looks like this country. By participating in the MMUF program, our students have the cultural capital to make informed decisions about their future."

The fellows have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have their voices impact the narratives of the academy. According to Ochoa, "Students in this program will see their potential while introducing them to other worlds and experiences they might never have envisioned for themselves."



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: NANCY FLORES

Pursuing a Ph.D. with mentorship and support

Nancy Flores is taking time to reflect on the benefits of joining the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) program.

"I knew this program could have a huge influence on my college career," said Flores, who is majoring in Pan-African Studies and Latin American Studies, with a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Flores is part of the inaugural cohort, making 2019 her second summer as an MMUF fellow. This program allows her to improve her research skills, build a network, and achieve her goal of obtaining a Ph.D.

"Before becoming a fellow, I did not know about research, literature, or the research process," says Flores. "Mentors from the program have taught me in a holistic way, and encouraged me to travel to conferences and present my research." Flores continues, "The most rewarding experience so far has been building the relationships."

Flores' research focuses on students who have taken extended leaves from their education either during or after their K-12 year and decided to return to complete their education.

"Most of these students have been pushed out of traditional high schools before they decide to return," says Flores. "Since they are often not expected to go back, they do not get the support or guidance needed. I'm interested in these students' experiences and obstacles and what made them return to finish high school and continue on to higher education. I will start my research by focusing on students from my home institution of Cal State LA."



Daphne Liu, Professor, Department of Mathematics



Lawson Bush, V, Professor, Department of Pan-African Studies, Division of Applied and Advanced Studies in Education



ChorSwang Ngin, Professor, Department of Anthropology

THREE NSS FACULTY MEMBERS AWARDED CAL STATE LA'S OUTSTANDING PROFESSOR AWARD

Each year, Cal State LA recognizes those professors who are outstanding teachers and show a deep level of devotion to their students' success. In 2018, three NSS faculty members were celebrated as Outstanding Professors.

What do you enjoy most about teaching in NSS?

"Teaching in Pan-African Studies is an absolute joy as it permits me to bring my full self to the classroom. This allows my students to have an authentic and transformative experience."

— Lawson Bush, V

"I have the best career in the world! Teaching is such a fulfilling job, and math is so beautiful and applicable. I have taught a wide range of math courses— more than two-dozen subjects— including general education, lower division, upper division, and graduate level courses. What I enjoy the most is having the opportunity to assist students to learn, to succeed, and to thrive! I enjoy seeing students' eyes and faces light up from learning math."

— Daphne Liu

"The ability to interact with colleagues from a range of disciplines. My research within the field of anthropology shares many commonalities with those from the other disciplines in the social sciences, especially ethnic studies, history and sociology."

— ChorSwang Ngin

What aspect of your work are you most proud of?

"I am grateful and humbled that my work pushes both the scholarship and practice around Black boys and men into a new direction and on a pathway towards freedom."

— Lawson Bush, V

"I am a first-generation college graduate. Education changed the course of my life. I am most proud of assisting students in succeeding and finding their talent and ability in math, making a direct impact on students' lives. In research, I am proud of both finding the answer to an open math problem and proving a new theorem that leads to new discoveries. I am also proud of mentoring students on research and obtaining substantial results with them."

— Daphne Liu

"I enjoy sharing with my students my knowledge and my approach to learning. I present to them the challenges of solving the seemingly impossible to tackle issues in the world that require both their expertise and their obligation to care about our fellow human beings."

— ChorSwang Ngin

What do you hope your students take away from their experience in your classes?

"I teach to facilitate a spiritual exorcism of white supremacy that allows students to leave my classes closer to their own divinity."

— Lawson Bush, V

"Students realize that math really makes sense, is fun, and is applicable. They gain confidence in math and recognize that doing well in math has a direct impact on their other courses and their future."

— Daphne Liu

"I want them to know it is through reading and learning that we come to understand the challenges in the world. It is really all a matter of seeking a deeper understanding of the issues around us."

— ChorSwang Ngin

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: VIOLET CAPISTRAN

Making it easier for students to succeed

Ask any NSS staff and faculty about Violet Capistran and their response is unanimous: Violet is as passionate about her work as she is committed to student success.

Capistran began her tenure at Cal State LA 10 years ago as an administrative support assistant for the Department of Political Science. After a year and a half, she moved to the Department of Psychology where she cemented her reputation as a hard worker who is integral to the success of a department.

"It is no exaggeration to say that the success of the psychology department largely depended on her skills and dedication," says Senqi Hu, chair of the psychology department. "She is the embodiment of excellence in this institution, and every day, the faculty was aware of our good fortune to have been supported by her hard work and commitment."

In 2016, Capistran was promoted again to the assistant to the associate dean position where she works closely with Associate Dean Nancy McQueen to maintain and review class schedules in the college, among a host of other duties.

"Violet serves as a treasure trove of information for the college (including me), and its faculty, staff, and students. In particular, the academic support coordinators in all NSS departments look to her as a leader in solving scheduling challenges and providing valuable advice," says McQueen.

Capistran sees her commitment to the college as necessary to help students graduate and pave the pathway to upward mobility.

"It took me 16 years to obtain my bachelor's degree so I know

how difficult it is for our students. A majority of them work and go to school simultaneously," she says. "My job is to make it easier for our students to succeed."

Capistran sits on two committees within the college — she serves as the recording secretary for the Nominations Committee and serves on the Selection Committee for the NSS Outstanding Lecturer Award Nominee. For two years in a row, she was nominated by her colleagues to receive the university-wide Outstanding Staff Award.

"I only do well at my job with the help of the other staff who make my job easy, fun, and impactful. I really love working here and I get such joy seeing the students succeed. For this, I know the work we, the staff, do here is beneficial."

"She is the embodiment of excellence in this institution, and every day, the faculty was aware of our good fortune to have been supported by her hard work and commitment."

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: ERIC MEDINA CASTAÑEDA

An insatiable desire to learn

Eric Medina Castañeda had every intention of a career in fire technology. He enrolled in Santa Ana College, completed an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) course and even began volunteering in an ambulance to gain field experience. But life had other plans.

"As part of my fire technology courses, I took a biology course and was immediately captivated. Biology is the basis of life—which to me is exciting," says Castañeda.

Castañeda graduated from California State University, Dominguez Hills with a bachelor's degree in biology and enrolled at Cal State LA to obtain a master's degree in biology.

"I decided to pursue a graduate education after I was introduced to research methodologies at Dominguez Hills. Now, my goal is to obtain a Ph.D. in biology to further my study of the human body and its functions at a molecular level."

At Cal State LA, Castañeda was accepted into the Minority Biomedical Research Support-Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (MBRS-RISE) program where he conducts research under the tutelage of Robert Nissen, chair of the Department of Biological Sciences. MBRS-RISE, a component of the Minorities Opportunities in Research (MORE) Programs, provides graduate students research and career enhancement opportunities in support of their doctoral degree pursuits.

"MORE programs exist for the sole purpose of identifying and developing talented individuals that will contribute to

the American scientific enterprise," says Krishna Foster, MORE programs co-director and professor of chemistry and biochemistry. "We look for resilient, hard-working, curious individuals like Eric with an insatiable desire to enrich society through research."

Castañeda also credits the MBRS-RISE program for broadening his access to the larger scientific community through multiple career development activities.

MORE provided a week-long seminar class to prepare students for the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE). Program participants were invited to a retreat in Lake Arrowhead to network with alumni, fellow students, professors, and recruiters from graduate schools.

"This was helpful in forging my path at Cal State LA, determining my research interests, expanding my network and understanding the Ph.D. program application process," Castañeda says.

Castañeda was accepted to the Irell & Manella Graduate School of Biological Sciences at City of Hope and will begin his Ph.D. program in Fall 2019.

"Thanks to Cal State LA and its committed faculty, especially Dr. Nissen, Dr. Gutierrez and Dr. Foster, I feel prepared for the next chapter in my life," he says. "The University created programs that have catapulted many students to success. Now, it is my turn to make a difference in the world through my research. I hope I can make my mentors proud."

MEET OUR NEW FACULTY MEMBERS

NSS welcomed six new faculty members in Fall 2018



ASHLEY HEERS (top left)
Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences

JIE ZHONG (top center)
Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics

OLASENI SODE (top right)
Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry



ALEJANDRO VILLALPANDO (bottom left)
Assistant Professor, Latin American Studies Program,
Department of Pan-African Studies

DONG ZHOU (bottom center)
Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics

FLORIDALMA BOJ LOPEZ (bottom right)
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology



Q: Why did you choose to come to NSS?

“I had been a full-time adjunct professor for about seven years prior to joining the tenure-track for the Department of Pan-African Studies and the Latin American Studies Program. I have been so privileged and honored to teach in both of these dynamic scholarly and activist fields on campus. I earned a Ph.D. in ethnic studies and I realized that the students who major in fields that are housed in NSS often share visions that reflect a desire to create a better world through scholarship, community organizing, and mutuality. Students who I have worked with benefit greatly from the incredible faculty across the college and I am proud to be part of this group of visionary thinkers and educators.”
—Alejandro Villalpando

“I chose to come to NSS because I want to make an impact on the lives of the students here and show them new experiences that they may not have seen before.”
—Olaseni Sode

Q: As a new faculty member, what are you hoping to contribute to NSS?

“I am hoping to bring my expertise in computational and applied mathematics. I taught numerical analysis and mathematical modeling during my first year at Cal State LA and enjoyed interacting with all my students. I am excited to continue sharing my knowledge and my passion in this field with my students in the future. Programming is a crucial component of computational math; so, I am also hoping to incorporate more programing components into my teaching and expose students to this important skill for their future career in academia or industry. My research interest in numerical methods for partial differential

equations has rich applications in physics, biology, and engineering. I am also very excited about potential collaboration on research with faculty members in NSS and across the University.”
—Dong Zhou

“I hope to bring new energy, perspective, and direction to NSS. I am committed to bringing both new research ideas to campus and new ideas on how to improve the student experience and learning.”
—Olaseni Sode

“I am hoping to bring new teaching techniques that are both unique yet complementary to those that already exist.”
—Ashley Heers

Q: What is most rewarding about teaching students at Cal State LA?

“The most rewarding part about teaching at Cal State LA is knowing the impact that one comment, lecture, and/or class can have on our students. I am a born-and-raised South Central Los Angeles resident and still live in my community. As such, I know the value of shaping and guiding our students to think beyond their individual circumstances and understand the mechanics of the world at large that create such egregious inequity based on racial, gendered, and class lines. Knowing that our students come equipped with many gifts from their own communities, families, and personal experiences and creating space in the classroom to empower these skills is a unique experience as an educator. I find immense joy and inspiration in knowing that students who leave my classes feel emboldened to not only think in new ways but also are encouraged to make change in Los Angeles and beyond.”
—Alejandro Villalpando

“On the first day of pre-calculus class, I asked everyone the same question, ‘how do you like mathematics?’ One of my students said he hated it because mathematics is difficult and boring. After we worked together for a semester, I asked him the same question again. “Not bad,” he said while smiling. I really enjoy the feeling that I can help my students improve and be better.”
—Jie Zhong

“The most rewarding parts about this job are building connections with my students and helping them explore their passions and achieve their goals. I remember running into a former student on campus last semester. He told me with excitement that what he had learned in my class helped him gain a deeper understanding of some of the more abstract concepts in a more advanced course. It is moments like these that make me happy to be a professor.”
—Dong Zhou

Q: What excites you most about your future at NSS?

“Included in my areas of research are machine learning and data science. NSS gives me various opportunities to contribute my expertise and involve more students in these fields. I also expect to collaborate with other faculty members from different departments within NSS.”
—Jie Zhong

“I am most excited about the potential to make a difference through my research and teaching methods.”
—Ashley Heers

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ERICKA VERBA

Telling the story of Latin America by way of music

Ericka Verba knew early on that her life's passion was to tell the story of Latin America to those outside the region. Today, she is pursuing her dream as the director of the college's Latin American Studies program, helping bridge the social sciences, arts, and letters to provide students with a broad understanding of Latin America and its connections to the rest of the world.

The Latin American Studies program is one of the first of its kind to be established in the United States. Its interdisciplinary focus draws on the expertise of over 30 Cal State LA faculty members.

"Our students are absolutely fantastic. Most of them are first-generation and Latino, and around 10 percent of them will go on to pursue fully funded Ph.D. programs—which is about the right ratio, given the job market," says Verba. "We create a space where they can succeed, and they go for it. I'm excited about the idea of our students replacing us one day!"

In addition to her work overseeing the Latin American Studies program, Verba is an accomplished and lauded researcher in her discipline. She dedicated her professional life to understanding the impact of Violeta Parra (a Chilean folklorist, musician, and artist) on politics, culture, and art.

"Parra is the most famous Latin American woman that the English-speaking world has never heard of. I want her to be as heard of as Frida Kahlo," she says. Verba has received an award from the National Endowment for the Humanities to write Parra's biography, and has spoken around the world about her research.

Verba is also an accomplished musician and was a founding member of the Los Angeles-based new song groups Sabiá and Desborde.

As passionate as she is about Latin American history and music, Verba finds her greatest joy working with the students in the Latin American Studies program. She says, "It's incredible to be part of such a close-knit and welcoming program where we all share an interest and passion for Latin America. We're also making a real dent in the number of Latino Ph.D. candidates going out into the world. This program is truly transformative—not only for our students, but for the next generation of students."



"This program is truly transformative—not only for our students, but for the next generation of students."

CELEBRATING ETHNIC STUDIES

Cal State LA students are empowered to become culturally-grounded leaders

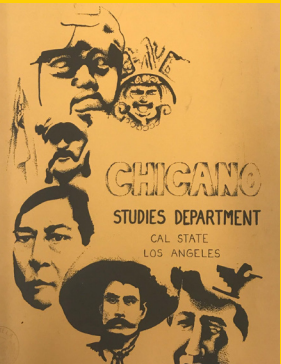
Pan-African Studies at Cal State LA is the second oldest Black Studies department in the nation. The establishment of the department in 1969 speaks volumes to the vision of our students, especially the Black Student Union. It also speaks to the strength of organizers in our community, who understood Pan-African and ethnic studies as more than just an academic pursuit, but instead as a broader intellectual endeavor that empowers the community beyond the confines of the campus. Finally, the establishment of Pan-African Studies in tandem with what was then known as Chicano Studies (now Chicana/o/Latina/o Studies), is emblematic of a solidarity praxis that binds Black and Brown freedom and justice struggles to each other. Pan-African Studies has grown into an academic home for Black students on the campus, has become known as the "intellectual arm of the revolution," has gained a strong standing in the community, helping to give birth to historic movements like Black Lives Matter, and continues to empower students to step into their fullest selves."

— Melina Abdullah, Department of Pan-African Studies



Having CLS at Cal State LA means we've been able to build on a legacy of activism, intellectualism, creativity, and public service. It also means CLS, as a part of the ethnic studies collective, has a responsibility to continue the work that needs to be done to best serve our students so that they can positively impact our communities."

— Dolores Delgado Bernal, Department of Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies



Our ethnic studies departments at Cal State LA continue to be uniquely positioned to educate culturally-grounded students who will provide essential leadership to the City of Los Angeles and beyond. There is a very long list of outstanding and distinguished ethnic studies alumni who have contributed in significant ways to enhancing economic, health, and educational opportunities among L.A.'s diverse communities, and we anticipate that future graduates will continue the long tradition of investing in the success of their communities. We look forward to their success and extend the University's deep appreciation to our outstanding ethnic studies faculty and staff for their commitment and hard work in support of our students."

— Octavio Villalpando, Vice President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion





STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: JANIELLE CUALA

Janielle Cuala receives California State University's (CSU) Trustees' Award for Outstanding Achievement

While growing up in Guam, Janielle Cuala's favorite subject was science. But her family didn't consider that an appropriate field for a woman, so she set out to earn a degree in nursing.

But her passion for science and research proved so strong that she changed her field of study, even though that meant she would have to pay her own way through college.

Cuala, now a 2019 graduate, was one of 23 students statewide who received the 2018 California State University (CSU) Trustees' Award for Outstanding Achievement—CSU's highest recognition of student achievement and scholarship.

"It was really exciting. Receiving this scholarship helped me focus on school and research rather than worrying about financial issues," said Cuala, who lives in Alhambra. "I am proud to represent minorities, women, and people from Guam trying to pursue a career in the STEM fields."

Cuala was honored for her superior academic performance, exemplary community service, and significant personal accomplishments.

As a child, Cuala enjoyed conducting experiments and participating in school science fairs. She remembers being fascinated by a can-crushing experiment, which demonstrated the science of water vapor pressure.

But there were few opportunities for STEM enthusiasts in Guam, and Cuala felt obligated to please her parents by studying nursing.

When she wound up living in Los Angeles, 6,000 miles from her home, she enrolled in Los Angeles City College and was introduced to the Bridges to the Future Program, which is part of the Minority Opportunities in Research (MORE) Programs at Cal State LA. The ten weeks of scientific research the summer program offered solidified her passion and confirmed her career path.

That summer led her to transfer to Cal State LA through the MORE Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement program, where she continued her research in Professor Cecilia Zurita-Lopez's lab. She excelled in her coursework and research and was accepted in the University's Minority Access to Research Careers-Undergraduate Student Training for Academic Research honors program.

The program helps prepare undergraduate students to successfully compete for positions in top graduate programs, leading to a Ph.D. in scientific fields useful to biomedical research.

Cuala completed her bachelor's degree in biochemistry and will begin her Ph.D. program at the University of Southern California. Her ultimate goal is to become a research scientist and serve as a role model for students in Guam who are interested in the STEM fields.

"I want to go back to Guam to create a mentoring program, like the MORE Programs, to help future students achieve a Ph.D. or career in STEM," she said.

"Most of our students have never considered the field of archaeology, so we can't just tell them about this opportunity and have them believe it's an option. Instead, we've shown them year after year by exposing them to the field and giving them a chance to actually do the work—and now the program attracts some of the best and brightest students in the country."



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: JAMES BRADY

A passion for caves and teaching his students

James Brady, professor of Anthropology and a Mesoamerican archaeologist, didn't set out to pioneer the field of Maya cave archaeology. However, that's exactly what happened after he stumbled across a local newspaper article highlighting a newly discovered cave while living in Guatemala in 1979.

He says, "I visited Naj Tunich and thought it was the greatest thing I had ever seen. No one really knew much about caves in those days, so it was a pretty extraordinary find."

Brady joined the Department of Anthropology at Cal State LA in 1998. Since then, he has been named Distinguished Faculty Alumnus, Outstanding Professor, and President's Distinguished Professor. He says, "I love Cal State LA. The student body here is perfect for my skillset and my passions, and I've been able to do great things because of that."

Professor Brady recalls that it wasn't always easy to get students interested in Mesoamerican cave archaeology. "Our first challenge," he says, "was getting the program going and attracting students. Most of our students have never considered the field of archaeology, so we can't just tell them about this opportunity and have them believe it's an option. Instead, we've shown them year after year by exposing them to the field and giving them a chance to actually do the work—and now the program attracts some of the best and brightest students in the country."

Students are essential to Brady's work. Each year, a number of his students have the opportunity to do extensive field work. Students receive what equates to a full-time classroom experience, with an incredibly low student to faculty ratio. This work often results in new, cutting-edge data and the opportunity for

students to present papers in front of professional archaeologists.

Most recently, as part of his work as co-director of the Great Maya Aquifer Project, Brady is credited with discovering hundreds of well-preserved Maya artifacts in a cave called Balamkú, under the ancient city of Chichén Itzá. The discovery is the most significant in the area since the 1950s. Each visit to Chichén Itzá included the opportunity to bring students, who were central to supporting the work and presenting the team's findings at national conferences.

"My research is so connected with my teaching. I'm able to give students opportunities, and that's all they need," says Brady. "Add in a little direction and mentoring, and these students are right up there with the best of the best in the country. They catapult to the front of the pack."



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: ED VIVANCO

Alumnus Ed Vivanco celebrates Cal State LA by paying it forward

Cal State LA alumnus, Edgar “Ed” Vivanco, still holds fond memories of his time at the University. Like many Cal State LA students, Vivanco was a first-generation college student who emigrated from Chile to seek a better life in the United States. In 1968, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Microbiology and a master of science in the same field four years later.

“Cal State LA was my first positive encounter in the United States. I remember the feeling of community, and of course, I am eternally grateful for the education I received which changed the trajectory of my life,” says Vivanco.

After 32 years at Beckman Coulter, Inc., a biotechnology company, Vivanco retired in 2004 as its president after holding various managerial and executive positions. In his retirement, his desire to help the next generation kept bringing him back to his first home — Cal State LA.

“I see my mission now as helping the next generation—especially, first-generation college students who are minorities. Coincidentally, this is the population served by the University.”

During his last visit to Cal State LA, he attended the Civic and Social Innovation Summit (CaSIS) which featured students pitching their innovative social enterprise ideas. The summit was a culmination of semester long projects by students who offered alternative solutions to critical societal issues such as homelessness and mental health.

“CaSIS really engages the students and instills in them social action. I see the curriculum as having double values: 1) a learning process for Cal State LA students and 2) practical enterprises that are rooted in social consciousness,” says Vivanco.

Impressed by the project outcomes and the students’ level of engagement, the Vivanco Family Fund made a gift of \$100,000 to create an endowment that would support college programs (and curricula) that foster social change with purpose and creativity.

“The true value of Mr. Vivanco’s gift is immeasurable. It’s the difference between students merely learning, and having a transformational educational experience that empowers them to change themselves, their community, and the world,” says

“The true value of Mr. Vivanco’s gift is immeasurable. It’s the difference between students merely learning, and having a transformational educational experience that empowers them to change themselves, their community, and the world.”

Marla Parker, assistant professor of political science and co-founder of the Civic and Social Innovation Group at Cal State LA.

Vivanco is already looking forward to his next visit with the students.

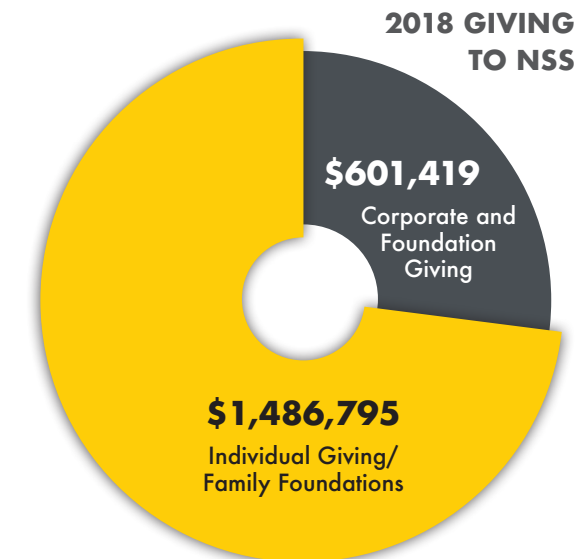
“I see it as my responsibility to support students who can make a change in their lives and their community through education. I am happy that my gift to the college (and by extension, the University) will foster the leaders of tomorrow and usher in transformative change. Simply said, it’s the right thing to do.”

Alumnus Edgar “Ed” Vivanco

GIVING UPDATE

In 2018, generous donors gave to 18 new and existing scholarships and 30 new and existing department and program funds in support of NSS. These contributions helped bridge the gap in funding from the state and provided essential services and tuition support to nearly 6,000 students in the college. Thank you to all of our donors.

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