

Reach

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“Working *with* Reality”

USC Rossier’s PhD students receive hands-on experience

IN MAY 2015, AS USC ROSSIER GRADUATED ITS MOST RECENT COHORT OF PHD STUDENTS, Associate Professor Tatiana Melguizo, chair of the PhD governance committee, took to the podium and evoked the words of Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez: “Ultimately, scholarship is nothing but carpentry. With both, you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood.”

Melguizo had taken the liberty of using the word “scholarship” in place of García Márquez’s original term (“literature”), demystifying any notion that the graduates had been locked away in an ivory tower over the past four years.

“We have these amazing artisans who are going to make a big difference in the world,” she said to the audience. “We have taught them, we have learned with them, we have learned from them. We look forward to continuing to mentor them throughout their academic and professional careers.”

It’s no accident that Melguizo had evoked a classic apprenticeship model in celebrating the transition of 18 graduates from student to peer. A decade ago, USC Rossier had taken bold measures to transform its doctoral program, separating the PhD and EdD tracks, thereby creating small, cohesive cohorts in a PhD program that fully funds every student.

Third-year PhD student Eric Felix is in the thick of this apprenticeship process, working under Estela Mara Bensimon, professor of higher education and co-director of Rossier’s Center for Urban Education (CUE). He recently completed a summer research fellowship at Penn’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education under Executive Director Shaun Harper (former director of Rossier’s EdD program).

“The adviser guides you through the doctoral process: the academic transition into research, socialization at conferences, the networking at events, the writing process,” he says. “You can do great research, but if you can’t articulate it into a brief or a journal article or even a blog post, no one is going to read the great work that you do. I chose USC primarily because I knew I would be paired up with Dr. Bensimon.”

Katharine Strunk, associate professor of education and policy, embraces the role of mentor. “The adviser’s role is to help students think about what they want to do over the time they’re in the program,” she says. This includes encouraging graduate students to publish papers independently and work on large-scale research projects.

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Tatiana Melguizo
Associate Professor

“*Ultimately, scholarship is nothing but carpentry. With both, you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood.*”

—Tatiana Melguizo paraphrasing Gabriel García Márquez

USC
Rossier
School of Education

MESSAGE

From the Dean

USC Rossier has high-caliber faculty members who conduct research that has the potential to change the lives of youth in urban communities. In doing so, they are serving the mission of Rossier—to improve learning in urban education locally, nationally and globally.

When students enter our PhD program, they quickly learn another value of our faculty—as mentors. We provide full funding for students in an apprenticeship model. This collaborative and supportive program also draws strength from a small cohort model—students learn from each other as well. The results speak for themselves, as Rossier alumni move on to prestigious post-docs and tenure-track posts at top universities.



Karen Symms Gallagher, PhD
Emery Stoops and
Joyce King Stoops Dean

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“We’re training them not only through coursework,” says Strunk, “but also by showing them how research is done and walking them through every step of the process, from writing a grant to collecting the data to writing the paper. The goal is to graduate students who can produce rigorous, innovative and policy-relevant scholarship that not only furthers the field but also impacts policy and practice.”

A Fertile Training Ground

This training happens to take place in the heart of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest school district in the country—a setting that provides opportunities for graduate students like Susan Bush-Mecenas and Ayesha Hashim.

The pair worked under Strunk and Associate Professor Julie Marsh on an evaluation of LAUSD’s Public School Choice Initiative.

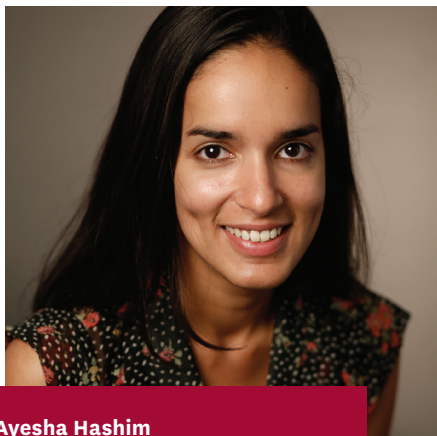
“This was a big study with a big scope,” wrote *Education Week* in April 2014, after then second-year student Hashim presented initial findings at the conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), where she talked about the impact of turnaround reform on student achievement.

“Ayesha is tireless,” says Strunk. “She really has a pursuit of perfection, which I think is critical. She will be an amazing faculty member after she completes her PhD.”

“Both Dr. Strunk and Dr. Marsh taught me the importance of working closely with district leaders to develop research projects that will have a direct impact on the work of education practitioners and help unpack the complex theory of change that informs their ongoing efforts to improve schools,” says Hashim. “I have seen firsthand that this collaborative research approach leads to publishable, informative and—most importantly—interesting research, and I hope to continue producing scholarship in this vein as I pursue my own career in academia.”

Meanwhile, Bush-Mecenas, who served as project manager on the longitudinal LAUSD study before matriculating to Rossier’s PhD program, is compiling an equally impressive track record, earning praise from Rossier faculty for a strong theoretical base to her work and helping to lead qualitative data collection, conducting solo interviews with senior district leaders.

“Susan has been an intellectual partner in all of our work,” says Marsh, who is Bush-Mecenas’ adviser. “She often leads the development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks as well as the data collection and analysis. Susan has emerged as an expert on qualitative research, frequently leading seminars and mentoring students and faculty on how to use coding software to manage data and facilitate analysis. She is an exceptional scholar and will be an asset to any faculty she joins after graduation.”



Ayesha Hashim
PhD student



Eric Felix
PhD student

Strength in Diversity

Associate Professor Tatiana Melguizo takes pride in the ways Rossier’s small cohort model draws strength from the racial and ethnic diversity of its students. “We are well aware of the meaning of homophily, or love of the same,” she explains, “the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others.”

Rossier faculty strive to think critically about this natural bias in order to avoid perpetuating this practice when forming the composition of its student cohorts. “The fruits of this effort are reflected in the racial and ethnic diversity of our students,” says Melguizo, “and we believe the diversity of our program will better prepare them for the reality they will encounter after graduation.”

“The adviser guides you through the doctoral process: the academic transition into research, socialization at conferences, the networking at events, the writing process. You can do great research, but if you can’t articulate it into a brief or a journal article or even a blog post, no one is going to read the great work that you do.”



Robert Danielson
PhD student

Expanding Opportunities

FOURTH-YEAR STUDENT ROBERT DANIELSON credits his adviser, Professor of Education and Psychology Gale Sinatra, for expanding his opportunities as a scholar.

“With her encouragement and mentoring, I have had my research accepted at a number of excellent conferences,” says Danielson. In April at the 2015 AERA meeting, Danielson was the inaugural winner of the Richard C. Anderson Graduate Student Research Award, presented by the founder of the National Consortium for Instruction and Cognition (NCIC), Richard Anderson himself.

“I was able to present at EARLI (the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction) in Munich, Germany,” he says. “I was also invited to be part of a keynote presentation with Dr. Sinatra and her current and former students in Reykjavik, Iceland. Dr. Sinatra’s mentorship and the support of Rossier have allowed me to engage and collaborate with scholars all over the world!”

From USC to UC

Two recent Rossier grads have begun UC Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowships.

CONSTANCE ILOH PHD '15 IS POSTPONING THE START OF HER TENURE-TRACK POSITION at the UC Irvine School of Education to begin her fellowship, which will focus on the changing landscape of higher education and how it impacts access, equity and experiences of underserved student groups.

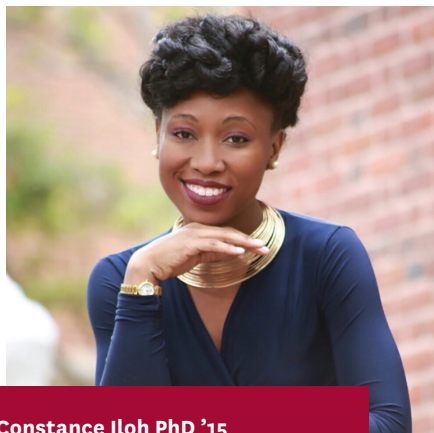
During her fellowship, which will focus specifically on higher education pathways for adult students, Iloh will work under UC Irvine Distinguished Professor of Education Jacquelynne Eccles and UCLA Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Education Patricia McDonough.

"I am so honored to be one of Dr. Iloh's UC Chancellor's Fellowship mentors," said Eccles. "She is an extraordinary scholar who will have a major influence on our understanding of postsecondary educational trajectories. I am looking forward to working with her with great anticipation."

Raquel Rall PhD '14 has begun her two-year UC Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowship at the UC Riverside School of Education. Working under Bank of America Professor of Education Leadership John S. Levin, she will be researching contemporary governance and management of higher education institutions.

"Rall is uniquely positioned to make significant contributions to the field of higher education with her focus on executive and trustee leadership of universities and colleges," says Levin. "She has a strong background in higher education research and scholarship and a passion for learning."

In her upcoming research, Rall will explore the influence of decision makers on the experiences of students in the UC and California State University systems. Her goal will be to inform how governance shapes diversity-related issues in public higher education through decision making, including a demonstration of how inclusion-related issues arise during the terms of office of chief executive officers and governing board members. She'll also look closely at the ways governance actors explicitly and implicitly create, perpetuate, combat, and/or exacerbate inequalities related to underrepresented and underserved communities in the UC and CSU systems.



Constance Iloh PhD '15



Raquel Rall PhD '14

New Positons of 2015 USC Rossier Graduates

Rodolfo (Rudy) Acosta PhD

Senior Research Analyst, CSU Fullerton

Andrea Bingham PhD

Assistant Professor, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Michelle Castellanos PhD

Institutional Research Associate, Loyola Marymount University

Julia Duncheon PhD

Assistant Professor, University of Texas, El Paso

Sean Gehrke PhD

Director of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment,
Lewis-Clark State College

Alice Huguet PhD

Postdoctoral Research Scholar, Northwestern University

Constance Iloh PhD

Assistant Professor, University of California Irvine
UC Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow,
UC Irvine and UCLA

Holly Kosiewicz PhD

Director of Policy Development, Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board

Daniel Maxey PhD

Provost's Fellow, Santa Clara University

Richard Welsh PhD

Assistant Professor, University of Georgia

Keith Witham PhD

Assistant Professor, Temple University

Postdoctoral Fellows Currently in Residence at USC Rossier

Araceli Espinoza-Wade PhD

USC Rossier School of Education (Working with USC Rossier
faculty members Adrianna Kezar and Kristan Venegas)

Ann Kim PhD

Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, University of
California, Santa Barbara (Working with Brendesha Tynes
and Gale Sinatra)

Amanda Ochsner PhD

Digital Media program in the Department of Curriculum
& Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
(Working with Zoë Corwin)

Marcelo Worsley PhD

(USC Provost's Postdoctoral Scholars Program for Faculty
Diversity in Informatics and Digital Knowledge)
Learning Sciences and Technology Design at the Stanford
Graduate School of Education (Working with Robert Rueda
and John Brooks Slaughter)

Xiaofei Yang PhD

University of Southern California (Neuroscience)
(Working with Mary Helen Immordino-Yang)

University of Southern California
Rossier School of Education
Waite Phillips Hall
3470 Trousdale Parkway
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0031

A Head START

BENJAMIN HEDDY HAD ONE YEAR UNDER HIS BELT AS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY at the University of Oklahoma when he accepted the award for Dissertation of the Year at the Rossier Spring 2015 commencement. (Another recipient was Constance Iloh, see page 3.) Heddy wrapped up his studies in 2014 and was honored along with the 2015 graduating cohort. Heddy's dissertation was on promoting STEM interest and engagement at an all-girls' middle school.

"Ben knew right from the start exactly what he wanted to do," says Gale Sinatra (pictured with Heddy), who advised him and collaborated with him on several publications throughout his studies. "This commitment served him well as he hit the ground running and never stopped."



Major Research Grants *Awarded between April and October 2015*

Adrianna Kezar and her USC Rossier faculty team of **Darnell Cole**, **Tatiana Melguizo** and **Kristan Venegas** were awarded \$6.2 million from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation. The grant marks the largest private supported study in Rossier's history to date. The money will fund "TSLC Scholars: A Mixed Methods Examination of a Comprehensive College Transition and Success Program for Low-Income Students."

Tatiana Melguizo was awarded an NSF-Early Concept Grant for Exploratory Research (EAGER) for "Using High School Transcript Data and Diagnostic Information to Fine-Tune Placement Policy and Tailor Instruction in Developmental Math." The grant amount is \$299,753.

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and **Daphna Oyserman** received a \$200,000 grant to work on developing and validating a measure of the social-emotional imagination quotient (ImQ) for adolescents. The grant is from the Imagination Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, funded by the John Templeton Foundation.

Morgan Polikoff is a co-PI on the IES \$10 million grant to fund the Research and Development Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL) at the University of Pennsylvania. The amount of the USC portion is \$427,991.

Katharine Strunk and **Julie Marsh** are co-PIs on a research team awarded a \$1 million Lyle Spencer Research Awards Grant from the Spencer Foundation. The two-year study examines the implementation and early outcomes of aspects of portfolio governance models in three cities: Los Angeles, Denver and New Orleans. This work will be undertaken in collaboration with co-PIs **Katrina E. Bulkley** (Montclair State University) and **Douglas N. Harris** (Tulane University). The amount of the USC portion is \$498,478.

Marcelo Worsley and **John Brooks Slaughter** received an NSF-Early Concept Grant for Exploratory Research (EAGER) for their proposal "Catalyzing Research in Multimodal Learning Analytics." The grant amount is \$299,803.

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