

# USC Rossier

M A G A Z I N E

## EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF AI



Exploring artificial intelligence's impact on teaching and learning

### Alumni Spotlight

Dean Noguera interviews Yaw Osei Adutwum PhD '09, Ghana's Minister of Education **P. 44**

### A New Equation for Student Success

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AI promises efficiency gains, but will the new tech advance or hinder equity? **P. 26**

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Yaw Osei Adutwum  
PhD '09, Ghana's  
Minister of Education  
greets students outside  
of Afia Kobi Ampen  
Senior High School. The  
all-girls school, which  
focuses on STEM  
education, plans to  
introduce courses in  
aerospace and aviation  
as well as robotics and  
artificial intelligence  
projects. See p. 44 for an  
interview with Minister  
Adutwum.

## Dear Friends,



The rapid development and deployment of generative AI is transforming many fields and sectors of society. We are at a critical moment in history. The innovative products that have been introduced to the market in health care, entertainment, engineering and education have forced skeptics to acknowledge the enormous potential of artificial intelligence to disrupt the way we live, work and learn.

AI will also lead to significant changes in education that we are only beginning to comprehend. Tools like ChatGPT are outpacing our ability to regulate or even fully understand how it will affect core practices related to intellectual property, authorship and attribution. Many have expressed concern, but the proverbial genie is out of the bottle. Some observers warn of disastrous consequences caused by the unfettered development and use of AI, while its advocates herald it as a technology that will yield numerous positive benefits to humanity and the world. There may be truth to both predictions, particularly in education, where AI is already being used to transform teaching and learning.

The implications of AI for education is the subject of this issue of *USC Rossier Magazine*. Our faculty, students and alumni are working hard to meet the challenge of this moment. They are determined to ensure that AI's extraordinary potential leverages and advances the power of knowledge and creativity, rather than eroding and undermining the value of education.

USC Rossier has always been at the forefront of utilizing new technologies to innovate and augment education. This moment is no different. Professor Yasemin Copur-Gencturk is engaged in cutting-edge research on how an AI-powered professional development program can reach teachers far and wide to accelerate student performance in math. With the leadership and participation of professors Gale Sinatra and Stephen Aguilar, USC Rossier is playing a critically important role in USC's new Center for Generative AI and Society. The university has invested \$10 million to conduct research and drive the national conversation around the ethical use and implementation of AI technologies. Additionally, Professor Aguilar is working on several projects with the center to understand how students and teachers are using AI. You will read about their work and more in this issue.

I was honored to be selected by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona to help create a federal advisory regulatory committee on the use of AI in education. The goal of the committee is to ensure that this disruptive and powerful technology supports teachers, closes learning gaps and helps make it possible to reimagine the future. Our commitment to advancing educational equity and ensuring AI is used to expand access to quality learning opportunities for all will be my foremost concern.

We are clearly in a period of profound change. Our obligation is to use our influence to further our mission and ensure that advances in educational technology contribute to greater equity and expanded learning opportunities throughout the nation and the world.

Fight On!

Pedro A. Noguera, PhD

Distinguished Professor of Education  
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean  
USC Rossier School of Education

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## EDITOR'S NOTE



### Education in the age of AI

Whenever a transformative technology emerges, it brings with it a mix of emotions: fear, hope, skepticism and excitement, to name a few. When ChatGPT was released in late 2022, the world was abuzz about its potential impact on every facet of the way we live, work, learn and educate. Just as many worried that the introduction of the pocket calculator would make math class irrelevant, many now fear that these new AI tools will render English class obsolete. But are these fears warranted? After all, math is still taught, even if students are now trained to use advanced calculators to solve difficult equations. And beyond these anxieties, what opportunities does AI present? How will teaching and learning evolve as the world inevitably embraces AI?

AI has the potential to be a force for good and efficiency—from helping teachers develop lesson plans to assisting school districts in rezoning projects. Yet, many of us don't know how to use these new tools, and nearly 90% of educators reported to *Education Week* that they haven't received any professional development on AI. On top of that, AI could exacerbate longstanding inequities in education—from who has access to it to how it will be used in college admissions (p. 26).

Our faculty, alumni and students are already considering these big issues. Associate Professor Yasemin Copur-Gencturk is working on an AI-powered PD program for preservice math teachers (p. 14), Assistant Professor Stephen Aguilar is leading several education research projects with the new USC Center for Generative AI and Society (p. 20), and Brent Warner MAT '12, co-chair of English as a Second Language at Irvine Valley College, is integrating the technology into his classes. This issue of *USC Rossier Magazine* explores our community's research and engagement with a rapidly changing technology that just might reshape our world.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh, Editor



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*By Ellen Evaristo*

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↑  
Master's students  
celebrate at  
USC Rossier  
Commencement  
2023.

### STORY IDEAS? FEEDBACK?

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## U.S. Secretary of Education appoints Noguera to new committee on the use of AI in education

Dean Pedro Noguera was recently tapped by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona to participate in a federal advisory regulatory committee on AI in education. Noguera, in an article published in *The Hill*, said that in his role he intends “to help the administration devise policies that will make it possible to utilize the extraordinary potential of AI to advance educational opportunities for all.”

In the article, Noguera extolled the technology as a tool that could help address existing inequities in education. He welcomed suggestions from the tech sector, but warned that the administration and Congress must “enact regulations requiring tech firms to invest in the development of generative AI that helps kids and schools.” If they don’t, the tech firms are “more likely to simply treat education as a market to be exploited—which would likely further the existing inequities in education for generations to come.”



## Extraordinary \$11m Gift Will Advance Educational Equity

USC Rossier receives a gift that will be felt for generations to come.

By Katrina Nash

**USC ROSSIER RECEIVED** an \$11 million gift from an anonymous donor, cementing the school’s ambitious Educational Equity Initiative to create transformative educational opportunities for children in Los Angeles and across the country. The gift was made to three projects that ensure youth will benefit from a more individualized, meaningful and equitable education experience.

The USC Center for Affective Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education (CANDLE), led by Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology, provides the much-needed practitioner-collaborative developmental science to guide educators and policymakers to transform the education system for the greater good of all youth.

“The gift to support the research of Professor Immordino-Yang could lead to significant breakthroughs in neuroscience,” USC Rossier Dean Pedro A. Noguera said. “For years she has been actively pursuing research grants while simultaneously conducting research at her lab and delivering presentations to thousands of people throughout the world. With this support she will have time to write and reflect on what she has learned and to launch new and highly innovative research.

“This field-launching gift will free us up to invent new research approaches that combine social-affective neuroscience and school-based field studies,” Immordino-Yang said. “Our current understandings of learning, development and teaching are out of date—they don’t reflect the diversity of assets and goals our youth and teachers bring, or the complexities of the modern learning context. With this gift, we can start to tackle the issue of educational equity from a whole new vantage point: that of the developing brain and mind.”

The USC Rossier Teacher Residency Program will expand to provide 30+ talented, bright students with a 100% tuition scholarship for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree, living stipend and a two-term teacher residency where they work side-by-side with a mentor teacher, intensively preparing them for the challenges ahead.

“This generous gift allows the USC Rossier Teacher Residency Program to advance our focus on diversifying the teacher workforce by increasing the number of underrepresented teachers of color in the field and preparing teachers to address the needs of local districts in the areas of STEM, Special Education and Bilingual Education,” said Assistant Professor Nasser Cortez. “These funds will help support resident teacher candidates financially so they can focus on becoming a teacher and addressing the needs of all students.”

With the goal of catalyzing tech-enabled education solutions, the USC Rossier Education Technology Accelerator is uniquely positioned to discover and foster the growth of the most promising education technology startups and entrepreneurs from around the globe. The Accelerator consists of a six-month program that nurtures the growth of education technology startups. To date, the Accelerator has successfully graduated 55 education technology companies from around the world and across all areas of learning. Supporting the Accelerator will exponentially impact the field of education, providing thousands of students, teachers and schools the opportunity to utilize emerging education technology tools that have the power to change lives. —R

## Closing the Literacy Gap

Rialto USD partners with Office of PD to launch transformative program.

By Katrina Nash

**CUAUHTÉMOC AVILA EDD '11, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF** the Rialto Unified School District, has made it his mission to address the declining reading scores within his district. Situated in San Bernardino County, northeast of Los Angeles, Rialto USD serves a diverse student population exceeding 24,000, with nearly 90% of students identifying as Latino and 25% considering English as their first language.

In partnership with the USC Rossier Office of Professional Development, Rialto USD initiated a transformative program in the 2021–2022 academic year. The program saw over 200 literacy experts complete the Reading and Literacy Added Authorization (RLAA) program. These educators, spanning grades K–12, are now equipped with essential tools and strategies to assess students’ reading difficulties and provide targeted remediation through guided practice. Since 2021, Rialto USD has committed to another cohort of learners and this year have expanded to offering the program to administrators and teachers on special assignment.

When Rialto USD decided to develop a deep understanding of the science of reading, they turned to the Reading and Literacy Authorization program, concluding it was the most effective way to enhance their knowledge and practical experience in teaching reading within the classroom. Rialto USD partnered with USC Rossier to offer the yearlong program at no cost.

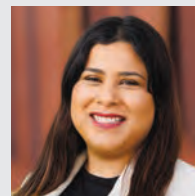
Upon completing the program, teachers reported feeling significantly more prepared. Shelley Gastelo, a teacher at Dollahan Elementary School, described the program as rigorous, “I learned so many strategies to work with my students and help them succeed.” Michael Rawls, a teacher at Eisenhower High School, said “It’s been great to go through this program. I can’t wait to take my learnings back to my students to be able to serve them better.”

In a matter of just a few months, and through the application of the acquired tools and strategies, 3rd grade students in Rialto made remarkable progress in their reading abilities. Mid-to-above grade level reader rates surged from 7% to 15%, early-grade-level readers increased from 19% to 28%, and the percentage of students reading below grade level decreased significantly from 74% to 58%. —R

## 7 faculty hired



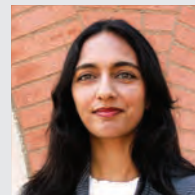
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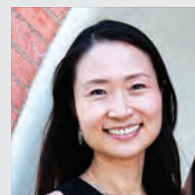
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**Expertise:** Education entrepreneurship



**HURIYA JABBAR**  
Associate Professor  
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**Expertise:** Racial equity in college admissions; organizational change



**XIAO-FEI YANG**  
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**Concentration:** Educational Psychology  
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← Amy and Jim at the 2017 Leaders in Giving event.

## A multi-million legacy gift will support USC Rossier, Keck School of Medicine and Caruso Catholic Center

Funds will be used to establish faculty chairs in leadership and education and new scholarship fund.

By Katrina Nash

AMY KING DUNDON-BERCHTOLD AND JAMES “Jim” Joseph Berchtold have been longtime USC supporters. With deep family connections to the university, Amy graduated from the USC Rossier School of Education in 1972. Amy’s mother, Joyce King Stoops, and her stepfather, Emery Stoops, were both USC Rossier professors. Upon Amy’s passing a few years ago, Jim and Amy made a momentous, multi-million dollar legacy gift to support the USC Rossier School of Education, Keck School of Medicine and Caruso Catholic Center.

USC Rossier will receive 40% of the gift to prepare leaders to advance educational equity through practice, research and policy. The Amy K. Dundon-Berchtold Education Leadership Chair and the Amy K. Dundon-Berchtold Early Education Chair will be established to make it possible for USC Rossier to recruit and promote distinguished faculty to lead in these areas. The remaining funds will be used to create a new Amy K. Dundon-Berchtold and Jim Berchtold Endowed Scholarship Fund and to further invest in existing scholarship funds previously set up by Amy and her family.

“Amy and Jim’s generous gift will support USC Rossier’s efforts to continue to develop leaders who are capable of creating schools that are innovative and responsive to the unique needs of every child and their learning needs,” said Pedro Noguera, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the Rossier School of Education. “The generosity of Amy and her family will produce a lasting impact on the field of education through the work that will be done by the students at USC Rossier. These funds will also go a long way toward ensuring that our students receive a world-class education that will prepare them to solve some of the most intractable educational problems facing our nation and the world today.”

Amy and Jim, along with her family, will leave a lasting legacy on the Trojan community. Amy’s parents established the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Education Library, the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean’s Chair in Education, and 25 scholarships for USC Rossier students. While continuously supporting USC Athletics and medical research, Amy and Jim endowed the USC Amy King Dundon-Berchtold University Club at King Stoops Hall in 2016. —R

## New BOC Chair Named

Mary Atwater James appointed chair; Austin Beutner and Lynn Jacobson join

By Katrina Nash

AFTER LEADING THE USC ROSSIER Board of Councilors as chair since 2018, Reveta Franklin Bowers BA ’70 is stepping down. Bowers oversaw the school’s transition to the leadership of Dean Pedro Noguera in 2020 and the launch of the Educational Equity Initiative in 2022. She has long been a leader in her community and in education, serving as the head of school at The Center for Early Education for over 40 years.

Mary Atwater James, who has been a BOC member since 2015 and more recently vice chair, is stepping into the role of chair. As a lifelong supporter of education, James has served on boards for Brentwood School, L.A. Leadership Charter School, and the Heart of Los Angeles After School Programs. James was one of the earliest supporters of USC Hybrid High School, the charter school established by USC Rossier in downtown Los Angeles.

Austin Beutner, former superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, and Lynn Jacobson, USC Annenberg alumna and appointee to the National Leadership Council for Teach for America, have joined the Board of Councilors. —R



## The Give-and-Take of Counseling

After flourishing under the guidance of a community college counselor, EC student Keily Molina pays it forward.

By Diane Krieger

IT WASN'T SO LONG AGO THAT KEILY MOLINA was on the receiving end of much-needed college counseling.

"I come from a low-income household, and my parents are undocumented Mexican immigrants. They don't know anything about higher education," says the 24-year-old native Angeleno who grew up in Koreatown.

So Molina welcomed all the help she could get fine-tuning personal statements, filtering through scholarship aggregators and filling out financial-aid forms.

Today, as a second-year student in the Master of Education in Educational Counseling (EC) program at USC Rossier, she's on the giving end of the counseling relationship.

She's advised hundreds of students already. During her first year, she interned as a Promise Success coach at West Los Angeles College. She spent last summer at El Camino College as a Financial Aid & Academic Student Training intern with the First-Year Experience program. In the fall, she started two new jobs: interning at the USC Career Center and mentoring transfer students at East Los Angeles College.

After having "bad experiences" with high school counselors, Molina discovered what good counseling looks like in community college. It looks like Maibe Bañuelos.

The Extended Opportunity and Programs counselor at Santa Monica College firmly held Molina's hand for three years, and the two have stayed close.

"She knows everything about me—personally, professionally, academically. I feel like I could tell her anything," Molina says. "I want to be just like Maibe."

Bañuelos vividly recalls her first counseling session with Molina, back in 2017. "I couldn't help noticing how prepared and determined Keily was," she says. "She had a list of questions for me and had researched the topics we were going to discuss." That thoroughness, combined with "empathy and genuine care for others, will make her a perfect fit for this career," Bañuelos predicts.

Financial obstacles had made Molina choose a community college over a four-year university. She lived at home and subsidized her education as a Starbucks barista. Even after transferring to the University of California, Santa Barbara, she attended remotely her junior year during the pandemic. It was a difficult time for her family, and Molina found herself shouldering heavy responsibilities. Her uncle had died of COVID-19, and her younger brother was undergoing cancer therapy. Her parents were at high risk of the coronavirus due



to diabetes and hypertension. Molina's father is a housekeeper at the Jonathan Club. Her mom is a senior caregiver and babysitter. Both are non-English speakers.

Committed college counselors like Maibe Bañuelos had helped Molina stay on track academically through adversity, and ever since, Molina has been determined to pay it forward.

At UCSB, she got involved with the university's transfer program as a "flock" mentor and peer educator. "I saw there were transfer students like me who needed a lot of support and guidance," she says. "And I fell in love with education in general."

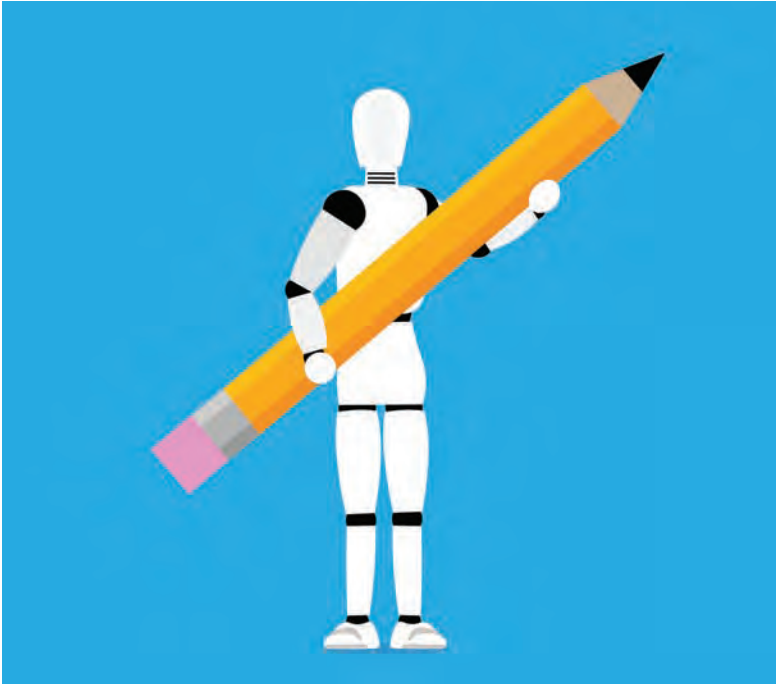
Molina graduated from UCSB in 2022 with a bachelor's degree in sociology and minors in education and applied psychology. She enrolled at USC Rossier in fall 2022, and her experiences at the school have far exceeded her expectations.

"I didn't expect to create such amazing friendships with my cohort-mates," she says. "I love how all of us are connected, and we all support each other. We're a team. If there's a job announcement or program opening, we share that because we all want to see each other go up the ladder."

When she first started looking into programs, Molina attended a USC Rossier informational session where she connected with Annie Villanueva ME '22. The two hit it off, and over the next year, Molina repeatedly turned to Villanueva for help sharpening her résumé and nailing down her personal statement. Villanueva later offered to introduce Molina to her supervisor at West Los Angeles College, where she was then a counseling intern. That introduction led to Molina's yearlong internship at the college.

Helping students like herself succeed academically is Molina's mission. She says she wants to be a change agent in higher education. "I'm passionate about being a counselor. I really want to see students succeed the way I saw my counselors wanted me to succeed," she says. Her ME in educational counseling, she feels, will get her there. —R

➤ Keily Molina at the campus of East Los Angeles College where she mentors transfer students.



## School Districts Prepare for AI

Superintendents across Southern California seek ways to integrate the new technology.

By Nadra Kareem Nittle

**WHEN CHATGPT DEBUTED LATE LAST YEAR**, Bob Nelson '91, EdD '18 remembers how the language processing tool powered by artificial intelligence led many educators to panic. "They were like, 'Oh, my God. Kids are going to misuse this tool in harmful ways,'" he says.

But the chatbot did not particularly faze Nelson, superintendent of Fresno Unified School District. Rather than focus on how students might misuse the technology, Nelson wants to help them understand how to use it "safely and responsibly," he says.

Since the technology has only recently become widely accessible to the public, Fresno Unified is still in the process of developing a districtwide policy around ChatGPT, and AI generally. Ultimately, according to Nelson, the district's approach to AI will consider the technology's benefits to students instead of its potential pitfalls alone.

As districts enter a second school year with ChatGPT, administrators say it's important to consider not only how students might interact with AI but also how teachers could. Some districts, such as Glendale Unified School District, have already held professional development sessions about AI or intend to educate parents about the technology. Others

are exploring how AI has the capacity to support a school system's administrative functions, such as recruiting staff or identifying troubling trends like absenteeism.

However AI is used, Vivian Ekchian EdD '19, who retired as Glendale Unified superintendent in June, says it should be engaged thoughtfully.

"Everyone should be mindful of ethical considerations, data privacy and the need for human oversight to ensure that AI technologies enhance education effectively and responsibly," Ekchian says. "We also have to consider that AI is not going away, and we need to teach our students the correct ways to use and navigate the world with it."

Maria Ott, professor of clinical education at USC Rossier and a former superintendent, says AI is part of the future. Some people may be inclined to fight it, but it would be smarter to figure out how to use it in a way that improves society, she says. At the same time, she adds, "We need to anticipate what could go wrong, and we need to put safeguards in place. That's my thinking."

Fresno Unified has a policy committee that will develop guidelines for AI use within the next year. In the meantime, students will be held to the same standards about inappropriate use—such as using ChatGPT to complete their homework—as they would be if they plagiarized an assignment.

"But we're not scaring kids away from it," Nelson says. "We're trying to educate them about what utilization of AI can do for them as young people."

Ekchian says the technology's advantages are numerous, including that AI can be used for personalized learning. "There are AI-powered educational platforms and adaptive learning systems," she says. "AI can be very helpful with intelligent tutoring systems that provide interactive and personalized support for students."

For AI to be used in this way, however, teachers need to be very familiar with how their students learn and perform. They also need to make sure that students are comfortable with the technology. The digital divide means that some students may be very acquainted with AI, while others may have significantly less experience with such technology.

"Having some students have access to it and others who don't is non-negotiable; it's not acceptable," Ekchian says. "So, if there's on-demand tutoring without an actual person or live Zoom tutoring that only some students have access to, then at GUSD, it's our responsibility to make sure that all of our students can benefit from it, and access is no longer limited to those who can afford it."

AI also has benefits for teachers, as the technology can be used to automate grading, allowing educators to spend more time getting to know their students.

"I think what would be really helpful to know is that assessment and grading starts with a teacher determining the parameters of what will be measured, what kind of progress will be measured," Ekchian says. "It needs to be based on what has been taught, so the teacher is in control of what simulations are prepared or assessments are prepared."

For educators to employ AI effectively, they need to participate in ongoing training on how to use and incorporate the technology into their teaching, Eckhian adds. Whether teachers create templates or interactive materials for students using AI, they need training on the best practices to facilitate learning. In August, GUSD held a three-day professional development training that included a 90-minute session called “Using AI to Supercharge Your Teaching” by Dyane Smokorowski, a National Teacher Hall of Fame inductee and 2013 Kansas Teacher of the Year. According to Lena Kortoshian, senior director of teaching and learning at GUSD, Smokorowski’s workshop helped Glendale educators enhance their teaching skills via apps like ChatGPT, Curipod, QuillBot and SlidesAI.io. In the training, teachers also learned “how to streamline administrative tasks and empower students to achieve their full academic potential,” Kortoshian says. “Teachers were excited to see how this seemingly disruptive new technology can move our practice and craft forward.”

Ott commends Glendale Unified for training its teachers on the technology. “Teachers will figure out ways to use it effectively, and they’ll also be able to identify where it’s not having the kind of outcome that might be intended or it’s having a negative outcome,” Ott says. “They’re the professionals” and need to be pulled into conversations about AI, she says.

The technology has the potential to help administrators, too.

“We’re exploring every positive possible use of AI,” Nelson says. Fresno Unified is looking into using the technology to create an early warning system for chronic absenteeism. Nelson hopes to determine whether AI can be used to spot signs and patterns in student behavior indicating that missed days of school will become an ongoing problem.

“AI is not going away, and we need to teach our students the correct ways to use and navigate the world with it.”

— Vivian Ekchian EdD ’19, Superintendent, Retired, Glendale Unified School District

Informing parents about AI will also be an important step. Many families in Nelson’s district—in an agricultural epicenter where most students are economically disadvantaged—may not be familiar with technological advances such as chatbots, he says. During the pandemic, however, the district offered extensive IT support to parents after outfitting each household it serves with a computer device. Now, district officials are beginning to have conversations with parents about what AI is and appropriate uses for the technology.

AI, Nelson says, “is just another research tool that we need to teach our folks, both adults and kids, to utilize responsibly and try to leverage in whatever way we can.” —R

## In the Media

“I don’t blame folks for being excited about ChatGPT and its efficiency, but it’s like the excitement caused by mass produced foods that came into fashion in the mid-20th century. ... When I read, I don’t simply want canned words—I want a full literary meal.”

— **STEPHEN AGUILAR**, Assistant Professor, in EdScoop

“While the discontinuation of race-conscious admissions policies and practices will negatively affect students of color across a range of racial and ethnic groups at predominantly white institutions, Black applicants will be most devastated.”

— **SHAUN HARPER**, University Professor, in *Forbes*

“If you use ChatGPT or other AI platforms, recognize that they might not be completely accurate. The burden falls to the user to discern accuracy.”

— **GALE SINATRA**, Gale Sinatra, Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education, in *The Conversation*

“A big part of why standards and other education reforms have failed has to do with the fact that school systems in the U.S. are remarkably decentralized. ... In a more centralized system, policies enacted at the state and federal levels could be implemented as intended; that is rarely the case in U.S. education.”

— **MORGAN POLIKOFF**, Associate Professor, in *The Conversation*

“Some would argue [policies that require schools to notify parents about student gender identity changes are] politics of distraction to distract us from the core work of what schools are supposed to be doing ... Others would even go further to say this is an explicit effort to undermine public confidence in the public school system.”

— **JULIE MARSH**, Professor, in EdSource

# 6 alums named LAUSD 2023 Rookie of the Year

The new teachers credit their USC Rossier education for their success.

By Ellen Evaristo

EACH YEAR, THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL District (LAUSD) honors between 17 to 18 first-year teachers as Rookie of the Year. Educators are recognized for their teaching practices, classroom management and their commitment to growth and development in the teaching profession. Of the 18 teachers selected for 2023, six are USC Rossier alums: Lauryn Merriweather MAT '22, Joseph Arechiga MAT '22, Sara Martino MAT '22, Thomas Woods MAT '21, Angela Liu MAT '21 and Amy Eunyeoung Lee MAT '22.

“One Rookie of the Year is great. Four is impressive,” said Assistant Dean of Teacher Education Eugenia Mora-Flores, former chair of the MAT program.

A first-grade teacher at 54th Street Elementary School, Lauryn Merriweather MAT '22 was always an active student and community member. Being a teacher was one of the first jobs Merriweather wanted when she was a child. A Los Angeles native, Merriweather grew up cultivating a spirit and love for giving back as well as knowing her community. Exchanging ideas with her fellow MAT classmates from diverse backgrounds also prepared her to be a better teacher. In her interactions with her students, Merriweather said, “It helps my students realize that differences are beautiful and makes learning a rich experience. They celebrate and build each other up, which creates a caring community we really need.”

Also a fellow Angeleno, Joseph Arechiga MAT '22 is a Special Education Special Day Class English teacher at Verdugo Hills High School as well as the school's volleyball coach. Growing up in L.A., Arechiga understood where his students were coming from and the struggles they experienced. Giving back to his community was always kept in mind. “No one loves every single teacher, but I was fortunate to have good teachers,” Arechiga said. “I'm always in

the mindset of okay, what could I have done differently to make it better?”

Originally from Connecticut, Sara Martino MAT '22 always loved being with and working with kids. Martino and her fiancé moved to California to be closer to family. The MAT program's curriculum, hands-on training, theoretical work and emphasis on being culturally responsive supported Martino's decision to enroll at USC Rossier. Through the program's emphasis on culturally responsive education, Martino gained a deep understanding of the importance of representing students in the curriculum. “Making the curriculum accessible to the group of students you're teaching, allowed me to be more successful in an area like L.A., where I had students from all different socioeconomic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds.” Martino was awarded Rookie of the Year for her work as a first-grade teacher at Hancock Park Elementary School.

Thomas Woods MAT '21 is a third-grade teacher at Sherman Oaks Elementary Charter School. After a career in public accounting and consulting, he realized his passion for teaching and enrolled at USC Rossier. “I am grateful to be a part of a learning community that respects and prioritizes the inclusive and culturally responsive practices I learned from my time at USC,” he said.

Angela Liu MAT '21 is a kindergarten teacher at Kingsley Elementary School. At the time of her nomination she was a fourth-grade teacher at Kingsley. “I have been able to apply all that I have learned from the USC Rossier MAT program and create my own teaching journey,” she said.

Amy Eunyeoung Lee MAT '22, fourth grade teacher at Commonwealth Avenue Elementary School, was also recognized at the ceremony. —R



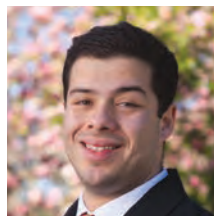
## What we're listening to

### SPARKING EQUITY PODCAST

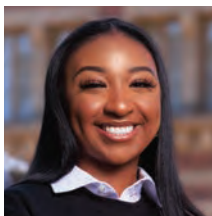
Co-hosted by Dean Pedro Noguera and Lande Ajose, managing director of the Waverly Street Foundation. Presented by the Advancing Education Success Initiative, the podcast focuses on how best to address long-standing education inequalities at all levels of the education system in ways that go beyond current controversies.

### ASHE PRESIDENTIAL PODCAST

Co-hosted by USC Rossier Associate Professor of Education Royel Johnson and Associate Professor of Higher Education at Old Dominion University, Felecia Commodore. In this podcast series, the co-hosts invite scholars and higher education leaders to consider how political forces today affect higher education's purposes and practices, and the role that we, as higher education researchers, can or should play in addressing these forces.



Joseph Arechiga



Lauryn Merriweather



Sara Martino



Amy Eunyeoung Lee



Angela Liu



Thomas Woods

## District leaders convene at Breakthrough Leadership Institute

School officials examine common challenges with expert guidance.

By Ellen Evaristo

FROM JUNE 26 TO 29, USC ROSSIER HOSTED its inaugural Breakthrough Leadership Institute for school leaders to take a deep-dive into their school communities and to examine common, schoolwide challenges to move forward.

“We designed the program because we want to support education leaders in their efforts to break through the paralysis that can set in when you’re beset by a number of challenges at once,” said USC Rossier Dean Pedro Noguera. “Participants will be able to plan to address the issues that are most pertinent to their schools and districts.”

Over the course of the intensive three-day event, the Breakthrough Leadership Institute focused on interrogating a local problem of practice from a variety of school district compositions. Over 55 participants—district superintendents, principals, instructional leaders, union presidents, school board members and community partners—analyzed case studies, interacted with peers and instructors as well as had the opportunity to network. Topics ranged from educational equity and communication strategies to organizational change and coherence building within educational systems.

“We wanted to open a dialogue to provoke, stimulate and challenge assumptions,” said Breakthrough Leadership Institute organizer and USC Rossier Professor Darline Robles. “Each group was led by an experienced superintendent and

facilitator, who is committed to engaging with each group in the fall and the spring. Our office is also available to provide ongoing support as needed.”

Featured speakers included former LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner and current LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho. USC Center for Affective Neuroscience, Development, Learning and Education director Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, USC Marshall School of Business Professor Shon Hiatt and University of Victoria’s School of Education Dean Vanessa Andreotti. USC Rossier speakers included Dean Noguera, who discussed educational equity strategies, and Associate Professor Morgan Polikoff, who discussed his study on teaching controversial topics in the classroom. USC Rossier Professor Julie Marsh spoke and co-led a workshop with Eupha Jeanne Daramola PhD ’22 titled Examining Racial (In)Equity in District Community Engagement Efforts.

“There’s hope,” said program participant Martha Chacon, principal at John Adams Middle School within Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District and USC Rossier Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership candidate. “These are not problems that are new to anybody or any school district, but there are proven practices that really help to shift the tide.” —R



→ Attendees converse at USC Rossier’s inaugural Breakthrough Leadership conference.

## Research Conference showcases faculty and student research

On March 3, USC Rossier held the inaugural USC Rossier Research Conference so faculty and doctoral students could learn from one another, and look for ways to align their work along the theme of Research for Impact.

“All of the presentations address critical issues facing the field of education and facing the country and that’s what is so encouraging to see. We’re doing work here that really matters,” said USC Rossier Dean Pedro Noguera.

Roughly 150 people packed USC Town and Gown with more watching online for the event, which included a keynote address by USC Dornsife Professor Manuel Pastor, four panel sessions and more than two dozen poster presentations.

Student and faculty projects focused on ways to advance equity and improve learning

opportunities for K-12 and higher education students. Panelists spoke on a wide range of topics including the legislative push to ban politically charged topics in the classroom, voter preferences on curriculum, and changes at K-12 districts in the wake of the racial reckoning of 2020.

In poster presentations, students and faculty shared their findings on teacher burnout, using data-informed practices to promote racial equity at community colleges and the discussion of community data to understand issues of environmental justice.

## AWARDS & ACCOLADES

**STEPHEN AGUILAR**, assistant professor of education, and his colleagues received a grant of more than \$690,000 from the National Science Foundation for their project “Determining Community Needs for Accessibility Tools that Facilitate Programming Education and Workforce Readiness for Persons with Disabilities.” Aguilar also received an award of \$216,000 from the Department of Defense Army Research Office to design an AI-driven student and instructor dashboard (p. 25). He was also the recipient of the American Educational Research Association Division C Early Career Award.

**YASEMIN COPUR-GENCTURK**, associate professor of education, was awarded a \$2 million NSF grant to create an AI-driven professional development program for teachers (p. 14).

**ZOË CORWIN**, research professor, was awarded USC’s Joint Educational Project Award for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research.



**JESSICA T. DECUIR-GUNBY**, professor of education, was selected as a 2023 American Educational Research Association Fellow and is president-elect of the educational psychology division of the American Psychological Association.

**SHAUN HARPER**, University Professor, is the recipient of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Outstanding Contribution to Higher Education Award and the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education Harold Delaney Exemplary Leadership Award. Harper was also awarded several grants: a \$250,000 grant from the Special Needs Network to create a racial equity learning academy; a \$250,000 grant by the Educational Credit Management Corp. Foundation for his Institutional Transformation for Community College Men of Color Student Success project; and a \$75,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation to create the National DEI Defense Commission.

**ADRIAN H. HUERTA**, assistant professor of education, with UCLA’s Cecilia Rios-Aguilar and UC Davis’ Marcela Cuellar, has been awarded a \$275,000 grant from the College Futures Foundation to develop a racial equity-centered framework for the California Community College Baccalaureate Degree Program.

**MARY HELEN IMMORDINO-YANG**, Fahmy and Donna Attallah Chair in Humanistic Psychology, has been elected to the National Academy of Education. She was also awarded several major grants, including: a 5 million gift from a private philanthropist for the project, “CANDLE: Toward a new transdisciplinary, developmental science of teaching and learning,” and a 1.5 million grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative Foundation for “Supporting and measuring what matters for at-promise youth and their teachers: A practitioner and researcher consortium for innovation, sustainability and scaling.”

**TATIANA MELGUIZO**, professor of education, received a \$299,000 grant from the NSF to study community college STEM opportunities. Melguizo and the Pullias Center, with the Los



Angeles Community College District and researchers from Harvard’s Center for Education Policy Research, were awarded a \$2.9 million grant from the Institute of Education Sciences for a study on COVID-19 recovery.

**ERIKA PATALL**, professor of education and psychology, was awarded a \$3.2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health for a project titled “Supporting Student Agency in Undergraduate Biomedical Education.”

**MORGAN POLIKOFF**, associate professor of education, and Anna Saavedra, research scientist, were awarded a \$173,125 grant from the USC Schaeffer Peterson Foundation Pandemic Response Policy Research Fund for their work “The Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 and Mitigation Interventions on Children’s Well-Being: Implications for Education Policy and Future Economic Productivity.”

**SARAH RABOVSKY**, PhD candidate, received the Results for America State Education Fellowship.

**MARITZA SALAZAR**, PhD candidate, was awarded the Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship.

**JOHN BROOKS SLAUGHTER**, University Professor Emeritus of Education and Computer Engineering, was presented with the prestigious USC Faculty Lifetime Achievement Award by USC President Carol L. Folt. Slaughter was also honored at a naming celebration commemorating the new John Brooks Slaughter Center for Engineering Diversity.



**BRENDESHA TYNES**, Dean’s Professor of Education Equity, was awarded a \$4.6 million NIH Transformative Research Award. Tynes will use this grant—the largest federally-funded grant in USC Rossier history—to study how digital and media literacy training and the

development of an immersive virtual reality experience can help combat online racism that disproportionately impacts the mental health of students of color. Tynes was also recognized by the APA with the 2023 Presidential Citation.

**ELIF YUCEL**, PhD candidate and research assistant at the Pullias Center for Higher Education, was awarded USC’s Grayson and Judith Manning Endowed Fellowship, the Outstanding Doctoral Student Award and the Research Grant Award from the Council for the Study of Community Colleges.

The **CENTER FOR ENROLLMENT RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE** was awarded multiple service agreements and grants for its USC College Advising Corps program, including \$610,000 from the National College Advising Corps; \$1,675,690 from Long Beach Unified School District; \$697,200 from Compton Unified School District; \$295,710 from West Covina Unified School District; \$197,140 from Glendale Unified School District; \$197,140 from Lynwood Unified School District; \$98,570 from Duarte Unified School District; and \$30,042 from the Los Angeles Dodgers Foundation.

## How Can Educators Support Gender-Diverse Students?

From validating feelings to creating a toolbox for emotional regulation, these practical tips can help students thrive.

By Theodore Burnes,  
Professor of Clinical Education

A new school year is here; are you ready? With the beginning of the academic year, many educators are preparing for the inevitable shift in their students' needs from the more relaxed summer months. Parents of transgender, gender-diverse and nonbinary students are of particular note in this preparation cycle, as summer 2023, unfortunately, was different from those in the past. As of August 2023, 351 judicial bills focused on anti-trans legislation (147 of which pertain to schools) have been passed nationwide. Although the Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County* that sex discrimination includes sexual orientation and gender identity in enforcing federal law, the fight against discrimination and hatred has taken a new turn. School districts have continued to outlaw books, conversations and learning activities based on everything from gender expression to accurate histories of our nation's racial inequities.

Unfortunately, students have not been immune from this hatred. Whether they are in elementary, middle or high school, these young people see it. Whether they live in supportive or unsupportive households, they hear it. Whether they are trans or nonbinary themselves or have close trans or nonbinary friends, they are no stranger to the discriminatory practices flying through our school systems, courtrooms and policymakers' offices. Whether it's TikTok or Instagram, their favorite YouTube channel or the billboards they see, it has become increasingly difficult to be a kid, to experience moments of invalidation and not know how to process them. In 2022, the National Association for Mental Health



reported, in addition to children still processing their experiences of the pandemic, rates of childhood anxiety and depression are slowly increasing. Further, many transgender, nonbinary and gender-diverse youth live with gender dysphoria, an experience of varying levels of discomfort between the gender with which they identify and their physicality.

For some of our gender-diverse students, school has been a place of safety where they can find resources, friends and adults to support them through this challenging sociopolitical climate. Having resources in your back pocket is always a good idea, even when your students "seem fine." The following tips can help:

**Talk to students.** As educators, sometimes we go into "fix it" mode. Unfortunately, there are parts of our world that you can't fix right now. So, start with connecting with your students and validating their feelings. Sometimes, feelings don't need to be fixed—just valued. When young people feel supported in their feelings and in establishing a connection with adults, their nervous systems find balance and their fear decreases. Adult problems are hard for brains that are not fully formed to process (Pozzi et al., 2021). Validating students' experiences helps provide extra support to their amygdala, the part of the brain most responsible for the regulation of emotion.

### Help students find courage and resilience.

Highlight for students the advances made by transgender and nonbinary people in the past and present. Emphasize the people in our culture who have come out and made steady progress in dismantling systems of inequity. This can be done through a trip to the library, by creating an assignment in which students connect with online LGBTQ+ archives or by watching a documentary together. (*Disclosure*, directed by Sam Feder, on Netflix is a good one.)

### Assist students in taking care of themselves.

Help your students recognize that, although it can be helpful, scrolling Instagram may not be beneficial for their mental health. Even if your students have a lot of followers who are affirming of gender diversity, there are lots of battles and comments that can be dysregulating. Encourage a social media break with your students' caregivers. Help students limit exposure to media focused on anti-trans legislation, and encourage them to begin tracking their screentime.

**Create a toolbox.** Skills to help with emotional regulation look different for every young person and can be co-created with them. Drawing, skateboarding, a walk around the block, going to the gym or park, baking cookies, journaling, dance breaks to their favorite song—the list goes on. —R

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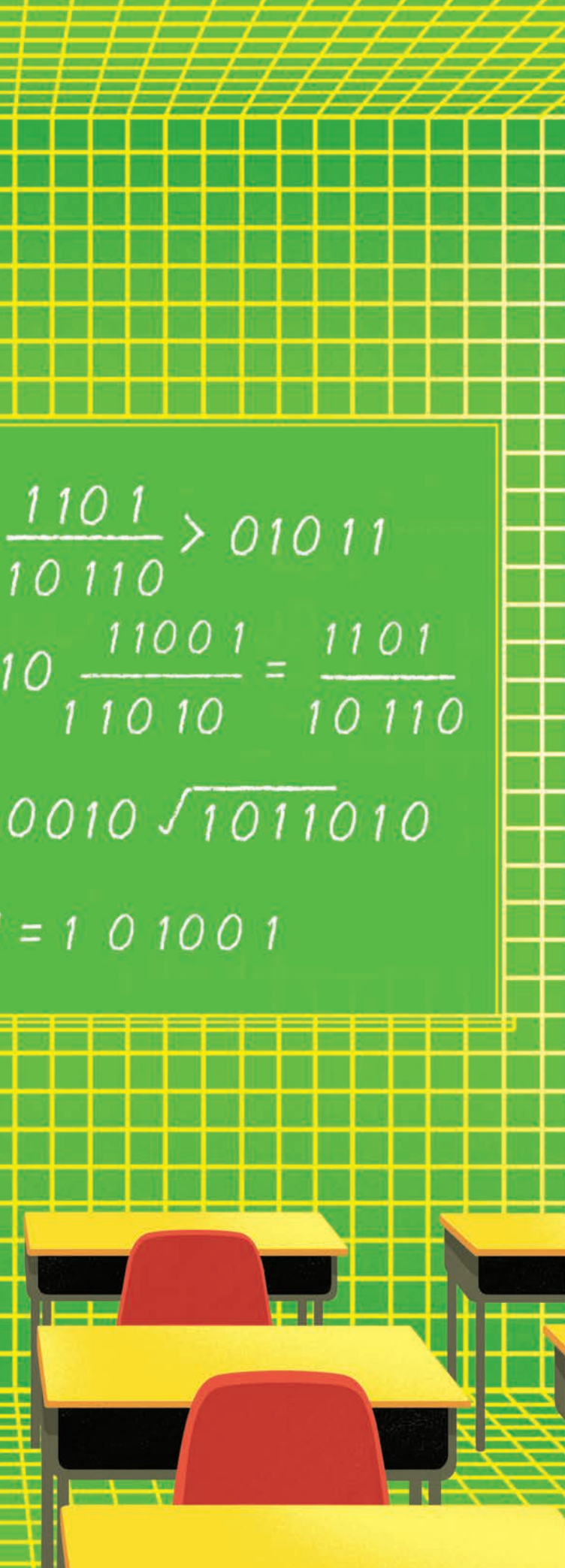
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# A NEW EQUATION FOR TEACHER + STUDENT SUCCESS

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Professor Yasemin Copur-Gencturk is empowering math educators with a scalable, AI-powered professional development program.

Story: Adriana Maestas  
Illustration: Chris Gash

**T**HE NEED FOR BETTER TRAINING OF MATH INSTRUCTORS has been a widely discussed topic in education for decades, especially as the policy focus has shifted to STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education and STEM-related careers as drivers of economic prosperity. The U.S. has lagged behind China and India in producing STEM graduates, and one of the challenges for the education system is finding good, qualified math teachers to inspire students to pursue STEM subjects. Creating effective professional development (PD) opportunities for K–12 teachers is difficult, and claims about the effectiveness of PD can be murky because of a reliance on teacher self-assessments. For instance, teachers may self-report that they learn more after participating in a training, but the outcome in the classroom could show a lack of improvement in teacher performance.

To find a solution to these problems, Associate Professor Yasemin Copur-Gencturk has been researching the impact on student performance of an AI-driven professional development program for middle school math teachers. Over the course of three years, Copur-Gencturk and a team of researchers—Chandra Orrill, a former professor in the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth’s Department of STEM Education and Teacher Development; Jingxian Li, a USC Rossier PhD student; Ben Nye, director of learning sciences at the USC Institute for Creative Technologies; and Allan Cohen, a professor emeritus at the University of Georgia—developed a program that uses a virtual facilitator based on natural language processing. The team then tested its efficacy with a randomized controlled trial that included 53 middle school math teachers and 1,727 students in grades 6 and 7. The results showed that AI is a promising tool for creating effective, scalable teacher PD.

In fact, the students of the teachers who completed the online PD program had higher test scores after their teachers completed the program. This shows that the program not only “improves teachers’ knowledge and instruction, but also improves student learning. Students learned more when their teachers completed the program,” Copur-Gencturk says. The findings are particularly profound because only a limited number of in-person PD programs have been found to improve student learning, according to Copur-Gencturk.

Copur-Gencturk was a high school math teacher early in her career in her native Turkey. Her classroom experiences exposed her to the challenges that math teachers encounter. She went on to study how teachers understand

Copur-Gencturk and her team found that the students of teachers who completed the online PD program powered by AI had higher test scores after their teachers completed the program.

proportional reasoning, a foundational concept that involves understanding multiplicative relationships between different quantities, such as understanding how to adjust ingredients in a recipe to make different amounts with the same taste. It’s a concept that some struggle with, leaving them unable to understand many concepts that involve multiplicative proportional relationships.

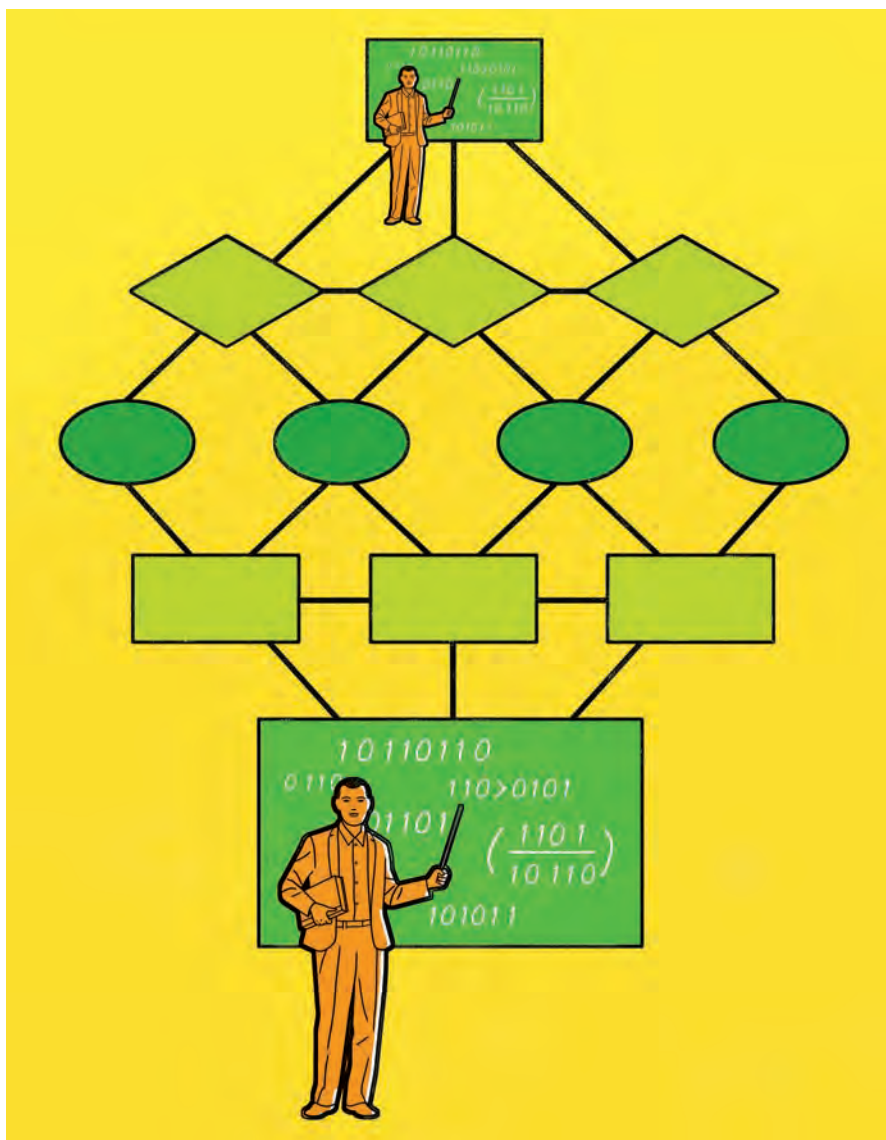
Copur-Gencturk has felt that the way math has been taught is mainly procedural, leaving little room for students to see how concepts are connected across grade levels. How teachers make sense of concepts relates to how they teach. When teachers can see how the concepts build on one another, they are more likely to have success in teaching their students.

“This research comes out of my desire to find ways to improve the instruction of mathematics,” says Copur-Gencturk. “Computer-based programs have been widely used with school-age kids, but they haven’t been used as much with teachers. This was part of the motivation for me to find a way to scale up effective programs so that teachers can complete their training anytime and anywhere.”

#### HOW DOES IT WORK?

The program that Copur-Gencturk and her colleagues designed was intended to be scalable and accessible to any middle school math teacher—the virtual agent guided

## FEATURE



teachers nationwide through the program's modules. But how exactly does a virtual agent work?

One way to demystify AI technology in PD, and in general, is to think of the virtual agent as a math equation that's guessing the probability of the next answer, Orrill says. The program developers anticipated likely responses that teachers would enter in the online PD program. The virtual agent determines a likely response and then looks at the actual response entered by the teacher. The tool finds out whether there are enough words that match what was entered to the likely response. At its core, AI is a tool that works off probability. If people understand how probability works, they can start to understand how AI operates.

As the teachers moved through various training modules, the virtual agent analyzed the teachers' interactions with various learning activities, such as solving a math problem or watching and analyzing mathematics instruc-

tion. The virtual agent would then provide personalized, timely feedback to the teachers. If a teacher's response did not indicate mastery of the key ideas covered in an activity, the virtual agent followed up by asking the teacher to complete another task or to probe their thinking until they met the expectations set for the activity. Once they passed a module, they would then be prompted to move on to the next module.

The program included two modules and eight sub-modules, with more than 50 activities, and took teachers on average about 11 hours to complete. The number of hours varied depending on the teacher, as some needed to complete additional tasks to master the targeted skills and concepts. By the end, Li felt that participants enjoyed interacting with the virtual agent and came to view it as a helpful study partner that encouraged them to think through their actions and responses.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC PUTS ANYTIME-AND-ANYWHERE TEACHER PD TO THE TEST

Data collection for middle school math teachers who were in the AI-driven professional development study occurred in the summer of 2021, while the COVID-19 pandemic protocols were largely in place. This was a time when many in-person events were limited, making remote online professional development a safe option.

“Yasemin wants to improve how teachers understand mathematics. She’s a very hard worker,” says Orrill. “[She] went up for tenure at the time when COVID was happening, and [was working on] multiple projects. ... The world shut down, and she insisted that we get this research done.”

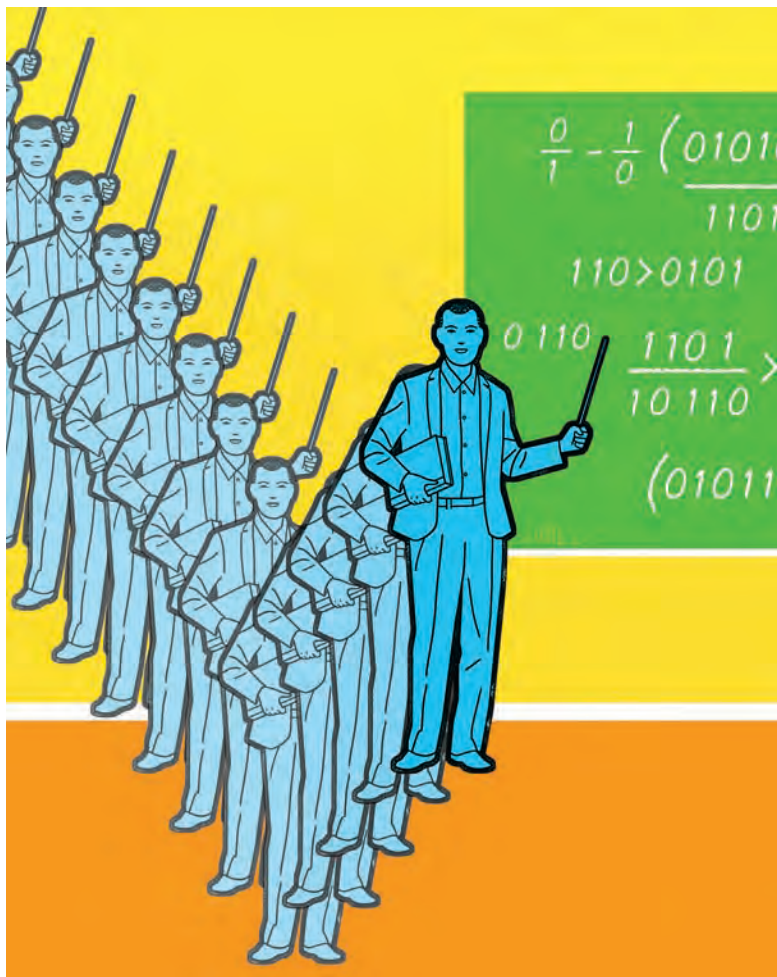
A global pandemic was not going to slow down Copur-Gencturk’s research on the effectiveness of AI-driven professional development, and the only impact was some attrition of teacher and student participants. Some teachers who were in the program dropped out of the study because of health-related issues or because their schools had put restrictions on their students’ taking the survey. That Copur-Gencturk and her team were able to forge ahead without delay, during that uncertain time, is a testament to her leadership as a researcher.

### THE PROMISE OF AI

The success that Copur-Gencturk and her team had with the AI-driven virtual agent shows that the technology can be applied to improve teaching and learning of other math concepts, as well as disciplines outside of mathematics. This program used one of the simplest models for intelligent tutoring systems, which provides adaptive learning opportunities to meet the needs of participants by asking questions, giving tasks and providing feedback to help the participant gain knowledge and to build skills.

“What allowed us to make a difference for these teachers is how this project was grounded in our research on how teachers understand proportional reasoning and other scholars’ research on how students stumble when learning proportional reasoning. We could anticipate where the students make mistakes and where teachers stumble to help make this more impactful,” Orrill explains. “We could create instruction that pushes teachers into those spaces where they may have difficulty before they have a real child sitting in front of them.”

Copur-Gencturk’s research is important because there’s a teacher shortage in the U.S. When indicators of teacher quality are accounted for, the shortage is more acute. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the teacher shortage crisis. Math teachers fall into the STEM subject pool of instructors that is already strained.



Finding qualified math teachers in rural communities is also a challenge. Teachers may not be able to travel long distances to attend in-person PD. Having access to quality, online professional development can make a difference in under-resourced school districts. This project helps fill in that gap, providing useful math teacher training for those who may not be able to attend in-person training.

### WHAT’S NEXT?

The program Copur-Gencturk and her team developed provided proof of concept that AI-based tools can be used effectively to analyze teacher performance, provide individualized feedback and improve test scores for students of teachers who completed the program. In addition, the research could lead away from less-effective PD programs that are typically not tailored to individual needs.

With the emergence of ChatGPT, AI-driven PD may be applied to reading and literacy. The program that Copur-Gencturk and her team created will be used as a model for others in math and other subjects. A paper has been submitted for publication and is under review.

“Ultimately, this is about finding and creating effective resources for teachers to improve math instruction and math learning at scale.”

—Yasemin Copur-Gencturk, associate professor of education

Copur-Gencturk recently received a \$2 million National Science Foundation grant to create an AI-driven program for preservice math teachers to improve knowledge about content and pedagogy through an interactive program with personalized feedback. While Copur-Gencturk and her colleagues will use the program that was previously developed as a prototype, they will incorporate new AI approaches and develop additional materials specifically designed to meet the needs of preservice teachers. She will be the principal investigator, working with co-principal investigators Jiliang Tang from Michigan State University and Allan Cohen and Shiyu Wang from the University of Georgia.



“I’m excited about this new funding because I’m really interested in scaling up teacher training so that when teachers need something, there will be a program that they can complete anywhere to address their needs,” Copur-Gencturk says. “Ultimately, this is about finding and creating effective resources for teachers to improve math instruction and math learning at scale.” —R

## Valuable research experience for USC Rossier students

Jingxian Li became intrigued by Yasemin Copur-Gencturk’s project when she visited campus before she enrolled in USC Rossier’s PhD program.

“I knew about [this project] from my campus visit when I was admitted to the program. I was impressed before I enrolled. During my interview, I got to learn about Yasemin’s current projects, and I was very interested in this one about teacher development for math teachers,” says Li.

“One thing that impresses me about Yasemin is that she always has good ideas, and she’s really good at implementing those ideas. It’s easy to work with her because she’s open to communication and negotiation. Even though she’s the PI, she’s open to taking student advice and thinking about how to incorporate student feedback into a project.”

Treating graduate students as equals whose input


is taken into consideration speaks to Copur-Gencturk’s mentoring ability and the collegial nature of pursuing research with PhD advisers at USC Rossier. Being able to work with professors as co-authors of papers helps prepare those graduate students as they enter the academic job market.

“Even when [Copur-Gencturk] is a first author on a paper, she’s very open to the ideas that students offer as co-authors. I appreciate that Yasemin is very hands-on with her students,” Li says.

Li wasn’t too surprised by the positive results of the research on AI-driven professional development because the team spent a lot of time on the program design to make sure that the AI virtual agent was useful. The program was grounded in research on the type of feedback and instruction that is useful for teachers.

➤ Yasemin Copur-Gencturk received a \$2 million NSF grant to create an AI-driven professional development program for preservice math teachers.





# USC Center for Generative AI and Society to Chart the Impact of AI on Culture, Education, Media and Society

Professor Stephen Aguilar is leading the center's education research, exploring how students and teachers are already using AI tools—and how they can best use them in the future.

Story: Katharine Gammon  
Photo: Rebecca Aranda

Stephen Aguilar has been a classroom teacher, a developer of educational technology and a college professor. But now, he's embarking on a new research project—one that could shape the way that artificial intelligence is understood and used in classrooms.

Earlier this year, with \$10 million in seed money, USC announced the launch of the Center for Generative AI and Society to explore the transformative impact of AI on culture, education, media and society. Faculty and leaders from the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, the USC School of Cinematic Arts, the USC Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young Academy, the USC Viterbi School of Engineering and USC Rossier will explore the benefits and challenges of generative AI from a variety of angles. Aguilar, a USC Rossier assistant professor of education, is leading a project focusing on the application and innovation of AI in education—studying how, when and why students and instructors use AI to support their learning and instruction. Gale Sinatra, professor of psychology and the Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education at USC Rossier, is serving as the project's co-lead. Eventually, Aguilar would like to see students gain experience using AI tools—not as shortcuts or as plagiarism tools or as cheating aids, but as applications that they will likely use in future jobs. “I want them to feel prepared to navigate this new landscape that's emerging,” he says.

The potential of using artificial intelligence in education settings has been a hot topic this year; some have foretold the end of the term paper as we know it, or the end of teachers. What's emerged in the community are two major approaches, says Bill Swartout, a computer science research professor at USC Viterbi and chief technology officer for USC Viterbi's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), who will co-direct the new center.

One is to try to discourage students from using ChatGPT and similar tools. The other focuses on adapting to the new reality that generative AI will be around for a long time, with classrooms needing to adapt an approach to education. “The folks at Rossier and we here at the ICT and in the center are very much in the latter category,” says Swartout.

Education must adapt—and taking a stance that prevents people from using AI is doing students a disservice. This fall, the center will produce the first of a series of reports to assess how students are using the tech and how it might be best used in the future—something that's important to know before demonizing the tool, Swartout says. “You're teaching the ones who follow the rules to have no experience with ChatGPT until they get out of school and into a world where it's pervasive, and you want to prepare them for it,” he says.

### WHO'S USING IT, AND HOW?

Aguilar's research aims to see how students are making sense of these new technologies: Are students using them as aides or shortcuts? As researchers start to have a better

understanding of what students are doing, Aguilar's goal is to examine the impact of generative AI technologies on student learning achievement—specifically, student engagement and motivation, he explains. An AI tool could be like a digital study partner, helping students make sense of a problem—or it could simply solve the problem for them. “How will students persist through tough problems in the age of AI?” he asks. “My emerging research is going to examine that question, among others.” The way that students incorporate generative AI tools into their study habits is the next frontier of research in educational technology, Aguilar notes.

In general, everybody is freaking out about AI and education, says Sinatra, “and I think the freakout is probably a little premature.”

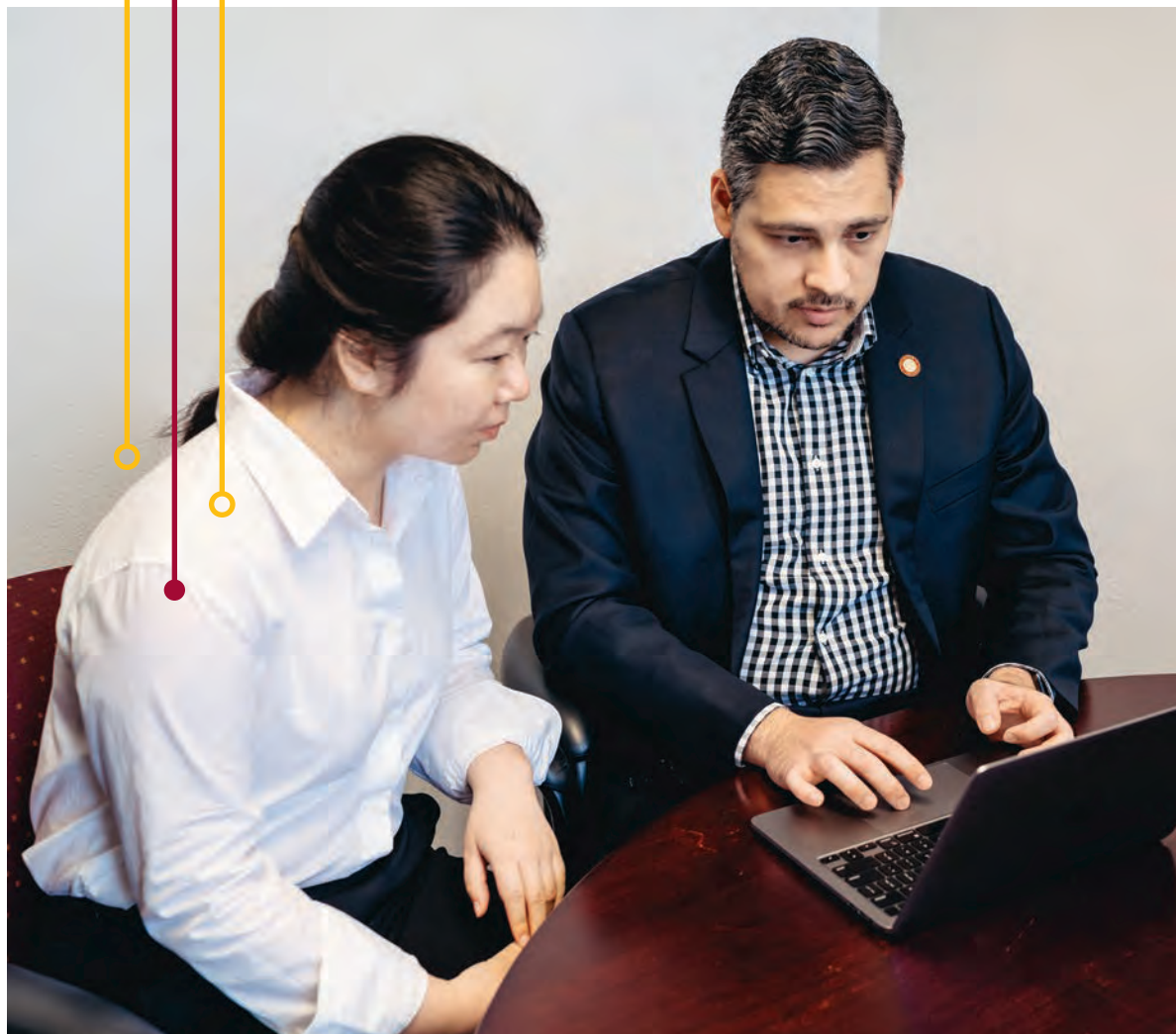
“There are folks who say things have changed forever every time there's a new technology. But the reality is that the fundamental process of engaging in the world and learning about it hasn't changed.”

—Stephen Aguilar, assistant professor of education

Every time a new technology is introduced, Sinatra says, people say it's either going to revolutionize or mean that teachers are done. “There's always an extreme reaction, like we're going to be taught by robots,” she says. But the reality Sinatra predicts is that generative AI will be a tool, like other existing technologies, that both students and teachers can use in their classrooms. How that tool will be used is very much up for grabs right now. “I think people need to step back and give it a little bit of time,” she says.

Many people have pointed out that ChatGPT can easily produce essays to help students cheat—and get good grades. But Sinatra says that if a teacher or professor is assigning a five-paragraph essay on a simple topic like the causes of the Civil War, that's not a great assignment anyway. “I





think that assignments need to be creative, individualistic [and] applied to a current context where students have to use their own thoughts and ideas,” she says. “ChatGPT can augment that.”

The technology is still unreliable in some contexts—it’s not 100% accurate in history or science, and it isn’t useful as a fact-checker yet, either. Sinatra has written about how ChatGPT could foster science denial, and she urges users to exercise caution and vet the information the application produces. Generative AI uses predictive language models and generates information based on what is likely to come next by analyzing large corpuses of language data. It works in a different way from an internet search—and ChatGPT isn’t always great at finding information, Sinatra says.

There are many places where it could be useful—the first draft of an essay or providing explanatory text, for example. “Maybe you want a summary of the IPCC report, so you ask ChatGPT to do a brief summary and you can check it,” Sinatra says. “It could save you 45 minutes or an hour of

writing time. That’s the kind of thing: getting rough draft info out of it, which you can then edit for accuracy, for flow and to fit your needs.”

#### **AUTHORSHIP BY EDITING AND REVISING**

Aguilar’s research will begin with surveys—asking students what they are using and why they are using it—but he also is developing tools that work alongside ChatGPT to begin to capture how students are actually using the technology. Working somewhat like plugins, the tools he and ICT are developing will be designed to better understand how students edit AI-generated text.

This idea of “authorship by editing and revising” acknowledges that writing changes when using generative AI. Tools like ChatGPT can write the first draft, allowing the student to move beyond the blank page and edit AI-generated text. “The idea of what writing means may

➤ Changzhao Wang (left) is a postdoctoral researcher working with Aguilar (right) at the center.



shift internally for students and externally in terms of how we think of writing,” Aguilar says, “and we don’t quite know yet but our hunch is that this will likely become a new normal for some types of authoring.” If this is truly the new normal, Aguilar notes, then we should be preparing our students for engaging with generative AI rather than discouraging them from using it.

In one of the first research projects, after students receive instruction on different ways they can use ChatGPT, they will utilize the tool during their writing process and will revise and improve the machine-generated text, says Changzhao Wang, a postdoctoral researcher working with Aguilar at the center. “What we will do is investigate how students can benefit from different approaches to using ChatGPT and also offer great examples of how to do this well,” she says. This research, Wang explains, is designed to focus on the process of student learning when they follow the team’s instructions.

The reaction from teachers and professors has been mixed so far—Aguilar says he’s heard from faculty members who are very concerned with cheating and plagiarism, and also wonder about bigger issues, like the future of writing programs or on-campus writing centers. Others are optimistic: ChatGPT could potentially teach coding and programming much more easily. But it also leads to new questions for instructors to consider when they are evaluating code: Who is really being evaluated? Does it

“That’s what we want to explore in the center: How are humans using this, how should humans use it and how should they not. The center is aiming to focus more on that human interaction.”

—Gale Sinatra, Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education

matter if the student didn’t write 100% of the code if they still understand how it works?

None of this means that teaching and learning is fundamentally changing, says Aguilar. As far back as people have records, new technologies have been feared. For example, Aguilar explains, Socrates is famous for stating that he hated the idea of writing because he feared it would lead to

↑ One of the first projects Aguilar and Wang are working on is to learn how students are editing AI-generated text.

forgetfulness. In the 1500s, a Swiss scholar named Conrad Gessner spent his career writing the first bibliography and going around Europe to different libraries. He wrote that there were too many books, and something needed to be done about it—someone needed to separate the good books from the bad ones. (At the time, there were only about 3,000 books total in the continent’s collective libraries.) “There are folks who say things have changed forever every time there’s a new technology,” says Aguilar. “But the reality is that the fundamental process of engaging in the world and learning about it hasn’t changed.” He points out that nothing about this technology is changing working memory, or the way we process information.

Swartout uses the example of calculators: When graphing calculators became powerful three decades ago, some people bemoaned the situation and believed students would rely only on calculators and not learn the fundamentals that made them work. Instead, he points out, schools didn’t ban calculators but focused kids in the lower grades on learning arithmetic tables. Then, as the students got older and more advanced, the use of calculators was allowed and encouraged. “Sometimes [calculators are] even required at the higher grade levels. It frees you from the mundane minutiae of working out the arithmetic and allows students to focus on higher-level concepts,” says Swartout. “I’ve had conversations with faculty members in the English Department here at USC, and they’ve said: Anything that can get us off a student having to stare at a blank page, and get into the mode of thinking critically about what’s being written and whether it’s effective or not, is a win.”

### FUTURE BENEFITS OF AI

In the future, generative AI may improve workflows and reduce the amount of time workers spend on rote or time-consuming tasks. Some classroom teachers are already using it to design skeletons of lesson plans and create prompts for students to respond to—things that would normally take teachers a long time to do either by hand or via traditional internet searches. Instead, teachers can now generate content immediately and then edit the output. “It reduces that lag between an idea and an artifact that helps instruction,” Aguilar says.

Another potential use for generative AI in education is personalization. For years, Aguilar says, educational technologies have promised to create learning experiences that adapt to students’ specific needs. Generative AI can help educators get closer to that goal by tailoring curriculum to individual students’ interests and needs, as well as capturing where some students might need extra instruction, thus actually creating personalized learning paths for them.

The technology can also break down barriers and make learning more accessible to more people—particularly in coding, Aguilar says. Imagine a tool that can be a conversation partner as well as a coach to help a student gain a new

## Stephen Aguilar begins work on AI dashboard project for U.S. Army

This fall, Assistant Professor Stephen Aguilar began work on the AI-Enhanced Dashboards (AID) project, one of the five inaugural tracks for the Artificial Intelligence Research Center of Excellence for Education (AIRCOEE). AIRCOEE is a two-year, \$4.5 million dollar research contract through the U.S. Army Research Office housed within the USC Institute for Creative Technologies.

Aguilar is leading a team to create an AI-enhanced dashboard for instructors and students. The resulting set of dashboards will provide AIRCOEE with actionable insights to help instructors engage and support students in the classroom and during periods when they need to self-pace their learning.

With a background in learning analytics, Aguilar will take what is known about dashboard design and instructor insights to determine when to provide assistance to students who may need additional support. “We will use data from their learning management system and create a series of dashboards that are useful for instructors,” said Aguilar. “We aim to support the instructor’s pedagogy and provide information they’ll need in order to be effective in their roles.”

skill. And, finally, generative AI can be a potent research tool to help teachers and others parse large data sets to help uncover insights and patterns that might have gone unnoticed otherwise.

Universities are good at developing insights into the implications of innovation on instruction and student engagement, and setting guidelines for things that we should try to do better—or things to avoid, Aguilar says. “Our main contribution and approach is to be in the room when a lot of things are being designed so that we ensure that approaches are empirically sound,” he says.

“What we are doing differently is looking less at the tech itself but more at the human uses of the technology,” adds Sinatra. “That’s what we want to explore in the center: How are humans using this, how should humans use it and how should they not. The center is aiming to focus more on that human interaction.” —R

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# BALANCING THE POTENTIAL AND PITFALLS OF AI IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS



Artificial intelligence promises efficiency gains for admissions offices and offers students innovative application tools, but will the new technology advance or hinder equity?



Story: Ellen Evaristo  
Illustration: Nate Kitch

**THERE IS NOT A TYPICAL DAY IN AN ADMISSIONS OFFICE**, according to Ryan Motevalli-Oliner ME '20, associate dean for enrollment operations at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. As a small private school, Kenyon receives approximately 8,500 applications a year with a 29% acceptance rate in 2023. Motevalli-Oliner's department processes and imports college applications for review.

"We try to stay true to our mission, but also try to make sure we're meeting students where they are and give them the resources that they need to go through this unnecessarily complicated process," says Motevalli-Oliner, who graduated from USC Rossier's Master of Education in Enrollment Management online program (EMP online).

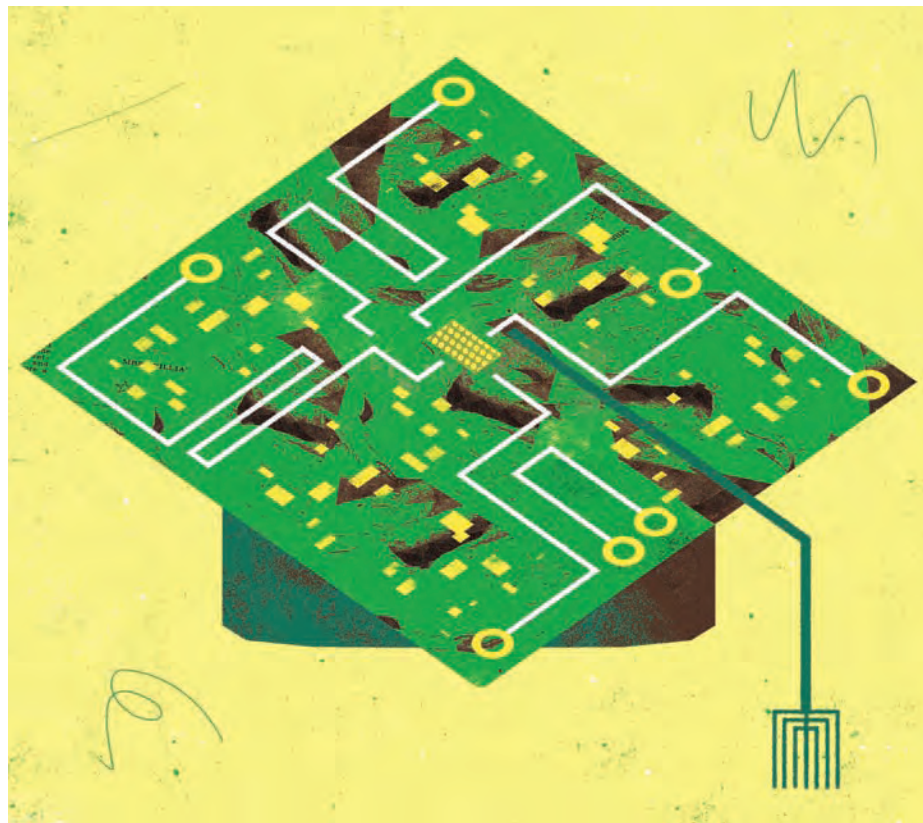
Reviewing applications is a community effort at Kenyon. The college uses both the Common Application and the Coalition Application to gather student admissions materials and begins reviewing applications in mid-November. “We have a holistic review process,” Motevalli-Oliner says. “We read everything that a student submits to us.” Employing a committee-based evaluation method that encompasses a two-person review, teams read applications every day; one person reviews the applicant’s academic side while another examines co-curriculars and recommendations. This approach contextualizes the prospective student.

While there is a growing trend in college admissions to use artificial intelligence, Kenyon does not employ AI in their process at this point. There is an art and science to Kenyon’s review, according to Motevalli-Oliner. “Synthesizing information with AI, I can see that happening, but I don’t think you’ll ever take away from the human element,” he says.

There are, however, a growing number of colleges and universities using AI to assist admissions offices as they evaluate applicants. Texas A&M University–Commerce and Case Western Reserve University utilize AI tools like Sia to quickly process college transcripts by extracting information like student coursework and college transfer credits. Georgia Tech has been experimenting with AI to replicate admissions decisions using machine learning techniques. The technology allows schools to sift through large data sets, evaluating thousands of applications more efficiently. Theoretically, this frees admissions staff members to have more time to thoughtfully consider other aspects of applicants’ submitted materials. But what’s at stake when AI is incorporated into the review process?

“It’s a complicated matter, and it’s not the first time that admissions has considered how to use algorithms or formulas in its processes,” says Jerome Lucido, founder of USC Rossier’s Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERPP) and former chair of and national presenter for the College Board’s Task Force on Admissions in the 21st Century.

While related, there are two distinct tools in the college admissions process: algorithms and machine learning, according to Lucido. A college admissions algorithm is a set of rules or instructions used by educational institutions to evaluate and select applicants for admission. Colleges and universities often have their own unique admissions processes and evaluate based on the university’s criteria. Many institutions commonly use a holistic approach that



considers a combination of factors including academic records, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities, recommendation letters and interviews.

Machine learning, a subset of AI, is a specific technology that can be used to improve data analysis and decision-making. According to researchers at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering’s Information Sciences Institute, machines are taught to behave, react and respond similarly to humans using data collected. As it applies to the college admissions, machine learning combined with admissions algorithms would streamline the process, identify patterns and make informed decisions to form predictions based on historical data. This data-driven approach could potentially help universities identify candidates who possess those characteristics determined by the institution for academic success.

In a joint statement from the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), EDUCAUSE and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), the organizations supported and reinforced the use of data to help better understand students. Data also lays the groundwork to develop innovative approaches for improved student recruiting. However, there is a challenge of relying too much on quantitative data. AI is efficient for processing data, yes, but it may not capture a student’s complete life story, full potential or unique qualities. For instance, factors like personal challenges, resilience and growth might not

be reflected in the data, which could lead to missed opportunities for students who have overcome obstacles.

“Many large public flagships and certainly selective privates were already well down a path that wasn’t being called AI,” says Don Hossler, senior scholar at CERPP. “They were building in algorithms that help them screen students.” The use of AI in the screening process, Hossler says, is really the next natural extension.

### LET’S BE REALISTIC: AI AND APPLICATIONS

For students applying to college, AI’s role in admissions initially seems promising, offering several benefits. For example, chatbots, or automated live chats, become pseudo customer service representatives, providing instant assistance during the application process, answering common questions, offering personalized guidance based on the student’s profile and even setting deadline reminders. It is also important to recognize their limitations. While useful for routine queries, chatbots may not replace human interaction, especially for complex issues or emotional support that some applicants may require. A balanced approach would be a combination of a chatbot and human support from college admissions staff and counselors to ensure a successful and positive application experience for students.

On the flip side, students are turning to generative AI technology to help them pull together their applications, including using ChatGPT to write their personal essays—the one area of the process where applicants can show universities who they truly are. AI, with its near humanlike responses, may sound appealing, but it calls into question academic integrity. Will university admissions be able to determine whether an essay was written by a human?

**“Synthesizing information with AI, I can see that happening, but I don’t think you’ll ever take away from the human element.”**

—Ryan Motevalli-Oliner ME ’20, associate dean for enrollment operations at Kenyon College

“The sad part of that, on the student’s side, will be that it may reduce the extent to which they think through the application process on their own,” Hossler says. An essay prompt from this year’s Common Application asks students to “Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?” An AI-generated response to the prompt would not result in a genuine student answer. However, one benefit for students using a tool like ChatGPT during the

drafting stage is that it offers a forum to try out ideas or to formulate arguments. According to Rick Clark, Georgia Tech’s assistant vice provost and executive director of undergraduate admission, AI could act as a sounding board for students who cannot afford an admissions consultant.

“Will they use it? Probably. Will we be able to decipher it? Probably not, to be honest,” Motevalli-Oliner says. “It’s a resource, but at the end of the day, you’re going to have to write that essay yourself.”

While the essay is one of the most important parts of the review, it’s not the only consideration. Kedra Ishop, vice president for enrollment management at USC, sees this next phase as another evolutionary step in admissions. “We navigate at different levels, at different kinds of institutions,” says Ishop. A 25-year higher education veteran and nationally recognized expert, she leads the university’s admissions, financial aid and registration functions. “In the admissions space, we always have a sense of healthy, positive skepticism, and we seek more information to know more about the student,” she says.

Ishop adds that admissions officers are adept at triangulation during the review process. Through triangulation, admissions professionals identify correlations within an application, looking to see if a student’s voice is consistent throughout and ensuring that recommendations align. Admissions officers seek multiple sources of data on each student for that reason. Ishop acknowledges that various individuals—parents, guardians, teachers or educational consultants—often assist and play a role in assembling admissions materials with students. “We’ll see this year in particular what comes from [AI],” says Ishop. “We’re not panicked about it.” As with any new technological development, she is aware that it is something that the admissions team will have to steer through and expect that the student’s voice will prevail.

### AI + ADMISSIONS = EQUITY?

Amid the landscape of the U.S. Supreme Court decision on race-blind admissions (see sidebar), the implementation of AI in college admissions has raised equity concerns. On the plus side, these tools can help institutions identify applicants who might have been overlooked through traditional processes, but on the other, there are valid concerns about bias.

Can AI learn biases? Bias can seep into the system in a variety of ways. For example, AI systems learn to make decisions based on data that may include biased human decisions or that may contain a flawed data sampling featuring groups that are underrepresented. If not carefully designed and monitored, AI systems could conceivably perpetuate existing biases in the admissions process.

“We know from [UCLA internet studies scholar] Safiya Noble’s work and that of many others that technological innovations like Google search engines are often baked with biases that can reproduce inequities,” says Royel Johnson,



USC Rossier associate professor. “AI is no different. It’s people who design and inform the algorithms, curate the data and make the decisions that shape these systems.”

This could disproportionately disadvantage certain groups, leading to inequitable results. AI systems may also unintentionally favor applicants who have financial resources to hire college consultants, which could create a class divide and widen the education gap. According to Hossler, affluent students are likely working with private counselors who inform applicants of what they need to say or write rather than acting as an open editor for applications.

Lucido, an outspoken expert on the affirmative action decision, is cautiously optimistic. “I want to keep an open mind about what this sort of machine learning can do to assist admissions and equity,” Lucido adds. “But everything I know about college admissions and how it’s done suggests that even currently, we don’t have a highly equitable system, particularly in the most selective places.”

The most important element about the review is reading in context, according to Ishop. Whether it is AI learning-,

**“Certainly, there are enormous benefits of AI, but we must also be clear about the risks. ... AI is only as just as the equitable decisions that inform its design.”**

—Royel Johnson, associate professor of education

neighborhood- or socioeconomic-bias, “our process is designed to read within that environmental context,” she says. Considering information such as an applicant’s socioeconomic background and the educational opportunities available at a student’s high school—several AP courses at one school versus only a few courses offered at another—provides context for the admissions team.



## FORGING A NEW PATH FORWARD

How higher education institutions address equity and AI will require a multifaceted approach. No system is perfect, and human involvement is still needed. Colleges and universities should invest in training admissions professionals to work with AI tools and carefully assess the recommendations provided by these systems. “You have to have mission-directed people and highly trained people to understand how this works,” says Lucido.

According to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report, individuals write the algorithms, select the data used by algorithms, and decide how to apply the results. Without diverse teams and rigorous testing of the AI systems created, there is a chance that individual biases may enter the AI. How do you change that? A diverse admissions staff may be one way, and collecting and using data that accurately reflect the backgrounds, experiences and achievements of a range of applicants could mitigate biases present in historical data and improve the algorithm’s ability to identify the potential in all students.

Oversight, monitoring and adjustment of AI systems is needed when it’s applied to college admissions. “It’s an open question as to how much oversight can and will be given if these systems are used,” Lucido says. Regular assessments of AI’s impact on equity, combined with improvements, can help address biases and flaws.

“Certainly, there are enormous benefits of AI, but we must also be clear about the risks,” Johnson adds. “Overreliance without conscientious efforts to mitigate bias will surely exacerbate the very inequalities we seek to address. AI is only as just as the equitable decisions that inform its design.”

For Liana Hsu ME ’20, director of admissions at UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism and a graduate of USC Rossier’s EMP online program, day-to-day work in the admissions office differs. Berkeley’s admissions team is focused on holistically supporting prospective students who are interested in learning about and applying to the Master of Journalism program.

This work includes designing an equity-centric admission review process. “We are continually in the midst of evaluating our admissions processes to understand how we are serving our students,” Hsu says. “I want to really understand how we can close the gaps for students to better support them and to think about how we strategically use our resources.”

AI does not currently play a role in the school’s review process. “We want to hear from the students’ voices directly—their full lived experiences and how that’s shaped their passion for journalism. These are not intricacies that AI can provide,” Hsu says.

Hsu sees potential AI benefits both on the university and applicant sides. Colleges could use AI to explore and

## DEAN NOGUERA WEIGHS IN ON RECENT U.S. SUPREME COURT RULINGS

Two of the U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings—race-blind admissions and student loan forgiveness—will have significant impacts on higher education in the United States. Though the setbacks are significant, I want to reassure our students, faculty, staff and colleagues of USC Rossier’s ongoing commitment to educational equity and diversity, and to provide support to students who require financial assistance as they pursue their education.

Regarding the Supreme Court’s ruling on university admissions, President Folt has reiterated USC’s commitment to excellence and diversity. We will continue to serve outstanding students from a wide variety of backgrounds and from across the globe.

The student loan decision is also gravely disappointing. The cost of higher education remains a significant obstacle to many of our students, and the debt many are compelled to incur often has an adverse effect on their professional careers and wellbeing. USC Rossier remains committed to prioritizing scholarships for our students in our fundraising efforts. Our goal is to work toward ensuring that financial burden will not hinder access to education for our students.

While these and other recent decisions by the court are significant setbacks for many in American society, we will not allow them to undermine our dedication to the pursuit of USC Rossier’s mission.

fine-tune marketing and outreach efforts, and candidates could utilize it as a search compilation tool to help them find funding and scholarships, particularly for graduate education.

“Hopefully, there are more conversations,” Hsu says. “I think it’s important for higher education institutions to always adapt and, in particular, always think about how we use new technologies to increase accessibility, advance educational equity, and leverage them as a tool to empower students.” —R



# Considering the Opportunities, Dangers and Applications of AI

**Professors Copur-Gencturk, Maddox and Hyde sound off on how AI will reshape education.**

Interview: Antonio Reyes

Illustrations: Heather Monahan

It's astonishing to reflect on the swift technological progress that has reshaped the educational landscape in just the past year. In this age of creativity and innovation, the incorporation of AI into classrooms has emerged as a vital conversation. For this interview, we've connected with three distinguished authorities in the field of education: Assistant Professor of Education Yasemin Copur-Gencturk; Professor of Clinical Education and Engineering Anthony Maddox; and Professor of Clinical Education Corinne Hyde. They share their thoughts on how AI is influencing the future of learning, the prospects it offers and the moral dilemmas we need to confront.

### What is the role of AI in shaping the classrooms of the future?

**YCG:** AI will play a key role in aiding teachers and schools to meet the individual needs of students. During instruction, AI can instantly help teachers differentiate instruction based on students' learning patterns. It can be used to tailor assignments to help students master the concepts with which they need additional help. The learning programs available for children and adults could become more interactive and personalized.

**AM:** With a shortage of teachers around the world, intelligent machines may be able to offer acceptable assistance. This evolution is

**“At a fundamental level, the development of AI requires us to consider the purpose of education.”**

**—Corinne Hyde, professor of clinical education**

ongoing, even as education is increasingly supported by lifelong (i.e., throughout a lifetime), life-wide (i.e., day-by-day) and life-deep (i.e., language, culture, being) learning, with classrooms only referring to physical spaces. After all, much learning takes place outside of classrooms, often prompted by what happens within classrooms.

**CH:** At a fundamental level, the development of AI requires us to consider the purpose of education. Do we educate so that people can remember facts and implement skills? Do we educate so that people can become productive citizens and because education gives power and freedom to the learner? When so much of what we want humans to know and be able to do can now be accomplished instantly with technology many students have in their pockets, we must critically examine what is the best use of humanity's time, energy and resources. If used thoughtfully and with a critical eye, AI can take over simple classroom tasks—grading basic assignments, quickly providing custom materials for classroom use and engaging in conversations with students around the content. This could free teachers up for more of the things that humans do best: relationship building, social-emotional learning, innovation, differentiating to meet individual student needs and teaching lessons.

### How can we ensure that educators are adequately prepared to use and integrate AI tools in their teaching methods?

**YCG:** As with any instructional tool we educators plan to use, we first need to investigate its affordances and limitations for helping our students. We then need to engage with the tool as if we were students to further identify the issues students might encounter while using it. This is when we can uncover how equitable the AI tool is in terms of providing learning opportunities for students from different backgrounds. It is possible that the tool might be beneficial for one group but not for another.

**AM:** There is significant importance of separating the skills and abilities of teachers with the role of AI. Teacher preparation may likely include the various roles that emerge between teachers and machines. It is likely that machines, at least initially, will not “understand” the roles that emotions and socialization play in teaching and learning, or may be quite limited in responding to such needs. Perhaps there is comfort in using the term “tool” to describe AI, noting it is often derogatory to call a person a “tool.” Perhaps, sooner than later, it may not be appropriate to label a machine, at least to some degree, as a tool.

**CH:** I would question whether anyone can ever be adequately prepared to use a technology that is rapidly advancing. We can make educated guesses, but we just don't know what AI in education will look like in the next three, five or 10 years. If we want educators

**“The most severe danger of integrating AI is developing these tools without content experts, because AI experts are generally not experts in education.”**

**—Yasemin Copur-Gencturk, assistant professor of education**

to be prepared to handle AI as it is right now, then we need to provide ongoing training on the benefits and the drawbacks, as well as specific pedagogical practices that can be enhanced with AI. Educators should be engaged in communities of practice around AI use in education, and administrators need to ensure that both funding and time for professional development are in place for this to happen.

### Could AI potentially replace educators in certain scenarios? If yes, where do you see this being most applicable or beneficial?

**YCG:** Not in the near future; however, if advances in AI are integrated with research in education, then effective, interactive learning opportunities for any subject and any population can be developed. More effective versions of MOOCs [massive open online courses] will be available for both adults and children because there will be interactive and personalized learning opportunities. AI can be used to create more effective curriculum materials and to aid teachers in differentiating instruction more effectively.

## IN CONVERSATION

**AM:** The integration of machines and people has been going on for centuries. More recently, machines have demonstrated a means of reproducing human cognitive ability in a somewhat autonomous manner. My sense is that machines are unlikely to replace educators, and it may take quite a while for the effective demonstration of sharing teaching and learning responsibilities between AI and people.

**CH:** I don't think AI will be able to completely replace educators (at least in the near term), because so much of education is centered around humanity—those personal connections and social interactions that support and inspire students. However, we aren't far from the point where AI will be able to provide accurate and adaptable explanations of content. Once we reach that point, the traditional lecture could be obsolete. Students could engage with the AI outside of class time or independently during class time, and this could free up the human educator to design and facilitate learning experiences for students that involve creativity, innovation and critical thinking.

### What is the most significant opportunity that AI brings to education, and why?

**YCG:** As an educator, the most exciting opportunity AI brings to education is the ability to create effective learning programs when content experts and AI experts can work together. This is a big “if” because I fear that the current attention being given to AI overlooks the importance of targeting specific content and delivering it effectively through AI tools. The content experts are familiar with the knowledge and skills needed to develop proficiency in a particular subject domain that should be utilized during the development of AI tools. Otherwise, AI will only perpetuate the problems already present in education. As an example, ChatGPT mainly focuses on procedural skills in mathematics, neglecting the crucial attention required for conceptual understanding, reasoning and problem-solving skills.

**AM:** One opportunity is its role as a force multiplier for instructors and learners at all educational levels. Currently, the manner in which people and machines distribute the “teaching and learning load” between them is unclear. Personalized education [via AI] is

a brave new world that offers opportunities for everyone regardless of age, language or location; learning across space and time, so to speak.

**CH:** I see the most significant opportunity that AI brings to education as personalization of learning. Without AI, teachers with 20, 30 or more students simply don't have the time

**“Personalized education [via AI] is a brave new world that offers opportunities for everyone regardless of age, language or location; learning across space and time, so to speak.”**

**—Anthony Maddox, professor of clinical education and engineering**

to personalize learning for each student. AI could provide immediate and personalized explanations, tasks, scaffolding and more for each learner. However, as we consider this, we can't ignore the reality that inequitably distributed resources could reinforce or even worsen opportunity gaps for students as it relates to AI. Will AI personalized learning be available to all, or only to those who can afford it?

### What could be the most severe danger of integrating AI in the education sector?

**YCG:** Generative AI tools could be used to cheat. More importantly, many generative AI tools are designed to give answers, rather than to develop a robust understanding and other skills. Thus, these tools could hamper efforts to develop robust thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills. The most severe danger of integrating AI is developing these tools without content experts, because AI experts are generally not experts in education.

**AM:** There is reason to believe that trust between people and machines is among the

list of essential “understandings” needed to advance the idea that true learning is achievable. Along with trust are ideas such as autonomy and agency that will emerge as critical elements of educational interactions between people and machines. We may be wise to admit that machines will likely operate as educators and learners. New meanings will be assigned to the phrase “Trust, but verify” as a mantra for educational interactions between people and machines.

**CH:** As we begin integrating AI into education, we have to be aware that AI is not perfect and cannot relate to humans like humans can. We should never entrust the education of a human being to AI without human oversight. However, I do think that financial incentives will eventually push us in that direction. It would likely be cheaper to have students taught by AI instead of by human educators. This is a very dangerous path to take. I dread a world where students miss out on the myriad benefits of engaging with human educators and their peer learners. —R

📶 For an extended version of this interview, please visit [rossier.usc.edu](https://rossier.usc.edu).

# Confronting Linguistic Racism

As our world grows more globalized, our acceptance of others—and their accents—is paramount.

By Nooshan Ashtari, Lecturer, and Stephen Krashen, Emeritus Professor of Education



**“I’VE GOTTEN COMMENTS ... THAT** I sound ‘angry’ when I speak in English because of my accent or their preconceived notion about Arab men and culture,” said a participant in one of our ongoing research studies about linguistic racism and accent discrimination. Unfortunately, similar remarks have been made by other participants from a diverse spectrum of backgrounds. The results of linguistic racism—the mistreatment, devaluation and acts of discrimination



toward people based on their language use—are even more devastating when we consider that over 281 million people are living in a country other than their country of origin, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

Accents have long been a part of our human language experiences. Let’s look at the different instances of English spoken: American, British, Canadian, Indian, Irish and Australian. Within these countries, there are numerous dialects and accents as well. American English alone has a wide range of accents: New England, Boston, New York, Southern, Midwestern and Californian to name a few.

Each of us also has a distinct personal accent—or idioms—when it comes to our pronunciations, vocabulary choices and grammar structures. However, we tend to be significantly more tolerant or intolerant of people’s idioms depending on their race and/or our perceptions about them. For example, in contrast to the Arab participant, a Caucasian French participant from an upper-class background had a very different experience: “I’m a celebrity chef ... a lot of the people I chat with are very interested in my country and culture ... so I’ve made a conscious effort to keep my French accent when I speak English ... It helps my business to sound and look more French.” How is it that the experiences of these two participants are so different? We hypothesize that our conscious and subconscious linguistic racism play significant roles.

Categorizing has helped humans survive, such as group- ing edible and inedible food items. Historically, the catego-

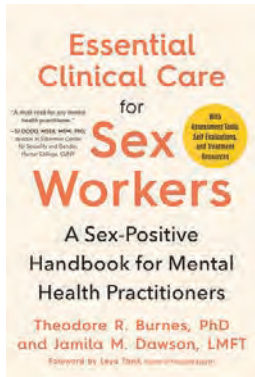


rization of people who belong to “our” group has protected lands and resources from potential enemies. With increasing globalization, we have evolved to gain more knowledge about the power and beauty of the advancements and accessibility of our modern world. However, some of our conscious and subconscious biases have stayed with us. We still judge other peoples’ “foreignness.”

These types of biases result in alienation and mistreatment of others with potential irreversible negative consequences. As one participant said, “I’ve tried to adapt my accent and tone ... and in a lot of ways I think I am doing myself a disservice by diminishing my true self and language/culture identity ... if the U.S. did not have as much economic and political power in the world, Americans would have to ... adapt themselves to the rest of the world.”

If we expect foreigners to quickly and perfectly learn the languages of their new countries, maybe we should put ourselves in others’ shoes and increase our awareness about our biases that may result in linguistic racism. Perhaps, instead of investing so much effort in accent reduction for non-native speakers—who are, in fact, the majority of English speakers worldwide—we can educate native speakers about increasing their language, identity and accent awareness. After all, if human history is any indication, socioeconomic and political powers are constantly in flux, and meeting each other halfway can go far in the long run. —R

# Faculty publications

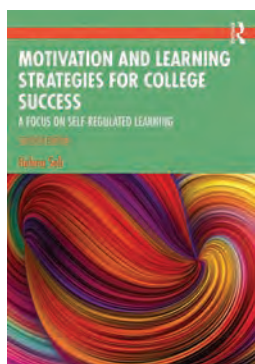


**Essential Clinical Care for Sex Workers: A Sex-Positive Handbook for Mental Health Practitioners**

By **Theodore Burnes**, professor of clinical education; and **Jamila Dawson**, LMFT

(North Atlantic Books/January 2023)

Despite the wide range of sex work, clinicians too often focus on what they think sex workers need, instead of building trust, developing rapport and doing the work to understand the unique stressors that make quality mental health care essential for sex worker communities. Sex-positive therapists Theodore Burnes and Jamila Dawson break down everything that mental health providers need to know to work effectively with sex workers, while dispelling the tired, pervasive myths that continue to impact treatment today.



**Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success: A Focus on Self-Regulated Learning**

By **Helena Seli**, professor of clinical education

(Routledge/July 2023)

Now in its 7th edition, this volume provides a framework organized around motivation, methods of learning, time management, control of the physical and social environment, and monitoring performance that makes it easy for college students to improve their study skills and become more effective, self-regulated learners. Updates include increased focus on students' lived experiences; increased coverage on cultural responsiveness and equity in education; additional content relevant for students with special needs; and acknowledgement of the impact of COVID-19 on higher education.



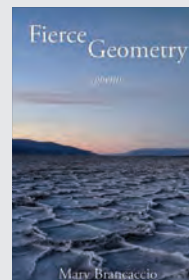
**Creating a Campus-Wide Culture of Student Success: An Evidence-Based Approach to Supporting Low-Income, Racially Minoritized, and First-Generation College Students**

By **Ronald E. Hallett**, research associate at the Pullias Center for Higher Education and professor of education at the University of La Verne; **Adrianna Kezar**, Dean's Professor of Leadership and director of the Pullias Center; **Joseph A. Kitchen** associate research professor; **Rosemary J. Perez** associate professor at the University of Michigan.

(Routledge/October 2023)

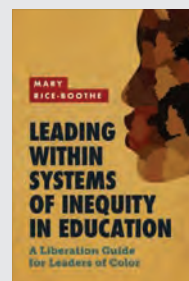
Large numbers of low-income, racially minoritized and first-generation college students are attending college in greater numbers than ever, yet access has not translated to significantly improved retention and graduation rates. This book proposes a realignment of existing initiatives to create campus-wide support through a new model of coordination and provides guidance to educators who want to be a part of changing how higher education supports at-risk students.

# Alumni publications



**Fierce Geometry: Poems**

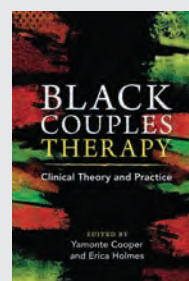
By **Mary Brancaccio**  
MS '01  
(Get Fresh Books/December 2022)



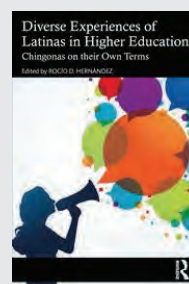
**Leading Within Systems of Inequity in Education: A Liberation Guide for Leaders of Color**  
By **Mary Rice-Boothe**  
EdD '19  
(ACSD/March 2023)



**Stories of Survival: The Paradox of Suicide Vulnerability and Resiliency among Asian American College Students**  
By **Amy Wong** '21  
(Oxford University Press/July 2023)



**Black Couples Therapy: Clinical Theory and Practice**  
Co-edited by **Yamonte Cooper** EdD '14  
(Cambridge University Press/August 2023)



**Diverse Experiences of Latinas in Higher Education: Chingonas on their Own Terms**  
Edited by **Rocio Hernández** EdD '13  
(Routledge/September 2023)

# Highlights From Class Notes

Class Notes are compiled by Tom Arteaga, USC Rossier's director of alumni engagement. To view all Class Notes and to submit your own update, please visit [rossier.usc.edu/alumni/classnotes](http://rossier.usc.edu/alumni/classnotes).

## OVER 600 STUDENTS ARE WAITING TO CONNECT WITH YOU.

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### 1960s

**MARLY BERGERUD MS '69** is the author of *My Dance With the Devil*. Marly enjoyed being the dean of business at Saddleback College for 17 years and completed her 38-plus-year career in education as vice president of workforce and education development at De Anza College. During her roles in education, Marly co-authored and published 25 computer technology textbooks. She now lives in Palm Desert, Calif., and serves as president of the Palm Springs Writers Guild and on the board of directors of the World Affairs Council of the Desert.

### 1970s

**HOWARD LANDESMAN DDS '62, ME '73** received his specialty credentials in prosthodontics at the USC Ostrow School of Dentistry in 1973 and at the same time received an ME at USC Rossier. He was named dean of USC Ostrow in 1992 and became dean of the University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine in 1998. He can still recall the excellent education from Professor Earl Pullias and others. He attributes much of his professional success to USC Rossier.

**PATRICIA KAHLER LEADER MS '77** retired in 2021 from a 45-year career teaching children who are blind. Throughout her career, she provided instructional services to children and coordinated the vision programs in her school district. After graduating from USC Rossier, she continued her education with a master's in education of the visually impaired from San Francisco State University. She writes contests for the Braille Institute of America's National Braille Challenge and coordinates the Contest Development Team. She has been teaching braille at San Francisco State in the Teacher Preparation Program for 20 years and is a doctoral candidate in instructional leadership.

### 1980s

**DON BRANN '68, EdD '82** serves on the executive committee of the Small School Districts' Association, which he founded in 1982. Don is also board president of Da Vinci Schools, which he founded in 2008. He recently published *A History of the Wiseburn School District* and is beginning to work on his memoirs. Don has served as superintendent of six California school districts since 1979.

**DONALD REMLEY EdD '84** was selected as the Retired Administrator of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators. He was honored in San Diego in November 2022. Don was superintendent of Oroville City Elementary School District, retiring in 2007 after serving for 22 years.

**JAN LEE PhD '88** retired in 2019 after 38 years in academia, specifically in nursing education. Still a licensed registered nurse, Jan volunteers at the local, state and national levels.

### 1990s

**JOYCE STOUT '90, MS '93** retired from working in education after 28 years in school mental health.

**PILAR LOPEZ-HERNANDEZ '98** completed her first year as assistant principal at Fishburn Avenue Elementary in Maywood, Calif.

**MIKE BROWN '99** is completing his PhD in educational leadership while serving as a head of school in Ohio.

**ERNEST JOSEPH ZARRA III PhD '99** is the author of three books: *When the Secular Becomes Sacred: Religious Secular Humanism and Its Effects Upon America's Public Learning Institutions* (2021), *From Character to Color: The Impact of Critical Race Theory on American Education* (2022) and *Understanding Radicalism: How It Affects What's Happening in Education and Its Impact on Students* (2023), all published by Rowman & Littlefield.

### 2000s

**MARY BRANCACCIO MS '01** is the author of *Fierce Geometry: Poems*, published by Get Fresh Books. The collection was recommended by the Academy of American Poets. Her work has appeared in *Naugatuck River Review*, *Minerva Rising*, *Edison Literary Review* and *Rattle*, as well as on Major Jackson's poetry podcast, *The Slowdown*. Mary's poetry is included in several *Writing the Land* anthologies and two international anthologies, *Veils, Halos and Shackles: International Poetry on the Oppression and Empowerment of Women*; and *Farewell to Nuclear, Welcome to Renewable Energy*. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee. Mary taught high school English and creative writing until 2022.

**ANNEKA BUSSE MFT '08** is now the assistant director of student health leave at USC.

## ALUMNI NEWS

**JOSE RODRIGUEZ EdD '08** was named a Fulbright Leaders for Global Schools participant and will be joining 16 school leaders from across the country in Finland during the winter of 2024.

**MARTHA ENCISO '03, ME '06, EdD '09**, associate vice president for student affairs at California State University, Fullerton, won the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' 2023 Mena Valdez Award. She was given the Outstanding Senior Student Affairs Officer Award, which is presented to senior officers who have provided advice, energy, leadership and guidance to the Latino community.

### 2010s

**DARRYL PEARSON EdD '10** is retiring from education after 35 years working with urban youth. He has served in several capacities and has taught at every level—elementary, middle school and high school. He also served as an assistant principal at the elementary and secondary levels.

**EMILY REYES MAT '11** was elected to serve as second vice president of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance in August as a representative of the American Federation of Teachers. Emily is a fifth-grade teacher at Laurel Cinematic Arts & Creative Technologies Magnet in Los Angeles and serves on School Site Council. She has been the United Teachers Los Angeles vice chair at her school site since 2020.

**BRUCE ABNEY JR. MAT '12** was chosen as the District Employee of the Year for the 2022–2023 school year in St. Tammany Parish, La.

**LINWOOD GUY BISHOP MAT '12** became headmaster of a collapsed K–12 church school a month before he graduated from USC. He turned it into a second-chance school for kids in trouble. In June 2021, Linwood established Education for Orphans, a nonprofit organization based in Japan. In February 2023, the organization broke ground on Peace Village Uganda, which will contain a home for abandoned babies, a K–12 school and housing for orphans, housing and a career development center for single mothers, medical clinics and community development programs.

**MATTHEW JELICK MAT '12** was selected to be an English language specialist on behalf of the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti. During his time

there, he worked with the Djiboutian Ministry of Education and local teachers on refining their research topics for presentations at a regional TESOL conference he organized.

**WENLI JEN EdD '12** was accepted into the Workforce Integration Network learning community that aims to close the digital divide among underrepresented student populations to promote a stronger future workforce.

**MARGARITA LANDEROS ME '12** completed her first year as a tenure-track school and college counseling assistant professor at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

**LE'MARQUNITA LOWE MAT '12's** business, Black & Crème, was accepted into the Silicon Valley Fall 2023 Founder Institute Core Program. The Founder Institute is the world's most proven network to turn ideas into fundable startups, and startups into global businesses.

**ESTHER MMAGU MAT '12** graduated from UCLA's Principal Leadership Institute this year with her master's of education and administrative credential and is transitioning out of the classroom to a special education coordinator position with LAUSD.

**JENNY MORGAN MAT '12** is the author of a new children's book, *The Wondrous Adventures of Julie O'Day*.

**JAIMI NEDZIWE MAT '12** is starting her third year as an elementary principal in the Lansing School District in Michigan.

**PATRICIA BECKMANN-WELLS EdD '13** created an award-winning curriculum for the Irvine Valley College Interactive Media Arts and game design department she founded. Four teams of students she mentored were semifinalists in the top 10 of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Showcase GameSIG.

**PATRICK GITTISRIBOONGUL EdD '13** was selected as one of 24 Google Global Silicon Valley Education Innovation Fellows for 2023–24. This inaugural cohort of fellows features exceptional K–12 instructional leaders dedicated to leveraging technology to transform education.

**JENNIFER GRIFFIN MAT '13** teaches AP psychology and ethnic studies at University High School Charter in LAUSD.

**ROCÍO HERNÁNDEZ EdD '13** is the author of *Diverse Experiences of Latinas in Higher Education: Chingonas on Their Own Terms*, published by Routledge in 2023. The book provides a diverse range of empowering testimonies from Chingonas who are defining professionalism for themselves.

**REBECCA KNIGHTON MAT '13** received her PhD from the University of Lethbridge in October 2022. For her dissertation, Rebecca studied teachers who are highly effective at building relationships with and engaging with chronically disengaged students to find the commonly shared factors that contribute to their success.

**RICARDO MARTINEZ MAT '13** was promoted to assistant head of upper school (years 10 and 11 in a 13-year system) at St. George's, the British International School, in Cologne, Germany.

**MARCO NAVA EdD '13**, with Imelda L. Nava and Jan Kirsch, is the co-author of "Leadership That Bridges Arts and Social-Emotional Learning." The article was published in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Marco was also one of 16 fellows selected to the inaugural National Leadership Institute of Men of Color in Educational Leadership.

**MIRIAM OTERO MAT '13** was voted to serve on the board of directors for the Fulbright Association Spain Interest Group. Miriam also started a new position as a middle school history teacher at Castilleja School in Palo Alto, Calif.

**JAMES WINTER MAT '13** is a senior English language arts teacher at Buckeye Union High School near Phoenix, Ariz.

**LEENA BAKSHI EdD '14** is the founder of STEM-4Real, an organization committed to increasing the school-to-STEM career pipeline, especially for underrepresented students of color. Leena was also selected to join Education Leaders of Color, a membership organization dedicated to ensuring young people of color have the support they need to thrive, capitalize on opportunities and build generational wealth.

**YAMONTE COOPER EdD '14** is the co-editor of *Black Couples Therapy: Clinical Theory and Practice*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2023.





## Empowering ESOL Students With AI

**MAT-TESOL alum and Irvine Valley College professor Brent Warner is embracing AI for its ability to help students take control of their own learning.**

Story:  
Dan Gordon

**THE WAY BRENT WARNER MAT '12 SEES IT**, Nov. 30, 2022, will go down as a watershed moment for educators.

That's the day OpenAI launched ChatGPT. The release of the user-friendly generative AI technology set off a frenzy, with 100 million monthly active users joining the fold by January 2023. It also resulted in consternation—and even calls for bans—among many educators, concerned about the potential for students to short-circuit learning by using the powerful new tool to pass off essays and other work as their own.

Warner isn't among the naysayers. As an associate professor and co-chair of English as a Second Language at Irvine Valley College (IVC), a community college in Irvine, California, he has long seen the value of bringing innovative technology applications to his students. A graduate of USC Rossier's Master of Arts in Teaching—Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MAT-TESOL) program, Warner shares his ed-tech insights as a co-host of The DIESOL Podcast (Developing Innovation in ESOL) and The Higher EdTech Podcast, as well as on blogs for TESOL.org.

And yet, as he began to grasp the potential impact of ChatGPT and its competitors, even Warner found himself uncertain over what to make of the game-changing development.

“We’re never going to live in the same world again,” he says. “But it’s tricky to predict how it will be different, because there’s so much to sort out.”

Warner’s interest in teaching English to speakers of other languages has roots in his own student experience. As an undergraduate, he double-majored in Pacific Asian studies and Japanese, and while learning a second language he developed an admiration for the impact his teachers had. After graduating from San Diego State University, he moved to Japan, where he taught English and became passionate about pursuing a career teaching ESOL.

He sees technology as an especially potent tool for ESOL. “I always tell my students that ESOL is not a goal, but a bridge to the goal,” Warner says. “Technology can help to create a sense of autonomy for them, so that they don’t always have to wait for the teacher to give them the feedback. It helps them to take control of their own learning, which is empowering.”

When he decided to pursue his master’s, Warner recalls, USC Rossier’s MAT-TESOL program was the obvious choice. “It was one of the first schools that had a synchronous online environment, and I viewed that as the future of teaching,” he says. “I found it to be the perfect combination of a program that was forward-thinking in terms of where the online experience was headed, but also recognized the need for humanity and the importance of the personal relationship between the teacher and student.”

At IVC, Warner is not only given the freedom to experiment with innovative adaptations of ed tech, but he also guides colleagues seeking advice on how to make the best use of ed tech. Warner led an effort to devote the first unit of the academic writing course to understanding AI, while also introducing it into his courses. As his students read Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, Warner had them use AI image generation through Canva, an online design platform, as a way to reflect on the story. Warner also prompted his students to choose a character from the book and, using ChatGPT, engage in a conversation with the book’s characters.

As co-chair of IVC’s Online Education Committee, Warner has been at the forefront of institutional discussions about AI’s place in the college’s classrooms. He has advocated against the use of ChatGPT-detection software, arguing that it is unreliable and easily bypassed—and that false positives are harmful to students. “Building student relationships is going to be far more important so that they can find a passion for what they’re learning, rather than playing cat and mouse with plagiarism software,” he says.

While much of the discussion around AI in education has focused on fears about plagiarism and other forms of cheating, Warner is embracing the transformative technology. “These are early days, and if we make good decisions, we can guide this in ways that will help students with their learning,” he says. “But teachers will need to have conversations with their students where they decide together what they want and need to learn, then make the necessary adjustments to ensure the highest chance of success.” —R

↑  
An AI-generated image of Brent Warner MAT '12, Irvine Valley College professor and host of The Higher EdTech Podcast.



## IN RETIREMENT, TONY KNIGHT EdD '06 DIVES INTO SHARING OCEAN'S WONDERS

It's been only two years since Tony Knight EdD '06 retired from his post as superintendent of Oak Park Unified School District, but he hasn't stopped educating. He's kept himself busy, continuing to invest in and share his love of the

outdoors, particular the ocean. Knight became a certified instructor through the American Sailing Association and is putting his skills to good use. He teaches sailing in Marina del Rey and is also in charge of sailing instruction at the Fairwind Yacht Club, a nonprofit organization subsidized by Los Angeles County to make sailing accessible to everyone, through a partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Los Angeles. Knight didn't stop there. He also became a member of the Channel Island Naturalist Corps and serves as a naturalist guide for the Channel Islands National Park and National Marine Sanctuary. He provides interpretative guiding on whale-watching trips that depart from Santa Barbara and was certified to lead hikes on Santa Cruz Island. Knight and his wife, Nancy, are also volunteer supervisors with TreePeople, where they work on urban forestry projects.

"I was retiring to something different," Knight says. "It's great being connected to nature, especially the ocean, and introducing people to its wonders." —R

**EDER FLORES MAT '15** is the college and career director for Variety Boys & Girls Club.

**ALICIA FOX MAT '15** secured her first teaching position after an eight-year hiatus to take care of her family. She now works for Los Angeles Unified School District in a combined fourth- and fifth-grade classroom.

**VIGOR LAM ME '15** is a founder of BuildOUT California and a senior project engineer with Jacobs. He was awarded the Emerging Professional Award from the Northern California Chapter of Construction Management Association of America.

**MADELEINE MEJIA EdD '15** received a California State University, Fullerton, Digital Ethnic Futures Consortium Fellowship Award from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to investigate the impact of disciplinary literacy, ethnic studies and the use of technology on K-12 teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions to promote social justice education.

**ROSE HACHEY MAT '16**'s last little Trojan was born in July 2022. He attended his first homecoming this year.

**SHAINA PHILPOT MAT '16** earned her EdD in leadership in higher education from National University.

**MELISSA WOODFORLK-WHYTE MAT '16** is co-founder of Whyte Warehouse Connection LLC, a company dedicated to providing educational products and services. She also released a new book, *My Education: Authentic Teaching*, a compilation of academic papers exploring authentic teaching practices and delving into the critical concerns educators face daily in the classroom.

**LARRY CHAPA EdD '17** is director of the Testing, Evaluation and Measurement Center at Texas State University. Additionally, Larry is an adjunct faculty member in the Student Affairs in Higher Education graduate program.

**AMANDA HOLDSWORTH EdD '17** joined Peter Riley Bahr's research team at the University of Michigan's Marsal Family School of Education, studying and communicating about research related to career and technical education, community colleges, workforce development, stackable credentials, economics and equity in education, labor market outcomes and education reform.

**AYESHA LEONARD MCLAUGHLIN ME '14** is celebrating the fifth anniversary of Teach to Reach LLC, a STEAM makerspace laboratory in Jefferson Park, just two miles from the USC campus. AyEsha looks forward to the next five years and the impact the education center will have on the community.

**OSCAR MACIAS EdD '14** was named a 2023-24 K-12 Dive Rising Leader for his role as director of equity, access and family engagement at Glendale Unified School District.

**SEBASTIAN PUCCIO EdD '14** was enjoying life's journey and his more than 20 years in K-12 and higher education when everything took an unexpected turn, as he faced a daunting cancer diagnosis. With unwavering determination and support from loved ones, Sebastian faced the trials of chemotherapy, radiation and surgery with remarkable courage. The experience led him to author a new book, *Morning Mental Activation*. He describes the book as "a daily guide for unlocking one's full potential and embracing life with renewed vigor." He also offers mental strength workshops.

**ANACANY TORRES ME '14** is a counselor for the North Orange County Community College District. She helped found a program to support formerly incarcerated students and launched the Rising Scholars program at North Orange Continuing Education.

**ELIZABETH TRAYNER EdD '14** is assistant vice president for institutional equity, Title IX coordinator and ADA/504 coordinator at Seattle University.

**GEOFFREY ZAMARRIPA EdD '14** is director of special education for Temple City Unified School District.

**RUFUS CAYETANO EdD '15** retired from the U.S. Navy in February after serving 33 years combined on active duty and reserve and reaching the rank of captain.

**PRISCILLA DE LARA ME '15** transitioned into international education after working at traditional universities in the U.S. for almost a decade. She is running a study abroad center in Milan, Italy, with SAI Programs.

## Leveling the Test-Prep Field

Valencia Belle EdD '23 is championing educational access in Alabama and beyond.

Story:  
Katrina Nash

**VALENCIA BELLE EdD '23 HAS ALWAYS HAD AN** entrepreneurial spirit. When she was in high school, the 12-year-old scholar-athlete in track and field began offering her peers ACT test prep in science and math for a small fee. Despite her early start running a tutoring business, the Mobile, Alabama, native hasn't always worked in education.

Before shifting her focus to education, Belle worked as a biomedical researcher. She graduated from the University of Alabama with a bachelor of science degree in biology, which she quickly put to work as a member of a National Institute of Health research team that advanced the development of HIV medications. Several years later, after obtaining a bachelor of science degree in nursing from Virginia Commonwealth University and a master's degree in family studies and system integration from the University of Maryland, Belle began to focus on the lack of educational opportunities for girls in the Dutch West Indies, where she has familial ties. These students aspired to work in health care in the U.S., but they lacked clarity on the educational pathway required. Belle found herself drawn to workforce development, wondering, "How can I support students in their educational journey toward their goals?"

In response, Belle founded SCHOOLS (Success Can Happen Out of Low Scores) in 2015. The company is on a mission to provide high-quality, cost-effective test prep, with the goal of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. She hopes that "one test score can spare grandparents, parents and students from going into debt." Since its inception, SCHOOLS has assisted over 250,000 students in the U.S. and abroad avoid more than \$250 million in student loans and debt. In collaboration with educators, counselors and career coaches, SCHOOLS develops and implements tailored postsecondary-readiness courses. The courses are offered to students free of charge through partnerships with schools or at one-tenth the cost of traditional test-prep courses. Pre-nursing students in community college are also able to gain access to SCHOOLS courses through financial aid. Students who take a SCHOOLS course, on average, raise their ACT composite score by 5-10 points and their SAT score by 100-200 points.

With a goal of learning how to effectively scale SCHOOLS and expand its reach, Belle enrolled in USC Rossier's Doctor



of Education in Organizational Change and Leadership online program. Building on her earlier work, she sought to help provide students interested in health care with test preparation that could help them reach their goals to attend college and pursue their careers.

Belle also participated in the USC Education Technology Accelerator, which propelled her company into a global force. Through the Accelerator, she forged partnerships with thought leaders, enabling her to support students in Nigeria, the Bahamas and the Philippines. Mark DeGennaro, managing director of the Accelerator, describes Belle's "passion for helping others" and her "let's get it done" approach as contagious. DeGennaro was thrilled the Accelerator could help Belle "expand her company's reach and improve educational access and outcomes for historically marginalized learners."

Belle's dissertation, which explores how educational equity impacts health care in Alabama communities, has gained recognition from the Alabama Legislature. SCHOOLS recently became the first BIPOC- and female-led company in Alabama to earn B Corp Certification, and two Alabama community colleges are now offering the SCHOOLS ACT prep course to nursing students, covered by financial aid. In 2024, this course will be available in all HBCUs in Alabama.

Belle attributes her success to the numerous professors and colleagues who challenged her. She fondly recalls the words of encouragement from childhood friend and mentor Latitia McCane, director of education at the Apprentice School in Newport News, Virginia: "You understand the problem; now, do something about it." —R

Valencia Belle EdD '23 founded SCHOOLS in 2015 which provides high-quality, cost-effective test preparation.

## ALUMNI NEWS

**FEDERICK NGO PhD '17** earned tenure and was promoted to associate professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He teaches in the graduate program in higher education and does research on the policy, finance and economics of higher education.

**BREE MARTIN STINSON MAT '17** is an education specialist for Orange Unified School District. In 2022, the special education department awarded her with the CAPE award, recognizing her for being collaborative, adaptable, proactive and equitable among her staff and community. She is also the co-chair for the Social Economic & Justice Committee.

**INGRID TWYMAN EdD '17** consults through her company, the Core Collaborative, and co-authored a new education book, *Amplify Learner Voice Through Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Assessment*.

**JIALU FAN MAT '18** is pursuing her PhD in STEM education at the University of Minnesota.

**ERIC FELIX PhD '18** earned tenure and promotion to associate professor at San Diego State University.

**SORANGEL HERNANDEZ EdD '18** was named vice president of student services at Los Angeles Harbor College in February.

**TERRI HORTON EdD '18** is a work futurist educating business leaders on how to leverage generative AI. As a LinkedIn Learning instructor, she created two courses on how generative AI is transforming human resources and learning and development processes.

**MICHELLE MATTER EdD '18** is director of aging at San Diego State University Center for Excellence in Aging & Longevity.

**ALBERTO PIMENTEL JR. EdD '18** earned his MS in learning technologies and design from the University of Missouri–Columbia in May.

**NINA THOMAS EdD '18** became assistant chief of education, associate superintendent, for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Office of Correctional Education, overseeing adult schools in state correctional facilities across the southern region of the state.

**ARELY ACUÑA PhD '19** was named the Mariette Sawchuk Director for Equity, Diversity and Justice at Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles.

**DARALEE BARBERA EdD '19** is the program director of the master of science in management and leadership, assistant professor of leadership and the George G. Joseph and Richard A. Liddy Chair in Practice Management & Leadership at the American College of Financial Services. In 2022, she was the program director of the financial planning programs at California Lutheran University. She is also the president and co-principal of Diversified Professional Coaching LLC.

**AERIAL ELLIS EdD '19** was appointed the Wells Fargo Endowed Chair and Distinguished Professor for North Carolina Central University's Department of Mass Communication.

**RANDEE KIRKEMO EdD '19** is assistant director of Chapman University's graduate program in school counseling.

**MELANIE ORELLANA MAT '19** was promoted to assistant principal, dean of students, at Heritage Christian School in Los Angeles.

**RICHARD PEDROZA EdD '19** entered his 20th year as a special education high school teacher this fall.



### FORGING A BRIGHTER PATH FOR THE INCARCERATED

Acacia Warren EdD '14 has long been committed to helping those experiencing hardship find ways to beat the odds. When she began teaching summer school in juvenile hall after earning her master's in education and her teaching credential from the University of California, Berkeley, her commitment to justice-centered work in education was sparked.

After years in the classroom—both at the K-12 level and at the university level—Warren was recently named the managing director of UCLA's Prison Education Program. The program makes postsecondary education accessible to women and young people who are incarcerated. UCLA is one of only two California universities that bring professors and college students into prisons to learn alongside incarcerated people, thereby challenging bias, discrimination and injustice in a shared and collaborative learning experience.

One of Warren's major responsibilities is to lead the Bachelor's Degree in Prison (BDP)

initiative, providing incarcerated students with the opportunity to complete a UCLA degree. By addressing the educational objectives of incarcerated, first-generation and underrepresented students, the BDP initiative furthers the mission of UCLA by creating pathways for continuing education, civic participation, successful employment and community reintegration.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there is a 43% reduction in recidivism rate for those prisoners who participate in prison education programs. In fact, the higher the degree, the lower the recidivism rate: The rate is 13% for those who obtain an associate's degree, 5.6% a bachelor's degree and 0% for a master's degree. Warren will use her knowledge, skills and expertise to forge important pathways of hope for system-impacted students by resourcing and supporting them in beating the statistical odds against their success. —R

## ALUMNI NEWS

**JASMINE SCALES MA '19** started a new position as foster-youth specialist with the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

**ROBERT SEDILLO MAT '19** wrote a book about a preteen living with childhood cancer titled *Am I So Different?*

**CHASITY TOLES ME '19** is assistant director of the nonprofit Aaron Community Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Chasity has worked effectively to grow and connect many resources to the community and fight food insecurity while establishing partnerships for health and community togetherness.

**LESLEY VUILLEMENOT RUZON '96, MAT '19** teaches dance and drama at South San Francisco High School.

**KRISTINA WRIGHT EdD '19** was promoted to vice president of student success at Making Waves Education Foundation, Bay Area.

### 2020S

**CHRISTINA CHAVEZ MAT '20** was awarded the Fund For Teachers Fellowship in summer 2023. She traveled to Washington, D.C., Germany and Poland to research the wartime account of Mexican American prisoner of war Anthony Acevedo and his role in preserving the historical record of World War II and the Holocaust. Christina hopes to meaningfully connect students to history, promote tolerance and counter rising antisemitism. She teaches in Montebello Unified School District.

**NEVIN DURMAZ MA '20** was accepted into the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Second Language Acquisition PhD program with four years of scholarship.

**BRANDEN GRIMMETT EdD '20** was nominated for a Tony Award as co-producer of the new Broadway musical *New York, New York*. The musical was nominated for nine Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

**SONJA JOHNSON EdD '20** is on the board of two wonderful organizations that both strive to create educational equity and access for all students.

**KIMBERLY KIRCHER MAT '20** is a sixth-grade teacher at Sun Valley Magnet School and was named a Los Angeles Unified School District 2021–2022 Rookie of the Year.

**BERTRAM MULLIN MA '20** is a lecturer at universities in Japan. He is writing his dissertation

for a doctorate in applied linguistics at Temple University.

**KAREN SONG EdD '20** is an adviser for the Cook Islands Ministry of Education and is supporting secondary teachers and administrators with the rollout of new English standards and a literacy co-requisite. Karen is also working on revising the Cook Islands secondary English curriculum and is a member of the steering committee focusing on the 2023–2033 education strategy for the Cook Islands.

**SATORI WEST MAT '20** started a business, Wildbluewest Education Services, in Washington state, where she provides preschool classes and enrichment opportunities for elementary-age students.

**ADOLFO DIAZ MAT '21** is a mild/moderate special education teacher at El Monte City School District in California.

**LUCAS DYER EdD '21** fulfilled a longtime passion and became a financial planner. Lucas spends a lot of time working with fellow Trojans and military members to help create a future in order to achieve, maintain and pass on financial security. Before his new career, he worked for Amazon as a senior program manager, running the learning and development sector.

**MELESSA HAMILTON MAT '21** teaches sixth- and eighth-grade math and science at Walter Reed Middle School in Los Angeles.

**ANGELA LIU MAT '21** was named an LAUSD 2022–23 Rookie of the Year (p. 10).

**YESSENIA MEDINA MAT '21** started her teaching career in August.

**GLORIA OLAMENDI '00, EdD '21** is assistant superintendent for special education at Santa Ana Unified School District.

**CHERRE STONEHAM MAT '21** is a mild/moderate special education teacher with Redondo Beach Unified School District.

**ALEX VIEIRA EdD '21** completed his second year as an assistant principal at Marco Antonio Firebaugh High School, part of Lynwood Unified School District.

**AMY WONG EdD '21's** dissertation was published as a book, *Stories of Survival: The Paradox of Suicide Vulnerability and Resiliency Among*

*Asian American College Students*, by Oxford University Press in 2023.

**ALEXMA CHOCOZA MAT '22** is a high school social science teacher and absolutely loves it.

**BRYAN GROSS EdD '22** was named Hartwick College's vice president for enrollment management.

**OMAR RAMOS MAT '22** began teaching fifth grade this fall.

**LORRAINE RODRIGUEZ MAT '22** started the 2023–24 school year as the English teacher for the second-grade Mandarin Dual Language Program at El Monte City School District.

**VALENCIA BELLE EdD '23** was named one of the 23 Women in Tech for 2023 for the state of Alabama by Business Alabama Magazine. The founder of V B Ideas LLC/SCHOOLS, Valencia was chosen as a member of the 2022 USC Rossier EdVentures Ed Tech Accelerator Program, led by Professors Doug Lynch and Mark DeGennaro; pitched at the 2022 ASU+GSV Summit; and was chosen as an ASU+GSV G Cup Elite 200 Company, one of 200 of the leading edtech companies worldwide, at the 2023 ASU+GSV Summit (p. 41).

**SERINA BRAVO ME '17, EdD '23** became a double Trojan in May by completing a second degree at USC Rossier, her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership with a concentration in higher education administration.

**DIANA HERNANDEZ ME '23** was promoted to director of undergraduate admission at California Lutheran University.

**TAMAR JOHORIAN MAT '23** is a chemistry instructor within the secondary level at Saint Monica Preparatory School in Santa Monica.

**BREEANNA THOMAS ME '23** accepted a job as a middle school counselor with Clark County School District in Las Vegas. She will be supporting seventh- and eighth-graders and their transitions to high school.

**JOVAN WILLIAMS MAT '23** teaches second grade at Ambler Avenue Elementary in Carson, Calif.

**BIANCA ZARAGOZA ME '23** is a school counselor at a K–6 elementary school. She provides support, empathy and compassion to struggling students through personal and group sessions that provide coping skills.



## Yaw Osei Adutwum PhD '09 Returned to Ghana to Transform the Nation's Educational System

After working as a teacher and founding a charter school network in L.A., Adutwum was appointed Ghana's minister for education and led the country's effort to expand free secondary education for all.

Interview by:  
Pedro A. Noguera,  
Emery Stoops and Joyce  
King Stoops Dean

**YAW OSEI ADUTWUM PHD '09 IS GHANA'S MINISTER FOR** education and a proud Trojan. He was born in Jachie, a small village in Ghana, and later immigrated to the U.S. to attend college. His ties to USC run deep, as he began teaching mathematics in the Neighborhood Academic Initiative in 1997-2001 after several years teaching at Manual Arts High School. Adutwum later went on to earn his PhD from USC Rossier in 2009. Along the way, he founded New Designs Charter Schools in South Los Angeles, which has since expanded to three campuses. When he crossed paths with now-Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo at an event in L.A., his life changed course, and he found himself back in Ghana. He was appointed deputy minister for education in 2017 and became full minister in 2021. He helped lead the country's effort to expand free secondary education for all, something many Ghanaians thought was impossible. In this interview, Dean Pedro Noguera discusses Adutwum's USC connections, his historic effort to expand educational access in Ghana and his hopes for the future.

**PEDRO NOGUERA:** Tell me about your professional journey and your connection to USC.

**YAW OSEI ADUTWUM:** I taught at Manual Arts High School, and USC's Neighborhood Academic Initiative which draws students from Manual Arts and Foshay Learning Center. Through the NAI, students were given Saturday school and SAT prep in addition to their regular math and English Classes at USC. At that time, if they got an SAT score of 1400, USC gave them a full scholarship. I was selected to be the lead teacher for mathematics in the [NAI] program. The classes were held in USC classrooms with the idea that as the inner-city kids sat in the lecture halls of USC, their

↑  
Minister Adutwum on a visit to Afia Kobi Ampen Senior High School to congratulate the all-girls school's engineering club for creating a first-of-its-kind model airplane. The plane soared to great heights on its inaugural flight, capturing the attention of the nation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

mindset [would] change and it [would] make them feel that they have what it takes to become [USC] students. And it worked.

As a result of being on campus, I decided to do my PhD [at USC], and somewhere down the line, I decided to start a charter school. When I saw the students succeeding at the NAI, I said to myself, “They have best practices here.” It encouraged me to know that inner-city kids, given the opportunity, can perform just as well as anybody.

I was able to open my first school in 2004. My school started from grade six, and once students were in high school, they had to select a career focus. Some did law and diplomacy; others did finance and engineering. We partnered with L.A. City College, and they offered engineering classes on our campus. A number of my students pursued engineering at university because they were exposed to it.

Unlike other schools in LAUSD, students who came to my school were required to complete precalculus and three years of a foreign language before they graduated. I saw that the vast majority of South L.A. students were not qualified to go to their own public universities—so don’t even think about USC. I recognized that graduation requirements should be aligned with the entry requirements of the UCs and USC.

**PN:** How did you jump from L.A.—running a charter network successfully—to becoming minister of education in Ghana?

**YOA:** While I was in L.A., I got a call from some Ghanaians, and they said, “There’s this guy running for president in Ghana. He’s visiting L.A., and we want to welcome him in your school.” They introduced me to Nana Akufo-Addo and told him I ran the school where they were holding the event. He was shocked and amazed, and he asked, “How could a Ghanaian come to America and build schools for Americans?” I explained how the charter schools work, and he asked, “Would you consider coming back to Ghana to help me change the education system?” I asked him a question: “What is so unique about your education agenda in Ghana that will necessitate my coming back to Ghana?” He said he wanted to implement free secondary education in Ghana, and America is the nation that began free secondary education for all.

I went to meet the late Congressman Mervyn Dymally, a mentor of mine, and I brought up the subject. He said, “I’ll tell you one thing. Your schools are doing well. We are so proud of you, but America can do without you. Maybe your country cannot. So, go and help your country.”

He really spoke to my heart. It took me back to Ghana, where I grew up in a rural community on a cocoa farm. My dad and mom never went to school. When it was time for me to go to senior high school, my dad didn’t have money. My younger brother, who was taking care of my uncle’s piggery, was willing to sell a pig so that I could go. When Akufo-Addo said, “We are going to make it free,” it really touched me.

When I came, I was [appointed] a deputy minister. When we started the free senior high school policy, enrollment almost doubled, but there was not enough space for everyone. They didn’t know what to do. I went to my minister and the president and said, “We can borrow from California.” In 1994, L.A. Unified moved from three-year to four-year high schools like other districts. They needed more teachers, so I got the opportunity to be hired as one of the teachers recruited for the four-year policy. They had limited facilities, so they introduced year-round schools and were able to accommodate more people in high school.

So, we introduced year-round school in Ghana. People started complaining—Why are you changing the schedule? Why are some students at home while others are not? The president deployed me to explain year-round education—which in Ghana we call the double-track system—to every Ghanaian I could find.

**PN:** How is that going for you? Because, honestly, I have heard from some Ghanaian parents who are not happy with their kids being at home for long periods.

**YOA:** Instead of 180 school days, we have 164, but we compensate for that with a longer school day. In terms of contact hours, students don’t miss anything. If you look at learning outcomes as measured by the West African Examinations Council, the growth is unbelievable. Before the free senior high school policy, only 28% would pass the exams on integrated science. Now it’s 62%.

If double-track is bad, why are they doing better? There were a number of things—free uniforms, tutoring—that were done in addition to increasing contact hours. Now, about 60% of our high schools have transitioned back to single-track.



## ALUMNI NEWS

As we built new schools, just like we did in California, we were able to retire year-round schools. For the well-to-do parent who could have paid for their children to go to senior high school, they will question why. But for those who wouldn't have been able to go if it weren't for the free senior high school policy, this is a miracle happening, something they never dreamt of.

**PN:** You've expanded access, you've made it free and you've also seen a rise, particularly in science. What are some of the things you're trying to accomplish in Ghana?

**YOA:** Now we've gone beyond free senior high school to STEM education. We've built new STEM schools. We are building junior high schools that have biology, physics and chemistry labs. We're infusing STEM into the education system, but we're also doing STEAM so students can do music or art for one year.

The Ghanaian education system is so exam-driven, but we are changing that so we can bring innovation to the classroom

We're also creating aerospace and aviation programs. Students are developing and flying drones. Ghana is one of the first countries, probably, in Africa where we are widely distributing medicine across the country with drones. The company distributing the medicine with drones is partnering with the Ministry of Education to offer internship opportunities for our high school students.

We started with free secondary, and now we're moving from access to quality, changing the curriculum so that we can stop rote memorization and move on to critical thinking and project-based learning. This is something the government is investing in because we believe that the better days of our nation should be ahead of us. It's all about creating an education system that can change the socioeconomic fortunes of Ghana.

**PN:** Ghana sends so many highly educated people abroad to the U.S., the U.K. and elsewhere. There are now, believe it or not, more Ghanaian doctors in Washington, D.C., than in Ghana. Is there anything [that can be done] to reverse that, so that some of the talented Ghanaians will stay in Ghana to help the country?

**YOA:** I think, as you develop high-paying jobs in software development, engineering and other areas, and you're creating a learning environment that will lead to those careers, that creates an opportunity for people to stay in Ghana. They will say, "I can make good money. Why travel anywhere else?"

**PN:** You epitomize the reversal of the brain drain because you went back. You're proof we can bring Ghanaians back to help the country, and I'm so glad to know you're a USC Rossier graduate doing this important work in your nation. You make us proud. —R

## IN MEMORIAM

**SONYA BLACK, FACULTY AFFAIRS COORDINATOR**, died in April. Sonya joined USC Rossier in 2010 and was dedicated to the Office of Faculty Affairs for 13 years. Anyone who came to visit the office while Sonya was there knew that she was the heartbeat. Sonya was gifted with an ability to form positive and encouraging relationships with USC Rossier's faculty as well as with fellow staff members. Sonya was a devoted and loving mother to her three children, and she was devoted to her own mother. She was active in her church and her community.

**DONALD E. LEISEY EdD '75** passed away on May 30, 2023. Don served in various educational capacities in the Lennox School District. He served as the Superintendent of San Rafael City Schools. He started 22 private schools in Northern California and was appointed to the California Childcare Commission by Governor Deukmejian. Later in his career he founded A+ The Report Card and educational resource stores. He served on the USC Rossier Board of Councilors and was a recipient of the Widney Alumni House Award from the USC Alumni Association. Don is survived by his wife, Patricia and two daughters, Kristen (Steve) Cauz, Kendra and four grandchildren.

**JACQUELINE MORA EdD '10**, assistant superintendent of educational services at Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, died Sept. 16 after a hard-fought battle with an illness. She was 46. Jacqueline came to California from Mexico as a child with her parents, sister and brother. She was an English learner who worked hard and was motivated to succeed to help others achieve their goals. She earned a bachelor of arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara; a master's degree in education from UCSB; a master's degree in education from UCLA and a doctorate from USC. Jacqueline's passion

for public education; dedication to students, families and staff; and desire to see all students succeed academically, socially and emotionally inspired her personally and professionally. She is survived by her mother, Maria Mora; her brother, David Mora; her sister, Vanessa Mora; a niece; and her fiancé, Eduardo Magaña.

**BRENT NOYES '75, MS '79** died April 21 after a battle with multiple myeloma. Brent was born in Los Angeles on June 26, 1952, and attended North Hollywood High School. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from USC Rossier. Brent was a teacher in Glendale Unified School District and a principal in La Canada, Agoura Hills, Calabasas and South Pasadena. Brent was a faithful and proud alumnus of USC. He served on the USC Alumni Association, Board of Governors and Board of Councilors for USC Rossier. He loved all sports but especially loved sharing USC football season with his daughter Alexis. Brent is survived by his loving wife and daughters Alexis Katherine and Kellie Nicole.

**JOHN ORR, FORMER DEAN** of USC Rossier, died Feb. 25 at 89. John was born in 1933 in Long Beach. He graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1955 with a degree in philosophy, followed by a bachelor's degree in divinity from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1958. In 1965, he was awarded a PhD from Yale Divinity School. He married Thelma Hodson in 1961, after they met at a New Year's Eve party, and the two remained married until his death. They had two sons, John and Steve, both USC alumni. Steve predeceased John in 2014. John began working at USC Dornsife as a full professor in 1967, and in 1970 became director of the School of Religion. In 1981, John moved to USC Rossier, where he first was interim dean and then permanent dean until he retired in 1988.



## USC Rossier Produces Leaders



**Gunn Marie Hansen MS '96, PhD '00**

was appointed superintendent of Westminster School District in March.

Gunn brings a résumé

that includes more than 32 years of public school experience, along with numerous academic achievements, awards, and community and business partnerships. Having earned a doctorate in educational policy and administration from USC, she's spent nearly all of the past 13 years working for Orange Unified School District, where she was promoted to superintendent in 2017. Among her accolades as superintendent, she won the Orange County School Boards Association's Maureen DiMarco Award for exemplary leadership in service of young people in 2021, and she was honored with the Fourth District PTA's Administrator of the Year Award in 2022.



**Jennifer Hawn Edd '07**

was selected to serve as Piedmont Unified School District's next superintendent. In her more than 25 years in public education,

Jennifer has dedicated herself to serving K-12 and college students in California. She has an extensive educational background, including broad experience as a teacher and administrator with Beverly Hills Unified School District, as an assistant superintendent of human resources with Whittier City School District, as an instructor for Pepperdine University and as deputy superintendent for Da Vinci Schools, serving Wiseburn Unified School District in Southern California.

**Josh Van Norman MAT '07** was named superintendent of Bradley Union School District.



**Ryan Cornner MSW '06, EDD '10**

was appointed superintendent/president of Glendale Community College on July 1, 2022.



**Alfonso Jiménez**

**Edd '12**, superintendent of Hacienda La Puente Unified School District, was named a 2022 Superintendent to Watch by the National

School Public Relations Association. He also was named the 2022 University of California, Davis, C-STEM Center Superintendent of the Year and the 2023 California Association for Latino Superintendents and Administrators Region V Superintendent of the Year.



**Domenika Lynch '97, MFT '15**

is executive director of the Aspen Institute Latinos and Society Program and was appointed to Toyota Motor North America's

North American Diversity Advisory Board.



**Maria Martinez-Poulin**

**Edd '17** was named interim superintendent of Culver City Unified School District in October 2023. She is the first Latina

superintendent in CCUSD's history. Maria most recently served as the deputy superintendent of schools of the Los Angeles County Office of Education.



**Amie Carter Edd '18**

was elected Sonoma County superintendent of schools. She is the first woman to be elected to this county office in more than 100 years and

is only the second openly LGBTQ+ county superintendent in the state of California.

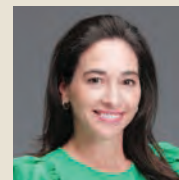


**Marina Theodotou**

**Edd '18** was appointed executive director of the Defense Innovation Board at the U.S. Department of Defense.

The board's mission is to provide the secretary of defense, deputy secretary of defense and other senior department leaders with independent advice and recommendations on innovative means to address future challenges through the prism of three focus areas: people and culture, technology and capabilities, and practices and operations. Marina also led a

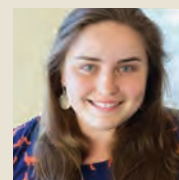
Crystal City-Pentagon Rotary Club project to support Ukrainian refugee orphans living in Poland. She was elected president-elect of the club in 2023-23 and will serve as club president in 2024-25.



**Kathy Limmer EDD '19**

joined United Way of Metropolitan Dallas as its chief growth officer. Kathy is responsible for building, growing and sustaining strong

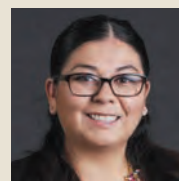
relationships with donors to strengthen United Way's ability to pursue its mission of creating the opportunity for all North Texans to thrive. As an accomplished nonprofit leader, Kathy brings extraordinary experience, skill and excitement to the organization as it drives measurable change for all North Texans in education, income and health—the building blocks of strong communities.



**Diewertje Kast**

**Edd '20**, director of STEM education programs with USC's Joint Educational Project, was chosen to receive the 40 Under 40

Public Health Catalyst Award by the Boston Congress of Public Health. The recipients represent the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, researchers, scientists, activists, intellectual provocateurs, authors and directors who inspire and catalyze us all to a more just and equitable world.



**Natalie Mejia Edd '20**

is the founding principal at the SEED School of Los Angeles County, the first public college-preparatory boarding high school in California.

The school's vision is to create a nurturing home away from home, fostering academic excellence and personal growth.



**Christa Glembocki**

**Edd '23** was named Middle School Principal of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators. Christa is the principal

at Dwyer Middle School in Huntington Beach City School District.



## Transforming the Education System From Within

Melanie Lundquist '71, MA '73 is advancing educational equity in underserved schools throughout Los Angeles.

By Katrina Nash

**MELANIE LUNDQUIST '71, MA '73** is a change agent who does not shy away from sharing the honest truth about what she believes needs to change in public education. After graduating from the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1967, Lundquist watched as the public school system eroded over five decades, as California ranked 36th in the nation for eighth-grade math scores in 2022. Realizing she was fortunate enough to obtain an excellent education through LAUSD, Lundquist set out to ensure today's students receive the same quality education.

A lifelong Angeleno, Lundquist holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from USC, and her husband, Richard Lundquist BS '72 from Marshall, is a Trojan, too. The pair also received honorary doctor of humane letters degrees from McPherson College. The Lundquists are signatories of the Giving Pledge and have appeared five times on the Philanthropy 50, the annual list of America's 50 most generous philanthropists.

In 2007, Richard and Melanie Lundquist became co-founders,

with then-L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, of the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, providing a \$50 million commitment to launch the organization. Melanie Lundquist believes that "because of system breakage in our country, in fact in our civilization, in every way shape and form possible, you must work inside the system, bottom-up and inside out, to see exactly what the problems are and what the solutions can be." So, to ensure revolutionary education change is made in the broadest way possible, the Partnership operates within LAUSD.

Today, the Partnership is a group of 20 K-12 schools, all in Boyle Heights, South L.A. and Watts, that were in the lowest 10% of performance when they were brought into the Partnership. Lundquist always goes where the need is greatest, often noting that "a person's ZIP code should not equal their destiny, and poverty should not equal their destiny, either." There are now over 13,500 students in K-12 Partnership schools, the size of most school districts in the United States. This scale proves that changes made

within Partnership schools can serve as a model that can be replicated across the country.

The outcomes of students attending Partnership schools speak for themselves. Graduation rates started out at 35-36%; today, they are at 86%, and college admissions have tripled. Wanting to make an even greater impact, Lundquist and the Partnership created the Playbook for School Transformation, a free resource that outlines a path forward for public school systems to accelerate equity for low-income students and students of color.

The Partnership is one of many educational causes Lundquist backs. Among her philanthropic efforts, she also supports AltaSea at the Port of Los Angeles, the only U.S.-based urban ocean cleantech incubator partnering with a consortium of universities. Lundquist is a passionate supporter of the News Literacy Project, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that is the country's largest provider of news literacy education.

For Lundquist, another essential part of transforming education is to make sure those on the front lines—the teachers—are supported. When speaking with new teachers, Lundquist often hears them say, "I wasn't trained to do this." USC Rossier's Teacher Preparation Residency program is pushing to change this narrative. In partnership with LAUSD, the program recruits talented educators who reflect the diversity of Los Angeles. Residents gain experience in LAUSD classrooms and are provided with a full tuition scholarship and a \$20,000 living stipend. Lundquist is a proud donor to the program because she has seen first-hand that the program produces "incredibly well-trained teachers who have the tools, foundation and footing they need to get excited about being in front of students." —R

📶 To learn more about giving to USC Rossier, please visit [rossier.usc.edu/giving](https://rossier.usc.edu/giving) or contact Rachel Beal, interim associate dean for advancement, at [bealr@rossier.usc.edu](mailto:bealr@rossier.usc.edu).

➤ Melanie Lundquist at the 2023 Aspen Ideas Festival, where she spoke at a session titled "How Philanthropy Can Drive Change in Public Education."

PHOTO COURTESY OF MELANIE LUNDQUIST

# Your gift transforms the future



“There are not enough words to describe how empowering it has been to receive a scholarship. I was able to move across the country, attend my dream education program, and will soon enter my dream profession as a public school teacher in the great state of California!”

—*Grace Donahue, Master of Arts in Teaching*

“As a first-generation Latina college student, head of the household, mother of two children, and an assistant principal, receiving a scholarship has been a huge financial relief. The help that this scholarship provides has been a blessing!”

—*Leticia Gonzalez, Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership*



“I grew up on the Mississippi Gulf Coast without a lot of resources, but my mom always emphasized the importance of attaining a sound education. Today, I am the first senior administrator of color in the history of the school where I work. Pursuing and earning my doctorate is truly a dream come true.”

—*Roger Bridges, Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership*



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Graduates, including  
Aunsha Hall EdD '23 (left)  
and Hector Cabrera EdD '23  
(center), celebrate at USC  
Rossier's 2023 Doctoral  
Commencement Ceremony.

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