

SPRING / SUMMER 2019

USC Rossier

AT 100



THE
EVERYTHING
EDUCATOR

Of Presidents and Parrotfish

THERE IS A SAYING: “*Ek mouj jab meloklok kilone.*” It means, “The parrotfish will always return to the undersea cave where it was born.” I learned this expression from Her Excellency Hilda Heine EdD '04, president of the Marshall Islands, who was honored with the Distinguished Alumni Award at our USC Rossier Hawaii Centennial celebration this February.

Born in the Marshall Islands, President Heine dreamed of becoming a principal, like her father. She traveled to the United States to pursue higher education. In fact, her graduation from USC Rossier made her the first Marshallese to earn a doctorate.

Like the parrotfish, President Heine chose to return home. She worked as a teacher and counselor and eventually, in 2016, became the first woman elected president of her home country—or of any Pacific island nation, for that matter. The challenges she faces are monumental. Due to climate change, her country may disappear in a little over a decade. President Heine now has the world as her classroom and a life-and-death lesson to teach.

As educators, we can all learn from President Heine. Being a teacher means being a leader. It requires us to have courage and vision facing challenges of any size or scope—and this issue's stories showcase the creative ways our USC Rossier community members are doing just that.

Fight On!



KAREN SYMMS GALLAGHER PHD

Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean, USC Rossier School of Education



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by Christiane Moore





The Everything Educator

“Teacher” is just one of many roles required of this generation of educators. They have to navigate natural and political forces, find new ways to collaborate, develop novel techniques to engage students and still make time for personal and professional growth. As the USC Rossier School celebrates our 100th anniversary—as well as 10 years of both Math for America Los Angeles and our partnership with 2U—we also celebrate the endlessly creative and flexible ways educators rise to every occasion, in and out of the classroom. 

Yvonne Thevenot MAT '14, founder/executive director of STEM Kids NYC, helps students explore mechanical engineering design.



FOR THE LOVE OF MATH

After overcoming huge obstacles,
she's changing the way we teach

by Diane Krieger
photography by Stephanie Yantz

YASEMIN COPUR-GENCTURK knows the secret ingredient to optimizing K–12 math-teacher education.

She first encountered it in Çelebi Aslan, her elementary school teacher in Kayseri, Turkey. What made Aslan extraordinary wasn't that he loved his students. It's that he loved math. If you could propagate this secret ingredient, replicate it ... well, then no math-learner need ever be left behind.

"I loved Mr. Aslan so much," Copur-Gencturk says, with a musical laugh.

To his mind, math should be ice cream and problem-solving a treat.

"If we did something really well as a class, our prize was a hard math problem," she recalls.

INSPIRING A LOVE FOR MATH is the vision driving Copur-Gencturk.

Since joining USC Rossier's faculty in 2016, the 37-year-old assistant professor has been making her mark. Last year alone, she earned four federal research grants worth nearly \$5 million, including the prestigious NSF CAREER grant, the National Science Foundation's highest accolade for young researchers.

She believes math-love is contagious, passed down from teacher to student. Conversely, teachers who dislike math pass on their antipathy.

"The reason we are struggling so much in math education is that most people who are really good at math are not willing to be teachers," Copur-Gencturk says. "And those rare teachers who do love math are not ending up teaching math, especially not in elementary school."

With math scores for fourth- and eighth-graders in the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress showing no improvement since 2015, Copur-Gencturk believes she's found a solution: Introduce ordinary teachers to the beauty of math.

"If kids saw math the way that I see it, they would love it," she says. "It's so beautiful because it's so logical. As long as you notice the pattern, you can arrive at important conclusions all on your own."

“IF KIDS SAW MATH THE WAY THAT I SEE IT, THEY WOULD LOVE IT.”

Copur-Gencturk believes that to understand math, the learner must first concentrate on meaning—not focus on problem-solving steps. Right now, the pedagogy goes in the opposite direction.

“We teach kids to memorize things and not to understand why, conceptually,” she says. “It’s easier to learn procedurally when you are younger, because the procedures are very straightforward. But if you know the meaning behind those steps, it gives you a very special power.”

COPUR-GENCTURK WAS THE SECOND of six children raised in a working-class Turkish home where education was not a priority. Neither parent had attended college; her mom worked in the home, and her father struggled to pay the bills on a civil servant’s salary.

But Copur-Gencturk was both academically gifted and driven. At 5, she started dressing herself in her older sister’s outgrown

uniform and demanding to go to school with her. Indulged by their mother, Copur-Gencturk “audited” the fourth grade until her embarrassed sister put a stop to it.

A math prodigy, Copur-Gencturk absorbed concepts quickly and spent the remaining class period “waiting, doing nothing, doodling.” To make matters worse, she was stuck in vocational schools where STEM education was watered down. Her parents didn’t know how to navigate Turkey’s tiered educational system and couldn’t afford the expensive after-school and weekend prep academies everyone attended before testing into Turkey’s elite “science high schools.”

Copur-Gencturk dreamed of attending a top-ranked college and becoming a mathematician, but instead experienced how first-generation, economically disadvantaged students get left behind competing against more privileged peers.

“We were expected to run to the same finish line, but I felt like I had weights on my feet,” she says. “Senior year, I cried every day, knowing I was not learning many things that would be assessed on the nationwide college entrance exam.”

AGAINST ALL ODDS, she did well enough to be admitted to a respectable university in the capital city of Ankara. Then came trouble around her headscarf.

Copur-Gencturk comes from a religious family and covers her hair. The year she started college, Turkey’s stridently secular government implemented a law banning headscarves from university classrooms.

The law, inconsistently enforced, made Copur-Gencturk’s college years a tactical nightmare. An incremental disciplinary system—first time, warning; second time, suspension; third time, expulsion—forced Copur-Gencturk to walk a tightrope.

“Oh, my goodness, it was bad, very bad,” she recalls. “My first year, especially, I felt I was in the crossfire. I felt pressure from both sides, and many girls were quitting school.”

Sometimes she removed the headscarf and wore a wig. Sometimes she took her chances, hiding in the back row of class. Because she was so gifted in math, many of her professors looked the other way.

She eventually devised a compromise strategy: She would wear her headscarf until a warning was issued, then stop attending that class to avoid triggering further disciplinary action. She kept up with those classes through independent study and only showed up for exams.

Thinking about that period of her life still brings tears. It’s a testament to her talent and tenacity that Copur-Gencturk graduated from Hacettepe University *summa cum laude*.

She still dreamed of becoming a mathematician, cracking a famous unsolved problem and winning a Fields Medal—the Nobel Prize for mathematicians under 40. The next step required coming to America for her PhD. But admission to a U.S. graduate school seemed unattainable: Application fees alone were prohibitive, and Copur-Gencturk spoke no English. She’d need to take expensive language classes before sitting for the TOEFL.

DISCOURAGED, Copur-Gencturk went to work as a high school math teacher in Ankara, but soon learned of a scholarship opportunity through the Ministry of Education. The grant

Q & A

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT MATH HOMEWORK?

I'm against homework, because it increases the achievement gap, depending on how much support kids get from their parents. More importantly, it doesn't advance the purpose of math education, which is to have students grasp concepts. I was always a top student in math, and I never did my homework.

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A "MATH BRAIN"?

There will always be geniuses. When we see remarkably gifted ice skaters or gymnasts, we don't say, "Anyone who works very hard will get those results." That's unrealistic. But the impact of giftedness on success is not as big as people think. Anyone can learn and excel in math. I've seen over and over again how people—with hard work—can achieve things so-called geniuses cannot imagine. It's about the effort.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE FOR MATH TEACHERS AND ENGAGED PARENTS?

Probe for meaning. Ask kids to explain why they solved a problem the way they did and how they arrived at the answer. Don't use tricks or catchy phrases. The right way to teach a child to borrow in subtraction is to explain the logic of base 10, not to talk about "borrowing milk from the neighbor."

SHOULD PARENTS HIRE MATH TUTORS TO SUPPLEMENT SCHOOL INSTRUCTION?

If the tutor is teaching meaning, go for it; if the tutor is teaching to the test, no. Time is valuable. I don't want kids to spend time preparing for a single exam without seeing any relevance to what they have learned. I took a differential equations course when I was in college. For the final, we were not allowed to use calculators. We were required to do everything by hand and memorize all these weird rules. After winter break, people were still talking about that final. I had gotten an A in the class. And guess what: I didn't remember a thing I'd learned by rote memorization. It was gone.



MANY HIGH SCHOOLERS HIT A WALL WITH ADVANCED MATH. SHOULD THEY ALL BE REQUIRED TO TAKE IT?

It's about teaching. If students are hitting a wall, it's probably because the math concepts aren't being taught appropriately. Mathematical reasoning is very simple. What gets complex is expanding that reasoning to different domains and applications. I'm not going to say calculus is unnecessary, but high school students have to learn statistics, too.

WHAT ABOUT MATH AND MUSIC? SHOULD TEACHERS PLAY BACH DURING CLASS?

Some experts encourage that, hoping it helps kids see how math is connected to different fields or "real life." I think that's a good thing. Anything that includes a pattern is related to math—of course, music is very pattern-based. You don't need music to teach math. But I want kids to see the logic in math by itself. There is beauty in math, and math is everywhere. It's not like any other subject. All the dots get connected. **R**

“IF I CAN HELP ONE TEACHER, HOW MANY KIDS AM I SAVING?”



IN MARCH 2018, Yasemin Copur-Gencturk won the coveted NSF CAREER Award—the agency’s highest distinction given to junior faculty. It was the first of four federal grants she earned during 2018, worth nearly \$5 million. Building on a stream of research supported by the USC-based Joan Herman & Richard Rasiej Mathematics Initiative, three of Copur-Gencturk’s federally funded studies focus on math teachers and pedagogical content knowledge. The fourth, led by a USC Viterbi civil engineer, investigates virtual-reality teaching environments to improve human-robot collaborations. **R**

covered everything—language academy, tuition, fees, living expenses—but she would have to earn a degree in math education, not theoretical math.

“I was thinking I could find a way to move into the PhD in math program once I arrived,” says Copur-Gencturk, who was admitted to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “But when I started taking courses in math education, I was inspired. I didn’t realize there were people doing research in this—people motivated to improve inequity.

“I remember how desperate I was, how many times I lost hope, all the things that had hurt me. I still cry when I think about my undergraduate years,” she adds. “That’s why I’m so motivated to make changes in the educational system and remove discrimination—to make sure that no one, regardless of their gender, color, race, religion or anything else, is treated differently.”

The idea of helping math students through research “brought meaning to my life and changed my mind about what I wanted to do,” she says. “It became so important to me that I said, ‘Bye-bye dreams of being a great mathematician and winning the Fields Medal.’”

She earned her doctoral degree in math education in 2012 from the University of Illinois. She also holds master’s degrees in statistics and secondary education. Before joining the USC Rossier faculty, Copur-Gencturk was an assistant professor at the University of Houston and a postdoc at Rice University.

Around the same time she was falling in love with math education, Copur-Gencturk also fell in love with Bora Gencturk, a civil engineering student at Illinois. They met at Friday prayers on campus. Today, they are married, and he is on the USC Viterbi faculty. The family lives in Palos Verdes, Calif., where their daughter, Verda, attends first grade—but won’t accept any math tutoring from her expert mother.

“It’s driving me nuts,” Copur-Gencturk says with a grin. “She says, ‘Mommy, you’re not my teacher!’”

GIVEN ALL THE HURDLES SHE FACED, what made it possible for Copur-Gencturk to beat the odds and thrive academically? Certainly, being math-gifted and stubborn helped. But it came down to one big thing: the skill and encouragement of her math teachers.

And that’s why, today, she focuses her energies on the transmission of those qualities to the next generation of teachers.

Copur-Gencturk’s research focuses on teacher knowledge, teaching practices and teacher development, and how these areas relate to student learning. She drills down on the mathematical knowledge teachers need to promote student learning in diverse classrooms, paying special attention to innovative learning opportunities for teachers. She also studies the dynamics between teacher perceptions of students’ learning and actual student performance.

“People like me who come from underprivileged families value their teachers’ opinions a lot,” she says. “My teachers either shaped or ruined my confidence and influenced my beliefs about what I could and could not do.

“If I can help one teacher, how many kids am I saving?” she adds. “It’s not just about how much teachers know about math; it’s about the hope they give.” **R**



“I don’t know how to play a guitar,” Copur-Gencturk laughs. “This was in ninth grade, and we were singing and acting out a part of an old Turkish movie. I was pretending to be the female lead.”

Memories of a Mathematician

“I don’t have many pictures with me, but these are the ones I’ve kept,” says USC Rossier Assistant Professor of Education Yasemin Copur-Gencturk of these images, which she saves in her math notebook.



“When I was 6, I was very careful with optimizing my savings to purchase as many gums and candies as I could,” she remembers. “I used to check out every nearby grocery store to make sure that I found the best deal—and I would calculate and collect interest from my older sister if she borrowed money from me.”



Multiplicity

Math for America LA has made a difference
for 10 years and counting

by Jonathan Riggs







STEPHANIE YANTZ

A typical Math for America LA professional development day is far from “typical,” incorporating conversation, creative activities and even cardio sessions, on top of the customary coursework.

TOO EARLY ON A COLD FEBRUARY MORNING, dozens of math and computer science teachers stream into a downtown Los Angeles office building, shaking rain from their umbrellas and rubbing sleep from their eyes.

Stiff from their commutes and from long weeks of leading classrooms, they’ve signed away their first Saturday of almost every month for five years or more to be here—and they couldn’t be happier.

They’re Math for America Los Angeles teachers, and they see the program as a resource, a network and a lifeline.

During the day’s professional development, it’s obvious how deeply they all care about their subject, their students and one another.

MATH FOR AMERICA seeks to better recruit and retain exceptional math teachers. It’s the brainchild of billionaire philanthropist Jim Simons, who launched the program in New York City in 2004. The most successful of its offshoots, Math for America LA started in 2008 in partnership with the USC Rossier School of Education, Harvey Mudd College and Claremont Graduate University, and is funded by private donations, philanthropic foundations and the National Science Foundation.

Although some things about the program and its participants have changed over the years—Claremont Graduate University no longer participates; computer science has been added—much remains the same.

For a decade now, MfA LA has provided teachers with development opportunities

as well as professional, personal and even financial support.

Current early-career MfA LA teachers receive:

- › Salary support stipends (\$10,000 annually)
- › In-depth coaching and mentorship
- › Travel funding for conferences
- › Assistance in becoming certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Master teachers (those with four or more years of experience) receive the same, as well as the opportunity to have MfA LA buy out one of their daily class periods so they can work on a self-designed project. For all participants, MfA LA stays highly connected with their schools and encourages as much clustering as possible, so that program participants ideally have a partner in a nearby classroom.

From the beginning, MfA LA’s steering committee has included Karen Symms Gallagher, Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of USC Rossier; Maria Klawe, president of Harvey Mudd College (HMC); Pam Mason, executive director and 35-year veteran LAUSD teacher; and Darryl Yong, professor of mathematics at HMC.

“This is a phenomenal program, rooted in building up, getting evidence and feeding long-term evaluation back in,” says Gallagher. “The team knows math and couldn’t be more committed to the work or to one another—that is the bottom line.”

All this stability, institutional knowledge and self-reflection may help explain the program’s

'MATH'

by the

Numbers

10
years

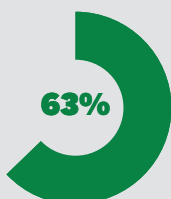
179
five-year fellowships

120,000
students reached in

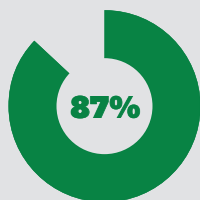
119
schools in
31
districts

544
hours spent in
68

professional development
meetings



of current master teacher
fellows have National Board
Certification; that number
is projected to be 100
percent by November 2019



of MfA LA teaching fellows
remain in the classroom
after finishing the program

success. Since 2010, an outside team led by Rebecca M. Eddy of Cobblestone Applied Research & Evaluation has done annual reviews of the program, and kept tabs on all the teachers who have ever participated in MfA LA. (A different company evaluated the program during its first two years.)

In its first decade, MfA LA provided 179 five-year teaching fellowships and reached 120,000 students in 119 schools in 31 districts. It also posted exceptional retention numbers.

"Nearly ninety percent of our fellows are still in the classroom after three years," Mason says. "For math and science, that's compared to 75 percent staying in nationally and 61 percent in LAUSD."

MATH IS CRITICAL to students' futures. According to MfA LA, the highest math courses high school seniors take determine not only what career paths will be open to them, but also what kind of higher education options they will have—if any.

Unfortunately, U.S. students are struggling: According to LAUSD's 2018 Smarter Balanced Assessment, only 28 percent of eighth-grade students met or exceeded standards for math achievement; the year before, only 33 percent of the nation's eighth-grade students performed at or above "proficient" in math.

The people best positioned to tackle these problems head-on are the ones in front of the classroom. But it's challenging to be a teacher, period, let alone an effective one, especially early in a career or while teaching in a high-needs school. Plus, there's a shortage.

"It's estimated that the U.S. will need another 100,000 math and science teachers by 2020 to ensure that American students are prepared for the 21st-century workplace," Klawe says.

"We need more highly effective and joy-inducing teachers of mathematics and computer science," Yong adds. "That's where Math for America LA comes in. We firmly believe that happy, fulfilled teachers who are lifelong learners ultimately lead to happy, fulfilled students who are lifelong learners."

Underpinning it all is the incredibly supportive community that's made MfA LA a nationwide leader.

"Our teachers go to conferences together, have meals together, stay in rooms together. It's a large group, but you can see how small it really feels when they're together," says Mason. "They're not just colleagues, but a family."

MASON MEANS IT, TOO. She let one MfA LA fellow facing family health issues move in

with her for a year; Mason and her husband then served as the young woman's godparents at her wedding.

Later, Mason and her husband were asked to walk down the aisle at a wedding of another couple, Michele Widener Nieves '13 MAT '14 and Hector Nieves MAT '14, who met in the program.

"I don't know where we would be without MfA LA," Michele says. "It gave us everything."


"Even though my cohort and I were all in different classrooms, we bonded so much over sharing our experiences," Hector says. "I honestly don't think I would still be teaching if it weren't for MfA LA, because I really struggled during my first couple of years."

Adds Mason: "We do a lot more than the teaching aspect at MfA LA. We know they're all in different situations, and their lives will inevitably keep changing, but it means a lot to be able to help young teachers with any problems

A SPIN-OFF?



WHAT MfA LA'S DONE FOR MATH represents other interdisciplinary possibilities, says Darnell Cole, co-director of the USC Rossier Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice.

"We're exploring the idea of a program that targets students who have a love for physics and/or astronomy and would be interested in a direct pathway into teaching these subjects at the K-12 level," he says. "There's a high need for these kinds of teachers, and this could also be an excellent opportunity to help empower greater numbers of women and minority students to enter and succeed in the sciences. Stay tuned." 



STEPHANIE YANTZ

**HARVEY MUDD
COLLEGE
PROFESSOR
DARRYL YONG
HAS BEEN A PART
OF MfA LA SINCE
THE BEGINNING.**

“WE HAVE TRIED TO create a holistic support system for teachers that respects them as professionals and individuals; to design coherent sets of programs that align with on-the-job expectations and contexts; and to integrate professional learning with coaching and mentoring to provide timely feedback.

“While giving our efforts enough time to take root, we want to pay close attention to educational research and our own external evaluators to improve—all within a close-knit, caring community.

“We want students to have uniform access to excellent educational experiences in math and computer science, and for teachers to persist in the profession while growing and honing their craft.

“We invite the USC Rossier community to visit one of our professional development meetings to see how all of the pieces of our programs mesh together—and to partner with us in the work!” **R**

or issues they have. Our goal is to keep them in the teaching profession, getting stronger all the time.”

ALL OF THIS CAN BEST BE SEEN on display about eight Saturdays a year, when MfA LA teachers meet for all-day mandatory professional development sessions to reconnect with, learn from and teach one another.

Outside coaches bring in special lessons—a highlight from a recent session was an interactive Lego-based approach to teaching binary number systems presented by two HMC professors—and there’s a special block devoted to wellness groups: a book club, a yoga class, an emotional support therapy session.

So successful have these professional development sessions been that Vanderbilt University’s Professor of Mathematics Education and Director of Graduate Studies Ilana Horn wrote a four-year grant to study them.

“MfA LA is an incredible resource for Los Angeles and the field of mathematics education,” she says. “We are learning a lot about what makes teaching math for understanding hard to do, as well as getting a grasp on how to support it.”

Not only do Horn and her team visit monthly, but Mason and Yong also travel to Tennessee for advisory board meetings. It’s all part of a virtuous circle of analysis, communication and continuous improvement that defines and differentiates MfA LA—and reminds everyone involved just how high the real-life stakes from this work really is.

“Unlike a lot of other academic areas, if students don’t have access to good mathematics education at school, it is hard to fill the gaps—too often, math classes serve as a filter rather than a pump,” Horn says. “Yet we know so much about how to get more kids to be successful—and happy—in math class. Teachers are the key in making that a reality, and the talented, committed teachers of MfA LA have been open, curious and really receptive to learning with us.”

These teachers put everything they’re learning

into practice every day. The reaction from their schools has been overwhelmingly positive.

Elizabeth Hicks EdD ’18 is the principal of the Girls Academic Leadership Academy, Dr. Michelle King School for STEM. For her first two hires, she chose MfA LA’s Ashley Purpura Fernandes MAT ’14 and Michele Nieves.

“Many of our parents have remarked that before our MfA LA teachers, their daughters did not think they were good at math, but now, not only are they good at it, but they like math,” says Hicks. “Thanks to these teachers, we also started a mathletes program and launched a tradition of celebrating Pi Day across the school with students and parents.”

MATH FOR AMERICA LA’s professional development session on Feb. 2 is a little out of the ordinary—stormy weather fills the windows on the USC City Center’s sixth floor; rain rattles the glass.

None of the math and computer science teachers in the room seem to notice, though—every seat in the room is full, and all eyes are intently locked on Michele and Hector Nieves’s breakout session presentation, “Incorporating Self-Assessment Into Master-Based Grading.”

“When we’re finished,” Hector says, in a smooth, practiced classroom-teacher voice, “Mrs. Nieves will share some assessment sheets.”

For a second, everything pauses as a smile slowly lights up everyone’s face, like friendly flickering electricity. Maybe it’s the mark of great peers as well as great teachers: fellow strivers who share ideals and a journey, radiating affection and intellectual curiosity. It’s palpable, their desire to teach and be taught, all in service to one another, to countless students, to the idea of a better future for all.

“I think you can call me Michele.” She grins, clicking on to the next slide. “After all, we’re with our friends.”

Everyone in the room laughs, then leans forward to learn more. **R**



CAMERON AND TRACY LEUNG

MfA LA Milestones

45
marriages

50
babies

1
pet feline named
“René DesCat” Nieves
 (“I meow, therefore I am.”)

From poker tournaments to potlucks, pool parties to taking the plunge, MfA LA members are always there for one another. At the July 8, 2017, wedding of Michele Widener Nieves '13 MAT '14 and Hector Nieves MAT '14 (from left): Dwight Stephenson MAT '14; Stephanie Erickson MAT '09; Ana Hernandez, MfA LA master teacher fellow; Alexandra Lee, MfA LA coach; Regina Kirschenbaum, MfA LA program specialist; Pam Mason, MfA LA executive director; Laila Nur MAT '13; Michele and Hector; Cheri Cheney, MfA LA lead coach; Diana Ortiz Martinez MAT '14; Andrea Van Dunk MAT '09; Ashley Purpura Fernandes MAT '14; Judy Song MAT '09; and Noel Galang MAT '14.

1 + 1 + MfA LA = FAMILY

MOST MIDDLE-SCHOOL ROMANCES don't last the year—or even past lunch.

“In eighth grade, I fell in love with math because it explains everything about the world,” says Michele Widener Nieves '13 MAT '14. “When I realized I could help people see these patterns and make them come to life, I knew I was going to be a teacher.”

Years later, math made another great love possible, when she married Hector Nieves MAT '14 in July 2017.

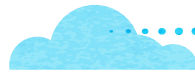
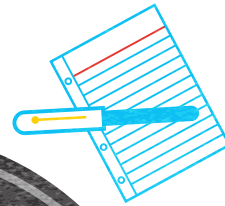
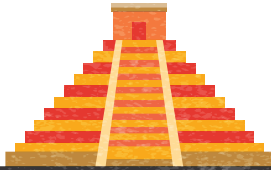
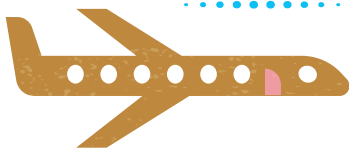
After meeting by chance in their MfA LA group interview in 2013, they completed the program together and wound up teaching at the same school. One fateful first date of bowling later—Michele

won—they became an item.

“The very first day of the MfA LA program, they took a walk-and-talk picture of us, and we didn't know what to talk about, so we looked really awkward,” laughs Michele. “We imitated that in our engagement photos, and had them side by side at our wedding.”

It's no surprise then that they included so many of their colleagues—their friends—on that special day.

“Because of MfA LA, I moved to Los Angeles from New York. I struggled coming out here by myself—I struggled just to get by, really—but meeting this group changed my life,” Hector says. “I'm so grateful to have met these incredible people ... one in particular, most of all.” **R**



A

DECADE AGO, the idea that online classrooms could rival the brick-and-mortar campus largely drew scoffs. USC Rossier Dean Karen Symms Gallagher included herself among the skeptics.

But a new education technology company changed her mind, and a unique partnership unfolded between USC’s then-90-year-old graduate school of education and the startup that became 2U. It resulted in USC Rossier’s online Master of Arts in Teaching program, launched in 2009.

Dubbed MAT@USC, the program was identical to USC Rossier’s campus-based MAT in admission standards, curriculum and tuition, but it blew up the traditional classroom, using 2U’s robust technology to connect faculty and students in far-flung locations in real time.

As the first major graduate school of education to prepare new K–12 teachers online, USC Rossier was “an island nation of innovation” in a tradition-bound world, *The Atlantic* wrote in

2011. By then, the magazine noted, the move to digital had brought USC Rossier more master’s students in education—1,500—than Harvard and Stanford combined. Its success would help transform the global conversation about the viability of online graduate education.

USC Rossier now has five master’s and two doctoral programs online, with 4,000 alumni. Ninety-four percent of graduates in 2017 were employed within a year of graduation, 85 percent of them in the education field, 2U figures show.

Although demand leveled off after 2012 due to school district layoffs and other residual effects of the 2008–09 recession, MAT@USC remains the largest online teacher prep program among top-ranked U.S. schools of education, according to 2U.

“People often ask me: ‘Why did they do it?’” 2U co-founder and CEO Christopher “Chip” Paucek says of the gamble undertaken by Dean Gallagher and the USC Rossier faculty. “We had absolutely no track record, but Karen believed we could pull it off. She had to take a huge risk, and she went for it.”





DIGITAL REVOL(2U)TION

How a transformative partnership between USC Rossier and a startup changed education

GALLAGHER HAD BECOME DEAN in 2000 when the school was struggling. Within her first few years, she led major efforts to right its course, including stabilizing an up-and-down budget and overhauling the doctoral programs.

The school also revamped its mission to focus on improving urban education locally, nationally and globally,

but it was constrained by a teacher preparation program that could serve only 50 to 75 students a year.

“Our program was so small,” Gallagher says, “it was hardly meeting those needs.”

by Elaine Woo
art by Jane Sanders

She had initiated conversations with faculty about an online venture, but they didn’t turn serious until spring 2008, when future USC Rossier faculty member Alan Arkatov introduced her to



“We have a guiding principle at 2U: Don’t let the skeptics win,” says CEO Chip Paucek. “Everything about this seemed absurd to most people, but not to Dean Karen Gallagher. Every step required someone at USC to push it forward.”

Princeton Review founder John Katzman, who was starting an ed tech company.

Katzman “had a two-part idea,” Gallagher recounts. “One was that highly selective universities at the master’s level ought to look at scaling up and have a bigger reach. The second was that you could prepare people new to the profession of teaching with an online program. That was novel.”

The company, which was later rechristened 2U, offered capital and technical know-how to expand USC Rossier’s capacity without the school having to worry about classroom space.

“We didn’t have the technology skills. That scared the faculty most,” Professor of Clinical Education Margo Pensavalle recalls. “But Karen said, ‘You have the opportunity to develop the best program you can.’ With that, all the doors opened.”

Pensavalle volunteered for the design team led by Professor Etta Hollins, who was Rossier’s chair of teacher education, and then-Associate Dean Melora Sundt. The team started in April; by August they had pulled in all the other faculty.

With this input, 2U set about building a platform that could deliver live classes and content with 24/7 access around the world. The company would also provide technical support and training, placement services for student teachers, and marketing.

The faculty would make all decisions about curriculum, including what parts of courses would be delivered live and how those sessions would be scheduled. Faculty also

wanted online office hours, electronic bulletin boards and chat rooms for students that allowed faculty participation.

While plotting the online experience, the faculty was also redesigning the MAT curriculum. They built in a “constructivist” perspective that guided candidates to develop instructional practices based on what they could learn about their pupils’ cultural backgrounds and community expectations. The faculty also revamped the field experience to provide training to supervising teachers and help them improve their own practice.

“We didn’t just take the program we had and put it online,” says Hollins, an authority on urban education who is now retired. “Every single course and experience was redesigned.”

The revamped curriculum was rolled out on campus at the same time that the online program went live, in June 2009.

The first-year enrollment of 142 students was about double the size of the on-campus program. With five rolling starts a year, it mushroomed rapidly, surging past 1,000 students in 2010. To keep up with demand, the school hired a dozen new full-time faculty members.

With an enticing interface that featured interactive chat boxes, Facebook-like profiles and a lively grid of video feeds, MAT@USC defied negative stereotypes of online learning.

“We had a few students in the face-to-face program who chose to switch to online,” Hollins recalls. “They thought they had more access online to professors and peers, but it was essentially all the same.”

THE FIRST YEAR WAS GRUELING.

“We needed to learn all the technology tools and were dealing with brand-new syllabi and curricula—everything had been innovated,” Pensavalle says. “We were 2U’s very first school, so we were walking carefully.”

The learning curve was steep for 2U’s team, too. They had to figure out how to streamline textbook ordering and how to store grades and student work online. They were continually rebuilding classes to address technological glitches or improve users’ access to stored

content, such as readings and videos, during live sessions.

The program's requirement for video assessment of MAT candidates during student teaching also brought challenges. In traditional programs, supervising teachers observe during classroom visits, but if the student is in Atlanta, for example, and the guiding teacher is in Los Angeles, video recording provided the best solution.

"We ran into problems with the quality of the lesson videos they collected, with the 2U platform accepting the videos and with districts being uncomfortable with candidates recording in classrooms," says MAT chair John Pascarella, who was USC Rossier's faculty director of fieldwork for four years. "We had to help districts understand the value and purpose of the recordings for initial teacher preparation."

USC Rossier now has partnerships with more than 6,000 schools across the country, according to Carolyn Kim, who manages teacher placements for 2U. A longitudinal study by WestEd, a San Francisco-based research firm, provided a largely positive view of online students' experiences.

"The on-ground students did not have a qualitatively better experience than the online students. And the online students felt as powerfully connected to us as the on-ground students did," Gallagher says of the findings from the five-year study concluded in 2016.

The first graduation ceremony, in 2010, brought proof of that connectedness.

"An equal percentage of online and on-ground students attended," Paucek recalls. "That's when

we knew we were on to something."

Yvonne Thevenot MAT '14 can attest to the online program's ability to foster relationships. She had been working in IT and finance for a Fortune 500 company in New York when she decided to seek a more fulfilling career. She knew that she thrived on interacting with people and didn't want to learn by "just watching videos" on her computer.

"That narrowed it down to USC," she says. After starting the program in 2013, she found that although her classmates were scattered around the country and globe—including Britain, Turkey and several Asian countries—the 2U platform made it easy to engage with them in chats and group projects.

"Everything was the same as if I was on campus. That was just super appealing to me," says Thevenot, who later started STEM Kids NYC to teach disadvantaged students computer science and engineering skills. "I'm the fruit of the labor that started at USC Rossier. It allowed me to get into the world of education justice."

NOW IN ITS 10th YEAR, the online MAT program draws students from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as from four U.S. territories and 33 countries, particularly South Korea, China and Japan.

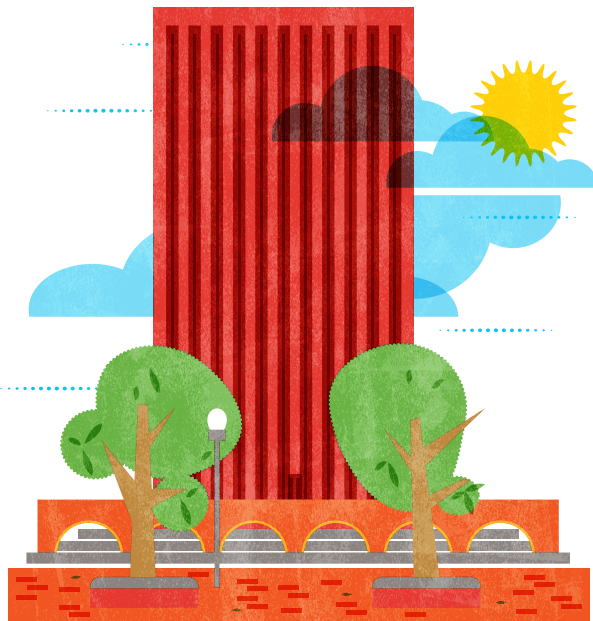
The program's success encouraged five other USC schools to work with 2U on their own online ventures, the most recent being the USC Price School of Public Policy; 2U now has 35 university partners and supports 68 online degree programs at institutions across the country.

"The partnership with USC Rossier built the entire company," Paucek says. "We're here to support a great university and support what it does extremely well. A school like USC is a pretty magical place. You just need to figure out how to bring that to the online environment."

For USC Rossier, working with 2U has paid huge dividends, some of which were unimaginable in 2008. In recent years, a USC Rossier team built the platforms for two master's programs—Learning Design and Technology, and Enrollment Management and Policy—and the EdD in Educational Leadership for professionals working in K–12 settings.

"We could not have gone online without 2U, but this experience really changed us—we came away from it saying, 'Well, we can do some of these things ourselves,'" says Gallagher. "The online master's is an idea that is here to stay. We just have to keep improving the quality of the experience." **R**

"USC Rossier faculty had to decide what online would mean and look like," says Etta Hollins, then the school's chair of teacher education. "2U entered with a platform that would support whatever program we designed."





IN CASE OF



DISASTER

Superintendents confront natural calamities
with preparation, leadership and care

by Michael Agresta



Flames over Lakeside High School in Lake Elsinore during 2018's Holy Fire.

ON JAN. 9, 2018, after the still-burning Thomas wildfire had torched more than 280,000 acres in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, a disastrous storm hit the California coast.

Warned of hazardous mudflows, Susan Salcido EdD '18, the Santa Barbara County superintendent of schools, received evacuation orders.

"Even with advance notice, we did not really know what to expect," Salcido says. "The rain came in such epic amounts in such a short amount of time that houses, cars, whole neighborhoods were washed away. Life was completely changed."

In what has since been called a "200-year event," 23 people died in and around Montecito, a suburb east of Santa Barbara. Students and teachers in Santa Barbara County were among the 400 families whose homes were lost or damaged. Out of the 20 districts that Salcido supports, 19 were forced to close, some for weeks. The 101 freeway became impassable, cleaving the county in two.

In partnership with her district superintendents, various city and county agencies, and supportive volunteers, Salcido helped lead Santa Barbara County through a harrowing period, ever mindful of the role of schools.

"One thing that emerged loudly and clearly was that having school open and students reunited with teachers—that routine and normalcy in their lives—was so important," she says.

In Santa Barbara, the efforts of Salcido and her colleagues bordered on the heroic. For several days, the California Highway Patrol led escorts through the closed section of the 101 to ensure that teachers and students, otherwise stuck on either side of the closure, could rejoin their classrooms. The Carpinteria school district also suspended its own home-to-school transportation to support the entire southern coast. In recognition of this special effort, which required very early mornings and late nights, Santa Barbara County honored Carpinteria's school bus drivers with a 2018 staff of the year award.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS in the 21st century must be ready and able to navigate the worst that nature has to offer, so that traumatized communities can look to schools as a source of care, reliable information and sanctuary.

"It starts with a high-quality safety committee and plan at the district level translated to each individual site's needs," says Doug Kimberly EdD '08, superintendent of Lake Elsinore Unified School District in Riverside County. "It's important to communicate those plans to all of the constituencies—parents, kids and staff alike—so that people can have an opportunity to rehearse what's expected in the event of a tragedy."

Like Salcido, Kimberly faced down a disastrous wildfire. Named for a nearby campground, the Holy Fire burned more than 24,000 acres in August 2018, one week before the start of the school year. Parts of Lake Elsinore were ordered to evacuate; five of Kimberly's schools were within the burn area. No facilities were damaged, but the effects of ash were extreme. The first day of school was delayed by a week to address air-quality systems, drinking fountains and ash cleanup.

"At some of our schools," he says, "the walls were black with ash, where you could rub and it would come off on your hand."

To prepare for future disasters, Kimberly has organized drills with teachers and bus drivers at the local outlet mall to practice how best to reunite parents and students.

"If parents and kids understand they're moving to a reunification scenario," he says, "it keeps everyone level-headed and calm and allows us to be as orderly as possible."

Kimberly has also worked with fire, police and other agencies to implement a joint information system; he's found that building good relationships and lines of communication with emergency personnel before a crisis emerges is crucial.

"I think the leadership class taught at Rossier is a really important factor to allow for planning and communication," he

says. “It gives a confidence in regards to making sure that you can stay calm under fire, no pun intended.”

ROBERT HALEY EdD '01 was superintendent of the Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District in Sonoma County when it was affected by the October 2017 Northern California wildfires, which burned more than 245,000 acres, forced 90,000 evacuations and killed 44 people. The wildfire broke out on a Sunday, which meant Haley was not put in a position of having to evacuate schools, but he still found himself in the middle of a chaotic situation from which he has drawn important lessons.

“We developed an acronym, OTA—observe, think and act—that a lot of districts around the state are now using,” says Haley, who recently moved south to lead the San Dieguito Union High School District in Encinitas. “The most important thing that we have in a crisis situation is the ability of our staff to use judgment and to act accordingly.”

In Haley’s first days of managing the disaster, his biggest challenges were around communication.

“People want information. In its absence, many people go to the worst place,” he says. “So be prepared to communicate, understand what can and should be shared publicly, and think through in advance what you don’t want to share publicly.”

Like Salcido, Haley and his colleagues determined that having schools open was, in and of itself, important to recovery.

“We reopened the next Friday; many other districts remained closed for at least another week,” he says. “We believed our students would be safer supervised, with us, at school, in rooms with commercial-grade heating, air-conditioning and air filtration.”

AN IMPORTANT LESSON Salcido, Kimberly and Haley learned was that the day after a crisis marks the first day of planning for the next one. For example, Salcido’s colleagues in and around Santa Barbara County, including the National Weather Service and the Emergency Operations Center, have developed much more detailed maps for areas at risk of mudflows, including guidelines for what to expect given the severity of the rain event. Similarly, all across California, districts are looking at how best to respond to air-quality problems from smoke.

That’s the benefit of living through an unprecedented event: It helps us understand how to better prepare for the next emergency while helping those affected from the current one to heal.

“We make sure that we thoroughly debrief internally and with external agencies, and that we follow through with communication to parents and the media explaining what’s happened,” Haley says. “Then we account for the social-emotional well-being of both our staff and our students, especially if there’s been property loss or a death. There’s often grieving that’s going to take place.”

Early this year, Salcido took part in a candlelight vigil for the victims of the Jan. 9, 2018, mudflows.

“People process these tragedies at different time periods—some right away and others after some space and distance,” she says. “It was really important to remember, honor and lift up not only those we lost, but all those who were part of this tragedy.” **R**



Susan Salcido EdD '18



Doug Kimberly EdD '08



Robert Haley EdD '01



SIT. STAY. HEAL.

Principal’s new program helps students find comfort in canines

MIDDLE SCHOOL CAN BE STRESSFUL, so Jennifer Jackson EdD '21, principal of Clifton Middle School in Monrovia, launched a pilot program in September that invites dogs and their handlers into her classrooms.

“Kids just light up,” Jackson says. “It creates an entirely different ambience.”

That’s on display when furry 14-year-old Ernie, one of the program’s pups, enters a classroom on a plastic leash that looks like linked sausages.

Under the current program, which Jackson is looking forward to expanding, dogs are welcome at any time in nine classrooms at Clifton.

The Pasadena Humane Society holds all liability, providing volunteer handlers and licensed therapy dogs like Ernie. To be on the safe side, Jackson has also gathered permission signatures for all students who will be visited; opt-outs due to fear or allergy are low.

“With today’s youth, there’s high anxiety,” she says. “The mere presence of a dog can lower that anxiety and create a deeper sense of calm, even if the child is not interacting with the dog.”

“The vision is to eventually bring the dogs into intervention-type settings, having kids read to dogs, and possibly even bringing dogs into some difficult social-emotional situations with the counseling office,” she adds. “As the program continues to grow, I’m pleased by the improvements in my students’ emotional state.” **R**

AT FIRST STRIKE



On the picket line after only two weeks of teaching

by Lizette Becerra MAT '18
photography by Margaret Molloy



"It really was a surreal time to officially become a teacher," Lizette Becerra MAT '18 says of January's United Teachers of Los Angeles strike, "but I found where I belonged."

MONDAY, JAN. 14, 2019, would have been my sixth day as an English teacher at Sun Valley High School in the northeast San Fernando Valley.

Instead, I went on strike.

On that rainy morning, I nervously met my new co-workers on the picket line for the first day of the United Teachers of Los Angeles strike.

I faced many unknowns: I hardly knew anyone's name yet. I did not know how long the strike would last or if I would be reprimanded. I did not even know if UTLA had received my mail-in membership form, since I had only signed my contract with LAUSD the Wednesday prior. I did not know that the two pairs of tennis shoes and three pairs of socks I brought would do nothing to keep my feet dry from the cold rain.

On that first day, the teachers and counselors of Sun Valley High School began walking the line, chanting, holding our signs and making our presence known, despite the rain. At some point, I took up one of the extra snare drums and put to use the few lessons one of my older brothers had given me in high school. A co-worker and I formed a two-person drum line.

In the late morning, we boarded the Metro and headed down to the Civic Center to join the march to LAUSD headquarters. A sea of red poured out of the train cars onto the platform. My co-worker and I began drumming as we rounded the corner to a long-tunneled escalator up and out of the station. As we ascended, the acoustics amplified our drumming and people began whistling and bouncing along. The loud and steady beat unified us: the teachers, counselors, and nurses of Los Angeles County, marching not for ourselves, but for our students.

I carried that drum throughout the strike, rain or shine. We found other drummers and musicians and formed impromptu bands. Crowds gathered around us, and people broke out dancing, singing and chanting. I could feel the unity and energy on the picket line as I bonded with my co-workers in a way that probably would not have been possible otherwise.

On the sixth and final day, I had been on strike longer than I had officially been a teacher. The end came quickly, and not everyone was happy with the results. However, I feel optimistic that we showed a collective force that not only positively influenced Los Angeles, but

also contributed to the national dialogue about education.

Going back into the classroom was a second rough start to the semester, and I am still finding my way as a first-year teacher. I remind myself what I tell my students: Making mistakes is part of the learning process. Luckily, I have gained many mentors at my school as our collaboration has gone beyond the strike.

That means a lot to me because I grew up in this community, the daughter of immigrants from Mexico who did not have the opportunity to complete even elementary schooling. I am the first in my family to earn a master's degree. I was drawn to teaching in Sun Valley because, when I was 7, my eldest brother was killed here. I want to help make a place that has taken so much from me just a little better by serving its underrepresented youth.

Starting my career on strike isn't what I expected, but it's given me a strong network of colleagues, mentors and friends as well as the desire to stay engaged in the leadership of my school and union. I've seen firsthand what's at stake and found my place early on in the fight for better teaching conditions and schools—on the front line. **R**



STRONGER TOGETHER

A creative vision for collaboration between charter and traditional public schools

by Martha Groves
photography by Cheryl Walsh

IT IS EARLY AFTERNOON at Orange County School of the Arts, and academic classes are in full swing. Teams of math students puzzle over equations as they compute the distance of a race. In a literature and composition class, an eighth-grade writer channels Grace O'Malley, a Renaissance pirate queen.

Come 2:15 p.m., the campus flips a switch. Gazing into mirrors, young actors apply cringe-inducing scars with special-effects makeup. In a Michelin-worthy commercial kitchen, budding chefs learn about molecular gastronomy while concocting raspberry foam. Juniors and seniors practicing Mexican *folklórico* techniques tap across the vibrating floor of a dance studio.

At a time when many urban public schools struggle to keep students engaged in academics and to fund arts programs, this public charter school in downtown Santa Ana, Calif., has devised a winning formula. The school serves not only its students but also the greater community with summer and after-school art programs, many of them free.

Known as OCSA (pronounced OH-sha), the school is also seeking to spread its successful combination of arts, academics and collaboration to satellites. In 2017, it opened the California School of the Arts—San Gabriel Valley in Duarte, 40 miles north, in partnership with the Duarte Unified School District. CSArts—SGV is also a public charter school.

“We’re not growing for the sake of growing,” says Ralph Opacic EDD ’94, OCSA’s founder and executive director. “The motivation behind opening additional schools is that we truly believe the OCSA experience is life-changing.”

It has certainly upended precedent: As recent teachers’-strike headlines attest, the relationship between traditional public schools and public charter schools can be fraught. But OCSA has managed to walk the line without making enemies. When it collaborated with Santa Ana in 2000, the local district was facing severe crowding. The addition of a charter school helped to ease the enrollment burden. With students coming from so many communities, no one school or district has faced undue hardship.

It helps that teachers at both OCSA and CSArts—SGV are members of the California Teachers Association, a statewide union.

The successful partnership demonstrates the possibilities when charter schools and traditional public school districts join forces for the betterment of all, says Abbe Levine ’05, dean of arts at the Duarte campus, formerly Northview Intermediate School.

BOTH CHARTER SCHOOLS cater to students in grades 7 through 12 with talents in performing, visual, literary and other arts who are willing to put in a longer-than-usual school day.

OCSA students, who participate in an audition/interview placement activity as part of their application for admittance, flock to the campus from 120 cities across multiple counties, as distant as Temecula, Lake Arrowhead and Redondo Beach; 200 commute by train. Each year, the school gets about 3,000 applications for 400 openings.

OCSA has 2,200 students and nine buildings. Only one structure—the dance, music and science center—was built from the ground up. The others include creatively renovated former bank buildings and a onetime Christian Science church turned Michael F. Harrah Symphony Hall.

Now in its 32nd year, OCSA puts on about 200 performances annually, many in Symphony Hall or Margaret A. Webb Theatre (where an old bank vault serves as a lounge). The U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts have recognized the school as a model arts-education program.

“Over and over again, I’ve heard from students that, at best, they felt invisible at other schools,” Opacic says. “In this setting, they feel safe to be themselves.”

Jason Cohen, 17, a junior in the instrumental music conservatory who drives 45 minutes from his home in Aliso Viejo, credits OCSA with sparking his interest in a career in entertainment. He has played trumpet since fifth grade, when he attended a traditional public school in Orange County where he endured bullying. After trying home-schooling and public middle school (“I ate lunch by myself every day”), he followed his older sister to OCSA.

“I enjoy it so much,” says Cohen, who takes audio classes and, on the side, serves as executive producer of clever videos for the in-house *Watch What Happens OCSA* (available on YouTube). “I might be in the instrumental music conservatory, but teachers haven’t stopped me from going out to explore.”

ROBUST FUNDRAISING is key to the success of both OCSA and CSArts—SGV. As public charter schools, they



Education is art and art is education at both OCSA and CSArts—SGV.

“Over and over again, I’ve heard from students that, at best, they felt invisible at other schools. In this setting, they feel safe to be themselves.”

receive funding from the state, but benefactors and education organizations provide financial support that would be the envy of many elite private schools. It also doesn’t hurt that famed OCSA alum Matthew Morrison (1997), who starred as the choir director in the musical series *Glee*, routinely touts the school.

Both schools ask for a voluntary tax-deductible donation from each family, but regardless of a family’s ability or willingness to give, the schools are committed to providing the same quality educational experience to all.

“In the same year that OCSA was created, we launched the Orange County School of the Arts Foundation,” says Opacic. “Its mission is to raise funds so

that there are no barriers for students at OCSA—and now CSArts–SGV—due to families’ financial constraints.

“We created the Artist Scholar Sponsorship Program, which annually raises money specifically for this cause,” he adds. “This past year, the foundation raised over \$500,000 to support families who had a financial need.”

OCSA has an operating budget of about \$30 million, nearly \$10 million of which is raised from parents and donors.

In Duarte, the budget is about \$10 million from the state, with \$2.5 million raised from parents and donors through the California School of the Arts Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization modeled on the OCSA Foundation.

The role of CSArts–SGV’s Levine also reflects the schools’ interconnectedness.

“Four years ago, Ralph approached me about this pie-in-the-sky idea of becoming OCSA’s director of arts enrichment and program expansion,” she says.

Her role began with increasing arts outreach around Santa Ana but grew into realizing the dream of expanding to a second location where they could have a positive effect on a new community.

The Duarte campus, just blocks from the Metro Gold Line, underwent a \$7.5 million renovation that included soundproofing for music rooms and new floors for dance spaces. It now has six buildings and a dozen “portable” classrooms. Performance spaces include a

The Art of Giving Back



COMMUNITY SERVICE IS A HALLMARK of students at both OCSA and CSArts–SGV, especially bringing inspirational arts-education opportunities to local elementary-school-age children.

“The arts inspire happiness,” says OCSA’s Ralph Opacic EdD ’94, “so we connect our students with opportunities to share their talents with those who could use uplifting.”

- ▶ CSArts–SGV provides funding for a free dance program for all Duarte Unified K–8 schools.
- ▶ Camp OCSA is a free, 10-week after-school arts program led by juniors and seniors who teach children acting, dance, drawing, guitar, painting, singing and more.
- ▶ OCSA and CSArts–SGV partner with the Dragon Kim Foundation to provide free instrumental music instruction and instruments for children in Santa Ana and Duarte.
- ▶ Through grants from the Max H. Gluck Foundation, OCSA provides free artistic performances and programs to youth centers, schools, retirement facilities, homeless shelters, parks, health centers and more. CSArts–SGV will launch its program this year.

500-seat theater and a 60-seat recital hall.

The current enrollment of 1,000 is expected to grow in the next school year to 1,220. CSArts-SGV draws students from more than 80 cities in the San Gabriel Valley and beyond.

Once the enrollment stabilizes, plans call for replacing portables with permanent art facilities.

In addition to its smaller size and more modest offerings, the Duarte school differs in another significant way from OCSA. Seventh- and eighth-graders take most of their academic classes at one of four nearby public schools. They then ride shuttle buses to CSArts-SGV for afternoon conservatory classes. The arrangement, Levine says, has helped to bolster the Duarte district's numbers and funding.

Duarte had experienced declining enrollment for many years as the city's population aged and as dissatisfied parents found slots for their children in districts with more to offer. In 2015, the district hired Allan J. Mucerino to reverse the trend. As superintendent, he and the local Board of Education agreed to partner with OCSA because it vowed to provide arts instruction for all of the district's students, not just those who chose to attend CSArts-SGV.

Mucerino acknowledges that many proponents of traditional public schools view charters with suspicion, contending that they drain needed resources and could pave the way for a shift to vouchers for private schools—an outcome they fear could spell the demise of the vaunted system of free public education.

Charters can be “as politically polarizing as any issue in education

or politics,” says Mucerino, now superintendent of the Alford Unified School District. But, he adds, “the fact that the 15-year trend of declining enrollment has been reversed in two years is further evidence that a planned public school–charter school partnership works.”

Duarte is now the only district in the area without declining enrollment, says Gordon Amerson, who replaced Mucerino as superintendent: “That’s a direct result of the instructional program and innovative partnership.”

FOR OPACIC, OCSA and CSArts-SGV have become the incarnation of what he had envisioned in his 1994 doctoral dissertation, “The Role of Education Foundations in Supporting Public Alternative School Programs in California.”

“We’ve created a unique, nurturing culture for students who might not otherwise be successful in a traditional public school setting,” he says. “But here they are flourishing and developing to their full potential as artists, scholars and well-rounded human beings.”

Eighth-grader Andrea Alhuay, 13, commutes from West Covina to CSArts-SGV, where she is in the integrated arts conservatory.

“To be in a place where I can share my passion for the arts is amazing,” she says. “We are all very kind to one another. I have students and teachers that are here for me. I feel I belong.”

Cohen, the trumpet-playing OCSA junior, feels much the same.

“It’s such a strong community and outlet for creative voices,” he says. “I don’t eat lunch by myself anymore.” **R**



SPARK OF GENIUS

“THE ARTS TEACH US TO BE HUMAN,” says Ralph Opacic EdD '94. “They are a universal language that bridges cultures and helps us see our commonalities.”

OCSA and CSArts-SGV exist because the arts-loving Opacic dreamed big. But, years before it secured its charter, OCSA began small—as an after-school choir program at Los Alamitos High School, where he was teaching English.

At the time, the high school had one choir class with 30 kids. The school allowed Opacic to add a “zero period” class, for which he recruited 60 singers in the first year. By the third year, he had five choirs with 300 kids.

Opacic applied for a grant to create an extended-day program for a school within a school; OCSA opened at Los Alamitos High in 1987 with 120 students from across Orange County. The three-year grant provided \$250,000 a year, with an agreement that the program would then become self-sustaining.

While teaching full-time, Opacic earned his EdD from USC Rossier.

“My experience there strengthened my educational leadership skills, deepened my business and financial acumen, and laid the groundwork for the trailblazing work we have done in our fundraising and development efforts at OCSA and CSArts-SGV,” he says.

Even better: In class at Rossier, he met his future wife, Sherry Edd '94, who went on to serve in the Vista Unified School District and the Orange County Department of Education.

“When people ask,” he laughs, “I like to joke that she’s the smarter, more attractive Dr. Opacic.” **R**





INTO THE WILD

A love of animals led her to educational opportunities at the L.A. Zoo



by Ross Brenneman
photography by Peter Brown

ON A BREEZY THURSDAY MORNING, several educators wait in an auditorium at the Los Angeles Zoo, ready to welcome students from nearby Colfax Charter Elementary.

Clad in the true-blue polo of an education team member, Anna Becker MAT '18 prepares with her team.

The telltale musical notes of Britney Spears's "Toxic" ring out as Becker's phone goes off. Colfax isn't coming; outside, some ominous clouds move in on a bright slate of sky, and in this city, rain is crisis.

But other visitors undeterred by the weather continue filing into the park, and so the educators disperse to tend to them.

The Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens opened in November 1966. More than 50 years later, the institution now has 1,400 animals, including 58 endangered species. Seven hundred docents work the 133-acre grounds that hosted 1.8 million visitors last fiscal year.

Becker and her colleagues are responsible for how the public learns at the zoo. The guiding ethos is to design experiences with intention—not "here's a cool sea lion," but rather "here's a lesson in empathy and inquiry, and it happens to be about a sea lion." By the end of a visit, ideally, people leave the zoo thoughtful about their own places in nature, and their responsibilities toward the planet.

"We work here because we want to save the world," Becker says. "We want to save

animals; we want to save species; we want to do something big.”

A HOME IN THE WILD

Walking the zoo grounds, Becker’s in her element—chatting up visitors, picking up litter, steering kids toward the best spot to watch otters rip the heads off tilapia.

But growing up in Chicago, she was a self-described “shy and awkward teenager” who spent weekends with her dad exploring—and later volunteering for—the city’s Brookfield Zoo. After starting work on her degree in biological sciences at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Becker landed an internship out west at Newport Beach’s Back Bay Science Center. Her three months there turned into six, and after a quick stop back east to complete her degree, she returned to California for good, joining the L.A. Zoo.

“As I volunteered, I found my people,” she says, crediting the zoo’s educators with making her understand the possibilities associated with teaching. “I realized it was something I was really passionate about, and that I wanted to make a career.”

The zoo’s education team has 50 part-time teachers and about a dozen more full-time staffers. It’s an eclectic group, united by one very important factor.

“We all get here in our own way,” Becker says. “I think it’s a tribute to all of us having a passion for conservation and animals.”

LEVELING UP

Becker enrolled at USC Rossier in 2016 to learn the formal science of teaching. Being able to think about how people process information differently, and how to create curricula in a more structured way, offered many opportunities.

As one of the zoo’s four full-time curators of education, Becker is responsible for providing support for the education team and developing new learning programs. Current programs have been designed around Next Generation Science Standards or Common Core State Standards, rather than trying to slip new standards into pre-existing programs.

Much of Becker’s work centers on getting educators to step out of their comfort zones and let visitors drive where the presentations go.

“Too often,” she says, “we can spit out

facts and overload them with information.”

The educators practice visual and thinking strategies to better understand how to engage their audiences in their talks, and get them excited about the information.

Jess Kohring, the manager of school and on-grounds programs, says the education team is always looking for new



ideas but the pedagogy remains the same.

“It’s about building up a skill set of observing nature literacy, slowing down and asking questions,” Kohring says.

A CITY ZOO

In 2016, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation

issued a comprehensive report citing the poor level of park access for Los Angeles residents, finding that just over half of residents live at least a half-mile away from a park.

And so the L.A. Zoo sees itself as a reliable resource. During the LAUSD strike in January 2019, for instance, the park offered free programming for students and parents.

The past several years have brought a load of new programs designed by the education team. There are overnights. There are chances to learn animal husbandry with seals. There are opportunities to break down the normal barriers of a zoo and get up close with hippos. A new favorite, the Flamingo Mingle, lets visitors offer up krill water to juvenile pre-pink birds with zero respect for personal space.

Forty percent of the 140,000 annual student visitors come from LAUSD schools. Under the guidance of education director Dan Keeffe, the zoo implemented a new program in 2018 that offers scholarships for Title I schools and includes free transportation, admission and programming.

The scholarships are a way to reduce inequity. Low-income students, Black students and Hispanic/Latino students are less likely than others to have access to parks and the benefits they provide, as suggested in a 2018 study from the University of British Columbia. The zoo estimates its scholarship program will serve 85 schools and more than 5,300 students this school year.

When students visit, they start slow, getting friendly with something fuzzy (rabbits are popular) and always—*always*—one thing that creeps on more than four legs. Before Colfax Elementary had to cancel, they were getting cockroaches.

Empathy is key to the zoo’s mission, Becker says. And if you can find empathy with a cockroach, empathizing with other wildlife—and taking steps to protect them and their world—only gets easier.

“I felt like if I could educate the general public on a day-to-day basis as part of my job, I could start to change the lives of individuals, people in our community, in our city and nationwide,” she says. “We do that every day, in little ways, in good ways.” **R**



“We know that we do good work at the L.A. Zoo,” says Anna Becker MAT’18. “We want to help our guests understand what we do here and decide themselves if that’s something they support or not. It’s about, ‘How can we help you critically think?’”

MAN MOTION



His superheroic
drive is matched
by his heart



writer
**Jonathan
Riggs**
photographer
**Stephanie
Yantz**
designer
Erik Baxter

KERIN ALFARO ME'20 DOESN'T SLEEP IN.

How could he? He's a first-generation college student at USC Rossier in the Learning Design and Technology (LDT) program, as well as the founding president of its student government organization, the Lambda Delta Tau Society. He works full time at USC Dornsife in biomedical and basic science research administration. He is a devoted son, brother and uncle who helps support his family. Oh, and he also swims 2 miles, bikes 40 miles and runs 10 miles a week on USC's triathlon team.

"I have to manage my time wisely," he laughs. "A strong work ethic has always been ingrained in me thanks to my parents."

The son of a photographer and a seamstress, Alfaro grew up in south Los Angeles, the youngest of six in a Salvadoran/Palestinian family, who couldn't have been more supportive.

He never *had* to come out, but wanted to tell his mother.

"At a car wash, I said, in Spanish, 'I'm gay,'" he remembers. "She just smiled at me, held my hand and said, 'But are you going to get the deluxe wash?' She loved me no matter what."

That support helped him dream big.

"I wanted to be more than just another statistic," he says. "I knew that education would serve as my ticket to success and a way to care for my parents the way they'd cared for me."

He started college at UC Santa Barbara but returned home after his father developed a severe health issue. Alfaro ended up working at a dental office to help support his family and put himself through undergrad, earning his Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Administration at CSU Dominguez Hills.

A windfall arrived when Alfaro—to impress his then-4- and 6-year-old nephews—went on their favorite game show, *Wipeout*, in 2009. Although he bounced off the obstacle course's famous big red balls—"The water was frigid!" he laughs—he ultimately won that episode and \$50,000.

"When I told my mother, I just fell on my knees in front of her, crying," he recalls. "I said, 'Mom, our lives are going to change.'"



He found his professional direction when he got a job at Los Angeles Biomedical Institute at Harbor-UCLA and decided he wanted to help facilitate scientific research as an administrator in grants and contracts. He moved into a role in this rapidly growing field at USC, winning a Dornsife Spot Award and eyeing grad schools. USC Rossier's LDT program seemed a perfect fit, but his plans to apply to the program were put on hold when his father died.

"It was devastating. He meant the world to me. But after a year, I knew I had to do this in his honor, for myself and for my family," he says. "There's a saying in Spanish my father always shared with me, '*Pa'lante, hijo*': Always think forward and pay it forward, my son."

As a USC Rossier LDT student, Alfaro has embraced that motto, building a community of like-minded friends whose real-life camaraderie imbues their virtual classroom. They study together, constantly call and text one another, and collaborate on projects, bound by the shared vision of connecting people around the country.

"I would love for this to be our shared legacy: to make educational resources and connections immediate and accessible to people of all intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality and geographical locations," Alfaro says. "Education means opportunity. It gives us the power to make impactful change. Nothing was handed to me on a silver platter, so I want to make the journey easier for others who find themselves in the same shoes I walked in growing up."

After graduation, his goal is to become an executive director in research administration; he also has his eye on an EdD from USC Rossier.

Then, maybe he'll sleep in?

"No way." He smiles. "There's still so much more to do." 

THE L.A. EDUCATION EXCHANGE

IN NOVEMBER 2018, the USC Rossier School and the Center for Engagement-Driven Global Education (EDGE) hosted the “L.A. Education Exchange,” a first-of-its-kind, two-day gathering for the leadership of L.A.’s public, private and parochial schools. The Exchange also brought together education leaders from across the city, including public officials, philanthropists and representatives from nonprofits, advocacy groups and professional associations.

Though each group shares equally in the goal of making education engaging and effective, they are often at odds over how to achieve success—or even communicate.

“The recent LAUSD teachers’ strike reminded us of multiple realities,” says Alan Arkatov, USC Rossier’s Katzman/Ernst Chair for Educational Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation, “including the sad fact that L.A.’s educational leadership is very siloed.”

“It can be easy—sometimes even comforting—to stick to what we know while we dismiss good ideas that don’t come from our own camp,” Dean Karen Symms Gallagher said during the event. “But it’s incumbent on the Rossier School to do the hard things, start the hard conversations and put the hard-learned lessons to work.”

Those hard conversations commenced during “Bridging Suppers,” hosted by philanthropists who generously opened their homes. Through carefully facilitated discussions, participants who might not have otherwise met connected deeply across differing backgrounds, beliefs and identities.

Participants spent the next day in equally intense guided conversations. They explored diverse perspectives on key issues in 21st-century education, including equity, mental health, media immersion, community engagement and creativity.

To ensure that these conversations continue moving forward in productive ways, the group will reconvene in May to discuss the crucial roles of storytelling and communications in educational coalition-building, joined by Sal Khan, founder and CEO of the innovative Khan Academy.

“I am heartened by the efforts that USC Rossier and EDGE are leading,” says participant John B. King, the 10th U.S. Secretary of Education and president and CEO of The Education Trust. “I am looking forward to the conversations that we began last fall continuing, for the benefit of our students.” **R** —STEPHEN LUCASI

THE NEW SCHOOL

FEB. 5 MARKED the groundbreaking for East College Prep’s long-awaited permanent Lincoln Heights campus.

Currently operating downtown, East College Prep is the second of five public high schools created and operated by charter management organization Ednovate, the brainchild of a USC Rossier School of Education initiative.

“We promised the East community that this building would be up and running so we can provide a high-quality education for years to come,” says Oliver Sicat ’01, Ednovate CEO. “We are going to make sure we follow through on that promise.” **R**



THIS JANUARY, 16 IMMIGRANT STUDENTS who attend LAUSD schools described to an audience at USC their struggle to get—and acclimate—to the United States, pouring out their hearts, many in their native language.

Brought together by a project called I Learn America—founded by filmmaker Jean-Michel Dissard, whose 2013 documentary started it all—these students are part of an ongoing “human library” of immigrant stories that develop youths’ literacy and storytelling skills.

Lizette Becerra MAT ’18, one of four USC Rossier student teachers who helped mentor workshop participants, brought the project to the attention of Professor of Clinical Education Margo Pensavalle, who helped organize the documentary screening and student presentation as part of USC Rossier’s ongoing Centennial celebration.

“The stories of these students are stories that no children should have to experience,” Pensavalle said. “We made a political statement in a very real way.” **R** —ROSS BRENNEMAN



USC Rossier attendees at the November 2018 Town & Gown luncheon show their Trojan spirit. Town & Gown has more than 800 members, 130 of whom are USC Rossier alumnae.

Higher Education for Democracy



UNIVERSITIES MUST ENGAGE with the great challenges that confront democracies. That was the key message of William G. Tierney, University Professor and Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education at USC Rossier and the co-director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education, at the 41st Pullias Lecture on March 26 at USC’s Town & Gown.

“The vision of the disengaged academic removed from society to study abstractions has to be refashioned to confront the democratic recession we face throughout the world,” Tierney said.

The annual Pullias Lecture features a nationally recognized scholar to enrich the ongoing academic dialogue on significant topics in higher education. Titled “Higher Education for Democracy,” Tierney’s talk served as a culmination of his career, which began at Penn State University and has continued at USC for a quarter-century. Tierney will step down from co-directing the Pullias Center in June, remaining on the USC faculty until the end of 2019, when he will retire.

Adrianna Kezar, Dean’s Professor of Higher Education, will step up from co-director to sole director of the Pullias Center.

“I hope to continue Bill’s important legacy,” she says, “of working with educators on the ground to develop innovative and scalable solutions for student success and institutional effectiveness.” **R** —SIEL JU

#12

FOR THE THIRD YEAR IN A ROW, *U.S. News & World Report* named USC Rossier one of the 15 best graduate schools of education in the country. This year we’re #12, and have ranked in the top 20 in eight of the past nine years.

All individual USC Rossier programs also ranked in the top 25 within their respective areas: Higher Education Administration (#8), Education Policy (#13), Education Administration and Supervision (#16), Secondary Teacher Education (#18) and Educational Psychology (#21). **R**

Leadership and Legacies



EUGENE KAM

Hawaii State Rep. Ken Ito EDD '15 and Hawaii State Sen. Glenn Wakai '90 present Dean Karen Symms Gallagher with a proclamation for USC Rossier from the State Legislature.

AT THE HAWAII CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION on Oahu in February, school leaders and alumni reflected on USC Rossier's island ties.


"You are among the many USC Rossier graduates across the Pacific region who stand for the values of equity, diversity and opportunity that are at the core of our mission," said Karen Symms Gallagher, Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of USC Rossier. "You make us proud."

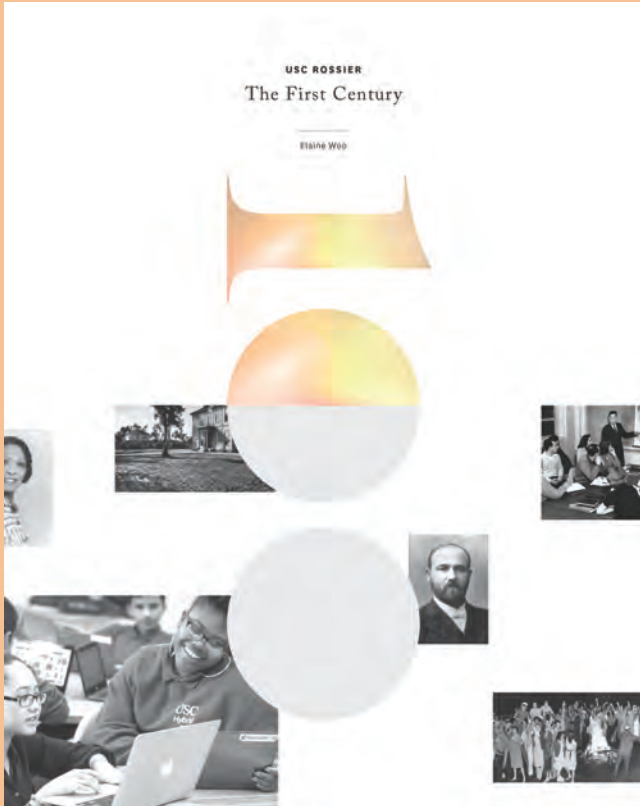
Among them was event honoree and President of the Marshall Islands Hilda Heine EDD '04, who had previously lived, worked and earned her master's degree in Hawaii.

"Without having gone through the EdD leadership program, I don't think I would be addressing this group as president of the Marshall Islands," Heine said. "The program gave me a new degree of confidence and awareness that I did not have before. It gave me the courage to dare to open doors that I would have thought restricted to me as a woman; it allowed me to dream."

USC Rossier has a long relationship with the Aloha State; following a series of teacher-preparation programs set up overseas by then-Dean Irving R. Melbo beginning in 1966, USC Rossier established an EdD program in Hawaii. The school flew faculty members from Los Angeles to Hickam Air Force Base—at the time, the only doctoral program in education in the state.

The program eventually moved to the Japan-America Institute of Management Science (JAIMS), expanding the program's reach beyond a principally military-focused group of students. USC Rossier incorporated its Hawaii-focused program into the school's Educational Leadership program earlier this decade.

"Now Rossier's EdD graduates are nearly everywhere you look in Hawaii," said Stuart Gothold EDD '74, "serving as college presidents, chancellors, headmasters, advisers to the governor and heads of major nonprofits like the United Way."  —ROSS BRENNEMAN



"I didn't want to just narrate a chronology; I wanted to tell a compelling story," says Elaine Woo, author of the new book *USC Rossier: The First Century*. "I hope readers will feel the pull of the many forces and strong personalities that shaped USC Rossier and how it has served public education over the past 100 years." Learn more at bit.ly/RossierBook.



Who: You

What: USC Rossier's Centennial celebration

When: Aug. 24

Where: L.A.'s Skirball Cultural Center

Why: To honor the history and impact of our first century and to explore our second

LOOK FOR YOUR INVITATION SOON!



BRIAN MORRI

Current and former superintendents in the Dean’s Superintendents Advisory Group flank USC Rossier Dean Karen Symms Gallagher (center) at DSAG’s annual dinner this year in Monterey, Calif. At least 230 USC Rossier graduates have run California school districts since 1970, including 78 in 2018. Of the 18 who became superintendents in the past four years, 11 are women.



PARRY’S PLAYLIST

“Lose Yourself”
by Eminem

The beat is strong and I can go into a zone.

“The Story”
by Brandi Carlile

I think it is about me. I want to tell my daughters my stories and I hope they will want to listen.

“Roar”
by Katy Perry

It makes me run stronger and faster.

“Bye Bye Bye”
by *NSYNC

When I am tired at mile 23, this is a great pick-me-up. At the end, I soon say “bye bye bye” to the course.

“We Are the Champions”
by Queen

During the last miles of my last two marathons, I sang this at the top of my lungs in the middle of the night!

Marathon Memories



THIS FEBRUARY, SHIRLEY PARRY PHD '17 became one of only 41 women and 97 men to ever complete the World Marathon Challenge: seven marathons on seven continents in seven days. While doing so, she raised more than \$77,000 for the Orthopaedic Institute for Children (OIC). Read more about her adventures below, and on her blog (bit.ly/Parry17).

- 1 **Antarctica (Novo)**
Due to the cold, my iPhone battery died after mile seven and I ran the rest of the course in silence—the only sound was our feet hitting the snow and ice.
- 2 **Africa (Cape Town)**
I will never forget the intense heat and utter lack of shade on the course. Volunteers at the aid stations dunked our caps in ice water and we lathered on sunscreen every 90 minutes.
- 3 **Australia (Perth)**
The race started at midnight, but there was a sizable welcoming party. A beautiful sunrise welcomed us at the finish line.
- 4 **Asia (Dubai)**
After 14 out of 15 laps, the officials pulled out the finishing tape by mistake. I struggled to hold back tears of frustration, but a volunteer’s encouragement hardened my resolve to finish that last lap.
- 5 **Europe (Madrid)**
By now, many of us were nursing myriad types of minor and not-so-minor injuries. I can now boast that I have run on a grand prix racetrack, with a steep camber built to maintain speed for F1 cars, but that wreaked havoc on ankles and leg muscles.
- 6 **South America (Santiago)**
This was an emotional run, because we were getting to the end. Afterward, we had to walk almost half a mile to shower at a boxing gym, but by the time I got there, all the hot water was used up.
- 7 **North America (Miami)**
I was floored to see OIC’s Senior VP of Development with a patient and her parents to cheer me on with beautiful handmade signs. My dad died between my Antarctica and Africa marathons, so I ran this last race with his name written on my shirt. This whole challenge is dedicated in loving memory to him. **R**



STEPHANIE YANTZ

LIFT EVERY VOICE

They're redefining the future of language education

USC Rossier's Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MAT—TESOL) program has evolved over the years from a more theoretically oriented program to a practitioner-focused teacher training model. This reflects larger developments in the field, according to

Clinical Education Professor and program chair Rob Filback and Associate Professor Jenifer Crawford.

"Language education is on the cusp of huge change: a massive shift in policy, practice, curriculum and pedagogy," Crawford says. "Our challenge is to make the field's ideas practical and concrete, so that our diverse students can enact them in their classrooms. That's the future."

WHAT IS THE STATE OF MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION?

ROB FILBACK: There are encouraging trends, like the growth of immersion programs, but at the same time the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that, from 2013 to 2016, higher ed closed 651 foreign-language programs. That's disheartening, especially with estimates that, by 2025 in the U.S., one in four public K–12 students will be an English language learner.

JENIFER CRAWFORD: There are glimmers of hope. The idea of subtractive bilingualism—that somehow being bilingual before college is negative—has long influenced education policies. But that's started to change with the idea of additive bilingualism coming down to K–12 and before. LAUSD did a two-year pilot with district-supported, dual-immersion preschools on elementary school campuses. They educated 227 students, and now 27 schools or so have joined the program's wait list.

WHAT IS DEFINING USC ROSSIER'S RESPONSE?

JC: A real sense of urgency. Seeing what's been happening around immigration makes us want to redouble our efforts.

RF: We just went through a process to identify the three new pillars of our program: effective language teaching, critical inquiry and social justice. Educational justice is not just something we're discussing, but one of the main things we want our graduates to be known for.

JC: Rob and I are living this, not just as teacher-educators, but also as parents who both have kids exploring questions of language and seeing themselves as multilingual.

RF: We're highlighting our World Masters in Language Teaching program, which has partnerships with universities in China, Korea and Mexico. It's an innovative dual master's program that immerses students culturally and prepares them to teach two different languages. It's another way we're supporting language learners and redefining what language education is around the world.

WHAT INSPIRES YOUR SCHOLARSHIP AND ADVOCACY?

RF: Having been raised monolingually and monoculturally, I'm on a careerlong campaign to promote multilingualism and a more empowering playing field for language learners, both for my kids and for any students who have been disparaged or marginalized linguistically.

JC: Remembering that we're all language learners, and we should never stop. Both Rob and I still take language classes and learn from our students. It's never too late, and it expands how we understand the world and one another. **R**

WHAT MAKES YODER A UNIQUE INSTITUTION?

We are one of the few bilingual/international schools that offer competitive Taiwanese and American Common Core State Standard curriculums in Taoyuan City; prior to the school’s establishment, families had extremely limited access to a Western education. Yoder is also among the first Taiwanese schools to incorporate the science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) concept into the curriculum of both elementary and middle school.

HOW IS YODER’S MISSION REFLECTED IN ITS STUDENTS?

Our enrollment has grown dramatically, from approximately 40 students in our first year to more than 620 today, including from 16 countries such as Canada, China, Costa Rica, France, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, South Africa and the United States. I’m proud that many of our middle school graduates make high school selections based not just on their performance on the entrance exam, but on personal interest. Because they have been exposed to different cultures and learning experiences, these courageous students are unafraid to veer off of the traditional path and pursue their dreams.

WHAT’S THE IMPACT OF YODER’S FOCUS ON STEAM?

Our students, who are studying English as a second language, are not only seeing the world, but competing in it—in 2018, they won three awards in the 117th annual Concours Lépine innovation competition in Paris. They also received the silver and bronze medals among more than 7,100 teams from 63 nations in the 2018 Wonder League Robotics Competition. Yoder was the only school in the world to have two of the top 10 teams! Besides the top-notch instructors and parental support, I believe that our students’ achievements are primarily due to their curiosity and creativity, which we believe in cultivating.

HOW ARE YOU OPENING INTERNATIONAL DOORS FOR YODER STUDENTS AND YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY?

Due to a partnership with the Educational Testing Service of Taiwan, Yoder is the only testing center for both the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Primary and TOEFL Junior in Taoyuan City. Our goal is to provide the convenience of taking the TOEFL series of tests in-school for our students while simultaneously inviting students of other private and public schools in Taoyuan City to participate.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM USC ROSSIER?

Whether you serve in a public or private educational setting, being able to call yourself an educator comes with both pride and responsibilities. Always strive to do the best you can, and don’t be daunted by the hard journey, for the outcome is priceless. **R**



STEPHANIE YANTZ

DREAM AND GROW

His bilingual school in Taiwan empowers future global citizens

Jerry Hsieh EDD ’07 built his career in manufacturing and finance, but a phone call with his family in Taiwan in 2003 gave him a new direction. After hearing that his father and grandfather were founding a school in his hometown of Taoyuan City, Hsieh decided to pursue an advanced degree in education at USC Rossier to help.

One doctorate and more than a decade later, Hsieh is CEO of Yoder Bilingual Academy (yoderedu.org), overseeing all aspects of the school’s international program. Named for his grandfather and founded in 2010, Yoder is expanding this year to offer a bilingual kindergarten and international high school division along with its elementary and middle schools.

“While Taiwan is a developed country, we are hoping to bridge the Eastern and Western culture and education gap,” Hsieh says. “One day, I hope that some of my students will become my fellow Trojan alumni.”



STEPHANIE HANTZ

Investing **IN** Women

Announcing the Veronica and David Hagen Chair in Women's Leadership

by Ross Brenneman

THE NUMBERS HAVE BEEN WELL-REPORTED:

While three-quarters of American teachers are women, women hold only half of all principal positions, and a quarter of all superintendent positions.

"I had always expected that once women were educated at parity, we would see more of an organic growth in women in leadership positions," says Veronica "Ronee" Hagen '68. "That hasn't happened."

Ronee, a previous president and CEO of Polymer Group Inc., and husband David Hagen '67 MA '68 EdD '93, a member of the USC Rossier Board of Councilors and retired superintendent of the Huntington Beach school district, want to even the gender imbalance in education leadership.

To that end, the Hagens are funding a new \$3 million endowed position at USC Rossier: the Veronica and David Hagen Chair in Women's Leadership.

They envision a chaired professor who will study the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions as well as provide coaching and mentoring to help correct it.

"We believe in opportunities for women and we believe in education and leadership, and we wanted to blend it all together," David says.

"It's hard for women to look up and see all men in leadership positions, and to feel like they're ever going to have a place at the table," Ronee says. "There has to be some proactivity." **R**

USC Rossier

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Deadlines—and dinosaurs—keep Kerin Alfaro ME '20 running. He's a USC Rossier LDT student, full-time USC staffer and USC triathlon team member. More on pg. 34!