Can Education Save Democracy?

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Dear Friends,

As I write, upholding USC Rossier’s pledge to the next generation of educators and students feels difficult. Schools everywhere are closing because of a pandemic, their service impacted in untold ways, likely for months. We at USC Rossier are continuing our teaching and learning activities online, and by most accounts, our students are adapting well.

But I can’t help but think about the fragility of human norms, structures and assumptions. It just takes one catastrophe, or one election result, to make our goals seem farther from reach. Particularly fragile—even before COVID-19—are the norms, structures and assumptions of our democratic system.

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote this message to educators in September 1938, during American Education Week. His words were clear: An educated democracy is the only democracy that works.

It wasn’t until years later, in 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation of children in public institutions was unconstitutional, that our laws started catching up with our ideals. Delivering the Court’s opinion, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that education is central to our democratic society, “it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. ... [It] is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”

The health of America’s educational institutions—its K-12 schools, colleges and universities—represents the health of our democracy. The history of America’s schools is also a history of access, rights and liberties. When threats to our democratic foundations emerge or grow, we need to ask ourselves, how do we leverage the significant power of our educational institutions to meet those challenges?

At USC Rossier, our mission is to achieve educational equity, particularly to prepare leaders to achieve it. We create and support scholars who understand that systems are made up of individuals, each with the capacity to see inequities and do something about them. In this issue of USC Rossier Magazine, you’ll read stories of people who are refusing to be passive participants in a democratic society in turmoil.

This is the final semester of my deanship, but I look forward to rejoining the faculty in the fall of 2021 to focus on scholarship related to women in leadership and the significant equity issues that exist there.

I am proud to know my successor will lead a school that is confident in its purpose and its ability to rise to any occasion.

Fight On!

Karen Symms Gallagher PhD
Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean
USC Rossier School of Education
When I arrived at USC Rossier in the fall of 2019, I attended as many lectures, events and other happenings as I could. The school, with its 228 full- and part-time faculty, 173 staff, 2,251 students, broad array of degree programs, 11 research centers and over 28,000 living alumni, is always buzzing. And as I met more members of the Rossier community and learned about the work they are doing, I was floored. At a time when our country feels incredibly divided, and we are often left wondering if our democracy is still functioning, I found myself feeling encouraged: The work of USC Rossier deeply embodies the democratic principles our nation was built upon.

Education and democracy share an essential bond, and this issue asks the question, can education save democracy? In these pages, Rossier faculty Mary Helen Immordino-Yang discusses how fostering abstract thinking in youth can support democracy, and Adrianna Kezar considers why we need to rethink the power structures that govern higher education. The features offer deep dives into some of our nation’s—and world’s—most pressing concerns. From burning questions of how schools grapple with climate change to how an inspiring school of refugees run by a Rossier alum is learning how democracy functions, this issue offers stories of hope and important reminders.

Democracy—rule by the people—requires participation from the populace. To have a healthy democracy, we must have an educated citizenry. And to truly have an educated citizenry, we must have educational equity.

Kianoosh Hashemzadeh, Editor
USC creates full-ride scholarship for Ednovate graduates

By Ross Brenneman

USC HAS ANNOUNCED the establishment of a full-ride scholarship for low-income students graduating from schools in the Ednovate network. USC Rossier School of Education established the Ednovate charter management organization in 2012 to create and operate five high schools in the Greater Los Angeles area. A sixth school joins the Ednovate network in 2020. One graduating senior from each of the nine Ednovate schools in the Greater Los Angeles area will be eligible for the scholarship.

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THE RUN OF HIS LIFE

By Kiamosh Hashemzadeh

THE FIRST TIME Edgar Fidel Lopez ran the Los Angeles Marathon, his phone died. Unable to listen to music, he was alone with his thoughts. He ran some 12 miles in his basketball shoes, but when he had nearly reached the halfway mark, he injured himself. He visited the medical tent. It wasn’t good news. The medics advised him to withdraw from the race and take a van to the finish line.

“Just give me that Gatador,” Lopez said. “I’m going to power through it.”

He limped another 12 miles, and then two miles from the finish, his body began to shut down. He fell to the ground. But then his sister and cousin jumped in to help. They lifted him up and kept pushing him toward the finish line.

Lopez completed the marathon that day, and has gone on to complete two more, thanks to the aid of his loved ones. The experience, Lopez said, made him think about those times “when we’re in our darkest moment [and] we think that one’s there to help us, that’s when we get the most unexpected support.”

Lopez compares running the L.A. Marathon to his experience navigating higher education. It’s a journey that has required both perseverance and the ability to accept help when it’s offered. Like the marathon, Lopez’s path as a PhD student in USC Rossier’s Urban Education Policy program hasn’t always been easy, but he’s been able to find support along the way.

When Lopez was in high school a second year senior, he was approached by Randall Clemens PhD ’12, a mentor in the Pullias Center for Higher Education’s Accessing Program at USC Rossier: “I was the first time anyone had told me about a PhD program,” Lopez said.

Clemens was one of Lopez’s first mentors, and the I AM sessions motivated Lopez to think about college. Clemens made him feel as though someone understood the circumstances and background of first gen students like him. Lopez grew up in inner-city Los Angeles with undocumented parents. They had dropped out of middle school, so to them, “high school was my higher education,” Lopez said. But Clemens guided him through the college application process, and Lopez was accepted to UCLA.

When Lopez was an undergrad, his mother lost her job, so he worked a job to help his family. His grades suffered. When a science professor asked to meet with him, Lopez optimistically hoped the professor would help him get back on track. Instead, he asked Lopez why he hadn’t dropped his class.

The professor asked Lopez where he was from, and when he learned that he was from Inglewood, the professor said he didn’t understand why “this school accepts people like you if they know you’re not going to succeed,” Lopez recalled.

Lopez avoided office hours for months. Eventually, though, after some pleading, he found himself in the office of a professor who provided the inspiring words he had been looking for during that challenging semester. The experience changed Lopez’s trajectory, inspiring him to pursue education instead of his initial interest, law: “I want to be someone who I wish I had known when I was younger,” Lopez said.

Lopez went on to graduate from UCLA with two bachelor’s degrees and a minor in education. But he continued to keep his eye on the prize. Lopez left Los Angeles and his family— not an easy decision—to attend the University of Texas at Austin, where he received his MEd in educational leadership and policy. Now, he’s a student in the same PhD program he first heard about from Clemens.

At USC Rossier, Lopez is still deep in the race, but he’s heading toward the finish line. Born out of his own experiences in higher ed, Lopez’s research looks at first-gen college students’ interactions with faculty as well as how faculty construct positive perceptions of students regardless of their perceived disadvantages. “We have to get to a positive frame of thinking about these students,” he said. “Just because they come from a poor background doesn’t mean they have poor skills.” —R

“Anything and everything is possible if you have mentorship.” These words were spoken by Tensie Taylor ME ’14, associate director of the USC Black Alumni Association, as she delivered an EdTalk—Rossier’s version of a TedTalk—at the Impact Showcase that took place in February at the Amy King Dunton-Berchtold University Club of USC.

This year’s event took a new format. Rather than telling attendees about all of the important work that their philanthropy supports, a series of interactive exhibits demonstrated the impact of Rossier’s faculty, staff and students. Dean Karen Symms Gallagher explained during her opening remarks that the event “is about from Clemens.

Taylor’s talk, “ Bullied From Terror to Triumph: Now Living My Best Life,” reflecting on the years of bullying she endured during her youth, was one of two EdTalks presented. Kenya Williams MA ’11, EdD ’18, pictured above, a principal in the Los Angeles Unified School District, gave a talk called “Extraordinary vs. Average,” which explored how her parents and teachers inspired her throughout her life. —R

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Women superintendents share insights

By Wendy Sturteck

OVER A DOZEN TOP DISTRICT LEADERS, all members of the Dean’s Superintendents Advisory Group (DSAG), gathered on Jan. 31 after the annual DSAG awards dinner, to share perspectives about occupying the highest seat in public K-12 education. From the disparities in career pathways they face compared to male counterparts to unsolicited wardrobe advice, they related common experiences about the role and expectations. Dean Gallagher established the brunch in 2015 to give a voice within DSAG to these professionals and provide a forum for workplace insights about the role and expectations.

One participant shared a realization she came to early on. She followed a man into the sup’s chair, and her district is particularly sports-dominated. The “boy” factor is important, she said. She had to work at that part of leading her district—paying attention to sports because of how much they meant to so many. A colleague across the table agreed that navigating “frames” like athletics can be critical to a leader’s success.

The group agreed that the concern about women’s representation within the ranks remains high. Women comprise just 21.7 percent of all superintendents in the U.S., remains high. Women comprise just 21.7 percent of all superintendents in the U.S., according to AASA, The School Superintendents Association. For women of color, it is especially difficult to overcome the “broken rung” on the ladder to a superintendent’s seat. Today, just six percent of superintendents in the nation are of color, regardless of gender (see illustration on page 24).

“All of us around the table mentor women in our organizations,” said one attendee. “What do superintendents need to do to accelerate these young professionals’ journey to the top?”

Four Rossier EdD students named DSAG Scholars, David Verdugo EdD ’05 inducted into Hall of Fame

By David Verdugo EdD ’05

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AT THIS YEAR’S DEAN’S SUPERINTENDENTS ADVISORY GROUP (DSAG) awards dinner, held on Jan. 30 in Palm Springs, Calif., David Verdugo EdD ’05, who served as superintendent of schools for the Paramount Unified School District in Los Angeles for nine years, was inducted into the DSAG Hall of Fame. The DSAG Endowed Scholarships were also awarded to four USC Rossier EdD students who aspire to become superintendents. This year’s recipients were Shane Creeem, coordinator of special education at Moreno Valley Unified School District; Richard Noblett, director of student achievement at Olive Middle School in Baldwin Park Unified School District; and Heather Bojorquez, principal at C.E. Ut Middle School in the Twin Oaks Unified School District, whose DSAG scholar award was presented in partnership with TELACU.

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Ove
PACE/USC Rossier poll finds voters skeptical of school quality, support more funding

By Ross Brenneman

THE RESULTS OF THE ANNUAL 2020 Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)/USC Rossier poll show that California voters lack enthusiasm about the state education system and local school quality.

In the poll, voters gave schools their lowest grade in a half-decade (only 20 percent gave an A or B on an A–F grading scale), with parents especially critical. More than two-thirds of respondents said that over the past few years, California school quality had gotten worse or stayed the same (41 percent; gotten worse: 32 percent; stayed same: 38 percent).

Yet voter responses indicated they may see school funding as a way to improve school quality, with a majority saying the state needed to spend more on schools (should spend more: 56 percent; spends enough: 25 percent).

“Two of the state’s largest school districts had prolonged strikes last year, and I worry whether Californians are losing faith that the people with real power to improve schools can lead,” said Karen Symmons Gallagher, dean of the USC Rossier School of Education. “Voters obviously want schools to have the money they need, but I think voters also want to know that the money they’ve already invested is being used well.”

The poll surveyed 3,000 registered California voters online Jan. 3-10. The poll was led by researchers Julie A. Marsh and Morgan Polkoff at USC Rossier and by Heather Hough and David N. Pflunk at PACE, and was conducted by Tulchin Research. The PACE/USC Rossier poll has generally been conducted annually since 2012. — R

“More than one year after Los Angeles teachers went on strike, momentum hasn’t carried over to the voter turnout required to pass new levies for school funding.

- The world is going to have to realize that climate change is here. Action has to happen now.”

— John Brooks Slaughter

Scholars push bold agenda to bring trust to college admissions

By Ross Brenneman

CHANGING A MASSIVE SYSTEM doesn’t happen overnight, but at an annual conference this year that hosts the nation’s senior admissions and financial aid officers, researchers from the USC Rossier School of Education and elsewhere argued for major reforms.

“We believe the admissions system in the United States is broken,” said Don Hossler, a senior scholar with USC Rossier’s Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERP), laying out the thesis of a damming new paper he’s co-authored. “The immodest hope we have is that we can stimulate policy actors at the state and federal level to say, ‘We can do something about this.’”

Hossler made the case at the annual CERP Conference, held in downtown Los Angeles at the end of January.

Hossler’s co-authors and allies in this fight are Jerry Lucido, a professor of practice and CERP’s executive director; Emily Chung, CERP associate director; and Robert Massa, an associate professor in USC Rossier’s Enrollment Management and Policy graduate program and former head of enrollment at Drew University.

CERP’s officers designed this year’s conference to find a way forward on higher education’s most significant enrollment-related issues. Over the course of three days, experts talked about the roadblocks to institutional change, both internal and external, as well as the problems that led them to this point, including how to define and measure merit, a lack of preparation for changing high school demographics, growing price and debt aversion, and loss of public confidence in the fairness of the college admissions system.

“We have no illusions that anything we share at this conference will result in any national decisions,” Hossler said, but “we hope it can result in discussions that result in some level of consensus that plays out differently in each state.” — R

Engineering a better climate

CEPEG announces:

THE USC ROSSIER CENTER ON Educational Policy, Equity and Governance this fall announced the formation of The Answer Lab, an initiative that provides policymakers and administrators with targeted research and expertise to better inform decision-making.

“There have been lots of efforts to connect research to policy; some of these have succeeded, and many have not,” said CEPEG co-director Morgan Polkoff, who founded The Answer Lab. “I’m excited about this new approach, which I think addresses many of the shortcomings of prior efforts by taking questions directly from policymakers and giving them clear answers in formats they can readily use.”

Ross Cepeg

FOR THE FOURTH 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 #11, and have ranked in the top 30 in nine of the past 10 years.

Many USC Rossier programs also ranked in the top 30 within their respective areas: Higher Education Administration (#5), Education Policy (#4), Education Administration and Supervision (#15), Secondary Teacher Education (#17) and Curriculum and Instruction (#20).

Visit The Answer Lab

theanswerlab.rossier.usc.edu

#11

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"It’s a crazy cycle. We know that when you have a college education, there are good outcomes with health. You’re more likely to live longer. It matters for employment stability and civic engagement. You’re less likely to rely on social services."
— Adrian H. Huerta, USC Rossier assistant professor of education, in The Washington Post

“It is totally fine and appropriate and good for White people to write about the legacy and impact of Martin Luther King Jr. I would go so far to say I wish we had more White students in college who would and could take the time to articulate King’s impact on social justice. We send millions of White college students into the world without the study of racial justice and equity topics."
— Shaun Harper, Provost Professor of Education and Business, Clifford and Betty Allen Chair in Urban Leadership, and founder and executive director of the USC Race and Equity Center, in Inside Higher Ed

“As college prices exceed … $70,000 a year, parents are scratching their heads going, ‘I don’t think it’s going to be worth it unless my kid is going to go to a school that everyone is bragging about.’"
— Robert Massa, associate professor in USC Rossier’s Enrollment Management and Policy graduate program and vice president emeritus of enrollment and college relations at Dickinson College, in The Washington Post

“There’s great work on learning being done around student engagement and collaborative learning, and within disciplinary associations, and by groups focused on diversity. Why don’t these communities speak to and learn from each other? Could they come up with a set of common things they’re exploring and work together on them?"
— Adrianna Kezar, Dean’s Professor of Leadership, Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education and director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education, in Inside Higher Ed

ELECTION YEARS ARE OFTEN A GOOD time to engage in difficult conversations with students about how the course content is relevant to elections that will impact existing policies and structures, as well as how students’ own learning in the course relates to their decision-making as voters.

Because students have varying political and social perspectives, it is important for educators to create brave spaces that allow for open and respectful dialogue, but that also don’t stay at the surface level and can challenge students’ assumptions and thinking.

First, there are a few preconditions to creating a classroom climate that would be considered a “brave space.” Early in each term, educators can construct a set of discussion norms that structure and frame how students relate to and interact with one another. These norms should be revisited throughout the term with an emphasis made on the collective responsibility to uphold them.

The second precondition is that educators should be on the path to developing a mindset and practice of critical reflection. What are the assumptions I have about the topics I might bring forward in class? How do my own positionality and lived experiences shape what I hold dear and how I vote? What are alternative ways of seeing these issues, and how might they make sense to those who see the issue that way? How is the way I view the issue informed by power dynamics? By reflecting on our own thinking and pushing ourselves to see alternative perspectives, we can better anticipate the varying perspectives our students will likely bring to the discussion.

Instructionally, educators can make space for challenging dialogue about the election by asking open-ended, nonjudgmental questions to spur and facilitate discussion. Some of my favorite go-to questions and prompts are: “Tell me more about your thinking.” “Please clarify what you mean by …” “What evidence can you point to that helps support your assertion?” “How have your lived experiences shaped your perspective?” “Are there alternative ways of seeing the presenting issue(s)?”

It is important to note that while questioning strategies might bring about rich dialogue reflecting different perspectives, educators should be ready to critically engage students when their comments reflect misunderstandings and assumptions that perpetuate entrenched inequities. — R

By Artineh Samkian, Associate Professor of Clinical Education
Students are demanding a better education on climate change, but can schools keep up?

Story: Ross Brenneman
Illustration: Chris Gash
Eight miles separate USC’s main campus from the Santa Monica mountain range north of Los Angeles. On a good day, you can see those mountains from campus. On a bad day, those mountains—and even the skyscrapers of downtown L.A.—are more of an idea; object permanence reassures us those places still exist within the smog, but you’d have to take someone’s word for it if you didn’t know.

That smog is a daily reminder of the toll humans have on the Earth, a subtler insecurity that is ubiquitous in our daily lives. It is against this backdrop that the youth-organized climate-strike movement has boomed, in which hundreds of thousands of students worldwide have walked out of school to protest systemic inaction on anthropogenic climate change. Those strikes and an abundance of other evidence suggest that both K-12 and higher education systems are unprepared to meet students’ demands for a better climate education. And if so—if our educational institutions are unable to meaningfully address the greatest threat to our democracy and to human rights—then what does that say about the purpose and priorities of our educational systems?

“Schools and school districts ought to ask themselves, ‘To what extent can we actually be responsive to the needs of our students given where the world is today?’” says Charles H.F. Davis III, an assistant professor of clinical education at the USC Rossier School of Education. “There’s something to be said for whether, despite its democratic aspirations of developing and forming people who participate and engage in society, our education system has consistently gotten away from the things that improve the material conditions of everyday people and society as a whole.”

The Stakes

Current worldwide goals—set by the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016—are to keep global average temperatures from rising 2 degrees Celsius above levels predating the Industrial Revolution. The accord has an even stronger goal of preventing the global average from rising 1.5 degrees Celsius. Scientists estimate we are already at 1 degree Celsius above preindustrial average.

The 2-degrees mark is considered to be the point of major, likely irreversible damage—the death of coral reefs; ice-free Arctic summers. But hitting the 1.5-degree number would also bring consequences, scientists say, such as accelerated permafrost thawing, which would release tons of trapped methane, further warming the planet. The United Nations’ abbreviated list of the already established and growing climate change problems includes warming and acidifying oceans; more-extreme weather events such as flooding and heatwaves; changes to crop yields; and sea-level rise. Already, the lot of these things, rather than recognize the ways in which they’re overlapping and intersecting,” Davis says.

For example: Portland, Ore., has long claimed a leadership role in environmentalism. The city was one of the first to adopt a light rail transit system; it has plans to create a zero-emissions bus fleet; and in 2018, its school district agreed to implement a progressive climate-change curriculum after a petition from students and teachers.

But the benefits of climate action have not been felt equitably in Portland. Writing for Fast Company in November, Alisa Kane, the climate action manager for the city’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, noted how unjust urban planning has left behind children of color.

“Decades of institutional racism and gentrification pushed Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latinx communities from Portland’s central city to its outer neighborhoods,” Kane wrote. “What was waiting for them there? Poor transit options, a deficit of trees and parks and inequitable investments in infrastructure. These areas are also farther from job centers, leading to longer commute times and distances and increased transportation costs.”

These differences are common in cities and lead to disparities in opportunities but also in health. Black and Hispanic people are the most likely demographic groups to live next to freeways (think Los Angeles’ Interstate 10), which research shows exposes them to poor air quality, increasing the likelihood of asthma. Food insecurity hits communities of color harder, meaning that the kind of price shocks that affects food—say, after a natural disaster—would most hurt people of color.

“We can’t make the environment separate from people, and we can’t separate people from the environment,” Davis says. “And if that’s the case, we have to ask which people are most likely to be affected by what’s happening.”

In September, the United Nations’ Michelle Bachelet declared climate change the leading threat to human rights: “This is not a situation where any country, any institution, any policymaker can stand on the sidelines,” she said. The high commissioner for human rights. “The economies of all nations, the institutional, political, social and cultural fabric of every state, and the rights of all your people—and future generations—will be impacted.”

Experts say that climate change has the capacity to undermine democratic systems by making existing inequalities worse and causing civic instability. It is against this backdrop that the youth-organized climate-strike movement has boomed, in which hundreds of thousands of students worldwide have walked out of school to protest systemic inaction on anthropogenic climate change. Those strikes and an abundance of other evidence suggest that both K-12 and higher education systems are unprepared to meet students’ demands for a better climate education. And if so—if our educational institutions are unable to meaningfully address the greatest threat to our democracy and to human rights—then what does that say about the purpose and priorities of our educational systems?

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The largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions are electricity, transportation, manufacturing and agriculture. In October, the Climate Accountability Institute released a report naming 20 companies responsible for 35 percent of the world’s carbon emissions since 1995; 12 are foreign-state-owned energy companies, while the remaining include names familiar to most Americans, such as Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP and Shell.

How much students learn about climate change depends on their state’s curricular standards; whether their teachers have adequate preparation, materials, desire and political cover to effectively teach it; and what resources educational institutions are willing to invest in creating learning opportunities.

Given what we know about climate change, it would be unfair to lay the responsibility for fixing it solely at the feet of an education system that is chronically underfunded, ignored and overburdened. But polls show that many adults lack a basic climate science education; research suggests that climate science education may be helpful to reducing climate change; and most of all, as evidenced by the student-led climate strike in Los Angeles on Nov. 1, students want it.

“We need a moonshot,” says Gale Sinatra, an expert on science education and the Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education at USC Rossier. “We need the Sputnik of climate education.”

How Students Experience Climate Change

The most extreme long-run effects of climate change will hit everyone, but low-income communities and, especially, students of color are already disproportionately feeling the effects.

Indeed, experts say the movements for equity and for action on climate change need each other.

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BETWEEN A HOT ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

Each state has its own standards for what children should know by the time they graduate from high school. Last decade, a coalition of teachers, researchers and education nonprofits produced the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), an initiative meant to unify science standards across the U.S. Twenty states and the District of Columbia have adopted NGSS, while many other states have adopted similar standards.

Yet English and Math classes overshadow science classes in terms of instructional time, Sinatra says, and being able to learn climate science obviously presupposes that students have learned science generally. But a 2016 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that science teachers need more preparation under NGSS.

“It’s like you’ve never even jogged before,” Sinatra says, “and now you’re going to run the Boston Marathon.”

NGSS does include climate science elements, but the implementation of those standards varies wildly between schools and even between classrooms. Environmental literacy is not otherwise mandated in most states; Maryland was first of a handful to do so in 2017.

And political differences can skew curricula between states; for example, a January review by The New York Times found a more-conservative approach to climate change in Texas textbooks than California texts.

“We know that what’s actually implemented in classrooms often varies considerably from what’s in the standards,” says Morgan Pulkoff, an associate professor of education at USC Rossier and an expert on standards and curriculum. “The question is, if this is an important priority—and by all accounts it should be—what specific content and strategies are being implemented at the school to ensure that students are learning about climate change and what they can do to combat it?”

Remember how those students in Portland petitioned for a better climate change curriculum? In March 2019, students staged a walkout because the district hadn’t implemented what it said it would. A science teacher told The New York Times that he had sent a letter of concern to the superintendent, relaying that he had “sent 30 students out of my class,” but the superintendent told him that “there just isn’t time” to address interest in climate change.

“I tell them that ‘there just isn’t time’ to address interest when it comes to educating themselves about climate change,” writes the author. “You can’t expect to see that in the classroom until you’re seeing it here.”

In their book Teaching Climate Change to Adolescents: Reading, Writing, and Making a Difference, authors and professors Richard Beach, Jeff Share and Allen Webb write that school districts need to understand that state standards aren’t so confining: “A purely science-oriented approach to climate change can miss the social, historical, ethical and human realities that are critical to the problem.”

But it’s one thing to write that, and it’s another thing for an interested teacher to have the resources and knowledge, much less feel supported, to tackle climate change in a non-science classroom.

Van Nguyen, MAT ’17, has been a teacher of science and engineering for 13 years. Although he can point to a proactive history of bringing climate change into the classroom, he says the level of similar concern among colleagues varies widely, with some teachers worried about re-credentialing or having to learn new curricula.

“If you’re doing a free workshop on a Saturday,” Nguyen says, “you have to really be into your stuff.”

Nguyen adds that students are not so monolithic in their activism, which means that teachers need to lead on climate science education.

“Bring it up more than they do,” he says.

HIGHER EDUCATION

When she took over as USC’s 12th president, Carol Folt galvanized an institution that many objective measures had lagged behind its peers for years on sustainable practices.

In her few years leading the university, Folt has made climate change one of the signature issues of her presidency. Early actions included reinstating a discount on bus and rail passes for USC employees, planning the installation of solar panels at the Galen Center and USC Wrigley Marine Science Center, and establishing a working group to guide the university’s future sustainability efforts. (Smarta is a member.)

“The culture at USC is changing,” says Claire Mauss ’09, an environmental sciences and health major and co-executive director of USC’s Environmental Student Assembly (ESA). “There was a student tradition for a long time, and it wasn’t until we got this new administration that we’ve actually been able to do anything.”

Mauss says the ESA has been working on a project that would establish mandated training for incoming freshmen around environmental and climate change, the way students already must learn about alcohol consumption. At the university level, the provost’s office is exploring how to improve climate change education. (To learn about one path USC Rossier is taking to address climate change, see page.)

Experts say that a key component of climate change education is having institutions examine their own practices; schools can’t expect to teach students about climate change and escape culpability for their own roles in accelerating it.

“The more you learn about the climate and what it’s doing to society, the more you want to do something about it,” says Victoria Petryshyn, an assistant professor of environmental studies at USC and teacher of a history class focused on climate change. “I bring it up more than they do,” he says. “And if nobody does anything, then they don’t want to do anything.”

Mauss says universities are working against a system not designed to do this:

“We have to be willing to ask a host of questions about how committed they are to fighting climate change: How sustainable are the school’s suppliers? How might meat consumption be reduced on campus?”

What barriers exist to creating more climate change classes? Should a climate change course or service-learning component be a graduation requirement? What barriers exist to making climate change one of the signature issues of a university’s presidency? Is the school acting as a good partner for the community in which it exists?

“I think it’s an unprecedented amount of change,” Mauss says. “Universities are working against a system not designed to do this.”

But, she says—in a positive sign that awareness and activism are spreading—incoming classes are showing excitement about addressing the issue.

“We first meeting this year had 150 attendees,” Mauss says. “We had freshmen emailing us over the summer asking how to get involved. The more I see you start to get involved with this, the more hopeful I become.”

That’s the kind of progress necessary to help fix such a large, multifaceted problem, the USC Rossier professor says, climate anxiety is merited, but the minimum that educational institutions can do is signal urgency instead of fatalism.

“THERE’S SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR WHETHER, DESPITE ITS DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS OF DEVELOPING AND FORMING PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATE AND ENGAGE IN SOCIETY, OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS CONSISTENTLY GONE AWAY FROM THE THINGS THAT IMPROVE THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF EVERY-DAY PEOPLE AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.”

—Charles H.F. Davis III, USC Rossier Assistant Professor of Clinical Education

Climate Change Resources for Educators

Teachers—and the public in general—often don’t know where to start when it comes to educating themselves about climate change. Here’s our guide.

THE SCIENCE

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is the United Nations body tasked with gathering the data on climate change. Their latest report represents “state of the art” scientific knowledge on climate change,” says Gail Sinatra, the Stephen H. Crocker Professor of Education at USC Rossier.

FOR EDUCATORS

A growing number of resources show how climate change is interdisciplinary. We recommend two.


The NAACP has been on the front lines of the climate justice movement and has amassed scores of teaching resources connecting climate change with equity.

MORE

Visit raisein.teachingclimateforthese and additional resources.

As covered by The Chronicle of Higher Education, universities haven’t been as responsive to moral or environmental imperatives as so many of the economic ones. Investments in renewable energy are now showing more long-term promise than fossil fuels. More than three-fourths of colleges and universities—primarily in left-leaning states—have withdrawn or begun to withdraw from fossil fuel investments.

Student protests have been more effective in bringing transparency; in February, for example, pressure from a coalition of student environmental groups such as Mauss’ successfully pressured USC to divest that it has any money invested in fossil fuels.

In addition to finances, colleges and universities have to be willing to ask a host of questions about how committed they are to fighting climate change: How sustainable are the school’s suppliers? How might meat consumption be reduced on campus?

### TEACHER BARRIERS

It’s not that most teachers are uninterested in climate justice. The California Federation of Teachers (CFT), for instance, claims to be the first statewide labor organization to adopt a Climate Justice Agenda, in 2016. CFT followed up on that agenda by offering a climate justice toolkit for teaching and by pushing for the state’s teacher pension fund to divest from the fossil fuel industry.

In truth, the majority of four teachers agree that climate change and its impact should be taught in schools, per a August survey by Public Radio. Yet in the same survey only in 40 teachers say they teach climate change. (Only 40 percent of parents talk to their children about it.)

By an overwhelming margin, surveyed teachers who don’t teach climate change say it’s because it’s not their subject area. This may be a reflection of a broader view-point within district leadership that sees climate science education as incompatible with the many things schools are already asked to do.

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fostering abstract thinking in adolescents is essential to democracy. 

We have some interesting new longitudinal data on adolescents. We can show that there are certain dispositions of mind—propensities toward engaging with social scenarios in ways that facilitate reflection on broader implications, the bigger historical context and values that are at stake—that, in some ways, help you transcend beyond just here and now. What our data suggests is that engaging in these styles of meaning-making grows the brain.

The kids who were inclined toward engaging empathetically, directly in the world, but then transcending that and making broader kinds of more abstract meaning, that is what actually allowed us to predict their brain development two years later. When kids did this, and also activated their brains in ways that suggested it wasn’t just empty words, then we could predict they’ll have better ego integrity, a better sense of values and self-worth, and feel more fulfilled and purposeful as young adults, no matter their IQ.

A democracy is about being able to manage those two ways of making meaning and regulating your behavior. On the one side, you have to be respectful and engage with other people. But that’s not enough to build a democracy or a person. To be a fully acted and functioning member of democracy means that you can infer the deeper intentions and patterns of beliefs and values that are instantiated in the way we act over time and the broader implications of what’s going on based on our historical past and our hypothetical futures.

Being able to think in that abstract realm—that culturally, socially constructed realm—that’s grounded in broad values like justice and equity. Those kinds of things, you can’t see them looking at the world. Diversity doesn’t equal equity. Equity is an intent. Being able to transcend to build broader meaning seems to be instrumental for adolescent development and well-being, and it’s fundamental to a functioning democracy.

How can educators help foster empathy and this type of abstract thinking?

In a classroom, you need people to be able to get along with each other and regulate themselves. But data has suggested that you need to transcend that. You need to be able to think about the bigger story of what’s happening. And when kids are not set up with opportunities to construct their own beliefs about what’s happening, to reflect on those together, and to reexamine, elaborate on them and also curtail them when necessary, you get predictable things like, “Why do we have to know this?” That question should never happen. Kids ought to know why they need to know this, because they are dying to know it, because something they’re working on demands that they must understand it.

What educators need to focus on is deep, interconnected, thoughtful, project-oriented work, where kids are always engaging socially around the work, explaining the work to others [and] reflecting on their process. Those kinds of authentic learning activities, when they’re higher and structured well, produce much higher-level thinking than what [going] into the tight rubrics and questions.

You built boats with street children in Russia and studied traditional boatbuilding in Kenya. What attracted you to boat-building, and how did this experience shape your work?

That was a long time ago, but it was pretty seminal for my identity. I wanted to explore the world. I wanted to learn languages. I was fascinated with how people build traditions around construction. Traditional ways of teaching and engaging with one another enable people to build things that are amazingly complex, beautiful and functional. Huge boats made out of wood with no power tools!

For an expanded version of this interview, please visit rsoe.in/immordino-yang

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang

Neuroscientist, psychologist, former teacher and mother to two teenagers, professor Immordino-Yang discusses why fostering abstract thinking in adolescents is essential to democracy.

Interview: Kianooosh Hashemzadeh Illustration: Heather Monahan

IN CONVERSATION

This issue explores the relationship between democracy and education. Why is empathy important in a democracy?

The Center for Affective Neuroscience and Developmental Learning in Education (CANDLE) just launched. What are your goals for the center?

CANDLE is a continuation and renaming of activities that I’ve been building up for years. The new projects will be collaborative, between educators and education scholars like myself, because that’s really where it’s at. We need to build science that informs important questions in education, answers what people need to know and gives new insights into what’s going on, without telling people what to do.

My hope for CANDLE is to launch a new kind of conversation in education about what counts as learning, that shifts the purpose that people understand schools to have in society. I think it will help us to reexamine the big assumptions that undergird modern education and shift to a conversation that’s more centered on development as the desired process and outcome—[understanding] learning as a way to promote development, but not as the main outcome of education.

It profoundly changes the way you think about achievement, accountability and assessment. We’ve known for a long time that the best preschool experiences do this. You can’t ignore kids’ social emotional growth, agency and ability to regulate themselves in a preschool environment or the place will fall apart. Older kids are able to compensate for our bad design, basically except that then they show mental health problems, higher levels of anxiety, depression and boredom, and drop out of school because they’re bored.

You’re incredibly busy. What do you do to relax?

I have a regular yoga practice, which isn’t relaxing—it’s actually super strenuous—but it’s kind of a moving meditation. I like to feel fit and to engage. And it’s a nice community that I’m part of. I also think just as important as what I do is what I don’t do. I hardly watch TV or movies. I don’t use social media. I’m not saying these things are bad—I just don’t have the bandwidth. I imagine the balance will be different once my kids are grown, but as of right now, it’s them or Facebook. —R

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Karen Symms Gallagher was a doctoral student in education administration in the early 1980s when she began to consider a big step in her career.

She’d spent a decade climbing the K–12 district ladder in her native Washington state, North Carolina and Indiana, serving in positions that included middle school social studies teacher, PE teacher, women’s basketball coach and assistant principal.

As the first member of her family to graduate from college, she had battled the odds and triumphed. So, she thought: Why not reach for the superintendency?

When she brought up the possibility with her PhD adviser at Purdue University, however, the response she received was discouraging. “She said, ‘You have two problems,’” Gallagher recalled recently.

The first was that Gallagher wasn’t a Hoosier, practically a prerequisite at that time as far as Indiana school boards were concerned. “You’d have to spend 20 years here,” her adviser warned, before her candidacy would be taken seriously.

And the second obstacle?

“You’re a woman.”

The adviser suggested that higher education was more open to women in leadership, so Gallagher changed direction. She wound up becoming the first female dean at the University of Kansas School of Education in 1994 and repeated that first at USC Rossier in 2000. But she never lost sight of the challenges confronting qualified women aiming for top leadership roles.

Across the U.S., few women occupied the superintendency when Gallagher was in graduate school, and their numbers remain disproportionately low. Women make up 78 percent of teachers, 52 percent of principals and 78 percent of central office administrators but only 33 percent of the nation’s superintendents, according to AASA, The School Superintendents Association.

The preponderance of women in USC Rossier’s programs also underscores the disparity. Women make up 65 percent of the enrollment in the doctoral program in educational leadership. Across all of the school’s master’s and doctoral programs, 71 percent of the students are women.

With such a large talent pool, why are women still so poorly represented in the superintendent’s office? What roadblocks do they face in the difficult climb to the most powerful job in K–12 education?

These are among the questions that will command Gallagher’s attention in fall 2021 when she returns to the faculty in a senior research position. After two decades as the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of USC Rossier, she says she looks forward to diving into research about the factors that hinder women’s progress as education leaders, particularly in the K–12 arena.
Her interest in the subject echoes what has been the overarching theme of her deanship and the centerpiece of USC Rossier's mission: advancing educational equity for historically marginalized groups, whose success is essential to a healthy democracy.

“What does it mean to be advancing educational equity when there's such a strong mismatch between who is in our programs and who are getting into the superintendency or becoming community college chancellor?” Gallagher said in an interview not long after deciding that this would be her last term as dean. “I'm interested in finding out: Where is the disconnect and what can we do about it? How can we find out what's causing it?”

“This is what I'll like to do, work on these issues as well as teach,” she said. “That's where I can continue contributing to our mission.”

To help her, she’s made two decades of transformative leadership, the school has launched a 1,000,000 campaign to endow the Karen Syms Gallagher Scholarship, which will support doctoral students—especially women—who have demonstrated their commitment to USC Rossier’s mission and seek to become leaders in education.

She said she hopes the scholarship will send a strong message to the recipients. “I hope they will feel it means they have something to live up to,” she said, “that they'll feel we've recognized their talents and their need.”

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

As dean, Gallagher has driven equity and diversity to the top of USC Rossier’s agenda. Those goals form the crux of the mission statement the school adopted in 2017: “Prepare leaders to achieve educational equity and inclusion. That's so remarkable compared to where we were.”

For instance, the past three years are women, and 14 are individuals of color. “One of the biggest criticisms at the time of the review was that we weren't really known for anything distinctive. Everyone [on the faculty] was doing their own thing, none of it very well,” said Professor Emeritus of Education Robert Rueda, who taught at USC Rossier for 30 years. “That began to change at the start of Dean Gallagher's tenure.”

Gallagher embraced the academic review as a blueprint for change. Her first order of business was bringing a seamless budgeting under control through a series of austersities. (She has demonstrated fiscal responsibility every since—not only balancing the school's budget through increasing tuition by $6 million to $7 million, (Psssst.) Then, she convened key faculty, staff, and students in a three-day retreat to build consensus on new directions. “We were going to tear everything down and start over. Which we did,” Rueda said. “It was an intentional starting point to create something different.”

The first major effort was to redesign the doctoral programs so that each had a distinct purpose. The PhD program was scaled down and geared to students who desired careers as scholars. The EdD became the flagship program, aimed at producing research-savvy practitioners who wanted to lead school systems.

The new approach, unveiled in 2015, earned praise from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. After bringing it to the traditional model for education schools. Its success was a turning point for USC Rossier, “a key factor in changing the nature of the school,” according to Myron Dembo, a professor emeritus of educational policy who chaired the redesign effort with former Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Stuart Gehold EdD ’94.

“Karen,” Dembo said, “has to be credited with moving the school into a new era.”

The successful overhaul of the doctoral programs was the first of several groundbreaking initiatives in the Gallagher era.

The dean ushered the school into the digital age with the launch of the first fully online master of arts in teaching program in a major U.S. research university. It enrolled more than the school’s traditional MAT program.

Next, she led the school in a bold experiment to operationalize USC Rossier’s vision of pre-service education by creating a school, whose curriculum is marginalized neighborhoodsthe Ednovate network of schools, which serves predominantly low-income Latino/ African American students, has achieved a 100 percent graduation and college acceptance rate for each of the five graduating classes since 2016.

In the world of higher education, you can get stuck sometimes in a level of abstraction and theory. Sometimes it can be hard to innovate and bring those ideas into practice. Karen is not afraid of that at all,” said Benjamin Riley, a Ph.D candidate and executive director of Deans for Impact, an alliance of education leaders working to improve teacher preparation programs of which Gallagher is a founding member. “She’s a doer.”

The dean can attest to the significance of the position. Early in her career, she was asked to coach basketball for middle-school girls.

“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY WHEN THERE'S SUCH A STRONG MISMATCH BETWEEN WHO IS IN OUR PROGRAMS AND WHO IS GETTING INTO THE SUPERINTENDENCY?”

Karen Syms Gallagher, Dean

Under Gallagher, USC Rossier has risen in national prominence. For the past four years, it is ranked in the nation’s top 15 graduate schools of education, according to U.S. News & World Report. The magazine has also rated USC Rossier No. 1 in research dollars per faculty.

At the same time, the school has continued its proud history of supporting California’s school districts with superintendents. Currently, 75 of the state’s nearly 1,400 superintendents are Trojans. Of those 75, almost half—37—are women.

Although exact figures are not available, about 42 percent of 85 California districts surveyed by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) are led by women. That’s higher than the national average of 33 percent but too low considering the prevalence of women in the classroom and administrative ranks.

Four years ago, Gallagher began hosting a breakfast at ACSA’s annual Superintendents’ Symposium for women in the Deans’ Superintendents Advisory Group (DSAG). Founded in the early 1980s as a support group for USC Rossier, DSAG was dominated by male superintendents, including many who were retired.

“Karen noticed that women were in the minority and wondered what they could do to elevate their voice and be a stronger influence in that group,” said Professor of Clinical Education Maria Ort, who led the Rowland Unified School District and Little Lake City School District before joining USC Rossier in 2012.

At the DSAG women’s breakfasts, the dean invites attendees to share the challenges they have faced in climbing the administrative ladder. She particularly remembers the story one graduate told about her interview with a school board as a candidate for the superintendent’s job.

“Many of the questions directed at her were about her husband,” Gallagher recounted. “He’d never done it. She was doing it alone and had her husband approve of her going after this job! How did her husband feel about relocating?”

Ironically, the head of the board was a woman, and she was the one asking those questions.

“Our graduate student,” Dembo said, “didn't want the job if that's what they're saying to me. So school boards are obviously a big barrier to women seeking to move up.”

Four Terms, Four Questions

What was the most memorable USC football game you attended?

“I think it would have to be the "Bush Push" in 2005, it appeared that we were losing. But then we came back and won. That’s how I knew, we’re really Trojans!”

What do you remember about your first day as dean of USC Rossier?

“The drive down the 110, I had left early because I didn’t know how long it was going to take to get there, I had thought like, “I guess we’re not in Kansas anymore”.

What do you consider as one of your greatest achievements in your role as deanship?

I would say the fact that 20 years later, we’ve had differences on how to do things, but not about what we value. The Cultural Values Agenda’s three goals form the crux of the mission statement—the school adopted in 2017: “Prepare leaders to achieve educational equity and inclusion.” That’s so remarkable compared to where we were.”

If you could revisit a part of your career and alter it, what would it be?

I wouldn’t say to my younger self: You know what you want to do, so you might as well do it. And say it out loud.

In hindsight, what advice would you give to your younger self?

I would say to my younger self: You know what you want to do, so you might as well do it. And say it out loud.

SURMOUNTING BARRIERS

Gallagher is passionate about identifying barriers and the strategies to overcome them. “Many of the questions directed at her were about her husband,” Gallagher recounted. “He’d never done it. She was doing it alone and had her husband approve of her going after this job! How did her husband feel about relocating?”

Ironically, the head of the board was a woman, and she was the one asking those questions.

“Our graduate student,” Dembo said, “didn’t want the job if that’s what they’re saying to me. So school boards are obviously a big barrier to women seeking to move up.”

Karen Syms Gallagher, Dean

The "disconnect" between who’s in the pipeline and who reaches the top jobs is not limited to USC Rossier. Nationally, women received nearly 70 percent of education doctorates in 2017–18. In fact, women have earned more than 50 percent of all doctorates for so many years.

So do women lack the desire to lead?

In a 2010 study by Margaret Gregor and C. Cyryn Brunnier, 40 percent of women in central office administration reported that they aspired to the superintendency; 15 percent had the credential or were working toward it. In a 2010 follow-up, Brunnier and Tong-Ly Lum Ken found that nearly all female central office administrators who aspired to the superintendency had their credentials.

Family obligations are commonly thought to be a factor in the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, but researchers are finding a yearning for traditionalism.

Using responses from more than 700 female superintendents who participated in the American Association of School Administrators’ 2007 National Study of Women Superintendents and Central Office Administrators, Brunnier and Kim reported on the top four reasons female administrators didn’t aspire to the superintendency:

1) They were satisfied with their current positions and didn’t want to change jobs;
2) The politics of the superintendent’s job didn’t appeal to them;
3) The superintendent’s job was too stressful; and
4) The salary wasn’t commensurate with the responsibilities.

As Brunnier and Kim noted, all four of these reasons could easily be cited by men. Only 17 percent of the respondents in the AASA survey cited family demands as an impediment.

Another study that Brunnier co-led found that 37 percent of female superintendents had raised children under the age of 20 while they were in the position; 15 percent of the women raised children who were 20 or younger.

If formal preparation, ambition and family concerns are not holding women back, then what? Women are especially interested in investigating “structural barriers” to women’s progress—where the pipeline breaks down.

Studies of the career paths that lead to the superintendency’s office show a stark difference. Women are finding this isn’t the case.

For women, the rise to the top is quite linear and simple, leading from the classroom to coaching to principal, with a stint as assistant or associate superintendent before landing at the top.

For women, the path is neither simple nor straightforward. Instead, it involves many steps: leaving the classroom to teaching to principal, with a stint as assistant or associate superintendent before landing at the top.

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Paths to the Superintendent: **Women vs. Men**

This chart compares men’s and women’s most typical paths to U.S. superintendent. While men’s mobility is concentrated in line positions, women’s paths include both line and staff roles. Although men’s path to the superintendency is simpler, Brunner and Kim argue that this doesn’t necessarily mean that they are more prepared than women, whose paths typically include more variation and focus on curriculum and teaching.

**“THE ISSUE IS NOT ABOUT WOMEN GETTING READY. THEY’RE READY.”**
— Karen Symms Gallagher, Dean

**THE NEXT CHAPTER**

A year has passed since Gallagher began wrestling with the decision about whether to pursue a fifth term as dean. Her family, who too often had to take a back seat to her work, was excited by the prospect of spending more time with her. “My son said, ‘Think about having time to be a grandmother,’” Gallagher recalled.

She was also swayed by an article in The Atlantic by Arthur C. Brooks that was ominously titled “Your Professional Decline Is Coming (Much) Sooner Than You Think.”

In the piece, Brooks described the experiences of high achievers, including athletes, artists and academics, noting the average age at which they peaked and faltered. Gallagher thought of people she has known who “stayed too long” in their jobs and concluded that she didn’t want to be one of them.

And she was inspired by Brooks’ advice for finding late-life happiness: Avoid the temptation to keep accumulating accomplishments—running one more marathon, writing one more book, earning another million dollars—but focus instead on cultivating the most meaningful personal virtues. “As we grow older,” Brooks wrote, “we shouldn’t acquire more, but rather strip things away to find our true selves—and thus, peace.”

For Gallagher, that odyssey means taking a sabbatical year to adjust to the rhythms of her next phase, then plunging back into teaching and research.

“I’m very proud of my career,” she said. “But everybody gets to the point where you should go try to do another thing.”

She intends to give her successor the space to create new directions for the school. But, she adds, “I’m not done making a difference in education. I think I can do it in other ways.”

**THE ISSUE IS NOT ABOUT WOMEN GETTING READY. THEY’RE READY.”**
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**KEYS TO THE KAREN SYMMS GALLAGHER ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

Gifts to the Karen Symms Gallagher Endowed Scholarship Fund can be made online at rossier.usc.edu/giving or by check payable to the University of Southern California and mailed to: University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education, 1149 S. Hill St., Suite 575, Los Angeles, CA 90005.
DEMONSTRATING DEMOCRACY

How a San Diego school led by refugees is cultivating civic engagement

Rossier alum is cultivating civic engagement

During a lesson in January exploring the principles of Athenian democracy, Rachel Davey, a teacher at City Heights Preparatory Charter School in San Diego, explained to her sixth-grade class the meaning of the word “democracy.” The word comes from two Greek words, she said: demos, meaning “the people,” and kratia meaning “power or rule.” Rule by the people. The students—a group overwhelmingly made up of refugees—took it in words. Some nodded. Others scribbled details on their sticky notes and whispered in their partners’ ears. The students in Davey’s class work at shared tables. In fact, you won’t find individual desks arranged in neat rows anywhere within City Heights Prep. The classrooms are designed to foster collaboration and facilitate discussions among students.

And when a Socratic seminar is on the agenda, as it was in Davey’s class on Jan. 21, all of these tables are pushed into the center of the room. For these text-based discussions, the students gather round the single, central table, seated in two rows. The inner row is made up of the “pilots,” the speakers during the seminar. Behind them, in the outer row, are the “co-pilots,” who listen closely to the discussion. They take notes and quietly pass back their questions and observations about the subject at hand to the pilots.

City Heights Prep, directed by Elias Vargas EdD ’17, uses Socratic seminars in all of its levels, grades 6 through 12. Some students, like junior Abdiltacak, prefer to be a pilot. “It makes you feel like you’re more engaged and involved in the process,” he said. Abdiltacak, a Somali Bantu refugee born in Kenya, has been at City Heights Prep for seven years.

Others, like junior Hinda, an Ethiopian refugee, would rather be the co-pilot. “Sometimes I’m too scared to say something. I feel like it might be wrong,” she said. “But if I have some-one [to work with], I write it down and pass it to her and she [can] agree with me if it’s a good idea.”

Socratic seminars are a sort of representative democracy in miniature. The pilots are the voice; the co-pilots the body politic. Each role is valued equally: Listening is just as important as speaking. There are no right or wrong answers in indecipherable to the average ear (see page 39), the Socratic seminar encourages engagement from all students in the discussion—both those speaking and those listening.

But before a class can even begin to participate in a Socratic seminar, it’s essential for students to consider their peers’ voices as “something they want to hear,” Davey explained. Without this environment of mutual respect, where everyone’s voice matters, the Socratic seminar, like democracy, will not function properly.

But within the walls of this small charter school in City Heights, a community on the east side of San Diego, the promise spoken by Lafayette’s “Mother of Exiles” is kept. The student body at City Heights Prep is roughly 85 percent refugee. More than 30 languages are spoken among the 350 pupils, and students interact freely with one another. Bullying is largely ab- sent, and the annual potluck day where stu-dents bring dishes from their native countries is one of their favorite events of the year.

Breitbart, a junior whose family emigrated from Ethiopia as refugees, said, this “night-time (community) is different from traditional schools,” and it has been life-changing for him. He has many groups of friends from a variety of backgrounds, and when new students arrive, they often fit in immediately.

SANTO COUNTY has historically welcomed refugees, and for many, City Heights has become a haven. Data compiled from the 2010 census estimates that City Heights’ pop- ulation comprises residents from more than 50 countries, including Vietnam, Syria, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Iraq, Ethiopia, Somalia, Laos, Mexico and Guatemala. This population is reflected at the school—and with it comes challenges, but also a cultural richness.

Most students who find their way to City Heights Prep initially hear about the school via word of mouth—admission is free and open to all. When students arrive, many are learn-ing English, and many come from socioeco- nomic disadvantaged backgrounds or from experiences of war. Students have what Vargas describes as “interrupted education.” One group of teenage boys from Syria had spent months in a refugee camp before finding their way to City Heights Prep. During their time at the camp, Vargas said, the only formal schooling the boys received was an hour of Arabic each day.

When Vargas was appointed director in fall 2018, the school was housed in a church, and only a small percentage of students were
meeting state standards. Since then, Vargas has overseen the relocation of the school and hired new staff—including a full-time counselor to address students’ academic and emotional needs—and test scores have increased significantly.

In 2016–17, 41.4 percent of City Heights Prep students met California’s standards for English language arts and only 8.4 percent for math. By 2018–19, those numbers had risen to 36.5 percent and 20.8 percent, respectively.

Impressive, to say the least.

Although Vargas is proud of this metric (after all, test scores are an unavoidable circumstance of the current education system and the way California measures a school’s success), he is adamant that he is not just concerned with the academic and test scores—those that constitute the current education system and the way California measures a school’s success—and are instead focused on closing the opportunity gap. The Socratic seminar is one such classroom activity, and it’s an exemplar of how an AVID school approaches its goal of preparing students for life after they graduate. It encourages students to communicate positively, listen actively and take focused notes. It asks students to think outside the textbook and engage in their own inquiry. It asks them to see themselves in what they are studying.

Vargas finds the AVID approach especially useful for underrepresented students and English-language learners. And there’s data to support this. According to figures from the National Student Clearinghouse, 2016–2018, and AVID Senior Data Collection, 2010–2012, four-generation and low-income students who graduate from high schools where AVID is a part of curriculum are four times more likely than their peers to graduate from college within six years.

The ability to apply an approach like AVID to an entire school was one reason that Vargas was attracted to the position. Before City Heights Prep, he had never worked in a charter school. He held a variety of roles—from basketball coach and social studies teacher to high school principal—in the El Rancho Unified School District in southeastern Los Angeles County. But while City Heights Prep does not have all the resources that come along with a large school district—things like IT and HR departments—the school is able to make decisions swiftly and institute changes to benefit students.


These are some of the words that Assistant Director Mrs. Mohammed—who came to the U.S. as a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan—and school counselor Amanda Graffiti used to describe Vargas. Michael Watts, board chair of City Heights Prep and a first-generation college student himself—describes Vargas as “a pro” and “a great leader.” When Watts and the rest of the search committee were evaluating candidates to lead the school, they were “looking for someone who could apply real sound educational principles and orthodoxy to a very diverse [student body]” and could take the school to the next level. Vargas fit the bill. He also encourages professional development and gives his staff the space to be creative and incorporate new ideas.

When speaking of his philosophy of education, Vargas refers to a famous Albert Einstein quote: “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” Vargas believes exposure to possible career paths—from app developer to attorney—can help students find a calling they will excel at and enjoy.

Through a grant from the nonprofit Project Lead the Way, the school offers multiple PLTW courses including, Computer Science for Innovators and App Creators, which shows students who love playing games on their phone what it might be like to develop them instead. Through courses like this one, students are exposed to what a career path could entail. And while some might learn they love creating apps as much as playing on them, others will realize this is not the right path for them.

This exposure, Vargas believes, is essential in helping students form their identities—not only for their personal fulfillment, but also so they can contribute positively to their communities.

THE SOC RATIC SEMINAR

1 Students are arranged around a central table. Plans, who lead discussions, sit at the table and their co-pilots sit directly behind them, passing notes with their own questions and observations.

2 Sixth graders in Ms. Davey’s class discuss the meaning of democracy.

Socrates SEMINARS ARE A SORT OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN MINIATURE. THE PILOTS ARE THE VOICE, THE CO-PILOTS ARE THE BODY POLITIC.

JON MORRIS, a lawyer-turned-educator at City Heights Prep who teaches 11th- and 12th-grade courses like Language of Law and Public Policy, says education should help “prepare students who can engage in democracy.” But what are the tools required for engaging in democracy? If a populace is to elect officials to represent them—from school board members to the president of the United States—it’s important to be equipped with the ability to think critically about issues and to engage in deliberation with fellow citizens.

Morris asked students to prepare legal memos that examined President Donald Trump’s now-infamous phone call with

CARRYING THE TORCH

SO, WHERE ARE WE GOING TO GO FOR THE DOCTORATE?

1 A former classmate of Elias Vargas EdD ‘17 posed this question to him regularly, and it eventually led him to the USC Rossier School of Education. After attending an informational session, he soon realized that the school’s Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program was an excellent fit for him. He felt that the USC Rossier faculty had “the right balance of practitioners and researchers.”

His dissertation focused on English learners in urban schools in California. Rudy Castruita, professor of clinical education at USC Rossier and Virginia Archer Melchoir Chair in Education Administration, served as the chair of his dissertation committee. Castruita, Vargas said, “both pushed and praised me.” The two share a special bond—Castruita once taught “Elias is one of my top doctoral students that I’ve had over the years at Rossier.” Castruita adds “and, of course, he will really impact the educational arena in the future because of his leadership, his passion and because he wants to make a difference in the lives of many, many students.”

Vargas’ experience as a student at USC Rossier—and, in particular, as a recipient of the Dean’s Superintendent Advisory Group scholarship—encouraged him to stand up for underrepresented students and be “that voice at the table” to empower communities and systems through the culture of institutions. He’s taken this mindset to City Heights Prep, where he intends to be “one of the many [who] carry the torch for USC Rossier’s mission and vision.”

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The students worked in groups of three to examine the call and make a determination on whether Trump violated federal law. Hinda explained, “We were studying our leader doing something he shouldn’t.” She enjoyed the project.

Many of the students come from nations where civil wars rage, and where democracy either doesn’t exist or is in tatters. Some have witnessed its unraveling. Kun, a senior who said “being highly informed” is essential to being a good citizen, is originally from Cambodia. After years of civil war and turmoil, the nation’s fragile democracy is threatened, despite international intervention. Media freedom—to name just one essential ingredient to a functioning democracy—has been “further curtailed,” a 2019 Human Rights Watch report found.

Another assignment asked students to select a law they believe to be unjust or one they would like to see enacted, and write a paper asserting their position. Topics ranged from overturning the law forbidding people from feeding homeless individuals to banning single-use plastic bags.

The project, however, will not end with their papers. The students, again working in teams, will identify and reach out to organizations sympathetic to their cause. They’ll then contact their local representatives and advocate for seeing the legislation overturned or rewritten.

The students at City Heights Prep are learning that democracy is ultimately a practice. It requires engaged citizens to participate and help shape the rules that govern them. It is not static. As the needs of the people who make up the democracy change, so must the democracy that represents them.

As I said goodbye to the students at City Heights Prep, Bereket and the other upperclassmen I spoke with asked if I could “give a shout-out” to Mr. Chalabi, the school’s meals and facilities coordinator. Mr. Chalabi, Bereket said, does so much for the students: He prepares their meals, fixes anything that’s broken, cleans the school and coaches after-school soccer. The students recognized and appreciated his essential role at the school. Democracy requires respect and equity to flourish, and the students at City Heights Prep understand these fundamental principles—perhaps because they know what it means to live without them.

Elias Vargas EdD ’17 is not just concerned with graduating students with high test scores, just as essential, he said, is graduating good citizens who appreciate diversity and will “embrace and develop their talents to engage with the world.”

What Happened to School Debate Teams?

These days, if you attend a high school or collegiate debate competition, chances are you might not be able to understand what the competitors are saying. In Policy debates—a competition in which two sides advocate for or against U.S. policy changes—each side is judged on the ability to present as much evidence as possible in a short timeframe. This speed reading, dubbed “spreading,” leads competitors to recite their arguments at speeds around 350 words per minute, resulting in debates that are comprehensible only to a few.

Debates are meant to be discussions. The spirit of this exchange of ideas is at the heart of democracy, but how can students engage in meaningful debate if the words they are responding to are being spoken at such an unnatural speed?
GOLD NIKES ARE HIS DRAW, BUT GERREL SAYLES’ GOAL IS COLLEGE ATTENDANCE.

Gerrel Sayles’ metallic-gold Nikes catch the sunlight as he walks the path to the career center at David Starr Jordan High School in Long Beach, Calif.

Fancy footwear is more than a fashion statement to Sayles. It’s a tool (bait, really) for funnelling low-income, first-generation, underrepresented students into the college pipeline.

“A lot of my students wear nice shoes,” explains Sayles, an avowed sneakerhead. “We talk about shoes, then start talking about other things. It opens up. I might see them on campus and say, ‘Hey, are you going to get those new Air Jordans?’ And they may say, ‘I don’t know, I spent a lot of money over Christmas.’ Then we start talking about financial aid.”

Sayles, 22, is a first-year adviser in the USC College Advising Corps (CAC).

Based in USC Rossier’s Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERPP), the program addresses head-on the dearth of college-guidance services for students in the region’s most underserved schools. Now in its seventh year at USC, CAC places passionate, high-quality college advisers directly in the schools.

“It is not only the work they do but they themselves who give us great hope for the future,” CERPP Executive Director Jerry Lucido says of corps advisers like Sayles. By devoting two years of their lives to CAC, they act out an “abiding belief in education and equity,” he says.

Corps advisers, who are USC employees, receive an entry-level salary plus full employee benefits. CAC Program Director Ara Arzumanian calls it a hybrid service-learning and career-building experience. When Sayles—who graduated from California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), last May—finishes his two-year stint, he will have racked up hundreds of hours in the booming college advising and youth-development field by overseeing the college-access process for about 1,000 students.

Recruited straight out of college, incoming advisers enter a four-week summer bootcamp where they’re immersed in the technical aspects of college research, applications, financial aid and enrollment. They’ll master the soft skills that work best with underserved youth and their parents, teachers and school administrators. And they’ll learn to track the youth’s progress and analyze results.

“It tell them when they’re getting started that this is going to be one of the most challenging but also most rewarding and fun experiences of their lives,” Arzumanian says. “They usually tell me by the end of two years that this was a very accurate description.”

CAC’s recruitment process is highly selective. Last March, nearly 400 candidates interviewed for just 25 first-year corps adviser openings.

Sayles was one of the select few to make the cut. IN INSIDE THE CAREER CENTER, Sayles is softly streaming hip-hop through the Bluetooth speaker on his desk. It’s one of two desks facing rows of computer workstations where students dutifully create login for college admissions portals, compose personal statements and fill out financial aid forms.

The other front desk belongs to second-year corps adviser Stacy Anguiano, a Compton native who graduated from Cal State Northridge in 2018. This is Anguiano’s third year at Jordan High. As a senior majoring in sociology with a minor in child development, she’d worked there part-time as a college adviser for Educational Talent Search (ETS). But the cohort-style program capped her caseload at 60 students and came with restrictions she found troubling.

“I didn’t like the limitation of not being able to work with undocumented students because ETS is a federally funded program,” she says. “I wanted to try something where I can work with all students, and USC CAC allowed me to do that.”

Standing nearby, Sayles assists Mayra, who is creating a portal account on the Long Beach City College site. He guides her through the steps, checking the school code on his cellphone.

Imani waits her turn. He has already finished his college apps and financial aid forms. He’s hanging out at the career center because he has a free period, and Sayles agreed to help with his economics homework.

They share a passion for basketball. Sayles used to play varsity basketball at nearby Lakewood High School, and he participated in intramural, coed and open leagues throughout college at CSULB.

Imani is on the Jordan Panthers varsity team and has received nibbles from a recruiter at the University of Illinois. His college list also includes Tuskegee University; CSULB and several local community college “safety” schools.

IT’S NO ACCIDENT that corps advisers are chosen from recent college graduates—near-peers, in program lingo. In Sayles’ first week on the job, Jordan High security guards kept stopping to ask for his hall pass as he made his way to classroom presentations.

“I think it’s a good thing that I look young because the students come and talk to me about random things. Sometimes I have to tell them, ‘Hey, roll it in a little bit. Have a level of respect,’” he says.

As authentic role models, Sayles and Anguiano are living proof that a college education is attainable for their advisees—young people just like them.

College and career specialist Maquequa Lawrence-Wells is one of three Long Beach Unified School District staffers who work alongside the two corps advisers in Jordan High’s career center. After 12 years on the job, Lawrence-Wells has seen the poster of the near-peer formula.

“The kids become very attached. If Gerrel and Stacy are not here, they don’t even want to talk to me,” she says, only
She told me that college is not a dream, it’s a reality.”

—Gerrel Sayles, first-year adviser in the USC College Advising Corps

half-joking. “Their age counts. Their just having finished college counts. Stacy and Gerrel are first-generation, so they’re able to meet the students where they are—because nobody really understands the mental part of being a first-generation college student like they do.”

BORN AND RAISED in Long Beach, Sayles graduated from Lakewood High in 2015. His mom works in the cafeteria at nearby Jane Addams Elementary, his stepdad works on a maintenance crew for the City of Long Beach.

A successful student, Sayles was holding down a 3.5 GPA as a senior. Still, going to college seemed unimaginable. The aha moment came when he met Cynthia Le MEG ’95, Lakewood High’s first USC CAC adviser.

“She told me that college is not a dream, it’s a reality, and that I was eligible for lots of schools,” Sayles recalls. “After that, I would be there every morning, asking her, ‘What do I need to do? You need me to write a personal statement? How do I pay for this? Are there scholarships?’”

Le recognized that Sayles was exceptional. When she gave him feedback on his application essays, he came back the next day with revisions. Other students took weeks or months to return.

“She gave me notes in a Bloomberg column. “We ARE CURRENTLY AT WAR with our students and parents on taking this matter seriously,” says Marquesa Lawrence-Wells, a college and career specialist at Jordan High. “We don’t collect it anymore at school.” She explains, “We’ve implemented a system where our students can access it on their own. “If they try to go directly to the Social Security Administration, they need a parent’s signature.”

A generation from now, the students whom CAC advisers steer to college today will have children of their own who, hopefully, won’t need their services.

A TABLE BY THE WALL in the career center has two bins filled with more than 500 hanging folders—one for each graduating senior they’ve met with, arranged in alphabetical order. Inside each folder is their login information for college portals and their complete academic record. Sayles puts in the career center has two bins filled with more than 500 hanging folders—one for each graduating senior they’ve met with, arranged in alphabetical order.
FEATURE

with their teachers and school counselors, reached out by email and phone. To no avail.

Still, should any of the stragglers wander in, there’s a binder with their academic records standing by. Corps advisers track each student interaction through a proprietary database. They keep careful records of each college application completed, each acceptance, rejection or waitlist received. They monitor progress on financial aid form status. They keep charts of students organized by their membership in learning communities and cross-tabulated by their GPAs, college, gender and admission status. They share these records with academic counselors to keep them in the loop.

It’s labor-intensive but important work. One corps adviser leaves high school, CAC continues to track their college enrollment, persistence and graduation. The data is integrated with information from the National Student Clearinghouse and other publicly available data sources, vetted by independent auditors and shared with all CAC partner institutions.

USC CAC belongs to a network of 29 universities that partner with the nonprofit College Advising Corps. Founded in 2005 and headquartered at the University of Virginia, the umbrella organization provides seed grants covering 40 percent of partners’ program costs, with school districts providing the balance. The lion’s share—79 percent—goes to paying advisers’ wages.

Collectively, the 29 programs reached 200,000 students last year at 42 public high schools in 17 states. The goal is to reach 1 million students by 2023, backed by a $20 million gift from philanthropist Connie Ballmer and her husband, former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer.

AS THE PROGRAM builds steam, an alumni network is evolving. A large number of corps advisers (42 percent) go on to graduate school—several at USC Rossier—during or immediately after their two-year stint. As a result, many now work at colleges where current corps advisers are trying to place their students. Cynthia Le is just one of 12 corps alumni employed at USC. Others are now insiders across nine Los Angeles-area community colleges, four Cal State campuses and an array of other postsecondary institutions.

The connections they form go deep and cross cohorts. “We train each other like I trained Gerrel,” says Anguiano. “We all support each other. When one of us gets into grad school, we all say, ‘Congratulations!’ If someone gets engaged, we all celebrate. It’s not just a job. It feels like family.”

Corps alumni like Le, who is now assistant director of financial aid at USC, regularly return as expert presenters at the summer bootcamp and lead special workshops held every month at USC Rossier throughout the year. Le’s niche is the College Scholarship Services Profile and appeals. Another corps alum, now based at Scripps College, leads the FAFSA training. “The corps helped me realize that I want to work in higher education,” says Le. “It’s what inspired me to pursue my master’s. I pretty much owe my current career to being a USC CAC adviser.”

THE WORK BRINGS ITS SHARE of disappointments. For Anguiano, it was an advisee last year who’d jumped through every hoop and was admitted to Cal State Dominguez Hills, only to learn in the summer that his admission had been rescinded. He’d called her, distraught. It turned out he’d allowed his spring semester grade in an art class to drop to a D.

“He didn’t think that counted,” she says with a sigh. As a result, he failed to meet his college admissions requirement for visual/performance arts. That student ended up at community college, but he’s resolved to transfer to a Cal State campus, he tells Anguiano. She’s keeping her fingers crossed. Sometimes the letdown is no one’s fault. A grim-faced young man in a pale-blue hoodie walks into the career center. He makes eye contact with his corps adviser.

“How’s the rehab going?” Sayles asks.

Anthony shrugs. Last summer, as a rising senior, Anthony was riding high. Named team captain of the Panthers football team, he was expected to line up at quarterback, receiver, running back, safety and special teams.

Instead, a knee injury sidelined him. Jordan High’s star athlete is also an academic star, holding down a 3.5 GPA. He was aggressively being recruited by colleges.

“Until I got injured,” he mutters, dejected. Holding out his shoe in his backpack.

Born and raised in Long Beach, it’s a tough pill to swallow. “I definitely will miss this job. I love coming to work every day,” she says. “Seeing the students, just them saying ‘good morning.’ Or when they get accepted into schools they didn’t think they had potential for—that just brightens my day.”

In the fall, Anguiano will be gone and Sayles will be the senior corps adviser at Jordan High, which comes with more responsibilities. He’ll need to bring his first-year corps partner up to speed and step up as the point-person for new programs and collaborations with teachers and the administration.

BACK IN THE CAREER CENTER, the computer terminals are filling up. Two students enter holding clusters of blue-and-silver helium balloons.

“Happy birthday!” Sayles greets them brightly.

“Happy birthday!””Sayles greets them brightly.

Two Army recruiters dressed in camouflage come in, carrying pizza boxes. Sayles and Anguiano eat their slices at their desks.

“Gorrel and I have a really hard time taking lunch,” Anguiano admits, “because we know if we said, ‘Come back, we’re closed,’ we might not see that student again for a month.”

For breaks, she and Sayles take turns retreating to the teachers’ lounge to clear their heads. As the lunchtime crowd subsides, Sayles walks across the room, his golden Nikes two bright spots on the carpet.

His face lights up as an advisee shows him a recent text from a basketball coach for the City of Long Beach’s rec program.

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LOOKING BEYOND THE DISAPPOINTMENTS, Sayles, Anguiano and Le take comfort in a shared passion for working with youths. “I love engaging with the students,” says Sayles. “I love when they come to me to ask for help.” Though his career goals aren’t fully formed, Sayles knows this much: “I don’t see myself doing anything that’s not connected with youth. That is my passion and my purpose. Not just high school age, but 1 and up and up.”

After a day of college advising, he moonlights as a basketball coach for the City of Long Beach’s rec program and volunteers with a travel youth league.

Le also volunteers in her spare time. She first became a mentor with the Pullias Center for Higher Education’s Increasing Access via Mentoring (I AM) program at USC Rossier back when she was a corps adviser at Lakewood High. She continues to mentor a dozen kids through the Pullias Center through the Pullias I AM college-transition program. Anguiano is applying to graduate programs in education counseling. As she looks ahead to leaving Jordan High School, she is filled with nostalgia.

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Seniors who met with a corps adviser were 18 percent more likely to apply to at least one college.

FEATURE
REVITALIZING SHARED GOVERNANCE FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

By Adrianna Kezar
Dean’s Professor of Leadership, W. Kief-Perdue Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education

OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS, shared governance in higher education has been replaced with top-down governance structures in which administrators take greater responsibility for policymaking and fewer responsibilities are delegated to faculty. Higher education as a public good is at stake when shared governance—a model that draws from democratic values and lays out a way for faculty, boards and administrators to work together to set policy and institutional direction—is weakened.

Increasingly, campus leaders are privileging prestige and revenue over access and success of students, community engagement and democratic participation. Scandals at prominent universities have revealed cracks in the neoliberal governance system, one in which regulation is transferred away from the public and its stakeholders and progress is measured by profits. Pennsylvania State University, Michigan State University and USC are all visible cases where a breakdown in shared governance led to catastrophic ends: individual administrators prioritizing institutional prestige and revenue over access and success of students themselves who value the creation of any shared governance process is on shaky ground. It is simply too easy for market and state voices to dominate in this new era. Engaging students as stakeholders, rather than treating them as passive customers or neglecting their concerns to meet the entrepreneurial goals of the university rather than students’ needs, and students themselves have been reduced to customers. Without re-professionalizing faculty and staff and recognizing their value, the creation of any shared governance process is on shaky ground. It is simply too easy for market and state voices to dominate in this new era. Engaging students as stakeholders, rather than treating them as passive customers or neglecting their concerns to meet the entrepreneurial goals of the university rather than students’ needs; and students themselves have been reduced to customers.

What are you reading?

Morgan Polikoff
Associate Professor of Education at USC Rossier:
- The Years that Matter Most: How College Makes or Breaks Us by Paul Tough
- Red, White, and Royal Blue by Casey McQuiston
- Making Labor in the Neoliberal University by Adrianna Kezar
- Dreamers and Schemers: How an Improbable Bid for the 1932 Olympics Transformed Los Angeles from Dusty Outpost to Global Metropolis by Barry Siegel
- “We cannot continue down this path—away from our democratic ideals.”

Rossier Book Club to read Ta-Nehisi Coates’ new novel

THE ROSSIER BOOK CLUB WAS LAUNCHED in spring 2018 as part of the school’s “The Rossier Way” initiative, which is designed to cultivate a culture of caring and support amongst faculty, staff and students. Dean Karen Symms Gallagher hosts the book club events each spring and fall in partnership with Darline Robles, associate dean of equity and inclusion. The goal of the book club is to select a work of fiction that helps the Rossier community explore themes relevant to Rossier’s mission of advancing educational equity.

This spring’s selection is The Water Dancer by Ta-Nehisi Coates, and, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the discussion will take place virtually. Past selections include The Other Americans by Laila Lalami, The Sympathizer by Viet Thanh Nguyen and There There by Tommy Orange. —R

Faculty publications

From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education by Ta-Bruce McNair, Estela Mara Bensimon, Lindsey Malcolm-Pigueux

The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University
By Adrianna Kezar
Dean’s Professor of Leadership, W. Kief-Perdue Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education
- The Years that Matter Most: How College Makes or Breaks Us by Paul Tough
- Red, White, and Royal Blue by Casey McQuiston
- Strategic Mergers in Higher Education: How Proactive Mergers Can Stabilize and Enhance Colleges and Universities—and Ensure Their Future by Ricardo Azziz, Guibert C. Hentschke, Richard St. Cooper and Mary Catherine Cooper Chair Emeritus and former USC Rossier Dean (1988–2000), Lloyd A. Jacobs and Bonita C. Jacobs
- From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education by Ta-Bruce McNair, Estela Mara Bensimon, Lindsey Malcolm-Pigueux

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Rosalind Conerly EdD ’16 was born in Long Beach, Calif., but as a young girl, she bounced around Southern California, from Compton to Rancho Cucamonga. The experience “forced me to figure out how to navigate spaces early,” she says, a skill she’s leaned on since moving some 350 miles north to take a position at Stanford University.

Last March, after working at USC since 2012, Conerly took on the new role of associate dean of students and director at Stanford’s Centers for Equity, Community, and Leadership. She oversees the university’s Black Community Services Center (BCSC), which focuses on intellectual development and advocacy of Stanford’s Black students and student groups.

The center, which was “created out of student activism” in 1969, Conerly says, celebrated its 50th anniversary last year and was looking for someone to “reshape and retool” it to mark the milestone.

No day is the same for Conerly. She manages 20 direct reports, a group that includes students and professional staff, and leads the center’s alumni engagement and donor relations.

The relationships that Conerly formed at USC Rossier have also served her well, especially the connections made through the student organization Jenga, which she formed with seven other women in her EdD program.

In addition to her new role at Stanford, Conerly is also building a consulting practice, working with employee resource groups, tech companies and universities looking to recruit employees and students of color.

She wants to be certain that she is “being intentional about the work that I’m doing and ensuring that it’s truly intersectional.” Although the center is focused on the Black student community, Conerly intends to “examine power structures at the university and see where those are in play and how they are impacting different parts of students’ identities.”

Working with the other centers on campus—the Asian American Activities Center, Women’s Community Center and Native American Cultural Center, to name a few—is essential to ensuring “we are really, truly supporting students on campus,” Conerly says.

One of Conerly’s primary tasks over the coming year is to create her vision for the BCSC, after taking the reins from a director who had held the role for 18 years. She’s been conducting a listening tour over the past few months, meeting with students, faculty and alumni.

The diversity of folks in the program allowed me to really open up my mind to other ways that I can use this degree,” Conerly says.

Conerly misses USC—her colleagues, family, friends, the students she worked with and the “electric” energy of the Trojan campus. But she’s embraced one thing the Bay Area is known for: wine. Over the summer, she explored many wineries in the region, and she’s since taken this love further by enrolling in her first wine education course. “That’s the thing I’m doing for me,” Conerly says. “I love how wine creates community.”
Class Notes are compiled and written by Matt DeGrauche ’64, USC Rossier’s director of alumni engagement. For additional Class Notes, please visit rossier.usc.edu/alumni/class-notes. To submit updates for consideration for future magazine issues, please email alumni@rossier.usc.edu.

1960s
SONNIE WEEDN BS ’56, MS ’69, MS ’73 recently published a workbook, “8 Ways to Wellbeing for Recovering People,” with a foreword by Roger Walsh, MD, PhD. Sonnie was also selected by the American Psychological Association to present her work in cognitive restoration, using computer brain interface, at the Technology, Mind and Society Conference in Washington, D.C.

CANDY YE’68, MS ’69 and her husband, Jim, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on Aug. 3, 2019. They were married in Houston.

1970s
TODD DEMITCHELL ED’79 is the John A. and Irene Peters Professor of Education at the University of New Hampshire. He will have two books published by Rowman & Littlefield in the next three months, Threshold the Evaluation Needle: The Documentation of Teacher un-professional Conduct and Teachers and Their Unions: Labor Relations in Uncertain Times. In addition, Todd published, “Armed and Dangerous – Teachers?” A Policy Response to Security in Our Public Schools” in the Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal.

MARY ANN MISHLER ’79, MA ’81 retired from the El Rancho Unified School District. She spent the first five years of her career with the South Whittier School District and the next 26 years with El Ran-cho. For 31 years, Mary Ann taught preschool-age children with moderate to severe disabilities. She looks forward to a restful retirement!

1980s
VIRGINIA KENNEDY PhD ’81 is president of the California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE), a statewide organization of teacher education professionals in higher education and K-12 programs. Its members and member institutions represent over 70 public and independent institutions of higher education. CCTE’s primary activities include professional development and research dissemination at semi-annual conferences, and advocacy at the state and national level.

JOHN DUGGAN MS ’83 was inducted into Na-tional Association of Underwater Instructors Hall of Honor. Very few of the thousands of under-water instructors get this recognition.

JOHN ROACH EDG ’88 serves as the CEO of the School Employers Association of California (SEAC), whose mission is to provide education, support and professional development to super-intendent and management team members through training, research and advocacy. SEAC represents distinct interests regarding labor relations and collective bargaining and other personnel issues on statewide, local and district levels.

1990s
FAY SHIN MS ’93, PhD ’94 is the chair and professor in the department of teacher education at Cal State Long Beach. She oversees the teacher preparation program for students interested in becoming elementary and secondary teachers, graduate level coursework leading to master’s degrees, advanced credentials and certificates.

KEN ROSSI ED ’96 was appointed chair of the master of arts in organization development and change program at Hawai’i Pacific University (HPU). In this role as chair, Ken advises students in the program. He teaches courses in the program as well as the leadership center in HPU’s MBA program.

REBECCA SHORE EDG ’96 is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She released her fourth book this year, Journeys of Charter School Creators: Leadership for the Long Haul, which quickly made its way to the Book Authority’s top 10 list of national best books on charter schools. The preface and foreword are authored by Guibert Hentschke, former USC Rossier dean and Tomisue Deal, former USC Rossier Irving B. Melbhor professor, respectively.

BARRIE MOORE EDG ’98 is director of the speech-language pathology education programs (master’s and minor) at Keck School of Medicine of USC. She is developing a master of science program in speech-language pathology (MS-SLP). The goal is to enroll the first class of students in fall 2021. The MS-SLP program will prepare new speech-language pathologists to work in various campus settings. Barbara has also developed a minor for undergraduates to learn about the professions of speech-language pathology and audiology. It begins this spring.

ARIANNE TEHERANI MS ’79, PhD ’00 is professor of medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine and an education scientist in the Center for Faculty Educators at the Univer-sity of California, San Francisco School of Medicine. She is director for program evaluation for the School of Medicine, a role in which she leads design, development and policy for evaluation of the School of Medicine. Arianne is an education researcher whose main research interests are in the areas of professionalism, professional identity formation and equity in medical education.

ERNEST ZARRA PhD ’79 recently published his ninth book titled, The Age of Teacher Shortages: Reasons, Responsibilities, Reactions. He is under contract for two additional books to be published in spring 2020, Detworing American Public Schools: From Social Agency to its Academic Urgency, and America’s Sex Culture: Its Impact on Teacher-Student Relationships Today.

2000s
KEVIN BAXTER ED ’04 was hired as the first chief innovation officer for the National Cather-olic Educational Association in July. He is focused specifically on three areas of the organization’s strategic plan: leadership formation and succession planning, curriculum and pedagogical innovation at the school site level, and developing new governance and finance structures for Catholic schools. The ultimate aim is to see growth in Catho-lisc schools across the U.S. by focusing on strong leadership at the school and diocesan level and creating innovative models that rest on a culture of continuous improvement.

TIMOTHY COUNCIL ME ’09 was named assist-ant vice president and dean of admissions at Claremont Graduate University.

KARLA RHAY ED’06 was recognized at the state level as the 2019 California Classified Leader of the Year and at the regional level as Classified Administrator of the Year for Region 12 by the Association of California School Adminis-trators (ACSA).

MARCELO VAZQUEZ EDG ’08 is dean of stu-dent services at Ventura College. He is in charge of leading student success initiatives through supervision of the offices of academic counsel- ing, educational opportunity program services, disability services, CalWorks, international stu-dent services and the university transfer center. Marcelo is also the Title IX coordinator in charge of student conduct and co-chairs the behavior intervention team.

2010s
LAURA CASTÁRĐEDA EDG ’10 is a professor at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She recently published the following stories for NBC Latino: “Groups aim to boost low Latino participation in organ and marrow donations, clinical trials” and “Latina longevity is real, but it can bring health, financial challenges.” Laura and her colleague Rebecca Haggyter EDG’14 published a peer-reviewed research article in Journalism & Mass Communi-cation Educator: “Undergraduate Students Pro-fer Learning Text and Broadcast Skills Sequentially Versus Concurrently. But Assessments of Their Final Projects Are Mixed.” In September, Laura was awarded the 2019 Barry Bingham Sr. Fellowship by the American Society of News Ed-itors in recognition of an educator’s outstanding efforts to encourage students of color in the field of journalism.

KIMBERLY GRANGER ED ’11 was promoted from chair of the department of culture, history and politics to dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at the College of Western Idaho in Nampa, Idaho.

LAURA CASTÁRĐEDA EDG ’10 breaks Usain Bolt’s record for world titles

2010s
LAURA CASTÁRĐEDA EDG ’10 is a professor at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She recently published the following stories for NBC Latino: “Groups aim to boost low Latino participation in organ and marrow donations, clinical trials” and “Latina longevity is real, but it can bring health, financial challenges.” Laura and her colleague Rebecca Haggyter EDG’14 published a peer-reviewed research article in Journalism & Mass Communication Educator: “Undergraduate Students Prefer Learning Text and Broadcast Skills Sequentially Versus Concurrently. But Assessments of Their Final Projects Are Mixed.” In September, Laura was awarded the 2019 Barry Bingham Sr. Fellowship by the American Society of News Editors in recognition of an educator’s outstanding efforts to encourage students of color in the field of journalism.

JUSTIN VANCE ED ’10 was promoted from chair of the department of culture, history and politics to dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at the College of Western Idaho in Nampa, Idaho.

ANGELA BRATHWAITE EDG ’11 received three U.S. patents with new for Road Trip Potty, a portable urine female that stores discreetly under a car’s passenger seat.

KIMBERLY GRANGER EDG ’11 was invited to attend the League for Innovation in the Community College International Conference to work in moderation at meetings. Kimberly also became certified in various yoga and meditation techniques and most recently began facilitating workshops catered to different student groups on how to incorporate a mindfulness practice into everyday lives.

JOHN ROACH EDG ’88 is the CEO of the School Employers Association of California (SEAC), whose mission is to provide education, support and professional development to superintendents and management team members through training, research and advocacy. SEAC represents distinct interests regarding labor relations and collective bargaining and other personnel issues on statewide, local and district levels.


JOIN MORE THAN 1,600 ALUMNI & CURRENT STUDENTS ON THE USC ROSSIER CAREER NETWORK!

The USC Rossier Career Network is a new online networking and mentorship platform designed to connect members of the USC Rossier Family (students, alumni, faculty and staff).

Platform features include: searchable member directory, built-in messaging platform, ask a question to entire community, join groups, share job leads, learn about events, explore resources.

Join today at rossier.peopleprague.com

ALUMNI NEWS

USC ROSSIER MAGAZINE SPRING / SUMMER 2020

ALLYSON FELIX BS ’08 breaks Usain Bolt’s record for world titles

ALLYSON FELIX BS ’08 has broken a world record previously held by track star Usain Bolt, and she did it just 10 months after giving birth. Allyson was part of Team USA’s mixed-gender 4x400-meter relay team that won the gold at the World Athletics Championships in September. The win gave Allyson her 12th world title, pushing her past Bolt’s record for the most gold medals of any athlete at the track and field world championships.
Six USC Rossier alumni hired as tenured faculty at local community colleges

Genevieve Ayala ME ’16
East Los Angeles College

Paulo Banaag ME ’16
Glendale Community College

Yvette Martinez ME ’16
Pasadena City College

Adriana Moreno ME ’16
Norco College

Yvette Nguyen ME ’16
Orange Coast College

Sabra Pan ME ’16
East Los Angeles College

statewide work in Math Pathways, serving as a member of the task force from August 2014 to December 2016.

M. EREZ KATS MAT ’11
set up a new web- site called Katsatastu.com, both a sports and travel blog.

HAN NEE CHONG EDG ’12

MATTHEW SELJICK MAT ’12
continues to teach at Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech), located in Shenzhen, China. During the summer semester, he taught methodology and pedagogy to a class of medical school faculty and aims to replicate this teacher training to other departments through a series of faculty teaching seminars in the fall semester. Matthew continues to enjoy the professional and personal opportunities afforded to him in Shenzhen, although he can’t stand the heat!

MARGARITA LANDEROS ME ’12
is a counselor support specialist at Green Dot Public Schools. She coaches and supports school counselor across the network and facilitates professor- al development conferences. Margarita also coordinates organization-wide efforts around course articulation, enrichment program partners, credit recovery, college readiness and crisis management.

TOLULOPE NOAH EDG ’12
is an associate professor of liberal studies in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Azusa Pacific University. She received the university’s 2019 Teaching Excellence Award.

BRENT WARNER MAT ’12
is completing his tenure probation as an ESL instructor at Irvine Valley College, where he works in academic writing for multilingual learners and coordinates the Language Acquisition Center. Brent has also launched the DEISOL Podcast, focusing on ped- agogy and best practices for using technology in the ESL classroom.

BRIANA WEILAND ME ’12
is manager of ad- missions and student affairs in the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin. She provides strategy for admissions and student affairs for a suite of four specialized master of science programs in the school. Bri- ana works directly with two of those programs and supports the faculty directors to deliver academic advising, certfity degrees, manage co-curricular budgets and plan/executive events. She also directly supervises the admissions staff for those two programs.

PATRICIA BECKMANN EDG ’13
is currently on sabbatical at UCSD in her teaching subject area that was featured in the 2019 Sliam- dana film festival in Park City, Utah.

TANYA CHALDARIS EDG ’13
formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Calioppe Academy, with other USC Rossier, USC Marshall and USC Suzanne Dworak- Packard grads. Their mission is driven by a fierce passion for equity and social justice.

MARC PIERCE MAT ’13
was tenured in the Soledad Unified School District. Also, Mark was selected as one of 34 candidates to be part of the class of 2020 of Leadership Morgan Hill, a training and development program created to inspire future leaders to community service.

THOMAS CROWTHER MAT ’14
is the proud new principal at Burbank High School in Burbank Unified School District. Thomas is returning to the district after serving as principal at Tol Mid- dle School in Glendale Unified School District for the past few years.

ISABEL HORALES EDG ’14
received a Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching to study stu- dent voice and educational decision-making in the Netherlands.

BRIAN GUERRERO EDG ’15
was elected vice president-college for the 2019-20 National Association of Colleges and Employers Board of Directors. He is senior director of the Arts & Sciences Center for Career and Professional Success at the Ohio State University.

MADELEINE MEJIA EDG ’15
received an award from the Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance for her excellent leadership in support of students, par- ents and educators at K–12 schools, colleges and universities across Southern California.

LEISHA NICKELS MAT ’15
is an eighth grade science teacher and eighth grade specifically de- signed academic instruction for English (SDAIE) science teacher in the Turlock Unified School District in Turlock, Calif.

OSCAR LUGO MAT-TEESOL ’16
has been working as an English teacher at Torrance Academy Los Angeles for over three years. This year he assumed the role of English department head, where he hopes to continue inspiring students to explore communities outside of their own and to understand the destructive nature of “othering.”

LAUREN REDMAN ME ’18
is an athletics aca- demic advisor at Santa Clara University where she provides academic advisement and support to NCAA Division I student-athletes.

AMY-MARIA SCHULZE MAT ’18
opened Grace School, a preschool in Dover, Mass., which wel- come its first class of students in the fall.

DEBRA BOGLE EDG ’17
released a new book that is an action research project turned book on curriculum: Building Bridges: Curricular The Arts, Equity. Democracy and Inclu- sion Transitioned.

SARA-JEAN LIPPMEN EDG ’17
is a newcomer instructional coach at the Los Angeles Unified School District. In this position, she has the honor to advocate for the inspiring students who have recently immigrated to the United States and provide professional development support and opportunities to their teachers and educators.

JAYNEMARIE ANGHIAY EDG ’18
is elected to join the Education Division at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation as senior manager of strategic projects. In this role, she provides implementation and strategic support to the president of education. Jaynemarie also leads cross-team projects and develops oper- ational systems and practices.

AMELIA FRANC MEYER EDG ’18
was featured as a People Magazine’s “30 Women Chang- ing the World” in 2018. Amelia is CEO of Asia, a national nonprofit focused on transforming how child welfare is done in this country.

CLORIS HENRY EDG ’18
is chief of operations at cyclic Frenchs de San Francisco (CFSF). She oversees all of CFSF’s operations, risk manage- ment and legal activities. Cloris also serves as the school’s operational and administrative leader responsible for admissions, marketing, finance, advancement, HR, communication, IT and facility management and op- eration. She works with the head of school to support and work collaboratively with three campus directors responsible for pedago- gy of CFSF’s rigorous academic and extra- curricular standards.
MEXICAN-AMERICAN ARTIST, professor emeritus and USC Rossier alumnus Manuel E. De Leon died Dec. 6 at age 93. His wife Helga, daughter Marita and son Andre were by his side.

De Leon was born on the USC Campus in Jan. 25, 1926, in his family's home, where Heritage Hall stands today. Born into a low-income family in South-Central Los Angeles, De Leon transferred from Compton College to USC on a football scholarship and played football at USC from 1948 to 1951. A proud Trojan, he received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the USC Rossier School of Education.

After graduating from USC, De Leon taught in L.A.-area schools from South-Central to Lomita. He went on to pursue fine art at ArtCenter College of Design and Otis Art Institute, where he studied under Norman Rockwell.

De Leon met his future wife, Helga, while teaching on an American base in Germany. They wed on June 15, 1957, in Mainz, Germany, and soon returned to Los Angeles.

In 1964, De Leon accepted the position of art professor at Cerritos College, where he became the chairman of the Cerritos College Art Department. He worked at the college until his retirement in 1991.

In 1998, De Leon and his wife left their home in Orange County to retire in Oro Valley, Ariz. He is survived by wife Helga, sons Marcus and Andre, daughter Marita Carina, a son-in-law and two granddaughters. —R
The Katzman/Ernst Chair in Educational Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation continues to make waves.

IN 2008, JOHN KATZMAN and his wife Alicia Ernst decided they wanted to do something that would make a lasting impact. The two have dedicated their lives to driving change in education. Katzman, who is also a member of the USC Rossier Board of Councilors, founded The Princeton Review, 2U and The Noodle Companies, and Ernst was vice president of research at The Princeton Review.

And thus, with a generous gift, the couple created the Katzman/Ernst Chair in Educational Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation. Professor David Dwyer was the first to hold the Katzman/Ernst Chair, and during his time in the role, he set forth the initial model and inspiration for USC Hybrid High School, a college preparatory charter high school located near the USC campus. The high school is part of the Ednovate network. Every Ednovate school boasts a 100 percent graduation rate, and 100 percent of Ednovate students have been accepted to a four-year college or university.

In 2015, Alan Arkatov was formally installed as the chair. "John Katzman," Arkatov says, "was always a hero to me because of the way he broke down barriers to great education." Over the few short years that Arkatov has been in the role, he has focused on harnessing the talent of the imagination economy to have a greater effect on educational ecosystems through a variety of projects.

A ratov helped organize an event that brought over 8,000 L.A.-area teenaged girls to a screening of Hidden Figures in January 2017. Not only did the participants get to engage in a Q&A with the film’s actors and musician and producer Pharrell Williams, but the evening also celebrated the achievements of women of color in science. Arkatov helped to produce a curriculum guide on the film as well.

In 2018, Arkatov launched the Center for Engagement-Driven Global Education (Center EDGE), through which he’s debuted several initiatives. In 2018, the L.A. Education Exchange was established. The Exchange gathers L.A. education leaders from across all sectors for a two-day summit with the goal of improving local education by bringing together individuals who do overlapping work but might not cross paths otherwise. Center EDGE is currently working on a series of dynamic teaching and learning initiatives, including a unique education competition, a platform for leveraging the values of the Olympic Games and harnessing the power of documentaries, films and games for K-12 education.

A ratov compares the role of the Katzman/Ernst chair to that of a musical composer. "The chair is someone who brings together the best composers, the best soloists with the best orchestra to transform education. We need a full orchestra, to really have impact."

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