

# *Voice*

University of La Verne Magazine

Summer 2021

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## SILVER LININGS

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FROM THE PANDEMIC CRUCIBLE  
CAME UNEXPECTED CHANGE

# Features



## 10 Silver Linings

Out of the challenges of the pandemic came innovations bringing new ways of connecting the university to its students and alumni.



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# Voice

University of La Verne Magazine

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



**THIS PAST YEAR, WHEN PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WERE STRETCHED BEYOND IMAGINATION BY AN** unseen yet hugely felt virus, the University of La Verne community rose to meet what others might have considered insurmountable obstacles. We faced them with grace and confidence. Professors applied new technologies—literally overnight. Students learned together while apart. Coaches invented new ways to inspire teams far away from the field of play. Staff and administrators redoubled their efforts to serve students well.

***“Our community was undaunted by the challenges the pandemic brought and worked to overcome them in new and creative ways.”***

Our community was undaunted by the challenges the pandemic brought and worked to overcome them in new and creative ways. Some of the ways we adapted and

moved forward have accelerated positive change. They are the focus of this issue of *Voice* magazine, the silver linings that will last long after the COVID-19 crisis ends.

As you read these pages, you will see advisers and mental health counselors who found that virtual visits allowed them to reach more students to provide support. You will see the coach of a canceled season who focused his team on 25 days of gratitude. You will meet a professor in his sixth decade of teaching at our university who learned how to conduct all his classes on Zoom with the help of a colleague. There are many reasons to take heart.

And yet, as we celebrate the silver linings that came into view in 2021, we do so with measured emotions. Loved ones lost to COVID-19 or other circumstances can never be replaced in our hearts. Others, while spared physically in the pandemic, have lost businesses and livelihoods. Still others missed moments that make life truly rich, like holding a first grandchild or celebrating a wedding with family and friends. Their perseverance is additional testimony to the resiliency of the human spirit that has shone brightly in so many ways.

In the gift boxes sent to each of our graduates in advance of their commencements this winter and spring, we included a commemorative glass, and during the ceremony I invited them to raise a glass of their favorite beverage in celebration of their accomplishments. They did not let a pandemic derail their dreams, and they inspired us all with their grit, resilience, and determination.

Today, I invite you to raise a figurative toast to what we have gained through the trials of the past year and to the silver linings we have found. Brighter days lie ahead. May we find that this past year is the precursor to a year of wonder for this university and, indeed, our community and our world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Devorah Lieberman".

Devorah Lieberman, PhD  
President



### College of Law Bar Pass Rate Rises

The passage rate of graduates from the University of La Verne College of Law who took the California Bar Examination for the first time in October 2020 reached 73 percent, the college reported. This marks a significant improvement for the college over previous years and nearly matches the statewide average of 74 percent for first-time test takers for this round of the examination.

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### \$3 Million Federal Grant Will Aid Student Success

The US Department of Education awarded the University of La Verne a \$3 million Title V grant to provide academic support, financial literacy, and college-to-career preparedness for students over a five-year period. Title V is a federally-funded grant program for Hispanic Serving Institutions that supports educational opportunities and attainment outcomes for students.

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### MBAX Program Increases Flexibility

The University of La Verne has streamlined its Master of Business Administration for Experienced Professionals program to be more flexible for those in the workforce and faster to complete. The program redesign was based upon feedback and consultations with business leaders and alumni to provide what working professionals need to become industry leaders. "With this program, the student is in charge," said Abe Helou, dean of the College of Business and Public Management. It includes fewer required courses and increases available electives.

### Tuition to Remain Constant for Nearly All Students in 2021–22

Tuition for the 2021–22 academic year will remain steady at the current level for nearly all programs, the University of La Verne has announced. The decision to keep most tuition at existing levels recognizes the financial challenges many students are facing as a result of COVID-19, as well as the university's commitment to helping students meet their educational goals during the pandemic. The tuition freeze applies to all students except for those in the College of Law, where tuition will increase by 3 percent.



### University Earns Military Friendly® Gold Ranking

The University of La Verne's long-standing commitment to helping veterans reach their educational goals has been recognized by The Military Friendly® Company with its gold ranking for 2021–22. Institutions earning the Military Friendly® School designation were evaluated using both public data sources and responses from a proprietary survey. The newly named Sara and Michael Abraham Center for Veteran Student Success promotes veteran community engagement, assistance, and advocacy for successful educational experiences and outcomes.

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## Sustainability Studies Major to Launch This Fall

The University of La Verne announced its new Sustainability Studies major during the Robert and Mary Neher Global Sustainability Lecture held on Earth Day, April 22. The major will engage students in economics, ecology, environmental policies, ethics, natural resources, city and regional planning, sociology, anthropology, and spirituality. The program will combine classroom theory with real-world experience through internships with community partners. Richard Rose, professor of religion and philosophy, will be department chair.



## WSCUC Affirms Accreditation for Eight Years

Following a year-long preparation and review process, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) has reaffirmed the University of La Verne's accreditation for eight years, with a mid-cycle Special Visit in fall 2023. The WASC accreditation process aids colleges and universities in developing and sustaining effective academic programs and assures the educational community, other organizations, and the general public that an accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness.



## Study Shows High Alumni Satisfaction

The University of La Verne is among the best universities in the country for alumni satisfaction, according to a new research study by Jonathan Rothwell, senior economist at Gallup. The study, published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, ranks the university at No. 1 in California and No. 11 nationally, just below Harvard and ahead of Stanford; University of California, Berkeley; and University of Southern California. It analyzed responses from nearly 146,000 alumni from 496 institutions in the United States.



## University Selected for Teacher Training Diversity Program



The University of La Verne is one of six minority serving institutions across the United States selected for the second cohort of the Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity's (BranchED) National Teacher Preparation Transformation Center. This

partnership aims to produce highly effective and diverse teachers through immersion programming. The university's partner, Pomona Unified School District, will also participate.

The three-year program provides a unique community of practice where faculty and Pomona Unified School District partners will access enhanced resources and professional development, network with others, share data, and learn from each other how to move forward with sustainability and innovation. The larger goals of BranchED's Transformation Center include both diversifying the teaching profession and intentionally addressing critical issues of educational equity for all students.

"We hope to be an example of how removing barriers and obstacles that disproportionately impact our educators of color will provide a pipeline of excellence from and back into our communities that we serve," said Kimberly White-Smith, dean of the LaFetra College of Education.

Betina Hsieh, professor and director of teacher education, noted that "There is still a large demographic diversity gap between the teachers that serve K-12 students and the students themselves. Research has shown that students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds view teachers of color favorably, and students of color perform better when they have teachers of color."

Major support for this cohort in BranchED's National Teacher Preparation Transformation Center comes from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation at the recommendation of Alice L. Walton. Support also comes from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, the Bezalel Fund, and others.

## New Dean Named for College of Arts and Sciences

A new dean took the helm in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of La Verne on January 4. Shannon Mathews came to the post from Savannah State University in Georgia, where she was dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and professor of social and behavioral sciences. Previously she served at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina as interim associate dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, Business, and Education; chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences; director of the honors program; and program coordinator for gerontology.

Mathews grew up near the University of La Verne and attended Ganesha High School in Pomona. She went on to Pomona College in Claremont as a first-generation college student. After receiving a bachelor's degree in anthropology, Mathews earned a Master of Arts in Medical Anthropology degree and a PhD in Gerontology from the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Her scholarship centered on poverty and aging, health disparities, and community engagement.

Mathews was attracted to the University of La Verne's mission and



commitment to student success. "I've served in historically Black colleges and diverse populations in the past, and they hold a place near and dear to my heart," she said. "I am fortunate to be coming back home to join our Hispanic Serving Institution that is progressively moving forward to help others."



# In Conversation with Kerop Janoyan

Kerop Janoyan, PhD, joined the University of La Verne on April 1 as provost and vice president for academic affairs. He came from Clarkson University, where he was dean of the Graduate School and a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. He earned bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees in civil engineering at the University of California, Los Angeles.



**Q You've experienced life and education in several very different parts of the world. How did those experiences help to shape you?**

Before moving to the US at age 12, I had lived or gone to school in Iraq, England, Cyprus, and Italy. I learned Armenian as my first language, then Arabic, and then English in elementary school. Making friends and acclimating to different environments and cultures has helped me to be more resilient and to adapt easily to different situations and people.

**Q How does your engineering training and mindset help you as an administrator in higher education?**

I've always liked looking at both the big picture and the details. My academic research has been on structural health monitoring of bridges, but I was always interested in the everyday bridges that usually go unnoticed. People don't typically think about these structures unless there's a problem. How do you maintain and budget for these bridges to avoid having problems? I think being an administrator in higher education is like that, where you have to make sure the university is running smoothly for students, faculty, and staff. And it often requires silent leadership—if done right, people don't notice it.

**Q What attracted you to the University of La Verne?**

The mission of the university resonates with me. It serves many first-generation students and has an impact that will change lives for generations to come. After my first interview at La Verne, my wife remembers I said I really liked everyone here. It felt very comfortable and familiar. And before I interviewed here, I was not aware that my father had applied (and was accepted) to graduate school at the University of La Verne in 1982. He showed me his acceptance letter, which he has saved for nearly 40 years! The University of La Verne had already positively impacted my life, even before I had started. I am honored to be able to positively impact a new generation of students.

**Q What trends in higher education are you following most closely?**

Higher education is evolving. Everyone is trying to understand what the landscape is going to look like in the coming years, especially as the incoming student population is largely comprised of digital natives. What keeps me awake at night is not the trends we can see—rather, it's not knowing what we don't know. I try to think about possible scenarios and how to deal with them. And not just the threats, but the opportunities as well.

**Q Have you had an "aha!" moment in your career?**

Probably when my students have become faculty members themselves. It's helped me see the whole academic cycle. I was once the former student sending holiday pictures of my kids to my faculty advisers who were pivotal in my life. Now my students are sending family pictures to me. Whenever I have gotten a promotion or tenure, among the first people I share the news with are my former mentors, to thank them.

**Q What gets you up in the morning?**

An espresso! Preferably Lavazza. Seriously, it's opportunities to help and support students, faculty, and staff.

**Q What might surprise people to learn about you?**

I'm an avid cyclist and have been riding since I was 15 years old. Growing up in Southern California, my favorite ride was exploring the Angeles Crest Highway.

# New Center to Focus on Entrepreneurs



The University of La Verne celebrates another major gift from prominent real estate executive and enthusiastic donor Randall Lewis: \$2 million to establish the Randall Lewis Center for Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Social Impact. The new nonprofit venture will focus on increasing the economic power and impact of university students, alumni, regional businesses, not-for-profits, and community organizations. It will do so by providing entrepreneurial training for several learning cohorts each year, integrating academic and hands-on approaches to job creation and long-term career support.

The new center, with a special emphasis on underserved communities in the region, will be located in the city of Ontario, where the university already has a strong presence through its College of Law. The Lewis Center will complement the city's own Innovation Center, a state-of-the-art business facility, and enable the university to expand its innovative educational outreach to the

surrounding community. Strategic partnerships will be developed at the local, regional, national, and international levels, with a focus on current and future businesses owned and operated by women, minorities, and veterans. The center's ultimate goal is to become a hub of regional economic development.

In accordance with the wishes of Lewis and a core group of early advisers that includes Quentin Strode of NEW Community Investments, University Advancement is actively seeking additional supporters as well as consulting partners to maximize the reach of the Randall Lewis Center for Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Social Impact.

If you would like to join the effort to uplift our local communities through entrepreneurial training and support, please contact:

- **Sherri G. Mylott**, vice president of University Advancement
- Email: [smylott@laverne.edu](mailto:smylott@laverne.edu) • Phone: **909-448-4513**

## Feeling Inspired?

### More Ways to Make a Difference in Our Communities

There are many initiatives at the University of La Verne that are worthy of your support. Fresh off the successful early completion of Create the Future: The Campaign for the University of La Verne, the most ambitious comprehensive campaign in the institution's history, the university is in the midst of an unprecedented period of forward-focused vision and accomplishment. Among other projects that are aligned with the university's 2025 Strategic Vision, we seek ongoing support for the following:

**College of Health and Community Well-Being**—a bold new initiative, currently in development, aiming to meet the critical and ongoing demands for diverse, qualified health care professionals, brought into sharp focus by the tragedies of the global COVID-19 pandemic. (See feature beginning on page 22.)

**Ludwick Center for Spirituality, Cultural Understanding, and Community Engagement**—embodying the heart and core values of the university and nurturing a deep sense of belonging and dialogue among all members of the university and regional community. The Ludwick Center building was recently honored by the City of La Verne with an Outstanding Design Achievement Award.

**Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research**—offering physical, emotional, and mental well-being resources for students, faculty, staff, and alumni at the university and its surrounding communities, while also engaging in research and programming partnerships with a wide network of regional community and health organizations.

**LaFetra College of Education's Center for Neurodiversity, Learning, and Wellness**—pioneering new methods of supporting neurodivergent learners through student and family support programs, teacher training, research, and advocacy.

**Nathan Chow Program of Film and Television**—building a top-tier film and television program to meet the burgeoning nationwide demand for qualified entertainment industry workers.

**Sara and Michael Abraham Center for Veteran Student Success**—ensuring that all veteran students have a place to congregate, access important resources, and receive support for their academic and future successes.

- For more information or to give today, please visit [univ.lv/advancement](https://univ.lv/advancement)



Our 2021 Giving Day, held on Founders Day, April 27, was a record-breaking success! We far exceeded our goal of 130 donors for the University of La Verne's 130th birthday, and we unlocked two \$13,000 challenges—raising over \$100,000 in total. It was incredibly heartwarming to see so many alumni, parents, friends, faculty, and staff come together in support of our students. Thank you all for making this the best Giving Day ever!







FOLLOWING THE ADAGE “NEVER LET A CRISIS GO TO WASTE,” THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ADAPTED TO CHANGES THE PANDEMIC FORCED BY DEVELOPING NEW WAYS TO SERVE STUDENTS. SOME WILL LAST LONG BEYOND THE PANDEMIC. THEY ARE THE

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# SILVER LININGS

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OF A CHALLENGING YEAR.

By Marilyn Thomsen

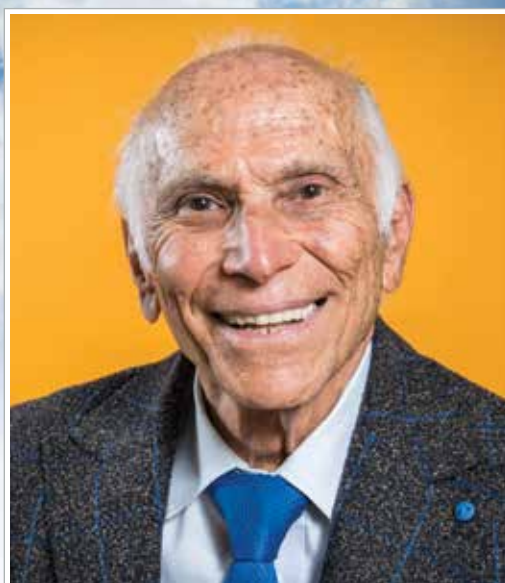
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Throughout his half-century at the University of La Verne, economics

and business Professor Ahmed Ispahani had stood before his students to begin class thousands of times—until March 13, 2020, when everything abruptly changed. As COVID-19 swept through California, President Deborah Lieberman made the difficult decision to go virtual. Within one week, all classes and services would become remote. Including Professor Ispahani's.

"Listening to the news and speaking with colleagues, I assumed we would be virtual for a short time, maybe two weeks or a month," President Lieberman recalled. Little did anyone know that the virtual delivery of all curricular and co-curricular activities and services would stretch not only through 2020, but deep into 2021 as well.

For Ispahani, at age 85 the university's most senior professor, the prospect of remote teaching was daunting. "First thing I did was panic," he admitted. "I was teaching three classes, and I'm



not technical with computers." In fact, he didn't even own one any more—he was relying on his phone, having given his computer to a student who needed it.

Enter Ispahani's colleague Yehia Mortagy, professor of information technology and decision sciences, who volunteered to help. Ispahani got a loaner computer and hotspot from the university. Mortagy set it up and provided assistance. Not only did Ispahani complete the spring 2020 semester, he's a veteran in remote instruction now, having completed the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters as well.

Following the adage "Never let a crisis go to waste," the university community adapted to changes the pandemic forced by developing new ways to serve students. Some will last long beyond the pandemic. They are the silver linings of a challenging year.

Enter Ispahani's colleague  
Yehia Mortagy, professor of information technology and  
decision sciences, who volunteered to help.



For years, counseling center clients asked for telehealth services, but the center was restricted by state and national guidelines. "Once COVID-19 hit, they relaxed those guidelines and we were able to provide telehealth services and reach so many more students," said Elleni Koulos, director of counseling and psychological services. Among them were graduate students and those enrolled in regional campus and online programs for whom distance had made in-person appointments difficult or impossible. No longer limited by the number of counseling offices on campus, the staff has now increased from four to ten therapists, more than doubling the number of students who can be served.





Jamie Solis, director of student health services, saw a similar dynamic. “We’re doing some virtual appointments, which we’d never done before,” she said, with phone triage to determine if an in-person appointment is needed. Before the pandemic, some patients would not make or keep an appointment because they lacked time or gas money. Now, the no-show rate has dropped as students “can call in and speak to a doctor or be seen in their car if they are sick,” she said.

Providing the rich co-curricular experiences a university offers, during a time when in-person

gatherings were not possible, meant that student affairs staff had to get creative to build engagement. Utilizing Campus Labs, a platform for planning, organizing, and promoting online events, “expanded the ability of students to participate, especially students who had family or work responsibilities that would have kept them from participating because it was harder to be in-person,” said Juan Regalado, chief student affairs officer. Even after the pandemic recedes, “We want to be able to keep this component.”

Now, the no-show rate has dropped as students “can call in and speak to a doctor or be seen in their car if they are sick.”



Virtual options for alumni have also dramatically increased.

Kim Grant, assistant vice president for alumni engagement, said, "We've been through a sea-change on how we are thinking about alumni engagement. It has to be more than just in-person events." Zooming has made it possible for alumni far from campus to speak, volunteer, and attend remote events such as "Leo Life Coaching" and the "Ask Me Anything" series. A digital library allows alumni to access content 24/7.

An alumni survey conducted last December suggested that the number one desire was for programming on health and well-being. "We were able to find a quick way to deliver results by working with our Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research colleagues," said Grant. Since the center had started creating virtual workouts and meditation sessions for students, "it was very easy to extend these to alumni as well." Even Homecoming pivoted to virtual, with panel discussions, games, and a virtual 5K fun run opening up the experience to alumni worldwide.



"I have bonded with my students and entered into a learning culture that is more holistic."

On-campus tours have always been a staple in the college recruiter's toolkit. When in-person visits came to a screeching halt on March 13, 2020, Adam Wu, director of undergraduate admissions, and the rest of Vice President Mary Aguayo's enrollment management team had to get creative. By the time socially-distanced campus tours began again 393 days later, they had launched new approaches that will long outlast the pandemic. One of the most popular is student-led Zoom tours. "I've also heard from students that they've loved the number of topics we've had for webinars," said Wu. "We'll definitely keep virtual meetings and webinars to supplement in-person, especially for out-of-state and international students."

As Professor Ispahani's experience vividly demonstrates, faculty faced huge challenges in converting to remote-only instruction with just a week to prepare. Yet silver linings are shining through.

Just ask journalism Professor George Keeler. "I have bonded with my students and entered into a learning culture that is more holistic," he has found. "With Zoom, I am inside their homes. I have met their parents, brothers and sisters, sometimes during life-threatening moments. During a Zoom academic advising session, I met a student's dad, a police officer who was suffering from COVID. The student wanted me to talk to her dad because he wasn't doing well but was trying to stay out of the hospital."

We talked for a few minutes and he then said he would go to the hospital for his daughter's sake. Thankfully, he fully recovered."

Andrea Minkoff, assistant professor of education, has also found a deeper understanding of her students as she's met their families online. It's "a glimpse into our students' lives, and they trust us to share it with us," she said. Minkoff organizes Saturday morning coffee chat and writing support Zooms to help build community and learning support.

Minkoff's colleague Amber Bechard, associate professor of education, said that digitizing processes made it possible for more children to receive literacy support from her Educational Specialist candidates—something that will outlast the pandemic.

"Another bonus is that our teacher candidates have gained important technology skills that they can use to broaden the impact of their expertise," she said.

Minkoff organizes Saturday morning coffee chats and writing Zooms to help build community and learning support.



Management Professor Issam Ghazzawi no doubt spoke for many colleagues when he noted the challenge of keeping students' attention in virtual classes. "Every couple of weeks I send an invite for an optional Zoom meeting for a course that was scheduled to be an online one," he said. Students can discuss assignments or their individual papers. "Last term," he said, "to my biggest surprise, out of 24 students I only missed two or three. Students feel they haven't been abandoned. It's something I will continue after the pandemic for the online classes."





The COVID-19 shutdown could hardly have come at a more inopportune time for President Lieberman. The university's \$125 million comprehensive fundraising campaign was in full swing. Before the pandemic, she shared dinners almost nightly with guests and donors whose support was crucial to the campaign's successful conclusion.

"You cannot allow a pandemic to take your focus off your goal," Lieberman said. "The dinners became virtual. We would have the guests' favorite restaurant deliver their favorite meal and a bottle of wine to their home. I would have dinner in my home and they in theirs." The dinnertime Zoom conversations built relationships that led to investments in the university's future. The campaign was completed a year early, \$3 million over goal.

"It's such a beautiful thing to think about what, in such a challenging time, has been positive," Minkoff remarked. "I read an article that said the pandemic is a portal. What do we want to carry with us through it?"

For the University of La Verne community, what we will carry with us into the future are the things we learned to do better in what was a year of crisis and resilience, of staying apart, yet pulling together. It was a year when, as President Lieberman put it, we learned "you cannot quarantine community." It was a year of silver linings.

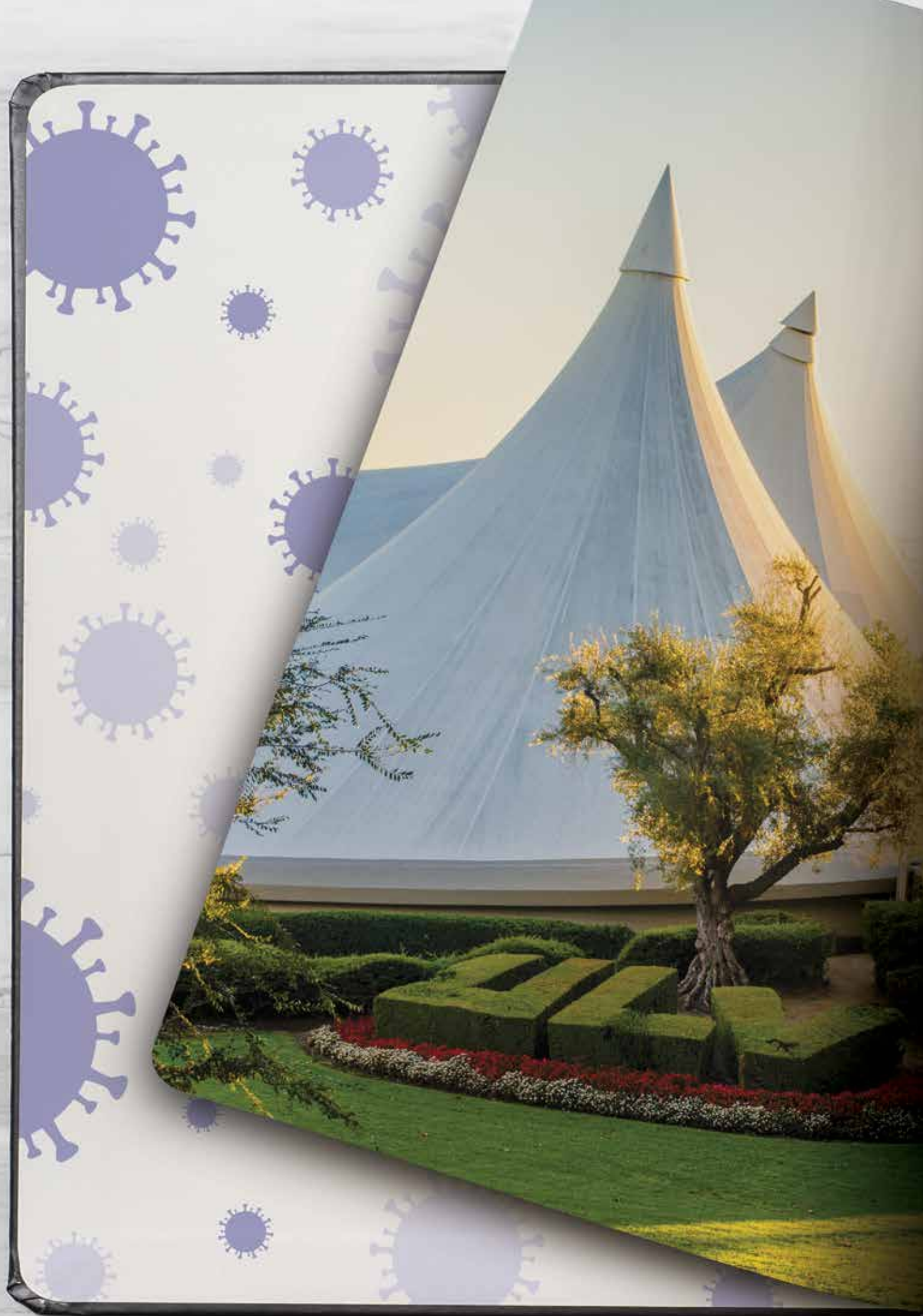
"The pandemic is a portal.  
What do we want to carry with  
us through it?"



IT WAS A YEAR OF  
SILVER LININGS.









# Normal 2.0

**What will Normal 2.0  
look like for the University of  
La Verne community?**

*by Alexandra Clayton*

Someday—sooner rather than later, we all fervently hope—the COVID-19 pandemic will be in the rearview mirror, a plague for scientists, sociologists, and historians to dissect and the rest of us to move beyond. One thing, however, seems certain. **What lies on the other side of the pandemic is not merely a return to Normal, but rather a Normal 2.0.**

After all, nothing that disrupts life across the entire globe simply springs back to the way things were. Like the virus itself, humans have adapted.

To get a sneak peek, *Voice* talked with people in a variety of professions and life stages to find out what has changed since the pandemic began and how their new normal is taking shape. Here's a page from the Normal 2.0 playbook.



## Alyssa Navarro

What began as a surreptitious recording of her singing Disney songs while at work in her home office turned into nearly 11 million views on TikTok for Alyssa Navarro '16 and her fiancé, A.J. Rafael.

It started with "Reflection," from the Disney animated feature *Mulan*, with Navarro singing and Rafael backing with keyboards and occasional vocal harmony. It moved on to songs such as "What I've Been Looking For" and "Breaking Free" from *High School Musical* and "On My Own" from *Les Misérables*.

"Just started playing to see if she'd sing along while working," Rafael captioned the original video. "And still sounds like a freakin Disney princess when not warmed up and working from home." That she was working at home, for Disney, made the story all the better. Eventually their close harmony landed the duo on *Good Morning America* in the heart of the pandemic—a bit of brightness in an otherwise dreary COVID-19 winter.

Normal 2.0 for Navarro? Hard to tell. She's keeping her day job, which she loves, helping to produce short original films by directors from under-represented groups for Disney Launchpad on Disney+.

"I now have a newfound love for bringing creative people together from across the world," Navarro said. "I don't think I would have been able to do this if the pandemic didn't happen. Pockets of happiness have come along the way, and I will take those forward with me."

## Gretchen Cooper

Gretchen Cooper '08 is a licensed marriage and family therapist whose practice aided the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health in supporting high-risk populations. Her clients were Medi-Cal recipients, undocumented migrants, and the unhoused. She reached clients in schools, shelters, and courthouses as well as her office.

The pandemic left Cooper scrambling for a new way to reach those who needed help. The answer she found was telehealth. Research and experience convinced her that it was just as effective as in-person therapy. "Telehealth made mental health accessible," she discovered. Clients who were without transportation and time-constrained could

still connect through virtual sessions. With younger clients, it was especially easy. "Children of this generation have adapted much quicker to online therapy than adults, because they've grown up with tablets in their hands," she said. "It's fascinating how adaptable children are."

But who helps the helpers? To help ease the strain on her fellow therapists, Cooper obtained a telehealth grant in partnership with The Gentle Barn, a nonprofit animal welfare organization. Cooper now brings animals into Zoom work meetings, providing stress-relief to mental health practitioners. Said Cooper, "Watching people heal is the most amazing feeling in the world."

## Jonathan Ayala

Jonathan Ayala '13 was a respiratory therapy student close to completing his clinical units. Then, almost overnight, he became a life-saver, helping to treat patients in extreme distress. The COVID-19 pandemic was creating a crush of patients, too many of them with respiratory failure. A new federal policy quickly passed in the spring of 2020 allowed eligible students like Ayala to work as externs, stretching the respiratory therapy workforce and his own professional experience.

Ayala was asked to check patients every two hours. Just putting on personal protective equipment took ten minutes before each visit. He quickly became family to strangers facing extreme need. The long hours were physically and mentally exhausting, but he felt hope as he saw patients survive.

At the University of La Verne, Ayala had majored in athletic training, aiming to improve lives. He found his calling in respiratory therapy following his own experience of lung collapse in 2018. He completed his program and is now a licensed respiratory therapist.

In Ayala's Normal 2.0, he takes nothing for granted. As he witnesses the most fragile moments of his patients' lives, he vows to take every measure to ensure they are given the utmost emotional support, just as much as physical care.

From the experience of the past year, Ayala now has a new life philosophy. "Live in the present," he said, "because we cannot control the future."

YES!



## Michelle Pasos

Until the pandemic struck, Michelle Pasos was living her *dharma*—her life mission—as owner of United Yoga Studio and partner with the Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research at the University of La Verne, where she led classes and trained certified yoga instructors.

All that changed in March 2020. To abide by local COVID-19 public health guidelines, Pasos shut down studio operations, closed off yoga-session memberships, and sent reimbursements to her clientele. Only the support of her yoga community kept her business afloat. They raised thousands of dollars to cover months of unpaid studio rent. “I have chills, because they are the reason we’ve stayed in business,” she said.

In the throes of the pandemic, Pasos pivoted her business to a new Normal 2.0. Now, her once temporary plans for virtual classes have become permanent.


Always committed to inclusion along with well-being, Pasos found a way to teach her first yoga instructor trainee, who is deaf. Using Zoom accessibility options and an interpreter, this student was able to attend the entire yoga training online without limitations. She used the chat function to ask questions fast and was able to do the yogic practice postures in a space that was familiar to her.

“Online training allows us to be more accessible,” Pasos said. The studio will continue to offer hybrid class options in its new Normal 2.0.

WHAT WILL MY  
NORMAL 2.0  
LOOK LIKE?

**Top to bottom:** Alyssa Navarro and A.J. Rafael, Michelle Pasos, Jonathan Ayala, Gretchen Cooper





# A Future of Health and Well-Being

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The announcement of plans for a new College of Health and Community Well-Being signals the university's intent to be a change leader in the healthcare field.

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By **Matt Hutaff**

In February 2020, the University of La Verne held a town hall meeting. The sole topic on the agenda was its 2025 Strategic Vision, a roadmap of themes, goals, and plans that would be used to guide the institution into the next decade. Of particular interest was the singular transformative initiative—a new College of Health and Community Well-Being. Its bold mission: to address complex, community-level inequities prevalent in the system while offering new and relevant programs to students interested in pursuing a career in the medical field. Then, three weeks later, the world shut down.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic flaws in healthcare in the United States, chief among them workforce shortages. Reports from the Department of Health and Human Services share that thousands of hospitals across the country face a labor shortage, with more than a thousand saying they are critically short on staff. Those projections are expected to grow as Americans continue to age. By 2025, the deficit of trained workers could reach well into the millions.

The coming launch of the College of Health and Community Well-Being could therefore not be more timely. The University of La Verne is poised to recruit, educate, and deploy a diverse healthcare workforce capable of reflecting and serving the Southern California region and beyond. The vision is about to be made manifest.





## A Commitment to Well-Being

That's not to say all this is new to the university—it has long held a keen interest in health and wellness. Opened in 2019, the Randall Lewis Center for Well-Being and Research links the region to resources for physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

"By leveraging our current health programs and enhancing our efforts to provide health profession education, our graduates will be able to return to their home communities and be prepared for professions that are in high demand," said President Deborah Lieberman.

Many of the university's existing health-focused programs will form the cornerstone of the new college in its first of three phases. Many more are planned in the coming years, including programs in nursing. Nursing is a key part of the plan, as the nurse-to-population ratio in California is low and tens of thousands of qualified applicants are turned away from nursing programs annually because of a lack of available space to accommodate them. Proposed training spaces for nursing include simulated labor and delivery suites, operating rooms, and pediatric care. Additionally, partnerships with local community colleges and businesses could provide registered nurses with an associate degree an opportunity to complete their bachelor's in nursing. The goal is to craft an educational experience that prepares students for the frontlines of medicine while addressing novel challenges at the patient and community levels.

"The students we attract are from the region," said Interim Vice Provost Brian Clocksin. "They are interested in returning to the region, and they represent the demographics of the region. We have a chance to lead the work in training the next generation of a diverse health and well-being workforce."

## The Unhealthy State of Healthcare

Currently, 1,000+ hospitals say they are critically short on staff.

By 2025, the deficit of trained workers could reach well into the millions.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services

## The Next Phase

Successive phases could see a number of new degree programs launch. Among those under consideration are health science, public health, behavioral analysis, occupational therapy, clinical laboratory sciences, genetic counseling, and respiratory therapy. New certificate programs will also be developed, and several are already available through La Verne Extended Learning.

The end result will be a new college positioned to make the university into a change leader in healthcare training. The pieces are coming into place and have strong backing to succeed over the next five to 10 years. When they are put together as one whole, the results will be transformative for the university and the region.

"It's critical to think of well-being as an umbrella term of the interconnection between different phases of our life," added Clocksin.

"As we move forward as a society, especially post-pandemic, there is overlap in our systems that has to be looked at through a systems approach, not just individual pieces. Education, health, food security, safety. If we focus solely on one and put everything else on the side, it can lead to illness or lack of thriving. We have to look at a holistic approach to how we prepare students, train the workforce, and build institutions of higher education in the community."

The new College of Health and Community Well-Being is being designed to do exactly that.

**"The university recognized the increasing need for health professionals in the region and the growing interest in health professions among students."**

— President Deborah Lieberman



## ❖ IN THE SPOTLIGHT ARTS





# World's Fair Collection Finds a Home in La Verne

## **MORE THAN 100 BOXES OF ORIGINAL WORLD'S FAIR DOCUMENTS AND ARTIFACTS ARE NOW**

part of the University of La Verne's Archives and Special Collections, thanks to the extraordinary gift of the PonTell family. Dating back to the very first expo, held in London in 1851, this vast treasure trove includes books, photographs, brochures, and objects revealing the fascinating history of this highly influential enterprise. Once catalogued, the collection will be shared in classes and made available to researchers. They will also be placed in rotating displays around campus and loaned to community institutions such as Fairplex in Pomona and the Huntington Library.

The World's Fair Collection was amassed by David F. PonTell (1923–2008), a versatile businessman who made major contributions to the civic development of Big Bear Lake, where he and his family lived for nearly 40 years. A true Renaissance man, PonTell loved the arts and literature and was a painter and violinist in his spare time. In his younger years, he ran Presentation Industries in San Gabriel, a company that built displays and interactive exhibits for museums and fairs. Among the projects he worked on was *Mathematica: A World of Numbers...and Beyond*, commissioned in 1961 by IBM Corporation and created by the legendary industrial designers Charles and Ray Eames. A copy of this exhibit was made for the IBM Pavilion at the 1964–65 New York World's Fair.

PonTell was an avid fan of world's fairs and expos. He and his wife traveled to many, and in all their travels,

they scanned antique shops in search of world's fair artifacts. Soon the collection grew as friends and family members went on the lookout for collectibles to gift to the PonTells.

When PonTell passed away, his son Steve, a city planner who develops affordable housing, became caretaker of the collection. After much thought and research, Steve, with the blessing of the rest of the family, decided to gift the collection to the University of La Verne. His good friend President Devorah Lieberman introduced him to Ben Jenkins, university archivist. Jenkins' passion and vision for the collection's use, along with the university's commitment to educating first-generation students, won Steve over.

"Fairs are great little pieces of history," Steve reflected. "At one time, they were the primary venue for bringing the latest products and technology to market, and they served to educate people all over the globe. Being such a huge draw, they also presented an opportunity to revitalize the cities they took place in."

***“Fairs are great little pieces of history. At one time, they were the primary venue for bringing the latest products and technology to market, and they served to educate people all over the globe.”***



Many people today don't realize that Seattle's Space Needle, the Eiffel Tower, San Diego's Balboa Park museums, and San Francisco's Palace of Fine Arts were all built for world's fairs and expos. Now University of La Verne students can learn about this global history from their classrooms in Southern California.

# Trustee Frank Lizarraga Endows Law Deanship

**IN LATE 2019, THE UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE DECIDED THAT THE COLLEGE OF LAW WOULD**

move forward with accreditation from the State Bar of California, recommitting to its mission of increasing regional access to a legal education and producing high-quality lawyers to serve the communities of California.

Since then, the college has had a landmark year, as it enjoyed record-high new student enrollment for the 2020–21 academic year and a first-year class that boasted the highest median GPA of any incoming class

in the last decade. The pass rate for the California Bar Examination among first-time test takers in October 2020 also rose to 73 percent, a significant increase over previous years.

Then came a generous and visionary gift from noted attorney and university Trustee Frank J. Lizarraga, Jr. '80, to endow the college's dean. Kevin S. Marshall, JD, MPA, PhD, the acting dean, immediately became the inaugural Frank Lizarraga Endowed Dean of the College of Law.

Endowed deans are a rarity in law schools, and the Lizarraga deanship is the first to be established at a school accredited exclusively by the State Bar of California. It is also the University of La Verne's first-ever endowed dean.

A native of Ontario, California, Lizarraga is an accomplished civil litigator with more than 30 years of experience. He has his own legal practice in Ontario and serves as general counsel to some of the most influential organizations in the Inland Empire. He is a longtime supporter of the College of Law, which has its campus in Ontario, and is chair of the college's Board of Advisors.

"I am so proud of how well the college's graduates are serving their local communities, and with this gift, I want to inspire my fellow established lawyers to support the college's mission," Lizarraga said. "My greatest hope is that the Frank Lizarraga Endowed Dean of the College of Law will kick off a long legacy of members of our legal community giving back to the College of Law and to the Inland Southern California community."

The University of La Verne's College of Law is known for creating an innovative and collaborative learning environment designed to develop the knowledge and real-world legal skills relevant to working in private practice, public service, business, government, and on the bench. The college is consistently ranked highly for student diversity and minority representation.



Frank Lizarraga (left) with College of Law Dean Kevin Marshall



The Ohana Project



Wheel Meal



GloFort

# Student Innovations Become Cash for Charities

## **RICK HASSE DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE TEACHING HIS STUDENTS HOW TO CREATE AND SELL PRODUCTS**

in the midst of a pandemic. But since the sudden transition to remote learning in March 2020, he and his students have been challenged to become even more agile and savvy—with remarkable results.

A senior instructor in the College of Business and Public Management, Hasse leads the college's signature Integrated Business Program. Students create and operate enterprises that sell actual products, with proceeds donated to charity.

Because of the pandemic, each team since spring 2020 has had to use innovative means to sell their products, with some going completely digital. The switch to online sales and marketing has not only helped them hone traditional business skills but cutting edge methods as well. In the 2021 spring semester, the teams ran well ahead of last year in sales, and Hasse believes this has to do with the students' dedication to helping their causes as well as their savvy online media skills. "These students picked charities where they really feel they are doing

something and can sink their teeth into helping the community," Hasse said.

One group, known as The Ohana Project, sold biodegradable eating utensils that are sustainable and travel-safe.

Another created GloFort, a small, portable ring light that can be clamped to most surfaces. It is lightweight and rechargeable by USB port.

Wheel Meal is designed to solve a problem for people who live and work in their cars. A detachable steering wheel tray acts as both a table and a laptop holder for efficient use of interior automobile space.

"These three products are all relevant to the pandemic age," said Hasse. "This sends a statement that our students are helping themselves and the community."

## ***Among the Charities Supported this Semester***

- **10,000 Degrees:** an educational foundation supporting families and students of all backgrounds
- **Restaurant Workers' Community Foundation:** aiding food workers affected by pandemic closures
- **University of La Verne Student Relief Fund:** helping students meet financial burdens caused by the pandemic



# Distant but Determined

**MARCH 12, 2020 WILL STICK IN THE MEMORY OF THE LEOPARD ATHLETICS COMMUNITY AS THE DAY THE UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE MADE THE DIFFICULT AND RESPONSIBLE**

decision to suspend the rest of the spring athletic season due to COVID-19. Students were heartbroken as teams were notified their season would be cut short. That began a long year of student-athletes training at home, away from their coaches, teammates, and athletic facilities.

But quitting is not in the DNA of Leopard student-athletes. When adversity strikes, they rise to the occasion and move forward. The Leopards borrowed, built, and used everyday items as workout equipment to train in their new environments.

Being away from campus also forced University of La Verne's coaching staffs to get creative. Coaches had to find ways to keep a strong connection within their teams.

These are just snapshots of the effort put in by University of La Verne's coaches and athletics staff to keep their teams connected and motivated during the strangest year.

Head Women's Soccer Coach Lauryn Pehanich used a tool she knew all of her players were experts in—social media. Pehanich took to Instagram and began posting videos of herself on the La Verne women's soccer account doing a variety of drills and challenges.

"One of the things I miss the most about being on the field is the competition," said Pehanich. "We were just searching as a coaching staff—what can we do to instigate some type of competition? So that was what we came up with."

Her athletes would respond by posting videos on their accounts going through the drills.

"It was really fun," said sophomore rhetoric and communications studies major Sarah Ramirez. "It was a good way of seeing everyone still on the ball even though we weren't with each other. It kept me motivated and held us accountable, especially since we were posting on our Instagram."

***“It was a good way of seeing everyone still on the ball even though we weren't with each other.”***

**SARAH RAMIREZ, SOPHOMORE**  
—ON POSTING DRILLS





*“It’s nice to hear what we’re thankful for and what we play for.”*

**RAYMOND MORONEZ, SENIOR**  
—ON POSTING POSITIVES

With plenty of negatives to dwell on resulting from their canceled season, Head Football Coach Chris Krich chose to have his team focus on the positives. He had his team record and share videos about all the things for which they are grateful. Krich then decided to post the videos on the team’s Instagram and Twitter accounts.

“We were just doing it amongst each other, sharing it with our players, but then I thought more people need to hear about this,” said Krich. “We really felt that if we felt good listening to our players talk about these things, maybe somebody else will too. It really helped us get perspective on what we should be grateful for and that not everything is as bad as it seems.”

Senior psychology major Raymond Moronez called the project “a reflection of the type of program we run at La Verne. It’s about football and family. It’s a community,” Moronez said. “It’s nice to hear what we’re thankful for and what we play for. It really makes me feel like there’s nothing we should be taking for granted. It makes me feel determined and passionate about what we’re doing.”

*“It gave us a chance to stay connected with coach.”*

**JAZZLYN JOHNSON, JUNIOR**  
—ON “WEEKLY TENS”

Outside of team Zoom meetings and group texts, Head Women’s Basketball Coach Jason Pruitt stayed connected with his players by scheduling individual 10-minute weekly video calls.

“The rule is they have to give me 10 minutes of their time outside of our team meetings, and we talk for about 10 minutes about life,” he said. “It can go longer—as long as they need, but they have to check in with me once a week.”

The “Weekly Tens,” as the team referred to the calls, ensured that his players received the individual attention they needed and had space to talk about whatever was on their minds.

“It gave us a chance to stay connected with coach,” said junior biology major Jazzlyn Johnson. “Coach Pruitt wants us to succeed outside of basketball. He wants us to get involved with other clubs and groups and be a well-rounded person for our future.”



# Three Leos Innovate in Response to Pandemic

**AMID THE UNPRECEDENTED COVID-19 DISRUPTION, THREE UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE ALUMNI, WHOSE PROFESSIONAL LIVES WERE TAXED IN WAYS THEY COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED, HAVE HARNESSSED**

lessons learned in their academic programs to find surprisingly positive outcomes. They no doubt represent thousands of Leos who have turned preparation into success under severely challenging circumstances.



## FONDA WHITEHEAD

MSLM '13; MPA '16

Fonda Whitehead said she held fast to concepts from her graduate business courses as the pandemic crisis swelled. "Accountability, responsibility, efficiency, and effectiveness. As the world seemed to be falling apart around me, those concepts were so helpful."

Whitehead directs the Union Rescue Mission's Hope Garden Family Center (HGFC) in Sylmar, California. It provides homeless transitional housing for women and children experiencing domestic violence, drug abuse, or sex trafficking. She accepted her new position just two months before the pandemic shutdown began.

"My first thought was 'How am I going to protect these 225 women, children, and senior citizens on our campus?'" Whitehead recalled. "I really just went into survival mode." The needs, such as regular meals and

***"I learned at the university that you must always be prepared... You have to think outside the box and realize there is not just one right answer."***

— JUDGE LISA M. ROGAN

on-site schooling, were widespread and complex, yet dozens of volunteers critical to HGFC's activities were sheltering at home.

Because of past traumas, Whitehead knew the students couldn't be isolated, so she and her staff pitched in to teach while social distancing. HGFC's location in the foothills makes Wi-Fi connectivity problematic. But Whitehead's persistence paid off in philanthropic support.

"One donor gave \$100,000 for Wi-Fi," she said. "Another gave us a computer lab. Another donor did a registry of items we needed through Global Gift Registry. It included blankets, toothpaste, PPE gear, sanitized masks, DVD players and games for the kids, anything a family might need."

A silver lining? "This pandemic has helped me be grateful and humble," said Whitehead.



## JUDGE LISA M. ROGAN

JD '01

San Bernardino County Superior Court Judge Lisa M. Rogan, who supervises the Rancho Cucamonga courthouse, has also experienced the positive that has come out of what she calls "operating in chaos."

"I learned at the university that you must always be prepared," said Rogan. "It's been a wild ride. But it harkens back to my time as a police officer, when you move from emergency to emergency. You have to think outside the

box and realize there is not just one right answer."

As COVID-19 restrictions limited the number of people in courtrooms, jury deliberation rooms, and public spaces, Rogan not

only thought outside the box—she thought outside the building. As the supervising judge of 20 courtrooms, she opened up one of them as an outdoor "courtroom" that handles misdemeanor arraignments.

The space, in a breezeway with a large fountain, has areas partitioned off by police tape for the judge, public defenders, and defendants. Minor cases, such as driving without a license, are now handled quickly and more efficiently, eliminating pandemic-related obstacles such as



long lines at elevators and screenings prior to entering a building. Pre-COVID there was a backlog of 2,000 cases. Now the court is able to handle up to 500 cases per day.

"The judge in this particular courtroom and even the defendants love it," said Rogan. "Courts all over the state are calling me about this. We will definitely keep it going after COVID."



## **SAM BUENROSTRO**

EdD '12

Sam Buenrostro, superintendent of the Corona-Norco Unified School District, has also dealt with the urgent needs of children during this stressful time.

Last November, Buenrostro took over leadership of 53,000 students, 51 schools, and 5,500 employees.

"That's overwhelming," he said. "But the values I learned at the university provided a rich toolkit to bring teams together." Although he had been with the district for more than 20 years, COVID-19 brought a different urgency to the work.

Buenrostro had to juggle the views of teachers, employees, parents, and union leaders, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Riverside County Public Health department.

"We try to remain as collaborative as we can. With parents, there are two extremes—those who don't want their children to come back at all and those who want things just like they were with no masks," said Buenrostro. "But the vast majority are in between, and in the end, we are all advocating for safety. Children are so resilient. We adults worry more."

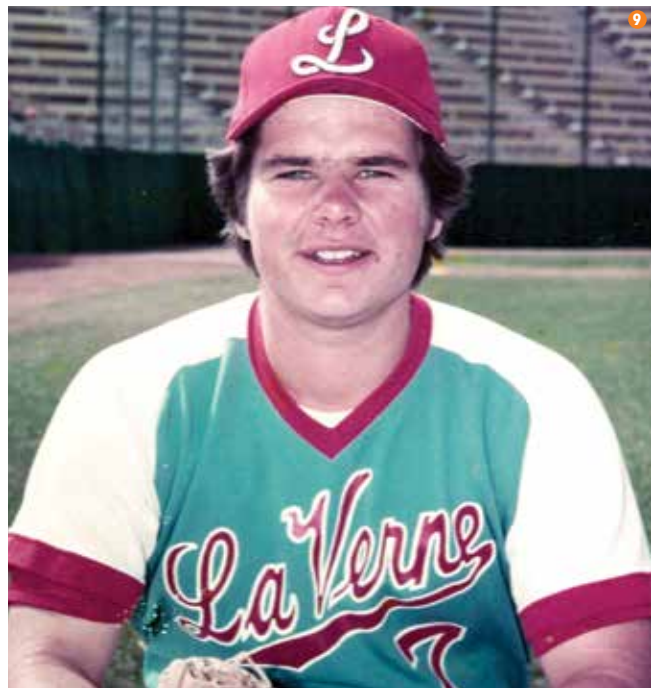
Buenrostro's team implemented numerous changes to make possible the gradual return of students to in-person learning. Among them were temperature checks, partitioned desks, improved ventilation systems, employees helping with entrance and exit, and constant cleaning of high-touch surfaces.

Some major benefits have accrued during the pandemic year. "We didn't think we would have a digital device for each student for years," said Buenrostro. "Now, because of federal and state emergency funds, we have them available for all students."

He also takes pleasure in parents' appreciation for teachers after months of at-home schooling. "The recognition of the value a teacher holds in society is so important!" he said.



## LEOPARD TRACKS ALUMNI NOTES







## Marriages

- ❶ **Sierra Dasher '16, MEd '21**, married **Ben Alikovic '17** on May 1, 2021.
- ❷ **Jessica Faber '18** married Jonathan Mitchell in the small town of Tuolumne, California on May 9, 2020.

## Births

- ❸ **Bree Brown '16, MEd '18**, welcomed her first child, Emmet William Brown, on April 21, 2021.
- ❹ **Annie Hokanson '18** welcomed her first daughter, Elle Sloane, on March 3, 2021.
- ❺ **Rubi Phillips '17** welcomed her second child, Jett Phillips, on March 19, 2021.
- ❻ **Oscar Pinto '20** welcomed his first child, Roque Pinto, on August 5, 2020.
- ❼ **Dallas Quinones '16** and **Zach Quinones '15** welcomed their first child, Hunter Alexander Quinones, on September 10, 2020.

## 1950s

**Pete Baum '53** passed away on August 4, 2020. As a student, Baum was a starting catcher on the baseball team for four years, then became the university football announcer for over three decades. In 2013, Baum was elected to the University of La Verne Athletic Hall of Fame. He also served on the university's Board of Trustees while working as a principal at the Azusa Unified School District.

## 1960s

- ❽ **Alma Cooper Gates '61** passed away on December 7, 2020. Gates met her husband, Harry Gates '61, while attending the University of La Verne. During her senior year, Gates was elected the homecoming queen of 1960. After graduation, the Gates' enjoyed working at Camp La Verne.

**Todd A. DeMitchell '69** recently had his ninth and tenth books published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. After 18 years teaching in public schools and 30 years in higher education, he retired in May 2020.

## 1970s

**Frederick O. Terrell '77** has become a new member of the Board of Directors for Vroom, an e-commerce platform for buying and selling vehicles.

- ❾ **Timothy Burzette '78** was named to the National College Baseball Hall of Fame Class of 2021 through the College Baseball Foundation on May 13, 2021. Burzette is the first alumnus to be inducted into the National College Baseball Hall of Fame. Burzette earned First Team NAIA All-American three straight seasons (1976–1978) during his time at the university.

## 1980s

**Dale Coleman, II '81** was appointed to the Board of Directors for the Wally Parks NHRA Motorsports Museum presented by Automobile Club of Southern California. He is the retired vice president of Fairplex.

- ❿ **Robin Holland '82** was appointed chief operating officer for Purchasing Power, LLC, in February 2020.

**Damon L. Alexander '85** was elected to the San Bernardino City Council on November 3, 2020.

**Thomas Edward Hazerian '87, MBA '91**, became a University of La Verne adjunct faculty professor in 1996 and received a PhD from the University of Sheffield on June 6, 2018.

**Beth A. Plale, MBA '87**, accepted a new position as executive director for the Indiana University Pervasive Technology Institute.

- ⓫ **Olivia Battle Graham '89** passed away on September 24, 2020.

## 1990s

- ⓬ **Raja Edirisuriya, MPA '92**, was appointed executive project management director for Columbo Port City Development Project.

**Alan Muney, MHA '92** was appointed to the Board of Directors of Alcresta Therapeutics, Inc.

**Anthony Lavale Dockery '94** was nominated to be first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in Nashville. Dockery is currently a pastor at St. Stephen Baptist Church in La Puente and is chairman of the Board of Trustees of California Baptist University.

**Donna M. Manfredi, MEd '98**, accepted a new position as principal for Golden Oak Adult School.

**Warren Masami Kato, JD '98** was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom as a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge.

**Angel Mejico '99** was named California Teacher of the Year in 2019.

**Cynthia Herrera, MEd '99**, was named the associate vice chancellor of strategic partnerships, enrollment, and advancement at the Ventura County Community College District.

## 2000s

- ⓭ **Leslie Ramirez '04** was promoted to Los Angeles Unified School District school police chief on December 8, 2020.

**Carlos Gonzalez '04, MEd '07**, received the San Bernardino County Teacher of the Year award in 2018.

**Richard R. Romero '08** president and CEO of Seattle Credit Union, accepted an appointment to serve on its Board of Directors.

**Pamela Bennett '00** was appointed by the State of California to the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission as of March 21, 2019.



## LEOPARD TRACKS ALUMNI NOTES



**Victor Gordo, JD '01** became Pasadena's first Latino mayor on December 7, 2020.

**14 Nathan Baca '03** won Broadcasting and Cable magazine's top investigative award for 2020.

**15 Brian K. Creasman '03** was named Superintendent of the Year by the Kentucky Association of School Administrators for 2020.

**Todd T. De Voe '03** is director in Emergency Management at Titan HST and has graduated from FEMA's National Emergency Management Executive Academy.

**Christopher J. DeRosa, MBA '04**, has started as business development officer for CIT Commercial Services.

**Christine Hopkins, MS '04**, is CEO of Associated Service Companies International, LLC.

**Alex Vasquez '05** was named the 2020 Video Journalist of the Year by Canon and the Press Photographers Association of Greater Los Angeles.

**16 Elizabeth "Libby" Cline Birmingham '05, MEd '07, MEd '12**, teaches science in Stanton Elementary School in Glendora, California.

**Candice A. Garcia-Rodrigo, JD '06, MPA '08, MS '09**, has been appointed to serve as a judge in the San Bernardino County Superior Court. She is its first Latina judge.

**Jonathan Serret '06, MS '17** has been named cultural affairs director of the City of Thousand Oaks.

**Mike Swize, EdD '06**, accepted a new position as the Palm Springs Unified School District Superintendent of Schools, effective July 1, 2021.



**Karen Preacely Hicks, MS '07**, was named Los Angeles County School Counselor of the Year and serves as a school counselor at Lawndale High School.

**17 Karen Pollard, MS '07, PsyD '10**, was named one of *Brainz Magazine's* Global Top 500, along with Elon Musk, Kamala Harris, Greta Thunberg, Simon Sinek, and more.

**18 Torie F. Gibson, EdD '09**, has been named as superintendent of schools at Amador County Public Schools.

**Tiffany Mendez '09, MEd '14, EdD '18**, was named Pomona College's director of financial aid beginning August 2, 2021.

**Shahrooz Roohparvar, MBA '09**, was named vice president for administration and finance at Humboldt State University.

### 2010s

**Erika Allen, MS '10**, was selected to participate in the 2021 Millennium Leadership Initiative, co-sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. Allen is the executive director of the Lewis-Clark State College's Foundation and the director of college advancement.

**Yeşim Atacan, MS '10**, has been promoted to head the Human Resource Department at VavaCars.

**Erik Johnson '11** joined the Commercial Litigation Practice Group of the midwestern law firm Plunkett Cooney on March 5, 2021.



**Michael Steven Warren '14** was appointed to the Board of Directors for Authvia.

**Aaron A. Brown '16** started as CSUSB Alumni Relations alumni outreach and communications specialist in 2021.

**Monique A. Gramling, Esq., JD '16**, is now an attorney at Kahana & Feld LLP, Irvine, focusing on insurance defense matters.

**Stephanie Ceminsky, EdD '17**, has been named an ACSA Region 18 Administrator of the Year.

**Paris Patterson-Garner '18** joined the Master of Science in Foreign Service program, Fall 2020 cohort, at Georgetown University.

**Austin Denison '19** was recognized for his successful leadership in Medium as the founder and CEO of Denison Success Systems LLC.

### 2020s

**19 Seema Sidhu, EdD '20** is an assistant principal in the Anaheim Union High School District.

**20 Seth Springer '20** is a Los Angeles city firefighter who cared for and transported COVID-19 patients while finishing his bachelor's degree in organizational management.

**Abdulla Wasel '20** was appointed as managing associate of Wasel & Wasel and secretary to the Board of Directors for the Hague Institute for Global Justice.



# My Perspective Doing *the Work*

**I FEEL ALIGNED WITH MY PURPOSE IN LIFE, BUT I DIDN'T GET THERE UNTIL I DID *THE WORK*. IT STARTS IN THE HEART.**

It took me a while to figure out what my role would be in *the work*. I knew I wanted to be a light in whatever space I occupied, but was unsure what *the work* was supposed to look like until I found my calling in diversity and inclusivity.

I wanted to meet people where they were and assist in their growth and development. The desire to understand the richness in differences, to serve as a resource, and to help create synergy pushed me to be more intentional in *the work*.

The more I dove into *the work*, the more reflection I did about myself. I wanted to pinpoint how I had developed this drive and how I would be able to sustain myself in it. I realized that I had been privileged to grow up in a household where God and love were the foundation. My parents, Willie and Zandra Burrel, created a space that was authentic, supportive, and conducive to continuous growth and development.

My mom likes to say that I take after my father, who, through ministry and community, dedicated his energy and effort to helping others. But I believe that I took after both of them and many others in my family and immediate support tribe. Their love for people, personable communication, community



engagement, and humble partnership provided great examples for my approach to this lifelong work.

After 13 years in higher education, I was fortunate to join the University of La Verne community in October 2019. After serving at multiple diverse institutions of higher education, I was ultimately drawn to the core values of the University of La Verne and its identity as a Hispanic Serving Institution. There is a positive shift happening within our university's culture, and I am grateful to help lead and to be a part of this journey.

Diversity work is challenging, as many people avoid difficult conversations and shy away from acknowledging the need for personal work. However, the presence of a global pandemic, racial unrest, and blatant racism and discrimination against Black and Brown persons give us no choice but to address the issues in front of us.

I look to approach *the work* from both a personal and an institutional perspective, where I initiate conversations around race and racism, bridge gaps in communication, educate myself and others around power, privilege, inequities, and oppression, and eliminate barriers to success. Knowing that I am aligned with my purpose and am bringing about change through this work is fulfilling. I invite everyone to join me as we grow our minds, bodies, and spirits together as one community.

Let's work!



## THROWBACK

**Top:** Roland Ortmayer (seated on the couch, right) spends time with students in Woody Hall. **Bottom left:** Isaac Woody (holding a shovel) attends the groundbreaking for Woody Hall. **Bottom right:** Students congregate outside Woody Hall.



Photos: Archives and Special Collections, University of La Verne



# The Roots of Woody Hall

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WAS NOT THE FIRST ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCE TO SERVE AS A CATALYST

for positive change at the University of La Verne. In the mid-20th century, from behind the long shadow of war and depression, an enduring “silver lining” emerged on campus—one still visible today.

For the first half-century of its history, the University of La Verne had no men’s residence hall. A women’s dormitory opened in 1918, but men who came to La Verne either had to commute or find their own housing in town. In many cases, they ended up living in the back lots of the town’s residents or in small sheds—whatever accommodations they could find.

Financially, the school was not in a position to build housing for its male students during the 1930s because of the Great Depression. Then, when World War II broke out, the number of male students plummeted. After the war, when the financial status of the college improved and the GI Bill opened the floodgates of returning soldiers anxious to get advanced education, the first men’s dormitory was built.

Woody Hall was officially dedicated on October 17, 1948. It was named for Isaac J. Woody, the keeper of the grounds and a beloved figure in the La Verne community. During the Great Depression, when a number of students found it difficult to pay tuition, he would sometimes loan or give them money to continue their education. Maybe Woody Hall was a “silver lining” for him, too. He worked hard taking care of the campus day in and day out, never expecting a building to later be named in his honor.

For years after Woody Hall opened, two “dorm parents” mentored and monitored “the boys” living there. Football coach Roland Ortmyer, after whom the football stadium is named, and his wife, Cornelia, were the dorm parents for many years. The Ortmyers were influential for many students, not just those who lived in Woody Hall. Students described them as being on duty

24/7. Corni Ortmyer was fond of saying about Woody Hall men, “If you hurt one of my boys, you better watch out!” The snack stand at Ortmyer Stadium is still called Corni’s Corner in her honor.

Students enjoyed the convivial atmosphere of the dormitory. Richard Hepner came to La Verne in 1949, making him an early dormer at Woody Hall. He recalls that his mother brought him fudge periodically, which the entire building enjoyed together. He was recently inducted into the university’s football hall of fame and says that many football players lived in Woody Hall and made it a very close-knit community.

Quinter Beery, who lived in Woody Hall in the 1950s, says that students who lived in the dorm were “always up to different shenanigans.” For instance, some of the residents who lived there once took a car off the street and tucked it between two trees on the lawn outside the building. Students would also ride in the drainage ditch outside Woody Hall (which is today a sewage line) in inflatable inner tubes all the way to Lake Puddingstone, with dorm mates cheering them on from their windows on the second floor. And they were not averse to raiding the women’s residence, Miller Hall—likely after the 10 p.m. curfew.

### Woody Hall Facts

- Dedicated: **October 17, 1948**
- Named for: **Isaac J. Woody, beloved university groundskeeper**
- First “dorm parents”: **Roland and Cornelia Ortmyer—the football stadium and Corni’s Corner are named in their honor**

Woody Hall was the first of many new buildings to go up on the La Verne campus in the postwar era. It signaled the revitalization of the university after the war—a “silver lining” indeed for future generations.

*Ben Jenkins is assistant professor of history and political science and University of La Verne archivist. Special thanks to the Al Clark Oral History Collection for some of the memories cited in this piece.*

# University of La Verne

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I believe in the university’s mission and values  
and love the community. I am proud of all that the  
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