

The Magazine of
Pitzer College
Fall 2024
Volume 57 Issue 2

PARTICIPANT



IN BLOOM

PITZER'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
LANDSCAPE IS THRIVING

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A Matter of Trust

Dear Pitzer Community,

There are a number of rankings and surveys that higher education institutions anticipate every year: *Princeton Review*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Times Higher Education*, among many others.



In light of the community engagement theme of this issue of *Participant*, though, there's another that interests me more: A 2023 Gallup survey about public confidence in higher education.

The results were not what anyone in higher education wanted.

According to that survey, just 36% of Americans expressed confidence in higher education. That number has been declining for years—Gallup reported a confidence level of 57% in 2015 and 48% in 2018.

Gallup cites a number of factors behind that decline. They include the fact that colleges and universities have been swept up in broader public dissatisfaction and mistrust of American institutions, including the Supreme Court, Congress, and the presidency, among others, as well as the concomitant rise in social and political polarization, manifested in recent turmoil across college campuses since the Gaza conflict began.

How can colleges and universities respond to this challenge?

As this issue illustrates, community engagement offers one answer. Partnering with surrounding local governments and organizations is one way to create real, meaningful relationships between schools and communities—and perhaps help reverse the decline noted by the Gallup survey. It also enables our students to develop the tools they will take out into the world to make it a better place.

Pitzer is uniquely positioned in this regard. As we learn in this issue from Tricia Morgan '08, the managing director of our Community Engagement Center (CEC), Pitzer doesn't have one community engagement focus, but many. In fact, Pitzer's belief in the power of community dates back to the College's earliest days, as this archival photo by Arthur Dubinsky illustrates.

And yet, our College has wrestled with the challenges of putting this belief into action. Back in the 1990s, Pitzer was stuck with an unsatisfying model of community engagement that most higher education institutions were following. In typical Pitzer fashion, we broke away from the rest to explore something new thanks to the vision and persistence of several members of our campus community.

In this issue, you'll learn more about those early days, the formation of the CEC and CASA Pitzer (Critical Action & Social Advocacy), and how the Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability, Justice Education Initiative, and other programs have joined them through the years. You will also find inspiring stories about our students, faculty, and alumni who are involved in community work locally and globally.

Most important of all, I hope this issue of *Participant* will serve as a reminder that, although the College may be small in physical size and acreage, our intellectual and activist footprints are large.

Provida Futuri,

Strom C. Thacker
President
Pitzer College

Come Together

Community engagement starts at home. The living room of old Sanborn Hall—not to be confused with the residence hall that today is homebase for all first-year students—was a meeting hotspot in Pitzer's earliest years. It was a place where regular town hall meetings like this one on Nov. 1, 1965, gave faculty and students a chance to meet face-to-face and discuss the College's future together. Though that old hall was demolished in 2008, the spirit of community engagement that filled its living room lives on today in Pitzer's many programs connecting students and faculty with outside organizations. This photo can be found in *Arthur Dubinsky: The Life and Times of Pitzer College*, a collection of photos featured in a past exhibition and book published by Pitzer College Art Galleries.

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Pitzer faculty receive major research awards; Sammy Basa '25 and Isa Iqbal '26 take their community engagement work abroad; the Sagehens dominated NCAA III this spring; Pitzer students were recipients of Fulbrights and other prestigious awards; the opening of The Nucleus was celebrated this summer with a ribbon-cutting; and much more.

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On the Cover: A gathering at Huerta del Valle, a community partner of the College's CASA Pitzer program.

READ PARTICIPANT ONLINE

Visit www.pitzer.edu/participant for related video, extended features, and other exclusives about the Pitzer College community.



EDITOR'S MESSAGE

The Links That Bind Us

What does community engagement look like to you?

As Annie Voss '26 declares in this issue, community engagement is so central to Pitzer College's identity that the student experience would be unthinkable without it.

That is why this issue of *Participant* focuses on the engagement pillar of the College's core values and how it's visible on campus today. The greatest takeaway might be the simplest: At Pitzer, community engagement has many faces.

Some of our central players include the Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability, the Community Engagement Center (CEC), and Critical Action & Social Advocacy (CASA) Pitzer. CEC and CASA Pitzer are celebrating their 25th anniversaries this year.

But there are additional programs and organizations that are having a real impact on surrounding communities. These include the Justice Education Center, and we offer a profile of Romarilyn Ralston '14, who was appointed as senior director earlier this year.

We also look at the efforts of Micah Huang '13, who is responding to Asian hate crimes through music and as director this summer of the Los Angeles Hungry Ghost

Festival. Professor of Asian American Studies Kathy Yep shows us how she introduces students to the ancient Chinese practice of qì gōng, which lays a critical foundation for building community. Kelly Heimdahl '20 describes her effort to start a partnership with Claremont-based ConductAbility after enrolling at Pitzer as a New Resources student.

While Voss, Alex Wise '24, and Andrea Robinowitz '25 describe the inspiring, unexpected impact of getting involved in community work, our profiles of Isa Iqbal '26 and Sammy Basa '25 demonstrate how some students are taking Pitzer's spirit of community engagement to other parts of the world.

Of course, this issue only scratches the surface on a rich aspect of the Pitzer experience. At Pitzer, there isn't a single way to conduct community engagement. We hope this issue serves as a starting point for your exploration of the College's many groups and organizations that are helping students put their social justice values into action.

Nick Owchar, *Editor*



Professor Emerita Muriel Poston was interviewed this spring for The HistoryMakers digital archives.

FACULTY DISTINCTIONS

Breaking New Ground in Scholarship

Recent faculty achievements culminated in hall of fame honors for a retired scientist, NIH-funded research involving desert ants, and more

Making History in Science

Professor Emerita of Environmental Analysis **Muriel Poston** has joined a prestigious lineup of STEM leaders whose interviews and stories belong to The HistoryMakers archives. Developed by Carnegie Mellon University, The HistoryMakers is a digital repository where, according to its website, one finds the achievements of both well-known and unsung African Americans. The archives are housed permanently in the Library of Congress and were established to address the lack of documentation of the African American historical record. Poston was invited to be interviewed about her career and STEM accomplishments, and that interview

will soon join the organization's extensive online database.

Disease-Fighting Molecules

Associate Professor of Chemistry **Ethan Van Arnam** and his lab have been awarded a three-year, \$400,000-plus R15 grant from the National Institute of Health's (NIH) Institute of General Medical Sciences. Van Arnam said his team's goal is to discover molecules "with medicinal potential" that can be found in a very unexpected place: the microbes that live on ants. "We

admit this is a very strange place to be searching, but microbes like bacteria and fungi have actually been a source for many transformative antibiotics, beginning with penicillin," he said. Van Arnam's team is studying how these



molecules and their microbes are distributed in ants in the American Southwest deserts. The NIH grant also supports student summer research positions and travel expenses for students to present their works at conferences. An R15 grant is a research enhancement award specifically for educational organizations.

Sociology of Education

Assistant Professor of Sociology **Denise Ambriz** joined other leading sociologists in an exploration of education, social inequality, and human rights. In *The Sage Handbook of Sociology of Education*, Ambriz co-authored the chapter “Educational Opportunities and Asian Communities.”



Disputed Water Worlds

Money and land are often hotly contested. Assistant Professor of Anthropology **Àngela Castillo-Ardila** argues that there is another element that we often take for granted and is just as powerful: water. In the new series “Disputed Water Worlds,” Castillo-Ardila and her co-editors at Engagement, the blog of the Anthropology and Environment Society, present the work of several scholars on how water can be a generative element for rethinking environmental politics, human and other-than-human relationalities, ecological transformations, and conflicts worldwide.

Chinatown’s Influence on Hollywood

Professor of Asian American Studies **Kathy Yep** joined author William Gow in the spring for a conversation at the Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles. Yep and Gow discussed the long-overlooked history of that city’s Chinatown and that community’s impact on Hollywood.



Unconventional Writing Explorations

In *Teachers & Writers Magazine*, Visiting Assistant Professor **Melissa Chadburn** discussed her journey from navigating the foster care system to developing a writing class at Pitzer. Chadburn’s class included a range of experiences and activities, including sewing talismans of their inner critics, building homes, and sleeping in a shelter for migrant men. “I took the window of time I had with [my students],” Chadburn wrote in her article, “and allowed them to see and write the world, but not just as they saw it—as other people saw it.”



Professor Marcus Rodriguez presented full-day training sessions to counselors and mental health clinicians at Pomona Unified School District.

Supporting Youth Mental Health

The Community Engagement Center (CEC) routinely connects Associate Professor of Psychology **Marcus Rodriguez**’s students to the Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) for internships. Pitzer students give supervised emotional support to PUSD students as peer counselors. The CEC recently helped arrange a training for 130 teachers, counselors, and principals from PUSD middle schools. Rodriguez co-led the training to teach educators about dialectical behavior therapy and validation strategies to make sure that their students feel supported.

New Endowed Professorships

Professor of History **Carina Johnson** has been selected as the Peter and Gloria Gold Endowed Professor. This professorship, designated for a full professor with at least 15 years of full-time experience at Pitzer, recognizes contributions to the College across teaching, advising, scholarly work, and service activities. Johnson’s research focuses on cross-cultural encounters, proto-ethnography, memory, and the experience of violence in the 16th century Habsburg Empire.

Professor of Anthropology **Claudia Strauss** has been selected as the Jean M. Pitzer Endowed Professor. This professorship, established in 1987, recognizes academic excellence and is designated for a faculty member with demonstrable interests in archaeology or anthropology. Strauss studies personal and cultural meanings of social policy issues, such as immigration and economic fairness. Her current research investigates diverse understandings of work in the United States.

Tying Mathematical Knots

Associate Professor of Mathematics **Jemma Lorenat** served as a speaker at the London Mathematical Society general meeting and celebration of the 200th anniversary of Lord Kelvin’s contributions to science. Lorenat presented the talk “An Illustrated History of Drawing Knots.”



Graffiti’s Cultural Nuances

In the spring, Professor of Environmental Analysis **Susan A. Phillips** talked to the *Los Angeles Times* about graffiti’s role in city spaces. “It’s really an anti-capitalism critique,” said Phillips. “It questions corporate control over public space. It upends our concept of private property and draws attention to the increasing privatization of public space in the city.”



Conspiracy Liars And Theorists

Professor of Philosophy **Brian L. Keeley** looks at the impact and influence of false data in the article “Conspiracy theorists are not the problem; Conspiracy liars are” recently published in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*.

FACULTY

In the Media



“If you assume that the only kind of work ethic is this obsessive work ethic, then if you see somebody guarding their free time, you think they have no work ethic at all.”

—Claudia Strauss, professor of anthropology, discusses her new book, “What Work Means,” on the 1869 Cornell University Press podcast. (For a review of the book, see p. 39).



“For the founding fathers of behaviorism, minds were identical with behaviors—talking, habits, dispositions to act in one way or another. More recently, minds have been imagined as a kind of computer: the software running on the hardware of the brain.”

—Brian L. Keeley, professor of philosophy, discusses theories of mind in a book review in *Reason* magazine



“Burnout is not linked to being a working parent; rather, it is a byproduct of a hyper-productivity-oriented culture that creates excessive demand without workplace social support and a low degree of control.”

—Alicia D. Bonaparte, professor of sociology, on workplace gender inequality on *WalletHub.com*



“[Kamala Harris] needs to separate from Biden. She needs to speak to TPS [temporary protected status] holders and DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] holders for a plan for legalization, and a border plan that does not include throwing children in jail.”

—Suyapa Portillo Villeda '96, professor of Chicano/a-Latino/a transnational studies, discusses Kamala Harris’ potential political vulnerabilities on *NPR.org*



“It’s really impossible to overstate how impactful child care is to the economy.”

—Rachel VanSickle-Ward '99, professor of political studies, on skyrocketing childcare costs on *ABCNews.com*

EASY PZ

Some facts and figures about Pitzer’s community engagement work

25

Years since the founding of the Center for California Cultural and Social Issues and Pitzer in Ontario, the precursors of the Community Engagement Center and CASA Pitzer program (see story, p. 24)

1

Ranking in the category “Top 20 Best Schools for Making an Impact (Private Schools)” featured in *Princeton Review*’s “Best Value Colleges for 2024” report

10

Number of community organizations in the Inland Empire that are core partners with CASA Pitzer

500

Approximate number of students engaged every year in praxis courses that are coordinated by the Community Engagement Center

18

Years that Pitzer College has held the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, an award presented in recognition of community engagement leadership from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

RETIREMENTS

Innovators in Scholarship and Research

Two professors leave a combined 90-year legacy at Pitzer

Sharon Nickel Snowiss Professor of Political Studies



For 55 years, Sharon Snowiss has pushed the boundaries of political studies at Pitzer in her pursuit of thought-provoking questions about society's future. She received an MA and PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles, and an AB from the University of California, Berkeley. Since joining Pitzer in 1969, Snowiss has contributed her expertise in futurology, mind/body healing, technology's social and philosophical impact, and more. Her courses have included Introduction

to Political Philosophy: Political Thought East and West; Feminist Political Thought; and Science, Politics and Alternative Medicine. She also taught as an Avery Fellow in Claremont Graduate University's Department of Politics and Policy.

Snowiss earned an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant to develop her class Nature, Movement, and Meditation in Qi gong in spring 2002. Long before remote learning became common practice, Snowiss leveraged video-streaming technology to connect her students with Beijing University and teach them about traditional Chinese healing practices.

She has also served in college governance roles dating to Pitzer's early years. As the chair of what was then the Executive Committee of the Faculty, she worked to revise the governance structure to its current philosophy of shared governance and worked on an intercollegiate committee to establish the structure of the Ethnic Studies Center. She also was part of initiatives to create majors in Gender and Feminist Studies, International and Intercultural Studies, and the option for Human Biology in Cross-Cultural Health and Healing. In 1979–80, as Chair of FEC, Snowiss said, "Uppermost in our minds in all these plans is how to best meet the needs of the students."

David S. Moore Professor of Psychology



Since joining Pitzer in 1989, David Moore has studied cognitive development with a focus on the perceptions and capabilities of infants. His courses included Monkey Business: Controversies in Human Evolution; Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience; and Seeking Human Nature: The History and Science of Innateness, among others.

Moore founded the Claremont Infant Study Center in 1989. Empirical research in his lab produced many influential publications, including

several with students as co-authors. Moore received two National Science Foundation grants for his study of infant development and had a key role in creating Pitzer's cognitive science major.

Moore holds a BA in psychology from Tufts University and an MA and PhD in developmental psychology from Harvard University. Moore's theoretical research interests include genetic and epigenetic contributions to development. He authored two books on these topics, *The Dependent Gene* and *The Developing Genome*. The latter earned the American Psychological Association's Eleanor Maccoby Book Award and the William James Book Award from the Society for General Psychology.

From 2016–2018, Moore served as director of the Developmental Sciences Program at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C. He was also an American Psychological Association Fellow and was a Fellow at Stanford's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences from 2023–24. Additionally, Moore served as a science consultant from 2019–2024 on the DARPA-funded Machine Common Sense program, which sought to use infant development to improve artificial intelligence. In retirement, Moore will remain an active scholar, educator, and science consultant. His next scholarly endeavor includes a Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.



ALUMNI

An Educational Journey That's Far From Over

Romarilyn Ralston '14 brings compassion and insight to her role as senior director of the Justice Education Center

When it comes to the words of Nelson Mandela, Romarilyn Ralston '14 favors one quote above many others: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Ralston puts those words into practice daily as she helps incarcerated students work toward attaining their undergraduate college degrees and imagining new possibilities—and new hope—for their lives.

Ralston was appointed earlier this year to serve as senior director of the Justice Education Center (JEC) of The Claremont Colleges. In this role, Ralston works with Pitzer and 5C faculty and staff to further develop and institutionalize the pioneering Inside-Out Pathway-to-BA program, which is central to the JEC's mission. That program helps currently incarcerated individuals ("inside" students) to obtain bachelor's degrees as they learn alongside on-campus Claremont Colleges ("outside") students.

With the appearance of its first graduates in 2021, that program started receiving steady media attention nationwide that continues to this day. For Ralston, this level of attention is well-deserved.

"For incarcerated people, pursuing a college degree is a dream come true," she said. "They are among the best students our faculty have ever had. They're prepared, open to discussing material, and open to dialogues and conversations about opposing views. Our program is very important to our inside students because, like me, they have dreams of college and aspirations."

Ralston said she is focused on enhancing the JEC's sustainable intercollegiate identity by tapping into the 6Cs: care, compassion, competence, communication, courage, and commitment. She also has a deeply personal understanding of the life-changing power of education. She kept her own educational dreams alive during 23 years of incarceration; upon her release in 2011, she enrolled at Pitzer as a New Resources student.

As a Pitzer undergraduate, she served as a summer intern with the Community Engagement Center, participated in the Borrowed Voices Program, was nominated by the College for the Napier Fellowship, and won a CORO Fellowship. After graduation, she earned a master's degree at Washington University in St. Louis and went on to lead Project Rebound at California State University, Fullerton. She was recognized with the College's Distinguished Alumni award in 2020



Romarilyn Ralston at this fall's kick-off event for the Justice Education Center.

before returning to Pitzer to lead the JEC. In 2022, Ralston also received something else that was deeply meaningful: a full pardon from California Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Despite many degrees and academic accomplishments, Ralston said her education is far from over.

"I chose education as my transformative practice and have not stopped learning since," said Ralston, who started a doctoral program this fall in executive management at Claremont Graduate University's Drucker School of Management.

Despite the demands of her doctoral program and her JEC responsibilities, Ralston continues to make time for related activities. Recently, she was appointed to the council of the Napier Institute for Creative Change, an important partnership between The Claremont Colleges and Pilgrim Place senior community that promotes peace and intergenerational leadership (and provides an important annual fellowship to students from the 5Cs).

The personal impact of education on Ralston's life is something she imparts to the Inside-Out program's students today. She noted that the JEC's goal of preparing incarcerated students for new opportunities—and new lives—upon their release doesn't only benefit them. Communities benefit, too. She said these graduates contribute in meaningful ways that show the program's benefits are reciprocal, which is the aim of Pitzer's network of community engagement efforts.

"Our Inside-Out graduates learn to contribute in impactful ways as they start their lives over, and that's important," she said. "It helps them not only realize that they can begin again, but it also teaches our communities an important lesson—that there is reconciliation and great value in our incarcerated students when they're shown compassion and given a chance. I'm grateful to have a role in this."

"I chose education as my transformative practice and have not stopped learning since."

—Romarilyn Ralston '14

For more photos from the Justice Education Center kick-off event, visit www.pitzer.edu/participant.



COMMENCEMENT

Honoring the Class of 2024

A time for celebration and civil protest at this year's ceremony

When you graduate, is it absolutely necessary to know your purpose? For Jim Obergefell, the answer is no. Finding one's purpose can sometimes take time and happen by accident.

The marriage equality activist, whose name is upon the landmark 2015 Supreme Court decision that recognizes same-sex marriage, delivered a moving address about his activist origins to graduating seniors at Pitzer College's 60th Commencement celebration held in the spring.

"Keep in mind, your degree does not define you. Your attitude, values, and strength of character are what define you. Don't force your life to fit your degree. Use your degree and your experiences here at Pitzer and beyond as the basis to build the life you want," said Obergefell, whose effort to have his marriage recognized in Ohio to longtime partner John Arthur resulted in the case that went before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"There's no single way to be an activist," he told the graduates. "But every activist cares about something deeply enough to act."

Obergefell received a standing ovation from the 265 members of the Class of 2024.

President Strom C. Thacker, who presided over his first graduation ceremony at the College, congratulated the students for their perseverance in the face of many obstacles in their undergraduate years, including beginning their time at Pitzer as online students during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is difficult enough adjusting to the challenges of life as a first-year college student," he said. "You had to adapt and find ways to connect with each other, to create a sense of community, despite many obstacles

that were meant to keep us apart in the name of health and safety. Your determination and your success are an inspiration to us all."

Other remarks were delivered by Senior Class Speakers Neha Basu '24 and Diego Borgsdorf Fuenzalida '24, who both called on the College administration to show more support of the Palestinian cause in the Gaza conflict. Sanya Dhama '24, Lilly Visaya '24, and Alex Maynard '24 announced that a class gift of \$1,500 would be given to the Reach Education Fund, a nonprofit organization that helps Palestinian students in their academic pursuits. Many graduates also waved small Palestinian flags during the ceremony.

Like Obergefell, other speakers sounded a similar note of optimism in their remarks to the audience.

Mark Cunningham '89 P'25, president of the Pitzer Alumni Board, quoted novelist Cormac McCarthy—"Between the dream and the thing, the world lies and waits"—in his encouragement of the graduates.

Though McCarthy's quote suggests great uncertainty, Cunningham said that it is also "a statement of great hope and promise because there's a recognition that both the dream and the thing are possible. Graduates, whatever your dream may be, wherever the world may take you, know this: The Pitzer community stands with you. ... I know your voice, your activism, and your change will make the world a better place."

Visit www.pitzer.edu/participant to watch the 60th Annual Commencement and view a gallery of photos.



SPRING 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

SHOW OF STRENGTH

The Sagehens have been a dominant force across NCAA Division III programs in 2024

SCIAC Three-Peat

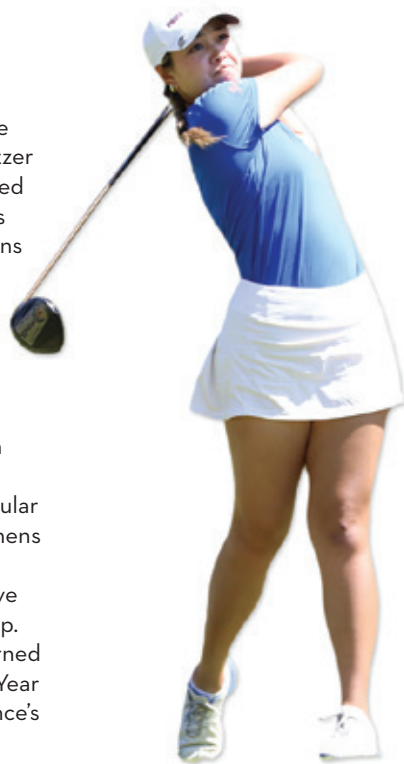
The Pomona-Pitzer women's water polo team defeated Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC) rival Claremont-Mudd-Scripps (CMS) 12-5 to earn the SCIAC Regular Season Championship. The Sagehens later completed their SCIAC Tournament Championship three-peat with a win over No. 2 CMS. The team then defeated CMS again to capture their third consecutive USA Water Polo Division III National Championship. This spring, **Namlhun Jachung '24** was named SCIAC Offensive Athlete of the Year for the second consecutive year for her feats in water polo.

World Series Debut

The Pomona-Pitzer baseball team earned its first SCIAC Tournament Championship in program history with their win over CMS. The Sagehens won as the No. 2 seed with three straight wins to improve to 32-11 overall and earned the automatic bid into the NCAA tournament. Then the team punched its first-ever ticket to the NCAA World Series with their win over East Texas Baptist. The Sagehens played two games in the World Series before falling to No. 1-ranked Endicott. The team ended their 2024 season at No. 5, their highest ranking ever, according to the American Baseball Coaches Association.

Absolutely Par-Fect

The Pomona-Pitzer women's golf team finished as champions of the SCIAC I Tournament. Pomona-Pitzer owned the course against a stacked SCIAC I competition at Los Lagos in Corona, Calif., with the Sagehens finishing with the highest number of pars as a team with 123.



Sticking It to the Competition

The Pomona-Pitzer lacrosse team earned a victory over California Lutheran to claim the SCIAC Regular Season Championship. The Sagehens soon followed with a victory over CMS to win their third consecutive SCIAC Tournament Championship. This spring, **Carly Sullivan '24** earned SCIAC Defensive Athlete of the Year honors after leading the conference's best defense in lacrosse.



Sorry, Athenas

The Pomona-Pitzer women's tennis team upset the No. 1-ranked CMS Athenas to claim the SCIAC Tournament Championship. The Sagehens claimed the championship for the first time since 2011 with their fifth SCIAC Tournament Championship in program history.

A Visit from the NCAA Prez

National Collegiate Athletic Association President Charlie Baker stopped in Claremont this spring during an L.A. stop to meet with leadership and students from the Sagehens, Stags, and Athenas programs. A former Massachusetts governor who is serving as the NCAA's sixth president, Baker met student-athletes and toured the Roberts Pavilion and the Center for Athletics, Recreation, and Wellness. Baker also stopped to inspect the Sagehens' Wall of Champions and shelves of championship trophies which—thanks to outstanding victories this year—are growing every season.

Newest Hall of Famers

Sagehens football player **Jake Caron '11** celebrated this spring with Cecil the Sagehen on his admittance to the Pomona-Pitzer Athlete Hall of Fame. In addition to Caron, who now serves as head football coach for Ransom Everglades School, other Pitzer alumni joining the list of Sagehens athletic greats include: water polo player **Tamara Perea '11**, who went on to play professionally with Federación Madrileña de Natación and now serves as an assistant coach at Fresno State; **James R. Kang '10**, who played in the Boston Red Sox organization and currently works as a scout for the Cleveland Guardians; and **David Colvin '11**, who played professional baseball for the Seattle Mariners organization



and was named Pitcher of the Year in 2013 with the High Desert Mavericks.

Making Waves

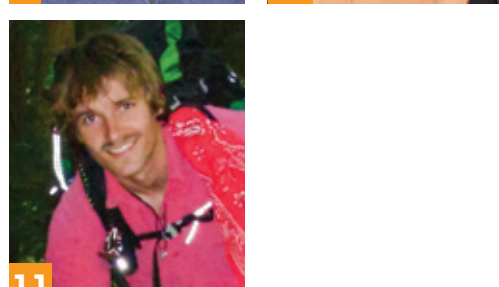
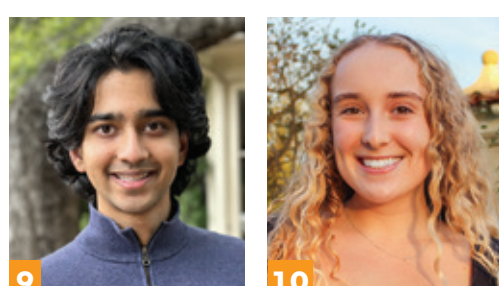
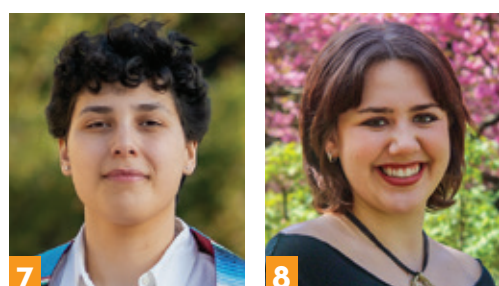
The Pomona-Pitzer women's swim and dive team swam their way to the 2024 SCIAC Championship, winning their fifth title in the past eight years and their 24th title in program history. The team ended the 2024 NCAA Division III Swim and Dive Championship with two relay championships: the 200 Freestyle Relay title and the 400 Freestyle Relay title.

Scrummage Champions

The Claremont Colleges Foxes women's rugby team won the Division I Collegiate Rugby Championship 7s. Seeded 10th out of 16 teams, the Foxes defeated Florida State, No. 1 seed Northern Iowa, Ohio State, and University of Oregon to win the title.

STUDENT & ALUMNI DISTINCTIONS

Inquiring Minds in Action



Research awards, grants, and fellowships are supposed to give undergrads a chance to enhance their skill sets in their discipline.

That may be true, but Pitzer's 2023-24 crop of recipients isn't content with just developing some scholarly chops. Whether they're exploring ecology and heirloom plants, what mushrooms can teach us about climate resilience, or how solar power systems can aid Sri Lankan farmers, this season's student and alumni winners are doing more than simply studying problems. They're seeking solutions.

Fulbright Program

1 Neha Basu '24, a psychology and sociology double major, is conducting research in India. Basu is examining street food vendors' interactions with the law and what local vending reveals about public space, culture, and economics. This project builds on her work as a CASA Pitzer Research Fellow with the Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice.

2 Sahar Dabirian '24, a public health major and Spanish minor, is teaching English in the La Rioja region of Spain. A child of Muslim immigrants, Dabirian intends to provide representation of the "insider/outsider" cultural experience while utilizing her multilinguistic background.

3 Ava Francis-Hall '24, a political studies major and economics minor, is conducting the study "Politics of Care: Life for Returnee Migrants with Chronic Kidney Disease." The project investigates the economic and social conditions of Nepali migrant laborers from Malaysia and Gulf countries diagnosed with kidney disease.

4 Erica Hjelle '24, a psychology major and religious studies minor, is teaching English in Laos. Hjelle is influenced by coursework in East and Southeast Asian religion and by her experience in Pitzer's Nepal study abroad program.

5 Skylar Masuda '24, a classics and human-centered design double major, is conducting research in Turkey. Masuda is working with the Turkey Design Council on an interdisciplinary analysis of the display and community impact of repatriated artifacts.

6 Elizabeth (Ellie) Montoro '24, a major in philosophy, politics, and economics, is conducting research in Italy. Her project examines how current Italian maritime policies related to mass migration in the Mediterranean impact NGO rescue vessels, volunteers, migrants, and Southern Italian residents.

7 Lauren Robles '24, a political studies major and Chicana Latinx studies minor, is teaching English in Taiwan. Robles' interest in teaching stems from her deep passion for learning as well as her positionality and experience working with students of diverse ethnic and learning backgrounds.

8 Laila Scarborough-Scharf '23, a critical global studies major and media studies minor, is teaching English in the Canary Islands. Having studied abroad in Sevilla, Spain, Scarborough-Scharf brings substantial country knowledge and experience in writing, tutoring, and teaching English to Spanish-speaking students.

9 Tommy Sheno '24, a double major in food and agricultural studies and environmental analysis, has been granted the Fulbright/Casten Family Foundation Award for a master's degree in world food studies at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy. Sheno also received the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to explore mushrooms as a key to climate resilience. This project is taking him to Italy, Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Netherlands, and Brazil.

10 Sarah Snyder '24, an environmental analysis and organizational studies double major, is teaching English in Timor-Leste. Through Pitzer's study abroad program, she has lived with host families in Tanzania and South Africa. In Timor-Leste, Snyder is engaging in a cultural exchange with her students and volunteers at UmaAmerika.

11 Robert (Bobby) Stitt '22, a double major in economics and environmental analysis with a minor in studio art, is conducting research in Sri Lanka. Stitt is addressing energy efficiency issues in solar irrigation systems with the aim of empowering farmers, optimizing equipment manufacturing, and aligning government subsidies with efficiency goals.

From studying repatriated artifacts in Turkey to investigating solar irrigation efficiency in Sri Lanka, Pitzer students and alumni are excelling as scholars in action

Additional Awards, Grants, and Fellowships

12 Bertha M. Posada Villanueva '26, Daniel Bonilla '25, Sophia Lore '25, and McKayla Khatija Proulx '25 studied how rising salinity in the Salton Sea affects microbial communities. Their group project received The Claremont Colleges Library Undergraduate Research Award.

13 Licheng She '25 and Corrine Waters '26 received the Pitzer College Art Galleries' Benjamin Godsill '00 and Anna Burns Student Apprenticeship Award. She is a media studies major and has her apprenticeship with Fulcrum Arts this fall. Waters is an art history major and finished her apprenticeship at the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions last spring.

14 Diego Borgsdorf Fuenzalida '24, an anthropology and Spanish major, was among the third cohort of AllPaper Seminar Fellows at the Benton Museum of Art at Pomona College.

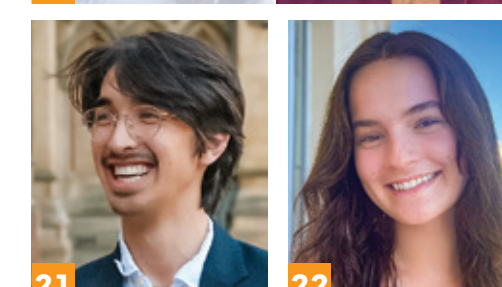
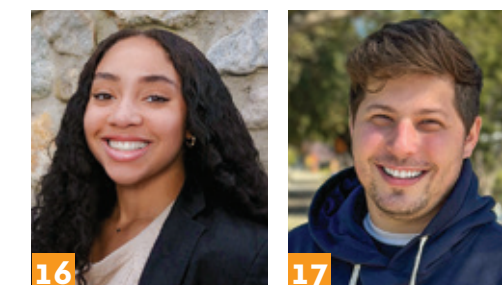
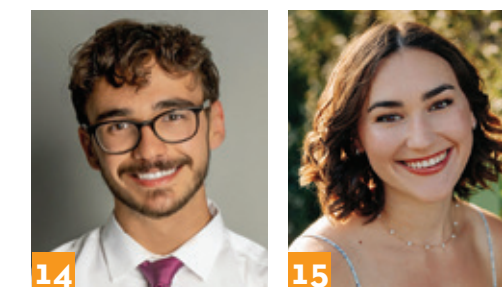
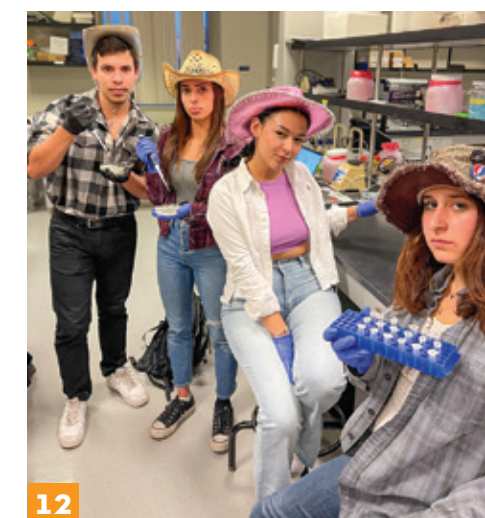
15 Alaina Neuburger '24, a double major in economics and public policy, was selected for the 2024 Judicial Fellowship under the Capital Fellows Program.

16 Kayla Mathurin '24, an international political economy major, received a scholarship from Emery Reddy PLLC as she pursues her JD at Columbia Law School this fall.

17 Vitor Lacerda Siqueira '24, a linguistics major and Spanish minor, received Pomona College's Glass Linguistics Prize.

18 Daniella Levy '24, a psychology major and economics minor, joined the McLean Hospital Post-Baccalaureate Child and Adolescent Clinical Fellowship Program to pursue a career in counseling.

19 Taeya Boi-Doku '24, an environmental analysis major, earned the Napier Award and a Projects for Peace Award to develop gardens as living libraries in Ghana.



20 Jansikwe Medina-Tayac '25 and Alexander Rodriguez '24 received a Projects for Peace Award for their oral history project about women's indigenous identities and culture in the Dominican Republic.

21 Benjamin Sievers '22 is pursuing a PhD at the University of Cambridge through the National Institutes of Health Oxford-Cambridge Scholars Program.

22 Sami Gottsegen '25, an organizational studies major, achieved the Newman Civic Fellowship for her environmental advocacy and civic engagement.

Not Pictured: Chi Adi '25, Feven Aklilu '26, Ben Ma '26, Diane Orozco '26, Luna Romero '26, and Chase Wade '26 received the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, which seeks to increase diversity in the ranks of institutions of higher learning.



Sammy Basa and his collaborators use free diving to study the reefs of Sibuyan Island in the Philippines. (PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAMMY BASA)

STUDENTS

Diving Deep

Sammy Basa '25 collaborates with the Sibuyan Island fishing community to protect its coral reefs

By BRIDGETTE RAMIREZ

Sammy Basa '25 traces his love for the ocean to a boat ride under a starry canopy to Sibuyan Island in the Philippines. Basa recalled how the brisk wind cooled his face and how he and his mother dipped their feet into water that glowed with bioluminescence.

“The bright flashes of blue and green were like stars in the sea, and we watched in wonder as they faded into the darkness,” he said. “While those flashes appeared as pure magic to my younger self, they signified something profound—a deep-seated bond between my family, our land, and the marvels of the natural world.”

Basa's family hails from Sibuyan Island, and Basa has many childhood memories from his grandfather's farm. Sibuyan is called the Galápagos of Asia for its biodiversity. However, underneath the emerald forests is a saddening

ecological reality: coral reefs devastated by dynamite fishing and climate change.

Nature's Unsung Heroes

About 25 percent of marine species depend on coral reefs. Resource Watch estimates that 1 billion people benefit from the ecosystems of reefs, including food and protection of coastlines from storms and erosion. A study in *Nature* finds that reefs reduce wave energy by an average of 97 percent.

Sibuyan resides in the Coral Triangle region, which hosts 30 percent of the world's reefs according to a 2020 report released by Earth.Org. Despite this reality, Basa noticed a gap in reef monitoring in Sibuyan and sought to rectify it.

Basa, who studies environmental science at Pitzer, started an independent study in fall 2023 with Visiting Assistant Professor Suryatapa Ghosh Jha as his adviser. He delved into

scientific literature and 3D mapping techniques to prepare for data collection in Sibuyan, where his family had planned a visit during one of his winter breaks.

Basa faced challenges in applying for institutional funding for this work, but he proceeded anyway with his own limited budget. Once he arrived in Sibuyan, the local community embraced him thanks to his grandfather's legacy.

“My lolo [“grandfather” in Tagalog] was an environmentalist and did a lot for the island,” said Basa. “He took care of people. That's why they helped me.”

Documenting Coral Reef Health

Community members drove Basa and his team out on boats to survey shallow reefs. Basa set a goal to make a baseline coral health assessment for the local government in the Philippines. He immediately noticed an algae issue.

“Lack of fish and runoff have led to a big bloom of algae,” said Basa. “Coral can't survive when there's overfishing, but at the same time people have to eat.”

This issue is also related to dynamite fishing, which uses explosives to stun or kill fish. Although the practice is banned, Basa heard booms while he was diving underwater.

Integrating Science and Local Communities

“You can't just tell people not to make a living, especially when they're impoverished,” said Basa. “You can't expect marine sanctuaries to work if people don't understand their value and what they can do in 10 years.”

The complexities of marine conservation, food, and society have strengthened Basa's passion for community-driven scientific research and education.

“It gives a deeper meaning to your research when you're working with the community,” said Basa. “The people have valuable insights on the future of their home. They are the

ones who will take care of that place.”

With support from the Pitzer Internship Fund, Basa returned to Sibuyan earlier this year in May to survey more reefs. He also interviewed fisherfolk about how they experienced the changes in the ocean.

“In the 1990s, some fisherfolk were catching 200 kilos a day,” said Basa. “Thirty years later, they struggle to get 2 kilos.”

Basa also talked to

the fisherfolk about their co-ops and self-regulation practices to adjust to the shifting ecosystem. Basa plans to use the latest data and interviews from Sibuyan for his senior thesis.



“It gives a deeper meaning to your research when you're working with the community. The people have valuable insights on the future of their home. They are the ones who will take care of that place.”

—Sammy Basa '25



ABOVE: Basa's ties to Sibuyan Island give his research a personal connection (Basa is seen here, on the right, with his older brother, Daniel, and grandfather, Gabriel). TOP RIGHT: Basa prepares to photograph sections of the island's reefs.



STUDENTS

Bold, Passionate, and Just 16

Isa Iqbal '26 was a high schooler when he started addressing injustice in Pakistan



TOP: Isa Iqbal '26 says anyone can be an activist at any age.
ABOVE AND AT RIGHT: Iqbal addresses students in Pakistan.
(PHOTOS COURTESY OF ISA IQBAL)

Isa Iqbal '26 remembers feeling helpless when an uncle lost property in a housing scheme in Pakistan.

Iqbal, who was born and raised in Lahore, the country's capital, said his uncle believed he was involved in a successful venture as a business partner—only to find he'd signed away his land in misleading paperwork. He didn't have any legal recourse because the country's judicial framework is full of gaps and ambiguity often exploited by such schemes.

"I was so saddened to see this happen to him and so outraged," recalled Iqbal, a junior majoring in mathematical economics. "And I wasn't just upset for him. There are so many people in my country who have been taken advantage of because no one really understands their rights or how the process works."

It's not just true of Pakistani property rights. Iqbal said victims of sexual assault and domestic abuse often don't understand their legal rights, either. Such situations

"If you really want to bring about change, you'll find a way, even if you're very young and worried about failing. That's what I've learned. Coming to Pitzer has reinforced my belief even more."

—Isa Iqbal '26

prompted Iqbal, who was still in high school at the time, and some classmates to create two nonprofits aimed at empowering Pakistan's citizenry to understand their constitutional rights and combat domestic violence.

Today, both nonprofits are still going strong, and Iqbal continues to monitor their progress with colleagues on the ground in Pakistan. He said plans are in the works to develop a more permanent structure, funding, and legal network for both organizations so that they can extend their help to anyone in Pakistan who needs it.

"I'm really proud of what we've accomplished so far," Iqbal said. "My hope is that our current efforts will enable these organizations to continue long into the future."

Aagah and Himmat: "Awareness" and "Power"

The two nonprofits established by Iqbal and his friends are Aagah Pakistan ("awareness" in Urdu), which focuses on educating citizens about Pakistan's constitution, and Himmat ("power" in Urdu), which addresses domestic violence.

In the past five years, they have created awareness campaigns in local schools and used social media to provide articles and information. Aagah Pakistan's social media efforts have made its content among the top news items read in Pakistan. Himmat also uses social media, but this organization focuses on in-person workshops, Iqbal explained, because the subject requires more human contact to be effective.

"You have to talk face-to-face to earn someone's trust when you're talking about domestic abuse," he said. "We've been very careful to create a positive environment whenever we've addressed large groups because you might have potential victims and abusers in the same audience. The situation can become quickly hostile if someone feels you're targeting them. Our hope is that abusers will see there are real consequences for their actions, and victims will see there are actually laws that can protect them."

An Ethos That Inspired Him

Though Iqbal's social justice work started before attending Pitzer, he said the College's atmosphere of social justice and community engagement were important factors in his decision to apply.

"I was looking for a place that shared my values," he said. "A lot of people focus only on schools with prestige and nothing else. I needed more than that. The whole idea of Pitzer and its five core values really struck me."

Iqbal speaks with so much authority and insight about his activist experiences that it may be hard to believe he's only in his early 20s. Older people frequently underestimate what young people can do, he said, and it's important that they don't underestimate themselves, either.

"People are always saying to wait until you're older and more experienced before you can help others. I don't think you should have to do that if you're passionate about what you do," he said. "If you really want to bring about change, you'll find a way, even if you're very young and worried about failing. That's what I've learned. Coming to Pitzer has reinforced my belief even more."



AROUND THE MOUNDS

Sociology Through Children's Eyes

"Children," bestselling author and educator Jess Lair once said, "are not things to be molded, but are people to be unfolded."

Associate Professor of Sociology **Jessica Kizer** understands the value and impact of sharing important lessons with young minds. As part of her Introduction to Sociology course, Kizer often plans the class so that it culminates in a storybook festival with elementary schoolchildren from the Pomona Unified School District.

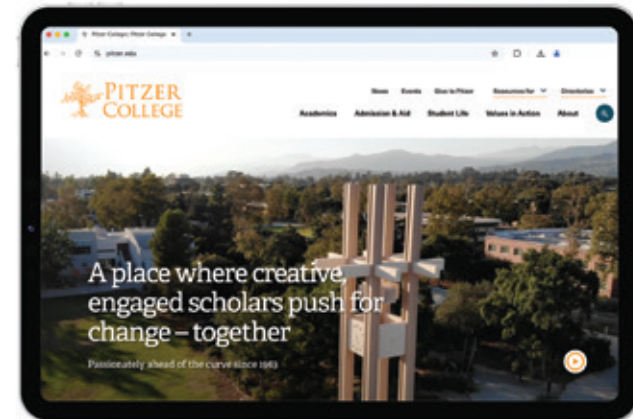
Sponsored by the Community Engagement Center, the Hive, and the Teaching, Learning, and Campus Life Committee, the festival features Kizer's students reading from children's books that they create and that illustrate challenges and examples of social change.

The most recent festival, which was held last December, included the books *Leo's Brave Journey: A Story of Empathy and Change* by **EllaWyn VanderTuig '26**, *Cam's Community Garden* by **Anoura Kohn '27**, *Braids of Change: Michaela's Fight Against Unfair School Rules* by **Jenna Coffman '26**, and *Riley the Rhino* by **Ava Park-Matt '27**.

Kizer encourages her students to tap their sociological imaginations and turn personal challenges into public issues as stories for young readers to understand. Kizer plans to teach the class again this spring.



Ava Park-Matt '27 reads her children's book, *Riley the Rhino*, to Pomona Unified schoolchildren during the 2023 storybook festival last December.



A New Look for Our Website

This summer, Pitzer's Communications and Information Technology teams launched a new College website offering richer visual content; distinctive, core values-focused messaging; and a more friendly user experience overall.

The year-long project prioritized the needs of prospective students, families, and other external visitors who are exploring Pitzer for the first time. A working group including Office of Admission representatives drove the process with an external partner specializing in web presence for higher education. The campus community, including students, contributed to the site's strategy through online surveys and in-person focus groups.

Explore the new digital "front door" to the College at www.pitzer.edu.

Expanding the Sciences

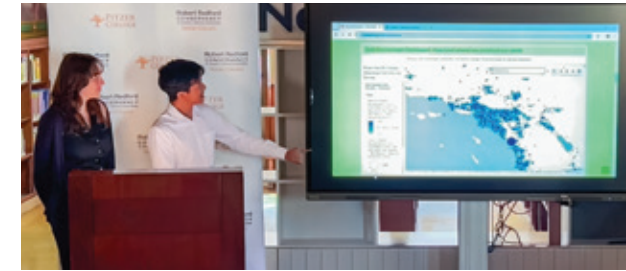
Members of the Pitzer and Scripps communities were on hand in the spring for a ribbon-cutting celebration of The Nucleus, the new home of the Department of Natural Sciences of Pitzer and Scripps Colleges. Pitzer President **Strom C. Thacker** and Scripps President Amy Marcus-Newhall were joined on the bridge connecting The Nucleus with the older science building by trustees, faculty, and supporters for a reception and tour.

The new 65,000-square-foot building provides the opportunity to expand science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) course offerings, add faculty, and act as a collaborative space for professors and students across science disciplines in the Department of Natural Sciences. Until the new building's opening, many classes were held in temporary classrooms at Pitzer and elsewhere. Now, thanks to The Nucleus, that is over, said Ulysses J. Sofia, dean of the Department of Natural Sciences.

"One of the most important things about science is to have a community," he said during the ceremony. "We're so looking forward to bringing everyone back together."



The Nucleus ribbon-cutting ceremony included Pitzer President Strom C. Thacker and Scripps President Amy Marcus-Newhall (center), Pitzer Board Chair Donald Gould (left of Thacker), Department of Natural Sciences Dean Ulysses J. Sofia (far left), and other members of Pitzer and Scripps leadership.



Celia Malone '24 (left) and Nathan Lu '25 demonstrate SoCal Earth to media and community partners Oct. 10 at the historic L.A. Central Library.

Robert Redford Conservancy Launches Powerful Environmental Data Tool

The Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability launched the "SoCal Earth" interactive dashboard this fall. A partnership with global mapping and spatial data leader Esri, the innovative digital tool provides Southern California data on pollution, food security, habitats, and more to improve policy- and decision-making and prioritize vulnerable communities.

Student researchers and faculty who helped design the site were featured at an October campus celebration and a press conference covered by *LAist* and *NPR*, *Politico*, and others. The project was made possible by a \$100,000 gift from The Eileen and (Pitzer Trustee) **Harold Brown** Foundation.

SoCal Earth arms users with information to combat climate change, protect communities and habitats, and address environmental inequities while promoting sustainable land use practices. Its data reveal the impacts of industrial development and pollution on air, land, and water quality, aiding in planning for a regenerative, equitable future. Data sets, from environmental justice indicators to biodiversity markers, allow users to map and pinpoint areas susceptible to climate pressure, identify appropriate action, and assess progress.

"SoCal Earth is an experiment in environmental communication, empowering everyone from fifth graders to municipal planners to ensure that the voices of those most affected by climate change are not only heard, but prioritized," said Conservancy Director **Susan Phillips**.

"It is like a one-stop-shop for people who are passionate about climate action and community advocacy. SoCal Earth gives us a new approach to data visualization and spatial understanding of our problems and solutions," said environmental analysis major **Nathan Lu '25**.

"SoCal Earth makes complex data accessible, providing information that communities and the public and private sectors can use to take action. This tool will help improve community health, enhance resilience to climate change, and protect diverse ecosystems here in [our] global biodiversity hotspot," said Piper Wallingford, Climate Resilience Scientist with The Nature Conservancy of California.

"With all that is on the line, SoCal Earth's 'community first, climate first' call to action is exactly what we need right here—and beyond—for the sake of our oceans, rich species and habitats, and ourselves and our children," said President **Strom C. Thacker**.

Use the tool at www.socalearth.org. Watch the press conference at www.pitzer.edu/participant. Learn about the Conservancy at www.pitzer.edu/offices/redfordconservancy.



Alum Joins Pitzer College Art Galleries as New Director



Emily Butts '15 was selected as the new director of curatorial affairs and the Pitzer College Art Galleries. In addition to a BA in art history and English and world literature at Pitzer, Butts earned an MA in art history from the University of Texas at Austin with a focus on modern and contemporary art of the Americas, particularly Latinx art.

As a student at Pitzer, Butts assisted with exhibitions in the Pitzer College Art Galleries. She has served as a curatorial assistant at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and was also the assistant director of the Lawndale Art Center in Houston, Texas. Butts has served in several roles at the new Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles, including as an exhibition project manager.

Butts enjoys bringing together her academic training and her experiences as an administrator, curator, and exhibition project manager. She plans to continue to connect the Pitzer College Art Galleries and exhibitions with academic programming and courses. She will also explore how to develop and stage exhibitions that amplify diverse voices in art and museums.

ART EXHIBITION

Meaning Among the Fragments

Artist Gala Porras-Kim’s Pitzer College Art Galleries exhibition, “Between Lapses of Histories,” creates new narratives for artifacts stripped of their contexts

Community engagement isn’t just about the present moment. For interdisciplinary artist Gala Porras-Kim, it’s also about looking at ancient communities and the damage done by archeology. Her work focuses on the artifacts taken from Chichén Itzá, an important archeological site in the Mexican state of Yucatán. The removal of thousands of objects, often using destructive methods, has damaged them and erased critically important contextual information. In response, Porras-Kim’s work draws on linguistics, history, ethics, and conservation to critique these actions. Pitzer College Art Galleries presented the “Gala Porras-Kim: Between Lapses of Histories” exhibition earlier this year with support from the Munroe Center for Social Inquiry (MCSI). Gallery visitors encountered spectacular drawings, paintings, and sculptures that critiqued archeological practices (and the museums that have collected these artifacts) and breathed new life into our understanding of the past. In addition to the exhibition and a lecture as part of the MCSI lecture series, Porras-Kim also served as 2023 Murray Pepper and Vicki Reynolds Pepper Distinguished Visiting Artist and Scholar.

See more photos from Gala Porras-Kim’s recent Pitzer exhibition at www.pitzer.edu/participant.



COVER STORY

LOOKING BACK

The creation of Pitzer’s two earliest community engagement programs 25 years ago wasn’t easy, but it was worth it

By NICK OWCHAR

As a young teen, Annie Voss ’26 knew her community was in trouble. Growing up in Athens, Ohio, a rural town in the heart of Appalachia, the now 21-year-old environmental analysis major saw suffering in her community. The region’s collapsed coal industry not only hurt the local economy and environment, it created a cycle of despair and devastating opioid addiction that continues today.

What could a high schooler do about it? Voss decided to get involved.

She joined a foundation that funded collaborations between her town’s university and community organizations to address crushing economic issues and help people find relief. The work gave her a vision of how such partnerships can effectively bring about change.

After her arrival at Pitzer, Voss wanted to continue this kind of work. She sought out the Community Engagement Center (CEC), where she became involved in engagement, fundraising, and philanthropic activities similar to what she was doing in Appalachia.

“The CEC is one of the big ways, besides CASA Pitzer, that you can really get involved with a project directly touching lives outside of Pitzer and the 5Cs,” she said. “I’m a real advocate for our CEC. It is an amazing resource. I wish more students were aware of just how many opportunities are available to them.”

As Voss suggested, the CEC is an important source of community engagement at Pitzer, but it isn’t the only one. The CEC belongs to a thriving activist landscape as rich and diverse as the plant species of The Outback.

In addition to the CEC, students work with Critical Action & Social Advocacy (CASA) Pitzer, the Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability (Voss is there now as a Conservancy Fellow), the Justice Education Initiative, the Institute for Global/Local Action & Study, The



“The CEC is one of the big ways, besides CASA Pitzer, that you can really get involved with a project directly touching lives outside of Pitzer and the 5Cs.”

—Annie Voss ’26



TOP: (From left) Maud Etheridge '25 and Robin Storey '27 celebrate with community partners Mary Valdemar and Veronica Brooks during CASA's spring research symposium.

LEFT: The all-Black Claremont a cappella group Earth Tones performed during the CEC's 25th anniversary celebration.

RIGHT: Students discussed their research during a CASA Pitzer research symposium held at the program's Ontario location.

People’s Pitzer, the Melvin L. Oliver Racial Justice Initiative, and cross-departmental collaborations like the Storyteller’s Festival and the Adelanto Water Justice Coalition, to name a few.

But that hasn’t always been the case. A quarter-century ago, the community engagement scene for Pitzer—and U.S. higher education—was starkly different. “What everyone was doing to serve surrounding community organizations didn’t come close to what these organizations really needed,” said Lourdes Argüelles, a former Pitzer faculty member who was one of the campus voices calling for a new model of engagement.

True to its innovating nature, Pitzer pivoted in the 1990s toward a new community engagement focus. As CEC and CASA Pitzer recently celebrated their 25th anniversaries, *Participant* looks back at how that pivot resulted in the creation of these two programs.

It was a hard-fought effort that has resulted in a vibrant community engagement culture that is helping many like Voss to produce real, meaningful impact.

Parachutes and Submarines

In the 1990s, the College’s community engagement outreach was in desperate need of a change. It was true for most schools across the nation. Community engagement programs in higher education at the time went by another name—“service learning.”



“We decided to start something different so that students would work closely with grassroots groups and get more immersed. We wanted to create more of a commitment in them.”

—Lourdes Argüelles

work closely with grassroots groups and get more immersed. We wanted to create more of a commitment in them. That approach was pretty unknown at the time.”

One reason Argüelles and Jones were dissatisfied with service-learning programs had to do with geography. Both lived in working-class areas of the Inland Empire, beyond



Pitzer in Ontario students regularly visited the U.S.-Mexico border for a two-day trip. (PHOTOS ON PAGES 26–30 COURTESY OF PITZER ARCHIVES, CASA PITZER, AND SUSAN PHILLIPS)

the idyllic student experience of college life in what many call “the Claremont bubble.” They wanted students to gain a better understanding of how much people in surrounding communities struggled and worried about money, discrimination, and how to care for their families in times of sociopolitical precarity. They also wanted students to learn from and recognize the incredible assets of knowledge and resilience existing in these communities. You couldn’t do that if you stayed inside the bubble.

“Geography really matters,” said Jones, an emeritus professor of neuroscience who later became Pitzer’s dean of faculty and retired from Pitzer in 2011. “We wanted students to really understand the hard knocks going on in many communities around us. You can’t do that with a parachute program. You need a deeper approach. I guess you could say we wanted to replace the parachute with a submarine. We weren’t quite sure what the new approach was going to look like, but we knew it had to be something different.”

The Lessons of Study Abroad

That “something different” started in the mid-1990s as a pitch to Ontario city officials.

The proposal’s key strategies included setting up internships that would place Pitzer students in public schools, youth centers, community mental health centers, and city offices. It also mapped out how these firsthand

experiences would be connected with interdisciplinary academic courses that provided a theoretical framework about urban issues. When the program first started, these courses weren’t taught at Pitzer but in the basement of the Ontario Public Library. The courses were taught by Argüelles, Jones, and other Pitzer faculty on a voluntary basis.

It was a good beginning, but far from what Argüelles, Jones, and a handful of faculty, staff, and students wanted.

A major influence on the new program was the College’s successful study abroad programs in Nepal and elsewhere around the globe. Why not apply lessons from those programs closer to home, especially since immigrants from around the world were settling in the Inland Empire, redefining its demographics and navigating new challenges brought to bear upon the area?

Ontario’s proximity to Pitzer, its eagerness to have a Claremont Colleges presence in the community, and the city’s diversity made it a natural choice for testing this program. Jones described Ontario as a “wonderful lab for urban studies.”

By the late 1990s, this experiment in a new kind of service-learning model took shape as the Pitzer in Ontario External Studies program—Pitzer in Ontario (PIO), for short—which is known today as CASA Pitzer. When it started in 1997, the program enrolled just 10 students, eight of whom were part time. That meant that they did everything in the program except live in apartments or with host families in Ontario, which was central to the program’s early immersive focus

(home-stay requirements ended in 2004). With no budget for a support staff of its own, the program relied heavily on the study abroad team at the time, especially Carol Brandt, Mike Donahue, and Jamie Francis.

The following year, in 1998, the College leased a foreclosed home—and later purchased it—in a residential neighborhood near downtown Ontario on H Street. It served as PIO’s central hub: Students attended classes there, put on seminars, and conducted meetings and research. Visiting Pitzer lecturers stayed there, and so did the program’s early directors, including Jones, Doug Anderson, Juan De Lara ’96, and Marie Sandy.

Pitzer students who wanted to learn a language were placed with local families who spoke that language. Students returning from a semester abroad could also live with a family from the country where they studied and learn more about their immigration experiences. Students lived, worked, and studied in Ontario, forgoing classes on the Pitzer campus.

The program’s immersive nature wasn’t just limited to the internship and living with a host family. Students also attended community meetings and toured Ontario, Los Angeles, and Tijuana, where they visited maquiladoras (factories) and barrios as part of a two-day U.S.-Mexico border trip that ran for many years but was halted in 2011 due to rising violence at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Early guest lecturers included peace activist and former gang member Dewayne Holmes, an architect of the 1992

Watts gang truce, who led workshops on conflict resolution. Students also learned from Alan Wapner and Debra Porada, two members of the Ontario City Council, about how municipal governments work. Students kept diaries, wrote fiction inspired by their experiences, and analyzed their responses to daily life.

In their efforts to avoid a program that created “community engagement tourists,” Argüelles and Jones said it was important to honor surrounding working-class communities and treat them as “centers of learning”—not victims of injustice incapable of finding solutions on their own.

“These communities are full of people with so much experience and knowledge,” Argüelles said. “I refer to them as centers of learning, but what I think we should really call them is ‘centers of wisdom.’ That’s what they truly are. We wanted to tap into that wisdom in a way that was respectful—and that showed the people helping us at the grassroots level were appreciated and compensated, too.”



Participants in the Pitzer in Ontario program (including Director Susan Phillips, back row, fourth from left) pose outside the College-owned house on H Street near downtown Ontario.

Complementary Dynamics

Pitzer in Ontario was a winning idea, but there was still a problem.

One of the program's limitations, Jones noted, had to do with the old issue of parachuting. Even if students decided to get involved for more than a single semester, their involvement was still limited by their graduation—and sometimes that meant leaving an organization in the middle of an ongoing project.

To reduce the jarring instability that this might cause, Jones said the College recognized the need for a more permanent infrastructure alongside the PIO program. This second program would foster longer term relationships and stability between faculty and partner organizations.

In 1998, the year that PIO moved to a house in Ontario, the College launched the Center for California Cultural and Social Issues (CCCSI). Designed in consultation with community partners, the CCCSI incorporated five-year plans and provided a framework for the program's evolution. The center was made possible by two major grants, totaling \$1 million, from the W.M. Keck and The James Irvine foundations.

The grants supported faculty and student longitudinal research projects about issues facing the state, curriculum development, community-based partnerships, and fellowships. Taken together, the CCCSI and PIO struck a balance between the short- and long-term needs of community organizations and the engagement mission of the College.

Changing Faces, Names, and Missions

For Jones, any program that manages to operate for a quarter of a century or more should be considered a success. Over the course of his academic career, and especially as a dean, Jones said he watched many programs launch with great fanfare only to lose momentum and disappear.

"Some programs survive, others don't. The funding runs out, or there might be too much turnover in the program's staff. But that's just the nature of what you sometimes see in academia," he said. "You always hope that a program will take root, but that type of development takes time."

Jones believes an important factor in the early success of PIO and CCCSI was their connection with Pitzer's culture of social responsibility. Both programs became expressions of a core value—and that organic connection aligned



Professor Tessa Hicks Peterson (center) conducts class in the Pitzer in Ontario house.

with the interests of faculty and students, not to mention philanthropic organizations that provided support.

Just as important, he added, was stable leadership—something that is still true today. In the years since he and Argüelles started the programs, other members of the Pitzer community have stepped in and stayed involved to the present day.

They include Professor Susan Phillips, whose 14-year tenure included overseeing both PIO and CCCSI (she left to become Conservancy director in 2018); Professor Tessa Hicks Peterson, who arrived at Pitzer in 2006 and took over as the CCCSI's director in 2008 and later became PIO's director in 2018; and Tricia Morgan '08, who has worked with CCCSI for more than 16 years and now serves as its director. Hicks Peterson has worked closely with Morgan (and with Phillips, too), and the two have provided a strong sense of continuity for these programs as they've continued to expand and grow.

For Hicks Peterson, who was involved in civil rights and social justice nonprofit activism before joining Pitzer's faculty, another reason for their long-term success involves flexibility.



Alan Jones believes the early success of PIO and CCCSI was due to their connection with Pitzer's culture of social responsibility and an alignment with the interests of faculty and students.



Students and community members advocate for a sustainable future in Ontario.

"The model that Alan, Lourdes, and others first envisioned for Pitzer's community engagement efforts has undergone changes over the years because it had to," she said. "You have to respond to the changing pedagogic needs of students and disciplines, as well as the shifting priorities of the local social movements, collectives, and organizations Pitzer partners with. Standing still isn't an option."

In 2016, PIO sold its neighborhood location and moved to its current site in the historic Frankish building on Euclid Avenue. The move enhanced the program's community visibility on the city's main drag. With that move also came a name change: The new name CASA Pitzer reflected the program's more intensive focus on critical action, advocacy, and participatory community-based research conducted by a small cohort of students each semester.

The CCCSI's identity has evolved, too, thus meriting a name change to the Community Engagement Center, to a more immediate, urgent focus on sustaining the College's many partnerships.

Today, Morgan and her CEC team support some 50

community engagement praxis classes—a term referring to semester-long internships that are a graduation requirement for every student—and some 500 students involved with these and other projects every year. She said that there are praxis classes in nearly every major. Regardless of a student's academic discipline, that means there are ways to integrate community engagement and social justice into their learning.

On the community side, the CEC provides organizations with various services, including written translation and live interpretation services in a wide variety of languages. The CEC also hosts many events, including the annual Storytellers Film, Arts, and Poetry Festival for Pitzer, and works with more than a thousand community members each year.

"The CEC provides important relational, pedagogical, and logistical support to students, faculty, and community members," explained Morgan. "We support Pitzer's community engagement work, but we don't do it alone. In addition to faculty who lead much of these efforts and have started many of the continuing programs and relationships we help support, Pitzer has many other centers of community

engagement and action. We embrace a decentralized approach that stays true to what Alan and Lourdes originally envisioned; it's a deeper, more meaningful, and impactful connection to the community that is now part of the very fabric of Pitzer.

A Thriving Landscape

Pitzer's culture of social responsibility, which Jones said supported a new engagement model in the 1990s, has also led to the creation of many other programs ever since.

For its 16th consecutive year, in fact, the College's blossoming of engagement programs in a wide range of areas—from voter registration and civic work to developing meaningful partnerships with local day laborers, Native and Indigenous communities, and incarcerated students—was awarded with another Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement earlier this year, an honor reserved for a select number of higher education institutions that have developed winning models that merge learning with community service.

It's an exciting affirmation of the many efforts undertaken over the past 25 years, but it's hardly a time to rest on one's laurels. In

fact, CEC and CASA Pitzer—and their peer programs and organizations—are continuing to explore new partnership



José Z. Calderón, professor emeritus of sociology and Chicano/a Latino/a studies, leads a public discussion about community engagement.

opportunities and strengthen existing ones at the institution level. They also continue to confront the challenge of finding enough steady financial resources to support this work.

For Voss, whose experiences with the CEC and Conservancy have deepened and enriched her understanding of community engagement, she hopes more support is forthcoming. Community engagement has defined her undergraduate experience at Pitzer and further developed those skills she first tested as a highschooler. She said it's important that future generations of students be given a chance to benefit in the way she has.

"I can't imagine Pitzer without its community engagement programs. Our students need this. This is what they come here for," she said. "If we didn't have these programs, there would be so many lost opportunities for students and community members to work together in the fight against disenfranchisement. That's why I'm such a big advocate and supporter. I can't say enough about it. If you want the Pitzer experience of activism and change that the College advertises as part of its brand identity, this is where you're going to find it."

LEARN MORE

The Recent History of CEC and CASA Pitzer:

www.pitzer.edu/documents/2018-fallwinter-participant-magazine

The Community Engagement Center:

www.pitzer.edu/offices/cec

CASA Pitzer:

www.pitzer.edu/offices/casa/academic-program

Social Responsibility at Pitzer:

www.pitzer.edu/values-action/social-responsibility

A DEEPLY PERSONAL CONNECTION

Getting involved with the Community Engagement Center (CEC) put Annie Voss '26 back in touch with her roots in an unexpected way.

Earlier this year, during spring break, Voss and a small group of students—including some classmates involved with CASA Pitzer—went to New Market, Tennessee, for training at the Highlander Research and Education Center, an acclaimed social justice leadership training school. The trip was sponsored by the CEC.

Highlander's social justice history is associated with major movements and important figures, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. During King's visit to the center, in fact, he heard the song "We Shall Overcome" for the first time and was inspired by it. Soon it became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

Voss doesn't just appreciate this history; the center is meaningful to her in a very personal sense. Her grandmother, Mary Anne Flournoy, was involved in the Highlander movement in the 1970s, and Voss' training at the center unexpectedly made her feel closer to her.

"The CEC team had no idea what they did for me in sending me there," Voss said. "I feel like my grandmother set in motion a lot of the pieces of who I am and the culture of community engagement that I grew up in. Even though she passed before I got to know her, visiting the center and getting training like she did connected me with her. It was so meaningful; I felt affirmed in what I'm learning and that I'm doing something that would have mattered to her."



Andrea Robinowitz '25 (second from left) spends time with members of Huerta del Valle and Mujeres del Jardin at a CASA Pitzer research symposium.

FEATURE

Reciprocity and Healing

Andrea Robinowitz '25 received unexpected gifts from her involvement with a local urban garden

By BRIDGETTE RAMIREZ

You can learn important lessons anywhere.

That's what Andrea Robinowitz '25 knows.

The place where the 21-year-old double major in environmental analysis and foreign languages has encountered some of her most transformative educational moments isn't a classroom in Claremont but an urban garden in Ontario. There, Robinowitz has cultivated an understanding of holistic health, radical care, and community-based wisdom.



Robinowitz's experience has been made possible by the longtime partnership between Critical Action & Social Advocacy (CASA) Pitzer and Huerta del Valle (HdV). CASA Pitzer is an intensive, two-course program that facilitates student fellowships with local partners—including Huerta del Valle's garden community. These fellowships take the form of praxis classes that immerse students in the day-to-day operations of partner organizations. Huerta del Valle,



Robinowitz (right) and co-workers help with distributing fresh fruit and vegetables to community members.

a network of urban farms and community gardens in the Inland Empire, grows organic food and advocates for an equitable food system.

Robinowitz’s double major delves into environmental justice, sustainability, and foreign language skills with a concentration in Italian and Spanish. Out of all of CASA’s community partners, HdV best aligned with her passion and skillset. She said she loved spending the semester with the organization.

“It was a great intersection of my coursework,” said Robinowitz. “For one, my Spanish got a lot better. For another, I feel like environmental analysis connects to anything you do. All forms of injustice are interconnected and connected to the environment. I saw these things play out in person.”

Robinowitz was grateful for the chance to break out of the Claremont bubble and immerse herself in a new region.

“I went to public school in a progressive, liberal city,” said Robinowitz, who is from San Francisco. “I grew up interested in social issues and grassroots work. CASA and Huerta del Valle helped me understand this new community in the Inland Empire.”

Intergenerational Learning with Community Healers

One of HdV’s hallmark offerings is the Mujeres del Jardin, a female-led community healing group that meets in the community garden. Robinowitz joined Mujeres del Jardin for their weekly meetings, which included home-cooked meals and wellness practices in aromatherapy, meditation, and dance. Every meeting included an emotional share-out for people to check in with each other.

“I saw a prime example of how important community is in supporting health,” said Robinowitz. “The garden provides organic food, but it also provides more holistic support. Everyone was there for each other.”

Robinowitz was inspired by the depth of emotional care that took place around her. But she didn’t experience this just as an observer: She was embraced by the group and found an unexpected source of support and encouragement there.

“I was touched by everyone sharing vulnerable, personal stories,” she said. “It was a safe space for people to bond over their culture and talk about their feelings and struggles.”

Robinowitz explained that many members in Mujeres del Jardin are immigrants from Central America and monolingual Spanish speakers. Since Robinowitz is fluent in Spanish, she was able to build stronger connections with them. The women embraced Robinowitz as one of their own, sharing their hearts and their knowledge across generations and cultures.

“I was included in multiple conversations where there were disagreements, but they never got heated,” said Robinowitz. “Everyone just wanted what was best for the community. They were able to have open dialogues that value everyone’s opinions. It’s helped me realize that I like to be in community in my work.”

Breaking Down Barriers

“CASA gave me the opportunity to meet this community I would have otherwise not met,” said Robinowitz. “I heard stories about how far people lived from the garden and about their different working and health conditions. I was able to connect that to issues I learned about in class.”

CASA Pitzer facilitates community-based participatory research on issues of regional equity and justice related to immigration, environment, health, and more. Students take their classes in CASA Pitzer’s community center in downtown Ontario while they participate in their fellowship with a regional partner.

Robinowitz’s research project delved into HdV’s past, present, and future commitment to values of community and health. She incorporated participatory observation, archival research of past HdV CASA projects, and interviews with employees to create an overview of HdV’s work. Her project listed challenges faced

by the community members and the organization, such as access to technology, institutional memory, and outreach. Robinowitz also compiled suggestions from HdV staff, community members, and past CASA fellows for HdV and future fellows to grow the organization. “We talk a lot about blurring the lines between binaries like the teacher/student model,” said Robinowitz. “In higher ed, we value people’s expertise when they have PhDs, but everyone can learn from one another. You can also learn outside the classroom—through doing and experience.”

—Andrea Robinowitz ’25

“I saw a prime example of how important community is in supporting health. The garden provides organic food, but it also provides more holistic support. Everyone was there for each other.”

Robinowitz considers her time with the Mujeres del Jardin as a prime example. While she was learning about traditional healing practices and herbal remedies, Robinowitz was also benefitting from the women’s life experience. As mothers and grandmothers with decades of wisdom, they gave Robinowitz access to a different view on community and care.

At the end of the semester, the Mujeres del Jardin attended the CASA Pitzer research symposium to celebrate Robinowitz and give her gifts.

“That was so touching,” said Robinowitz. “It made me realize that the relationship was, at least I hope, reciprocal. That they were able to learn from my perspectives like I learned from theirs.”

According to Robinowitz, the women taught her a renewed sense of optimism and an example of community resilience that she had never experienced before.

“I got access to such a different attitude of positivity and community,” said Robinowitz. “Even if people were facing difficult struggles in their personal and financial lives, they were still able to have a positive outlook and always be there for one another. This was possible because of how everyone supported each other. It was a breath of fresh air.”

In higher education, a classroom can feel intimidating and competitive. Mujeres del Jardin showed a different path to Robinowitz. Seeing other people’s willingness to be vulnerable and open-hearted encouraged Robinowitz to do the same. She found an inner healing she never expected.

Robinowitz has kept in touch with the women via group chat to this day.

In addition to the Mujeres meetings, Robinowitz assisted in Huerta del Valle’s produce markets and assembled their annual report. CASA Pitzer prioritizes reciprocity with community partners, but Robinowitz wished her involvement could have been more extensive.

“It was easy for me to receive more than I was giving,” said Robinowitz. “I was getting class credit and was there for a short period, whereas other community members depend on Huerta del Valle. To the biggest extent that I and that CASA can, we emphasize community offerings.”

Environmental Education and Grassroots Organizing

In her environmental analysis courses, Robinowitz has studied the warehouse boom, air quality concerns, and food insecurity. However, CASA Pitzer and Huerta del Valle introduced her to these issues and their impact on community in a concrete way.

“I didn’t know anything about the Inland Empire before,” said Robinowitz. “I saw how environmental impacts affect real people. I was learning from those on the ground working toward social justice. I experienced much more than classroom conversation, although that’s also important. There’s a balance.”

Thanks to her involvement with CASA Pitzer and Huerta del Valle, Robinowitz is more passionate than ever about grassroots action, mutual aid, and community-driven organizing.

“My most important takeaway is that, regardless of career, I want to prioritize community,” said Robinowitz. “I learned the value of being there for the people around you. We help and protect each other. I want to find that wherever I go.”

Cultivating a Green Vision: Huerta del Valle’s Philosophy

Huerta del Valle’s (HdV) vision for the Inland Empire is “one garden every mile.” HdV doesn’t just offer plots for families to grow their own food. Through farmer training and agricultural education programs, HdV empowers communities to create an equitable, local food system in Ontario and beyond.

As a hub of the warehousing and logistics industry, Ontario deals with air pollution and other environmental hazards. Residents also have limited access to nutritious locally grown food. Huerta del Valle Founder and Director Maria Alonso faced this issue when she was looking for organic produce for her son. Alonso took matters into her own hands by creating a community garden.

Pitzer College was an important partner in the formation of HdV. In 2010, Professor Susan A. Phillips was directing the community-based academic program Pitzer in Ontario (now known as CASA Pitzer). Phillips and Alonso collaborated with other Pitzer and Ontario community members to develop HdV and establish stable land access for the garden. Pitzer College became Huerta del Valle’s fiscal sponsor until the organization finalized its nonprofit designation.

Since then, Alonso has overseen HdV as it expands to new garden sites and education programs in sustainability, environmental justice, nutrition, and wellness. In a recent annual report, Alonso said that Huerta del Valle “is a resource to all through our gardens and programs to find personal growth, peace, and love in all aspects of life.”

Learn more at huertadelvalle.org.



Robinowitz gained both practical skills through the work of her hands and a stronger sense of purpose through the relationships she built at Huerta del Valle.

“I saw that it is possible to use your academic background to do meaningful work,” said Robinowitz. “Still, the amount of work that I did was nothing in comparison to what the employees and community members do every day.”

Robinowitz returned to Huerta del Valle this fall and is applying what she’s learned throughout her life.

“I learned more in my CASA semester than I did in any other class,” said Robinowitz. “I think every class should have some sort of community praxis involved.”

FEATURE

Sometimes It's Personal

How a community partnership arose from one mother's search for help

By LISA BUTTERWORTH

For the past 25 years, the Community Engagement Center (CEC) has been helping Pitzer students bring their in-class knowledge into real-life practice with local organizations and communities.

Sometimes, the genesis of a successful partnership works the other way around. Pitzer's ongoing relationship with Claremont nonprofit ConductAbility is a prime example of how community engagement can organically flourish, and one student in particular, Kelly Heimdahl '20, helped make that happen.

When Heimdahl first visited Claremont in 2015, she had no idea it was known as "the city of trees and PhDs." In fact, she wasn't even familiar with The Claremont Colleges. She was drawn by ConductAbility, a Claremont-based educational nonprofit that serves children and young adults with neuromotor impairments. Heimdahl's youngest daughter, Savannah, was diagnosed with quadriplegia cerebral palsy; she has little control over her limbs and, despite a wide range of receptive language abilities, is nonverbal. ConductAbility was where Heimdahl wanted her to learn.

Heimdahl also realized that Pitzer was a perfect fit to finish her own undergraduate education as a student in the College's New Resources program, which enables nontraditional age students 23 and older to get their undergraduate degrees. Today, Heimdahl is preparing to begin Claremont Graduate University's organizational psychology doctoral program and will continue to nurture the CEC's ConductAbility partnership.

Heimdahl's path has not been an easy one. She was raising three young children when her husband died unexpectedly in 2005. Savannah was born the year after, premature and with a brain injury and significant needs. Heimdahl's mother, who

provided some much-needed support, passed away when Savannah was just 1 year old.

From Despair to Action

Though she reached a point of despair, Heimdahl's never been one to be kept down (her 20 years of recovery from alcoholism are one proof of that). In 2011, she began taking community college courses near her home in Los Angeles' South Bay and realized that education was the key to providing for her family as a widowed single mom.

When Heimdahl decided to move so that Savannah could enroll in ConductAbility's program—a change that meant leaving her established support network and building a new one while trying to keep their household afloat—she googled colleges in Claremont.

She connected with Pitzer right away. "I just loved it," said Heimdahl. "It totally fit. These are my ideals."

In 2016, at the age of 44, Heimdahl became a Pitzer student; though she majored in anthropology and political studies, it was community-engaged education that caught her interest.

"I was like, 'Oh, this is the work I want to do.' The readings and the dialogue and the collaboration on projects that are related to social justice—that's my jam," she said. It's how she ended up at the CEC. "I just went in there and I said, 'I'm here because of my daughter's program. And if you're doing social justice work, there's a partnership that could be born here.'"

Cultivating Reciprocity

Launched in 2019, the partnership with ConductAbility is one of the CEC's newer relationships.

"Students were learning about all these wonderful things regarding social responsibility and social justice," said Tricia Morgan '08, the CEC's director. "This provided an opportunity for them to put that knowledge into practice."

The CEC nurtures relationships with community organizations, and Morgan said that ConductAbility was a natural fit to partner with the College. She cited the phenomenal strides that the organization's students make, "in terms of their ability and confidence and social capacity—it just grows tremendously while they're in the program." It also represented a population that the CEC was not yet serving, which created a new opportunity for everyone involved.

"The interplay between the Pitzer students and our students has been really helpful," said Jim Prust, ConductAbility's founder and president. "Our students are getting to relate with the Pitzer students. They can learn from and interact with those who are outside their regular circle of people, and the Pitzer students get exposed to a



Kelly Heimdahl '20 and ConductAbility Founder and President Jim Prust will continue to nurture the partnership between CEC and the organization.



Kelly Heimdahl '20, center, discusses ConductAbility with its founder and president, Jim Prust, and Community Engagement Center Director Tricia Morgan '08.

population of individuals that they might not otherwise be exposed to. It becomes a learning opportunity for both, and that's always a good thing."

"You're Never the Same After"

Heimdahl, who is a tireless advocate for Savannah and her peers, knows these individual experiences lay the foundation for systemic change.

"My vision [for the partnership] was exposure. [Savannah] makes people uncomfortable. How do you make policy about someone you won't look at in the elevator?" Heimdahl said. "There's a relationship between every student that comes through—you're never the same after you've been in the special needs world for any length of time. And it's so important to bring people in from the outside because we're too tired and too few to do anything else besides the fighting that we're doing to get our kids' basic needs met."

In 2022, Morgan became an adjunct professor of organizational studies and made ConductAbility a key partner for the social justice course she teaches.

"My students who have worked there absolutely love it. They have the best experiences; it's the highlight of their week, every week," Morgan said. Each volunteer brings their

"Our students ... learn from and interact with those who are outside their regular circle of people, and the Pitzer students get exposed to a population of individuals that they might not otherwise be exposed to."

—Jim Prust, ConductAbility's founder and president

individual strengths to ConductAbility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pitzer students researched how compromised communities were being affected around the world. A media studies student made a documentary about Heimdahl and her ongoing struggle to find in-home nursing care for Savannah.

Prust gave another example of a student intern with computer science skills who created an app after helping a student with math homework and realizing how cumbersome the current technology is.

"These are brilliant students," Heimdahl said. "They do amazing things—from a place of knowing, of being a part of. When you come into the community, you're in."

Prust agreed. "We view this as a long-term ongoing relationship," he said, "that can foster a lot of positive things for both of us."

FACULTY

Community Engagement Isn't Always a Verb

For Kathy Yep, an ancient practice holds important lessons



In Kathy Yep's classes, students learn to breathe. During 20 years as a professor of Asian American Studies at Pitzer, Yep has introduced students to qì gōng in her classes to help them develop their sense of self and social justice practice.

Qì gōng (pronounced "chee-gung") is an ancient Chinese practice that focuses on breathing, meditation, and flowing physical movements to cultivate *qi*, the vital life force or energy that is in everyone and everything. Even for those already familiar with it, Yep's approach offers something unexpected—she shows us that qì gōng provides another way of thinking about community and one of Pitzer's educational objectives: social responsibility praxis.

"Whenever we speak of civic engagement and service learning, we tend to focus on

individual actions in relation to the state and civil society: voting, marching in protest, tutoring in schools," she explained. "But I've always explored counter-narratives. I've always explored alternative ways that we can move together as a community, and qì gōng is one of them. It gives us another way of understanding what action means."

Loneliness and Oppression

At a recent conference organized by the UC San Francisco Osher Center for Integrative Medicine, Harvard Medical School, and Brigham and Women's Hospital, Yep presented her research on loneliness, college students, and qì gōng.

"The U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared loneliness a dangerous, nationwide epidemic," she said. "Murthy warns that loneliness increases the risk of depression, anxiety, heart disease, stroke, dementia, premature death, and suicide. The mortality rate of social disconnection is about the same as smoking daily."

Yep noted that recent studies show that one in three responding college students have had severe psychological distress with many LGBTQIA and POC students reporting that they experience loneliness.

Yep's research and teaching shifts community engagement to look at the interconnected roles of being and doing.



Photos: Kathy Yep gives a demonstration of qì gōng movements on the Mounds.

Feminist scholar activists Margo Okazawa-Rey and Gwyn Kirk call on us to not only examine and study oppressions and liberation but also to understand them through our minds, bodies, and hearts.

Qì gōng, according to Yep's research, is about more than belly breathing and eliciting a relaxation response. Qì gōng has an ontological and epistemological dimension. "If *qi* is everywhere and in everything," Yep said, "students are never alone. They are never separate."

It doesn't matter what their major is, Yep believes every student benefits from this practice.

"There are many forces and systemic inequities that are isolating, that seek to dehumanize and break us apart," she said. "Qì gōng deepens our ability to move the other way, to reflect on being a human in the world and interconnected. In my classes, we break down all the scripts that students write about each other and rebuild what it means to think about liberation and engagement together. We do this through breathing and moving in class and through teaching others foundational moves as a type of social responsibility praxis."

Yep said that qì gōng provides a theoretical framework and embodied practice that remind students that they are interconnected with all beings and all others—even if they radically disagree with them.

Her students want to make society better and engage with social issues head-on: reproductive justice, mass incarceration, climate catastrophes, domestic violence, the killings of George Floyd and Sandra Bland, human-made starvation, poverty, and military occupations.

But, she added, they often struggle to balance engaging with the world and can feel overwhelmed, hopeless, and paralyzed. During the recent protests and encampments

"There are many forces and systemic inequities that are isolating, that seek to dehumanize and break us apart. Qì gōng deepens our ability to move the other way, to reflect on being a human in the world and interconnected."

—Kathy Yep

across the country, she recalled how one of her students flip-flopped between closely monitoring current events and staying in bed with a blanket over her head. Practicing qì gōng in class and teaching others provided her with a realization that she was not alone.

The Classroom Experience

While some qì gōng practices can be found in most of her classes, Yep has focused on it specifically in courses about the social theory of Vietnamese monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh and the course Qì gōng and Embodied Learning, which she co-teaches with Organizational Studies Professor Barbara Junisbai.

In these classes, students fulfill the social responsibility praxis graduation requirement as they practice qì gōng and help each other. Yep said that Pitzer's social responsibility praxis shows students how to engage in a space between contemplation and social justice, between ideas and actions.

Illness and Discovery

A fourth-generation Chinese American, Yep was raised in a family that practiced both qì gōng and tai chi. As a child, she said she followed these practices because her parents wanted her to—and her true discovery of their importance didn't occur until she was a student at UC Berkeley and was diagnosed with cancer.

Yep said the cancer affected her thyroid and that—even once it was removed and Western medicine declared her cured—it drained her energy so much that she didn't think she would be able to finish school. Desperate for help, she spotted a flyer at the Berkeley Bowl grocery store advertising an eight-week qì gōng class and decided to go. The teacher, she recalled, instantly sensed her energy level was depleted and approached her.

"He said to me, 'you're ill,' without any hesitation," she said. Yep decided to work with him, and she said she had a clear sign that it was working: She was able to sit through her typical three-hour-long graduate seminar.

Yep has gone on to become a practitioner and has trained with Paul Li and Dr. Bingkun Hu, important foundational figures in bringing Da Yan (Wild Goose) qì gōng to the U.S. The transformation she experienced in her life is something she's passionately committed to sharing with Pitzer students. She said

she's hopeful that a continuing interest in qì gōng among students will lead to textured ways of approaching collective loneliness on the one hand and community engagement on the other hand.

Until then, she said she simply hopes that what students take with them about the practice is a new way of seeing and doing as they tackle current issues.

"My hope is that students will move from feeling lonely and nourish their resilience, social connection, and sense of empowerment. I hope they develop and use a nuanced analytical toolkit as a result of this practice," she said.

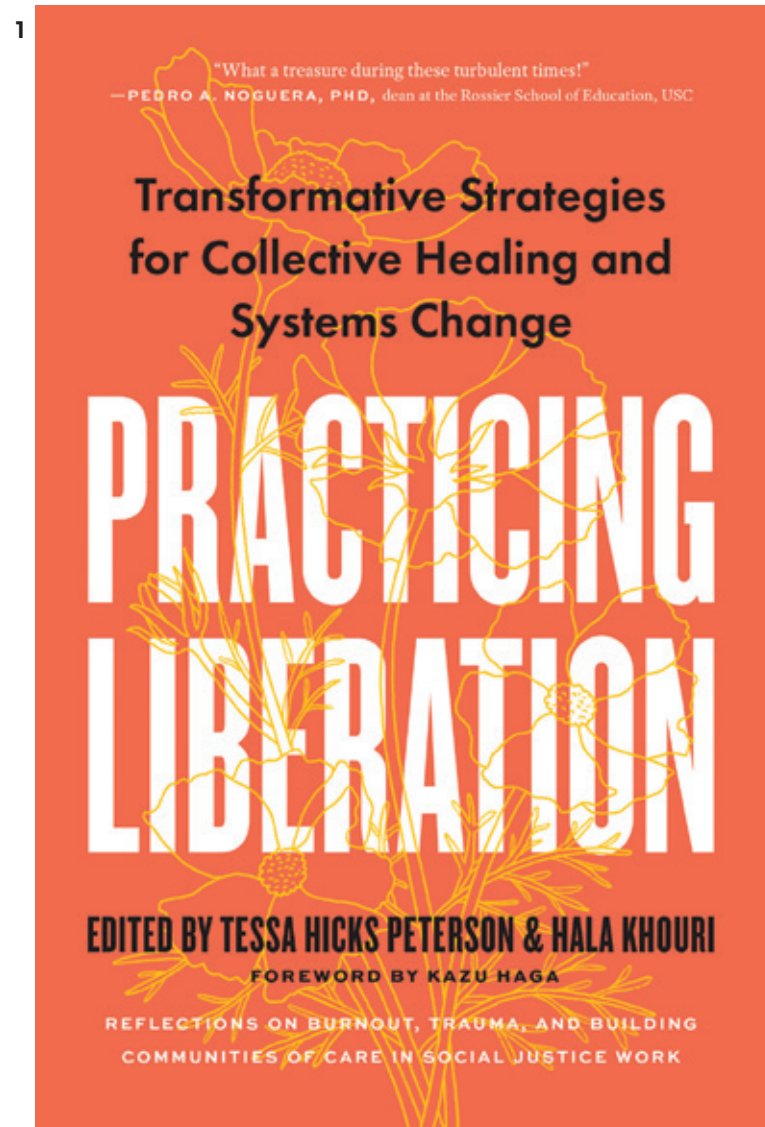
"From the principles of qì gōng, what does it look like to interrogate, reflect, and act from the framework that everything is interconnected? How does knowing and understanding a social phenomenon shape our ways of being and doing? I hope they'll see the relevance of what this means for their college careers and beyond, and for what they can do to create a society where everyone's needs are met with no one thing, being, or place feeling left out."



COMMUNITY BOOKSHELF

It Takes a Network

New books from the Pitzer community explore social justice collaborations, the meaning of work, fairy tales, political apocalypse, and more



1. PRACTICING LIBERATION: TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES FOR COLLECTIVE HEALING AND SYSTEMS CHANGE—REFLECTIONS ON BURNOUT, TRAUMA, AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF CARE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK
(NORTH ATLANTIC BOOKS)

Fighting for social justice is round-the-clock work. In their new book, **Tessa Hicks Peterson** and co-editor Hala Khouri have assembled a collection of essays that offer a practical, insightful look at the toll of collective justice work. Activists and organizers are just as susceptible to burnout or toxicity as workers in other organizations. The essays address many of these challenges and underscore the importance of embodying healing; celebrating creativity and radical imagination; honoring the need for self-care; and disrupting racist, classist, anti-queer, and antitrans behavior and systems. The editors and their contributors hope the book will provide a blueprint for building a collective justice model based on “resilience, joy, and community care.” Hicks Peterson and Khouri have also produced an accompanying workbook, *Practicing Liberation: Radical Tools for Grassroots Activists, Community Leaders, Teachers, and Caretakers Working Toward Social Justice*, to make that blueprint even more achievable.

2. THE PLACE COLLABORATORY: HIGHER EDUCATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND THE PUBLIC HUMANITIES
(E-BOOK: WWW.BTTOP.ORG/THE-PLACE-COLLABORATORY-E-BOOK/)

The PLACE Collaboratory (Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators) was a network of eight projects in four cities focused on humanities-based civic engagement and included 12 academic institutions and more than 20 community partners. It existed from 2019 to 2023 and utilized students as key co-creators and leaders. This multi-media digital book provides an overview of the network’s projects and partners and what it accomplished in its four years. That overview features a contribution from Pitzer Professor **Tessa Hicks Peterson**, who describes the work done by CASA Pitzer (Hicks Peterson is the director) along with the Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice and the Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective.

3. WHAT WORK MEANS: BEYOND THE PURITAN WORK ETHIC
(CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS)

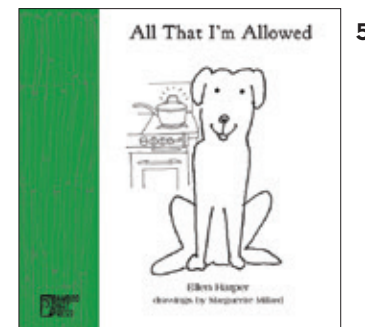
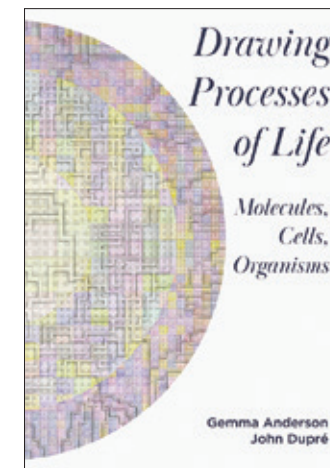
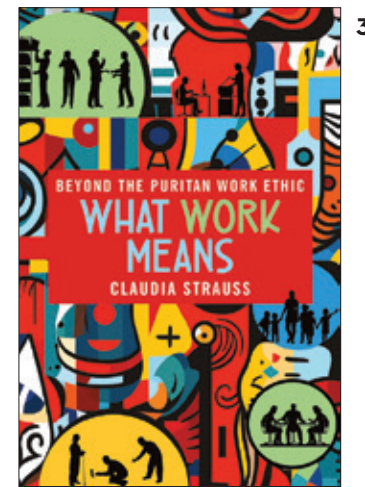
Dispelling the idea of Americans as workaholics, **Claudia Strauss**, a professor of anthropology at Pitzer, presents a more nuanced perspective in her new book. Drawing upon the evocative stories of unemployed Americans from a wide range of occupations, Strauss explores how diverse Americans think about the place of work in a good life. In addition, *What Work Means* provides a platform for a discussion of the possible meaning of work as it changes because of the increasing dominance of teleworking, greater automation, and more atypical forms of employment.

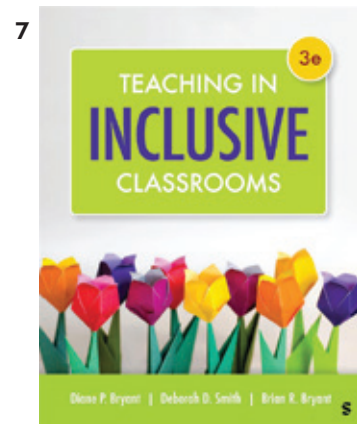
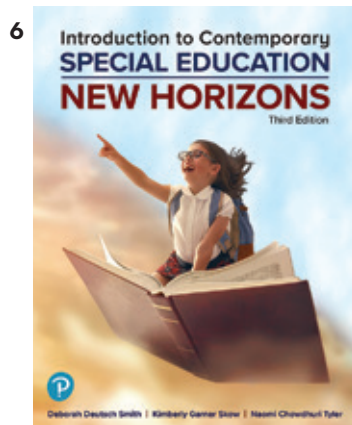
4. DRAWING PROCESSES OF LIFE: MOLECULES, CELLS, ORGANISMS
(UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS)

The insights of Pitzer Associate Professor of Art **Sarah Gilbert** featured in this book address the challenge of depicting biological systems and how artistic evocations can generate productive questions for artists and scientists. If you’re an artist who is sketching the process of cell division, for example, what’s the best way to do that? This book considers such questions with the help of Gilbert and other scholars in the humanities and life sciences. The result is a rich variety of topics, including epigenetics, epistemology, and metamorphosis in insects, proteins, and other ever-shifting biological systems.

5. ALL THAT I’M ALLOWED
(BAMBOO DART PRESS)

Like many of the best children’s books, *All That I’m Allowed* does double duty as a storybook for grownups about learning to live with children and dogs. **Ellen Harper ’87** gently reminds moms and dads that their parenting lessons are often interpreted differently than they intended. *All That I’m Allowed* is a make-believe romp through the poignant and often funny misinterpretations that children make as well as a social commentary on coming to grips with a rapidly changing society and how we attempt to make sense of it all.





6. INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY SPECIAL EDUCATION: NEW HORIZONS, THIRD EDITION
(PEARSON)

Deborah Deutsch Smith '68 and her co-authors present evidence-based practices, data, and research on special education and balance this material with real stories about real people. Current, accurate, and personal, this unique text sets educators who are engaged and passionate about their work and value each student on the best path forward using validated practices. This new edition also puts the spotlight on the impact of role models, diversity, and equity while incorporating the latest information about evidence-based practices, inclusive settings, and assisting exceptional learners.

7. TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS, THIRD EDITION
(SAGE PUBLICATIONS, INC.)

Along with the special education new edition included in this roundup, Deborah Deutsch Smith '68 also serves as a co-editor and contributor to an essential work that uses the ADAPT framework (ask, determine, analyze, propose, test) to help teachers determine how to use proven academic and behavioral interventions to obtain the best outcomes for students with disabilities. Smith, Diane P. Bryant, and Brian R. Bryant show how to create truly inclusive classrooms for students with disabilities. This third edition also features reorganized chapters on individualized services and diverse learners, new information on the latest court cases, and revised sections about disabilities.

8. LA SIRENA: A NOVELLA IN VERSE
(CLOUDBANK BOOKS)

Maurya Simon's '80 11th volume of poetry, *La Sirena*, is a poignant retelling of "The Little Mermaid" that critic W.J. Herbert in *MER Journal* calls "a vibrant contribution to feminist recastings of myth and fairytale." Simon's story of the magical Pacific Ocean and a young girl's coming of age, according to fellow poet Amy Gerstler '78, is "a truly fresh take on mermaid myths drawn from across cultures, hybridizing and unifying them into a vivid tale for our time." A recipient of the 2019 Gold Medal in Poetry from the Independent Booksellers Association, Simon is a 2024 National Book Award in Poetry nominee for *La Sirena*. Her poems, essays, and reviews have been published in an array of literary journals and included in several national multimedia exhibits and performances.

9. NOT FAR FROM HERE
(CANDLEWICK PRESS)

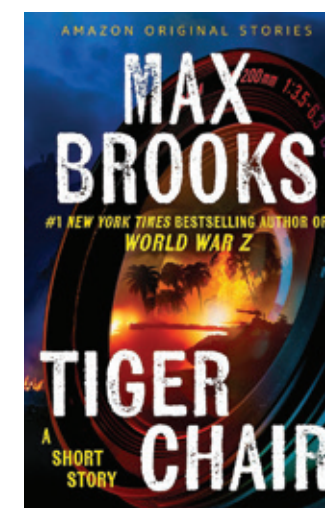
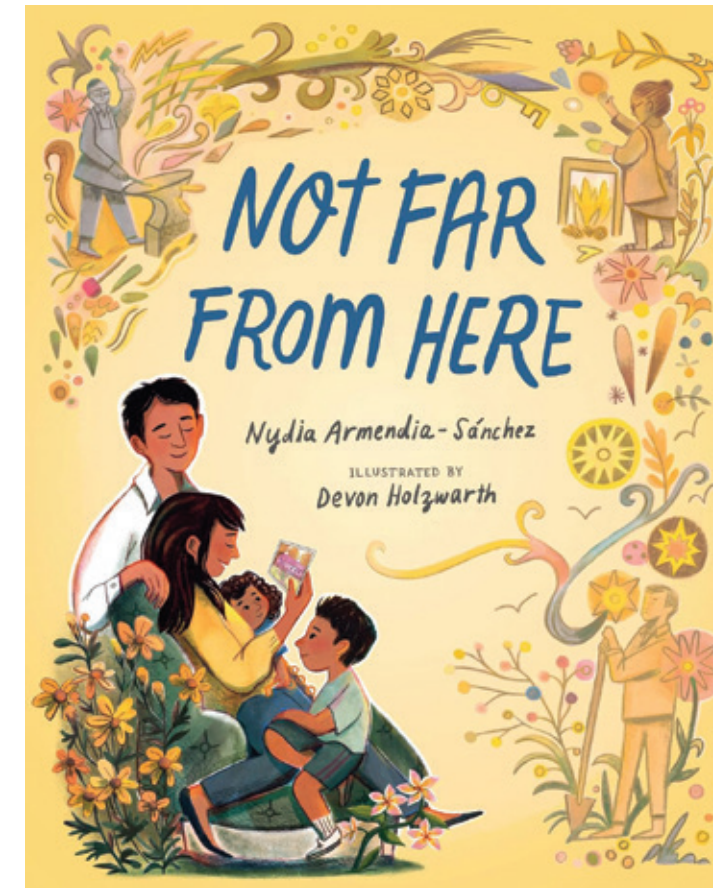
In her debut book, Nydia Armendia-Sánchez '06 (with help from award-winning illustrator Devon Holzwarth) has crafted a bilingual ode to the love, courage, and memories we carry from one generation to the next and from one country to another. She lovingly relays a story of immigration, creativity, and *comunidad* through a translanguage text that moves naturally from English to Español and back in a manner that will be familiar to many second- and third-generation Latine families—and evocative to immigrant families of any heritage. Young People's Poet Laureate Emerita Margarita Engle (author of the Newbery Honor Book, *The Surrender Tree*) hails Armendia-Sánchez's book as a "lovely tribute to immigrants and creativity."

10. TIGER CHAIR: A SHORT STORY
(AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES)

Max Brooks '94 (son of Mel and bestselling author of *World War Z*) has followed his zombie apocalypse with a gripping short story about guerrilla warfare exploding on the streets of Los Angeles after a Chinese invasion of the U.S. West Coast. Years into the war, the insurgency escalates but the propaganda never changes. Torn between loyalty to his country and loyalty to his troops, a Chinese officer writes a brutally honest—and possibly suicidal—letter home to unmask the truth. In his epistolary approach to this scenario, Brooks combines his signature meticulous research with unforgettable characters to create a landmark work of speculative fiction.

11. STATISTICS FOR ECONOMISTS
(WORLD SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING CO. PTE LTD)

Pitzer Economics Professor Linus Yamane has written a book about statistics that is made to order for undergraduate students. Among the dozens of statistics textbooks extant, most are written at a level that is either too complicated or too basic, which makes you wonder who will actually benefit from using them. In Yamane's case, his new textbook quickly gets to the major points of statistics used by economists with a mixture of concision and accessibility that is sure to appeal to students at all levels.





ABOVE: Huang '13 presents a traditional-style puppet show during L.A.'s Hungry Ghost Festival. (PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEX ZAMORA)
RIGHT: Huang says the festival evokes the power of the ancestral past. (PHOTO COURTESY OF OLIVIA MOON)



ALUMNI

The Sound and the Fury

Micah Huang '13 seeks community healing and transformation with L.A.'s Hungry Ghost Festival

By TOM JOHNSON

Micah Huang '13 is a fervent believer in the idea of community engagement making lives better. But he goes one further. “My approach,” he said, “is founded on the idea that in order to benefit a community, your personal interests have to be inseparable from theirs.”

By his reckoning, this alignment happens because of a situation one is born into, or one that develops more organically from the flow of life. Regardless, he said what really matters is just that you have “some skin in the game.” For Huang, if efforts to serve the community succeed, everyone wins and prospers together. Conversely, if those efforts fail, all suffer the consequences together.

A composer, musician, and sound artist, Huang exposes social injustice as he explores music's ability to heal and transform. A Fulbright fellow who traveled to Hungary to

work alongside Roma people and amplify and help preserve their musical traditions, he served as director of the 2024 Los Angeles Hungry Ghost Festival, which was held in August in Alpine Park in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

“The project went well,” he said, “and my team had a great time preparing a traditional style puppet show for the festival, in response to a special request from some of the elders in Chinatown.” The festival also included traditional music and dance, which was performed on the outdoor stage with more conventional sit-down performances taking place on the indoor stage.

Stereotypes vs. Reality

The Hungry Ghost Festival was the latest installment in a series of projects that started with the 2018 commemoration of the Los Angeles Chinese Massacre (19 Chinatown

residents were lynched on the night of October 24, 1871). Huang said the festival was particularly important as a way of addressing concerns unique to the Chinatown community, which, he explained, tends to be overlooked and dismissed because of the disparity between stereotypes and street-level reality.

Consider just one data-point as an illustration, Huang said. In 2021, Asian American communities received less than 0.2% of philanthropic donations despite making up nearly 7% of the country's population.

“The list goes on and on from there,” he said. “We are considered a low-priority demographic in the ideology and rhetoric of struggles for racial justice in the U.S., with some questioning whether ‘Asians’ are even worthy of being considered people of color at all.”

Huang said he had been “running” from his Asian heritage for years, including during his time at Pitzer. Like many, he struggled daily with a variety of microaggressions. “Fortunately,” he said, “my time at Pitzer also enabled me to learn the skills that would ultimately become central to my process of seeking meaningful social change through performance art.”

The Hungry Ghost Festival, he added, taught him important lessons, too.

“I really learned a lot over the course of this project and was able to implement some promising new methods,” he said. “My favorite involved training young adults from Chinatown to work as live-sound engineers and then putting on a monthly open-mic series where they were able to gain paid work experience over six months.

“They became skilled and confident enough to work alongside a group of more seasoned professionals on the sound crew at the festival,” he continued. “It was a hands-on, practical approach to community engagement and economic empowerment that I think really owed a lot to the methods and values I learned during my time at Pitzer.”

The Social Justice Potential of Music

Huang decided to enroll at Pitzer as an undergraduate after studying for two years in a cross-discipline studies program at San Francisco State University. As a transfer student, Huang said he was “just overwhelmed by the kind of resources that Pitzer had as a private college. There was just a lot going on. I ended up taking a lot of music courses and [then] doing a self-created major.”

Unlike his parents, Hao and Rachel (both are members of the music faculty at Scripps College), Huang wasn't automatically drawn to classical music. He didn't study music formally until his teens, and he played guitar in many bands, including a punk band in Pomona. His tastes range widely, including international music, dance, and theater, which have

“My time at Pitzer enabled me to learn the skills that would become central to my process of seeking meaningful social change through performance art.”

—Micah Huang '13

all served as influences on his work today.

One influential experience from his undergraduate days was Pomona College's Afro-Cuban Ensemble, a class in which he sang and played the conga and bell. He also learned to play the dundun (large two-headed drums) and bell in an informal group specializing in Malinke music (from the Mali-Guinea border region) that was organized by his friends and classmates, Andrew Kemble '13 and Justin Dixon '16.

These experiences, he said, caused him to start “reevaluating some of my own cultural roots, the presence of ancestors, and hearing the sonic properties of that music and East Asian music that is kind of ambient in my consciousness.”

That reevaluation eventually encouraged him to use music to explore the raw and still-painful experiences his own family had endured and left unattended. Investigating that wound and the traumas of old experiences turned into an opportunity to convene with his ancestors through his art.

That investigation resulted in his creation with his father of two acclaimed pieces, *Blood on Gold Mountain*, a theatrical podcast about the 1871 Chinese Massacre in Los Angeles (2021), and *American Dreams/Asian Nightmares*, a theatrical performance that examines the historical and contemporary effects of violence and trauma on Asian Americans and their descendants (2022).

Huang said it's hard to tell what the future holds for him, his family, Chinatown, or the diverse constellation of Asian American communities. “However, as long as I'm alive and able, there will always be a place in my work for telling and celebrating the stories of my ancestors, even if the American mainstream insists on ignoring, belittling, attacking, and dehumanizing us.”

A Message from the Senior Director

Dear Pitzer Alumni,

As we explore the theme of community engagement in this issue, I am proud of how Pitzer alumni continue to embody our College's core values. From local initiatives to global efforts, our graduates carry forward the spirit of civic responsibility and social justice, making tangible impacts in communities everywhere.

This year, our Engagement Tour stops have brought together alumni and families, highlighting the strength of our Pitzer community and allowing us to reconnect and celebrate Pitzer's values across the country.

The newly formed Engagement Committee is working hard to offer meaningful opportunities for alumni to stay connected and give back to the College. Through roles like class agents, regional ambassadors, and giving advocates, alumni can actively foster stronger connections within the Pitzer community. Your involvement is vital, and we're excited to see how these efforts will strengthen our shared commitment to Pitzer.

I'm also thrilled to share that our Alumni Weekend has been rebranded as Community Weekend, taking place May 2-4, 2025. This event will celebrate the entire Pitzer community, reconnecting alumni, families, students, faculty, staff, and friends to celebrate our exciting collective journey of engagement and impact.

Now in its second year, the Inclusion and Justice Committee continues its vital work, focusing on education, dialogue, and action to address issues of racial justice and equity. This is a powerful example of how Pitzer alumni are living out our core values.

Thank you for your dedication to Pitzer and for embodying our community's values. I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events.



With gratitude,

Shannon Spaccarotelli
Senior Director for
Alumni & Family
Engagement and
Annual Giving

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The south face of Mead Hall bears a mural painted last year in memory of Graham Derzon-Suplee '22. The mural incorporates blue waves and other elements signifying his love of the water.

SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

New Memorial Award Honors Late Alum's Scientific Curiosity

As a student majoring in organismal biology, Graham Derzon-Suplee '22 was driven by an enormous sense of wonder toward the natural world. His mentors said that he saw science as a series of questions to be asked rather than facts to be known. His fellow students remember how he stood—smiling openly, fully present, encouraging others to be present. Derzon-Suplee's life was cut short the summer after his graduation; his impact as a Pitzer student has inspired the creation of a new scholarship award.

The Graham Derzon-Suplee Award will be given annually to a graduating senior who best exemplifies the academic and personal qualities that Derzon-Suplee exhibited during his undergraduate career as a student in the Department of Natural Sciences. These qualities include: a sense of wonder, inquisitiveness, scientific creativity, leadership, and willingness to assist others.

The award was established earlier this year by Derzon-Suplee's family. In a message on the Pitzer website, they express their thanks to his classmate, Mikaela Lipsky CMC '23, for initiating this effort.

Chosen by members of the Pitzer-Scripps science faculty, the recipient will receive a \$1,500 award and something else that was deeply meaningful to Derzon-Suplee: a pair of binoculars. He was a remarkably patient observer who spent hours studying the feeding habits of the roseate spoonbill and other birds.

The Derzon-Suplee family is collaborating with Pitzer's fundraising team to build a \$50,000 endowment in support of the award. Any earnings raised annually that exceed the \$1,500 award amount will be donated to the Department of Natural Sciences' Summer Science Immersion Program. That program supports first-year students who are interested in studying science and whose high school experience did not provide them with a strong science background.

Interested in making a gift in support of this endowment?
Visit www.pitzer.edu/graham-derzon-suplee-award-donation-form.

IN MEMORIAM

Gwendolyn Lohmann '81

History



A former librarian at The Claremont Colleges' Honnold Mudd Library, Gwendolyn Kathleen Lohmann passed away in April. She was 83.

A devoted mother and grandmother and a loving sister, she is remembered for her resilience, gentle spirit, and enduring love for her family. Her siblings lovingly referred to her as "Dolly."

Born in 1940 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Lohmann pursued a passion for aviation, securing her pilot's license to fly small planes. After high school, she joined National Airlines as a flight attendant and met her future husband, Kaj Lohmann. They married soon after, settled in Claremont, and welcomed identical twin daughters, Denah and Ruth, in 1963. The couple divorced in 1975.

Lohmann worked as a librarian at Honnold Library while raising her daughters. She earned her bachelor's degree in history from Pitzer and went on to earn a master's degree in library science at California State University, Fullerton. She later finished her library career as a law librarian at Loyola Law Library.

Manuel Mercado '96

Psychology



A marriage and family therapist who worked with children, adolescents, and families contending with emotional trauma, Manuel Mercado passed away in May. According to a Forest Lawn obituary, Mercado was involved in a motorcycle accident on his morning commute. He was 49.

Born in 1974 in Loma Linda, California, Mercado graduated from Pitzer College with a BA in psychology and earned an MA in psychology from Pepperdine University in 1999. As a marriage and family therapist, he was known for his grace and humor in helping countless patients. In addition to helping people with trauma, abandonment, loss, depression, victimization through local sex-trafficking, and other circumstances, Mercado also had four years supervising marriage and family therapist associates in a treatment center for children.

Justin Shapiro '02

Economics



A bond trader and finance executive, Justin Philip-Vincent Shapiro passed away in May after being diagnosed with brain cancer. He was 43.

Born in 1980 in Chicago, Illinois, he grew up on the North Side of downtown Chicago and attended the Latin School of Chicago. Known for a curious and sharp intellect and a wry sense of humor, he played on the school's baseball team and founded the school's investment club.

At Pitzer, Shapiro majored in economics and entered the world of finance as a treasury bond trader at Trans Market Group LLC. He also earned an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business with a concentration in finance.

Shapiro and wife Ashley welcomed the birth of a daughter, Penelope Annella. In recent years, Shapiro served as a finance executive for a corporate startup assembling, constructing, and packaging portfolios of single-family homes for rental. Shapiro was interred in June with his paternal grandparents at Westlawn Cemetery & Mausoleum in Illinois.

Lynne Spear

Administrative Staff
Office of Financial Aid



Independent, straight-talking, and always brimming with motherly love and advice for Pitzer students, longtime staff member Lynne Spear passed away in May 2023. She was 83.

Born in 1939, Spear grew up in the golden era of Los Angeles, riding the old railway Red Cars to the beach from her childhood home in Los Feliz. She married Gerald Sanders, and the couple had two sons, Eric and Eddie. After a

divorce in 1979, she juggled raising her sons with full-time work and later relocated to Claremont.

In 1980, she met and married Bill Spear and later took on a new career at Pitzer College working in the Office of Financial Aid. Several times she was voted a favorite staff member of graduating seniors for her help in navigating complicated government aid programs, lending a supportive ear, and providing support to those on their own for the first time. She retired from Pitzer in 2000.

Loretta Warmbrunn '84

Anthropology



Longtime Claremont resident and spouse of a Pitzer founding faculty member, Loretta Warmbrunn passed away in March. She was 90.

Born in Detroit to parents who immigrated to the U.S. from Italy, Warmbrunn was one of five siblings. At Pomona High School, she met Wesley Fretter. They married two years after her high school graduation in 1951. The couple had

four children and settled in Claremont.

Warmbrunn took a job at Boy's Market in Pomona, starting as a clerk and working up to office manager. After divorcing in the 1970s, she enrolled at Pitzer through the New Resources Program. She studied anthropology and met Werner Warmbrunn, a history professor and one of Pitzer's first faculty members. They married in 1984.

She became a docent at the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles. An avid gardener, Warmbrunn also volunteered at the California Botanic Garden. She mixed her love of flowers and painting; for years, her watercolors of native wildflowers graced the garden's annual wildflower show.

Warmbrunn was predeceased by Werner. She is survived by her children, brothers, grandchildren, and stepchildren, as well as eight great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

PARTICIPATING

In My Father's Footsteps

When you get involved in community engagement, you never know what connections you'll make

By ALEX WISE '24

When people talk about the reciprocal effect of social justice work, I know they're usually talking about how satisfying it is to help other people and how it gives them a positive sense of self-worth. I've felt that, too.

But for me, it's also meant something else.

I've always been close to my parents, and now I've found myself getting even closer to them thanks to the work I did with CASA Pitzer.

I was drawn to the social justice work being done by CASA Pitzer, which is led by Professor Tessa Hicks-Peterson and her team. Located in Ontario, CASA connects students to the communities surrounding The Claremont Colleges.

When I got involved with CASA, I was given a chance to grow and explore some troubling areas of legal and social injustice that interested me. I was lucky enough to work with a Riverside nonprofit called Starting Over Inc. (SOI) in their policy department. SOI was founded as an organization focused on reentry services but has expanded into many areas of communal support.

The project I worked on involved the relationship between the county coroner's office and the sheriff's department in Riverside County.

The office and the department are combined, and that's a problem. Many critics have said this relationship erodes public trust, especially involving in-custody deaths. That conflict of interest affects the coroner's office's ability to give impartial reporting on instances of police brutality. That often means that the families of those who have died in custody are forced to hire a third-party coroner to verify the results, or, in some cases, show them what really happened to their family member. It also results in millions of dollars in lawsuits that hurt the system.

I wasn't the first person ever to be interested in this, but—encouraged by Professor Hicks Peterson and helped by many others, including Isabelle Thacker, our president's spouse and a legal expert—I pursued my research in this area and published my findings with SOI.

Exploring the legal system suddenly gave me a new topic of conversation with my parents, who were both public defenders in Washington, D.C. I think they were surprised—and happy—when I'd call them up and say something like, "I just can't believe the lack of transparency between the medical officer and the law enforcement agency, can you?!"

It was definitely not what they were expecting.

This new way of relating to each other became even more noticeable as I worked on my senior thesis. I wanted



to examine another area of social injustice: how the rate of plea bargaining has surged to 97% and that an outdated set of Supreme Court cases say that any defendants who take a plea bargain aren't entitled to evidence that could prove their innocence. It isn't fair, and I wanted to dig deeper into that legal inequity. I worked with some terrific faculty on this, but there wasn't anyone who had the familiarity in this specific area of the law that I really needed ... except for my dad.

My dad knows a lot about this situation, and it was amazing to pick his brain about this subject as I worked on my thesis. It led to some unexpected conversations and seeing each other in a whole new way.

I'm grateful for that. And all of it started because I wanted to work with CASA Pitzer. That program gave me more than just a special experience helping people. It's made me come to see my career, and my family, in a wholly unexpected light.

It's also led me to be open to considering law school. This past summer, in fact, I had the chance to spend three months as an investigator for the Public Defender Service in D.C. It wasn't just an amazing experience, it gave me another unexpected family connection, too.

What was that?

My position happened to be the same one my dad held 30 years ago.

Alex Wise '24 is currently serving in the AmeriCorps City program in New Orleans.

"[CASA Pitzer] gave me more than just a special experience helping people. It's made me come to see my career, and my family, in a wholly unexpected light."

—Alex Wise '24
(pictured with his father, Andrew, during 2024 Commencement)

Pitzer students are learning what it takes to make a meaningful impact on people's lives and society. Will you support them?

BECOME AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN THEIR LIVES



This season, there are two important ways you can impact the lives of Pitzer students who are producing a meaningful impact on our community:

- 1 GIVING TUESDAY 2024 IS ALMOST HERE**
- 2 INTRODUCING THE FAMILY FUND**

Join the global movement on Dec. 3, 2024—support Pitzer College on Giving Tuesday!

Contribute to initiatives that directly benefit Pitzer students. Every gift counts—no matter the size—and helps continue Pitzer's legacy of educational excellence.

Use the QR code or visit the Pitzer website to learn more about how you can participate, share the campaign, and become an advocate.

Let's come together and make a difference for Pitzer!

#PitzerPower #GivingTuesdayPitzer

Pitzer parents and families are essential for creating a truly exceptional liberal arts experience.

When you support The Family Fund, you are making a powerful statement. To make sure your student and their classmates reap every benefit of the Pitzer experience.

The Family Fund is a vital resource for meeting the day-to-day needs of the College.





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Welcoming the Class of 2028

First-year and transfer students walked down a row of current students and community members at Family Orientation and Move-In Day in August. Visit a photo gallery of the day's events at www.pitzer.edu/participant.

