

PITZER COLLEGE

Fall 2025

The PARTICIPANT MAGAZINE



Cause and FX

How does an anthropology major end up running a thriving entertainment network?

John Landgraf '84 describes his journey. p. 24

Remembering
Robert Redford
p. 4

Maia Stern's '07
Tiny Desk Job
p. 14

The Power of Pitzer's
Liberal Arts
p. 20

James Kang '10 Scouts
for MLB Talent
p. 38



Classic Course, Classic Professor

Stephen L. Glass is a member of Pitzer's founding faculty and an emeritus professor of classics who spent his career reminding generations of undergrads that the antique past is far more relevant to the present than we might assume. "I have always thought," he once told an interviewer, "that if one has not read Homer's *Iliad*, any claim that person might have to having experienced a liberal arts education is short by at least the length of that *Iliad*." Today, he and his wife, Sandra, are known for their ongoing support for the humanities (including the annual Pitzer lecture series named in their honor). In this early photo by Arthur Dubinsky, Glass is seen discussing Greek mythology with his students and a special guest—near the door, caught between two students, is James Dickey, former U.S. poet laureate and the College's first Commencement keynote speaker.

Firing Pottery—and a Liberal Arts Identity

Dear Pitzer Community,

When I think about the value of a liberal arts education, I can't help thinking of three unlikely things.

Clay, silt, and dust.

While I was an undergraduate at Pomona College, I majored in international relations. But the environment there, like ours at Pitzer, encouraged students to explore areas outside of their focus.

I liked working with my hands—it was a good balance to other courses and activities I was involved in—so I took some classes in ceramics. I also had a work-study job making clay and porcelain and firing kilns. Raku firing was especially fun—the rapid heating (in burning leaves!) and cooling produced all kinds of sheens and surface effects that made each piece unique.

Working with clay produces a lot of silt and dust, and I vividly recall one specific time, heading back to the dorm to clean up before going out for the evening with friends. It was on that walk that I had an aha moment. I realized how everything in my life—my coursework in and outside my major, engaging with faculty and peers, getting involved in intramural sports, ceramics, work-study—was coming together in a seamless whole, just like one of those pieces fired in the kiln.

I knew at that moment that I was on my path, though I did not yet know that it would ultimately lead me back to Claremont and right to Pitzer. I felt an exciting sense of possibilities with my liberal arts experience—and that's what this issue of *The Participant* explores.

There is no limit to where you can go with a liberal arts background. Just ask **John Landgraf '84**, whose study of anthropology at Pitzer laid the unexpected groundwork for his incredible success in the entertainment industry (the same is true for his fellow undergrad and friend **Joel Fields '85**, also included in this issue).

Maia Stern '07 took her media studies background to the streets to hone her filmmaking skills before arriving at NPR to produce its highly popular "Tiny Desk" concert series. **James Kang '10** was a Sagehens baseball player and economics major who travels the world today as an international scout for the New York Mets. None of these alumni knew exactly where their career path would lead them after graduation. But studying the liberal arts prepared them for whatever challenges life threw at them and set them up for a lifetime of success and fulfillment.

That's something absent from most criticisms of a liberal arts education that say it isn't job-specific enough to guarantee a good career. On the contrary, the liberal arts prepare students to handle anything, to adapt to precisely the kind of disruption we are seeing today across so many fields. You'll find this view echoed by several of our faculty, whose mini-essays this issue features. These, along with other stories—including a profile of Media Studies Assistant Professor **Lisa Yin Han** and a piece by John A. McCarthy Professor of Classics **Michelle Berenfeld** that first appeared in *The Atlantic*—also demonstrate the kinds of critical and complex thinking our complicated world needs and that seems in short supply now.

Of course, every person's experience and understanding of the power of the liberal arts is unique to them—just as my dusty experience was so many years ago—but what this issue of *The Participant* suggests is that such meaningful experiences are not just possible at Pitzer, they're essential.

Provida Futuri,



Strom C. Thacker
President
Pitzer College



PITZER COLLEGE

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

14 Not Your Typical Desk Job

Maia Stern '07 spends her 8-to-5 filming Phish, Radiohead's Thom Yorke, and other top musicians for NPR's "Tiny Desk" concert series.

20 Tools for Living

How do the liberal arts prepare students for their lives? Several Pitzer faculty members offer their responses to this question.

24 Thinking Outside the Box (Office)

John Landgraf's '84 decision to study anthropology at Pitzer gave him the right mindset to work with teams of storytellers as chair of FX.

30 Reimagining the Last Frontier

Media Studies Assistant Professor Lisa Yin Han explores how we understand the ocean in her award-winning book *Deepwater Alchemy*.

38 Around the World in Nine Innings

James Kang '10 travels the world as an international scout for the New York Mets.

DEPARTMENTS

1 President's Message

President Strom C. Thacker describes a defining moment as an undergrad that made him realize the power and potential of the liberal arts experience.

4 Remembering Robert Redford

The legendary actor and director formed a special connection with Pitzer based on a shared environmental vision.

5 News & Updates

Michele Siqueiros '95 and Jon Graham '82 lead the Board of Trustees; Pitzer College scores high again in the *Princeton Review* and other annual rankings; Sagehens Athletics gets a new look; Commencement 2025 was a joyful rite of spring; and much more.

18 Faculty Retirements

111 combined years at Pitzer: We say thank you to Professors Nigel Boyle, Melinda Herrold-Menzies, and Sheryl Miller for their service.

43 Community Bookshelf

The latest releases include a story of art and relationships in a dystopian world, a history of the trans community, a child's growing eco-awareness, wildfires, Frida Kahlo, and much more.

45 Alumni News & Class Notes

47 In Memoriam

48 Participating

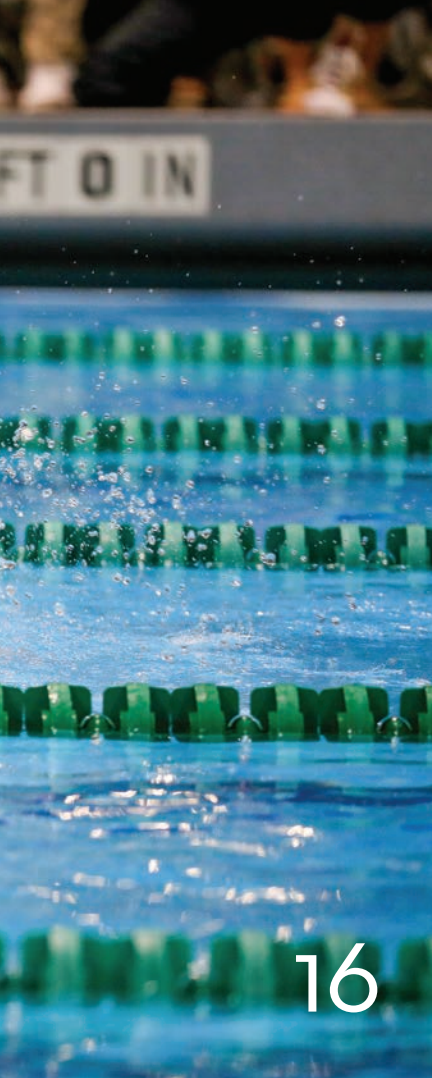
Professor Suyapa Portillo Villeda '96 urges her students to embrace the freedom that comes with studying the liberal arts.

On the cover: FX Chair John Landgraf '84 proudly stands in front of a showcase of the many awards won by FX since his tenure began (including a record-breaking 36 Emmy Awards in 2024 alone).

(PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANK MICELOTTA/FX)



Read The Participant online:
Visit www.pitzer.edu/participant for related expanded content, photo exclusives, and more.



TRIBUTE

Robert Redford, Namesake of Pitzer's Sustainability Conservancy, Dies at 89

Redford leaves a legacy that includes his involvement with the College's environmental initiatives

The Pitzer community mourned the passing in September of Oscar-winning actor-filmmaker and environmental activist Robert Redford, who was 89. Redford played an important role in supporting the College's environmental sustainability goals and initiatives.

"Robert Redford's impact is deeply embedded in the work of the Robert Redford Conservancy at Pitzer College," said Pitzer President Strom C. Thacker. "By linking environmental responsibility with experiential learning, his legacy strengthens our college's mission to engage students in shaping a more sustainable and equitable world."

Though Redford has appeared on big screens worldwide as an actor (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Way We Were*) and a director (*Ordinary People*), what shines as an equally bright legacy is his environmental advocacy work for the planet. Redford served as a special adviser to Pitzer College on environmental matters. The College's hub of environmental research, the Robert Redford Conservancy for Southern California Sustainability, was named in his honor when it was established in 2012.

"What really resonates with us about Robert Redford's life was his ability, dedication, and passion for telling stories to amplify environmental causes," said Susan Phillips, director of the Robert Redford Conservancy at Pitzer College. "That is something we try to emulate and do all the time as we go about our work at the Conservancy. It's so important to raise and uplift the issues and voices of those who aren't getting heard. That's something he did, and it's front of mind in everything we do."

Devoted to socio-ecological justice and sustainability, the Robert Redford Conservancy gives students hands-on opportunities to conduct research and engage communities about environmental issues affecting Southern California. In Pitzer's press release announcing the establishment of the Conservancy, Redford shared his excitement to partner with what he called "an educational institution firmly planted in the 21st Century."

"We hope that this Conservancy will become a place of collaboration with the best thinkers and best dreamers to take on the sustainability opportunities and challenges embodied in the Southern California region, and apply them here and beyond," said Redford. "I'm most excited about



Robert Redford speaks during the 2012 launch of the Conservancy named in his honor.

how inspired this place will be by the 'nothing's impossible' drive of the Pitzer students who will study and discover here."

In 2014, Redford also participated in the College's announcement of a breakthrough fossil fuel divestment-climate action plan. Pitzer became California's first private college or university to divest from fossil fuel stocks.

"I grew up in Los Angeles at a time when Los Angeles was really a beautiful city," said Redford at the press conference announcing the divestment. "And then, it felt like it was disintegrating below my feet. And suddenly, the green spaces were shrinking in favor of concrete and freeways. I thought, well, there's nothing more I can do about the city I love that has squandered its assets. Until this came along with Pitzer College."

Redford continued his advocacy for the environment, the arts, and other causes throughout his life. Media reports on his passing included coverage by KCAL-CBSTV, KTLA, and FOX 11 of his connections with Pitzer.



ROBERT REDFORD'S LEGACY AT PITZER: Learn more about the movie icon's involvement with Pitzer College and listen to him discuss the College's sustainability initiatives.

AROUND THE MOUNDS

Michele Siqueiros '95 Selected as Chair of Pitzer's Board of Trustees



Pitzer Trustee **Michele Siqueiros '95** was chosen to serve as chair of the Board of Trustees, and Trustee **Jon Graham '82** will serve as vice chair. Siqueiros succeeds **Don Gould**, who was elected in 2021 and will remain an active member of the board. Her three-year tenure started July 1.

An innovative leader in supporting higher education and community access to news media, Siqueiros is one of just three Pitzer alumni to serve as board chair and the first Latiné member of the College community to hold this role.

"Pitzer didn't just educate me—it fundamentally transformed how I see the world and my role in it," said Siqueiros about her selection. "I was a first-generation college student, and the College opened doors I never knew existed and taught me that with opportunity comes responsibility. Pitzer showed me that critical thinking isn't just an academic exercise; it's a tool for social change. Everything I've done since, from expanding college access to strengthening local journalism, stems from the values and vision I developed during my time here."

Siqueiros transformed California's higher education landscape during her 20 years at the Campaign for College Opportunity, serving as its president for 16 years. In 2025, she pivoted to another area of need in the state: local news media. She now serves as chief executive officer of the Los Angeles Local News Initiative, working to ensure that all Angelenos have free access to representative, relevant, and trusted news.

Board of Trustees Vice Chair Graham is the executive vice president, general counsel, and secretary of Amgen, a multinational biopharmaceutical company known for its role in the biotechnology revolution and the pioneering development of innovative human therapeutics.

Impactful Board Leadership: Don Gould

In addition to the announcement about **Michele Siqueiros '95** and **Jon Graham '82**, the College expressed its appreciation to **Don Gould** for his service as chair of the Board of Trustees. Gould first joined Pitzer's board in 2006 and served as vice chair in 2017 before taking on the role of chair in 2021. Gould has chaired numerous committees, including presidential searches and the board's investment committee and Climate Change Working Group.

In 2014, Gould spearheaded the board's unanimous approval of the student-driven working group's Fossil Fuel Divestment-Climate Action Model. That model made Pitzer the first private higher education institution in California to commit to divesting its endowment of fossil fuel stocks. Gould is president and chief investment officer of Gould Asset Management of Claremont.



Flexing Our Rankings Muscle

Pitzer College received high marks in rankings released this year by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Wall Street Journal/College Pulse*, *Forbes*, *Washington Monthly*, and *Princeton Review*.



Because of the leadership and civic opportunities created for its students, the College's *Princeton Review* dominance continued this year, ranking again at No. 1 in the "Making an Impact" category and scoring high in several others. Pitzer leaped seven spots in *Washington Monthly*'s rankings to enter the top 50 and placed at No. 39 in *Forbes*' top 50 U.S. small liberal arts colleges. In *U.S. News*' 2026 Best Colleges report, Pitzer placed at No. 37 and jumped eight spots to No. 4 in *WSJ/CP*'s "best schools for the student experience" category. "I'm thrilled to see our College recognized again for fostering a powerful community that encourages bold thinking and a desire to bring about innovative societal change," said President **Strom C. Thacker**.



A Green Thumbs-Up

To commemorate Earth Day in April, **Stryder Rodenberg '25** and his classmates celebrated our planet by working on the Pitzer Student Garden. In addition to crafting a new mission and values statement, the student crew entirely rebuilt the northern half of the garden and launched a community garden section in the garden's southern half.

Thank You, Dean Omoto



At the end of the spring semester, Pitzer President **Strom C. Thacker** and the Faculty Executive Committee hosted a celebration to honor **Allen M. Omoto's** service as dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs. Since his arrival in 2019 from Claremont Graduate University, Omoto served during the tenure of three College presidents, a global pandemic, campus protests, and Trump administration policies affecting higher education.

Omoto is a social psychologist who has a long-standing commitment to social justice research, teaching, and service. His research interests focus on the social and psychological aspects of prosocial behavior and civic and political engagement. He also conducts scholarly work on social issues and social action—particularly environmental issues, HIV, and sexual minority (LGBTQ+) concerns—and on the connections between psychological science and policy.

New CAPAS Director

Dominique “Nikki” Acosta is the new director of Pitzer’s Center for Asian Pacific American Students (CAPAS). Acosta is a Claremont Graduate University doctoral student and brings experience in mentorship, research, and community organizing to the position. She hopes to develop CAPAS as a space where students can go to explore different topics around identity—including leadership, mental health, and professional development.



A New Look for Cecil and Sagehen Athletics

Pomona-Pitzer Athletics announced in late summer the launch of a refreshed brand identity that honors its storied legacy while signaling a new era for the Sagehens. The comprehensive rebrand introduces a suite of updated visual elements, including a modernized primary logo, a streamlined secondary mark, a bold script wordmark, and revitalized vintage logos.



Sagehen Athletics held focus group discussions with a wide range of stakeholders—including students, alumni, coaches, and campus leaders. Feedback and insights from these sessions directly informed the creative development process. To bring the vision to life, Sagehen Athletics partnered with Joe Bosack & Co., a nationally recognized sports branding agency.



A CLOSER LOOK: Learn more about the new branding of our amazing Sagehens athletics program.

THE Outback Pitzer's Student Magazine

A Voice for Students

Did you know Pitzer has more than one Outback? The Outback Preserve is a nature hub of native plants. Nearby, the Grove House hosts the creative and political hub of Pitzer’s student magazine, *The Outback*.

A tri-semester print publication, *The Outback* includes news, poetry, art, and other genres. **Willa Umansky '27**, the editor-in-chief and an English and world literature major, believes “*The Outback's* mission is to have people be engaged politically and artistically.” Umansky hopes to grow the publication with fundraising and related efforts.

This spring, *The Outback* won Best Editorial at the Associated Collegiate Press’ National College Media Conference. The editorial, “You Can’t Silence Us: A United Front Against Pomona’s Repression,” was written by editors from *The Outback*, *Claremont Undercurrents*, and *The Scripps Voice* and published in *The Student Life*.

Visit online: www.theoutback.news.



Outback Editor Willa Umansky '27 (center) with creative directors Ben Connolly '26 (right) and Rhyus Goldman '26

Summer Artist Residencies

With support from a \$20,000 Pepper Family Foundation grant, Pitzer College hosted a summer residency with artists affected by the Eaton Fire in Altadena in January. The Pitzer College Art Galleries and Art Field Group welcomed four artists for an eight-week program. The artists included Bridget Batch (photography), Ruby Neri (ceramics), Brook Schneider (ceramics), and Delbar Shahbaz (painting/drawing). These artists accessed resources at The Claremont Colleges Library, the Harvey Mudd College Makerspace, the Rick and Susan Sontag Center for Collaborative Creativity (the Hive), and the studio space at Pitzer.



Intercultural Immersion in Japan

From Little Tokyo to Tokyo, Professor **Linus Yamane** and Pomona College Professor Sharon Goto took students on an immersive, cross-cultural journey in the spring. Their class participated in the Tomodachi Inouye Scholars Program (TISP), a 10-day youth exchange between American and Japanese university students.

As co-directors of TISP at The Claremont Colleges, Yamane and Goto collaborated with Loyola Marymount University (LMU) to send 28 students as TISP participants to Sophia University in Japan. Then Sophia students visited Claremont to share their culture with LMU students and 5C students in Yamane and Goto's class, Trans-Pacific Japan: Love & Money.

TISP is part of the Kakehashi Project organized by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and facilitated by the Japan International Cooperation Center, the U.S.-Japan Council, and the Laurasian Institution. The Kakehashi Project seeks to promote deeper mutual understanding among the people of Japan and the United States.

"All these organizations are working tirelessly to increase international education, international exchange, and international understanding," said Yamane. "Given all the conflict in the world today, nothing could be more important."



Celebrating Staff Retirements

Eloisa Ramirez (pictured, far right) retired after more than 40 dedicated years of service. She was a treasured part of McConnell Dining Hall, bringing joy and a smile to our community. She has left a lasting impression on generations of students, staff, and faculty. She created moments of connection, comfort, and belonging for our students that will be remembered for years to come.

After 34 years of service, senior maintenance mechanic **Dominic Salcido** (pictured, right) retired from Pitzer College. Salcido contributed tirelessly to the care and upkeep of the campus. He was a valued member of the community and a steady presence to all who have had the pleasure of working with him. Salcido looks forward to spending more quality time with his family and enjoying a well-earned period of rest and relaxation.

Maria Guerrero retired after nearly a decade with the McConnell Dining Hall team. Since joining Pitzer as a utility worker, Guerrero has been

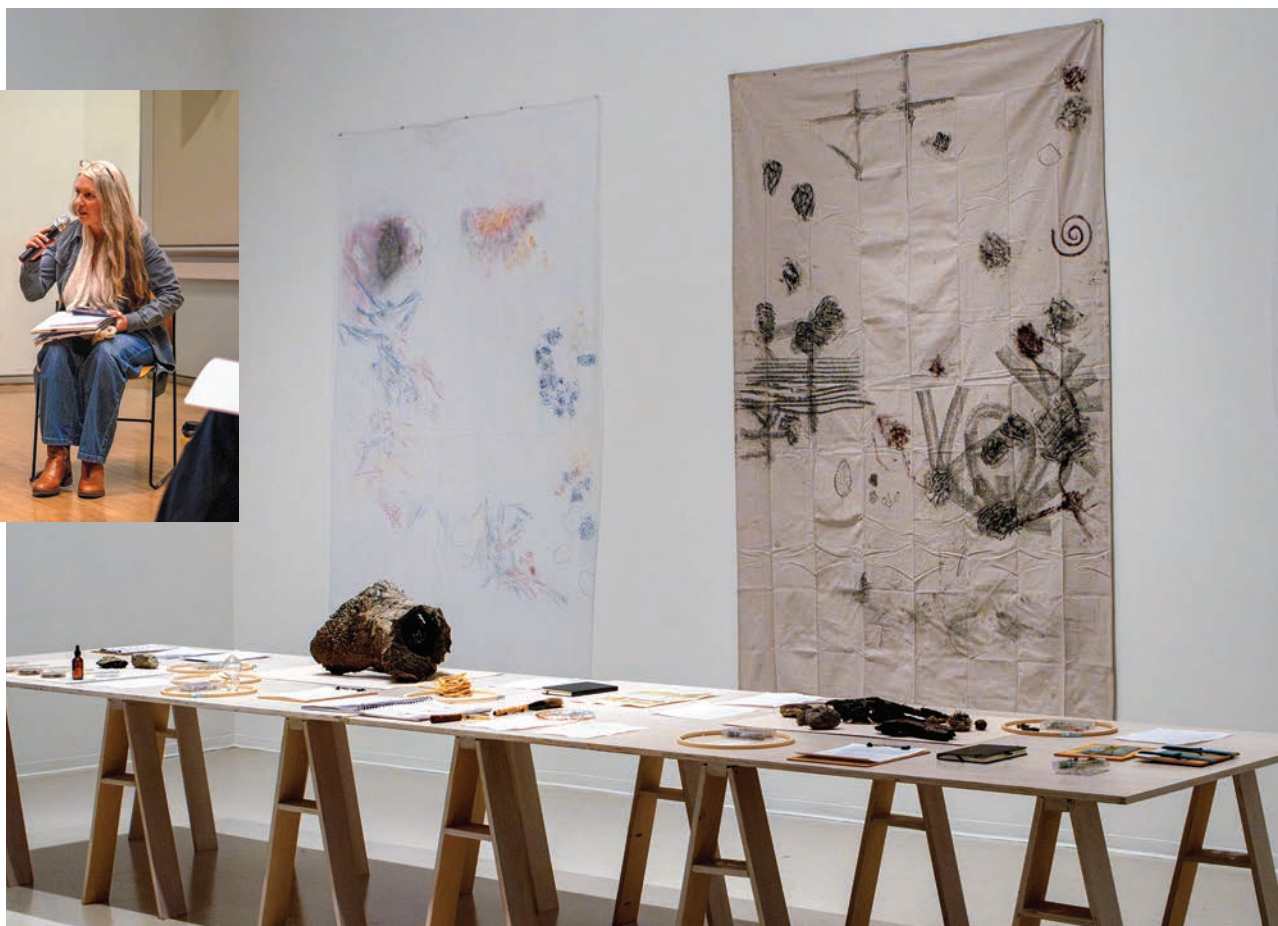


a wonderful part of our community. Her contributions behind the scenes were vital in supporting the team, and her positive presence will be warmly remembered.



Visiting Environmental Analysis Professor **Monica Mahoney** (pictured above, right) with public artist Emily Stover during an exhibition and community conversation earlier this year.

The Field Station | Field Studio event featured several multidisciplinary works of art (pictured, right).



FACULTY DISTINCTIONS

Intersecting Worlds

The latest faculty research includes studies of work-life balances, famous poets, and more

Creative and Scientific Inquiry

Visiting Environmental Analysis Professor **Monica Mahoney** joined other scholars in an artist-in-residence pilot project to explore how biological field stations can become centers of ecology, place-based art, and Indigenous perspectives. The Field Station | Field Studio project featured The Claremont Colleges' Robert J. Bernard Biological Field Station and the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. In the spring Pitzer College Art Galleries hosted a pop-up exhibition and community conversation with Mahoney and others about the project.

All in the Family

Professor of Organizational Studies **Barbara Junisbai** and her collaborators received a grant from Claremont Graduate University's (CGU) BLAIS Foundation to develop a scale for assessing how organizations support a family-building climate. The team plans to create the scale to reflect the realities of modern workplaces by being inclusive of all genders and



gender identities and considering diverse family structures, varied workplace roles, temporal aspects of family-building, and multiple pathways to parenthood.

Junisbai and her partners hope to advance a theoretical understanding of work-family integration while providing an evidence-based tool for organizations to assess and improve their family-building support systems. Junisbai also co-authored an article with **Reggie Bullock Jr. '22** about the Inside-Out classroom experience in the *Professing Education* journal.



John Keats and White Supremacy?

Assistant Professor of English and World Literature **Amanda Louise Johnson** explored how U.S. Southern writers appropriated John Keats' poetry for anti-abolitionist purposes in an *English Literary History* journal article. Johnson argued that these writers constructed Keats' cultural image as a saintly, morally abstracted poet to preserve white supremacy in the antebellum South.

Johnson also wrote an essay included in *Money and American Literature*, which was published by Cambridge University Press. Johnson argued that the complexity of monetary exchange in the New World forced colonists and settlers to engage in thought-experiments that characterized Adam Smith's philosophical and economic thought. In performing said thought-experiments, however, Johnson asserted these colonists and settlers leaned toward self-serving rationalizations that Smith found troubling.

Support for Students

Professor of Economics **Menna Bizuneh** was appointed as Pitzer's associate dean for curriculum and advising. In her role, Bizuneh's primary responsibilities revolve around curricular planning and support, student advising and engagement, and pedagogical innovation and student accommodation processes.

Supporting Faculty Innovations

Professor of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures **Juanita Aristizábal** was appointed as Pitzer's associate dean of global/local initiatives and programming and director of the Institute for Global/Local Action and Study (IGLAS). As associate dean, Aristizábal is focusing on coordinating and developing global and local academic programming and fostering community engagement and advocacy in local and global contexts. As the director of IGLAS, she works to incubate and support innovative faculty work that bridges these contexts and issues.



Bot Assist

Associate Professor of Psychology **Marcus Rodriguez** and his collaborators received a grant from CGU's BLAIS Foundation to develop a bot to help early-career therapists remember foundational principles. Rodriguez hopes that the AI bot can provide real-time reminders to therapists to put their validation and motivational interview skills into practice with their clients. His team is partnering with community mental health workers supporting underserved youth in Jurupa Valley, California. Rodriguez also co-authored an article for *Europe PubMed Central* that explored the effects of emotional regulation skills and human interaction on well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Award-Winning Book

Assistant Professor of Media Studies **Lisa Yin Han** recently received the Ludwik Fleck Prize. The Society for Social Studies of Science chose Han in recognition of her book *Deepwater Alchemy: Extractive Mediation and the Taming of the Sea Floor*. The Fleck Prize, first awarded in 1992, recognizes an outstanding book in science and technology studies. For more about Han's book, see p. 30.

The Search for Work

Assistant Professor of Economics **Deepti Goel** co-authored an *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* article, "Social Ties and the Job Search of Recent Immigrants." Goel's work showed that a close tie increases the likelihood of generating a job offer from a social network.

The Realm of Numbers

Assistant Professor of Mathematics **Bahar Acu** was a co-organizer of the N+12th Southern California Topology Colloquium held at Pitzer College. The mathematics conference was sponsored by the Claremont Topology Seminar with funding from Pitzer and the National Science Foundation.

Investment and Social Value

Visiting Economics and Environmental Analysis Professor **Kevin Grell** co-authored "Subsidizing Uncertain Investments: The Role of Production Technology and Imprecise Learning" in the *Journal of Corporate Finance*. Grell's team developed a framework to analyze government subsidies, firms' production technologies, and learning under uncertainty. The paper sheds light on which firms should be subsidized, when investment flexibility creates social value, and how to design effective subsidy policies under fiscal constraints.

Mathematics for Philosophers

Flora Sanborn Pitzer Professor Emerita of Mathematics **Judith V. Grabiner** authored an article in the book *The Cartesian Mind*. Published as part of the Routledge Philosophical Minds series, the book centers the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes. Grabiner's article, "Descartes: Mathematics and Geometry," explains to the philosophy community how Descartes invented analytic geometry. Grabiner explores how Descartes created a new method of solving problems in geometry by translating them into algebra, using the algorithmic power of algebra to transform the problem into algebraic equations, and then re-interpreting the resulting equations into geometric form.



Lifetime Achievement Award

Jean M. Pitzer Professor of Anthropology **Claudia Strauss** (pictured, right, with Durham Sociology Assistant Professor Mohaddeseh Ziyachi) received the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for Psychological Anthropology. The award, which honors career-long contributions to psychological anthropology that have substantially influenced the field and its development, was presented to Strauss this spring during the society's biennial meeting.

Professor-Student Collaboration

Professor of Secular Studies and Sociology **Phil Zuckerman** collaborated with **Sophie Myers '27** on the research article "Altruistic Atheists" published in the journal *Secularism & Nonreligion*. Drawing on interviews with 17 individuals, their article looks at the possible motivations for altruistic behavior in people who are atheistic or grew up in an environment in which a belief in God wasn't taught.



Fulbright Scholar in Media Arts

Professor of Media Studies **Jesse Lerner** was granted a 2025–26 Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to conduct research at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas of the National University in Mexico City. He is using his time there to complete his book on Latin American experimental media arts. Lerner is a documentary film and video maker, curator, and writer. He served as the director of Pitzer's Munroe Center for Social Inquiry from 2023 to 2025.



An NSF Grant for Bangkok Research

Department of Natural Sciences Professors **Pete Chandransu** and **Katie Purvis-Roberts** have been awarded a \$446,000 National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to fund the international research experience of 18 students from Pitzer and Scripps Colleges. The NSF grant will support a project that builds on five years of work in studying the biodiversity and water quality of Bangkok's canal system. According to Purvis-Roberts, the grant will enable their team "to study the environment of the area more in depth. In addition to understanding water quality (temperature, salinity, total dissolved solids, and chemistry), we will probe the diversity of the microbiome and the plants and insects along the canal, which will greatly expand the water quality knowledge in the area."

Occupied U.S. Cities and Conspiracies

An op-ed by Professor of Chicano/a-Latino/a Transnational Studies **Suyapa Portillo Villeda '96**, "Low-intensity warfare against immigrants and a series of unanswered questions," which calls for action over rhetoric in response to the Trump administration's occupation of American cities, was published in August in the *Claremont Courier*. An August column by *Washington Post* critic Philip Kennicott on conspiracy theories and American politics features the commentary and research of Professor of Philosophy **Brian Keeley**. In the piece "This 1848 painting has uncanny insight into American conspiracy thinking," Kennicott turns to Keeley's perspective on American conspiracy thinking, which Keeley says can be traced back to the Declaration of Independence.

FACULTY

In the Media



“You know, you put anybody in shackles, you’re going to make them look like a criminal, and that becomes how people contextualize their tattoos.”

—Susan Phillips, professor of environmental analysis, discusses on National Public Radio how tattoos affect the perception and treatment of migrants



“[T]he patriotic defense of Iran isn’t a passing phase, produced under the duress of bombs, but the default position, the big idea that holds Iran together, hardened over the last two centuries of Iranian history and the trauma of the loss of territory and dignity to outside powers, including the Russians, the British, and the Americans.”

—Shervin Malekzadeh, visiting political studies professor, writes in a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed about nationalism and the potential ramifications of a regime change in Iran



“We are overly dependent on warehousing. Devoting such a large share of our land use to it and not diversifying our economy is a problem.”

—Michael McCarthy, visiting environmental analysis professor, shares his doubts about the warehouse industry in the Inland Empire with the *Los Angeles Times*



“Like the ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ immigrant binary, the notion of a ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ way to protest creates an ‘us/them’ binary. It functions as a form of rights-washing to guarantee a false sense of security for some.”

—Suyapa Portillo Villeda '96, professor of Chicano/a-Latino/a transnational studies, writes about the Los Angeles immigrant rights movement for Migrant Roots Media



“Even now, [the ocean is] perhaps one of the few spaces on Earth that we still refer to as a kind of final frontier ... that has resonances with this more colonial moment of frontierism, of a frontier gaze, in which we’re trying to fill out the empty space of the map.”

—Lisa Yin Han, assistant professor of media studies, discusses her book *Deepwater Alchemy* on the *Blue Humanities* podcast of Arizona State University’s Humanities Institute (See p. 30)

EASY PZ

Facts & Figures
about the Pitzer Community

1

Ranking in *Princeton Review*’s 2025 “Making an Impact” category (see more on p. 5)

4

Consecutive years that Pitzer has ranked at No. 1 in this category in *Princeton Review*

2,100+

Classes available to Pitzer students every semester at Pitzer and across The Claremont Colleges

40+

Number of majors in the liberal arts offered at Pitzer

80

Number of years it took for the Roman Republic to become a dictatorship (see more on p. 36)

COMMENCEMENT

Ready for the World

Commencement 2025 was a time to celebrate, reflect, and look ahead

When former NFL player Shaquem Griffin addressed the Class of 2025 this spring, he had a resounding message for them: “Your dream is only impossible until you do it.”

The keynote speaker for Pitzer’s 61st annual Commencement, Griffin is no stranger to achieving the “impossible.” As a child, Griffin experienced a rare condition called amniotic band syndrome, and his left hand had to be amputated. Thanks to his family’s support and his own perseverance, Griffin eventually made history as the NFL’s first one-handed player.

Griffin drew on his experiences to encourage Pitzer’s graduating seniors as they look at the world beyond the campus.

“If you have a dream, go after it,” said Griffin. “No matter what’s said to you. No matter what’s done. No matter how hard it is. You go after that dream.”

Griffin is now an advocate for people with disabilities and strives to motivate others to make a difference. In his final call to action, Griffin told the graduates: “You go make that happen and leave the world a better place than you found it.”

Griffin received a standing ovation from the 332 members of the Class of 2025. This year’s ceremony also included 11 graduates of the Inside-Out program.

President Strom C. Thacker acknowledged the uncertainty that the students had faced when they entered Pitzer in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as the world copes with threats to democracy and profound social, environmental, and human challenges, Thacker expressed a wholehearted belief that Pitzer graduates represent hope in the future.

“It is precisely because of these conditions that your Pitzer education matters now more than ever. That the world needs you, each and every one of you, now more than ever,” said Thacker. “No one is better prepared to meet these challenges and to help society overcome them than a Pitzer graduate, which you now all are.”

Attendees also heard remarks from Senior Class Speaker Ramya Herman ’25: “What we have achieved today has been a sincere effort on the part of every single person here now. And so, the most important question going forward is: What will we do with what we have gained—or rather, what we have so diligently earned in our time here?”

Sara Kimura ’26 announced that families and students of the Class of 2025 raised \$222,457 in support of scholarships,



internships and career development, health and wellness programs, and emergency funds at Pitzer. The graduating seniors also raised \$1,262 for the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund, a nonprofit humanitarian organization that provides medical relief to children in the Middle East.

Mark Cunningham ’89 P’25, president of the Pitzer Alumni Board, emphasized Pitzer’s mission as a north star for graduates.

“Our core values will help you navigate the challenges ahead,” said Cunningham. “Celebrate this milestone with your friends and family and then take a beat. And once you’ve done that, go change the world.”



COMMENCEMENT EXTRA FEATURES: Watch video highlights, including the full ceremony and keynote remarks, and see a full gallery of photos in celebration of the Class of 2025.







ALUMNI

Not Your Typical Desk Job

Video producer Maia Stern '07 shares how she parlayed a media studies major into a career filming NPR's popular Tiny Desk Concert series

By BRIDGETTE RAMIREZ

Not many can say that Radiohead's Thom Yorke playing live on the piano is their work soundtrack.

As the lead video producer of National Public Radio's Tiny Desk Concerts, Maia Stern '07 can. In addition to Yorke, Stern has filmed music artists from many different genres, ranging from American rapper Post Malone to Argentine power duo CA7RIEL and Paco Amoroso.

"The Tiny Desk to me is the great equalizer," said Stern. "All artists are performing on the same platform, the same brightly lit office space. I love seeing how artists interpret the space. Some of the biggest names get nervous. Some of the smallest names get the loudest applause."

The Tiny Desk team—which consists of Stern and her small production team—publishes three concerts per week. Artists play in the open office for a small crowd of mostly NPR employees. Stern films the performances so that even YouTube viewers can feel like they are part of the audience.

"During a Tiny Desk performance, my goal is to capture all the instruments you hear in the room," she said. "We also have to show faces. We'll show a guitar player's face and hands playing the guitar. It's important to me to capture the emotion."

Stern enjoys experiencing new genres and meeting the artists behind her childhood albums. Listening to Yorke rehearse was one of her most surreal experiences.

"No one experiences music that way, in a room with your favorite artist six feet away from you," said Stern.

A Fascination With Film

Stern made her first movie at seven years old and has carried around a camera ever since. Majoring in media studies at Pitzer was her first opportunity to do video projects in a more formal context.

"I owe a lot to Pitzer for having that major as an option," said Stern. "I couldn't believe that this was school. This was the most fun, personal thing to me."

Stern described fond memories while at Pitzer of "going to the dark little edit caves and ingesting Mini-DVs," a tangible difference from today's all-digital era. From documenting her study abroad in Canada to filming snakes eating mice in a Claremont pet shop, Stern experimented with whatever she found interesting.

Her first job after graduation was street marketing in Los Angeles. She was later hired as a full-time video producer in New York. Stern created segments for the music publication *The FADER* and later as a freelancer.



"I owe a lot to Pitzer," said Maia Stern '07 (facing page and above with Phish).

"Freelance for me meant I could do whatever I wanted," said Stern. "I'd dream where I could see myself, where I would be excited to work."

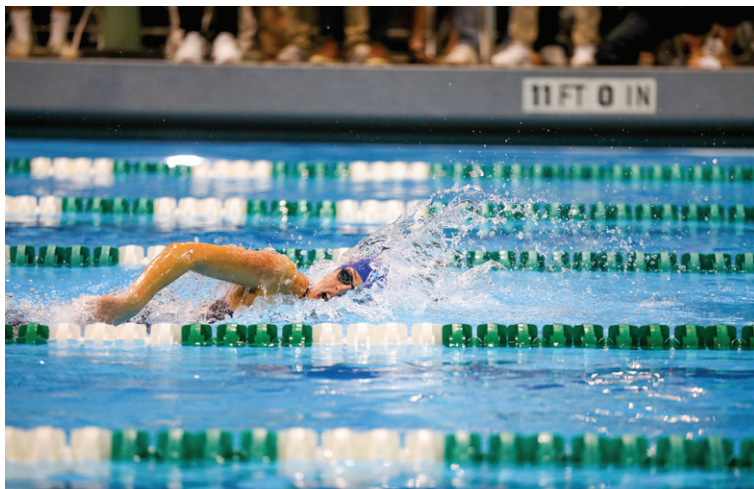
A Fly-on-the-Wall Approach

Stern continued to work in video production in New York for brands and sites including *New York Magazine*, *Elle Magazine*, *Refinery29*, and *Sesame Street*. Eventually, she was able to find a connection with a video producer at NPR. Stern started at NPR producing live news videos, and she enjoyed this work, but she was eager to return to her roots in music.

"I'd filmed a lot of bands in bathrooms, in living rooms, in front of a fireplace, in backyards," said Stern. "I thought it was so quirky to hear music in different settings."

She became involved with Tiny Desk and eventually rose through the ranks to work full time as the lead video producer. She maintains a fly-on-the-wall approach to let her subject (in this case, the music) speak for itself. Stern feels grateful for the community she has built at Tiny Desk.

"We're all one big family when artists arrive," said Stern. "An artist comes in and gets to know all of us. Then they sign their tchotchke and put it on the shelves. I've had a lot of fun with it."



SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

FLYING HIGH IN THE SPRING

The Sagehens soared above the competition in NCAA Division III contests in 2025

Victory Lap

The Pomona-Pitzer women's swimming and diving team clinched the Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SCIAC) Championship after finishing the meet with 1051.5 points, ahead of Claremont-Mudd-Scripps (CMS) and Chapman University. The title is the Sagehens' sixth in the last nine years and their 25th championship in program history.

Athlete of the Year in Swimming

Valerie Mello '25 was named SCIAC Athlete of the Year in women's swimming and diving at the SCIAC Championship. Mello won the 100-yard freestyle on day four and won the 200-yard freestyle with a SCIAC record time of 1:49.78 on day three of the championship. Mello also achieved event wins with her teammates in the 400-yard and 800-yard freestyle relays.

Swinging to Victory

The Pomona-Pitzer women's golf team won its third SCIAC Championship in four years. The Sagehens made a 13-stroke victory over rival CMS, providing that extra spark heading into the National Championship.

Spiking the Competition

The Claremont Colleges Women's Club Volleyball won the National Collegiate Volleyball Federation, Inc. Division 2AA National Championship. Recently, the club team's level of competition moved them from Division III to Division II. Pitzer's **Zhané Moledina '25** was a team captain.



Triumph on the Court

The No. 1 Pomona-Pitzer women's tennis team beat No. 2 CMS Athenas 4-0 to claim the SCIAC Tournament Championship for the second year in a row. It was the team's sixth SCIAC Tournament Championship in program history. The Sagehens went undefeated in SCIAC play in the 2025 season for the first time since 2010. The Sagehens also defeated the Athenas 4-3 to close out as 2025 SCIAC Regular Season Champions.

Hole in One

The Pomona-Pitzer men's golf team picked up a crucial victory at that sport's SCIAC 2 event. The Sagehens returned to Claremont with a conference-level title, their first team crown in two years. This resounding win came with a 10-stroke margin separating the Sagehens and CMS.





Fourth-Straight SCIAC Win

The Pomona-Pitzer women's lacrosse team (pictured above) earned its fourth-straight SCIAC Tournament Championship with their 15-12 win over CMS. The Sagehens earned the automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament with an 18-2 overall record. The team also clinched their fourth-straight SCIAC Regular Season Championship with their 21-6 win over Occidental.

Athlete of the Year in Lacrosse

Sydney Landauer '25 (pictured) earned a second career Offensive Athlete of the Year award to headline the 2025 SCIAC Women's Lacrosse All-Conference Teams. Landauer also received top offensive recognition in 2023. Landauer led the conference by a wide margin with 78 total points (6.50 per game) with both the top goals (41) and assists (37) marks. The senior converted a clinical 68.3 percent of shots for scores while fueling the conference's top offense to 21.3 goals per game.



A Sweet Four-Peat

The Pomona-Pitzer women's water polo team completed their four-peat of the NCAA Division III National Championships with a 9-8 win over CMS. The Sagehens ended the season at 25-10 overall and four-peated as the SCIAC Regular Season Champions, SCIAC Tournament Champions, and DIII National Champions. The team earned the SCIAC Regular Season Championship with a 17-6 win over Cal Lutheran before earning their fourth consecutive SCIAC Tournament win beating CMS 12-7.



SAGEHEN UPDATES: Get more news and game information about Pomona-Pitzer Athletics.

RETIREMENTS

Deeply Rooted

This spring, the College honored three faculty members whose long careers have shaped Pitzer's identity



Nigel Boyle Professor of Political Studies



Since 1992, Nigel Boyle has engaged in the transformative power of liberation education and intercultural learning as a distinguished professor of political studies. He has held several leadership roles, including dean and vice president of academic affairs. As a teacher and mentor at Pitzer, he worked with a multitude of students applying for prestigious fellowships. He held the Peter and Gloria Gold Chair at Pitzer and was chosen as the founding director of the Institute for Global/Local Action & Study.

Boyle also folded the fellowships office into his portfolio and developed the Global Local Mentorship Project, the Junior Faculty Development Seminar, and a set of foreign language initiatives and short-term study abroad programs. Boyle focused his research on the political determinants of social inequality. His classes covered Irish politics, European social policy, comparative politics, and more. Boyle earned his BA at Liverpool University and PhD at Duke University.

In 2015, Boyle received three honors: the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board recognized him as the top Fulbright adviser; the Pitzer Class of 2015 elected him as a student marshal for Commencement; and he became president of Aston Villa Football Club in the Upper Prison in Luzira, Uganda.

Boyle's crowning achievement is opening doors in prison education. Boyle facilitated the first Inside-Out classes, in which incarcerated "inside" students and "outside" Claremont Colleges students share a learning environment, at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, California. Boyle eventually became the founding director of Pitzer's Inside-Out Pathway-to-BA Program, which enables incarcerated students to earn a bachelor's degree.

During Community Weekend this spring, Boyle donned a white apron and invited the Pitzer community to "Boyle's Bar" in Benson Auditorium. Former students sat on barstools and imbibed a glass (or two) as they swapped stories.

Michael Griggs '21, who was formerly incarcerated and is a graduate of Pitzer's New Resources Program, hailed Boyle for helping him to believe in second chances.

"As a formerly incarcerated nontraditional student, I had questions about whether or not I belonged here," Griggs said, "and Nigel didn't just answer those questions, he dismantled them."



Melinda Herrold-Menzies

Professor of Environmental Analysis



For 22 years, Melinda Herrold-Menzies has been an important part of one of Pitzer's most popular majors—environmental analysis—and a dedicated colleague and researcher. Her research interests included conflicts over natural resources, gender and the environment, nature reserves in China and Russia, natural history, and California cultures and ecosystems. In this work, she examined economic change and the tensions and integration of conservation work with development projects. This research has included investigations and commentary on ecotourism

and on social activism and citizen resistance in relation to conservation efforts. Herrold-Menzies taught a variety of classes about environmental studies, California's landscapes, conservation, nature through film, and more.

Herrold-Menzies earned a BA in Language and Literature and Mathematics at Webster College, an MA in International Relations at Yale University, and a PhD in Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the University of California, Berkeley. While at UC Berkeley, Herrold-Menzies received international dissertation research fellowships for her project "Economic Reform, NGOs, and Cranes in Russia and China." She served on all of Pitzer's governance committees as well as in the role of an associate dean.

Faculty, staff, and students gathered in late spring to honor her contributions with tributes from then Dean of Faculty Allen M. Omoto and faculty and staff members Kebokile Dengu-Zvobgo, Paul Faulstich '79 P'15, Kathy Yep, Susan Phillips, Muriel Poston, and others. They acknowledged her energy, inspiration as an adviser and mentor, and deep commitment to serving Pitzer. Omoto led a toast in praise of Herrold-Menzies.

"I want to raise a glass and express deep gratitude to Melinda for her more than two decades of commitment to Pitzer, our students, and faculty and staff colleagues," he said. "Melinda, you have been an important thread in the fabric of Pitzer College, and we have all been made better for your efforts."



Sheryl Miller

Professor of Anthropology



For 56 years, Sheryl Miller has inspired students to explore anthropology with curiosity, passion, and joy. The Pitzer community gathered outside Broad Center at the end of the spring semester to salute Miller's foundational work. She arrived at Pitzer in 1969, just six years after the College was founded in 1963. As then Dean of Faculty Allen M. Omoto said of Miller in his opening remarks, "she is truly a Pitzer OG!"

These sentiments were echoed by other speakers, including Sheila Kemper Dietrich '78 and Professor Emeritus Paul Faulstich '79 P'15, who paid tribute to Miller's influence on generations of students with her hands-on, experiential approach to learning.

"No wonder that she is 'distinguished teaching chair,'" Faulstich said of Miller's title as the distinguished chair in archaeology and biological anthropology.

Miller is a fellow and life member of the American Anthropological Association and a founding member of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists in America. She has done field work on the Hopi Indian Reservation in Arizona; the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium; and in many different countries in Africa, including site surveys and excavation work. Her expertise is rooted in African cultures and human evolution. Her scholarly work also extends to Native American Indian cultural traditions, arts, and crafts.

At Pitzer, Miller served on and chaired many governance committees. This includes the Academic Standards Committee, Academic Planning Committee, Budget Implementation Committee, and Faculty Executive Committee.

Miller earned a BA at Occidental College and an MA and PhD at UC Berkeley. Pitzer's Sheryl F. Miller Endowed Scholarship Fund was established in 2003 in recognition of her lifetime commitment to teaching excellence.

The gift that created Miller's endowed chair position was also given to the College, in part, to honor her passion for teaching and her contribution to the academic, intellectual, and personal development of one of the donors. With her retirement, and as part of the gift agreement, this endowed position has been renamed the Sheryl F. Miller Distinguished Chair in Archaeology and Biological Anthropology.





Tools for Living

The liberal arts are important, right? The answer might seem obvious, but we asked our faculty to weigh in. Here are some of their reasons why, in their own words.



Seeing Different Points of View

Ruti Talmor, Professor of Media Studies

When I am asked to name a positive quality about myself, the first thing that comes to mind is, “I know how to think.”

I was a voracious reader of literature and a viewer of movies as a child. I was an art history major in college and a graduate student in cultural anthropology with a focus on visual culture. I have spent my life reading and looking and asking and trying to

understand and then express knowledge that did not previously exist in my mind. Sometimes, when I am writing theoretically, I can *feel* my brain working, like a muscle. By the end of the day, it aches. There is a profound, exhausted satisfaction at the end of that kind of mental workout. I feel that a liberal arts education is one of the best ways to build your mind. Through repeated practice, you learn the skills and then exercise them again and again and again. It is an expansive practice. It makes the world bigger, exposes possibilities and wonders, and gives us agency and confidence and the power to decide.

“I feel that a liberal arts education is one of the best ways to build your mind. ... It is an expansive practice. It makes the world bigger, exposes possibilities and wonders, and gives us agency and confidence and the power to decide.”

I became an anthropologist because I am deeply fascinated by the basic fact and ultimate mystery of our humanness and its creative diversity. Anthropology is always asking “Why? And why this way? And look, there are all these other ways. Why those? What do we all share, and how then are we so different?” These are the questions the liberal arts ask. They shift us out of our usual position. They move us to look upon the world from a new vantage point. This quickening, deepening, and opening of the mind, this practice of thinking, is the skill the liberal arts provide. We have always needed it. We certainly need it now.



More Than a Career

Brian L. Keeley, Professor of Philosophy

A liberal arts education is about the long run, not the immediate response to current conditions. When successful, a liberal arts education is for a lifetime, not just for the level of salary one gets upon graduation (assuming one doesn't go on to additional education postgraduation). In my own case, when I consider what I learned 35 years ago when I earned a master's degree

in "knowledge-based systems"—essentially, artificial intelligence (AI)—the computer science skills I learned are no longer all that useful. Does anybody write programs in POP-11, PL/1, or Forth anymore?

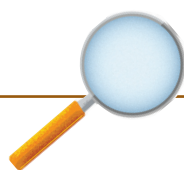
What I do continue to make use of, however, are the liberal arts elements of that degree program, including the philosophical issues involving what we knew of the brain, and the history of the ups and downs of AI. Those aspects taught me how to read critically, write clearly, and think more effectively—skills that I try to impart to my students today.

I am also reminded of the first- and second-year writing program I taught in as a graduate student in philosophy and cognitive science. This program was a two-year-long Western "great books" program where the undergraduate students (who were often pre-med or hoping to pursue

careers in science and technology) were guided through the history of Western thought. It was a solid liberal arts education with difficult texts, challenging ideas, and lots of writing. This program had been in place 40 years by the time I taught in it, and the university had good longitudinal data on what the former students thought of their experience.

What the program's administrators saw was a consistent arc: Students disliked the courses while taking them. They hated them *even more* in their junior and senior years (as they bemoaned the time "wasted" on this distraction instead of learning more in their scientific and technical majors). But then, after graduation, their appreciation for the program steadily tracked upwards, to the point that they insisted that their donations should support the program. Why? Because after many years out in the "real world," more and more, what they remembered of their college education was the material in those classes. They found themselves coming back to the books, ideas, and questions they grappled with in those classes. That is the power of a liberal arts education. It is meant to equip one for a *life*, not just a career.

"[A liberal arts education] is meant to equip one for a life, not just a career."



The Power of Freethinking

Michelle Berenfeld, John A. McCarthy Professor of Classics

The liberal arts are tools for living. In a time when information is both widely available and often unreliable, the liberal arts help us evaluate arguments, recognize rhetorical and visual moves, and grapple with perspectives that are not our own. A liberal arts education cultivates our ability to understand the difference between an assertion and a

reasoned argument built on evidence. We can explore worlds outside of our own—past, present, or invented—and therefore develop new ways of thinking and imagine different futures. Exploring other perspectives is not only crucial because it helps us develop empathy and an open mind (although that is important), but also because relying on one's personal experience, ideas, and feelings is not sufficient to function in society. The liberal arts help us challenge our own perspectives and think about where our ideas come from so that we may seriously examine and adjust them throughout our lives.

The simple fact that autocrats and dictators routinely go after them—taking books off library shelves, telling teachers what to talk about in class, censoring scholarly speech—is evidence of the power of the liberal arts.

"A liberal arts education helps us develop the tools we need throughout our lives to better understand the people and the world around us."

Dictators know, and so should we, that the arts, humanities, and social sciences are how we gain access to the minds and memories of those who came before us and who share the world with us now. With the tools of a liberal arts education—thinking critically, evaluating arguments, articulating our own ideas so that others can understand them—we are less vulnerable to those who say, "it was always like that" or "this is just how it is" or "how people are."

More personally, the liberal arts offer limitless opportunities to find joy and learn throughout one's life. They sustain us long after our formal education has ended by allowing us to be alone with our thoughts, to cultivate our attention to both work and leisure, and develop a generosity of spirit toward others. Perhaps most important, a liberal arts education helps us develop the tools we need throughout our lives to better understand the people and the world around us.



Unending Possibilities

Harmony O'Rourke, Professor of History

One of many hopes I have for all Pitzer students is to question the social norms of the time and place in which they live. If something is described as “common sense,” there should be a quick pivot to questions such as, “Is this really the case?” “How did it come to be?” and “Are there other ways?” I begin my response in this way because

there has indeed been a decline in liberal arts degrees since the great recession. However, the conventional wisdom that they matter less is misguided.

Students may feel pressured to major in a preprofessional field, believing this will enhance their chances of finding meaningful employment. But this is not borne out by the facts. The University of Colorado-Boulder concluded an exhaustive study of three decades of alumni up through 2018 and found that while those in STEM fields did earn more, arts and humanities alumni earned greater incomes than their counterparts with preprofessional or professional degrees (and also slightly more than those with social science degrees) by the time they reached their 50s.

I hope this information is an entrée to those curious about the unending possibilities of the human experience—the foundational focus

“When you major in the liberal arts, you acquire the capacity to simultaneously grapple with complex and incomplete evidence, traces of lives lived, and rigorous theories of knowledge that help you see connections you couldn’t see before.”

of humanities disciplines. There is no end to learning what humans have thought, created, shared, borrowed, argued over, and destroyed. When you major in the liberal arts, you acquire the capacity to simultaneously grapple with complex and incomplete evidence, traces of lives lived, and rigorous theories of knowledge that help you see connections you couldn’t see before. Then you learn to work through it all by writing, discussing, and finding your own unique human voice.

Several years ago, a student wrote this simple note about what she learned that day in my class: “People are more than their oppression.” We are living in hard, bewildering times, but our ancestors have shown us how to see the constructs around us and to possess the confidence to commit ourselves to human and nonhuman flourishing. If this isn’t empowering, I am not sure what is.



Initiation Into a Larger World

Bill Anthes, Professor of Art

Growing up I was always interested in the arts. I spent my time drawing and playing music, so when I started college, I assumed I would major in art. But I was excited by classes in art history, film, literature, philosophy, and religious studies. Courses in these fields introduced me to thinking critically about complex subjects. My teachers were broadly curious. Beyond their

defined fields of study, they were engaged with social and political theory. What they studied and taught mattered outside of the classroom. Their teaching and mentorship shaped the person I would become, not just as a professor, but in how I thought about the world and my place in it, and how I related to other people and the planet.

The humanities introduced me to radical cultural, temporal, and spatial difference, and encouraged me to grapple with ambiguity, disagreement, and incommensurability—with not having all the answers and being OK with that. The humanities cultivated in me a hunger for new information

“The humanities cultivated in me a hunger for new information and perspectives, for being surprised and thrown off-center.”

and perspectives, for being surprised and thrown off-center. And as I get older, it’s important to hang onto that curiosity, that feeling of learning something new, of not being an expert. In my teaching, that feeling still motivates me. I tend to be a little restless intellectually. I revise my courses all the time, bringing in new material, new topics, new (to me) ways of thinking and being. There’s always something to learn, to be changed by. That’s a gift that my undergraduate teachers—and the humanities—gave to me, and I aspire to pass that along to the students I work with, whether they are in art, art history, or American studies (the majors I advise), or are in STEM, environmental analysis, or in the social and behavioral sciences that have always been a focus at Pitzer. Students don’t have to major in a humanities field to get that gift.



The News That Makes Life Worth Living

Brent Armendinger, Professor of English & World Literature/Creative Writing

Whether I'm writing or reading a poem, I'm practicing encountering something I don't immediately understand with patience, attention, and a belief that it has something to teach me. This is something I try to model for my students in every one of my classes.

The liberal arts help us cultivate ethical relationships with ideas, people, places, and more-than-human species that are unfamiliar

to us. We come to understand what our individual lives have to do with the lives of others, both the living and the dead. I can think of nothing more important for our collective survival in these existential times of climate crisis, genocide, extreme economic inequality, rising fascism, and war.

William Carlos Williams famously wrote, "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found

"The liberal arts help us cultivate ethical relationships with ideas, people, places, and more-than-human species that are unfamiliar to us."

there." To me, Williams is talking about a kind of news that lives beneath the surface of all the noise that vies for our attention. It's the kind of news that allows us to approach the crucial issues of our time (and of others' times) from the light (and sound and breath) of lived experience. It's the kind of news that demands something more of us than simply consuming information, and, if we let it, it touches us on a deeper level. Sometimes, it's the kind of news that requires us to change our lives, to take concrete action for the world we want to live in.

What else should we be doing with our lives?



How to Adapt and Think Critically

Carina Johnson, Peter and Gloria Gold Professor of History

As a historian, an invitation to reflect on the value of a liberal arts education always inspires me to turn to history—a historical perspective helps us think critically about the politics that motivate efforts to dismiss the liberal arts as irrelevant in the 21st century. The term "liberal arts" has long been a term to describe "free (liberal) inquiry or thought" in western Eurasia. Historically, in Europe, the study of the "seven liberal arts" became widespread with the emergence of the university, when students began their college studies with the *trivium*: first learning grammar, logic (critical analysis), and rhetoric (effective and persuasive communication) and then moving on to the natural world with the *quadrivium*: the four fields of arithmetic, geometry, music (physical harmonics), and astronomy.

Finally, with a developed capacity for critical thinking, analysis, and communication, students embarked on their professional studies in medicine, law, theology, and the natural sciences (called in earlier times natural philosophy). These practices of critical thought brought about the fields of knowledge we now define as a liberal arts education: the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. We are human. We make human choices, as individuals and societies. The skills that help us make informed choices, to recognize community across difference, to flex with profound change, are the liberal arts.

So why are naysayers dismissive of the liberal arts? The question of "value" was raised by the Obama administration, which in 2015 offered a measure of the financial outcomes of an undergraduate education at the

"We are human. We make human choices, as individuals and societies. The skills that help us make informed choices, to recognize community across difference, to flex with profound change, are the liberal arts."

five-year mark with the College Scorecard. There were good reasons for this effort (more historical context!), yet five years after graduation is a very short time span. Longitudinal studies continue to demonstrate that, over longer time spans, liberal arts majors are better than preprofessional majors at adapting to a rapidly changing work environment. So why aren't people absorbing that message?

The liberal arts are a set of necessary skills that cannot be copied but have to be taught, again and again, to each person. It is no accident that generative AI models have been taught to "think" or extrude patterns with the writings of many, many communicators educated and skilled in the practice of the liberal arts. Why do naysayers have no interest in creating critical thinkers who can move from judging the reliability of information to effective communication and ethical action? In 2025, some of the answers to that question are more visible than ever.



THE POWER OF THE LIBERAL ARTS: Read extended versions of our faculty's responses and watch a video of our students describing the liberal arts experience at Pitzer.



FRANK MICELOTTA/FX

Thinking Outside the Box (Office)

Is anything possible with a liberal arts degree?

FX Chief John Landgraf '84 thinks so.

By NICK OWCHAR

JOHN LANDGRAF '84 HAS SPACE ALIENS ON HIS MIND.

One of the big shows that his network, FX, launched in late summer was “*Alien: Earth*,” an eagerly anticipated reboot of the space horror franchise that appeared in 1979 about Sigourney Weaver’s chilling showdown with a terrifying alien in deep space. With showrunner Noah Hawley (“*Fargo*”) at the helm, the show has enjoyed much critical acclaim, and Landgraf is thrilled not just as an exec but as a creative. It’s given him and his team a chance to get involved in an exciting genre that’s new to him.

“I liked the ‘*Alien*’ franchise, but it was never something I expected to work on. I’ve never worked in that genre before,” said Landgraf, 63, the chairman of FX Content and FX Productions. “But doing something different and just seeing what’s possible has always interested me. You can limit yourself at the beginning of your career and say everything that you do must stay inside the box, but what I’ve found over and over again is that you can blow the walls off that box.”

“Blow the walls off that box”: That phrase could be turned into a motto for Landgraf’s career.

Just prior to “*Alien: Earth*,” for instance, there was “*Shōgun*,” FX’s original re-envisioning of James Clavell’s epic novel (which was also made into a 1980 miniseries hit with Richard Chamberlain). Industry pundits thought it was a huge gamble—who’s going to watch a period piece set in medieval Japan?—and Landgraf and his team proved them all wrong. Again. *Slate* hailed the series as “a runaway hit” while *Variety* even dared to call it a “transportive epic” on the scale of HBO’s “*Game of Thrones*.”

Then there are the network’s other successes—including “*The Bear*,” “*It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*,” “*Atlanta*,” “*Fargo*,” among many—that Landgraf has been involved in since arriving at FX in 2004. In a recent *Vanity Fair* profile, the impact of his leadership is spelled out in no uncertain terms.

“In the two decades he has been at FX’s creative helm,” the profile said, “Landgraf has transformed it from a basic-cable network ... into a singular brand that’s now the jewel in Disney’s crown.”

Prior to that, Landgraf’s professional experience included serving as a television programming executive for NBC during its “Must See TV” heyday. His success—and his

knowledge of the medium—are so well known in the industry that it's earned him the nickname, according to various outlets, of the Mayor of Television.

But here's the thing about Mayor Landgraf: He didn't reach this pinnacle with an undergraduate business degree in his pocket. Or an MBA. He studied anthropology at Pitzer. Looking back on his time spent in McConnell Dining Hall or joking around with his friends in Mead Hall, he said his life now is a far cry from what he imagined then.

"I didn't have a clue what I was going to do with my major after I graduated," he said. "I just learned everything I could, and I fortunately found a profession in which almost everything I've ever learned has found some kind of application. When you work with storytellers, everything comes up for discussion. It turned out to be the best education I could have ever gotten."

With some asking whether a liberal arts degree is worthwhile or not—translation: Will this get students good jobs?—Landgraf's career makes an elegant argument that it is. Though Pitzer (and Claremont) might be on the periphery of SoCal's entertainment industry, important things happened on the College's 35 acres that played a consequential part in his future.

Last-Minute Plans

It's been 40 years since Landgraf sat in her classroom, but Emerita Anthropology Professor Sheryl Miller still remembers his intellectual seriousness and yearning to create a meaningful life. She said he was like many students at that age who struggle to find a purpose. But, she added, there was something different about him, too.

"During my office hours, we'd talk about anthropology, the world, life in general," she recalled. "I sometimes felt as if John and I were exchanging ideas the way one does with a colleague, not an undergraduate student."

Born in Detroit, Michigan, Landgraf describes his parents as "a pair of itinerant musicians" whose wanderings eventually brought them to Southern California's San Gabriel Valley. His arrival at Pitzer was unexpected: The College's late acceptance of applications saved him when his other plans didn't work out. Even though he thought he'd transfer somewhere else, Landgraf changed his mind as soon as orientation started. The small, intimate atmosphere on campus surprised and pleased him. He remembers faculty discussing the nature of autocracy (a topic, it seems, that never goes out of style), and there was a stage reading of Orwell's *1984*. The intellectual climate stimulated him. So did the campus' intimacy—he was impressed with the way professors wanted to know what he thought.

He decided to stay.

"The idea of small classes and the Socratic method and direct access to faculty on a first-name basis was completely new to me. It was a radical departure, and I really thrived in it," he said. "Pitzer turned out to be the right school and place for me."

"You can limit yourself from the beginning of your career and say everything that you do must stay inside the box, but what I've found over and over again is that you can blow the walls off that box."

The Pitzer Difference

The chair of an entertainment network needs the kind of corporate toolkit that would seem impossible for any single person to possess. Not only does this person build relationships with stakeholders and provide the kinds of oversight that will keep everyone on track, there's a creative part, too.

In hindsight, the liberal arts education Landgraf received at Pitzer prepared him for much of it.

He points to the College's special approach to governance for introducing him to the ways that large organizations function. Pitzer's highly participatory approach in many of its committees meant that an 18- or 19-year-old suddenly found a place at the table.

In Landgraf's case, that opportunity came via his service as a convenor of students, a role that had him acting as a liaison between his peers and the College's administration. He also became a student representative to the Faculty Executive Committee, which is charged with making the College's final academic policy decisions. Thanks to experiences like these, Landgraf often found himself, as the musical *Hamilton* puts it, in "the room where it happened."

"My involvement with the College's leadership was nothing like I'd ever dreamed about or thought possible," he said. "To have this kind of access and visibility was so unique. If I'd gone to a much larger school, I'd have had zero visibility into the governance structure. It was the participatory structure at Pitzer that created opportunities for me to learn that I wouldn't have found anywhere else."

What Pitzer also gave him was an abundance of mentors. One of them turned out to be Frank Ellsworth, the College's third president from 1979 to 1991.

Ellsworth opened his home to Landgraf and other first-year seminar students, and they engaged in spirited discussions about the nature of equality and what primary sources say about it. It was Ellsworth who saw Landgraf as potentially the College's first Rhodes Scholar and took him under his

Bio in brief: John Landgraf '84

Birthplace: Detroit, Michigan

Age: 63

Spouse: Ally Walker

Children: 3

Pitzer major: Anthropology

Current position: Chair of FX

wing; Miller was another important mentor who inspired Landgraf to consider anthropology as a major.

When his Rhodes aspiration didn't work out, another mentor stepped in with a decisive suggestion. Lucian Marquis, a longtime professor of political studies, pointed Landgraf in the direction of Coro, a respected nonprofit organization that provides fellowships in leadership and public affairs. Landgraf was selected as a Coro fellow, and the fellowship gave him more of what he enjoyed—insights into how various organizations operate.

To this day, Landgraf remembers all of their impact in the fondest terms.

"They were filled with joy and mirth and curiosity and good humor, and their passion for their subjects was infectious," he said. "Instead of being taskmasters pounding information into you, they were more like tour guides, saying, 'I live in Rome, can I show you what I know?' There was always an unfettered sense of joyful curiosity in their classes. They were just inspiring to me."

Landgraf spent his Coro fellowship in various high-level internships with the California Association of Realtors, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, and other organizations. When one of his internships took place at a small production company that supported ad agencies and PR firms, it was his first taste of the entertainment business. That taste excited him enough to keep at it for three years until he found a permanent entry into the industry.

That entry came thanks to another Pitzer connection, Joel Fields '85, one of Landgraf's former classmates who was already in the business. Even though Pitzer, in the 1980s, didn't yet have an alumni network in the entertainment industry, all Landgraf needed was his friendship with Fields (who would later work with Landgraf as the co-showrunner for FX's "The Americans"). Fields connected Landgraf with

acclaimed screenwriter, director, and film/television producer David Manson, who had started his own company, Sarabande Productions, as a platform for storytellers with a distinct literary flavor. Landgraf was hired. He was on his way.

"Honestly, recommending John for that job with David was about the easiest thing I ever did in my life," Fields recalled. "I was supposed to go to work for David after college, but due to the timing of one of his films, by the time the job was open I was unavailable. I knew John. I knew David. I knew it would be a great thing for them both." For more on Fields' working relationship with Landgraf, see p. 29.

Entertainment and Anthropology

When he describes the steps in his subsequent career—moving from Sarabande to NBC, becoming a partner with Jersey Television (Danny DeVito's production company), arriving at FX—Landgraf continually returns to what he learned at Pitzer.

"I would say my whole career has been one in applied anthropology," he said. "Running an organization, working with so many incredible creators, and building a culture of excellence that's embedded in other corporate cultures with broader goals—to me, all of it is anthropology."

Working for Sarabande was a crucial early step in his journey. Because the production company was small, Landgraf said it gave him opportunities—like Pitzer did—to get involved in processes and decisions that a larger company might never have allowed. As a development executive, he became steeped in everything, from working with writers to post-production, all with Manson's encouragement.

"David told me to go work on the set and run



Left to right:
Frank Ellsworth
Pitzer's Third
President
(1979-1991)

Sheryl Miller
Professor of
Anthropology

Lucian Marquis
Professor of Political
Studies

An Abundance Of Mentors

Of their impact on him, John Landgraf said: "They were filled with joy and mirth and curiosity and good humor, and their passion for their subjects was infectious. Instead of being taskmasters pounding information into you, they were more like tour guides, saying, 'I live in Rome, can I show you what I know?' There was always an unfettered sense of joyful curiosity in their classes. They were just inspiring to me."

postproduction, and I learned so much from him,” he said.

Asked if he regrets not studying business before embarking on his career, Landgraf shakes his head. He doesn’t think studying the liberal arts put him at a disadvantage. In fact, the opposite is true: He said it taught him adaptability and flexibility. With every new company and new role, he acquired new skills and understandings that helped him evolve and prepared him, in his 40s, to lead FX, which hit all-time highs in revenues and profitability under the ownership of 21st Century

Fox (FX was later acquired by Disney as part of its purchase of the conglomerate) after his arrival.

This, in turn, made him realize the ongoing validity of a liberal arts education. Beyond specific skills, he said, what matters most is having a passion for something.

“I have nothing against someone wanting to learn a specific skillset in college,” Landgraf said, “but I’ve found in my life that all the technical stuff is much easier to learn than the bigger issues. That requires a bigger exposure to all of human experience, the kind of thing I learned at Pitzer.”

Staying Curious

Even now, feted by *Variety*, *Vanity Fair*, and other publications, Landgraf stays true to his anthropological interests as much as his career will allow.

He’s still an intense student of the field’s important texts—currently he’s reading E.O. Wilson’s *The Social Conquest of the Earth* and Ruth E. Kastner’s *Understanding Our Unseen Reality*—and on his morning drive from Santa Monica (where he lives with his wife, actress Ally Walker, and their family) he catches up on news with *The Daily* or *The Ezra Klein Show*.

What many in past interviews and profiles have said about Landgraf’s intellectual poise comports with his demeanor for this *Participant* interview. He’s thoughtful and measured in his comments. When he talks about understanding organizations, he might pivot suddenly to discuss the differences between societies organized in “patrilineal” or “matrilineal” ways. In the end, he doesn’t sound like your stereotypical executive—he sounds more like a professor.

The same is true of his office, which is simply furnished and seems like one you’d find down a corridor in Scott Hall. A life as a professor, in fact, was something he said he had contemplated if his entertainment career hadn’t worked out.

“I thought my odds of succeeding in Hollywood might be low, so I figured I would go back and get a doctorate,” he said. “But I was fortunate. My odds turned out to be much better than I thought.”

For Sheryl Miller, his former mentor, Landgraf’s success comes as no surprise.

“John has gone into a career that has made good use of his intellect and creativity,” she said. “I always felt that John would make a significant contribution to his generation, whether it was through the arts, social service, or philosophy.”

For Miller, in other words, Landgraf’s odds of success were never low.



John Landgraf '84 (right) talked with *Variety*'s Cynthia Littleton during a breakfast forum about how FX has flourished under Disney. “They’ve been terrific stewards of our brand,” he told her.



AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY: Read an extended version of our John Landgraf '84 profile that describes the decisive impact of Pitzer on his future career.



“To have this kind of access and visibility was so unique. If I’d gone to a much larger school, I’d have had zero visibility into the governance structure. It was the participatory structure at Pitzer that created opportunities for me to learn that I wouldn’t have found anywhere else.”



Liberal Arts as the “Secret Sauce”

When Joel Fields ’85 visited Pitzer as a high schooler, who was his tour guide?
John Landgraf.

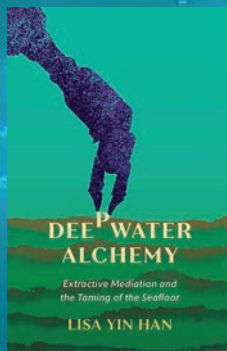
“What neither of us could have imagined, so many years ago when John gave me my campus tour, was that decades later we’d wind up finding such joy and meaning working together,” he said.

A writer and executive producer whose work on FX’s critically acclaimed series “The Americans” earned him an Emmy (and two Writers Guild of America awards), Fields has had ample chances to witness his former classmate (and campus tour guide) in action at FX. Fields doesn’t think a liberal arts background hinders anyone from embarking on an entertainment executive career (or any other) just because they don’t have a business or law degree. Quite the opposite, in fact. (OK, Fields might be a little biased since his own professional success stems from the same liberal arts tradition as Landgraf’s: Fields majored in philosophy at Pitzer.)

“John’s liberal arts degree and anthropology major have been part of the secret sauce of his success,” Fields said. “As someone trained in classic liberal arts, he maintains an intellectual humility and always reflects before he reacts, which has made him a great manager.”



FROM PHILOSOPHY TO FX: Read more and watch a video in which “The Americans” showrunner Joel Fields ’85 discusses what led to his career in the entertainment industry.



Reimagining the Last Frontier

Lisa Yin Han's award-winning book, *Deepwater Alchemy*, draws on the humanities to reframe humanity's use—and harm—of the world's oceans

By MARC WEINGARTEN

As a grad student at UC Santa Barbara, Lisa Yin Han would often stroll over to the Stearns Wharf Pier, where she could view the oil rigs a few miles offshore sitting there like statuary and extracting hydrocarbons from the ocean, as they have done for more than 60 years. Han had heard the story of the 1969 oil spill, when one of these rigs exploded, releasing 100,000 gallons of oil into the water. Yet the rigs remained, as they do today. The story of the spill never left Han, even after she earned her PhD in film and media studies from UCSB.



“Being in Santa Barbara had a big impact on me in terms of shaping my intellectual trajectory,” said Han, an assistant professor of media studies in the intercollegiate media studies program at The Claremont Colleges. Han’s first book, *Deepwater Alchemy: Extractive Mediation and the Taming of the Seafloor*, is the outgrowth of her thinking about oceans—namely, the uneasy symbiosis of science and business, and how media shapes our attitudes about unchecked hydrocarbon extraction.

The book also won the 2025 Fleck Prize from the Society for Social Studies of Science.

Han’s emphasis in *Deepwater Alchemy* is the ocean floors that have become the last frontier for oceanic exploration. For millennia, what lay beneath the oceans was a deep, dark mystery, unfathomably remote and unknown. With scientific progress came a less murky picture of the ocean floor, as well as a drive toward extracting its treasures for profit, which proceeds apace today. It is in some ways the aqueous version of Manifest Destiny, what Han calls “the mechanical conquest over nature,” as petroleum engineers, treasure hunters, and even weekend warriors in underwater submersibles attempt to codify, taxonomize, and take what they will from the world’s seabeds.

As the science and technology of ocean mapping has become a multibillion-dollar enterprise and our knowledge of the ocean has grown, we have come to think about our seas the way we think about land, as something that can be parceled, classified, and plundered. “How we’ve come to relate to the ocean is informed by how we relate to terrestrial space,” said Han. This has transformed the seafloor into what Han calls a “resource frontier” in which scientific discovery begets extraction, often to the detriment of marine life.

“Oceanographic science is such an expensive endeavor. It’s expensive to buy ship time, to be able to have technologies that can operate underwater,” said Han. “So, when it comes to funding, a lot of it comes from industry, at least in the U.S.”

Seafloor extraction, as Han sees it, is science working in tandem with capitalist enterprise. How we perceive this relationship is contingent upon what Han in her book calls the “locative, datalogical, and representational media technologies” that are disseminated (mostly) on the internet. Given that the discipline of media studies is predicated on the notion that “what matters is not just what we tell each other but also how we tell it,” Han’s book details how the extractive scientific-industrial complex uses both familiar media tropes and high-tech razzle dazzle to normalize the public’s perception of what has often been a dangerously invasive and economically venal enterprise.

This media spin entails creating phenomenological narratives that ignore the natural world and place humans front and center, the sexiest and most compelling of these being the retrieval of shipwrecks from the ocean floor. Han visited maritime museums in the U.S. and China to find out how certain ideas about loss and retrieval vis-à-vis the romance of the shipwreck narratives have shored up the extraction industry.

“There’s a reason why disruptions that occur in the ocean depths are not as readily understood by the public as other kinds of terrestrial animal slaughter. Han calls this phenomenon extractive mediation.”

“Shipwrecks dominate our imagining of the seafloor,” said Han. “Even now, the Titanic is so much a part of our popular discourse. I wanted to explore how these stories preempt our thinking about the seabed as a resource frontier.” What we take away from the Pearl Harbor Museum in Hawaii, to name just one example, are ideas of vigilance, derring-do, and technological triumph—in short, man’s mastery over nature. What we don’t find there are examples of ecological damage, the degradation of the seafloor in the quixotic pursuit of man-made artifacts.

Han’s book illustrates the ways in which technological innovations that allow explorers to create a clearer picture of the ocean floor can have deleterious effects on marine life. For decades, oceanographic scientists have used various sounding techniques to get better images of the seabed, but the ecological consequences can be dire.

“There is so much emphasis on the development of better technologies around sound sources, but there’s a lot less thinking about the environmental impact,” said Han. “A device called the NOBEL [near ocean bottom explosive launcher] is a rig of eight or so explosives. They just drop it to the bottom of the ocean, and the device detonates. Of course, this kills everything in the area of the device, including plankton and other crucial marine life.”

Ostensibly less invasive innovations such as echolocation, in which an audial impulse is discharged into the ocean via powerful air guns, has been hailed as a gentler way to map the seabed. But as Han points out, “it largely ignores or deems negligible the production of fear, anxiety, and confusion in nonhumans.” Han cites studies that have found white whales to have increased levels of dopamine and adrenaline near seismic air gun exposures, indicating increased stress levels. “Sonar, which is also considered a safer technology, has caused mass whale strandings,” said Han.

There’s a reason disruptions that occur in the ocean depths are not as readily understood by the public as other kinds of terrestrial animal slaughter. Han calls this phenomenon extractive mediation, the means by which industries with a vested interest in ocean exploration, especially giant petroleum concerns, refract their work through a highly selective media lens, creating what the linguist and cultural critic Noam Chomsky might call manufactured consent.

“Although there has been a push for a global observation network, the impetus for that is coming from a very singular direction,” said Han. “What I try to do in the book is to think about what it would mean to foster coproduction of knowledge instead of just assimilating all information into one system. People have different ways of seeing things, and it’s important that we maintain that diversity of knowledge.”

STUDENTS

Listening to Each Other

With its first class wholly taught in Spanish, Pitzer's Inside-Out Program gathers incarcerated "inside" students and "outside" students to redefine Latinx identity, power, and the Spanish language on their terms

By BRIDGETTE RAMIREZ

Stryder Rodenberg '25 would always remember the first words he heard in prison on his way to class. As he and other students passed through security at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, California, a prison guard remarked, "Here come the libs."

What, Rodenberg wondered, did it mean to talk about liberation in a prison education class? He and his classmates embarked on an answer with the first Inside-Out course conducted in Spanish in the U.S.

Inside-Out creates a shared learning environment for "inside" incarcerated students and "outside" students from The Claremont Colleges. Pitzer Professor Paula Gutierrez was excited to teach her first Inside-Out class, Latinx Identity: Language and Power. According to the

catalog description, her Spanish course "explores the complex relations between language, race/ethnicity, and power in the construction of identity."

Reclaiming Bilingualism, Identity, and Culture

Gutierrez's class included many heritage speakers. Many of her students faced discrimination for using Spanish growing up, and she wanted a forum to reclaim ownership of the language.

"Spanish is a minoritized language, even in California, where so many people speak it," said Gutierrez. "It is important for speakers of the language to rebuild their identities related to the language in a more positive light."

Ryan C. '25 found the class transformational. He is a member of the fourth cohort of Pitzer's Inside-Out Pathway-to-BA program, which enables students to obtain a bachelor's degree while incarcerated. He was released shortly before Commencement.



Ryan C. '25 and Stryder Rodenberg '25 at Commencement 2025. .

"I have learned so much about my culture that my own family hasn't been able to teach me!" he said.

Growing up Mexican American in Southern California, he never fully identified as white (on his father's side) or Mexican (on his mother's side). He sometimes visited family in Mexico and learned some of his family history, but he experienced gaps in understanding his identity. He came to embrace his own Mexican American and Chicano culture as distinct from mainstream Mexican culture. Gutierrez's class introduced Ryan to more experiences like his.

"Reading stories of others who identify as Mexican American or Chicano and who have discussed some of the issues that I have encountered growing up has deepened my sense of pride of who I am, and the beautiful culture I come from," said Ryan.

"The Spanish language is a resource, it is the gossamer of a culture that does not care if you forget it but rewards you if you don't," said Jessie G., another "inside" student who was in the class but is not enrolled in the Pathway-to-BA program. "Gossamer because it is a dying, fleeting, yet durable artifact. So light, it will catch in the wind, but then it [starts] anew in



Professor Paula Gutierrez

a new land just like my Mexican ancestors, still unsung for their brave quest in search of better lives.”

Rodenberg said the class helped him think more deeply about how bilingualism is viewed based on race, gender, and other forms of identity. He recognized how his privilege afforded a positive bilingual experience growing up.

“One of my classmates mentioned the saying ‘Classy if you’re rich, trashy if you’re poor,’” said Rodenberg. “In my experience being bilingual and white, well educated, and of means, speaking a second language is always celebrated.”

“Inside” and “outside” students brought diverse views based on whether they were heritage or nonheritage speakers or from privileged or marginalized backgrounds. Yet they found commonality by speaking Spanish in community.

“Everyone speaks a language, and we all relate to how the language we’re speaking puts us in certain structures of power and certain positions,” said Gutierrez.

Highly Personal

A signature part of an Inside-Out class is how “inside” students enrich discussions of theory and literature by tying them to their real-life experiences. Rodenberg saw this in action when the class read *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. Just 15 pages sparked an hour-and-a-half discussion as the students shared their stories.

“‘Inside’ students tend to bring a deeply personal, relational way of engaging with literature, whereas the ‘outside’ students traditionally have a more analytical way of engaging,” said Rodenberg. “I could totally see that dynamic in Inside-Out where people talked about how it related to their lives. It was a really powerful moment that brought us together as a class.”

Rodenberg double-majored in Spanish and organizational studies and devoted his Spanish thesis to the Inside-Out class experience. Rodenberg noted how “inside” students who only spoke Spanish had less access to education that could reduce their sentence. He wanted to delve into the complexities of freedom, academics, and language by listening to their experiences.

“If the liberal arts is represented by this academic project that’s, in part, focused on equipping students to think about liberty, how do you do that in a prison, which definitionally restricts liberty?” he said.

Rodenberg decided a traditional, argumentative paper couldn’t capture what he wanted.

“How can I replicate the magic and dynamics that occur in the Inside-Out classroom?” said Rodenberg. “The point of my thesis is to preserve humanity, dignity, and think about liberty. The best way to do that is through literature.”

Rodenberg’s thesis tells a fictionalized account of a classroom experience that teases out the differences between the liberal arts and Inside-Out. Rodenberg based the story on interactions with classmates and interviews with Inside-Out alumni and faculty.

“I’m drawn to creative works that expose me to new ideas, ask me to think a different way, and speak to a truth or bring my attention to a truth I hadn’t thought about in a particular way before,” said Rodenberg. “My hope is that if you were to read this, you’d have a sense of what it’s like to have a class in a prison. Reading it, it feels very normal because it feels very normal in the class. You forget you’re inside a prison.”

People-Powered

What stood out to Gutierrez about teaching her first Inside-Out class was students’ intense motivation and engagement.

“The ‘inside’ students admire the ‘outside’ students, and the ‘outside’ students admire the ‘inside’ students,” said Gutierrez. “That makes everyone eager to listen to others more and learn more about them. It makes for positive community building.”

Chris F. ’26, an “inside” student who recently joined Pitzer’s fifth Inside-Out cohort, appreciated how people in class authentically interacted with each other.

“Language isn’t just words—it’s a weapon. Everything we speak burns the stories they tried to bury. This program? Not about playing by their rules. It’s about breaking their boxes, rewriting what ‘belonging’ means, and speaking in ways they can’t mute. No apologies. No filters. Just our voices—loud, messy, and uncontainable.”

—“Inside” student Alejandro M.

“Our professor is not telling us what to believe or how to think but instead presents information to get the class to work through conflicts, issues, and conversations most are not having,” said Chris. “The class engagement has been organic and fulfilling.”

Community is the center of not only Inside-Out but also Gutierrez’s field group of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (MLLC) at Pitzer. The MLLC field group emphasizes language learning through relationships.

“Our languages programs are community-based and community-engaged,” said Gutierrez. “We try to connect our students to communities of speakers on campus, around campus, and in the world.”

The people-powered mission proved truer than ever in Gutierrez’s Inside-Out class. Together, her students gained a deeper appreciation for each other and the Spanish language.

“Language isn’t just words—it’s a weapon,” said “inside” student Alejandro M. “Everything we speak burns the stories they tried to bury. This program? Not about playing by their rules. It’s about breaking their boxes, rewriting what ‘belonging’ means, and speaking in ways they can’t mute. No apologies. No filters. Just our voices—loud, messy, and uncontainable.”

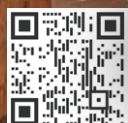


ART EXHIBITION

Illness, Love, and Memory

With “Aurora,” acclaimed artist Valeria Tizol Vivas presents an intimate exploration of identity

Valeria Tizol Vivas is an artist and educator from Puerto Rico known for exploring how material forms, ancient dialects, and time transform our experiences. In the spring, she turned the College’s Lenzner Gallery into an intimate space—part bedroom, part closet, and cleaning area—inspired by her grandmother Aurora’s life and Alzheimer’s journey. A former ceramic-artist-in-residence at Pitzer, Tizol Vivas not only created a stunning exhibition that memorialized the scenes, gestures, and efforts involved in caring for a sick loved one, she also tapped into her heritage, introducing elements of Taíno art and furniture-making to create an exhibition filled with vibrance, warmth, and an intense viscosity. One of “Aurora’s” effects, the exhibition description explained, was to give visitors a deep glimpse into “the powerful part that cultural memory plays in one’s sense of self.”



UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS: Learn more about current and future exhibitions planned by Pitzer College Art Galleries.

Photo by Christopher Wormald.

EXCERPTED FROM *The Atlantic*

The Roman Way to Trash a Republic

When you're the emperor Augustus, they let you do it.

This article first appeared April 16, 2025, in *The Atlantic* and is reprinted with permission.

By MICHELLE BERENFELD

In about 80 years, roughly the same length of time between the end of World War II and now, the Roman Republic was transformed into a dictatorship. If you had told a Roman senator at the beginning of the first century B.C.E. that his grandchildren would willingly hand over governance to a monarch, he would not have believed you. Like the American one, the Roman Republic was founded on the rejection of a king. Rome had a representative government that, though flawed, was based on the rule of law, with freedom of speech and rights to legal recourse for its citizens.

The Roman Republic lasted nearly 500 years, about twice as long as Americans have had theirs. As was surely true for the Romans, most Americans can hardly imagine that their system of self-government might break and be replaced by an imperial dynasty. That is why considering what undid the Roman Republic is useful today—if we can learn from the Romans' mistakes.

Augustus was Rome's first emperor. In so becoming, he dismantled the republic and founded a monarchy that would last for more than a millennium. In Rome, most aristocratic men were also senators and usually held that position for life. In the later republic, some of those men—notably, Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus—grew so extraordinarily rich and influential that they began to ignore the constraints of the Senate and the law. In the first century B.C.E., decades of aristocratic overreach and the authoritarian violence of Augustus's predecessors Sulla and Caesar brought Rome to the brink more than once, but Augustus pushed it over the edge.

He took control of the government gradually but completely, with the support of those wealthy aristocrats who valued fortune above principle and with the complaisance of a population exhausted by conflict and disillusioned by a system that favored the rich and connected. Perhaps most salient for us today, Augustus consolidated his power with the institutional blessing of the Senate.

At first, the Senate let Augustus bend rules and push boundaries. It allowed him to accumulate domestic powers and bring unqualified members of his family into government. The Senate stood by while Augustus removed enemies from his path, and supported him when he put a self-serving spin on recent actions. Even when elections were held under Augustus, he often handpicked state officials.

The senators never called him emperor in his own day, but as *primus inter pares*, or first among equals, Augustus was allowed to pretend he was part of the republican system even as he destroyed it. Those who praised Augustus and those who failed to fight back, despite their misgivings, created a king by another name. They may have



“He took control of the government gradually but completely, with the support of those wealthy aristocrats who valued fortune above principle and with the complaisance of a population exhausted by conflict and disillusioned by a system that favored the rich and connected. Perhaps most salient for us today, Augustus consolidated his power with the institutional blessing of the Senate.”



believed they were securing their own positions by doing so, but their acquiescence to Augustus meant the practical end of their power, forever. In their defense, Rome’s senators legitimately feared death if they broke with him; Augustus certainly had a lot of people killed. Our American senators apparently have only primaries to fear—yet they and their congressional colleagues have shown little inclination to rein in their leader or assert their own constitutional powers.

An ambitious and ruthless political operator such as Augustus provides opponents with only so many chances to stop him. The Framers of our Constitution drew on ancient Greek and Roman history when they established our republic and sought to protect it from the inevitable threat of dictatorship. When they discussed ways to avoid despotism, the Romans served as a cautionary tale. The checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution look very much like those that were in place in Rome before Augustus. There were none after him.

All of this might raise a flag over the love for ancient Rome expressed by our contemporary elites. Mark Zuckerberg’s admiration of Augustus is famous. He recently gave up his “Caesar” haircut for young–Marcus Aurelius curls and wears big T-shirts printed with Latin slogans. Elon Musk has donated several million dollars to support the study and “appreciation of Greek-Roman culture.” Steve Bannon regularly cites Roman history, in a selective and idiosyncratic way, as a guide for modern politics. During Donald Trump’s first term, Bannon helped found a “gladiator school” at a former monastery near Rome, where students would be trained in a curriculum designed to save Western civilization.

Like the wealthy elites of ancient Rome who aligned themselves with a dictator so that they could increase their fortunes, the richest and most influential men in America seem willing to let our republic fall apart as long as they believe that its demise is in their interest. And they might prosper by it. Or not. That’s the thing about capricious one-man rule—no one, not even billionaires with spaceships, can be sure they won’t get on the bad side of the emperor and suffer as a result. Thanks to the Senate that enabled him, Augustus—and every Roman emperor who followed—was a brutal dictator.

Some might argue that the empire that rose from the ashes of the republic brought peace and stability to the world for centuries to come.

But this ignores the costs. The Romans were nearly always at war; their celebrated expansion was achieved by military subjugation of foreign lands and harsh repression of those they conquered. Augustus alone ordered the extrajudicial killing of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of domestic enemies. The supposedly stable dynasty he founded gave Rome Caligula and Nero; the latter’s death was followed by a bloody civil war. More mayhem followed, and not until a century after Augustus did the Senate finally reassert itself—by appointing another emperor and initiating a new line of succession. Some emperors made sure the roads were safe and the water clean, but these more admired rulers—Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius—were nonetheless dictators. Even for the most privileged Romans, the empire could be a terrifying and unpredictable place in which a single man held absolute, arbitrary power.

The United States, too, may endure as a great power for centuries to come. The ultimate lesson of the Roman Republic’s fate is that once you’ve allowed one man to rule as a monarch, even if you pretend he doesn’t, you are past the point of no return. When Augustus died in his bed at a ripe old age, the Roman Senate made him a god. This seems an honor that even the most sycophantic U.S. senators would be unlikely to suggest for our president. But as they cede ever more of their power to him, our own era of Roman-style imperial rule may be drawing closer than we think.



Editor’s note: Students in Michelle Berenfeld’s classes explore the ancient Greco-Roman world not just to familiarize themselves with the past but to also recognize its linkages with the present day. Berenfeld, who is the John A. McCarthy Professor of Classics, demonstrates this approach for readers of *The Atlantic* in a recent commentary. A recipient of the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman/National Endowment for the Humanities Post-Doctoral Rome Prize (2017-18), Berenfeld has published her scholarship in numerous journals, including *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.



James Kang '10 said his liberal arts experience allowed him "to be all in on packing a bag, going to another country not knowing anybody, and being OK that I would figure it out."

ALUMNI

Around the World in Nine Innings

James Kang '10 satisfies his passion for travel as an international baseball scout

By BRIDGETTE RAMIREZ

When James Kang '10 finished his career as a professional baseball player, he had one question on his mind. How could he continue his lifelong love for baseball and still satisfy his taste for globetrotting adventure?

The answer turned out to be scouting.

As a director of international scouting for the New York Mets, Kang looks for the next generation of all-star baseball players in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and points elsewhere.

He manages the global scouting staff, leads talent evaluation processes, and oversees all international acquisitions.

Kang, who majored in economics at Pitzer, enjoys the dual aspects of scouting.

"We're taking an element of uncertainty, the human element of baseball, and trying to figure out how a person's makeup, motivation, and character impact how they play," said Kang. "On the flip side, we have the data: These are the numbers that tell us how they performed. Scouting is interesting because you get to marry the two."

On the Lookout

Kang spends almost half his time traveling. He has most often visited Latin America, including the Dominican Republic.

“It’s a teeny island, and they have more Major League baseball players than almost anywhere else,” said Kang. “Every kid born in the Dominican Republic essentially plays baseball from the time they’re young. It’s their national sport.”

Although Kang looks for the same core skills, he has found wide-ranging traits in players in different countries.

“Socioeconomically, most of the players in the United States have a consistent background,” said Kang. “In Latin America, a lot of the kids I meet don’t eat meals consistently, and they don’t have as much of a support structure.”

Kang also noted that players in the U.S. tend to have more access to high-end training facilities, technology, diet, and training regimens. On the international side, he finds varying kinds of players from country to country.

“There are different body types, different personalities, and different cultural norms that impact how the players are,” said Kang. “Having a good understanding of where these

kids come from culturally helps put in context the players that we’re scouting.”

In some ways, transcending borders is in Kang’s heritage. His parents immigrated from Korea to the United States before he was born. They were unfamiliar with careers in baseball aside from being a player, but their unconditional support allowed Kang to try new things without fear.

Hitting Homers in Claremont

Kang approaches scouting with empathy and a healthy appreciation for different understandings of baseball and life. That appreciation started when he played for the Pomona-Pitzer baseball team as an undergraduate.

“I saw people of such vastly different backgrounds on the team, but we all had a passion for baseball,” he said.

Some of Kang’s teammates aspired to play professionally, while others only wanted to play during college. Regardless of their differences, the team achieved one of the most successful stretches in Pomona-Pitzer baseball history—winning three SCIAC championships during Kang’s time as a Sagehen.

Kang was a major contributor to this success. He was



Kang with his family at his Pomona-Pitzer Hall of Fame induction in 2024.

“My undergrad experience led me to being OK with meeting people from all kinds of cultures, passions, and walks of life.”

—James Kang '10

named SCIAC Player of the Year, First Team All-SCIAC, and Pomona-Pitzer’s Most Outstanding Athlete. His achievements earned him an induction to the Pomona-Pitzer Hall of Fame in spring 2024.

“It’s not something I aspired to, but I just dedicated myself and put in as much work as I could to get the best out of myself and my teammates,” said Kang. “I was fortunate to play with exceptionally talented baseball players. Coach Frank Pericolosi has also always been ultra supportive of us.”

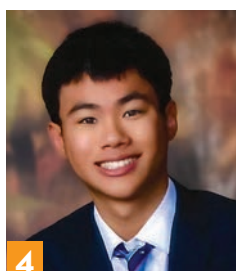
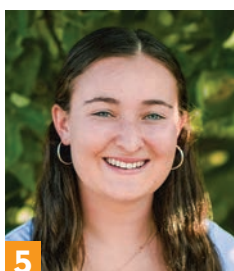
Kang’s coach and teammates were not his only influence at Pitzer. He was intrigued by his classmates’ myriad experiences in Pitzer’s study abroad programs. Although his involvement in baseball made it too challenging for Kang to study abroad, he knew from his classmates that, one day, he wanted to immerse himself in other cultures.

After graduation, Kang played for the Heidenheim Heideköpfe, a first-division team in Germany’s elite Baseball-Bundesliga. Then he discovered his career in scouting, through which he combines his interests in baseball, travel, and intercultural experiences.

“Pitzer opened me up to that possibility,” said Kang. “It allowed me to be all in on packing a bag, going to another country not knowing anybody, and being OK that I would figure it out. My undergrad experience led me to being OK with meeting people from all kinds of cultures, passions, and walks of life.”



Kang (right) took James Brunswick PO'10 with him to scout players in the Dominican Republic.



STUDENT & ALUMNI DISTINCTIONS

Will These Students Change the World?

Our 2024–25 award winners have big plans

Pitzer College's academic profile continues to grow in the U.S. and abroad thanks to an impressive number of fellowships and other academic distinctions achieved by our College community this year.

Pitzer students and alumni have been awarded 18 Fulbright Fellowships—that's right, 18!—to teach English or pursue self-designed research projects around the globe. This year's whopping number of recipients ranks among Pitzer's best Fulbright performances.

Our award recipients also include many other prestigious achievements, including the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, Projects for Peace Award, Napier Award, Gilman Scholarship, and more.

Fulbright Program

1 Sammy Basa '25, an environmental analysis major on the environmental studies track, will conduct research in the Philippines. Basa's project investigates educational access, sustainable behaviors, and marine ecosystem health within his family's home island of Sibuyan. Basa will combine community-based participatory research and marine ecological assessments. He also received the 2025 Projects for Peace Award.

2 Anya Fineman '25, a human biology major, aims to preserve and revitalize traditional Tharu medicinal and cultural practices in Nepal's Tarai region. Fineman will also facilitate a community-led establishment of a garden focused on cultivating traditional medicinal plants. Fineman's project builds on her study abroad experience in Nepal.

3 Aidan Henrikson '25, a history major, received a Fulbright to study history education in Lesotho. Henrikson has chosen to instead pursue his project, "History Off the Books!," through the 2025 Thomas J. Watson Fellowship. Henrikson will travel to Sweden, the Netherlands, Senegal, Hungary, Italy, and New Zealand to explore multisensory, nonlinear storytelling methods that offer innovative ways of understanding our collective past.

4 Grant Ho '25, an environmental analysis major and Japanese minor, aims to understand marine protected areas (MPAs) in Japan. Ho plans to visit six coastal towns with MPAs to interview residents and fishery cooperatives and explore each area's history, ecological impact, and community influence. Ho is also a Japanese Exchange and Teaching Program recipient.

5 Eliana Katz '25, a double major in psychology and education (self-designed), will teach English in Galicia, Spain. With a long-term goal of becoming an educator, Katz views the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship as a critical step in her professional development.

6 Enoch Kim '25, a political studies major, plans to study the impact of a new partnership within the Indian textile industry between Reliance Industries and Shein on the environment and small businesses in Tirupur, Mumbai, Lucknow, and New Delhi. Kim will look at a circular economy framework to find ways that small businesses can become more sustainable and use their advantage of higher environmental sustainability to stay in business.

7 Jefferson (Jonah) Konah '21, who majored in linguistics and Spanish, will teach English in Colombia. As an interdisciplinary teaching artist, Konah considers how identity, performing arts, and second language acquisition theory can be utilized to substantiate learning and speaking in a second language as well as intercultural community building.

8 Ang Lee '25, a political studies major, will pursue an MA in Political Science at the University of Toronto to study deliberative democracy in Canada. The core curriculum of this MA program will ground Lee's research investigation in democratic theory and the politics of urban multiculturalism.

9 Joanne Oh '25, a biochemistry major, was awarded a Fulbright to teach English in Taiwan. Oh has decided to stay in Los Angeles to volunteer as a behavior technician in preparation for medical school instead of pursuing the Fulbright.

10 May Paterniti '25, a critical global studies major and Spanish minor, will teach English in the Canary Islands, Spain. Paterniti plans to harness her experiences in teaching, language, and her own positionality to work with Spanish students on their perceptions of self, language development, and curiosity about the world.

11 Jack Pine '25, a human biology and Spanish double major, will teach English in La Rioja, Spain. Using his fluency in Spanish will allow him to connect with students and design a classroom environment where they can take risks. He plans to integrate his love of song with Spanish and American musical traditions to help students learn. Pine is also a Princeton in Latin America recipient.

12 Meredith Poten '25, who majored in environmental analysis and anthropology and minored in Spanish, will teach English in Madrid, Spain. Poten's study abroad experience in Spain reignited her passion for learning and teaching. She aspired to return to help students understand language and intercultural communication as tools to foster creativity and agency. Poten is also a North American Language and Culture Assistants Program recipient.

13 Alexander Rychlik '25, a mathematical economics major, will teach English in Tajikistan. Rychlik's desire to be an English teaching assistant in Tajikistan is rooted in his study abroad experience in Kyrgyzstan. He met many international students from Tajikistan who made him feel welcome and encouraged him to apply for a Fulbright in their country.

14 Sadie Scott '25, who majored in psychology and media studies, will conduct research in Belgium. Scott's project centers on the curation, qualitative analysis, and community presentation of Belgian films about incarceration in collaboration with the Cinema and Audiovisual Center of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Scott seeks to preserve important cultural artifacts and analyze their representation of justice.

15 Ariella Seidman-Parra '25, who majored in political studies and organizational studies and minored in Spanish, will teach English in Madrid, Spain. Seidman-Parra is eager to explore how different political systems and infrastructures shape culture and well-being. She believes education is a powerful tool for personal and community transformation.

16 Tommy Shenoi '24, an environmental analysis and food and agriculture studies double major, has been awarded the Fulbright/Casten Family Foundation Award for a master's degree

in World Food Studies at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy. Shenoi will investigate climate change's effects on Italian fungi and implications that extend to local livelihoods, Italian national cuisine, and global exports of Italian mushrooms and truffles.

17 Charlotte Wirth '25, a religious studies major, has planned an ethnographic study of Tibetan Buddhist nuns in Dharamshala, India. Wirth will examine gender, spirituality, and empowerment within monastic communities. This project builds on Wirth's study abroad research in Nepal and serves as a bridge for future graduate studies in religious and gender studies.

18 Natasha Yen '25, a combined environmental analysis and sociology major and an Asian American studies minor, will conduct research in Indonesia. Modernization agendas are unfolding across the world, with development plans reshaping urban spaces, including in cities such as Jakarta and Bandung. Yen's project aims to explore how street food vendors experience "modernization" and "development" on the ground. Yen is also helping youth leaders in South Africa and learning the Bahasa Indonesian language with support from the 2025 Paul M. Minus Napier Award and Critical Language Scholarship.

Additional Awards, Grants, and Fellowships

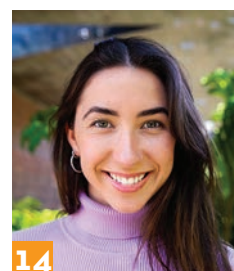
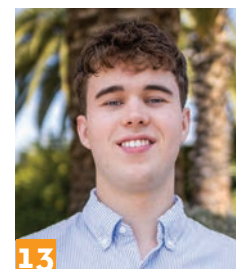
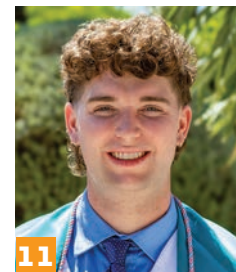
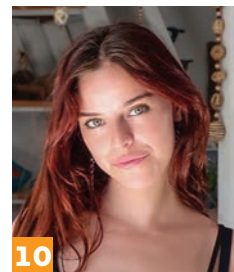
Co-leads Chi Adi '26 and Grace Wood-Hull '25 received a Back to School for Democracy Collaborative Fellowship project grant from Project Pericles to initiate conversations about Pitzer's free wall, host events, and stage an art exhibit.

Sammy Basa '25 and Zhané Moledina '25 received a 2025 Projects for Peace Award to collaborate with community members and educators on Sibuyan Island in the Philippines to create a sustainable environmental education project. Basa also received a Fulbright.

Jasmine Caniban '25, a political studies major, was accepted to the 2025 Executive Fellowship under the Capital Fellows Program.

Ethan Tu '26, a data science major, will research deep learning models of the human brain through the Fulbright Canada-Mitacs Globalink Fellowship.

Alia Wang '26, a human biology major, received the U.S. Department of State's Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship to participate in Pitzer's study abroad program in Ecuador.





Students gathered this spring to celebrate the relaunch of the Student Leadership Awards.

Sia Were '25, an environmental analysis major, was chosen as Pitzer's first Gaither Junior Fellow, a program established by the Carnegie Endowment think tank. She will explore climate change with the Carnegie Endowment's Sustainability, Climate, and Geopolitics program.

Miranda Yee '27, **Riley Thibodeau '27**, **Chi Adi '26**, and **Yaw Danquah Acquah '28** received student creativity grants from The Rick and Susan Sontag Center for Collaborative Creativity (the Hive) for individual and group projects with other Claremont Colleges students.

Student Leadership Awards

Pitzer College reintroduced the Student Leadership Awards to recognize students, student groups, and student organizations for

their representation of the Pitzer core values in motion. Pitzer also added two Heart of Pitzer Awards for a student and student group that have shown leadership in all core values.

Group Awards

Social Responsibility:
Inside-Out Pathway-to-BA Cohort

Intercultural Understanding:
Pitzer Center for Asian Pacific American Students Fellows

Interdisciplinary Learning:
Pitzer College Art Galleries Fellows

Student Engagement:
Pitzer Strive2Thrive Student Leadership

Environmental Sustainability:
Pitzer Eco Reps

Individual Awards

Social Responsibility:
Micaela Oram '25

Intercultural Understanding:
Richard Ampah '25

Interdisciplinary Learning:
Lola Latan '25

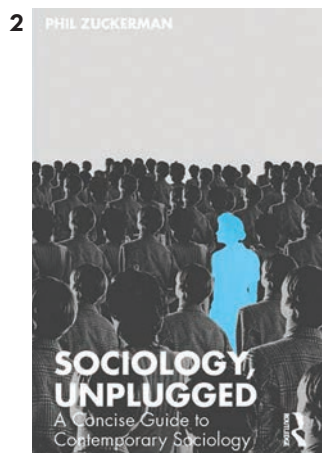
Student Engagement:
Adan Moreno Cabrera '27

Environmental Sustainability:
Marjorie Haddad '26

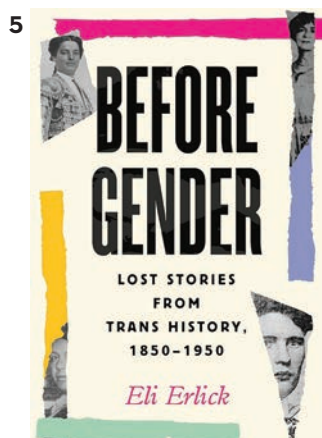
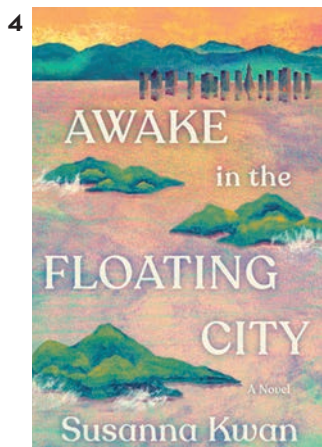
Heart of Pitzer Awards

Group:
Native Indigenous Student Union

Individual:
Stryder Rodenberg '25



3 Peter Mountford



COMMUNITY BOOKSHELF

Eye of the Beholder

The latest books from our community offer theories, hidden histories, and futuristic visions about the world around—and within—us

1. COGNITION AND THE ARTS: FROM NATURALIZED AESTHETICS TO THE COGNITIVE HUMANITIES

(CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS)

What happens to a mind in the middle of artistic creation or appreciation? To consider a possible answer, Professor of Cognitive Science **Timothy Justus** looks at the concepts of art and cognition from the angle of philosophy, the empirical sciences, and the humanities. Some of the topics he considers include 4E cognition, which challenges traditional views of the mind, as well as predictive processing, which theorizes that the brain is continuously generating predictions of incoming information to anticipate what might happen next. Along the way, Justus delves into numerous examples of visual art, music, literature, and film to show us the cognitive properties that they illuminate. In the process, Justus' book serves as an ideal example of how interdisciplinary scholarship can improve our understanding of who we are.

2. SOCIOLOGY, UNPLUGGED: A CONCISE GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY

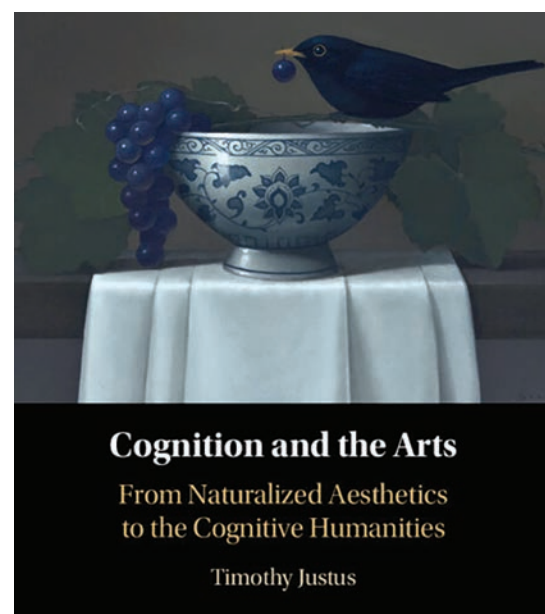
(ROUTLEDGE)

When we talk about sociology, what do we mean? This cogent “anti-textbook” by Professor of Secular Studies and Sociology **Phil Zuckerman** offers an answer via personal stories, solid research, and key theories that underscore how sociologists examine the world. In the process, he suggests how this view of social dynamics can be liberating. Zuckerman's book is an essential resource intended to serve as a springboard for undergraduates interested in exploring the essential principles of sociology.

3. DETONATOR: STORIES

(FOUR WAY BOOKS)

In his latest book, **Peter Mountford '99** gives us what *Publisher's Weekly* calls a perceptive story collection that “unearths the inner struggles of characters caught



in the middle of political and private battles.” These tales range from “One More Night Behind Walls,” which is a portrait of a crumbling marriage set against Sri Lanka's civil war, to the sadomasochism of “Pay Attention” as a suburban woman seeks distraction from the election of Donald Trump. Novelist and short story writer Karen Russell describes Mountford as having “a gift for creating crystalline articulations of the messiness inside us. I learned from these stories.”

4. AWAKE IN THE FLOATING CITY: A NOVEL

(PANTHEON)

In her transporting debut novel, **Susanna Kwan '04** explores the unexpected relationship between an artist and the 130-year-old woman she cares for—two of the last people inhabiting a flooded San Francisco of the future. Despite the environmental dangers facing them, neither is ready to leave the city—or each other. The *Los Angeles Times* praises Kwan's post-apocalyptic vision, highlighting how the “role of community during environmental disaster is one of the themes that runs through this thoughtful novel about art, creation, and the ways we care for one another.”

5. BEFORE GENDER: LOST STORIES FROM TRANS HISTORY, 1850-1950

(BEACON PRESS)

Highlighting influential individuals over 100 years who are all but unknown today, **Eli Erlick '17** shares 30 remarkable stories from romance to rebellion and mystery to murder. These narratives introduce us to Frances Anderson, the world's top female pool player in the 1910s and Gerda von Zobeltitz, a trans countess who instigated an LGBTQ+ riot some 40 years before Stonewall. Organized into four parts that parallel the many controversies over gender identity (addressing youths, activists, workers, and athletes) in today's headlines, *Before Gender* introduces us to individuals whose forgotten stories transform the discussion.



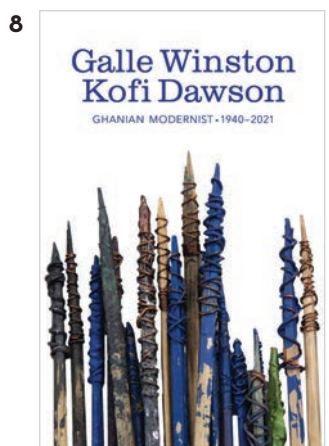
6. BURN SCARS: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF FIRE SUPPRESSION FROM COLONIAL ORIGINS TO THE RESURGENCE OF CULTURAL BURNING (OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS)

In *Burn Scars*, historian and Pomona College Professor **Char Miller** '75 assembles a collection of primary sources focused on debates over “light burning” (as prescribed or controlled burning was once called). These historic documents demonstrate that not only was fire suppression controversial, it was also driven by explicitly racist and colonial beliefs. The book addresses the burning debates of the early 20th century, but Miller also provides evidence of a powerful counternarrative emerging from southern non-Indigenous foresters who used fire to revive longleaf pine ecosystems. Miller includes the contributions of Indigenous practitioners discussing the long history and resurgent practice of cultural burning as part of traditional stewardship.



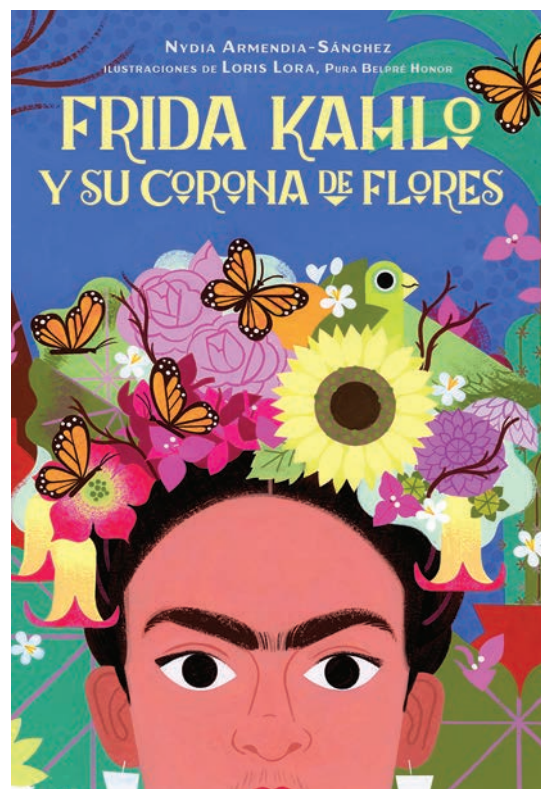
7. PARKER CLEANS UP THE HIKING TRAIL (BOOKBABY)

In this instructional paperback aimed at toddlers, **Kathleen Kile** '97 introduces us to young Parker. On a hike with his family, he learns the importance of cleaning up after yourself when you're in nature. Determined to do his part, Parker helps out a variety of forest friends and learns the value of respecting the environment around us for the benefit of everyone. Illustrated and written with great affection, Kile provides young readers with a delightful short adventure that teaches them the value of the natural world and the responsibility we share in respecting it.



8. GALLE WINSTON KOFI DAWSON: GHANAIAN MODERNIST 1940-2021 (VLOXX)

In the early 2000s, Professor of Media Studies **Ruti Talmor** was a graduate student who spent several years in Ghana researching the country's art world. In Accra, the country's capital and largest city, she met Galle Winston Kofi Dawson, a prolific modernist visual artist whose works range from paintings and sculptures to texts, drawings, printmaking, and more. “I was always profoundly grateful for any time spent in his company, and I think I will always miss him,” Talmor writes in this monograph of the artist, who died in 2021. “There was something about the deliberate, unhurried way in which he inhabited time, the way he paid attention, that were contagious.” Their interactions resulted in Talmor conducting a lengthy interview with Dawson that forms the content of this book. The text is accompanied by selected images of Dawson's works that possess a vibrancy and intimacy in their presentation of glimpses of Ghanaian life. “A life story interview is a unique experience,” Talmor explains, “in which the storyteller is asked to step back from the immediate temporality of the everyday, to look upon his life as a whole, to find a story—an arc—that links one event to another.” In



this book, that effort has been successful, resulting in a rich and fascinating record of an important figure in contemporary art.

9. FRIDA KAHLO'S FLOWER CROWN (ABRAMS BOOKS)

Nydia Armendia-Sánchez '02 has written a lyrical and inspiring picture book about the life of Frida Kahlo—told through the language of flowers—and how she blossomed into a celebrated, beloved artist. Illustrated by Pura Belpré Honor awardee **Loris Lora**, the book features the very flora Frida grew in her garden, bought at the market in her hometown, painted in her famous portraits, and wore proudly in a crown around her head. *School Library Journal* described the book as “a soaring, enticing tribute to a strong and distinctive artist.” The book includes an illustrated guide to all the flowers and plants featured and an activity for kids to make their own flower crown. Armendia-Sánchez has also translated the book into Spanish: *Frida Kahlo y Su Corona de Flores*.



READ MORE: Need reading this season? Search for these and other titles included in our regular Community Bookshelf feature.



A Message from the Director of Alumni Programs

Dear Pitzer Alumni,

It's a pleasure to introduce myself to all of you as the College's new director of alumni programs. I'm joining Pitzer after working at Scripps College for six years in the offices of alumnae engagement and career planning & resources. I am thrilled to serve this vibrant alumni community and look forward to meeting you at alumni and community events.

Before my arrival, Pitzer's Office of Alumni Engagement had a very successful year. A total of 13 engagement events were organized with more than 400 people in attendance. These events brought alumni together in 10 cities across the country and on campus.

During the 2025-26 academic year, my goal is to organize more opportunities for the alumni community to connect with each other and with students through meaningful programs and experiences. Stay tuned for more information on exciting programs from our office.

Do you want to get involved?

There are many ways for alumni to engage with our student and alumni communities. We're always looking for **volunteers** to share their stories with others, **host an event** on our engagement tour across the country, become a **regional ambassador**, and help organize milestone reunion celebrations as a **class ambassador**. Reach out to our office to learn more about how to get involved.

In community,
Steve Flores
Director of Alumni Programs
Steve_Flores@pitzer.edu

**CLASS NOTES ARE AVAILABLE ONLY VIA
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IN MEMORIAM

Lora Elizabeth Swayne '76

History



A vice president and director of special projects with Cathay Bank, Lora Elizabeth Swayne '76 died during the Eaton Fire in January. She was 71.

According to a report from the L.A. County medical examiner, Swayne died as a result of "inhalation of products of combustion and thermal injuries."

A resident of Altadena, California, Swayne was born in 1953 to Louis and Lelia Swayne. According to her LinkedIn profile, for many years she worked in the financial services industry. In addition to Cathay Bank, she was previously employed by the Los Angeles Financial Credit Union.

Swayne is predeceased by her father, a former investigative photographer, and her son, Matt, a graduate of Flintridge Preparatory School. A family service was held in May to celebrate her life.

Dipannita Basu

Professor Emerita, Africana Studies and Sociology



An emerita faculty member beloved by many at Pitzer as "Professor of Hip Hop," Dipannita Basu passed away in July at Pomona Valley Hospital after a long battle with cancer. She was 63.

Born in India in 1961, Basu was raised in England and later moved to the United States to complete her postdoctoral work at UCLA. She spent 21 years as a member of the Pitzer faculty, introducing a global perspective to everything she did.

Basu was known for her sense of humor, her scholarship on the sociology of music, Black popular culture, and the politics of race and ethnicity, and a deep commitment to her students.

During her career, Basu also worked with incarcerated youth at Feltham Young Offender Institution in the UK and at Camp Afflerbaugh-Paige in California, sharing education, meditation, and the uplifting power of art and music. She believed deeply in giving everyone a chance to grow and transform.

In a LinkedIn message announcing her passing, Basu's husband, Martin Perminas, celebrated her life of passionate inquiry as well as her defiance of a diagnosis with glioblastoma multiforme (GBM) in 2012. He praised her for facing her illness "with unyielding courage, relentless curiosity, and a fierce will to live" and for pursuing innovative treatments that, her husband wrote, "showed that GBM does not have to be an immediate death sentence—her example forces us all to envision a future where this disease is a chronic, survivable condition."

A nondenominational service was held in July at Todd Memorial Chapel in Pomona followed by a celebration of her life at Lordsbury Taphouse & Grill in La Verne.

PARTICIPATING

Being the Change the World Needs

A professor shares what she tells her students about the power of the liberal arts

By SUYAPA PORTILLO VILLEDA '96

After I graduated from Pitzer, I worked on organizing projects around Los Angeles for six years. I decided to apply to history doctoral programs even though I'd majored in psychology and Spanish (actually, it was Latin American literature, but the major didn't exist, so it appears as Spanish on my degree). Why did I make such a significant change? Because of something Professor Miguel Tinker Salas told me while I was deciding on a doctorate in Spanish lit or history.

"With history you can do anything," he said. "You can write about Latin American literature, philosophy, or anything else. It's freedom."

He made it possible for me to imagine the field of history as a wide-open space for thinking about the past, present, and beyond. He helped me to see a wide horizon of possibilities, not a narrow one. Pursuing Latin American and Latinx history, one of the liberal arts' traditional pillar disciplines, was a way to do that.

I don't regret my decision at all. Today I feel the freedom that he assured me I'd find. I'm free to think about society and the world; understanding the past is especially critical in our turbulent present. My experiences taught me why a liberal arts education is valuable: It possesses a flexibility that allows you, if you want, to change directions and study—and become—something else.

The education I received gave me a foundation that has enabled me to have a breadth of knowledge and be inquisitive—and respectful—about the world around us. Often, during Pitzer's first-year seminar course, I want my incoming students to understand this. Some of what I tell them is worth repeating here. I want to dispel the notion that anyone in the humanities is not able to make changes. When it comes to the humanities, especially in a liberal arts environment and including interdisciplinary scholars, we do have the power to effect real changes.

In fact, when you take an interdisciplinary approach to your studies, this can help you change how people think about power and bodies of knowledge that will encourage



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them to take a broad-minded approach to problems. This process might be long and tedious, difficult, sticky, and we may not see results right away, but it is worth it.

This is something that our Chicano/a Latino/a studies and ethnic studies programs, and historians in general, have done (over time) in various disciplines. Vital to these programs has been a series of interdisciplinary projects between historians, students, and community members and an effort to change knowledge so radically that diversity and intersectionality is critical—and anything else would be boring and old.

Understanding how power operates in a society (how neoliberal markets move people and resources inequitably) was a radical shift in my thinking as a Pitzer student. Even more radical was learning how people have subverted and challenged power in unexpected ways to construct new responses and more just societies. This is something exciting: This complex, generative thought process is what I share with my students. It does not matter what you do or where you do it, I tell them; if you can learn to think critically about power, you can learn how to make changes, too.

I also tell them that my classroom is not restricted to the community around us, either; we look beyond—throughout the Western Hemisphere and the Global South. Historical actors making change in L.A. or anywhere else enter my class and tell their stories. (I see L.A. as a magnificent social justice laboratory in which my students can explore complex, intersectional issues through various projects and field trips.)

Many times people who have been trained in a formal discipline will critique the interdisciplinary approach because they are concerned that it will be hard to teach (and learn) such skills. I invite my students to worry less about any challenges and consider a more important possibility—that such an experience will instill in them an ability to study from multiple perspectives, disciplines, and genres. Not only will they understand how to break down power constructs, they will learn how to build.

This kind of understanding isn't just important. Like my professor once said, it's a form of freedom.

Suyapa Portillo Villeda '96 is professor of Chicano/a-Latino/a transnational studies at Pitzer College.





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Lena appreciates how special, rare, and important Pitzer is. And as a student receiving financial aid and working two on-campus jobs, she sees that nearly every experience she's had is possible thanks to donor support.

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