

CAL STATE

SPRING 2021

# East Bay

CELEBRATING  
THE CLASS OF  
2021

MEET PRESIDENT  
CATHY SANDEEN

ENDANGERED  
PLANTS &  
EARTH'S FUTURE





magazine is published by the Office of University Communications and Marketing, a department of the Division of University Advancement.

**President**  
Cathy Sandeen

**University Advancement**  
Bill Johnson,  
Vice President

Lori Bachand,  
Associate Vice President,  
Communications & Marketing

Holly Stanco,  
Associate Vice President,  
Development

Richard Watters '13,  
Executive Director, Alumni  
Engagement & Annual Giving

**Editor**  
Natalie Feulner

**Graphic Designers**  
Kent Kavasch  
Gus Yoo

**Contributing Writers**  
Elias Barboza '13  
Cathi Douglas  
Natalie Feulner  
Eric Harding  
Ilene Lelchuk  
Erin Merdinger '10, '15

**Photography**  
Kelly Cox  
Garvin Tso '07


**Contributing Copyeditor**  
Melanie Blake

**Inquiries**  
Send your letter to the editor, submit a class note or update your address/subscription preferences, including the option to receive Cal State East Bay magazine electronically, by contacting:

natalie.feulner@csueastbay.edu

Or mail to:  
Cal State East Bay  
SA 4800  
25800 Carlos Bee Blvd.  
Hayward, CA 94542

\*Please note: Letters will be printed at the discretion of Cal State East Bay and may be edited for publication.

Construction crews have a clear view of the San Mateo-Hayward bridge and the San Francisco Bay from the various support beams holding up the forthcoming CORE building.  GARVIN TSO

## FEATURES

# 16 A Presidential Homecoming


Cal State East Bay welcomes president Cathy Sandeen

# 22 Machine Learning vs. COVID-19

Students create app to help users avoid encounters with virus

# 28 Endangered Plants and the Earth's Future

Cal State East Bay's Green Biome Institute is sequencing the genomes of mysterious, disappearing plants that could benefit humans

COVER: Cal State East Bay celebrated its 2020 and 2021 graduates with a Car-mencement ceremony in May.  GARVIN TSO

## DEPARTMENTS

04 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

05 UNIVERSITY NEWS

08 COMMENCEMENT

34 ATHLETICS

36 ALUMNI

38 OAKLAND CAMPUS

40 GIVING

42 CLASS NOTES

47 PARTING SHOT



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Hello Cal State East Bay community,

I want to welcome you to this issue of East Bay Magazine. We're glad you're here.

We are in unusual times, that is for sure. But I have spent the past six months virtually diving into our campus culture and community, and after dozens of conversations with faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors and friends, I am invigorated and encouraged by the bright future we have ahead. (Read more about these conversations and several themes that have emerged on page 19.)

I am also proud to take a moment and reflect on our accomplishments. For one, we were very effective at deploying federal COVID relief funds, helping our students who have faced financial hardships due to the pandemic. We have focused sharply on closing graduation gaps for all students, and this spring, we announced the establishment of several student success centers for our Black, Latinx and APIMESA students, and a resource center for our undocumented students (see page 5).

We have received multiple grants to provide student support, including peer mentoring and smooth pathways for students transferring from community colleges. And physically, the footprint of our Hayward campus is expanding, with the continued construction of the CORE building. Thank you, readers and donors, for your ongoing support of these initiatives. It means the world to our students and university community.

As I look forward, several key priorities for the coming years have already emerged. We are a university built on connection, agility and transforming lives. We are a community of educators and learners committed to fighting for equity and justice while building the workforce our world needs.

These stories and more are told within the pages of this magazine, and I encourage you to explore the many ways Cal State East Bay is working to ensure higher education is accessible for all our students, who we know will become the future leaders of our communities.

As we look toward fall 2021, we are encouraged by plans to bring back our students to their physical classrooms and labs. To help with the transition, we are introducing "Today, toward together." This is a concerted effort to take the steps today that will allow us to once again work, live and learn at our three great campuses.

With care,

Cathy Sandeen

# CAL STATE EAST BAY University News

## Topping Out

Cal State East Bay held a virtual topping-out ceremony for the university's new CORE building earlier this spring. Prior to the event, campus community members had a chance to sign the 18-foot beam that was ceremoniously hosted during the event.

In construction, a topping-out ceremony is a tradition held when the last or highest beam of a forthcoming structure is placed. Many times, individuals who have been key to the building's inception sign their names on the beam before it is lifted up.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cal State East Bay opted to hold a virtual ceremony that included video messages from key donors, administrators and students, as well as a video of the final beam being placed.

When complete, the CORE, which sits at the center of the Hayward campus, will serve as a space for learning, engagement and collaboration. The LEED Gold facility



will be 100,000 square feet of zero-net-energy ready space, designed with flexible seating and study rooms.

The 21st-century academic library will teach students how to navigate the information age economy and become self-directed learners. The Student Center for Academic Achievement, located on the top floor, will

focus on providing the skills needed for student inquiry, development and research. And the Hub for Entrepreneurship — prominently placed on the ground floor — will provide a nexus for students and faculty to explore innovations that will propel the creative economy into the next generation and beyond.

## Student Success Centers Announced

In a step to provide targeted support to address equity and graduation rates as part of Graduation Initiative 2025, President Cathy Sandeen announced in February that Cal State East Bay will establish three new student success centers: a Black Student Success Center, a Latinx Student Success Center, and an Undocumented Student Resource Center.

Additionally, significant renovations to the Diversity and Inclusion Student Center will create dedicated spaces for other affinity-based student success units, including a center to support Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American and other student populations that have achievement and equity gaps.

To support the centers, Sandeen created a task force that will provide transparency on planning and make specific implementation recommendations related to these centers



and their programs and services. The group will make recommendations grounded in data that examine and assess learning sup-

port, student demand, staffing, space usage, future advisory committees, and dedicated marketing and outreach to students.



# California State University Provides Sevenfold Return on State's Investment



A new economic impact study illustrates the California State University's and Cal State East Bay's significant and varied financial contributions to the state's economy, including a return of nearly \$7 for every dollar invested in the university by California. Notable examples of the CSU's annual statewide economic impact include:

- \$26.9 billion in industry activity

- \$10.2 billion in labor income
- \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue
- The creation of over 209,000 jobs

"The California State University has long been recognized for the quality of its educational offerings and as an economic engine powering California, and this new report helps to further illustrate and quantify the

consequential impact of the CSU on the Golden State," said CSU Chancellor Joseph I. Castro in a statement. "A return of nearly \$7 for every dollar invested in the university demonstrates the wisdom of continued bold investment in the university."

The study used data from 2018-19 and was conducted by global advisory and digital services provider ICF. As a state-supported institution, the CSU relies on the state's General Fund allocation to fund the university's operating budget. California's increased investment in the CSU over the past several years has resulted in student success growth with annual increases in graduation rates that have reached all-time highs under the university's Graduation Initiative 2025.

The study also pointed to the return on investment into CSU campuses throughout the state, including Cal State East Bay:

- For every dollar the state invested in the Bay Area CSU campuses, \$7.24 in statewide spending is generated.
- Cal State East Bay-related activity supported 5,695 jobs and \$305.2 million in labor income.
- Cal State East Bay alumni in the region supported an additional 12,091 jobs, \$908.7 million in labor income, \$2.5 billion in industry activity, and \$164.5 million in state and local tax revenue.

The report also examined the CSU's impact on several of California's most essential industries as well as those positioned for growth, including agriculture, water research, biotechnology and healthcare, and energy and environment, among others.

# College of Education and Allied Studies Appoints New Dean

Cal State East Bay has appointed Robert Williams, associate dean in the Graduate College of Education at San Francisco State, as the new dean of the College of Education and Allied Studies.

Williams will begin July 1. He was appointed following a public search conducted in fall 2020 that included a virtual town hall with Cal State East Bay faculty, students and staff.

Before accepting the position at Cal State East Bay, Williams was with San Francisco State for many years, serving as a professor, department chair, and eventually associate dean.



In his current role, Williams supervises the university's Credential and Graduate Services Center and the Student Resource Center. He's also responsible for numerous projects related to teacher education training, with a particular focus on building a pipeline of future teachers who identify as people of color, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities.

Williams is a licensed clinical psychologist and was a visiting Fulbright Scholar from August 2001 to 2002 with the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus in Barbados in the Department of Government, Sociology and Social Work.

# More Than 100 Student-Athletes Named to Honor Roll



Cal State East Bay had 105 student-athletes named to the most recent Athletic Director's Honor Roll.

The Pioneers by far surpassed their previous total of 89 honorees. To qualify for the accolade, a student-athlete must record a grade point average of at least 3.5 during the most recent academic semester.

For the fourth time since the AD's Honor Roll was instituted in 2016-17 under for-

mer director of athletics Jason Carmichael, all 13 teams posted at least a 3.0 average.

CSUEB student-athletes achieved a collective GPA of 3.5 during the fall, with 35 individuals posting a perfect 4.0. Fall 2020 marks the seventh consecutive academic semester during which the department-wide GPA has exceeded 3.2.

The Pioneer water polo team led the way with a department-best 3.78 GPA, includ-

ing seven students with a perfect 4.0, after volleyball had the high mark each of the previous two years.

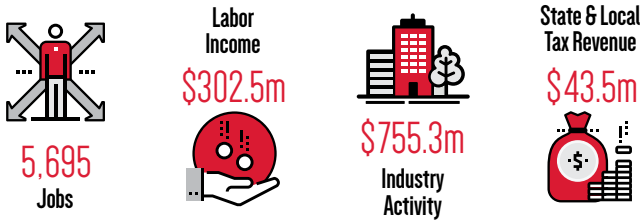
East Bay water polo had 13 student-athletes make the AD's Honor Roll, trailing only baseball (18), women's soccer (17) and women's swimming (15) for most in the department.

Women's track and cross country had 14 honorees, while volleyball finished with 13.

— Eric Harding

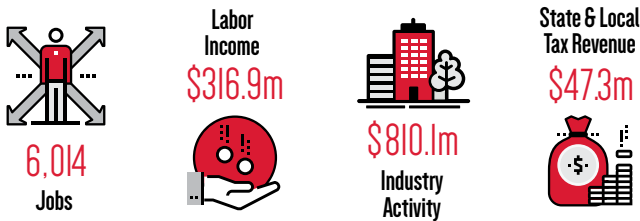
## REGIONAL AND STATE-LEVEL IMPACT

In the region, Cal State East Bay supported:



Alumni in the region supported an additional **12,091** jobs, **\$908.7 million** in labor income, **\$2.5 billion** in industry activity, and **\$164.5 million** in state and local tax revenue.

Within California, Cal State East Bay direct spending supported:



Cal State East Bay alumni who are still in California supported an additional **21,264** jobs, **\$1.3 billion** in labor income, **\$3.95 billion** in industry activity, and **\$264.5 million** in state and local tax revenue.





Cars line Old Hillary Road at the Cal State East Bay Hayward campus during the university's Car-mencement ceremony. **© KELLIE COX**

## University Celebrates Graduates From Class of 2020 and 2021 With Non-Traditional Ceremony

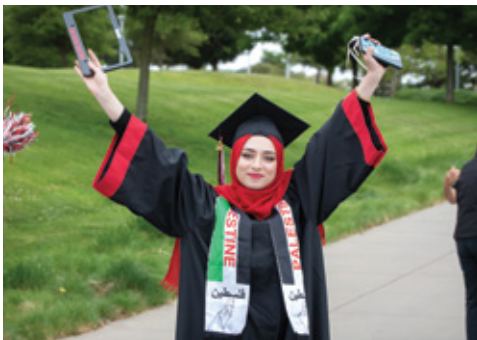
BY CATHI DOUGLAS AND ELIAS BARBOZA '13

**C**AL STATE EAST BAY CELEBRATED the accomplishments of its 2021 graduating class in May with a Car-mencement ceremony. Graduates adorned in black commencement robes and sporting decorated caps and leis arrived in cars on campus at a pre-scheduled time. They then proceeded to a specially staged area in front of the university's monument letters while their names were recognized via loudspeaker.

Cal State East Bay President Cathy Sandeen said the event was a chance for the university to celebrate the milestone that is commencement while keeping the health and safety of graduates in mind.

"Earning a degree from Cal State East Bay is life-changing for our students and their entire families," she said. "While we would have loved to honor them with our traditional in-person event ... it was just not yet safe to have a large event in Pioneer Stadium. Our creative solution of a Car-mencement ceremony was so well-received by our graduates and we enjoyed celebrating their achievements in this unique way." ▶





Total number of undergraduates:	4,806
Total number of graduate students:	1,313
Youngest Graduate:	19 (undergraduate) 22 (graduate)
Oldest Graduate:	74 (undergraduate) 67 (graduate)
Graduates by college (students who major in two different colleges are counted twice)	
College of Business and Economics:	1,322
College of Education and Allied Studies:	733
College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences:	2,088
College of Science:	1,980

CAR-MENCEMENT 2021 AT A GLANCE





## SHASWAT BABHULGAONKAR B.S., COMPUTER SCIENCE

project titled, “Machine Learning Prediction of Fracture Growth as a Result of Hydro-Mechanical Coupling in Geological Media.”

“During my internship, I learned about the importance of research and how machine learning is applicable in the geosciences,” he said. “I enjoyed coming up with ideas of how to develop software in a machine-learning model to solve problems.”

He was thrilled to present the paper in Seoul, Korea, in November 2020.

“As a young master’s student, it was a great experience to be able to do research and present it,” he said. “I learned a lot from the conference.”

Pathbreaker Program advisor Ruth Tinnacher, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry and a project scientist at the Berkeley Lab, says that Babhulgaonkar has been exceptionally successful and productive from an academic perspective.

After college in India, he set his sights on the East Bay master’s program thanks to an alumnus friend’s recommendation and its location in the Bay Area close to Silicon Valley.

“The program is flexible, and you get to explore many interests,” he said. “The professors have been doing significant research in the areas I’m interested in — machine learning, deep learning, and artificial intelligence.”

“Each professor has a unique way of teaching, explaining their experiences,” he noted. “They are passionate about their interests, and they have backgrounds and skills in the professional world as well as academic excellence.”

He describes Professor Zahra Derkhshandeh’s course in machine learning as an example of a course taught with a technical rather than theoretical mindset. Her hands-on instruction helped him learn the importance of solving real-world problems in the industry.

“I’m passionate about computer science, design, machine learning, and software development,” Babhulgaonkar said. “I’m competitive — I love being in competition. It makes me work harder each and every day.” In addition, he says, he loves to communicate and present ideas.

A cricket and chess aficionado, the Hayward resident credits his parents, father Jeetendra and mother Tanuja, his sister Pranali and grandfather Prabhakar for their support of his educational journey in their home country and in the United States.

“My grandfather asked me to dream big,” Babhulgaonkar said. ▶

At 24, Shaswat Babhulgaonkar not only earned his master’s degree in computer science from Cal State East Bay this May, but he has also achieved noteworthy accomplishments in his chosen field.

Babhulgaonkar has co-authored a peer-reviewed research paper, presented his research at an international conference and served for a year in Cal State East Bay’s Pathbreaker Program.

An international student who hails from the small city of Vajapur in the state of Maharashtra, India, he served for two semesters in the master’s student research program at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. He is currently seeking his dream career as a machine learning engineer in the software industry and wants to remain in the Bay Area / Silicon Valley region.

“I’m someone who is interested in solving the more complex problems in the industry,” Babhulgaonkar said.

Under the mentorship of the Berkeley Lab’s Mengsu Hu and East Bay advisor Zahra Derkhshandeh, he co-authored and published the

## LALA DE LA O CORTEZ B.A., ETHNIC STUDIES

Longtime community organizer and activist Lala De La O Cortez is used to working tirelessly on behalf of causes and people who need her help.

Years before earning her 2021 bachelor’s degree in ethnic studies with an emphasis in Black studies, De La O Cortez began organizing at her high school, Impact Academy in Hayward. She continued her activism through her years at Cal State East Bay.

“As I entered these institutions my parents never had a chance to attend — middle school, high school, and college — there were a lot of things I felt needed to be addressed, talked about, and changed,” the student leader explains.

“I know that one day my kids might attend East Bay, and I would want the things I saw to be addressed.”

Ethnically, De La O Cortez identifies as a villager from Tejalpa, in the Mexican state of Puebla, where she spends two months a year connecting with her Indigenous roots.

In 2019, she worked to remove the university’s prior mascot, Pioneer Pete, because of the associations of pioneers with violent colonization of Indigenous people in North America.

“In my village, seven generations back, everyone was slaughtered, except the babies, who were stolen and survived to make their own families,” she says. “Pioneer Pete was a reminder of the things we lost because of that attack. It was important to not have to see a constant reminder of the violence done to my family.”

Working in 2017 with Students for Quality Education, De La O Cortez lobbied to pass California’s AB 21, a law that, among other actions, requires universities and colleges to shield students from deportation and mandates a contact person who can identify legal, social and government assistance for immigrant students.

“With great risks presented by changes to immigration policies and enforcement at the federal level, it is more important than ever to work to protect the students, faculty, staff, and the public, and ensure that, regardless of their immigration status, they can continue to take advantage of the education to which they are entitled and are free from intimidation or loss of access to resources and programs that other students enjoy,” the law states.



Though her parents are documented, De La O Cortez says, other family members were deported during her time at East Bay.

“Working on that bill was very important to me,” she said.

Upon high school graduation, she joined the EOP Bridge program, which provided a gateway summer program for her to enter East Bay.

Seeing De La O Cortez’s passion for social justice, a high school counselor recommended she major in ethnic studies, noting she was already involved in learning about various cultures and races. The encouragement continued at Cal State East Bay, where EOP counselor Dianne Peterson supported and guided her academic journey.

Now 24 and a newlywed expecting twin daughters in summer 2021, De La O Cortez says she plans to earn her doctorate in education so she can teach ethnic studies.

“Graduating with my degree from East Bay means everything to me,” she says. “As a woman of color, to have the privilege of attending university means a lot.” ▶





## VICTOR CASTILLO

### M.S., E-LEARNING

Castillo knows what it's like to be in one of those Bay Area working families. Growing up in under-resourced Gilroy and San Jose neighborhoods, Castillo watched his parents leave in the early morning to work from sunrise to sunset every day in the farms of the Salinas Valley. By middle school, he'd fallen into gang culture and dropped out of high school in ninth grade. One month after his 17th birthday, Castillo became a father, with no clear vision of where his life was headed.

"There were a lot of times when I felt like giving up, and there wasn't really anybody there to say, 'I got you,'" Castillo said.

With a family of his own, Castillo realized education was the only chance out of his tough situation. He earned his GED when he was 18 and soon after became the first in his family to enroll in college.

He spent the first eight years of his career with a nonprofit, mentoring at-risk youth, previously incarcerated youth and the homeless community before becoming a deputy probation officer, assisting juveniles and adults. Four years ago he accepted a full-time faculty position at West Valley College in Saratoga.

In addition to grading papers and handing out assignments, Castillo holds online forums where he and his students discuss a range of topics, including historical injustices and how different communities deal with police. He mentors community college students through Puente, a program supporting transfer students, and is a member of West Valley College's President's Commission of Diversity and Equity.

"People throw around that term [social justice] all the time, but what is it?" Castillo said. "Just the act of having conversations about social justice and what it means for people who want to be criminal justice practitioners and advocates, social workers, judges and lawyers is important. Not only talking about it but also figuring out ways of action. How can we take that first step? That's the kind of dialogue I want to bring into the classroom."

Today, the 43-year-old father of two lives in Hayward with his two German shepherds. His now 26-year-old daughter lives on her own, and Castillo graduated from Cal State East Bay in May at the same time his 17-year-old son graduated high school.

"I chose to set the bar high for myself," said Castillo. "I want to set a good example in what I do, and now I hope to see my son get his degree one day." ►

After more than 20 years of social service, public health, correctional and law enforcement experience, Cal State East Bay graduate student and West Valley College Administration of Justice Professor Victor Castillo has learned how difficult it can be for many Bay Area working families to have the opportunity to receive higher education.

And in response, Castillo plans to create a fully online pathway to a career in criminal justice for WVC students.

"Nobody should be left behind because they have to work nine to five," said Castillo. "Everybody should have an opportunity to learn and explore ... and we can do that in the online environment because it provides accessibility and flexibility."

Schools in California are currently held online due to COVID-19; however, Castillo plans on keeping the classes he is developing online even after California classrooms reopen.

"I know there are Bay Area families who work hard and are trying to make a living, so my end goal is equity and accessibility," he said.

## MARCI BERTUZZI

### B.S., BUSINESS

"Over Before You Know It."

That motto has guided Marci Bertuzzi — single mom, Marine Corps veteran, and domestic abuse survivor — through a lifetime of challenges.

Bertuzzi's can-do philosophy recently propelled her to earn a Cal State East Bay bachelor's of science degree in business with a concentration in entrepreneurship — a degree she earned with a 3.95 GPA while parenting her daughter, now 16, and even founding her own oil and gas consulting firm.

The degree took her seven years, Bertuzzi says, with a year off to establish state residency after moving from her hometown in Texas for a job transfer to California.

"I want to show my daughter that while life will throw you curveballs, it's how you swing the bat that determines your ultimate success," she said. "You can do anything if you really want it."

Now 36, Bertuzzi was determined to earn her degree despite the hardships she faced as a single parent going to school and working full-time, and in spite of the fact that her career was going well without it.

In her last position, she managed a 27-member team, the majority of whom were mechanical engineers.

A counselor at Diablo College in Pleasant Hill, where Bertuzzi earned her associate's degree, told her about East Bay's entrepreneurship program.

"I didn't know that entrepreneurship was a degree," she recalls, but adds that she thought it was perfect since she already knew that she wanted to go into business for herself.

Amid her studies in 2018, she founded Petra IQ, a data-quality consulting firm that focuses on discovery, strategies, business process frameworks, risk analysis, and governance and regulatory standards for clients in the oil and gas industry.

Bertuzzi's career has its roots in her military service, which began shortly after the 9/11 attacks.

"I wanted to be involved, to help and serve my country," she said.

In the Marines, she received intelligence training, including surveying and map-making. In her work today, she uses the same soft-



ware she learned in the military.

Her daughter was born at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

"My daughter's father was physically abusive and at one point I nearly lost my life," she says. "I've been through a lot of stuff. But you either choose to be a victim or a victor."

She missed eight months of her daughter's babyhood when serving one tour in Fallujah, Iraq. But after her service, she moved back to Houston and got a job in pipeline routing for the oil industry.

As Bertuzzi ponders her life post-college, she still has significant things she wants to accomplish. One of them is to complete writing a parenting book, a mission she undertook because so many other parents have asked for her advice.

Her motto from boot camp will ensure that she perseveres. "Every time I was running, which I hate, I kept thinking, 'you will be fine,'" she said. "Push through it, get through it, and then it will be in the past." ■



President Cathy Sandeen, a first-generation student herself, says she knew Cal State East Bay was a place with values and a mission that resonated with her.

# A Presidential Homecoming

Cal State East Bay welcomes incoming president Cathy Sandeen

BY NATALIE FEULNER PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO

**C**AL STATE EAST BAY President Cathy Sandeen is home.

The San Leandro-raised leader began her tenure at the university amid a raging global pandemic, state budget cuts, and another virtual semester.

But she's ready.

Hailing most recently from the University of Alaska-Anchorage, Sandeen has taken tiny prop planes landing on remote beaches, reeled in 30-pound king salmon, explored the crevasses of the Matanuska Glacier, and, two months after arriving at UAA, led the university in response to a 7.1 magnitude earthquake.

But it was time to return to the East Bay.

## THE JOURNEY TO HERE

"The Hayward campus is less than seven miles from where I grew up, and as a graduate of a CSU, I feel fortunate to be able to work in a system that emphasizes access and opportunity ... to be able to pursue my calling at a place that has a lot of meaning to me," Sandeen said. "[My story] is a long story, but it is a very circling back story, and I feel so fortunate."

Sandeen's journey to Cal State East Bay began in 2006 while serving as the dean of UCLA's extension program, one of the largest nationwide. There, her advisory board of industry leaders encouraged her to follow the internal tugging she felt to eventually become a university president.

A few years later, she was an American Council on Education fellow, assigned to study at none other than Cal State East Bay under then-president Mohammad H. Qayoumi.

"I knew this was a place where the values resonated with me," Sandeen said of her year as a fellow learning from leaders at East Bay and from the two dozen-plus information-gathering interviews she did with presidents and chancellors, many in the California State University system.

It was also the first time she and other leaders began talking about how to better serve a specific type of student — those who are the first in their families to attend college.

"It was an 'aha' moment for me because I realized I am a first-generation student," she said. "That feeling of uncertainty of whether you belong and not having people at home to guide you or help you figure out what courses to take, those are the same feelings our students go through."

## THE HEART OF WHY

While Sandeen's resume is bursting with accomplishments, she said the best part of her job is working with students, many of whose stories echo her own.

"Fundamentally, I work in higher education because I care about the students," she said. "I want to have meaningful conversations with students and listen to their stories."

Based on the listening she's done at universities nationwide, ►



advising for first-year students is high on her priority list.

“We know that it takes making sure advising is accessible, and it helps if advisors are close in age to our students and come from the communities they come from,” she said. “We don’t want those connections to be random either. We want to create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to connect with someone who can take them under their wing, and that’s part of the culture.”

Cal State East Bay’s work regarding students’ social mobility and the focus on social justice were key factors in Sandeen’s interest in the university. She believes the university has the ability to dismantle the systemic factors leading to the murder of George Floyd, and touched on the importance of the nationwide response and the increased visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement that followed.

“The economic mobility and emphasis on social justice at Cal State East Bay goes to the heart of why I’m in public education, especially the part that is more student and access oriented,” she said. “Given the social and economic conditions that exist in the East Bay and the true opportunity for a university like Cal State East Bay to make a difference, that was very exciting to me.”

Sandeen said she’s also drawn to the work the faculty at Cal State East Bay is doing in the community and beyond.

“The type of research and scholarship faculty here do tends to be applied and focused on solving the region’s and California’s problems,” she said. “I’m inspired and respect that kind of work and look forward to enabling it.”

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THINGS

In an interview just a few weeks before starting as president, Sandeen quickly acknowledged she’s starting at the university during a tumultuous time. But she’s looking forward to the challenge, some of which is familiar.

As the former dean of university extension at UC Santa Cruz, for example, from 2000-2006, she experienced the dot-com bubble burst, which resulted in a swift and dramatic enrollment decline and her first introduction to rapid budget management changes.

**“Given the social and economic conditions that exist in the East Bay and the true opportunity for a university like Cal State East Bay to make a difference, that was very exciting to me.”**

It was in those moments, Sandeen said, that she learned to trust and lean on her pillars of leadership.

“My guiding principles, especially in challenging times, are to be open and transparent to the highest degree possible, to be highly data-informed when making decisions, and to remember the human side of things,” she said.

Adding that she always prefers an open, consensus-driven leadership style, Sandeen said she recognizes the challenging times the university faces may require tough decisions.

“Sometimes new leaders will avoid making decisions and continue to analyze, but I’m willing to make decisions when I need to,” she said. “I realize not everybody is going to like that approach, but I think people will accept your decision if they understand what factors into it and that they’ve had the ability to provide input and feedback.”

In the coming months, Sandeen is planning a listening tour of sorts, meeting (virtually) with key groups and individuals on campus from students to other administrators. And in the meantime, she hopes to soak up the California sunshine and spend her free time hiking, practicing yoga, and enjoying time with her daughters, son-in-law and 1-year-old grandson.

“My daughter recently said to me, ‘Mom, wherever you move, you embrace it,’” Sandeen said. “That’s true, and it’ll be true about East Bay too. There are many new things to explore, and I will dive in; that’s just who I am.”

## Fast Facts About President Sandeen

**Education:**

University of California, Los Angeles  
University of Utah  
San Francisco State University  
Humboldt State University

**First job:**

As the oldest of five children, babysitting her younger brothers and sisters

**Family:**

Two daughters, son-in-law, grandson

**Hobbies:**

Hiking (she’s particularly eager to go back to Yosemite and the Sierras), reading, yoga, walking, cooking for and with others

**Recently read books:**

“Angle of Repose,” “Where the Crawdads Sing,” “The Vanishing Half”

# FIRESIDE CHATS WITH PRESIDENT SANDEEN

BY DAISY TALAVERA '21 PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO

*Over the course of three months, Cal State East Bay President Cathy Sandeen teamed up with the university’s Alumni Association to hold biweekly Fireside Chats. During the virtual events, President Sandeen gave attendees insight into herself and her background, and took questions directly from Cal State East Bay alumni. Through the events, alumni and others got a firsthand look at Sandeen’s goals, plans, initiatives and ideas for how the campus and community will improve during her presidency. Here are highlights from topics covered. This interview has been edited for clarity.*

**The Importance of Higher Education**

President Sandeen: I was a first-generation college student. Neither of my parents went to college, and my dad dropped out of high school to join the military in World War II. They gave us a good life, [but] as the oldest of five, I really didn’t have any role models who went to college.

But at the time, the public schools in California were top-rated, we had more funding, and we had counselors. All of that introduced me to the idea of going to college. I remember being a child and going to our dentist’s office and seeing for the first time a woman dentist walking through the office. My brothers and sisters and I, our mouths dropped [open], like, “Can a woman be a dentist?” At an early age, there were just some influences around that were pointing in the direction of there being more opportunities out there.

Fortunately, the Cal State [University] system existed, because it’s not like my parents had a ton of money they could devote to higher education.

At the end of the day, out of five of us, only two completed higher education degrees. My sister is a law professor at a law school in Minnesota, so we look at each other and say, “Well, with our degrees, we made up for the rest of the family, right?”

**GPA and Grade Standards**

President Sandeen: I don’t think the GPA is that important, really. Of course you want to learn, and you want to do well, but the actual number isn’t so important. What is more important is your experience and how you can make it relevant, how you can connect the dots between what you learned and what they’re looking for on the job.

Your GPA is important for getting into graduate school if you go on, but ultimately, it’s more about the learning than the number.



**Student Success, Inequity and Improvement**

President Sandeen: All we need to do is look at our student achievement data. Our graduation rates are improving, especially when you factor in our mission as a high-access university where a lot of our students are first generation, PELL eligible, and so forth.

In that sense we are doing very well, but if you dig into that data and disaggregate it according to our different student subpopulations, we have severe and persistent achievement and equity gaps, meaning that our Black students and Latinx students do not graduate at the same rates as the overall student population. That was something I could see before I even applied for the job, and it was a theme I detected in some of the [interview] questions such as, “What are you going to do about these equity gaps?” That’s one of the reasons I was happy to establish our Black Student Success Center and Latinx Student Success Center. We will also have an Undocumented Student Resource Center and, in addition to that, in the DISC [Diversity and Inclusion Center] space, we are going to do renovations to carve out dedicated space for other student affinity groups.

We also need to work with our faculty, for them to be more culturally inclusive in terms of pedagogy and how they assess students, because so many of the practices we have reward the family income the student comes from. I can’t dictate to the faculty what they teach, and what happens in the classroom is the purview of the faculty, but fortunately, here at Cal State East Bay, there are new things being put in place.

Finally, recruiting faculty of color to Cal State East Bay is really important. The other big challenge we have is the cost of housing and cost of living in the San Francisco Bay Area. I’m trying to be really creative and think about how we might help someone who is coming to the Bay Area with transitional housing. ►





**ADA Accessibility**

President Sandeen: Unfortunately, some of the older buildings were built before we were conscious about making spaces open for people who have accessibility challenges, but I know there are plans for deferred maintenance. The governor and the legislature have agreed they are going to restore the cuts the Cal State system took for this fiscal year. It is about a 5 percent cut to the system, and we are going to get that back starting July 1, [2021].

That's great news, but in addition to that commitment, the Cal State system is asking for one-time funding for deferred maintenance for older buildings like Meiklejohn [Hall]. There's a backlog of projects we want to accomplish, including ADA improvements, that we need money for. In your role as private citizens and alumni of the university, I ask you to reach out to your state elected officials and advocate on behalf of this one-time infusion of money the Cal State system for deferred maintenance. It will go a long way.

**Retention Rates Among Diverse Student Populations**

President Sandeen: This year has been difficult on everyone, as you know, and I'm sure it's been challenging in your jobs. Those of you who work at Cal State East Bay know we were really worried about the retention rates of our students. We were worried about enrollment and so forth.

The good news is that we're pretty much holding steady. We're a bit down on our enrollment target for spring [2021], but nothing scary. Our retention rates are up this year, and our applications for graduation are up this year. I have to give a full shout-out and credit to our faculty and staff, because they really stepped up.

We also had infusions of federal money for emergency grants for technology and support for students who needed it.

We haven't mentioned basic needs, such as housing and food insecurity. That's a big push for the Cal State system, and we do have

great support in place. We need to keep these issues top of mind and communicate to students so they know what's available to them. It is a total wrap-around system: It's academic support, it's a sense of belonging and having a community and connecting with people, and it's basic needs. We need to address all of them.

It's also a question of constant shift and change, and [solutions] may be different for one population of students compared to another, so we need to get ever more sophisticated about how we address retention and graduation rates.

**Financial Struggles (Such as Campus Parking)**

President Sandeen: We're constantly looking at how we can make services more affordable for students. One reason I was able to pursue higher education back in the day was because the Cal State system was accessible and affordable. The cost [of higher education] has increased and is much more now than when I started, and we're constantly looking at that, at all different aspects of student aid and how we can make [education] more affordable.

We haven't talked about this yet, but a big theme and value at Cal State East Bay is sustainability and reducing climate change impacts. One solution we can think about is reducing the number of individual car trips to our campus. Can we support more carpooling and more use of public transportation? These are more sustainable solutions that may also address affordability; people aren't bringing a car and paying the parking fee. It kind of blends together.

**LGBTQIA+ Student Support**

President Sandeen: When we say we want equity for all, we mean for all. This goes back to the deferred maintenance [projects]. Part of that includes creating more all-user bathrooms and multistall bathrooms on campus, and having appropriate signage, because these actions signal we are supportive of our transgender and gender-fluid community members.



In all our new buildings, we will be including all-gender multistall restrooms. When we do a major renovation like we did to our Student Union, we will also build in all-user multistall restrooms, and we are mapping and labeling our single-user restrooms so people know where they are. We're ramping that up, and whenever we build another building, it will have appropriate restrooms.

In addition, our DISC will include programming meant to increase awareness of the transgender and gender-fluid community. In our student information systems, students can indicate a preferred name for university correspondence and for their diploma.

Do we have everything figured out yet? No, I'll admit that, but there is the will to take steps to support our LGBTQIA+ community.

**Discrimination (Specifically Anti-Black and Anti-Asian Racism)**

President Sandeen: The [rise in] hate crimes that has emerged recently has only intensified since the start of the COVID pandemic. This is happening in our community. We have systems in place in our own CSUEB community to try to address hate crimes, discrimination and microaggressions. I hope people feel comfortable using those pathways to bring forward their concerns so that we can know about them and address them.

But this has been a horrible time for our country. What I can do as president of Cal State East Bay is make sure we talk about these problems, that we don't sweep them under the rug, and that people who have concerns or complaints have a way to bring them forward so that we can address them.

I will also say we do have faculty in ethnic studies and other departments who are doing important work in the community, both in terms of their research, but also in their advocacy.

**Black, Latinx, and Undocumented Student Centers' Funding and Ethnic Studies**

President Sandeen: I made the decision that Cal State East Bay student centers would be funded from regular university funds. They are not going to be funded from student fees, and that financial structure will continue. Hopefully, as we discover new needs and new ways to help our students, that [funding] will grow.

That's the intention, but we have to start somewhere and work from there. If there's one thing I can address, it is that we are very fortunate at Cal State East Bay in that we have an ethnic studies department, and we did fill a number of faculty positions in that department, with several faculty who just started this year.

At Cal State East Bay, we have the course sections available where we anticipate demand for the new requirement [that starting in fall 2021, students at all Cal State universities complete a 3-unit course in ethnic studies as part of their baccalaureate degree]. We will be tracking how many students come in who need to take those courses. I'm happy to report that our campus has been a leader in this area all along, and this leadership has put us in a good position to meet this new requirement. [E3](#)

GET SOCIAL

 @CathySandeen

 CathySandeen

 cathy.sandeen



# MACHINE LEARNING VS. COVID-19

CAL STATE EAST BAY STUDENTS  
CREATE APP TO HELP USERS  
AVOID ENCOUNTERS WITH VIRUS

BY ILENE LELCHUK

**I**N THE SPRING OF 2020, Cal State East Bay undergraduate Emmanuel Gallegos was walking through Costco in Livermore and aiming his smartphone at random shoppers while, as he put it, trying not to look creepy.

"I definitely was approached by security guards," he said with a laugh.

But it was all in the name of science.

Gallegos, who has since graduated, was part of CSUEB's iLab computer sciences team that created an ambitious smartphone application called Covid ID.

Covid ID is what that team calls a "health situation awareness" app. Using computer vision and machine learning, Covid ID detects four critical coronavirus risk factors in public spaces: fever indicators, mask usage, social distancing and crowd density.

It helps users assess infection risks so they can make safer choices — such as decide which market checkout line to wait in or see how "safe" a crowd is at a party.

With broad use, Covid ID also can consolidate crowdsourced data to create live maps. Users could see if high crowd density is detected at their favorite park or if high body temperatures are detected at the corner market.

In short, Covid ID helps users avoid potential close encounters with the virus.

"I think this could be a great benefit for public health," Ryan Gamba, assistant professor of health sciences, said about the program. "I don't think anything is zero risk, but everyone could benefit from knowing how much risk they are subjecting themselves to and make decisions based on their comfort level." ▶



**“I really want to instill in my students that this work is about ongoing research and experimentation. You don’t develop the perfect system the first time; you develop ‘a’ system. And then you keep refining it or take what you’ve learned and use it somewhere else.”**

**— Lynne Grewe**

Gallegos and 15 other graduate and undergrad students embarked on the project in May 2020 under the guidance of computer science professor Lynne Grewe, a computer vision and assistive technology specialist.

“Covid ID was our response to a very challenging time,” Grewe said. “I thought this could be a way for students to feel like they were doing something to help their communities while also engaging in their field.”

A year later, the prototype app for Android phones has earned attention and accolades. One participating grad student, Shivali Choudhary, was named a finalist for the National Center for Women & Information Technology Collegiate Award (see sidebar). For other students, participating in the project led to prestigious grad school acceptances, soon-to-be-published papers and job offers. Gallegos, for example, has been invited into master’s programs at Carnegie Mellon and Cornell universities, the University of Southern California and the University of Illinois, among others.

“This research project definitely played a huge part in my applications being accepted,” Gallegos said.

So, how exactly did they create Covid ID? With cutting-edge computer vision, deep machine learning technology, and a lot of patience. The Infrared Fever Indicator System turned out to be the most complex and challenging function of Covid ID.

The IRFIS team — including Choudhary, Gallegos and grad student Dikshant Patel Jain — started with a basic question: Could they use the coronavirus’s most common symptom against it?

Their goal: Create an app for a smartphone equipped with a small, commercially available infrared camera to detect feverish skin temperatures within 10-20 yards.

They needed the program to not only distinguish people from backgrounds within the camera frame; it also had to identify heads and then capture the highest skin temperature in a particular region — around the cheeks, eyes, forehead, or ear if a face is turned sideways.

Using smartphones with a Flir One infrared cameras attached, team members set out to capture 1,000 images at parks and stores, including at Gallegos’s Costco.

“Then you have to go in with a program that’s similar to Microsoft Paint and draw little rectangles (bounding boxes) around every single head,” to teach the artificial intelligent model what a head is, Gallegos said. “It’s a tedious process. We also had to decide what ‘kind’ of heads we wanted the model to identify. What if they are too far away? What if they are turned sideways? What if they are wearing glasses?”

Grewe explains it this way: “It’s a lot like how you teach a child to read. We are showing it pictures and teaching it to only see specific things.”

In the end, they surprised themselves with their success — a 95.6% accuracy rate for identifying heads.

Choudhary said another major IRFIS challenge was finding a high-resolution, highly accurate infrared camera accessory with a consumer-friendly price. Unfortunately, the higher the resolution, the higher

the cost. The team eventually settled on a \$300 camera with less-than-ideal resolution.

“While working on the project, one thing I learned was that failure is not a failure if you learn from it,” said Choudhary, who completed her master’s program in May. “Learning from your failures contributes towards your successes.”

Programming the mask detection module had similar challenges. That team had to collect more than 1,000 images.

“We created a data set full of images of people not wearing masks, wearing masks and wearing masks incorrectly to train the machine,” explained Maithri Chullakani House, a recent master’s program graduate who now works as a software engineer in Silicon Valley.

The Covid ID project felt deeply personal to all the students. For House, her parents in India fell ill with COVID-19, and her mother was hospitalized for a few days.

“I think if everyone can use this app, it could definitely make an impact,” House said.

Because of funding constraints, however, CSUEB’s iLab is not currently developing the project more broadly.


“We would love to deploy this, but it’s not free to do it,” Grewe said, explaining that backend systems such as cloud data storage are costly.

Instead, the team posted their open source code on GitHub, a public sharing and collaborating repository.

“Even if we can’t afford to fund further development, I still feel extremely proud of the students,” Grewe said. “They did something that felt very timely and vital. It was a great motivator.”

Also, she said, she is proud of the many “micro-outcomes” for her students: Gallegos and undergrad Phillip Aguilera from CSU Dominguez Hills were invited to present at the Great Minds in STEM conference. The experience also spurred Gallegos to attend graduate school next year to delve deeper into how large-scale machine learning and AI programs can be used to combat climate change and develop smart cities. Choudhary was named a finalist for the prestigious 2021 National Center for Women & Information Technology Collegiate Award. And House said this experience helped her showcase her skills and secure a post-graduate job at Intuit.

“I really want to instill in my students that this work is about ongoing research and experimentation,” Grewe said. “You don’t develop the perfect system the first time; you develop ‘a’ system. And then you keep refining it or take what you’ve learned and use it somewhere else.”

The Covid ID team also included CSUEB graduate students Subhangi Asati, Divya Gupta, Cemil Kes, Buhmit Patel, Kunjkumar Patel, Dikshant Pravin Jain and Manasi Rajiv Weginwar; CSUEB undergraduate Jamie Ngyuen; Santa Clara University undergrad Allen Shahshahani; and high school student Jake Shahshahani. National Science Foundation grants supported two students in the program. 



**To learn more about the Covid ID app, watch this student video.**



# A PIONEER IN HER FIELD



## COVID ID student team member named finalist for 2021 National Center for Women & Information Technology Collegiate Award

Computer science graduate student Shivali Choudhary was named a finalist for the prestigious 2021 National Center for Women & Information Technology Collegiate Award for her outstanding accomplishments on Covid ID, the health situation awareness application for smartphones.

Choudhary was an integral member of CSUEB's iLab student team that created the ambitious four-part app using computer vision and machine learning. Her contribution was an infrared fever indication system that enables smartphones to identify high body temperatures within the user's vicinity.

"Shivali's project has a high potential for impact on a serious and timely issue," said NCWIT Aspirations in Computing Program Director Edie Cheng. "Her approach, which uses deep learning and low-cost parts to create a system for identifying temperature data in a crowd, shows interesting and innovative applications of existing technologies."

Choudhary and the other students launched the project in May 2020 under the guidance of CSUEB professor Lynne Grewe, a computer vision specialist. They wanted to create an app that helps users assess coronavirus infection risks in public spaces in order to make safer choices.

Besides detecting possible fevers, the prototype app detects mask use, social distancing and crowd density. Consolidated data is stored in the cloud and used to create maps so users can visualize and avoid high-risk areas.

"Working on this application felt good for my heart," Choudhary said. "This project was at the crossroad of technology and societal benefit. Using my software skills in healthcare made me realize my work can impact the larger public and improve lives."

Fever detection was the trickiest function of Covid ID, Choudhary explained. The project involved teaching the app to distinguish people from backgrounds within the camera frame, to focus on heads only and then capture the highest skin temperature in that region.

Another challenge was finding a high-resolution, highly accurate infrared camera accessory with a consumer-friendly price. Unfortunately,

Choudhary said, the higher the resolution, the higher the cost. The team eventually settled on a \$300 smartphone accessory with less-than-ideal resolution.

This project felt deeply personal for all the students involved. For Choudhary, 26, COVID-19 kept her apart from her family in India for more than a year because international flights were suspended. "I really miss my parents," she said of her mother, a teacher, and her father, a retired bank employee.

Choudhary grew up in Indore, a large city in west-central India. After earning her undergraduate degree in computer science from a state university three hours from home, she launched her career as a software engineer for IBM in Pune, India.

In 2019, Choudhary enrolled in CSUEB's master's program. She wanted to push her knowledge and career to greater heights. She heard that CSUEB — right next door to Silicon Valley — was the best place to do that.

"CSUEB helped me build a solid foundation in computer science, machine learning and computer vision," Choudhary said. "A special shout-out to the CSUEB faculty who were always available to help, not just with the coursework but any personal challenges in these unprecedented times. Dr. Lynne Grewe was an amazing mentor who listens, teaches and motivates me. Especially as a woman in tech, she is really inspiring."

Grewe was impressed by Choudhary's infectious work ethic, drive to learn and kindness.

"She really merits this award," Grewe said. "And this experience will open many new opportunities for her in industry."

After Choudhary earns her master's in May, she hopes to work for a company where she can continue using her tech skills to impact lives positively.

As an NCWIT Collegiate Award finalist, Choudhary is in good company. Past winners include Pooja Chandrashekar, a Harvard medical student who was named one of Forbes Magazine's 30 Under 30 in Healthcare in 2021, and Joy Buolamwini, who founded the Algorithmic Justice League and is featured in the 2020 documentary "Coded Bias" about flaws in facial recognition technology. [EE](#)





# Endangered Plants and the Earth's Future

CAL STATE EAST BAY'S GREEN BIOME INSTITUTE IS SEQUENCING THE GENOMES OF MYSTERIOUS, DISAPPEARING PLANTS THAT COULD BENEFIT HUMANS

BY NATALIE FEULNER PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO

**C**ALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANTS ARE DISAPPEARING. More than 10 years ago, scientists predicted that over half of California's 2,300-plus plants would be significantly reduced. Just last year, the Department of Fish and Wildlife reported 136 endangered, 22 threatened and 64 rare state-listed species in California, with 122 listed as endangered or threatened at both the state and federal levels.

Little is known about these plants, particularly at the molecular level, despite many of them being used by indigenous peoples of California for thousands of years to treat and prevent illness.

Cal State East Bay's Green Biome Institute is aiming to change that. "A genome is what defines us and gives us our individual characteristics, our eye color, our hair color," said Melis Akman, staff scientist with the GBI. "In plants, that can mean their tolerance to drought or whether they're going to be successful in a particular environment. So having this information is helpful in ensuring we are increasing and conserving the highest genetic diversity possible." ▶





**“Resistance is becoming an emerging public issue, not just for UTIs, but other infections and diseases like tuberculosis [that] have become not only antibiotic-resistant, but multidrug-resistant, which means the search for new, medicinal treatments is imperative.”**

**— Alejandra Moreno**

## MYSTERIOUS MANZANITA

Founded in 2019, the Green Biome Institute, the first of its kind in the California State University system, aims to preserve the genetic diversity of plants in California and contribute to the discovery of new or useful biological processes that can improve human lives. Researchers ask: What if an endangered plant could help cure cancer? Or survive poor soil? Or provide insight into why some plants have a higher tolerance for drought?

One such plant: manzanita.

The shrub or small tree-like plant found throughout the western United States and Mexico is the common name for many species of the genus *Arctostaphylos*. Known for their smooth orange-red bark and stiff and twisted branches, manzanita can survive with very little water and poor soil.

And for Indigenous people in what is now Northern California, manzanita leaves and berries have been used for generations to treat everything from mild urinary tract infections to stomach ailments, skin sores and headaches. Which means they may hold information scientists can use to treat any number of infections, rapidly growing resistant to common medications and antibiotics.

“Various species of manzanita have been used by Indigenous people of California for centuries, so we are taking what we know from those widely used species and comparing it to the species we know very little about,” said Ana Almeida, assistant professor of biological sciences. “There is one manzanita that is already commercialized for use in treating urinary tract infections and in the cosmetic industry for lightening creams.”

It’s a phenomenon that has long fascinated Almeida, who has a background in biology and medicine, and her students, one of whom comes from a line of Mexican women who have long used native plants to treat a variety of illnesses and woes.

Alejandra Moreno, a student-researcher funded by the College of Science Student Research Assistant program and Cal State East Bay’s Center for Student Research, has long known she wanted to be a doctor. The first-generation Mexican American grew up watching family who didn’t have access to healthcare in the United States travel back to Mexico for care or find their own ways to treat ailments at home.

“My family and generations before me have used herbal medicine,” Moreno said. “It’s so common, and I grew up hearing my grandma say ‘go outside to your garden, find this plant, make a tea and drink it.’”

Now, with a goal of working as a doctor at the intersection of preventative health and underserved communities, Moreno is exploring the science behind native knowledge.

In the coming weeks, she and Almeida will be working on a process known as disc diffusion — streaking plates with bacteria found in UTIs and then pacing paper discs coated in plant samples to measure

susceptibility to the antibiotics naturally occurring in the manzanita.

“When I first saw that manzanita could be used to treat UTIs, I was like ‘no way,’” Moreno said, adding she’d hear many common infections have become increasingly antibiotic-resistant in recent years, leading researchers to find a new way to treat them. “Resistance is becoming an emerging public issue, not just for UTIs, but other infections and diseases like tuberculosis have become not only antibiotic-resistant, but multidrug-resistant, which means the search for new, medicinal treatments is imperative.”

Plus, Moreno said in a way, her research honors not only her roots but also those native to what is now California.

“I’m not the first person to do medicinal plant research, it’s already been done for years, but we are expanding on that knowledge and giving homage to the indigenous communities, acknowledging and honoring them and [their] knowledge,” Moreno said.

## IMPORTANT PARTNERSHIPS

Since its inception, partnerships with private donors, botanical gardens and industry leaders have been at the heart of the GBI.

The institute, which will be housed in the forthcoming \$30 million Applied Sciences Center, was seed-funded through a gift from alumnus and Cal State East Bay Educational Foundation member Randy Davis (B.S. ’02, Biological Sciences; M.S. ’06, Biological Sciences) and his wife Pat as part of the university’s first comprehensive capital campaign.

Earlier this year, the institute was awarded \$52,500 from Illumina, a California-based company working to develop, manufacture and market systems used in the analysis of genetic variation and biological functions for genomic research centers, pharmaceutical companies and academic institutions.

The funding will provide training for 10 high school, 60 undergraduate and two graduate students for a project that will ultimately create a GBI Germplasm Bank, a collection of live plant materials. Dubbed the “GBI-Illumina for Conservation Program,” the one-year effort will focus on student-researchers using Illumina Sequencing Platforms to establish protocols for the creation of genome-level data on several endangered, threatened or rare California plants.

The eventual GBI Germplasm Bank will house plant materials that scientists can use for years to come.

“In a futuristic sense, the germplasm bank could help us resurrect some of these plants ... it might be hundreds of years, but we might be able to look at the genome and say ‘let’s put these genes in a sister species and see if we can get the sister species to act like the extinct one,’” Akman said. “It’s amazing to think about what we could learn in 100 years; it gives me the goosebumps.”

In addition to corporate partners, GBI is working with several botanical gardens throughout the state as well as with the California Native Plant Society, those groups who are working to propagate ►



**“Various species of manzanita have been used by Indigenous people of California for centuries, so we are taking what we know from those widely used species and comparing it to the species we know very little about.”**

**— Ana Almeida**





**“It’s amazing to think about what we could learn in 100 years; it gives me the goosebumps.”**

**— Melis Akman**

native California plants but may not have the resources or skills to genetically sequence them.

“It’s beneficial to us because we wouldn’t have the specimens we need if we didn’t partner with them, but it’s also beneficial to them,” Akman said.

## FOR CALIFORNIA’S FUTURE

The partnerships also mean students working as researchers with GBI are involved in hands-on opportunities to develop skills with cutting-edge technology used daily in the industry. Faculty say this increases their students’ competitiveness in the job market, particularly within the biotech field, which is expected to grow exponentially in the next 10 years.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, California is projected to have nearly 10% of the nation’s STEM jobs by 2022. Labor trends predict job growth in health, biomedical and environmental industries by an average of 33% over a 10-year span.

By engaging high school, undergraduate and graduate students in hands-on research using industry technology, the GBI not only prepares students for those jobs, but faculty also say it contributes to the creation of a diverse regional workforce for biotech and related industries.

“It means we can potentially have students with a more direct pipeline to industry jobs and post-graduation work and also create a connection to Cal State East Bay,” Almeida said. “The grant also means students are able to work with technology [such as that developed by Illumina] without having to go to outside companies or having to have additional jobs to support themselves while they work on their research.”


And the research they’re doing now is what students are likely to encounter once they graduate.

“In the Bay Area, especially in the biotech industry, there’s a lot of potential for this research, especially around native plants,” Almeida said. “In our lab, we are using highly technical molecular techniques, all of which are widely used in industry, which is helping them become more competitive.”

Not to mention, the faculty and students involved in the GBI know they’re contributing to the future of California and the state’s ability to handle an ever-longer fire season, drought and other natural disasters.

“As the climate changes, as fires rage through the state more frequently, we’re looking toward a not very bright future,” Almeida said. “If we can contribute to the research around that and show the potential of students and what we can do, we have an incredible opportunity.”

Akman agrees.

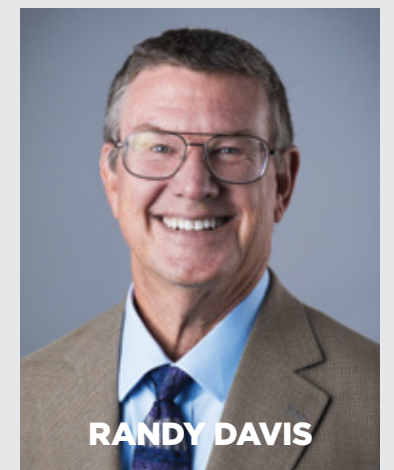
“We are doing this for California,” she said. 

# A \$3M MATCH FOR SCIENCE

**Cal State East Bay donors offer dollar-for-dollar match to help university raise remaining funds needed for \$30M Applied Sciences Center**



**RICH ROBBINS**



**RANDY DAVIS**

**BY NATALIE FEULNER PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO**

**T**wo Cal State East Bay donors are leading the way for the university to raise the remaining \$6.1 million needed to build a \$30 million Applied Sciences Center with a \$3 million dollar-for-dollar match for gifts that support completing the campaign for the new building.

Since 2010, the College of Science has been the largest, fastest-growing college on campus. At the same time, California needs more than 2 million STEM workers and is facing a severe shortage of STEM-trained teachers due to smaller class sizes and a drop in teacher credential enrollment.

“The innovation [and] STEM economy is essential to communities all throughout Northern California, not just here in the Bay Area,” said Rich Robbins, donor and founder of Wareham Development. “Cal State East Bay graduates not only fuel that larger regional economy but, as one of the most diverse schools in the system, CSUEB students bring much-needed diversity of background, thought and perspective to this highly competitive and essential field.”

The forthcoming Applied Sciences Center is designed to meet those needs. The 20,000 square foot building will feature state-of-the-art interdisciplinary areas for student and faculty research projects, well-equipped labs, and a STEM Lab to support students moving through their introductory courses.

“By investing in this infrastructure and technology today, we are investing in critical science education for our future students and its benefits will be felt in our community and many others around the world,” said donor and Cal State East Bay Educational Foundation Trustee Randy Davis (B.S. ’02 Biological Sciences; M.S. ’06, Biolog-


ical Sciences), who alongside his wife, Pat, is supporting the ASC.

Robbins agreed, saying he hopes the match will inspire even more students to pursue careers in STEM and help meet the needs of California’s growing STEM industry.

“It is our privilege and our mission to help students without the resources or foundation to access equal opportunity to career paths in innovation industries where their skills will always be needed and which will always provide them with jobs with dignity and the opportunity to stay and grow here in Northern California,” he said.

Both the Davis and Robbins families have previously supported Cal State East Bay’s efforts to prepare students for future jobs in STEM fields.

The Nancy P. and Richard K. Robbins Family Foundation has long supported the Institute for STEM education and previously donated \$1 million to the ASC. And since 2019, Davis and his wife Pat have provided more than \$1.8 million in seed funding for the now thriving Green Biome Institute and \$1.5 million for the future GBI lab in the ASC. The institute, which will be a cornerstone of the new ASC building, is the only one of its kind in the California State University system.

“I am sincerely grateful for the generosity of donors who continue to provide resources and support for our students, as Randy, Pat, Rich and Nancy have done with this match,” said President Cathy Sandeen. “Because of their gifts, we will have a state-of-the-art Applied Sciences Center where our students can continue researching and building the hands-on skills they’ll need to become the scientists and engineers who will solve some of our world’s most pressing challenges.” 





Daniela Passoni was recently named vice captain for the South Africa National Team, which will compete in the 2021 Olympic Games. **CSUEB ATHLETICS**

## CAL STATE EAST BAY WATER POLO PLAYER NAMED VICE CAPTAIN FOR SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL TEAM

BY ERIC HARDING

**D**aniela Passoni still has to pinch herself. The Cal State East Bay junior goalkeeper has already been a leader in and out of the pool for the Pioneer water polo program. Now she's ready for the world stage.

Passoni was recently named vice captain for the South Africa National Team, which will compete in the 2021 Olympic Games.

"It's such a dream," she said. "Just to be able to get the experience and play for my country and to represent it at something like the Olympics is such a dream that has come true for me. [And] being awarded vice captain is just the cherry on top."

A native of Waverley, South Africa, Passoni was on track to leave the Pioneers for a short stretch in March to compete with South Africa in 2020 before the Olympics were eventually canceled.

She's no stranger to national team competition. A two-time ACW-PC All-American, Passoni initially joined the South Africa water polo system while in high school.

Passoni recently became even more of a factor within the program when new head coach Delanie Mentoer replaced Pierre Le Roux as head coach.

But when team trials began in December 2020, Passoni wasn't even sure she would make the final roster, much less be named captain.

"I was so surprised [to be named vice captain]," she said. "I had a tear or two of joy."

Following December trials and a short break for the holidays, Passoni and teammates now work out twice a day, with weight sessions three times a week.

The team will have one final set of trials in February, which will further reduce the number of players on the team as they continue to prepare for the summer.

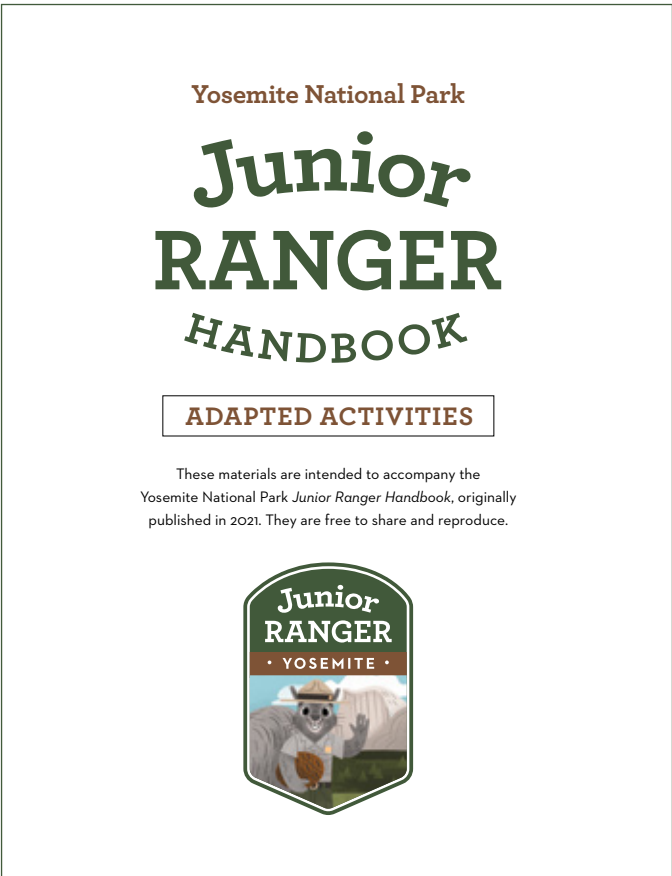
With the Pioneers' 2020 season canceled midway through, followed by a complete cancellation of the 2021 campaign, Passoni hasn't set foot in the United States since last spring.

Until she returns, the Pioneers' two-year starting goalie is looking toward the future.

"I haven't seen my teammates face-to-face in so long, and I really do miss them," she said. "I miss the whole vibe. Training, going to practices and my coaches."

"When I heard the news, I was devastated. But what helped me get through it is I'm still training. I'm hoping when August rolls around, this training will help me stay fit for the season." **EE**





(top left, bottom right) The Junior Ranger Handbook Adapted Activities guide created by Cal State East Bay alumnus Penny Hatch is designed to help children of all abilities explore the natural wonders of Yosemite National Park. **DREW CONNER, NATALIE FEULNER, YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY**



### Introduction for Caregivers

All children can do the activities in the *Junior Ranger Handbook* with a little bit of your help! The following adapted activities are for children who have difficulty using speech to communicate or using a pencil, crayon, or marker to write or draw.

Each activity includes specific instructions. You can help your child understand and respond to these adapted *Junior Ranger* activities with gestures and touch, and by pointing to pictures in the *Junior Ranger Handbook*. Instead of speaking or writing their answers, children can work with you to make choices from a list created for each adapted activity using any physical behavior (e.g., nodding, smiling, pointing, making a noise, or blinking). If your child uses alternative communication such as picture symbols, computer-generated messages, or sign language, you can write their responses in the handbook. All responses should be recorded in the handbook itself and, when your child has finished, the handbook shown to a park ranger for your child to receive their Junior Ranger badge.

These activities require children to use different senses to discover and describe Yosemite. If your child has vision or hearing loss or finds it uncomfortable to touch things, some activities will be more appropriate than others. A few activities also have options that make it possible to complete them in alternate ways.

As your child experiences Yosemite, don't forget about the interpreters and rangers you see throughout the park. They can provide you and your child with additional information about the specific areas you are visiting. We hope your child enjoys exploring Yosemite with you and becoming a Junior Ranger!

# Fostering Stewardship and Accessibility

## Alumna, professor emerita help create first-ever Yosemite Junior Ranger adaptive guide

Explore. Learn. Protect.

The National Park's Service Junior Ranger program is completed by thousands of children across dozens of parks throughout the U.S. every year. In visitor centers ranging from Denali National Park in Alaska to Everglades in Florida, Junior Rangers complete a series of conservation-related activities and, in the end, dutifully raise their right hands and promise to serve as park advocates and share their "ranger" stories with friends and family.

In California, of the 4.5 million visitors to Yosemite National Park each year, upwards of 20,000 participate in the program.

Now, thanks to a new partnership between Yosemite National Park, the Yosemite Conservancy, and Cal State East Bay alumna Penny Hatch and Professor Emerita Jan Avent, that program is more accessible than ever for children of all abilities.

"The Junior Ranger program helps children learn about the park, what makes it unique and what plants and animals live here," said Adonia Ripple, chief of Yosemite Operations for the Yosemite Conservancy. "It's to foster a sense of stewardship and learning about things like the Leave No Trace principles, staying on trails, and leaving what you find."

But according to Avent, who taught at Cal State East Bay for 19 years and now serves on the Yosemite Conservancy board of trustees, some of the activities are inaccessible to children with differing needs.

"I tell you what; I had tears in my eyes thinking of children who come to the park that have been sidelined because they could not follow the guide as it is," she said.

Wanting to find a way to support all children, Avent and her husband seed-funded the project, and she reached out to her former student and mentee Penny Hatch, now a professor at the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Together the pair has created an adaptive supplemental book to accompany the guide for families and children who may need to modify some of the activities required of the program.

"Many of the activities rely heavily on vision, and there are many students I work with that are either deaf-blind, blind or have significant visual constraints," Hatch said. "We asked ourselves, 'How do we make sure that the observations can be done through a sense other than vision.'"

For example, one activity in the existing Junior Ranger Hand-

book is called "Geology Rocks." Children are asked to look at the various rocks found throughout Yosemite and draw what they see. In the adapted version, children — through a communication partner, if needed — are able to describe instead how the rocks feel. In another activity, children would explore a model of the roundhouse which is a building used for ceremonies by the native tribes of Yosemite. In the Junior Ranger Guide, children draw a picture of the roundhouse, but in the adapted activity, children make the connection to the purpose of the roundhouse by communicating about ceremonies they have participated in such as birthdays, weddings, graduations and family reunions.

"Many children don't have the motor skills to control a pencil, but if the goal of the activity is to demonstrate their observations, how can we change that? The onus is on us," Hatch said. "The way one child communicates could look very different from another. Their response could be a smile, a vocalization, a point, the important thing is to be tuning in and watching."

The adaptive guide will be available to Yosemite visitors this summer, and the team is hopeful they'll receive feedback from families that can then be incorporated into making the park even more accessible.

"I speak for our whole publishing team when I say that you can't read it without feeling moved," Ripple said. "The level of adaptation needed was enlightening. Now we know this handbook can be accessed by all children."

As for Hatch and Avent, they have their sights set on the remaining 62 national parks.

"I'm hoping we can get some sort of feedback if this works for families and incorporate any tweaks or suggestions they have, and then I would love to write some guidelines for the entire National Parks Service that they can use."

And in the meantime, Avent said she's proud to know the project means 'the park' is now more accessible for everyone.

"This was one of those heartwarming experiences in life that just puts a lump in your throat," she said. "This creates a wide-open door, a wide-open path for all children. No more looking at what everybody else does and not being able to participate. That's what accessibility is. It's not making it easier; it's letting people be who they are and do the same thing that everybody else is doing." ■





Cal State Alumna Clarisse Choy joined a hālau hula, or hula school as a way to stay connected to Hawaiian culture. COURTESY OF CLARISSE CHOY

# “I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu”

CAL STATE EAST BAY ALUMNA TEACHES HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE COURSES TO OFF-ISLAND, REMOTE LEARNERS



BY ERIN MERDINGER '10, '15

is tied to the text of the dance. If you don't understand what the text says and you're just sort of pantomiming, you're not really doing hula," said Choy, who has been studying hula for over 15 years.

Choy graduated from the master's program last summer and credits the eLearning program for providing the building blocks on how to structure her Hawaiian language classes.

"As a student in the program, I learned sound pedagogy, instructional design models, assessment methods, and other building blocks of eLearning course design. That foundational knowledge, combined with practical real-world application, gave me the confidence to create courses and teach online."

In addition to her beginner-level Hawaiian language class, which is normally taught in a hybrid format but due to the COVID-19 pandemic is now taught entirely online, Choy is also designing a self-paced online course on one of the foundational works of Hawaiian literature, "The Epic Tale of Hi'iakaikapoliopele." The story offers a wealth of knowledge that every hula dancer should know, Choy says, by providing details into the geographic landscape of the islands, social and religious practices, Hawaiian hierarchy systems, healing arts and other Hawaiian cultural practices and customs.

For Choy, it is this deeper understanding of the Hawaiian language and hula that has been the main motivating force behind her passion for language revitalization.

"There's so much depth in the language and the stories and the

culture so that's what really drives me to just do my part to keep that alive, to perpetuate it," explained Choy.

But even with passionate language learners and instructors like Choy, many indigenous languages are still considered threatened.

According to the Endangered Languages Project — a project that supports language preservation and documentation around the world — more than 40 percent of the world's approximate 7,000 languages are at risk of disappearing. The Hawaiian language is still one of them.

"So much knowledge is tied to language, especially indigenous languages," said Choy. "The way they named their plants, the way that they order time, or even just the way you express yourself, your feelings and your thoughts. When those things are not used and English words are adopted for it, that knowledge is lost. That happens with a lot of languages."

Choy takes her role as a language instructor very seriously and refers to a Hawaiian proverb "I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu," which means the branches grow because of the trunk, to explain her appreciation for her teachers and hula community and the knowledge they have shared with her over the years.

"There's a saying in Hawaiian that you're an extension of your teacher. It's really important to me as a teacher to be able to represent my teachers well," said Choy. "Whatever I'm doing, especially when language instruction and cultural instruction is involved, I want to do it in a very careful and sensitive way that acknowledges the teachers and people who shared the knowledge with me." ■

When Cal State East Bay alumna Clarisse Choy was growing up in Honolulu, Hawaii, in the 1970s, the option to learn the Hawaiian language wasn't widely available. In fact, the Hawaiian language was in serious danger of extinction.

"In the time that I was growing up, the Hawaiian language was present but you heard it mostly in songs and hula and culture," said Choy, whose grandparents and parents immigrated from China to Hawaii. "It wasn't spoken every day. It was seen as a cultural and intellectual language but not spoken every day and was in jeopardy of dying out."

It wasn't until the early 1980s that a grassroots organization, 'Aha Pūnana Leo, was created to support the revitalization of the Hawaiian language and help lift a nearly 90-year-old ban on using the Hawaiian language in schools. With the establishment of its first Hawaiian language immersion preschool in 1984, Pūnana Leo — which translates to "language nest" or "nest of voices" — and later the expansion to Hawaiian medium K-12 schools, a new generation of native Hawaiian speakers was on the rise.

Now, years later, Choy is doing her part to help continue the revival of this endangered language as a Hawaiian language learner and instructor in the Bay Area.

"As a Hawaiian language learner and speaker, I support Indigenous language revitalization," Choy said. "I intend to continue teaching Hawaiian language, especially to learners who live off-island and need to learn remotely."

Choy, who moved to the Bay Area to attend undergraduate school at UC Berkeley, understands firsthand the importance of distance learning. After joining a hālau hula, or hula school, in Berkeley as a way to stay connected to Hawaiian culture, it was this connection with Hawaii and love of hula dancing that encouraged her to formally learn the language as an adult through a distance learning program.

"For someone like me who was always exposed to the [Hawaiian] language but didn't really understand it, I always wanted to have that understanding and the facility to speak it," said Choy. "Especially because if the language was in jeopardy of dying out — it's a beautiful language, a beautiful culture, a beautiful people — I wanted to do what I could to preserve and perpetuate that language."

Choy began studying the Hawaiian language in 2008 through a distance learning program based in Hilo, Hawaii. It was her own experience as an online learner that sparked her interest in online teaching and ultimately led her to enroll in Cal State East Bay's M.S. in Education, Option in Online Teaching and Learning program (which has since been elevated to the M.S. in eLearning program in fall 2020).

Choy currently teaches a beginning Hawaiian language course to several cohorts of students based in Northern California, and although the course is open to anyone interested in the Hawaiian language and culture, the majority of her students are actively engaged in the hula community.

"In hula, the Hawaiian language is very important because, unlike other dance forms, the movements and everything you do in hula



# A LIFE OF MUSIC AND LAUGHTER



## CAL STATE EAST BAY ALUMNA LEAVES LEGACY GIFT TO MUSIC DEPARTMENT

BY NATALIE FEULNER

In the early 1970s, when Cal State East Bay was CSU Hayward, and students clad in tie-dye and bell bottoms students filled the quad, MaryAnnette Venti was a musician and class comedian known and loved by many.

Now, just a year after succumbing to a long battle with cancer, her legacy lives on thanks to a gift to the university and its music students.

"A gift this significant will allow us to support our music students in the form of scholarships and program initiatives," said Music Department Chair Buddy James. "Music tends to be one of the most expensive degrees on a university campus, and this gift will support many students in future years."

Mariko Abe, a longtime assistant in the Music Department at Cal State East Bay and friend of Venti's, said as a student at then-CSU Hayward, Venti was well known for bringing different people together.

"When you have that many individuals together, there's always going to be differences in personalities ... MaryAnette had this wonderful way of instilling this sense of community and collaboration among her fellow students," Abe said. "She would tease people ... but if you happened to be the subject of her jabs as I often was, it was never an insult; we always knew that if you were the subject of her jokes, she was doing it out of sheer affection for you."

As part of the band program, Venti and others would travel around California recruiting new students and playing at various venues, including Disneyland.

"Those long bus rides together were where a lot of people would get to know one another, and we just had a wonderful time together," Abe said.

An avid sports fan, if Venti wasn't spending time with friends in the Music Department, she was nearby at the P.E. department.

"[She had] energy galore, so much energy," Abe said. "And when you look at photos of her, you can see her infectious smile, and you can still see that sense of humor, that audacious, almost wicked sense of humor ... oh, she was a total riot."

After graduating from CSU Hayward, Venti joined the Mount Diablo Unified School District in 1976, where she taught music to elementary and middle school students for more than 35 years. She was also involved in the Diablo Valley Chorus and played clarinet for the Contra Costa Musical Theater and the Diablo Light Opera Company, and conducted for the Brentwood Community Theater orchestra.

"When you hear from her students, they often talk about how she instilled in them a lifelong love of music and the arts and how she inspired them to always work their hardest and attain their best no matter what level they were," Abe said. "She felt that we as teachers should be the adults that we as individuals wished we had as students."


According to James, a primary obstacle for Cal State East Bay music students, in particular, is being able to afford school while pursuing a time-intensive degree. He said Venti's gift would help the department increase scholarship opportunities to ensure they can continue studying despite any financial hardships they may face. In addition, James is hopeful the department will be able to invest in equipment that will help prepare students for work as professional musicians after graduation.

"The pandemic has highlighted the importance of technology in all of our lives, and we are working to keep our technology equipment up to date and relevant for our students so they are ready for the professional challenges they will face after leaving university," he said.

The department is also looking forward to adding to its musical instrument collection in an effort to diversify its offerings and work toward a more inclusive program.

"We are also working to align directly with the mission of Cal State East Bay, and incorporating music from the cultures of our students is a primary initiative for our faculty," James said. "We hope to expand our outstanding Western instrument collection to include instruments from around the world."

Abe said she wasn't surprised to hear Venti left a gift to the university and Music Department upon her death. She hopes it will serve as a reminder of the legacy Venti leaves and her passion and love for both the study of music and the students who dedicate their lives to composing, performing, and everything in between.

"The Music Department really holds a special place in the hearts of many students and alumni ... the sense of accomplishment and respect of music that we developed as students is a feeling that stays with us for the rest of our lives," Abe said. "The program is very challenging and rigorous, and there are times when you feel like it's sink or swim ... but throughout the time that I was there, I could feel this very strong camaraderie among the students and the support that is offered by both the students and staff, you just don't see that everywhere." 



# CLASS NOTES

## FOREVER PIONEER

This is where we celebrate life's moments from fellow Pioneers with the university community. Do you have career news, accomplishments, fond memories or life changes to share? We'd love to hear from you! Submit your class note online at [csueastbay.edu/alumni](https://csueastbay.edu/alumni).

## 1960s

**HORACIO FONSECA** (B.A. '69, Latin American Studies) is a recently retired professor emeritus of history. Horacio was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship for graduate studies at UCLA in history and worked for the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 and the World Cup USA in 1994. He established and founded several collegiate soccer programs and worked extensively in youth, collegiate and amateur soccer. He also served as co-founder of the National Latino Soccer Coaches in 1995 and served as Intercollegiate Director of Athletics at LA City College.

## 1970s

**BILL SALEEBEY** (M.S. '73, Counseling) has written a new book titled "Networking in the Virtual Age: Connecting with No Limits", which offers a roadmap for businesses and professionals on how to survive and thrive in the age of Zoom. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a brave new era of digital interaction, forcing society to quickly adapt. Saleebey draws on decades of experience as a business networking consultant and trainer — along with firsthand observation, expert research and COVID-era case studies — to provide a clear blueprint for effectively networking in an online setting. His guidance includes practical steps on how to harness the power of virtual channels and connect with others in creative and positive ways.

**WILLIAM BAXTER** (B.S. '79, Recreation) has been included in Marquis Who's Who. Supported by decades of practiced expertise, Baxter excels as a civilian contract

worker with Service Source Inc., which hires people with disabilities as contract workers at the U.S. Army Mountain Post at Fort Carson, Colorado. After more than five years with the organization, he retired in 2020, but continues to work between two and three days a week to stay active. Previously, Baxter gained valuable experience with such companies and organizations as World Vision, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International and St. Jude Heritage Medical Group. Alongside his professional career, he is a 30-year member of Toastmasters International, through which he has won many contests for his storytelling abilities. Baxter has written more than 100 books for children, including "W.E.B. Tales," a compilation of short stories.

## 1980s



**MICHAEL TROTT** (B.S. '86, Business Administration) is the vice president of finance for the Petaluma-based financial services firm CrossCheck. Trott has over 30 years of experience (including 15-plus as a CFO) in finance, administration and operations for middle-market fintech and consumer packaged goods companies. His background includes working for companies such as EQIS Capital Management, Worldwide Inc., Central Garden & Pet Company, and Deloitte & Touche.



**SARA TOYLOY** (B.S. '87, Biological Sciences) has been appointed to the Board of Directors for Shockwave. Toyloy, who is

a recognized leader in the medical device industry with over 30 years of professional experience in regulatory affairs and clinical research, currently serves as president of Fabrica Consulting LLC, a consulting firm she founded in 2020 to provide global regulatory and clinical trial strategies to support the medical device approval process. Throughout her career, Toyloy has served in multiple successive positions from pre-clinical research associate to company president. In her most recent role, she served as president of new therapies, and chief regulatory officer of Elixir Medical Corporation, a company focused on delivering innovative solutions that combine state-of-the-art medical devices with advanced pharmaceuticals.

**KEVIN MCINTOSH** ('89, Teaching Credential) is a recently retired teacher. For 30 years, he has taught English, history, drama and public speaking to eighth-graders in Oakland, New York City and greater Boston. Through Teachers College, Columbia University, he developed a model writing workshop program and worked with two dozen of their student teachers. His former eighth-grade students are now journalists and novelists, actors and activists, inventors and innovators. His debut novel, "Class Dismissed", informed by his experiences teaching students of every race and class on both coasts, will be published in July 2021.

## 1990s

**IDA PERA** (B.A. '92, Art) is a retired educator from Ukiah Unified School District. She enjoyed teaching second-language learners in second, third and fourth grades. One of them became a doctor at a Kaiser Permanente Hospital. After she retired, she worked eight years as an art teacher for two school

districts, going into classrooms to teach art. Now, she has a freelance art studio.

**RANDALL BILLINGSLEY** (B.S. '93, Criminal Justice Administration) is the chief of police for the Truckee Police Department. Chief Billingsley has had an extensive career in law enforcement. He worked for the Oakland Police Department in 1994. He served there for two years before moving to the San Mateo Police Department in 1996. During that time, he earned several Chief's Commendations. He served as a detective for three years, specializing in the investigation of crimes against persons, sexual assault investigations and homicide investigations. He was also a member of the SWAT team for over five years, specializing as a sniper. Billingsley changed career paths when the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office selected him to be an inspector in 2003. In 2010 he was chosen as the chief investigator of the Nevada County District Attorney's Office. During his tenure there, he has transformed their agency into one of the premier detective bureaus in our region. Billingsley has been the Truckee Police Department's police captain since July 2019.



**NICOLE RICE** (B.A. '94, Political Science) is the president of the California Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition. Rice works with state regulators and legislators to forge a path towards cleaner air and better environmental solutions that can come from a more inclusive adoption of natural gas fuel and vehicles. Before joining the CNGVC,

## CAL STATE EAST BAY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION IMPORTANT PRIVACY CHOICE — Restrict Information Sharing With Affinity Partners

You have the right to control whether we share your name, address and email address with our affinity partners (companies that the Alumni Association partners with to offer products and services to alumni). You can update your privacy choice status by doing one of the following:

Complete an online form at [csueastbay.edu/alumni](https://csueastbay.edu/alumni)  
Call toll-free: (866) 414-8136

Email us at [alumni@csueastbay.edu](mailto:alumni@csueastbay.edu) with your current contact information and "privacy choice" in the subject line.

## EAST BAY INNOVATION TALKS

Everyone comes up with innovative ideas that make life easier and solve everything from mundane to complex problems, but the process of moving an idea out of your head and into reality comes down to one thing: execution. The commitment to doing everything you need to do to make it real. Learn from our innovative Pioneer alumni what their experiences were in creating their own businesses and developing social innovations that are changing life in the East Bay and around the world!

### PREVIOUS EAST BAY INNOVATION TALKS SPEAKER:

**Chanterria McGilbra** (B.S. '98, Sociology)

Chanterria McGilbra built a successful career as a biotech consultant until a car named Coco inspired her to launch



the first all-female Ferrari rally as well as a foundation that helps young women.

Watch previous recordings, including Chanterria's, and learn about East Bay Innovation Talks: [csueastbay.edu/EBIT](https://csueastbay.edu/EBIT)

Rice served as senior policy director of government relations for the California Manufacturers & Technology Association, a statewide nonprofit association that works to foster a strong business climate for the more than 30,000 manufacturing, processing and technology-based companies in California. In this role, she worked on a myriad of issues, including workforce development, labor and employment, and innovation incentives.



**SEAN WASHINGTON** (B.S. '97, Criminal Justice Administration) is the police chief for the City of Fremont. Washington joined the Fremont Police Department in 1997 and over the course of 24 years has held a variety of roles, including detective, field training officer, SWAT team member, arrest control instructor and driving instructor. He also served as the supervisor of the school resource officer unit. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant in 2007, lieutenant in 2011 and captain in 2015. Over the past six

years he has rotated as commander of the department's three divisions and has vast organizational knowledge. He currently oversees investigations, internal affairs, training and personnel and is active within the Fremont community as well as within the law enforcement profession. Washington has also coached several local high school teams in Fremont, is the department's coordinator for Special Olympics of Northern California, has organized charitable events benefiting members of the community, and developed the FPD Community Safety Fair. He currently serves as the president of the Alameda County Commanders' Group. He is an associate member of the California Police Chiefs Association (CPCA) and is an active member of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), as well as many other professional associations.



**LAKISHA YOUNG** (B.A. '98, English) is co-founder and CEO of The Oakland Reach, a parent-led advocacy group. The Reach

garnered national attention for its City-Wide Virtual Hub, which kicked off in June 2020 with an online summer academic and enrichment program for low-income K-8 students. Young is working to make sure that low-income students have access to high-quality distance learning during the pandemic.

**MICHAEL FAY** (M.S. '99, Taxation) is the CFO for Purebase Corporation. Fay is an innovative and collaborative executive with a background in all aspects of private and public accounting. He has a proven record of improving operating performance in high-growth, fast-paced companies. Fay has operated as CFO for Silicon Valley and San Francisco-based companies. Most recently, he prepared Whizz Systems Inc. and Conference Direct for takeout. Fay was a co-founder of the energy integration enterprise Stalwart Power along with Bay Area entrepreneur Woody Gibson.

**JALIZA JOHNSON** (B.S. '99, Business Administration) is an assistant patient care manager on a blood and marrow transplant unit for Stanford Health Care. Jaliza made a career change from working in sales/marketing to becoming a registered nurse, and co-founded a nonprofit organization called A Sista's Touch in 2017. The mission of A Sista's Touch is to cultivate and celebrate Black excellence through the personal and professional inspirations of African American women across all generations in local Bay Area communities, with a foundational focus on adolescent girls.



**LEIGH JOHNSON** (B.S. '99, Biological Sciences) is owner at the Law Offices of Leigh E. Johnson in Richmond, California. She is a practicing trial lawyer and principal of Trial Whisperer Trial Consulting, in which she assists lawyers preparing for civil and criminal trials with a focus on cases with difficult facts and complicated scenarios. Leigh is an active member of several legal organizations and routinely attends seminars, teaches trial skills and gives presentations

to trial lawyer associations and groups in California and throughout the country. Her background includes five years in the United States Air Force as a mobile combat specialist; 12 years as an air traffic controller providing radar control for aircraft into and out of the three major Bay Area airports; and seven years as a biological scientist.

**SWAMMY IRRINKI** (MBA '99) is the vice president of marketing and business development for MosChip Technologies. He leads the long-term strategy for growth in semiconductor and embedded systems business units along with North America business development for turnkey application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC) and design services for the company.



**FRANCIS MENDOZA** ('99, Teaching Credential) is a naturalist with the East Bay Regional Park District. He educates people of all backgrounds on the natural and cultural history of the region's parks, shorelines and open spaces.

## 2000s

**JASON MITCHELL** (B.S. '02, Business Administration) has been appointed public works director for the City of Baltimore. Born in Oakland, Jason previously served the City of Oakland as assistant city administrator, where he supervised several departments, including public works. This was following three years as Oakland's director of public works. Jason also served as CFO of San Francisco's Head Start program. He earned both his MBA and doctorate in organizational development from the University of San Francisco.





Bridget Love



Emerald Templeton

**BRIDGET LOVE** (B.A. '04 Mass Communication & M.A. '07 Speech Communication) and **EMERALD TEMPLETON** (B.A. '06 Human Development) published "Elevating Marginalized Voices in Academe: Lessons for a New Generation of Scholars." Their new book is an anthology of narratives from scholars of color about traversing doctoral studies in American higher education. This book shares advice, how-tos, validations and cautionary tales based on minoritized students' recent experiences in doctoral studies.



**NIA SAMADY** (B.S. '04, Computer Science) is the vice president of partner success at Salesforce and is responsible for enabling and supporting architects to build technical solutions. In her role, she can combine her business acumen and technical background to help customers with their digital transformation needs. Samady is also a Cal State East Bay Alumni Association board member and joined the board to pay it forward.



**HEATHER RUIZ** (MPA '05) has more than 20 years of public sector experience and is the City of Napa's director of human resources. Most recently, Ruiz served as the director of human resources with the City of Vallejo from 2018 to 2021. There, she managed a staff of 17 employees while providing services to all city departments and 600 employees. Ruiz also served in an acting assignment in the Vallejo city manager's office supervising the housing division, public information office and administrative staff, among other programs. Previously, Ruiz worked for Napa County for eight years, beginning her time as the deputy director of employment and compensation and ending it as director of human resources. She has also worked as the deputy director of human resources for the City of San Jose and the director of human resources at the San Mateo Medical Center.

**MIKE BYRNES** (MBA '05) is the CFO for eFFECTOR Therapeutics Inc. He previously was senior vice president of finance at Principia Biopharma Inc., which was acquired by Sanofi in September 2020. Prior to that, Byrnes served as CFO of Alkahest Inc. from May 2018 to January 2020 and CFO of Ocera Therapeutics Inc. from December 2014 until its acquisition by Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals in December 2017. Byrnes served as corporate controller of Maxygen Inc. from March 2010 to December 2014 and prior to that, held finance positions of increasing responsibility from 2000 to 2010 with NeurogesX Inc., Lipid Sciences Inc. and ADAC Laboratories Inc.



**THOMISHA BOOKER** (B.A. '06, Sociology) is the CEO of Hey Carter! Books — named after

## FINANCIAL LITERACY SERIES



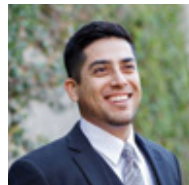
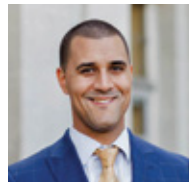
**THE FINANCIAL LITERACY SERIES** is led by industry experts to help alumni understand and effectively use various financial skills around budgeting, investing and financial management. The series aims to help alumni better plan for important financial decisions and milestones; and increase financial independence.

### PREVIOUS FINANCIAL LITERACY SERIES SPEAKERS:

**John Lane** (B.S. '07 & MBA '10) and **Miguel Delgado** (B.A. '12)

John Lane and Miguel Delgado are both certified financial planners for David White and Associates. They presented a webinar teaching alumni how to think about money management with a clear vision.

Watch previous recordings, including John and Miguel's, and learn about the Financial Literacy Series: [csueastbay.edu/FLS](https://csueastbay.edu/FLS)



Booker's 4-year-old son, Carter — and is the only self-published author featured in Netflix's Bookmarks, a series in which celebrities read children's books that feature Black characters and nurture a positive self-image among Black children. Booker published her first book, "My Brown Skin," in September 2017. While building her business and inspiring the next generation of authors, artists and professionals, Booker still manages her full-time job as an administrator for the Alameda Health System in Oakland's Highland Hospital.

**ANTTI VIKSTEDT** (M.A. '08, Applied Anthropology) is a bilingual YouTube technology solutions associate. After graduating, Vikstedt worked for UCSF as a research assistant and qualitative analyst. That career took Vikstedt to Copenhagen to work for a pharmaceutical company for a year. After returning to San Francisco, Vikstedt was hired at Google in 2017. Vikstedt's qualitative analysis skills together with critical thinking taught by the wonderful professors at Cal State East Bay Anthropology Department, as well as proficiency in two foreign languages, helped launch Vikstedt's current career in big tech.

## 2010s



**INNA GIGUERE** (M.S. '10, Statistics) is a content data engineering leader for Netflix. She provides rich data, analytic products and strategic insights that drive how Netflix creates and licenses content. Can't stop watching binge-worthy shows like "The Crown" or "The Queen's Gambit"? Inna's behind-the-scenes data engineering role more than likely played a hand in it.



**ALLISON TILLMAN** (MBA '11) began her career at Old Navy in their Accelerated Management Program. Now she is a senior planner for Gap

Inc. She is responsible for getting the right product to the right store at the right time at the right price, while taking into account the effects of the pandemic. Tillman developed creative inventory strategies to manage transportation delays, customer shopping habits shifting to online, and increased demand for comfort clothing and leisurewear.



**STACY SHAW** (B.A. '12, Human Development) is an assistant professor in the Department of Social Science and Policy Studies. Her research focuses on creative thinking in mathematics, how anxiety and other experiences impact mathematical cognition and reasoning, and how classroom experiences can impact learning and performance in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Shaw has an M.A. and a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is an ambassador for the Center for Open Science, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting transparency and reproducibility in science.



**KURT SCHLEHUBER** (MPA '14) is the captain for the Pleasanton Police Department. Captain Schlehuber, who oversees investigations and support services, has worked for the department since joining as a police officer in 2003, including the past five-plus years as a lieutenant. First joining the department 17 years ago, Schlehuber initially served as a patrol officer, bicycle officer, field training officer, SWAT operator and child abuse detective. While climbing the ranks, he also worked as a watch commander, field training manager and PPD Technology Committee member. He was promoted from sergeant to lieutenant in December 2015.



**BUCKET MANYWEATHER** (B.A. '16, Ethnic Studies) began their academic career in computer engineering until an ethnic studies course showed them their true passion. Bucket quickly realized they wanted to become an educator to teach underrepresented students their true histories. Following the completion of their master's program at the University of San Francisco, they began teaching at their alma mater, Cal State East Bay. A lifelong learner, Bucket is currently pursuing their Ph.D. in higher education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.



**STEPHANY TONE** (B.S. '16, Criminal Justice Administration) is the senior administrator for Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. She works in the Office of the CFO in support of the operational functions which have dramatically changed with the department being fully remote. She is currently wrapping up her graduate program with an M.S. in Organizational Leadership.



**LEVI MILLER** (M.S. '17, Education) was named the newest captain of the Bakersfield Area of the California Highway Patrol. He joined CHP in 1999 in the East Los Angeles Area. He was then transferred to the Morongo Basin Area and then the Arrowhead Area, where he was promoted to

sergeant. Most recently, Miller served as the administrative lieutenant within the CHP's Inland Division.

**JENELLE ARMAS** (B.A. '18, Nursing) is a nursing instructor at Cal State East Bay. Within the past few years, Armas has accomplished her dream of becoming a critical care nurse. However, she didn't think she would start her career as a new nurse working in the unit that was hit the hardest during the coronavirus pandemic. The experience truly has made her appreciate the education and friendships she developed during her time at Cal State East Bay. After this life-changing experience, she decided to further specialize in cardiovascular critical care at Stanford Children's Hospital. She will be using her abundance of knowledge to teach future nurses at Cal State East Bay.

## 2020s

**JASMINE GRAHAM** (MPA '20) is a housing assistance specialist for the San Antonio Housing Authority. Graham is a first-generation college student who obtained three degrees in the span of four years. Looking at her parents when she showed them her MPA degree made every struggle and every bad day worth it. Showing them that degree showed them their struggle paid off. That is what made her graduation enjoyable.

**ASHA REED** (MPA '20) was appointed city clerk and clerk of the council for the City of Oakland. Reed was first hired by the city in 2013 and joined the city clerk's office in 2017.

## WOMEN ON THE RISE



**WOMEN ON THE RISE** events and initiatives recognize successful Pioneer alumnae and provide opportunities for Pioneer women to share their personal and professional journeys, discuss the unique benefits and challenges of being a woman in society and the workforce, and connect with each other for support and networking.

### PREVIOUS WOMEN ON THE RISE SPEAKER:

**Gabriela de Queiroz** (M.S. '14, Statistics)

Gabriela de Queiroz is a senior engineering and data science manager and a senior developer advocate at IBM, where she leads the CODAIT machine learning team. She is the founder of R-Ladies, a worldwide organization for promoting diversity in the R programming language community with more than 150 chapters in 45-plus countries.

Watch previous recordings and learn about Women on the Rise: [csueastbay.edu/wor](https://csueastbay.edu/wor)





# FOREVER PIONEER WEEK 20/21

2020 was the year of virtual events, and Forever Pioneer Week was no different. We went completely online, which allowed alumni to come together worldwide in new and creative ways. We celebrated our Pioneer spirit and connected with the university like never before.



**PIONEERS** celebrating their 50th anniversary as alumni from Cal State East Bay were honored at the Golden Grad Celebration. Graduates connected with classmates, shared memorabilia, and met the university's president. This year's Golden Grad Celebration will honor a decade's worth of alumni who graduated between 1961 and 1971. Learn more about the Golden Grad Celebration: [csueastbay.edu/goldengrad](https://csueastbay.edu/goldengrad)



## CLASS PASS



**CLASS PASS** events are 30-minute bite-sized classes taught by Cal State East Bay faculty. It's the education you know and love. Watch previous recordings and learn about Class Pass: [csueastbay.edu/classpass](https://csueastbay.edu/classpass)

**FOREVER PIONEER: PAINT AND SIP** Museum of Children's Arts instructor Mary Lawrence guided alumni step-by-step through the painting. We provided mocktail recipes prior to the event so alumni were able to sip and paint in the comfort of their homes.

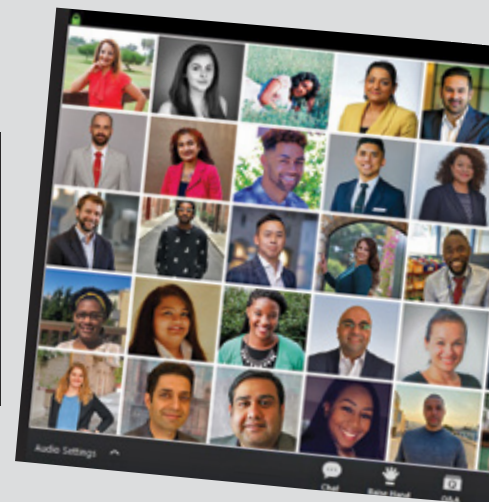


## 40 UNDER 40

CAL STATE EAST BAY

**THE 40 UNDER 40** award program identifies alumni age 40 or younger who have demonstrated dedication, excellence and development in their professional, philanthropic and personal endeavors.

2020's 40 Under 40 award recipients were honored during a virtual awards ceremony. To view 2020's 40 Under 40 awards ceremony and to nominate a Pioneer for 40 Under 40, visit: [csueastbay.edu/40u40](https://csueastbay.edu/40u40)



**We are planning for a combination of online and in-person events.  
Take a peek at what we have in store:**

- Golden Grad Celebration
  - 40 Under 40 Awards
  - Distinguished Alumni Awards
  - Athletics Hall of Fame
- And much more...stay tuned!

**SAVE THE DATE! FOREVER PIONEER WEEK IS SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 18-23!**

## PARTING SHOT

Cal State East Bay President Cathy Sandeen celebrates at the university's May Car-mencement event. Roughly 2,500 graduating students from the classes of 2020 and 2021 participated in the event, which took place over three days at the university's Hayward campus. **KELLY COX**







CAL STATE  
**EAST BAY**

California State University, East Bay  
University Advancement, SA 4800  
25800 Carlos Bee Blvd., Hayward, CA 94542

Non Profit Org  
US Postage  
**PAID**  
California State  
University East Bay

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

