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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

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

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 access 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-
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. Notable examples of the CSU’s annual statewide economic impact include:

- $26.9 billion in industry activity
- $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, 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.

### 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. More than 100 student-athletes were honored during the most recent academic semester.

Alumni in the region supported an additional $12,091 in 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:

- $380.1m in labor income
- $473.7m in state and local tax revenue
- $1.3 billion in industry activity
- $264.5m in state and local tax revenue.

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.

College of Education and Allied Studies Appoints New 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.

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

For the fourth time since the AD’s Honor Roll was instituted in 2016-17 under former director of athletics Jason Carmichael, all 13 teams posted at least a 3.0 average. Cal State East Bay student-athletes achieved a cumulative GPA of 3.5 during the fall semester, 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, including 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.

## Regional and State-Level Impact

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<th>Region</th>
<th>State &amp; Local Tax Revenue</th>
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<th>Industry Activity</th>
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University Celebrates Graduates From Class of 2020 and 2021 With Non-Traditional Ceremony

By Cathi Douglas and Elias Barboza ‘13

Cal 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
B.S., COMPUTER SCIENCE

SHASHWAT BABHULGAONKAR

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

B.A., ETHNIC STUDIES

LALA DE LA O CORTEZ

Through 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 says. "As a woman of color, to have the privilege of attending university means a lot."
A fter 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.

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.”

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 show 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 children.

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

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 said. “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.

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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 software frameworks, risk analysis, and governance and regulatory standards for clients in the oil and gas industry.

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Bertuzzi is a single mother, 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 parenthood 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 entrepreneur- ship 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.

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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 how it can be applied and focused on solving the region's and California's problems, so there's a huge appeal for me there."

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It was in those moments, Sandeen said, that she learned to trust her first introduction to rapid budget management changes. "As the former dean of university extension at UC Santa Cruz, that was a tumultuous time. But she's looking forward to the challenge, some of the new 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, but unfortunately, the Cal State [University] system existed, because it's important to have those support systems. By the time we made up for the rest of the family, right?"

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 places where we have widened the student 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.

Student Success, Inequality and Improvement
President Sandeen: 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 Latino 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 Latino Student Success Center. We will also have an Undocumented Student Resource Center and, in addition to that, in the DESC [Diversity and Inclusion Center] space, we are going to do renovations to carve out dedicated space for other student affinity groups.

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Finally, recruiting faculty of color to Cal State East Bay is really important.
President Sandeen: Unfortunately, some of the older buildings were built before we were conscious about making spaces open for people with accessibility challenges, but I know there are plans for deferred maintenance. The governor and the legislature have agreed they are going to restore the cut 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.

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.

In all our new buildings, we will be including all-gender multi-stall restrooms. When we do a major renovation like we did to our Student Union, we will also build in all-user multi-stall 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.

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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.

In our student information systems, students can indicate a preferred name for university correspondence and for their diploma.

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

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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.

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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.

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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.
In 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.”

By Ilene Lelchuk
"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 35 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 nominated for the National Center for Women & Information Technology Collegiate Award (see sidebar). For other students, participating in the project led to prestigious grad school acceptance, 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 Pravin 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 camera 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 intelligence model what a head is, Gallegos said. "It’s a tedious process. We also had to decide what ‘kind’ of heads we were training it to identify. 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 highest 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 toward your success."

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 Mahesh 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 supporting the project.

"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. 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 Sobhan- gi Arati, Divesh Gupta, Consal Kri, Bhuvan Patel, Karishka Patel, Dikshant Pravin Jain and Manasa Raj Puttinavaru; CSUEB undergraduates Jamie Nguyen, Santa Clara University undergrad Alihosin Shahlabakhani; and high school student Juke Shahlabakhani. National Science Foundation grants supported two students in the program.
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 feels deeply personal for all the students involved,” Choudhary said. “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. 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.
California 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 sequencing the genomes of mysterious, disappearing plants that could benefit humans.

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

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

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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.”

BY NATALIE FEULNER PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO
“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

MystEryOUss 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 project 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 heard 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 what they’ve done 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 alumna 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 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 and conserving 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—Melis Akman—goosebumps.”

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

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 so 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.”

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

Two 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, fast-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 Warsham Development. “Cal State East Bay graduates not only fill that larger regional economy but, as one of the most diverse schools in the system, CSUEB students being multi-ethnic 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 interdisciplinary centers.

“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. ’01 Biological Sciences; M.S. ’06, Biological 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, Doris and his wife, Pat have provided more than $1.8 million in seed funding for the now-growing 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.”

“RICH ROBBINS

BY NATALIE FEULKNER

PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO

RANDY DAVIS

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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 near 10 years.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, California is projected to have nearly 18% 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.

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Since 2010, the College of Science has been the largest, fast-
Daniela Passoni still has to pinch herself. The Cal State East Bay senior 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 as 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 ACWPC 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 Mentoor 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.”
Fostering Stewardship and Accessibility

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

EXPLORER. LEARN. PROTECT.

The National Park 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.

Wishing to find a way to support all children, Avent and her husband-funded the project, and she reached out to her former student 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 adaptable supplement to the Junior Ranger Handbook that 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 accessible 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.”

Introduction for Caregivers

All children can be Junior Rangers 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 pencil/paper to make visual choices.

Each activity includes specific instructions. You can help your child understand and engage in these activities based on their own abilities. This guide emphasizes how to adapt the handbook for different communication needs. For example, you will find ways to move through the book by asking questions visually, using computer-generated messages, sign language, or picture symbols.

Throughout the Guide

These activities require children to use different senses to discover and describe Yosemite. If your child’s communication method requires verbal repetition, repeated questions, or short sentences for making decisions, you may want to consider using highlighted sentences in the adapted guide. You may also want to incorporate or adapt the suggestions from the “Top Tips” section.

Top Tips

- Use the adapted guide as a visual prompt throughout the park. That can provide your child with additional information about the topics you are already teaching. We hope your child enjoys exploring Yosemite with you and becoming a Junior Ranger.

- For example, one activity in the existing Junior Ranger Handbook 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 ones 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 listening 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.

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- “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.”
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 Hawaiian 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. After joining a hālau hula, or hula school, in Berkeley as a way to stay connected to Hawaiian culture, it was this connection with Hawaiian 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."

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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 is tied to the text of the dance. If you don't understand what the text says and you're just sort of pan-morning, 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 Hūakapēpēpolohi." This story offers a wealth of knowledge that every hula dancer should know. Choy says, by providing details into the geographic landscape of the islands, oral 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 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 approximately 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 for her teachers and hula community and the knowledge they have shared with her over the years. "That'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."
CAL STATE EAST BAY ALUMNA LEAVES LEGACY GIFT TO MUSIC DEPARTMENT

BY NATALIE FEULNER

CAL STATE EAST BAY MAGAZINE SPRING 2021

A LIFE OF MUSIC AND LAUGHTER

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

Now, just a few years 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 … MaryAnnette 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 a lovesick, 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 everything 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.

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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.”
60s

HORACIO FONSECA (B.A. '67, Latin American Studies) was recently retired professor emeritus of English. He founded the A. Dahlen Foundation Fellowship for graduate studies at UCLA in history and worked for the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1968 and the World Cup USA in 1994. He established and founded several collegiate soccer programs and worked extensively in youth. He also served as co-founder of the National Latino Soccer Coaches in 1994 and served on the NCAA College Cup at Petaluma and at City College.

bill salebes (M.S. '72) Counseling has written a new book titled "Networking in the 21st Century: Virtual Age: Connecting with No Limits" which offers a guide to help businesses and professionals on how to grow and thrive in the age of virtual meetings. He has written more than 100 books for the World Wide Web channel "W.E.B. Tales," a compilation of short stories.

70s

MICHAEL TROTT (B.A. '73, Business Administration) is the chairman of the Putnam Financial for the Petaluma-based financial services firm, Truist. Trott has over 10 years of experience (including 15 years as a CFO) in finance, administration and operations for mobile-market and web-based companies. His background includes working for companies such as ESSG Capital Management, Washington Inc., Central Sanitor & Pet Company, and Deloitte & Touche.

Rice served as senior policy director of government relations for the National Information & Technology Association, a statewide non-profit organization that works to host a stronger business climate for the more than 35,000 manufacturing, processing and technology-based companies in California. In this role, she worked on issues including workforce development, labor laws and tax reform and innovation incentives.

DA PERA (B.A. '72, Art) is a retired educator from Ukiah School District. She enjoyed teaching second, third and fourth grades. One of her students became a valedictorian of a Kaiser Permanente Hospital. After the retiree, 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. ’94, Criminal Justice Administration) is the chief investigator of the Nevada County District Attorney’s Office selected him to be an inaugural 2013. He was chosen as the chief investigator of the Nevada County District Attorney’s Office. During his tenure there, he has transformed his agency into one of the premier detective bureaus in the state.

1980s

NANCY RICE (B.A. ’82, Political Science), former principal of the San Mateo Daily News, is 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 Violence Eaten: csueastbay.edu/EBIT

SEAN WASHINGTON (B.S. ’97, Computer Science) is the police chief for the City of Fremont, Washington. Washington joined the Fremont Police Department in 1997 and over the course of 24 years has held various positions including detective, field training officer, and has served as a member of the police department’s Critical Incident Response Team. Washington has also served as the supervisor of the police 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 retired as commander of the department’s three divisions. Washington is a graduate of California State University, Fullerton, with a bachelor’s degree in public administration. He currently oversees investigations, internal affairs, training and personnel as it within the law enforcement community. Washington has worked at several local high school and police departments in Fremont, serving as the department’s coordinator for Special Olympics of Northern California and has also coached several local high school and police departments in Fremont, serving as the department’s coordinator for Special Olympics of Northern California and has also coached several local high school and police departments in Fremont, serving as the department’s coordinator for Special Olympics of Northern California. He currently oversees investigations, internal affairs, training and personnel as it within the law enforcement community.

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HEATHER RUIZ (MBA ’10) has more than 30 years of public sector experience and is the City of Vallejo’s director of human resources. Most recently, Ruiz served as the director of human resources for the City of Vallejo from 2018 to 2021. There, she managed a staff of 77 employees while providing guidance on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ruiz also served as an acting assistant vice president of human resources for the City of Vallejo’s manager’s office overseeing 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 services before rising to the position of acting director of human resources. She has also worked as the deputy director of human resources for the City of仙藏 and the director of human resources at the San Mateo Medical Center.

MIKE BYRNES (MBA ’05) is the CFO of ECTOR Therapeutics, a private company founded by Nobel Prize laureate Barry Marshall. Byrnes previously served as president of Prince Biopharma Inc., which was acquired by Seret in September 2020. Prior to that, Byrnes served as CFO of Alkahest Inc. from May 2017 to January 2020 and CFO of Oora Therapeutics Inc. from December 2014 until its acquisition by Halobiotics Pharmaceuticals in December 2015. Byrnes served an intern at BioMed Capital from March 2010 to December 2011, where he worked on human resources and finance positions of increasing responsibility. From 2000 to 2010, Byrnes worked with NeuvenSc, Lipid Sciences Inc. and ADAC Laboratories Inc.

NIAM SAWDY (B.S. ’04, Computer Science) is the vice president of partners, technology and professional services, and is responsible for enabling and empowering individuals and architects to build technical solutions. In her role, she is committed to building a diverse and inclusive team. She draws on her own background to help customers with their technology needs. Sawdy is also a Cal State East Bay alumnus, Spartan Athlete of the Year, a Spartan National Athletic Hall of Fame member and the board president of the Cal State East Bay Spartan Club.

THOMAS BOOKER (B.A. ’09, Business) is the CEO of Hey Carter Books—a name after Booker’s 4-year-old son, Carter—and is the only self-published author featured in Netflix’s Black Mirror. 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 writers 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, Anthropology) is a bi-lingual YouTube technology solutions associate. After graduating from Cal State East Bay with a degree in psychology, he joined UCSD as a research assistant and sought to use his skills. 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 found qualitative analysis skills together with technical skills taught in his kinesiology taught by the wonderful professors at Cal State East Bay, as well as proficiency in two foreign languages, helped launch Vikstedt’s current career in big tech.

INNA GIGUERE (M.S. ’10, Statistics) is a content data engineering leader at Netflix. She provides rich data insights that drive how Netflix creates and licenses content. Can’t stop watching binge-worthy shows like “The Crown” or “The Queen’s Gambit”? TV’s behind-the-scenes data engineering roles may likely play a hand in it.

JASON REED (MBA ’20) was appointed city clerk and clerk of the council for the City of Oakland. Reed was first hired by the city in 2015 and joined the city’s clerk’s office in 2017.

WOMEN ON THE RISE: events and initiatives recognize successful Pioneer alumnae and provide opportunities for Pioneer women to share their personal and professional journeys. Anyone interested in the university’s diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts can visit the student diversity webpage. To learn more about Pioneers, find them on Facebook or Instagram.

PREVIOUS WOMEN ON THE RISE SPEAKER: Gabriela de Queiroz is a senior engineering and data science manager and a senior developer advocate at Netflix. She is a member of the R-Ladies organization for promoting diversity in the R programming language community with more than 150 chapters in 45-plus countries.

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FINANCIAL LITERACY SERIES

EMERALD TEMPLETON (B.S. ’04, Computer Science) is the vice president of sales and business development at Lipid Sciences Inc. and a content data engineering leader at Netflix. She provides rich data insights that drive how Netflix creates and licenses content. Can’t stop watching binge-worthy shows like “The Crown” or “The Queen’s Gambit”? TV’s behind-the-scenes data engineering roles may likely play a hand in it.

JACLYN ARMAS (B.A. ’18, Nursing) is a nursing instructor at Cal State East Bay. Within the past five years, Armas has accomplished her dream of becoming a nurse and giving back to the community. However, she didn’t think she would be able to start her own medical field working in the unit that was the hardest during the coronavirus pandemic. The experience truly has made her appreciate the education and opportunities she was given during her time at Cal State East Bay. After this life-changing experience, she is considering her future with a career in cardiovascular critical care at Vallecitos Medical Center. Armas will be using her abidance of knowledge to guide her future nurses at Cal State East Bay.

STEPHANY TONG (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 master’s degree with an E.H. in Organizational Leadership.

KURT SCHELBURGER (MBA ’14) is the capital for the Hewlett Police Department. Captain Schelburger, who oversees investigations and support services, has worked as a police officer for 21 years. In 2008, Schelburger joined the University Police Department as a patrol officer. He was promoted to sergeant in 2010, and then to captain in 2013. Schelburger currently serves as a patrol officer. Before joining the University Police Department, Schelburger worked as a police officer for 21 years. He was first hired by the city of Cal State East Bay in 2008 and joined the city’s clerk’s office in 2017.

LEVI MILLER (M.S. ’17, Education) was named the newest member of the Bakken Foundation’s Office of the California Highway Patrol. Miller joined the Chaffee College in 1998 in the East Los Angeles Area. He was then named the director of the Office of the California Highway Patrol in 2000, and later the director of the Office of the California Highway Patrol in 2004. He was promoted from sergeant to lieutenant in December 2021.
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.

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

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.

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

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

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!