



SUMMER 2024

Meet the Neighbors: Who’s Who in UO’s Move to the Big Ten

In its new conference, Oregon joins seventeen of the nation’s elite universities

By Sarah Lorge Butler • Photo illustration by Kyla Tom • July 3, 2024

10 min read



When the University of Oregon officially joins the Big Ten conference August 2, it will be like moving to a new neighborhood—an elite academic and athletic neighborhood home to some of the country’s best schools.

Many of these residents are fresh faces, while some will be familiar from Pac-12 days—hello again, Washington, UCLA, and USC!

Shared by all eighteen members of the Big Ten: a tireless commitment to academic excellence. Cutting-edge research that improves lives. Devoted alumni networks. And, of course, proud athletic traditions. In time, we’ll be as familiar with Terrapins, Boilermakers, and Nittany Lions as we are with Huskies, Trojans, and Bruins. For now, below is an introduction to each of our new conference neighbors.



*What to know about each of the universities
in the UO’s new conference*

[University of California, Los Angeles](#)

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University of California, Los Angeles



City Los Angeles
Enrollment 48,000
Nickname Bruins

Tops Among Publics UCLA’s health care services, programs for veterans, and inclusive spirit helped push the university into the top spot on *US News & World Report's* Top Public Schools list for the seventh year in a row.

Highly Sought After UCLA is the most applied-to university in the nation, with more than 146,000 applications for fall 2024 first-year admission.

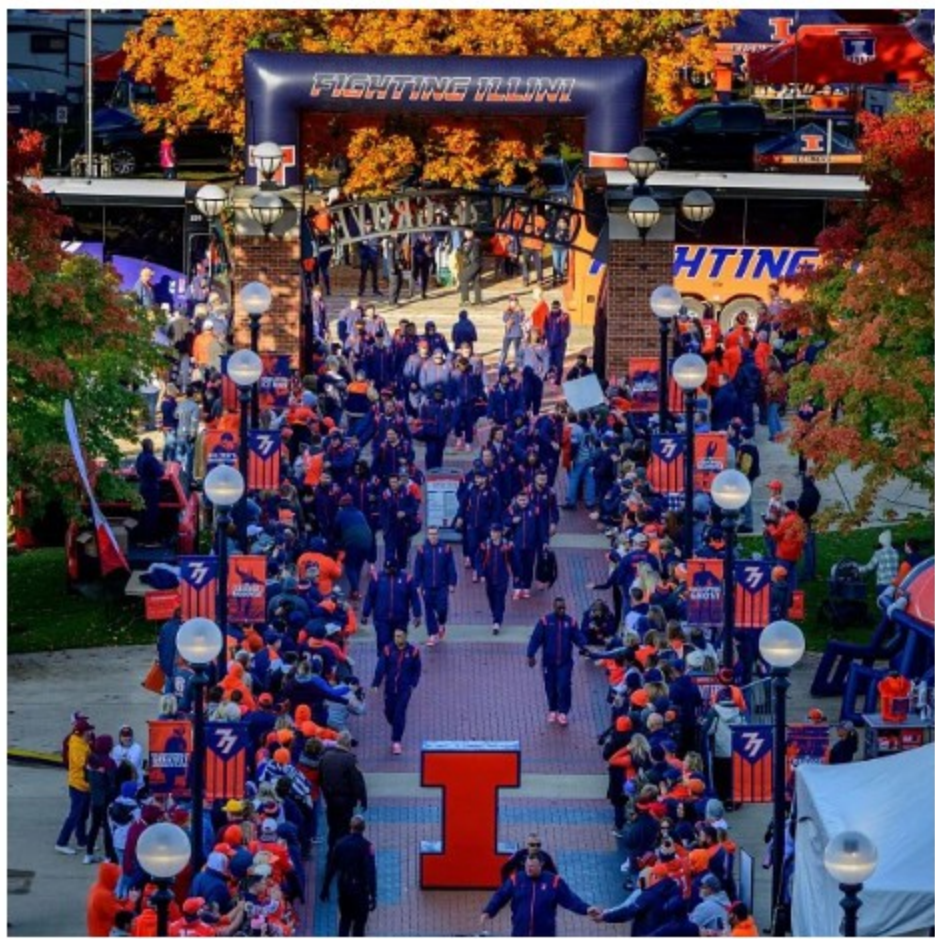
Good Taste UCLA has earned the title of Best College Food in America from niche.com.

Sports Legends Famed basketball coach John Wooden led his teams to ten national titles in twelve years. Trailblazing icons Jackie Robinson, Kenny Washington (first African American to break the NFL’s informal ban against Black players), Ann Meyers (first woman to receive a college basketball scholarship), and Arthur Ashe (first African American tennis player to win the US Open) changed the world on and off the playing fields and courts.

[Hills of Westwood](#)

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University of Illinois



City Champaign-Urbana
Enrollment 57,000
Nickname Fighting Illini

Advancing Tech Revolutionary ideas and inventions from faculty, students, and alumni, including the transistor, the visible LED, the modern graphical internet browser, PayPal, and YouTube, have quite literally changed the way everyone sees and interacts with the world.

For the Bookish University Library holds one of the largest public university collections in the world, with fifteen million volumes at more than twenty libraries.

A Historic Field Illinois Athletics will celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Memorial Stadium in 2024. The stadium was constructed as a tribute to Illinois men and women who gave their lives for the country during World War I. In the dedication game against the University of Michigan October 18, 1924, Harold “Red” Grange—Fighting Illini legend and college football’s first superstar—ran the opening kickoff back ninety-five yards for a touchdown in front of sixty-seven thousand roaring fans, one of his five running touchdowns on the day.

[March of the Illini](#)

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Indiana University



City Bloomington
Enrollment 48,000
Nickname Hoosiers

Digital Future IU has a first-of-its-kind informatics school, spearheading research in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data science.

Rave Reviews Faculty and graduates in the Department of Theatre, Drama, and Contemporary Dance have won four Tonys, six Oscars, thirty-three Emmys, and sixty-six Grammys.

From Academia to Industry IU chemists developed and patented a fluoride toothpaste that became Crest.

Hoops Hysteria The 1975–76 men’s squad, coached by the legendary Bob Knight, remains the last team to go undefeated and win the NCAA National Championship.

[Hello, Hoosiers!](#)

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University of Iowa



City Iowa City
Enrollment 31,000
Nickname Hawkeyes

The Writing University The renowned Iowa Writers’ Workshop was the first creative writing degree program in the nation. Iowa is ranked the top public university for writing by *US News & World Report*.

Where Art Meets Science Iowa awarded the first-ever master of fine arts in 1940, distinguished itself in space exploration with discovery of the Van Allen radiation belts, and houses a nationally recognized medical center.

Star Power, Powerful Wave Caitlin Clark, the all-time leading scorer in NCAA Division I basketball, twice led Iowa to the title game and was selected first in the April 2024 WNBA draft (Indiana Fever). At the end of the first quarter of home football games, fans and players give the Hawkeye Wave to youth patients and families of the University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children’s Hospital that looks over the stadium.

[Hawkeyes in Flight](#)

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University of Maryland



City College Park
Enrollment 41,000
Nickname Terrapins

Government Center As the only public research university inside the Washington, DC, beltway, UMD has strategic partnerships with national institutions that provide exceptional opportunities for faculty and students. UMD offers more than three hundred academic programs, twenty-five living-learning programs, and four hundred study abroad

programs to empower students to make a global impact.

The Greater Good The university’s Do Good Institute—a campus-wide hub of social innovation and entrepreneurship—has established UMD as a global leader in advancing social change, philanthropy, and nonprofit leadership.

Consistent Conference Champs Since joining the Big Ten in the 2014–15 season, Maryland has won or shared in forty-nine regular season or tournament championships, third-most in the conference.

[Terrapin Station](#)

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University of Michigan



City Ann Arbor
Enrollment 52,000
Nickname Wolverines

Dedicated to Discovery With nineteen schools and colleges and more than two hundred centers and institutes, the University of Michigan conducts research in nearly every area of science, social science, medicine, engineering, public health, education, business, and the humanities. In 2023, Michigan reported a record \$1.86 billion in research expenditures, fueling advancements in areas ranging from mobility to artificial intelligence to social justice.

Finding Answers The university is focused on issues in today’s world with initiatives that include firearm injury prevention, poverty solutions, environmental justice, and sustainability.

Storied Athletic Tradition Intercollegiate competition officially began in 1865, with the baseball team winning its first three games. In 1879, football started its path to becoming college’s all-time winningest program. Nearly three hundred Wolverines have represented thirty-seven countries in the Olympics, winning more than 180 medals, including at least one medal in every Summer Games since 1900.

[Meet Michigan](#)

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Michigan State University



City East Lansing
Enrollment 51,000
Nickname Spartans

Tops in Teacher Ed For thirty years running, *US News and World Report* has ranked the College of Education No. 1 in elementary and secondary teacher education. MSU is also home to the No. 1 undergraduate and graduate programs in supply chain management.

Combating Cancer In 1965, Michigan State scientists discovered the chemical compound cisplatin is a cancer treatment. The compound—which prevents the DNA in cancer cells from replicating—is used to treat many types of the disease. Today, rare isotopes produced by the powerful heavy-ion accelerator on campus are used to develop targeted cancer imaging and therapy.

Courting Success The men’s basketball team has made twenty-six straight NCAA tournament appearances, including ten Final Fours. During the 2023–24 academic year, MSU won Big Ten titles in women’s soccer, cross country, gymnastics, and men’s ice hockey.

[Home of the Spartans](#)

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University of Minnesota



Cities Minneapolis and St. Paul
Enrollment 50,000
Nickname Gophers

“10,000 Lakes” and a Legendary River The U of M’s Twin Cities campus is in Minneapolis—on both sides of the Mississippi River—and St. Paul. A field station near the headwaters offers students and researchers access to diverse habitats.

Comprehensive and Responsive The U of M is highly ranked in nursing, chemical engineering, business, ecology, psychology, and robotics. The university is also a pioneer in apple breeding and organ transplantation, with more than

thirteen thousand organ transplant surgeries since the program began in the 1960s. The pacemaker was invented at the U of M, as was the retractable seat belt.

Raising Banners Fitting for the “State of Hockey,” the women’s team has won seven national titles and the men’s team, five. Dating to 1904, the Golden Gopher football team has won seven national championships.

[Gopher Land](#)

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln



City Lincoln
Enrollment 24,000
Nickname Cornhuskers

A Top-Tier Research University The University of Nebraska–Lincoln drives cutting-edge research across disciplines, from taking over for Princeton in leading US physicists at the Large Hadron Collider to constructing the first USDA research facility for sustainable, resilient, and highly efficient agriculture on UNL’s campus.

Doing Big Things For the seventh straight year, the University of Nebraska has been named among the top one hundred patent-earning institutions in the world.

There Is No Place Like Nebraska With five national championships each for our football and volleyball programs, and as Division 1 leaders for NCAA Academic All-Americans, Husker Athletics has cultivated a powerful tradition of excellence. Known for having the best fans in college sports, Nebraska broke world records in August 2023 when 92,003 fans packed Memorial Stadium for a historic Husker Volleyball match.

[Rally Huskers](#)

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Northwestern University



Cities Evanston and Chicago, Illinois
Enrollment 23,000
Nickname Wildcats

At the Top Northwestern consistently ranks among the top US universities — No. 9 nationally in the 2024 *US News and World Report*— and is known for prestigious programs across multiple disciplines.

Graduate Programs Northwestern is one of four top ten US universities ranked in the top twenty in all five graduate education categories business, medicine, law, education, and engineering.

Standing Out with Trophies and Diplomas The field hockey team took the 2021 national championship and women’s lacrosse has won eight NCAA titles since 2005. Student-athletes have a 98 percent graduation rate, tied for No. 1 among institutions in the Football Bowl Subdivision—formerly Division I-A—and leading the Big Ten for the nineteenth consecutive year.

[Go, 'Cats!](#)

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The Ohio State University



City Columbus
Enrollment 61,000
Nickname Buckeyes

Capturing the Ever-elusive Electron Professor Pierre Agostini was part of a team awarded the 2023 Nobel Prize in physics. Agostini and his colleagues used pulses of light that lasted just one quintillionth of a second to capture electrons—something that had never been done before.

Jump Starters The Buckeye Accelerator program helps student entrepreneurs prepare a startup for launch, with structured support that includes funding, skill building, and networking.

Script Ohio The musical drill “Script Ohio” is one of the most recognizable Ohio State traditions, dating to 1936. During football games, the roar of the crowd surges with the dotting of the *i*, an honor that goes to a senior sousaphone player.

[Dot the *i*](#)

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University of Oregon



City Eugene
Enrollment 23,000
Nickname Ducks

Making a Splash Focused on societal impact, the UO is strong in biological and applied sciences and a research leader in sport and human performance, mental health and well-being, and environmental resilience. UO scientists were the first to use zebrafish as a model organism; today, labs worldwide use the shimmery fish to study everything from diabetes to Parkinson’s disease.

Rare Air Attracting students from all fifty states and more than ninety countries, Oregon is one of only two schools in the Pacific Northwest in the Association of American Universities, a consortium of seventy-plus leading public and private research institutions.

From TrackTown USA to the End Zone Change agent and innovator, the UO was the setting for Nike’s birth, the waffle-sole running shoe, and the 1960s jogging craze that make Eugene a running capital. Today the UO is home to elite track and field and a football team as exciting to watch—check out the latest uniforms!—as they are punishing to play.

['Sco Ducks](#)

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Penn State University



City University Park and communities across Pennsylvania
Enrollment 90,000
Nickname Nittany Lions

Research Excellence Penn State ranks third nationally for the breadth and depth of its research, as measured by the number of top ten rankings in key fields. From stopping the spread of malaria to salvaging rare earth elements from coal waste, the university’s interdisciplinary researchers solve problems for the world’s benefit.

Largest Alumni Network With more than 775,000 alumni, Penn State has the largest—and one of the most passionate—alumni networks in the United States.

Football Fans Wear White At designated White Out games, more than 110,000 fans break out color-coordinated shirts to cheer on the Nittany Lions at Beaver Stadium, creating an unforgettable atmosphere and a home field advantage.

[Where Nittany Lions Lurk](#)

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Purdue University



City West Lafayette, Indiana
Enrollment 56,000
Nickname Boilermakers

Innovation and Discovery Purdue is committed to developing practical solutions to today’s toughest challenges. As champions for research and innovation, Purdue researchers have advanced thinking in physical artificial intelligence, semiconductors and microelectronics, drug discovery and cancer research, cybersecurity, global sustainability, computing, and quantum science and engineering.

The Value of Higher Ed Committed to affordability and accessibility, the main campus has frozen tuition thirteen years in a row.

Founding Member The Big Ten was established in 1896 under the leadership of Purdue president James Smart. Fifteen Purdue quarterbacks have gone on to play in the NFL.

[Boiler Up!](#)

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Rutgers University-New Brunswick



City New Brunswick, New Jersey
Enrollment 51,000
Nickname Scarlet Knights

All are Welcome Among Big Ten schools, Rutgers–New Brunswick ranks first in campus ethnic diversity and social mobility. It’s also the top university in the conference for transfer students. Rutgers Scarlet Service, an undergraduate internship program, sends students to nonprofits and government offices to work on issues related to public health, infrastructure, education, and the environment.

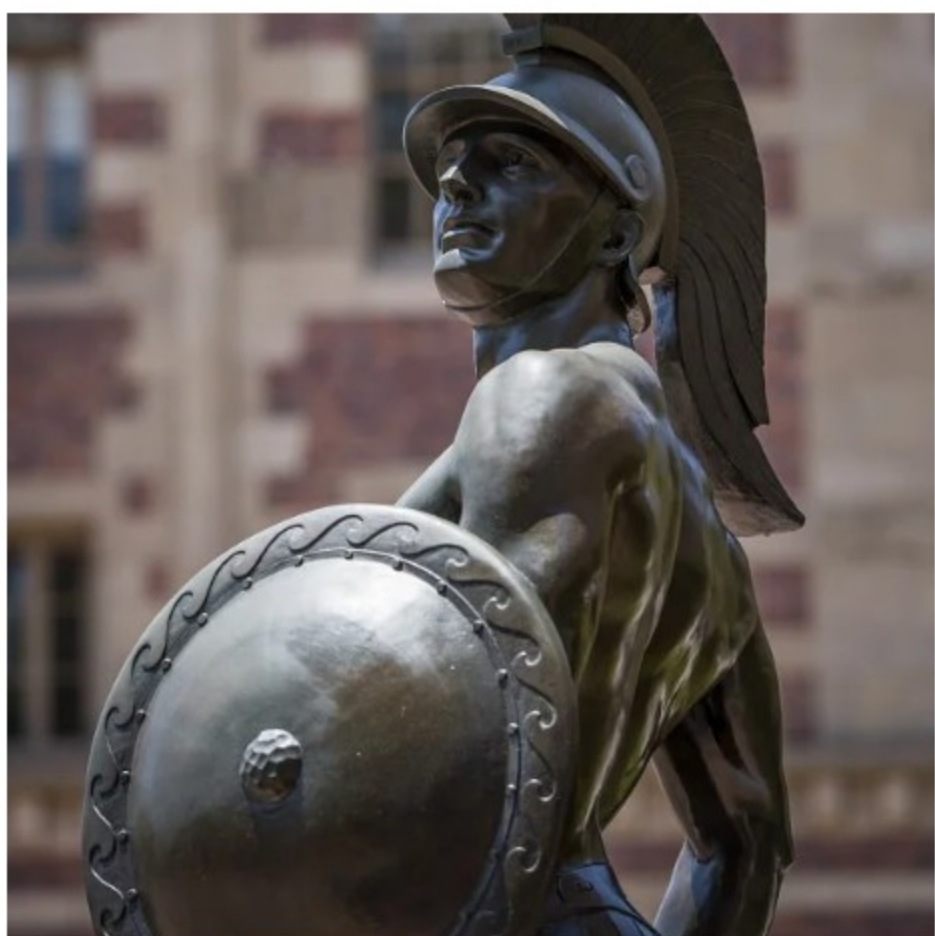
The Leading Edge From deploying ocean robots during hurricanes for better forecast accuracy to examining the relationship between rigorous exercise and Alzheimer’s disease, Rutgers research scientists are addressing global challenges.

Where Football Began Rutgers is the birthplace of college football, having hosted the first-ever collegiate matchup November 6, 1869—a 6-4 victory over Princeton.

[Battle with the Scarlet Knights](#)

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University of Southern California



City Los Angeles
Enrollment 49,000
Nickname Trojans

School of Schools With twenty-three schools, including six in the creative arts, USC provides a breadth and depth of academic programs for students to excel in every field that interests them.

Computing Pioneers The university developed the first network computers and shaped the internet’s core architecture. USC researchers created the Domain Name

System (which introduced .com, .edu, and .org to internet naming standards) and two alumni laid the foundation for ChatGPT. The new School of Advanced Computing is part of a \$1 billion Frontiers of Computing initiative to integrate advanced computing—with an emphasis on ethics and responsibility—into academics across all disciplines.

Heisman History With eight Heisman Trophy winners, the Trojans stand unrivaled in college football history. USC has produced more Olympians, medalists, and gold medalists than any other university.

[Fight On!](#)

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University of Washington



City Seattle
Enrollment 61,000
Nickname Huskies

Climate Focus Students and faculty in the College of the Environment—the nation’s largest—conduct interdisciplinary research on climate change, ocean health, natural hazards, conservation, and more. The UW is also home to the Clean Energy Institute, whose mission is to accelerate clean-energy technology and solutions.

Farm to Dorm The UW Farm is a 1.5-acre student-powered urban organic farm and educational facility that supplies six tons of produce each year for campus dining halls, local food banks, and the community.

Gold Standard The UW’s “Boys in the Boat” rowing team won Olympic gold in 1936, an underdog story captured in the best-selling book turned Hollywood movie. The men’s and women’s programs continue to live up to that legacy, with the men recently winning their twentieth national championship.

[Wave to Washington](#)

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The University of Wisconsin



City Madison
Enrollment 50,000
Nickname Badgers

Research Powerhouse UW–Madison’s annual research expenditures top \$1.5 billion, eighth among universities nationally and generating discoveries such as cosmic neutrinos at the South Pole and the first lab-cultivated embryonic stem cells.

Wisconsin Idea Students and faculty embrace a century-old principle called the “Wisconsin Idea”—a belief that education should improve people’s lives beyond the classroom. Thousands of alumni have taken this service mission abroad through the Peace Corps, which named the university its top producer of volunteers in 2023.

Smellin’ Roses The Badgers have won thirty-three NCAA national championships in team sports, including a record seven titles in women’s hockey, the latest in 2023. Known for its hard-nosed play, the football team has appeared in ten Rose Bowls and became the first program to win back-to-back games in Pasadena (1999 and 2000).

[Badger Territory.](#)

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Photos in the Big Ten map courtesy of the member universities.

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A Teamwork Touchdown: UO Will Score in Big Ten Academic Alliance

The consortium offers schools resources for upping the academic game

By Matt Cooper • Illustration by David Gill • July 3, 2024

7 min read



It was one thing to dream about all the schools in the Big Ten conference collaborating on instruction of world languages.

Convincing them to get on board would be quite another.

That’s the situation Chris Long faced in 2016. The dean of the College of Arts & Letters at Michigan State University saw potential in an offer by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support instruction of less commonly taught languages across the conference.

But would the deans of the other schools agree? Would they embrace adopting new technologies to teach languages online? Who would solve the Rubik’s Cube of coordinating courses conference-wide so students at any school could reach higher levels of proficiency in Swahili, Hindi, or Hebrew? With wide-ranging strengths in language teaching and learning across the conference, what if the other schools’ priorities differed from those at Michigan State?

Long didn’t worry. Yes, there was some reticence, but mostly his Big Ten peers met him with a cooperative spirit born of trust; decades of collaboration within a consortium of the schools in the conference had created a culture in which the idea could succeed. It is standard operating procedure in the Big Ten for each school’s leaders to meet regularly with their peers across the conference to troubleshoot problems, identify efficiencies, and share resources.



UO provost Chris Long (photo: University Communications)

The deans recognized the power of Long’s vision, and the rest is history. The foundation awarded \$1.2 million to launch a Big Ten partnership for online instruction of less commonly taught languages—and then \$2.5 million to expand the project to support indigenous languages. “Those grants were successful because the relationships among the deans within the conference are rooted in trust,” Long says. “Collaboration requires trust, and we had long-standing relationships of trust within that deans’ group.”

Trust is the foundation of this sixty-five-year-old consortium called the Big Ten Academic Alliance.

In joining the conference, the University of Oregon will also join this alliance—and will be able to tap resources that include leadership groups, one of the largest library collections in the world, and a network for the study and preservation of less commonly taught languages.



A “unicorn” for leadership in academia

To see the value of the alliance, look no farther than the leadership in Johnson Hall.

Long, [who joined the university in June](#) as provost, and President Karl Scholz are alumni of the alliance’s peer groups and other programs: Scholz during his tenure as a provost and dean at University of Wisconsin-Madison and Long, first at Penn State University and then the last nine years at Michigan State, where he was dean of the arts and letters college and honors college.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Scholz and provosts of the other Big Ten schools were meeting as often as twice weekly on questions such as testing options and best practices for closing and reopening campuses.

“Others have tried to replicate the alliance but no one else has,” Scholz says. “There’s a spirit of cooperation among these large, mostly public research institutions that gives the alliance a coherence. People have seen the value of it, so they buy into it.”

Funded by member dues, the alliance is built on the collaboration that happens within the regular meetings of the many peer groups: provosts, deans, librarians, and academic and administrative leaders across the breadth of university functions.

Like Long, many of these officers also participated in alliance leadership development programs along their rise to higher posts. Across the alliance, half of top positions—presidents, provosts, deans—are held by current or previous participants of these programs.

Keith Marshall, alliance executive director, credits the consortium’s success to the peer nature of Big Ten schools—all large research universities with similar challenges and opportunities—and a culture of trust built over time. Even in the über-competitive realm of drawing students, Marshall notes, Big Ten schools share secrets of success with each other rather than hold them close.



Keith Marshall, Big Ten Academic Alliance

“The people of the Big Ten universities see that they’re part of something bigger than their university,” Marshall says. “No other collection of large research universities is doing what we’re doing, anywhere. We are a unicorn.”



BIG Collection is among the world’s largest libraries

In what’s been called an unprecedented move for independent universities, the collections of the Big Ten university libraries are being united into a single digital and physical library, shared and fully networked, called the BIG Collection.

The project places at the fingertips of each Big Ten university a collection breathtaking in size—nearly one-quarter of all print titles in North America. Once complete it will be the third largest collection in the world, trailing only those in the Library of Congress and the British Library, according to Maurice York, director of library initiatives for the alliance.

The borrowing network already moves tens of thousands of volumes a year to students, faculty, and researchers across the Big Ten. Through a massive digitization effort and sharing agreements, York says, the completion of the BIG Collection will result in “any content, from anywhere, to anyone, now and in the future.”



Alicia Salaz, UO Libraries

Alicia Salaz, vice provost and university librarian for the UO, says the collection will enable each university to share digital surrogates of unique assets without putting anything in the mail. The UO, for example, could make available robust Chinese, Japanese, and Thai language materials, aerial photography collections, the original Oregon Trail Diaries, and books produced before the invention of the printing press.

Conversely, the UO will have access to unique—and otherwise expensive—collections of Big Ten schools. Salaz, noted, for example, that because many Big Ten schools have strong medical and engineering programs, their libraries have a wealth of resources that will serve the UO as it expands biomedical- and engineering-related research.

“Those libraries will now also be our libraries,” Salaz says. “It will really build on existing partnerships we have to share those kinds of resources with local partners like Oregon Health & Science University in Portland.”



Less commonly taught languages thrive in CourseShare

Through a program called CourseShare, Big Ten universities offer the study of more than one hundred less commonly taught world languages at a frequency and depth that none of them could provide alone. In 2022–23, more than five hundred students enrolled in two hundred courses on language—everything from

Akan to Zulu—for academic requirements, study abroad, and more.

The program also serves preservation of languages, including indigenous ones. In fact, the language partnership that Long proposed—and which he now runs—coordinates curriculum across institutions drawing on the CourseShare infrastructure and has added an emphasis on indigenous languages. Long plans to explore ways the UO’s Yamada Language Center and Northwest Indian Language Institute can connect with CourseShare and these language partnerships.

“No other collection of large research universities is doing what we’re doing, anywhere. We are a unicorn.”

—Keith Marshall

“Language learning is critical in a globally interconnected world, and it also has to be at the heart of community-engaged research because culture is shaped by language,” Long says. “Nurturing reciprocal relationships with indigenous communities to preserve and sustain indigenous languages has been a central commitment of the language partnership grant.”

The UO joins the Big Ten and the alliance August 2, just ahead of the start of football. Alliance welcome activities will happen throughout the fall for the UO and other new members of the conference—UCLA, USC, and the University of Washington.

“With the Big Ten, everybody thinks about sports, and that’s going to be great,” Long says. “But from my perspective, the most compelling reason to be part of the Big Ten is its long history of academic collaboration. We will have fun at the stadiums, but we’ll have more fun transforming higher education with our colleagues across the Big Ten Academic Alliance.”

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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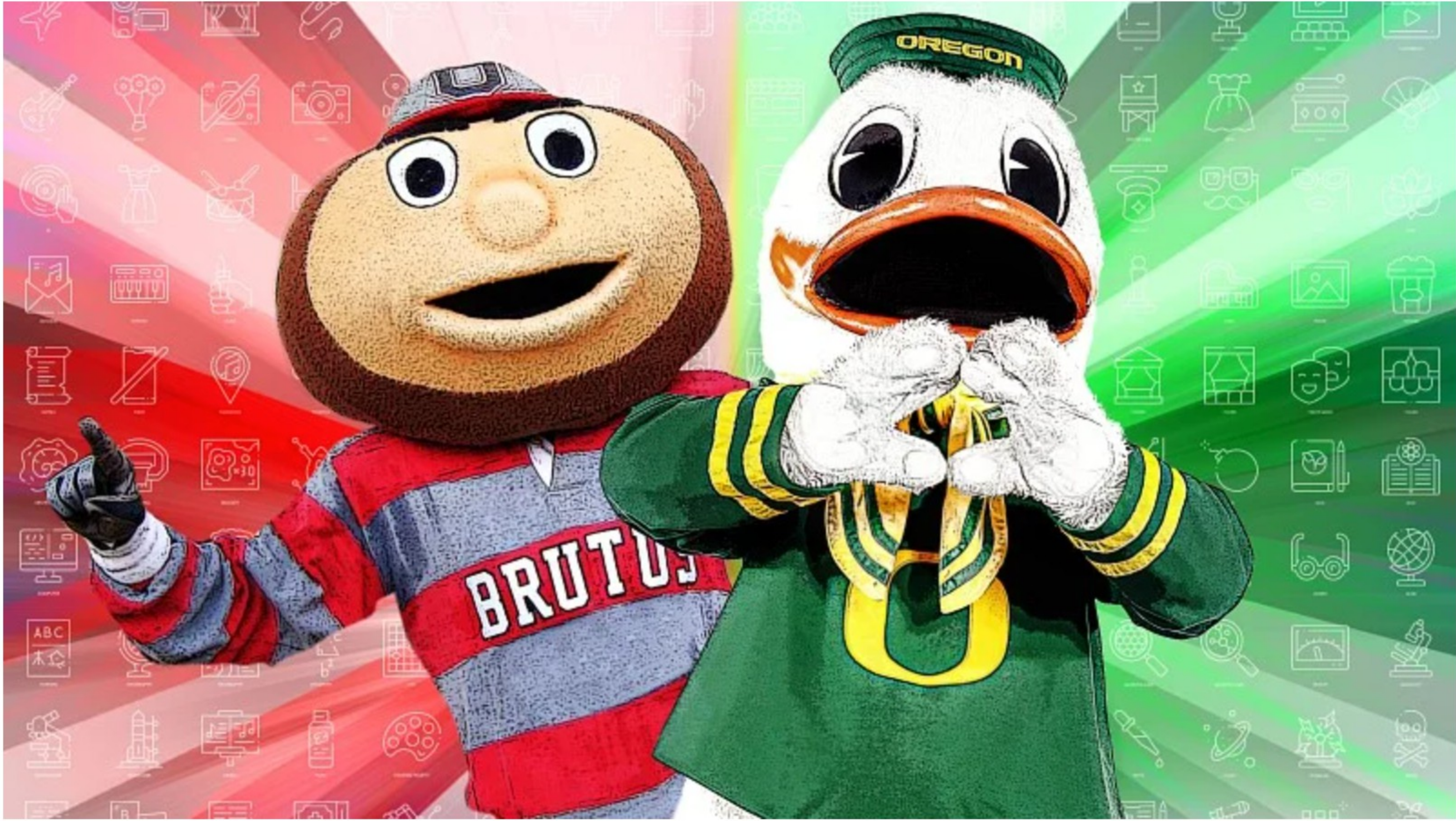
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SUMMER 2024

UO Scientists and Big Ten Peers Make Powerful Partners

The university’s move to the conference heralds more opportunities for researchers to collaborate

By Sherri Buri McDonald • Photo illustration by David Gill • July 3, 2024

6 min read



The University of Oregon may be one of the newest members of the Big Ten conference, but UO scientists have long partnered on research with peers at Big Ten schools. As shown in the following profiles, UO-Big Ten teams are making discoveries to help babies breathe, kids learn, and smokers kick the habit.

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Seeking out clues for better breathing

University of Oregon and University of Wisconsin-Madison



Adrienne Huxtable Associate Professor, human physiology, neuroscience, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Oregon



Jyoti Watters Professor, comparative biosciences, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Project Neonatal Inflammation Impairs Control of Breathing, funded by the National Institutes of Health

The researchers found that illness or injury early in life can harm neural circuits that control breathing, potentially affecting this critical function throughout life. The pair want to further investigate the role of microglia, immune cells in the brain. Their work supports better identification and treatment of breathing control issues in infants, which in turn could help prevent common breathing disorders in adults, such as sleep apnea.

Be Like Jyoti Huxtable was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison when she started publishing with Watters in 2010. She credits Watters for helping her start her own lab and figure out the nuances of being a new faculty member.

“In all aspects of life, I aspire to be Jyoti,” Huxtable says. “If it was up to me, I would always have a collaborator because I think the science is stronger when you pool expertise.”

Adds Watters: “It takes a multidisciplinary approach to make significant advancements in our knowledge.”

Discovering the building blocks of math skills

University of Oregon and Purdue University



Sara Schmitt Associate Professor, Bricker-Squires Faculty Chair in Early Intervention, College of Education, University of Oregon



David Purpura Professor, human development and family science, College of Health and Human Sciences, Purdue University

Project Examining Potential Causal Connections and Mechanisms between Children’s Block Play and Mathematics Learning, funded by the National Science Foundation

Schmitt studies how children engage self-control and manage emotions. Purpura’s expertise is early-math skills. Together, they’re studying how playing with blocks in preschool can build skills for school readiness and long-term academic achievement. Kids benefit when teachers set aside time to play with blocks, the two report, gaining skills for early geometry and behavioral self-regulation.

Football Fans The pair met eleven years ago when Schmitt was a new hire at Purdue, and they’ve been collaborating ever since. Work aside, they share a love of pro football.

“I’m a die-hard Patriots fan,” Purpura says.

“Green Bay Packers for me,” Schmitt responds.

With college ball, Schmitt has mixed allegiances. She’s a Badgers fan from her undergraduate days at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. With her Purdue connection, she cheers for the Boilermakers, and now she’s a Ducks fan, too.

“I know who I’m cheering for as long as they’re not playing each other,” she says, laughing.

Tracking children’s development over decades

University of Oregon and Penn State University



Leslie Leve Professor and Lorry Lokey Chair in Education, College of Education, University of Oregon

Jenae Neiderhiser Distinguished Professor of Psychology, College of the Liberal Arts, Penn State University

Project Early Growth and Development Study, part of the Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes Program funded by the National Institutes of Health

For more than twenty years, the pair have followed youth raised in adoptive or biological homes from early childhood to late adolescence. Their research involves interviewing about a thousand children each year. Roughly half of the children were adopted at birth by families to whom they’re not genetically related. That enables Leve and Neiderhiser to study which behaviors are influenced by genetics or the prenatal environment and which are influenced by parenting styles and the rearing environment.

Better Together The researchers’ mentors introduced them in 1994 and they have been going strong ever since. “We divide and conquer when there are scientific needs aligned with our respective strengths,” Leve says.

Adds Neiderhiser: “The longevity of our collaboration has nurtured strong relationships and trust among our teams, enabling us to be very efficient with our limited funding and to accomplish much more together than we could alone.”

Creating AI technology to improve STEM studies

University of Oregon and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



Daniel Lowd Associate Professor, computer science, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Oregon



Suma Bhat Assistant Professor, electrical and computer engineering, The Grainger College of Engineering, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Project The Inclusive and Intelligent Technologies for Education Institute, funded by the National Science Foundation and the Institute for Education Sciences

The institute is creating AI technology to help children learn about science, technology, engineering, and math. Lowd and Bhat co-lead about fifteen scientists and graduate students studying foundational AI research.

Changing Education The new AI technology will supplement teacher instruction by supporting student collaboration, persistence, and resilience—attributes that are key to student success, Lowd says.

Imagine lab partners who can’t agree on next steps to solve a science problem. The AI technology—a cartoon avatar moderator—would intervene: “How about we try doing it this way?”

The institute plans to unveil pilot technology in classrooms this fall.

“This is not research in a vacuum,” says Bhat, an expert in how machines process the language that people use. “We’re excited that it’s going to be in collaboration with teachers and students.”

Finding new ways to help smokers quit

University of Oregon and The Ohio State University



Elliot Berkman Professor, neuroscience, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Oregon

Kentaro Fujita Professor, psychology, College of Arts and Sciences, The Ohio State University

Project Construal Level as a Novel Pathway for Affect Regulation and Cancer Control, funded by National Institutes of Health

Using insights from psychology and neuroscience, the researchers are testing more effective ways to help smokers quit. Instead of other approaches that elicit smokers’ negative emotions to reduce their cravings, the researchers send a daily inspirational text to activate their motivation to quit. A sample text reads, “My family would probably thank me five to ten years from now for quitting,” compared with the control message, “Cigarettes contain harmful chemicals.”

Enjoying the intellectual pursuit The researchers knew of each other before they actually met.

“I’ve known about Ken’s work and admired it for a long time,” Berkman says.

Even as a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles, Berkman was being recognized for his research.

“I had lots of friends in the field who thought very highly of him,” Fujita says. “He was known as ‘the boy genius.’”

They met at a conference in 2017 and realized they shared an interest in studying self-control, but from different angles: Berkman from neuroscience and Fujita from psychology. Both enjoy thinking deeply about the problems they’re trying to solve. Their enthusiasm for collaboration also extends to the graduate students on their teams.

“I say that in light of the fact that I suspect Ohio State and UO will be No. 1 and No. 2 in football, so we’ll be rivals before you know it,” Fujita jokes.

Sherri Buri McDonald is a news and research writer with University Communications.

Image of Brutus from Wikipedia Creative Commons by [Brett T. Burch](#)

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

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EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

How to Care for Someone with Swallowing Problems

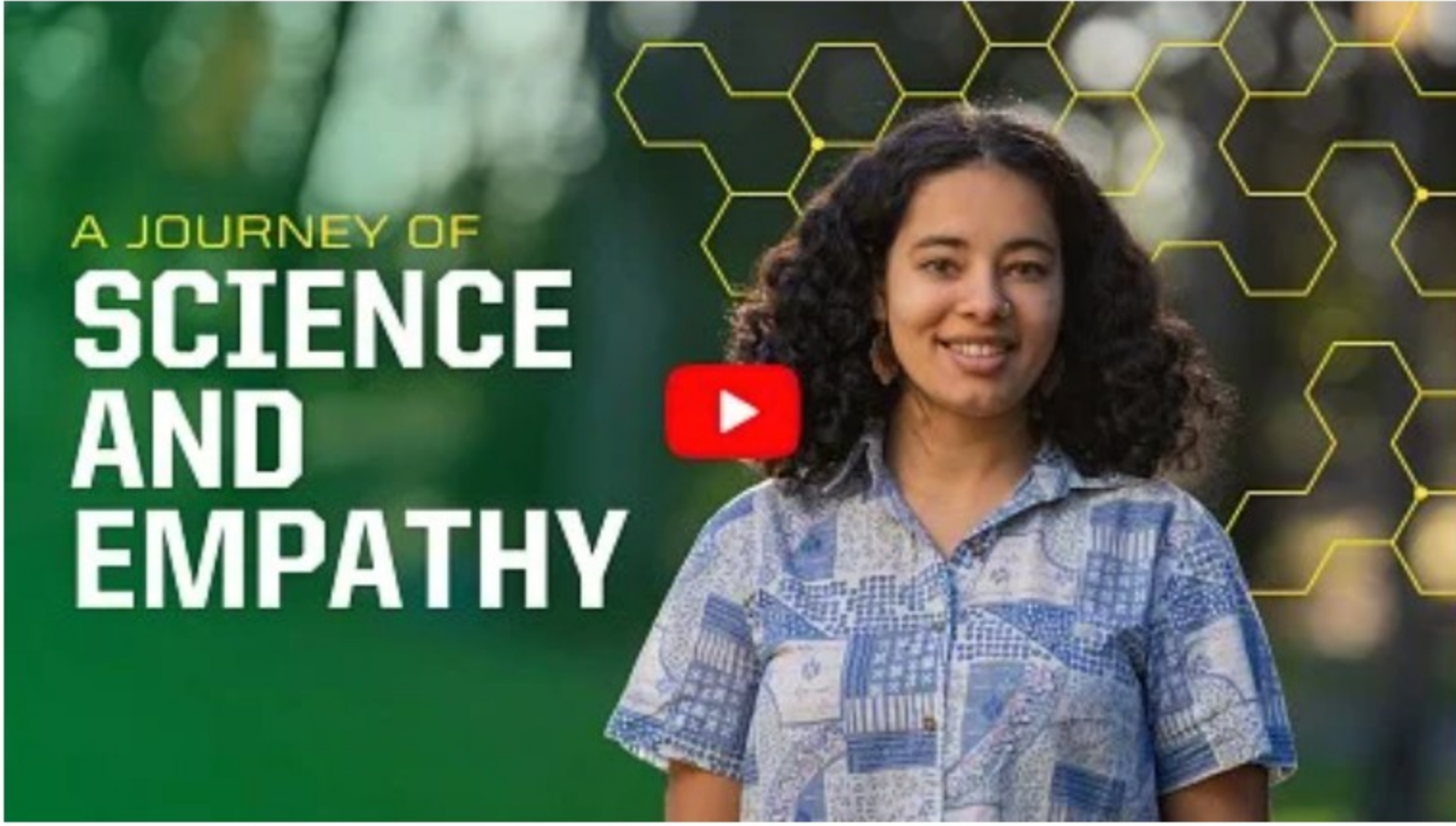
Samantha Shune, an expert on aging, troubleshoots this problem of dementia



EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

How to Empower Yourself to Survive and Thrive

Former UO instructor authors book on self-defense and success in a sexist world



EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

Rhodes in Hand, Her Sights Are Set on Global Health

Video: Nayantara Arora is the first UO woman to win the world’s most prestigious international scholarship

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SUMMER 2024

A Campus in Tree Dimensions

Standing at the center of campus history and ecology, our trees help make the University of Oregon truly green

By Jason Stone • Photos and video by Dustin Whitaker • July 3, 2024

9 min read



Trees are essential for defining the character of a university landscape. They delineate open spaces and views, shield unwanted noise, stabilize soils, and cast soothing shade. Seasonal changes in trees provide an ever-changing aesthetic experience, accenting the architectural designs. And trees provide many important environmental benefits; lowering summer energy usage, reducing winter storm-water runoff, and filtering out air pollution year-round.

Woven into the collegiate lore, certain trees help to convey our institutional history. Less often recognized—but no less vital—trees play an important role in supporting human psychology. Research has shown they help reduce the stress associated with urban settings by creating feelings of relaxation and well-being.

In all respects, the University of Oregon is well served by its diverse collection of trees. Along with Ducks sports, good times with friends, and preparation for success in life—when they’re asked to

look back on their time here, UO alumni frequently remember our beautiful trees.



UO landscape designer Jane Brubaker practices her tree-hugging technique with NBA Hall-of-Famer Bill Walton (1952-2024), a longtime friend and supporter of the university. (photo courtesy Jane Brubaker)

“This is a phenomenal place for trees,” Jane Brubaker says.

That’s obvious to even a casual nature lover, but Brubaker is a specialist. A graduate of the University of Oregon’s [master of landscape architecture program](#), she has served as the university’s landscape designer for twenty-eight years. She’s watched the Eugene campus expand and urbanize—but still [maintain a verdant, shading canopy of mature trees](#) that is indispensable for visual appeal, ecological health, and human comfort.

“We have these wonderful, green open spaces that are still great for growing trees,” she says. “They’re not confined by concrete; there’s walkways, but not big heat islands. People still tend to think tree roots grow down. But no; they grow *out*. You can’t plant a big tree in a four-by-four-foot space.”

Arborist and laborer coordinator Becket DeChant, Brubaker’s colleague in Environmental Services, agrees. Having previously plied his trade in urban environments with minimal tree cover—and having closely observed the effects of climate change on trees—he appreciates the green spaces of the Eugene campus and a UO culture rooted in sustainability.

“The greatest gift of working at the UO is seeing how what I’m doing impacts the Eugene campus on a daily basis,” DeChant says. “Generations of people who did my gig before me worked to get us here. We’re just trying to save their work and keep it going.”

The Eugene campus is a ‘de facto’ arboretum and tree-I.D. classroom

295
ACRES

500+
TREE SPECIES

3,500+
INDIVIDUAL TREES

Caring for trees

From transplanting and pruning to mitigating root heaves in pavements and maintaining irrigation systems, tree care is a year-round job for the university’s landscape and grounds maintenance crew. Every autumn, just after the new academic year begins, literally [tons of leaves drop to the Eugene campus grounds](#)—clogging drains, covering crosswalks, and rendering stairs slippery. Leaves continue to turn and fall through winter.

“From the end of October through March,” DeChant says, “someone is blowing leaves somewhere on our campus.”

More work is on tap in any year—such as 2024—when severe storms blow down branches and topple entire trees. DeChant says [clearing the damage from January’s ice storm](#) is “daunting, exhausting, and still ongoing.” He hopes to finish before students return in September.

“So many of the big life events that happen to young people in their college years—whether it’s graduating, getting a job offer, maybe proposing to somebody—there’s a tree that’s attached to that memory.”

—Becket DeChant, arborist with campus planning

Opportunities to plant new trees are welcome, but bittersweet. There’s limited space for additional trees, so most plantings follow removal of mature trees making way for construction.

“I have a wish list of trees from the [landscape architecture department](#), things they’d like to see planted for educational purposes,” Brubaker says. “The challenge is to find spots for them that aren’t going to have a building on them in the future.”

Informed by nature

Though space for trees is precious today, this wasn’t always the case. When the university opened in 1876, it was shady spots that were in short supply.

“When the campus was first designed and built, there were hardly any trees at all,” Brubaker says. “It was mostly just a grassy knoll.”

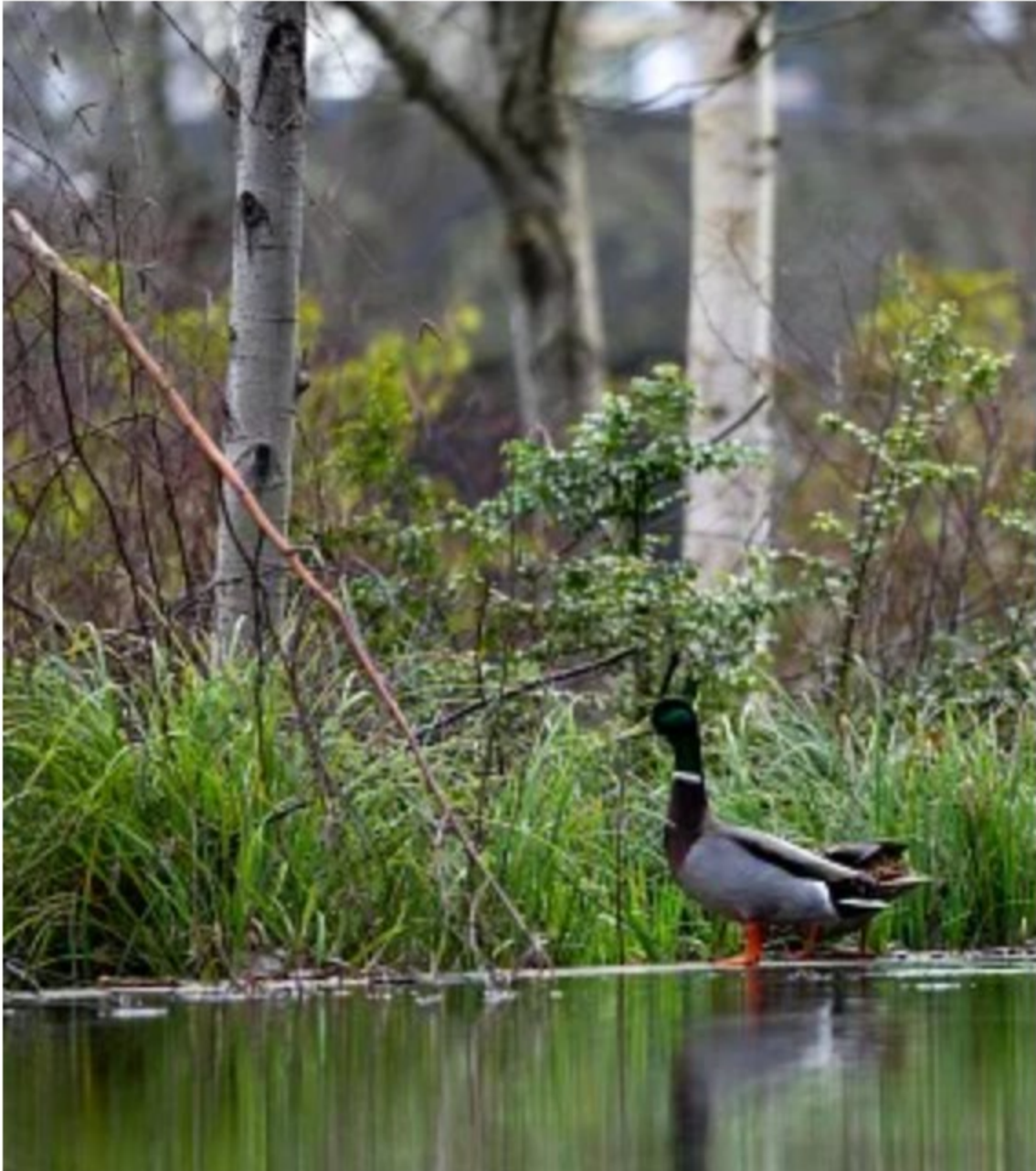
It’s likely the land had been cleared for agriculture during pioneer settlement in the 1850s or ’60s. But two large oak trees were left standing—a tradition of farmers to help maintain soil productivity and provide corridors for pollinators.

Long before the arrival of Europeans, the region’s trees were already being admired, studied, and stewarded. [The University of Oregon is located on Kalapuya Ilihi](#), the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people. Drawing upon a deep core of indigenous knowledge, the Kalapuya managed certain trees to maximize production of food, game habitat, and craft materials.



Professor Thomas Condon and an original campus oak pictured in the 1902 Webfoot yearbook.

In the twenty-first century, many professional landscapers are reembracing a more ecologically informed approach to creating and maintaining plantings. Brubaker and other project architects have consciously designed many landscapes on the Eugene campus to emphasize Northwest native plants, [provide habitats for honeybees and other pollinators](#), and incorporate the natural processes of decomposition by leaving some dead wood, needles, and leaves on site, rather than maintaining an artificially immaculate environment.



Mallard ducks at home in the marsh by the John E. Jaqua Academic Center for Student Athletes.

"It's exciting to have all those design elements in one place: formal landscapes with old architecture and a classic college feel but also try to bring natural spaces and processes onto campus," DeChant says. "The Eugene campus now stretches from the Willamette River to the South Hills. This is a point of connectivity for many types of wildlife, so it's important to leave pockets of habitat in the midst of all our buildings and traffic."

But it's not just about creating plantings that look attractive and feel natural—the long-term viability of the trees must also be considered. Sadly, some species native to the local environment are among the most vulnerable to climate change and invasive pests and diseases.

"There's a big push from our community and our students to plant native things," Brubaker says. "But honestly, some of our natives are not doing well. We've got the emerald ash borer here in Oregon now and it's going to affect our native ash tree. Western white pine has suffered from a fungus, blister rust. We're trying to experiment to see what kinds of trees will do well here; we want them to live a long time."

Explore Further: Biology, History, and Lore of Eugene Campus Trees





Jason Stone is the strategic communications and writing specialist with University Communications.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

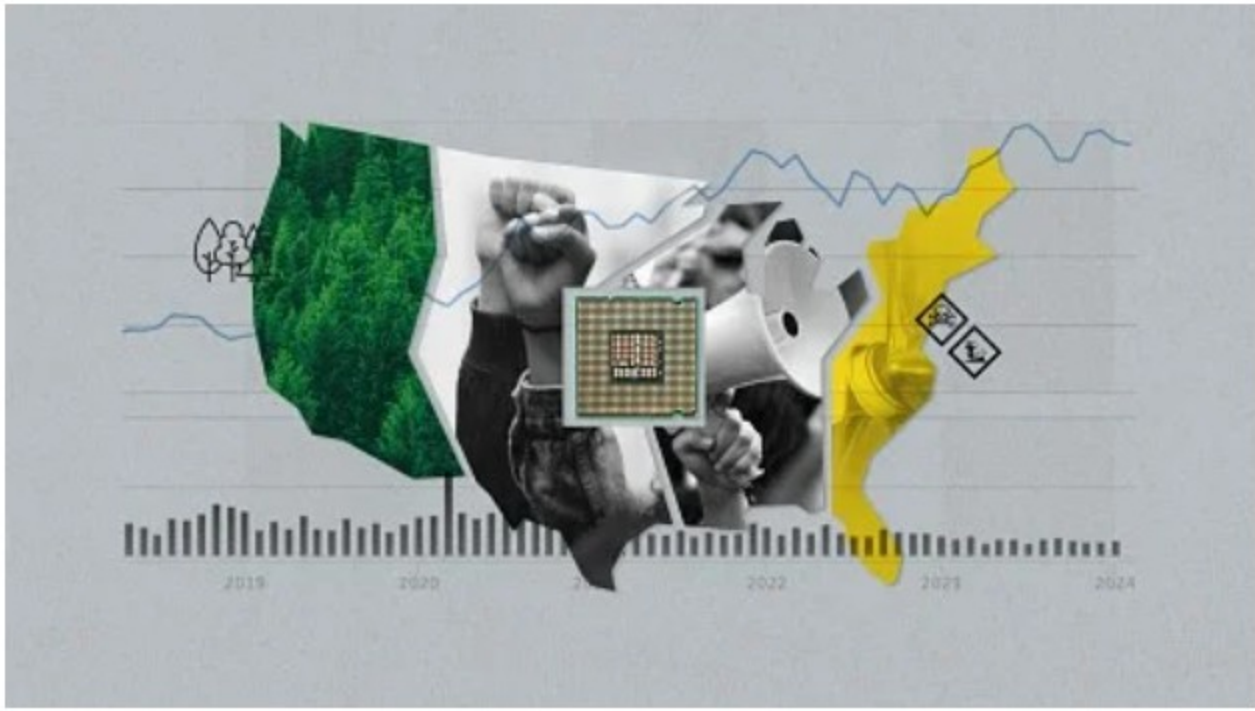
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Spinning Stories of Climate Change and a Fragile Planet

Alum Ross West pens cli-fi collection with provocative questions but no easy answers



ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Four Ways US Chipmakers Can Learn from History

The past holds lessons regarding workplace conditions, labor rights, and the environment



ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

The UO’s First Black Woman Grad Brought Lasting Change

The legacy of Nellie Franklin—a Black student who was not permitted to live in a dorm—still resonates today

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SUMMER 2024

From Arafat to the Dalai Lama, Alum Shielded Leaders

Special agent Cam Burks '96 put himself in harm's way for the US and global dignitaries

By Rosemary Camozzi • Illustration by David Gill • July 3, 2024

6 min read



If you run into University of Oregon alumnus Cam Burks at a backyard barbecue, you'll probably end up talking about fly fishing on the McKenzie River or powder skiing at Tahoe. The 1996 sociology graduate might mention his daughter's interest in physics or a recent family trip to Patagonia.

You'd never guess that this mellow, outdoorsy dad has led a life of danger and intrigue as a special agent for the US government, protecting international dignitaries and overseeing security at embassies around the world.

When Burks arrived at the UO in 1992, he had no idea what to study, but an introductory sociology class grabbed his attention. “It appealed to my curiosity about what makes people tick,” he says. Sociology professor Ken Liberman, who became his advisor, sealed the deal. “All of us students really took to him,” Burks says. “He was this incredibly smart person, but he was also a surfer and completely laid-back.

“Those were formative years for me,” he adds. “I found a group of friends and professors who were very smart and professional, but they were also mellow and fun. I learned that I could succeed by being who I was.”

“I wore a little wire in the ear, the black suit and sunglasses, all that stuff.”

—Cam Burks

In his junior year, Burks was offered a full-term internship in Washington, DC. He was assigned to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, the law enforcement and security arm of the State Department, and worked in an office that protected classified information. He was later transferred to the San Francisco field office, where he assisted agents and joined protective details for foreign ministers. Along the way, he began to learn the workings of the intelligence community. “I realized that this amazing organization has a tangible impact on our national security,” Burks says. “The agents were just really good people, and I saw the difference they were making. I immediately knew I wanted to be a special agent.”

Burks went on to earn a master’s degree in criminal justice at California State University, Sacramento. In 1997 he joined the Diplomatic Security Service, where he was trained in firearms, defensive tactics, and driving in motorcades. This wasn’t your normal driver’s ed: Burks learned how to ram vehicles, fire weapons from a moving car, and conduct high-speed “J-turns”—driving backward and then swinging the car around to face forward.

While at the training academy, Burks occasionally worried about the risks of his career choice. To ease fears, he asked the most questions of anyone in his class. “This line of work is very dangerous, and I took that very seriously,” he says. “I didn’t take anything for granted. I knew what I was getting into.”

Once he became an agent, Burks worked on criminal investigations, made arrests, and testified before grand juries and at trials. Most of his work revolved around pursuing foreign criminals who obtained fraudulent US passports under a false identity, typically in furtherance of another crime such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, or terrorism.



Cam Burks managed security details during the Clinton administration

In 2000, Burks joined the protective detail for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. “I wore a little wire in the ear, the black suit and sunglasses, all that stuff,” he says with a laugh. Albright learned the names of the agents who protected her and took a genuine interest in their lives. “She was a role model for so many,” Burks says, “trailblazing as the first female secretary and standing up to world leaders around the globe.

She treated her special agents with dignity and respect—she always supported us and had a genuine and kind human side.”

Burks also managed security for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at President Clinton’s Camp David Summit in 2000. At an event in Washington DC, broadcast live, a CNN anchor and Arafat began to argue. “Arafat stood up and started screaming at him,” Burks says. “He was enraged, with a deep red face, and we thought there would be a physical altercation.” Although known for his temper, Burks says, Arafat was always respectful to the agents protecting him.

Burks went overseas after the September 11 attacks to head up the Regional Security Office at the American embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh. At one point, the embassy received a threat that a training camp of US Peace Corps volunteers near Dhaka would be attacked. Working with the Bangladeshi government, Burks sent in a military convoy and evacuated the group—all two hundred of them—in the middle of the night. “I was very concerned for their safety,” he says. “As the caravan approached Dhaka, I felt great relief. I personally knew most of them, and we often had volunteers over to our house for a home-cooked meal.”

In 2003, the US invasion of Iraq triggered massive protests in Dhaka. Almost every Friday for months, Burks says, more than one hundred thousand angry people gathered across the street from the US embassy, where a line of police prevented them from entering the compound. “There was a line of police, then me, six Marines, and one political attaché inside the embassy, ready to destroy classified information and shut everything down,” Burks says. “It was a harrowing time.”



Cam Burks (second from left) with Madeleine Albright at the Taj Mahal in 2000

After learning to speak fluent Romanian, Burks managed security for the American embassy in Moldova, a former Soviet state. He also led the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency’s criminal investigation against New Jersey millionaire Anthony Mark Bianchi, who was convicted of child sex abuse in Moldova and Romania and sentenced to twenty-five years in federal prison.

Burks’s wife and two young daughters always accompanied him overseas. The family’s social scene included barbecues, a softball league, and evening tennis tournaments. “It was wonderful to have them there,” he says. “They were truly part of the State Department family, and we became lifelong friends with other diplomatic and expat families.”

There were tense times, too, in various countries where the family resided. After a threat was made against Burks, an army detail was activated to protect their house for months. At another point, his family locked themselves in their home’s saferoom while throngs of anti-US protesters marched down their street. “But all in all, it was a great experience for my wife and kids,” he says. “We traveled the world and learned to appreciate so many different cultures.”

After returning to Washington, DC, in 2008, Burks rejoined the security service as chief of staff to the director and an advisor on counterterrorism and counterintelligence. In 2010, he left to join Chevron as deputy chief security officer, managing global security. The move enabled Burks and his family to return to the Bay Area—Burks hails from Burlingame, California—and his training came in handy, as the company drew frequent protests against oil and gas extraction. “We had to protect the CEO at his home all the time,” Burks says.

Settling in Lafayette, California, Burks worked at Chevron for about eight years. He also served his city: after being appointed chair of Lafayette’s crime prevention commission, he was elected twice to the city council and served as mayor from 2019 to 2020.

Today Burks is vice president for global safety and security at Roku, the digital media player company. He is also a senior fellow at George Mason University’s National Security Institute and an affiliate of Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Cooperation. The positions enable Burks to keep up with “the geopolitical risk side of the business,” he says.

Certain periods of his life as a special agent still hold a special resonance for him. When the 14th Dalai Lama was in the US in 2001–2002, Burks managed the spiritual leader’s security detail. He fondly recalls a poignant moment at the end of the visit, when he was escorting the Dalai Lama to his plane at Dulles International Airport near Washington, DC.

“He got on the plane and I turned around to walk back up the ramp,” Burks says. “Then I heard footsteps behind me. He was running back to give me a hug, and he gave me five or six pats on the back.

“We maintained a very professional relationship,” he says, “but his kindness and generosity were not lost on me.”

Rosemary Howe Camozzi, BA ’96 (magazine), is a freelance writer and editor in Eugene.

Images courtesy Cam Burks, BS ’96 (sociology).

POLITICS & SOCIETY

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POLITICS & SOCIETY

Anita Hill sees Peril and Promise for Feminism

Anita Hill visits May 9 to lecture in conjunction with fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Center for the Study of Women in Society



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Five Faculty Members on the Women Who Move Them

The Center for the Study of Women in Society supports inspiring faculty members. But who inspires them?



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How a Group of Visionaries Forged a Feminist Future

The Center for the Study of Women in Society is celebrating fifty years of research on issues tied to gender—and setting its sights on the decades to come

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SUMMER 2024

Ducks Soar This Summer Around Oregon and Across the Globe

Undergraduates are embarking on life-transforming adventures

By Ed Dorsch • Photos by Nic Walcott and Dusty Whitaker • July 3, 2024

5 min read



Remember summer break? Or maybe you’re enjoying one right now. Working hard, playing hard, or relaxing—it’s a time for rejuvenation. *Oregon Quarterly* caught up with half a dozen Ducks to discover their plans for the sunny days between spring and fall quarters.

Summer adventures

- [Learning, exploring, and growing in Oxford, England](#)
- [Getting down to business at Bloomberg LP in San Francisco](#)
- [Getting air time at Oregon Public Broadcasting](#)
- [Serving on the Oregon Climate Action Commission and exploring Peru](#)
- [Studying Mandarin for eight weeks in Taiwan, then a family trip to Vietnam](#)
- [Leading backpacking expeditions in Norway for US high school students](#)



Jimena Castañeda Ramirez

Junior from McMinnville, Oregon, majoring in planning, public policy and management

Robert D. Clark Honors College

Summer adventure: Three weeks at Oxford, England, with the University of Oregon’s [Global Education Oregon](#) program. Students will learn about artists, scientists, legislators, and others whose own study abroad sparked in them revolutionary ways to create, explore, and reimagine possibilities in their fields. They’ll learn how these leaders shaped—and were shaped by—the environments of Oxford.

Highlights: Traditional punting (pushing a boat with a pole) on the Thames River, visiting a restorative farm, and an “Uncomfortable Oxford Tour” to spur discussions about topics like slavery and colonialism. A London excursion includes the British Museum, London Eye, and *Les Misérables*.

What are your goals? “Become more confident. I’m going to be both a student and a world traveler at the same time. I’m excited to meet new people and see new things.”

Any fears? “We’re going to do improv. I’m not good at that, but it’s good to get out of your comfort zone.”

What are you looking forward to? “The community. We’re going to be together the entire trip, so it’s a completely different experience than taking classes on campus. I think we’ll learn about ourselves. We’ll be different people when we return home.”



Mason Ferré

Junior from Joseph, Oregon, majoring in business

Summer adventure: San Francisco internship with Bloomberg LP, a financial, software, data, and media company

Jumping the gun: The internship began in May, so Ferré had to plan ahead, including taking his Finance 380 final exam early.

What will you be doing? “Learning about the Bloomberg Terminal, helping current clients use it more effectively, and working in sales with potential new customers.”

What’s a Bloomberg Terminal? “A system for financial professionals that most major financial firms use. It includes the hardware, as well as access to news, data, and analytics.”

Diverse résumé: In addition to running a vintage fashion company and cofounding a late-night grilled cheese sandwich shop, Ferré has worked as a pig farmer, lumberjack, and dock worker, all of which, he says, taught valuable lessons.

What are you most excited about? “I’m from a small town and I’ve always craved big city life. I’m also excited to work in an international company and see, firsthand, how day-to-day operations work. How does management lead such an organization?”

Why an internship? “Hands-on, in-person learning offers the best education. You can digest the material in class or from a book. But for it to really sink in, you have to experience business in action.”



Julia Boboc

Sophomore from Portland majoring in journalism

Robert D. Clark Honors College

Summer adventure: Interning for Oregon Public Broadcasting in Portland

What sparked your interest in this internship? “I love OPB. My mom and I always listen to it. I’m also interested in audio production.”

Sound experience: Boboc is a podcast producer for the Emerald Media Group and president of the audio club at the [School of Journalism and Communication](#).

What gives you maximum stoke? “I’m excited to see the way it all works, how the station is run, and how the parts of such a celebrated news outfit operate together. They have so much experience and wisdom.”

Nervous about anything? “I’m honored to have this internship as a sophomore, but I have a little imposter syndrome. I’m there to learn, so of course I won’t do everything perfectly. But I feel like I have to work hard and prove they made the right choice when they picked me.”

What will be the highlight of your summer? “Interviewing people from different places, with different perspectives and experiences, is the best part of journalism. That’s what’s going to wake me up every day.”



Conôr Male

Sophomore from Charleston, South Carolina, majoring in philosophy and political science

Summer adventure: Serving on the Oregon Climate Action Commission and exploring Peru

What inspired you to join the commission? “I want to use my time in a way that benefits my community and I think it will be a good introduction to Oregon politics. This nonpartisan committee works with Oregonians to make sure their perspectives are part of the governor’s policy-making process.”

What do you hope to get out of it? “It’s an easy way to gain hands-on experience and see if this is an area of politics I want to pursue as a career.”

What attributes do you offer? “I’m originally from Charleston, South Carolina, which is very conservative. So I think I bring an understanding of liberal and conservative, rural and urban, that reflects the different parts of Oregon.”

Journey to Peru: Male will visit friends, sandboard dunes, hike Machu Picchu, and explore Vinicunca, AKA Rainbow Mountain.

Any advice? “College students should travel. Find a way to get out there!”



Ryan Hinton

Sophomore from Springfield, Oregon, majoring in economics with a pre-major in global studies

Summer adventure: Studying Mandarin for eight weeks in Taiwan, then a family trip to Vietnam

What are you looking forward to? “Learning Mandarin while I’m immersed in the language and the culture. I’ll be forced to speak it, and I think that will help me learn exponentially. And the food!”

What’s on the menu? Hinton already has plans to hit Good Friend Cold Noodles, a food cart in Taipei’s Shilin Night Market with a stellar review in the *Michelin Guide*.

Passion for Mandarin: “I just stumbled upon it. Turns out I absolutely love the language. Now I look for every opportunity I can find to speak it. I chat with a friend online regularly. At work, there’s a customer who would come in every weekend so we could talk in Mandarin. It’s so much fun!”

Extra credit: After Taiwan, Hinton will join his family on a trip to find relatives in Vietnam and explore their roots.

Personal goal: Become more independent. This will be Hinton’s first trip abroad and first flight by himself.



Allie Braun

Junior from Missoula, Montana, majoring in art

Summer adventure: Leading backpacking and sea kayaking expeditions in Norway for US high school students

Bona fides: A certified Wilderness First Responder and avid backpacker, Braun has worked two seasons with Overland Summers, the Massachusetts company organizing her Norway trips. She also credits the UO [Holden Leadership Center](#), where she’s part of the leadership development team.

What do you like about leading excursions? “Motivating people and building community. You have to maintain group harmony, assess everyone’s needs, and foster relationships.”

Any harrowing wilderness stories? “I’ve seen bears, blisters, sickness—including homesickness. I helped with a compound fracture once, but that was another group and not our camper.”

Pro backpacking tips? “Buy the best boots and pants you can afford. But leave your book at home, because it’s going to get heavy and you’re going to crash at dusk anyway.”

What are you looking forward to? “I love meeting students from all over the country. When you coexist with people for weeks in the wilderness, you get to know their personalities—good and bad.”

Ed Dorsch, BA ’94, MA, ’99 is a contributing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

Nic Walcott, BS ’16 (journalism), and **Dusty Whitaker** are videographer/photographers for University Communications.

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SUMMER 2024

New Weather, New Foes, New Dictionary: The B1G Road Ahead

Our alumni association exec scouts the new conference, destinations, and adventures in spelling

By Raphe Beck • Illustration by Bridgette Coyne • July 3, 2024

4 min read



Welcome to the B1G league! For those of you unfamiliar with our new conference, I offer some helpful insights on the Big Ten.

The first thing to know is that all the cool kids write “B1G” instead of “Big Ten.” And don’t be fooled into saying “bee one gee” like you’re singing a Prince song at karaoke night. That is a total rookie move, although if anyone has extra tickets to the Ohio State game, I would die 4U.

For me, the move to a new conference is a homecoming of sorts because I grew up in Evanston, Illinois, in the shadow of the Northwestern Wildcats. My high school team was the Evanston Wildkits, and—I kid you not—we displayed a fighting kitten on our athletic jerseys. R4WR! (See what I did there, cool kids?)

Those of you from the Pacific Northwest may question why a school so far to the east is called Northwestern, but it was named at a time when Indiana was considered the center of the country, which was never. I hope this clears things up.

Please note that while they may sound like B1G teams, the following are *not* in fact part of the Big Ten: Penn, Iowa State, Ohio University, and the Detroit Lions.

The people who schedule the football season have a B1G sense of humor. With all the excitement about a new season, new conference, and new opponents, who do we play in our first-ever Big Ten conference game? That’s right: the UCLA Bruins, who we’ve played 1,876 times. And a team that, like us, is rushing to sew B1G logos onto their uniforms. We travel to LA in balmy September. Join us! The University of Oregon Alumni Association is throwing a [B1G tailgate](#).

Away games in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Madison, Wisconsin, have been saved for late in the season when the polar vortex arrives from Canada. The fashion authorities who dictate Oregon’s fan colors for each game have declared both contests “Wear White for the Ducks,” presumably so that our fan base will appear deceptively large in the November snow. (B1G tailgates there, too. Bring your parka.)

Here’s a story: in 2021 when we last played THE Ohio State University (you know—the school whose name officially begins with an article?), my colleagues and I arrived in Columbus proudly wearing our Ducks gear. THE rental car booth man told us that local fans are always super nice to THE visiting fans. I asked if that had anything to do with THE visiting teams consistently getting shellacked and if he thought it would be different when Oregon won. He just stared at me, unsure how to respond. For THE record—final score: UO 35, OSU 28—we ran for our lives to THE airport after that game. We didn’t want to find out if THE locals remained super nice or not.

We’ll get visits from Illinois and Maryland this year. These teams were national football champions as recently as 1951 and 1953, respectively. Good seats still available. We also have an away game at Purdue. Note to self: look up the definition of “Boilermaker.” And “Terrapins.” And “Nittany” Lions, while we’re at it.

Let’s not forget those darned Huskies, our new-yet-not-so-new conference rivals. Our season will conclude in Autzen with this familiar foe and, we can be assured, a win. Right? I’m not N3RVOUS at all.

Some critics claim that former Pac-12 schools aren’t ready for their new conference. Others predict that the Big Ten championship game will be played by two teams whose names start with the letter O. Did you know that with the new playoff system, we could play as many as six games after Thanksgiving? Woo hoo! More tailgates!

Whatever happens, I hope to see you at the games. I can assure you that we’re about to have a lot of F2N.

Raphe Beck is executive director of the University of Oregon Alumni Association.

Bridgette Coyne is a freelance illustrator in Bend, Oregon.

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SUMMER 2024

Researchers Developing New Approaches to Solve Aging Problems

Emerging science initiative will look at root causes of aging and ways to prolong health

By Ed Dorsch • Illustration by David Gill • July 3, 2024

4 min read



Around the world people are living longer, and that presents a looming health crisis. Age related health problems—Alzheimer’s disease, osteoarthritis, dementia, and more—are also expected to grow.

“Across the globe, we’re living longer lives, but not better lives,” says Patrick Phillips, a biology professor at the University of Oregon. “The health challenges associated with aging represent a critical problem.”

Patrick Phillips is spearheading a new research initiative focused on age-related diseases

Phillips is spearheading a new research initiative focused on age-related diseases. The effort employs technology that will accelerate discovery and fuel new approaches to research.

Launched with a major gift from longtime UO donors Kenda and Kenneth Singer, the synthetic biology and aging initiative will leverage the UO’s strengths in the life sciences and unite researchers from different disciplines to study age-related disease.

While conventional medicine often addresses the symptoms of disease, UO researchers will study root causes and how fundamental human systems break down with age. For example, inflammation serves as an essential immune response, but chronic inflammation is linked to heart disease, cancer, and other ailments.

Ultimately, Phillips hopes to modify how human systems function at the cellular level. It starts with synthetic biology: redesigning how organisms function by tweaking their DNA. Using innovative methods, UO scientists will test thousands of these genetic adjustments at once.

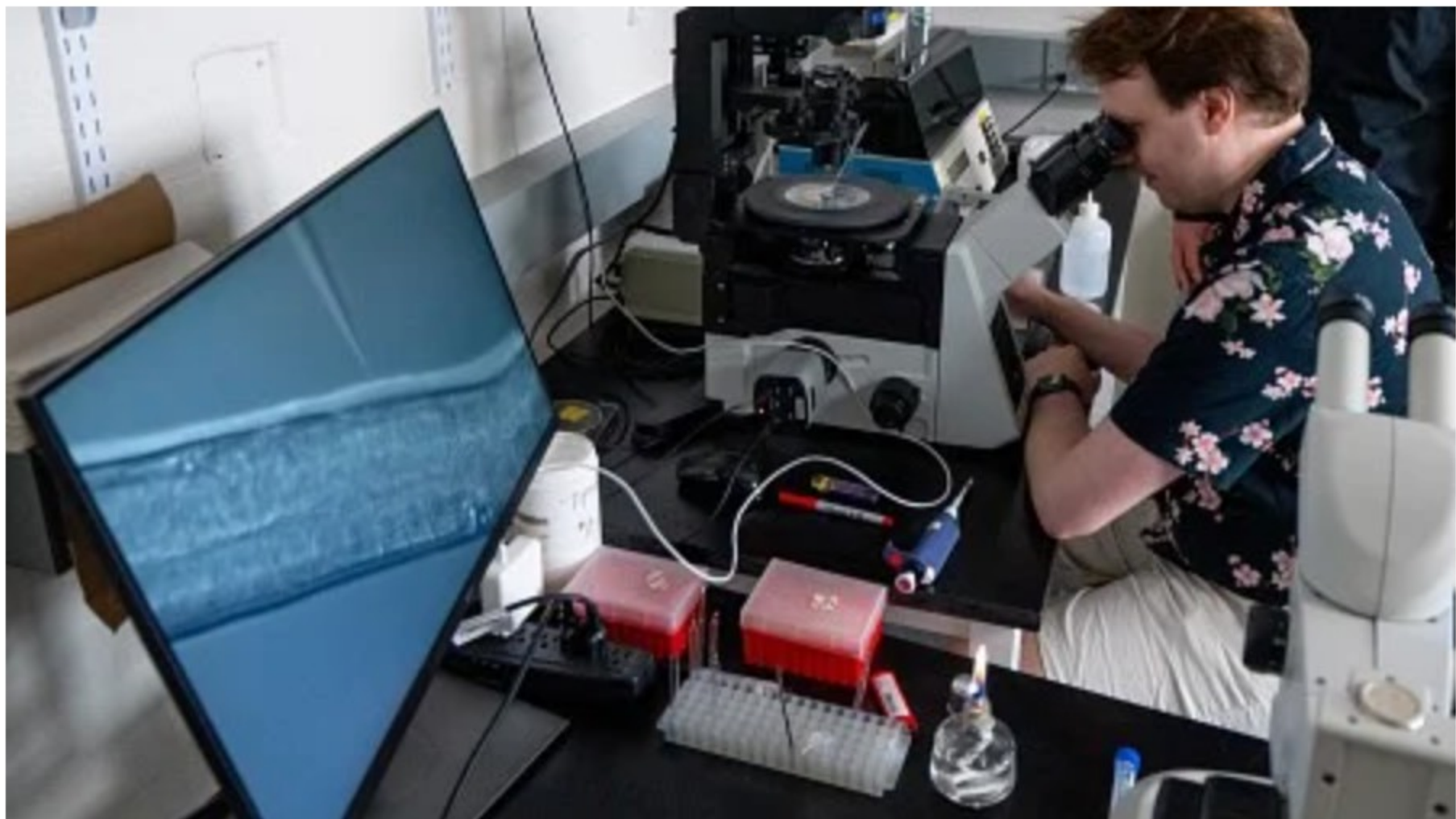
Imagine, says Phillips, a drug that alters the genes of a seventy-year-old to regenerate tissue more like those of a thirty-year-old. This would nip several diseases in the bud—or at least delay their onset.

Phillips concedes aging can’t be stopped. But he hopes we can change how we age and maintain active living—what he calls “health span”—later in life.

His research team has already made *C. elegans*, a worm as long as a pencil tip, live ten times longer by [making a few genetic mutations](#). Researchers in the Phillips lab specialize in this worm—the team recently discovered a revolutionary method for testing [thousands of genetic mutations at once](#) using a single specimen.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- World Health Organization: Global population sixty years and older will double 2015–2050
- New UO research initiative addresses age-related health challenges
- Donors Kenda and Kenneth Singer seed projects with major gift
- Interdisciplinary effort focuses on quality of life, not just prolonging it
- Cell clusters called organoids will be used to screen drugs and study aging



Graduate student Zach Stevenson working with a C. elegans worm

For the first phase of the initiative, they’re exploring synthetic circuits: switches engineered in the lab that turn genes on and off, in specific tissues at specific times. Currently they’re studying genes known to control how cells respond to stress.

Starvation, excess heat, and toxins are not good for us. However, Phillips says, turning on the cellular responses that

our body uses to manage these and other stressors—when they’re not present—could help us lead longer, healthier lives.

For the next phase, Phillips plans to combine this work with that of scientists at the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact [who work with “organoids,”](#) an emerging technology.

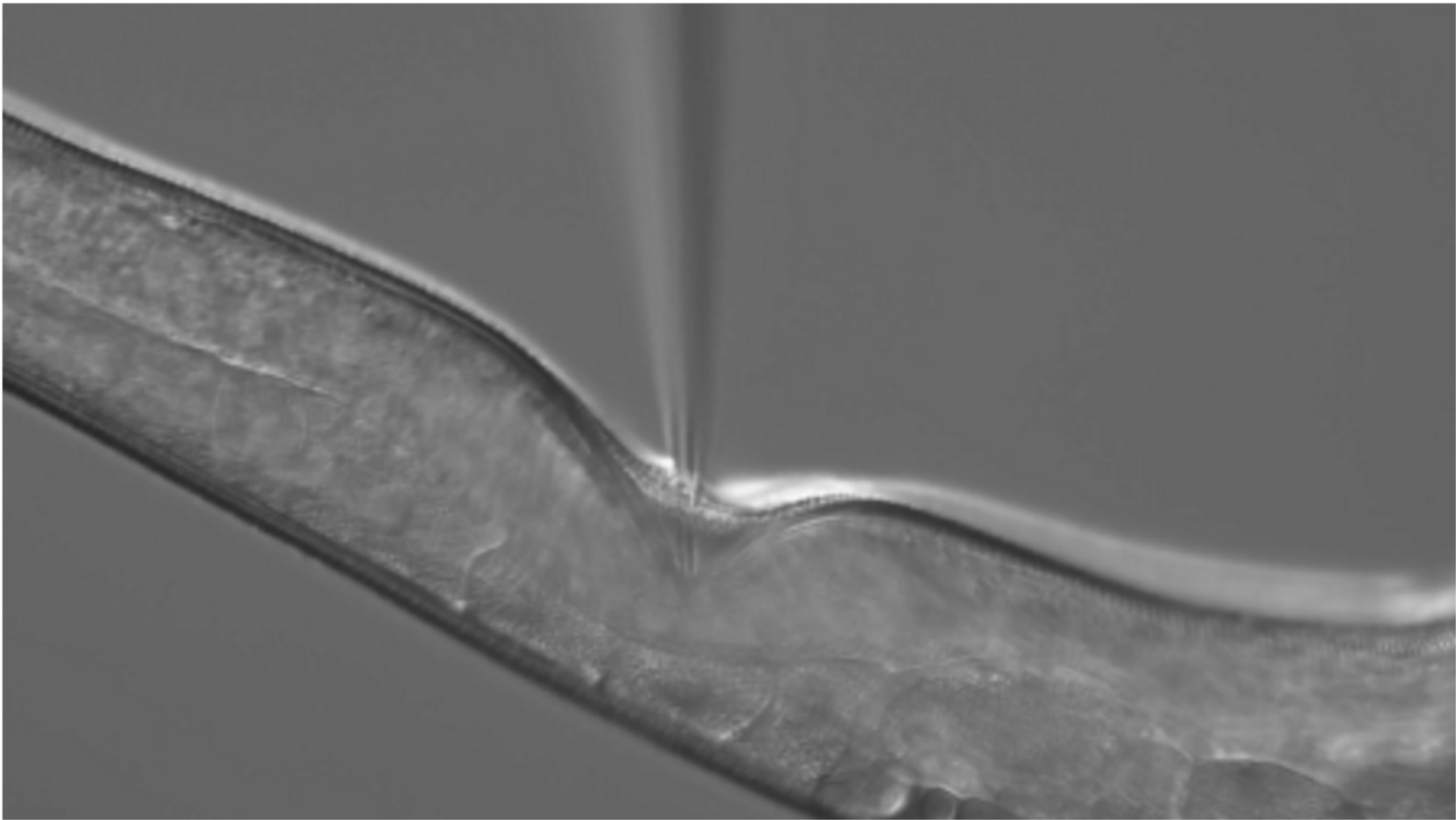
Clusters of living cells are extracted from human tissue, grown in the lab, and function much like an organ, enabling researchers to test new treatments. Scientists have created organoids emulating the lung, stomach, heart, liver, pancreas, retina, and kidney.

At the Knight Campus, researchers are already using organoids related to human performance. For example, they’re studying tissue models of the human knee, bone, cartilage, and muscle.

Phillips emphasizes you won’t see little knees kicking around in UO laboratories. They’re microscopic (picture rows of petri dishes). Organoids offer an effective alternative to experimentation on living subjects, and they’re scalable.

Aging is a massive, systemic phenomenon, Phillips says; Studying its root causes will require complex experiments involving organoids, robots to automate procedures, and artificial intelligence to evaluate vast amounts of data.

Researchers in the Phillips lab and Knight Campus will apply discoveries about worm DNA to organoid experiments leading to revelations about age-related disease.



C. elegans, a one-millimeter worm, receiving an injection of genetic material

Take Alzheimer’s, for instance. More than six million people in the US have the disease and this number is expected to increase to nearly thirteen million by 2050, according to the Alzheimer’s Association.

Scientists don’t know what causes Alzheimer’s or who’s going to get it. Researchers could use brain organoids to screen drugs, test treatments, and observe how the disease

progresses.

Traditional experiments focus on one or two variables, but Phillips envisions “brute force” research in which scientists examine many variables at once. By simultaneously studying thousands of genetic circuits in organoids, he hopes to make discoveries that lead to new therapies.

This potent combination of artificial intelligence, synthetic biology, organoids, and automation will enable scientists to take a more comprehensive approach to exploring—and transforming—how we age. It will also reduce the time between discoveries in the lab and treatments that help people.

It’s a big plan. But Phillips is familiar with thinking big, having served in numerous university leadership roles and nationally, as an expert on aging and genetics with the National Institutes of Health.

Phillips’s research—and its potential—inspired the Singers to invest and launch the initiative.

“For investing and philanthropy, we look for excellent people,” says donor Ken Singer, a retired orthopedic surgeon and team physician for the Ducks for thirty years. “Phillips is a well-regarded scientist who’s done incredible work.”

“I spent much of my time as a physician assistant working with older people,” says donor Kenda Singer, BS ’74 (biology), whose career spans primary care, women’s health, dermatology, and women’s athletics. “This research model holds great promise.”

Ed Dorsch, BA ’94 (English, sociology), MA ’99 (journalism), is a contributing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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From the classroom to the lab to a global health internship, Dante’ James has excelled while exploring what it means to be mixed race

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SUMMER 2024

Protecting First Foods, Navigating Two Cultures

Keyen Singer balances studies and tribal traditions as Miss Indigenous UO

Video by Dusty Whitaker • July 3, 2024



Traditional or “first foods” are the plants and animals that sustained the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation for thousands of years: water, fish, game, roots, and berries.

For University of Oregon sophomore Keyen Singer, protecting those foods is protecting the culture of her people.

Singer is well positioned for this goal. As Miss Indigenous UO, Singer raises awareness about the importance of first foods to Native peoples and environmental risks such as dams that harm salmon. And as an environmental studies major, she’s examining the same issues and how to

solve them.

In a new *Oregon Quarterly* video, Singer explores questions of identity, education, and tradition with Native American peers Yazzie Chee and Megan Van Pelt, both 2024 graduates.

“Sometimes traditional does mean engaging in old ways,” Singer says. “To me, it’s not that old. It’s just who we are.”

Dusty Whitaker is a videographer/photographer for University Communications.

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