

Autumn 2023



The UO 2023–24: Unboxed

The UO’s academic year package has arrived with new places, programs, and projects
Volume 103 Number 1. Motion graphic by David Gill and Chris Larsen, University Communications.

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Training the Next Virtual Virtuosos

A new immersive media communication master's degree envisions an exciting reality for creative careers

By Marcus Wilkins • October 4, 2023

6 min read



Tip back your head to peer at the beachfront architecture framing the subtropical sky. Surrounding you in the sand are dozens of eggs—they are your siblings, simultaneously emerging from your comfy clutch. As you use your flippers to traverse the shore, your first steps in an epic oceanic journey, a speedboat zips past in the waiting waves and jostles your shell. It’s your first pang of the dangers that abound in the modern world.



A student demos Project Shell during the SOJC Center for Science Communication Research's Climate Change Game Night. Photo: Brian Davies

Thanks to the immersive magic of the latest virtual reality (VR) technology—delivered through VR goggles—you are experiencing a loggerhead sea turtle’s first moment of life. Developed by Daniel Pimentel, assistant professor of immersive media psychology in the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication (SOJC), the fifteen-minute [Project Shell](#) experience cultivates empathy by giving the user a first-person experience of an endangered reptile’s ecological plight.

“In VR, what happens to your virtual body is imprinted on your mind as a lived experience, which changes your view of the issues you encountered, and thus your willingness to take action,” says Pimentel, a fellow with the [environment initiative](#), one of the university areas where interdisciplinary collaborations are building on a strength for greater global impact. “For example, when people become sea turtles, they view other sea turtles in the environment differently than they view other animals. You see them as part of your in-group.”

It may seem futuristic, but immersive media is already in use all around us, from video games and retail websites to nonprofit work and education. To help UO students get ahead of the surge in this emerging communication technology, SOJC launched a [one-year online master’s degree](#) in immersive media communication in the 2023–24 school year. The program filled quickly and recruitment for 2024–25 has already begun.

New power to inform and tell stories

The immersive media communication program teaches graduates how to build immersive content and use it to communicate about brands, nonprofits, social causes, and more. Immersive media, or extended reality (XR), is a broad category that encompasses virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR), social virtual worlds, and other digitized environments. The metaverse—not to be confused with the company Meta, formerly Facebook—describes the approaching future of cyberspace where users are connected in virtual, augmented, and other extended-reality environments.

According to immersive media communication master’s program director [Donna Davis](#), who also codirects the SOJC [Oregon Reality Lab](#) with [Pimentel](#), the immersive media industry will soon change everything about the way we communicate and interact, in much the same way social media reshaped the world more than fifteen years ago.

“Many communications professionals discounted the potential of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as communication tools when they initially launched,” says Davis. “We cannot afford to ignore the power of immersive technologies as communications platforms and opportunities when they have such power to tell stories, create experiences, and teach in new and profound ways, especially if you want to reach Gen Z or Alpha”—people born in the mid to late 1990s through the mid-2020s—“who are truly digital natives.”

“This technology is coming at us like a bullet train whether we want it to or not.”

—Nikki Dunsire



Nikki Dunsire, manager of the Oregon Reality Lab.
Photo: Jeremy Parker

The SOJC believes communicators who learn how to use immersive media will help their employers get ahead of the curve.

“This technology is coming at us like a bullet train whether we want it to or not,” says [Nikki Dunsire](#), manager of the Oregon Reality Lab and one of the founding instructors of the immersive media communication master’s program. “Having a diverse set of voices at the table is important and this is a discipline that is touching every industry. It’s in high demand.”

Path to a dream job

Davis created the online program with classes covering the strategy, design, and psychology of immersive media approaches. The course incorporates interactive chat sessions, VR experiences, virtual field trips that can be taken individually or in groups, faculty office hours held in a virtual world, and practice with immersive media-building tools. Students’ tuitions cover the cost for individual laptops and VR headsets, which they get to keep.

[Video: 'Bring Wonder to Your Audiences' with the immersive media degree](#)

“There are so many opportunities and pathways to success when a student has extensive experience in immersive media strategy, largely because all industries are leveraging immersive media in some form to engage with stakeholders,” says Pimentel. “It is only a question of what field a student wants to enter, after which they can tailor our program to give them experience to potentially enter that space.”

Jake Savelich, a 2023 graduate, worked with immersive media faculty as a strategic communication student before the new online immersive media program launched. “Before I started the [strategic communication] master’s program, I was working for a local nonprofit because I wanted my work to make a difference in other people’s lives,” Savelich says. “[The immersive media faculty] helped me find a way to do that through communication. There’s a huge audience in immersive platforms already, and it’s growing.”

Savelich compares his project to Amazon’s and Ikea’s augmented reality applications, where you can view images of furniture and household items “placed” in your living room or kitchen before buying them. Disney, Gucci, and Nike are among the many companies hiring immersive media strategists and metaverse marketers to sell their products.

“Much like traditional strategic communication, graduates from this program can find their skills and expertise will be in demand across many fields,” says Davis, who has also conducted extensive [research](#) into the ways virtual worlds can help individuals with disabilities. “Any organization attempting to reach audiences for advocacy, behavior change, attitude change, sales, marketing, and the many disciplines in communication can find an effective use of augmented, virtual, and extended realities. Already we are seeing museums, health care organizations, and NASA finding effective uses of immersive media.”

Marcus Wilkins, a writer specializing in higher education in Columbia, Missouri, covers research, community, athletics, fundraising, and long-form profiles.

Photo of Donna Davis with student by Charlie Litchfield, University Communications. Videos and media provided by the School of Journalism and Communication.

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

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Student’s Vibrant Vision for the Future Coming into Focus

Annie Neal is on a fast track to graduate, the latest step on a journey to success for the advertising major and photographer from Portland



MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

Sexism and the Woman Journalist

Q & A with former *New Yorker* editor Tina Brown, who visits in February for the Center for the Study of Women in Society’s fiftieth anniversary



MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

Sundance Lessons: Filmmaker Masami Kawai Rises

The cinema studies professor brings the inspiration of Robert Redford’s movie institute to the classroom and the set

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Sound Artist Makes Waves with Multisensory Experiences

Faculty member Jon Bellona creates new sounds, instruments, and perspectives through sonic experimentation

By Ed Dorsch • October 4, 2023

6 min read



When ten-year-old Jon Bellona heard Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” he was hooked on that sound. Bellona was already playing the flute, an instrument chosen for him because that’s what his school orchestra needed.

But what he needed was an electric guitar—and a distortion pedal. It took a couple years, but eventually he got his sunburst Fender Squire. He kept practicing (both guitar and flute).

In 1999, he enrolled in Hamilton College in Upstate New York. Bellona majored in music and joined the orchestra as well as his third rock band, the Edgy Citizens. However, it didn’t take long for him to realize his true passion was tweaking soundwaves, not performing.

“Instead of songs, I was interested in manipulating sound with technology,” he says. “You can use knobs to make a scream or a whisper, to change the sound in more ways than just plucking out a melody.”

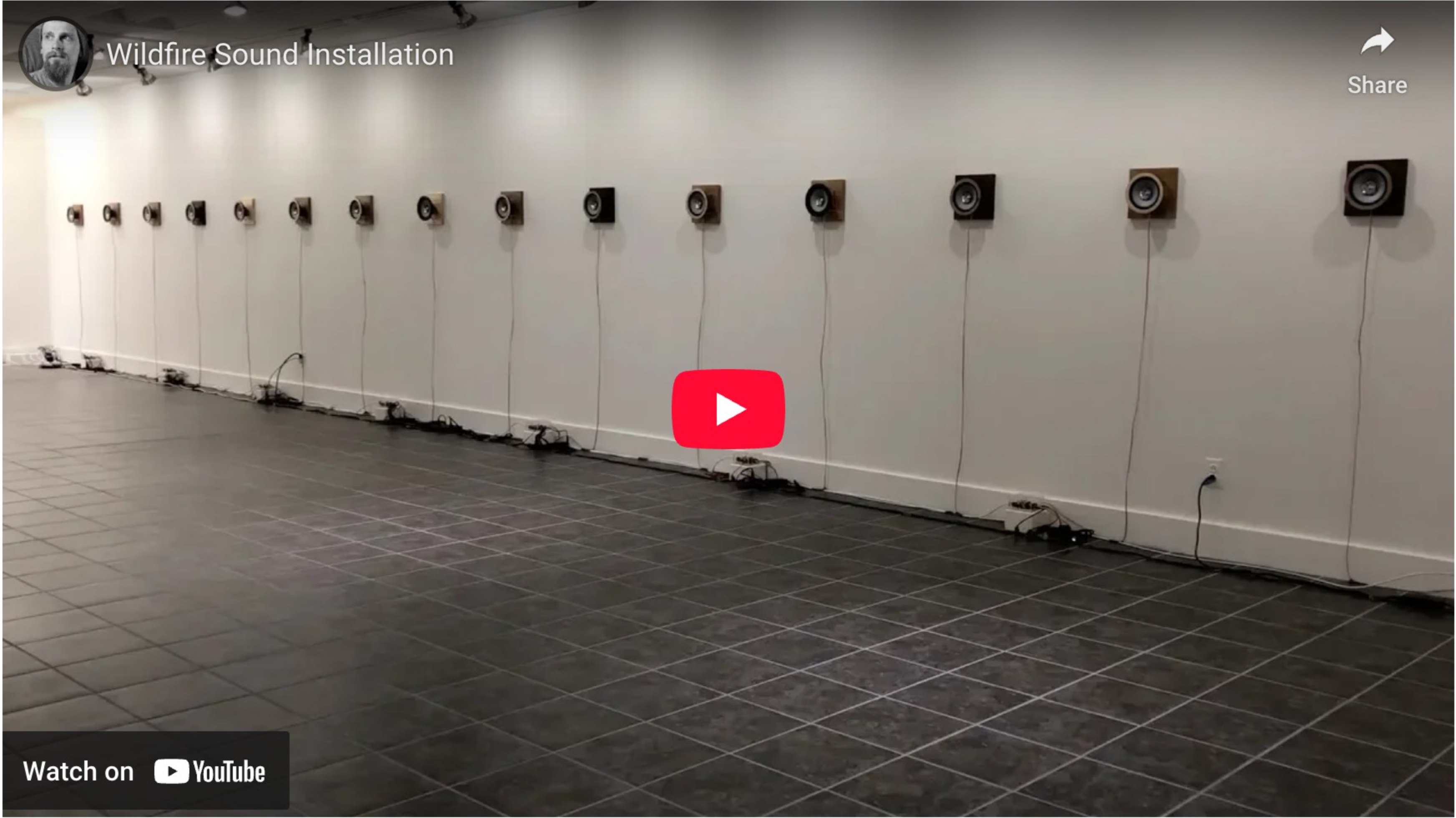
Today, as a senior instructor of audio production at the University of Oregon, he brings his ingenuity for [creating with sound](#) to the classrooms and studios of the [School of Music and Dance](#). In addition to teaching and mentoring students, Bellona, an alumnus of the school, conducts research in areas such as music technology and [new ways to use sound in education](#).

He’s also an active sound artist, creating works—often in collaboration with others—that present sound as a medium of expression. As you’ll hear and see in the examples that follow, these also involve visuals, moving parts, and audience interaction to create immersive public installations.



Jon Bellona, UO
senior instructor of
audio production
(photo: Ann Hughes)

Wildfire



Bellona was driving from Eugene to Santa Cruz in 2018 when wildfires near Mount Shasta forced a four-hour detour. The extra time—and the smoke-filled sky dotted by a blood-red sun—gave him pause to reflect. How could he use sound to help people understand their relationship to wildfires?

The result: a forty-eight-foot-long array of speakers Bellona built from sustainably sourced alder, pine, sycamore, myrtle wood, and black walnut. The exhibit features the sound of fire sprinting across the speakers at eighty-three miles per hour, the speed flames traveled during one of California’s most destructive wildfires. Wildfire was installed in New York in 2019 and 2020 and at the UO earlier this year.

City Synth



This fun, community-oriented sound art installation transformed a city into a musical instrument in February 2018. Live video feeds from cameras around Eugene were transmitted to a downtown building lobby where a synthesizer interpreted moving images as sound. Here, visitors watched the video and played with the sounds by using an interface resembling a video game controller.

Each camera employed a different sonification method. For example, one used “blob tracking” to identify the movement of people in a space. Eugene-based art collective Harmonic Laboratory developed the installation; South Eugene High School’s robotics team helped with the cameras.

Tower of Voices

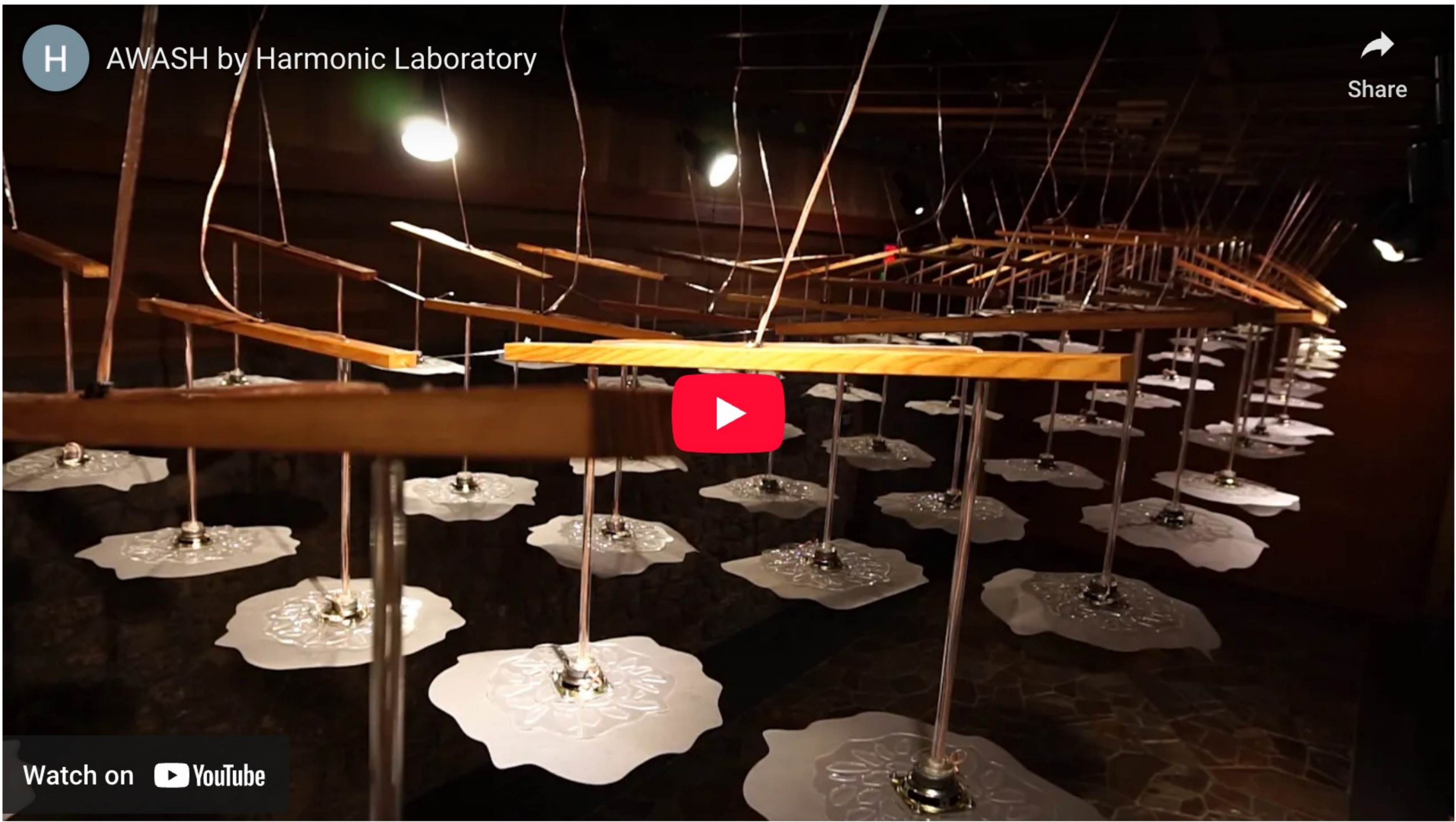


Bellona’s college mentor Sam Pellman designed the sound for this ninety-three-foot-tall tower at the Flight 93 National Memorial near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The installation features forty chimes, in honor of the forty crew members and passengers who died while stopping terrorists from crashing a hijacked airliner into the

White House in 2001.

Pellman died in a bicycle accident in 2017, before the installation was completed. His widow contacted Jon Bellona and classmate Ben Salzman for help. They ensured the architects had Pellman’s final plans, updated the acoustic model simulations based on Pellman’s pitch design, and gave a presentation at an international symposium in 2018 about Pellman’s work.

Awash



Commissioned by the High Desert Museum in Bend for its 2019 Water in the West exhibit, this kinetic sound sculpture reflects the ecology of Central Oregon. The installation, which combines amplified field recordings from the region with the sounds of an organ and moving pieces that interact with sonic vibrations, was created by Eugene-based Harmonic Laboratory. Bellona is codirector of the art collective.

An interpretation of the high desert floodplain and natural water cycles, Awash distributes sound energy across 120 speakers. A motorized wheel with twenty holes, each connected to string, moves the spine of the work, which conveys the sounds of wind, water, and motion in waves over visitors’ heads.

Distance-X



To create a digital musical instrument he calls Distance-X, Bellona chopped a Gametrak video game controller in half and strapped it to his right arm. He uses a Nintendo Wii remote for the button and accelerometer of his creation. These devices change the parameters of the instrument’s sound when the player moves their arms.

Bellona created the instrument to explore connections between body movement and control of the musical landscape. The instrument’s name is derived from the way it manipulates sound based on the changing distance between the player’s hands. It’s also a comment on figurative distances—between composer and performer and the space that technology creates between effort and sound.

As a music major at Hamilton College, Bellona marched to the beat of a different drum. Rather than writing down musical notes, he preferred taking notes on guitar pedal settings. During orchestra concerts, he focused on how all the sounds fit together rather than his own flute performances.

Then his mentor, Professor Sam Pellman, showed him how the studio could become an instrument, a tool for artistic expression. Pellman also introduced Bellona to the notion of “sound art”—not songs, but innovative ways to shape sound as an artistic medium.

Bellona spent hours in the studio helping fellow undergraduates record music. And he experimented by creating audio collages from sound samples.

For his senior fellowship, he created an [exhibition](#) featuring more than two hundred voices in eight-channel surround sound reading all 58,206 names of service members killed during the Vietnam War. It was a preview of the inventive, thought-provoking works he creates today.

After completing his undergraduate degree in 2003, Bellona worked as an assistant engineer in a New York recording studio. But he yearned for a more creative outlet and kept in touch with his college mentor; Pellman told him he should check out the UO School of Music and Dance. So Bellona headed west and enrolled.

In 2011, he completed his master of music in intermedia [music technology](#), then a PhD at the University of Virginia. In 2017, he joined the UO faculty.

Bellona specializes in technology, data-body interactivity, digital musical instruments, and data sonification—the translation of data into sound. He’s also codirector of [Harmonic Laboratory](#), an interdisciplinary arts collective based in Eugene.

For his sound installation, [Carbon Feed](#), Bellona collaborated with John Park, a career instructor with the School of Art + Design and cofounder of Harmonic Laboratory. The piece uses transparent tubes of water and bubbles to demonstrate the greenhouse gas emissions that result from the energy that powers social media servers. The exhibit has been installed thirteen times across the US, including the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, DC.

Visitors to a 2011 Eugene installation called [Human Chimes](#) moved to create sounds that interact with other people in the space.

Collaborating with researchers across the US, Bellona is currently exploring how ocean data presented in new ways that use audio formats (as opposed to visuals) can serve blind and low-vision learners—and open up new avenues to interpreting information.

Whether as an artist, teacher, or mentor, Bellona says he’s always looking for new ideas.

“However, it’s also important to stick with your ideas,” he adds. “I hope to impart this to my students. You have to know what you want and be willing to fight for your art.”

Ed Dorsch, BA ’94 (English, sociology), MA ’99 (journalism), is a staff writer for University Communications.

ART, DESIGN & LITERATURE

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Composer Reimagines a Classic for Bach Fest Project

Damien Geter is known for infusing his works with musical styles of the Black diaspora



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Playing and Paying Forward the Art and Traditions of Jazz

Video: Pianist Keith Brown fuels the dreams of students in UO's thriving jazz studies program



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Literary Sisters: Two Years That Changed Our Culture

English professor’s new book captures pivotal moment for Black feminist writing

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AUTUMN 2023

Greg Dotson is Down to Earth on Climate Legislation

Law prof offers insights on Capitol Hill, the historic Inflation Reduction Act, and cutting carbon pollution

By Ed Dorsch • Illustration by David Gill • October 4, 2023

4 min read



An expert at keeping the gears of Congress moving forward, Associate Professor Gregory Dotson has returned to the University of Oregon School of Law after working on historic climate legislation on Capitol Hill.

August marked one year since the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was signed into law. The IRA includes provisions to counter inflation, lower drug costs, and more. It's also making great strides to lower carbon emissions.

Dotson took a leave of absence in 2021 and '22 to serve as chief counsel for the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. He focused on the decarbonization pieces of the IRA, helping write, negotiate, and push the bill over the finish line.

Before joining the Oregon Law faculty in 2017, Dotson, JD '95, spent twenty years advancing environmental legislation in the US House of Representatives. He specializes in energy policy, renewable energy, and laws that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks.



Associate Professor
Gregory Dotson

OQ: What's the IRA?

Gregory Dotson: By far, the biggest step forward Congress has ever taken on climate change. It includes at least \$370 billion in incentives to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, including tax credits, rebates, and federal grant programs.

That budget number involves some prognostication because we're estimating future tax revenues and public appetite for incentive programs. More recent forecasts anticipate an even bigger impact, with some estimating over \$1 trillion to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

OQ: How did such a big bill make it through such a divided Congress?

GD: The IRA is actually the second of a pair of related acts. The first, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, was the largest infrastructure bill ever passed. But it had limitations.

It included long-overdue infrastructure improvements for water, transportation, broadband, and more. But climate change is—unfortunately—a partisan topic, so many important decarbonization-related elements did not make it into

the infrastructure act.

Step two was the IRA, which had a major focus on those climate provisions. As a reconciliation bill that’s about budgets and taxes, it required only a simple majority to pass.

OQ: How does the IRA reduce greenhouse gas pollution?

GD: Some examples include tax incentives for electric vehicles, solar panels, clean energy manufacturing, and energy-efficient appliances. Others include new federal grant programs. Cities can obtain funding to develop and implement plans to reduce pollution or initiate energy projects. And it promotes cleaner production of construction materials such as cement and steel.

“Stay hopeful and join the effort. It’s easy to feel like there’s nothing you can do. That feeling is unwarranted and debilitating.”

—Greg Dotson

These are just some of many examples, but they all add up to less carbon in the sky. According to a US Department of Energy study released this August, by 2030 the infrastructure act and IRA will drastically turn back the clock on US greenhouse gas pollution—to 41 percent below 2005 levels.

OQ: What’s the biggest obstacle to addressing climate change?

GD: Inertia. The systems we’ve built resist change, but people are leading the way. Ten years ago, you probably didn’t know anyone with an electric car. Few, if any, of your neighbors had solar panels. What was once novel has become commonplace.

As we see the benefits of these technologies, more people decide to adopt them. Insulation and new windows make your home more comfortable immediately—then you get a lower electric bill. Heat pumps are efficient at keeping your home warm, with the added bonus of air-conditioning. Your new electric vehicle is fun and it frees you from getting whipsawed by prices at the pump.

OQ: How did you get interested in climate law?

GD: It started with backpacking, rock climbing, and a love for the outdoors. As a law student, I wanted to protect endangered species and threatened natural areas. Of course, I still care about those.

But it didn’t take long to see how climate change affects everything: forests, fires, wildlife habitat, rivers, glaciers, and so on. And of course the human cost of unchecked climate change is staggering. A strong response to climate change can help improve public health, transportation, architecture, and other human systems, even local economies.

OQ: What’s next for you?

GD: Sharing my experiences with students. They’re hungry to know about policy, passing legislation, and what it takes to make tangible progress on the environment. Teaching law represents an opportunity to take a deep breath, look at things more methodically, and focus on the end game.

If you work in Congress, you focus on next week. If you work for a think tank, you can look at the coming months. At a university, you can work on even more enduring issues.

OQ: What’s the most important message you’d like to share?

GD: Stay hopeful and join the effort. It’s easy to feel like there’s nothing you can do. That feeling is unwarranted and debilitating. In Oregon we just endured a summer of wildfires, heat waves, and smoke. On the news, we see other serious impacts of climate change from around the world.

But we’re in a very different place today than we were even a couple of years ago. The federal government has stepped up to support this transition to a new era. Because farsighted state policies are already in place, Oregon is ready to hit the ground running and put these resources to work.

Be a Part of It

Learn more about the Inflation Reduction Act and available incentive programs

[Oregon Department of Energy on two historic pieces of climate legislation](#)

[Consumer guide to incentive programs](#)

[Clean energy guide](#)

Ed Dorsch BA '94 (English, sociology), MA '99 (journalism), is a staff writer for University Communications.

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ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

The Beauty of Campus in Tree Dimensions

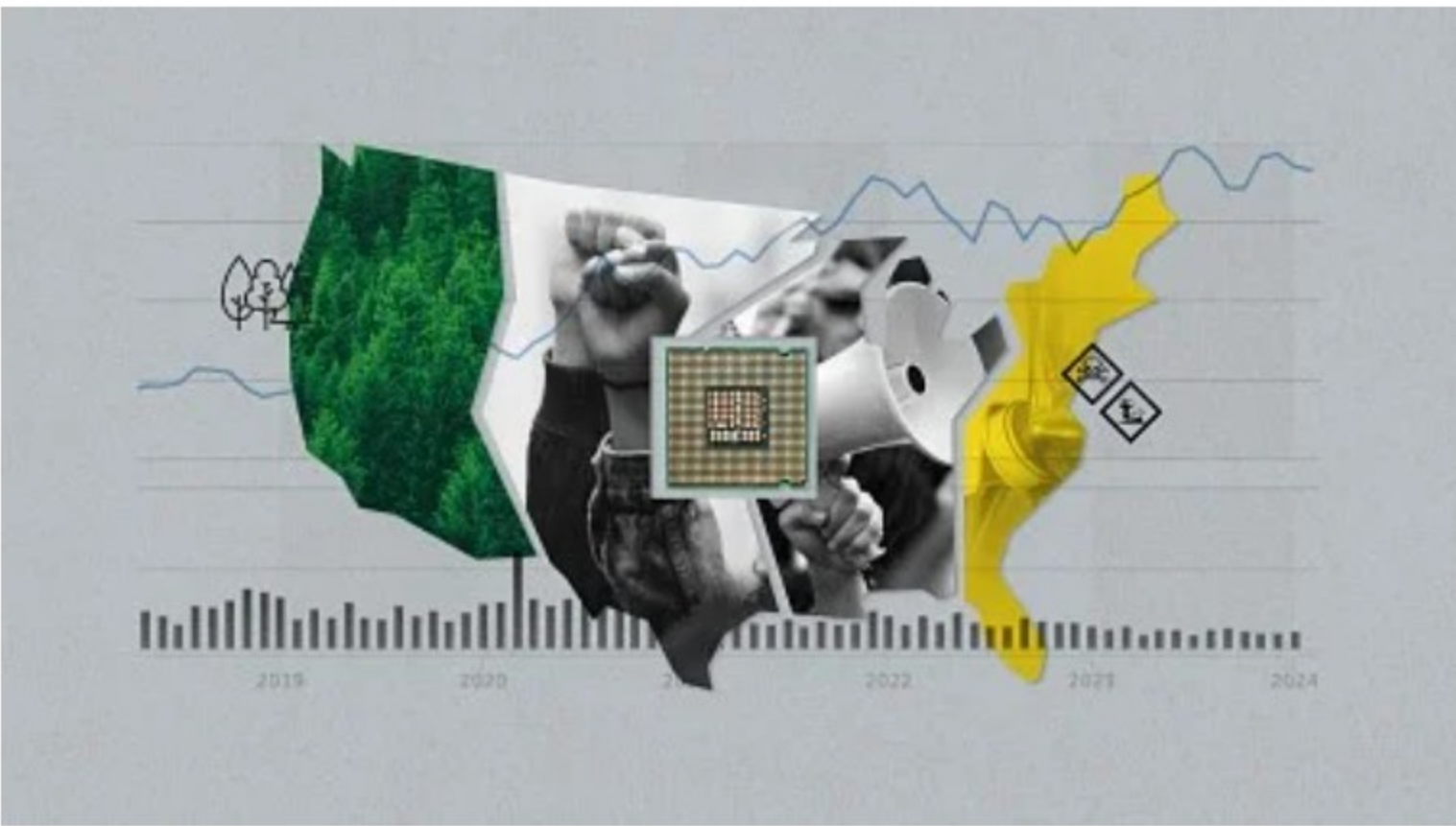
Native species, thriving transplants, and majestic memorials contribute to the UO experience



ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

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

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AUTUMN 2023

Seven New Scenes at the University of Oregon

From academics to buildings to leadership, the latest attractions underscore the fact that Ducks never stand still

By Tim Christie • Video and photos by University Communications • October 4, 2023

4 min read



As a new academic year gets underway, the University of Oregon is embracing change and moving forward with new leadership, new academic endeavors, and new buildings.

1

The New BMOC

Karl Scholz took office as the [UO's nineteenth president](#) in July, arriving from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he served as provost. Scholz is an economist with expertise in household savings, low-wage labor markets, financial barriers to higher education, and bankruptcy laws. In addition to his roles in academia, Scholz served in the George H. W. Bush and Clinton presidential administrations.



Scholz visited the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact in August (photo: Charlie Litchfield, University Communications)

2



Now Open in PDX

To the north, University of Oregon Portland’s [new campus in northeast Portland](#) partially opens this fall, including the [Ballmer Institute for Children’s Behavioral Health](#). The UO purchased the property in June 2022 and will be renovating and remodeling buildings through next year.

In addition to the Ballmer Institute, the Northeast Portland campus will be home this fall for students in law, school psychology, and journalism as well as administrative staff for student life, government and community relations, security, and information technology. Third-year law students were the first to arrive, beginning fall term in August. All other UO Portland programs are scheduled to move to the new campus during the 2024–25 academic year.

3

Residence Upgrades

On the building front, two residence halls with a combined 301,250 square feet are opening at the corner of East Fifteenth Avenue and Agate Street, across from Hayward Field in the space formerly occupied by Walton Hall.

The yet-to-be-named complexes, which cost an estimated \$121.3 million, are known as buildings B and C for now. The Board of Trustees is expected to approve names for the halls in the coming school year.

Building B, which can house seven hundred to nine hundred students, offers a mix of double and triple rooms, all with attached bathrooms and showers. Resident floors pinwheel around a community lounge which offers study space, areas to hang with friends, and views across the Eugene campus. The ground floor has a community kitchen, a service center, a package delivery hub, and dedicated spaces for Academic Residential Communities, a program in which students with similar interests live and learn together. In addition, the ground floor hosts apartments for the community director and faculty-in-residence.

Building C is an apartment-style residence hall for returning Ducks that offers living options distinct from their first-year experience. Students can live alone or with friends, in options including a micro-studio and quad-unit layouts. Each apartment-style unit includes a private bathroom and kitchen. The complex will house about four hundred students.



4



Elevating Computer and Data Sciences

The start of the school year marks the opening of the [School of Computer and Data Sciences](#), housed within the [College of Arts and Sciences](#). The school incorporates existing degree programs in computer science and data science, with a goal of serving two thousand students in current and new undergraduate and graduate programs in the coming years.

5

Major Changes

The Child Behavioral Health major (BA, BS) at the Ballmer Institute is one of four new majors this fall. The others: Cybersecurity (BS) in the School of Computer and Data Sciences, **Environmental Design** (BA, BS) in the School of Architecture & Environment, and Popular Music (BA, BS) in the School of Music and Dance. Music Production is a new minor.



The Fuller Land Lab in the School of Architecture & Environment (photo: Michael Geffel, School of Architecture & Environment)

6



Advanced Degrees

New programs are also available to graduate students: Data-Driven Music Performance and Composition (PhD) in the School of Music and Dance, and Immersive Media Communication (MS) in the School of Journalism and Communication. There is a new graduate specialization in ethnomusicology and a graduate microcredential—a brief program that provides advanced disciplinary knowledge and/or skill development—is being offered in **child behavioral health**.

7

Bioengineering Abode

Meanwhile, across Franklin Boulevard, at the [Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact](#), work on Building 2 is under way. The 185,000-square-foot, multistory bioengineering and applied science research facility at 1100 Riverfront Parkway will double the Knight Campus’s capacity for research and development of biomedical technologies, with additional room for expanding academic programs.

Scheduled to open in 2026, the building will emphasize engineering research and training with amenities that include a makerspace for students to learn, create prototypes, and test inventions. It is expected to house up to twenty-three research groups in bioengineering and medical computational science.



The exterior of Building 2 takes inspiration from the faceted façade of Building 1 and the biomaterial scaffoldings already being created in that building’s labs for use in research and to address medical challenges. The new building will include a public café alongside the Millrace, a floating central staircase, an open-air courtyard, and the second of two Papé Family Innovation Centers. These facilities feature modules that startups and other companies can lease for projects.

Building 2 is made possible by a second \$500 million gift from Penny and Phil Knight, BBA '59 (accounting), to the campus bearing their names. Additionally, the Oregon legislature has approved \$10 million to support new technologies in Building 2.

Tim Christie is a communications generalist in the Office of the Provost.

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

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EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

UO Scientists and Big Ten Peers Make Powerful Partners

Teammates in research, they’re advancing work in education, health, and child development



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

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A New Leader Meets Many to Listen and Learn about the Road Ahead

UO president Karl Scholz has spent his first ninety days engaging Ducks at a whirlwind of events

By Matt Cooper · Photos and video by University Communications · October 4, 2023

2 min read



The University of Oregon’s nineteenth president has been in office for ninety days. But you’ll forgive Karl Scholz if it feels like ninety seconds.

Scholz, a distinguished economist [who took office July 1](#) after a long and notable career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has wasted no time embracing the UO community. He’s been on the go and on hand at scores of university events locally and statewide as he begins to chart a course for the institution.

Throughout this academic year, Scholz will engage in priority-setting discussions with faculty, staff, the university senate, the Associated Students of the University of Oregon, and others. As you’ll see in the following gallery, he has already cast a wide net in garnering input on the UO—he’s connected with students, academic leaders, the broader university community, and stakeholders across the state and beyond.

“I come to this position with a deep commitment to public higher education, and I have ideas of how the university can set goals and priorities for the future,” Scholz says. “But my intent now is to really listen to campus constituents and stakeholders and learn more about what they want from the university and what they aspire for it to be.”



In visits with students at the ASUO and across the Eugene campus, Scholz has connected with a group for whom, he says, he is dedicated to providing “a world-class education.”



An avid sports fan, the new president has already been in the stands at UO athletic events. He's also dressed up—for convocation—and, with Melissa, his wife—dressed down for the Pendleton Round-Up, connecting with his inner cowboy.



In summer meet-and-greets and other events, Scholz has started priority-setting with friends, including alumnus Nate Jackson (left); academics such as Professor Doug Toomey, director of the Oregon Hazards Lab (middle, center), and US Sen. Jeff Merkley (middle, right); and UO leaders Anshuman “A. R.” Razdan and Robert Guldberg (right).



September’s Unpack the Quack found Scholz and Melissa, his wife, helping new students move in, and the university president has already earned the respect of the UO’s favorite feathered fan.



In guiding Oregon onward, Scholz seeks to tap the university’s dedication to educational excellence, curiosity-driven scholarship, and service to the state and broader society as a catalyst for ideas, innovation, and prosperity.

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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At an Ancient Site, Holding Hands across History

A rock shelter in Oregon tells a story of human habitation thousands of years earlier than previously thought

By Lexie Briggs and Laurel Hamers • October 4, 2023

8 min read



The **Rimrock Draw rock shelter** doesn't look like the kind of place that could upend our understanding of human history in North America.

The basalt overhang near Burns in Eastern Oregon sits unassumingly on a dusty plain crisscrossed by dirt roads and sprinkled with dried-up lake beds. Looking out across the high desert landscape—one of the least populated parts of Oregon—one sees sagebrush in every direction.

But recent archaeological finds have thrust the remote site into the spotlight. A collection of stone tools interspersed with tooth enamel from extinct mammals suggests that humans lived here eighteen thousand years ago—several thousand years earlier than previously thought. That makes Rimrock Draw the earliest currently known site of human habitation in North America.

The discovery challenges longstanding assumptions about when and how humans reached North America. It also confirms what Indigenous people have said for years—that their ancestors have lived here since time immemorial.

The finds tell an unfolding story about climate, too. Archaeological and geological evidence describe a landscape that has undergone dramatic transformations in the span of human history, shifting the way people used the land. And it's still changing today.

Patrick O'Grady, an archaeologist with the University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History, is excavating the site in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Almost every summer since 2012, [O'Grady](#), of the College of Arts and Sciences, has brought students to Rimrock Draw for a six-week archaeology field school. Slowly, they've dug into the past, carefully probing layers of dirt for clues to how people have interacted with this land over millennia.

O'Grady, BS '96, MS '99, PhD '06 (anthropology), has been keeping the fact that this could be the oldest known human site in North America under wraps for nearly ten years. Now, with additional confirmation from more artifacts and new techniques, he can finally talk about it. Says O'Grady: "These are now dates we can believe in."



Patrick O'Grady

Old, older, oldest

The Rimrock Draw find was made possible by geography and a bit of luck. The rock shelter faces north. Because of prevailing winds, layers of sediment have built up over time, preserving a rich trove of artifacts and evidence of human habitation stretching back thousands of years in layers of dirt that act as a geological timeline. In an undisturbed setting, the deeper something is buried in the strata, the older it is.



O’Grady began investigating Rimrock Draw in 2011, after BLM archaeologist Scott Thomas noticed tall sagebrush and dark, charcoal-speckled deposits against the rock wall. These were clues that deep, rich sediments with evidence of ancient cooking fires might be preserved there, and that a dry stream channel was once a reliable source of water.

The first indication that the site was special came in 2012, when O’Grady’s team found a tool under a layer of volcanic ash. Roughly palm-sized, it’s made of a honey-gold agate, with three working edges. One edge is straight and sharp and was possibly used for cutting; another is convex and ideally configured for skinning. A third has a serrated edge worn with use. Testing of the tool revealed traces of bison blood along its edges.

Initially, the team thought that the volcanic ash, or tephra, above the tool came from the eruption of Mount Mazama, which formed Crater Lake more than seven thousand years ago.

But when BLM officials submitted the ash for identification, they got a surprise. Emeritus Professor Franklin Foit of Washington State University found that the tephra was instead from an eruption of Mount St. Helens fifteen thousand years ago. This suggested that the tool underneath must have been made before then—far earlier than scientists had thought people were in the area.

If true, the discovery would upend the understanding of the earliest human habitation in North America, O’Grady’s team realized. At the time of their original excavation in 2011, the oldest known site was Paisley Caves in south-central Oregon, which had human habitation dating back fourteen thousand years. The Rimrock Draw site had the potential to be much older. But they needed more evidence.

Fortunately, another find nearby in 2012 provided backup: the team unearthed a concentration of large herbivore tooth enamel fragments, some so large they could cover a palm, underneath the layer of volcanic ash and above the stone tool. [Edward Davis](#), associate professor of earth sciences and director of the UO [Condon Fossil Collection](#), helped O’Grady identify the genus *Camelops*. It was most likely *Camelops hesternus*, or “yesterday’s camel,” which went extinct about eleven thousand years ago.

But how old were the tooth fragments really? O’Grady called in Thomas W. Stafford, Jr., a geochemist in New Mexico who specializes in radiocarbon dating, to test the tooth enamel. Stafford found the camel tooth enamel was more than eighteen thousand years old. And because the agate tool was found buried deeper than the tooth enamel, its makers must have visited Rimrock Draw even earlier.



With finds that would set the date of human occupation of North America two thousand years earlier than previously established, you need to be sure, O’Grady says. It took three more years in the midst of a pandemic to resample and retest the enamel. This spring, the team finally got confirmation: the numbers held. More than eighteen thousand years ago, humans lived at Rimrock Draw.

This timeline fits with Indigenous oral histories of life on the land, says David Lewis, BA ’97 (humanities), MA ’00, PhD ’09 (anthropology), a professor of anthropology at Oregon State University. Many tribes have stories of the Missoula Floods, volcanic eruptions, and other geological events from the period.

“Tribes also have oral histories of encountering giant animals, monsters on the land,” he says. “Rimrock Draw rock shelter’s evidence suggests that we did interact with the megafauna, and they may have become characters in our histories of the time before memory.”

The agate tool was no longer just a beautiful connection to people who lived in the area a few millennia ago. It was the earliest evidence of Indigenous people in North America identified to date.

A tale of climate and landscape

Pushing back the date when people inhabited this area raises questions about how they got here and what the landscape looked like.

Today, the shadow of these basalt cliffs would be a harsh place to call home. Less than ten inches of rain falls per year and the few water sources are seasonal. Wind often whips dust across the open and empty landscape. Despite these unaccommodating conditions, the Wadatika band of Northern Paiutes, now known as the Burns Paiute Tribe, lived in the region until they were forcibly removed in 1878. Today, about seven thousand people live in what is now Harney County, including more than 140 members of the Burns Paiute tribe, spread over more than ten thousand square miles.

But eighteen thousand years ago, this was a cooler and wetter environment. A stream once ran near the rock shelter, its path recorded in layers of dirt. In place of the mostly dry lake beds that dot the area today, O’Grady thinks a nearby basin was once a large lake. A community might have gathered on its shores, harvesting plants recovered from the rock shelter such as wada and wapato. At some point, these water sources shrank and dried up, changing the way people lived on the land.

“The real story is what we learn about the environment. As the environment changes, people’s response to it changes.”

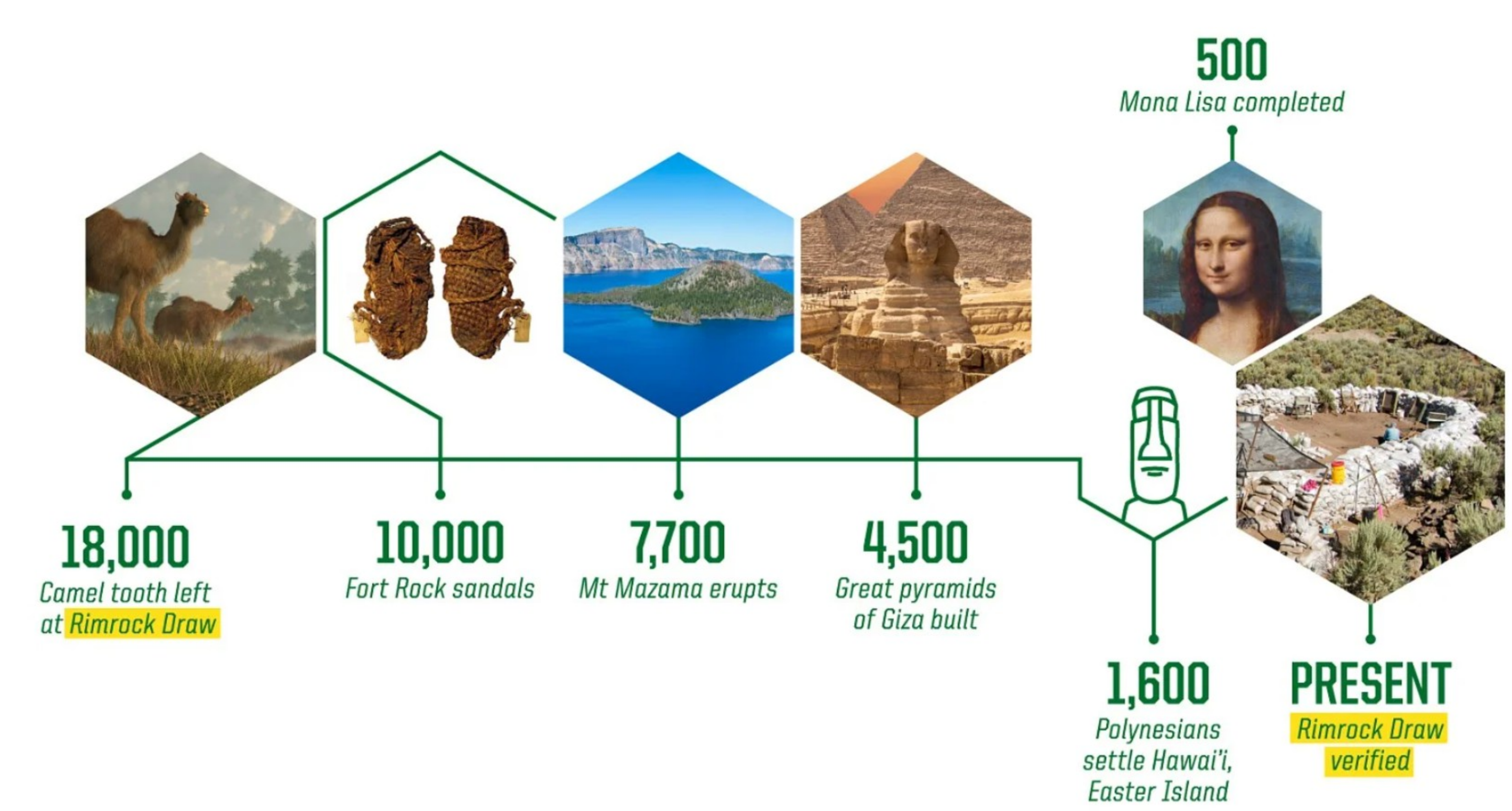
For many years, archaeologists trying to piece together how people arrived in North America championed the land bridge hypothesis—the idea that, as the Ice Age ended and glaciers retreated, people migrated from Asia into North America via an ice-free corridor, known as the Bering Land Bridge, eleven thousand to sixteen thousand years ago. The land bridge stretched between present-day Alaska and Russia. From there, people dispersed across North America, gradually making their way south.

But the Rimrock Draw finding is part of a growing body of evidence suggesting a more complicated story. Given the find by O’Grady’s team that people were living in Oregon more than eighteen thousand years ago, it’s likely that the first people arrived in North America more than twenty thousand years ago. At that time, the climate was much colder and the land bridge would have been impassable. People could have arrived by boat during summers—an idea known as the “kelp highway,” hypothesized by scientists including the UO’s [Jon Erlandson](#), professor emeritus of anthropology. But during winters, seas would have been frozen, making passage difficult.

“This research, along with the work of other museum archaeologists and collaborators, demonstrates that Indigenous communities were in Oregon and the Americas far longer and their migrations were much more complex than once believed,” says Todd Braje, director of the [Museum of Natural and Cultural History](#). “Patrick O’Grady’s work is helping rewrite scientific paradigms about the peopling of the Americas and the Indigenous histories of our state, highlighting Native Oregon histories that date back into the deep Pleistocene and suggesting that their migrations followed routes both on land and at sea.”

How Many Years Ago?

Geologically speaking, a tooth from eighteen thousand years ago old isn’t all that old. But within the context of human history, the Rimrock Draw settlement was in the deep, deep past.



Years approximate. Timeline graphic by Kyla Tom, University Communications; research by Jered Benedick, UO Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

The evolving story reflects the way that climate and human presence are inextricably linked. O’Grady’s goal as an archaeologist—and the lesson he imparts to his students—isn’t just to find artifacts. It’s to understand how people were interacting with and using the land on which they lived.

It’s clear that this landscape looked different eighteen thousand years ago and ten thousand years ago. And it’ll look different a thousand years from now, too.



Five-gallon buckets, sandbags, tarps, and dust pans are tools of the trade for archaeologists. Students and staff at Rimrock Draw dig in one meter by one meter units.



Isaac Miller, a student at this year’s Rimrock Draw field school, shows off an ancient tool from O’Grady’s collection

This year, students at field school got a clear reminder that climate change is present and ongoing: smoke from nearby wildfires blew in, interrupting their work for a week. Some students worked in N95 masks to avoid breathing smoke. Others went home until the air cleared.

“The real story is what we learn about the environment,” O’Grady says. “As the environment changes, people’s response to it changes.”

Though O’Grady has spent many nights camping near Rimrock Draw, he never tires of snapping photos of the sunset over the sagebrush plains. Dusk brings welcome relief from the blazing sun after a hard day of fieldwork, casting long shadows and painting the wide-open sky pink and orange. It’s when animals come out, too, and the high desert comes to life, revealing a side that’s hidden during the day.



Sunset near Rimrock Draw, courtesy Patrick O’Grady

The lushness of evening evokes the landscape that was here many millennia ago, and the connection to the past seems closer than ever.

Whenever someone finds a tool at field school, O’Grady reminds them to think of the last person who held it thousands of years earlier. Through these artifacts, he says, “we’re holding hands across history.”

Lexie Briggs is a marketing and communications specialist for the UO Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

Laurel Hamers is a senior writer and editor of science and research communications for University Communications.

Rimrock Draw lead photo courtesy Bureau of Land Management.

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



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Researcher Felix Deku is designing tech to relieve symptoms of Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and depression



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Escaping the Taliban, She Fights for Education and Women

Saghar Salehi fled her homeland and landed at the UO to study and fight for women in Afghanistan

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AUTUMN 2023

Data Detective Cracks Mysteries in Biology

In her lab and research, Rori Rohlfs uses data science skills to move toward social justice

By Tim Christie • Illustration by David Gill • October 4, 2023

3 min read



The intersection of biology and computer science is where you’ll find University of Oregon data scientist Rori Rohlfs.

She specializes in computational methods to answer biological questions, such as the reliability of forensic DNA identification and how genetic changes affect evolution. She also has used data science to examine [how academics decide to distribute credit for research](#) and [who they hire for faculty jobs](#).

“This is a nice thing about data science: you can answer all kinds of questions,” she says.

Rohlfs, an associate professor of data science, is the first tenure-track faculty member in the UO’s Department of Data Science, within the new [School of Computer and Data Sciences](#), which opened this fall in the College of Arts and Sciences.

“It’s an honor,” she says. “I’m thrilled to be at the ground floor as we start to build this new department and this new school. It’s a tremendous opportunity to build a department that is diverse, that is impactful, and that reaches across campus for interdisciplinary collaborations.”

Finding the intersection

Growing up in northern Virginia, Rohlfs took computer science classes in high school and found it “both fun and easy.” But as she pursued a bachelor’s degree at Carnegie Mellon University, she realized the traditional career paths in that field, such as becoming a software engineer, did not appeal to her. So, she pursued a double major in biology and computer science.

From that confluence, Rohlfs and her lab team have developed different branches of research. Among them is analyzing the reliability of forensic DNA identification, which includes police identification of criminal suspects through biological samples, human remains identification, and missing persons work.

“Often there’s a real lack of understanding about the accuracy and the variation of the accuracy with regard to human genetic variation,” she says. “In my lab, we try to quantify how often mistakes could be made using those technologies.”

For example, [in a paper currently under review](#), Rohlfs’s lab quantifies the accuracy of DNA mixture analysis, which occurs when a biological sample contains DNA from multiple individuals. They found accuracy varies depending on the genetic background of the contributors to the mixture, and to a lesser extent, on assumptions about the genetic background of the contributors.

Examining evidence behind assumptions

Rohlfs is also interested in how data science can inform social justice.

“There’s no avoiding social context when we’re doing science,” she says. “Our social context is evident in the questions we ask and our approaches to those questions, who we include on our scientific teams, what assumptions we make, and what assumptions we examine.”

For example, human genetics is a field of study that has roots in the eugenics movement, the erroneous and immoral theory rooted in scientific racism which posited that humankind can be improved through selective breeding of populations.

“Eugenics relies on the idea that genetics determine everything about somebody, which was a very popular idea in science as well,” Rohlfs says. “It took decades for scientists to accept the plentiful evidence that mutations, causing new genetic variation, rarely have a big impact on traits. This means that we have a lot of neutral genetic variation in our genomes.

“If you don’t examine the assumption you’re working with, then you could just go on thinking every genetic variant is crucially important to natural selection, and you fail to see how the evolutionary process actually works, which is not nearly as deterministic as that. The vast majority of mutations don’t dramatically impact individuals.”

Making a new home

Rohlfs comes to Eugene and the UO from San Francisco State University, where she was an associate professor of biology. Getting acclimated, she has enjoyed playing with her partner and their two children in the Willamette River, going on bike rides, and attending community events such as the Eugene Pride festival in August.

“It was so fun, so sweet,” Rohlfs says. “I love a daytime drag show and the particular creative, queer energy that comes from that. I appreciate it being accessible to queer parents and kids.”

Tim Christie is a communications generalist in the Office of the Provost.

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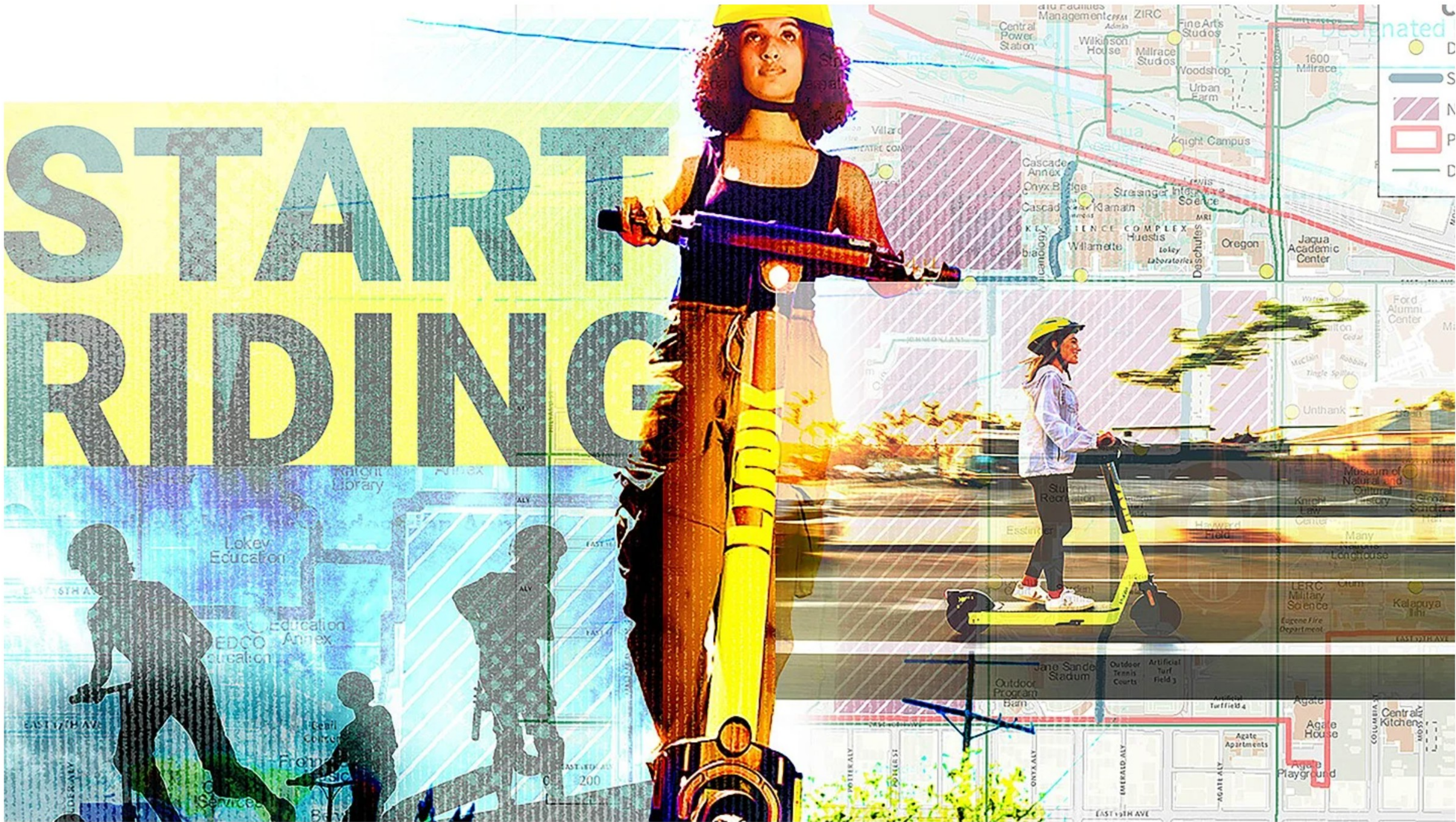
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AUTUMN 2023

These Two-Wheelers Aren't Just Taking You for a Ride

Surge in e-scooter use at the UO follows path to transportation shift—and fun

By Don Kahle • Illustration by David Gill • October 4, 2023

4 min read



Is the **electric scooter** rental program at the University of Oregon and across Eugene the next new thing or a *new* new thing? Is it revolutionary or simply a continuation of our evolving multimodal future? First came Zipcars that could be rented by the hour. Then came bike rentals that charge by the minute and mile. Local transportation choices are expanding, but are they transmogrifying? (It's such a treat to be writing for a college-educated audience.)

According to John Kashinsky, UO active transportation coordinator, 84,527 scooter trips were taken in Eugene during the UO's spring term. Remarkably, bike-share trips citywide during that period actually increased slightly to 54,934, up from 53,406 the year prior. "Overall, there were two-and-a-half times more trips taken by shared mobility," says Kashinsky. "That definitely exceeded everyone's expectations."

[Scooters are already changing habits](#)—on the Eugene campus, across the city, and around the world. They could end up reshaping how people think about getting from Point A to Point B.

Why?

I couldn't talk to people using the scooters because I can't run that fast and take notes at the same time, but I've ridden the scooters myself and interviewed others. Here are six ways that scooters are completely new.

Scooters are cheap. Until we install airport-style moving sidewalks, it's hard to imagine any transportation alternative that will transport us from Dads' Gates to Hayward Field with a comparable mix of efficiency and economy. Kashinsky once forgot his laptop at home. He took a scooter to go get it. The four-mile round trip took eighteen minutes and cost him \$9.02.

Scooters require almost no planning. You don't need to know how your trip will end before you begin. Although trips on the UO's Eugene campus are required to end in designated parking corrals, which are plentiful, the city has had fewer requirements. Across most of Eugene, riders simply leave their scooters wherever they finish using them.

Ubiquity makes scooters more convenient. There's probably one nearby when you need it. But, as we'll see, there's a fine line between "on your way" and "in your way." The most common complaint from residents concerns "scooter clutter," but it can also be a selling point.

Call it "perpendicularity." One person's end point is often another's starting point. Scooters are the impulse buy off our transportation shelf. A randomly located scooter can even feel like a gift from the gods.

For someone at the end of a long day or faced with an urgent need, scooters are not an alternative. **They are a rescue.** Step on board, twist your wrist, and watch the ground move under your feet. With no planning, no effort, and virtually no expense, the wind feels suddenly at your back.

Don’t forget the final and most significant feature that sets scooters apart from every other choice in our multimodal world: **they are fun!** Yes, economical, efficient, available, accessible, and easy. But also yes, fun! Ride one down a hill or around a corner, and you can almost hear your mother calling you for dinner. I’ve ridden scooters in Eugene and Washington, DC, and Paris. Each time I’ve wished I had a clothespin and a baseball card, to make them sound as fun as they are to ride.

Returning to the clutter complaint, [Marc Schlossberg](#), a professor in the School of Planning, Public Policy and Management, counterintuitively welcomes it. “Seeing scooters as clutter and parked cars as anything but just shows an unfair bias against the new thing,” Schlossberg says. “Once you start seeing how ubiquitous car parking is, then scooter parking is just one more little thing.”

His colleague [Nico Larco](#), a professor in the School of Architecture & Environment, agrees. “We should be thinking of scooters as part of an integrated transportation system that includes a range of mobility options that can serve all of our needs,” Larco says, “without having the expense, waste, and clutter from our cars.”

Scooters are slowly changing Eugene’s cityscape, and also the minds of its university students and residents. Could this better future also be fun? It looks that way, with or without a baseball card making simulated putt-putt-putt sounds.

[Don Kahle](#) was a columnist for the Eugene *Register-Guard* for two decades. Read the archive at www.dksez.com.

E-scooters were part of a one-year pilot conducted by the city of Eugene. The pilot program ended early, in January 2024, after the [Superpedestrian company shut down](#).

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The Beauty of Campus in Tree Dimensions

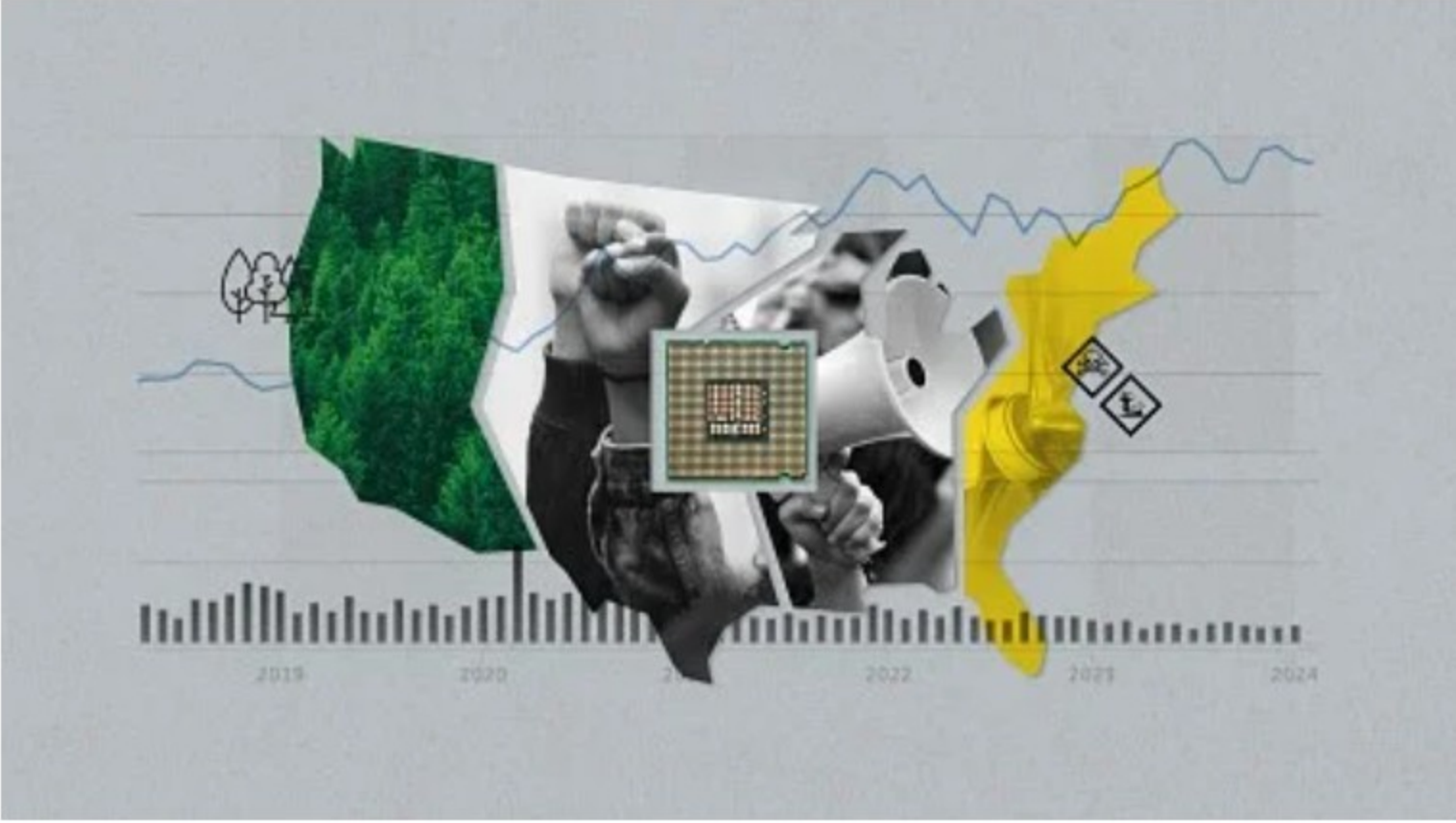
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AUTUMN 2023

In Their Own Words: New Ducks Sample the FIGs

From animals to adhesives to DJ food stamp, students in First-year Interest Groups follow their fascinations and create community

Story and photos by Matt Cooper · October 4, 2023

6 min read



Take a trip to the Portland Zoo. Conquer your fear of public speaking. Become an apprentice anthropologist. Or learn what makes glue, well, *glue*.

For a first-year student at the University of Oregon seeking community (and credit hours), [First-Year Interest Groups](#) or FIGs are often where to start.

In each of these offerings that run fall term, first-years come together in small classes and a seminar connected by an overarching and imaginative topic. The FIGs help new Ducks acclimate quickly to campus academically and socially by connecting them with peers and faculty.

The breadth of FIGs is breathtaking—comic books and cross-cultural conversations, museum trips and media-mixing artwork, coffee expeditions and soccer with Special Olympics athletes, problem-solving, public speaking, virtual reality, the local music scene . . .

That’s just a taste of the fifty-plus interest groups. For more of the flavor, *Oregon Quarterly* caught up with six first-years in FIGs for a quick Q&A.

Shawn Angeles



Major: Biology
Hometown: Napa, California
FIG: Make It Stick: The History and Chemistry of Adhesives Working with Adam Glass, instructor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, students explore chemical principles of binding agents and make creations.

Why this FIG? “My goal is to go pre-med so I want to build a community of students in the sciences. I looked at this and thought it’s for me—it’s like, who would make a topic like this?”

What’s your go-to adhesive? “Tape. With glue, if it’s the white bottle, it can take awhile to come out. But tape—when I’m decorating my room, putting up posters, you don’t have to punch a thumbtack through the wall, you just stick it on.”

Skylar DeBose



Major: Journalism
Hometown: Portland, Oregon
FIG: Hip Hop and the Politics of Race Working with André Sirois (aka DJ food stamp), senior instructor in cinema studies, students produce the UO Hip Hop Jam November 30.

Why this FIG? “Hip-hop has always been a huge part of my life. It’s been eye-opening for me how much culture is behind hip-hop and how it created community, especially for Black people.”

Favorite artist? “Kendrick Lamar. His lyrics stick out to me—he speaks a lot on Black issues, whether that’s Black celebration or Black struggle, he has a lot of constructive things to say.”

Are you ready to run a huge hip-hop event? “It’s really exciting! We’re going to

Kadence Gavin



Major: Environmental science
Hometown: Aledo, Texas
FIG: Food Matters Through visits to restaurants, markets, food pantries, and gardens, students study food with sociocultural anthropologist Stephen Wooten to better understand challenges and opportunities for humanity.

Why this FIG? “There’s a lot of diversity in Texas—a lot of Asian and Mexican food but a lot of it is whitewashed—people think it’s culturally accurate but it’s not. I want to experience the real food being eaten outside of America.”

Any revelations? “Food is a community experience but eating alone—that seems like an American thing. Food tastes better when you’re enjoying it together.”

What do you think about getting college

How’d you do with high school chemistry? “I took advanced placement chemistry without having done general chemistry. I struggled but I pulled an *A* out. I don’t even know how I did it.”

Any words of wisdom for your FIG classmates? “When everyone struggles together and we all start to rely on each other, we’ll all stick together. Like glue.”

bring in different artists—that’s the area I’m most interested in, learning about artists in the community.”

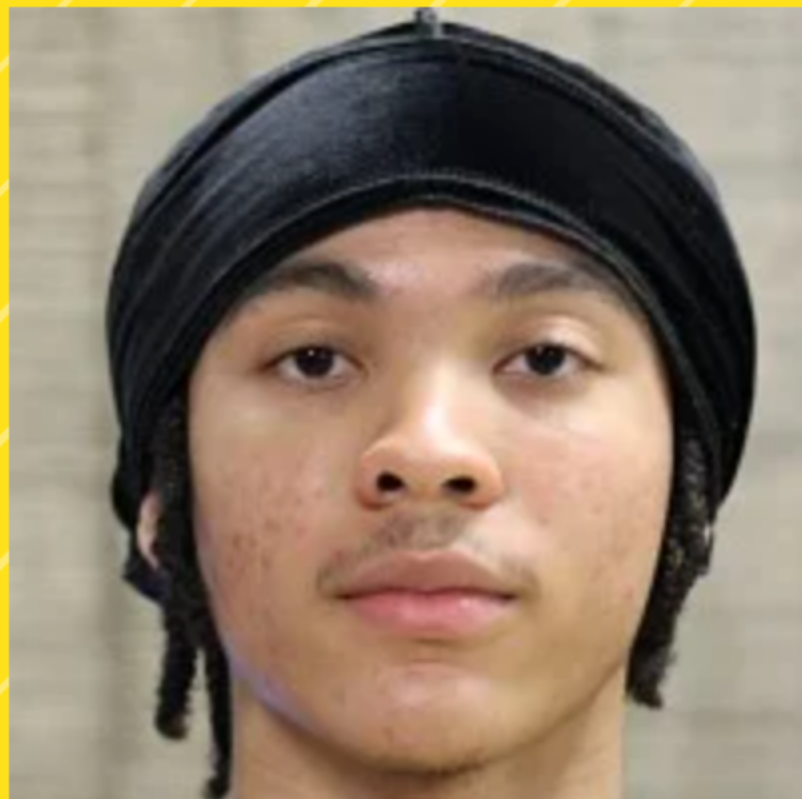
Ever have a teacher with a handle like “DJ food stamp”? “Uhh, no I haven’t. I can just tell by his name he has a lot of passion for what he does.”

If you had a DJ handle, what would it be? “DJ DaBoss.”

credit for eating in restaurants? “It’s really cool. I’ve never been here before so I get to try foods I’ve never had.”

Do you have a story about food? “Every single time I was sick, my mom cooked chicken noodle soup—she didn’t like prepackaged food, she always made chicken and dumplings, Southern food. When I’m sick I still go for the chicken noodle soup. It makes me happy.”

Jason Jackson



Major: Cinema studies
Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri
FIG: *Speak for Yourself!* Working with Tricia Rodley, career instructor in the Department of Theatre Arts, students practice public speaking and presentation using theater and voice methods.

Why this FIG? “I want to be a director and screenwriter. One of the main jobs is communicating to the cast and being able to rally them together to execute a creative idea. Public speaking is mandatory for that.”

Do you like public speaking? “No, but I perform under pressure. I try to concentrate on what I’m speaking about and not the eighty million eyes looking at me.”

One exercise was giving your worst most off-putting introduction—what did you do? “I said, ‘My name is Jason and I love Oregon State.’ You say that in Eugene and it’s like, whoa, a lot can happen to you.”

What do you hope to get out of the next ten weeks? “I hope to become more comfortable speaking in public settings, improve my conversation skills, and improve my listening skills. A big part of conversation is actually listening.”

Cooper Payne



Major: Geography
Hometown: Austin, Texas
FIG: *Animal Behavior* Working with Frances White, a professor of biological anthropology, students examine our relationships with animals—including the ethical treatment of animals in captivity—and take a trip to the Portland Zoo.

Why this FIG? “I’ve always been interested in animals and this FIG has two science classes which fill my prerequisite [to study] anatomy.”

What’s your favorite animal?
“Rockhopper penguin, they have really cool hair. You’ve seen the penguins with the yellow hair in *Surf’s Up*? They’re all over that movie.”

This FIG includes a trip to the Portland Zoo—any thoughts on ethics of zoos Professor White discussed? “I’ll be thinking about how they’re treating these animals, how they get them here, if the animals would rather be here or in the wild.”

How is this FIG helping you? “The FIG assistant showed us where our classrooms are, where our lecture halls are—it was really nice, especially at 8:30 in the morning, I’m not really awake. I’m going to get to know these people, ask questions about college. It’s like a club.”

Marisa Weigel



Major: Human physiology
Hometown: Bellevue, Washington
FIG: *The Problem with Problems* Working with Randy Sullivan, senior instructor emeritus in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, students learn the skills to tackle complex science and math problems.

Why this FIG? “I have never been good at math and chemistry but I want to pursue a job in the medical field. This looked right up my alley—I thrive in social settings where I’m working with other people.”

What’s your problem? “I have a problem with problems! In chemistry, things are going to move very quickly. I’m a little nervous about it. I don’t retain information well—learning how to actually study will be really nice.”

How’s the FIG going? “The class was amazing today! I never really thought about the way we process information, long-term memory, instances where we lose information, memorization, thinking about that loop. It’s super-interesting to me.”

Retain anything from today’s class?
“Write problems down with pen and paper—don’t just use a computer. That really stuck with me. My mom always told me that.”

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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University of Oregon students and faculty members at the 2023 NDiSTEM conference in Portland

AUTUMN 2023

National Science Conference Has Diversity at Its STEM

UO students found camaraderie, career paths, and more at major conference in Portland

By Ed Dorsch • Photos by Chris Larsen • November 15, 2023

5 min read



Networking, inspiration, community: these are some of the opportunities University of Oregon students discovered at a recent Portland gathering promoting diversity in the sciences. The largest event of its kind in the US, the annual National Diversity in STEM conference or [NDiSTEM](#) supports underrepresented groups in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

The Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science ([SACNAS](#)), which brings the event to a US city each year, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. SACNAS has more than ten thousand members and 144 student and professional chapters in the US.

The October 26–28 gathering was the first in Oregon since the UO started a [SACNAS chapter](#) in 2014, says chapter president Harrison Reid, a PhD candidate in chemistry.

“This is the premier event for STEM and diversity,” says Reid. “We’re excited NDiSTEM came to Portland and grateful the university provided funding to help approximately seventy students attend.”

Some presented research posters. Others learned about academic and professional opportunities by networking with students and faculty from universities across the US and scientists from prominent corporations and research institutions.

Students also caught up on the latest scientific buzz, attending presentations by researchers working at the vanguard of their fields. Graduate students frequently attend such conferences, Reid says, but it’s not as common for undergraduates.

At the center of it all: celebrating diversity, supporting budding scientists, and exploring pragmatic, effective ways to advance equity and inclusion in the STEM fields. Oregon Quarterly caught up with four UO students who attended NDiSTEM.

Diego Becerra

Senior, human physiology

Research assistant: Exercise and Environmental Physiology Labs, [Bowerman Sports Science Center](#)

Hometown: Medford, Oregon

Scholarships: PathwayOregon, Diversity Excellence

Dream job: trauma surgeon



“One of the best experiences in my college career.”

How was the NDiSTEM conference? “One of the best experiences in my college career. Even though it was on ‘Halloweekend,’ it was more than worth it.”

What could be better than Halloweekend? “Networking with people from places like Harvard, Stanford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the National Institutes of Health. Also the research presentations. It was all a lot of fun.”

How did it transform you? “Seeing the potential for people like me—first-generation college students from minority backgrounds. It was inspirational to see people with similar backgrounds who earned their PhDs and MDs and now work for high-level institutions.”

Clearing the cobwebs: “Sometimes it’s hard to navigate all the possibilities for life after graduation. But they made the fear go away and solidified the possibilities.”

What are those possibilities? “I was just focused on practicing medicine, but I learned that, with an MD-PhD, I don’t have to give up the research.”

Mahboubeh Khoddam

PhD candidate, neuroscience

Hometown: Shahreza, Iran



“I’ve always dreamed of being a scientist, even in elementary school.”

Multidisciplinary journey: While earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees in physics, Khoddam studied nanomagnetites—extremely small magnetic particles—and the neural process that enables animals to navigate using the earth’s magnetic field.

Those interests led to curiosity about neural branching and the University of Oregon’s research in fractals, patterns that repeat infinitely at varying scales. She studies aural fractals with [neuroscience professor Margaret Sereno](#).

Best thing about NDiSTEM: “I would like to do postdoctoral research and I talked to several people who encouraged me. We discussed ideas about developing my career and planning my future.”

Something new: “I was a judge for the NDiSTEM poster presentations. I’ve been a teaching assistant and I’ve presented posters but this was the first time I’ve been a judge.”

Lifelong STEMmer: “I’ve always dreamed of being a scientist, even in elementary school. I remember my father gave me a book about physics for kids. I want to discover something that will help people live better lives.”

Why support diversity in STEM? “When I came to the university, it was my first experience studying in another country. During those first months, I felt alone. Any opportunity to gather and meet other international students—a seminar, conference, or any event—is important. It helps create a supportive community.”

Ethan Nguyen

Sophomore, biochemistry

Hometown: Eugene

Scholarships: Presidential, Summit

“SACNAS helps people who love STEM—but may not have had the same opportunities as others—pursue careers in these fields.”



Current UO research: “I study cycloparaphenylene (CPP), a type of carbon nanohoop, in [Professor Ramesh Jasti’s lab](#).”

What are nanohoops? “A class of molecules joined together in a large ring structure. What I am specifically studying is ways that we can modify carbon nanohoops to tune their fluorescence.”

What was the topic of your poster presentation? “Synthesizing CPPs that fluoresce in ultraviolet light and could someday be used for biological imaging. I’ve presented posters to other students before, but at NDiSTEM I also answered questions from professors and scientists (including one from Merck).”

What was the best thing about the conference? “The camaraderie, plus all the excitement packed in that huge convention center.”

What about networking? “I hope to do clinical work as well as research, so I’m interested in an MD-PhD. I got to speak with students enrolled in MD-PhD programs. Talking in person, you learn things that aren’t on a university’s website. What’s a typical day? What are their favorite things about the program?”

Tell me about SACNAS: “It highlights issues in diversity that are important to the STEM community. SACNAS helps people who love STEM—but may not have had the same opportunities as others—pursue careers in these fields.”

Sof Fox

Senior, marine biology

Hometown: Seattle, Washington

Scholarship: UO Excellence

Honors science thesis topic: Rostanga pulchra, a species of sea slug

“They work to bring about true diversity by supporting underrepresented students.”



Do you really have three minors? Yes: dance, environmental studies, and science communication

What does diversity sound like? “At the NDiSTEM conference, sometimes the speakers would insert Spanish words and phrases. That’s not something I’m used to in an academic setting. My mom is Mexican, and Spanish was my first language—so I appreciated those little moments.”

Practical advantages of diversity: “The STEM fields—and society—benefit from a wider variety of lived experiences, opinions, and knowledge. These allow us to see more perspectives. And they enable us to develop more creative and effective solutions.”

NDiSTEM top three list: “Community and togetherness, graduate school and career expo, and the speaker who talked about climate science in Alaska and collaborations with Native American groups.”

What’s so great about SACNAS? “It fosters a sense of community that can sometimes be difficult to find at large universities and in the big academic STEM disciplines. Also, the groups SACNAS represents have historically been excluded. They work to bring about true diversity by supporting underrepresented students.”

Ed Dorsch BA '94 (English, sociology), MA '99 (journalism), is a staff writer for University Communications.

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



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Escaping the Taliban, She Fights for Education and Women

Saghar Salehi fled her homeland and landed at the UO to study and fight for women in Afghanistan

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The Sisterhood included (front, left to right) Nana Maynard, Ntozake Shange, Audreen Ballard and (back, left to right) Vertamae Grosvenor, Alice Walker, Lori Sharpe, Toni Morrison, and June Jordan. Photo courtesy Schlesinger Library, Harvard Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University

AUTUMN 2023

Literary Sisters: Two Years That Changed Our Culture

English professor’s new book captures pivotal moment for Black feminist writing

By Henry Houston • November 20, 2023

5 min read



The black-and-white photograph from 1977 captures eight Black women in winter clothing. Some of them would go on to become luminaries in American literature. All would contribute, in one way or another, to changing our culture.

From 1977 to 1979, they gathered in a New York City apartment to drink champagne, eat gumbo, and argue for liberation. Their members included Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Alice Walker, and Margo Jefferson, and they called themselves the Sisterhood.

In [The Sisterhood: How A Network of Black Women Writers Changed American Culture](#), Courtney Thorsson, an associate professor of English in the College of Arts and Sciences and faculty-in-residence at the Clark Honors College, tells their story in a critically acclaimed book that has been called a model for literary histories.

“The civil rights and Black Power movements had clearly not produced the kind of gains for Black people that activists hoped for,” Thorsson says. “The women in the Sisterhood and other groups quite rightly saw culture as the place to intervene.”

Sharing food, love, and ideas



Courtney Thorsson (photo: Livia Fremouw)

Inspired by that photograph, [Thorsson](#) spent years researching the group, gathering interviews, close readings, and archives into a portrait of a rare moment in literary history. To help her invest the time to write a thorough account of the Sisterhood, she had a \$60,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2018 and sabbatical support from CAS from 2016 to 2017.

The Sisterhood came together at a time in the late 1970s when White supremacist voices were rising in all levels of government, Thorsson writes. A place for Black women was a necessity, especially as the women’s liberation movement of the late ’60s depended on the domestic labor of women of color to free White women to move from home into the workplace.

From 1977 to 1979, members of the Sisterhood “made Black feminist writing central to magazines and trade publishing, and they laid the foundation for Black feminism in the academy,” Thorsson writes.

They worked in magazines, publishing, journalism, academia, and other cultural spaces. Whenever they gathered, taking turns hosting in their New York City homes, Thorsson writes, it was exclusively for Black women and “the purpose of unifying us and strengthening our bonds with one another through the sharing of ourselves, our art, our experiences, our food, our love, and our ideas.”

Gatherings sometimes numbered more than thirty members—they had disagreements but they all believed in the power of literature as an agent of political and social transformation.

The support and friendship within the Sisterhood is evident in their writings. For example, Thorsson analyzes Jordan’s poem, “Letter to My Friend Poet Ntozake Shange,” in the context of the friendship between the two writers.

During her research, Thorsson interviewed and corresponded with Sisterhood members Judith Wilson, a prominent art historian; Margo Jefferson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer; Renita Weems, a womanist author and theologian; and award-winning poet Patricia Spears Jones.

“Every person I corresponded with really confirmed for me this sense that they knew the Sisterhood was important,” Thorsson says. “They recognized the amount of cultural capital in the room when they got together. They knew that other members of the group were going to do really big things.”

Jefferson, a professor of practice at Columbia University who won a Pulitzer in criticism in 1995 as a writer for the *New York Times*, remembers the Sisterhood gatherings as varied. Sometimes there was easygoing chatter and laughter; other times, there were serious conversations if a member was struggling with issues such as depression, parenting, racism, or sexism at work.

“It felt both informal and formal,” Jefferson says. “There would be literary chat, political talk—what I would call strategizing about the jobs we had in the larger media. But also just what it meant in so many ways to be entering as Black women—not just us, but other women, our friends, our colleagues—entering this previously impenetrable cultural and social and political space.”

She recalled the excitement, for example, of working as a critic and writing about breakthrough works by members of the group.

“Oh my god, what a period,” she says. “I can write about Alice Walker’s fiction. I can write about Toni Morrison. I can write about Toni Cade Bambara. You know, this is thrilling.”

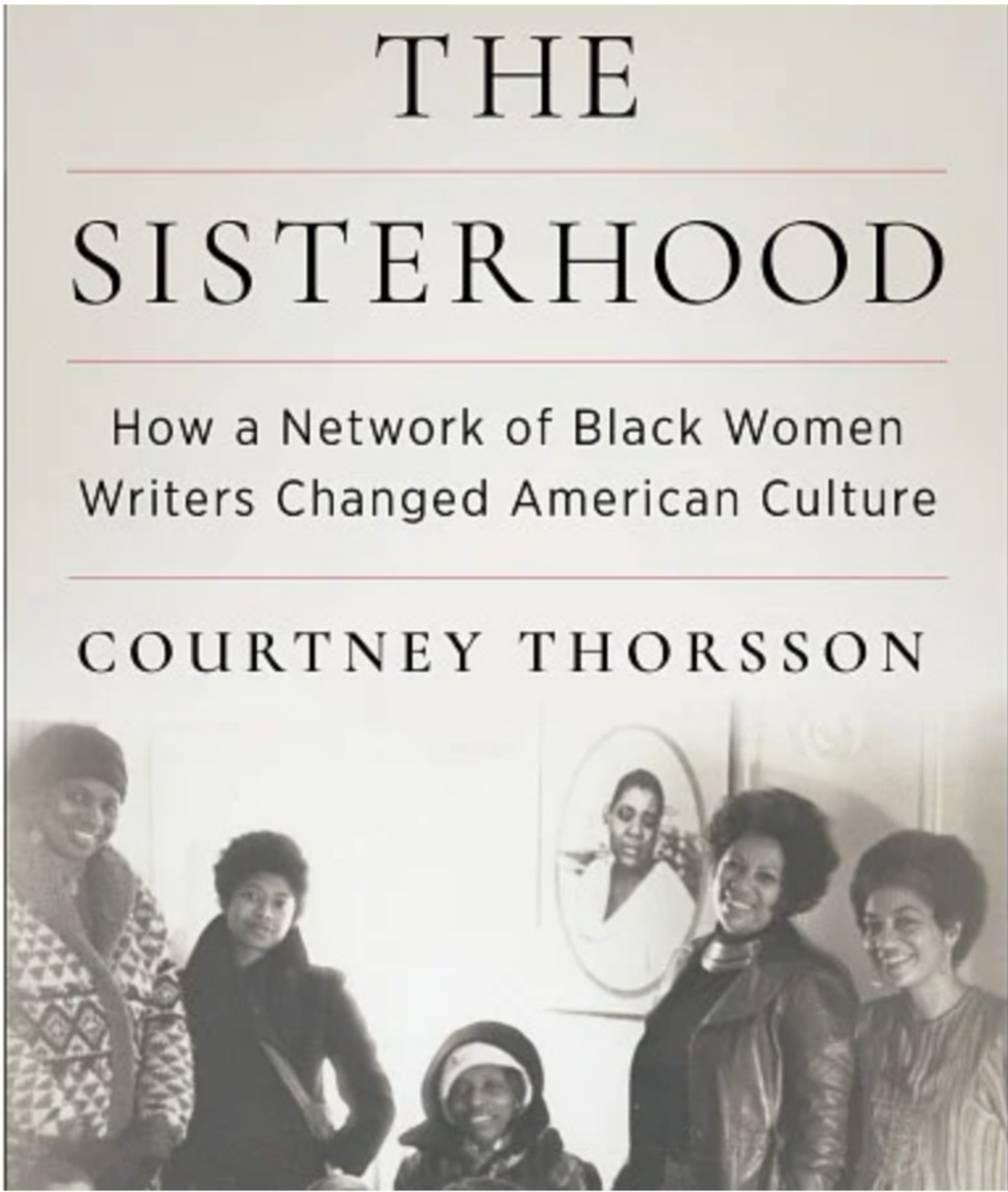
A model for literary histories

Thorsson will discuss the book January 25 during an [Oregon Humanities Center Wine Chat](#) and will hold a reading February 4 with Mat Johnson, UO English professor and Philip H. Knight Chair, at Powell’s City of Books, Portland.

Critics in publications as varied as *Publishers Weekly*, *Town and Country*, and the *Los Angeles Times* have put the book on must-read lists for capturing this gathering and its importance to Black literary history.

Mary Helen Washington, a professor at the University of Maryland who studies African American literature and culture, says *The Sisterhood* is more than just an important read, thanks to Thorsson’s preservation of journals in which members were published in the 1970s and ’80s. The book is a model for academics who want to do literary histories, according to Washington, providing a blueprint for the collection and analysis of information and drawing conclusions.

“This mosaic that she puts together is a literary history,” Washington says. “The words ‘literary history’ sound so high-minded and so elegant and important. But literary history is just the pieces that we put together and what we pay attention to. And she has paid attention to something that most other people didn’t notice.”



Henry Houston, MA ’17 (international studies), is an information representative in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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Composer Reimagines a Classic for Bach Fest Project

Damien Geter is known for infusing his works with musical styles of the Black diaspora



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Video: Pianist Keith Brown fuels the dreams of students in UO's thriving jazz studies program



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Faculty member Jon Bellona creates new sounds and perspectives through sonic experimentation

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Toward a Thriving University

Karl Scholz, the nineteenth president of the University of Oregon, brings a passion for public higher education, a focus on students, and a framework for imagining our next chapter

By Matt Cooper • Photo illustration by David Gill

Photos by University Communications • December 7, 2023

11 min read



As student body president at the University of Oregon, senior Chloé Webster appreciates that Karl Scholz, the university’s new president, favors casual candor for their talks, absent titles and formality. When they meet, she says, she’s just Chloé and he’s just Karl.

Webster has seen it repeatedly, in Scholz’s interactions with people in general and students in particular: no pomp, no circumstance, just a down-to-earth earnestness and interest in whomever he meets.

Accompanying him for a campus tour, Webster watched as a curious Scholz peppered a facilities crew with questions while in the Lillis Business Complex. Walking together on Thirteenth Avenue during October’s Street Faire, Scholz quizzed Webster and other students about their affection for boba tea, the Taiwanese drink served with starch tapioca balls. Similarly, Webster says she was surprised not just that Scholz attended a recent student government meet-and-greet at which he wasn’t expected, but that he engaged with and remembers student leaders he meets.

Students have pressing concerns, Webster says, and not all her monthly meetings with Scholz will be “sunshine and smiles and walking through the street fair.” But she’s seen enough to believe the new president has students top of mind.

Says Webster: “Because I’ve seen the way in which he’s interacted with students, trying to understand their experience, I feel better about how he makes decisions every day.”

A passion for higher education

When Scholz met earlier this year with the committee searching for the university’s next president, he brought an energy that was palpable, if not contagious.

At six foot five, Scholz commands attention when he enters a room. The effect is only intensified when he talks about something that excites him—his voice grows louder, his arms and hands become animated, radiating enthusiasm.

“He came in with incredible excitement and just captivated the room,” says committee chair Connie Seeley, BS ’92 (political science). “He clearly had done his homework, but in demonstrating that, he showed us the depth of his



Webster is confident Scholz will keep student concerns top of mind

experience and ability to meet both our challenges and aspirations.”

“He didn’t hold himself back at all; he really gave us a great picture of ‘Karl Scholz,’” adds vice chair Renée Evans Jackman, BA ’97 (sociology). “He was authentic; he was truthful. The committee was wanting more, and he wasn’t apprehensive to tell us what we needed and wanted to hear. We all thought, ‘We have our next president!’”

“I honestly don’t know if I have met someone so excited about public higher education.”

— Connie Seeley, UO Board of Trustees

During his interview, Scholz, then provost for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, celebrated the knowledge that public universities create. He challenged the committee and discussed his own vulnerabilities. He spoke compellingly about diversity and equity, acknowledging “the privilege and responsibility” that comes with being a White man. And he described the transformational impact a public university can have on students and the happiness he feels in helping them succeed. “If he asked me for money,” one person said afterward, “I’d give it to him.”

“You kind of didn’t want it to end,” Seeley says. “I honestly don’t know if I have met someone so excited about public higher education.”

Three priorities: Identifying what matters most

As one of his first orders of business, Karl Scholz, the nineteenth president of the University of Oregon, has defined a core set of priorities that he believes will inform the university’s next chapter.

An effort called [UO Onward](#) provides the opportunity for the university community and stakeholders across the state, region, and nation to weigh in. Hundreds of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and others have provided feedback. “If we can collectively agree on things that really matter,” Scholz says, “it will guide our efforts in important ways for the next several years.”

UO Onward proposes three broad priorities, each with specific goals. These include student learning and achieving, elevating Oregon’s distinct academic strengths, and building a culture of belonging.

- **Student Learning and Achieving.** Scholz’s focus on graduation rates and career services is partly practical; given modest state funding, the UO relies on tuition and must show that for this expense, students will be guided efficiently through college and graduation and into a career.

The UO’s four-year graduation rate is 59.3 percent, roughly the rate held by Wisconsin in 2013, when Scholz began a six-year stint as dean of the College of Letters & Science. As dean and later provost, Scholz was involved in improving graduation rates across demographics. Wisconsin’s rate today—driven by the college, which, at twenty-three thousand students, is itself bigger than the UO—is 75.1 percent.

As strategies for improving graduation rates, Scholz says steps could include shoring up emergency financial assistance, ensuring mental health services are reaching students in need, bolstering advising and messaging to underscore the importance of timely graduation, and doing the hard work of curriculum scheduling—and rescheduling—so students can take the classes they need, when they need them.

He is equally committed to strengthening the infrastructure that helps students into careers. At Wisconsin, Scholz led an effort to overhaul career services in his college, including courses, advising, internships, and alumni engagement. The result is SuccessWorks, an innovative program which drives undergraduate engagement in career readiness and skill building and connects students to employers and alumni for job interviews. Since launching in 2017, the program has seen a vast increase in student participation and the number of alumni mentors has grown sixfold, to 440 in the 2022–23 academic year, according to Nathan Barker, SuccessWorks director of marketing and communications. Universities across the country and around the world have visited Madison to study the program.



During the fall Scholz offered opportunities for hearing from campus constituents on core priorities



Student success is a top priority. Here, Scholz meets with students in the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact.

- **Elevating Oregon’s Academic Strengths.** Raising visibility for scholarship and service, particularly in areas of excellence that are distinct to the university, is second of the three priorities. Says Scholz: “We should be proud of the exceptional education we are delivering to our students, our service to the citizens of Oregon, our work in advancing human understanding, and new knowledge we’re creating through research that competes with the finest institutions in the world.”

The UO is an R1 research university—a designation that fewer than 150 universities achieve—and is one of only two in the Pacific Northwest among the seventy-one institutions that comprise the Association of American Universities, the organization that represents North America’s leading research universities. The UO also has a long history of investment in innovation and public partnership, seen most recently in the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact and the Ballmer Institute for Children’s Behavioral Health. Among the university’s academic strengths: leading environment and architecture programs; rich cultural, arts, and performance assets; distinguished professional schools in law, business, and education; and world-renowned leadership in athletics and the science of human performance.

- **From Belonging to Flourishing.** An appreciation for diversity and belonging developed in Scholz as a youth. He was transferred by his parents from his home district to schools that were more socioeconomically and ethnically diverse; his high school, he noted, was the only one in the area with Black students and those of low income. “It was important to my parents that I have a more diverse experience,” Scholz says. “That left a big mark.”

As an economist at Wisconsin, Scholz examined financial barriers to higher education and factors affecting family wealth accumulation. He also directed the university’s Institute for Research on Poverty, which studies economic inequality. As provost, he oversaw an enrollment management unit that raised the percentage of the student body from underrepresented groups by more than 50 percent—to 16.6 percent—in three years. He also led successful efforts that improved the quality and diversity of departmental faculty of UW-Madison.

Scholz believes public universities can help level the playing field in society by ensuring that their students—who typically come from a variety of demographic backgrounds—receive the same world-class education and career opportunities offered in private institutions.

But for all students at the UO to flourish—for all *people* at the UO to flourish—Scholz says the university must establish a true sense of belonging. He recently held a forum on the topic of belonging during which he invited and answered questions from an audience of three hundred university employees. “If there’s a greater sense of belonging,” Scholz says, “it will be easier to reach real understanding.”

Providing opportunities to make a difference

Scholz was a devoted fundraiser at Wisconsin, having evolved in his thinking about that critical-but-sometimes-uncomfortable duty of academic leaders: inspiring people to donate.

He still finds it a bit awkward to reach out, hat in hand. People didn’t talk much about money in his hometown, Lincoln, Nebraska. As a boy, Scholz once joined his father on a visit with a rancher; in an effort at small talk Scholz asked, “how many cows do you have?” His father later admonished him—“he said, ‘You don’t ask that,’” Scholz says. “I might as well have asked, ‘What’s your net worth?’”

Over time, though, he has come to see fundraising not as an ask from him but as an opportunity for the donor to support the institution they love and to make a difference. “You can bring people joy,” Scholz says, “by providing the opportunity to help.”

Mike Knetter, chief executive officer of the Wisconsin foundation and a close friend, says Scholz was a successful fundraiser because he can spot the right projects to support and articulate why they matter—not to the institution, but to people. “He’s authentic,” Knetter says. “People can sense they’re dealing with a person with really high integrity.”



Melissa Scholz says her husband’s passion for education was instilled in him as a youth

Toward a thriving university

The passion for education that defines Scholz as a university president was instilled in him as a boy, says Melissa Scholz, his wife, an accomplished nonprofit attorney.

Scholz’s parents—John, a chemistry professor, and Joyce, a stay-at-home mother—raised him to be curious, to love learning. Over the years, that love of learning has become a relentless drive for knowledge and a deep commitment to education.

Scholz’s three daughters, in fact, were beneficiaries of that commitment. When they were kids, Scholz, skeptical of math instruction at the primary and middle school levels, worked with them on math at night, doling out peanut M&Ms for correct answers. “I remember being thirteen and hating it,” one daughter says. “I was having to sit during summers and do math. As I’ve grown up, I’ve realized it speaks to how he cares about things quite deeply.”

UO administrators say the care Scholz takes with the issues is rooted in a commitment to hearing all sides before he acts.

Certainly, Scholz is capable of taking bold and calculated risks, as evidenced by his announcement in August that the UO will join the Big Ten Conference.

Moreover, Bob Guldberg, DeArmond Executive Director of the Knight Campus, the UO’s research-to-application enterprise, has seen the president’s willingness to take risks in the context of innovation and entrepreneurship. “We teach our students that all the time—taking risks and not being afraid to fail is part of the learning process toward success,” Guldberg says. “[Scholz’s approach] has me really optimistic for the future.”

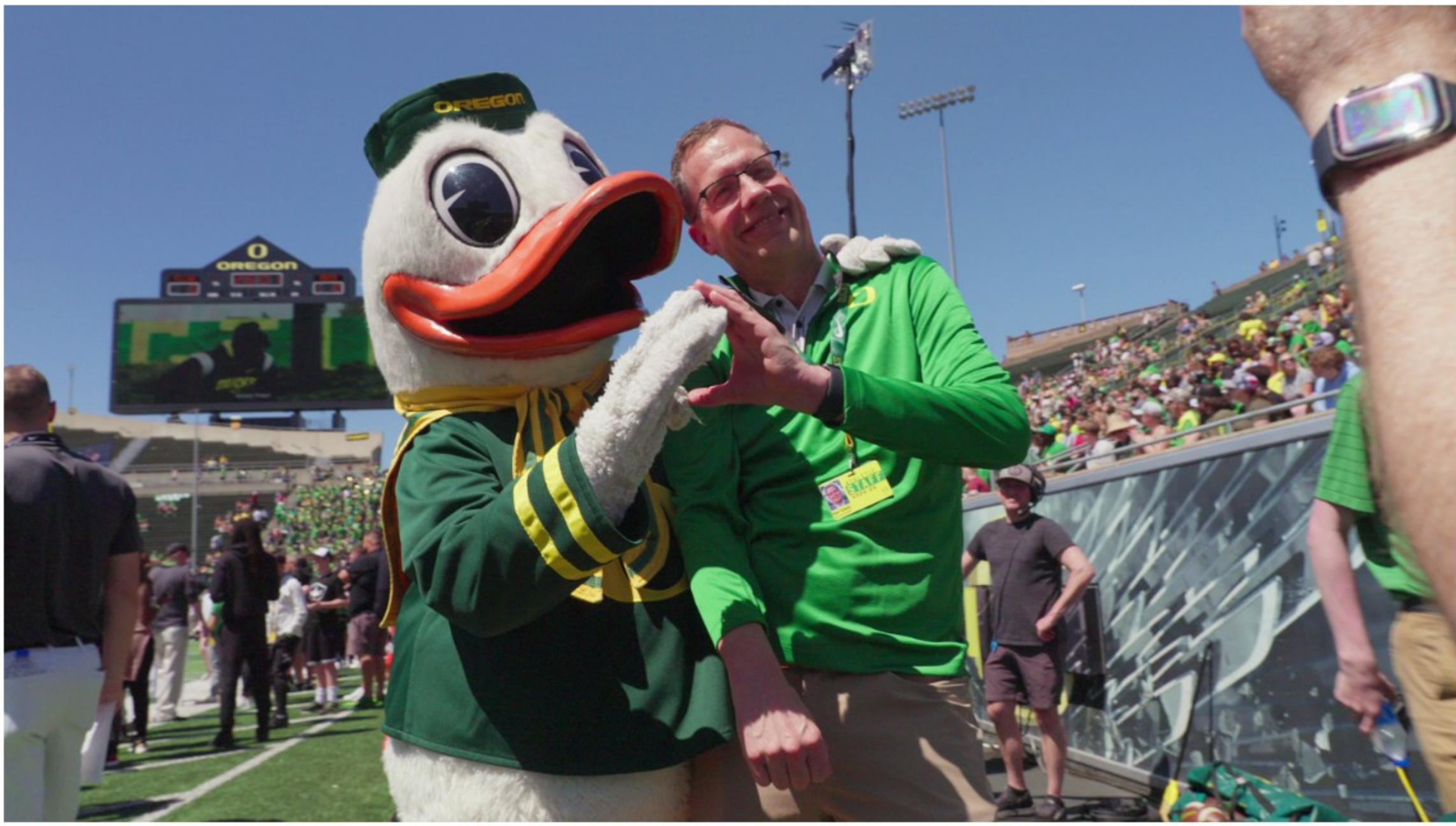
“[Scholz’s approach] has me really optimistic for the future.”

— Bob Guldberg, Knight Campus

He is also willing to consider advice and change course. Jamie Moffitt, chief financial officer, says she has seen the president routinely “go into a meeting thinking we’re going to go in one direction and then listen to the expertise of staff and advisors and consider a different decision.”

Consistent throughout, according to those who know him, is his trust in the opinions and abilities of those around him.

Rebekah Paré, for example, was working at Wisconsin in an area unrelated to career services when Scholz tapped her to help build SuccessWorks and serve as executive director. “That’s how he leads,” says Paré, now a higher education consultant. “He’s going to create space for people to rise. He realizes he can’t do it alone. It’s a lot about people empowerment.”



President Scholz and his newest best friend at the spring football game



During the Good Neighbor Welcome, Scholz and Eugene mayor Lucy Vinis went door-to-door in neighborhoods near campus with Marcus Langford, dean of students

Steve Holwerda, chair of the trustees, says the UO Onward approach exemplifies Scholz’s leadership style, which is to gather as much input from as many voices as possible before he acts.

“He wants to hear from everybody—it’s the best way to build consensus, everyone gets a chance to be heard,” Holwerda says. “Karl recognizes we can’t reach our goals unless everyone is on board with the university’s direction.”

Throughout her husband’s thirty-plus years in academia, Melissa Scholz says, Karl Scholz has been well served by giving everyone a voice and empowering those around him. It speaks not just to the analyst in him who solves problems by collecting reams of data, she adds, but to the humanist who believes deeply in the dignity of all people.

“He’s working with people who share his interest in a thriving university,” Melissa Scholz says. “He knows he can’t move the aircraft carrier by himself. He has a strong baseline respect for human beings who are here, working, dedicated to the university. He sees himself as a leader to unlock that potential.”

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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