Spring 2023

SPORTS & FITNESS

The Solitary Genius Who Sparked a Global Revolution

Legendary coach Bill Bowerman spurred TrackTown USA and a stream of innovations in footwear and performance

POLITICS & SOCIETY

Lifting "Chicas" into College

Her experience and ideas make alumna Itzel Chávez Gómez the bridge to higher ed for Latinas in Oregon

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

A Dynamic Approach to Learning Your A-B-C's

For decades, the UO's short test has helped millions of kids improve literacy

VIEWPOINTS

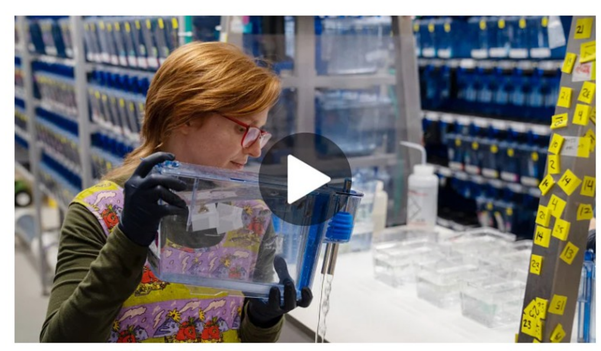
Talking Ideas with Karl Scholz

The university's incoming president on his career, curiosity, and what he likes about Eugene. Hint: he's a runner.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Fusing Art and Science to Save the Seas

Stacy Alaimo explores the intersection of aesthetics and marine conservation



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

An Aquarium Fish That Became a Supermodel

Video: The zebrafish makes waves worldwide as a research aid, thanks to UO scientists

BUSINESS & INNOVATION VIEWPOINTS

Ask These 8 Questions before Making Your Pitch

Here's the windup from Lundquist College of Business expert Jeff Sorensen

BUSINESS & INNOVATION DUCK LIFE

Fab Five: What I've Learned about Building a Business

A quintet of innovative alumni share the inspirations underpinning their endeavors

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Tiny Worms and Time Machines

Imaginative breakthrough in gene editing could speed development of new drugs

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS DUCK LIFE

Putting the "Peer" in Peerless Support

Student mentors help PathwayOregon scholars navigate college life and thrive

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Breaking the Ice: Debut by M Jackson Blends Science and Fiction

M Jackson is a TED Fellow and a National Geographic Society Explorer who is breaking barriers facing women in science. In her first novel, the glaciologist tells the story of four women and the fierce fight for survival.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY DUCK LIFE

"Live Well, Think Beautifully"

Undergrad anthropologist immerses himself with an Indigenous people who are determined to protect their way of life

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:24:28
https://getfireshot.com

Previous Issues

University Communications

Oregon Quarterly
5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:24:28
https://getfireshot.com

Spring 2023

SPORTS & FITNESS

The Solitary Genius Who Sparked a Global Revolution

Legendary coach Bill Bowerman spurred TrackTown USA and a stream of innovations in footwear and performance

POLITICS & SOCIETY

Lifting "Chicas" into College

Her experience and ideas make alumna Itzel Chávez Gómez the bridge to higher ed for Latinas in Oregon

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

A Dynamic Approach to Learning Your A-B-C's

For decades, the UO's short test has helped millions of kids improve literacy

VIEWPOINTS

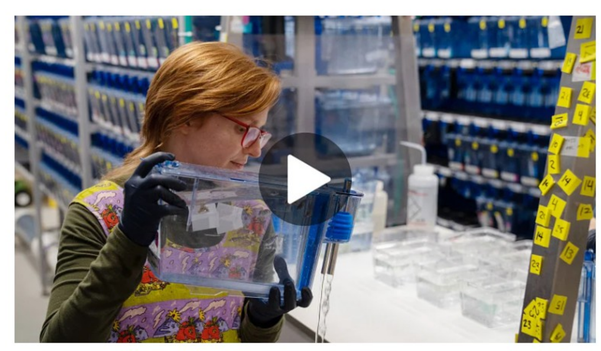
Talking Ideas with Karl Scholz

The university's incoming president on his career, curiosity, and what he likes about Eugene. Hint: he's a runner.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Fusing Art and Science to Save the Seas

Stacy Alaimo explores the intersection of aesthetics and marine conservation



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

An Aquarium Fish That Became a Supermodel

Video: The zebrafish makes waves worldwide as a research aid, thanks to UO scientists

BUSINESS & INNOVATION VIEWPOINTS

Ask These 8 Questions before Making Your Pitch

Here's the windup from Lundquist College of Business expert Jeff Sorensen

BUSINESS & INNOVATION DUCK LIFE

Fab Five: What I've Learned about Building a Business

A quintet of innovative alumni share the inspirations underpinning their endeavors

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Tiny Worms and Time Machines

Imaginative breakthrough in gene editing could speed development of new drugs

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS DUCK LIFE

Putting the "Peer" in Peerless Support

Student mentors help PathwayOregon scholars navigate college life and thrive

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Breaking the Ice: Debut by M Jackson Blends Science and Fiction

M Jackson is a TED Fellow and a National Geographic Society Explorer who is breaking barriers facing women in science. In her first novel, the glaciologist tells the story of four women and the fierce fight for survival.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY DUCK LIFE

"Live Well, Think Beautifully"

Undergrad anthropologist immerses himself with an Indigenous people who are determined to protect their way of life

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:25:25
https://getfireshot.com

Previous Issues

University Communications

Oregon Quarterly
5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:25:25
https://getfireshot.com

Chávez Gómez often felt isolated growing up, but at the University of Oregon she found courses, community, and mentorship that changed everything

SPRING 2023

Lifting "Chicas" into College

Her experience and ideas make alumna Itzel Chávez Gómez the bridge to higher ed for Latinas in Oregon

By Alice Callahan • Photos by Joshua Krause • April 12, 2023

5 min read

As a child, Itzel Chávez Gómez had no mentors to offer examples of what she could do in life. Her aspirations were based on only her favorite TV shows, *CSI: Miami* and *Criminal Minds*—she considered working for the FBI someday.

Without guidance on a path to college and career, she says, "I just knew that I had to go and do something better and make something of myself, but I didn't know what that was."

Chávez Gómez is determined to help other Latinas chart a smoother course through college than her own. As the college and career coordinator for a nonprofit organization near Portland, she's turning her ideas into action to ensure that Latina women have a rewarding experience in higher education.

Finding her voice

Chávez Gómez grew up in Beaverton, attending predominantly White schools. "It was very isolating," she says. "I was usually one of the only Brown people in any space I walked in."

But at the University of Oregon, she found courses, community, and mentorship that changed everything.

In ethnic studies and sociology classes, Chávez Gómez studied immigration and the disproportionate rates of incarceration of Black and Brown people. "Those classes really just blew up my world," she says, and she began to think about how she could contribute to social justice. She decided to major in general social sciences, a multidisciplinary, undergraduate program in the College of Arts and Sciences that prepares students for success in an interconnected global environment.

Chávez Gómez also began working at the UO Women's Center, eventually serving as the sexual violence prevention and education coordinator. There, she found her first mentor, Director Fatima Roohi Pervaiz, and a community of women that helped her feel comfortable in her own skin, find her voice, and step out of her comfort zone.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:26:01
https://getfireshot.com

Chávez Gómez "provided that emotional support that they needed."

—Leticia Aguilar, Adelante Mujeres

"For so long, I felt so trapped and so alone in my identity and not knowing what I wanted to do with my life," Chávez Gómez says. "And then, just those few years that I worked there changed my world and changed my trajectory."

Building Chicas in College

After graduating in 2018, Chávez Gómez was hired by Adelante Mujeres ("Women Rise Up"), a nonprofit organization in Forest Grove working to build a more just society by empowering Latinas to lead. As an advocate in the Chicas youth development program, she began leading after-school activities for middle and high school students, becoming the type of mentor she wished she'd had as a child.

Then in 2020, amid the upheaval of the pandemic, Chávez Gómez set to work building a new program, Chicas in College, supporting Latina/e college students throughout Oregon.

College readiness has long been a focus of Adelante Mujeres, which says the vast majority of participants in the youth program have enrolled in post-secondary education in recent years. But the organization has been unable to keep up with and support students beyond high school; they asked Chávez Gómez to help bridge that gap.

She comes to the work with an intimate sense of what students need. Having been a first-generation college student, she has walked in their shoes. She also brings a passion for advocacy, a flame that was sparked and fueled at the UO.

The timing was fortuitous. As the pandemic hit, students needed more support than ever. Chávez Gómez was there for the high school seniors, some of whom were the first in their families to graduate, says Leticia Aguilar, associate director of education programs at Adelante Mujeres. Chávez Gómez "cheered them up and provided that emotional support that they needed, making sure that they were still receiving the recognition they deserved," Aguilar says.

As the students entered college, Chávez Gómez stayed with them, offering one-on-one mentorship, regular meetups, and workshops. Initially open only to graduates of the Chicas high school program, Chávez Gómez expanded Chicas in College to welcome all women and nonbinary Latina/e college students in Oregon; the program now supports over ninety students from around the state.

Marquez, BA '22 (Spanish, journalism: advertising), secured scholarships and graduated debt free

Elizabeth Leos Gonzalez, a second-year student in early childhood education and family studies at Portland Community College, says Chicas in College provides a place where "I can be comfortable and get together with more of my people. It's like counseling, self-care, just being there for each other. It's like a family."

Through the program, Chávez Gómez provides continuous guidance on how to make college financially feasible, which helped UO alumna Rubby Marquez, BA '22 (Spanish, journalism: advertising), secure scholarships that allowed her to graduate debt free.

Chávez Gómez "made it her mission to make our college experience a lot better than hers was, just make it more seamless," says Marquez, now a media coordinator at an advertising agency.

New ideas to grow the program

Even with financial aid and scholarships, Chávez Gómez still sees many students struggling to pay bills. Costs for books, housing, food, and health care often aren't covered by scholarships, she says.

Leos Gonzalez used a Chicas grant to purchase school supplies for her daughter (photo: Sergio Chay)

Chávez Gómez takes it next.

Chávez Gómez persuaded Adelante Mujeres to adopt an emergency grant program. In the 2021–22 academic year, the Chicas emergency grant helped seventeen college students in Oregon cover extra costs.

Leos Gonzalez, who used the grant to help cover rent and purchase school supplies for her five-year-old daughter, is now one of three paid interns for Chicas in College, helping to plan events, mentor high school seniors, and provide one-on-one support for other college students. The idea of employing Chicas in College participants as interns? That was Chávez Gómez's, too.

Her next idea is to fund renewable scholarships, particularly for undocumented students, who are ineligible for many existing scholarship programs.

Under Chávez Gómez, Aguilar says, the Chicas in College program has already grown far beyond the original vision. She's excited to see where

"The thing with Itzel is that she not only has ideas, but also, she acts on them," Aguilar says. "She takes the initiative to understand what it takes to get there and does the work it takes to get that idea to happen."

Alice Callahan is a freelance writer in Eugene whose work appears in publications including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Knowable Magazine*.

POLITICS & SOCIETY

Explore More

POLITICS & SOCIETY

From Arafat to the Dalai Lama, Alum Shielded Leaders

Cam Burks, BS '96, put himself in harm's way as a special agent for the US and global dignitaries

POLITICS & SOCIETY

Anita Hill sees Peril and Promise for Feminism

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

POLITICS & SOCIETY

Five Faculty Members on the Women Who Move Them

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

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:26:01
https://getfireshot.com

SPRING 2023

A Dynamic Approach to Learning Your A-B-C's

For decades, the UO's short test has helped millions of kids improve literacy

By Alice Callahan • Illustration by David Gill • April 12, 2023

5 min read

As a doctoral student at Harvard Graduate School of Education in the early 2000s, Gina Biancarosa was working with after-school programs in New York City and looking for a quick, inexpensive way to assess if curriculums were improving students' reading.

Most options to test reading were costly and took as long as an hour to administer—too impractical and not enough fun for voluntary programs where, Biancarosa says, "students vote with their feet."

But one reading test caught her eye: DIBELS® or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, a tool offered by the University of Oregon that is fast to use and free to download, perfect for cash-strapped graduate students and teachers.

Gina Biancarosa

The after-school officials "needed something that was very quick, but still reliable and valid, and that was sensitive to instruction or small-grained improvement," says Biancarosa, now an administrator of DIBELS at the UO and Ann Swindells Chair in Education. "DIBELS really fits the bill for all three of those things."

For decades, DIBELS has been a standard for testing early literacy, and it is now used in every state to assess millions of elementary and middle school students annually. The short, minutes-long tests published by the UO are based on a simple idea: to test a child's reading skills, listen to them read.

Validating what grandmothers already know

The idea of DIBELS—pronounced "dibbles"—was to give teachers an easy, efficient way to track students' acquisition of literacy, says Mark Shinn, a professor in the College of Education from 1984 to 2003. Assessing children while they read was a common-sense approach—"If you want to know how well a kid reads," he adds, "listen to them read, right? Grandmas knew that."

DIBELS is based on decades of research that started with Stan Deno at the University of Minnesota in the 1970s and '80s, says Shinn, who completed his doctoral work with Deno. As researchers at the UO, Shinn and colleagues standardized and validated the short assessments to confirm the tests reliably identified whether children were on track for reading. The original name—DIBS—was coined by Caren Wesson, a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee who died of breast cancer in 1994.

> *"DIBELS gives us consistent data so we're comparing apples to apples. I don't know what I'd do without my DIBELS."*
>
> *—Gayle Tacchini, BS '82 (sociology), Willamina Elementary School*

For her doctoral thesis at the UO, Ruth Kaminski, MS '84 (special education), PhD '92 (school psychology), created short tests to check the reading growth and development of kindergartners and beginning first-graders, says Shinn. She and Roland Good, associate professor of school psychology, later added to these, incorporated several other validated oral-reading tests for older students, and began publishing early versions of DIBELS assessments in the late 1990s at the UO, with the first widely available version published in 2002. Good and Kaminski have since formed their

own educational assessment company, but the UO continues to run DIBELS with faculty and graduate student researchers contributing to its continuous evolution.

Out with the old, in with the new

Patrick Kennedy

Over the years, DIBELS has been updated multiple times to reflect advances in the science of reading and incorporate feedback from teachers and researchers.

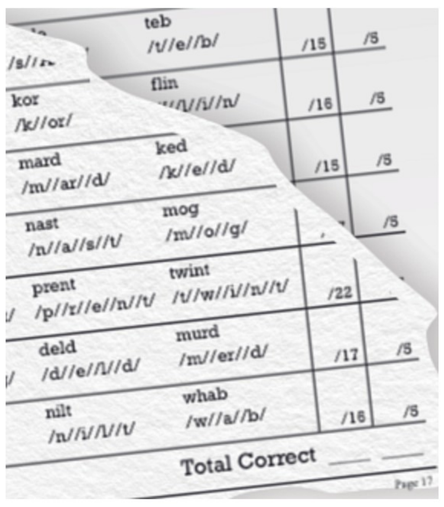
Biancarosa and Patrick Kennedy, PhD '14 (educational leadership), a senior research associate in the college's Center on Teaching and Learning, led a complete revision of DIBELS for the current eighth edition. They dropped less useful measures, added a measure of word reading, extended the grade range of some measures, and incorporated all new reading passages. Regional-specific references such as "butte" have been removed and the passages are more relatable to children in urban areas and with more diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Schools typically administer DIBELS assessments three times per year. Depending on grade level, the tests require no more than five to seven minutes per student to administer. New rules in the eighth edition allow for stopping the assessment if students are extremely successful or unsuccessful on the measures, saving even more time for instruction.

Checking reading "vital signs"

Just as you have your blood pressure and temperature checked at every doctor's visit, DIBELS are meant to be basic screening assessments, Biancarosa says.

For example, during a DIBELS assessment, a first-grade student might be asked to read the names of letters from a mixed-up list ("t, n, P, L, e," and so on); then to sound out "nonsense" words ("tib, yate, lish, thamp"); next, to read from a list of common but increasingly difficult real words ("no, they, there, help, island"); and finally, to read a passage from a story ("Bobby was on his way home from school one day . . . "). All the while, an educator listens and tracks how much the student can successfully read on their own.



If a student scores below their grade-level benchmark on one or more measures, that's a signal they may need specific interventions to catch up. For these students, DIBELS assessments can also be given more frequently to see if the extra instruction is helping, just as a patient with high blood pressure might be monitored to see if they're responding to changes in diet or a new medication.

At Willamina Elementary School, in a rural, predominantly low-income district east of Salem, DIBELS has been a key tool in the reading program for more than a decade, says reading specialist Gayle Tacchini, BS '82 (sociology).

With DIBELS, Tacchini and her team have systematically identified which kids need more intensive instruction, leading to dramatic improvements in reading. When they started using DIBELS, about 25 percent of students were reading at grade level, and just before the pandemic, about 75 percent were hitting that goal. The disruptions of the pandemic rolled back some of those gains but now DIBELS is helping Tacchini track students' progress in catching up.

"What DIBELS does is it gives us consistent data, so we're comparing apples to apples," she says. "I don't know what I'd do without my DIBELS."

Alice Callahan is a freelance writer in Eugene whose work appears in publications including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Knowable Magazine*.

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

Explore More

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

University Communications

Oregon Quarterly
5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:26:30
https://getfireshot.com

SPRING 2023

Talking Ideas with Karl Scholz

The university's incoming president on his career, curiosity, and what he likes about Eugene. Hint: he's a runner.

By George Evano • Photos by Charlie Litchfield • April 12, 2023

5 min read

On March 13, Karl Scholz was introduced as the University of Oregon's nineteenth president. A distinguished economist and longtime leader in higher education, he comes to Oregon from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he served as provost and dean of the College of Letters and Science. His presidency at the UO begins July 1.

Oregon Quarterly met with Scholz to learn more about his career, his family's move to Oregon, and his ideas about higher education.

OQ: What sparked the idea to pursue a career in higher ed?

KS: Both my parents had advanced degrees. My father was a chemistry professor, my mother studied microbiology. But the academic mindset did not flow immediately to me. As a young person, I was obsessed with basketball. I ended up not being good enough to play in a big-time program like Oregon or other Division 1 schools. So, I played basketball at a liberal arts college in Minnesota, Carleton College, where it began to dawn on me that my life was probably not going to be centered around basketball. At Carleton, I studied economics and mathematics. A faculty member took an interest in me and supported me, and then I had a break and got to be a research assistant at the Brookings Institution [a nonprofit public policy research organization in Washington, DC, that develops solutions to societal problems]. And those two events began to change my life. I went to graduate school at Stanford and had a fantastic mentor there, which prepared me for a wonderful career in higher education.

OQ: As an economist who has led institutes and programs and advised in two presidential administrations, when did you first grasp the idea of supply and demand?

KS: I played the bassoon as a young person. I like to say I understood supply and demand from an early age. Orchestras need bassoonists, so there is steady demand. But the supply was restricted: there was not a lot of competition among bassoonists in Lincoln, Nebraska. That allowed me to play in the youth symphony and, in fact, be a senior soloist when I perhaps did not put as much time into it as some of my more musically focused peers!

OQ: As a higher education leader, what are your guiding ideas?

KS: My astronomer friends tell me that the North Star is really three stars. Polaris A, Polaris B, and you'd think you'd know the third one.

OQ: Polaris C?

KS: In fact, it's Polaris AB. That's a little astronomer humor. For me the North Star refers to the foundational principles of the university. We're trying to create world-class, life-changing experiences for the students we serve. We're trying to push the boundaries of knowledge and enhance understanding of what it means to be human. And we're serving our communities, our state, the region, and the world. Those are the three guiding stars. And layered on top of that is respect: we're going to treat each other well and work to create an environment where we can each reach our full potential. In doing that, together we will tackle the things that will truly make Oregon a leader in higher ed.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:29:00
https://getfireshot.com

Melissa and Karl Scholz

OQ: You've been with Wisconsin for more than thirty years. The day you came home with the idea that you could pack it up and move halfway across the country to Oregon—what was the dinner-table conversation like?

KS: So, so great. It was joy and excitement with my wife, Melissa. She grew up in California, so she's very excited about moving back to the West Coast. I have three daughters. The oldest, who's in California, is really excited. The middle, who's here at UO has, I think, somewhat mixed feelings. The youngest, who's going to school in Virginia right now, let it be known that we're "going too far away." But generally, a lot of support.

OQ: Aside from adding a whole bunch of green and yellow to your wardrobe, what are you most looking forward to in moving to Eugene?

KS: Joining the wonderful UO community. It's a great university—a member of the Association of American Universities and as such, it's one of the sixty-five leading research universities in North America. It's been exhilarating to learn more about the accomplishments of Oregon students, staff, faculty, and alumni. And things outside the university are also aligned. I love sports. The Oregon Athletics brand is fantastic. We love wine. The Willamette Valley is, for wine, a mecca, since we've always loved Pinots. I'm an avid recreational runner. I love music. I do a lot of listening when I'm running (slowly!). So, the idea of coming to TrackTown USA, and having this opportunity, is a dream come true.

OQ: You frequently use the phrase "curiosity-driven research." Why do you like that idea?

KS: A variety of reasons, but I think it's a wonderful umbrella that covers what a great public research university does.

It's broad enough to encompass the fascinating research that occurs in the arts and humanities. Why do certain things endure? Why are we reading Shakespeare now, when contemporary writers of his time have been forgotten? That's the sort of question that humanists will dive into and help us better understand our world.

Curiosity also encompasses what we call "blue sky" science—the science that helps us understand, let's say, the origins of the universe, which may not have immediate commercial applications, but in time sometimes can.

And then of course, it encompasses the phenomenal basic and applied research that's happening out of the Knight Campus, where we're accelerating scientific impact, and the Ballmer Institute for Children's Behavioral Health, and so much other work across the UO campus that will serve society.

OQ: What about instilling curiosity in students?

KS: I often tell students to try to have experiences that will help you to be a better human. Celebrate the arts, celebrate the experience, celebrate all these magnificent things that we do. Going through a great university like the University of Oregon, students will acquire skills that allow them to earn a good living, but also to lead a good life—to understand culture, to understand belonging, to make connections, to be excited about acquiring new knowledge. As you do these things, curiosity naturally follows.

OQ: This issue of our magazine spotlights ideas that have been generated by Oregon faculty, staff, students, and alumni. What resonates for you about the power of ideas?

KS: Ideas inspire people. I think we become our better selves when there's that kind of inspiration. It can be subtle. It can be profound. But I think ideas are a key part of being human. Our interactions and our universities can be magical because our students are getting exposed to many ideas for the first time. It's a wonderful theme because it captures what universities are about.

Learn more about Karl Scholz and his announcement as the nineteenth president.

George Evano is senior director of editorial content for University Communications and publisher of *Oregon Quarterly*.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:29:00
https://getfireshot.com

University Communications

Oregon Quarterly
5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:29:00
https://getfireshot.com

SPRING 2023

Fusing Art and Science to Save the Seas

At the forefront of blue humanities, Stacy Alaimo explores the intersection of aesthetics and marine conservation

By Lauren Hodges • Illustration by David Gill • April 12, 2023

3 min read

It's said some of Hollywood's most famous monsters were inspired by creatures that live in the darkest reaches of the ocean.

This presents Stacy Alaimo with an intriguing conundrum for conservation efforts. "Deep-sea creatures are often pictured as aliens from another planet, and that gets people interested in them because we're all interested in novelty and weirdness and the surreal," she says. "But the idea of the alien can also cut us off from any responsibility."

Alaimo is a professor in the Department of English and the Environmental Studies Program, both in the College of Arts and Sciences. She is also a leader in blue humanities, combining the critical study of the human world with marine science and ocean ecologies.

This collage by Alaimo reflects her exploration of the effects of beauty and aesthetics on deep-sea science and conservation efforts for the creatures that live there (credit: Stacy Alaimo)

In her new book, *Deep Blue Ecologies: Science, Aesthetics, and the Creatures of the Abyss*, Alaimo explores an idea based in her fusion of art and science: how do aesthetics affect conservation efforts?

Presenting images of deep-sea creatures as unrelatable animals promotes a detached world absent of our inflictions on the planet and therefore not requiring conservation, Alaimo says. She is examining the dichotomy of photographing marine creatures in a way that promotes conservation without reducing them to "pretty pictures" devoid of context.

"I always try to work from a place where I can't figure it out conceptually, ethically, politically," Alaimo says. "I always try to go to the spots that are really difficult and that's where I think the work happens."

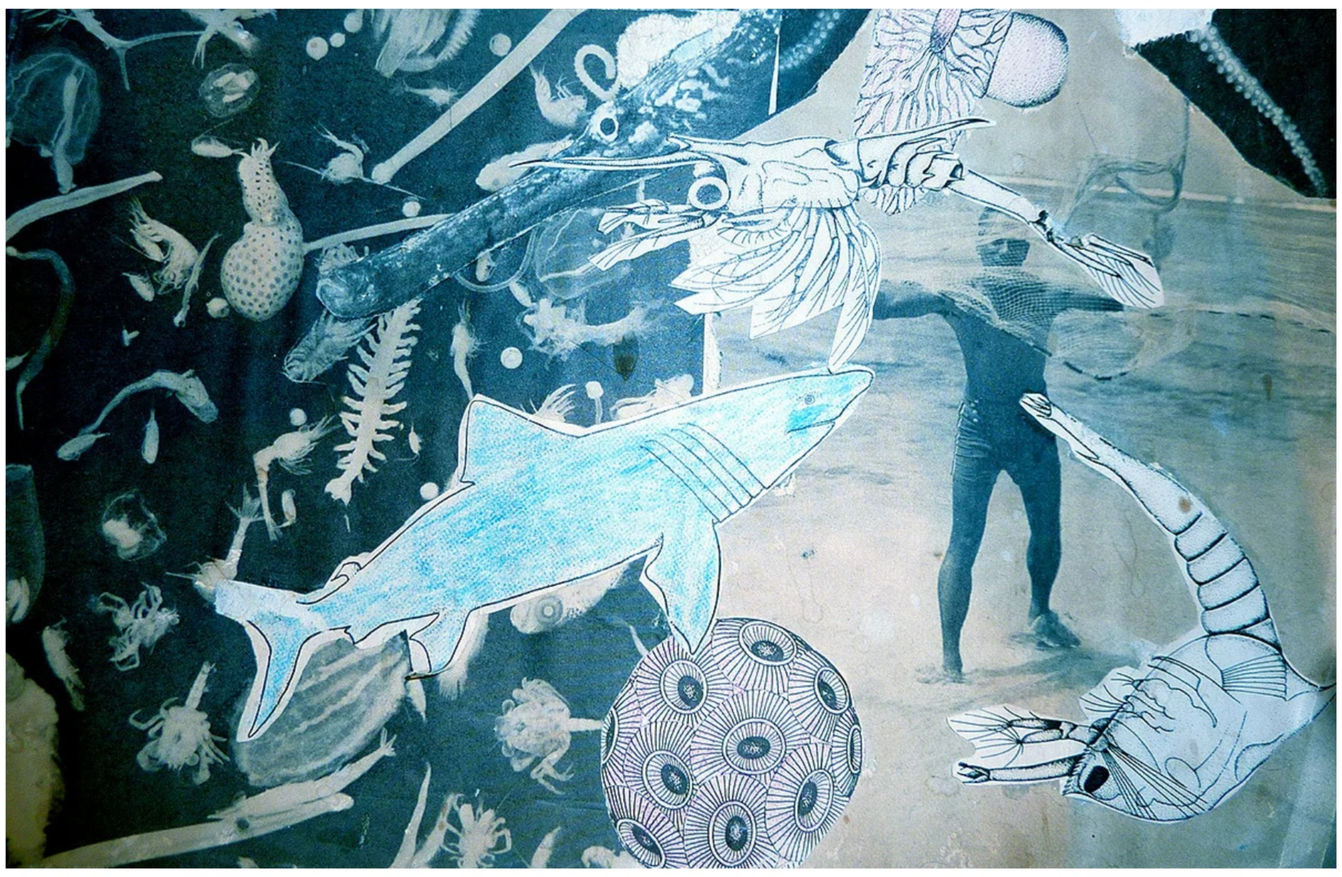
Sea creatures and social justice

Alaimo also explores images of marine life through the lens of social justice and colonialist concerns. “One of the things I am interested in is the idea of who the spectator is, who is the ‘we,’” Alaimo says. “When these images of deep-sea creatures are circulated, it is another kind of colonialist vision. How can I be concerned about these fish across the world in the deep seas that aren’t part of my life?”

Drawn to Jacques Cousteau and William Beebe

Alaimo watched *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* as a child. But it was naturalist William Beebe of the early twentieth century who inspired her work at the intersection of science and the humanities.

“Beebe was in this moment where science was starting to become modern, which meant objective, disconnected, not related to the arts or humanities,” says Alaimo. Beebe sought to connect how the beauty of a creature relates to conservation, for example.



Alaimo grew up watching The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau *and was inspired by naturalist William Beebe (credit: Stacy Alaimo)*

Dance of the manta rays

Alaimo began scuba diving while in graduate school.

Her most memorable experience was a night dive in Hawaii: “We’re sitting at the bottom, and we have a little flashlight pointed up. And then giant manta rays came right at us with this big mouth, and then at the last second, they gracefully arched back and came back around—like ballet dancers. That was one of the most beautiful, moving moments of my entire life, these manta rays in this beautiful ballet.”

Lauren Hodges, an environmental science major and member of the class of 2024, is a staff writer for the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Explore More

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

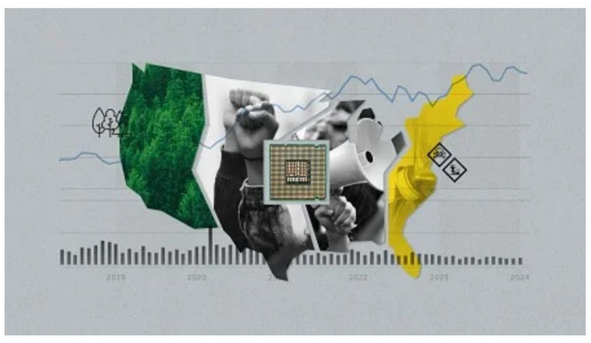
The Beauty of Campus in Tree Dimensions

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

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:29:31
https://getfireshot.com

5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:29:31
https://getfireshot.com

SPRING 2023

An Aquarium Fish That Became a Supermodel

The unassuming zebrafish is an important model organism in research worldwide, thanks to UO scientists

Video by Chris Larsen and Laurel Hamers • Illustration by David Gill • April 12, 2023

To learn about human health and disease, look to the zebrafish.

Scientists use these shimmery tropical fish as model organisms for research because they're a lot like us—they share the same internal organs and many of the same genes. Moreover, they reproduce abundantly, they're instinctively social, and their embryos are transparent—helpful for making observations.

Today, in labs around the world, scientists use zebrafish to study everything from diabetes to Parkinson's disease. It all started in the 1960s at the University of Oregon, where biologist George Streisinger pioneered the use of zebrafish for research.

In a new *Oregon Quarterly* video, researchers describe the UO's place in zebrafish research, recalling both the history of their use at the UO and the importance of these small vertebrates today for understanding concerns such as spine development.

Chris Larsen, MS '18 (journalism), is a videographer and photographer for University Communications.

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

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Explore More

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Researchers Developing New Approaches to Aging Problems

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

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Building Better Brain Implants

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

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Page 1
Ask These 8 Questions before Making Your Pitch | Oregon Quarterly
https://oregonquarterly.uoregon.edu/ask-these-8-questions-making-your-pitch

Eight Questions to Make the Right Pitch

Entrepreneurship expert Jeff Sorensen of the Lundquist College of Business deals tips for giving your big idea pop

By Jeff Sorensen • Illustration by David Gill • April 12, 2023

4 min read

Pitching an idea to potential investors can be a daunting task.

What should you include in your presentation? What's best left out? How deep into the details should you go? If you're hoping to start a business, it's important to communicate effectively so potential supporters understand what you do and how they can help.

Answering key questions is critical whether your venture is ready to launch or just the seed of an idea. In fact, I'm sharing these tips with students for a new program called the Oregon Innovation Challenge. This program is within the Lundquist Center for Entrepreneurship, housed at the University of Oregon Lundquist College of Business. The Challenge is a twelve-week incubator during which students build projects with the support of experienced mentors from the UO community. Students compete based on their pitches; at stake is up to $10,000 per winning project and an eight-week fellowship to take ventures to the next level. We'll fund ten to fifteen projects this year.

Jeff Sorensen

Whether you're a first-year student or an experienced entrepreneur, if you can compellingly answer these eight questions, you'll give yourself a great chance at getting funding.

1

What do you do?

Explain what your product or service does in two sentences. Be clear and concise. Don't get bogged down in the details, but make sure you convey the essence of your idea.

2

Who uses your product?

Your idea won't be successful unless it meets a specific need or solves a specific problem for a specific group of people. Clearly identify who your target audience is, why they need your product or service, and what it looks like for them to use it. Sharing a working prototype or demo is a great way to do this. If you don't have one yet, you can visualize what it would look like with mockups or diagrams.

3

How big is the market?

Once you explain who will be using your product, do a bit of calculation on how many of these people you think exist in the market. If you're building a product that automates work for university research scientists, you might want to

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:30:29
https://getfireshot.com

estimate how many research labs exist in all the universities in the country. Your estimate might be slightly off, but it gets you in the ballpark.

4

What progress have you made?

Investors want to see that you've made headway in bringing your idea to life. This could include a working prototype, early customer feedback, or partnerships with other companies. Be sure to highlight any milestones you've already achieved and explain why they're important for the success of your idea.

5

How will you make money?

You want your project to succeed and sustain itself over time. To do this, you'll need to eventually generate enough recurring revenue to keep the business afloat—and hopefully generate a positive return for your investors. Your revenue model could include direct purchases, subscription fees, advertising revenue, sponsorships, or other revenue streams. Don't spend too much time describing the model, but show that you've thought it through.

6

Who's on your team?

Investors invest in people, not just ideas. Tell us who you are and why you're working on the project. Share any relevant experiences that make you the right person for this idea. If you have a team, explain how each person adds a specific perspective and value to the group.

7

What milestones are you aiming to hit?

Include a clear roadmap for the future. Explain your milestones and how you will measure success. Be specific and realistic and show that you have a clear plan for the next six to twelve months.

8

What's the ask?

Be clear about what you're asking for. This could be a specific amount of money, a partnership, or other resources. Be sure to explain why you need this support, what you'll do with the resources they provide, and how it will help you achieve your goals.

Ultimately, what matters most is the progress you're making on the project itself. If there's no substance, then style doesn't matter. But if you're making real progress, answering these eight questions will make the work of winning over investors that much easier.

Jeff Sorensen is director of the Lundquist Center for Entrepreneurship in the Lundquist College of Business. While earning his undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan, he cofounded a student social innovation community and incubator to help students start projects to make a difference. He later became the youngest director-level administrator at Michigan.

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

Explore More

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

A Teamwork Touchdown: The Big Ten Academic Alliance

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

Navigating Change by Staying Her Course

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

Lundquist College of Business Sparks Start-up Culture

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:30:29
https://getfireshot.com

From world languages to leadership, member schools reap resources for upping the academic game

She ran track in high school, and now Nike executive Sarah Mensah is sprinting past business milestones

Students and faculty across campus bring new ideas to life thanks to support for entrepreneurship

University Communications

Oregon Quarterly
5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:30:29
https://getfireshot.com

Page 1
Fab Five: What I've Learned about Building a Business | Oregon Quarterly
https://oregonquarterly.uoregon.edu/fab-five-what-ive-learned-about-building-business

Emily Darchuk discovered a new "whey"

SPRING 2023

Fab Five: What I've Learned about Building a Business

From sustainable spirits to pet products, alumni share the inspirations underpinning their endeavors

By Alice Tallmadge • Photo by Dan Cronin • April 12, 2023

11 min read

"Success is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration."

This famous quote from Thomas Edison notwithstanding, entrepreneurs know that hard work alone is meaningless without a great idea driving it. So say five University of Oregon alumni who trace their business ventures to an idea—an observation, a revelation—that compelled them to chart their own course.

Their companies could scarcely be more disparate. But in the profiles that follow, each alum points to a moment of inspiration—of imagination—when they recognized unfettered opportunity amid the limitations of the status quo.

- **Emily Darchuk**: Do Things Differently for the Right Reasons
- **Marcus Harvey**: Hustle and Make It Cool
- **Anne Marie Levis**: Solve a Problem
- **Nathan Lillegard**: Repeat After Me—"I Can Do It"
- **Aisha LuVert**: Why Not Be That Person

Emily Darchuk: Do Things Differently for the Right Reasons

The logo for Wheyward Spirit, a distilled alcohol made from whey, a dairy by-product, features a Highland Coo cow with unkempt hair, pointed horns, and a determined jaw. The image is fitting, says Wheyward Spirit founder Emily Darchuk, MBA '18.

Darchuk was encouraged to "do her own thing" (credit: Dan Cronin)

"She has that 'long hair, don't care' Wheyward spirit," says Darchuk. "I fell in love with her. She has horns but she's not a bull. She's a different type of cow representing a different type of spirit."

Darchuk, too, goes her own way. A food scientist by training and experience, she's also committed to natural foods and sustainability. Once she learned about the billions of gallons of whey discarded during the cheese-making process, it was only natural that she figured out how to create a new product from a by-product: a distilled spirit from whey. Farm to flask, she calls it.

"I saw an opportunity to do things differently for the right reasons," she says. "It's that Wheyward mentality." Darchuk had the science chops but not the business acumen to build and market her product. She enrolled in the Oregon MBA program at the University of Oregon's Lundquist College of Business, pursuing a specialization in innovation and entrepreneurship, and set about learning the basics: creating a business plan, pitching, incorporating feedback, and retooling, again and again.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:31:00
https://getfireshot.com

"Everyone was encouraged to do their own thing," she says. "You were able to continually improve and be in a community of other people doing the same thing. That is a really powerful environment for innovation." Wheyward Spirit's public debut was set for early 2020. "We were locked and ready to go," she says. "Then COVID hit." It could have been a disaster but, she says, her UO program taught her how to pivot. She dumped her business plan and grew her company online. She made connections and built partnerships, including helping Ben and Jerry's resurrect their long-discontinued flavor, Dublin Mudslide, with the new rendition featuring Wheyward Spirit. Today, Wheyward Spirit is available for purchase from their website and in stores across Oregon, the Midwest, and soon Whole Foods stores throughout California. It has garnered positive press in the *New York Times*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Sip*, and *Eating Well*.

Darchuk is a member of the business school's Forty Under 40 Advisory Board, which advances the school's mission by providing strategic advice concerning goals, policies, and programs. She says her success is in part because others—namely UO business school alums—have lent a hand, a story, or an encouraging word when she most needed it.

"A lot of us have taken an unconventional path," she says. "I love connecting with them and hearing about their business journey, how they navigated, and where they are today."

↑ Back to Top

Marcus Harvey: Hustle and Make It Cool

Some novice entrepreneurs follow the rule book. Others fly by the seat of their pants. Marcus Harvey, BS '12 (digital arts), founder of the apparel brand Portland Gear, did the latter. Nine years later he is still soaring high.

Harvey works with students interested in graphic arts (courtesy Marcus Harvey)

"My first day I sold $5,000 worth of T-shirts. I kept making more stuff and cooler stuff and promoting it through Instagram and social media. It became my full-time job the first day I started it," he says. Along with selling online, Portland Gear has two brick-and-mortar stores. A third opens soon.

It didn't hurt that Harvey had nabbed the Instagram handle @Portland a year before he started his business in 2014. He mostly used it to promote events and post photos of Portland. While his idea of an apparel company germinated, his follower numbers mushroomed into tens of thousands, he says, "who loved Portland like I did." Unlike most entrepreneurs, he amassed potential customers before having a product to sell them.

Harvey—now using @portlandgear—had dabbled with designing and selling skateboard-themed T-shirts while at the UO, hawking them door-to-door in his dorm for twenty bucks each. "It's where I learned everything," he says. He applied what he was learning in College of Design graphic arts classes—Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, color, typography—to his brand. He didn't think to seek out business mentors. "I didn't know what I was doing—I was just hustling and making stuff I thought was cool." As an undergrad he learned to value building community—his fraternity brothers, classmates, friends. "I love being surrounded by people," Harvey says. "At the UO I developed my people side, my community side, my care for others." Today, Harvey gives back by speaking to high school and college students about creating and running a small business: the risks, failures, and successes; the time it takes; the commitment to employees, customers, and creativity. For the past several summers, in partnership with the UO, he has held two weeklong "brand camps" for high school and college students interested in graphic arts, apparel, business marketing, and entrepreneurship. The camps are held at the White Stag building in downtown Portland.

"The students learn about sports product design and product management," he says. "I get to brainwash them all to be Ducks. It brings me a lot of joy."

↑ Back to Top

Anne Marie Levis: Solve a Problem

Marketing and communications during crisis is all about problem-solving, Levis says (credit: Sabrina Zawierucha)

It's a wonder Anne Marie Levis, MBA '96, still loves owning and running Funk/Levis & Associates, the Eugene marketing and communication business she took over in 1997. Many of her clients are people, institutions, or municipalities in crisis. Either their business is tanking, their image is on the rails, or they are facing public pushback. But where most people see a complex, thorny mess, Levis sees challenge.

"I see myself as a problem solver," she says. "My MBA program gave me confidence in problem-solving. That's my job." Levis says that, overall, her MBA program was "a springboard for the trajectory of my career." In addition to arming her with problem-solving skills, the program provided the financial know-how necessary to run a business. It also introduced her to the value of working in groups.

"What I took out of the program is 'we're always better together.' Minds around a table to solve a problem or come up with a big idea is the way to do things." She paraphrases a favorite maxim: "If you want to go fast, do it alone. If you want to go far, do it together."

Even now, twenty-seven years later, Levis continues to rely on group process. "When I am working through a difficult issue with a client, I work with several team members. Seeing things through their perspective is so helpful. It doesn't matter who comes up with an answer. I recognize it when it happens."

Her gut tells her when an idea rings true. "I hear something, it sticks with me, and I can't forget it." Yes, an effective message has to include solid reasoning, she says—"but it has to hit in the heart. It has to elicit an emotional response."

Many of the issues Levis's former clients were dealing with are too sensitive for her to discuss. But some problems were less weighty. Levis's company helped retool the image of a suburban commuter city from that of a car-choked byway to a community characterized by parks, diversity, and vibrant economic development. For another client, her company used video storytelling to reframe the image of a corporate acquisition from greedy takeover to affable partnership.

"I am a 'yes' person," she says. "I have an optimistic perspective. My attitude is, 'I don't know how, but we'll figure it out.'"

↑ Back to Top

Nathan Lillegard: Repeat After Me—"I Can Do It"

Nathan Lillegard, BA '98 (planning, public policy and management), MBA '06, instructor at the Lundquist College of Business, tells his students there are two ways to approach starting a business.

Devise a novel technology and find a market, Lillegard says (courtesy University of Oregon)

One, the most common, is to find a problem—or niche, or vacancy—that people care about, then figure out how solve it in a way that makes money. The problem has to be migraine-level, he cautions, not equivalent to a hangnail. "If the problem is just an annoyance, people won't pay to solve it."

The second approach is a 180-degree pivot: come up with a technology that does something novel, then figure out who cares enough to pay to use it.

That is the path that Lillegard and his business partner Eric Johnson followed in 2007 when they formed Floragenex, a genomics research company.

Johnson, a UO associate professor of biology, had devised a way to "slice and dice" DNA into a library of fragments that could be used in research. Lillegard, who confesses he took just one college biology class, handled the business end, doing enough research to know they were on a viable trajectory and seeking the appropriate consumers market. His first target group—plant breeders—didn't offer the path to market the company needed. He eventually connected with targeted research projects, such as a whale researcher whose challenge their technology could solve—determining if there were one or two populations of blue whales in the Pacific Ocean. Word got out and Floragenex was on a roll, serving researchers around the world working with plant and animal species.

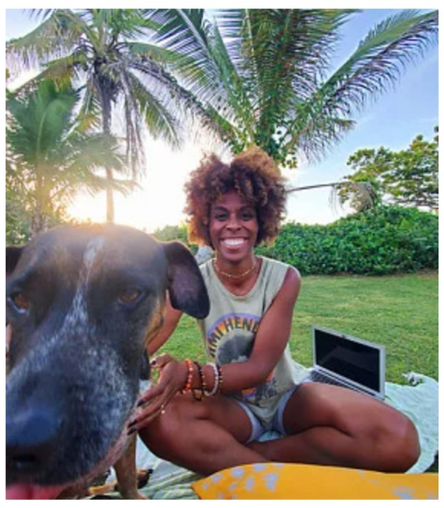
"As we evolved the business, we found customers who needed to solve problems that we could solve," Lillegard says. "And were willing to pay for it." He separated from Floragenex in 2012. The company was acquired by Portland-based Sedia Biosciences in 2013 and continues to thrive.

Entrepreneurs come in many forms, Lillegard says, but one trait they have in common is unwavering determination: "They have the attitude, 'I can do it. I'm going to figure out how to make it happen.'"

Staff and faculty in his MBA program helped foster that mindset. "I got enough positive feedback and encouragement that I felt like I had something worth pursuing," he says. "Nobody said, 'this is a terrible idea—it will never work.' It gave me the confidence to keep going. And that's the ecosystem you want to build in a university—help students feel like they can do it."

↑ Back to Top

Aisha LuVert: Why Not Be That Person



LuVert researched the value of CBD for dogs (credit: Aisha LuVert)

The spark for Aisha LuVert's natural pet product company, Emisha Wellness, came out of a crisis: one of her beloved dogs had developed a seizure disorder, and LuVert wasn't comfortable with the medication the vet had prescribed. LuVert, BS '03 (general science), was in the waiting room agonizing over whether to start her dog on the medication when two policemen came in with their injured K-9 partner. While they were at the front desk, she overhead one of them say, "What are we going to do—give our dog weed?"

The fuse was lit. LuVert ended up giving her dog a CBD remedy, and his seizures immediately stopped. "I was, like, how did I forget how cannabis has been such an ally to those who have seizure disorders?" LuVert remembers. "I had wanted to treat my dog in a different way. And then I hear an opening."

At the UO, LuVert dove into the sciences available in the College of Arts and Sciences, majoring in general science and minoring in chemistry and biology. "It's where I got the base for a lot of the work I did in my career," she says. Her experience in biomedical research and medications required her to dig for answers, and she scoured the internet for information on CBD. She wasn't planning on starting a business—she simply wanted to assure her two dogs healthy, long lives.

She asked pediatricians, pharmacists, and other medical professionals about safe, effective natural products to use with pets, and discovered they knew little more than she did.

"I was expecting them to have the information," she says. "I would have loved to have had someone to trust, to lean on. Over time I thought, 'Why not be that person for other people?'"

It took a few years before LuVert had amassed the knowledge she felt she needed. She opened Emisha Wellness in 2018, offering soft CBD dog chews, a pet detox formula, mushrooms, and teas that promote vitality, health, and immunity. Many of her products are human grade.

At the UO, LuVert was often the only Black person in her classroom. She learned the value of speaking up when her perspective wasn't being included. With Emisha Wellness, she says, she wants to expand the community conversation on health to include earth medicine for the entire family.

Both her dogs lived for more than sixteen years, and she wants others to know they have options when it comes to health and longevity.

"Having multiple pathways to wellness should be for every family who can benefit," she says.

Alice Tallmadge, MA '87 (journalism), is an editor for *Oregon Quarterly*. She has been a reporter, writer, and editor over a career that included stints with the *Oregonian* and *Eugene Weekly*. She was an adjunct instructor at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication from 2008 to 2014.

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

Explore More

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

A Teamwork Touchdown: The Big Ten Academic Alliance

From world languages to leadership, member schools reap resources for upping the academic game

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

Navigating Change by Staying Her Course

She ran track in high school, and now Nike executive Sarah Mensah is sprinting past business milestones

BUSINESS & INNOVATION

Lundquist College of Business Sparks Start-up Culture

Students and faculty across campus bring new ideas to life thanks to support for entrepreneurship

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:31:00
https://getfireshot.com

Page 1
Tiny Worms and Time Machines | Oregon Quarterly
https://oregonquarterly.uoregon.edu/tiny-worms-and-time-machines

SPRING 2023

Tiny Worms and Time Machines

Innovation in gene editing could speed better understanding of human diseases and development of new drugs

By Laurel Hamers • Illustration by David Gill • April 12, 2023

3 min read

Traveling through space and time like Doctor Who might still be beyond the scope of current Earthly science. But University of Oregon biologists are bending time in their own way, via a new gene-editing technique that compresses years of work into days.

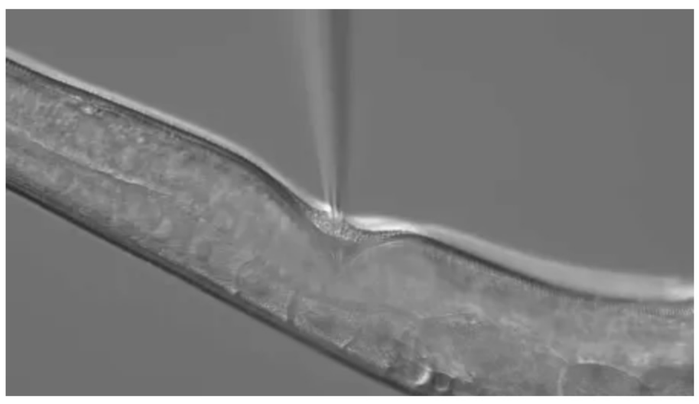
They've named their new technique "TARDIS"—a playful nod to the time-and-space traveling police box from the classic British sci-fi TV show.

Working in worms the size of a pinhead, the UO team has found a way to test thousands of genetic mutations in one fell swoop.

The advance will make it possible for biologists to quickly do experiments that compare many versions of a gene, hunting for mutations that lead to specific traits. Such research is often a crucial first step toward unraveling the mechanisms behind human diseases or finding new therapeutic drug possibilities.

By speeding up a part of the process that's currently painstakingly slow, the advance makes new kinds of experiments possible in animals.

"In biology, we spend a lot of time working with genetic mutants. But in animals, we're limited by how many genetic mutants we can make at one time," says Zach Stevenson. Stevenson, a graduate student, helped design the technique with research professor Stephen Banse, BS '03 (biology). Both work in the lab of Patrick Phillips, a professor in the Department of Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences.



UO scientists inject genetic material into a C. elegans *worm*

Today, scientists can make precise, targeted genetic mutations in animal subjects such as worms or fruit flies. Still, each subject with a different combination of genetic mutations must be engineered individually. It can take months to make all the mutant strains for an experiment.

The new technique, says Stevenson, "is a way around that bottleneck."

Comparing the effects of many genetic mutations simultaneously is a key starting point for many questions in modern biology.

For example, consider a scientist who hopes to identify a mutation that makes people less susceptible to the effects of a strain of deadly bacteria.

She might start by testing how hundreds of worms, all with different genetic mutations, react to the bacteria. She could then single out the ones that survive for further research—something in their genes is protecting them. These screening experiments narrow down the possibilities and help scientists figure out where to focus time and attention when translating that knowledge to human-based studies.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:31:33
https://getfireshot.com

With the new method, Stevenson says, “for the same labor of making three or four mutations, you can make tens of thousands.”

The team has piloted the technique in *C. elegans*, a tiny worm that’s popular for biology research. A similar approach could eventually be used on other research animals.

While mass gene-editing is frequently used in single-celled organisms such as bacteria and yeast, the Phillips team is the first to make it possible on this scale in an animal.

The new approach works by compressing the information needed to make many mutations into a single package, which is engineered into an individual worm. When that worm reproduces, its offspring each have different mutations, saving researchers the time of editing the genes of hundreds of worms individually. (For details on the new technique, see this related story.)

Here, TARDIS stands for Transgenic Arrays Resulting in Diversity of Integrated Sequences. Like the famous fictional TARDIS, the worm “is bigger on the inside,” Stevenson says—it contains a lot of extra genetic material in the same small package.

The team sees broad applications for biology in general, doing experiments that before were only possible in yeast or bacteria, Banse says. “Now we can do these things in an animal model.”

Laurel Hamers is a senior writer and editor of science and research communications for University Communications. She has been a science writer and editor for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, was a reporter for *Science News* magazine, and has held positions at the American Institute of Physics and the *San Jose Mercury News*.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Explore More

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Researchers Developing New Approaches to Aging Problems

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

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Building Better Brain Implants

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

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:31:33
https://getfireshot.com

PathwayOregon mentors connect their peers with resources that pave the way for success

SPRING 2023

Putting the "Peer" in Peerless Support

Student mentors help PathwayOregon scholars navigate college life and thrive

By Ed Dorsch • Photo by Vincent Foster • May 22, 2023

3 min read

First-generation college student Eric Ruiz Cortes knows how disorienting the transition to undergraduate life can be. When the accounting and Spanish major started his first year at the University of Oregon in 2019, he appreciated the supportive community he found through the PathwayOregon scholarship program.

"Some people can rely on the experience of their parents or somebody else they know," Cortes says. "For me, it was like, 'Where do I go if I need something?' I didn't have a grip on what to do or where to go yet. It was daunting at times."

PathwayOregon covers tuition and fees for qualified Oregonians who are eligible for the federal Pell Grant. The scholarship program also provides students with personal support that helps them succeed. That includes academic advising, financial and career counseling, and a community that includes peer mentors.

For Ruiz Cortes, simply knowing he could reach out and talk to somebody—a familiar, friendly voice—helped alleviate fear and anxiety during his first year as a Duck. Grateful for the help, he paid it forward, first as a PathwayOregon peer mentor and this year as coordinator of the program, helping manage fifty to sixty mentors.

Since 2015, the program has matched first-year PathwayOregon scholars with peer mentors who check in regularly, offer advice, and connect their mentees with resources. The mentors also help normalize obstacles to success that students face, says PathwayOregon advisor Kelly Mason, BA '17 (Spanish; planning, public policy and management), MA '22 (planning, public policy and management).

Undergraduates, especially first-generation college students, often assume they're the only ones facing problems that are actually quite common, Mason says. Understanding they're not alone instills belonging and confidence, helping them succeed early in their college careers. Statistically, this early success correlates with increased undergraduate retention rates.

Working with peers is sometimes more effective than seeking guidance from faculty or staff, Mason says. The mentors have recently experienced what their mentees are going through. That's especially important for cohorts that attended school during the pandemic.

And the mentees aren't the only ones who benefit, Mason adds. Mentors gain career skills and experience they can add to their résumés, such as time management, problem solving, and communication.

> *"I'm their cheerleader making them feel welcomed to this community."*
>
> *—Minnie Chau, mentor*

Junior anthropology and general science major Carter Boldman sees a link between his experiences as a peer mentor and his aspirations to work in a museum.

"I'm helping others, giving them a guiding hand," Boldman says. "I feel like it also provides good communication skills. In my dream job, I would be explaining different information to people and helping them learn more, which is what I do as a mentor."

In addition to one-on-one connections, participants share group activities such as Friday coffee hours and outings to the Eugene Saturday Market. Mentors often invite mentees to join them for UO events or to check out student organizations.

Minnie Chau (photo: Charlie Litchfield, University Communications)

"A university has nooks and crannies that students might not know about," says mentor Minnie Chau, a senior majoring in general science. "I enjoy being able to give them more information. For example, someone needs help with math; they're struggling, but I can tell them about the variety of tutoring opportunities on campus. Or if they love the outdoors, I can tell them about the Outdoor Program.

"I'm their cheerleader making them feel welcomed to this community."

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

EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

Explore More

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

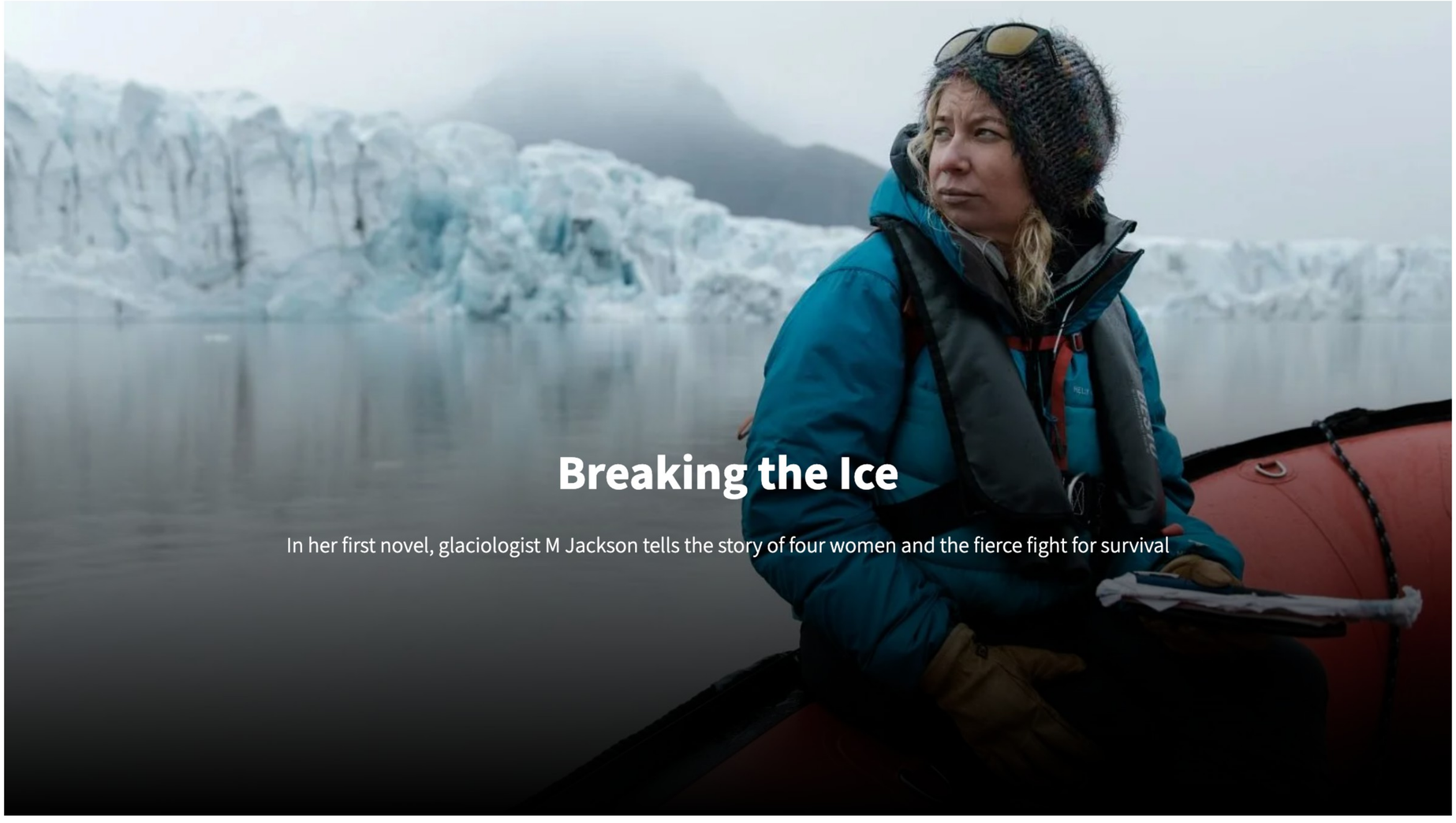
How to Empower Yourself to Survive and Thrive

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

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:32:03
https://getfireshot.com

Page 1
Breaking the Ice: Debut by M Jackson Blends Science and Fiction | Oregon Quarterly
https://oregonquarterly.uoregon.edu/breaking-ice-debut-m-jackson-blends-science-and-fiction



Breaking the Ice

In her first novel, glaciologist M Jackson tells the story of four women and the fierce fight for survival

SPRING 2023

By Lauren Hodges • Photo by Jake Dyson • May 11, 2023

5 min read

As a scientist, alumna M Jackson had never considered writing fiction because, she says, it was outside what a "traditional" scientist would do—never considered it, that is, until that belief was challenged by a mentor.

In her debut novel, *The Ice Sings Back*, Jackson tells the stories of four women and their struggles, against the backdrop of the Oregon Cascades. The characters include a mother who enjoys hiking with her young daughter, a data scientist and daughter of a rugged outdoorsman, a newbie medic trying to navigate her position at a fire department, and a scientist working at a remote research station. These women's lives are seemingly unrelated but closer inspection reveals the intertwined nature of their stories.

"I wanted to write a story about women from their perspective and I wanted to tell a bigger story, but I didn't want to presume that every individual [in the novel] would ever know all the pieces of the story. Hopefully the reader comes away knowing more of the story than the characters," says Jackson, who earned her doctorate from the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Geography in 2017.

Jackson's inspiration for the book comes from the female scientists in her life (photo: James Bernal)

Inspirational women, a glacier that speaks

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:32:37
https://getfireshot.com

Jackson has a long track record of engaging the public with science.

She is a TED Fellow, a three-time US Fulbright scholar, and a National Geographic Society Explorer, receiving funding from the organization for her work. She's become more of a household name for her role in the Netflix show, *Pirate Gold of Adak Island*.

Releasing a novel was but the next rational step.

When Jackson was the Kittredge Visiting Writer at the University of Montana in 2019, she met with novelist Debra Earling. Earling asked Jackson, "What about the power of fiction in storytelling? In science? What happens if we put amazing science in fiction?" That realization set off a spark in Jackson and she began her journey into the world of fiction.

Jackson's inspiration for the book comes from the female scientists in her life. It was freeing and extraordinary, she says, "to take bits of these amazing women's stories and flesh it out into a conversation, and then flesh it out into a story."

The Collier Glacier, which is situated on the west slope of North Sister in the Three Sisters Wilderness east of Eugene, is a main character in *The Ice Sings Back*, as both an object of scientific study and a personable being that expresses emotions and communicates with the women. This inspiration came from Jackson's own experiences. As a National Geographic Explorer, Jackson has visited glaciers around the world, but she didn't want to write a book about just the science of them.

"We—glacier scientists broadly—have done a really good job at studying ice," Jackson says. "What we don't have is the business of you and me connecting to a glacier."

Given that humans find understanding in stories, Jackson follows the long tradition of packing science into entertaining storytelling. She also incorporates themes such as risk assessment—both situational and personal.

"I put risk assessment in there because to me that term is the most catch-all for this business of being a woman," Jackson says. "I wanted to show some variety of keeping yourself safe because this is part of being a woman in today's world. It's been part of being a woman in the world for quite a long time."

Toppling barriers in science

Jackson also populated her novel with the kind of people she wants to see welcomed in science, though they may not currently be well represented.

"I want a book where scientists can be women, can be people who are questioning their heritage, can be people who are Black, can be people who are Asian, can be a range of diversities," she says. "All the books I write"—she described her previous works as nonfiction science—"have that element because that's what I want for science. That's how I want to change science."

> *"I wanted to show some variety of keeping yourself safe because this is part of being a woman in today's world."*

In a recent episode of the podcast *The Duck Stops Here*, Jackson spoke about her experience with science and what she hopes science will look like in the future. Her discussion with Hollie Smith, associate professor of science and environmental communication in the School of Journalism and Communication, highlights the difficulties of being a woman in science and how to break through the barriers blocking what science can be.

Communicating science through story has opened up a new path for Jackson. She plans to publish two more novels about science over the next three years.

"There are all these different ways to communicate science," Jackson says. "For me, I don't know if I have a limit. I get to communicate science by writing nonfiction, fiction, and academic papers. By being the lead scientist on a Netflix show. By being a climate and energy host for Crash Course [an educational YouTube channel]. By being a public scientist for National Geographic. By giving public talks and by going to classrooms and interacting with people.

"If we want to actually change what science looks like, maybe it's not an issue of hiring new scientists who will just replicate what has happened before," Jackson says. "Maybe we need to dream entirely differently."

Lauren Hodges, an environmental science major and member of the class of 2024, is a staff writer for the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Explore More

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

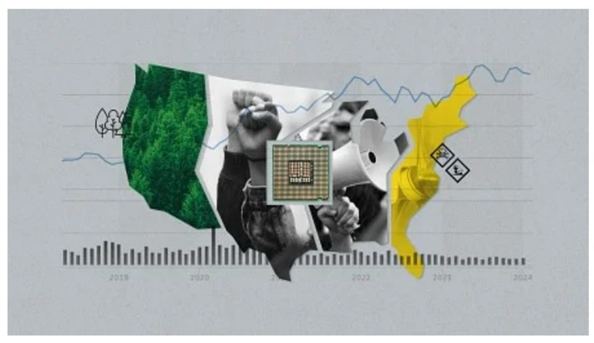
The Beauty of Campus in Tree Dimensions

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

University Communications

Oregon Quarterly
5228 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

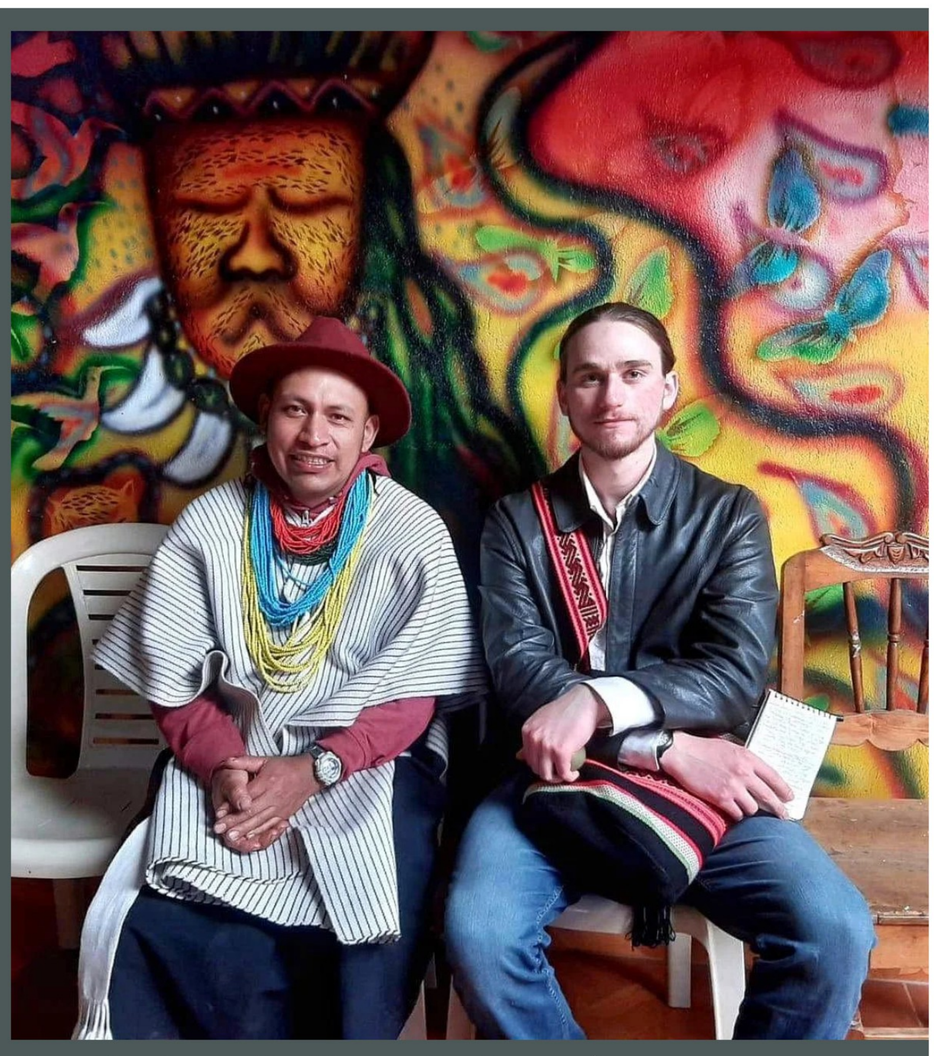
Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:32:37
https://getfireshot.com

Page 1
"Live Well, Think Beautifully" | Oregon Quarterly
https://oregonquarterly.uoregon.edu/live-well-think-beautifully

SPRING 2023

"Live Well, Think Beautifully"

Undergrad anthropologist immerses himself with an Indigenous people who are determined to protect their way of life



Glass with a shaman friend the morning after a yagé ceremony

By Matt Cooper • Photos courtesy Rowan Glass • June 9, 2023

11 min read

It was the murder of a shaman that illustrated to Rowan Glass the fortitude of Indigenous peoples.

He was eighteen and backpacking in southwest Colombia in 2019 when he met Miguel Ángel Muchavisoy, renowned shaman of the Kamëntšá people, who live in the Sibundoy Valley, a lush basin between the Andean highlands and the Amazonian lowlands. Glass sought to experience yagé, a potent hallucinogenic brew sacred to the Kamëntšá for what they regard as its medicinal and spiritual powers. The bespectacled Muchavisoy, an experienced shaman and former elected official, agreed to guide Glass through a typical ceremony with the drink, which can cause crippling nausea and intense visions.

Miguel Ángel Muchavisoy

Glass eventually opted against the ceremony but befriended Muchavisoy. He was devastated to learn, in 2021, that Muchavisoy had been gunned down in his home by two attackers from outside the community. Possible motives, according to news reports, included money, revenge for a death that happened during a previous ritual led by Muchavisoy, or even politics, given the leader's standing as an Indigenous activist and organizer in one of the world's deadliest countries for defenders of human rights and the environment.

Regardless of the truth, Glass—by then a junior anthropology major at the University of Oregon—saw the shooting as the latest offense in a centuries-long intrusion by outsiders into the world of the Kamëntšá. And the stubborn survival of the Kamëntšá way of life despite this history inspired him to study how the people preserve and renew their culture to protect who they are.

"Nearly five hundred years of colonial dispossession have not succeeded in stripping the Kamëntšá of their unique culture, language, and thought," Glass says. "The murder of Taita Miguel served as the catalyst to better understand a people that remain, against all odds, vibrant and resilient today."

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:33:11
https://getfireshot.com

A shaman offers another a shot of aguardiente, a strong Colombian liquor, a tradition during the Bëtsknaté celebration and a sign of respect and friendship

The Bëtsknaté festival—critical to Kamëntšá cultural preservation—is led by the Matachín, in mask, apparently representative of the sun god that was once the supreme being of Kamëntšá cosmology

Colonialism, mining, a language on the brink

Archaeological evidence suggests the Kamëntšá—pronounced "come-CHAH"—and their ancestors have been in the Sibundoy Valley since around the year 600, and perhaps much earlier. Their way of life intertwines nature and spirituality with shamanic rituals and plant-based medicines, an ancestral solar god and lunar goddess, and a sacred connection to their land, which they call Tsbatsána Bebmá, or Mother Earth.

Spanish conquistadors ushered in sporadic violence against the Kamëntšá beginning in 1535. But it was the Capuchin Catholic missionaries of the 1900s—come to "civilize the savages," in their words, and infamous for whippings and other forms of torture—that threatened the group's very existence. Their land was taken, their customs violently discouraged, their children punished harshly for speaking their native language.

The harms of twentieth-century colonialism have given way today to the pressures of globalization: mining and oil drilling projects that contaminate the drinking water, highways planned through Indigenous land and ecologically sensitive areas, sweeping agricultural projects on property that once hosted the small medicinal-nutritional gardens that were a cornerstone of every household, and an influx of non-Indigenous settlers who now outnumber the Kamëntšá.

"The Kamëntšá people show a resilience and adaptability that all so-called marginalized and oppressed peoples are capable of."

And yet the Kamëntšá survive, and fight back. Their numbers are holding steady at seven thousand, according to Glass, and they've reclaimed large swaths of land with legal protections. Protesters stopped a road project by marching on the regional capital. Muchavisoy's death was met with outrage and a demand for justice from the state.

One ongoing concern is the vanishing Kamëntšá language, spoken by just a fraction of the population. The language is critical, Glass says, because it underpins the Kamëntšá "thought system"—values around family, nature, reciprocity, ancestral wisdom—which in turn inspires them to defend their culture and territory. One popular Kamëntšá saying: "Live well, think beautifully."

"We have to wake up"

From the time of his arrival on the UO campus in fall 2021, Glass—who transferred from Portland Community College with an associate's degree and two years remaining for a bachelor's—began contemplating topics for a senior thesis in anthropology, which is part of the College of Arts and Sciences. A second visit to the Kamëntšá in summer 2022 and a third in February inspired him to examine how this community is fighting for its way of life through reclaiming ancestral land and renewing—or reimagining—cultural practices.

Says Glass: "It is no longer self-evident to suggest that Indigenous cultures are doomed to annihilation by the relentless growth of global capitalism and Western cosmopolitanism. The Kamëntšá people show a resilience and adaptability that all so-called marginalized and oppressed peoples are capable of."

Glass found, for example, that Kamëntšá artisans have begun to embrace beadwork for bracelets and necklaces due to the low cost of materials and ease of production, which increase profitability. But he doesn't see the practice as a break from the Kamëntšá tradition of weaving; the beadwork features the same age-old and meaningful motifs—the sun, the territory, the womb—and its popularity with younger craftspeople, he says, helps sustain and extend the crafts practice to the next generation.

The growing popularity of bead bracelets among Kamëntšá artisans helps sustain and extend the crafts practice to the next generation

For his research, Glass explored the importance of *jajañ* gardens for nutritional, medicinal, and spiritual sustenance. He attended the annual festival of Bëtsknaté, during which thousands fill the streets to celebrate and renew the culture with crafts, music, dance, and ceremonies. He interviewed Kamëntšá people ranging from teens to those in their eighties, capturing a kaleidoscope of opinions on issues including colonialism, environmental degradation, and the future.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:33:11
https://getfireshot.com

"The radical Indigenous groups that think that everything is ours, that the other is an invader and has to leave, personally I do not agree," a 65-year-old man told Glass. "The territory was ours, it was, that is the past. Now we are living together . . . We are made the same, there is no difference in race. We have to wake up, we have to become aware that our Mother Earth, which is not only the mother of the Kamëntšá, is the mother of the whole planet earth."

In the roundhouse, transcendent visions

Malocas or roundhouses are the typical settings for yagé ceremonies

Perhaps the most vivid example of Glass's immersion in his work was his experience with the shamanic yagé ceremony. This practice, he says, helped him envision the integral relationship between the potent hallucinogen, the Kamëntšá people, and the ancestral land they seek to recover and protect. Indeed, the Sibundoy Valley contains the greatest concentration of psychoactive plant species anywhere in the world, according to Glass, which could help explain the cultural importance that developed around shamans, long respected in the community as medicinal and spiritual guides.

Glass participated in four ceremonies—typically all-night affairs during which participants gather in a ceremonial maloca or roundhouse and drink yagé under the supervision of the shaman. The dark, viscous brew can be "disgustingly bitter," he says, triggering violent waves of nausea in addition to powerful visions and feelings running the gamut from paranoia to euphoria. In field notes from one ceremony, he wrote in part:

Feeling sick, I went to the back of the veranda to be alone and to be close to the banister in case I needed to throw up. Then came the snakes, the visions, and the shakes . . . closed-eye visuals followed, predominantly serpentine in design. There were also the visions of death and decay accompanied by a feeling of generalized paranoia—omens of death lurking in the shadows of the maloca where the firelight didn't reach. I did not feel well. Suddenly I sprang to the banister and vomited . . . then came a moment of total transformation by which visions of horror and an overwhelming sense of anxiety were replaced by ones of beauty and a totalizing feeling of love and amazement . . . It sounds stereotypical, but primarily I felt what could be described as a sense of universal unity and love . . . as I heard the shaman sing and the musicians play, I thought that at least in the realm of yagé ceremony, the Indigenous peoples here remain vibrant and proud.

Glass argues that the yagé experience validates Kamëntšá principles by generating feelings of love for others and for nature, and by reinforcing a belief in personal healing as a prerequisite for communal harmony.

"It was a unique and beautiful experience," Glass says. "I felt privileged to share in an important cultural tradition dating back probably millennia."

Research that was "personally transformative"

Glass's prodigious research—his thesis stands at two hundred pages—has been supported by a half-dozen university departments and programs including the McNair Scholars Program and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Engagement. It was validated with a Humanities Undergraduate Research Fellowship and the awarding of exhibit space in the Knight Library; in one of the library's so-called "tiny galleries," he has created a multimedia display of belts, masks, and other crafts complete with interpretive panels and a soundtrack of Kamëntšá music accessible through a smartphone.

University mentors had high praise for Glass, whose work they likened to a graduate student's—or better.

Reuben Zahler, associate professor of history, met Glass in fall 2021, when the latter reached out on the project. Typically, undergraduates seeking faculty help on independent research have dug no deeper on their topic than a Wikipedia entry, Zahler says; Glass had already visited the Kamëntšá people, developed a detailed premise for his thesis, and could articulate exactly what he sought from Zahler in guidance.

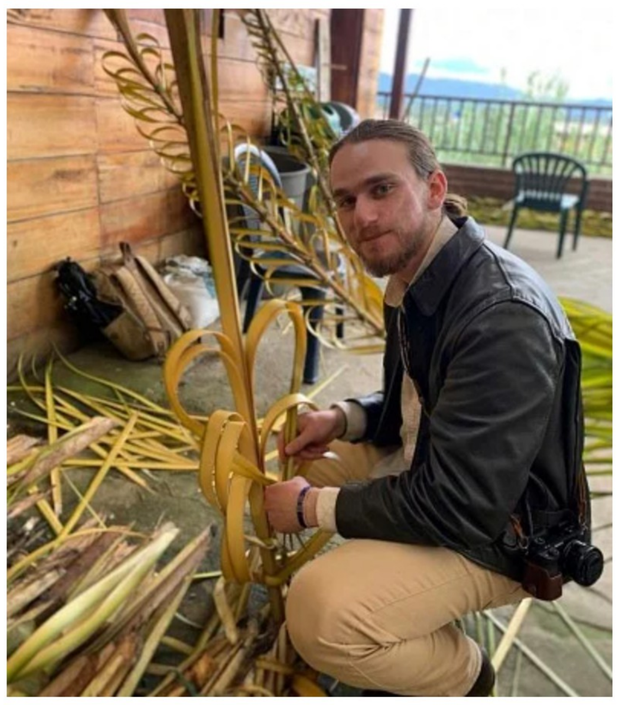
"He doesn't want to screw around—he gets stuff done," Zahler says. "Lots of folks in academia get lost in the theoretical. And in the business world there are a lot of people who are practical but not interested in thinking about anything bigger than their current project. Rowan is interested in both the abstract and in being very practical and organized—that is unusual even among highly successful professionals."

The challenge for anthropologists is to allow your interpretations to emerge from the theories you've developed through the literature and whatever you are learning from direct field experience, says Maria Fernanda Escallón, assistant professor of anthropology and Glass's thesis advisor. Glass has based his premises on what he's learned among the Kamëntšá people, she adds, calling this "the key of good ethnographic research."

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:33:11
https://getfireshot.com

"It's like 'detraining' yourself a little bit so you can be attentive to what is being thrown at you," Escallón says. "He has these beautiful ethnographic gems, these vignettes. He had the attentiveness—the moments when something is happening, somebody is saying something—it takes a real commitment to be really present and also connect it to what you're writing. It's mindful listening and being engaged to the world and making those connections. That is really beautiful."

Glass graduates June 20 and will pursue a master of social and cultural anthropology at KU Leuven in Belgium this fall, with his sights set on a PhD. He'll continue his work with the Kamëntšá people and is already planning his next visit. He hopes his research will help promote a better appreciation of the ways that Indigenous groups assert their rights and recreate their cultures.


(photo: Natalia Jacanamijoy)

From a personal perspective, Glass says, the project is already a success. As a first-generation college student, he encouraged other motivated undergraduate researchers with limited means to pursue similarly ambitious projects, calling his experience "personally transformative."

"I grew up in the only Jewish family in a small, homogenous, conservative town in rural Oregon," Glass says. "From as early as I can recall, I wanted to 'escape.' My desire to explore other cultures is, in part, an attempt to find a place for myself in the world. For all my wandering, there is something to be said for setting down roots in a place and coming to feel at home in it. The example of the Kamëntšá made me realize that perhaps this is possible for me, too."

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Explore More

ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

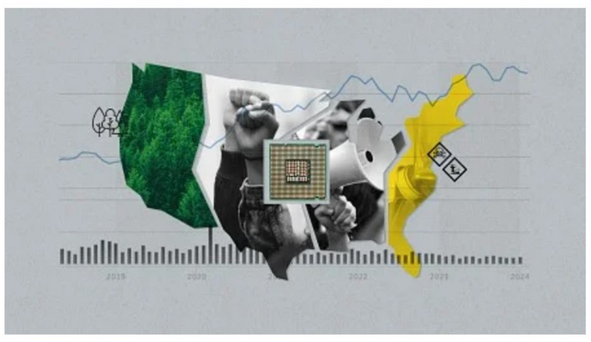
The Beauty of Campus in Tree Dimensions

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

© University of Oregon. All Rights Reserved.

Captured by FireShot Pro: 08 August 2025, 15:33:11
https://getfireshot.com