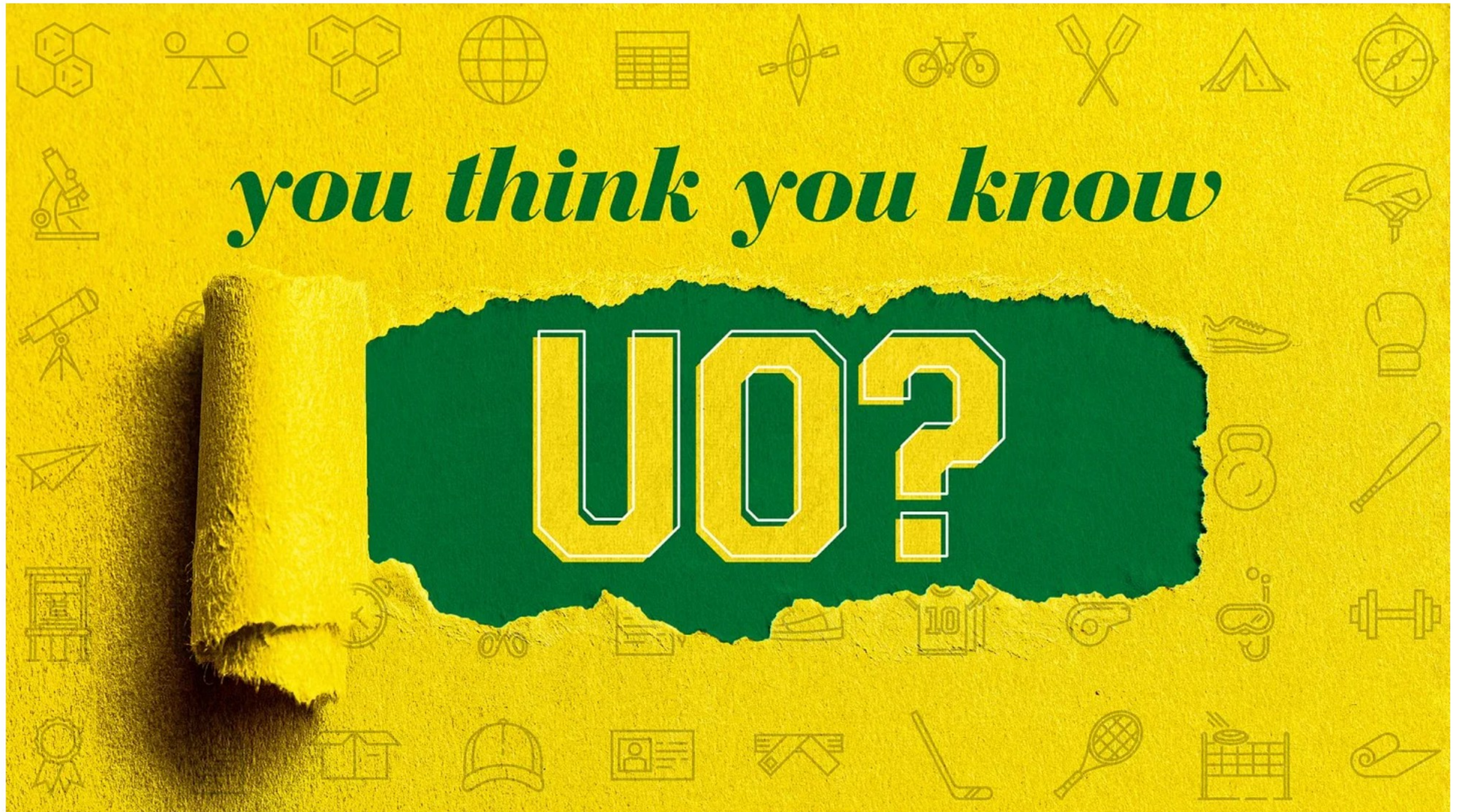


Spring 2024



The spring issue of *Oregon Quarterly* introduces you to the latest from Ducks who are curious, courageous, and creative—inspiring stories you might not get from the daily headlines. Plus: a news quiz!

Volume 103 Number 3 Illustration by David Gill

[See the Contents](#)



DUCK LIFE

Think You Know UO Research? Take the OQ News Quiz and See

Test your knowledge of our scientific and scholarly work with fifteen brain-teasing questions from UO news



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY DUCK LIFE

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



ART, DESIGN & LITERATURE

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



BUSINESS & INNOVATION DUCK LIFE

Navigating Change by Staying Her Course

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



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Building Better Brain Implants

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



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



EDUCATION, HEALTH & WELLNESS

How to Care for Someone with Swallowing Problems

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



DUCK LIFE

It Takes Mettle to Earn Stamps, and These Ducks Prove It

Student achievements have helped UO expand its ability to award the rigorous scholarships



SPORTS & FITNESS

Running Down Questions about Marathons and Fatigue

Podcast: Sports scientist Mike Hahn pursues research that serves elite athletes and the rest of us



POLITICS & SOCIETY

Anita Hill sees Peril and Promise for Feminism

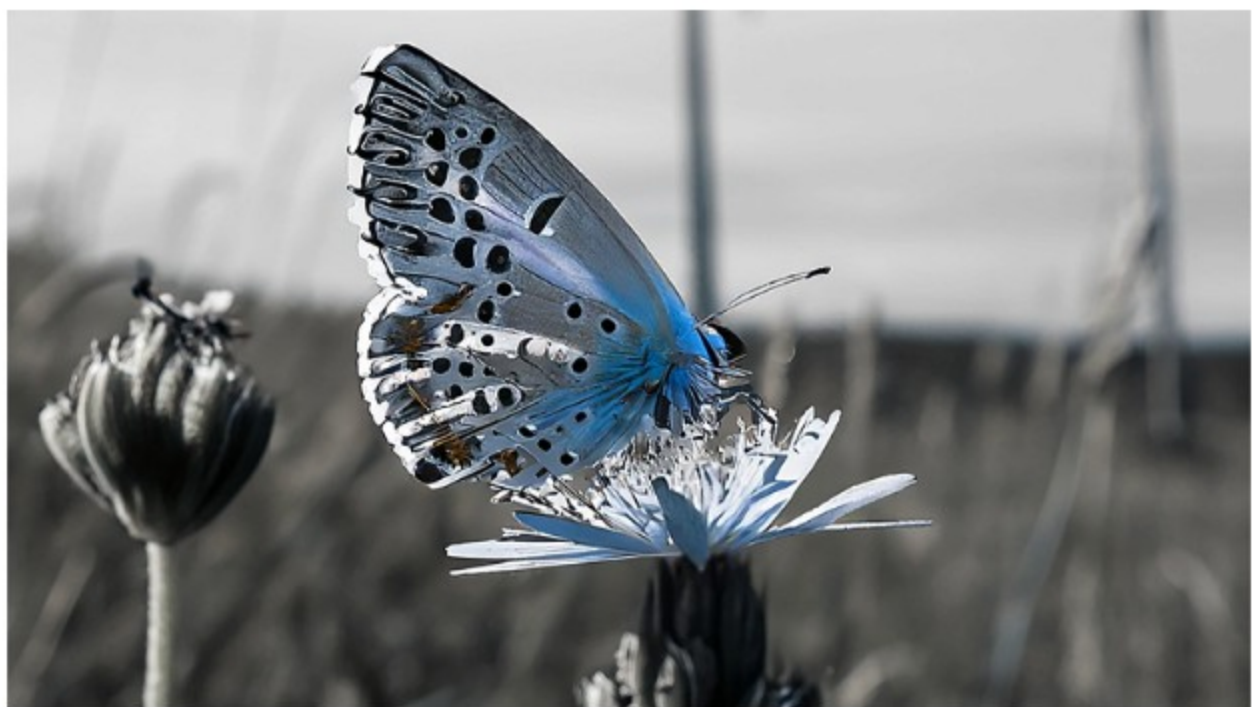
Anita Hill visits May 9 to lecture in conjunction with fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Center for the Study of Women in Society



MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS DUCK LIFE

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



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



ART, DESIGN & LITERATURE

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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SPRING 2024

You Think You Know UO Research? Take the Quiz

Test your knowledge of the UO’s recent scientific and scholarly work with these Duckbill-busting questions

By the *Oregon Quarterly* staff • Illustrations by Kyla Tom • April 3, 2024

8 min read



You’ve been around the block. Perhaps even jogged around the Hayward Field oval. Sipped and swilled at the EMU. Scarfed elephant ears at the Street Faire. Recognized locations in *Animal House*. And maybe—just maybe—learned the words to “[Mighty Oregon](#).”

You know the University of Oregon. But how well do you know UO research? Test your knowledge with these fifteen questions, based on news about UO scientific and scholarly work published on Around the O and other UO sources in the past year. To learn more about the work of our faculty and students, check out the story links that follow the quiz. Good luck. And Go Ducks!

Researchers in the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact are exploring which new method to heal bone fractures?

Delivering bone-healing proteins to the injury site

Using cryogenic healing chambers to support faster healing

Boosting the gut microbiome to speed healing

Dermal regenerators

Submit

Which strategy is NOT being tested to help reduce suspensions and other forms of exclusionary discipline for middle schoolers?

Teachers greeting students individually at the classroom door

Setting clear expectations for classroom behavior

Increase teacher pay

Practice making amends

Submit

A 2024 study of big brands found ads had the potential to boost brand value when:

The race of models in the ads reflected regional demographics

The age of models reflected regional demographics

The ads featured individuals of one race

The ads included a mix of models of different races

Submit

How is the UO helping the struggling alewife, a fish species?

Providing environmental expertise to rebuild natural habitats

Generating genomic sequencing data

Breeding "alehusbands" in the Millrace

Creating genetic mutations in UO zebrafish labs

Submit

The Ballmer Institute for Children's Behavioral Health offers a graduate "microcredential" for K-12 educators and professionals who serve youth. Which of these is NOT an aspect of the program?

Focus on benefits for kids including emotion regulation, trauma support, and healthy relationships

Evening classes, online attendance

Participants receive proof of completion

Tailored for those early in their careers

Submit

To better understand how it affects humans, researchers in the College of Arts and Sciences are studying the effects of which substance on worms?

Marijuana

Alcohol

Antidepressants

Tums

Submit

Pop star Taylor Swift's phenomenal global success is attributable to:

Her songwriting

Her business acumen

Her genre-switching versatility

All of the above

Submit

Which legal framework led to a landmark 2023 climate decision in Montana?

Carbon computation

Common liberties regulation

Atmospheric trust litigation

Climate change mitigation

Submit

According to sociolinguist Rachel Weissler, which of the following is an example of the swift dissemination of linguistic trends?

Black communities developing unique terms during enslavement as a means of resistance

Terms picked up by White Gen Zers that have been long used in the Black community

White hip-hop artists appropriating Black language

Linguistic differences of hip-hop artists in Detroit and Los Angeles

Submit

Which of the following was NOT a winner in the 2023 graduate studies Three Minute Thesis competition?

"Hitting the Woah: Statistical Analysis of Top-Liked TikTok Dances"

"The Key Role of Impossibility in Curiosity and Cognition"

"Bioelectric Communication during Zebrafish Development"

"Tendon Stiffness is Altered by Fatigue and Sex in Young Males and Females"

Submit

A 2023 analysis of US working conditions found that:

Workers placed little value in whether a job's physical demands were moderate or substantial

Workers favored treats in the lunchroom and happy hour Fridays over wage hikes

Workers said they might choose a job with a lower wage if it had paid time off or a flexible schedule

The willingness to forego wages for better working conditions decreased with age

Submit

Among the recommendations offered by faculty in the College of Design for cities grappling with autonomous vehicles (AVs), which of these is true?

Cities should pursue AVs to help advance the technology

Cities should ask if AVs are a way to help achieve the city's goals

Cities should limit AVs to protect themselves

Cities should plan immediately to create curb space for AVs and "robotaxis"

Submit

According to research in the School of Journalism and Communication, more than half of wildfire-related tweets authored by thirty-two institutional accounts in 2022 were posted:

One week before peak smoke levels

One day before peak smoke levels

During peak smoke levels

Two days after peak smoke levels

Submit

UO researchers in the College of Arts and Sciences found which simple step helped cut coffee waste while delivering a more consistent cup of java?

Add a spritz of water before grinding the beans

Use a pod coffee machine

Use distilled water instead of tap water to brew coffee

Use more coffee beans

Submit

You-made-it-to-the-end Bonus Question! Which of these did the Duck not do?

Give a hip-hop artist a piggyback ride in Matthew Knight Arena

Enter Autzen Stadium on a zip line

Hang out with TV host Jimmy Fallon

Throw out the first pitch for the Medford Mallards pro softball team

Submit

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[Strategy behind climate action](#)

[Rescuing “floundering” fish species](#)

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Kyla Tom is senior graphic designer for University Communications.

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SPRING 2024

Escaping the Taliban, She Fights for Education and Women

Saghar Salehi fled her homeland when her life was threatened and landed at the UO to advocate for women in Afghanistan



Salehi arrived at the UO after Reza Rejaie responded to a plea for help on the social media platform X

By Nicole Krueger • Photos by Charlie Litchfield • April 3, 2024

6 min read



When Saghar Salehi joined Afghanistan’s first all-girls robotics team as a high schooler in 2017, she did so in the face of warnings from her classmates and neighbors.

The team planned to tour internationally, despite the fact that girls weren’t allowed to travel outside the country without a male guardian and were discouraged from learning about science and technology.

“We were girls, we were doing science, we were building robots. It was all strange for people to think about,” says the nineteen-year-old computer science major at the University of Oregon. “I wanted to fight the idea that engineering and computer science were only for boys.”

That decision changed the course of her life. Before arriving at the UO in January, Salehi was a global newsmaker at the heart of an international story about



Salehi intends to connect women in her homeland to education

Afghan women’s fight for freedom—a fight that nearly cost her, and her teammates, their lives.

Known as the Afghan Dreamers, Salehi and the robotics team captured the world’s attention as they traveled the globe from 2017 to 2021 to compete in robotics contests, demonstrating what women from Afghanistan could achieve with education and opportunity.

But just when the Afghan Dreamers began to feel unstoppable, the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, toppling the country’s democracy and issuing death threats against the team.

In August 2021, Salehi and the rest of the team fled their homeland together, seeking a safe place to continue their education. For Salehi, that sanctuary was a new home as a student in the UO [Department of Computer Science](#).

“We are trying to prove the Taliban wrong,” she says. “Women can go for their dreams and achieve their goals.”

Trouble in DC, then a triumphant return

By age five, Salehi was captivated by technology. She used her brother’s computer up to five hours a day at their home in Herat, the largest city in western Afghanistan.

Says Salehi: “It was a magic box for me.”

Although women weren’t allowed to study science, technology, engineering, and math at university or leave the country without a male chaperone, Salehi dreamed of studying abroad. She developed her English skills by reading computer science textbooks, which weren’t available in the Farsi language. At fourteen, she became one of six girls chosen from around the country to join the all-girls robotics team sponsored by a nonprofit founded by an Afghan American woman to support female entrepreneurs.



Salehi (second from left) and the Afghan Dreamers, Afghanistan’s first all-girls robotics team, made international headlines in 2017 when they were denied visas for a US robotics competition (photo courtesy Saghar Salehi)

When their visas for a July 2017 robotics competition in Washington, DC, were denied, the team refused to admit defeat. Their multiple attempts to enter the country drew supporters and global attention, and ultimately a petition signed by fifty-three members of Congress was followed by approval of their visas.

The girls returned from the competition with an award for courageous achievement in hand. TV news was at the airport to greet them. The Afghan ambassador to the US even came to welcome them home.

“People were having a change in perspective. They were now proud of us,” Salehi says. “Bringing home a medal, waving the Afghan flag—people saw it as a national honor, and we were representing the country. Girls across Afghanistan now wanted to be part of the team.”

Labeled infidels by the Taliban

The Afghan Dreamers traveled to more than forty countries, competing in robotics tournaments, speaking at events such as the United Nations General Assembly, and drawing international media attention.

They began holding robotics workshops for girls in Kabul and Herat, teaching nearly six hundred students each year. In 2019, they met with Afghan president Ashraf Ghani to discuss building a school in Kabul where women could study subjects such as science and math.

Their mission—to change the world’s perception of Afghanistan from that of a war-torn country to a thriving hub for technological advancement—became the subject of a documentary, [Afghan Dreamers](#).

“We are the new generation,” Salehi says. “We use technology for achieving our goals.”

But while the team won acclaim abroad, violence was spreading back home. Less than a month after the robotics competition in DC, the father of one of the team members was killed in an ISIS bombing at a mosque.

When the Taliban began seizing control of the country in 2021, they circulated photos of the Afghan Dreamers, labeling them infidels and saying they should be killed.

“We were physically scared for our lives,” Salehi says. “Everything we had done in our whole lives became very dark. We were worried about the safety of our families.”

Sarah Porter, founder of a global AI community called InspiredMinds, rallied more than three hundred volunteers and raised funds to help the team flee to a safe house in Pakistan in August 2021.

The goodbye she said to her homeland and family three years ago still makes Salehi cry.

“It was the most difficult time in my whole life,” she says. “All I could do was hug my mom. I was crying so hard. We knew we had to leave our country forever.”

Committed to helping Afghan women



Salehi shared her experiences as an Afghan woman seeking education during a 2022 policy debate in New York City that was part of the United Nations General Assembly (photo courtesy Saghar Salehi)

[Reza Rejaie](#), professor and head of the College of Arts and Sciences’ computer science department, learned about Salehi in August 2022 through an appeal for help from InspiredMinds on Twitter.

Salehi was living with her family, who also had left Afghanistan and settled in the Bay Area. She desperately wanted to earn a college degree but couldn’t get financial aid because of her refugee status.

“When I heard about her story, it really resonated with me, both as a department head and as a father. It became my mission to bring her here,” says Rejaie. “Despite everything she has gone through, and despite her inability to go back to her country, she’s still committed to making things better for the girls she left behind. Welcoming someone to our campus who has had such diverse, unique, and difficult experiences is an asset that will enrich all of us.”

Rejaie spent a year securing funding support from the UO [Office of Financial Aid](#) and the Rotary Club of Portland. With additional support from InspiredMinds, Salehi’s first year at the UO was funded. In January, Salehi began classes in computer science, math, and philosophy.

“Despite everything she has gone through, and despite her inability to go back to her country, she’s still committed to making things better for the girls she left behind.”

—*Reza Rejaie*

Although the Taliban has banned girls in Afghanistan from getting an education, Salehi plans to earn a PhD in computer science and develop software that will discreetly connect women to educational opportunities at universities. She also still harbors dreams of creating an online STEM school for people who can’t access education in their own countries. Her plans resonate with people such as Juan Flores, a computer science instructor, who told Salehi he is more than willing to assist her.

Backed by a supportive community, Salehi believes she can make a difference for women in her home country who seek an education despite Taliban rule.

After acquiring so much life experience in such a short time, she admits she sometimes feels twice her age. But her work has just begun—and her desire to be a voice for women in Afghanistan drives her forward.

“Every day I wake up, I feel so grateful. I feel so energized. I will never take this for granted,” Salehi says. “I believe education and technology can help me achieve my goals for girls in my country.”

Nicole Krueger, BA ’99 (journalism), is a communications coordinator for the College of Arts and Sciences.

Charlie Litchfield is director of creative media for University Communications.

Cathy Kralik, senior director of communications for the college, contributed to this article.

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Researchers Developing New Approaches to Aging Problems

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



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Building Better Brain Implants

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



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Finding Herself, Thousands of Miles from Home

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

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SPRING 2024

Playing and Paying Forward the Art and Traditions of Jazz

Keith Brown, a top-rank pianist, mentors his UO students with lessons learned from his musical family

By Kristen Hudgins • Video by Dustin Whitaker • April 3, 2024

5 minute read



Alone in a practice room at the School of Music and Dance in February, Delos Erickson sits at the piano workshopping a song that is playing tricks on him.

Aiming to replicate what he hears in the recording of “Bolivia” by Cedar Walton, the graduate student in jazz studies listens over and over, but something isn’t quite right.

“It’s like I can’t hear the notes [in the recording],” Erickson, BM ’22 (jazz studies), confesses to his mentor, Keith Brown. “I’ve been listening to it too much.”

Brown, an [assistant professor of jazz and contemporary piano](#), listens to Erickson play, then the recording, and calmly diagnoses the issue.

“[The notes] are there, but with his left hand, they aren’t really pronounced,” Brown says. He joins Erickson at the piano and plays the difficult flurry of notes.

Erickson’s focus sharpens, and it finally clicks— “Ah!” he says. The pair then discuss the intricacies of the piece and how to work through the rough patch.

“He’s a great teacher,” Erickson says later. “I record all our lessons, and I look back at those and that’s how I want to be as a teacher: friendly, supportive, inviting, and confident. He holds you accountable, but at the same time, is totally with you.”

Brown teaches to give back to the craft and honor his mentors whose nurturing patience eventually paved the way for his career as a world-class musician.



Keith Brown

“I had support and help coming up,” Brown says. “Now I want to pay it forward by teaching.”

Brown, who grew up in the 1990s, finds it hard to pinpoint a time when music wasn’t flowing through his Knoxville, Tennessee home.

His mother, Dorothy, who played piano and woodwind instruments, shared the love of

R&B icons Stevie Wonder and Luther Vandross. His father, Donald, infused jazz into their household. A world-renowned jazz pianist, composer, and educator, he played with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and many other jazz greats.

Originally attracted to hip-hop and R&B, Brown always had an appreciation for jazz and his father’s music. But his interest in the genre catapulted to new heights when he was 18. After high school graduation, he took a semester off and dove into the world of jazz with his father.

“Lessons with my dad would be late at night,” Brown says. “We’re talking 11:00 p.m., 12:00 a.m., 1:00 a.m. We’d get together for a few hours and then I’d be up for the next few hours after he went to bed, practicing and trying to figure it out.”

Brown took all he learned in those late-night sessions to the University of Tennessee, where he graduated with his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in jazz studies in 2011. A successful performance career followed, as Brown performed alongside a who’s who of jazz luminaries including vocalist Jazzmeia Horn and bassist Endea Owens. He currently tours with veteran jazzman Kenny Garrett, with whom he played a gig on [NPR’s Tiny Desk Concert series](#).

[Brown still performs today](#) but he is also invested in molding the next generation of jazz musicians, teaching them in a way that retains the integrity of the jazz tradition.

His students must immerse themselves in the world of jazz — to go beyond what is written on the page, to be an avid listener of the genre, and to have a deep understanding of its musical language and rich history. Above all, he expects an excellent work ethic.

When his students have conquered the technical elements of the genre and start to develop their own authentic sound, they are ready to take it to the stage alongside him.

“When you hit the stage, there’s something sacred about it,” Brown says. “When I get up there and play with students, I hope they can feel the energy that I’m giving off. When I was learning

and playing with someone who was on a different level, there’s a moment of, ‘Oh! That’s what that’s supposed to sound like.’ So, that’s what I hope—they feel that connection.”

Jazz Studies at UO

The renowned [Jazz Studies](#) program of the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance offers both bachelor’s and master’s degree programs. It is home to three big bands, the Jazz Guitar Ensemble, the Latin Jazz Ensemble, and ten small jazz ensembles, including the Herbert J. Merker JazzArts Oregon Combo. The program’s ensembles and students have recently been named winners in multiple international competitions. Visiting guest artists have included such stalwarts as Branford Marsalis, Vijay Iyer, and Ingrid Jensen. Dedicated studio spaces facilitate instruction, rehearsal, and student recording projects. Explore the ensembles and programs at [jazz.uoregon.edu](#).



Pianist Delos Erickson and trumpeter Julian Borkowski rehearse with the Oregon Jazz Ensemble (photo: Dustin Whitaker, University Communications)

Trumpeter and pianist Julian Borkowski, a graduate student in jazz studies, has earned the occasional spot playing on stage next to Brown. Graduating in June, Borkowski will absorb as much as he can in his final lessons and take that knowledge into the teaching job he has lined up in his hometown of Vancouver, BC, Canada. "I aspire to have an individual voice formulated as strongly constructed as he does, and I know he can help me get there,” Borkowski says.

Erickson has also played with Brown, describing it as an awe-inspiring experience. “Keith is a very charming, confident performer,” Erickson says. “When I see that, I want to strive to be like him on the bandstand—totally in control of everything that’s going on.”

Erickson plans to stay in Eugene after graduation in June to continue performing and composing. He envisions teaching in his future—a way to give back and continue the cycle of mentorship. He aspires to guide his students through moments of uncertainty, facilitating those “a-ha” moments when they overcome challenges to give back not only to Brown, but the artistry and craft that is jazz.

Kristen Hudgins is a public relations specialist for the School of Music and Dance.

Dusty Whitaker is a media producer for University Communications.

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

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SPRING 2024

Navigating Change by Staying Her Course

Q&A with alumna Sarah Mensah, the first Black woman to lead Nike’s Jordan Brand

By Ed Dorsch • Photo illustration by David Gill • April 3, 2024

5 min read



Sarah Mensah, BA ’87 (telecommunication and film, journalism), ran track for Aloha High School, just a few miles from what is today her new office at Nike World Headquarters in Beaverton.

After graduating from the University of Oregon, Mensah aspired to become a broadcast journalist. She interned with Portland’s KGW-TV and tried on different hats before landing in sales. Then the Portland Trail Blazers called.

Starting in 1993, Mensah rose through the ranks to become the first Black woman to serve as an NBA team’s chief operating officer and the highest-ranking female staffer in the league. She helped the team navigate financial and reputational challenges, reinvigorate its brand, and boost attendance and revenue.

Mensah joined Nike in 2013, sprinting past milestones for Black women: first to lead one of the company’s four geographies, first as vice president at Nike North America, and—starting last June—first to head Jordan Brand, a sneaker and apparel juggernaut that generated more than \$6 billion in revenue last year.

Oregon Quarterly caught up with Mensah to reflect on Nike, success, her years at the UO, and staying true to yourself.

OQ: What does it mean to lead Jordan Brand?

Sarah Mensah: It’s a full-circle moment for me on multiple levels. When I started at Nike, I started with Jordan Brand. But I never imagined I would one day be leading it. I grew up half a mile from Nike World Headquarters, which was then a field with ducks. It’s incredible to come to my office to lead this extraordinary global Jordan Brand where I used to play in my rain boots.

OQ: What’s your advice about success?

SM: It’s not linear. There’s a possibility for myriad twists and turns—things you’re not going to see that are around the corner. Stay true to your core purpose. What drives you? What gives you energy, passion, and excitement?

When you do that, you can remain open to all the different opportunities—all the twists and turns that will be available to you over the course of your career. That was the spine that allowed me to enter many different professional iterations, from journalism to broadcast journalism, from sales to sports leadership, and then to Nike and ultimately Jordan Brand.

OQ: What was it like to attend the UO?

SM: I’m forever grateful for my experience at the University of Oregon. It felt like no topic was off limits. No idea was unworthy of consideration. We were exposed to a wealth of intellectual concepts as well as social challenges. Early exposure to the duality of cultural and intellectual innovation is an extraordinary foundation for how a young human approaches life.

OQ: What obstacles did you overcome as an undergraduate?

SM: In some cases, I was the only woman in the room. More often, I was the only woman of color. I had amazing professors and a rigorous academic experience. But I also learned to hold my own in a room where nobody looks like you or maybe there’s an assumption that you don’t necessarily belong—and then you succeed. That has been crucial to my overall career experience.

OQ: How have you managed to embrace authenticity throughout your career?

SM: It doesn’t come easy. From the time I was a little girl—and I think this is true for most people—I’ve noticed the world rewards you for coloring inside the lines. We all learn it early on: the more you fit in, the easier it’s going to be for you.

As a mixed-race girl growing up in Oregon in the 1970s and ’80s, I had to develop a monologue and tell myself I had something worthy to contribute. I’m thankful for my parents, coaches, and the role that track played in my life. Competing helped me form that understanding of “Hey, it’s important for you to be unabashedly yourself and show up—at the table, during the meeting, in the world.” To use your voice for anything other than that sacrifices the gift.

There have always been people in the room telling me that I ought to color within the lines—and fall in line. But I’ve developed an ability to resist that.

OQ: What are common threads that run through the history of the UO and Nike?

SM: At the UO and later at Nike, Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman thought about athletes, how to create different systems to support them. I’ve experienced it at both places: an incredible sense of possibilities and new ideas. As Ducks, we fancied ourselves as responsible for pushing the envelope. How can we think in new ways and cross disciplines? That’s part of the university’s—and Nike’s—DNA.

OQ: How does a brand transcend shoes?

SM: Jordan Brand is one of the most inspirational brands in the world—possibly the most inspirational. It’s about greatness. For communities across the globe, it reflects how within every human being there is a seed of greatness. All we have to do is figure out a way to tap into that and unleash the Michael Jordan inside of every human being. Black Americans in particular have taken initial ownership of Jordan Brand as a beacon of hope.

OQ: You’ve always been willing to learn new things. At KGW-TV, you got into sales because you were interested in the business side of journalism. Then you continued learning as you took on more responsibilities with the Trail Blazers and Nike. What’s the value of curiosity?

SM: Curiosity is critical for anyone who’s leading teams or an innovation agenda. As soon as you’ve got it all figured out, business—and life—shows you otherwise. Jordan is a big brand that’s fairly mature. It’s gone through many successful iterations because we stay curious, humble, and hungry. We remain open to the possibility of doing things differently.

Update: Sarah Mensah will deliver the 2024 University of Oregon commencement address. To learn more, [read the Around the O article](#).

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

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SPRING 2024

Building Better Brain Implants

Knight Campus researcher Felix Deku is designing tech to relieve symptoms of Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, depression, and more

By Laurel Hamers • Photos by Chris Larsen • April 3, 2024

6 min read



Felix Deku encourages his students to fail—and fail fast.

It’s one of the core tenets the neuroengineer uses to foster rapid innovation in his lab at the University of Oregon Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact.

Deku’s engineering philosophy centers on iterative design—a cyclical approach of prototyping, testing, analyzing, and refining. “Basically, you come out with the dumbest idea, build a prototype, test its limit, and when it fails, you learn from the failure—then build the next less-dumb prototype, and the cycle begins again,” says [Deku](#), the Betsy and Greg Hatton Assistant

Professor in Neuroengineering.

Turning failure in the lab into a learning experience leads to a better product—one that won’t fail outside the lab, where it could cause harm. Deku’s team is trying to improve lives by building high-quality, long-lasting brain implants that relieve symptoms of conditions like Parkinson’s, epilepsy, depression, and dementia.

The idea behind brain implants is simple: these microelectrodes—thin, flexible structures a few millimeters long—are surgically placed into the brain, where they target specific neural circuits. The implant can be integrated with a tiny computer chip, also implanted into the brain. The devices send electrical signals that override or course-correct the faulty brain signaling that’s causing neurological problems.

Getting them to work in real life? Much more complicated. In particular, [Deku’s lab](#) is addressing a major barrier to widespread adoption of this emerging technology: the relatively short lifespan of these devices. Many implants designed to help patients with chronic, lifelong conditions fail after just six to twelve months.

Deku notes, “When technology fails, it’s the patients and their families who bear the brunt of the disappointment. They’re offered a glimpse of hope, a brief period where improvement seems possible, only to return to their prior condition.”

Deku envisions a better way.



Photo courtesy Knight Campus

He’s been developing neural implants since he was a graduate student at the University of Texas at Dallas in 2014. Eager to pursue projects with direct human impact, he hoped to join a cancer biology lab. But he ultimately switched his field to bioengineering and landed in a lab designing neural implants.

After graduate school he joined Neuralink, the brain implant company founded by Elon Musk. There, he led a microfabrication team and was instrumental in developing an FDA-approved neural implant system that has since been successfully implanted in a [paralyzed patient](#). He later worked for Braingrade, another neural implant startup.

But in 2022, Deku was lured back to academia by the [Knight Campus](#), which emphasizes translational research, shortening the time between discovery and societal impact.

“For me, the focus on translation was one of the key draws to come here to the Knight Campus,” Deku says. “Faculty here focus on getting products out from the bench to bedside.”

[Deku’s lab](#) is working to perfect a material that he began developing in graduate school. It could help solve a major problem in the rapidly growing field of neural implants—the poor reliability and longevity of these devices.

“We want to build a technology platform that can solve a lot of different issues, but with the goal that these implants are going to last longer than current devices,” Deku says.

Most neural implants are made of silicon, a versatile material commonly used in computer chips. But silicon corrodes in the saline environment of the brain, so these electrodes often wear out quickly. The field has moved to thin, flexible, polymer-based implants in recent years, but there are other challenges with their use.

Deku’s alternative, a kind of ceramic, holds up better. His team has shown that implants made from this material could potentially last decades without corroding. But it’s a challenging material from which to make electrodes.

Ceramics tend to be brittle—imagine how easily a porcelain teacup shatters. The brittleness comes, in part, from residual stress incorporated in the thin-film material as it forms. That intrinsic stress also makes the electrodes roll up instead of remaining straight. By controlling the way the material forms, Deku is working on ways to reduce the stress within the films and make a more pliable ceramic for brain electrodes.

“For me, the focus on translation was one of the key draws to come here to the Knight Campus. Faculty here focus on getting products out from the bench to bedside.”

—Felix Deku

His team tests the longevity of their electrodes by submerging them in a saltwater solution, heating them up to almost two hundred degrees Fahrenheit, and stimulating them with an electric signal as many as a billion times in a row. The idea is to simulate extreme conditions that accelerate the failure of the product. From that data, they can predict how long the device will last inside the more moderate environment of the brain.

It’s not lost on Deku that in seeking to build a better brain implant, he is competing with high-profile work driven by private industry.

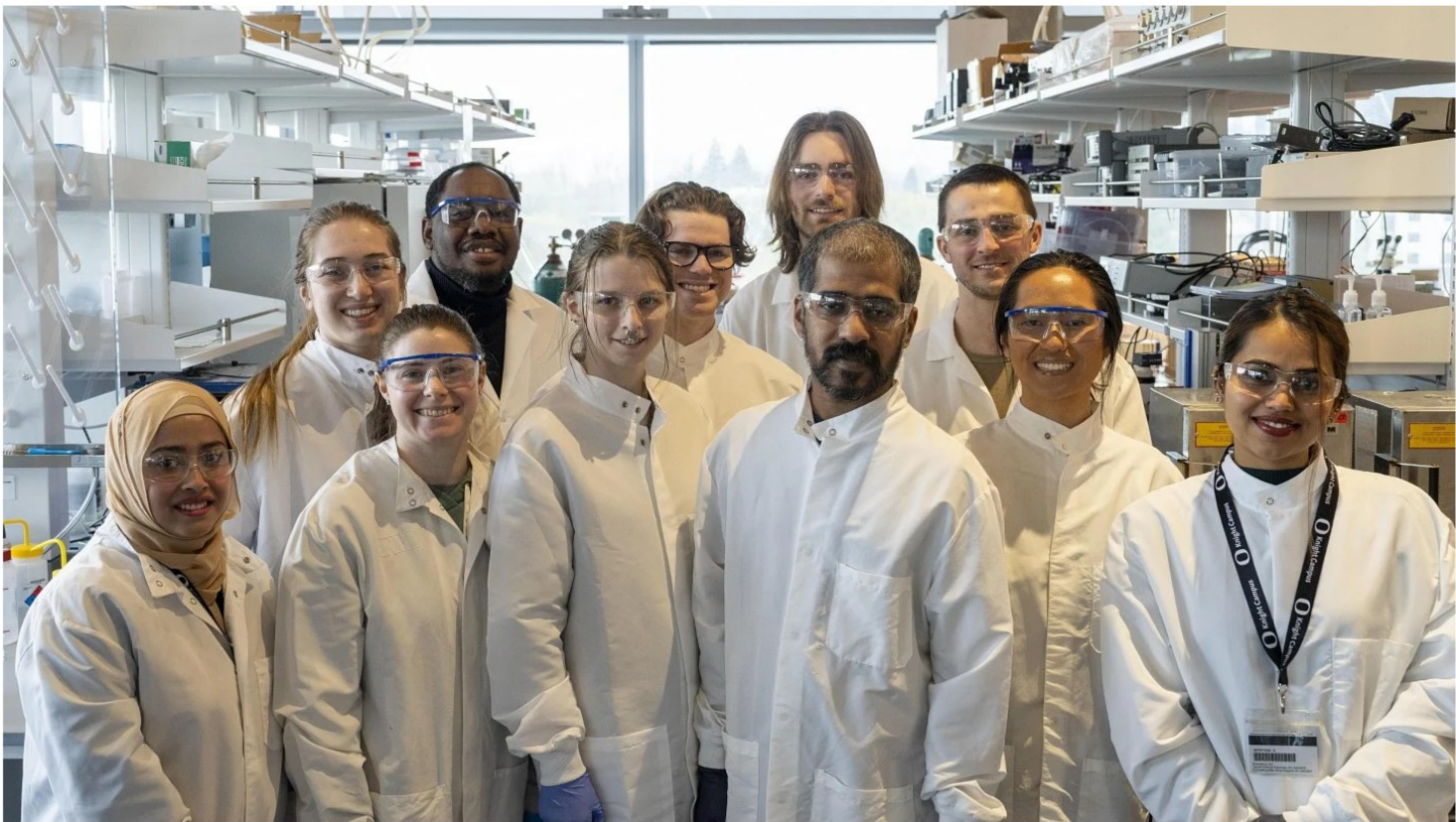
Says Deku: “We’re trying to succeed in the face of multimillion-dollar companies. Yet our approach is rooted in scientific rigor, an element that can often be overlooked in the rapid tempo of the startup landscape.”

Instead, the Deku lab is supported largely by philanthropy, including support from the Donald and Delia Baxter Foundation and the Hattons—Greg, BA ’71 (business environment), and Betsy, BA ’71 (Romance languages). The Hatton family has personal experience with the neurological conditions that Deku is trying to address.

The Knight Campus positions the lab to turn research into a product, thanks in part to a top-of-the-line clean room where they can manufacture and test products. And a partnership with Oregon Health & Science University in Portland provides Deku’s team with a pathway to move promising technology from preclinical experiments into clinical testing.

The team is driven by a creative and thoughtful approach to science. Deku’s lab pulls in students with varied life experiences, personal identities, and academic interests—materials science, chemistry, engineering, neuroscience, and more. These diverse perspectives encourage lab members to look at problems in new and different ways.

“Whether you’re a postdoc with five years of experience or an undergrad who has no idea—I encourage you to just tell us what you think,” says Deku. “That diversity in the lab in terms of how we solve problems gets everyone engaged in our work.”



Deku encourages the researchers in his lab to consider limitless possibilities and resist the temptation to do things the way they’ve always been done

Deku encourages his students to engineer from what he calls “first principles”—that is, not being restrained by past experience when envisioning what the future could look like.

While past experience can be a useful guide, it can also hold one back, Deku says, limiting assumptions about what is possible. Instead, first principles thinking encourages approaching each task as a new problem to solve and breaking it down into fundamental components. By asking basic questions and considering limitless possibilities, scientists and engineers can avoid getting stuck in the trap of doing something a certain way just because that’s how it’s always been done.

“Sometimes you get stuck in it,” Deku says, “and the deeper you get, the more difficult it is to see the big picture.”

The team also dreams of working on even more complex health conditions.

The electrodes for people with depression or epilepsy are implanted just a few millimeters into the brain and target specific areas. But Deku is also interested in dementia—a more difficult problem, he says. Memory circuits are much more widely distributed and deeper in the brain—centimeters instead of millimeters. Electrodes would need to be implanted much deeper and touch more places in the brain, without interrupting other brain functions.

Using targeted stimulation to address memory disorders would be a new approach, Deku says. Many research teams and pharmaceutical companies seeking cures for Alzheimer’s and dementia focus on addressing defective proteins and their accumulation in the brain. Instead, Deku wants to solve the problem with electrical signaling, answering questions about how the brain forms memories and what goes wrong in dementia.

“Can we learn something that will help us recreate those memories in people?” Deku asks. It sounds futuristic, he adds—“and that’s why we’re excited about it.”

Laurel Hamers is a senior writer and editor of science and research communications for University Communications. She was previously a science writer and editor for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and a reporter for *Science News* magazine.

Chris Larsen, MS '18 (journalism), is a videographer and photographer with 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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Saghar Salehi fled her homeland and landed at the UO to study and fight for women in Afghanistan



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Finding Herself, Thousands of Miles from Home

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

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SPRING 2024

Lundquist College of Business Sparks Start-up Culture

Students and faculty across campus bring new ideas to life thanks to vibrant entrepreneurial spirit

By Ed Dorsch • Photos by Dustin Whitaker • Illustration by David Gill • April 3, 2024

5 min read



When Justin Svendsen signed up for last year’s Oregon Innovation Challenge, he didn’t have an idea for a new business. The University of Oregon graduate student just wanted to learn about entrepreneurship in theory.

The Lundquist College of Business competition for student entrepreneurs quickly helped him put theory into practice. By thinking about a gap in the marketplace that he could address, Svendsen was able to isolate his idea, develop a market plan, and divide his aspirations into achievable milestones.

Today, as Svendsen works on his biochemistry PhD at the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact, he’s also working on a patent for Hydroject, his innovative drug delivery system that could revolutionize antibiotics.



Svendsen is working on a patent for Hydroject (photo: Dustin Whitaker, University Communications)

For coaching and inspiration along his journey from science to start-up, Svendsen credits Jeff Sorensen, director of the Lundquist Center for Entrepreneurship.

Says Svendsen: “I didn’t have the idea for Hydroject until Sorensen inspired me to think about how I could apply my background in science to create something novel.”

Starting a new venture is daunting, says Sorensen. But it’s the first step that matters most—not the destination.

“We want to see more shots on goal from across the university,” he says. “We’re here to help launch new products, services, and organizations. Many of those won’t become sustainable, but you’ll learn more by taking a shot than if you never try.”

More students and faculty members are giving their ideas a shot, thanks to a start-up ecosystem centered in the Lundquist College. This support network provides education, mentorship, and community for entrepreneurs from all disciplines. And donors are stepping up to keep the flywheels humming.

Recent leadership gifts from the Cameron family, Nancy and Dave Petrone, David Stern, and other UO donors have boosted joint initiatives that unite the Lundquist College and Knight Campus around innovation. Their contributions will support faculty, student awards, and new entrepreneurs in residence.

The demand for these resources will likely increase along with the number of UO student and faculty start-ups created through the Oregon Innovation Challenge.

Sorensen launched the [challenge](#) shortly after starting at the Lundquist College in fall 2022. It’s quickly become the primary platform for inspiring and supporting student-led innovation.

“We want to see more shots on goal from across the university. We’re here to help launch new products, services, and organizations.”

—Jeff Sorensen

Having an entrepreneurial spirit is crucial for career readiness, regardless of your major or professional aspirations, says Bruce Blonigen, Edward Maletis Dean in the [Lundquist College of Business](#). He adds that the college serves many different kinds of ventures and emphasizes collaboration.

“It’s not Shark Tank,” Blonigen says. “We’re working together and supporting each other. Being an entrepreneur can be lonely. We’ll meet you where you are and help you push your ideas toward something viable in the marketplace.”

The challenge welcomed more than two hundred student entrepreneurs to submit their start-up ideas for the inaugural competition in 2022. Sixteen finalists were funded, including an artificial

intelligence 3D modeling program, paper manufactured from mushroom farm waste, several clothing brands, healthy workout supplements, and freeze-dried backpacking cuisine.

[Hydroject was also a finalist](#). Svendsen’s venture could save lives and address the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance by delivering antibiotics more precisely. Since penicillin was discovered in 1928, antibiotics have saved countless lives. But overuse has spurred microbes to develop resistance to them.

According to the World Economic Forum, antimicrobial resistance could lead to ten million deaths per year by 2050. Oral antibiotics also wipe out your entire gut biome—like a nuclear bomb in your stomach, Svendsen says.

Hydroject is a conditional drug release system that tricks bacteria into thinking they’re attacking cells when they’re actually dissolving a polymer embedded with antibiotics. Because Hydroject targets pathogens precisely—where they are, only when they’re around, and without affecting the rest of the body—it could help reduce antimicrobial resistance, Svendsen says.



As Justin Svendsen works on his biochemistry PhD at the Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact, he’s also working on a patent for Hydroject, his innovative drug delivery system that could revolutionize antibiotics (photo: Dustin Whitaker, University Communications)

Administered as an ointment, gel, or implant, one application could provide treatment that lasts for days, weeks, or longer.

What sparked Svendsen’s invention? It may have started on the first day of the challenge, he says, when participants gathered for introductions and a freewriting assignment: no wrong answers, no stopping, just let it flow. Then share.

Svendsen credits this fluid state of idea generation for helping hatch Hydroject, a new twist on his work with Marian Hettiaratchi, assistant professor of bioengineering at the Knight Campus. [In the Hettiaratchi Lab](#), chemical and biomedical engineering researchers design biomaterials.

By mulling over his graduate and undergraduate research, Svendsen developed his new idea. But without plans, he soon realized, ideas are just ideas.

The Oregon Innovation Challenge helped him organize the steps to reach incremental goals. For him, planning these tasks and sharing them with others created what he calls a system of accountability—crucial for a busy PhD candidate.

During biweekly four-hour workshops with other challenge participants, Svendsen developed his elevator pitch and a business plan. In addition to Sorensen and Bob Mighell, an entrepreneur in residence at the Lundquist College, he met regularly with attorneys hosted by the challenge to discuss corporations and intellectual property.

At Friday business college events called Startups&Slices, Svendsen learned from guest entrepreneurs. Lens of the Market, a program supported by the Knight Campus and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation, taught him about finances, markets, and funding—the nitty-gritty of business.

Biotechnology companies are already reaching out to partner with Svendsen on Hydroject. Without all the help, he says his discoveries would likely have stayed within the lab.

“As foundational researchers, it’s easy to get caught up in the beauty of the science and new knowledge for the sake of new knowledge,” Svendsen says.

“The Oregon Innovation Challenge helped me take that first step, then look at what’s feasible from a business standpoint. I didn’t know how to start an LLC or what a market analysis was. This process added a layer of realism and helped me explore how research could be useful to everyday life.”

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

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



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SPRING 2024

How to Care for Someone with Swallowing Problems

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

By Emily Halnon • Illustration by David Gill • April 3, 2024

4 min read



Caring for someone with dementia is difficult enough, and it doesn’t help that one of the most common complications isn’t on most people’s radars.

“The prevalence of dysphagia, when it’s difficult for the individual to swallow, is a really understudied piece of dementia,” says [Samantha Shune](#), an associate professor in the University of Oregon College of Education. She directs the [Communication Disorders and Sciences Program](#).



Samantha Shune

Dysphagia is a disorder that makes it hard to swallow food and liquid. Swallowing is a complex process that involves muscles in the mouth, throat, and esophagus; dysphagia impairs this musculature and causes symptoms like coughing, choking, regurgitation, painful swallowing, and the sensation of food “sticking” in the esophagus.

Dysphagia can also cause food and drink to enter the lungs, increasing the risk of infection and pneumonia. Up to 33 percent of older adults experience dysphagia and that number can increase to more than 80 percent for those with conditions such as dementia and Parkinson’s disease.

Shune’s research sheds light on how swallowing issues affect caregivers and informs better interventions. She is especially interested in better understanding how shared mealtimes can improve quality of life for older adults and their caregivers. Her current research, which is funded by a \$400,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health, examines how dysphagia influences the burden on caregivers.

“There’s a real financial, emotional, and physical burden with caregiving,” says Shune. “Finding ways to manage dysphagia can help improve the care recipient’s quality of life and ease the toll of caregiving.”

Shune has five recommendations to help caregivers support patients with dysphagia—while also caring for themselves.

Five tips for caregivers

1

Learn the signs of swallowing struggles

Though up to 93 percent of people with dementia develop a swallowing issue, many cases go undiagnosed due to a lack of training and education for clinicians.

“Knowing the signs of dysphagia could help you catch it early,” Shune says, “so you can develop a more effective treatment plan and lower the risk of medical complications.”

Caregivers should ask themselves:

- Does the person cough when drinking?
- Does it take them longer to eat than others at the table?
- Are they avoiding certain foods?
- Have they lost weight?

If the answer to any of these is yes, discuss the possibility of dysphagia with a medical provider.

2

Reduce fatigue during meals

A caregiver can help a person with swallowing difficulty by reducing fatigue they experience while eating. This also helps ensure they’re getting adequate hydration and nutrition.

Says Shune: “Have a variety of offerings, with some foods that are harder to chew and others that are easier to chew, so they can pivot to a softer option as they get tired.”

Also, she adds, make sure meals include familiar foods the person likes.

3

Set goals

Dysphagia doesn’t affect just swallowing and mealtimes. It also challenges people’s lives in other ways, from diminished social activity to increased stress.

Have a conversation with the person’s family, friends, and medical team about what to prioritize in care to preserve and enhance quality of life.

“Maybe you’ve always had family dinners and want to make sure you still have a chance for nightly conversations,” says Shune. “You can find ways to do that without eating.”

4

Learn how to handle an emergency

“It can be really stressful to hear someone coughing a lot while eating,” says Shune. “But sometimes, coughing is a good thing because it means air is flowing.”

She encourages caregivers to learn [the difference between coughing and choking](#)—when air stops flowing—so they know when to intervene. Resources include the [Mayo Clinic](#) and [MedlinePlus](#).

Shune also recommends learning the [Heimlich maneuver](#) to stop a choking event.

5

Take care of yourself, too

“If the caregiver’s health and well-being is impacted, they’re less likely to be able to provide care and it can turn into a vicious cycle that negatively affects everyone,” says Shune. “The needs of the caregiver must be met so they can be successful in that role as well as in other parts of their life.”

Caregivers should participate in support groups, prioritize mental and physical health, and recruit help so they can take breaks to do things they love and need, whether that’s going to a medical appointment or grabbing a coffee with a friend.

Regarding caregivers and patients, Shune says, “the needs and well-being of both people have to be prioritized.”

Emily Halnon is a freelance writer in Eugene whose work has been published in the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, *Salon*, *CNN*, *Runner’s World*, and *Trail Runner Magazine*.

If you are interested in learning more about dysphagia and Samantha Shune’s work or participating in current studies, email her at eatinglab@uoregon.edu.

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UO one of three schools selected to expand their Stamps Scholars Program

Sage Kiernan-Sherrow, UO Advancement Writer and Rosie Martin, UO Advancement Communications Associate

The University of Oregon will again double the number of Stamps Scholars starting fall 2024

Executive Director of the Stamps Scholars Program Randy McDow knew that the University of Oregon was a special place the first time he set foot on campus in 2013. Ten years later, the UO-Stamps partnership is expanding for the second time, with an additional \$11.3 million in funding that will increase the scholarship capacity to twenty students each year.

“We always internally try and arm wrestle to see who gets to interview the UO students because they’re always so interesting,” McDow says. “They love life. They’re engaged. They’re doing neat things. They give you so much confidence about the future of our country.”

Founded by E. Roe Stamps and his late wife Penny in 2006, the Stamps Scholars Program helps exceptional students across the nation forge their own paths and become community leaders. The UO is one of just thirty-five schools chosen by the Stamps Scholars Program as partners—and the only one on the west coast. UO Stamps Scholars receive full coverage of their tuition and fees, are awarded up to \$12,000 in enrichment funds, secure automatic placement in the Clark Honors College (CHC), and gain access to an ever-growing network of fellow Stamps Scholars and alumni. Oregon resident students also qualify for having their room and board fees covered by the scholarship.

The decision to expand the program was made in part because of Oregon’s reputation as a flagship university, but ultimately it was the students themselves who convinced McDow and the Stamps Scholars Program to increase funding. McDow recalls once asking a UO tour guide which degree was considered the most rigorous. Her answer? English.

“I just love that it wasn't STEM,” McDow says. “It was like, ‘we take things seriously here and things are tough because we want you to be good at them’. I think we see that our objectives are very much aligned with Oregon's objectives. They want to go after the very best students that they can. They want to support them. They're willing to commit the financial resources to have a program of this size and stature.”

Carol Stabile, dean of the CHC, says that the expansion is monumental for student success and accessibility. Stamps scholarships allow students to take classes full-time, without the financial pressures of paying tuition and fees and without incurring debt. Plus, there’s that added benefit of enrichment funding.

“The enrichment funding is amazing,” Stabile says. “Many [Scholars] use it to study abroad, others use it for internships. It gives them resources so that they can enhance their college experience.”

Part of the college experience for Stamps Scholars includes connecting with peers from other partner schools via regional conferences and conventions, as well as with each other. At the UO, this results in a tight-knit and supportive cohort. Not only is it an unspoken rule that the current Scholars take incoming freshmen under their wings, but they also share ideas and collaborate on projects. Faculty are equally likely to introduce Stamps recipients to world-class opportunities for undergraduate research, field work, and other formative experiences.

"I think we see that our objectives are very much aligned with Oregon's objectives. They want to go after the very best students that they can. They want to support them. They're willing to commit the financial resources to have a program of this size and stature."

–Randy McDow (executive director of the Stamps Scholar Program)

Michelle Holdway, associate director for scholarships at the UO office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships says that one of her favorite parts of her job is seeing everyone across campus come together in support of the Stamps Scholars Program.

“A kind of magic happens,” Holdway says. “The community is the cherry on top of the program.”

Yet the community would not exist without the work of faculty and staff across campus who have been championing the success of the Stamps Scholars Program since its inception. McDow, Holdway, and Stabile all note that this expansion was only possible because of UO’s incredible team of development and financial aid officers as well as those advancing student success and enrollment such as Jenn Parker and Jim Brooks. The group works on everything together from recruitment, to interviewing prospective students, to hosting events.

“This work is quite intensive because of the way we do it, because of the competitive nature of the program,” Holdway says, “We've risen to the challenge. The students have come and been successful. They've gone to graduate in the time frame that we would hope. And they're doing great things.”

UO Stamps Scholar accomplishments run the gamut, from being featured in *TeenVogue* to becoming Fulbright Scholars. The Stamps Scholars Program helps exceptional students pursue their passions, and this most recent expansion will allow more Ducks to chase after what they love and make the most of their college experiences.

“I am often reminded of the wonderful Stamps Scholars, who have come to the UO and distinguished themselves while on campus and then after graduation,” says Roger Thompson, vice president for Student Services and Enrollment Management. “I am extremely proud of our program and this most recent expansion represents a vote in confidence from the Stamps Scholars Program for the progress we have made since we enrolled that first class of five students more than a decade ago.”

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CURRENT STAMPS SCHOLARS

\$3.5 Million +

AWARDED TO THE PROGRAM IN THE
LAST TEN YEARS

36

STAMPS SCHOLAR ALUMNI

Student Stories

Stamps Scholars are not just driven—they're hardworking, curious, and community-oriented. To be accepted into the Stamps Scholars Program, candidates go through a rigorous interview process, one in which they must prove they exemplify three pillars: scholarship, leadership, and community. Stamps Scholars then live out these values during their time on campus.

“They don't just bring high GPAs. They bring this dedication to service and commitment to leading for change that I think is so impressive,” Stabile says.

Every single Stamps Scholar has a story, which expands once they become a Duck. Some become researchers, others are athletes, but all of them are family thanks to the Stamps Scholars Program. At the time of this publication, there are thirty-eight Stamps Scholars making a difference across campus. The following five are leaders who have taken full advantage of the Stamps Scholars Program's resources to pursue unique opportunities and set themselves up for success after graduation.



UO’s first woman Rhodes Scholar began as a Stamps recipient

Nayantara Arora, class of 2024 (neuroscience), plans to pursue graduate degrees in global health and international health and tropical medicine at Oxford next year.

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Stamps Scholar makes music meaningful

Micah Primack, class of 2024 (psychology), is a leader of We the Ensemble, a group focused on music education for people with disabilities.

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“Reporter-at-heart” charts own path with Stamps Scholarship



Ruby Wool, class of 2025 (journalism), says being a Stamps Scholar provided her with the community, flexibility, and leadership skills to succeed.

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ASUO President Chloé Webster guides the flock

With the Stamps Scholars community to support her, Webster, class of 2024 (planning, public policy, and management), is propelled toward accomplishing her leadership goals.

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The UO’s first five Stamps Scholars graduated in 2017. Find out how three of them used their UO education to chart their own courses over the past seven years.



“ The Stamps Scholarship was essential in providing the resources to have the most enriching educational experience in Eugene and beyond. Thanks to the funding, I was able to study and conduct research around the world, which inspired me to pursue a career telling global stories. ”

Hannah Steinkopf-Frank, BA ’17 (journalism, international affairs)

Hannah Steinkopf-Frank is based in Paris, where she pursued a master's degree at Sciences Po. For the past two years, she has been helping leading French newspaper *Le Monde* build an English website, bringing its coverage of France and beyond to a wider range of readers around the world. Her writing and photos have been published in outlets including the *New York Times*, *Atlas Obscura*, *Vice*, *Teen Vogue*, *YES! Magazine* and *JSTOR Daily*. [Read the CHC’s recent interview with Steinkopf-Frank.](#)



“ The Stamps Scholarship has had a huge impact on my life. It enabled me to study abroad for an entire academic year, which was the most influential part of my college experience. Because of the scholarship, I also graduated with no student debt, which made it much easier for me to pursue an advanced degree and move into a new field of work doing what I love. ”

Ruby O’Connor, BA ’17 (international studies)

Ruby O’Connor worked at an environmental consulting firm for multiple years before deciding to pursue a career in librarianship. She obtained her master’s in library and information science from Simmons University in 2022 and is now working as the public service specialist for the library of Central Oregon Community College in Bend.

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UO senior is named the UO’s first Rhodes Scholar since 2007



November 14, 2023 - 10:10am  [Twitter](#)  [Facebook](#)

University of Oregon senior Nayantara Arora has been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship for graduate study at the University of Oxford, making her the first Duck to earn the prized award in more than 15 years.

Arora is among 32 U.S. recipients of the fellowships this year, which fund two to three years of study at Oxford and are the oldest international fellowship awards in the world. This year’s Rhodes scholars “inspire us already with their accomplishments, but even more by their values-based leadership and selfless ambitions to improve their communities and the world,” Ramona L. Doyle, American secretary of the Rhodes Trust, said [in the announcement](#).

At Oxford, Arora will pursue two master’s degrees, one in modeling for global health and the other in international health and tropical medicine.

“I think it’s the first time in my life that my jaw has unironically dropped,” she said of hearing the good news. “I spent the first few minutes in absolute disbelief and guilt because I was surrounded by deserving, hardworking, and brilliant peers. The actual excitement and adrenaline didn’t hit me until I had the chance to pinch myself, hug everyone, and shake the judges’ hands several times.”

Arora will be the first Rhodes Scholar from the UO since 2007 and is the only recipient from a Pac-12 institution this year. She was assisted throughout the process by the [Office of Distinguished Scholarships](#), which provides comprehensive advising and guidance to UO students and recent alumni who wish to apply for competitive national and international [scholarships and fellowships](#). Arora becomes the 20th UO student to receive the award since the scholarships’ 1902 inception.

“To be selected for a Rhodes Scholarship is an extraordinary achievement, and we are honored and proud to have Nayantara as our student,” said UO President Karl Scholz. “During her time at UO, she has conducted impressive research, demonstrated remarkable drive and leadership, and immersed herself in a wide array of international experiences. I look forward to seeing the impact she will have in the field of global public health or wherever her interests take her.”

Arora, who is from Portland, is majoring in neuroscience at the [Clark Honors College](#) and pursuing two minors in chemistry and global health. She conducts research in two areas: global health biomarkers in Tunisia and the relationship between the vascular system and Alzheimer’s disease, working with UO professors Josh Snodgrass and Ashley Walker respectively.

A first-generation Indian American, Arora speaks many languages and is fluent in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English; she also is learning Arabic, Hebrew and Spanish. She spent time living in Oregon and in India as she grew up.

“Code-switching is intrinsic to my life, due to my multilingual household, and contributes to my flexibility in unfamiliar situations,” Arora wrote in her Rhodes personal statement. “With a family history of storytelling, I am drawn towards empathy, open communication, and reconciliation as powerful keys to solving the nuanced issues we face in communities today.”

Arora is a [Stamps Scholar](#), [Phi Beta Kappa Public Service Scholar](#), and an Oxford Consortium for Human Rights fellow. While at the UO, she has traveled to Israel, the Palestinian territories, [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Ghana](#) through the UO’s Division of Global Engagement to pursue interests in global health.

She has interned with the U.S. State Department as a content creator since 2019 and, as a high school student, co-founded a grassroots organization dedicated to highlighting immigrant youth stories through story-exchange workshops and [a podcast](#). She also is an accomplished violinist and has been a performer in Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance, since she was a child.

“Studying at Oxford will further diversify my global health perspective,” Arora said. “I’m excited to research at the intersection of my undergraduate studies in neuroscience with the degrees in global health and epidemiology by collaborating with professors, public health leaders, and medical professionals. Most of all, I’m thrilled to meet this year’s global cohort of Rhodes scholars, who will undoubtedly be inspiring classmates.”

—By Saul Hubbard, Division of Undergraduate Studies and Student Success

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Filling the gap with music

A Clark Honors College junior teaches Lane County residents with disabilities how to connect and find new purpose through songs.

STORY BY KEYRY HERNANDEZ
PHOTOS BY ILKA SANKARI
AUDIO BY MIRANDAH DAVIS-POWELL
CLARK HONORS COLLEGE COMMUNICATIONS



Micah Primack (right) is a junior in the Clark Honors College who is double majoring in psychology and music. He helps coordinate a group called "We the Ensemble" that teaches people with disabilities how to play musical instruments. Here, Primack shares some basic chords with student Ronin Katana who learned how to play the ukelele.

Inside the Lane Independent Living Alliance peer center, a framed poster hangs on a wall with a quote from former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt that reads: “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Its meaning is on full display twice a month during the UO academic year as Clark Honors College junior Micah Primack leads a group from the university called “We the Ensemble,” a club that advocates for teaching music to people with disabilities in the Eugene area.

The peer center in downtown Eugene is their classroom. One side of a community room is filled with comfortable furniture and art as Primack, the group’s president, patiently guides ukulele players through their finger movements.

Nearby, one of the music enthusiasts plays a song unaccompanied on the piano. When the song ends, the room erupts in applause.

Hear an audio story about We the Ensemble:

▶

0:00 / 5:03

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For more information or to get involved:
Send an email to Micah Primack at uowtensemble@gmail.com.



Primack (right) tunes his ukelele and prepares other instruments for a lesson at the Lane Independent Living Alliance peer center where the “We the Ensemble” club gathers regularly to teach music to people with disabilities.

Primack has been one of the driving forces of the club for two years, helping people who haven’t been able to access music education in their lives. He works closely with five other UO students who volunteer regularly at the social service organization.

“There’ve been a lot of studies and research done about how we can use music to help engage people with their emotions and feelings. Music is an extremely powerful tool. Communities that have been underrepresented are not reaping (some of the) benefits of music education.”

– Micah Primack, president of “We the Ensemble” and a junior in the Clark Honors College

A [Stamps Scholar](#), Primack is double majoring in psychology and music. He wants to pursue a career in music therapy because he believes in the healing power of song. People with disabilities face a variety of institutional barriers and the ensemble club helps lessen those hurdles, he says.

Music lessons can be expensive, and not too many people with modest incomes can afford it. “There’ve been a lot of studies and research done about how we can use music to help engage people with their emotions and feelings,” he says. “Music is an extremely powerful tool. Communities that have been underrepresented are not reaping (some of the) benefits of music education.”

Music as a tool

Primack worked with another student from the Clark Honors College when he first arrived at UO to turn the idea for a club into a reality. They sought out volunteers and came up with ways to share a love of music.

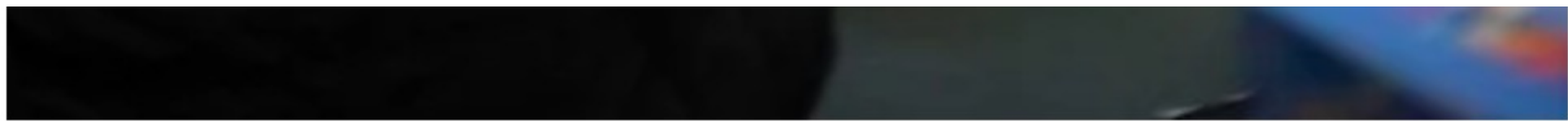


Members of We the Ensemble volunteer their time at the peer center and serve people with physical, mental, cognitive and sensory disabilities from across Lane County.

They plan lessons on music theory and provide instruments so community members can practice. With music as the tool, the group’s mission aligns with the alliance’s goal of providing a safe space that leads to personal growth.

Scott Lemons, the [alliance’s](#) program coordinator and peer support specialist, says organizations like We the Ensemble encourage people with disabilities to participate in their own communities.

“People with disabilities can feel really isolated and like the community does not care about them in so many ways,” Lemons says. “To have the students work with our members and to always have smiles on their faces makes them feel like the greater community of Eugene really cares about them. (We The Ensemble) has given them a lot of inspiration to get out there more.”



Ronin Katana plays the ukelele at Friday ensemble meetings. People with disabilities come to the alliance's peer center every other week for music lessons and more.

Primack learned from his father how to play growing up in his home state of Pennsylvania before moving to Arkansas. His dad composed music and played several instruments, which led to Primack picking up the guitar when he was 9. He learned music theory and composition, and taught

himself other instruments.

His parents split up before he arrived at UO, which took a toll on his mental health. But he was able to recover, he says, by listening to compassionate lyrics and playing in a band. The experience helped him process his emotions during the difficult time.

Since then, he's made headway on other areas of music, including recently releasing an album with his band called "[Belltower](#)" on Spotify.

At the peer center, he encourages the students to play in a group rather than teaching them one-on-one. "One of our goals for the club is to get people to play together," Primack says.



Ronin Katana (left) enjoys his time learning from Primack about different ways to play music "One of our goals for the club is to get people to play together," Primack says.

It's important to the group's organizers that students to make their own decisions about music. That's because they don't want to set limitations on how people with different abilities learn. Teaching music, they say, has to help level the playing field for others.

Celebrating growth together

Charlotte Curtis learned how to play a song on the piano, choosing the theme from the movie “Star Wars” because she is a fan. Curtis says she took a community college piano course but ended up failing it twice. Learning how to play the piano as part of “We the Ensemble” has helped her overcome personal barriers.

“My favorite part about (the ensemble) has been meeting them and having them help me understand certain things in music that I’ve never known,” she says. “With my learning disability, it's really hard for me to understand certain things, and I can’t read sheet music. Here, they bring me sheet music with chords that I can actually play instead of having me figure out everything by myself.”

Curtis bought her own piano and has spent time practicing, working with peers at the alliance and organizing times to play together.

Lemons says noticed a change in Curtis. “She saw that she was capable of not only playing instruments but also helping people and is now much more participatory and supportive,” he says.

For Primack, working with a team of UO students makes the effort that much more enjoyable. “Our team is really amazing,” he says. “We work hard to recruit students and volunteers, and we offer a wide range of instrumental expertise. I’m really proud of how everyone in the club is stepping up and working toward forming that sense of community.”

Primack also participates in other activities. He likes sitting with his guitar and strumming chords, playing and singing vocals in his band, and he's worked in the past as a design editor for a campus literary magazine.

His team wants to see the ensemble grow and say recruiting more student teachers is a priority. “It’s vital that you know who and what you’re playing for,” he says. “I’m really looking forward to getting everyone on the same level where they have the ability to mesh together.”

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"Reporter-at-heart" charts own path with Stamps scholarship

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"Reporter-at-heart" charts own path with Stamps Scholarship

Ruby Wool, class of 2025 (journalism), says being a Stamps Scholar provided her with the community, flexibility, and leadership skills to succeed.

By: Rosie Martin, UO Advancement Communications Associate, and Sage Kiernan-Sherrow, UO Advancement Writer

Ruby Wool, class of 2025 (journalism), always knew that the University of Oregon was the place for her. Originally from Burlington, Vermont, Wool was drawn to the UO after hearing stories from her brother, Henry—a fellow Duck who became immersed in the many community-building opportunities on campus. When she discovered the Stamps Scholars Program, the “reporter at heart” knew she had to apply. Wool was inspired by the program’s insistence on applicants portraying their authentic selves and took great care in showing off her creative side—touching on her interests in everything from slam poetry to philosophical discourse.

What ultimately clinched Wool’s interest in the Stamps program and the UO was getting to know her Stamps cohort and the faculty and staff that would be supporting her journey. At her semi-finalist interview, Wool felt an instantaneous connection to her peers. Their ambition and desire to make a difference inspired her. That’s when she realized the value that a Stamps scholarship could bring to her college experience—leading to her delight when she found out she had been accepted.

“I was really excited,” Wool says. “I saw who I could be in a few years after meeting with the junior and senior Stamps Scholars.”

Wool went about immersing herself in the UO community even before her first semester started, reaching out on social media to find other students who were on campus early.

“I found UO Club Tennis on Instagram and was like ‘I’m here early does anyone want to hit?’ and heard back immediately,” says Wool.

Throughout her freshman year, Wool continued to seek out networking and growth opportunities. She found favorite professors in Carol Stabile, dean of the Clark Honors College (CHC), Charlie Butler, a School of Journalism and Communications instructor, Peter Laufer, SOJC professor and James N. Wallace chair of journalism, and Catalina de Onís, one of CHC’s core faculty. Alongside Laufer and a group of SOJC students, Wool even travelled to New York in 2023 to cover World Press Freedom Day.

“I kept meeting people, kept connecting with professors, and finding spaces that valued my presence and where I could contribute,” she explains.

During her sophomore year, Wool studied abroad in Spain using the enrichment funding offered through the Stamps Scholars Program. The UO Global Education Oregon’s Spanish immersion program placed her with a host family in Oviedo on the north coast. The experience forced Wool to get out of her comfort zone. She had to learn different customs, navigate a new schedule, and adapt to different teaching styles. However, she found familiarity in the rainy climate and lush green landscape.

“It reminded me of Eugene a little bit,” says Wool.

At the UO, Wool developed a passion for global health and solutions journalism that helped cement her dream of bridging sports and culture writing through a broadcasting career. Now a junior, Wool is the president of Oregon’s co-ed tennis team and a writer for the [Daily Emerald](#). She is also the sole student member on the [Board of Trustees](#), appointed by Oregon Governor Tina Kotek. This fall, she welcomed her sister, Georgia, to campus, rounding out the trio of Wool Ducks. Throughout it all, the Stamps Scholar Program has been essential to Wool’s success as a student.

“Stamps allows you to be flexible, choose your own path, and make the college experience your own,” she says.

Read [this profile](#) on Wool or check out this [recent feature](#) from the CHC to learn more about Wool and fellow Stamps Scholar, Chloé Webster.



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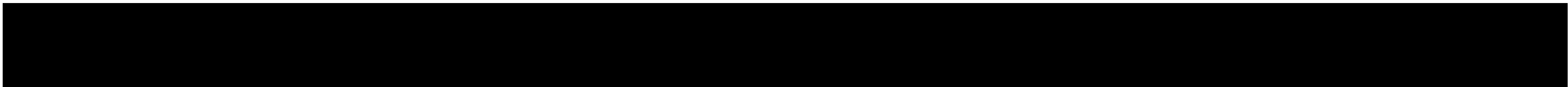
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ASUO President Chloé Webster guides the flock

With the Stamps Scholars community to support her, Webster is propelled toward accomplishing her leadership goals.

By: Sage Kiernan-Sherrow, UO Advancement Writer and Rosie Martin, UO Advancement Communications Associate

Chloé Webster, class of 2025 (planning, public policy, and management), decided she wanted to be a Duck before she was ever accepted into the [Stamps Scholars Program](#). Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, Webster’s comfortability with a big public school and her love for the outdoors made the University of Oregon a perfect fit. Add to that a father with a passion for Oregon-related bestsellers like *Shoe-Dog* and *Bowerman and the Men of Oregon* and her course was set. But Webster wasn’t about to settle for anything less than a full ride.

“I was the type of student that did research on what scholarships were available. I was comparing other big schools in the west and was more interested in UO because of the [Stamps Scholars Program],” she says. “When I got that first ‘you’re being considered’, I was so excited.”

Then came the bad news: Webster didn’t get accepted into the program. However, she had enough financial aid—including a [Wayne Morse scholarship](#)—to comfortably say yes to relocating more than two-thousand miles away from home. Webster was set to do just that when she got the call mid-May in 2020 that the Stamps Scholar Program was reconsidering her for the scholarship. Immediately, she called the Stamps director and made it official.

“At the end of the day, it was icing on the top of the cake,” Webster says.

Moving to Oregon proved to be a major feat—but one made easier because of both the Stamps Scholars community and the UO community at large. Webster’s passion for the UO community is why she was driven to run for president of the [Associate Students of University of Oregon \(ASUO\)](#). According to the ASUO Voter Guide, Webster won sixty-seven percent of the vote in April 2023, with a campaign centered around increasing the visibility and approachability of ASUO processes, clarifying tuition processes, educating students on their rights as student workers, and more. Since then, she’s even [met with UO President Karl Scholz to advocate for student success](#).

“I have been able to be surrounded by outstanding, brilliant young people who are leaders and visionaries and just genuinely so cool,” she says. “I was in a first-year interest group alongside other Stamp Scholars and that group was the reason why I ended up running for ASUO. Stamps gave me confidence to go after leadership positions because I had this community to support me and the funding.”

In 2021, she used some of her enrichment funding—a Stamps Scholars benefit allowing students an additional \$12,000 toward academic and experiential pursuits—to remain on campus over the summer and work the track and field World Championships. This summer, she’ll use the rest of her funds to fulfill a life-long dream of studying abroad at Oxford University—which she hopes to attend full-time in the future. Webster says she thinks about the privilege that the Stamps Scholars Program has afforded her “every single day”.

“There are no words to describe how impactful [Stamps] is on your college experience,” she says. “It gives you a sense that your options are boundless. It keeps you moving towards bettering yourself, bettering your university, and bettering your community.”

Dean of the Clark Honors College, Carol Stabile, is Webster’s advisor, mentor, and a major source of support. She’s nominated Webster for several university awards, such as the [Vernon Barkhurst Sophomore award](#), which Webster won in 2023. Webster says that, like Stabile, the university excels in connecting Stamps Scholars to interesting opportunities, highlighting student achievements, involving them in university-wide initiatives, and encouraging them to chase their dreams. Now a junior, Webster is looking towards the future—but she admits she doesn’t yet know where her dreams will take her.

“The long answer is that I want to get experience. I want to travel. I want to spend time figuring out what I want to get my master’s in,” she says. “I tend to do what I should do and so I'm trying to figure out ‘what does Chloé want to do?’. There have been a lot of Stamps Scholars who have impacted me in realizing that I can do what I'm truly passionate about.”

Regarding the recent announcement of the Stamps Scholars expansion to increase the capacity of funded scholars to twenty students each year, Webster says she’s “excited” and “grateful” that the UO continues to be recognized as an institution of excellence.

“I'm so excited to bring more people on and to meet the next installment of first-year students. I want to be a mentor to them as much as I can,” says Webster.

Check out this [recent feature](#) by the CHC to learn more about Webster and fellow Stamps Scholar, Ruby Wool.



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Rewriting the relationship with fire

Clark Honors College student Kyle Trefny and two CHC alums are using basketball to help shape a future for Oregon where people live with fire, instead of fighting against it.

STORY BY ELIZABETH YOST AND MADDY CARSON
PHOTOS BY GRACE MANGALI
CLARK HONORS COLLEGE COMMUNICATIONS



Jess Gladis, Kyle Trefny and Ilse Stacklie-Vogt of FireGeneration Collaborative organized a recent Hoopathon fundraiser on campus. Gladis and Stacklie-Vogt graduated last year; Trefny is an Honors College senior. (Photo courtesy of Marielle Fehrenbacher)

Near the fire front, wildland firefighter Kyle Trefny and his team clear the roofs of rural residents’ homes to prevent them from burning. The race to prevent the devastation of houses is interrupted by residents passing out freshly picked apples from their backyard to the fire crew.

But Trefny, now a Clark Honors College senior, imagines a day when the reaction to fire looks different. The emergency response firefighters provide when fire is 100 feet away isn’t a long-term solution, he explains.

“We’re trying to help residents make changes when it’s largely out of our hands,” he says. According to Trefny, the future of fire requires year-round education, with communities actively working to keep their homes safe. With that, it requires a healthy relationship with fire – one that isn’t dictated by fear.

As one of the co-founders of the FireGeneration Collaborative, Trefny works to create that future. But it’s not work he can do alone.

The collaborative is a group effort involving Trefny, two Clark Honors College alumni – Ilse Stacklie-Vogt and Jess Gladis – and team members from across the Northwest region and beyond. The organization, under the guidance of the nonprofit Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology, and directed by Oregon alum and Indigenous fire practitioner Ryan Reed, centers youth advocacy and Indigenous leadership in redefining the public’s relationship of fire.

Their work is strengthened by their partnership with other environmental justice organizations such as the Wagon Burners, an all-Indigenous wildland fire crew stationed in the Willamette Valley and the Oregon Conservation Corps.

Their most recent project together was the Oregon Wildfire Resilience Hoopathon last month. The event raised over \$8,000 to empower Indigenous communities, youth voices, and other organizations around the state working on wildfire resilience.

A generation marked by fire

It isn’t the work of one person, according to Trefny, who is a [Stamps Scholar](#) studying Chinese and economics. But collaboration makes it possible when everyone does their part. “There is a lot of fear around what our future looks like with fire,” Trefny says.

It’s an anxiety he used to share, as he remembers fire being one of his earliest fears as a child growing up in Northern California.

After the devastating impacts of the 2020 wildfires that took place in Oregon and Trefny’s home state of California, he set the goal of training to become a wildland firefighter. He soon realized that fighting fires is only a small piece of the larger puzzle.

Learn more about groups advocating for wildfire resilience in Oregon:

FireGeneration Collaborative: A non-profit working to redefine the public’s relationship with fire by uplifting youth and indigenous voices in discussions about fire.

Wagon Burners: An Indigenous burn crew based in Kalapuya Ilihi dedicated to restoring the land with good fire.

Oregon Conservation Corps: An organization established by the Oregon State Legislature to fund partners around Oregon working to reduce wildfire risks.

“I think that a lot of [our generation] recognizes we’re in a pretty unique time in human history, and so when you meet other young people who want to get involved, it’s like ‘What can we do together?’”

– Kyle Trefny, FireGeneration Collaborative cofounder, Chinese and economics major, and senior in the Clark Honors College

“When I got to the University of Oregon, I (started) learning that people and fire actually have a really deep relationship in this landscape and that indigenous people have had a positive relationship with fire for most of the time that people have been on this land,” Trefny says.

During his first year in the Clark Honors College, he took a class taught by Mark Carey, UO professor of environmental studies and geography, about Indigenous peoples. The discussions and projects in the course motivated Trefny to consider other ways he could be involved in the environmental justice movement that did not revolve solely around suppressing wildfire.

“He was terrific as a student,” Carey says of Trefny. “He was energetic, thoughtful and engaged, curious and really trying to learn.”



Kyle Trefny’s work is built on the relationships that he forms with others. “Friendship is undervalued in changemaking spaces,” he says.

Chloé Webster, a Stamps Scholar and president of ASUO, appreciated the teamwork on the court and enthusiasm for the cause at the Hoopathon.

In 2022, Trefny worked with Reed, Bradley Massey and Alyssa Worsham to found FireGeneration. Their goal was to amplify diverse young voices. Once they got started, it wasn’t difficult to find other passionate young people.

“I think that a lot of (our generation) recognizes we’re in a pretty unique time in human history,” says Trefny. “And so when you meet other young people who want to get involved, it’s like ‘What can we do together?’”

Stacklie-Vogt joined up shortly after it started, assisting with administrative and policy work. She’d come to the University of Oregon determined to study political science, but quickly fell in love with environmental justice. After regularly volunteering at Huerto de la Familia, a community garden in Eugene, she became interested in learning more about the relationship individuals have to the land and the cultural nature of food.

“(Fire) wasn’t a domain I’d worked in before, so that’s why I joined FireGen,” she says.

Gladis joined soon after to work with Trefny on the research team. Their research focuses on investigating workforce demographics in wildland firefighting crews and ways to include the voices of less represented groups in that space. Her focus at UO was around labor organization and environmentalism.

Wildland firefighting is a topic that’s particularly close to home for her, as someone whose partner works in the field. “It just really takes a toll physically, mentally, and financially for those folks,” she says. “It is very hard to unionize in that industry. (The system is) just kind of set up in such a way that makes it very difficult to break out of those inequities.”





The Oregon Wildfire Resilience Hoopathon raised \$8,000 during a one-day event in November. University of Oregon students and others participated, with the proceeds going to FireGeneration Collaborative, the Wagon Burners, and the Oregon Conservation Corps.

Since FireGeneration’s inception, the team has made major strides in research, working on land and policy advocacy.

One of the earliest goals of FireGeneration was to support the appointment of Reed to the Northwest Forest Plan Federal Advisory Committee. The committee makes recommendations to manage forests across indigenous land.

Members have also traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with leaders of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Interior to uplift the voices of young adults in the decision-making process of environmental initiatives.

Meanwhile, FireGeneration’s partners continue to actively prevent wildfire risks by conducting pile burns, a process in which extra vegetation is gathered and lit on fire to reduce fuel levels on the land.

Free-throws for the cause

The Hoopathon took place on Nov. 19 at UO’s McArthur Court. Teams of students huddled with one another to shoot as many free throws as possible. Each successful shot resulted in a donation to an organization working to prevent wildfires.

“The amount of love and inspiration and excitement you feel from bringing all of those people together is enough to make you keep going and wanting to keep doing the work,” says Stacklie-Vogt. “It’s a place that makes me feel good, where I feel sustained, like I can keep making a positive impact.”The event gave participants a chance to have fun and brainstorm how to develop a relationship with fire that is a positive one.

Gladis described it as a way for “bringing people together, having friendly competition, and pointing people’s attention towards this important cause.”

She said she hopes to see it grow and turn into an annual event to mark the end of fire season.

As Trefny approaches his graduation this spring, he plans to continue his leadership at FireGeneration and establish a stronger local presence in communities most impacted by fire.

“We are here for the long fight,” Trefny says.

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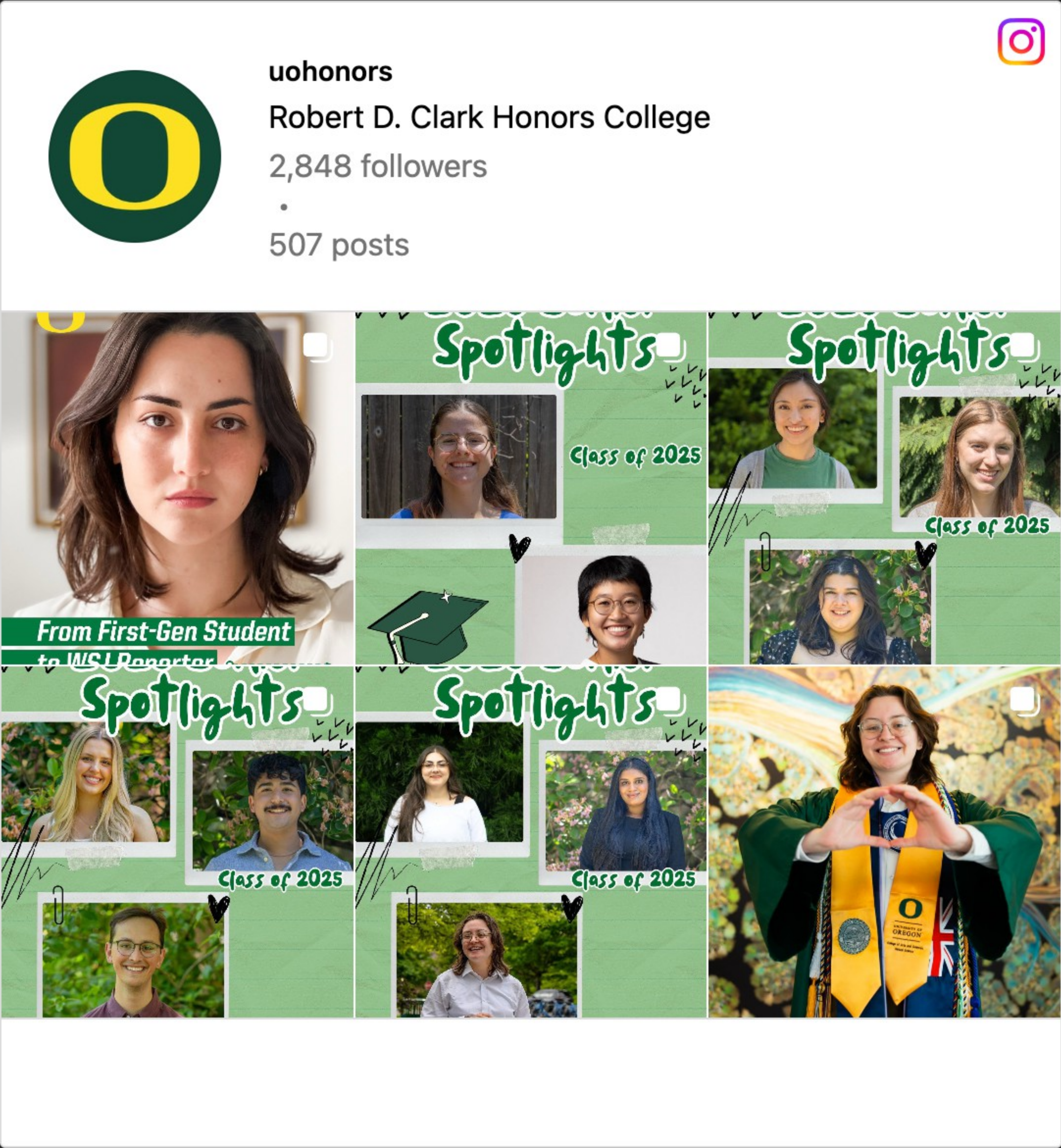
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SPRING 2024

Running Down Questions about Marathons and Fatigue

Podcast: sports scientist Mike Hahn pursues research that serves elite athletes and the rest of us

By Matt Cooper • Podcast produced by Chris Larsen • Illustration by David Gill • April 3, 2024

3 min read



When Mike Hahn got the word out that he needed subjects for a study on marathons and fatigue, Eugene runners came running.

Hahn, a human physiology professor in the College of Arts and Sciences and director of the [Bowerman Sports Science Center](#), is an expert in sports science. Working with athletes wearing sensors, he studies lower limb musculoskeletal biomechanics, injury prevention, and improved performance in sport.

Hahn’s team recently turned their attention to distance running and how the legs’ absorption of the impact of foot strike changes as the miles pile up. Their research, which could yield insights on injury prevention, hinged on the willingness of runners to run at a variety of paces, uphill and downhill on a treadmill in the lab and around Eugene while being hooked up to all manner of monitoring equipment.

Fortunately, in TrackTown, USA, there’s no shortage of runners willing to go the distance for science. In early 2022, Hahn’s team put out the call for subjects at local trails and running stores and soon had scores of participants of all ages and abilities, some of them weekend 5kers and others fast enough to qualify for the Boston Marathon.

“The community generally loves being involved in research,” Hahn says. “And if it’s something that they’re passionate about like running, it’s pretty easy to recruit.”



Pro tip: be hard core

Hahn’s research has given him insights into how to get the most out of your run (listen for tips and more in the accompanying podcast). Among them: strengthen your core—that’s the pelvis, lower back, hips, and stomach—to stabilize your torso for long runs.

“Once you get into a spot where the pelvis control is strong,” Hahn says, “you can run with less fatigue, for longer.”

Giving ACL tears the boot

Hahn’s team is also studying the role that [soccer cleats could play](#) in reducing ACL tears and other injuries for female athletes. Working with Hahn, PhD student Emily Karolidis, MS ’22 (individualized program), is examining soccer cleats’ stud length, shape, and more for her dissertation research.

“We need more scientists addressing female athlete research questions specifically,” Hahn says. “Emily represents the next generation of human performance researchers, directly shaping the future of footwear biomechanics and product design.”

Hear more from Hahn: Science Knight Out

The soccer cleat research is supported by the [Wu Tsai Human Performance Alliance at Oregon](#), a global effort of six institutions to promote wellness and peak performance through science.

In a [May 1 “Science Knight Out” talk](#) that is free and open to the public (RSVP required), Hahn, associate director of the alliance at the University of Oregon, will discuss this initiative and breakthroughs with wearable sensors and machine learning that will boost performance and human health.

“Once you get into a spot where the pelvis control is strong, you can run with less fatigue, for longer.”

—Mike Hahn

“Wearable sensors are enabling us to crack the code on athletic performance,” Hahn says. “When combined with machine learning, sensors are improving performance and resilience for athletes around the world.

“This blend of technology development and problem solving makes me excited to go to work every day.”

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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

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

Our alumni association exec offers insights and some adventures in spelling



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SPRING 2024

Anita Hill Sees Peril and Promise for Feminism

Hill, who visits in May, started a national conversation on sexual harassment thirty years ago in testifying against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas

By Matt Cooper • Photo by Taylor Jewell/Invision/AP • April 10, 2024

6 min read



When Anita Hill testified in 1991 that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had subjected her years earlier to unwanted sexual advances, she says much of America had never even heard the term sexual harassment.

Today the term is commonplace and there is “an expectation of accountability,” Hill says—and not just for sexual harassment, but for attacks ranging from partner violence to stalking to

cyberthreats.

Hill testified to Congress that Thomas, among other inappropriate behavior, had repeatedly asked her for dates and spoke about pornography in the office when they worked together in the 1980s, a charge he vehemently denied. Thomas was confirmed and Hill’s life was turned upside down; she was condemned by many for her testimony but validated by people who flooded her with stories of sexual harassment.

Now a professor of social policy, law, and women’s studies at Brandeis University, Hill is a leader in the fight against gender-based violence. Her most recent book, *Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence*, is a [University of Oregon Common Reading](#) selection.

Oregon Quarterly interviewed her in advance of a May 9 speaking engagement at the University of Oregon that is free and open to the public. Hill will present the [2023–24 Lorwin Lecture on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties](#), concluding fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the [Center for the Study of Women in Society](#) and held in partnership with the [Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics](#).

Oregon Quarterly: What have you learned from your advocacy regarding gender violence?

Anita Hill: The cultural biases that allow gender violence to go unaccounted for are often shored up through structures. They can even be legal structures meant to correct the violence. Very few rape cases are ever adjudicated—around 6 percent. District attorneys may not feel that they can have a conviction. The same thing has happened in cases involving intimate partner violence. The criminal justice system is making progress. Statutes of limitations are being extended to allow for people to come forward who in the past didn’t come forward because they were convinced nothing would be done.

In the civil process, many people can’t even access the system because it’s too costly. Many lawyers can’t afford to take those cases because the amount you can recover is less than what it costs to pursue the case. There’s also the fear of retaliation. Some say as many as 60 percent of people who file sexual harassment cases in the workplace will be retaliated against.

OQ: What are the perils and promises of this moment for feminism?

AH: One chief peril is that the courts are tightening the laws that protect against civil rights violations. Whether it’s equal pay or abortion or sexual harassment, the limitations that are coming out of the Supreme Court have really shrunk all rights and I don’t see that changing with today’s Supreme Court. Ruth Bader Ginsburg complained about it in 2017, that the court was moving in a direction to corral the protections that were intended under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and now we’ve seen it really being played out, not just in terms of gender. If you bring a gender discrimination case and the justices are doing an interpretation of the civil rights law, it will have implications for race, religion, disability—all the other covered categories. That’s the peril that is the most frightening.



The promise is that we are beginning, as a society, to understand that none of these categories can stand alone, that any number of us can be implicated when the court reduces the protections under the civil rights law. The promise in that is it gives us a reason to work together in terms of a movement and awareness and speaking out, and in terms of the laws and policies that get enacted at the federal, state, or local level.

OQ: Your latest book, “Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence,” is a story of America’s long reckoning with gender violence. Are we making progress?

AH: In terms of awareness, we are better now than we were thirty years ago. But one of the things that is truly missing is trust in our structures that there will be accountability. The Hollywood Commission [a group chaired by Hill that fights abuse in entertainment] has done surveys that included sixteen thousand workers in Hollywood; we found there is greater awareness and a desire to step forward but there’s still a lack of trust that the system will bring about that accountability.

OQ: How do you talk about Justice Thomas today? Do you comment on his decisions or concerns that make news?

AH: I tend not to comment on Clarence Thomas. I comment on the movement of the court in terms of its failure to appreciate the need for robust civil rights protections. Certainly Clarence Thomas has been one of the more vocal justices and some of the rhetoric and the cases that are being decided by this majority on the court are saying, “Now is a time to challenge the civil rights gains that have been made over the last few decades.” This court is aggressive and activist in terms of pursuing a change in the law that will be in effect for decades to come if we don’t step up to counter it in society. Restricting civil rights, that is the court’s current movement.

OQ: What change would you make to the process for Supreme Court nominations regarding protections for people with powerful testimony opposing a nominee?

AH: There was no system when I came forward. The Senate Judiciary Committee had my statement but there was no sense of what they were going to do, what kind of processes they were going to go through for me to come forward. Even when Christine Blasey Ford testified against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in 2018, she faced that same kind of confusion.

We need to fix that. At the very least, we ought to give people a chance to be heard in a fair process where their information is fully investigated—and not investigated at the direction of the people who are nominating a person for the Supreme Court. Donald Trump was president and directing the FBI investigation of the allegations against Kavanaugh—that should never have happened. The investigation should be fair and impartial.

OQ: You’ve been called “courageous” for the testimony you gave thirty-three years ago. From where did that bravery come?

AH: I was born in 1956, I grew up in an era of a lot of bravery. The civil rights and women’s rights movements were brave and you’d see them on TV and hear about them on the radio or read in the newspaper about them. That was part of where it comes from.

There’s also everyday bravery: the bravery of my parents, who raised thirteen children. My mother was so clear in her mind about what she wanted for her children—to get an education and go to college and be able to pursue life to the fullest. That takes bravery. She was born in 1911 and much of her life was in Jim Crow Oklahoma, but she never gave up. You have to call that bravery—not assuming that the world is always going to be against you.

If you want to call it bravery or courage, knowing that I’m telling the truth allowed me to be brave.

Matt Cooper is managing editor for *Oregon Quarterly*.

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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

Five Faculty Members on the Women Who Move Them

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



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How a Group of Visionaries Forged a Feminist Future

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

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SPRING 2024

Student’s Vibrant Vision for the Future Coming into Focus

All the puzzle pieces fit together perfectly for photographer, advertising major

By Ed Dorsch • Photo courtesy Annie Neal • Illustration by Ella White • May 20, 2024

3 min read



Annie Neal is on the UO dean’s list and a fast track to graduate. For the advertising major and entrepreneurship minor, it’s the latest step on a journey to success—thanks to guidance along the way.

“My support system has been so important,” Neal says. “There was always someone or something reminding me of where I want to be and how I was going to get there.”

She’s followed a path of success, from valedictorian at Portland’s McDaniel High School, to the UO, the School of Journalism and Communication, then photographer, creative director, and

content creator.

Neal already does marketing communications for several organizations. She hopes to ramp up the freelance work as soon as she finds the time and eventually start a creative agency.

She credits a mosaic of mentors for keeping her on the straight and narrow.

Those interconnected pieces—her puzzle for success—included dance, her mom, and a nonprofit that helps students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. At the UO, Neal found more support: Teachers, advisers, the Black Alumni Network, and the Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence to name a few.

Along with other Ducks who are soaring high, Annie Neal is featured in [Wings of Achievement](#), a campaign that highlights students supported by UO programs and scholarships on their paths to success

Neal plans to complete her degree just three years after enrolling. All the pieces are in place for commencement next June—no surprise for a student who’s always been future focused.

At age five, Neal started with Portland studio Body & Soul Creative Dance, dedicating hours rehearsing, competing, and eventually teaching younger students. Balancing school with dance taught her responsibility, accountability, and discipline, she says.

Also, in her corner there was always mom: strict but nurturing. A single parent, Amy Mitchell attended night school to become a medical assistant.

“Mom inspired me. She taught me that I can do whatever I want with my life.”

Annie also credits stepdad Doug Ashley for “intense support” and adds he’s a major Ducks fan.

In the fifth grade, Neal joined Advancement Via Individual Determination, a student success system developed by a global nonprofit. McDaniel was the first school in Oregon to offer the program.

The advisers helped Neal apply to more than ten colleges and universities. But she chose the UO because of the financial assistance.

Neal received diversity excellence and summit scholarships, Arlyn E. Cole and Ann Maxwell scholarships from the School of Journalism and Communication, and other awards.

She also received the PathwayOregon promise. In addition to guaranteeing tuition is covered, PathwayOregon offers advising, tutoring, and student activities.

“Annie is destined for great things,” says PathwayOregon adviser Melissa Bentley. “She’s had to work hard to get where she is, but she’s also been good at identifying supports, mentors, and communities.”

Bentley says students like Neal often need the most help with what she calls the hidden curriculum of university life—obstacles such as financial aid forms, academic requirements, and finding resources. Crucial pieces of the puzzle.

During her first year at the UO, Neal also reached out to Ericka Warren, BA '92 (Asian Studies), MBA '19, president of the Black Alumni Network. Neal says she'll never forget her simple, powerful advice: get involved. Neal joined the network and now volunteers on its board. Another crucial piece.

Last summer, for the university’s Portland Internship Experience Neal worked on design, branding, and social media for GladRags. The Portland business sells zero waste wellness products and offered Neal a part-time job after the internship ended.

“Having that validation, knowing my work is valuable enough to keep me on, made me realize I can do that with other brands,” Neal says. More pieces fitting together.

She also does photography and social media work with Nurturely, a nonprofit committed to perinatal equity. And she’s taking photos for a Eugene yoga studio.

For Neal, the creative work is inspiring. Helping great organizations makes it even better.

She hopes to someday help others piece their futures together, drawing from her own experiences. Because crime, gangs, and violence were part of daily life in her neighborhood while growing up, she says, but not her life.

“My ultimate goal is to support scholarships and provide mentorship to Black creatives,” she says.

“I know how important both of those were to me, in terms of going to college and being able to fulfill my dreams. I want to provide that space for others when I have the opportunity.”

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

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

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Sexism and the Woman Journalist

Q & A with former *New Yorker* editor Tina



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Sundance Lessons: Filmmaker Masami Kawai Rises



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New Master’s Meets the Demand for Virtual Virtuosos

Brown, who visits in February for the Center for the Study of Women in Society’s fiftieth anniversary

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SPRING 2024

Spinning Stories of Climate Change and a Fragile Planet

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

By Sharleen Nelson • March 27, 2024

4 min read



Food insecurity, carbon footprints, environmental justice, global warming: wide-ranging and complex issues of climate change are in the headlines every day, generating passionate debate but few solutions.

Author Ross West, MFA ’84 (creative writing), tackles these complicated topics through the lens of literature in [The Fragile Blue Dot: Stories from Our Imperiled Biosphere](#), a climate fiction book that hits bookstores on Earth Day, April 22.



Photo: Sharleen Nelson, BS '06 (journalism: magazine, news editorial)

“One of the functions of fiction, and the arts in general, is to address the pressing issues of the time,” West says. “The readers who I imagine will be most interested in this book are among the millions of people worried about the livability of their planet, the world they will leave to future generations, and living in an era plagued with fears concerning our very survival.”

West worked for University of Oregon communications from 1995 to 2014 as a science writer and later managing editor of *Oregon Quarterly*. He wrote “Smoke, Fire, Ashes”, the first story for *Fragile Blue Dot*, in 2019:

... I pull the covers over my head and roll up into a ball, small as I can be. I start to shake and squeeze my arms tight against my chest and try not to

think about anything and remember that right before I woke up I was dreaming. There was a big horrible forest fire, roaring into a town like that one in California, Paradise. Everybody running and screaming, driving their cars all crazy trying to escape. Smoke and fire and ashes. Every building burning until there wasn't a single thing left. Stupid greedy adults. Greta blames them, says they're the ones who wrecked everything and it's us kids who are gonna pay. You stole our childhood and you stole our future. How dare you. We'll never forgive you. I will never ever ever forgive you.

“I knew [climate change] was an issue of our time and saw that it would likely continue to be one for years to come,” West says. “But it didn’t occur to me until after I’d written a couple of them that it was a theme that I wanted to explore. Since then, concerns about climate change have only intensified.”

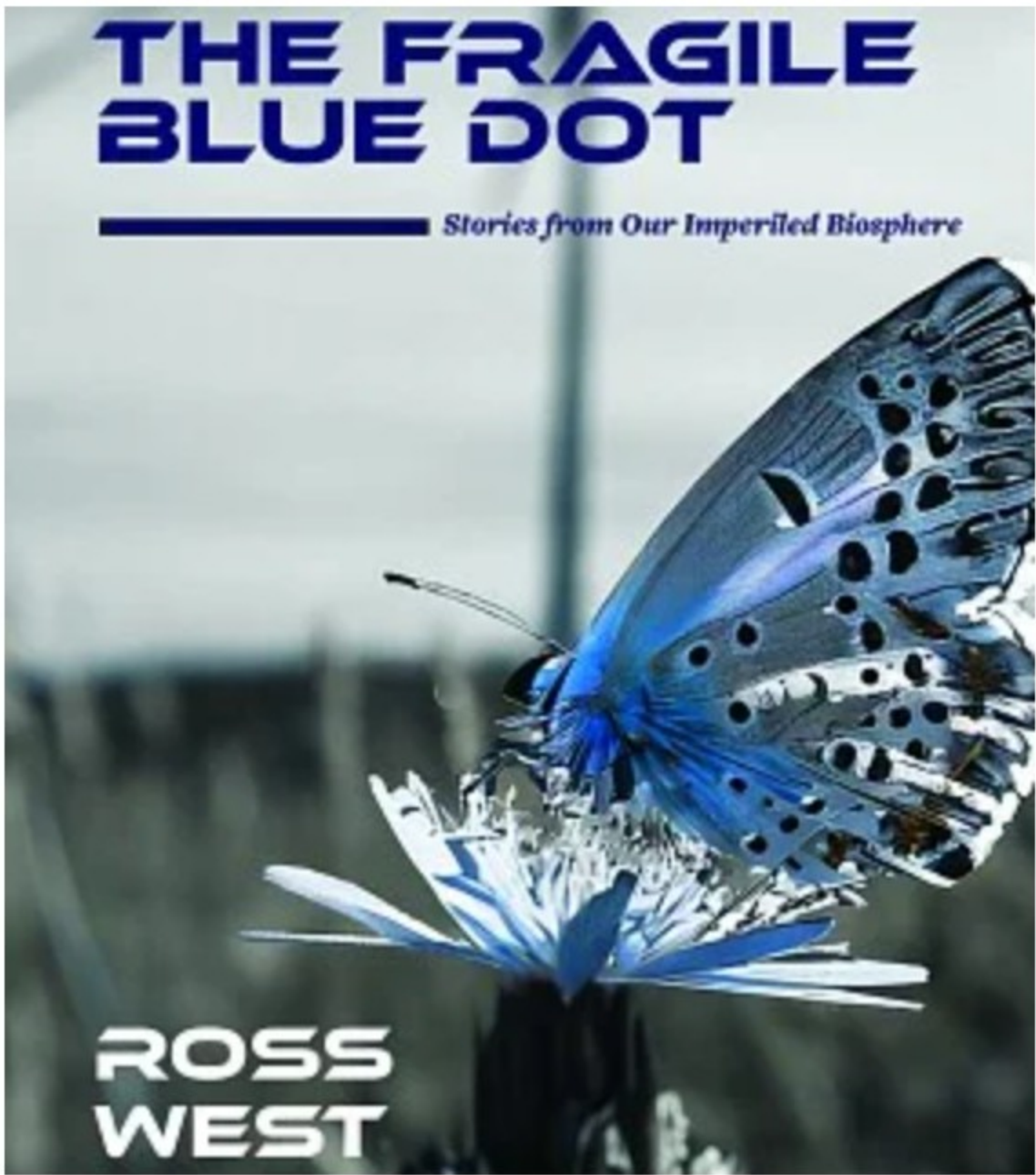
Fifteen award-winning, timely, and thought-provoking stories of subtle change and colossal catastrophe raise complicated questions while exploring how the problem affects everyone—from industries and workers to families and endangered species—in big and small ways.

Characters struggle with the complexities of lives contorted by climate change.

“It occurred to me that we were living in the age of climate change and that was going to affect all of our lives in innumerable ways,” West says. “Even as people work to inform themselves about the facts and science of climate change, they are also hungry for fictional explorations of its manifold subtleties and implications in today’s world as well as possible worlds they may soon be facing.”

Stories in *Fragile Blue Dot* include:

- A high school boy embraces a radical eco-ideology and resorts to violence after a climate-caused forest fire burns down his home and town.



- A glaciologist’s burgeoning career threatens to tear her marriage apart while the couple paddles kayaks amid calving Alaskan glaciers.
- An engineer building a solar power generation facility discovers that clean energy production will eradicate an endangered species of butterfly.
- The manufactured paradise in “Cowabunga Sunset” crumbles under the strict rules of the bureaucrats at the Office of Cultural and Historical Disambiguation.
- An ambitious young journalist uncovers the duplicity of a climate change crusader and must choose between supporting a laudable cause and furthering her career.
- Divorced parents with shared custody of a teenage daughter grapple with the girl’s obsession with becoming the American version of Greta Thunberg, a Swedish environmental activist.
- A United Nations administrator considers the ultimate form of protest after failing to convince world leaders to incorporate population reduction measures into a global climate change treaty.

While the stories offer no quick fixes or easy solutions, West says they will leave readers with food for thought.

“Responding to climate change is very complicated. Looking into the future and trying to see where we’re headed is difficult,” he adds. “These stories are more aimed at exploring how there aren’t simple answers—one size doesn’t fit all. There’s no three-point plan that will fix everything.”

Sharleen Nelson, BS ’06 (journalism: magazine, news editorial), is publisher/owner of a book publishing company and a former editor and staff writer for University Communications.

West will host a [book](#) reading and signing at 7:00 p.m., April 25, in the Colonial Inn room of the Veterans Memorial Building, 1626 Willamette Street, Eugene.

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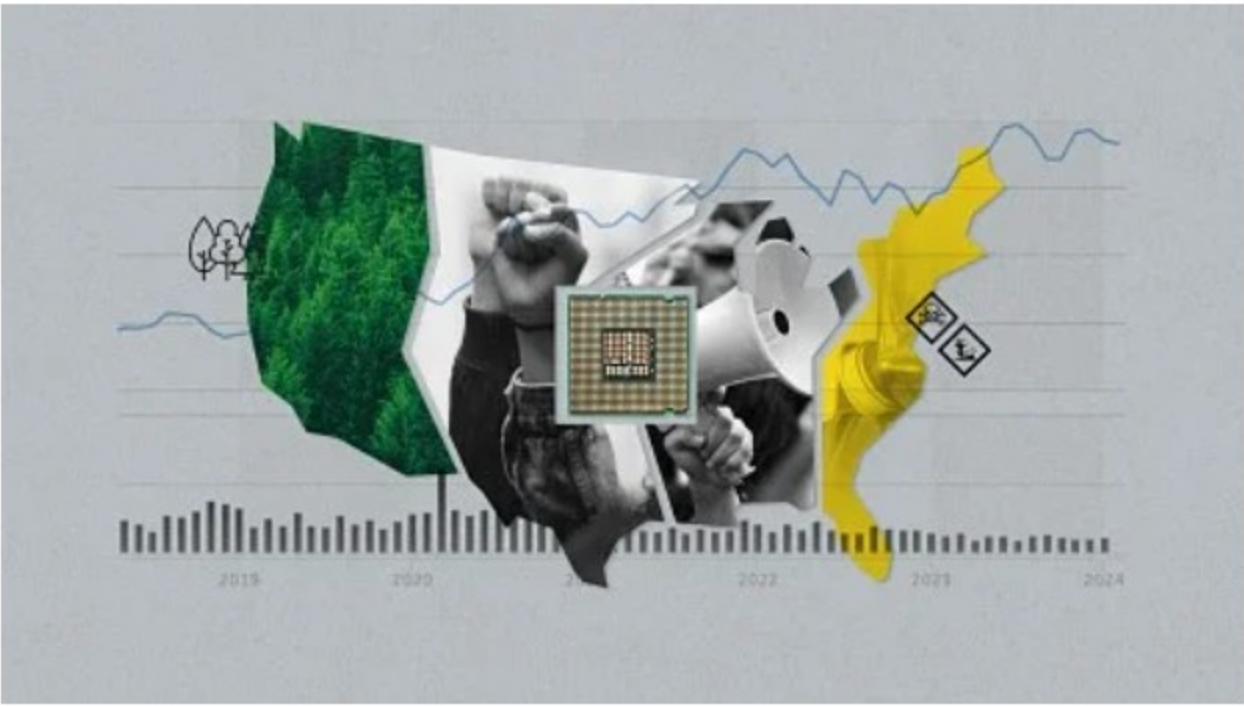
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The past holds lessons regarding workplace conditions, labor rights, and



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

the environment

dorm—still resonates today

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SPRING 2024

Composer Updates a Bach Classic for Festival’s ‘New Transcriptions’ Project

Damien Geter infuses his works with musical styles of the Black diaspora; his Oregon Bach Festival premiere is July 11

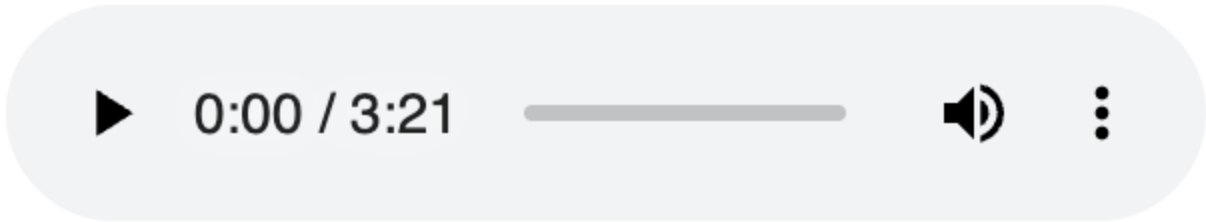
By Kristen Hudgins • Photo by Jana Simmons • May 22, 2024

5 min read



It’s quiet in composer Damien Geter’s Chicago loft, save for the tinkering on two sets of keys: those of his piano and computer. Notes fly from the piano as he plays Bach’s dramatic and expressive “Prelude and Fugue No. 2 in C Minor.”

At first the piece sounds repetitive, the same several notes over and over. But with closer listening, variations emerge in a complex, woven fabric:



Bach’s “Prelude and Fugue No. 2 in C Minor” performed by Angela Hewitt at the 2023 Oregon Bach Festival

The piece is part of Bach’s *The Well-Tempered Clavier* from the 1720s, a famous collection of compositions in all twenty-four major and minor keys, considered one of the most demanding tests of a musician’s skill. The monumental task before Geter is to transform Bach’s original “Prelude and Fugue,” written for a single keyboard, into a version for an orchestra of seventy musicians at the [2024 Oregon Bach Festival](#) in July.

Geter, a celebrated composer whose works have been performed across the country, including the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, sees the journey not as daunting, but delightful.

“I already have Bach’s keyboard music here in front of me,” Geter says. “My job is to make it my own, which is really, really fun.”

As he rearranges the piece, he focuses on its inherent energy. “There’s a driving pulse to it,” he says. “The propulsion of the music is such that it makes you tap your foot. It makes you listen to it and lean into it in a different way. It honestly reminds me of jazz.”

The jazz-like propulsion is precisely what Geter intends to infuse into his reimagining of the three-minute work, expanding it into a nine-minute opus titled “Prelude and Fugue (*and Riffs, too*).”

Geter’s rendition inaugurates the festival’s New Transcriptions Project: composers from underrepresented communities are commissioned to reimagine Bach for the festival’s Modern Orchestra, introducing today’s audiences to the musical genius of the eighteenth-century composer.

Typically, Bach compositions are reserved for the festival’s Period Orchestra, which transports listeners to the historic eras of Bach and other composers by playing replica instruments in a manner authentic to the time. The Modern Orchestra, by comparison, uses today’s instruments and styles.

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—Damien Geter

The fusion of historical composition and contemporary interpretation presents an opportunity for the Modern Orchestra to perform Bach’s music.

“As a festival dedicated to celebrating Bach’s enduring legacy, it is imperative that we continually explore fresh avenues for both musicians and audiences to experience these timeless masterpieces,” says James Boyd, director of programming. “The color palette of our Modern Orchestra presents options for an expanded sound world that Bach didn’t have at his disposal.”

Geter is known for mixing classical music and styles from the Black diaspora, such as jazz, gospel, and rhythm and blues. His compositions span classical music genres, including chamber, orchestral, and vocal works, and full-scale operas. He is also highly regarded as a bass-baritone vocalist. Geter is currently composer-in-residence at the Richmond Symphony in Virginia, artistic

advisor for Resonance Ensemble, a professional vocal ensemble, and interim music director at Portland Opera.

He’s confident his Bach interpretation will resonate with both seasoned classical music aficionados and newcomers. “I want people to walk out of the concert hall after listening to my arrangement and say, ‘Hey, that was cool! I like that!’” Geter says. “For those familiar with the work, I want them to say, ‘That was a different way for me to hear that piece, and I really liked it!’”

Geter’s “Prelude and Fugue (and Riffs, too)” will be performed by the Oregon Bach Festival Modern Orchestra July 11 at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts in Eugene. The full program, [Organ Symphony](#), also features Symphony No. 3 by French composer Camille Saint Saëns and the west coast premiere of a new organ concerto by American composer Lowell Liebermann, to be performed by Grammy-Award winning organist Paul Jacobs. Visit [OregonBachFestival.org](#) to purchase tickets.

Kristen Hudgins is a public relations specialist in the [School of Music and Dance](#).

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