

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



### Investing in the Long Run

Earning a college degree is much like training for a marathon. It requires dedication, hard work and perseverance in the face of inevitable obstacles – obstacles of competing priorities. Obstacles that might leave oneself feeling alone or like an imposter. Obstacles that make many wonder if the long hours, the energy exerted and the time away from family and friends is worth it. And I am here to say that it is.

The same feelings of triumph and accomplishment that come with crossing the finish line ring true for every student as they cross the graduation stage. Just as a marathoner draws strength from their family and friends along the way, our students thrive off the support they receive from you, our Bronco community.

It is that community of care and support that prompted Money Magazine

to recognize Cal Poly Pomona as one of the “Best Colleges in America 2023” based on quality of education, affordability and student outcomes.

As you will read in this special philanthropy edition of CPP Magazine, there are so many people and programs that empower our students to reach their full potential and get **A Running Start** toward a lifetime of success. It is this support that continues to help them overcome obstacles, stay motivated in the face of challenges and ultimately achieve their goals.

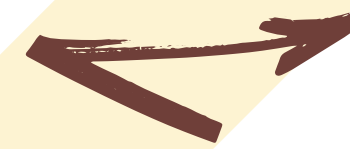
To all our donors and supporters: **Thank You.** Your continued support makes a real difference in the lives of our students, empowering them to thrive in their careers and communities as leaders, innovators and problem solvers.

Together, we can ensure that our graduates not only cross the finish line but continue to run toward success for years to come.

Sincerely,

**Soraya M. Coley, Ph.D.**  
President

# A RUNNING START



**GAL POLY POMONA  
COMMUNITY AND RESOURCES  
HELP STUDENTS GET  
CAREER READY**

BY MELANIE JOHNSON

The best time to find a job after college is when you start college.

**Cherrie Peters**, lead career coach in the **Career Center**, sees it all the time. Students who put off applying for internships or looking for a job until their final year of college often struggle to find a position. They often play catch-up in researching prospective employers, getting interview-ready, and preparing their cover letters and resumes.

It can take up to eight months to find a position, so it is wise to be proactive, Peters says.

“Students should start the process their first day on campus,” she says. “Career planning really is a process – a process of elimination, getting to know what they value and what is important to them. It’s about making themselves career ready. Students know themselves best, so they have to create career readiness for themselves first.”

For many, the prospect of homing in on a career and figuring out how to find an internship or a mentor in their chosen field can be daunting, but Cal Poly Pomona provides a supportive network and resources to help students find their passions, apply their education and skills, and pursue their dreams.

Scholarships, stipends for experiential learning, micro-internships, alumni mentors, the Career Center – all these programs, resources and more help connect Broncos to new possibilities.



## CAREER PREP

**Christopher Keung** knows the career route he wants to take.

Charting his course is all about research and preparation. The finance, real estate and law senior recently began to focus on life after graduation with a visit to the Career Center, meeting with Peters. It was something the San Dimas resident wished he had done even earlier.

"The whole process of talking to her was very exciting," he says. "I really want to start looking for jobs. I found out about all of the resources that we have for looking for jobs and internships. I had no idea those resources even existed."

Besides counseling, the center offers workshops on career readiness, connects students to alumni in the industry of their interest, hosts career fairs and dozens of networking events, and provides students with online tools to find a job or internship. The center recently launched a Virtual Career Center, putting job searching, appointment scheduling with a career counselor and other resources at students' fingertips.

As a result of his efforts, Keung completed an eight-month internship earlier this year at the accounting firm **Clifton Larson Allen**.

"It's almost a must. It's so important," he says. "Although my internship was in accounting and not in the field I am interested in, just having a background in some kind of professional setting is important. It's also about networking. I met some great people at the company."

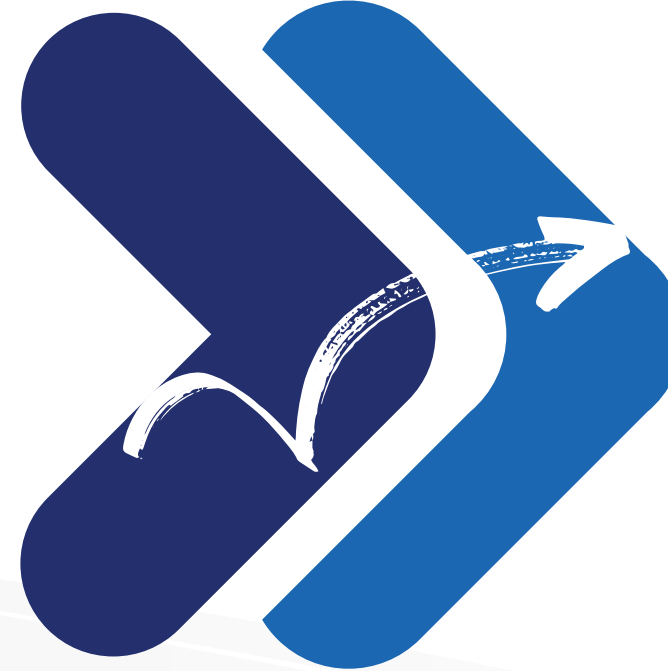
Most students know about the Career Center and the important role it plays in helping them figure out next steps after their diplomas are earned, but many put off utilizing the center's services.

Planning for the future may seem daunting and scary, but Keung says it's worth taking the initiative.

"Sometimes you don't always know exactly what you want to do, and it's a lot of pressure. What's going to help is doing research and understanding your industry."



Cherrie Peters



Alumni mentors meet with students to discuss career pathways and preparing for the job market.



## MENTORSHIP

The event is like speed dating. Only instead of students looking for potential mates, they are in search of career advice and job opportunities.

The **Cal Poly Pomona Alumni Association** regularly hosts career events to connect students and alumni. At each table, five or six students talk with one mentor for a round of personal and professional questions. It's an opportunity for career exploration and advice.

**Tiffany Smith** ('12, finance, real estate and law), a subcontract manager at **NASA JPL** and an Alumni Association board member, participated in a recent speed mentoring event.

"The students were very eager and prepared," says Smith, who has also attended virtual events to coach students in interviewing and resume preparation. "They asked good questions. They wanted to know how I got into my career, how long it took me to get to where I am now and what I do on a daily basis."

Many of the students who participate in the events have internships, so they are already learning to juggle their various responsibilities and find work-life balance, Smith says, adding that she enjoys helping students become successful in a full-time position.

"I just want to do for students what I wish someone had done for me when I was a student," she says. "As they take these big leaps into their careers, they need that guidance. I enjoy being a mentor and giving back."

**Renita Bess**, a fellow Alumni Association board member, also enjoys working with students to help them discover and tap into their talents.

One tool that Cal Poly Pomona encourages incoming students to use is **CliftonStrengths**, an online assessment that helps individuals identify their innate talents.

All Alumni Association board members have taken the CliftonStrengths assessment, so when they engage with students as mentors, they can have a conversation about it, says Bess ('94, accounting), CEO and president of the **Southland Data Processing** payroll company.

Other universities, including UC San Diego and Kansas State, have implemented CliftonStrengths with students and have had success, she adds.

The assessment reveals an individual's top five natural patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving and how they can be developed into strengths. The 34 CliftonStrengths themes provide insight on how those strengths can be utilized in a professional setting, such as relationship building, strategic thinking, executing or influencing.

"When we mentor our CPP students, they often want an internship, but they say, 'I don't really have experience,'" Bess says. "The assessment brings out what you're naturally good or strong at. By asking the students questions about a class project and their role, we can help them identify how their top five strengths played a part in how they approach the team, their tasks and life."

"It's about how students can communicate with future employers about what makes them good prospective employees. Having conversations around their strengths is a great start to thinking about what makes them great individuals."

Post pandemic, many students are having a hard time using their voice, which makes advocating for themselves more difficult, Bess says, adding that CliftonStrengths can help them show up more self-assured.

"I think our students are amazing," she says. "I wish I could infuse them with energy and confidence. I believe it is within them. It just takes practice."

## HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

For financially strapped students already working jobs around their class schedule, a traditional 10-week internship might not be feasible. The **Office of Academic Innovation** recently came up with a solution designed to make internship opportunities more accessible and tenable, securing a \$1.7 million grant to fund its **Community Partnership for Student Success** micro-internship project.

The **Michael & Susan Dell Foundation** and the **California Community Foundation (Los Angeles Scholars Investment Fund)** partnered with Cal Poly Pomona to offer micro-internships. Community nonprofits and public service organizations will work with the campus to provide the micro-internship opportunities, while faculty teaching related courses can make the micro-internship experience a course requirement. Students receive academic credit and are paid for their work. The short-term projects will be the

equivalent of 40 to 60 hours of remote or onsite work assignments.

The plan is to provide 500 students with micro-internships in this first year. Next year, the number doubles to 1,000 and goes to 1,500 in year three. More than 100 students are undertaking micro-internships in fall 2023, with 400 available slots set for spring 2024.

"It is a four- to eight-week project. They're doing something meaningful for a nonprofit organization or school. It's not just busy work," says **Olukemi Sawyerr**, associate vice president for Academic Innovation.

Research shows that students who have at least one internship are more successful academically, and 77 percent of internship hosts hire their interns for permanent jobs, according to Sawyerr.

These community partnerships aren't new to the university. The long-running **Ernest Prete Jr. Fellowship** program provides opportunities for students to get hands-on learning experience and earn money.

Undergraduates in STEM, liberal studies and education students, as well as STEM graduate students apply for a paid fellowship. They dedicate 10 hours a week, including at least six hours at Kellogg Polytechnic Elementary School in Pomona to teach science and math lessons in an existing urban gardening program. The fellows receive an annual stipend of \$5,000, which also requires them to attend workshops and mentor meetings.

The **Ernest Prete Jr. Foundation** funds the fellowships. **Mohammad Virani**, the foundation president who co-founded the Encino-based nonprofit with the late **Ernest Prete** says that the organization's connection with Cal Poly Pomona goes back to the early 1990s. At that time, the foundation was looking at various universities to fund science and education programs.

Cal Poly Pomona gets things done and keeps the foundation well informed about how its philanthropic gifts are making an impact on students and the community, Virani says. He enjoys visiting the elementary school to see the fellows in action.

"The children have so much connection to these college students. They really look up to them," he says. "For the fellows, they get paid for their time and it is good experience for them. If somebody wants to be a teacher, this is the line for them to get in."

Besides the fellowships, the foundation has given to the university in other ways, says **Bill Burrows**, director of development for the College of Science. The organization recently gifted \$30,000 in scholarships for geology and biology students. Over the years, the foundation also has donated to scholarships, provided completion funding for **Project Blue**, and supported the **Rain Bird BioTrek** and **Mesozoic Garden** outdoor education facilities.

Prete fellows help teach science lessons through an elementary school urban garden.



## PAYING IT FORWARD

**Mike Beckage** ('87, engineering technology) knows what it is like to be a college student working to put himself through school. He was a first-generation college student. His wife, **Bridget**, didn't come from money either and struggled to pay for tuition, fees, books and other expenses.

Those early struggles were motivation for the couple to establish scholarships to help students make it.

"Our parents were great parents, but they didn't have the resources to pay for university," says Beckage, one of the founders of the Seal Beach engineering firm **DTS (Diversified Technical Systems)**. "So, we were really moved by the fact that there are students out there who have a hard row to hoe financially."

In spring 2021, the couple gifted the university \$70,000 to establish an endowment and award four \$5,000 scholarships to engineering students, specifically targeting women and students from underrepresented communities. Of the total given, \$50,000 went to set up the endowment and \$20,000 was used for the scholarships, two for **Women in Science and Engineering** and two for the College of Engineering.

This year, the couple has expanded their philanthropic support to help aspiring teachers.

Beckage came up with the idea while walking through the Phoenix airport on a business trip in 2022. He called **John Huynh**, a director of development for the College of Engineering who had been involved in **Partners in Education (PIE)**. PIE is an organization on campus that awards scholarships to student teachers annually. Beckage's wife is a former elementary school teacher, and Mike wanted to honor her by giving to an area that means a great deal to her.

The couple's gift established a \$300,000 endowment and provided an additional \$33,000 to help fund fellowships – 22 total, \$4,000 each – that were awarded in spring 2023.

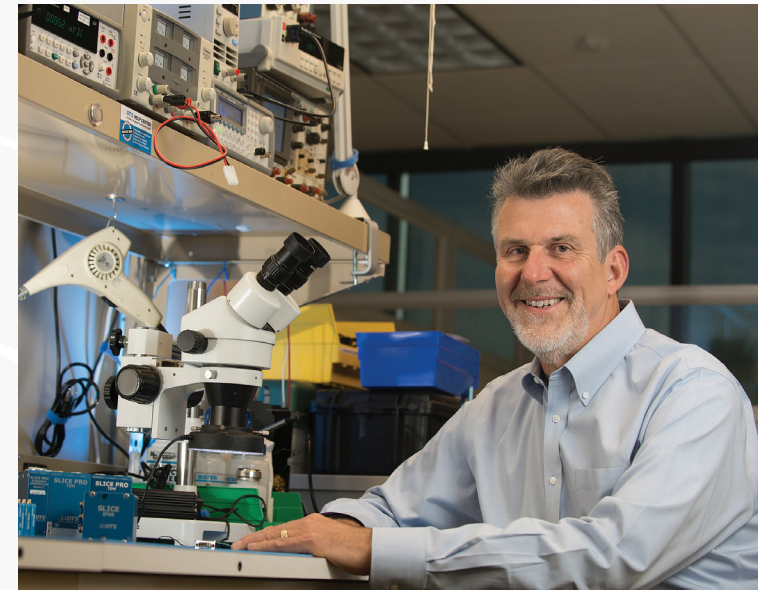
"The No. 1 thing I encourage people to do is to donate and help students get an education. If you wind up in a place in life where you can afford to help students when they are struggling and on the edge financially, there is nothing more rewarding in life," Beckage says. "CPP is about connecting the people who give and scholars who have so much potential. It is really rewarding to be able to help someone."

The support of corporate and foundation partners also is key to providing the scholarships and other campus resources students need to succeed.

The **U.S. Bank Foundation** provided a \$150,000 multiyear grant to the Cal Poly Pomona Philanthropic Foundation to support the university's most vulnerable students. This year, the campus received the first \$50,000, which will help the **Renaissance Scholars** program for foster youth and the new **CARE Center**, a starting place for students struggling with basic needs, says **Sam Moore**, director of development for Student Affairs.

"U.S. Bank has been great supporters of the Renaissance Scholars program for several years," Moore says. "U.S. Bank has sent volunteers to come talk to students about financial management, resumes and negotiating skills. They are funding seminars around financial literacy and support peer mentoring programs."

Through scholarships and endowments, alumnus Mike Beckage and his wife support future engineers and teachers, as well as students from underserved communities.



Rossina Gallegos, community affairs manager at U.S. Bank, is proud of the relationship between U.S. Bank and Cal Poly Pomona, which the multiyear grant reinforces.

"The statistics show that only 4 percent of foster youth attain a college degree. We know that the Renaissance Scholars program changes lives and provides students with the tools and resources to be successful," Gallegos says. "We are humbled to play a part in the success of these students."

U.S. Bank currently works with 38 campuses across more than two dozen states to develop financial literacy programs. The bank is exploring ways to bring those activities to CPP as well.

The aim is to make sure that students have all the tools and resources they need to thrive before they graduate, says Sandy Porter, who oversees the company's financial literacy programs in California.

"We want to give them all of the information they need in order to make wise financial decisions," Porter says. "They learn to view money differently through financial education. We are equipping students with how does a loan work and how do credit cards work. Financial literacy is an important tool."

Everyone in the Bronco family – from staff to faculty to donors to alumni – wants to see students succeed and thrive. The many resources, mentors, scholarships and other forms of support are in place to help students get a running start in life.

– Anais Hernandez contributed to this story.



Kinesiology student and intern Alexia Montantes works with a child at CPP's Motor Development Clinic.



*"THE SCHOLARSHIPS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT CPP HAVE ALLOWED ME TO AFFORD HOUSING, PAY FOR MY BOOKS AND CONTINUE MY SCHOOLING WITHOUT HAVING TO WORRY ABOUT FINANCIAL NEEDS."*

## SCHOLARSHIPS HELP STAR ATHLETE BALANCE SCHOOL AND COMPETITION

For alumna and graduate student Ayana Fields, 2022-23 CCAA Female Athlete of the Year, coming to Cal Poly Pomona was an easy decision.

After a short tour from the track and field coach, Fields instantly felt a connection to the campus. What proved to be more challenging was figuring out how she would balance her kinesiology coursework while being a premier track and field athlete.

Luckily, Fields' support group came naturally – she credits the kinesiology department, her coaches, and her teammates for giving her a sense of belonging – a feeling that has since become her favorite part of campus. From the fundraisers that back athletic programs to the accommodating professors who understand student-athlete responsibilities, every department has helped Fields flourish.

Fields cites the wide range of scholarships available as a key reason why she can give it her all on the track and in the classroom. As a result, she is a 12-time NCAA Division II All-American, likely the most titles earned by an individual athlete in school history.

"The scholarships and resources available at CPP have allowed me to afford housing, pay for my books and continue my schooling without having to worry about financial needs," says Fields, who earned her bachelor's degree in kinesiology in 2022. "I know some students struggle with that and not having to worry allowed me to focus on my academics while competing at the level I am at today."

Now Fields is a master's student at Cal Poly Pomona, studying physical therapy. She plans to continue training to compete at the Olympic level while completing her master's thesis on athletic identity associated with career transitioning, career retirement and student athletes.

– Dylan Luong



**"CAL POLY POMONA IS THE ONLY SCHOOL THAT TOOK THE TIME TO MEET ME. DR. RICKEY BADUA AND DR. DAVE KOPPLIN REACHED OUT AND GAVE ME THE CONTACT INFORMATION OF CURRENT STUDENTS TO HEAR ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES. THERE ARE NOT A LOT OF UNIVERSITIES THAT CARE THAT MUCH."**



## MUSIC STUDENT FINDS OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT AT CAL POLY POMONA

Music has been a lifelong love for **Christian Solis**. Growing up in Costa Rica, Solis attended school at the Instituto Nacional de la Música (the National Institute of Music) and began playing the clarinet at age 10.

When it came time for college, a professor recommended he apply to universities in the United States for more professional opportunities.

Cal Poly Pomona stood out to Solis for its culture of care.

"Cal Poly Pomona is the only school that took the time to meet me," he says. "Dr. Rickey Badua and Dr. Dave Kopplin reached out and gave me the contact information of current students to hear about their experiences. There are not a lot of universities that care that much."

At CPP, he's performed as the principal clarinetist in the National Intercollegiate Band with top college musicians from

around the nation, but the highlight of his college experience has been the students, faculty and staff on campus.

"I feel supported everywhere. I have a place here," he says.

Solis serves as a resident advisor, band manager, usher and stage manager to fund his education and support that of his sisters, who are also studying musical performance at different universities.

Solis is double majoring in music performance and music composition. He aspires to pursue a master's degree, play clarinet professionally and compose music for film and television.

— Allison Cook

