CAL POLY SAN LUIS OBISPO'S NEWS SOURCE MUSTANG NEWS INSIDE THE STATE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AT CAL POLY

PG.3: THE BEGINNING OF A THREE-PART INVESTIGATIVE SERIES INTO SEXUAL ASSAULT AT CAL POLY — MORE THAN 10 YEARS AFTER LEADERS CALLED FOR CHANGE.

2023

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'IT'S COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS': Cal poly has among the highest reports of Sexual Assault across the CSU system

BY ELIZABETH WILSON

It was May 2011. Three rapes on or near campus had been reported in the span of just nine days. The university responded in condemnation, President Jeffrey Armstrong launching a task force to reevaluate how campus organizations responded to issues of sexual assault and alcohol abuse.

Community leaders were called upon "to examine how we can create a culture that does not tolerate sexual assault, that never blames the victims of sexual assault," Armstrong wrote.

A presidential task force released its recommendations on Feb. 12, 2012, calling for increased support, resources, communication and services for sexual violence prevention and education. Some recommendations called for safe rides, a campus safety application, informational resource cards and increased funding for Safer, Cal Poly's confidential resource for sexual violence. Still, in 2021, Cal Poly had the

Still, in 2021, Cal Poly had the highest reports of sexual assault in the Cal State University system and the second highest for the previous two years — and that's only of the assaults that were reported.

More than a decade after the task force's recommendations, students interviewed by Mustang News feel unaware of what resources the university has, find prevention training methods outdated and say their perpetrators are not being held accountable. These feelings are not met without efforts the university has made to increase awareness around sexual violence and how to prevent it.

According to Cal Poly Clery Director and Title IX Coordinator Maren Hufton, who helps lead the university's efforts for tracking and responding to sexual assault reports, more reports are a sign of progress since sex-related crimes often go unreported.

"As our society and our culture migrates to more of a place of wanting to shine a light on these issues and bring sex and gender based violence into the conversation, we're going to hear about it more and

more," Hufton said. "It's coming out of the shadows."

CAL POLY'S SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORTS WERE ABOVE CSU AVERAGE IN 2021

sex-re-

Cal Poly had 67 lated crimes in 2021, according to Cal Poly's Annual S e c u r i t y Report. CSU campuses on average saw only about 17 reports. In 2021, there were 402 reports of sex-related crimes across the CSU.

The reports of sex-related crimes included fondling, sexual assault, rape, statutory rape, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking, including both on and off campus incidents.

Of all Cal Poly crime reports in 2021, most were stalking, followed by fondling and rape. There were 26 reports of stalking and 16 reports of rape in 2021. Fondling reports have tripled in the past three reporting years, with five reports in 2019, six reports in 2020 and 18 reports in 2021. As of March 2023, reports for the 2021 to 2022 year have not been released. The number of reports are more reflective of incidents, Hufton said. University spokesperson Matt Lazier said that Cal Poly has the largest s t u d e n t body and refined programs for prevention meaning that there are more reports made overall.

CAMPUS CLIMATE CHANGES IN THE PAST DECADE

For women and queer gender studies professor Rachel Fernflores, she found it "weird" coming to Cal Poly 22 years ago, where multiple rape cases were part of the university's recent history.

Fernflores was in charge of the task force and submitted the report to Armstrong around November 2011. Three to four years later, the university completed all of the suggestions, Fernflores said.

Since then, Cal Poly has increased staff and funding for Safer, launched a safety app, The Mustang Shuttle service and updated plans each year to improve safety overall. Some recommendations have been implemented gradually, including the Rave Guardian app in 2021 which was launched nearly 10 years later.

Safer is the university's main resource for advocacy services and prevention facilitation on campus, and it's only growing. In 2015, \$203,409 was directed to Safer compared to \$517,232 in 2021, according to documents obtained by a records request. Although Fernflores feels "we're in a better place" compared to 20 years ago, she hopes the conversation around sexual violence continues at Cal Poly.

Fernflores hopes the university will "continue doing campus climate surveys to find out what students are experiencing" to keep up with developing resources applicable to Cal Poly's student body.

In Cal Poly's 2023 annual safety plan, the university proposed expanding advocacy services and presentations to improve "sexual violence awareness."

Not all students are aware of campus resources for sexual assault and prevention. In a Mustang News survey sent to a random sample with 762 responses, 68% of students said that they were not aware Cal Poly had a safety app, called Rave Guardian, prior to taking the survey. 97% of respondents said that they had not used the safety app.

Red handprints were painted across campus where an assault had occurred on campus. In the 2000s, the handprints were memorialized with pillars. Fernflores felt that the handprints were a healthy reminder of the campus history. But now, 78.9% of students say they haven't learned about the significance of the red handprints, according to the survey.

For campus safety, a majority of respondents ranked their concern for safety a two out of five. Of the respondents, the majority said they were first years, followed by third years. Over half identified as female. In the survey, 34.6% of respondents said they knew someone who had been sexually assaulted since fall quarter began.

In addition, only 14.8% reported a high understanding of how to report an assault.

HOW STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT CAMPUS SAFETY AND REPORTING THEIR ASSAULT

Physics senior Sudheendra Gamoji has found it difficult to reach out to the university for support — and challenging to do as he had experienced assault before. As a man, he said he feels there is stigma with men experiencing emotional or sexual abuse from women.

"To be perfectly honest, I feel uncomfortable using the term survivor or victim or anything like that," Gamoji said. "Because I feel like what happened to me is not as bad as what happened to other women."

Gamoji used an advocate service on campus, but did not find support through other university resources. He was warned by people he knew that this might be the case.

"I don't fully trust the Title IX Office here," Gamoji said. "I have friends who have tried to go through the legal action route and they just

Sexual Violence Statistics (2011-2021)



ended up getting re-traumatized with the whole Title IX process." Sudheendra Gamoji on a hillside

near the "P" where he would spend time thinking and watching the stars around midnight. Gamoji feels wary to label his experience anything based on stigma surrounding men who experience sexual assault. Credit: Annabelle Fagans | Mustang News on Jan. 25, 2023.

He wishes that the campus narrative around sexual assault was not one thing or another, since everyone is affected by the issue. Gamoji thinks that some awareness training enforced by the university "feels incredibly performative."

"There's always more you can do to prioritize survivors ... when you're not even doing the bare minimum," Gamoji said of the university.

In recent years, students have advocated for more safety services on campus. The Mustang Shuttle Rides were shortened due to the pandemic then reexpanded to both daytime and nighttime operations, following two rape reports in Fall 2021. One of those reports was unfounded, though students expressed concern for the lack of communication around the investigations, Mustang News previously reported. Upcoming changes in the next two years include increasing shuttle hours and locations, outlined in the 2023 safety plan.

Business administration senior Diana Suarez petitioned Cal Poly to re-implement the Mustang Shuttle service. Suarez said she was relieved when the service was brought to



ANNABELLE FAGANS | MUSTANG NEWS

Sudheendra Gamoji on a hillside near the "P" where he would spend time thinking and watching the stars around midnight. Gamoji feels wary to label his experience anything based on stigma surrounding men who experience sexual assault.

MUSTANG NEWS | TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2023

campus, though found it a little odd given she initially received a response that it was "impossible" to do so.

Suarez was a junior living off campus when she noticed that the shuttle had been taken away. In light of the two reports of rape that fall, this made her feel nervous.

Living off campus this year, Suarez had a class 4-6 p.m. and was concerned about walking back, until she saw her friends were in the same class as her and they could walk together.

Diana Suarez standing by the Mustang Shuttle stop by Kennedy Library on Feb. 26 2023. Credit: Elizabeth Wilson | Mustang News

Environmental management and protection sophomore Jordan Langley said that the Mustang Shuttle improved her feelings on campus safety. However, she said that some spots on campus are still



CLERY REPORTS FOR CSU CAMPUSES (2019 TO 2021)

REPORTS INCLUDE TOTAL NUMBERS EACH YEAR FOR RAPE, FONDLING, INCEST, STATUTORY, RAPE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, DATING VIOLENCE, AND STALKING



too dark for comfort.

During fall quarter, Langley had a core class from 6-9 p.m., where she and at least one other girl in the class would worry about walking home afterward.

"It's just kind of disheartening, you know?" Langley said.

Another student said they feel especially nervous after being stalked off campus. They asked to remain anonymous for their safety. They decided not to report to the university because, after past experience reporting to off campus police, the student wanted to avoid going through the process again.



I don't fully trust the Title IX Office here, I have friends who have tried to go through the legal action route and they just ended up getting re-traumatized with the whole Title IX process.

SUDHEENDRA GAMOJI

Physics senior

Students have historically rallied against sexual assault at Cal Poly, expressing frustration for how the university has responded to different allegations.

Assistant Director of Wellbeing Kara Samaniego, who oversees Safer, says the history of this issue on campus — and elsewhere — isn't lost on her. Samaniego was an undergraduate student at Cal Poly when the three rapes were reported in May 2011.

"If you're mad, join us with this, because this is a societal issue," Samaniego said. "This is something that every single person on our campus plays a role in deconstructing and envisioning a campus where this doesn't happen."

Following articles will look ahead at how students largely feel about campus climate regarding sexual assault prevention measures, and what changes community members hope to see in store for the university. Elizabeth Wilson volunteered at one Safer held event in April 2022, prior to starting this investigative series. She has no affiliation with Safer and has not volunteered for Safer since then.

For 10 months, Mustang News analyzed public records and interviewed more than 25 community members. The result: An investigative series providing an in-depth look at sexual assault at Cal Poly and the university's response to the issue.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO SEE THE FULL SERIES



'Position of Power' Employees say Campus Dining ignored several sexual harassment complaints against former executive chef

BY COLE PRESSLER

To former Campus Dining employee Bobbi Gibson, the staff's executive chef seemed "really nice and friendly" at first.

"I eventually realized he was being too friendly," said Gibson, who worked at Campus Dining as a student and after she graduated in 2018. "The first time I met him he was asking about my boyfriend, and I told him I didn't have one. At first, I thought it was an honest mistake, but he kept doing it."

Gibson ignored the "weird comments," brushing him off as "flirty." But Abrigo, now in his 40s, started making more overt comments to the then-25-year-old Gibson.

"One time I had dropped something, and I picked it up and he was like, 'Oh, do you want to drop that in front of me again?" Gibson said.

Gibson slowly stopped interacting with Abrigo just a few months after he started working. She didn't yet think she should file a complaint with Human Resources, though. "I didn't realize it was happening to other people, too," Gibson said. Gibson was one of five current and former Campus Dining employees who say former executive chef Rensford Abrigo made repeated inappropriate comments toward women and had a prohibited relationship with an 18-yearold employee. When employees filed complaints, they say Cal Poly Corporation (CPC) — which oversees Campus Dining — failed to respond. Abrigo worked at Campus

Dining for more than two years after the employees say they told HR about his behavior. He continues to work with CSU students as San Francisco State University's executive chef — a situation that employees say could potentially cause further harm. CPC repeatedly refused to release records of any sexual harassment and misconduct complaints filed by employees, writing to Mustang News that "there is little or no public interest in how the Corporation addresses claims of misconduct or even sexually-related misconduct regarding its Dining employees."

Jennifer Wharton, the CPC's human resources director who left the company in August, said in an email to Mustang News that, if there were a need for an employee to be disciplined, then the Corporation "addressed the complaint and took action."

"So what then is the public interest in second guessing how much discipline was issued — especially regarding an employee who no longer works for the Corporation?" Wharton wrote. In another email, Wharton wrote: "Your request does not concern public officials, or teachers of small children, or malfeasance of public funds, or an office of general public interest. Your request concerns employees who make and serve food. Why exactly is there a public interest in complaints against such employees? There is none."

An attorney representing CPC said in a Feb. 27 email that CPC does not deny the existence of complaints against Abrigo, but that Mustang News is "not entitled to any additional information."

Working at Campus Dining from April 2019 to Fall 2021, Abrigo oversaw roughly 40 students and fulltime employees day-to-day and took part in job interviews and hiring recommendations, according to CPC spokesperson Aaron Lambert. Campus Dining featured Abrigo

several times in their digital marketing and described him as a "huge asset" to the organization.

"

I didn't realize it was happening to other people, too.

BOBBI GIBSON

Campus dining employee

Mustang News sent eight emails to Abrigo's current work email (which was provided by San Francisco State Campus Dining) from October 2022 to February 2023, receiving no response. San Francisco State did not respond for comment. CPC's employee handbook says that the organization will inform any employee about the "action taken" based on their sexual harassment complaints. Employees who said they complained to HR claimed they were never informed of any discipline.

When Mustang News asked if CPC had investigated Abrigo's conduct, Lambert said they cannot discuss HR investigations.

"Cal Poly Corporation takes complaints of inappropriate conduct very seriously, and all such reports are responded to quickly and appropriately," Lambert wrote. "The Human Resources review process is robust and provides a fair and thorough investigation of all claims."

CPC denied Mustang News' request for documents with employee names redacted to shield their identities, arguing that California state code "expressly requires all employers to maintain a complaint process that is confidential." However, the single state code they cited explicitly says CPC can not "indicate that [an] investigation will be completely confidential."

On Feb. 6, CPC's new HR director Tiffany Kramlich said she'd send a "more detailed response" to the records requests. She later said she was not allowed to talk with Mustang News and referred to Aaron Lambert.

The CPC handbook urges employees to talk with their direct supervisors about sexual harassment complaints before approaching HR. Ashleigh Toscano, a former full-time Campus Dining supervisor, said this policy was ineffective.

"The directors were very into the chain of command," Toscano said. "I would have to take [a complaint] to my direct supervisor, and then they continue to run it up the line. So a lot of the time I wouldn't even hear if anything was done about it because by that time, it was too far away from me."

Former employee Jessica Johnson said former Campus Dining assistant director Greg Yeo verbally reprimanded her for going to HR with a complaint about her manager after she had already talked to Yeo and nothing had changed.

"Whatever you do, don't break the chain of command, or else you'll piss people off," Johnson said. "A lot of the people in charge of Campus Dining are men, and I feel like it's probably an ego thing."

California law requires Campus Dining to "[provide] a complaint mechanism that does not require an employee to complain directly to his or her immediate supervisor."

Leanne — a former Campus Dining employee who asked to be referred to by her middle name out of fear of legal retaliation from CPC — met Abrigo in Spring 2019 during his job interview when she was a 17-yearold assistant supervisor. She took a leave of absence in April 2019, returning in August as an 18-yearold. Then, she said Abrigo began making comments to her, such as, "I would marry you if I could."

"There were inappropriate conversations with a lot of people continuously, whether it be men towards women, women towards men," Leanne said. "There were inappropriate conversations all the time."

Your request concerns employees who make and serve food. Why exactly is there a public interest in complaints against such employees? There is none.

JENNIFER WHARTON

Former CPC HR Director

They soon exchanged phone numbers, and Abrigo started texting her.

Eventually, she said they began having sex "pretty much daily" in his office in the Building 19 Dining Facility, which closed for renovations in 2020.

"He had told me he was separated from his wife, this and that," Leanne said. "It got very personal — not conversations you'd have with coworkers generally."

Leanne started doing "tedious little tasks" for Abrigo like cleaning his "special pots and pans." She said she received perks in exchange such as getting to taste new food first.

"It was a, 'Hey, I'm in charge," Leanne said. "There's this dirty little secret between us and you should do this for me. I think there was a power trip sort of thing going on there."

Leanne said she felt trapped in the relationship.

"I couldn't say no to certain things," Leanne said. "It was like, 'Well, you're my boss. While this is going on, if I don't do something, obviously you have more power than me to start me losing my job.' I felt like it had to continue while I was working there."

Leanne said Abrigo often drank during work hours, storing bottles of wine and other alcohol in his office. "That was a perk of the job — that

I would get to go in there and drink with him," Leanne said.

Leanne said Abrigo would make comments to her about female workers' "physical appearances, things like, 'oh yeah, she has a great ass,'' and that some student employees would tell Leanne how Abrigo was "flirtatious and kind of bothersome." At a small get-together with at

Recard a small gereigener with at least four other coworkers in late September 2019, Leanne said she revealed the relationship while drunk, briefly showing at least three coworkers text messages between her and Abrigo.

She said her coworkers seemed "perturbed" about the relationship between Abrigo and Leanne.

"I think deep down within I knew that there was something wrong with it, which is probably why I said anything in the first place," Leanne said.

Soon after the get-together, Leanne became fearful of repercussions when word spread among her coworkers.

According to the CPC handbook, relationships are "forbidden" and employees who violate this rule "will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment."

In early November 2019, she quit her job.

"I was being groomed; I felt like I had to protect [Abrigo] instead of myself," Leanne said. "I felt like I would lose my job because obviously an executive chef is a hard position to fill. My position? Not hard to fill."

Shortly after she quit, three employees who attended the September get-together said they told Wharton, CPC's HR director at the time, about Abrigo and Leanne's relationship.

Leanne said no one from CPC ever contacted her to ask about the relationship.

In what she estimates was December 2019, Leanne said Abrigo "nonchalantly" texted her that he had received just a "write-up." Shortly after that, she ended their relationship and cut off communication with him, deleting Abrigo's contact information and texts.

"It was just really frustrating knowing that I had made a complete career change and ran away from my job and really he was the point of authority in that relationship, and he felt completely fine about his job and that no repercussions were going to come from it," Leanne said.

Leanne said she thought HR should have "appropriately taken" action to prevent Abrigo from working with students — like he does at San Francisco State — after learning about the relationship from other employees.

"It's just purely disgusting that he can get away with that and continue working in an environment with a bunch of vulnerable women," Leanne said. "There's more harm that could be done."

"I don't think I've necessarily

worked through it completely," she continued. "It seemed so silly to me before, but it messes with you."

Former employee Jessica Johnson met Abrigo the week he started working at Campus Dining. After a couple of months, she said he started making uncomfortable comments toward her.

"He made a comment multiple times about 'how do you not have 20 boyfriends' with a smile," Johnson said.

Toscano, the former supervisor (who is Johnson's friend), said Abrigo made similar comments to her. Toscano also said that on another occasion, she witnessed Abrigo comment on a female manager's butt in front of the manager. That manager refused to speak with Mustang News.

Johnson was close friends with Leanne and attended the September get-together. Johnson and Toscano both said they saw now-deleted texts between Leanne and Abrigo on Leanne's phone. Soon after that, Johnson said she told her manager in the 805 Kitchen about Abrigo's and Leanne's relationship.

The manager said she didn't remember that conversation with Johnson ever occurring and was adamant that she wouldn't "comment on rumors" when asked about Abrigo.



I couldn't say no to certain things.

LEANNE

Former Campus Dining employee

Former Campus Dining assistant director Greg Yeo said the manager approached him in his office and told him a "rumor" about a relationship Abrigo was having with an employee, but said the manager didn't tell him Leanne's name.

"I didn't really have any hard facts or anything," Yeo said. "We, the management, just never dealt with gossip. I said if you hear of the employee's name, tell them to reach out to me or go to HR if they have concerns."

Johnson said she told the manager Leanne's name.

Weeks later, Johnson and Toscano both said Wharton called them into HR separately, where they told Wharton about Abrigo's comments toward them and his relationship with Leanne.

"We were told that it was addressed [by Wharton], but we weren't allowed to know how it was addressed," Toscano said. "As far as we know, nothing happened. Nothing changed, anyways."

Wharton declined to comment on these claims.

Soon after they talked to Wharton, Johnson said she didn't see Abrigo for a "couple weeks."

"He came back," Johnson said. "The comments did stop, and I feel like he was more aware of what he was saying to people, but I don't feel like there were any repercussions for it at all."

Johnson said she thinks Abrigo should have been terminated because of the relationship from Leanne.

"That is such a breach of your position of power, and it also could seem like a threat to student life," Johnson said. "The fact that he was able to move on and get another job in the CSU is very off-putting to me."

Toscano said she was angry Abrigo wasn't fired after she told HR about his inappropriate comments and the prohibited relationship.

"None of it was hearsay," Toscano said. "And a lot of us were saying the same thing. The thing that made me most uncomfortable was that we all still had to keep working with him without knowing if anything happened — was he just given a slap on the wrist?"

Johnson said the events made her lose faith in CPC's management.

"It made me feel that the higher ups, especially the men, could kind of get away with whatever they wanted to at that point," Johnson said. CONTINUE READING ON MUSTANGNEWS.NET.

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2282 and the Title IX Office at

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ENVIRONMENT

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7

Under-served computer science students are leaving at a higher rate than white students — but the CS department is taking action



BY NAOMI VANDERLIP

Looking around his classes, computer science sophomore Jesus Meza notices the glaring imbalance of diversity. Classes are dominated by white men and a high Asian population, while there are a handful of other students of color, and the number of women stalls at one to two in a class of 30, he said.

According to computer science professor Zoë Wood, not only is the department lacking in diversity, "students who are categorized within the federal categorization of underrepresented minorities leave computer science at a higher rate than white students."

However, a new program led by Cal Poly as an alliance of six CSU campuses plans to change that.

NEW INITIATIVE TO RETAIN UNDERREPRESENTED CS STUDENTS

The National Science Foundation (NSF) supplied a grant of \$1.8 million under their Directorate for Broadening Participation in Computing to create curriculum to show how students can influence and impact the communities they are from. The project is particularly aimed at retaining underrepresented Hispanic or Latino students.

Meza said the "backgrounds" of students play a vital role in career goals and the "real-world application" of a computer science degree. Meza himself volunteered at a nonprofit in high school in his hometown of Salinas. This showed and could see that kind of work in his future.

"[Salina] is a majority Latino population, so it would be good to sort of get more people into [different career paths] instead of just going, getting a job and just doing it for the money," Meza said.

This idea guided Wood, the initiative's lead principal investigator. She said there is a nationwide focus on integrating social responsibility or ethics into computing.

"It's been shown that if students can feel like their academic goals are aligned with their community goals or their personal goals to better society or help their community, they have a better sense of belonging in their field of study."

Because of this, the alliance is

developing "curricular interventions and pedagogical changes in the early computer science classes" to integrate these ideas, while focusing on "community action computing," Wood said.

For instance, students can learn not only to write programs for big companies like Google, but to create programming to help nonprofits like an adoption page for a local pet shelter, she said.

"What we hope is that students will be able to see their own goals reflected in that and want to stay in computing," Wood said.

This program is also particularly targeted at Latinx populations. Wood said the majority of CSU students who are federally categorized underrepresented minorities are Hispanic/Latino students, so the bulk of students leaving the major are Hispanic/Latino students. The other five schools in the alliance are also Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI).

"While Cal Poly is trying to provide leadership on the pedagogical, we're actually looking to the other sites to lead us in terms of how to build a successful computing program for Hispanic/ Latino students because Cal Poly is committed to becoming an HSI," Wood said.

According to Wood, this project has been three to four years in the making. It sparked when, locally, a group of computer science faculty engaged with research papers about computer science education, and these issues began to surface.

NEWS

Before the grant was submitted last December, Wood said there were "early hesitancies" in initial meetings with other CSU faculty.

"[Initially, there was resistance in] how can we fit this in? There's so much technical content in our classes, so we don't have time to talk about this," Wood said. Yet, over the course of a few months, faculty came around and agreed on the importance of this new curriculum.

"

What we hope is that students will be able to see their own goals reflected in that and want to stay in computing.

ZOË WOOD

Computer science professor

"I feel like the people have been brave about trying to really expand their conceptions about what intro computer science will include," she said.

Wood said these classes can help prepare students to join organizations like Cal Poly's branch of Hack4Impact, a student-run organization developing projects for local nonprofits.

Wood notes that nonprofits and the government are having a hard time hiring developers because industry jobs can pay so much more. But, there are students interested "in having a job that is more fulfilling" and what can "help all of society."

The first of these classes was taught by co-principal investigator and computer science professor Ayaan Kazerouni this fall, which was mandatory for computer science majors who did not have AP computer science in high school. Wood is teaching a class this quarter, required for GRC students with a UI/UX concentration, looking at web-based visualizations.

Computer science freshman Oleksandr Gorpynich also proposed hiring diverse faculty, so students are more willing to reach out.

'It would also help out if professors were made aware of these issues and the demographic differences and went out of their way to help those students that might feel left out," Gorpynich said.

While Gorpynich wasn't previously

aware of this new series of classes, he proposed making these kinds of classes mandatory as an incentive, as some computer science students just try to "do all the required classes and leave."

WHY STUDENTS ARE LEAVING

To account for students leaving the major, professor and Computer Science and Software Engineering Department Chair Chris Lupo said there is some "normal transition that first year," within the College of Engineering.

In his conversations with students who decided to leave, Lupo said the reasons for doing so vary. Some students feel pressure from parents to major in computer science but have no personal interest in it, some have issues with the department or college and others have felt their "confidence broken" by their courses.

Lupo said the experience of incoming students is all over the board. He's heard from students from Silicon Valley with prior computing experiences and say, "I wrote my first compiler when I was 17."

"That can be really intimidating for [other] students," Lupo said.

PRIOR EFFORTS TO RETAIN A DIVERSE STUDENT BODY

These issues and efforts are not new for the Computer Science Department. Just one of the many initiatives was introduced by a group of Cal Poly faculty — back in 2018. The research paper detailing the

efforts talked about how retention rates for computer science majors

are among the lowest on campus — especially among students of color and women.

The paper discussed a CS0 course that launched in 2010. The course features different tracks students can choose from, such as robotics, gaming, music and mobile apps. According to the paper, "this allows students to learn the basics of programming, teamwork and college-level study in a domain that is of personal interest." Initial assessment showed increased performance in later CS0 courses and greater student retention.

Research contributor and computer science professor John Clements said the lack of diversity already present in classes can further incentivize underrepresented students to leave the major making the push for retention all the more important.

"I think their conclusion is sort of a natural human conclusion, like, 'Gosh, I guess I don't belong here. There's nobody else like me here," Clements said. "California is, at this point, a relatively diverse state in certain ways, so [the lack of diversity] is kind of appalling. Cal Poly really stands out for our lack of diversity, and that's something we need to do better."

The "classic engineering outlook" focused on "rigor and suffering" should be let go, Clements said, even though classes should be challenging and come with high expectations. "This idea that [CS curriculum] is somehow a bootcamp, or only

strong survive or 'look on both sides of you, two of you will be out of here' — the whole idea we're gonna try to kill you, I think is very unnecessary," Clements said. "[This class] kind of opened the door to some kind of change in the first year."

THE FUTURE OF DIVERSITY WITHIN COMPUTER SCIENCE

The fight to retain under-served students goes beyond the classroom, but into the industry as a whole, Lupo said.



It's been shown that if students can feel like their academic goals are aligned with their community goals or their personal goals to better society or help their community, they have a better sense of belonging in their field of study.

ZOË WOOD

Computer science professor

"In the classroom, we do better with more experiences, different perspectives," Lupo said. "Design solutions for problems is better with the theory of pursuing inclusion. On the other side of it upon graduation, you'll see the tech industries are really trying to support that as well. So if we're not producing the people that they want to hire, then we're doing a disservice to the community."

Computing that incorporates unique experiences and understanding of a variety of backgrounds also simply makes the best work, every source reiterated.

Lupo organizes outreach programs to connect with underrepresented and female populations before they reach college. He is also working with community colleges — "which tend to be a more diverse group, socioeconomically as well as racially" — to create a 2+2 program. This would be a well-defined curriculum path for students coming from community colleges to finish their computer science degree at Cal Poly in two years.

Wood is overall interested in "transforming computer science culture" and working with computer science faculty to "embrace the fact that socio-technical, ethical concerns are something that all of our students really need to be thinking about."

She said she wants to give students the opportunity to pursue more computing options, since many haven't had the opportunity to before.

"I want to broaden participation because I do think technology is so important — It's a part of the future. We need everyone's voice," Wood said. "And we need people who are thinking about ethical considerations of, 'How are we helping society with the choices we're making?"



Thinking outside the box:

Local artist finds inspiration from California's natural aesthetic

BY LEILA TOUATI

10

A few steps away from Cal Poly's Scout Coffee location, four electrical boxes sit lonely on the tanbark for the campus community to see. Local Central Coast artist Oscar Pearson set out to beautify the campus by painting the utility boxes to represent the land upon which the university rests.

"It's been nice to see the campus become more and more beautiful. Oscar clearly has talent — his artwork is very indicative of that and everything is very clear and bold," Scout Coffee shift lead and business administration sophomore Anthony Dovidio said. "I think [the paintings] artistically represent his lens on the local vegetation."

Originally from Grover Beach, Pearson studied drawing and painting at CSU Long Beach. He has worked on projects in Santa Maria, San Luis Obispo and across the Five Cities region. Pearson is currently applying for Masters of Fine Arts programs on the East Coast to further his education. He also runs an arts coalition in Oceano called 'The Place on PCH' that doubles as an art shop and gallery.

After working for three years as an assistant to established ceramicist Darcy Badiali, Pearson chose to pursue his own career as an artist. He dabbled in nearly every medium of art — photography, mixed media, ceramics and sculpture — before discovering that he wanted painting to be his main focus.

"Inspiration comes and goes and the more I get involved in the art, the more inspired I am," Pearson said. "It's like digging a well, the deeper you dig the better clear water you get."

The summer of 2022, Pearson painted a mural titled 'Generosity' in Via Carta Plaza near Campus Market, which was his first experience working for the university. 'Generosity' was an ode to the agricultural bounty of the Central Coast.

"I came to that just thinking of it as a synonym of abundance abundance is what we have here and that's what the bounty is," Pearson said. "We have to be generous to each other and I think it just keeps that wheel turning when people aren't afraid to share."

He sees the electrical boxes as an extension to 'Generosity,' this time focusing on wild, native plants



The plants are generously fruiting, the sky is generously raining and people have to be generous in order to have abundance keep going.

> OSCAR PEARSON Central Coast Artist

rather than agriculture. The project for the utility boxes is to paint 16 native plants of California in an effort to show the natural beauty of the different regions of the state.

Pearson's work goes beyond the 16 plants of California. He plans to organize the plants in four directions to represent the four main Californian terrestrial habitats — mountainous regions, coastal and dune habitat, creekside and arid chaparral, shrubbery with Mediterranean climate.

"It all has to do with orientation, because when I got the assignment with the boxes I had to think about the three-dimensionality of them because, instead of a mural on the wall, there's all these sides and it's more sculptural in a way," Pearson said.

The mountainous plants are Viola, Madrone, Pine and dodecatheon meadia, commonly called 'shooting stars'. Plants common in the arid chaparral are Yucca, Chocolate Lily, Datura and Sage. Creekside plants are the Riparian, Poison Oak, Sycamore, Columbine and Cattails. In the coastal and dune habitat, the plants are Ceanothus, Dune Lupin, Dudleya and Coast Live Oak.

"These plants might not be used daily or they're not all edible, but they're all in this place that we share and this project is important because a campus is nothing without the land that it's on," Pearson said. "It's a way of referencing the land and the aspects of it and it's educational as far as identifying and reflecting the surrounding area."

Pearson's project is nearly completed and he plans to host artists in residence at 'The Place on PCH' over the summer. Also on his checklist is making paintings in his studio in Oceano.

"What's unique about public art is that — especially something like this — there's a given set of parameters. In the studio I can choose any size or material but when I'm out here it's

responding to that given set of parameters and there's a lot of creative opportunity with that. It reminds .' Pearson said. "I reminds me of problemsolving, working with the architecture, in this case the utility boxes."

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STUDENT LIFE

TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2023

MUSTANG NEWS

'I decided I wanted to be that voice': Student creates motivational podcast, **"Spilling Tea with a POC"**

BY MIA ANDERSON

Coming to Cal Poly, communications sophomore Jasmine Phipps said she would wonder, and hope, that she'd see another Black student in one of her classes.

"[That] bothered me to the point where I was like, 'Okay, I wanna share what I am experiencing because I know it will help other people," Phipps said.

Then, in December 2022, Phipps began her podcast called "Spilling Tea with a POC."

Phipps described her podcast as motivating, inspiring and different. She hopes to have guests who are at a place career-wise that she, and other students, would hope to be in the near future.

"

I often wanted someone with a voice for my age. I decided I wanted to be that voice. I know that success and achievements are intentional.

JASMINE PHIPPS

Communications sophomore

Phipps also wants to bring on Black entrepreneurs who are students at Cal Poly to talk about their experiences with their businesses, as well as people who have degrees and would make a good fit for specific episodes, she said.

Building on past experience speaking at various events, Phipps said she aspires to become a motivational speaker to inspire young people in her community and across the globe. As such, she said listeners can expect more motivational episodes on the podcast going forward.

"My determination to become a motivational speaker crystallized when I was in the sixth grade," Phipps said. "I come from a long line of entrepreneurs, and I've found that I want to be an entrepreneur myself. I've been preparing to go into business for as long as I can remember."

Phipps explained how she looks for advice from her elders to help with guidance and direction.

"I often wanted someone with a voice for my age," Phipps said. "I decided I wanted to be that voice."

During quarantine in 2020, Phipps wrote and published a teen's guide, "Bringing Your Vision To Life," in hopes to create a foundation of success and pave the way for future students of color. 'Bringing Your Vision To Life' can be found on Amazon.

Phipps gained inspiration to write the book because of her journey of healing after being injured while running track in high school, which is an activity that she picked up in fourth grade.

"Not having that foundation and structure in my life anymore led me to have to find that somewhere else," Phipps said.

Phipps was raised by two successful parents and felt a sense of pressure to succeed as an individual, though she did not want to be known for what her parents achieved. This led her to her personal quote: "Why wait, be great."

"I started to write speeches in sixth grade. I have always been a writer," Phipps said. "I started with fifteen pages and brought it to my dad. He told me to bring it back to him when I was done and that helped me learn while writing. Before I knew it, I had a whole book."

Phipps encourages people to join her journey by listening to the podcast.

According to Phipps, listeners can expect more consistency and greater variety in episodes in the near future. Episodes of "Spilling Tea with a

POC" can be listened to on Spotify or Apple Music. More information about current and future episodes can be found on Phipp's website, jasminephipps.com.



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How Kimberley Bhunu's tennis journey brought her from **Zimbabwe to Cal Poly** 16-person board including LaMette and Cal Poly business professor

BY MILES BERMAN

12

Opportunity is a word that is thrown around a lot. However, for graduate tennis player Kimberley Bhunu, the word has profound meaning.

Opportunity brought her from Harare, Zimbabwe to France to Cal Poly through tennis. While here, she has earned an education that has helped her create a non-profit to give those same opportunities to people back home.

And here is how it happened.

At 14, Bhunu left her family in Zimbabwe to head to France. In Biot, France, she attended the Mouratoglou Tennis Academy - one of the most prestigious tennis academies in the world-for her high school years.

The academy is named after Serena Williams' tennis coach Patrick Mouratoglou.

"I always wanted to travel and see different parts of the world and tennis happened to really give me the opportunity to do that," Bhunu said about attending the academy.

While there, Bhunu worked with an adviser who helped with United States placement for college.

"When I first went [to France] I had not considered playing tennis in college," Bhunu said.

However, after speaking to the agent she realized college was yet

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SPORTS

another opportunity where she could continue to play and advance her education.

The agent had sent two other students to Cal Poly for the men's team, Antoine Noel and Alexis Delisle.

In order to visit Cal Poly, Bhunu had to go through the long and expensive process of going back home and then applying for an American visa.

So, in 2018 when Bhunu arrived at Cal Poly, it was the first time she had stepped foot on the campus.

"I don't think she knew the words back then but you would define it as a culture shock," redshirt junior teammate Melissa LaMette said.

"When I came to Cal Poly I really struggled with the culture here," Bhunu said. "There weren't many black people at the academy I was at but it was very diverse."

On top of that, Bhunu was 10,000 miles away from her family.

A few weeks into her college career, she tore her ACL and had to get surgery, meaning she could not travel with the team or practice.

"It was a lonely time," Bhunu said. "One of the things that got me going when I first got here was the team aspect."

Following the injury, the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Bhunu had moved halfway across the world, barely touched the court

in her first two years and then could not see her family for another two. "I wasn't able to go back home

because my visa expired," Bhunu said. "If I left there was no guarantee that the embassies would be open for me to come back."

The one thing Bhunu did have at that time was her new family on the team. Teammate MacKenzie Worsnop let Bhunu stay with her for part of the pandemic.

Another player that took Bhunu in was LaMette, LaMette and Bhunu were excited to meet each other when LaMette

joined the program in 2019 because it meant they'd both have another Black teammate.

However, their relationship did not really grow until LaMette brought her home to Houston, Texas. In three trips over the span of a year, Bhunu got to know LaMette's family, grandparents and friends from home.

It's a testimony that no matter what situations you come to, things can always be better.

KIMBERLEY BHUNU

Graduate Tennis Player

"It's almost like I have a sister now... we even live together," LaMette said. "My mom sent us both Valentine's Day gifts."

In 2022, Bhunu, fellow teammate Laura Bente and Cal Poly student Sunmisola Adeyemi created Craft by Jáde. Craft by Jáde is a non-profit created to help bridge the opportunity gap for under-served people in Zimbabwe and Nigeria through the sale of Afrocentric apparel.

The trio has expanded to a

Sharon Dobson.

LaMette serves as the Director of Fundraising and Donor Relations while Dobson serves as the Marketing and Finance Adviser. One of the

main programs funded by Craft by Jáde is the family development program, where they are currently working with the Uzo family in Nigeria to provide everything from clothes to textbooks to mental health care.

The second initiative is the tennis program in Zimbabwe. Bhunu has helped coordinate the donations, funding, hiring and scheduling of a professional tennis coach to give lessons to children in Zimbabwe. Much of the equipment comes from donations made in the San Luis Obispo community.

"Me getting here, the opportunity to play for a DI school on full athletic scholarship is because of opportunities I received that many people don't receive," Bhunu said.

LaMette echoed the same sentiment that "tennis has opened a lot of doorways for me."

Craft by Jáde's goal is to have a tennis court built and sign kids up for the tournament in the near future.

With all the extracurriculars off the court and the time spent earning a master's in business analytics, it's hard to believe that Bhunu has time to do what she came to Cal Poly for: Tennis

Bhunu isn't just a player on the team, as she has earned her spot at the No. 1 court in either doubles or singles play over the past three years. "She is very brave," LaMette said about the girl who left her family at 14, got even farther away after earning a full ride to the central coast and battled injury and the pandemic while in a place that lacks diversity and looks nothing like home.

KAYLA STUART | MUSTANG NEWS

As a tennis player, she makes the most of her opportunity and is consistently at the top of the lineup. Those opponents who get the

opportunity to face her line up across from an aggressive attacker.

"She'll end a point in three shots," LaMette said about Bhunu.

Last year. Bhunu was a team-best 15-8 in doubles and 14-6 in singles to earn her All-Conference honors and All-Academic honors again.

In the young 2023 season, Bhunu is at the No. 1 spot in singles with her coworker, teammate, friend and "sister" LaMette right behind at No.

In a weekend win over San Jose State. LaMette had a 7-5 victory to clinch the doubles point and then Bhunu had a come-from-behind victory in singles for the 4-1 victory.

In October, Bhunu will capitalize on another opportunity with a job at Ernst & Young, one of the big four accounting firms.

"It's a testimony that no matter what situations you come to, things can always be better," Bhunu said in reflection. "Who would've thought a Zimbabwean girl would be the first black girl on the Cal Poly women's tennis team?"



SOCIETY TREATS THE UNHOUSED LIKE A PROBLEM, NOT LIKE HUMAN BEINGS

BY EDEN-ROSE BAKER

There is no denying that homelessness is a prevalent issue in San Luis Obispo County. It became a huge topic in November's election cycle. Both former State Assembly District 30 candidates needed a plan of action to help combat the housing crisis SLO is experiencing. City council candidates Michelle Shoresman and James Papp both ranked housing and homelessness as their top priorities.

When I was at the Jamba Juice on Chorro Street last year, I saw police officers kick a homeless man off the sidewalk out front and tell him to go downtown. The police tend to send homeless individuals downtown, which I believe is so that they are concentrated in one area. That does not mean that they are going to be treated well once they get there.

I was downtown in June when I saw a woman call the police on a man for being homeless. The man didn't do anything to her; all he did was exist. The police didn't do anything or make any arrests, but that doesn't change what happened.

This woman proved a pretty harsh reality: In society, homeless people are not treated like people.

I know this first hand because my dad was homeless during my junior year of high school. When people found out, they would often treat me like I was less than they were. I felt alienated in my classes because homeless people are seen as dirty and lazy, and my peers saw me as that.

I've also seen the shame carried by my dad because it isn't exactly easy to afford housing, but he was seen as a bad person for not having it. I have seen how being homeless and struggling with addiction broke his close relationships.

Just because someone struggles with addiction, homelessness or both, it does not mean that they are not human. According to the University of Michigan, when someone is an addict, their brain stops producing the same amount of dopamine as the average human brain. They become reliant on drugs or alcohol to produce the hormone that they are used to occurring naturally.

At this point, using is no longer a choice, but addicts see it as a necessity. So, people, like my dad, lose their jobs, housing and relationships to fulfill what they see as a basic human need.

And trust me, addicts know that they are at a low point when they are trading food, housing and their relationships for drugs. In fact, suicide rates amongst the homeless population are nine times the national average.

So, even if you don't want to associate with an addict—which is perfectly valid—you also don't have to go out of your way to be unkind to them. If a homeless person is existing, there is no need to mock them or call the police. It's not worth making someone feel lower about themselves. Most homeless people are just trying to survive and are not trying to hurt anyone, so most times, there is no reason to fear them.



I felt alienated in my classes because homeless people are seen as dirty and lazy, and my peers saw me as that.

EDEN-ROSE BAKER

Opinion columnist

The stereotype that all homeless people are addicts is harmful. According to the Washington Post, the rates of homelessness are increasing across the country due to the current recession. At this point, anyone could be just one budget cut or rent hike away from losing their job or home.

And yet, homeless people are blamed for existing and making a city seem less beautiful or desirable to live in when individuals can't possibly be at fault for a growing epidemic.

I am glad that government officials in SLO are taking the housing crisis seriously and are seeing homeless people as people. We are all human beings, and we need to support one another. Being homeless—no matter the reason—doesn't make a person any less human or any less deserving of support.

Eden-Rose Baker is a journalism junior and opinion columnist at Mustang News. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of Mustang News.



OPINION

Meet the women taking on the male-dominated music scene in SLO

BY ALYSON SMITH

14

Electrical engineering junior Abby Neal grew up with music, surrounded by her dad's collection of over 500 vinyl records. When Neal was a child, she would pretend to play a guitar cut out of cardboard, using her family's dining room table as a stage.

Now, Neal is no longer pretending. She's on-stage nearly every weekend as the bassist of The Sandspits, an indie surf-rock band local to San Luis Obispo.

"Younger me would love what I'm doing right now," Neal said. "She would probably scream and run around the house (with excitement)." Neal is a selftaught guitarist and bassist. Shortly after r e c e i v i n g a bass for Christmas in 2020, she met Lucas Erickson, one of the two guitarists of The Sandspits. Erickson was looking for a bassist for the band, and Neal volunteered.

She joined Erickson, drummer Jack Vitek and guitarist Nilav Maulik, and the group began practicing, performing and recording.

Of the four band members, Neal is the only woman — which isn't uncommon in San Luis Obispo's largely male-dominated band scene. Most of the bands that are local to San Luis Obispo consist either mostly or solely of male musicians. Shabang, a music festival hosted annually at Laguna Lake Park, has hosted 87 musical acts since 2017. Less than 20% of those acts included at least one woman.

Similarly, the 2022 Concerts in the Plaza series sponsored by the Downtown SLO Association featured 10 headliners, only two of which were fronted by women.

While men do still dominate the local music scene, local talent booker Drake Freeman said there's been a recent increase in women getting involved, especially in student-run bands like The Sandspits.

"I would say since COVID, women have been more prevalent in the SLO

Younger me would love what I'm doing right now.

ABBY NEAL Sandspits bassist and Cal Poly student music scene," Freeman said.

Neal, as an engineering student at Cal Poly, is familiar with navigating male-dominated spaces.

"A lot of the time, I'm the only girl in my class, and if that's the case, you just have to work hard and be confident in what you do," Neal said. "It's the same [in music]."

Being the only woman in the band does

> WATCH: WOMEN IN MUSIC, PART 1



JESSIE SCHROEDER, KAITLIN ASUNCION | COURTESY

present its own set of challenges, Neal said. Audience members especially men — sometimes treat Neal differently than they do her bandmates.

WATCH: WOMEN IN MUSIC, PART 2 "It's always such a great feeling to be with my band," Neal said. "We respect each other so much."

Neal said she also enjoys connecting with local musicians outside of her own band — like Skyllar Evans, the lead singer and only woman member of punk band Plywood Love.

Evans, who graduated from Morro Bay High School before coming to Cal Poly, has been attending house shows in San Luis Obispo since she was 17.

WATCH: WOMEN IN MUSIC, PART 3



Neal recalled one incident in which an intoxicated man at the front of the audience repeatedly touched her while she was performing. Her bandmates eventually had to intervene.

"Sometimes people just think that they can take advantage of you ... like you don't deserve any of that respect," Neal said.

The Sandspits speak openly about Neal being their only female member and work together to ensure Neal's voice is not overshadowed by the male majority.



She frequented Jeffrey House, a popular house show venue for Cal Poly students, and quickly realized that nearly every band that performed at Jeffrey House was predominantly male.

When Plywood Love began playing shows locally, Evans made it a goal to play at Jeffrey House — and she eventually did, just one week after The Sandspits performed at the same venue.

"I remember



telling Abby that night that she was the first girl I'd ever seen play Jeffrey," Evans said. "Then I got to do it as well a week later, and the show was so much fun."

Evans said she views other female musicians as role models and hopes that her own involvement in the local music scene will inspire others to get involved. Performing in male-dominated spaces could give other women the confidence to follow their lead, she said.

"

The biggest challenge I've dealt with is selfdoubt. The band was something that I built from the ground up, but sometimes I worry that people will assume my male bandmates did all of it.

AMANDA MEI

Kiwi Kannibal lead singer and guitarist, Cal Poly alum

"There isn't a lot of female representation [in the local music scene], but I think it's changing," Evans said. "I'm seeing more bands pop up in SLO that are mostly female, and it



Percent of Shabang's 87 musical acts that included at least 1 woman since 2017.

makes me really happy."

Amanda Mei is the lead singer and guitarist of Kiwi Kannibal and a recent Cal Poly graduate. Mei said she saw very few female musicians while growing up, which made it difficult to believe she was capable of becoming a musician herself.

"It was this unattainable fantasy, me fronting my own band," Mei LUCILLE IRIS HOLLY | COURTESY

said. "I've always known how to play instruments, I just didn't think there was a place for me in music."

Mei is the only woman in Kiwi Kannibal. She started the band, writes their songs and coordinates the bookings of their shows. She's the frontwoman of the band, but Mei said that it's not uncommon for people at shows to assume she is a bandmate's girlfriend.

"The biggest challenge I've dealt with is self-doubt," Mei said. "The band was something that I built from the ground up, but sometimes I worry that people will assume my male bandmates did all of it."

Mei said that in overcoming that self-doubt, she's developed a sense of community not only with other female musicians, but also with women who attend Kiwi Kannibal shows as audience members.

"Having women come up to me after shows and say that my songs emotionally resonated with them, nothing brings me more fulfillment," she said.



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