

Diego M. Higuera

diegohigueraed@gmail.com | (619) 829-5636 | San Diego, CA

EXPERIENCE

Comics and Pop Culture News (San Diego)

July 2022 -Present

- Report from San Diego Comic-Con on an array of panels and celebrity features
- “Go To” reporter for breaking news

Southwestern College Sun (Chula Vista, CA)

August 2019 - Present

- Campus Section Editor, Member of Editorial Board
- National award-winning writer
- Social justice, human rights investigations, LGBTQ issues and underserved communities

INDIVIDUAL//TEAM AWARDS

- 2024 Southwestern College Student of Distinction Award (college’s top student honor)
- 2024 Southwestern College Student Awards Celebration Keynote Speaker
- 2023 Southwestern College Equity Champion Medal
- 2023 Associated Collegiate Press, Best of Show Award
“Unsaintly Persecution: LGBTQ Students Mistreated at BYU”
- 2023 Associated Collegiate Press
Magazine Pacemaker Award (Collegiate Pulitzer Prize, Editor)
Newspaper Pacemaker Award (Collegiate Pulitzer prize, Editor)
- 2023 College Media Association PINNACLE Awards
1st place, Feature Magazine of the Year, Southwestern College El Sol Magazine
1st place, Newspaper of the Year, Southwestern College Sun
- 2022 California College Media Awards
First Place, Best Non-Breaking News Story
First Place, Best Feature Story
First Place, Best Social Justice Coverage
- 2022 Journalism Association of Community Colleges
Best News Story
Best Feature Story
- 2022 San Diego Society of Professional Journalists
In-Depth Reporting Story
Feature Story

EDUCATION

Southwestern Community College (Chula Vista, CA)

Transfer: May 2023

Associate in Transfer degree, Journalism

LANGUAGES and CULTURAL LITERACY

- Fluent in Spanish and English
- Deep understanding of Mexican and American cultures, and Southwest Borderlands subculture

PHOTO COURTESY OF RICK BOWMER / AP

UNSAINTLY PERSECUTION

STUDENTS CALL OUT BYU'S ANTI-LGBTQ PRACTICES

By DIEGO HIGUERA

Brigham Young University seems so far from Chula Vista. It is 713 miles away, an 11-hour drive through four states.

Culturally, it is a light year from diverse, progressive South San Diego County. BYU is in the heart of red state Utah, a bastion of conservative politics since the late 1840s.

BYU seems like the last place a kid from the South Bay would want to attend, but there is a quiet pipeline from our multiracial blue coastal strip to the

“Mormon Harvard.” There may be as many as 14,000 Mormons in the South County who have high regard for BYU’s deserved reputation as an excellent academic university with an affordable price tag.

Often, though, culture shock consumes BYU’s overwhelmed LGBTQ students. Ugliness ensues.

Last semester when campus clubs and student organizations were invited to insert brochures and handouts in a Welcome to BYU bag for incoming freshmen, campus officials removed all materials from LGBTQ organizations.

One of the purged clubs was the BYU Rainbow Collective, an organization whose stated mission is “to create and identify safe spaces for BYU’s LGBTQIA+ students.” Rainbow Collective organizes back-to-school Pride events, DEI training and a popular art show.

Rainbow Collective PR Manager Haley Malesich said the move was hurtful. ▶



UNITED IN UTAH

BYU attracts Mormon students from across America with its affordable tuition and generally good academics. Students from the South County are among the leaders of a growing movement to push BYU toward full acceptance of marginalized LGBTQ students.

“(BYU administrators) make statements about inclusivity and loving your neighbor,” she said, “but fail to show up for the LGBTQ+ community and give full love only on the condition that you change who you are to fit their mold.”

Malesich said LGBTQ students are starting to push back.

“We want LGBTQ+ students to know that they have a community of people here to encourage them and support them,” she said. “No one deserves to feel excluded or stranded with no life vest. Our goal is to listen, lift and love.”

Raynbow Collective works alongside 14 organizations that support the greater queer community of Utah. Malevich said faculty and students are becoming more vocal in their allyship.

“Alongside our friends at the Cougar Pride Center, USGA, Equality Utah, the Out Foundation, Black Menaces, and so many others, I have seen a surge of support and love within the community and from allies to the community,” she said. “I feel like our organizations bring out the best in people. We’ve been able to create powerful, deep friendships while advocating for a better, more inclusive Utah. I’ve also seen more people stand up for the rights of those being discriminated against. It’s a beautiful thing to see so many people united in purpose.”

Grace (a pseudonym) is a freshman at BYU. She identifies as an LGBTQ

Mormon, which they said is often a dichotomy difficult to reconcile.

“I want to talk openly about LGBTQ topics, but I’m scared to,” they said. “None of the organizations made for queer BYU students are school affiliated and none can meet on campus. Within these groups, the LGBTQ community at BYU is very vibrant and supportive. We meet and give each other advice, comfort and resources. We warn each other which professors to avoid and also tell each other which ones are allies.”

Grace said their time at BYU has not been all bad, but they feel LGBTQ students are marginalized.

“(BYU has an) Office of Belonging, but that is the only official (institution encouraging diversity) I know of,” they said.

Grace said the conundrum of LGBTQ students’ attraction to BYU seems illogical, but is driven by pragmatism.

“Why do queer students go to BYU?” they asked. “Why don’t they just go somewhere else? We think it’s going to be different. It’s the best choice financially. Some (students) don’t know they are queer until they’re already at BYU. Financial control by parents. Social pressure to attend.”

Grace is attending BYU for spiritual reasons, they said. Many queer students are still faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but chafe under an “honor code” hostile to LGBTQ students.



SPEARHEADING A CALL FOR CHANGE

BYU administrators and Mormon Church leaders have for years quietly hemmed in its LGBTQ students and prevented them from organizing clubs and activities, according to the BYU students and alumni. The community is pushing back and demanding that BYU join other U.S. universities in respecting the rights of LGBTQ Americans. Kaitlynn Wright (l) is one of the emerging voices in the movement to empower LGBTQ Mormon students. *Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education*

“Change is likely to be slow at BYU,” they said. “The honor code stuff is controlled by people very high up (in the church hierarchy), so even if all the staff and students wanted change (to campus culture) it would be unlikely.”

Sydney Mortenson is a freshman at BYU and an LGBTQ ally.

“Most of the people I have talked with seem to be very kind and accepting of everyone,” she said. “I will say, though, that there have been a few times I’ve heard some very homophobic things said by students and people on campus.”

Mortenson said LGBTQ students are subject to the old Christian canard “love the sinner, hate the sin.”

BYU’s surrounding Provo, Utah community can be rough on LGBTQ students, she said. Once, while riding a city bus, she mentioned to a woman that she was majoring in animation. The woman blurted out her disapproval of a same sex kiss in the Disney film “Lightyear.”

“She said she thought it was terrible how early kids are being exposed to LGBTQ relationships and how Disney should not pretend those relationships are normal,” Mortenson said. “Even though many of the people I’ve met on campus are amazing and accepting of everyone, I absolutely understand how (members) of the LGBTQ community can feel unwelcome and unsafe at BYU. The university needs to encourage its students and faculty to be more inclusive.”

Students are modeling the way forward, she said.

“BYU teaches students to love everyone, but I feel like there are definitely times at school where that value is not kept,” she said. “I absolutely love groups like the Rainbow Collective and the Black Menaces and everything they’ve done for the school, but I think more should be

done by BYU itself.”

Mortenson cited the BYU honor code, strictly held behavioral mores that ban “homosexual behavior.” Under the honor code, LGBTQ couples are not to hold hands, hug, kiss or date in public.

Mortenson said the honor code encourages straight students to rat out LGBTQ classmates.

“I think the biggest issue with the honor code is that most people don’t even bother reading it, so they are just reporting whatever they deem inappropriate,” she said. “The honor code is very outdated.”

BYU alumnus Jillian Orr went viral with more than 1.6 million views when they sowed a rainbow flag into their graduation gown and flashed it on BYU’s Marriot Center Jumbo Tron after receiving their diploma. It was a violation of the honor code and could have cost Orr their degree.

“I knew there could be consequences for what I did and I was ready to face whatever it was,” they said. “When I was making this decision I remembered something that had happened this year. On Rainbow Day there were students that went up to the Y for BYU on the mountain and they took lights and made the Y a rainbow. To be recognized! BYU made very, very clear rules against this. (The students) did that knowing they could be arrested and knowing they could be charged.”

Despite the prejudicial treatment, South County LGBTQ students still go to BYU. Pat (a pseudonym), who identifies as queer, said pragmatism weighs in.

“BYU has the program I wanted and every year it ranks Top 10 in the country for \$3,000 a semester,” they said. “Look me in the eyes and tell me that’s not an option you might take. I was a teenager when I decided to go to BYU. I was deeply entrenched in my religion and I knew I would be in a community of likeminded people at BYU.”

“Most of the people I have talked with seem to be very kind and accepting of everyone. I will say, though, that **there have been a few times I’ve heard some very homophobic things said by students and people on campus.”**

SYDNEY MORTENSON

BYU Freshman, LGBTQ ally

Pat rejects the “you knew what you were getting into” rhetoric they often hear.

“I did not know (about the anti-LGBTQ culture),” they said. “Nobody knows what BYU is like until you’re actually on campus and seeing what’s going on.”

Pat said he made a sound fiscal decision.

“If I had chosen my major at a different university or a different state, I would be paying student loans akin to medical school,” they said.

Mortenson said BYU is a great academic university, but it needs to evolve. There should be room for Mormon LGBTQ students fighting for a better BYU. The university’s motto, “Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve,” remains aspirational, she said.

“The university needs to learn from its minority populations,” she said. “LGBTQ students deserve a chance to pursue a better education and feel comfortable while doing so. They deserve the chance to go forth and serve their community.” ■



THE HEM OF HER GARMENT

Jillian Orr flashed attendees at her BYU graduation with the colorful lining she had sewn into her gown. She waited until after she was handed her diploma to show her Pride or she might not have received it.

Sports

Remembering Jim Spillers

Beloved former Athletic Director advocated for women's sports, LGBTQ students

Story Page 11



Community

¡VIVA CHICANO PARK!

Park born of strife celebrates richness of Chicano culture and resurrection of Logan Heights

Read the full story, Page 6-7



Arts

Paranoia Reigns

Brilliant production of 'The Crucible' revisits Red Scare during Era of MAGA.

Story Page 10



SAN DIEGO PRESS CLUB HONORS FORMER SOUTHWESTERN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, STORY PAGE 8

THE SUN SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE

AN ACP HALL OF FAME NEWSPAPER

MAY 10, 2024 / ISSUE 4

A NATIONAL PACEMAKER AWARD NEWSPAPER

■ NATIONAL CITY

FORMER PROFS CLAIM TITLE IX REPRISAL

Dental Hygiene program target of discrimination lawsuit

BY ALEXA LIMA

A pair of former dental hygiene professors have filed a lawsuit against Southwestern College alleging retaliation by administration after they reported "severe and pervasive" racial discrimination.

College officials declined to comment on the case because it involved personnel issues and pending litigation.

Tenured professors Karen Kubischta and Dr. Linda Lukacs filed suit against Southwestern College in April. Their attorney Arash Sadat said Kubischta and Lukacs had plentiful documentation of the incidents and many supporting witnesses. Sadat said the professors were required by Title IX to report suspected discrimination but were punished for doing so.

"Southwestern College has a pretty long history of racial discrimination," said Sadat. "There have been reports, allegations from a variety of parties, regarding the way that minority students especially are treated at the school."

Nelly Ramirez, 33, a dental hygienist and alumnae of the program, attended SC from 2018 to 2020. She said her experience in the program was "very hectic and stressful."

"The environment was very hostile," she said.

Ramirez said she and her classmates had a project that required them to choose a community to educate about oral hygiene and nutritional counseling. She said they proposed a plan to serve children in southern San Diego. When they discussed the food choices the professor told her to also include tacos and burritos in the lecture.

Students of color were stereotyped and picked on, she said.

"I recall other students (of color) being yelled at, being grabbed by the

LAWSUIT • PG 2



Photo Courtesy of Ko Inouye

POWWOW DRUMS UP RESPECT

Native Americans from across the U.S. gathered at Southwestern College for a spirited and spiritual celebration of life. Biology major Winter Begay of the Navajo (Diné) Nation was honored as Head Young Woman. Begay is an indigenous dancer who tours America performing and representing her People.

CAMPUS PRIDE CALLS COLLEGE UNSAFE

PLNU AGAIN LISTED AS ANTI-LGBTQ

Student allies of LGBTQ community urge Southwestern College to terminate partnership with conservative religious college until it modernizes its hostile policies toward gay community

BY DIEGO HIGUERA

Once again there is trouble in paradise. One of America's most beautiful campuses has one of America's ugliest records toward LGBTQ students, according to a national civil rights organization.

For the ninth consecutive year Point Loma Nazarene University has made Campus Pride's list of America's Worst Colleges and Universities for LGBTQ students. PLNU was listed for its failure to make LGBTQ students feel safe on its campus and its prejudicial policies toward students in same sex relationships.

LGBTQ activists and their allies are once again urging Southwestern College to re-examine its relationship with PLNU and to cut off the conservative Christian private school until it modernizes its policies about and treatment of LGBTQ students.

CENSORING LGBTQ STUDENTS

It is a cancelled screening of a documentary that has the rightwing seaside campus once again on the defensive in San Diego County. PLNU administrators recently blocked the screening of the historical documentary "1946: The Mistranslation that Shifted Culture," a film about the roots of the anti-gay movement among the Christian Right. Voices of Love, an LGBTQIA+ organization comprised of PLNU students and alumni, had scheduled a screening of the documentary. Voices of Love leaders said "1946" was cancelled three days before it was to be shown.

Marshael Salgado, associate minister of University Christian Church and a PLNU alumnae, said the administration's move to cancel the screening was "really disappointing."

"Universities and college campuses should be safe places for people to learn," she said. "If you are doing a good job as administrators, as staff, you are teaching students to think critically. Point Loma should allow students to think for themselves and make up their own minds about issues."

Laurena Cazares, a PLNU alumna and leader of the Loma LGBTQ Coalition, agreed. She said

PLNU • PG 2

OUT OF STEP

17% A 2020 survey of 180,000 undergraduate and graduate students found nearly 17 percent identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, queer, or questioning, while 1.7 percent identified as transgender, nonbinary, or questioning.

Source: Association of American Universities



"My firm belief, informed by my faith, is that God's love is truly for all people. I am thoroughly affirming of the LGBTQIA+ community. I love the story and mission of Jesus Christ and equally grieve at how religion is used to harm and control people."

MELISSA TUCKER former PLNU professor



MARK MADDIX

Mark Maddix, dean for the School of Theology and Christian Ministry, was

fired March 15, 2023, for his support of Melissa Tucker and the LGBTQ community.

AIN'T NO SUNSHINE WHEN YOU'RE GONE STEM faculty roll out spectacular solar telescopes for rooftop celebration of an historic eclipse. Page 8

LAWSUIT

• CONT FROM PG 1

Professors claim college ignores bullying, racial discrimination

arm," she said. "I remember reporting the professor on more than one occasion about her comments to Title IX and nothing was done. There was no follow-up by the school at the time."

Nicole Arreola, 31, is a dental hygienist who graduated from the program in 2020. She said there was a culture of racism and discrimination in the program.

"I definitely felt like we all had our hands tied because we were there to get an education and do well in school, based a lot on grades and point systems," she said. "I definitely felt like a lot of us were in a very vulnerable position, especially coming from never having a dental background to now learning a completely new skill."

Arreola said she never experienced racist comments but witnessed classmates being harassed by professors. She said she met a lot of students who made complaints to the director about a certain professor who still works in the program, which is based in the National City Higher Education Center.

"I am really proud of Dr. Lukacs and Professor K for supporting us," she said. "It just feels really good that someone has our back. It's unfortunate so many incidents had to happen for them to be pushed into the position that they are in right now."

Kubischta graduated from the dental hygiene program in 2007 and later become an adjunct instructor. She became a full-time tenured professor in 2018. Lukacs, an NYU College of Dentistry graduate, has taught at SC since 2001 and earned tenure in 2008.

Kubischta documented "racially discriminatory" comments allegedly made by Dental Hygiene Director Jean Honny, according to Sadat. Kubischta lodged a formal complaint against Honny, Sadat said, which an independent investigation substantiated. After the investigation, Sadat said, the dean of the NCHC advised Kubischta to handle her complaints in-house rather than through the Title IX process.

Kubischta and Lukacs reported to the Title IX department that the program engaged in "bullying, intimidation, unwarranted physical touch, verbal abuse and retribution," according to Sadat.

Kubischta and Lukacs endured a "campaign of retribution" and a "toxic work environment," said Sadat. Both professors "had no option but to leave their tenured positions and seek employment elsewhere," he said.

"It's tragic what these respected professors were subjected to," said Sadat. "They spoke out against wrongdoing, but the college attempted to silence them. We intend to hold Southwestern accountable."

The Sun reached out to Southwestern College Vice President of Human Resources Angela Riggs and National City HEC Dean Christine Perri for comment. Sofia Salgado Robitaille, executive director of Advancement and Community Engagement, said in an email that she was authorized to answer on their behalf.

"Southwestern College has been engaged for several years in the deep work of equity, which must also include accountability," read her statement. "Although we cannot comment on any personnel matters and pending litigation, we remain focused on the work to best serve our students, employees and our broader community"

PLNU • CONT FROM PG 1

"1946" was a factual historical study of biblical text that made the case that the term "homosexual" never appeared in the Christian scriptures. Anti-gay language began appearing in biblical translations and rewrites in 1946.

PLNU sends conflicting messages to the broader community when it clamps down on LGBTQ citizens, said Salgado. An institution attempting to attract government and private funding to develop 21st century STEM programs is still mired in outdated prejudices from the 19th and early 20th centuries, she said.

"Point Loma prides itself in being a center for thinking and teaching," she said. "A good professor teaches you multiple perspectives and critical facts. It is censorship to try to limit what students hear and what perspectives they are hearing from, especially when it is from a documentary or guest speaker. It hurts students (when they do not) hear an array of perspectives."

HARBORING HATE SPEECH

Salgado said she had many excellent professors and enjoyed her PLNU experience but does not like its rules and policies that she said discriminate against LGBTQ students. The institution's attitude toward its LGBTQ students leaks over into other forms of prejudice and even hate speech, she said.

PLNU was rocked earlier this year by the discovery of hate speech on walls of a bathroom and the words "I hate Blacks" spelled out in toilet paper on a bathroom floor. Salgado said she was glad to hear PLNU was investigating the racist messages, but questioned the atmosphere that seems to encourage this kind of behavior.

It comes from the top, she said, the Midwestern leadership of the conservative Church of the Nazarene which provides most of PLNU's funding.

"These values the (Nazarene) denomination lives by (are causing) a lot of brokenness right now," she said. "They are out of step with what is going on in America and Southern California."

Cazares agreed.

"I just want PLNU to know that the writing is literally on the wall," she said. "It really has become unsafe and more dangerous at PLNU."

Cazares said PLNU's leadership may not actively encourage anti-LGBTQ behavior, but it fuels a culture that encourages discrimination. Calling LGBTQ students sinners who need to change reduces their humanity and makes them targets.

"Where the problem exists is student-to-student," she said. "Last year the graffiti was done in the resident halls and the school did not have a strong response. I think it creates a culture where that is allowed on campus. For LGBTQ students that creates a hostile environment."

LGBTQ students were subjected to slurs and insults, Cazares said.

"Conservative students would get into their car and hang out the window yelling 'fag' or sometimes the whole slur," she said.

Other student clubs would intentionally block Voices of Love out of meeting spaces, she said. Failure by PLNU administration to signal its displeasure with anti-LGBTQ and racist behavior sends the message to students that what they were doing is allowable, she said.

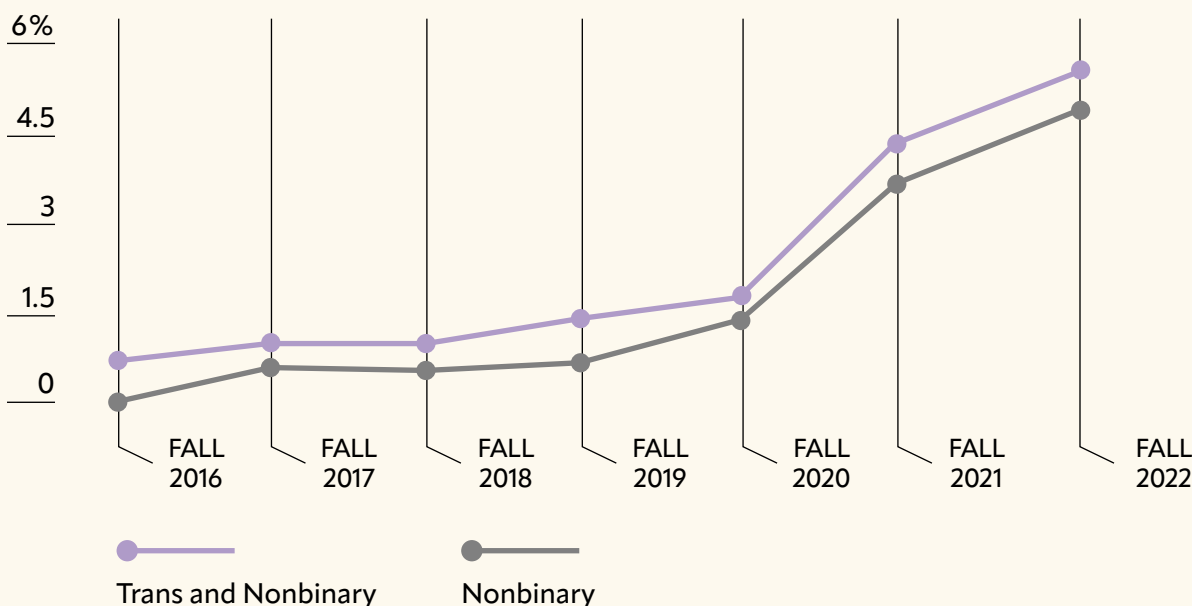
"I think there is a (sizable) percentage of students that don't think we (LGBTQ people) should be allowed to attend PLNU," she said. "When you hear about these hate incidents they are not coming from the professors, they are coming from students with their own personal beliefs."

LGBTQ SUPPORTERS FIRED

Salgado said she thinks most faculty at PLNU are either supporters of LGBTQ students or do not engage in anti-gay rhetoric. Due to the fraught campus climate, however, they generally keep that to themselves. Exceptions are journalism professor Dean Nelson, a deeply respected figure in academic and professional news media circles. Nelson has called PLNU's

College remains on anti-LGBTQ list

Percentage of Self-Identified Trans and Nonbinary Undergraduate Students



THE RAPIDLY GROWING NUMBER OF TRANS AND NONBINARY STUDENTS

While this is the first year that the Common App has asked gender identity, other forms and surveys have been doing so for much longer, and these sources show that the number of students openly identifying as trans and nonbinary has been quickly increasing. For example, among the nearly 27,700 undergraduate students who completed the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment (NCHA) in Fall 2016, the percent who identified as trans or nonbinary was 1.6% (ACHA 2016). Five years later, in Fall 2021, this figure had risen to 4.6% (ACHA 2021). This past spring, when more than 54,000 undergraduates filled out the assessment, it was 5.7% (ACHA 2022). Almost all of this increase has come in less than three years.

GENDER IDENTITY FINDINGS

On the Common App, 3,521 students wrote in a gender by using the "add another gender" option by itself or in combination with one of the gender choices provided. These students offered about 130 different genders; the most frequent responses were genderfluid (41.5%), genderqueer (9.8%), trans man (9.0%), agender (8.4%), and demigirl (5.1%).



INFORMATIONAL GRAPHIC BY DIEGO HIGUERA / STAFF

strictures against LGBTQ students and their free speech rights “backwards” and has openly called for change.

“Dean Nelson is a personal hero of mine,” Salgado said. “He is a source of light.”

Less venerated faculty and administrators have been terminated or pushed aside for supporting LGBTQ rights and PLNU students who belong to the LGBTQ community, she said. Former Dean of Theology Mark Maddox was fired recently after he defended adjunct instructor Melissa Tucker for openly supporting LGBTQ students. Tucker, a minister at Normal Heights United Methodist Church and co-leader of San Diego United Youth Group, an “open and affirming group” that welcomes LGBTQ Christians, was shunned due to her outspokenness and off-campus work with the LGBTQ community, Salgado said.

“Some faculty were told never to hire (Tucker) again for an adjunct position because she was working at an open and affirming church and because of her work with the LGBTQ community,” Salgado said. “She had deep roots with the students at PLNU.”

Students rallied in support of Maddox and Tucker, to no avail.

“The situation with (Melissa Tucker) was just an excuse to fire (Maddox),” said Salgado. “(PLNU administrators) had wanted to fire him for a long time because of his progressive views.”

MEXICAN PRESIDENT SHUNNED

Salgado said PLNU has “shot itself in the foot” a number of times in recent years by making petty decisions that damaged the school’s reputation. One such controversy involved the shunning of former Mexican President Vicente Fox.

PLNU had invited Fox to speak to students about international cooperation and the need for the United States and Mexico to work together collaboratively. His appearance was cancelled about two weeks prior to his visit when PLNU heard he had advocated for the decriminalization of marijuana.

“The university did not like it,” she said. “(Administrators) were afraid he was going to mention something they did not agree with in his speech, so they basically told him he was no longer invited.”

Fox was in Japan at the time and said he was stunned by the decision. Nelson and Salgado’s father moved the Fox appearance to the University of San Diego, even though PLNU had already paid his honorarium and mailed promotional materials to students’ homes to encourage a large audience. Salgado said the episode underscored the fundamental problem with PLNU leadership and the reason the university will never attain its lofty ambitions unless it modernizes its thinking.

“You are trying to teach us to think critically, so why don’t you trust us enough to make up our own minds?” she said. “It is really disappointing to see that (no lessons have been learned) and this still happens.”

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Cazares said PLNU’s baked-in prejudice starts with its Student Handbook and Community Living Agreement, which include policies antithetical to LGBTQ students.

“It is God’s intention that in the sacramental union of marriage a man and a woman may experience the joy and pleasure of sexual intimacy and from this act of intimate love new life may enter the world and into a covenantal community of care,” reads a section headlined “Human Sexuality.”

The passage continues:

“Students are expected to abstain from sexual intimacy outside of heterosexual marriage.”

“PLNU seeks to be a community where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons are treated with dignity, grace, and the holy love in the Spirit of Christ. We recognize the complexity of current issues related to same sex attraction, same-sex marriage, and gender identity. The university desires to faithfully care for all students while engaging these conversations with respect, care, humility, courage, and discernment.”



OUT OF STEP—Point Loma Nazarene University has policies that are not represented in Christian scripture and out of compliance with state and federal law. College officials insist its status as a private college means it is not obligated to follow Title IX.



PLNU also offers “counseling” for LGBTQ students, but the catalogue gives no details as to the nature of the counseling.

Southwestern College, on the other hand, is committed by state and federal law to follow the non-discriminatory guidelines of Title IX, which reads, in part: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

Southwestern College’s website spells out its prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of “sexual orientation; gender; gender expression (a person’s gender-related appearance and behavior whether or not stereotypically associated with the person’s assigned sex at birth), gender identity and other characteristics related to a person’s sex.”

Cazares said the differences are stark. PLNU’s language, she said, and gives anti-LGBTQ staff and students tacit support.

“Those are things that are more conservative that faculty, staff and students can point to that say ‘You are not welcome on this campus’ even though those aren’t the words coming out of their mouths.”

“Students should not have to be straight passing,” she said. “If you cannot exist as your full self and feel valued, then the university’s motto – Who You are Called to Be – is bullshit.”

PARTNERSHIP WITH SOUTHWESTERN

Southwestern has a contract with PLNU to teach upper division classes on the Chula Vista campus in four subjects and to facilitate SC students studying at PLNU or transferring to the university. Students who complete the reciprocal program would receive



“I think there is a (sizable) percentage of students that don’t think we (LGBTQ people) should be allowed to attend PLNU. When you hear about these hate incidents they are not coming from the professors, they are coming from students with their own personal beliefs.”

LAURENA CAZARES
Loma LGBTQ Coalition
PLNU alumna

Bachelor’s degrees from PLNU.

SC’s website describes the program: “Southwestern College partners with Point Loma Nazarene University to offer you a variety of bachelor’s degrees that you can earn without leaving SWC’s campus. Earning your bachelor’s degree from PLNU opens new doors of opportunity in your professional and personal life, and can help you achieve your career goals.”

Degrees included in the arrangement are nursing, criminal justice, business and child development. Southwestern’s claim that students can complete a Bachelor’s degree from PLNU entirely on the Chula Vista campus is not true, according to Southwestern and PLNU alumna Jen Valenzuela. Members of her family, she said, were among those forced to finish degrees in person on the Point Loma campus.

“Imagine a very, very open and outspoken queer person decides to take child development and ends up at Point Loma,” she said. “How do we let them work on their degree for years and then have them end up at a place where they won’t feel welcome?”

“It is kind of crazy that Southwestern has CHEL and says it is an affirming campus, but it is also in a relationship with a college that doesn’t support LGBTQ students. What’s that about? You can’t have it both ways. I still think it makes Southwestern look really bad.”

APRIL RAMIREZ
Southwestern College
alumna

Southwestern alumna April Ramirez agreed.

“It is kind of crazy that Southwestern has CHEL and says it is an affirming campus, but it is also in a relationship with a college that doesn’t support LGBTQ students,” she said. “What’s that about? You can’t have it both ways. I still think it makes Southwestern look really bad.”

MONEY DRIVES PHILOSOPHY

Cazares said for PLNU to ever reach its potential it needs to wean itself off the conservative money the campus depends on.

“LGBTQ people and other progressive notions are seen as problems and things that are seen as problems tend to go away,” she said. “The university always says that it wants to foster an inclusive environment, and I think that in some ways they do try. I don’t want to put all the blame on the president or the deans, but I think they all play into (discrimination) in different ways. When money is threatened that becomes the university’s number one concern.”

Jordan Rios (a pseudonym) is a Southwestern College and PLNU alumnus who said he received a quality education but “lived in fear” much of the time he was on the Point Loma campus.

“Some mornings I could feel my hands clinch on the steering wheel when I entered campus,” he said. “I liked my classes and most of my professors were nice. I was just nervous about some of the other students who were gay bashers.”

PLNU is unsustainable as long as it looks the other way from hate speech and its anti-LGBTQ culture, said Rios.

“(PLNU) wants to be like SDSU and UCSD and be a place for serious science students,” he said. “Won’t happen until it gets its act together with its LGBTQ students. Modern universities don’t put up with that. Good students who have choices won’t put up with that, either. Don’t have to. News flash, a lot of smart STEM students are gay.”

Cazares agreed. A reckoning looms, she said.

“Soon PLNU is going to have to figure out money concerns and whether they want to become more than what they are right now,” she said.

Destination STEM university?

“Who knows? Why not?” said Rios. “They will have to become more open, more modern.”

Funding sources are evolving, Cazares said. The elderly White straight males tied to the Nazarene doctrine are dying off, she said. They are being replaced by younger, more diverse people who are accepting of LGBTQ citizens.

“I donate a couple grand a year to various organizations and groups that I care about, and you can guarantee I am not sending it to PLNU right now,” she said. “I might send it directly to Voices of Love, but I’m not just giving money to the school.”

A private college, Point Loma cannot rely on state or federal funds, Cazares said. Alumni are the institution’s core source of funding.

“Many of us as we grow into our careers are going to be the main demographic (PLNU) will be counting on for cash,” she said. “If they still aren’t creating a safe environment and protecting students and still not protecting queer staff, I don’t think we will be giving and they will have a serious cash problem.”

To receive federal funding PLNU will have to follow federal laws, including Title IX, which bans discrimination and enforces equality, said Rios.

“Point Loma is one of the last of the Old Time Gospel colleges, at least in SoCal,” he said. “They either change with the times or they fade away. Time will tell. A lot of us are watching.”

VIEWPOINTS

Editorials • Opinions • Letters to the Editor



The mission of the Southwestern College Sun is to serve its campuses and their communities by providing information, insights and stimulating discussions of news, activities and topics relevant to our readers. The staff strives to produce a newspaper that is timely, accurate, fair, interesting, visual and accessible to readers. Though The Sun is a student publication, staff members ascribe to the ethical and moral guidelines of professional journalists.

EDITORIAL BOARD

- | | |
|---|--|
| Editor-in-Chief Alexa Lima | Assistant Photo Editor Emily Esparza Dira Wong |
| Associate Editors-in-Chief Emily Ingco Nicolette Monique Luna | Staff Writers Alfonso Julián Camacho Cindy Gonzalez Jose Guzman Lucas Huerta Briana Nuñez Maritza Prieto Raul Ramirez Eduardo Ruiz Melissa Suastegui Martínez Jonathan Tiznado |
| News Editor Morgan Jacobson | Staff Artists DeLuna Abraham Godinez Edmundo Godinez Carla Labto Ivan Medida Robert Navarro |
| Assistant News Editor Zeke Watson | Assistant Campus Editor Rebecca Esparza |
| Viewpoints Editors Anahy J. Gutierrez Luis Zavala | Arts Editor Blanca Esthela Castañeda García |
| Campus Editor Diego Higuera | Assistant Arts Editor Valeryah Lara-Urrea Miguel Nicolas |
| Assistant Campus Editor Rebecca Esparza | Sports Editor Julio Rodriguez |
| Arts Editor Blanca Esthela Castañeda García | Assistant Sports Editor Juan H. Estrada |
| Assistant Arts Editor Valeryah Lara-Urrea Miguel Nicolas | Photo Editors Camila A. Gonzalez Yanelli Z. Robles |
| Sports Editor Julio Rodriguez | |
| Assistant Sports Editor Juan H. Estrada | |
| Photo Editors Camila A. Gonzalez Yanelli Z. Robles | |

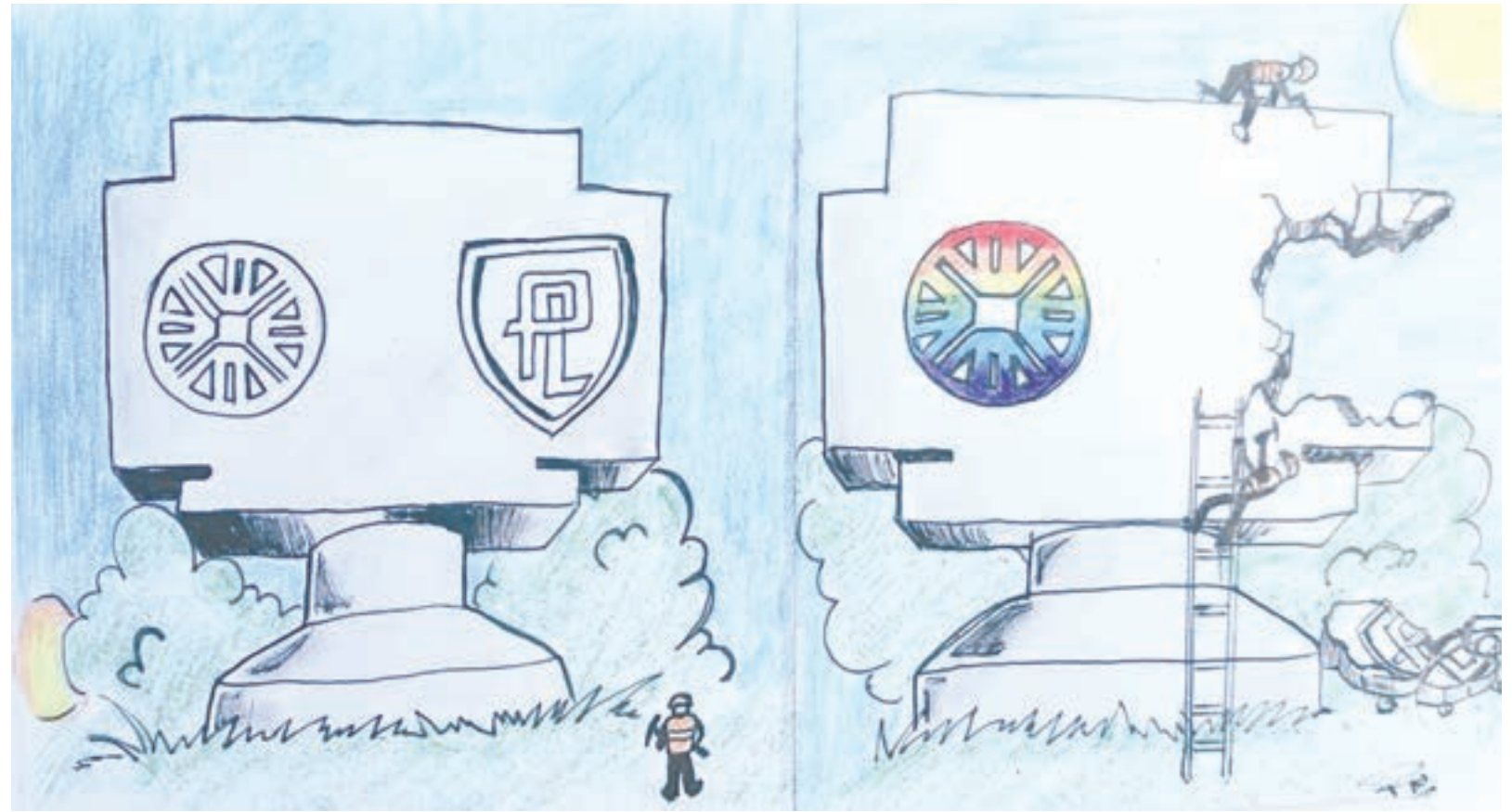


ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT NAVARRO / STAFF

TIME TO CUT LOOSE TOXIC POINT LOMA NAZARENE U.

Enough is enough. It is time to terminate Southwestern College's relationship with Point Loma Nazarene University. PLNU's history of anti-LGBTQ behavior is not congruent with Southwestern's stated support for LGBTQ students and employees. For Southwestern to prioritize the rightwing, openly homophobic religious institution over its own community is unbearable and unacceptable.

This divorce is years overdue. Point Loma never left the homophobic America of the 1950s and '60s. Institutional discrimination against LGBTQ citizens – like slavery and racism – is supposed to be in our nation's past (Florida and Texas notwithstanding). California, in particular, has denounced homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Southwestern College has an enviable reputation as a bastion of multiculturalism and racial diversity. We may be the most diverse college or university in the United States. We have a diverse faculty with diverse backgrounds and rich

experiences. Our diversity gives us strength, power and wisdom. Our LGBTQ students and staff are an essential part of who we are. Without them, we are all diminished.

Southwestern is long past the Age of Ignorance where LGBTQ people were expected to denounce or hide who they are. We do not pressure LGBTQ students to "reform" or "convert." We do not censor their ideas, ban their literature or pull the plug on their films. We do not have special counselors for LGBTQ students to "steer them from sin." We do not pepper them with self-righteous, candy-coated hate speech like "hate the sin, love the sinner."

Point Loma Nazarene does all these things and more. Its smug, holier-than-thou attitude toward its own students and staff is vomitous and primitive. A few examples:

- PLNU bans the hiring of out LGBTQ people as faculty or staff.
- The Dean of Theology was fired for supporting an instructor who expressed support for LGBTQ people.
- In 2015 when the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the right of same sex couples to marry, PLNU stopped hosting weddings, receptions and vow renewals.
- In 2016 PLNU was named one of America's worst universities for LGBTQ students by the human rights organization Campus Pride. It remains on the list.
- Southwestern College students who identify as LGBTQ report being mistreated when they transfer to PLNU or attend on-campus classes required to complete Bachelors degrees they started at Southwestern as part of a joint degree program.

This month PLNU blocked a screening of the film "1946: The Mistranslation that Shifted Culture" by Voices of Love, an LGBTQ+ student organization on campus. The documentary argues the case that recent rewrites of Christian scripture fueled anti-LGBTQ behavior in America's church communities.

PLNU is a private institution and apologists say that gives it the right to discriminate against LGBTQ people. That is a distasteful legal argument for another day. Southwestern College, however, is a public institution funded by state and federal tax money. It is prohibited from discrimination on the basis of race, age, sexual orientation and other human characteristics.

Period. So why is Southwestern College in a cozy relationship with an institution that engages in open discrimination against LGBTQ members of our community? Why do we have a program that intentionally sends students to a place that violates state and federal anti-discrimination laws? Why is Southwestern College – proudly diverse – in partnership with an institution that engages in behavior banned on our campus?

Southwestern College talks a good game but is guilty of galling lapses in principle. Partnering with a retrograde institution like PLNU is to LGBTQ people like partnering with the Ku Klux Klan would be to Black people or the Minuteman Project is to Latinos. It should be unthinkable.

Our leaders frequently speak of making data-informed decisions. The data is clear. PLNU is an anti-LGBTQ institution.

This partnership needs to end.

Now.

Our hope is that principled colleges and businesses abandon PLNU, forcing it to change. Divestiture and isolation work.

PLNU is a bad place for LGBTQ people. Southwestern College is tarnished by rubbing up against that. Our college needs to stop looking the other way and start pressuring PLNU to join the 21st century. PLNU must begin to treat LGBTQ students and staff with the same rights afforded to all other Americans.

Let's get on the right side of this situation. We are currently guilty of complicity and hypocrisy. Do we love and support LGBTQ people, or not?

Time to align the rhetoric with action. PLNU must go.

AWARDS/HONORS

- | | |
|---|---|
| National College Newspaper Hall of Fame Inducted 2018 | San Diego County Multicultural Heritage Award |
| ACP Pacemaker 100 An Outstanding Student Publication of the Century 2022 | California Newspaper Publishers Association California College Newspaper of the Year 2013, 2016, 2020, 2021, 2023 |
| Student Press Law Center National College Press Freedom Award 2011, 2018 | Student Newspaper General Excellence 2002-23 |
| National Newspaper Association National College Newspaper of the Year 2004-2023 | Society of Professional Journalists National Mark of Excellence 2001-23 |
| Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker Awards 2003-06, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012-2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 | First Amendment Award 2002, 2005 |
| General Excellence 2001-24 | San Diego Press Club Excellence in Journalism 1999-2024 |
| Best of Show 2001-24 | Directors Award for Defense of Free Speech 2012 |
| Columbia University Scholastic Press Association Gold Medal for Journalism Excellence 2001-23 | Journalism Association of Community Colleges Pacesetter Award 2001-18, 2022-24 |
| College Media Association National College Newspaper of the Year 2020, 22, 24 | Newspaper General Excellence 2000-2024 |
| California College Media Association Outstanding College/University Newspaper | American Scholastic Press Association Community College Newspaper of the Year |



CAMPUS

Campus News • Student News • Profiles



Photo Courtesy of Henry Romero / Reuters



Photo Courtesy of Frederic J. Brown / Getty Images

THERE GOES THE SUN—A rare total eclipse tracked across Texas, the Midwest and New England in April, plunging the Path of Totality into a cool dusky darkness. The centerline experienced 4 minutes, 28 seconds of darkness, causing animals to prepare for sleep.



Photo Courtesy of Micajah Truitt



Photo Courtesy of Silvia Nadalet

WITNESS TO CELESTIAL SPECTACLE

God winked at Southwestern College on April 8 as a partial eclipse of the sun briefly dimmed and cooled SoCal. Other parts of America on a bending path from West Texas to Maine had a full eclipse experience, including nearly 4-and-a-half minutes of a circular sunset that dropped temperatures as much as 20 degrees in Texas and the midwest.

Astronomy faculty set up a solar viewing center on the roof of the Math and Sciences building. Students fared better than early indigenous Caribbean people who were fooled by malevolent Christopher Columbus who convinced them his god was eating away the sun in 1503. Some American conspiracy theorists, including the notorious Alex Jones, peddled paranoia for profit.

SD PRESS CLUB HONORS FORMER EDITOR

Albert Fulcher, an outstanding EIC at *The Sun*, feted as Emeritus President of the San Diego Press Club

BY DIEGO HIGUERA

Albert Fulcher had no idea when he stumbled through the door of his first ever journalism class at Southwestern College that two decades later he would exit the San Diego Press Club as one of its revered leaders.

Fulcher recently turned over leadership of the venerable club that has roots going back to the 1890s. He has been credited with making it a more student-friendly, inclusive and service-based organization. The current San Diego Press Club was founded in 1973 and has included most of the region's greatest journalists over the past 50 years.

Fulcher was recently honored as President Emeritus with lifetime rights and benefits.

A precursor to Fulcher's regional leadership talents is still nestled in the creaky old newspaper lab ensconced in a "temporary" building since 2003. Among the program's countless awards that line the walls and shelves of the newsroom is a little red one that stands out. A tennis ball sized shiny apple rests on a wooden base with a golden plaque that reads: ALBERT FULCHER, BEST STUDENT MEDIA LEADER.

The College Media Association named Fulcher America's most outstanding Editor-in-Chief almost 13 years ago after he and his feisty staff fought off a dozen attempts to shut down the student newspaper and its website, defame and fire its advisor, and prevent student journalists from breaking what is now known as the South Bay Corruption Scandal. After *The Sun* reported on successful efforts by builders and architects to bribe college officials to obtain multi-million-dollar construction contracts, the San Diego County District Attorney raided their homes and charged them with 264 felony counts of extortion, bribery, perjury, falsifying official documents and myriad other crimes.

The Sun was later honored by the San Diego Press Club, Society of Professional Journalists, National Student Press Freedom Association, Associated Collegiate Press, College Media Association, American Civil Liberties Association and several other national First Amendment and news media organizations. The battles endured by Fulcher and his staff were chronicled on CNN, NBC, ABC and CBS, as well as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and many other national print publications.

Fulcher was honored by Southwestern College with its Student of Distinction Award and was presented a special award for courage and leadership by the governing board. His experienc-

EMERITUS • PG 9

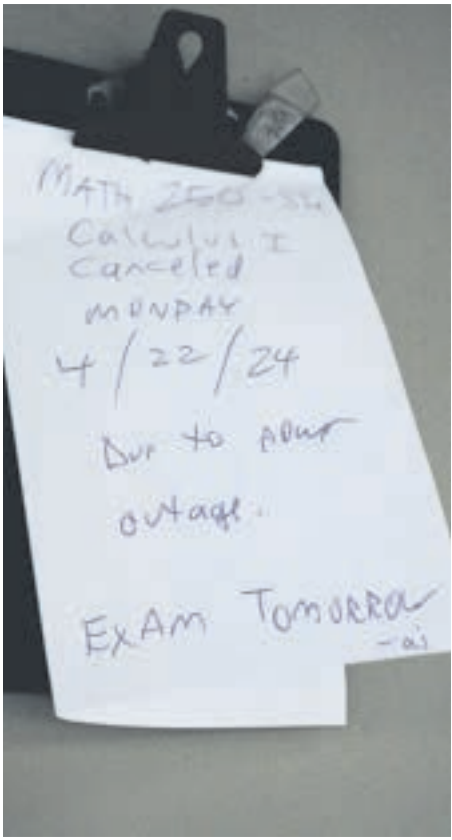


PHOTO BY YANELLI Z. ROBLES / STAFF



PHOTO BY YANELLI Z. ROBLES / STAFF



PHOTO BY ANAHY J. GUTIERREZ / STAFF

MAN MADE ECLIPSE LEAVES COLLEGE DARK

An unexpected power outage caused classes to be cancelled for most of two days when a 60-year-old main electrical cable failed. Electricians and college officials said the system was likely overmatched by all the construction. (above) Dusk brought near complete darkness to the campus, with the exception of the STEM building, which has its own generator.

TWO-YR COLLEGE PLAN IS SHORTER OPTION

Many well-paying careers only require one- or two-year degrees

BY LUCAS HUERTA

Five-and-a-half is the new four.

A typical “four-year” Bachelor’s degree now typically takes more than five-and-a-half years depending on a student’s course of study.

Certificates, however, are holding steady at one-two years and can get students into well-paying jobs much quicker than Bachelor’s programs.

Southwestern College offers about 60 career education options including training for paralegals, police officers, emergency medical technicians, firefighters, recording engineers, drafters, mariachi musicians and an array of others. Most can be completed in a year or two and may lead to well-paying careers.

Automotive repair certificates have helped hundreds of students get on the road to good careers, according to Brian Palmitter, an instructor in the automotive department.

“We have a very weird situation here,” he said. “Auto-

motive is probably unique from other programs, but it serves a lot of people very well.”

Palmitter said automotive students learn how to fix engines, electronic systems, heating and air conditioning. An Automotive Service Excellence Certificate is the goal of most students, he said. This certificate means the student is certified to be a mechanic and ready to be hired at a shop. Some may choose to go in other directions.

“Not everybody that comes here for an automotive skill ends up in automotive,” he said. “Some guys end up working for the electric company.”

Mark Sisson, a professor in the Film, Television and Media Arts program, said an FTMA certificate can open many doors.

“We are preparing students to engage in many different areas including camera operations, cinematography, editing, television and multi-studio cameras,” he said.

Sisson said certificate courses

introduce students to industry grade cameras, lighting and sound design in preparation for studio work and live broadcasts. Internships with broadcast outlets like NBC7 can also be part of a certificate program.

“Sometimes students start a certificate program and discover they really like the discipline and move into a Bachelor’s track,” he said. “That’s always a cool thing to see, too.”

EMERITUS

• CONT FROM PG 8

Former journalism student became honored leader of San Diego Press Club

es at Southwestern changed the direction of the college and his life. Today he is the managing editor for Integrity Newspapers Incorporated, which includes The Star News, East County Californian and The Alpine Sun.

It all started with a Journalism 101 class at Southwestern.

“It totally changed my career path,” he said. “I went to Southwestern right after I had been laid off at the beginning of the recession. In 2007 I went looking for a job and since I had never gone to college nobody was hiring me. It was really frustrating because I had been in the Navy for 10 years and worked my way from the bottom to the top. I had worked for a dental laboratory in San Diego, starting out as a driver and working my way up to chief of operations. After that I worked for a multi-billion-dollar internet advertising company.”

Each time he applied for other positions he was stiff-armed for the same reason – no college education. Fulcher started taking classes at Southwestern, originally for a two-year certificate in Microsoft Office.

Fate intervened. Journalism 101: Mass Media and Society beckoned.

“The reason I decided to take a journalism class was that people I had engaged with couldn’t write a simple email,” he said. “I always wound up in management, so I figured I needed to brush up on my skills in writing, to talk to people about how they write.”

Journalism 101 was more about journalism history and the industry than writing, so Fulcher signed up for Journalism 171: Writing for Publication.

It would be fair to say he exceeded expectations.

His professor loved an article Fulcher wrote about his experience surviving AIDS and encouraged him to publish it. Fulcher was thinking local newspapers, Dr. Max Branscomb was



Photo Courtesy of Albert Fulcher

SUNNY FORMER SUNISTA—Albert Fulcher’s cheerful personality made him a popular editor in divided East County and at the San Diego Press Club.

thinking “Newsweek.”

“I thought he was nuts because that was something audacious I would never have dreamed of trying,” Fulcher said with his native Mississippi twang and country boy humbleness. “But I submitted it like he said.”

On the first day of class the next fall, Fulcher walked in unannounced as Branscomb was going over the syllabus for his new Writing for Publication class. Fulcher told the students that the class had worked for him and that he had been published a few days earlier in “Newsweek.”

Branscomb joked that he should hire Fulcher to bust in on all his classes with great news like that, but instead encouraged him to join the staff of The Sun.

Like all good hero stories, Fulcher was at first reluctant to join because he already had a 21-unit schedule and a vision of a Microsoft Certificate.

“Max kept after me,” he said. “He can be a stubborn old boy when he homes in on something. I joined. Best decision I ever made.”

Fulcher swiftly moved into leadership positions on the Editorial Board and was granted a column – one of journalism’s greatest signs of respect. Branscomb also pushed Fulcher to freelance for professional media outlets to build his portfolio.

“I was working at a Subway Sandwich shop when I started writing for Patch (an online journalism site run by former San Diego Union-Tribune editors),” he said. “All the professionals I met told me to stay at The Sun until I got a job in the news media. I was still on the newspaper staff when I was hired at The Star News.”

The original job opening was for a staff writer, which, coincidentally, went to current Southwestern College Governing Board Member Robert Moreno. Fulcher was instead asked if he would come aboard as Editor of the East County Californian. He accepted.

He embraced the position and became a popular figure in the East County thanks to his rural upbringing and fondness for cowboy hats. The region was an intriguing mix of old, conservative White folks and a burgeoning minority population fueled by Chaldean immigrants from Iraq and other Middle Eastern nations.

“Albert has an innate kindness and respect for all people that made him so well-liked and effective in those East County communities,” said Branscomb. “Albert could have run for mayor of El Cajon where it not for the fact that he lived in Imperial Beach!”

Two years later Fulcher landed his dream job as Editor of Gay San Diego, the region’s best known LGBTQ+ pub-

lication. An outspoken member of the LGBTQ community, Fulcher brought a new energy and perspective to the punchy publication. He later added leadership of the startup Downtown San Diego to his portfolio of responsibilities.

The Integrity newspaper chain lured him back. He is currently Editor of The Star News, East County Californian and Alpine Sun.

“I had no thoughts about being a journalist,” he said. “It was all Max, I can tell you that. In my years of working with Max and The Sun he has this ability to see talent in people and encourage them to take directions where they can succeed just like he did for me. (Students may) have no clue that we have a talent or special ability until someone spots it and tells us. He totally changed my career.”

Journalism gave him the voice to advocate for people and issues important to him, Fulcher said. He remains a warrior for LGBTQ people, a passion that grew out of the AIDS crisis. An AIDS patient himself, Fulcher said he was blessed to survive HIV after becoming one of the early patients to enroll in an experimental drug cocktail program. It worked.

“Those are my most passionate things to write about,” he said. “I just think people in general are fascinating. There are these great moments in this profession when you talk to someone and as soon as they start talking, you can’t wait to write their story. Even as you are writing it you know it’s good. Even before you write it you start to write it in your sleep. I always love those interviews.”

Fulcher radiated joy during his appearances as President of the San Diego Press Club. He enthusiastically greeted students at Press Club events and told them that he was once a student journalist, too.

“That’s where it all started for me,” he said. “That’s where it starts for so many people who work in the news media. Your college newspapers have so much to offer, so much to teach.”

Fulcher said he left his student leadership award in the newsroom so future generations of journalism students would see it.

“Maybe it will inspire some young person to follow in my footsteps.”