

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

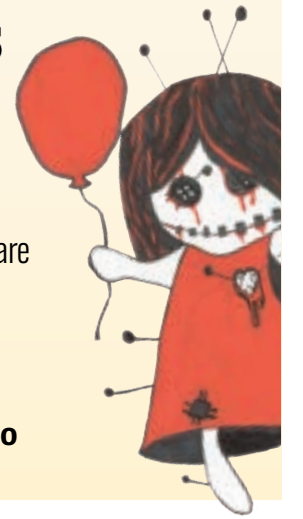


Arts

### Paranoia Reigns

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

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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.

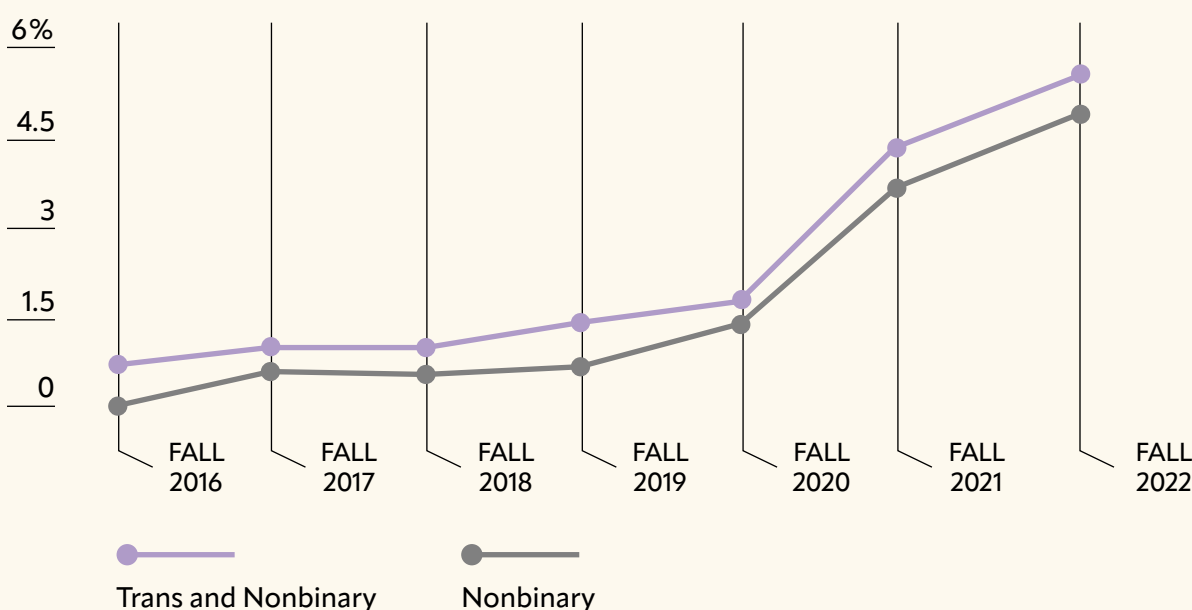
"I think there is a (sizable) percentage of students that don't think we (LGBTQ people) should be allowed to attend PLNU," she said. "When you hear about these hate incidents they are not coming from the professors, they are coming from students with their own personal beliefs."

### 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.”