

# APULIFE

AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

FALL/WINTER 2023

CALLED TO FAITHFULNESS ■ BIBLICAL DIVERSITY ■ GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT STORIES



Faith-Informed  
Excellence in Science  
and Research

*God First Since 1899*



The semester is in full swing, and God continues to bless APU in remarkable ways. Beginning with our Faculty/Staff Kickoff event (see story on page 10) and continuing throughout the semester, our campuses are bustling as we celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> year of equipping students to be difference makers in the world for the cause of Christ.

The last few months have been especially encouraging as we welcomed Anita Fitzgerald Henck, PhD, to serve as provost, and David Shynn, MBA, as vice president, chief strategy officer. I'm incredibly grateful to God for filling these final two executive leadership positions, and look forward to how God will use APU's senior leadership team to help advance the mission of APU for years to come.

This semester has been marked by an intentional commitment to prayer. In the last few weeks, more than 500 alumni and friends have joined a grassroots initiative I'm calling AzusaPrays. To join this faithful team of prayer warriors who receive a monthly list of prayer requests from me, simply email amorris@apu.edu with the words "I'm In" and I'll add you to the list.

I've also been deeply moved by a group of students who recently hosted the first of several on-campus worship nights. A student who attended wrote to me and said, "God exceeded our expectations ... nearly 100 students came and worshiped for more than 5 hours ... students shared about God's redemptive power in their lives ... every student who attended received prayer." The presence of God was evident, with many in our community describing spiritual awakening on campus.

God is also showing Himself faithful to APU in countless other ways. Highlights include a host of new faculty publications, a \$2.7 million grant to meet the needs of our Hispanic student population, a recent STEM Research Symposium, a new Diversity Strategic Plan, improvements in student retention, nearly 300 students involved in Discipleship Groups, a new APU website that launched this fall, and so much more.

We have much to be thankful for here at APU, and as we celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we do so recognizing God's faithfulness to this institution, and with great expectation for how He will use APU to advance His work in the world for years to come. Thank you for partnering with us in the great work of Christian higher education. Be encouraged.

In Christ,

Adam J. Morris, PhD  
President

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FALL/WINTER 2023



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*Cover photo by Dana Attebery, MA '17*

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Azusa Pacific University's Department of Theater Arts delighted audiences with their fall 2023 production of *Cinderella*. This contemporary take on the classic tale featured the music of Rodgers & Hammerstein, colorful sets and costuming, and a story brought to life by the talented cast of APU students. *Cinderella* kicked off the theater season, which also includes *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Silent Sky*.

APU theater arts students perform in main-stage productions, studio shows, short films, an annual webseries, and an L.A. industry showcase. They're mentored by professors with acclaimed professional credentials—working actors, directors, designers, agents, and casting directors.



## Anita Henck Named Provost

Azusa Pacific University President Adam J. Morris, PhD, named Anita Fitzgerald Henck, PhD, provost and chief academic officer, effective July 1, 2023. Henck’s expertise lies in aligning programs/institutions with best academic practices; developing innovative curriculum and student service programs; building strong, healthy teams; and leading turnaround assignments in administrative areas. Her experiences and responsibilities at APU, Eastern Nazarene College (Quincy, Massachusetts), and American University (Washington, DC) have included assignments as dean, department chair, program director, faculty member, vice president, board/press liaison, policy and speech writer, ombudsperson, and assistant to the president and provost.

“Dr. Henck’s genuine love for our students and our community, heart for faculty, collaborative spirit, ability to innovate, aptitude for organizational change, and skill in shaping institutional culture, coupled with her outstanding research, writing, and teaching and strong commitment to the mission of APU, are among the many reasons why I invited her into this important role,” Morris said.

As provost, Henck will lead and advocate for APU’s academic mission, overseeing all schools, colleges, and libraries. Reporting to the president and serving as a member of the President’s Cabinet, Henck will provide strategic leadership and oversight of academics and broad university initiatives.

“I am honored and humbled to be selected to serve as APU’s fifth provost and to partner with faculty and academic leadership to enrich APU’s academic identity,” said Henck. “The transformative power of education—for individuals, families, and communities—is a compelling call in which I have invested my professional life. With a renewed focus on innovation and agility, APU’s academic future could not be brighter and our mission could not be more clear.”



“I am honored and humbled to be

selected to serve as APU’s fifth provost and to partner with faculty and academic leadership to enrich APU’s academic identity.”

ANITA FITZGERALD HENCK, PHD

## Renee Pozza Selected as New Dean of School of Nursing



APU Provost Anita Fitzgerald Henck, PhD, named Renee Pozza, PhD, RN, CNS, FNP-BC, FAASLD, dean of the School of Nursing, effective October 1, 2023.

Pozza, a nationally recognized researcher, clinician, educator, and leader in nursing education, brings more than 25 years of higher education experience to the role, with expertise in developing new programs and pathways for nursing professionals at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

“Dr. Pozza is a visionary collaborator and innovative educator deeply committed to her faith, which provides her with the core values essential for academic leadership at APU,” Henck said. “Her investment in APU has shaped institutional policies and practices, which has positioned the university as a local, national, and global leader in nursing education.”

As dean, Pozza oversees day-to-day operations and provides leadership to 14 programs, the Institute of Health Research, and continuing education on five campuses (Azusa, Monrovia, San Diego, High Desert, Inland Empire). Pozza will serve internal and external stakeholders as a liaison with APU’s clinical partners, who support the School of Nursing in its mission of educating the next generation of nursing and public health professionals. She will also supervise accreditation efforts at state and national levels, and will manage relations with alumni across the nation and the world as the School of Nursing prepares for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025.

“To bring my passion for preparing exemplary nurses to this role at my alma mater is exciting,” Pozza said. “I completed three programs of study at APU, then taught on our faculty and served as associate dean for more than two decades. I understand the critical need for competent and compassionate nurses at the bedside, as nurse educators, and as health care leaders and scholars. And I can attest to the impact our nurses are making across the world. I look forward to advancing our forward-thinking, innovative approach that will bring health and wellness to generations of Californians and others around the country and across the globe.”

## KKLA Conference a Success



On September 21, APU hosted the 2023 KKLA Impact Conference, with more than 400 pastors from churches around Southern California and beyond in attendance. The

conference opened with worship led by Raymond Gregory, followed by an address from Steve Arterburn, founder of New Life Ministries and host of New Life Live on KKLA. Next, pastors participated in table discussions on a variety of issues facing church leaders today, before hearing from APU President Adam J. Morris, PhD, who spoke about his journey to APU and the university’s plan to remain faithful to its mission. Next, Scott Furrow, host of KKLA’s Pastor Scott Show, interviewed renowned national talk show host Dennis Prager about his new series of books, “The Rational Bible,” and his advice for pastors today. After the interview and lunch, Furrow hosted a local pastor’s panel, featuring Steve Balentine (San Gabriel Community Church), JP Jones (Crossline Community Church), Ron Hill (Love and Unity Christian Fellowship), and Shane Idelman (Westside Christian Fellowship). The conference concluded with the presentation of the Impact Award to Andy Bales of the Union Rescue Mission and a keynote address from pastor Robert Jeffress.



## APU Celebrates Being a Hispanic-Serving Institution

To coincide with the culmination of Hispanic Heritage Month, APU hosted the Title V Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) event on October 13, featuring a live mariachi band and a fajita lunch for students, faculty, and staff. The event included addresses by Richard S. Martinez, EdD, Title V HSI program manager; Adam J. Morris, PhD, APU president; Robert Gonzales, Azusa mayor; Brady Compaan ’24, Student Government Association president; Jocelyn Brambila ’25, Latin American Student Association (LASA) president; and Rebekah A. Rossi Loufik, campus pastor. Later that night, LASA hosted the Latino Heritage Night with more live mariachi music, traditional Latino food, and folklórico dancing performances.

APU is one of only 516 HSIs across the nation. Hispanic students make up approximately 40 percent of APU’s student body. As part of the Title V HSI grant, Martinez will implement a series of culturally relevant curricula throughout the school year.

## By the Numbers

**39:** The holiday season kicked off with Azusa Pacific University’s School of Music performing its beloved Celebrate Christmas concert at Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena. Now in its 39<sup>th</sup> year, the event drew more than 100 alumni from several decades to join current music students on stage in a mass choir that performed new songs and favorites in a special grand finale.

**25:** APU was recently recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* as a top college for social mobility. Securing spot No. 25 among California universities, APU is recognized for enrolling and graduating a significant population of economically disadvantaged students, many of whom are first-generation college students. These graduates go on to successful careers, improving their lives and those of their families.

**14:** APU students in the School of Business and Management’s Leung School of Accounting had the opportunity to network with 14 accounting firms at the annual Meet the Firms event held on campus in October. APU is recognized for having one of California’s top accounting schools, and employers recruit APU students for numerous internships and jobs, often before they graduate.

**12:** Azusa Pacific has selected Romans 12 as this year’s university passage to coincide with APU’s 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary and its theme: Celebrating a Legacy of Transformation. The passage represents an institutional calling that has guided APU’s work since its founding as the Training School for Christian Workers: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (verse 2, NIV).

## Grants Advance Significant Research and Scholarship



**\$2,598,706**

From the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) to Lynda Reed, DNP, RN, FNP-C, associate dean of evaluation, accreditation, and assessment in the School of Nursing, to support students who are dedicated to caring for low-income, minority individuals

in the community as nurse practitioners (NP). APU has one of the largest NP programs in California and graduates 150-200 NP students each year with a mission to serve God's people. The Advancing Nursing Education Workforce (ANEW) Program has provided continuous funding to APU for the past six years with a total award to date of \$6,734,998. The most recent work plan emphasizes interventions to improve maternal outcomes, reduce substance use disorders, and identify community-based resources, and early childhood intervention for developmental delay.



**\$1,498,963**

From the HRSA to Ruth Mielke, PhD, RN, CNM, FACNM, WHNP-BC, associate dean of faculty affairs in the School of Nursing, to support the L.A. County Simulation Education Training (LAC SET) project. In partnership with L.A. County and Pasadena City College, the LAC SET

project will use virtual reality and high-fidelity manikin simulations to train nurses and nursing students. This project will equip nurses with the skills they'll need in order to recognize health issues in the elderly and in mothers, which is particularly impactful in L.A. County, where there's a higher rate of maternal morbidity and mortality compared to other regions of the country.



**\$1,361,820**

From the U.S. Department of Education to Kandy Mink Salas, PhD, associate provost for student success, as part of the TRIO McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, to provide research and scholarship opportunities to low-income and first-generation

undergraduate students who show high promise in academic curriculum and demonstrate commitment to pursuing advanced and doctoral degrees. The grant will be funded at \$272,364 per year over the course of five years. Areas of support include undergraduate student-faculty research and mentoring partnerships, summer research internships, seminars and workshops to prepare students for doctoral studies, tutoring and academic counseling, and special assistance to program participants on seeking out, applying for, and enrolling in graduate programs. The grant also supports students' personalized need assessments, development of individualized achievement plans, and interactively monitoring progress.

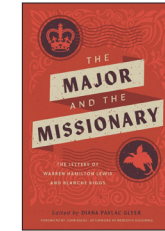


**\$1,249,837**

From the Lilly Endowment as part of the Compelling Preaching Initiative to Jenn Graffius, DMin, executive director of the Center for Vocational Ministry (CVM), to support the Formation of the Preacher for More Effective and Engaging Preaching project. This initiative will be

implemented by the CVM in collaboration with the School of Theology. With instruction from renowned pastors and preaching scholars, the project offers a continuing education certificate in transformational preaching. This program encompasses all levels of the formational process of a preacher and is open to pastors at all stages of their career (including undergraduate and graduate ministry students). This program provides a means for the academy and the Church to collaborate, equipping pastors and ministry leaders with robust mentoring training, peer-to-peer mentoring, preaching conferences, coaching, and lectures from renowned pastors. Special focus will be given to women in ministry, pastors of color, and those serving in solo-pastor congregations.

## Scholarship at Work



**The Major and the Missionary: The Letters of Warren Hamilton Lewis and Blanche Biggs** (Rabbit Room Press, 2023) edited by Diana Pavlac Glyer, PhD, professor, Honors College

After the death of his brother, Warren Lewis lived at the Kilns in Oxford, edited his famous brother's letters, and did a little writing of his own. Then he got a letter from a stranger on the far side of the world. Over the years that followed, he and Blanche Biggs, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, shared a vibrant correspondence. These conversations encompassed their views on faith, their politics, their humor, the legacy of C.S. Lewis, and their own trials and longings. Their letters paint a colorful portrait that illuminates not only the particulars of distant times and places, but the intimate contours of a rare friendship.



**Who Are You, Really? A Philosopher's Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Persons**

(IVP Academic, 2023) by Joshua Rasmussen, PhD, assistant professor, Department of Philosophy  
What does it mean to be human? What is a person? Where did we come from? Many answers have been offered throughout history in response to these perennial questions, including those from biological, anthropological, sociological, political, and theological approaches. And yet the questions remain. Rasmussen offers his own step-by-step examination of the fundamental nature and ultimate origin of persons. Using accessible language and clear logic, he argues that the answer to the question of what it means to be a person sheds light not only on our own nature but also on the existence of the One who gave us life.



**Historical Fiction Now**

(Oxford University Press, 2023) edited by Mark Eaton, PhD, professor, Department of English, and Bruce Holsinger, PhD (University of Virginia)  
*Historical Fiction Now* brings together prominent authors, scholars, and critics of historical fiction to explore the genre's character, fortunes, and potential in the 21st century. The volume explores the nature of reading and writing about historical fiction in the present moment while meditating on myriad contexts of the genre. What inspires writers to choose particular moments, events, and personalities as the subjects of their fictional imaginings, and with what implications for their readers' understanding of the present? How do contemporary scholars approach the making and the reception of historical fiction, and how do these approaches resonate with writers' own preoccupations in the process of invention?



**The Goblin Twins**

(Independently Published, 2023) written and illustrated by Chuck Grieb, MFA, professor, Department of Cinematic Arts, and director, BA in Animation and Visual Effects  
An illustrated fantasy novel, *The Goblin Twins* follows Bela and Vuto as they run for their lives from an evil shaman, fleeing to the far side of the enchanted Thicket. But the shaman has not given up, and the Goblin Twins' escape to the Faerie Garden Clans sparks a confrontation that could lead to a Goblin-Faerie war. Written for anyone aged 10 to 100, *The Goblin Twins* includes more than 100 illustrations.



700 faculty and staff gathered in the Felix Event Center (and online) to usher in the start of the fall semester.

# Called to Faithfulness

BY ADAM J. MORRIS, PHD

**Throughout the pages of the last several issues of *APU Life* we have intentionally focused on APU's unwavering commitment to Christ-centered higher education.**

After all, how can we claim to be a *God First* institution if the Truth of God's Word doesn't permeate every crack and crevice of this place?

Such was my message back in August as 700 faculty and staff gathered in the Felix Event Center (and online) to usher in the beginning of a new academic year and the start of the fall semester. It was a powerful day of worship and prayer celebrating God's faithfulness to APU.

At the heart of our gathering was a message I felt compelled by God to deliver—a reminder, if you will, of APU's clear Christian identity and purpose. Having spent my first year immersed in APU's mission and engaged with our many stakeholders, it was important to me that we commission this academic year with a very clear reminder of who we are and why we exist.

I led the community through the *What We Believe* document that is foundational to our mission. It outlines our core convictions as expressed through our Statement of Faith, Daily Living Expectations, Four Cornerstones, Statement of Academic Freedom, Evangelical Commitment, Statement on Diversity, Statement on Human Sexuality, and much more. If you've never read this document, I strongly encourage you to do so. It can be found on our website at [apu.edu/about/believe/](http://apu.edu/about/believe/).

I reminded the APU community of the challenges facing all of Christian higher education and the importance of us remaining faithful to God's call on this institution. I described how this will require laserlike attentiveness and a daily commitment to stewarding the mission of APU in ways that honor and please God. And I talked about how faithfulness to mission will require bold decision making, anchored in courage and conviction, and a level of organizational attentiveness and resolve to stay the course.

I went on to say that APU will not compromise its biblical values and convictions. We will not succumb to the pressures of culture. We won't let things slide. We will hold each other to the highest levels of accountability. We will pursue Christlikeness in our work, in our scholarship, and in our relationships with one another.

And we will make "faithfulness to God" our highest institutional priority.

Toward the end of my address, I asked the APU community to join me in recommitting ourselves to our time-honored mission—asking that we fully live into our identity and calling as a Christ-centered university.

I believe so strongly that what our culture needs now more than ever is a generation of students and graduates who are trained and prepared to be at the absolute top of their game professionally, and equipped with a winsome and articulate biblical worldview that points people to the saving message of Jesus Christ. As one of the largest faith-based universities in America, APU has a special calling and responsibility to be the aroma of Christ.

In many ways, our fall kickoff event was a watershed moment for the faculty and staff of APU, with many expressing deep gratitude for missional clarity and conviction. At the end of the day, we spent time in corporate prayer, asking God to guide and direct us and to bless the semester ahead—how appropriate as we celebrate 125 years since the founding of this university.

In the days that followed, I reached out to many of you directly, asking that you join me in a grassroots effort I'm calling AzusaPrays. To the hundreds and

hundreds of you who emailed me directly, thank you! Thank you for agreeing to pray for APU every day as we seek God's will and provision for this institution.

If you're not yet part of AzusaPrays, I invite you to join today. Simply email me at [amorris@apu.edu](mailto:amorris@apu.edu) with the two words "I'm in" and I'll add you to the growing list of friends and supporters who are petitioning God on our behalf. In return, I'll send you a short list of monthly prayer requests that can be part of your regular quiet time with God.

As I begin year two of my time at the helm of APU, I do so recognizing the immeasurable power of prayer, and the incredible promise that APU holds to educate and disciple a generation of students to be salt and light. You are dear partners with us in this ministry, and your faithful support is greatly needed and much appreciated.

God is continuing to do incredible things through our faculty, staff, and students. Thank you for standing with us in the great work we call Azusa Pacific University!

**Adam J. Morris, PhD**, is the 18<sup>th</sup> president of Azusa Pacific University. [amorris@apu.edu](mailto:amorris@apu.edu)

Toward the end of my address, I asked the APU community to join me in recommitting ourselves to our time-honored mission—asking that we fully live into our identity and calling as a Christ-centered university.

# Faith-Informed Excellence in Science and Research

BY ABBIE J. REED

From undergraduate biology majors exploring the intricacies of human drug-metabolizing enzymes to biotech master's degree students utilizing 3D tissue models of human organs to minimize animal testing, APU students are fully engaged in high-level research in their fields. With access to multimillion-dollar, industry-standard equipment, along with professor-mentors to lead projects, students conduct experiments, submit papers for publication, and make original contributions to the sciences well before graduation.

This high commitment to research is reflected in APU's status as the only institution in the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) to earn a prestigious R2 designation from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education—the most influential rating organization among colleges and universities. Rather than choosing between a Christ-centered education or access to esteemed research opportunities, students find both at APU.

And opportunities only continue to grow. Earlier this year, APU announced a \$2 million investment in research infrastructure and equipment. Among other upgrades, the university introduced a new bioengineering facility in September—the only one of its kind among CCCU schools. New equipment includes a Cell-Ink Bio-X 3D tissue printer, allowing students and faculty to construct tissue models of major organs, including skin, liver, heart, and brain.

“Our philosophy is to open doors for undergraduate students to use these powerful tools that would normally be off limits to them,” said Philip Cox, PhD, associate professor of biology and chemistry. “We want our students to have hands-on experience that will give them a competitive edge in their future workplace.”

If you glimpse inside the Segerstrom Science Center, you might find Cox and a group of student researchers gathered around the newly acquired triple quadrupole mass spectrometry system. The equipment quantifies drugs and other small molecules in complex solutions to better understand how the body processes prescription drugs.

Just one department over, under the guidance of Aisha Chen, PhD, assistant professor of engineering and computer science, a group of physical therapy, nursing, and computer science students combine skill sets to design and test video software. Their goal? To predict and prevent falls in nursing centers.

“How valuable are these research experiences? Completely invaluable,” said Chen. “Not only are they applying what they've learned in class, but they're also acquiring knowledge and skills beyond that. They're making impactful contributions as the next generation of Christian scientists.”

## UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE

Alongside significant research opportunities, APU makes sure students are equipped with more than just a degree. Here, course matter comes to life through real-world projects and prestigious connections across

fields. Whether a freshman writing their first computer code or a PhD student securing an internship, students graduate with robust experience that sets them apart in the job marketplace.

“My engineering students actually create the circuits they built the equations for, to see firsthand how they run,” said Chen. “The hands-on projects integrated throughout our programs set them up to enter the workplace a step ahead of their peers.”

Valuable training takes place off campus, as well. Many programs have long-standing relationships with prominent organizations, including big-name tech companies such as Raytheon and the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Students in the School of Nursing—which celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025—take advantage of a rich history of partnerships with key healthcare leaders in Southern California, including City of Hope and Huntington Hospital, part of the Cedars-Sinai health system.

“We have a unique philosophy of starting students in a clinical setting right at the beginning of their college journey, while most other programs wait until later.”



“MY ENGINEERING STUDENTS **ACTUALLY CREATE THE CIRCUITS THEY BUILT THE EQUATIONS FOR,** TO SEE FIRSTHAND HOW THEY RUN. THE HANDS-ON PROJECTS INTEGRATED THROUGHOUT OUR PROGRAMS SET THEM UP TO ENTER THE WORKPLACE A STEP AHEAD OF THEIR PEERS.”

—Aisha Chen, PhD

*Continued on page 14*

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said Renee Pozza, PhD, RN, CNS, FNP-BC, dean and professor in the School of Nursing. “Because of this, they graduate with robust experience in a variety of settings, and 98 percent are employed within three months.”

Since Southern California is home to a vast range of clinical opportunities, students within these fields are able to experience diverse areas of expertise. The Department of Physical Therapy, for example, has around 600 clinical partnerships across the southwestern U.S.

“I don’t think there’s any better location to train,” said Samuel Girguis, PsyD, chair of the Department of Clinical Psychology. “Whether my students desire to work at correctional facilities, in early childhood settings, or with immigrant families, there is a huge diversity in clinical populations here, opening doors to their field of interest.”

The Master of Science in Biotechnology program takes industry connections to a new level. Through an ultra-applied-learning model, APU collaborates closely with prominent companies such as Amgen, Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine, and Medtronic to place students in professional workplaces throughout the duration of their program.

“This is a real boots-on-the-ground experience for them, not offered in your typical, campus-based program—it allows students to build a professional network in a hard-to-enter industry,” said David



Dyer, PhD, executive director and professor in the biotechnology program. “I’ve had more than 200 students graduate with this kind of training, and 92 percent of them have moved successfully into careers within months of graduation.”

These practicum and internship connections bolster résumés and bring sought-after connections, resulting in alumni who are effective in complex jobs on their first day of hire.

### ETHICS GROUNDED IN TRUTH

Artificial intelligence entering the workforce? Genetic editing of human genomes? The opioid epidemic? In today’s age of rapidly advancing technology and scientific solutions, fraught with ethical concerns and questions, it is perhaps more important than ever to train a generation of highly qualified, Christ-centered scientists who will navigate their fields with integrity and biblical wisdom.

So, as students peer through microscopes, engage in classes, and pursue internships, APU makes sure Christ is at the heart of all that they do.

“One thing that makes APU different is our faith,” said Dyer, who coaches biotechnology students in ethical decision making as they prepare to manufacture pharmaceuticals, design medical equipment, or manage the development of new products. “It’s one of my joys to be able to refer to a Christian worldview in the ethics performance area.”

The result? Students able to discuss and think critically about topics often pushed under the table or omitted from secular curriculums—students grounded in Truth.

Companies are beginning to notice and value the faith-based, ethical perspectives of employees who graduated from these programs. So much so that Gilead Sciences, the biopharmaceutical company that produces the annual flu vaccine, and several other prominent organizations have expressed an interest in establishing a regional industrial ethics center at APU.

“Our alumni are bringing a unique, deeply needed perspective into their fields,” said Dyer.

### PRACTICES INTERWOVEN WITH FAITH

Aside from the hot-topic ethical issues and questions of today, faith is also imbued into the everyday practices of APU students—whether

nurses answering patient calls late at night or psychiatrists working through trauma with an abuse victim. As our students learn the necessary skills and knowledge for their field, faculty intentionally shepherd them to marvel at God’s creation and follow Jesus’ example.

In the physical therapy and nursing programs, this involves diving deep into Scripture, applying passages such as those about Jesus’ healing ministries to the patients and families they’ll serve.

“We know that the mind, body, and spirit are all tied together in healing,” said Susan Shore, PT, PhD, chair and professor in the Department of Physical Therapy. “So we train our students to view patients as Jesus did: with respect, dignity, and excellent care. He is our example.”

APU’s Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology students learn how to take into account values and spiritual beliefs with future clients—rather than treating those things as topics to avoid, as is the case in many programs.

“Because it is so easy to abuse the power differential and try to impose your values on someone else, many schools don’t train on faith/spirituality in psychotherapy at all,” said Girguis. “We want to teach our students to address their patients’ values and belief systems with the grace and tenderness of Christ.”

In all majors, students grow in appreciation of God’s creation. Faculty encourage students to pause, reflect, and marvel at the intricacy of a cell or the complexity of the human brain. In turn, these students carry their wonder and reverence into their future workplaces, setting themselves apart in a secular world.

“Uncovering how the mechanisms of the natural world work is not a threat to faith, but a chance to develop an appreciation of how these things can happen,” said Cox. “We are training Christians, who happen to be scientists, with the tools to deepen their understanding of how God is working.”

### ALUMNI TRANSFORMED TO MAKE AN IMPACT

At Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, Jenna Chiang ’21, PsyD, wears many hats. As a bilingual pediatric neuropsychologist, she might be found conducting evaluations for epilepsy patients pre- and post-surgery, monitoring children with blood cancers,



or providing bilingual services to Spanish-speaking patients across departments, among other roles. Her passion? Advocating for diverse groups, a calling that emerged while at APU.

“The relationships I fostered with colleagues and professors from wide-ranging perspectives stretched and refined my personal values,” said Chiang. “This, in turn, highlighted the importance of reaching historically marginalized communities in my work with medically fragile children.”

Halfway across the world, in Heraklion, Greece, a pair of APU alumni enter the stadium for the 2023 World Deaf Basketball Championships. As physical therapists for the U.S. men’s and women’s teams, Azusa Pacific DPT grads Natalie (Peterson ’17) and Chris Meinhold ’20 thoughtfully tend to the athletes’ injuries, design recovery programs, and learn stories from the deaf community.

“APU taught me to not just look at the injury or diagnosis, but consider the person as a whole,” said Natalie. At the end of the championships, both teams walked away with a gold medal.

Perhaps the greatest testament to a program is its alumni, and these stories are two of hundreds that show the long-lasting impact of a transformative APU education in the sciences. Science, Technology,

Math, and Engineering careers are expected to grow nearly four times as much as non-STEM careers in just the next 10 years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, yet close to 60 percent of employers face difficulties recruiting for these rapidly growing positions, most often due to lack of technical abilities and qualifications. Azusa Pacific University students—equipped with not just a degree but valued experience, outstanding skill, and a meaningful faith perspective—enter the field prepared to make a difference with excellence, for the cause of Christ.

**Abbie J. Reed ’20** is a freelance writer living in Manzanita, Oregon. [abbiejreed@gmail.com](mailto:abbiejreed@gmail.com)



# A Commitment to Biblical Diversity

BY KEITH HALL

**“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9-10 ESV)**

## LEANING INTO A CULTURE OF COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Imagine a university community where *all* students, faculty, staff, and administrators experience a heightened sense of community and belonging—an open-enrolled, Christ-centered community where *all* employees and students are seen, spiritually formed, intellectually stimulated, socially connected, and culturally adept with faith-informed resolve to *advance the work of God in the world*. Imagine a community where there are no disparities in success outcomes across diverse categorical lines. Envision a university community where all faculty, staff, and students are thriving and experiencing\*:

**Membership:** a true sense of belonging that translates to thriving, holistic outcomes.

**Relationship:** the ability to relate to and establish authentic, meaningful connections with peers and colleagues within the community.

**Ownership:** the opportunity to leverage one’s faith, strengths, expertise, and unique capacity to offer contribution within and outside of the community.

**Partnership:** the opportunity to cultivate and optimize interdependent relationships in learning, building, and serving collaboratively to make a difference.

*\*Adapted from Chavis and McMillan, 1986*

## WHY IS DIVERSITY IMPORTANT?

At Azusa Pacific University, diversity is not a secular concept but a biblical one. The Bible includes a recurring theme of *diversity as an expression of God’s image, love, and boundless creativity*. Scripture begins with the Creation narrative, which illuminates God’s infinite and creative power (Genesis 1-2), and it ends with a descriptive,

## COMMUNITY

We believe in community. We are a richly diverse people who value the worth of each individual. Our mission is to encourage, equip, and enable each student to fulfill his or her great potential, and in turn, encourage, equip, and enable others.



**“I love Colossians 3:17, which says whatever you do, whether in word or deed, to do it in the name of God. I want that to be the story of my life, whether I’m on a chapel team, or I’m an RA (resident advisor), or pursuing acting behind or in front of the camera—I want it to be for God.”**

*Jollyfisher Ekpe '24  
Acting for the Stage and Screen*

Spirit-filled vision from the Apostle John describing a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual Kingdom (Revelation 7) under the rule of the Lord. We see diversity in Luke’s account of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. We also see it reflected throughout Jesus’ ministry as He engaged, loved, fed, healed, and ministered to people from a variety of backgrounds, including the Samaritan woman in John 4, children and the elderly in Matthew 18 and Isaiah 46:4, the physically impaired in John 9 and Mark 2, the psychologically and spiritually distressed in Mark 5, and so many others in terms of social, political, racial, and economic standing. Diversity mattered to Jesus, so it should be important to us.

Because a commitment to diversity is a biblical distinctive, it’s also a missional priority. To fulfill our institutional mission of *advancing the work of God in the world*, the APU community must effectively engage an increasingly diverse and complex world. Fulfilling the Great Commission in today’s culture requires faith, courage, discernment, and cultural dexterity to spread and live out the Gospel. Current (and forecasted) student demographics on many college campuses show a significant rise in female students, first-generation college students, students of color, international students, and undocumented students; APU reflects these statistics.

These demographic shifts translate into a rich mosaic of faculty, staff, and students. Higher education research

confirms that diversity enhances the education experience, fosters critical thinking and problem-solving, prompts creativity and innovation, bolsters community engagement, increases preparedness for organizations and industries that have become increasingly diverse, and translates to other measurable benefits for the individual, institution, and society as a whole. This development also presents an opportunity to consider ways we can advance our mission and legacy of transformation within a community reflecting myriad backgrounds. Steps toward this goal include deep understanding of the faculty, staff, and students and how they experience APU, and creating a shared vision for cultivating belonging, which translates to holistic gains for the entire university.

## UNDERSTANDING OUR UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Since our inaugural cohort of 12 students in Whittier, California, under the leadership of President Mary Hill in 1899, the APU student body has expanded significantly. Our mosaic comprises traditional and nontraditional students, first-generation and legacy students, residential and commuter students, domestic and international students, students of color, students with varying abilities, veterans and military-affiliated students, student-athletes, and more.

Today, APU is one of the most diverse Christian higher education institutions in the Council for Christian Colleges &

## CHRIST

Belief in Christ is central to all that we think and do, and who we are. It is this understanding of God’s love that informs all our pursuits: academic, service, and community.



**“Service is transformational. Service is the Gospel. If we’re culturally aware, and going in with a learner’s mind, with faith at the root, then of course you’re going to be transformed alongside those you serve.”**

*Jada Tarvin Abu-Bekr '22  
Social Work*



**“I want to advocate for students and amplify their voices. ... I’ve been surrounded by amazing leaders here who have inspired me. When I took a leap of faith in obedience to serve, that’s the moment God started using me to make a difference for His Kingdom.”**

*Karla Consuelo Alejandro Meza '22, MS '23  
Psychology*

Universities (CCCU). The U.S. Department of Education recognizes APU as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), with more than 25 percent of traditional undergraduate students being Hispanic (37.4%), and as an Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI), with more than 10 percent of traditional undergraduate students being of Native/Indigenous or Asian descent (14.51%). These designations enable APU to vie for competitive grants such as the recently awarded \$2.7 million Title V *Advancing Student Achievement and Success* HSI grant. These funds expand the institution’s ability to support the success of diverse, traditionally underserved students at all levels through resources including robust tutoring and academic advising services, funding of library renovations, and the use of the Stellic student success platform to better serve this growing student population. The grant also funds efforts to equip faculty and staff to more effectively engage, educate, and serve this generation of students.

In addition, the university administered a campus climate survey from January 23-February 24, 2023, to students, faculty, staff, and administration. More than 900 members of our university community participated, reaping empirically validated results. Findings revealed areas of strength and gaps that translate to strategic priorities such as demonstrating an institutional commitment to diversity as a Christ-centered value, bolstering retention, cultivating a healthy campus climate, establishing pathways for success, and increasing community engagement. Student success measures (e.g., retention, persistence, and graduation rates) and employee-related data were coupled with the campus climate survey results to identify action items that form APU’s Diversity Strategic Plan. Multiple campus and online forums have been hosted to communicate campus climate survey results and allow community members to offer feedback, ideas, and observations.

During this milestone year, we celebrate the 125-year legacy of transformation reflected in the heritage of APU, we look ahead with hope and celebration, knowing that APU will continue its mission of equipping a diverse community of disciples and scholars who advance the work of the Lord in the local community, across the nation, and around the globe for His glory.

**Keith Hall, EdD**, is APU’s Vice President for Student Belonging and Chief Diversity Officer. Hall is a Council for Christian Colleges & Universities Presidential Fellow. [khall@apu.edu](mailto:khall@apu.edu)

# Dominique Johnson: Pouring Into the Next Generation

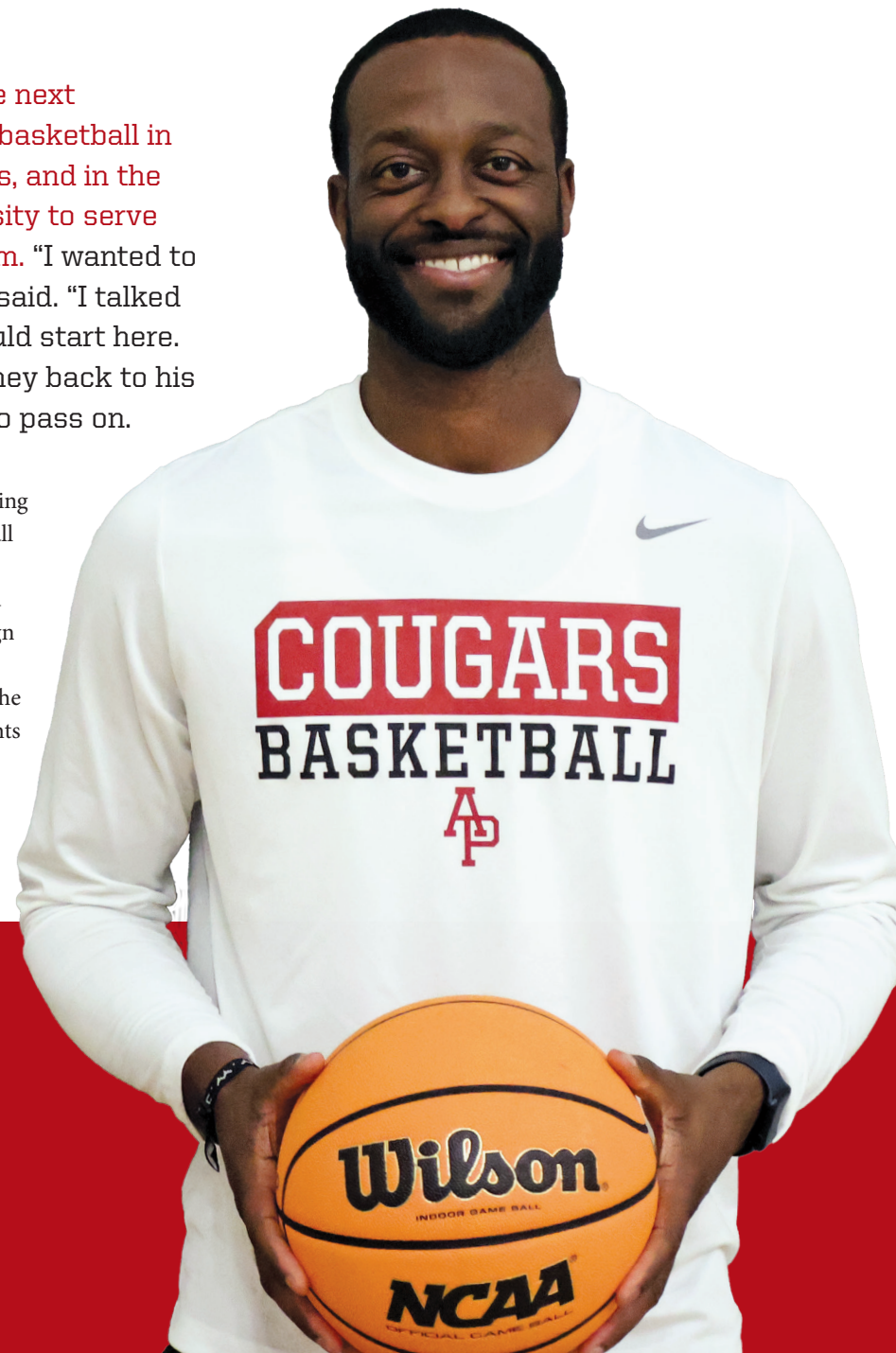
BY NATHAN FOSTER

Dominique Johnson '10 is driven to pour into the next generation. After 13 years playing professional basketball in the NBA D-League, for many international teams, and in the Big3, Johnson returned to Azusa Pacific University to serve as assistant coach on the men's basketball team. "I wanted to share my knowledge and experience," Johnson said. "I talked with (head coach) Pete Bond, and he said I should start here. I'm grateful for the opportunity." Johnson's journey back to his alma mater is filled with life lessons he hopes to pass on.

A Detroit native, Johnson discovered his love for basketball as a child and played for his middle and high school teams. After graduating from high school, he moved to Memphis and played college basketball at Southwest Tennessee Community College. After a standout sophomore season, he was recruited by several schools and decided to transfer to APU. "When I visited APU, I saw the big *God First* sign on the wall in the gym and everything just felt right," he said.

The natural fit translated to enormous success for Johnson and the men's basketball team. In 2008-09, Johnson paced the squad in points at 17.2 per game and three-point field goals with 70 on the season. "Coach (Justin) Leslie broke down my whole game and taught me how to play high percentage shots, spacing, and positioning. I was like a raw piece of clay and he molded me," Johnson said.

Johnson passed on his knowledge in a book, *Adjusting, Adapting, and Managing Expectations of Overseas Basketball*, which gives athletes insight on picking an agent, reading contracts, and avoiding hiccups.



Johnson's achievements earned the recognition of NAIA All-American third team. He led the Cougars to a 24-10 record and a Golden State Athletic Conference (GSAC) championship.

The following year, as a senior, Johnson played even better, earning NAIA All-American first team honors. APU won the GSAC championship again and made it all the way to the NAIA Championship. Unfortunately, APU lost in the final seconds to Oklahoma Baptist. "It was brutal. We sunk a game-winning shot at the buzzer, but upon review, the clock expired literally .1 seconds before the ball left my teammate's hands," Johnson said. "That team was special. I'll never forget that season."

Although his time at APU came to a close, Johnson's basketball career was just taking off. He was selected by the Idaho Stampede in the 2010 NBA D-League Draft, but got cut before the season. "That was the first time I had ever been cut. It taught me a lot about the politics of the D-League," he said. Johnson rebounded, signing with the Texas Legends, where he played for two years, then the Canton Charge for a year before moving on from the D-League. "I got advice from friends to play basketball overseas, so I found a new agent who helped secure me my first international contract in Poland."

Johnson's experience in Poland was a game changer. In his first season, his team won the Polish Cup, even though they weren't considered contenders. "I didn't realize the significance of winning the Cup. I thought it was just another game, but everyone was ecstatic. My agent said I had accomplished something most guys don't experience in their whole career," he said. That season kickstarted Johnson's international career. He went on to play for another team in Poland, where he led the league in scoring, then played in Israel, Turkey, Germany, Italy, China, Italy again, Lebanon, France, Mexico, and Egypt. "Having the opportunities to experience all those different countries and their cultures was life changing." Johnson went on to win the FIBA Europe Cup in 2018 and the Lebanese Cup in 2019.

Although most rules of the game are the same in other countries, Johnson said the way the game was played and the environment were completely different. "In the NBA, it's all about offense. Overseas, it's much more defense-centric; they're strategic and more physical to stop you from scoring," he said. "The fans are on another level. They're jumping from start to finish, setting off flares in the gym, and lighting coins on fire. Every game is like Game 7 of the NBA Finals."

PHOTO BY NATHAN FOSTER '20

## JOHNSON'S INTERNATIONAL BASKETBALL CAREER

WKS Śląsk Wrocław (Poland)  
KKS Siarka Tarnobrzeg (Poland)  
Maccabi Rishon LeZion (Israel),  
Banvit (Turkey)  
Alba Berlin (Germany)  
Pallacanestro Varese (Italy)  
Reyer Venezia (Italy)

Al Riyadi Club Beirut (Lebanon)  
Orléans Loiret Basket (France)  
APU Udine (Italy)  
Fuerza Regia de Monterrey (Mexico)  
Dolomiti Energia Trento (Italy)  
Al Ittihad Alexandria (Egypt)

Although Johnson thrived on the court, life off the court was challenging. He married his college sweetheart from APU, Marissa Johnson '12, but she was still living in the U.S. as her career as an education administrator blossomed. "Marissa would visit me during Thanksgiving, Christmas, and spring breaks. She stayed longer for two stints when I was playing in Venice and Florence," Johnson said. "I was grateful for those times, and I'm so proud of her career." Johnson bonded with his teammates and made good friends at each stop along his journey. He particularly loved his time in Israel. "My best friend is Israeli. Her family took me in and invited me over every Saturday for Shabbat dinner," he said. "There were tons of Americans in Israel. We would have barbecues where we would hang out and play cards. It felt like I was at home." Through all the ups and downs of playing overseas, Johnson's one constant was his faith. He wears a WWJD bracelet every day and has Scripture from 1 Corinthians tattooed on him, serving as a reminder of God's provision. "God has never left me. He's always protected me. When I have doubts about how I'm going to get through tough times, God's there for me."

After playing for 13 teams in 10 countries, Johnson retired from international basketball. After returning to the U.S., Johnson was drafted by the Killer 3's in the Big3 league. "The Big3 is awesome. I've played alongside a lot of former NBA players," he said. "It's fun seeing Ice Cube at every game. I even met Dr. J. That had me starstruck."

Today, Johnson is focused on being a husband and a father to his three-year-old daughter and three-month-old son while coaching at APU. "It's all about mentoring for me. I want to motivate the guys and get the best out of them," he said. "We've got a talented and industrious team." Johnson is excited to learn from Coach Bond. "I'm constantly picking Pete's brain. He's a fantastic coach and has taught me a lot." While the team's goal is to win a championship, Johnson measures success in other ways. "I want the guys to develop their skills and learn about life outside of basketball. The ball isn't going to bounce forever. I tell them to take their education seriously." Johnson is furthering his education as well, pursuing a Master's in Leadership at APU. "If the players can grow in their knowledge and their faith, that's far greater than any championship."

Nathan Foster '20 is public relations manager in the Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement. [nfoster@apu.edu](mailto:nfoster@apu.edu)

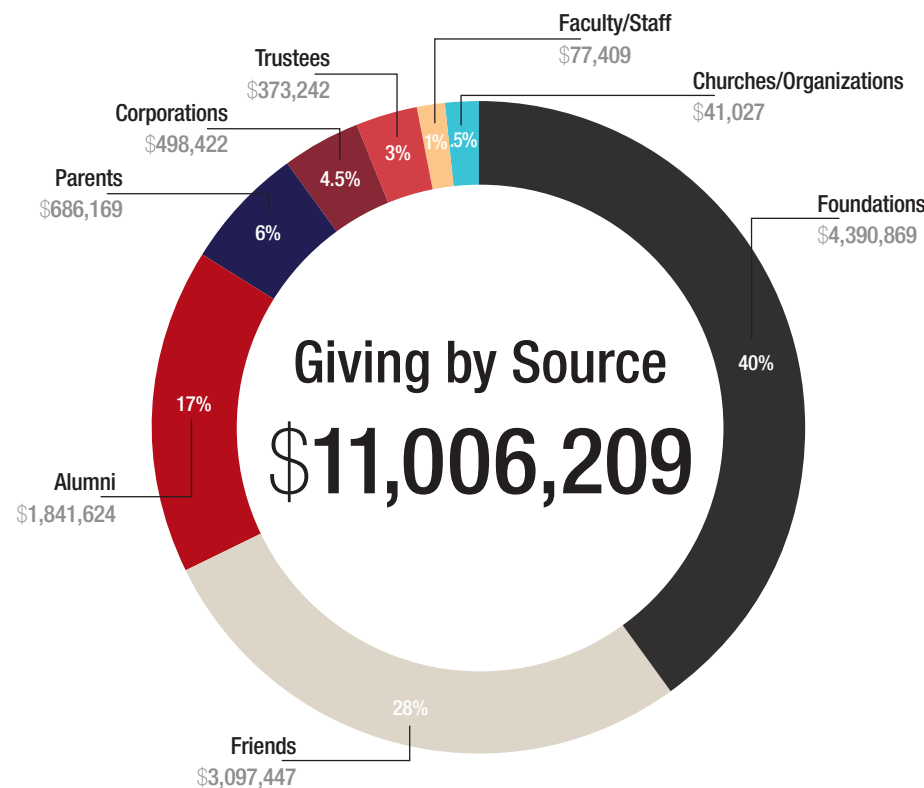
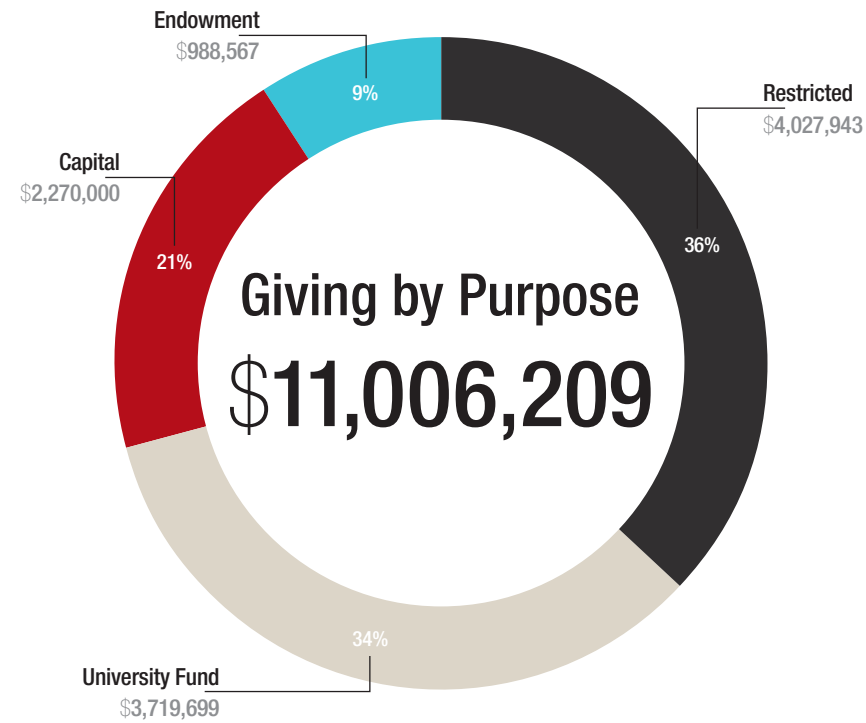
JOHNSON LED THE POLISH LEAGUE IN SCORING WITH 23 POINTS PER GAME IN 2014-15.

# Donors Made This Possible

### Alumni Donors by Graduation Decade

2020s	260
2010s	270
2000s	219
1990s	163
1980s	105
1970s	63
1960s	34
1950s	12

## 2022-23 Commitments: Supporting Every Corner of the University



## FY23 Planned Gifts

**\$1,843,544**

### What is a Planned Gift?

APU provides professional services to help individuals make informed decisions regarding their current and future estate plans, while also facilitating investment in the mission of APU to create disciples and scholars. Gifts take the form of gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, matured bequests, and other gift-planning vehicles.

Over time, these generous gifts have helped build today's endowment of more than \$90 million, which funds scholarships as well as academic and cocurricular programs and support.

For more information, contact the Division of University Advancement at (626) 815-5333 or advancement@apu.edu.

**2,340** First-Time Donors

**10,133** Gifts Given

Gifts of less than **\$500** added up to **\$543,315**. Gifts of every size matter!

### Donors by Consecutive Years

5-9 years: **275**  
 10-14 years: **145**  
 15+ years: **102**

### Student Phonathon Results

Conversations: **2,195**  
 Donors: **520**  
 Gifts: **1,498**

**\$90,358,715** Market Value of the Endowment

## Student Profile



### Hannah Frey '23 Education and Psychology

Thank you to everyone who helped me be where I am today. The scholarship that I received is the reason I attended my dream school, Azusa Pacific University, and why I recently walked across the graduation stage. The gift of generous financial support means

that as a graduate, I have no debt and two degrees, and I'm ready to successfully contribute to society. Thank you so much for your generosity. It is truly changing lives.

When I began my journey at APU, I wanted to be a teacher, but through the generous gift of a scholarship, I was able to explore my options and realize that I actually want to be a child life specialist. I discovered my love of psychology and working in a hospital. I benefited from internship opportunities at hospitals such as City of Hope and Pomona Valley. I am already using my calling in the community by volunteering with the Azusa Unified School District as a teacher aid, and in the infusion center at City of Hope. APU has equipped me by providing the best professors, education, and opportunities so that I'm ready to launch my career.

Looking back on my four years here at APU, I'm filled with immense emotions. I went through a global pandemic, spent a year and a half of my college experience online, lost two family members, a friend, and a teammate, and struggled with mental health challenges. Throughout this difficult journey, however, I have experienced God in new and profound ways. I have made my best friends ever, and I graduated with honors in two degrees. Although life may not look how I expected, APU followed through on its promise to be a *God First* university that values community. I could not be more thankful for my time at APU and I would not change anything. I know that I'm carrying APU's legacy with me, and I promise to make my school and my community proud.

**100** | The percent of our 7,120 APU students impacted by your generosity!



**24**  
hours

**1,439**  
donors

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**\$346,952**  
raised

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**76**  
areas, programs, and  
scholarships supported  
across the entire university  
community

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Gifts made from  
**39** states and  
**7** countries

# Cougars

## Sports Roundup

### Stephen Vogt '07 Named Manager of Cleveland Guardians



Stephen Vogt '07, an Azusa Pacific Hall of Fame inductee and a two-time MLB All-Star catcher, has been named the manager of the Cleveland Guardians. Following a 10-year playing career in the big leagues, Vogt was named the bullpen and quality control coach for the Seattle Mariners prior to the start of the 2023 season. "We're thrilled to welcome Stephen and his family to Northeast Ohio and to name him the next manager of the Cleveland Guardians," said Guardians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti. "Stephen earned a reputation as one of the best teammates in the game across his 16-year career as a player. ... His deep care for others, his ability to build meaningful relationships with those around him, and his open-mindedness and curiosity make him an ideal fit to lead our club moving forward. We couldn't be more excited to partner with Stephen."

### Women's Soccer Goes Unbeaten in October



Azusa Pacific women's soccer went 4-0-2 over the month of October, which moved the Cougars into fourth place in the PacWest and into contention for a postseason berth. In two of the October wins, they scored seven or more goals, defeating Academy of Art 7-0 and Hawai'i Pacific 9-1, the latter of which is a program record in the NCAA era for goals scored in a single game. This season, the Cougars have tied two nationally ranked opponents (#12 Concordia 1-1, #13 Hawaii Hilo 2-2).

### Volleyball Goes on Seven-Match Winning Streak



The Cougars volleyball squad won seven consecutive matches in October, including three victories in straight-set fashion. The winning streak pushed the Cougars up to third in the PacWest Conference. As of early November, Azusa Pacific has won eight matches by a 3-0 score, and the Cougars are guaranteed to finish with a winning record for the eighth straight season.

### Swimming and Diving Captures First Cornerstone Cup Points of 2023-24



Azusa Pacific swimming and diving claimed the first points of the Cornerstone Cup Rivalry Series this year, as the Cougars beat Biola 130-113 in a dual meet on Saturday, November 4, in Azusa. The Cougars won nine of 13 events in the meet, but the overall victory was secured in the final event of the day, with the 400 Free relay team of Ellie Sivesend, Hannah Swailes, Madeline Schultz, and Montana White winning to capture the 10 Cornerstone Cup points. The Cornerstone Cup Rivalry Series was renewed in 2016-17, when Biola joined the PacWest Conference and NCAA Division II. Azusa Pacific has won all six Cups, winning by an average margin of 53 points a year.

### Men's Cross Country Wins First PacWest Title, Returns to Nationals



The Azusa Pacific men's cross country team won its first PacWest title, behind the strength of nine All-PacWest performers: Felix Perrier, Juan Diego Castro, Jared Wright, Nixon Korir, Riley Burns, Dider Sandoval, Benjamin Sumner, Ezekiel Nyberg, and Michael Schneider. The Cougars put together such a dominant performance at the PacWest Championships that if their group of 10 runners was split in two, Azusa Pacific would have finished first and second in the race. A few weeks later, the Cougars took second at regionals to secure their second consecutive trip to nationals. At regionals, Castro, Perrier, Wright, Korir, Burns, and Sumner were all-region performers, while on the women's side, Sofia Camacho was an all-region honoree with a 16<sup>th</sup>-place finish in the women's 6k.

**For more news and updates on APU athletics, including team schedules, visit [athletics.apu.edu](https://athletics.apu.edu).**

#### FOUNDATION AND GRANTOR SUPPORT

\$10,000 and more

- The Ahmanson Foundation
- Butterfield Memorial Foundation
- Carl E. Wynn Foundation
- Charles Koch Foundation
- Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
- Gatherer Family Foundation
- Helen & Will Webster Foundation
- Hugh and Hazel Darling Foundation
- Inland Empire Community Foundation

- John and Maria Laffin Trust
- JW & Ida M. Jameson Foundation
- The Kern Family Foundation, Inc.
- Lilly Endowment, Inc.
- Merklin Family Foundation
- National Christian Foundation California
- Peter and Masha Plotkin Memorial Foundation
- Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford
- The Tsern Foundation
- V. Eugene and Rosalie DeFreitas Charitable Foundation

#### BUSINESS AND CORPORATE SUPPORT

\$2,500 and more

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing
- Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund
- Benevity Social Ventures, Inc.
- Clifton Larson Allen Edison International Furniture Row
- Gawenda Seminars & Consulting
- Gilead Sciences, Inc.
- IMA Financial Group
- KPMG Foundation Giving Campaign
- KPMG Foundation Matching
- Larry W. Smith Ranch
- National Philanthropic Trust
- Northrop Grumman Corporate Citizenship
- Payden & Rygel
- Raymond James Global Account
- Waymaker Properties LLC



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MICAYLA BREWSTER '17

# From Broadway to Digital Nomading and Back

BY NATHAN FOSTER

For some, social media is simply a platform to share pictures of food or concert videos. For others, it's a way to maintain relationships with old friends. For Micayla Brewster '17, social media is so much more—it represents a passion that blossomed into a one-of-a-kind career. Just six years after graduating from Azusa Pacific University, Brewster has lived in more than 25 locations across the world as a self-proclaimed digital nomad, and recently launched her own company, The Social Team.

Brewster's journey began at APU where she studied communication management and public relations. She knew she wanted to pursue communications professionally, but wasn't sure how. It was only when she took an introductory public relations class that she began to envision a career in social media. "I spent so much time and energy on social media, but I had always heard it talked about negatively," Brewster said. "That was the first time I heard social media talked about positively, as a tool to communicate and connect with audiences, sharing information and having fun while expressing a brand."

With a career path in mind, Brewster began getting experience by serving as a social media intern for APU's Campus Store, APU Dining Services, and New Beginnings Community Church. She won APU's Battle of the Interviews after blowing away the judges with her "breathless excitement" for a hypothetical position. In the past, Brewster had tried to tame her enthusiasm, but it served her well in that moment and in the years to follow. "My passion and how much time and energy I dedicate toward what I love is one of my greatest skill sets," she said.

Around this time, Brewster made a pivotal discovery—a media company called theSkimm. "I love theSkimm because they distill the news in a way that keeps me interested and informed," she said. Brewster applied to their ambassador program and campaigned for the company on APU's campus, hosting tables on Cougar Walk. Her efforts paid off: She won the "Skimbassador" competition, which earned her a letter of recommendation from their CEO. "I said, 'That's perfect, I'll just give it right back to you. I'd like to work for you.'" She moved to New York City for a part-time internship with theSkimm in summer 2016 and immediately began looking for a second job to work on her off days.

Brewster reached out to a couple of Broadway productions to see if they needed a social media intern, including the hottest play of the year, *Hamilton*. "I didn't think I had much of a chance to hear back from them," she said. "Yet, the very next morning, I got a response from a manager at Marathon Digital, who runs social media for *Hamilton*, asking me to schedule an interview." Brewster got the job. After graduating from APU, she moved to New York to work for the company full-time, overseeing social media for *Hamilton*, which included running the production's Snapchat during their popular "Ham4Ham" performances, coordinating content shoots with the cast, and helping with numerous campaigns. "It was the greatest experience," she said. "It catapulted my career and made me realize fandom marketing, specifically within Broadway, was what I wanted to do."

Then Brewster faced a pivotal moment in 2020 when the pandemic hit and Broadway shut down. After much self-reflection, she decided

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**"We decided to start our own company, where we could run social media in the ways we wanted to, avoiding pitfalls and being more in touch with individual platforms."**

Micayla Brewster '17

to let go of her job at Marathon to pursue another dream—living in many places across the world. "I traveled around, spending a month or two in each location before moving on to the next one, while doing freelance work virtually to support myself as a digital nomad." Brewster started off in New Orleans, then headed to Montana, before branching out to other countries. She has lived in more than 25 cities in Ireland, England, Scotland, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Romania, Croatia, and Mexico. "I found digital nomading to be incredibly enriching and fulfilling. I've made a lot of good friends across the world that I'll be happy to visit."

After two and a half years, Brewster decided it might be time to settle down. Over dinner one night with her best friend, Chase, they came up with a life-changing plan. "As much as we both loved social media management on Broadway, it was very challenging and the current model didn't feel sustainable," Brewster said. Many of her friends in the industry experienced burnout and she wanted to avoid the same path. "We decided to start our own company, where we could run social media in the ways we wanted to, avoiding pitfalls and being more in touch with individual platforms."

Their company, The Social Team, launched in September with its headquarters in New York. Although in its infant stage, the business aims to represent major Broadway clients. Brewster sees this new business venture as an opportunity not only to draw upon her life experiences but to live out her faith. "My faith has taught me to lead with love and compassion first, and that's how I approach my work," she reflected. As she leans on God and trusts in His perfect timing, Brewster's focus is on preparation. "For now, I'm building content calendars and designing style guides and strategy documents," she said. "My top goal is for social media to be as enjoyable a process as possible for everybody involved. I'm excited for this business to take off and see where life takes me next."

**Nathan Foster '20** is public relations manager in the Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement. [nfoster@apu.edu](mailto:nfoster@apu.edu)

# Four Students, One Mission: The Life-Changing Impact of Global Engagement

BY ABBIE J. REED AND NATHAN FOSTER

**Serving meals amid the site of a devastating earthquake, preparing spaces for war-impacted refugees, providing health checkups for local children—every summer, hundreds of Azusa Pacific University students embark on dozens of Global Engagement trips, stepping into God’s work across the world.** Whether in Europe or South America, whether painting houses or playing soccer, these students return to APU transformed by their experience, inspired to boldly serve God wherever He may lead.

Take a glimpse into the stories of four students as they reveal just how these trips made a life-changing impact.

Emily Durbin '23 and her team gathered over steaming cups of tea and a plate of Turkish delight as they listened to the stories of their Iranian refugee hosts. Although they had traveled across the world to serve these people, Durbin found herself struck by their immense generosity, even in times of need.

“I learned how to love people more selflessly from their example,” she said.

The team of APU students traveled to Turkey to come alongside an organization serving refugees,

specifically at the site of a devastating earthquake that happened just a few months prior. While they worked amid the desolate landscape, serving meals at a kitchen assembly line, God moved in Durbin’s heart as she considered her future calling.

“This trip, along with my previous trip to Thailand, inspired me to want to do missionary work long term,” said Durbin. “These experiences are literally life changing.”

That same summer, kinesiology major and deaf student Kekai Ka’auomoana-Cummings '25 embarked on a different, but no less transformative, Global Engagement trip.

“I chose to serve in Rome, because it’s very important in Jesus’ story and the history of the Church,” said Ka’auomoana-Cummings. “There are many nonbelievers there, and I wanted to share God’s love with them.”

So, amid the spectacular historic churches and bustling

gelato shops, the team of APU students listened to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and shared the Gospel message with the help of an interpreter. At first, Ka’auomoana-Cummings felt nervous about how people would look at him—a deaf American traveling around with an interpreter. But before long, he was able to reach one man in a special way.

“I was introduced to another deaf person and could communicate with him directly, because I know International Sign Language,” he said. “I’m so grateful that I was able to share my story and talk about my faith.”

After this experience, and numerous others leading individuals to Christ or planting seeds, Ka’auomoana-Cummings feels braver, bolder, and prepared to share his testimony with confidence. “I’m already planning on going on another trip next

“I learned to put aside my own desires, serving with God’s love to help others with their needs.”

EMILY GUERRERO '24

summer,” he said. “You don’t know what’s outside of your world until you experience it.”

On another Global Engagement team, Anthony Chow '24 also shared the Gospel—but this time through pickup soccer games with children, visiting families’ homes, painting walls, and organizing storage spaces. His goal? Simple service with powerful love. The team of 11 students spent a week in Guatemala City, helping a local nonprofit prepare for their Vacation Bible School that summer.

“Many of the children in the area are victims of the drug and human trafficking trades,” said Chow. “This nonprofit sought to

provide a place where kids were secure and could safely get an education.”

The following week, the team traveled to the rural town of Pacaya, where they prepared houses for missionaries arriving later that summer. Although he and his student teammates came from different walks of life, they laughed over meals, shared testimonies, and wrote each other encouraging notes—building a unique community that would last back on campus in the fall.

“When people say mission trips are a life-changing experience, it’s true,” said Chow. “They’re a way to see the world, to learn how life is outside of the U.S. and what God is doing in other places.”

Chow urges students to consider their “why” and listen to God’s unique calling for them: “The intention is so important. God looks at your heart. Is it just to have fun? Or is it to see God more clearly?”

For journalism major Emily Guerrero '24, her calling felt clear: Coming from a family of refugees, she had a deep desire to work with refugees. APU offered her the ability to pursue this calling, and she boarded a plane to Bucharest, Romania, with four other students. There, Guerrero helped a church meet the needs of some of the thousands of refugees who had recently fled from the war in Ukraine. While she cooked meals and organized supplies, God taught her the value of serving others selflessly.

“For some tasks, like cleaning bathrooms, I focused not on what I wanted to do, but what the church needed the most help with,” she said. “I learned to put aside my own desires, serving with God’s love to help others with their needs.”

Back in the U.S., Guerrero desires to apply what she learned within her local community, eager to look for opportunities to help those around her. She reminds us—along with Durbin, Ka’auomoana-Cummings, and Chow—that the transformational impact of these stories continues to further God’s Kingdom long after these students return home.

“If you’re open to what God has for you,” said Durbin, “it could change your life like it did mine.”

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Anthony Chow '24  
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Kekai Ka’auomoana-Cummings '25  
Kinesiology  
Italy



Emily Guerrero '24  
Journalism  
Romania



Emily Durbin '23  
Business Management  
Turkey

# Experiencing Transformational Healing at APU

BY SAUNDRI LUIPPOLD



“APU is where I found my voice and calling to serve God and others through a community that cares.”

ULYSES LOPEZ '19, MDiv '23

**For many, the years spent in college are some of the most formative for personal development and career preparation.**

For others, college is a time of healing and restoration. Such was the case for Ulyses Lopez '19, MDiv '23.

Lopez grew up in Rosemead, California, spending his teen years playing football at San Gabriel High School. He continued pursuing the sport at the community college level, before he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on Dec. 15, 2009. The events surrounding 9/11 and the war on terrorism provided him with motivation to serve his country. He also looked to the military for a fresh start, hoping to turn his life around and gain direction.

“In boot camp, they break you down and build you up, tearing down the identity you had before and giving you a new one,” Lopez said. His first experience in combat was during a deployment in Afghanistan.

The setting he entered affected his life dramatically as he witnessed violent, tragic events that most people see only in films. Lopez's second deployment was in Okinawa, Japan, where he conducted jungle warfare training, sailing across the Pacific to train the Thai army.

When Lopez's contract ended in December 2013, he decided not to reenlist, instead choosing to pursue a college degree. Like many veterans who return home, the transition back to civilian life proved challenging. Lopez tried to move past the trauma he had experienced, focusing on his education. After earning an Associate of Science in Wildland Fire Technology at Rio Hondo College, Lopez transferred to APU because of his sister's encouragement—she served on an APU mission trip as a volunteer in high school and experienced the university's special community. Lopez was accepted one week before the start of the fall semester, and there was only one seat left in one of the classes he wanted most, which he took as a sign that God was calling him to say “yes” to APU.

Lopez's “yes” to APU became a “yes” to a multitude of opportunities that changed his life. As a communication studies major, he developed skills that increased his confidence in conversations and helped him build rapport with others. After an incredible first year deepening friendships and being immersed in the community, Lopez decided to live on campus instead of commuting. “I loved living on campus,” he said. “You're always there and getting involved. You get to experience so many activities. You build relationships and they continue to grow while you develop spiritually and personally.”

During his time at APU, Lopez noticed a healing in his life. There had been times he would cry by himself in his apartment, calling out to God in despair, but eventually his thoughts were overcome with the desire to do God's will, to pray more, and to talk to his peers about Jesus. “I had this burning fire for God,” he said. Waking up each morning, Lopez would ask the Lord how he could help others heal through Christ's love.

Lopez found an opportunity to help others by serving as student president of the Office of Military and Veteran Services. By developing relationships with the staff, and with the students who reached out for resources, Lopez played an integral role in helping veterans create a sense of belonging in the APU community. He also served as a resident advisor in University Village, hosting a weekly Bible study there, where he met his wife, Shawnty Lopez, MDiv '21, MS.

After graduating, Lopez began a career in real estate, using what he learned in his classes to create connections with clients and

ultimately spread Christ's love. “APU was truly transformational for me,” said Lopez. “APU is where I found my voice and calling to serve God and others through a community that cares.”

**Saundri Luippold '25** is a public relations intern in the Division of Strategic Communication and Engagement. Saundri is double majoring in Honors Humanities and English with a minor in Spanish.

LOPEZ'S “YES” TO APU BECAME A “YES” TO A MULTITUDE OF OPPORTUNITIES THAT CHANGED HIS LIFE. AS A COMMUNICATION STUDIES MAJOR, HE DEVELOPED SKILLS THAT INCREASED HIS CONFIDENCE IN CONVERSATIONS AND HELPED HIM BUILD RAPPORT WITH OTHERS.



### '80s Grads Reunite

Azusa Pacific alumni spanning the decade of the 1980s came together for a special reunion this fall, one that included campus tours, lunch in “the Caf,” and a memorable dinner with masters of ceremonies Joe Berry '89, Guy Sasso '86, and Rose (Smith '88) Pederson. APU’s “Singing Men” and many '80s alumni from University Choir performed. Another highlight included notable alumni Christian Okoye '87 and Innocent Egbunike '86 sharing recollections of their time at APU and how it positively impacted their lives.

APU has many other exciting alumni events coming up. Learn more at [apu.edu/alumni/events/](http://apu.edu/alumni/events/).



STUDENTS TRANSFORMED THROUGH THE ARTS: WATCH VIDEO



## OUR APU

**“God wants artists in the industry who define themselves not by fame, not by celebrity, but by Him.”**

Jill Lincoln  
Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Theater Arts





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# A Trip of a Lifetime: Join the APU Family in Greece

**Follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul.**

**May 12-24, 2024**



President Adam J. Morris and his wife, Faith, will host a land-and-sea experience of rich biblical teaching, historic sites, amazing Greek cuisine, and deep fellowship that will touch your lives in real and profound ways. Mirroring Paul's missionary journeys to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Philippi, Thessaloniki, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus, the Scriptures will come alive in ways you can't yet imagine.

**Spaces are filling up quickly so reserve your spot today.** A transformational experience awaits. For more details, visit [footstepministries.org/apu-greece-tour-2024](https://footstepministries.org/apu-greece-tour-2024)