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UNLV Magazine

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RESORTS ARE BETTING THAT ARENA VIDEO GAME COMPETITIONS WILL BECOME THE NEXT BIG THING

The Esports Spectacle

A GROWTH CAREER
ALUMNI IN NEVADA'S MARIJUANA INDUSTRY TACKLE THE CHALLENGES OF THE EMERGING MARKET

ICE, ICE REBEL
HOCKEY TEAM SKATING TO BECOME JUST THE SECOND TEAM FROM THE SOUTHWEST IN NCAA DIVISION
Soaring Possibilities

To bring some geographic diversity to campus, UNLV’s admissions office targets high-achieving students in such markets as Chicago, Seattle-Tacoma, and Denver. The scope of the university’s top-notch academic programs — from hospitality to health sciences — are the first selling point, but the great weather certainly helps attract students from cities with gray winter skies.

[Photo by R. Marsh Starks/UNLV Creative Services]
Data Driven
UNLV mines its own grade books to ensure students aren’t weeded out of STEM success.

A League of Their Own
Esports is becoming the next big spectator sport — and resorts are betting that it’ll bring Millennials into casinos.

Highs and Lows of a New Market
UNLV alumni are at the forefront of Nevada’s marijuana industry.
Emerging Markets, Emerging Opportunities

I began working on my doctorate at the University of Arizona in 1985, just as personal computing was starting to take off. In the computer lab, software was being written to support collaboration among team members across a “network.” That turned out to be a precursor to social media as we know it today.

I didn’t know then just how much that work would impact the way we do business every day, but I knew something special was happening right before my eyes. I also suddenly — innately — understood how universities could literally transform our lives and give rise to new businesses.

Though we can’t always predict when and where the moment will strike, the work of our faculty and students can provide the spark to ignite a new industry. And when this work is aligned with regional economic development work, the university becomes a center for supporting emerging industries and the jobs that come with them.

This issue of UNLV Magazine is filled with excellent examples of UNLV’s role in supporting our region’s economic development. On Page 26, we examine how UNLV is at the forefront of the billion-dollar esports industry. Our faculty in hospitality and gaming law are thought leaders for what is rapidly evolving into a new avenue for growth in our state’s tourism industry.

UNLV also is examining the policy issues the state is facing in legalizing recreational marijuana use (Page 32). We asked a broad group of UNLV alumni — from entrepreneurs leading new businesses to health care professionals advocating for their patients — why they took a chance on this industry. They shared with us their challenges and the work they are doing to ensure Nevada gets this market right.

Among them are two of our Ph.D. graduates. Douglas Duncan is a chemist, first-generation college student, and Las Vegas native. Israel Alvarado is a microbiologist who immigrated to California from Mexico as a child.

They had established strong roots in this community and wanted to stay in Southern Nevada after their studies. And they both applaud efforts by the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and state legislators to bring more biotech jobs to the community. Alvarado told our writer that his emerging industry “is only going to require more expertise. Now (we) have a whole new market that’s going to start looking for employees.”

That makes the investment that the state and private donors have made in UNLV all the more valuable. As Duncan pointed out: “The best way we can recoup the cost of our investment (is) by keeping our graduates in the community.”

I am proud to say that a pillar of our Top Tier strategic plan is to further support economic development efforts through our research, teaching, and service. Like the community we are in, like the graduates we produce, we are not afraid to take an unconventional path. We are Rebels and we take chances.

Len Jessup
UNLV President

Engineering student Michelle Mata demonstrates the smart microwave she developed to President Len Jessup in UNLV’s booth at the Consumer Electronics Show in January. Mata worked on the project with Youssef Abdallah and Alyson Weber, both ’16 BS Electrical Engineering.
If you believe in a strong UNLV, you can help. Join us by making your Annual Fund gift today.
unlv.edu/foundation/give-online
UNLV racked up **6,281 on-air mentions** in domestic broadcast media on debate day, according to the monitoring service TV Eyes. On an average day, that stat hovers around 100.

**The Debate Bump**

Hosting the presidential debate boosts admissions interest, generates **$114 million in publicity.**

**BY DEANA WADDELL**

When admissions counselor Kelsey Kaplan opened her inbox Oct. 20, she was greeted by the subject line “Love at first sight with UNLV.” Brennan Quinn, a high school junior in Georgia, sent the message just hours after watching the broadcast of the final 2016 Presidential Debate from the UNLV campus.

Quinn had already won a debate of his own, he said. He had wanted to see the pre-debate coverage while his mother wanted to watch the Food Network until the candidates actually appeared. He convinced her to change the channel just in time to see UNLV President Len Jessup’s opening address.

“After hearing about this college, I spent the entire night researching about everything UNLV,” the aspiring hotel owner wrote to Kaplan. “A hospitality management program six miles away from Las Vegas literally sounds too good to be true.”

Kaplan was in Seattle for a national college fair during debate week. “People recognize UNLV,” she said of prospective students at the fair. “It put us on the map.”

Kristine Shay, executive director of admissions, encouraged recruiters to use the debate as a conversation starter, particularly with prospective out-of-state students. But she was surprised to find application numbers up in areas where UNLV does not actively recruit, including from North Dakota, parts of the South, and rural areas in Pennsylvania and New York. There’s also been a 21 percent increase in international student applications this year.

“It’s hard to pinpoint exactly what is going to impact admissions,” Shay said, “but I think these particular increases could be attributed to our debate exposure.”

UNLV’s website saw a huge traffic spike during the debate. Traffic on the “Apply” page was up 82 percent over a typical Wednesday, while there was a 60 percent increase on people researching UNLV’s academic programs and a 210 percent increase in UNLV News Center traffic.

And Quinn wasn’t the only person reacting to President Jessup’s speech — there was a 1,374 percent increase in views on the president’s website during his talk. Likewise, his mention of the new UNLV School of Medicine prompted a 1,475 percent jump in traffic to its site.

UNLV’s social media audiences grew substantially in October. Compared to the monthly average, the Facebook account more than doubled the amount of new followers gained. On Twitter, #UNLVPresDebate garnered 4,400 tweets while #UNLV was tweeted 6,000 times, compared to the weekly average of 1,500.

UNLV’s media relations office conservatively estimates that faculty conducted more than 400 debate-related interviews with national and international media. With more than 71 million television viewers, the debate generated $114 million in publicity for Las Vegas and the university — more than double the original projection anticipated by the host agencies.

Shay believes that the preparations — which included the sprucing up of campus and community engagement programs — also resonated with prospective students. “The sense of pride and of community was palpable on campus as we led prospective students through tours — it still is,” she said. “While we may have a relatively low residential population, our campus doesn’t feel like a commuter campus. And that matters a lot to prospective students.”

Shay hopes Quinn’s story is one of many she’ll see through the next couple recruitment cycles.

As for Quinn, the Atlanta native reports, “I will definitely place UNLV at the top of my list when I will be applying to college next year.”

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7 Things Rebels Can Brag About

1 UNLV FOR THE WIN
UNLV Athletics earned the Mountain West's Community Service Award in blowout fashion. From March 2016 to February 2017, the 11 conference institutions tallied their hours of community service. UNLV racked up an eye-popping 13,058 hours of service to easily win the top spot over that other Nevada school up north. UNR finished a distant second with 7,957 service hours. Air Force was third with 5,719 hours. (Right) Lady Rebels basketball players participate in National Girls and Women in Sports Day.

2 RANKING UP
U.S. News & World Report released its annual Best Graduate Schools rankings and the Boyd School of Law came in at 62, a 16-spot jump up to over last year and its highest-ever overall ranking. The school stood out with its rankings as 2nd in legal writing, 9th in dispute resolution, and 19th for part-time law programs. Plus: The William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration came in first in the QS World University Rankings for hospitality and leisure management programs. - The School of Nursing's online graduate nursing program came in 20th out of 149 programs in U.S. News.

3 WE BELIEVE
The Beverly Rogers, Carol C. Harter Black Mountain Institute, an international literary center at UNLV, is the new home of The Believer, one of the world’s leading journals of arts and culture. Contributors to the five-time finalist for the National Magazine Award include such literary luminaries such as Hilton Als, Anne Carson, Nick Hornby, Susan Straight, and William T. Vollmann. Since its founding, The Believer has been published by McSweeney’s, the independent press founded in 1998 by Dave Eggers. McSweeney’s will be involved in projects with BMI, including the City of Asylum program for writers-in-refuge.

4 CHOMP ON THIS
UNLV Dining upped its game this year as UNLV became only the second campus in the nation to get a Steak & Shake outlet. The beloved Midwestern chain is known for its steakburgers and classic milkshakes. Also new to the union is Soho Sushi Burrito, a Mexican-Japanese fusion restaurant. Chef John Chien Lee honored the school by creating the “Hey Reb!,” a burrito of unagi, spicy tuna, surimi crab, cream cheese, vegetables, and wonton strips.

5 WORTH SALUTING
Ross Bryant, retired U.S. Army veteran and longtime director of UNLV’s Military & Veteran Services Center, was named the nation’s “Chapter Advisor of the Year” earlier this year by the Student Veterans of America, which has chapters on 1,400 campuses. Bryant’s work has led to UNLV being named a VetSuccess Campus by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and recognition as a top school by Military Times magazine.

6 BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR UNLV
The new MGM Resorts Public Policy Institute in the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs will be a think tank for bipartisan solutions to a
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

When the inaugural class of UNLV’s new medical school starts studying this summer, Dr. Samuel Parrish will be there to guide these future health heroes through the obstacles on their journeys. The wand was bestowed by a former colleague, who challenged him to “make magic happen” for students when things looked hopeless or overwhelming.

“When most people at the level of medical school start having trouble, their first inclination is to think that they just need to work harder,” he said. “That is almost never the right thing to do.”

Instead, his sage advice to them is to learn how to work differently. He encourages them to step back to look critically at the situation and make specific changes. One student may need to budget time differently. Another may need to slay the material by focusing less on memorization and more on the bigger concepts.

For Parrish, his real magic is simply believing. “Seeing students overcome obstacles and personal failures and then succeed has reminded me that I should never give up on a student.”

— Cate Weeks

The Tool
A Disney princess pink magic wand toy

The User
Dr. Samuel Parrish, senior associate dean for student affairs and admissions at the UNLV School of Medicine
Beyond the MCAT and GPAs

Medical school crafts an innovative admissions process to find future doctors dedicated to improving health care in Southern Nevada.

BY PASHTANA USUFZY

When the UNLV School of Medicine received preliminary accreditation Oct. 18, more than 900 applications flooded in for just 60 spots in the inaugural class. Within two weeks, the school’s nine-person admissions team began reviewing student applications and setting up student interviews. Two months later, the first group of students received letters of acceptance and Dr. Barbara Atkinson, founding dean, began calling students to congratulate them.

“Making those calls was a very special experience,” Atkinson said. “Our charter class is extremely diverse with students who are motivated to learn and have a deep desire to stay in the community. Each one has an interesting story about his or her educational and career plans.”

Applicants had the opportunity to share their story during the school’s innovative admissions process — one crafted specifically to go beyond test scores and level the playing field.

VALUING LIFE SKILLS

“The school’s admissions processes value privacy, assess candidates in a multidimensional way, and eschew favoritism,” said Dr. Samuel Parrish, senior associate dean of student affairs and admissions. The process brings diversity to matriculating classes by diminishing the role economics and other advantages often have in the traditional admittance processes.”

For instance, students who worked through college to support family members may not have participated in many extracurricular activities but they may have gained valuable community experience.

The school’s admissions process takes a holistic approach — reviewing not just academic and extracurricular achievements but personal circumstances as well. Although grades still play a key role, the school also values life skills — like being the first in a family to graduate from college, succeeding academically while residing in an inner-city or rural environment, or having joined the military.

“A diverse class enhances the learning environment,” he said. “If everybody is exactly the same in a class, then nobody brings anything to the table.”

COMMUNITY-INVOLVED PROCESS

The admissions process begins with applicants submitting their initial application through the American Medical College Application Service. In the second step, the school asks for further details on applicants’ backgrounds, commitments to Nevada, and other factors.

The admissions committee then selects individuals for in-person interviews that are conducted by one faculty member and one community member. The community members — from firefighters to food bank workers — have in-depth knowledge about issues in Southern Nevada, which is critical in developing a community-centered school, Parrish said.

The interviewers underwent hours of training to parse candidates’ answers for signs of preparation and the characteristics of the school’s ideal student: someone who understands the service nature of medicine, who would be serious and dedicated to caring for patients, and who is committed to the community.

The prospective students are given the list of 50 potential interview questions in advance. In a carefully considered strategy, the interviewers are not given access to applicants’ transcripts or test scores. Their task is solely to assess the students’ personalities and how they reflect upon their experiences in the provided questions.

Finally, the admissions committee — composed of two individuals from the community and seven faculty members — reviews application materials and the interview assessments. They vote anonymously to eliminate the possibility of one member lobbying others on behalf of a student.

By building safeguards into the processes, the school is ensuring that candidates are accepted after a rigorous but fair process.

As the selection of the inaugural class was nearly complete, Parrish said, “Our committee has agonized over every spot because there are so many talented kids. We’d love to offer half of them a spot.”

“Our charter class is extremely diverse with students who... have a deep desire to stay in the community.”

DR. BARBARA ATKINSON
FOUNDING DEAN,
UNLV SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

7 THINGS

range of economic, social, political, and workplace issues. Co-chaired by former U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, a Democrat, and former House Speaker John Boehner, a Republican, the institute will focus on policy issues that impact the travel, tourism, hospitality, and gaming industries and the global communities in which they operate. Reid also recently was named a Distinguished Fellow at UNLV’s Boyd School of Law.

7 A BUNCH OF HACKS

Team Wingin’ it — (from left) alumnus Ernesto Zamora, grad student Maria Ramos Gonzalez, alumnus Saaj Varghese, friend Derek Jewell, and alumnus Ruben Medina — won the Smart Cities Hackathon competition at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. More than 300 software developers and designers from around the world used their wits and public works data to solve a city of Las Vegas challenge. The team’s software can help the city quickly identify streetlight outages and schedule repairs — a process currently done manually by a city technician dedicating countless hours to the task or by relying on resident reports. The city now is looking to implement the team’s invention.

Spring 2017 | 7
The Skatin’ Rebels made a run in their division playoffs, but the UNLV hockey team’s sights are set so much higher than that. The Rebels already are headed to their league’s top division. Next they want to follow the trail blazed by Arizona State University and become a full-fledged NCAA Division I squad.

UNLV now belongs to the American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA), which is composed of member schools across three divisions. They compete at the club team level on up to teams roughly on par with the NCAA’s Division III.

After a season-long campaign that saw UNLV hold onto the No. 2 ranking in the West Region of the ACHA’s Division 2, the Rebels were nipped in the final week thanks to a pair of losses to Northern Arizona University.

The top two teams from each division went to Columbus, Ohio, for the ACHA's
Raiding Rebels?

Of any league to take the plunge into the Las Vegas market, the National Football League always seemed like the longest of shots. But owners came together to approve the move of one of their most nomadic franchises, the Oakland Raiders, to Las Vegas for, most likely, the 2020 season.

It was, of course, contingent on a new stadium. With a combo of public and private funds, the $1.9 billion stadium project could begin in the next year, and the Raiders won’t be the only home team. UNLV football will begin play in the new stadium in 2020 with its own locker room and gameday branding on the field. The specific location in town is yet to be finalized while the future of Sam Boyd Stadium is up in the air. What it means for the future of the Rebels, however, is clear. Along with the roughly $24 million Fertitta Football Complex expected to be completed sometime next year, UNLV will have a one-two punch to make the team the envy of college football.

“Sharing a state-of-the-art stadium with the Raiders is another thing that will allow us to recruit at a high level,” said Tony Sanchez, head football coach. “The (two facilities) bring so much energy to this program and to campus. As someone who has lived here for eight years, I’m also excited for this community.”

— Jason Scavone

national championship in March. Opening against Grand Valley State University, UNLV jumped out to a 1-0 lead less than six minutes into the opening frame, but a six-goal second left the Rebels on the wrong end of an 8-5 loss. The following day, a 3-1 loss to William Paterson University left UNLV on the outside looking in, with no chance to advance out of pool play. The team did finish strong with a 3-1 win over Ohio University on St. Patrick’s Day, though.

“Our end goal is to get [NCAA] D-I,” Rebels coach Anthony Greener said. “We’re following [coach Greg] Powers at Arizona State University. He helps us out daily. Our general manager went to ASU and knows Powers really well and has a relationship with him.”

ASU Sun Devils competed with a hybrid ACHA/NCAA schedule in the 2015-16 season before stepping up to full NCAA competition this year as an independent team. It’s the route Greener wants to see UNLV travel. “We look to be the next school to go NCAA D-I. Last year it was (expected within) five years. Now, maybe we can do it in three.”

Becoming a full varsity team requires the school to add a complementary women’s program to satisfy Title IX regulations. To that end, the hockey team has been working closely with women’s lacrosse as a possibility.

Greener said the team has two promising — and complementary — pitches on the horizon to attract recruits. First, there’s the imminent inaugural season of the newest National Hockey League franchise, the Vegas Golden Knights. Come September, UNLV will have its own dedicated space within the Golden Knights’ new training facility and access to the team gym.

Greener’s other selling point: the chance to be part of the group that pushed the Rebels to Division I. That’s already resonating with recruits.

Sophomore mechanical engineering student Dion Antisin played at Concordia University in Mequon, Wisconsin, before coming to UNLV. He’s already letting players from his old team and from his native British Columbia know the score. Those connections all wonder about competitiveness and support for the team and the environment at UNLV, he said.

“Hockey — you don’t think Vegas,” Antisin said. “Well, now you do. It’s starting to become a hockey hotbed. Everybody wants to be part of something that’s going to be great. That’s one of the things you push to these kids: Build something you’re going to remember.

“This year we’re looking at a national title. Next year we’re looking at a national title. It’s not just a rebuilding year. We’re building and we’re winning.”

In just his second year as head coach, Greener has brought in 13 new players, including two from Sweden and two from Canada. He plans to bring in another 12-15 next year.

The team will play at T-Mobile arena again next season. With growing support from the community helping to boost recruiting and fundraising, Greener expects another strong season.

“With winning,” Greener said, “players will come and money will come too. Vegas is a city built on winning. You can see that in our games. We want to be the legacy that started this so they could say, ‘Hey, I was here during that whole process.’”
Resiliency and a relentless competitive spirit drive new athletics director Desiree Reed-Francois’ career.

BY JASON SCAVONE

If nothing else, Desiree Reed-Francois has impeccable timing.

President Len Jessup announced Reed-Francois as UNLV’s new athletics director on April 17 to follow in the footsteps of Tina Kunzer-Murphy and take over athletics just as the Rebels are a few short years from taking the football field in a $1.9 billion NFL stadium, supplemented by the state-of-the-art Fertitta training facility now in the works.

A day after the announcement, Reed-Francois took to the podium at a media conference with her husband, Joshua; son, Jackson; father, Don; mother Gloria Jean; brother, Roman — and a plush Hey Reb! at the foot of the dais — looking on.

“My first team was with my brother,” she said. “When I was a little girl growing up in the San Francisco Bay area, Roman and I played every sport. I was a rower, but he was the real athlete. My brother and I, we dreamed of him being a professional football player. He was going to play for the San Francisco 49ers, and I was going to be his lawyer.

“In 1994, a football accident changed our lives and it changed our dreams. Roman became a quadruple playing football; however, the story doesn’t end there. It was the lessons we learned in athletics of resiliency, determination, and a relentless competitive drive that caused our dreams to take a different course. My dream became finding a way to help other student-athletes achieve theirs.”

Reed-Francois comes to UNLV from Virginia Tech, where she has served as the deputy athletics director to Whit Babcock, who also attended April 18’s press conference. She was in charge of day-to-day operations for 22 programs and more than 600 student-athletes.

Ticket, marketing, and licensing revenue was up more than 20 percent over the past two years under Reed-Francois’ eye, bolstered by season ticket sellouts for Hokies football and big jumps in attendance for men’s and women’s basketball, baseball, soccer, and softball. She partnered on budget development, prepared the department’s facilities master plan, redesigned fundraising strategy, and revitalized the university’s student-athlete success program.

“There’s a great sense of enthusiasm and momentum in the community and at UNLV,” Reed-Francois said. “College athletics have the unique ability to educate, unite, and inspire. Together, we will do all of that at UNLV and build a championship culture that leads academically and athletically.”

With her appointment, effective June 1, Reed-Francois becomes the first Hispanic female athletic director at the Football Bowl Subdivision level.

Reed-Francois was a standout to the search committee, and Jessup was effusive in his praise for her experience and enthusiasm during the interview process.

As a research institution, Jessup said, UNLV is rising through its Top Tier strategic plan, “but a very fundamental part of the strategy is also making ourselves more formidable in the Mountain West (Conference) and, ultimately, positioning ourselves down the road for a move to a Power Five conference. Athletics is part and parcel with the strategy of where we’re going with this institution.

“This hire of the new athletics director is certainly one of the most important hires that I’ve participated in in my two years. It’s important for the entire university and the entire Rebel nation.”

While working under Babcock, Reed-Francois played a key role in recruiting head football coach Justin Fuente, the 2016 Atlantic Coast Conference Coach of the Year. She also helped secure new coaches for women’s basketball, lacrosse, and volleyball.

Her plan for UNLV is straightforward enough.

“Quite simply, we’re going to win.”

Athletics Director Deseree Reed-Francois

1995: Graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles with a bachelor’s in political science
1995: Served as legal associate to the Oakland Raiders
1997: Earned juris doctorate from the University of Arizona
1999: Named director of compliance at San Jose State University
2002: Became associate athletics director for compliance & academics at Santa Clara University
2003: Transitioned to that same role at Fresno State University
2007: Joined the University of San Francisco as associate athletics director
2008: Named by the University of Tennessee as associate athletics director for strategic initiatives
2013: Started at the University of Cincinnati as the senior associate athletics director & senior woman administrator. When athletics director Whit Babcock left Cincinnati for Virginia Tech in January 2014, she was named interim athletics director.
2014: Joined Babcock at Virginia Tech as executive associate athletics director
2016: Promoted to deputy athletics director at Virginia Tech

10 | UNLV MAGAZINE
Different. Daring. Diverse.

UNLV is different. It is a place where real change is made, not just talked about; an environment where exploring, pushing past boundaries, and discovering what hasn’t been done before is part of the everyday experience.

UNLV is daring. The atmosphere fosters a climate of innovation in which undergraduates and graduates work side-by-side with faculty to research real-world issues like potential cures for disease, climate change solutions, and new energy alternatives.

UNLV is diverse. As the nation’s second-most diverse campus, we are as colorful and innovative as the city we call home, a place where diversity of culture, experience, and worldviews create an environment of learning and collaboration unlike anywhere else.

To learn more, visit unlv.edu
Then came the news of the successful explosion of MIKE, the world's first hydrogen bomb.

Ten-thousand times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima...

...these weapons could level a city the size of Manhattan in one shot.

Atomic Testing: One Panel at a Time
Professor Andy Kirk’s “Doom Towns” takes a ground-level view of ground zero and presents it in the form of a graphic novel about Las Vegas’ position in the atomic firmament.

By Jason Scavone

Sixty-five years ago, the exercises at Camp Desert Rock called for soldiers to charge into ground zero seconds after an atomic bomb was detonated.

In all, some 6,500 troops were sent running toward fire and haze as the ground melted to glass at the Nevada Proving Ground, 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas. Bombs went off three times during the round of testing, known as Operation Buster-Jangle, in the fall of 1951. Among other things, the tests were to determine the psychological effects on military personnel. Would troops still be able to function after seeing the bomb?

And then, after they went into the middle of the devastation, the radiation? They were swept off with a broom that “looked like it came right off the rack at Sears Roebuck,” as one soldier described.

That kind of story is part and parcel of Doom Towns: The People and Landscapes of Atomic Testing, an ambitious graphic history from professor Andrew Kirk published by Oxford Press.

Kirk served as a principal investigator for the Nevada Test Site Oral History project from 2003 to 2008. That project interviewed test site workers, those living in the area outside the gates, and others affected by atomic testing — not necessarily the high-ranking personnel normally found in academic works. An editor at Oxford talked him into it with an unusual pitch: Marry his past research with a graphic novel approach. The idea resonated.

Just as the oral history project had given voice to those seldom asked for perspective, this book could honor the art that had come from the era. “During the oral history project, I realized that art and visual representation of work and life in atomic regions was very much a part of the historical experience and part of the culture that emerged from living in secrecy and doing this kind of extraordinary work, and living around that kind of extraordinary, experimental landscape.” Security secrecy often meant those affected by the test site couldn’t talk about their experiences; some created art.

Kirk identified Kristian Purcell, an artist in the United Kingdom who had specialized in paintings of the intersection of people and technology in militarized landscapes but had never done anything in a graphic novel format.

“I had to restrain my lecturing and instead really rely on Kristian to convey themes and tone through the art,” Kirk said. They bridged the cross-Atlantic gap with Skype. “(Kristian) would literally sometimes draw while I was looking. I really got a sense of his process as an artist, and I think he got a good sense of my process as a scholar.”

The result is a collection of rare primary source documents and a traditional history of the era anchored by a 100-plus page graphic representation of the age of atmospheric atomic testing. It starts with the Manhattan Project Trinity test in 1945 and runs through the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

“Art and visual representation of work and life in atomic regions was very much a part of the historical experience and part of the culture that emerged from living in secrecy.”

Doom Towns tells the story through the lens of the people who were on the ground, like Dorothy Grier Whitcomb, one of the clerical workers for the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory; or Donald English, the Las Vegas News Bureau photographer who captured some of the most iconic images of the era, including the mysterious Miss Atomic Bomb photo.

It’s New York Times reporter Gladwin Hill that Kirk poses as a kind of Virgil of this nuclear era. Hill began covering the tests in 1951 and continued through 1969, becoming one of the first environmental reporters in the country.

“One of the things as an environmental historian I noticed was [Hill’s] perceptions of the people around Las Vegas and the nuclear testing region was pretty simple in the beginning but became more sophisticated and thoughtful as he got to know them,” Kirk said.

“At the time there were a lot of people who were passionate and who thought (nuclear testing) was right, and there were protestors who were passionate and thought it was wrong. But the bulk of the people … worked long hours in arduous conditions, so they weren’t waxing poetic about history. They were living it.”

Kirk enlisted more than 40 graduate students on both the oral history project and related work afterward. One offshoot drew in students from Clark County School District, who were selected in 2015 to travel to the National Atomic Testing Museum’s Kazakhstani counterpart, the EcoMuseum, on a U.S. State Department grant.

Kirk also used his undergraduate students as a test site of his own. “I did some beta testing of some of the draft chapters with several sections of History 102, and they gave me excellent feedback. That was as useful to me as the extensive academic peer review I got,” he said.

“Throughout the research, there were at least eight different classes participating in some way in the research. It was a fabulous opportunity to teach about method and about working with sponsored projects on grants toward an end that was clearly going to have an impact academically but also in the community.”
Just a few short years ago, sociology professor Georgiann Davis was building her academic career in the traditional way: publishing papers, working on her first book, and presenting at conferences. “Sometimes at conferences I felt like I was preaching to the choir,” she recalled. “I wanted more feedback, a pulse on the impact the research was having.”

Now, as the country contends with so-called “transgender bathroom bills” and conventional views of what defines male and female butt up against medical facts, Davis has become something of a celebrity. It began with her dissertation and a personal blog that grew from it. She joined UNLV in 2014 as she finalized her first book. To help promote a campus public lecture, she wrote “5 Things I Wish You Knew About Intersex People” for the UNLV News Center. It quickly became our website’s most-read article and her media coverage has exploded since. This spring she was featured as an expert in “Gender Revolution” a groundbreaking cover story in National Geographic and a companion documentary from Katie Couric.

Her book Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis (2015, NYU Press) explores how inintersex — which refers to various conditions in which a person is born with both male and female reproductive or sexual organs — is “treated” in the medical community. As was the case with Davis, parents and doctors often choose an intersex child’s gender and then subject them to surgery to make them appear more distinctly male or female. Davis was told she had ovarian cancer when in fact the doctor removed internal testes.

She hesitated to write about her own experiences as she published in research journals until she realized they were inseparable. It was then that her research began to make an impact beyond academic circles and her public persona took off. “As I see it, it’s not only desirable, but a moral obligation to discuss our knowledge outside the academy,” Davis said. “It’s what Lee Badgett describes as the ‘public professor.’ Being able to get my work before a broader audience — and to use it to counter misinformation — why wouldn’t I do that just because I’m an academic first?”

Being feted alongside John Legend and Melissa McCarthy at the Television Critics Association meeting in Los Angeles was a blast, she said, but her top accolade came from a U.S. Supreme Court amicus brief. Contesting Intersex was cited in a transgender bathroom rights case before the court. “There is some cost to being a public professor,” she said. “I’ve gotten some emails that are cruel and hateful, but for every one of those, there are a dozen other supportive ones. A 9-year-old and his mother sent me a video sharing his experience with doctors and how it’s comforting for him to know there are people like him out there.”

Next up: Davis is studying the factors at play when a doctor chooses his or her specialty. Not surprisingly, there are gender and racial differences in those choices and Davis wants to find out what drives them. She’s also working on a second book, which again is growing from a blog post, titled “#IntersexyFat.” It explores how the two traits come together amidst a society focused on the pursuit of the perfect body — a topic her NYU Press editor believes will resonate with an even wider audience than Contesting Intersex has.

“There isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t hate my fat body,” Davis wrote, “not because my fatness directly harms my health (it doesn’t — my last physical and lab workup confirmed I am healthy), but because society repeatedly sends a loud message that fatness is unhealthy (wrong) and universally ugly, as if attractiveness isn’t subjective. Ten years ago I wouldn’t dare to publicly identify as intersex, let alone say I’m proud to be intersex. But I got here by owning, personally and professionally, that part of my body.”

Now she wonders if owning her fatness could transform her life in a similar way.

**More:** Follow Davis on Twitter @Georgiann_Davis
THE BOYD SCHOOL OF LAW BY THE NUMBERS

U.S. News & World Report rankings:

#62 NATIONAL RANKING

#9 DISPUTE RESOLUTION

#2 LEGAL WRITING

NEVADA’S LAW SCHOOL

60,000+

Nevadans provided with free legal education by the law school and its partners, the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services
Bias on the Roads

UNLV study confirms that motorists are less likely to stop for pedestrians of color.

BY KEYONNA SUMMERS

A UNLV study has found that motorists approaching mid-block crosswalks are less likely to yield for black pedestrians than white pedestrians. And, the pedestrian bias is most apparent in high-income neighborhoods.

Researchers say the findings — which replicate the results of a similar study out of Portland, Oregon — may help explain why people of color are disproportionately affected by fatal pedestrian crashes.

Pedestrian fatality rates between 2001 and 2010 for black and Latino men were more than twice the rate for white men, and American Indian/Alaska Native men had a rate more than four times higher, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

In 2016, Smart Growth America ranked Nevada as the 12th most dangerous state to be a pedestrian, and Las Vegas as the 21st most dangerous metropolitan area (out of 52).

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

UNLV researchers had two female students — one white and one black, with similar height, build, and clothing — take turns crossing the street alone in high- and low-income neighborhoods on opposite ends of the Las Vegas Valley. They attempted to cross the street about 130 times, roughly 30 times each per neighborhood, during peak daylight hours on a Saturday and Sunday.

Meanwhile, scientists examined two driving behaviors:

• How many cars passed in the nearest lane before yielding to the pedestrian waiting at the crosswalk on the curb, attempting to make eye contact with the driver, and waiting for the car in the nearest lane to begin braking.

• How many motorists drove through the crosswalk while the pedestrian was actually in the process of crossing their half of the road.

The study found that, at the high-income crosswalk, drivers were slightly less likely to yield for the white pedestrian waiting curbside (47 percent of the time) than the black pedestrian (55 percent of the time). However, it was a different story once the pedestrians stepped into the road. At that same high-income crosswalk, researchers found, significantly more motorists drove through the crosswalk while the black pedestrian was already in the road compared to the white pedestrian — by a 7-to-1 ratio. That translates to one or more cars driving through the intersection 20.6 percent of the time while the black pedestrian was actively crossing compared to 2.9 percent of the time while the white pedestrian was doing so.

In the low-income neighborhood, there was no significant difference in driver yield rates for pedestrians either on the curb or in the road.

WHAT THIS MEANS

UNLV researchers wondered whether the speed limit (45 mph in the high-income neighborhood vs. 35 in the low-income area), difference in road design, or drivers being
unaccustomed to seeing pedestrians contributed to poor yielding behaviors overall at the high-income intersection.

Nonetheless, they called for lower speed limits or pedestrian safety enhancements, such as stop lights activated by push-button, to make roadway use equitable for all users.

Courtney Coughenour, the Community Health Sciences professor who led the study, said other methods of increasing safety might include police enforcement of proper crosswalk rules or driver and pedestrian education campaigns to foster understanding that motorists by law must yield to pedestrians.

Overall, regardless of race, motorists yielded to a pedestrian waiting curbside only 51.5 percent of the time in the high-income neighborhood and 70.7 percent of the time at the low-income crosswalk, according to the UNLV research.

“We’ve been very effective at designing our roadways to move cars. Unfortunately, this is sometimes done at the expense of pedestrian safety,” Coughenour said.

The Vision Zero Initiative, a national road safety project, reports that pedestrians struck at 30 mph do not survive 50 percent of the time and those struck at 40 mph die 90 percent of the time.

Coughenour said the study and similar findings from Portland show that pedestrians of color experience an increased risk on the roadway, which may be one factor that contributes to the higher rates of pedestrian crashes.

“From an urban design perspective, it is important to take this into consideration when designing pedestrian facilities, especially in communities of color,” Coughenour said. “Given the design of this study, we are unable to determine the nature of driver bias. However, often times the decision of whether or not to yield to a pedestrian is made very quickly, so it is likely that any bias drivers may have is unconscious. It’s important to understand and discuss findings of this nature, as dialogue is a critical first step in beginning to address such biases.”

UNLV students are continuing research on this topic, examining various biases and working to understand what might be done in the short term to enhance pedestrian safety.

Hello, my name is...

UNLV’s research and teaching missions are so intertwined that one of its key nursing training tools — the Clinical Simulation Center of Las Vegas — has led to valuable insights for improving your health care.

The center re-creates the clinic environment so future health care professionals can practice their skills on hyper-realistic manikins. “Each element, from the smallest Demo Dose vial to the construction of an exam room, mentally places students in scenarios they will encounter as professionals,” said Jessica Doolen, nursing professor and educational director of the center.

But the center has also been critical to Doolen’s research, particularly studies shedding light on the importance of teamwork among your health care providers. One study examined the use of a checklist to decrease the potential for central-line insertion infections and in the process highlighted how communication can go a long way toward preventing illness. After introductions were made among the simulation’s various participants, a medical resident inserted a central line into a manikin while a nursing student followed along with the checklist. Faculty remained outside the room, maintaining the realism of the scenario, but observing students’ behaviors.

As it turns out, that basic introduction at the beginning of the simulation reduced the potential for medical errors to occur along the way, which could dramatically decrease negative patient outcomes if implemented in real-world health care settings. — Raegen Pietrucha and Kevin Dunegan

More: Take a photo tour of the custom-designed training center for nursing students — where manikins talk, blood is made by the gallon, and life-saving skills are mastered. unlv.exposure.co
For the past 16 years, Stephen M. Miller has had a front-row seat aboard Las Vegas’ high-speed economic roller coaster, one that’s featured more twists and turns than a Hitchcock flick. It’s a seat for which most economic enthusiasts would have paid top dollar, but one Miller almost passed up. “Both my wife and I were a bit nervous about moving to Las Vegas,” said Miller, who like many an outsider equated Las Vegas with The Strip before moving here in 2001 from the University of Connecticut. Now director of UNLV’s Center for Business and Economic Development, Miller has observed our economy from the heights of immense prosperity to the depths of a Great Recession to a recovery that has residents feeling both hopeful and anxious.

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM AND BACK AGAIN

Stephen M. Miller, director of the UNLV Center for Business and Economic Research

When I arrived in Las Vegas, we were just starting the housing bubble. By 2005 – which was sort of the peak time – homebuilders were giving potential buyers a lottery ticket that said, “OK, if we draw your number, you can buy our house.”

As an economist, that doesn’t make a lot of sense. If that’s the case, why don’t you raise the price so you don’t have an excess demand for your product? If I was really smart, that would’ve been the signal that, “This is not sustainable.”

I don’t know that I thought our economy was in peril. Of course, I was new to the scene, but most people thought Las Vegas was immune to recessions. We’d had recessions before, but they didn’t have much of an effect on our economy.

The new characteristic of this recession was there was a financial crisis triggered by the housing market and mortgage-backed securities. There weren’t many people who knew that when the housing market collapsed and mortgage-backed securities became toxic that it would spread to other parts of the financial market, which it did.

In the next five years, I think the probability is pretty good that we’ll have another recession. The question becomes “How serious will it be?” God forbid it’ll be tied to another financial crisis. More likely it will be just a run-of-the-mill recession.

My concern for millennials is this may be the generation that doesn’t live as well as their parents did.

I suspect if we asked our new administration in Washington, D.C., they’d say, “Oh, we’ve got the solution. We’re going to grow economically at 3, 4, 5 percent.” Well, maybe for a year or so. But it’s going to be difficult to sustain. We have this group of retirees coming out of the employment market who are going to put a strain on our federal budget through Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

At some point, Washington, D.C., is going to have to address that issue. They can’t keep kicking the can down the road.

Nevada’s greatest untapped economic source is probably our population. But we face one problem: The level of education of our labor force is not competitive at the moment.

One way to get a better educated workforce is to hire people from outside Nevada. Another way is to train them internally. It’s better if we could train them internally.

UNLV is going to play a big role in our economic future, certainly as the UNLV Medical School comes online this year. That potentially could have a big economic effect because we have a shortage of doctors. I know I had to go out of state when I had a medical problem, and just this week my friend went to California for surgery.

There’s been discussion for a long time about diversifying our economy. I have a friend who says, “It’ll never happen. This is Vegas, baby, and that’s the way it’s going to be.”

Certainly the governor and his office of economic development are trying to diversify the economy. And they may take some criticism for giving away these tax abatements to entice companies to relocate here. The problem is every state is doing this; if we don’t compete, we’re going to lose out.

For most cities, a new stadium would probably be economically neutral – it has some positive benefits but also some negatives. Las Vegas is unique because we do have a lot of very large events and tourism is still our major driver. So if the new stadium draws those 50 events they’re talking about, it probably pushes the stadium into a positive for the local economy.

I said there’s a concern about Las Vegas’ lack of an educated workforce, but we really have some good students who come out of UNLV that I would put up and match against students anywhere.

I always tell my students if you stay awake, you can learn something every day.
“My concern for millennials is this may be the generation that doesn’t live as well as their parents did.”
Learning to Learn

First-generation and underrepresented minority students who used the “Science Learning to Learn” tools in entry-level biology saw markedly higher scores on exams compared to peers who did not.

- **FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS**
  - First Exam: 76.5
  - Final Exam: 80.1

- **UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY STUDENTS**
  - First Exam: 74.4
  - Final Exam: 70.6
For the past decade, high schoolers across the United States have heard the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) career pitch. It’s an enticing one: Get a STEM degree. Get a higher-paying jobs. You’ll outearn other grads by $15,500 on average, according to a 2014 Department of Education report.

In Southern Nevada, officials are making that pitch in the hopes that developing the STEM workforce will spur economic development. Las Vegas is ranked 97th (among 100 metropolitan areas evaluated) in terms of employees in STEM-related fields, with 3.6 percent of the workforce compared with an 8.7 percent national average.

But once they enter college, though, students face a harsh reality check. Training for STEM fields is academically rigorous and demands study skills that many students did not acquire in high school. As a result, roughly 40 percent of those entering college as a STEM major end up either switching to a non-STEM field or not completing a degree at all. This reality is further compounded for first generation college students, who have less exposure to mentors who can help them navigate college. Unsurprisingly, they switch from their STEM majors at even greater rates.

In 2014, Matthew Bernacki, assistant professor of educational psychology and higher education, felt UNLV was in a position to change this trend. “Prior research shows that students often abandon STEM majors after poor performance in early coursework,” he said. “That experience leaves students feeling they lack ability in the STEM disciplines, when in fact they may only lack some specific learning skills.”

Bernacki believed the key was to identify struggling students long before their grades revealed they were having trouble and to provide learning support. He wanted to dive into the student activity data in UNLV’s WebCampus learning management system for the answers.

In 2014, the National Science Foundation awarded him a three-year grant to test his strategies. Today, as the project nears completion, his results are encouraging. More of UNLV’s STEM majors his project targeted moved forward in their degree programs, achievement has improved in critical courses in math and science, and work is underway to make permanent the efforts that are producing these results.
A THREE-STEP APPROACH

The project involved partnerships with instructors of four entry-level courses: human anatomy and physiology, college algebra, calculus, and an introductory engineering course. These large lecture courses have often been called “weed-out classes.”

“That trial-by-fire mentality was all wrong,” said Carl Reiber, senior vice provost. “We’re here to teach students, not weed them out of their futures. It’s an approach that’s been proven harmful to first-generation students and underrepresented minorities in particular.”

Jenifer Utz, a professor in the School of Life Sciences, teaches freshman anatomy and physiology courses. “Some students do not achieve at their potential simply because they’re not equipped with appropriate study skills and strategies,” she said. “They’re completely capable of being successful in the course — and ultimately in the field — if they can just get past those early hurdles.”

Bernacki’s project was conducted in three phases. In the first year, he met with each instructor before the start of the semester to review the learning objectives for each class and the resources provided to students on the WebCampus course site.

Civil engineering professor Donald Hayes hadn’t thought about his introduction to engineering course from this perspective. “This opened my eyes to educational research and how it can be really helpful to us. I’ve learned a lot from him about how to organize a class,” Hayes said.

Utz adjusted her materials too, adding practice quizzes for each individual chapter. The students who regularly used the quizzes to study scored 12 percent higher on the final exam than non-users. Differences were even larger among students who entered the course with minimal prior biology knowledge. “To simply say ‘Here are some practice tests to see if you’re on track’ and then see someone’s grade suddenly jump 10 percent was impressive,” she said.

Bernacki also used that first year to observe students’ behavior in the WebCampus environments for each course. He collected data about which resources students accessed — or ignored — and when. Then he observed how students’ behaviors correlated with their grades. This would be critical information for the third year of the study.

LEARNING TO LEARN

In the second year, Bernacki studied whether a program called “The Science of Learning to Learn” could be delivered in WebCampus to improve performance. It first acknowledges the challenges students face when transitioning to college coursework. It then introduces important learning principles — like “retrieval practice” to improve factual information and “self-explanation strategies” to break down complex concepts — and helps students select the most appropriate strategy for their course. It trains them on behavioral strategies for managing a college lifestyle.

“It’s one thing to study, but it’s another to be aware of the correct objectives to study and to keep track that the knowledge is being learned and retained,” said one engineering student who provided anonymous feedback. “Sounds simple, but it’s something I never thought about.”

In the initial study with anatomy and physiology students, those who completed “Learning to Learn” modules after their first unit exam outperformed a control group on the next two exams. The pattern of results was replicated the next semester when students completed the modules in the first weeks of the course. A third run of the study showed similar results in math courses. College algebra students who completed the training outperformed peers (who spent equivalent time solving algebra problems) on the next two course exams.

The Clicks of Academic Success

Cam Johnson can get roped into a lot of interesting projects, but the operations manager in UNLV’s office of information technology, didn’t see this one coming. In 2014, backed by a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, Matthew Bernacki approached Johnson. The education professor wanted to collect student data from UNLV’s WebCampus course management system to create an early warning system for student success.

“We do work with faculty on occasion, maybe just to mentor a group or speak to a class, but we’ve never done something like this with hands-on research,” Johnson said.

His team had been working with Splunk, a system used by Fortune 100 companies to collect data and effectively organize it for searches.

“It allows us to collect data from disparate sources and make it searchable,” Johnson said — a powerful tool for organizations where systems tend to be developed over time for specific functions. These systems don’t always “talk” to each other. “First we had to answer the questions, ‘Do we have the data he needs?’ and ‘Can we curate it in a way to support his research?’” he said.

The project’s novel use of the data — it was the first time Splunk was applied to faculty research — garnered a 2016 Splunk Public Service Innovation Award. Johnson’s team developed a data modeling solution that recorded clicks within the WebCampus system. Their solution allowed Bernacki to see exactly what students are — or are not — clicking on for a course and what kinds of learning resources they accessed. They then created a model that aggregates and mines these data in order to predict each student’s success.

“One of the things we’re trying to deal with now is how to scale this out, help students graduate, and do things we know are predictive of them doing well at the university,” Johnson said. Bernacki is working to apply what he has learned to other STEM classes on campus and he hopes other institutions will learn from UNLV’s success.

“[Bernacki] saw data and found a way to interact with it,” Johnson noted. “We built a solution I wouldn’t describe as an enterprise solution, but it was a challenge and it was fascinating.”

Most important: It worked.
POWER OF PREDICTION

After gathering data about students’ online behavior for the first two years, Bernacki created an algorithm to predict performance. “We’re at a point where after four weeks into the biology, three weeks into the calculus, or five weeks into the engineering course, we can identify which students are going to earn that poor outcome about 80 percent of the time,” he said.

Students typically need to pass with a B or a C in these initial courses to advance in their STEM coursework. Without prediction modeling, students may not know if they are on track to make that grade until after their first exam.

“That’s a problem because when a poor first exam grade arrives — often as late as mid-semester — it means the time available to adjust learning methods is short,” Bernacki said. “What’s worse, the first chance to perform well in the course has now been missed, which raises the stakes of the remaining exams.”

Utz added, “It can become mathematically impossible to recover a passing grade.”

Bernacki and his team created an early alert system so students know they need to change study habits. A week before their first exam, a message from their instructor reminded students about the upcoming test and proposed they use some powerful learning methods — things that had worked for students in past semesters.

They were directed to an advice page authored by real UNLV students and faculty and hosted on WebCampus. Students also were encouraged to use the “Learning to Learn” modules.

In spring 2016, more than 300 anatomy and physiology students identified as likely to struggle received the message; more than one-third beat projections and earned A’s or B’s in their course. Follow-up studies showed similar improvements in the biology course. And when applied to calculus, messaged students outperformed others predicted to struggle by nine to 15 points on all five exams.

“So far, those who get the message and take us up on the offer [of learning support] ultimately outperform those who don’t get a message,” Bernacki added. “I was pleasantly surprised that when students did what we’d hoped they would do they were as successful as we thought they could be.”

About 40 percent of those entering college as a STEM major end up either switching fields or not completing a degree at all. But a new algorithm from the UNLV College of Education is predicting which students will struggle and then getting them on the path to success. Professor Jenifer Utz, below, saw immediate benefits in her anatomy classes.

Photos: Josh Hawkins/UNLV Creative Services
‘Pretty images on a plate’

Ari Williams, a dance performance and choreography major, rehearses for the “Movement and Tides” spring concert. UNLV photographer Josh Hawkins’ affection for dance photography began 14 years ago when his newspaper editor sent him to a local performance. He fell instantly in love with the niche. “On a craft, technical level, it’s challenging in that, unlike my other shoots, there’s no set up. You have to act instinctively. The dancers and the lighting designers have already done the hard work. Really, they’re just throwing pretty images at me on a plate. I’m just there ready to catch them.”

More: The dance department’s summer session classes are geared for anyone with an interest in the art. Among the most popular offerings are Ballet I for Nonmajors; Survey of African-American Dance; and Sex, Dance & Entertainment.

summerterm.unlv.edu

[Photo Josh Hawkins/UNLV Creative Services]
A LEAGUE OF

ESPORTS IS MOVING FROM HUDDLES AROUND A COMPUTER — AND RESORTS ARE BETTING THAT IT...

STORIES BY JASON SCAVONE | ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN OLBRYSH
OF THEIR OWN

ESPORTS IS MOVING FROM HUDDLES AROUND A COMPUTER TO BECOMING THE NEXT BIG SPECTATOR SPORT AND RESORTS ARE BETTING THAT IT'LL BRING MILLENNIALS INTO CASINOS.
If, in your various time-travel hypotheticals, you wanted to eschew the Biff Tannen sports almanac route for success but still make a killing, investing in a Las Vegas nightclub around 2008 — just prior to the DJ explosion — would’ve been a blue-chip move.

Now if you’ve got a few bucks lying around and want to join the ranks of Magic Johnson, Washington Wizards and Capitals owner Ted Leonsis, and nightclub turntable mainstay Steve Aoki, the timing is pretty great for investing in an esports squad.

“If you’re asking my opinion, it’s probably the next nightclub phenomenon that is sustainable into the future,” said Robert Rippee, director of the Hospitality Lab at UNLV’s International Gaming Institute. He led the school’s first official esports lab course in the fall semester. “I think ultimately, this is the evolution of the casino.”

Rippee knew he had a hit on his hands when he put the course up for registration two weeks before the semester started. It filled up in three days.

Boiled down to the basics, esports turns video-game playing into a spectator event while its professionals soak up the glory, adulation, and cash that major league competition affords.

It has blown up to a massive degree in recent years in the United States. An October event at Madison Square Garden sold out two consecutive nights — something normally reserved for the Knicks and Rangers — and high-end tournaments, like last year’s Seattle-based The International, can top $20 million in the prize pool, including more than $9 million to the winning five-player team. And that’s just tournament earnings. Corporate sponsors like Monster and HTC chip in even more.

Rippee’s course focused on designing and developing hypothetical business models to show how esports can work in a modern resort-casino setting. Students were tasked with exploring events, profitability, loyalty, and customer engagement.

According to a report from research group Newzoo, there are about 148 million esports enthusiasts, and the industry is expected to generate $1 billion in revenue by 2019. In Las Vegas, Mandalay Bay has hosted major events like the League of Legends North American League Championship Series, and the SLS has recently kicked off its Battle on the Strip series.

“It’s a green field,” Rippee said. “A lot of people are talking about it; a lot of companies are trying to understand it. It just made sense to me that UNLV should play a leading role in advancing knowledge-based research and economic modeling to support the industry and allow them to make better decisions rather than having them come to us after the fact and saying, ‘Hey, help us figure this out.’”

If Rippee is right, the potential for profits for resorts is enormous. According to Nightclub & Bar magazine, in 2015, Vegas clubs in
the publication’s annual Top 100 list combined for more than $445 million in revenues.

The trick is in anticipating how esports will fit into a resort’s entertainment profile, something students tackled from multiple angles during the lab. Their big takeaway: As much as playing video games appeals to enthusiasts, to make esports a transformational offering, it needs to move beyond just a dedicated following of hardcore gamers huddled around a local-area network.

“We’re seeing a lot of integration of other types of gaming,” Rippee said. “You’re seeing integration into food and beverage, restaurant concepts, nightclub concepts, kind of mashing all of that together. The experience needs to be much broader and appeal to many more people than just the active gamer who wants to sit in front of a PC and play games for four hours.”

In practice, this means taking a page from some major nightclubs, which have integrated dining and other entertainment into the venues to create one overarching experience.

“You’re going to see a space that would transform over the course of the day. In the afternoon, maybe it is closer to being like a [local-area network]. You might have a pod you [and friends] all rent together and you’re served extraordinary food. Maybe, as the day goes on, the environment itself begins to change. Maybe in the evening there’s the insertion of some anime or cosplay, or music begins to come in later in the evening. You can still play the games, but maybe there are other things that begin to transform the energy and experience of the place so it appeals to a much broader group of people.”

The fall esports lab was the first class that any university has offered of its kind, focusing on the business elements. It makes sense for UNLV to be at the forefront, not the least of which because the university already has a robust esports community.

ESPORTS, MEET REBEL PRIDE

Milo Ocampo helped found 8-Bit eSports in 2012, a student club that serves as UNLV’s collegiate team in national competitions. Since then, the club has blown up to 900 members online, with 250 having signed up in person. The club’s weekly events regularly attract 80-100 people, making it now
UNLV’s 8-Bit club team is now one of the largest student organizations on campus and competes regularly against collegiate teams around the country.

one of the largest student organizations on campus.

With Las Vegas developing into a major esports destination, the opportunities have been plentiful for Ocampo. The mechanical engineering major started the club as part of a collegiate program of 20 clubs around the country that League of Legends publisher Riot Games founded. That helped get 8-Bit interacting with major publishers, and this summer Ocampo was invited to Blizzard’s headquarters.

“It didn’t really hit me that I could be in esports the rest of my life until then,” Ocampo said. “Mike Morhaime, he’s the CEO. He walks in the room and all the presidents turn their heads … from the corner of the room he just goes, ‘Is that Milo?’”

As president of 8-Bit, Ocampo had helped the company run a Heroes of the Storm event the previous year, raising the club’s profile off campus and inspiring him to keep developing it. The club even has its own version of the Fremont Cannon (a 3-D printed miniature replica) for intercollegiate competition in the spring — something 8-Bit has never lost to UNR in four years.

Former 8-Bit members have been drafted by professional teams, and the club is starting to consider how it can counsel its members through the amateur/professional transition. Because the club was founded at a time when few schools had esports teams, it’s in a position to take advantage of the maturing relationships between the professional esports world and its collegiate counterparts.

EXPLORING THE ESPORTS MAP

The maturity in the esports industry points to the vitality of programs like the esports lab. By the end of the spring semester, IGI plans to convert part of its casino gaming lab to a permanent multiuse esports facility. It will be a technologically advanced classroom and a lab for exploring the emerging industry’s unknowns.

For example, conventional wisdom in the gaming industry holds that millennials, broadly speaking, prefer skill-based gaming to games of chance. That’s something supported both by research conducted by the International Gaming Institute and Rippee’s own interactions with students.

“It’s stereotyping an entire generation, but I think you can say by and large, it’s true.”

But why? First, they perceive the random game, the slot machine, as an old person’s game. “A 22-year-old walking into the casino and walking up to the poker room or walking up to a blackjack table may be intimidated from actually sitting down because everyone sitting there is [middle-aged and older],” he said. “They’re looking at it as I don’t want to look foolish.”

Through the esports lab, researchers and students find ways to remove that intimidation.

In addition, he said, “You have to remember this is a generation that has grown up playing online games. They’re a click away from the answer to every question.” So their perception of slot machines is that they are pure chance. “Even students in my class who do not gamble will say ‘You’re going to lose. Why would I want to throw my money away? At least League of Legends is skill-based — I may be crappy at first, but I’ll get better.’”

Now, the question is how casinos capitalize on those attitudes and trends. It’s one UNLV is leading the quest to answer.
While students are busy dreaming of new ways that casinos and esports can come together, Brett Abarbanel, the International Gaming Institute’s Director of Research, is digging into the nuts and bolts of the nascent marriage between gaming and, well, gaming.

For starters, sports books have already begun accepting wagers on certain esports events. With a gambling component wrapped up in what casinos view as a new entertainment offering to draw in a growing market, it’s a subject well worth studying to the IGI.

“It seems the casino industry is very, very interested in esports, but a lot of them still approach it with a little bit of trepidation,” Abarbanel said. “This is still very new, and there’s quite a few unknowns still floating out there.”

One of those factors is age — esports enthusiasts span a coveted younger demographic, but that’s a double-edged sword. A sizeable segment of esports fans are far, far too young to set foot in a casino. Another attractive element to this for casino marketing departments is that, though esports competitors are primarily men, the fans who flock to the competitions tend to split fairly evenly between men and women.

How casinos approach integrating esports is still very much under consideration, though Abarbanel’s assessment is that this is just the beginning of another reinvention of casino floors.

“What we’re going to see broadly, is a lot of new technology,” she said. “We’re going to see the skill-based games, or we’re going to see esports components whether that be increased hosting of tournaments or whether it’s going to be integrated into nightclubs or other nongaming components. I think we’re going to see a lot more integration of the gaming and gambling spaces within the casino.”

The use of mobile devices is part and parcel of casino games of the future, Abarbanel envisions. Younger players are smitten with new technology, particularly the kind that allows them to communicate with each other during the course of playing.

One factor that can impact how tightly esports and gambling tie together is how long it takes for esports competitions to become regular, expected offerings on sportsbook wagering menus.

Right now, the Nevada Gaming Control Board has to approve each tournament for wagering on a case-by-case basis. Some have passed muster, some haven’t. Being able to ensure integrity of the game is part of the equation, but the books also aren’t fully comfortable setting lines for the competitions.

Jennifer Roberts, associate director for UNLV’s International Center for Gaming Regulation, will be watching that process closely. The center, a partnership between the UNLV’s Boyd School of Law and IGI, is the only one in the country focused on research, best practices, and industry education programs for gaming regulators.

Senate Bill 240, now being considered by the Nevada Legislature was written by students in the UNLV’s Gaming Law Policy class. It would allow pari-mutuel esports wagering on a regular basis — something currently only allowed for horse racing and fantasy sports.

Boyd law students have a good track record for influencing gaming policy. In the past, they’ve written legislation related to Gaming Control Board membership, progressive jackpots, and charitable lotteries.

On a national level, Roberts predicts a centralized league will emerge to set the uniform rules for esports tournaments and who can bet on them, much like the NCAA does for college basketball.

“With basketball, football, those sports — they’ve had these leagues around for decades,” Roberts said “With adding wagering into the mix, it is just getting to the point where people are comfortable with the technology, with the leagues, with the integrity.”
UNLV ALUMNI ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF NEVADA’S BUDDING MARIJUANA INDUSTRY
Recreational marijuana, with its stereotypes of stoned, easy-going fun, would seem a natural fit for a destination city that touts its escapist brand. But it has taken the better part of two decades for the state to progress from legalizing medical marijuana to actually dispensing it to legalizing its recreational use. Now that Nevada voters gave ballot approval to allowing residents to possess up to an ounce of pot, UNLV graduates, students, and researchers all are playing a part in the maturation of this young industry.

First, a little history.
Marijuana was legal in the United States until 1913, when California banned it. Other states followed over the next two decades. The drug became illegal under federal law with the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act and is currently classified as a “Schedule I” controlled substance, which means a drug has been deemed to have no medical use and a risk of “potentially severe psychological or physical dependence.”

But states, starting with Oregon, have been decriminalizing marijuana since the 1970s and California began legalizing its medical use in 1996. According to Governing Magazine, 26 states and the District of Columbia now have some form of legalized marijuana. Colorado and Washington voters legalized recreational marijuana in 2012; Alaska and Oregon followed two years later. This past November, four more states — California, Massachusetts, Maine, and Nevada — voted to legalize recreational marijuana.

The two major chemical compounds, or cannabinoids, found in cannabis are the psychoactive compound Tetrahydrocannabinol and the nonpsychoactive compound cannabidiol, the latter of which has many potential health applications, including providing relief from pain, without making people feel high.

According to a 2015 study in the Journal of the American Medical Association, there was moderate-quality evidence to support the use of cannabinoids for the treatment of chronic pain and spasticity but “low-quality evidence suggesting that cannabinoids were associated with improvements in nausea and vomiting due to chemotherapy, weight gain in HIV infection, sleep disorders, and Tourette’s syndrome.”

Medical marijuana in Nevada actually dates to 2000 — when 65 percent of Nevada voters approved a ballot question allowing patients with medical conditions to obtain 2.5 ounce of cannabis every two weeks. But it took more than a decade for the state to build its regulatory framework to actually allow dispensaries to begin to sell it legally.

Julie Monteiro, ’99 BS Kinesiology, spent nearly 20 years as a registered nurse before she became a convert to the health benefits of medical cannabis in 2010. After developing degenerative disc disease and being involved in two motor vehicle accidents, she experienced severe chronic pain that was failing to respond to traditional pharmaceuticals. So she investigated becoming a cannabis patient herself.

She was shocked to discover that there “was no dispensary, no safe access, no safe product” available to her. Though she had never been involved in politics, she and other nurses helped spearhead efforts to prod the Nevada Legislature to action. Monteiro also went on to found and edit Cannabis Nurses Magazine to connect medical professionals to evidence-based research and education tools.

“I never envisioned this for my career,” she said, “but as a member of the medical community, it’s frustrating when our laws haven’t caught up to the science yet.”

In June 2013, Gov. Brian Sandoval signed Senate Bill 374, which established regulations for medical marijuana businesses, including cultivation, production, dispensaries, and laboratories. During the 10-day filing period for applications in August 2014, the state received 519 applications; that November, according to the state, “372 provisional certificates were granted: 182 for cultivation; 118 for production; 55 for dispensaries; 17 for independent testing laboratories.” The first businesses, a cultivator and a lab, opened in March 2015 followed by the first dispensary in August 2015.

Getting in the game wasn’t cheap. The state required dispensaries to have $250,000 in liquid assets to qualify for an establishment. According to Riana Durrett, ’08 JD, executive director of the Nevada Dispensary Association, that was intended to prevent those facing financial hardships from selling on the black market. “As a result, dispensaries are owned or backed by a lot of people who have been successful in other businesses,” she said.

Under the Boyd School of Law grad’s leadership, the dispensary association, founded to develop and promote best practices, has grown to represent more than 80 percent of dispensaries statewide. The association represents all three stages of the industry — cultivation, production, and distribution — and Durrett has been a constant figure at the Nevada Legislature as lawmakers refine laws for the budding industry.

Also on the NDA’s board is Ben Sillitoe, ’03 BS Finance, who built his career in the mortgage industry. When medical marijuana was getting off the ground in 2014, he saw an opportunity to be in on the ground floor of a new industry that involved significant social change. An old friend introduced him to an orthopedic surgeon interested in the medical applications of marijuana. The three
applied for a license and opened Oasis Medical Cannabis in December 2015. At that point there were fewer than 10 dispensaries statewide. “That was a good number for what the market would bear,” Sillitoe said.

Today there are 48 dispensaries across the state. The dispensaries vary in look and feel. Some resemble pharmacies, others look like an Apple store, still others look like a hobby shop. They sell a range of products, from flowers and edibles to tinctures, transdermal patches, and vape pens.

But the gold rush on medicinal marijuana — even with Nevada’s reciprocity laws, which allows cardholders in other states to purchase cannabis here — hasn’t yet happened.

“Companies are not making enough money to justify the amount of money they’ve invested, if they’re even making money at all,” Sillitoe said. “The market is just too small.”

Of Nevada’s 26,500 cardholders, nearly 19,000 are in Southern Nevada, according to Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health. That’s quite a bit short of the 100,000 cardholders that policymakers initially projected.

“For 44 dispensaries down here, it’s a number’s game. It’s just not enough,” Sillitoe said.

That makes the passage of recreational use crucial to those already in the industry, Sillitoe said. Many are optimistic that it will create a new niche in the tourism market. Colorado, for one, has certainly benefitted from establishing a recreational pot economy. A 2015 study by the Denver-based Marijuana Policy Group points out that in 2015, legal marijuana in Colorado created 18,005 jobs, $996 million in sales, and $2.39 billion in economic impact. Demand there is projected to increase 11.3 percent per year through 2020.

Nevada’s Department of Taxation is charged with developing rules and regulations governing recreational marijuana, and local jurisdictions are forming their own task forces to study how to accommodate these new businesses. Under the Question 2 ballot initiative, the state has until January 2018 to complete its regulatory regime. A law introduced this year by Democratic State Sen. Tick Segerblom would allow recreational sales to begin July 1 under a set of temporary regulations.

The prospect of economic development from a new industry as well as the growing social acceptance of cannabis has also influenced the state’s quick timetable.

Seth Floyd, ’10 JD, a principal with The Urban Law Firm, notes that one of the reasons lawmakers are moving fast is to address a loophole that permits state residents to grow up to six marijuana plants at home as long as they’re not within 25 miles of a recreational dispensary. “That creates an opportunity for a black market,” he said.

Closing that loophole also will allow existing dispensaries — which will get first crack at temporary recreational licenses — to expand markets. Duevall Dorsett, a UNLV journalism graduate student, helped found the university’s chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, says dispensaries are biding their time until recreational cannabis gets off the ground. “The industry is a small baby. It can’t eat any meat right now. (But) wait a couple years — it’ll start getting bigger and growing stronger.”

“Nevada is not going to get all the details I never envisioned this for my career, but as a member of the medical community, it’s frustrating when our laws haven’t caught up to the science yet.”

JULIE MONTEIRO
Douglas Duncan (above right), ’11 BS and ’15 PhD Chemistry, has a succinct answer when asked how he found himself working in the cannabis industry. “It was very difficult to find a job in Vegas with a science degree — extremely difficult,” he says. “So it was either move out of state or stay here and try and find a unique area of chemistry. That unique area happened to coincide with the medical market exploding out here.”

Duncan and fellow alumnus Israel Alvarado (above, left), ’15 PhD Microbiology, landed with Ace Analytical, a cannabis testing laboratory founded in 2015. It’s one of a handful of labs in the state testing to make sure the products dispensed are safe.

They describe their work as a bridge between pharmaceutical testing and food testing. Cannabis is a naturally growing plant, like food, but testing depends on adhering to very strict standards on contamination and microbial growth, similar to the pharmaceutical industry. “Like any other food industry — or any kind of manufacturing industry — you need quality control,” Alvarado said. “People who are taking this plant as a medicine can be cancer survivors or someone who is very ill.”

With such stakes, Alvarado doesn’t take lightly his role in an industry that is easily mocked. Untested cannabis may contain coliform bacteria, which like *E. coli* can lead to serious health issues — or molds, which can be really potent toxins in small concentrations.

“No one wants an AIDS patient with immune deficiency getting microbial growth in their marijuana, smoking it, and getting pneumonia,” says Duncan. “That could be a death sentence for some of these people.”

So Ace receives and tests samples from growers or extractors. The lab tests for mycotoxins, pesticides, solvents, and heavy metals such as lead and cadmium. Alvarado specializes in bacteria. Using a base-ball card-like petri film, he suspends samples in a solution to grow any bacteria or mold living in the sample. The amount of growth helps determine whether the bacteria is concentrated enough to be dangerous. He also uses genetic sequences from bacteria or mold to identify them.

Duncan, meanwhile, tests for pesticides. There’s a huge range. Some cultivators are pesticide free; others are not. He once tested a sample that had more than 10 times the state limit for pesticides, making him grateful for his laboratory safety gear. “I certainly wouldn’t want anyone consuming it,” he says. “The only way to truly protect patients is through the work of independent laboratories like ours.”

When samples come back with unsafe levels, the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health is notified. Officials observe as the cultivators destroy the entire lot, so there is little margin for error in the lab tests.

When the products show problems, lab scientists also help cultivators find organisms that are causing trouble. They use onsite environmental swabbing and monitoring to identify potential sources of contamination: water, soil, and common surfaces.

Alvarado’s doctoral work at UNLV focused on spore-producing bacteria (think anthrax). He says he “lucked out” finding his job through a lab mate. “I wanted to continue doing research; I just didn’t know what was available,” he said. “As a scientist, you always look for the next challenge.”

Now that Nevada voters opened the door for recreational marijuana, Alvarado anticipates career growth. He hopes the state continues economic development efforts to broaden the opportunities for scientists who want to stay in Nevada.

As for Duncan, the work in the lab is exciting because there are so many unknowns in the young industry. “Things that a lot of scientists take for granted — standards and methods — we are at the forefront for developing.”

It’s an industry he once held strong opinions against. “I come from a family of drug dealers and addicts,” he said. “I had a lot of negative perceptions of marijuana as a ‘gateway drug,’ but then I started exploring the science.”

Douglas Duncan, Chemist at Ace Analytical
enough for the lab to study method development in the industry products. Perhaps the biggest challenge is one at the very root of this new profession: the constant risk of a federal crackdown, or as Duncan calls it, “the hammer over our heads.”

He worries that a changing political climate could leave him without a job. “That scares us. It also makes it difficult to attract great talent.” Scientists have to be cognizant of whether their industry experience will freeze them out of future jobs in the federal public sector, particularly those that require security clearances.

Still, the reality is the industry in Nevada is likely to grow, and it will need the behind-the-scenes quality control work of scientists to make sure it succeeds. “The marijuana industry can be a great asset to take some of the UNLV graduates and keep them in the economy,” Duncan says. “That’s the best way we can recoup the cost of our (state’s higher education) investment — by keeping our graduates in the community.”

As the state of Nevada prepares to roll out regulations overseeing recreational marijuana, here are some key issues to keep an eye on:

**SOCIAL CLUBS**

Marijuana has created a cottage tourism industry in Denver. If Las Vegas wants to compete, it will have to consider following the Mile High City’s recent move to allow pot use in bars or other establishments. The gaming industry has steered clear of supporting legal marijuana, for fear of upsetting federal regulators. But areas like Downtown Las Vegas appear well poised to be epicenters of a new casual pot consumption scene — if the state will permit it. State Sen. Tick Segerblom introduced a bill to enable local jurisdictions to create rules for so-called “social clubs,” which are essentially pot lounges. “People go to Las Vegas to do things they ordinarily wouldn’t do at home. It’s called Sin City for a reason,” said John Hudak, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a national expert on marijuana regulation. “Because it’s such a booming tourism economy, domestic and international, I think the potential for this is tremendous. A much larger city such as Los Angeles will sell more, but per capita, Las Vegas should be huge.”

**WILL PATIENTS BE PROTECTED?**

When medical cannabis was first regulated, patients had to obtain permission from their physicians to apply. The state lists several acceptable reasons, such as AIDS and cancer. Advocates want to make sure medical patients don’t get lost in the potential stampede to cater to recreational tourists. For one, they would like the state to make licenses for cardholders easier to get and less invasive, exempting cardholders from having to renew their license every year. They also want lower taxes for medical use. Julie Monteiro, a nurse and patient advocate, wants patients to be able to cultivate their own flowers to meet their own specific health needs. She also is advocating for protections for board-licensed medical practitioners. Without more explicit protections, doctors or nurses who provide education on medical marijuana or use the products as patients themselves could risk losing their licenses.

**FEDERAL POLITICS**

While President Donald Trump has indicated he doesn’t want to touch medical marijuana programs, new U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has talked tougher than his predecessors about recreational use. Attorney Seth Floyd contends the Trump administration could claim the states are acting unconstitutionally — violating the Supremacy Clause — but this may prove difficult politically for an administration that has trumpeted states’ rights on other issues. Meanwhile cannabis remains under the most restricted category of the Controlled Substances Act; thereby severely limiting peer-reviewed university research into the medical claims.

**PRICES**

This isn’t a simple issue, Hudak notes. It involves tax rates, how many licenses are awarded, and how many plants the state allows producers to create. “If prices are too high people will not transition away from the black market. There will be fewer incentives for businesses to get into this space,” he said. On the other hand, “you don’t want to be the state that authorizes a flood of marijuana.”

Marijuana was very expensive in the early days of recreational sales in Colorado and Washington. People bought it as a novelty item, but it wasn’t sustainable. How Nevada manages the market “could mean life or death for the industry,” Hudak said.

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

The number of people testing positive for marijuana while driving has increased in Colorado. Hudak said, and coroners have increased testing for marijuana in fatal crashes. So resulting uptick could be a result of simply looking for it more. Or it could be reality. At any rate, traffic deaths in Colorado have declined since legalization.

The driving limit in Nevada is two nanograms of marijuana per milliliter of blood. But determining what counts as intoxication is far more art than science at this point. “You could have a positive result for someone who hasn’t smoked in days,” said Ben Sillitoe, board member of the Nevada Dispensary Association. “Blood metabolite levels can’t really determine impairment... Everybody recognizes that (establishing intoxication) really is a challenge.”

**Highs and Lows**

FROM PAGE 37

right on the first try — no one does,” said John Hudak, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and an expert on marijuana policy. “Passing reform is the first step in a really long journey.”

As a visiting fellow in UNLV’s Brookings Mountain West, Hudak has taught policy courses on marijuana on campus and is an advisor to state legislators. He notes that legislators generally hesitate to be seen as boosters of recreational marijuana, but more are coming around. “It’s hard to find an elected official who will call legalization positive,” he said. “But you will often find these officials say, ‘This has worked out better than I expected. There have been fewer problems.’”

Nevada legislators have traveled to other states to study what has worked best. “They don’t want a carbon copy of what happened elsewhere,” says attorney Carlos Bumbag, ’95 BS Political Science, a founding member of the dispensary association. “They want to make this the gold standard in how you regulate it and sell it.”
POTENTIAL IN TIME OF CRISIS

BY BRIAN SODOMA

In 2009, when the real estate odds were stacked against him and the product he developed was deemed worthless, Chip Johnson looked in the mirror. He looked around and listened to the stories of broken people losing wealth and hope. He did his share of soul searching, too. There were lessons to be learned. Less debt, more cash would be the new normal. But even with all the heartache, when he looked out his office window, he saw a city that was down but not out.

The founder of Real Estate Services Group in Las Vegas moved to the valley at the age of 5 when his father took a job as a carpenter at the Nevada Test Site. He saw the city’s rise, embraced it, and couldn’t wait to make his living in real estate. Like many others, Johnson, ‘71 BS Business Administration, prospered handsomely.

“Real estate is an industry I’ve always believed in. It’s like air and water. You have to have it. And at the end you’re buried in it. It’s something that has true value,” he said.

When the real estate industry cratered, Johnson had to tap into the ephemeral — past UNLV friendships and his unwavering belief in Southern Nevada — to find his way back to prosperity.

LOSING IT AND GETTING IT BACK

As a UNLV student in the late 1960s, Johnson earned money photographing homes and properties for the multiple listing service (MLS) book. Thrifty and ambitious, he soon started investing. One site was across the street from today’s Fiesta Hotel-Casino in North Las Vegas. It had a small apartment complex that he later tore it down to build a retail building.

“In a town of about 100,000 people, I had my niche. … It helped me to kind of develop a scope and understanding of real estate,” he said.

With the Great Recession’s real estate collapse, Johnson faced his toughest life challenges. Longtime banking friends now sat across the table for heated negotiations. He even lost some of his early holdings, including that parcel near the Fiesta.

“It was the first time in my life I felt like everything I had was thrown away,” he recalled. “It was our deepest disappointment. … We ended up giving back a number of things to the bank. … But we got it all behind us. There were no hard feelings.”

Johnson persevered by turning to past investment clients, some of whom were longtime friends from his days at UNLV.

“ I was very fortunate in so many ways. Even though real estate gave me a beating at one point, it ended up taking care of me again.”
As a utility player of the acting profession, alumnus Michael Bunin has found his niche in Hollywood.

BY DIANE RUSSELL

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Michael Bunin is that he actually works in his chosen field consistently. Remarkable because, well, he’s an actor. Bunin has been making his living fully as an actor for nearly two decades, starting just three weeks after he arrived in Los Angeles fresh from his studies at UNLV.

If you are tuning in to NBC’s Superstore, you know him as Jeff, the manager from district headquarters. Or, if you watched the series My Boys, which ran for four seasons on TBS a few years back, you know him as memorabilia store owner Kenny Morittori.

But even if you skip sitcoms, Bunin is one of those actors whose face you likely have seen again and again — even if you don’t realize it. As he describes himself on Twitter: “I’m that guy you know from that thing you saw.”

And that, in part, may be why he is so marketable. “I seem to fit whatever mold they want — not bald, have a little hair. Not skinny, not fat,” Bunin reflected. That “everyman” quality makes Bunin a sort of utility player of the acting profession, someone who fills a variety of roles and seems tailor-made for every one.
EARLY DAYS AT UNLV
I came to UNLV on a speech and debate scholarship from Chaparral High School in 1988. A girl I had a crush on asked me if I wanted to take a theatre course and I said, “Of course.”

LESSONS LEARNED
UNLV taught me to be prepared, be professional, be courteous. Don’t be a diva. Don’t complain. UNLV really helped me have the career I am having.

Sometimes I sit in on classes now taught by (professor) Rayme Cornell, who was a UNLV student with me. I don’t lecture. I like to have the kids on their feet performing. I also talk to them about fame. I say, “To be famous, you don’t have to be here. Get a DUI, a mugshot, and a publicist and you probably will get a reality show.” A paycheck does not make you an actor.

ARRIVING IN LA LA LAND
I drove out to Los Angeles and crashed with friends. Within a week, I met an agent at a restaurant. I had a commercial audition a week later. I was very fortunate. I got the part. It was for a TV talk show called Vibe TV that was produced by Quincy Jones. I have had the same commercial agent for 20 years.

COMMERCIALS
My first national commercial was for Enron. It never ran. I was in a Spam commercial that ran for about three years. After that, for about a decade, I did eight to 12 commercials a year. I’m always willing to do a commercial. It’s a great way for an actor to make a living.

THAT “SHIP MY PANTS” KMART COMMERCIAL
When we were auditioning for it, we were talking about how funny it was, but we thought it probably never would air. Then it aired and went viral. Here I was at 45 and I got to be part of something that went viral.

ADVICE FROM DAD
My father used to say, “Luck is when preparation meets opportunity.” Prepare yourself to give yourself the best chance to succeed. That’s how you create luck.

LANDING SUPERSTORE
This is a great example of “preparation meets opportunity.” They had been auditioning for a week. The director knew me and called me and a couple of friends to come in and audition. This was a boring way to get a job that I couldn’t be happier with. The cast is a fun group. You spend a lot of time with the people, so to have a fun set with nice people is great. You don’t get that a lot. When I pull into NBC, I am excited to be there.

ADVICE FOR ANY PROFESSION
I can be as lazy as the next person. I have to fight it all the time. You’ve got to stay active in the community. I get a lot of auditions because people see me on stage (doing improv). Sometimes you are up on stage before six people and think, “What am I doing here?” Then two days later you get a call (as a result of that performance). Everything is a steppingstone. You are less of a rookie each time you get in front of a camera.

RECENT WORK
In the last few weeks I have played five very different roles, including a recurring role on Amazon’s The Last Tycoon and a butler on a Nickleodeon show. I also was on the pilot of the TV show Superior Donuts. It’s pilot season. We are all looking at new shows.
Henderson. He and his wife live in Elementary Education. He and his wife, BA Communications; production is his hobby. He and his wife, Licensing Board. Television and radio State Board of Osteopathic Medicine serves as president of the Nevada as an associate professor of family Regional Center for Clinical Simulation. is an associate dean and director of the is an honor graduate. In 1984 to 1995 he and his wife, Cindy, served as the adult coordinators for the youth ministry for high school and college students at Christ the King Catholic Church where one of their first student participants was late-night talk show host and former UNLV student Jimmy Kimmel, who in 2013 received an honorary doctorate degree. Married since 1976, Chris and Cindy have three children: Joshua, Matthew, and Brenna Hill Schneider, ’88 BS Comprehensive Medical Imaging. His hobbies include watching Rebel football, baseball, and sportscar racing.

Ronald Hedger, ’79 BA Psychology, is a doctor of osteopathic medicine. After practicing urgent care and family medicine in Las Vegas for 25 years, he joined Touro University Nevada in its College of Osteopathic Medicine. He currently is an associate dean and director of the Regional Center for Clinical Simulation. He also is involved in regular teaching as an associate professor of family medicine at Touro. Additionally, he serves as president of the Nevada State Board of Osteopathic Medicine Licensing Board. Television and radio production is his hobby. He and his wife, Karen, and have three grown children, Shannon Hedger Cammilleri, ’09 BA Communications; Christopher Hedger, and Lindsey Hedger, ’16 BA Elementary Education. He and his wife have two — and soon will have three — grandchildren. He and his wife live in Henderson.

Silver State Award
Lindy Schumacher
CEO, Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas

Achievement in Service
Terry Shonkwiler - president, Shonkwiler Partners Advertising

Outstanding Faculty Member
John “Jack” Schibrowsky
marketing professor, UNLV

Allied Health Sciences
Maria Barton - ’00 BS Sports Injury Management and ’04 MS Physical Therapy - Physical therapist at Mountain View Hospital

Business
John Guedry - ’82 BSBA CEO, Bank of Nevada

Dental Medicine
Dr. Cody Hughes - ’07 DMD owner/operator, Valley Pediatric Dentistry, Mesquite

Education
Tina Kunzer-Murphy - ’75 BS and ’77 MEd Physical Education UNLV Athletics Director

Engineering
Suresh Vishnuhattach - ’92 MS Electrical Engineering executive vice president PharMerica Corp.

Fine Arts
Tim Bavington - ’00 MFA Art art professor, UNLV

Graduate College
Lisa Danielson - ’98 MS Geoscience manager of basic and applied research, Jacobs Technology at NASA Johnson Space Center

Honors College
Jason Smylie - ’03 BS Computer Science and ’06 MBA president, Capirotti’s Sandwich Shop

Hotel Administration
Kathy Clark Dyke - ’94 BS Hotel Administration event designer, By Dzign

Law
Daron Dorsey - ’98 BSBA and ’01 JD general counsel for the Americas, Ainsworth Game Technology

Liberal Arts
Herb Santos Jr. - ’85 BA Sociology owner, Herb Santos Jr. Law Firm, Reno

Nursing
Tomas Walker - ’12 PhD Nursing director of clinical projects, Dexcom

Sciences
Ted Garland, Jr. - ’78 BS and ’80 MS Biology - biology professor, University of California, Riverside

Urban Affairs
Sara Leoni - ’96 BA Communications Studies - tech industry entrepreneur

NOTES
Mary Cain Rector, ’74 MEd - Special Education, retired from the Clark County School District (CCSD) with 37 years in the classroom. For 16 years she has served as volunteer chair of the Retiring Teachers Appreciation Luncheon. All CCSD retirees and their guests are invited to the event.

Chris Hill, ’78 Biology, was a 7-Eleven franchisee in Southern Nevada from 1976 until recently when he sold his last franchise and retired. From 1984 to 1995 he and his wife, Cindy, served as the adult coordinators for the youth ministry for high school and college students at Christ the King Catholic Church where one of their first student participants was late-night talk show host and former UNLV student Jimmy Kimmel, who in 2013 received an honorary doctorate degree. Married since 1976, Chris and Cindy have three children: Joshua, Matthew, and Brenna Hill Schneider, ’88 BS Comprehensive Medical Imaging. His hobbies include watching Rebel football, baseball, and sportscar racing.

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Johnson
FROM PAGE 39
“I paid attention to the positive. I started knocking on doors of past investors and said, ‘If you only have 10 bucks, give me a dollar;’” he recalled. “Basically, we went out and bought up the market again when it was absolutely at the bottom.”

Now, the longtime real estate pro views that down time as an opportunity of a lifetime. “I was very fortunate in so many ways,” he said. “Even though real estate gave me a beating at one point, it ended up taking care of me again.”

Those relationships that helped him through crisis were nurtured by decades of UNLV alumni event involvement and volunteering.

He credits the late Fred Albrecht, a longtime administrator who created UNLV’s alumni relations program, as key to keeping him involved in the university. “He was always such a champion of the university … It’s one of the greatest decisions I’ve made, to be involved with that group,” Johnson said.

He is a member of the UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees and chairs its real estate committee. He also serves as president of the Commercial Development and Management Corp., which oversees UNLV’s Harry Reid Research and Technology Park as well as all university real estate assets.

And he and his wife, Helen, commissioned the bronze “Hey Rebl!” statue in front of the Richard Tam Alumni Center, and they were the drivers behind the Jerry Tarkanian statue outside the Thomas & Mack Center.

2017 COLLEGE ALUMNI OF THE YEAR
The UNLV Alumni Association’s slate of 2017 Alumni of the Year is an impressive bunch. We asked them to tell us why they’re proud graduates and to share their own stories of when #RebelsTakeChances. Read all of their responses: unlv.edu/news

Silver State Award
Lindy Schumacher
CEO, Fulfillment Fund Las Vegas

Achievement in Service
Terry Shonkwiler - president, Shonkwiler Partners Advertising

Outstanding Faculty Member
John “Jack” Schibrowsky
marketing professor, UNLV

Allied Health Sciences
Maria Barton - ’00 BS Sports Injury Management and ’04 MS Physical Therapy - Physical therapist at Mountain View Hospital

Business
John Guedry - ’82 BSBA CEO, Bank of Nevada

Dental Medicine
Dr. Cody Hughes - ’07 DMD owner/operator, Valley Pediatric Dentistry, Mesquite

Education
Tina Kunzer-Murphy - ’75 BS and ’77 MEd Physical Education UNLV Athletics Director

Engineering
Suresh Vishnuhattach - ’92 MS Electrical Engineering executive vice president PharMerica Corp.

Fine Arts
Tim Bavington - ’00 MFA Art art professor, UNLV

Graduate College
Lisa Danielson - ’98 MS Geoscience manager of basic and applied research, Jacobs Technology at NASA Johnson Space Center

Honors College
Jason Smylie - ’03 BS Computer Science and ’06 MBA president, Capirotti’s Sandwich Shop

Hotel Administration
Kathy Clark Dyke - ’94 BS Hotel Administration event designer, By Dzign

Law
Daron Dorsey - ’98 BSBA and ’01 JD general counsel for the Americas, Ainsworth Game Technology

Liberal Arts
Herb Santos Jr. - ’85 BA Sociology owner, Herb Santos Jr. Law Firm, Reno

Nursing
Tomas Walker - ’12 PhD Nursing director of clinical projects, Dexcom

Sciences
Ted Garland, Jr. - ’78 BS and ’80 MS Biology - biology professor, University of California, Riverside

Urban Affairs
Sara Leoni - ’96 BA Communications Studies - tech industry entrepreneur

#RebelsTakeChances
One of the craziest chances I took was when I started the Rose Regatta Dragon Boat Festival in 2009 as a fundraiser for our RED Rose Breast Cancer program. This was a HUGE risk, not only because I didn’t know anything about dragon boating, but because it launched during a very difficult financial time in Las Vegas. My very open cluelessness about dragon boating must have endeared me to others. We have built the sport one paddler at a time, and since our first race, have raised more than $1 million and held more than 4,000 practices. We have 50 local teams who are avid paddlers and we draw 20 to 30 out-of-state teams to our race each year. This event is now so much more than just a fundraiser — it is therapy for our Pink Paddler Breast Cancer team, physical activity for all our weekly local teams, and a fun, innovative way to pull the community together to support the healing ministry of St. Rose.

Holly Lyman, ’14 MPH, is director of the Barbara Greenspun WomensCare Center of Excellence and Community Outreach and the School of Community Health Sciences Alumna of the Year
NOTES

#RebelsTakeChances

I learned how to scuba dive, fly a plane, and make my dreams come to life. Life is about action — so get busy!

Craig Michie, ’92 BS Business Administration, ’98 MBA, serves as the film & television employees - craft representative for working men and women in the film, motion picture and television industry in Southern Nevada for the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees - IATSE Local 720. He says that going to college was a big deal for him and that graduating was even more special. To celebrate that special event he chose to purchase a lifetime membership in the UNLV Alumni Association. He said he felt that after all of the effort and hard work, he wanted to have some kind of lasting element to signify the commitment he had made to his UNLV education and the focus on personal self-improvement.

Jesse Salas Jr., ’79 BS Physical Education, ’88 MEd Health Education, retired from Clark County School District (CCSD) after 36 years. He is the former head coach of wrestling at his alma mater, Rancho High School, where he also taught physical education, Spanish, math, and weight training. During his CCSD career he also taught at Las Vegas and Mojave high schools and at Kenny Gunn, Jim Bridger, and James Cashman middle schools. He has been married for 27 years to Sherree and has three sons, Jesse III, John, and James; one daughter, Jasmina Salas, a senior in UNLV’s Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies; two stepsons, Ryan and Chase; two stepdaughters, Lori and J’Lyn; and one granddaughter, Chevelle. His hobbies include working out regularly and watching football and baseball.

1980s

Jill Campbell, ’80 BA Sociology, recently was appointed chairperson of the board of Girl Talk, a national nonprofit serving girls throughout North America and beyond. The organization is dedicated to inspiring all girls to develop the confidence to lead through peer-to-peer mentoring. She has been a board member since 2015. Campbell currently is executive vice president and COO of Cox Communications. Prior to her current position, she was senior vice president for Cox’s field operations. She joined Cox in 1982 as director of communications in Oklahoma and has served in multiple roles throughout the company. She was Multichannel News’ Wonder Women of 2002, a Betsy Magness Class X Graduate, and was named National Women in Cable Telecommunications Woman of the Year in 2008. She lives in Atlanta.

Richard Hunsaker, ’83 BS Computer Science, has spent more than 30 years as a cybersociety scientist. He serves as chair of the KUNV Historical Society where he is dedicated to celebrating UNLV’s campus radio station from its inception in the early 1970s to the present. His hobbies include jazz and going to concerts. He and his wife, Nancy, have two daughters, Nicole and Natalie.

Glenn Plantone, ’83 BS Hotel Administration, is owner and broker of VIP Realty Group. He also is the founder and owner of Tony Boloney’s Italian Market. He lists work, travel, food, and real estate as being among his hobbies. He and his wife, Evelyn, have four sons, Tony, 25; Ed, 24; Vince, 16; and Giovanni, 13. The family lives in Las Vegas.

Mark Louis Walters, ’85 BFA Art, is art director of the feature film Rampage starring Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, which will be shooting this summer in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Diego. He has been a Hollywood art director for nearly 20 years with such credits as Transformers 4 and 5, CSI:Miami, The King of Queens, and Babylon 5. He lives in Los Angeles.

Richard Sinderband, ’86 BS Hotel Administration, is the creator/owner of a new app that is about to launch on the Apple Store. iSaid-uSaid is a texting app designed to help improve communication between people in strained relationships. Its purpose is to help the user steer his or her troubled relationship by having conversations through the use of the iSaid-uSaid content. It serves those going through a breakup, separation, or divorce. It can help to rekindle or salvage a relationship, too. It keeps talks “quiet” if children can overhear loud discussions or arguments. The app offers content comprised of statements and comment cards to be texted, geared toward being at any stage of the relationship. He lives in Thousand Oaks, California.

Leon Symanski, ’87 BS Business Administration - Management, ’94 Master of Public Administration - Management, ’01 JD, has been an attorney at Craig P. Kenny & Associates since 1987, practicing in the area of personal injury. He played for coach Jerry Tarkanian’s Runnin’ Rebels from 1984-87. His hobbies include golf, basketball, horse racing, reading, and live music. He is married to Lisa Gentile Symanski, ’97 BA Communications.

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Randall Cunningham, '04 BS Recreation & Leisure Studies, in 2016 became the first player in UNLV history to be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame. The former UNLV All-American punter and quarterback was inducted in December. Of the 5.12 million individuals who have played college football since the first recognized game in 1869, only 963 players and 200 coaches have been immortalized in the Hall (that’s .0002, two tenths of one percent). While an offensive force on the field, Cunningham earned All-America honors primarily as a punter. He is the only Rebel to post three punts of 70 yards or longer. He set 18 individual school records and finished his collegiate career by leading the Rebels to their first-ever bowl-game appearance – a 30-13 victory over Toledo in the 1984 California Bowl. Inducted into the UNLV Athletics Hall of Fame in 1997, he remains the only UNLV football player to have his jersey, No. 12, retired. The first quarterback selected in the 1985 NFL Draft when he went No. 37 overall to the Philadelphia Eagles, Cunningham went on to turn in a hall-of-fame level professional career. A four-time Pro Bowl invitee, he was a three-time winner of the Bert Bell Award, which annually goes to the league’s top player, and was named the 1990 NFL Offensive Player of the Year while with the Minnesota Vikings. For the past two years, he coached Silvarado High School’s football team.

Bryan Scott, '88 BS Business Administration, last year became the 88th president and the first African-American president of the State Bar of Nevada. An attorney for more than 25 years, he celebrated his 20th year with the Las Vegas city attorney’s office in August and is the office’s senior assistant city attorney. He practices in the areas of land use, zoning, and planning.

Leo Poggione, '92 BS Business Administration, was awarded the Manufactured Housing Institute’s (MHI) Chairman’s Award during the MHI annual meeting in California in September. The award is the trade group’s highest honor. The president of Craftman Homes in Reno, Poggione was recognized for his outstanding achievements, dedication, and service to the industry. During the early 2000s when traditional street retailers were struggling and closing doors all over the country, he was busy pushing the envelope of the retail sales center business model, learning how to utilize low-income housing tax credits, bidding on workforce housing projects, transporting homes on barges for projects in Alaska, purchasing homes for rental properties, and providing customer services that in good times a retailer would normally subcontract out to others. He also volunteered his time to serve in leadership positions at MHI and his state association. He is an MHI board member, has held leadership positions on the National Retailers Council, and has served on numerous MHI committees and task forces addressing some of the industry’s most challenging issues. Craftman Homes is Nevada’s leading manufactured housing dealer and has won multiple awards for customer service and overall satisfaction. Poggione lives in Reno.

Carlos Blumberg, '95 BA Political Science, joined De Castroverde Law Group focusing on personal injury, real estate, family law, and other business-related cases. He is a founding member of the Nevada Bar Women’s Association (See page 32).

John Santana, ’95 BA Communication Studies, is a reference and circulation librarian at Columbia-Greene Community College in Hudson, New York. He will be teaching History of Rock Music during the 2017-18 academic year. He lives in Albany.

Craig Billings, ’97 BS Business Administration, recently was appointed chief financial officer of Wynn Resorts. As a longtime gaming industry executive, he has worked closely with gaming regulators, in mergers and acquisitions, and capital structure management. He has held leadership positions at Aristocrat Leisure, including chief digital officer and managing the director of strategy and business development, and at International Game Technology. He also was an executive in the Investment Banking Division of Goldman Sachs, where he served numerous clients in the gaming industry. A certified public accountant, he lives in Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Valley. Paid subscriptions also are available. He and his wife, Kama’aina Magazine in 2012. It is a free, quarterly publication for the Las Vegas Hawaiian community that proudly shares stories of aloha, food, music, and culture. Celebrating its fifth anniversary this spring, the magazine can be found at more than 20 locations around the Las Vegas Valley. Paid subscriptions also are available. She and her husband, John, and have two daughters, Bella and Lily. She also has two stepdaughters, Brendan and Ethan. The family lives in Henderson.

Angela Khristin Brown, ’97 BS Education-Recreation & leisure Services and ’10 BS Education-Workforce Education-Recreation & Leisure Services, is the assistant director of strategy and business development, and at International Game Technology. She also was an executive in the Investment Banking Division of Goldman Sachs, where he served numerous clients in the gaming industry. A certified public accountant, he lives in Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Valley. Paid subscriptions also are available. She and her husband, John, and have two daughters, Bella and Lily. She also has two stepdaughters, Brendan and Ethan. The family lives in Henderson.

Jill Reinhardt Munenimitsu, ’98 BA in Communication Studies, launched Kama’aina Magazine in 2012. It is a free, quarterly publication for the Las Vegas Hawaiian community that proudly shares stories of aloha, food, music, and culture. Celebrating its fifth anniversary this spring, the magazine can be found at more than 20 locations around the Las Vegas Valley. Paid subscriptions also are available. She and her husband, John, and have two daughters, Bella and Lily. She also has two stepdaughters, Brendan and Ethan. The family lives in Henderson.

2000s

Quincy Branch, '00 BS Business Administration, is the president & CEO of Branch Benefits Consultants, was appointed to the Federal Advisory Committee on Insurance. The committee of various state government officials, insurance professionals, and consumer advocates advises the Federal Insurance Office. He is a second-generation insurance professional who started his career in college working for his father’s agency. He is a member of the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America and served as chair of the organization’s National Young Agents Committee. In 2013, he was honored by Vegas, Inc. as one of Las Vegas’ 40 Under 40. He also was selected as one of Employee Benefits Advisors’ 10 Rising Stars in 2013 and Insurance Business America’s Hot 100 for 2015. He and his wife, Tamika, have two children.

Joseph Wagner, ‘00 BS Hotel Administration, is vice president of casino marketing at Sycuan Casino Resort. He lives in Tampa, Florida.

Vickie Wilson, ‘01 BA Sociology, ‘10 M Ed Social Education, started Vegas Valley Food Tours in December 2013 as the first food tour to operate exclusively in downtown Las Vegas. While other tour companies focus on the Strip, she put the spotlight on downtown Las Vegas mom-and-pop shops, first-time business owners, and nationally ranked chefs. In 2016, she was able to hire her first four employees, so now there are others serving up joy in historic downtown Las Vegas. A history buff, she recently attended Boomtown 1905 at the Springs Preserve and the Nevada Museum. While some ladies collect shoes, she loves to collect and share Nevada History.

David Engler, ’02 BA Theatre Arts, has been promoted to operations manager of Hampton Inn and Suites, Research Park in Huntsville, Alabama. He says that when his entire staff persists in asking who he roots for — Alabama or Auburn, he always replies that he roots for the UNLV Rebels. He lives in Harvest.

Lory Howard Gatter, '02 BS Business Administration-Accounting, is a truck driver.

Jackie Hwang, ‘04 BA Communication Studies, is a credit analyst at KPMG. Southern Nevadaans can listen to her on the radio from 3 to 7 p.m. She has been with the radio station since 2003. She says she’s 2-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter keep her busy. Photography and dance are her hobbies.

Anthony Guy Patricia, ’04 BA, ’08 MA, ’14 PhD English, is an instructor of English at Concord University in Athens.
West Virginia. He recently delivered a talk at UNLV, “Gender Trouble in Michael Hoffman’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” that was sponsored by UNLV’s English department.

Jeremy Cope, ‘05 Radiography Certificate, ‘07 BS Kinesiology, has been invited to speak at the Landauer Clinical Dose Optimization Symposium in Chicago in June. His presentation will be titled “Not Gambling on CT Dose: How Our Health System is Succeeding.”

Steinar Skipsnes, ‘05 BA Communication Studies, made a New Year’s resolution for 2016 to meet one new person every day for one year. He documented the year on an Instagram account called “Daily Hello.” Actor Ashton Kutcher even posted about it on his Facebook page. Skipsnes lives in Seattle.

Corrin Sullivan, ‘05 BA Political Science, is director of curriculum for the UNLV School of Medicine. In her job she serves as liaison with many different departments, bringing together information and lesson plans to make sure the school is meeting all its program objectives. She said it is an incredible, almost magical process to be opening a medical school from scratch. She previously worked for the University of Washington School of Medicine.

JC Sibley, ‘07 BS Kinesiology, and Sara Costanza Sibley, ‘06 BA Journalism & Media Studies, were married Sept. 24 in Los Cabos, Mexico. He was a member of the UNLV baseball team in 2005. She was a member of the UNLV cheerleading squad from 2002-06. They met while attending UNLV in 2005. She works for Southern Hills Hospital in the physician relations department. He is the wellness director at Tim Soder Physical Therapy.

John Gregory Green, ‘08 PhD Civil Engineering, is a senior project manager - rail with Mott MacDonald in its Chicago office. He also serves as a commissioner on the Village of Plainfield Planning Commission and is treasurer of the Illinois section of the American Society of Civil Engineers. He and his wife, Margaux, have a daughter, Margaret Louisa, and sons, John Jr., Joseph, and Matthew. The family lives in Plainfield.

Rebekah Hamby, ‘08 BA English, is a receptionist at Townbin Dodge. She is returning to UNLV to study nutrition. Her hobbies include yoga and zumba. She lives in Henderson.
Torgersen, ’08, ’09
Jacob Montoya, ’08 BS Hotel Administration - Hospitality Management, previously worked at Gila River Casinos in Chandler, Arizona, but now has moved back home to Santa Ana Pueblo in New Mexico. He is the environmental services manager at Santa Ana Star Casino.

Matthew A. Cooney, ’09 BA Spanish for the Professions, recently completed his PhD in higher education administration from Bowling Green State University. He has accepted a position at Governors State University in University Park, Illinois, as a research analyst focusing upon student success initiatives. He lives in Orland Park.

Chelsea Milko, ’09 BA Political Science and BS Kinesiology, recently joined the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the U.S. government’s international media agency, as a public affairs specialist. Previously, she worked in public relations at two other federal agencies. She holds an MBA from Rutgers University and served in Peace Corps Uganda from 2010-13. She currently serves on the board of directors for the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Washington D.C. She lives in Washington.

Heather McGowan Torgersen, ’09 MA Political Science, has joined UNLV’s College of Liberal Arts as director of development. She began her career working on political campaigns and later transitioned into development work with nonprofits, spending nearly a decade in development with the American Cancer Society. While there, she worked in event planning and fundraising, led a national training team for development, and secured major gifts. She is married to Andrew Torgersen, ’08 BS Marketing. They live in Henderson.

Gabrielle Angile, ’10 JD, recently was promoted to global compliance manager for Zufit.
Megan Batara, ’10 BS Secondary Education, is director of site administration at Nevada State High School. Previously, she served as educational advisor/partner at the school and as a science teacher at Andre Agassi Preparatory Academy and at Coastal Academy of Science Las Vegas. She earned a master of science degree in school leadership from Nova Southeastern University. A native of Hawaii, her hobbies include spending quality time with friends and family, traveling, and going to concerts and shows. She lives in Henderson.

2010s
Janice Conway-Klaassen, ’10 PhD Educational Psychology/Learning & Technology, was inducted as a Fellow of the Association of Clinical Scientists. She lives in Minneapolis.

Jessica Morel, ’11 Master of Music, has been named assistant conductor of the Winston-Salem Symphony in North Carolina. Previously, she was a visiting assistant professor and director of orchestra activities at the University of Evansville in Indiana and conductor for the Lollipops Concert Series with the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra. A 2014 International Conductors Workshop and Competition winner, she has served as assistant conductor for the 2015 Hot Springs Music Festival, assistant conductor for the Lewisville Lake Symphony Orchestra, apprentice conductor with the Pia Mozart and Irving Symphony orchestras, and opera conductor at Texas Woman’s University.

Chris Cummins, ’12 BS Human Services Counseling, is a full-time child and family case worker who is finishing his master’s degree in marriage and family therapy at Regis University in Denver. An intern at The Marriage and Family Clinic, he recently had his blog published on the clinic’s website. He is married to Amanda Gerber Cummins, ’14 BA Psychology. They live in Broomfield.

Lisa Levine Rubin, ’12 PhD Higher Education Leadership, was recognized as a 2017 Outstanding Woman Leader in Higher Education by Diverse: Issues in Higher Education. She lives in Manhattan, Kansas.

Christian Dane Terry, ’12 BS Gaming Management, ’16 BS Business Administration - Finance, works at Wynn Resorts as a floor supervisor. He also works for Virtus Commercial, handling leasing and investment sales. He has started his own company, Terry Holdings, flipping houses. He says that despite its illiquidity and rather high risk profile, he loves real estate. His hobbies include golf, trading in the markets, and watching baseball. The Royals are his hometown team and still his favorite. He also enjoys trying new restaurants, attending Elite Yelp events, and networking with other Yelpers.

OBITUARIES
Troy Atkinson, ’01 BS Biology, died Dec. 28 following an inspiring fight with colon cancer. A 2004 graduate of the University of San Diego School of Law, he worked for multiple firms before founding the law firm best known as Battle Born Injury Lawyers in 2010.

David Ault, ’73 BS Education, ’75 Master of Education in Educational Administration, died Nov. 9. A teacher with the Clark County School District for 27 years, he taught at Park and Williams elementary schools before retiring in 1999. Among his survivors is his wife, Carol McCracken Ault, ’72 Master of Education in Elementary Education.

Clarice Guertler Goldberg, ’76 BS Accounting, died June 20 from cancer. She was a certified public accountant, a principal at Goldberg, Maroney & Associates, and an active supporter of Planned Parenthood, Habitat for Humanity, Opportunity Village, and Save the Children. Her son, Jason Aaron Goldberg, ’00 BFA, has established the Clarice Goldberg Scholarship to benefit accounting students who intend to practice in Southern Nevada.

Leroy Pelton, emeritus professor of social work, was found murdered in his Henderson home in December. His death is still under investigation. An advocate for children’s welfare and for the homeless, he taught at UNLV from 1997 to 2013. He primarily taught welfare policy courses in the School of Social Work, the Honors College, and the doctoral program in public affairs.

Andre Simmons, emeritus professor of economics, died Jan. 29 following a brief illness. Born in Poland, he joined the Polish Underground during World War II, was wounded in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, was captured by the Germans, and was liberated by American forces in 1945. He came to UNLV (then Nevada Southern) in 1960 and remained on the faculty until 1994. He served as chair of the economics department, acting dean of the College of Business, and director of graduate programs for the college. In 1963 he was the first UNLV recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship, which he used to teach at a university in Egypt.

Michael Valiente, ’12 BA Political Science, ’16 JD, has joined the Las Vegas office of Weinberg Wheeler Hudgins Gunn & Dial, a “Litigation Department of the Year” winner.

Holly Balmer, ’13 Master of Public Administration, serves as chief of staff to the dean of the The City College of New York School of Medicine, which is part of the City University of New York system. She lives in the Bronx.

Jamie Bichelman, ’13 BA Psychology, has worked as a full-time communications and public relations practitioner for UNLV’s department of police services for two years. Now he will be taking his career to new heights by pursuing a master’s degree in communication studies at UNLV.

Tamaara Prouty Day, ’13 BA Psychology, works as a judicial assistant to two juvenile judges in St. George, Utah. She graduated from UNLV after pursuing her degree over a period of many years as a single mother. A native Californian, she lived 17 years in Las Vegas and hopes to move back one day. Happily married with two children and eight grandchildren, she loves to hike, travel, and read.

George Alexander Pierce, ’13 MBA, serves on the board of the Arthritis Foundation.

David Raanan, ’13 MA Communication Studies, is a communications professional with his own company, Raanan Representation. He says he has been fortunate to work with everyone from Lady Gaga to Floyd Mayweather and couldn’t be more excited to join forces to flip commercial and residential properties with one of the leading private real estate investors in New York and Florida. His hobbies include hiking Red Rock and Gold Strike Hot Springs, working out, playing tennis, and collecting quotes.
Jovita Maria Bayuga, ’14 M Ed in Career & Technical Post-Secondary Education, has joined UNLV’s College of Education Student Services Center as assistant director of the alternate route to licensure and field experience coordinator.

Becky Bosshart, ’14 MFA Creative Writing, joined the U.S. Small Business Administration in January at its Washington, D.C., headquarters. She is the writer/editor in the office of communications & public liaison, overseeing the Resource Guide for Small Business and promotional materials. She worked as a journalist for about eight years, including as the business reporter at the Nevada Appeal and in the community news and online departments of the Las Vegas Sun. As a student at UNLV, she was awarded a U.S. Fulbright grant to Romania, where she completed a project to develop a series of contemporary American literature workbooks to teach English communication skills. She presented on this project, “The Global, Creative ETA: Energizing Higher-Ed English Teaching,” at the 39th annual Fulbright Conference in November. The workbooks incorporate communicative activities and group work for The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction, The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, and The Great Gatsby. The workbooks started as her service project while she was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ukraine as part of the master’s international writing program at UNLV.

Matthew Mumm, ’14 BS Computer Engineering, is an engineer I with the company JT3, where he updates and writes code for various programs. Previously, he interned in the electrical engineering department of Bally Technologies, where he learned a lot about the design process for circuit boards and slot machine wiring, electromagnetic interference, and testing procedures. Later he worked as a test engineer at GLI, which tests gambling machines and games. The job required a good understanding of electronics and statistics.

Ashley Farkas, ’15 Executive MBA, has been promoted to executive director of public relations at MGM Resorts International. Her hobbies include working as a yoga instructor. She lives in Henderson.

Blanca Ortega, ’15 Master of Education, is a developmental specialist for part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. She said she loves her job. The mother of three boys, she has been married for 22 years. She enjoys reading and painting.

Rhiannon Gladney, ’16 BA Economics, started a dog entertainment company, You Lucky Puppy, immediately after graduating. Now, You Lucky Puppy is hosting dog events all over Southern Nevada. She says she is planning to take local dog entertainment to a new level by opening Las Vegas’ first Dog Cafe. Once the company is more firmly established, she plans to return to UNLV to pursue an MBA. She says her hobby is dogs, dogs, and more dogs.

Jordan Hollander, ’16 LLM Gaming Law and Regulation, recently was hired as a deputy attorney general with the New Jersey department of law and public safety (office of the attorney general), Division of Gaming Enforcement, where he works in casino and employee licensing for casinos in Atlantic City. He lives in Branchburg.

Eliesa Lafranconi, ’16 BA Philosophy of Justice & Law, is program manager for the UNLV Community Garden, which hosts a farmer’s market starting at 9:30 a.m. the last Sunday of each month through June. The garden helps create a sense of community and promotes sustainability among students, faculty and staff through the common goal of producing 100 percent organic, natural harvests.

Ashkan Mahdavi, ’16 DMD and MBA, is pursuing further studies in orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics at the Georgia School of Orthodontics. He is one of 18 licensed dentists selected from a diverse group of applicants to enroll in the new residency program. The program educates dentists to be proficient in the clinical specialty of orthodontics while providing affordable care to the underserved populations. His hobbies include watching the Los Angeles Clippers and hanging out with friends and family. He lives in Atlanta.

Brianna Vargas Zambrano, ’14 BA Journalism and Media Studies, is a social media and public relations supervisor at Golden Nugget Las Vegas Hotel and Casino. A Sigma Kappa while at UNLV, she enjoys aerial arts, writing, volunteering, yoga, hiking, and crafting. In 2015 she married Alex Zambrano, ’15 BS Business Administration. They own two fur babies, Fiona and Smokey. The couple lives in North Las Vegas.

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“I recently spearheaded a month-long book drive throughout the Golden Nugget Las Vegas. I had to be bold and call a meeting with executives and then organize a variety of events to improve the book drive. It turned our great and we raised 200-plus books.”

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Leaving Her Mark

Last year, Allen Linnabary was hunting through the archives at the UNLV Barrick Museum of Art when he opened an old guestbook to find a familiar name. “It was amazing,” he said, “to see a person who I only knew as an adult, represented as a child on her first visit to the museum she would later run.”

Linnabary curated a new exhibit celebrating the museum’s 50th anniversary. The signature belonged to 6-year-old Aurore Giguet. A couple lines down on the same page, she also scrawled her father’s name, Jean. He had moved the family from Illinois into an apartment on Cottage Grove Avenue when he took a job at the museum, which then focused on natural history. Visiting the Barrick for the first time as a child in 1977, Aurore had her toe bitten by a tortoise (“I had a ridge in my toenail well into my teens.”) and wrote her name in the same guestbook that her future employee would rediscover four decades later. “I lived at the university, and the museum. I walked through what was then a desert between (Paradise Elementary) and the university every school day,” she remembers.

Faculty members brought the child on their anthropological field trips. Later she was old enough to help the staff install exhibits. She became a student and then built her career there, eventually becoming director and transforming it into an art museum.

Now Giguet, ’93 BS Secondary Education, is executive director of the Everhart Museum in Pennsylvania. “UNLV and the museum were home to me for over 38 years,” she says, “and a part of my heart and head will always be there.”

—D.K. Sole

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