Future Aztec
Andy Nelson, 3, great-grandson of SDSU’s oldest living alumna

Celebrating 125 Years
And Beyond

Class of ’26
Hopeful
Avery Laws, 18, great-granddaughter of SDSU’s oldest living alumna

Oldest Living Alumna
Natalie Berndes (‘37), 106
I HOPE THIS COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE OF SDSU MAGAZINE CONVEYS THE EXCITEMENT WE FEEL FOR A HISTORIC MOMENT AT SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY: OUR 125TH ANNIVERSARY! This expanded edition is packed with special features as we kick off more than a year of celebration and Aztec pride.

Like all anniversaries, it’s a time both to look back and to plan ahead. The timeline that appears on the back of our fold-out cover is a fitting place to start, identifying many of the milestones in SDSU’s evolution from a training facility for elementary school teachers — operating out of rented space downtown — to a world-class academic and research university, still expanding to serve our region, state and beyond. We’ve changed and grown and accomplished so much in 125 years — and what you will read in this issue are just a few of the highlights.

Research is an increasingly important part of the story of SDSU, and our eight-page centerpiece (p. 22), “The Road to R1,” digs into ambitions that date back to the ’60s as well as the latest Big Ideas propelling us toward a better future. Speaking of the future, catch up on the latest on SDSU Mission Valley’s Snapdragon Stadium (p. 12), which will be the new home for Aztec football and fans.

Of course history unfolds at a very personal level as well. I was charmed reading the memories of our current longest living alumna Natalie Berndes (p. 20), a student from the class of ‘37 — when San Diego State was still so new and far removed from any other hub of activity in the community. Meanwhile, University History Curator and 125th Anniversary Advisory Board Co-Chair Seth Mallios offers his perspective (p. 14) on “What Makes This Place So Special,” and invites you to share your thoughts as well.

Never forget: You are an important part of the SDSU story. I hope these stories and other highlights stir many fond recollections and keep you watching and contributing to where we go from here.

Please visit 125.sdsu.edu to find a schedule of campus events celebrating the anniversary. I hope to see you soon.

ADELA DE LA TORRE, PH.D.
ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR CAMPUS SPOTS GOT A MAJOR UPGRADE.

An expansion of the Aztec Recreation Center (ARC) opened in fall, bringing the latest fitness trends and more capacity to meet the needs of all SDSU students.

The new space features synthetic turf for functional training, a 41-foot climbing wall and separate bouldering wall, five multipurpose studios for group fitness classes (including cycling and hot yoga) and an indoor track with sweeping views of SDSU’s campus.

“Running inside the facility with that beautiful view is a new way of exercising on this campus like never before,” says senior Orlando Ochoa, recreation and wellness commissioner for Associated Students (A.S.), which manages the center.

The 94,000 square foot, two-story expansion is the first phase of the ARC Expansion and Renovation project, which will bring the facility to 138,000 square feet after the second phase is complete this summer. ARC first opened in 1997 at 78,000 square feet.

The building meets LEED Double Platinum standards with zero reliance on fossil fuels and also incorporates design elements to support a holistic, inclusive approach to student health including wellness programming spaces, areas for adaptive sports, gender neutral locker rooms and restrooms, and social and study areas.

“I just feel this sense of joy for this next generation of students that’s going to utilize and enjoy this facility,” says Christopher Thomas (’18), who supported the expansion proposal in 2018 during his time as A.S. president. “They are going to have the most amazing time.”

Alumni, faculty and staff may also purchase a monthly membership ($45) or day pass ($15) to use the facility.

—Olivia Li

A LOOK INSIDE THE ARC EXPANSION

SDSU IMPERIAL VALLEY WELCOMES NEW FACULTY

Several recent faculty hires are bringing new and exciting ideas to SDSU Imperial Valley. They include:

Dominika Bukalova, assistant professor of public administration

Jeffrey Osborne, assistant professor of criminal justice

Efrén López, assistant professor of English, specializing in Chicana literature

Lluliana Alonso, assistant professor of teacher education and winner of the campus’s most recent Outstanding Faculty Global Engagement Award.

“These hires signal our commitment to bring remarkable scholars to the Imperial Valley,” says Interim Dean Mark Wheeler. “Doing so is part of a strategy to strengthen existing programs but also to start building new majors to benefit the region.”

286%

Increase in SDSU Microsite Degree Completion Program applicants in Spring 2022 compared to Spring 2021.

SDSU GEORGIA LEADS FOR WOMEN IN STEM

OF THE 287 STUDENTS currently enrolled at SDSU Georgia in Tbilisi, nearly 42% are women—the highest participation rate for women in STEM programs in the country. And 45% of the graduating class in May will be women.

“Seeing early on that there was an apparent gender inequality in STEM in Georgia, SDSU Georgia focused on encouraging women to enter the workforce in critical STEM fields,” says Dean Halil Güven. “We are proud that we have almost 50% female participation in STEM degree programs.”

The SDSU Georgia Associated Students Board of Directors is also predominantly comprised of women, with seven out of 10 board members, including the president and executive vice president.

—Gvantsa Kheladze

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heart to the university for a way of saying thank you. “It’s very happy to be able to support the Department of Psychology in the College of Sciences. In his family’s name to endow a scholarship and an endowed seminar room. “I’m just especially able throughout his career, though, he started giving back to the causes and institutions that are dear to him — including SDSU through the years. In December, he donated two significant gifts — an endowed scholarship supporting the SDSU Library and an endowed professorship named the ‘National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America,’ co-authored by an SDSU alumnus, Jon L. Dunn.

Q: Got any advice for aspiring backyard birders? A: Birding is for everyone, everywhere! Figuring out what’s supposed to be nearby — the part of the world, the habitat you’re in and when you’re looking — narrows down the possible species from 10,000 to a few hundred. Observe the sounds and behaviors of birds to help you identify them. Are they perched or only on the ground? How do they beat their wings? Then pay attention to size, shape and colors.

What’s the best way to figure out what birds are in the area? There’s a great app called Merlin and website AllAboutBirds.org that have been built through community science and can identify sounds, like a Shazam for birds. And I always recommend the “National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America,” which was living paycheck to paycheck. As the professor emeritus of psychology became financially able throughout his career, though, he started giving back to the causes and institutions that are dear to him — including SDSU through the years. In December, he donated two significant gifts — an endowed scholarship supporting the SDSU Library and an endowed professorship named the “National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America,” co-authored by an SDSU alumnus, Jon L. Dunn.

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WELCOME TO SNAPDRAGON STADIUM!
YOUR SEAT IS WAITING

CONSTRUCTION’S SPEEDING ALONG — AND YOU CAN ALMOST PICTURE IT NOW: It’s Saturday, Sept. 3, and you arrive at SDSU Mission Valley’s Snapdragon Stadium to cheer on the Aztec football team in the season home opener against the University of Arizona Wildcats. You get off the trolley at the welcoming newly renovated trolley plaza and head toward the stadium — the silhouette of its stadium lights angled against the blue sky.

You enter the new home for SDSU football and notice a variety of food options from local eateries: Best Pizza and Brew, Cali BBQ, The Crack Shack, Everbull, Gaglione Brothers, The Taco Stand and more. Everything smells good. You decide on a burger from Hodad’s and a gourmet cookie from Batch & Box. While waiting for your food, you overhear people talking about the exclusive Sycuan Founders Club, which has high-end suites, club seats and year-round access to stadium events. You hope someone you know invites you to a suite for a future game.

With your gourmet stadium eats in hand, you pass more concessions, bars, open-air box seating, and notice artistic design details celebrating the history and culture of Mission Valley and the site as you move along the open concourse that circles the stadium. As you enter the bowl, the combination of red, gray and light gray seats in the 35,000 capacity stadium creates a cool pixelated effect. You look up and see Sycuan Piers — a triple-deck of platforms extending over the field inspired by San Diego’s coastline. You make a mental note to take in the view from Sycuan Piers at some point during the season. Or maybe when you come to watch some of the many other teams — including San Diego Wave Fútbol Club, San Diego Legion and SDSU women’s lacrosse, women’s soccer and men’s soccer — that will compete here too.

As you rush to your seat section, the stadium is bustling with people and you are thankful you filled out the ticket interest form on SnapdragonStadium.com in March so you had early knowledge of ticket options. You finally find your seat among a crowd of Aztec football fans who are equally excited. And as you fix your eyes upon Bashor Field, the team appears from the 50-yard line tunnel, and the inaugural game at Snapdragon Stadium gets underway. Go Aztecs! —Michelle Barón

ALSO HAPPENING AT SDSU MISSION VALLEY

◆ SDSU is breaking ground on the 34-acre River Park and 80 acres of community parks and open space, with construction scheduled for completion in 2023.

◆ The first phases of the SDSU Mission Valley Innovation District and residential development are on track to begin construction as soon as 2023.

◆ SDSU researchers will work alongside partners who are focused on applying research discoveries. The initial public-private and public-public partnerships for the Innovation District will be announced this year.
What Makes This Place So Special

By Seth Mallios
University History Curator and Co-Chair of SDSU’s 125th Anniversary Advisory Board

Legacy is a bond between past and present, and San Diego State University’s vibrant heritage consists of a dynamic blend of histories, traditions and values that have been passed down for generations. At the heart of our institution is a mix of tangible and intangible qualities with special meaning in our collective memory.

So in honor of our 125th anniversary, I am spotlighting five themes that I believe are truly timeless. When taken together, I think that these legacies help to distinguish SDSU from other institutions and define our collective character, trajectories and impacts.

In addition, I am including reflections from members of the SDSU community. I also invite readers to identify their own historical legacies for San Diego State. What do you think epitomizes SDSU? Tell us at magazine@sdsu.edu for possible inclusion in an upcoming issue.
“We Rise We Defy” may be the name of the university’s current strategic plan, but the rallying cry could apply to any decade at SDSU. Almost from the start, the institution took great pride in standing out from other schools. Our history teems with instances of opting for distinction as opposed to accepting conformity.

Our architecture is tied to early 20th century San Diego building traditions — not well-established Cal State norms — and our iconic historic core of buildings has made SDSU one of few universities on the National Register of Historic Places due to its significance and distinctiveness.

Greatly predating the California State College/University (CSC/CSU) system, we fought vigorously to ensure that “San Diego” always came first in our name and that the “CSU” (or “IU”) in this case was secondary. (This was true except for one especially contentious period from 1972-74.) “San Diego comes first” has been a regular sentiment on campus, and was especially apparent in 1960 when San Diego State College President Malcom A. Love audaciously turned down the opportunity to serve as the inaugural chancellor of the CSC/CSU system to remain in his executive post at Montezuma Mesa.

And while in many parts of the nation, the term “State” for a college or university conveys a lesser standing, that is not the case here. As the oldest and most diverse institution of higher education in the region, and with nearly 500,000 alumni, SDSU is inseparable from the surrounding community. In fact, the relationship between university and community over the past century and a quarter has been so perpetual and interdependent, it is nearly impossible to specify where one begins and the other ends. SDSU Mission Valley in the heart of San Diego only further solidifies this bond between SDSU and the community it serves and adds to local exaltation for all things “State.”

“Our students are genuinely unique. An SDSU student means pushing boundaries and constantly challenging the status quo to continue to innovate. Every student is a leader in their own right and has a powerful desire to continue the quest of being a lifelong learner and making the world a better place.”

—Shawki Moore, a junior and Associated Students vice president of external relations

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The State Normal School of San Diego started with a cohort almost entirely of women and had no male students at the height of World War I. In addition, the first building completed on Montezuma Mesa — Scripps Cottage in 1931 — was designated activity area and safe space specifically for women on campus that resulted from a donation from one of the nation’s leading female philanthropists at the time, Ellen Browning Scripps. SDSU also boasts many famous firsts, including the first Women’s Studies Program in the nation (spring of 1970), the first woman to play a Men’s Division I sport (Laurel Brassey in 1974), the first Latina in space and second female director of NASA’s Johnson Space Center (Ellen Ochoa, ’80), and even the greatest woman distance swimmer of all-time (Florence Chadwick, ’38).

And visits by two “First Ladies”-to-campus in the same year had a profound impact on the institution. Famed “First Lady of the World” Eleanor Roosevelt’s 1945 appearance and lecture at Peterson Gym led to successive visits by U.S. President John F. Kennedy (1963), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1964), future president Ronald Reagan (1966), and many other dignitaries during the 1960s and beyond. Likewise, “First Lady of Song” and “Queen of Jazz” Ella Fitzgerald and her 1961 campus performance, also at Peterson Gym, paved the way for big-name concerts at State and has resulted in SDSU hosting more live popular music shows than virtually any other university in the nation.

“SDSU’s diversity is extremely unique and one that unites the community rather than divides. We have a student body from all over the world, including those that cross the border to engage with the campus and all the perspectives that comprise the SDSU community. The diversity on campus is beyond that of ethnicity or culture, it’s diversity of thought and experience, perspectives and passions, which creates a truly distinct and precious experience that we are blessed to have.”

—Michael Wiafe (’20), master of public policy candidate at the University of California, Berkeley
Today, SDSU consistently ranks as a top university for veterans by Military Times and one eighth of the current student body are military affiliated. But San Diego State has always been a home for the military. Whether it is the history of service by those affiliated with the institution [for example, alum John Marsden (attended 1948-49), served in the Spanish-American War, World War I and World War II], the on-campus memorials or the steadfast outreach to military communities, SDSU's support of the military has been consistent for more than a century. Evidence of the SDSU-military connection dot campus. Multiple permanent tributes to military alumni decorate the SDSU campus. They take many forms, ranging from tall towers (Hardy Memorial Tower) and monuments (SDSU War Memorial) to modest plaques to an understated tree (The Freedom Tree). Collectively, they commemorate thousands of veterans with ties to San Diego State who served in WWI, WWI, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the First Gulf War and subsequent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

World War II, in particular, had a most profound impact on San Diego State. Immediately following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government placed troops on the Montezuma Mesa campus. More than 3,500 State students, faculty and staff served in WWII, and 135 perished. San Diego State's student body was the youngest in the state, for it included many young women who took part in the WAVES program. Students from the university were placed on active duty and formed an auxiliary military unit, the San Diego Service Unit, which was eventually deployed to the South Pacific. SDSU dispersed troops on the Mesa campus to clear and develop land for the Navy's use. The university had to be relocated from the Mesa to its current site in 1943. Following the war, the university returned to its former site and began to flourish, with enrollment increasing from 2,000 to 10,000 students.

SDSU has had remarkably consistent administrative leadership with only nine presidents in its 125-year history. In comparison, another university in the state has had eight presidents in just the last two decades. What’s more, five of SDSU’s presidents served at least 15 years, and none have served fewer than five. The university community was stunned when two of its presidents — President Irwin Jacobs in 1994 and President Elliot Hirshman in 2017 — left for other jobs, as the regional expectation has long been for lead administrators to finish their careers at San Diego State. In fact, multiple presidents achieved near-mythical status by the time of their departure. Upon President Samantha T. Black's retirement, the Board of Trustees insisted that, "not once during [Black's] entire incumbency... was there a particle of friction among his staff of instructors or between himself and the board." President Edward L. Hardy allegedly turned down invitations to run for mayor in the 1930s. The marching band swarmed President Malcolm A. Love with “All You Need Is Love” at his farewell. And the tykes at the SDSU Children’s Center were convinced that President Stephen L. Weber and his wife, Susan, were only leaving SDSU to replace Santa and Mrs. Claus at the North Pole.

SDSU has had many other legends and traditions that define the university’s identity. One of the most noteworthy institutional legacies of San Diego State’s wartime dedication to local service people was The Aztec News Letter, created by geography professor Lauren Post during WWII. Post, himself a wartime soldier, was pilots, a most hazardous role during times of armed conflict. Casualty rate was far higher than the national average because so many of its students, faculty and staff served in WWII, and 135 perished. San Diego State's student body was the youngest in the state, for it included many young women who took part in the WAVES program. Students from the university were placed on active duty and formed an auxiliary military unit, the San Diego Service Unit, which was eventually deployed to the South Pacific. SDSU dispersed troops on the Mesa campus to clear and develop land for the Navy's use. The university had to be relocated from the Mesa to its current site in 1943. Following the war, the university returned to its former site and began to flourish, with enrollment increasing from 2,000 to 10,000 students.

The roots for prioritizing the extracurricular go back to President Edward L. Hardy. The institution’s second president was deeply wedded to the teaching philosophy of “progressive education,” which insisted that a school’s primary function was to prepare students for life, not just a specific job or skill. As a result, he prioritized the development of social, artistic and athletic activities, which greatly increased the enjoyment of the students and paved the way for today’s robustly diverse campus organizations.

Through the decades there have been many beloved campus traditions. In the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, for example, annual San Diego State pushball games pitted the first years against sophomores in a match that involved few rules and a giant ball 8’ in diameter. The super-sill showdown regularly occurred at halftime of the homecoming football game and was determined by the group that could successfully push the enormous sphere — by whatever means necessary — past the opponent’s endline.

The Show, SDSU’s iconic 21st-century student section in Viejas Arena for basketball games, consists of a chaotic mix of elaborate mismatched costumes, eccentric big-head cut-outs, and manic student energy. Specializing in distracting opponents while they shoot free throws, The Show grew with Coach Steve Fisher’s unprecedented transformation of the men’s basketball program from conference cellar dweller to national powerhouse in the 2010s. Although its members are constantly changing and its rigid Twitter account regularly crosses the line while mocking the opposition, The Show’s reputation for wild antics and fun is known across the U.S.
YEARS AGO

State University that she inspired. her love of teaching, her upcoming elegy, “Adios” — which her family tradition of attending San Diego Natalie composes poetry in her mind — including her own Sharp and witty, Natalie talked Now blind and partially deaf, HOW CAMPUS HAS LIVED THROUGH TWO PANDEMICS. Natalie has compiled into a book. Sharp and witty, Natalie talked with SDSU Magazine in early February about HOW CAMPUS HAS CHANGED, memories of her sorority days, her love of teaching, her upcoming birthday and (on p. 34) the family tradition of attending San Diego State University that she inspired.

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO

W hat made you want to go to what was San Diego Teachers College at the time (and then San Diego State College)?

Well, my grandparents had just built a home in Ocean Beach and I was just graduating from high school, and they wanted me to come and live with them and go to San Diego State. I grew up in Alhambra, near Los Angeles.

The campus was only a few years old then. What was it like when you arrived for the first time?

I lived a long way from the university and I was going to have to find a way to get there. So I asked around and I found a friend who had a little 1930 Chevy that was just a little matchbox with four wheels on it. So I climbed in and we were going to pick up our other passengers, and I was sitting in the back and over on the left. And when we got to our last passenger, she came out with a big smile, all of us in that little tiny car. And it was a pretty rough road because in those days the roads weren’t really good, they had a lot of holes in them. And so we finally got out to State and I said, “Where are the rolling green lawns, and the ivy-covered buildings, and the statues, and the fountains?” Was nothing but San Diego State sitting out in the sticks. That’s before we had the sprawling lawns. The quad was just dirt when I was there — hadn’t been landscaped yet. Well, I said, at least there’s a sorority. So I was lucky enough to join Phi Sigma Nu.

What do you remember about your sorority?

We were all going out for a treat at the local ice cream place and all the girls ordered hot fudge sundaes with the chocolate dripping down, and the whipping, and the cherry. They didn’t serve me anything. And so pretty soon the waitress came over with an ice cream cone with one vanilla scoop in. I said, “I didn’t order that!” They all said, “Yes, you did, pledge.”

Our sorority had a table in the library, and I remember we could hardly get through a day that the librarian didn’t come up and say: “You girls are disturbing the peace, you’ll have to leave.” I can still remember our sorority sisters, those young girls singing our song that was full of loyalty and all those things. They were so reverent and so dedicated, and there’s such a feeling of camaraderie between the girls. I can still hear them singing.

What else did you do for fun? Did you go to dances and athletic games?

Oh, I remember dancing with Frank Harriet at a fraternity dance. We had a lovely dance every Christmas at either El Cortez [Hotel] or the Hotel del Coronado. And we loved to go to the ball games. Leo Calland was the football coach then and our sorority went all together and watched the games. We loved that.

You studied in the teacher education program. What methods did you learn?

I wanted to be a teacher ever since I was a kid. I used to get all the neighborhood kids to play school even though they’d been in school all year. So to find myself actually in a training school was a delightful experience. We used the method called integration. If we were going to teach math, we would build something and we measured each piece. I don’t think they do that anymore.

Did you have a favorite teacher?

Mrs. Hamburger. She was very formal and we all loved her. She kept everything smooth and nice. I remember one of my professors was a little old man. I can’t remember his name, but he taught astronomy and he’d come in with his little umbrella, and he’d open the umbrella, and then he’d take the chalk, and on the inside of the umbrella, he would draw all the constellations and all that stuff.

What else do you remember about what going to classes was like?

We would pick out our classes before the term started, and each class had a number, and you’d get your program all fixed out. And then they would post up the numbers of the classes that were closed, and you’d look up there and all the ones you picked out were closed. That was a real ordeal. You had to pick out something else, but it might not be what you needed. Sometimes you could just go in a class and sit down and hope you’d be accepted. There were ways you could do it, but registration was hectic. Now, I think they do it all electronically.

Do you recall your commencement — and those of your family members over the years?

It was held in the gym. And I remember many, many years later, I was sitting in the same gym and watching the graduation and who walked by pleasant in his cap and gown but my grandson, Erik [’09]. [We also went to see President Kennedy speak at the 1963 commencement.] I remember we were so excited that he came because it wasn’t a real big university by that time.

What did you do after graduation?

When I was a senior, I was engaged to be married and the sorority sisters gave me a shower, of course. I married this handsome, 6 foot 3 redhead engineer from USC and he was a geologist with an oil company. And we moved every three months all over the United States and half of the world. But when I got back I worked for 14 years at Warren-Walker School in Point Loma.

SDSU is celebrating its 125th anniversary on March 14 and you’re turning 107 on March 27. Are you looking forward to your birthday?

No. I’ve had all that I want! [Laughs]
SDSU is moving toward its goal of achieving the highest research classification for doctoral universities. Here’s a look at how it all got started — from a group of leading chemistry professors in the mid-60s to today’s thought leaders.

By Kellie Woodhouse
The tables are laden with white tablecloths topped with paper sheets, the servings are generous and affordable and, in years past, one might have noticed a picture on the wall of a group of gray-haired men standing in front of the restaurant and smiling, Sula Thai’s neon sign blazing behind them.

The men have been meeting at Sula Thai for nearly 30 years, religiously getting together on the first Friday of each month, spurred only by a global pandemic that requires participants — most of whom are now in their 70s and 80s — to meet over Zoom as they try to avoid exposure to COVID-19.

They are the original professors who lobbied for, and ran, San Diego State College’s — and the California State University system’s — first doctoral program in the mid-1960s. Many among their number have passed on, but they keep meeting each month, sharing stories and keeping the memory of their achievement alive.

What many Aztecs don’t know — including a lot of the students who have passed through the modern-day SDSU’s 23 doctoral programs — is that the university was never meant to be the research institution it has become. In fact, California’s Donahoe Higher Education Act, which was adopted to the state constitution in 1960, specifically lays out that the CSU system’s state-supported academic agency for research “solely to partner with us — unless we are the leading story on the evening news for a week,” explains Mallios. “And that’s what happened with Kennedy’s visit. It brought prestige, and that changed the trajectory of SDSU.”

Two years after Kennedy’s visit the institution’s first doctoral program was approved, and just a couple of years after that — in 1967 — the college conferred its first joint doctoral degree, in partnership with the University of California, San Diego, to chemist Robert P. Metzger, now a professor emeritus at SDSU.

“Looking back it seems a miracle that we were able to overcome all the objections and to live through all the frustrations and delays,” Robinson wrote in 1973, shortly after the upgrade to state university status. And the university was making the case that it could be a research institution in other ways as well. By 1965, faculty had authored at least 211 books and in the fall of 1967 alone, it received $1.2 million in federal grants, according to Starr.

“When this group of chemistry professors started the chemistry department, they had to overcome a lot of challenges,” says Bill Tong, who came to SDSU as a chemistry professor in 1985 and is now the university’s vice provost. “But they prevailed. They actually started the research culture here and started SDSU down the path it’s on today.”

The momentum continued under President Thomas Day (1978-96), a powerful proponent of the teacher/scholar model, and by 1991 the university had eight doctoral programs. Later, President Stephen Weber (1996-2011) and President Elliot Hirshman (2011-17) continued to champion research and bolster investments in faculty scholarship.

Since then, SDSU has continued defying expectations and growing its research enterprise, while still excelling in teaching students. SDSU now runs 19 joint-doctoral programs and four professional doctoral programs (three of which are operated independently). SDSU and UCSD recently established a joint-doctorate for Interdisciplinary Research on Substance Use, was launched in partnership with UCSD in 2015.

In 2020-21, in the midst of the pandemic, university researchers from all seven colleges brought in $414 million in funding. SDSU received one of its largest-ever grants, a $15 million, five-year award from the National Institutes of Health to bolster the university’s efforts in practicing research and strengthen the pipeline of scientists focused on the subject. Throughout the pandemic, researchers have led more than 50 research projects aimed at tackling different aspects of COVID-19.

At the same time, SDSU has remained focused on providing a quality education for its students, including underserved students. The university is a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, and underrepresented minorities have a near 75% six-year graduation rate, according to university figures for
the cohort that entered SDSU in 2015 (the latest data available), SDSU offers a cache of programs aimed at increasing student participation in research. The Maximizing Access to Research Careers (MARC) program, for example, has been running at SDSU for three decades and supports underrepresented students in STEM fields through mentorships, paid research experiences and other programming.

“Research provides really valuable tools that set students up for any career they want to go into,” Sohl explains. “Day in and day out, student researchers get to practice critical thinking, working in a team and resilience. There’s a big movement in science education to have the classroom replicate the research lab and prioritize discovery-based learning. SDSU has done a great job of exemplifying that, and it wouldn’t be possible without the culture of research here.”

COLLABORATION IS KEY

When Forest Rohwer — a prolific researcher and ecologist who founded the field of viromics — thinks about what makes SDSU an exceptional research university, he looks at the university’s diverse pool of capable student researchers and its prime location in a city rich in open to collaborating and helping one another advance science.

“You have a lot of the things you need here,” he says. “There’s a lot of good people — great students and partner institutions. When you are in a city with so many good people around you, it really does make a difference.”

Collaboration is one of the key reasons SDSU’s research enterprise has exploded in the last decade. University researchers are increasingly working together, and with community, industry and scientific partners, to solve major problems facing the region and the world.

For example, SDSU’s Areas of Excellence initiative started in the early 2010s and focused on hiring clusters of expert faculty researchers dedicated to tackling pressing issues like climate change, smart health and human dynamics in the digital age. And the ongoing Big Ideas Initiative, with projects selected by President Adela de la Torre, brings existing researchers together on faculty-identified initiatives like curing homelessness, leveraging comics to advance social justice and using digital platforms to improve lung health. Both programs represent an investment by the university to prioritize collaborative research.

“We are building team science — transdisciplinary groups of people working together to provide unique solutions to sticky problems,” explains Stanley Maloy, associate vice president for research and innovation. “It has become clear that many of the problems facing us today can’t be solved within the lens of a single discipline.”

This is especially true with the planned innovation district at SDSU Mission Valley. With 1.6 million ft² of office, technology and research space, the district will be built to facilitate collaborations between SDSU researchers and public-private partners. It will consist of hubs where particular areas of focus — transportation, health and media, for example — are approached through a lens of transdisciplinary collaboration.

Maloy uses buzzwords like “bumpability,” “convergence” and “crafter” — people who could describe a place where transdisciplinary collaborations beget new partnerships and new ways of thinking about solutions. A site where engineers might develop a technology, and social scientists help hone it so that it’s easy for anyone to adopt, and industry and SDSU faculty work together to advance the technology from basic science all the way to commercialization. With support from innovation districts, place becomes essential in building opportunities to collaborate and ideate.

“Maloy says. “This provides a greater opportunity for research that solves areas of problems and stands across disciplines. That’s the type of research society needs.”

Plans for the district are underway, and SDSU’s first public-private partners are expected to be announced later this year, with construction starting as early as 2023. The university has a long history of working with the San Diego community — from SDSU’s first community-based grant led by public health researcher John Elder in the mid-1980s and focused on nutrition in the Latino community, to present day research at the South Bay Latino Research Center measuring Latino health in one of the largest studies of its kind.

These strong relationships have helped SDSU researchers gain credibility among both community partners and funding agencies. Long-term relationships fostered by public health faculty like Elder, for example, were what allowed SDSU researchers across disciplines to pivot so quickly during the pandemic and launch the Communities Fighting COVID (CFC) program. CFC is a major effort, supported by both local and national agencies, that facilitates contact tracing, testing and vaccination throughout San Diego. The program has also led to research insights on how best to reach vulnerable communities during a public health crisis.

“We are embedded in the community. We represent the community,” says Hala Madanat, interim vice president for research and innovation, pointing out that roughly 245,000 SDSU alumni live in San Diego County. “We do everything we can to pivot our research when necessary and address issues that are important to the community,” she says. “That builds trust and allows us to roll out programs at a speed others can’t because they have to forgo relationships from scratch, whereas we already have them firmly in place.”

STRATEGY AT CENTER

In recent years, the university has been strategic about supporting team science with financial incentives. This has included support for research-based centers and institutes on campus, for reduced teaching loads for teams of faculty working together on important projects, and for equipment purchases that benefit research groups, as opposed to a solitary researcher.

SDSU has also made key investments in faculty Training programs for early career faculty, for example, help them become more competitive when applying for hard-to-get grants, and robust reviewer programs greatly improve grant application success rates.

The benefits are apparent. Since 1999, SDSU has received 26 National Science Foundation CAREER awards, a prestigious award given to highly competitive early career faculty. Yet half of them — 13 awards — have gone to early career faculty within just the last three years. Meanwhile, SDSU is launching a program that facilitates expert review of faculty manuscripts, and has bold workshops for faculty interested in applying for funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This effort, too, is reaping dividends. So far in 2022, faculty have received three NEH grants.

With a commitment to helping more university discoveries to the public sector where they can be further developed into products that improve people’s lives, SDSU has progressively prioritized entrepreneurship throughout recent years. Faculty receive support from programming like the Zahn Innovation Platform Launchpad, a start-up incubator for students and faculty. CSU I-CORPS, an SDSU-led workshop series that helps research teams explore biotechnology commercialization, and the university’s Pilot Innovation Fund, which offers financial support for faculty looking to commercialize their innovations.

The university had 46 intellectual property disclosures for fiscal 2021 and $558,000 in revenue from intellectual property — figures that measure well against its peer group of research institutions, says Tommy Martindale, director of technology transfer.

A special endowment has allowed SDSU to hire its first National Academy of Sciences member, geographer and conservationist Janet Franklin. Her hire positions the geography department — which is already a major leader in creating and interpreting spatial data to analyze phenomena over time — as increasingly competitive.

As SDSU faculty become more ambitious, the entire institution’s strategy at center. With successful innovation districts, place becomes essential in building opportunities to collaborate and ideate, and helping one another advance science.
When the university unveiled SDSU’s strategic plan in 2020, R1 A TOP GOAL strategies and mechanisms in place to invest in research across individual faculty often drove the research agenda for the universities. “It’s like the saying, ‘A rising tide lifts all boats,’” says Madanat. “At SDSU, research is not siloed from the larger mission of the university — it’s strong here at SDSU,” he says. “It’s what makes us different. If we want to do something, we will get it done.”

Bernstein leads the university’s longest running grant, a $10 million grant awarded to SDSU in 1981, a situation whose faculty have a significant impact on society,” says Madanat. “At SDSU, research is not siloed from the larger mission of the university — it’s strong here at SDSU,” he says. “It’s what makes us different. If we want to do something, we will get it done.”

Connect SDSU engineers, hydrologists, geographers, social scientists and public health experts to their counterparts in Mexico to develop innovative solutions to problems that include raw sewage from Mexico entering the U.S. via the Tijuana River, sea level rise and plastic pollution. They will develop sensors for real-time monitoring of bacteria levels; map flood risks, explore the best uses for recycled water and improve water treatment technology — in order to protect life’s most vital resource for generations to come. “There are a lot of world-class research institutes in Mexico that are already doing fantastic work on water issues along the border,” says Trent Biggs, research ecologist and one of the team’s faculty leads. “It’s about socioeconomics. It’s about arts. It’s about community action. It’s about how we interact as people — we have to have all these components represented or we’re not going to move the needle.”

SDSU is currently classified as an R3 doctoral university with “high research activity.” To become R1, it needs to continue strategically investing in research, encouraging doctoral programs in a wide variety of fields and supporting the research of young graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and research scholars. These are investments SDSU has made for decades, and will increasingly make in the future. SDSU’s R&D expenditures — $108 million in 2021 — are already on par or ahead of a number of longstanding and recently inducted R1 institutions. “We are extremely active, and we make phenomenal contributions to science and society,” says John Crockett, associate vice president for research advancement. “R1 status will come as an outcome of our continuing investments and sustained research excellence.”

For many at SDSU, the path ahead is exciting and full of potential. Faculty like Sandy Bernstein have seen the research enterprise grow and grow, despite the odds. “The can-do attitude — it’s strong here at SDSU,” he says. “It’s what makes us different. If we want to do something, we will get it done.” Bernstein leads the university’s longest running grant, a 36-year-long National Institutes of Health-funded study of the molecular basis of muscle contraction. Yet as he retires from nearly 40 years on SDSU’s Faculty, what sticks with him the most are the memories of his students over the years. “Seeing your student learn to love science, or get a wonderful job, or get into med school — that’s the main reason we keep doing what we are doing,” Bernstein says. “I mean the research is fun too. But it’s really the interaction with the students, and seeing them succeed, that is most rewarding.”

Solving the greatest challenges facing humanity requires visionary thinking and bold action. These six finalists in the Office of the President’s Big Ideas initiative foster collaboration between interdisciplinary teams of researchers and community partners with the goal of making the world a better place. By Susanne Clara Bard

SDSU’s five-year strategic plan.

Finalists were chosen based on their alignment with SDSU’s five-year strategic plan.
ODE TO PETERSON GYM
Athletics championships, historic concerts and just hanging out — the venue is the scene of memories for many alumni.

OPENED IN 1961 AND NAMED AFTER THE GREAT C.E. PETERSON, who had an impactful 37-year tenure as SDSU athletic director, coach and alumni executive secretary, Peterson Gym is now the beloved home of SDSU women’s volleyball. It’s also the former home of men’s and women’s basketball — and men’s volleyball. In 1973, that team won an NCAA championship, with many of the tournament games played in the gym.

In the ’60s and ’70s, Peterson also played host to some of the most important concerts in university history, notably: Ella Fitzgerald in 1961 and Buffalo Springfield, the first big name rock show, in 1966. Bob Dylan, Ray Charles and Joan Baez all played there too.

As did countless students who snuck in throughout past decades for pick-up basketball games or just to hang out. “People would sneak in all the time,” says Mark Warner, who coached Aztec volleyball for 27 years. After daytime PE classes, students would stick cardboard in the door, so that it wouldn’t lock, he says. That trick no longer works but the memories remain.

Coach Warner played in Peterson too — as a volleyball player for San Diego State and, before that, as a Crawford High School basketball player at a tournament in 1965. “Man, we thought we were at the Taj Mahal,” he says, noting how rare glass backboards were at the time. That was one of his favorite wins in Peterson. The other was in 1995 when women’s volleyball upset Long Beach State to go to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament. “That was a special time,” he says.

—Lisa Haney and Emily Wenk
THE DONOR: Margo Kasch  
(‘67, B.A., mathematics)  
THE GIFT:  
38 consecutive years of giving

ABOUT MARGO’S SDSU CONNECTION: SDSU has been a part of Margo’s life since she was 3 years old and her father, Fred Kasch, was appointed assistant professor in the physical education department. An innovative researcher in cardiac rehabilitation and exercise physiology, Fred was also head gymnastics coach. Margo remembers attending San Diego State College basketball games at a young age and watching her father’s gymnastics team do the halftime show. Margo’s brother, also named Fred, went on to join the gymnastics team and to graduate from San Diego State with a B.S. in biology in 1963. Margo says she always knew she wanted to become a teacher. After earning her bachelor’s in mathematics at San Diego State in 1967, she earned her teaching credentials the next year and went on to teach at Patrick Henry High School.

WHY SHE WANTED TO GIVE BACK: Margo began donating to SDSU in 1984. “I think it probably started with the student phone calls, and then eventually getting things in the mail,” Margo says. “I always respond to those.”

Giving became a habit and she has been contributing ever since, over the last three decades. “There are many reasons that I give… but I think the most important thing for me is to help the students,” Margo says. “And giving is the right thing to do.”

She also likes carrying on her father’s legacy. The SDSU Exercise Physiology Laboratory was named in his honor in 1990 and an endowment was established in his name in 1999 to assist SDSU graduate students in the School of Exercise and Nutritional Sciences (ENS). This endowment now also honors Fred’s former colleague, Dr. John Boyer. Margo contributes to the endowment and has kept in touch with some of the students it has supported, including one who is now a professor in ENS. “That’s been really rewarding,” she says.

Margo is also a member and donor to SDSU BRIDGES, which gives scholarships to students in the Weber Honors College, and she enjoys meeting the recipients every year and staying in touch as they start their careers. In addition, she has helped to fund student scholarships in the College of Education and College of Engineering, and to support students who have a financial burden due to a cancer diagnosis through the Wallace, Shatsky, Blackburn Courage Through Cancer Fund.

“It feels good to be able to give back,” she says. “I’m proud of how much the university has grown,” Margo says. “It has done wonderful things and I’m really happy to be a part of that.” —Lisa Haney

ABOUT SDSU LOYAL: Everyone who has made a gift — in any amount, to any area of the university — in each of the last two fiscal years is recognized as SDSU Loyal. There are currently more than 6,100 members honored for their steadfast annual giving. Nearly 1,500 donors, like Margo, have given for more than 20 years in a row.

FROM $2 TO $50,000 Paul Stuverud (‘71 B.S., ’76 M.S., electrical engineering) first started giving to SDSU with a $2 gift shortly after completing his master’s degree in 1976. He has since made more than 40 gifts over 45 years, most to the College of Engineering. In 2019, he made a $50,000 gift to fund an endowed scholarship in his name that goes to a student in the Math, Engineering, Science Achievement program each year to help first generation and low-income students become engineers. As a student, Paul rode his bicycle to campus. He now belongs to three cycling clubs in San Diego.

“DEDICATED DONORS LIKE MARGO AND PAUL HELP PROVIDE SDSU STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF WITH RESOURCES THEY NEED TO PURSUE OPPORTUNITIES, DISCOVER NEW SOLUTIONS AND ACCOMPLISH THEIR DREAMS.”  
—ADRIENNE VARGAS, vice president for University Relations and Development

Photographs: Sandy Huffaker (left), courtesy of Paul Stuverud (right).
San Diego State University’s oldest living alumna Natalie Berndes (‘37), 106, inspired a family tradition by becoming an Aztec. Three of her four children went on to attend as well: Peggy Potter (‘61, attended), Barry (‘69) and Jon (‘71). And although son Scott went to University of California, Riverside, he is an avid SDSU sports fan. Additionally, two of Natalie’s grandchildren graduated from SDSU: Peggy’s daughter, Laura Potter Laws (‘84), and Jon’s son, Erik (‘09). Now there’s the possibility of a fourth generation: Natalie’s great-granddaughter — Laura’s daughter, Avery Laws — is a high school senior and SDSU hopeful. And the family jokes that Natalie’s 3-year-old great-grandson — Scott’s grandson, Andy Nelson — is a “future Aztec.” Cheers to the Berndes family — and SDSU! —Lisa Haney

SDSU IS A TRADITION FOR THESE FAMILIES

GO AZTECS!

1. The Watkins Family Tommie (‘95) and daughter Cierra (‘23)

2. The Padilla Family Gloria Celaya (SDSU mom and grandmother), Mary* (‘95), Ylexia (‘20), Eddie (‘18), Catalina (‘23) and Cesar* (‘95)

3. The Castro Family Lorilyn Lord (‘98, retired in 2021 after working 23 years at the SDSU Children’s Center, an Associated Students program), Chelsea (‘06), Ryan (‘04) and their children Russell (‘20, SDSU Children’s Center graduate) and Eva (‘18, SDSU Children’s Center graduate)

4. The Carlson Family David (‘74-76, attended), Elizabeth (‘22), Robyn (‘74-76, attended). Not pictured: Elizabeth’s aunt, Lori Patterson (‘75), and grandfather, Russell Palmer (‘46)

5. The Tetley Family Jack (high school sophomore and SDSU hopeful), Jason* (‘94), Ella (first year student), Jenny* (‘97)

6. The Burgreen Family (three generations of sisters) Margaret Martin (Burgreen) (‘47), Betsy Burgreen (‘86), Nancy Burgreen (Burgess) (‘73), Loren Burgess (Nordin) (‘18), Megan Burgess (‘34). Not shown: Barbara Sue Martin (‘50), deceased

7. The Lima Family Jacqueline (‘22) with her “future SDSU Aztec” nieces Emma and Allison

8. DeGuzman / Quinajon Family Cousins Bernadette DeGuzman (‘05), Christine DeGuzman (‘10) and Roehla Francisco Quinajon (‘96). Not shown: Roehla from Avery Francisco (Junior)
Early in the morning on Oct. 4, 2021, Jayanti Mathur had an exciting meeting with a counselor that paved the way to his success. Why? "Don’t be afraid to fail. It’s literally jumped out of bed; my phone was buzzing with notifications all morning. "I was very excited because many people don’t try that hard. After graduating, Berry worked his way up to president of stores at the parent company of 7-Eleven. Before deciding he wanted to pursue a career in the food industry, he applied himself more. He graduated with a 4.0 GPA graduate and was promoted to chief operating officer at Feeding America in 2021. I really wanted to do something positive. To help the community through Feeding San Diego, I decided to start my own food rescue organization."

By Emily Wenk, SDSU Magazine

San Diego State University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer. SDSU Magazine welcomes your input. E-mail us at magazine@sdsu.edu.
Quiz:

TEST YOUR SDSU KNOWLEDGE

Who said it? Match the person on the right with the quote that they uttered on Montezuma Mesa. By Seth Mallios

1. “Come down here and get CRAZY with me! Whoever gets on stage, gets backstage!”
   - JIMMY BUFFETT

2. “No country can possibly move ahead, no free society can possibly be sustained, unless it has an educated citizenry.”
   - ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

3. “We must learn to live together as brothers, or we will perish as fools.”
   - THE 14TH DALAI LAMA, TENZIN GYATSO

4. “NASA inspires people around the world and to have been part of that has just been an amazing experience, and for me it really started at San Diego State.”
   - SDSU PRESIDENT ADELA DE LA TORRE

5. “A peaceful life brings maximum happiness.”
   - OZZY OSBOURNE

6. “Education is an inalienable right for all peoples across the globe.”
   - ASHLEY TEJADA, SDSU ASSOCIATED STUDENTS PRESIDENT

7. “You might as well enjoy life; God grades on a curve.”
   - SAN DIEGO STATE COLLEGE PRESIDENT MALCOLM LOVE

8. “San Diego State University is a certainty.”
   - MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

9. “The beauty of being a student at San Diego State is there’s a place for everyone. There really is no one identity that makes up what it is to be an SDSU student, but what brings us all together is our sense of pride, a love for the school and a constant desire to always see it made even better.”
   - U.S. PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

10. “Honor the people who got you here, thank the people who help you succeed and surround yourself with people who keep you grounded.”
    - ELLEN OCHOA (‘80)

ANSWER KEY:

A: JIMMY BUFFETT
B: ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
C: THE 14TH DALAI LAMA, TENZIN GYATSO
D: SDSU PRESIDENT ADELA DE LA TORRE
E: OZZY OSBOURNE
F: ASHLEY TEJADA, SDSU ASSOCIATED STUDENTS PRESIDENT
G: SAN DIEGO STATE COLLEGE PRESIDENT MALCOLM LOVE
H: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
I: U.S. PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY
J: ELLEN OCHOA (‘80)

Professor of Anthropology Seth Mallios is the university history curator, director of the Office of University Heritage and director of the South Coastal Information Center at SDSU. He is co-chair of SDSU’s 125th Anniversary Advisory Board.
Your passion for giving is admired and appreciated.

SDSU is committed to advancing student success, ensuring faculty excellence, increasing research activity and building for our future. This is achievable with the support of generous donors.
CONGRATULATIONS
TO OUR 2022 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI Awardees:

Ramona Pérez, Ph.D. ('92)
Arts and Letters

Angela Byars-Winston, Ph.D. ('91, '92)
Education

Roger Ball ('74)
Engineering

Humberto Monge ('89)
Health and Human Services

Doug Palladini ('88)
Professional Studies and Fine Arts

John Wu, Ph.D. ('91)
Sciences

Esperanza Colio Warren ('03, '06)
SDSU Imperial Valley

Frederick W. Pierce, IV ('84, '88)
Distinguished Alumni Service

Rebecca Harshberger ('84)
Fowler College of Business

Tom Karlo ('75)
Distinguished University Service

AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
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