

PACIFIC

FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY | NOVEMBER 2024 | VOL. 37, NO. 2



Celebrating 80 Years of
**FAITH, WISDOM
& SERVICE**





president's message

80 YEARS OF GOD'S INSPIRATION TO FAITH – WISDOM – SERVICE

“Our alumni are indeed rising to the challenges in their communities...”

— André Stephens, Ph.D.

Eighty years ago a group of Mennonite Brethren established Pacific Bible Institute. These visionaries valued education and desired a place on the West Coast where their young adults could grow in faith and knowledge.

Eight decades later FPU stands in the shade of trees we did not plant. Countless individuals have created our rich history. We honor that past while eagerly “planting” for a fruitful future.

In this issue, we reflect on the words on our seal and in our DNA: Faithfulness – Wisdom – Service.

Many of you can attest to God's faithfulness to FPU. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

The *Fresno Pacific Idea* states: “All authentic knowledge and experience are unified under God...there is no contradiction then between the truth of revelation, of scholarly investigation and of action.” With divine curiosity we seek wisdom beyond cultural, political and religious divisions.

The motto also calls us to godly service. Menno Simons said of true evangelical faith:

“It cannot lie dormant, but spreads itself out in all kinds of righteousness and fruits of love; It dies to flesh and blood, seeks, serves and fears God in its inmost soul, clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, comforts the sorrowful, aids and consoles the sad—it becomes all things to all people.”

As we honor our history, we look enthusiastically forward! This fall, we established an Esports club. Next fall we will add STUNT as an NCAA sport and, through a generous alumni donation, have refinished the track in time to host the Spring 2025 PacWest Conference Championship. We returned required College Hour (chapel) for new students in partnership with Psalmist Mission. Charlotte's Coffee Corner has been upgraded thanks to another generous donor, as have the SCC Lounge and the amphitheater. The Dan Martin Baseball Stadium complex will soon be ready for play.

FPU remains founded on Christ. Through God's faithfulness, the wisdom he imparts and the service he inspires, we transform our world into a place of human flourishing. Thank you for your support and prayers! 🏠



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Fresno Pacific University develops students for leadership and service through excellence in Christian higher education.



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Pacific is sent to alumni and friends of Fresno Pacific University.

FPU Celebrates 80th



BIRTHDAY PARTY

Eighty years to the day—September 18, 2024—after 28 students and their teachers opened Pacific Bible Institute, more than 400 students, faculty, staff, administrators, board members and guests celebrated the birthday of Fresno Pacific University.

“We believe we are a community that goes out and has an impact on the world. Each student reflects that belief,” said Jordan Ringhofer, district minister for the Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (FPU’s sponsoring denomination), alumnus and board member.

After chapel in the Warkentine Culture and Arts Center, participants enjoyed Orange Crush and Mountain Berry Blast Powerade—symbolizing FPU’s blue and orange school colors—along with birthday cake and cupcakes.







HOMECOMING

The Sunbird flock returned to the nest for Homecoming 2024 October 3-5. Alumni, students, families and other members of the FPU community enjoyed alumni reunions, concerts, athletic events, meals and family-friendly activities on the Campus Green and other locations. 🏠

(FPU photos by Megan LaBlanc)





KEEP UP

with all things 80th at
80.fpu.edu
or scan the QR code.



FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

80
years

FAITH • WISDOM • SERVICE



FAITH in Action

By Katie Fries

Growing up active in her church, Xitlali Alvarez was drawn to helping others, but her service had always been within her community. “I had always wanted to go on a missions trip but the opportunity had never crossed my path,” she says. When an advertisement for an FPU missions trip to Thailand caught her eye, the sophomore criminology major knew it was an opportunity to serve in ways she’d long dreamed about.

Alvarez was one of 11 team members (including eight students) that spent two weeks in Thailand during the summer of 2024. The first part of the trip involved working with Abundant Life Home in Chonburi, which provides housing and education for orphans and other children in need.

The home has an FPU connection: alumni **Ricky Sanchez (MA, '98, BA, '93)** and **Karen Huebert-Sanchez (MA, '14, BA, '89)**, are missionaries with Multiply, the missionary arm of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Church. The couple, longtime missionaries in Thailand, established the home in 2006.

Although Campus Pastor Brian Davis had led previous missions trips in Thailand and other countries, the seed for the 2024 trip was planted by Jillian Balakian, a student chaplain who works with Davis in the Office of Spiritual Formation. Balakian, a junior music major, participated in a similar trip to Thailand in the summer of 2023.

Balakian returned to school with a vision. “The first thing I wanted to do in my job was take a team there and bring that overseas missions experience to the students here,” she says.

Fresno Pacific University has a long history of involvement in overseas missions trips and service learning. Locations have been as close as Mexico and as far away as Malawi. “Historically they’ve been referred to as missions trips,” says Davis. “There’s some sort of faith-based component.”

As to the role they play in Christian education, he says, “We are tasked as folks that work at FPU to help create the conditions for students to become what God has created them to be, and we think that includes having a global understanding of what’s going on in this world and how they might be a part of God’s work globally.”

Davis differentiates between missions and service learning, noting the latter emphasizes learning and observing, while missions work emphasizes participation. “This one was a little bit more on the missions side.”

Together, Balakian and Davis planned the trip and recruited students. That’s when Alvarez came on board. “I knew it was going to be a different sort of trip other than a vacation,” Alvarez says.

“I had no idea how it was going to turn out,” she adds. “I had no expectations other than it was going to be very hot and we’d be doing a lot of work.”

At Abundant Life Home, the group hosted vacation Bible school and helped with other jobs around the orphanage.



“ I felt the Lord telling me to do this.”

– Jillian Balakian





“Being in missions forces you to be bold in your faith.”

– Jillian Balakian

“A big highlight was seeing the team pour into the kids,” Balakian says. “Sometimes they take a little bit of time to warm up to a team that comes, but they warmed up really quickly to us and it was really heartwarming to see students from Fresno loving on those kids.”

After about a week, the group left Chonburi, a provincial capital of over 340,000 people, for a more rural area of the country, assisting with tasks like packaging and delivering food to local families.

“It was very hot, very humid,” Davis says. “We were in the back of the truck for eight hours or something. It was challenging mentally, emotionally, spiritually...but our students responded so well; people were quick to volunteer and do what needed to be done.”

According to Alvarez, the physical labor might have been the easy part. She spent the long flight to Thailand battling anxiety over the plane ride and what awaited. “It was such a vulnerable time, I felt very anxious, very scared,” she recalls.


Those nerves returned away from the city. “I’m scared of animals,” she admits. “For a couple of days we were in the jungle, and there were wild elephants. We literally could have had an elephant in front of us!”

There were no elephant encounters, but Balakian and Alvarez did sense God’s presence. “It was my first trip leading and there were nerves, but from the very beginning I felt the Lord telling me to do this,” Balakian says. “A lot of miracles happened on the trip.”

“I saw God work all around me,” Alvarez adds. “I saw the beautiful world God created and how big it is, how different we all are. These kids had a completely different life before coming to the orphanage.

“It really expanded my mind and [my idea of] what God can do for people. Being around people who want the same things, worshipping together, praying together, made my faith even stronger. They brought me closer to God.”

Alvarez is already making plans to participate in another missions trip next summer. Balakian, too, was changed by the experience.

“Being in missions forces you to be bold in your faith, and it’s helped me to be more clear when living the Gospel out in my whole life,” Balakian says, “I’ve learned being missional is being the hands and feet of Jesus. That could be in another country, but that could be in your own house. Missions is everywhere, not just overseas.” 



From Struggle to **WISDOM**

By Amy D. Fienen

Paulina Lazaro Aleman cried every week during her freshman year at FPU. High school had felt impossible for the Edison High School graduate, who was diagnosed with ADHD her senior year. Debilitating mental and academic challenges affected her grades and her relationship with her Mexican immigrant parents. They encouraged her to attend Fresno Pacific, hoping the small university could offer the support their daughter needed.



“FPU was meant for me even though I didn’t know it at the time,” Lazaro Aleman says.

Now a senior Spanish major, Lazaro Aleman has a 4.0 GPA and is active in the University Scholars Program (USP). Thanks to medication that helps her center her curious nature and the support of accommodating professors, she’s discovered she’s capable of accomplishing anything she sets her mind to.

Lazaro Aleman is the vice president of Alpha Alpha Alpha (Tri-Alpha), an honors society for first-generation students. Since roughly half the university’s students are first-generation, University Scholars Coordinator W. Marshall Johnston, Ph.D., says mentoring is Tri-Alpha’s primary focus. “First-gen students don’t have a family background and they’re not aware of scholarships and what to expect in college,” he says. “They’re going to do better when they leave our campus because they’ll know what it’s like to struggle, but they’ll know how to network and what leaders should look like.”

Perhaps surprisingly, Lazaro Aleman says she is grateful for the hardships she experienced growing up, because you can’t live a more fulfilling life than the one lived by someone who struggles. As a junior, she was invited to join Alpha Chi, an interdisciplinary honors society for the top 10% of upperclassmen. “Getting into Alpha Chi was a redemption arc that allowed me to redeem my high school experience,” she says. “I think I’ve healed many parts of myself that were broken because of the public education system. I’ve learned to advocate for myself.”

Being in honors is as much about leadership and enhancing college and future experiences as it is about academic performance, Johnston says. Great importance is placed on helping students develop their God-given potential and providing support, encouragement and mentoring for their life’s journey. “The university is trying to train for all of life, so take your required classes, but beyond that, you should do things around campus and look for ways to augment your intellectual work,” Johnston says.



The program's key Bible verse is Luke 12:48: To whom much is given, much will be required. "We don't take our intellectual gifts for granted," Johnston says. "Our honor students aren't just those with high GPAs and test scores and scholarships; they choose to be part of a high-achieving cohort."

Senior Cailey Lessel, USP teaching assistant and member of Tri Alpha and Alpha Chi, is spending the fall semester on an exchange program in Lithuania.

The political science and philosophy double major has also participated in conferences at Harvard and in Birmingham, AL. Her goal is ambitious—she wants to be an ambassador for the United Nations—but

her experience in the program has given her the confidence to position her education into real-world practice. "I came into FPU very unpolished, but the way I've learned how to communicate and my interpersonal skills have grown exponentially," she says.

In addition to Alpha Chi, qualifying students can join societies with a focus on history, math, social science, biblical studies and social work. In addition to smaller class sizes, honors students have opportunities to travel to regional and national conventions, participate in collaborative research projects and special learning opportunities, and attend honors banquets and awards ceremonies.

Johnston says the 200 students involved in the USP have opportunities for scholarly publication, a network that will serve them beyond their time at FPU and lifetime membership that enhances their resume.

For Lazaro Aleman, seeing her family in the audience at honors society ceremonies has made an educational journey once fraught with challenges worthwhile. Her dad's formal education ended after seventh grade, and her mom couldn't afford college, yet they never stopped encouraging her to strive for more than working at the family's taco truck. "I'm so grateful for the sacrifices my family has made for me; they've been there every step of the way," she says. "If it weren't for my mom

teaching me about the opportunities and freedom that come with education, I wouldn't have worked so hard."

Next for Lazaro Aleman are pursuing a teaching credential and master's degree at FPU to become

a dual immersion teacher and encourage families like hers that found the public school system difficult to navigate. "FPU is very service focused and kind-hearted and benevolent and it's made me want to help others," she says. "I want to support students and their parents who come from a background of need."

Lessel says that wherever students' passions lie, the University Scholars Program will leave them astonished with their own potential. "It's an unexpected door that's open for you and it's about creating space for the kind of person you are; you don't have to fit into a mold," she says. "I've found so much love for justice and virtue and have learned that wisdom has to grow into service." 🏠

“I want to support students and their parents who come from a background of need.”

– Paulina Lazaro Aleman



MORE ON HONORS

Learn more about the University Scholars Program at <https://www.fresno.edu/undergraduate/programs/university-scholars-program>







Leading Through Service

By Cyndee Fontana-Ott

Like others at Fresno Pacific University, Coach **Timothy Beauregard (BA '10)** leans into this principle: “If serving is beneath you, leading is beyond you.”

The quote is displayed on his office wall and woven into the fabric of his women’s basketball team culture. “We want every single person that comes into our program to understand that day one, you are expected to lead,” the head coach says. “And one of the ways that we lead most in life is that we serve.”

For years, women’s basketball has led the way in Sunbird Athletics by recording the highest number of community service hours per player. But devotion to volunteerism is fundamental to the entire community, with student-athletes typically logging well beyond 800 hours of service and engagement each year.

Last year, the number was nearly 930 hours served in partnership with 17 organizations ranging

from local elementary schools to the Central California Food Bank. Fresno Pacific coaches and student-athletes view such joyful work as an integral part of their campus experience and personal development.

“We want to be out there; we want to serve,” says Lydia Manu, a guard on the basketball team and graduate student working toward a Master’s in Business Administration. “We want to give back to the community that has already been supporting our school, our team, our program.

“We want to give back to those around us just like Jesus would have,” she adds.

Across the FPU sports landscape, the belief in service to others is an aspect of recruiting—whether spoken or unspoken. **Jaime Ramirez (MA '96, BA '81)**, director of soccer and formerly the coach of both men’s and women’s teams, has talked about community service with prospective student-athletes and their parents.



“Many of them come from high school or community college programs that do this,” he says. “Many of them have taken classes that require some form of community service so it’s not unfamiliar to them.”

Still, some aspects of service can be an adjustment for younger student-athletes. Some may not see themselves as role models for children; the soccer teams frequently volunteer at schools and camps.

The change in each student-athlete is palpable as they grow into community service. “You get a different sense in their behavior and their heart and how they address the kids,” Ramirez says. “They leave with a sense that they have somehow, somewhat been changed by that experience.”

C.J. Haydock (BA '10), head coach of the men’s basketball team, describes his program as developmental in ways that reach far beyond the court. “We believe in the old-school model of shepherding young men into adulthood and in the athletic spectrum,” he says. “We believe in that holistically.”

So that means working on shooting, ball handling, speed and more. But it also means focusing on communication, leadership and service.

“We find gratitude in service to be the antidote to entitlement,” Haydock says. “We want the best of the best young men—not only basketball-wise, but in terms of who they are. If we get the best of the best, a fundamental part of that is making sure they are engaged and invested in the community.”

The team “tries to go wide and deep” in its

community service, he says. The program creates partnerships and mentorships while giving student-athletes a robust menu of experiences.

The team has a strong bond with Every Neighborhood Partnership, a faith-based

“We want to give back to those around us just like Jesus would have.”

– Lydia Manu

nonprofit working toward transformative change, and Cen Cal Sports, which gives children opportunities for growth through sports.

Another partnership is with Team Impact, an organization that places children with serious or life-threatening illness on college sports teams. Elementary school student Tristen Graham, who has twice battled leukemia, is currently a member of the team and was celebrated on “Tough Like Tristen Night” earlier this year.

“I would say that out of all of our community service...that’s the one that has provided the most spark, light and depth,” Haydock says. “It’s been really powerful for everybody.”

Ryas Vang, a senior guard and kinesiology major, says he didn’t completely grasp the culture of the program’s community service as a freshman. But it was easy to acclimate, he says, adding that his physical therapy career path dovetails with the concept of helping others.

“I really enjoy being part of a team and being able to serve the community,” Vang says. “Helping people builds a chain reaction of fulfillment in the world.”

In women’s basketball, recruitment efforts emphasize student-athletes who fit the culture and program: “really just people who are chasing the best version of themselves every single day,” Beaugard says.

The team motto—“Dream Chasers Only”—is “what we do every day,” he says. “For us, part of being a dream chaser is giving back.”

Team volunteerism ranges from canned food drives and elementary school sports days to pounding nails for Habitat for Humanity and working with older folks in an assisted living facility. The team’s leadership council discusses options for community service and coaches work to solidify times, dates and plans for the year.

“There is a collective buy-in to what we do and why we do it,” Beaugard says. Each student-athlete finds value in the experience.

“Just understanding that being selfless and serving other people—whether that is your own family, teammates or people in your community—that is the true joy in life, to be able to help others find more joy in life,” he says. 🏠



REVITALIZATION: THE GOAL OF HISTORIC ACADEMIC RESTRUCTURING

By Wayne Steffen

A historic reorganization of the academic structure will revitalize how Fresno Pacific University serves its students.

“This academic realignment will help FPU uncomplicate processes, improve the effectiveness and sharpen the focus on students’ professional, personal and spiritual education,” said FPU President André Stephens, Ph.D., who initiated the change. “As the Valley’s Christian university, FPU is dedicated to putting students at the center of all we do.”

In January 2024, FPU consolidated its five schools—the School of Business, the School of Education, the School of Natural Sciences, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and the School of Humanities, Religion and Social Sciences—into two: the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) and the School of Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS). New leadership was in place by the end of summer.

Graduate, traditional undergraduate and bachelor’s degree completion programs in business, nursing, social work and education are housed in GPS, along with the seminary, while traditional undergraduate and degree completion programs in the sciences, visual and performing arts and social sciences—history, psychology, etc.—are part of SAS. The general education program and majority of courses are also part of SAS.

ADVANTAGE STUDENTS

Among the new structure’s benefits is that it allows us to serve students both by population (graduate, traditional undergraduate and degree completion) as well as maintain disciplines within single schools. For example, undergraduate students studying education or business can work seamlessly with faculty should they decide to continue their education in a graduate program. In addition, the structure of faculty-department chair-dean is now consistent across the university, providing clear organizational pathways for students.

“One of the really great things about this system is how it manages to serve students, not only by population but also by discipline,” said Alison R. Noble, Ph.D., provost and senior vice president of academic affairs. “It is a structure developed with the student in mind.”

The restructure is part of an overall academic revitalization at FPU. “Revitalization is not just about organizational structures, it also includes examining the curriculum, both content and sequencing, to identify areas that may need updates or revisions,” Noble said. In addition to the curriculum, it includes tuning the co-curriculum and academic support to the university’s changing student body and finding ways to provide appropriate avenues for belonging and support. Noble adds that “it is important that we use effective and inclusive pedagogy, and that we provide students opportunities to explore the questions of faith around their disciplines.”

NEW LEADERS, NEW ROLES

The two school deans and three associate provosts all report to the provost. “The deans are

responsible for the schools and the academic programs in the schools,” Noble said. “The associate provosts are responsible for specific programmatic areas.”

Filling the positions are a mix of administrators new to FPU and familiar faces in new roles:

Provost

- ▶ Noble comes to FPU from Messiah University where she served as interim provost, associate provost, assistant provost and director of faculty development and professor of chemistry.



Deans

- ▶ Michelle Bradford, Psy.D., is dean of GPS. She had been interim dean of the School of Business, assistant professor of business and head of the MBA program.
- ▶ Quentin Kinnison, Ph.D., is dean of SAS after being associate professor of Christian ministry and director of the Christian ministry and leadership program.



Associate provosts

- ▶ **Kerry Sue Brown (MA '17, BA '97)**, Ph.D., is associate provost for student success and retention. She had held positions at FPU in the Academic Success Center and director of student retention and persistence.
- ▶ **Drake Levasheff**, Ph.D., is associate provost of adult learning. He had been director of the Orange County and Murrieta regional campuses of Azusa Pacific University.
- ▶ **Norlan Hernández**, Ph.D., is associate provost of engagement and inclusive teaching and learning. He was formerly director of the Jesse Miranda Center for Hispanic Leadership at Vanguard University.



In her former role, Noble helped lead an academic restructuring at Messiah University

Continued on page 22

when it consolidated five schools into three. Academic restructuring, particularly when reducing rather than expanding the number of schools at a university, can be challenging, she said. "At the same time, creating a structure that allows for disciplinary integrity and interdisciplinary collaboration can strengthen institutions, particularly smaller universities, by fostering communication and cooperation."

Consolidation is an effort to be fair and fiscally responsible in times when universities are making cuts in multiple areas, including faculty and majors. "We need to know that as we make

changes in the faculty, we're also making changes in the administration," Noble said.

A HOPEFUL FUTURE

While the challenges are real, for FPU and other colleges and universities, now is the time for hope, Noble said. "I appreciate the vision that President Stephens continues to set for the university and am encouraged by the dedication of administration, faculty and staff in fulfilling the mission of Fresno Pacific as a Christian university serving the Central Valley. I'm excited by what's to come." 🏠

CHARLOTTE'S COFFEE CORNER REOPENS WITH UPDATED ATMOSPHERE

Students, faculty and staff gathered for a cup of coffee and a lot of conversation during the Grand Re-Opening of Charlotte's Coffee Corner Friday, September 6, 2024, in Alumni Hall on the main campus. Charlotte's sells snacks, candy, sodas and specialty coffee drinks. Visitors can gather in comfy chairs in front of the fireplace or around tables. Improvements include new flooring, tile,

fixtures and furniture to update the atmosphere of this campus favorite. Improvements and renovations were made possible by a gift from long-time donors and friends of the university, Max and Charlotte Steinert. This generosity is representative of their ongoing commitment to invest in FPU students and ensure excellence in the student experience. 🏠



The Power of Mentorship

By Christopher L. Scott

While attending Fresno's Edison High School, Michelle Salazar knew she wanted to become a teacher. One of her counselors, Tina Chandler, told her, "FPU really prepares their future teachers well." Michelle is the first person in her family to attend college and plans to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies.

But that first year at FPU was difficult. "I had so many breakdowns the first week of my freshman year," she says, regularly asking herself, "Am I going to be able to do this?" But Michelle made it through because of the peer mentor program, which paired her with another student to walk beside her. Reflecting on that experience she says, "I learned God is my foundation and that I need to put my trust in Him."

As a sophomore, Michelle began serving as a peer mentor. The program matches an upperclassman with a group of 20 freshmen. In this position Michelle supports freshmen by checking in with them, praying for them and trying to be there for those students during difficult times. "Being a peer mentor is my favorite thing ever," says Michelle.


The role has enriched her life as well. "I'm learning to be vulnerable with others," she says. Helping others and learning to be vulnerable has also helped her become a stronger Christian. "This school is where I have grown most in my faith," she says.

Through regular College Hour events on campus and spiritual retreats to Hume Lake, Michelle says



EDITOR'S NOTE

Do you know a student who has been transformed at FPU? Contact Wayne Steffen at wayne.steffen@fresno.edu

she regularly reads her Bible, has grown to love worship time and regularly prays for others. Those were experiences she didn't practice or enjoy regularly before coming to FPU, but now they are part of her everyday practice of faith. She says, "Because of FPU I've grown and am a whole different person." 

FINDING THE KEY

to Help Kids Learn Music



“I felt something inside me tell me to be here.”

-Delilah Ovalle

Delilah Ovalle doesn't just teach music at an elementary school in Parlier—during the 2023-24 school year she taught music at all the elementary schools in Parlier.

Not only that, but she feels called to the job. While she has always loved music, Ovalle never thought about teaching until she was a student at FPU. “I never knew what I wanted to do,” she says.

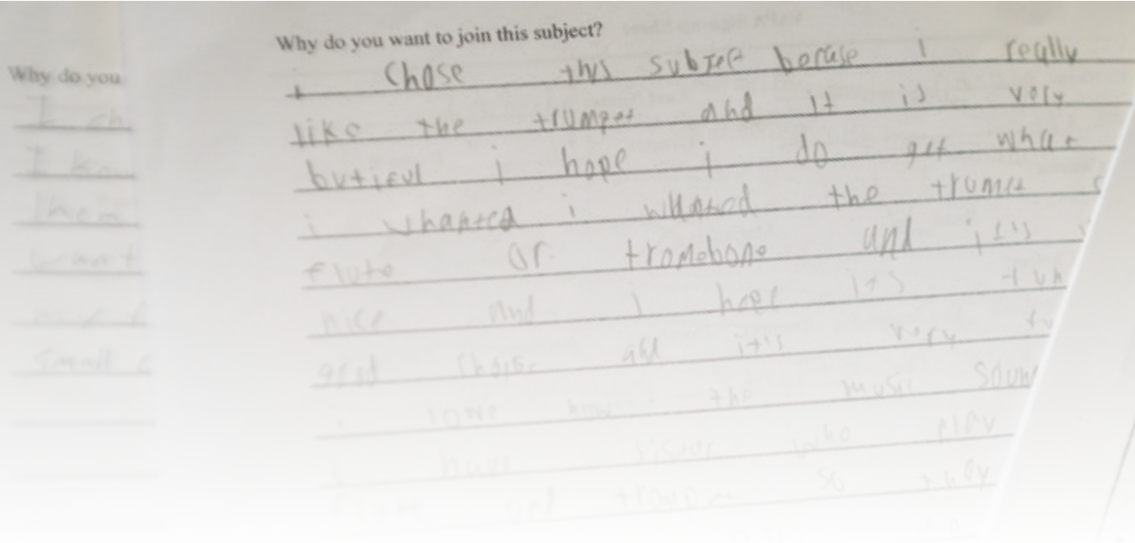
After earning her B.A. Ovalle began teaching in the Fresno Unified School District, finishing her teaching credential a few years later. Now she teaches music at all four elementary schools in Parlier Unified School District, and to better serve her students, she is continuing her music education in FPU's IMAP (Individualized Master of Arts Program).

Ovalle believes God led her to Parlier. Her grandparents had moved to the Fresno County city decades ago and she has always felt a connection to this community of about 20,000 people, mostly migrant farm workers, about a third of whom live below the poverty line.

So, when Ovalle was invited to interview, she prayed, “God, please let this one work out.” She was so hopeful that she turned down other opportunities

for the chance at Parlier. “I felt something inside me tell me to be here,” she says.

FPU gave Ovalle the degree, experience and confidence to do the job. “The staff and professors at FPU were always there for me,” she says. “They always had the right words.” While a student she learned to use Finale music notation writing software, allowing her to write customized practice sheets for kids. Now she could take music




already written and transpose it into a key her elementary school kids could play and practice.

This way of teaching simplified music has had a deep impact on the kids' desire to learn, according to Ovalle. Each year when her students finish fourth grade, she asks them to write a letter declaring their desire to join the school band. One student wrote, "I want to join band because I feel like music is actually something I am good at." Another wrote, "I want to make my family proud because I have finally found something I am good at."

These comments are close to Ovalle's heart because she was dyslexic and often struggled in school when she was young. "The only way I got an 'A' in a class was to do all the homework and all the extra credit," she says. Some of her fourth-grade students who never received awards in math, reading, citizenship or attendance got a music award because they performed all their songs with 100% accuracy.

Ovalle's effect on students shows when she sees them in Parlier stores. The students often want to introduce her to their parents saying, "Mom, look it's the music teacher." The kids

regularly tell their parents music is their favorite time of the day at school.

In high school Ovalle was an up-and-coming cross country star. When someone suggested she focus on running so she could compete in the Junior Olympic Games she replied, "I don't want to be known as a runner. I want to be known for music." That, and for being a great teacher, is how she is now known to the families and students of Parlier. 



IN TOUCH WITH ALUMNI

» GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Savannah Dias (BA '24) and **Alyssa Robles (BA '24)** presented a research poster May 18, 2024, during the Central California Behavioral Health Conference at Alliant International University's Fresno Campus. "Thriving?: A Study of First-Generation Freshmen at Fresno Pacific University," culminated a year-long project managed by Elizabeth Lake, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology. Lake's research group also included four other psychology graduates and **Sarah Micu (BA '15)**, assistant director of the FPU Academic Success Center. The conference was open to all undergraduate and graduate students in psychology (or a related field) presenting on behavioral health.

Briana Parra (BA '24) was appointed Clovis (CA) city clerk June 3, 2024. Her career has included positions in the Fresno City Clerk's Office, including interim city clerk.

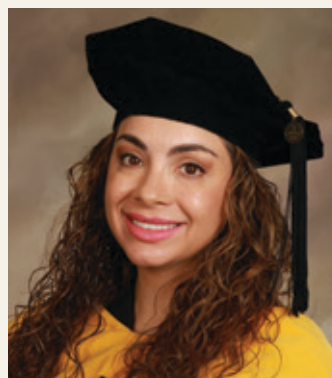
Darrin Person, Jr. (MA '23, BA '21), former Sunbird basketball player, appeared June 27, 2024, on *Your Central Valley's Sports Central* to talk about playing professionally in Germany and his summer basketball camp at Immanuel High School in Reedley, CA.

Ana Duarte (BA '21) is a fourth-grade teacher at Aspen Valley Prep Academy in Fresno. She earned her M.A. from Alliant International University in 2023.

Luke Fredette (BA '21) won a Graduate Student Teaching Award from Idaho State University in May 2024. He received the prize in the Master of Arts category for his thesis, "Examining the 'India' in 'India's Tolkien': Amish Tripathi's Postcolonial Mythopoeia." Luke completed an M.A. in English at Idaho State and in the fall of 2024 and joined the faculty of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. He also has an M.A. from Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland.

Brenda Quispe (BA '21) is a teacher in the Fresno Unified School District.

Tracy McDonell (BA '20) joined Fresno County as a child welfare social worker in family reunification in December 2023.



Brittany Nielsen (BA '20) graduated with an M.S. in Cardiovascular Sciences from Midwestern University in May 2023. The next month she was hired at Swedish Hospital Cherry Hill Campus in Seattle, WA, and in October 2023 passed her boards to become a Certified

Clinical Perfusionist (CCP).



Francesco Parisi (BA '20) published his first young adult action novel, *Alex McKellan: Mind vs. Matter*. He worked on earlier drafts of the novel during his time in FPU's English program. The book is available on Amazon. For more information, visit

parisiwrites.com.

Sara Grulé (BA '19) published "Complex grief of climate change" May 16, 2024, in the *Learn, Pray, Join: Climate Justice: Seeking Shalom* blog sponsored by Mennonite Church USA.

Kyland Hall (BA '19) is a multimedia journalist for WSBT (CBS 22) in South Bend, IN.

Denise Michelle McKendell (BA '18) published her first work of poetry titled, "Pieces of Me."

» GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Krystle Evans (MA '17) was named assistant coach of the Indiana State University Women's Basketball Team June 6, 2024. Over the last 15 years, she has held numerous coaching positions at UC Santa Barbara, the Academy of Arts University, Cal State Dominguez Hills, UC Irvine and LA Southwest College.

Jennifer Vences (BS '17) is office manager at Kids2Dentist in Porterville, CA.

Rodolfo Venegas (BA '16) and **Elsa Asrat (BA '14)** were featured in the *Christian Leader* online magazine in summer 2024. They, along with their two young children, are missionaries in Ethiopia serving HIV+ women and children. They finished a ministry home there and have also partnered with a blind school to support their work.

Sarah Bonnar (BA '13) is assurance manager at Moss Adams, LLP, in Sacramento, CA.

Geoffery Taylor (MA '15, BA '12) is director of business development at Rancho Tree Service in Bakersfield, CA.

Stephanie Bowers-Buckridge (BA '11) was named Dinuba's 2024 Woman of the Year in April during the Dinuba Annual Business Awards Banquet hosted by the Dinuba (CA) Chamber of Commerce. The event recognized the work of community leaders in business and nonprofit organizations as well as individual residents. Stephanie serves as a librarian for the Tulare County Library.

Former Sunbird pitcher **Jesse Darrah (FS '11, current student)** returned as head baseball coach to Minarets High School, O'Neals, CA, in May 2024.

Doug Kulungu (BA '10) was profiled July 29, 2024, in *The Business Journal* for his relief work and political career in his native Democratic Republic of Congo.

Matt Mendonca (BA '08) was promoted to head football coach at College of the Sequoias July 9, 2024.

Linda Montemayor (TC '06, BA '04) was selected as the Educational Leader Award recipient by the Cutler-Orosi (CA) Lions Club in May 2024. Linda is the administrator of mental health services for Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District and serves on the FPU Board of Trustees.

Stephanie Cortez (BA '05) was interviewed on her life and work as a professor and division chair at Porterville (CA) College June 11, 2024, by *The Porterville Recorder*.

Linda Calandra (BA '04) was appointed to the Fresno City Planning Commission in May 2024. Previous positions include executive director of the Foundation for Fresno County Public Library, director of annual giving and donor relations at FPU and member of the Fresno City Council.

Helen Milliorn-Feller (MA '02), Ed.D., was appointed principal of University Preparatory High School, Visalia, CA, in May 2024. She has worked at the school since it opened in 2009 as teacher, department head and interim principal.

Caty (Massey, BA '99) Perez is the senior philanthropy officer at the Central Valley Community Foundation in Fresno.

Johnny Baltierra (MA '97) was honored as Educator of the Year at the Association of Mexican American Educators Fresno Chapter 42nd Dia Del Maestro Awards Banquet May 10, 2024. He was awarded for his charisma, ability to influence, passion and positive attitude.

» **BIRTHS**



Christina (Maule, BA '06) Baltazar and husband Frank announce the birth of their sixth child, Isaac, January 14, 2024. Christina founded the Central Valley Belly to Baby Expo, a local trade show for all things pregnancy, birth and baby related for families in the Central Valley. Visit belly2babyexpo.com for more information.



Gianna Ruffino was born to **Noel Ruffino (BA '19)** and **Karla Moreno (BA '19)** February 2, 2024. Noel and Karla met while completing their degrees at FPU's North Fresno Campus. Gianna joins brothers Samuel and Ethan.



Sarah (King, BA '14) and Zach (BA '18) Bartley welcomed third son Baylor Mikaele February 1, 2024. He weighed 8 pounds, 4 ounces and was 20.5 inches long.



STAY IN TOUCH

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UPDATE your info at fpu.edu/alumniupdate or scan QR code



» DEATHS

Former Track & Field All American student-athlete **Josiah Ford (BA '15)** died May 5, 2024, after going for a run and suffering a fatal cardiac arrest. Josiah was an officer with the Clovis (CA) Police Department but in the process of medically retiring. Survivors include wife Alyssa and daughters Presley and Penelope.

Raymond Eugene Organ Jr. (MA '12), 53, of Bakersfield, CA, died April 9, 2024, after an 18-month battle with glioblastoma. Born June 1, 1970, he was a special education teacher for the Kern High School District for almost 30 years, also coaching football and golf. He was a lifelong member of Valley Baptist Church. Survivors include wife Leah, daughter Baleigh, parents Ray Sr. and Glynda, sister Tiffany Bowles and stepchildren Lexi and Cole McRoberts.

Janelle Marie Mendoza (BA '96), 73, died May 19, 2024, at home in Lawton, OK. A Fresno native, she served in a variety of positions in the State Center Community College system, starting as a secretary and ultimately becoming a vice president of finance. Survivors include her sons and her siblings.

Mark Richard Walter (FS '74), 71, died December 7, 2023, of cancer. Born in Redwood City, CA, he grew up in Santa Rosa and Kentfield before returning to Santa Rosa in his mid-twenties. He participated in Marin Covenant Church and New Vintage Church. Survivors include sister Sharon Elmore, brothers Dave and Gary Walter and stepmother Wende Walter.

Alvin "Al" Witzke (BA '58), 87, of Crete, NB, died January 18, 2024. He was born March 19, 1936, in Shafter, CA, to Alvin and Helena Witzke and married Joanne Klassen in Inman, KS, June 4, 1959. Survivors include his wife, son Doug, daughters Jan Sorensen and Kris Sayler, brother Ed and six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Zoe Ann Smith (PBI '57), 85, died February 3, 2024, a lifelong resident of Shafter, CA. She studied music and performed as a pianist and singer in community productions. She married Jack Groves in 1958 and they raised two sons. She married Bob Smith in 1982. A member of Shafter Mennonite Brethren Church, she was a pharmacy tech at Stringham's Shafter Drug and Junior Miss volunteer. Survivors include sons Kevin and Jeff Groves, stepchildren Bryan Smith and Nita Crist, three grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Albert N. Pauls (PBI '53), 95, died May 31, 2024. A native of Medora, KS, his family moved to Reedley, CA, when Albert was in the fifth grade, where he became a member of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church. He and wife **Laverna (PBI '51)** met at PBI and married in 1954. He worked at Sears in Fresno, then earned bachelor's and master's degrees and a teacher credential at Fresno State and taught for more than 30 years, mostly at Fresno City College. Survivors include daughter Gail, six grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and two brothers. Laverna and daughter Connie preceded him in death.

Esther (Peters, PBI '47) Berg, 99, died March 16, 2024. She was born September 8, 1924, in Dinuba, CA, to Henry and Elizabeth Peters. She was known for her love of music—playing the clarinet, piano, organ and accordion—and cooking and baking pies, zwiebach, cinnamon rolls and chocolate chip cookies. She married **John Berg (PBI '47)** December 12, 1946, and they attended PBI for one year. They raised daughters, **Marilyn Berg Nachtigall (FS '68) (husband Donald Nachtigall, BA '67)**, **Carolyn Berg Jost (FS '69)** and **Kathy Berg Nachtigall (BA '73) (husband Kelly Nachtigall, BA '75)** and son **John D. Berg (BA '80) (wife Valerie Wiens Berg (FS '78))**. She also has eight grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren.

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BACK FROM WASHINGTON, SCHLESSELMAN STEPS IN AS DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI DEVELOPMENT



A graduate has come home from the nation's capital to serve as director of alumni development at FPU.

Morgan Schlesselman (BA '20) started work September 3, 2024. The Dinuba native and graduate of Immanuel High School, Reedley, is happy to be back. "After three years in Washington, D.C., I am ecstatic to return to the Valley and Fresno Pacific—a place that has been so formative in my life. I look forward to working in Christian higher education, deepening connections and serving the wonderful Fresno Pacific alumni," she said.

Liz Garvin, vice president for advancement and executive director of the FPU Foundation, is just as enthusiastic. "The Advancement Office is thrilled to

have Morgan back at FPU! We know she will keep our Sunbirds posted on all the FPU is up to," she said.

In Washington, Schlesselman served as regional and later national director of Young Women for America, part of Concerned Women for America, a Christian nonprofit. She also worked on staff for a former Valley Congressman.

Now Schlesselman looks forward to reconnecting with alumni and the Mennonite Brethren community. "Growing up in an MB church, attending a MB high school and Fresno Pacific for undergrad, I have formed many cherished relationships. I know that FPU alumni fill countless roles in professions and ministries that I will have the privilege of highlighting," she said. "As



a student, professors and staff poured into my academic, professional and personal life.”

While earning her Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice at FPU, and being awarded both junior and senior highest honors, Schlesselman worked for two years in the University Marketing and Communication Office as events assistant. After graduation, she earned a Master of Arts in Public Policy from Liberty University, where she received an Outstanding Graduate Award.



CHECK IN!

Morgan Schlesselman, director of alumni development, would love to hear from you! Contact her at alumni@fresno.edu



WHAT'S GOING ON?

It's so easy to let your classmates and friends know what's happening in your life—job, marriage, children, new address and awards. visit fpu.edu/alumniupdate.



NEW MEMBERS OF THE FLOCK

Recently had a baby? Let us know—we'd love to send you one of our cute little Future Sunbird baby t-shirts, like Rowyn Henry is wearing, pictured here with dad **Brennen (BA '13)**.



LIFE

The Eighth Alumni and Friends Tour!

Scandinavia

Scandinavia

June 2025

- ▶ Historic Bergen
- ▶ Norway's fjords and Fram Museum
- ▶ Copenhagen's Nyhavn district
- ▶ Sites of writers including Andersen and Kierkegaard
- ▶ Stockholm's Old Town
- ▶ Finnish cooking class and Temppeliaukio Church visit
- ▶ Optional excursions to Elsinore, Uppsala, Drottningholm and Tallinn in Estonia
- ▶ Optional Iceland extension!

More at fpu.edu/alumnitour





From
the
Archives...

1991

By Kevin Enns-Rempel, Director, Hiebert Library

THE TREE THAT MOVED A BUILDING

In early 1991 plans were underway for an administration building near the main entrance to campus on Chestnut Avenue. This new building, today McDonald Hall, would bring together administrative offices, student services, faculty offices and other departments previously scattered haphazardly across campus.

While reviewing final plans, it became evident the design would require the removal of a large live oak tree near the building's northeast corner. While construction already demanded the removal of a large amount of landscaping, FPC business manager Steve Varvis and president Richard Kriegbaum saw this tree as worthy of preservation.

Redrawing the plans would be costly and change how the building functioned. Instead, administrators explored moving the building several feet west. Even this option presented challenges. The new site plan would narrow the space for driving and parking on the west side (facing Chestnut Avenue) and alter both the alignment with existing parking in the southwest corner and the relationship with Sattler Hall to the south.

But the most noticeable effect of this change was its effect on the east side of the building. Given the location of the Sattler Hall breezeway and Hiebert Library, it was necessary to keep the sidewalk between those two buildings where it was. The architect's original design included an entryway with two large pillars that spanned this sidewalk, allowing pedestrians to pass between the pillars and building. Moving the building meant those pillars would stand in the middle of the sidewalk, forcing a slight detour for those walking by.

The tree still stands near the northeast corner of McDonald Hall. So, next time you find yourself making a slight course correction to go around those pillars in the middle of the sidewalk, look to the north and admire the mighty oak that was the cause of it. 🏠



COOK SISTERS *balance* *teamwork* IN THE POOL *and* *individual life* BEYOND THE DECK

By Marina Gaytan

It might be hard to tell Emma and Maggie Cook apart when they are up to their ears in the pool wearing their water polo caps, fighting for a win.

The Sunbird sisters may be close in age and share some similarities, but Emma, 20, and Maggie, 19, are highly competitive—even against each other. Emma, a junior studying nursing, plays center for the water polo team, and Maggie, a sophomore majoring in liberal studies with an emphasis in math, is a utility player. The two have always been athletic, playing sports such as volleyball, basketball and track since fourth grade.

Playing water polo together was not their original plan, but they enjoy it. “We played last year together. It was a lot of fun,” Emma says.

Entering her third year at FPU, Emma has already received her nursing scrubs and shoes, and practices giving shots in the arm as well as making goals in the pool. “I’ve already had classes delving into concepts that I’m inevitably going to have to face in the future,” she says. “And through my professors and being in classes with other students who might not have the same values as me, the combination of our views is helping me shape the context.”

After graduation, Emma plans to work in pediatrics or go on a Mercy Ship, where she and like-minded volunteers can use their lifesaving skills to do God’s work in different countries. Currently, she is focused on improving the water polo record she and her sister help build.

“Water polo helped me become comfortable with being uncomfortable,” she says.



Maggie

“We could have a great time together being on a team again, and we could both live our own lives.”

– Maggie Cook

Meanwhile Maggie hopes to become a math teacher and continue her role coaching the junior varsity girls water polo team at Buchanan High School. “I love seeing them better understand the sport daily and make connections,” she says. “With hard work and God’s guidance, my degree will help me be a successful teacher in the classroom and on the pool deck.”

Although parents **Aaron (TC '01, BA '00)** and **Ginger (TC '03, BA '98) Cook** encouraged their kids to attend FPU, Emma and Maggie made their own decisions, both for education and faith. “It’s always been their decision to accept Christianity or not,” Ginger says. “That was always their call, and they did.”

“We always encouraged them to look at a private education, faith-based, because that’s the value I felt that I had going to FPU,” Aaron added. “Our encouragement was to find a community.”

The sisters did consider other options. “I knew I wanted to stay local,” Emma says. “I liked (FPU) a lot. I did not want to go to a big school.”

“I tried so hard to not be in Emma’s shadow, but I realized that FPU would be two distinct experiences for both of us,” Maggie says. “We could have a great time together being on a team again, and we could both live our own lives.”

Aaron and Ginger agree that the smaller community and connectedness they felt at FPU attracted them to the institution.

Ginger’s first job after FPU was at a Bakersfield drug and alcohol clinic for pregnant women, while Aaron taught sixth grade in Hanford. The two eventually moved to Clovis Unified School District, where Ginger is a school psychologist and Aaron is a principal.

“We’re proud that our children are living out that next chapter of their lives at FPU,” Aaron said.

Aaron and Ginger Cook have a 15-year-old son, Grady, also a water polo player. 🏠

Emma



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THE FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION WELCOMES EVERYONE

By Wayne Steffen

“Foundation”—few words sound more imposing. Skyscrapers rest on foundations of rock and concrete. Marriages are built on foundations of love and respect. Christianity is founded on the promises of Jesus and the Word of God.

What about a foundation of committed friends supporting a place dedicated to education? Welcome to the Fresno Pacific University Foundation.

If that sounds friendly and accessible, then count Steven Redekop pleased. Redekop is the director of foundation and legacy gifts, whose warm smile may be a new donor’s first welcome.

The foundation’s purpose is simple—support university students and programs. “We exist solely to benefit FPU,” Redekop says.

That uncomplicated definition can play out in several ways. While a conversation with Redekop is perhaps the best way for a supporter to plan their route, a couple of major directions stand out:

ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS

The foundation oversees nearly 100 scholarships, many directed to fields—nursing, biblical and religious studies, business, accounting, Christian ministries—or groups of students—athletes, musicians, seminarians and international students.

Established for at least \$10,000, endowed scholarships provide funds forever. Donors may start their own or give to one that exists. “One of the most accessible ways to give is by establishing an endowed scholarship,” Redekop says.

Scholarship awards range generally from \$500-10,000 and some go to more than one student. “For me this is pretty motivating,” he adds.

PLANNED GIFTS

Planned gifts allow varied donors numerous opportunities to leave a legacy. Funds may come from stocks, bonds, real estate, retirement assets, insurance, IRA rollovers and more, and be set up as trusts, annuities or other structures.

Donors may benefit a school, program, facility or activity. Gifts may also be left unrestricted, so university leaders can direct funds to projects or immediate needs.

Whatever the method and source of the funds, this support is not just for the wealthy or those in or nearing retirement. “Planned gifts are available to a variety of donors,” Redekop says.

BENEFITS TO DONORS

Gifts to the FPU Foundation benefit the heart, spirit and budget of those who kindly give.

Each gift helps a donor support their passion: for the university, its students and/or a favorite



program or activity. All contributions also provide an immediate tax deduction.

Depending on the kind of gift, donors may also receive income for life and further tax benefits, such as capital gains relief. “A gift to the foundation maximizes tax advantages,” Redekop says.

One thing common to foundation donations is they are rarely cash. For large cash gifts, contact Major Gifts Officer Matt Mazzoni at matt.mazzoni@fresno.edu or 559-453-3613.

THE HERITAGE SOCIETY

Friends who name FPU and its foundation in a planned gift, will or lifetime donation join the Heritage Society. Members are recognized annually and receive updates on tax changes and issues related to their estate planning. “A bequest today can put you in the Heritage Society and cost you nothing now,” Redekop says.

Whatever a donor’s circumstances, there are a couple of easy ways to join the foundation. One is to make FPU the beneficiary of a life insurance policy. “That’s a simple gift,” Redekop says.

Another is an IRA rollover gift. People with IRAs must take some funds from the account after a

certain age. Giving these proceeds to FPU means they will not be taxed as income. “That’s a planned gift for everyone with an IRA,” Redekop says.

Redekop’s message is as clear as the foundation’s purpose. “Giving to the FPU Foundation is for everyone,” he says. “Every donor is valuable. We’re creating a pipeline of support to the university that just keeps giving.”

FOUNDATION STRUCTURE

The FPU Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation guided by a 10-member board whose experience in banking, investment, accounting, agriculture and industry guides how funds are invested. Many directors are longtime members, and several are FPU alumni; a current student and a faculty member have been added. The board includes Mark Deffenbacher, foundation executive director emeritus. Overseeing foundation operations is Liz Garvin, university vice president for advancement and executive director of the foundation. Rounding out the full-time staff with Redekop is Office Administrator Sarah Knight.

More at fpu.edu/foundation. 

YEAR END GIVING STRATEGIES

Cultivate High Impact Generosity



LEGACY GIFTS MIGHT COST YOU LESS THAN YOU THINK:



Transfer of Appreciated Assets – A gift of securities, business interests or real estate can provide you with significant income and capital gains tax savings.



Appreciated Stock – FPU receives the present value of the stock, while you pay no capital gains tax and receive an income tax deduction.



IRA Charitable Rollover – Pay no income tax on the immediate transfer. You may fund a Charitable Gift Annuity or Trust from your IRA (once in a lifetime).



Your Estate – Let us help you write or update your estate plan. Experience the many benefits of planning and create a powerful gift to benefit students.



Real Estate – You can donate property outright for tax savings or create a life estate that gives you a tax deduction today while you retain the right to live in it for life.



Charitable Gift Annuity – Create income and possible capital gains benefits, while receiving fixed payments for life.



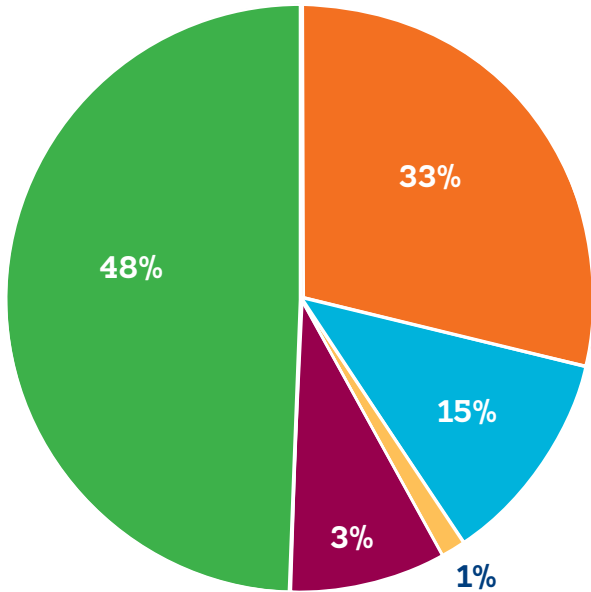
Charitable Remainder Unitrust – You choose who and what the trust pays, and how long it will last, while leaving a legacy for Christian higher education.

The Fresno Pacific University Foundation can help you use tax breaks and maximize retirement income while leaving a blessing to Christian higher education.

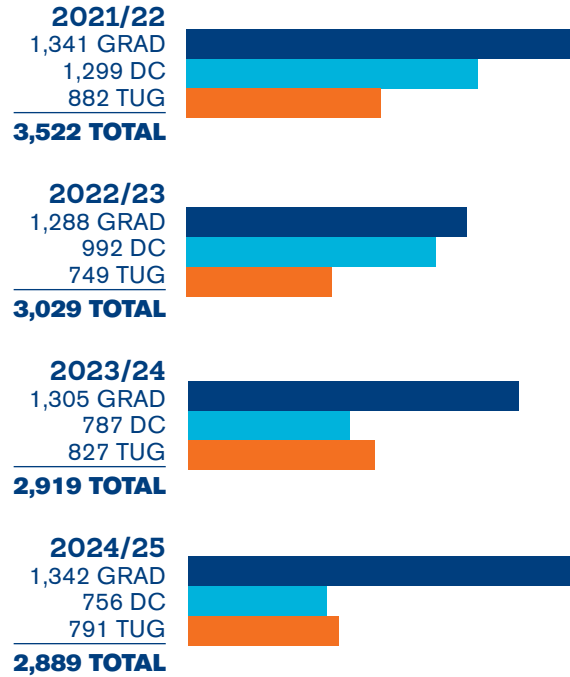
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GIFTS BY DONOR GROUP

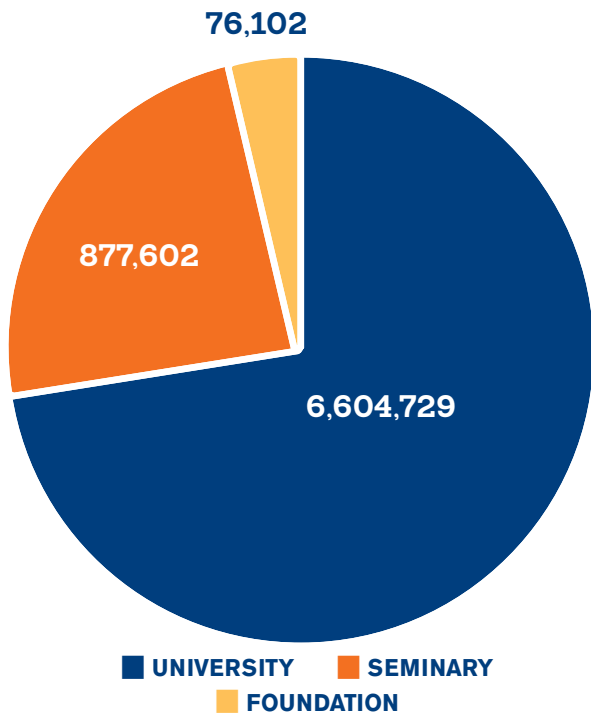
ALUMNI FRIENDS ORGANIZATIONS
CHURCHES FOUNDATIONS



ENROLLMENT



2023-24 GIVING SUMMARY



REVENUE & EXPENSES

2021/22 Audited	
Revenue	70,411,290
Expenses	70,232,754
Surplus (Deficit)	178,536
Cash Position	2,724,301
Net Assests	68,817,498

2022/23 Audited	
Revenue	72,299,747
Expenses	67,221,377
Surplus (Deficit)	5,078,370
Cash Position	2,716,679
Net Assests	73,895,868

2023/24 Unaudited	
Revenue	61,789,576
Expenses	68,990,545
Surplus (Deficit)	7,200,969
Cash Position	2,612,126
Net Assests	66,694,899

Fresno Pacific University Consolidated Financial Information.
The above numbers include operating and non-operating activities for
Fresno Pacific University, FPU Foundation, MBBS-US Inc.



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