d e i

diversity equity & inclusion
newsletter

reflecting on universal design for learning in biology spaces

by Taormina Lepore
Graduate Student

Take a moment to think back on your educational experiences. Are there any moments that stand out to you? Perhaps there's a time when you felt rewarded or praised by a good grade or a teacher's kind word, or another time when you felt discouraged by a test score or subject. We all probably have moments in our formative education that made us feel like we belonged, or didn't belong.

For some people, this sense of belonging is much less tangible than for others. Maybe our experiences made us feel doubt, exclusion, or intense stress. For some, we might not have had food or housing security. Some of us might have been learning a second language like English in order to thrive in school. Some of us may have been placed in "gifted" or "special education" classrooms, or may have taken our tests in separate rooms from our peers. Some of us might have had an IEP—an Individualized Education Plan—and had our caregivers meet with teachers to develop our learning goals under a Section 504 Plan. There are so many factors at

photo: jacksonpe
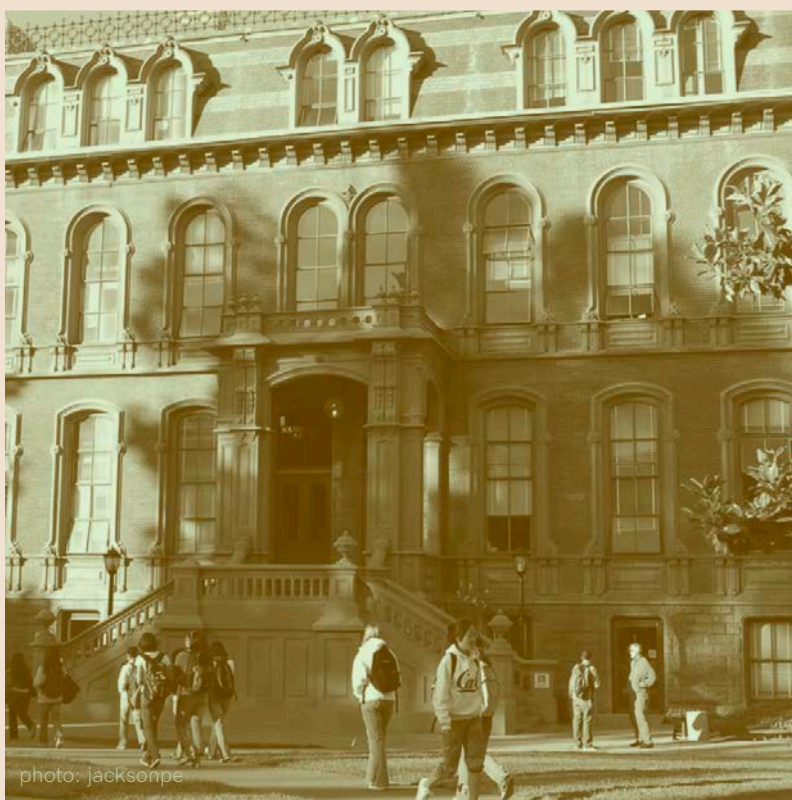
play in our feelings of belonging, it's hard to wave a wand and make everyone feel like they fit in educational spaces.

But we owe it to our students, and ourselves, to think about how we can do it anyway.

In August 2023, a group of graduate students, staff, and faculty took on the effort of organizing and

accessible architeture, like this rampway on campus, helped inspire ULD.

leading the inclusive BIology (iBio) symposium, an annual effort that sprang out of graduate student efforts in the last few years. Among the focuses of the iBio symposium was the phrase "shattering barriers to rebuild community and strengthen trust". This guiding phrase allowed the symposium and workshop organizers to have a common through-line for the day; in many ways, our biology communities had felt the barriers come up over the past several months and years. Our students, staff, and faculty members saw the need to rebuild the community and strengthen a broken trust, especially following the fall 2022 graduate student strike. The idea of shattering barriers in our graduate student programs and departments recalls the same systemic issues that put up barriers to belonging in education. The idea of rebuilding community and strengthening trust can be actualized in part by taking a hard look at how we communicate, teach, and bond with one another as a community of care.

During the symposium, I had the honor of running a workshop on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a methodology that comes from disability social justice, and attempts to provide flexibility and remove barriers in our educational spaces. Universal design and its twin, inclusive design, come from the built environment and architectural fields which saw a crucial need to provide universal access to buildings for wheelchair users and other mobility device users.[1,2] Put into an educational context, Universal Design for Learning gives students and educators options for barrier-free learning and teaching. Students may be given more than one way of reflecting their learning, besides an exam, for example; or, they may have a choice in how they access their learning, with options to read a paper, view a video, or listen to a podcast. There are access needs such as closed captioning, audio description, and alt text built into the learning materials, rather than left out or added hastily.

I shared much of this information in the context of my own dissertation research looking into how our students define and understand concepts like "accessibility" and "disability" in our evolutionary biology courses. To do this, I co-developed a sequence of lesson plans that helped our college students implement UDL in a science communication project. The pedagogy aspects of this project were developed with Dr. Leslea Hlusko for her IB35AC course, Human Biological Variation, which ran online in Fall 2020. I also implemented the same pedagogy project in science communication in Dr. Jack Tseng's Spring 2022 course, IB33, Life in the Age of Dinosaurs. Several amazing GSIs were involved in those efforts, including Tanner Frank, Peter Kloess, Anna Scharnagl, David Manahan, Ryan Yohler, Kwasi Wrensford, and Dan Wait. Lastly, I implemented the project in two off-campus

evolutionary biology courses at the University of Southern California and at Boston University, along with their respective professors.

Some of the highlights of the research results include student written responses, which I analyzed qualitatively through a social science method known as reflexive thematic analysis. Students often considered disability to be a "limitation", and described accessibility in terms of making things "easy". These broadly non-disabled perspectives are crucial to understand and unpack if we're going to approach changes in our class climate towards disabled people and marginalized people on the whole. Other highlights were quantitative and underscored student feelings about the project itself. Over 85% (N=399) of students felt more included in science as a result of the project; over 90% of students also felt they were more aware of and motivated to advocate for disability accommodation in the future.

I think it's important to highlight the ways our own undergraduate students can practice UDL, especially when they're tackling science concepts and communicating them to others. This is good practice for their training as biologists and members of a compassionate community that thinks of all of its audience members. But it's also an interesting way to help students understand their own biases and understanding of equity concepts. Because evolutionary biology has a history of upholding discriminatory practices based on "race science" and ableist science concepts, we have an added responsibility to confront our biases on equity, accessibility, and disability within these courses. And, I want to encourage other graduate students to include these broader impact types of research in their dissertations, if their committee is open to the idea.

But even UDL isn't a magic wand. We operate in an academic system that makes this kind of individualized or differentiated learning very difficult for educators, and in a big lecture hall, it can feel like far too much to offer each student these choices. The Disabled Students Program (DSP), even with the best of intentions, is often stretched thin with requests for assistance in these areas. As a practice, Universal Design for Learning interrogates our systems of productivity in education—everything from how we assess learning, to how students apply and reflect on what they learn. It's not a perfect system, and it has even been criticized as ambiguous in its pluralism,[3,4,5] ignorant of the Global South, and more beneficial for those students who already have a good deal of social and economic capital.[6] UDL won't solve all of our

"it's hard to wave a wand and make everyone feel like they fit in educational spaces. But we owe it to our students, and ourselves, to think about how we can do it anyway. "
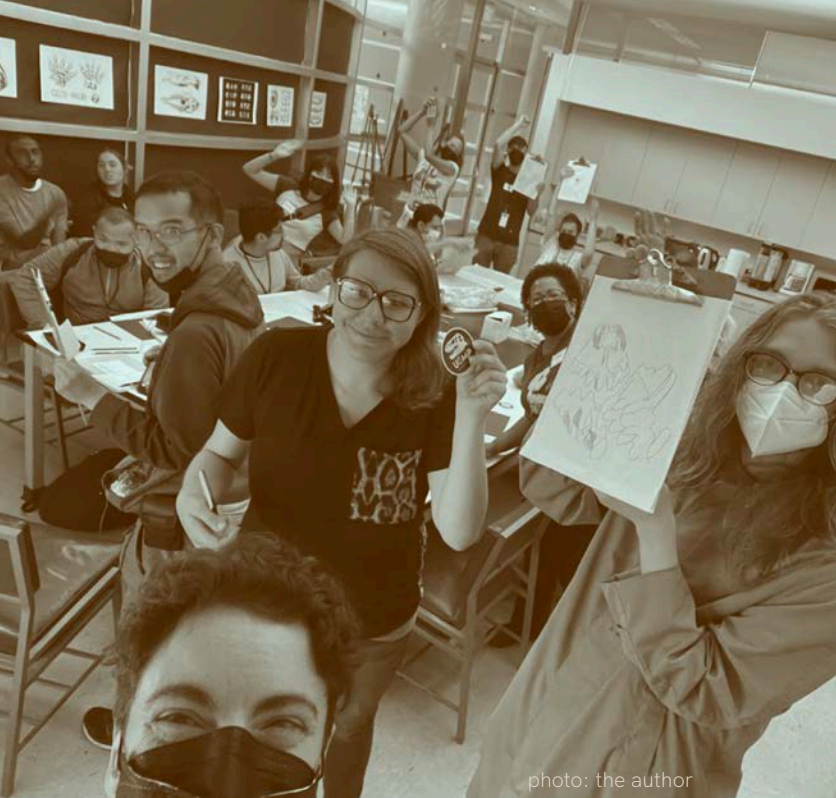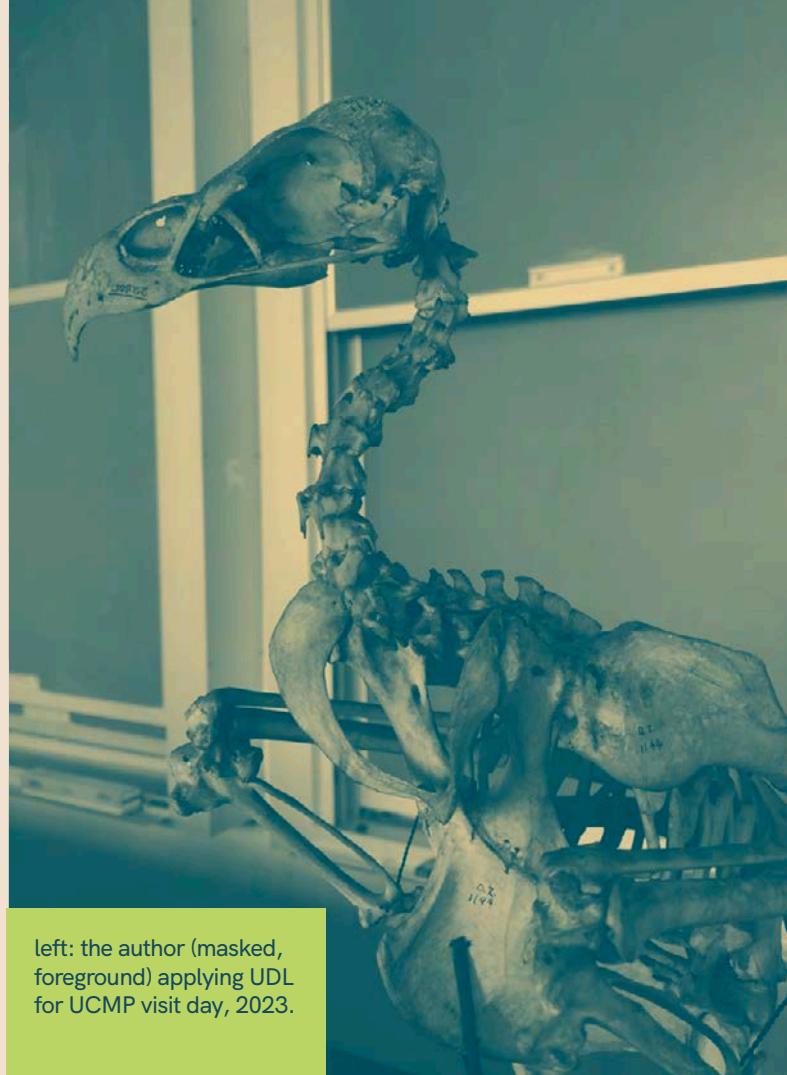
—*Taormina Lepore*
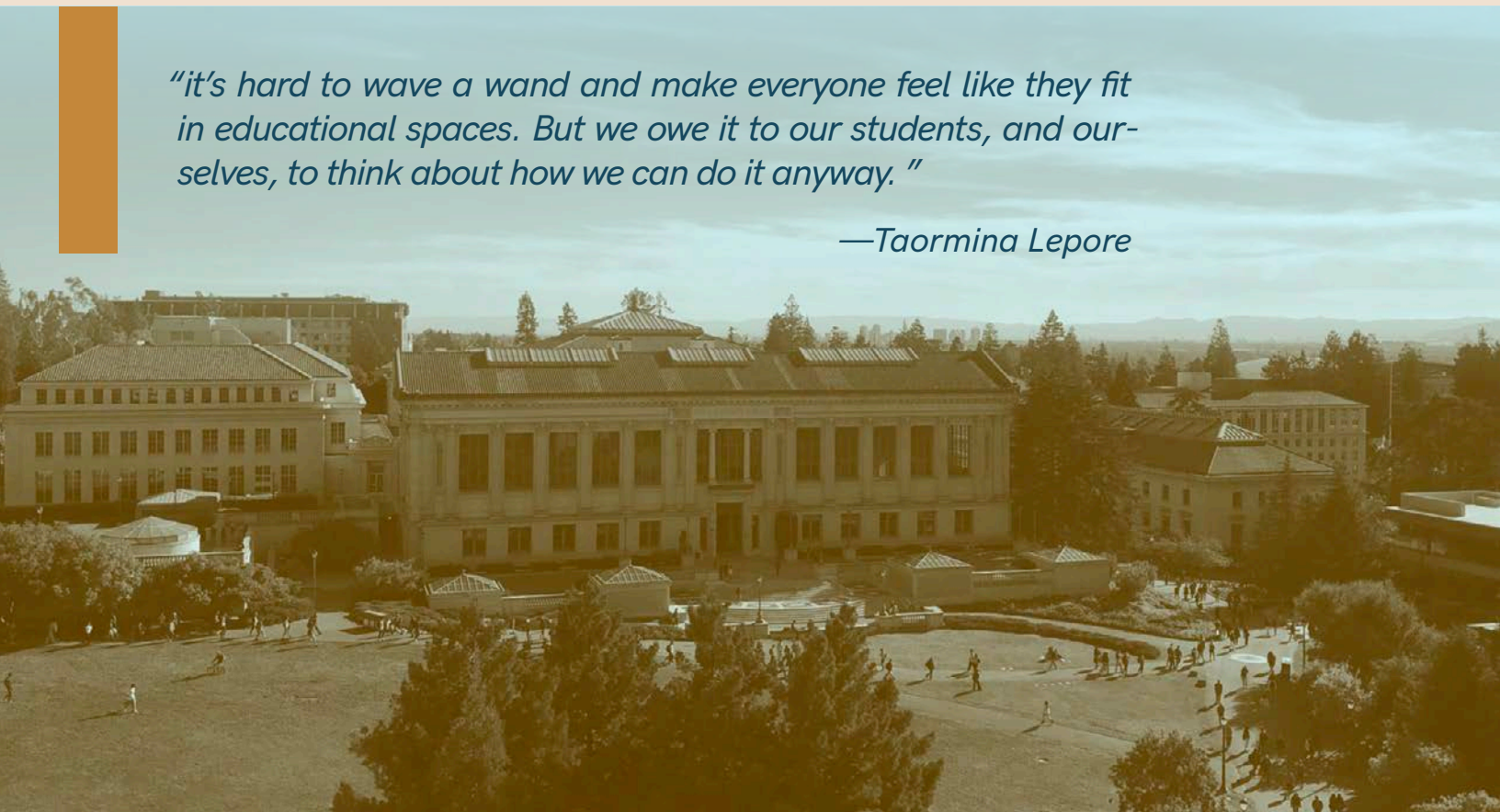
left: the author (masked, foreground) applying UDL for UCMP visit day, 2023.

classroom equity problems, and it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all method to help every student feel included. But it's a starting point for bringing "universal" equity into our classroom and even our lab and field spaces, by designing learning materials that simply give students more choice and flexibility. UDL is also not a set of special privileges for a few students. As a process, UDL forces academic educators to confront implicit biases about what makes a course "rigorous", what constitutes "challenge" and "ease", and what practices reduce barriers to learning rather than uphold them.

Some key components of the workshop that you can use to implement in your own teaching included:

■ Taking a look at the **CAST.org** website, where UDL guidelines and resources are curated. This is a great place to begin your journey implementing even one small component of universal design in your class or field spaces.

■ Higher education prioritizes high productivity & stress. How can we disrupt this system? Even *one* small equity-centered component, in *one* science class, can make a huge difference for our students.

■ Define and discuss Universal Design: The design and composition of an environment or learning material so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people.

■ Practice **Universal Design** concepts and Universal Design for Learning **guidelines** in your class and your lab spaces.

■ Invite students to co-create the learning and class environments with you. Yes, even assessments!

Here's another thought experiment. Consider a course, lab, or discussion you'd like to teach. Now, come up with a way to recruit interest and engage your students by optimizing student choice and autonomy. What might that look like? Perhaps there is a component of flexibility in the final assessments for the course? Maybe you could **practice ungrading**, or assign more no-stakes **formative assessments**?

This is one of the **guidelines of UDL**—engagement and choice—that you can implement! Universal Design for Learning gives us one path towards more equitable and inclusive classroom and lab spaces, and it simply takes a little curiosity and boldness to give new pedagogical techniques a try.

Building and maintaining equitable learning environments in academia is going to take sustained effort at all levels of higher education. But we know from **UDL's research** and my own research work on- and off-campus that our students feel more included in class spaces when these efforts are made. Excitingly, the UDL guidelines are getting an update in 2024 to be even more mindful of linguistic and cultural diversity; and, CAST's annual UDL symposium will be held in Sacramento in July, 2024—if you'd like to send in a proposal, you can **check out the details by January 19th, 2024.**

Projects using UDL make a difference. Even a small component of UDL can help knock down barriers to learning in our class and lab spaces. What components of UDL can you implement in your classroom? Start with one, small piece that you can implement today, to make a more equitable and memorable classroom environment your students will remember positively for years to come.

reflection questions:

1. What makes you feel that you are comfortable to participate in a learning or work space?

2. How can UDL help you better communicate your ideas to others?

3. The author asks us to envison UDL in the classroom or lab. What could optimizing student choice and autonomy look like in your teaching?

other linked information and resources:

Universal Design for Learning Graduate Certificate Program - Center for Teaching and Learning—contact Linda von Hoene
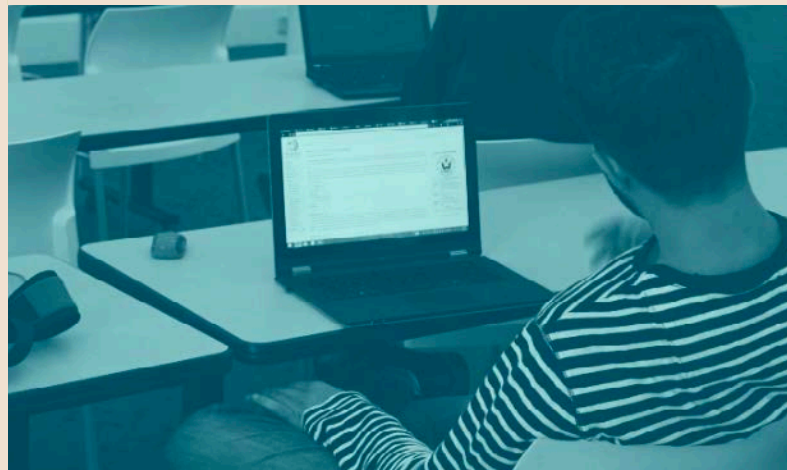
Disability Studies on campus

UDL at Berkeley

Disability Access & Compliance (DAC)

Disabled Cultural and Community Center—Hearst Field Annex

DSP—Disabled Students' Program

further readings links

1. Mace, R. (1997). What is universal design? The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, 19, 2004.
2. Hall, T. E., Meyer, A., & Rose, D. H. (Eds.). (2012). Universal design for learning in the classroom: Practical applications. Guilford press.
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5. Baglieri, S. (2020). Toward inclusive education? Focusing a critical lens on universal design for learning. Canadian Journal ofDisability Studies, 9(5), 42-74.
6. Song, Y. (2017). To what extent is Universal Design for Learning "universal"? A case study in township special needs schools in South Africa. Disability and the Global South, 3(1), 910-929.

bear witness

by Gregory Arena
  Graduate Student

These past months the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been at the center of discourse at UC Berkeley and on college campuses nationwide. Vigils, activism on Sproul plaza, and letters to the editor in local newspapers highlight the diverse and divided ways in which members of our community interpret and are impacted by these tragic events. But the conflict also highlights the responsibility shouldered by UC Berkeley as a leading public research institution with substantial economic and cultural capital as a global citizen. This article examines 155 years of UC Berkeley and its community members' reactions to and involvement in oppression, imperialism, war, and the military industrial complex throughout its history.
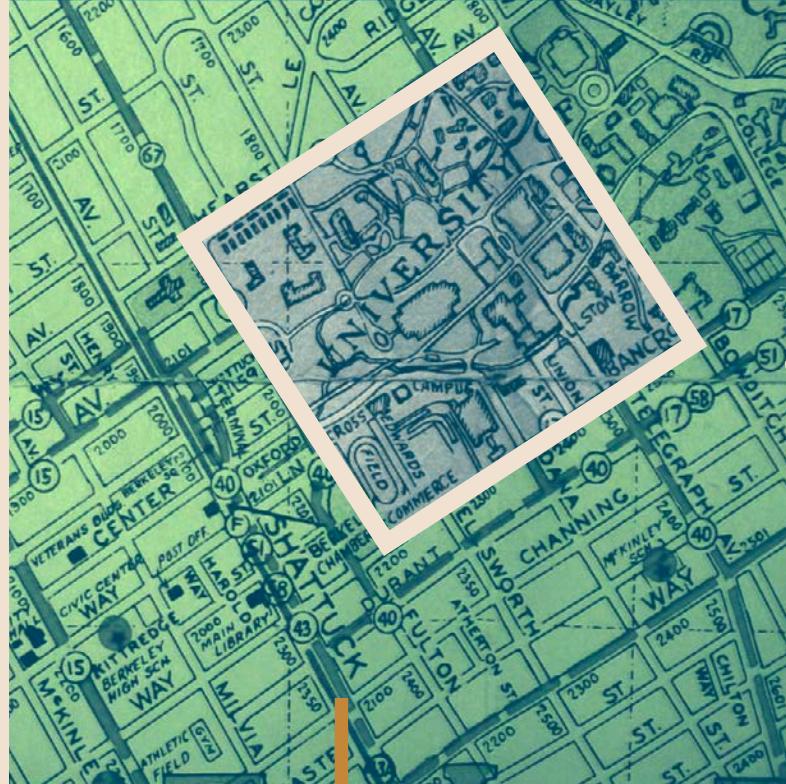

a 160 acre parcel forms the core of campus

1865

Trustees of the University of California christen their newly formed college after philosopher and slaveholder **Bishop George Berkeley**. Bishop Berkeley's mythologizing of British colonialism in a poem he penned in 1725 served as the trustee's inspiration. At the time, his verse "westward the course of empire takes its way" was deeply **entwined** in the fabric of 19th Century American imperialist sentiments and a dawning sense of manifest destiny.

1866

The Federal Government provides the newly formed University of California with **unceded Ohlone land**. Fredrick Olmstead Law, architect of Central Park and Golden Gate Park is commissioned by the fledgling university to create a campus plan blending natural and human made elements. But a **legacy** of settler colonialism, evident in the underlying geometry of campus, can not be covered-up. Bounded in a near perfect square between the Campanile and Oxford, Heast and Bancroft Avenues is the original **160 acre parcel**—also known as a quarter-section—a unit of area US land surveyors used to subdivide the continent as early as the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Parcels of this size were commonly distributed to homesteaders and public institutions through the Homestead and Morrill Acts of 1862. This land give-away incentivized population growth and settlements in the Western United States. The University of California would ultimately receive 150,000 acres of "depopulated lands" through these grants.
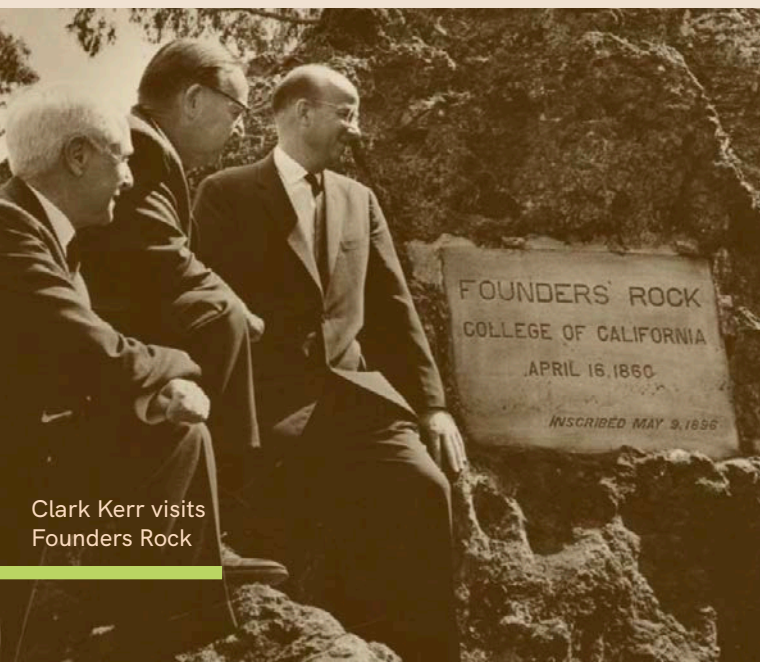
Clark Kerr visits Founders Rock

photos: UCB

Newspaper Row, San Francicso. circa 1889
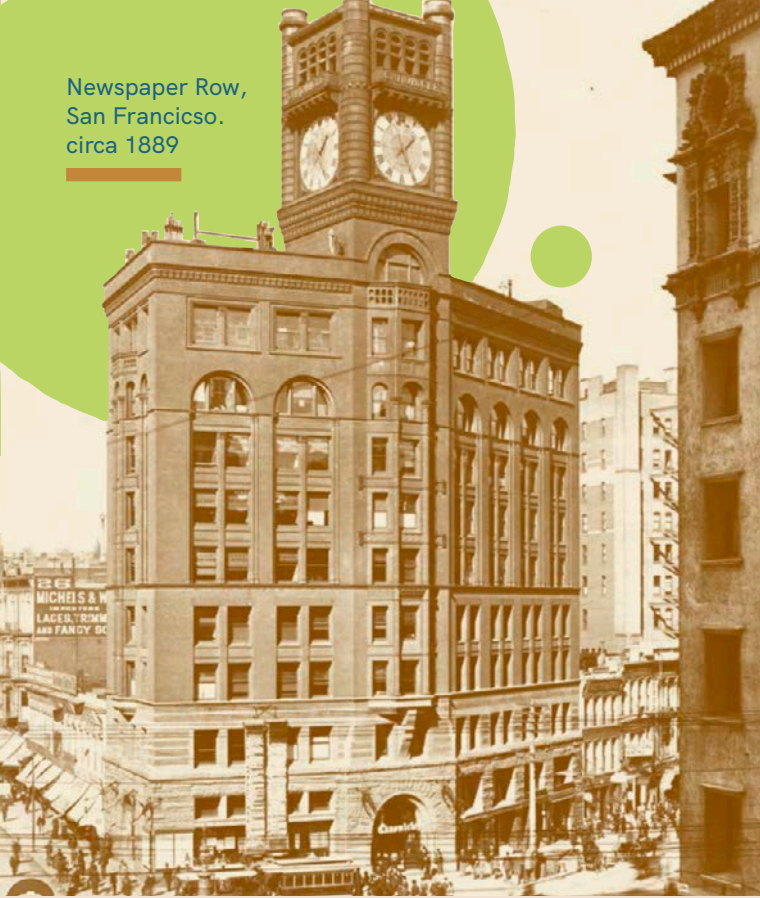
1868

The University Board or Regents adds Union Iron Works mogul Irving Scott. Scott's company puts San Francisco and Alameda **shipyards** on the map where some of the first steel-hulled battleships are constructed. Battleships like the USS Oregon are later deployed against civilians in the Philippines and Guam in the 1890s. Throughout the 20th Century, Berkeley Engineering becomes a lynchpin in Naval technology development.

1869

John LeConte joins the campus faculty. A white supremasist and former slave owner, LeConte worked as a scientist manufacturing gun power for the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

1898

Newspaper baron **William Randolph Hearst**, a benefactor of the university, sensationalizes conflict in Spanish controlled Cuba. Historians will later credit Hearst with driving public opinion that would spark the Spanish-American War. Hearst and his family's **last name** adorn numerous campus and city landmarks.

1917-1920

UC Berkeley graduates over 2,000 pilots through a program developed to serve the US School of Military Aeronautics.

1919

David Prescot Barrows is appointed the 10th president of the University of California. Following the Spanish-American War, Barrows oversaw construction of the school system as part of the US colonial administration in the occupied Philippines. As a professor, Barrows promoted white supremacy and US imperialism in the Pacific and Latin America.

photos: SF County Archives, UCB

above: While LeConte Hall was un-named in 2020, a plaque in the eucalyptus grove still commemorates the two brothers.

left: Ishi last remaining member of the Yahi tribes dies in 1916. After his death UCSF medical researchers remove his brain for study, violating his last requests for cremation.

1924

American Anthropologist and Berkeley Professor **Alfred Krober** designates the **Ohlone** as an extinct people, precipitating the loss of federal recognition for the tribe. The Ohlone people are **still fighting** for the protection and funding owed them.

1926

Admiral Chester Nimitz is appointed to develop the first Naval ROTC at UC Berkeley. At the time, ROTC participation is mandatory for all male students. Nimitz, who led the naval victory in the Pacific Theater during WWII, would later be appointed to the Board of Regents.

1939

Despite campus protests and peace rallies, the Regents refuse to overturn mandatory military training for male students.

1941

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US Federal Government commits total funding to Berkeley physicist Ernest Lawrence for the development of his Uranium fission technology into a weapon.

Berkeley Engineering receives $57 million in government-sponsored research and development for WWII military infrastructure. The programs that grew out of these contracts establish Berkeley as a preeminent research university. Over **1400 battleships** and submarines were constructed in just three years with Berkeley tech and training.

atomic weapons testing at LANL

Kaiser Permanente Metal Corporation Shipyard No. 2, Richmond, CA, 1942
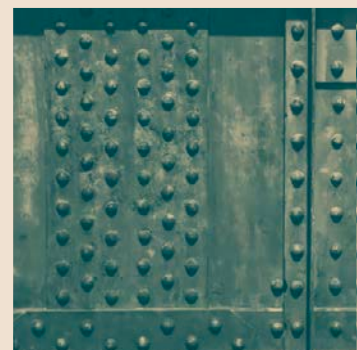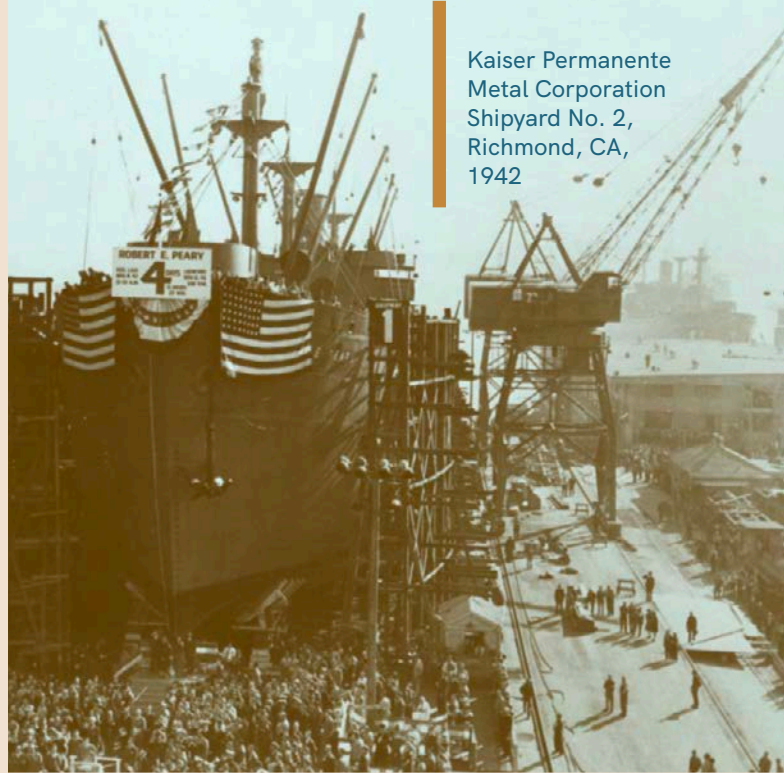
1942

UC Berkeley expels 500 Japanese American students in compliance with Roosevelt's **Executive Order 9066**.

UC Berkeley faculty member Robert Oppenheimer is selected to head the Manhattan Project, with a contract awarded to the university to manage the program. Oppenheimer is later eulogized as the "fathers of the atomic bomb." Oppenheimer's bomb would kill an estimated 220,000 Japanese civilians. Though today the city of Berkeley is a nuclear free zone, the UC System manages Los Alamos National Lab and other nuclear facilities. In addition to conducting nuclear physics and chemical research, LANL maintains and services the **US nuclear weapons stockpile**.

1962

UC President **Clark Kerr** pushes the Regents to terminate mandatory ROTC participation for male undergraduates. For spearheading the end of a mandatory ROTC program, his leniency with student free speech, and his disavowal of a ban on communist rhetoric on campuses, Kerr would be "fired with enthusiasm" by a newly elected Governor Ronald Reagan in 1967.

1966

Ronald Reagan launches his political career by taking a hardline stance on Berkeley Free Speech and protests of the Vietnam War. Reagan initiated an unbroken tradition of state budget cuts to the UC system. In 1967 he proposed reducing the **UC budget** by 10%. In the years since, tuition rates and private money at the UC have soared while state funds have declined.

1969

Bloody Thursday: 128 Berkeley residents are admitted to the hospital and one person dies from a gunshot wound after the National Guard and UCPD disrupt a peaceful protest at People's Park.

during the late 1960's Berkeley was a hub for antiwar protest.
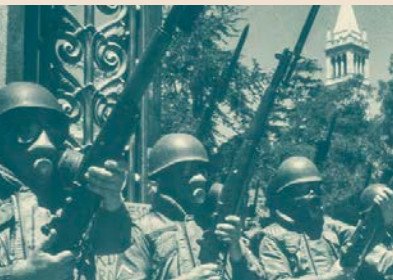
National Guard on campus and parked on Ridge Road, leading up to Bloody Thursday.

1980

Alumni Stephen Bechtel establishes himself as a benefactor of the UC, with Berkeley's Bechtel Engineering Center completed in 1981. A multi-national defense contractor, in the US **Bechtel Group** is primarily partnered with the military, CIA and DOE.

1985

Protests at UC Berkeley and other UC campuses lead to the **successful divestment** of $3.1 billion by the UC system from apartheid South Africa. It was the largest single divestment by a university from South Africa. US divestment from companies conducting business in South Africa was consequential in the end of apartheid.

1986

The UC Berkeley nuclear reactor located in the Etcheverry Hall basement is dismantled to comply with a city ordinance.

1998

Novartis and Monsanto make a $25 million gift to the College of Natural Resources. In 2021, the US Justice Department will call Monsanto a "**serial violator** of federal environmental law," with the impacts of Monsanto chemicals, practices, and policies affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions of agricultural workers and rural people globally.

right: John Yoo author of the Torture Memos

bottom: Agent Orange developed by Dow.

2004

The **Torture Memos** authored by UC Berkeley Law Professor John Yoo are leaked to the press. Yoo, a former legal counsel to the Bush Administration, is responsible for outlining an argument condoning wartime executive privileges to authorize waterboarding and other enhanced interrogation techniques. Yoo is accused of war crimes at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay by an EU court in 2006.

2005

UC entered into partnership with defense contractor Bechtel to co-manage Los Alamos National Labs. Through the development of the lab, the University of California acquired 54,000 acres of **Tewa Tribal Land** between 1941 and 1960. The result of LANL nuclear testing at this land has made entry to sacred sites impossible for these tribal groups, and has been correlated to heighten cancer among rural and indigenous New Mexicans.

2012

UC Berkeley College of Chemistry receives $3.5 million from Dow. Napalm and Agent Orange used during the Vietnam War are two of the company's most **infamous products**.

2013

UC Berkeley ASUC Senate resolution calling for **divestment** from companies that profit from Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is passed. Campus administration rejects the resolution.

2017

DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) provides $65 million to research CRISPR at UC Berkeley and Brown University. Between 2020 and 2023, UC Berkeley will receive an estimated $700 million in support annually from the Department of Defense for research and development purposes.

2019

UC Berkeley bans the practice of teaching anthropology with stolen indigenous human remains. As of 2023, UC Berkeley maintains the **largest collection** of unrepatriated indigenous human remains in the United States.

above: until recently, paleoanthropology courses at Berkeley were taught with ill-gotten indigenous human remains.

2020

After pushback from faculty, UC Berkeley renamed the long-standing $2.41 million **Genealogical Eugenic Institute Fund**. The fund, established in 1975, was created to promote "the improvement of the human race through research and education in that field generally known as eugenics."

2022

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, California Governor Gavin Newsom calls for the divestment of UC and other state retirement funds linked to the Russian Financial Market. Complete state divestment totals $1.5 billion.

UC invests $2 billion in Blackrock Investment Management. Blackrock maintains substantial shares in **arms and defense** contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman.

photos: UCB, Univeristy of California, Ben Chaney

by Georgia Pellucida
Jepson Herbarium

With a focus on connecting undergraduate students with graduate students through an informal mentoring approach, Real Talk Buddies serves the diverse needs of CNR undergraduates. Whether that's offering guidance and feedback around grad school and internship applications, building resumes, or exploring the etiquette of office hours, and other aspects of campus culture, **Real Talk Buddies** provides personalized mentorship that can sometimes feel in short supply in a campus community of over 45,000. For many incoming students, college can be a time filled with great uncertainty. This can especially be the case for first generation college students, EOP students, or students from historically minority groups. By creating a safe and welcoming space, the program invites undergraduates to find the space and support they need to flourish. To learn more, DEI Newsletter discussed the program with co-founders Jashvina Devadoss and Sierra Hampton, and Rose Mohammadi, who has been a member of the organizing team since the early days of the program. All three are ESPM PhD candidates. Joining that conversation, Ava Wang and Owen Harling, two CNR undergraduates who have participated in the program first as mentees and now as program organizers.

At UC Berkeley, it is easy to get lost in the crowd. Mentorship and counseling provided through the campus are historically sparse and impersonal. In developing Real Talk Buddies, how did your own undergraduate experiences shape what you wanted to see in this program?

Hampton: My last two years [at Berkeley] as an undergrad, I was working at a mentorship program at the YMCA called **Y-Scholars**. Y-Scholars is all about reaching low income students and students of color, and trying to bridge the achievement gap

photo: UCB

between highschool and college. We talk about the real challenges that people are going to face. My interaction with grad students while at Berkeley was really just with the GSI's I had in classes where we only ever talked about class content, and I wasn't part of a lab. So I didn't really have that mentorship, but I could see how impactful it would be for our students.

Devadoss: I also did my undergrad at Berkeley. It's such a big institution, but I had really great advisors—Ricky Vides and Eva Wong—in the CRS major. Having that personal connection with someone who was there on the journey with

"Having that personal connection with someone who was there on the journey with me was really helpful."

—Jashvina Devadoss

me was really helpful. When I left undergrad, I worked in a few different places, one of those places was as an intern at Lawrence Berkeley Lab. That was the first place where I really envisioned a future career for myself as a scientist, and part of that was because of my experiences working alongside and forming connections with my colleagues there, as scientists, but also just as humans. Coming to the PhD program, one of the moments that sparked the idea for Real Talk Buddies happened in our first year class. **Chris Schell**, who was a new faculty member at the time, spoke to us from such a real place about his own journey through graduate school. It was so refreshing and helpful to hear that during our first semester. Sierra and I walked out of that meeting and just sat on Sproul Plaza and talked about how impactful these conversations would have been when we were undergrads. We thought, how can we help provide this to undergraduate students?

Mohammadi: I went to a primarily undergraduate-serving institution so I had a lot of close relationships with faculty and not graduate students. So everything I heard about academia was from a faculty perspective which misses a super huge gap in how you become an academic. So I think I came in with rose colored glasses— but everything is great now! I think having a graduate student mentor as an undergrad would have been helpful from a logistical point of view or learning how to optimize grad school for all its opportunities rather than just something you check off on the path to become a professor.

In what ways has Real Talk Buddies built a community within CNR for undergraduates? What role do graduate students play in inviting undergraduates into academic spaces?

Wang: From my experience [Real Talk Buddies] has absolutely helped me along my journey in my undergraduate career. I came to Berkeley not really knowing, or just not accepting, that I

could be a scientist in any capacity. I think that Sierra, and Real Talk Buddies was a big part of making me feel a part of the scientific community, which I had never thought was available to me at all. I have two different identities at Berkeley, because I'm also a music major. Already I felt pretty involved in that community, but also now in CNR. Having the one-on-one mentorship is really impactful. I've been in affinity groups, but it's just not the same as having a conversation and building a relationship with one person.

Harling: I feel like I've never been able to accomplish anything without the support of a community. I grew up in a very rural area, so I had very small schools and involved communities in those schools, with lots of connections to people younger and older than me. It's really in those dynamics and spaces where I've thrived throughout my life. Coming here, this was definitely the biggest school environment I've been in, a totally different space to negotiate. Talking to my buddy was a cool way to learn from someone who is interested in some of the same things as me, and is also farther down that path. My mentorship last year was a great time for me to talk and think about things in a way that was different from how we do things in a classroom or at office hours.

> *"…Real Talk Buddies, regardless of whether a student wants to talk about science or career stuff, is about mentoring the whole student, the whole person."*
>
> —Rose Mohammadi

There are other programs and campus resources such as Berkeley Connect, or research and apprenticeship opportunities that pair undergrads with faculty and graduate student mentors. What makes Real Talk Buddies so different?

Devadoss: Pretty early on, in the first semester that we were piloting the program, we talked about what niche we wanted to fill. With **Berkeley Connect**, there is one graduate student mentor for a large cohort of undergrads. Other campus opportunities can be highly specific. We felt that matching people in one-on-one relationships could provide more individualized, broad support. And we've eventually shifted to a model where the mentees choose their mentor, based on what they are looking for, whether that is an identity, an academic fit or any of the other things mentees can see in the mentor bios. This gives students more agency in seeking out support. One other thing I'll mention, there is a buddy program for more advanced graduate students to mentor beginning graduate students in ESPM. That was a model our program benefited from, as something that was already working and that we could build off of for the undergraduate space.

Mohammadi: Programs like **URAP** and **SPUR** are also different because undergrads are working with a graduate student on a project. These relationships are primarily research or academic focused. Students in these programs may not want to broach personal matters, thinking that that is outside the bounds of what is supposed to happen in a lab space. Real Talk Buddies, regardless of whether a student wants to talk about science or career stuff, is about mentoring the whole student, the whole person.

Harling: My first year, I did Berkeley Connect in ESPM. For me these are very different experiences. There is a lot of flexibility in being able to really decide with your mentor what you would

Real Talk Buddies mixers and events.

like that connection to look like. There is not the pressure of attendance like in a scheduled class or lectures and set activities and assignments. And, having that one-on-one is very different and more intimate than being in the classroom.

Hampton: In our first meetings we toyed around with the idea of offering workshops and trainings, but decided we wanted to center on one-on-one mentorship because it is not something you can find anywhere else on campus. With other programs there is homework or set check-ins and with [Real Talk Buddies] the relationship is the only expectation. It is a totally safe space to just get to know someone. I think that if the mentors had to hound the mentees for assignments or if there were units or a grade it would really change the nature of these relationships.

Wang: I did a freshman seminar last year and I loved it. But I love how informal Real Talk Buddies can be. Sierra and I have gone for hikes at the Botanical Garden, or made dinner for each other, or just hung out on one of the lawns. I feel like it is a friendship in addition to a mentorship, and that is something that is really valuable, and you don't usually find in a seminar class or Berkeley Connect or other similar programs.

Mentorship through Real Talk Buddies is highly flexible in terms of format and topic, catering to the student's needs. What does a typical mentor-mentee relationship look like in this program?

Hampton: For the program we have three categories: academic, career and personal mentorship. When they sign up to the program, both the mentors and mentees, can select the areas they are interested in or comfortable with. Mentors and mentees also list other relevant experiences like if they took a gap year or are first gen.

Mohammadi: In terms of what those relationships look like. My first buddy was a senior who wanted to go to grad school, so we spent a lot of time reviewing her CV and her statements, and even learning how to write a cold email to a professor. So it was mostly academic mentorship

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and a lot of asynchronous things, emailing back and forth.

Wang: I feel like [my mentor] and I mostly talk about personal life, more than academic stuff, although I have learned a lot about what grad school looks like. I know what a Qual exam is now. But we just catch-up like peers.

Harling: Last academic year, my mentors and I had a pretty broad spectrum of conversations. I was really interested in the work my mentor was doing so in addition to personal stuff we would also talk about that.

Devadoss: I feel this all really speaks to the span of experiences from the very academic focus to the mostly personal. I think that the strength of the program is really that mentors and mentees have so much freedom.

Ava and Owen, you're both participating in the planning and development of this program as undergrads. Many outreach programs and opportunities for undergraduates offered elsewhere on campus are typically led exclusively by staff, faculty and/or grad students. How is undergraduate participation driving RTB and enriching the program?

Wang: Something that I bring are ways to plug into the undergrad eco-community. I'm involved in the **ASUC eco-office** and **Zero Waste**, so I'm in a ton of slack channels. That communication and opportunity for collaboration is something I want to expand.

Harling: This is just semester one for me, and there is still so much that I'm learning as part of the organizing team, but I definitely think that [undergrads] can give real time feedback. In planning meetings [grad-student organizers] will ask "what are undergrads doing this week, or what's is the undergrad experience like?" There are also times in the semester that are especially busy for grad students. We can step up and volunteer and

"Real Talk Buddies was a big part of making me feel a part of the scientific community, which I had never thought was available to me at all."

—Ava Wang

offer more of our time and those opportunities are nice skill development for me as well.

There's a lot of activation energy required to launch a program like Real Talks Buddies. What were some of your challenges in that process and where did you find support? What advice would you give to grad students looking to model similar community building in their own departments?

Hampton: Our budget is pretty low, about $500 per semester. Part of our language was we do want this to be a program that can actually sustain with no funding, because it is totally reliant on the grad-undergrad relationships. But if you do want to have socials and other events to draw in the broader community you do need some amount of funding. We had a model that we want to be able to share with other departments and cohorts. Our funding has been pretty ad-hoc. ESPM provided us with funding for one event. We've also tracked down several different funding opportunities and collaborations such as with the **American Indian Graduate Program** which supported us to host a social event in solidarity for building diversity and community.

Mohammadi: The funding and the model are pretty ad-hoc and can be pretty easily guerrilla-ized.

It would be ideal if funding did come through the department, for small social events to help bring people together, break the ice, and expand the community. But department level funding hasn't really materialized for recruiting and reaching out to undergrads in the department. So we have funded ourselves through other campus sources, and we became a registered student organization so we could apply for Berkeley-level funding. Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of specific grants and funds that apply to both graduate students and undergraduate students. The way that the **ASUC**, **Graduate Assembly**, and **Graduate Division** create grants, is siloed between grad and undergrad in a way that is confusing. Not to get into the weeds, but we received funding for events from the graduate assembly. If we had undergrads at these events, we only receive $1 per ever undergrad but we receive $20 per every graduate student. This is because the Graduate Assembly is focused on supported grad student centered events. These types of policies make it difficult to support organizations that serve more than one community.

Devadoss: The funding has been a tricky part. But funding is important for hosting events that can build connections within the community and expand beyond those one-on-one relationships. We're also trying to benefit grad students on some level by giving them opportunities to develop their mentoring skills. We've put together some best practices for mentoring and shared them on our **website**. We want to pursue even more growth in that area to ensure that Real Talk Buddies is a development opportunity for both graduate and undergraduate students.

In terms of support, we had a great team that helped us build out the program during our first year, and I think that was essential to our success, especially considering all the other responsibilities we hold as PhD students. Having a strong team built our capacity as an organization, rather than Sierra and I just going it alone, and everyone had their unique strengths and experiences to bring to the table. I'd like to acknowledge the core members of that early team, who are all members of our PhD cohort in ESPM—Sierra Yarnes, Charlotte Kwong, Kat Culbertson, Cesar Estien, and Rose Mohammadi, who's here with us today.

photo: UCB

How can someone get involved or support Real Talk Buddies?

Hampton: Becoming a mentor is the most important thing someone can do. The more amazing mentors we are able to recruit the more undergraduates we are able to serve, both in terms of quantity and quality and in having a broad range of experience and expertise to share. I think that we could easily be overrun, but somehow there are always about 2-3 mentees per mentor, so we've been very lucky. Mentors at Real Talk buddies aren't just in ESPM, we've also created mentoships with grad students in ERG which has been very seamless.

Devadoss: Becoming a mentor is a great way to get involved. We had 60 participants our first semester, then 80, and we've remained at a similar size. There is a lot of interest from undergraduates in the program, and it's all made possible by our mentors. Another way to get involved is by joining the organizing team. Lastly, we

would love to help bring our model to other departments, so if people are interested in doing this in their own department, let's collaborate!

To get involved with Real Talk Buddies, contact them at realtalkbuddies@gmail.com.

reflection questions:

1. How do you/can you provide mentorship for students or colleagues in your department?

2. The interviewees describe some of the difficulties associated with funding programs that include both graduate and undergraduate students. What structural barriers exist in your work?

upcoming events + campus resources

- 14, 16 Jan.—**Museum of African Diaspora**, San Francisco, (free days)

- 28 Jan.—**Little Saigon Lunar New Year Festival**, 12.00-4.00pm, Clinto Park, Oakland (free)

- 25 Feb.—**Black Joy Parade**, 12.00-7pm, 20th & Franklin, Oakland (free)

photo: izahorsky

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