

STUDENTS + CAMPUS

2021 reflections: In an amazing year of achievements, nothing topped the return to campus



Chancellor Gene Block surprises UCLA students on Bruin Plaza on the first day of class in the fall 2021 quarter. *Reed Hutchinson/UCLA*

UCLA Newsroom | December 16, 2021

As we approach the end of December, it's a natural time to look back at the year that was. In 2021, UCLA welcomed students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors back to our home in Westwood, though of course it wasn't exactly the way things had been.

Different from pre-pandemic times: Masks remain present. Better (much better): UCLA officially opened the Black Bruin Resource Center.

Even with all the changes, UCLA persisted as a force for public good, guided by our mission of teaching, research and service. In the past year, professors continued helping us better understand our world with their research, students kept excelling in ways that make us proud and UCLA showed how it helps make Los Angeles a world-class city.

Here we present a look back at some of the most memorable UCLA moments and stories from 2021.

Bruins return to campus and Westwood



Reed Hutchinson/UCLA

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block welcomed students, faculty and staff back to campus for in-person classes after nearly a year and a half of remote learning with both a [hopeful message](#) and a [surprise on Bruin Plaza](#). UCLA also opened [two new residence halls](#), coming closer to fulfilling its promise of providing four years of housing to any first-year student who wants it or two years to any transfer student.

COVID patient thanks UCLA medical team that saved her life



Christina House/Los Angeles Times. Photo use with permission.

The front-page [Los Angeles Times story](#) chronicled Blanca Lopez's lifesaving treatment with extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or [ECMO](#). The state-of-the-art technology filters the blood of critically ill patients, providing a reprieve to hearts and lungs failing from COVID-19 or other diseases.

UCLA Health oversees the largest adult ECMO program on the West Coast, treating up to 160 people per year. With the only ECMO ambulance in the region, UCLA's mobile team regularly stabilizes and transports patients from every hospital in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and Ventura counties.

"Blanca is a miracle of medicine," said Dr. Peyman Benharash, the surgical director who led the mobile ECMO team that sped a gravely ill Lopez from Glendale to UCLA in mid-August. "After so much sorrow and loss, tonight was something we really needed to see."

History in the making: The Black Bruin Resource Center has arrived



Reed Hutchinson/UCLA

The Black Bruin Resource Center's mission is to provide a space for Black students to find and create community by offering a fun social atmosphere and academic support and fostering mental health and wellness. Through the years that students and campus administrators worked to bring the center from an initial vision to its ultimate home in a 1,500-square-foot space in Kerckhoff Hall, everyone agreed that centering students' voices was vital.

"Seeing how many people showed up today to a two-hour program gives me so much excitement and hope for what the center is going to be like," said Amanda Finzi-Smith, interim program director of the center, or BBRC. "I hope this is the trend: We're happy, excited, we love each other, come into the center and hang out. That's what I hope is going to happen the rest of the week. If this is just the first one, I can only imagine what the rest of the week's events are going to be like."

The opening of the Black Bruin Resource Center was the most public of the many ways UCLA furthered its progress toward fulfilling its previously announced commitment to making improving the campus environment for Black Bruins, which were detailed in its [Rising to the Challenge](#) announcement in 2020. Also, this year staff and faculty in the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies collaborated across campus to build an infrastructure that will [support faculty hiring](#), [seed grants](#), [graduate student fellowships](#) and [postdoctoral scholarships](#) for scholars whose research serves the study of Black life.

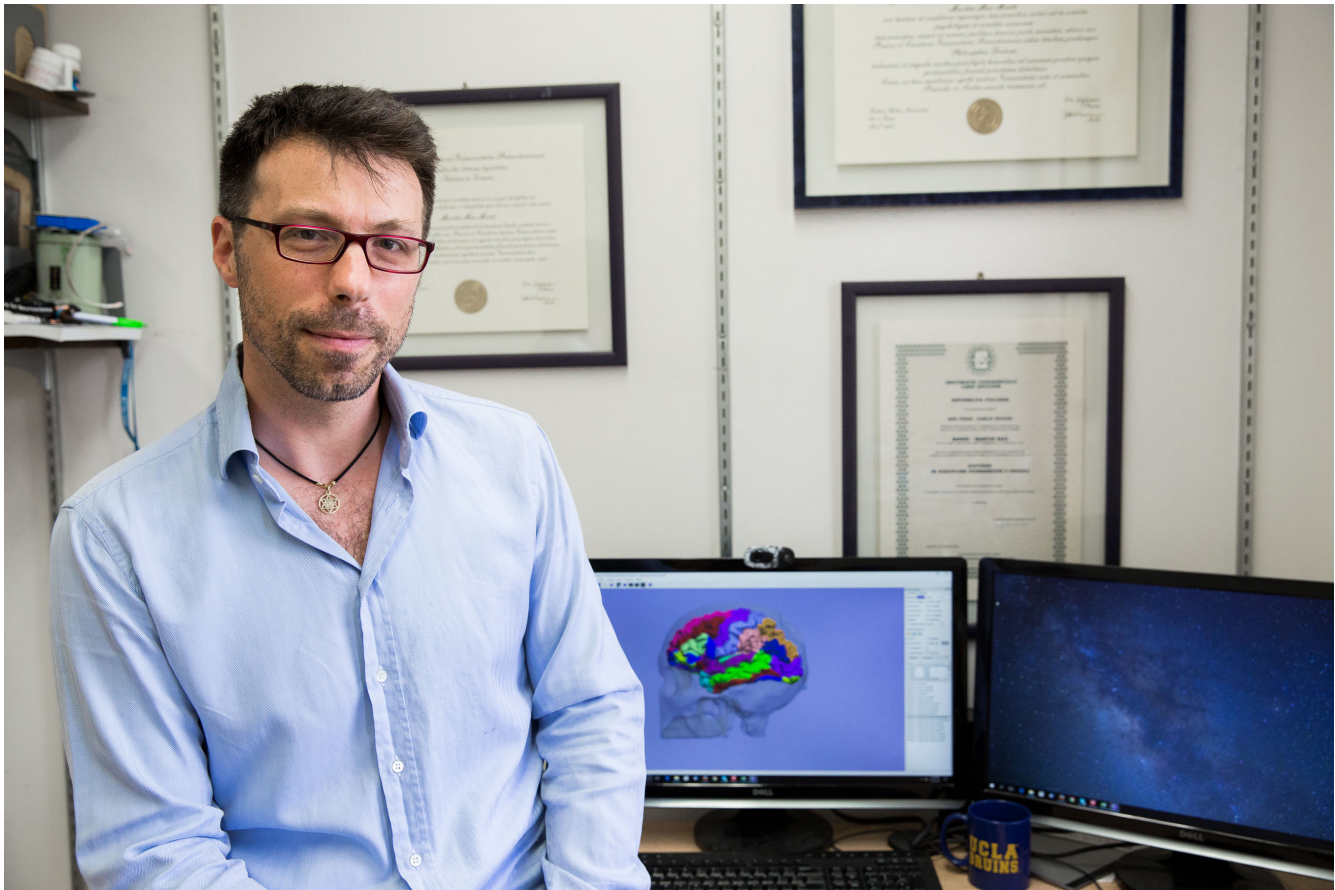
From building a more just world to providing a best-in-class student experience, UCLA excels across a range of rankings



Abraham Ramirez/UCLA

As proud as Bruins are that U.S. News & World Report has named [UCLA the nation's No. 1 public university five years in a row](#), we also know that UCLA is a higher education leader in many areas that truly capture the best of what our campus provides to students, the local community and global society. These areas include being No. 1 for: transfer students, veterans and even campus dining hall food.

Scientists jump-start two people's brains after coma



Ivy Reynolds

In 2016, a team led by UCLA's Martin Monti reported that a 25-year-old man recovering from a coma had made remarkable progress following a treatment to jump-start his brain using ultrasound.

In 2021, Monti and colleagues reported that two more patients with severe brain injuries — both had been in what scientists call a long-term “minimally conscious state” — had made impressive progress thanks to the same technique.

“I consider this new result much more significant because these chronic patients were much less likely to recover spontaneously than the acute patient we treated in 2016 — and any recovery typically occurs slowly over several months and more typically years, not over days and weeks, as we show,” said Monti, a professor of psychology and neurosurgery. “It’s very unlikely that our findings are simply due to spontaneous recovery.”

Making strides toward becoming a Hispanic-Serving Institution



Les Dunseith/UCLA

In furtherance of UCLA's goal of becoming a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, campus leaders have been working with faculty and campus partners to develop plans to build up UCLA's intellectual community devoted to Latinx life.

Over the next seven years, UCLA will provide 15 new faculty lines — balanced across north and south campus — for individuals whose teaching, scholarship and/or mentoring has ties to Latinx experiences. Deans of schools and divisions may match these appointments for a total of up to 30 new scholars. In addition, UCLA will support 20 two-year postdoctoral fellowships over the next five years, again balanced across north and south campus, for work related to Latinx issues. We will also establish a new funding pool of \$250,000 per year over five years for seed research grants for basic and applied scholarship on Latinx populations.

The Chicano Studies Research Center, led by director Veronica Terriquez, will administer the hiring of faculty and fellows and will manage the seed research grants in collaboration with the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Creative Activities.

UCLA raises \$611 million in 2020–21, supporting students and advancing critical research



UCLA

In response to conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, many donors focused on students' need to adapt to distance learning, access for students from underrepresented groups and timely research on global issues.

For the 2020–21 fiscal year, UCLA received more than 75,000 gifts, nearly 95% of which were less than \$10,000. Donors made 34,680 online gifts, and 24,353 alumni gave back to their alma mater. The campus also received 84 gifts of \$1 million or more.

“From meeting immediate needs to seeding recovery and rejuvenation, UCLA’s diversity of donors and their passions and gifts are sustaining and advancing our invaluable work,” said Rhea Turteltaub, UCLA’s vice chancellor for external affairs. “Thanks to their generous support, students, faculty and the campus stand ready to help society reemerge from the pandemic stronger than ever.”

Job hunting in the COVID economy



Meiko Arquillos

Amid the pandemic and the uncertainties regarding the future of work, the UCLA Career Center has re-imagined how to assist students in this new virtual world. For instance, while other universities have canceled their career fairs, UCLA redesigned its event to span several days online, starting with a general informational session. After that initial session, students can sign up for one-on-one video appointments with employers. The follow-up meeting can be purely informational or can serve as a formal interview.

UCLA is also leading the rest of the University of California system in the number of employers registered at its virtual events. While other career centers have seen a decline in events and job offerings, the UCLA Career Center is thriving, scheduling multiple career fairs in various industries — from business consulting and management to engineering and technology — and registering almost double the number of employers at its events compared to the other UCs.

UCLA to establish archive on policing and mass incarceration in Los Angeles



Leroy Hamilton

UCLA scholars launched an ambitious initiative to create one of the nation's most diverse collections of materials related to policing and incarceration. The effort will collect, digitize and preserve a sustainable archive of data, testimonies, artifacts and police files for the next generation of research on racial and social justice.

"Archiving the Age of Mass Incarceration" is being funded in part by a three-year, \$3.65 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and it will bring together expertise from the UCLA Institute of American Cultures' four ethnic studies centers and their established connections to local advocacy groups.

The project builds off of the work of the award-winning [UCLA-based Million Dollar Hoods](#) research project, a community-driven initiative that began in 2016 to map the fiscal and human cost of mass incarceration in Los Angeles.

A COVID crisis comes to light



Ryan Young

In California, the people most disproportionately devastated by COVID-19 are Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, or NHPs. They are three times more likely to contract the disease as white people and nearly twice as likely to die.

But this is not only a story about health disparities between whites and racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. A deeper look at the data reveals that NHPs are suffering disproportionately compared not only to white people but also compared to other Asians. In fact, the infection and mortality rates for Pacific Islanders are alarmingly singular.

There are 1.4 million Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders living in the United States. In 11 of the 16 states that track their death rates separately from other Asians, NHPs are dying at the highest rates of any racial or ethnic group. For doctors, public health experts and, most importantly, the people in those communities, the questions are why, and what can be done?

At UCLA, a groundbreaking study on the tragic impact of COVID-19 on Pacific Islander communities may help researchers and clinicians better understand the virus's effects on this population and provide more focused treatment as the battle against the disease enters a decisive phase.

Men's water polo wins NCAA championship No. 119



Photo courtesy of Catharyn Hayne

The Bruins defeated their Trojan rivals in March to capture the NCAA title in men's water polo. Also this year, the men's basketball team took Bruins on a thrilling [ride to the Final Four](#), where they lost an instant classic to Gonzaga.

DataX initiative aims to broaden UCLA expertise in data and data science



iStock.com/golero

In September, UCLA announced the launch of DataX, a new campuswide initiative that will give UCLA students, research staff and faculty — whatever their scholarly concentration — the tools to incorporate data in their work, both at UCLA and in their careers beyond academia.

The initiative is being backed by an initial three-year, \$10 million commitment. One of the first manifestations of that investment will be a campuswide organizational structure called DataX Homeworld.

Through DataX Homeworld, UCLA will hire 18 new faculty members whose appointments will be shared with existing academic departments and will create six interdisciplinary DataX cluster courses on topics of societal or scientific importance that will be accessible to students without extensive technical backgrounds. The campus also will support 18 new interdisciplinary postdoctoral fellowships, as well as graduate student researchers and research working groups.

UC teams with Indigenous scholars to recast history of the California missions



As part of a UCLA-led grant program called critical mission studies, Native scholars and community members are bringing their lived experiences and ancestral histories to bear on a project that is rewriting the history of California's missions.

They seek to shine a light on the brutality and inhumanity experienced by Native people at California's missions during Spanish colonization and beyond. To tell truths about trauma, enslavement, genocide and abuse. The truth around centuries of intentional obfuscations. Truth about the ongoing impact of settler colonialism.

A history of LGBTQ milestones



As part of its 25th anniversary, the UCLA LGBTQ Campus Resource Center created a timeline of important events in the campus's queer and trans history. Center interns Mika Baumgardner and Arlene Reynolds worked on this project with Al Aubin and Kaya Foster, who are both part of the Lambda Alumni Association. The timeline celebrates moments that show how much things have changed for the LGBTQ community at UCLA and how people at UCLA have shaped history.

Also: [For a bellwether of progress in LGBTQ rights, look to UCLA's Williams Institute](#)

A new day in Westwood



Brett Affrunti

Although the name UCLA is recognized around the world, the university is intrinsically linked with one place: Westwood Village. Developed in 1929 by the Janss Investment Company, which sold the state the land on which to build the campus at a bargain price, the neighborhood holds a fond place in Bruin memories.

Changes are afoot that could maybe — just maybe — enable the village to evolve into a lively, college-friendly, 21st-century neighborhood. They range from the pandemic-induced loosening of city restrictions on outdoor dining to the Metro Purple Line stop coming to the intersection of Westwood and Wilshire boulevards. The Hammer Museum at UCLA is remodeling to become more inviting. UCLA is transforming the historic Crest Westwood Theatre south of Wilshire into the Nimoy Theater for live performances. And the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games are coming in 2028.

UCLA-led study reveals ‘hidden costs’ of being Black in the United States



iStock.com/FlamingoImages

A woman grips her purse tightly as you approach. A store manager follows you because you look “suspicious.” You enter a high-end restaurant, and the staff assume you’re applying for a job. You’re called on in work meetings only when they’re talking about diversity.

The indignities and humiliations Black men — even those who have “made it” — regularly endure have long been seen as part and parcel of life in the United States among the Black community, a sort of “Black tax” that takes a heavy toll on physical and mental health.

A UCLA-led study reveals these “hidden costs” of being Black in America. Researchers who analyzed a national sample of the views of Black men and white men found that Black men of all income levels reported experiencing higher levels of discrimination than their white counterparts.

“Black men face constant experiences of discrimination and disappointment when they try to contribute. They are treated like criminals in a society where they often are not allowed to achieve their full potential,” said the study’s co-senior author, Vickie Mays, a professor of psychology in the UCLA College and of health policy and management at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.

Research suggests ending eviction moratoriums led to spikes in COVID cases and deaths



tap10/123rf

Research by a UCLA-led team has determined that the number of COVID-19 cases and the number of deaths from the disease both increased dramatically after states lifted eviction moratoriums that had been in place to protect people who were struggling to make rent payments during the pandemic.

The study found that the number of COVID-19 cases doubled and the number of deaths attributable to the disease increased fivefold in the four-month period after eviction moratoriums expired.

Those figures suggest that during the summer of 2020, there were 433,700 more COVID-19 cases and 10,700 more deaths in the U.S. than there would have been had moratoriums continued.

UCLA establishes Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies



UCLA

In a move that defies a national trend toward diminishing higher-education language instruction, UCLA has renewed its commitment to languages by establishing the Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies, or ELTS.

The new department brings together the existing departments of Germanic languages, French and Francophone studies, Italian and Scandinavian, but aims to offer a wider and more holistic course of study, focusing on the breadth of languages and cultures across Europe.

The term “transcultural” emphasizes shared European roots and an expanded focus on the perspectives of filmmakers, writers and theorists from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and elsewhere. This approach allows for a more pointed, rigorous and comprehensive understanding of history and a more accurate contextualization of the European experience and legacy in the world.



Show Imaging

A quintet of roboticists at the UCLA Samueli School of Engineering are doing the early work to realize robots with an entirely different feel, literally — softer, more pliable and better suited for engaging with people.

“We build machines based on the materials we have, and steel and rubber have actually worked very well,” says Qibing Pei, professor of materials science and engineering. “However, we’re also limited by our materials, and certain jobs are impossible for robots [that exist] right now. So people like me are looking at developing soft materials and devices.”

Today’s innovators envision soft robots capable of performing tasks that benefit human health and well-being and that advance the discovery of the unknown. Pei and his colleagues are beginning to figure out what those soft robots will be made of, and how they will move.

Increasingly frequent wildfires linked to human-caused climate change UCLA-led study finds



NASA

Research by scientists from UCLA and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory strengthens the case that climate change has been the main cause of the growing amount of land in the western U.S. that has been destroyed by large wildfires over the past two decades.

Rong Fu, a UCLA professor of atmospheric and oceanic sciences and the study's corresponding author, said the trend is likely to worsen in the years ahead. "I am afraid that the record fire seasons in recent years are only the beginning of what will come, due to climate change, and our society is not prepared for the rapid increase of weather contributing to wildfires in the American West."

The dramatic increase in destruction caused by wildfires is borne out by U.S. Geological Survey data. In the 17 years from 1984 to 2000, the average burned area in 11 western states was 1.69 million acres per year. For the next 17 years, through 2018, the average burned area was approximately 3.35 million acres per year. And in 2020, according to a National Interagency Coordination Center report, the amount of land burned by wildfires in the West reached 8.8 million acres — an area larger than the state of Maryland.

The remarkable achievements of Jimmy LuValle, Olympian and groundbreaking chemist



UCLA Athletics

While he may be remembered for crossing the finish line at the Olympics just 0.3 seconds behind two other runners, other numbers reveal more about Jimmy LuValle, who died in 1993 at age 80. He authored 35 papers that appeared in peer-reviewed scientific journals and held eight patents.

As we honor distinguished African Americans during Black History Month, the UCLA Division of Physical Sciences and the UCLA Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry have established a fund to support the department's efforts to advance equity, diversity and inclusion, especially through supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds. To recognize his embodiment of true Bruin spirit, they have named it the James. E. LuValle Fund for Excellence in Chemistry. The division and the department will each match donations to the fund.

To go far, go together: UCLA's Academic Advancement Program



Jon Stich

Created in 1971, UCLA's Academic Advancement Program is the nation's largest university-based student diversity program.

"In the beginning, things were working pretty well in terms of outreach, but retention became a big concern," says Charles Alexander, AAP director and associate vice provost for student diversity. "At that time, students were getting in, but they weren't staying. You can recruit people, but if they're not prepared to do the work or they're not able to do the work, then you have to provide some support."

As a result, AAP is an expansive program with a multifaceted mission. The program advocates and facilitates access for students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education through the Vice-Provost's Initiative for Pre-College Scholars program. A partnership between UCLA and Los Angeles County school districts, VIPS assists high school students in becoming competitively eligible for admission to UCLA and other top universities. In addition, AAP's Center for Community College Partnerships works with California community colleges to assist transfer students with academic preparation and competitiveness.

Animals laugh too, UCLA analysis suggests



iStock.com/Ian Dyball

Human laughter is common, but it's a somewhat mysterious part of our evolution. It's clear to evolutionary scholars that we laugh as a part of play, signaling our cooperation or friendliness. But how did laughter evolve? And are humans the only ones who do it?

Not a chance: Animals laugh too, researchers have observed. In an article published in the journal *Bioacoustics*, graduate student Sasha Winkler and Professor Greg Bryant take a closer look at the phenomenon of laughter across the animal kingdom.

They found such vocal play behavior documented in at least 65 species. That list includes a variety of primates, domestic cows and dogs, foxes, seals, and mongooses, as well as three bird species, including parakeets and Australian magpies.

UCLA alumnus Ardem Patapoutian wins 2021 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine



Courtesy of Scripps Research Institute (Patapoutian), Andrew Brodhead (Imbens)

Two scholars with connections to UCLA won Nobel Prizes in 2021.

Alumnus Ardem Patapoutian (pictured at left), a professor of neuroscience at the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California, and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator, shared the prize in physiology or medicine with David Julius, a UC San Francisco professor of physiology, for their discoveries of receptors in the body that respond to temperature and touch.

Patapoutian, who was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1967, came to the United States in 1986 and earned his bachelor's degree in molecular, cell and developmental biology at UCLA in 1990. His advisor was the late Judith Lengyel, herself a UCLA alumna, who was a professor at UCLA from 1976 to 2004. It was as a UCLA undergraduate that Patapoutian began working in a research laboratory.

Former UCLA faculty member [Guido Imbens, right, shared half the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences with Joshua Angrist, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Now a Stanford University professor, Imbens taught at UCLA from 1997 to 2001.](#)

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences presented the award to Imbens and Angrist for “their methodological contributions to the analysis of causal relationships.” The other half of the prize went to David Card of UC Berkeley “for his empirical contributions to labour economics.”

‘I could be killed at any time’: The anguish of being wrongfully convicted of murder



David Greenwald/The People's Vanguard of Davis

Maurice Caldwell spent 20 years in prison before his wrongful conviction for a 1990 murder in San Francisco was finally overturned.

Paul Abramson, a UCLA professor of psychology who was hired as an expert by Caldwell's legal team to assess the psychological harm Caldwell suffered, conducted 20 extensive interviews with Caldwell between 2015 and 2020, in addition to interviewing prison correctional officers and reviewing court hearings and decisions, depositions, psychological testing results and experts' reports.

In a paper published in the peer-reviewed *Wrongful Conviction Law Review*, Abramson provides an overview of the case and a comprehensive psychological analysis detailing the devastating and ongoing effects of Caldwell's wrongful conviction and imprisonment. He also examines the historically contentious relations between police and communities of color and asks why corrupt and abusive officers rarely face punishment for their actions.

Visual artist and UCLA Arts staff member Verlena Johnson paints love, Blackness and divinity



Verlena Johnson

Architecture and urban design students at UCLA know Verlena Johnson as an academic advisor and student affairs officer who helps them balance their course loads and makes sure they have the credits to graduate.

But outside of her day job, Johnson is a mixed-media visual artist who creates vivid acrylic and watercolor paintings filled with symbolism. She has a spiritual practice that incorporates Reiki and meditation, has published a children's book starring her 11-year-old son, Kai, and has been active in promoting diversity on college campuses.

Johnson's paintings are often self-portraits, and many feature her son. She weaves in symbols that relate to her African ancestry, such as Adinkra symbols from Ghana, which are often printed onto fabrics or carved into pottery and carry proverbial meaning.

"I remember being in sculpture school as an undergraduate and one of the students, or several of them, asked me why all my subjects were Black. And I looked at them and I said, 'Well, why are all your subjects white?' To which of course they didn't even have a response or answer. But because most of my portraiture are self-portraits, of course they're going to be Black," she said. Johnson says she recognizes the power of representation and loves celebrating Blackness and Black lives.

Red planet, Golden opportunity: Mapping Mars for mankind



NASA/JPL-Caltech/ASU/MSSS

UCLA expertise is making a difference on board both the Curiosity and Perseverance rovers, while taking the 2020s concept of “remote work” to extreme lengths. Communicating across 140 million miles with Perseverance, which soft-landed on Mars in spectacular fashion in February 2021, Professor David Paige is leading an experiment to collect soil samples that could ultimately help answer the seminal question about the planet: Is there, or has there ever been, life on Mars?

Exposing inequalities: The underlying connection between COVID and AIDS



NIAID/Flickr

In an opinion piece published in *Ms. Magazine* in March 2020, Brad Sears, founding executive director of the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, predicted how COVID-19 would harm marginalized communities and offered suggestions for how to end the cycle of injustice he'd lived through during the AIDS epidemic.

Sears has made lots of observations in the almost two years since his piece was published. Overall, he's not surprised by much of what has played out.

"COVID-19 quickly settled in, like HIV, to disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, including the Black community, Latinx communities, LGBTQ communities, as well as immigrant and low-income communities in particular," said Sears, who is also the associate dean of public interest law at UCLA School of Law.

UCLA cook tackles Mount Everest (sort of)



Sean Brenner/UCLA

In August, Jesus Leon, a cook with UCLA Dining, ran up and down the Culver City stairs 91 times to complete an Everesting challenge, a grueling endeavor that requires athletes to bike, hike, climb or run the equivalent of summitting Mount Everest — the world's tallest mountain — in a single workout. That's more than 29,000 feet (!) of elevation gain. Elevation gain — which is calculated by the total amount climbed — distance, moving time and average pace are all tracked from start to finish using an app. Though there's no time limit, Leon will not be allowed to sleep for what he estimates will be the next 30 to 36 hours.

What did you do this year?

[UCLA's 2021 commencement celebrates returning to and redefining normal](#)



After more than a year of virtual and hybrid classes that most students experienced remotely, UCLA welcomed the class of 2021 back to campus to celebrate an important, albeit distanced, milestone.

Starting June 10, UCLA began bringing more than 9,000 students back to campus over the course of six days to have the iconic graduation experience of crossing a stage in cap and gown while their names are announced and their families cheer. With the returning students came the buoyant communal atmosphere so missed at 2020's virtual commencements. — Graduates came carrying babies or pushing grandparents in wheelchairs; draped in flower garlands and holding flags from countries all over the world; wearing mortarboards — and masks — decorated for the occasion.
