

# EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2020 • ISSUE 3

Welcome to the Fall edition of our EXL Newsletter.

In education and life, we believe all challenges contain opportunities for discovery and learning. In this issue, we are proud to showcase examples of how our faculty have responded to our current restrictions by innovating their programs and how students interact with content and each other. We offer some insights on effective Distance Learning and a preview of Agents of Change: The Civil Rights initiative, created by Atty. Olu Orange, that will launch in 2021.

As we look forward to 2021 with Hope and Courage, I am continually inspired by the passion and resilience of our undergraduates. With Student Spotlight, I am honored to showcase a representational group of these exceptional people. Finally, some thoughts on the transformational power of Gratitude, surely at the Heart of the Holiday Season.

Wishing you much joy and a healthy and happy New Year,



Tammy Anderson  
Associate Dean, Office of Experiential and Applied Learning



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To learn more, visit our website:  
<https://dornsife.usc.edu/exl/>

## A REFINED VISION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN COVID 19

When faced with catastrophes and disaster throughout history, humans have transformed challenges into opportunities. The proven benefit of societal crisis is that it reveals vulnerabilities, exposes imbalance, bias, and injustice and triggers dynamic new insights which inspire transformative innovations.

Due to COVID 19, education is now experiencing this disruption. Traditional pedagogy, methods, practices, and social behaviors rooted in site-based learning no longer apply. Our shared situation requires us to "think different" about how we learn in the current situation we all share.



While often associated with travel, Experiential Learning is not solely defined by Place; it lives and thrives in Relationships. At EXL, we believe the context of Learning is more relevant than the Content of Learning; we nurture and value connecting our students to accomplished individuals whose counsel and mentorship inspire and motivate them.

In these days of physical separation, we have the tools to create and maintain productive and fulfilling relationships of surprising depth and intimacy. When used well, the results of digital Experiential Learning can be surprising and rewarding.

### Student Spotlight

#### Connect-123 Virtual International Internship

Jason Wong

Major: Physics

Placement: Biophysics in Ireland

*"I was placed in a biophysics lab in Ireland, which was indeed the perfect fit for me. Once the internship started, the staff continued to check over each student's experiences and make sure the employers were giving them adequate attention. My employer was wonderful."*

*"I've always had a mental block in jumpstarting my career; how could I apply for jobs that required experience without having experience first? This position provided me with the launchpad I needed, and in addition to learning laboratory skills and procedures, gave me the confidence to venture further."*



## KEYS TO EFFECTIVE DISTANCE LEARNING

*An Opinion piece in the New York Times, "Kids Can Learn to Love Learning, Even Over Zoom" By Adam Grant and Allison Sweet Grant offers valuable insights into how to make distance learning effective and rewarding.*

A classic study found that world-class artists, athletes, musicians and scientists typically had an early coach or teacher who made learning fun and motivated them to hone their skills. An analysis of 125 studies of nearly 200,000 students found that the more the students enjoyed learning, the better they performed from elementary school all the way to college. Students with high levels of intellectual curiosity get better grades than their peers, even after controlling for their IQ and work ethic.

Three important principles are **Mystery**, **Exploration** and **Meaning** and they're especially important in online classes.

**Curiosity** begins with a mystery: a gap between what we understand and what we want to find out. Behavioral economists argue that an information gap is like an itch. We can't resist the temptation to scratch it. Information gaps can motivate us to tear through a whodunit novel, sit glued to the TV during a quiz show or stare at a crossword puzzle for hours. Great teachers approach their classes the same way: They open with a mystery and turn their students into detectives, sending them off to gather clues.

If gaps in knowledge are the seeds of curiosity, **Exploration** is the sunlight. Hundreds of studies with thousands of students have shown that when science, technology and math courses include active learning, students are less likely to fail and more likely to excel. A key feature of active learning is interaction. But too many online classes have students listening to one-way monologues instead of having two-way dialogues. Too many students are sitting in front of a screen when they could be exploring out in the world.



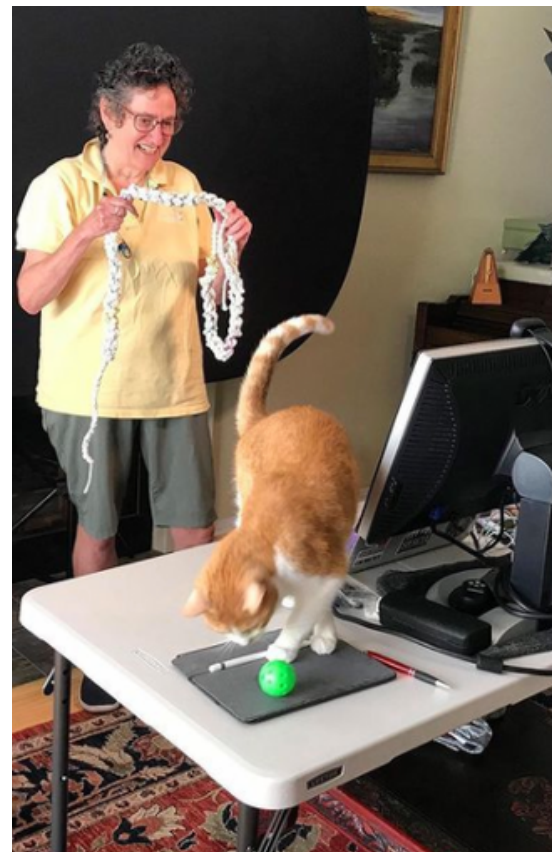


When field trips aren't possible, teachers can still take students on virtual tours and send them off to do hands-on learning projects. In the past few months, our kids have been lucky to learn from social studies teachers who challenged them to survey people about their stereotypes of the elderly, computer science teachers who invited them to design their own amusement parks, and drama teachers who had them film their own documentaries.

**"At every every level of education, when students see the real-world consequences of what they are studying, they're more likely to stay engaged. The purpose of school is not just to impart knowledge; it is to instill a love of learning."**

In online schools and hybrid classrooms, that love of learning doesn't have to be lost.

Psychologists find that when college students have a purpose for learning beyond the self, they spend more time on tedious math problems and less time playing video games and watching viral videos. And high schoolers get better grades in STEM courses after being randomly assigned to reflect on how the material would help them help others. That's a question every teacher can ask and answer, even over Zoom: Why does this content matter? When the answer to this question is clear, students are less likely to doze through class with one eye open.





## SIX BENEFITS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

One of EXL's community program partners, My Voice Matters, uses student interest and inquiry-based learning activates and sustain MS and HS student interest in South LA schools in the distance learning context. MVM identifies six benefits of distance learning that extend beyond the journalism work of MVM students into positive life-long learning methods and practices that transfer to other subjects.

### **Engagement**

Engaging and holding student attention while at home is arguably the primary challenge of distance learning. Grounding the learning process in student interest increases engagement and provides the foundation for the introduction and integration of academic content.

### **Relevance**

The distractions of home study increase the susceptibility of a students' challenge of the relevance of course content. By first exploring the students' personal life history, culture and interests, teachers can bridge student experience to course content within a meaningful and personal context.

### **Teamwork**

One of the major discoveries of the examination of distance learning is the effectiveness of working virtually in teams and breakouts following instruction and discussion periods. The MVM journalism based "Beats" method that groups students based on content themes inspires, motivates and sustains interest.

### **Accountability**

Working in teams increases motivation and accountability because students must work with and relay on and be accountable to each other to accomplish their Beat goals by the publication deadline.



## Transference

Research, communication, writing, editing, and presentation skills that are the core of the MVM Method are effectively transferred to other subject areas, increasing comprehension and retention of content within a personally relevant context.

## Empathy

Recent studies find that Zoom Fatigue is based in our constant visual search for emotional cues in facial movements that have become self-conscious in Zoom. This inhibits the assimilation and retention of information and produces significant optical and physical fatigue. Conversely and surprising in this text & social media culture, telephone conversations have proved highly effective in conveying empathy and an authentic sense of caring and connection so needed by students in this time of enforced distance.



## Student Spotlight

### Connect-123 Virtual International Internship

Jack Damiani  
Major: Computational Neuroscience  
Placement: Engineering in Barcelona

*"In the midst of a pandemic, Connect-123 was able to pair me with valuable work experience across the world. I am working for a nanotechnology company in Barcelona, and the experience of learning how nanotechnology reactors work and how a start-up technology company functions has been invaluable. I have been a part of a vital process in growing their company, and with the wonderful advisors at Connect-123, I have been able to make the most of it. I have been able to make productive use of my time as well as learn and grow in a field I'm interested in."*



## **FACULTY RESPONSE TO COVID 19**

EXL faculty embraced a steep learning curve and learned so much during the change from teaching onsite/on travel to online. They understood the need to add technology and guest speakers to a zoom context and students were receptive and supportive to online classes.

Our current situation requires that educators Re-Imagine / Create / Innovate in our practice. Recent studies have found that projects based in virtual travel have proved very effective in producing a depth of learning and builds strong project making, teamwork and communication skills. EXL also has identified a desire and benefit for more faculty to have rich and inspiring off campus, travel-based experiences for academic and professional enrichment and development. We continue to produce a robust schedule of Experiential Learning programs for our students. Here are some examples:

### **FACULTY LED OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS (FLP)**

When courses were moved online in the Spring, professors who were leading Maymesters found creative ways to make the most of their virtual learning experiences. For example, bringing in guest speakers who students may have not been able to hear from while abroad because of the logistics of travel and creating quarantine diaries to help students reflect on how COVID-19 intertwined with their topic of study.



*For more information, contact Wendy Pederson  
cook@usc.edu*



### **D.C. PROGRAM**

The Washington D.C. Program brought experiential elements of DC and the policy world to LA. A 3-part conversation with pollster and political analyzer Dr. Frank Luntz surrounding the 2020 presidential election. In the spring, a small cohort of students will travel to D.C. for its traditional program of online classes and internships at one of Washington's many policy-focused organizations, such as government agencies, NGOs, advocacy groups, think tanks, consulting firms, and congressional offices.

*For more information, contact Jeffrey Fields  
jrfields@usc.edu*



## JOINT EDUCATIONAL PROJECT (JEP)

JEP's student tutors worked alongside the Keck School of Medicine's "Care for the Caregiver" program to provide tutoring services to children of coronavirus health care providers. This fall the tutoring looks a bit different as student tutors have adapted to the new virtual learning environment. Students pre-recorded educational videos which are now available for students, parents and teachers can access at any time.

*For more information, contact Susan Harris  
scharris@usc.edu*



## PRISON EDUCATION PROJECT (PEP)

This fall, the USC Dornsife Prison Education Project (PEP) is offering six virtual classes-- including courses in Physics, Creative Writing, and Film Studies--in three Southern California correctional facilities, with a robust group of 40 undergraduate volunteers and nearly 20 graduate student and faculty volunteers. In September, PEP also launched "PEP Talks," a new virtual speaker series featuring scholars, activists, and clinicians exploring questions related to incarceration, public health, racism, education, and more.

*For more information, contact  
Kate Levin klevin@usc.edu or Nik De Dominic  
dedomini@usc.edu*

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (PE)

Although the all PE sports and activities classes as well as outdoor classes were cancelled this semester due to the pandemic, the mind-body and fitness programs within PE thrived within an online teaching modality.

*For more information, contact Steve Vankanegan  
vankaneg@usc.edu*



## STUDY ABROAD

Despite the coronavirus pandemic preventing students from studying abroad this fall, the Office of Overseas Studies is keeping students globally engaged. Overseas Studies arranged for 20 Dornsife students to be placed in credit-bearing virtual international internships with organizations in Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Dublin, Shanghai, and Sydney. In addition, the Overseas Studies staff organized a virtual study abroad fair and an Overseas Studies speaker series.



*For more information, contact Peter Hilton  
philton@usc.edu*



## TRIAL ADVOCACY

This semester, students in the Dornsife Trial Advocacy Program continued to develop their legal advocacy skills in structured virtual exercises and competitions. They compiled a remarkable record of tournament success while competing via Zoom at several tournaments around the country. The Program earned top-ten finishes in every tournament, as well as winning the George Floyd Memorial Tournament with an undefeated record after besting Harvard University in the final round. Program members also earned a total of fourteen individual awards throughout the competitions. Additionally, Program members furthered social justice causes by assisting with the Black Lives Matter class action lawsuit against the LAPD.

*For more information, visit [www.uscmocktrial.org](http://www.uscmocktrial.org)*

## USC CENTER FOR ACTIVE LEARNING IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CALIS)

Also a service-learning program, teaches International Relations to local middle and high schools and had to offer online classes this semester. TIRP teams (Teaching International Relations Program) created new materials in order to frame existing resources more squarely within the current context of the Black Lives Matter movement. The TIRP topic is equality & identity and are taking advantage of **Virtual TIRP** as a chance to innovate and collaborate in new ways.

*For more information, contact Teresa Hudock  
calis@usc.edu*

## MORE THAN A BUSINESS

In the fall of 2019, staff from the USC Dornsife Office of Experiential and Applied Learning along with faculty from USC Economics and Spanish Department were pleased to collaborate with OmniWorks and Union Bank and on a new initiative, "More Than a Business: Empowering Women, Securing Communities." Our goal - to close the gap of lack of financial and entrepreneurship training available to low-income women who have taken their talents and begun to turn them into fledgling start-ups. This semester, some 60 women participated in entrepreneurial workshops with our econ students providing assistance.

*For more information, contact Tammy Anderson  
tanderso@usc.edu*

## AGENTS OF CHANGE

The Civil Rights Advocacy Initiative weaves together direct action and a custom-tailored curriculum involving instructional collaboration between community activists, legal practitioners and government officials, USC faculty and classroom learning based upon real civil rights advocacy experiences. *Learn more about "Agents of Change" in this issue.*



## COMMUNITY SERVICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The community and the world are the learning destinations of adventure, discovery, connections, and relationships. The positive and enthusiastic student response to EXL programs highlights the critical importance of Relevance and Social Benefit to their USC experience. I am deeply inspired and moved by their passion and commitment to giving back and creating positive social change as a fundamental post of their education. At EXL, we believe meaningful learning is grounded in values that extend beyond personal benefits to those that also include others in your community.

### Student Spotlight

#### Connect-123 Virtual International Internship

Caroline Murphy

Major: Neuroscience

Placement: Environmental Intern in Australia

*"The Connect-123 team handled the unexpected changes that came with COVID-19 with grace and flexibility. Although the Summer of 2020 turned out differently than planned, I still had the opportunity to work for and connect with professionals on the other side of the world to complete an impactful internship."*





## A RETURN TO EMPATHY

In conclusion, I share some insights from Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology MIT Professor and best-selling author, Sherri Turkle on life and learning in the times of COVID 19.

"Solitude supports and sustains creativity and prepares us for relationships with other people. Previously to COVID, Solitude was time alone within the hum of contemporary society. However, the creativity of solitude does not come easily when you are afraid.

"In countless zoom calls, I was missing the neuroscience within the shape of a smile or a look of an eye that gives me affirmation and comfort. We are in Liminal times when old rules don't work and new ones have yet to emerge.

"When I offered my students telephone office hours versus zoom dates, they were grateful. It was as if I was offering something personal, intimate, and generous. It allows you to really focus on the tiny little changes in voice, and sound and pitch and connect more deeply.

**"When we had all the Time in the world to be with our machines, we yearn for the warmth and embrace of the human."**



## Student Spotlight

### Connect-123 Virtual International Internship

Lauren Mattice

Major: Philosophy, Politics, and Law/Cinema and Media Studies

Placement: Journalism in Dublin

*"Being able to work with Connect-123 for a remote internship felt like a reprieve from pandemic concerns. The application process really focused on what we wanted to do and how we could best put our foot forward in our careers. I ended up taking a chance on an internship in a field I wanted to learn more about but wasn't quite sure if it was something I really wanted to pursue. I ended up interning in Dublin remotely, and everyone from my supervisors on-site to the Connect-123 team was there to make sure I had everything I needed to succeed. The opportunity is unlike anything you could do just within your university, and I highly recommend that every student, regardless of interests, apply."*



## AGENTS OF CHANGE: THE PATH FROM PROTEST TO POLICY

We share a world infected with division, polarity, and opposition; we are subjected to a daily firehose of raw data that is often political, economically, or socially prejudiced plagued with binary thinking, and emotional judgments. This condition induces fear, anxiety, emotional paralysis, and sometimes panic at all levels of society. How did we get here? How did *"We the people"* become *"I the individual, on my time and terms?"*

More than ever in contemporary history, it is time to see ourselves in the needs of others, to accept that our survival means accepting that we are our brother's keeper and most important, that these values are the cornerstones of social justice we memorialize in the laws that unite and protect us as citizens and a nation. From within this culture of toxic polarity, political protest, systemic racism, implicit bias, and cultural division we ask ourselves, *"What is the path from Voice to Agency to Action, from Protest to Policy, by which we can achieve meaningful and lasting change?"*



At the Department of Experiential & Applied Learning (EXL), we believe that the most important experiences we provide students is a real-world context for learning. Dornsife College's "Agents of Change: The Civil Rights Advocacy Initiative" integrates the students' community-based advocacy into pedagogy by weaving together direct action and a custom-tailored experiential curriculum.

**"If we want to bring about real change, then the choice isn't between protest and politics. We have to do both. We have to mobilize to raise awareness, and we have to organize and cast our ballots to make sure that we elect candidates who will act on reform."**

Created and Directed by Prof. Olu K. Orange, "Agents of Change" established a first-in-the-country undergraduate civil rights clinic within which students are participating in a sequence of three civil rights advocacy divisions: (a) governmental entity; (b) community organization; and (c) legal. Atty. Kath Rogers, is AOC's Program Manager overseeing the day-to-day program operations, working with faculty to design class curriculum, and developing/maintaining relationships with community partners.

Dornsife College and EXL are fully committed and engaged to feature the civil rights advocacy learning experience in both residency i.e. on-campus and community-based learning experiences and will therefore base the program in the EXL Lab.

The Spring 2021 program will involve instructional collaboration between community activists, journalists, legal practitioners, government officials, and USC faculty with classroom and community-based learning experiences. These experiences are based upon real civil rights advocacy so students can understand the systems and protocols of meaningful and sustained social justice and change for individuals and their communities.

## AGENTS OF CHANGE: CIVIL RIGHTS INITIATIVE

**"The more specific we can make demands for criminal justice and police reform, the harder it will be for elected officials to just offer lip service to the cause and then fall back into business-as-usual once protests have gone away."**

**- President Barack Obama**

USC is uniquely positioned to promptly prepare, disperse and support its students to function as Agents of Change working with community-based stakeholders in the City of Los Angeles and participating cities nationally to research, structure and implement circumspect solutions to civil rights issues in systemic and individual contexts.

In addition to its work with USC undergrads, EXL and Olu Orange recognize the importance of instilling an understanding in youth of how social justice issues become law through community action, legislation, and sustained support throughout the community.



**"A nation is a multitude of rational beings united by the love of things in common."**

**- St Augustine**

To achieve this, AOC incorporates a parallel program for high school students produced and directed in partnership with My Voice Matters (MVM) that brings them into the process of understanding, exploring and activating issues of social justice and community action. Founded by Tara Guber, MVM activates and supports student Voice and Agency using the essential tools of journalism and reporting: asking questions, doing effective interviews, connecting with your subject, doing and verifying research, writing, editing, and revising working in teams, accepting productive criticism, working to schedules and deadlines and presenting your work to the class, school and public through a variety of media, all within an experiential learning context.

Societal change begins with the individuals that compose it. Responsibility for creating a more inclusive and compassionate community and world begins with each of us, in our thoughts and deeds. We must discern what is exciting from what is important, marry passion with reason, listen to each other with empathy, compassion and tolerance, foster conversations, not confrontations. We must create community and seek resolutions by building coalitions, uniting under shared values and mutual interest. It is time to solve problems together and accept that difference does not equal enemies. These values lie at the heart of the positive personal and social evolution that is before us: We are all Agents of Change.

**"A great student not only has the reason and education, but a moral compass to do what's right with his or her gifts. It's not just important to be smart, you have to know what's right and what's wrong."**

**- Martin Luther King**



## LITERARY JOURNEYS THROUGH LITERAL LANDSCAPES : THE JOY OF BOOKPACKING AT USC

- Andrew Chater,  
Adjunct Professor of the Practice of English, USC Dornsife



Philip Marlowe approaches the front door of an imposing Beverly Hills mansion, looking sharp in a power-blue suit. "I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars." So begins Raymond Chandler's classic LA novel, *The Big Sleep*.

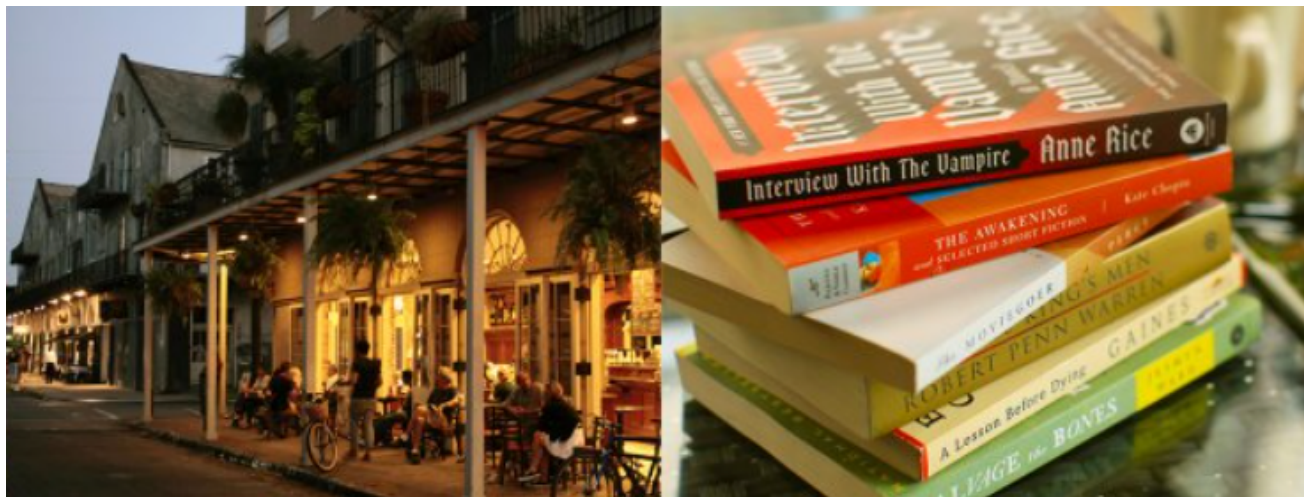
This past February, I had the pleasure of leading a group of USC students on a journey in Marlowe's footsteps. We visited Greystone Mansion in Los Angeles, the inspiration for the Sternwood Mansion in the novel. We stood on the terrace overlooking the sprawling city, and contemplated the moral maze of Marlowe's LA.

My Los Angeles class is one of several Bookpacking classes I lead at USC, inviting students to explore novels not just on the page but 'on the road,' using novels as guidebooks to people and places, past and present. Week by week the students read a different LA novel, and then head out and explore the neighborhoods described in the books - from Boyle Heights to Watts to Venice - discovering the myriad cultures of this complex city.

**It's a fascinating form of literary adventure that takes a holistic approach to the humanities, and it's a wonderful example of experiential learning at USC.**

Each Spring in May / June, I offer a popular Maymester class which takes students for a month on the road to New Orleans and across Southern Louisiana. We read *Interview With The Vampire*, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, *The Awakening* - a host of classic and contemporary New Orleans novels, enjoyed whilst exploring one of the most vibrant and culturally exciting pockets of America. We meet fascinating people and eat glorious food and dance in the streets, and we blog and share our experiences on the Bookpackers social feeds.

Things had to change this year, of course. Soon after our visit to Greystone Mansion, the LA class moved online, as did my 2020 New Orleans Maymester. But it turns out virtual Bookpacking can be joyful and rewarding too. We had a Creole chef cooking a crawfish étouffée on Zoom, and a couple of jazz musicians from Preservation Hall joining us for an online jam.



Bookpacking is transformative because it stimulates and encourages empathy. Literature and travel are inherently empathetic disciplines; combine them, and the benefits are exponential.

The Bookpacking experience invites us out of our narrow boxes and takes us on a journey through other cultures and mindsets; it helps us understand how different people live and think. In this age of stark division, we need these kinds of empathetic learning more than ever. Nothing gives me more joy than to see my students breaking bread with Cajun musicians, listening to folk songs in old French as the rain lashes down on the Bayou.

This is more than a literary adventure: it's a lesson in life.

*Andrew Chater is an award-winning British filmmaker and presenter, on faculty at USC since 2017. Follow along with Bookpackers at USC at [bookpackers.com](http://bookpackers.com), or on Instagram @bookpackers.*

## Student Spotlight

### Connect-123 Virtual International Internship

Anne Gao  
Major: Applied and Computational  
Mathematics  
Placement: Digital Marketing in Shanghai

*"My internship experience has been pretty great so far. I've been working on small projects that I can work on in my own time. Timing has been very flexible even though there is a 12 hour time difference. They allow me to work with different projects to try different things I'm interested in. I'm very thankful to my supervisor, the team there, my peers and those at Connect-123"*



## SPEC LAB EXPERIENTIAL INNOVATIONS

**-Dr. Megan Becker**  
**Co-Director, Security and Political Economy (SPEC) Lab**

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited experiential learning for undergraduates in many ways while creating opportunities through innovative virtual learning programming. Dornsife professors Megan Becker, Benjamin Graham, and Jonathan Markowitz 'went virtual' with their undergraduate research lab, the Security and Political Economy (SPEC) Lab this spring. The purpose of the SPEC Lab is to recruit students from diverse backgrounds and give them the tools necessary to engage in impactful policy-relevant research on the interrelated causes of war and economic development. The lab has received national attention for its innovative approach to undergraduate research and continues its leadership by moving its programming into the virtual space.

This summer, with the support of Dornsife College, the lab provided an intensive 8-week summer research experience for 25 USC undergraduates. Funding from the National Science Foundation and Department of Defense enabled the participation of 15 undergraduates from nine additional institutions. Students worked in teams of six on faculty-led research projects on topics including the causes and effects of military and economic coercion, the role of natural resources in inciting civil war, and the determinants of success for foreign-funded education programs in conflict zones.



In addition to their research activities, students participated in extensive trainings in research design and applied data science; the materials from these trainings include over 40 new instructional videos. Participants had valuable networking opportunities through an outside speaker series with visitors and alumni working for organizations including RAND, the House Financial Services Committee, Amazon, Boston Consulting Group, and Accountability Counsel. While balancing trainings, workshops, and intensive research, students still found time to socially connect through group study sessions and Zoom.

Three projects were completed by the end of the summer and two new research articles, one co-authored with five USC undergraduates, were submitted to top-tier academic outlets. Building on this year's success, a similar program is slated for next summer with the students from other universities to be hosted in-person at USC, public health guidelines permitting.

The SPEC Lab continues to make progress in the current academic year on five active research projects. A new team, the Consulting for Social Change Project, led by Professor Graham, is working on data collection with the Lewis Registry on police misconduct and assisting the National Foster Youth Initiative with focus groups to improve participant experience. For more information on the SPEC Lab's work, visit [uscspec.org](http://uscspec.org).



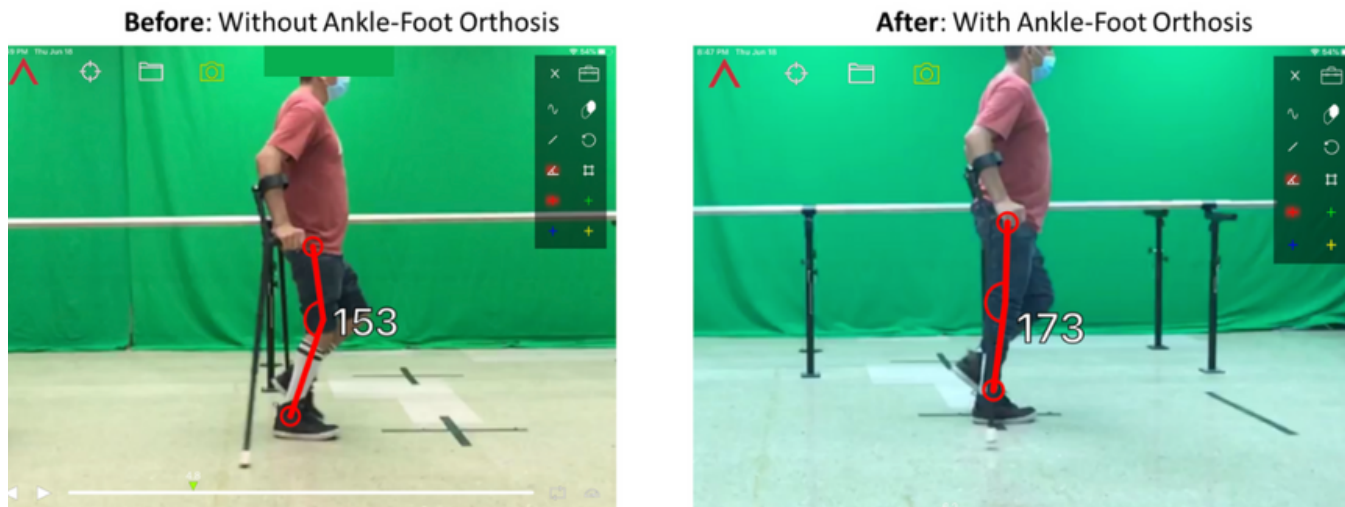
## BIO-MECHANICS INNOVATION IN COVID TIMES

- Dr. Jill McNitt-Gray  
**Director of the USC Biomechanics Research Laboratory**

The VULCAM system by Vulcan Vision, previously used by the USC Biomechanics Research lab to track improvements in performance of Olympic and Paralympic athletes in the field, was adapted using two iPhones and an iPad to evaluate gait modifications before and after patient use foot and ankle orthosis developed by RRI Orthotics and Prosthetics (Figure 1). The students worked together with RRI through Zoom to set-up a protocol to record, assess, and compare an individual's movement mechanics during a timed Get-up-and-go Test commonly used by clinicians to evaluate clinical interventions. This functional assessment test involves rising from a chair, walking 3 meters, returning to the chair and sitting down.

*"I'm very grateful for having had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Jill McNitt-Gray. ...It was an amazing experience having a class based on real-life applications and approaches that we can use in the future. ...I appreciate that we are already able to apply the knowledge we've gained to the project we are currently working on in HBIO 439. It is so special to us that we are able to participate in a project that will help clinicians assess problems and develop treatments by providing them with new technologies..."*

- Annelisse Montes and Osnat Barazani



***What happens when you mix together student scientists, engineers, innovative technology, and clinicians and add COVID-19 social distancing? You create innovative experiential learning opportunities that bring together student superpowers to translate science and technology knowledge into productive practice!***



Through a HBIO 439 Bioenergetics and Human Performance course in Dornsife and a BME 490 Directed Research in Viterbi, undergraduate students with backgrounds in human biology and biomedical engineering are exploring how concepts they are learning translate and apply to the real world. Undergraduate students mentored by Dr. Jill McNitt-Gray, Director of the USC Biomechanics Research Laboratory, drive their own inquiries through problem-based learning. Students select a project of interest to them and use fundamental concepts, emerging technology, and rigorous problem-solving processes to better understand problems they encounter. Through these learn-by-doing experiences, students integrate and embody their knowledge of physics, math, biology, and quantitative skills learned in biomechanics with meaningful actions to improve the health-related quality of life of others.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the USC Biomechanics Research Lab, Rancho Research Institute Think Tank at the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, and Vulcan Vision addressed a unique challenge: to conceive and implement a plan to assess gait and evaluate improvements in movement mechanics resulting from the use of personalized orthotics and prosthetics.

## Student Spotlight

### Connect-123 Virtual International Internship

Alyssa Delarosa  
Major: Psychology  
Placement: Human Rights Intern in South Africa

*"Working remotely for a nonprofit organization in Cape Town, South Africa, proved challenging due to different time zones but I was so grateful for the support of Connect-123 as they provided continuous support throughout the semester through virtual workshops, social events, and check-ins. Knowing that I had a solid support system through Connect-123 and hearing testimonies from other peer interns at Connect-123 events, helped me realize that I was not alone. Overall, I had a very rewarding experience as a remote intern and had the amazing "plus" of Connect-123 supporting me every step of my journey."*



## **THE SILVER LINING OF PHILANTHROPY**

**- Ani Manavyan**  
**Corporate and Foundation Relations Director, Dornsife College**

In my conversations with current and potential donors, I often talk about the power and impact of giving and how the act of generosity can trigger an unexpected sequence of opportunities, courage, transformation, growth and expansion. I'm always gratified to witness how someone's act of kindness turns into a life-changing opportunity for the recipient of the gift and in the process, transforms their life as well.

This year, I had the opportunity to work with my colleagues from Union Bank and OmniWorks, Economic Development Organization, and students from the USC Department of Economics to create, design and implement the program, "More than a Business: Empower Women, Secure Communities." The initiative offers training and courses in basic concepts and tools how to start their own micro-enterprises to women micro-entrepreneurs in the community surrounding USC's University Park Campus.

While pivoting from a physical event to virtual gatherings, the USC students and our partners at OmniWorks constantly asked how to better serve the community in these unique times. Together, we explored how to offer a convenient and feasible structure while presenting empowering information that will catapult our participating women's secret hopes for business success into a rewarding and fulfilling reality.

Looking at the nearly sixty women we helped, I see promises to accomplish long-yearning dreams fulfilled, fears and doubts left behind, and clear visions now equipped and empowered with knowledge and skills. As a development officer, I am humbled and honored to report these successes to our generous donor Union Bank, who entrusted us with their vision and chose us as the best partners for this noble venture.

I began this essay as my statement of gratitude to the generous individuals who gave us resources, time and love to accomplish all that. Instead, I now realize life offers me another lesson: how the power of giving and how it can transform the giver. I have read about the "helper's high" and the "giver's glow" but I have always wondered about the long-term effect of that, if any. "Creativity, meaning, resilience, health and even longevity can be enhanced as a surprising byproduct of contributing to the lives of others. This is perennial wisdom, and science now says it is so," according to Dr. Stephen Post.



USC Undergraduate students – six bright young women who have provided 1:1 mentorship and guidance to the participating Latina women coming from very low-income communities – shared how the act of service and giving has taught them one of the greatest lessons of all time: service and helping someone is one of the most satisfying and fulfilling emotions. Here are the testimonials of the participating USC undergraduate students from the Economics Department:

*"I started doing the More than a Business Program to help Latina micro-entrepreneurs start their businesses, however, I didn't realize how much these women would inspire me. I hope to become an entrepreneur one day and these women reminded me that you can do anything you set your mind to, despite of any challenge. It's been a great honor to mentor these women. Our conversations during our meetings led to what felt was one of the best part of mentoring; a bond of friendship. I'm very excited to see where their entrepreneurial journey takes them."*

- Ana Sofia Garay Quezada

*"I see this program as opening doors for so many women. I myself have learned so much from this program and these women. They are daring, ambitious, and powerful and I see their businesses growing more and more with every session ... I thank this program for connecting me to the LA community and for supporting Latina micro-entrepreneurs."*

- Ana Mendoza Ruiz

*"This program has been a complete blessing! I notice each week how the participants grow and learn from the presentation as well as the homework ... I am personally also benefiting from the information being thought and highly recommend others to engage in this offering if possible."*

- Carolina Souza

*"It has been an honor to be a part of the More than a Business Program this past semester. I thoroughly enjoyed working with a team of leading women supporting women in their entrepreneurship endeavors. Each workshop and meeting left me feeling so fulfilled and empowered by the support system created between the women within each cohort .... As a graduating senior, I couldn't think of a better way to end my time at USC. I am grateful for this opportunity, and I look forward to watching this program grow!"*

- Delaney Brower

Traditionally, the Holiday Season is the time of celebration, self-reflection, gratitude, and looking back, trying to find the silver lining in the events of the preceding year. For me, the greatest lesson is how sometimes those whom we consider the most vulnerable can teach us about strength, possibilities, and growth, and through their courage we can find meaning and motivation in this year of pandemic.

## ON GRATITUDE

*In this Season of Reflection and Giving, I asked education advocate, experience designer, event producer, and Breakthrough LA Executive Director and EXL program partner, Robert Gould to share his thoughts on the role of Gratitude in our lives. – Tammy Anderson.*

**Sometimes, without expectation or warning, life reminds you that you are alive.**

Painful, joyful or revelatory, these moments often define the beginning and ending of eras of our lives, when light emerges from shadow, clarity from confusion, direction from confusion, renewed vitality and purpose from demise. In these transformation moments, we often experience gratitude, humanity's most profound emotions.

***"Gratitude happens when some kindness exceeds expectations, when it is undeserved. Gratitude is a sort of laughter of the heart that comes about after some surprising kindness."***  
**- David Brooks**

In its purest incarnation, gratitude is a perpetual active force, not a rhetorical expression in the moment. "Thank you" is not gratitude: it's the positive acknowledgment of an action by another. Saying "I tell you that I'm grateful for you all the time" is not gratitude: it's pointing to a moment in the past as justification for the absence of that moment in the present. Gratitude is not something that is on your check list of things to do; it is a constant state of being.

Gratitude exists in the Active Present, out of time, imbuing the essence of our being, perhaps in the most evolved sense, becoming the purpose of your being. Gratitude is our most profound and transformational emotion; True Love cannot and does not exist without it. We easily talk about "Being in Love" but we do not speak so easily about "Being in Gratitude." Gratitude is by its nature inclusive; it never divides, separates, only includes and unites.

The impact of gratitude goes beyond the emotional; it is a highly neurologically active force that can change us physically. Emily Fletcher, the founder of Ziva, a well-known meditation training site, mentioned in one of her publications that gratitude is a 'natural antidepressant.' The effects of gratitude, when practiced daily can be almost the same as medications. It produces a feeling of long-lasting happiness and contentment, the physiological basis of which lies at the neurotransmitter level. When we express gratitude and receive the same, our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, the two crucial neurotransmitters responsible for our emotions, and they make us feel 'good'. They enhance our mood immediately, making us feel happy from the inside.

We are most honored and fulfilled when we commit to a practice of being in an active state of perpetual Gratitude and seek out and surround ourselves with others who share this same path and dedication. Here, in a relationship that exists in a mutual state of expressed, received and returned Gratitude, we will find our deepest and most satisfying fulfillment. Without gratitude, love cannot exist. As an agent of transformation, Gratitude is more powerful than love.

In our belief that gratitude, sharing and community service are the foundation for meaningful, experiential lifetime learning, EXL is currently in development of programs and courses on the Transformational Power of Gratitude.

In these times and in this Season, Life is reminding us that we are Alive and more important, that we are connected and interdependent, connected in mind and heart, and will fall or rise by what we choose to do for others, not what we do for ourselves.

- Robert Gould, Executive Director, Breakthrough LA/MVM;  
President, Imaginosis Media Design



*Happy Holidays!*