



CONNIE L. LURIE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION



2024 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2025





As San José State continues to prepare students to lead and contribute to the workforce of Silicon Valley and beyond, the Connie L. Lurie College of Education stands at the heart of this mission. Our graduates embody the transformative power of education—diversifying the workforce, advancing equity, and serving as role models for the next generation of educators, counselors, therapists, and community leaders. As Silicon Valley's anchor institution, we champion pedagogy that uplifts, inspires, and reflects the communities we serve.



Cynthia Teniente-Matson, Ed.D.
President
San José State University

Photo courtesy of the Office of the President

In This Report

2 | Message from the Dean

3 | Programs Overview

5 | Living Our Mission

7 | Lurie College At-A-Glance

9 | New Roles, Promotions

11 | Interdisciplinary Initiatives & Collaborations

13 | Innovating Access, Meeting Needs

15 | Alumni Excellence & Distinguished Service

17 | Philanthropy

Message from the Dean



DAVID WHITENACK
INTERIM DEAN

It is both an honor and a privilege to welcome you to the 2024–2025 Connie L. Lurie College of Education (LCOE) Impact Report.

Across the many challenges we face in education and beyond, our LCOE community—faculty, staff, students, and partners—continues to stay grounded in our values and strategic priorities, pursue our shared goals, and make meaningful progress. This past year, our college enrollment grew by 17%, including an impressive 45% increase in the Department of Special Education. This growth highlights our deep commitment to serving the broader community by preparing special education teachers—one of the most critical needs in today’s workforce.

We also strengthened our academic foundation by welcoming six new tenure-track faculty members, including two whose expertise lies in generative artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in education. These additions ensure that our programs remain innovative, future-focused, and ready to meet the evolving demands of our field.

I am deeply inspired and grateful to work alongside such brilliant, compassionate, and justice-oriented colleagues. Together, we prepare counselors, educators, leaders, therapists, and scholars who embody the same values of equity, care, and excellence that define our college. The values we model in our classrooms and community become the values our graduates carry forward—transforming schools, organizations, and communities both locally and beyond.

In the pages that follow, you will find stories that bring these values to life—examples of distinguished service, interdisciplinary innovation, student-centered creativity, partnership building, legislative leadership, international engagement, and transformative philanthropy.

These stories remind us of who we are and what we stand for. They guide and inspire us as we continue advancing our mission in community with one another. The challenges ahead are real, but so are the opportunities. I have every confidence that the LCOE family—through its diversity, talent, and wisdom—will continue to rise to every occasion and create lasting impact. Let’s go, LCOE!

Onward together,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Whitenack". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

David A. Whitenack, Ph.D.
Interim Dean
Connie L. Lurie College of Education
San José State University

Academic

Undergraduate Minors:

- Atypical Child Studies
- Child & Adolescent Development
- Deaf Education
- Special Education

Undergraduate Degrees:

- Child & Adolescent Development
- Communicative Disorders & Sciences
- Interdisciplinary Studies; Concentration in Educational & Community Leadership



Lurie College Centers

- Early Childhood Institute
- Institute for Emancipatory Education
- Queer Hope Institute

Community Engaged

Together, my team and I strive to make the Queer Hope Institute a beacon of hope and resilience for our LGBTQ+ community. I'm proud to work and study at the Lurie College of Education, where our shared commitment to inclusion and advocacy ensures that Queer and Trans voices are heard, supported, and celebrated!

– Danny Castillo (They/Them)

'26 MA Queer Anthropology in Child Development;
Interdisciplinary Studies

Culturally Sustaining

Programs

Credentials:

- Multiple Subject
- PK-3 ECE Specialist Instruction Credential
- Pupil Personnel Services School Counseling
- Single Subject
- Special Education
- Speech-Language Pathology

Master's Degrees:

- Child & Adolescent Development
- Counseling & Guidance
- Educational Leadership; Concentration in Emancipatory School Leadership
- Higher Education Leadership
- Special Education
- Speech-Language Pathology
- Teaching

Doctoral Degrees:

- Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)

& Institutes:

- Center for Innovation in Applied Education Policy
- Healthy Development Community Clinic
- Institute for Regenerative Futures

Holistic



I love the sense of community within the Lurie College of Education. I've appreciated the holistic approach the faculty have taken when it came to learning in the classroom and being able to apply it in my work, formerly in Student Affairs and currently in University Advancement. I've enjoyed the opportunity to pursue my research passions and build partnerships that make a meaningful impact with my cohort and the faculty as well.

– Clarissa Mae Calimbas (She/Her)
Doctoral Candidate, '26 Ed.D.
'16 BA Child & Adolescent Development;
Preparation for Teaching



Interdisciplinary 4

Introducing the Queer Hope Institute



The Queer Hope Institute (QHI) is reimagining what support for queer and trans youth can look like when research, community, and care come together. Recognizing that affirming spaces can transform outcomes for queer and trans young people, QHI bridges the gap between grassroots initiatives and institutional resources to ensure every youth has access to environments that uplift and sustain them.

Through research, evaluation, and collaboration, QHI strengthens existing community programs, helps partners expand their reach, and develops new, youth-centered initiatives. This past year, QHI hosted the first annual Unity Conference, welcoming more than 75 LGBTQ+ middle school students to campus for a day of connection and empowerment.

At its heart, QHI embodies a simple but powerful vision: a future where every queer and trans youth not only exists—but thrives.

Top photos: QHI Director Dr. Robert Marx (left) and Program Coordinators Ellery Carlson (center) and Danny Castillo (right)

Living Our Mission



Marcella McCollum, Ed.D., CCC-SLP

Assistant Professor
Communicative Disorders & Sciences

"I love that Lurie College has built a place where disciplines intersect—where students, educators, clinicians, and researchers collaborate to build new possibilities for inclusive practice. Working alongside colleagues who bridge ideas across fields constantly renews my belief in transformation and social justice. It has provided space for many of us from different backgrounds to connect, collaborate, and create community."



Valerie Faye Manzano

SPEAKS Graduate Student
'26 MS Speech-Language Pathology

"As a Filipino American graduate student in the online MS in Speech-Language Pathology program – known as Speech-Language Pathology Education and Applied Knowledge and Skills (SPEAKS) – I'm proud to represent my community in a field where cultural diversity is still growing. Lurie College inspires me to use communication as a bridge for inclusion, uplifting every voice and creating spaces where everyone feels valued, heard, and part of a community that practices inclusion every day."



Ellery Carlson

SAGE Program Student
BA '24 Child & Adolescent Development; '27 MA Teaching

"Being a Spartan Accelerated Graduate Education (SAGE) Program student has allowed me to pursue higher education efficiently while strengthening ties with community partners through classes and hands-on experiences"

At San José State University's Lurie College of Education, we prepare transformative educators, counselors, therapists, and school, community, & higher education leaders.



Emily Gauvreau

MS/PK-3/SPED Intern Coordinator
Teaching Pathways & Field Experience

"I am grateful to be part of Lurie College of because of the college's holistic approach to supporting our students. The Teacher Education Department has allowed me to grow as an educator so I can support my students, not just academically, but socially and emotionally. It brings me joy to observe our teacher candidates and interns take that same holistic approach into their own classrooms to support the whole student. The passion and excitement they bring to their classrooms as they begin their teaching career is truly a testament to our mission."



Alberto Gomez

Assistant Director
Lurie College of Education Student Success Center

The best part of the Lurie College community is the enthusiasm of our students, faculty, and staff in their dedication to education. The connection between everyone is so inspiring, and you can really feel how tight-knit the college is. I genuinely believe that our students are learning from the best. This environment is not just about learning, but also about personal growth. At the Lurie College of Education Student Success Center, we understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. We ensure that our students' needs and wants are met through personalized recommendations that support their personal, educational, and occupational goals."



A Celebration of Justice, Partnership, & Humanization in Education

The Institute for Emancipatory Education hosted its first annual conference, bringing together educators, researchers, and

community partners to reimagine education grounded in justice and humanization.

From Dr. Randi Williams' fireside chat on Day of AI to the Intersectional Disability Studies Strand led by LCOE's own Dr. Kulkarni and Dr. Krishnan, sessions emphasized care,

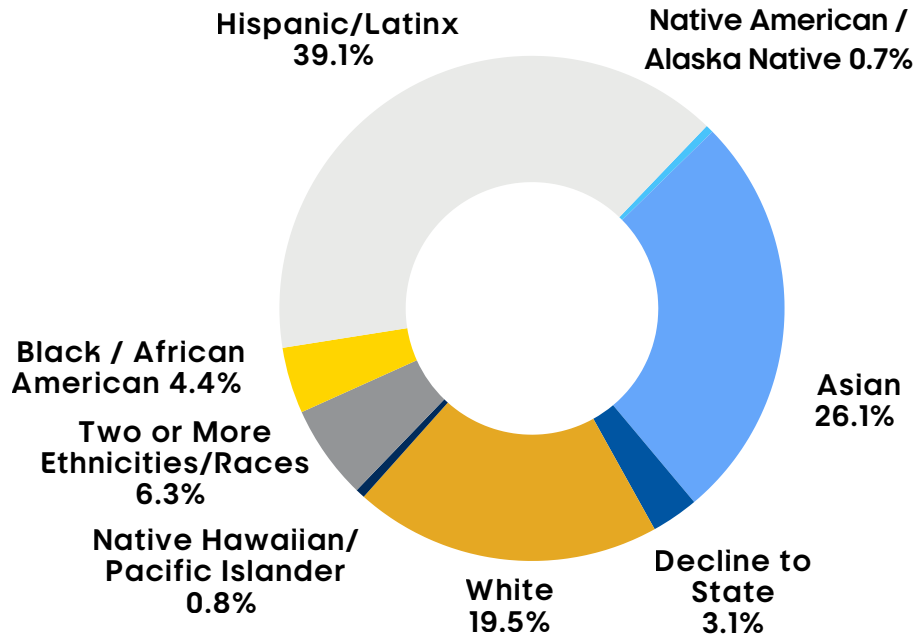
reflection, and transformation. Discussions on teacher diversity, Ethnic Studies, and teacher residencies underscored the importance of sustaining educators committed to equity and healing. Presentations from SJSU faculty and students on translanguaging, climate justice, and Gender & Sexuality Alliances illustrated what emancipatory education looks like when research, hope, and lived experience intersect.

One message resonated: transformation thrives in

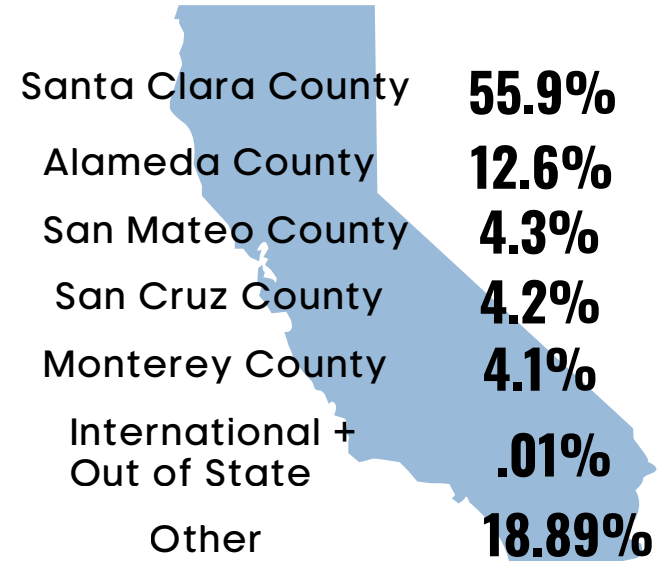
partnership. The conference showed what's possible when universities, schools, and communities unite to reimagine education as collective liberation.

LURIE COLLEGE

Student Enrollment by Ethnicity



Student Enrollment by Location



\$21,400

Hardship Grants Provided to Meet Immediate Needs

\$538,763

Academic Scholarships Awarded

SJSU SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY RANKINGS



#1

MOST TRANSFORMATIVE UNIVERSITY



#3

TOP PUBLIC SCHOOLS, REGIONAL WEST



#5

BEST PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN THE NATION

SJSU CONNIE L. LURIE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RANKINGS



#1

AMONG BEST SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY PROGRAMS IN SF BAY AREA



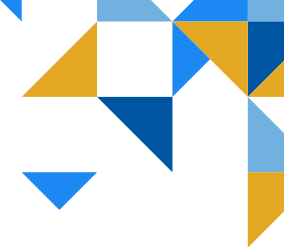
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AMONG UNIVERSITIES IN THE CSU SYSTEM

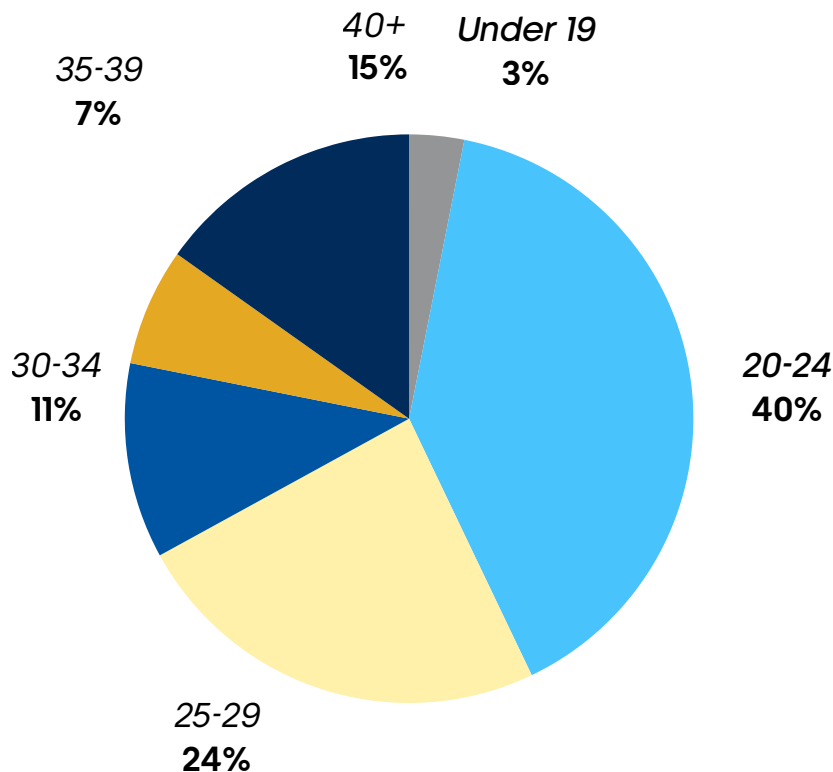
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AMONG UNIVERSITIES IN SF BAY AREA

AT-A-GLANCE



Student Enrollment by Age



2024-2025 Total Enrollment
2,661 STUDENTS

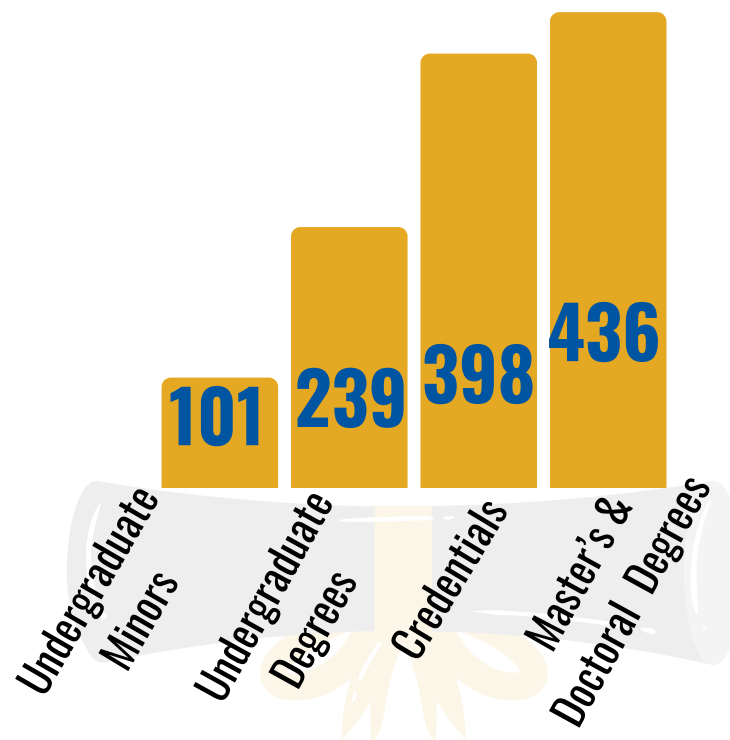
1174 Degrees and Credentials Awarded
During the 24-25 Academic Year

Student Success Center

Providing individualized guidance to both lower- and upper-division students. Through major, GE, and graduation advising, as well as course planning and resource connections, the center helps students navigate their academic journeys and achieve their goals.

980 Average Student Advising
Appointments Each Semester

Empowering Student Progress



WELCOMING NEW LURIE FACULTY, AND



Interim Associate Dean

EMILY SLUSSER, PH.D.

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

"One of Lurie College's greatest strengths is the relationships we nurture - among disciplines, across communities, and through dedication to equity and innovation. I'm grateful to be part of a community that turns collaboration into lasting impact."



Interim Department Chair

GRINELL SMITH, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
TEACHER EDUCATION

"What excites me about being part of Lurie College? Working on important issues in the company of smart people dedicated to equity and excellence - it's a privilege I cherish!"

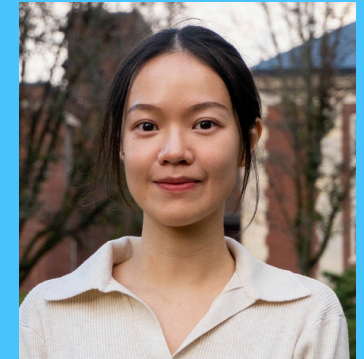


Welcomed as Assistant Professor

NANCY MCINTYRE, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION

"I am thrilled to bring my community-based, interdisciplinary research and scholarship on language and literacy development to Lurie College to prepare transformative and culturally sustaining special education teachers as California's literacy policy evolves."



Welcomed as Assistant Professor

MINNIE LI, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
COUNSELOR EDUCATION

"My work explores the use of creativity, expressive arts, and mind-body approaches in therapy, supervision, and counselor education, and I am excited to join Lurie College to collaborate with students and colleagues on projects that enhance counselor training and serve the needs of surrounding communities."



ALLISON BRICEÑO, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
TEACHER EDUCATION

Promoted to Full Professor

"I'm especially proud of my students and the work that they do, both while they're at SJSU and once they're teachers. The world of bilingual education is small, so I hear about them, and I absolutely love hearing about the great work they're doing as educators."



PEI-TZU TSAI, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATIVE DISORDERS & SCIENCES

Promoted to Full Professor

VOICES IN LEADERSHIP, PROMOTIONS



Welcomed as Assistant Professor

JOANNE LI, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATIVE DISORDERS & SCIENCES

"I'm thrilled to join the SJSU Lurie College of Education, where the dedication to community engagement and culturally sustaining practices reflects the values that guide my research on bilingual speech development and my pursuit of equity in communication sciences."



Welcomed as Assistant Professor

JA YOUNG KIM, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATIVE DISORDERS & SCIENCES

"Joining Lurie College offers a unique opportunity to engage with students and colleagues who share my passion for addressing upper airway dysfunction."



Welcomed as Assistant Professor

DOGUKAN OZGEN, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
CHILD & ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

"I'm excited to bring my work in speculative pedagogies, games and equity-centered AI practices to Lurie College, where I can help future educators integrate emerging technologies while centering culturally sustaining pedagogies."



Welcomed as Assistant Professor

KRITHIKA JAGANNATH, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
CHILD & ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

"My mission is to advance our understanding of how we might create developmentally appropriate socio-technical systems for very young adolescents – work that I'm really eager to advance through collaboration with students, colleagues, and our community partners."

"I am grateful for being in a position that values my work towards a more inclusive and empowering vision of communication rights, by integrating community-informed research, clinical practice and mentorship in stuttering and voice."



CARA MAFFINI, PH.D.

DEPARTMENT OF
CHILD & ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Promoted to Full Professor

"I am most proud of creating a collaborative, interdisciplinary, community-centered initiative that leverages the strengths and expertise of SJSU faculty and students in partnership with community leaders to promote mental health, health equity, and healthy development for local families. The Lurie College continues to provide opportunities to innovate in student training and advance creative, cutting-edge approaches to holistic wellness."

Unified in Purpose:

Using Theatre to Transform Clinical Training



Dr. McNiece (left) observes a patient simulation session with students Joaquin Gawchua (center) and Kyrillos Sawiris (right)

“Patients’ lives don’t fit neatly into one discipline... By training students together, we’re helping them learn when to lead, when to listen, and how to serve holistically.”

– Dr. Zachary McNiece, Simulate Patient Program Co-Leader

Lurie College is leading innovative, interdisciplinary opportunities that bring students together across fields to learn, connect, and care in new ways. Through the Simulated Patient Program, students and faculty from Counselor Education; Nursing; Occupational Therapy; Communicative Disorders and Sciences; Nutrition, Food Sciences, and Packaging; and Film, Theatre, and Dance are transforming how future professionals prepare for collaborative practice.

Co-led by Dr. Zachary McNiece (Department of Counselor Education), the program trains theatre students to portray patients with complex and evolving needs. Health professions students then work with these “patients” throughout the semester, learning how to communicate, coordinate care, and provide trauma-informed, anti-oppressive support as part of a team.

The collaboration benefits every participant: acting students gain applied experience that opens professional doors, while health professions students strengthen their confidence, empathy, and understanding of interprofessional care. Faculty have expanded the work through research and partnerships with local schools, sparking interest in health careers and showcasing Lurie College’s commitment to unity and innovation in education.

This model for collaborative, equity-minded learning proves that care, like education, is most powerful when it’s shared.



Interdisciplinary students enjoying keynote speaker, Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D., ABPP

Advancing Interprofessional Education:

At Lurie College, collaboration isn’t just a value—it’s a way of learning. This spirit of connection was at the heart of the Interprofessional Collaboration Symposium, an event that brought students and faculty together across disciplines to explore how teamwork transforms education, health, and human services.

The symposium emerged from a shared commitment among faculty to break down silos and create learning experiences that reflect the realities of today’s interconnected world. Recognizing that no single profession can meet the complex needs of individuals and communities alone, the event fostered meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration and shared understanding.

Through a partnership between Lurie College and the College of Health and Human Sciences, departments including Communicative Disorders & Sciences, Child and Adolescent Development, Counselor Education, Occupational Therapy, Social Work, Special Education, Nursing, Audiology, Nutrition, and Kinesiology designed sessions that blended keynote insights, case-based problem solving, and hands-on activities grounded in real-world scenarios.

Innovation Across Disciplines

Empowering Young Voices Through Art and Identity

For graduate student, Priscilla Koh, teaching is more than instruction; it's collaboration, creativity, and community care. While completing her Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program and student teaching in a 5th-grade classroom at Milpitas Unified School District, Priscilla launched "The Things We're Made Of" — a semester-long project inviting students to explore their identities, connections to place, and sense of belonging through storytelling and art.

The project culminated in a student-curated gallery exhibition hosted in partnership with the SJSU Art Department. Families, educators, and community members gathered in January 2025 to view the students' work in a professional gallery setting — an experience that celebrated their voices and creativity in a way many had never imagined.

With a background in fine arts and liberal studies, Priscilla weaves art and social-emotional learning to create inclusive, student-centered classrooms. Supported by her mentor teacher, Andrew Topham, and university supervisor, Jenn Pierson, she cultivated an environment where students felt safe to express joy, curiosity, frustration, and pride.

"It was amazing to see the process unfold," Topham shared. "The gallery experience is something they'll never forget."

Reflecting on the experience, Priscilla says the project reminded her that learning is most powerful when it begins with connection. "When students feel safe to share who they are," she says, "they learn through love and care — and that's where real growth happens."



"I wanted them to see that their stories mattered...and that their art belonged in spaces beyond their school walls."

— Priscilla Koh '25 MA, Credential in Mild Moderate Support Needs

Preparing Students for Collaborative Practice

"IPE Day gives students the chance to engage with faculty outside their own fields, exposing them to new frameworks and ways of thinking that enrich their future practice." Dr. Cara Maffini, Professor of Child and Adolescent Development and Director of the Healthy Development Community Clinic, adds, "These cross-disciplinary opportunities spark rich discussion and provide invaluable insight into addressing complex issues from multiple angles."

By connecting disciplines and fostering understanding, this annual collaboration exemplifies the Power of Unity—preparing future educators and health professionals to work together with compassion and purpose.

"As a speech-language pathologist, I have the privilege of working alongside a wide range of education and healthcare professionals...This event gives our students the chance to experience that same kind of collaboration they will encounter in their careers." — Cynthia Van Laar, Director of Clinical Education



Panelist Dr. Cara Maffini & Wendy Kinnear-Rausch

From Access to Impact: Meeting

Answering the Call: Preparing More Teachers for Inclusive Education



Dr. Simpson with the first Tri-Valley Ed Specialist candidates

Across California, the need for special education teachers continues to grow. At Lurie College, the Department of Special Education is responding with compassion, creativity, and collaboration—building pathways that remove barriers and bring opportunity closer to home.

Enrollment has more than tripled in the past two years, reaching 161 students in Fall '25, thanks to

partnerships that create access where it's needed most. Through offsite cohorts, students can now earn their credentials without leaving their communities. The Tri-Valley Cohort in Livermore and Dublin serves 27 students from surrounding areas, while the Santa Cruz Cohort, developed with the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, welcomed 25 students in its first year.

For many candidates, these programs have made the dream of teaching finally possible. One applicant shared that after years of working in schools, they “always wanted to become a teacher but never had the chance — until now.” With classes close to home and supportive peers, they're not just earning a credential — they're finding belonging.

“Our faculty are deeply invested in equity-minded, student-centered programs...When our students thrive, our schools and communities thrive with them.”

– Dr. Lisa Simpson, Department of Special Education Chair

Teacher residency programs add another layer of collaboration, pairing candidates with experienced mentors for a full year of co-teaching. Supported by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, these residencies prepare educators who are confident, compassionate, and ready to serve.

Leading Beyond Borders: Global Learning in Action



Ed.D. Educational Leadership Cohort II at the University for Peace

In Summer 2025, second-year Ed.D. students in Lurie College's Educational Leadership Doctoral program traveled to Costa Rica for a two-week global field experience that blended learning, reflection, and cultural immersion. Nineteen doctoral students and three faculty members — Drs. Liliana Castrellón, Veneice Guillory-Lacy, and Robert Marx — partnered with the University for Peace (UPEACE) to explore how educational systems intersect with social, environmental, and cultural issues.

Throughout the trip, students examined topics including immigration, Indigenous and Native communities, environmental sustainability, gentrification, and women's access to resources. They visited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) serving minoritized communities and engaged with educators and advocates from the University for Peace and the University of Costa Rica.

“The global field experience to Costa Rica pushed my thinking about privilege, positionality, and even my own sense of strength and

Photos courtesy of Dr. Liliana Castrellón

Needs and Celebrating Growth

capacity,” shared Gloria Perry Higgins, Doctoral Candidate, ‘27 Ed.D. “The relationships with classmates, professors, and new friends are stronger and more meaningful now.”

Each day concluded with collective reflection sessions that invited students to unpack their learning, deepening their understanding of social justice leadership and global education.

“Transformation is not a destination, but a deliberate daily practice. Immersed in new landscapes, stories, and systems, I came to understand access as a living, relational ethic rooted in dignity and care... I did not simply return home, I returned transformed — with wings shaped by wisdom, equity, and purpose.” – Amanda Yvette Olivas, Doctoral Candidate ‘27 Ed.D.

Through experiences like these, the Ed.D. program continues to model unity through leadership — preparing scholar-practitioners to serve communities with humility, courage, and care.



Ed.D. Educational Leadership Cohort 11 during global field experience in Costa Rica

Leadership for Equity: Transforming Policy Into Practice

For Cade Story-Yetto (‘25 MA Higher Education Leadership), education is more than a profession; it’s a vehicle for change. As a graduate student in Lurie College’s Higher Education Leadership Master’s program (HELM), Story-Yetto played a pivotal role in shaping Assembly Bill 3158, signed into law by California Governor Gavin Newsom in September 2024.

The bill, introduced by Assemblymember Marc Berman and championed by Story-Yetto alongside Chancellor Brad Davis of the West Valley–Mission Community College District (WVMCCD), waives enrollment and tuition fees for all local students beginning in 2025. A dedicated supporter of the HELM program, Chancellor Davis has contributed as both faculty and advisor since its inception—helping to prepare future higher education leaders to navigate the intersection of policy and equity. Together, Davis and Story-Yetto turned vision into action with a landmark policy designed to remove financial barriers and expand access to higher education for the Bay Area’s most underserved populations.

Story-Yetto’s journey, from struggling student to legislative advocate, reflects the kind of leadership that Lurie College cultivates. “Working within institutions of education means we need to have a fluid understanding of

how systems of education and public policy interact,” says Dr. Liliana Castrellón, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and HELM program co-coordinator. “Policy defines what resources and opportunities our students have access to, and leaders like Cade show how we can shape those systems to advance equity.”



Photo courtesy of Cade Story-Yetto

“The work we’re doing here matters...Given my own experience with housing insecurity as a community college student, knowing that every single dollar counts, when I found out the bill had been signed, it felt incredibly rewarding.”

**– Cade Story-Yetto
‘25 MA Higher Education Leadership**

Through collaboration, mentorship, and a commitment to social change, the Department of Educational Leadership empowers students to turn theory into action, preparing the next generation of educational leaders to create pathways of opportunity for all.

*Adapted from the Spring ‘25 Washington Square:
The Magazine story by Julia Halprin Jackson*

Legacy of Learning: Honoring Excellence

Alumni Lan Nguyen: Shifting Narratives Through Storytelling and Education



Photo courtesy of Lan Nguyen

For Lan Nguyen, '22 Teaching Credential, MA Teaching, storytelling is more than art — it's activism. A former journalist and filmmaker turned educator, Nguyen has devoted her career to challenging stereotypes, amplifying marginalized voices, and helping students see themselves reflected in the stories they tell.

The daughter of Vietnamese refugees, Nguyen directed and produced "Fighting For Family", a 2019 documentary that follows one family's fight to reunite after deportation. The film, which has earned multiple awards for social justice storytelling, was inspired by her own family's experiences navigating poverty, displacement and resilience. "I see filmmaking as an outlet that helps mobilize people for community change," she says.

After earning a master's degree in Asian American Studies from UCLA, Nguyen found her true calling in the classroom. Through Lurie College's Ethnic Studies Teaching Residency, she completed her teaching credential and MA in Teaching, working alongside Associate Professor Luis Poza, who calls her "a creative and brilliant teacher and a relentless advocate for students."

Today, Nguyen teaches ethnic studies in Oakland and lectures in SJSU's Asian American Studies program, where she encourages students to tell their own stories through documentary film and community journalism.

"I want students to know that you don't need to become the oppressor to live the American dream," she says. "Pursue your goals, but act in solidarity with other immigrants and communities of color."

– Lan Nguyen; '22 Teaching Credential, MA Teaching

Through her teaching, filmmaking, and activism, Nguyen is redefining what it means to educate — using story, culture and collaboration to build community and empower the next generation to lead with empathy and truth.

Honoring Distinguished Child and Adolescent

This year, Lurie College's Department of Child and Adolescent Development (CHAD) proudly celebrates two members of its community whose dedication and leadership were recognized through San José State University's 2024–2025 Distinguished Service Awards.



Dr. Cara Maffini, Associate Professor and Director of the Healthy Development Community Clinic (HDCC), received the Distinguished Service Faculty Award for her ongoing commitment to community-engaged education and transformative student mentorship. Under her direction, the HDCC has become a vital resource for families, providing free developmental services while offering students meaningful, hands-on learning experiences. Through this work, Dr. Maffini bridges research and practice, fostering partnerships that uplift both the university and the broader community.



and Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders

Service in Development



Alongside her, Annie Nobuhiro, Department Analyst for CHAD, earned Honorable Mention for the Distinguished Service Staff Award. With more than a decade of service at San José State, Annie is known for her professionalism, resilience, and collaborative spirit. Her work ensures that the department's programs, faculty, and students thrive.

ChAD Distinguished Honorees:
Cara Maffini, Ph.D. (left), Annie Nobuhiro (above).

Whether streamlining processes, supporting departmental growth, or mentoring student assistants, Annie exemplifies the heart of Lurie College — service through care and connection.

Together, Dr. Maffini and Annie Nobuhiro embody the spirit of unity and purpose that defines both CHAD and Lurie College. Their contributions strengthen the community every day, reminding us that transformative education begins with those who lead — and serve — with compassion and integrity.

Alumni Vondell Pilcher: Finding Purpose Through Voice and Service

For Vondell Pilcher, '23 BS, '25 MS Speech Language Pathology, few accomplishments mean more than helping others find their voices. Growing up in Alaska with a stutter, he learned early how isolating communication barriers can be.

"I got bullied a lot," he recalls. "Teachers would ask me to read aloud, and kids would make fun of me. High school was brutal."

In college, while playing quarterback — a position that depends on clear communication — Pilcher's stutter worsened under pressure. After being benched during a game, he decided to seek help. "Getting benched was one of the hardest things, but also one of the greatest, because it helped me find myself."

That moment of humility led him to speech therapy — and a newfound purpose. Pilcher transferred to San José State, majoring in speech pathology and audiology. Volunteering at the Healthy Development Community Clinic, he created Free Flow, a support group for children who stutter. "I wanted to build an inclusive space where kids can just flow — where they can learn, connect, and feel seen."

He later co-founded the podcast Beyond the Stutter and began developing training resources for law enforcement officers to better understand communication disorders — work he's now piloting with a Bay Area Police Department.



Pilcher preparing for Bay Area Police Department workshop

"San José State created a blueprint to help me find purpose...It taught me how to use my life experiences to serve others."

– Vondell Pilcher; '23 BS, '25 MS Speech-Language Pathology

From the football field to the therapy clinic, Pilcher's journey reflects resilience, compassion and the power of turning personal challenge into collective change.

Giving That Builds Communication and Connection: The Jindia Family Story



Inside Sweeney Hall, voices of encouragement and laughter fill the room as students and clients practice speech together. It's a moment that captures what makes the Spartan Aphasia Research Clinic (SPARC) so special — a place where learning and healing happen side by side, and where communication becomes both a tool and a triumph.

SPARC, housed within the Kay Armstead Center for Communicative Disorders, was founded in 2017 by Nidhi Mahendra, former chair of the Department of Communicative Disorders and Sciences. Modeled on the Life Participation Approach for Aphasia, SPARC centers the right of every person with aphasia to participate fully in daily life. Taught as a graduate clinic, it offers free, weekly services for community members while providing hands-on learning experiences for future speech-language pathologists — an embodiment of Lurie College's mission to unite education, service and compassion.

Among those profoundly touched by SPARC is Urmil Jindia, a professional software engineer whose life changed after a major stroke in 2007. Since joining the program, Urmil has found renewed confidence and joy in her recovery, supported by dedicated students and faculty. Her husband, Rajinder Jindia, '79 MS Industrial and Systems Engineering, reflects, "While looking for different resources available for her recovery, we came across programs offered by SJSU. Urmil's speech started improving with SPARC, and we saw an opportunity to give back to a university that had already given so much to our family."

In honor of Urmil's journey — and in memory of Rajinder's mother, Shrimati Savitri Devi Jindia — the Jindia family made a generous gift to support the renovation of the Urmil R. Jindia SLP Resource Center, part of the Kay Armstead Center. The newly refreshed space now includes anatomical models, assessment tools, reference materials, and specialized technology that help graduate students deliver high-quality, compassionate care.

"We are deeply honored by the Jindia family's generosity," says Cynthia Van Laar, director of clinical education. "Their gift enhances how future speech-language pathologists learn, collaborate and serve."

For the Jindia family, philanthropy is about connection — a belief that generosity can bridge education, care, and community. Through their gift, the Jindias have ensured that future Spartans will continue what SPARC embodies every day, the transformative power of communication and compassion.

**"We've always felt that giving and happiness are linked together...
It gives us fulfillment, meaning, and accomplishment in our lives."**

– Rajinder Jindia

Urmil R. Jindia
SLP Resource Center

Colleen Wilcox's Gift for Voice and Vision in Teacher Preparation

Colleen Wilcox, Ph.D., grew up in Moline, Illinois, where her severe stutter began at age four. "When I was seven, my father enrolled me with the school's speech therapist, and I knew at that point that this person was lovely, but had no idea what they were doing," Wilcox recalls. "I knew that's what I wanted to do."

From the moment she learned to manage her childhood stutter, she understood how transformative communication could be. What began as a struggle to find her own voice became a lifelong mission to help others discover theirs — and, ultimately, a gift to ensure future generations can do the same.

Wilcox's early experiences shaped a deep empathy that would guide her career as a speech-language pathologist. After earning her degree from the University of Iowa, she joined the Peace Corps, becoming Guatemala's national director of speech pathology — at the time, the only professional in that role across the country. "We opened clinics and started a school," she recalls. "When I left, people I'd worked with came to the airport singing. It was life-changing."

Her career took her from hospital wards to classrooms, and from research labs to leadership positions. Along the way, she earned advanced degrees, helped shape bilingual assessment practices, and mentored countless students and educators. But no matter how far she went, her purpose remained constant: to use education as a bridge — one that connects learning, compassion, and community.

"I've worked with thousands of teachers and speech pathologists who graduated from San José State...The university is amazing. I wanted to give back to the place that's doing the most to prepare the next generation." – Dr. Colleen Wilcox

That same purpose now inspires her philanthropy. Through a planned estate gift, Wilcox has established the Colleen Wilcox Faculty Chair in Communicative Disorders and Sciences at Lurie College — the first endowed faculty chair in the college's history. Her gift will sustain research, support teaching, and strengthen opportunities for future speech-language pathologists for generations to come. Wilcox knows firsthand what opportunity can mean. "I existed on scholarships," she shares. "I couldn't have finished college without them. Once you've lived that, you understand how essential support can be."

In retirement, Wilcox found a new form of expression through sculpture — powerful bronze and stone figures inspired by emotion, resilience, and strength. Many were created at the SJSU foundry, where she now volunteers to help students explore their creative voices.

Whether through art, education, or philanthropy, Colleen Wilcox continues to shape lives through communication in all its forms — a testament to how one person's voice, once found, can echo across generations.



CONNIE L. LURIE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

San José State University
One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0071

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