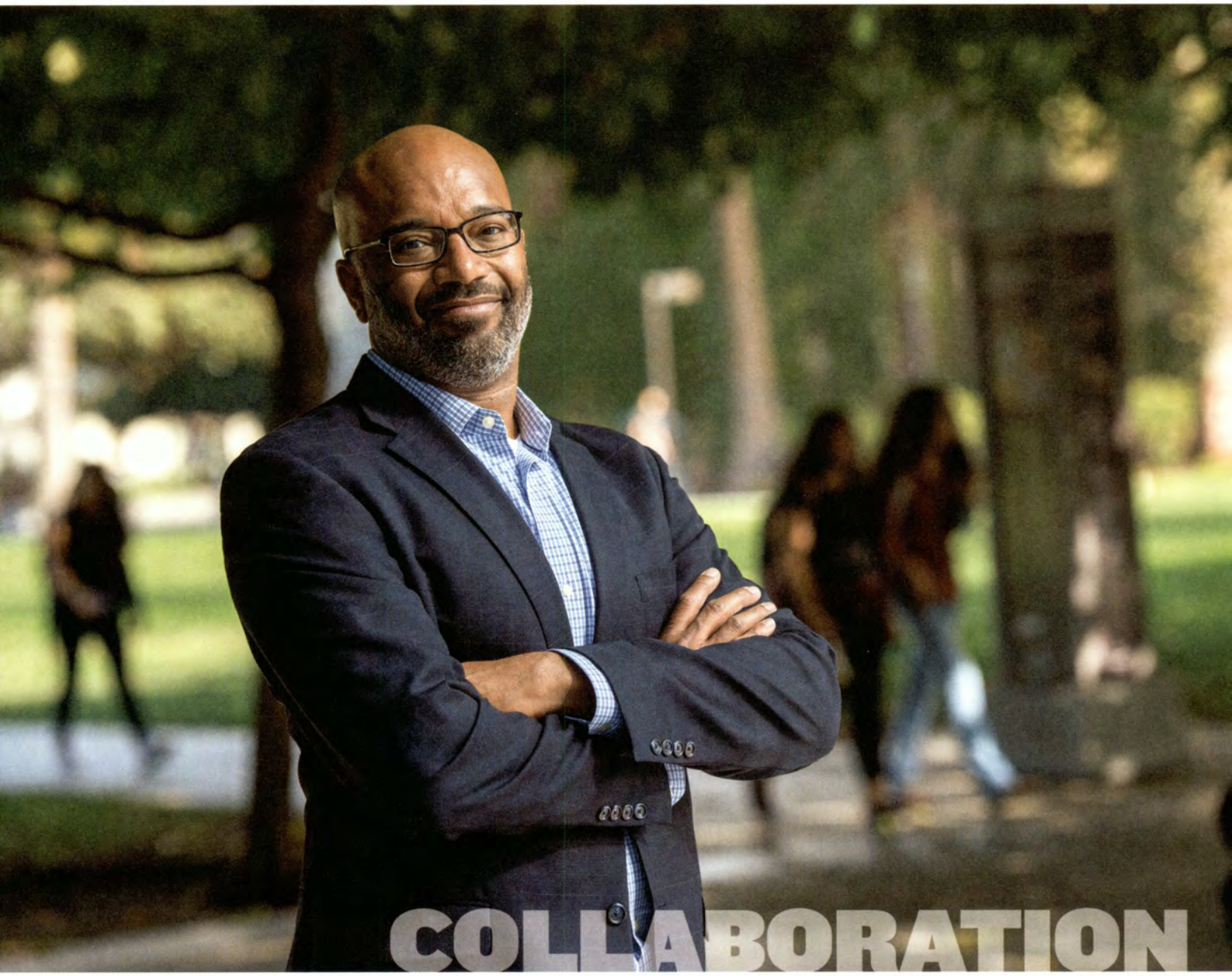
together

EXPLORING WHAT CAN BE

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES FALL 2015 NO. 09



[kuh-lab-uh-rey-shuh n] noun

1. the act or process of working jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor.

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COLLABORATION

from the dean

I am thrilled to join San José State University as the new dean of the College of Social Sciences! I began my assignment on July 6, 2015. Previously I was the founding dean of the College of Social Sciences & Professional Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, which is composed of the Center for International Studies, the Institute of Professional Educator Development and five social science departments. I hope to be at SJSU for much longer than the two years that I was at UW-Parkside. Hopefully the 14 years I spent at the University of Minnesota—including five years as a department chair—will be the more relevant guiding pathway.

I enjoy the process of engaging individuals and groups with a wide array of contrasting ideas, do not shrink from making tough decisions and draw energy from the challenges of facilitating alliances. I encourage faculty and staff to put students first; our discussions and unit strategies are based on what is best for student welfare and learning outcomes. I view academic leadership as both a science and an art: important considerations for decision-making cannot be completely captured in a spreadsheet when balancing compliance with changing financial/organizational realities, fidelity to tradition and established best practices and a commitment to innovation. I achieve equilibrium by keeping current on issues that affect higher education and collaborating deeply with both internal and external stakeholders, using new media formats as well as traditional methods. I consider myself successful when I am able to quickly solve problems, expand unit strengths and advance co-created goals.

In my first few months here at SJSU I have engaged in a listening tour to learn more about the college and its wonderful people and programs. I am also in the process of reframing the college's consultative structures. I have weekly meetings with my executive assistant, Delmy Figueroa, the "Dean Team" (Acting Associate Dean Lynne Trulio, Academic Resources Manager Karel Floyd and the "Decanal Fellow," former Interim Dean Jan English-Lueck) and the entire Dean's Office staff. I have individual meetings once a month with each department chair. The department chairs also meet collectively with the Dean Team once a month, and they meet once a month without us. A student advisory board is in formation, and next year we will create a community advisory board. One of the department chairs recently told me, "Collaboration is in your DNA." Indeed!

In the spring of 2016 the college will conduct strategic planning activities, which will involve extensive input from faculty, staff, students, alumni, community and industry partners, and friends of the college. I look forward to receiving input from *Together* readers to help the college illuminate a collaborative path for continued success.

Walt Jacobs
Dean

Meeting of the Minds

College envisions space for 'intellectual buzz'

What if there was a place on campus—a beautiful place with high arched windows and a grand fireplace—where faculty in the College of Social Sciences could gather during the day to exchange ideas, to collaborate on projects and spread out for class projects? A place where students could take part in research projects, grab a cup of coffee and imagine a life as a scholar?

Ruma Chopra, a history professor just back from her sabbatical, hopes she has found that place, or at least the building blocks to develop such a center for research, synergy, dynamism and ideas. In an airy wing of one of the university's early classroom buildings, a white-stuccoed, red-roofed Spanish beauty that dates to 1924, Chopra was envisioning a remodel with a purpose at the beginning of the fall semester.

The newly christened Applied Research Center was only three weeks old and Chopra, its new executive director, was about to meet an architect to take a look at the big room and help her brainstorm some ideas for turning it into a meeting space that would attract faculty from across departments to collaborate on research projects.

Chopra looked around the room, currently jammed with office furniture and desk carrels and looking more like a call center than an academic salon, and hoped for beauty.

"It has the potential to be beautiful," she said. "And beauty really matters. We want people to come here and feel comfortable."

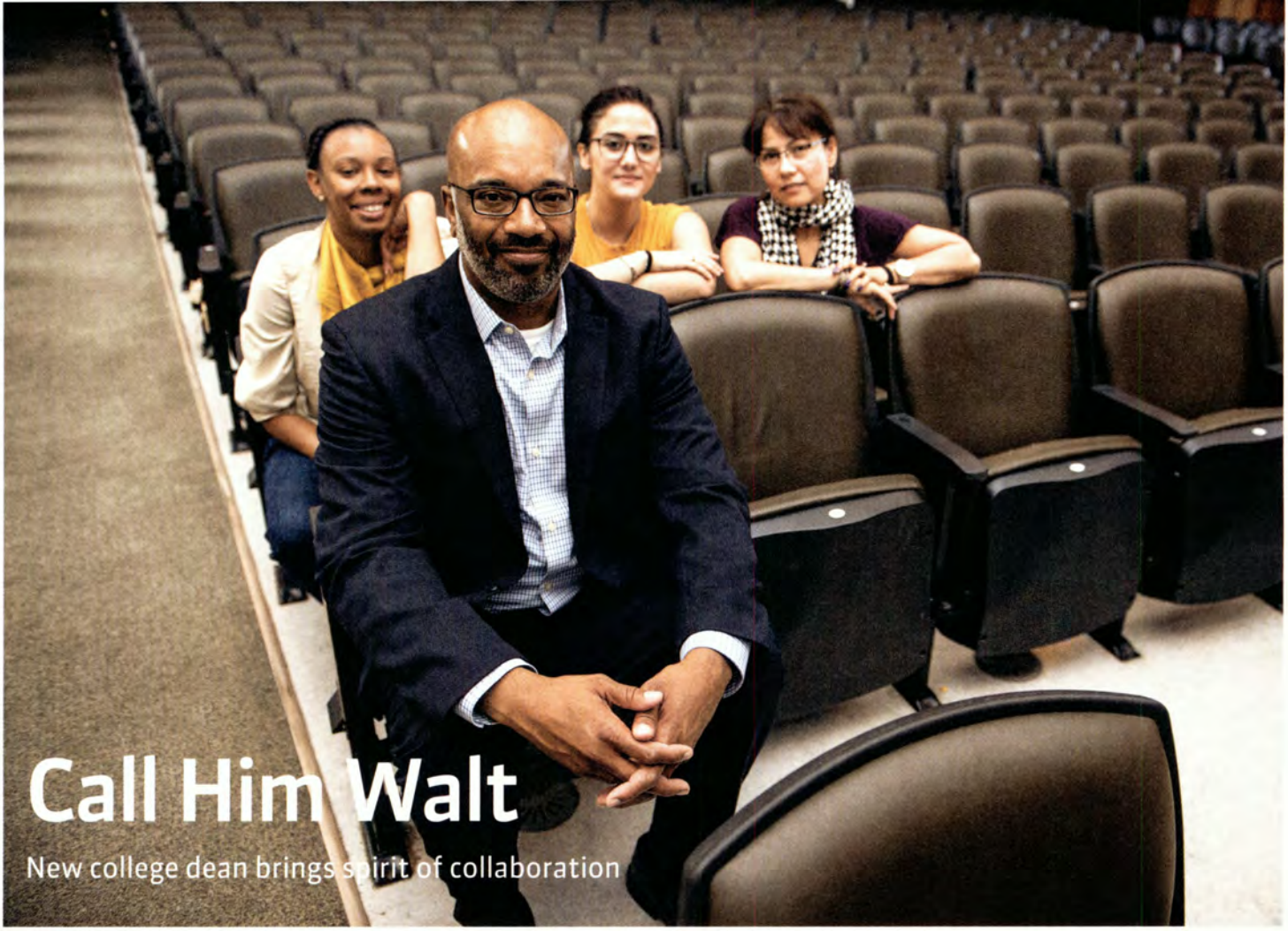
Chopra has a small budget for furniture and other improvements and hopes to raise more funds.

The space is not only about faculty. It is also envisioned as a place where students can get a taste for the applied research that answers questions in the social sciences.

"The idea is that research creates dynamism—this intellectual buzz—and students who participate begin to see themselves as academics, as scholars. If you want to keep the social sciences thriving, you've got to develop that vision."

—Ruma Chopra

PHOTO: ROBERT BAIN



Call Him Walt

New college dean brings spirit of collaboration

In his first job after college, Walter Jacobs was writing software manuals for minesweepers at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Crane, Ind., when he had an epiphany: his work as an engineer wasn't particularly fulfilling. It was everything happening outside of the technical project that he found fascinating.

"I was much more interested in the people," says Jacobs, who recently took over as dean of the College of Social Sciences at San José State. "I was always doing surveys, asking folks about their ideas about race and gender and class."

He tried a few classes at nearby Indiana University and soon was on his way to graduate studies in sociology, which led to a career as a professor of sociology, a department chair in African-American Studies and eventually a college dean.

But Jacobs credits his engineering training with helping approach his administrative role in a methodical way. "It's systems thinking—thinking about how things fit together," says Jacobs, who took over as dean of the College of Social Sciences this summer.

Incorporating feedback is a key part of systems design. Jacobs' first order of business when he started work on July 6 was to embark on a listening tour with the department chairs and staff in the College.

"I've asked them three questions," Jacobs says. "One, tell me a problem I need to solve right away. The second question is, outline a more complex problem, something that will take us a while to work on, that I should start working on right away. The third one is, tell me something to keep my hands off of, something that works well."

Jacobs plans to start more formal strategic planning next spring. It's part of his approach to leading, which is all about collaboration.

"For me, being a dean is being a CFO, in two different ways," Jacobs says. "Chief financial officer, of course. But more so, CFO for me means 'chief facilitation officer.' We have lots of really smart, experienced folks here and I see my job as encouraging their ideas, bringing us all together and working for consensus. My philosophy is it's not about my vision, it's about our vision."

Jacobs comes to SJSU from the University of Wisconsin—Parkside, where he served for two years as dean of the College of Social Sciences & Professional Studies. With 12 departments, 120 faculty members and 4,000 students, San José State's College of Social Sciences is about the size of the entire UW—Parkside.

Jacobs taught for nine years at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, a major university with 50,000 students, and spent five years there as chair of the Department of African-American & African Studies.

One of the things I'm happy about," he says, "is getting back to a larger place, an urban setting."

Jacobs grew up in an upper middle class African-American suburb of Atlanta. The president of Morehouse College, the former mayor of Atlanta and U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young lived nearby.

Jacobs' father, who recently received a doctorate at the age of 73, was an administrator in the southern regional office of the College Board and his mother and stepmother were also college graduates. So Jacobs and his younger brother grew up with the expectation that they would go to college.

"It was a given," he says, "but the question was where."

His high school, a magnet school for math and science, had 1,600 students (all but four African-American) and Jacobs was the valedictorian. "I was a big old nerd in high school," he says. His clique of five guys called themselves PSI Inc., which stood for "Potentially Stupid Intellectuals." Of the five, four are Ph.D.s today and one is an M.D.

Jacobs' success was spurred in part by an unhappy home life. His mother died when he was 10 and his father remarried about a year later. He and his stepmother had a difficult time relating to each other and that spurred in him independence and a focus on academics.

"I developed a laser focus," he says. "'I'm going to do what I need to do to get out of here.'"

He got a scholarship to attend Georgia Tech and pursued electrical engineering. He didn't like his classes much and, tellingly, his grades in his engineering classes were Cs and Ds, while he got almost all As in social science classes. But he loved his internship at 3M in Minneapolis, so he ignored the warning signs that he might be headed down the wrong career path, graduated and went to work.

Once Jacobs discovered sociology and earned his master's and then his Ph.D., his first teaching job was at an internal community college at the University of Minnesota for students who needed preparation before transferring into the general university population. Jacobs was promoted to associate professor and tenured in 2005.

When he was in the classroom, Jacobs concentrated on helping his students develop and sharpen their "sociological imagination," the concept that the individual can influence larger societal structures, and also that larger structures have an influence on the individual.

"You're not some isolated individual, but at the same time you're not totally shaped by these larger forces," Jacobs says.

"One, tell me a problem I need to solve right away. The second question is, outline a more complex problem, something that will take us a while to work on, that I should start working on right away. The third one is, tell me something to keep my hands off of, something that works well."

He also taught media literacy and wrote a book, "Speaking the Lower Frequencies: Students and Media Literacy," which aims to help students become critical of the media without losing the pleasure they derive from it.

His more personal book, "Ghostbox," a memoir about growing up, he self published in 2007.

Jacobs was a popular teacher—he has never given a test and prefers short essays and group projects—and he received the University of Minnesota's 2010 Arthur "Red" Motley Exemplary Teaching Award.

In 2007, Jacobs moved to the Department of African-American & African Studies as chair and found he loved administration as much as teaching.

"When I think back about my engineering background, systems thinking and feedback were profound influences," he says. He uses those skills today as he negotiates the structure and challenges of SJSU and his department.

As he gets to know faculty, students and staff, "My job is to take their ideas and translate them for various audiences," Jacobs says. "To me, it's about working with a wide variety of folks, getting their ideas about what they want to do."

He is also looking at how his department can contribute to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Jacobs, pictured here with new faculty member Valerie Francisco, has embarked on a listening tour to hear from staff, faculty and community members.

FROM PAGE 5

the university's brand—"Powering Silicon Valley"—by reinforcing the contribution the social sciences make to STEM by adding the perspective of peoples' interactions with technology.

Jacobs also plans to further a core component of his teaching: critical thinking and says:

"We want to prepare students to be critical thinkers who are comfortable with ambiguity. The social sciences really enable you to be comfortable with going in and really not knowing, but then to be able to quickly synthesize information and create a path and go forward."

When he's not reading "The Chronicle of Higher Education," Jacobs is a fan of science fiction. Star Wars and The X-Files are favorites. "In a way, it's social commentary. Using what could happen in the future to comment on what is happening today."

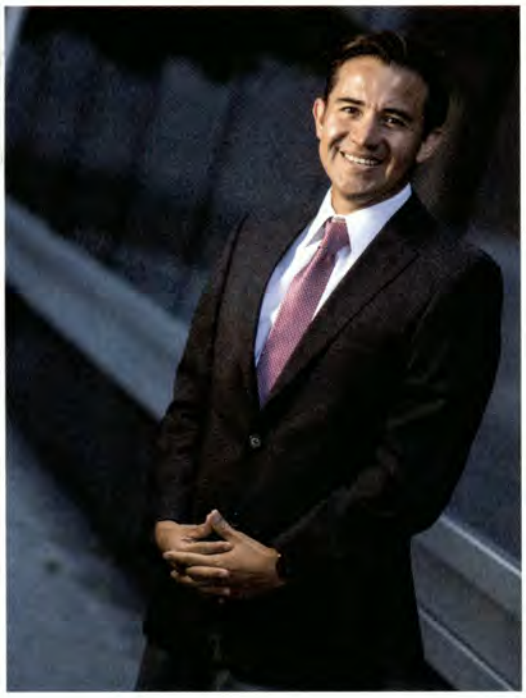
In fact, he credits The X-Files with bringing his wife, Valerie, into his life. She was a Stanford graduate working in human resources in San Francisco when, through a mutual friend, she heard that Jacobs was also an X-Files fan. In 2001, she emailed him and asked him what he thought about a recent episode. They emailed back and forth for months about the exploits of Scully and Mulder before finally meeting in person in 2002.

The two married in 2004 and revisited that long-distance relationship when she moved to Charlotte, N.C., to pursue an MBA while Jacobs stayed in Minnesota. They've had a commuter marriage for the past five years, with Valerie working at North Highland, a management-consulting firm in Charlotte, and her husband flying out to visit several times a month.

Valerie recently transferred to the San Francisco office of North Highland and the couple lives together in San José now, a welcome change.

New Faculty Research Passions

Fish, Memory and Chairman Mao



Growing up in the Mexican state of Guanajuato, **Sergio Bejar López** saw his friends' parents hit hard by recurring financial crises. "I always wanted to understand why those crises happened—and whether politicians had something to do with it," he says.

Bejar, who started this semester as an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, earned his master's in economics at the University of Pittsburgh, then completed his Ph.D. in political science at Notre Dame, making the study of financial policy his specialty. Lately, he has been examining how the financial systems in developing countries help or hinder their efforts to jump-start their economies.

A key element is public banks—government-owned financial institutions that provide cheap loans to fund development or public welfare programs, Bejar says. These banks are problematic, because they often play a role in circumventing strict controls put in place by institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—and that can lead to banking and currency crises.

So why do they persist?

"Neither politicians nor people working in public banks want to get rid of them," Bejar says. "They tend to be very powerful in authoritarian regimes. They persist because they perform a very important function in the political system by providing funds to the government in office and helping it to stay for as long as those people basically want."

After teaching a post-doctoral fellowship at Tulane and teaching stints in New Jersey and Texas, Bejar is happy to have landed at San José State. "I think the mission of the university is very good," he says. "We get a lot of diversity and a lot of first-generation college students."

As someone who spends much of her time researching how the brain creates, stores and retrieves memories, **Valerie Carr** has some doubts about their trustworthiness.

"When you study memory, you realize how imperfect and fallible it is," says Carr, newly hired as an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology. She brings an interest in the use of neuroimaging methods like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to get a better understanding of the brain structures involved in episodic memory—our recall of autobiographical events and emotions.

Carr, who earned her Ph.D. at UCLA before spending seven years as a post-doctoral fellow and research associate at Stanford University before coming to San José State, has found that two sub-structures of the hippocampus deep within the brain play a role in determining how vivid a memory is.

In more recent research she has found that age-related changes in these areas – the dentate gyrus and Region CA 3—may account for the difficulties older people have in accessing these episodic memories.

Now, Carr is exploring whether exercise-based interventions might help people at risk for mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease by spurring the growth of new neurons in the hippocampus. "What does that exercise regimen need to be?" Carr asks. "That's my main interest."

It can be challenging to work with older adults who have mild cognitive impairment, she says. "It's very likely they're going to develop Alzheimer's disease. It can be depressing. A lot of my sense of self-worth comes from thinking that I'm fighting for those people. That gives me a sense of satisfaction in my job."

Jason Douglas grew up visiting relatives in both northern England and rural Jamaica, developing a strong awareness of diversity issues and an appreciation of the need for social justice. Later, traveling in South America after earning a psychology degree in college, he also became interested in conservation.

Douglas, who has joined the Department of Environmental Studies as an assistant professor, melds those interests as he teaches his students about the importance of working for environmental justice with disadvantaged populations.

"What I'm looking at is how are we working with a community to develop a sense of efficacy," Douglas says. "How do we further a sense of community and empowerment at the community level? These communities have been disenfranchised throughout the history of our country. As a person of color who's gotten to a different position and feels very fortunate to have done so, this is my mission—to advocate for these underserved communities."

Douglas did his dissertation research in Jamaica, where rural people were seeing forestry resources threatened by bauxite mining. "The fundamental issue there was access to resources," he says.

During his post-doctoral work at Loyola Marymount University, he took part in the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health study funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That project involved mapping community resources, working with local residents to develop proposals to improve their access to recreational space. "We started to develop some really innovative and fun projects," Douglas says.

"It's so encouraging to see what we can achieve together," he says. "To take this walk hand in hand and say, 'We're aligned. What can we do?' Even if we don't get a win, it's a beautiful process."

When Valerie Francisco began her dissertation project on Filipino domestic workers who had left their children to come to New York, she never considered just standing on the outside of that immigrant community and observing.

Using a technique called "participatory action research," Francisco interviewed and observed the women in New York and their children and extended families in the Philippines. She also helped the women connect with advocacy training, get public speaking skills and advocate for raises and other benefits with their employers.

"The times call for sociologists to engage," says Francisco, who joined the Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences this year as an assistant professor.

For Francisco, part of an immigrant family from Manila, looking at transnational families and combining activism with scholarship are natural extensions of her own experience. Francisco came to California on her mother's work visa as a child, but that status expired when she turned 21 and she found herself an undocumented college student in the country she had lived in since childhood.

Francisco was able to obtain a green card and stay in the country, and she began to look at the world differently.

"I began to look at how these larger social forces and cultural forces that I had no control over had such an effect on my life," Francisco says. "Why is it like this?"

That led to her Ph.D. from CUNY in 2012 and her book project, which is now in review and scheduled for publication. That's an accomplishment for a young faculty member, but Francisco is focused more on the importance of getting the stories of mothers raising children long distance out into the world.

"For me, getting the book out there is in honor of the 11 families whose lives are at the heart of my research," Francisco says.

Xiaojia Hou spent years studying modern Chinese history in Beijing, but it wasn't until she came to the U.S. for her Ph.D. and learned about the Soviet Union that she gained a clear perspective on her own country's recent past.

"In China so much information has been filtered or deleted," says Hou, who recently joined the Department of History as an assistant professor. "Chinese students were not taught to think critically."

Chinese historians deal with the painful reality that their government regards history as "objective" and not subject to interpretation, meaning they must be careful about what they publish, Hou says. "They have to dance with this official reality."

Hou, who earned her bachelor's and master's degrees at Peking University, knew "there were pieces missing" from the official narrative, but it wasn't until she won a scholarship to do her doctoral work at Cornell University that she put the pieces together.

Hou found that China's communist leaders styled many of their reforms on models that had been represented in Soviet propaganda as successes when in fact they were disasters. Chinese communists who had spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union knew better, but they were marginalized, she says.

These days, she's exploring alternative approaches to history, such as how Chinese clothing styles were determined by the availability of different types of fabric under central planning.

"It looks funny to study Chinese history in the U.S.," she acknowledges, "but when I came to the U.S. I started to see Chinese history from a different angle."

After a five-year post-college career in marketing research at *Wired* magazine, **Ana Pitchon** took a job as a kayak guide in Washington: to spend some time on the water and figure out her next step.

Her undergraduate degree from Colby College was in anthropology, so of course Pitchon started to look at the world around her with a discerning eye.

"I was in the Pacific Northwest, so I saw people's connection to the sea and it just clicked for me," Pitchon says today from her new office in Clark Hall. "I became more and more fascinated with the people, the culture of fishing. There was something magical about it."

Pitchon got a master's degree in anthropology and then a job with the South Atlantic Fishery Council to identify and describe fishing-dependent communities from North Carolina to Key West.

She went out on all different kinds of fishing vessels to hunt for shrimp, snapper, grouper and the other mainstays of the area's fishing economy, interviewed fishermen and observed their social networks.

That led her to the University of Georgia's ecological and environmental anthropology program and a Ph.D. dissertation on the effects of salmon aquaculture on traditional fishing communities in Chiloé, an island on the Pacific in far southern Chile. Her question was how a switch from wild capture fishing to commercialized fish farming would affect traditional social networks, knowledge of the sea and fishing practices.

Now as assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology, Pitchon is turning her research eye toward a survey of fishermen's self-perception of their agency in determining policies. She is also involved with SJSU's Moss Landing Marine Laboratory.

As to getting out onto the water, Pitchon says she'll have to rely on rides from the fishermen she studies. When she moved, she sold her kayak.

Wendy Rouse is a new assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences , but she has been engaging undergraduates in the College of Social Sciences for four years as a lecturer in the social science teacher preparation program.

The program, which prepares future K-12 teachers to teach social sciences, is a perfect fit for Rouse, who taught high school history for 10 years before finding a home at SJSU.

Rouse had degrees in history and archaeology but none in education, so as her preparation for entering the classroom, she says, "I literally wrote down everything I could remember from when I went to school."

That included a lesson in which her history teacher dressed up as historical figures and one where a teacher explaining apartheid had students stand in separate corners of the classroom. "Everything was interactive," Rouse says.

So that's the way Rouse taught—while earning a Ph.D. in American history from the University of California, Davis, and writing a book, "Children of Chinatown: Growing Up Chinese in San Francisco, 1850-1920."

Since joining SJSU, Rouse has focused her teacher preparation on scavenger hunts, role-playing and other interactive techniques. "Because the lecture system doesn't work," Rouse says. I've been in the classroom and I know that."

As an assistant professor, Rouse plans to take a more active role in developing the social science teacher preparation program into a program that incorporates engaging and dynamic student-centered active learning strategies into all of its courses.

Susan Snycerski's research subjects have ranged from lab rats to college freshmen in her ongoing quest to understand the behaviors and motivations that accompany substance abuse.

These days, she's looking at simultaneous poly-drug use, where someone takes two mind-altering substances at once. "There isn't a lot of research in that area," says Snycerski, who recently joined the Department of Psychology as tenure-track assistant professor after 10 years as a lecturer.

She asks students to anonymously self-report their drug use while also testing for signs of neurocognitive impairment. Based on the small sample she has collected thus far, most San José State students don't abuse hard drugs, but a fair number combine caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and marijuana in various ways., Snycerski says.

The Warren, Mich., native earned her master's and Ph.D. from Western Michigan University, where she studied the effects of drugs in animal models. Later, she did a two-year postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institute on Drug Abuse researching gamma-hydroxybuterate—better known as the date rape drug GBH.

Snycerski and her husband, Sean Laraway (an associate professor in the department), moved to San José in 2004 without having jobs. He started teaching at San José State that year as a lecturer and joined the tenure track in 2008. Snycerski began teaching classes as a lecturer in 2005 and she has also served as a major advisor since 2008. "I really enjoy it," she says. "It's a great way to communicate with the students outside the classroom."

Snycerski says she's excited about having more time and resources for research. "It's a nice change," she says. "I'm looking forward to my new role."

In Collaboration with the Muwekma Ohlone

IT staffer moonlights as tribe's historian

New York native Alan Leventhal discovered anthropology on childhood visits to the American Museum of Natural History.

Among the meteorites and minerals and saber-toothed cats and dinosaurs, there were the halls of Plains Indians and Indians from the Northwest Coast, where the early history of the earliest Americans was told.

Leventhal graduated with a Bachelor's degree in anthropology in 1973 and received his Master's in social sciences anthropology from San José State University in 1993. Over the course of his 37-year career at San José State, he has worked to bring another Native American tribe's history and culture to light.

Leventhal, who moved from the Department of Anthropology to run the college's then-nascent IT department in 1987, has been working with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the Bay Area as its ethnologist and archaeologist and as an interface between the tribe and the university on a decades-long partnership.

"It's been a collaboration and a mutual learning curve," Leventhal says from his office decorated with tribal artifacts. "Students have done projects and master's theses, faculty have published on the tribe, we've become the repository of their excavated human remains and the tribe has contracted with the university for archaeological and skeletal analysis."

Leventhal's long and rewarding history with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe began by chance in 1980 when two anthropology students introduced him to Rosemary Cambra, a native of San José who had come to campus looking for some help researching the genealogical descent of her extended family.

Leventhal took her to the old Walquist library and they dug around until they finally found a mention of the Muwekma Ohlone's ancestors, the Costanoan Indians of Mission San José, in Alfred Kroeber's "The Handbook of California Indians," published in 1925. Leventhal read to Cambra the author's conclusion—that the tribe was extinct for all practical purposes.

Cambra put her hands on her hips and said, "I beg to differ with you and Dr. Kroeber, I am an Ohlone Indian and my mother is an Ohlone Indian. She was baptized at Mission San José in 1912."

And so began a partnership that has led to a detailed tribal enrollment of 550 members, an organized government with elected council members and Cambra as its tribal chairwoman and a protracted legal and bureaucratic battle with the United States government for the reaffirmation of their federally recognized status.

For Leventhal, the relationship has been all-consuming and rewarding, although largely accidental. "I tumbled into it," he says.

Leventhal's role began as an ethnohistorian and archaeologist researching the tribe's history, genealogy and language and helping them to preserve eroding coastal burial sites and repatriate human remains unearthed by other archeologists. He now advocates for their recognition by the federal government.

"They're a landless tribe," says Leventhal. "The myth was that they were extinct." Leventhal has no doubt the Muwekma Ohlone as a previously recognized tribe will be restored.

Excavations of their ancestral heritage cemetery sites revealed an intricate puebloan-like community structure with ceremonial centers, and the mission-based genealogical records trace the enrolled lineages' Indian ancestry back to the mid-late 1700s, and the people had a language still spoken and songs still sung until the 1930s. The government had even recognized the tribe as far back as the late 1920s.

"The tribe has a 12,000-year old cultural heritage here in the Bay Area," Leventhal says. The oldest Muwekma Ohlone tribal member, 93, is a WWII combat veteran and some of the younger tribal members are alumni of San José State. Leventhal, who is likely to greet strangers with "HorSe Tuuxi!" ("Good day!" in the Muwekma language), feels a deep kinship with the tribe.

"I know all of their ancestors' dates of birth," Leventhal says.

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ON THE COVER

Newly appointed Dean Walt Jacobs is in motion—meeting with faculty, staff and community members and getting to know San José State. He comes to San José from postings in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

We're in this together

IT'S NO SECRET

Your annual gift to the College of Social Sciences assists us in our mission to deliver a high-quality education to students who need it the most.

Whether you designate your gift for the dean to invest in our most pressing needs or for your alma mater department, in an era of extraordinarily limited resources, your tax-deductible contribution will help to realize our students' dreams.

Please give to the College of Social Sciences fund today. We simply can't do it without you.

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